

6-PAGE EXCLUSIVE!

PUNCH-OUT!!

The NES Classic Reborn On The Wii pg. 46

MAG Brings **256-Player** Combat to **PS3**

We Play The New Franchise From The Creators Of SOCOM

GAMEINFORMER

THE WORLD'S #1 COMPUTER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



WORLD EXCLUSIVE

ISSUE 193

MAY 2009

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

A NEW HERO FOR A NEW TIME



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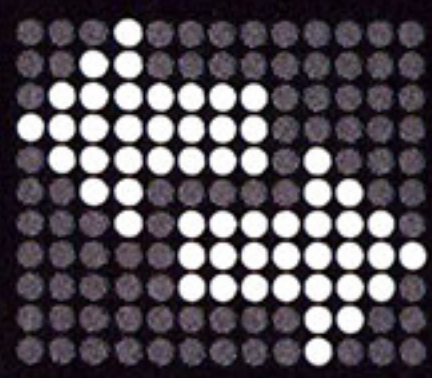


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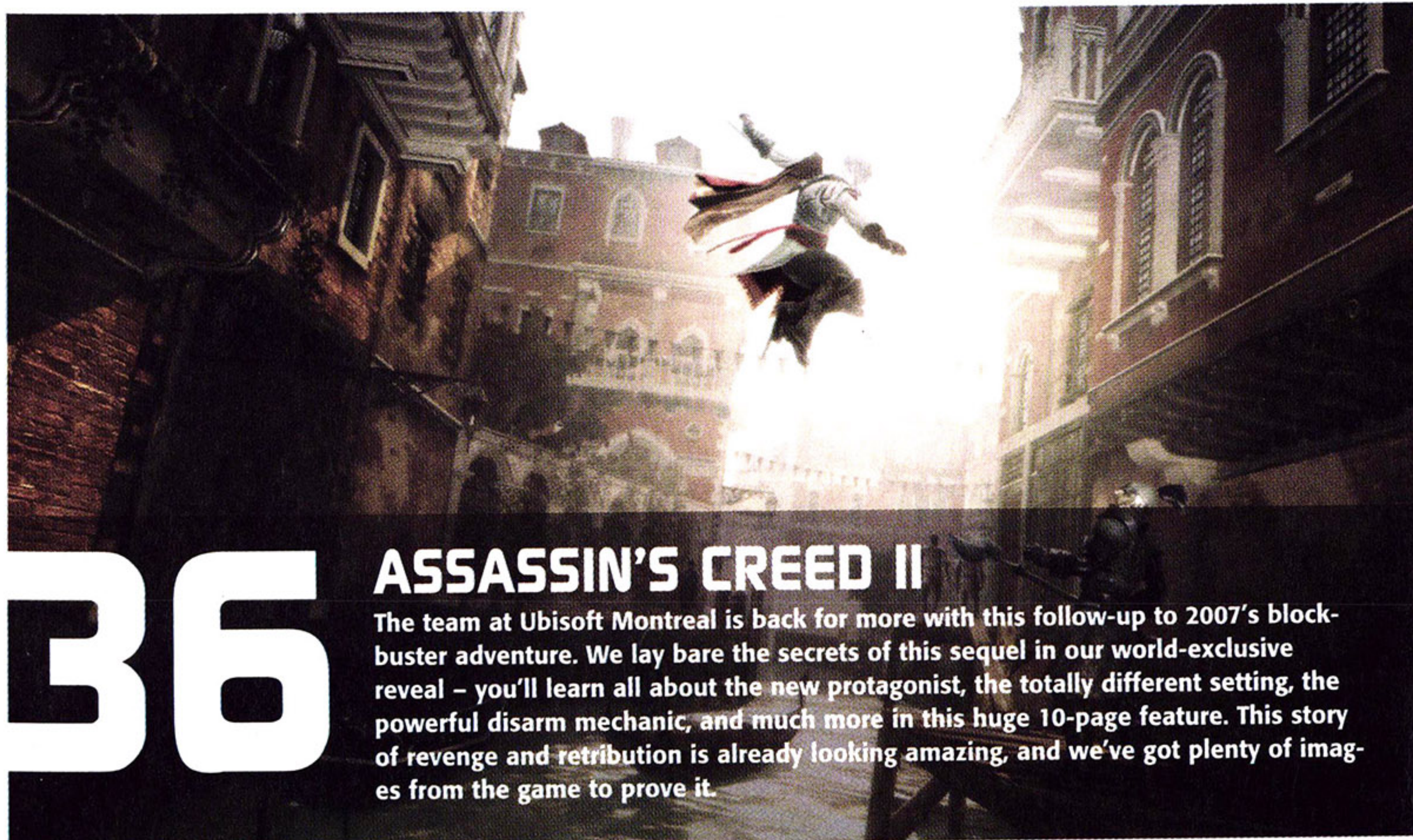




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ASSASSIN'S CREED II

The team at Ubisoft Montreal is back for more with this follow-up to 2007's blockbuster adventure. We lay bare the secrets of this sequel in our world-exclusive reveal – you'll learn all about the new protagonist, the totally different setting, the powerful disarm mechanic, and much more in this huge 10-page feature. This story of revenge and retribution is already looking amazing, and we've got plenty of images from the game to prove it.

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PUNCH-OUT!!

Nintendo's beloved boxing franchise has laid dormant for more than a decade. The strident pleas of its many fans have, until now, fallen on deaf ears. This month, however, we present to you the new face of Punch-Out with six pages of gameplay details and beautiful screenshots.



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MAG

The console first-person shooter genre may be saturated, but it doesn't have anything like this title from the developer behind SOCOM. Up to 256 players can battle it out in MAG, but does it have the gameplay chops to get that many gamers online? We take an up-close look at Sony's upcoming massive action game.

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



THE CULTURE OF VIDEO GAMES

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

With each passing day, video games extend their reach into popular culture. From television shows to movies, the video game reference isn't just some weird anomaly – it's a common occurrence.

I'm not here to answer the question of why, since that is so obvious: Video games are growing as an entertainment medium and people aren't viewing it as "that thing that kids do in their parents' basements" anymore. But is that a good thing? Are the people that want hardcore video game experiences being marginalized by the masses and becoming victims of the industry they helped create?

With the growing popularity of video games, we get the pleasure of seeing commercials where Lisa Kudrow endorses Professor Layton and the Curious Village, or Carrie Underwood touts the virtues of her Nintendo DS.

On one hand, these commercials are amazing. Twenty years ago I would never have thought that a game publisher would be able to create mass-market ads and play them on HGTV or the Food Network to such great effect. The thought simply would never have occurred to me. And their success is a testament to the power of video games in today's pop culture.

On the other hand, these commercials make it crystal clear that video game publishers don't need to market to the classic video game consumer to be successful.

While many are happy to see the industry draw in new players and continue its unprecedented growth, this is also where fear sets in for many gamers out there. Some have gone so far as to accuse Nintendo of forgetting its video game roots and the "people that got them there."

But the situation is more complicated than that, because players of all types loved Professor Layton. There is no reason anyone should feel threatened that video game companies are trying to sell their games to newer consumers. In fact, gamers should be embracing new "casual" players and new play styles, because as these new gamers get drawn into experiences like Professor Layton or Peggle, they are laying the groundwork they need to someday be able to play historically "hardcore" franchises like Final Fantasy, God of War, or BioShock.

The transition is inevitable. It's a surprisingly small jump from "casual" gamer to "hardcore" gamer. Even these archaic labels that define who a gamer is supposed to be are becoming obsolete with each passing day.

There will be a day in the not so distant future when the video game marketing machine will target not only the "hardcore," but will appeal to just about anyone that understands games regardless of label. Nintendo has been instrumental in teaching a new generation the language of gaming, and that groundwork will lead to not only more variety in games, but more games in every category.

While it may be scary to see Lisa Kudrow selling Professor Layton, it's just another step in the evolution of gaming as the defining pop culture entertainment of our lives.

Cheers,

PS: Keep the feedback coming regarding what you'd like to see in the magazine. The response to last month's issue has been fantastic, and I'm enjoying reading everything you have to say. The countdown to issue 200 continues...

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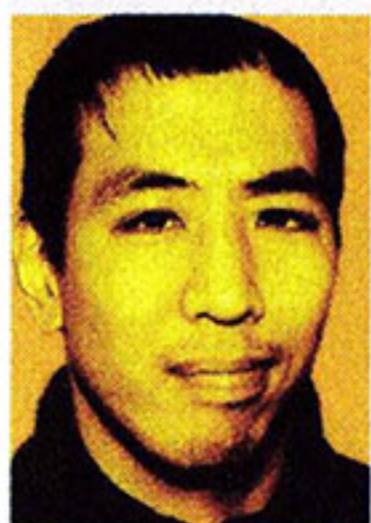
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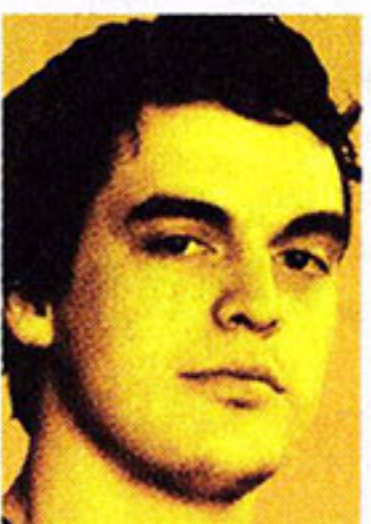
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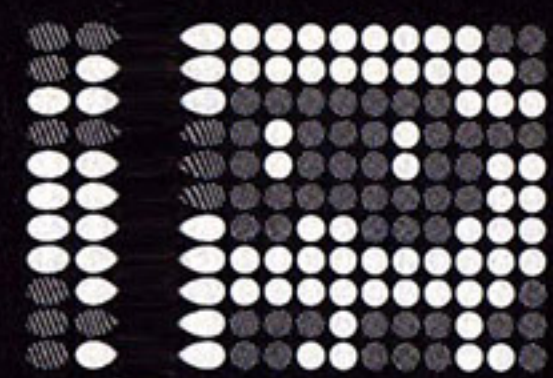
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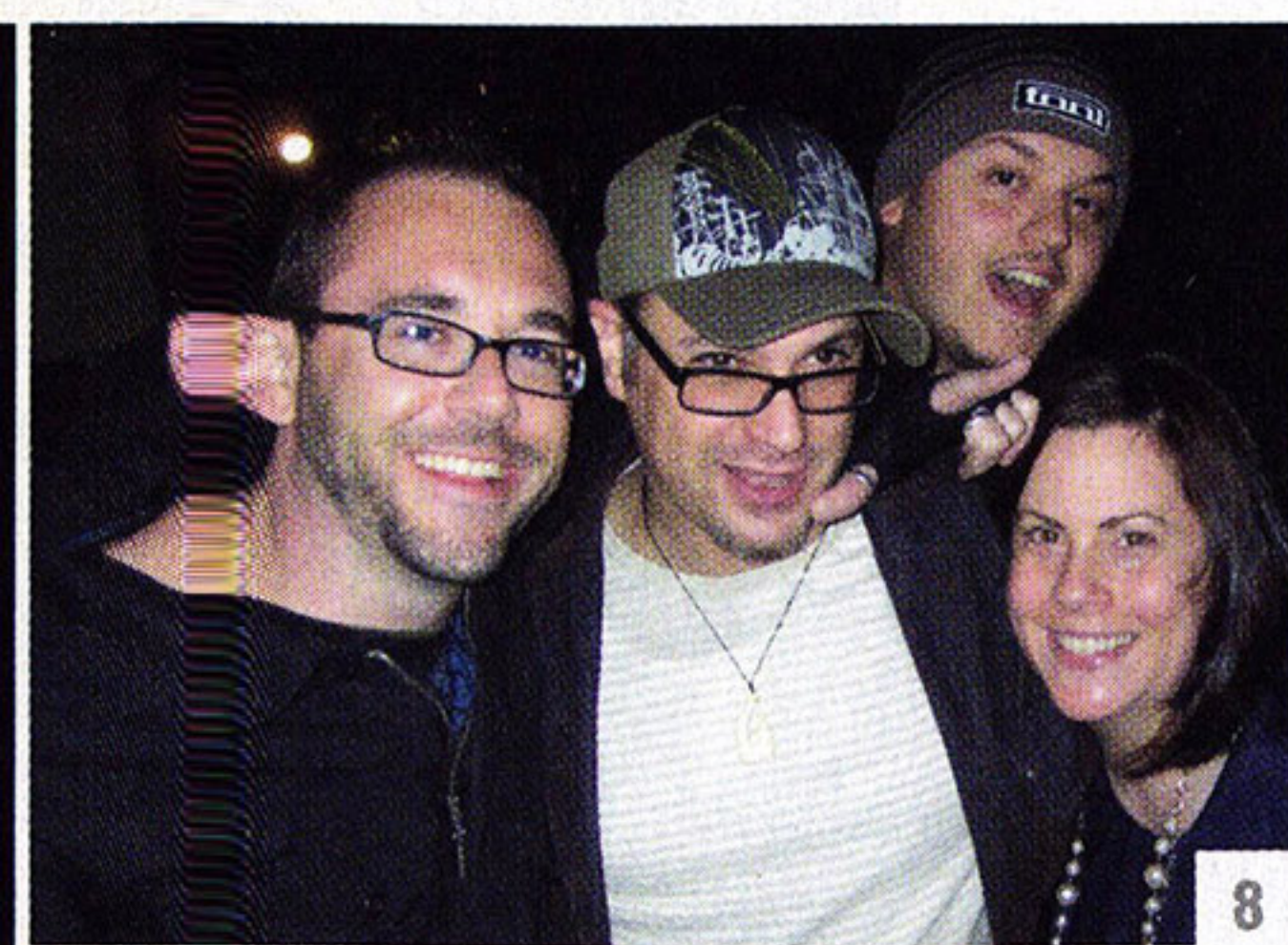
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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



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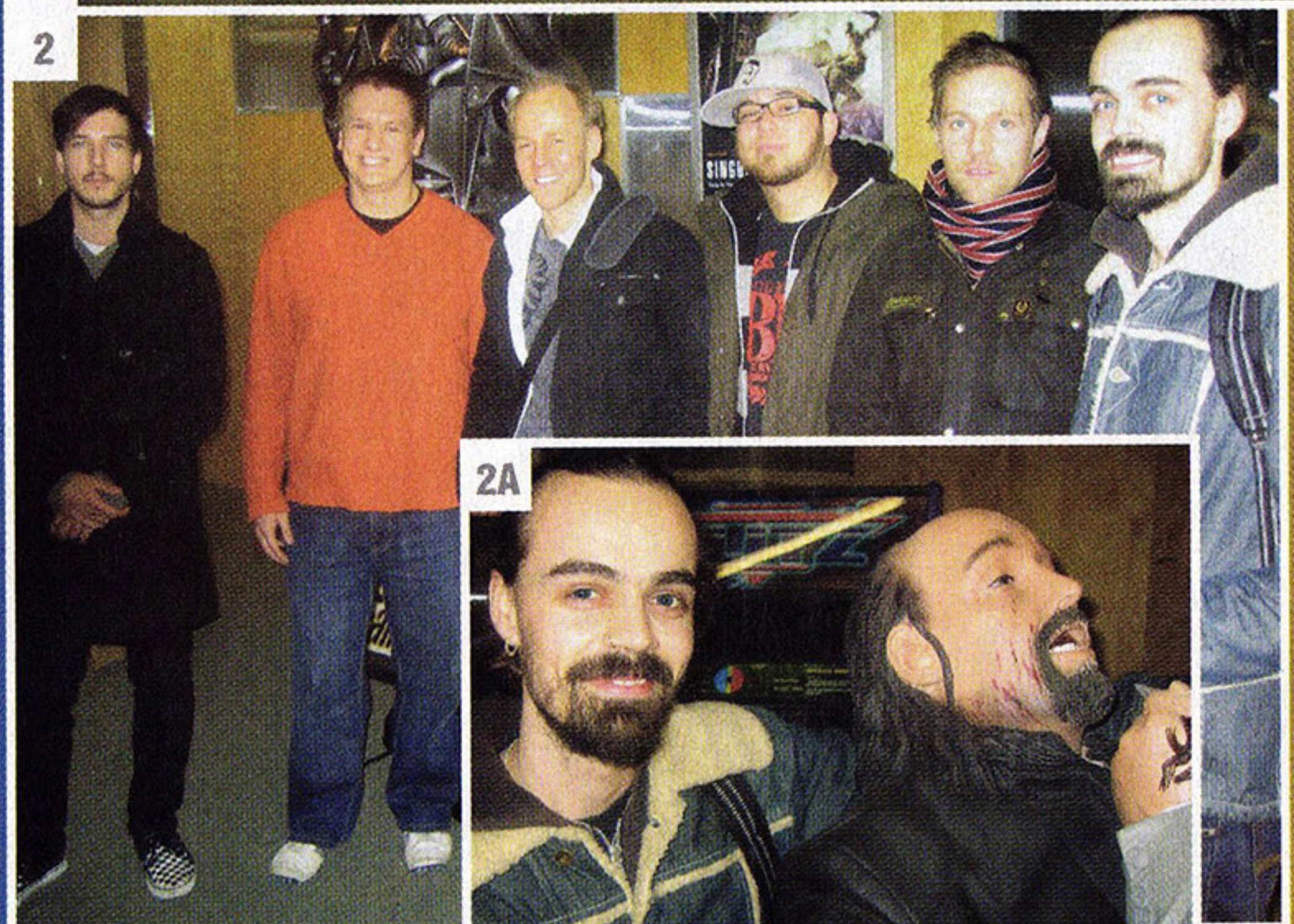


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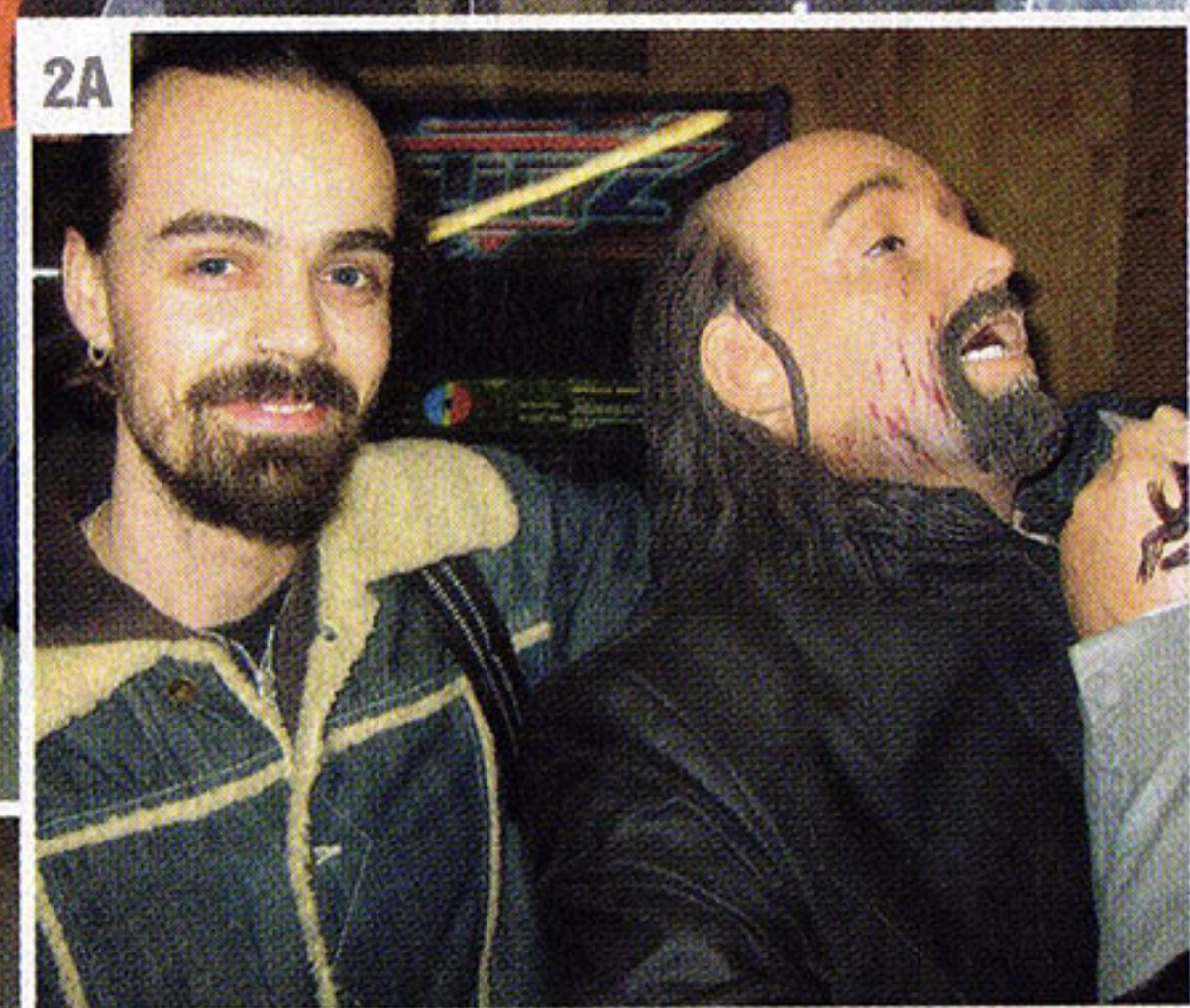
1 The GI gang finds out the secrets of the afterlife from EA's Dante's Inferno team 2 Miller's posse gettin' big, Miller's posse gettin' bigger: Eidos' George Wright, Miller, Peter Johansson of Avalanche Studios, Eidos' Stanley Phan, and Justin Hills and Sebastian Lindoff of IO Interactive 2A Sebastian Lindoff poses with the character that was modeled after him, Lynch from Kane & Lynch 3 Reiner and Meagan meet long-time GI Reader Jonathan Klein, who incidentally won our Reader Art contest with a sweet Death Jr. piece back in issue 151 4 Reiner and Bertz hang with Tim Schafer, the creator of Brütal Legend, the breakout game of GDC 5 It's all smiles for EA's Pete Nguyen, OnLive's Tiffany Spencer, and EA Montreal's Alain Tascan 6 Bertz reunites with former GI editor Lisa Mason (now of Destineer) and Square Enix's Sonia Im 7 Ben treats Meagan and Activision's Bianca Harzbecker and Jeff Poffenbarger to his patented "Power Chill" pose. He's currently in negotiations with Gatorade to bring out a Ben Reeves Power Chill line of energy drinks 8 Destructoid's Alex Ryan, PC World's Darren Gladstone, Sandbox Strat's John Kopp, and Sheila Bryson of Spark PR get in the GDC spirit



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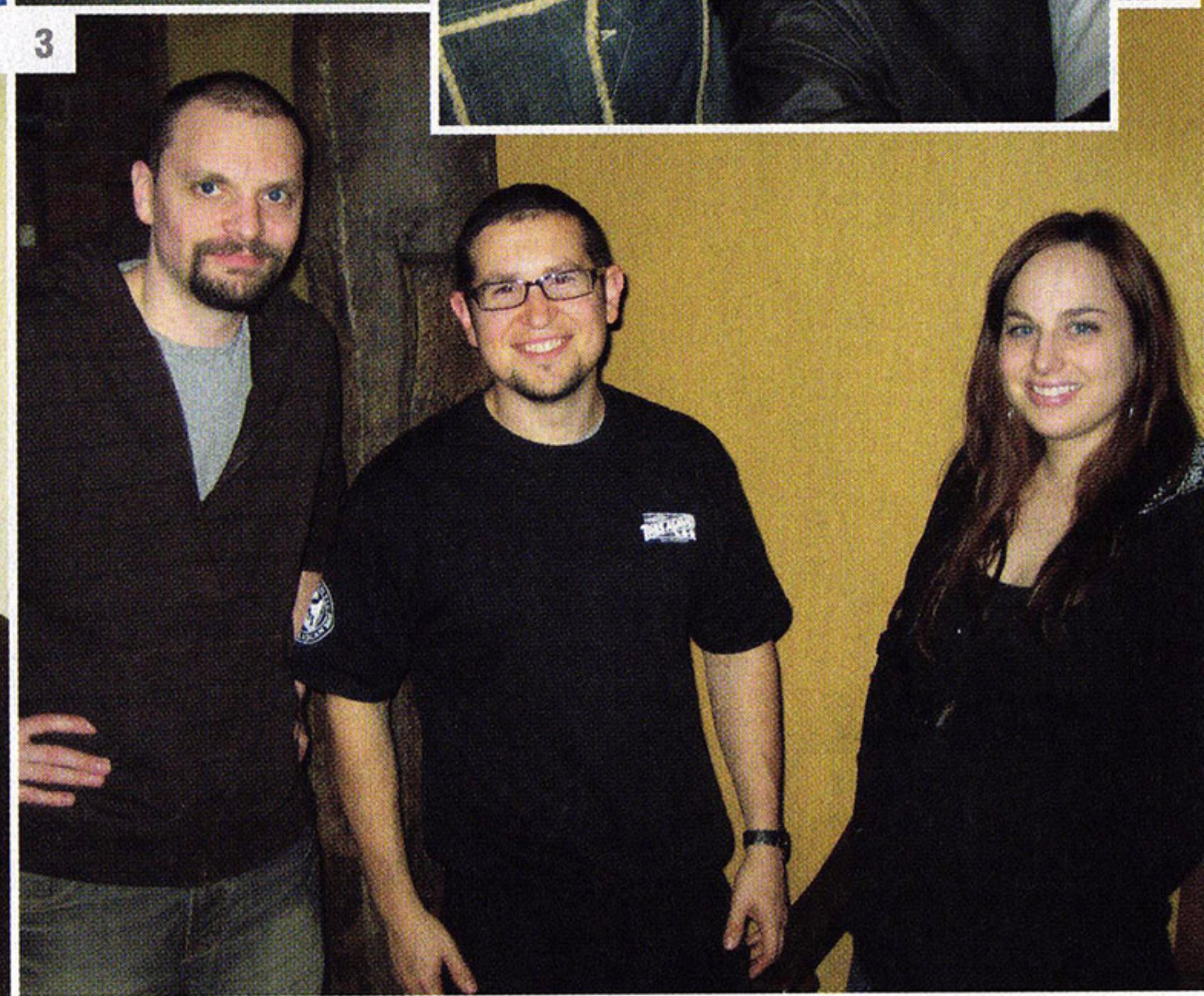
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Take A Step Back

In issue 191, Andy's editorial about the need for new 2D games took the words right out of my mouth. Why must we be denied classic franchises – ones we fell in love with because of their beautifully executed 2D gameplay – just because technology has advanced? Such things should not be relegated to handhelds. Why not use the power of consoles to render a Metroid, Castlevania, or Zelda adventure with stylish art direction and classic mechanics? Thank you, Andy, for saying

something that needed to be said.

Alexander Kodger
via email

We have not met a single gamer who thinks 2D revivals of classic franchises is a bad idea. However, these games still aren't being made, so someone must be whispering evils into the ears of publishers and developers, convincing them it isn't a good move. This leaves us with two big questions: who are these people, and what is their problem?

and try to pinpoint what accounts for the decline in interest, and then try to rectify the problem. We have trouble believing that Lara's current design is any more responsible in this case than Underworld's stale gunplay, but we'll have to wait until the next entry is announced to see what gets retooled. Then again, with Square Enix moving to take over Eidos, maybe plans for Lara Croft makeover will be put on hold. Square's RPG heroines don't exactly dress conservatively, so Lara might not be destined for life as a schoolmarm after all.



The Fooling Time

I was saddened after reading the Connect Opinion article "What Does It Take To Kill Sonic" in the April 2009 issue, but a little confused as well. If Yuji Naka left Sonic Team with the intention of giving the little blue guy the axe, why would the rest of Sonic Team embrace the idea? Was such a classic character not even worth improving, let alone saving? Aside from the obvious, something seems terribly wrong on the inside; even franchises that started off on the wrong foot have gotten total revamps and makeovers that made them better. Some companies just stop making certain games – why would Sega do something like this to something people actually grew up liking?

Ernesto Cervera
via email

Blast. I actually took that Sonic must die article seriously...I didn't realize it was in Game Infarcer until now. You've racked up one April fool – though I've got to admit that if I'm willing to believe such a thing, then things are as grave for Sonic as is widely believed. I can't un-type any of that, but I'll try to be as graceful about it as possible.

Ernesto Cervera
via email

Way to be a good sport, Ernesto. Don't feel too bad; every year, plenty of readers think the articles in Game Infarcer are real. Heck, we've even received fan mail for the fictional editors. So, unless you're currently composing an angry rant to Game Infarcer editor-in-chief DarthClark about why he fired Chad, know that there are much greater fools than you in the world.

A Fine Line

Please stop complaining about wanting something "different" when the next game in a series comes out. For example, I love Ratchet & Clank; I love the exploring, the weapons, and the characters. I don't need a different premise, just as long as there are new worlds to explore. Developers shouldn't take a great game and ruin it by turning it into something else! If you want something different, play a different game. Sequels should give gamers more of what they loved about the previous game.

Anonymous
via email

This might make sense on the surface, but it is ultimately a dangerous request. Getting more of what you love doesn't seem like a bad thing, but how long will your affection endure? After two or three games of doing the same song-and-dance,

won't you be ready for something new? When making sequels, developers need to assess what worked and what didn't in the previous entries; it keeps games from getting stagnant and allows improvements to be made. Every game can't be a paradigm-shattering revelation, but there should be something to differentiate a sequel from its predecessors and make it a distinct experience. If you only want more of the same, you can always replay the ones you like.

Love Croft

I just read your news piece about Eidos making Lara Croft more female friendly, and it disturbs me that the company believes this move will increase their sales. I am a female gamer, and have been a Tomb Raider fan since I was 11 years old. I don't know of a better female role model than Lara – I'm a history major because of her! Having curves doesn't make her unfriendly to a female audience; Lara is proper, independent, highly intelligent, and successful to boot!

Bella Rios
via email

When titles like Tomb Raider: Underworld don't sell as well as expected, executives get nervous. They study focus groups

Fading Out

Is it just me, or is there a severe lack of good PS2 games out on the market? The last moderately interesting game that came out for the system was Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories, and that was months ago! Am I just going to have to face the depressing facts that the PS2 has finally become old-school, or is there any hope for newer (and better) games to come out?

Kathleen Mitchell
via email

Yeah, it's time to face the facts: The PlayStation 2 is officially last-gen. As such, there is definitely a lack of good new PS2 games on the market, and that isn't going to change. However, the console is far from dead; the PS2 still puts up respectable sales numbers every month, and it is still a good (and cheap) gaming system with a huge library of quality titles. Even though the biggest new releases are inevitably going to land on current-gen systems, the PS2 has received enough great games during its lifespan to keep you entertained for years.

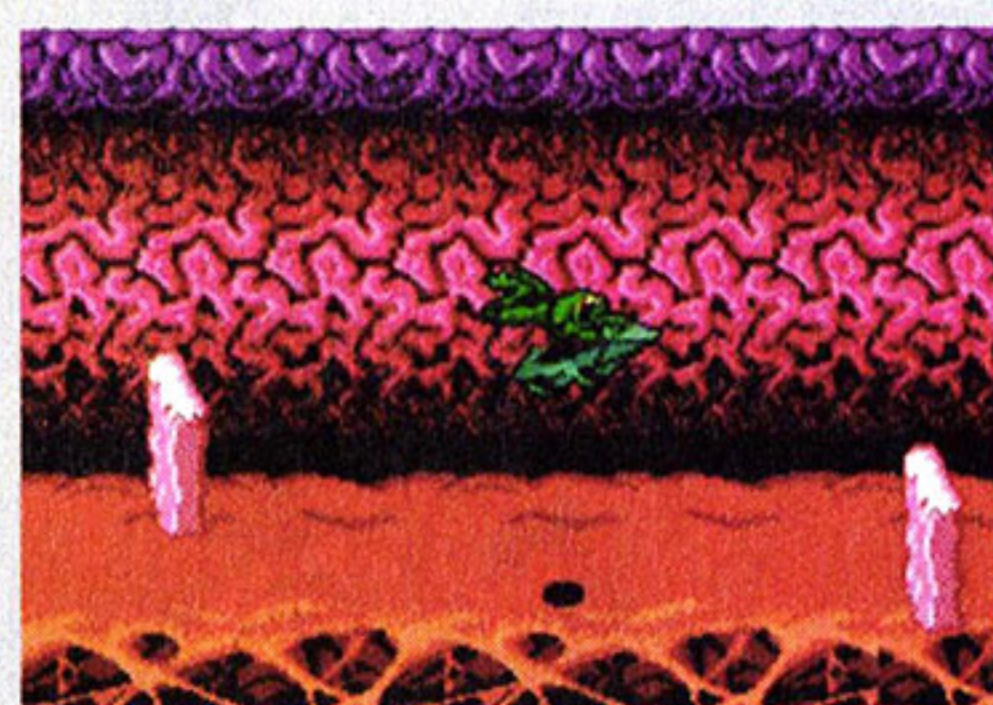
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GI COMMUNITY

Game Informer has a thriving online community, and this is where they can sound off about issues facing the gaming industry today

THE QUESTION:

What are your predictions for E3 2009?



I think the big news at E3 will come from Sony in regards to the PSP. I think the new one will be a touch screen, and come with more applications like the iPhone.

miriam I

Microsoft will announce Killer Instinct III for 360, and possibly Battletoads. Alan Wake will be shown in gameplay form with a release announced for this year. Finally, Nintendo will surprise the hardcore crowd with a new Zelda.

ItsameMalt

I've always dreamed of Zone of the Enders 3 from Kojima Productions. Now is the best chance since Metal Gear Solid 4 is out of the way.

AnubisTheOrbital

Miyamoto will announce a stupid game that is "revolutionary" for the Wii and it will be the highlight of this year for 90 percent of the people there.

crazyJ775

Half-Life 2: Episode 3 will be announced, and it will be awesome.

Wazza_inc

Call me foolishly optimistic, but I'm still holding out hope that Team Ico will surprise everyone by unveiling its new game. That alone would make for a good E3 this year.

StrongBad87

I predict that we will finally see some news on Kingdom Hearts 3. Whether or not the game will be exclusive or multiplatform will probably remain a mystery for a while longer, though.

Testament_ggx2



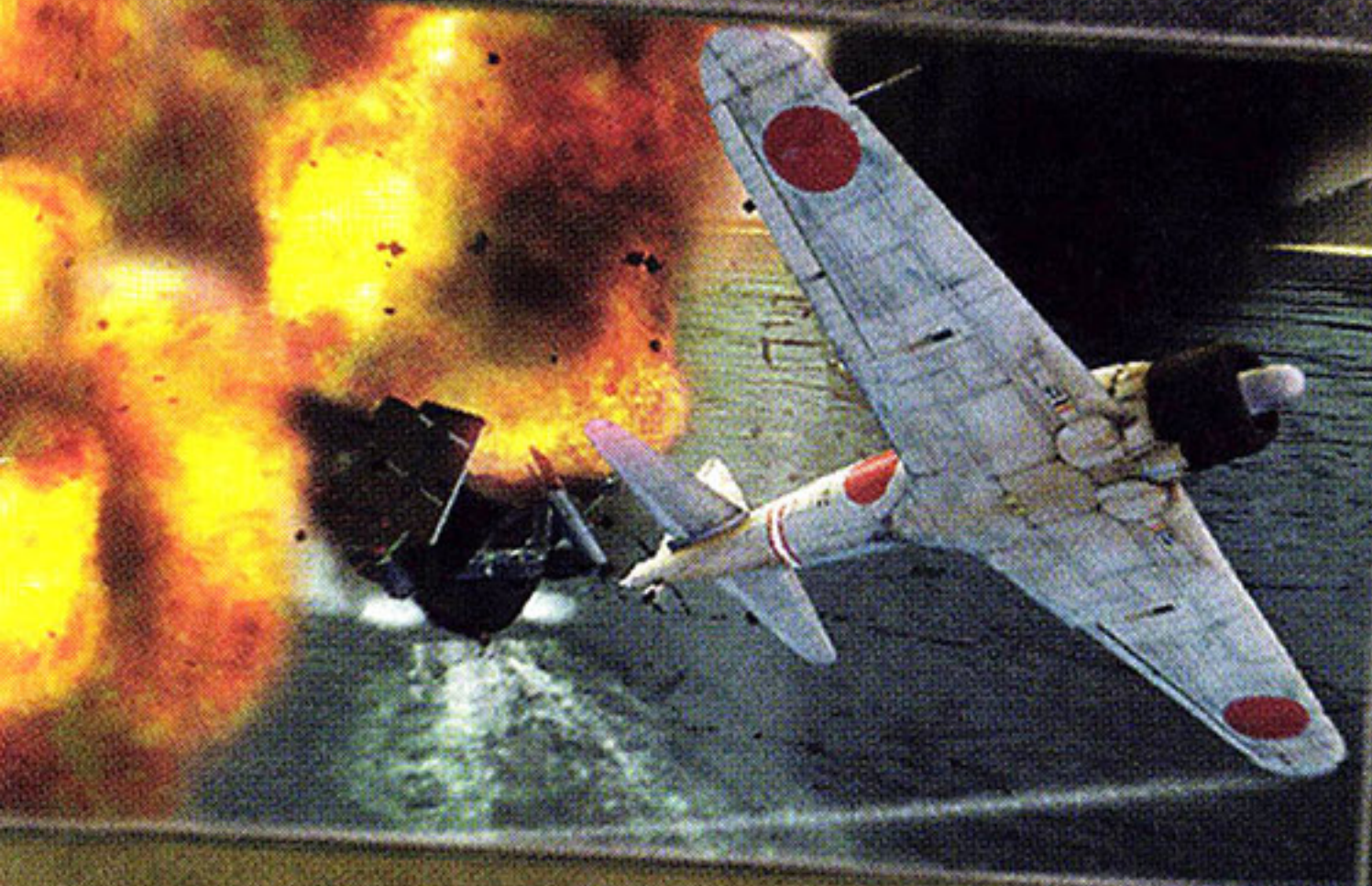
Do you want to make your voice heard? Weigh in with your opinion at www.gameinformer.com/forums

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Where Credit Is Due

I recently read the article "What's Wrong With Video Game Credits?" (Issue 191) and I had some issues with the arguments. Moviegoers generally turn off the credits or leave the movie unless there is something (like a blooper reel) to entertain them, so maybe movie credits aren't the standard to hold games up to. Also, N'Gai Croal mentions that "Credits should be as long as they need to be in order to perform the function" when talking about the length of credits. News flash! I brought the game, and my money is the developers' credit (and \$60 is a lot of credit for a college student). Video games are an art form, certainly – but they are also a product, and thus mine to decide how to acknowledge their creation.

Lee Lake
via email

I think it's cool when there is a neat little surprise at the very end of the last reel – in fact, I'm a little disappointed when there isn't. But I'll admit that while the credits are rolling, I'm not really reading the words on the screen. However, I know that all these people had jobs that were very important in creating the experience I just enjoyed. I know if I'd put effort into making something like a video game, I would want my name on it, whether anybody reads it or not. Is sitting still for 10 minutes so impossible? I'd bet that each and every person mentioned would be happy to have a split second of your invaluable time.

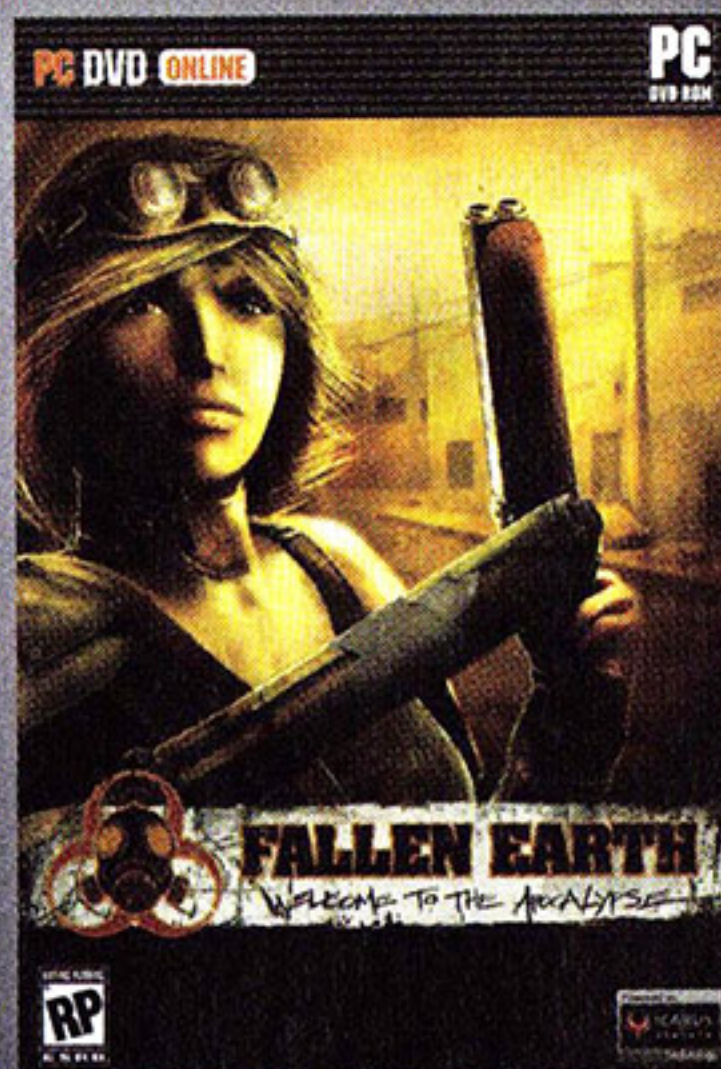
Jamie Booth
via email

As an owner of both a PS3 and an Xbox 360, I was shocked and disappointed to learn there's anything after game credits. I always simply turn off the game once I beat it, since the experience is supposedly complete. I never knew I was missing content (which I paid for) on the other side of the credits. This practice is ridiculously self-serving. Imagine if each time you started a car, you had to read a list of the people who contributed to its creation – including all the back-office staff – before you could continue. What makes game developers think they can do this?

Tim Frazier
via email

Because all gamers deal with them at some point, everyone seems to have an opinion about credits. However, despite the varying opinions out there, certain things just aren't up for debate. First and foremost, game developers deserve their credit. Your purchase of a game does not mean the people who created it are not entitled to receive due recognition. Secondly, extra content at the end of credits is meant to be a bonus for players, not a punishment. The core of the problem lies where these areas intersect. If it takes 20 minutes to run the necessary credits, that's okay...but if developers want players to stick around to see the surprise twist afterwards, they need to work on new ways to make those 20 minutes more engaging. Video games are an interactive media, so why shouldn't credits take advantage of that fact?

WINNER



This month's winner receives a copy of *Fallen Earth* on PC.

Fallen Earth is a fast-paced post-apocalyptic FPS/MMORPG in the ravaged wastelands of the Grand Canyon. Scavenge, fight, craft, and trade to survive. Where will you stand?



BRIAN BRIDGEFORTH

By the power vested in us as a magazine, we now pronounce you man and...bwaugh! What is that?!

reader art

Enter the Game Informer Reader Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault. All entries become the property of Game Informer and can't be returned.

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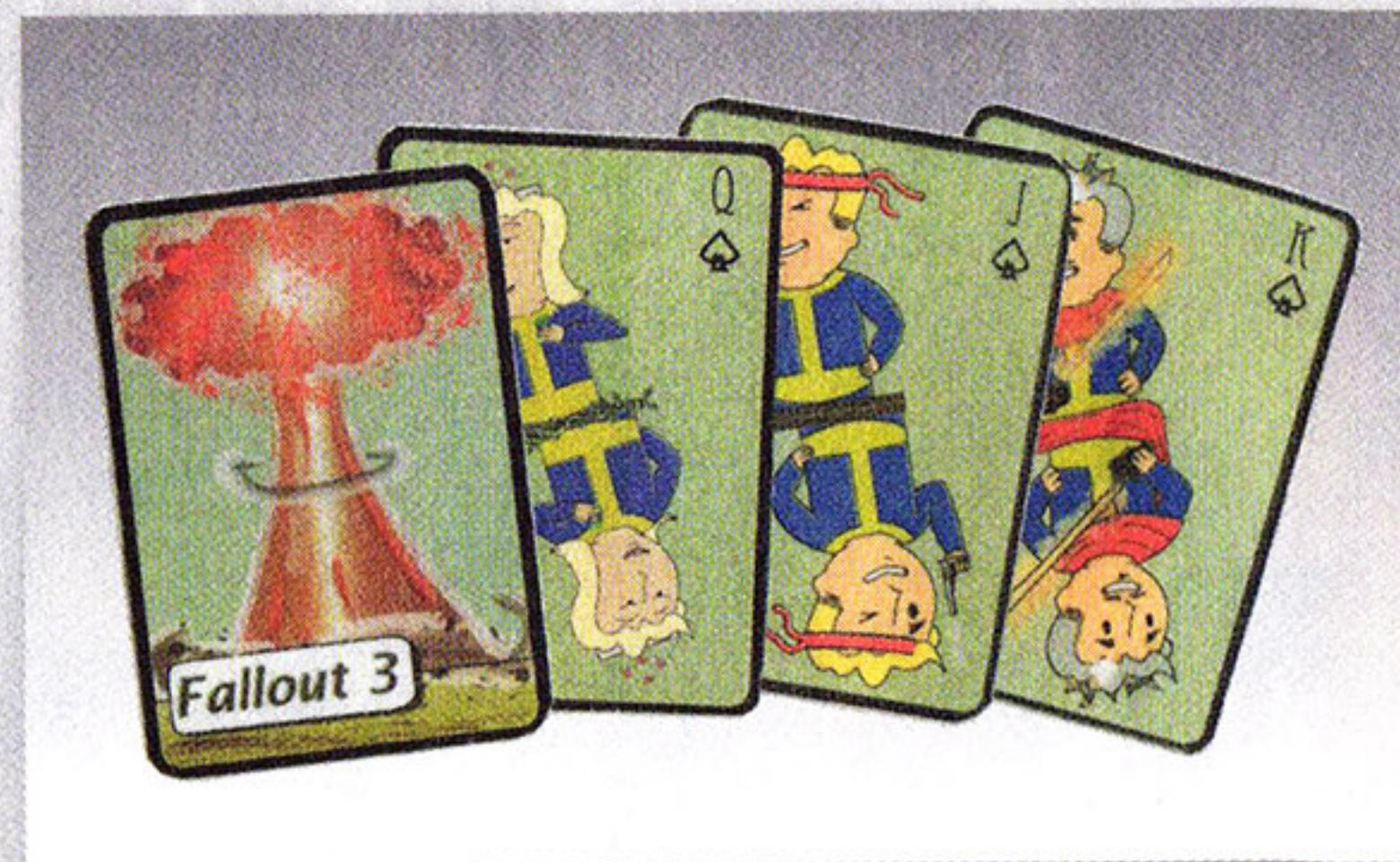
BASIL R. BARRETT

Wow, Samus has really let his hair grow out. Just kidding! We know it has always been about that long



STEVEN OSTROWSKI

Creating custom Fallout playing cards marks you as a true citizen of the Wasteland



ISAAC LARUSSA

One thing Rock Band is missing? Dual-wielding guitars



ED THOMA

Everyone has lots of scrap steel laying around, but not everyone can make a cool Pyramid Head sculpture with it



CORRECTIONS:

In the Gear section of issue 192, we incorrectly labeled the price on *Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! Season 2* as being \$44.98. The correct price is \$19.97. Also in that issue, we mistakenly neglected to credit Big Time Attic with the creation of the *Braid II* image accompanying the Game Infarcer humor piece. We apologize for the oversights.



Pirates knew how to have fun on a budget. Paid once a year (maybe).

And no dental coverage. But you know what? Pirates had a blast. They

had hard times, but they still had fun. Had they been able to drive, pirates

certainly would have picked the all new 2010 MAZDA3. Why? Because

the MAZDA3 offers trick stuff like available Nav System and Dual Outlet

Exhaust without costing a ton of booty. Plus, it's far more fuel efficient

than a gigantic pirate ship. And with quick-response steering, way

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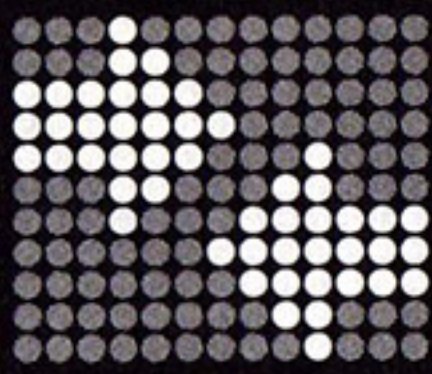


Mazda3
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Trick It Out w/Options: | Rain-Sensing Wipers | Bluetooth Phone/Audio Capability | 167-hp** 2.5L Engine | Push Button Start**

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• Comes in black
and light blue
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news

HANDS ON THE NINTENDO DSi

NEW VERSION OF DS HAS PLENTY OF TRICKS

The release of the Nintendo DSi is right around the corner, and we recently got our hands on the unit and have some details on what it's all about.

• Available April 5
• \$169

■ DS Lite



FORM FACTORS

There is no GBA slot on the DSi, and as a result the unit is thinner than the DS Lite. Instead, the platform has an SD memory card slot that allows you to transfer music and photos to and from your DSi, as well as store any titles you buy from the DSi Store.

The screens of the DSi are slightly larger, although this won't affect the resolution of your current DS titles if you play them on the DSi. The handheld's power button is on the interior face of the DSi (below the d-pad) and allows for a soft reset. You will not have to turn off the DSi just to switch games like on the DS Lite. Finally, adjusting volume is done with specific + and - buttons instead of a slider.

DSi game carts will come in two forms: DSi-exclusive game cards and DSi enhanced game cards. While exclusive cards can only be played on the DSi, enhanced game cards can be played on either the DSi or DS Lite, except unique DSi features will only appear when played with that handheld.

INTERFACE/APPLICATIONS

The interface of the DSi is more like the Wii's channels, and you can even arrange them to your liking. Any games or applications you have for the platform will show up in the interface. The system will launch with the DSi Camera, DSi Sound, DSi Shop, and PictoChat applications.



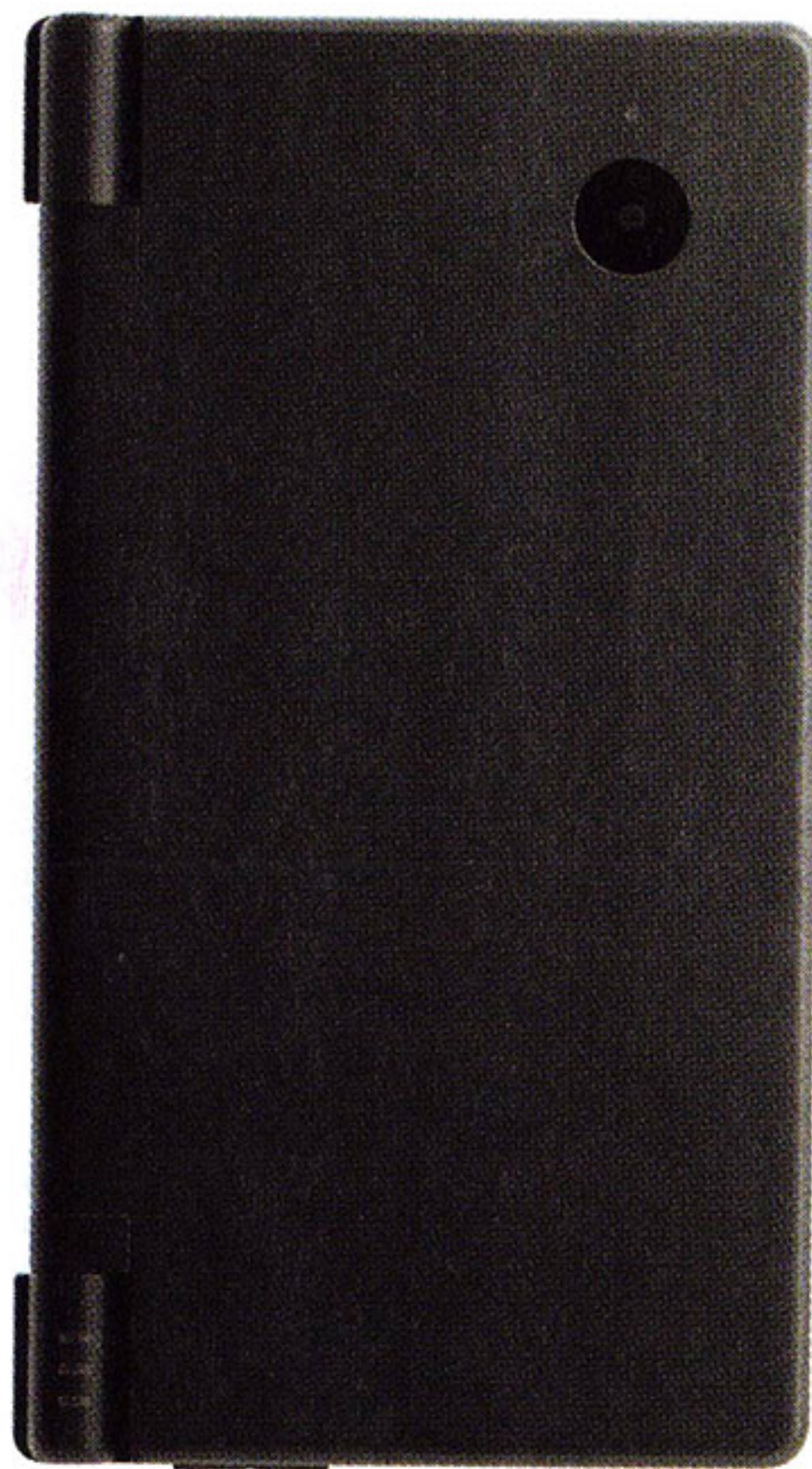
DSi SHOP/BROWSER

The handheld uses an Opera-based browser, and can wirelessly hook up to the Internet, included WPA-encrypted networks. The top screen shows the full page while the bottom offers a magnified view. Parental controls can be used to block sites, PictoChat, or even games.

Nintendo is offering 1,000 Nintendo DSi Points the first six months after launch (you must access the shop by Oct. 5) which you can redeem for DSiWare games and applications. These will be offered in four different price points: free, 200 points, 500 points, and 800+ points.

We got our hands on a few DSi Shop titles, including Decode (a puzzle title that tasks you with rearranging numbers to add them up to 10) and Bird and Beans. Here you must grab beans that fall out of the sky before they hit the ground and restrict your room to maneuver.

■ DSi



CAMERAS

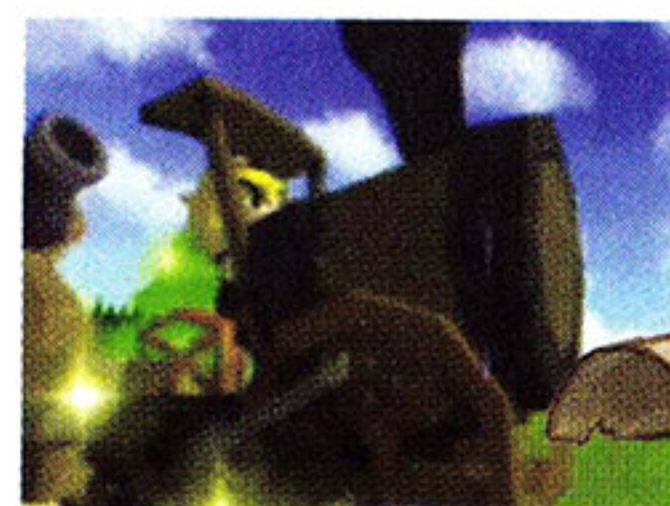
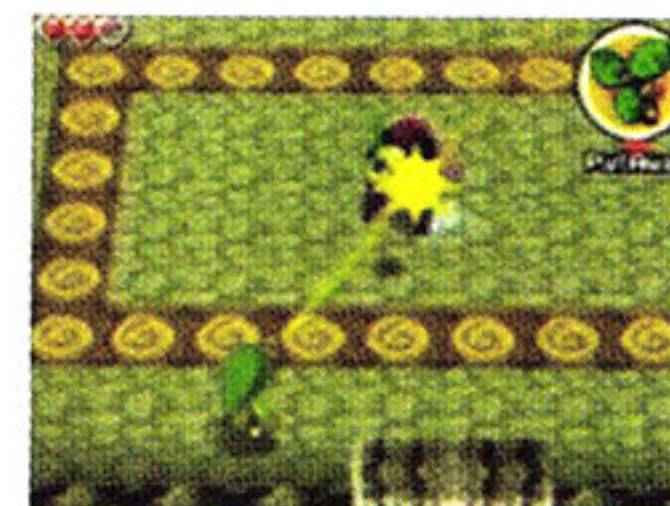
The DSi houses two cameras – one on the exterior shell of the unit and one on the interior spine. The handheld has the capacity to hold around 400 photos before requiring an SD card. Any photos you take can be sorted by date and used as a screensaver, and the DSi Camera application's ten lenses can apply effects to your shots.

- **Sticker:** Mark photos with stickers and shapes
- **Color:** Add color to black-and-white shots
- **Distortion:** Tweak faces in real time
- **Mischief:** Using auto-tracking, the DSi adds a variety of props like glasses, pig noses, mustaches, etc.
- **Emotion:** Can change your face to make it happy, sad, or angry
- **Merge:** Like Conan O'Brien's "If They Mated" sketch
- **Frame:** Here you can cut out portions of photos and mesh them with others
- **Graffiti:** Lets you doodle on photos
- **Mirror:** Similar to a carnival mirror
- **Resemblance:** Compares two faces and tells you the percentage resemblance

No launch-day games will utilize the cameras, although Nintendo is talking about WarioWare: Snapped and Moving Memo. The former title has you miming actions like drying a dog in classic WarioWare fashion using the camera, and the latter lets you create animated digital flipbooks.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SPIRIT TRACKS



Nintendo announced this title at the Game Developers Conference, and its play style is modeled after DS title *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*. A short video of the game was shown at Nintendo's GDC press conference, and *Spirit Tracks* features a projectile-shooting steam locomotive that Link uses to get around the world. It also appears as if there is a monster training aspect to the title.



DSi SOUND

While the SD card allows you to play plenty of tunes from your DSi (using the AAV file format), this application takes things a few steps further. You can record 10 18-second clips that you can then mess around with, such as increasing the speed/pitch or applying sound filters. Fifteen visualizers can be used while playing back your music, and you can even add beats to your songs (via the shoulder buttons), speed them up, or extract just the vocals. Whatever freestyling you do, it won't be permanent.

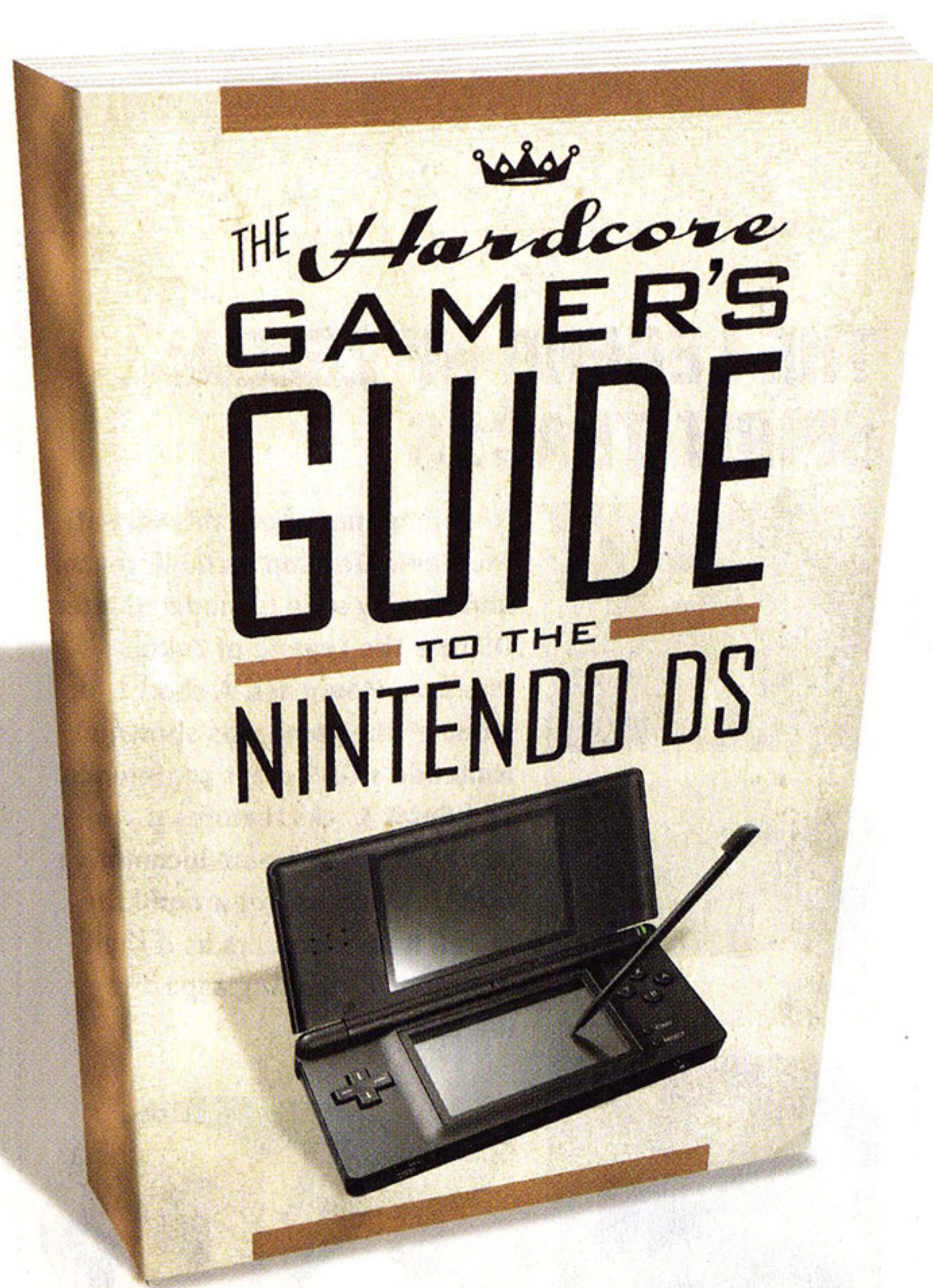
The DSi also has new, higher quality speakers, so your tunes will sound better even without headphones.

■ You can throw up a Nintendo-related visualizer while you rock out to your music

THE BOTTOM LINE

The lack of a GBA slot is unfortunate – no *Guitar Hero* for the DSi (although Nintendo will continue to sell the DS Lite), but hardly a major blow to the handheld. This is especially true given the addition of an SD memory slot and the ability to surf the web and download new games from the DSi Shop. The added applications that allow you to fool around with your photos and music may or may not appeal to you, but Nintendo knows how to make its handhelds stick around for the long haul.

GRADE: A



When buying a game for your DS, you've probably noticed that the shelves are packed with options. Amid all of the language coaches and cooking guides, it can be difficult to sort out which so-called games are actually games – and even harder to tell which of those are worth playing. With over 100 million units sold around the world, the DS obviously has a wide appeal. However, if you bought your DS because you want to play awesome games, this guide will help steer you toward the inventive, high-quality titles you may have missed.

CLASSICS

These are the franchises that have fueled Nintendo's success with the hardcore crowd for years. Just because they're on a smaller system doesn't mean they can't deliver the same thrills as their big-screen counterparts.



New Super Mario Bros.

Mario goes back to his roots in this 2D platforming adventure. Drawing inspiration from entries like Super Mario World, this title has all of the goomba-stomping, mushroom-eating, princess-rescuing fun that made Mario a gaming icon all those years ago.



The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass

If you liked The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past on SNES, then you need to check out Phantom Hourglass. The top-down view is reminiscent of classic Zelda games, but the stylus controls – which assist in everything from battle to navigation – set the standard for how to use the system's unique touch screen.



Mario Kart DS

It's Mario Kart! What else do you need to know? Tons of characters, crazy power-ups, and multiplayer mayhem make this the best racing game on the DS. You can play with your friends in the same room (they don't even need to have the game), or you can go online to find some competition.

SO CRAZY IT JUST MIGHT WORK

Many publishers don't like taking risks with their big-budget games, but the smaller scale of a DS project allows for a degree of experimentation. This approach has paid off in multiple titles that provide unique, bizarre, and clever gameplay while defying categorization.



Trauma Center series

If you want to be a surgeon without years of medical school, Trauma Center is for you. Requiring precision and speed, the operations in this series are sure to cause your brow to sweat and push your dexterity to its limit. The games aren't too graphic, so the squeamish needn't worry about picking up the scalpel.



Ace Attorney series

Half adventure game and half courtroom drama, the Ace Attorney series focuses on wacky characters and hilarious dialogue to keep the player involved. The highlights are the trial segments, where pump-up music and shouts of "objection!" can turn a cross examination into a laugh riot.



Metroid Prime Pinball

Nothing says "Metroid" like... pinball? Samus spends most of her time as a morph ball in this unconventional spin-off, though players will use her signature weapons and moves to blast through Metroid-themed tables and rack up points.



Master of Illusion

Turn your DS into a stage-show prop as you practice magic that will fool your friends and confound your enemies. Master of Illusion is packed with real tricks that use the DS in a variety of ways, and it comes with a deck of playing cards so you can practice without draining your batteries.

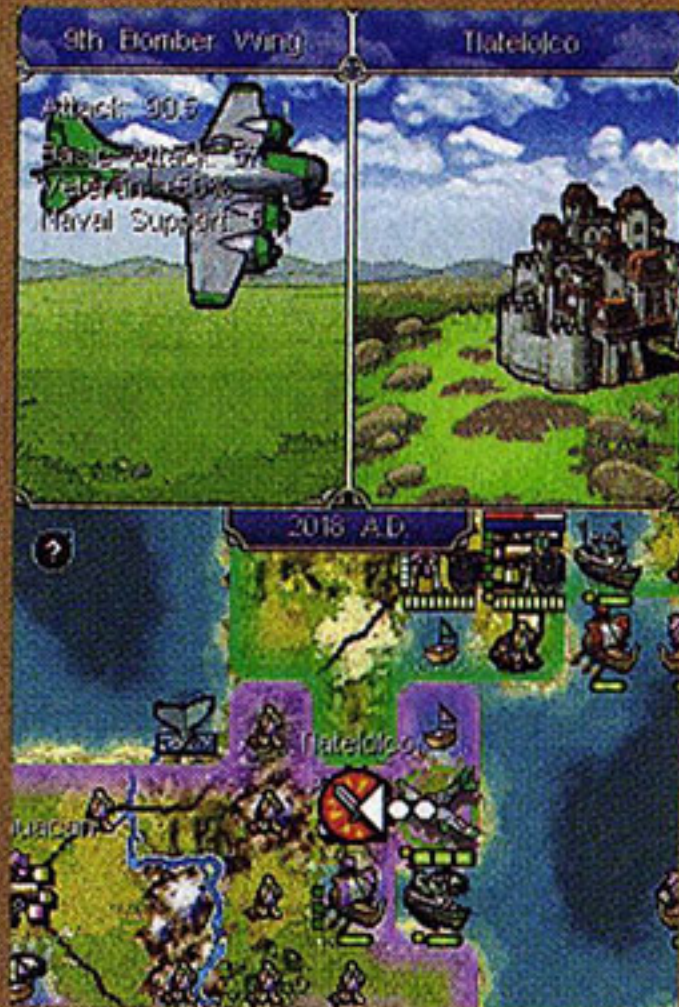


KORG DS-10

This cool piece of software emulates a KORG MS-10 synthesizer, a classic '80s instrument. The realistic interface provides an interesting way to mix your own tracks and add effects. It may not technically be a game, but it's still pretty hardcore.

STRATEGY

The turn-based tactics of strategy games make them ideal to play on the go, but that doesn't mean these titles are lightweights. A well-executed plan is always satisfying, and the DS gives you many options to systematically crush your opposition.



Civilization Revolution

The deep, engrossing strategy of this series makes an amazing transition to handheld. Civilization Revolution allows you to make cultural progress, conquer your enemies with military might, and guide your empire to prosperity.



Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift

Grid-based battles are at the heart of this title, but moving and attacking are just the beginning. As they progress through various jobs, your characters gain awesome new abilities that allow for incredible diversity in every encounter.



Advance Wars series

You'll build and command an army, use special powers, and traverse all kinds of terrain on your way to victory in Advance Wars. The series has a simplistic visual style, but the strategic intricacies in directing your land, sea, and air units are quite sophisticated.

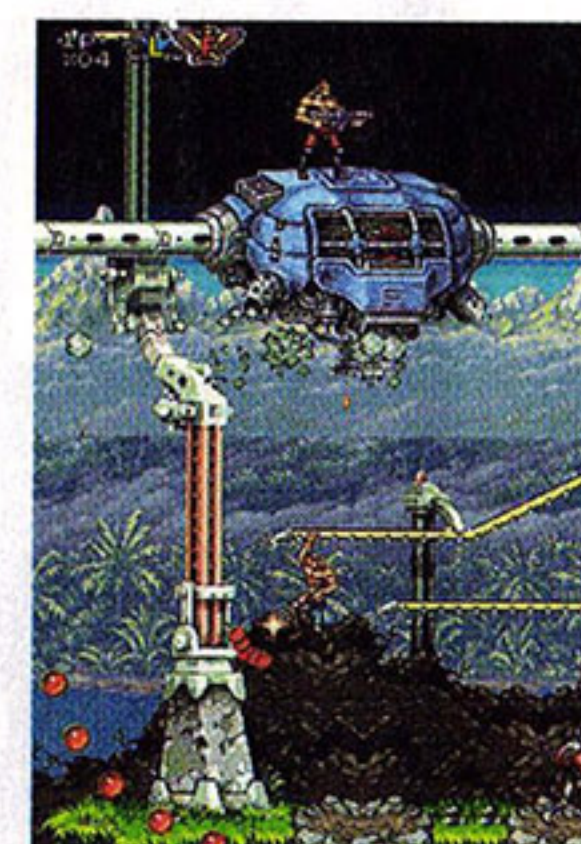
OLD-SCHOOL SENSIBILITIES

Side-scrolling action games were a staple of the 8-and 16-bit eras, but you don't see them on home consoles much anymore. Thankfully, the DS is a great place to find new games that combine those old-school mechanics with modern gameplay twists.



Castlevania series

After several bad console entries over the years, the DS has become Castlevania's true home. Ridiculous boss fights, powerful magic attacks, and free-form exploration make these games rewarding for players who don't mind a challenge.



Contra 4

Everyone remembers playing Contra on NES, and Contra 4 recaptures that feeling. Two-player co-op, heavy firepower, endless parades of cannon fodder, and unforgiving difficulty are what it's all about. Yes, the spread cannon still rules.

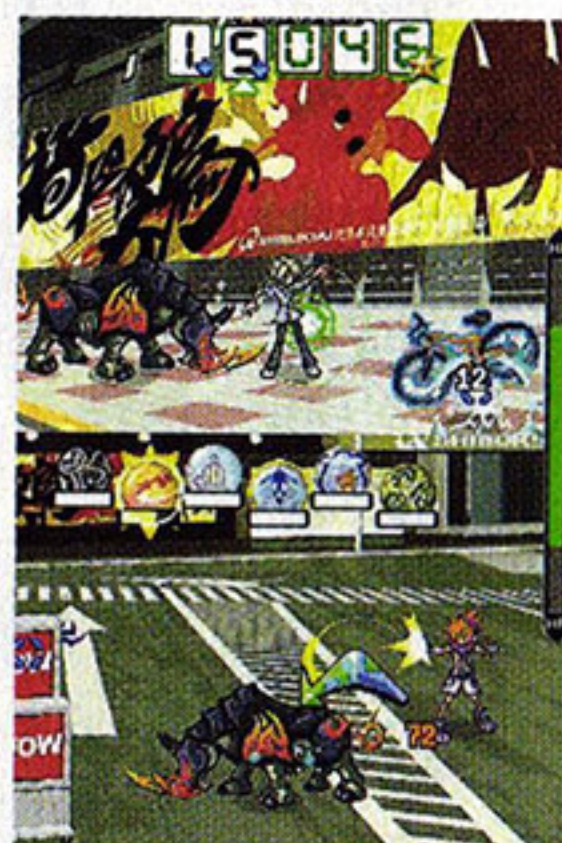


Kirby Canvas Curse

Canvas Curse turns the platforming genre around by letting players create the platforms themselves. Using the stylus exclusively, you'll draw ramps that guide a rolling Kirby through eight colorful levels, collecting items and battling bosses along the way.

ROLE-PLAYING

Whether you want to play new RPGs or revisit some old favorites, the DS has you covered. Square Enix has this category largely to itself, but renowned developer BioWare has also proven its ability to make a quality handheld role-playing experience.



The World Ends With You

Mixing real-time combat, a dark and compelling story, and a fair bit of shopping, this is a difficult game to explain – but it's easy to love. Innovative use of both screens makes battle fun, and the clever plot twists will keep you on your toes.



Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood

The best Sonic game in years has nothing to do with tearing through levels at high speed. Instead, this RPG from BioWare is traditional with a twist; it features Sonic and company in turn-based battles, but implements touch screen controls to execute powerful special attacks.



Chrono Trigger

Chrono Trigger is a must-play for gamers calling themselves RPG fans, and this port makes it easy to see why. The time-traveling tale is full of memorable characters, cool cooperative attacks, and the artistic efforts of some of the biggest names in gaming.

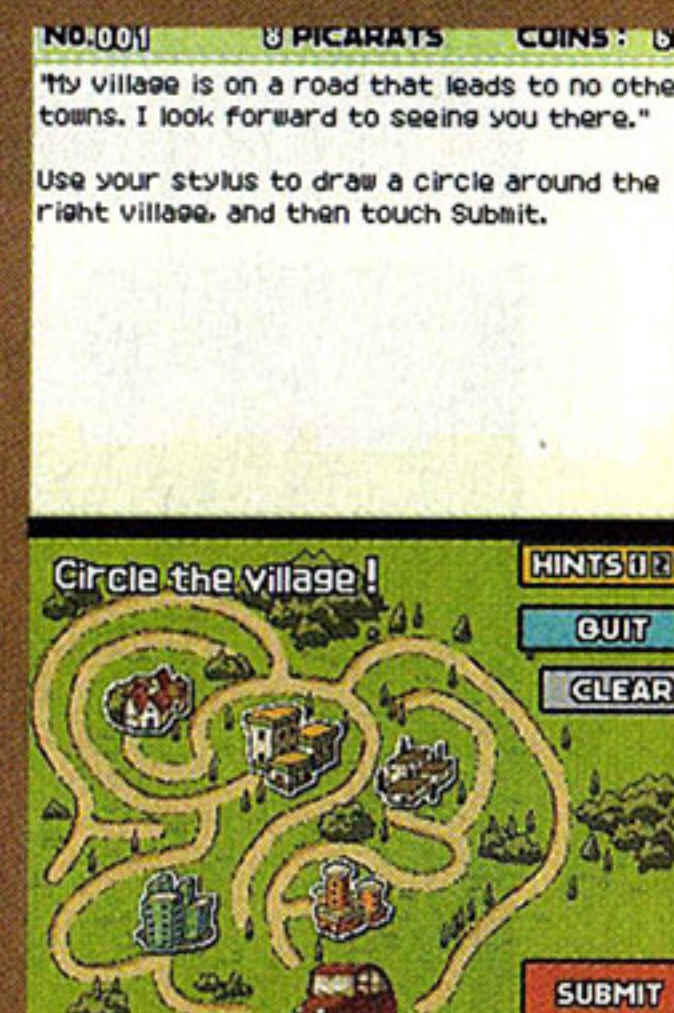
PUZZLERS

Everyone likes a challenge. The DS has plenty of casual brain-training titles, but it also has a selection of true puzzle games that test your reflexes and problem-solving skills. If you enjoy getting hopelessly addicted to games, these are definitely worth your time.



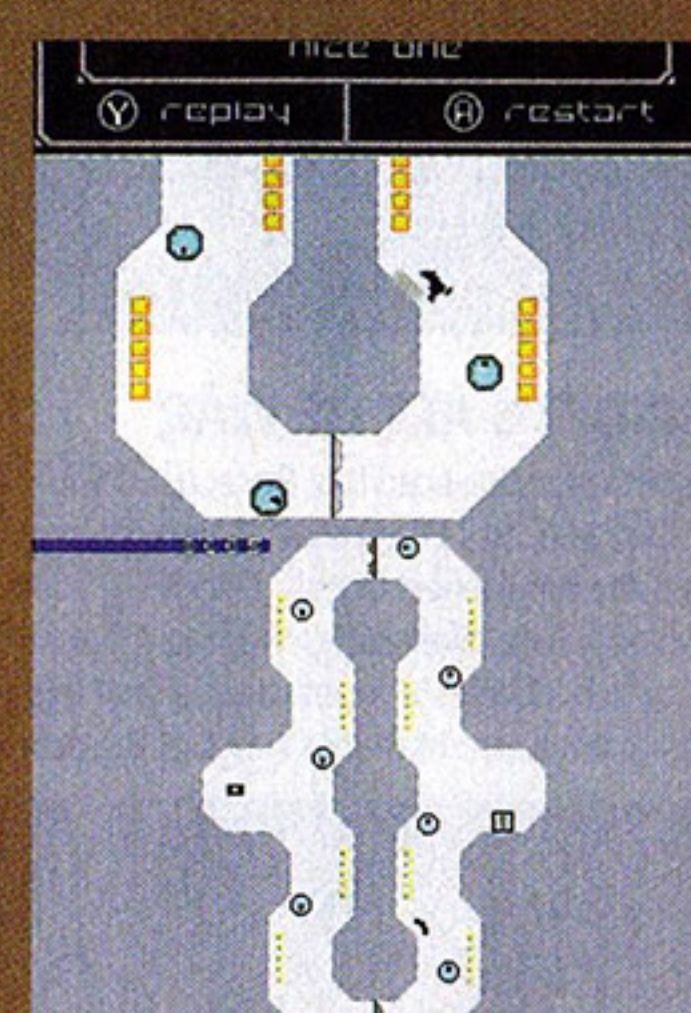
Picross DS

This logic game has players comparing a grid's rows and columns to determine which spaces should be filled. Every filled square contributes to forming a pixelated image of fruit, animals, and various other objects, so recognizing the pattern helps solve the puzzle.



Professor Layton and the Curious Village

Packed with mind-bending conundrums, Professor Layton strikes a delicate balance between fun and frustration. The puzzles aren't too easy, but a little thought and perseverance will carry you through the challenges and make you feel smart.



N+

You're a little ninja dude with a scarf, and you need to get through levels before time runs out. It sounds easy, but once you add the bombs, missiles, lasers, and other deathtraps, things start to get tricky.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

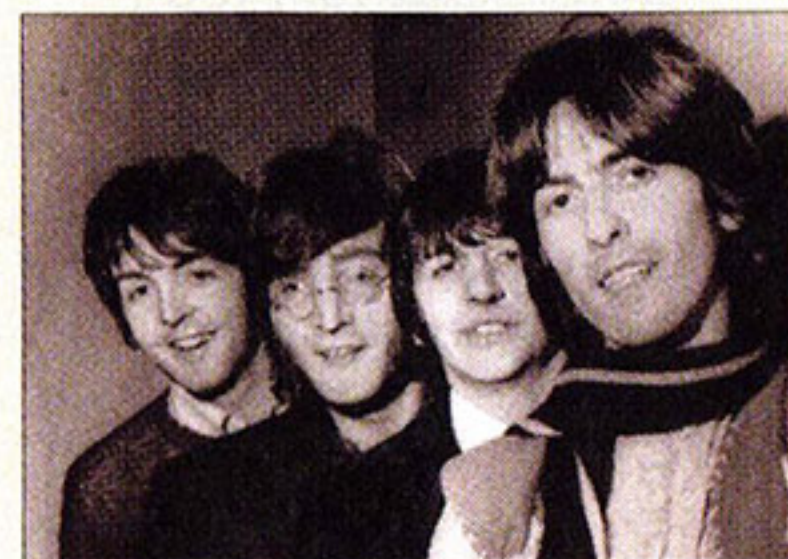
THQ'S BIG HUGE PROBLEM

As part of its restructuring plans, THQ says that it plans to close down Rise of Nations (shown) developer Big Huge Games if a buyer cannot be found for the studio. THQ acquired Big Huge Games in early 2008, and it was working on an unannounced RPG.



MEET THE BEATLES

More details are coming out about The Beatles: Rock Band. The PS3, Xbox 360, and Wii versions hit stores on 9/9/09 (later for the PS2), and will be sold in a full-band bundle for \$249.99, game with a guitar for \$99.99, and as a standalone game for \$59.99. The instruments will be modeled after the Beatles' own, although you can also use your existing ones. Dhani Harrison, son of the late George Harrison, recently let slip that the game would feature unreleased Beatles songs.



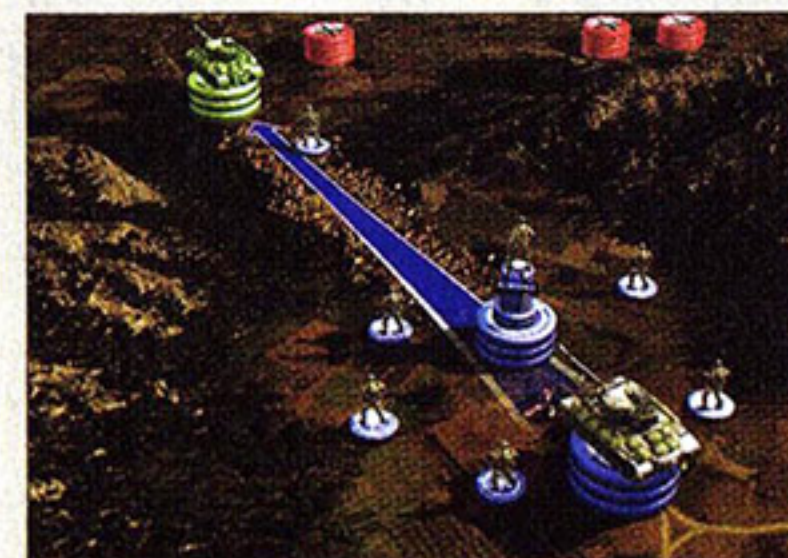
NEW FROM MISTWALKER

Mistwalker has posted some new art on its next project, which from what we hear (and see in the art) will involve nature coming to life in the forests... and this dude with more swords than a sausage party.



UBISOFT'S ART OF WAR

Ubisoft has announced that Ruse, its RTS for PC, Xbox 360, and PlayStation 3, will release sometime before next March. Deceiving your enemies will be a key component to this strategy title, which includes a zoom camera that lets you switch from micro to macro views of the action.



NEW LAYTON BEING LOCALIZED

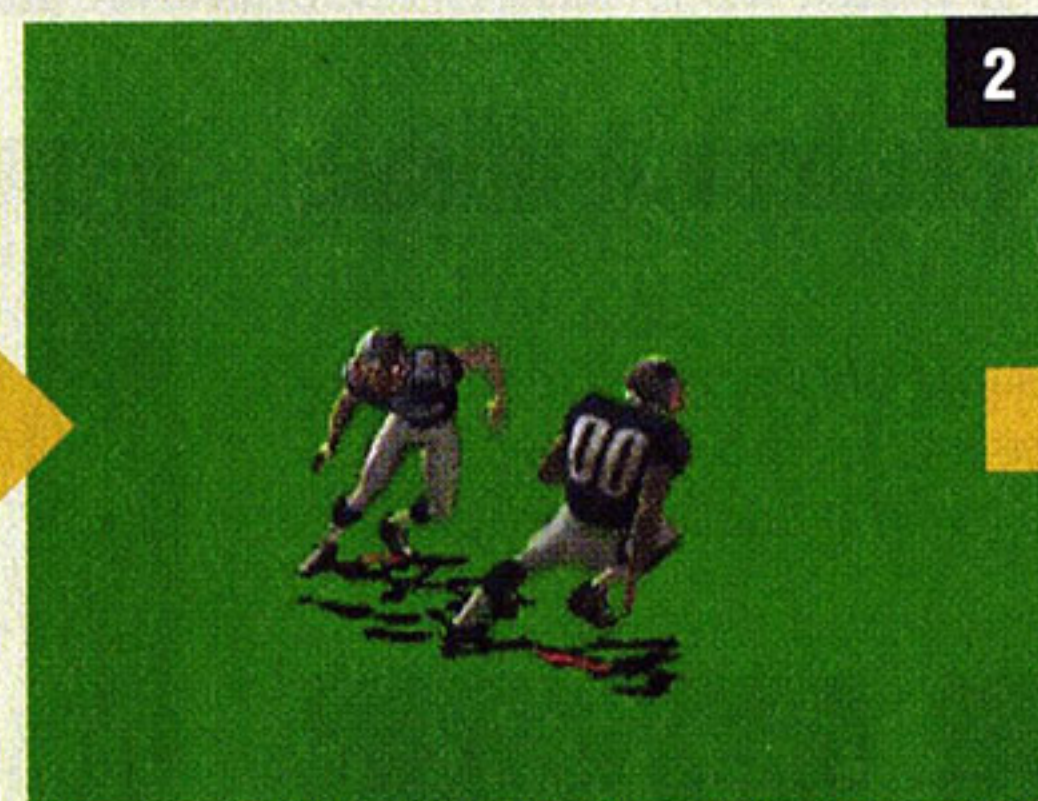
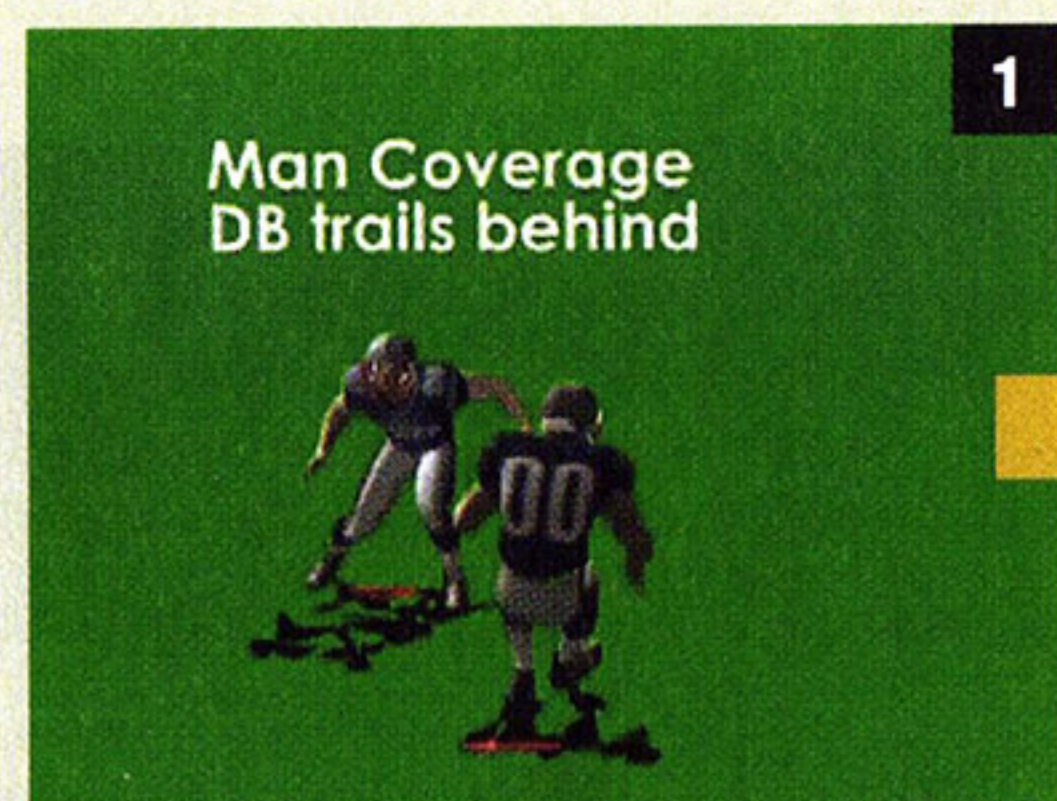
We thought it would never happen! Akihiro Hino, CEO of Professor Layton creators Level 5, recently said that the company is now working on the localization of the second title in the puzzle series, Professor Layton and the Diabolical Box. Hino said that he hopes the game will be out in six months and that all six of the Layton titles will eventually appear in the U.S. and Europe.

games

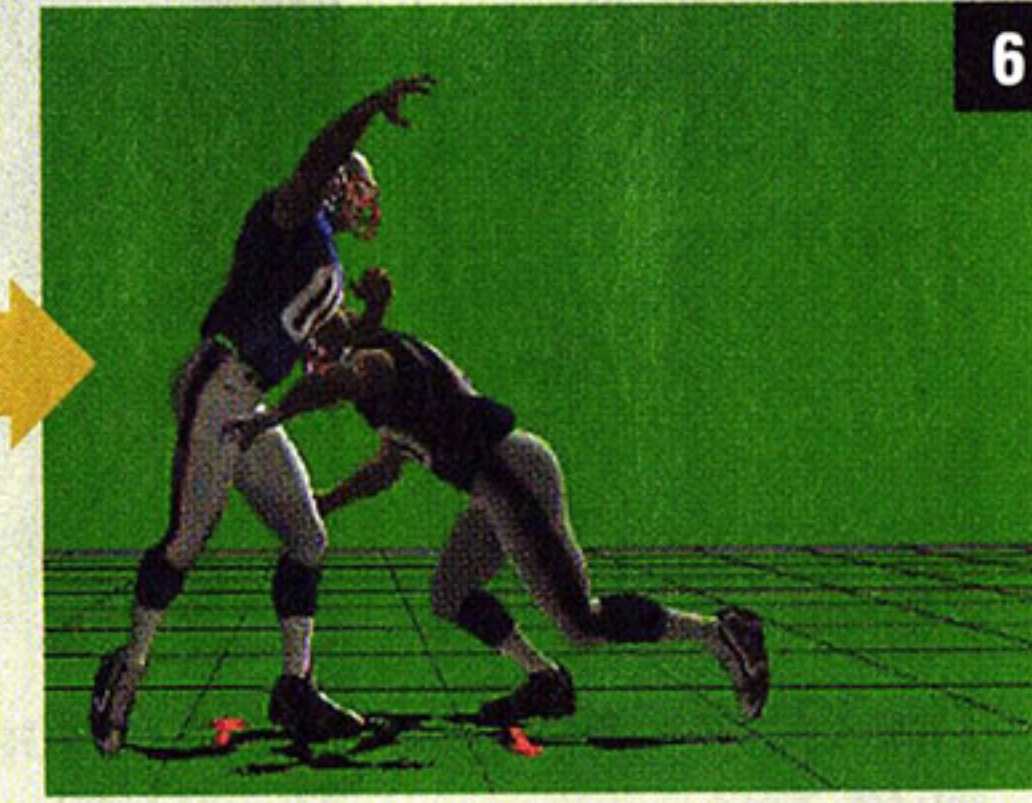
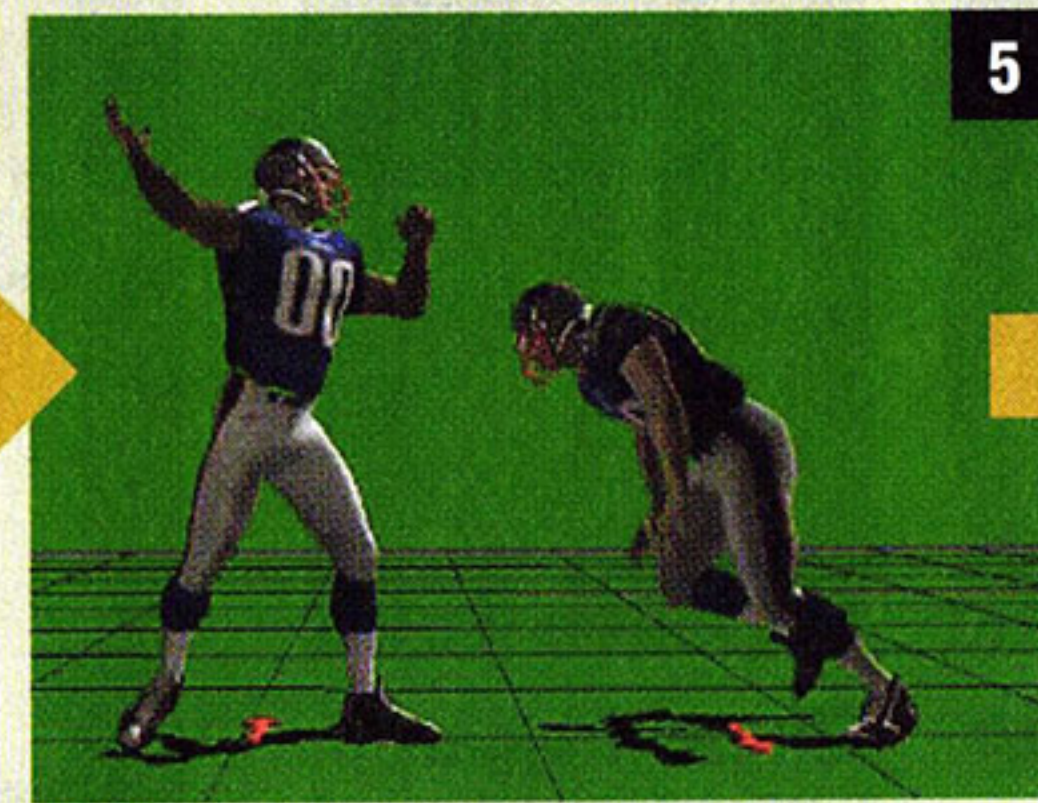
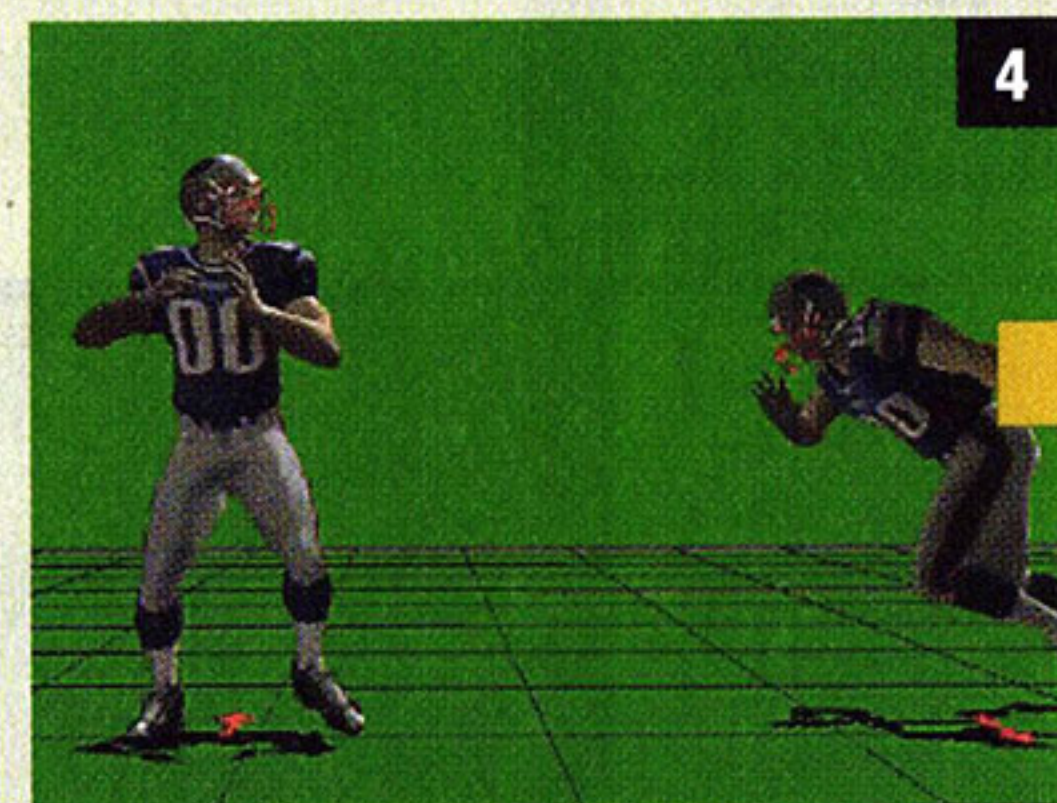
MOVING THE CHAINS?

MADDEN DEVELOPER PROMISES CHANGES

EA Sports has absorbed criticism for the unchanging nature of its Madden NFL football franchise, but developer Tiburon wants to make this year different. Ian Cummings, Madden's lead designer, has been blogging about the game, and he's revealed some interesting changes in store for fans. Will it make a difference? We'll have to wait and see. In the meantime, check out these first details on Madden NFL 10*.



■ These are shots of test animations from lead designer Ian Cummings' Madden blog



ANIMATIONS

- More realistic animations for players' movements make for better outcomes. Cummings' blog shows video footage of how a wide receiver's deceleration, acceleration, planting, etc. during a route determines how open he gets. Every route animation in the game has been re-done. More realistic route movements by WRs – and the defensive backs covering them – should do away with DBs all of a sudden jumping routes to intercept the ball when they actually aren't in a good position to. (1 - 3)

- Wide receiver and defensive back jostling means that a faster WR won't always blow by a defender. The DB can use jostling to maintain superior body positioning and keep the WR in check. This also replicates the hand fighting and subtle degrees of pass interference you see in a game.

- Head tracking means that defensive backs cannot intercept or react to balls that they can't see.

- QBs can now get the ball off before being sacked. This helps alleviate suction sacks, where the sack animation starts (and the QB tucks the ball instead of throwing it) even though it looks like you have enough time to get the ball off. (4 - 6)



ATTRIBUTES & STATS

- Cummings says that every position and rating has been rescaled to use more of a numerical range. The upshot of this is that while superstars will still possess superior ratings, your average player will be just that – a 70 rating instead of an 80 rating in previous years.

- New QB attributes: Deep Ball Accuracy, Medium Passing Accuracy, Short Passing Accuracy, Throw on the Run, and Play Action. Precision passing has also been tweaked to make it actually relevant.

- Half sacks and assisted tackles have been added to stats.

SPEED

- In general, the game will be slightly slower. A game speed slider has been added for customization.

- Previously, the game would change speeds in transitional animations, but Madden NFL 10 will keep a more constant speed. The FB Dive play in 09 was effective because the fullback would speed up to take the handoff from the QB, thus hitting the line quicker.

- More differentiation of QB throwing speeds and more realistic touch passing. Fewer moon balls on long passes.

- Players' speed ratings were tweaked, and there will also be an adjustment slider.



■ In Madden NFL 09, QBs would pull down the ball too early



*All game captures are preliminary and do not represent the final product.

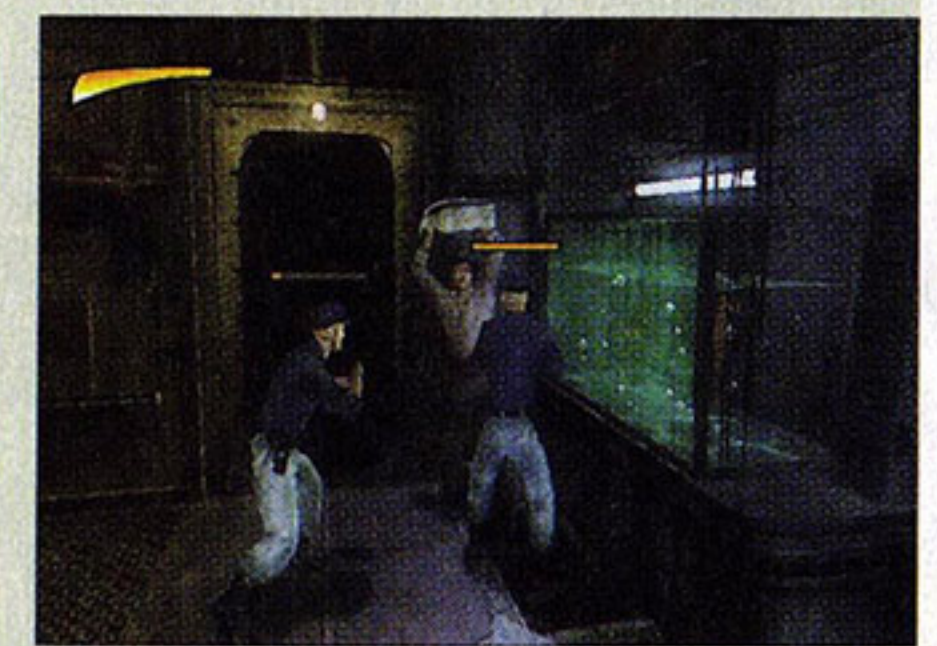
THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



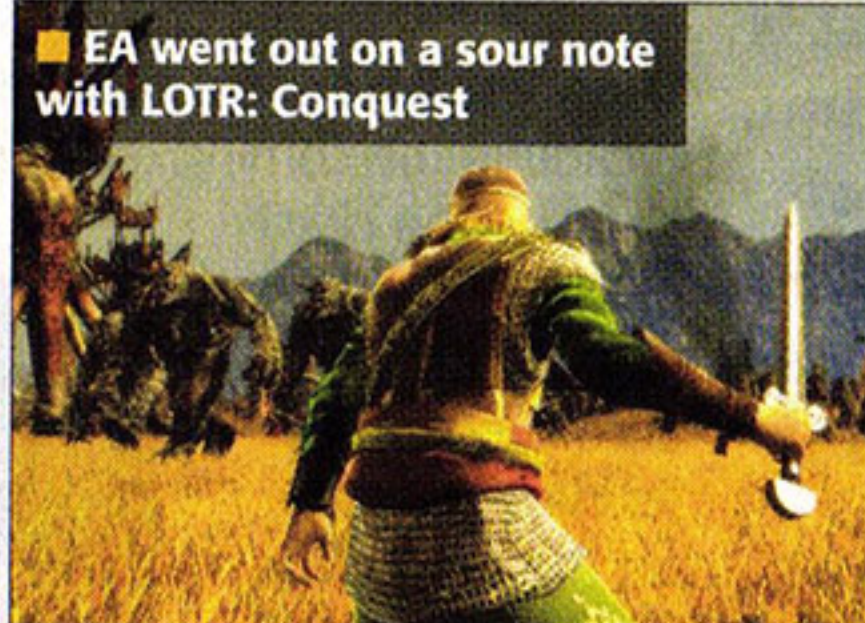
UGLY

Ubisoft has taken I Am Alive developer Darkworks off the project. Judging by what both sides are saying on the matter, it sounds like the developer has other projects on its docket that might have interfered with fulfilling the game's new release date. I Am Alive is expected somewhere between the end of this year and March of 2010. Ubisoft Shanghai – which had already been working with Darkworks on the game – will take over the title.



BAD

Although LucasArts originally announced its Indiana Jones game for the PS3 and 360, the company is pulling the plug on those versions of the title. Matt Vella, the game's producer, says that there wasn't enough time to finish the PS3 and 360 versions before the launch window, so they were dropped. Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings will appear on the Wii, PS2, DS, and PSP on June 9 (see page 72 for more). Now we know what it's like to be stuck with Short Round.



■ EA went out on a sour note with LOTR: Conquest

GOOD

EA's uneven reign over the Lord of the Rings franchise is over. The rights have reverted back to Warner Bros., and the company can look forward to making games based on two Hobbit-era movies on the way in 2011 and 2012 from New Line Cinema. Warner Bros. is a subsidiary of Time Warner, which has invested heavily in Turbine – the studio behind Lord of the Rings Online. Unfortunately, neither Warner Bros. nor EA is talking about the situation at the moment.



GOOD

Rockstar Vancouver is bringing back the Max Payne franchise this winter. "This is Max as we've never seen him before," says Sam Houser, founder of Rockstar Games. "[Max is] a few years older, more world-weary and cynical than ever. We experience the downward spiral of his life after the events of Max Payne 2 and witness his last chance for salvation."

GOOD

Developer Infinity Ward has unveiled the debut trailer for Modern Warfare 2, which contains audio from what sounds like someone opening fire at a crowded airport. The trailer also reveals the game's release date – November 10.

If you're wondering why the title doesn't include the Call of Duty moniker, it's because the developer is laying claim to the Modern Warfare tag. This is smart because you no longer have to remember which Call of Duty titles Infinity Ward is making. Although you have to wonder if it's only a matter of time before publisher Activision hijacks the Modern Warfare brand like it did with Call of Duty.



UGLY

Midway is so desperate that they are offering bonus incentives to employees who can sell off the Mortal Kombat franchise. Sadly, one person's gain will come at the expense of another's fortune. More specifically, the money from the bonuses is coming from a pool that Midway had previously said was going to go towards paying the paid time off of employees who had been let go.

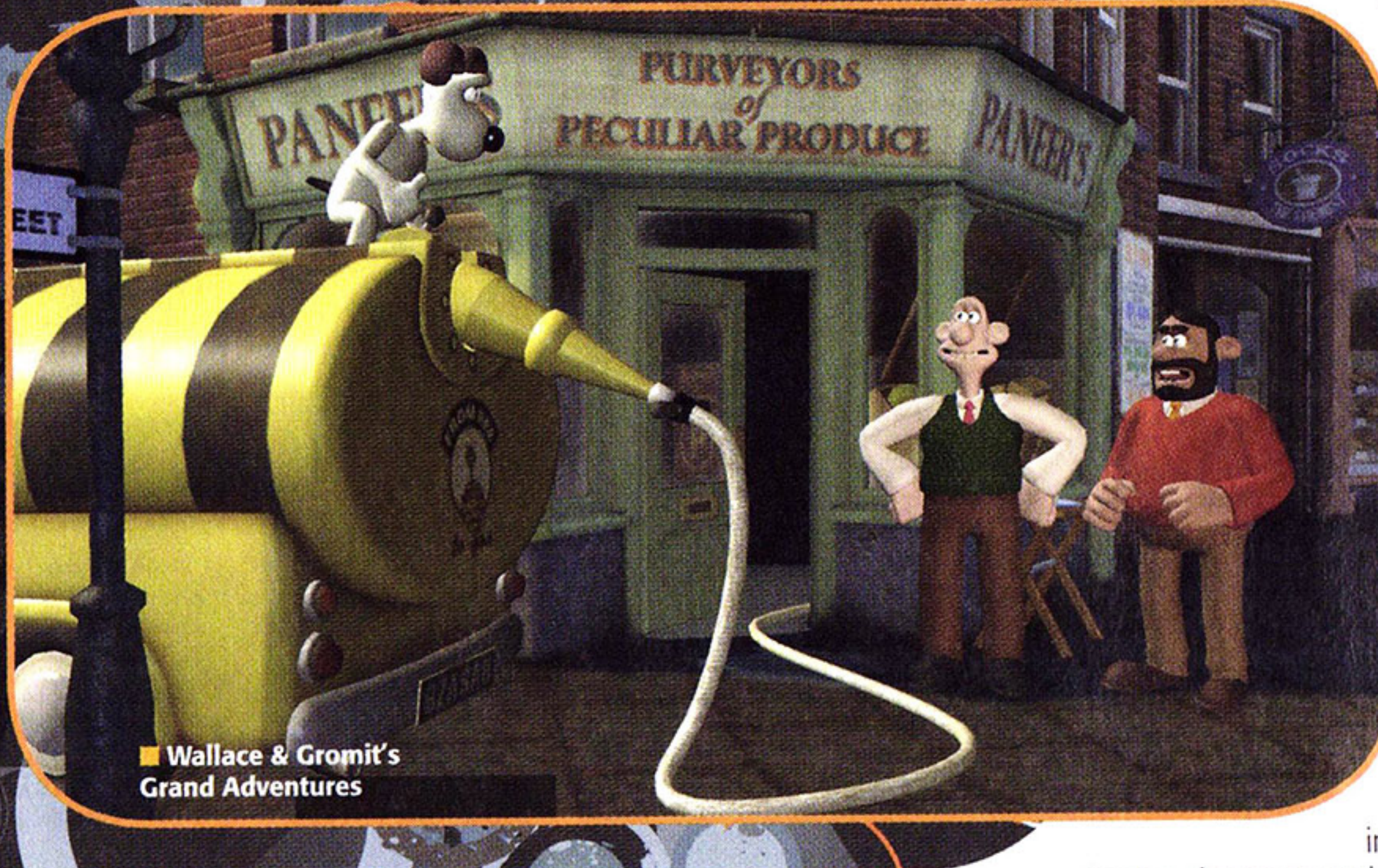
GOOD

Nintendo has finally given us a memory solution for the Wii via SD memory cards – up to 32GB. Go get the Wii System Menu 4.0 now!

impulse

BY MATT MILLER

Tower defense, brawlers, shooters, and adventure games. No shortage of genre choices for spring and summer.



Wallace & Gromit's Grand Adventures

been tweaked and evolved for its release on Sony's platform, even as its original creator has moved on to Media Molecule. At its core, the game is a four-player brawler, complete with wild martial arts combos and silly kung-fu characters.

However, laugh-inducing modes like Capture-the-Fish are where the fun really emerges. Even better, a surprisingly deep control scheme assures players some solid gameplay to tackle after the chuckles slow down. Even with the extensive character editor, this isn't going to hold your attention for weeks, but it should fit the bill nicely for a weekend party.

One of my favorite recent DS titles is making its way to Live Arcade.

I got a chance to tackle the new version of **Space Invaders Extreme**, and came away impressed. Like the original, the classic formula of increasingly speedy, descending space ships has remained, but the addition of power-ups based on hitting similarly colored enemies breaks open the design, making for some challenging play sessions. Bonus rounds, multiple enemy types, branching level trees, and boss fights all combine to create a game far more complex and entertaining than first impressions might indicate. The big bonus for Live Arcade players? Four-player online co-op.

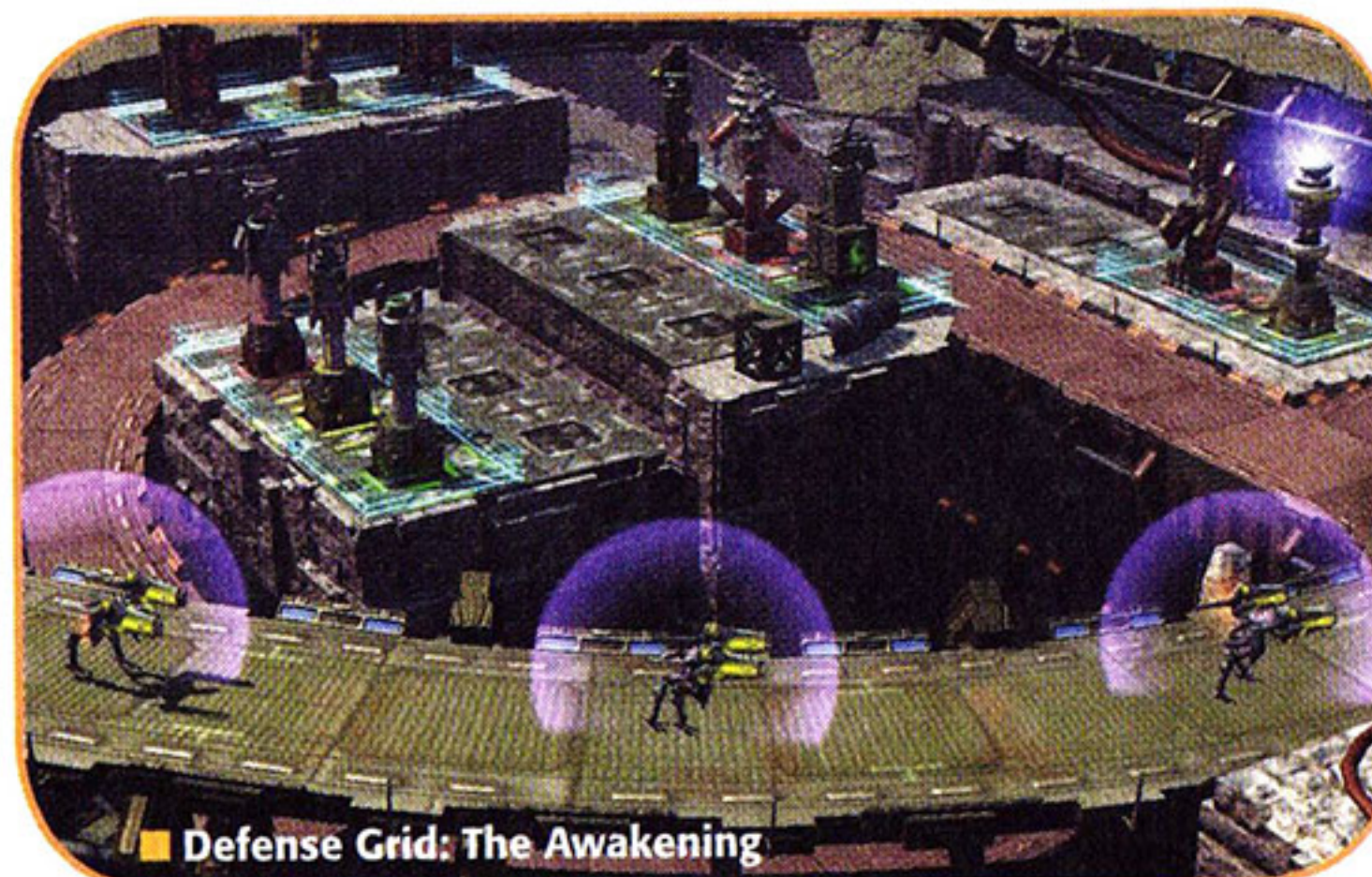
I probably don't need to point adventure gamers in the direction of Telltale Games, but its recent endeavors deserve some attention. Last year's **Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People** (for PC & WiiWare) was a great translation of that hilarious property into the point-and-click genre. Xbox Live Arcade and PC download services will be home to the studio's next inspired outing: **Wallace & Gromit's Grand**

Adventures takes the classic claymation series and gives it the game treatment. As with Strong Bad, the charm of the main characters certainly shines through. The first of four episodes should be out on Live Arcade sometime this summer. If that's not enough, it sounds as if Telltale has a version of **Sam & Max** they're preparing for Live Arcade a few months after that. ■■■

I've been increasingly interested in how downloadable game content is priced. Not being a marketing guru, I'm sure I'm ignorant of a number of factors that go into the cost of downloadable games and content. So I may be missing something, but it seems like we're still in the phase of arbitrary pricing. For years, the \$50 price tag was the industry standard for retail games. More recently, Xbox and PS3 titles have made the jump to \$60. However, no such standard rates have been established for downloadable content. Ten dollars seems to have emerged as a nice round figure that the audience can accept – not too pricey, but indicative that the product is worth spending money on. Personally, I'm hoping that a seemingly random amount doesn't become the default. I've played more than enough games that defy the average in both quality and quantity. While arbitrarily assigning a number is no solution, it'd be a shame to demand that publishers all conform to a rigid pricing structure.

Looking toward the horizon, spring and summer certainly seem promising. I was particularly surprised by how much I enjoyed **Defense Grid: The Awakening**, which is headed to Xbox Live Arcade in the coming months. If the name sounds familiar, that's because the cleverly designed tower defense game won accolades upon its initial release on PC. As endless streams of aliens rush your base to steal away its power cores, your hastily erected defenses hold the line against the threat. The game takes this common concept and makes it worth a purchase through excellent balancing, a steady learning curve, and an intriguing array of options as you lay out your strategy. When you begin shaping the board to your purposes and finding the right mixture of units, Defense Grid begins to shine where most entries in the genre get tiresome.

PlayStation Network is finally seeing the release of **Rag Doll Kung Fu: Fists of Plastic**. Originally concocted as a side project by Mark Healy during his time at Lionhead, the game has

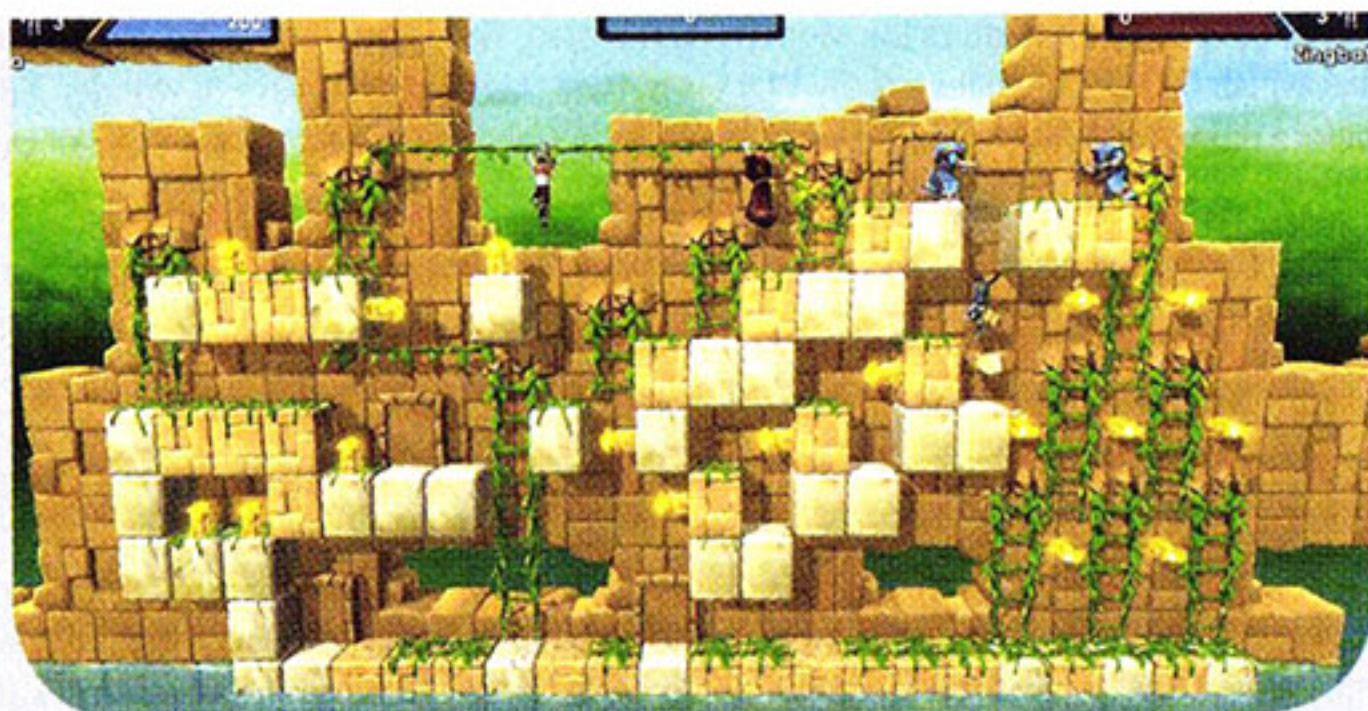


Defense Grid: The Awakening



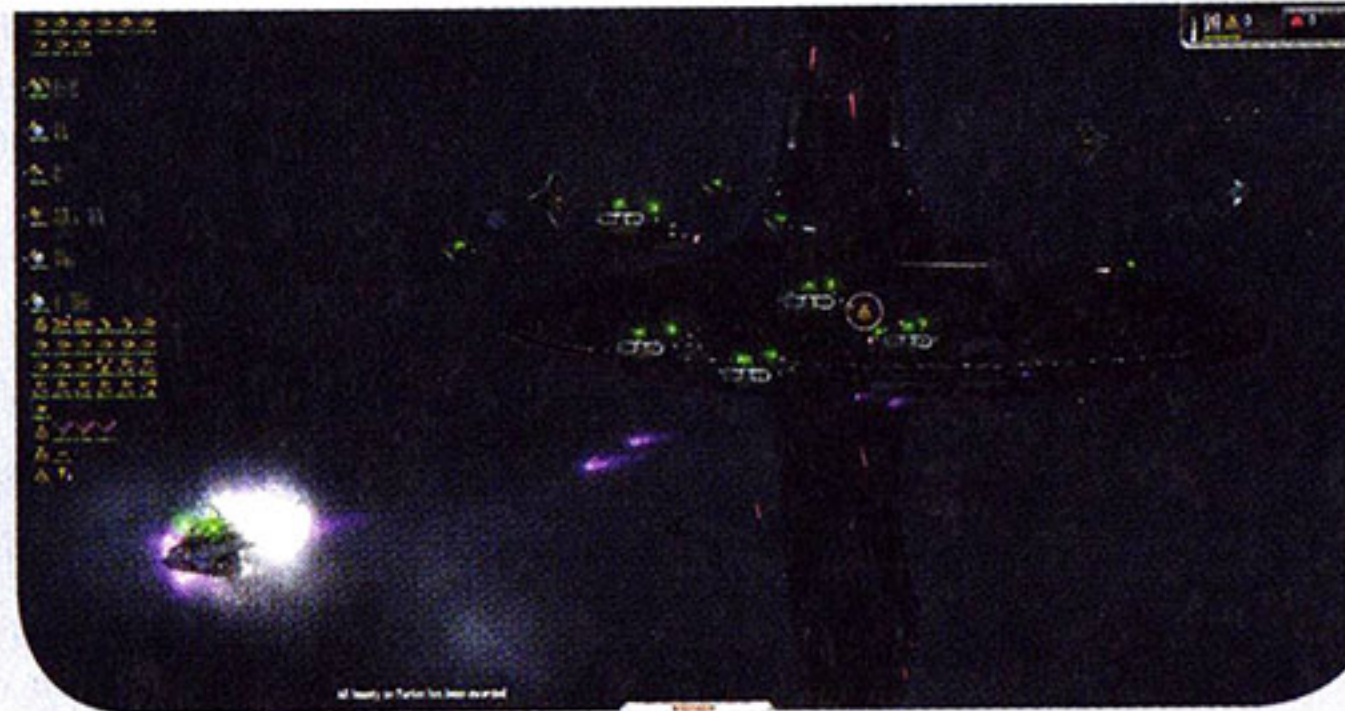
Rag Doll Kung Fu: Fists of Plastic

POSITION



> **Lode Runner**

After months of waiting, the remake of the classic Lode Runner looks to be revving up for a Live Arcade launch. Once you've mastered all the standard action/puzzle levels, make sure to check out the sweet co-op mode, as well as the level editor.



> **Sins of a Solar Empire: Entrenchment**

The first of three planned micro-expansions to last year's real-time strategy space epic, Entrenchment focuses on defensive measures, including upgradeable starbases and minefields. The expansion requires the original to play, and is available exclusively through Stardock's digital content platform, Impulse.



> **Outrun Online Arcade**

Another re-release of the classic arcade racer is headed to Live Arcade. You know the one – ridiculous drift turns, and a crazy girlfriend in the passenger seat who yells at you when you mess up. You've driven this road before, but nostalgic gamers may wish to get back behind the wheel.

BE RIDDICK.

APRIL 7, 2009

www.riddickgame.com

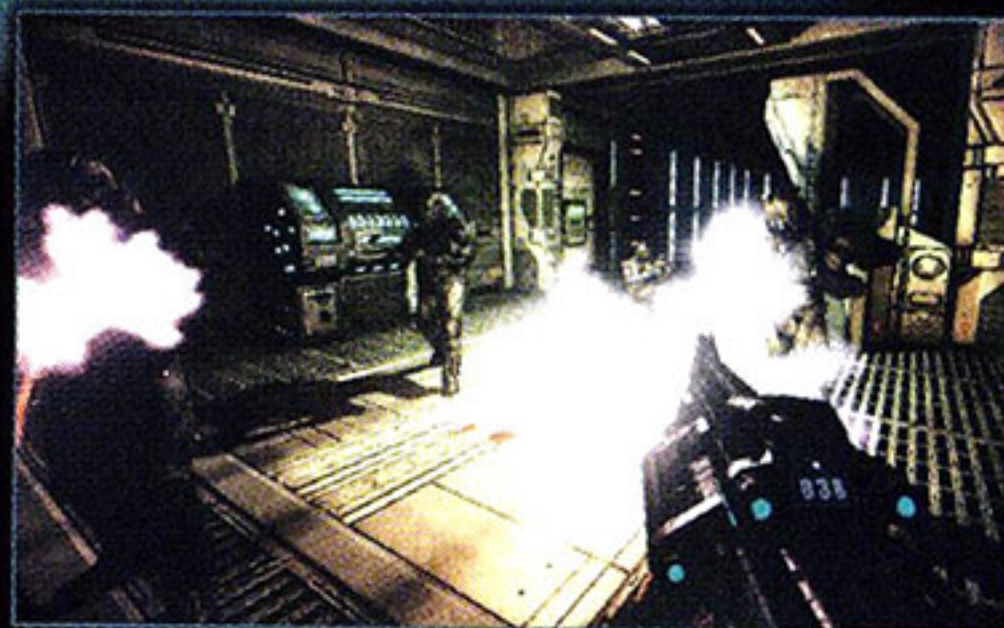
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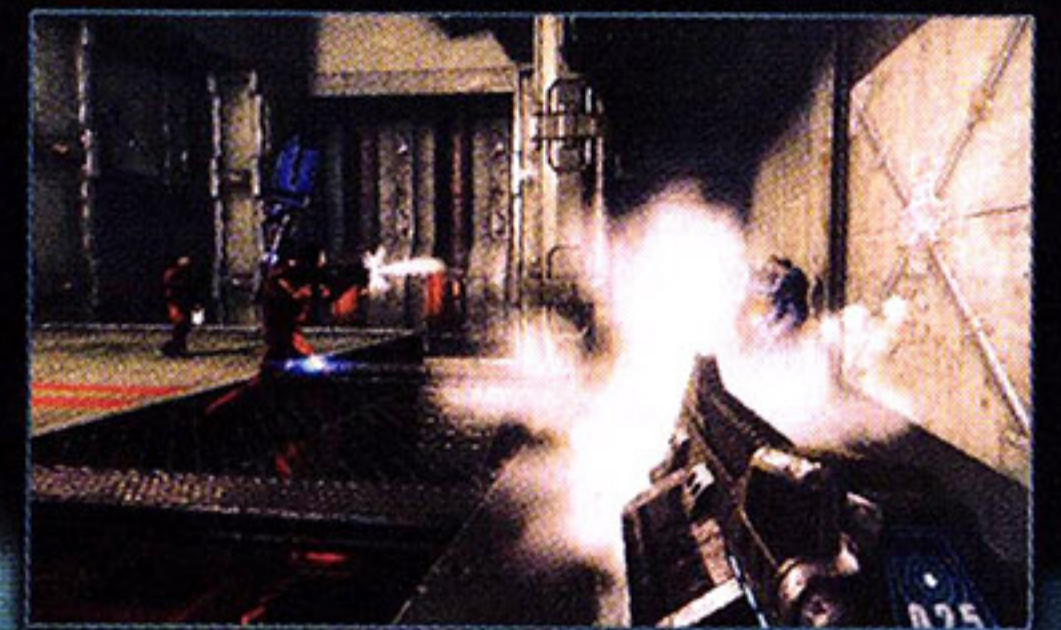
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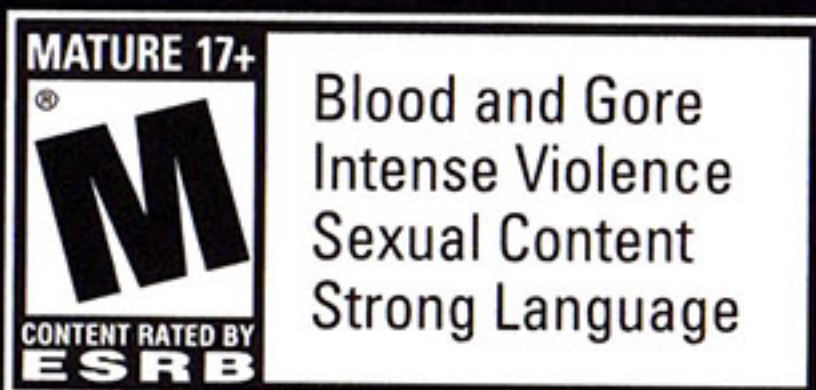
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ATARI

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afterwords

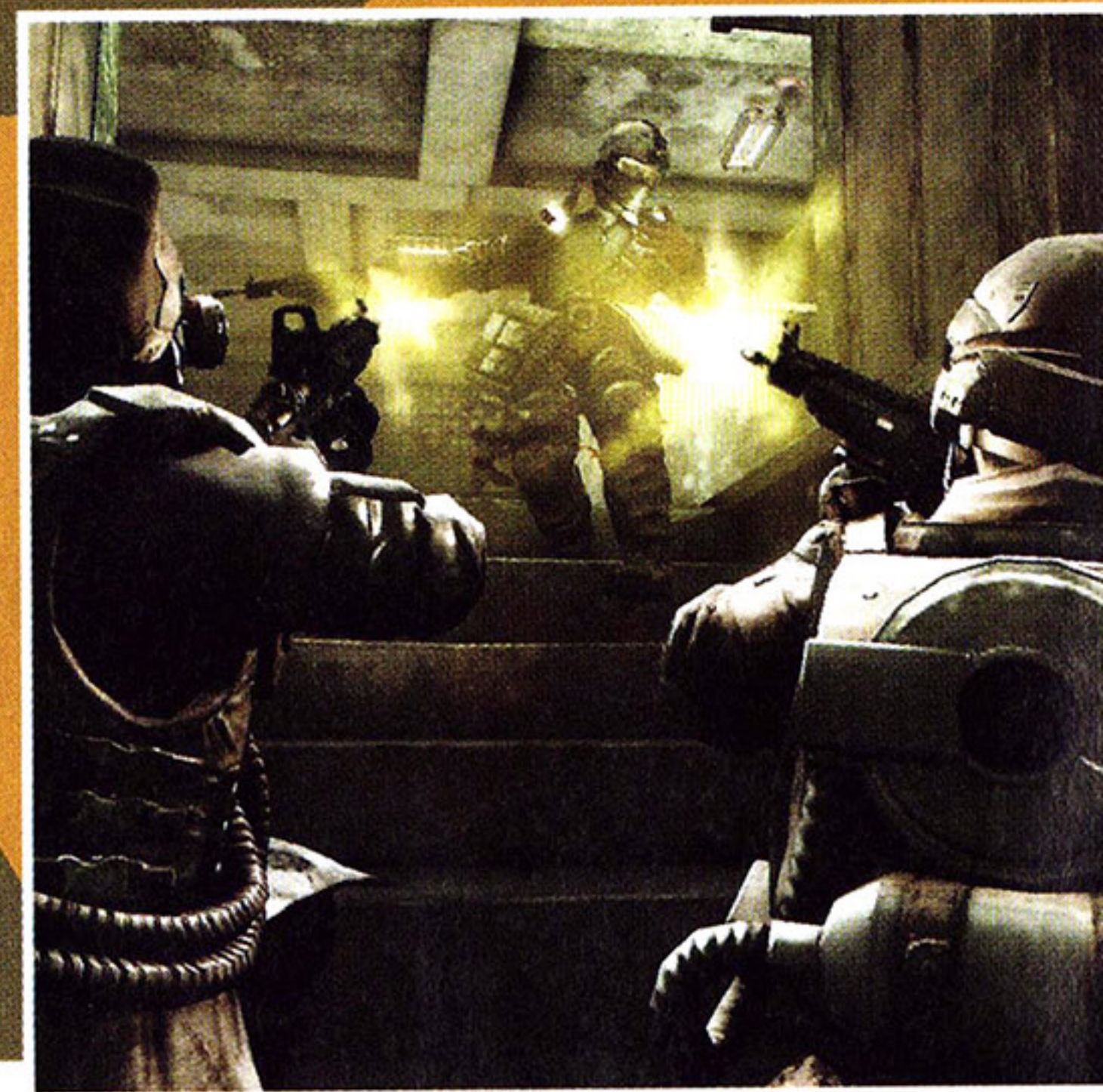
READERS PUT DEVELOPERS IN THE HOTSEAT

**HERMEN HULST**

Managing Director, Co-Founder, Guerilla Games

KILLZONE 2

Guerilla took a long and complicated path to the completion of Killzone 2. First revealed through an impressive trailer at E3 2005, both the media and the public became increasingly skeptical about the game's progress and its ability to live up to its own hype over the years that followed. Upon its release, the game has met with widespread praise from many circles, and frustrated concerns from others. We polled our readers, and then sent their questions to Hermen Hulst, managing director and co-founder at Guerilla Games.



Fyrefly: Why did you decide not to include cooperative play? Are there any plans to add co-op in the future through an update or DLC?

HERMEN HULST: We looked at all the different flavors of co-op early on, but decided our first priority would have to be the single-player experience and the multiplayer. We put all our focus and attention on that. Rather than just tack on co-op, it would have to be integrated and done to a similar standard as the single- and multiplayer. Having looked at it again now, I do not think we would want to add it as DLC.

LastKnight: Why did you allow players to only carry a primary weapon and a sidearm? I thought in the first Killzone you could carry up to three weapons. What's up with the change in formula?

HH: We carefully looked at what worked and what didn't in the original Killzone. Having multiple weapons or secondary fire complicates the balancing and took away from the more tactical gameplay experience we wanted to create this time around. We wanted to force the player to make more conscious decisions.

aubradley84: Some outlets have said that Killzone 2 isn't very innovative, but it does a lot to perfect the FPS conventions that already exist. Do you think that is a fair assessment?

HH: First off, I think innovations like the first-person cover system or the dynamic mission modes in multiplayer are some great new options that you won't find in other games. You're right in the sense that we aim to perfect the FPS experience. Rather than going for one main innovation with a capital "I," we set out to create a very consistent game, where the different features all were incredibly polished and would complement each other.

aubradley84: Why do the Helghast need to wear masks on their own planet? I thought the whole reason for them wearing them in the other games was due to them invading planets that had atmosphere that was substantially different from their own.

HH: The living conditions on Helghan have affected their physiology, forcing the less fortunate to wear breathing masks. They suffer from a condition known as lung burn. This happens when you are exposed to the Helghan atmosphere for too long. If you are interested in this kind of stuff, do check out the backstory on Killzone.com.

puggyluv: Other than a couple of the guns (lightning and bolt) the weapons didn't seem very sci-fi. Was there

a reason for this? The lightning gun was my favorite and I was sorry to not find it more throughout the game.

HH: With Killzone we want to create a universe that, although sci-fi, is grounded in reality.

puggyluv: While the vehicle portions were fun I think it would have been cool to do something aerial, like the ATAC. Were there ever any plans for this?

HH: We had looked into using the Intruder as a flying platform, but ultimately decided against it.

BladeWarrior23: What games had the biggest influence on your team? I've seen comparisons to Call of Duty and Halo. Do you like your game being mentioned in the same sentence as those other great shooters for what it does similar to those games, or would you prefer people talking about what fresh and innovative things your game brings to the table?

HH: We generally don't mind it, as I can think of worse franchises to be compared to than the ones you mention. What I don't like is being labeled as the "killer" of franchise X. We've set up Killzone as a universe and an experience in its own right, without wanting to benchmark it against any one particular game. We're, obviously, gamers ourselves and we play anything from World of Warcraft to LittleBigPlanet, MotorStorm or Guitar Hero, but there isn't one title that has been the biggest influence.

Ninja_Hawk: The Killzone universe has a pretty in-depth backstory about why the Helghast and the ISA are fighting; how come so few of these story aspects were brought up or explored in the game?

HH: The game is pretty much full-on action, and we did not leave enough

room to add in more of the backstory. With KZ 2, we wanted to focus more on the Helghast side of things, and taking the fight to Helghan allowed us to put more emphasis on them. We could have done a bit more there.

Sarinvx: Why is the melee combat so hard to pull off?

HH: Melee can be a little disorienting and, of course, the enemies do not like to be meleed, so they move a little too much to get a clear kill right away.

silverstein41: Do you feel that the controls for Killzone 2 would have benefited from a more modest auto aim?

HH: Hmm. I think the auto aim is quite subtle already. We did a lot of testing with the auto aim, and added it because it was too hard to track moving enemies.

bets_off: Lots of recent first-person games switch to third-person while you're in cover. Why did you decide to retain a first-person view, even behind cover?

HH: We keep the immersion intact as much as possible, making you the center of it all. Removing a lot of the HUD, keeping things in first person as much as possible, we felt would really add to the cinematic and immersive experience we wanted the player to have. We're quite happy with the first-person lean & peek system. Initially we did not think it would work, that was until one of our designers taped a video camera to his head and played it out behind his kitchen table.

TonicPop: It seems like you and your squad are some of the only people in the war who won't wear their helmets. What's wrong with those guys? Do they have a death wish?

HH: Apart from being able to see their happy faces a little more often, they are a little over enthusiastic.

TheWayBackMachine: I love the constantly changing objectives in multiplayer, but I hate how far the spawn points are from the action. Why not set spawn points a little closer to where the fighting is going on?

HH: Spawn points can be made by players. If you play as a tactician you can set a spawn point near to where you think would be valuable. Also, if you play in a squad you can spawn on your squad leader. The pre-defined spawn points are there to guarantee you a relatively safe spawn point.

xRiderx: Some of the big explosions and building collapses look amazing, but they seem pretty scripted. Was there a conscious effort to value big scripted events over more random, but less spectacular moments?

HH: Having these big set pieces was very important to us, as they add that Hollywood bang. Additionally there are a lot of cool "accidents" that will happen on any play through. With our AI we sometimes get some very unexpected and spectacular events. They aren't "building collapsing" kind of big, but certainly spectacular.

Ashmodai: Killzone 2 had certain expectations attached to it ever since that first video was shown at E3 2005. With the game now released, do you believe Killzone 2 lived up to the expectations established by that cinematic sequence?

HH: That is in the eye of the beholder. For me I think we captured the chaos and intensity from the trailer and, to be honest, if I look back at it now I really think the finished game looks better. To me it is more vibrant and has much more depth.



Jamster

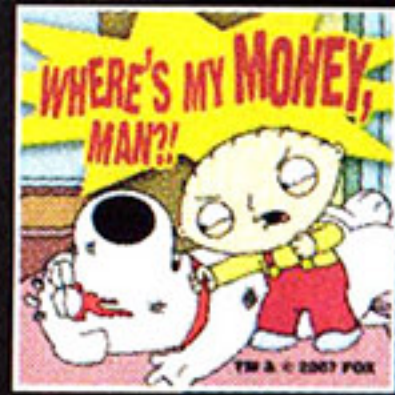
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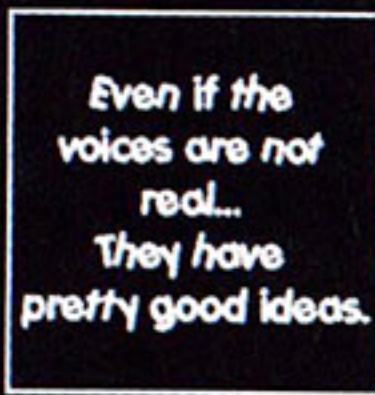
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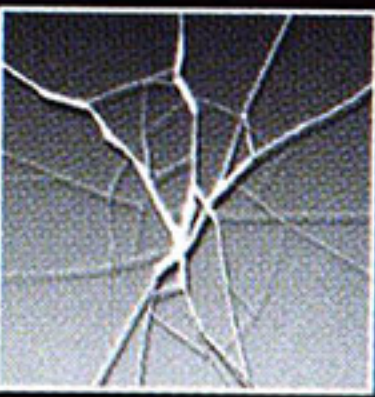
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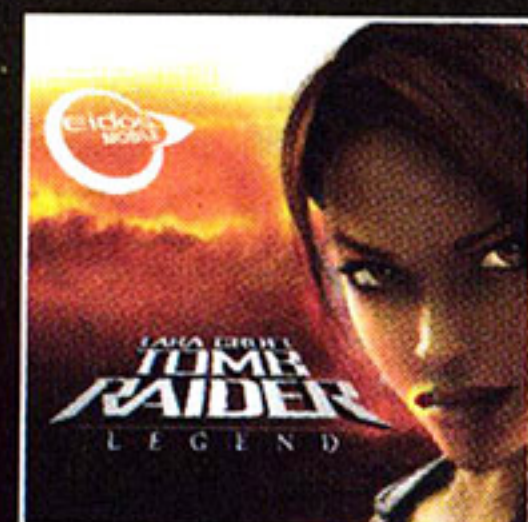


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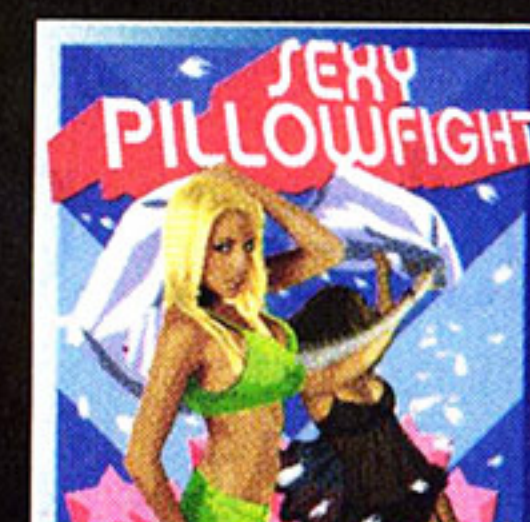
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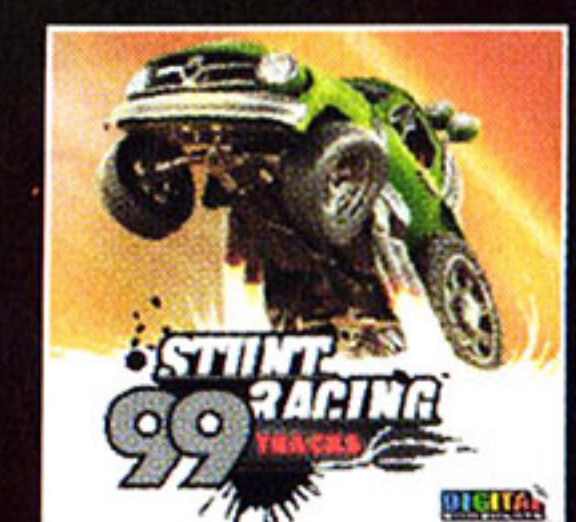
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Lady GaGa / Colby O'Donis - Just Dance	song4560
Lil Wayne - Prom Queen	song4561
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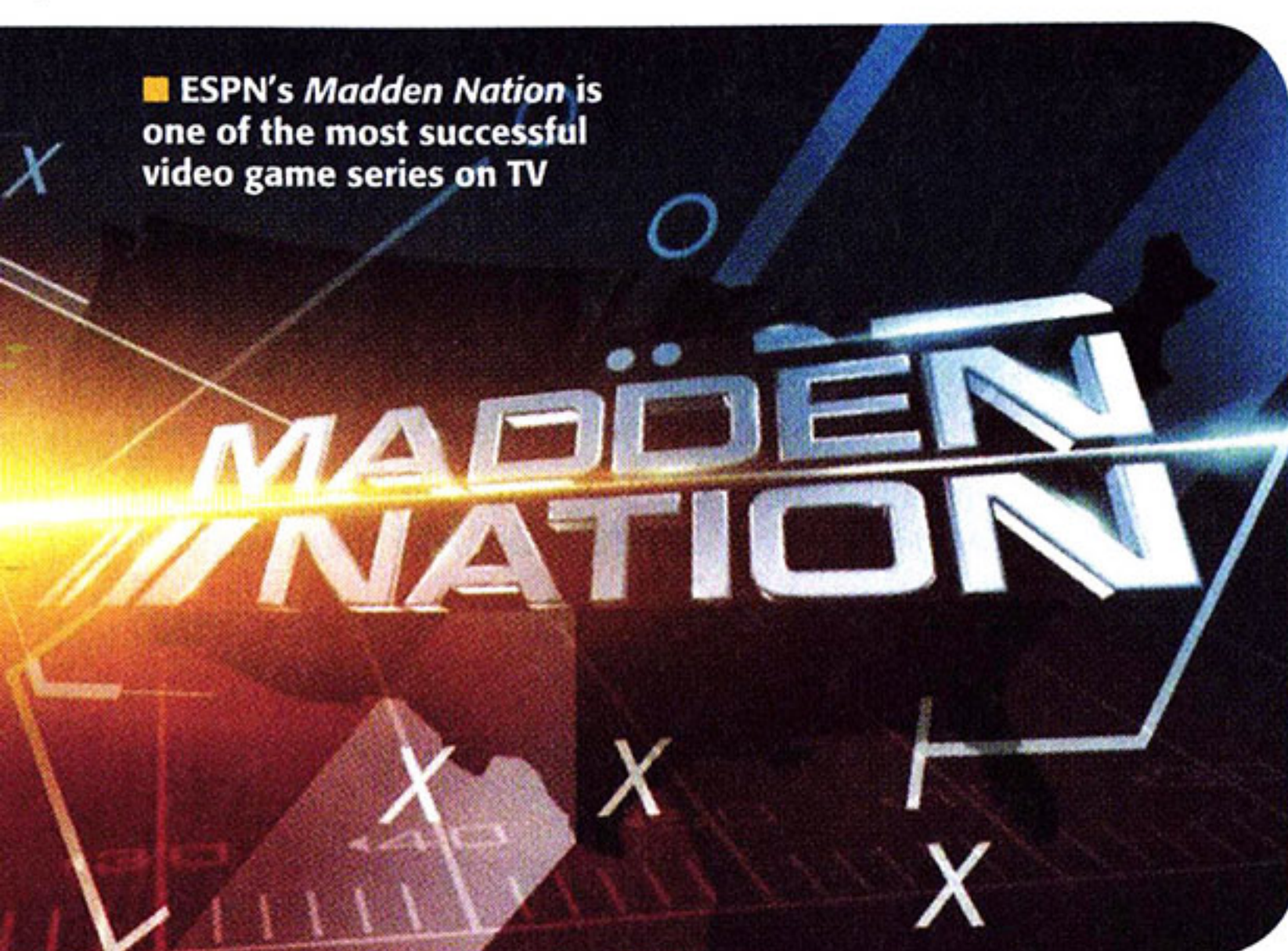
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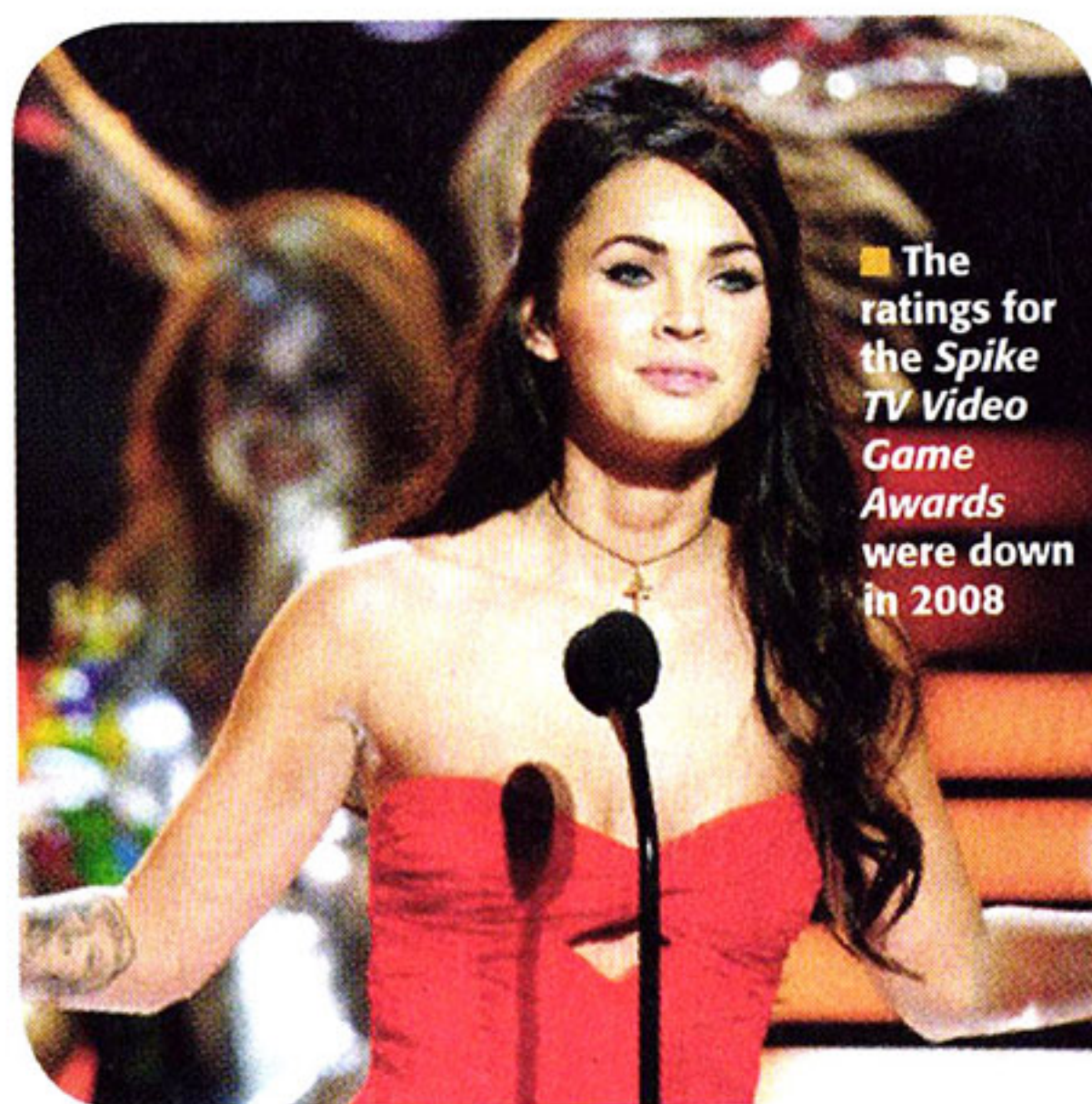


Searching For An Audience

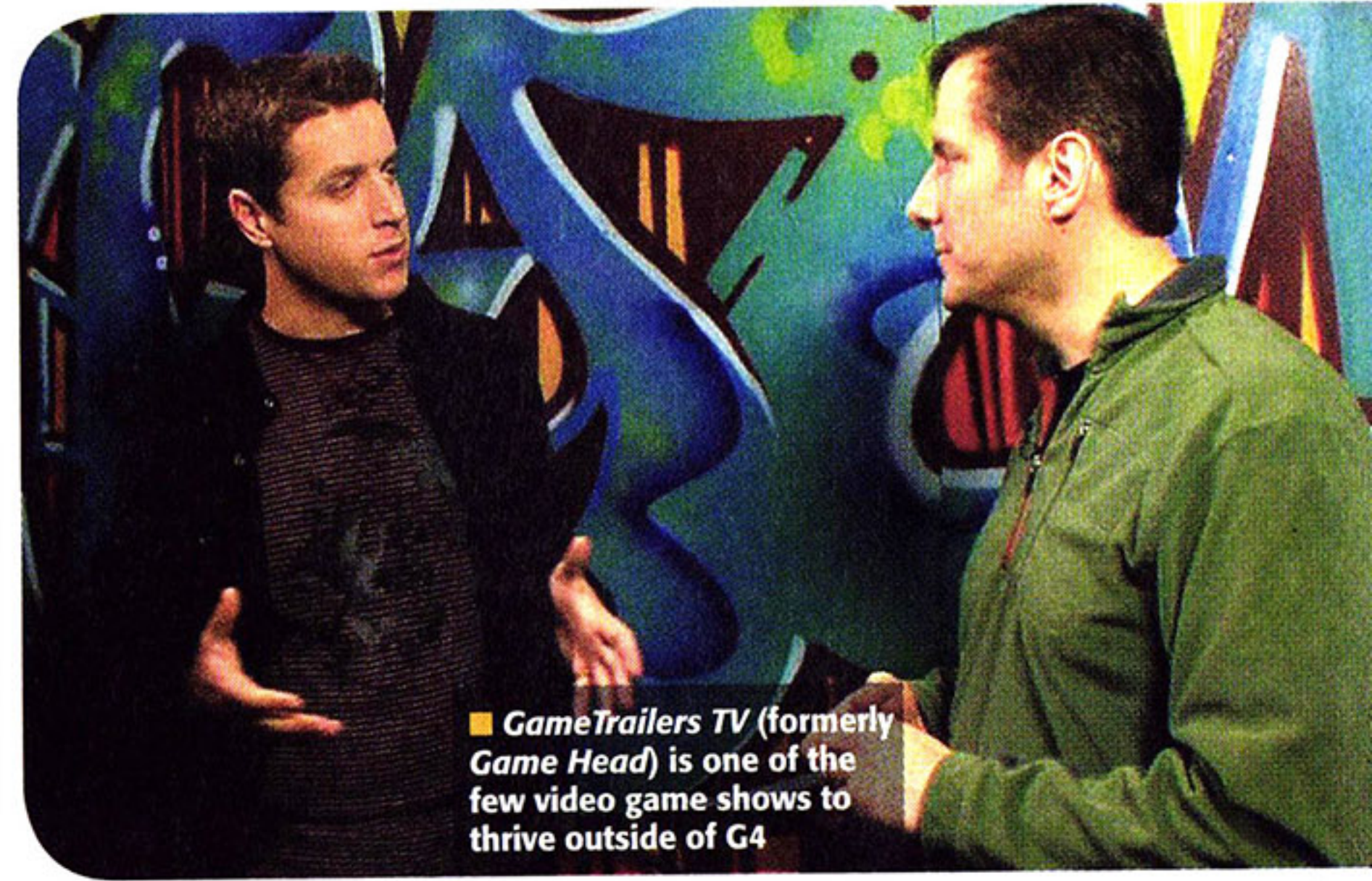
Video Games' Struggle To Make
It On The Small Screen



■ ESPN's *Madden Nation* is one of the most successful video game series on TV



■ The ratings for the *Spike TV Video Game Awards* were down in 2008



■ *GameTrailers TV* (formerly *Game Head*) is one of the few video game shows to thrive outside of G4

In 2002, cable giant Comcast launched the G4 Network with grand ambitions. It was conceived as the first television channel devoted solely to video games, which were rapidly becoming the most popular form of entertainment among the coveted 18 to 34 year old male advertising demographic.

The goal was clear; G4 was to be to video games what ESPN is to sports. "Americans will spend over \$8 billion on video games this year. G4 is the television network for them," claimed G4 founder Charles Hirschhorn at the time. "G4 is the network for them. Whether on consoles, computers, online, cell phones, PDAs, or in an arcade, Americans have fully embraced video games. G4 is game to bring this national pastime to TV."

The network launched with a large roster of shows – over 13 including special programming – every one centered on gaming. This slate included the show *Icons*, which profiled legendary game creators like Mario and Zelda creator Shigeru Miyamoto, *G4TV.com*, a interactive game talk show,

and *Filter*, a top ten video game show styled after MTV's *Total Request Live*. For nostalgic old-schoolers, there were even reruns of a 1983 arcade competition show called *Starcade*.

Flash forward seven years, and things look much different. While the network still maintains a presence in video games, including the long-running *Attack of the Show* and *X-Play*, on an average day you're more likely to see reruns of bottom-feeding reality shows like *COPS* and *Cheaters* than video game programming. Recently, the network has developed an odd (but not entirely unwelcome) fascination with showing the 1985 Val Kilmer comedy *Real Genius*.

The Ratings Game

The struggle to convince gamers to tune into game-oriented programming is not limited to G4. While Spike TV's *Game Head* (recently re-branded as *GameTrailers TV*) has proven to be a moderate ratings success, the male-oriented network's Spike Video Game Awards telecast has floundered, with last year's broadcast pulling in 680,000 viewers according to the Nielson Company, down from 1,237,000 in 2003 when it debuted. Professional gaming broadcasts, touted by various upstart leagues as a new sport for the 21st century, have performed even worse. The Championship Gaming Series, which had been broadcast on DirecTV and signed a pact for a run of shows with G4 in June of last year, was shuttered last November when it was unable to raise enough revenue from sponsors and broadcast deals.

Variety senior writer Marc Graser, who reviewed G4 for the industry publication when it debuted in 2002, questions many of the attempts to make gaming fare for prime time. "I've always thought that anything video game-related on television is odd to me," he comments. "All these Championship Gaming Series and similar competitions are televised. People do not want to see people playing video games – it's the most boring thing. I don't want to do it when I'm over at a friend's house; I'd rather be playing the game. It just doesn't translate to television."

As for the Spike Video Game Awards, Graser feels that it "kind of works." However, he cautions, "unless you're really into video games, I don't know if it does anything for you. I think it seems like a party where you don't know anyone."

Given the current economic conditions and its continued struggle for ratings, G4 announced that its last bastions of gaming programming, *Attack of the Show* and *X-Play* (a holdover from TechTV, which merged with G4 in 2004), have been scaled back. *Attack of the Show* has been cut from five to four live broadcasts per week, and *X-Play* has been cut to three shows per week. Both shows have also made significant cuts in production staff. The company also

“
...video game television is also subject to the same problems facing broadcast television in general...
”

declined to renew its contract with on-air personality Layla Keyleigh, host of *The Feed*. In an online Q&A with viewers, G4 president Neil Tiles explained the changes. "We needed to make hard choices across the board... These moves were necessary for us to free up funds to allow us to increase our original development and acquire more titles for our *Movies That Don't Suck* block, which has been performing rather well for us."

Hope for the Future

Despite the sometimes-disappointing ratings, the true picture isn't as gloomy as it might appear at first glance. *X-Play* executive producer Wade Beckett points out that the show's long run proves it can be done. "The thing that I think is really important is personalities... People have really connected with [*X-Play* hosts] Adam [Sessler] and Morgan [Webb] over the years. The fact that we're coming up on a thousand episodes, and it's a video game show, is pretty amazing."

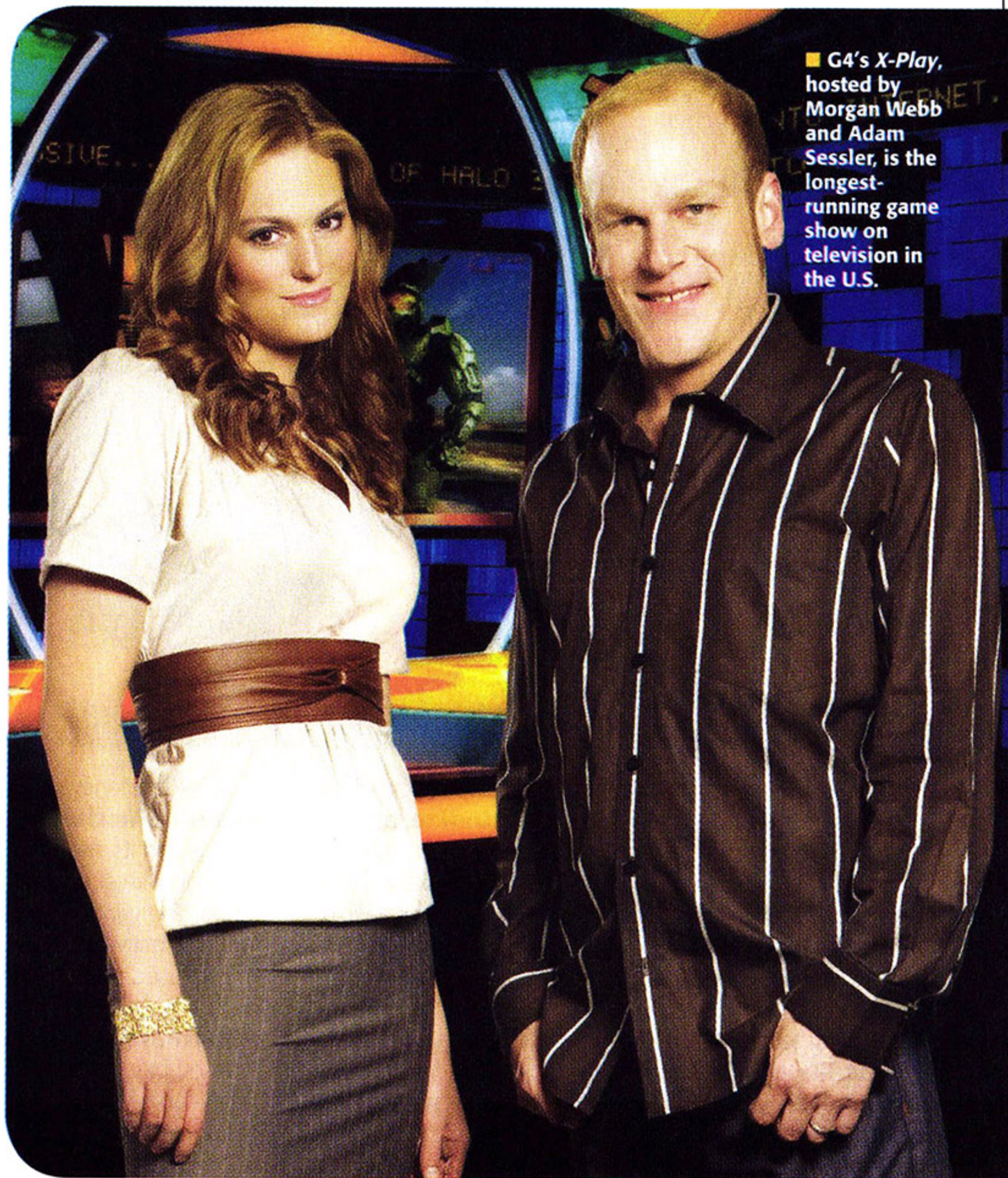
Variety's Marc Graser echoes Beckett's sentiments. "I think *Attack of the Show* is pretty good and it does pretty well for them. *X-Play* is doing pretty well, too. There's a reason those shows are the only ones that still exist."

There are other success stories as well. *GameTrailers TV*, hosted by veteran video game journalist Geoff Keighley, opened 2009 with its best ratings to date, posting an average of 375,000 viewers per showing (up from 291,000 in late 2008). Specials focusing on certain high-profile titles have also done well, including MTV's Halo 2 mini-documentary and ESPN's popular *Madden Nation* competitions.

More importantly, video game television is also subject to the same problems facing broadcast television in general: an audience that's spending more and more time online and gaming instead of watching TV. "Nielsen tells us that viewers who were watching us when ratings were strong are now playing video games more than they are simply watching other competitive networks," claims G4's Neal. "It makes sense based on G4's content and historical appeal to gamers that we would suffer disproportionately than other networks here."

In addition, much of this audience accesses television content in an unconventional manner. As might be expected of the network's tech-savvy demographic, G4's viewers are watching its shows in an astonishing number of ways. The company's partnership with Xbox Live has proved fruitful, and in the coming year G4 has plans to bring its game-oriented shows to Sony's PlayStation Network as well. Other popular platforms for accessing G4 content include Hulu, iTunes, Verizon, and Comcast On-Demand.

"We've actually found that right now [*X-Play*] is at an all-time ratings high, and our nonlinear numbers are greater than some of our TV numbers," Beckett says. In fact, this "nonlinear" viewing is so popular that Beckett claims that



■ G4's *X-Play*, hosted by Morgan Webb and Adam Sessler, is the longest-running game show on television in the U.S.

X-Play's nontraditional viewership actually outnumbers its traditional TV viewers, six million to four million. It's a promising trend, but one that presents problems for advertisers bound to more conventional ratings systems like Nielsen.

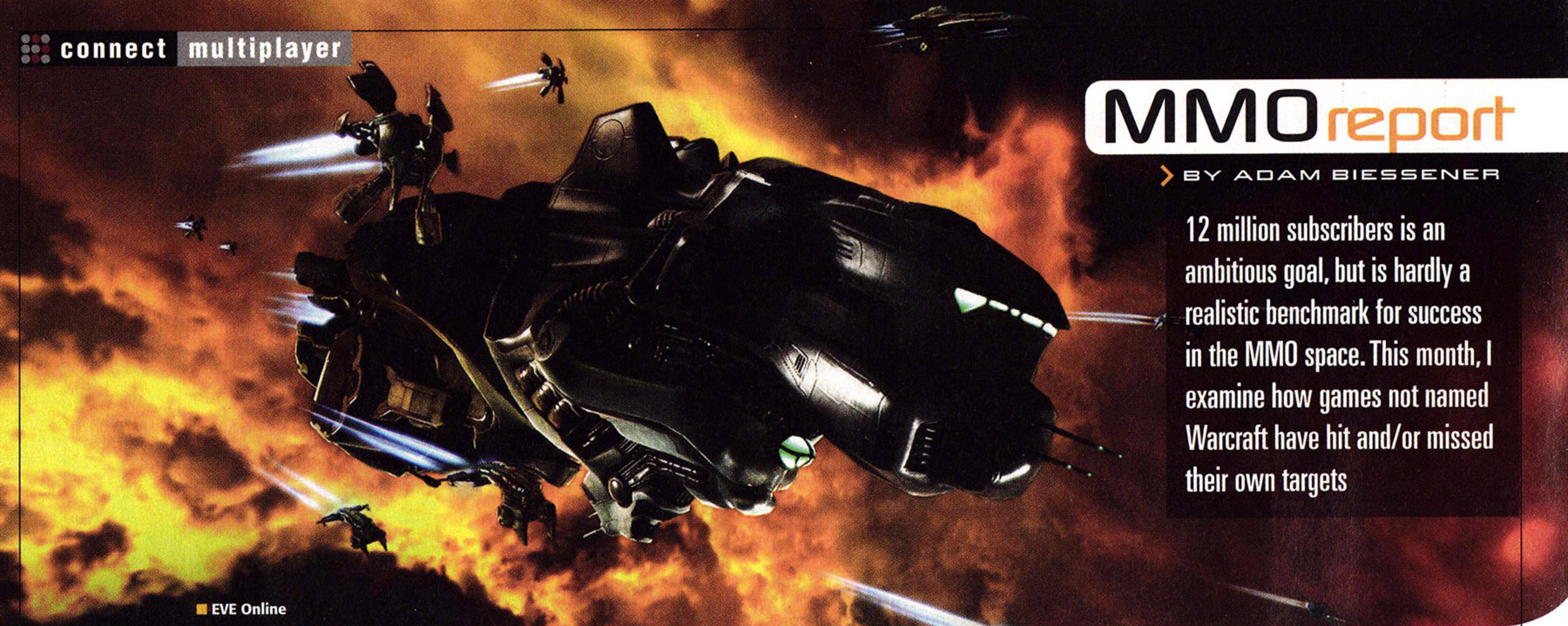
Despite the challenges of developing successful game television, the tremendous popularity of the hobby makes it unlikely that the attempts to create game-centric TV will end. "They obviously want to go after young males, that lucrative demo – 18 to 35 year olds – because advertisers love them," Graser observes. "People keep trying it every couple of years. When Hollywood looks at the numbers of how well video games are doing, someone will always say, 'Hey, we need to do something in this space.' But they always face the same problem of coming up with something compelling enough to watch."

Even now, the steady stream of programs aimed at the gaming generation shows no signs of stopping. The Sci-Fi Channel (we'll never accept "Syfy") recently announced a partnership with game publisher Trion World Network to develop a new show that would exist as both a TV program and an online massively multiplayer game. If successful (and that's a fairly big "if"), it would represent the most complex synthesis of the two mediums to date. For G4's part, it's launching a new weekly news magazine series titled *G4 Underground*, which Tiles touts as "Part *Gamemakers*, part *Icons*, and part *60 Minutes*." However, the show's focus will be a bit broader and lifestyle in nature. Pieces like profiles of *Ultima* creator Richard Garriot will be balanced by more human-interest pieces like a report on the phenomenon of "real life superheroes." The shows will keep coming. The only question is, will anyone be watching? ■ ■ ■



BY ADAM BIESENER

12 million subscribers is an ambitious goal, but is hardly a realistic benchmark for success in the MMO space. This month, I examine how games not named *Warcraft* have hit and/or missed their own targets



■ EVE Online

From humble origins, Icelandic developer/publisher CCP's spacefaring MMORPG, **EVE Online**, has quietly grown into one of the genre's most successful games. Hosting more than 260,000 paid subscribers on its single shard, EVE has ridden its radical design concepts to heights unimagined by its creators. Though many games have tried to put the state of the world in players' hands, no others have pulled it off without also suffering from crippling technical problems or other limiting factors. EVE is a technically solid title in an often bug-ridden genre, and has to date avoided the sort of horrific design errors that cause players to quit in droves.

EVE is best known for its player-driven narrative, which has resulted in the formation and implosion of dozens of in-game coalitions, alliances, and corporations. The players are truly in charge of EVE's gameworld – the majority of high-level action happens in "0.0 space," where no NPC guardians enforce the rules. In the sectors of deep space where all the profits are, there's nobody to watch your back except for the friends and allies you've made for yourself.



■ The Lord of the Rings Online

In EVE, you can be part of an entirely player-run corporation or alliance that literally takes over star systems. The gameplay itself may be merely competent, but no other game comes close to giving players that level of impact on the world. Players who are burnt out on the static content and "grind" of other MMOs often graduate to EVE, and it's easy to see why.

Turbine's **The Lord of the Rings Online** has carved itself a comfortable niche among PvE-focused players. Its excellent group dynamics, remarkable storytelling prowess, and a clever reward system that encourages exploring the game's many aspects have earned it a significant following.

LOTRO recently received its first major expansion, titled **Mines of Moria**, to a favorable reception. Turbine stayed focused on its strength – cooperative PvE play – by adding a lot of high-level content to explore and new bosses to overcome. The game's minimal PvP aspect isn't much of a draw for competitive-minded players, but it doesn't have to be. PvE-focused players as well as more "casual" types who still want a triple-A experience should give LOTRO a look.

Warhammer Online from EA Mythic has been more of a mixed bag. More than half a million units sold out of the gate – and Mythic just closed down 43 servers because of low player population. Endgame players seem to be largely enjoying the large-scale PvP that makes up the majority of the elder game. But despite some patched-in changes, leveling in Warhammer can be a brutal, will-sapping affair.

On the other hand, Mythic has been nothing if not willing to listen to its players. Significant free patches (including four new playable classes) have dramatically improved Warhammer since its launch. The game still suffers from something of an identity crisis, with group PvE elements clumsily integrated into the larger realm-vs-realm war and dreadfully boring early and midgame slogs that stretch on far too long. The endgame provides a unique competitive experience – if you can make it there.

In its favor, Warhammer continues to enjoy full support from EA's deep pockets and a large team at Mythic. Indications are that it is on an **EverQuest II**-like career

path: perhaps not living up to its immense hype, but using publisher and fan support to continually refine the game and serve its fans well.

A number of other titles continue to turn a profit and entertain players – Sony Online's **EverQuest**, as well as Korean publisher/developer NCsoft's **City of Heroes/Villains** and **Guild Wars** are notable for staying under active development and maintaining stable and enthusiastic fanbases. NCsoft seems to have survived the multi-million-dollar debacle of **Tabula Rasa**, and has promising titles **Aion** and **Guild Wars 2** slated for release in the near future.



■ EverQuest II

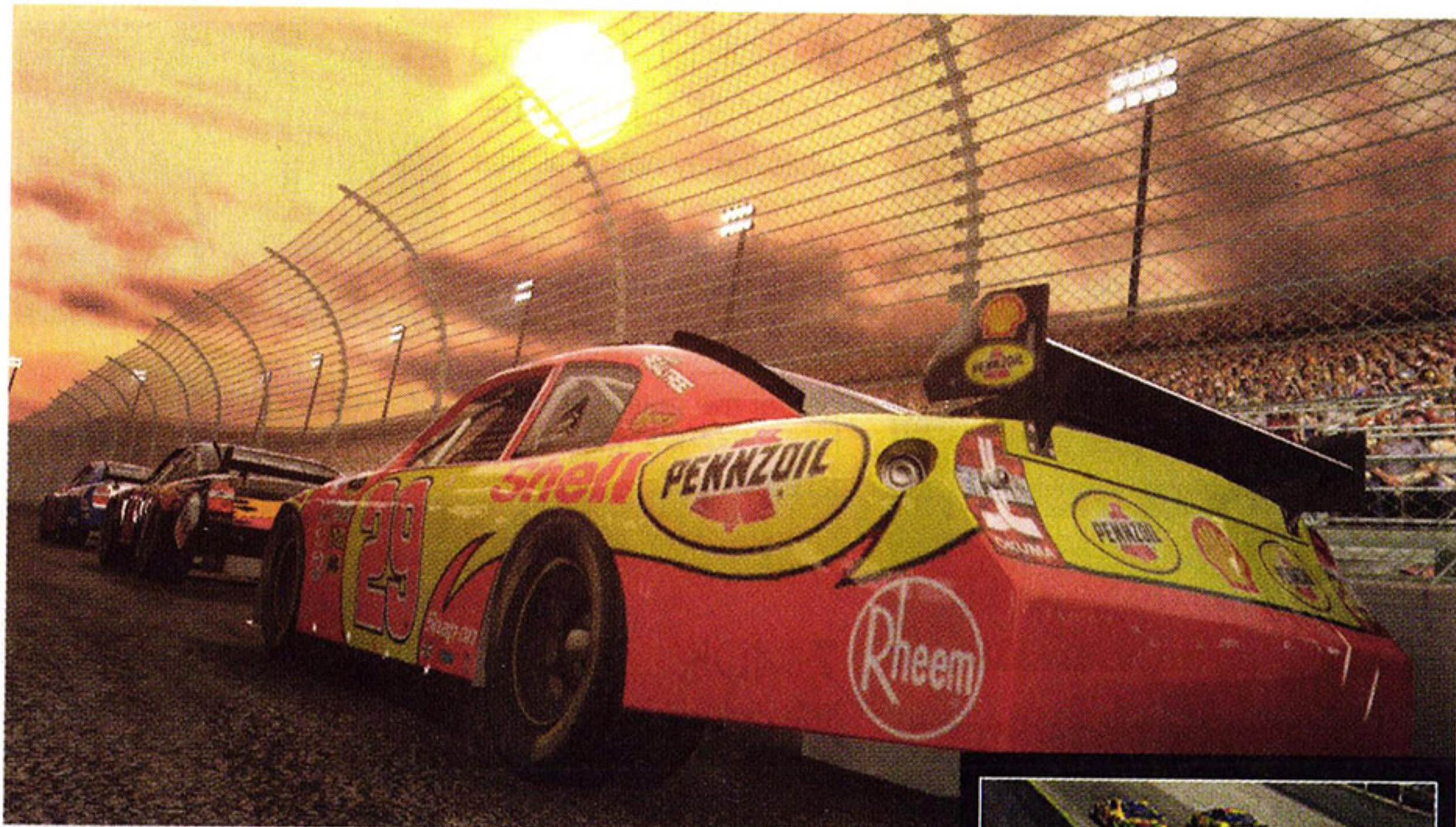
However, Funcom's **Age of Conan** is veering toward disaster territory. The game sold like gangbusters at first, but a dearth of content after the highly polished initial area, as well as technical problems and horrific class imbalances, led to comparatively low player retention. Funcom cut Conan down from 24 to 6 U.S. servers to address population issues in January.

Big changes are on tap under new director Craig Morrison, including overhauling character progression, so there may be hope for this ambitious title yet.

The world is undoubtedly gorgeous, and the hands-on combat mechanics are a breath of fresh air in the MMO space. Conan has a lot of ground to make up to get back to where Funcom had hoped it would be, though – and that's an understatement. ■ ■ ■



■ Age of Conan



games

NASCAR'S IN THE PITS

EA HALTS SIM-RACING SERIES

At first, this year's NASCAR Kart Racing title from EA Sports seemed like a way for the company to both provide more games for the Wii and use its exclusive license with the stock car association. Little did we know that it would be the only NASCAR title we'd get from EA this year. In a statement, the publisher/developer says that "due to the family-friendly atmosphere of NASCAR, we felt that a title developed exclusively for the Wii platform was the best scenario for the NASCAR racing video game franchise and fans of racing alike."

If taking at least one year off sounds like bad news for fans who preferred the sim-racing style of EA Sports' yearly NASCAR franchise, it very well could be. EA is currently in negotiations with the sanctioning body for the future of the license. There are unconfirmed reports that EA is considering not renewing its deal for exclusive rights with NASCAR, but EA would only characterize the discussion as "continuing."



THE RETURN OF MONSTER GAMES?

EA Sports' NASCAR series (developed by Madden-maker Tiburon in its last years) wasn't beloved by all, and before EA held the exclusive rights, developers such as Monster Games (NASCAR Heat) and Papyrus (NASCAR Racing) were well-known by fans of video game stock car racing. Game Informer talked to Monster Games' president Richard Garcia, and asked him if the company would consider returning to making NASCAR titles. "When I heard that the exclusivity might end, the thought of working on another NASCAR title immediately crossed my mind. Right now, it is still a dream."

Garcia told us that keeping an exclusive license is expensive, and EA likely wasn't getting the sales numbers to support it, and the move to a Wii title supports this. "I think that the days of making an ultra-realistic NASCAR racing game are over. On the consoles, you need to make a more accessible game. But, I don't think that means that you need to make an arcade game."

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

BLIZZARD TALKS ABOUT NEXT XBOX

A discussion about the design of the next round of home consoles broke out at the Luminaries Lunch at GDC. Blizzard vice president Rob Pardo said that his company has been in discussions with Microsoft about the next Xbox. Pardo says Blizzard's input could be important to what the system is capable of. "There are so many games like we make at Blizzard that we don't take to consoles because they don't support the input device and you end up with crappy ports. If I was them, I'd be sitting around trying to figure out what's a cool input device that supports all types of new kinds of games."

While Pardo left the audience with dreams of a version of World of Warcraft or Starcraft II (shown) for consoles that weren't bastardizations, other developers at the lunch were either miffed that they weren't included in the console makers' discussions, or were weary of what the future for them looks like. "I get the impression they're focusing on owning the living room," said Warren Spector (Deus Ex/Disney's Junction Point Studios). "One device that lets you watch movies, television, and play games and music and all that stuff. They're so focused on that that I'm not even sure they're thinking about the games that are going to come out - which is kind of crazy."



KOJIMA AND ICO DEVELOPER SPEAK

At GDC, both Metal Gear's Hideo Kojima and Ico's Fumito Ueda talked briefly about their next projects. Kojima's next Metal Gear project appears to show a figure of Raiden, which makes sense given that Kojima has said that the tale of Solid Snake is over.

Meanwhile, at another GDC panel, No More Heroes creator Suda51 was trying to get Ueda to spill the beans on his next project. Ueda resisted Suda's attempts, saying, "The Japan studio bosses are here so I can't say anything specific, but it might be something similar to what's been done. The essence of the game is rather close to Ico." As Suda51 pressed further, Ueda said, "I can't talk about this anymore! Don't ask anymore questions please. As soon as I stop talking they're going to shoot me!"



PlayStation 2's Ico
MISSION: THE NEXT MGS



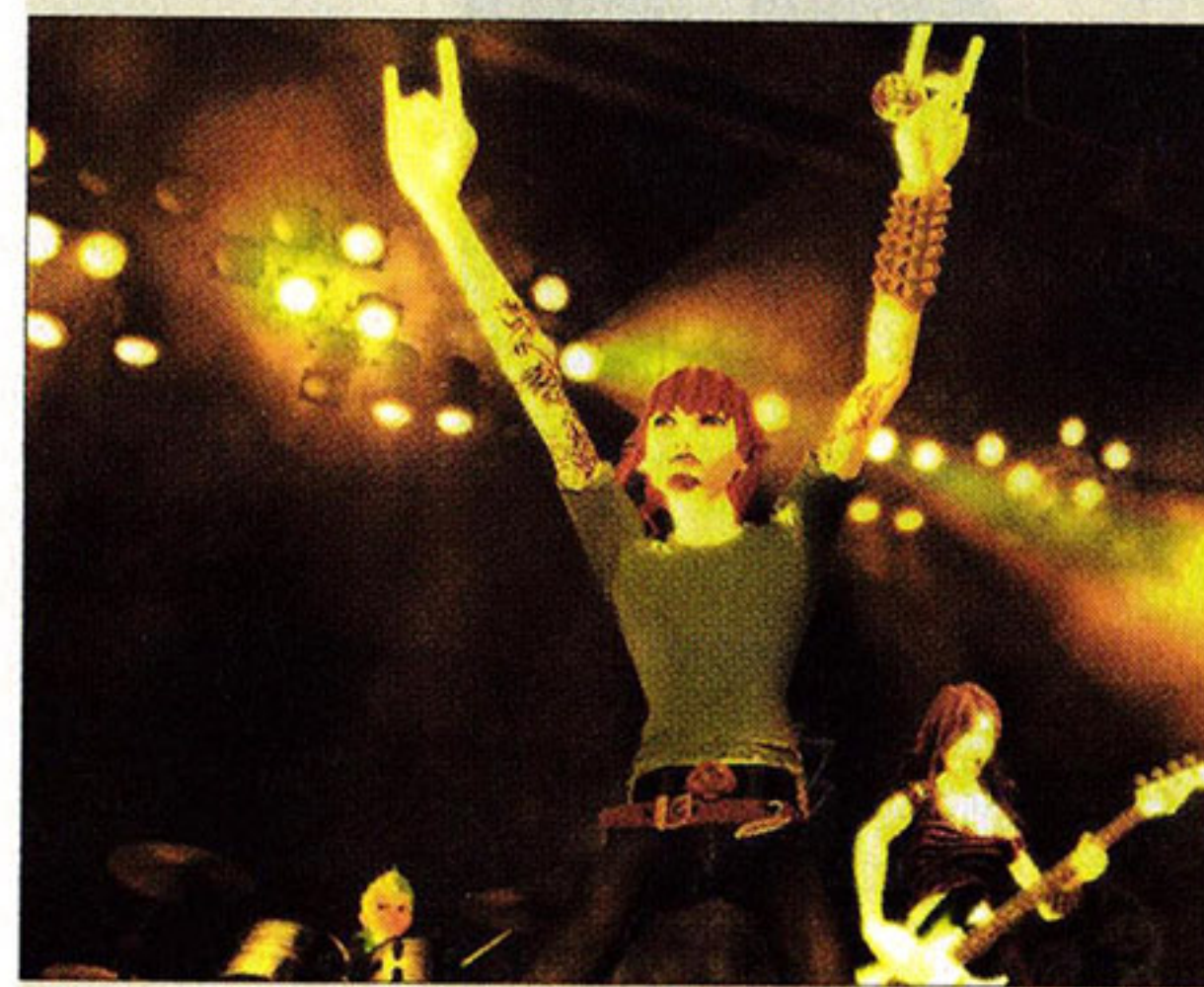
games

MASS EFFECT 2 MYSTERY

WHERE IS COMMANDER SHEPARD?

Mass Effect 2 hasn't been a secret, and now EA has made it official by announcing the sequel to 2007's lauded action/RPG for Xbox 360 and PC.

The game's first trailer has been released, and it tells little save a single tantalizing morsel. It features a readout of Commander Shepard's accomplishments as the first human Spectre from the first title, before listing Shepard's status as "killed in action." Whatever Shepard's whereabouts, developer BioWare is urging players of the first Mass Effect to keep their saves for use in the sequel.



FUTURE FEATURES FOR ROCK BAND

Rock Band is always offering new content via downloadable songs, but new features are in store for fans of the franchise. Loose Talk has heard that The Beatles: Rock Band will allow multiple singers with different microphones to harmonize on the vocal track to replicate the fab four's fabulous harmonies. We're also hearing that the Rock Band franchise will support some kind of user-created content.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Amnesia is nothing new in video games. The main character of this month's title, John Cain, wakes up in an apartment building with nothing but a gun in his hand and a barcode on the back of his neck. What ensues is maximum damage. Cain's rage meter (the game has no health bar) must be changed from green to yellow to red by killing as many enemies and destroying objects. Once Cain hits red, he can unleash an attack that obliterates everything onscreen. This PSone game was created by Visual Concepts for ASC Games.

(Answer on page 28)



10

the top videogame snipermoments

The extreme tension. The zero margin for error. The thrilling escape after a job well done. Sniper missions are a great way to add more cerebral variety to shooter gameplay, but most suffer from being too vanilla. We've rounded up everything from sniping pioneers to the latest creative implementations for the best in long-range sneakiness.

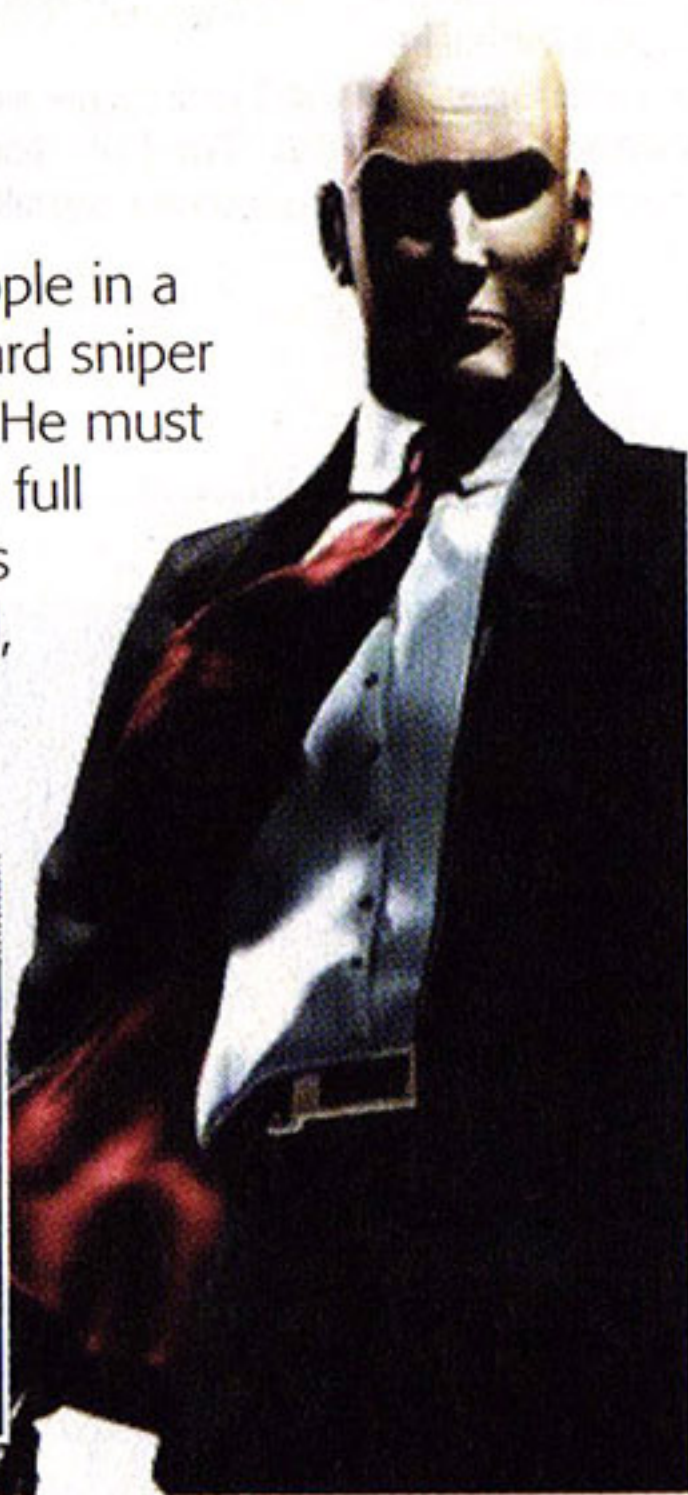
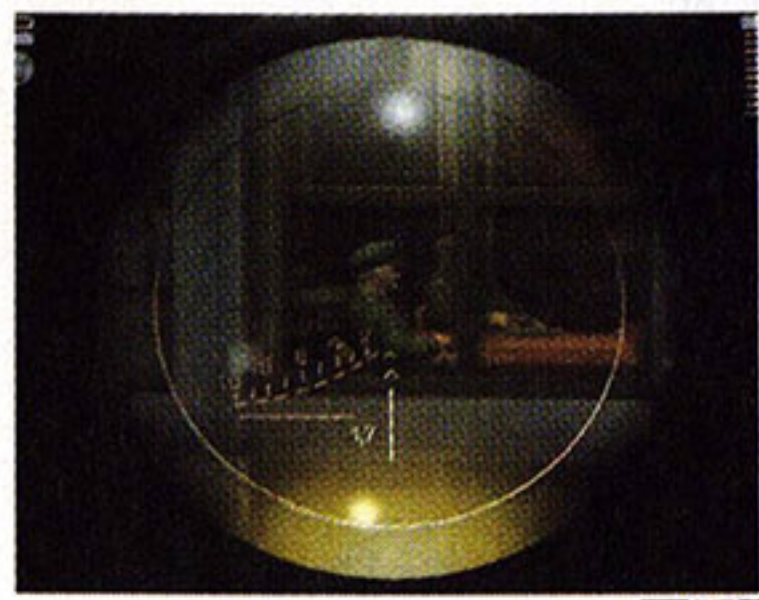
1 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

In this flashback sequence you take on the role of a ghillied up Lieutenant Price as he learns the tricks of the trade from badass Captain MacMillian. Pacing ranges from a slow crawl through the grass to a mad dash toward the next cover spot, culminating in the longest sniper shot in video games, a fiery helicopter crash, and a thrilling escape.



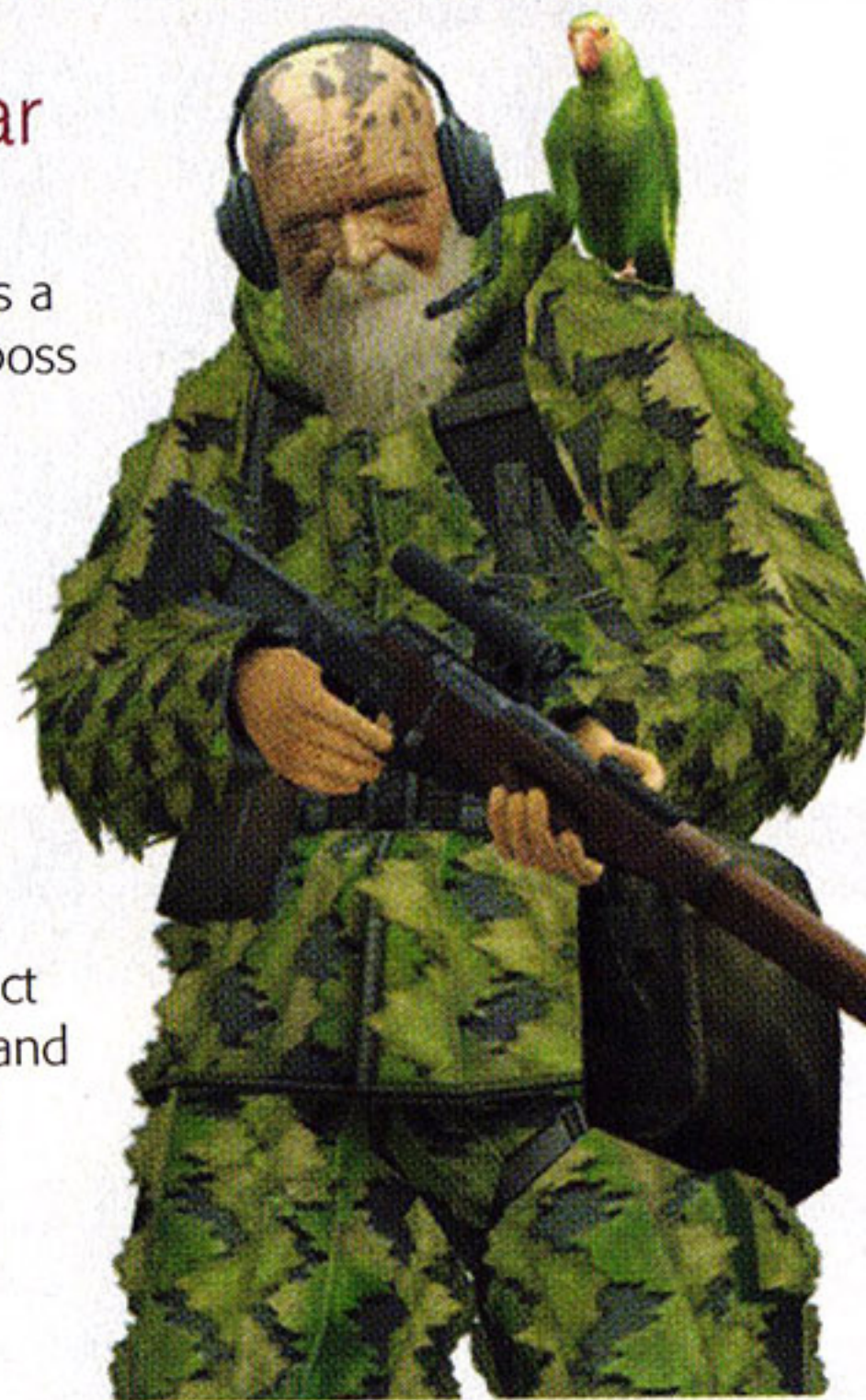
2 Hitman 2: Silent Assassin

Agent 47 has killed a lot of people in a lot of ways, but even his standard sniper shots have an interesting twist. He must take out one general in a room full of look-alikes using his contact's radioed hints. The target is bald, doesn't smoke, and is right handed. Shoot away.



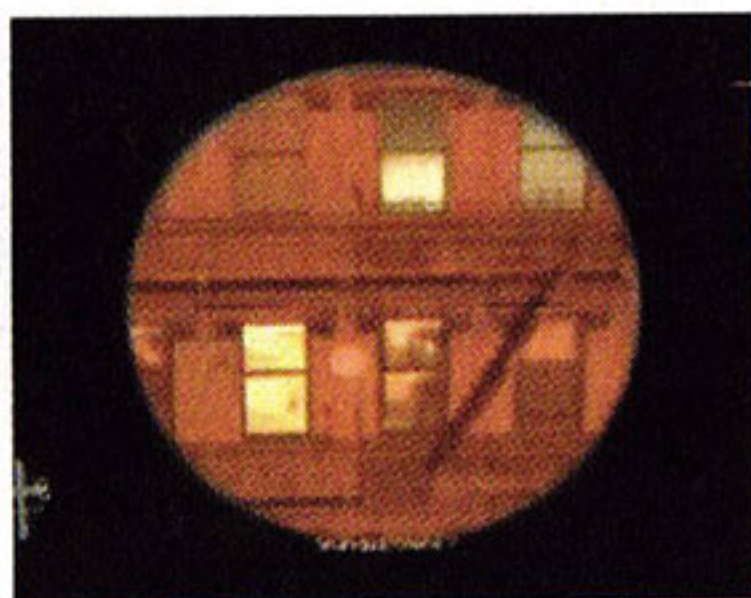
3 Metal Gear Solid 3

Every MGS entry has a great sniper-based boss battle, but Snake's fight with The End takes the cake. A tense game of cat and mouse spans multiple screens in a large forest area as you use gadgets like heat vision goggles and keen instinct to gain the upper hand on this googly-eyed old geezer.



4 Grand Theft Auto IV

Tasked with sniping a drug dealer from a rooftop across the street, Niko must somehow lure his TV-watching target to the window. Shooting out his TV or antenna is the most obvious solution, but creative killers can zoom in on the dealer's phone, write down the number, and give him the last call he'll ever receive.



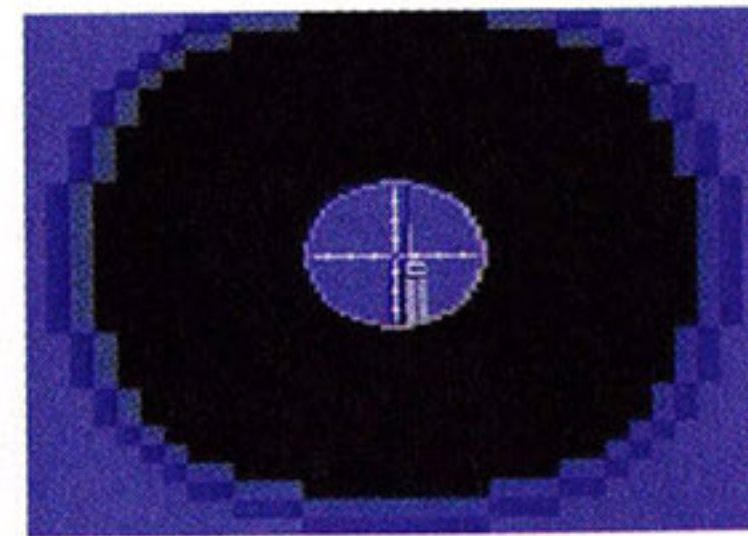
5 Silent Scope Series

Sure, this arcade series is cut from the same cloth as other badly translated, over-the-top, cheesy on-rails light gun games, but the amazing rifle peripheral mounted on the cabinet (with a small magnified screen in the scope) provides the most realistic sniping experience we're likely to see in gaming. Plus, the whole thing is one massive sniping mission!



6 Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode

While it may not be all that impressive now, Golgo 13 gets points for being one of the first to incorporate sniper shooting way back on the NES in 1988. As one of the many gameplay types in this spy thriller, you have to spot a dude hiding in a skyscraper, zoom in, and take him out.



7 MDK

This dark yet wacky 1997 shooter from Earthworm Jim developer Shiny incorporated a sniping option into almost every weapon in the game. A neat innovation at the time, the three kill cameras above the main scope follow the bullets as they travel into the heads of your prey.



8 Rescue: The Embassy Mission

As one-third of the gameplay in this brief SWAT team embassy raid, the sniper section awaits operatives that can make it past a series of spotlights to the optimal shooting position. You'll then scan the side of a building waiting to blast any terrorist stupid enough to wander in front of a window.



9 Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror

In the most notable portable sniper mission, you play as Gabe Logan perched in a vertical position as partner Lian Xing moves in and out of cover. Picking off waves of enemies is all the more satisfying with the wide variety of ammo types, and your AI ally actually waits for your signal to press on instead of getting herself killed.



10 Bully

Amidst cries of "You suck!" and "Nerd!" from harassing jocks, nerd leader Earnest tries his best to win over the crowd in his run for class president. Main character Jimmy agrees to protect him from detractors during the speech with his slingshot for a small fee. With your help maybe Earnest's "no more phys-ed" platform will actually be heard.



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TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
MASACHIKA KAWATA
 Producer, Resident Evil 5

- 1 After Burner II – Arcade
- 2 Resident Evil – PSone
- 3 GuitarFreaks – Arcade
- 4 Vampire Hunter – Arcade
- 5 Out Run – Arcade



READER
AJ STYLES
 TNA Legends Champion

- 1 Super Mario Bros. 2 – NES
- 2 Street Fighter II – SNES
- 3 NFL/NCAA 2K Series – Dreamcast
- 4 Tekken 2 – PSone
- 5 Madden NFL/NCAA Football Series – GameCube

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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 (attach digital picture)

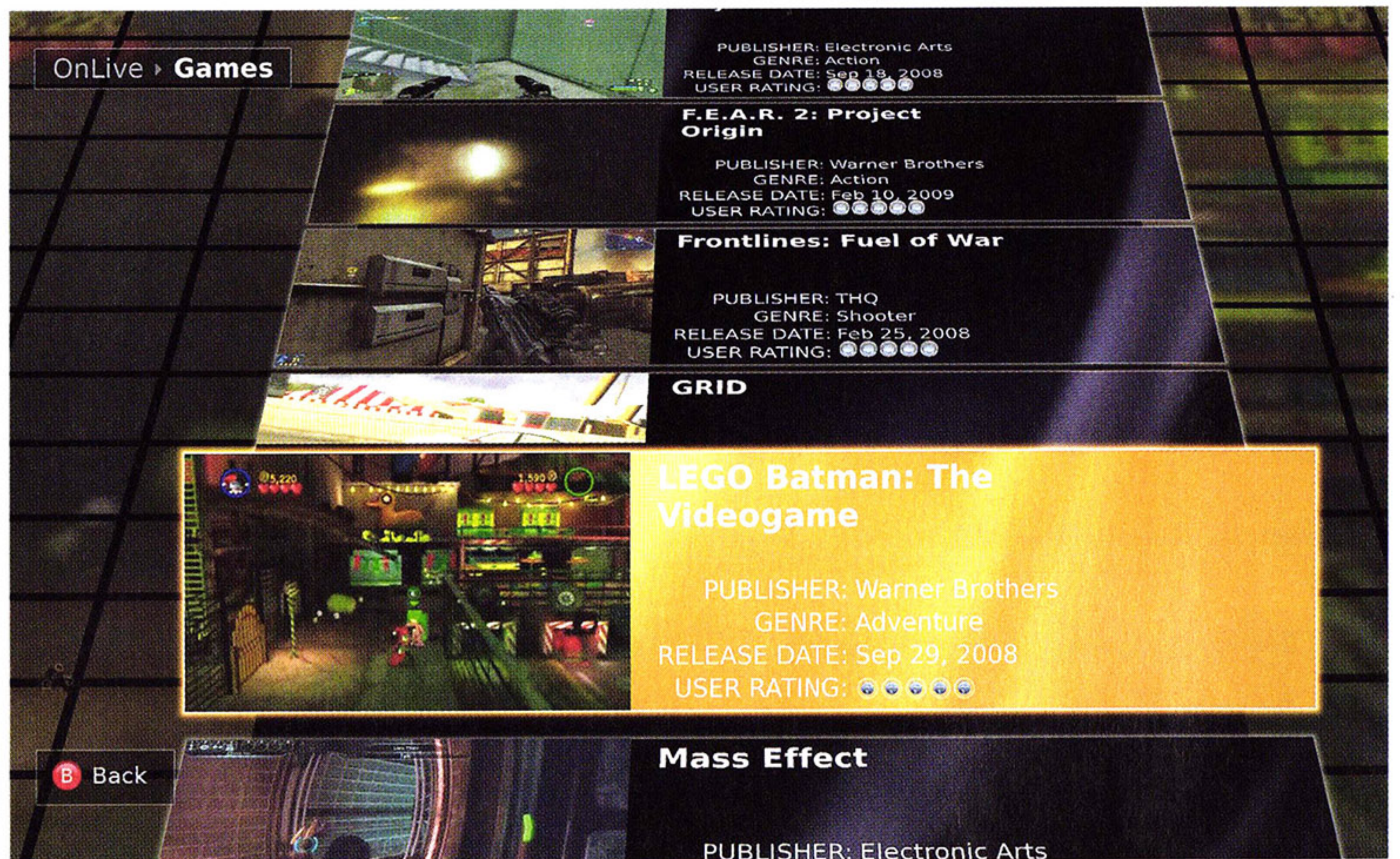
TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Upcoming Vin Diesel Games

- 10 Singstar: Vin Diesel's Greatest Hits
- 9 BioDiesel
- 8 Left4Bald
- 7 Company of Diesels (!!)
- 6 Final Fantasy VIN
- 5 Diesel & Lynch: Do It Right This Time
- 4 Professor Vin and the Curious Shotgun
- 3 Resident Diesel
- 2 The Young Riddick Adventures: Escape From Detention
- 1 MyDieselz

Name That Game Answer: One



news

FOUR'S A CROWD?

NEW STARTUP CONSOLE ONLIVE TO CHALLENGE THE BIG THREE THIS FALL

To steal the thunder from video gaming juggernauts Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony, you must come armed with bold, industry changing ideas. On this front, startup company OnLive delivers.

Seven years in the making, this new on-demand service from Rearden Labs grants gamers access to PC and console games instantly, without the hassle of fronting hundreds or thousands of dollars for a capable machine. Instead, users pay a nominal monthly fee for access to the service. How is this possible? With five unique server farms built specifically for playing games strategically placed throughout North America, all users need is a client on a Mac or PC or a small micro console for their television to jump instantly into the action. A proprietary compression technology developed by Rearden is the lynchpin technology that must succeed in delivering a lag-free experience if OnLive is to compete with the established consoles.

Since the server essentially streams your inputs to the servers and relays the action back to you, OnLive can attach DVR-like capabilities to your stream. At any point during gameplay, you can pause, rewind, and record epic moments with the transport controls located on the OnLive controller. Users can then upload these Brag Clips to share their exploits with friends. The streaming technology also allows OnLive to offer arena spectating. Watching tournament matches in real time from the perspective

■ The size of a portable hard drive, the OnLive micro console enables gamers to connect to the service with their TVs



of professional gamers is now a reality.

Thus far, nine publishers have offered support for OnLive: Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, Take-Two, THQ, Epic Games, Eidos, Codemasters, Atari, and Warner Bros. Interactive. Thus far, the publisher support seems measured. Though the service launches this winter, most of the titles the publishers announced thus far are older games that have already been available for console and PC gamers alike. OnLive has yet to reveal any first-party titles.

OnLive's margin for error is scant. Even the slightest appearance of lag in gameplay will sour potential customers from abandoning their consoles and PCs in favor of this kind of service. One way OnLive is attempting to combat lag is by limiting online multiplayer to regional servers. So, if your old college buddy lives in California and you live in New York, you're out of luck. The games library must deliver new experiences to gamers instead of rehashing older titles, and the monthly fee must be manageable considering OnLive is also charging gamers for purchasing or renting games as well.

Rearden has yet to announce pricing, but promises to reveal more information as we move closer to OnLive's winter release.



■ The OnLive controller features transport controls for rewinding, pausing, and recording your games



ARE MUSIC GAMES ON THE WAY OUT?

The video game industry is faced with a number of difficult questions and many ways to look at them. In *Game Informer's* debate section, we attempt to analyze these scenarios from different angles. Like a typical debate club, our editors have been assigned to defend a position whether it agrees with their personal views or not. In this edition, we examine the state of music games and whether their phenomenal success is waning.



YES

QUESTION: HOW DO YOU KNOW THERE'S A BUBBLE?

Answer: When people start saying there's not a bubble. It happened in real estate; it happened in the stock market. Now it's happening in music games. I've loved the Guitar Hero/Rock Band phenomenon as much as anyone, but make

no mistake: this genre's best sales are behind it, not ahead of it. Although you might chalk it up to having a higher than average price point in a poor economy, the disappointing sales of both *Rock Band 2* and *Guitar Hero: World Tour* (both have sold at a slower pace than their predecessors) is not an anomaly. Simply, it's the beginning of the end of one of the most successful trends in gaming history.

Am I saying music games are going to disappear overnight? Absolutely not. This genre will (thankfully) be with us for a while. However, the days of it dominating every party you go to and blockbuster sales will not last forever. Also, it's quite possible that yearly sequels will result in its downfall, à la *Tony Hawk*. The casual gaming crowd that helped make the genre a hit will eventually tire of it, putting their drum kits in the closet next to their Razor scooters and *Thighmasters*. High profile tie-in titles like *Guitar Hero: Metallica* and *The Beatles: Rock Band* will help in the short term, but over the next few years a large percentage of the audience is going to move on, and never return. And, as more music licensing deals are signed, the pool of classic rock icons to be mined for these games is becoming smaller and smaller. *Guitar Hero: Marshall Tucker Band* anyone?

Let's face some facts. Everyone who wonders whether Activision is going to run *Guitar Hero* into the ground can stop now. It will. That's what Activision does. It's like putting a raw steak in front of a pit bull and expecting him to save half of it for later.—**MATT**



NO

DESPITE ANALYSTS' CLAIMS TO THE CONTRARY, the outlook for the music genre is just fine. The detractor will say that music games aren't going to be able to keep up their unprecedented success. Well, yeah. Duh. That's why it's "unprecedented." *Guitar Hero III* was the first single title

to generate over \$1 billion dollars in revenue on its own, with the series as a whole far surpassing that. Recently, MTV Games announced that *Rock Band* as a franchise has eclipsed the \$1 billion mark. Even more impressively, Harmonix has sold 40 million individual song downloads since the original *Rock Band* was released.

Take a look at those numbers. They are insane. While much was made of the so-called "disappointing" sales of *Guitar Hero World Tour* and *Rock Band 2*, over the long term both have multiple millions of sales over all platforms. And let's not forget that, this was in spite of having price points over \$150 during one of the worst economic downturns in 50 years. Most publishers in the business would cut off – not one – but both arms to rack up these kind of "disappointing sales."

There's simply no reason to suggest that the music genre is destined to be cast in the dustbin of history. Like all genres, it will wax and wane, but its basic appeal is so simple: people love music and people love to perform. I've listened to music my whole life and I still get excited when a song I love pops up on my iPod. When karaoke debuted in the U.S. the '80s, people said it was just a fad. Well, go out in any city in America and I guarantee you can still find a karaoke night going on. This simple appeal, coupled with the future innovations that will come from the creative folks invested in this genre, is why I still believe the future of music games is a bright one.—**ANDY**

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Over There

1943 Baer is drafted into the Army and serves in WWII in military intelligence

TV Eye

1949 Baer receives a degree in the rapidly expanding field of Television Engineering from the American Television Institute of Technology. He later works in TV repair in New York City

The Big Gig

1958 After working in the electronics field for a few years, Baer gets a job at Sanders Associates, a military and technology engineering firm where he would spend most of his career

A Bright Idea

1966 Baer comes up with an idea for playing interactive games on a television set. He writes these ideas down in a document that now resides in the Smithsonian

The Prototype



1968 Baer and his engineers create a working prototype of his home video game machine, called the "Brown Box" because of its faux wood-grain finish

The Breakthrough



1972 After making a deal with Magnavox, the Brown Box is released as the Magnavox Odyssey, effectively launching the home video game business

Imitators

1972 Nolan Bushnell and Atari release the arcade unit Pong, which was based on the Odyssey's ping-pong game. The arcade unit is a huge smash, leading to later legal battles between Baer and Atari

Simon Says



1978 Baer releases another innovative product, the handheld electronic game Simon. The game is now seen as the precursor to today's handheld game market

The Highest Honor



2006 President George W. Bush awards Baer the prestigious National Medal of Technology

RALPH BAER

PRESIDENT, RALPH BAER ASSOCIATES

>>> **Ralph Baer is a living legend in gaming. After fleeing Nazi Germany in his youth, Baer has gone on to be one of the world's most successful engineers. As the creator of the Magnavox Odyssey, the world's first home video game system, he can quite literally claim to have almost single-handedly birthed the modern game industry. We recently spoke with Mr. Baer about his life and career.** <<<

You and your family left Nazi Germany when you were a kid?

Well, I was 16. I'd been thrown out of school two years before that. When we came over, I worked in a factory and studied radio and television repair through a correspondence course. As soon as I graduated, I spent the next three years servicing radios and early television sets in New York. We did repairs, rewiring, including changing sets to AC/DC current. Around the store on 79th street and Lexington, they still had DC [direct current – Ed.] wiring left over from an old Edison plant. When people moved into the neighborhood with their AC sets, the transformer would burn up because of the DC. You could smell them coming in through the door. Then, the Army got me and I spent three years in the service, most of it overseas – England, France.

How did you end up at Sanders Associates?

There's a span of 10 or 15 years between me leaving the Army and Sanders. By the time I got to Sanders, I was a seasoned engineer and a VP in another firm. [Military contracts] were their primary concern. When I joined, within a year, I was a division manager. Two or three years later, I had 500

to college when that stuff was current. Spacewar was a 1960s product. I was in college in the '40s.

Ultimately, you developed the Odyssey game machine at Sanders and you ended up having to find a partner to manufacture it.

We paraded a whole bunch of TV manufacturers through the place, thinking one of them would take the device. None of them did at the time. They all said, "Hey this is very creative," but no one wanted to do a contract other than RCA, and that contract was so onerous that we walked away from it.

How did you end up with Magnavox?

Fortunately for us, one of the members of that team left RCA and became a VP of marketing for Magnavox. He was so impressed that [he convinced] their corporate headquarters to take another look. They invited us to come to Fort Wayne and demonstrate. We were in a big boardroom, with about 20 guys sitting around and looking glum. Nobody wanted to commit, but the guy in charge had vision. When we got done, it was thumbs up. We had the license agreement after about a year of lawyers fighting over the details. We took our hardware, the seventh version,

any credit even though he did most of the work in the beginning. He was the only technical guy there. Nolan didn't know from anything, but he was a damn good marketer.

It seems like Magnavox didn't really see the potential in what it had.

Oh, no question. They didn't know. It wasn't obvious, anyhow. Nobody can read the crystal ball. Even for me, what was that machine? Could I see that it would develop into more and more complex machines as time went by and become a gigantic industry? Hell, no.

On your site, you mention several of your patents that you have that are being infringed. Could you talk about what those are?

None right now, but back in the mid-'70s, arcade business had gotten big enough where it was worth pursuing the infringement suits – Atari, Midway, and a bunch of others. We took them to court in Chicago in 1975. Atari and Nolan met with their lawyers and my lawyers and me on the steps of the courthouse. Nolan decided to opt out of the suit and take the license. They became our first licensee. Next up was Mattel, with the Intellivision. We

My only regret is that I won't be able to see what's going to happen in the next 80 years.

engineers and techs reporting to me. We were all doing military work – submarine warfare, radar countermeasures. But I went to school after WWII in Chicago and graduated as a TV engineer, so I knew television equipment.

Could you talk about when the idea for a home video game machine hit you?

Well, actually it struck me much earlier, but officially, it was September 1st, 1966. I'd had the idea the day before, and sat down at my desk and wrote a full-page paper. If you're interested in looking at it, you can go to the Smithsonian website. There are 500 documents there that have been scanned. That full-page document is basically the Magna Carta of the home game industry. Within a year and a half of that paper, we were playing video ping-pong, handball, and shooting at the screen with light guns.

Were you aware of Steve Russell, who did the Spacewar game on a mainframe at MIT in 1962?

My lawyers were happy as hell that I didn't know anything about any of that stuff. Part of the reason was that I was from an older generation. I didn't go

which we called "The Brown Box" because it was covered with adhesive paper to make it look like a wood box, to Fort Wayne. Within nine months, early March of '72, we were able to show early models of the Odyssey to people in the trade. I got invited to see a dealer show in Central Park West, at Tavern on the Green. At the end, they showed the Odyssey. It was hard not to jump up and down and yell, "Hey, that's my baby!"

What are your feelings about Atari's Nolan Bushnell? He took a lot of credit in the media as being the "father of video games."

There was a demonstration of the Odyssey in California, which was attended by one Nolan Bushnell. He played the ping-pong game. He went and hired Al Alcorn. Nolan gave Al the job of building a ping-pong game. Al got done, and it was Pong. Pong became the successful start of the arcade business. Look, I'm 87. I'm long past the point of carrying grudges, and I'm much more philosophical than I might have been 30 years ago. I always respected Bushnell for having the guts to start a company with almost no money, along with his partner Ted Dabney, who never seems to get

took 16 million bucks from Mattel over the years. Next came Activision and a bunch of Japanese companies. Nintendo finally decided not to deal with us and it actually went to hearing in New York. They lost that case and quietly settled for \$12 million, which was a pittance. All that litigation over a period of 10 years netted something like close to 100 million in 1970s money, so you can multiply that by three.

What's your opinion of what games have evolved into?

It's utterly amazing. I have an early Apple computer; it had 32K of memory. You can go to the store and for \$50 buy 10 gigabytes of memory on a stick that plugs into a USB. It's like going from bows-and-arrows to the space age. Nowadays, you look at a video game – it's done on very complex software running on fantastic equipment, and it resides in machines that are so powerful that 10 years ago we wouldn't have thought it was possible. The public has no sense of how fast things are moving. We're used to getting miracles served up every year. My only regret is that I won't be able to see what's going to happen in the next 80 years.

Ralph Baer poses with two of his inventions, the "Brown Box" prototype of the Magnavox Odyssey and Milton Bradley's popular Simon handheld game

THE FATHER OF VIDEO GAMES

software

SAY2PLAY: THE WEAPON OF VOICE

VERY GOOD

Along with jetpacks and holographic butlers, voice-controlled computers are one of those near future technologies that still elude us. Say2Play is the crafty software trying to bring that future to us now by letting players interact with their PC games through a vocal interface. Several pre-made game templates are available, but the software can be programmed for almost any title. The software is quick and easy to setup, and doesn't require any voice training. Aside from the awkwardness we felt while barking orders at our computer, we found Say2Play's vocal commands worked great for switching weapons, casting spells, and other macro functions we didn't feel like assigning to a key binding. Unfortunately, the slight delay in response (less than a second) could frustrate some, especially when playing twitchy shooters. At the very least check out the free seven-day trial, because Say2Play could be a useful addition to anyone's gaming repertoire.

\$29.99 • www.Say2Play.com



toys

RESIDENT EVIL 5 FIGURES

NECA, purveyor of fine video game collectibles, has unleashed these RE 5 figures in conjunction with Capcom's newest entry in its survival horror series. The set includes Chris Redfield, Sheva Alomar, and the massive Executioner Majini complete with his giant axe. Each figure includes its own arsenal and up to 25 points of articulation. Like the game, these are more fun when you're playing with a friend.

\$15.99 • www.necaonline.com

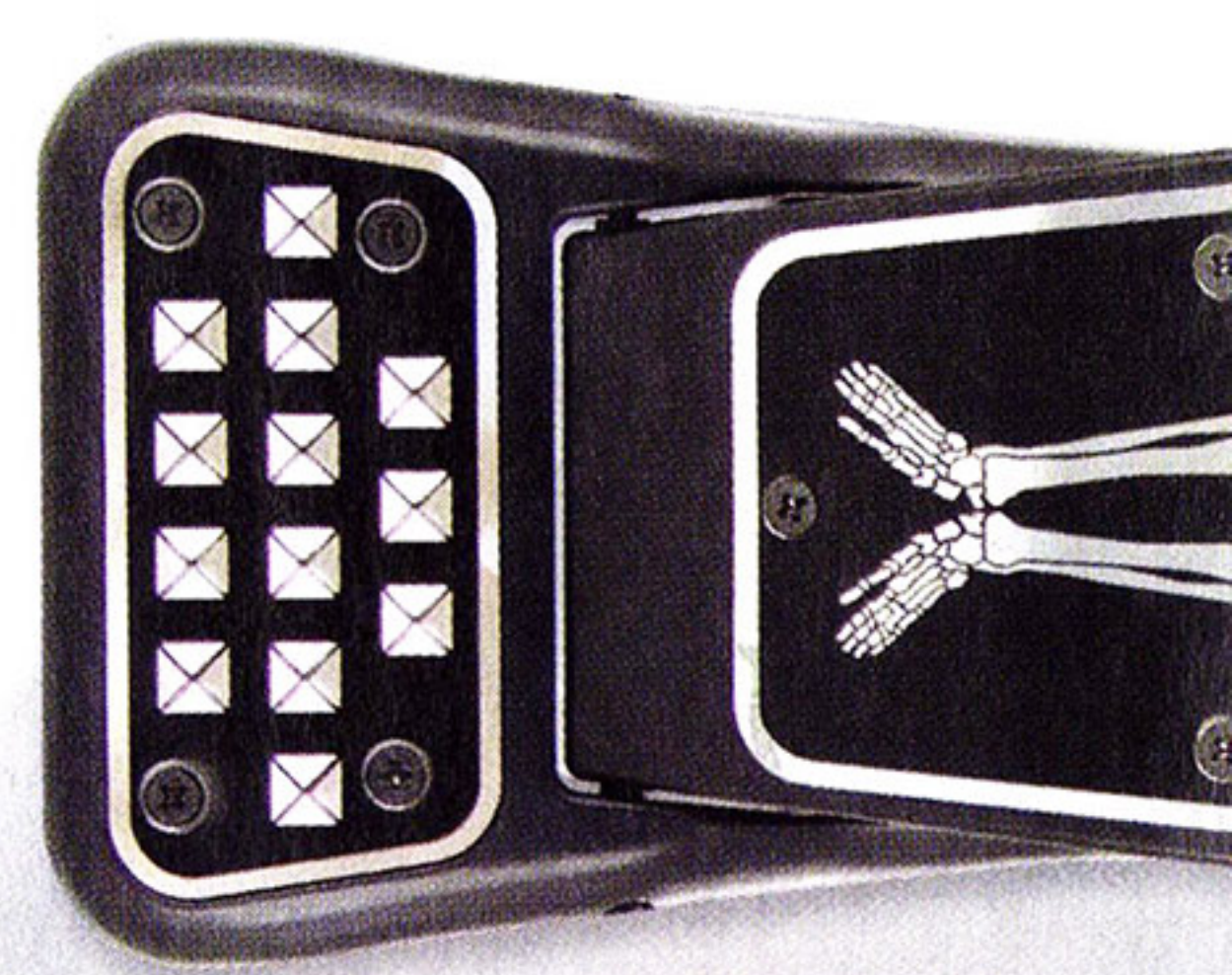
rocking

NYKO METAL DRUM PEDAL

SUPERB

This drum pedal isn't called metal just because it knows how to rock. It's actually has reinforced metal plating, so it should have no problem surviving your late-night Metallica beatings. The unit's extra wide base and rubber feet make sure it stays in place. Best of all, it works with all the important music games: the PS3, Xbox 360, and Wii versions of Rock Band 1 & 2 and Guitar Hero World Tour. The unit also comes with a splitter, letting you double kick your heart out if you haven't already destroyed your original pedal.

\$19.99 • www.nyko.com



pc

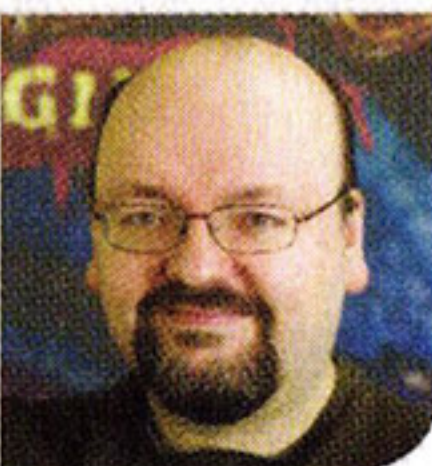
RAZER CARCHARIAS HEADSET

VERY GOOD

Nothing's worse for a professional gamer than headphones that pinch the ear. After extended gaming sessions, even a slight amount of pressure can leave a migraine. That's not a problem with Razer's new Carcharias Headset; unless you're Babar, these round cans should have no problem keeping your ears cozy. They also produce solid, if bassy, audio, and boast a sturdy noise-cancelling mic. We also like the extra long, braided cord. The only thing that gave us pause were the thin wires along this set's neck, which make us wonder how long the unit will hold up in combat.

\$79.99 • www.razerzone.com

DAVID GAIDER
LEAD WRITER, DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS



DRAGON AGE: NOVEL AS GAME COMPANION?

...this presented an exciting opportunity to take the reader a little further into the world than we could do with the game alone.

suppose the first question that needed to be asked when we approached the idea of writing a novel based in the world of Dragon Age was: Who would want to read it? Ideally, you would have a group of fans interested in the game that find the idea of exploring that world intriguing, but there are several hurdles that would need to be cleared.

For one, the novel would need to avoid spoilers. Not everyone who reads it is going to have played the game first. Unless you want to limit your audience to those who have, you need to make sure there's some distance from events in the game while not being so totally separate that it may as well be another world altogether.

Second, you can't assume familiarity, not with it being for a world that nobody has yet adventured in. Unique concepts need to be introduced, but not so that it feels redundant to any reader who is actually familiar.

Easy? I didn't think so. At the end of the day, we elected to do a prequel to the events within Dragon Age: Origins, taking place about 30 years previously and including a few of the same characters when they were much younger. It's funny, because even though this was the same decision reached by the Mass Effect team (the first Mass Effect novel, *Revelation* by Drew Karpysyn, being a prequel as well), it wasn't due to any coordinated plan. When we were putting the story for Dragon Age: Origins together, we noted that there were many references made to the time when the Kingdom of Ferelden was occupied by a foreign power. The rebellion that freed the kingdom set the stage for many of the events within the game, but we never felt the need to do more than reference those events of long ago.

"Wouldn't it be interesting," I asked at one particular brainstorming session, "if we could explore the story of that rebellion further? Look at what happened and how the people involved became what they are today?" Everyone agreed that it would be interesting, but who knew if we would ever get the chance to explore it? So when the prospect of a Dragon Age novel came up, I remembered that particular conversation and decided it might fit the bill after all. Those readers who eventually play the game would be familiar with these characters, yet not know so much about this part of their lives so as to feel they were re-treading the same ground. And those readers that go into the game after the book would possess more insight into the story's events without feeling as if they had inadvertently spoiled their experience. In that way, the novel becomes sort of a companion to the game – not a new concept by any means, but pretty new for us at BioWare. As with almost any game BioWare produces, there is a wealth of background that never makes its way into release at all. As a writer, I sigh a little sadly every time one of those precious "maybes" gets set aside, so this presented an exciting opportunity to take the reader a little further into the world than we could do with the game alone.

As the lead writer for Dragon Age: Origins, I knew the setting pretty intimately (I helped create it) and perhaps more importantly I also knew the tone that would be required. Dragon Age isn't about light-hearted adventure romps, as fun as those can be. It's about making hard choices in a fantasy world where good and evil aren't always so easy to define. Humour has its place (I wrote the homicidal android HK-47 in *Knights of the Old Republic*, for example, so I think my adoration of humour is well-established)

but here it exists in contrast to the darker moments. So in that sense, I was prepared to tackle the project. What I wasn't as ready for was the task of actually writing a novel.

In concept it makes sense; I've written large chunks of games that had many hundreds of thousands of words. Heck, I've probably written the equivalent of a few novels in my time at BioWare as it is. The reality is that writing a novel is a different world. In a game you don't have strict control over the protagonist. You're not going to know where they are at all times, you can't look into their head and you have no ability to use narrative. So in this respect it was a pleasure to use these tools, as I don't often get access to them. The fact that I found it a bit of a guilty thrill at times to write a single path of dialogue rather than multiple threads and optional question hubs would probably amuse my colleagues to no end.

Did it work? I hope so. I feel, in some ways, as anxious as I did when the first game I worked on came out. The novel was a solo project, but at the same time there was an entire team that breathed life into the world I drew it from, and thus made my job just that much easier. I hope those who decide to read *Dragon Age: The Stolen Throne* as well as play the game find that they compliment each other well. If so, the effort will have been well worth it. ■ ■ ■

The views and opinions expressed on this page are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer Magazine or its staff.

If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com.

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THUR

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may

For more information on these games and others go to www.gameinformer.com

01

Nerd quiz: Today, are you going to A) see the *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* movie, B) buy the game inspired by said movie, or C) go see the CG sci-fi epic, *Battle for Terra*? The correct answer is anything that does not include option A. Hugh Jackman looks like he's 80! Hope that healing factor kicks in soon.



X-Men Origins: Wolverine



Patapon 2 – 05/05

NEW RELEASES 05

- The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena – PS3
- Crysis: Maximum Edition – PC
- Imagine: Music Fest – DS
- Klonoa – Wii
- Magician's Quest: Mysterious Times – DS
- Patapon 2 – PSP

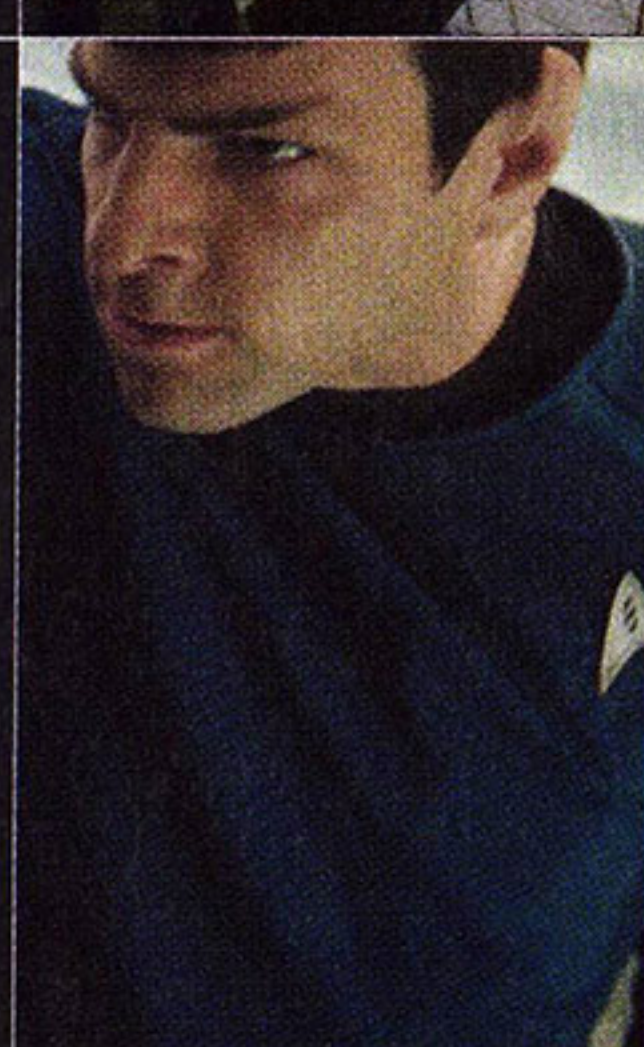
06

Miller's desk holds the world's largest collection of half-dressed men. Plastic men. Miller calls them his "home boys." His shirtless Illidan Stormrage action figure no longer needs to stand next to his shirtless, nipple-pierced Spider-Man (we're thinking this is a custom design). Lady Vashj is here to break up this sausage fest.



08

For us, Star Trek will never get better than Kirk hammer-punching a lizard-man. For you, it might not get better than J.J. Abrams' Star Trek reboot, opening in theaters today. According to trailers, the new Captain Kirk is a thrill-seeking toolbox, and Spock is an evil supervillain who can steal people's powers. We're glad they are staying so true to the sci-fi epic.



Devil Summoner 2 – 05/12

NEW RELEASES 12

- Drum King – Wii
- Fuel – PS3, 360, PC
- Garfield: Gets Real – Wii, DS
- Girl Time – DS
- The Little King's Story – Wii
- I Love Beauty – DS
- Imagine: Makeup Artist – DS
- Mission Runway – DS
- Necrovision – PC
- Puchi Puchi Virus – DS
- Reel Fishing: Angler's Dream – Wii
- Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner 2 – PS2
- Sushi Academy – DS

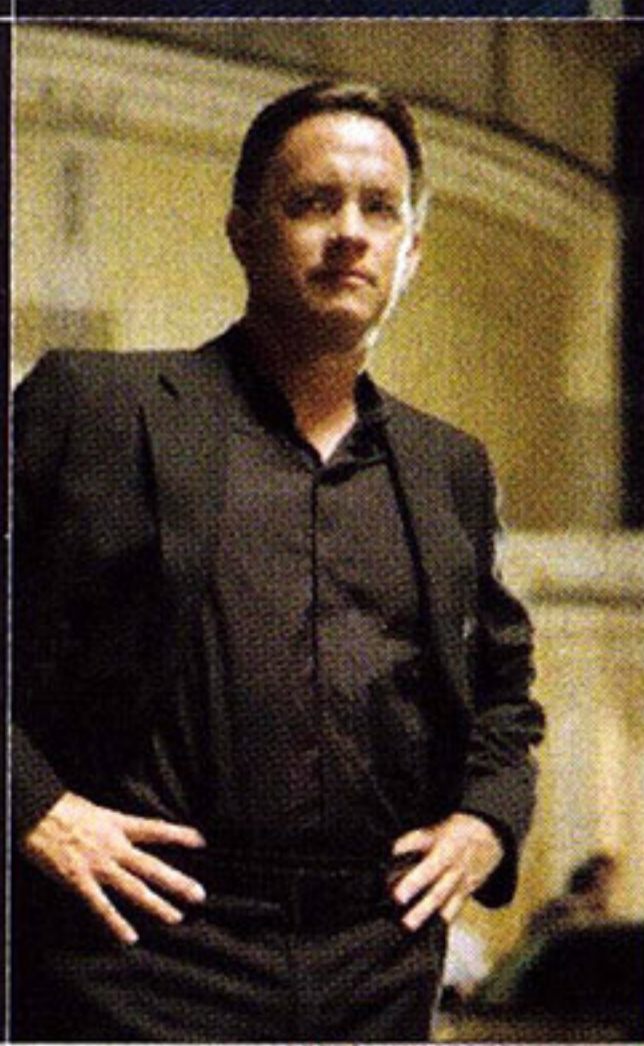


14

We've finally found something fun for you to watch on Thursday night (secret *Ugly Betty* obsession aside). If you tune in to Spike TV at 12:30am ET, you'll catch *GameTrailers TV with Geoff Keighley*. This show is loaded with video game news, footage, and interviews. In this month's episodes, *GameTrailers TV* takes you behind the scenes for the making of *BioShock 2*.

15

Conspiracy! Murder! Mystery! Tom Hanks! Today's theatrical release *Angels & Demons* has all of those things. Unfortunately, if it's anything like its predecessor *Da Vinci Code*, it will be the snoozefest of 2009. Why doesn't Tom Hanks do what we are all waiting for: *Big 2*?



Punch-Out!! – 05/19

NEW RELEASES 19

- Bionic Commando – PS3, 360
- Boom Blox: Bash Party – Wii
- EA Sports Active – Wii
- Punch-Out!! – Wii
- Spore: Galactic Adventures – PC
- Terminator: Salvation – PS3, 360, PC
- Virtua Tennis 2009 – PS3, Wii
- X-Edge – PS3
- Yu-Gi-Oh: Stardust Accelerator World Championship 2009 – DS

20

Chris Claremont forgot to do something 15 years ago. He forgot to finish the X-Men story he started! Luckily for him, Marvel's editors are more forgiving than we would be, giving him carte blanche to rewrite X-Men history in *X-Men Forever*. Our guess is that he will turn Cyclops into a woman (he is sensitive), have Wolverine lose his claws, and you know, a bunch of other stuff that doesn't make sense. The madness starts today.



22

Edward Furlong was obviously the first choice to play John Connor in *Terminator Salvation*, which opens today. Of course, with a busy schedule of straight-to-DVD horror releases, he probably couldn't find the time. We'll just have to settle for Christian "B-List" Bale. Maybe we'll just go see *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* instead. When has Ben Stiller ever made a bad movie?



Terminator Salvation



Bionic Commando – 05/19

NEW RELEASES 26

- Guitar Hero: Metallica – PS2
- Majesty 2: The Fantasy Kingdom Sim – PC
- Munchables – Wii
- Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising – PS3, 360, PC
- Pangya – PSP
- Up – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS, PC

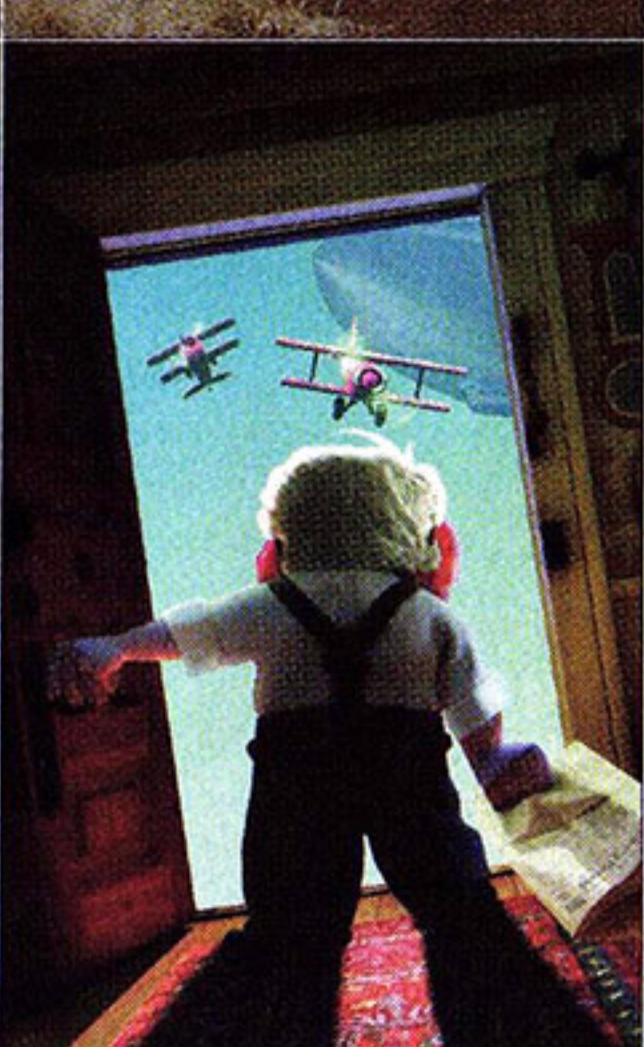
27

Do you play *StarCraft*? Do you read video game comic books? If you answered "yes" or an uncertain "maybe" to both of these questions, kick your sister out of your bedroom, drop the cat, and hold on to your pants as tightly as you can. *StarCraft* is coming to comic books!!! You can buy the first issue today!!! NERDPLOSION in t-minus 4, 3, 2...



29

Pixar's newest movie *Up* floats into theaters today. Like Ben Stiller, Pixar has never made a bad movie. We just have one question: Why would you spend millions of dollars rendering balloons when you can pick up a party pack at Party Go Round for five bucks?! We should run Pixar.





UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE

> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT

> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL

> **RELEASE** WINTER 2009

ASSASSIN'S CREED™ II

“Our life is made by the death of others.”

—Leonardo da Vinci

Italy in 1476 is a spiderweb of political intrigue, warring families, and corrupt clergy. Even the implied unity of calling the place by a single name is a simplification; violent city-states are in a constant state of upheaval and conflict, both within and without. Assassination, banishment, and grisly executions are commonplace. Life can be short and brutal, even at the very top of the social ladder. Beside this harsh world coexists a strange counterpoint. The western world is waking up from long years of plague, famine, and conquest. The foundations of modern science, art, and literature are emerging from these same bloody streets, and the epoch that will be known as the Renaissance has begun. Behind it all, two forces vie for the hearts and minds of the people, continuing a conflict that stretches back into history, from the fields of the Crusades 300 years earlier to a mysterious future of conspiracy and secrets. The Assassins and the Templar continue their ceaseless struggle, and one side is about to receive a new combatant.



THE PRIMER

Gamers who missed the first Assassin's Creed may be more than a little lost amid the complex mythology. Here are the basics:

- ◆ Two competing forces have been battling throughout history. The Templar seek to control humanity by harnessing powerful secrets and ancient artifacts. The more egalitarian Assassins hope to share that knowledge with the world, and they're willing to kill the Templar to make sure that goal is met.
- ◆ Desmond is a young man who has been captured by the modern-day version of the Templar in the year 2012. Forced to recall his Assassin ancestors' memories through a machine called the Animus, he is still imprisoned at the end of the first game.
- ◆ Throughout the first game, Desmond dove through the memories of Altaïr, an Assassin in the Holy Land during the 12th century. Altaïr's ultimate fate remains unknown.

A Change in Setting

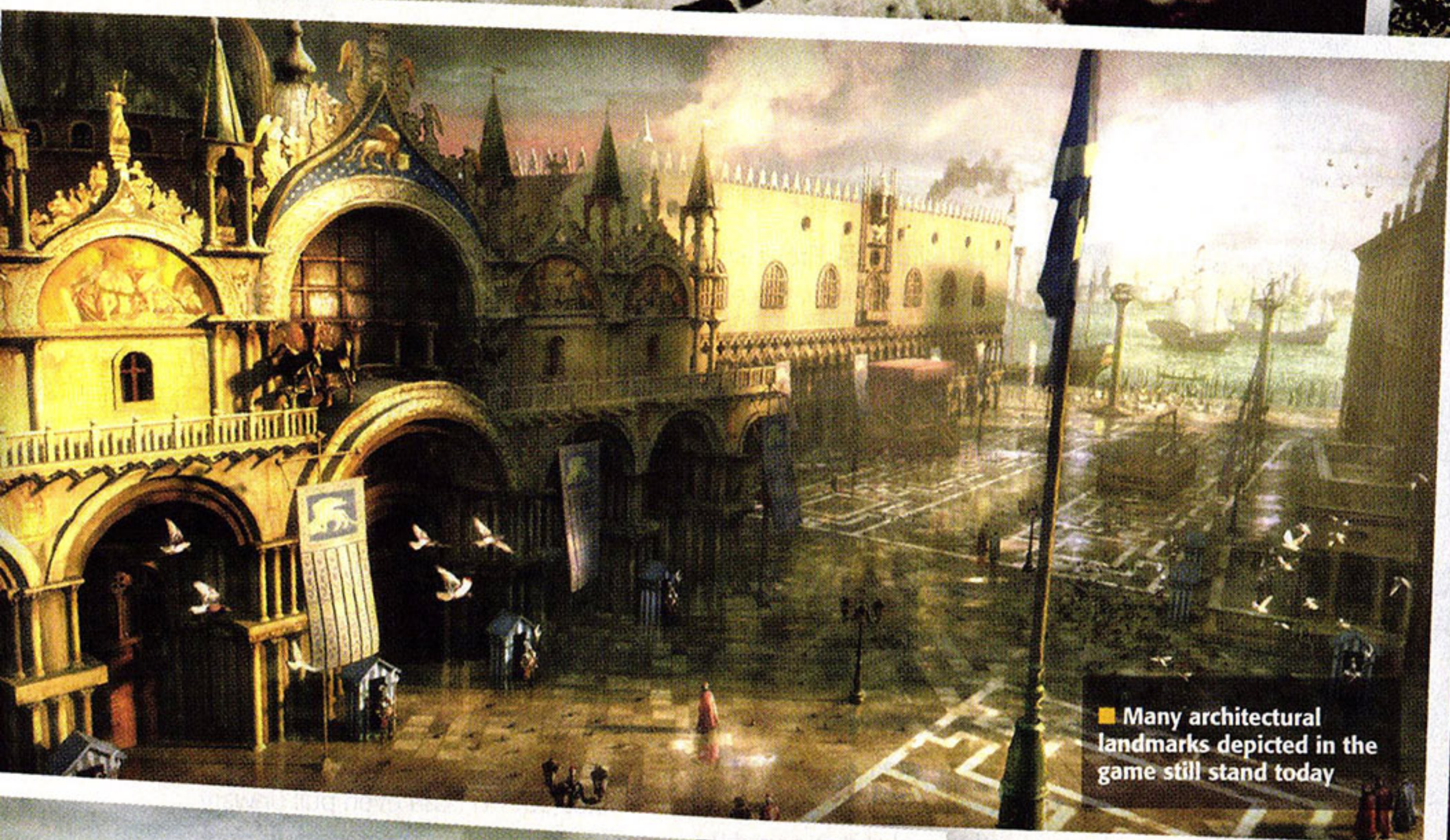
Renaissance Italy might seem like a strange place to advance the mythology of Assassin's Creed. "It was basically the switch between the Middle Ages and modern times," says producer Sebastien Puel. "It's a place that was talking about banking, and art, and a new way of thinking, with man at the center of his own universe, changing the way we saw religion. Lots of things happened in these very small cities in a very short period of time." For most, our perception of the time is dominated by iconic images of art and architecture – da Vinci's Mona Lisa, Michelangelo's statue of David, Venice's Rialto Bridge. Often overlooked is the fact that these monumental achievements emerged out of an era of incredible strife. This tension of opposites drew the team at Ubisoft Montreal to take the dramatic leap forward, abandon a familiar, well-liked setting, and start anew.

The clustered city-states of Italy serve as an entirely new game world to wander and explore. The interconnected waterways and canals of Venice make for a striking backdrop to intrigue and assassination. The architectural marvels of Florence become yet another obstacle to climb atop and leap across. "One of the main reasons we chose the setting was for the amazing cities. Florence and Venice are two of the most visited places in the world. It's a fantasy for a lot of people," Puel tells us.

Unlike in the previous game, these cities are no

longer isolated bastions of civilization separated by a wide "kingdom" of gorgeous but mostly empty wilderness. "There'll be a lot more missions that go from one place to another. It's not the feel of three cities, and a place to travel in between," creative director Patrice Désilets says. "It's a whole bunch of connected cities, and continuous gameplay that links them together." Individual cities have countryside built around them, with mission content, story development, and hidden secrets seamlessly connecting the urban to the rural. Like the historical record of the period, a given city was far more than its buildings and walls. Places like Florence would extend their military and political might across broad reaches of the surrounding countryside, controlling smaller towns and villages that might further the central city's goals. There was no Italy in the way we understand it today, but rather a squabbling collection of nobles, church officials, and merchant families vying for land and profit. Wherever possible, the team in Montreal has stayed true to this concept, resulting in a far more dynamic and compelling landscape to explore.

The game opens in 1476, a far cry from the distant crusades of the Holy Land seen in the first game. Players who enjoyed that first outing with Altaïr might not be surprised by the change up. After all, Assassin's Creed has been presented from the beginning as the story of a family stretched across



■ Many architectural landmarks depicted in the game still stand today



BLURRING THE LINE

Ubisoft sent key members of the development team to Italy on a multi-week research trip to chronicle the modern-day architecture and art they are emulating in the game, traveling through Venice, Florence, Tuscany, and Rome. In many cases, the fine workmanship has survived the passage of years. "It's great, because we're able to work on our own references. For us, it was about capturing the crowd in Italy – the sound and the feel of the place," producer Sebastien Puel says.

"Plus, we took about 10,000 pictures," adds Patrice Désilets. Along with meticulous attention to historical details on the dates of creation for buildings, bridges, and statues, the developers hope to craft the most realistic representation of Renaissance Italy ever created.



■ The sprawling countryside of Tuscany is as alive with activity and mission content as the larger cities

centuries, not the individual tale of one man. "Altair was only in the middle of this long timeline," Désilets hints. The first game opened in a strange futuristic scene, as a man named Desmond was forced to experience the memories of his ancestor Altair, a sort of warrior-monk, during the summer of 1191. As the story came to a close, many questions were left unanswered. Altair was left with a mystery about an ancient artifact he had uncovered. In the future, Desmond was waking to some of his ancestor's potential, detecting the hidden messages left behind on the laboratory walls of his prison. In the final scene, players were left to ponder these curiosities in that empty lab. While the team is cagey about dealing with specifics, it's abundantly clear by their silence on the topic that Desmond and his imprisonment is far from forgotten. But it's through the memories of a new ancestor that real answers emerge.

SAINT MARK'S BASILICA

Photo



Screenshot



THE GRAND CANAL

Photo



Screenshot



THE LITTLE CANAL

Photo



Screenshot



RIALTO BRIDGE

Photo



Screenshot



FACES OF THE RENAISSANCE

Even more so than in the first game, *Assassin's Creed II* is awash in dramatic and memorable characters from the annals of history.

Leonardo da Vinci was a sculptor, scientist, painter, engineer, and overall genius. His tumultuous life was fractured by disappointment and regret, despite leaving behind some of the best-remembered ideas and images in history. In the game, Leonardo is a close ally of the Auditore family and friend to Ezio. As the adventure progresses, Leonardo becomes to Ezio what Q is to James Bond, crafting items like the hidden blades to further the Assassin's quest for vengeance.

Machiavelli is best remembered for writing *The Prince*, a cynical political treatise that

encouraged deceit and cunning to defeat one's enemies. The Florentine civil servant becomes an ally to Ezio later in the game, teaching him tactics – a feature of the game that remains quietly under wraps this early in development.

Caterina Sforza, whose life was filled with true stories of betrayal and revenge, was one of the most fascinating women of the Renaissance. In one astounding event, she and her children were captured after the assassination of her husband. Escaping captivity, she fled to a nearby citadel and climbed to the wall's battlements. There, threatened with the death of her children if she didn't return, Caterina lifted her dress to all who could see what lay beneath, and shouted: "I have the instrument to bear more!" This event, and others in the woman's wild life, will be included in the game.

It's hard not to imagine other larger-than-life characters of the period not making an appearance. Lorenzo de' Medici was a central figure in politics of the time. He survived an unbelievable assassination attempt that will be recounted in the game, and he becomes one of Ezio's allies in the aftermath. Given that Medici helped to found the modern banking institution, it raises some interesting questions about what gameplay features his alliance might introduce.

As for others, the period is filled with one colorful character after another. Even in the realm of total speculation, it's hard not to imagine the involvement of Pope Alexander VI, who came to power near the same time as the game timeline. History records him as one of the most heinous of the now-disgraced church leaders of the period. Time will tell if Ubisoft finds him worthy of inclusion.

A Change in Character

Ezio Auditore de Firenze is a nobleman of Florence when we first dive into his memories during the tumultuous year of 1476. He's a young man with a far different background from his ancestor, Altaïr. The link between the two is a necessary precursor to Desmond's ancestral memories, but the actual family ties remain a matter of unrevealed plotline. Whatever the connection, Ezio has grown up in a life of privilege. Like his distant family member, he is mysterious and well-trained – the gentry of the period were educated with equal skill in swordplay, poetry, and art. Unlike Altaïr, there is a practiced charm in this new hero; seduction and wit come easily.

The Auditore family is like much of the well-to-do nobility of the time. They have alliances with other Florentine houses. They participate in the endless one-upsmanship of moving up the social ladder. And they have enemies. While Ubisoft refuses to spoil the tale of how Ezio turns from a cultured noble into an assassin, we know that he does end up alone and on a quest for vengeance against the most powerful families of the Renaissance.

Though Ezio begins the game with a great deal to learn about the path of the Assassins, he has a wealth of new skills that will set him apart from the first game's protagonist. With Venice

featuring so prominently in the story, the team members are well aware of the riots they'd have on their hands if they didn't include a swimming component. "It's sort of a geek joke, but since it's a sequel, he has to be able to swim," Désilets laughs. From any rooftop, street, or bridge, Ezio can dive into the water, traversing the twisting waterways of Venice with the same ease that he might free-run along its rooftops. Like bales of hay in the first game, the water can also be used as a hiding place, so long as Ezio's breath holds out. You can even pull unwary guards into a watery grave with new assassination moves.

Ezio also has new options in the more familiar arenas of running and climbing. To further aid the sort of fast-paced chases that made the first game so engaging, excellent free-running paths are now frequently marked with a white cloth. Just as the ledge-side birds highlight an appropriate place to dive into cover, the white sheets now reveal many of the most advantageous avenues to clamber and swing your way through cluttered streets and past dangerous obstacles. With numerous taller buildings around (many nobles would compete with their fellows by building ever taller homes and businesses), the climbing system has been reworked with a new leap and grab maneuver that allows easy traversal of



■ Da Vinci's Workshop



■ Approaching an assassination target by water adds a new layer of tactical options for Ezio

seemingly sheer vertical surfaces. Once he uses these new abilities to evade his pursuers, Ezio has the ability to blend in with any crowd he encounters, not just the white-garbed monks of the first game.

Ezio doesn't live his life in a bubble. The game will feature a notoriety system that governs how enemy soldiers and even the general populace will treat you. As he sows discord and assassinates targets, Ezio's infamy grows, causing increased suspicion and alarm from the populace. "In a given city, you can either be incognito or notorious," Désilets says. "When you're notorious, new missions will appear. For instance, you might be asked to assassinate the witnesses, bribe the people who are talking about you, or get rid of posters of your face in the city. This will get your notoriety down to zero, and the guards won't be actively seeking you out."

The biggest innovations have been saved for Ezio's combat capabilities. As before, the game encourages an observation-based system of parries and counters. Unlike Altaïr, Ezio can disarm an enemy with the tap of a button and then use that weapon against them. On top of that, each of the dozens of weapons have their own special move. Holding down the attack button will trigger each enhanced attack. Grab a long pike, and

you'll attack with a wide arc that flings surrounding enemies to the ground. Snatch away a dagger from a lightly armored guard, and you'll stab and flip past him onto a second target, opening up a hole in the circle of enemies to allow for a quick escape. Fight with your bare hands, and Ezio will take advantage of any dirty trick to stay alive – an unarmed charged-up attack has him reaching down to fling dirt into his attackers' eyes. "Since Ezio will not be carrying a weapon at all times, except for his hidden blade and throwing knives, he needs

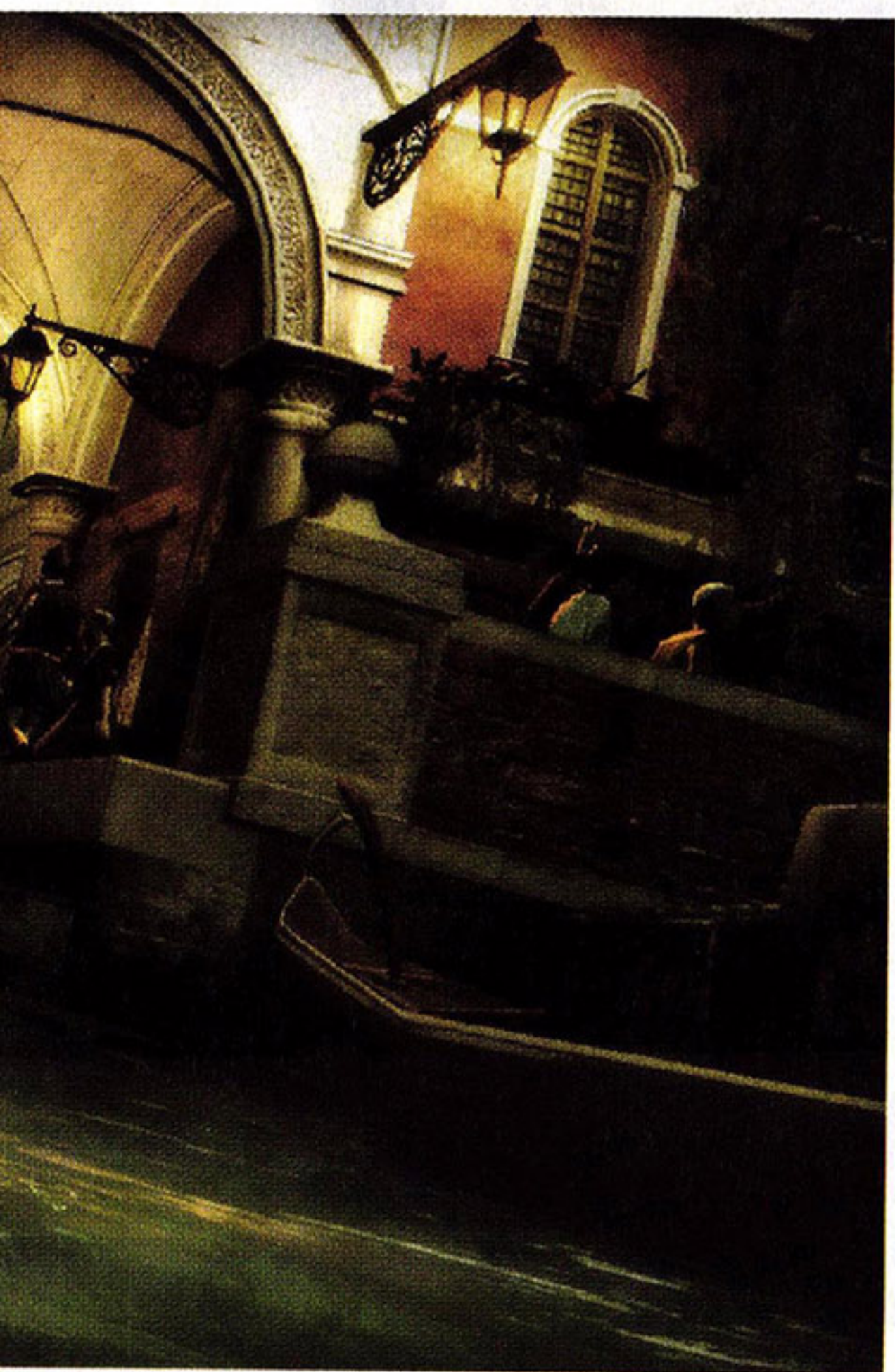
to be able to use his hands more efficiently when fighting," Puel explains. "Therefore, Ezio will be able to fight barehanded against enemies anytime in the game and perform various punches, kicks, grabs, and head butts."

Even with all the other options, the hidden blade retains its prominence, this time in the form of an intricate device crafted by Ezio's friend, Leonardo da Vinci. Ezio now wields two blades, which can be used

to swiftly take out two targets in one fierce attack. "It's Assassin's Creed II; let's put two blades in," Désilets tells us with a smile. "If you're really good, I'm hoping that by then you're mostly fighting with the hidden blades. That's the goal. At the end, you're just a bad-ass assassin, without needing all the weapons."

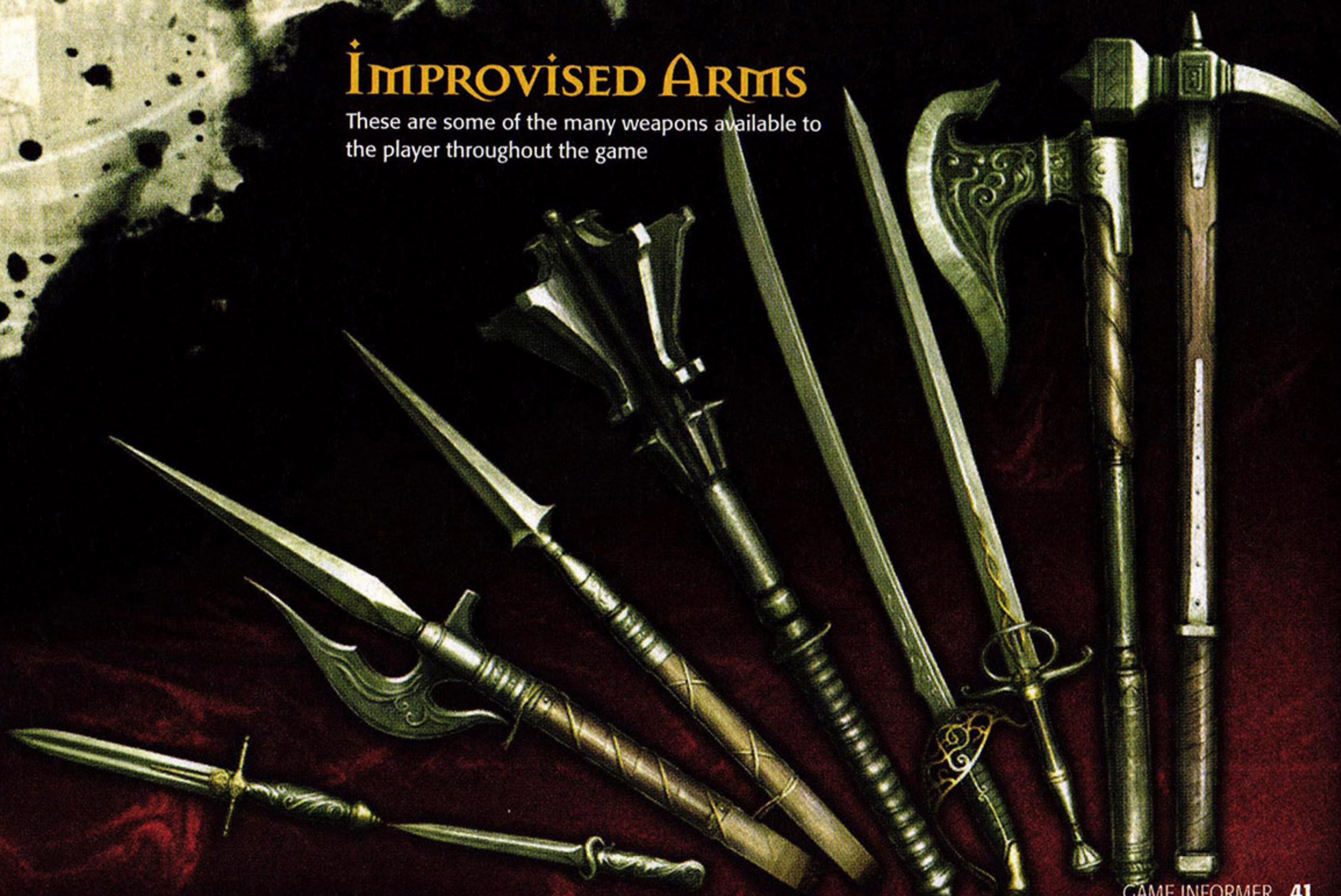


■ Ezio's opportunities to evade pursuit are much wider than those of his predecessor, Altaïr. He can disappear beneath the water, meld into any crowd, and take advantage of a much broader array of hiding places



IMPROVISED ARMS

These are some of the many weapons available to the player throughout the game



A Change in the Game

After completing Assassin's Creed, months were spent gathering information from game critics, and, more importantly, the wider fan community. The team wanted to know what worked and what didn't in order to make informed choices. The result is a game that is being shaped to respond to voiced concerns, but without abandoning the core experience that made Assassin's Creed the fastest selling new game property in history. The number one agreed upon change? More variety.

The first Assassin's Creed had a gameplay loop that was easy to grasp. Pick up a mission at the Assassin's bureau, investigate the target, report to the bureau, kill the target, and escape back to the bureau. It was an elegant and simple design that had the unfortunate side effect of becoming increasingly repetitive as the game progressed. For some players, it was enough to turn them away. Assassin's Creed II completely abandons that structure. "We thought, let's forget entirely about the idea of having a really strict mission design concept," Désilets

tells us. "There's no preset structure."

Instead, a branching network of contacts provides hints and suggestions that move you through cities, out into the countryside, and through constantly changing objectives. While you're still trying to track down and isolate individual targets, there are now 16 unique mission types that you'll encounter along the way. More than that, these missions are rarely transparent repeats of earlier events. In one example we were given, Ezio heads to a nearby palace where a noblewoman holds some vital clue. Upon arriving, she informs him that she is in grave danger, and he must defend her from assassination as they flee through the streets. Reaching a dock along the Venetian canals, they escape by boat, and Ezio must keep the craft afloat until they reach safety.



DA VINCI'S FLYING MACHINE

Beyond a new, less stratified approach to mission design, Ubisoft is going one step further by crafting several unique events that fall outside normal expectations. Certainly one of the most outlandish will be the use of Leonardo da Vinci's flying machine. Sketches of this early glider appeared in the real-life da Vinci notebooks, but video games have a license to fictionalize to the next logical step.

An influential ally is about to be assassinated in the Ducal Palace, a nearly impenetrable fortress in Florence. To reach it, Ezio must pilot his friend's contraption across the city, even as his friends below light fires that help produce an updraft of heat to keep the vehicle aloft.

Passive mission types like eavesdropping and pick-pocketing have disappeared, replaced by more active endeavors, like tailing a woman through a crowded marketplace or chasing a fleeing man as he seamlessly moves out of the city and into the sprawling countryside. "When you add a narrative component to the mission, it becomes a different experience," says Désilets. "Think of how many different things you deliver in GTA – but each time it feels different. So we decided to use the same approach. But then we're also saying, let's sometimes put two missions back to back. So you start by doing a delivery, and that transforms into a chase,

then you end up with a killing mission. We think of it like linked sausages, where one mission is connected to the next." The current plan calls for a total of around 200 missions. Any one of them can be triggered whenever you desire, as you travel back and forth between different contacts, each of whom have their own unique requests.

Mission structure is home to perhaps the most dramatic effort at providing increased variety, but other, smaller elements of the game have been fleshed out as well. Diving from a rooftop, the default hiding place isn't always some conveniently placed hay bale. A merchant's pile



■ Ezio can wield any weapon in the game, but varied enemy types will each respond differently to a given attack



■ You no longer need to select the hidden blade before an assassination – you'll automatically use it if the target is unaware

of wool or a cart filled with a local fisherman's catch will also serve, among others. When preparing for a complex mission filled with guards, careful players can now scour the nearby rooftops and streets to take out excess guards, greatly easing the approach when the time to strike finally comes, and adding flexibility to how you approach the task. Ezio's increased combat skills are met by a far broader array of enemy types, each of whom are susceptible to different attacks, and hunt Ezio in their own unique ways. The health system has been adjusted to allow for a more dynamic and participatory experience. Maintaining memory "sync" helps to recharge your health up to a point, but grievous injuries require a trip to one of the many street-side doctors, who can return you to full strength.

Even collectibles have been adjusted in a significant way to address an issue that was fundamentally lacking in the first game. Scattered about the world of Renaissance Italy are any number of hidden objects to uncover, but they now come with concrete, in-game bonuses that will make it worth a player's time to hunt them down. "It's not only flags this time around. Now there's flags, plus statues, plus gold coins, and a bunch of others," explains Désilets. "And all of them have real rewards attached to them."



NEW ERA, NEW ENEMIES

Combat in the first game had the potential to grow tiresome, since most of the enemies fought and moved in the same way. The new game introduces a host of new enemy types, each with unique attitudes and weaknesses.

Three ranks of basic militia share similar traits with the enemies of the first game. Whether they are archers or melee combatants, both gain better abilities and weapons as the game progresses.

New elite enemies dramatically change the playing field. Agile dagger wielders share the same free-running abilities that Ezio utilizes, and they'll chase him tirelessly across rooftops and jutting beams. Brutish armored troops represent a different challenge; their heavy armor and two-handed swords and axes can be devastating in close combat. Finally, the paranoid and intelligent halberd wielders are keenly aware of their surroundings, and will go so far as to probe hiding places with their weapons if they think you're nearby.



■ You can assassinate targets from hiding places, but more intelligent foes will now investigate those previously safe havens

Knowing What Not To Change

The 240-person collective of developers crafting Assassin's Creed II knows that many players had a blast with their first game. In light of its success, the second game maintains the bulk of the features that made their earlier release a hit. Movement, combat, and interaction with the world are still handled through the innovative marionette control mechanic, where face buttons correspond to body parts, and triggers help to indicate the degree of intensity to the action. Likewise, even as the mission structure has become more nuanced, the game world still

features familiar options. Players can still ride horses and climb high towers to get a view of the surrounding landscape. More importantly, the freedom results in lots of emergent gameplay as you cause mayhem on unsuspecting soldiers.

Though the setting is new, historical authenticity is still a central focus. As the team did last time, they've brought on an expert historian from the University of Notre Dame to consult on the project. Some of the astounding events of the period are presented through in-game encounters. In one infamous but true event, the

leaders of the Pazzi family tried to assassinate the powerful Lorenzo de' Medici while he was at Mass on Easter Sunday. In the midst of communion, Medici's brother was stabbed and killed, but Lorenzo escaped. The Medici and their allies struck back in a bloody and well-documented street war, which ended with the lynching of the failed Pazzi conspirators. Examining tumultuous events like these, it's not hard to see how Ubisoft has drawn comparisons to modern-day Italian mafia, with its tales of murder and inter-family warfare. The tone of the game begins to take on a whole different feel when concepts of gangster crime families are overlaid on top of the cultures and conflicts of the Renaissance. Ultimately, the goal is to present a genuine vision of Italy in the 15th century, albeit layered with the fiction of two eternally warring factions that have brought their conflict to this new land.

On that point, the focus on the war between the Assassins and the Templar remains the overarching plotline that guides the story. "The Templar and the Assassins went underground," Désilets reveals. "You don't see them anymore, but they're still there. And they're still fighting." Somewhere behind the conflicts of merchant families, city-states, and the papacy lie the

secret organizations of the Templar and Assassins, pulling the strings from the very beginning. In online forums, conspiracy theories abounded in the wake of the mysterious images revealed at the end of the first game. Assassin's Creed II will do nothing if not expand that cult of curiosity by broadening the cast of characters, and making it clear that there are entire generations, yet undisclosed, that hold more keys to the mystery.

In recent years, Ubisoft Montreal has developed a tradition for innovative risk-taking in their approach to game design. Assassin's Creed II stands to be in a unique position amid that lineup. Embracing the ideas that set the franchise apart from other action/adventure games, it's clear that there is no fear of remaining apart from the crowd. At the same time, the new approach to mission design reveals a willingness to explore some of the more traditionally successful methods that have been used in open world games. The marriage of innovation to more familiar conventions is one of the fundamental challenges in creating a video game. If Ubisoft Montreal can strike that delicate balance, gamers will be the ones to reap the reward come this winter. ■■■



■ Approximately 240 people are currently working on Assassin's Creed II, a huge team by any measure



■ The story begins in 1476, but it's unclear whether all of Ezio's important memories will be hidden away there. Ubisoft is silent on the point, but it'd be a shame to miss out on all the incredible historical events in the later years of the 15th century



■ A night and day cycle has been added to deliver a sense of the passage of time



Interested in learning more about the fascinating true history behind Assassin's Creed II? Go online and check out our interview with Notre Dame professor of history Margaret Meserve, in this month's Unlimited.

Wii

- > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
- > PUBLISHER NINTENDO
- > DEVELOPER NEXT LEVEL GAMES
- > RELEASE MAY 18

PUNCH-OUT!!

THE CHAMP RETURNS

HALTING BALD BULL'S CHARGE, JOGGING IN A PINK SWEATSUIT IN FRONT OF THE STATUE OF LIBERTY, AND UNLEASHING A STAR PUNCH FOR THE BIG K.O. MOST OLD-SCHOOL GAMERS STILL REMEMBER THESE SIGNATURE MOMENTS FROM THE ORIGINAL MIKE TYSON'S PUNCH-OUT - SOME EVEN RECALL THE BOXERS' EXACT PATTERNS. IT'S BEEN 15 YEARS SINCE THE ONLY FOLLOW-UP, SUPER PUNCH-OUT, WAS RELEASED, BUT THIS SUMMER LITTLE MAC IS FINALLY STAGING HIS COMEBACK. FINDING A BALANCE BETWEEN MODERN GRAPHICS AND A CLASSIC VIBE, PUNCH-OUT TRIES TO CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF THE BELOVED SERIES WITHOUT FEELING ANTIQUATED. WE LACED UP OUR GLOVES AND SPENT SOME EXTENDED TIME TRADING BLOWS WITH SEVERAL OLD RIVALS AND ONE NEW CHALLENGER IN THIS LONG-AWAITED RETURN TO THE RING.



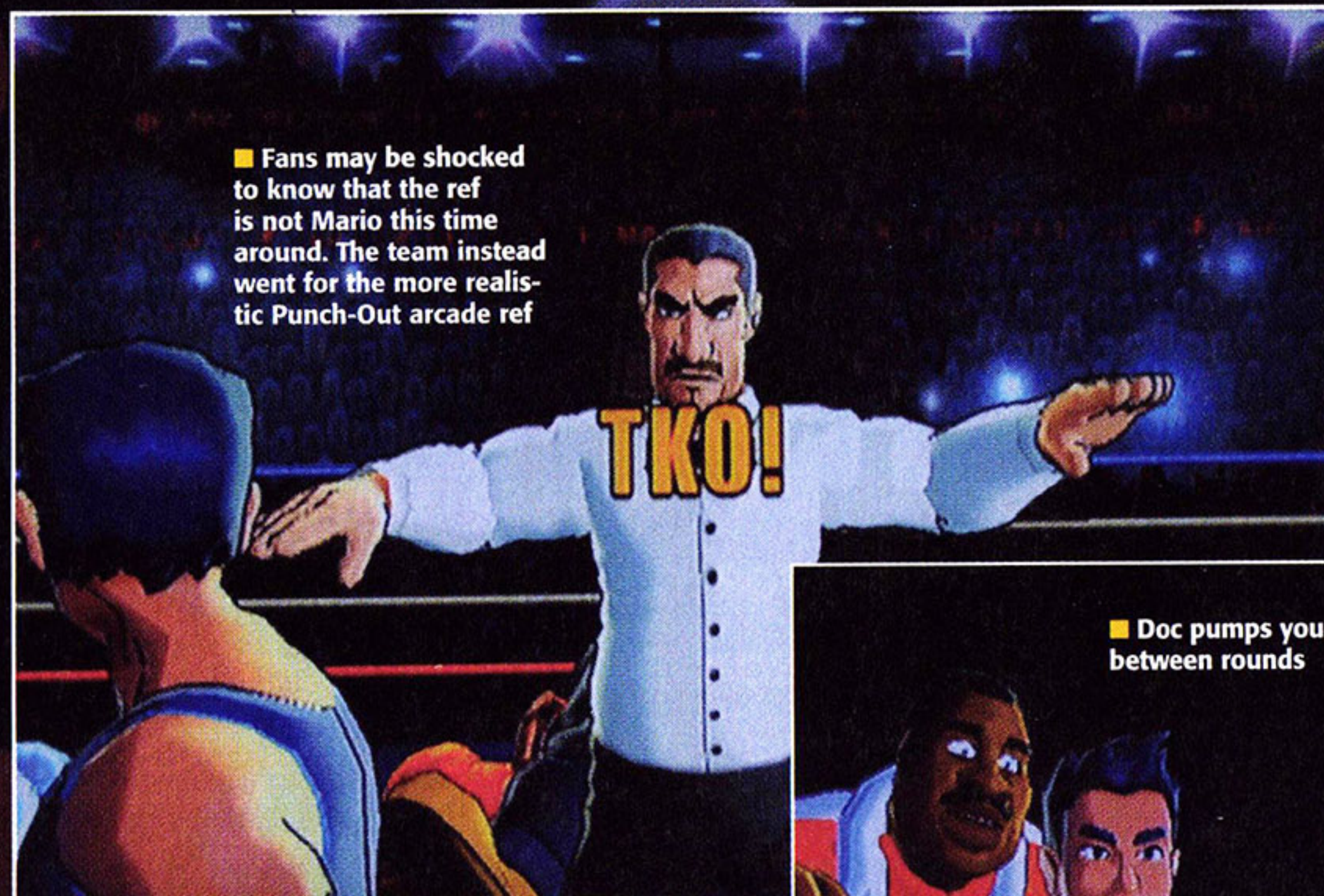
As soon as Punch-Out was announced for Wii, fans' first question was aimed squarely at the controls. Yes, you can hold the remote sideways and box NES-style. And, yes, it feels fantastic. We were instantly back in the rhythm of dodging, ducking, and working the face and body with alternating button taps. Almost nothing has changed in the basic gameplay mechanic; Mac still turns a tired shade of pink when too many punches are blocked, and he still racks up stars with surprise hits. The only noticeable tweak in the system is that the three star slots now stack to deliver one extremely devastating punch instead of serving as a storage system for three separate power punches.

But the controls aren't completely steeped in tradition. Players can plug in the nunchuk and guide Mac with their own punches. This isn't a wild-armed slugfest like Wii Sports boxing – precise defense and offense is still important. Thanks to liberal use of the analog stick on the nunchuk, the Wii doesn't have much chance to get confused by complex motions. Overall, we prefer the classic method, but the motion controls provide a fun extra challenge similar to the wheel steering in Mario Kart Wii.

The second major question is "who's on the roster?" Of the 13 fighters in the main career mode, we are able to talk about six of them: Glass Joe, Von Kaiser, Disco Kid, King Hippo, Bear Hugger, and Don Flamenco. All we can say about the remaining fighters is that fans of the classics will not be disappointed. The career mode may not have as many total fights as the NES game, but there are absolutely no repeated opponents.

Mac begins in the minor circuit at a run-down gym wearing his traditional black and green ensemble. After earning the title, he'll switch to a blue outfit and battle inside a fancy stadium in the major circuit. Mac's costume constantly changes throughout his career and the top-secret mode afterward.

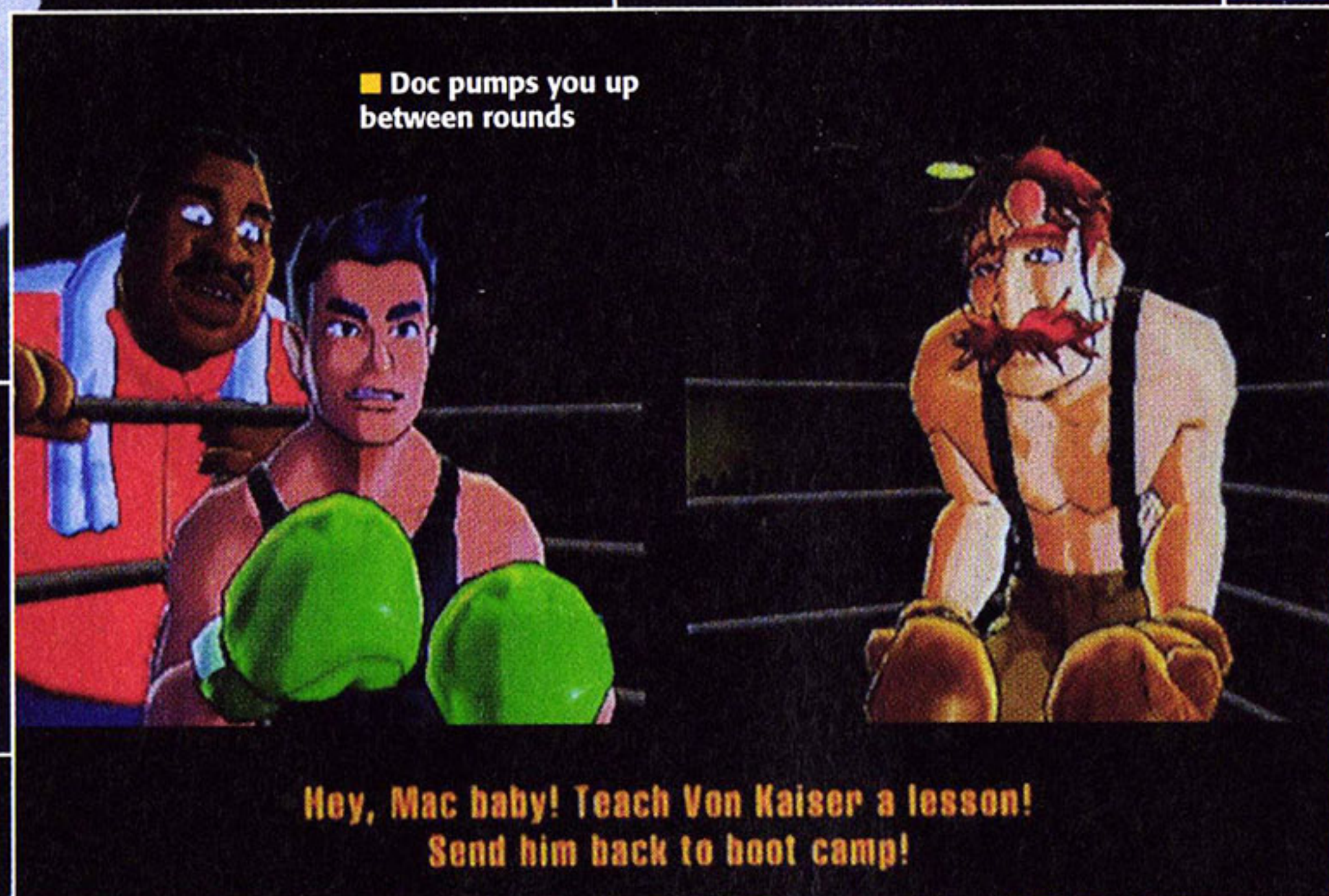
(continued on page 51)



■ Fans may be shocked to know that the ref is not Mario this time around. The team instead went for the more realistic Punch-Out arcade ref



■ The new triple star punch is a spinning uppercut that ruins opponents' health bars



■ Doc pumps you up between rounds

Hey, Mac baby! Teach Von Kaiser a lesson! Send him back to boot camp!



■ Running out of hearts leaves Mac all tucked out

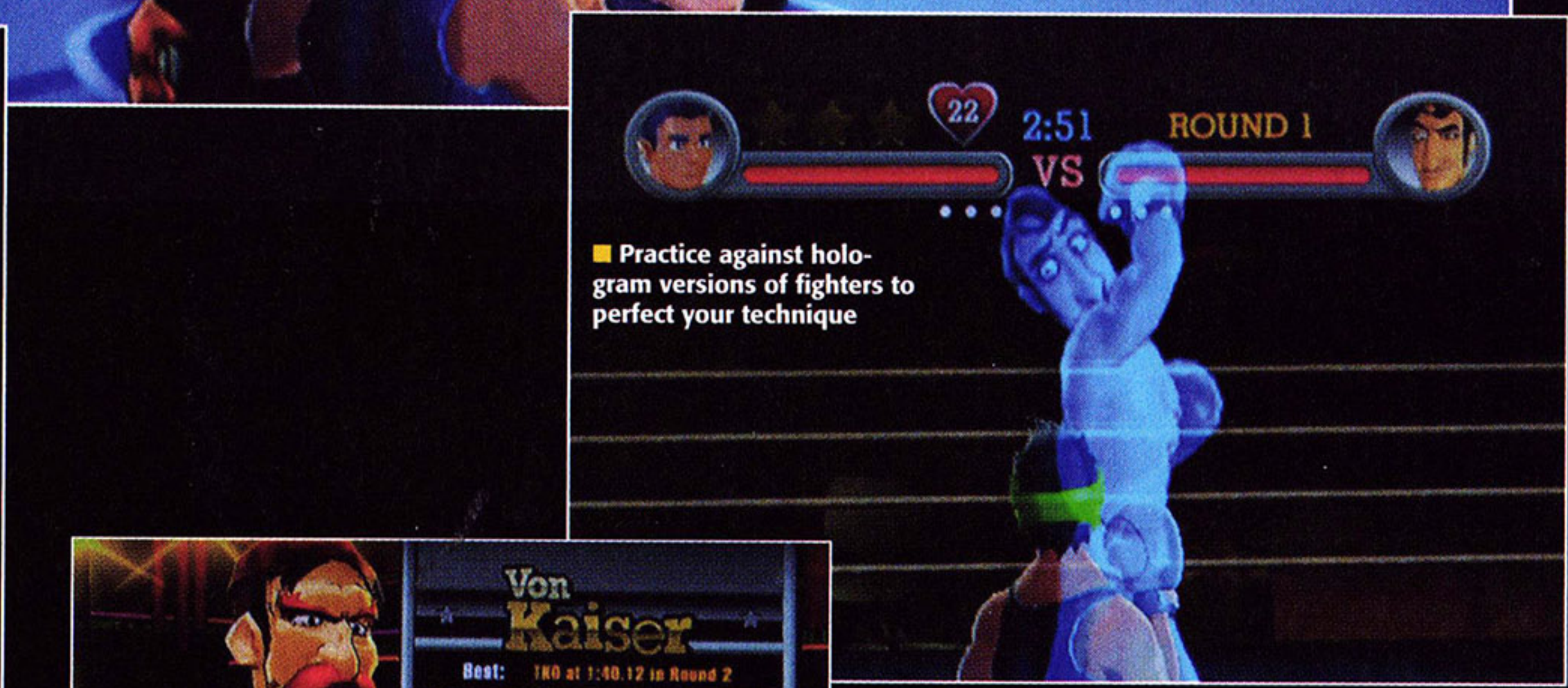
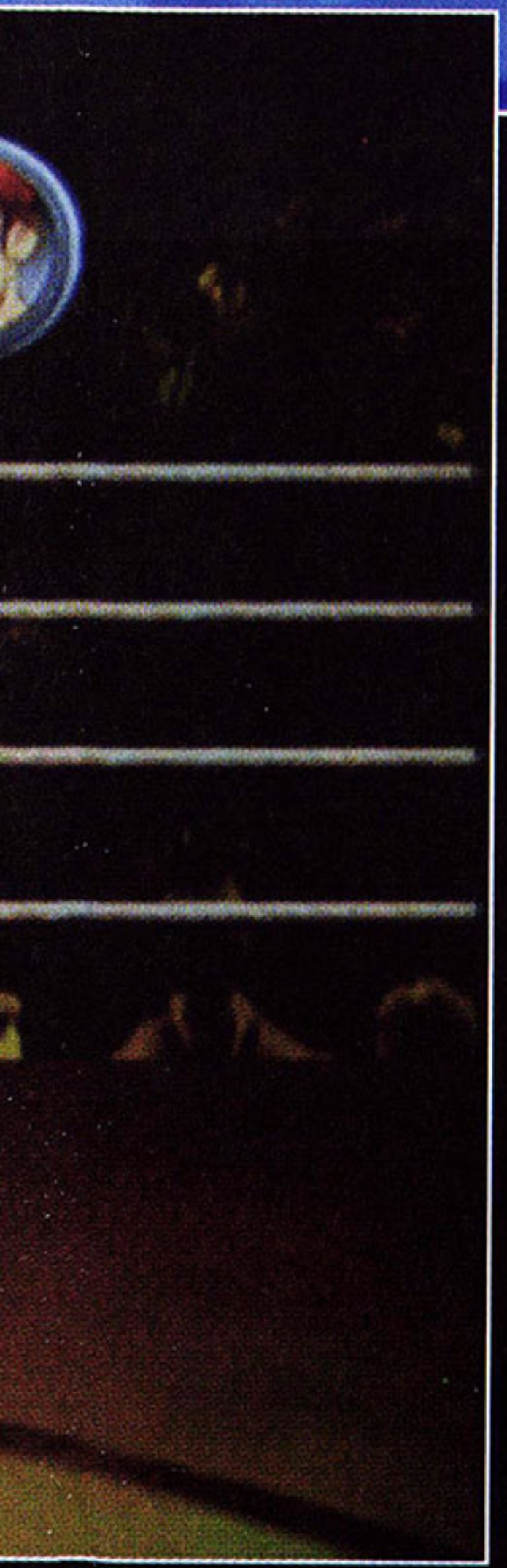
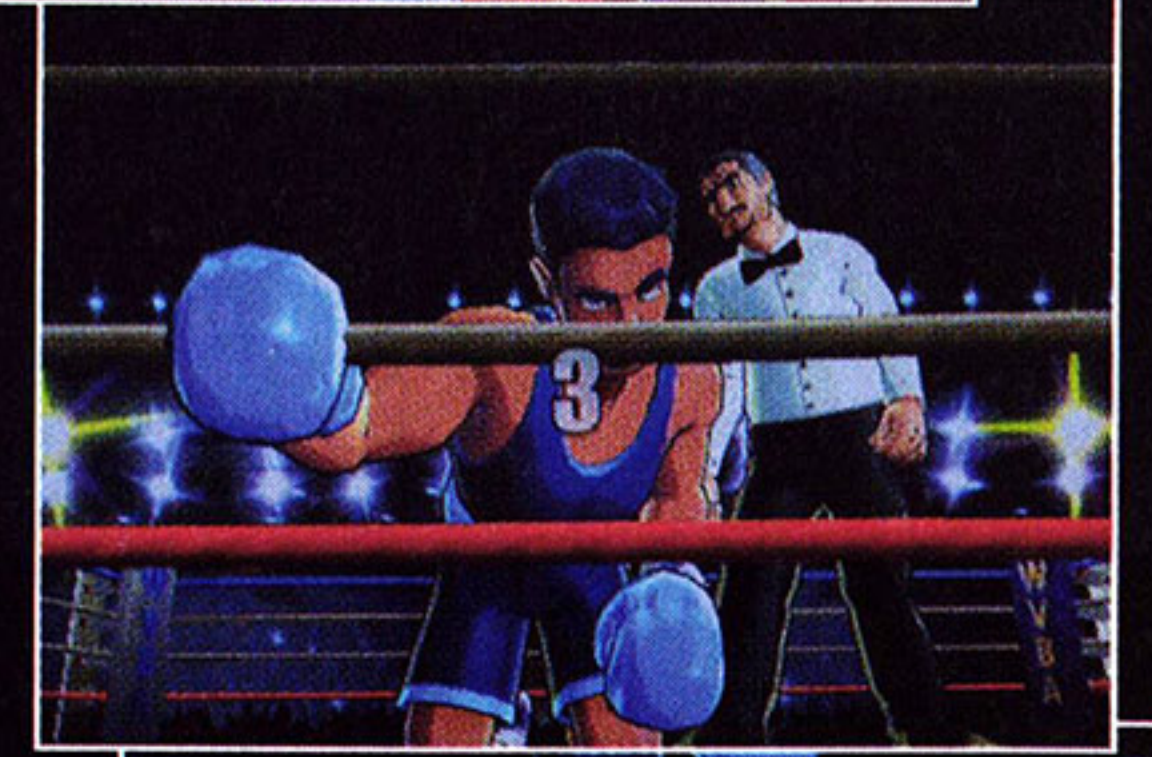
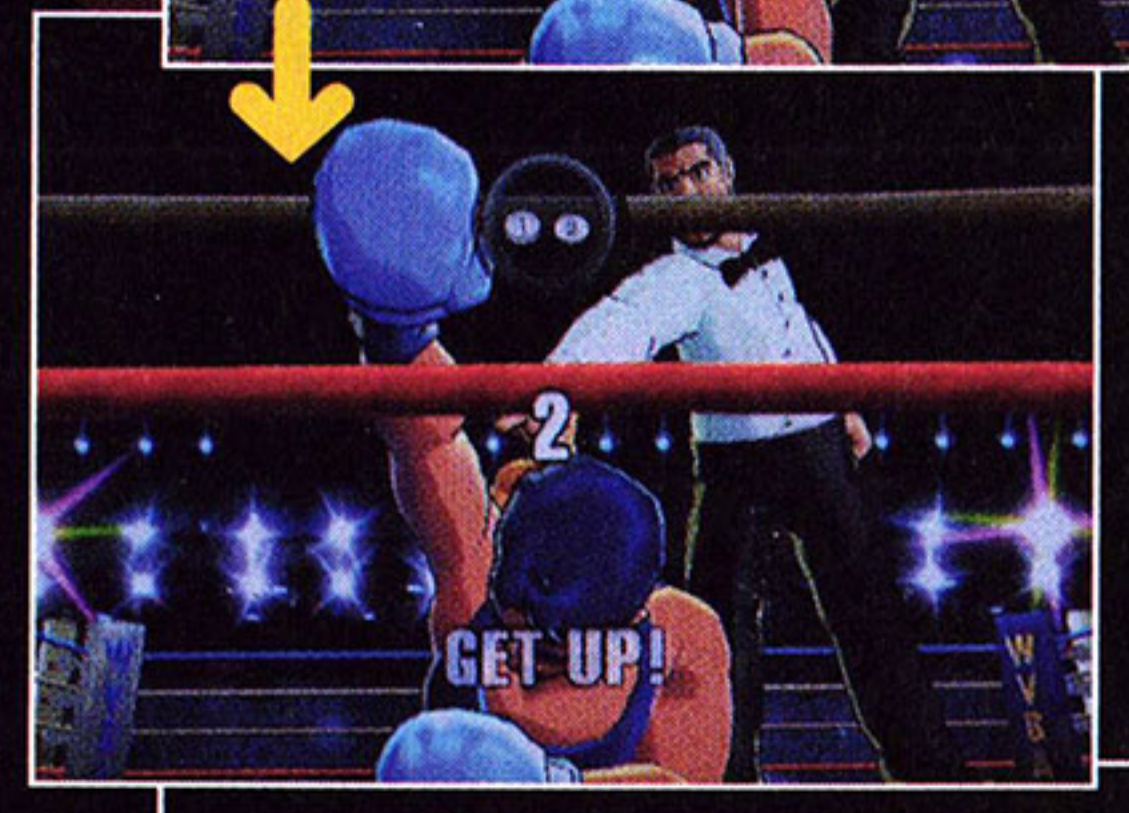
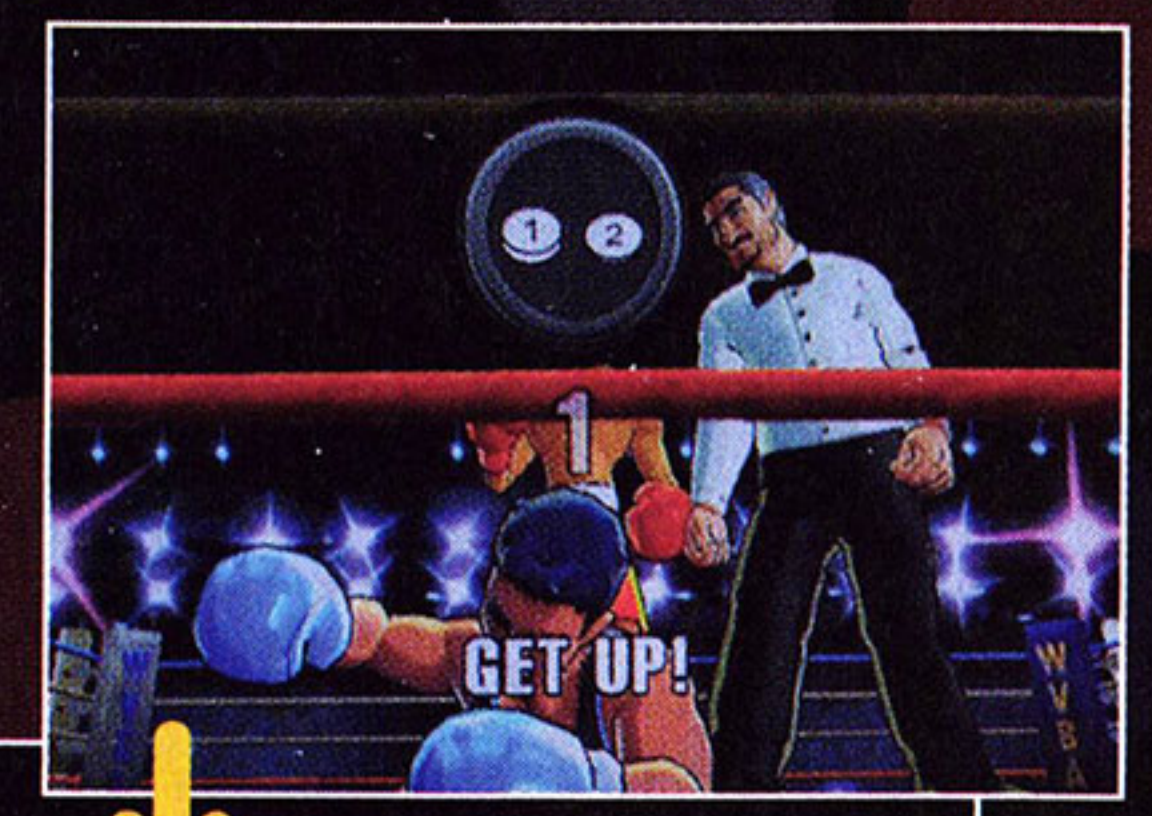
■ Going down for the last time



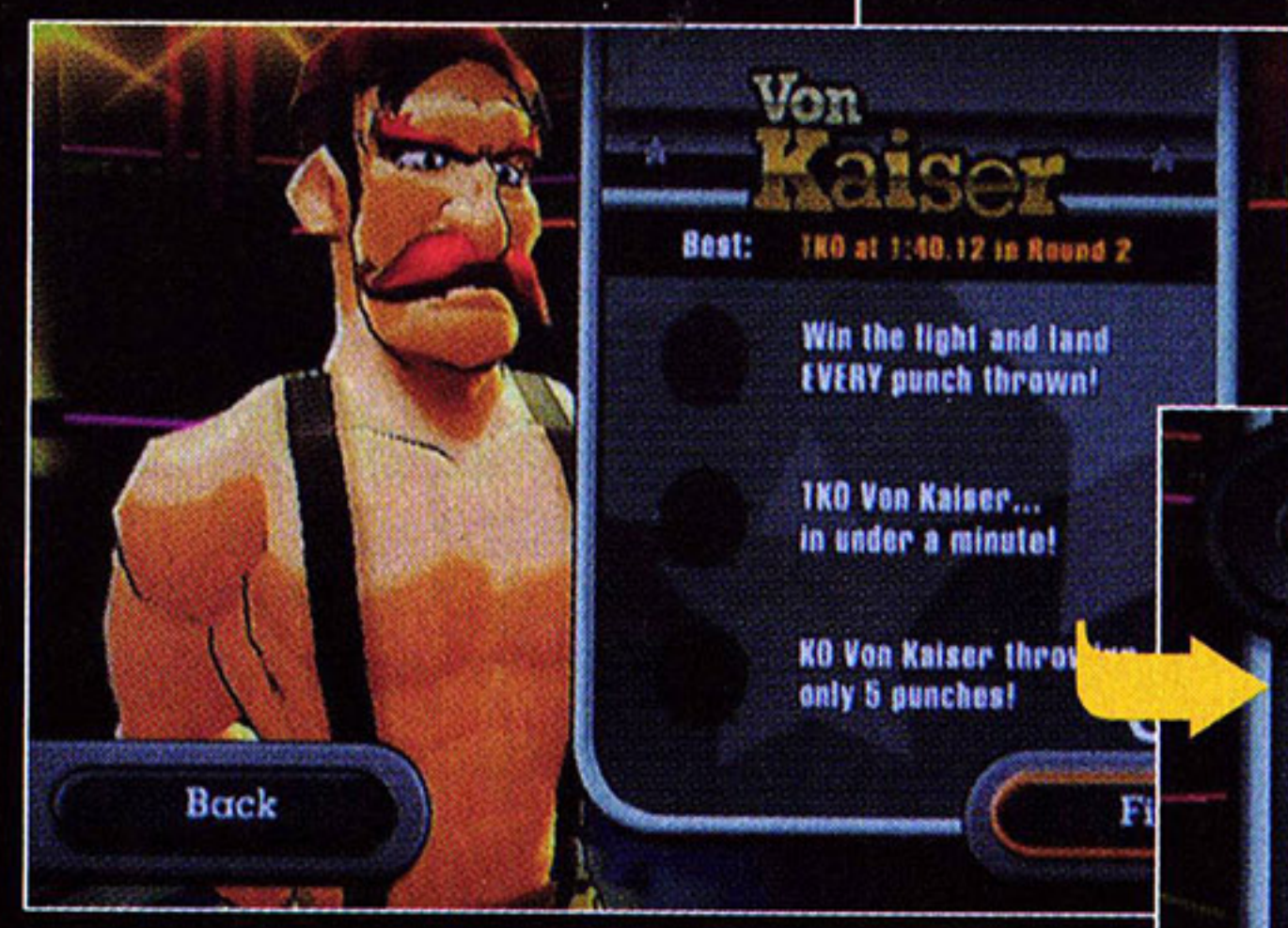


■ Developer Next Level Games has worked with Nintendo in the past on the Mario Strikers series

■ Mash the buttons to get back up

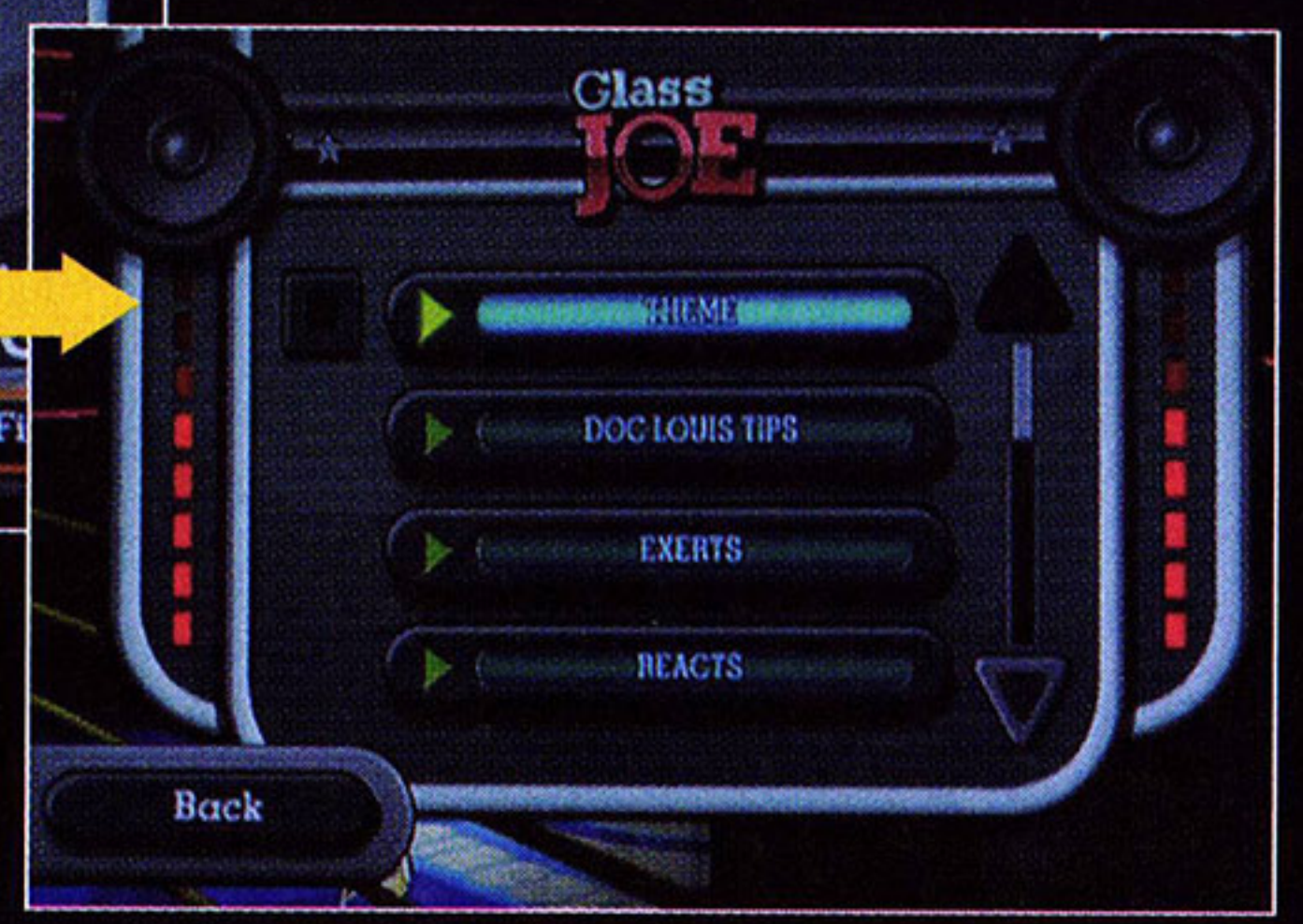


■ Practice against hologram versions of fighters to perfect your technique



■ Beat challenges like this...

■ ...to unlock audio packs like this



EARLY SECRETS

• ALTERNATELY TAP THE 1 AND 2 BUTTONS (OR "DRUM" THE REMOTE AND NUNCHUK) TO REGAIN HEALTH AFTER KNOCKING AN OPPONENT DOWN

• DO THE SAME WHEN MAC IS ABOUT TO GO DOWN FOR THE LAST TIME FOR AN EXTRA CHANCE AT VICTORY

• HIT THE MINUS BUTTON BETWEEN ROUNDS FOR A ONE-TIME HEALTH BOOST. YOU'LL KNOW IT WENT THROUGH WHEN DOC STARTS EATING A CHOCOLATE BAR

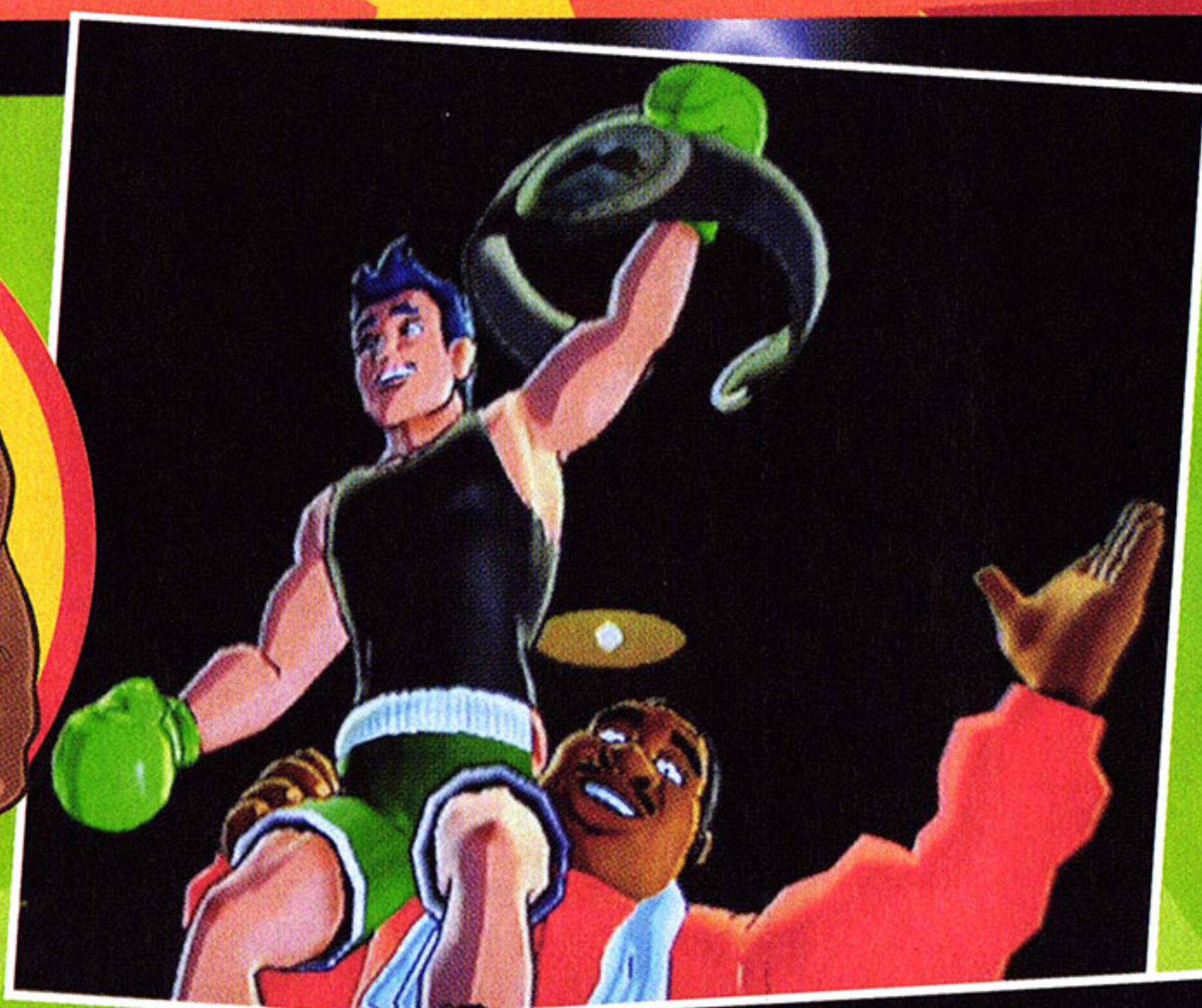
• LOSE 100 TIMES TO EARN THE SHAMEFUL, YET INVULNERABLE, TRAINING HELMET



LITTLE MAC

Age: 17
From: Bronx, NY, USA
Height: 5' 7"
W: 107 lbs

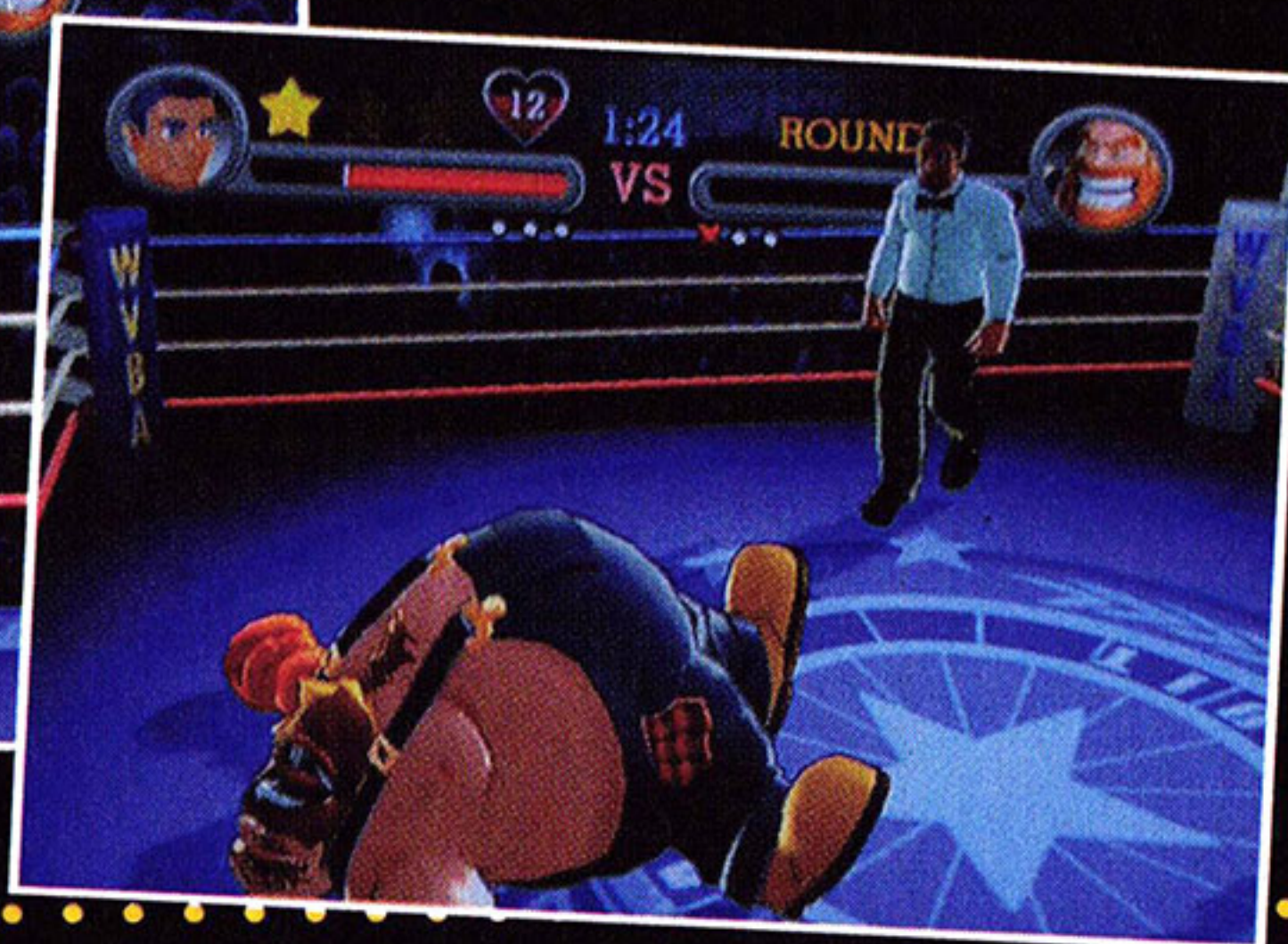
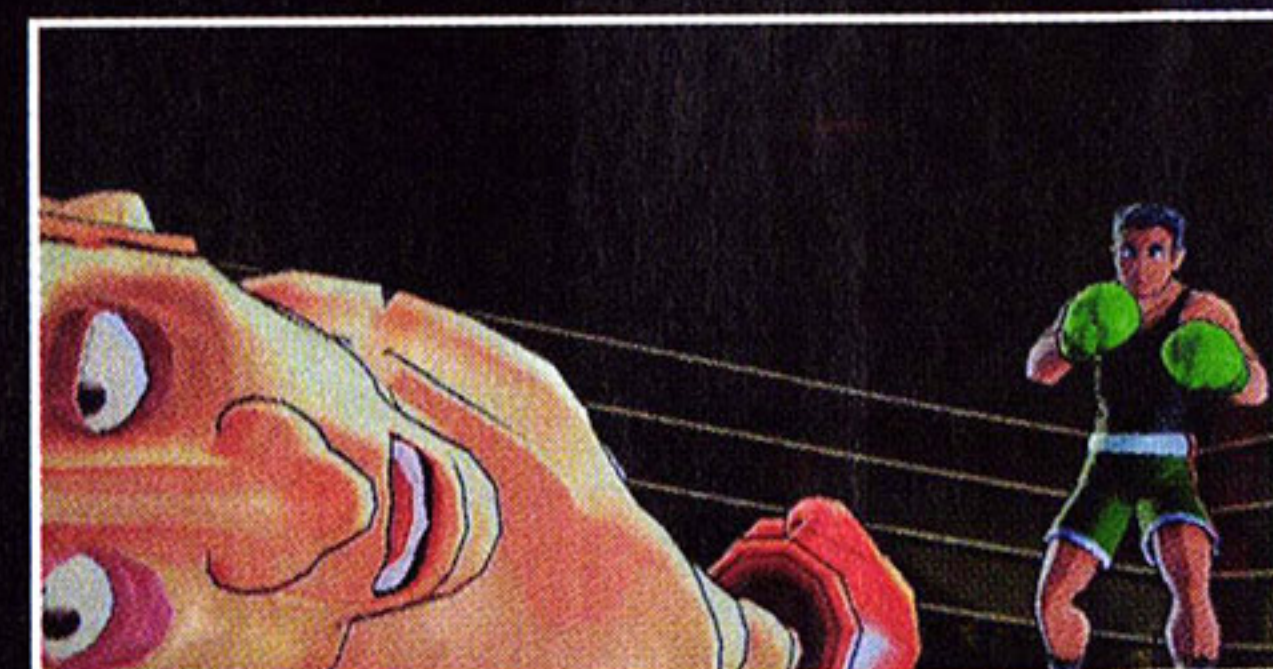
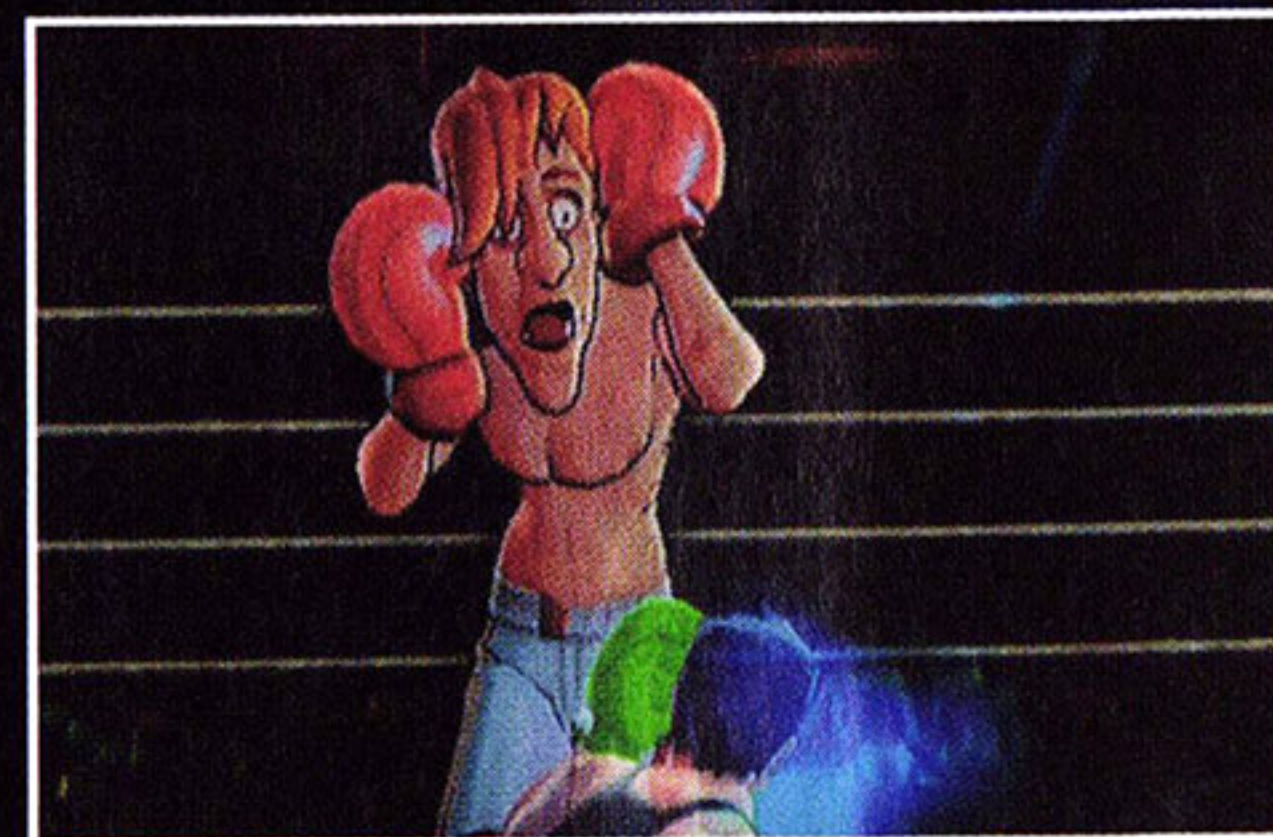
The perennial underdog, Little Mac always overcomes the odds to take down opponents five times his size. He may not have much to say, but his chocolate-loving trainer Doc Louis talks enough for the both of them (with full voice acting!). Doc is still adjusting to living in 2009, as evidenced when he advises Mac to "Join the Nintendo Fun... I mean, Club Nintendo today, Mac!"



GLASS JOE

Age: 38
From: Paris, France
Height: 5' 10"
W: 110 lbs

Glass Joe, aside from the goomba, is quite possibly the weakest character in all of video games. He leaves obvious holes in his defense that you can just constantly pound through without waiting for him to punch first. Now that Punch-Out has voice work, players can finally hear Joe's heavy French accent with such phrases as "Bonjour!" and "Vive la France!"



BEAR HUGGER

Age: 32
From: Salmon Arm, BC, Canada
Height: 6' 3"
W: 440 lbs

This woodsy Canadian loves eating raw fish and chugging maple syrup. Fans will recognize him from Super Punch-Out on the SNES. This burly dude is more concerned with showing you his raspberry face than dishing out punches at first, but after you send a few star punches his way he'll call you a hozer and unleash his patented bear hug. Once he's got his confidence back, he'll taunt you with a provocative hip swivel that shows off his jiggly belly physics.

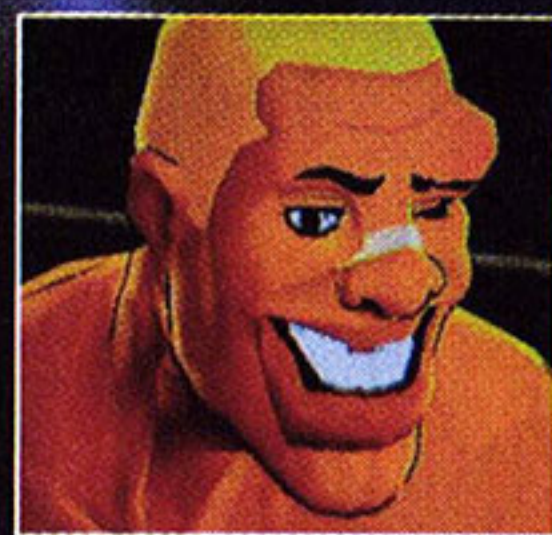


KING HIPPO

Age: ??
From: Hippo Island, South Pacific
Height: ?' ???"
W: ???

The ruler of Hippo Island doesn't have to tell anyone how much he weighs. This guy's voice sounds more Tyrannosaurus Rex than human, and his every step shakes your Wii remote. Hippo's classic belly weakness is still intact, except this time he's got a new pincer double punch in his arsenal. He'll still stay down after hitting the canvas once, and there's apparently a secret way to knock his crown off during the fight.





DISCO KID

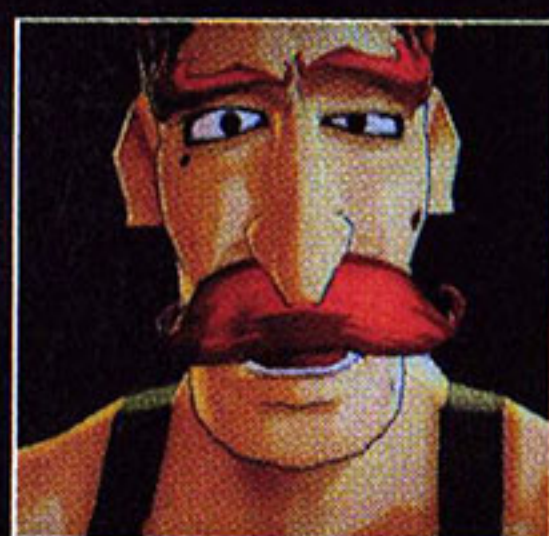
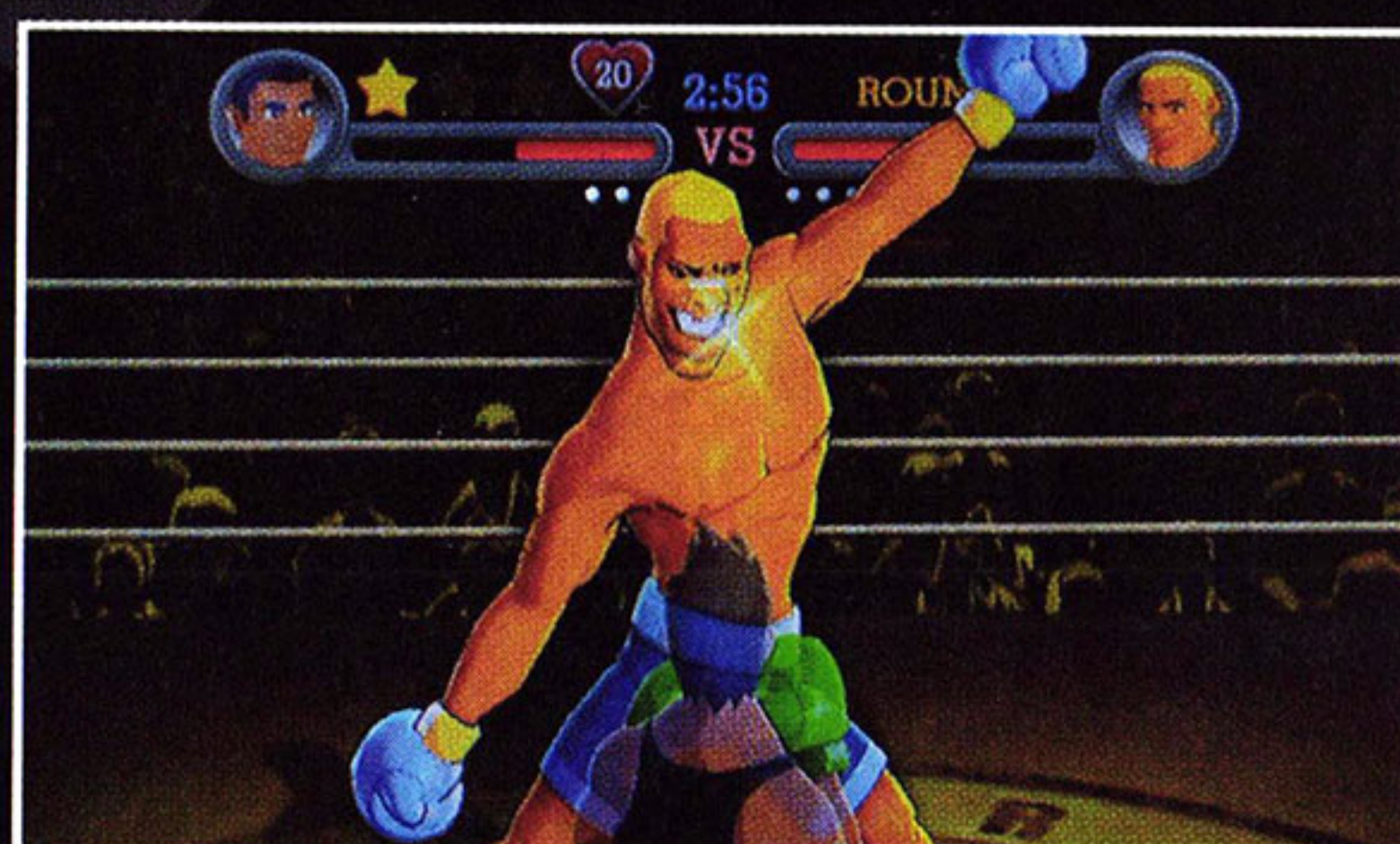
Age: 20

From: Brooklyn, NY, USA

Height: 6' 3"

W: 210 lbs

The Disco Kid is the only new character we encountered, and his eccentricity totally lives up to the rest of the cast. This vain boxer is more concerned with dancing and looking in the mirror than beating people up. He sways back and forth with the music and strikes various poses throughout the match, always warning you about his hooks with a polite "Here it comes!" Whenever he does a disco point, a brief sparkle glitters off his teeth signaling that it's punching time.



VON KAISER

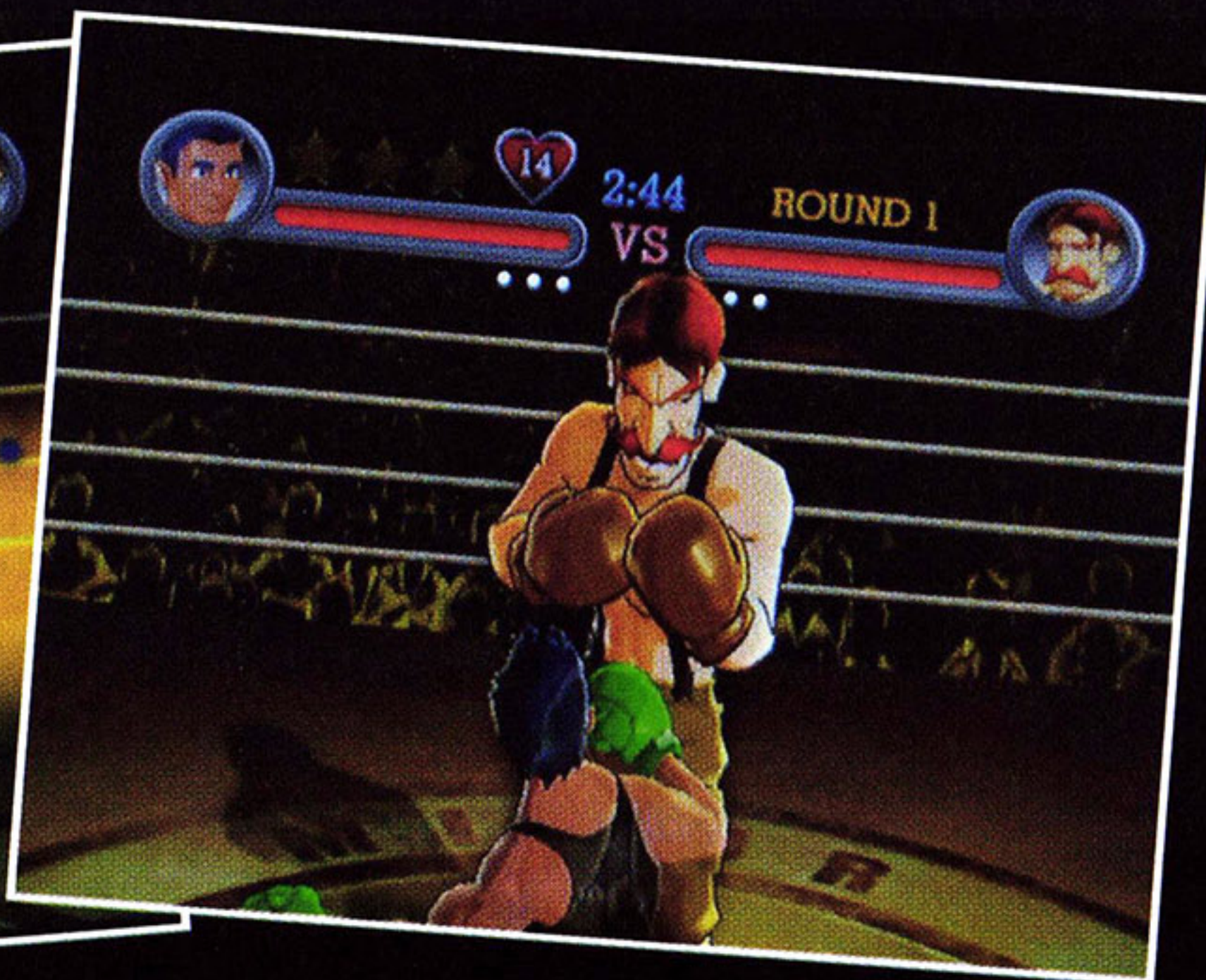
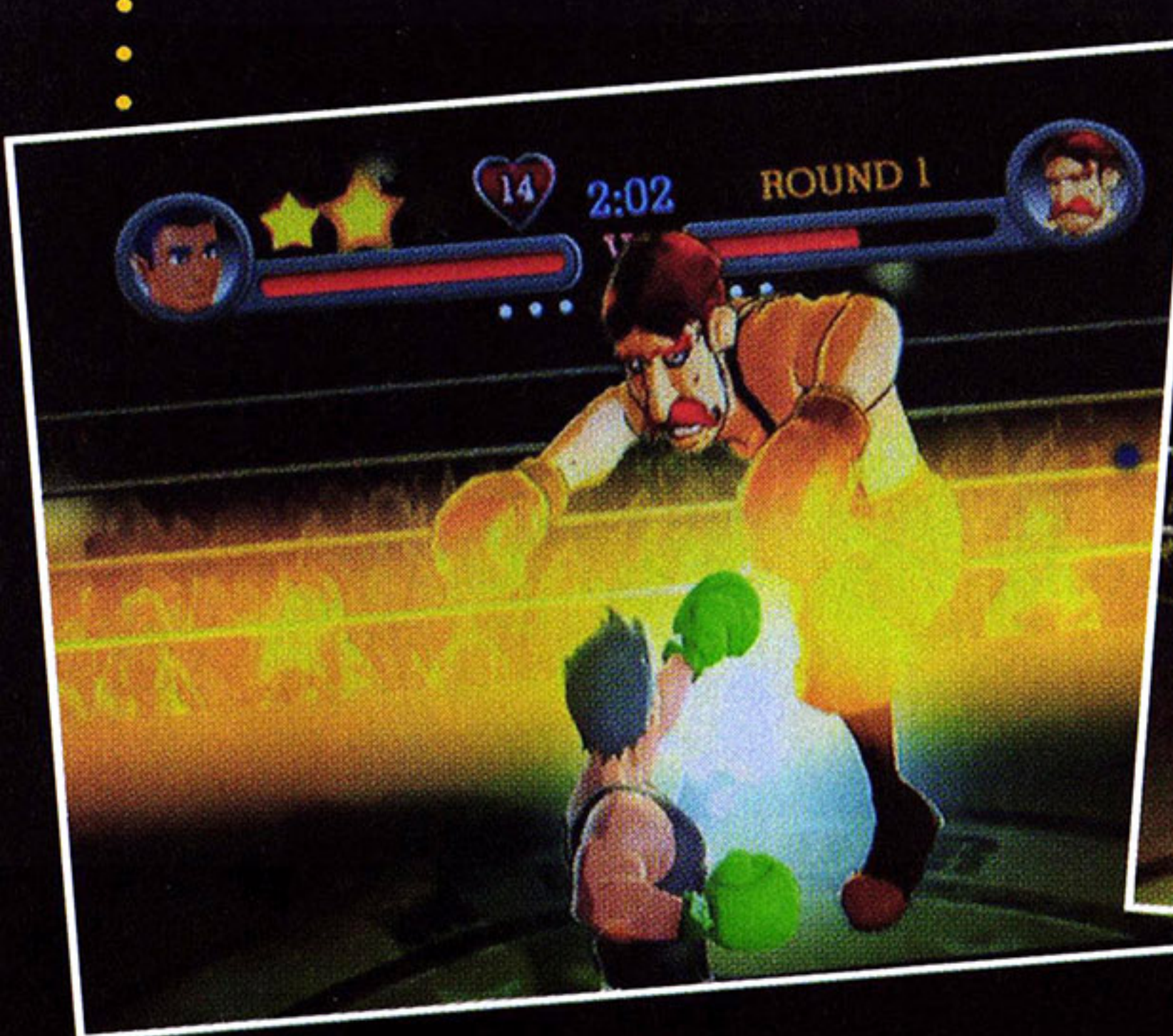
Age: 42

From: Berlin, Germany

Height: 6'

W: 144 lbs

Anyone who has to shake his head before punching is probably a little wired, but the latest version of Von Kaiser is completely unhinged. Partway through a fight he'll cower and call for his mommy and between rounds he'll rock back and forth on his stool while his ruffled up moustache looks like an abandoned bird's nest.



DON FLAMENCO

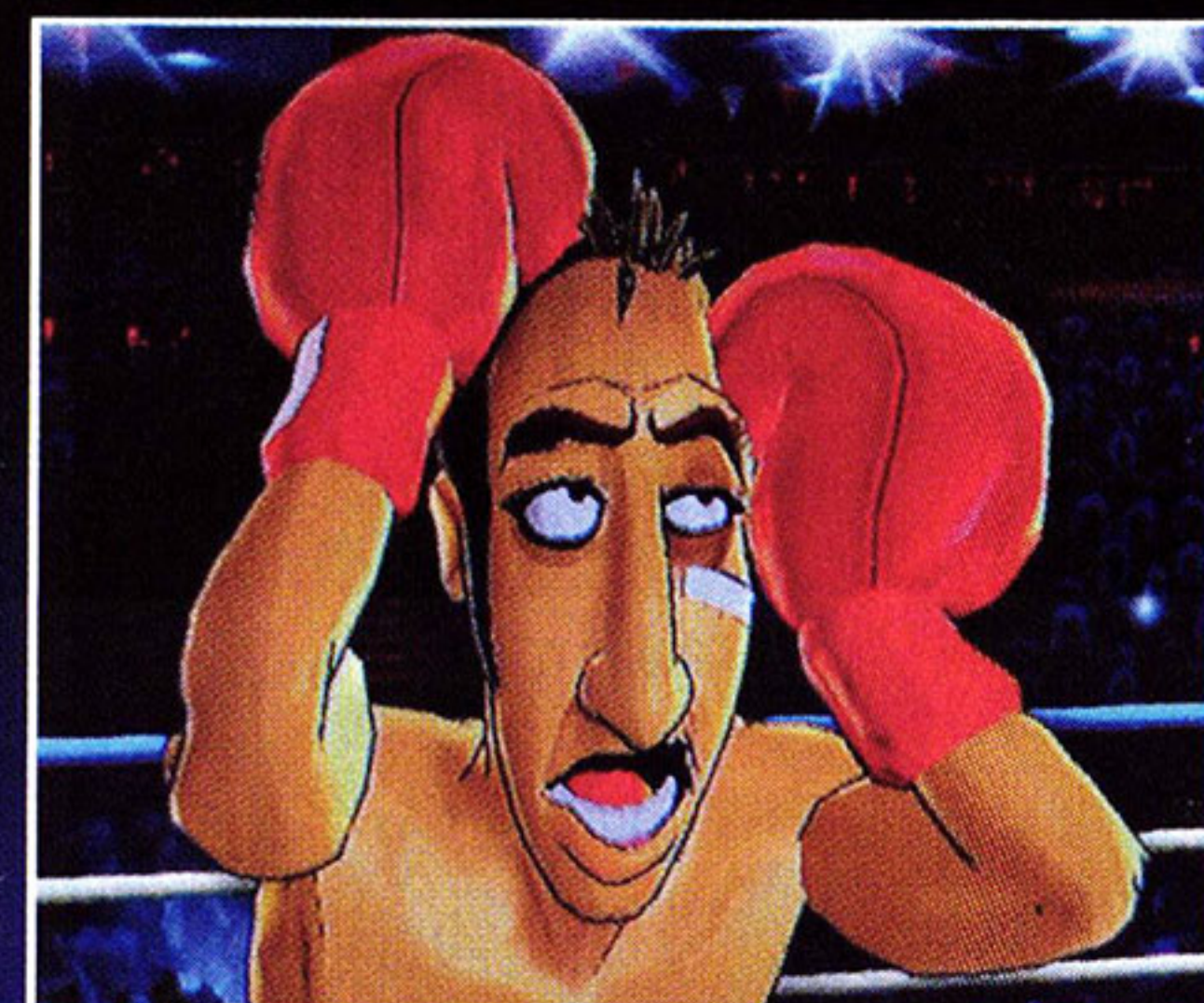
Age: 23

From: Madrid, Spain

Height: 6' 1"

W: 152 lbs

Don loves the smell of a rose and a nice spritz of perfume before getting in the ring. His strategy involves taunting you into punching and then countering with a maraca shake uppercut. Don's nastiest attack comes after he backs up and claps "Uno, dos, tres" and unleashes a triple hook combo followed by an uppercut. To really stick it to him you can punch off his toupee. Watch out - this makes him very angry.



(continued from page 48)

As the variety of screenshots convey, Punch-Out's presentation is faithful to the classic while adding a new layer of detail. For example, Don Flamenco's rose dance and Von Kaiser's telling head shake are still present, but now characters will develop bruises, lose teeth, and earn some bandages. Their faces telegraph emotions outside of anger as well. King Hippo is sympathetically sad as you relentlessly punch his shorts down, and Glass Joe's eyes grow wide with terror as your slo-mo star punch arcs toward his face. The camera even zooms in slightly to provide a better view when you're dishing out a particularly good beating.

On the other hand, if you're on the receiving end of a beat down, a handy practice mode helps you learn the tactics of the fighter giving you problems. Doc takes you to the gym where you'll box a blue hologram version of your rival. Mac wears a training helmet in this mode, so he doesn't take any damage and is free to memorize patterns and test out star-earning techniques.

Exhibition mode allows rematches with any boxer you've already defeated. As an added bonus, three custom challenges for each opponent help keep things interesting. Glass Joe's challenges require you to knock him down three times and then let him win by decision, find the one-punch-knockdown weak spot, and win the fight without dodging, ducking, or blocking a punch. Once you've completed the challenges for a given fighter, you'll unlock his custom audio pack, which includes a song and voice samples. The real reward, however, is that most of these objectives line up with a character's biggest weaknesses so you'll automatically learn the best tactics along the way.

While we can't give details about Punch-Out's multiplayer component, we can say that it is completely offline. In fact, the game has no online features at all. We were initially dismayed that there wasn't at least some kind of leaderboard for K.O. time, but most boxers have some kind of timing-based, predetermined vulnerability that would have lead to everyone in the top 100 having the identical time.

There are plenty of fighters and a couple gameplay modes that must remain a secret at this point, so keep an eye out for our full review in the coming months. ■■■



PLAYSTATION 3

- **STYLE** 2 TO 256-PLAYER ONLINE ACTION
- **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER** ZIPPER INTERACTIVE
- **RELEASE** FALL

ZIPPER INTERACTIVE *unveils its new take on* LARGE-SCALE MULTIPLAYER COMBAT

Can the **SOCOM CREATORS** *succeed where*
OTHERS *have FAILED?*

History is rife with massive military conflicts. In 1944, 156,000 Allied soldiers stormed the beaches of Normandy to gain a critical foothold in Western Europe. In 1968, 2,500 U.S. Marines attacked and defeated more than 10,000 Northern Vietnamese troops in the Battle of Huế. In 2004, an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 troops launched Operation Phantom Fury to regain the Iraqi city of Fallujah from an insurgent force. The inevitability of these large-scale conflicts in the real world makes

their absence in competitive multiplayer first-person shooters all the more conspicuous. Millions of console players have settled for shooting the day away in 32-player Call of Duty and Battlefield matches, and more recent titles Resistance 2 and Frontlines have pushed the limits higher, but Zipper Interactive is going far beyond even those. With 256 players, 30 frames per second, and a persistent multiplayer warfront, MAG aims to rewrite your expectations for online shooters. >>



■ Every platoon is assigned different objectives, each of which is critical to overall victory

BATTLE-HARDENED SOLDIERS

Zipper Interactive is no stranger to success on the battlefield. After working on other studios' franchises like *Crimson Skies* and *MechWarrior*, Zipper's stellar work convinced Sony to give the fledgling developer a chance to prove its mettle with a new IP, and the gamble paid off handsomely. In 2002 Zipper released the third-person military shooter *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs* for the PlayStation 2, the first game designed to take advantage of the console's network adapter. *SOCOM*'s fresh take on tactical warfare won the hearts of shooter fans across the globe, selling 10 million copies over six titles and setting the benchmark for online shooters on the PS2. Over the series' progression, Zipper constantly pushed the boundaries of the multiplayer experience, adding groundbreaking features like customizable kits, four-player co-op campaigns, and clan support.

When Sony presented the developer with its ambitious hardware plans for the PlayStation 3, Zipper took the opportunity to break away from the *SOCOM* franchise. The goal? Create a new paradigm for competitive multiplayer shooters. After studying the Cell processor's advanced architecture, the team believed that it could harness that processing power to create a genre-defining experience that more closely mimics the scale of modern military battles. Developer Slant Six Games became *SOCOM*'s caretaker, and Zipper was given free reign to begin work on *MAG*, a multiplayer-only title promising 256-player battles. Why 256 players? "It really lets us deliver combat experiences at a real-life scale," says lead designer Andy Bodewin. "I'm sure you've seen *Black Hawk Down*. That was about 160 Special Forces troops. We're basically delivering a scale that allows us to play it out in real time."

In order to bring these epic battles to fruition, the team

realized it must move away from the local server architecture employed by many current multiplayer shooters in favor of a dedicated server structure. Built from scratch by Zipper, the new network architecture is designed to create large-scale battles without succumbing to the problem that has doomed so many others – lag.

The servers make intelligent decisions as to what information reaches the console, optimizing each user's fixed amount of bandwidth. Zipper hopes its architecture keeps the battles humming along above 30 frames-per-second in every circumstance, whether 100 soldiers are fighting over a key point or four aerial assaults are triggered at the exact same time. The dedicated server structure also allows Zipper to systematically eliminate cheating by monitoring server activity, and the team has placed a huge emphasis on streamlining matchmaking to avoid long waits between matches.

The end goal is to deliver an explosive war experience where every sound you hear on the battlefield is related to player activity. "Whereas a lot of other games have used ambient tracks or smoke and mirrors to give that feeling of being part of a larger war, in *MAG* every single time you hear an explosion over a hill top, you hear a helo flying into a neighboring area, or you hear a jet scream over, all those things are actually real players and player-triggered actions," Bodewin claims. "These are 'tells' to let you know what's going on in the battle. If you hear an air raid siren in the distance, that's telling you that your platoon next door has managed to push forward."

Cheater's Folly

You get a jump on a competitor rounding a corner and unload a clip of ammo into his chest, only to have him soldier on and knife you in the face. We've all experienced it. What gives? Player cheating is all too rampant in multiplayer games. Zipper plans to make it irrelevant in *MAG*. "We've spent a lot of time coming up with systems to detect, prevent, and essentially eliminate as much cheating as possible," says Zipper vice president Michael Gutmann. The developer has written an algorithm that searches for gameplay anomalies to eliminate cheating. Like popular PC anti-cheating program PunkBuster, the servers monitor gameplay and test the probability of rates of fire, movement, and damage to make sure every player action is plausible. Maybe this time your clip of bullets will keep that knife-wielding kid in check like they should.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

The biggest change SOCOM fans will notice in MAG is the gameplay perspective; Zipper abandoned the third-person perspective in favor of a first-person experience. "We looked at a number of different camera options for the game, and settled on FPS primarily because of the scale of MAG," Bodewin remarks. "Some of our previous games were third-person, and it was well suited to [managing] teammates and AI squadmates as well. But for a game of this size we really wanted to make it the most immersive and the most intense large-scale game that we could. There's really no better way to do that than to sink you right into the action and look at things through a first-person perspective."

MAG sets the stage for battle 20 years in the future. With dwindling resources and increasingly restless populations rallying against spending tax money on international affairs, governments can no longer afford to support large standing armies to protect overseas interests. Instead, nations have turned to private military corporations to handle their messy affairs in foreign lands. Three major PMCs have emerged in this new military climate, each vying for supremacy. Their competitive business environment has devolved into direct sabotage and all-out war as they compete for the highly valued contracts. MAG focuses on the power struggle between these three factions, dubbed the Shadow War.

Upon starting the game, players must declare their allegiance to one of the three PMCs (see sidebar above). Once you've chosen a side, each objective-based battle you fight impacts your faction's standing. Whichever one holds more prestige in the persistent battle plays as the defending team, and a weaker faction must attack their home base to disrupt their operations in hopes of stealing the contract.

MAG features three game modes that support the Shadow War (see sidebar below), but the star mode will undoubtedly be the 256-player Domination mode. The attacking team squads start scattered in the outer

The Shadow Factions

Reluctant to embrace the clichéd natural enemies of modern military war games, Zipper chose to go the creative route when outlining its factions. "It was really important to us to break the standard paradigms of East vs. West and terrorists vs. counter-terrorists and create three unique bodies that would each appeal to a different audience," says lead designer Andy Bodewin. Choosing which private military corporation to support will paint the user experience; each faction features a different user interface, music, home base, and weapons arsenal. Players must choose a faction to support upon starting the game, but will be given the option to change teams at a later date. MAG features three warring factions, but Zipper chose to reveal only two at this point.

edges of the map to the north, south, east, and west. Most soldiers must move in on foot, but each map also includes a few transport vehicles. Conversely, the defending faction must take up outer defensive positions to meet the oncoming violence, with each squad being held responsible for guarding specific areas of the base. As the attackers move in, they must first eliminate front-line defensive emplacements – like bunkers, mini-gun turrets, and tank traps – to reach the inner base. Once the attacking team breaks through the outer defense, forward spawn points are established, the hot zone constricts, and the larger battle begins.

This is when all hell breaks loose. The defending faction's anti-aircraft batteries and radar sensors are also now vulnerable, and the attacking team will gain access to powerful new tools if these secondary objectives are eliminated. Once the batteries fall, the attacking faction can launch UAV drones to reveal enemy positions or

RAVEN

Decked out in polished black attire and sporting high-tech futuristic weapons, the Raven faction features the most highly trained soldiers on the planet. Zipper says their style of play will appeal to fans of sci-fi shooters like Halo and Resistance.

SVER

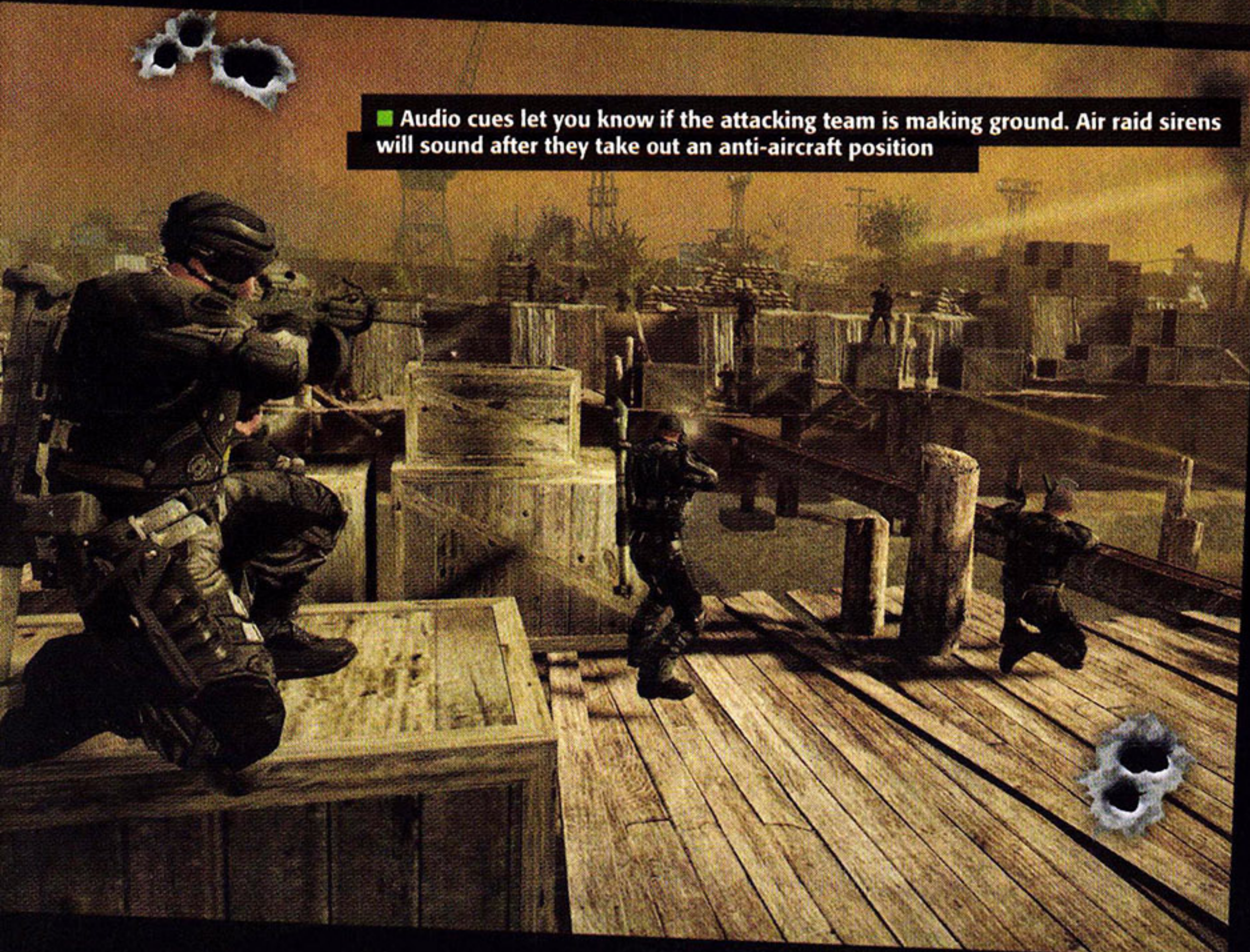
Pronounced "sever," this faction is comprised of fierce fighters raised in the climate of warfare. SVER soldiers often hail from war-torn regions in the Middle East or Central Asia. Their weapons arsenal may not be the most powerful, but these battle-hardened warriors are very adaptable. SVER soldiers wear brown and grey outfits similar to those found in S.T.A.L.K.E.R.

call in air strikes. If the defending faction loses its radar sensor, they must scramble to repair it to preserve their ability to track the attackers' movement. With defenders falling back into new positions and attacking reinforcements parachuting in from above, the battle intensifies into a cacophony of air strikes, artillery bombardments, C4 explosions, and gunfire. Once attackers capture the objectives, they must hold position to inflict enough damage on the defending team's base to cripple it before the timer runs out.

If your faction wins enough battles in a specific game mode, it will gain the contract for that mode, which translates into bonus experience and perks for your soldiers. Squads may have access to better weapons and vehicles for holding the contract, but once another faction usurps your position atop the Shadow War, you lose those bonuses and your opponents gain them.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 56 >

■ Audio cues let you know if the attacking team is making ground. Air raid sirens will sound after they take out an anti-aircraft position



Strength in Numbers

While MAG's biggest selling point is its 256-player battles, the game also includes three other modes to offer battle variety.

ACQUISITION: This 128-player escort-style mode requires attackers to steal two prototype armored transports from a rival faction and escape to the extraction point before the attack timer runs out.

SABOTAGE: This 64-player, objective-based mode requires attackers to infiltrate rival communications facilities and hold two control points simultaneously. Once this is achieved, a final demolition objective is revealed, which the attackers must destroy to attain victory. Attackers have a time limit to succeed in this goal.

SUPPRESSION: This 64-player team deathmatch mode focuses on pure infantry battle. This game mode is considered a Faction Exercise, so it doesn't contribute to the Shadow War.

PLAYING TO YOUR STRENGTHS

As a multiplayer-only title, MAG takes many cues from popular progression-based games like Battlefield, Call of Duty, and Rainbow Six Vegas. Players are given the freedom to customize their soldier's face, voice, and armor before they head into battle. Taking the customization one step further, MAG abandons the familiar soldier class structure in favor of a free-form kit creation.

"We talked about [adding classes] early on, but those can sometimes be restricting," Bodewin remarks. "We do use ways within the game to identify based upon your choices so other players can look at you and know this is basically how you play."

Each soldier can carry one primary weapon, sidearm, melee weapon, and three gear perks. Common perks include smoke grenades, frag grenades, rocket launch-

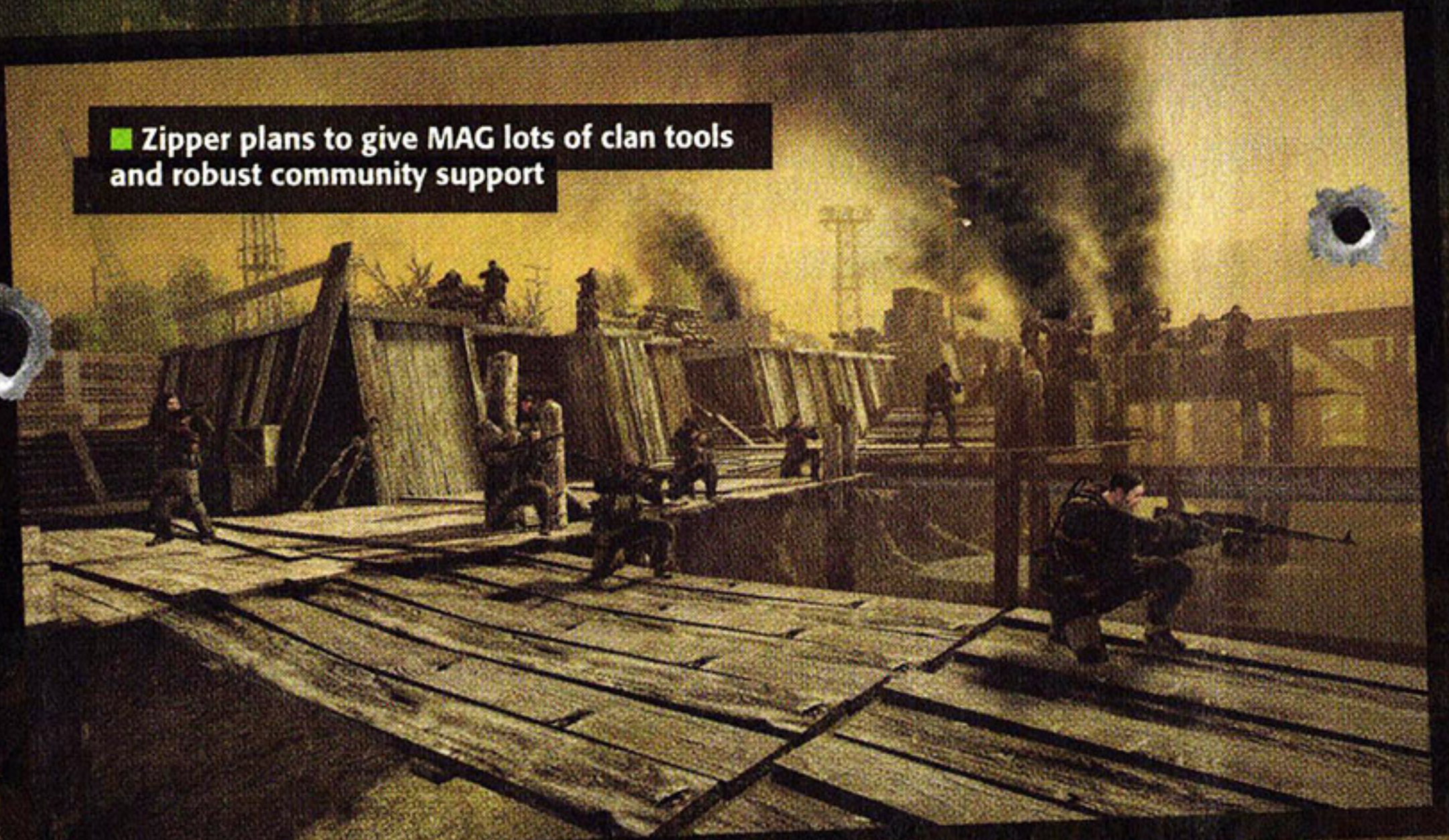
ers, and medic kits. Players can create and save three different load-outs in the Armory and switch freely between them as they respawn. This gives players the flexibility to respond to a shifting battle dynamic – you might start with a rocket launcher and sniper rifle to take down outward defensive positions, then switch to an assault rifle and medic kit as your team advances into the frantic base where combat is more up close and personal.

Every in-game accomplishment – from killing enemies and healing squad mates to destroying secondary objectives and defending capture points – earns players experience. With 256-players in the map, the possibilities for earning massive amounts of experience become quite intriguing. Detonating a bridge while two squads

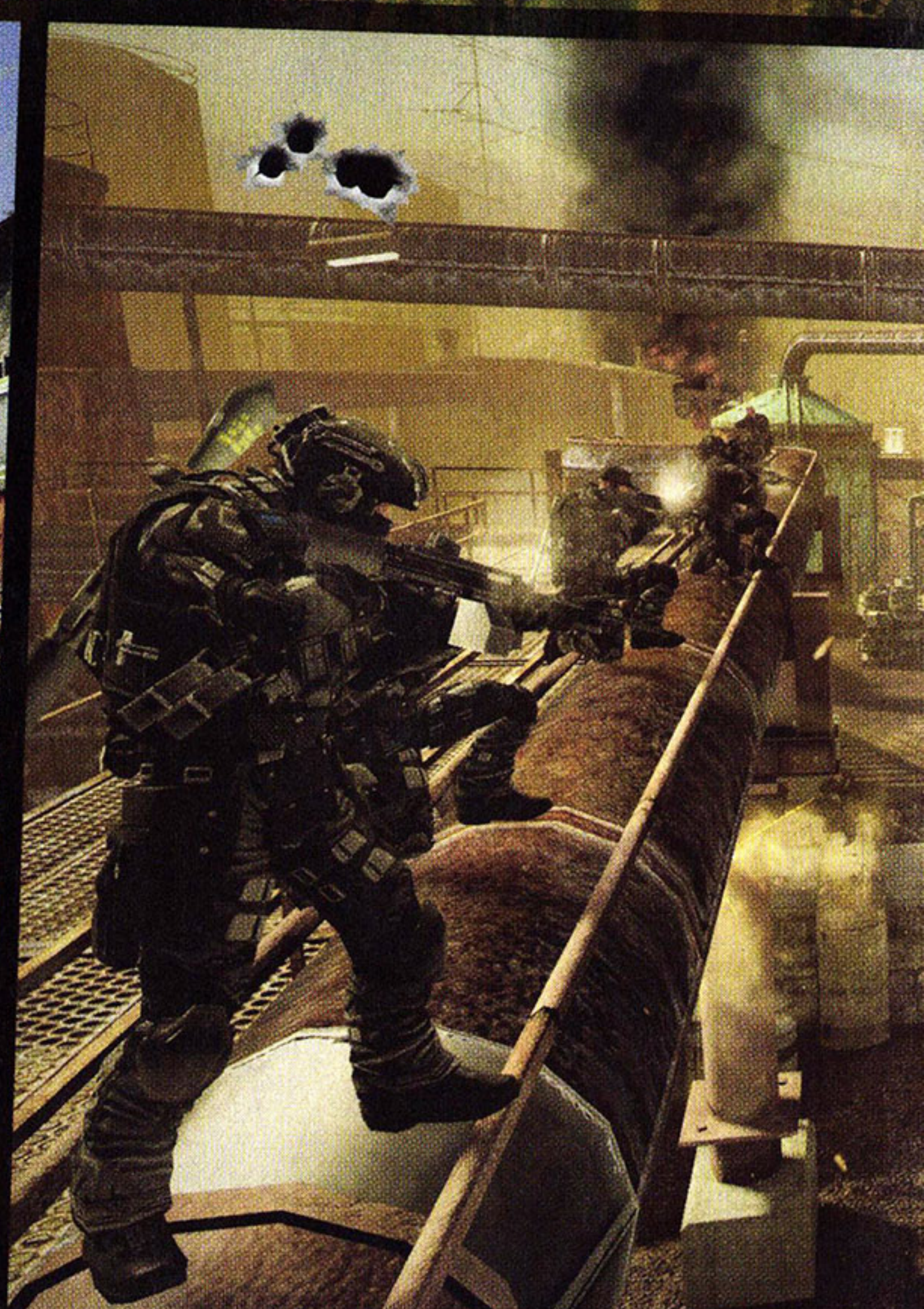
are crossing, turning a crowd of closely grouped soldiers into a shrapnel salad with a grenade, taking out a fully-loaded APC with a well-placed missile – all of these explosive kill scenarios should earn skilled soldiers huge experience payoffs. Zipper has also tuned the experience points to reward all types of players. In most games, the best a sniper can do is rack up a huge amount of kills to level up. MAG rewards these players for making kills in important tactical areas. If your assault team is assigned the task of overrunning a bunker, snipers can earn extra experience by taking out targets near the objective, essentially giving their squad mates a free run at planting the C4. As players rank up, they gain access to new weapons, perks, and leadership positions.



■ Zipper plans to give MAG lots of clan tools and robust community support



■ MAG's matchmaking all filters through a narrow pipe, which should make finding large battles much easier and faster



MASTER AND COMMANDER

Bringing the scale of battle up to 256 players brings many more challenges than simply curing lag and eliminating cheating. NovaLogic aimed for 150-player skirmishes with its 2004 PC title *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising*, but the maps were so large players spent most of their time traveling to the hot zone rather than fighting. When they did reach the battle, the lack of a dedicated chat system created a battle experience so disorganized that the chaos undermined any tactical efforts. Bodewin is well aware of the pitfalls in creating a large-scale experience. "With that many players, the first question everybody asks is: 'Is it going to be chaotic and crazy?' People can't wrap their heads around it." Zipper plans to minimize the confusion by taking cues from an organization familiar with making sense of chaos: the U.S. military.

Following military protocol, each player is placed in an eight-player squad. Four squads group together to form a platoon, and four platoons comprise the company. Once players reach a veteran level in MAG they become eligible to enlist in the leadership tree. Squad leaders, the lowest rung on the leadership tree, command seven other soldiers and are responsible for low-level tactics such as plotting waypoints and calling in UAVs. Once officers have proven their ability to make sound tactical decisions at the squad level, they can be promoted to platoon leaders, who issue orders to four squad leaders. True battlefield generals can eventually become the Officer In Charge (OIC), issuing commands to all four platoons in his or her company. Commanding officers can issue mission-dependent commands like tactical air bombardments and precision strikes. Using these abili-

ties responsibly can help turn the tide of battle. In order to better relay high-level information, players in leadership positions can use a separate communication channel for discussing tactics with fellow officers.

Each squad, platoon, and company has specific high-level objectives to achieve during battle, which are scripted by Zipper. In addition, the battlefield is riddled with secondary objectives, such as eliminating bridges, doors, bunkers, gun turrets, and anti-aircraft batteries. Players in leadership positions can assign these secondary missions to their squads as they see fit. By streamlining objectives into these two tiers, Zipper hopes to appeal to all kinds of players.

"A lot of times you used to have to be involved in a clan, you had to be a real hardcore in order to get that

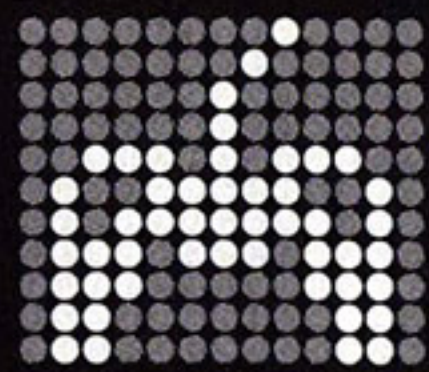
team dynamic," says Bodewin. "We want that to be very inherent and approachable feature for more casual players, as well as providing really strong tools for the hardcore guys."

Coordinating this symphony of multiplayer warfare is no easy task, but Zipper is confident it can deliver a lag-free 256-player experience. To that end, the developer has been running 256-player player tests each week since November 2008, and plans both closed and open betas to work out the remaining kinks as they approach the Fall release date. It sounds like a tall order, but with its competent team working out the kinks and a dedicated legion of SOCOM fans anxious to jump into battle, MAG has a chance to come out of the gates with guns blazing. ■■■

■ Soldiers earn experience for battle prowess, and ribbons for in-battle achievements

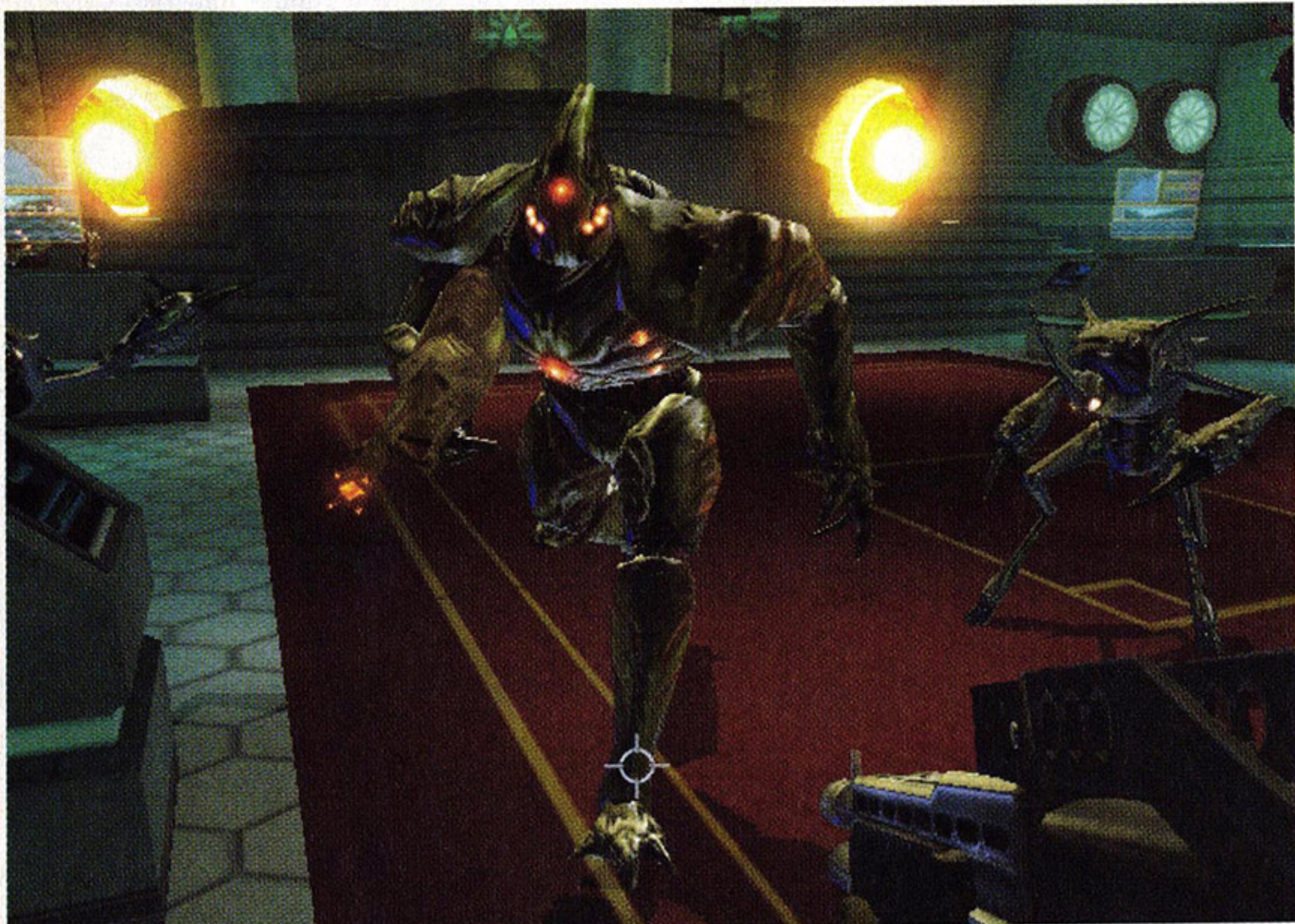


■ A command voice channel lets COs devise plans or react to battle situations on the ground and reorganize troops



PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



Wii

The Conduit

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** JUNE

HOPE FOR THE HARDCORE



■ The Drudge weapons you appropriate all have secondary charge functions



Since the Wii's control scheme became public knowledge, the console seemed a natural home for first-person gunplay. To date, however, the best efforts have been on-rails light gun titles and the quasi-FPS mechanics found in *Metroid Prime 3*. What most gamers think of as first-person shooting has been conspicuously absent from Nintendo's console. The *Conduit*, the ambitious title from independent developer High Voltage Software, aims to remedy all that.

Set in a near-future world where many of the conspiracies we mock for being loony are all too real, *The Conduit* has a vibe like a less obtuse season of *The X-Files*. As a newly recruited member of a secret organization that deals with these threats, players are thrust into the middle of a full-blown war when hostile extraterrestrials mount an open invasion of Washington, D.C.

Using the nunchuck to move and the remote to aim, players blow away enemies in a variety of iconic D.C. locations. The levels we saw in action are well-executed FPS stand-bys, with the Reagan National Airport playing home to pitched firefights and the subway system infested with menacing aliens. Genre vets will be familiar with the designs, which run the gamut from doors that unlock after all the enemies are defeated to boss monsters with glowing weak points. With any luck, the developer has some tricks up its sleeve as well.

While the control mechanics are solid in their default state, nearly everything can be changed to suit a player's personal taste. Don't like where the ammo indicator is? Put it wherever you like; interface elements are movable. Is the view too jumpy for you? Tweak the camera's response to the pointer to your liking. There are literally pages of sliders and menus that allow you to get the interface just right. Our hands-on time with the game leaves no doubt that High Voltage has largely solved the Wii FPS riddle.

The bread-and-butter action sequences are broken up by occasional puzzles, which typically use the player's All-Seeing Eye in various ways. Similarly to *Metroid Prime's* Scan Visor, the A.S.E. reveals hidden markings, translates alien text, and allows players to dig for hidden story clues. We saw one example where the A.S.E.'s flashlight-like beam must be used to discover otherwise-invisible buttons, which in turn open a door locked by impassable alien technology. The *Conduit's* pacing is far from *Tomb Raider*, but High Voltage wants to avoid creating a *Serious Sam*-esque series of combat arenas.

Multiplayer details are under wraps for the time being, but we can assure you that the game plays as smoothly via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection as it does in offline mode. Though players have to deal with the rigamarole of friend codes and Nintendo's often-irritating online backend, the developer is doing everything possible to create a solid online experience. Anonymous matchmaking similar to *Mario Kart Wii's* is available if you don't have enough friends to fill out a match, though you need friend codes to communicate via the Wii Speak peripheral. High Voltage is hoping to squeeze more than eight players into a match, but split-screen play is unfortunately not possible and LANs will likely not be supported in the final version either.

The visuals being coaxed from the Wii are impressive; even on a 73-inch display, the game looked great and we detected no framerate or popup issues. Couple that with solid mechanics and multiplayer far beyond anything else available on the Wii, and it's easy to see why *The Conduit* is being hailed by many as a savior for the Wii's hardcore faithful. ■ ■ ■



■ Ragdoll effects and big shotguns aren't stopping High Voltage from aiming for a Teen rating from the ESRB



■ Foes both human and alien will impede your progress



■ The A.S.E. reveals things invisible to the naked eye. Not these things, though – you can watch them rend your flesh quite well unaided



■ You can carry and switch between two weapons at a time, Halo style



■ The advanced weaponry sprays cool disintegration effects



XBOX 360

Lost Planet 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE TBA

SLIGHTLY LESS EXTREME CONDITION

Huge bosses, arctic conditions, and vital suits (a.k.a. mechs) are the three tenets of the original *Lost Planet*.

But, as anyone who's finished the game knows, planet E.D.N. III won't stay frozen for long. Ten years later, the world has experienced drastic changes, providing a much wider variety of environments for players to explore that are much more hospitable to human survival. So far we've seen lush jungles, a raging river, and a lake that conceals some serious danger beneath.

Protagonist Wayne has been kicked to the curb in favor of various factions of snow pirates that players can fully customize. While dudes in helmets may have less personality than a named character, the exciting opportunities available in the new online four-player co-op campaign more than make up for any possible story limitations. Frankly, *Lost Planet's* lore wasn't the reason fans kept coming back anyway.

The debut trailer, containing mostly in-game footage, shows all four troops riding in a motorized raft amid fiery explosions and deadly shrapnel. As far as co-op specific tools go, a new portable shield can expand out to cover multiple allies. Players can all pilot their own mechs or hitch a ride on others'

machines. There is even a three-man mech where one person steers and the other two fire their own chain guns.

The most exciting aspect of co-op, however, is the ability to team up against massive Akrid bosses. The trailer shows a giant dragon that blasts a devastating ice beam that forms six-foot crystals in its wake. A huge lizard that emerges out of a lake really got us pumped. This thing has two long tongues that whip out and try to hit or crush pesky pirates. To avoid this particular danger, players can use the traditional *Lost Planet* grapple hook to get up on the monster's back and blast away at its orange sacks.

No release date or competitive multiplayer has been announced yet, but the footage already looks extremely polished, so we'd be surprised if *Lost Planet 2* is too far off. Versus play is pretty much a lock due to the wide support in the original game. Interestingly, the game is only announced for Xbox 360 at this point. Whether this means that we'll eventually hear about PS3 and PC versions launching day and date, or if they'll be gradually released later on, is anyone's guess. ■ ■ ■





Rival pirate factions battle for control of E.D.N. III



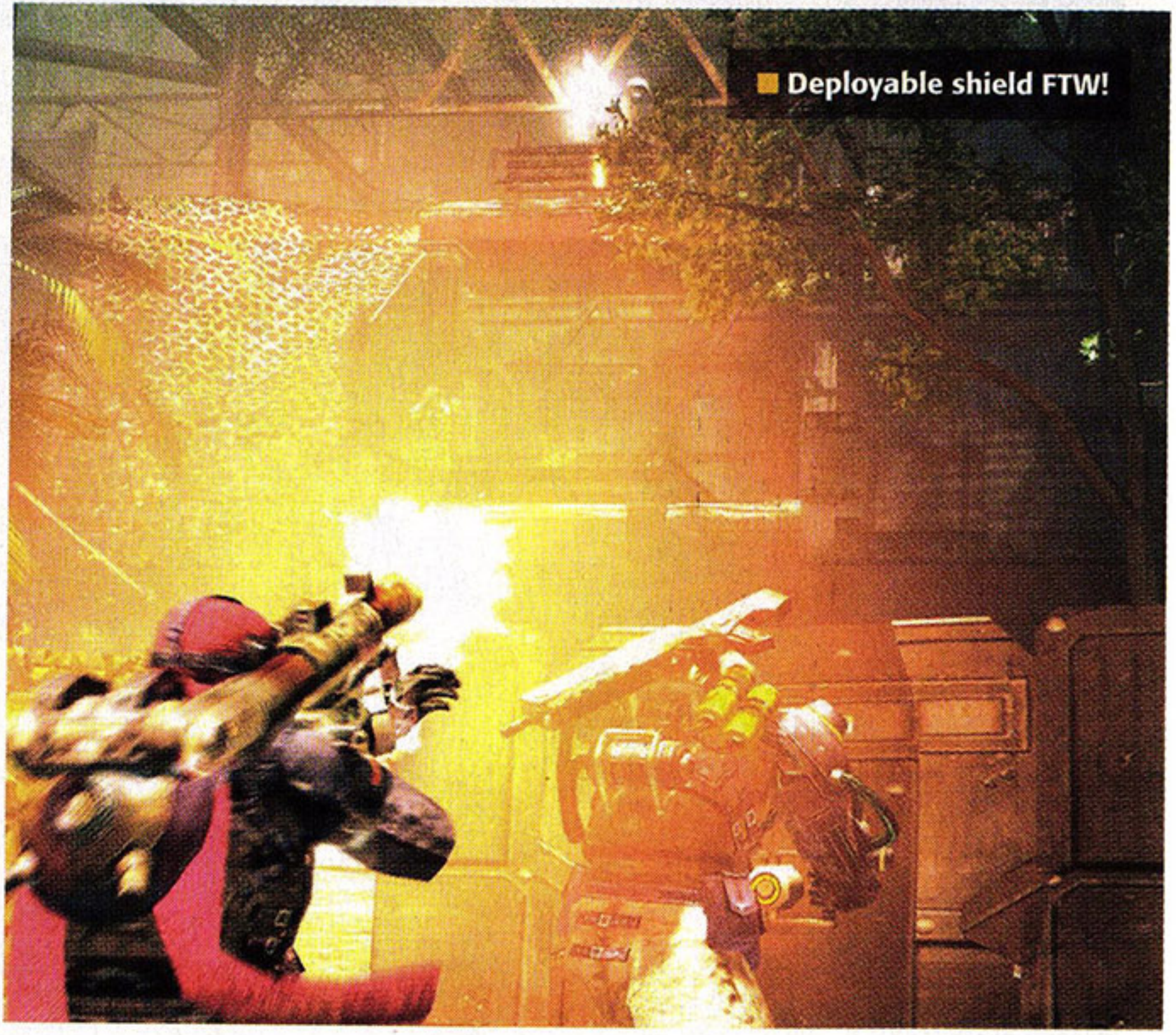
Hook shot up on this thing's back...if you dare



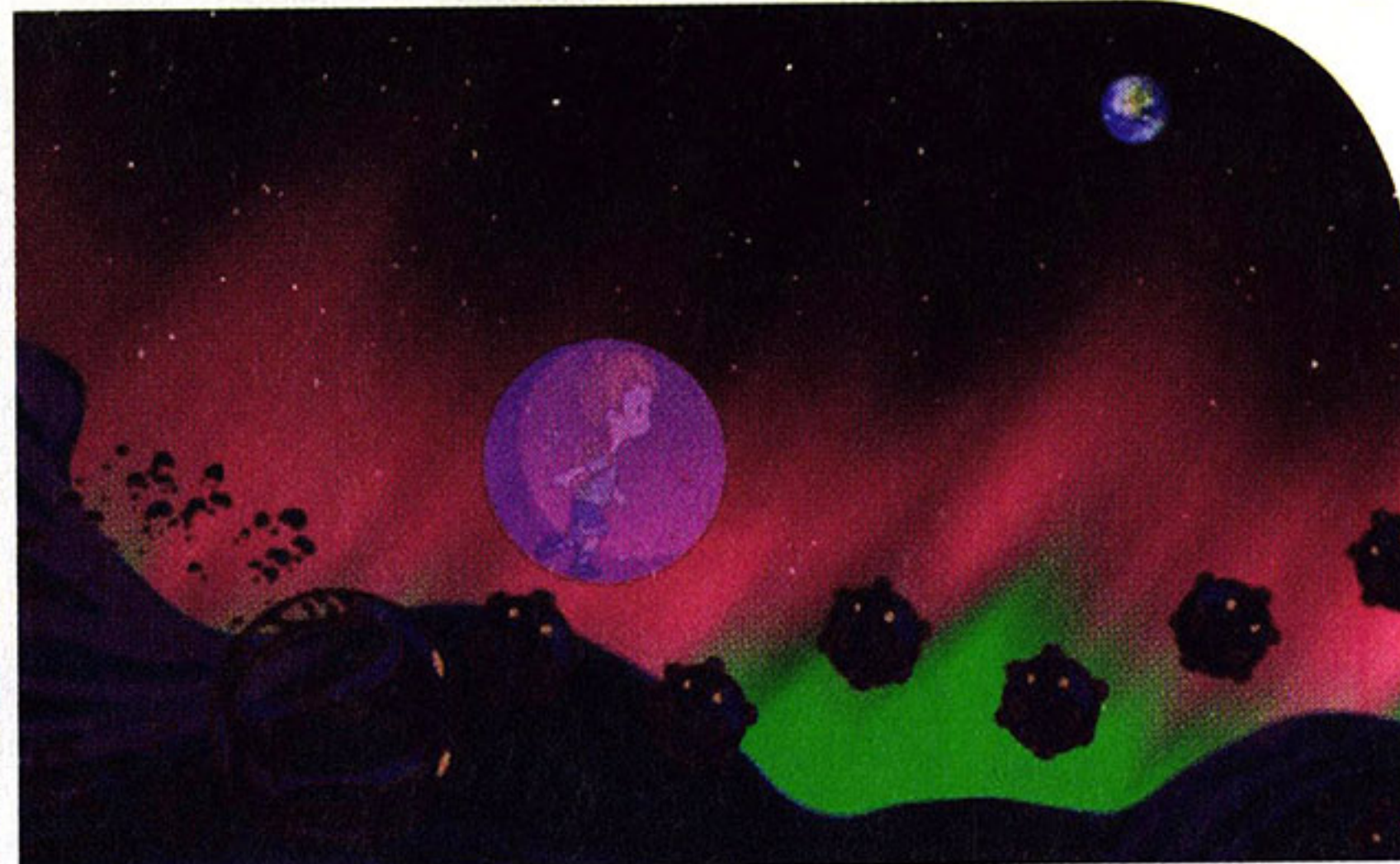
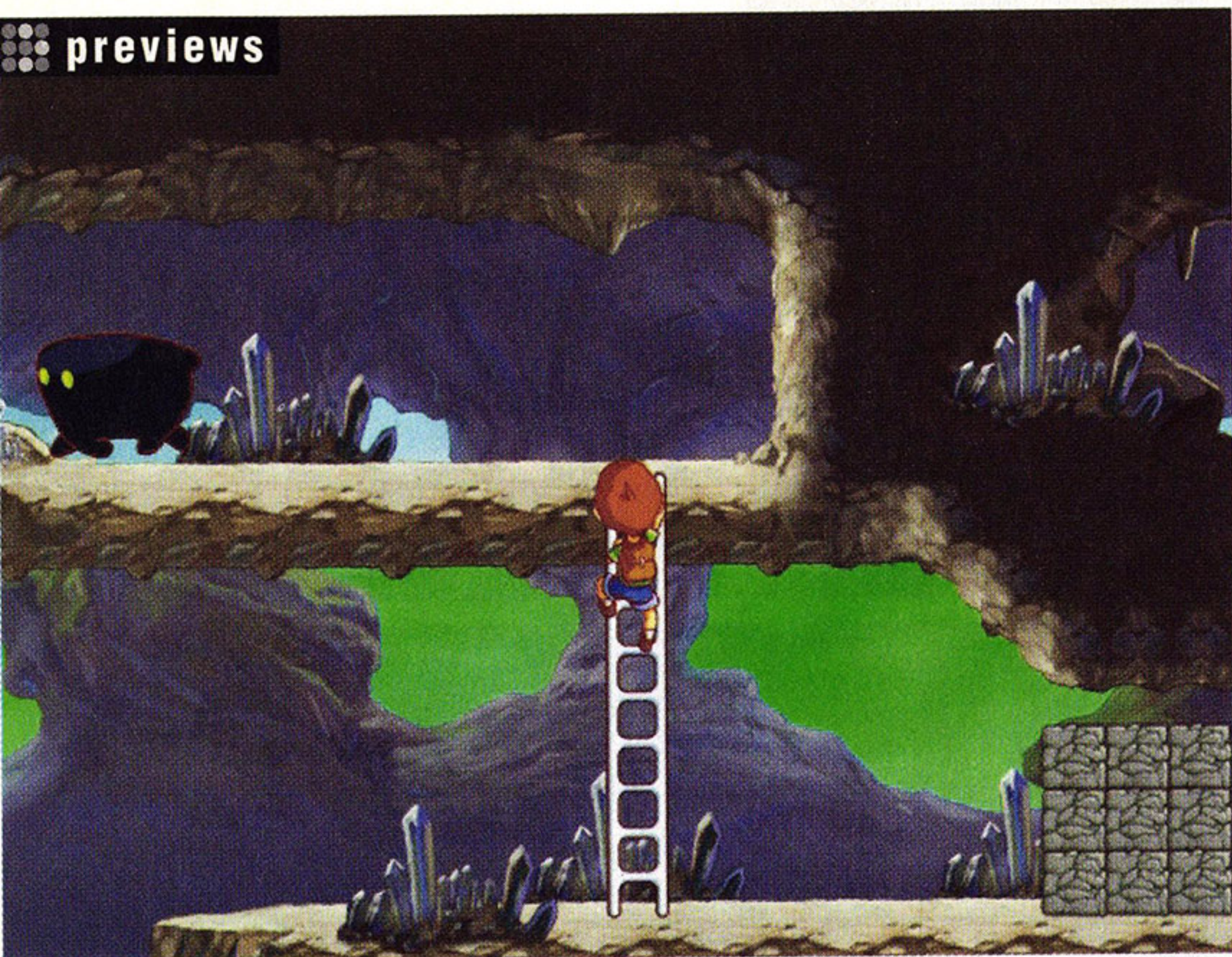
New three-man mechs - so unstoppable



Catch a ride on a friend's mech for added firepower and protection



Deployable shield FTW!



Wii

A Boy and His Blob

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** WAYFORWARD TECHNOLOGIES
 > **DEVELOPER** MAJESCO > **RELEASE** FALL

BLOBBIN' IT UP

Modern revivals of classic games are inherently exciting, but they can also be dangerous territory. Developers must carefully capitalize on nostalgia while ensuring the game is more than a retread of an ancient design. With 2007's much-lauded *Contra 4*, the team at WayForward proved its ability to balance old and new gameplay concepts. Now the studio is resurrecting another favorite of the 8-bit era with *A Boy and his Blob* exclusively for the Wii.

Fans of the game on the NES will undoubtedly recognize a few areas depicted in these screens, but the Wii version is not a remake. Instead, it takes inspiration from the original while providing gameplay based on similar concepts. "The goal is to give the player the same feeling they had when they played the original," says director Sean Velasco. "Even if it's only what they remember through the glasses of nostalgia. It takes careful integration of new elements, subtle improvements, and lessons learned from the past." In other words, players shouldn't expect all of the problems of the old version — like the rigid structure and limited jellybeans — to return in the new game. However, the core mechanic of feeding your blob jellybeans to solve puzzles remains the same. He can transform into a ladder, an anvil, a trampoline, and many more handy objects to help players traverse obstacles.

"The concept for the NES game is absolutely stellar; having a transforming toolkit at your disposal is a great concept," Velasco tells us. "Also, the blob felt like a real living companion with actual feelings. These two main ideas drove the development of the new *A Boy and his Blob*." Producer Robb Alvey adds, "It's taking the elements of the original — the jellybeans, the transformations, the puzzles — and adapting them for today's gamers."

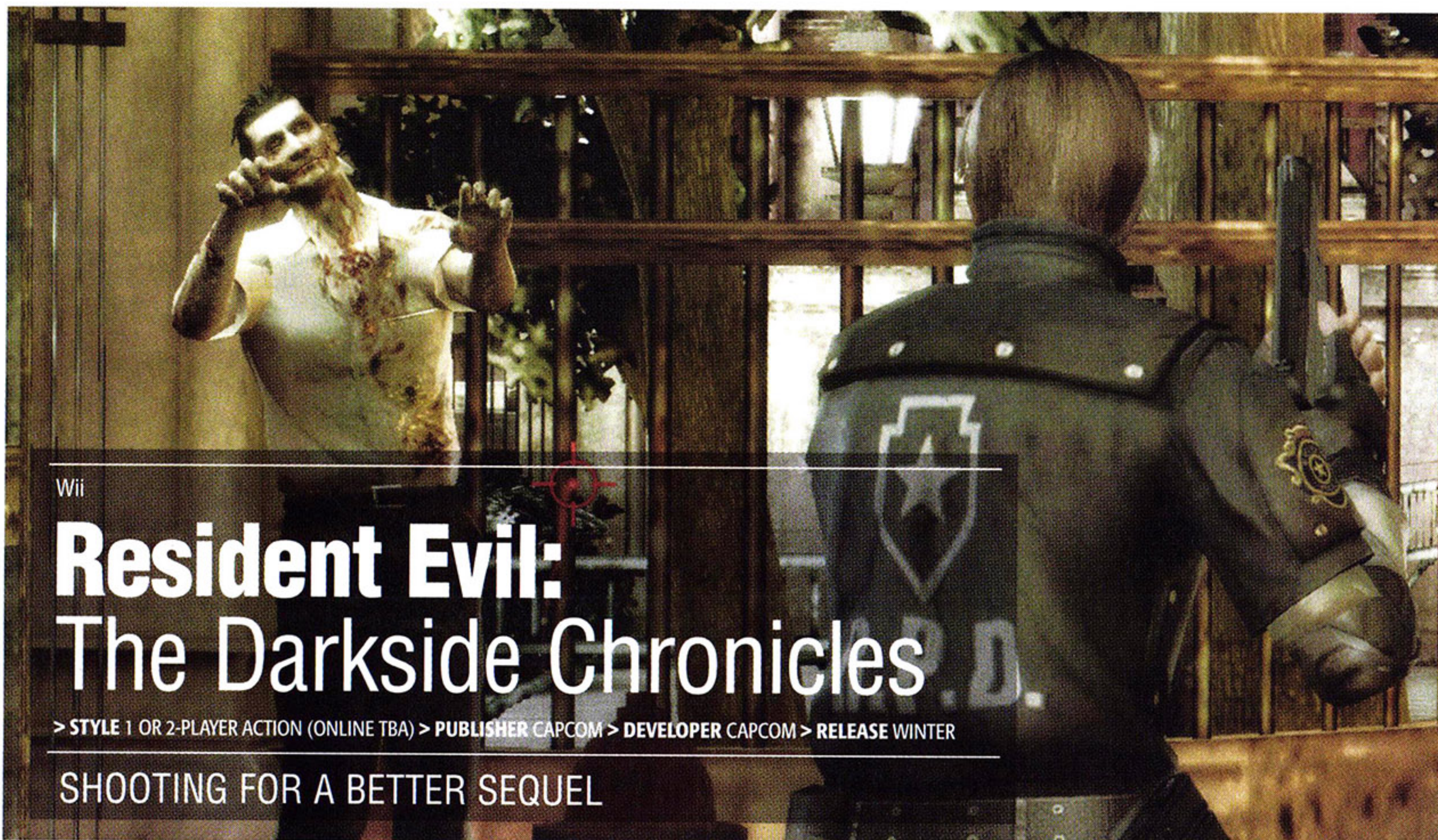
The fundamentals may be the same, but there are plenty of interesting additions and changes to the original formula. First of all, the game is split into discrete levels joined by a hub world. That way, players have more immediate goals and puzzles, rather than the meandering trial-and-error of the original. The new structure also facilitates the inclusion of boss battles at the end of certain levels.

While the game does have action elements, these fights revolve around puzzle elements; you have to find ways to reflect the bosses' attacks back at them rather than fighting the creatures head-to-head.

Apart from its revamped gameplay, *A Boy and his Blob* also displays a stylish graphical update that conveys a specific tone throughout the game. Art director Marc Gomez explains: "The visual style is in direct relation to the mood and emotion we're trying to portray. I couldn't imagine it looking any other way. There's a sense of innocence in hand drawn art that will give you a much different effect than 3D art." Judging from screens on this page, the effect is definitely working.

Though it is important to differentiate this game from its predecessor, the team isn't just throwing in new stuff for the sake of being different. For instance, as a Wii exclusive, this title might have integrated a bunch of motion-sensitive controls. Technically, those features would have been new, but they wouldn't necessarily be improvements, and so the decision was made to keep the control scheme more traditional. "*A Boy and His Blob* uses no IR or motion control of any kind," declares Velasco. "We didn't feel it was necessary for this game, so we didn't shoe-horn it in." Gamers can still use the remote and nunchuk combo, but plugging in a classic controller is also an option.

Not every classic game merits a current-gen facelift, but given the ungraceful aging of the original, *A Boy and his Blob* deserves a second chance. With striking graphics, brain-bending puzzles, and a fun concept, WayForward's intriguing reinterpretation could signal the resurrection of this long-dormant series. ■ ■ ■



Wii

Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TBA) > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE WINTER

SHOOTING FOR A BETTER SEQUEL



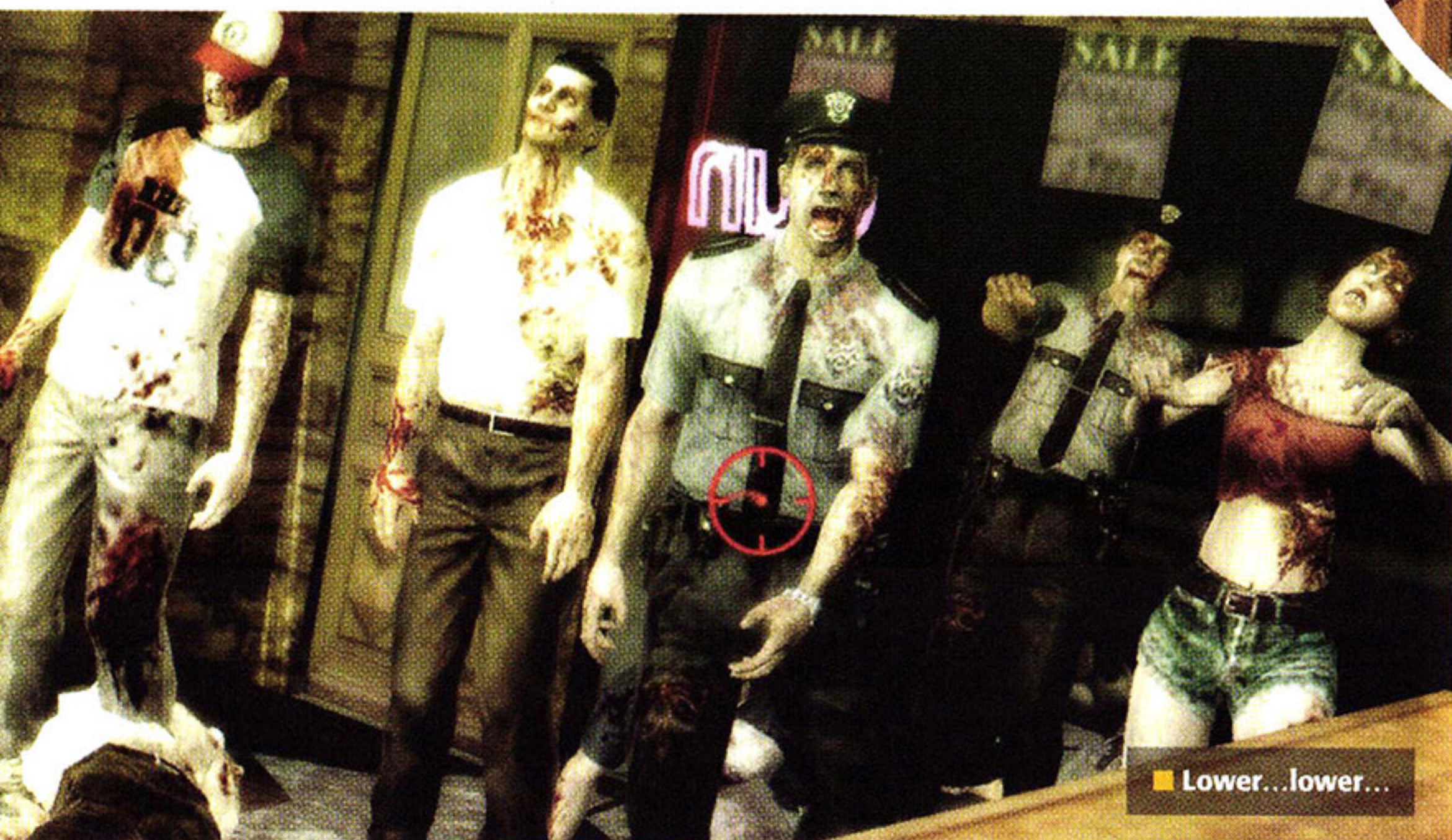
■ Leon Kennedy: A room full of zombies, and he shoots the only human



Fans of Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles, start stockpiling your ammo. Capcom recently announced Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles, a sequel to the successful rail shooter exclusively for the Wii. For those who missed The Umbrella Chronicles, it stripped Resident Evil of item collecting, puzzles, backtracking, and pretty much everything else that didn't involve blowing off the heads of zombies. The game proved Resident Evil could be successfully reincarnated in an entirely different genre, replacing the signature gameplay elements that made the original a hit with a new, more simplified approach.

While details on The Darkside Chronicles are scarce, Capcom promises to keep the fledgling series from going stale by fleshing out the rail shooter formula with a more robust co-op experience. Capcom claims it will accomplish this by pairing the player with an AI-controlled character during gameplay, who can be replaced by a living person if, you know, you have friends. Capcom hasn't divulged many details beyond the co-op announcement, but early trailers suggest that your characters will spend more time on screen during gameplay. One partner may follow the other at various times, providing covering fire or a few well-placed slugs to save their partner from an undead attacker. At the very least, it will give you a chance to laugh and shoot your partner in the ass while he's helplessly being mauled. Capcom also promises a new layer of strategy to gameplay with a reworked Evade system (which hopefully goes beyond the Umbrella Chronicle's "waggle the remote to keep from dying" moments during boss fights), as well as more interactive pathways, new characters, and new environments.

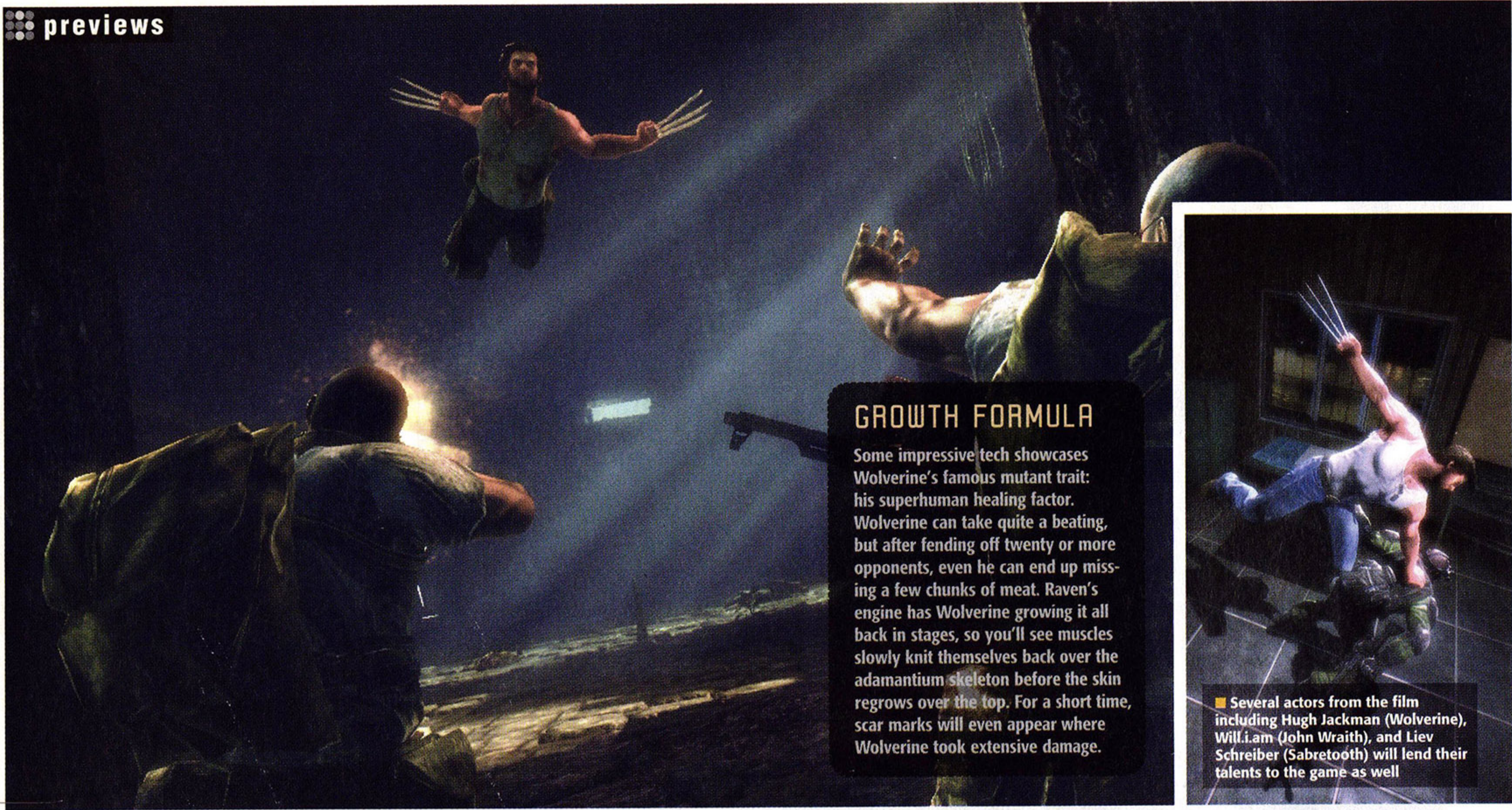
One area where The Darkside Chronicles sticks closely to its predecessors is the way it ties all of the franchise's storylines together into one neat, blood-spattered package. While the main focus of the game is on retelling the events encapsulated by Resident Evil 2 and Resident Evil: CODE Veronica, you'll also play through brand new shenanigans starring Leon Kennedy in South America, adding yet another twist to the legendary RE narrative. We're betting the storyline will still be confusing and sport plot holes big enough for hordes of zombies to crawl through, but as long as we can frantically blast those zombies apart with the help of a friend, we won't complain. ■ ■ ■



■ Lower...lower...



■ What's better than a headshot? Hickey shots!!!



GROWTH FORMULA

Some impressive tech showcases Wolverine's famous mutant trait: his superhuman healing factor. Wolverine can take quite a beating, but after fending off twenty or more opponents, even he can end up missing a few chunks of meat. Raven's engine has Wolverine growing it all back in stages, so you'll see muscles slowly knit themselves back over the adamantium skeleton before the skin regrows over the top. For a short time, scar marks will even appear where Wolverine took extensive damage.

■ Several actors from the film including Hugh Jackman (Wolverine), Will.i.am (John Wraith), and Liev Schreiber (Sabretooth) will lend their talents to the game as well

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER RAVEN SOFTWARE > RELEASE MAY 1

ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

Most games featuring Marvel Comics' favorite mutant have failed – from the '90s disaster *Wolverine: Adamantium Rage* to the 2003 flop *X2: Wolverine's Revenge*. One fault these titles shared was their neutered portrayal of the short-tempered Canadian, pitting the feral antihero against hordes of bloodless robots. Raven Software is setting out to turn the character's fortune around with *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. The developer sharpened its superhero skills on *X-Men Legends* and *Marvel Ultimate Alliance*, and our hands-on time with this action-packed title indicates the studio is finally giving fans a game that will do Wolverine justice.

Though the associated movie is unlikely to be rated R, Raven is taking full advantage of the game's predicted M rating. After all, those indestructible blades at the end of Wolverine's knuckles aren't used for tickle fights. Wolverine twirls through the air with impressive fighting prowess, hacking off enemies' legs and arms with unnatural speed. A lunge move lets him close the distance between his foes in an instant, and a familiar experience system will allow him to upgrade a variety of berserker attacks.

Light puzzle elements break up the action, but if Wolverine gets stuck, a feral sense will help him find his way. This power lights up

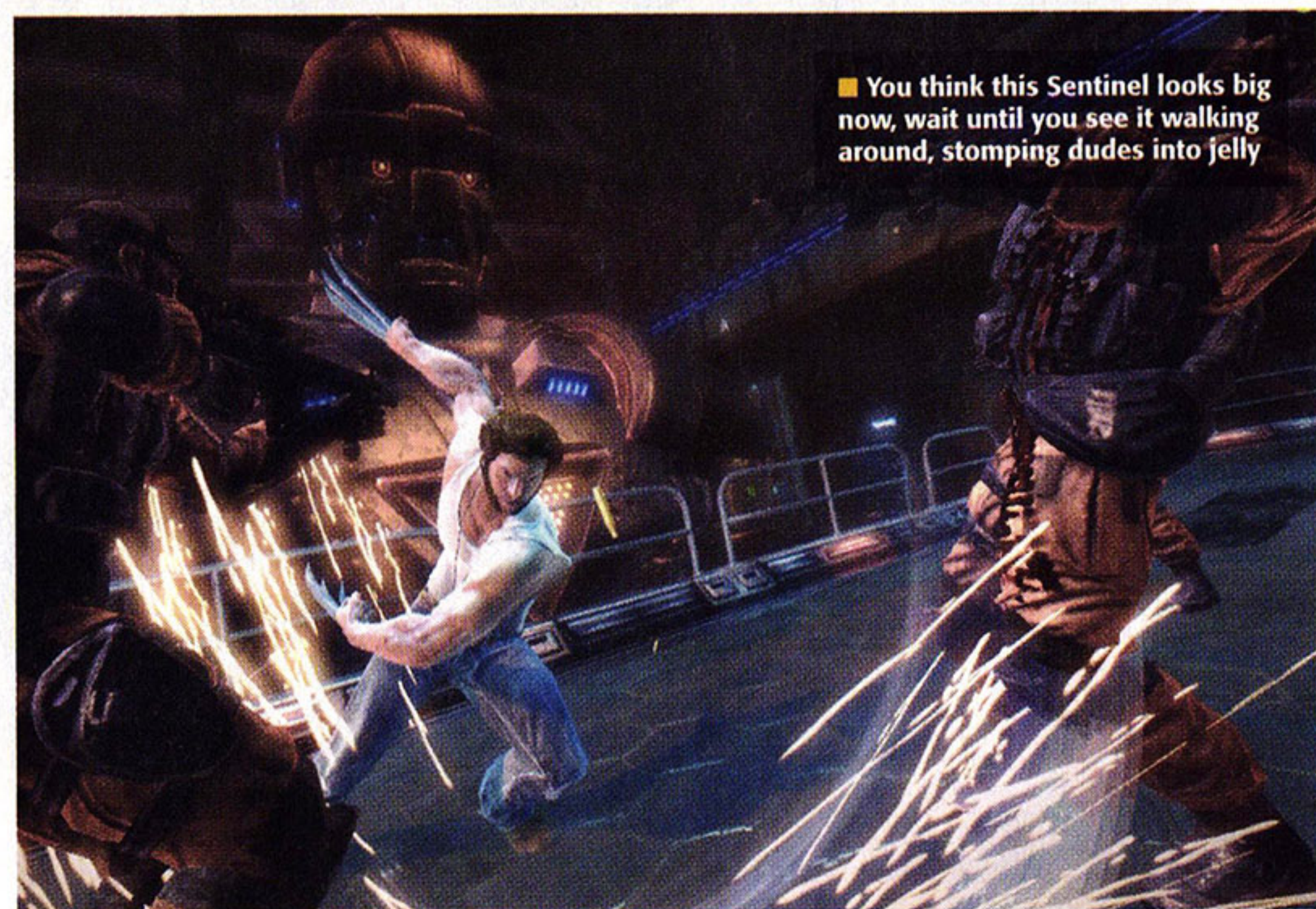
important objects in his surroundings, and can also be useful for finding environmental quick kills. We grabbed a few armed soldiers, slamming their torsos through broken pipes and shoving their heads into open industrial fans. Even when the environment isn't deadly, Wolverine knows how to crack open some skulls. A variety of grapple maneuvers let him snap necks and turn his opponents' guns back on them. Parents be warned: This isn't the Saturday morning cartoon Wolverine.

The most impressive moment of our demo was when a 250-foot Sentinel came stomping onto the battlefield. Wolvie rolled out of the way at the last second, but a few hapless soldiers weren't so lucky. An exhausting battle ensued with Wolverine facing off against the several-ton mech. We won't ruin every detail (spoiler: Wolverine wins), but if players aren't careful they could end up caught in the Sentinel's fist – in a precarious "Days of Future Past" scenario.

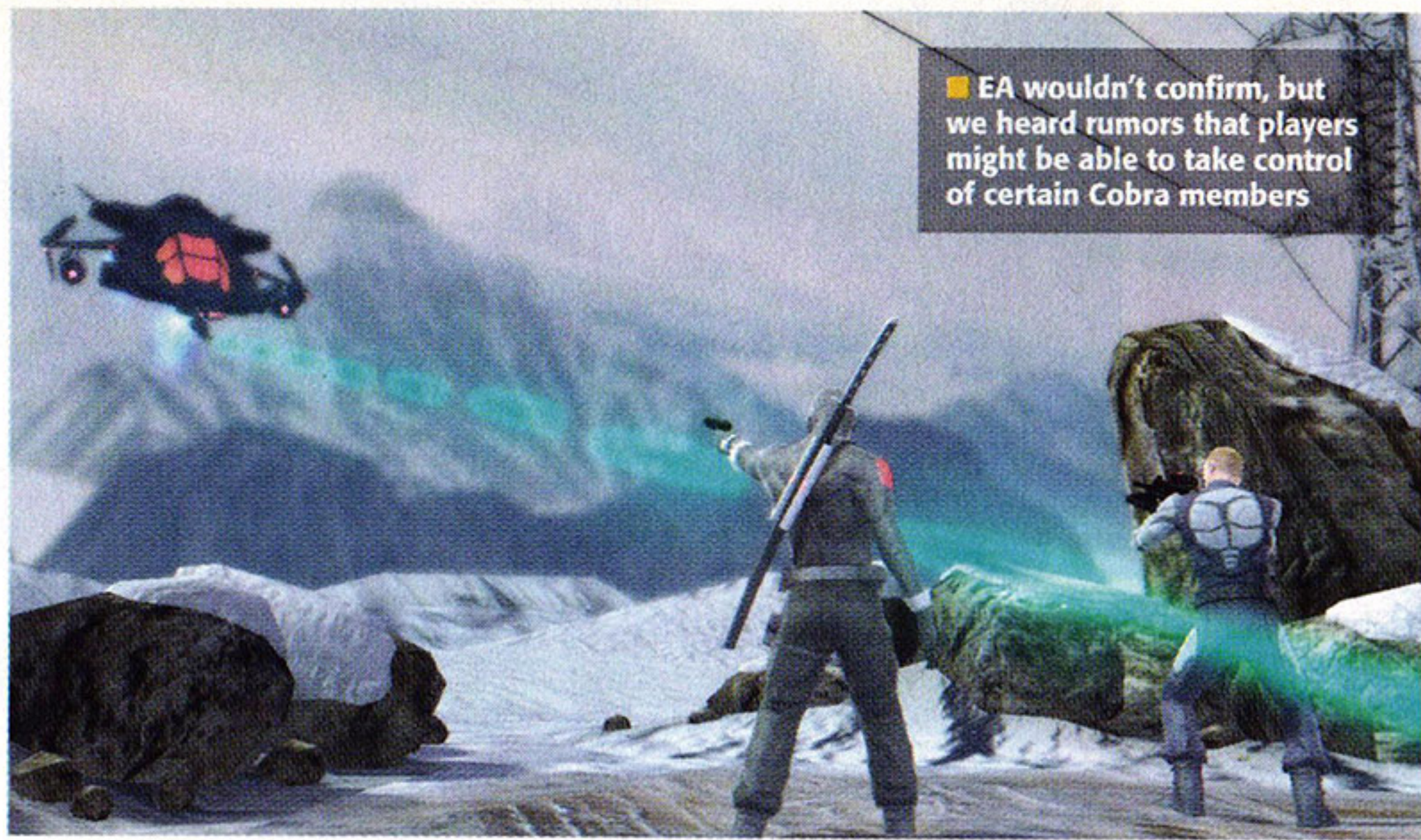
We walked away from our time with the game encouraged, which is more than we can say about the upcoming movie. Interestingly, the team at Raven has been working on this title for two and a half years, an unprecedented amount of time for a licensed movie game, so maybe this will be one of those super rare games that are actually better than the source material. ■ ■ ■



■ You'll be able to pop Wolverine's claws in and out at will, but the function doesn't really serve a purpose other than looking really badass



■ You think this Sentinel looks big now, wait until you see it walking around, stomping dudes into jelly



EA wouldn't confirm, but we heard rumors that players might be able to take control of certain Cobra members

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PS2

G.I. Joe: The Rise of the Cobra

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** DOUBLE HELIX > **RELEASE** AUGUST

YO, JOE!

Wherever Transformers goes, G.I. Joe is determined to follow. If Transformers makes a comic book comeback, so can G.I. Joe. If Transformers creates an explosive live-action movie, so can G.I. Joe. If Transformers makes an adequate video game tie-in, well then by golly, so can G.I. Joe.

Coinciding with this summer's theatrical release, G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra won't just follow in the film's footsteps. The game features story elements lifted from the classic comics and the '80s cartoon. The basic plot has the Joes investigating the Cobra organization and its connections to the mysterious M.A.R.S. Corporation.

Even with the game's ties to the roots of the franchise, the action focuses primarily on the characters featured in the movie. Each of the 12 playable characters has his or her own unique abilities, weapons, and special attacks. Characters like Snake Eyes and Kamakura are optimal for close-quarters melee combat, while soldiers like Heavy Duty and Gung Ho are fit for

using their guns' heavy firepower. Since all the Joes' styles complement each other, EA wisely included a single-screen co-op mode in the game so players can take down Cobra with a friend.

Everyone raised in the '80s knows something would be missing if the game didn't feature several oddly specialized vehicles. Thankfully more than 12 combat-ready transports are included in the final game. The widely popular H.I.S.S. Tank, for example is present, and a second, more advanced model based on toy designs from Hasbro's archives will also make an appearance.

If nothing else, EA is tapping into G.I. Joe nostalgia. Players can call a variety of classic Joes in as support characters. For example, Wild Bill can perform air strikes on well-defended Cobra bases. The classic campy banter has also been well preserved, and EA promises plenty of PSA-style Easter eggs are hidden throughout the game. Now you know... ■ ■ ■

Several non-playable characters, such as Dataframe, Dialtone, Breaker, Stalker, and Tunnel Rat will be featured in some fashion



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Terminator Salvation

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** EQUITY GAMES/EVOLVED GAMES/WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** GRIN STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MAY 19

WAR OF THE MACHINES

Gamers hoping for a minigame about Christian Bale yelling at people are out of luck – the hot-blooded star is not involved in the Terminator Salvation game at all. You'll still control John Connor, however, and the character model looks almost exactly the same from behind anyway. You'll fight alongside the human resistance against Skynet approximately two years before the events of the upcoming movie.

Visions of this post-apocalyptic world have always been dark and gloomy in the previous Terminator films, but developer Grin has decided to go with a more sun-drenched world. We hustled through a bombed-out version of Los Angeles in a mission to rescue a pocket of survivors. The third-person shooter has a Gears of War feel with a variety of machine guns, shotguns, grenades, and rocket launchers, plus a unique cover system. Players hit a face button to stick to cover, and when they want to move they'll push on the analog stick to make a rainbow-shaped indicator appear. Move an arrow around this dial to select if you'd like to jump to forward cover

or to other options on the side.

Enemies we fought included floating bots, spider bots, and T-600s (a bigger and cruder Terminator model than Arnie's T-800). Since we were always fighting alongside AI allies, it was possible to flank some of the stronger robots and hit them in the back where they're weakest. This strategy is most effective when you're playing with another human in local split-screen co-op. Salvation contains no competitive multiplayer or online play, in case you were thinking of terminating your out-of-state buddy.

The final section we played was an on-rails shooting sequence where we drove down a long stretch of road on a turret-equipped jeep. Robot motorcycles pursued a school bus full of survivors and we had to try to aim at these things as the driver careened wildly over rough terrain. Deserted cars served as nice stand-ins for explosive barrels, but they also prevented us from stopping the final robo-cycle from destroying the bus. We'll try not to blow it next month in our full review of Salvation. ■ ■ ■





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Just Cause 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER EIDOS
> DEVELOPER AVALANCHE > RELEASE FALL

EMBRACING THE ABSURD

It's been a good while since we first heard word of Just Cause 2, but this month finally gave us the opportunity to see the game in action. Packed with missions that fill a positively gargantuan game world, those aren't the features you'll notice first. Like us, as you parachute into the action, you'll spend the first few minutes laughing at how totally insane this game is.

Rico Rodriguez has received a makeover since his days in the first Just Cause. As the game opens, we see our newly rugged hero dropping through the sky into the fictional southeast Asian island of Panau. Your stunt chute is extremely maneuverable, allowing for quick turns and fast dives toward the ground. Stopping on one of the towering mountains, we look out on the sprawling vista stretched out below him. Dropping down onto a speeding car, Rico sets to work blowing up everything in sight as the vehicle beneath him veers and crashes. Causing chaos is the major path to unlocking new missions, so there's no reason Rico shouldn't go absolutely crazy as he demolishes vehicles, takes out guerilla soldiers, and topples buildings. Even if one of your three currently equipped weapons doesn't cause enough destruction, the ground is positively littered with explosive objects. An easy-to-aim grappling hook pulls you around to any part of the environment, slingshotting you up to redeploy your chute and go flying off in some new direction. Alternately, the grapples can be used to tether two objects together, such as an enemy soldier and a propane tank. Shoot the tank, and proceed to watch your foe get pulled screaming into the air as the gas shoots skyward.

Cause enough chaos, and more of the 50 story missions will unlock across the massive island nation of Panau, which stretches 32 kilometers across at several points. The map

is littered with settlements, military bases, airports, and more, all placed to encourage your unique breed of shenanigans. The 100-plus vehicles in the game include everything from helicopters to dune-hopping motocross bikes, each with their own specialties. Some are great for the expansive desert, while others are designed to get you through the snowy mountain peaks near the center of the island.

Wherever you go, and however you get there, the focus in Just Cause 2 seems to be squarely set on insane stunts, broad freedom of activity and movement, and a constant flow of action. We came away impressed, and eager to get our hands on the full game and experiment for ourselves. ■ ■ ■



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Dante's Inferno

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EA REDWOOD SHORES > RELEASE 2010

ALL HELL, ALL THE TIME

■ Death's scythe is Dante's primary weapon

First Beowulf, and now Dante's Inferno. Classic epic poems are hitting video games big time. EA Redwood Shores, the studio behind last year's *Dead Space*, is taking on the first chunk of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, which actually lends itself to a game environment quite well. It follows the character Dante through nine circles (read: levels) of hell, full of elaborate torture and vicious creatures.

The game begins as Dante returns from years of war to finally marry his fiancé Beatrice, only to find her murdered (one of

many understandable departures from the source material). As Lucifer drags her soul to hell, Dante jumps in after them to begin his journey. Before entering the first ring of hell, Dante learns the ropes in a battle with Death in which he ends up stealing the Grim Reaper's scythe.

In the first of many *God of War* similarities, this weapon can extend out like Krato's chain blades and pummel enemies in a wide variety of combos. A powerful cross projects deadly energy, and various magical spells are also options in combat. Dante can also absolve or condemn damned

souls scattered throughout hell in order to earn points to spend on ability and weapon upgrades. In a nod to *Golden Axe*, he can ride certain monsters and use them to bash waves of enemies.

EA has also locked in some Hollywood talent to bring the story to life. Wayne Barlowe, a concept artist on both *Hellboy* movies and a couple *Harry Potter* films, has conceptualized the look of Dante's hell, providing new takes on often-used creatures like the three-headed dog Cerberus and minotaurs. The developer is also teasing an as yet unnamed Oscar-nominated screen-

writer who is handling the story adaptation. Even though *Inferno* is only the first part of *The Divine Comedy*, it's difficult to imagine EA crafting the remaining two parts into possible sequels if this game's a hit. The scaling of mount purgatory might work with some tweaks, but Dante's journey through the spheres of heaven is more about enlightenment than any sort of action. We'll have more on this *Inferno* quandary and others in the coming months. ■ ■ ■



■ The cross clears demons out when they get too close



■ Let the flame breath do the work



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PC

Mini Ninjas

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER EIDOS
> DEVELOPER IO INTERACTIVE > RELEASE FALL

DEEPER THAN YOU'D THINK

This charming and feature-rich title caught us by surprise when the folks from Hitman developer IO Interactive showed it to us this month. The cute visuals and childlike story belie a deep and rewarding adventure full of upgradeable skills, hidden collectibles, and varied combat mechanics.

After an evil samurai warlord begins transforming cute and innocent animals into shadowy evil soldiers, a clan of beneficent ninja sends its best warriors to confront the threat. As they disappear one by one, there

is eventually no one to send but Hiro and his heavysset, hammer-wielding best friend Futo. The two set out, and begin to gather the ninjas back together as they journey to five sinister castles and defeat the evil masters.

As you go, new ninjas are added to a stable of playable characters. You'll unlock six in all, each of who have unique special abilities, and enemies against whom they are particularly useful. No matter the powerful ninja spell or sword swipe you inflict on the baddies, no one ever dies. Instead, they turn

back into the absurdly cute forest creatures they once were. Any of these animals can be possessed with a special power called spirit form, allowing you to scout the path ahead as a rabbit, or charge an enemy column as a roaring bear.

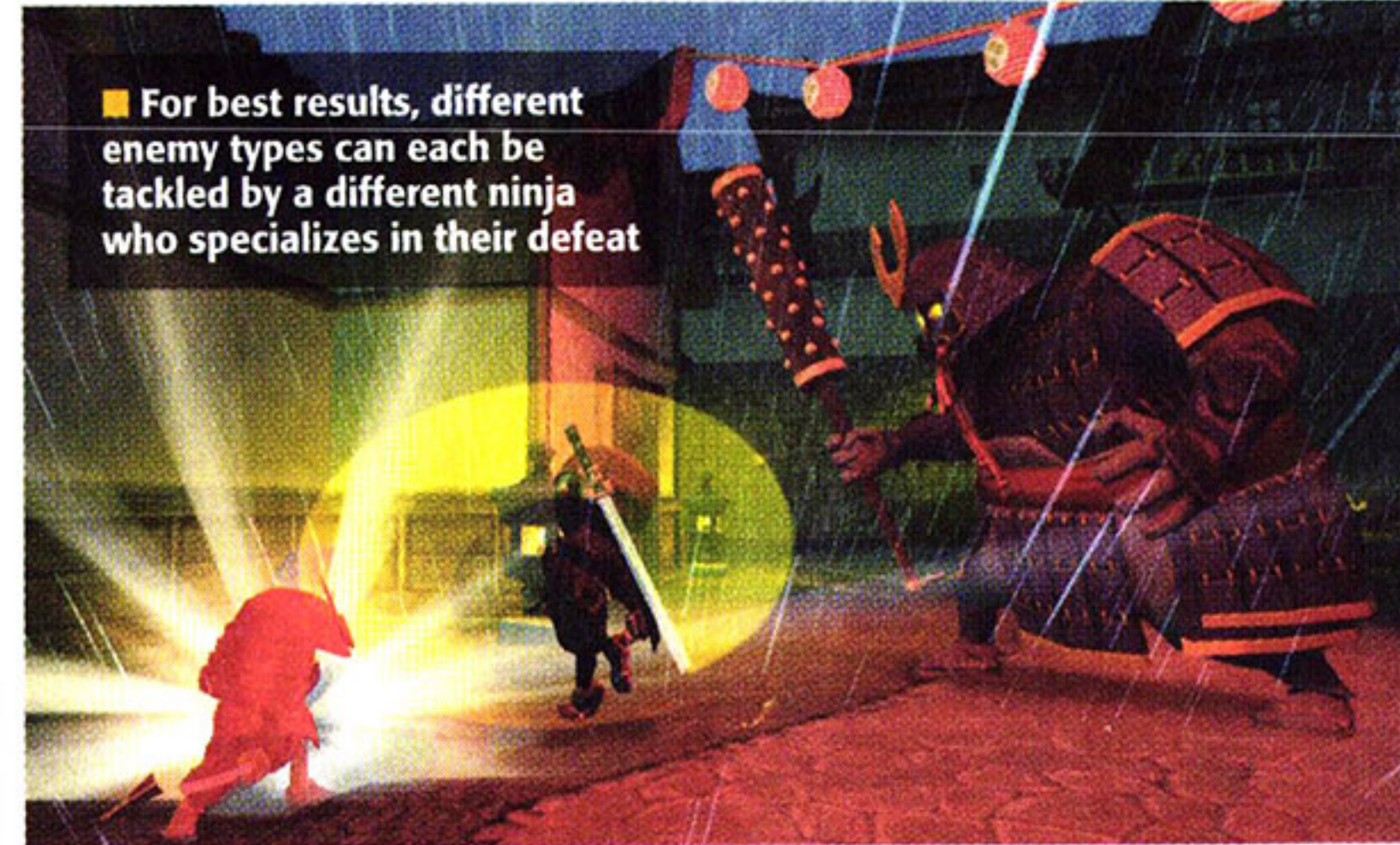
Moving through the wilderness, you'll spend time uncovering hidden paths to secluded shrines that contain new powers, and hunting enemy troops for experience and health power-ups. By hiding in the grass, you can sneak up on evil soldiers and take them out with one-hit knockouts.

Alternately, the head-on approach will have you swiping to and fro, dodging attacks, and waiting for an opportunity to unleash one of your power moves to finish off the enemy.

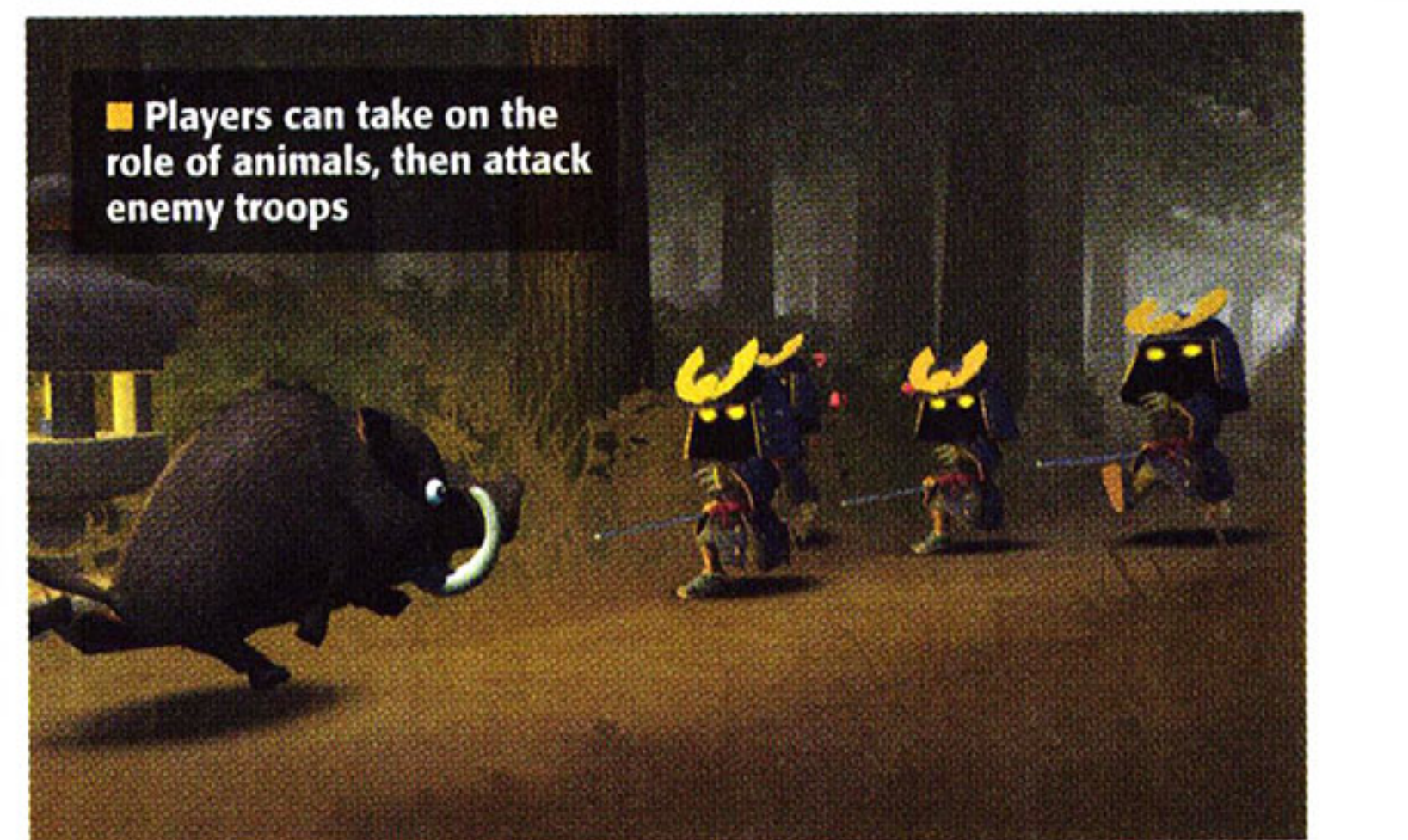
Mini Ninjas has a simple and uncomplicated visual palette, which means that it should play and look remarkably similarly on your system of choice, including Wii. Even with its target squarely on drawing in younger gamers, we wouldn't be remotely surprised to see this one charm an older audience as well when it releases this fall. ■ ■ ■



■ Environments have a lot of variety, but every wilderness area eventually leads to a major castle, and each of those is a sprawling section of the game all by itself



■ For best results, different enemy types can each be tackled by a different ninja who specializes in their defeat



■ Players can take on the role of animals, then attack enemy troops



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Scratch: The Ultimate DJ

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RHYTHM/MUSIC (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** GENIUS PRODUCTS
> **DEVELOPER** 7 STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SUMMER

THE NEW REMIX

Scratch hopes to be to hip-hop what Rock Band and Guitar Hero have been to rock 'n' roll. Building on gameplay fundamentals established in those hit franchises, 7 Studios' new DJ simulator is an intriguing alteration of the formula that focuses on the vibe of the largely untapped arena of hip-hop music. With a brand new peripheral and some major musical talent to back them up, they have a chance to succeed in the lucrative but crowded waters of the music genre.

The game strives to be an authoritative and comprehensive look at the hip-hop scene, including both early artists in the field and modern hits. Announced artists include familiar chart-toppers like Kanye West, The Black Eyed Peas, The Gorillaz, and the Beastie Boys, while classic genre pioneers like Eric B. and Rakim help ensure a broader palette than current radio hits. Mixmaster Mike of the Beastie Boys and Invisible Scratch Picklz is advising on technical issues, and Quincy Jones III is bringing his encyclopedic knowledge of hip-hop to the table.

A familiar array of falling notes makes up the basic gameplay approach, but the addition of scratching adds a layer of customization not present in most other music games. With hundreds of "tricks" to pull off on the turntable, the development

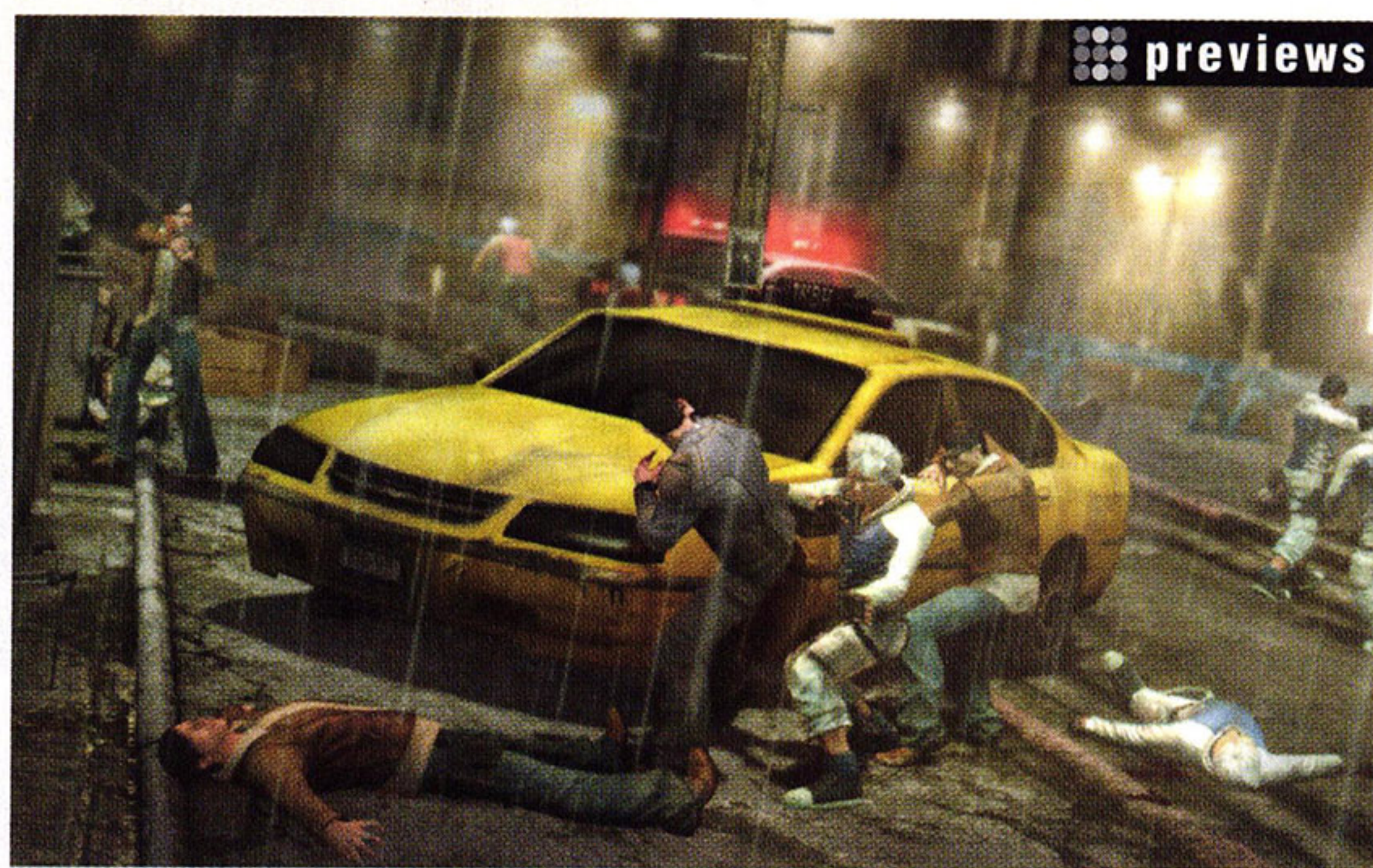
team likens the experience to a skateboarding game, where the performance is as much about experimentation and variety as it is making your way through a song. The game features a single-player experience, and there will be limited multiplayer options, including a sweet question and answer mode between two turntables that plays out like a musical game of H-O-R-S-E. When viewed altogether, it's a lot of components to get right for a studio on the first major outing in the genre. Even so, count us excited at the prospect that it all could come together. ■ ■ ■

SPIN THE RECORD

The turntable peripheral includes five buttons laid out in the familiar pattern of most guitar peripherals. A spinning record simulator on one side feels remarkably authentic, with a responsive touch and just the right give when spun. The opposite side boasts a cross-fader, which allows for sound manipulation during songs. While still in prototype, the controller looks to strike a nice balance between realistic feel and simplicity.



■ All the music in the game will be master tracks from the original artists, and there are plans to include never-before-heard remixes from participating artists. Expect around 60 songs at launch



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Dead to Rights: Retribution

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** VOLATILE GAMES > **RELEASE** FALL

THE SHADOW KNOWS

It's been awhile since anyone's heard from Jack Slate, the hard-nosed vice cop wrongly convicted of a crime he didn't commit. Namco is ready to resurrect the sleeping franchise for a prequel that explores the history behind the character.

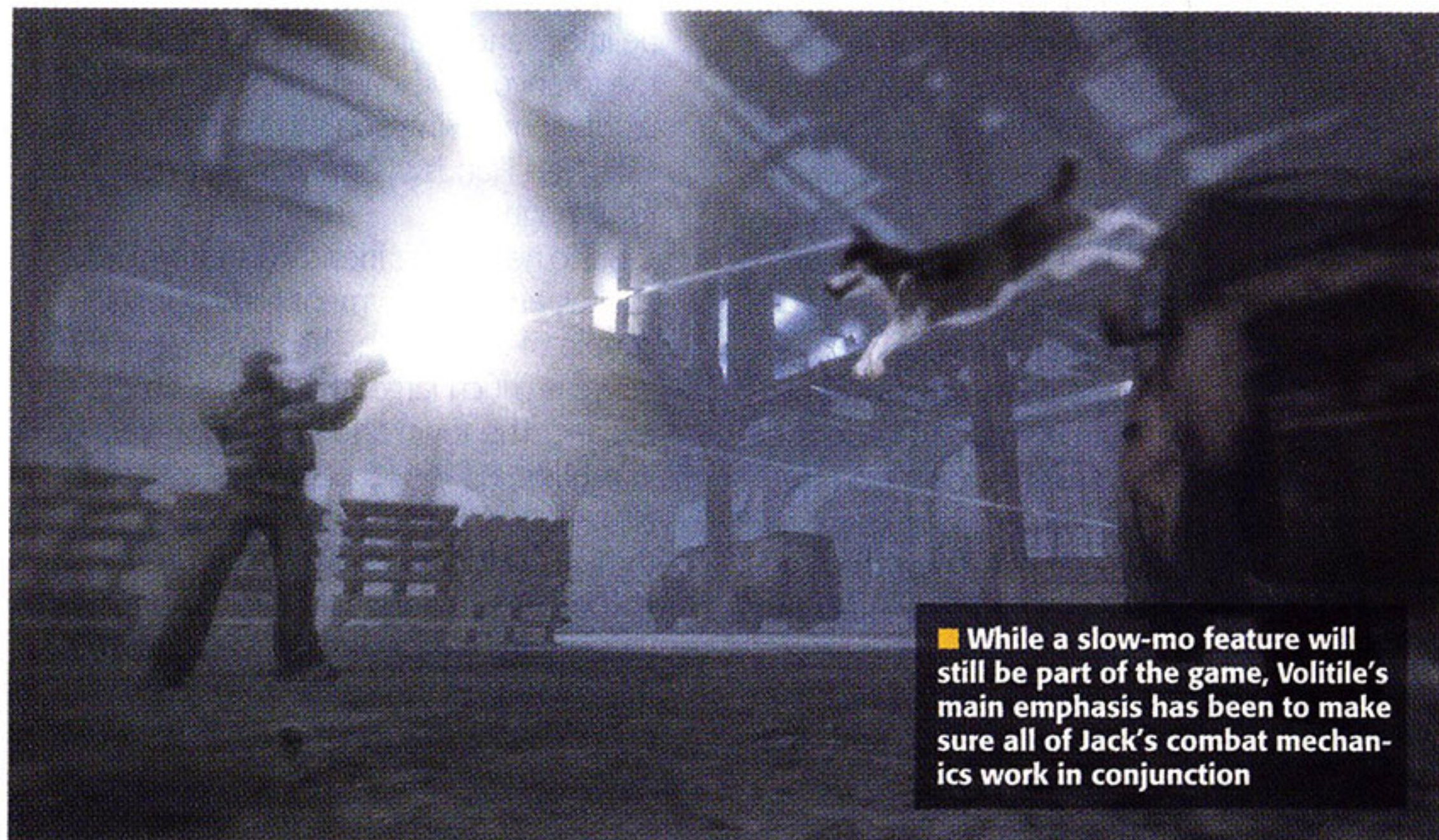
Jack's hometown, the neo-noir Grant City, is a microcosm for all the worst things about humanity: greed, crime, poverty, and violence. With no one willing to stand up to the corruption, Jack takes matters into his own hands. Going back to the beginning allows Namco to re-invent the character and hopefully introduce him to a whole new audience. "The Jack you'll see at the end of the game is very different – both physically and mentally – from the one at the start," says creative director Nick Dixon.

The story isn't the only aspect of the game being re-envisioned. Dead to Right's blend of hand-to-hand combat and third-person gunplay has its fair share of tweaks. A new free aiming mode replaces the old lock-on feature, helping smooth out the

gunplay, while a deeper combat system allows Jack to perform a wider variety of counters, takedowns, and disarms.

What really sets Retribution apart from other generic action titles is Jack's canine companion, Shadow. This faithful mutt intuitively fights alongside Jack, taking cover when he does and responding to his master's basic commands. At certain points in the game, players can even take control of the dog. "Shadow is a nice change of pace," says design manager Nick Adams. "He can track enemy movement through walls and objects, creep up on enemies and when needed, use his sprint to make a quick exit or close the distance between a target."

The second Dead to Rights game and the PSP release weren't as well received as the original, but the series still has some solid ideas. We're hoping the team at Volatile Games can unlock them before Retribution's fall release. ■ ■ ■



■ While a slow-mo feature will still be part of the game, Volatile's main emphasis has been to make sure all of Jack's combat mechanics work in conjunction

PC

The Sims 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION
 > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
 > **DEVELOPER** THE SIMS STUDIO
 > **RELEASE** JUNE 2

A NEW BEGINNING

Sequels pose an interesting challenge for fans of The Sims franchise. On one hand, a new entry promises expanded features and functionality that affect how players interact with their virtual worlds. On the other hand, making the move from one game to the next means abandoning the million-dollar houses and maxed-out careers that took hours to achieve, only to begin again with nothing. Well, don't worry about your climb back up the social ladder in The Sims 3 – we played through the introductory hours of the game, and the new additions make starting over worth it.

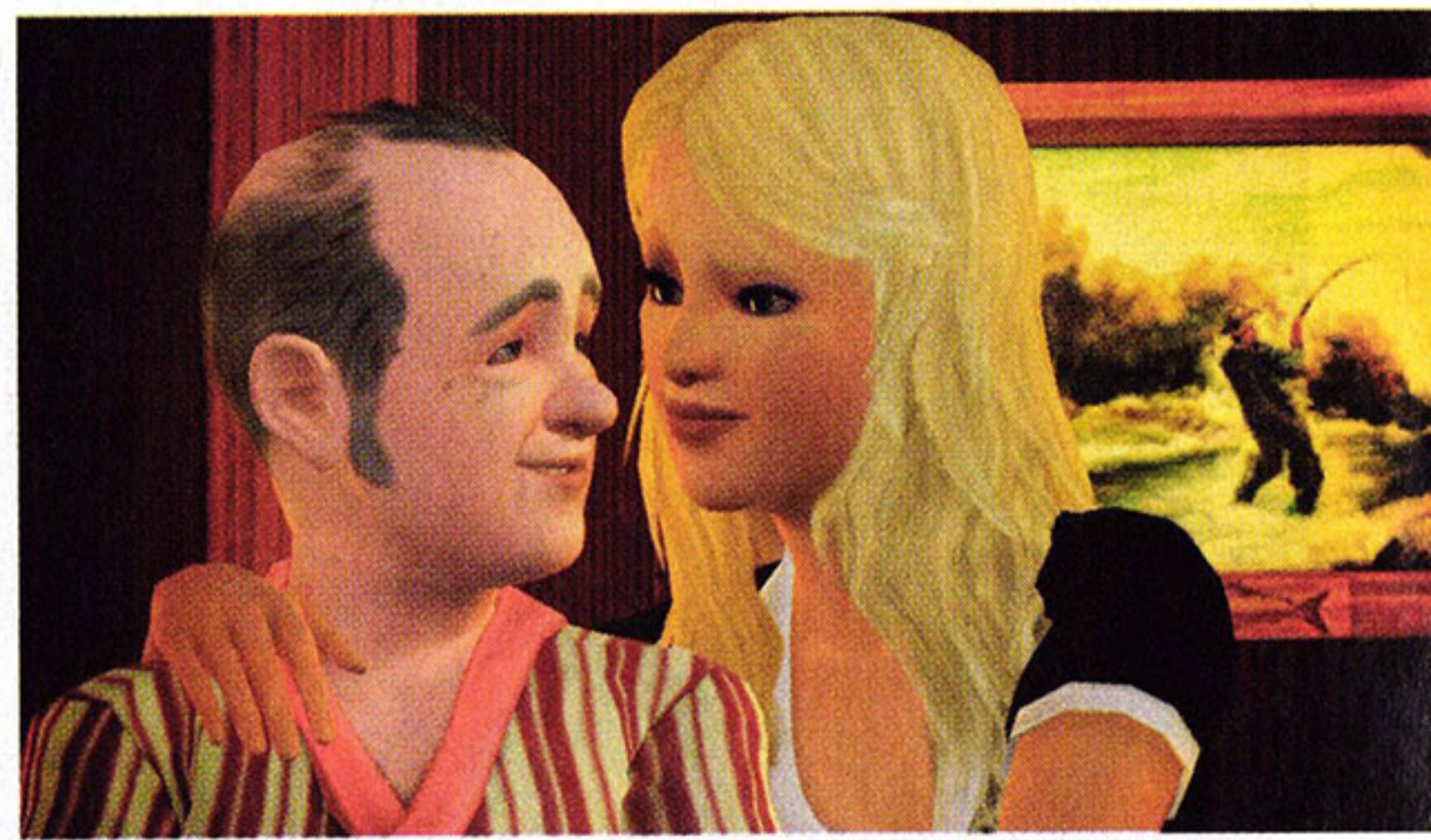
While crafting our new sim, the first thing we noticed was the increased depth in character creation. Your control over the precise shape of your sim's features is greater than ever, and the ability to color the individual parts of your clothing adds a more personal touch to the various outfits. However, even more impressive is how the sims feel less like dress-up dolls and more like characters. During creation, you assign a series of personality traits to your sims that impacts their abilities and aspirations throughout their entire lives. Depending on the traits you apply, you have the option of choosing a lifetime wish appropriate for your skills. For instance, if you choose the ambitious, schmoozer, and charismatic traits, you may be able to select "become the leader of the free world" as your life's goal.

Fulfilling these aspirations is a long-term prospect, and after character creation, we were occupied with more immediate concerns, like finding a place to live. When you move into a home, you can choose to purchase it furnished or unfurnished, which is nice if you don't care which particular bed or sofa you start with. Alternately, you can buy a lot to build and furnish your own home from scratch. Once you get settled, the next priority is finding a job. Unlike previous entries, you aren't limited to browsing ads in the paper or online; each career has an associated headquarters in the town, and you can just walk in and enlist. If you want a job as a criminal, just stroll up to the "legitimate" warehouse. Would-be politicians should head for city hall, and athletic superstar hopefuls can sign up at the stadium.

These locations are more than just buildings in the town. Once you start your career, the headquarters is where you report for work. You don't see the inside of these structures, but it is interesting to know that your sim doesn't just disappear for several hours each day. While at work, you can choose how your sim spends the day, selecting options like working hard, slacking off, and building relationships with co-workers.



You can choose specific colors for your clothes and surroundings, in addition to fabric patterns



Diet and exercise will affect your appearance

During a regular day working as a criminal, we met an associate named Buster. Our sim and Buster didn't get along – they got into a fight after work (we won, since the evil trait gives an edge in scuffles), and we seized the interaction opportunity to declare Buster our nemesis. While that was a funny sequence by itself, the real payoff came a day later when our sim was chatting up some ladies at the gym and "complain about Buster" popped up as a conversation option. Apparently, when you declare a sim your nemesis, you can take every opportunity to belittle, slander, and otherwise defame your foe to anyone who will listen. It reminded us of Homer Simpson's longstanding feud with Ned Flanders, and was definitely good for a laugh.

Basic needs like friends (or enemies), shelter, and employment filled our first couple of hours with The Sims 3, but the game is much larger than those simple categories. The town and its citizens are always in motion, no longer separated into stand-alone lots. You can guide your sim's path through skills and careers in innovative ways, and more surprises than ever before await you in your new virtual life. We'll explore these facets of the game in greater depth for our full review, so stay tuned. ■ ■ ■



FOR BAD PEOPLE

With little touches like an evil trait and occasional maniacal laughing, The Sims 3 acknowledges the sinister tendencies of certain players. While classic options are still available, like building a zoo filled with your neighbors, there are some hilarious new ways to make sims miserable. You can donate money to undermine charities (like Toilets for Tots), and unique conversation options tied to the evil trait spice up interactions. Even everyday tasks are renamed to seem more ominous, like "evil slumber" and "take evil shower." Doing twisted things with The Sims is nothing new, but it's nice to see that EA isn't making players operate outside of the game's rules to indulge in those whims.



Wii | NINTENDO DS

Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SEGA > RELEASE WINTER

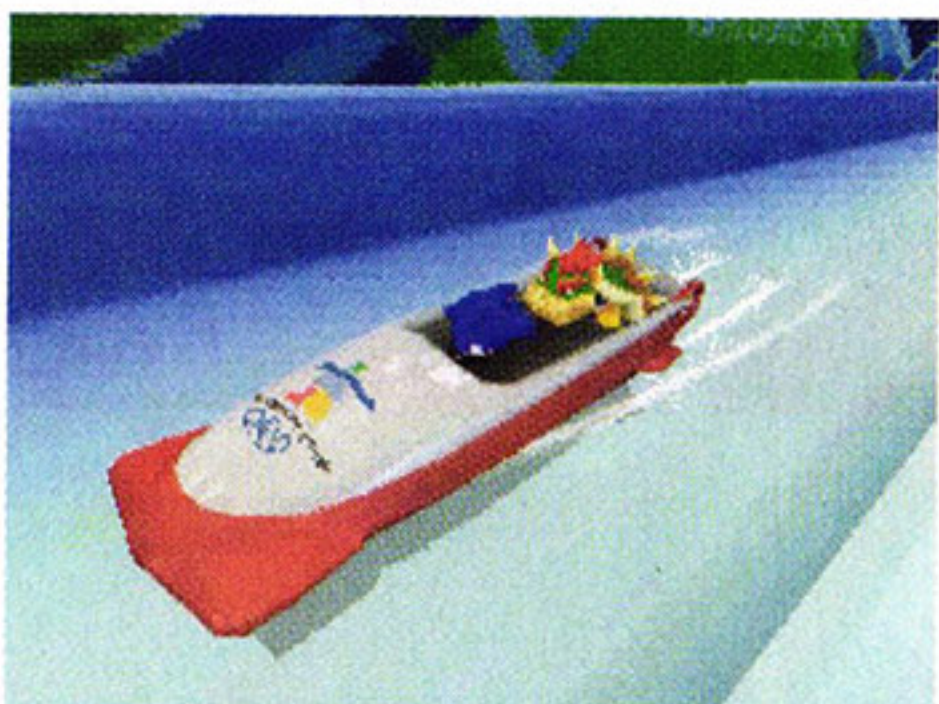
THE MILLION-DOLLAR DUO RETURNS

While Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games didn't win accolades in the pages of Game Informer, the exploding Wii and DS market embraced the twin titans' casual sports title with enthusiasm. By "enthusiasm," we mean "a combined 10 million units sold worldwide." With sales numbers like that, it's no surprise that the duo is back for another Olympic outing.

Gearing up for the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver, Canada, the mascots take part in a new collection of athletic pursuits. Alpine skiing and speed skating are confirmed for the Wii, while bobsled and snowboarding are slated for the DS. However, given that the Wii version is fully compatible with the Wii Balance Board, we would be shocked if snowboarding didn't make the slate of events.

Multiplayer is a focus for both titles, with Sega promising an even greater number of cooperative and competitive modes. The DS uses its local wireless functions to allow for four-player competition, although we're not certain if each player will need a cartridge or not.

It's certainly gratifying to see two old rivals working together. With Nintendo's legendary Shigeru Miyamoto overseeing production this time around, hopefully the quality of this game will match its expected sales figures. ■ ■ ■



NINTENDO DS

Legend of Starfy

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL)
 > PUBLISHER NINTENDO
 > DEVELOPER TOSE
 > RELEASE JUNE 8

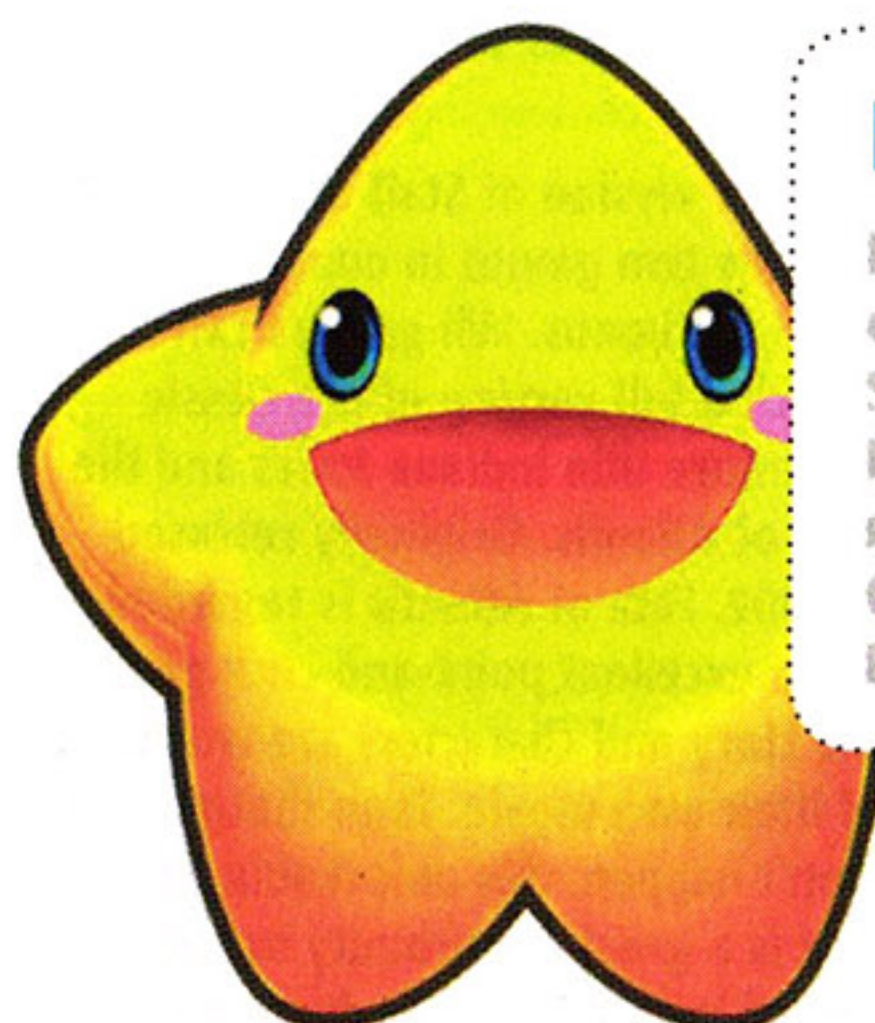
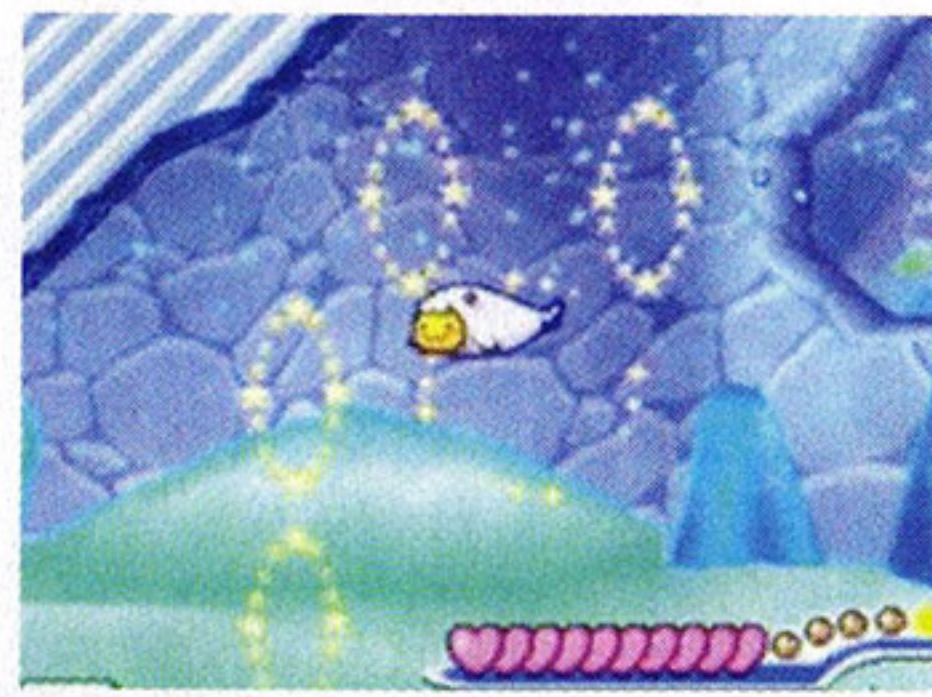
SEEING STARS

Not all of Japan's video game weirdness makes its way over to the states, and there are perfectly good reasons for that. After all, how many dating simulators could the U.S. market really sustain? But sometimes that also means we miss out on something original. Legend of Starfy, a quirky Nintendo platformer – now on its fifth entry in the Pacific Rim – is finally making its way out west.

The Legend of Starfy series follows the exploits of a yellow starfish called Starfy. This tiny hero finds his world turned upside down when a mysterious bunny-eared visitor shows up in the middle of the ocean, and Starfy lends the displaced rodent a hand by helping find the rabbit's lost memories.

While some of Starfy's traditional platforming takes place on the ground, much of the action is underwater, where Starfy is free to swim in all directions. Starfy has many tricks to aid him through his misadventures, including the ability to transform into a variety of creatures, all with their own special abilities and attacks. A land-based dragon form can shoot powerful blasts of flame from his mouth. A ghost form is best used to breach otherwise impassible barriers. The seal transformation cuts through the water quickly and has a tail shaped like a crystal sword, making it useful for cracking open heads and obstacles.

Even with all his mood swings, Starfy would get lonely if he had to travel alone all the time. Thankfully Starfy's sister, Stapy, is a playable second character in the game's co-op mode. Since she's a girl, she's pink and wears a bow (of course). But she also has a slightly different move set from Starfy, so the pair must work together to survive. If that's not enough multiplayer for you, Nintendo has also incorporated a four-player party mode where friends can compete in various cooking and fishing minigames. Get your water wings out – Starfy is finally making a splash out west this summer. ■ ■ ■



NAME GAME

In Japan the game is called *Densetsu no Starfy Taiketsu! Daiiru Kaizokudan*, which means *Legendary Starfy Confrontation! Dire Pirate Squad*

UNLIMITED ENABLED

Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP | NINTENDO DS

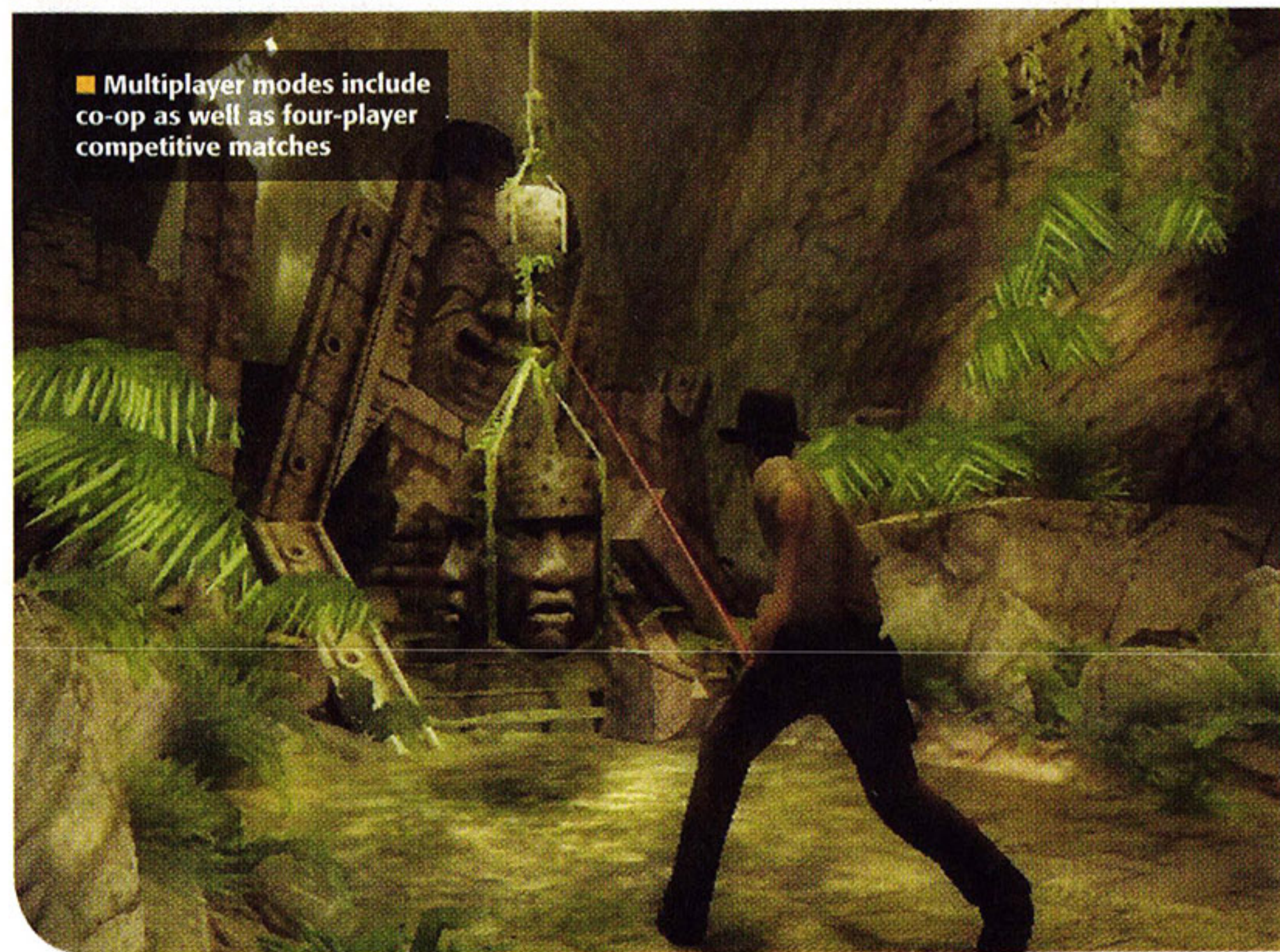
Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS
> **DEVELOPER** A2M (WII, PS2, DS), AMAZE (PSP) > **RELEASE** JUNE 9

NO NUKED FRIDGES



■ The story will essentially be the same across all platforms



■ Multiplayer modes include co-op as well as four-player competitive matches

Indiana Jones can accomplish the impossible. Outrunning boulders, fighting legions of thugs, and uncovering ancient relics are all in a day's work. Even though Indy couldn't overcome the odds with his latest film outing, the fedora-wearing archaeologist still has a few good adventures left in him, and the next one is right around the corner. Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings was initially unveiled a few years ago for the PS3 and Xbox 360, but with those versions now cancelled (see page 17), the Wii is taking center stage.

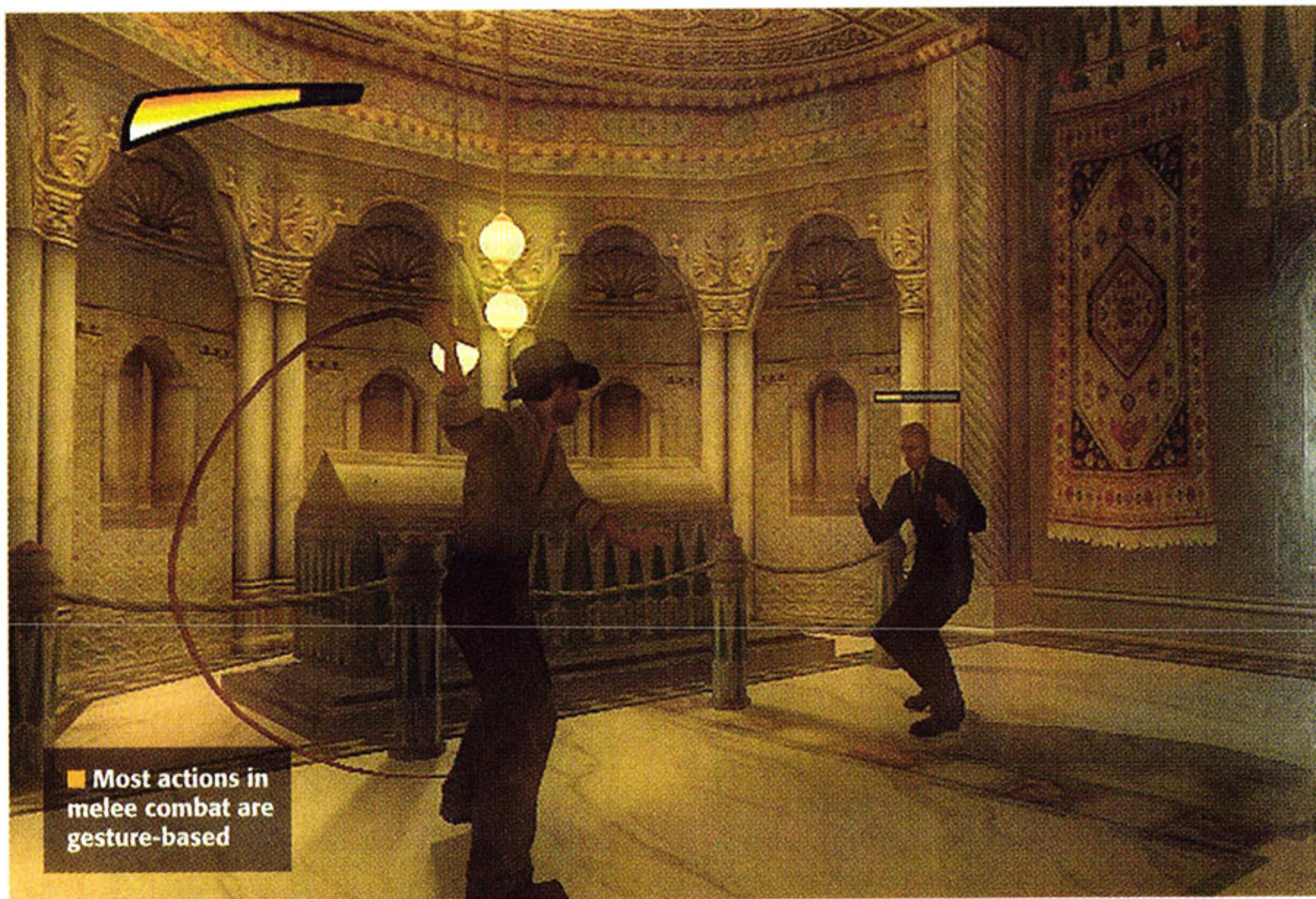
Despite the fact that the game is in development for three other systems, the Wii version of Staff of Kings is the one most gamers will want to check out. This installment seems to have the most interesting exclusive features, including motion controls. "Things that might be too repetitive to be gestures are mapped to buttons, while things that make sense and are fun to be motion based are gestures," says producer Matt Vella. "Hand-to-hand combat is very heavily based on gestures. Use of the whip to grab, disarm, pull enemies off their feet – those are all gesture based." Other non-combat actions, like lighting a fire and steering vehicles, are also handled with motion controls.

Don't worry that all of your time will be spent wiggling the remote and nunchuk around; Indy is a fighter, but he's also an explorer, and the team is working to ensure that both sides of the character come through in the gameplay. "We paced the

game very carefully so that it is not too heavy in either area," Vella explains. "We want the player to feel like there are a nice variety of things to do, without hitting them over the head with that idea. In other words, we really tried to make sure that the different play styles flowed together naturally through the story."

The events of the game take place in 1939, one year after Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. The single-player campaign follows Indy as he travels the globe searching for the Staff of Moses, but LucasArts will also include competitive and co-op modes. "Co-op is a separate campaign that we're calling internally the comic-story mode," Vella says. "When you enter the mode you're actually selecting a comic from Indy's desk in his office. It has a unique story line that is outside of the main game as well." Fortunately, the second player doesn't need to settle for some second-string hero like Short Round or Satipo for these extra missions; the co-op partner is none other than Indy's dad, Henry Jones Sr.

It may be disappointing that the Wii can't support any Force Unleashed-style material effects in the environments, but the system seems like a natural fit for all of the whip-swinging action fans have come to expect from Indy. Then again, fans aren't expecting much from him after the whole fridge-nuking incident, so hopefully the team at A2M is aiming at a higher mark. ■ ■ ■

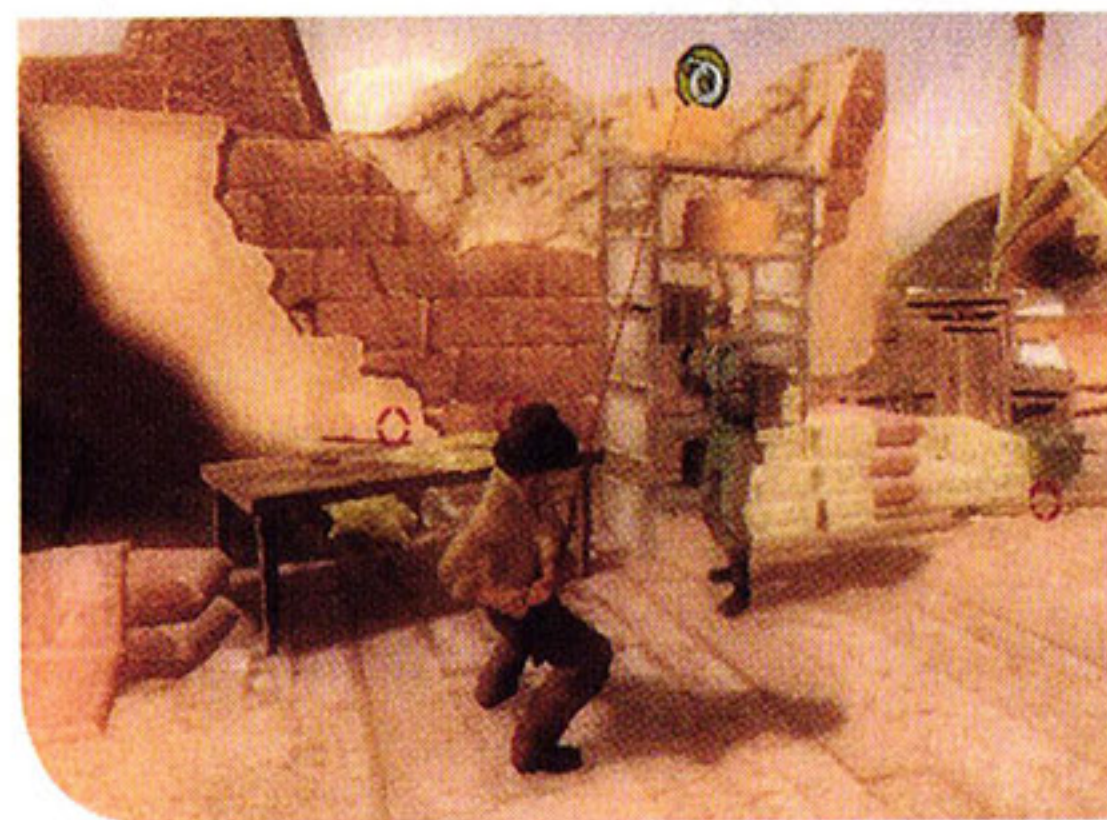


■ Most actions in melee combat are gesture-based



THE LOST CITY

The Wii version of Staff of Kings is really two games in one. As an exclusive bonus, Wii gamers can unlock a full version of the classic adventure title Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis. Originally released in 1992, Fate of Atlantis is regarded as an excellent point-and-click game; the story and characters are worthy of their own movie. Even though that won't happen, this unlockable content is a great opportunity to relive one of Indy's greatest adventures.





■ Meet the snow cat

PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

MotorStorm Arctic Edge

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** BIGBIG STUDIOS > **RELEASE** HOLIDAY 2009

ARCTIC THUNDER

The MotorStorm series has spanned the globe, hosting events at exotic locales for its devil-may-care roster of race participants. Last fall's Pacific Rift featured jungle canopies and flowing lava. Not to be outdone, this Christmas the PSP is hosting far-flung races in an arctic wasteland (which are also coming to the PS2) complete with its own brand of wintery dangers.

Sony-owned BigBig Studios, a developer with team members who've worked on such marquee racing franchises as TOCA Race Driver and Colin McRae, is handling the series' inaugural PSP appearance. Hopefully BigBig continues the pattern of Sony console properties being successfully translated to the handheld (as in the cases of God of War and Syphon Filter).

BigBig is planning on adding a few new touches, including a slew of customization options for your vehicles like spoilers, lights, alloys, and extensive livery patterns and decals. You can apply these to all six original vehicle classes from the previous MotorStorm titles, as well as two new types indigenous to this game's festivals – the snow machine and the snow cat. The latter is a compliment to the big rig, with a large

plough out front to take care of any business that gets in its way.

Naturally, these two additions are particularly well suited to handle the new course features of Arctic Edge. The series has always been about choosing the correct path for your vehicle, and lighter rides like the snow machine are perfect for handling the game's ice bridges, which can be destroyed permanently if risked by the heavier vehicles. On the other hand, everyone should be on equally slippery footing during the bobsled corners – which sound like the icy equivalent to the series' normal high-banked tunnel turns – as well the avalanches. Avalanches are triggered by any loud noises (from big rigs, for instance) or explosions. Both players and the AI can use avalanches, although it seems that they can only be triggered in certain locations.

Arctic Edge seems to be a pretty straightforward MotorStorm experience with a few extra wrinkles added. Thankfully, the PSP is more than powerful enough to handle these additions, making Arctic Edge sound more like a new MotorStorm than a watered down port. ■ ■ ■



■ Ice bridges will only bear so much weight before crashing down



PSP

Rock Band Unplugged

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MTV GAMES > **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE/HARMONIX > **RELEASE** SUMMER

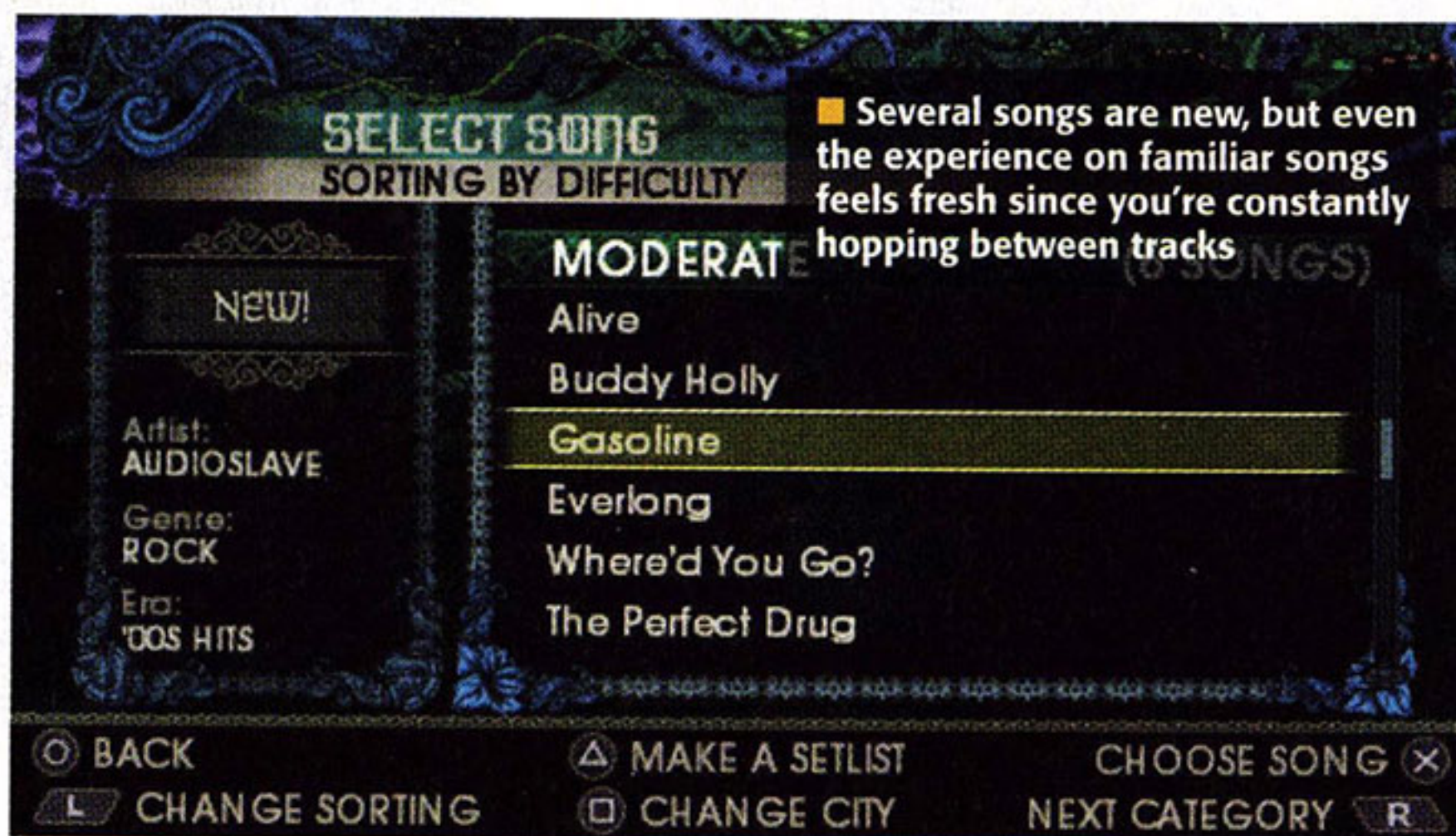
AMPLITUDE IN DISGUISE

More recent converts to the music gaming scene may have heard their friends wax poetic about a PS2 title named Amplitude, one of the early but often overlooked releases from Harmonix. Along with its predecessor, Frequency, it helped to lay the groundwork for titles like Guitar Hero. Luckily for both new and old players, the addictive formula of Amplitude is now set to find new life through the portable incarnation of Rock Band.

It is by no means an exact replication of the original formula. Rather, Rock Band Unplugged mashes together the gameplay concepts of Amplitude with the visual aesthetic, music genres, and structure of Rock Band on consoles. The exclusively single-player experience has you constantly hopping back and forth between the various musical tracks, such as vocals, drums, or guitar. Complete a phrase, and the track continues playing and the score racks up; mess up and you'll have to start a new section of that instrument to bring it to life. Gameplay is fast-paced and challenging, especially as you switch between tracks that have their own unique rhythms.

Despite the name, the music of this new PSP exclusive is by no means acoustic. Instead, expect 41 songs on the UMD, most of which have shown up in one of the previous Rock Band titles, either on-disc or through download. However, nine of the songs are exclusive to the PSP, and 10 songs will be available for download onto your PSP on day one – a promise that bodes well for future DLC. Unfortunately, there is no crossover between the download catalogue of your console version of Rock Band.

Several mainstay features from the console game make an appearance, from a customizable character creator to a 24-city world tour. While the absence of multiplayer is a drag, the single-player experience felt tight and responsive during our time with the game. With Harmonix helping to guide development, Backbone has some big shoes to fill as it preps the game for a summer launch. Our outlook was sunny after they pried the PSP from our hands after a couple hours of play. ■ ■ ■



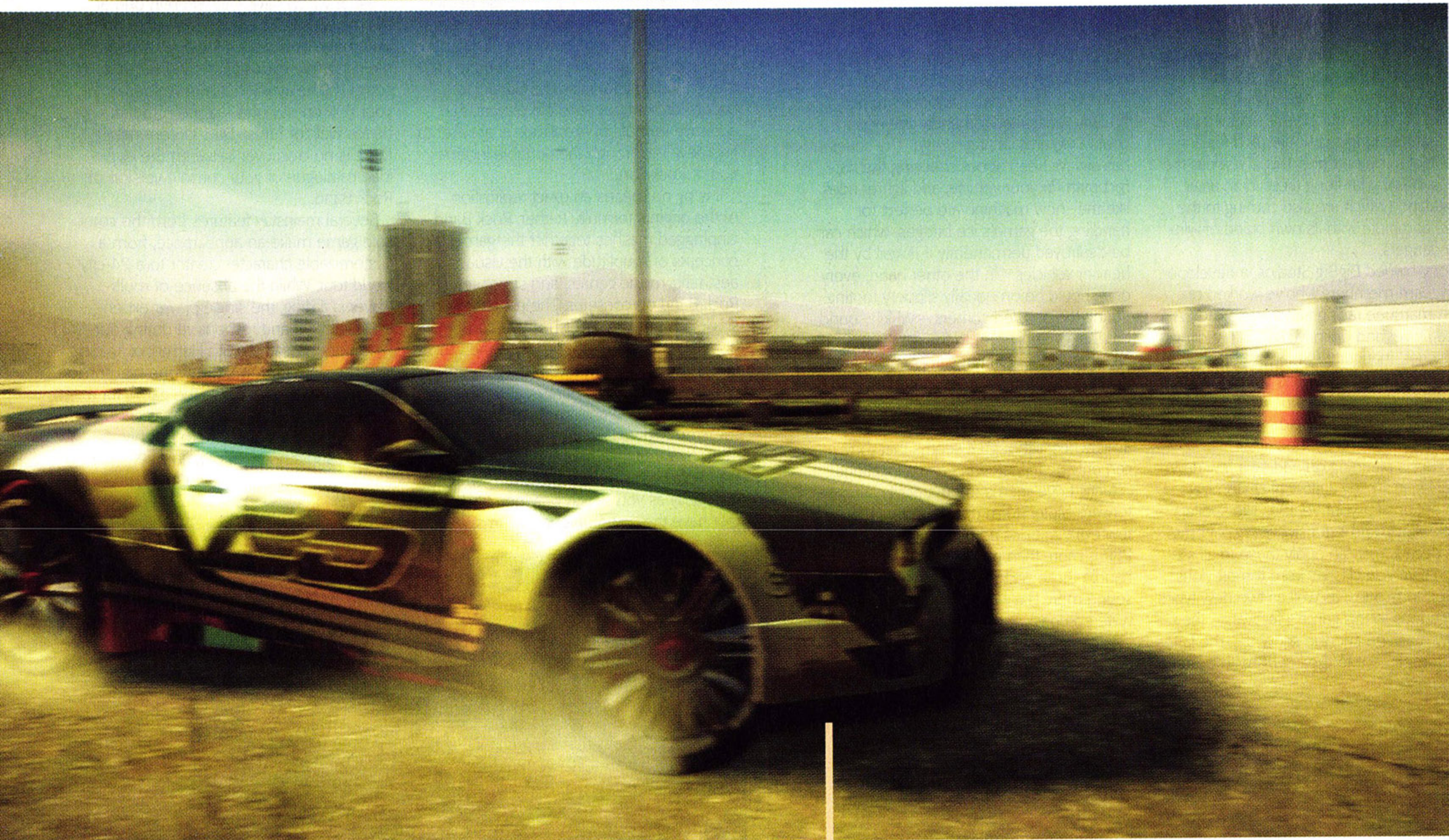


PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Split/Second

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (ONLINE TBA) > **PUBLISHER** DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** BLACK ROCK STUDIO > **RELEASE** EARLY 2010

PRIMETIME CARNAGE



The game's heads-up display isn't final. However, the developer says that it will be different than other racing games. Black Rock Studio wants to deliver all screen info like track position, etc. around the car, so that your eyes don't have to search the corners of the TV just to find information. It should keep you more focused on the action at hand

Those who watch NASCAR only for the crashes, take note. Black Rock Studio's newest game is based on a fictional reality show death race that features tracks filled to the gutters with explosive set pieces, track-altering moments, and deadly competition. "It's kind of like if you let Michael Bay direct NASCAR for a weekend or something," says game director Nick Baynes. "It's a massive, primetime, sports-entertainment show."

The game's tracks are elaborately constructed TV sets packed to the gills with booby traps and aids that players and other racers can activate as they race. You earn power points by jumping, drifting, overtaking, etc. while you race. These fill up three ascending color-coded segments on your HUD that correspond to elements in the

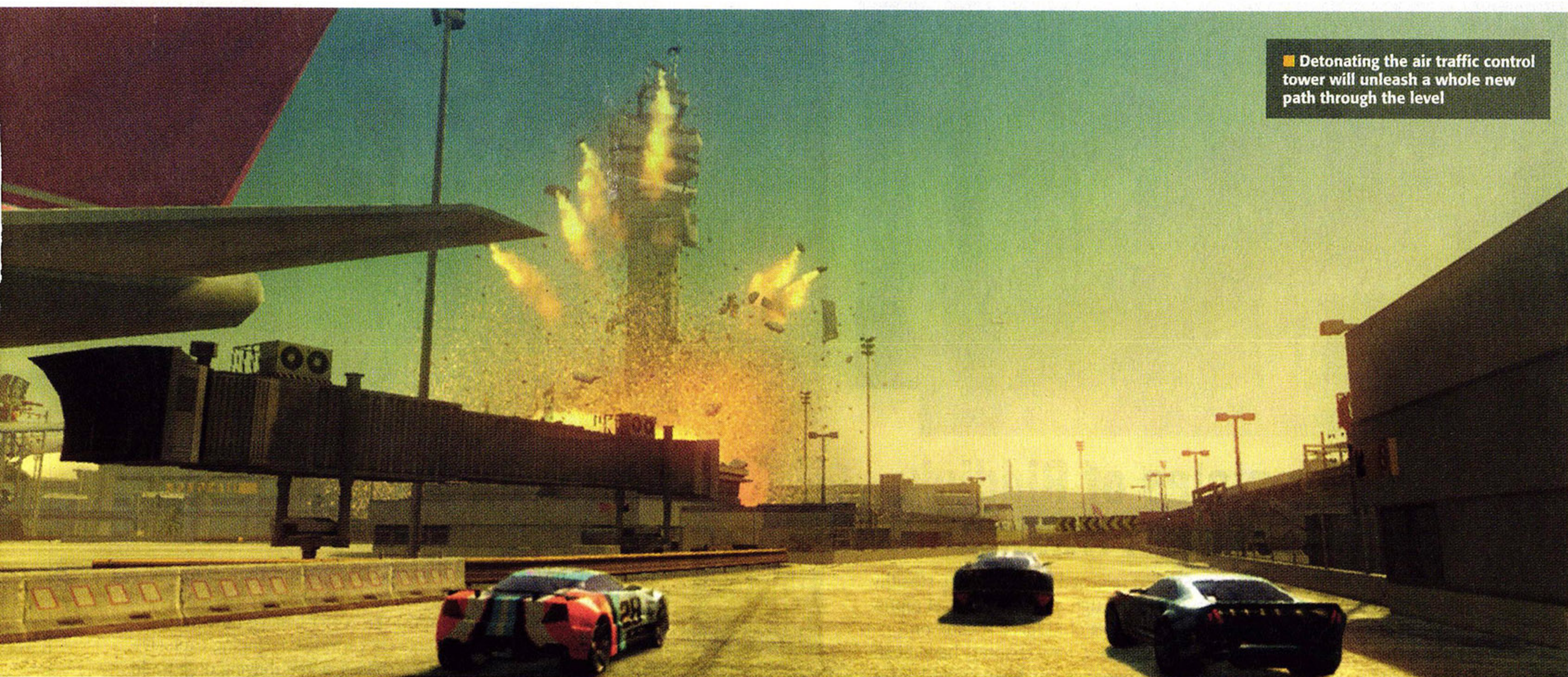
environment that you can trigger to your advantage with what Black Rock calls power plays.

Helicopters can drop bombs on opponents. Gas stations can go up in flames right as someone passes by. Short cuts can be opened up. You can command a giant jackhammer to pound the track at the right time. Fill your meter up and you can drain it all for one super power play that will introduce new areas to the race. "There are a number of levels to it," Baynes explains. "Players can play it just by trying to drive around cleanly and avoiding power plays. They can be doing small power plays. Or they can really be trying to kick it all off."

Baynes walks us through the game's airport track, where you start off on the perimeter of the airport. A monorail circling the track

can be triggered to rain explosives down on the track. Successive laps around the track and the initiation of multiple super power plays let players explode the airport's control tower, blow up the freeway overpass, race through the terminal, get onto the tarmac, and crash through the baggage loaders, all in the name of dealing damage to competitors and getting ahead in the race. Whatever routes you activate, Black Rock wants to make sure there's always something to trigger. "If a player doesn't trigger any of the alternative routes, is it still a really exciting experience? The answer is that it is," Baynes claims. "There are so many power plays on route one that you could do three laps on route one and still be on the final lap still triggering brand-new power plays to change the environment."

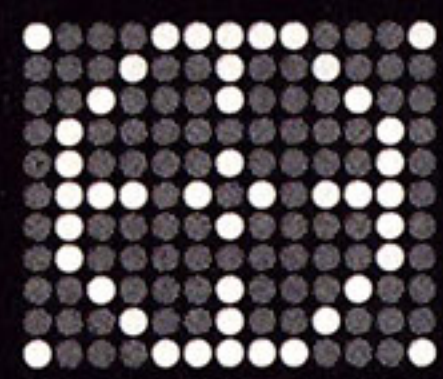
Split Second spans a season of the show and also features interior tracks and upgradable cars – although all of them are comparable in horsepower for competition's sake. Baynes wouldn't talk about the different vehicles (or multiplayer for that matter, beyond saying it exists), but he says they encompass different driving styles and that there is still more to be revealed about them. Varying race types are also available to help break up the main lap racing format. Tired of going around in circles? Nothing an earthquake of TNT can't solve. ■ ■ ■



■ Detonating the air traffic control tower will unleash a whole new path through the level



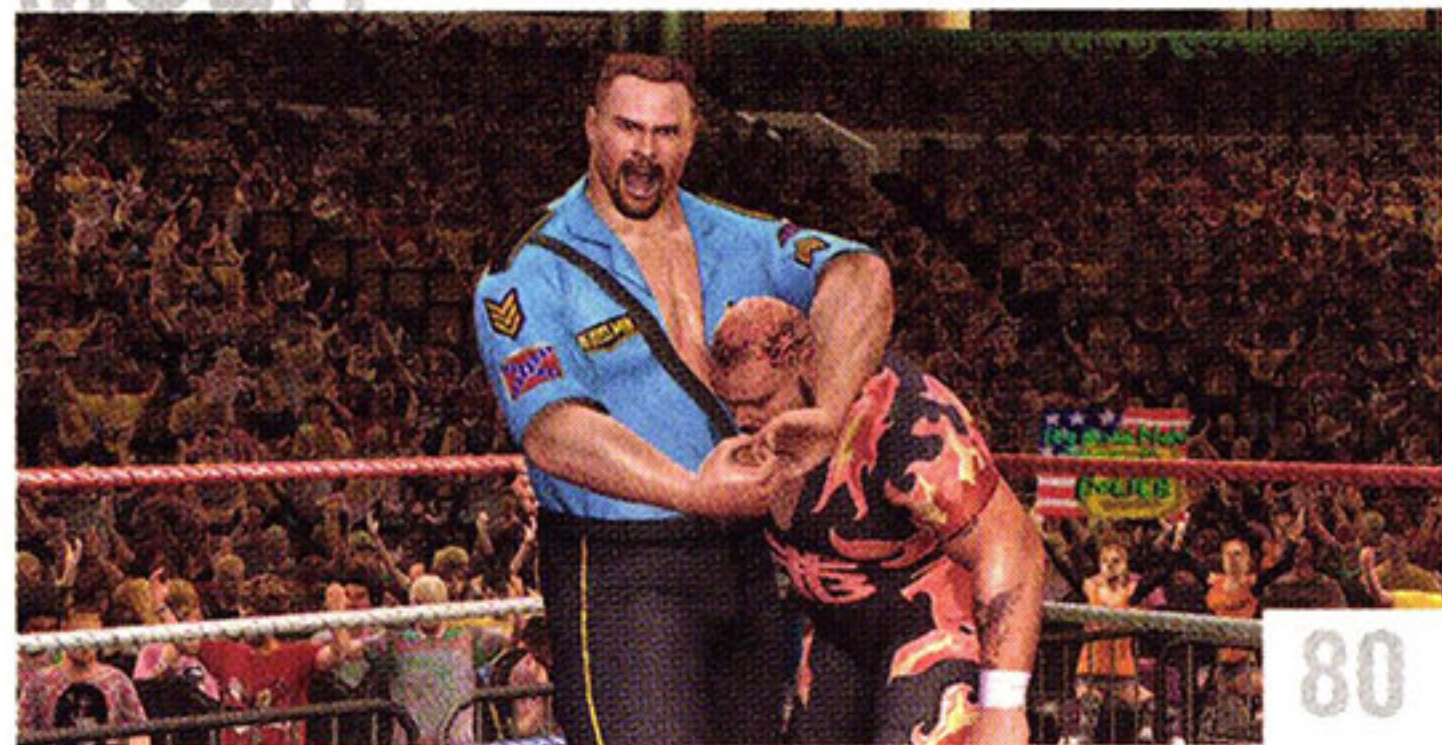
"Maybe there are people out there who love action games and don't play racing games as much. I think they are going to want to pick up this game. We're not just trying to have the best special effects in the racing genre, we're pushing the envelope across all genres."
 – Split Second game director Nick Baynes



REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



WWE Legends of WrestleMania

80

PC



Codename: Panzers - Cold War

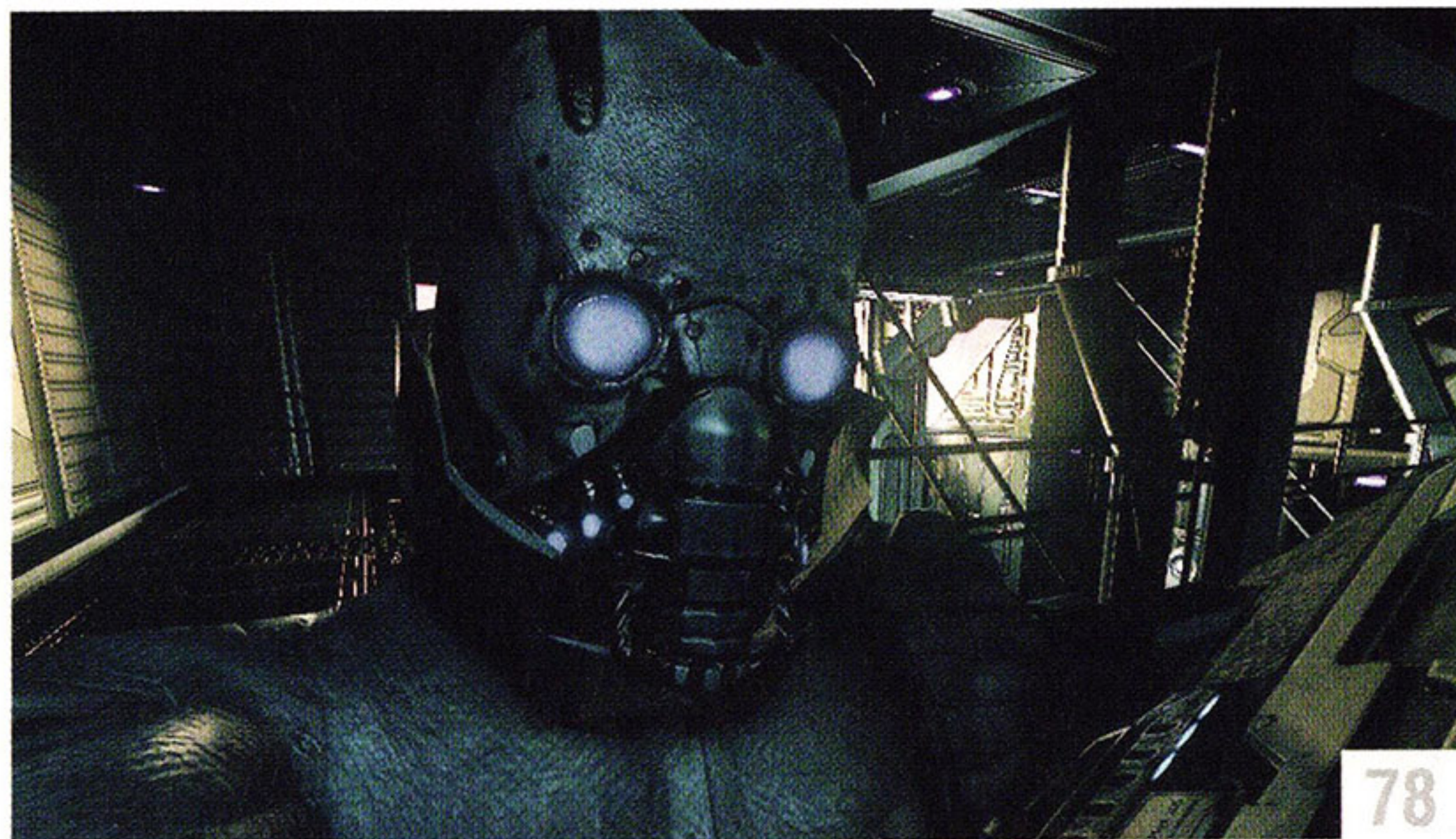
85

Wii



New Play Control Pikmin

87



78



88



The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

Nearly five years ago, Starbreeze Studios released an innovative, stealthy FPS. Thankfully, they couldn't leave well enough alone; Vin Diesel reprises his role as Richard B. Riddick in Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena. The graphics have been updated, new chapters have been added, and a wholly new multiplayer experience has been crafted. It's a remake, a sequel, and a multiplayer map pack all in one package – and it's a must-play for anyone who loves shooters with a twist.



Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

The top-down view may look like a classic Grand Theft Auto title, but the gameplay in Chinatown Wars is on par with this blockbuster franchise's recent console entries. You won't believe how much Rockstar has packed into a single DS cartridge, including explosive sabotage missions, heated police chases, and a thriving drug trade. Just when you thought you'd seen all Liberty City had to offer, Chinatown Wars uncovers even more dark corners of the metropolis perfect for exploration and corruption.

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

THE SCORING SYSTEM

- 10** Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
- 9** Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
- 8** Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.
- 7** Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.
- 6** Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.
- 5** Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
- 4** Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
- 3** Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
- 2** Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
- 1** Syfy. Your failure is total.

- > **Concept:** What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.
- > **Graphics:** How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.
- > **Sound:** Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?
- > **Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.
- > **Entertainment:** Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

> Replay Value

- High** – You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.
- Moderately High** – Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
- Moderate** – Good for a few months or a few times through.
- Moderately Low** – After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
- Low** – You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

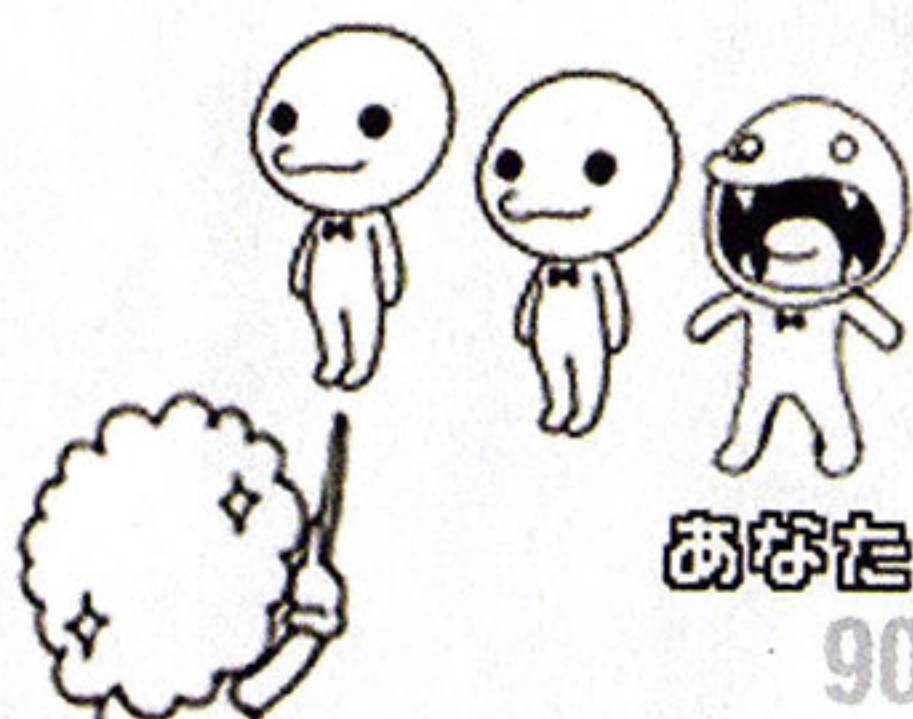
PSP



Resistance: Retribution

89

DS

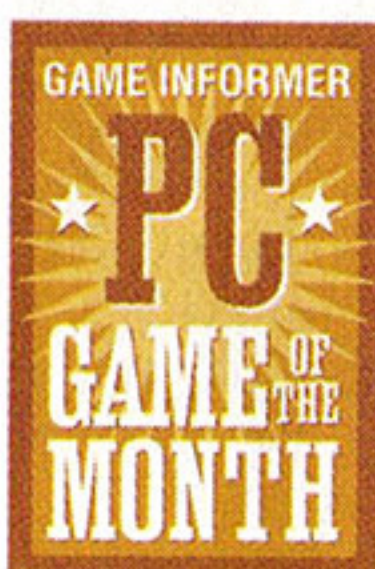


Rhythm Heaven

90



84



Empire: Total War

Taking the Total War franchise into the colonial era and onto the high seas is a winning strategy. This huge turn-based 4X wargame improves on its predecessors in nearly every way. Cutting down on micromanagement on the empire side of things while increasing the variety on the strategic map opens up that arena of gameplay, while moving into a time period defined by the wide usage of gunpowder puts a whole new face on tactical combat. Empire: Total War is the total package when it comes to conquering the world.

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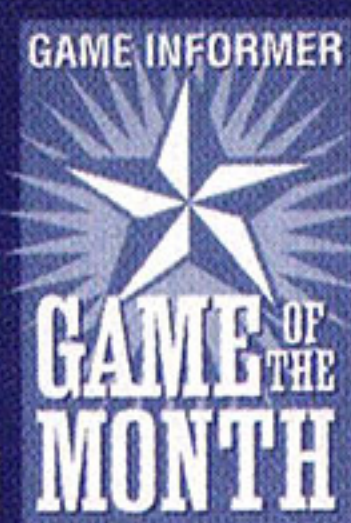
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.		Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.		Content suitable only for adults.
	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.		Product is awaiting final rating.
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		

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

- 1080i** – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced
- 1080p** – Currently the best resolution for gaming on an HDTV. In widescreen, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format
- 480p** – Progressive scanning, this option ("p"= progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture, 480i ("i" = interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting
- 720p** – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The "p" means that the video is in progressive format
- 4X** – A term we use for games like Civilization and Total War. The abbreviation means "explore, expand, exploit, exterminate"
- action** – A term we use for games like God of War and Devil May Cry
- ad hoc** – A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity
- AI** – Artificial Intelligence. Usually refers to how well the computer reacts to human opponents or works with human allies
- adventure** – A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island
- bloom** – An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces
- board** – A term we use for games like Scene It? and Mario Party
- cel shading** – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels
- CG** – Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics
- DLC** – Downloadable content. Usually takes the form of inexpensive or free add-ons to existing games
- E3** – Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry
- first-party** – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system
- fighting** – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive
- FPS** – First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase "frames per second," or how many animation frames happen in one second
- framerate** – The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement
- frontend** – A game's menus and options
- HDTV** – High Definition Television
- HP** – Hit Points. A numerical representation of a character's remaining life. Common in RPGs
- HUD** – Heads Up Display. The various status indicators overlaid on the screen, like mini-maps and health bars
- infrastructure** – A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances
- IP** – Intellectual Property. A single game or franchise encompassing the ideas and characters contained within
- isometric** – Three-quarters top down view, like Warcraft 3 or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance
- jaggies** – Graphical lines that look jagged when they should be straight
- LAN** – Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay
- Lydon B. Johnsoning** – The best word Ben invented this month. You don't want to know the worst one
- MMO** – Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role-playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft
- motion blur** – Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed
- music** – A term we use for games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band
- NPC** – Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans
- particle effects** – Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time
- platform** – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Ratchet & Clank
- pop-up** – When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance
- PS2** – Sony PlayStation 2
- PS3** – Sony's PlayStation 3 console
- puzzle** – A term we use for games like Tetris and Picross
- racing** – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart
- RPG** – Role-Playing Game. A term games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls
- RTS** – Real-Time Strategy. A subgenre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer
- shooter** – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius
- sports** – A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin
- strategy** – A term we use for games like Disgaea and Fire Emblem
- third-party** – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI
> **DEVELOPER** STARBREEZE/TIGON > **RELEASE** APRIL 7 > **ESRB** M

THE BLACK BOX

Many of the gamers I talk to have never played the original Xbox title *Escape From Butcher Bay* that anchors this value-packed release. With *Dark Athena* releasing on all high-powered consoles, there is absolutely no excuse not to play this incredible game.

The remastered *Butcher Bay* looks better than most new titles out today and the gameplay still feels fresh after all these years. The generous mix of stealth and action gameplay still works brilliantly. Whether you're working prison politics in your favor, upsetting the system from the shadows, shiving a fellow inmate, or experiencing one of the explosive action sequences, you will feel like the baddest dude in a place full of bad dudes. Aside from the snazzy presentation, the bonus mech level from the PC "Developer's Cut" is back in. *Butcher Bay* does show its age in the inconsistent lip-synching and occasional unhidden loading screens (the second prison yard is the worst offender by far). Even though players can easily skip to the *Dark Athena* content if they choose, *Riddick* veterans and rookies alike really should start out here.

Assault on Dark Athena picks up right where the first game leaves off, with Riddick's ship pulled in by the tractor beam of the massive and menacing ship *Athena*. Here you'll trade the confines of prison

for the corridors of a starship. Captain Revas, the first of many female characters debuting in the *Riddick* game universe, is the primary antagonist of this more than 10-hour campaign. Her ship is full of mercs and drones, which are former humans whose insides have been replaced with electronics that allow remote control (yes, you get to pilot these guys eventually).

Of course, there's plenty of sneaking around in the dark, and Riddick's new curved *Ulak* blades provide an efficient slice and dice takedown. All of the old weapons have been visually redesigned and the new SMG blends in nicely. The most drastic addition to your arsenal, however, is the SCAR gun that appears later in the game. This allows you to shoot out up to five mines with the right trigger and detonate them simultaneously with the left. Not only does this provide some amusing antagonism toward enemy troops, but it's also cleverly incorporated into a few tense boss battles.

Once again, you're never doing the same thing for long. You'll platform up a towering wall while avoiding a spotlight, fight the toughest guy on the ship hand to hand, go outside for a spacewalk, and chat up the ship's prisoners who are in line for drone conversion. These characters, and Revas for that matter, all come to life through excellent voice acting and lifelike animation. The second half of

BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

> **Concept:** Spruce up a true classic and add in a full-length sequel and multiplayer

> **Graphics:** The original looks great with a new coat of paint, but the *Athena* content looks even better

> **Sound:** Diesel's gravelly voice will rattle your living room when gunfire and explosions die down

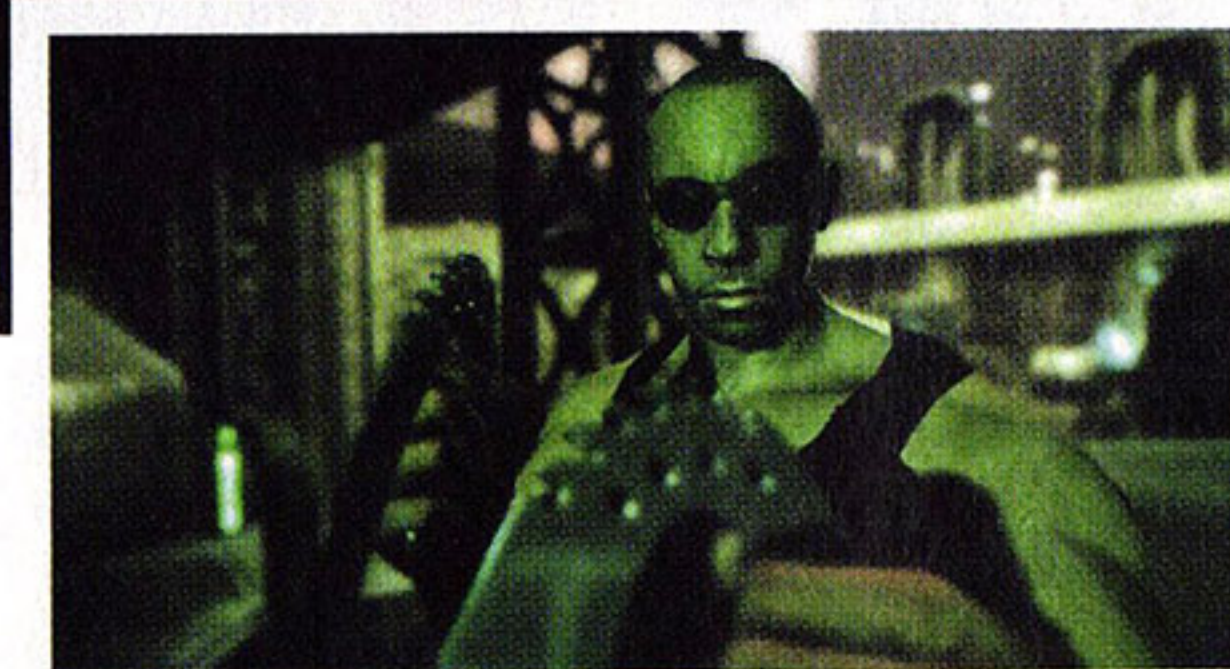
> **Playability:** The weapon selection wheel can be clunky in the midst of battle, but both melee and gunplay shine

> **Entertainment:** Stealth, platforming, action, adventure, and mechs – you're always rotating from one great thing to the next

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

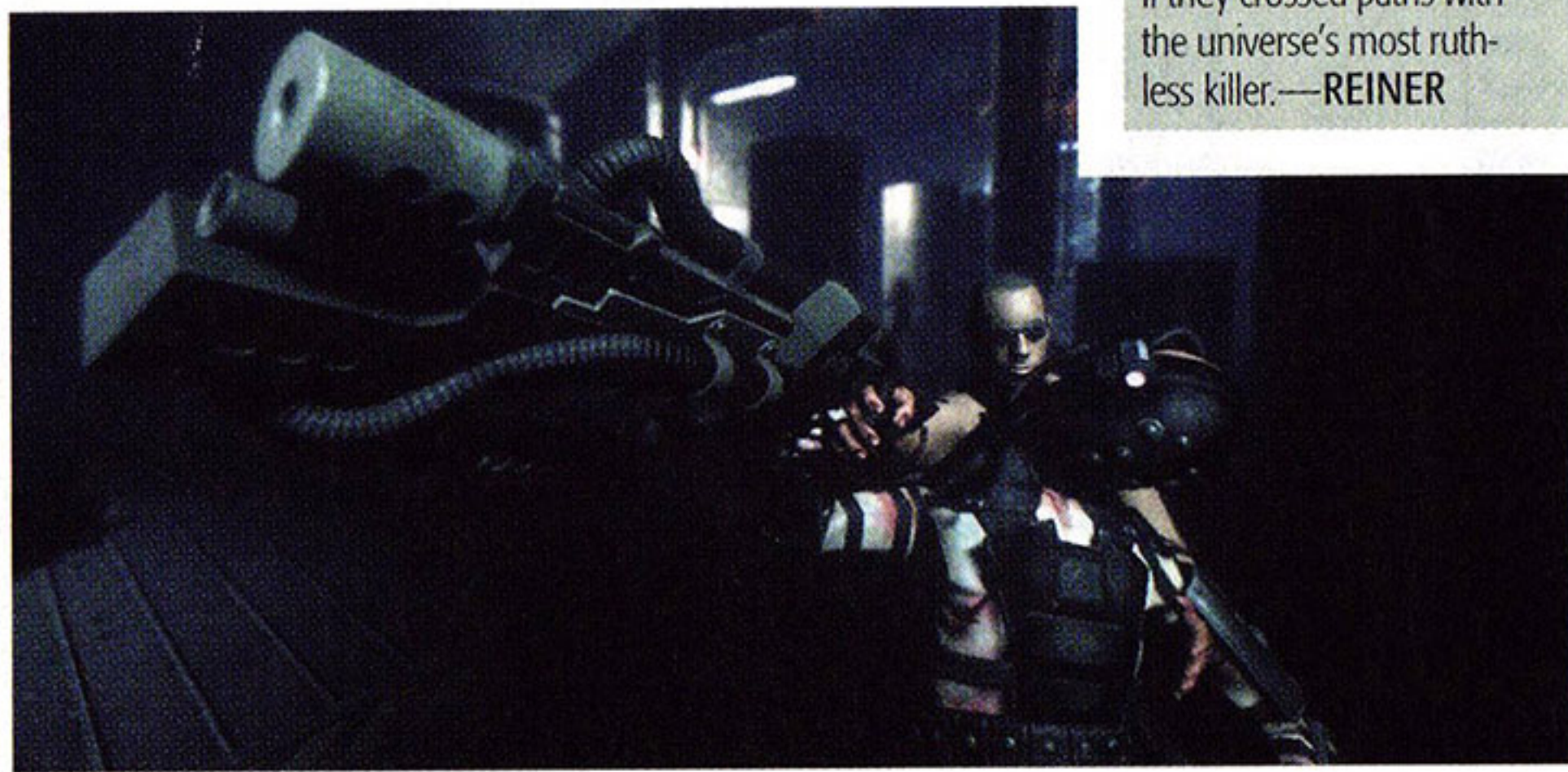
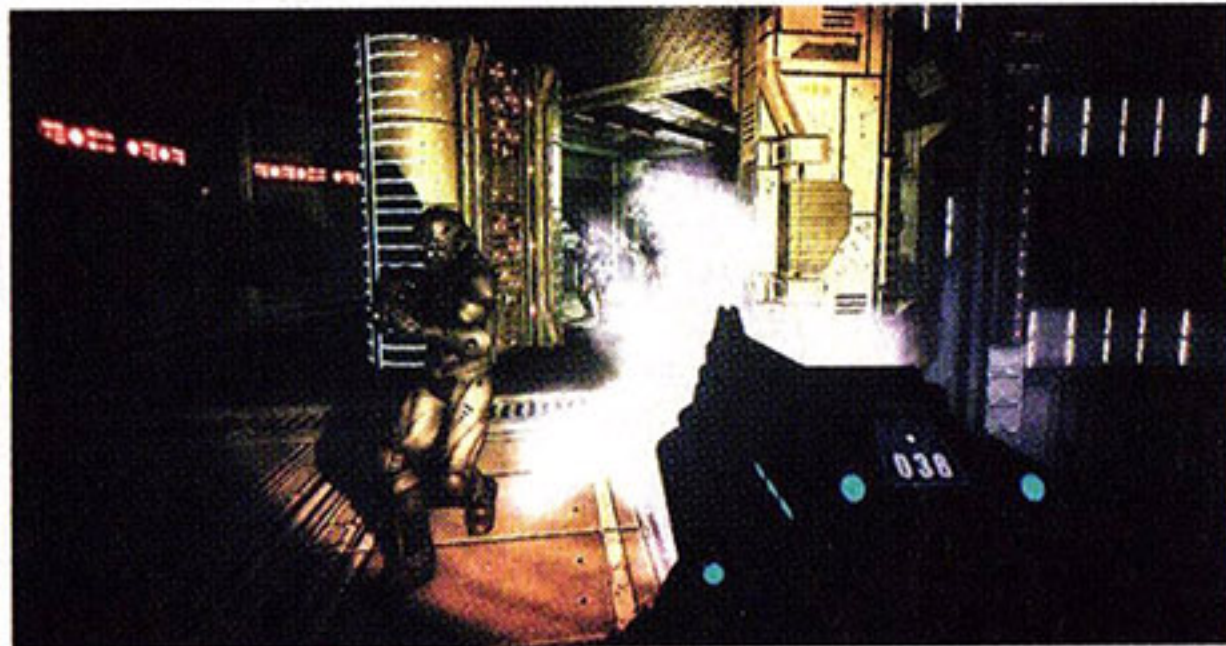
Second Opinion 9.25

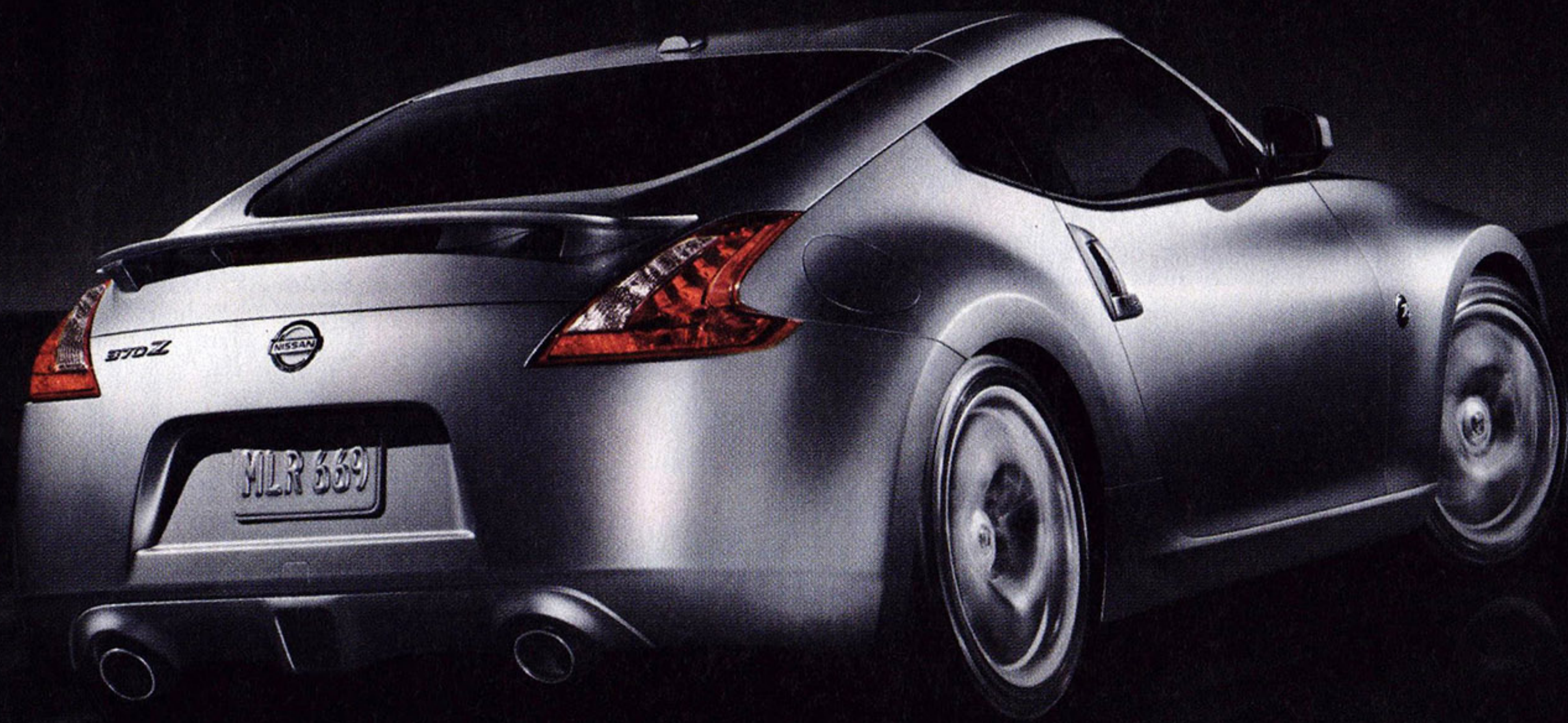
This *Chronicles of Riddick* collection is similar to Valve's *Orange Box*, in that it offers two fully featured games, plus an outstanding *Pitch Black* multiplayer mode that joins the two. The first game, *Escape From Butcher Bay*, is an enhanced port of the Xbox/PC game released in 2004. Like a fine wine, this title has gotten better with time. The new character models, atmospheric lighting, and subtle gameplay tweaks go a long way in lifting up the gameplay – whether it's lurking in the shadows for a kill, beating the snot out of a prisoner for a pack of smokes, or launching rockets at guards from the cushy seat of a mech. The lifeless banter between characters is the only aspect that still retains a classic feel. The second game, *Assault on Dark Athena*, is a direct sequel that retains the conceptual basis of original game of Riddick fleeing a prison colony, yet shows significant growth in its level designs and pacing. The solutions to puzzles are not as obvious (think *Half-Life 2*), and new jaw dropping ideas are continually introduced into the gameplay mix. *Dark Athena* also offers this franchise's most riveting narrative (yes, I think it's better than *Pitch Black*). Basically, picture what would happen to *Star Trek's* Borg if they crossed paths with the universe's most ruthless killer. —REINER



Dark Athena places Riddick in unfamiliar territory – sunlight. The bright and open level designs change the rules significantly and provide some thrilling moments, but I prefer the earlier ship sections overall. Plus, those damn spider turrets drive me nuts!

Multiplayer is closest to *Unreal Tournament* in flavor (complete with tough-voiced narrator) and includes standards like deathmatch, capture the flag, and close quarters arena matches. And *Butcher Bay Riot* pits three teams against each other for control of a power cell. All of these match types are entirely solid, but *Pitch Black* mode is the only one that captures the unique *Riddick* gameplay. Up to five players pursue Riddick in total darkness with only their flashlights to guide them. The *Riddick* player can see in the dark and kills up close with his *Ulaks*. Although the *Riddick* role is constantly shifting, it's still quite fun to be on either side of the flashlight. Consider it one more reason to buy one of the year's best deals in gaming. —BRYAN





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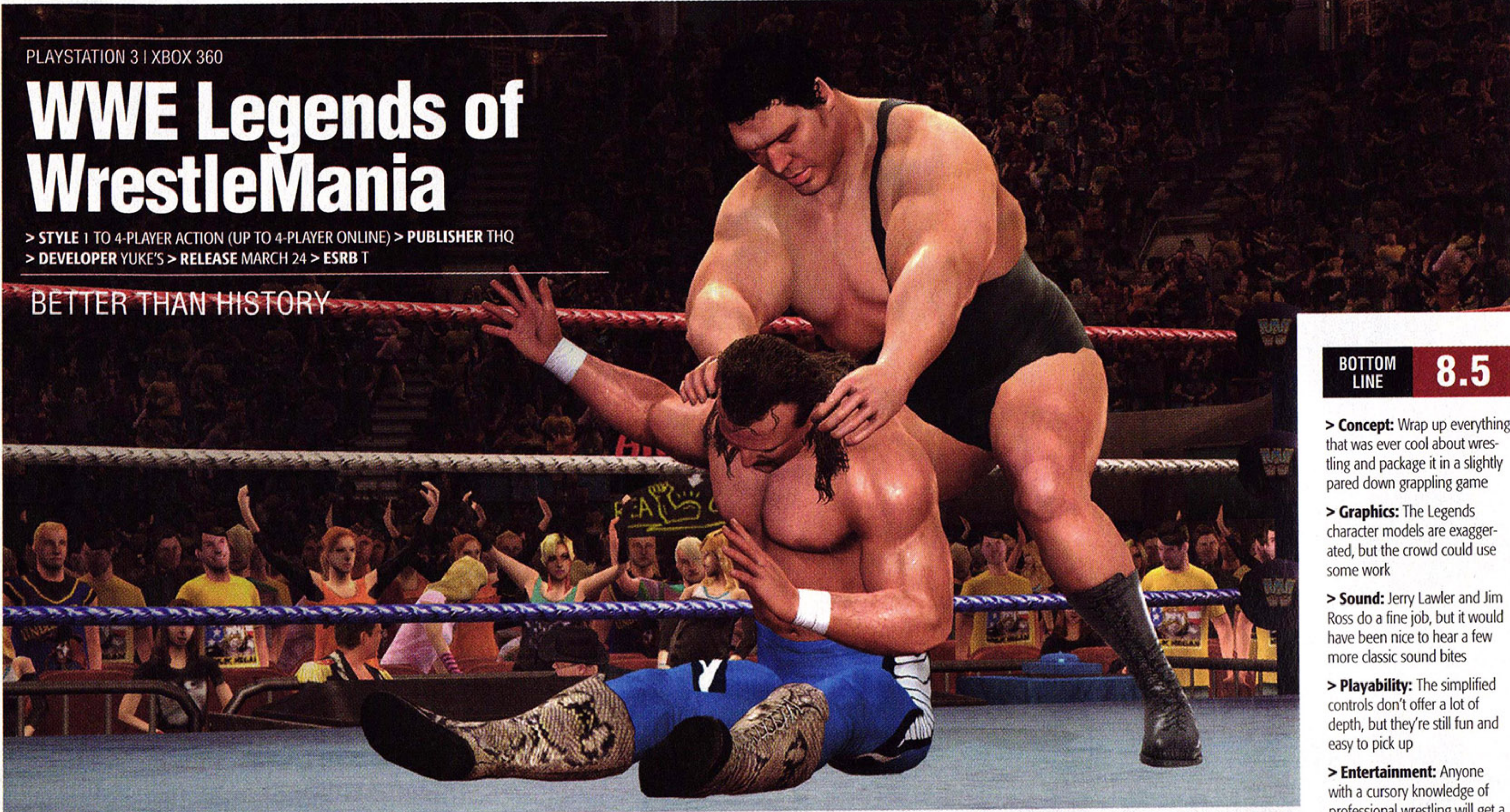
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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

WWE Legends of WrestleMania

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER THQ
> DEVELOPER YUKE'S > RELEASE MARCH 24 > ESRB T

BETTER THAN HISTORY



If Andre the Giant's betrayal of Hulk Hogan before Wrestlemania III brought tears to your pre-teen eyes, if Mike Tyson's appearance at Wrestlemania IV still gives you chills, if you find yourself pining for the days when gaudy mangers could meddle with the outcome of a match, then Legends of Wrestlemania is for you. This collection of what made wrestling cool in the '80s and '90s lets hardcore fans relive the exhibitions of more than 40 larger-than-life WWE Legends and their managers. But what's most impressive about this fan service title is how easily it will rope in non-fans.

The real superstar in Legends is the featured Relive, Rewrite, Redefine mode. This feature lets you reenact classic matches from WrestleManias I through XV, and in some cases, change history. Two minute introductory movies precede each historical match. These montages are comprised of actual televised footage, and do an amazing job of not only bringing newcomers up to speed, but of getting fans fired up about these classic rivalries. During the matches, mini-objectives reward you with points

for performing moves from the real match. The closer you come to recreating the event, the closer you'll get to that gold medal.

Legends' control system has been trimmed down to the four face buttons, giving the action a quick, arcade-like feel. While it isn't as robust as Smackdown vs. Raw, these brawlers still know their way around the ring. Context sensitive actions, unique finishers, and a few out of the ring weapons help give each match some diversity.

The beauty here is how much research has gone into the presentation. Despite the over-the-top

■ Normally we like to make fun of how silly these wrestlers look, but we can't see anything wrong with this picture



graphics, the game almost feels historic in its recreation of classic arenas, wrestlers, and signature ring entrances. Yellow text displaying each wrestler's name even scrolls across the bottom of the screen emulating the older broadcasts, which makes the commentary from the modern-day team of Jerry "The King" Lawler and Jim Ross slightly jarring. It's also strange to see these legends collide in the ring, watch their mouths animate with hatred, yet hear nothing spew out. I understand that getting audio samples for all of the characters is impossible, but any voice work – even soundalikes – would have made the exchanges less hollow.

The game's not perfect – the camera can get a little wonky whenever you move out of the ring, your AI opponents sometimes perform cheap comebacks from out of nowhere, and the button-mashing combat won't satisfy everyone. Still, this is a no-brainer for anyone who still has a yellow Hulkamania shirt tucked away in their closet. And even those who associate Hulk with a green-skinned Lou Ferrigno shouldn't immediately turn away. Legends of WrestleMania is a history lesson you won't sleep through. —BEN

■ Players who spent a lot of time with last year's Smackdown vs. Raw 2009 will be happy to know that they can import those created characters into Legends



BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Wrap up everything that was ever cool about wrestling and package it in a slightly pared down grappling game

> **Graphics:** The Legends character models are exaggerated, but the crowd could use some work

> **Sound:** Jerry Lawler and Jim Ross do a fine job, but it would have been nice to hear a few more classic sound bites

> **Playability:** The simplified controls don't offer a lot of depth, but they're still fun and easy to pick up

> **Entertainment:** Anyone with a cursory knowledge of professional wrestling will get a kick out of the historical match ups, but even newcomers might find themselves surprisingly enthralled

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **8**

Sure there have been wrestling legend compilations in the past, but none have ever brought this level of presentation. In recreating the biggest matches from WrestleMania, real TV footage sets up the rivalries and does a great job of getting you pumped for the match. "I can't believe Andre would betray the Hulkster like that," you'll proclaim. I enjoyed Relive mode's checklist in which you have to pull off the big moves from the real match to earn medals and unlockables. While Rewrite and Redefine lets you toy with history in interesting ways, their checklists are far more generic and repetitive. The controls are simple and responsive, which is well suited for lapsed wrestling fans like myself, but more current SvR 09 fans will be happy to know they can import most of the roster and their created characters in Legends. The Legend Killer career mode allows some leveling for your inevitably weird-looking created character, but the fact that you have to defeat many wrestlers in a row without checkpoints means you can only take this on if you have a decent chunk of time to play. —BRYAN

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** A seamless blend of tried-and-true racing objectives and summer blockbuster action movie fireworks

> **Graphics:** Vin Diesel's model is well done and the intensity of the crashes jumps off your screen

> **Sound:** Vin is appropriately deep in timbre, and I'm glad that the other actors' accents seem to at least be genuine

> **Playability:** The out-of-car gunplay is a hodgepodge that is adequate at best

> **Entertainment:** Unlike most racing or action games, Wheelman keeps your hands glued to the wheel the entire ride

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Wheelman

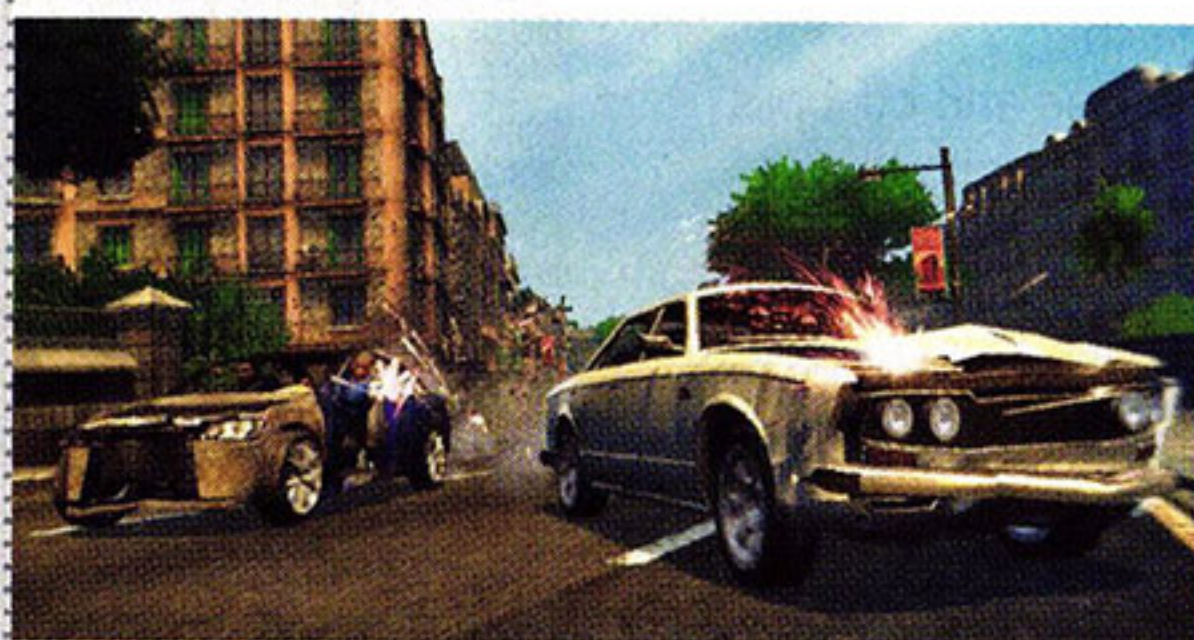
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY STUDIOS NEWCASTLE > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** T

DELIVERING THE GOODS

When you're hired muscle, or in Vin Diesel's case a hired lead foot, you never know what you're going to be asked to do. If you told me before playing Wheelman that I'd be tearing through the floors of office buildings at high speeds, taking on all

LOOKING FOR WORK

Here's a list of the types of side missions available in the game. Each one contains 15 individual missions, and a grade of A or higher earns you a reward.



MADE TO ORDER

Objective: Hijack specific cars and bring them back to a garage

Reward: Unlocks garages where you can repair and repaint your cars

TAXI

Objective: Deliver clients to locations as quickly as possible

Reward: Unlocks spots you can teleport to on the map

FUGITIVE

Objective: Escape to map locations before your vehicle is destroyed

Reward: Gives you more vehicle health

RAMPAGE

Objective: Destroy multiplier objects (like benches) first before destroying everything in your path

Reward: Bestows your vehicles with more melee attack power

STREET SHOWDOWN

Objective: A typical street race with five other vehicles

Reward: Improves your overall vehicle performance

HOT POTATO

Objective: Pick up packages and deliver them to a drop point as fast as possible

Reward: Unlocks up to 50 weapon caches around the city

CONTRACTS

Objective: Destroy specified enemies with melee attacks

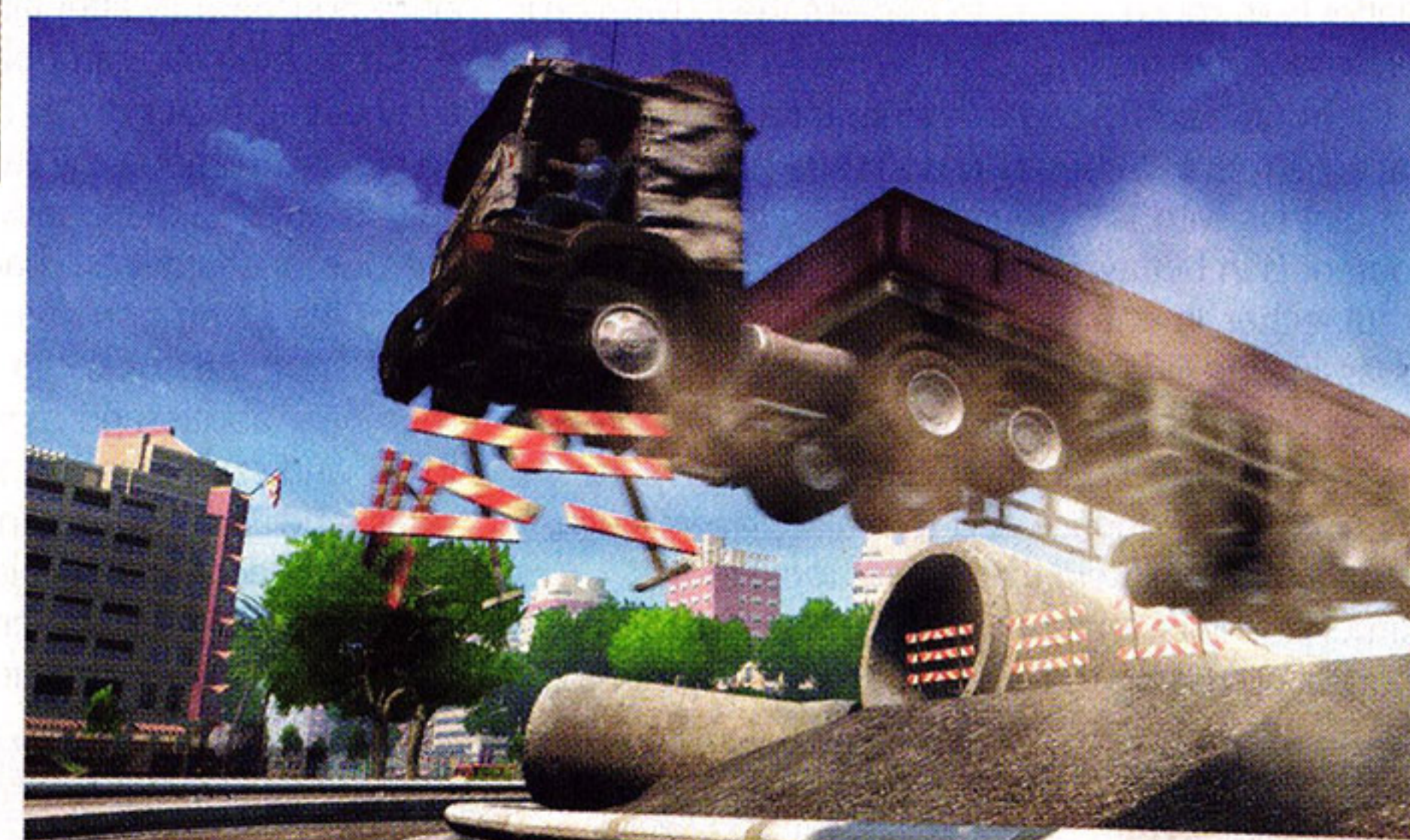
Reward: Increases the capacity of your Focus gauge

challengers in a big rig, and terrorizing everyone in Barcelona, I'd say: "Sign me the hell up!" Whether on foot or behind the wheel, this game plays like a summer blockbuster the whole way through.

Vin Diesel takes the role of Milo Burik, a fixer for three Barcelona gangs. Most of your time is spent running around doing story and side missions, but the game does a good job of elevating you above feeling like just an errand boy. The way it paces the action and its variety of assignments always keep you interested. One of my favorites was when I had to speed down a subway tunnel (complete with oncoming train) chasing a runaway train as I fought off goons on motorbikes and baddies hanging out of the subway cars. Each carriage had to be separated from the main line by shooting the cars' hitches before I could take on the main bad guy at the front of the train.

Wheelman has enough explosive thrills that you'll be yelling and laughing the whole time. Enemy cars don't just crash, they're vaulted up in the air as masses of smoke and fire, scattering their occupants on the street. You don't just get air when you drive up some plaza steps, you are launched into the sky – complete with a cinematic camera angle – much to the terror of your suspension.

None of the game's thrills would be possible without its special moves, such as hijacking cars with an action called the airjack. With a timed button press Vin leaps from his car,



landing on the roof of the car ahead of him and then commandeering it by kicking out the driver in one motion. In later missions, my car was getting hammered so frequently and severely by foes that I was switching cars every 10 seconds. Melee car attacks (via the right analog stick) allow you to swerve and take out vehicles, and you can also lean out of your driver's window and shoot enemies in either real time or slow-motion.

MK DMV

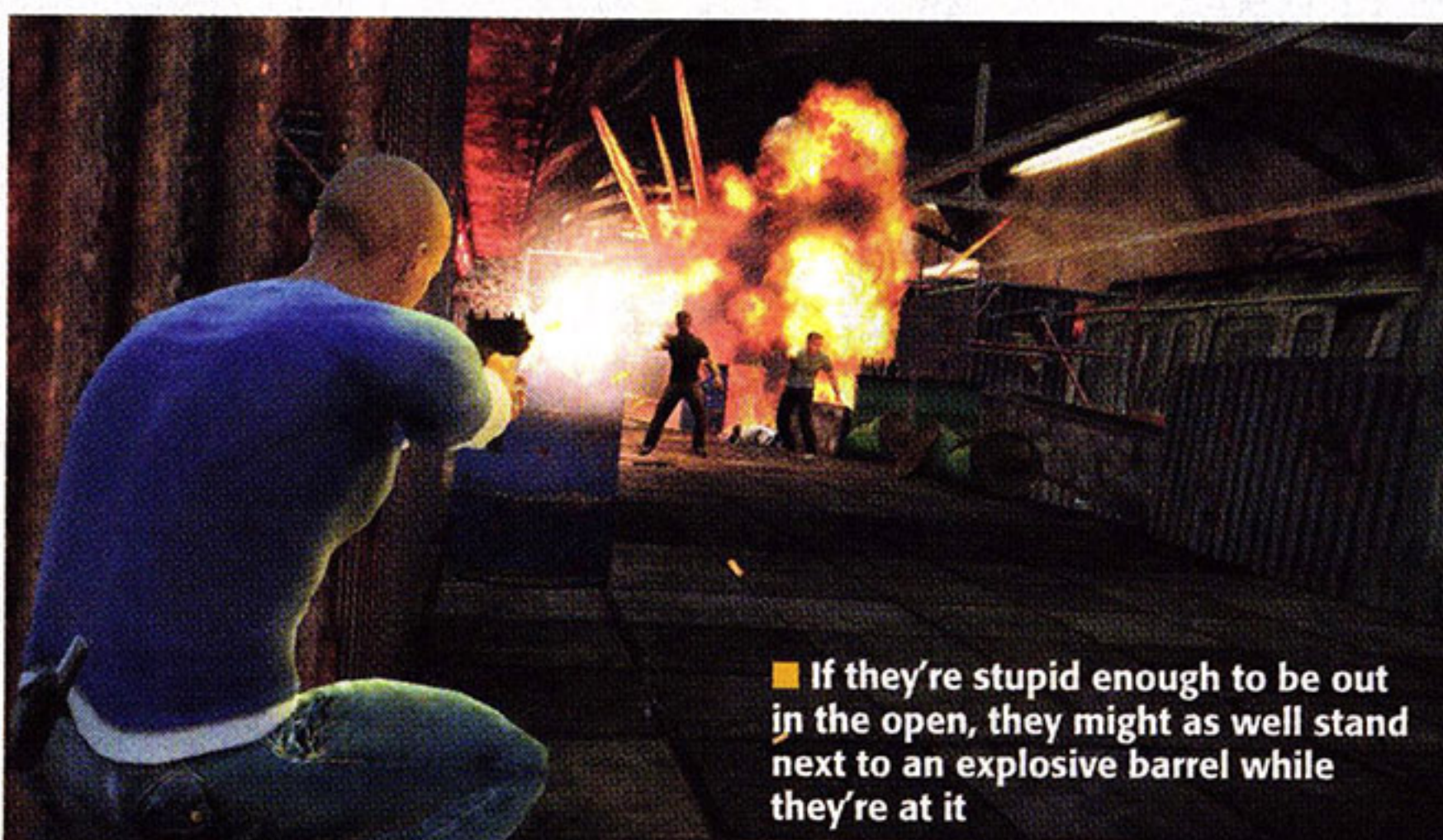
Vehicles' license plates throughout the game reference classic Midway titles. Here are a few of our favorites.

RT8R T4PR
MKV 5DCU
MRBL MDN5
SP1 HNTR
RMP 8GE
DF3 NDR
RO80 TRN

Wheelman is a well-built game, but it's not without a few hiccups. The out-of-vehicle gunplay – while nicely breaking up the driving segments – is an awkward, merely adequate combination of over-the-shoulder, auto, and free targeting. Furthermore, the side

missions (see sidebar) are a great addition, but they are ultimately unnecessary since their rewards aren't required to complete the story. Wheelman misses an opportunity to be more of a complete experience by not offering more of a symbiotic relationship between the story and the side missions.

Vin Diesel may just be a lowly wheelman on the crime syndicate ladder, but he delivers an action experience that is larger than life. —KATO



■ If they're stupid enough to be out in the open, they might as well stand next to an explosive barrel while they're at it

Second Opinion 8.25

Just as The Chronicles of Riddick gave everyone plenty of reason to be skeptical before the game's original release, Wheelman overcomes the odds to prove that Vin Diesel isn't a gaming one-hit wonder. This breezy driving action title doesn't necessarily hit the high mark of Riddick's serious shooter, but it succeeds in different ways. The forgettable under-cover-lawman-in-Barcelona plot only serves as an excuse for a long string of high-action set piece moments like a destruction derby inside a bull ring, a subway train chase on a motorcycle, and a semi-truck smash up. The vehicle melee and air-jacking systems are equal parts ridiculous and fun, and I would love to see these features become standard in all open-world driving games. The sloppy on-foot shooter sections, however, do little to impress, but at least provide some variety. Wheelman may be a little rough around the edges, but its focus on good times over plausibility will have you cheering your own awesome moves through the final chase. —BRYAN

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

The Godfather II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** APRIL 8 > **ESRB** M

AN OFFER THAT'S EASY TO REFUSE

Electronic Arts' interpretation of Francis Ford Coppola's Oscar winning film, *The Godfather: Part II*, draws more comparisons to the raunchy teen film *Porky's* than the masterful gangster story that moviegoers and critics alike herald as one of the greatest sequels of all time. For every shot gangster, a pretty girl is hit on with groan-inducing lines like "Has anyone ever told you that you look like an angel?" Topless women are everywhere; I even saw a few walking down the side of the street. To top it off, a car ride isn't complete without your cronies telling you that you should pull over to pick up a gal. Of course, like *Porky's*, no matter how much you try to impress the ladies, you'll never reel one in.

The foundation is certainly here for an amusing dating game, but I honestly don't see how this content fits with *The Godfather*. Most of this game's content is in betrayal of the license, and it's not all smut, either. In one mission, you are tasked with assassinating Fidel Castro, an act that ends up being just as comedic as *The Naked Gun's* assassination attempt on Queen Elizabeth II. Unfortunately, the intent of this sequence isn't to make players laugh.

But laugh is all I did throughout most of this game. At any given time, you may see two character models occupying the same space. I was fortunate

enough to see two topless call girls meld to create a three-breasted beast. I also got a kick out of shooting the bottom crate in a stack, only to see the others float magically in the air. Upon exiting a vehicle, there's a chance that it may vanish. Periodically while sniping, my bullets were blocked by invisible barriers, even when the target wasn't near cover. Police seem to have short attention spans, as they'll give up during car chases and walk away nonchalantly after taking a shot at you.

The problematic gameplay, unfaithful story, and array of graphical glitches create an experience I wouldn't wish upon my worst enemy, which is a shame since all of the tasks associated with being the Don of a family are handled nicely. When you pause the game, you enter a mode called "Don's View." From here, you can upgrade your family members' abilities, purchase new weapons for them, and send them on attack and defend missions. Additionally, you can promote them when positions become available, and entrust your life to them as protectors who enter battle with you.

Taking out businesses under the control of other

families can bring benefits other than additional income. If you can take control of a crime ring, such as drugs or strip clubs, you'll earn perks for your family. One ring delivers bulletproof vests, whereas another will give you armored cars. These boosts come in handy, as the game's difficulty elevates when other families are introduced into the mix. As you build up your crime syndicate, your rackets will come under attack from rival families. Protecting them isn't difficult, however, as you can send in guards or take the defensive responsibilities into your own hands by driving there. All three of the worlds (Queens, South Florida, and Cuba) are miniscule in size, making most commutes feel like an unnecessary drive around the block.

You can also earn additional cash for your family within the moderately amusing Don Control multiplayer mode, where two dons and seven henchmen on each side battle for control of an area. Each Don has a bird's eye view over the action. He can highlight enemies, reward players with boosts, and dictate the flow of the action. Under his tutelage, the other players battle standard deathmatch style for supremacy. The winning team takes home all of the money wagered before the match.

Most of the gameplay, both online and off, boils down to pop-and-shoot firefights. Despite the hit detection difficulties, these end up being a blast. The excellent lock-on targeting system makes lining up headshots a breeze, and the shotgun decimates everything in your path. Like the last game, if you can corner an enemy, you can finish them with an awesome (albeit graphic) Black Hand execution.

This game shows how having control over a family can be a powerful experience. But as I dictated where a city's money was sent, I couldn't shake the feeling that this wasn't a *Godfather* game. Although many of the characters from the film are present (complete with actor likenesses), the vibe often reflects that of a teen gross-out comedy. The *Godfather II* seems to have more in common with *Saints Row* than the license it gets its name from. —REINER



■ This warehouse contained all the ways the game could fit with the movie. Oops

BOTTOM LINE **5.5**

> **Concept:** Everything that the *Godfather* license is not: ogling boobs, assassination attempts on Fidel Castro, and matching uniforms for the families

> **Graphics:** Cars disappear, boxes float, and entire city blocks pop up right before your eyes

> **Sound:** Although you'll see people playing instruments at strip clubs, you won't hear them. There's hardly any music in this game

> **Playability:** The targeting system and Don's View interactions are the game's only highlights

> **Entertainment:** The real entertainment will come when Francis Ford Coppola sees this game. Here's hoping a camera is nearby!

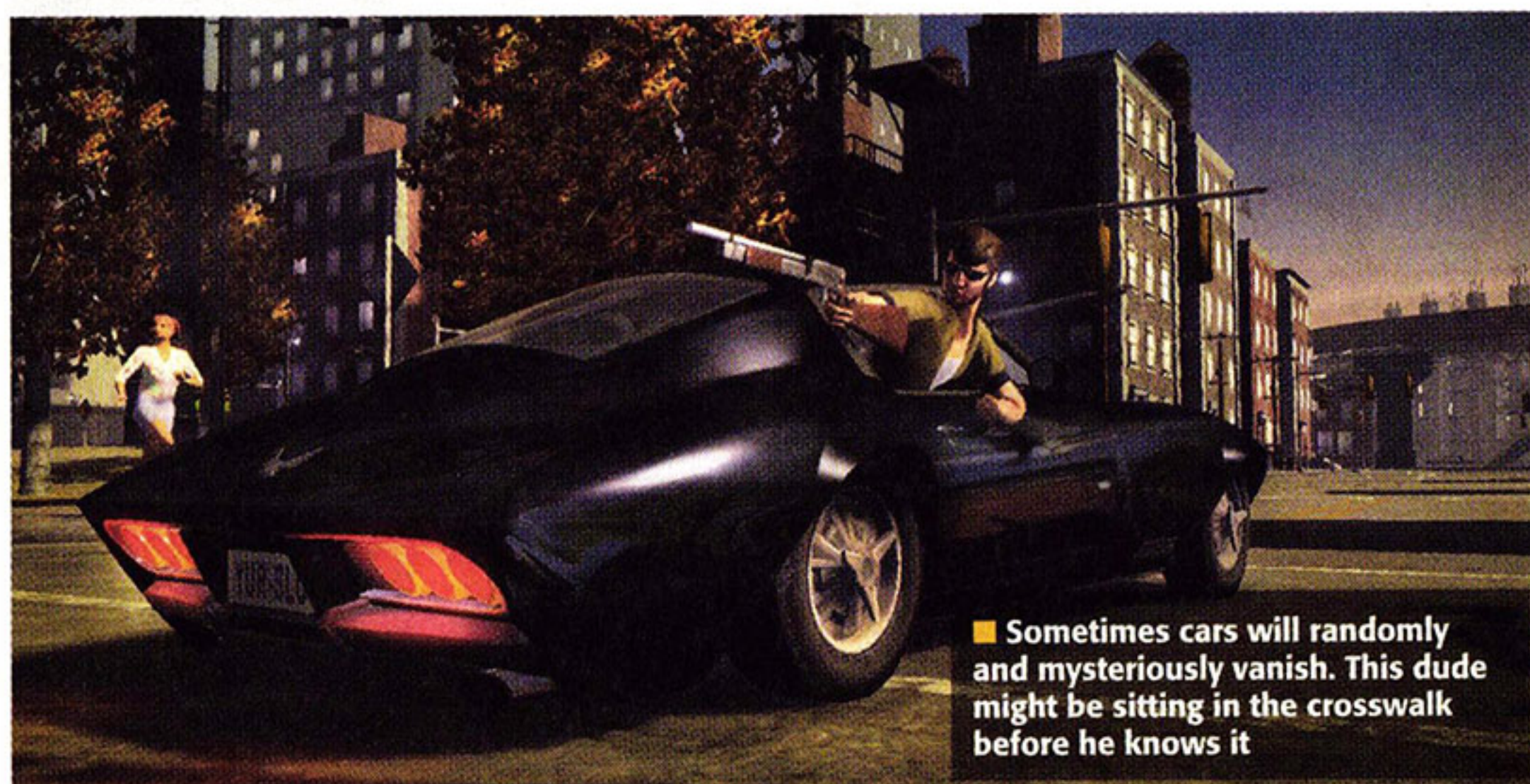
> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5

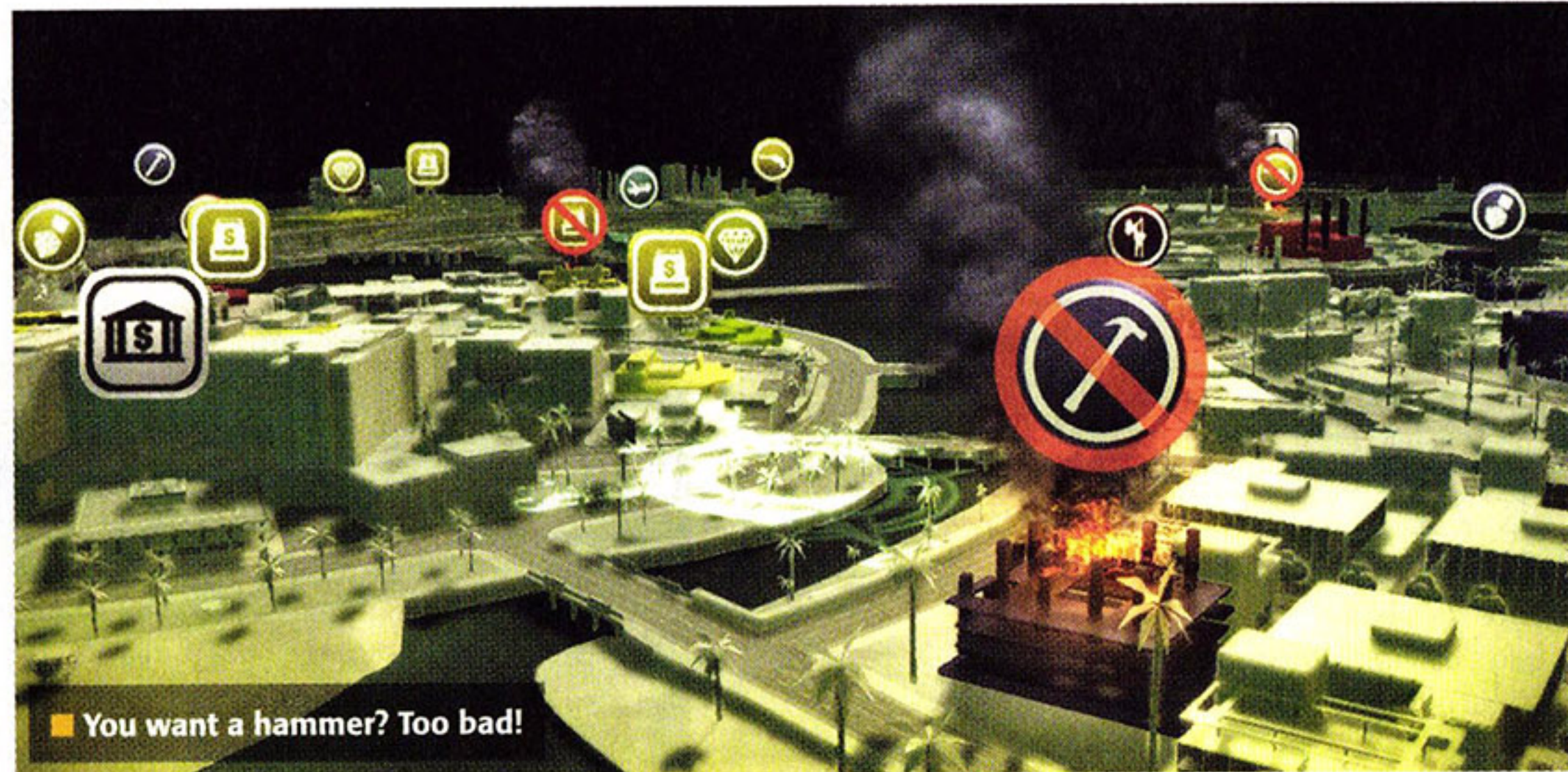
EA mangles *The Godfather* worse than the RICO statutes mangled organized crime. This ugly travesty (we're talking last-gen graphics) suffers from so many gameplay deficiencies and bugs the developers should head for witness protection. Non-player characters fall through couches and floors. Cars get stuck on retention walls and disappear once you exit them. Police inexplicably stop pursuing you during get-aways (I hid behind the bank I just robbed). The miniscule "cities" of New York, Miami, and Havana are so small and uninteresting it's laughable. These gaffes are all the more disappointing because they ruin the excellent Don's View meta-game. Hiring made men, sabotaging rival families, and managing your crime empire is a riveting experience. If the Don's View were skinned over a semi-competent effort, *The Godfather II* would have been an offer you couldn't refuse. As is, this mafioso does us all a favor and turns state's evidence as an example of how not to make a game. —BERTZ



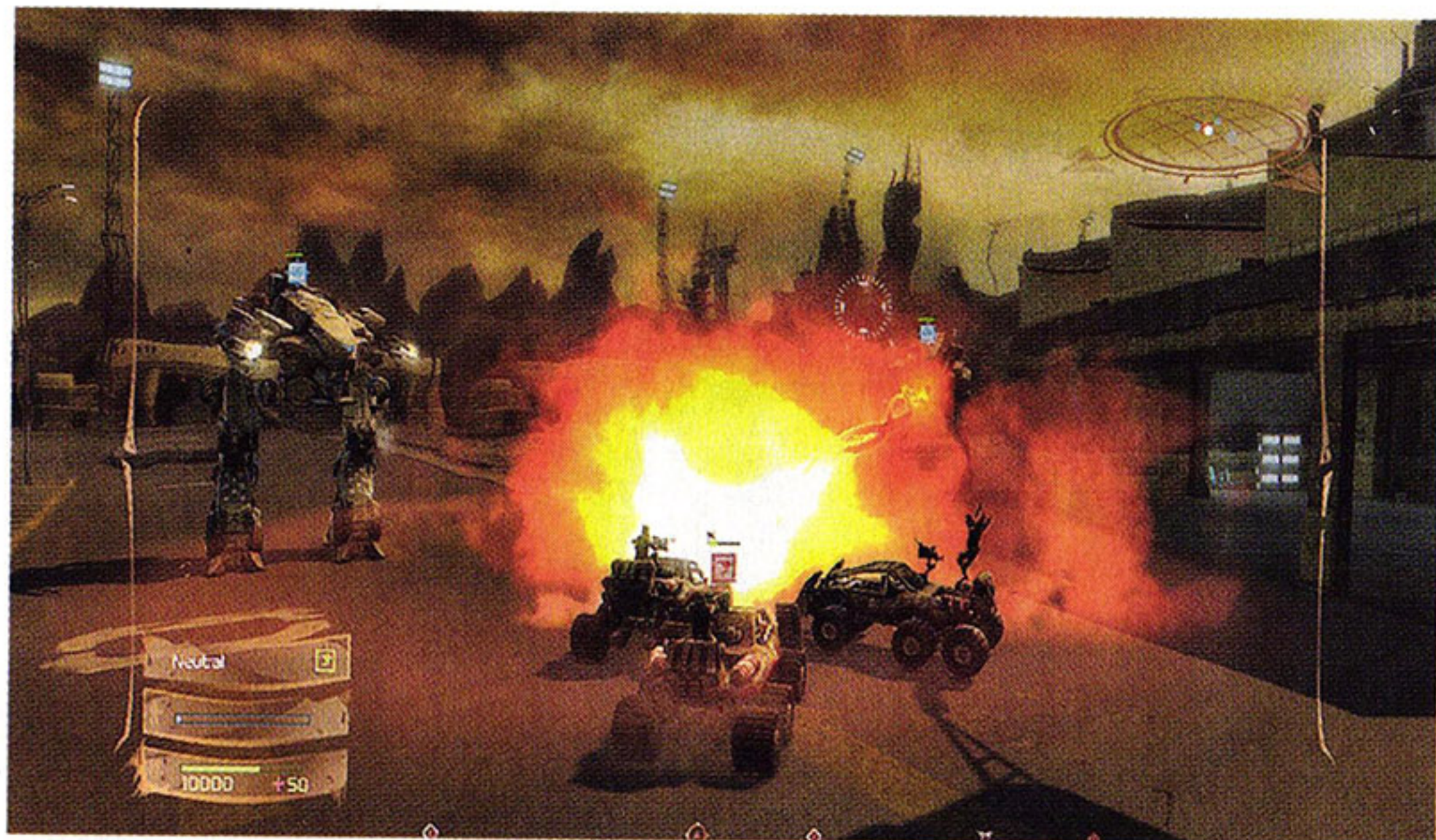
■ From a distance, the graphics almost look like they belong on current gen systems



■ Sometimes cars will randomly and mysteriously vanish. This dude might be sitting in the crosswalk before he knows it



■ You want a hammer? Too bad!



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Stormrise

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** M

S---STORM

It's one thing for a console RTS to be unwieldy and limited when compared to what's on PC (although this excuse runs thin when you look at Halo Wars), but Stormrise doesn't suffer simply because it's on a console. In trying to introduce a new, supposedly user-friendly unit selection system, developer The Creative Assembly instead destroys almost all of the game's playability.

Players select off- or onscreen units via the right analog stick, which rotates a cone of light that emanates from your current unit and highlights whoever you want to select. Upon selecting that unit, the camera zooms to its perspective. This simple system fails whenever you have multiple units to manage – which you always do – due to the fact that the icon you need to highlight becomes lost in a sea of the other unit icons filling the margins of your screen.

Apart from being nigh unusable, Creative Assembly's whip select system hamstring the player's unit options. Many

RTS standards, such as selecting all of your units or units of a specific type, setting rally points for newly created units, and simple AI routines for ally forces, are gone, leaving you with few strategic options. Bum rushing with superior numbers is even a problem given that you can't group and command large numbers of units. This becomes a major hassle given that some levels contain infinitely spawning enemy troops.

If the fundamental flaws aren't enough to make you surrender, even peripheral elements of Stormrise provide no succor. The camera, which eschews the normal top-down RTS view, and its interaction with the environments makes it hard for you to get a good tactical read on the board. The save/checkpoint system uses only one save. Finally, the AI is useless in determining good pathfinding, finding cover, and using its special attacks when ordered. All in all, this game is useless, and the sacrifice its soldiers make in battle is utterly in vain. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE 4

> **Concept:** A console-specific RTS game unfit for human consumption

> **Graphics:** The close action camera gives the game a different look, but it also highlights its generally bland visuals

> **Sound:** It's hard to blame the voice actors when the dialogue lines are this excruciating

> **Playability:** The onscreen radial unit selection system is confusing, limited, and not worth its few benefits

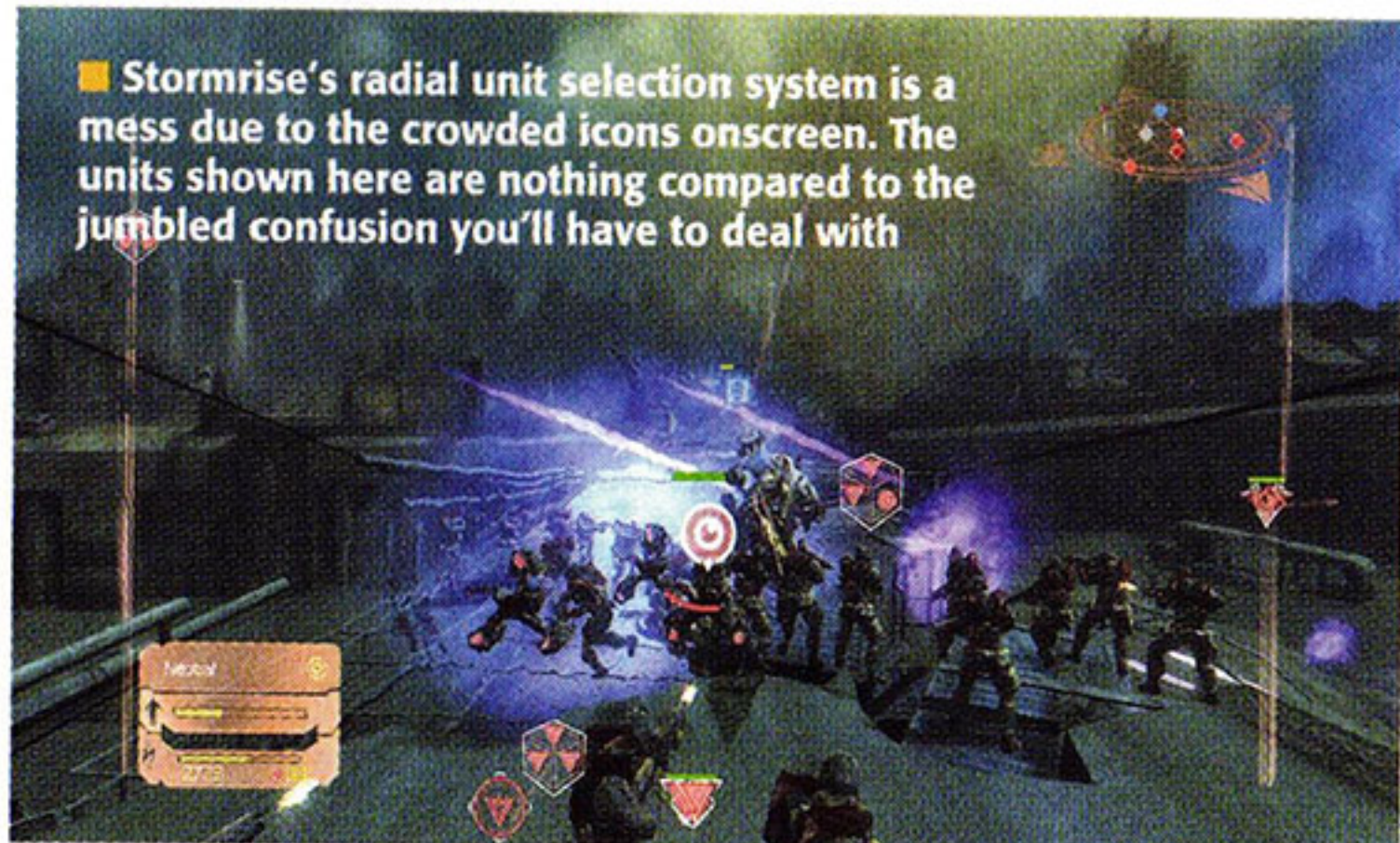
> **Entertainment:** Even those who are jaded enough to enjoy watching things crash and burn will want to avert their eyes

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 3

Stormrise is a real-time strategy game that uses a unique unit selection system called whip select. Well, I'd like to whip something at the guy who thought of that. The idea of tapping the right analog stick towards the unit you want to command doesn't seem so bad at first, but once you have 20-plus units spread across a level, it's easy to select the wrong guy and whip yourself to the opposite end of the map. It doesn't help that you're confined to an over-the-shoulder view of whatever unit you're commanding, either. It's impossible to get a big picture view of what's going on. Most of the time I was Lyndon B. Johnsoning my way through combat – building up huge armies and marching them blindly towards my target. With no base management, an inability to issue commands to more than one unit at a time, and drones that sometimes refuse to use their special attacks, there is no reason even hardcore strategy nuts should punish themselves with this title. —BEN

■ Stormrise's radial unit selection system is a mess due to the crowded icons onscreen. The units shown here are nothing compared to the jumbled confusion you'll have to deal with



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

Guitar Hero: Metallica

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT, VICARIOUS VISIONS (WII), BUDCAT CREATIONS (PS2) > **RELEASE** MARCH 29 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Guitar Hero. Metallica. The name says all there is to know

> **Graphics:** Impressive in-the-round staging and dramatic camera angles make this the most visually exciting GH game yet. Even better, the characters models don't look like Muppets anymore

> **Sound:** If you love metal, you'll be in heaven. For my money, Metallica is the ultimate Guitar Hero band. While we were excited for the vintage tunes, a lot of the '90s material and beyond holds up very well

> **Playability:** The guitar and bass play is spot-on, and the new Expert+ mode on drums will have you begging for mercy

> **Entertainment:** A challenge for Guitar Hero freaks, and a boon to Metallifanatics; there's a whole lot of metal power packed on this one disc

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Every Metallica fan can point to songs they like that are missing from this game, but it simply shreds no matter what instrument you play. I'm more of a fan of old school Metallica, but the songs are picked well enough that the newer material doesn't get in the way. In fact, the tempo changes and stitched-together manner of the songs off of *St. Anger* and *Death Magnetic* actually make them fun – especially with Lars' drum fills. This game ditches any in-game biographical angle, and instead tries to differentiate itself by offering song-specific animations from the band. It's very noticeable, but given the game's anti-climactic ending, more context throughout would have given this title some weight. Apart from the non-stop, pounding thrash riffage, that is. —KATO

BLACKENED ARE YOUR FINGERS

I still vividly remember getting my cassette of *Master of Puppets* in the mail from the BMG Record Club. As the Spanish-tinged, classical guitar intro of "Batteries" gave way to the pummeling main riff, my little mind was blown. With all due respect to the Beatles, the baroque, epic thrash of classic period Metallica is the stuff for which this game was made.

Tearing through "Orion" on expert bass mode is a dream come true. From "The Shortest Straw" to "Seek & Destroy," there is a treasure trove of fan favorites for old-school Metallica fans. Not only are they great songs, they represent a tremendous challenge for seasoned players. I expect many veteran Guitar Hero gamers will have to delve into the medium difficulty for the first time in ages. That's not even counting the insane Expert+ difficulty, which lets you recreate Lars Ulrich's machine gun blast beats with a splitter and two pedals.

While I knew I'd love playing the songs off the first four albums, the rest of the soundtrack definitely matches the intensity of the vintage stuff. It's clearly been selected by the band, and packed with quirky and fresh choices of tunes. Instead of a Queens of the Stone Age track, we get "Demon

Cleaner" by Josh Homme's first band, Kyuss. Rather than a Danzig or Misfits hit, we get the menacing "Mother of Mercy" by Samhain. Black metal pioneer King Diamond shows up as a playable character and in the track "Evil" by his band Mercyful Fate. All in all, it's got perhaps the best hit to miss ratio of any music game to date – although it's not aimed at the casual party crowd.

Perhaps inspired by the band they so love, Neversoft has dramatically improved the visual presentation. Extensive motion capture sessions with the band have yielded a host of realistic animations and dramatic, 360-degree camera work. Stage sets based on the band's real-life tours and extensive pyrotechnics displays also help deliver a better sense of authenticity than Guitar Hero: Aerosmith. Also, the improved character models are leagues better than any in the series' history. The only misstep is the cheesy cartoon storyline, done in the style of the last few games. It seems out of character with

Metallica's image, and I would have preferred more documentary-style footage (I did appreciate the fan-shot videos and visual archive in the extras menu). Still, it's a small quibble with a game that provides a whole lotta metal for your \$60. —MATT



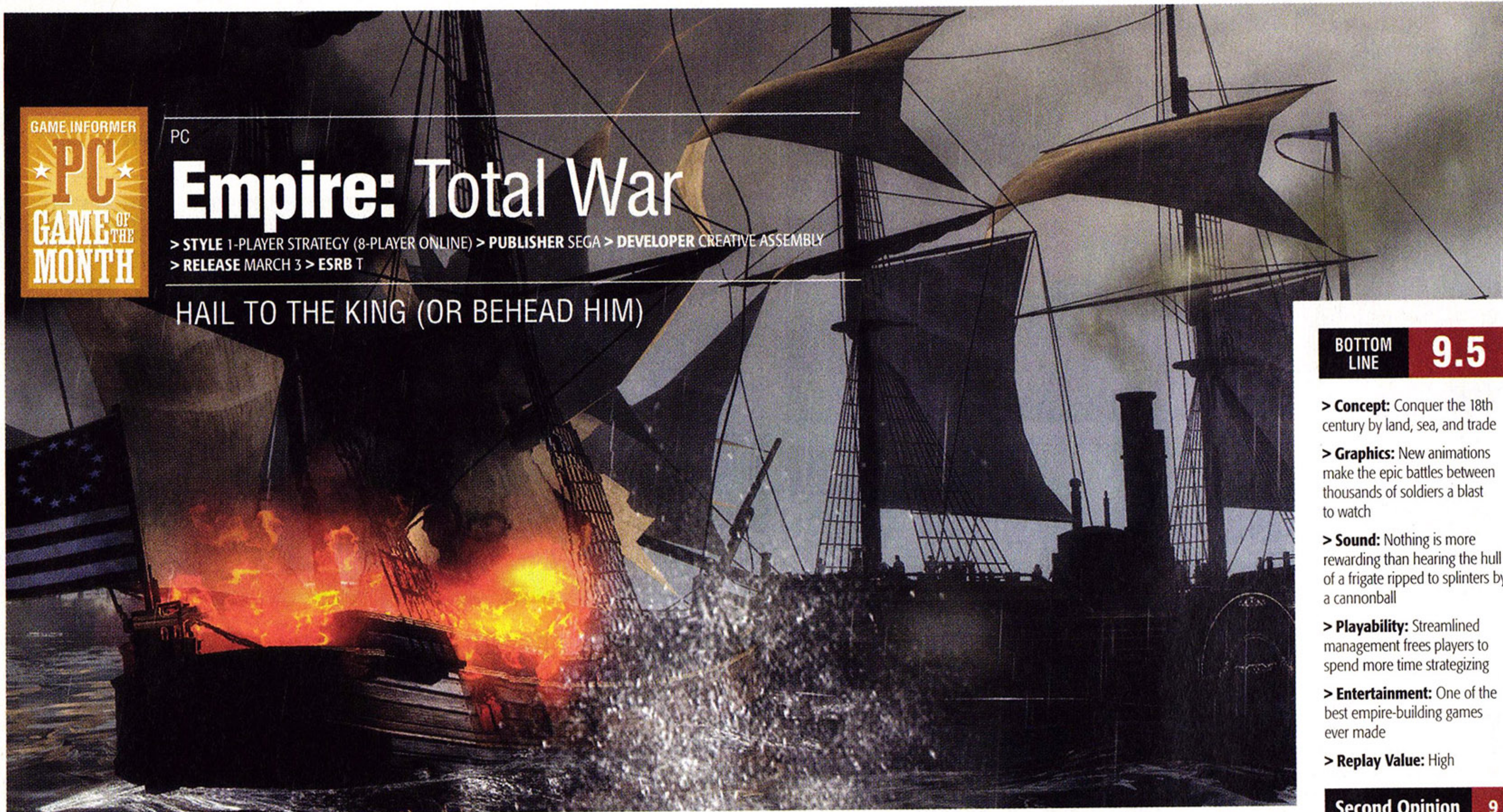
GAME INFORMER
PC
 GAME OF THE MONTH

PC

Empire: Total War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (8-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
 > RELEASE MARCH 3 > ESRB T

HAIL TO THE KING (OR BEHEAD HIM)



BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

- > **Concept:** Conquer the 18th century by land, sea, and trade
- > **Graphics:** New animations make the epic battles between thousands of soldiers a blast to watch
- > **Sound:** Nothing is more rewarding than hearing the hull of a frigate ripped to splinters by a cannonball
- > **Playability:** Streamlined management frees players to spend more time strategizing
- > **Entertainment:** One of the best empire-building games ever made
- > **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **9**

World domination and the colonial era are two of my favorite flavors in gaming, and they taste best together. Empire: Total War adeptly combines them into one of the better war games around. The streamlining of some of the menial tasks that the Total War series traditionally saddles players with is great. Pulling elements of a region's prosperity, like ports and farms, out of easily defended capitals is a fantastic change that dramatically expands strategic possibilities during open warfare. However, despite its spectacular presentation, the real-time battle component is fraught with legacy issues that would make a Madden fan blush. Pathfinding over and around obstacles routinely breaks down, and the enemy AI falls apart from time to time. Naval battles, the shiniest new feature for this entry in the franchise, are similar affairs – the astonishing level of detail and audio work are a spectacle well worth watching, but the battles themselves are often problematic messes. Once you learn to avoid the tactics that cause these issues, the battles are enjoyable enough – but that doesn't excuse the fact that there are serious problems with environmental interaction and broken, abuseable AI. Even with these flaws, though, Empire is an outstanding title that wages war like no other. —ADAM

Vying for power in the 18th century isn't easy. Neighboring European nations are sending skirmishers across my border, spoiling for all-out war. Pirates are hijacking trade routes, disrupting the fragile economy funding my colonial war in the New World. To top it all off, my monarchy is under fire at home from a populace embracing Voltaire's teachings on civil liberties. What's an armchair monarch to do?

To say Empire: Total War is a deep experience is an understatement. The latest game in the famed strategy series combines thrilling real-time battles with turn-based 4X empire building and outshines its predecessors in every possible way. The studious attention to historical detail, ambitious web of political intrigue, and spectacular battles place this game in the pantheon of strategy greats alongside Civilization and Age of Empires.

Empire features an expanded world map that extends from the European mainland to North America, the Caribbean, and India. Trade routes also incorporate ports in Africa, South America, and the East Indies, giving players an entire globe to conquer. With three theaters of war and five continents at play, your master strategy is put to the test as you

manage wars on multiple fronts, protect precious trade routes from seafaring pirates, forge alliances, and improve your nation with new technologies.

This game throws more at the player than any previous title in the series, but the impressive streamlined management system keeps Empire from becoming an overbearing mess. All diplomacy and build-

ing management is handled in easy-to-use centralized menus, players can recruit new soldiers directly from generals, and the game wisely separates money-generating buildings from hub cities so players have a visual clue to how their economies are growing. Even the agent classes are simplified; rakes handle all sabotage, assassinations, and spying missions, while gentlemen give research bonuses to universities and can impair rival nations apolitically by challenging their leading thinkers to duels.

Total War veterans can jump right into the fantastic empire building, but newcomers should start with the new story-driven Road To Independence campaign. This four-chapter experience, which chronicles the United States' struggle for sovereignty,



PC

Codename: Panzers – Cold War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER STORMREGION/INNOGLOW > RELEASE MARCH 10 > ESRB T



WHITE BREAD

In general, I'm in favor of removing unnecessary complexity from game designs. Making players worry about low-level minutiae often adds tedium without adding appreciable depth to the gameplay. This latest entry in the Panzers franchise, however, goes too far. In the name of streamlining gameplay, the guts of the game have been ripped out. A fair helping of bugs doesn't help its case either.

Panzers applies a laundry list of vanilla RTS elements to its Cold-War-turned-hot alternate history. There is no base building, but infantry can construct and garrison guard towers or medical tents on the fly. No resources are collected, but holding control points gives prestige that can be used to summon in reinforcements and support powers like airstrikes. Cooldown-limited abilities from grenades to smoke-

screens abound, while units like medics automatically heal or restock nearby forces.

With all of this abstraction and automation, higher-level tactics and strategy have plenty of room to shine through. Unfortunately, Panzers' design doesn't take advantage of it. The lack of an economic game means that this is all the title has to hang its hat on, and it's just not there. Facing barely matters, the cover system is clumsy to the point of being barely useable, and the AI fails to present a credible challenge in the lackluster campaign. Serviceable skirmish and online modes do nothing to elevate this beyond mediocrity.

I want to like Panzers – the basic design is full of concepts that I enjoy, and the presentation is outstanding. It's a pity that the gameplay sadly lacks the chops to pull it all together.—ADAM



■ The dynamic lighting effects are impressive

BOTTOM LINE

6

> **Concept:** Streamline this European real-time strategy series in an attempt to... honestly, I have no idea

> **Graphics:** The first time you see a thunderstorm rendered here, you'll never want to go back

> **Sound:** Whatever its other faults, at least this doesn't subject players to the lame amateur voiceovers you might expect

> **Playability:** There's nothing wrong with the interface – there's just not much room for strategy

> **Entertainment:** As a remedial RTS 101 class, this would suffice. As a full-on new release in a saturated genre, not so much

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.5

I wonder if Codename: Panzers – Cold War was once planned as a console release. While removing base management, de-emphasizing cover and unit positioning, and streamlining resource gathering are acceptable concessions for a game built around using a controller, Stormregion has watered down one that uses a mouse and keyboard. Not that there isn't anything to like about Panzers. The game's impressive destruction effects look great, and there is a healthy selection of unit types with which to experiment. Unfortunately, my army never learned how to move in formation. My tanks occasionally halted in their tracks and had trouble navigating around allies to attack a target. Even the enemy AI shuffles its feet. Units just around the bend fail to come to the aid of local control points under attack. While there are some decent pieces here, RTS fans will feel like something is missing.—BEN

nerds are for dorks

GEEKS

ARE 4-EVER

hacker instead of slacker
Alpha Geek, Turbo Nerd, Proto-hacker

I'M NOT ABOUT
TO TEST MY
\$ most alive when

24/7 LIFE

Im playing in the sandbox
Network guru, CGI characters
Network security backbone

Bang the board beige toaster

blog, command z
Pearl, Ruby and Ada

Blackberry, Cell phone ring tone, emails and
Laptop for my boot projects contacts

Gots to get the cheddar

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Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** RELIC ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** APRIL 9 > **ESRB** M

PARTY ON COMPANY TIME

It's not that rare to see a real-time strategy title focus on multiplayer as much as Tales of Valor. It is unusual, however, to come across an expansion that deviates so dramatically from the base game. This is an easy game to classify – it's a definite pickup if you're into online RTS, but single-player gamers won't find much value here.

Nine total missions are the extent of the offline offering. These heavily scripted operations focus on some of the war's heroic exploits, giving players control of only a handful of units to complete daunting tasks. Instead of taxing your tactical acumen, you get massively overpowered troops. It's not that hard to hold off an armored division when your infantry can shrug off a 40mm shell to the face.

Tales of Valor shines in multiplayer, though. There are three new modes: a

Defense of the Ancients-style hero-driven tug-of-war, an über-tank destruction derby, and a co-op defensive style reminiscent of Gears of War 2's Horde mode. These unusual match types are fresh and exciting additions to the often-formulaic landscape of online RTS play. Company of Heroes' strong gameplay foundation provides a fantastic sandbox in which to mess around with these new ideas. It would be nice to have more than a single map per mode, however, and the scarcity of progression options for hero units is a bummer.

Gamers who spend the majority of their time in single-player modes should pass this one by. If you're an online-focused player, though, Tales of Valor provides hours of amusement, especially if the community takes advantage of the excellent mod tools to flesh out the map selection. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Take this WWII RTS into unfamiliar territory: short hero-centric campaigns and unusual online modes

> **Graphics:** Relic sure knows how to build an engine. This still looks amazing with the effects cranked

> **Sound:** Solid voiceovers, cinematic score, punchy explosions – what else did you expect?

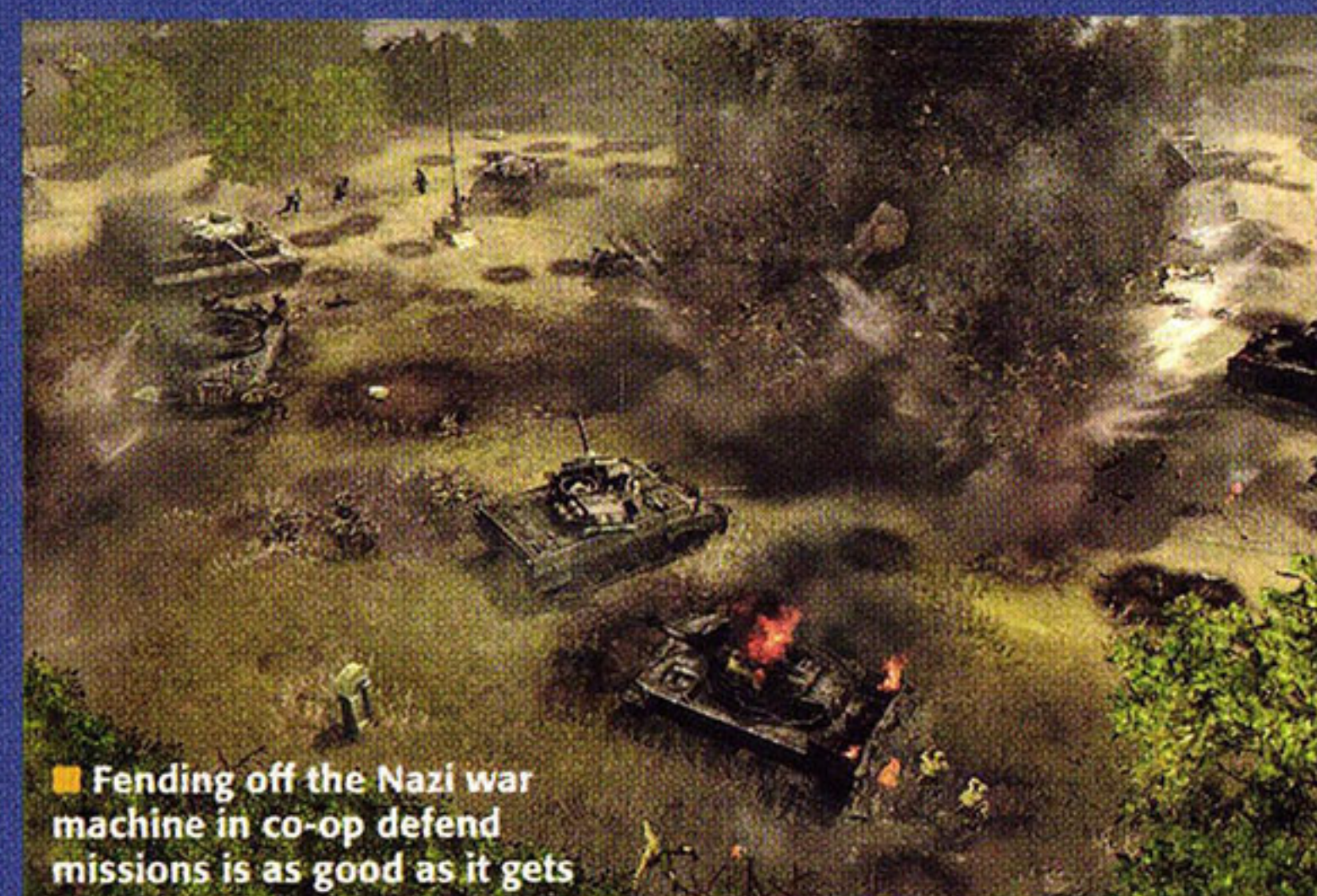
> **Playability:** Requiring players to manually target certain attacks is an odd and unwelcome addition

> **Entertainment:** Buy this for the multiplayer, or don't buy it at all

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **8.25**

Company of Heroes' second standalone expansion adds new single-player missions, new units, and a new direct-fire mode. It shouldn't come as a surprise, however, when I say the real meat is in its multiplayer modes. Of the three additions, Assault is probably the standout. It plays like a lightweight Defense of the Ancients, with hero units clashing to advance the front. It's fun in a silly "Did I just survive a direct artillery hit?" way, but the earned unit upgrades are a bit on the boring side. Tanks are overpowered to nearly cartoon proportions, which is satisfying but illusion-breaking. That said, the package is a solid introduction for people looking to enlist in a great RTS or for fans looking to return to the front for more action. —JEFF

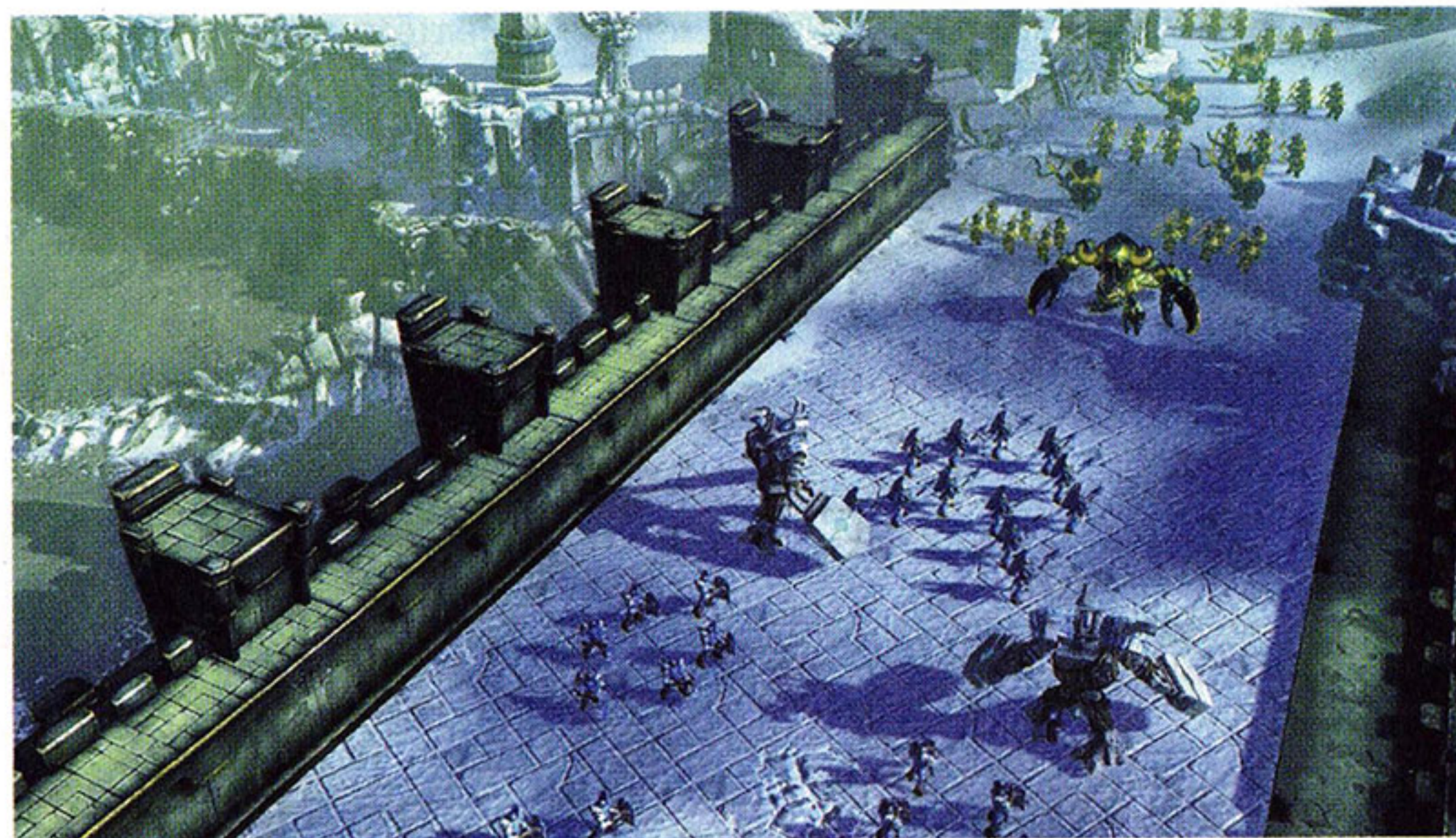


■ Fending off the Nazi war machine in co-op defend missions is as good as it gets

PC

BattleForge

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER STRATEGY ONLINE > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA PHENOMIC > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** T



IF IDEAS WERE HORSES

I've got nothing against non-traditional monetary models in games. BattleForge's odd setup, where players buy card packs through the online store to supplement their significant starting pool, and complete real-time strategy missions with created decks, is an intriguing framework. The online backend is solid, with a browser that lets players quickly find teammates or opponents for the mission they're interested in. It's too bad that the actual gameplay is so shoddy I wouldn't play it if the entire thing were free.

The basic combat is very traditional RTS battle, granting victory to the player who best uses counter units and properly employs his troops' activated abilities. Many of the little details that go into RTS design are poorly done, though. The massive pool of creatures and spells you may encounter makes it difficult to keep abreast of strengths and weaknesses. The extremely fast pace makes it easy to be overwhelmed – especially if, as

in many scenarios, you have multiple fronts to deal with.

There isn't much of an economic game, either. Controlling nodes gives a trickle of power to your pool, and any dead units slowly return their power cost to your bank as well. Strategic orbs can be captured to allow access to the higher tiers of spells in your deck. Most maps are designed in such a way that each player has access to a preset amount of these, meaning the units you summon are virtually the only determinant of success.

BattleForge is a combination of strange mechanics and bad design. Units are diverse – and yet none of them are terribly interesting. Missions have a ton of variety on the surface, but in practice they're variations on the same few objectives. Combat is vanilla RTS, but too messy to allow for much tactical or strategic creativity. New revenue models are a good way to try to find success in a tough PC gaming market, but even the cleverest is nowhere near as important as good gameplay. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE **6**

> **Concept:** Combine Yu-Gi-Oh with Magic: The Gathering and Warcraft, and shove that mess into a collectible online-only format

> **Graphics:** The game is nothing if not bright, inviting, and well animated

> **Sound:** All you get are unit acknowledgments and a bland score

> **Playability:** Automatically assigning units to control groups is not as good an idea as it sounds

> **Entertainment:** Adding deck-building and collectible card mechanics doesn't improve the sloppy RTS foundation one bit

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **8**

You might think that having to buy cards to play Battle Forge is a money grab by EA, but if you didn't buy one single extra card you'd still hold an awesome arsenal in your hands. The unit options available via your card deck are staggering. On the one hand, balancing a deck with healing, firepower, etc. takes practice. On the other, it's very easy to deploy some kick-ass units (complete with special powers from the start). The latter – helped by the ability to drop units anywhere on the map next to friendly units – leads to a tug of war between raw power and strategy that leaves the player with plenty of options, some frustration, but lots of fun. —KATO



■ Quick! At a glance, what do all these creatures do and how do you counter them? Sorry, three seconds is too slow

Wii

New Play Control Pikmin

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
> **RELEASE** MARCH 9 > **ESRB** E

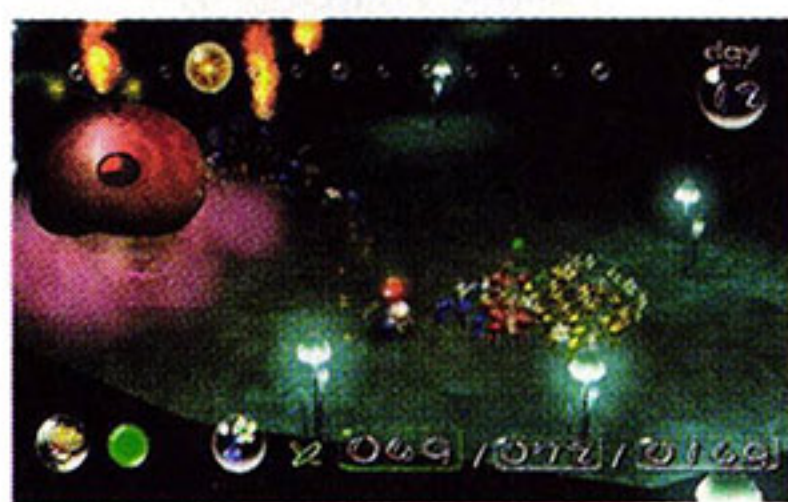


IMPROVED THROWING

For many of you, the headline sums up all you need to know about this re-release of Pikmin. Having played the original, you know that the cute visuals hide a clever variation on traditional strategy games. You also know that Miyamoto and company know how to craft levels, so that there's a constant sense of adventure and discovery as you play. Finally, you remember that for all its strengths, the original Pikmin was also challenging to control. It's here that Nintendo targeted all its energy for the Wii version, with mostly positive results.

Let's back up. Not everyone *has* played the original Pikmin, so some explanations are in order. Players adopt the role of Captain Olimar, an enterprising space explorer who crash-lands on a strange planet, scattering his ship parts across the forest. His only hope lies in some friendly indigenous life, the pikmin are half animal/half plant creatures that obey his every command. Using them to confront dangerous creatures, knock down obstacles, and haul his ship parts, Olimar has 30 days to reconstruct his ship and return home.

At any time, you're directing and controlling dozens of the little pikmin, and an onscreen cursor now allows for far more flexibility and ease of use when throwing them to a task. The change makes it much easier to target enemies, even as you move, and it's hard to imagine going back to the old way. In contrast to the dramatically improved throwing and targeting, directing



pikmin who aren't on a task is oddly more difficult. Where the second analog stick of the GameCube controller allowed for an elegant way to maneuver your followers, the new method is far clumsier, involving a shift button and precise cursor manipulation.

Little else has changed about the game, so expectations on the visuals should be kept in check. I'd love to see improvements to the pikmin pathfinding; I shouldn't have to tell my reds not to drown themselves in the lake, or my blues to not wildly wander off nearby cliffs. However, Nintendo's goals with this game appear more modest, and they are largely accomplished. If better controls for an eight-year old game meet your equally modest goals, you should find little that disappoints. —**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Guide multi-colored walking onions on a quest to find missing spaceship parts

> **Graphics:** This game came out eight years ago. Set your expectations accordingly

> **Sound:** A charming musical score, but it'd be nice to have more variety as the in-game days pass

> **Playability:** The new control scheme dramatically improves some mechanics, and is a little worse than the original in other areas

> **Entertainment:** A simple but engrossing strategy title wears its age well, but even a new control scheme can't make it feel like new

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

Even after eight years in an ever-evolving market, the original Pikmin still packs a strategic punch. That's high praise for Nintendo's skillful game design, but also a veiled complaint about the company's work ethic. Come on, guys! Give us a new game, not a GameCube title we can already play using the Wii's backwards compatibility. The new functionality isn't even impressive. The new cursor aiming makes throwing your Pikmin to a specific spot a little easier, but the GameCube made managing your flock a bit smoother by using the C stick. I'm not one to normally complain about the lack of motion controls, but Nintendo hasn't added anything to the game. Thankfully the original game is still an adorable, easy to pick up strategy title that will suck you in with its diverse environmental puzzles. Let's just hope Nintendo is testing the waters for a Pikmin 3. —**BEN**

Wii QUICKIES

Wii

Major Minor's Majestic March

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC
> **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO
> **DEVELOPER** NANAON-SHA
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE

3

As a huge PaRappa and Um Jammer Lammy fan, I was very excited about this reunion of

designer Masaya Matsuura and artist Rodney Alan Greenblat. What the hell happened? The game starts by casting you as a cartoon drum major who leads a marching band through town by moving the Wii remote up and down to the beat like a baton. Unfortunately, that's where it ends, too. This is the shallowest game design I've seen in years. Even worse, the infectious music and lyrics of PaRappa (the real draw of that game) are replaced by forgettable marching band instrumentals. If I'm going to spend a long period of time with my hand wrapped around an oblong object, moving my arm rapidly up and down, it sure won't be with this game. —**MATT**

Wii

We Ski & Snowboard

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **RELEASE** MARCH 17 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE

6.75

This sequel adds an additional mountain and the use of a snowboard, but the series' easygoing vibe isn't dramatically altered. Even with its selection of tricks, We Ski & Snowboard remains a very playable title whose only crime is that most of its challenges are simple, and sometimes — like when you're tasked with finding people or collecting objects — boring. The scarcity of new features may make it a hard-to-justify purchase for those with the original (especially since using a snowboard isn't a dramatically different experience), but at a minimum this game is fun enough that it's elevated just above being a simple diversion. —**KATO**



Wii

Sonic and the Black Knight

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM > **RELEASE** MARCH 2 > **ESRB** E

NONE SHALL PASS

After kneecapping the Middle-Eastern epic *Arabian Nights* in Sonic and the Secret Rings, Sonic and his gang of henchmen put a hit out on a more familiar tale — the legend of King Arthur — in this new Wii exclusive. While the plot is too ludicrous to detail at length, you can expect the usual (Sonic's friends thinly disguised as Arthurian characters) and the surprising (a talking sword whose resemblance to Towlie from *South Park* had Reiner and I frequently asking the TV "Wanna get hiiiiigh?").

The gameplay holds a few nasty surprises. While the game is still structured around the classic "autopilot" running, the unsatisfying motion-controlled sword combat ruins the game's sense of speed. Just when Sonic builds up a head of steam, a large enemy is placed in your path, forcing you to manically waggle the remote until he is dead. There are some upgradable moves and special items, but they have little bearing on the gameplay. Most of the game is so easy that you'll often complete a level in less than two minutes, until you suddenly run into an impossibly frustrating rail-sliding sequence late in the game. I wish I could say that this game's poor design and execution was a surprise, but let's be honest: old Sonic's been down so long it looks like up to him. —**MATT**



BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Butcher Arthurian legend in this new entry in the Sonic "Storybook Series"

> **Graphics:** Sonic Team's Wii engine is good enough, and the game moves quickly when it's not bogged down in the new combat

> **Sound:** I perversely look forward to the corny rock songs in Sonic games — the Shadow theme is comedy gold

> **Playability:** The new sword combat further muddies the already sloppy control mechanics

> **Entertainment:** Maintains all the problems of recent Sonic titles, while adding another layer of suck

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.25

Sega's spin on Arthurian lore is profoundly stupid, light on magic, even lighter on gameplay, yet worth playing if you enjoy so-bad-it's-good camp. In this version of Camelot, Arthur is the bad guy, Merlin's granddaughter is named Merlina, swords can talk, and every battle is accompanied by uplifting Joe Esposito-like rock beats. Most of the levels qualify for video games' shortest, offering little more than a minute of confusing sprinting, wild remote shaking, and pointless item collecting (unless of course you want to show your friends that you were fortunate enough to find an icon of "spongy bread" in a barrel). Sonic has played the role of passenger in many a train wreck, but none have made me laugh (for all the wrong reasons) like this one did. For that, Sega is moving the series in the right direction. —**REINER**

NINTENDO DS

Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA WI-FI OR ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR
> **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR LEEDS > **RELEASE** MARCH 17 > **ESRB** M

TOUCHING CRIME

In 2005, developer Digital Eclipse successfully recreated the Grand Theft Auto experience on Game Boy Advance. The miniaturized version tapped into the series' crime-laden roots to deliver high-speed police chases, open world navigation, and an engrossing narrative. While holding true to series expectations, that entry's design clung tightly to the classic two-dimensional formula from Grand Theft Auto I and II.

At a glance, Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars appears to draw similar inspiration. The isometric view harks back to the series' first attempts, and I once again found myself counting the pixels in my character's body. These are the only elements that are of the nostalgic flavor; the majority of Chinatown Wars' content falls in line with Grand Theft Auto III and IV.

Liberty City is a thriving three-dimensional world. Citizens open umbrellas when it rains, run for cover when you let your guns do the talking, and become fruitful money-giving red stains when you "accidentally" park a fire truck on top of them. While it's nearly impossible to differentiate the look of the citizens, the city itself is gorgeously rendered with familiar locales and the smallest of details. You can see chunks missing from concrete walls, years of wear and tear on store signs, colorful graffiti in dark alleys, and beautiful landmarks like a dragon statue on a Chinese restaurant. If you are familiar with the lay of the city from GTA IV, you will notice

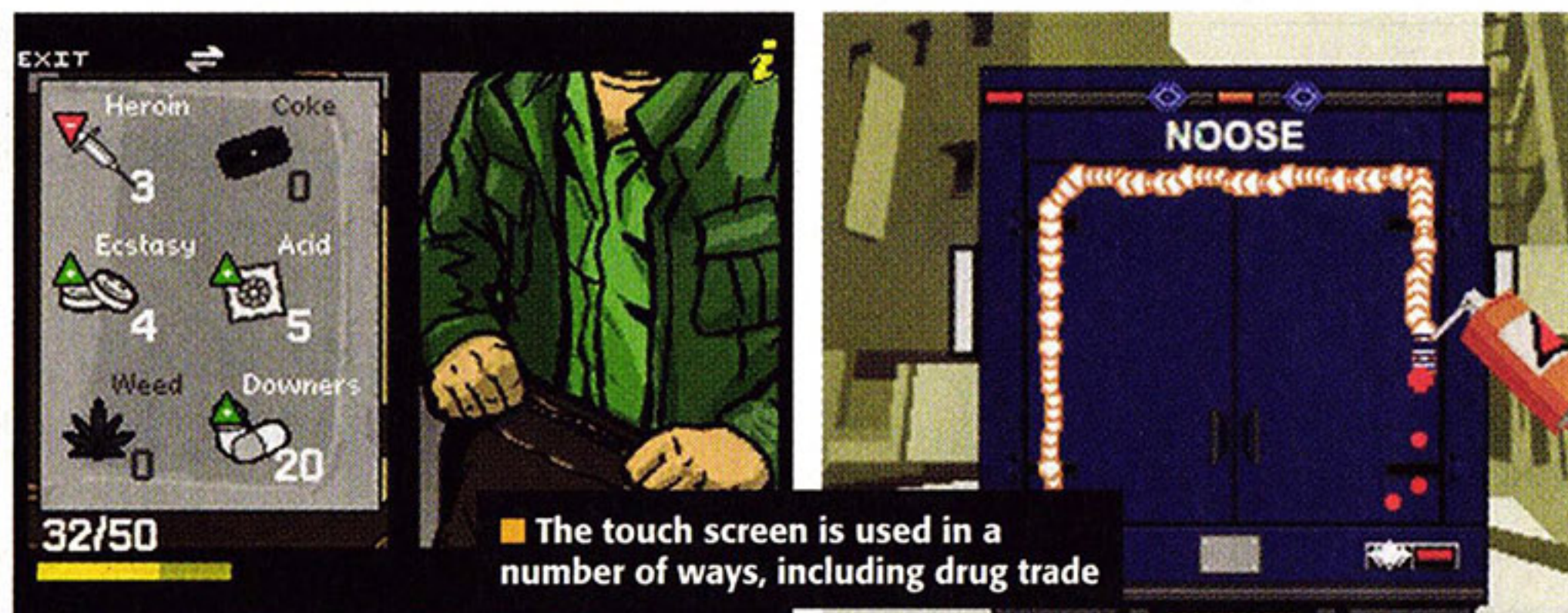


that the Alderney borough is missing, and some of the streets have been condensed or outright removed. Moreover, all of the action takes place on the streets; the only time you'll see an interior is in a cutscene. The smaller playfield is hardly noticeable, however, as you don't spend much time in the same area before being asked to travel to a different location.

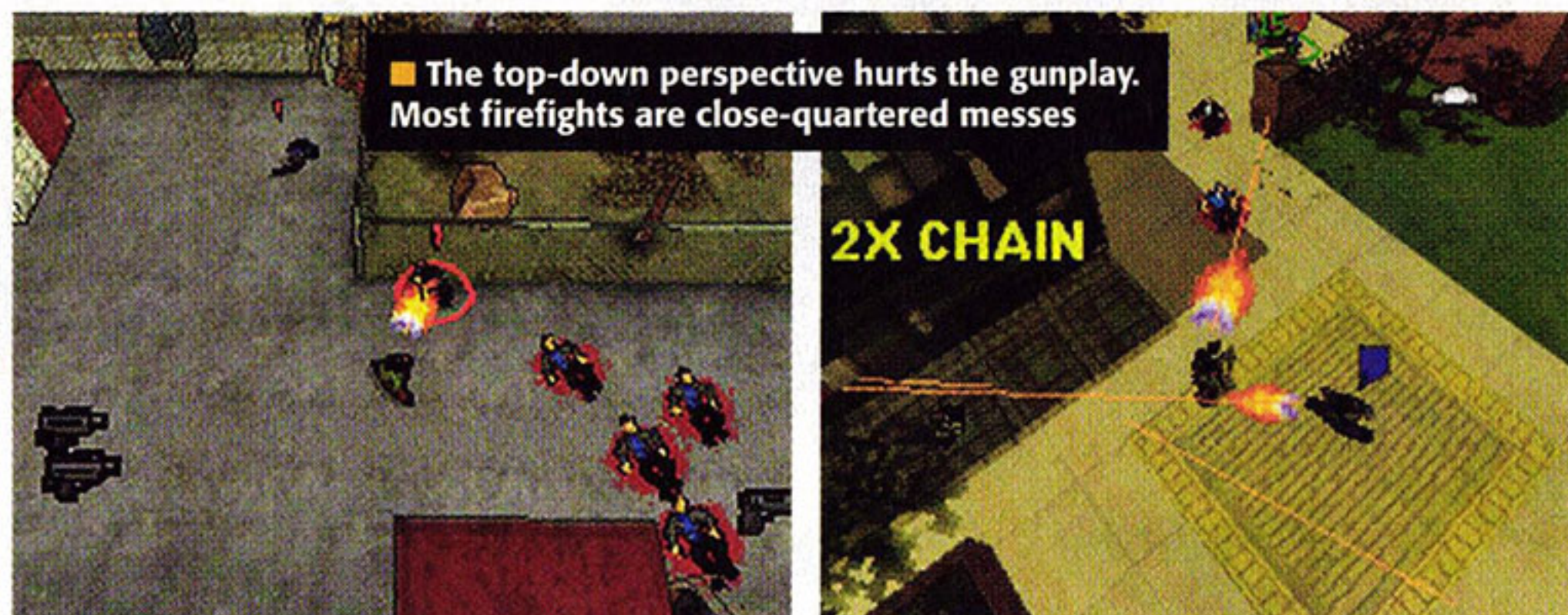
The biggest change comes from the intentions of protagonist Huang Lee. He isn't just packing heat under his coat. He may also be carrying marijuana, cocaine, acid, ecstasy, heroin, or downers. Lee is a drug dealer, and completing story missions isn't enough to get him through the game. Lee also has to earn his keep by selling drugs to progress further in the narrative. To be successful as a dealer, you'll have to buy low and sell high. Demand is always changing, creating situations where you'll have to sit on your supplies and wait for the right opportunity. The thrill of turning a profit is an addictive addition to the game's already large pool of activities.

Keeping the citizens of Liberty City stoned is just a small part of the action. Like any other GTA title, almost every mission brings new challenges, and of course, unexpected twists like firefighting or dumpster diving. The touch screen opens the doors for additional layers of complexity. In one mission, you are asked to damage a racecar. In previous iterations in the series, you likely would approach this hostile aggression with a baseball bat or crowbar. In Chinatown Wars, the caveman approach is replaced by a multi-tiered assault on the racecar's engine. With different stylus strokes, you'll sever the oil line with a wire cutter, smash the fuel injector with a hammer, and finish the job in style by putting a fish in the radiator.

Most of the touch screen functionality is brilliantly interlaced into GTA's seedy world, offering big laughs, outstanding controls, and challenges that you wouldn't mind doing 10 to 20 times – like throwing away your money on scratch cards, or giving your gang members awful tattoos. The



The touch screen is used in a number of ways, including drug trade



The top-down perspective hurts the gunplay. Most firefights are close-quarters messes



2X CHAIN

touch screen is also used effectively for selecting weapons and lobbing grenades.

Most of the controls are mapped closely to the console versions. Jacking cars, hopping fences, and calling for a cab are handled cleanly. Despite what you may think, the limited visibility from the overhead camera doesn't affect driving. Even at the highest speeds, you can roar around corners and thread the needle through tightly packed traffic. From garbage trucks to motorcycles, you can ride how you want to, and store your favorites in a garage. The concept behind police chases has changed, now pushing players to wreck police vehicles to lower the star count. In a way, the prey becomes the hunter. Knocking the fuzz into oncoming traffic and buildings is an adrenaline-filled riot that should be explored in the next console entry.

As comfortable as I felt behind the wheel, I never got the hang of the gunplay. The targeting system has a mind of its own. Manipulating it in the ways you want is difficult, so I mostly let the game dictate who got shot next. The isometric perspective also works against the art of gunplay; most fights unfold on one screen, and they don't take long to devolve into an ant-like commotion with everyone crowding into the same space.

From these difficulties, I was surprised that Lee never accidentally shot himself – something I wouldn't mind seeing, given how annoying his dialogue can be in the narrative. Lee and most of his supporting cast are unlikable buffoons better suited for the satirical roles of classmates in *Bully*. The plot, which delivers the intriguing hook of hunting down a ceremonial sword, suffers when seen through the eyes of morons.

Chinatown Wars stumbles occasionally, but it also pushes the series forward in numerous other ways. Don't let the diminutive size or nostalgic look fool you, this is just as complete of a Grand Theft Auto experience as any of the console iterations. —REINER



BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** Rockstar has crammed an entire GTA experience onto the DS cart. Gunplay and storytelling come up short, but new gameplay avenues keep you glued to this crime caper

> **Graphics:** Liberty City hasn't lost any of its life. Stylish still-frame cutscenes effectively convey the story

> **Sound:** The ambient sounds of the city establish the setting well. The radio stations also pump out catchy synth-heavy licks

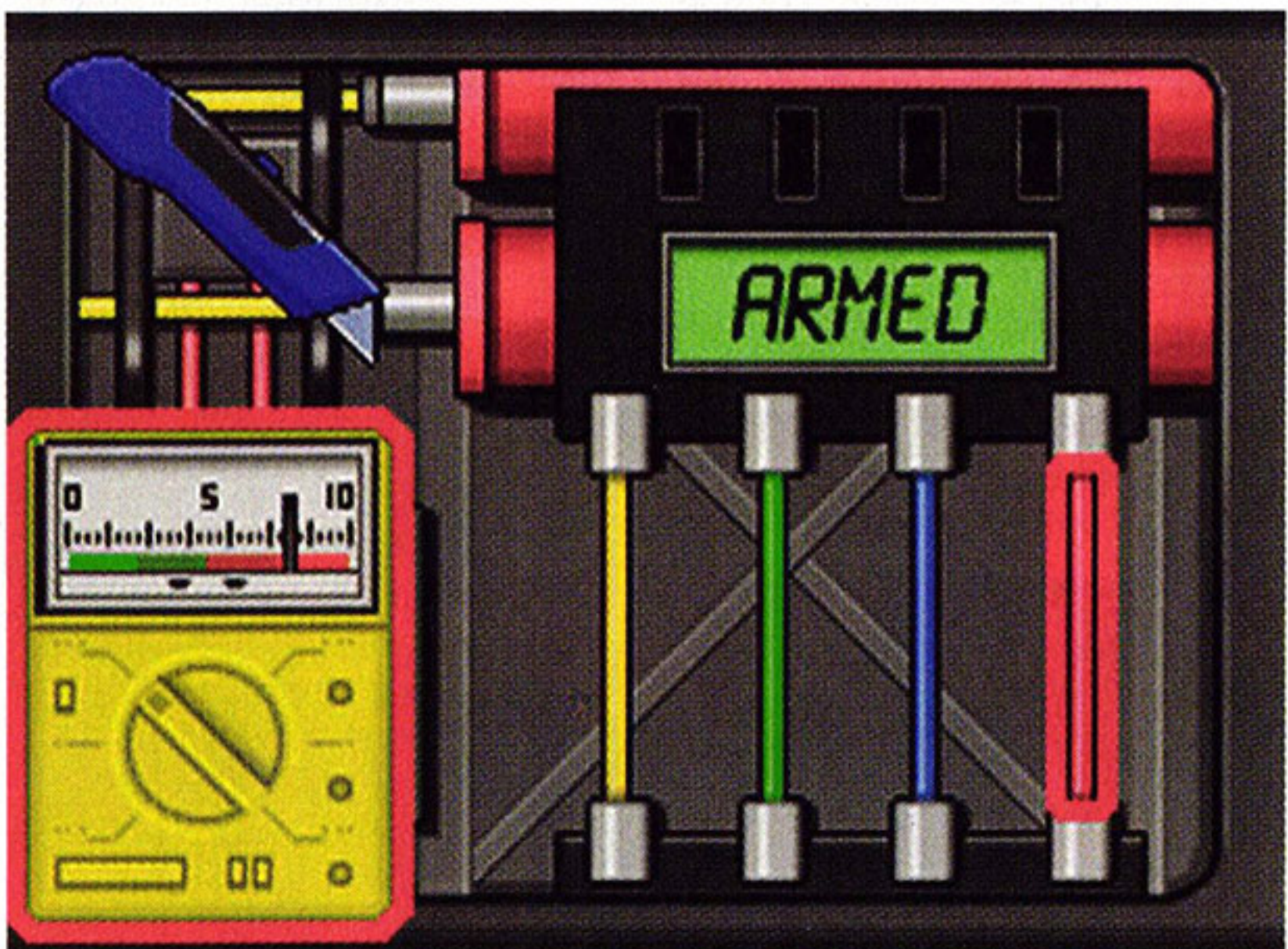
> **Playability:** Gunplay is a messy affair, but the driving, drug trade, and new touch screen functionality are handled without fault

> **Entertainment:** Hardly any concessions were made in bringing GTA to the DS. This is a full-on GTA experience

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9

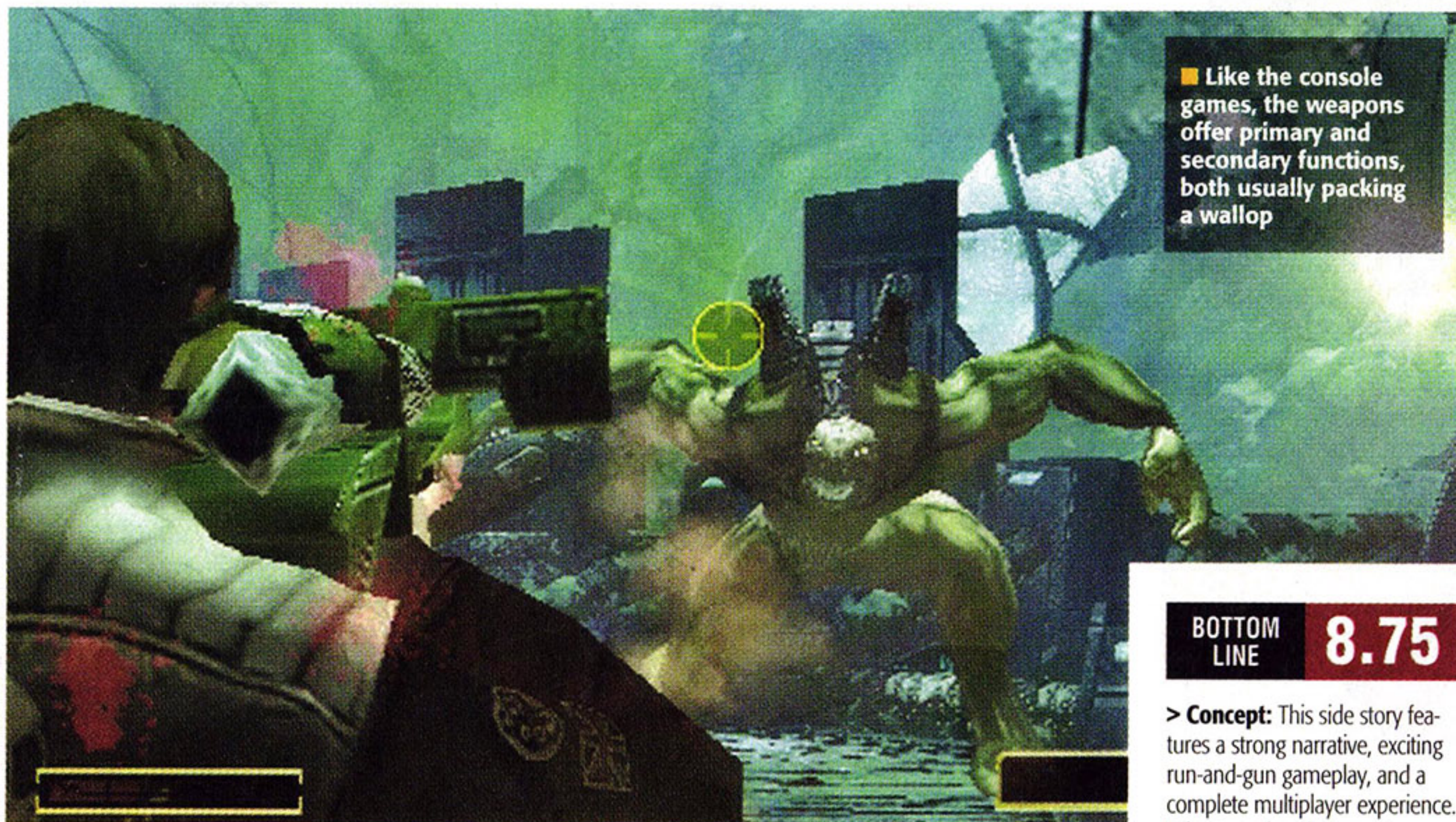
Dealing drugs is dangerous business, even in the cesspool of Liberty City. The risks may be amped, but so is the payoff. Play your cards right and you can generate thousands of dollars in a matter of minutes. In Chinatown Wars, the drug trade is a central new tenet of the GTA experience. Your pay for plugging rival gang members is paltry, so you need to find other ways to keep your SMG supplied with bullets. Rockstar has shoved a full GTA experience onto the DS' two small screens; the city sprawls for miles, the cars handle well, and clever minigames make use of the touch screen for stealing cars, giving tattoos, and playing the lotto. The only gameplay mechanic that takes a significant step back is the combat, which is plagued by a sketchy aim mechanic. The story doesn't hold up as well as the rest of the game, since the unlikable cast of characters makes it hard to give a damn about the plot, and the humor often falls flat. Chinatown Wars may lack a loveable anti-hero like Niko Bellic, but Rockstar's technical accomplishment on the DS makes this a must-play. —BERTZ



PSP

Resistance: Retribution

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** SONY BEND > **RELEASE** MARCH 17 > **ESRB** M



■ Like the console games, the weapons offer primary and secondary functions, both usually packing a wallop

A SIDE STORY WITH CHARACTER

Within the first minute of Resistance: Retribution, protagonist James Grayson transitions from a patriotic hopeful who puts his life on the line to save his people to an unforgiving recluse who spits in the face of his country. In this sequence, Grayson is forced to say goodbye to his brother. It wouldn't be fair of me to reveal the details of the scene, but I immediately felt sympathy for him.

The tight bond I developed with this character brought deep seeded hatred for the Chimera, an axis that I didn't develop an emotional attachment with in the first two Resistance titles on PlayStation 3. Sony calls Retribution a side story, but even as an accessory it delivers this series' most compelling narrative.



Developer Sony Bend has made two of my favorite PSP titles: Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror and Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow. Like both of these titles, Resistance: Retribution offers outstanding gunplay that is varied nicely between frantic run-and-gun sequences, mech warfare, and underwater gunfights. Where the Syphon Filter games delivered mission dynamics that required intelligent solutions, Resistance: Retribution

abandons any notion of pushing the player to think in favor of a fast-paced shooting gallery, where you are constantly bombarded from all directions. It retains the feel of the PS3 series, but also has an identity of its own. If you have Resistance 2, you can "infect" Retribution by linking the games together to get regenerative health, a magnum, and other beneficial boosts.

The intelligent auto-lock targeting system ably handles the onslaught, switching to the closest threat and quickly transitioning to the next target. If you feel that the lock-on is cheating, you can always turn it off, which the game encourages with enemy types that need to be shot in specific zones.

Retribution's solid gameplay package transitions into online play, supporting up to eight players. This experience includes all of the fixings found on consoles, including ranked and unranked matches and an extensive list of medals for feats like kills, kill assists, captures, and taunts. While offering only five maps, each is scaled perfectly for the action, allowing for high kill counts. I found that the auto-lock targeting sucks some of the fun out of

the experience, as it really doesn't feel like much of a challenge, but more of a "who started firing first" affair. Regardless, there is some fun to be had in these matches.

Resistance: Retribution is a worthy addition to Insomniac's series. It adds an amazing story to the existing lore, and is a great standalone experience for those of you who haven't played a Resistance game before. —**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> **Concept:** This side story features a strong narrative, exciting run-and-gun gameplay, and a complete multiplayer experience. Is it as good as the console series? Absolutely

> **Graphics:** No expenses were spared in the CG cutscenes, character models, or environments, making it one of the PSP's graphical darlings

> **Sound:** Character banter is constant, and the energetic score blends perfectly with the frantic firefights

> **Playability:** A hassle-free experience that makes good use of an auto lock-on system and smartly mapped controls

> **Entertainment:** The campaign is superbly made. While multiplayer feels cheap due to the auto-lock targeting, it offers a deep reward system

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **7.5**

Retribution protagonist James Grayson is a talkative and brash counter to the solemn Nathan Hale. I have no problem with this change; it's Grayson's need for 1990s-style health packs and bland pop-up-and-shoot gameplay that brings this title down. Thankfully high production values, mech sequences, and plenty of large-scale boss battles help even things out. If you own Resistance 2, definitely use it to "infect" your PSP and earn regenerative health and a sweet magnum. Not only does this change the story slightly, but it also makes the final few levels infinitely less frustrating. Multiplayer has a decent progression system, however neither auto-targeting nor face button aiming are ideal control options for versus play. —**BRYAN**

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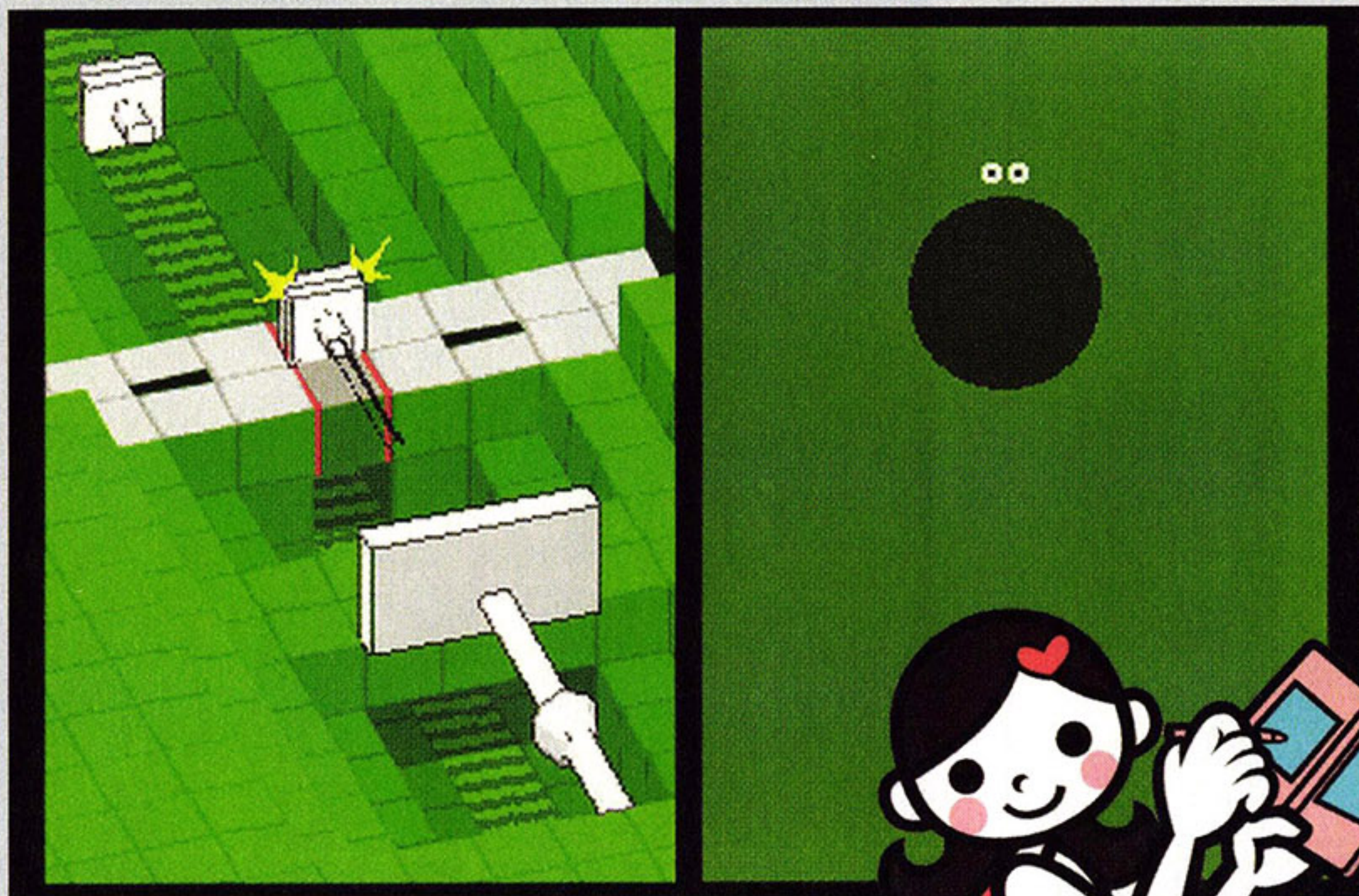
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NINTENDO DS

Rhythm Heaven

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RHYTHM/MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** APRIL 5 > **ESRB** E



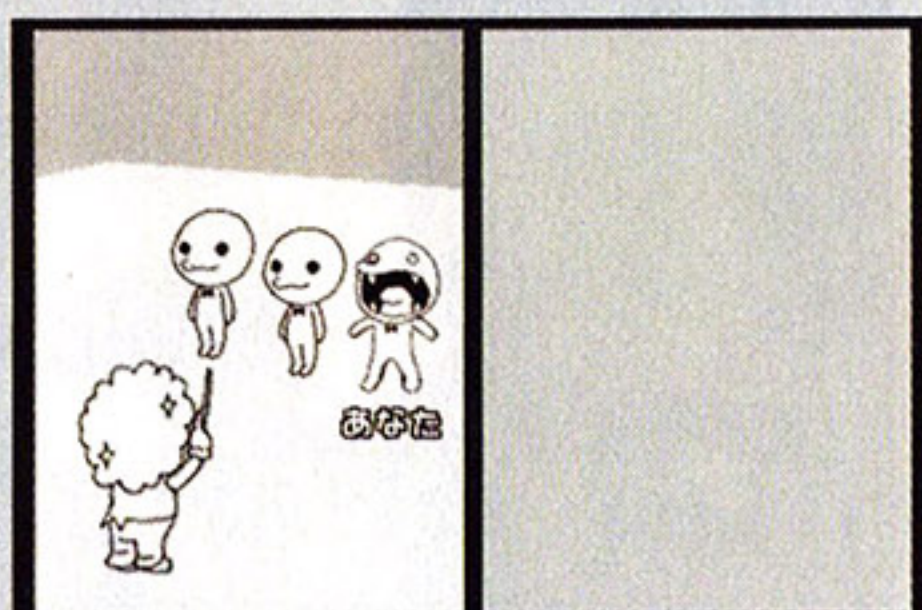
TAP, TAP, FLICK

Rhythm Heaven introduces a refreshing variation on the music game; instead of increasingly difficult combinations of notes, colors, and speed, it's all about simple taps and flicks on the touch screen. Complexity arrives in the form of the constant flow of new situations in which players must find the beat. Poppy tunes and the basic graphics can feel either charming or shoddy, depending on your perspective. However, the simplistic controls allow for some genuinely entertaining challenges.

The setup is uncomplicated. A progression of minigames unlocks one-by-one, and each has some absurd situation to confront with your rhythmic acumen. Sing along in time with a choir. Assemble robots in a factory. Dance your way through a lizard mating ritual. Before each task, a tutorial lays out the cues to watch for, and when you should be tapping and flicking. It'd be nice to have more choice in which game to tackle at any one time, but most of these

puzzles are straightforward enough that you'll move on to the next within minutes.

In many ways, the game shares as much in common with an old game of Simon as it does traditional music releases. While your rhythm



is certainly being tested, an equal portion of the action is pattern recognition. Audio and visual cues telegraph the action to take, and fast reflexes and observation are key. The game shines in the moments it drops you into a groove and demands those skills in abundance.

Unfortunately, many of the minigames just don't have that level of depth. As a result, the initial playthrough of a given stage will frequently be your last, despite attempts that the game makes at asking you to go back and perfect your performance. Rhythm Heaven

ends up being pretty limited in its ambitions and scope, but I can't deny that it had me toe-tapping along for the ride. —**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Tap and flick your way through dozens of rhythm games

> **Graphics:** Functional visuals are there only to give context to the audio

> **Sound:** Occasionally cute, but frequently inane tunes help keep the beat, but these ditties aren't winning any awards

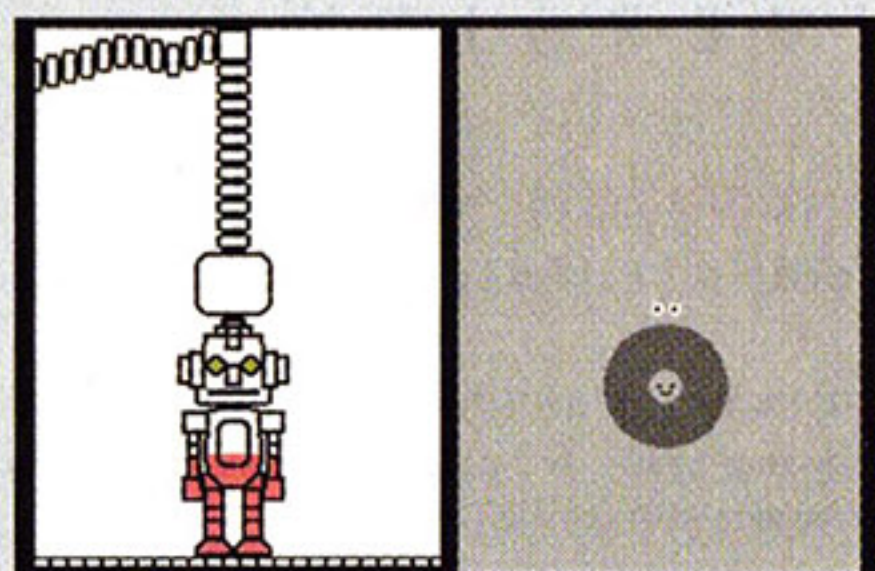
> **Playability:** Simple touch screen controls, and tutorials before each level lay out the way that each minigame works

> **Entertainment:** Surprisingly interesting and challenging rhythmic challenges, but the limited gimmick grows tiresome

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

If you're not a little charmed by Rhythm Heaven, you're an incurable curmudgeon (or Kato). Though all of the gameplay consists of tapping or quickly flicking your stylus on the touch screen in time to the music, the developers represent this onscreen action in a number of ingenious (and hilarious) ways. I'm also fond of the diverse and catchy soundtrack. This cute overload nearly distracted me from the fact that the gameplay is far too repetitive, and that certain levels don't work as well as they should. Still, it's an enjoyable bit of fluff with some genuine comic flair. —**MATT**



NINTENDO DS

The Dark Spire

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** SUCCESS
> **RELEASE** APRIL 14 > **ESRB** E 10+



GREETINGS FROM 1981

The degree to which The Dark Spire is directly based upon early Western RPGs — particularly Wizardry — cannot be overstated. From the unforgiving difficulty to the minimalist presentation, this title is a naked homage to antediluvian dungeon crawls. It's very well crafted for what it is, but gamers with no nostalgia for the early '80s will likely be bewildered by its archaic design.

With little graphical fanfare, players create a group of faceless adventurers to brave the perils of an ominous tower. Exploring the numerous secret passages, dramatic encounters, and puzzles within each level's sterile grid is amusing, but the experience is accompanied by a tremendous amount of grinding. With limited options for restoring your health and spells inside the tower, you can expect to retread the same ground dozens of times in an effort to uncover deeper secrets.

The combat system breaks actions up into discrete rounds and puts very typical fantasy tropes at play. Fighters bash skulls and absorb damage, priests heal them back up, mages deal with otherwise untenable situations, and thieves pretend to be useful until you come across a trap or lock.

Nice touches like being able to sacrifice speed for power in attacks or spellcasting improve the otherwise limited options at your fingers, but this is no tactical masterpiece.

Antiquated concepts limit this title's appeal by requiring repetitive tasks and enforcing a punishing difficulty level. However, players who don't mind grinding and reloading may find themselves eagerly pursuing the tower's many hooks. Well-designed puzzles and interesting encounters, like a mid-tower gambling den and a pirate hideout, await the patient adventurer. Still, this is far from a game for everybody. RPGs have changed a lot in the last quarter-century, and there are reasons for that. —**ADAM**



BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Pay homage to the first-person dungeon crawls of yore — think Wizardry — in the most direct way possible

> **Graphics:** It's very telling that you have the choice to enable 8-bit style graphics and interfaces

> **Sound:** The score is good, though it gets repetitive

> **Playability:** Some backward interface elements take getting used to

> **Entertainment:** Those who pine for Western RPGs of the '80s have a new object for their devotion

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.5

Grinding is an occasional necessity in modern role-playing games, but in The Dark Spire, it comprises the entirety of the experience. This game is not weighed down by story or mechanics — you kill monsters, power up, and kill more monsters. This routine of exploring an evil tower is more frustrating than fun thanks to awful menus, archaic design, and unforgiving difficulty. Fans of old first-person dungeon crawlers may love this faithful representation of the genre (especially using classic wire-frame visuals), but others should be warned: It makes no concessions in gameplay, interface, or structure. The Dark Spire is built on the foundation of a 28-year-old game, and it shows. —**JOE**

NINTENDO DS

Peggle: Dual Shot

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** POPCAP GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** Q ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MARCH 3 > **ESRB** E

PLAY THIS SILVER BALL

Peggle's wacky take on pachinko has enchanted PC gamers since 2007, and now DS owners can join the fun. Dual Shot includes the original Peggle, Peggle Nights, and some all-new levels. The dozens of hours it takes to clear all of this content fly by, as the breezy gameplay leavens the profoundly luck-driven action with just enough skill to keep players enthralled.

Players must clear all of the orange pegs on each level by simply aiming and firing a ball from the top of the screen. Mastering the first bounce is possible thanks to a clever interface that allows for precise, frustration-free aiming. Beyond the initial rebound, it's impossible to predict where your ball is headed, especially on boards that feature moving pegs. Cheering the little silver sphere on or cursing its hatred for you is half the fun.

This port has a decidedly low-fi presentation compared to the PC original, but the gameplay is 100-percent authentic. The hand-



held's limited resolution makes tricky shots somewhat harder to line up, but this is only a minor annoyance. Peggle is one of the better puzzle games available, no matter the format. —**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Clear all of the orange pegs by firing a pinball from the top of the screen. It's way cooler than it sounds, trust me

> **Graphics:** They don't hinder the gameplay, but the visuals don't help the experience much either

> **Sound:** The full-chorus Wagnerian interpretation of "Ode to Joy" that busts out when you clear a level is hilarious the first few dozen times

> **Playability:** Being able to zoom in and precisely place shots is nice, but still not quite as solid a scheme as in the PC original

> **Entertainment:** Peggle taps into some primal part of the human psyche that makes it far more addictive than it seems on paper

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

It only took me 15 minutes to understand the Peggle craze; this game is digital crystal meth. The setup is very basic: aim your cannon and shoot a ball at an assortment of blocks and pegs to score points. But Peggle embodies a perfect balance of skill, strategy, and blind luck. If you get that right, the results are dangerously appealing. Don't believe me? Drive down the Vegas strip, a road built entirely on games that got this deceptively complex formula right. —**MATT**

NINTENDO DS

Tokyo Beat Down

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** SUCCESS > **RELEASE** MARCH 31 > **ESRB** T

AWESOME JUSTICE

This isometric brawler revels in its overwrought dialogue and ludicrous story. While the gameplay is the very definition of a mediocre, by-the-numbers beat 'em up, the snappy writing and appealing presentation make it worth a play for fans of the genre.

In the stylish shoes of loose cannon Lewis Cannon, players punch and kick their way through waves upon waves of indistinguishable enemies. Moving ever rightward, you'll tap into a variety of combos to crack skulls. The difference between, for example, kick-punch-punch and punch-kick-punch is minimal. For the most part, you're bashing buttons until the bad guys stop spawning and you can move to the next screen, and hopefully a new plot element.

The wacky anime-styled story is well aware of its silly premise. Skillfully written dialogue and amusingly larger-than-life characters masterfully sell this send-up of genre



schlock. If *The Naked Gun's* writers had spent their adolescences giggling at Zero Wing's iconic mis-translations and watching *Cowboy Bebop*, the result may well have been something akin to Tokyo Beat Down's zany tale — and I mean that as a high compliment.

If the gameplay had more to recommend it, this would be a must-play on the DS. As it is, it's an amusing if uninspired romp that should give more than its share of belly laughs to the beat 'em up faithful. —**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Beat the hell out of Tokyo's boundless supply of ne'er-do-wells

> **Graphics:** Solid animation work makes every punch a pleasure

> **Sound:** If you expected anything other than some poppy techno beats, prepare to be disappointed

> **Playability:** The timing-based two-button combat is, sadly, the weakest part of the game

> **Entertainment:** The delightfully campy plot and amusing presentation are worth a look, but the brawling leaves much to be desired

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 7.25

Lewis Cannon's fists are bigger than his brain, but his attitude is perfect for this title. Its Double Dragon approach to gameplay and B-movie humor ask you to punch your way to the truth. I like the bullet dodging, but initiating special attacks is inconsistent, and the game needs to give you a second of post-damage invincibility. Enemies can spam you way too easily. It's surprising this old-school throwback is missing such a standard feature, because it has charm to spare. —**KATO**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Avalon Code

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** XSEED GAMES/MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** MATRIX SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** MARCH 10 > **ESRB** E10+

When you smack someone in the face with a book in real life, everyone gets a good laugh. In Avalon Code, this act allows you to index and rearrange the genetic code of any person, monster, or weapon. The clever mechanic gives you control over many aspects of the world; you can use your book to add an "ill" element to a monster's code to make it weaker, or add a "fire" element to your sword to give it new powers. While this kind of agency is refreshing, the gameplay isn't nearly as novel. Sluggish combat, unimaginative objectives, and a plodding story are constant roadblocks to enjoying the unique and entertaining aspects of Avalon Code. Collecting codes and manipulating them is engaging, but the rest of the experience is merely functional. —**JOE**



NINTENDO DS

My Pet Shop

BOTTOM LINE 5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** TAITO
> **RELEASE** MARCH 10 > **ESRB** E



Apparently, in small towns even the animals are friendlier. All it takes to catch one of these wild beasts is a slow "two steps forward, one step back" approach and the occasional tasty treat. After moving out of the big city with your mom, you help her open a pet shop by capturing the hearts of the local wildlife. When you're not in the forest dancing with the animals, you're performing banal minigames to help your mom shampoo, comb, and train the town's pet population. If you suffer through the repetitive process of running the shop long enough, you'll eventually be able to take your animals to contests, and earn more exotic pets such as pandas and penguins. As much as I'd love to own a panda, after an eight-hour shift in the dullest pet shop in the planet, I was ready to tell my mom to stuff the allowance. —**BEN**

NINTENDO DS

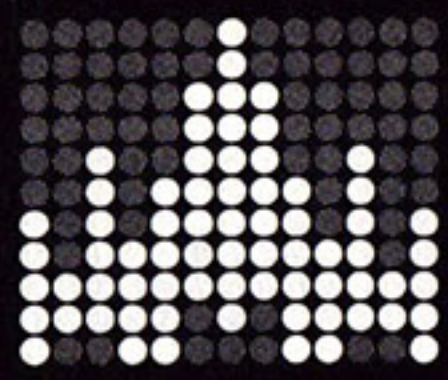
Gardening Mama

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** COOKING MAMA LTD.
> **RELEASE** MARCH 31 > **ESRB** E

Gardening Mama seems like a welcome change from the repeated cooking routines in Mama's primary franchise (and it probably won't get the PETA hate either). But it suffers from the same repetitive minigames, spotty control, and lack of depth. Most people garden to relax, but the game's time limits, seed scattering winds, and wildly moving pots ensure the exact opposite. The wilting mechanic forces you on a linear rotation through a collection of flowers, fruits, and veggies instead of letting you branch out and experiment with the new plants you've unlocked. Gardening Mama could use more of a Harvest Moon crop economy instead of rewarding players with lawn decorations and new slacks. But if you like Cooking Mama, this is certainly on par. —**BRYAN**





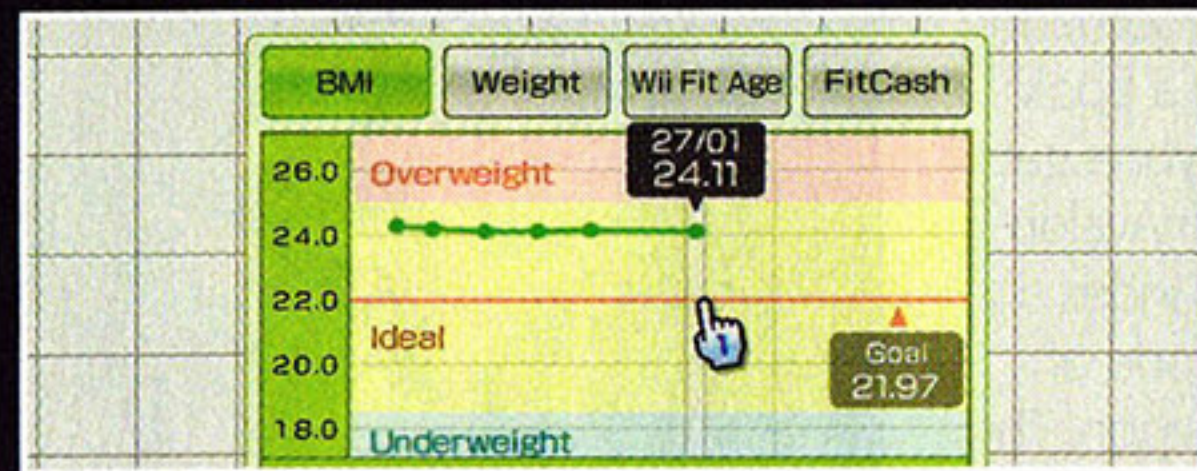
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For February 2009 Based On Units Sold

1 Wii FIT (Wii)



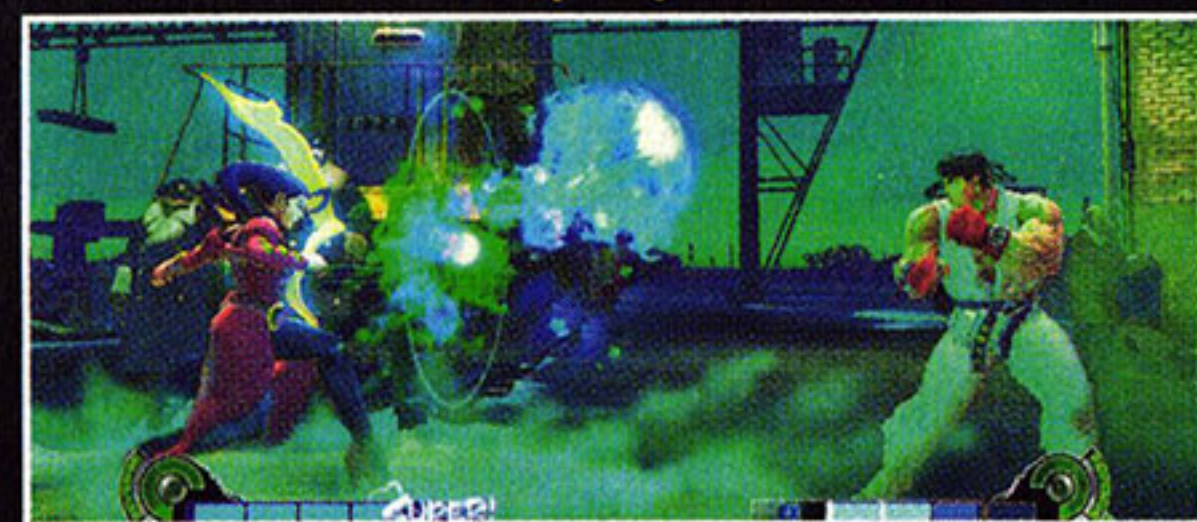
There's been a lot of talk about these high-falutin' electronic gizmos of late – these computer games with their graphics and their Internet. Bah! What really sells today are the old school remakes and unimpressive low-tech software like Wii Fit. It just serves you whippersnappers right. You don't need fancy technology to have a good time. Back in my day we didn't need entertainment to be entertained.

2 STREET FIGHTER IV (360)



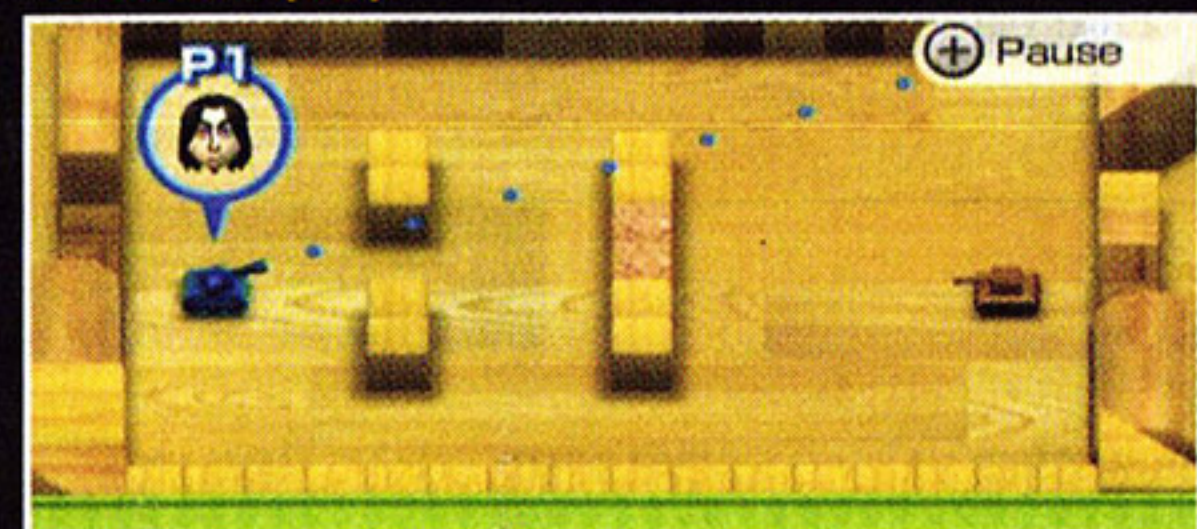
Street Fighter IV is another example of what I'm talking about... what was I talking about? You'll have to excuse me; it's almost time for my nap. Then I'm off to Old Country Buffet to steal silverware – which all ties back to my original point. You don't need new games to have fun. Street Fighter IV plays exactly like a 15-year-old title. They didn't need to change a thing.

3 STREET FIGHTER IV (PS3)



What? You don't think old people know how to have fun? Poppycock. That's balderdash! Why do you think we drive down the street with our blinkers on? Why do you think we yell at grocery store checkout clerks? That's entertainment! So don't make fun of me because my teeth and I don't sleep together, or because I fart in public and pretend I didn't feel it. I know fun.

4 Wii PLAY (Wii)



Which brings me to Wii Play. This game is amazing. A night with Wii Play is better than a Tony Bennett record and a glass of fine wine. I used to have to leave the house to go bowling. I can't go outside; there are ne'er-do-well youths out there! Thanks to Wii Play I don't have to. Now my schedule is packed tighter than Warren Beatty's little black book (expiration date: joke best if used before January, 1987).

5 KILLZONE 2 (PS3)



So, you're probably wondering what I think of Killzone 2? It stinks! I don't like the graphics. There is too much graphics. I don't need to be able to see what I'm shooting at in so much detail. I can't see while I'm driving, and I do just fine. Also there is too much action. How am I supposed to go to the bathroom every five minutes with all this shooting going on? Also, where are my glasses? Get off my lawn! Looks like it's time for my medication.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Wii Fit	1	Wii	8	04-08
2	Street Fighter IV	N/A	360	9.25	02-09
3	Street Fighter IV	N/A	PS3	9.25	02-09
4	Wii Play	2	Wii	7	02-07
5	Killzone 2	N/A	PS3	8.75	02-09
6	Mario Kart Wii	3	Wii	8.5	04-08
7	Call of Duty: World at War	5	360	8.75	11-08
8	Mario Kart DS	9	DS	8.5	11-05
9	New Super Mario Bros.	8	DS	9.25	05-06
10	Guitar Hero World Tour	7	Wii	N/A	10-08
11	F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin	N/A	360	8.25	02-09
12	Skate 2	6	360	9	01-09
13	Left 4 Dead	4	360	9.25	11-08
14	NBA 2K9	N/A	360	8.5	10-08
15	Halo 3	N/A	360	9.75	09-07
16	Call of Duty: World at War	11	PS3	8.75	11-08
17	LEGO Star Wars: The Complete	20	Wii	N/A	11-07
18	My Fitness Coach	17	Wii	N/A	12-08
19	Fallout 3	13	360	9.5	10-08
20	LEGO Star Wars: The Complete	N/A	Wii	N/A	11-07

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Warriors Orochi Z	PS3
2	Resident Evil 5	PS3
3	Cube Picross	DS
4	Mario & Luigi RPG 3	DS
5	Dynasty Warriors Multi Raid	PSP
6	New Play Control Pikmin	Wii
7	Yakuza 3	PS3
8	7th Dragon	DS
9	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP
10	Resistance: Retribution	PSP



TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena	N/A	multi
2	Empire: Total War	N/A	PC
3	Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	N/A	DS
4	Resident Evil 5	4	multi
5	Peggle	N/A	multi
6	WWE: Legends of Wrestling	N/A	multi
7	Madworld	5	Wii
8	Street Fighter IV	6	multi
9	Halo Wars	7	360
10	House of the Dead Overkill	8	Wii



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World Of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King	1	\$38
2	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	2	\$19
3	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War II	N/A	\$49
4	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	3	\$37
5	F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin	N/A	\$50
6	Spore	4	\$45
7	World Of Warcraft	5	\$18
8	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	7	\$20
9	Fallout 3	8	\$47
10	World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	11	\$28



Based On Monthly Units Sold

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS®

REVIEWSARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

50 Cent: Blood in the Sand	8	Apr-09
Afro Samurai	7.75	Mar-09
Alone in the Dark: Inferno	7.25	Jan-09
Armored Core: For Answer	6.25	Dec-08
Baja: Edge of Control	8	Dec-08
BioShock	9	Nov-08
Blitz: The League II	7	Nov-08
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	7.75	Nov-08
Buzz Quiz TV	8.25	Nov-08
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Dead Space	9.25	Nov-08
Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard	7	Apr-09
Fallout 3	9.5	Dec-08
Far Cry 2	8	Dec-08
FEAR 2: Project Origin	8.25	Mar-09
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	7.75	Nov-08
FIFA Soccer 09	8	Dec-08
Fracture	7.5	Nov-08
Golden Axe: Beast Rider	6	Dec-08
Guitar Hero World Tour	9.25	Dec-08
H.A.W.X.	8.75	Apr-09
Killzone 2	8.75	Mar-09
Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The	4	Jan-09
Legendary	6.5	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
LittleBigPlanet	9.5	Dec-08
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The	4.75	Mar-09
Major League Baseball 2K9	7.25	Apr-09
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	9	Nov-08
Mirror's Edge	8	Dec-08
MLB 09: The Show	9	Apr-09
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe	8.5	Dec-08
MotorStorm Pacific Rift	7.25	Dec-08
NBA 09: The Inside	6.5	Nov-08
NBA 2K9	8.5	Nov-08
NBA Live 09	7.75	Nov-08
NCAA Basketball 09	7.25	Jan-09
Need for Speed: Undercover	7	Dec-08
NHL 09	9.25	Oct-08
Prince of Persia	8.75	Jan-09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	8.5	Jan-09
Quantum of Solace	6.5	Jan-09
Resident Evil 5	9.5	Apr-09
Resistance 2	8.5	Dec-08
Rise of the Argonauts	6	Feb-09
Rock Revolution	7	Dec-08
Saints Row 2	8.75	Dec-08
Shaun White Snowboarding	6.75	Jan-09
Silent Hill: Homecoming	6.5	Nov-08
Skate 2	9	Feb-09
SOCOM: Confrontation	6	Dec-08
Sonic Unleashed	6	Jan-09
Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection	8	Apr-09
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6	Dec-08
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	8.75	Oct-08
Street Fighter IV	9.25	Mar-09
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Tomb Raider Underworld	8.75	Jan-09
Valkyria Chronicles	8.5	Dec-08
Wanted: Weapons of Fate	6.25	Apr-09
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08
X-Blades	5.5	Apr-09

XBOX 360

50 Cent: Blood in the Sand	8	Apr-09
Afro Samurai	7.75	Mar-09
Armored Core: For Answer	6.25	Dec-08
Baja: Edge of Control	8	Dec-08
Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts	8.5	Dec-08
Blitz: The League II	7	Nov-08
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	7.75	Nov-08
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	8.75	Dec-08
Crash: Mind Over Mutant	4.75	Dec-08



Resident Evil 5 - Xbox 360 - Apr-09

Dead Space	9.25	Nov-08
Destroy All Humans! Path of the Furon	4.5	Feb-09
Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard	7	Apr-09
EndWar	7.75	Dec-08
Fable II	9.25	Dec-08
Fallout 3	9.5	Dec-08
Far Cry 2	8	Dec-08
FEAR 2: Project Origin	8.25	Mar-09
FIFA Soccer 09	8	Dec-08
Fracture	7.5	Nov-08
Gears of War 2	9	Dec-08

Golden Axe: Beast Rider	6	Dec-08
Grand Theft Auto IV: The Lost and the Damned	9	Apr-09
Guitar Hero World Tour	9.25	Dec-08
H.A.W.X.	8.75	Apr-09
Halo Wars	9	Mar-09
Last Remnant, The	7	Dec-08
Left 4 Dead	9.25	Jan-09
Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The	4	Jan-09
Legendary	6.5	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
Lips	7.5	Jan-09
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The	4.75	Mar-09
Major League Baseball 2K9	7.25	Apr-09
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	9	Nov-08
Mirror's Edge	8	Dec-08
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe	8.5	Dec-08
Naruto: The Broken Bond	8.25	Jan-09
NBA 2K9	8.5	Nov-08
NBA Live 09	7.75	Nov-08
NCAA Basketball 09	7.25	Jan-09
Need for Speed: Undercover	7	Dec-08
NHL 09	9.25	Oct-08
Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad	6	Apr-09
Prince of Persia	8.75	Jan-09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	8.5	Jan-09
Pure	8.5	Oct-08
Quantum of Solace	6.5	Jan-09
Race Pro	7	Mar-09
Resident Evil 5	9.5	Apr-09
Rise of the Argonauts	6	Feb-09
Rock Band 2	9.25	Oct-08
Rock Revolution	7	Dec-08
Saints Row 2	8.75	Dec-08
Scene It? Box Office Smash	8.5	Jan-09
Shaun White Snowboarding	6.75	Jan-09
Silent Hill: Homecoming	6.5	Nov-08
Skate 2	9	Feb-09
Sonic Unleashed	6	Jan-09
Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection	8	Apr-09
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6	Dec-08
Star Ocean: The Last Hope	7	Mar-09
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	8.75	Oct-08
Stoked	7.5	Mar-09
Street Fighter IV	9.25	Mar-09
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	8.5	Oct-08
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Tomb Raider Underworld	8.75	Jan-09
Wanted: Weapons of Fate	6.25	Apr-09
Warhammer: Mark of Chaos - Battle March	5	Nov-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08
You're In The Movies	7.25	Jan-09

Wii



Madworld - Wii - Apr-09

Active Life: Outdoor Challenge	7	Nov-08
Animal Crossing: City Folk	7.5	Jan-09
Brothers in Arms: Double Time	5	Dec-08
Carnival Games MiniGolf	5	Jan-09
Castlevania: Judgment	5	Jan-09
Cooking Mama World Kitchen	5.5	Jan-09
Crash: Mind Over Mutant	4.75	Dec-08
Deadly Creatures	7	Mar-09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	7.75	Apr-09
House of the Dead: Overkill, The	8.5	Apr-09
Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The	4	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
Line Rider 2: Ubound	6.25	Nov-08
Madworld	9	Apr-09
Major League Baseball 2K9	7.25	Apr-09
Marble Saga: Kororinpa	8	Mar-09
Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars	5.75	Dec-08
MySims Party	6	Apr-09
NASCAR Kart Racing	6.75	Apr-09
New Play Control Mario Power Tennis	8.25	Apr-09
Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad	6	Apr-09
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	7	Jan-09
Ready 2 Rumble: Revolution	1	Apr-09
Rock Revolution	4.75	Nov-08
Rune Factory: Frontier	6.75	Apr-09
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	5.5	Feb-09
Samba de Amigo	6.75	Nov-08
Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip	6.75	Jan-09

SimCity Creator	5	Nov-08
Skate It	7.75	Jan-09
Sonic Unleashed	6.5	Jan-09
Spray	7	Dec-08
Star Wars: The Clone Wars - Lightsaber Duels	5	Jan-09
Ten Pin Alley 2	5	Jan-09
Tenchu: Shadow Assassins	6.5	Apr-09
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Ultimate Band	7.5	Dec-08
Wario Land: Shake It	6.75	Dec-08
Wii Music	3	Dec-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08

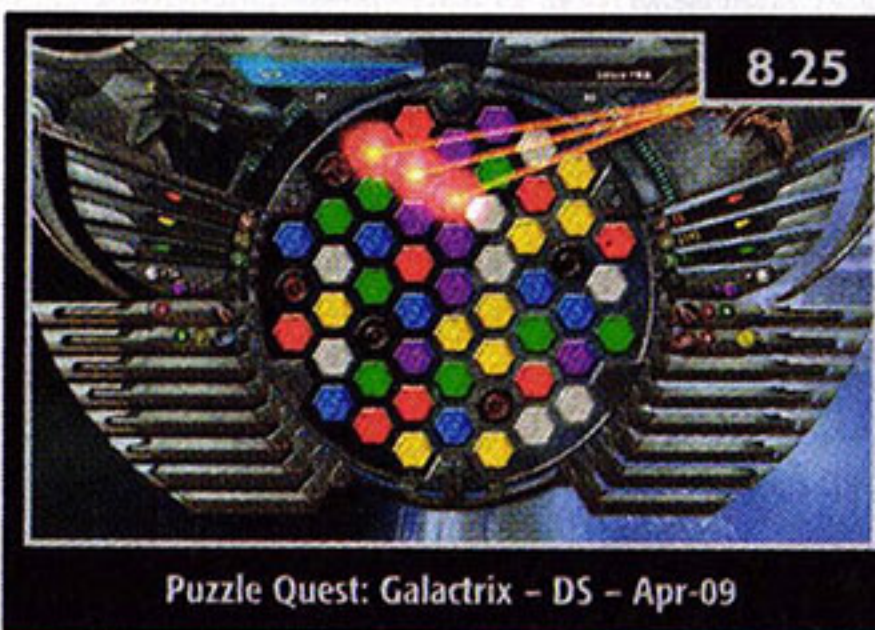
PLAYSTATION 2

Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories	6.75	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
Persona 4	8	Jan-09
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08

PC

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II	8.75	Mar-09
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Civilization IV: Colonization	9	Oct-08
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	8.75	Dec-08
Crysis Warhead	8.75	Dec-08
Drakensang: The Dark Eye	6.75	Mar-09
Legendary	6.5	Jan-09
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Neverwinter Nights 2: Storm of Zehir	7.5	Jan-09
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky	7.75	Nov-08
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	7	Jan-09
Saints Row 2	8.75	Dec-08
Silent Hill: Homecoming	6.5	Nov-08
Spore	8.75	Nov-08
Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning	8	Dec-08
Warhammer: Mark of Chaos - Battle March	5	Nov-08

NINTENDO DS



Puzzle Quest: Galactrix - DS - Apr-09

Age of Empires: Mythologies	8.25	Feb-09
Big Bang Mini	7.75	Feb-09
Blue Dragon Plus	5.5	Mar-09
Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	8.25	Nov-08
Chase: Felix Meets Felicity, The	6	Feb-09
Chrono Trigger	9	Dec-08
Cradle of Rome	6.75	Jan-09
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	7.5	Mar-09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	7.75	Apr-09
Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon	7.75	Apr-09
Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades	7	Jan-09
Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure	7	Apr-09
Iron Chef America: Supreme Cuisine	4.5	Feb-09
Kirby Super Star Ultra	7	Dec-08
Legacy of Ys: Books I & II	5	Mar-09
Master of the Monster Lair	6.25	Nov-08
Metal Slug 7	6.75	Dec-08
My World, My Way	6	Mar-09
N+	8.75	Oct-08
Ninja Town	9	Dec-08
Pokémon Platinum	8.5	Apr-09
Populous DS	7	Dec-08
Prince of Persia: The Fallen King	6	Feb-09
Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	8.25	Apr-09
Retro Game Challenge	8.5	Feb-09
Robocalypse	7	Jan-09
Rubik's World	8	Dec-08
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	8.5	Nov-08
Star Wars: The Clone Wars - Jedi Alliance	6	Jan-09
Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff	6.25	Dec-08
Time Hollow	7	Nov-08
TrackMania DS	6.5	Mar-09
Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume	6	Apr-09

PSP

LocoRoco 2	9.25	Mar-09
N+	8.75	Oct-08
Prinny: Can I Really Be The Hero?	8	Apr-09
Star Ocean: First Departure	7	Nov-08
Star Ocean: Second Evolution	7	Feb-09

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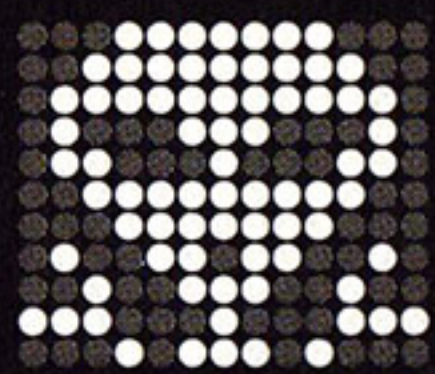
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XBOX
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XBOX 360



Street Fighter IV

Mastering The Characters

UNLIMITED ENABLED



By special advisor to Street Fighter Seth Killian

(Check out this month's Unlimited section for tips on the full roster)

ABEL – Abel has options at a distance, but he is at his best up close. Make careful use of the Roll or an EX High Kick (HK) Wheelkick to get in quickly with low risk. From up close, you can create a lot of pressure by dash canceling his standing Medium Kick (MK) by holding towards, hitting MK, then tapping forwards again. The attack comes out, and Abel will immediately cancel into a forward dash, keeping the opponent blocking and Abel right on top of them. From there, mix it up with Tornado Throws, quick rolls to the other side, and cross-up attacks using jumping MK. His Ultra is a great way to punish fireballers – it's got good invulnerability and speed. You can also combo into this easily from any successful crouching High Punch (HP) attack.

C. VIPER – Viper's best poking move is actually the instant aerial Burning Kick. Jump towards the opponent and immediately perform the Burning Kick. Your jump arc is massively shortened and you can cover half the screen and attack almost instantly, knocking down the opponent and opening the door for more tricks (it's safe if blocked). As a follow-up, jump at them with HK in the air. If it's blocked, cancel it (while still in the air) into a HK Burning Kick, which will cross very quickly to the other side and hit them in the back of the head. If you land a Burning Kick (in the air or even from the ground) near the corner, you can tack on her Ultra combo with a little timing. You can also open up opportunities by pressuring with low MK - MP Thunder Knuckle. Once they get complacent with blocking, use her special cancel trick (tap any two punches immediately after performing a Thunder Knuckle or Seismo-Hammer and she stops

the move and recovers immediately) to make them block, letting you walk in for free a throw. You can also use this technique to speed up your recovery from some normal moves for advanced combos.

CHUN LI – Chun Li is best on offense. Cross-up your opponent using jumping LK. After you land, you can jump again immediately with her ↓+MK stomp for an instant overhead, or stay on the ground with her crouching LP. It's one of the fastest moves in the entire game, so you can keep an opponent pinned down easily with it while you mix it up with throws, her overhead floppkick, Focus Attacks, or combo into EX Lightning Legs. If you do land the EX Lightning Legs, you can juggle them afterwards with her Ultra combo.

EL FUERTE – El Fuerte is all about unpredictability. He has a lot of great tricks, but they all involve putting him in harm's way, so you have to stay mentally ahead of your opponent to win. You'll want to make heavy use of his Run into MP bodyslam. If done from up close, this can actually cross-up your opponent and require them to block the other way. With a little variation, it can be very hard to tell which way to block it. Mix this up with his Run (away) into HP for a throw (you can duck his Run towards + HP, but not his Run away + HP). If you're under pressure, use his EX Run to be able to absorb a hit and keep running, or his EX Guacamole if you're in deep trouble. It leaves you very briefly vulnerable but can escape any tight spot and recovers surprisingly fast. His Ultra is best used as air defense. If you see someone jump at you, start your Ultra just after they pass the apex of their jump to catch them as they land with an unblockable slam.

HONDA – Honda has a hard time getting going, but does giant-sized damage once he does. Save your EX meter for his super combo if you can, and go for a crouching

MK into Headbutt into Super for massive damage. If they're blocking, don't be shy with the Oicho Throw – Honda needs this to have a chance, and the HP version does major damage. EX Headbutt is great on defense, but won't go through fireballs, so practice jumping over them or absorbing a few with Focus Attacks while you work your way up close. The Ultra does go through fireballs on startup, but isn't usually fast enough to let you react, so save it for anti-air purposes or as a follow-up if you're able to land a Focus Attack up close.

KEN – Ken has a great cross-up using jumping MK (or LK), so use it as much as possible. After you cross your opponent, do two crouching LKs into a crouching MK. If it's blocked, just combo the MK into a fireball to push them away. If it hits, combo into EX Hurricane Kick. It does a lot of dizzy and leaves you right next to your opponent for a great "50/50" mix-up. If you think they'll block, go for the throw. If you think they'll try and counter your throw, jump straight up. If they try and throw you and you jump, they'll whiff the throw and you can land on them while they're recovering with another big combo and score a dizzy. If you hit early with a LP Dragon Punch, immediately fire off a HP Dragon Punch to juggle the opponent. It doesn't do much damage but is demoralizing and helps you to build super meter for more EX Hurricanes!

RYU – Ryu is very versatile but one of the reasons he's so dangerous is that he has a lot of great ways to land his Ultra combo even without using a Focus Attack. If you hit an airborne opponent with just the tip of your LP Dragon Punch (or even trade hits with it), you can almost always recover in time to juggle their falling body with his Ultra fireball. You can also land the Ultra after you hit an airborne opponent with Ryu's jumping MP, after an EX fireball, and even after an EX Hurricane kick if you're near the corner.

SAGAT – Sagat has a strong fireball game at a distance, a tricky cross-up with jumping LK, and an effective poke with his LK Tiger Knee, but his core strength is his overall high damage and lots of easy ways to set up his Ultra combo. The easiest method is to do one of many combos into his Tiger Uppercut, and if you've got half your super meter filled, Focus Cancel the Uppercut and dash towards them. If you've got your Ultra, go for it. If you don't, you can still add some extra damage with a HK Tiger Knee. You can also land the Ultra after an EX low Tiger Shot near the corners.

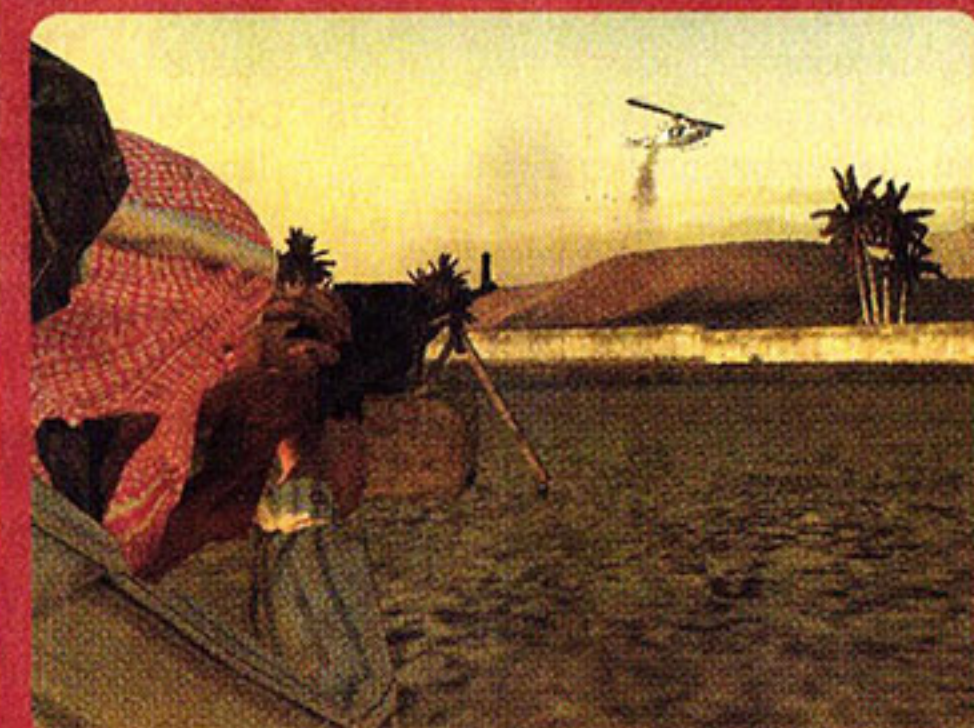
Mod World

Battlefield 2
Project Reality
www.realitymod.com



Recently honored by ModDB (www.moddb.com) as the 2008 Mod of the Year, Project Reality has been a long time in the making. In fact, it's still not done – but even in its current v0.8 state, it's a fantastic addition to Battlefield 2.

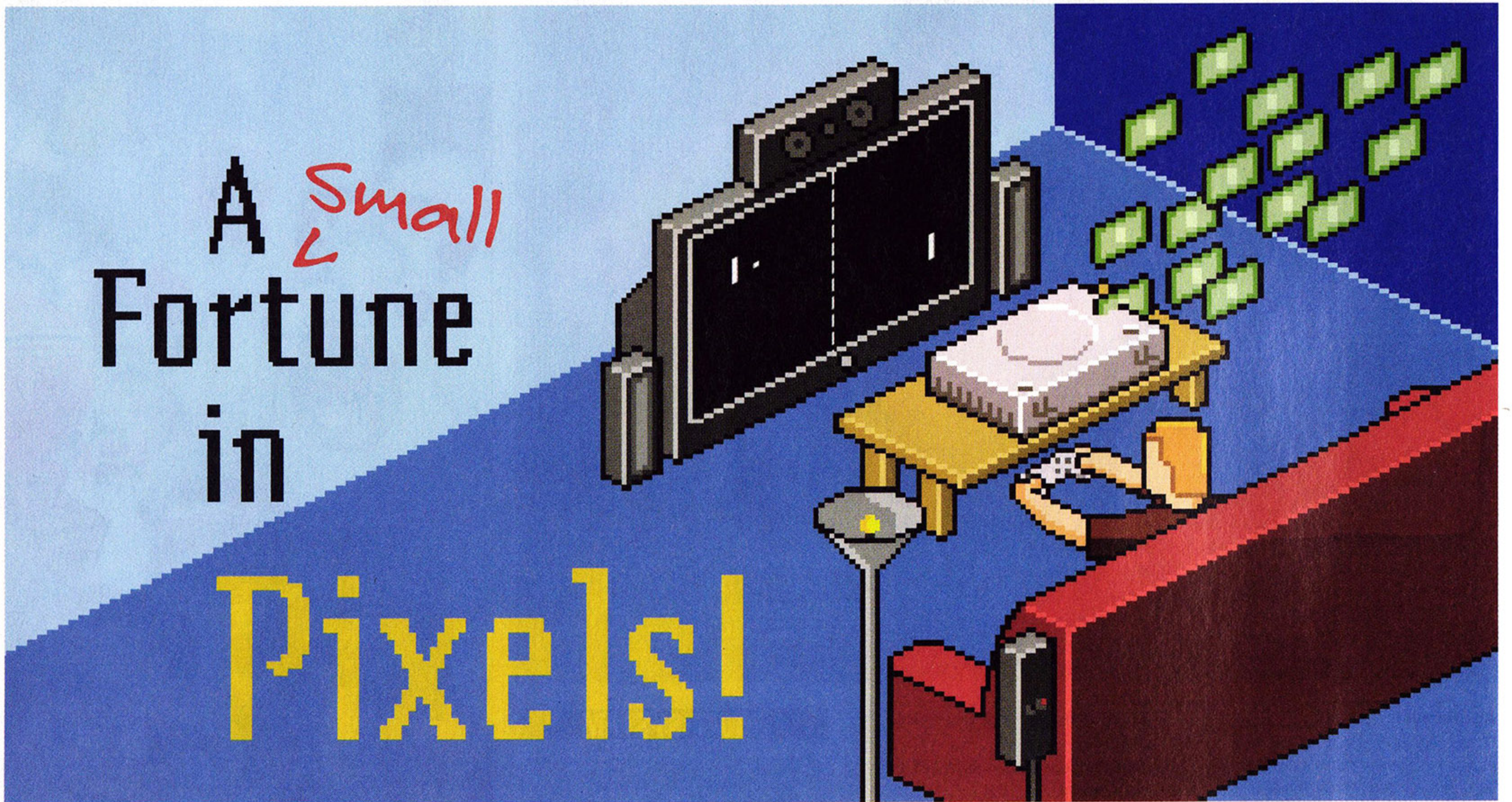
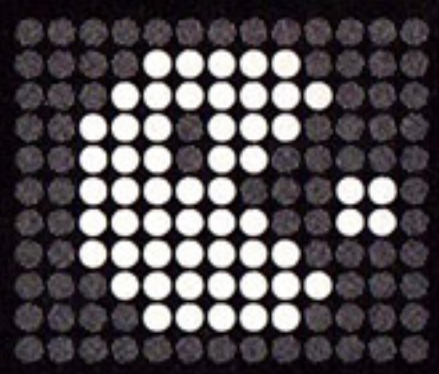
The goal of the Project Reality team is to turn Battlefield 2 into the most realistic warfare simulator possible. Dozens of adjustments to everything from damage models and weapon handling to the game's physics engine are part of this re-imagining of the popular FPS.



This mod is much more than a set of simple tweaks. New maps, modes, and factions expand the playing field. The spawning system and squad structure have been reworked to force players to work in effective teams and think strategically. The flip side of this, of course, is that Project Reality is unapologetically rough on newbies.

A sister mod, creatively named Project Reality Single Player, adds an offline experience. Though only one mode is available offline, it's still good training for the wilds of online play. Frankly, that a single-player version exists at all speaks to the popularity and quality of Project Reality.





Last month, Classic GI dove deep into the video game collector's scene, detailing the rare games that only the world's wealthiest can afford. This month, we take a look at games that could put a dent into a checking account, but won't require a loan or the sale of a kidney. As you'll find, a game's rising value isn't based solely on its rarity; consumer demand also plays a large factor in the price. For more complete lists for each system, head to racketboy.com. The site's curator, Nick Reichert, is on top of the game, and helped greatly in the creation of this two-part feature.

Batman Forever, Justice League, Maximum Carnage, Virtual Bart, WWF Raw, Judge Dredd, Comix Zone

Mega Drive • Value: \$300-\$650

All seven of these Genesis games would have a hard time fetching \$1 at a garage sale...in the United States. If you can get your hands on the Japanese Mega Drive versions, you could make a small fortune. Most of these games were published by Acclaim, releasing just as the console entered its death throes. Rather than creating unique Japanese packaging for each game, Acclaim cut corners by slapping bar code stickers onto the European packaging. Most of these games have sold for around \$300, but one copy of Batman Forever fetched \$650. That's a lot to pay for pixelated Val Kilmer nipples.



Earthbound

Super Nintendo Value: \$200

This modern day RPG is fairly easy to find, but demand has kept its value high. The big question surrounding it: why hasn't Nintendo created a Wii sequel yet? Or at least brought the series' other entries to North America?



Chrono Trigger

Super Nintendo • Value: \$1,217

Many of you have a copy of Chrono Trigger in your game collection. It wouldn't surprise us if some of you are no longer reading this, and are instead rummaging through a closet to locate said game with the hope of selling it on eBay for over \$1,000. If your game has been opened, there's little chance that you'll even land \$100 for it. Collectors are looking for unopened, mint condition copies. Seeing that hardly anyone could wait to get this game out of its wrapper, mint versions are hard to come by. If there's a lesson to be learned here, it's either to keep all of your games sealed (which would leave you bored and miserable), or to buy two copies of all great games – one for playing, and one to pay for your mid-life crisis Corvette.



Elemental Gearbolt: Assassin's Case

PlayStation • Value: \$1,379

At 1998's Electronic Entertainment Expo, Working Designs handed out 40 special edition bundles of Elemental Gearbolt. In this metal case, lucky recipients walked away with a copy of the game, a golden GunCon, and a golden memory card. The last tracked copy sold for \$1,379.



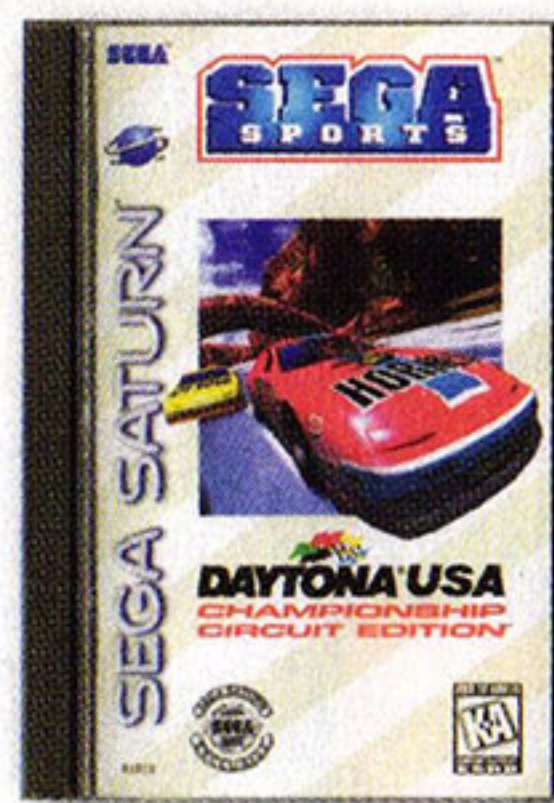
(All amounts represent the product's latest list price or estimated value. This may not reflect actual selling prices.)



Psychic Assassin Taromaru

Saturn (Japan) • Value: \$400

Time Warner Interactive manufactured only 7,500 copies of Psychic Assassin Taromaru before the publisher went the way of the dodo. Keen-eyed collectors have spotted differences in the manual art, but no variation as of yet is worth more than the other.



Daytona USA: CCE Netlink Edition

Saturn • Value: \$300

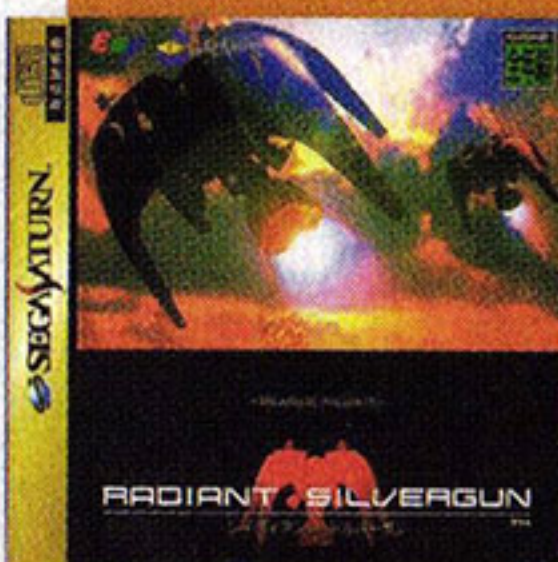
The only way to determine if you have the rare edition is to open the case to see if the NetLink booklet is beneath the manual and that the disk has a NetLink logo. If you have a sealed copy, keep it sealed. Finding out that you have a standard version would be devastating.



NCAA College Basketball 2K3

GameCube • Value: \$400

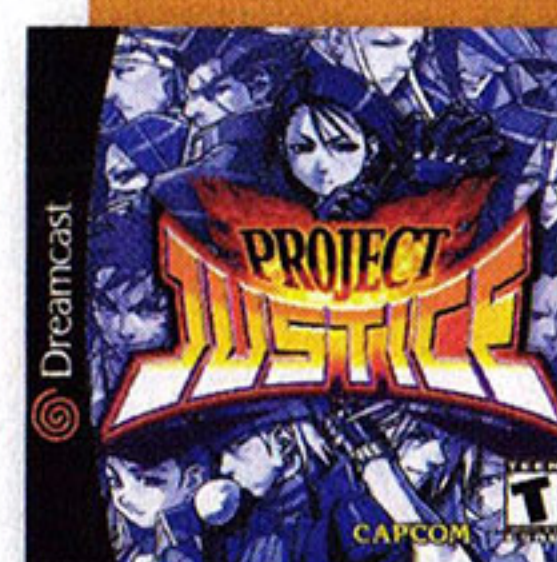
No one knows how many copies were produced, but it is believed that only 2,500 to 5,000 are in the wild. Since the game sucked, we wouldn't be surprised if many of those were thrown in the trash. The latest sale had the game selling for just under \$400.



Radiant Silvergun

Saturn (Japan) • Value: \$350

This game is as common as can be, but for some reason, it has become the item that any self-respecting game collector must have in his or her collection. The demand has driven the price up despite its frequent availability, much to the liking of Japanese game retailers.



Project Justice

Dreamcast • Value: \$300

Released months after Sega discontinued the Dreamcast, Project Justice joins Final Fantasy VII and Chrono Trigger as a hot commodity for collectors only if it's in its unopened state.



Bangai-O Prize Edition

Dreamcast (Japan) • Value: \$500

Treasure, the developer behind Gunstar Heroes, Ikaruga, and most awesome games that feature brutal difficulty levels, christened the five top scores in Bangai-O spirits with a rare variant of the game. The only identifier for this version is a special sticker on the cover. Of the five copies handed out, two have been sold, one for \$500.



Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence

PlayStation 2 (Red Box)

Value: \$288

Special editions are this generation's tournament games. They'll likely never reach the towering thousand dollar mark, but some of them, like the red boxed Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence, are proving to be incredibly hard to find.



Stop That Roach

Game Boy • Value: \$200

This odd puzzle game is widely considered to be one of the rarest Game Boy titles. You won't get much for it opened, but a sealed copy recently sold for around \$200.



Suikoden II

PlayStation • Value: \$280

Even after receiving rave reviews, Konami didn't print enough copies of Suikoden II to meet demand. With role-playing fanatics sitting on their copies, it has become a frequent high-priced seller.



Panzer Dragoon Saga

Saturn • Value: \$250

Only 30,000 copies were manufactured, and everyone wants to play it. Expect this game's value to skyrocket.



Tactics Ogre

PlayStation • Value: \$200

With each passing year, Tactics Ogre's value continues to climb. This game is fairly easy to track down, which makes its rarity somewhat of a question. However, its reputation of being rare has kept the price up and kept collectors' bank accounts empty.

This Month In Gaming History

On May 11, 1995, the first annual Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) kicked off in Los Angeles, CA. This event started with the shocking announcement that Sega had secretly delivered the Saturn to U.S. retailers. This new console release drew laughs, and took a back seat to Sony's PlayStation reveal and Nintendo's Ultra 64 talks. Keynote speakers for the show included Nintendo's Howard Lincoln, Sega's Thomas Kalinske, and Sony's Olaf Olafsson.

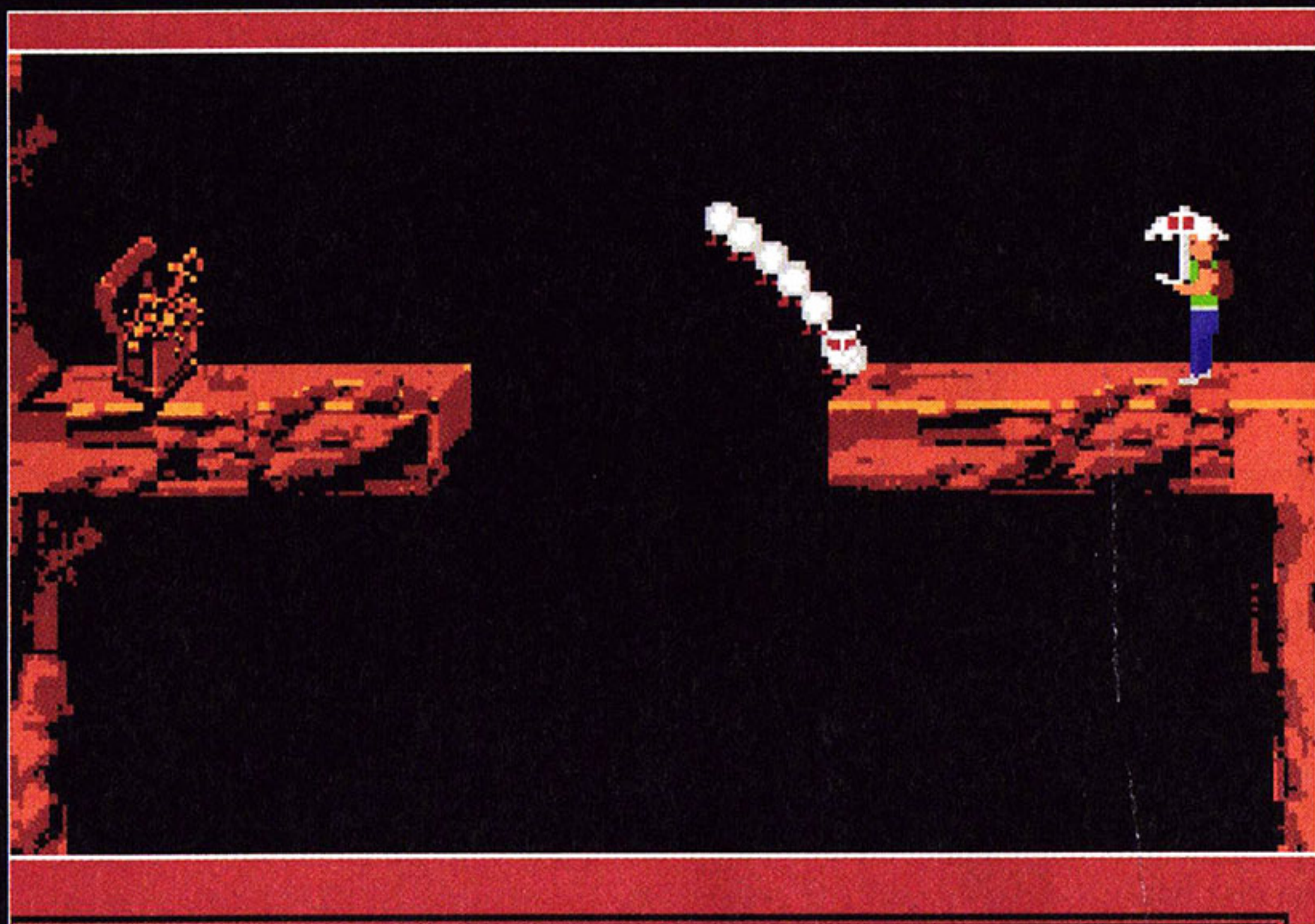


Final Fantasy VII

PlayStation (Black Label)

Value: \$417

Like Chrono Trigger, Final Fantasy VII isn't rare. In fact, two of Game Informer's copies are being used to keep Joe Juba's desk level. The only rare version of this game is the black bar edition in mint condition. The last sale of an unopened copy went for \$417. Before you get any bright ideas, collectors know how to spot the original shrink wrap.

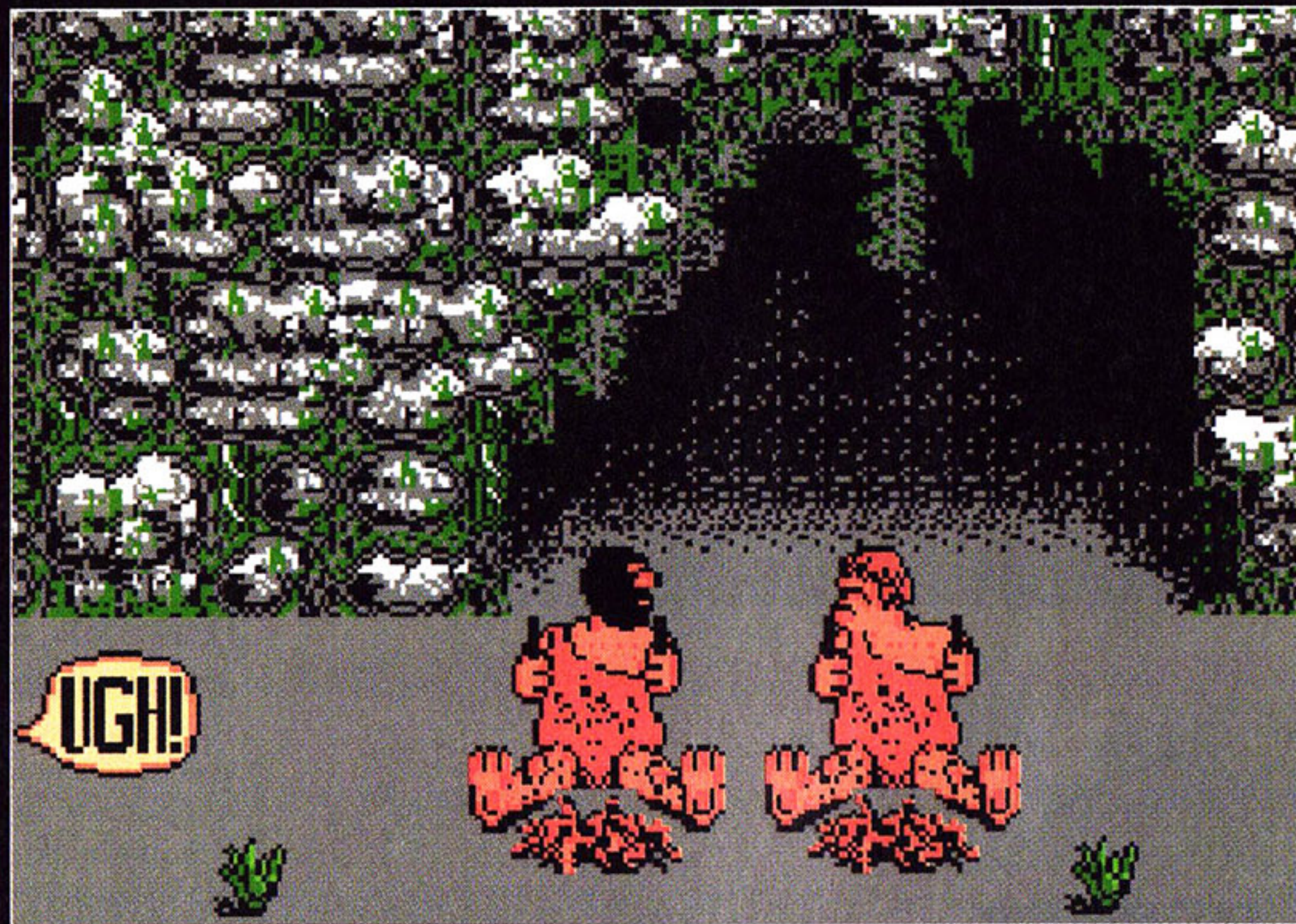
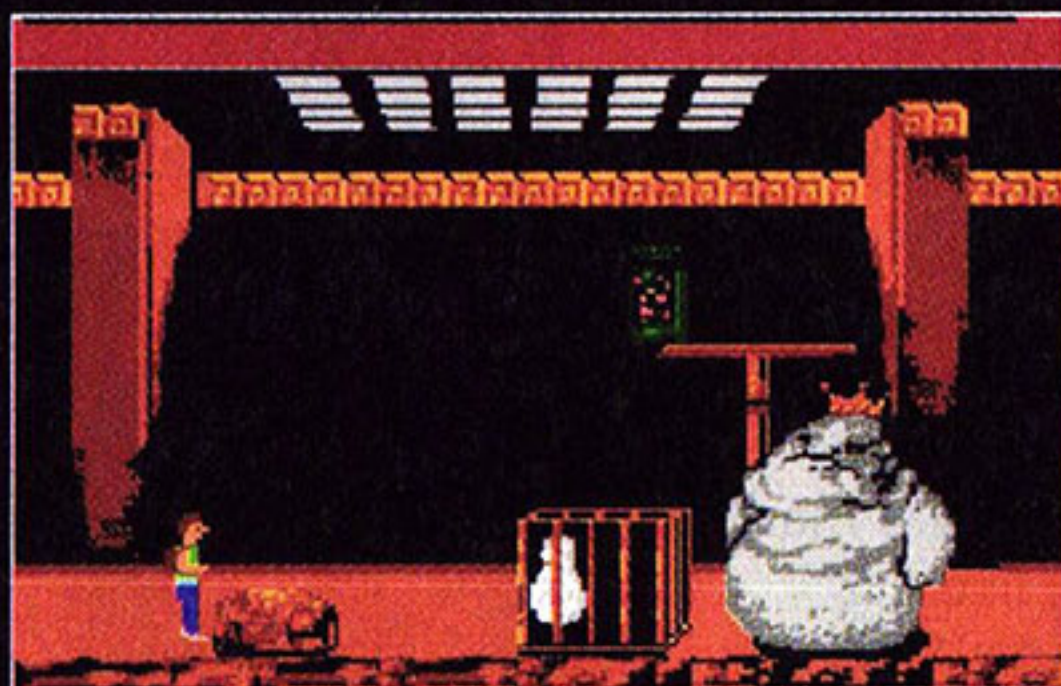
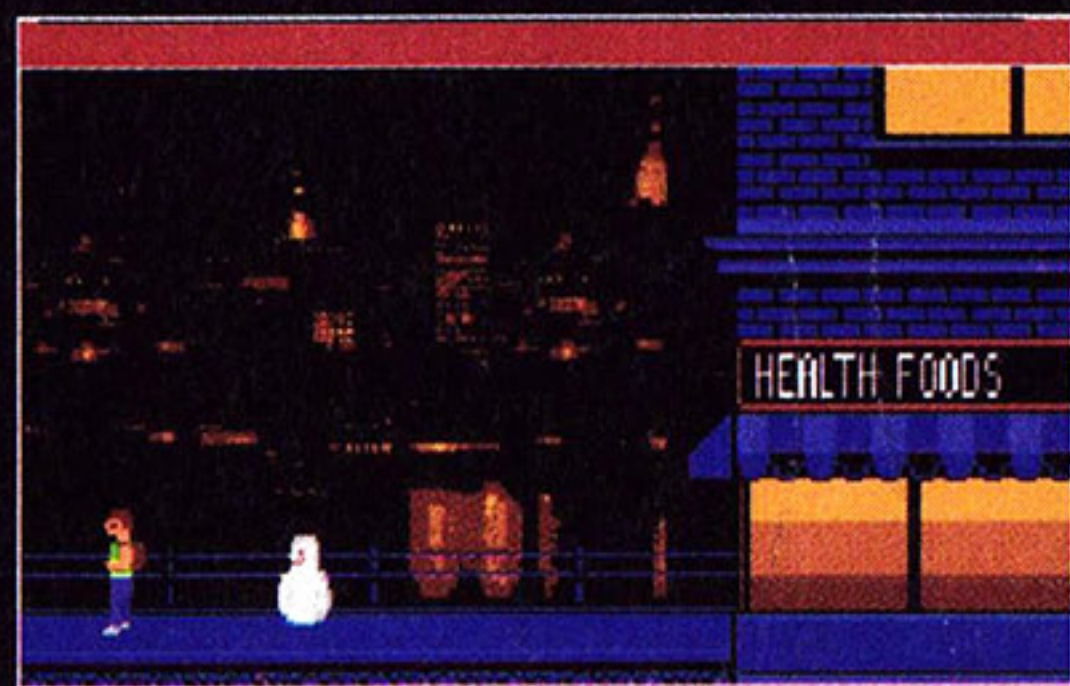


NES

A BOY AND HIS BLOB

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER ABSOLUTE ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER IMAGINEERING
> RELEASE 1989

A Boy and his Blob is among the most memorable games of the 8-bit era, but your recollection of this classic title is probably more pleasant than the constant trial-and-error required to play it. You probably remember the basics: When you feed your blob buddy various jellybeans, he transforms into handy objects that help you traverse obstacles and collect treasures. What you may have forgotten is that you have a limited supply of beans, so you need to be careful where and when you use them; it's possible to use all of your licorice beans and then be stuck without a ladder, necessitating a full restart. This becomes a big problem as you explore a jumble of underground tunnels, since you sometimes need to throw down random holes and trampolines with no clues or guidance in order to get to the next area. The moment-to-moment puzzles are fun to solve, like crossing gaps and surviving underwater, but the framework holding them together is more memorization than actual gameplay.

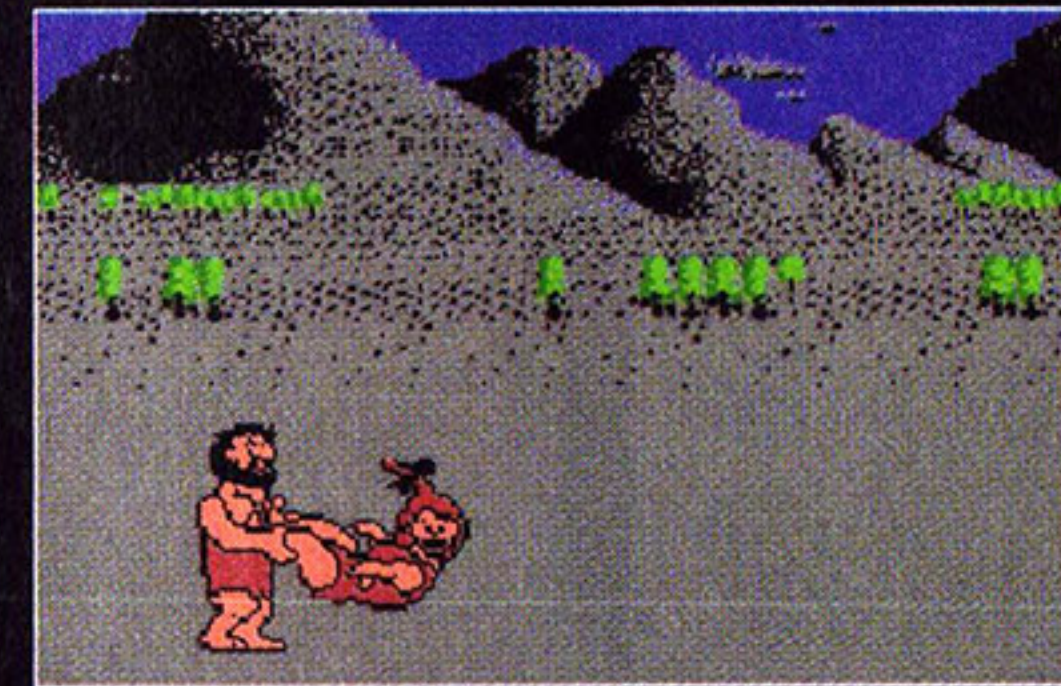


NES

CAVEMAN GAMES

> STYLE 1 TO 6-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER DATA EAST > DEVELOPER DATA EAST > RELEASE 1990

In Caveman Games, the word "ugh" is the starting cry for the pre-historic Olympic events. You will undoubtedly mutter the same word in sighs of resigned desperation as you play through the game's six dull and often broken contests. The events usually involve mashing the A button as fast as possible, with a few barely functional ancillary mechanics thrown in. The controls are sluggish and unresponsive, making victory an unsatisfying and unpredictable anomaly. The randomness combined with the awfulness makes Caveman Games fun to play in a group, since you and your friends can just marvel at your combined failures. Several events are at least good for a laugh, like the mate-toss (you throw your caveman wife as far as possible) and the saber race (where two runners are pursued by a hungry saber-tooth tiger). Even though you may be smiling during these segments, you won't be having fun.



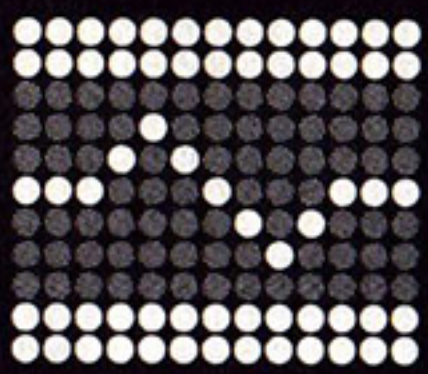
PC

DUKE NUKEM 3D

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > PUBLISHER APOGEE SOFTWARE > DEVELOPER 3D REALMS > RELEASE 1996

There's a reason why fans of Duke Nukem 3D have been willing to wait 12-plus years for Duke Nukem Forever: The series is a whole lot of fun. With contemporaries like Marathon, Star Wars: Dark Forces, and Doom, Duke Nukem 3D distinguishes itself more in terms of style than innovative gameplay: it was the first game to inject the FPS genre with derisive humor, cultural satire, and...well, babes. Duke trades the fledgling genre's drab alien worlds for the movie theaters and seedy bars of L.A. while never committing the sin of taking itself too seriously. Leaving bloody footprints, tipping strippers, and punching that big orange nuclear sign to end each level are a few of the flourishes that make Duke Nukem 3D shine. Surprisingly, the original PC version holds up well: The game could use a modern guidance system (getting lost in an FPS is so 20th century), but for those willing to trade polygons for pixelated sprites and open worlds for clever (albeit primitive) level design, Duke's one-liners and over-the-top humor still entertain.

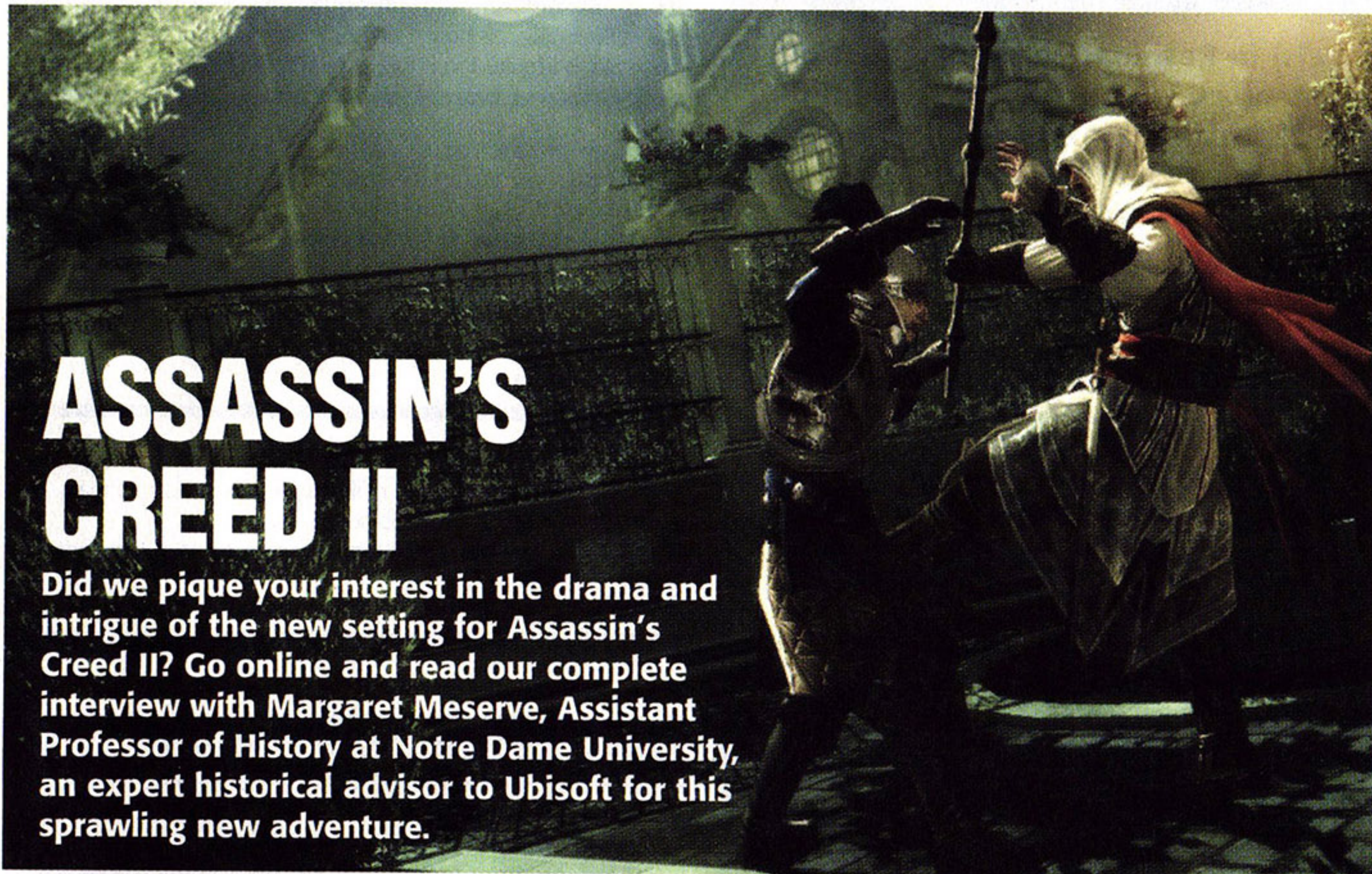




ONLINE

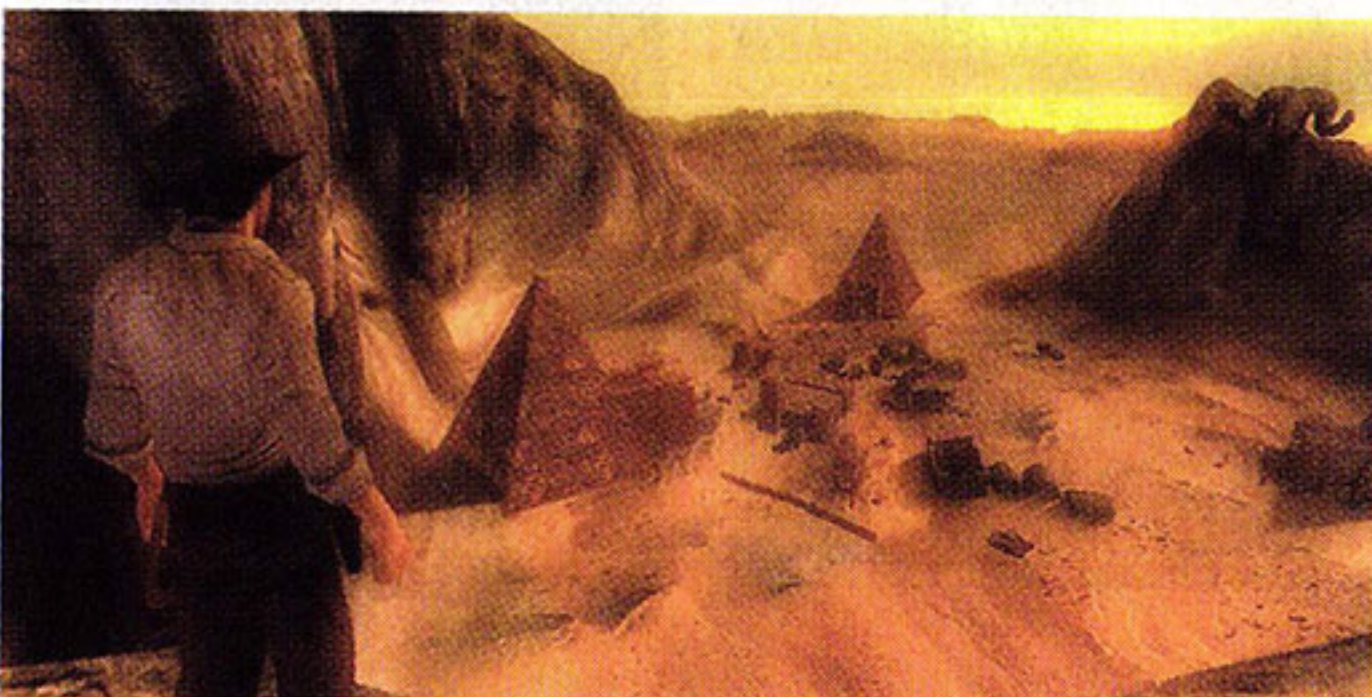
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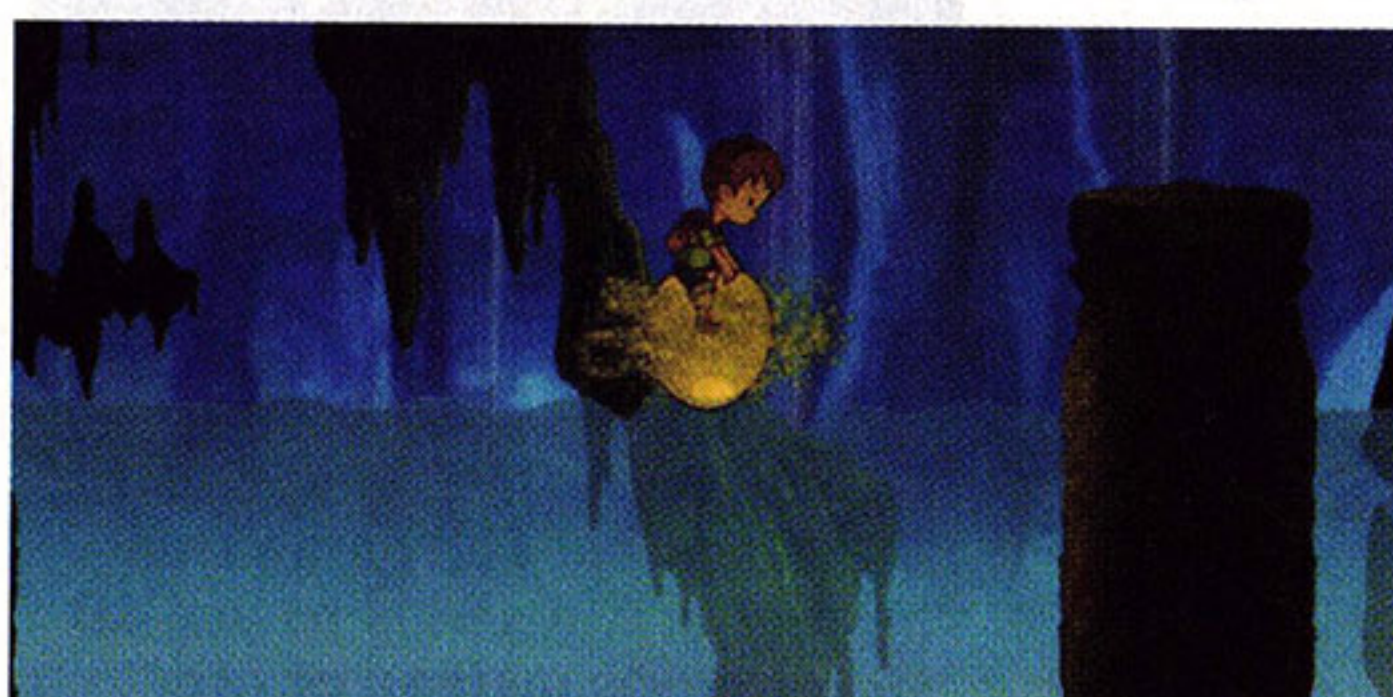
ASSASSIN'S CREED II

Did we pique your interest in the drama and intrigue of the new setting for Assassin's Creed II? Go online and read our complete interview with Margaret Meserve, Assistant Professor of History at Notre Dame University, an expert historical advisor to Ubisoft for this sprawling new adventure.



Indiana Jones & The Wii Crusade

It's been a long, winding road, but Indiana Jones is finally set to appear on a next-gen console. Read more about Indy's latest adventure in our Q&A with LucasArts producer Matt Vella.



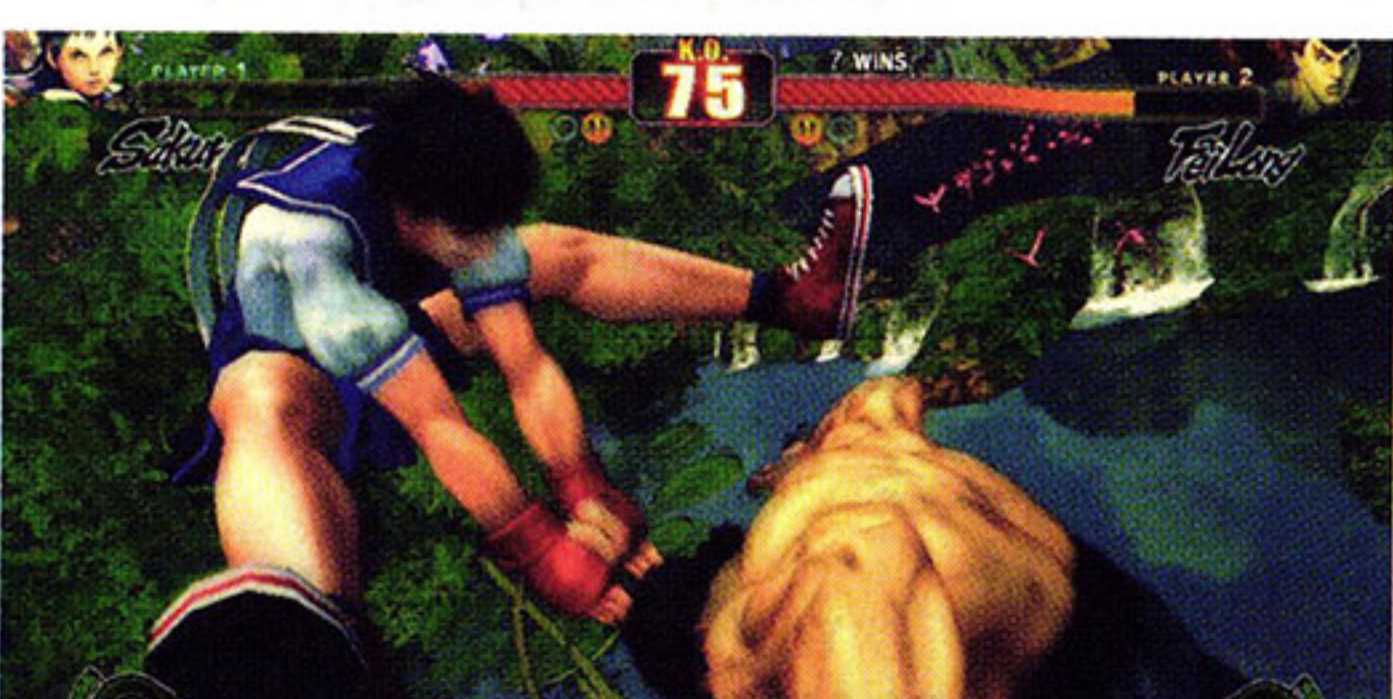
The Blob!

After wowing gamers with Contra 4, developer WayForward turned its gaze to A Boy and His Blob. Learn more about this intriguing reinvention in our exclusive developer interview.



Divine Retribution?

Check out additional assets and our extended Q&A with Volatile Games about their new project, Dead To Rights: Retribution.



Street Fighter's Sensei

Get more tips on each Street Fighter IV character from the boss-man himself, Seth Killian.



Also Online This Month:
Game Informer Online hits the pre-E3 Gamer's Day circuit. Stay tuned for new information about the hottest games of 2009!

UP TO THE MOMENT NEWS

IN-DEPTH FEATURES

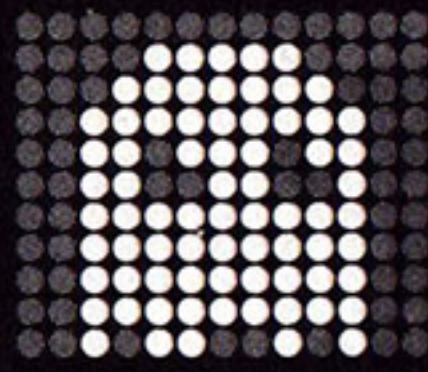
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GAMEOVER

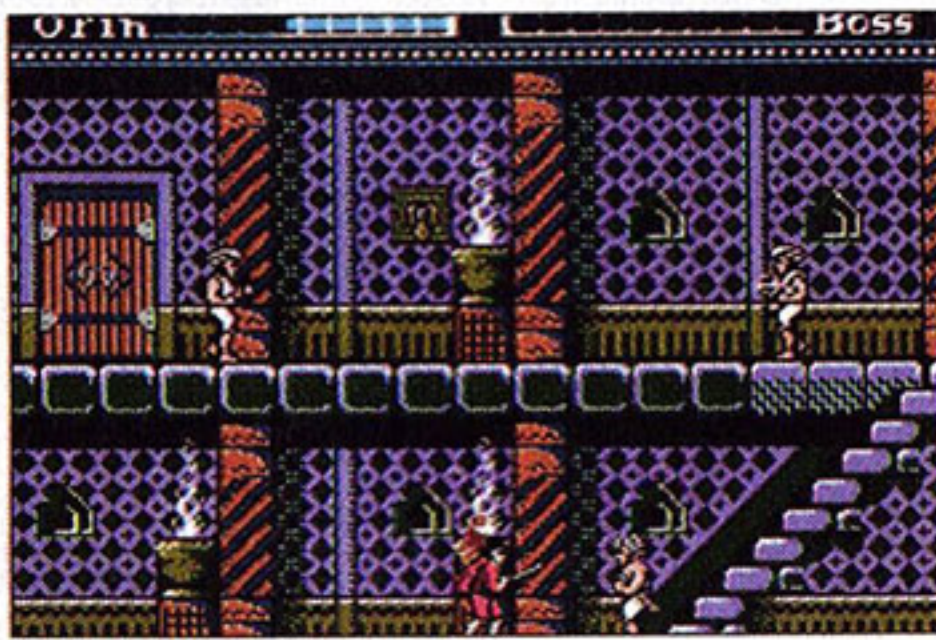
This Is Adam Fenix... Can You Hear Me... ?
What Have You Done... ?

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Remember those ridiculous chainsaw guys (and gals) in Resident Evil 4? As most of you may have noticed by now, these intimidating maniacs are back in RE 5. But did you ever wonder what these freaks looked like underneath their creepy head wraps and burlap masks? Wonder no more! Our sources have revealed the identity of six chainsaw lunatics! The better you perform on this quiz, the scarier the revelation. Parental discretion is advised.

1 This ambitious action-platformer on NES played similarly to Castlevania but featured two-player co-op with Orin the Falconer and his fighting falcon Cutrus.

- A. Over Lord
- B. 8 Eyes
- C. Faxanadu
- D. Zombie Nation



2 The home version of Street Fighter IV features additional fighters not playable in the arcade.

- A. True
- B. False



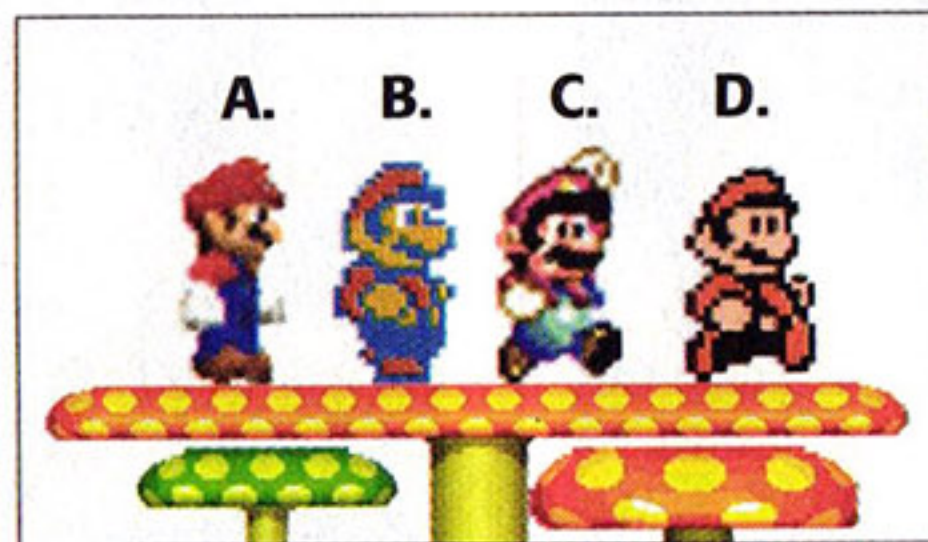
3 What PSP puzzle-platformer allows gamers to transform 3D environments into 2D, only to manipulate the world back into 3D to solve mind-warping brainteasers?

- A. Echochrome
- B. Pipe Mania
- C. Crush
- D. Puzzle Scape

4 What playable character in Marvel Vs. Capcom: Clash of Super Heroes hasn't been featured in his own game since 2000 on PSone?

- A. Wolverine
- B. Mega Man
- C. The Incredible Hulk
- D. Strider

5 Mario, your graphics have changed so much over the years that we've forgotten just how much your mustache has evolved...or hasn't. In any case, please order these Marios, starting from oldest design to newest.



6 This screenshot is from which goofy Nintendo 64 game that features a technologically advanced amusement park where players must possess robotic animals in order to solve puzzles and defeat enemies?

- A. Nightmare Creatures
- B. Wonder Project J2: Koruro no Mori no Josette
- C. Space Station Silicon Valley
- D. Body Harvest



7 Haze, the first-person shooter exclusive to PS3, stars Shane Carpenter and his fellow Mantel troops who can boost their combatant skills by injecting what substance into their bloodstream?

- A. Bemon
- B. Nectar
- C. Drape
- D. Huney



8 Excluding light gun spin-offs, what Resident Evil game was the first in the series to use 3D backgrounds instead of pre-rendered ones?

- A. Resident Evil 3: Nemesis
- B. Resident Evil: Deadly Silence
- C. Resident Evil: Outbreak
- D. Resident Evil Code: Veronica

9 What 2008 WiiWare and PC title developed by 2D Boy won numerous for its art and design?

- A. World of Goo
- B. Pong Toss - Frat Party Games
- C. My Aquarium
- D. Mega Man 9

10 You're probably expecting an easy question right about now, right?

- A. Yes, it's question 10.
- B. No, the other questions were already easy.
- C. Did I miss something?
- D. What a waste of text.

BREAKDOWN

117 million dollars is how much Final Fantasy publisher Square Enix paid to acquire Tomb Raider publisher Eidos.

60 percent of Xbox Live users in the U.S. have purchased a gold membership, according to Microsoft. Silver members can download content but cannot play online.

90 million dollars is the size of the lawsuit Microsoft is facing from online chat company PalTalk Holdings, which alleges Microsoft infringed two patents through use of the Xbox consoles and Halo games.

124 million PS2s have sold worldwide since its release 10 years ago. That number is over 20 million more consoles sold than Wii, Xbox 360, and PS3 combined.

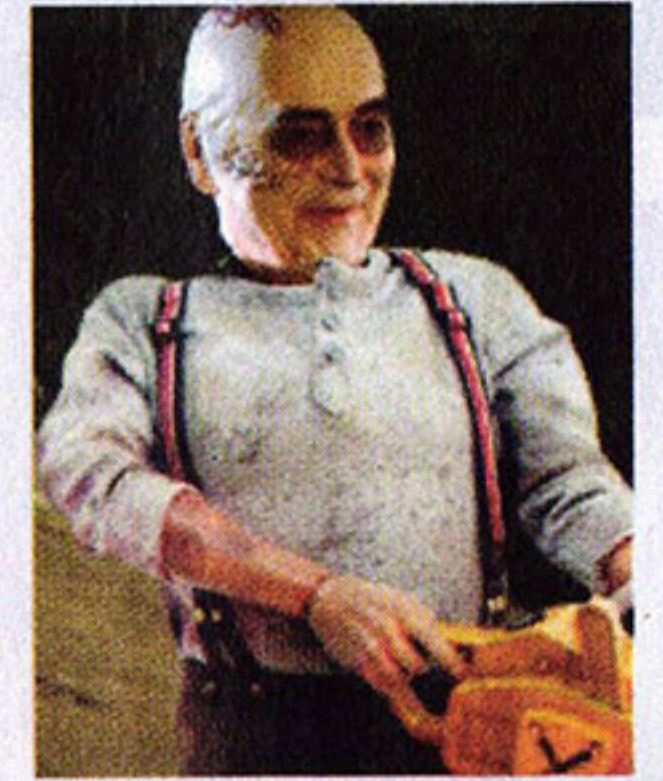
2 Val Kilmer references in one issue is too many.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:

Not so innocent anymore, Mrs. Doubtsawer!



2-3:

The Force is definitely weak with this one, Anakin Sawalker



4-5:

Wait. You have a second mask under your first one Mr. Jasawn?



6-7:

Winnie the Saw. Should have known



8-9:

It looked like this! Be sure to tell 'em Large Saw sent ya



10:

Chainsaw Ben. It's true. He's chained and gets fed a few dog treats twice a day

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SEEING IS DECEIVING



Handwritten-style text on the water surface

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