

8-PAGE BLOWOUT! ROCK BAND 2

Exclusive Music, Hardware, and Info Revealed

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 2: FUSION

The Superhero Blockbuster Returns pg. 46



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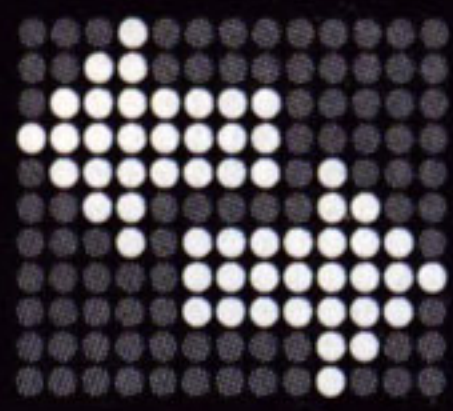
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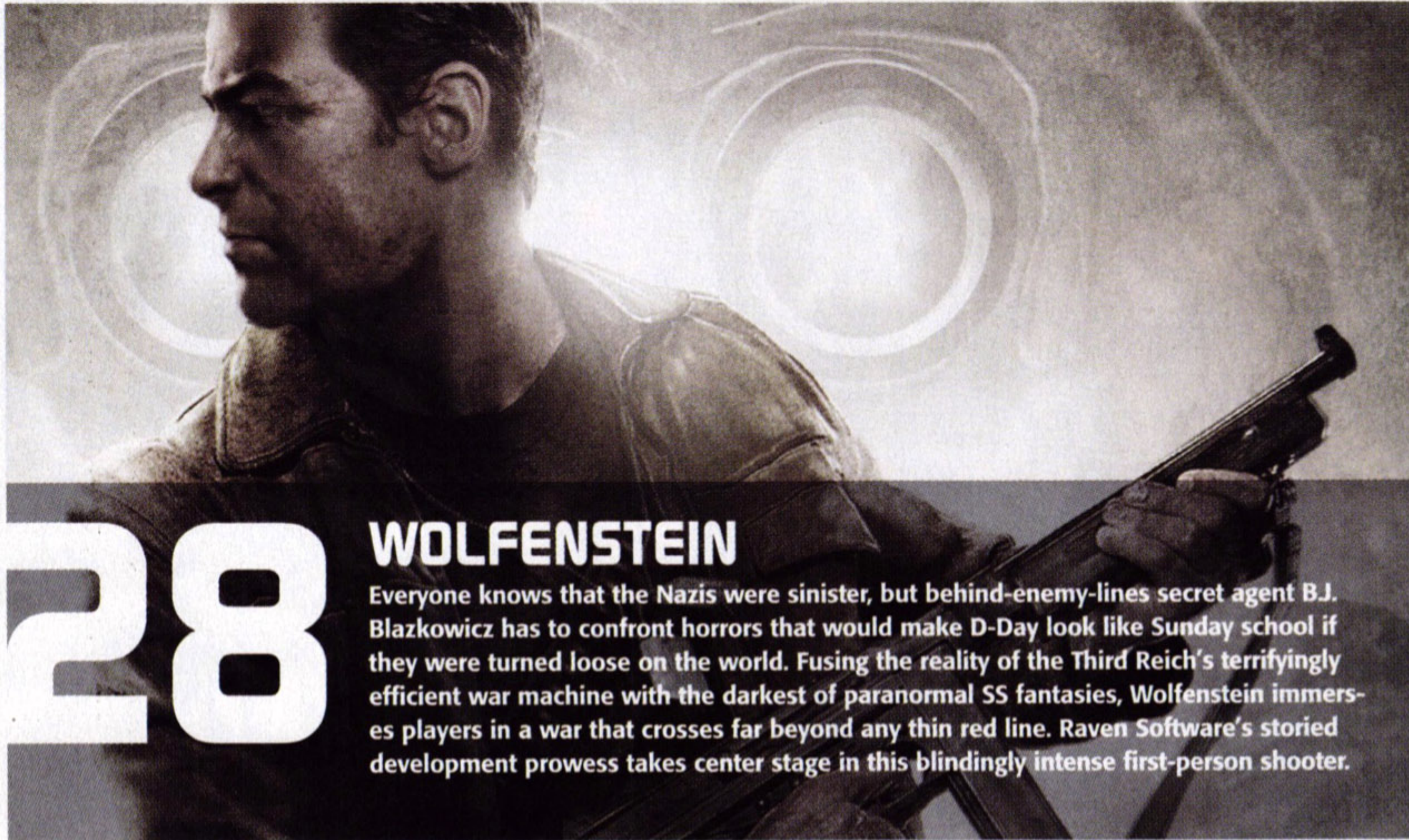
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CONTENTS

The "Are You Feeling E3?" Issue

cover story



28

WOLFENSTEIN

Everyone knows that the Nazis were sinister, but behind-enemy-lines secret agent B.J. Blazkowicz has to confront horrors that would make D-Day look like Sunday school if they were turned loose on the world. Fusing the reality of the Third Reich's terrifyingly efficient war machine with the darkest of paranormal SS fantasies, Wolfenstein immerses players in a war that crosses far beyond any thin red line. Raven Software's storied development prowess takes center stage in this blindingly intense first-person shooter.

features



38

ROCK BAND 2

Rock Band was great, but developer Harmonix is doing anything but rest on its laurels with the sequel. Redesigned instruments meet an all-new interface as well as the ability to battle other bands online, and we know about 17 songs that will be in the initial track list. These details and much more pack eight pages full of info in our early look at the musical giant.



46

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 2

What better way to make sitting on a couch with three buddies awesome than to tear up planet-threatening evil with explosive superpowers? Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2 brings awesome superhero co-op brawling back into the spotlight with tandem attacks and an exploration of major strife between Marvel's biggest heroes. Check out the exclusive first look right here.

departments

4 Staff

Read the team's latest favorites

6 GI Spy

Silly pictures of our life and times

8 Dear GI

Your chance to fire back at us!

12 Connect

Where news, talk, and technology collide

22 Gear

Geeky gadget stuff for the masses

24 Opinion

Steve Schnur, EA's worldwide executive of music and marketing, explores the future of the music industry and how that relates to games

26 Calendar

Get hip to this month's happenings

52 Previews

This month, our previews section gets you up to speed on the next installments in the Call of Duty and Midnight Club franchises, and also pulls the curtain away from new titles like Wanted and Dark Void

78 Reviews

Game of the Month: NCAA Football 09 for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360

92 Charts

Retail Sales Data and the GI editors' Top 10 Games

94 Secret Access

Codes, strategies, and passwords

96 Classic GI

Reliving gaming's greatest moments

99 Online

See what's happening at Game Informer Online

100 Game Over

The end...or is it?

GAME INDEX

GAME	PAGE #
Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures	90
Alone In The Dark	85
Bionic Commando	66
BioShock	67
Bourne Conspiracy, The	84
Call of Duty: World at War	52
Civilization IV: Colonization	74
Civilization Revolution	91
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	88
Dark Void	56
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	83
EndWar	73
Far Cry 2	70
FIFA Soccer 09	74
Final Fantasy IV	91
Fracture	58
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	82
Incredible Hulk, The	83
Kung Fu Panda	84
Last Remnant, The	72
Lock's Quest	77
LOL	91
Madden NFL 09	71
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	64
Monster Madness: Grave Danger	87
NCAA Football 09	80
NHL 09	62
Ninjabtown	76
Quantum of Solace	65
Rayman Raving Rabbits TV Party	77
Resident Evil 5	60
Rock Band	86
SimCity Creator	77
SingStar	87
Spyborgs	76
Street Fighter IV	76
Top Spin 3	86
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	91
Unreal Tournament 3	88
Velvet Assassin	68
Wanted	54

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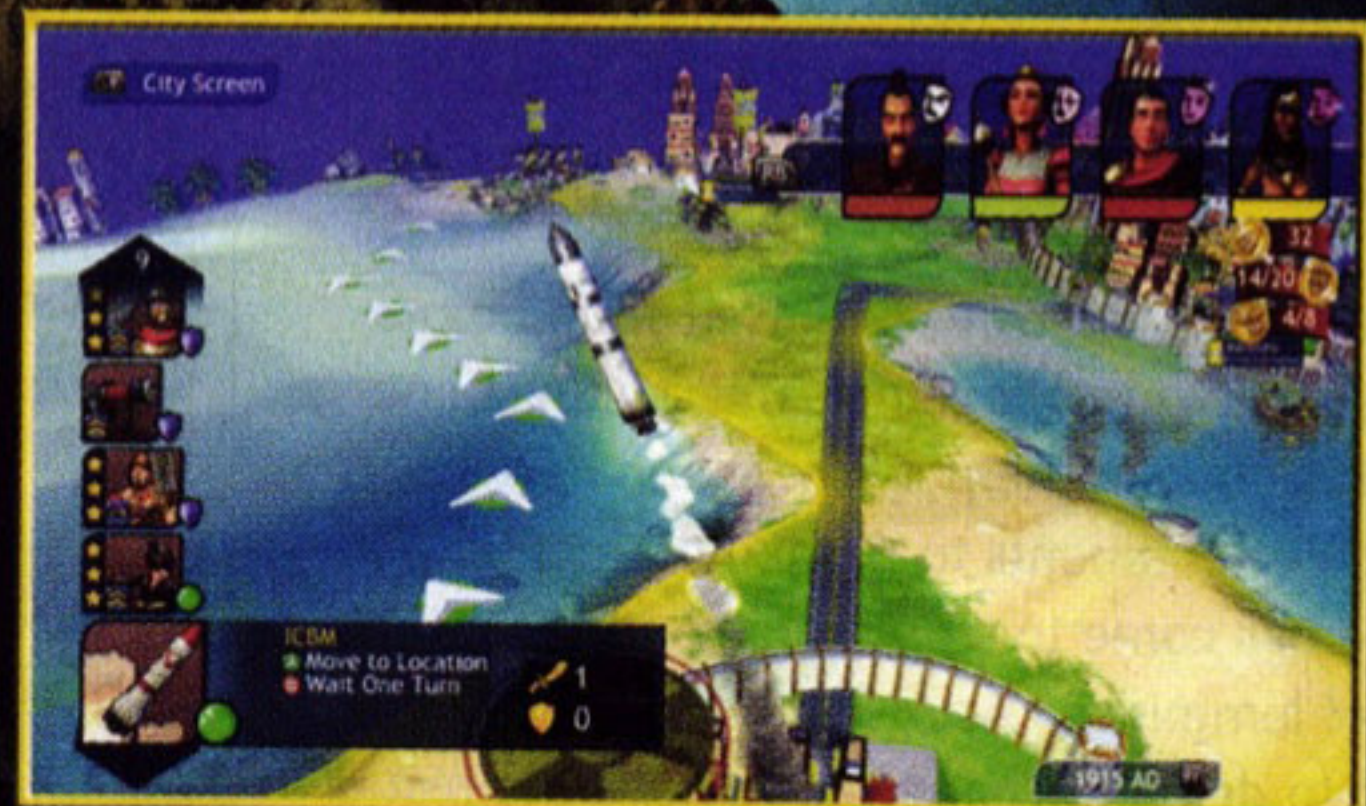
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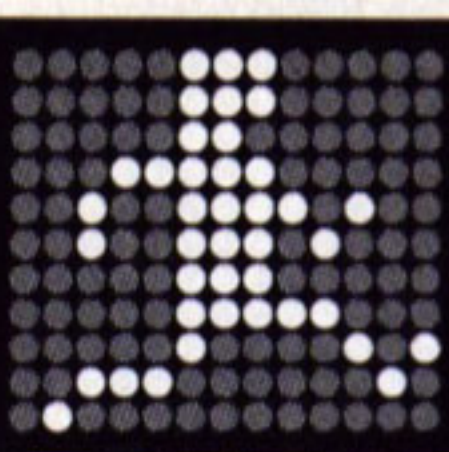
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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



CHANGING CONVENTION

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

When the Electronic Entertainment Expo was first unleashed on the world back in 1995, I couldn't have been more excited as a gamer or journalist. After years of being a "me too" addition of the Consumer Electronics Show, this was the game industry's first chance to shine on its own.

For the decade that followed, E3 did as it was asked. It gave the industry a spotlight to show its stuff. Sure, E3 wasn't perfect and had plenty of flaws for game media pundits like myself to point out, but at the end of the day, for good or ill, it got the job done.

As time wore on, however, the show changed for the worse. As cliché as it sounds, it went from being "about the games" to a giant booth showdown, where skate parks, loud music, and "celebrity" appearances were the order of the day. The real show happened behind closed doors in cramped meeting rooms, or at press conferences before the show even started.

Everyone in the industry knew it was time for a change, and the ESA listened and reformatted the show last year into its current incarnation known as the E3 Media & Business Summit. Sadly, the new show still doesn't do what we need it to, which is showcase gaming as the entertainment giant it is today and will be for generations to come.

I'm more than willing to give the ESA a mulligan for 2007 (a redo for those unfamiliar with the term). However, taking E3 back to the Los Angeles Convention Center is not the answer and everyone in the industry knows it. Numerous game companies have made their displeasure known, most notably Activision, which is not only skipping the show but went as far as to drop out from the ESA all together.

E3 isn't dead, but it needs to find itself soon before the show loses its worth altogether. This isn't just one man's opinion, either. Game publishers and developers echo these same sentiments to Game Informer all year long. The time has come to stop running off the cliff like a bunch of lemmings. Activision was willing to go out on a limb to demand change. Let's hope the rest of the industry is bold enough to demand more of video gaming's premiere showcase.

Cheers,

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Six Feet Under* (Late To The Party, I Know), *Weeds: Season 4*, Euro 2008 (If Only The Dutch Had Won) **Dislikes:** The Passing Of George Carlin (His Comedy Will Indeed Be Missed), E3 In Los Angeles (Can We Hurry Up And Move It To Las Vegas Already?) **Current Favorite Games:** Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, World Of Warcraft, Warcraft III, Rock Band 2, Guitar Hero: World Tour, Guitar Hero: Aerosmith, Rock Band



Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Making A Car Purchase Based Solely On Whether It Was In *Transformers* Or Not (I Now Drive Barricade), Knowing Who The Final Cylon Is And Using This Info To Blackmail People (You Don't Want To Know, Huh? Buy Me Dinner And I Won't Tell You) **Dislikes:** People Pretending That Metal Gear Solid 4's Story Actually Makes Sense (Yes, It Has Words, But That's As Much As I'm Giving You) **Current Favorite Games:** Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, Grid, Grand Theft Auto IV, Guitar Hero: World Tour, Rock Band 2



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Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/RPG **Interests:** Watching Everyone Try To Play Cliffhanger For The Sega CD - Also Known As Escape From Crap Mountain, Custom Dairy Queen Blizzards, Blaming Jeff Cork For All Kinds Of Stuff (The Guy Likes To Just Take It), "2541" - Grant Hart **Dislikes:** Getting Hit With Two Slapshots In The Same Spot - The Spot With No Padding Near The Nut Cup, The Inevitable Conversion Of My DVD Collection Into Blu-Ray **Current Favorite Games:** Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, NHL 09, FIFA 09, NCAA Football 09



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Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Glen Cook's Many Works Of Fantasy (Particularly *Faded Steel Heat* And *The Black Company*), Pushing My Rock Band Skills Even Though I'm No Miller, Those Rare Moments When My Cats Aren't Being Bastards **Dislikes:** The Worst Morning Ever (Broken Bike, Broken Shoes, Glass In Foot - Don't Ask), Finding A Solid Layer Of Dust And Cat Hair Between My Heatsink And Fan, Mediocre Baseball **Current Favorite Games:** The New York Times Crosswords, Portal, Half-Life 2, FreeCol, Peggle, Audiosurf, Titan Quest



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Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** Dream Theater In Rock Band 2, *Runaways* (The Comic), My New Rancor, The Mississippi Headwaters In Itasca Park, *The Seldom Seen Kid* - Elbow **Dislikes:** No Release Dates For Downloadable Games (See This Month's Impulse), Mouse Traps Where There Are No Mice **Current Favorite Games:** Rock Band 2, Odin Sphere, Castle Crashers, Final Fantasy IV, Grand Theft Auto IV, Grid, Age Of Conan: Hybriian Adventures



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Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* (Still The Best), *The Incredible Hulk*, Bachelor Parties That Involve Guns (Of Whatever Type), Traveling **Dislikes:** Traveling Four Times A Month (Turns Out That Makes It Harder To Get All Your Work Done), My Trial Of Metal Gear Abstinence, Not Being Allowed In The Women's Restroom **Current Favorite Games:** Grand Theft Auto IV, Marvel Ultimate Alliance II: Fusion, Dark Void, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, World Of Warcraft, Civilization Revolution



Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** New Journey Singer Arnel Pineda (While He Will Never Live Up To The Legacy Of Steve Perry, He Certainly Has "The Voice"), Playing "Any Way You Want It" In Rock Band 2 **Dislikes:** Not Being Able To Marathon MGS 4 During The First Weekend After Release Due To Circumstances Beyond My Control **Current Favorite Games:** Rock Band 2, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, Castle Crashers, Trauma Center: Under The Knife 2, Alone In The Dark

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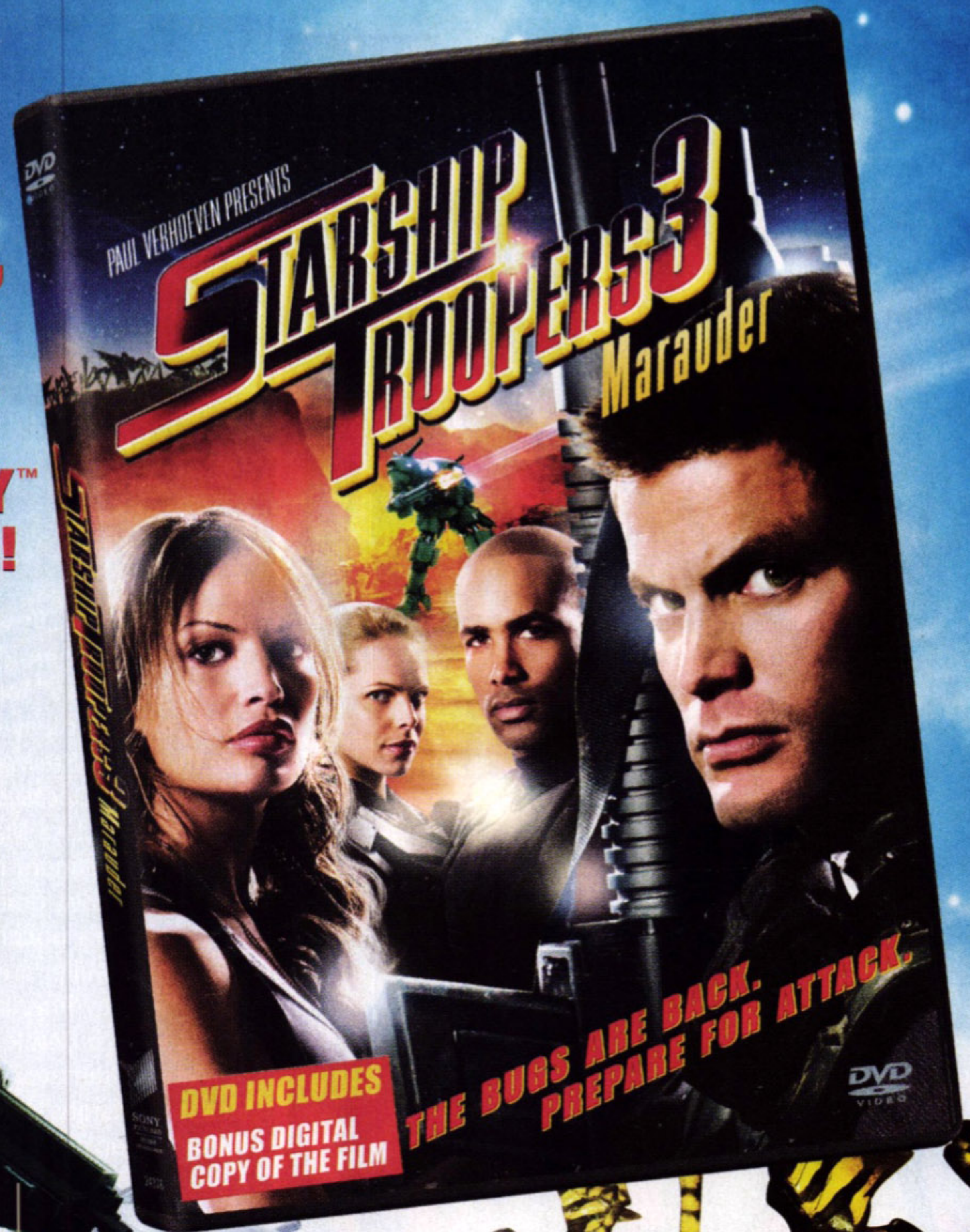


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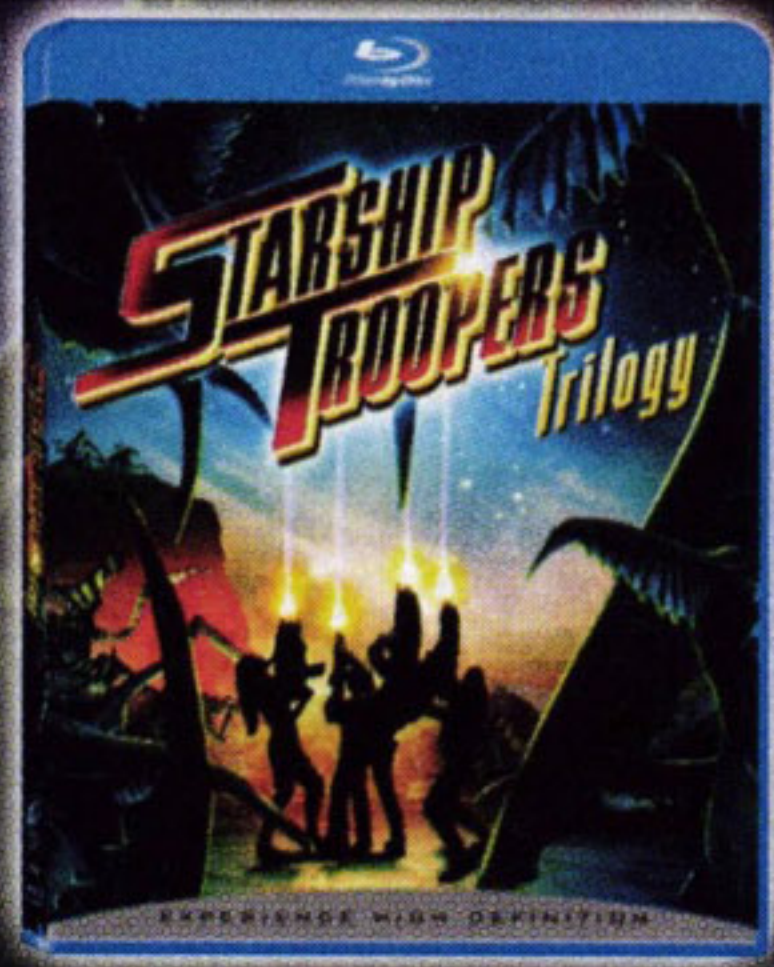
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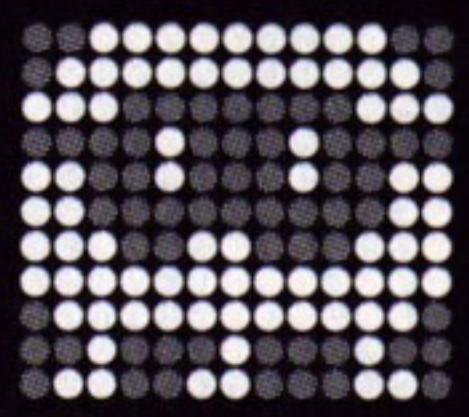
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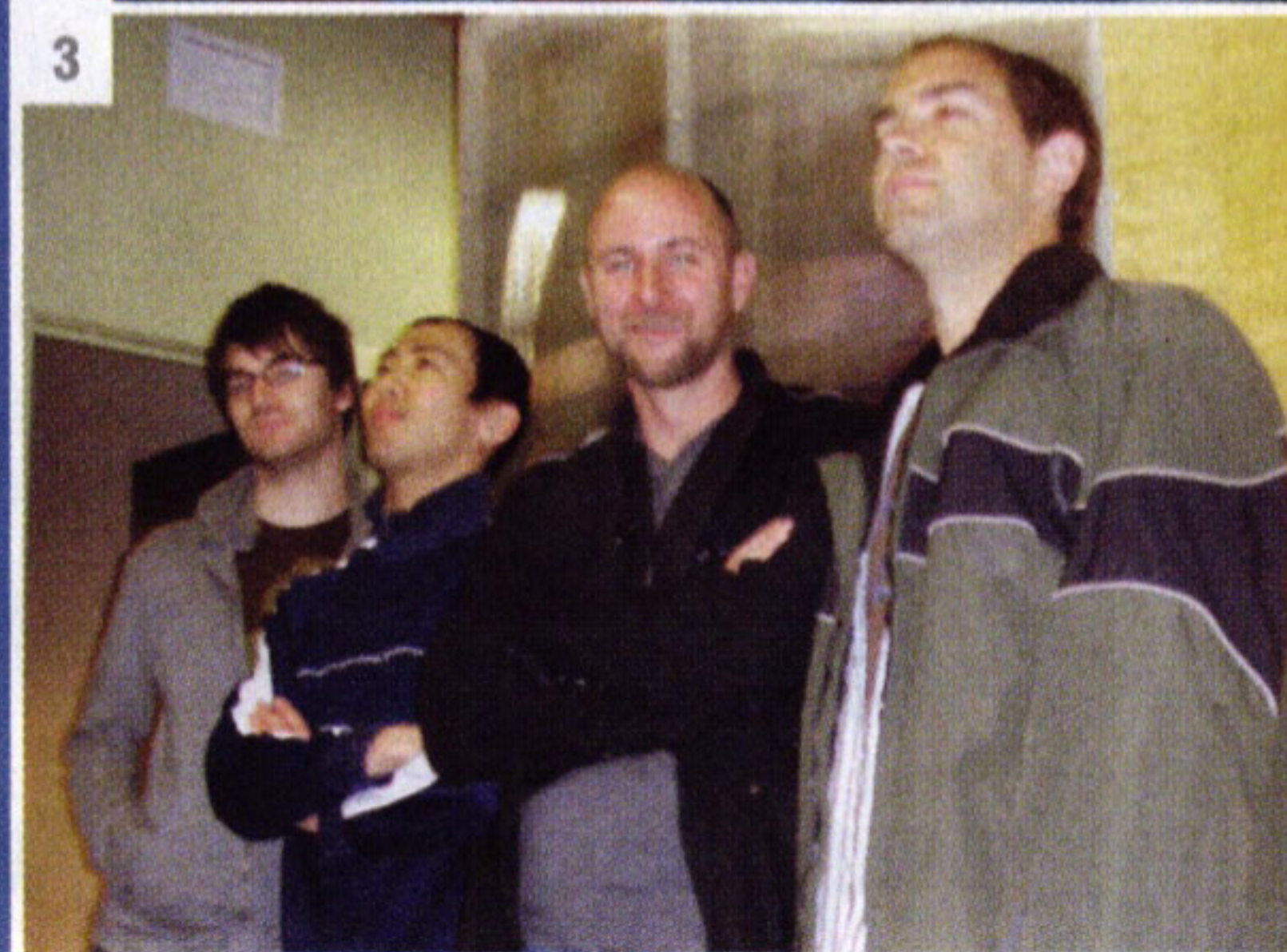
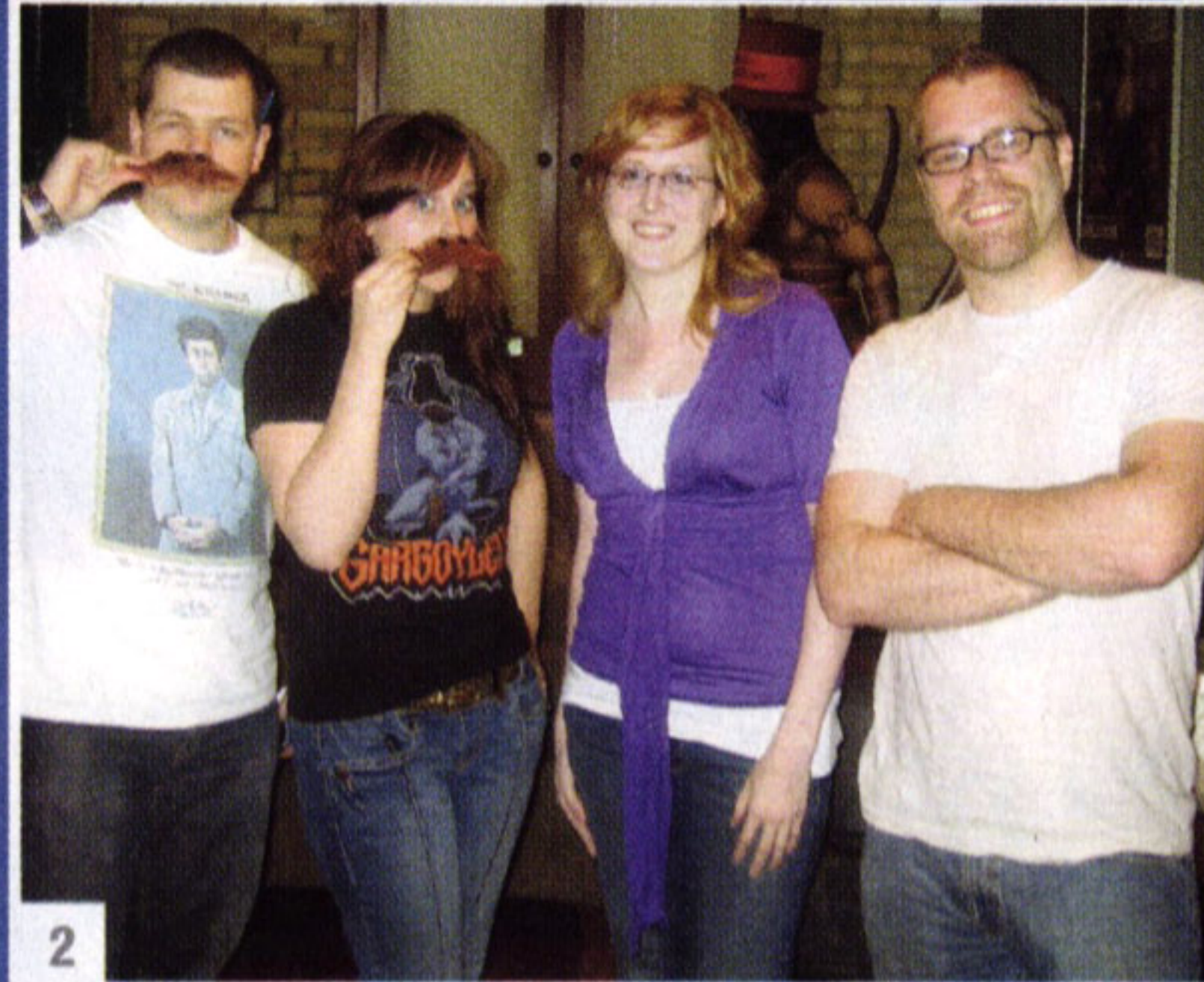


GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



1 This month's GI Spy Power Player™ Ben shows the Fracture posse – Day 1 Studios' Dan Hay and LucasArts' Chris Norris – his favorite arcade game, Princess Awesome's Amazing Super Pony Battle Plus. (The game only exists in Ben's imagination; we just don't have the heart to tell him, we're afraid he'll start to cry) 2 South Peak's Aubrey Husted and Shawnimals creator Shawn Smith stopped by to show us the upcoming Ninjatown DS game and provide Ben and Meagan with some plush moustache creatures 3 Nick and Black Rock's Jason Avent look the GI Spy camera in the eye, while Kato and Disney's Derek Dutilly practice their "heroically staring off into the distance" looks 4 Two chefs enter, one chef leaves! Or something like that. Alex Brewer of HighWater Group, Mark Dacascos of Iron Chef America, and Lisa Mason and Juan Benito of Destineer hang on the set of the hit TV show, doing some research for Destineer's upcoming Iron Chef DS game 5 Miller and Reiner show Eidos' Stanley Phan and Karl Stewart the GI vault 6 Ben learns the secrets of Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2 from Vicarious Visions' Jennifer Oneal, Dan Wallace, Dan Tanguay, and Bryan Shutt 7 Neversoft's Scott Pease, Joel Jewett, Alan Flores, Ryh-Ming Poon, and Brian Bright introduce Matt to the Guitar Hero developer's secret weapon, Riley the dog. (Don't laugh, Riley is actually an executive vice president!)



THIS TIME THE SECRET AGENT IS THE GADGET.

Holo-Monocle

Look at your enemy and become him. Then mess with his mind.

Chrome Dome

A rust-resistant melon protects fragile wiring and those secret agent-type secrets.

Cuff Link Bombs

Every secret agent needs bombs. And linked cuffs. Done and done.

Tie-A-Rang

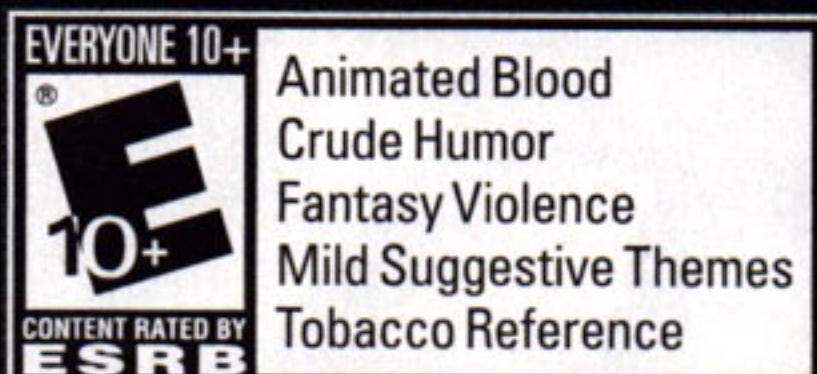
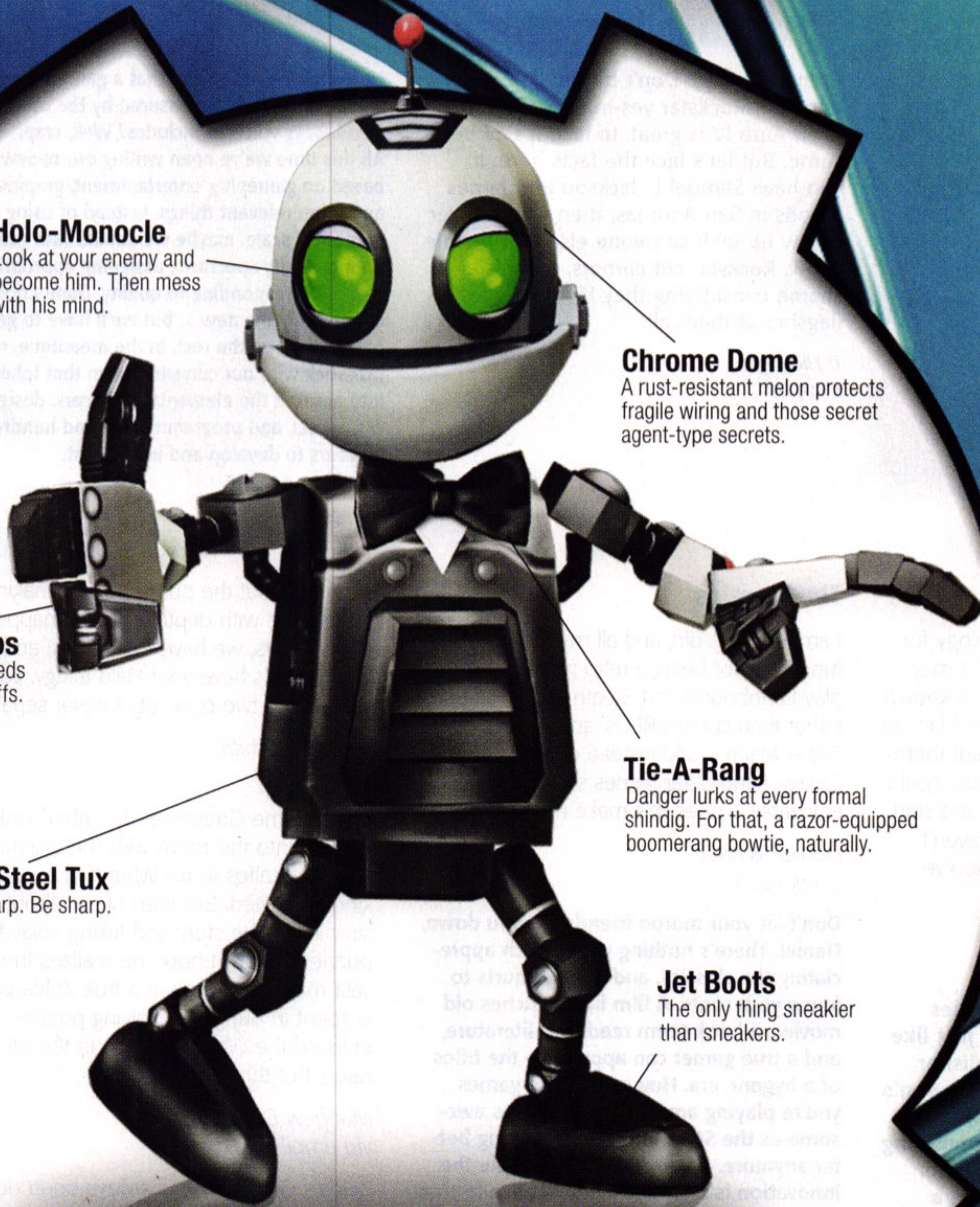
Danger lurks at every formal shindig. For that, a razor-equipped boomerang bowtie, naturally.

Solid Steel Tux

Look sharp. Be sharp.

Jet Boots

The only thing sneakier than sneakers.



When the most difficult, secret and dangerous missions in the galaxy need to be solved, there's only one robot to turn to: Secret Agent Clank. Ratchet has been wrongfully jailed and it's up to you to free him and clear his name. Embark on a top-secret intergalactic rescue mission, using state-of-the-art gadgets to overcome challenges in stealth, puzzle-solving and hand-to-hand combat. You'll need to use everything you've got. Literally.



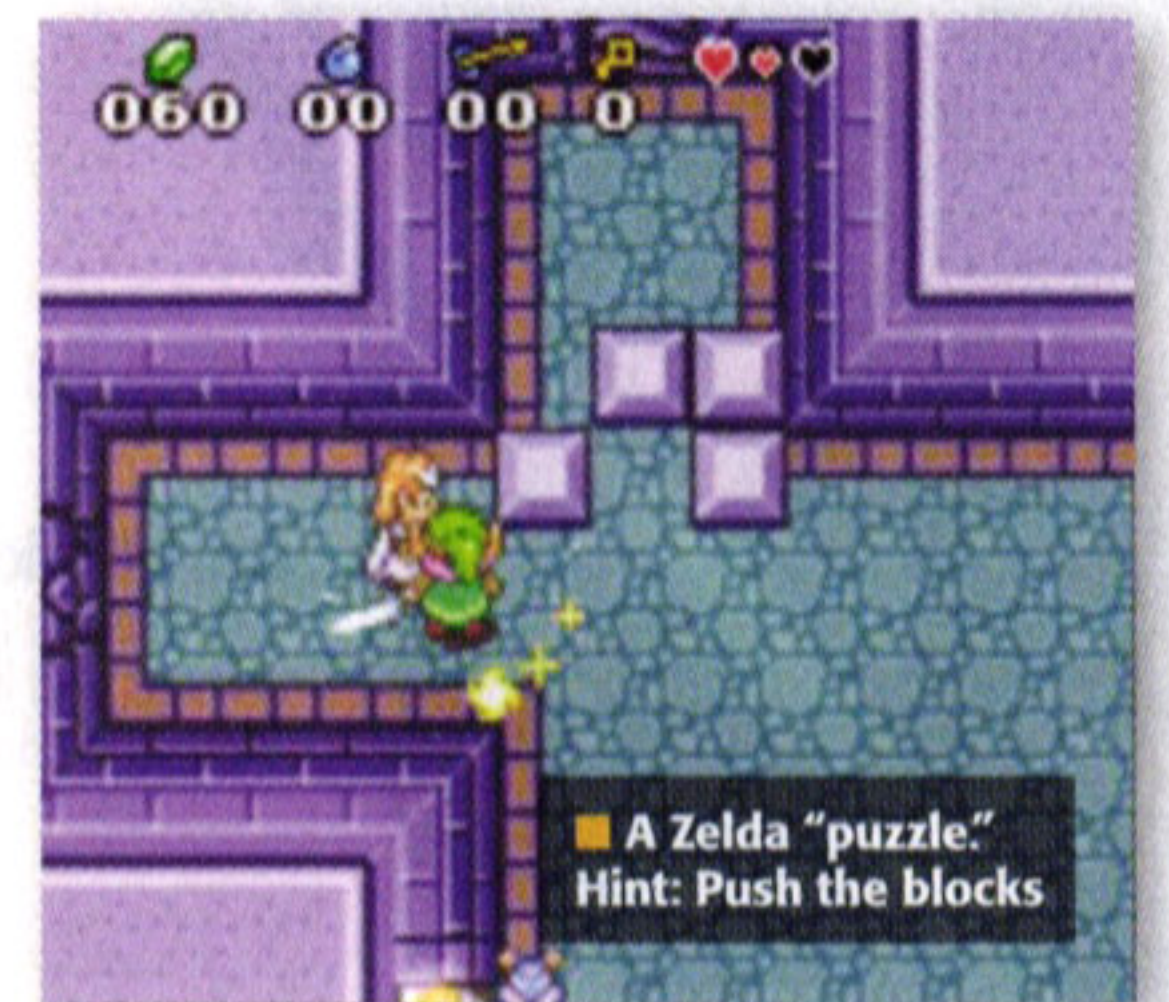
The Main Ingredient

Come on, guys. Don't be the latest bunch of Rockstar yes-men. Sure, Grand Theft Auto IV is great. In fact, it's awesome. But let's face the facts here: If you have Samuel L. Jackson and James Woods in San Andreas, then you'd better follow up with someone else that people know. Rockstar cut corners, and it's a shame considering they fly the biggest flagship of them all.

TJ Flickinger
Knox, IN

Hold on! Are you saying that a game's quality and success is best measured by the caliber of celebrity voices it includes? Well, crap. All this time we've been writing our reviews based on gameplay, entertainment, graphics, and other relevant things. Instead of using a numerical scale, maybe we should rate games on a celebrity spectrum, assigning appropriate names corresponding to quality. Dane Cook is obviously the new 1, but we'll have to get back to you on the rest. In the meantime, we'll just stick with our current system that takes into account the elements producers, designers, artists, and programmers spend hundreds of hours to develop and implement.

Yikes. Hell hath no fury like a Zelda fan scorned. Here's the thing... What If is purely hypothetical – that's what makes it interesting. It would be a lousy section if developers just said they would make games exactly like the ones you've already played. We can see it now... Jaime Griesemer's revised Zelda: "Link gets a sword, arrows, and has to press switches to open doors in a bunch of elemental temples." You've done that already! Questioning the things that are held sacred in a series is the only way to really see it from an entirely new perspective. Whether you like what you see is clearly a different matter.



Oiling The Machine

Why the simpering two-page apology for the Madden series in issue 182? It may be a fixture of the industry, but it is known worldwide for its repetitiveness and lack of innovation. Maybe if EA didn't paint themselves into a corner every year, they could actually take time between titles and start introducing new features. They haven't really got an excuse, as hard as you've clearly tried to give them one.

Jason Phillips
Indianapolis, IN

We'd love to see the Madden series become everything it could be, just like you. But EA's interests as a publisher aren't always in synch with EA Tiburon's as a developer. It's safe to say that no one ever wants to make a disappointing game. Sometimes a developer wants more time to try new ideas, while a publisher wants to get a game to retail on schedule. For EA, this regimented release is especially important with the Madden series. Why don't they take a year off to experiment and implement new features? Simple: Because from a financial standpoint, there's no point. The franchise is a cash cow, and it will sell in huge numbers either way.

The Classics

I am 17 years old, and all my friends make fun of me for being a retro gamer. I prefer to play Earthbound and Breath of Fire on SNES rather than current RPGs, and I also play Super Mario World instead of Super Mario Galaxy. I find older games simpler and more enjoyable – does this make me weird?

Daniel Skinner
Cordova, AL

Don't let your moron friends get you down, Daniel. There's nothing wrong with appreciating the classics, and it never hurts to know your roots. A film buff watches old movies, a bookworm reads old literature, and a true gamer can appreciate the titles of a bygone era. However, those games you're playing are frozen in time; as awesome as the SNES was, it isn't getting better anymore. If you want to be where the innovation is happening, you'll have to start migrating over to current releases. Don't worry – the 16-bit era will always be there, perfectly preserved and ready to be enjoyed.

It's Not Real

It is good to see that Jaime Griesemer has a sense of humor, because there is no way that any intelligent, self-respecting person would describe a version of Zelda like he did without it being a joke. Making a Zelda

game without the puzzles is like making a Halo game with depth – it can't happen. The thinkers, we have our Zeldas, and you sub-normals have your Halo trilogy. Let us keep these two concepts forever separated.

Vincent Demitri
via email

When Jaime Griesemer described Link walking into the room with the Darknuts and the Stalfos in his What If entry, I was kind of excited. But then I hear about simplifying the story and taking away the puzzles. What!? I hope he realizes the vast majority of time in a true Zelda game is spent in dungeons solving puzzles. I enjoyed the What If section in the previous issue, but this was ridiculous.

Matthew Dollar
via email

Zelda's gameplay has always been defined by three main components: story, action, and puzzles. Without the puzzles, it's just a hack n' slash. Without the epic story, all we have is another generic dungeon crawler clogging store shelves. Don't get me wrong – Jaime Griesemer had some good ideas in his What If. They just wouldn't make for a good Zelda game.

T.J. Reilly
via email

They Just Wanna

Donna Mei-Ling Park's article in issue 182, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun," had me pumping my fists in the air. Males tend to look down on female gamers in contempt. Even females who are not gamers tend to look down upon us, because they view us as immature or boyish. I am sick and tired of it. I'm almost afraid to bring my Game Informer to school to read because some guys in my class will look at me and say, "Why are you reading that? You're a girl." Just because we wear makeup doesn't mean we don't like blowing people up, too.

Kristina Woehlke
via email

I work at a game store, and I am proud to say I am a female gamer. The article written by Donna Mei-Ling Park basically put everything I encounter at work into words. Countless times I've been asked that pierc-

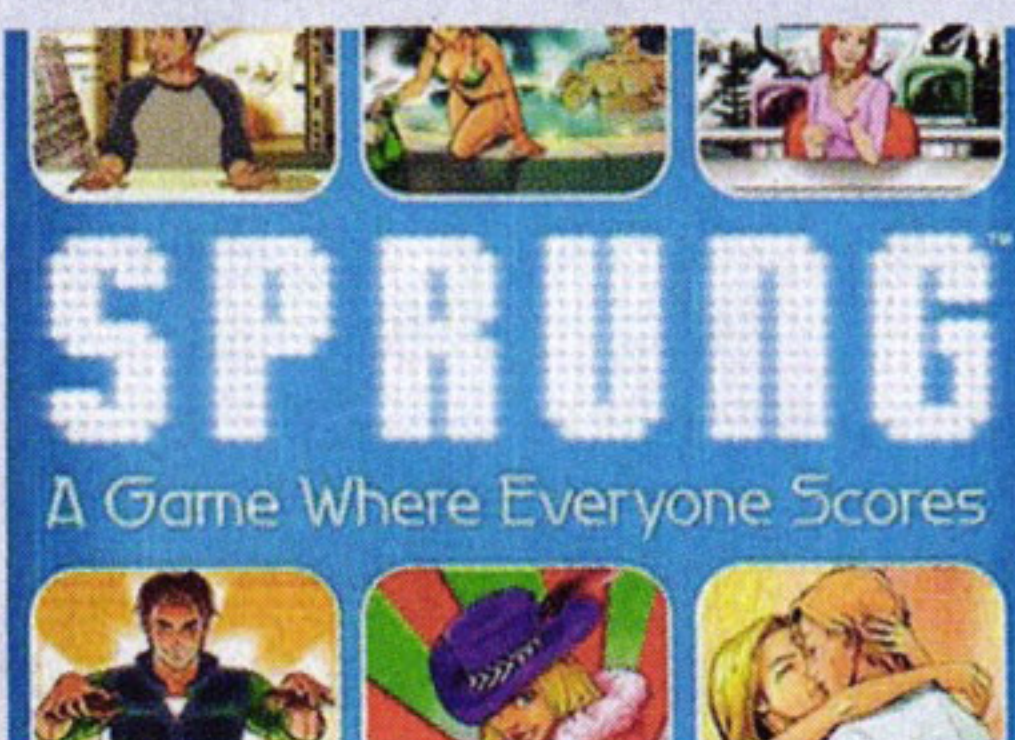
Send your comments to Game Informer. Snail Mail: Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 Email: deargi@gameinformer.com

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 gaming purchase do you regret?



Sprung and Ping Pals. I was desperate for new DS games, so I decided to get both of them on day one at full retail price. Big mistake!

DTJAAAAMJSLM

I regret buying GTA IV. After playing for three straight hours I felt like I didn't do anything. The next day, I played three hours again and still felt the same. I had to get rid of it.

littlejoe

I bought Devil May Cry 2 instead of GTA: Vice City. It was such a depressing day.

Wazza_inc

My biggest regret is paying \$60 for Vampire Hunter D for the PSone over Klonoa. It taught me two valuable lessons: always read the reviews, and anime and video games don't mix.

not_a_bumblebee

Back in the days of the N64 I bought some third-party memory card and lost about four hours of gameplay in Turok 2. At the time I had no idea how suspect the quality of third-party memory cards could be. I've stayed first party ever since and never had another problem.

Tanooki

A Game Informer subscription. Zing!

ganonsbane

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent. I thought it would be awesome to play a villain and fight against Bond. Then I realized you actually play a good "bad" guy who fights bad guys, and Bond dies right at the beginning. Lame.

Wii_Master

It's definitely the Wii Zapper. When I got the game I was kind of excited because of Link's Crossbow training, but then I realized that using the Wii Remote was way easier than the Zapper, and I wasted my money.

unclepj57



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

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ALIENWARE® PRESENTS
BREED

SCENE 1: ORIGINS REVEALED
A SYNQ STUDIOS ANIMATED SHORT

CREATED & DIRECTED BY
YUSNEY GARAY
MANAGING DIRECTOR
AHMED SHEHATA
VISUALIZATION DIRECTOR
ALBERT GONZALEZ

7.15.08
ALIENWARE.COM/BREED

The Area-51® desktop
is Powered by the Intel®
Core™ 2 Extreme Processor.



**Extreme
Performance**

ing question: "Do you actually play video games?" Customers will even skip over me and ask a male co-worker a question. What am I, the cleaning lady? I work there, too! All I'm saying is: Donna, I feel your pain, and I just hope more girls get into the business and express their love for video games.

*anonymous
via email*

I remember sneaking around my home after work while my kids were in bed – I couldn't wait to play Zelda, Castlevania, or SimCity. I'm now a 52-year-old serious gamer and grandmother, and I just wanted to say "way to go" to Donna Mei-Ling Park for her article. Girls and grandmas just want to have fun!

*Nila Halbig
Annapolis, MD*

Not only do girls just want to have fun, some of us just want to have fun without all the fanfare and hype around girl gamers. As much as I can relate to the sentiments of the article, I still can't help but cringe every time I see a girl gamer article. Bringing unnecessary attention to the issue only fuels the fire. So we play games... big deal! Let's stop talking about it.

*Tara Dragert
via email*

"Explosive" is a good word to describe the response to Donna Mei-Ling Park's opinion piece. It's kind of telling that such a basic message – women play games and don't deserve to be judged because of it – resonates so strongly with the gaming community. As nice as it would be to just embrace the fact and move on, it seems clear that many male gamers are having trouble coming to terms with their female counterparts. Video games are a form of entertainment to be enjoyed by all, regardless of gender or age. If you think otherwise, it's time to grow up.

Accepting Imitations

I was excited to read your take on Guitar Hero: World Tour, but I couldn't help but think that you forgot something when you wrote the article. You seem to somewhat conveniently ignore the fact that Harmonix came up with the idea of individual instruments, DLC, customizable characters, and a more realistic guitar. Neversoft is hardly "changing music games forever," as your cover claims. Guitar Hero: World Tour is just a rip-off.

*Bryan Meixner
via email*

We love Rock Band. We have a nice big blowout on Rock Band 2 on page 40, and we appreciate what Harmonix has done for the music game genre. However, just because they made the first full band game doesn't mean that they have exclusive rights to the concept. As Rock Band's only major competitor, did you expect Guitar Hero not to step up to the plate? Even though the general concept is the same, both games have distinguishing features that will appeal to different types of gamers. Plus, with two great band games out there packed with awesome songs, everyone wins.



ELLIA HILL

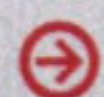
Baby Kratos' teddy bear has several years of make-shift stitching and stuffing replacement ahead of it

Send to:

Game Informer
Reader Art Contest
724 1st St N.,
4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401

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.



BILLY WILSON

Spoiler alert: The smoldering wreckage in the background is Otacon. Wait, he was a robot? You never know when Hideo Kojima's involved



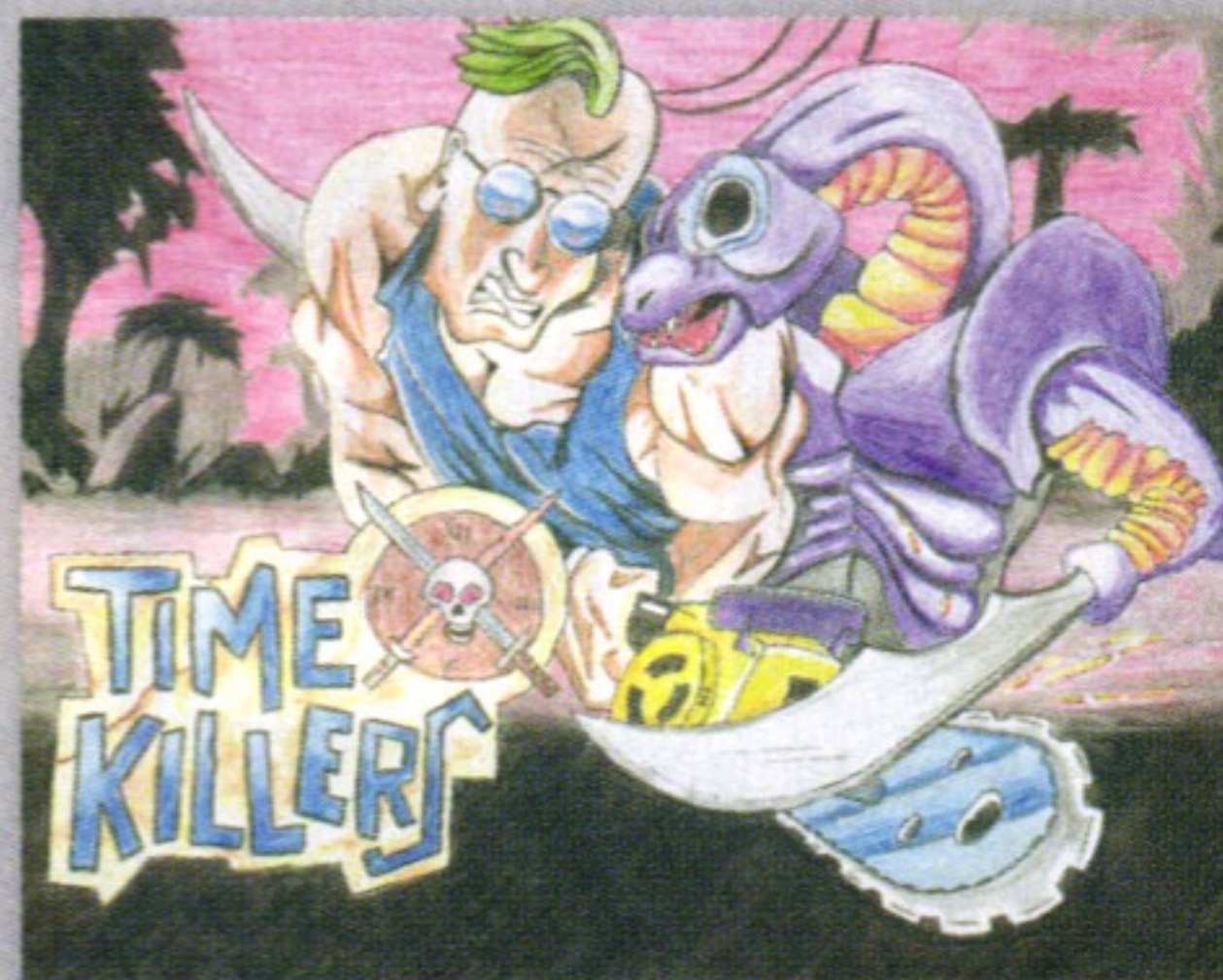
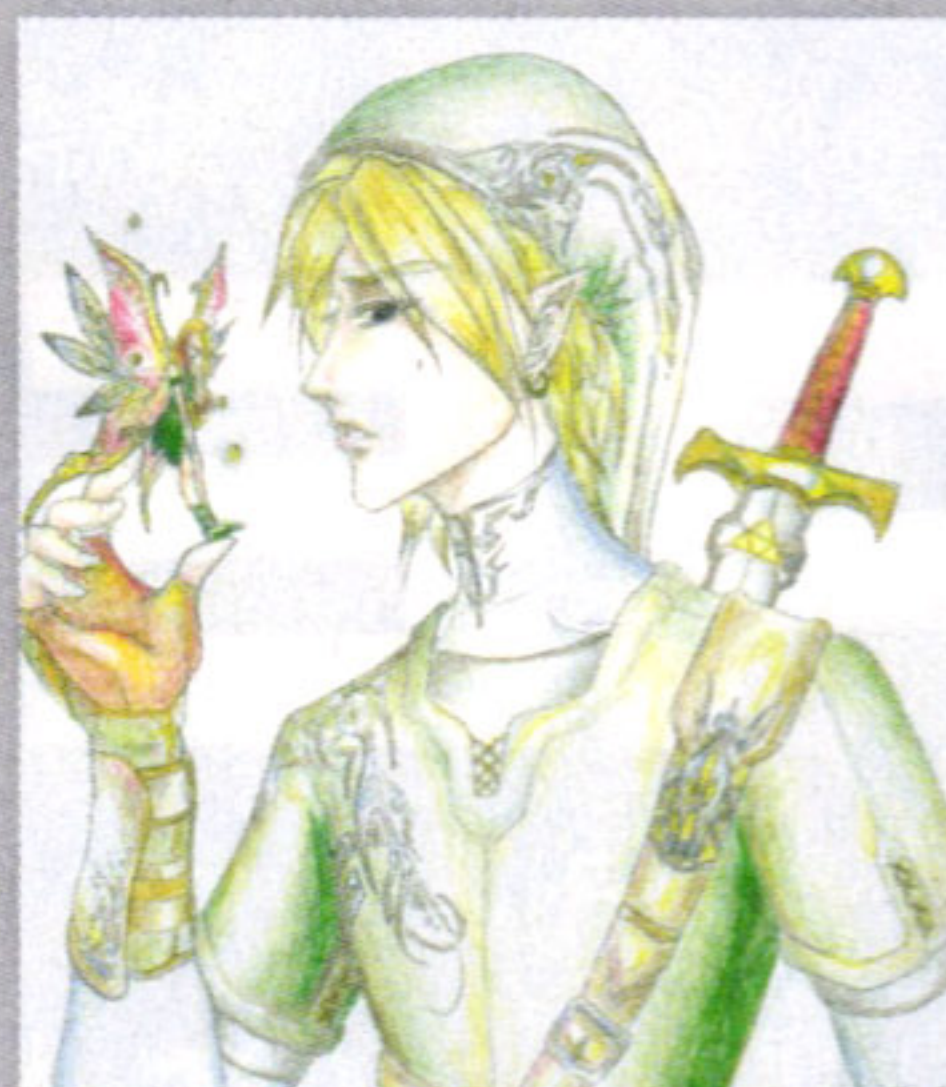
REGAN HALL

The best part about this knit Katamari ball (which is now perched on Bryan's desk) is that it's magnetic, picking up paper clips and promotional pins left and right



LUKE HOLMAN

"u r they lol"



ERIC KNEPP

Award yourself a thousand points if you remember Time Killers. You get a bonus thousand if you actually played it!

CORRECTIONS:

In issue 183, descriptions of Project Origin's gameplay were mistakenly attributed to Loz Doyle. They should have attributed to the game's lead designer, John Mulkey. We apologize for the error.

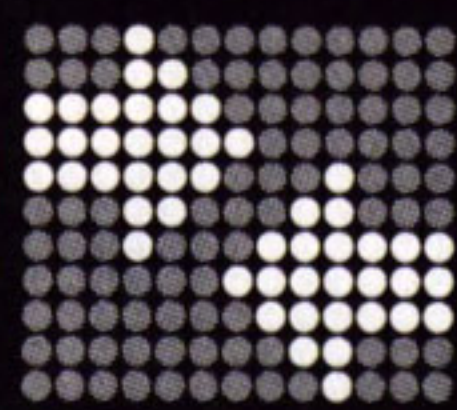
Take this show on the road!

July 2008



With over 20 games, you can bonk a clown, fling a frog, bump a boat, shoot a star, quack a duck, dunk a punk and have a Wild West showdown wherever you go. And however you get there!





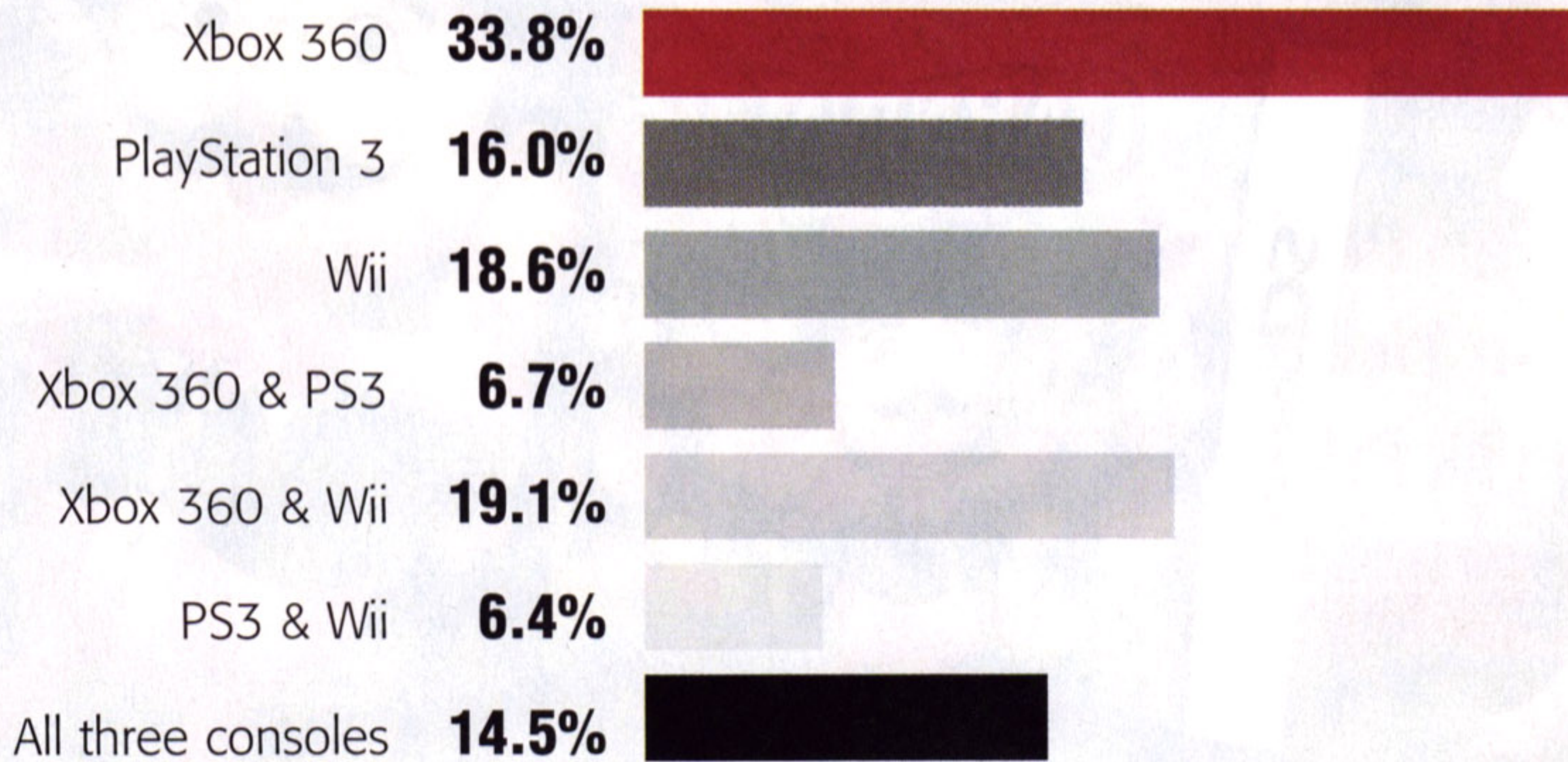
news

THE ONLINE OVERVIEW

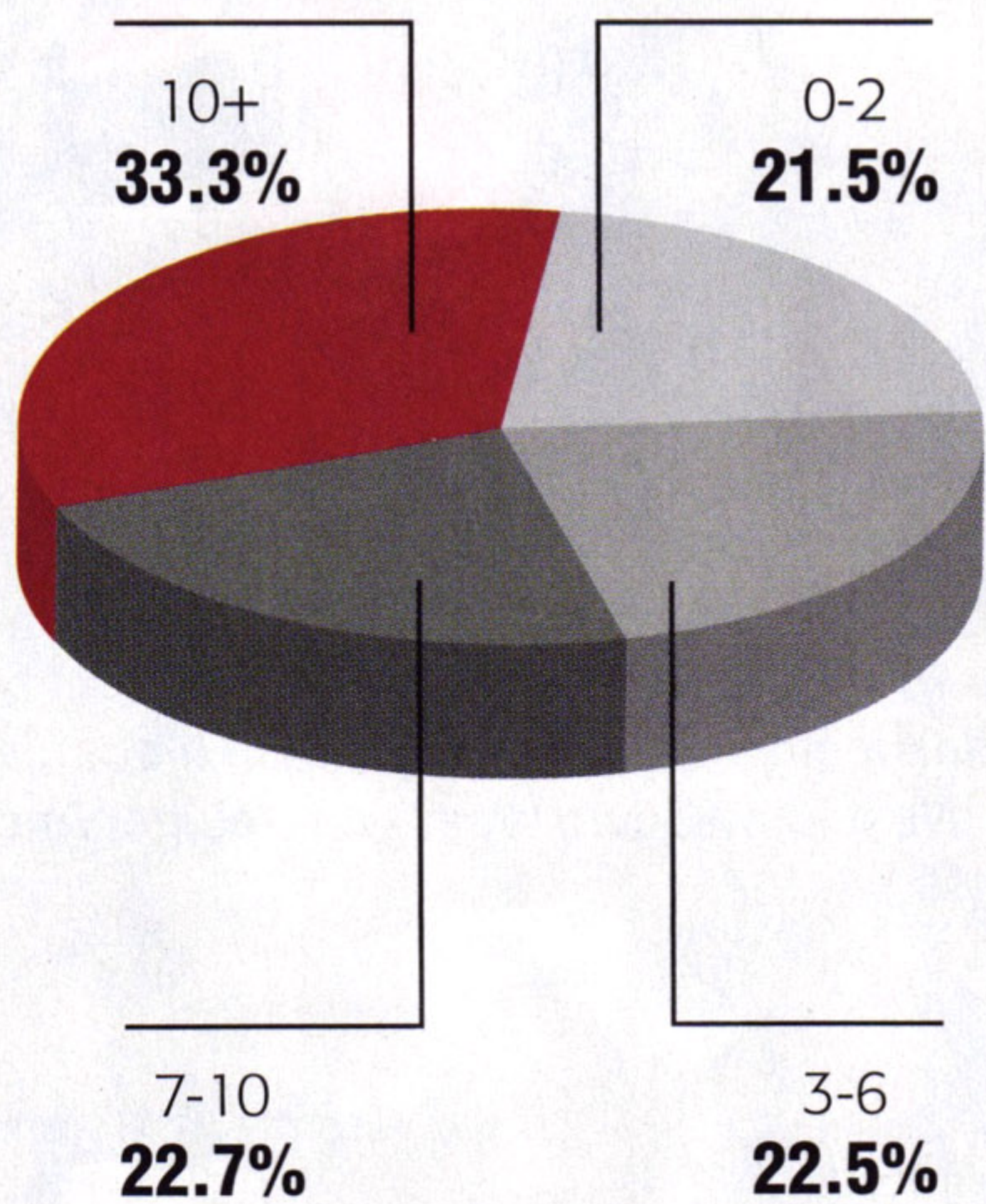
GI POLLS YOUR OPINION

Last month we polled readers about their perceptions of publishers and developers, and we had so much success that we went back to gauge your reaction – over 1,400 people strong* – about what some would say is the most important frontier in gaming: online.


WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING HOME CONSOLES DO YOU OWN?



HOW MANY HOURS DO YOU PLAY VIDEO GAMES ONLINE PER WEEK?



GI OPINION



In an era when music, movies, and pictures are increasingly downloadable, it's interesting to see nearly three quarters of GI readers still prefer a hard copy of their games. It's interesting, but not surprising. The ever-changing (or disappearing) features on services like MSN Music have made the digital user suspicious of those nebulous collections of downloadable items. Better to have something you can hold in your hand – something that can't be snatched away if a user agreement goes sour or a feature stops being supported. On the other hand, it might be because game publishers simply haven't communicated to their consumers that they should care about downloadable releases. As to larger, triple-A releases, we won't have a realistic view of consumer expectations until we see larger broadband penetration, faster download speeds, and larger capacity drives on all the consoles.—MILLER

UNLIMITED ENABLED

Take a look at the full slate of this month's questions and check them against your own opinions in our Unlimited section.

*The total number of respondents for the survey was 1,429 Game Informer subscribers, but the number of respondents for each question varies. All questions contain an uncalculated margin of error.

GETTING CARDED

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

10 and under	.1%
11-15	11.3%
16-19	22.4%
20-25	22.0%
26-30	14.4%
31-40	18.9%
Over 40	10.9%

- PlayStation 3 owners are most likely to be between 31 and 40 years old, as compared to those who own an Xbox 360, the majority of which are between the ages of 20 to 25.

- Respondents who were over 25 indicated that their friends (and the systems they owned) were less likely to influence their buying choices when compared to those 25 and under. Similarly, the percentage of those polled over 25 who said that they never bought a game for its multiplayer content was three times larger than those who were 25 and under.

- Gamers over 25 were more excited by further PSP integration with the PS3, while those 25 and under listed the Home social network as the PS3 feature they were most enthusiastic about.

- Gamers 25 and under were more likely – by 10 percent – to use their Wii or PS3 to surf the web.

CHECKING THE X BOX

Not surprisingly, the Xbox 360 – with its acclaimed Xbox Live service and deep catalogue – holds the lead in a variety of online categories. More of our respondents had 360s than any other console, preferred Xbox Live as a service, and used the system for their downloads.

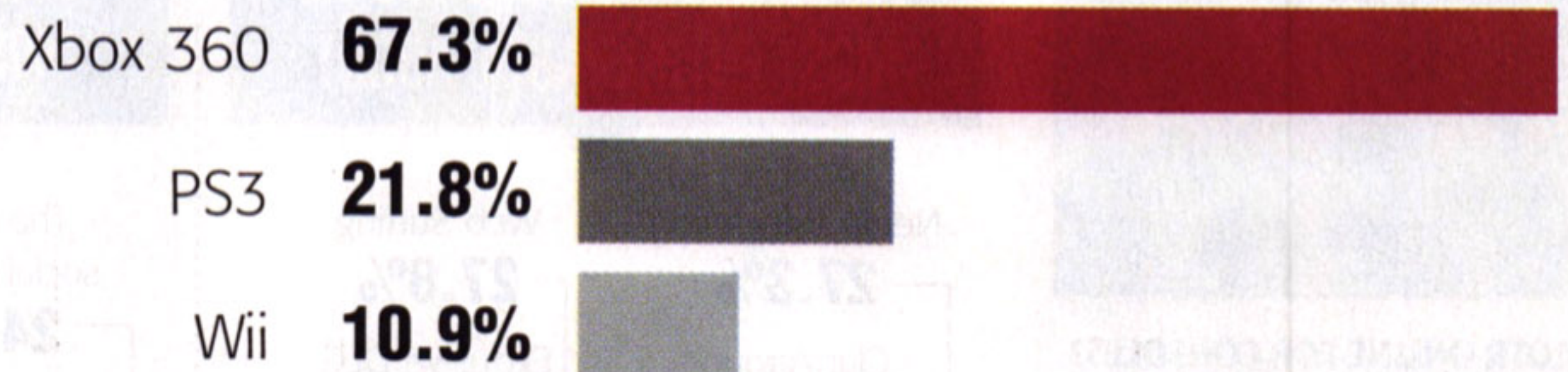
- A vast majority of those polled – 74 percent – own an Xbox 360.

- Even those who owned all three consoles indicated that the Xbox 360 was the system they downloaded content for the most, 67.3 percent of the time. Likewise, PS3 owners rated Xbox Live as the online service with the best feature-set 74.7 percent of the time.

- Xbox 360 owners were slightly more likely (59 percent) to consider which system their friends played on when deciding which console to purchase a multi-console game for when compared to PS3 owners (50 percent).

WHAT SYSTEM DO YOU DOWNLOAD CONTENT FOR THE MOST?

(Among those with all three systems)

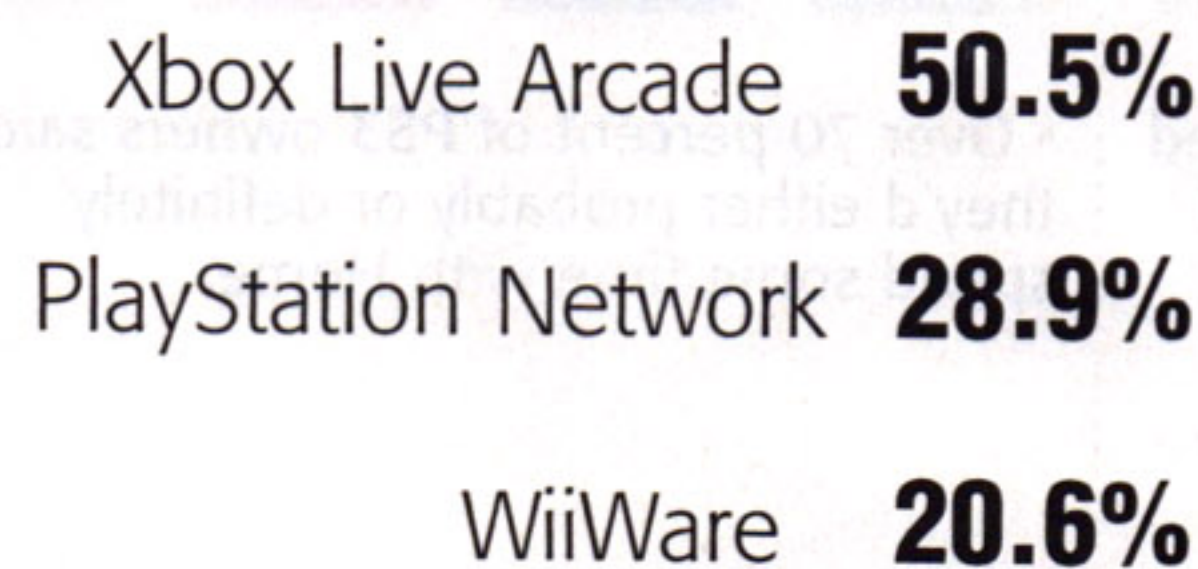


THE LOWDOWN ON DOWNLOADS

IF YOU HAD THE OPTION, WOULD YOU BUY A GAME IN DOWNLOADABLE FORM INSTEAD OF A RETAIL COPY?

Yes	26.9%
No	73.1%

WHICH DOWNLOADABLE GAME PLATFORM ARE YOU MOST ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT?



- No matter which console is owned, the percent of respondents that say they occasionally download content for one of their consoles is relatively the same, around 40 percent. It was not surprising, then, to find that the majority of people said that the promise of downloadable content only sometimes influenced whether they'd buy a game.

- Despite the fact that almost a third of Xbox 360 owners say they look forward to the discussed Netflix integration (whereby you'll be able to download movies in your Netflix queue to your 360), 65.5 percent have not bought and downloaded a show or movie to their 360.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

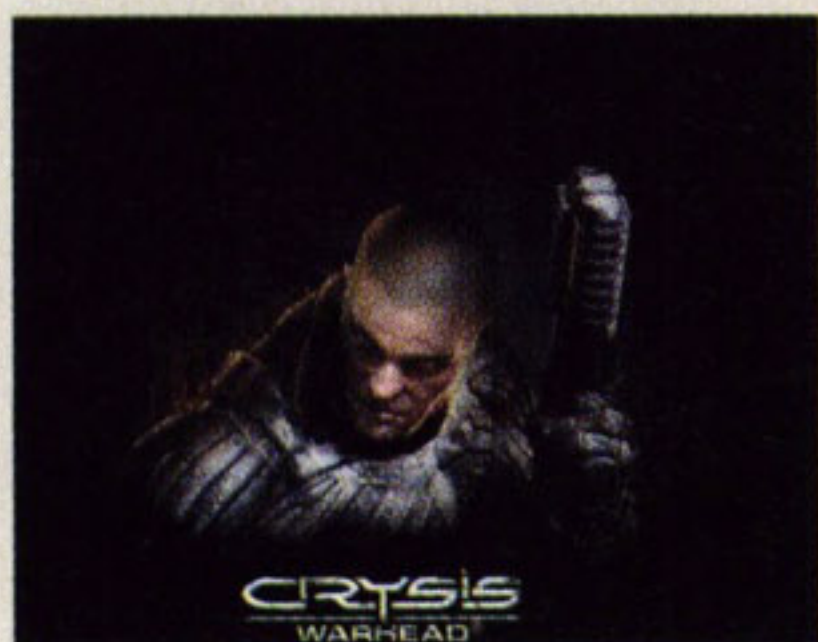
IPHONE OPENS FOR GAMES

Apple has launched its App Store for third-party iPhone software, and Sega's Super Monkey Ball is available for \$9.99, featuring the series' patent tilt-based gameplay on over 100 levels. EA is promising Spore for the iPhone as well, and other companies are also offering games via the store.



CRYSIS ADDS WARHEAD TO ARSENAL

Developer Crytek has pulled away the curtain on Crysis Warhead, the first expansion pack for the PC title. The game follows Sergeant "Psycho" Sykes on the other side of the island in a parallel timeframe of the original game. Crysis Warhead appears on store shelves this fall.



LOTR ONLINE FOR CONSOLES?

Lord of the Rings Online developer Turbine recently received a cash infusion, which CEO Jim Crowley says will be used to expand the platforms the company currently supports, among other things. No specific titles or systems have been announced, although the developer is currently looking for senior engineers with Xbox 360 or PS3 experience.



SPORE'S GOD HAND

As if we already weren't anxious for Spore's impending fall release, EA has just released Spore Creature Creator for \$9.99. Get a jumpstart on creating your Spore specimen, take pictures and make movies of it, and send them to friends. A free version featuring a pared-down creator is also available.



OTHER TAKE-TWO SUITORS?

EA's buyout offer for Rockstar parent company Take-Two is still under consideration, but business website Forbes says French publisher Ubisoft and Activision may be also in the running.

XBOX 360

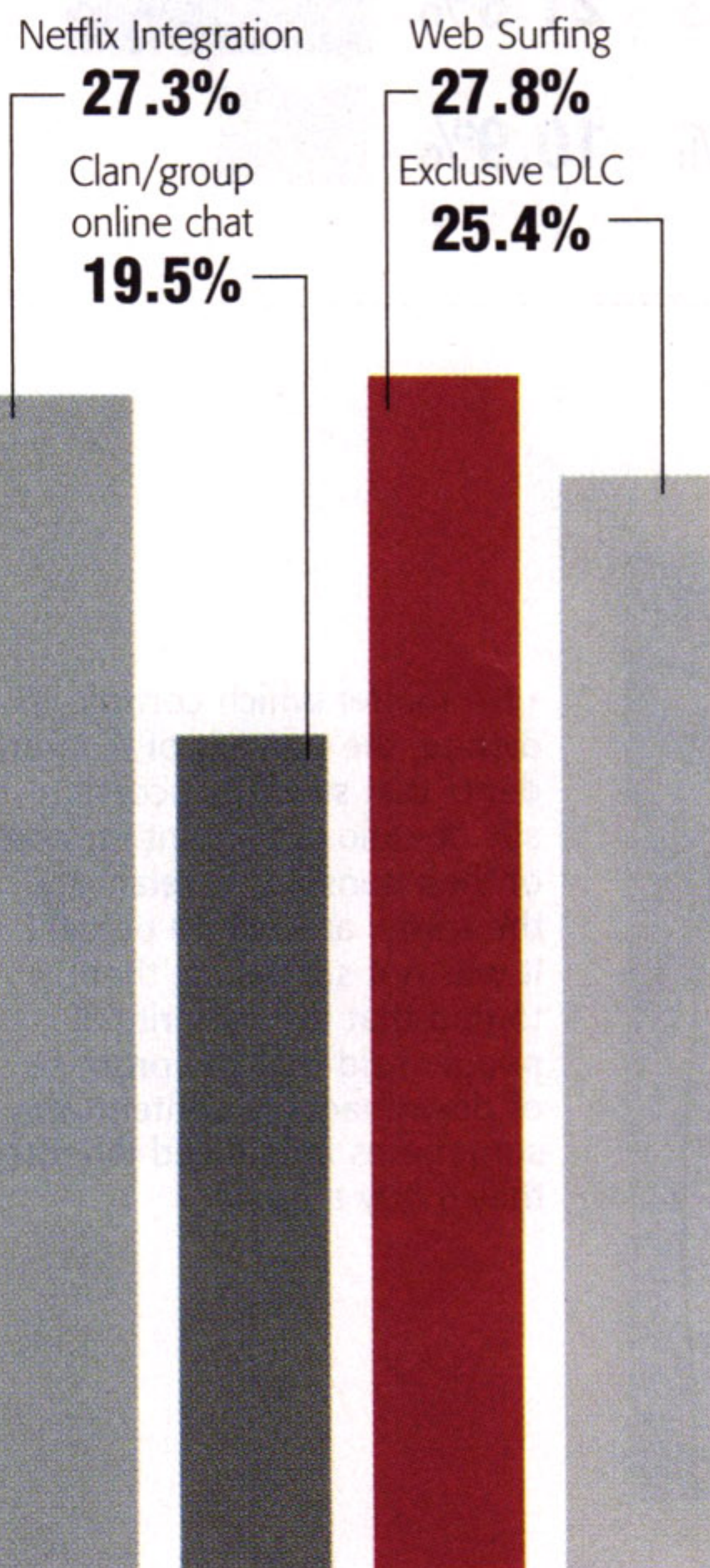
(Results taken from anyone indicating they have a 360)

IS THE XBOX LIVE FEATURE SET WORTH THE MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION FEE?

Yes **71.4%**

No **28.6%**

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING XBOX LIVE FEATURES — IF AVAILABLE — WOULD YOU BE MOST ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT



• Sixty-three percent of those that owned all three systems — and thus could play some titles online for free on their PS3 or Wii — still said that Xbox Live was worth the monthly fee.

PLAYSTATION 3

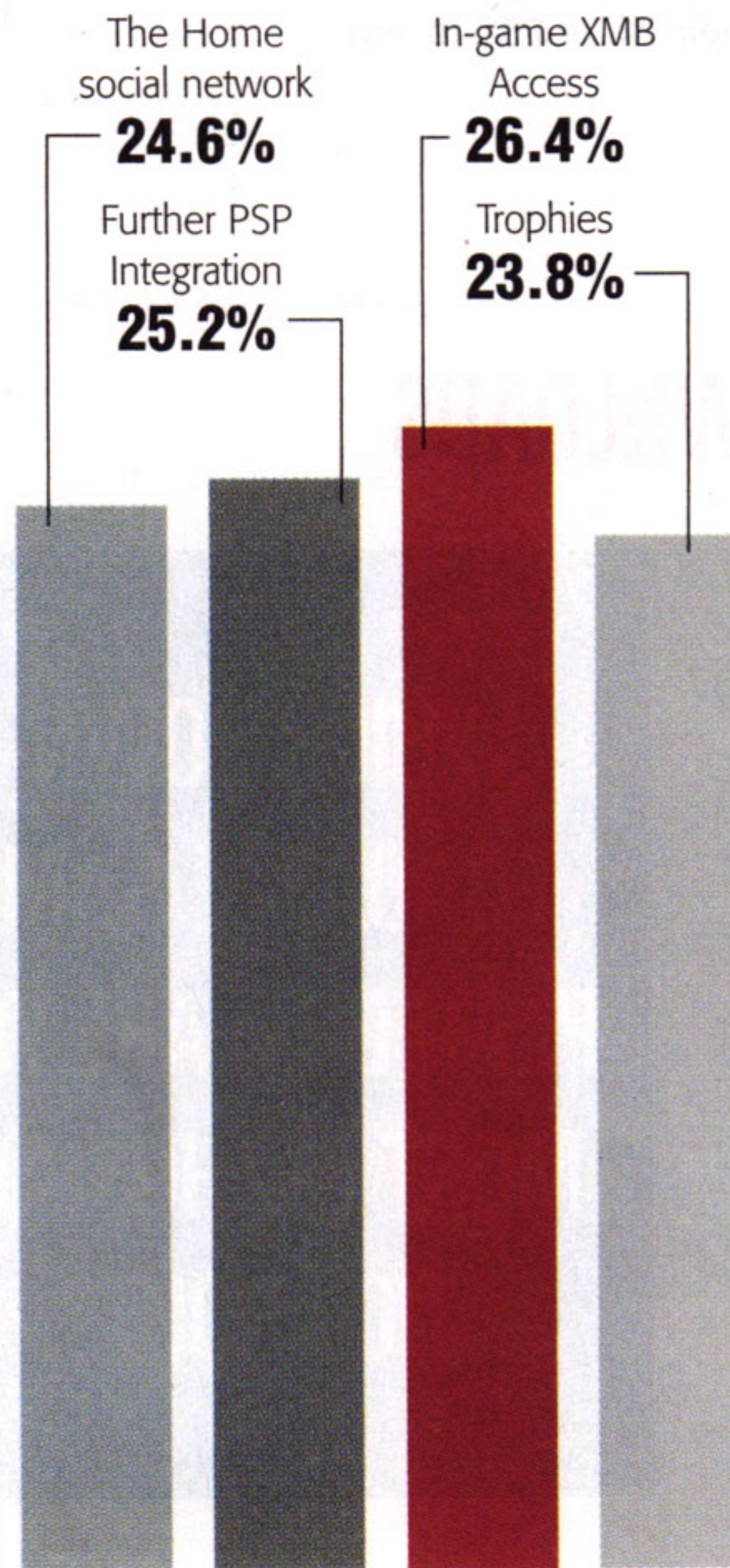
(Results taken from anyone indicating they have a PS3)

HAS PS3'S FREE ONLINE MULTIPLAYER INFLUENCED YOUR DECISION TO USE YOUR PS3 FOR ONLINE PLAY?

Yes **70.8%**

No **29.2%**

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING PLAYSTATION NETWORK FEATURES — IF AVAILABLE — WOULD YOU BE MOST ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT?



• Over 70 percent of PS3 owners said they'd either probably or definitely spend some time with Home.

Wii

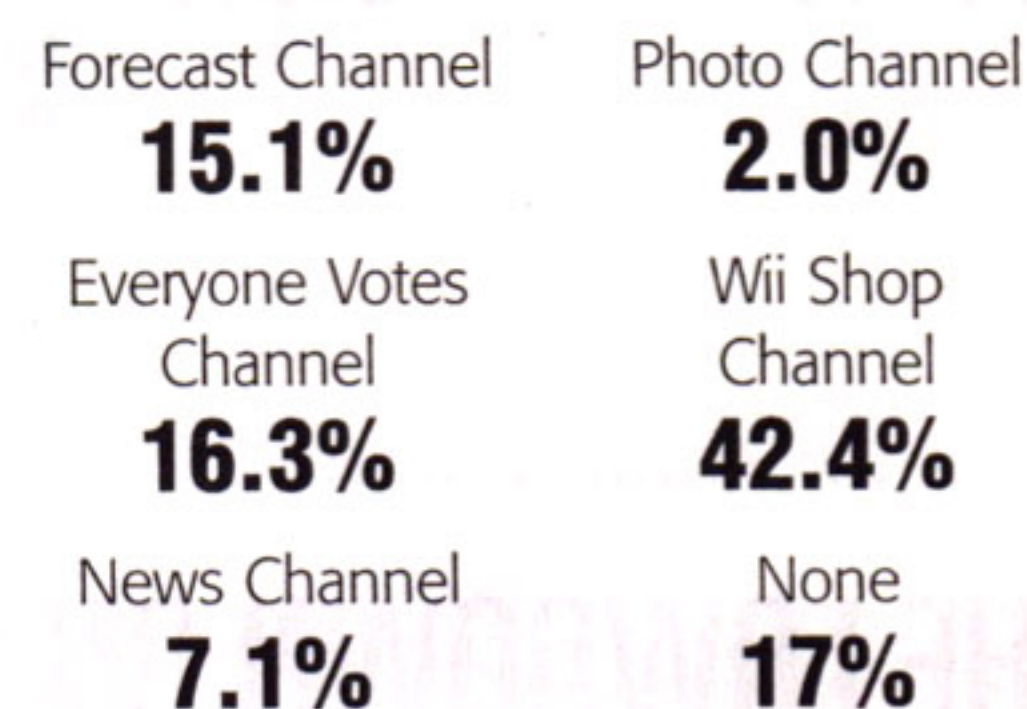
(Results taken from anyone indicating they have a Wii)

DO YOU LIKE NINTENDO'S FRIEND CODE SYSTEM?

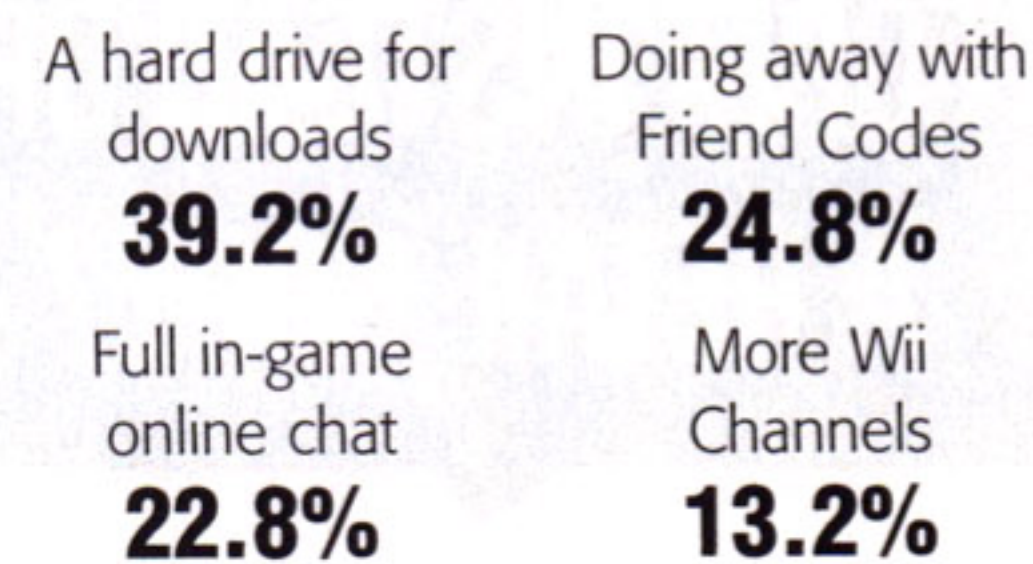
Yes **35.2%**

No **64.8%**

WHICH OF THESE Wii CHANNELS DO YOU USE?



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WIICONNECT24 FEATURES — IF AVAILABLE — WOULD YOU BE MOST ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT?



• Despite the fact that 39.2 percent of Wii owners polled said they would be most enthusiastic about getting a Wii hard drive, only 34.8 percent said the system's lack of one prevented them from downloading content for the console.

the top 10 comic book games

Not all comic book games are super-sized duds. As history has shown, if a motion picture isn't tied to the release of a comic book game, most super heroes fare quite well in their pixel and polygon forms. Hollywood is the real comic game kryptonite. After a week of debating and throwing dull knives at one another, here are the selections we came up with for the best comic book games to date. Excelsior!

1 Marvel: Ultimate Alliance

(PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, Xbox, PlayStation 2, PC)

Raven Software rewrote the book on action/RPGs with X-Men Legends, and perfected the formula with Marvel: Ultimate Alliance. A huge cast of characters battle their way through a massive story that stretches from Atlantis to the far reaches of Asgard. The game features a remarkable single-player campaign, but as a four-player cooperative adventure it soars above all the genre games that came before.



2 The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

(PlayStation 2, Xbox)

To create this winning formula, THQ took one of the most furious protagonists in comic books and gave him to one of the best open world developers in the industry. The result is Radical Entertainment's The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, an explosive smorgasbord of falling buildings, smashed cars, and flying tanks.



3 City of Heroes (PC)

This comic book MMORPG wasn't based on an established comic book series, but it let you create a character that looked exactly like your favorite established comic book hero. The character creation tool is so flexible Marvel sued NCsoft over who would govern character likenesses in video games (the case was eventually settled out of court). City of Heroes also flies high with its gameplay, from its vast array of superpowers to its varied comic book locales.



4 Marvel Vs. Capcom 2: New Age of Heroes

(PlayStation 2, Xbox, Dreamcast, Arcade)

The idea of Iron Man fighting Mega Man is kind of silly, but when you apply Capcom's arcade pedigree to the mix, it becomes an instant classic. New Age of Heroes is the fourth and final installment in the Marvel Versus Capcom series, and it's easily the best. Three-on-three tags, snapbacks, assists, and a handful of well-rounded new characters (including Cable and adamantium-less Wolverine) make it a must-play for comic and fighting fans alike.



5 The Adventures of Batman & Robin

(Super Nintendo)

Spidey continues to find success, but the caped crusader can't seem to catch a break. His last great venture came 14 years ago in Konami's Super Nintendo game, The Adventures of Batman & Robin. Although it's based on the art style and universe created for the cartoon, this game portrays the Dark Knight perfectly by tapping into his martial arts, gadgetry, and brooding personality. His famous rogues gallery is also used thematically for the level designs.



6 Spider-Man 2

(PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube)

Of all the comic book characters in the video game fold, Spider-Man has had the most success. Spider-Man 2 is the first game that taps into his web-swinging potential. Leaping off skyscrapers and zipping along the city line proved to be the most exhilarating aspect in any Spidey game, and it has become the cornerstone of all Spidey games that have followed.



7 X-Men: The Arcade Game

(Arcade)

Cooperative play seems like a fairly new term in gaming, but X-Men: The Arcade Game was doing this well before it became a popular buzzword. This breakthrough coin-op supports six-players on a gargantuan multi-screen display, and allows players to control Wolverine, Cyclops, Storm, Nightcrawler, Colossus, and, for whatever reason, Dazzler. The mutant mayhem is delivered through a typical brawler context, but stands out for its beautiful animation and amazing special attacks. Why Konami hasn't ported this to a console yet remains one of the world's greatest mysteries.



8 Turok 2: Seeds of Evil

(Nintendo 64)

Turok 2 has earned its place in the history of games for its violent weapons (most notably the skull-hollowing cerebral bore), but it also deserves to be remembered for its dynamic FPS action and adventurous level designs. The comic made few ripples, but this game definitely put Turok onto the map, making it a more popular franchise to play than read. And did we mention that it has a weapon that de-brains dinos?



9 The Darkness

(PlayStation 3, Xbox 360)

The Darkness is technically a first-person shooter, but it delivers the unique sensation of remorse when you shoot someone. It's not that you don't want to harm them; you just want to do it in more creative ways. Why use a gun when you have a twenty-foot tentacle that impales people at your disposal? The Darkness captures the mood and sharp writing of the comic, and delivers devilish action the likes of which FPS has never seen.



10 Alien Versus Predator

(Arcade)

Most people don't know that the conflict between two of Hollywood's most recognizable killers started in a Dark Horse Comics miniseries. This amazing story gave way to a number of memorable video games, even a great one for Jaguar. The best AvP game, however, could only be found in arcades. This Final Fight-like brawler was created by Capcom on the CPS-2 board and released in 1994. It delivers a deep, special-attack heavy combat system, awesome blood-splattering action, and the choice to suit up as two different Predator characters (a hunter and a warrior) or Colonial Marines (Lieutenant Linn and Major Dutch). On top of the chest-bursting fun, it offered an interesting story that expanded upon the AvP mythology.



The Art of WRITING

Today's Game Scribes Are Ushering In A
New Era Of Interactive Storytelling



"THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN KIDNAPPED BY NINJAS! ARE YOU A BAD ENOUGH DUDE TO SAVE THE PRESIDENT?" To our younger readers, that might read like the text to a nonsensical animated .gif posted on a message board, but there was a time when that was all the story a game needed (in this case, the arcade classic *Bad Dudes*). Throughout much of video games' first two decades, a lack of storage space and technical limitations meant that storytelling and writing took a back seat to the needs of gameplay. While there were notable exceptions, primarily in the RPG and graphic adventure genres, most gamers were content with being given a goal and a set of tools that allowed them to reach it – or, at the very least, a gun and something to shoot. For a long time, that was enough. While we might never know *Pac-Man*'s true motivations, other than an appetite for dots and a fear of ghosts, the game managed, like so many of the era, to turn a primitive concept into enduring entertainment.



■ Call of Duty 4



■ BioShock



■ Mass Effect

Parasini: Allow me to reintroduce myself. Parasini, Noveria In
Why are you here?
What do you want?
I don't have tim

With the advent of CD-ROM as the primary media for games, designers began writing more involved stories, delivered through computer-generated cutscenes or [shudder] b-movie quality full-motion video. While this was a step in the right direction, in recent years the power of consoles like the Xbox 360 and PS3 is allowing game creators to merge gameplay and storytelling into a more cohesive whole, resulting in dramatic storytelling that responds to the player's actions in real and often shocking ways.

With so much ink being spilled about recent successes like Mass Effect and BioShock, it's tempting to proclaim a new golden age of game writing. In fact, some in the media have gone so far as to say that games are quickly surpassing Hollywood in terms of pop culture storytelling. However, statements like this ignore the torrent of clichéd drivel that still pours out from our consoles each year. Recently, we spoke with some of the industry's top writers to talk about not only how far the industry has come in terms of storytelling, but also how far it still needs to go.

By speaking with talented writers, it quickly becomes apparent that "good writing" for video games is a concept as diverse as games themselves. In addition, the art of crafting a game story is one that's quite different from writing in any other form of media. For most, the interactive nature of games isn't just something that informs the story; it's the very foundation of the process.

"Good video game writing enhances and complements gameplay, and vice versa. Reading a book, watching a movie – those are both passive media," observes Bethesda's Emil Pagliarulo, who is currently working on Fallout 3. "With a game, I can alter that story depending on my actions. So the player is always an active participant. Good video game writing needs to recognize that. A strong narrative is important, sure, but equally important is the way the player interacts with that narrative."

Susan O'Connor, whose past work includes writing credits on BioShock and Gears of War, is more succinct: "Player action defines the story. What I do, I am. Good game stories amplify those game mechanics and give them meaning."

Marrying gameplay and story can be accomplished in a number of different ways, as evidenced in recent years by many of the top titles. In BioShock, players are drawn into the world through clues left to the player through bits of dialogue, taped evidence, and the environment itself. In Mass Effect, cutscenes become gameplay through a system that allows players to select responses and guide the conversation. In Grand Theft Auto IV and Oblivion, traditional cutscenes and dialogue segments coincide with the player's

in-game actions to shape the outcome of events.

While there are many valid approaches to tackling next-generation game storytelling, it's clear that developers and writers must work more closely than in years past in order to assure that the story serves the needs of the gameplay and vice versa.

For BioWare's Drew Karpyszyn, who has worked on Mass Effect and many of the company's other projects, game writing is a balancing act of maintaining a strong narrative theme while making the myriad changes necessary to complement the gameplay. "Our writers work very closely with the artists and technical throughout the project," he reveals. "We have full-time [writers] on a project from day one right up until we ship. With any collaborative project there is constant revision from everyone involved. Sometimes there are technical limitations that require changes in art, writing, or design. Other times ideas simply evolve as the project goes on; they are iterated on and refined to give them more emotional impact and more resonance with the gamers. It's an integral part of the process, which is why you need to have writers involved with the project throughout the entire duration."

While all the writers we talked to seem to agree that more and better collaboration is in everyone's best interest, there are differences in how they view certain aspects of storytelling. In recent years, the trend has been to move away from long CG cutscenes in favor of player-controlled content or in-game sequences that grant the player some freedom over how to view the action.

"I'm tired of people trying to turn video games into movies. I'm tired of losing my HUD, and sitting through 20-minute cutscenes, and playing games that are little more than interactive stories," comments Pagliarulo. "Why should we so desperately try to be something we aren't?"

Others take a more mixed view. "There are a lot of advantages to in-game narrative. It gives the team more leeway to iterate on the story – to try ideas, see if they work, and change them if they don't. Cutscenes are labor intensive, so you have to lock the script early. That can cause problems, obviously. But cutscenes are still opportunities to surprise the player. Player takes action X, expecting result



VIDEO GAME WRITERS ARE JUST NOW STARTING TO BUILD AND DEVELOP OUR NARRATIVE LANGUAGE.

Drew Karpyszyn
MASS EFFECT

Y, and the cutscene delivers a surprise instead. Surprises are part of the deep pleasures of storytelling," observes O'Connor.

Games are also capable of delivering story through experience, even with very little exposition or dialogue – something no other medium can do. "Call of Duty 4, for me, epitomizes great video game storytelling, because the story is told through the medium, through the gameplay. There's very little dialogue, only pre-scripted character

interaction, but when that story hits a major beat, you know it," observes Pagliarulo. "What better way to feel the impact of a character's death than to be that character during the moment of execution? And the nuclear bomb scene? I think for Infinity Ward, it took a lot of guts to give me a five-minute gameplay segment where I don't actually do anything except crawl around, view the destructive power of man, and then die. That was probably the strongest, most memorable story moment for me of all last year. It was just superb."

While it will likely be awhile before games reach a level of writing consistency and quality delivered in other forms of media, it's clear that we're in an exciting time. Games sit at the confluence of a number of encouraging trends – technology that's better able to express emotion and subtle forms of storytelling, an increasing number of studios that actually care about telling quality stories, and an audience that sees games as a vehicle for experiences greater than just mowing down random enemies with a machine gun.

"I think the industry as a whole has always valued quality writing, but now it's become expected," says Pagliarulo. "In the early days, good game writing was so rare, it really stood out in players' minds. Everyone remembers the witty dialogue in The Curse of Monkey Island, because it was so unlike anything else at that time. Doom is a classic, but it had no discernible story. You can't really get away with doing that today – gamers would cry foul. Just look at GTA IV. The series has actually become less about crazy sandbox gameplay, and more about exploring characters and relationships."

For Karpyszyn, we've only begun to see the fruits of what new development technologies will bring to bear in the art form. "In many ways, video games are in the same place movies were in during the 1920s. Technical advances, such as sound and later color, changed the movie experience. It took time for screenwriters to adapt to these advances and develop the 'language of film.' Similarly, video game writers are just now starting to build and develop our narrative language." ■ ■ ■



PLAYER ACTION DEFINES THE STORY. WHAT I DO, I AM. GOOD GAME STORIES AMPLIFY THOSE GAME MECHANICS AND GIVE THEM MEANING.

Susan O'Connor
BIO SHOCK



DOOM IS A CLASSIC, BUT IT HAD NO DISCERNIBLE STORY. YOU CAN'T REALLY GET AWAY WITH DOING THAT TODAY – GAMERS WOULD CRY FOUL.

Emil Pagliarulo
FALLOUT 3

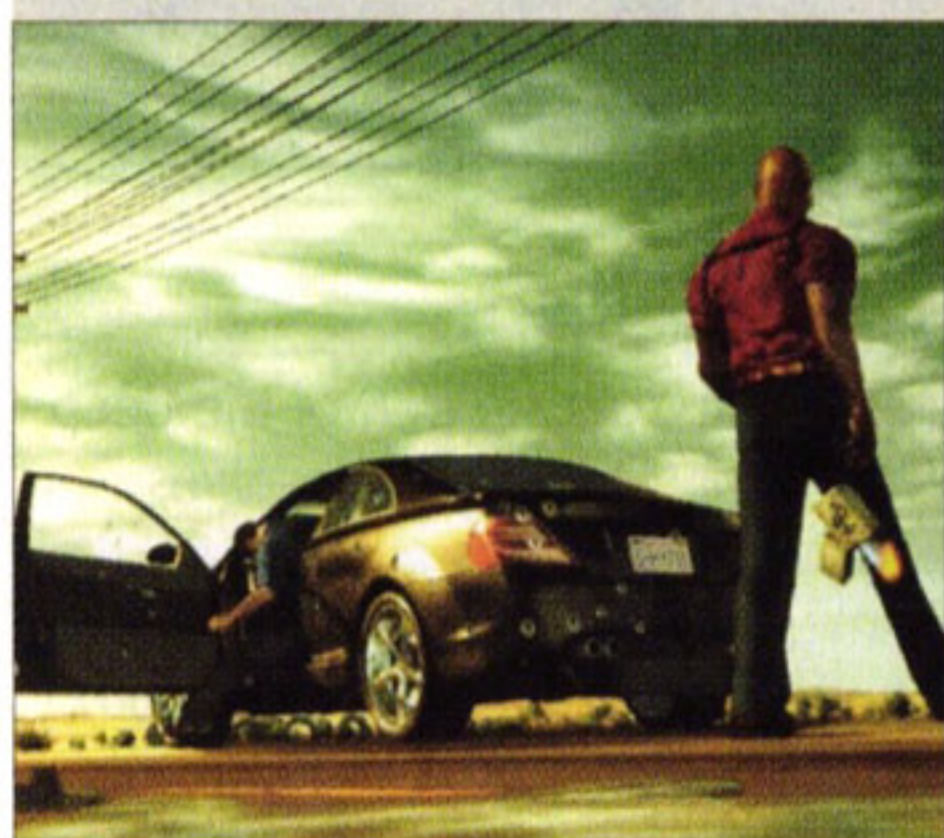
THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

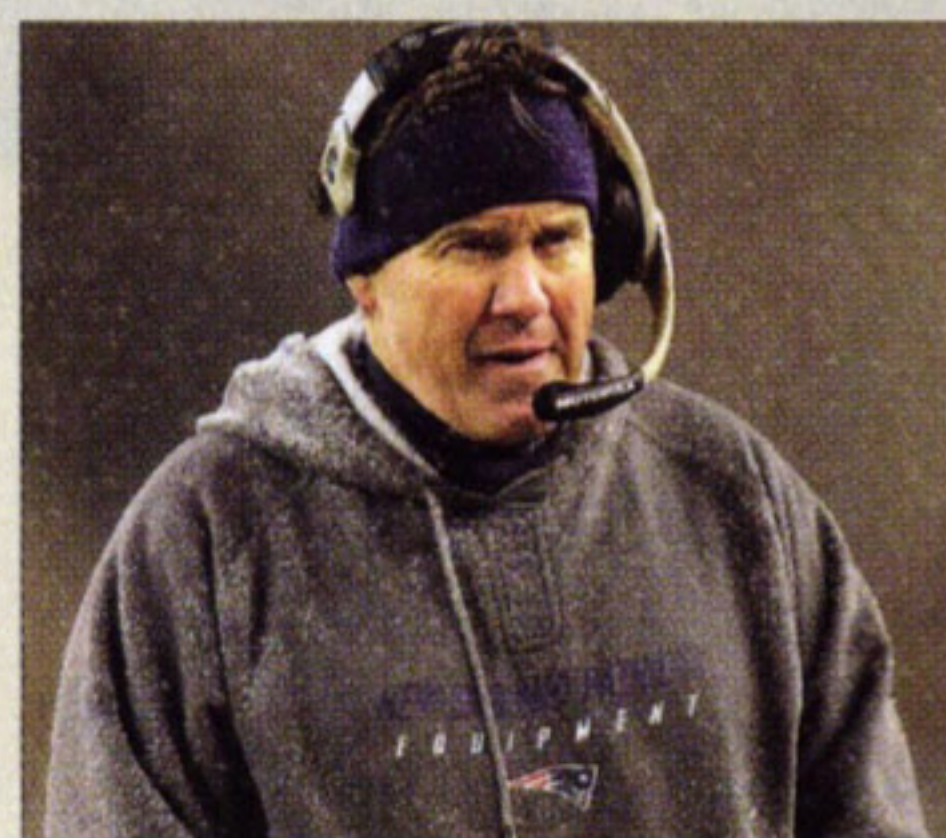
We're working on it.

— Laurent Fischer, Nintendo Europe senior marketing director in response to fans' calls for a significant Wii data storage system. Earlier Fischer joked that only "geeks and otaku" wanted a Wii hard drive.



UGLY

The PlayStation 3's exclusive software roster has taken a couple of shots to the face, as Sony has killed *Eight Days* and *The Getaway*. There are also rumors that *Heavenly Sword 2* is now dead. The company says other first-party games will feed off of their corpses and utilize the resources that would have gone to those games. Cannibalism...yum!



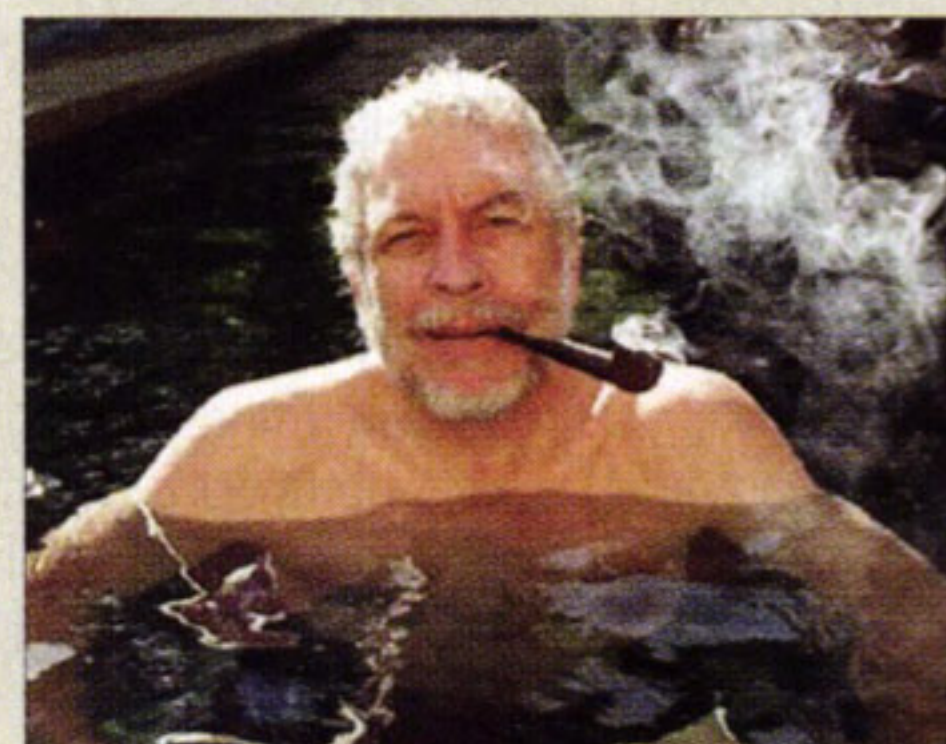
UGLY

Two gamers in California have filed a lawsuit against Electronic Arts for its monopolistic, "blatantly anticompetitive conduct" in the way it manages its Madden NFL franchise — the only football game on the market due to its exclusive license with the league. Surprisingly, Bill Belichick was not mentioned anywhere in the lawsuit.



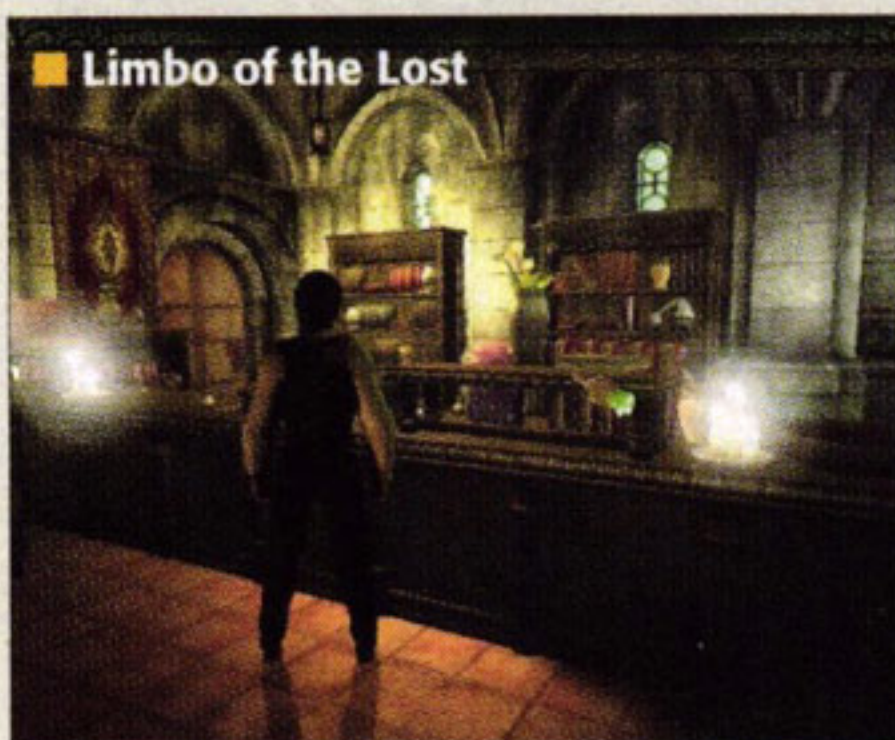
GOOD

Activision is planning to release *Guitar Hero: Metallica* sometime before March 31 of next year — likely after *Guitar Hero: World Tour* this holiday. We've heard Neversoft is using cutting-edge technology to make sure that the drum tracks for *St. Anger* songs sound like soggy drumsticks pounding on wet paper bags.



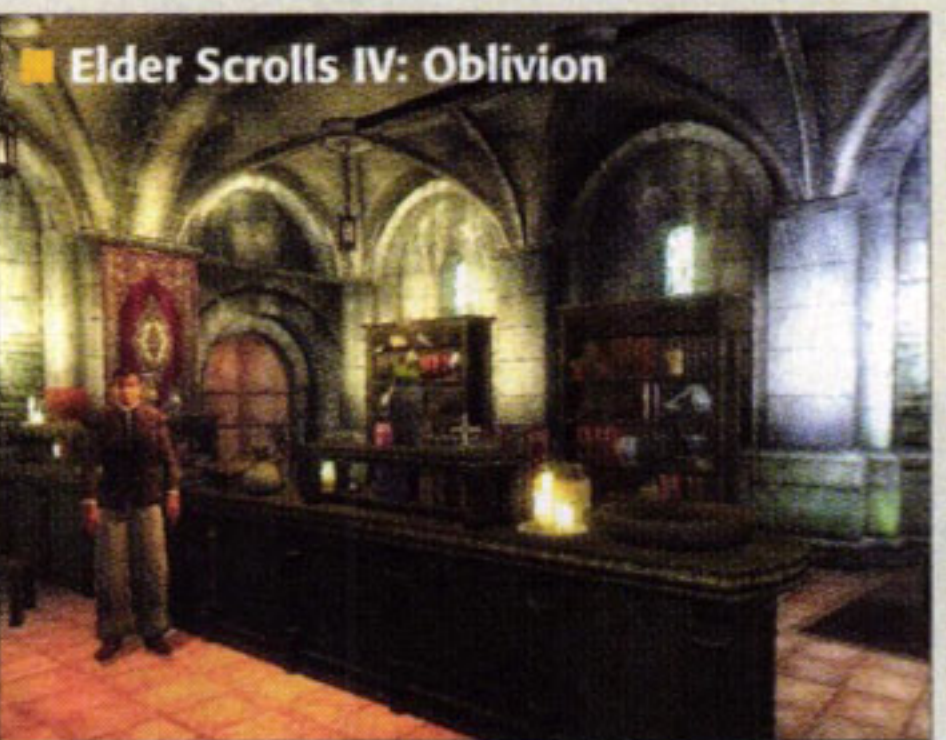
GOOD

Having already portrayed Howard Hughes, Leonardo DiCaprio is ready to step into the shoes of yet another crazy bearded genius — Atari's Nolan Bushnell (shown). The actor has attached his name to a screenplay recently picked up by movie studio Paramount. We're sure DiCaprio has been at parties where people are doing blow in hot tubs, so it sounds like he's already done his research.



UGLY

Adventure game *Limbo of the Lost* was pulled from retail and online sales channels after its publisher, Tri Synergy, was told that the game's developers stole environmental assets from games as famous as *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *Thief: Deadly Shadows*. That's just the tip of the iceberg, as *Limbo of the Lost* has also been pinched from movies and a slew of other sources. Check out the comparison shots above.



games

NOKIA RESETS FOR GAMING

NEW TITLE PANS VIDEO GAME HISTORY

The N-Gage is the punch line to any number of gaming jokes, but phone maker Nokia is not giving up on its troubled platform. Starting this summer, *Reset Generation* will be available for PCs, the N-Gage, and select Nokia phones.

The characters of *Reset Generation* are takes on classic video game characters and archetypes, including recognizable jabs at *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *EverQuest*, and *Mario*. The game itself is a puzzle/turn-based strategy mix whereby you lay down Tetris-like pieces on the game board. The object is to capture one of your opponent's princesses. You move across the blocks you've already put down, and bonuses and penalties will be applied depending on their formation. Capturing a princess requires power-ups, stringing together combos, utilizing special attacks, bombing out foes' squares, and more.

Reset Generation will be offered as a free browser-based widget on PCs, and the N-Gage version costs \$10. Cross platform play will be available, and other features such as profile pages on the *Reset Generation* website, leaderboards, the ability to replay any match, and other amenities round out the experience.



news

ITAGAKI QUILTS TECMO

TEAM NINJA REBELLION?



Outspoken *Ninja Gaiden* and *Dead or Alive* mastermind Tomonobu Itagaki has quit publisher/developer Tecmo and filed suit against the company relating to — in part — a claim of unpaid bonuses.

Money, however, apparently isn't the only issue. Itagaki has singled out Tecmo president Yoshimi Yasuda in a released statement, saying, "The conduct of Tecmo and its president Yoshimi Yasuda towards me has been unbecoming of a publicly listed company. I have filed this lawsuit with a strong intent to question the social responsibilities of Tecmo and its president... I can no longer continue to work with president Yoshimi Yasuda, a man who chooses not to honor promises even when he is able to do so." Itagaki claims that Yasuda made "demeaning remarks" about Itagaki and his colleagues.

Tecmo calls Itagaki's charges of distress as "distortions," and says that it has paid him bonuses. The company also claims the specific bonuses Itagaki references in the lawsuit were actually the responsibility of the previous management.

Beyond his games, Itagaki is known for his high opinion of his work and his rockstar attitude — something that has not gone unnoticed by Tecmo. In its response to Itagaki's lawsuit, the company took a shot at his ego, criticizing him for trying to take sole credit for the work of Tecmo's development studio Team Ninja.

In the wake of Itagaki's departure, two employees have filed a separate lawsuit against Tecmo for unpaid overtime on behalf of all of the company's employees. At the time of this writing there were also rumors that other Team Ninja members are contemplating resignations and further lawsuits.

impulse

BY MATT MILLER

Where are the release dates?
Do console makers really care
about remarkable games like
Castle Crashers and Plunder?



designer for Halo 2 and Halo 3, Max Hoberman, seems more than ready to be the scourge of the seas. His new team at Certain Affinity has crafted an addictive hex-based real-time strategy title where you lead your own swashbuckling crew into battle. The

deceptively simple premise has you sailing a ship around the map, conquering port towns and sinking opposing teams of pirates. An enjoyable single-player campaign whets your appetite, but the game takes off in the cutthroat multiplayer sessions. There's a constant ebb and flow to the battle as one team or another holds

resources and rules the seas before being overthrown. Four people can play together on a single console, but as many as eight salty gamers can jump into an online match.

The verdict is still out on Sony's latest venture into horror; I finally got a chance to try out **Siren: Blood Curse** this month. While based in the same Japanese village as the PS2 Siren game, Blood Curse is an entirely new tale about an American TV crew investigating the strange and terrifying disturbances surrounding the town. They crash their van (gasp) and are separated, and players adopt the roles of the seven survivors as they strive to survive against the zombie-like shibito infesting the area. The game is reminiscent of some of the old Resident Evil games, and in the level I played, it took a while to get used to the controls. Amid oppressive darkness and creepy Japanese music, I found myself sneaking my way past some walking dead, inevitably getting spotted, and then frantically beating them back with a handy farm implement. The game in its entirety will have 12 episodes, each about one to two hours long. No word yet on pricing or timing, but this brief glimpse left me intrigued. ■■■

One of the best games I've played this year is **Braid for Xbox Live Arcade**, a title that I praised a couple of months ago in this same column. A dozen people have asked me since when the game is coming out, and I just shake my head and shrug. Microsoft may let us know about a release date more than a day ahead of time, but I doubt it. It's not just Live Arcade at fault here. At a recent press event Nintendo suggested that it wasn't particularly interested in pushing Wii Ware titles through marketing – in its opinion, that's the job of the press. All three of the major console download services seem as if they're wandering aimlessly, trickling out information on the games only days before they release, and assuming word of mouth is all they need. Out here in the real world, it just seems disorganized and disrespectful. Small developers pour their heart and soul into these titles, and sometimes even they don't know when their games are coming out until it's too late for them to create a buzz or purchase advertising. It's an inexcusable way of doing business, and all three console makers need to do better.

I feel strongly about the issue because of the amazing work coming out of some of these smaller development houses in recent months – exemplified by the work of developers like The Behemoth. **Castle Crashers** has been in the works for a long time, but the wait has been worth it. Up to four players can bash their way through this latest release from the makers of Alien Hominid. In response to the orders of a blustering king, you and your buddies head out to save princesses, kill monsters, and leave behind a wake of destruction. The initial vibe of the game calls to mind frantic sessions of Golden Axe, Double Dragon, and Ninja Turtles, but Castle Crashers is more involved than those early arcade classics. Experience

points and treasure let you increase abilities and specialize into unique roles, like the melee strongman or the group magic user. Clever (and hilarious) bosses are peppered throughout the game, but your most skilled enemies are your allies; the game encourages an endlessly amusing interplay of co-op and competitive play. After a big battle, you'll often have to beat your fellow knights senseless to win the right of a kiss from the grateful rescued maiden. Whenever the game hits Live Arcade and PlayStation Network, it deserves your attention.

Those same two platforms will play host to some piratey goodness in the

form of **Plunder**. For years it was a badly kept secret joke that Bungie might make a pirate game. While the acclaimed studio still hasn't made the leap, its multiplayer



SO
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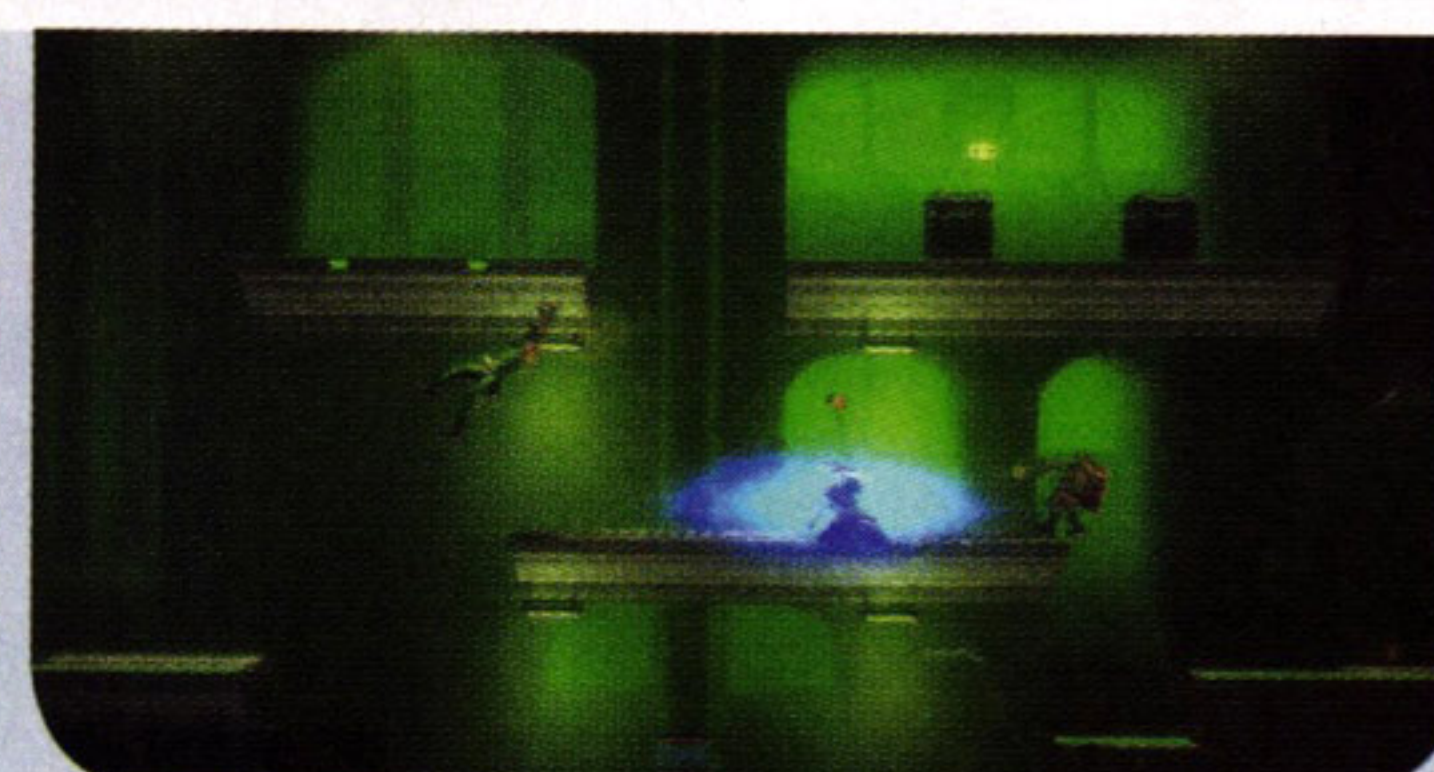
> Soul Calibur

The classic and well-loved original is making its way to Xbox Live Arcade. The re-release looks amazing, and still delivers the same perfect timing and varied characters that fans remember.



> American McGee's Grimm

While not yet confirmed for any console download services, this unusual twist on the fairy tale world will show up soon on the PC-only Gametap service. As the nasty 13th dwarf named Grimm, you'll wander through classic stories like Little Red Riding Hood, spreading your filth and stripping away the Disney-like sanitization of modern children's tales.



> Bionic Commando Rearmed

The remake of this 1988 NES classic should be a blast. Of all the new features, the most exciting is the two-player co-op option, but the number of other additions – from music to new bosses – also make this a must-play when it releases.

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

DAWN OF DEAD RISING SEQUEL

Mashing zombies with cash registers and tennis rackets is a one-way ticket to fun, so we've been surprised that Capcom hasn't announced a sequel to *Dead Rising*... until now. Word is that the company is preparing *Dead Rising II*, and one of the words being used to describe it is "episodic." Whether that refers to chapters of the game being downloadable or available at a lower price at retail, or if that pertains to the structure of the gameplay is unknown.



SONY'S PSP/PS3 BLOCK

We all wish that Nintendo would allow third-party developers to utilize Miis and other Wii features more freely, but from what we hear, Nintendo isn't the only company with a tight grip on the reins. Loose Talk has heard that Sony is blocking some PS3 games from integrating features with the PSP handheld. One developer we talked to was dismayed that they couldn't have players unlock cards in a PS3 game that could then be downloaded and useable in the PSP iteration.



MORE ON PS3'S NEW CONTROLLER

A few months ago we told you a rumor we heard about Sony working on a motion-sensing casual gaming controller. Now there's more talk about this new device, which apparently has the ability to separate into two parts, both of which will have motion-sensing capabilities. If this controller is as far along as it seems to be, hopefully we'll officially hear about it soon.

"Avatars" are digital personas available this holiday for all Xbox LIVE connected members and this spring for all new console owners. "Avatars" will be used in place of the gamer picture you have today and give you a much more lifelike, animated, and fully customizable persona for you to reflect who you are online.



MICROSOFT'S Miis

While we all wait for Sony to finally release Home, its online social network hub allowing players to create their own avatars and even houses, Microsoft isn't sleeping on its own ideas. According to info yanked from a marketing research firm, Microsoft is planning on offering a service this fall called Avatar that will allow gamers to create Nintendo Mii-like characters that will sit in place of your icon on your GamerCard, be useable in games, and act as your online persona.

Also being considered is a Singstar-esque singing game called Lips that features two wireless mics, 30 songs, and an online store. If that's not enough, you can also use your own CDs and have the game reduce the vocals so you can sing along.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Jack Wade may look like an imitation of a third-rate Baldwin brother, but he's actually worth something. As the star of this game, Wade is a bounty hunter who wakes up in the near future with amnesia. He soon gets back to taking cases, and the gameplay is split up among action, stealth, and motorcycle sequences. The game also includes some nice touches like stealth kills, puzzles, and a good variety of weapons. This title originally came out on Dreamcast (and included some story-driving FMVs), and a port was created for the PS2. Unfortunately, its sequel was less well received than the original.

(Answer on page 21)



games

GOING BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

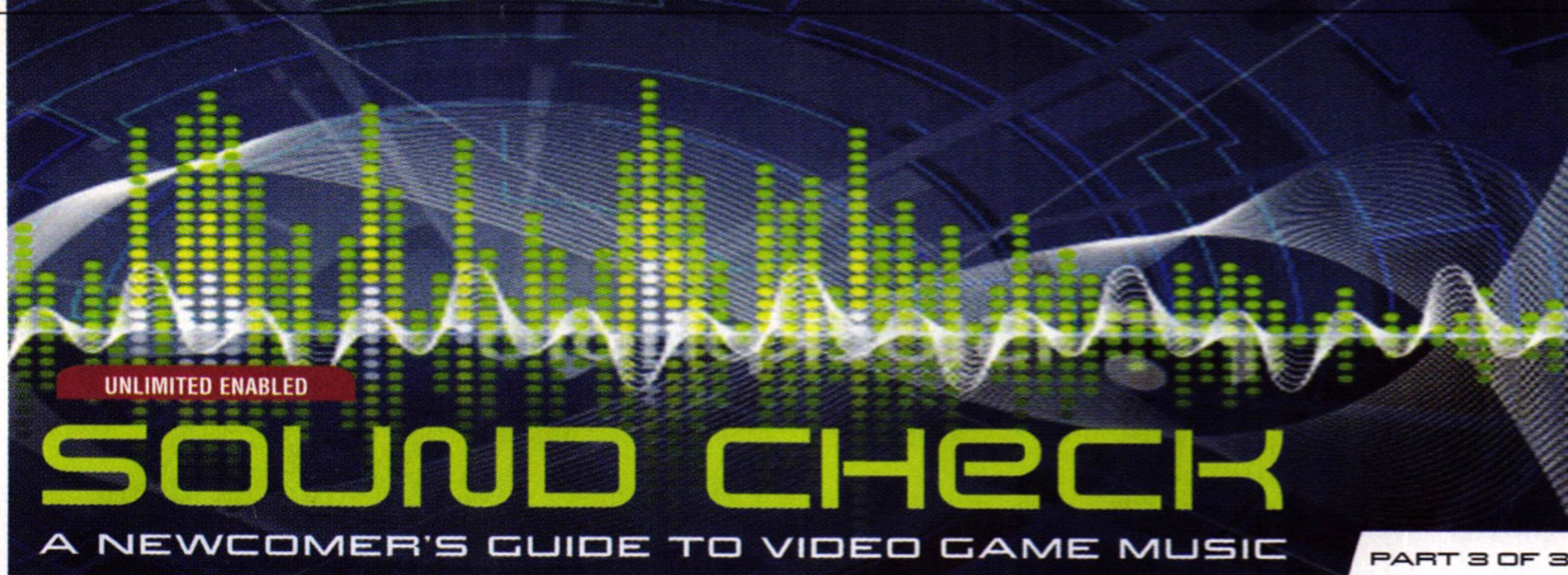
UBISOFT FRANCHISE RETURNS FOR SEQUEL



Michel Ancel's last-generation classic *Beyond Good & Evil* wasn't a commercial success, but fans of the original have been clamoring for a sequel. Now they are going to get their wish. Publisher/developer Ubisoft has announced that *Beyond Good & Evil 2* (tentative title) – which is already in preproduction – will be released sometime in the future.

There are no official platforms for the title yet, but the game's first trailer has already been shown. In it, the camera zooms upon a broken-down hovercar on a desert world. Waiting patiently under an umbrella is an unknown woman (presumably BG&E's Jade), while Pey'J slumbers with a magazine draped over his head to provide some shade from the sun. His nap is interrupted by a pesky insect, which after a struggle is sucked into his snout. While the camera pans out, another bug is added to Pey'J's count as both characters wait for unknown help.





In our first two installments, we explored original game soundtracks and the gaming cover bands that riff off of those themes. This month, we delve deeper and take a look at the wider world of video game remixing. Live cover band acts are only a small segment of this ever-growing group of artists. Hundreds of musicians now remix existing game music, and much of their work is available free on the Internet. To get a comprehensive look at this thriving community, we spoke with David Lloyd, better known to many as djpretzel. Lloyd runs one of the most respected and comprehensive video game music sites online, **OverClocked ReMix** (www.ocremix.org). We asked him about some of the specifics of the site, and what's exciting about the remix scene right now. To read the full text of our interview, check out this month's Unlimited section at www.gameinformer.com.



What can folks expect to find at your website, OverClocked ReMix?

First off, everything's free – registering for the forums, downloading the MP3s, and we've also got a free BitTorrent distribution if you want to grab everything all at once. I think most initial visitors will want to see if their favorite game has any mixes. So, for example, if you're into Mega Man X for SNES, you could search for mixes of that game and at the moment you'd get 14 tracks. We've got Zelda jazz, Final Fantasy techno, Castlevania metal – you name it.

How do you decide what pieces of music to post on the site?

We feel like the best way to honor game composers and their work is through interpretation, not just performance. We feel like arranging this music shows how flexible and powerful it truly is. To ensure that this standard is upheld, and to free up some of my time for improving/developing the site, we started a judge's panel of about 10 people, usually ReMixers themselves, to vote on submissions.

Are there challenges or concerns about copyright that you ever have to deal with when working on remixes?

In over seven years, we've never received any legal threats, cease & desist letters, or anything of that nature. Knock on wood! Seriously, though, we are very careful to never charge for the

music itself or make profit through its distribution. Basically, the only money we make is from shirt sales, donations, and advertisements, and that barely covers the cost of hosting the site in the first place, so if anyone ever sued us, they wouldn't get much. Really, it's not much different from fan art or fan fiction, both of which most game companies have realized is really just free advertising for their products.

We hear you're doing some cool stuff with the Street Fighter franchise right now. Can you tell us about that?

We're making history! A while ago we released an album of ReMixes from Super Street Fighter II called *Blood on the Asphalt* – you can check it out at <http://sf2.ocremix.org>. Anyways, Capcom liked it quite a bit and contacted us about using some of the tracks in their upcoming remake for XBLA and PSN, Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix. So of course we said yes, and actually ended up doing the entire remixed soundtrack for the game, with some new pieces being created in addition to modified versions of tracks from the *Blood on the Asphalt* album. As far as we know, this is the first time a major game company has reached out to the game remixing community and used their arrangements in a major game title, and we're proud that OverClocked ReMix was involved.

What You'll Find On OverClocked ReMix

- Over 1,500 Remixes, all available for free download
- 513 ReMix artists
- Information about creating your own remixes
- Interviews with ReMix artists and original composers
- Over 150,000 fellow visitors every month

Other Recommended Sites

- **Remix.Kwed.Org** (<http://remix.kwed.org/>)
Great remixes of Commodore 64 games
- **Dwelling of Duels** (<http://dod.vgmix.com/>)
Game arrangement competition site with an emphasis on live performances & musicianship, featuring some amazing rock/metal pieces
- **SquareSound** (<http://www.square-sound.com/>)
Extensive resource for fans of Square music, with fan arrangements, album info, and frequent competitions
- **VG Frequency** (<http://www.vgfrequency.com/>)
Blog covering the VGM fan remixing/arrangement scene, with news, links & editorials

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
BRANDON JAMES
Owner/President Nerve Software (Enemy Territory: Quake Wars Xbox 360)

- 1 M.U.L.E. – Atari 400
- 2 Doom – PC
- 3 X-Com: UFO Defense – PC
- 4 Rez – PS2
- 5 Ico – PS2



READER
RAMON JOHNSON
Tuscon, AZ

- 1 Super Street Fighter II – Genesis
- 2 Otogi: Myth of Demons – Xbox
- 3 Super Smash Bros. – N64
- 4 Resident Evil 4 – PS2
- 5 Red Dead Revolver – Xbox

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five
724 N 1st St 4th Fl
Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Things Bryan Shouted Playing Cliffhanger On Sega CD

- 10 How dare they make me hold a controller like this!
- 9 You've just got to do tiny jumps... ARG! Even those don't work!
- 8 C'mon! Dynamite and snow farts!?
- 7 Awww! I clocked my face on the top of the triangle!
- 6 The way the graphics are... you can't... you... [trails off]
- 5 What? Cave?! Health?! I'm only half way?
- 4 What the f--- is this?! You can't even see him. I don't even know what to do.
- 3 I hit the button! You heard me hit it!
- 2 The whisker forest is what gets me. I made it through a hundred feet of this s---, and now it's all going down the crapper!
- 1 It just keeps going! For-ev-er!

Name That Game Answer: Headhunter



1



2



3



4



5



6

BLUE IN THE FACE

It's been over a year and a half since Sony launched its PS3 and it still hasn't released an official Bluetooth headset. What's a trash-talking, Internet-ready gamer to do? We round up some of the best third-party Bluetooth headsets and run them through the gauntlet to see which one deserves your hard-earned green.

1: Datal Bluetooth Wireless Headset

PASSABLE ●●●●●●●●●●

Pro: The Datal's one-hour charge time got us right into the gaming action, and it sounds good. Plus the price is nice.

Con: The short charge comes at the cost of a six-hour battery life. Add in the dysfunctional button layout, poor mic quality, and an earpiece that sits loosely on your head, and you have a set for cheapskates only.

\$39.99 • www.codejunkies.com

4: Motorola Motopure H12

AVERAGE ●●●●●●●●●●

Pro: Motorola's offering comes with two slick rechargeable magnetic bases. The set looks smart, is super small, and has a great noise reduction mic. It's also so comfortable it's almost nonexistent.

Con: Considering the H12's price, we expected more from the unit's sometimes-fuzzy audio and six-hour talk time.

\$119.99 • www.motorola.com

2: Logitech Cordless Vantage

OK ●●●●●●●●●●

Pro: The Vantage knows what is most important in a headset: crisp, clear sound and a decent noise-canceling mic. Over twelve hours of game time isn't bad, either.

Con: The volume knob could be sturdier, and its odd headband design not only feels a little flimsy, but sometimes makes the earpiece slide around. Plus the unit's bulk runs counter to the standard "small and sleek" Bluetooth philosophy.

\$79.99 • www.logitech.com

5: PDP Metal Gear Headset

AVERAGE ●●●●●●●●●●

Pro: This set's eight-hour battery life and decent sound reproduction are nice, but its best feature is hard to beat: It makes you look like the video game industry's oldest badass.

Con: Snake's headset would have scored far better if it weren't for the terrible mic pickup that makes you sound like one of the adults from a Charlie Brown cartoon.

\$59.99 • www.pdp.com

3: Mad Catz Bluetooth Headset

AVERAGE ●●●●●●●●●●

Pro: Mad Catz's set is basically a good speaker in a small package that fits easily over the ear. It's so lightweight that it's hardly noticeable.

Con: This set's biggest fault is the earpiece, which sits a little high on the ear and isn't easily adjustable. Considering the competition, barely more than five hours of game time isn't good.

\$50.99 • www.madcatz.com

6: Plantronics Voyager 520

GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

Pro: The voyager wins with the headset trifecta of comfort, solid noise reduction, and good audio output. The eight-hour talk time is reasonable and it even comes packaged with multiple charge options.

Con: On top of being a little large, this unit also isn't very stylish. The max volume might be a little low for some people, and its finicky volume nub sometimes slides off your finger.

\$99.95 • www.plantronics.com

ARTFX THEATER INDIANA JONES AND THE RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK STATUE

If you are like us, then you likely felt nostalgic after seeing *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Well, what better way is there to assuage nostalgia than by throwing money at the property's creators? Our suggestion is this beautiful new ArtFX statue taken from what is likely the most iconic scene from any of the films.

\$131.99 • www.entertainmentearth.com



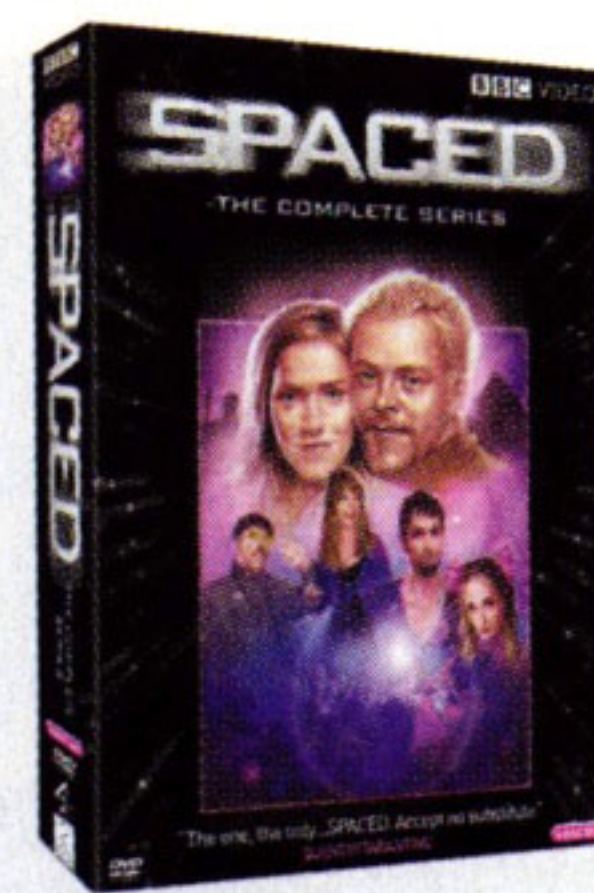
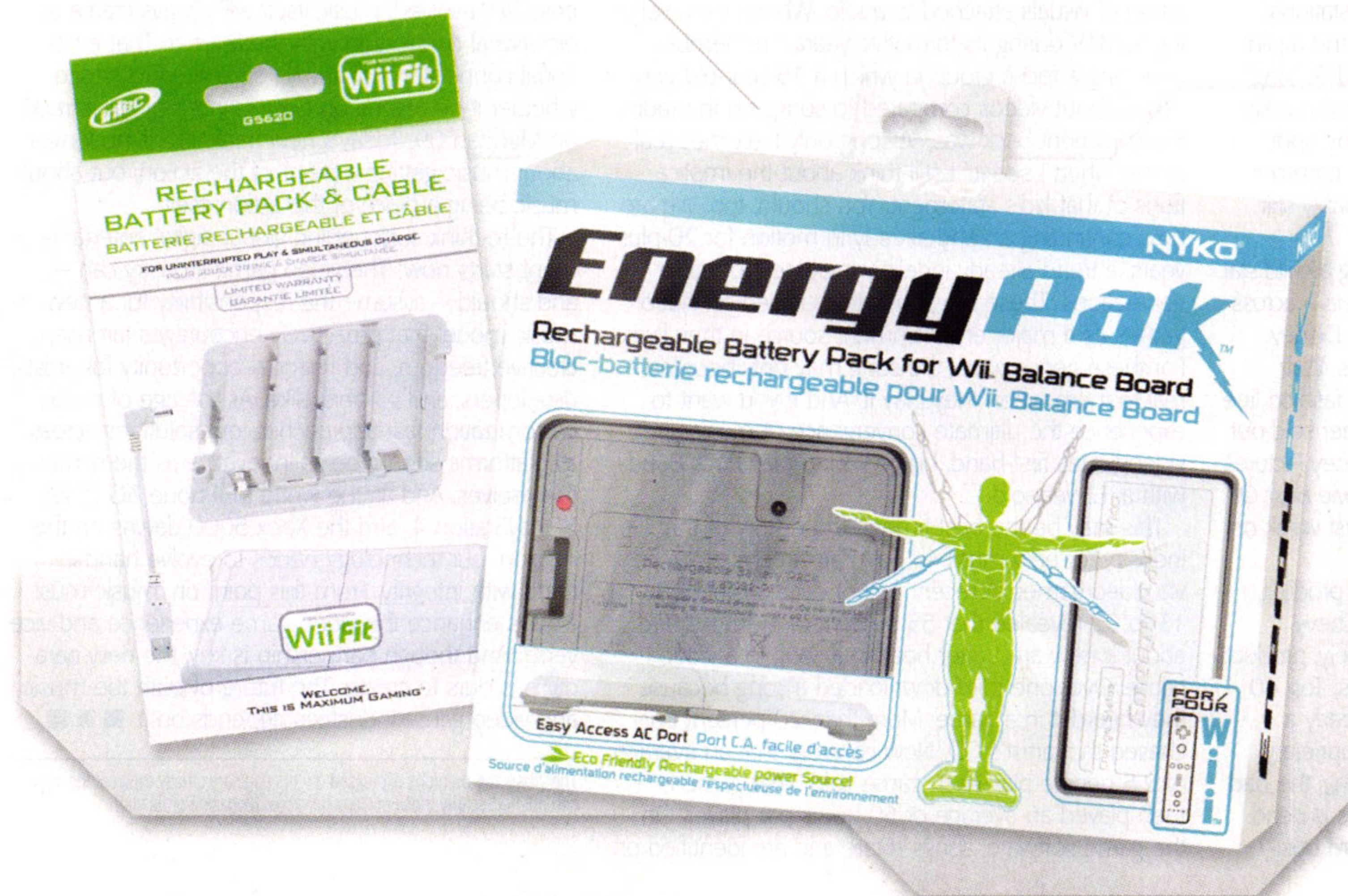
etc

Wii FIT BATTERIES

Is your Wii Fit board running out of juice before you do? Don't slack off just because you don't want to bike to the store and pick up batteries; a couple of options are out there to help keep your Wii Fit board running. While the Intec unit has a longer battery life, with almost 40 hours of charge time (opposed to Nyko's 30), the Nyko brand has the advantage of a longer power cord and an adjustable AC jack, making it easier to recharge while you play.

\$19.99 • www.nyko.com

\$19.99 • www.inteclink.com



Spaced: The Complete Series

Before Simon Pegg was making cinematic hilarity with movies like *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz* he was making small screen hilarity on the BBC. *Spaced*, a sitcom about two twenty-somethings trying to survive life in a London flat, is available for the first time here in the States.

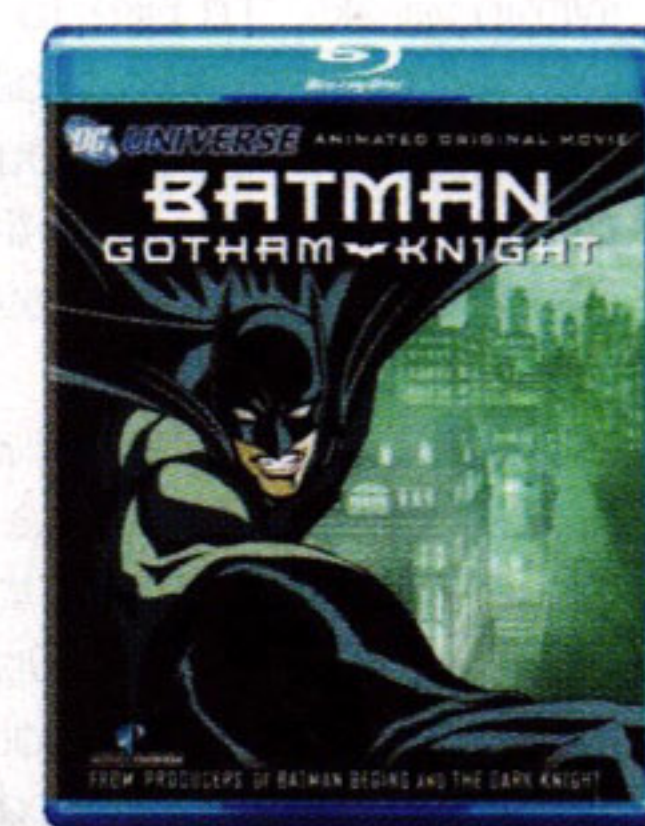
\$59.00 • www.bbcamericanshop.com



Robot Chicken: STAR WARS

Adult Swim's stop-motion show that holds nothing sacred took on Star Wars with a half-hour special, and it's finally coming to DVD. Check out our interview with series creators Seth Green and Matthew Senreich in our Unlimited section this month.

\$14.97 • www.williamsstreet.com



Batman: Gotham Knight

Animatrix style, *Gotham Knight* features six animated vignettes about DC's coolest superhero. This collection boasts stunning artwork from some of the industry's top studios and the writing talents of Josh Olson (*A History of Violence*), David S. Goyer (*Batman Begins*), Alan Burnett (*Batman: The Animated Series*), and award-winning comic scribes Greg Rucka and Brian Azzarello. Check out our interview with producer Bruce Timm in this month's Unlimited section.

\$34.99 • www.warnervideo.com/batman-gothamknight

STEVE SCHNUR
WORLDWIDE EXECUTIVE OF MUSIC
AND MARKETING, ELECTRONIC ARTS



CHANGING OUR TUNE, CHANGING THE GAME: MUSIC, MARKETING & THE REALITIES OF THE NEW INDUSTRY PARADIGM

Today's new paradigm is no longer about music getting a piece of the action, but about music being a piece of the action itself.

In 1926, the General Mills Corporation created the first commercial jingle, a song called "Have You Tried Wheaties?" sung by four male vocalists live on a Minneapolis radio station. Within a week, the company's ad manager realized that 30,000 of the 53,000 cases sold nationwide had been bought in the Minneapolis market. General Mills soon went national with the act that had become known as "The Wheaties Quartet." The move single-handedly saved one of America's most enduring brands, invented direct marketing, and launched the first-ever radio hit to sing about the joys of fiber.

In 1971, Coca-Cola premiered their latest global ad campaign built around a brand new jingle. Immediately, listeners began to call radio stations requesting to hear the commercial again and again. Within weeks, "I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing" was recorded by two separate pop acts and quickly became a Top 10 hit around the world. The spot itself was recently voted the #1 television commercial of all time. If you're over 40, you probably still remember every word.

In 2003, Disney began actively promoting a child star named Miley Cyrus – a.k.a. Hannah Montana – across Disney-owned platforms that included The Disney Channel, Radio Disney, Disney theme parks, Walt Disney Records, Hollywood Records and a fashion line via Disney Consumer Products. Following her sold-out 70-date live concert tour last year, Walt Disney Pictures released the Disney Digital 3D concert movie *Best Of Both Worlds*. It grossed \$31 million in its first week on just 683 screens.

The point is this: Music has always sold product, whether it was war bonds, Elvis movies, Chevy trucks, or presidential candidates. Conversely, product has always sold music, be it gramophones, Top 40 radio, iPods, or a Sims ringtone. But for nearly a century, recorded music had been the proprietary realm of a traditional record business. Today, the bad news is that the traditional record business is dead. The good news is that the traditional record busi-

ness is dead. And with terrestrial radio and television becoming as marginalized as CD sales, a worldwide consumer base will now turn to the only growth media that matters.

When I was a teenager, "interactive music" meant using my Allman Brothers' *Live At The Fillmore East* album to clean my weed. But the teens of today are the first generation to have fully grown up with digital technology. That means they've never known a world without computers, Internet, or cell phones. The Digital Generation is now 88 million strong and growing, and they can't imagine their lives without video games.

Music video first appeared in 1981, and since then an entire generation has been raised with an expectation of visuals attached to audio. When I was working at MTV during its formative years, I remember attending a focus group in which a 15-year-old was asked about videos compared to songs on the radio. His comment back was, "A song only becomes real to me when I see it." I still think about the implications of that kid's statement. You should, too. We are now continuing a trend already in motion for 20-plus years, a trend already indelibly ingrained in future generations. These are generations raised on video games as a major entertainment source in their lives. For these generations, the song may only become real to them when they play it. And if you want to experience the ultimate convergence of music and videogames first-hand, I urge you to play *Rock Band* with a 12-year-old.

This may be the best time in the history of the industry for new music to get mainstream exposure via video games. A recent poll of core gamers ages 13 to 32 revealed that 55 percent of them learned about a new artist after hearing a song in a video game. Over one third downloaded a song because they heard it in a game. More than 20 percent purchased that artist's CD. Now consider that an average of 2.5 people play each game sold. That game is then played an average of 50 hours per player. On the game software, songs rotate and are identified on

screen at least twice per hour of play. Our Madden NFL 08 game sold more than 7 million units. That means that any given song in that game was heard and identified more than one billion times.

According to a recent Nielsen Soundscan study, for the first time last year nearly half the teenagers in America bought no CDs whatsoever. And despite NARAS' sincere but misguided "Just Say No" approach to P2P, consumers overall paid for less than 42 percent of the music they obtained. However, we also live in a world where MySpace delivers new pop stars, *Rock Band* can single-handedly revitalize the Molly Hatchet catalogue, and iTunes has now surpassed Wal-Mart as the number one music retailer in America. Though the business has evolved, music itself will always create an emotional connection with the listener. That emotional connection will always drive product desire, whether it be a song on *Grey's Anatomy*, or a track on *Madden 09*. Today's new paradigm is no longer about music getting a piece of the action, but about music being a piece of the action itself.

The re-think surrounding global digital entertainment starts now: The video game industry can – and should – assume the responsibility for a new music model that proactively encourages fair use, creative freedom, and financial opportunity for artists, developers, and gamers alike. As the age of music customization fast approaches, our solutions across all platforms should be as innovative as the games themselves. And as the world of iPhone 3G 2, Wii 3, PlayStation 4, and the Xbox 5000 dawns on the horizon, our technology needs to evolve hand-in-hand with integrity. From this point on, music must always enhance the video game experience and vice versa. And though partnership is key, the new paradigm is ours to create. The future of both the music and video game industries depends on it. ■■■

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

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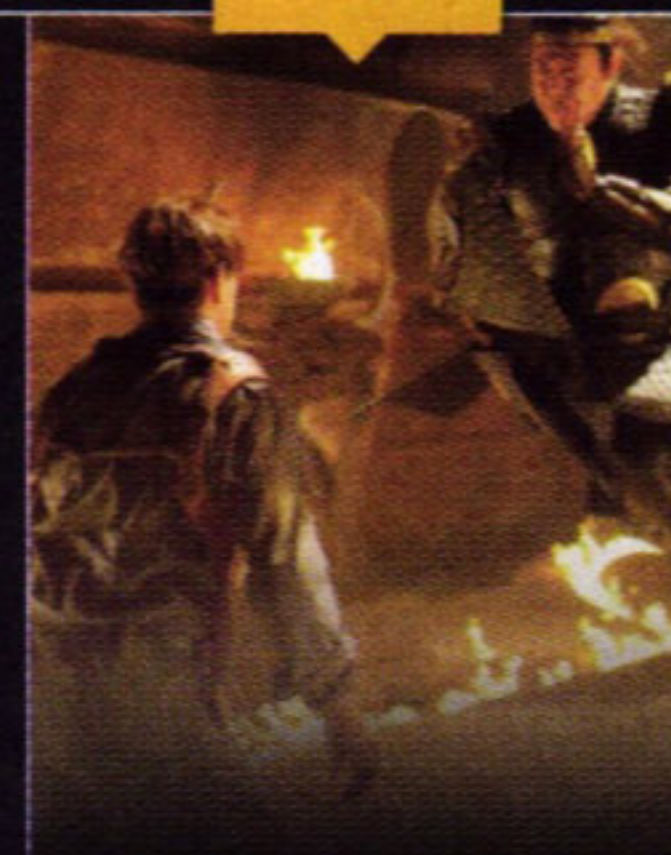
SAT

august

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

01

Today, theatergoers flock in record numbers to see *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*. The two leads of this movie tell us a lot about who you are. If you dig Jet Li, we won't punch you. However, if Brendan Fraser is more your style, prepare for a beating, loser! *Encino Man* sucked!



The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor – 08/02

05

NEW RELEASES

- The Cheetah Girls 3 – DS
- Hanna Montana: Spotlight World Tour – PS2
- Highlander – PS3, 360, PC
- Little League World Series – Wii, DS
- Monster Madness: Grave Danger – PS3
- Vampire Rain: Altered Species – PS3



Highlander – 08/05

06

WETA DALEK STATUE

As people debate over who they think the final Cylon is (spoiler: it's the person you least expect), *Doctor Who* continues to deliver some of the greatest science fiction we've ever seen. This statue of the Doctor's oldest foe is sculpted by Weta and will be limited to just 900 units worldwide. It will cost you a pretty penny at \$330 dollars, but is unquestionably the ultimate prize for any Who fan's collection.



08

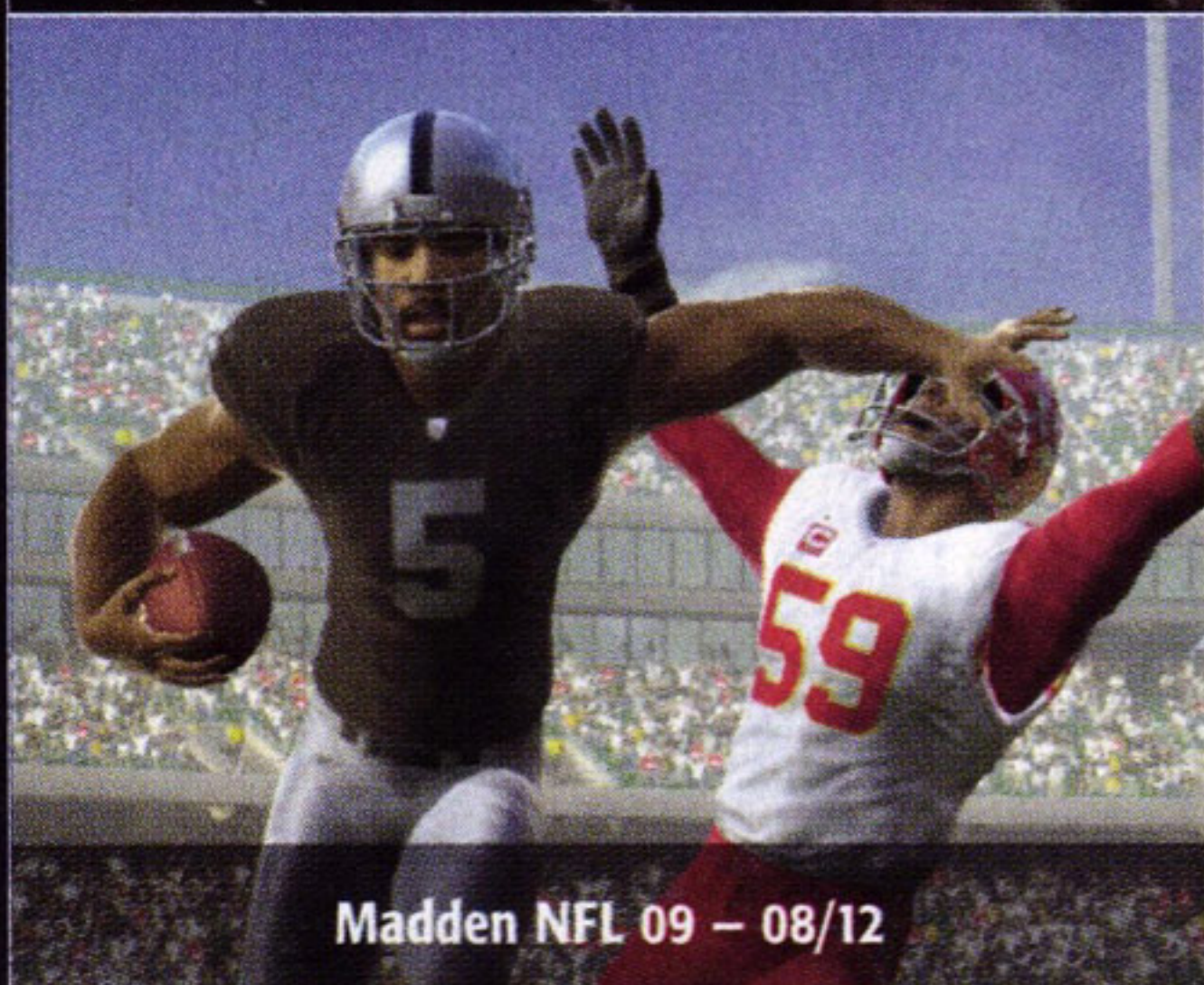
If you've seen Adam Sandler, Will Farrell, and Mike Myer's new films, you know that Seth Rogen is the only funny man left in Hollywood. The opening of his new stoner comedy, *Pineapple Express*, will likely bring a new smell to theaters today. Bring your own, dudes!



12

NEW RELEASES

- Bangai O Spirits – DS
- Bratz Ponyz 2 – DS
- Brave: A Warrior's Tale – 360, Wii, PSP
- Madden NFL 09 – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS, PC
- N+ – PSP, DS
- Rollin' Rascals – DS
- Shaman's Challenge – DS
- Smash Court Tennis 3 – 360
- South Park: Season 11 – DVD
- Too Human – 360
- World of Warcraft Atlas 2nd Edition



Madden NFL 09 – 08/12

13

VALKYRIE PROFILE STATUE

For roughly the same price as a gallon of gas (\$459.99), this amazingly detailed statue can be yours. It stands 17 inches tall (just a few shy of Joe "Hobbit" Juba's actual height), and is made of polystone. It's been available for import for a while, but it should be rolling into your comic shops this month.



15

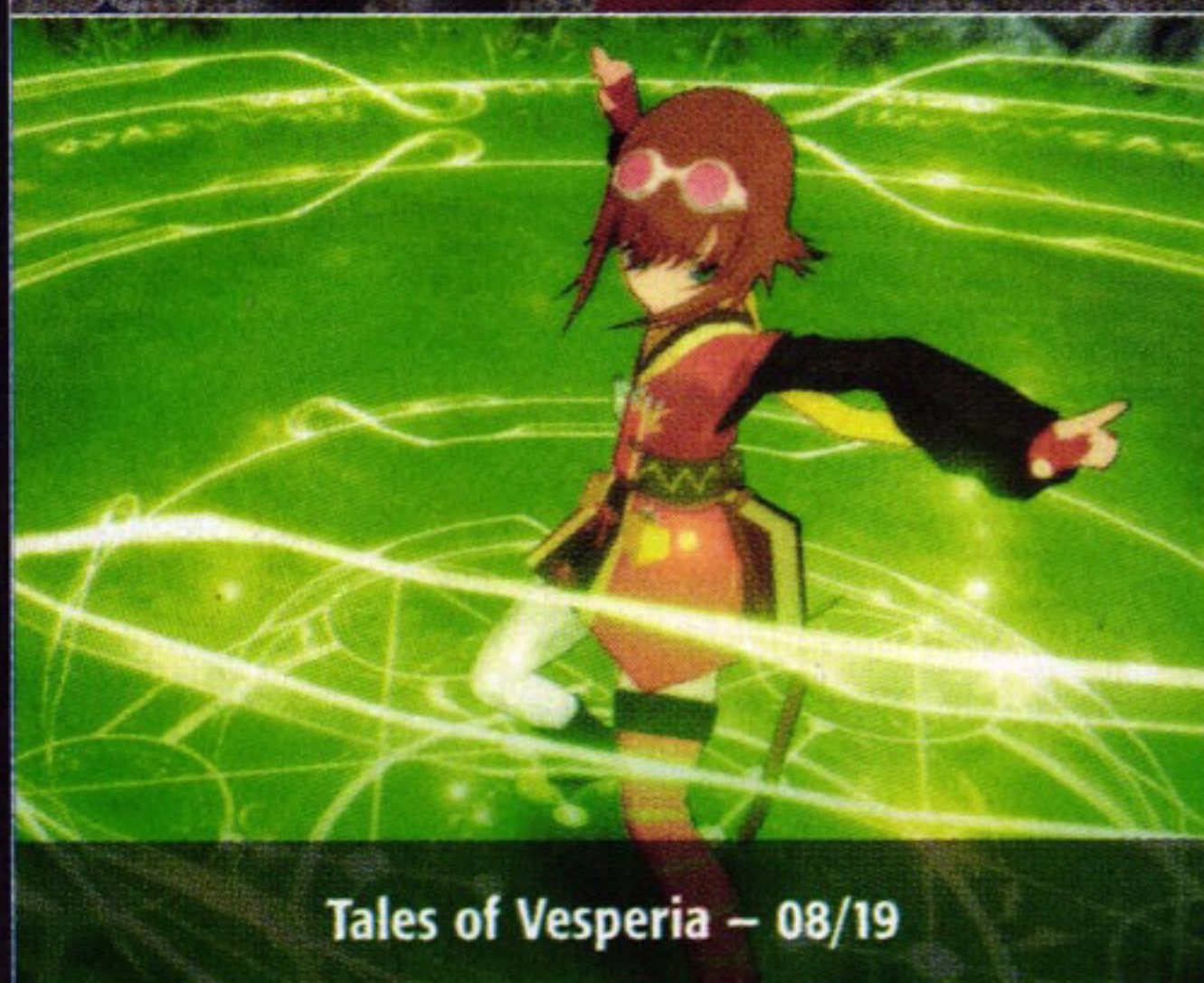
The only movie you should actually see this month, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, takes place between Episodes II and III. This film apparently delves into the back-story of Jabba the Hutt. Haven't you always wanted to know how he and Salacious Crumb met? Thank you, George Lucas!!!



19

NEW RELEASES

- Brothers in Arms: Double Time – Wii
- Commando Steel Disaster – DS
- *Dexter: Season 2* – DVD
- Rebel Raiders – Wii
- Samba De Amigo – Wii
- Space Siege – PC
- Suzuki Superbikes – DS
- Tales of Vesperia – 360
- Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles – DVD

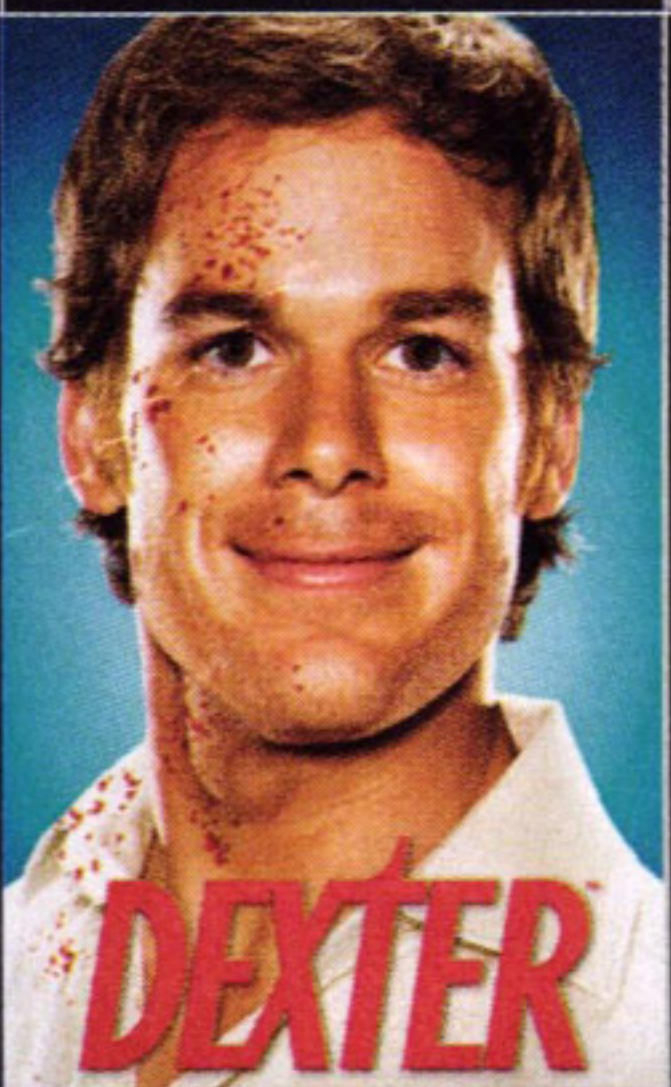


Tales of Vesperia – 08/19

21

Do you need something to watch between gaming sessions? Here are our top picks for TV shows on DVD.

- *Dexter*
- *Battlestar Galactica*
- *Six Feet Under*
- *Freaks & Geeks*
- *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*
- *Heroes* (Season 1 only)
- *The Wire*
- *Farscape*
- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
- *Weeds*



22

MAJOR LEAGUE GAMING MLG's Pro Circuit hits the Toronto Convention Center for three days. Seasoned pros will put their skills to the test in Halo 3, Gears of War, and Rainbow Six Vegas 2. Over \$60,000 in cash prizes will be rewarded to the victors. A number of spectator events will be available as well.

23

26

NEW RELEASES

- Bleach: Dark Souls – DS
- Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway – PS3, 360, PC
- *Entourage: Season 4* – DVD
- Red Bull BC One – DS
- The Sims: Apartment Life – PC
- Tiger Woods 09 – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP



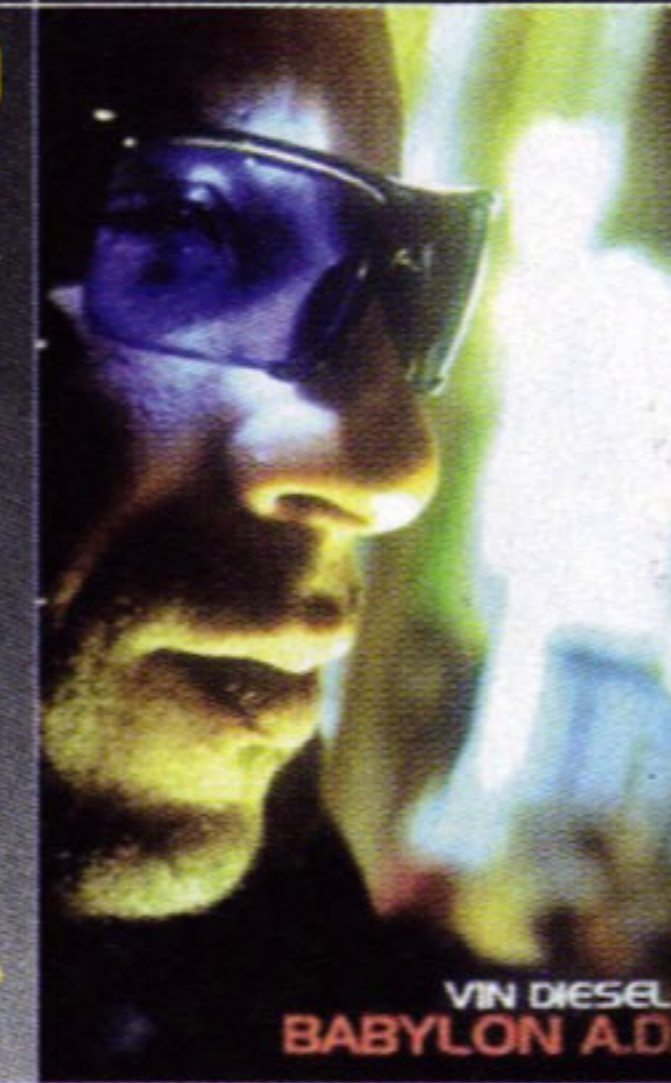
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames – 08/31

29

Remember Vin Diesel? He was the guy who was in *Pitch Black*, its crappy sequel, and some babysitting movies. He found another job! To much surprise, he stars in the promising action film, *Babylon A.D.* Wait... Babylon has the word "baby" in it. Sigh. Here we go again.



Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway – 08/26



VIN DIESEL BABYLON A.D.

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SECRET WAR

1943.

The Second World War is at its height. While Allied forces have stalled the expansion of Hitler's Third Reich, the Nazi war machine still has its boot on the throat of mainland Europe. However, the Führer demands nothing less than global domination. Enter Heinrich Himmler's feared Schutzstaffel (or SS) and its plan to master an occult force known only as the Black Sun. With this mysterious power source at its disposal, no army on Earth could stand in the Reich's path. No army but the man who had single-handedly shut down Himmler's Übersoldat program and thwarted the resurrection of ancient superhuman king Heinrich I, that is. Once again, the world requires the particular talents of special agent B.J. Blazkowicz.

In 1992, Wolfenstein 3D marked the beginning of first-person shooting as we know it.

In addition to that small feat, id Software's seminal title also introduced a mythos that has endured countless technical advances, competing products, and FPS paradigm shifts. 2001's *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* revived the franchise, retelling the saga of heroic Army Ranger B.J. Blazkowicz and his exploits foiling sinister Nazi plots. Today, developer Raven Software continues the tale under the simple moniker *Wolfenstein*.

With a history of working with id's technology and franchises — notably in the *Hexen* series, *Jedi Knight II*, and *Quake 4* — Raven is a trusted name in FPS circles. Even so, *Wolfenstein* ranks as one of the studio's most ambitious projects to date. The previous two games dabbled in the occult, but *Wolfenstein* embraces it with relish. B.J. has access to powers far beyond a Panzerfaust or Tommy gun (though those have their place in combat as well), and faces threats that require ingenious use of both. As id Software executive producer Kevin Cloud puts it, "[We're] taking these dark fantasies the Nazis had and bringing them to life."

Wolfenstein finds B.J. working alongside insurgents in the fictional German city of Isestadt. This Nazi-occupied burg is the game's primary setting and, like a real city, is filled with back alleys, accessible sewers, and traversable rooftops. Rather than following the linear structure that most action-oriented FPSs cleave to, *Wolfenstein* allows players to explore the city at their leisure — though the threat of hostile Nazis lurks around every corner. Most areas are accessible via several different routes, and Isestadt features plenty of hidden treasure and secret areas to find. The meat of the adventure, however, is in the missions that B.J. can obtain from the resistance safehouses that pepper the city.

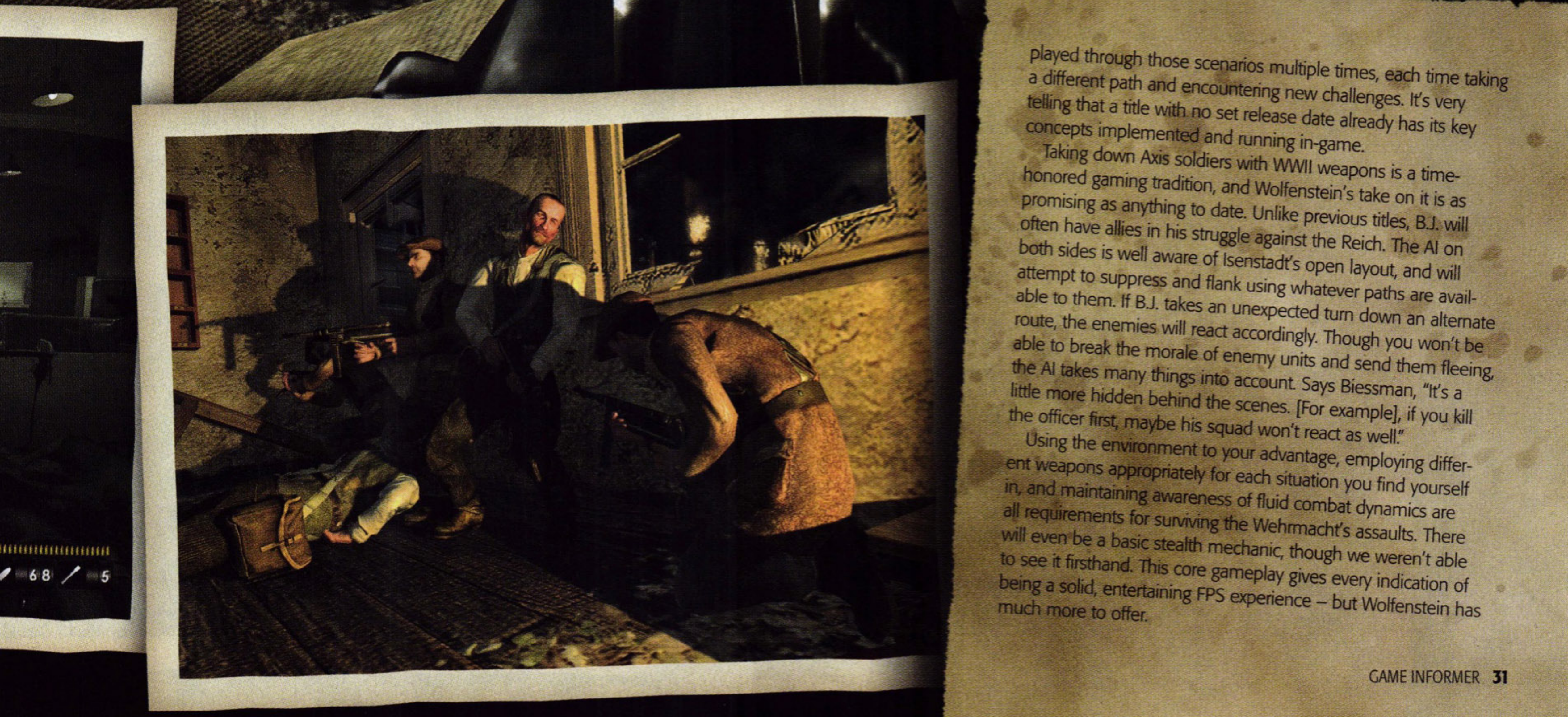
Thwarting Nazi schemes takes many forms. Some quests will have players traveling within Isestadt itself, never seeing a loading screen. Others send you to separate mission-specific areas. As you progress, new sections of the city will open up and grant access to more adventures and places to explore. However, Isestadt itself evolves along with you. Both set-piece and randomly generated Nazi activity will impede you at every turn, which Raven hopes will immerse players in the experience of being a resistance fighter behind enemy lines. "This is a Nazi-occupied city, and they're going to send reinforcements. So there's always going to be fighting on some level," explains Raven's creative director Eric Biessman. "But you can clean out an area for a little bit and do some exploration, and eventually the Nazis will come back in."

This open approach to designing Isestadt is already working in practice. In addition to showing us a few missions, Raven went back and



■ This courtyard is practically impassable without supernatural assistance

■ Blast through this Nazi checkpoint, or find another way around – it's your choice

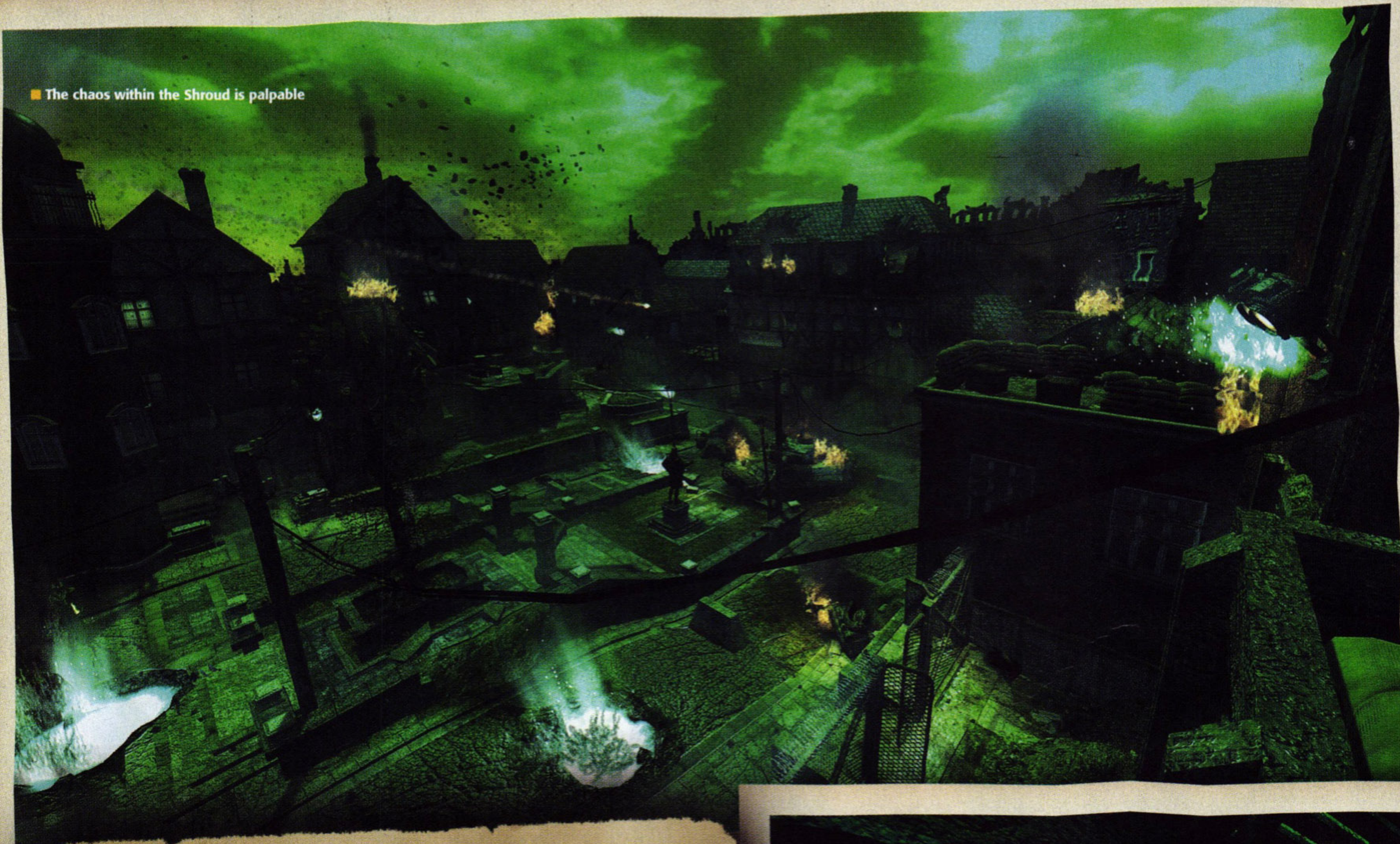


played through those scenarios multiple times, each time taking a different path and encountering new challenges. It's very telling that a title with no set release date already has its key concepts implemented and running in-game.

Taking down Axis soldiers with WWII weapons is a time-honored gaming tradition, and Wolfenstein's take on it is as promising as anything to date. Unlike previous titles, B.J. will often have allies in his struggle against the Reich. The AI on both sides is well aware of Isenstadt's open layout, and will attempt to suppress and flank using whatever paths are available to them. If B.J. takes an unexpected turn down an alternate route, the enemies will react accordingly. Though you won't be able to break the morale of enemy units and send them fleeing, the AI takes many things into account. Says Biessman, "It's a little more hidden behind the scenes. [For example], if you kill the officer first, maybe his squad won't react as well."

Using the environment to your advantage, employing different weapons appropriately for each situation you find yourself in, and maintaining awareness of fluid combat dynamics are all requirements for surviving the Wehrmacht's assaults. There will even be a basic stealth mechanic, though we weren't able to see it firsthand. This core gameplay gives every indication of being a solid, entertaining FPS experience – but Wolfenstein has much more to offer.

■ The chaos within the Shroud is palpable

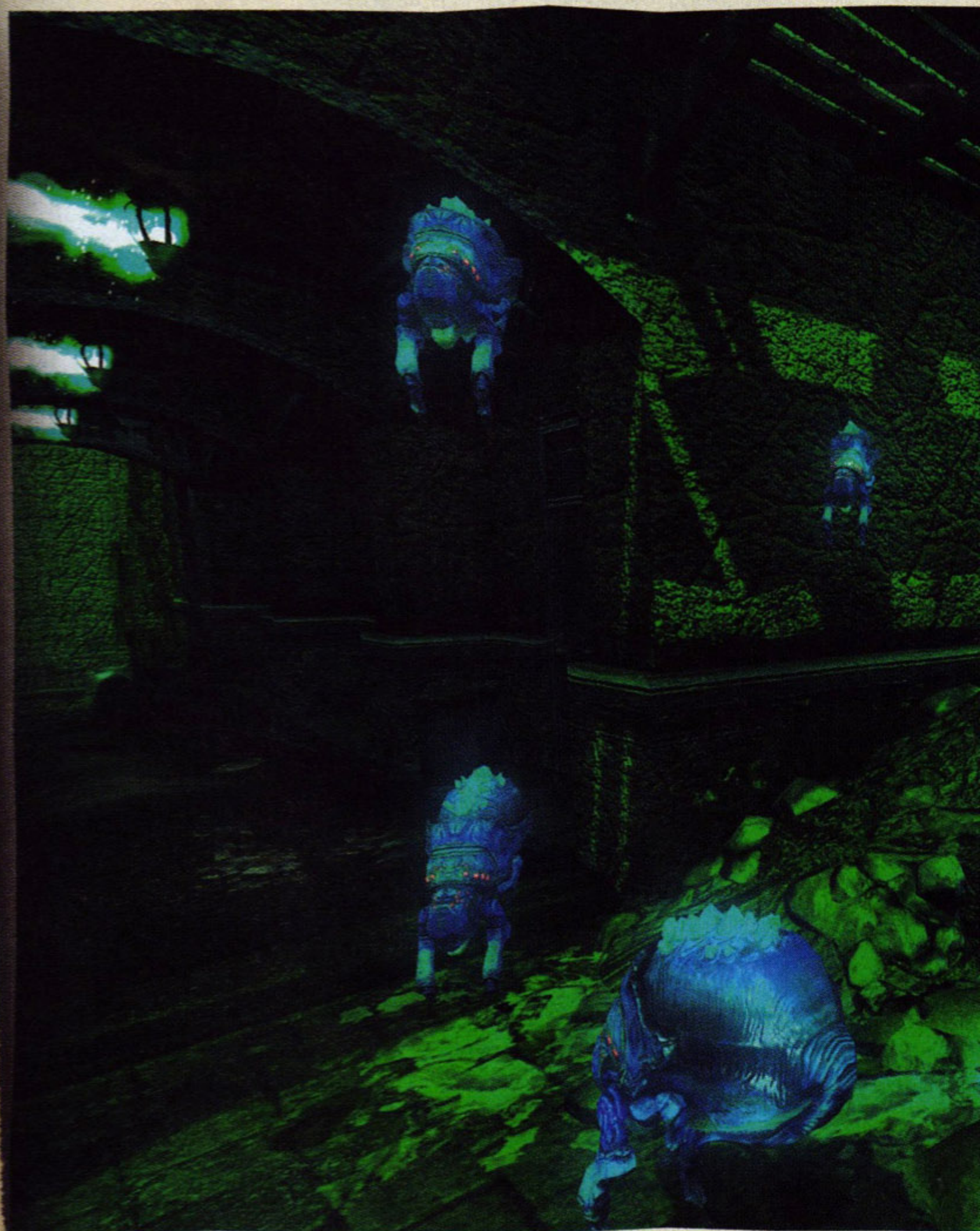


This being an alternate-history WWII in which the Reich's obsession with the occult is paying all-too-real dividends, B.J. will face challenges far more deadly than mere ten-to-one odds against trained soldiers. Himmler's SS has found a way to harness the energy source they call "Black Sun," and though their understanding of it is still limited, impossibly dangerous applications are already in service. "They know it's a superpower, and they know that if they can just use it to its full advantage, they can turn the tide of the war," Biessman notes.

Black Sun draws its energy from a dimension dubbed the Shroud, an alternate reality that overlays our own. "We love the occult and the weird science and what we can do with that, so we decided to push it even more, and that's how we came up with the Shroud. It's the window into all the occult stuff for B.J.," Biessman states. At some point during his quest (Raven wasn't forthcoming with the details), B.J. gains the ability to enter and manipulate this enigmatic realm.

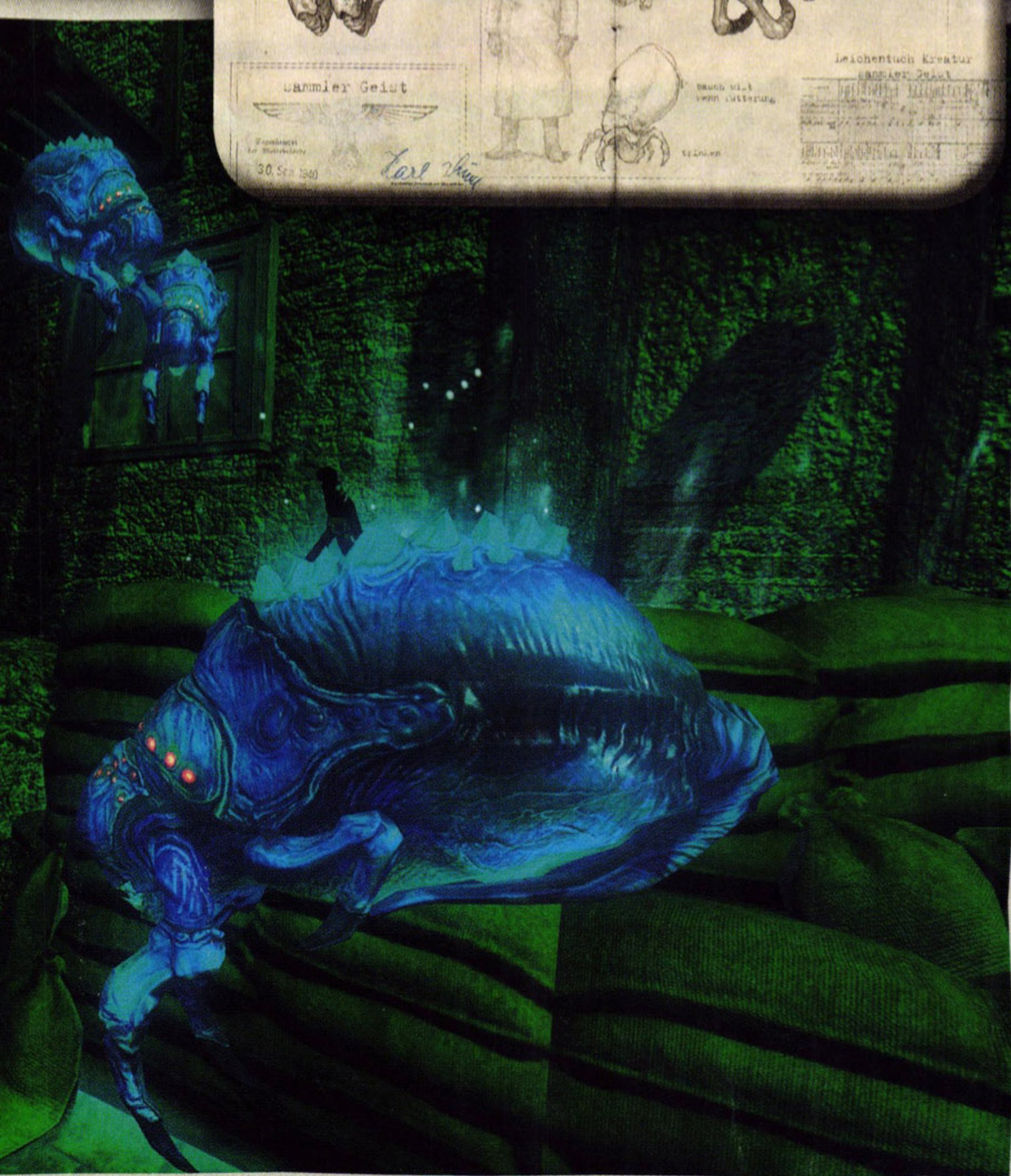
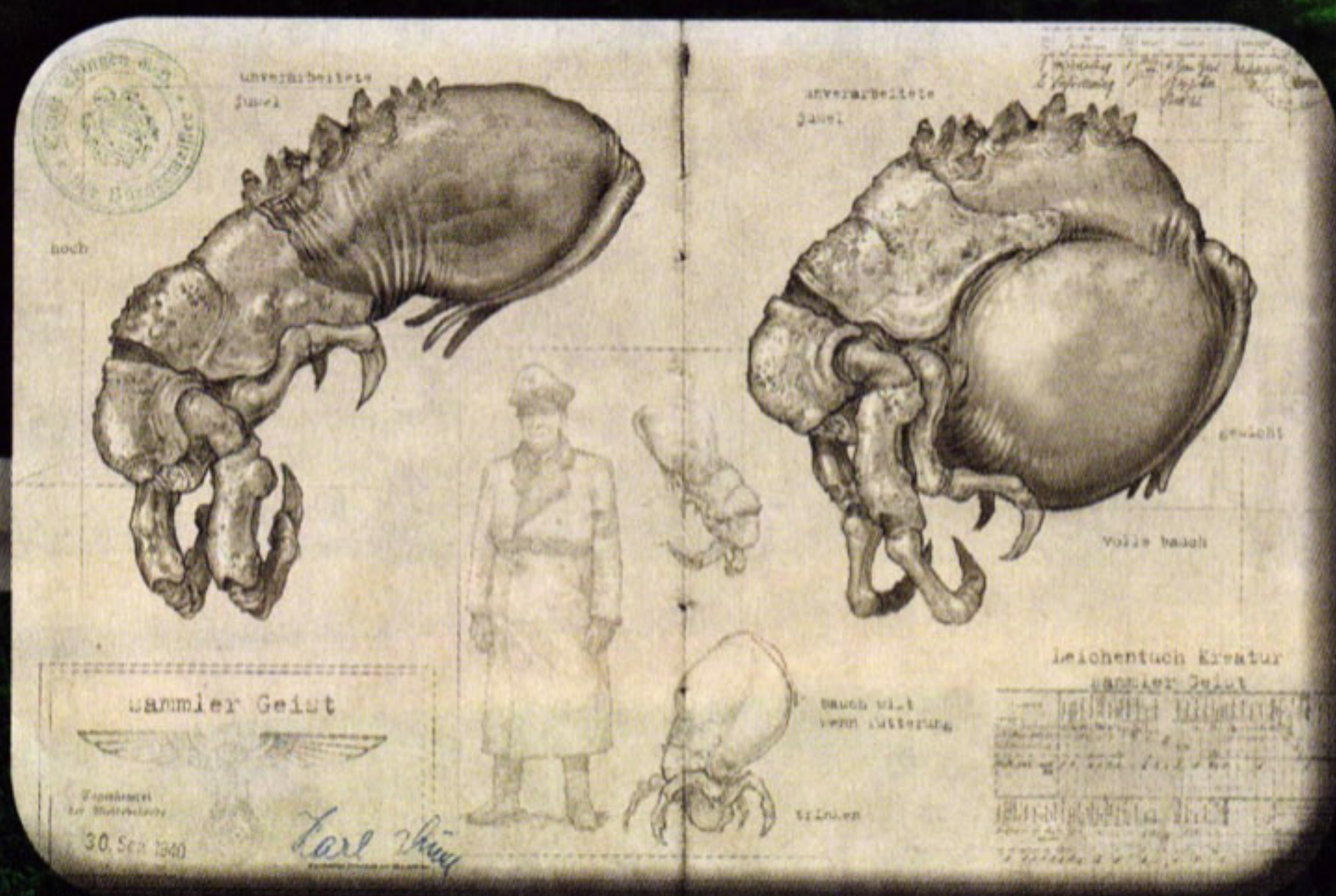
As he shifts into the Shroud, the world takes on a radically different aspect. The light changes to an eldritch greenish hue, and raging chaos surrounds our hero. Shingles fly off of roofs. Loose stones and trash whirl skyward from a flat surface. A howling maelstrom dominates the sky, sucking the detritus up to an unknown fate. Monstrous creatures appear, threatening B.J. with torments beyond mortal comprehension. However, this terrible realm is not without its advantages.

The Shroud has many effects beyond its impressive graphical flair. B.J. moves faster, and Raven hinted at other possible differences in the way the world works. More importantly, B.J. has access to several powers while in the Shroud. We were only shown one – Mire [see sidebar, page 35] – but even this single ability fundamentally changes the gameplay. By slowing time and stunning nearby foes, a single touch of a button turns unavoidable death into certain victory. A recharging meter constrains the use of these powers (though





■ The Havok physics-enabled destruction is undeniably amusing



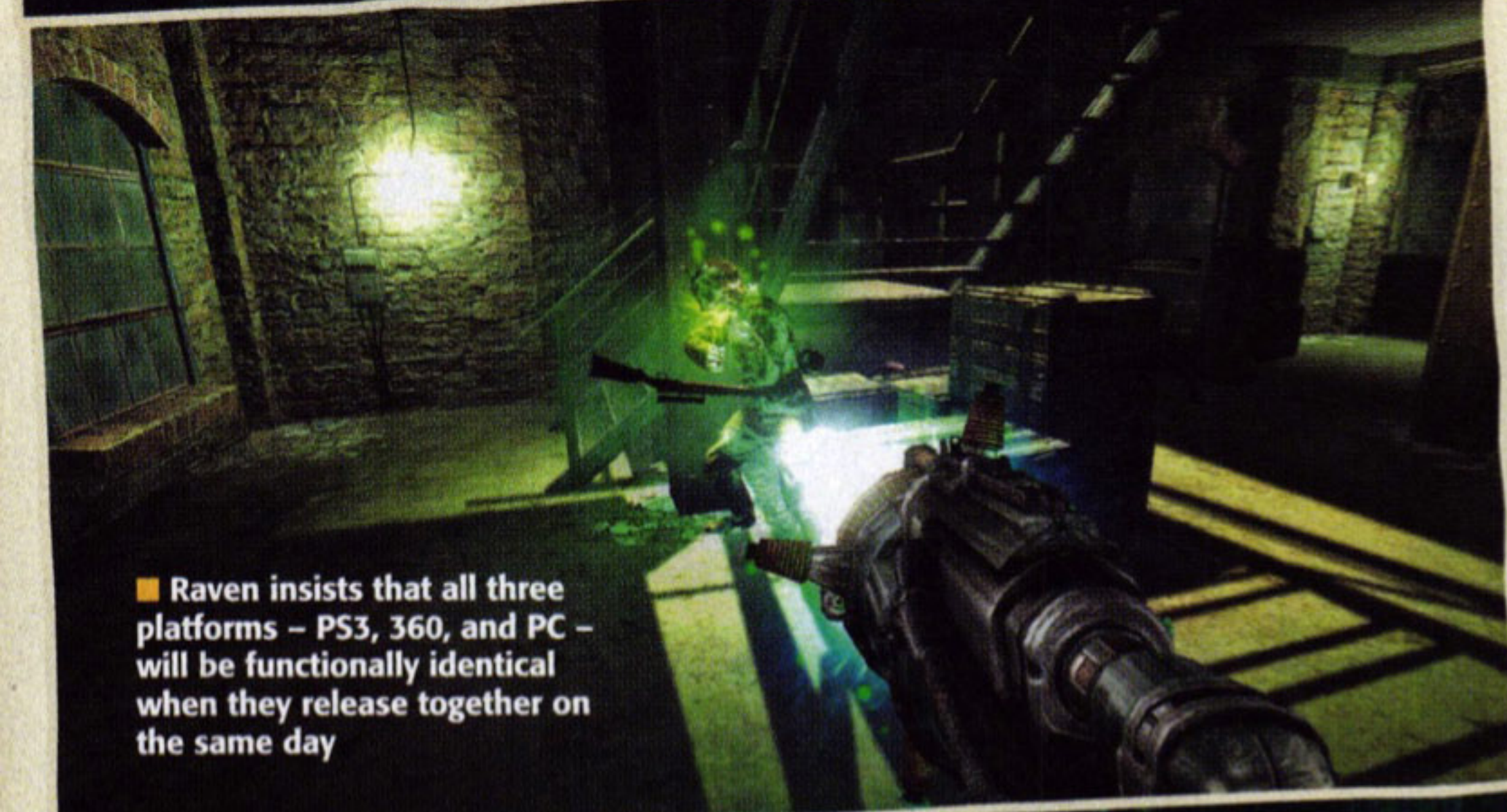
B.J. can enter and leave the Shroud at will), but that's not the biggest limiting factor.

Cloud notes, "As the game progresses, the Shroud is being more and more disrupted by the Nazis' activities and becomes [increasingly] violent and hostile." Primarily, these threats are monsters seen only in the Shroud. We were shown only one Shroud creature that B.J. encounters. This bee-like monstrosity floats around collecting energy from the glowing pools that appear on the ground in the Shroud. These are not initially hostile, but shooting one that has filled up on Shroud energy unleashes a torrent that fries any nearby people. While this collector is more of help than hindrance, you'll encounter more serious perils in this shadow realm later in the game.

Another aspect of the Shroud is that certain barriers will be passable while shifted. Clever players will be able to use this to unlock alternate paths to their goals, but the unique mechanics of the Shroud aren't used in a brain-busting way. "It's an action game; it's about fighting Nazis and discovering strange new things," Biessman explains. "There's exploration and discovery, and the Shroud is part of that. What you see in the Shroud is different than what you see in reality, so we can open all these other doors."

Weird science also plays a large part in Wolfenstein's setting, as the jetpack-riding Nazis wielding chainguns we saw can attest. We didn't get a glimpse of any more bizarre pseudo-science beyond that, but Raven's intention to maintain the series' tradition would seem to indicate that there is a lot more where that came from.

"We really want the story to be what's driving the player," declares Biessman. This purported renewed focus on story is no joke. Raven has expanded its offices and hired a whole new cinematics team in order to raise the level of Wolfenstein's



■ Raven insists that all three platforms – PS3, 360, and PC – will be functionally identical when they release together on the same day



storytelling. Every element of the design pushes in that direction, from the open structure of Isenstadt to the development of B.J.'s powers and the evolution of the enemies you face. All of these elements come together to create a sense of progression throughout the quest. As you get deeper into the story and closer to the Black Sun project's heart, several things happen. The rank-and-file Nazis will give way to tougher, elite troops. The Shroud will become more dangerous as nastier creatures begin appearing. B.J. will gain new supernatural powers and deadlier weapons. This is all standard fare for a first-person shooter, but Wolfenstein will also allow players to upgrade their capabilities via treasure.

Raven was unwilling to discuss the details, but the developer did reveal that both Shroud powers and weapons can be improved by giving the stolen Nazi gold you liberate to certain NPCs. Whether this will be for all weapons or just special guns like the particle beam, and if you'll be able to upgrade basic abilities like health and run speed, is still unknown. Even so, it's an exciting addition that offers a more tangible reward to seeking out hidden rooms and taking on sidequests.

Continued on page 37

Doctör



■ Good luck hitting those shoulder canisters without the help of Mire



BEYOND THE VEIL

One storyline mission we saw has B.J. assisting a squad of resistance fighters attempting to reach a massive Shroud-related machine the Nazis have activated. Unfortunately, the bad guys have set up a killing ground in the courtyard chokepoint, with two MG-42 emplaced machine guns laying deadly fields of fire across the only way past. The resistance forces are pinned down and unable to advance, and the situation seems hopeless — but not to B.J. Blazkowicz.

As he enters the courtyard, B.J. shifts into the Shroud and activates his Mire power, stunning nearby Nazis and slowing time around him. Dodging the many streams of enemy fire becomes trivial, and B.J. casually lands a few headshots as he strolls to a pile of rubble across the way. His Mire power fading, B.J. finds cover against the second-story wall of the church as he involuntarily shifts back into the real world. After his power recharges, B.J. slides back into the Shroud to find that the glyph-marked wall before him is nonexistent within the alternate dimension. Quickly dispatching the oblivious Nazis, our hero steps through the now-open wall and beyond the MG-42s' lines of fire. He easily fights his way to the entrance of the machine gun nests and clears the way for his Kreisau Circle compatriots.

With the resistance fighters' assistance, B.J. opens the door beyond the courtyard. The machine is near; strange sounds make their way through the next set of walls. All of a sudden, one of those barriers crumbles and hardened soldiers start screaming. A larger-than-life juggernaut bearing the symbol of the Reich comes into view, scything through B.J.'s allies with some kind of green beam. The Kreisau fighters stand no chance, melting as the mysterious weapon's fire hits them.

Bullets are no use. Grenades are no better; this super-soldier shrugs off every attack thrown at him. B.J. has a few more tricks, though. He shifts into the Shroud, stuns the super-Nazi with a burst of his Mire power, and shatters the capacitor-like tubes coming off of his back with a few well-placed shots. The juggernaut futilely clutches at his power-suit's armor source before exploding into dust, leaving only his weapon and a green smear as notes of his existence. Picking up the weapon, B.J. sets off in the sinister machine's direction, encountering Wehrmacht soldiers who fare no better against the particle beam's assault than his former Kreisau friends.



■ B.J.'s resistance allies meet an astonishing variety of gruesome ends



■ Raven wouldn't say much about multiplayer, other than that there won't be co-op and that it'll follow in the footsteps of Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

REAL-LIFE INSANITY

Wolfenstein's events are fictional, but are inspired by the reality of the Nazi regime. Below are a few examples of elements that appear both in the real world and the game.

Kreisau Circle

REALITY: Centered around the estate of a German nobleman who opposed the Nazis, this resistance group was primarily concerned with dreaming up a peaceful post-Hitler government. Though the Kreisau Circle passed some intelligence to Allied forces, it was never actively involved in trying to overthrow the Nazis from within.

GAME: The Circle is an extensive resistance network of paramilitary fighters and informants that aids and abets B.J. in his exploits. Their mortality rate is not to be envied.

Thule Society

REALITY: A quasi-mystical group, similar to Freemasons, that dabbled in politics and played a part in Hitler's early rise to power. The Thule Society was largely toothless once the Nazi party took control of Germany, and Hitler later formally disavowed them as Führer.

GAME: A powerful sect of Nazis who discover the Black Sun and are deeply entangled in the Reich's paranormal research efforts.

Black Sun

REALITY: A symbol embossed on the floor of the Wewelsburg castle, which Himmler used as a nerve center for the SS. It featured prominently in Himmler's obsession with occultism and symbolized his fantasy of forming the SS in the image of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

GAME: A limitless energy source that the Nazis are hell-bent on manipulating toward their own nefarious ends.

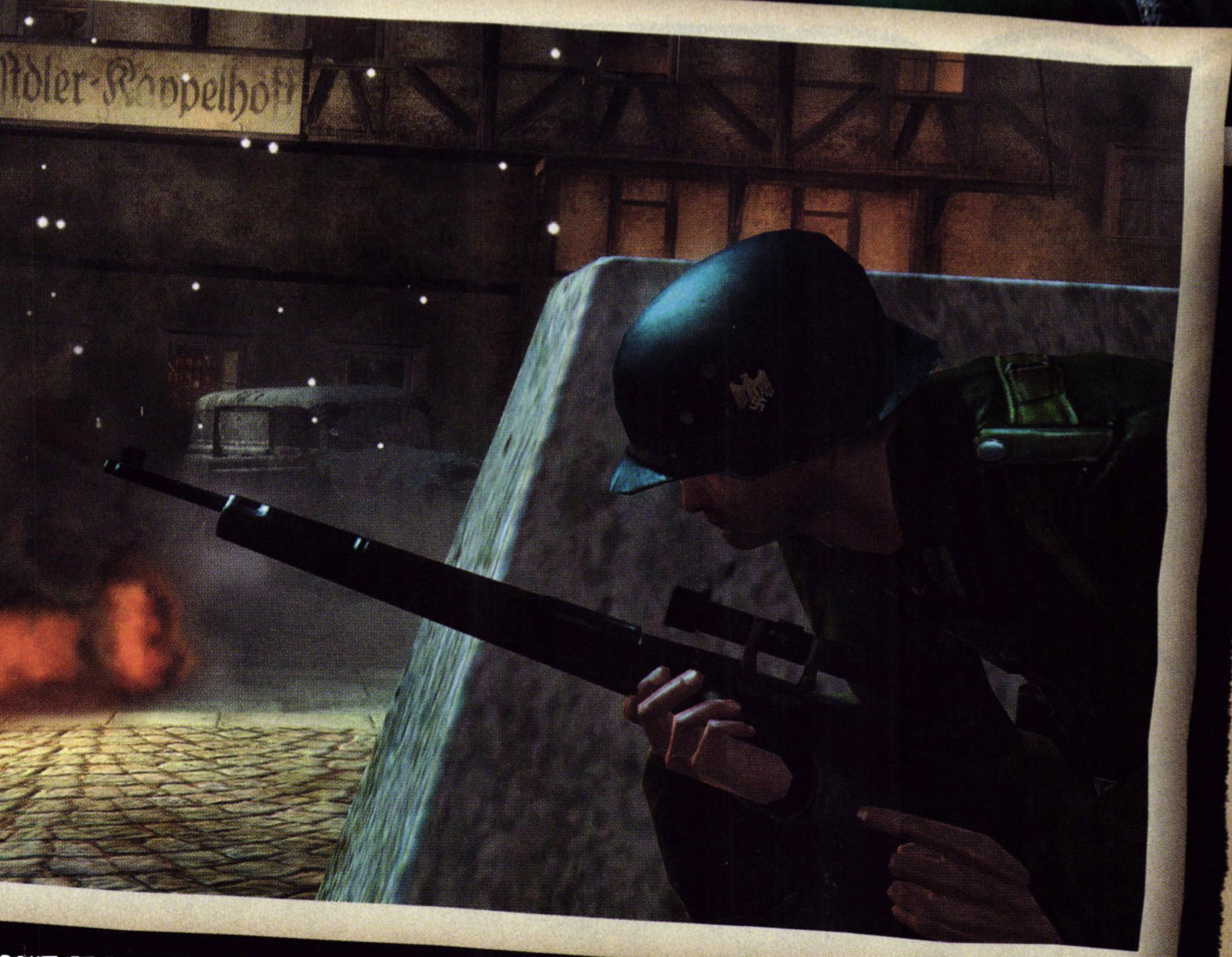
Tagestempel
der Meldebehörde

30. Sep. 1940



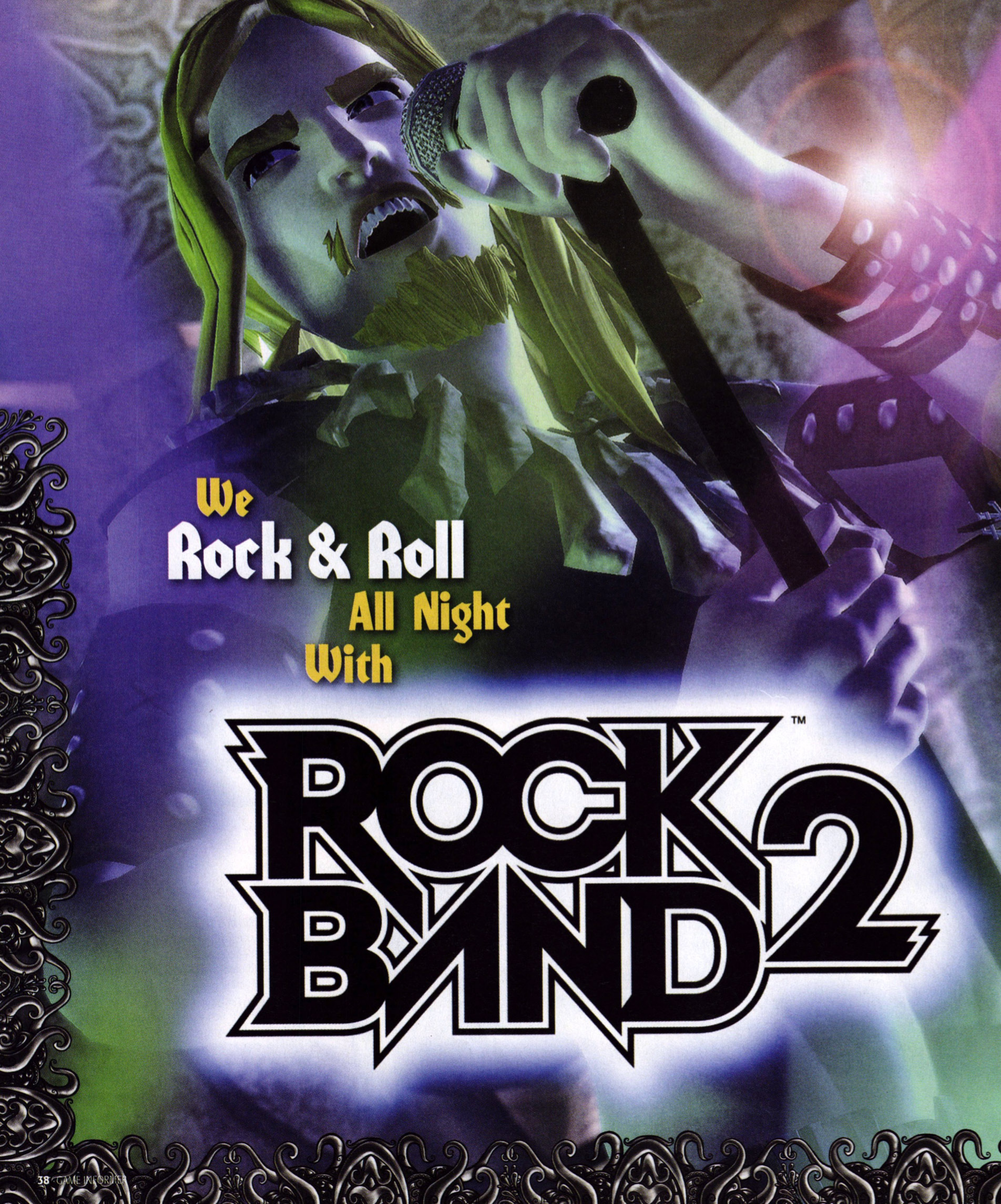


■ The particle beam disintegrates any unfortunate soul it touches



Continued from page 34

There are many questions about the game left unanswered, but this first glimpse is more than enough to spark interest in this supernatural thriller. With several departures from FPS tradition layered around a solid core combat mechanic, Wolfenstein aims to be anything but another breezy action FPS, and Raven's triple-A pedigree lends credibility to its many claims. However much truth there may or may not be to the many occult conspiracy theories about Himmler and the SS, exploring this dark fantasy promises to be a gripping adventure. As with any title id Software is involved in, there is no release date yet set for Wolfenstein — but a wise person wouldn't expect it out this year. ■ ■ ■



We
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All Night
With

ROCKTM **BAND 2**

Something Old, Something New

Few games capture the imagination like **Rock Band**. For months now we've been banging drums, strumming guitars, and screaming into microphones. For some of us, it's hard to count the parties in the last year that have eventually devolved into hysterical fits of laughing and singing along as notes stream down the screen. Musical novices have put in endless hours while evolving into drumming maniacs. Thousands of imaginary bands have formed. Millions of songs have been downloaded. **Rock Band** is a phenomenon. When we learned of the sequel, which is surprisingly near completion, there was only one thing to do. We tracked down the game, grabbed our instruments, and played until Harmonix tore the drumsticks from our tired, twitching hands.

Rock Band 2 is an evolving game platform as much as it is a sequel to one of last year's biggest hits; this isn't a profound departure from the successes of part one. Harmonix knows what it did right, and those elements are still very much in place. Tracks still scroll down the screen in the same way. Visuals still highlight characters you've built from scratch. A tour mode still sends you roaming across cities to new venues as you build a fan base and rock to the top. Perhaps most exciting, you'll still be downloading and playing an astonishing array of new tracks as each week passes, whether you're only starting with the sequel or you've been building your library since last year. Every song on your hard drive from the first game is immediately available for play in **Rock Band 2**, and subsequent songs throughout the fall and into next year will be playable on either game. For those keeping score, that's going to be literally hundreds of tracks in an ever-growing catalogue.

Harmonix also recognizes what it did wrong in the first game, or at least the places in which there is room to improve. In these areas players are going to see a tide of innovations and changes. As we played, these adjustments were apparent from the moment we started navigating through menus. The front-end screen is clean and quick to respond to flicks of the guitar strummer. Right off the bat, we're surprised to see a simple "World Tour" mode highlighted and ready to play. We hop in and realize that the original straightforward progression of the solo tour has been axed. Instead, whether alone or with all four instruments in play, gamers can always partake of the full World Tour experience, including accruing fans and choosing gigs. From this hub you can play a solo guitar tour, try drums or singing, and for the first time, dive into a solo bass tour. Your band remains consistent, no matter how many players drop in and out. Your characters are also now interchangeable in their band positions. You like that cute goth girl with the glasses who you made to play drums? Now she can just as easily switch to guitar or any other instrument whenever you desire.

The World Tour mode includes every one of the old cities and venues from the first game, but now expands to include dozens more. You'll now actively hire new employees to help out with the band. You may wish to shell out for the initial expenditure to get a merch girl for your shows, with the knowledge that her presence will eventually deliver way more cash than what you paid to hire her.

If the slow crawl through international cities isn't your thing, you can opt for the tour challenges. These events, which involve anything from a particular decade-focused set list to an individual artist challenge, get more challenging as you progress. The coolest aspect of this mode is that it repopulates with new tasks as you download additional DLC – the game automatically recognizes new music and creates challenges around the new content.

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> **PUBLISHER** MTV GAMES/ELECTRONIC ARTS

> **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX

> **RELEASE** FALL

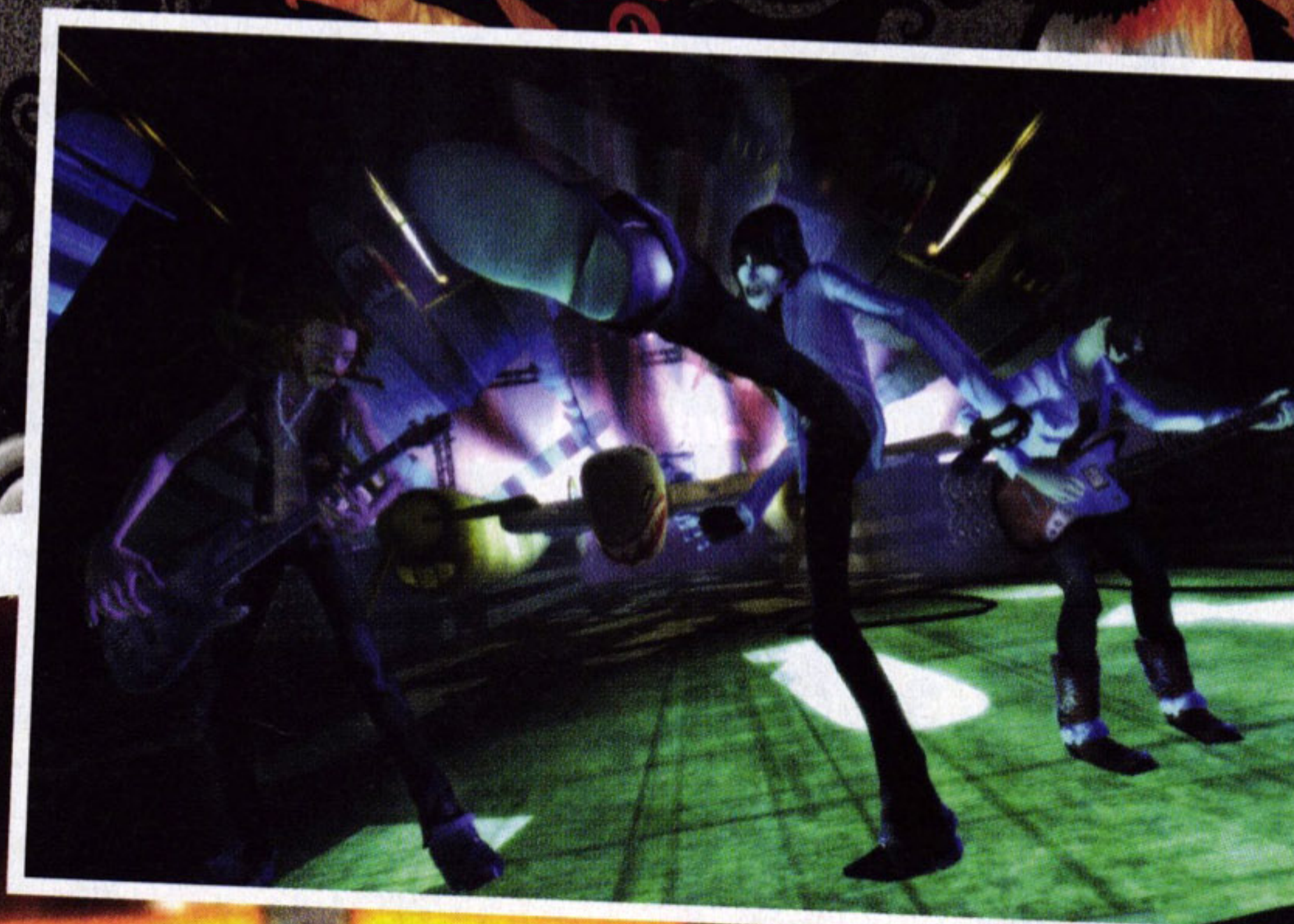


Drink Proof

As we tested the expanded character creator (there are new faces, costumes, and accessories like facial piercings and bandannas) something amazing happened — we were all logged in and nobody was accidentally backing out to the main menu. We've all heard stories about the horrific menu navigations of inebriated partygoers who refuse to stop banging on buttons. Rock Band 2 makes the problem moot by sensibly reorganizing the character selection screen. By setting the Start button as the primary input to progress once everyone has logged in, even the most frantic enthusiasts shouldn't anger their bandmates as they "tune" their instruments. Alternately, in the redesigned Quickplay mode, a number of great-looking pre-fab characters are available to choose as soon as you buy the game. Each one is decked out to the teeth, and gives an option for players to hop into the game without having to spend five minutes boring everyone else as they create their character.

Breezing past the start up menu, we found ourselves in the brand new track choice screen. Between the dozens of new songs

on the disc and the potentially hundreds of downloadable tracks you may have even on launch day, a reorganization was in order. The new song selection cribs a lot of the best ideas from the recently released Music Store for the first game. When you stop on each track, you can see album details, the album artwork, as well as a complete run-down of how difficult each instrument will be on that song. Hold down the yellow button (or the bass drum pedal) and you can scroll through categories to get to where you want. For instance, if you're sorting by band names, you'll be able to jump straight to "J" for Journey, or "D" for Dream Theater. For the first time, you can also create set lists, so you can play straight through without a break. These set lists can be just a couple of songs, or enough to keep you playing for hours. Furthermore, a few button presses enables an auto set list creation, where you play a gig that includes all the songs from one band, every song in the "Impossible" difficulty, or each thrash metal track in your collection.



■ No Fail mode can be enabled in the Options menu, assuring you can play through songs with beginners to the very end, without fear of getting booted off stage



Playing It Up

Of course, we didn't spend the entire day staring at menus. The cheer-inducing new songs on the disc kept us busy for one replay after another. Highlights? Think about that driving acoustic guitar riff at the beginning of The Who's "Pinball Wizard." Wait until you try Taylor Hawkins' insanely fast drum rolls in the Foo Fighters' "Everlong." Perhaps you fancy yourself enough of a singer to tackle the soaring vocals of Journey's "Any Way You Want It." Or, for a real laugh, do what we did. Take your best friends and give Dream Theater a try on Expert with a full band. Let us know how that turns out.

The new songs deliver where it counts. While dozens more will be announced in the coming months, the initial release reveals a concerted effort to meet demands from fans for heretofore unseen acts in a music game, like System of a Down and Elvis Costello. At the same time, staples like Foo Fighters and the Red Hot Chili Peppers show up with tracks we've wanted to play since the very first Guitar Hero.

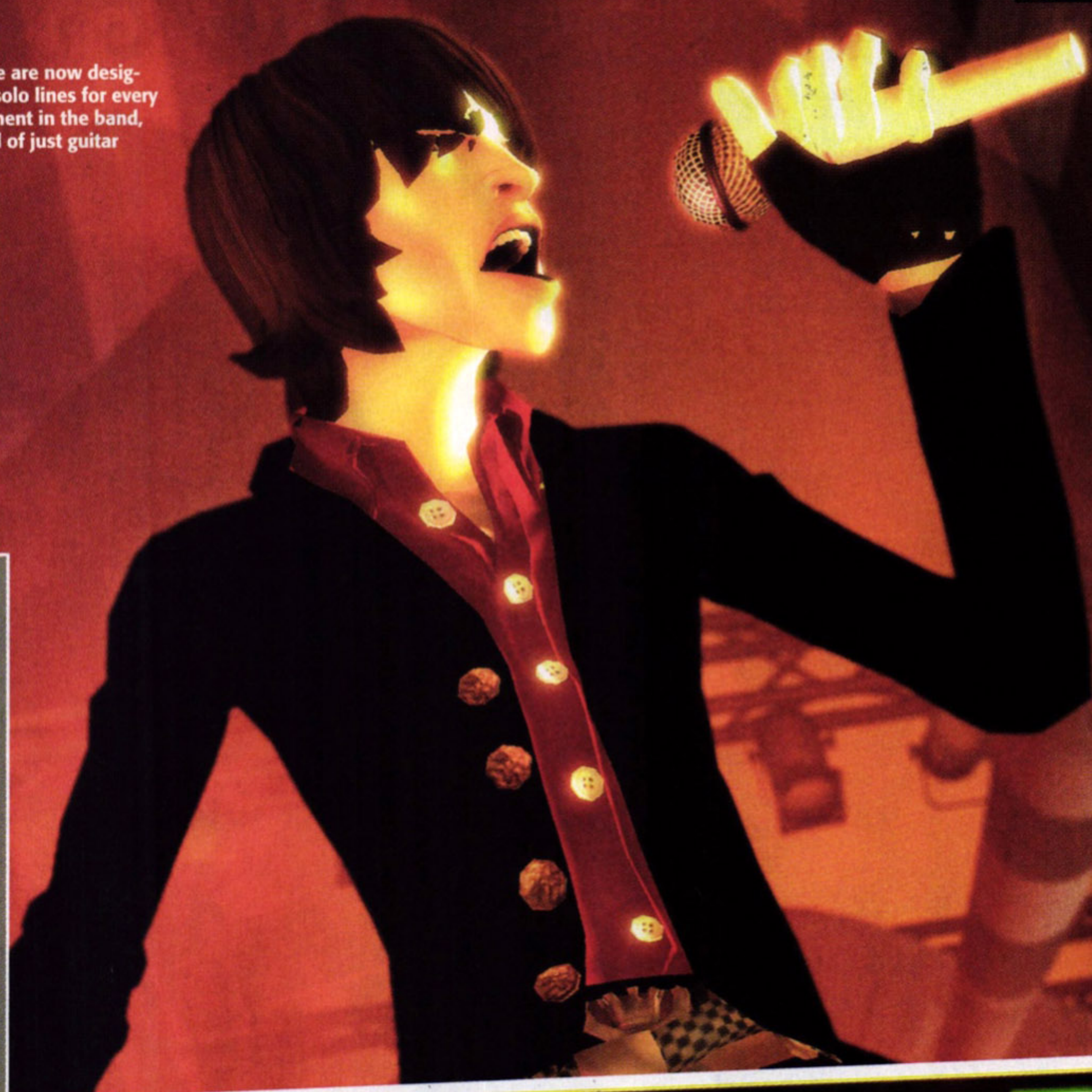
While many of the online features weren't ready for play, that didn't prevent us from wandering through the options to see what would eventually populate those fields. It's worth noting right off the bat that we'll all finally be able to play World Tour mode online, letting the band stay together even when everybody is home from college for the summer.

We were also intrigued when we came across a feature entitled Battle of the Bands. These unique competitions will change and evolve every few days in real time. Rather than presenting simultaneous head-to-head competitions between two onstage bands (not the most common of occurrences in the real world) Rock Band 2 offers distinct goals, and all the bands playing the game online will compete for the top spot. You'll start by trying to beat the scores of everyone on your Friends list. Like a local band finally breaking out into the national scene, you'll only ascend into competition against strangers once your band is on top among your friends. During each challenge, a meter dictates how close you are to surpassing the next band up the list. In one battle we saw listed, bands compete for the highest multiplier over the longest time on a particular song. Listed next to the instructions was a countdown that revealed that only three days and eight hours remained before a winner would be declared.

Short Term Exclusive

A large percentage of folks are going to be fine with the following news, and a slightly smaller percentage of you are about to start cursing wildly. Rock Band 2 is coming exclusively to Xbox 360. Sort of. Microsoft has arranged for a short window of exclusivity with the title, after which the game will release on all the other expected systems. The game should be out on all consoles before Christmas.

■ There are now designated solo lines for every instrument in the band, instead of just guitar



■ Character creation options have been expanded, and there will be all sorts of new clothing and accessories in which to deck out your rocker



Devil In The Details

Strangely, the seemingly small additions to Rock Band offer the most excitement. The previously limited options in the Tutorials section now include a new selection entitled Drum Trainer. Here, novice percussionists can take what amounts to a full course in drum patterns and fills. A beats-per-minute meter sits on the left side, adjustable with a press up or down on the d-pad. Opposite it is a chart of a given drum pattern – one of 78 that you can switch between by ticking left or right on the pad. Used together, you can learn many of the most fundamental rhythms of rock, slowly easing up in speed and difficulty as you progress. Another section teaches the basics of creating realistic and exciting drum fills – a real godsend for anyone who has played the first game with a beginner. There's even a freestyle mode where you can drum away to your heart's content, just as if you had a real kit sitting there in the basement with you. For all of these modes, four unique drum kits are playable for variety – standard, trashy, roomy,

and electronic. Each one has its own unique set pieces and timbre.

Another seemingly minor addition addresses one of the biggest problems that many users had with the original Rock Band. A much more user-friendly mechanic now awaits players who wish to manually calibrate lag for their complex HDTV and surround sound setups. Even better, the new Rock Band 2 guitars have a built in microphone, and a new feature allows you to hold the guitar up to your

speakers and let it calibrate lag automatically.

There's also a brand new Jukebox mode. Especially for those of us with large libraries of music, sometimes you just want to sit back and enjoy the music without playing along. You paid for it, right? This new mode allows you to establish a set list and watch what amounts to in-game music videos (minus the scrolling tracks) of any song in your library.

Evolution

It's not fair or apt to characterize Rock Band 2 as the next dramatic leap forward for music games. For all its innovations and improvements, this is a sequel firmly grounded in the successful gameplay of its predecessor. At the same time, the inevitable critics are wrong to judge this new release as a retread. The Rock Band platform demands a different mindset than almost any other game out there, since all the new content pieces fit in side by side with the old. Your existing library of music isn't going to start over – it's going to continue to grow. Your hardware isn't going to become obsolete, but you'll have the chance to trade up to a better version. For our part, it's hard to argue with the hours in which half of the Game Informer office played Rock Band 2, delving into new songs, set lists, and game modes. Did it change everything we ever thought about Rock Band? No. Will it keep us playing for yet another year? You bet.



■ The new drum pads are velocity sensitive, which should add a little more nuance to your fills

The New Songs

We were blown away by some of the great choices found in this initial track lineup. The following songs will appear on the disc itself; DLC will also continue to release every week going forward. All of the following are master tracks performed by the original artist.

- "Ace of Spades" – Motorhead
- "Almost Easy" – Avenged Sevenfold
- "Any Way You Want It" – Journey
- "Bad Reputation" – Joan Jett
- "Chop Suey" – System of a Down
- "Everlong" – Foo Fighters
- "Give It Away" – The Red Hot Chili Peppers
- "Hello There" – Cheap Trick
- "I Was Wrong" – Social Distortion
- "Kids in America" – The Muffs
- "Livin' on a Prayer" – Bon Jovi
- "Panic Attack" – Dream Theater
- "Pinball Wizard" – The Who
- "Pump It Up" – Elvis Costello
- "Rock 'n Me" – Steve Miller Band
- "Testify" – Rage Against the Machine
- "White Wedding Pt 1" – Billy Idol

The New Instruments

Whether you're getting into Rock Band for the first time or you're a dedicated player who wants to upgrade to the new Rock Band 2 instruments, the new tweaks are likely to please. The new guitar, which is still a Stratocaster, features an attractive sunburst body with a faux-maple wood finish on the neck. The strummer has been altered to feel less "squishy," and the fret buttons now make less noise. Meanwhile, the new drums have softer pads that should dramatically decrease the noise factor, and the metal-reinforced kick pedal accounts for over-enthusiastic stomping. In addition, several new inputs on the main body drums allow for expansion slots.

An additional purchase will get you a cymbal expansion that includes a crash, ride, and high hat, each tied to one of the existing colors. In this version of the game, those same-colored cymbals will just be an alternate input for one of the four pads. In future iterations, the cymbals could have unique functionality. The expansion slots also make the new drums potentially compatible with sets from other games, presuming the companies allow cross-compatibility. If you're happy with your Rock Band 1 instruments, don't worry. Those will still work for either game.

A couple amazing but expensive options will be available for those who really want to step

up. In the same vein as some earlier third-party peripherals, there will now be a first-party option for those who want the heft and size of a real guitar. Several real Fender Strats are being stripped and replaced with Rock Band internal parts, which will be sold in limited release. Even cooler is the partnership established with Ion, a maker of real electronic drum kits. The brand new premium Rock Band drum set is fully adjustable and features amazing pads and cymbals. Even better, by unplugging the gamepad from the unit, we're told you'll be able to plug in a real drum brain and step up to an actual electronic set. ■■■■

The limited edition Ion drum kit will be sold separately for true aficionados, and it will convert to a real electronic set



■ The photo creator will allow players to set facial expressions and poses, and then upload the image to rockband.com for printing to merchandise



It's All About Merchandising

An exciting new feature is being implemented for both Rock Band and its sequel that will allow players to purchase customized, real world merch for their in-game band. An in-game photo creator lets you set facial expressions and poses for your character, add visual effects, and then upload to RockBand.com. From there, you'll be able to order everything from t-shirts and posters to bumper stickers, all customized to feature your band's logo and images. If that's not enough for you, we also learned that you'll soon be able to buy customized figures of your in-game rockers, not unlike the recent World of Warcraft statues you may have heard about.

Expansion slots for separately sold cymbals

Velocity sensitive pads

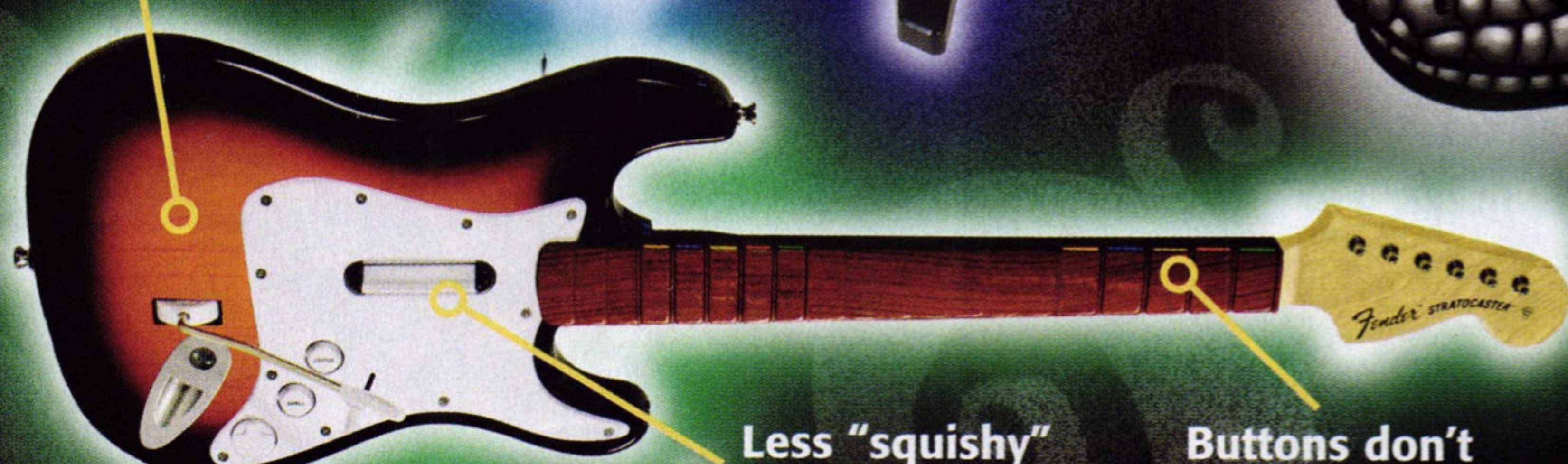
Soft and bouncy – far less noise

Metal-reinforced pedal

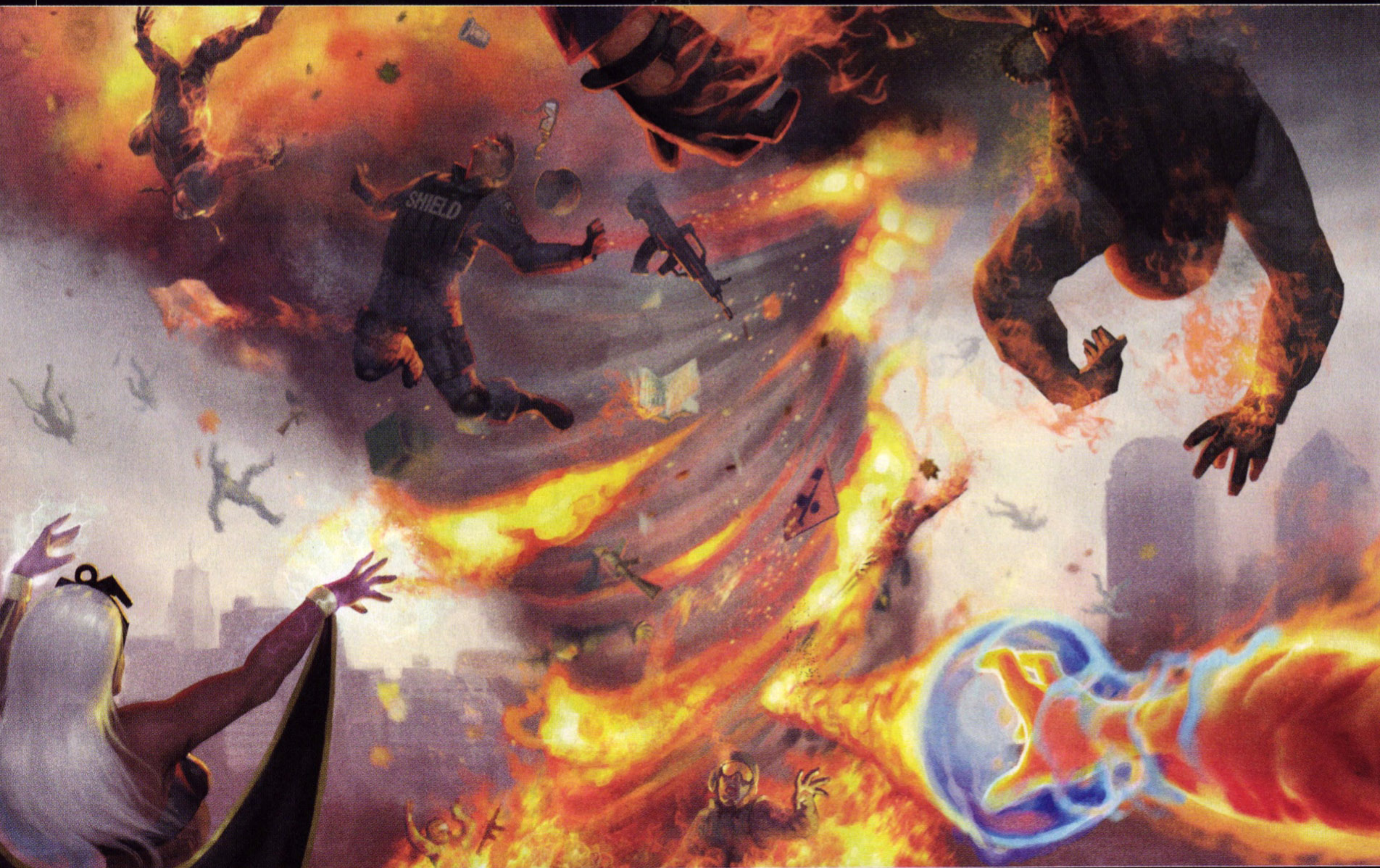
Redesigned color scheme

Less "squishy" strum bar

Buttons don't click so loudly



MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE II: FUSION



THEY ARE LIKE MODERN DAY GODS. THEY WIELD UNPRECEDENTED POWER, POSSESSING THE MIGHT OF ENTIRE ARMIES WITHIN A SINGLE BODY. THAT IS WHY THEY ARE CALLED "SUPER." THEY'RE ALSO ICONS OF MORALITY. CHARACTERS WHO DISPLAY THE BEST TRAITS HUMANITY HAS TO OFFER — PERFECT EXAMPLES OF THE GREATNESS WE COULD ACHIEVE. IT'S WHY THEY ARE CALLED "HEROES." BUT THEY DON'T ALWAYS FIGHT ALONE. WHEN THEY TEAM UP IT'S ALWAYS A TITANIC AFFAIR WOR-

THY OF STANDALONE COMIC BOOK SERIES AND BLOCK-BUSTER FILMS. THE SUPERHERO DREAM TEAMS STILL HAVE PLENTY OF FERTILE GROUND TO COVER IN THE VIDEO GAME REALM, AND IT'S A THEME THAT VICARIOUS VISIONS HOPES TO MINE WITH THE NEXT ENTRY IN THE ULTIMATE ALLIANCE SERIES. AFTER ALL, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THESE GOD-LIKE BEINGS FUSED THEIR POWERS TOGETHER? WOULD ANY FORCE ON EARTH BE CAPABLE OF STANDING AGAINST THEM? OR WOULD THESE HEROES BECOME THEIR OWN WORST ENEMIES?

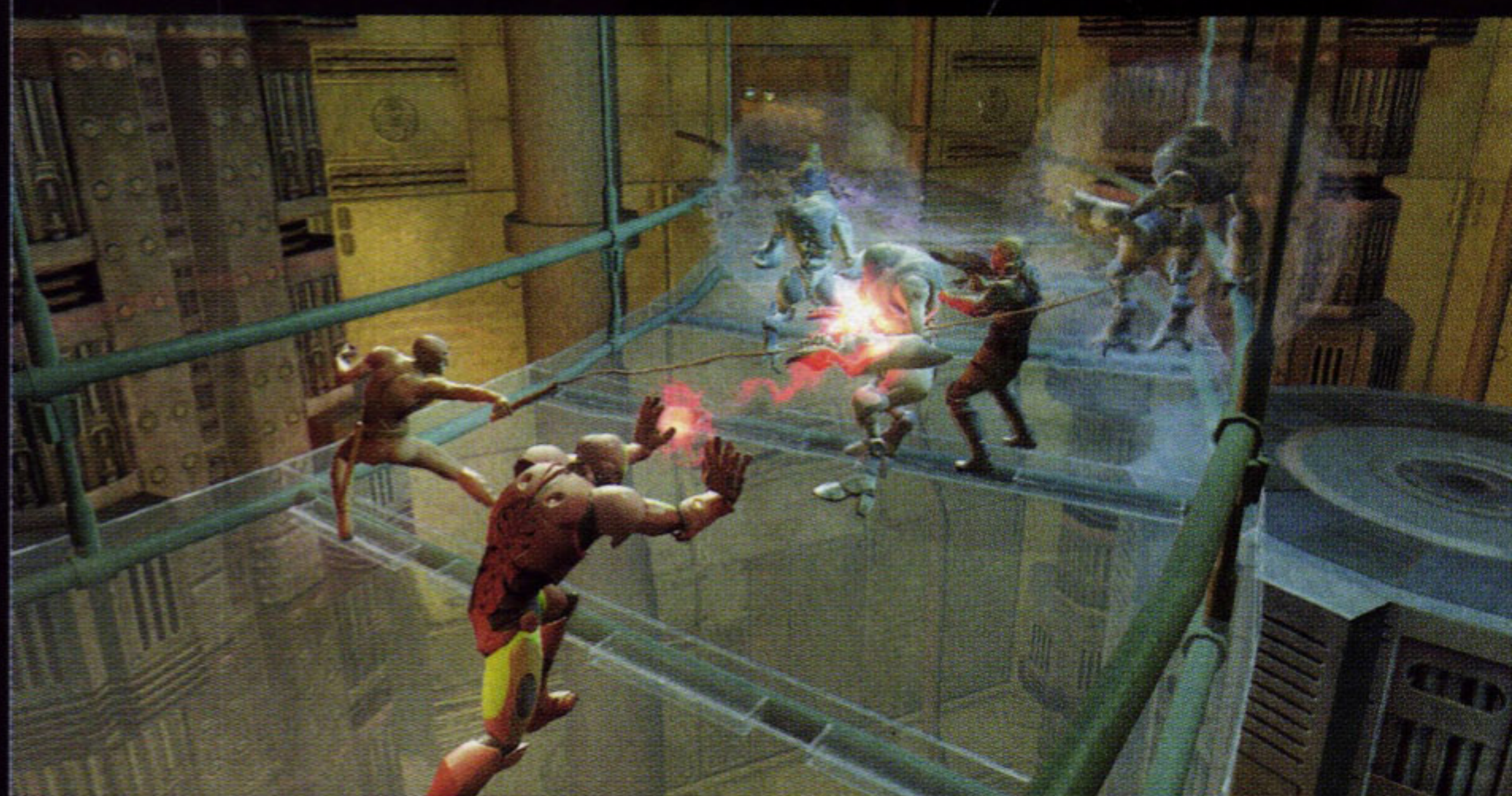
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG

(UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE)

> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION> **DEVELOPER** VICARIOUS VISIONS> **RELEASE** 2009

V In one of the missions we witnessed, Captain America and Iron Man ended up at odds with one another. This begs the question, "Will we be controlling two separate teams at some point?"



A Did you know: During the development of the first *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*, Captain America was one of the least popular characters until his shield throw move was implemented, at which point everyone on staff wanted to play as him

The first *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* was arguably the best comic book video game ever made (according to us anyway, read our top ten on p.15). It combined several top-tier characters from the pantheon of Marvel Comics with excellent action/RPG gameplay. Not surprisingly, it became one of those rare licensed titles that delivered both critically and commercially. Given its success, a sequel wasn't just inevitable, it was expected. But with series creator Raven busy working on other projects (see our *Wolfenstein* story on p. 28), who was there to take over the reins? How about the studio that owns the game's engine and was influential in the development of the first *Ultimate Alliance*?

Vicarious Vision's involvement with the series dates back to 2003, when the team was working on a cart

racing game using the Alchemy engine. When the company that owned Alchemy, Intrinsic Graphics, began having financial troubles, Vicarious Visions bought the engine outright and continued supporting the technology on its own. One company that just happened to be using Alchemy at the time was Raven, which was in the middle of developing the very first *X-Men Legends* title.

Over the years, the two companies developed a close working relationship, and when Raven's parent company Activision bought Vicarious Visions in 2005 the two companies became more closely linked than ever. "Now that Raven is in the same studio system with us, we visit each other," says creative director Dan Tanguay. "They have seen all our builds, they give us notes, tell us where they think we could improve

things, and we take a look at some of their stuff sometimes. It's a pretty cool relationship."

When Raven started working on the next-gen versions for *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*, Vicarious Visions was there, helping fine tune the engine for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 builds while also porting the game over to the PSP and Wii. "The benefit of having the Alchemy engine with us is that we probably wouldn't have been able to innovate as much as we did otherwise," says producer Dan Wallace. "And there is a significant amount of innovation."

That innovation begins with the game's story. The first *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* may have had a deep roster of heroes and great cooperative gameplay, but it failed to deliver an engaging narrative, a sad oversight for a game tied directly to a rich storytelling medium. *Ultimate*

Alliance II hopes to correct this.

"We want to have these RPG elements and a strong story," says Tanguay. One of the reasons the first game succeeded was its well-paced gameplay, but the game may have been diminished somewhat by a plot that was too easy to dismiss. In response, *Vicarious Vision* is shaping a tale that won't detract from the overall action experience, but will instead aid the gameplay. "We definitely spent a lot of time making sure it's all coming together as a rollercoaster experience," Tanguay proclaims.

The game's plot is being pulled straight from the pages of Marvel's books. "The story starts with *Secret War*," Tanguay tells us. This five issue series, written by modern-day comic book legend Brian Michael Bendis, was a sizable comic crossover that led to some major events in the Marvel universe.

When Nick Fury, director of government police agency S.H.I.E.L.D. comes across a terrorist plot being orchestrated by the Latverian Prime Minister, he becomes angered by the government's inaction. In response, Fury assembles

a team of superheroes – including Spider-Man, Captain America, Wolverine, Luke Cage, and Daredevil – to covertly overthrow the small country.

A year later, the heroes who participated in that attack become targets of an army of high-tech super villains being manipulated by a mysterious third-party benefactor. The team scrambles to unravel the mystery of how these current attacks are tied to the secret war they all participated in a year earlier.

"We're using Nick Fury's invasion of Latveria as a jumping off point – the rest of the story is derived from the consequences of those actions," Tanguay says in allusion to later events that comic book series fans might be able to surmise on their own. The game's plot won't stop at *Secret War*, but will branch out from there. Some of the boss battles we witnessed pitted Marvel heroes against one another, which implies that there has been some kind of fracture amongst the ranks and the lines between good and bad have become blurry.

A narrative is only as good as its dialogue, and *Vicarious Visions* hopes to ensure that people don't

just skip past every line. "We want our conversations to feel dramatic," Tanguay says. To this end, the team has added attitude choices to *Ultimate Alliance II*'s conversations mechanic. The choices are as simple as picking between aggressive, defensive, or diplomatic lines. How a player acts during these sequences will affect how every mission plays out and will have a dramatic impact on the team dynamic.

"It's kind of like your attitude is projected onto the team itself," Tanguay says. "If you decide to be a jerk all the time and treat everyone like crap, then we are going to reward you appropriately for that." These rewards come in the form of medals. Being aggressive will award the team a medal that gives them an attack bonus. If your team takes a more diplomatic approach, it may yield a teamwork bonus instead. These medals can be applied to any team a player creates, so, for example, if the Hulk is swapped out for Spider-Man, the team will keep all its boosts. "The key is to not only encourage players to use the entire roster of characters, but to not punish them for doing it," Wallace says.



▲ "We've kept a strong eye towards co-op while we were looking at the UI and upgrading," Tanguay says. "What we've done is allow the player to upgrade on the fly. Some guys have to pause every time they level up and then they spend 15 minutes leveling up every character, but now that won't break up the action for everyone else"

▼ Comic artist Steve McNiven's work was a strong influence on the new designs for every character



▲ Fusion moves will be upgradeable just like all the other powers

INTERFACING

One of the few clear faults of the first *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* was its confusing character management interface. "The UI wasn't doing a particularly good job of communicating the various things you could upgrade and what they all did," Wallace says. In response, *Vicarious Visions* has streamlined the interface. "One of the things that we wanted to do was move away from the overused techy, big metal widget with flashing lights, Michael Bay-style DVD menu," explains art director Bryan Shutt. "We're going for a very clean, clutter-free system. We didn't want anything too extreme. We wanted a look that would evoke a presidential dossier, something that

would look like an official document." As it stands, the system is much simpler and easy to understand, which is good news for people who like to tinker with their characters. While the studio doesn't plan on removing the auto-leveling system from the first game that allowed uninterested players to skip skill management in favor of getting on with the action, *Vicarious Visions* wants to make the fine-tuning easier for advanced players. "If they want to, they can dive down deeper into the RPG aspects to peel back the onion and experience something richer," Wallace says.

"... VICARIOUS VISIONS IS SHAPING A TALE THAT WON'T DETRACT FROM THE OVERALL ACTION EXPERIENCE, BUT WILL INSTEAD AID THE GAMEPLAY."

THE MAKING OF A HERO



Comic book artists generally don't have the time to draw every visible seam in a pant leg, but this minimalist approach hardly translates well to video games. "One of the big challenges we face every time we start a new character is that we ask ourselves how can we get this character out of the comic book and into the game in a way that is more grounded in reality, more practical and functional?" says Vicarious Visions art director Bryan Shutt. We sat down with Shutt and he explained their process with one of Marvel Ultimate Alliance II's characters, Thor.

- 1 "For the texture artist, and to an extent the hi-res modeler, it's useful to provide actual photographic reference of any materials needed for the character so they can effectively create the desired look. With Thor's leather tunic, we were lucky to find photos of leather armor, which approximated the coarse grain we wanted. The modeler can use this for sculpting details not provided in the drawing and to generate ideas for where to place 'wear and tear' details."
- 2 "The first thing that jumped out at us when we were working on Thor is we wondered, 'What are these disks?' We decided that we wanted these to feel like they were very low-profile metal plates that were worked into this hand-tooled leather. We added a lot of detailing and construction elements, the rivets, and some battle damage. We wanted his materials to have a very old-school look."
- 3 "In the classic style costume he's got these – Underoos we call them – the shorts over the tights. We couldn't figure out how to get the metal plates on the Underoo-style costume and have it look believable, so we came up with this idea of running this flap down the front. When we ran it by Marvel they were actually pretty happy with it."
- 4 "The one thing that Marvel almost blocked us on was the enhancement of the gauntlets. The wristbands that you see in the comics reminded us too much of the NBA sweatbands that you wear to get the sweat out of your eyes. We wanted something that matched the badassness of Thor's costume, so we beefed up the gauntlets."
- 5 "We thought that the hammer just looked too small, too simple, like a cinderblock. We wanted to embellish it a little bit. We wanted it to feel legendary or mythic in the same vein as Excalibur. We found photos of ancient tombstones which had the type of stone we desired and included engraved letters similar to the runes found on the hammer."

Another aspect of the game that Vicarious Visions feels the need to innovate with is the visuals. "We really want to push the hardware as far as possible," Tanguay says. After seeing Ultimate Alliance II in action, it's clear that the series looks better than ever. Every character model pops with a higher level of detail, and environments now have a less blocky, more organic feel. The goal is to make the levels look more like functional, real-world locales instead of tiled video game dungeons. "We've spent a lot of time focusing on presentation and believability," Tanguay says.

Superhero games are all about big explosions and superpowers, and Vicarious Visions has recognized the need for

bigger booms and better destruction by integrating Havok physics into the experience. This allows the studio to amp up the level of onscreen damage and debris. A whole team is specifically dedicated to working on the damage system, making sure that more objects in the environment will be interactive. If the Thing smashes a forklift it will break into smaller pieces. Its fuel tank might roll off and he could pick that up and throw it at his enemies. Other objects in the environment, such as the lights, will react properly to that explosion. "We've spent a lot of time focusing on that sense of destruction and power that superheroes are supposed to have," Tanguay says.

To complete the graphical overhaul, Vicarious Visions retooled the camera system to give the game a more cinematic look in line with Marvel's summer blockbusters. A lot of the time the camera will be closer to the action, helping showcase the game's improved character models, but it's a more fluid system now, and the camera won't stay locked to the same spot. "There is one mission that we are working on right now where the camera is way back on the city streets," Wallace says. "Everyone looks kind of small, but the amount of destruction and violence going on down there is so intense that dudes are ragdolling up in the air. It's really great looking from a higher distance."

“WE WANTED TO HAVE THINGS THAT FELT MORE VISCERAL, THINGS THAT FEEL MORE TIED TO THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR POWERS.”

– Brian Shutt, art director



▲ “We’ve ripped out the audio engine,” Wallace says. “The old one was pretty simple and we’ve replaced it with a robust audio engine that gives us better 3D spatial control, which also gives us the ability to create 3D sounds off of our physics”

Talking with the team at Vicarious Visions, it’s easy to see they are most excited about the game’s monster roster of Marvel characters and their superhuman powers. “We have a whole team just working on the powers,” says Wallace excitedly. “Every time they take a character and build a new set of powers for them it’s awesome.” The powers now do a better job of playing off the Havok physics and directly impacting the nearby world. Heroes who indiscriminately use their powers will bowl over cars, destroy walls, and affect the lights around them. The whole effects system has been revamped for greater oomph. “I guess the laymen’s version of all that is, ‘they’re frickin’ awesome,’” says Wallace.

The team has researched which characters fans liked most from the last game and what their most popular powers were. Captain America’s shield throw, for example, was extremely popular and will be making a return to the sequel. But the studio isn’t resting on those laurels; there’s still plenty of room for these characters to expand their move sets. Unfortunately, the team remained hush about any new characters that might appear in the game, but they did tell us about a few new powers for the old favorites. “Human Torch burns things,” Wallace laughs. “Yeah, he’s a pretty big Human Torch fan,” adds Tanguay, “and the Human Torch has many, many different ways to burn things.”

“We’ve been trying to think of ways to treat the visual cues in more plausible ways instead of nonsensical sprites spinning around you or flashing trails,” Shutt says. “We wanted to have things that felt more visceral, things that

▼ Vicarious Visions is improving the facial mapping for the cutscenes, and it promises that they’ll be “way cooler” this time around



▲ Vicarious Visions has upgraded the engine technologies, allowing them to push 20 to 30 enemies on the screen at one time in special encounters they are calling Mass AI

feel more tied to the characters and their powers.” One example of this is the Hulk’s new Fear move, which – like it sounds – is a buff that makes enemies cower in fear. Instead of being represented by a glowing hue, once the power has been activated, Hulk’s veins begin to glow radioactive. It’s a scary effect and its subtle visual cues perfectly convey what’s happening.

Other powers are more intrinsically tied to characters’ innate abilities. Daredevil is a melee fighter, so most of his powers are used to get him in closer to the action. Spider-Man can ensnare enemies in webs and hang them from

the ceiling. While these enemies are flopping around from the ceiling, any teammate can walk up and beat on them. Vicarious Visions has even made sure to go back to characters like Invisible Woman – who wasn’t the best choice in the first game – and rework their skill sets to make them more formidable.

“The animators hate Mr. Fantastic because we’ve made his animation rig much more complicated, but he can do all the stretchy things for real now instead of how we cheated it in the first game. Now all his moves look – well I don’t want to say fantastic,” Tanguay shrugs, “but, well...”



Which leads us back to how the characters fuse together. To defeat these super villains, working together is key, which is only natural in a cooperative game. Vicarious Visions feels teamwork is so important to the game that it's even been integrated into the name. "Fusion is basically the big concept that we arrived at when we were doing our early prototyping," Tanguay says. "We really wanted to find something that stood out, but also felt believable, powerful, and cinematic."

Fans of the franchise will remember the Momentum and Xtreme moves from the first Ultimate Alliance and two X-Men Legends titles, powerful super moves every character possessed. "Team-ups are very, very common in the Marvel universe. They're an important part of the brand," Tanguay says. The new Fusion system replaces these and offers even more opportunities for the heroes to work together.

The studio is creating various combat encounters built around the different types of Fusion (see sidebar). The goal is to make players think about how these different Fusion attacks work in hopes of making the gameplay more tactical. Some Fusion attacks act like smart bombs and will be good for clearing a room. Others deal more damage, but are targeted to one enemy. Yet another Fusion mechanic allows characters to revive fallen teammates, which is something that had been missing from the franchise up to this point. "You don't have to wait for some arbitrary timer to go down then go to a shield

spot to resurrect your team," Wallace explains. "If you have enough fusion power you can revive someone on the spot."

Many of the Fusions are player controlled, which greatly enhances the cooperative experience. Take the Hulk and Iron Man's Fusion, for example. The Hulk rips out a large chunk of ground and directs where the projectile goes. Meanwhile, Iron Man jams on the attack button to infuse the rock with extra energy, which will result in a larger explosion once the Hulk launches the impromptu bomb. During single-player mode the player still can take advantage of these contextual events, they just won't be separated into distinct actions.

Given all the story, graphical, and gameplay enhancements in Ultimate Alliance II, the game seems to be headed in the right direction. Vicarious Visions has over 120 titles under its belt (nine of them based on comic characters), but it still hasn't attained the level of esteem that peers such as Raven have. With Ultimate Alliance II representing the biggest project the studio has worked on, this might be its chance to show gamers its mettle.

"We take this franchise really seriously and we are really excited about this opportunity," Wallace says. "We've done the homework. We've looked into what resonates with the fans and what makes this franchise tick, and we're doing it right. I think that when this title releases it will be received just as well — if not better — than the first game." ■■■■

FUSED TOGETHER

Using Ultimate Alliance II's new Fusion system, every character in the game can combine his or her powers with another hero to produce a powerful team-up attack. With over 20 characters, that adds up to more than 200 combinations. Here are some examples we witnessed with just one team of four.



IRON MAN + HULK = Using his superhuman strength, the Hulk rips out a giant chunk from the ground and Iron Man superheats it before the Hulk throws it at their enemies, creating a devastating explosion.



HULK + DAREDEVIL = Popularized in comics by Wolverine and Colossus as the Fastball Special, the Hulk winds Daredevil up and throws him at great speed for a single focus attack.



INVISIBLE WOMAN + IRON MAN = Invisible Woman creates a small sphere with her telekinetic shield, which Iron Man load ups with energy. Once the bubble has reached its breaking point Invisible Woman opens the ball, creating a large blast of radial damage.

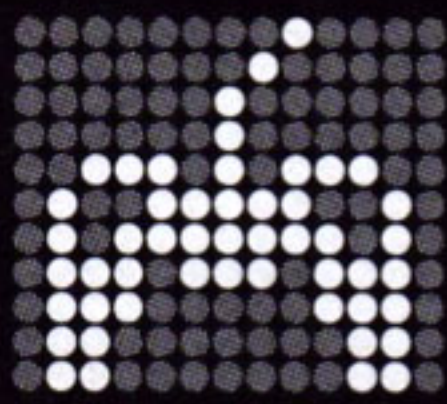


DAREDEVIL + IRON MAN = After a mob of enemies has surrounded Daredevil, he twirls across the floor, whipping his foes into the air. Meanwhile, Iron Man is hovering overhead shooting down everyone who gets sent his way.



INVISIBLE WOMAN + HULK = Dubbed the Hamster Ball, Invisible Woman surrounds the Hulk with one of her telekinetic shields, and the Hulk rampages across the map, crushing enemies under his weight.





PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PC | NINTENDO DS

Call of Duty: World at War

> STYLE | OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 18-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER TREYARCH > RELEASE FALL

TREYARCH TAKES OVER THE FIGHT

In the relatively short time since its conception, the Call of Duty has held relationships with multiple developers at once – some fleeting, some long-term. Despite this lack of stability, the Call of Duty name behind Infinity Ward remains rock solid, reaching a pinnacle last year with Modern Warfare.

Regardless of this success, doubt has begun to cloud enthusiasm for many Call of Duty fans. Original creator Infinity Ward has shared the franchise with the team at Treyarch, a developer introduced to the series through expansion packs and spin-off titles under the Call of Duty umbrella. This leaves some gamers apprehensive about them taking on the next full-blown Call of Duty. If you are one of those concerned fans, let us assuage your doubts – Call of Duty: World at War looks good. Damn good.

And it should. Treyarch is building on the foundation set by the Modern Warfare engine, but the studio has been given an

unprecedented amount of time to work on the title. The team of Call of Duty veterans believes they are making the best FPS of the year. While we can't verify that claim until we get our hands on it, the value of the technology, extra time, and their familiarity with the series is apparent.

Unlike Call of Duty 4, World at War sticks with the World War II timeframe, trading Germans for Japanese and dismal trenches for lush jungles in the Pacific Theater. Because of the Bushido code honored by Imperial Japanese, the Call of Duty rulebook established in previous games had to be thrown out the window. Japanese forces focused on infiltration and ambush tactics. Banzai charges, ambush attacks, and even kamikaze fighters made the experience incomparable to anything American forces faced in the European Theater.

While the major campaigns follow the end of the war in the Pacific, World at War also explores the closing acts of the European

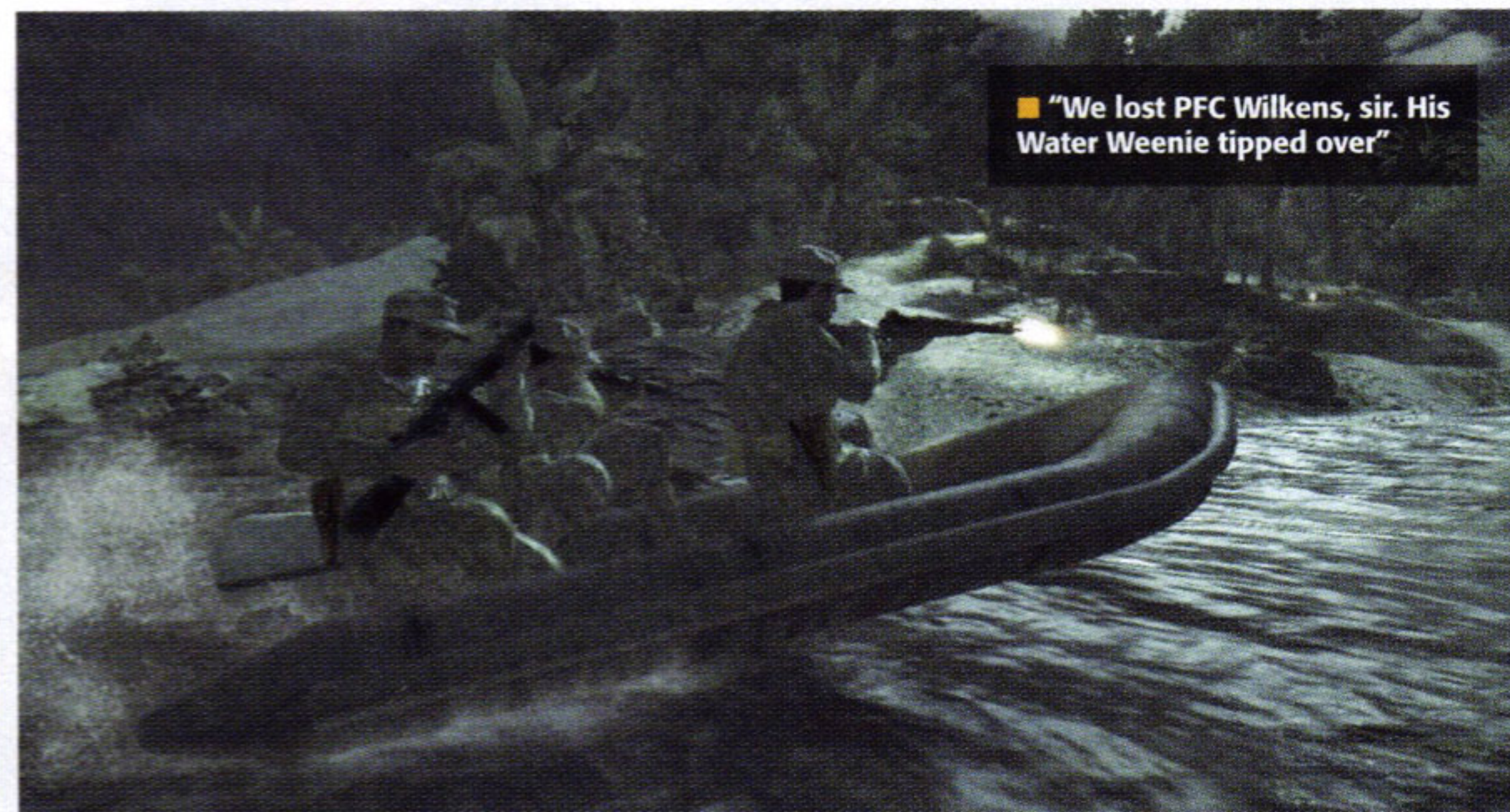
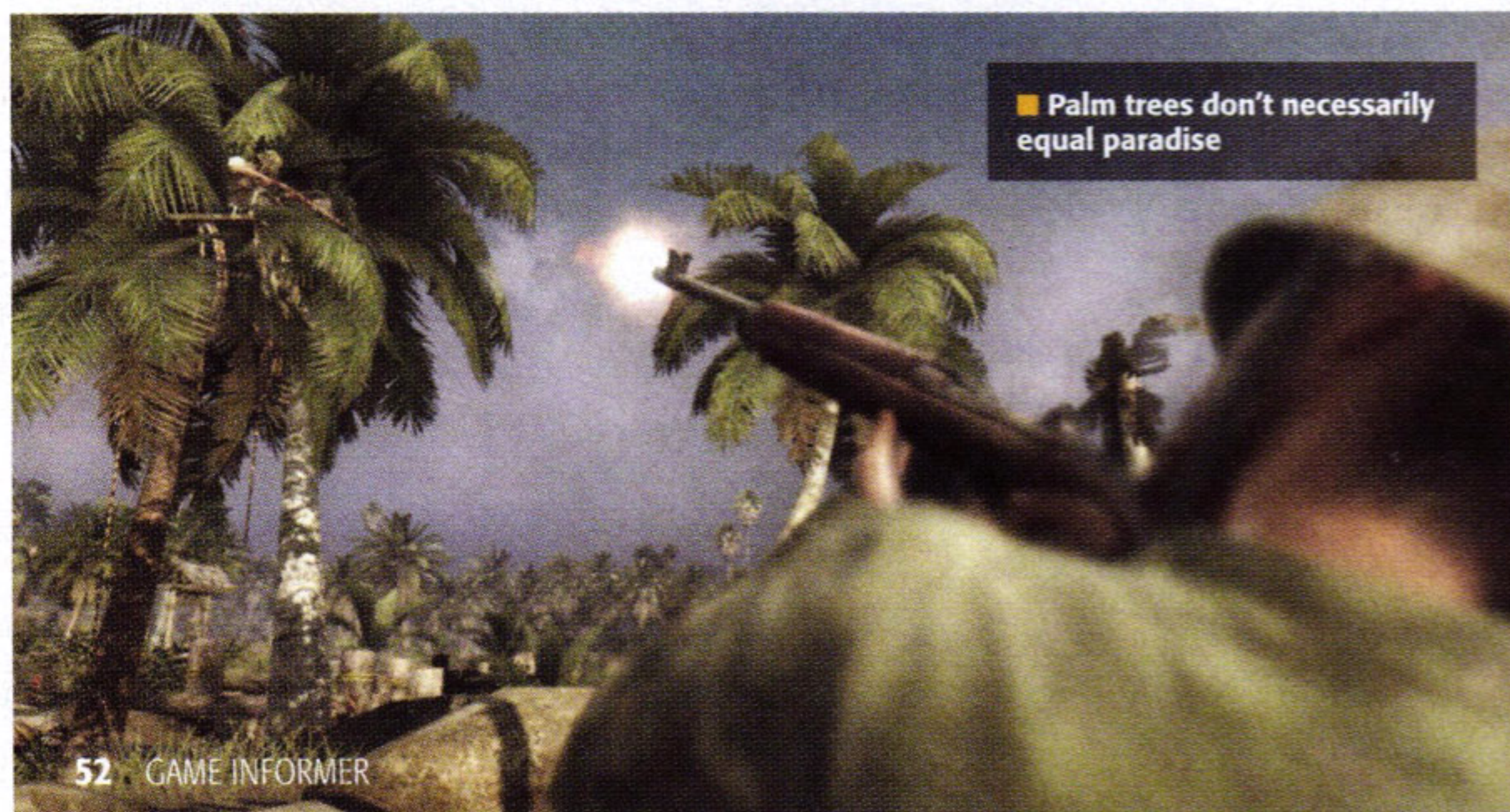
theater. The European campaign details the struggles of a very angry Russian army that has finally pushed German forces out of their country. The mood is one of revenge and desperation as German forces fight frantically to keep the battle from inching closer to their homeland. The new enemies, locations, and tactics create a much darker and grittier game experience.

On the technical side, the game looks fantastic – as impressive as the visuals of Modern Warfare. Everything has been amped up thanks to the CoD 4 engine. Realistic physics, destructible environments, and even small considerations, such as trajectory changes when firing into water, help give the impression of an already polished product. New weapons such as the flamethrower – which can be used both as a weapon and a tactical tool – will undoubtedly affect how players approach battle. When demonstrated, the flames burned all foliage in its path, scorched the ground, and spread based on

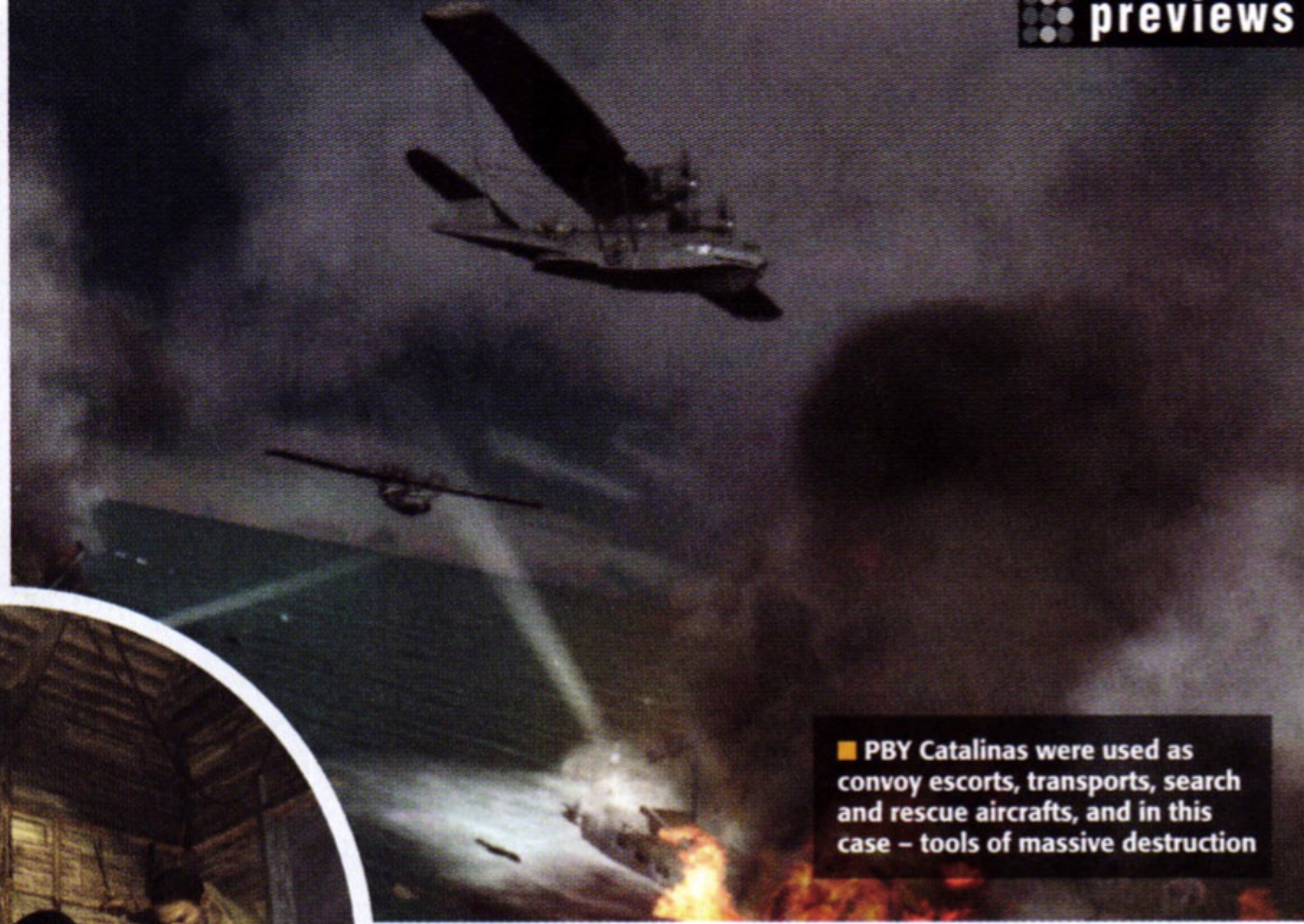
wind patterns and undergrowth.

Everything came together seamlessly in two exclusive missions we had a chance to view at Treyarch headquarters. The first – a mission on the Pacific campaign – utilized .50 caliber machine guns on either side of a PBY Catalina boat plane to take out the Japanese merchant fleet below. This segment showcased some of the massive destruction possible in the game. The second level we saw took place on the European front. This time, the endgame was to aid a wounded sniper on a mission to take out a German head honcho, all the while avoiding attention by strategically using airplanes to mask the sound of the rifle picking off guards.

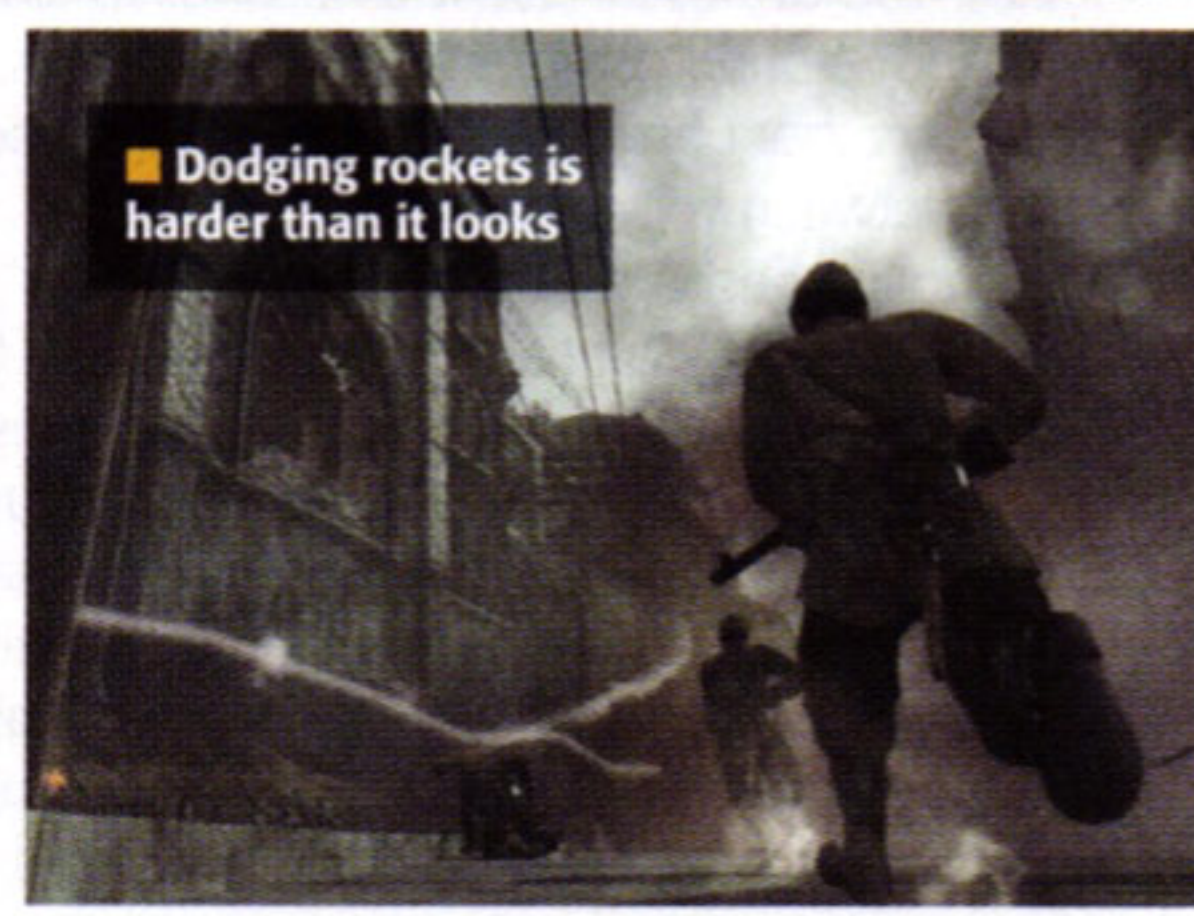
Infinity Ward and Treyarch's volleying of the franchise isn't likely to end soon, but if World at War is as good as it appears to be so far, perhaps gamers won't have to fear Call of Duty games that aren't made by Infinity Ward. ■ ■ ■



■ Lt. Colonel Hank Keirse explained how it would be "uncomfortable" to be on the receiving end of this weapon



■ PBV Catalinas were used as convoy escorts, transports, search and rescue aircrafts, and in this case – tools of massive destruction



ARMY OF ONE? NOT ANYMORE

World at War is the first game to bring co-op gameplay to the Call of Duty franchise. Co-op mode includes intelligent AI that adjusts difficulty depending on the number of human players – a nice touch to ensure that the Veteran difficulty stays challenging. On the multiplayer front, Treyarch will be adding vehicles to online play, but with appropriate weapon counter-balances to ensure the core infantry experience is not lost. Squads – complete with a new spawn-influencer system that keeps you in the center of the action – are also a new key element.



If you've been to a showing of Timur Bekmambetov's *Wanted* in the theater, you might have found yourself confusedly looking down at your hands and wondering where your controller was. From the stylized, gun-focused action to the slick premise, it seems like a prime contender for the video game treatment. Fortunately, this fact hasn't gone unnoticed. Since early last year, Grin's Barcelona studio (under the direction of Universal Pictures Digital Platforms Group) has been crafting a game that embraces the film's extreme gunplay. Talking with executive producer Pete Wanat, it's difficult to not get pumped up.

"The story of the game begins, literally, right after the movie," reveals Wanat. "Wesley's stirred up the hornets' nest a bit. He thinks he's put the kibosh on it. Wesley has a moment to breathe at the end of the film, and the game starts off with a bang. Doors are being kicked in, and someone's trying to kill Wesley."

Even though the story will branch off from the film's version of events (rather than Mark Millar's original graphic novel), the team is still intent on integrating concepts from both sources. "The game definitely takes elements from both the movie and the comic book together," Wanat admits. "We're certainly very cognizant of the Mark Millar source material, and we're obviously fans of Timur and what he's done in the film." Therefore, most of the game's visual style is drawn from Bekmambetov's film, but fans of the comic will notice some special nods, like the inclusion of Wesley's leather suit.

While the story of a flourishing assassin is interesting, the real core of *Wanted*'s gameplay will (unsurprisingly) be found in the shooting mechanics. Wesley isn't your typical run-and-gun hero; he has the unique ability to curve his shots, so it appears that his bullets are defying physics as they fly from improbable angles for the kill. For the player, this ability will be controlled via an analog stick. When you curve a bullet, the action will slow down momentarily as you guide an on-screen arc representing the path the bullet will follow. You can use these few seconds to aim your shot around corners, behind dumpsters, and past any other obstacles that would otherwise stand between you and your prey.

"Shooting becomes a kind of chess game," explains Wanat. "Can I aim it around a post? Can I hit the enemy behind cover? In most games, where you have to time your shot to hit a guy right as he ducks out of cover, in ours you can just wing the bullet right around the thing and — BAM! — he's dead." Just because you can blast your enemies wherever they hide doesn't mean that you won't use cover yourself. In *Wanted*, using the environment is not only important for protection — it enhances your combat senses. Wesley enters a state of heightened awareness (similar to Max Payne's bullet time) if he moves quickly between cover. This mechanic, currently called cover chaining, is the dev team's solution to representing an assassin's preternatural ability to catch foes unaware.

"Obviously, there's a lot of cover stuff happening, and we wanted to expand on it. Where other games tend to be big hulking steroid guys taking cover, we wanted to be super-fast, quick, bam-bam-bam!" Wanat tells us. "Wesley isn't a behemoth — his agility is what gets him through things." This sort of kinetic gunplay is what *Wanted* is all about, and when you throw in the distinctive visuals, stylish combat, and the whole bullet-bending mechanic, this game is looking like an incredibly promising shooter — and we don't even feel compelled to throw in the "for a movie-licensed game" addendum. ■ ■ ■

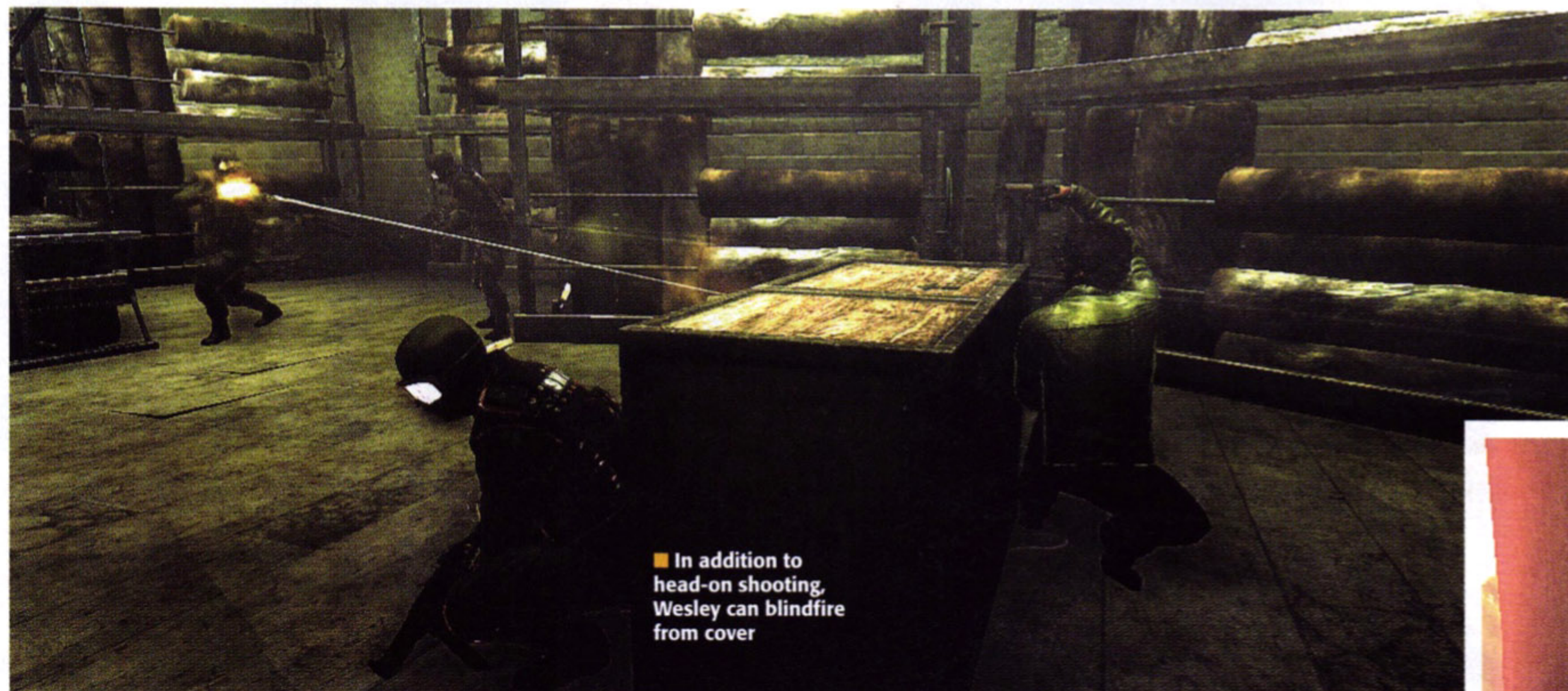


PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Wanted

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER TBA > DEVELOPER GRIN BARCELONA > RELEASE HOLIDAY

BULLET BENDING



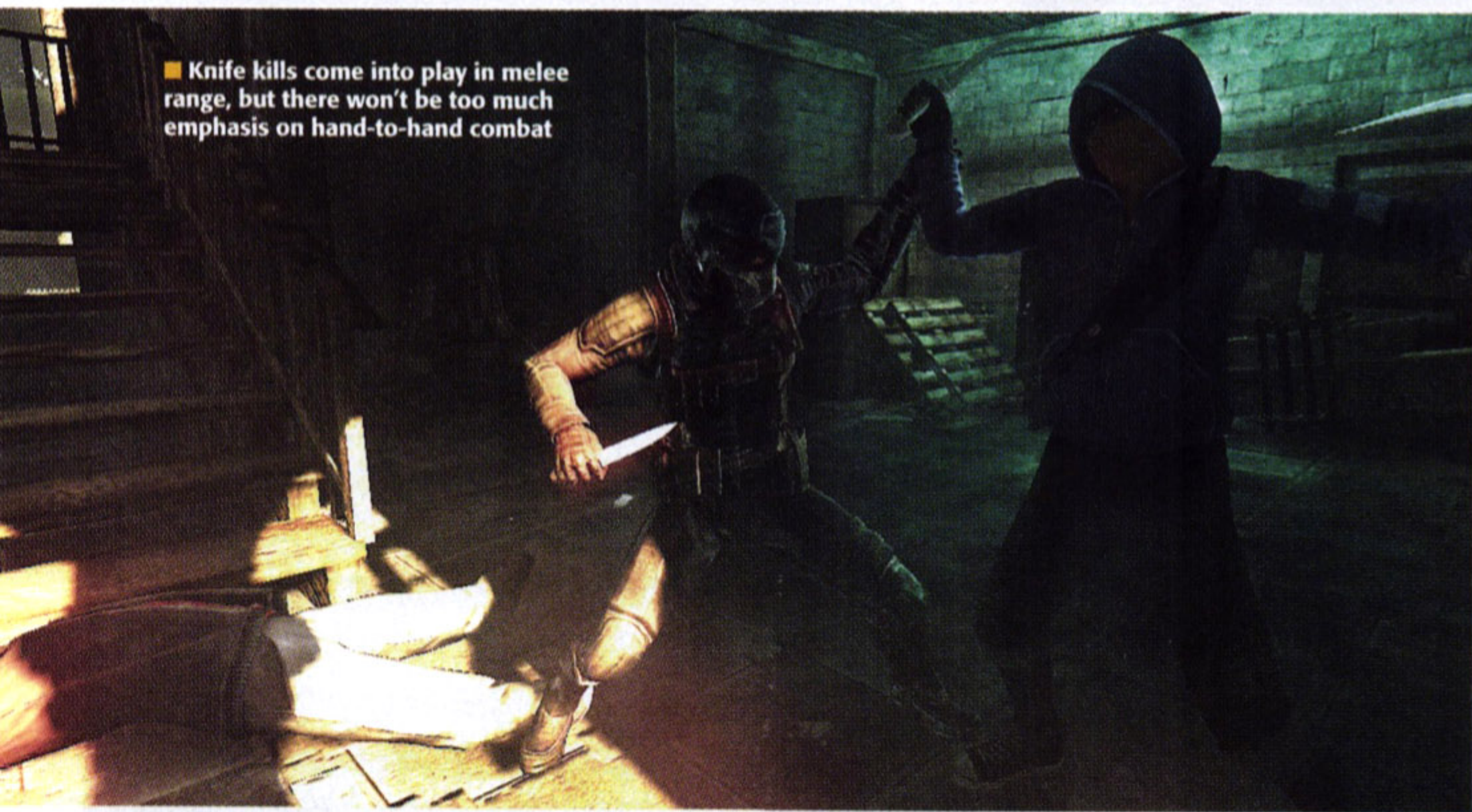
■ In addition to head-on shooting, Wesley can blindfire from cover



■ To curve bullets, you will guide an arc that shows your shot's trajectory



■ Cover chaining (rapidly moving from one protected position to another) will allow you to get the jump on unsuspecting foes



■ Knife kills come into play in melee range, but there won't be too much emphasis on hand-to-hand combat



THE SUIT

For fans of Mark Millar's *Wanted* graphic novel, it may be disappointing to see Wesley looking like a regular guy wearing regular clothes. The Killer's signature suit may not have featured prominently in the film, but that doesn't mean it won't play a significant role in the game. "The suit will be in there. It's something the player doesn't start out with, but is able to unlock," Wanat reveals. "It doesn't work as well in the fiction of the film – you can't really blend in when you're wearing an all-leather body suit. Even though it diverges from the film slightly, including the suit in the game makes the player look like a f— badass. First and foremost, we're trying to make the best game decisions." In addition to just looking cool, the suit will increase Wesley's overall performance, but details in that department will have to wait.



■ *Wanted*'s visual style closely mirrors that of the film

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Dark Void

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER AIRTIGHT GAMES > RELEASE 2009

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH YO! NOID

At a Capcom event starring Street Fighter IV and Resident Evil 5, it's hard to walk away thinking about any other game. Dark Void not only managed to impress, it looked like the game of the show. Developed by Airtight Games, a new studio started by the makers of the entertaining Xbox and PC flight combat sim Crimson Skies, Dark Void is a shooter that lets you step outside of the cockpit without sacrificing the flying sensation.

The story revolves around a pilot named Will, who crash lands inside the Bermuda Triangle and stumbles into a dark plot involving an ancient alien race called the Watchers. These aliens trap Will in a mysterious world called the Void. The rest of the game deals with Will's reluctant journey to become a hero, the interesting people he meets, and his quest to escape this strange land.

The game uses many traditional third-person shooter elements, but when Will acquires a jetpack, Dark Void's gameplay gets interesting. Airtight has created what it is calling a vertical cover system. Using his jetpack, Will can traverse sheer vertical


cliffs and grab onto any abutment for cover. Hanging from the side of a rock face, Will then fires into the sky as his opponents crawl down the walls after him, adding an interesting new dimension to standard shooter gameplay.

The new vertical action is complemented by Airtight Games' phenomenal animation and camera work. There's a real sense of height and vertigo as Will makes his way up the craggy cliffs in the Void. He won't be stuck hopping from ledge to ledge through the whole game; eventually Will learns to fly. With the assistance of an upgraded pack, Will takes to the open skies like the Rocketeer.


Will's jetpack gives him the option to tackle Dark Void's challenges in many different ways: He'll fly along the cliff taking cover at every edge, or he could go full out into the open blue, skyjacking enemy crafts and using them against each other. As the game progresses Will continues to upgrade his jetpack, gaining abilities that make him a more adept aerial threat. Though Dark Void is still at least a year out, we already have high hopes. ■ ■ ■

BERMUDA TRIANGLE

The large patch of ocean located between Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and Florida has fascinated paranormal theorists for decades and been a constant setting for modern fiction. The legends surrounding the Devil's Triangle are large inspirations for Dark Void's narrative. Airtight Games hinted that a variety of different crafts lost in these waters could surface, in some form, in the game.



■ The game does a great job of inducing vertigo. It should be noted that we are looking up in this shot

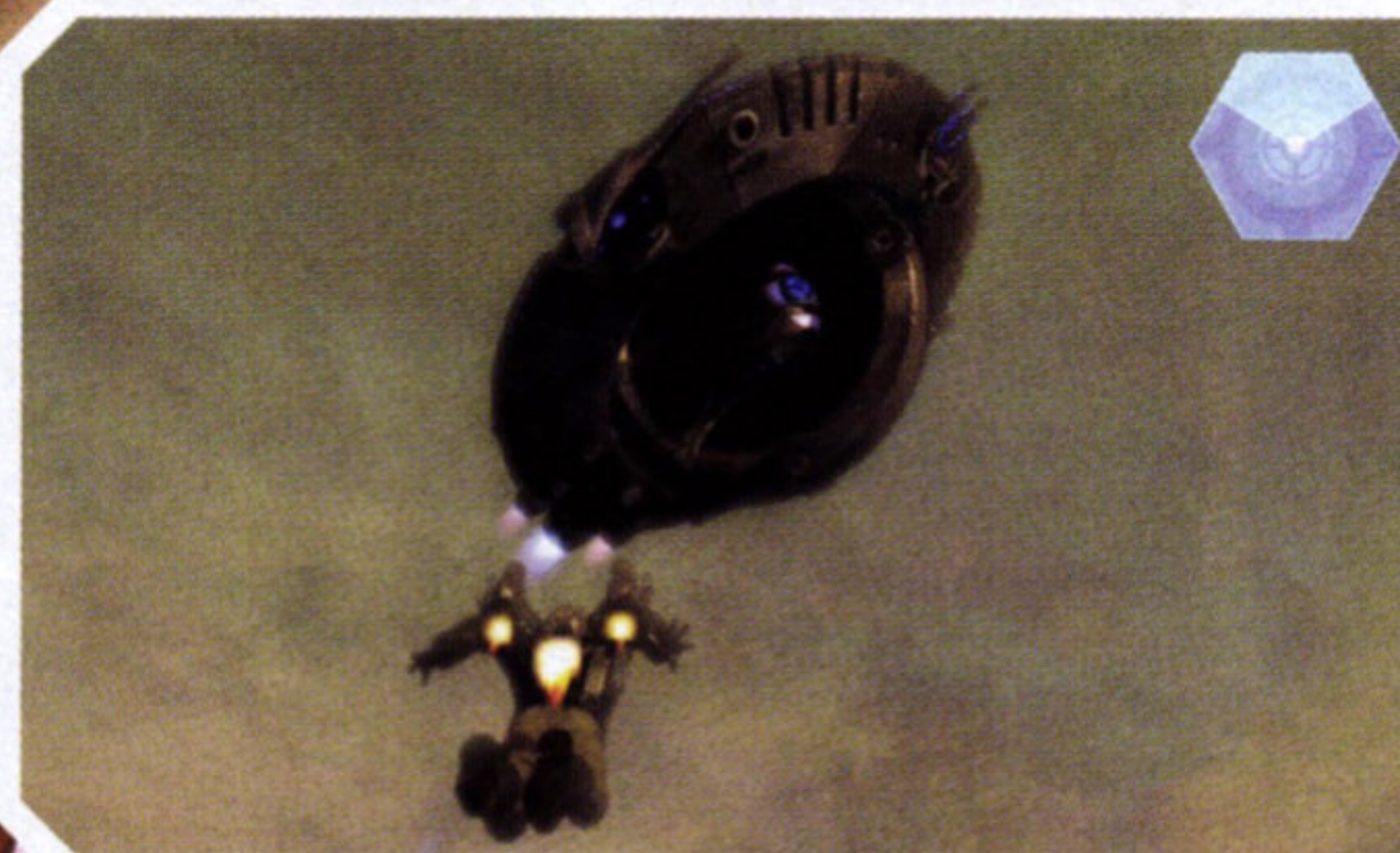


■ Large explosions make Will lose his grip; he'll have to act fast if he doesn't want to fall

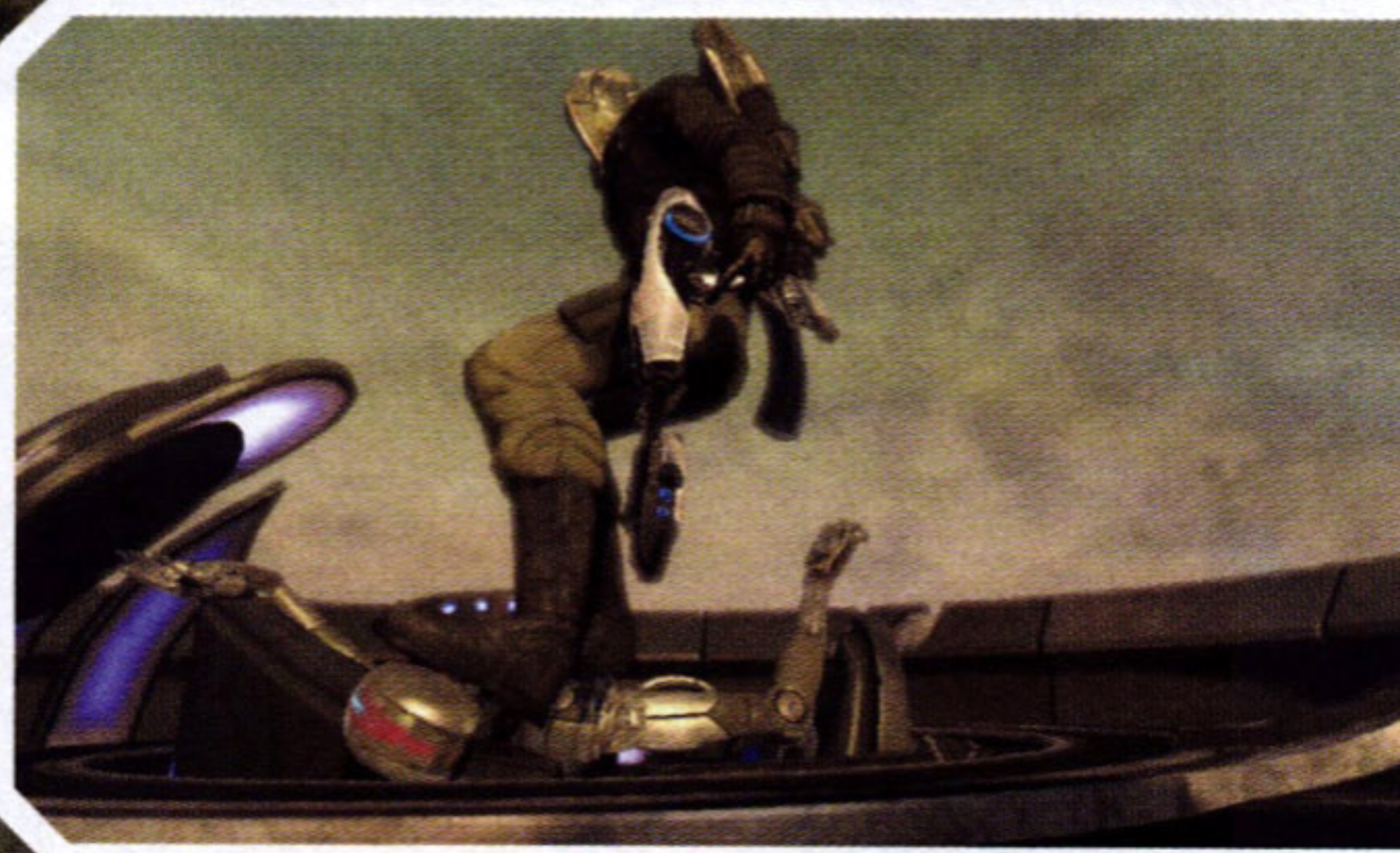



GET A GRIP

Dark Void's grip system, which Will uses to cling to rocky ledges, comes into play during aerial battles as well. Approaching a Watcher UFO, Will bounces around the hull of the ship until he finds an opportunity to rip through the craft's plating, open the cockpit, and toss out the pilot. These won't be scripted events, however. These vehicles fly uncontrolled until Will takes over, and he might have to abandon ship if the UFO crashes into a mountain or another ship.



■ The jetpack won't just be useful in the sky. Will eventually learns a variety of uses for it during ground combat





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Fracture

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS
> **DEVELOPER** DAY 1 STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER

CIVIL SPLIT

It's 2161, and political turmoil has shaken and reshaped the social structure of the United States. When a presidential decree outlaws the use of genetic engineering on human beings, the social divide splits open and cuts a bloody swath across our nation. For the first time in 300 years, the U.S. is on the brink of civil war. As part of the Atlantic Alliance, we get sent into San Francisco. The mission is to apprehend General Sheridan, leader of the Pacifican Army. We're going in hot, and we're going in fast: These are the first three hours of Fracture.

The game throws you right into the terrain-deforming action the title is now known for. Using your guns and a variety of grenades, you learn how to build up or cave in the ground around you. This is useful in battle for confusing your enemies or throwing up a quick mound for cover, and there are loads of practical uses outside of combat. Within the first half-hour we had formed caves in the ground to find hidden tunnels, raised it in other areas to overcome

what would have been impassable obstacles, and reshaped the earth in creative ways to solve some puzzles, such as raising a collapsed bridge.

While the terrain deformation is the game's most touted feature, our favorite experience came from playing around with its unique arsenal. One of the more amusing guns is the Torpedo. As the name implies, the device fires off powerful rockets that burrow under soft ground, bypassing certain obstacles until they contact with a sturdy structure or you choose to remotely detonate them.

About halfway through our war on San Francisco we found our favorite weapon: the vortex grenade. We first tested this new toy on a group of enemies gathered near an open field. The grenade immediately produced a hurricane force air-funnel that sucked in all nearby enemies along with a few loose boulders from a nearby rock face. Our manmade weather anomaly twirled about debris like a powerful blender before suddenly exploding and spitting everything back into a

useless heap. It was awesome to behold.

We continued our chase after Sheridan, but before we could capture him the ground beneath us began to shake violently. This wasn't your average California quake. Out of the ground a walking metal monstrosity arose like a Grecian titan that could crush one of Halo's Scarabs under the weight of one leg. With one well-timed super jump we soared 30 feet through the air and boarded at the base of the vehicle's foot.

The curtain closed on our demo before we could attack the walking skyscraper, but at least we got a good sense for how far the game has come in recent months. If Day 1 Studios continues to polish the game's remaining rough edges in these last few months before the ship date, we'll have plenty of motivation to go back and finish that fight when Fracture hits retail shelves this October. ■ ■ ■



■ Throughout the game you'll gain new technologies that augment your abilities, giving you increased melee damage or super jumping abilities that send you a couple stories into the air



■ Various parts of the environment can be used to your advantage. This rock face, for example, can be destroyed, burying your foes under heaps of rubble



■ This is the Dreadnaught, a giant walking mech buried under San Francisco



■ The Black Widow fires off a string of sticky grenades that can be remotely detonated



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Resident Evil 5

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 2009

ALL I SEE IS DEATH

EVIL REVISITED

We know what you're thinking: "Didn't GI just do a big preview on all the Resident Evil 5 speculation and conjecture?" We sure did, but it just so happens that we recently saw a playable version of the game and learned a few more exciting tidbits that we couldn't wait to pass on. Resident Evil 5 is one of those titles we hungrily await with wide eyes and frothy mouths (quite frankly it's a little scary). Rest assured we're dedicated to passing on every scrap of information we can about the game until it's released. If creative producer Jun Takeuchi even sneezes we'll let you know.

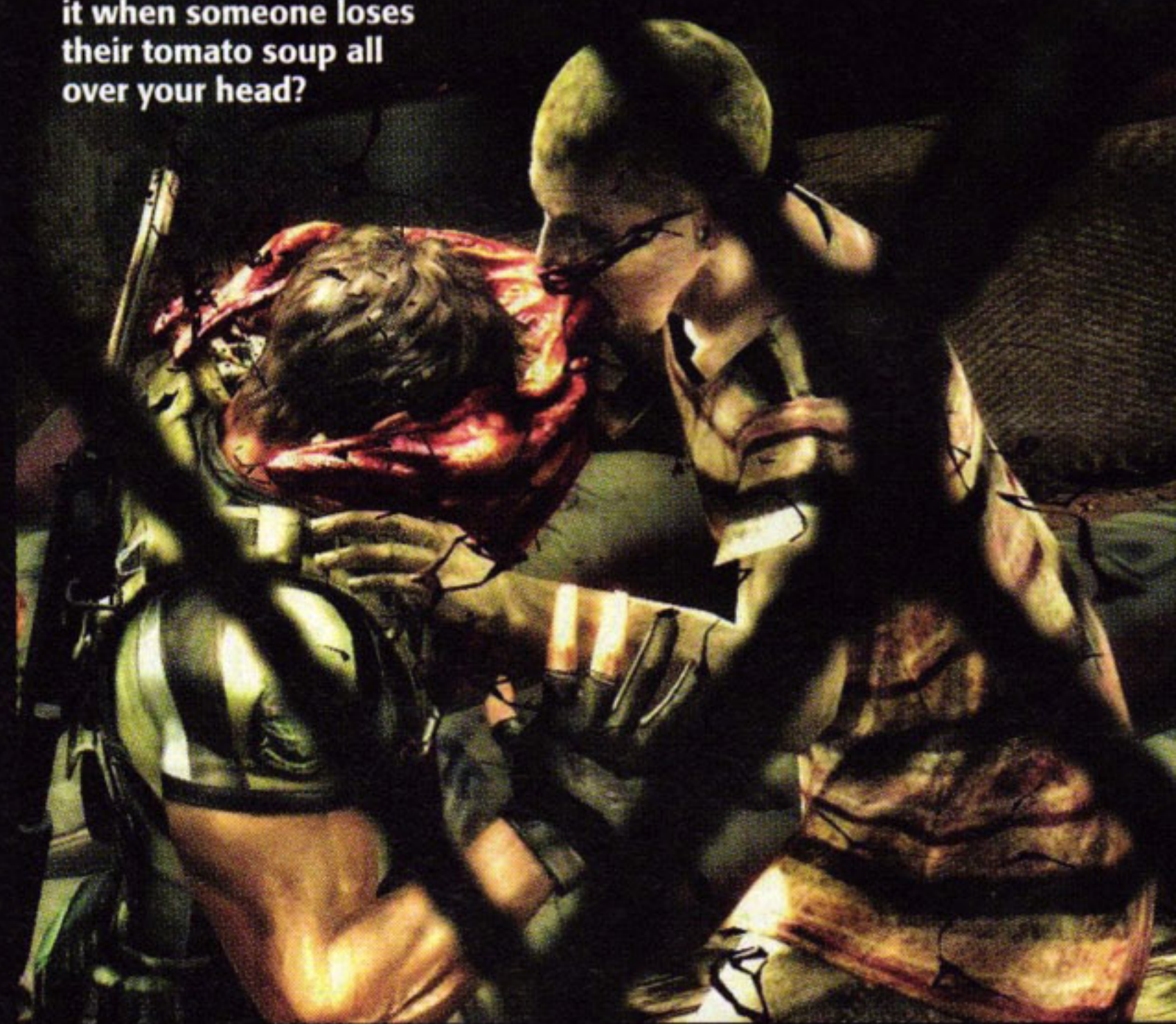


■ That's not a knife! Chris' hand-to-hand weapon of choice is a lengthy machete. That means it might actually be useful this time around

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

In some ways this newest entry in the famed series will be going back to the beginning. Takeuchi told us that he was excited to take Resident Evil into Africa, because the continent is – in some ways – the origin of humanity. This idea of primal origins is going to be very thematic for RE 5. Not only will the game's story involve the origins of the original virus – the Progenitor virus fans will remember from Code Veronica – but Takeuchi promises many of the mysteries surrounding Chris Redfield will also be resolved.

■ Don't you just hate it when someone loses their tomato soup all over your head?



DESTRUCTION

In the playable demo, protagonist Chris Redfield enters a large shantytown, a space four times the size of RE 4's opening area. The demo exhibits the game's new focus on wide-open areas. Capcom plans to open up Resident Evil's gameplay, giving players more options to go where they want and do what they want. As Chris explores the environment, a hulk of a man wielding a battle hammer shows up, the perfect showcase for the game's new destructible environments. As he chases after Chris, the enemy tears apart the town, smashing fruit stands, cement walls, and even other enemies. Watching the debris fly is both thrilling and terrifying, and we can't wait to learn more about how this new element plays into the game's action and puzzles.





LOCATION IS EVERYTHING

Africa has been the big talking point for Capcom up until now, but for the first time it has been suggested that the game could move to other locales at some point. Takeuchi was very cryptic on the subject, but he did promise that RE 5 would have the most diverse and interesting environments of any entry in the series.



MYSTERY GIRL REVEALED: YES, SHE'S MYSTERIOUS

Capcom didn't reveal the identity of the dark-haired mystery woman who's appeared in trailers and screens, but it did confirm that she is a brand-new character who will play an important role in the game. Though we don't know her name, we do know that she speaks with what sounds like a South African accent and at some point she will team up with Chris. Capcom has also stated that a large feature of the gameplay has yet to be announced. Does this mean co-op? We'd like to think so.



■ What would Resident Evil be without dogs? We're just glad there aren't birds in Africa – those things are annoying. There aren't birds in Africa, right?

THE REDFIELDS

Now that we know the mystery woman is a new character, does this mean Claire Redfield is out of the picture? In one of his interviews talking about Chris, Takeuchi mentioned "the Redfields," plural. This seems to imply that someone else with Chris' last name (his little sis, perhaps?) will make an appearance in the game.

GAME ON!

Last year's three vs. three online play was one of the star features of the game. This year EA is upping the ante by allowing players to skate with a full team of online teammates in six vs. six matches. The online league play has also received major upgrades, including player-for-player trades, playoffs, and full stat tracking.

■ Finally, the Wild add some real firepower to their lineup (this caption was written by Bertz's wildest dreams)

■ Xbox 360 users can create custom soundtracks for each arena. Joe's team, the Chaska Chodes, exclusively uses Hall & Oates songs, which is why Bertz demanded a trade to the Wild

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NHL 09

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9

THE QUEST FOR THE CUP

NHL 08 was the best hockey game since the Genesis glory years when Gretzky and Lemieux were lighting the lamp. But EA Canada has no intention of NHL being a one-year wonder like the last few Stanley Cup winners. With the laundry list of improvements 09 offers, we may be witnessing the start of a dynasty.

The skill stick control is at the center of the NHL renaissance, and this year further improves the revolutionary control scheme. Star players like Sidney Crosby and Alexander "The Great" Ovechkin can now dominate inferior opponents with one-handed dekes. Defensemen can finally counter with their own suite of skill-stick tools like the quick poke or stick lift to prevent one-timers or passes across the goalmouth. The intended result is a more balanced game where well-timed defensive parries can offset killer offensive moves. The revamped strategy also lends the game another level of realism with the new dump-and-chase tactic, an NHL staple.

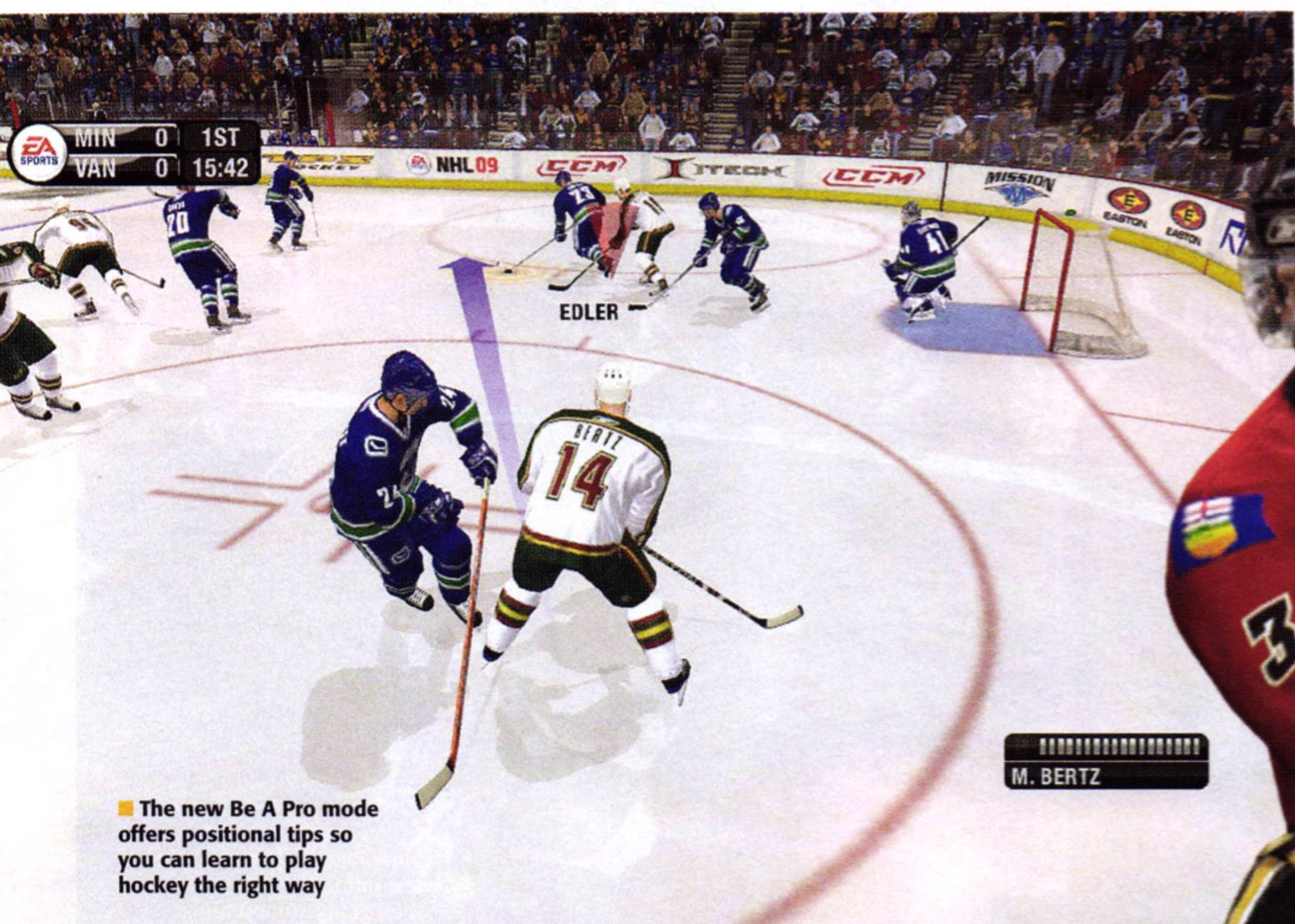
EA has gone back to the drawing board to rework the neglected Create-A-Play feature to include breakouts and assignments for every player on the ice. This mode was tough to get the hang of for noobs, so EA has added a video tutorial to teach people the ropes. Each NHL team also comes with its own set of plays that reflect their real world playing style. This year also reintroduces the oft-requested offensive and defensive line changes for the first time on next-gen consoles.

One of the few big flaws in NHL 08 was the almost non-existent checking system; hard hitters like Zdeno Chara rarely delivered epic open-ice hits, and knocking a player off the puck seemed to take an act of providence. This year features a drastically improved way for doling out justice; over 100 new checking animations and a new collision system means bruisers like Dion Phaneuf can decapitate unsuspecting forwards with punishing blows. The new emphasis on hockey's more violent nature carries over to dropping the gloves, as the fighting has been completely rebuilt to deliver more realistic fisticuffs.

All of these welcome additions add up to our most anticipated sports game of the year. The NHL may be having a hard time attracting more fans, but with this gargantuan feature set, EA's next hockey title sure shouldn't. ■ ■ ■

■ Upload your remarkable goals online – like Gaborik's amazing one-handed deke – so your friends can marvel at your skills

■ With the new right analog stick lift ability, defensemen are no longer helpless against snipers camping for one-timers



■ The new Be A Pro mode offers positional tips so you can learn to play hockey the right way

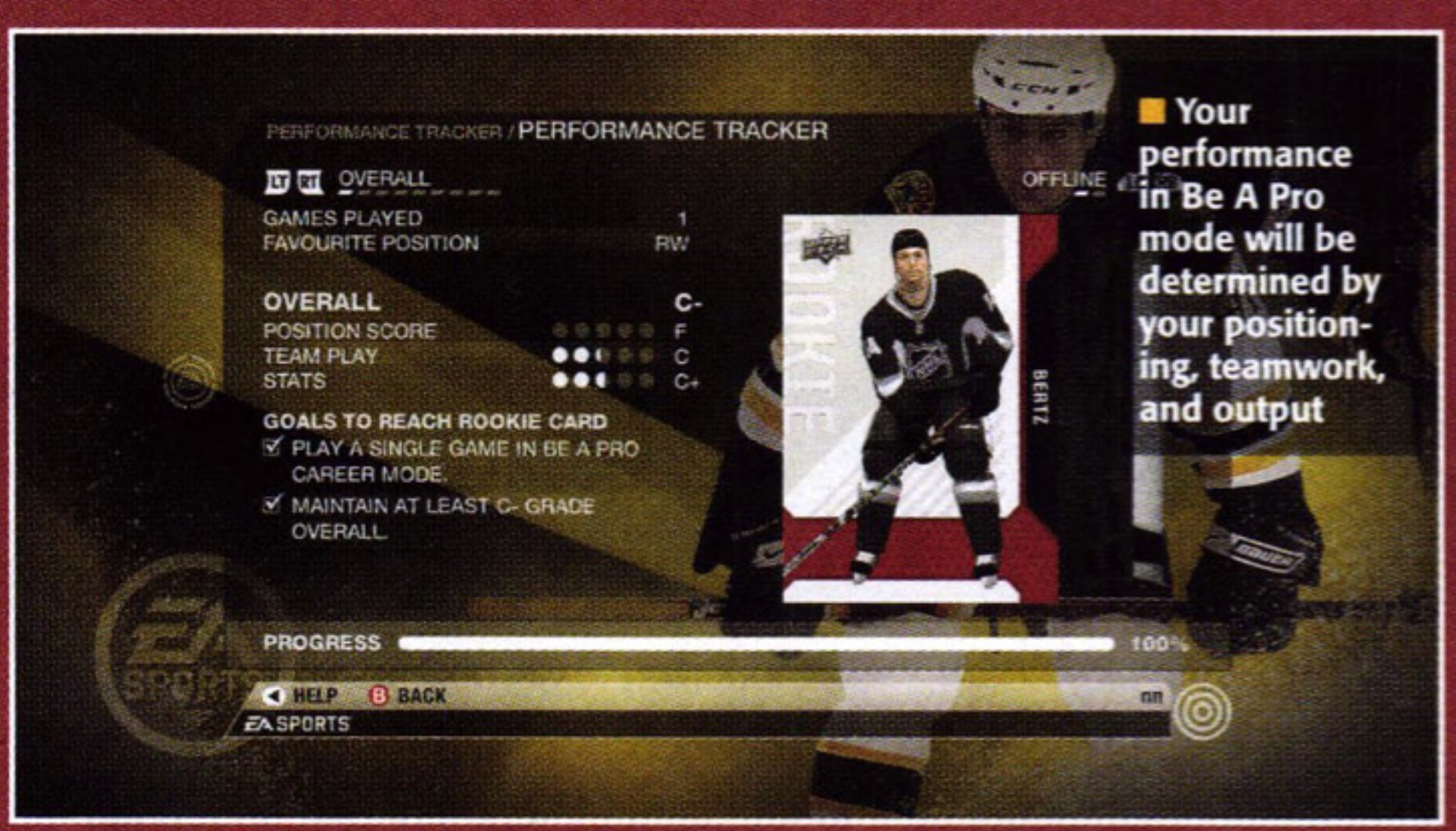
M. BERTZ



■ Checking is back, as Phaneuf demonstrates on the now-broken Oiler, Ales Hensky

■ Calgary Flames defenseman Dion Phaneuf is the cover athlete for NHL 09

MMO, SPORTS STYLE!
 Since NHL 09 features six-on-six online leagues and the new Be A Pro mode, it only makes sense that they combine the two to create the first quality sports MMO title, right? With the EA Sports Hockey League, this Holy Grail of sports games is about to be achieved. The league allows you and your fellow puckheads to join a team (or "guild" in nerdspeak) of up to 50 people and compete for the world championship. As with the Be A Pro mode, you will create your player, choose his playing style, and start with a basic set of attributes. Then you can set up a team, choosing your name, jerseys (from the pool of NHL, AHL, and euro league options, along with a few custom jerseys), and invite friends to the squad. Only six players from a team can compete in any given game, but if you have another six players from your team online, they can start another game representing your organization. The competition is broken up by skill-based divisions, which you can climb by improving your team's winning percentage. If your club is struggling, relegation is a possibility. After a yet-to-be determined deadline, EA will take a snapshot of the league standings and select the top teams from the best division to compete in the playoffs for the cup. The winning teams and star players will receive big prizes from EA, which have yet to be revealed.



■ Your performance in Be A Pro mode will be determined by your positioning, teamwork, and output

LACE YOUR SKATES, ROOKIE

For all of you who missed your shot at the pros, here's your chance. NHL 09's Be A Pro mode allows you to create a player and work your way up from the minors to the big time. The full-blown career mode allows you to play any position, and the type of player you choose to become will determine your career goals. Snipers must light the lamp for their team, whereas stay-at-home defensemen focus on cleaning up the trash in front of the net. After each shift, your coach evaluates you on three areas of your performance: positioning, team play, and stats. Play well enough and you'll earn a role on the power play or penalty kill. If you're tired of riding the pine, you can play as another skater between shifts. Players track their careers through Upper Deck hockey cards. As you work your way from a pond hockey grinder to an NHL legend, you will unlock new cards. Bonus feature: You can choose the images for your cards by taking in-game screenshots.



■ With 100 more goalie animations, saves should look even more realistic this year



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Midnight Club: Los Angeles

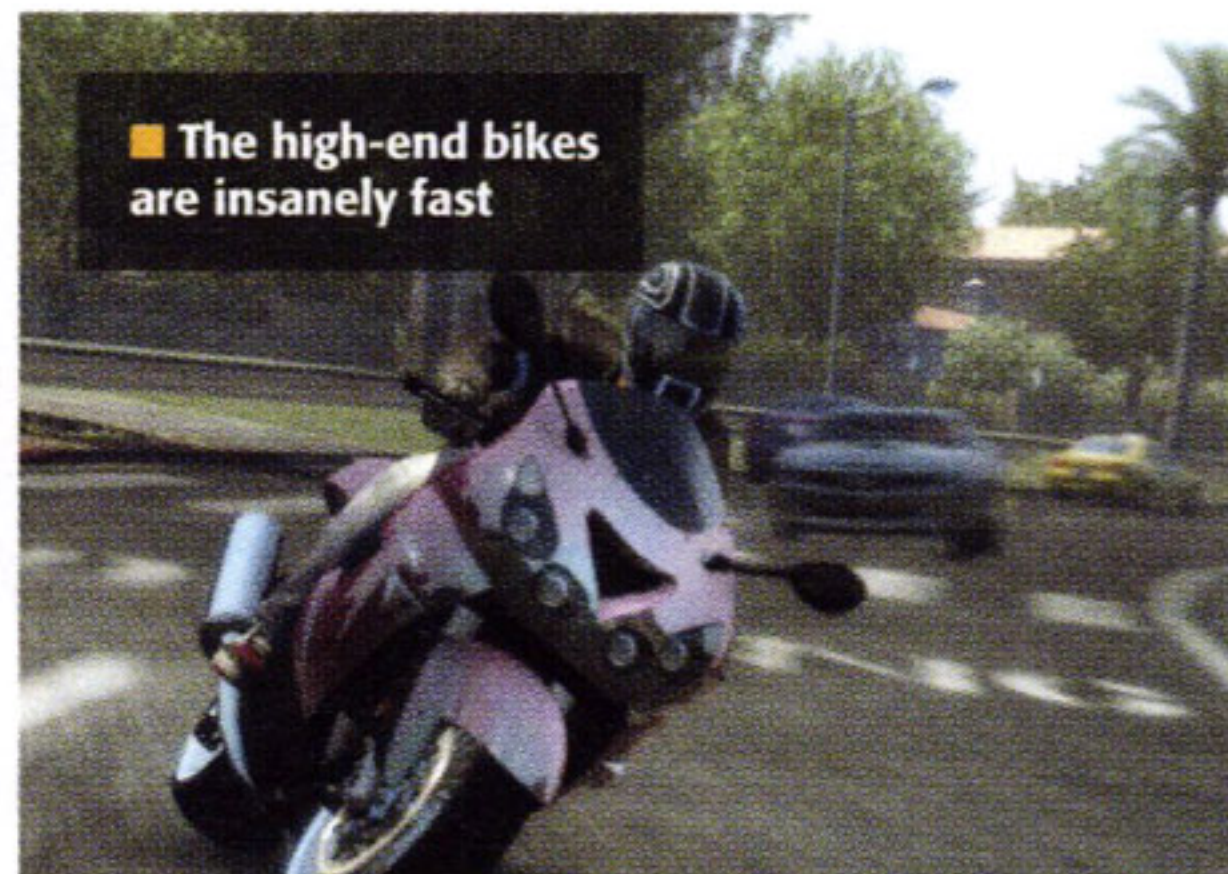
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9

BURNING UP THE STRIP

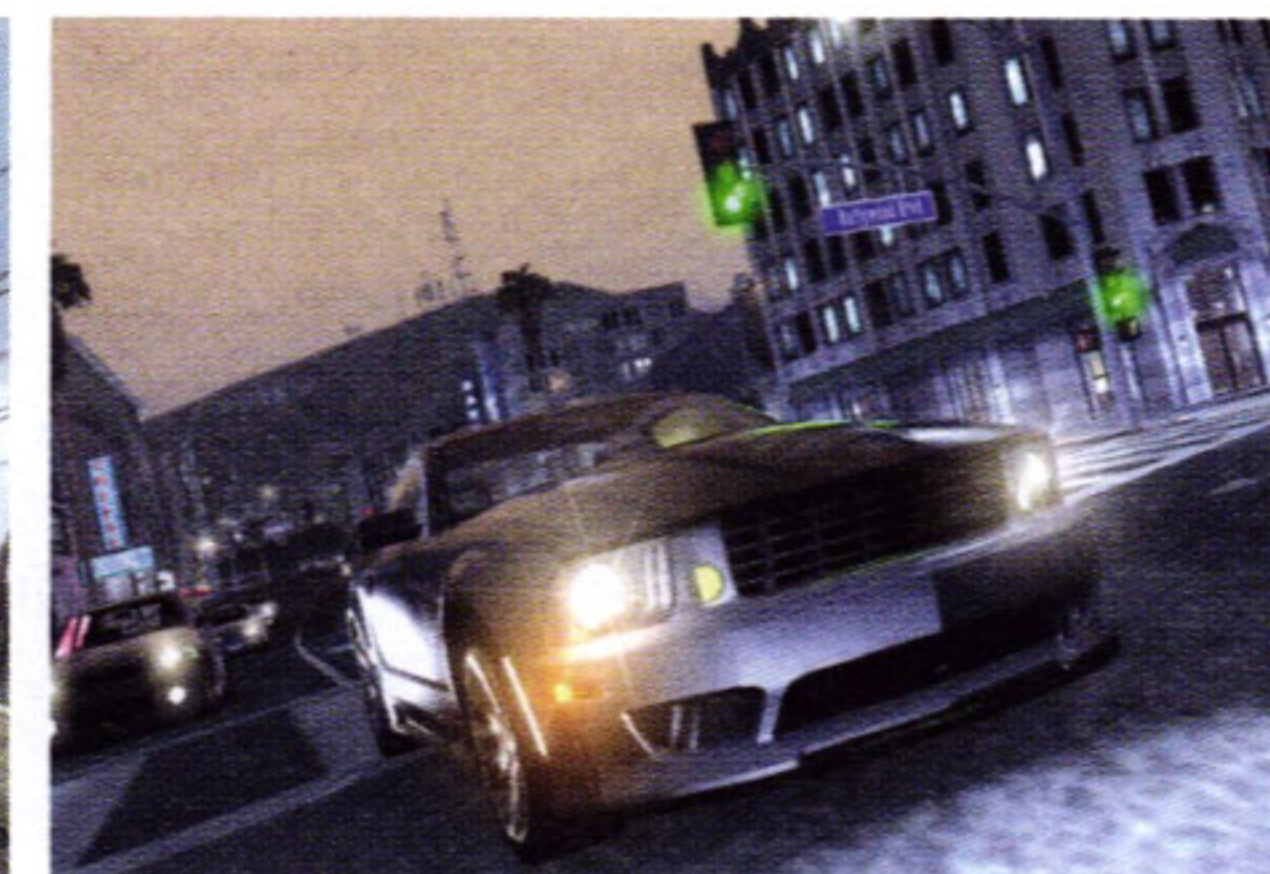
■ The game features a new camera mode that swings the view out to the side of the car when going around turns



■ As you can see, the game features an amazing selection of cars



■ The high-end bikes are insanely fast



After seeing a promising demo some months ago, we were finally given the chance to get our hands on the wheel of *Midnight Club: Los Angeles*, and came away very impressed.

As the title suggests, the three-city structure of *Midnight Club 3* has been abandoned in favor of one giant metropolis, in this case an "interpretation" of L.A. that manages to capture the spirit of the sprawling urban center without being geographically accurate. Honestly, it's quite thrilling to see in action. While the level of graphical realism and the speeds at which the game moves will blow you away, the rest of the game wisely builds on the foundation of previous entries. It's not so much a dramatic reinvention (why fix what isn't broken?) as a summation of

Midnight Club's considerable strengths, packed with improvements both large and small to please longtime fans.

While it's not in the title, *DUB* magazine is still onboard to provide guidance on car customization features, which exceed even the options in *Midnight Club 3*. From scissor doors to undercar neon in the color of your choice, you can craft cars that are literally one of a kind with kits, rims, and parts from most of the major manufacturers. Interiors are now fully modeled (for the new cockpit gameplay view), and can be color-matched and altered with a host of gauges, dashboards, seats, and wheels. You'll also be able to custom create vinyl overlays and share (or possibly sell) them online with friends. While we don't have a full list of cars, this build was packed

to the gills with classics new and old, including the Lamborghini Gallardo, Chevy Camaro Concept, Chrysler 300, '70 Challenger, and even the legendary frat boy motorcycle the Kawasaki Ninja. Fans will also be pleased to note that the game's special power-up abilities Zone, Aggro, Roar, and the new EMP (electromagnetic pulse) can be assigned to any vehicle this time around, meaning you won't have to forgo the car of your dreams because you don't like its designated ability.

The races are largely what you've come to expect, although longer and more intense than before given the larger amount of real estate at Rockstar San Diego's disposal. In addition to the familiar checkpoint races, there are also new "Landmark" contests where you race between real-life L.A. locales

without the aid of checkpoints. For instance, we tore a 100-mph path between the Santa Monica Pier and the legendary Chateau Marmont Hotel. There's a ton of content here, and the game has been designed so you'll see more of it in the way you choose. Since races are unlocked via "rep" points instead of straight wins and losses, players will be able to skip particularly frustrating events and even create "playlists" of their favorite events.

With a great feature set, insanely fast racing action, and the challenging yet approachable control that has been the hallmark of the series, *Midnight Club: Los Angeles* is shaping up to be not only the strongest entry in the series thus far, but one of 2008's best racing experiences. ■ ■ ■



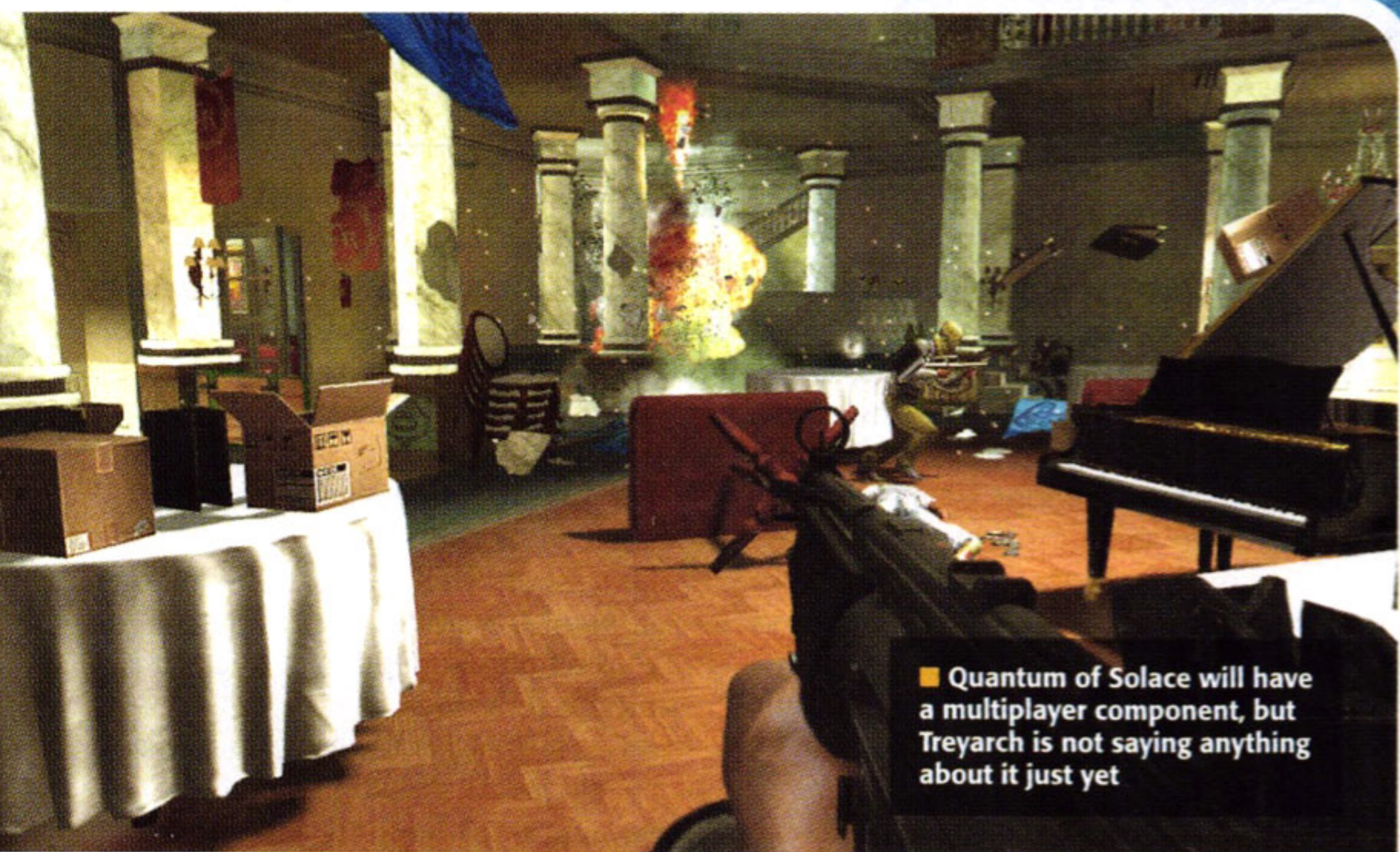
■ The voice and likeness of Daniel Craig have been confirmed for the game

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

Quantum of Solace

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER TREYARCH (360, PS3), BEENOX (Wii, PC), EUROCOM (PS2) > RELEASE FALL

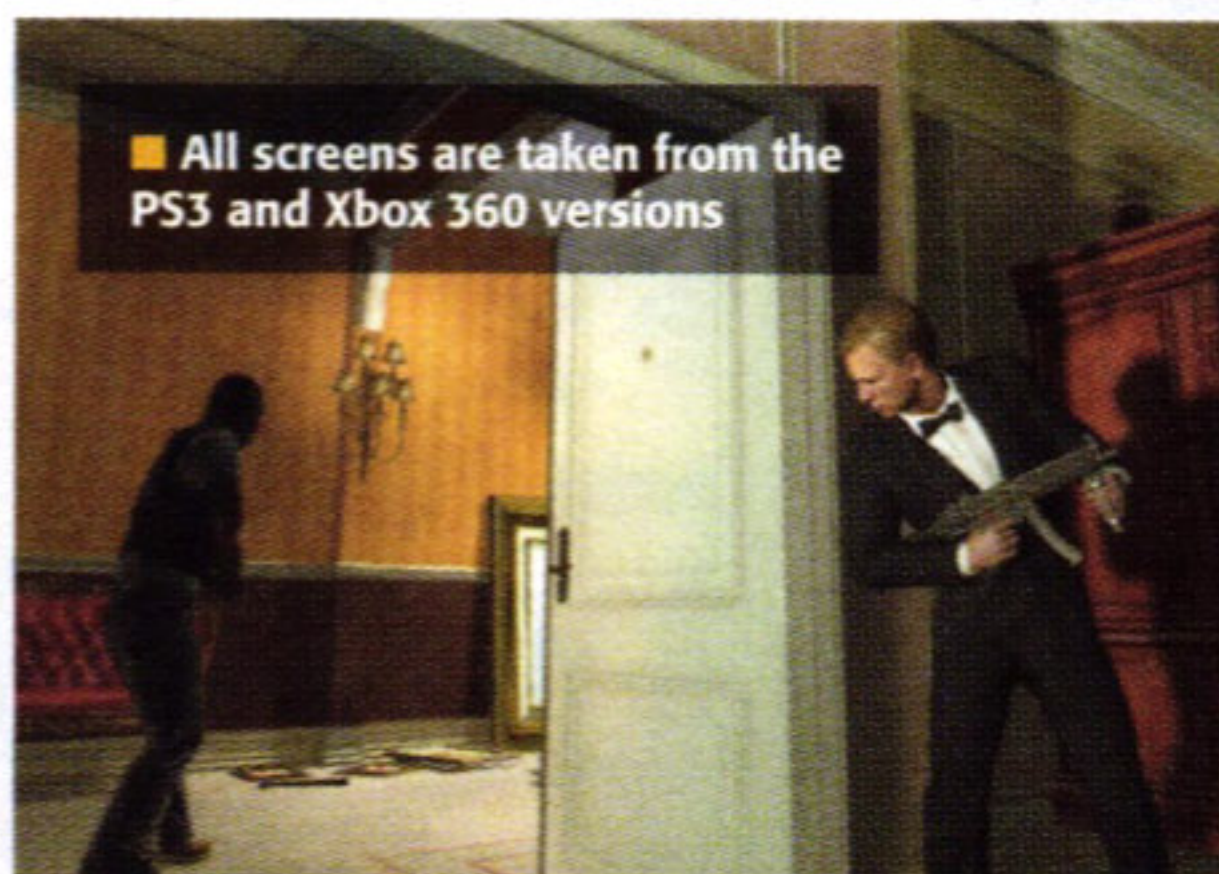
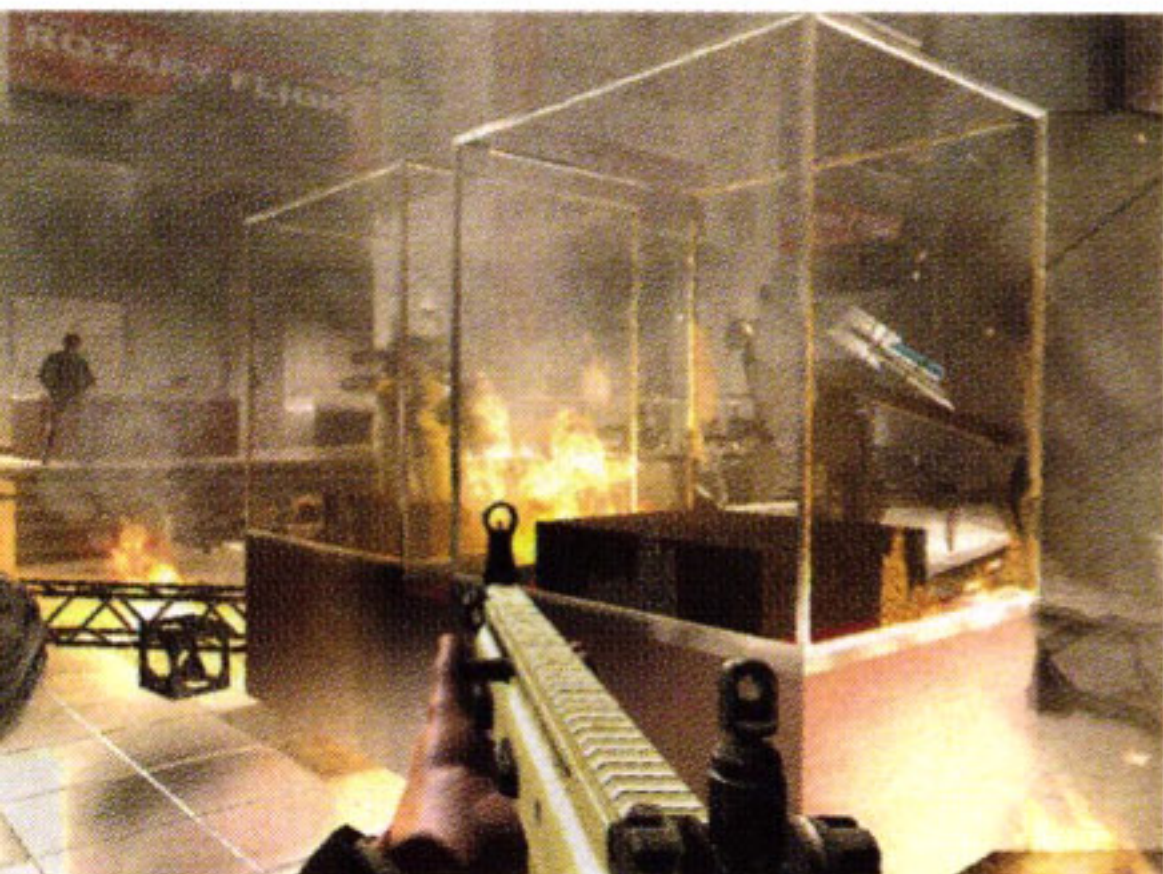
BE THE NEW BOND



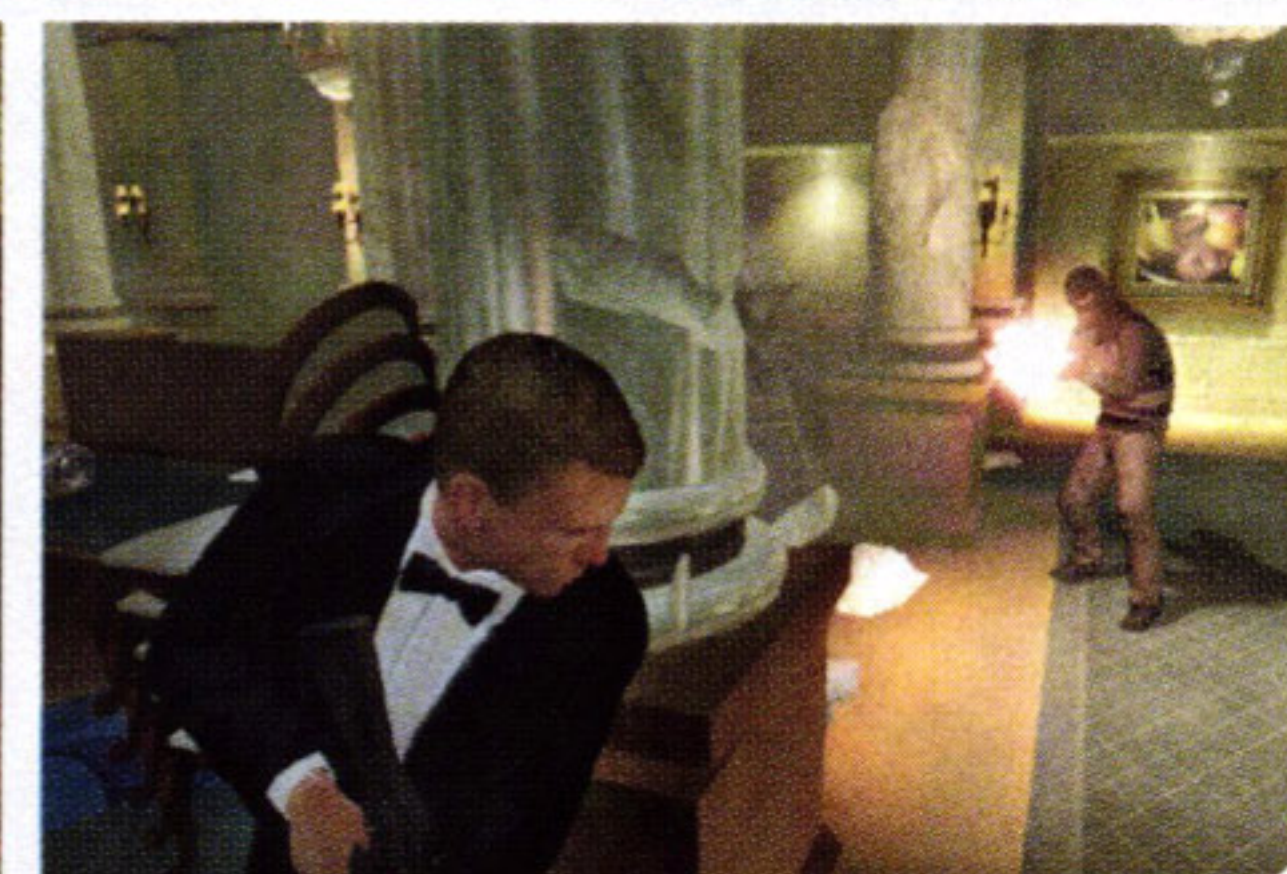
■ Quantum of Solace will have a multiplayer component, but Treyarch is not saying anything about it just yet



■ Treyarch was fortunate enough to have an on-set photographer for the filming of Quantum of Solace to take reference photos for the game



■ All screens are taken from the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions



The question on everyone's mind: Can there be a better Bond than GoldenEye? In its first stab at the James Bond license, Activision hopes it can top one of the classic first-person shooters in video game history, and developer Treyarch has been given the license to kill.

The game follows the story of both *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace* – since the movies take place only an hour apart. In fact, you can choose to start with either movie, and both will be represented in the game equally. The intense, quick-moving free-running scene at the beginning of *Casino Royale* is in the game, with Bond's moves executed through contextual button presses. The game

surveys exotic locations and diverse terrain such as London, Bolivia, Miami, and Venice – the site of the final scene in *Casino Royale*. In the demo, we witnessed Bond's struggle to save Vesper Lynd by picking off henchmen while the building slowly sunk.

Quantum of Solace – crafted using the Call of Duty 4 engine – has a different gameplay tone than the hit shooter. While some scenes, notably one we witnessed in a upscale European bath house, featured waves of enemies, Bond will also be utilizing stealth and cover in combat to take out smaller batches of rented muscle. Players can sneak up on hired toughs and dish out an elbow to the head or a

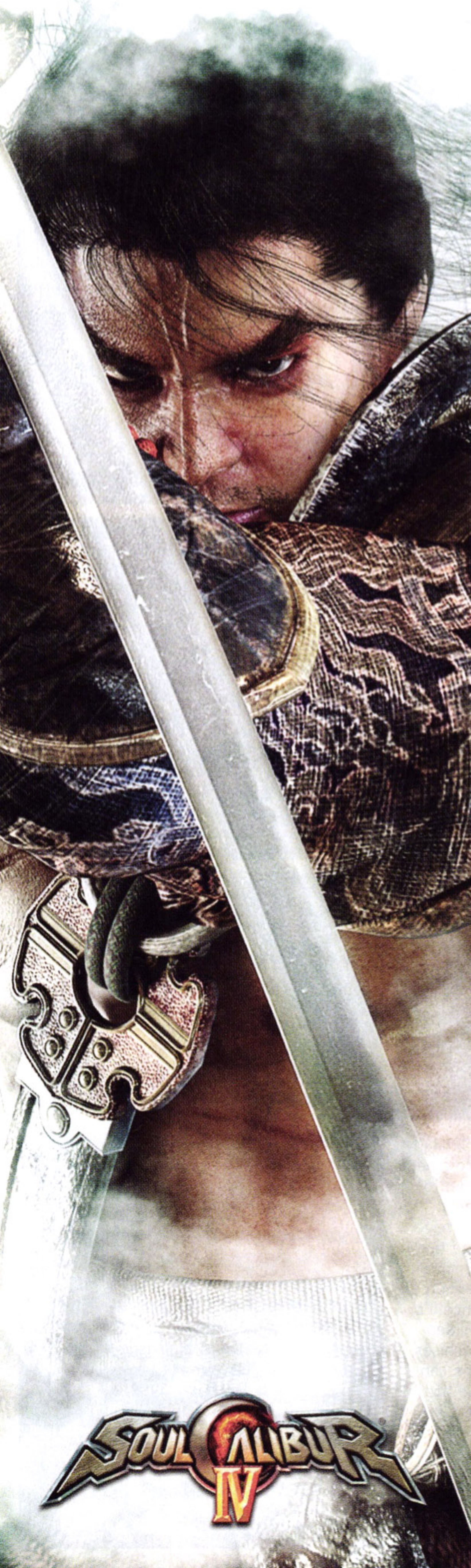
silenced bullet to the temple. Similarly to *Rainbow Six Vegas*, the predominant first-person camera will zoom out to third-person as Bond leans against cover – which degrades with damage.

The team at Treyarch explained that it is approaching the title as a launch of a new franchise – with the intention of getting it right the first time. Since it's Activision's first shot at one of video games' more up-and-down franchises, we certainly hope that this game can mirror the turnaround that Bond has experienced in theaters. ■ ■ ■

WHAT THE HELL IS A QUANTUM OF SOLACE?

The title of the new Bond movie may sound like something only George Lucas could think of, but Bond himself – Daniel Craig – knows what it's all about. "Ian Fleming [Bond's creator – ed.] had written about relationships," Craig told BBC News Online. "When they go wrong, when there's nothing left, when the spark is gone, when the fire's gone out, there's no quantum of solace. At the end of the last movie, Bond has the love of his life taken away from him and he never got that quantum of solace."

STRENGTH



SOUL CALIBUR
IV



■ Maps are accordingly massive for plenty of swinging room

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Bionic Commando

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER GRIN > RELEASE TBA

SWINGERS' CLUB

Capcom's been plenty generous with details on the single-player aspects of Bionic Commando, and now it's finally talking multiplayer. Developer Grin is taking inspiration from Quake III Arena's fast and straightforward gameplay style. Instead of crafting a bunch of wild new match types, the team is sticking with old standards like capture the flag and deathmatch and relying on bionic enhancements to shake things up.

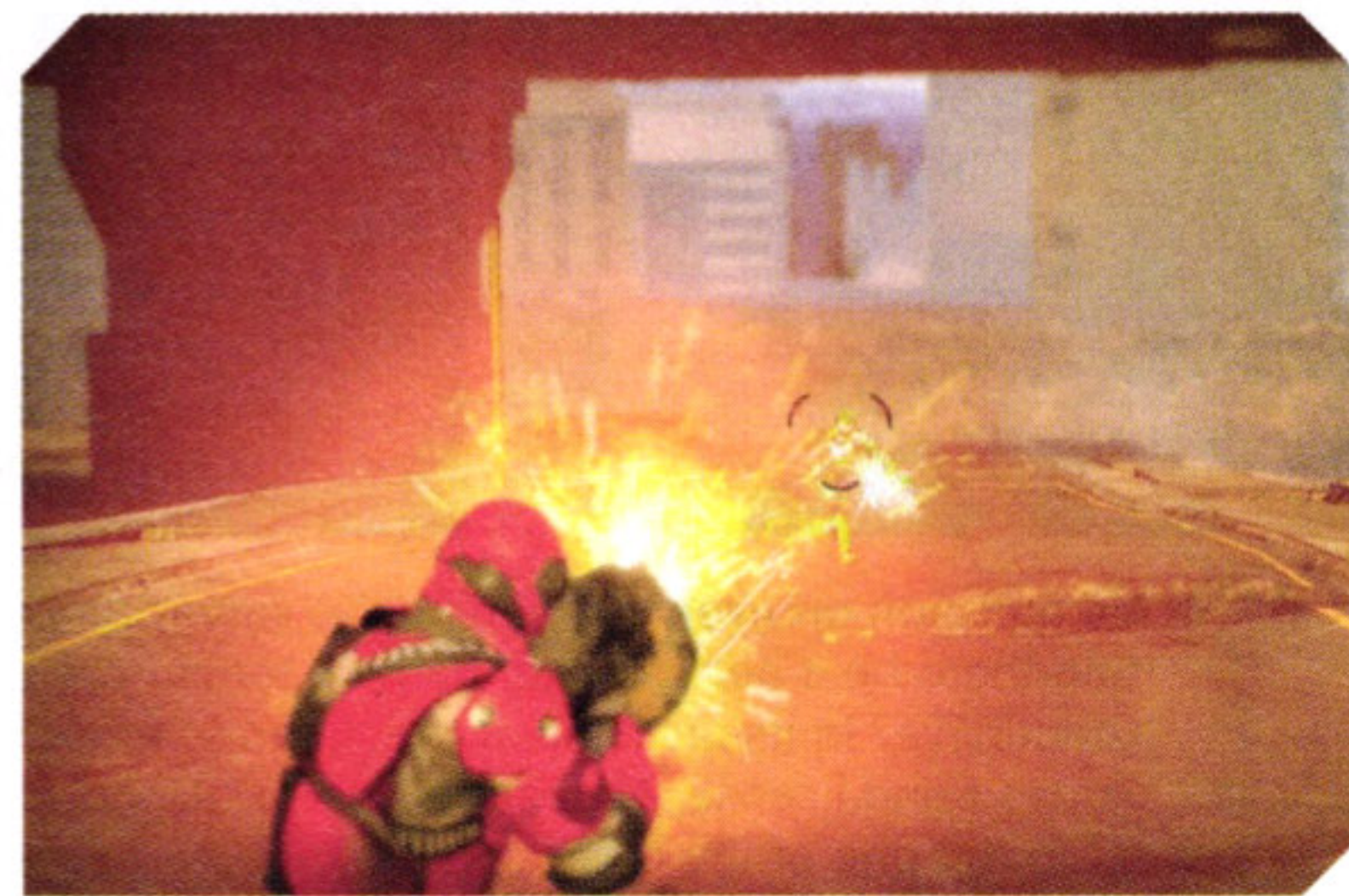
Up to 10 players can choose from different brightly colored armor designs, similar to Halo's Spartans, and swing into action. The map we

saw was quite large and included plenty of skyscrapers and decrepit raised highway roads. While we didn't get our hands on the multiplayer, the demo looked absolutely hectic, with troops swinging everywhere and guns firing from every direction. These aerial swing tricks are a great way to get around and dodge gunfire, but they can also make aiming difficult. The developers hope this constant trade off between accuracy and mobility will keep things compelling.

Many moves and weapons from the single-player game make their way over to multiplayer as well.

Shoot an enemy with your grappling hook and you can pull yourself in for a dropkick or just remain attached as he clumsily attempts to swing around the city with a new passenger in tow. If an adversary is below, you can perform a ground slam that knocks him back – preferably off the edge of a building. Group match-making and in-depth stat tracking is promised as well.

Capcom still isn't giving up any kind of release window outside of this fiscal year. On the optimistic side this could mean fall, but it also leaves the company breathing room to stretch it out to March 2009. ■ ■ ■





PLAYSTATION 3

BioShock

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
 > **DEVELOPER** 2K BOSTON > **RELEASE** OCTOBER

CAN'T STOP SPLICING

If you had just escaped a crumbling underwater city filled with genetically mutated maniacs, what would you do? For anyone who has played BioShock, the answer is obvious: jump right back in. The PlayStation 3 re-release of our 2007 Game of the Year will give some gamers the chance to experience Rapture for the first time, and give others incentive to descend into the depths yet again.

The PS3 translation has all of the features of the Xbox 360 and PC iterations, including their post-release downloadable options like new plasmids and the ability to turn off Vita-chambers. Additionally, the widescreen problems some gamers experienced immediately after BioShock's initial launch won't be an issue on the PS3. The idea is to create the definitive version of the game without negating or overwriting any of the established story elements.

In addition, 2K Games says it is planning new content unique to the PS3. No details were available as of press time, but we do know that, contrary to Internet rumors, no new Big Daddies will be added. Shucks. The game will have some functionality tied specifically to the PlayStation 3's unique capabilities, though. If we had to guess, it is probably related to Home's mysterious Trophy system, which Sony has been tight-lipped about recently. This silence may not last for long; with E3 just around the corner, you can expect more details out of 2K and Sony regarding the enhanced features of this exceptional game. ■ ■ ■



■ Dressing up like an Ent is a bad idea when you are surrounded by flames



SOUL CALIBUR IV



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XBOX 360 LIVE

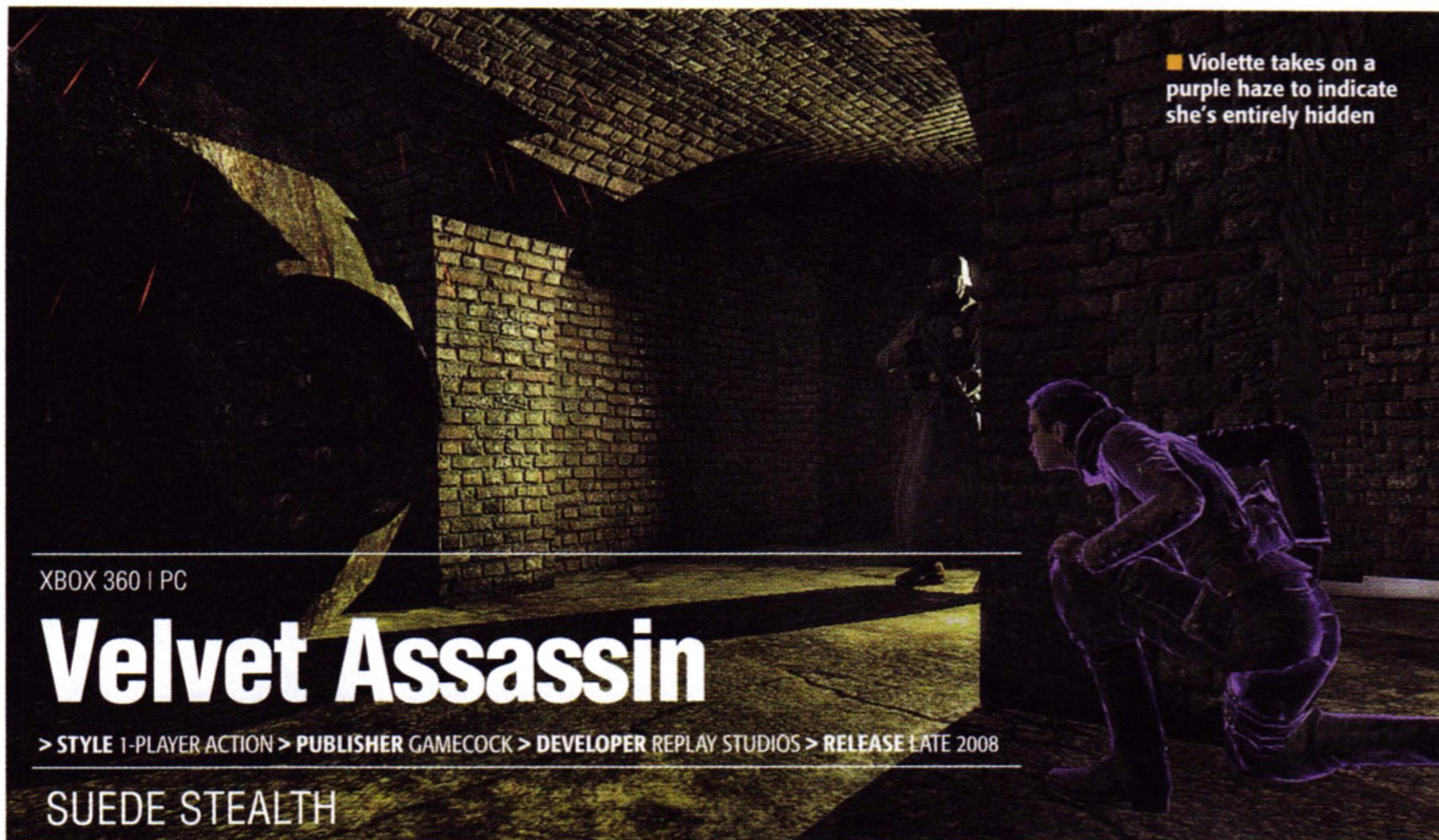


PLAYSTATION 3

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 Partial Nudity
 Sexual Themes
 Violence
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■ Violette takes on a purple haze to indicate she's entirely hidden

XBOX 360 | PC

Velvet Assassin

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER GAMECOCK > DEVELOPER REPLAY STUDIOS > RELEASE LATE 2008

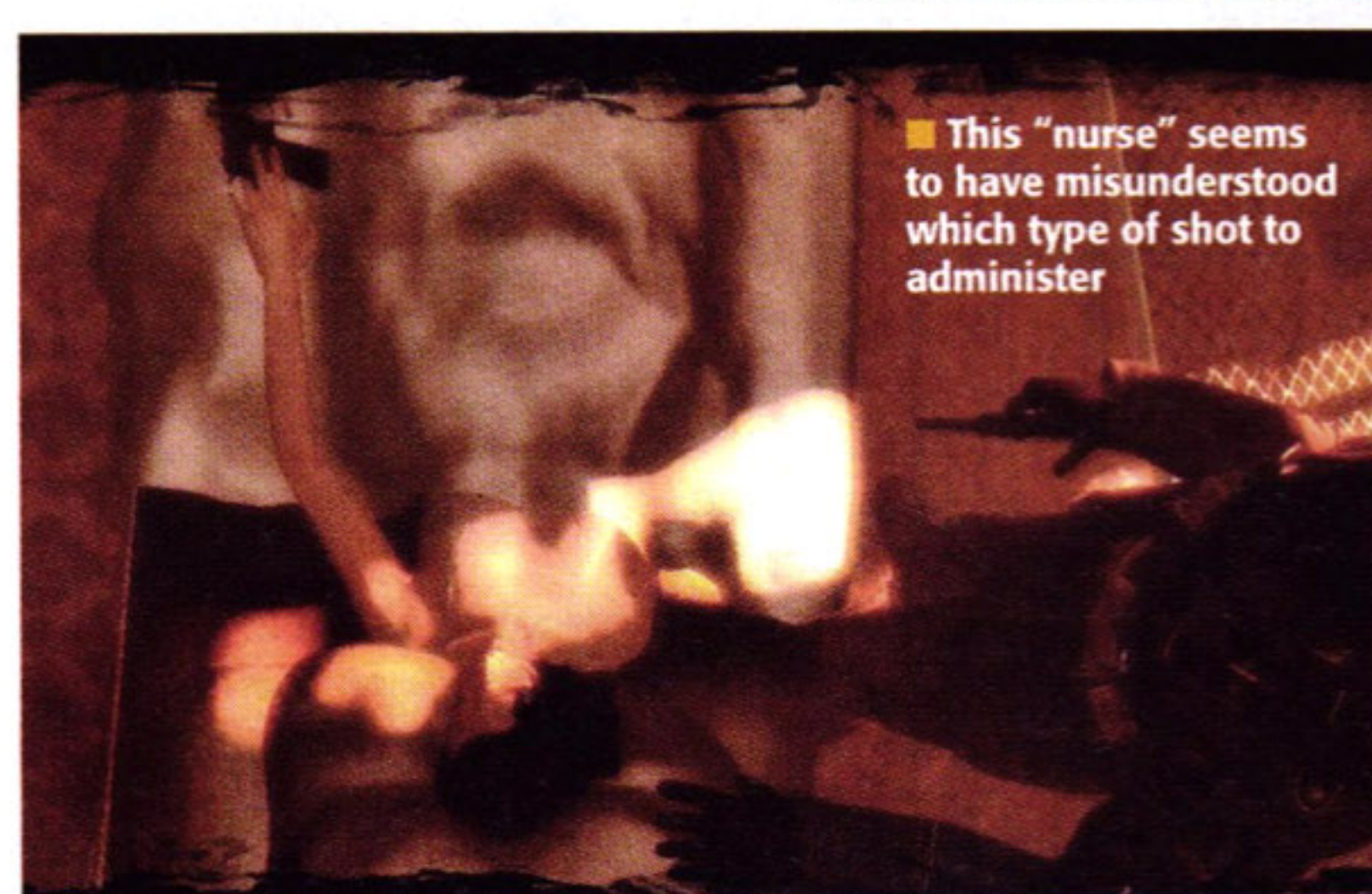
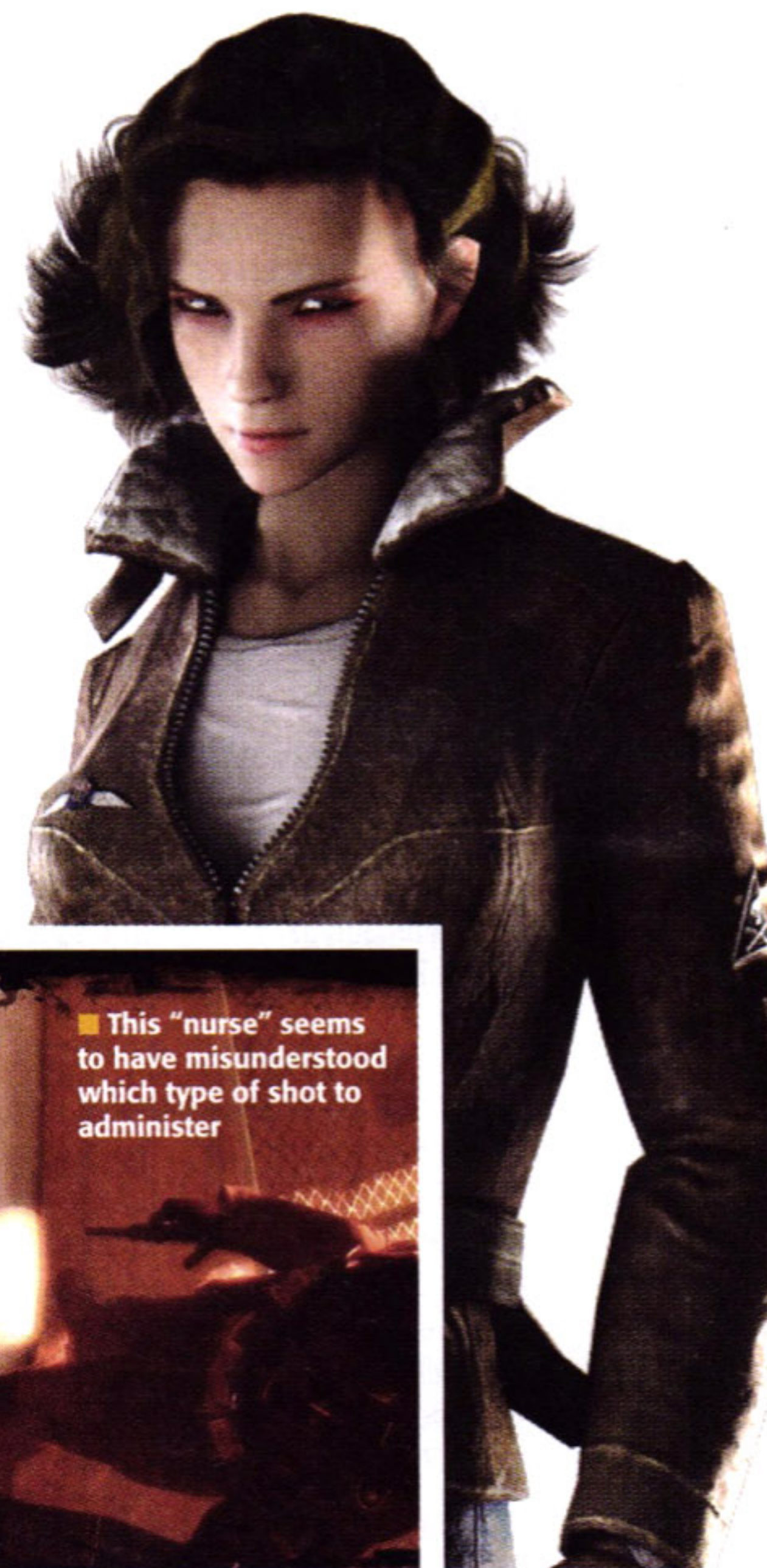
SUEDE STEALTH

World War II games are mostly run-and-gun explosion fests, but developer Replay Studios hopes to change things up with stealth and subterfuge. Main character Violette Summer is loosely based on actual war hero Violette Szabo. "She's a woman that lost her husband at age 21, just weeks after having their baby," says creative director Sascha Jungnickel. "She joined the SOE [Special Operations Executive, the British spy network - Ed.] and took part in several missions in France before being captured. To us, Violette Szabo is an archetype of an unbreakable spirit."

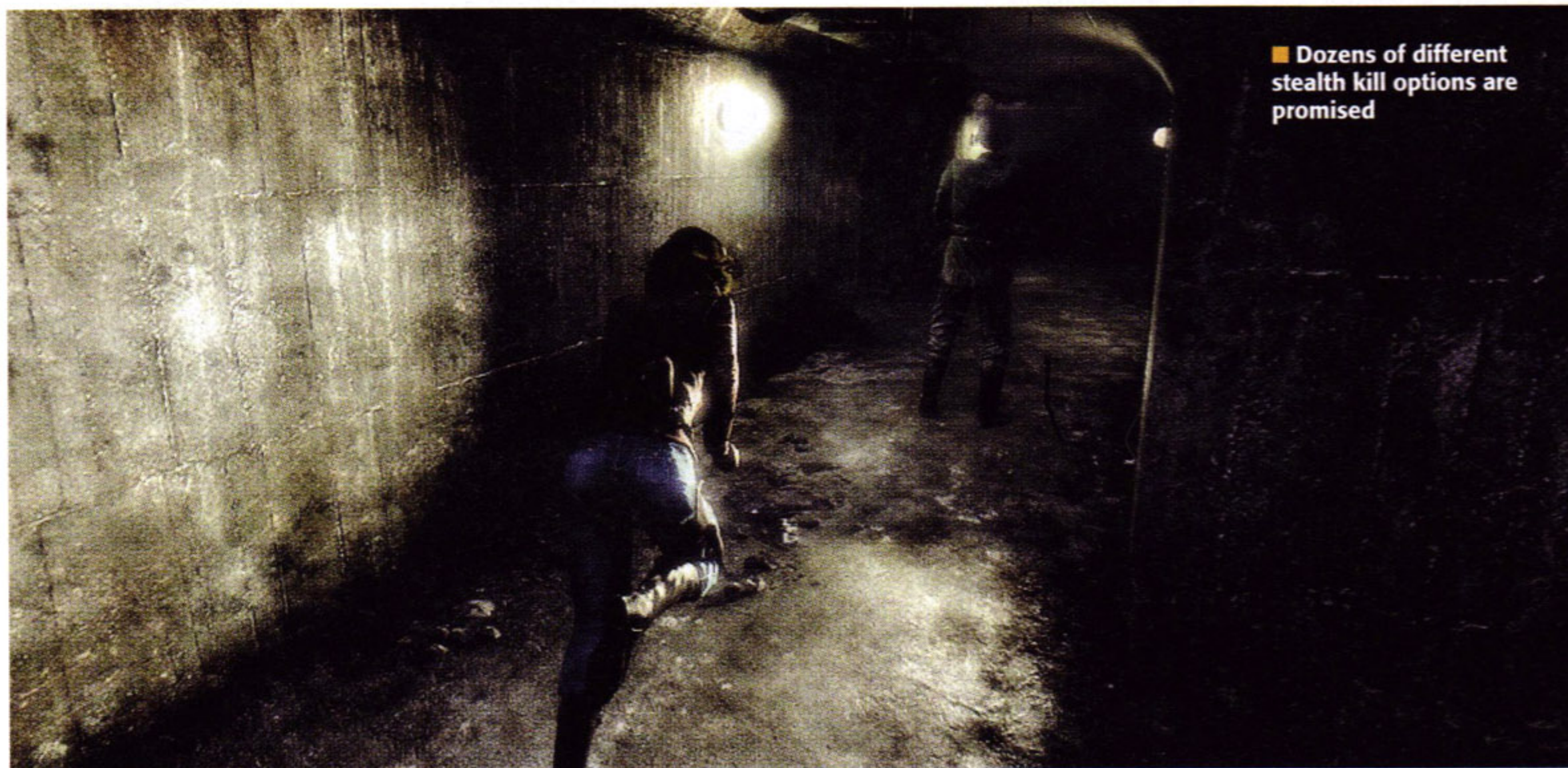
While the real Violette met an untimely end during the war, the fictional character narrates the story from a hospital bed through flashbacks. Spanning several missions throughout Europe, Violette works behind enemy lines to weaken Nazi forces. "The missions in Velvet Assassin are designed to showcase what an individual is able to do against an omnipresent, overpowering system," Jungnickel says. "For example, Violette's mission in Warsaw is to find three allied agents and deliver them cyanide to prevent the Nazis from interrogating them. In another mission she tries to prevent a

massacre on civilians. There are also classic sabotage missions where she has to blow up a fuel and ammo storage or take out a Nazi [leader]. The biggest explosions will be seen in the harbor of Hamburg, where Violette marks the targets for British bombers."

Since Velvet Assassin is told as a flashback, Violette being killed would contradict the game's premise. So, in a similar vein to Prince of Persia: Sands of Time, players can give her morphine to fix "incorrect" memories. A surrealistic visual filter appears on screen and time slows to a crawl allowing for easy kills and counters. Legal disclaimer: morphine does not fix all of life's problems, kiddies. ■ ■ ■



■ This "nurse" seems to have misunderstood which type of shot to administer



■ Dozens of different stealth kill options are promised

DAMNATION

WHAT'S WITHIN
YOUR SOUL?

SOUL CALIBUR IV

HOPE

FEAR

REDEMPTION





■ Full day and night cycles in addition to a constantly changing weather system not only add some variety to the visuals, but can also provide tactical cover



■ The game world is said to be over 30 square miles with up to 50 hours of possible gameplay including sidequests



■ Weapons age and degrade with time. This will lead to a grimmer look and up the chances that your weapon will jam

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Far Cry 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** FALL

AFRICA IS THE NEW NORMANDY

With high profile games like *Far Cry 2* and *Resident Evil 5* set in fictional African countries, we may be seeing a new trend emerging for this mostly untapped backdrop. "We chose [Africa] because it's really iconic as a visual universe," says art director Alex Amancio. In the general vein of *A Fistful of Dollars*, you go about escalating tensions between two rival factions in order to get to the arms dealer stoking the flames of civil war, The Jackal.

Our demo began with a charge from the APR faction to destroy a UFLO radio tower used to transmit propaganda and tactical information. On the way over, we got a call from fellow merc Frank asking us to stop by his safehouse beforehand. Once inside, he asked us if we'd blow up a pipeline run by a section chief illegally selling water to a neighboring country. Frank is actually one of eight selectable avatars at the outset of the game. Each of the seven characters you don't pick will become NPCs in the game that you can choose to help out, ignore, or simply kill. Ubisoft hopes this will create drastically varying experiences for players.

"Let's say one of your friends is playing the game," Amancio says. "You're talking to him about this mission that Frank just gave you to blow up the pipeline. He's like 'Frank? Who the hell's Frank? I never met him.' Or 'Frank? That guy I killed in the first five minutes? Wait a second. That pipeline? No, I defended that thing.'"

Amancio decides to help Frank out and drives a Datsun-esque car down a dirt road toward the camp. Just outside, he stops to attach an IED (improvised explosive device) to the car, and drives it straight through the gates. Once inside he runs over a few soldiers and crashes into ammo crates. He tosses a few grenades and detonates the car as he runs out of the camp, effectively wiping out several enemies in one fell swoop. But that's just one option. "There are many ways to play the game," Amancio says. "You can play it like Rambo and just run in the camp and kill everybody. You can play it stealth. You can even go lay down and sleep awhile to attack a camp at night."

The more strategic player can pull up a tactical map, compass, and binoculars that his in-game avatar's hands will hold up onscreen. With the binoculars you can scope out sniper towers, vehicles, ammo cases, health packs, etc., and they'll automatically show up on your map. There's even a wind direction indicator so you can set a fire in some brush on one side of the camp and let the wind help spread it through an enemy base.

After blowing the pipeline, Amancio steals a boat and follows the river to the radio tower. Once there, he tosses an IED into the boat and blows it up. "I never leave vehicles behind in case the enemy decides to use it against me," he says. Sure enough, after setting the radio tower ablaze with a flamethrower and grenade launcher combination, he's speeding through grasslands with several mercs driving after him. Just another day on the savannah. ■ ■ ■

What's Up With Multiplayer?

Not much info is available on the multiplayer modes, though they are said to involve elements of trust and betrayal like the main game. An in-depth level editor will ship with not only the PC edition, but the console versions as well. "We're confident that we're probably going to have the most powerful level editor of this generation," says art director Alex Amancio. "We're basically giving people the tools we have to create this world."



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Madden NFL 09

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
 > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** AUGUST

TRAINING CAMP

We all have weaknesses in our Madden ability. Some of us only control defensive linemen because our pass defense is terrible, while others can pass all day, but don't know how to execute a running play without losing five yards. This year's Madden wants to help players equalize their gameplay deficiencies as well as ease in new players with a variety of help systems. Worry not, hardcore fans, these systems are optional, and in our hands-on time with the game we found some new things you are going to love as well.

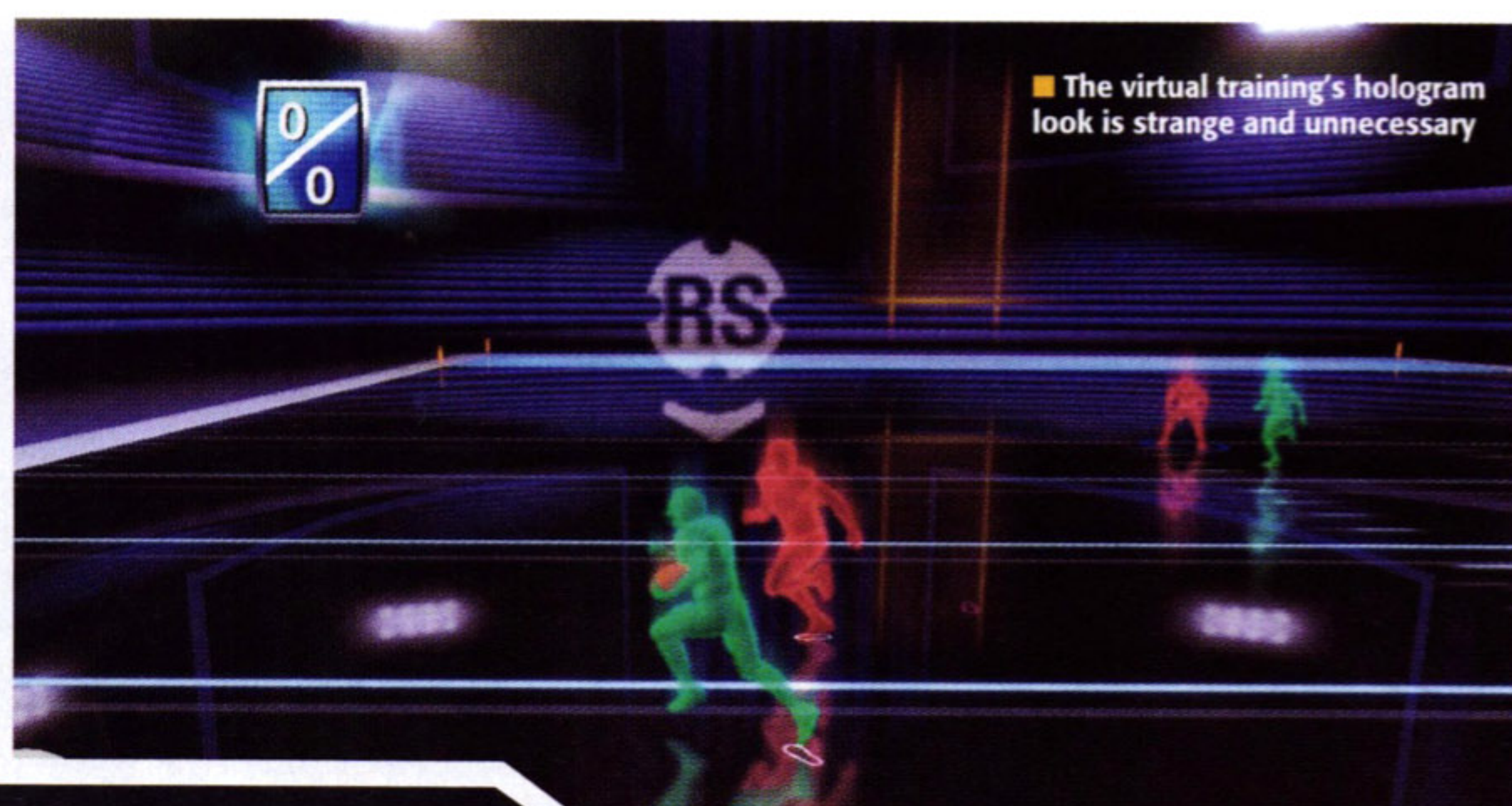
As soon as you turn on the game you're dropped into the new virtual trainer, complete with an Obi-Wan Kenobi-style holographic version of John Madden (he must have given up the ghost the second Favre announced his retire-

ment). Here you'll go through drills to determine your My Skill rating. Any time you play the game, the AI will adjust around your My Skill rating accordingly.

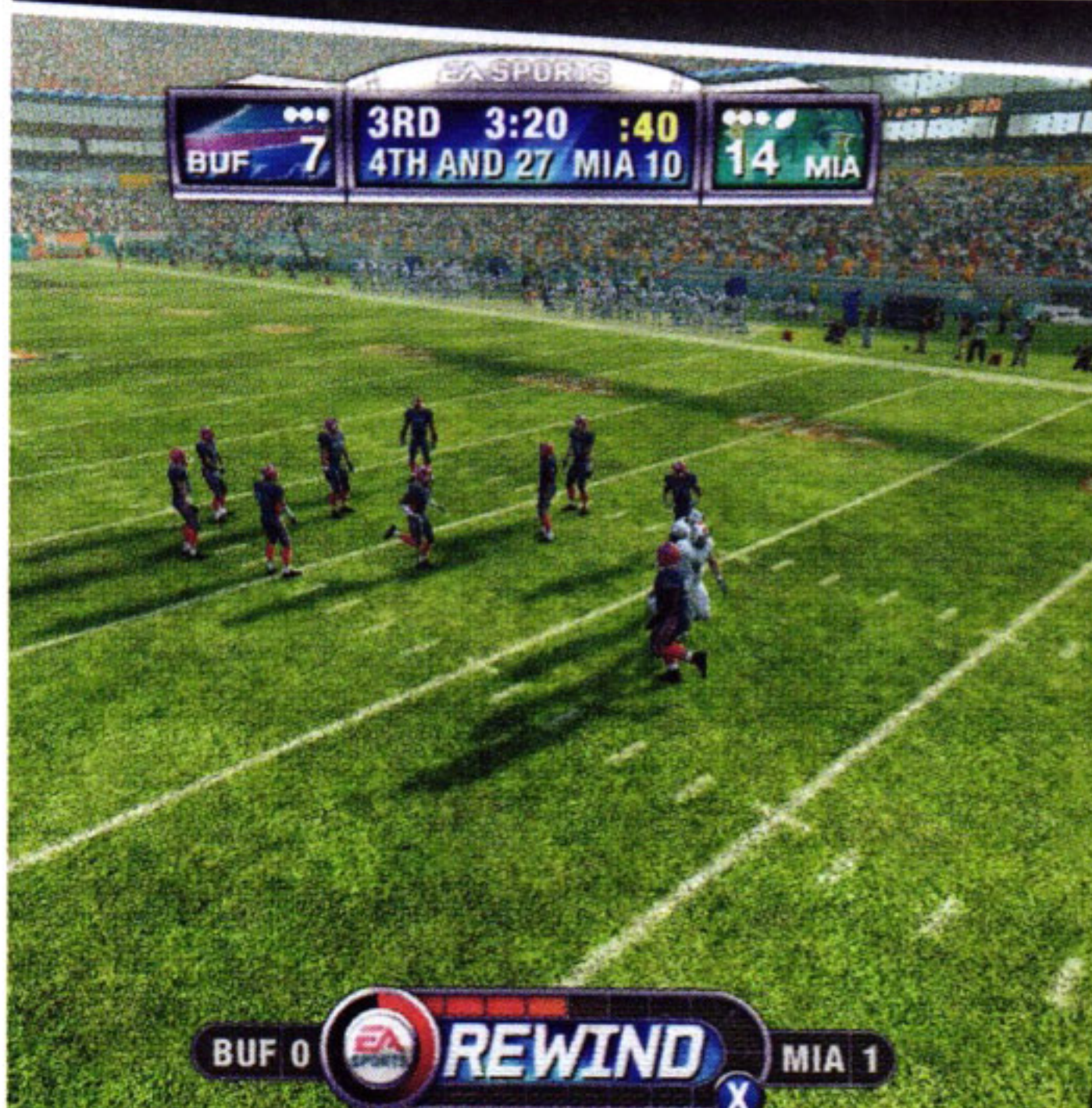
After going through the training we scored All-Madden in the passing department, but only got a lowly Rookie rating for our bad pass defense. Thus, the AI ups the difficulty to All-Madden when we are passing, but then bumps it down to Rookie when we're in pass defense. While passing during a game, we noticed the AI defense was more aggressive playing passes and our QB had to set his feet to ensure a good pass. Conversely, when our defense went up against Peyton Manning he threw a pass into triple-coverage. My Skill compensation? Perhaps. Don't worry, though, in our play-through this new AI system was flexible, but not as

schizophrenic as it may sound. After each game your My Skill rating will go up or down according to how you played, but you can always play on the fixed, classic ratings as well.

Other than the vagaries of the My Skill difficulty, this year's Madden is faster from the get-go. This makes a big difference in the running game when combined with the changes made to player momentum – running backs no longer automatically fall forward for three yards. When combined, these changes force you to choose holes in the running game more carefully, set up your blocks, and watch for backside creases. This early preview build still displayed some legacy issues, such as poor offensive line play and magnet catches, but we'll have to wait and see if these are resolved before release. ■ ■ ■



THE SUBSTANCE OF YOUR STYLE



Apart from Madden's variable difficulty setting, this year's title introduces a new customization setting called Game Style, which breaks out into beginner, intermediate, advanced, and hardcore levels. Also making its debut are Rewinds, mulligan tokens you can cash in to replay a down should it not go your way.

BEGINNER

- Plays are chosen for you
- Five Rewind opportunities
- Play art is permanently shown on field

INTERMEDIATE

- Choose from a selection of four plays - this can be a problem since there are times the play selection simply isn't good. However, this year's new audible system does offer a way out. After hitting the audible button before the snap on offense or defense, if you push the right analog stick in one of four directions, you can choose a generic long pass, quick run, play-action pass, or short pass play, for instance.
- Three Rewind opportunities

ADVANCED

- Full playbooks
- One Rewind opportunity
- Player-type icons still shown

HARDCORE

- Full playbooks
- No Rewind

■ "Aw, I just can't stay mad at you, blue fire"

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

The Last Remnant

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
> **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** WINTER (XBOX 360), TBA (PLAYSTATION 3)

BRANCHING OUT

Square Enix's role-playing empire was built on names like Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest. With those established franchises on the scene, is there still room for a new property to cause a stir? That's the hope with The Last Remnant, Square Enix's upcoming Unreal Engine 3-powered RPG slated for a worldwide release later this year.

The Last Remnant is the story of Rush, a young man who lives on a peaceful island until the abduction of his sister, Irina. Her captors serve as recurring villains throughout the game; one of them is a burly guy named Jager, and the other is Wagram, an old mage with mysterious motives. Once Rush sets out to save Irina from these men, players are thrown into a rich world where those with power struggle for control of Remnants – ancient artifacts, weapons, and creatures that vary in shape and size.

Some Remnants are colossal structures, like the enormous Valeria Heart – a sword-shaped Remnant in the city of Athlum. Others are actually monsters that Rush must fight. For example, players will encounter a boss fight with twin

stone statues named Namul Sin and Niram Sin, protectors of a single treasure. Individual characters can also wield Remnants as weapons. Rush has an ally who uses the cannon Gae Bolg, and Jager commands a Remnant called Lob Omen.

How these weapons figure into combat has yet to be revealed, but players can still expect some interesting encounters. Instead of a typical battle system, The Last Remnant uses an innovative army mechanic that allows you to split your forces into unions to accommodate the increased scale of the battlefield. Some fights will feature as many as 70 units, which the player guides by issuing commands in a turn-based framework. To gain the upper hand, you will also have to do everything you can to keep your troops' morale up and your enemies' in the gutter.

Not all of the fights will pit you against vast numbers. There will also be plenty of

boss encounters, which will put a smaller number of characters against a single powerful foe (who probably has a few friends for support). Expect to take down beasts like a giant carnivorous plant, as well as a fiery demon with armored skin.

Neither the Xbox 360 nor the PlayStation 3 has a wide role-playing catalogue, so it's exciting when any release in the genre draws near. Even though The Last Remnant is expected to hit the 360 first, the fact that this game is multiplatform should make a lot of RPG enthusiasts happy. Given the compelling world and interesting departures from convention in The Last Remnant, we're keeping a close eye on this new contender. ■ ■ ■



■ Bouncers appear to forcibly remove Rush after he stumbles into the Final Fantasy VIII intro sequence



■ You'll often find yourself commanding groups of characters rather than individuals



■ Warning: Not all statues are inherently evil. In your everyday life, only attack statues that hit you first



■ After you issue a command, you still need to stay alert for special circumstances that arise during attacks

BROTHERS ★ IN ARMS ★ HELL'S HIGHWAY

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY OUT OF HELL,
AND THAT'S THROUGH IT...



LEAD YOUR MEN THROUGH
THE DARKEST MOMENTS OF WWII.



MORE REALISTIC THAN EVER WITH A
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CONTENT RATED BY
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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Mild Sexual Themes
Strong Language

COMING AUGUST 2008
to PC and Next-Gen Consoles
BROTHERSINARMSGAME.COM



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PC

Civilization IV: Colonization

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (ONLINE TBA) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS GAMES > **RELEASE** FALL

BACK TO THE NEW WORLD

Sid Meier's Colonization was a staple of many strategy gamers' diets in the '90s, as it pandered to a different taste than contemporaries like Civilization or Master of Orion. Its focus on trade, production, and diplomacy made players tread a unique path as they built up colonies into free nations capable of declaring independence from their European sponsors. Now Firaxis is working on a total conversion of Civilization IV to update Colonization for the new millennium, and we can't wait to dig into it.

Not many details are available, other than that Firaxis intends to maintain the spirit of the 1994 classic in this reworking. As the English, Spanish, French, or Dutch you'll

need to overcome native tribes, rival colonists, and meddling kings along the road to independence. Recruiting historical figures like Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry to aid your fledgling nation will confer bonuses, and the improved diplomacy system allows for more complex interactions than threats and peace treaties.

Colonization will also ship with extensive mod tools. Unfortunately, that's all the info coming out of 2K regarding this exciting project for now. We'll keep you updated on more details as they become available, but until then take solace in the fact that Colonization will not require the base Civilization IV game to play. ■ ■ ■



■ The Civ IV engine still looks decent, and features one of the best interfaces around

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

FIFA Soccer 09

> **STYLE** 1 TO 7-PLAYER SPORTS (PS3), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX 360) (UP TO 20-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

HEROES WANTED

Soccer is a great amalgamation of team play and individual feats of skill. A sweet free kick into the box by Beckham can be perfect in and of itself, but it requires the right person to make a run at the far post if it's to be headed in for a goal. FIFA 09 is trying to personify this maxim. With an expanded Be a Pro mode, more team tactical options, and full online sides (minus the keepers) – a first for the series – individual accomplishment and team glory will be yours for the taking.

FIFA 09's move into ten-versus-ten online games is a big step forward in a sport where correct positioning, intelligent attacking runs, and overall team movement can make a huge difference in scoring or being scored upon. EA isn't talking yet about what specific teams or leagues players can choose from, but you will be taking over real-world clubs – although the matches themselves won't be grouped in an overall online league. Getting the nine other players on your squad to not act like ten-year-olds and all crowd around the ball will be hard, but you can utilize team chat to try and get everyone in line. Should you not play with a full side of real players, your team will be filled out with CPU players that you can switch between at any time.

For those who would rather go it alone, this year's game greatly expands the already cool Be a Pro mode. Here you can step into the boots of a created or already established star and start a four-year campaign. At

the end of the four years hopefully you will be respected enough to play with your national team in the International Cup (don't mention the World Cup – that's a whole other game sold separately!). Although there will be no new controls for Be a Pro mode, you'll hear more chatter from your teammates in an effort to provide you with more info on how you can impact the game with a perfect pass or run. The mode is also being tuned to offer you Influence points in a fairer manner than before.

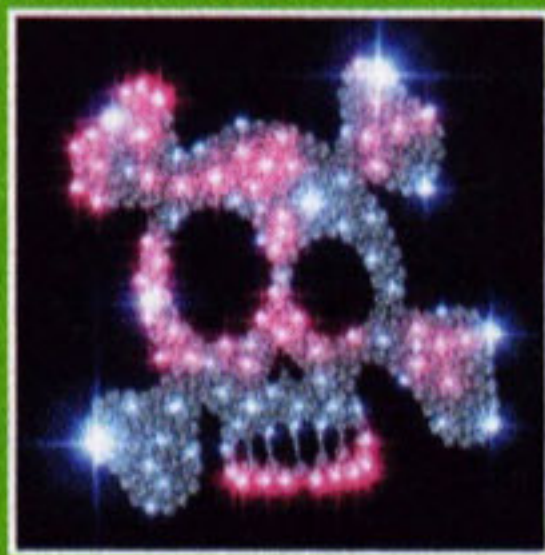
This game's expanded feature set is nice, but the development team at EA Canada admits it has plenty of work to do – particularly in shoring up some of the long-time complaints of the series, whether that's implementing custom control configurations or fixing the wonky keeper AI so they take better positions and react more realistically. EA's saying all the right things, and it's working hard to improve its game. Sounds like it's trying to be the ultimate team player. ■ ■ ■



■ When online each player can select the camera mode he or she wants, whether it's the tighter Be a Pro style or classic wide camera



Wallpapers

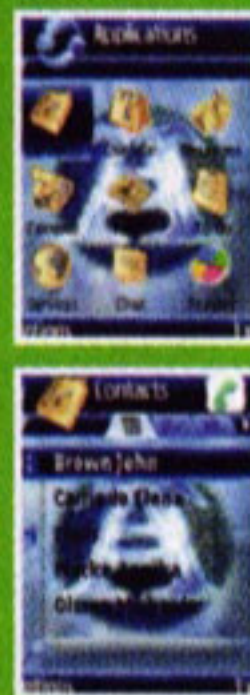


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Themes



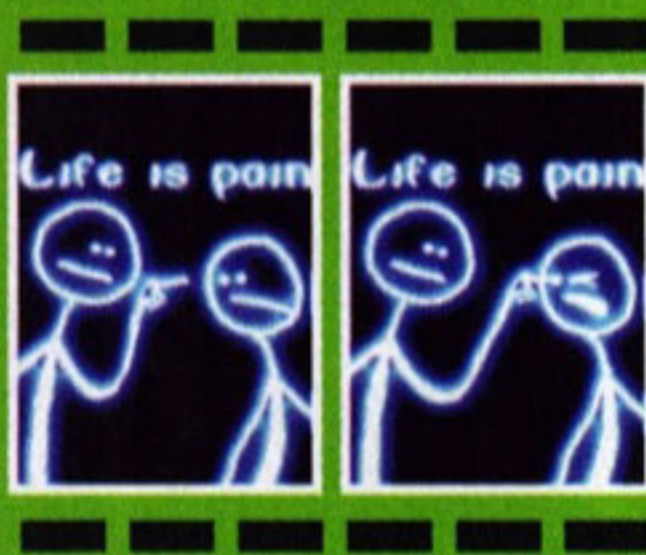
skin1707



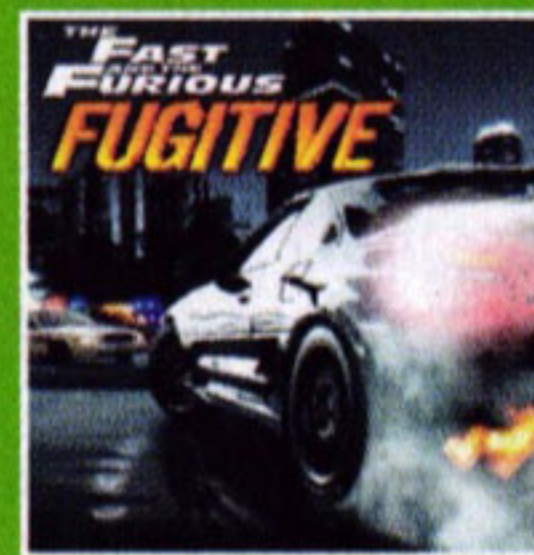
Screensavers



move1756



Games



game1167

Realtones



real2091



pic2336



pic2337



pic2338



pic2339



pic2340

Even if the voices are not real... They have pretty good ideas.

pic2341



pic2342

WTF?!

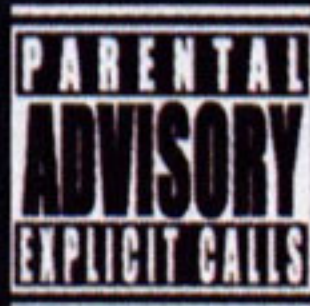
pic2343



pic2344



pic2345



pic2346

A dirty mind is a terrible thing to waste.

pic2347



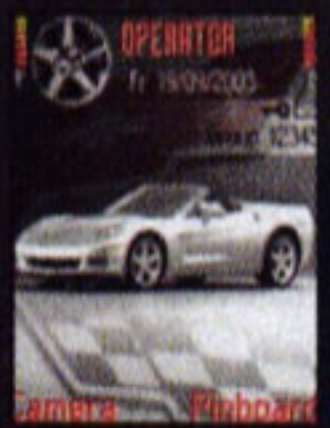
skin1708



skin1709



skin1710



skin1711



skin1712



skin1713



skin1714



skin1715



skin1716



skin1717



move1757



move1757



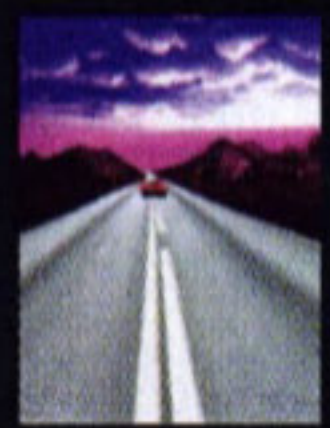
move1757



move1758



move1758



move1758

I taught your girlfriend

move1759

I taught your girlfriend

move1759

that thing you like :)

move1759



move1760



move1760



move1760



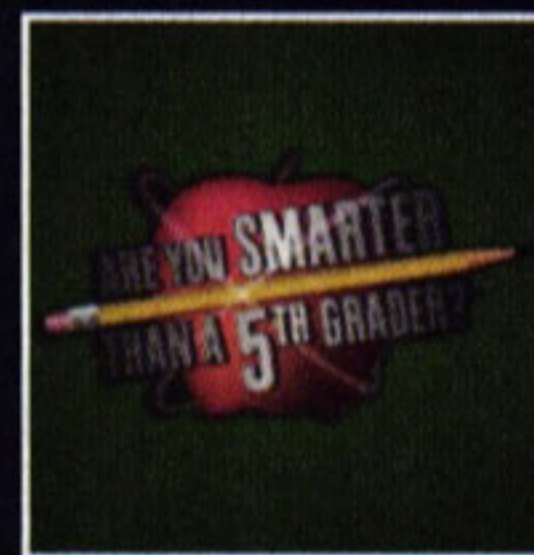
move1761



move1761



move1761



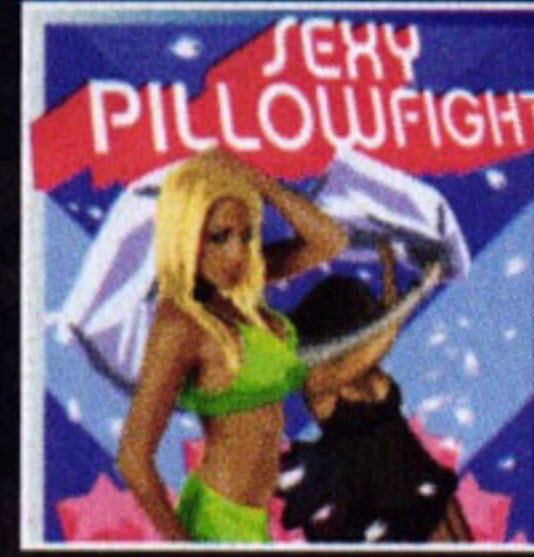
game1168



game1169



game1170



game1171

Lollipop - Lil Wayne	real2093
Love In This Club Part II - Usher / Beyonce	real2094
Get Like Me - David Banner / Chris Brown	real2095
Sexy Can I - Ray-J / Yung Berg	real2096
Take A Bow - Rihanna	real2097
She Got It - 2 Pistols	real2098
Love In This Club - Usher / Young Jeezy	real2099
Moving Mountains - Usher	real2100
The Boss - Rick Ross / T-Pain	real2101
Touch My Body - Mariah Carey	real2102
I Kissed A Girl - Katy Perry	real2103
Forever - Chris Brown	real2104
Boyfriend/Girlfriend - C-Side / Keyshia Cole	real2105
Zooted - Soulja Boy Tell Em	real2106
Customer - Raheem DeVaughn	real2107
Lolli Lolli - Three 6 Mafia	real2108
Never Too Late - Three Days Grace	real2109
Finer Things - Cyssero / Kanye West / Nayo	real2110
Closer - Ne-Yo	real2111
Umma Do Me - Rocko	real2112
Life Of Da Party - Snoop Dogg	real2113
Party People - Nelly / Fergie	real2114
Who The F Is That? - Dolla / T-Pain / Tay Dizm	real2115

BABY GOT BACK



"I LIKE BIG..."
SIR MIX A LOT

REALTONE
real2092

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PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



ARCADE | PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Street Fighter IV

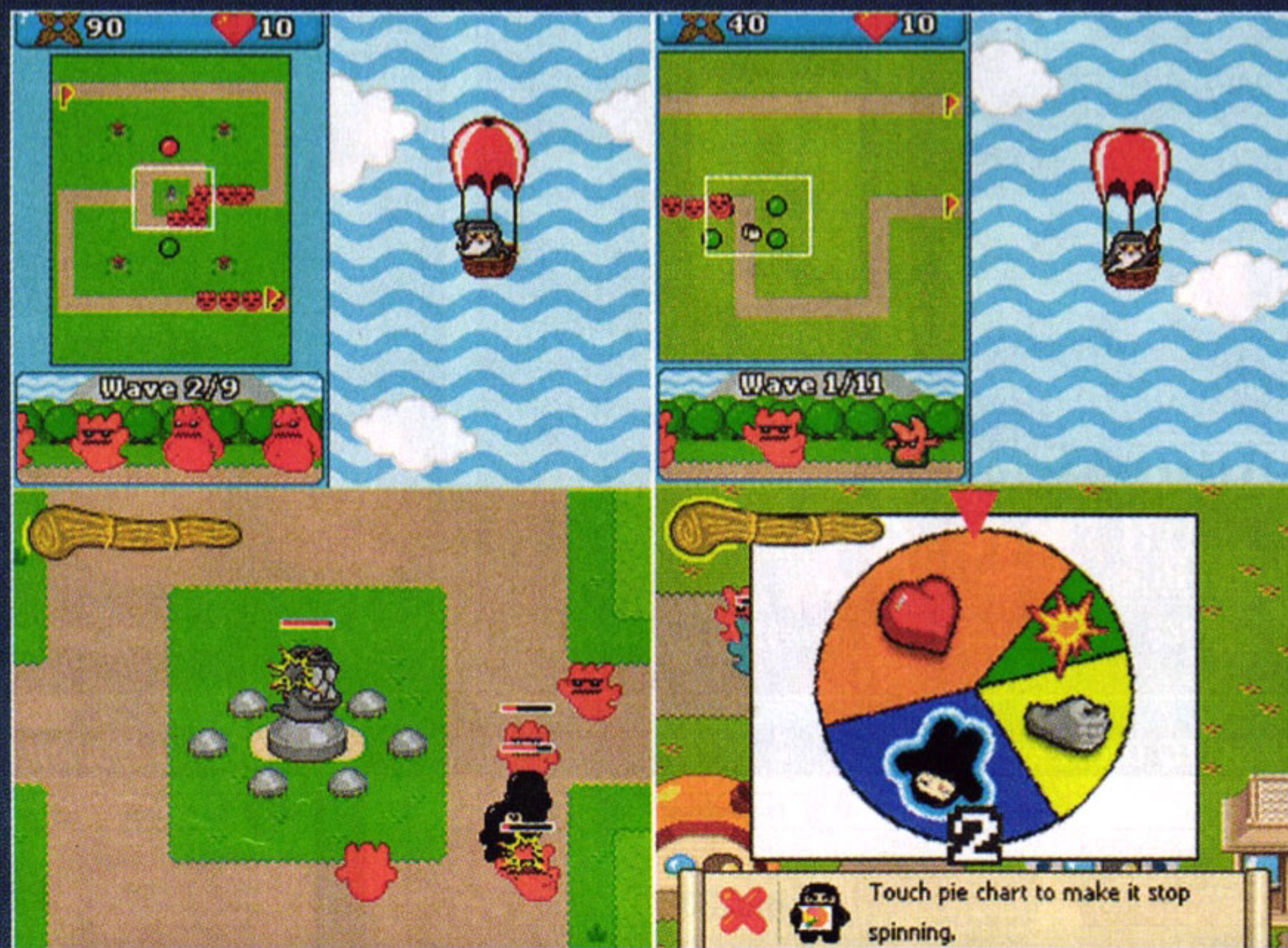
While you check out these screens of Street Fighter's new final boss, Seth, let us fill you in on the new SF IV details that have emerged since we last covered the game. Dubbed "The Puppet Master," Seth is the CEO of Shadowloo's weapons division who has modified his body with the latest cutting-edge technology. His story ties into many of Street Fighter's popular characters, but fans will have to wait for the console versions to get the full scoop; Capcom is adding animated segments to the console versions that will help flesh out the game's plot. This near-final version we played is very reminiscent of the classic Street Fighter II we all respect and love. The fighting mechanics feel better than ever, as the game's collision detection system has been entirely reworked. While we still don't have a firm release date, signs point to early 2009.



Wii

Spyborgs

Capcom's newest Wii title follows the whimsical adventures of five bionic-powered spies who fight to save the world from the dastardly schemes of a super villain. This co-op centric action brawler has players switching between team members who all employ a different kind of combat specialty, such as heavy gunpower, martial arts, extreme skateboarding skills, or pure robotic might. The game's pacing and humor match the speedy, quick cuts of a Saturday morning show. Playable commercials will even be interspersed through the game to break up the action. Featuring exaggerated dialogue and catchy jingles, these minigames make use of the Wii's unique controls. For example, as two fish sing about unclogging a drain, the players strum their Wii remotes like a banjo. Spyborgs is still a year or more out, but its clever premise has us hoping for the best.



NINTENDO DS

Ninjatown

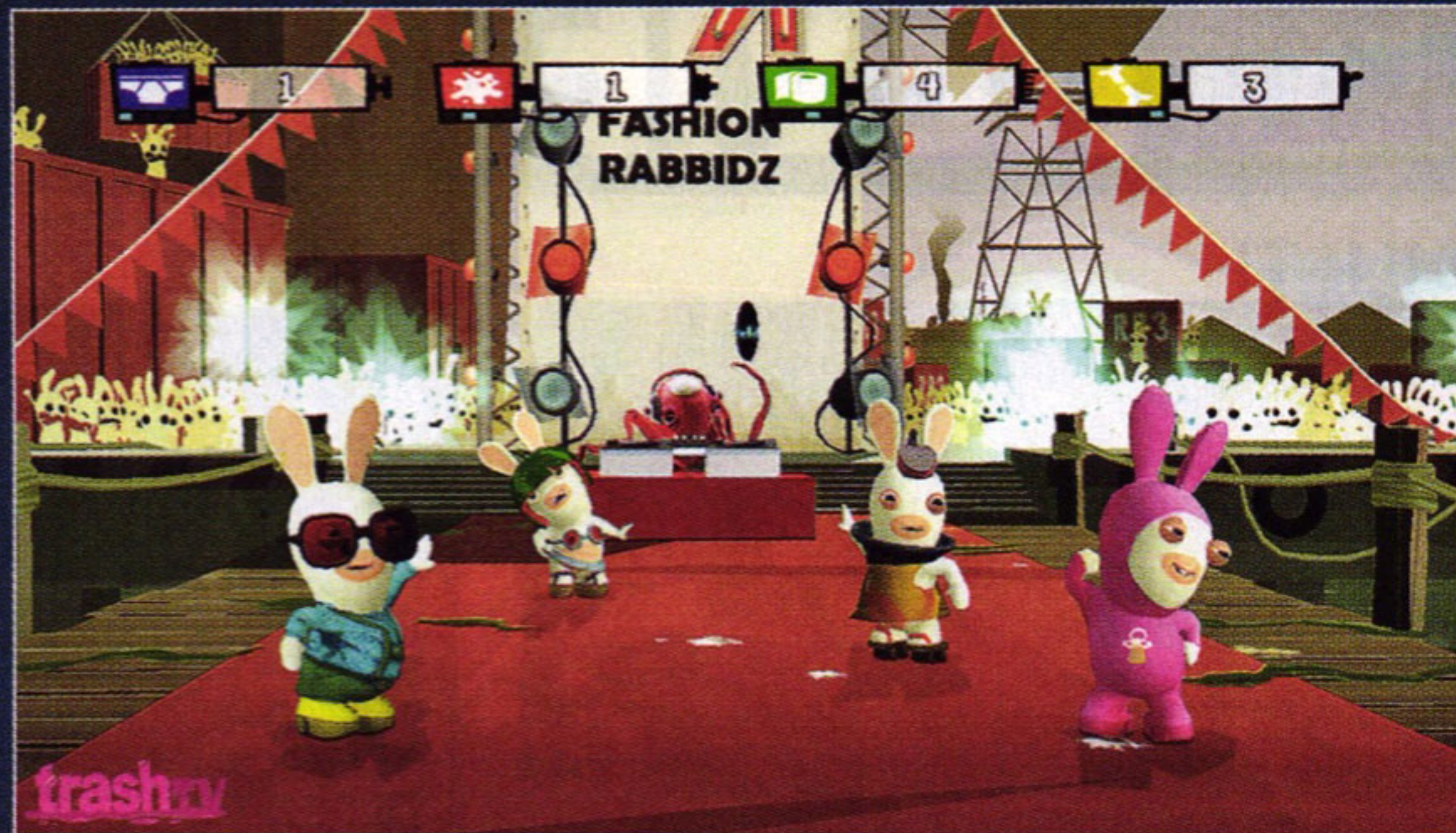
Shawnimals, the oddly adorable, girl-friendly-yet-still-not-unmasculine plush ninja toys created by former EGM editor Shawn Smith, are coming to the DS this October courtesy of SouthPeak Games and Venan Entertainment. Just as in a tower defense strategy game, Ninjatown requires players to build up their defenses before the battle. Then your army of Wee Ninjas, Sniper Ninjas, and snowball-throwing White Ninjas must defend their homes from the evil forces of Mr. Demon and his army of Feroshi, Zombie Ninjas, and Business Demons by using special attacks like Stealth Hugs and The Long-Winded Story (paralyzing attacks). Ninjatown's clever strategy and absurdist humor make it a game worth keeping your eye on.



NINTENDO DS

Lock's Quest

The developer of Drawn to Life, 5th Cell, is moving from phallic platforming to Japanese-inspired strategy. Coming this fall from THQ, the game follows Lock, an "Archineer" who must fight off a clockwork army. Gameplay consists of a building phase where players construct walls, traps, and turrets, and then a battle phase where enemies try to raid your camp. Defensive structures will thin out enemy ranks, but Lock will have to engage in melee combat and spell casting to truly win. Online play has yet to be confirmed, but four-player multi-cart battles are in.



Wii

Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party

The first Rayman Raving Rabbids earned points for being one of the original clever minigame collections on Wii, but the sequel was swept away in the flood of shovelware copycats. By incorporating the Wii Fit Balance Board, developer Ubisoft Paris has a shot at the cutting edge once again, claiming to be "the first game you can play with your arse." This time around Rabbids have taken over TV for a week, parodying MTV, soaps, movies, extreme sports, and ads. A mix of simultaneous co-op, battle, and party multiplayer maxes out at four players, but up to eight people can take on turn-based challenges. Watch for the Rabbid invasion this holiday.

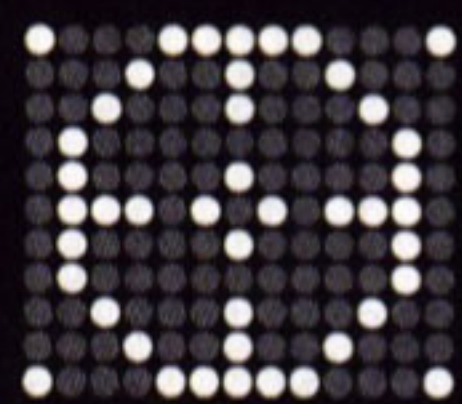


Wii | NINTENDO DS

SimCity Creator

Who likes all of the complicated, nuanced aspects of virtual city management? Well, lots of people do. But not everyone! For those who prefer a more relaxed approach to metropolitan prosperity, EA is bringing a more casual city builder to the Wii. Its interface is designed for the Wii remote, and will allow players to zone areas, draw roads and rails, and even choose an architecture style (like European and Asian themes). You'll also be able to share your city with friends via WiiConnect24. Another SimCity Creator will be coming to the DS, but it looks to follow more in the vein of last year's SimCity DS, with an emphasis on watching your city evolve through the ages. Be sure to tune up your emergency sirens, because you become mayor again on September 22.

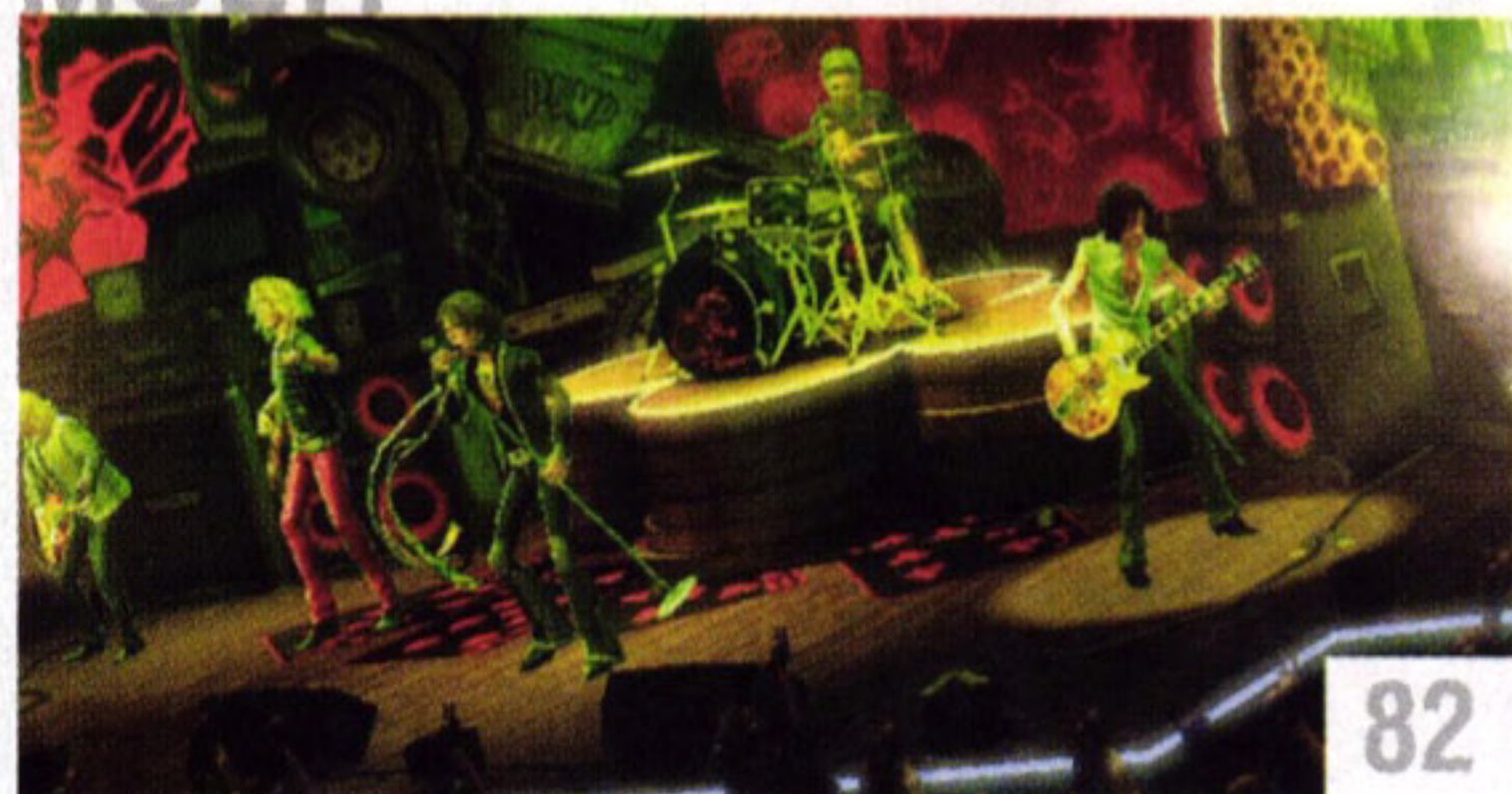




REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

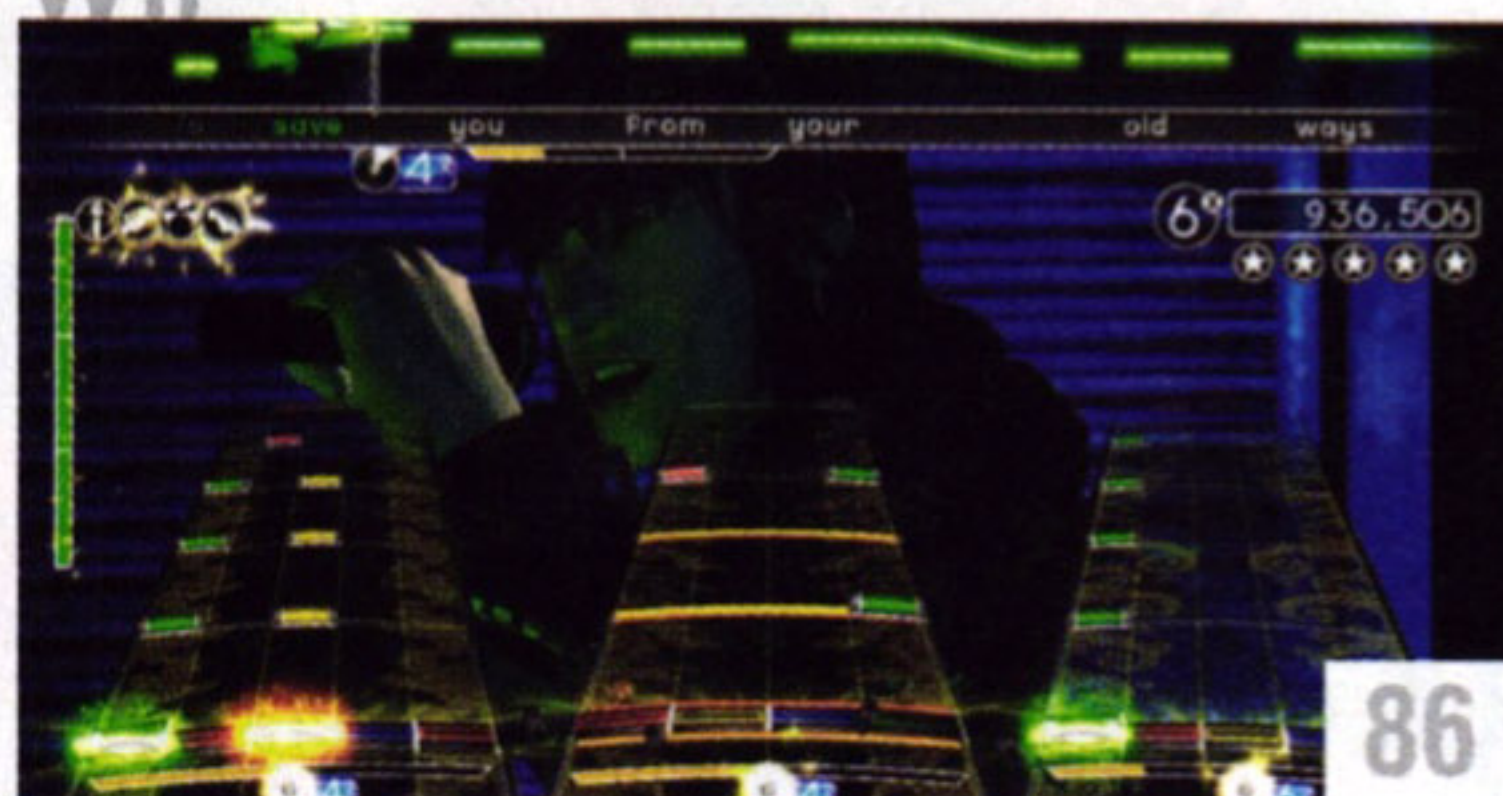
MULTI



Guitar Hero: Aerosmith

82

Wii



Rock Band

86

PLAYSTATION 3



Monster Madness: Grave Danger

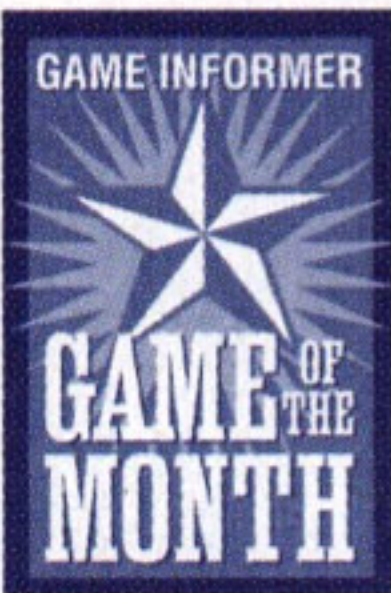
87



80

NCAA Football 09

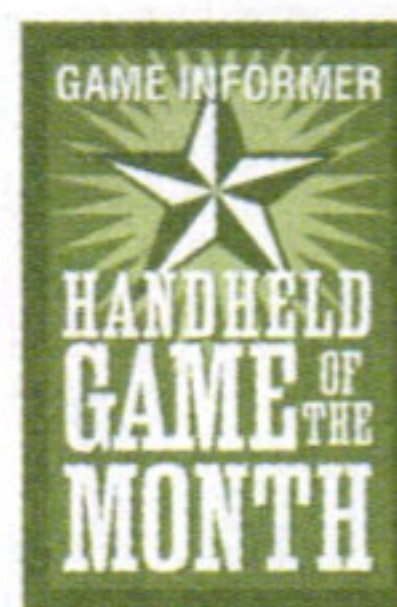
After some struggles its rookie and sophomore years on next-gen consoles, NCAA Football finally looks ready for the bright lights, highlight reels, and bowl game pageantry. With refined gameplay, improved graphics, roster sharing, and the new online dynasty mode that lets up to 12 players compete, this is the year to bask in the college football experience.



91

Final Fantasy IV

You may be familiar with the story, but you've never played Final Fantasy IV quite like this. Updated 3D graphics, new skills, and expanded story sequences are just a few of the reasons to play this re-imagined classic. With all the great characters and plot twists, there's plenty of nostalgia for people who know the original inside and out, but enough modern touches to keep first-timers going strong. Final Fantasy IV on DS is what happens when a developer takes an already-excellent game and improves it.



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** Dane Cook. Not even funny.

- > **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.

XBOX 360

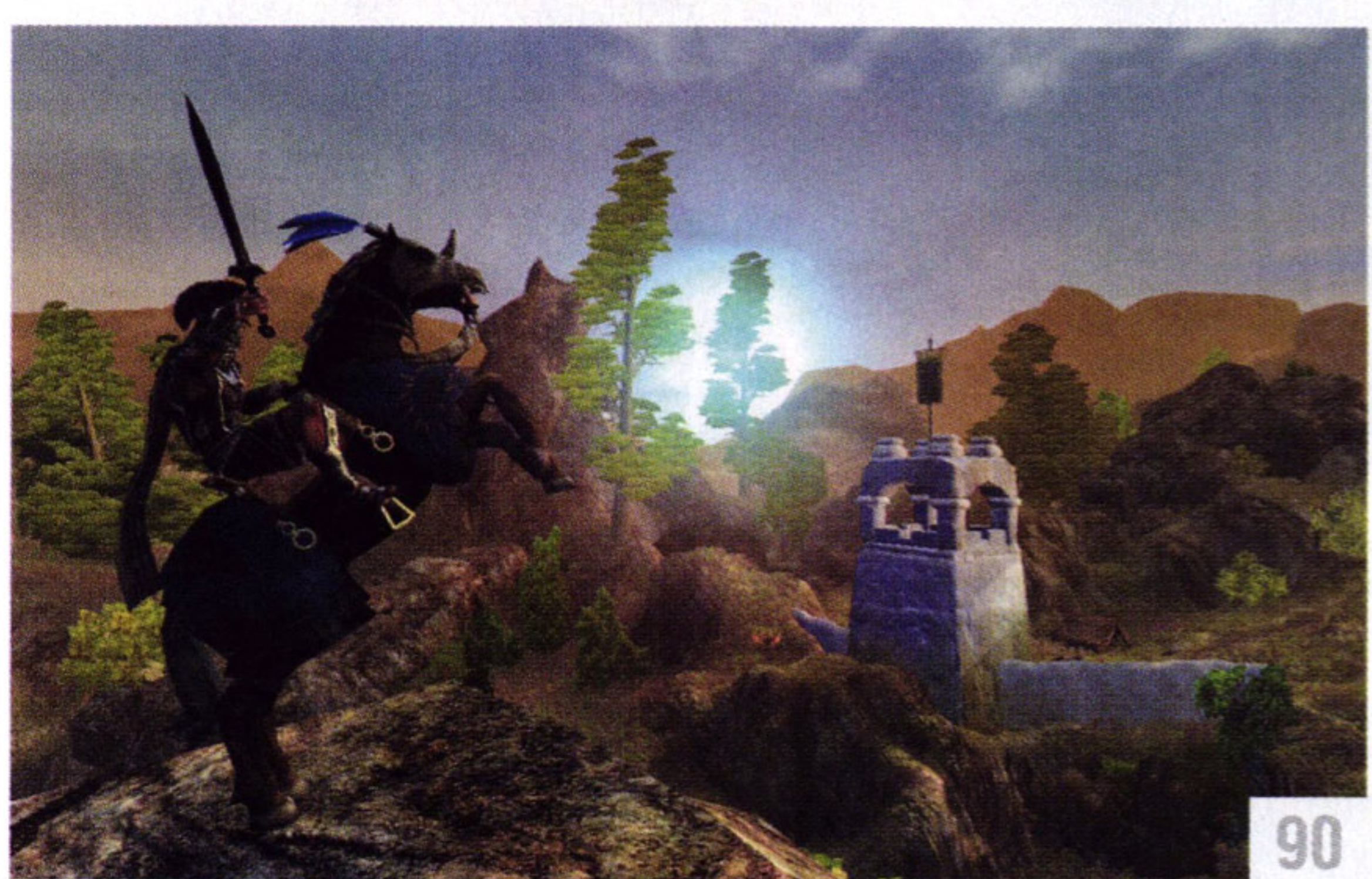


Unreal Tournament 3 88

HANDHELD



Trauma Center: Under The Knife 2 91



Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures 90



Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures

Half of the content in Age of Conan isn't printable in this family magazine, but that doesn't mean it isn't fun. Making emphatic use of its Mature rating by the ESRB, this MMORPG is the most visceral, bloody, intense experience in the genre to date. Spectacular visuals, intriguing storylines, and open-ended player-driven endgame PvP content await adventurers in this Norwegian import.

REVIEWS INDEX

Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures..... 90

Alone In The Dark..... 85

Bourne Conspiracy, The..... 84

Civilization Revolution..... 91

Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath..... 88

Don King Presents: Prizefighter..... 83

Final Fantasy IV..... 91

Guitar Hero: Aerosmith..... 82

Incredible Hulk, The..... 83

Kung Fu Panda..... 84

LOL..... 91

Monster Madness: Grave Danger..... 87

NCAA Football 09..... 80

Rock Band..... 86

SingStar..... 87

Top Spin 3..... 86

Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2..... 91

Unreal Tournament 3..... 88

pg. 87



SingStar 84

the edge

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 10 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.		Product is awaiting final rating.

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
- 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
- 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
- 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
- Soundwave** – Michael Bay had better get him right
- 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



GAME INFORMER
GAME OF THE MONTH

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NCAA Football 09

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS
> DEVELOPER EA TIBURON > RELEASE JULY 15 > ESRB E

THE ONLINE OFFENSIVE

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Online Dynasty play is the big focus here, which leaves some legacy gameplay problems unattended

> **Graphics:** Gang tackles and shoe-string grabs look cool. Overall the presentation is good

> **Sound:** You can add your own songs to cue up during pre-set situations

> **Playability:** The new running moves on the left analog stick help make moving the ball-carrier pretty smooth

> **Entertainment:** NCAA's brand of college football is fun, but it requires a certain suspension of your expectations

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Now this is a pep rally I can get behind. NCAA 09's gameplay isn't revolutionary, but its polished animations, tweaked gameplay that reflects the wide-open nature of college football, and new "about damn time" features like location-based passing and formation-specific audibles are all steps in the right direction. Many of the legacy problems of years past are diminished, though you'll still see the occasional stunted animation, magnet pass, or tractor beam tackler. The Dynasty mode is basically the same, with slight modifications to the already solid recruiting system. However, now you can take the competition online with 11 friends to compete for titles and recruits – a major plus in my book. The neglected Campus Legend mode, on the other hand, is still hindered by repetitive playcalling (the draw again!?) and a boring off-field regiment. Is NCAA 09 a conference contender? No doubt. A BCS champ? Maybe next year. —BERTZ

We're always looking for progress in our video games – especially when it's a year-to-year series like NCAA. Weird, huh? Less time between iterations means we expect more? Unfair, perhaps, but if you're looking for a reason that separates this year from the rest, then NCAA 09 has it – online franchises. Yes, the one feature we've been waiting for is finally here. As far as dynasties go, however, Rome wasn't built in a day – and neither is yours.

The one thing that I enjoyed other than going up against a group of online players was the fact that the game's Online Dynasty feature kept up the mid-week recruiting. Knowing that everyone else in the group was recruiting from the same pool of players made me more careful and vigilant in my recruiting tasks. Since I find the back-and-forth of recruiting (which is the same phone call format from last year) generally tedious, it was nice to find that all the hard work paid off in stealing some unknown three-star juco athlete from my competition. The Online Dynasty mode also includes all the bowl games, red-shirting, and offseason trappings of your regular

Dynasty. You can even get a friend to step in for the CPU for those weeks you're not playing human opponents. This makes playing in small leagues more interesting.

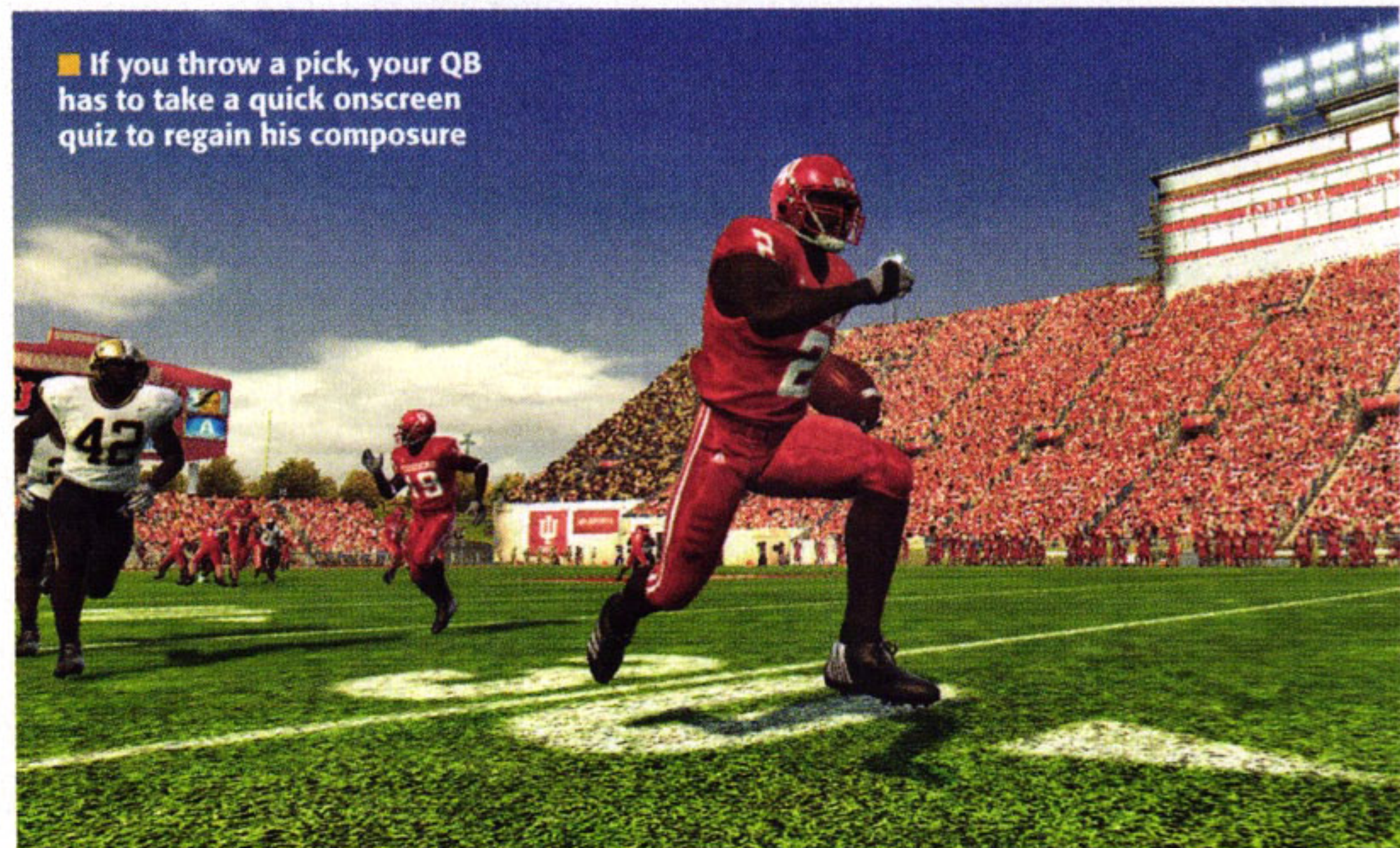
The hum of EA's dynasty servers can only keep you so warm, and the game is a mixed bag of

moving the left analog stick. These new moves aren't as extreme as the right-stick jukes, but they are important for maneuvering through small spaces without losing your stride, such as on kick returns and interior runs. Thankfully the animations for these are relatively compact, so you won't waste movement by putting your hand on the ground, for instance. I'm also impressed by the increased attention to atmosphere, with the QB composure ratings and loud stadiums that can wreak havoc on your audibles and hot routes.

Such additions are unfortunately overshadowed by the glaring legacy problems that pop out at you worse than the Oregon Ducks' uniforms. Magnet catches, floating receivers, catch-up AI (and flat-out poor AI in the Campus Legend mode), and outrageous forward momentum for ball carriers drag down the improved gang tackles, overall tackle variation, and smart pre-play options added in NCAA 09. This game is going places its predecessors never went, but it's also unwilling to ditch a past that is just slowing it down. —KATO



new and old outside of this glitzy new feature. My vote for the most important addition goes to the subtle moves ball carriers can access simply by



■ If you throw a pick, your QB has to take a quick onscreen quiz to regain his composure





Get in touch with your dark side. YourOtherYou.com

Prototype shown with optional equip't. ©2008 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> Concept: An expansion to Guitar Hero III with Aerosmith character models and their best songs

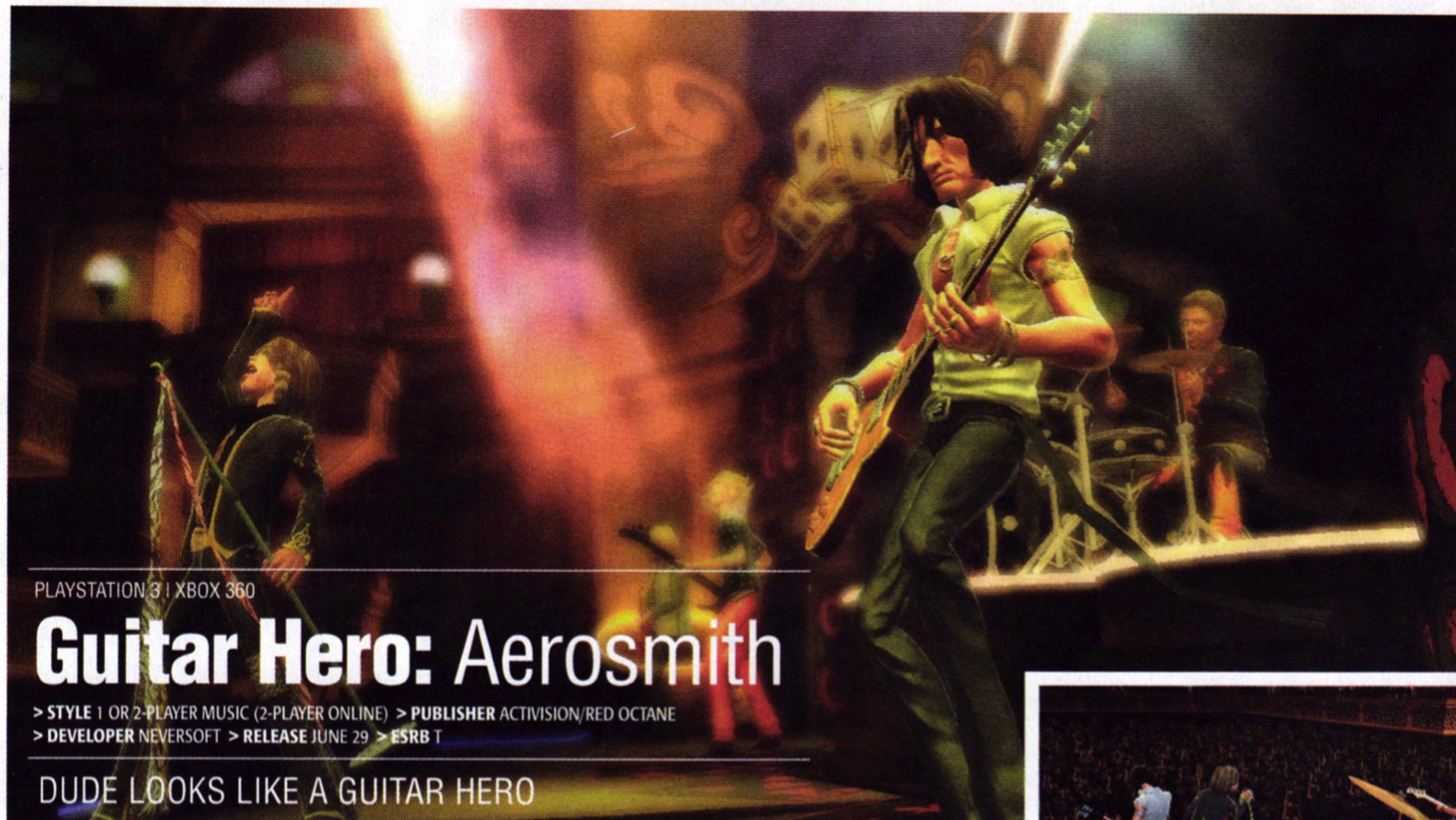
> Graphics: There's some great motion capture work, but otherwise expect a repeat of the bright colors and cartoonish exaggeration of GH III

> Sound: Some of the best songs from one of the most prolific bands out there, plus several tunes from acts they've played with over the years

> Playability: A rare game that appeals to the hardcore crowd as much as new gamers, gameplay is accessible and grows with your skill level

> Entertainment: This is great new content for fans of the band – just don't expect a brand new game

> Replay Value: High



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Guitar Hero: Aerosmith

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION/RED OCTANE
> **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT > **RELEASE** JUNE 29 > **ESRB** T

DUDE LOOKS LIKE A GUITAR HERO

The move to band-specific content releases is a smart one for Activision. It's an easy incentive to offer big names (like Aerosmith) to gain access to their back catalogue, and a new retail disc can be released with a unifying concept behind it, even though very little has changed from the base game.

Enthusiasts may wonder why they can't just download these songs for their existing copy of Guitar Hero III. It's a fair gripe, but it must be balanced against the numerous small features that flesh out Guitar Hero Aerosmith beyond the new songs. New venues and motion-captured versions of the titular band look great, and the video interviews with its members are a blast for music history buffs.

The music itself certainly shouldn't garner too many complaints – a lot of Aerosmith's best stuff is playable here, from "Sweet Emotion" to "Love in an Elevator." There's also some fantastic music from bands that played with these Hall of Famers over the years, from Ted Nugent to Run-DMC, even if some of these songs are covers.

I feel foolish describing this now ubiquitous gameplay style to the uninformed. Suffice to say, the falling gem gameplay is easy to pick up and play, thanks to some great track layout work from Neversoft. It should come

as no surprise that the last couple song tiers are challenging, particularly when dipping into one of Joe Perry's inimitable solos. Unfortunately, it's all over too soon – the game only has 41 songs – a little over half of what Guitar Hero III boasts. With the impending release of Guitar Hero: World Tour, I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that downloadable content for this Aerosmith release will be sparse.

Love the band-focused formula or hate it, Guitar Hero: Aerosmith is a herald of things to come. This won't be the last Guitar Hero with an individual band for a subtitle. It remains to be seen whether a public that increasingly downloads singles and listens to mix CDs still wants a musical experience focused on a single act. Whatever the answer, Guitar Hero Aerosmith delivers where it counts – with great music enhanced by the chance to play along. —**MILLER**



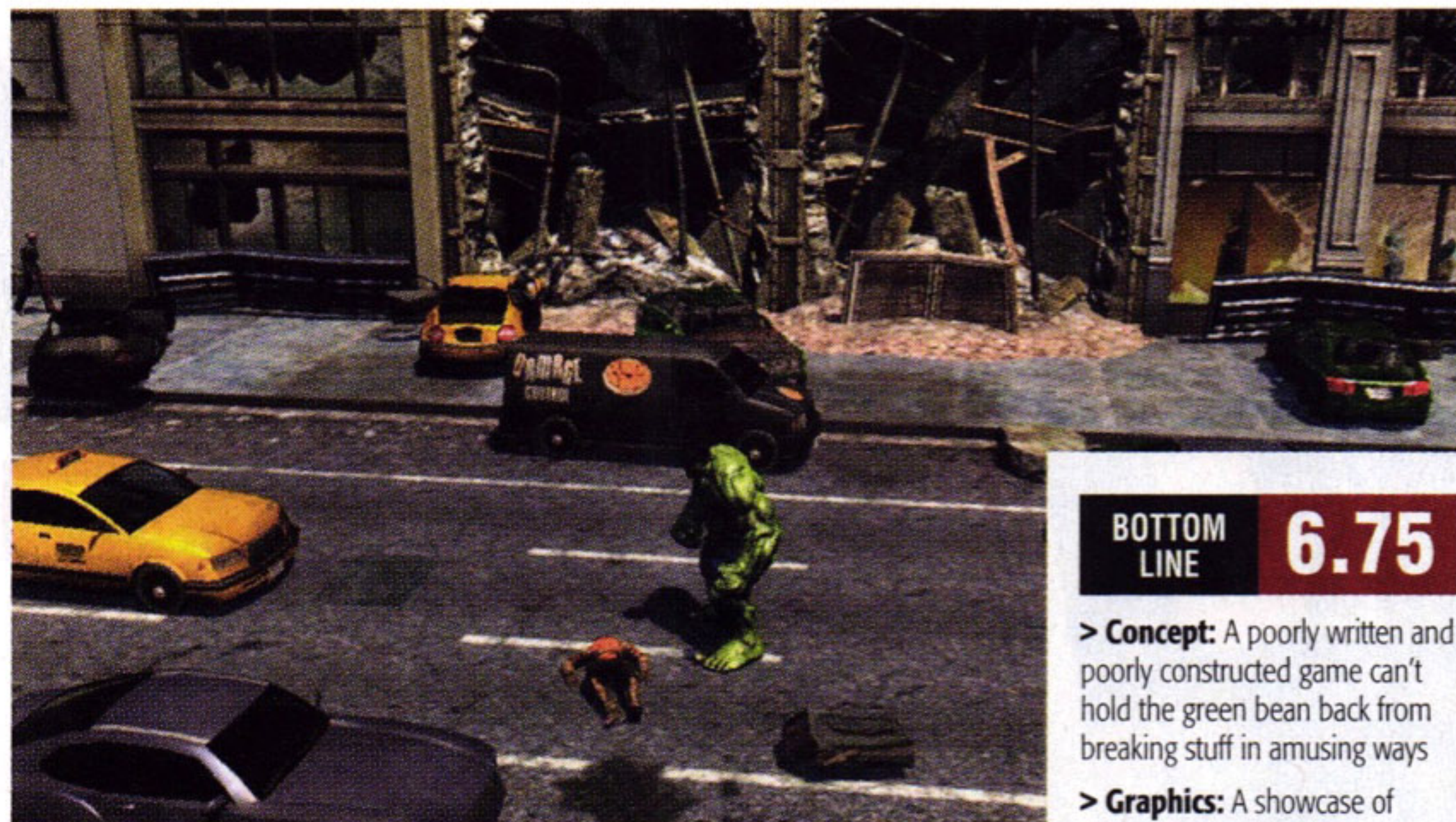
Second Opinion 8.25

In a way, consider this Neversoft's counter to Rock Band's myriad downloadable songs. However, the VH1 documentary style packaging succeeds in adding new material to the game while giving players a strong defense of Aerosmith as being a great rock band. If you only know the '90s hits, you'll be surprised at just how hard this band hit in their drugged-out '70s peak. In addition, there's a nicely selected group of songs by bands whose careers intersected with Aerosmith, including Ted Nugent, The Clash, Stone Temple Pilots, and great onscreen cameo by DMC of Run-DMC. While I'm surprised the much-debated guitar battles return, and I still bemoan the lack of a bass career (especially because Tom Hamilton is one of the greatest bassists in rock history), most of the game provides us with exactly what we want: more great GH III gameplay and awesome tunes. Predictably, Aerosmith fans will be in heaven, and the rest of you may come away with a greater appreciation for the formidable axe skills of Joe Perry. —**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

The Incredible Hulk

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER EDGE OF REALITY > RELEASE JUNE 5 > ESRB T



STUPID SMASHING

The Incredible Hulk, also known as The Green Vessel of Anger With an IQ Slightly Higher Than Paris Hilton, is back to punch holes in another city. Moreover, he's returning to show us that he can be a more versatile character than just a moron who throws things. With his friend, Rick Jones, dishing out orders and tagging along to clean up his messes, The Hulk shows us that he could be the next Lassie. "Oh no! Terrorists have planted bombs across the city! Go get 'em, boy!" This relationship is disturbing, and The Hulk's docile demeanor is more Bill Bixby than Lou Ferrigno.

The plot, which could crack the Top 100 list for mankind's greatest narrative failures, gets more confusing by the second, and somehow manages to be far-fetched even for a comic story. Four scientists, dressed head-to-toe in colored Power Rangers-like armor, devise plans within the Citadel of Science to create the ultimate killing machine. Edward Norton accentuates this unintentional camp by channeling a half-awake zombie through his dialogue. The story and characterizations are so bad that they end up being enjoyable for all the wrong reasons.

The only area where this game hits the green nail on the head is in the destruction. The Hulk can knock down buildings, toss puny humans over skyscrapers, and run right through a bus. His untamed power is backed by a stunning fireworks-like display of

smoke, debris, and bodies flying through the air. It is such a focus, in fact, that one of the goals requires you to destroy all of the landmarks in New York City.

The entire city is open to you from the outset, and is loaded with striking details and objects that you just want to smash. You are tasked with completing annoying missions that often have timers and numbers on them, but you can always veer off of the story path just to raise your wanted level and see how many tanks you can destroy by throwing cars at them. Outside of the clumsy system of having to press two face buttons at the same time to heal or unleash a super attack, the controls feel great, and will seem familiar for anyone who played the brilliant Xbox, GameCube, and PS2 game, *Ultimate Destruction*. The Hulk's move set isn't as dynamic (or large) as it is in the previous game, but the actions available definitely fit the character. As impressive as his moves are, they don't always go off without a hitch. Poor collision detection, erratic camera swinging, and laughable AI often put an unintentional comedic twist on the large scale action.

The word "good" should never be used when describing this game, but "entertaining" definitely fits it. Who doesn't love smashing stuff? The Hulk does it better than anyone, and it's captured quite well within this game. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** A poorly written and poorly constructed game can't hold the green bean back from breaking stuff in amusing ways

> **Graphics:** A showcase of destruction and mayhem

> **Sound:** Kirsten Dunst needs to hand her "Worst Voice Actor" award over to Edward Norton. He may have literally phoned it in

> **Playability:** Cheap death sometimes comes from the game not recognizing that you are hitting two buttons together at once. Other than this, the controls are easy to pick up, and the destruction is brilliant

> **Entertainment:** Terrorizing a city is fun, but protecting it from terrorists is a different story altogether

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

It's hard to criticize this new Hulk game for so blatantly copying the formula of 2005's *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*. From the mission styles down to the jumping mechanics, this new adventure with the green goliath mimics that earlier excellent game. Unfortunately, the copy doesn't hold up to scrutiny. Odd collision and AI behavior issues are the most profound technical mishaps, and wonky controls don't always respond the way you want them to. Hulk's suite of moves is extremely limited, and it only grows marginally as the game progresses. Unenthusiastic voice acting and a few ludicrous premises for missions blunt the half-hearted attempts at story. With all that said, there's an awful lot to smash as you bounce through Manhattan, and there's a genuine attempt to deliver a wealth of content as you do it. Loads of missions, side jobs, and a huge number of collectibles and unlockables make this a worthy time suck, even if your escape into epic vandalism isn't the most polished gaming experience. —MILLER



XBOX 360

Don King Presents: Prizefighter

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER 2K SPORTS > DEVELOPER VENOM GAMES/2K NEWCASTLE > RELEASE JUNE 10 > ESRB T

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

BATTERED BUT PROUD

With reigning champion *Fight Night* lost in the wilderness, it was only a matter of time before someone stepped up to challenge the king. Nobody fills a spotlight quite like Don King, and I've got to give the man credit on this one. *Prizefighter* is far from a perfect specimen, but it's not a sack of potatoes either.

Prizefighter feels as responsive as *Fight Night*, even though it is a button masher. It's not the way I would have gone, but it's still not the major gripe I have with the game. While this title presents a lot of the boxing fundamentals, like the importance of footwork, blocking, stamina, and counters, the punch animations don't match up with the correct results. Thus, you'll see punches that miss but still hit their target, and some that just miss...for unknown reasons. The blocking system, which includes a shoulder-button modifier that lets you perform stationary dodges from the torso up, is also

unreliable. When combined, these two factors can leave the game open to victory by button mashing when either you or your opponent are landing strings of outrageous combos no matter what the other boxer is doing. Early in the game I got a TKO during a round where I threw nothing but uppercuts. Later on this strategy failed, but the animation annoyances persisted.

Despite these problems, *Prizefighter* is not without its charms. The use of video interviews with luminaries from the boxing world talking about your character's ascension is a cool technique, as are the kinks in the road to superstardom. Your career isn't super deep, but it easily tops *Fight Night*'s bare-bones mode.

Prizefighter definitely has its frustrating moments, but there was enough fight in it — in and out of the ring — to keep me from needing the smelling salts. This series has taken some punches, now let's hope it knows how to counter-attack. Then we could have a serious battle on our hands. —KATO

> **Concept:** Even though it's a button-masher in an analog world, Don King's not just here to grab the money and run

> **Graphics:** Overall, it doesn't look bad. The body sweat effect is nice, but the spray and brutality is not *Fight Night* quality

> **Sound:** Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger" fits nicely here. Boston does not belong, however

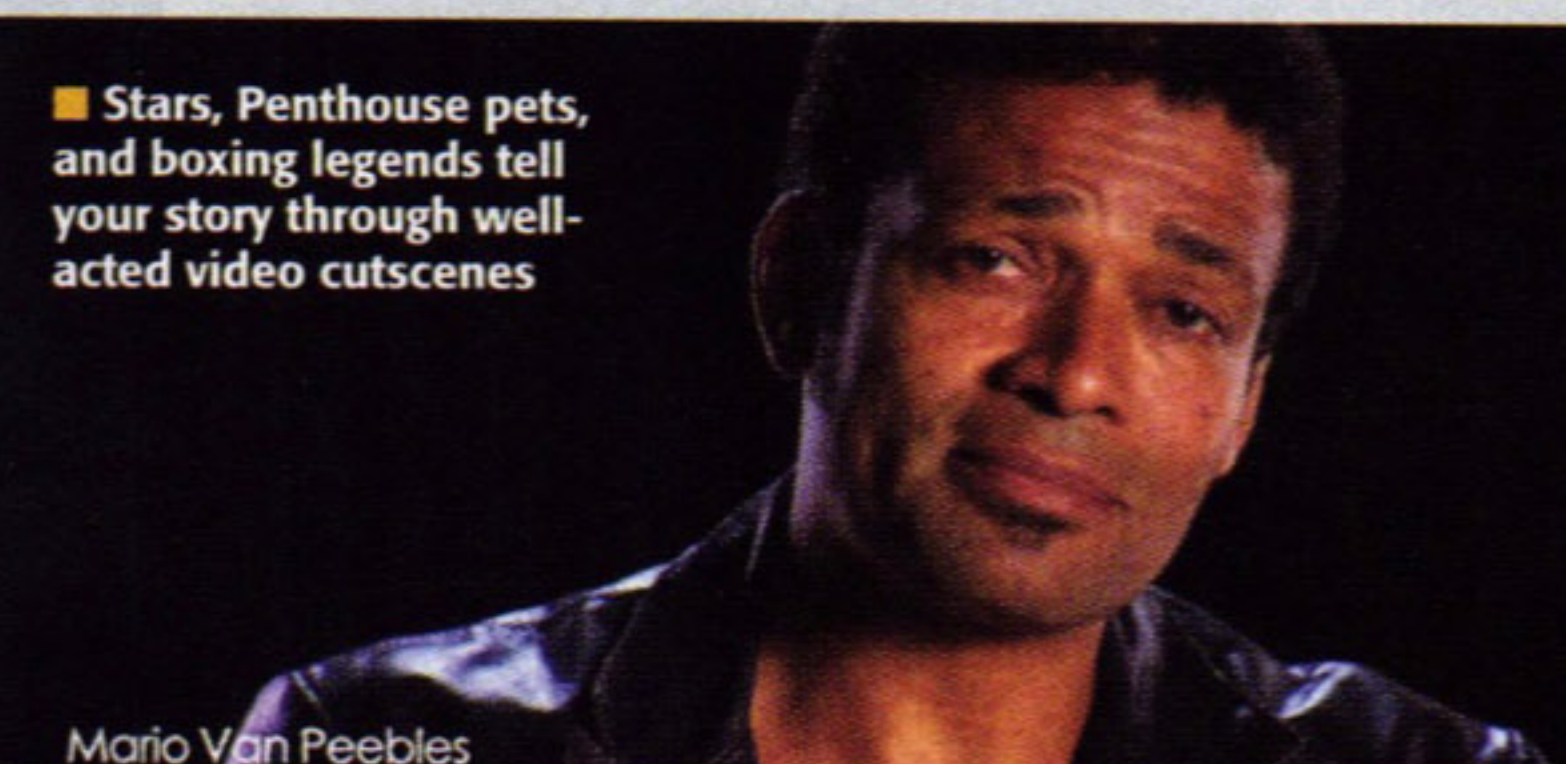
> **Playability:** The inconsistent blocking system and missed punches frustrate

> **Entertainment:** This game is neither as bad as it seems nor as good as it could be

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Prizefighter's prize possession is easily the career mode, in which you create a boxer and relive his rags-to-riches story, complete with memorable bouts and documentary-style footage chronicling his pursuit of superstardom. In the ring, the button-mashing action lacks the fluidity of the superior *Fight Night* analog controls, but still demands skill. Landing combos while ducking punches and dancing around the ring is a must if you don't want to end up a bloody mess on the mat. Unfortunately, the animations can't hang with your string of jabs, hooks, and uppercuts, as punches frequently miss their location. Even though I jacked an opponent in the shoulder while trying to land a hook to the face, he went down as if I rearranged his brain cells — go figure. Still, this is a decent exhibition fight for boxing fans waiting for the next championship bout of *Fight Night*. —BERTZ



Stars, Penthouse pets, and boxing legends tell your story through well-acted video cutscenes

Mario Van Peebles



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

Kung Fu Panda

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** LUXOFLUX > **RELEASE** JUNE 3 > **ESRB** E

A WORTHY PANDA

I'll be honest: I look forward to reviewing games based on popular CG-animated children's movies about as much as doing my taxes or contracting polio. More often than not, they tend to be a mix of shoddy combat and hollow platforming clichés aimed at doing only one thing well: relieving parents of their hard-earned money. Thankfully, there are the odd surprises, and Kung Fu Panda is most certainly one of these. From beginning to end, it's an entertaining mix of bracing combat, polished platforming, and a good dollop of humor.

Kung Fu Panda was made by Luxoflux, which cut its teeth on more adult-oriented titles like Vigilante 8 and the True Crime series. The studio's experience shows. While Kung Fu Panda doesn't exactly innovate, it distinguishes itself from the pack by cleverly swiping bits of gameplay from better titles and its keen knack for knowing just the right moment to give players a bit of variety—be it a chase sequence, timed button pressing a la God of War, a stationary gun turret section, or alternate playable characters.

It does the basics well, too; the combat system (which features an astonishing amount of customization and upgrades) is excellent. In boss battles, you actually have to use (gasp!) strategy and attack in an intelligent manner. While the platforming can be a bit wonky at times (landing on some objects in the environment can be tricky), the frequent checkpoints save you from any real frustration.

What's more, many of the jokes actually inspire laughs, due in large part to the humorously portentous voice work. To top it off, there are a host of solid multiplayer brawling contests and other unlockables to open up during your adventure. While Kung Fu Panda certainly isn't breaking new ground, it's inspiring to know that studios are still capable of doing quality work in the well-worn platforming genre.—**MATT**

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

While it's a fine game on any system, the Wii lags behind the PS3 and Xbox 360 in terms of both visuals and control mechanics.

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Create a licensed platformer that's actually fun to play. Why didn't someone think of this before?

> **Graphics:** On the PS3 and 360, this is one nice looking game. On the Wii, not so much...

> **Sound:** A nice score supplemented by voiceovers from the world's best Jack Black impersonator

> **Playability:** The slight issues with platforming and camera are more than made up for by a solid and deep combat system

> **Entertainment:** I played all the way to the end, not because I had to for work, but because I wanted to—something I rarely say about these types of games

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

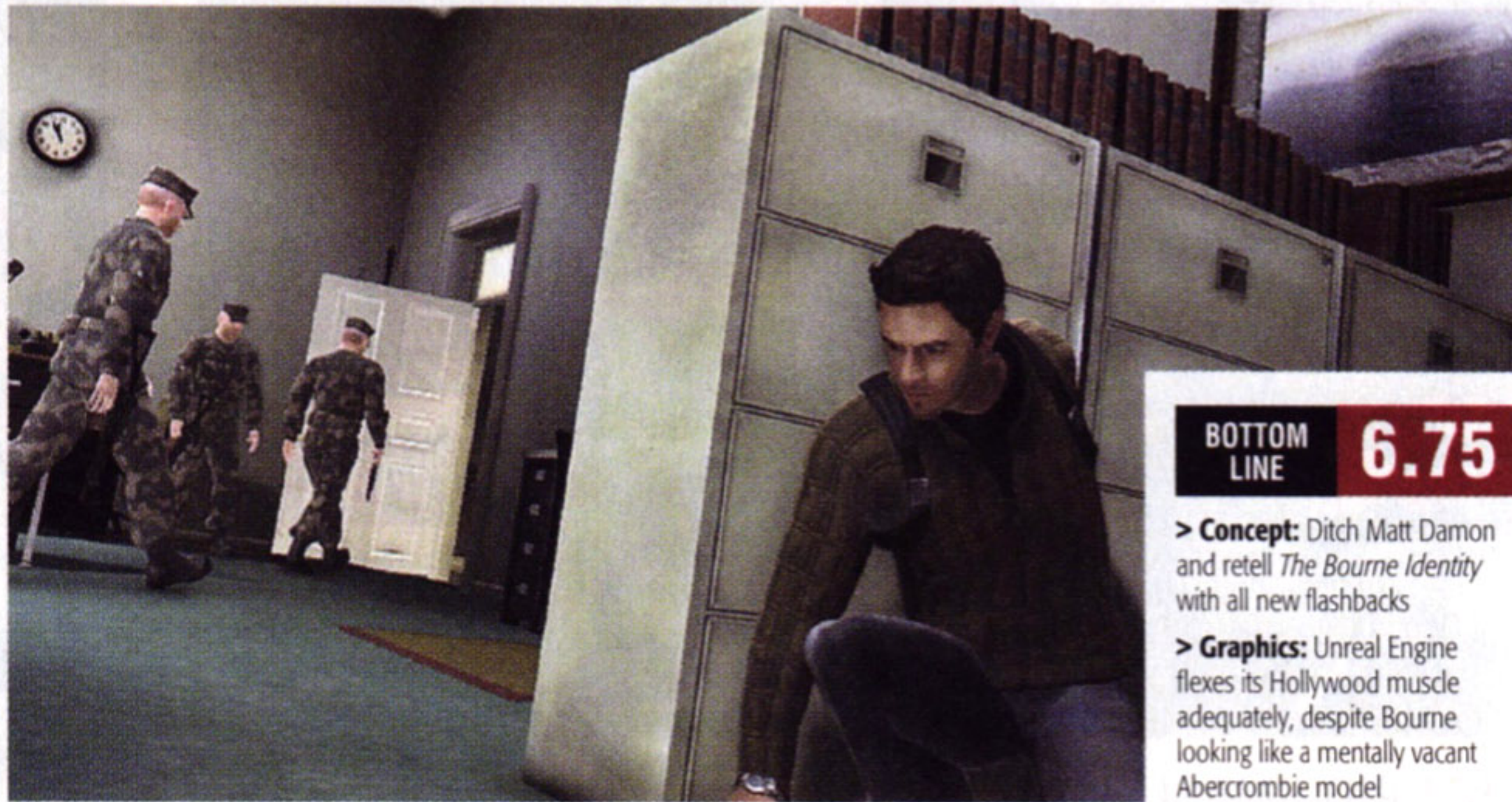
Second Opinion 7.75

If there were a concoction used to open up the gates of hell, there's a good chance that it would be composed of talking animals, a Jack Black impersonator, and a game based on a computer-generated children's film. This mixture may sound like the devil's work, but it's actually a winning formula for gamers. Like the film, Kung Fu Panda's combat is mighty fun. Thanks to the fluid movements and excellently crafted controls, unleashing combos upon hapless boars is a blast. The game also provides a nice slice of variety for the supporting cast, be it a flying sequence or the chance to see what the master can do. To top it off, its story flows well and is loaded with hilarious dialogue and beautifully animated sequences. In a summer filled with wretched movie-based games, this is a nice surprise.—**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

The Bourne Conspiracy

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SIERRA > **DEVELOPER** HIGH MOON STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 3 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Ditch Matt Damon and retell *The Bourne Identity* with all new flashbacks

> **Graphics:** Unreal Engine flexes its Hollywood muscle adequately, despite Bourne looking like a mentally vacant Abercrombie model

> **Sound:** The surround sound rivals the films, and Paul Oakenfold lends his fast-paced beats to the action

> **Playability:** The close quarters combat is riveting, but the poor fighting logic, touchy aim, and weak cover mechanics result in a lot of cheap deaths

> **Entertainment:** Ludlum junkies will appreciate the true-to-the-film presentation style, but the action sometimes feels more like Bond than Bourne

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

While I was skeptical that the kinetic energy of the Bourne films could be captured in game form, High Moon has managed—at least in the game's tense brawling sections—to emulate the quick-cut, highly skilled hand-to-hand combat of the movies. However, instead of being a foundation for an excellent super-spy experience, *The Bourne Conspiracy* flounders in a morass of poor design decisions. It's hard to mess up aiming mechanics, but that's just what Bourne does. Coming in and out of cover, the reticle is almost never where you expect it to be, a failing that's even worse for the fact that nothing but headshots seem to take down even run-of-the-mill enemies. More importantly, the staid level design robs the game of the sense of invention and ingenuity that Jason Bourne displays in the films. Here, it's nothing more than shoot, fight, open door, repeat. While I loved the quick-time button events during cutscenes and the car chase sequence, the overall lack of variety and polish leaves what should have been a great adventure stuck in mediocrity.—**MATT**

BOURNE DOES BOND

You have to credit the Ludlum estate for treating its star super agent right. Instead of tacking a hastily produced game on the coattails of a film, they hired Sierra and High Moon Studios to craft a standalone Bourne game from the ground up. The result is an experience that largely conveys the style of the films. If only the same amount of attention was paid to the troublesome gameplay.

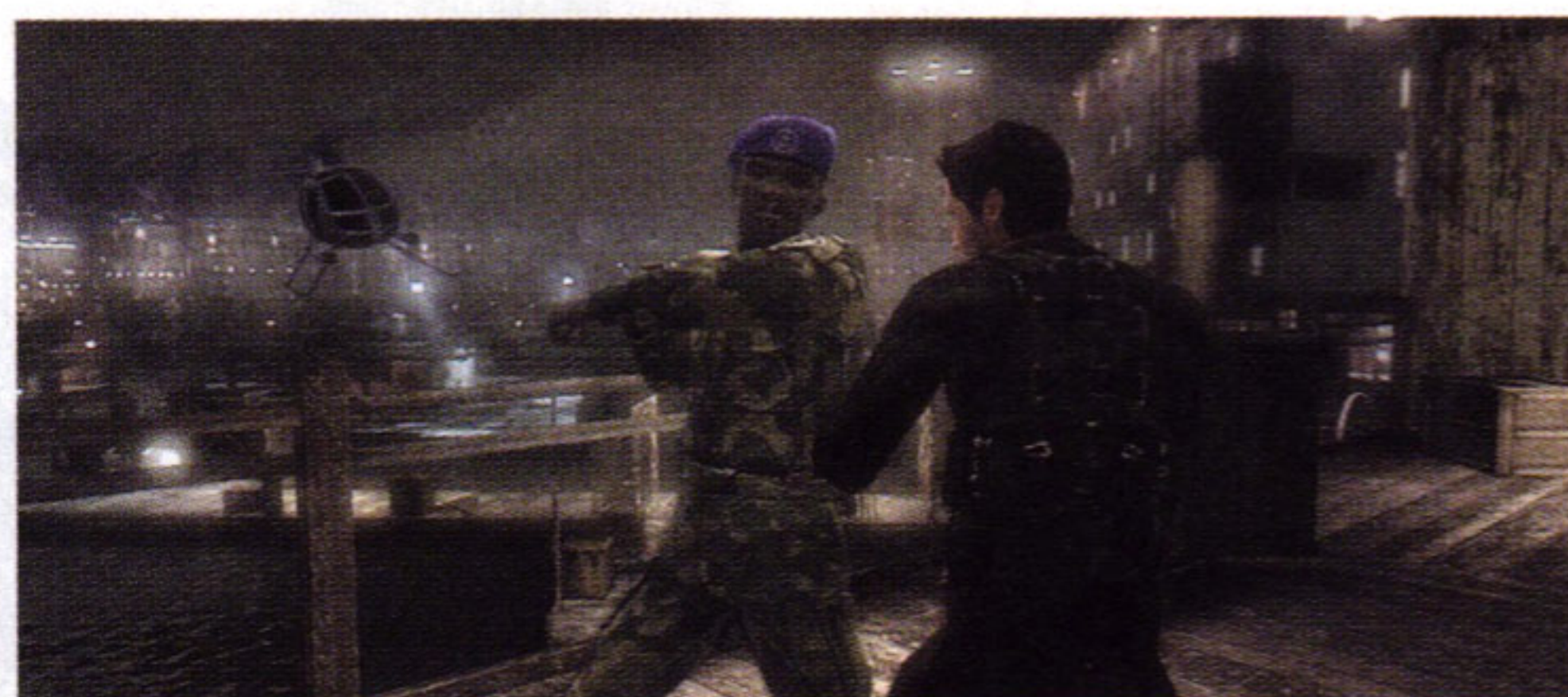
The Bourne Conspiracy follows the plotline of *The Bourne Identity*, but distinguishes itself by including flashbacks that show the \$30 million killing machine in action before he malfunctions. As with the superb films, the hand-to-hand combat and thrilling chase sequences are the centerpieces of the experience. The simple-input, complex-output two-button combat system unleashes a fury of kicks and punches in Bourne's signature Kali martial arts style. Land enough punches and Bourne performs an improv takedown move like the famed pen stab. Each fight features Paul Greengrass' directing style, with quick cuts and ever-shifting camera angles giving you a unique view of the action.

The heart-pounding chases take a page out of the God of War playbook, using quick-time button events to simulate the thrill of Bourne's

escapes. The game also delivers one car chase, which, while hampered by the arbitrary city borders, still features great moments like crashing through corner stores and cruising through tight alleys.

Not all of the game preserves the character of the films, however. Though the film-based Bourne is often so ahead of the game that he avoids major conflicts or resorting to gunfire, his video game counterpart isn't as savvy. During the flashback sequences, Bourne wields machine guns, fights entire armies, and takes on helicopters and APCs. Plagued with poor cover and sketchy shooting mechanics, these action sequences pale in comparison to the hand-to-hand combat. Worst of all is the battle logic. Bourne cannot disengage or avoid close quarters combat situations, which are automatically triggered if an enemy is within punching distance. When surrounded by snipers in elevated positions, Bourne would never engage in fisticuffs, but the game gives you no choice if an enemy gets too close.

Though *The Bourne Conspiracy* is weighed down by broken gunplay mechanics, its thrilling hand-to-hand combat, slick presentation, and relatively short time commitment (eight hours) make it a perfect rental for fans of the films.—**BERTZ**



BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

> Concept: A jack-of-all-trades game that features decent gun-play, swordplay, and driving, plus some amazing disaster-themed moments – all with very little polish or bug testing

> Graphics: There are times where you'll say, "That looks great," and others where you'll say, "Where are the textures? Does that even have a texture?"

> Sound: A choir pumps out haunting melodies much like *Akira's*. The voice work isn't bad, but the actual dialogue is

> Playability: A perfect blending of innovation and bugs allows you to experience awesome new concepts in painful ways

> Entertainment: The mystery-filled story and inventive gameplay is enough to pull you along through the buggy waters

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion **6.75**

I was really hoping *Alone in the Dark* would live up to its potential, but artificial game lengthening tactics and a general lack of polish have tainted the game's flashes of brilliance. On the positive side, it's got some of the most action-packed scenes in gaming, like scaling a cliff before a helicopter falls on you and driving through a crumbling city. It doesn't shy away from entertaining large-scale boss battles, and most of the clever puzzles blend realistically into the world. The rest is a strange mix of innovation and annoyance. The story teeters between cool and lukewarm, the latter of which is due to overly macho, f-bomb laden dialogue and both ho-hum endings. It's cool to climb around inside the cars and fiddle with the knobs, but by the end you'll just want to get in and go without all of the options getting in the way. The analog melee attacks offer an interesting hands-on feel, but they don't always work the way you want. DVD-style chapter navigation is great for zipping around the game. Unfortunately, it's not possible to skip the one thing everyone's going to want to – root burning. Imagine you're playing *Assassin's Creed* and right when you're going for the final kill, some guy says you have to collect most of those stupid flags in the game before you can continue. It jarringly kills the flow of gameplay and, for me, is *Alone in the Dark's* biggest sin of all. —BRYAN



XBOX 360 | PC

Alone in the Dark

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER EDEN GAMES > RELEASE JUNE 24 > ESRB M

BREAKING INNOVATION



The inventory system is pretty slick

Generations from now, *Resident Evil* will likely be remembered as the franchise that popularized horror in video games. For those of us who were playing games prior to 1992, we know that the true origin of pixelated scares is *Alone in the Dark*. Its story was greatly inspired by the work of H.P. Lovecraft, but its gameplay, which blended survival, horror, exploration, and puzzles, gave birth to a new breed of gaming. A testament to its greatness, many of its signature features are still found in modern day horror games. It's been over a decade since *Alone in the Dark* unleashed its genre-breaking lightning. Could it do it again?

screens, all item management is handled through your character's jacket, which you view from a first-person perspective.

Eden Games even went to the length of incorporating a DVD chapter selection system that allows you to jump to any point in the game, even if you haven't gotten there yet. Each leap is accompanied by a "previously on *Alone in the Dark*" clip that brings you up to speed on something that you may have missed. This cool little idea will allow people who either don't have the time or are stuck on a specific part to see the finale.

Like the *Alone in the Dark* games of old, much of the gameplay is comprised of puzzles. Most of them offer inventive solutions, whether it be using fire in newfangled ways or combining items for explosive results. This game has the makings of a certifiable hit, but the entire experience is corrupted by myriad problems. For one, the game has no polish. From the graphical glitches to the bothersome collision detection, you are constantly wondering if you are playing a finished copy of the game, or if Eden Games accidentally submitted the alpha code. The game's pacing, which starts out at a breezy clip of a Hollywood disaster movie, slows down to a crawl as players are asked to hunt down specific targets spread across a huge Central Park environment. These stretches are tedious, and are here to artificially lengthen the game.

Functionality wise, the first-person targeting

system works well, especially for the arc-based projectile throwing, but the weapon play, which asks players to do little more than press the analog stick left or right, is a study in how to not do melee in games. To top it off, the story, which piqued my interest early on with its incredibly dark atmosphere and complex characters, ends unexpectedly without any real conclusion. It would have been better if the main character turned toward the screen and said, "Sorry, that's all we have so far. Come back when we actually finish making the game."

Alone in the Dark can be applauded for its innovation, but it cannot be saved from its dysfunction. Had Eden Games added polish, or dare I say it, play-tested the game, it could have been a welcome addition for survival horror fans. If you can tolerate the broken experience, you'll be treated to some memorable and original moments. Given the amount of frustration you must endure to get there, it's a lot to ask. But if you are a game aficionado who is interested in seeing all the breakthroughs this industry has to offer, *Alone in the Dark* breaks new ground just as much as it breaks gameplay. —REINER



Central Park, a.k.a. the pit of gaming hell



Once you've dominated your silicon opponents, take your baseline game online and compete in the World Tour

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Top Spin 3

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** PAM DEVELOPMENT > **RELEASE** JUNE 23 > **ESRB** E

GAME SET MATCH

If you're looking for a pick-up-and-play tennis title, stick to Wii Sports and its "anyone can do it!" philosophy. Top Spin 3 is the tennis game for hardcore players who wear K-Swiss, know the difference between syngut and polyon strings, and think of Prince as a tennis company and not a rock star.

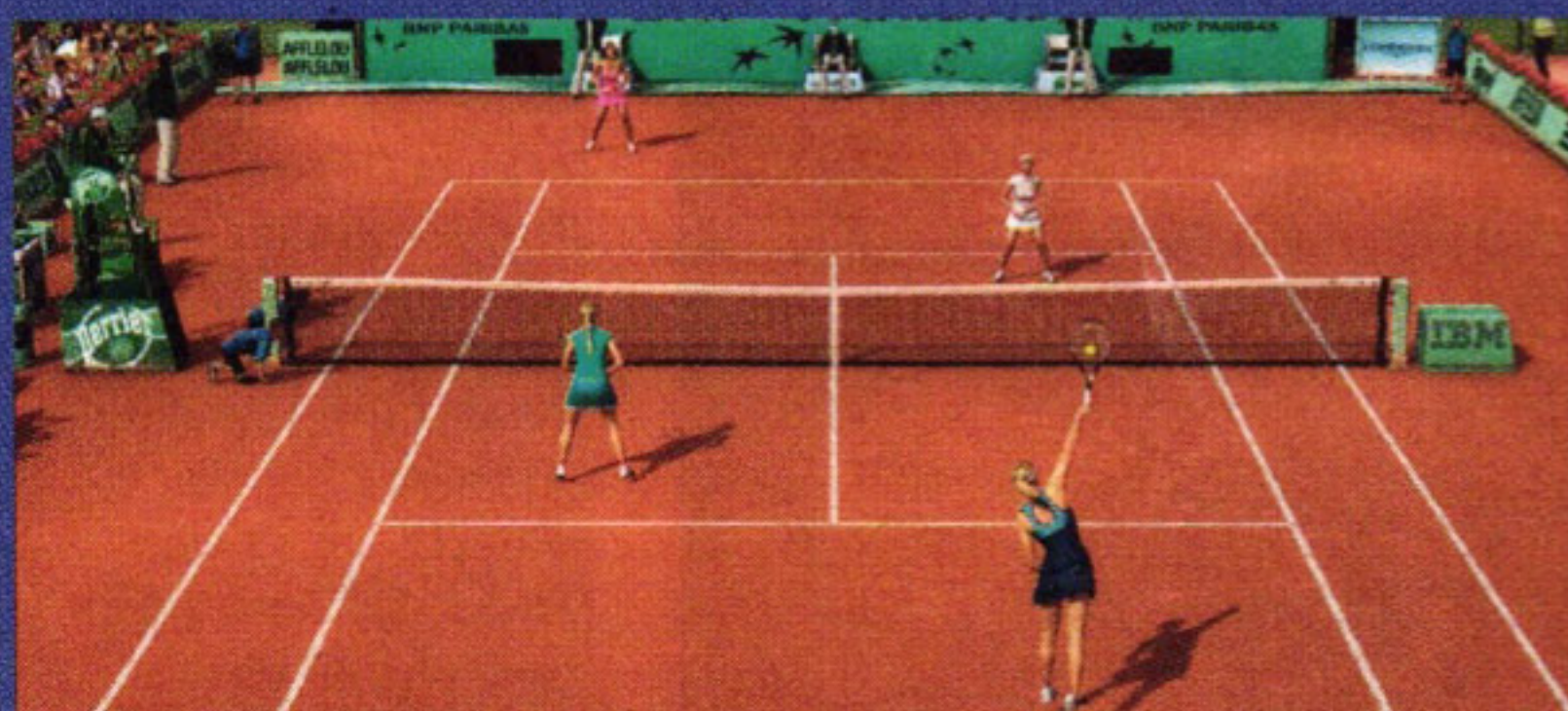
Top Spin 3's new gameplay system is based on true tennis timing. Players must select their shots and hold the button down well before the opponent returns the ball to their court. Once the shot arrives and you are properly aligned, release the button and hold the direction you want the ball to travel. This takes getting used to, but it properly reflects the anticipation, timing, and footwork required in real tennis, which aficionados will appreciate. The analog serves also feel more natural than the simple button presses of games past; if only 2K incorporated the analog swing into the forehand and backhand strokes as well.

Unfortunately, the gameplay falls apart in transition to and from the net. Your player moves with a grace of an overweight ball boy, incapable of changing directions quickly, and the

hold-and-release formula breaks down completely at the net, where quick reflexes (and button presses) are paramount. The drop ball and lob shot are also inconsistent, which leaves the game feeling like a recreation of wood racquet era where net players were the most difficult to defeat — the complete opposite of the modern game.

The gameplay may be a mixed bag, but the career mode is the best yet. After you create your player, you must work your way through amateur and junior circuits before taking on the big guns like Federer and Sharapova. As you win matches and tournaments, you're awarded points you can attribute to skills like baseline strokes, service, and return. You cannot max out every skill, so deciding whether you want to buffer your weaknesses or cement your strengths is key to rounding out your game.

2K Sports deserves credit for this bold attempt at redesigning the tennis interface. With more responsive movement controls and a better transition game Top Spin 3 could have been king of the court, but for now it will have to settle for being tagged as a promising but flawed prospect. —BERTZ



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Knock Roger Federer off his lofty perch as the best tennis player in the world

> **Graphics:** Impressive courts and realistic animations make this the best-looking tennis game to date

> **Sound:** What does it take to get commentary? Is a little Fred Stolle and Cliff Drysdale action too much to ask?

> **Playability:** The new controls better mimic real tennis, until you approach or retreat from the net

> **Entertainment:** Tennis may be floundering on television, but it has a strong pulse, albeit with a few palpitations, on consoles. The career and online modes are fantastic

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.25

Top Spin 3 is certainly the most ambitious tennis game we've seen in a long time. With an unprecedented graphical detail, deep career mode, Madden-quality animations, and new gameplay mechanics that quite literally change the feel of video game tennis, you can't fault this title for not taking chances. After a period of adjustment, I grew to love the new "hold-and-release" control scheme as well as the excellent analog serve. However, the high difficulty curve combined with some nagging issues — most notably the terrible lob and drop shots (which make server and volley opponents extremely difficult to beat) and the annoying ways that your player seems to get stuck in animations instead of quickly changing direction — make for a game that will be off-putting to more casual fans. In addition, it could sorely use a bit of excitement and glamour in the presentation, which is remarkably dry for a "jet set" sport like tennis. Hardcore tennis buffs will find all the work of relearning the sport worth it, but ultimately Top Spin 3 feels like an evolutionary step rather than a new standard. —MATT

Wii

Rock Band

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS/MTV GAMES > **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX/PI STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 22 > **ESRB** T



IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S Wii

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

I'm going to spend the next few paragraphs detailing feature sets, comparing systems, and praising song selections. Before I do, I'd like to ask a few questions that should tell you whether Rock Band Wii is for you. Do you own a PS3 or a 360? If the answer is yes, then you need read no further. There is no reason I would suggest the Wii version to you. If the answer is no, but you do have a Wii, then the second question is whether rocking out with your buddies in a pretend band sounds like fun. If so, even with its limited options, then this is a pretty sure thing.

Rock Band has been dramatically stripped to successfully run on the Wii. The character creator has been completely axed — you play with pre-fabs. The Band World Tour mode has also disappeared. The excitement of choosing venues, setlists, and growing a fan base has been replaced by a straightforward song progression. Behind the ever-descending tracks of notes, the background videos are entirely preset, and surprisingly blurry. Finally, you can forget about downloading songs. The game with the best and most comprehensive DLC in history

is missing that component on the Wii.

All of that stinks. So why is it a sure thing for Wii owners? Even ravaged by all these missing features, Rock Band is the best music game on the system. It has a fantastic selection of songs, including a few of the best DLC hits. The audio mix is amazing, the track layouts are varied and exciting for all skill levels, and the instruments are as good as the ones for any other console, albeit with a shiny white sheen.

Rock Band represents exactly

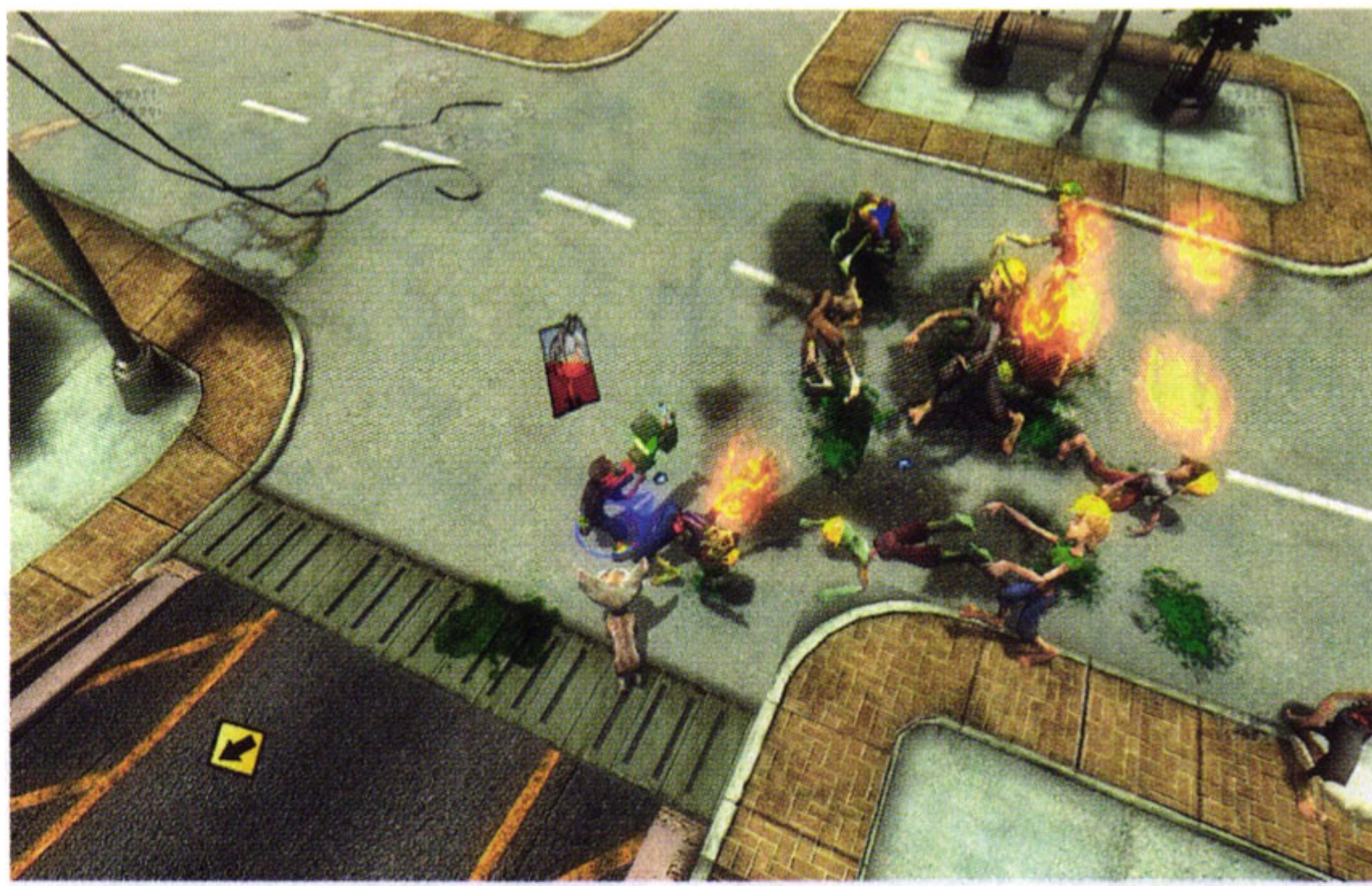


Second Opinion 8.25

what most people who own a Wii are looking for. This is cooperative gaming at its best — the perfect party game for friends, family, and new gamers alike. Even with its regrettable omissions, Rock Band has a broad audience of Wii owners just waiting in the wings to get their chance on stage. —MILLER

All of the limitations and workarounds of the PS2 version of Rock Band have essentially been copied and pasted to the Wii. It lacks a character creator, true World Tour mode, and downloadable content. On the plus side, five new songs have been thrown in and wireless guitars are standard. While you don't have to jam a remote into your controller like Guitar Hero III's Les Paul, a USB dongle is required. Unlike the 360 or PS3, the Wii only has USB ports in the back of the console, so have fun yanking your system out of the entertainment center every time you want to plug in instruments. The 360/PS3 versions are better in every way, but if the Wii is the only system you'll ever own, this is a suitable way to get your Rock Band fix. —BRYAN





PLAYSTATION 3

Monster Madness: Grave Danger

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** SOUTHPeAK GAMES > **DEVELOPER** PSYONIX/ARTIFICIAL STUDIOS > **RELEASE** AUGUST 8 > **ESRB** T



GRAVE ROBBING

Like a decaying zombie, last year's Xbox 360 teen-horror hack and slasher rises from the grave and shambles with a groan onto the PS3. In case you're not familiar with the title, here's the quick and dirty. Four unlikely schoolmates are thrust together in a "no time for explanations" storyline that has them battling hordes of monsters ravaging their town.

The top-down action lets you use a variety of weapons scattered across the environment, but you'll quickly abandon melee combat in favor of buying and upgrading new weapons cobbled together from everyday parts. The action is about as fresh as a zombie's breath, but it's fun in the same way as a campy B horror flick. Conversely, the dialogue is so cheesy it should be breaded, fried, and sold at some state fair. Every character grated on my nerves and took away from the overall charm of the game.

Grave Danger boasts many improvements over the Xbox 360 version. The terrible checkpoint system has been replaced with an instant respawn that makes the game more forgiving. Also, SouthPeak added a new challenge mode that lets you take on a variety of Galaga, Pac-Man, and DDR-like events. These minigames range from cool to frustrating, but at least they offer a nice change of pace from the main story mode.

Grave Danger's biggest problems are old bugs that never got exterminated, like the one that leaves your vehicles stuck in walls. The camera can still be an issue, especially with the more friends you try to crowd onto one system. However, given that the game now has online co-op, it's easier to experience fewer of its faults by playing Grave Danger online with a friend.—**BEN**



■ Vehicles make a nice addition to the game, and add some variety to the game's repetitive combat

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** An update to the Smash TV concept that proves why games must continue to evolve

> **Graphics:** The bright comic book levels keep in tone with the game's overall campy feel

> **Sound:** The voice work is terrible and sounds like it might have been recorded in someone's basement

> **Playability:** This is the perfect buddy button masher; it's easy for casual gamers to pick up and play

> **Entertainment:** With a story that makes you feel like your watching a junior high talent show, you'll be thankful that you can (and will) skip the cutscenes

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

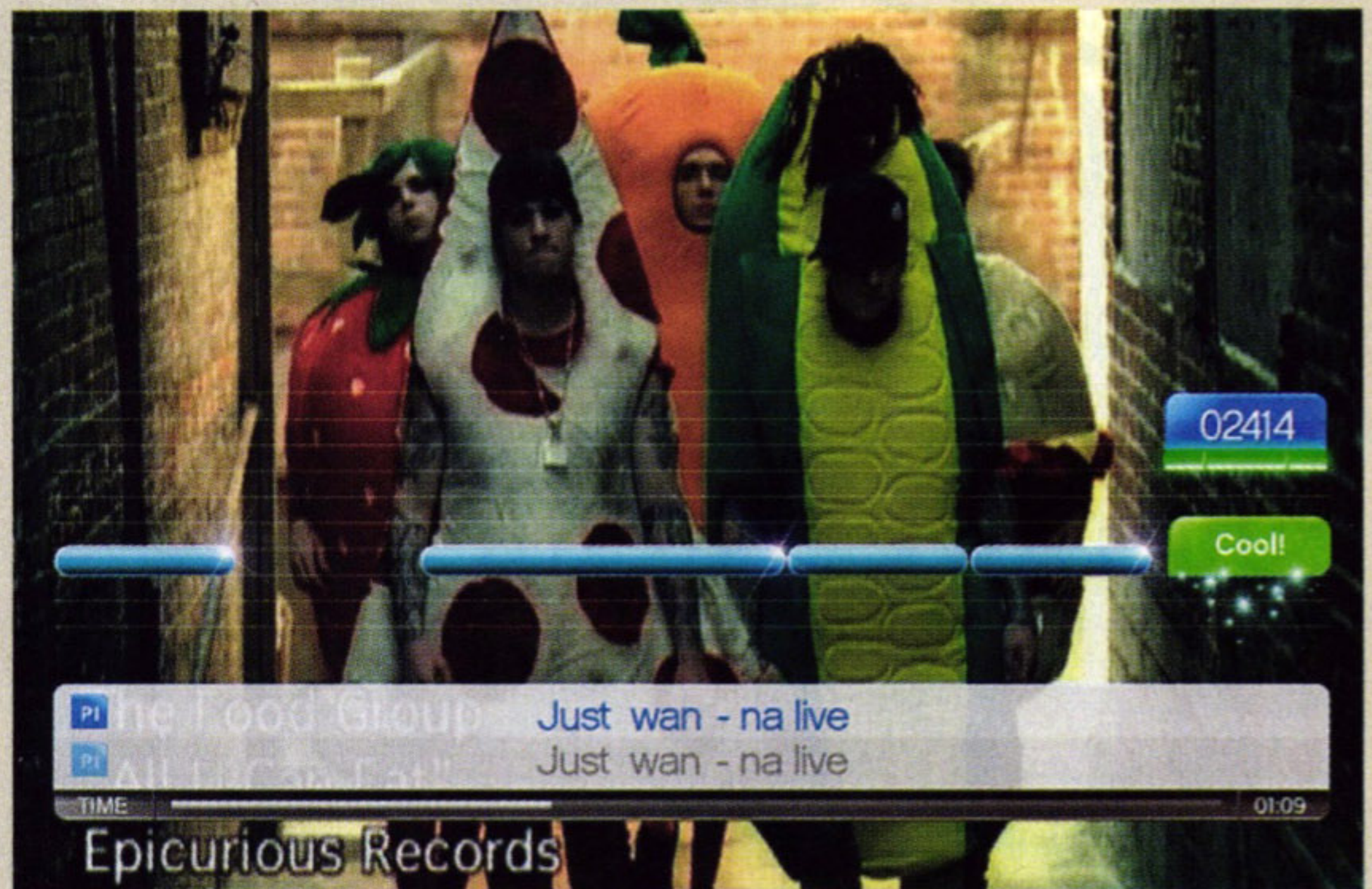
Second Opinion 6.75

With Grave Danger, the developers set out to fix a few things, add in some bonus content, and hope for the best. While online co-op and a more forgiving checkpoint system are certainly welcome, not much was done to remedy the grating story, four-player camera and slow down problems, and vehicles getting stuck in the environment. The 25 new minigame challenges offer a few decent thrills, but most of them aren't worth playing more than once. Don't get me wrong, fans of Smash TV-style shooters could rent this and have a "not bad" Saturday afternoon with some friends. Just know what you're getting into.—**BRYAN**

PLAYSTATION 3

SingStar

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE > **RELEASE** MAY 20 > **ESRB** T



YEP, MORE KARAOKE

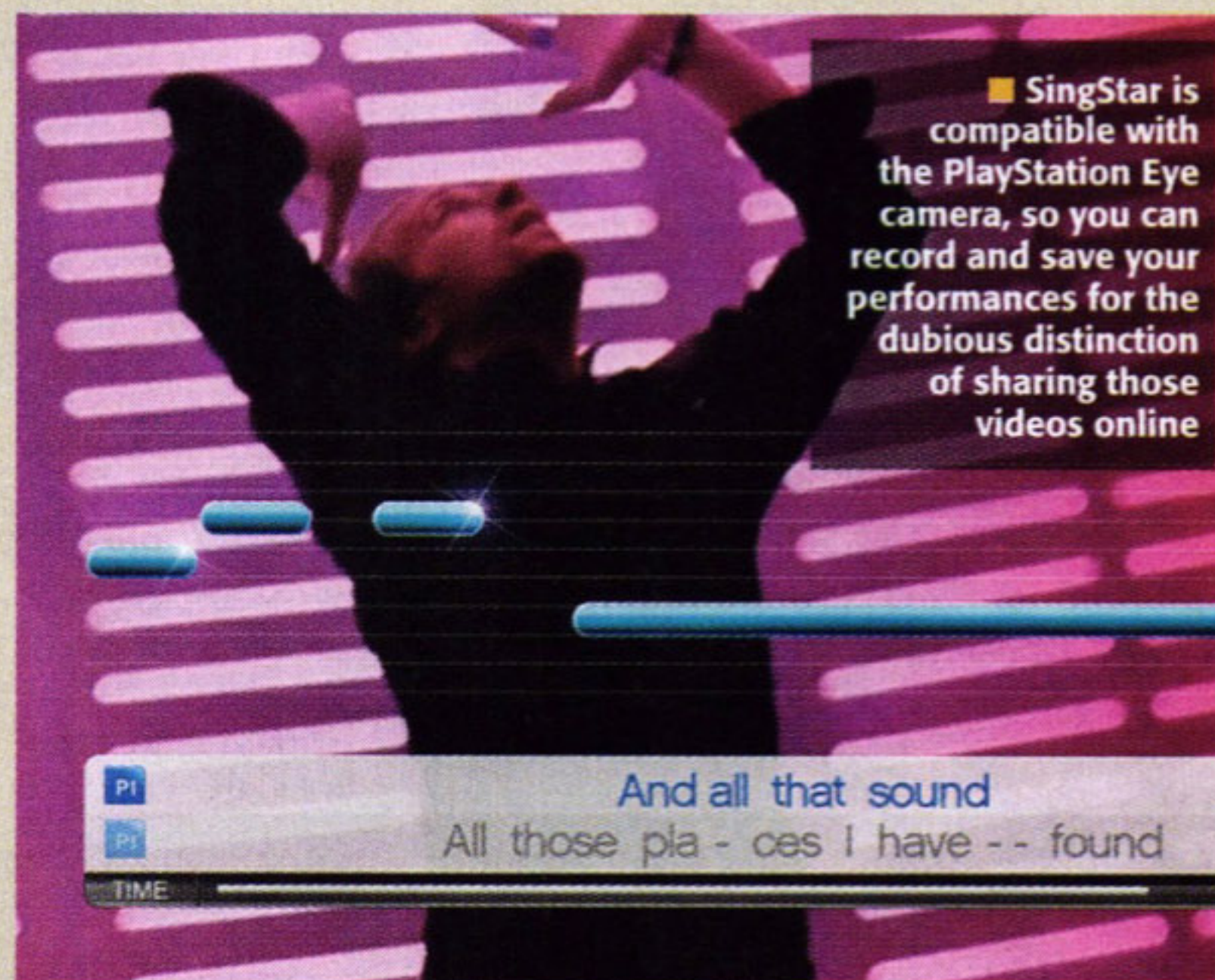
You should really know by now whether you are the target audience for SingStar. If you are, then the question for you is what does this title offer that other similar releases haven't already? To put it succinctly, it doesn't bring much innovation to the table, but it offers a lot more of what you'd expect with some pretty slick packaging.

SingStar features around 30 popular hits on the disc, along with their accompanying music videos that play along in the background. Whether playing solo or in a duet, the now familiar side-scrolling bars deliver words and approximate pitch. I was disappointed that the duet mode so frequently fails to take advantage of harmony parts and backup vocals, usually opting for the much more simplistic idea

of switching off the lead. Otherwise, the karaoke works just the way you'd hope.

This PS3 iteration of the franchise distinguishes itself with a wealth of downloadable content and some fantastic community features. Even music game giants Rock Band and Guitar Hero could learn some lessons from the easy-to-navigate SingStore and the ability to upload and watch user clips, most of which are as ridiculous as you'd expect.

SingStar's karaoke action may be somewhat limited in an era that follows the release of Rock Band, where so many other ways of playing are available. However, for enthusiasts who aren't looking for anything that complicated (or expensive), SingStar should deliver some amusing Friday nights with friends.—**MILLER**



■ SingStar is compatible with the PlayStation Eye camera, so you can record and save your performances for the dubious distinction of sharing those videos online

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** It's an old-fashioned sing-along, everybody!

> **Graphics:** Crisp menus are sometimes at odds with the SD music videos, but the overall presentation is clean and attractive

> **Sound:** While the initial song list isn't as varied as it should be, there's a wealth of downloadable songs for a price

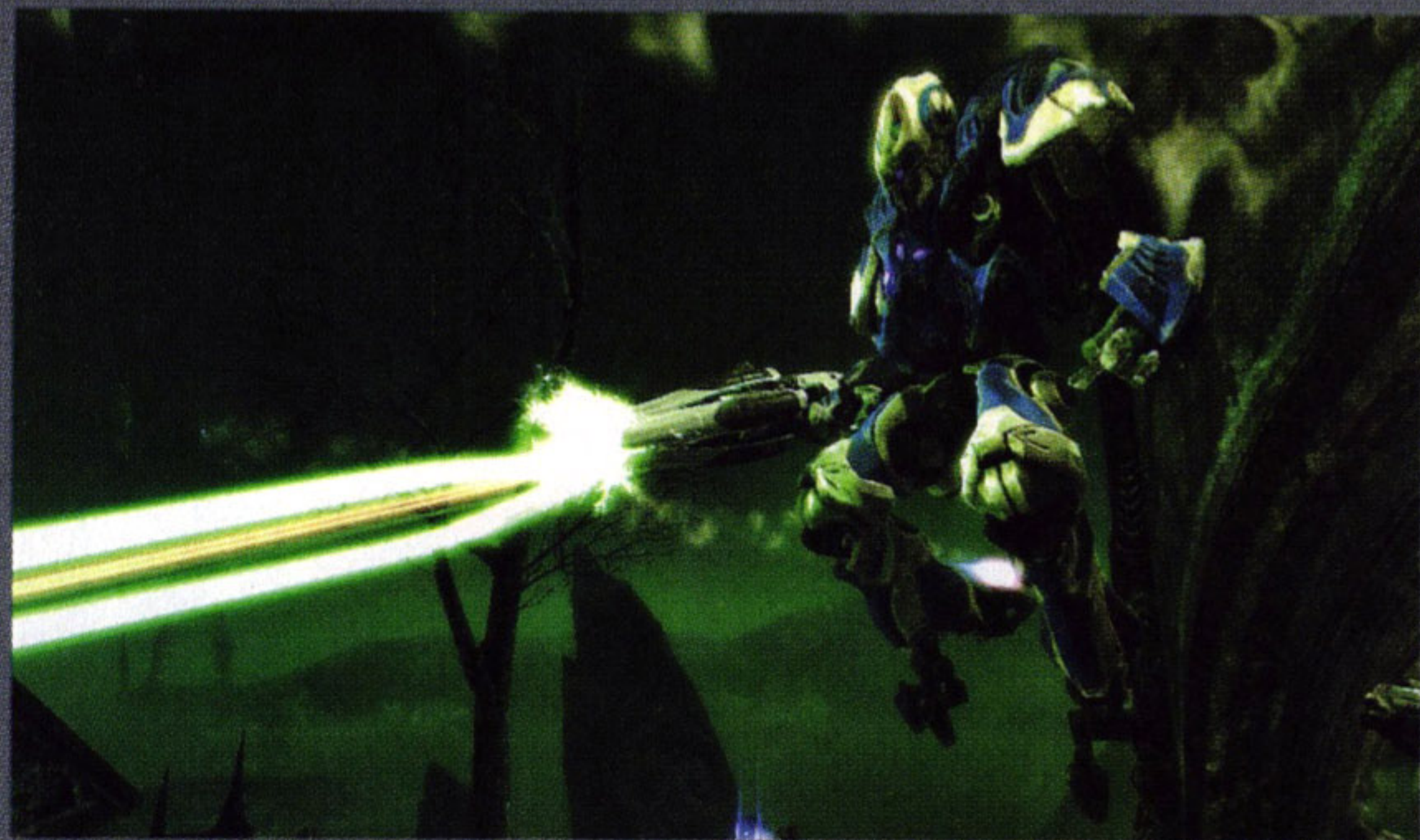
> **Playability:** This couldn't be more straightforward, and the slick interface is easy to navigate

> **Entertainment:** Your fun will be directly proportional to your willingness to make a fool of yourself singing Britney Spears

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

While those hoping for any kind of major change to the core SingStar gameplay may be disappointed with the first PS3 entry, plenty of bells and whistles spice up the same old lines-on-top-of-a-music-video standard. The hard drive allows for more video and audio saves, over 200 songs are available for download already, and the MySpace/YouTube-inspired community features trigger the same guilty pleasure receptors in the brain as watching bad American Idol contestants. I just wish there was a better video search structure and some kind of in-game incentive to post said vids. And where are the wireless mics?—**BRYAN**



XBOX 360

Unreal Tournament 3

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** EPIC GAMES > **RELEASE** JULY 7 > **ESRB** M

MAKE WAR NOT LOVE

Boy, it feels like this game just came out – twice! Anyone who's played Unreal Tournament 3 on PC or PS3 knows what to expect here. UT 3 is the best of the best when it comes to fast-twitch FPS action. The graphics are amazing, the maps beg you to explore and find every sniping point, and the vehicles and weapon arsenal are always a blast to use.

The 360 version brings a few nice additions to the table, including five additional maps, two new characters, and the split-screen mode that lets you bring friends in for co-op play. The online action is lag free, and the variety of match types keeps the gameplay fresh. Warfare, in particular, is a blast; this vehicle-heavy, team-based mode has you fighting over sequential nodes. Once you string together the nodes in your favor, you can blast the opposition's core to claim victory.

Other features don't fare as well. The single-player experience boils down to a string of bot matches. The poorly implemented weapons selection system could have been handled better, and while the movement controls feel good on the 360 gamepad, PC gamers likely won't be leaving behind their mouse and keyboard combos. The biggest tragedy is the lack of an infrastructure to handle user-generated content, which is an important feature for fans of the PC version. Fortunately, all of the Epic-generated DLC from the PC is included on the disc.

All these complaints don't add up to much when you're online mowing guys down with the flak cannon while the infamous Unreal announcer screams "Killing Spree!" in your ear. UT 3 still offers fast and furious action like few others, and 360 sci-fi shooter fans finally have a reason to take a break from Halo 3. —**BEN**



■ Vehicles, as always, are a blast to play

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** One of the most intense twitch shooters makes its way onto the 360 with few surprises

> **Graphics:** These graphics pop. Another breathtaking game that lives up to Epic's pedigree

> **Sound:** Loud and in your face, but would you really want it any other way?

> **Playability:** Faster than a rascally rabbit, UT3's action is smooth enough to appease most action junkies

> **Entertainment:** The game never lets up, online play is always fast and intense, and never grows stale

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.25

While the 360 version of UT 3 is late to the party, at least it catches the eye when it arrives. Like the PC and PS3 iterations, this frantic frag-fest looks amazing. The campaign cutscenes are gorgeous, even if the plot and dialogue clock in at about a third-grade reading level. While the campaign levels are little more than multiplayer stages with bots, I appreciate the chance to play through the chest-thumping story with a co-op buddy, online or off. The real excitement comes from the big online multiplayer matches; I found the map layouts in particular to be brilliant. As far as the transfer to analog sticks, only the vehicle controls come up a tad short. Unreal will find some awfully stiff competition with the other excellent shooters on Live these days, but it's certainly up to the challenge. —**MILLER**

XBOX 360

Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EALA > **RELEASE** JUNE 23 > **ESRB** T



■ The omission of Global Conquest mode in this version is no big loss

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Bring the recent C&C 3 expansion to 360 with a notably improved control scheme

> **Graphics:** Even at HD resolutions, it's tough to keep track of the chaotic battles. The effects are great, though

> **Sound:** Tuning out the constant reminders that your units are under attack is a necessary coping mechanism

> **Playability:** Best gamepad RTS control scheme ever. Now with five percent of the usability of a mouse and keyboard!

> **Entertainment:** Online is solid, but I can't think of a single-player campaign less suited to clunky gamepad controls

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

Make no mistake. Kane's Wrath may be a standalone title on the 360, but in every way that matters it's an expansion of an existing game. Consequently, it's hard to recommend the title to the uninitiated. With that caveat, this is another notable example of EA's ability to implement the RTS framework for consoles. Sure, the PC controls are still the far better alternative, but it's surprising how much you can do with a 360 controller. The tale of Kane's rise to power is pretty standard fare, but the battles themselves are certainly visually arresting. On the spectrum between walking softly and carrying a big stick, I'd have to say that the straightforward approach to tactics favors the latter. Even with a lack of subtlety and some noticeable frame stutters during big fights, it has one thing going for it: It's a functional console RTS. A rare claim indeed. —**MILLER**

KEEP 'EM COMING

So help them, Electronic Arts is going to keep on pounding this square peg into a round hole until it goes in through sheer brute force. I applaud the developers' efforts at refining the way players interact with a real-time strategy title via gamepad, but it's going to take a serious break from the genre's PC roots to create a good RTS title on console. Kane's Wrath, with its weak campaign and questionable unit AI, is not that game.

and the missions never push the player to engage in what C&C 3 does best: crushing enemies under an unstoppable wave of whichever unit(s) you focus on.

When you have access to the precision offered by a mouse/keyboard setup, babysitting your forces to minimize the impact of their idiotic AI and pathfinding is an annoying chore. On a gamepad, it's a fun-killing nightmare. Don't bother creating combined-arms groups of different units; the

faster ones will jump ahead to be slaughtered while the slower troops are still puttering along halfway across the map. The

■ Making sure your units are attacking what they're strong against is both essential and incredibly frustrating

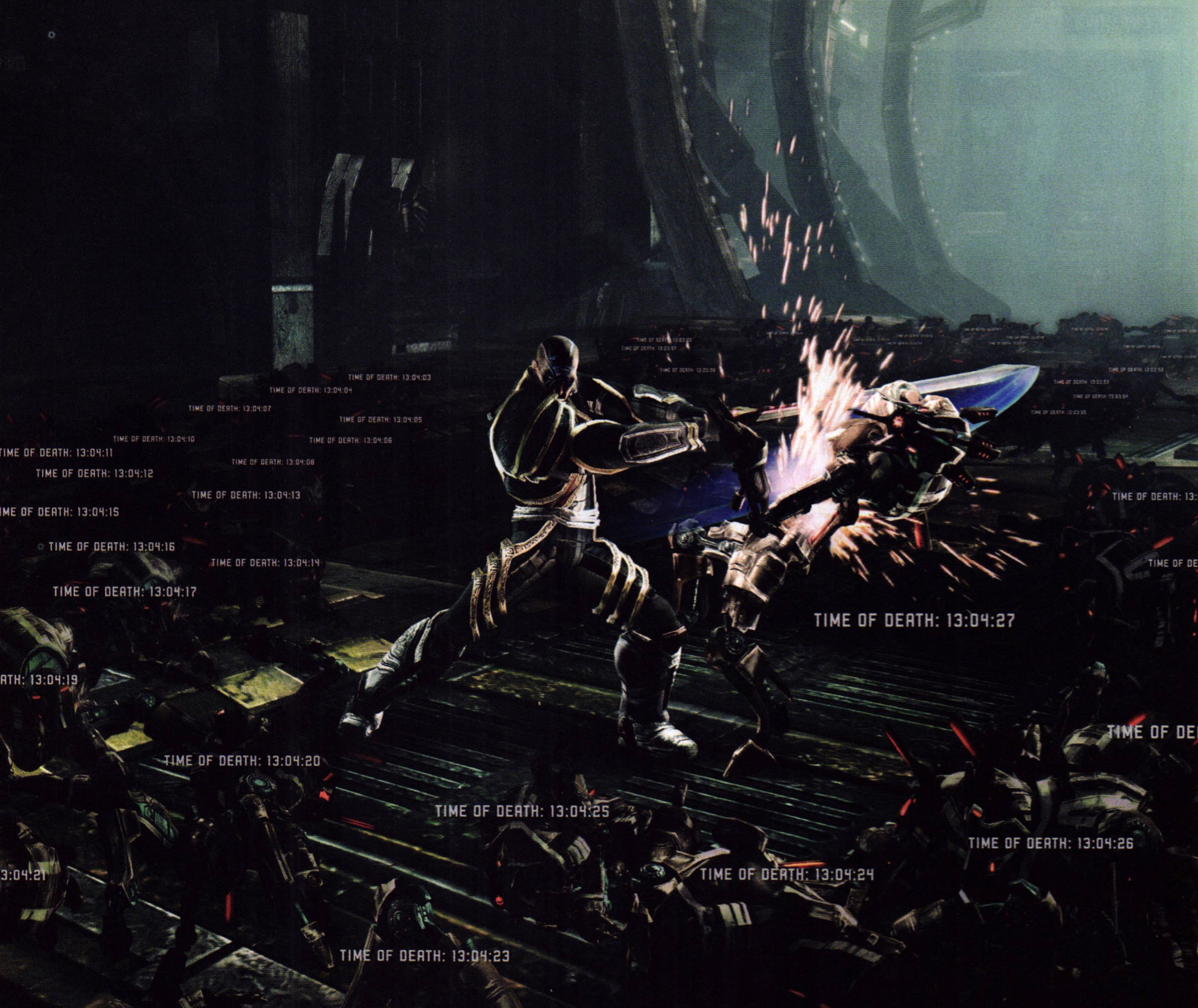


This expansion's greatest selling point on Xbox 360 is a reworked control scheme that allows you to pull up Mass Effect-style radial menus via the left trigger. These contextual interfaces make it much easier to manage your base building, production queues, and global powers. It's a step in the right direction, to be sure, but Kane's Wrath's underlying design prevents the game from being anything special.

While the single-player campaign was mediocre on PC, it's downright bad on 360. The constant need to micromanage Saboteurs to complete objectives highlights everything that's wrong with the interface,

most effective strategy is usually to grab your entire army and baby-step them across the landscape using a series of short attack-move orders – anything else generally results in your units competing to see who can make the least effective use of their abilities.

Online play is as good as we've seen out of the genre on console, mostly because of the improved controls, but C&C 3's reliance on hard counters, unit specials, and speedy expansion is a terrible fit for the limitations of the gamepad interface. Kane's Wrath executes its mediocre ideas solidly, but that doesn't make it any more fun to play. —**ADAM**



TIME OF DEATH: 13:04:27

BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU FIGHT THE MONSTERS, LEST YOU BECOME ONE.

-FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

TOO HUMAN

TEEN
T
 Blood
 Language
 Mild Suggestive Themes
 Violence
 ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Microsoft
game studios



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Jump in.



BOTTOM LINE **8**



PC

Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** FUNCOM/EIDOS INTERACTIVE
> **DEVELOPER** FUNCOM > **RELEASE** MAY 20 > **ESRB** M

DARK IS BEAUTIFUL

It's been a long time coming, but Age of Conan has finally arrived to lend some much-needed variety to the MMORPG scene. Taking a vastly different tack than its competitors, this dark, brutal, and often sultry world makes full use of its M rating. A blend of genre traditions and new ideas distinguish Conan from the pack for better and for worse, but to my delight it largely executes on the many promises made by Funcom during its long development.

As a solo experience, Conan isn't much different than most other fantasy MMOs. Players can viably solo all the way to the level cap, and the variety of personal goals make it enjoyable. Outside of the fantastic Tortage intro of levels 1-20, the experience isn't as polished as World of Warcraft or Lord of the Rings Online, but the unique combat mechanics make for more engaging battles than the genre standard. Manually activating every swing of your weapon and the addition of player collision also work very well in PvP.

The true strength of any MMO is its group content, and here Conan doesn't fare quite as well. Classes don't play off of each other as well as they could in battle, and encounters are often sloppy and hard to keep track of. PvE content is a step behind the genre leaders, with irritating zone design necessitating frequent backtracking. The solo questing and staid dungeon crawls also fail to deliver the excitement of LOTRO's story instances or WoW's interesting encounters.

In terms of presenting a shared world and fostering social interaction, Conan is mediocre at best. Public zones are fractured into different instances in the manner of Guild Wars, and it's rare to encounter more than 10 or 20 players

around you in the world. Crafting – a catalyst for player interaction – is fairly lame, so it's generally only at higher levels that other players mean anything to you beyond occasionally fighting them over slowly respawning quest items or mobs.

The real meat of Conan's gameplay is in the Borderlands, where high-level guilds large and small vie for control of territory and resources. As of this writing, the Borderlands dynamic is still evolving, with small cadres of power gamers dominating the early goings. It's impossible to evaluate how this system will play out over the coming months and years, but Conan's good underlying PvP mechan-

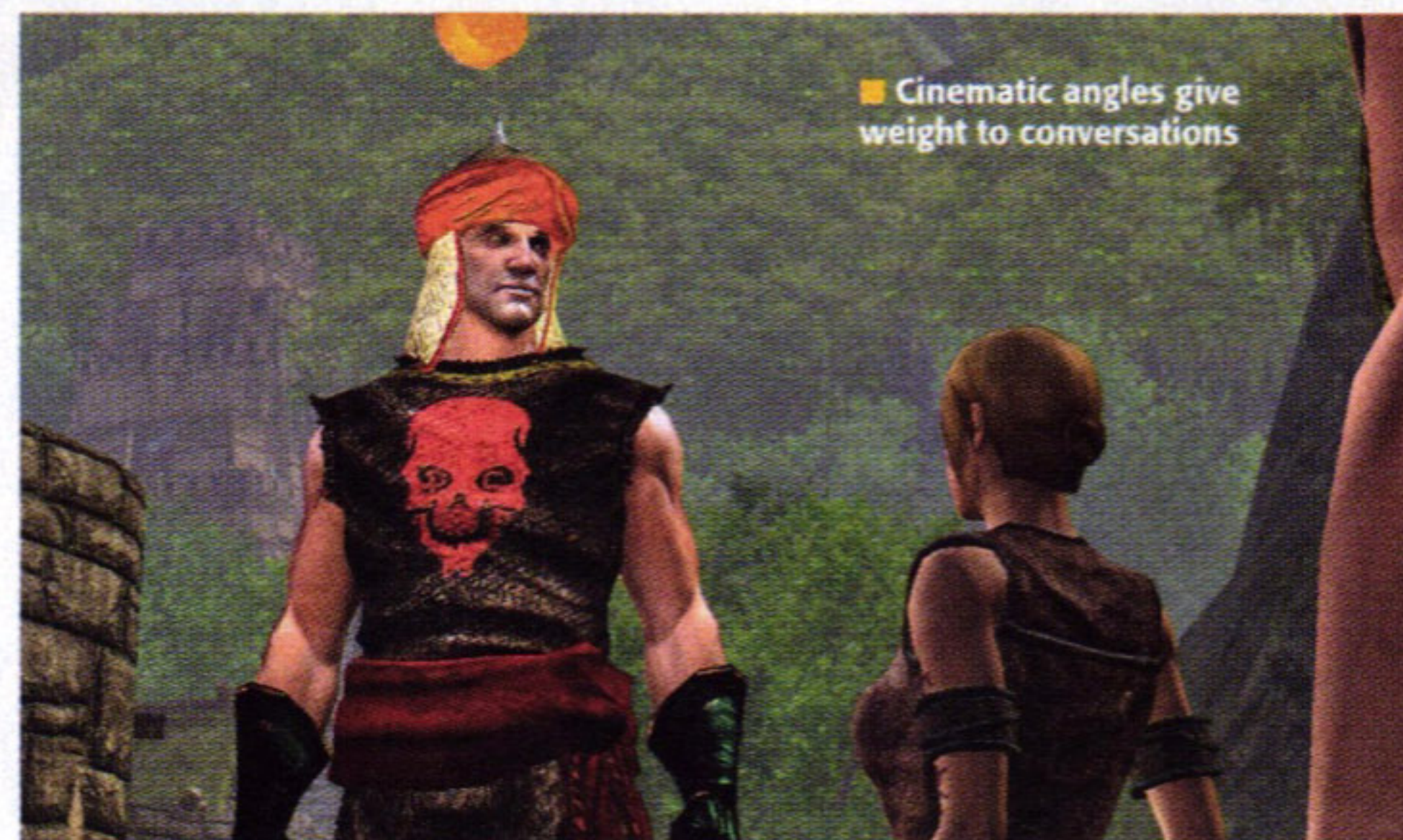
ics and guild-focused endgame design certainly have a lot of potential. Funcom has already significantly tuned up the gameplay post-release, and further adjustments are inevitable.

Conan delivers the best action in the genre, presents an

amazingly immersive world, and has a lot of room for emergent PvP gameplay at the level cap in the Borderlands. However, its heavily instanced design and lackluster PvE content offer little of note to more socially inclined players and PvP haters. More than perhaps any other genre, enjoying an MMO is tightly keyed to your individual taste, and Conan is a prime example. Overall, this is a solid, fun, polished title that should entertain just about any MMO fan – at least for a while. —ADAM



■ "Bloody" only begins to describe Conan's more sinister settings



■ Cinematic angles give weight to conversations

> **Concept:** Take the MMO genre in a darker, more action-oriented direction in this PvP-centric RPG

> **Graphics:** With a beefy machine to pump up the settings, this is the genre's high water mark. Don't expect it to play well – if at all – on any PC more than a few years old

> **Sound:** Limited but excellent NPC voice work and a fitting score greatly add to the immersion

> **Playability:** The clean and useful interface gets the job done, and excellent in-game help and maps are standout features

> **Entertainment:** Nothing in the genre is this visceral or immersive, but the non-PvP content often feels uninspired

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

It's easy to forget how monumentally huge a project it must be to put out an MMO, much less a good one. That's why Funcom's Age of Conan is a profound success, even if the game still has some kinks to hammer out. Robert E. Howard's seminal sword and sorcery world is presented here as if it were pulled from the author's imagination – from its pulp dialogue to the wildly buxom, over-sexed women. While the intrigue and plots are thoroughly grounded in that anachronistic style, the gameplay thankfully isn't. A portentous combat system delivers interesting options for every class, the well-structured UI is helpful, and the approach to upgrades and leveling is exciting. It could use more gameplay variety, particularly outside of combat, and the action was plagued with noticeable bugs in the early days after release. Even so, this is one of the best MMOs yet released, with a style all its own. —MILLER



NINTENDO DS

Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS
> **DEVELOPER** ATLUS > **RELEASE** JULY 1 > **ESRB** T

DOCTOR STYLE

While the Wii editions of Trauma Center worked surprisingly well, there's just something about the DS's touch screen that brings you deeper into the role of a surgeon. Many of the advancements of Second Opinion and New Blood have been brought over for Under the Knife 2 (i.e. the pacemaker, defibrillator, and penlight). This may be old hat to a Wii M.D., but those who haven't dabbled in the series since the last DS entry will find plenty of new surgery types and tools to use.

Unlike the original, more realistic surgeries persist through the entire game instead of going full bore into sci-fi creature infections (thank God). A few strains of the classic GUILT virus make cameos, but they're different enough that they don't feel like complete reshapes. The new virus types are tough without being a complete pain in the ass. If you get stuck on a particularly nasty surgery, you can now occasionally dip down to an easier difficulty instead of snapping your DS in half in frustration.

The surprisingly multifaceted story covers everything from political maneuvering to the consequences of hubris and tinkering with the laws of nature. However, the game would benefit from less jibber jabber and a more concise campaign — which could have easily been accomplished if your allies would just remember to wear some freakin' hazmat suits when going after bioterrorists. —**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Bring Trauma Center back to where it belongs

> **Graphics:** Obviously not as sharp as recent Wii iterations, but character art and operations have stepped up since the original

> **Sound:** The small snippets of voice work are a nice touch

> **Playability:** Tool manipulation is markedly more precise, but the hunchback you'll get from playing DS on a table limits long play sessions

> **Entertainment:** Possibly the best storyline in the series, and surgery types constantly change with less of a reliance on fantasy ailments

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

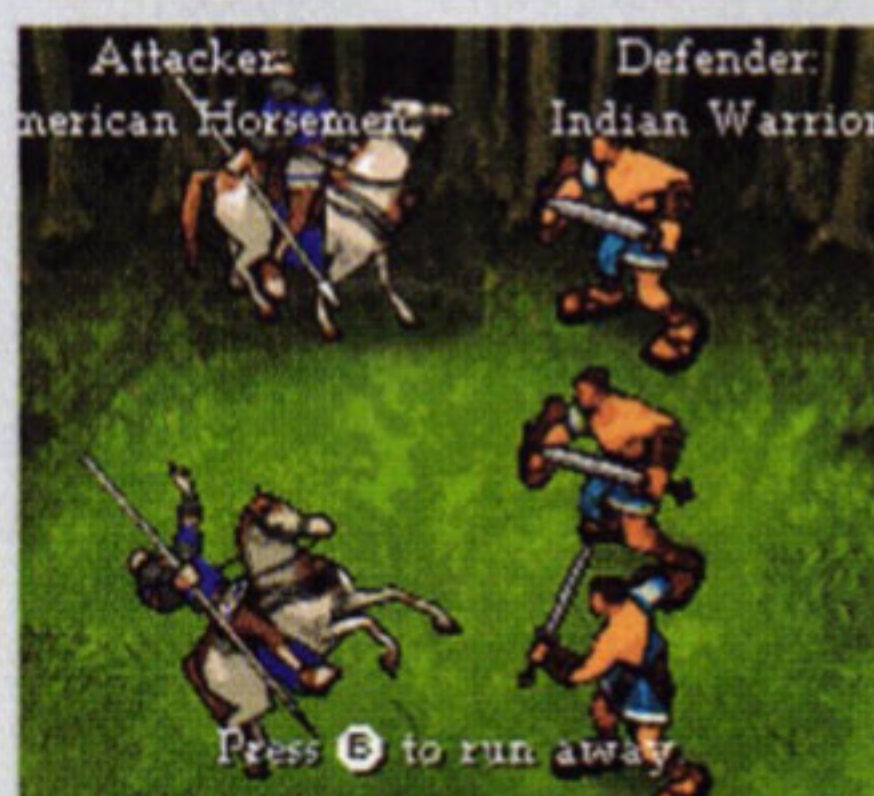
There aren't many series out there that test your reflexes and precision like Trauma Center. Back on the DS where it belongs, Under the Knife 2 requires a surgeon's touch as you patch up your patients in operations that are more interesting and varied than any other entry. The controls are much smoother now; you still need to be unerring at times, but I rarely felt like the game was blatantly screwing me over. I also like how it is generally more grounded in reality, despite some hilariously outlandish boss surgeries. The story and supporting characters exist only to surround Dr. Stiles with medical emergencies, but when the gameplay is this fun and challenging, a world in constant peril is a great place to be. —**JOE**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Civilization Revolution

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL OR ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS > **RELEASE** JULY 8 > **ESRB** E 10+



BOTTOM LINE

8.5

This title's greatest accomplishment is simply in delivering the full Civilization

Revolution experience on Nintendo's handheld. The outstanding turn-based strategy is here in its entirety (see our full review of the console versions last month for details). Some few sacrifices have been made, notably the absence of the in-game Civlopedia, and the control is nowhere near as smooth as it is on a gamepad. However, you won't find a deeper or more replayable portable strategy experience anywhere. Civilization Revolution is a very worthwhile investment for any strategically minded DS owner. —**ADAM**

NINTENDO DS

LOL

> **STYLE** 2 TO 4-PLAYER BOARD
> **PUBLISHER** AGETEC
> **DEVELOPER** SKIP/ROUTE24
> **RELEASE** JUNE 2 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE

1

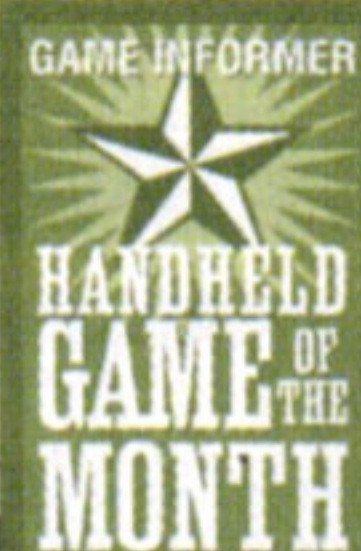
In LOL, one player writes a question or makes a request and up to three other

people try to scrawl a clever reply on their own DS (via single-card download play). Everyone gets three votes to pick their favorites, which works fine in four-player. But in smaller games you're forced to either vote for everyone or double up. Or you can just vote for yourself three times! After a few rounds, the game is over and a winner is declared. There is absolutely nothing else to do on the card except watch the credits. Congratulations, you just spent \$20 on 10 minutes of gameplay! The game is only available on Agatec's website...or for free on every DS. It's called PictoChat. —**BRYAN**

NINTENDO DS

Final Fantasy IV

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
> **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX/MATRIX SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** JULY 22 > **ESRB** E10+



This is from the CG intro, but most cutscenes use the in-game graphics

KAIN IS SO AWESOME

Even after so many years, the underlying foundation of Final Fantasy IV remains incredibly solid. A rotating cast of party members means your tactics are always changing, and the plot twists keep you on your toes. The gameplay is fun, the musical score is amazing, and Kain still reigns supreme. If you've forgotten any of this, or never knew it to begin with, it's time to set things right.

This enhanced remake of Final Fantasy IV does a remarkable job of blending 3D visuals with classic gameplay; it's familiar, yet still drives you to keep playing. I couldn't wait to relive my favorite moments, and most of them are made even cooler with new cutscenes. There's even some extra backstory for certain party members, leaving you with fewer blanks to fill in yourself.

Don't be put off if you've never played the original version of this game, since there's more here than pure nostalgia. As opposed to the 2006 remake of Final Fantasy III, Final Fantasy IV makes intuitive use of the DS' capabilities. The game doesn't strain itself trying to work in touch screen controls; the lower screen is used almost exclusively for battle info and area maps — an excellent addition. You can use the stylus to move your character if you want to, but all other commands are entered with the d-pad and buttons, and all the action unfolds on the top screen.

Even with its streamlined design, it's difficult to escape the fact that the core experience is pretty old. You'll still need to do some level grinding, and the new features (like minigames tied to a summon for Rydia) seem tacked on. But my biggest complaint is that combat feels sluggish; even with the battle speed set high, the process of attacking, especially casting spells, drags on a bit too long.

There are always going to be parts of a remake that don't totally live up to the original, but it's rare that one stays so faithful to the source material as Final Fantasy IV DS. The story of Cecil and his companions set the standard for console role-playing games. That fact will never change, and this version gets things right where they count the most. —**JOE**



Rydia is ten times the party member Edward is

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** The best old-school Final Fantasy game gets an update that keeps almost everything you love about the game intact

> **Graphics:** The new character designs are great, and all the monsters and bosses transition well to 3D

> **Sound:** Features a retouched interpretation of one of the best game soundtracks ever. The addition of voice acting is not an improvement, though

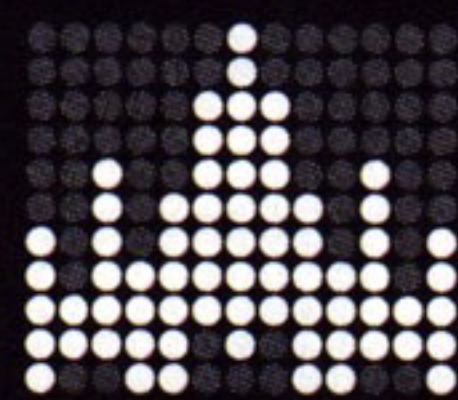
> **Playability:** Minimal touch-screen nonsense retains the classic feel of the controls, and the map screens are helpful

> **Entertainment:** Even without the nostalgia factor, it's an enjoyable adventure for anyone with a taste for traditional turn-based RPGs

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 9

I'm not the only one who can wax nostalgic about how much they adored this game in their youth, which is one of the biggest reasons I feel so confident in recommending it both to those who share my enthusiasm and those who wonder what the big deal is. Seeing Cecil and company fleshed out with new visuals, spoken cutscenes, and rewritten dialogue adds tremendously to a game that is already one of the foundations of the genre. Even when the battles feel dated, the story and its memorable cast of characters sweep you along past the rough spots and into another adventure. It's an unabashedly grand, melodramatic affair, and I found myself as excited to follow along this time as when I first discovered it. —**MILLER**



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For March 2008 Based On Units Sold

1 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV (360)



GTA IV has been on the top of the charts for two months in a row. That's pretty good, though it has a ways to go if it wants to beat Wii Play's record. That game has been in the top five for well over a year now. Seriously, how many controllers do you people need? We're beginning to hate that game.

2 MARIO KART Wii (Wii)



Mario Kart again, huh? We can live with that. At least we don't have to write another blurb about Wii Play. Seriously, what's that game's problem? It always wants to hang out, and it acts so insecure, like people are just using it to get a free controller. Are we sending an unclear message? We threw the game disc away as soon as we brought it home.

3 Wii FIT (Wii)



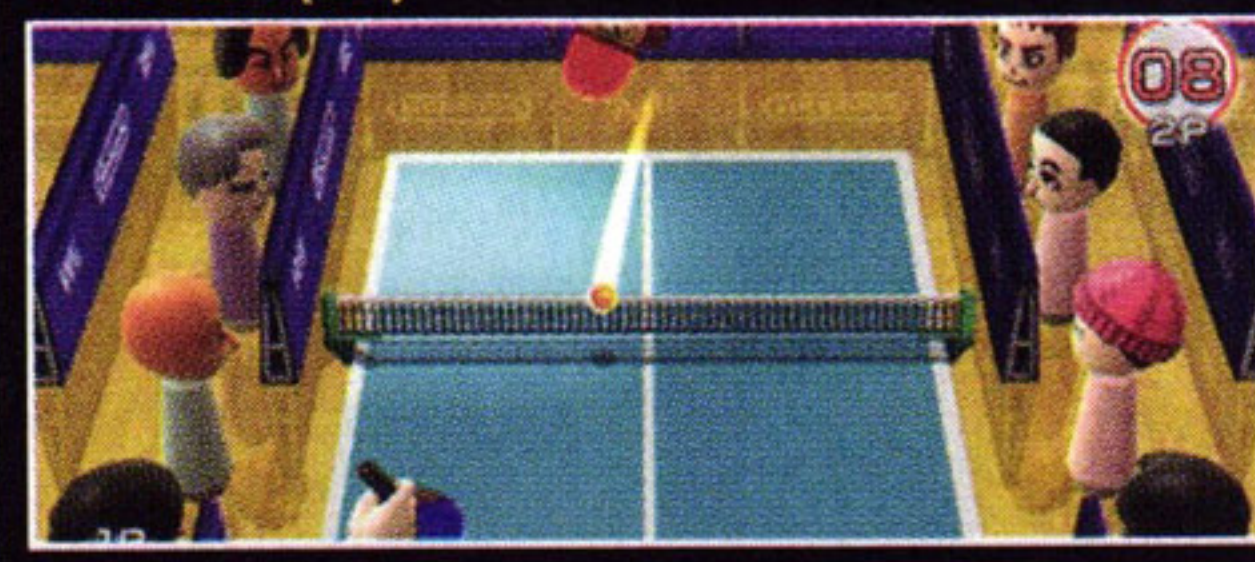
Oh no! Wii P - oh, wait, this is Wii Fit. Okay, we can live with that. We almost shoved our spacebar through our left eye. Apparently we have some unresolved, pent up anger. Wii Play is ruining our life. But Wii Fit is cool, at least for now. Come to think of it, Wii Fit comes packaged with it's own controller. Could Wii Fit be Wii Play's successor? We've got our eye on you, Wii Fit.

4 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV (PS3)



Alright, GTA again! That's great! This game deserves to be here. And it also means we don't have to write another contrived blurb about a game where you race cows. A chart can only take so much of one game. Well, there is only one spot left in the top five. Surely some other game will have made the top five. Smash Bros. maybe? Some version of Guitar Hero? We swear to God, if Wii Play is down there and we have to write another blurb about it we're going to...

5 Wii PLAY (Wii)



We quit.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Grand Theft Auto IV	1	360	10	04-08
2	Mario Kart Wii	2	Wii	8.5	04-08
3	Wii Fit	N/A	Wii	8	04-08
4	Grand Theft Auto IV	3	PS3	10	04-08
5	Wii Play	4	Wii	7	02-07
6	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	5	Wii	9.5	03-08
7	Iron Man	N/A	PS2	3.75	04-08
8	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	9	Wii	8.75	10-07
9	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness	7	DS	N/A	04-08
10	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time	8	DS	N/A	04-08
11	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	10	360	10	11-07
12	Iron Man	N/A	PSP	N/A	04-08
13	We Ski	N/A	Wii	8	05-08
14	Mario Kart DS	17	DS	8.5	11-05
15	New Super Mario Bros.	16	DS	9.25	05-06
16	God of War II	N/A	PS2	9.75	03-07
17	Game Party	14	Wii	N/A	11-07
18	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	15	PS2	8.75	10-07
19	Haze	N/A	PS3	6.25	05-08
20	Super Mario Galaxy	20	Wii	9.75	11-07

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	PS3
2	Mario Kart Wii	Wii
3	Wii Fit	Wii
4	Power Pro Baseball Portable 3	PSP
5	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP
6	Pachinko Pachislot Kouryaku Series DS Vol. 2	DS
7	Dragon Ball Z: Burst Limit	PS3
8	DS Beautiful Characters Training	360
9	Yamamura Misa Suspense	DS
10	Mysterious Dungeon 3	Wii



TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	1	PS3
2	Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures	N/A	PC
3	NCAA Football 09	N/A	multi
4	Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	N/A	multi
5	Grid	2	multi
6	Battlefield: Bad Company	3	multi
7	Civilization Revolution	4	multi
8	Grand Theft Auto IV	5	multi
9	Castle Crashers	N/A	360
10	Ninja Gaiden II	7	360



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures	N/A	\$50
2	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	2	\$28
3	Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures Collector's Edition	N/A	\$88
4	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	4	\$39
5	The Sims 2 Kitchen & Bath Interior Design Stuff	1	\$20
6	World Of Warcraft	5	\$20
7	World Of Warcraft: Burning Crusade	8	\$29
8	The Sims 2 FreeTime	3	\$29
9	Sim City 4 Deluxe	N/A	\$18
10	15,000 Games	N/A	\$10



Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Assassin's Creed	9.5	Dec-07
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
Burnout Paradise	8.5	Feb-08
Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian, The	6.25	Jul-08
Civilization Revolution	9	Jul-08
Club, The	8.75	Mar-08
College Hoops 2K8	7.75	Feb-08
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08
Devil May Cry 4	9	Mar-08
Dynasty Warriors 6	7.25	Mar-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8	Jul-08
FIFA Street 3	7	Mar-08
Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	7.75	Jun-08
Grand Theft Auto IV	10	Jun-08
Grid	9	Jul-08
Hail to the Chimp	4	Jul-08
Haze	6.25	Jul-08
Hellboy: The Science of Evil	7	Jul-08
Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds	8	May-08
Iron Man	3.75	Jul-08
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	7	Jan-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	8	Mar-08
Lost: Via Domus	6.75	Apr-08
Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	10	Jul-08



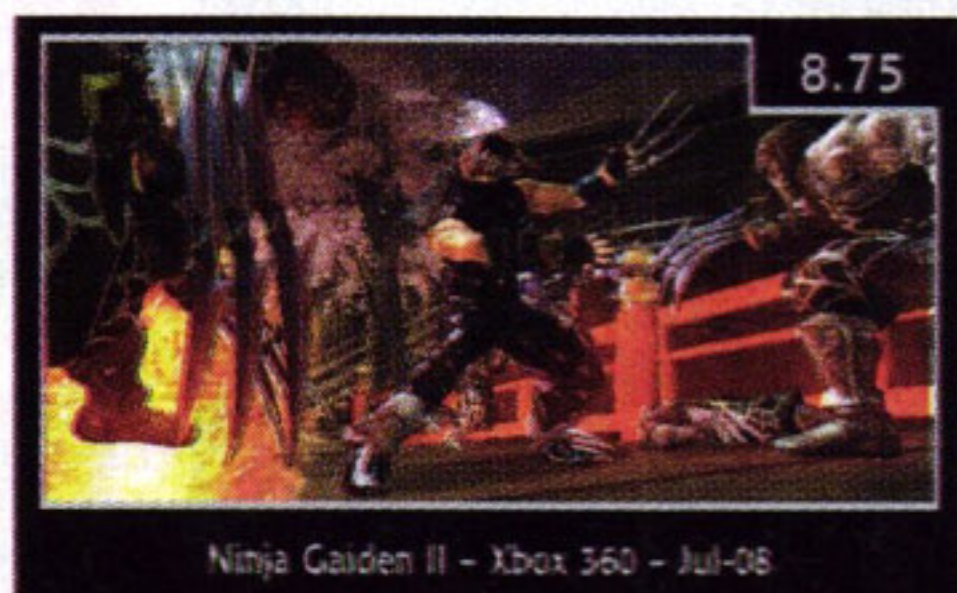
Metal Gear Solid 4 - PS3 - Jul-08

MLB 08: The Show	8.5	May-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
MX vs. ATV Untamed	8	Jan-08
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NCAA March Madness 08	7.25	Feb-08
NFL Tour	5	Feb-08
Orange Box, The	9.25	Feb-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	7.75	May-08
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	9.25	Apr-08
Rock Band	9.25	Jan-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.25	May-08
Time Crisis 4	4.25	Jan-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08
Unreal Tournament 3	8.5	Feb-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08

XBOX 360

Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Assassin's Creed	9.5	Dec-07
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
Bee Movie Game	6.5	Jan-08
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Apr-08
Burnout Paradise	8.5	Feb-08
Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian, The	6.25	Jul-08
Civilization Revolution	9	Jul-08
Club, The	8.75	Mar-08
College Hoops 2K8	7.75	Feb-08
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Culdcept Saga	7	Feb-08
Dark Messiah of Might & Magic: Elements	8	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08
Devil May Cry 4	9	Mar-08
Dynasty Warriors 6	7.25	Mar-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8	Jul-08
F.E.A.R. Files	6.5	Jan-08
FIFA Street 3	7	Mar-08
Frontlines: Fuel of War	7.25	Apr-08
Golden Compass, The	3.25	Feb-08
Grand Theft Auto IV	10	Jun-08
Grid	9	Jul-08
Hail to the Chimp	4	Jul-08
Hellboy: The Science of Evil	7	Jul-08
Iron Man	3.75	Jul-08
Jumper: Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	7	Jan-08
Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom	5.25	Feb-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08

Lost Odyssey	8.5	Apr-08
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition Colonies Edition	8.25	Jun-08
Lost: Via Domus	6.75	Apr-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
MX vs. ATV Untamed	8	Jan-08
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NCAA March Madness 08	7.25	Feb-08
NFL Tour	5	Feb-08
Ninja Gaiden II	8.75	Jul-08



Ninja Gaiden II - Xbox 360 - Jul-08

Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	7.75	May-08
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	9.25	Apr-08
Rock Band	9.25	Jan-08
Scene It? Lights, Camera, Action	8.5	Jan-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.25	May-08
Soldier of Fortune: Payback	4.25	Feb-08
Spiderwick Chronicles, The	6.5	Apr-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08
Universe at War: Earth Assault	5	Jun-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08
Viva Piñata: Party Animals	5.5	Jan-08

Wii

Battalion Wars 2	7.25	Jan-08
Battle of the Bands	6	Jun-08
Blast Works: Build Trade Destroy	8	Jul-08
Bomberman Land	6.5	Apr-08
Boom Blox	8.5	Jul-08
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Apr-08
Castle of Shikigami III	6.5	May-08
Cranium Kabookii	6.75	Feb-08
Dancing With the Stars	5.25	Jan-08
Death Jr.: Root of Evil	7.25	Jul-08
Deca Sports	3	Jul-08
Destroy All Humans: Big Willy Unleashed	5	May-08
Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	7.75	Mar-08
Emergency Mayhem	5.5	Jun-08
Endless Ocean	6	Jan-08
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	5.5	Jul-08
Ghost Squad	7	Jan-08
Golden Compass, The	3.25	Feb-08
Harvey Birdman: Attorney At Law	6	Feb-08
House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return	7.5	Apr-08
Jenga	2	Jan-08
Jumper: Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08
Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Link's Crossbow Training	6.75	Feb-08
Major League Baseball 2K8	6.75	May-08
Mario Kart Wii	8.5	Jun-08
Medal of Honor Heroes 2	6.75	Jan-08
Nights: Journey of Dreams	6.5	Feb-08
Ninja Reflex	5	Jun-08
Nitrobike	4.25	Mar-08
No More Heroes	6	Mar-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Okami	9.25	May-08
Opoona	5.5	Apr-08
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	8.5	Apr-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	8	May-08
Rayman Raving Rabbids 2	7.75	Jan-08
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles	8.25	Jan-08
Samurai Warriors: Katana	6	Mar-08
Sega Bass Fishing	5	Apr-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.5	May-08
Smarty Pants	7.5	Jan-08
Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity	6	Mar-08
Soulcalibur Legends	4	Jan-08
Star Trek Conquest	5	Feb-08
Super Mario Galaxy	9.75	Jan-08
Super Smash Bros. Brawl	9.5	Apr-08
Super Swing Golf Season 2	8.5	Feb-08
Target: Terror	4.5	Jul-08
Trama Center: New Blood	7.5	Jan-08
We Love Golf	6	Jul-08
We Ski	6.25	Jun-08
Wii Fit	8	Jun-08
Wild Earth: African Safari	5.75	Jul-08
Winter Sports: The Ultimate Challenge	6.5	Mar-08
Worms: A Space Oddity	6.75	May-08

PLAYSTATION 2

Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Mana Khemia: Alchemists of al-Revis	7	May-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Persona 3: FES	8.25	May-08
Star Trek Conquest	5	Feb-08
Twisted Metal: Head On: Extra Twisted Edition	7.25	Apr-08

PC

Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut Edition	9	Jun-08
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	7.75	May-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Crysis	9	Jan-08
Empire Earth III	6.5	Jan-08
Frontlines: Fuel of War	7.25	Apr-08
Fury	5	Jan-08
Gears of War	8	Jan-08
Hellgate: London	8.5	Jan-08
Lost Empire: Immortals	7.25	May-08
Mass Effect	9.5	Jul-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Seven Kingdoms: Conquest	4	May-08
SimCity Societies	8	Jan-08
Sins of a Solar Empire	9	Apr-08
Tabula Rasa	8	Jan-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08
Universe at War: Earth Assault	8.25	Jan-08

NINTENDO DS

Advance Wars: Days of Ruin	8.75	Mar-08
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney	8	Mar-08
Assassin's Creed: Altair's Chronicles	6	Apr-08
Contra 4	9.25	Jan-08
Draglade	6.75	Feb-08
Drone Tactics	7	Jun-08
Eco-Creatures: Save the Forest	3	Apr-08
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates	6	Apr-08
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	8.75	Jul-08
Insecticide	5.75	May-08
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	6.5	Jun-08
Left Brain, Right Brain	5	Feb-08
LifeSigns: Surgical Unit	6	Jan-08
Lost in Blue 3	6.25	May-08
Major League Baseball 2K8: Fantasy All-Stars	5.5	Jun-08
Mario Party DS	7	Feb-08
Master of Illusion	8	Jan-08
My Word Coach	8	Feb-08
Nanostray 2	7.25	Jan-08
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	7.75	May-08
Orc & Elves	6.75	Jan-08
Professor Layton and the Curious Village	7.5	Apr-08



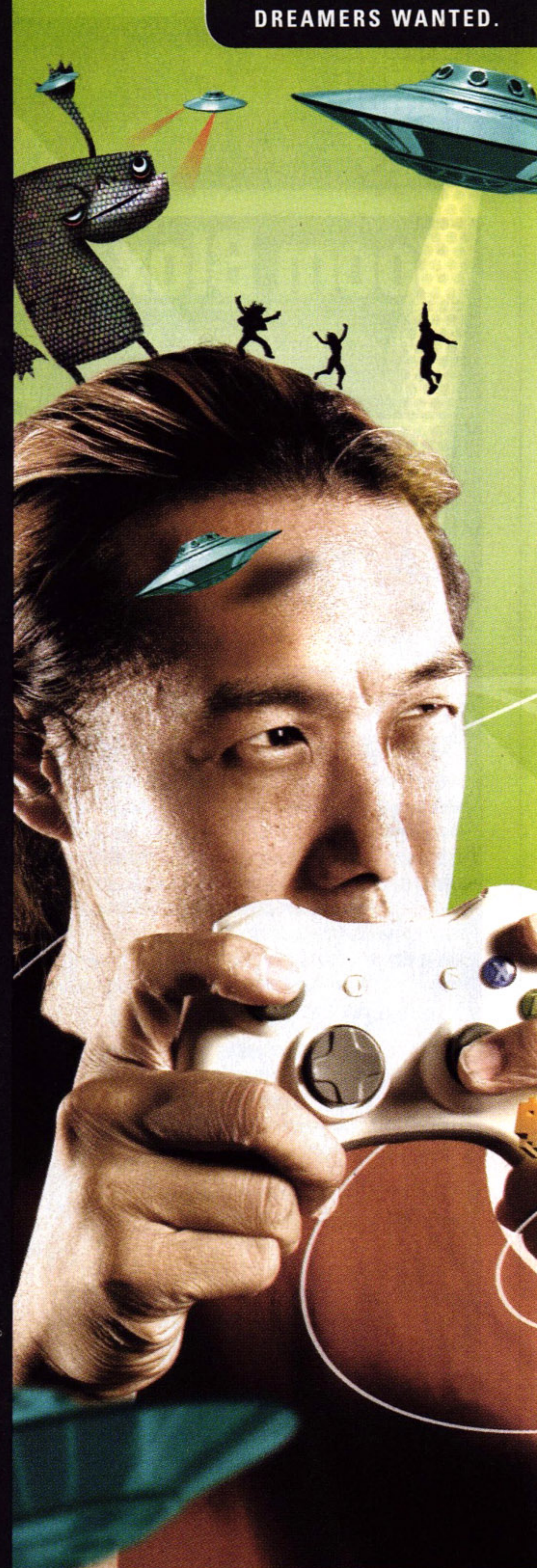
Final Fantasy Tactics A2 - DS - Jul-08

Puchi Puchi Virus	7.5	May-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Summon Night: Twin Age	7	Jun-08
Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Things!	6.75	May-08
World Ends With You, The	8.25	May-08

PSP

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII	7.25	Apr-08
Dungeon Explorer: Warrior of Ancient Arts	6	Apr-08
FlatOut Head On	7.5	May-08
God of War: Chains of Olympus	9	Mar-08
Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2	8	Jul-08
Patapon	8.75	Mar-08
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	7.25	Feb-08
R-Type Command	7.25	Jul-08
Secret Agent Clank	8.5	Jul-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command	8	Jan-08
Wild Arms XF	7.5	May-08
Wipeout Pulse	7.75	Apr-08

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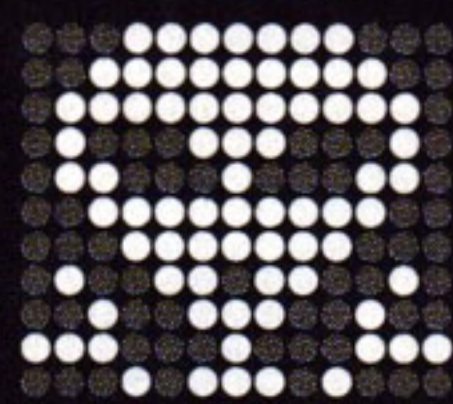
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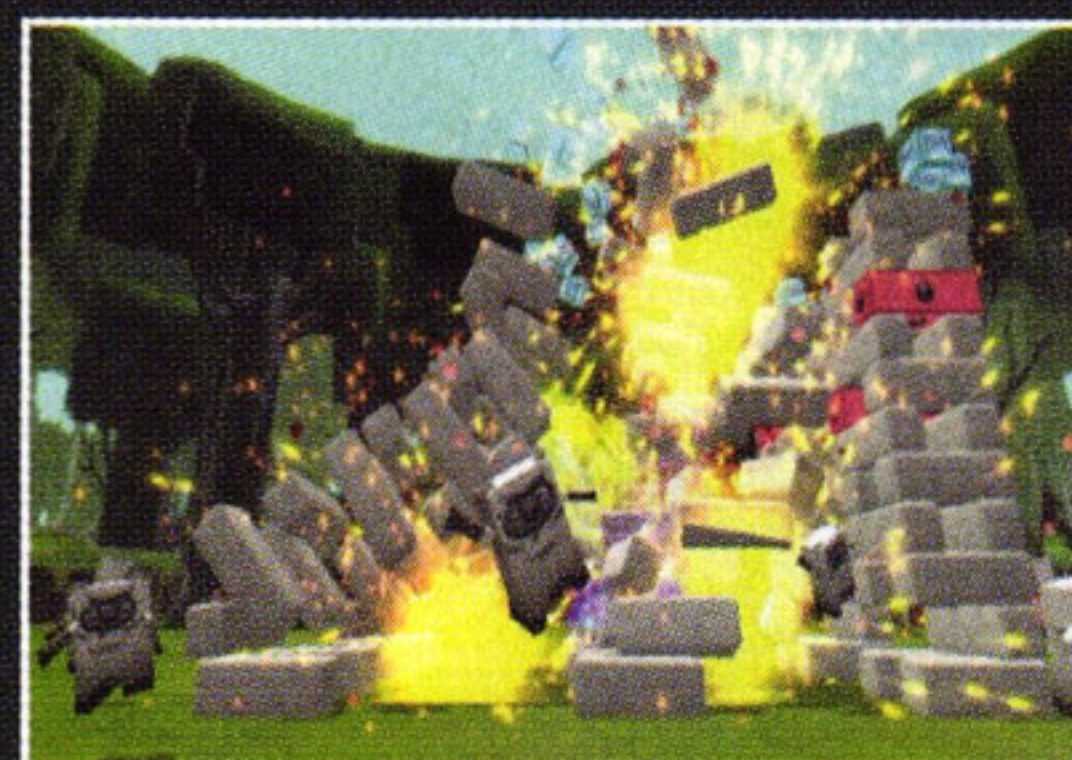


Boom Blox

Wii

Advice for Leaving No Blox Unturned

By Robin Hunicke, Game Designer



TIPS FOR EXPLORE MODE

Gem – Aim low to score high. Targeting blox near the bottom of towers will help topple the whole thing. Look for weak points or small blox supporting many other blox above. In most cases, you'll want to use power throws for maximum damage. A quick, controlled wrist flick is more consistent than a wild baseball pitch when it comes to executing strong throws. Not sure how your wrist flick measures up? Jump back into the first few levels in training – you'll see exactly which throw strength you're getting.

Point – Look at the puzzle from all angles. Think about what will happen to each of the blox that you hit. Point blox are made of tough stuff, so the baseball will bounce off with lots of momentum. Take advantage of ricochets to maximize your per-throw earnings.

Bomb – Sequence, position, and timing are the key ingredients in earning gold medals here. It's much easier to aim once you know what you're trying to achieve. To target bomb blox that are on the move, play the puzzle without throwing and watch where they fall. Then replay the level to blast them at just the right moment.

Vanish – Cause and effect is crucial in these levels. All vanish blox must be popped, but in what order? If your first strategy doesn't produce gold, try looking at the problem from a different angle. How many vanish blox can you pop with one throw? Aim for one vanish blox, but pay attention to where your ball ricochets after it hits. You may be able to hit another.

Chemical – Chain reactions are the charm of chemical blox; see how many combos you can start. Chemical blox explode upon contact – so even the slightest nudge will lead to chaos. Use your throws and explosions to make the blox work for you. When creating levels within the game's editor, be sure not to stack chemical blox on top of each other – unless you want the level to explode instantly.

Grab Tool – It's much easier to pull blox left and right than it is to push them away or pull them toward you. Blox wiggle less when pulled from the side. Rotate the camera so that you can pull blox from the puzzle with a quick pull to the left or right. Pulling blox is like pulling off a bandage. You can grab tightly and rip – but only if your pull won't upset the structure. Be sure that there are few or no other blox touching the one you want before using this approach. For more delicate situations, gradually and slowly pick out the blox you want to move. Do this by quickly pressing and releasing the

A button as you make a very slight twitching motion with the Wii remote. With this technique, you can carefully nudge the blox a tiny amount each time you pick at it. The picking method is useful also if you want to test how much weight is resting on the blox you want. If you pick at something and the structure starts to wobble, it's probably a good idea to leave it alone. Use these techniques in multiplayer Dismantle levels.

TIPS FOR ADVENTURE MODE

Medieval Levels

Gem Harvest – Use the knowledge you learned in the explore stacks to figure out these puzzles. There are vanish, bomb, and chemical blox mixed into these puzzles. Remember that vanish blox disappear, bomb blox explode when hit, and you'll have to match two chemical blox together to get an explosion.

Sneaky Thieves – Pay attention when a gem block is stolen. The enemy will carry it over their head and it will turn red to let you know it's in danger of being destroyed. Sometimes it's better to wait until many bears have grouped together before throwing a bomb ball.

Warriors – Don't worry about throwing directly at the Monkeys. Aim to knock out the gem blox as quickly as you can.

Tiki Levels

Escape – Sometimes releasing Gorilda first is the best chance you've got at gold. Remove obstacles in her path starting with the ones that are closest to her.

Crossing – Before hitting the play button, line up your first shot and plan your next.

Rescue – Remember, gem blox aren't the only blox you can grab. Sometimes the safest path to gold requires very small, quick pulls with the grab tool. If your gorilla babies are teetering, sometimes using quick pulls on the normal blox to reposition will save them.

Frontier Levels

Gold Mine – Blast your way into the mine by creating the smallest opening, then fire into it at different angles to rack up the points.

Blastin' Site – Bomb blasts can chain together so make sure to place them all near enough to ensure maximum blast combos.

Bandit Blast – Those pesky monkeys will continue to appear as long as there are blox with a star on them. Take those out any way you can. Fire at the structures to bring everything crashing down.

Haunted Levels

Spooky Woods – Keep an eye out for Devil Monkeys. They're even more deadly than the walking creeps. Zap Dante Babadoos first when you see them; you never know what they'll throw. Clear the way for your Mitten Kittens as they move towards their destination. Zap the vanish blox in their way.

Lost Kitten – Move obstacles away from your Kittens and into the path of those creeping creeps. Knock together chemical blox to create an explosion...but make sure your Kitten won't be caught in the blast. Some blox are heavier than others. Remember to move vanish blox around so that they weigh down the cloud blox.

Grave Battle – Blast! Blast! Blast those creeps! The later levels require quick camera control to win gold. Keep an eye on your Buster Maguffs – especially towards the end. Helping them survive will keep your kittens alive. In the final two levels, the creeps come in waves, and after the initial attack, they'll never come from all sides at once. Keep bomb blox and potential chemical blox matches far away from your kittens. Use the environment to your advantage! Don't detonate bomb blox or match chemical blox until you see a cluster of lots of creeps around the trap, then set it off.

TIPS FOR CREATE MODE

Simplified Stacking – Use the camera to help create tall structures. The easiest way to stack items on top of each other is to view your construction from the top. This makes it much easier to build tall towers.

Group Select – You can select and manage groups of multiple blox. Rotate the camera for a top-down view of the blox you are working with. Then use the select tool to drag select a box around the ones you wish to manipulate. This will create a set of blox that you can copy, rotate, and place as desired.

Height Tool – You can place objects in mid-air. Use the height tool to pull the ground plane up above the default height. Place regular blox to start a level with falling items, and place immobile blox to create shapes that float in space. You can also use the height tool as a mask. Things below the ground plane will not react to the paint, selection, and erase tools. Advanced Tip: To combine the group select and height tool tips, first select a group of blox. Then switch to the height tool to move the ground plane up or down. Switch back to the select tool and grab your group selection – now you can place the group at the desired height.

Sets – Copy and paste elements from these pre-assembled pieces to make any level more interesting. The biplane object has payload of bomb blox inside. The small ramp comes with a giant sphere – the only one in the final game.

Rules – Editing any puzzle from the main game will let you play with its rules. Not seeing the behavior you'd expect in a level you're editing? Be sure that the rules are turned on. Special blox textures are sometimes available in a particular level or environment. To access colored gems, check out the Castle Attack levels in Multiplayer. This is also true for things like character spawners, pucks and other blox with special behavior. Copy and paste them to be sure they work properly.

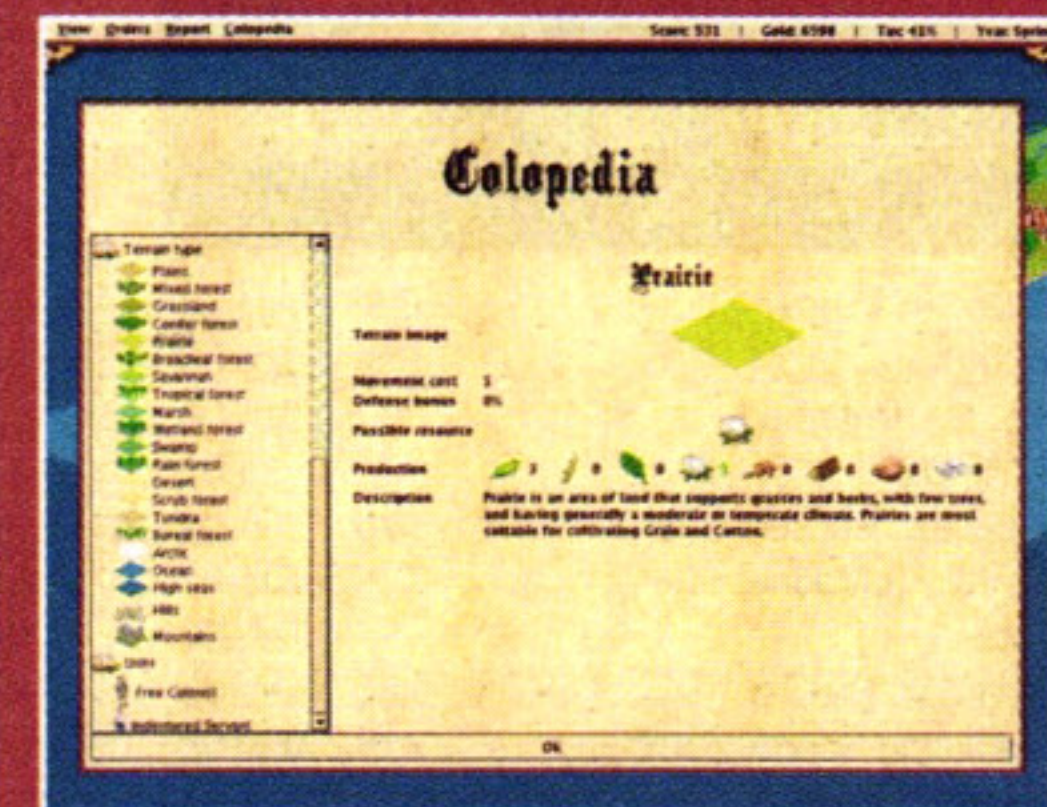
Mod World

FREECOL

www.freecol.org



With Firaxis just having announced a new Colonization title (see page 74), what better way to get reacquainted with that venerable franchise than with this freeware adaptation? FreeCol has been in the works since 2003, and is still technically in a beta state with version 0.7.4 having been released June 16. Even so, it's an entirely playable game right now.



The goal of the FreeCol team is to make a near-exact replica of Sid Meier's 1994 classic first, and then add new features once that project is done. With the goal of creating an independent nation in the New World, you'll develop cities, trade with natives and rivals, and recruit a Continental Congress full of historical figures.



Unlike many other mods and freeware projects, FreeCol is amazingly well-documented. The manual is easily readable in either HTML or PDF formats, and covers step-by-step instructions to get the game running as well as doing a good job teaching new players the game's many systems. Oh, and Firaxis' recently announced Civilization IV: Colonization doesn't have any bearing – as the main webpage proudly declares, "Rest assured that our team will continue working on FreeCol no matter how good or bad the remake turns out."

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM



Grid

From the main menu go into Options, then select Bonus Codes, then Enter Code to input these cheats.

Unlock All Drift Cars – TUN58396

Unlock All Muscle Cars – MUS59279

Unlock Buchbinder 320si – F93857372

Unlock Gamestation BMW 320si – C29782655

Unlock Micromania Pagani Zonda R – M38572343

Unlock Play.com Aston Martin DBR9 – P47203845

MULTI-SYSTEM



Kung Fu Panda

Go into the game's cheat menu and you will be able to enter these codes.

4X Damage Multiplier – Up, Down, Up, Right, Left

Big Head Mode For Story Mode – Down, Up, Left, Right, Right

Dragon Warrior Outfit For Multiplayer – Left, Down, Right, Left, Up

Infinite Chi – Down, Right, Left, Up, Down

Invulnerability – Down, Down, Right, Up, Left

Unlock All Multiplayer Characters – Left, Down, Left, Right, Down

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – last seen dropping out of the ESA)

Code of the Month



LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures



Indiana and Short Round aren't enough for you? Enter these codes on the blackboard of the math room in Barnett College to unlock plenty of characters to play with.

Barranca – 04EM94

Belloq (Desert) – CHN3YU

Belloq (Jungle) – TDR197

Belloq (Priest) – VEO29L

Boxer – 8246RB

British Commander – B73EUA

British Officer – VJ5TI9

British Trooper – DJ5I2W

Captain Katanga – VJ3TT3

Chatterlal – ENW936

Chucin – 3NK48T

Colonel Dietrich – 2K9RKS

Colonel Vogel – 8EAL4H

Dancing Girl – C7EJ2I

Desert Digger – 12N68W

Desert Enemy Officer – 2MK45O

Desert Masked Bandit – N48SF0

Desert Monkey Man – 3RF6YJ

Desert Soldier – 4NSU7Q

Desert Swordsman – 1MK4RT

Donovan – 3NFTU8

Dr. Schneider (Desert) – JSNRT9

Dr. Schneider (Officer) – VMJ5US

Enemy Bazookaman – S93Y5R

Enemy Butler – VJ48W3

Enemy Communications Officer – 1MF94R

Enemy Guard – VJ7R5I

Enemy Guard (Nepal) – YR47WM

Enemy Officer – 572E6I

Enemy Pilot – B84ELP

Fedora – V75YSP

First Mate – 0GIN24

Grail Knight – NE6THI

Hovitos Tribesman – H0V1SS

Indiana Jones (Officer) – VJ85OS

Indiana Jones (Disguised) – 4J8S4M

Jungle Guide – 24PF34

Kaokan – WMO46L

Kazim (Desert) – 3M29TJ

Kazim (Venice) – NRH23J

Laoche – 2NK479

Maharaja – NFK5N2

Major Toht – 13NS0I

Mola Ram – FJUR3I

Pankot Assassin – 2NKT72

Pankot Guard – VN28RH

Punjabi Dignitary – KD48TN

Punjabi Village Elder – 4682E1

Sherpa Brawler – VJ37WJ

Sherpa Gunner – ND762W

Slave Child – 0E3ENW

Thuggee – VM683E

Thuggee Chatterlal – CNH4RY

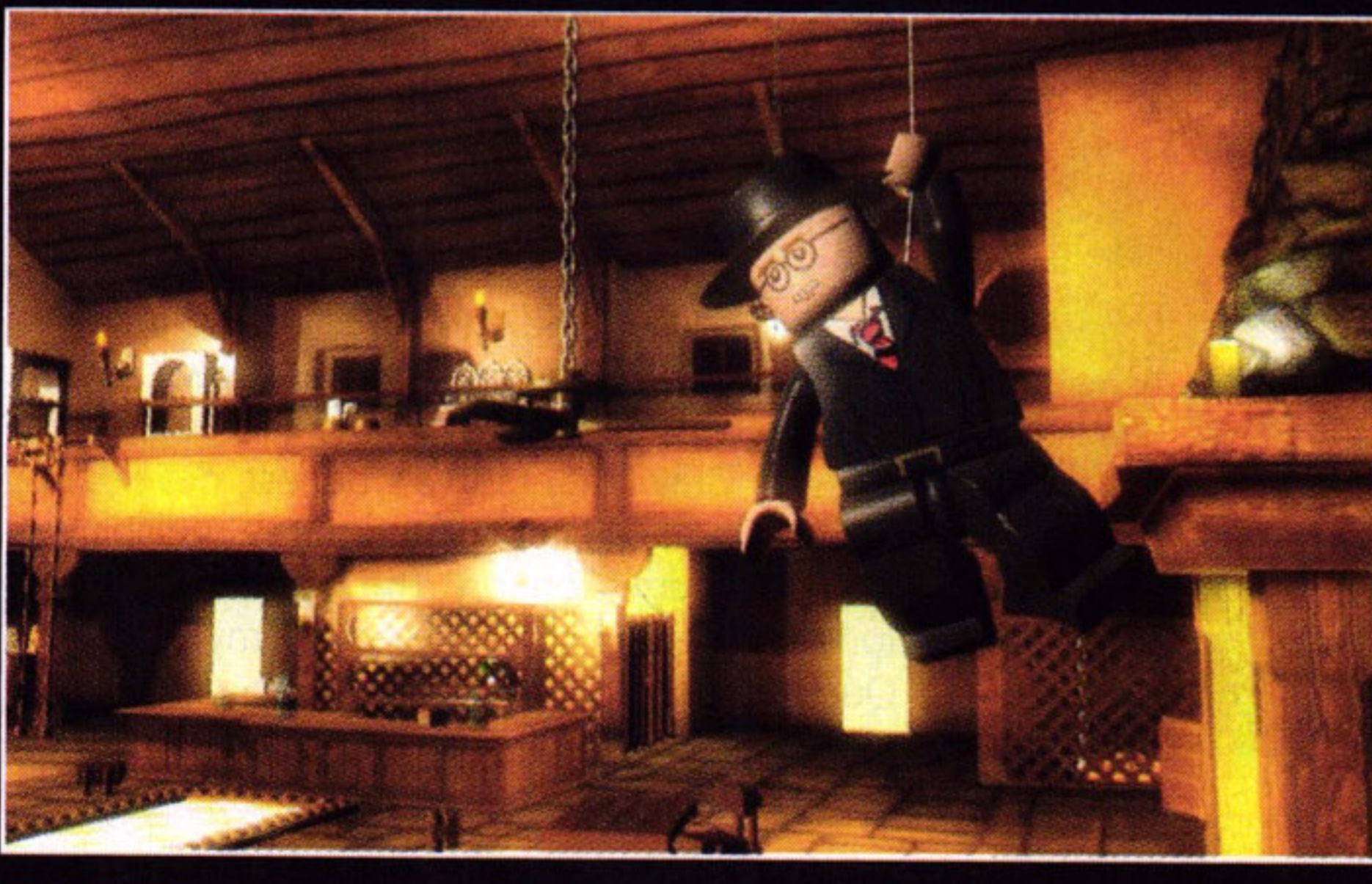
Thuggee Priest – T2R3F9

Thuggee Slavedriver – VBS7GW

Willie (DJ) – VK93R7

Willie (Pajamas) – MEN4IP

Wuhan – 3NSLT8



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

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 bot projects, contacts.

Gots to get the cheddar

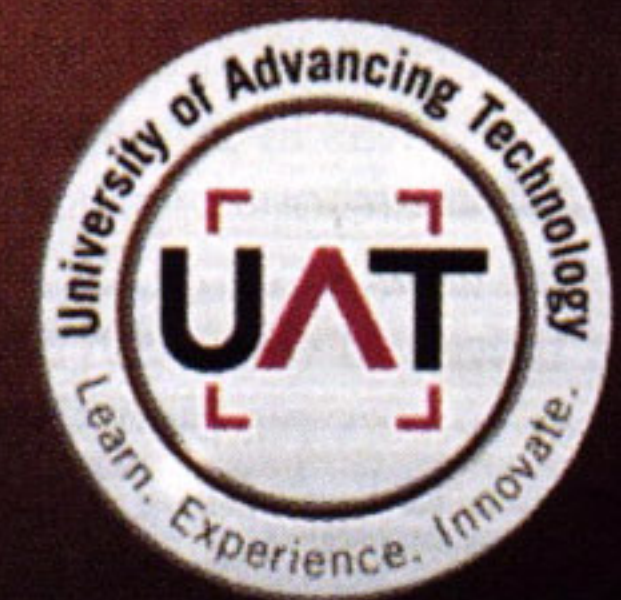
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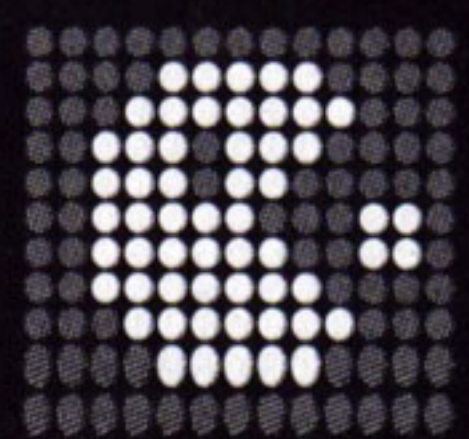
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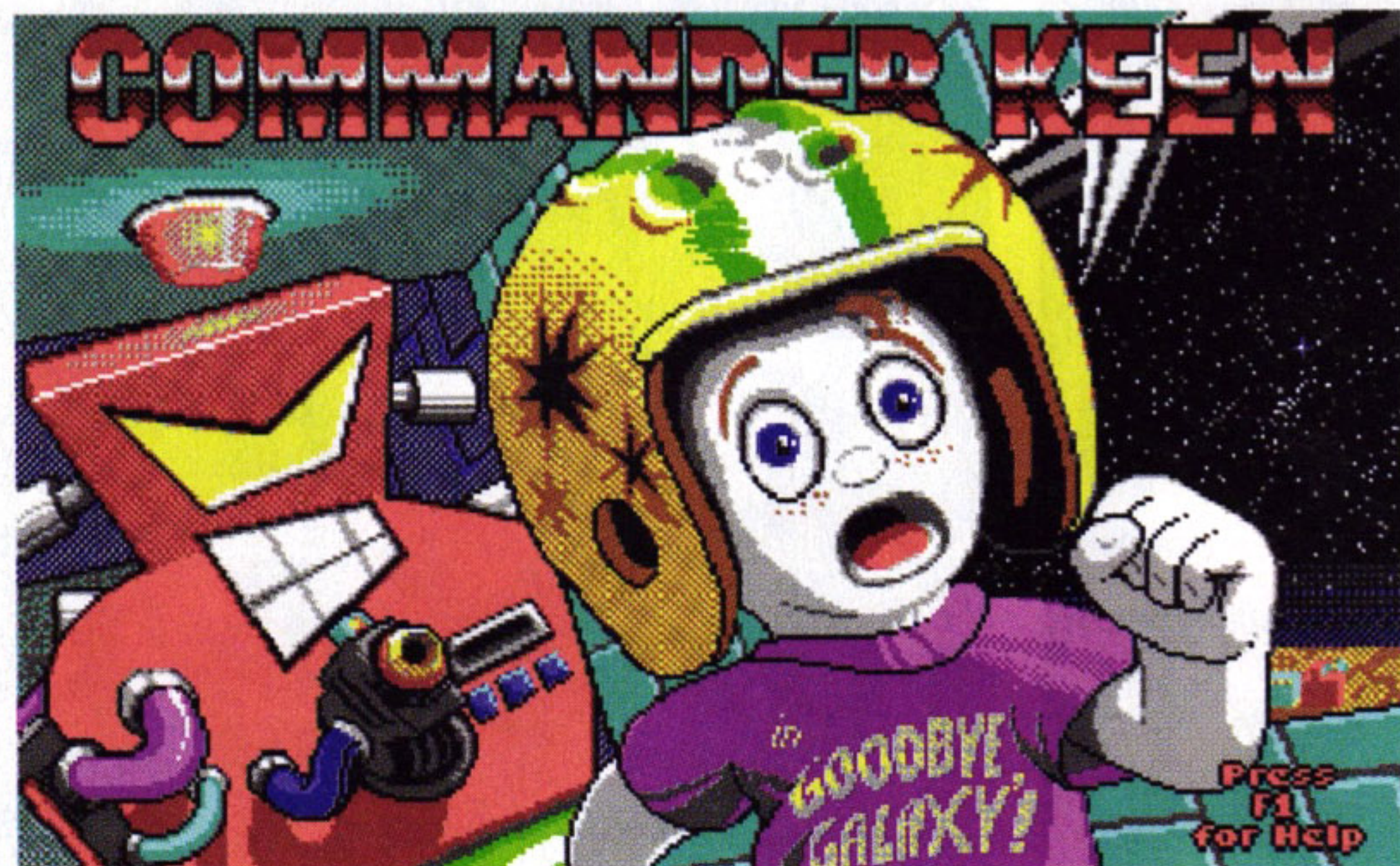
The game industry has many well-known developers, but few have reached the legendary status of id Software. The Texas-based company produced one of the most infamous games of all time, 1994's *Doom*, and invented the first-person shooter genre. A company of firsts, id has proven itself time and time again as a driving force of innovation in the video game industry. Begun by a group of Softdisk employees, including industry icons John Carmack and John Romero, the company's history isn't just a timeline of game releases, but just as often a catalogue of game development milestones as well.



Commander Keen

Featuring the first smooth side-scrolling techniques seen in a PC game, *Commander Keen* was id Software's first game series. Previously, platforming games like *Keen* were only available on home consoles like the NES. The title also marked the first time a computer game was sold via the shareware concept.

Conceived before id was even an official company, the game starred Billy Blaze, a whiz kid that creates his own spaceship and defends the galaxy by donning a football helmet and becoming Commander Keen. The series spawned six episodes over the course of a year.

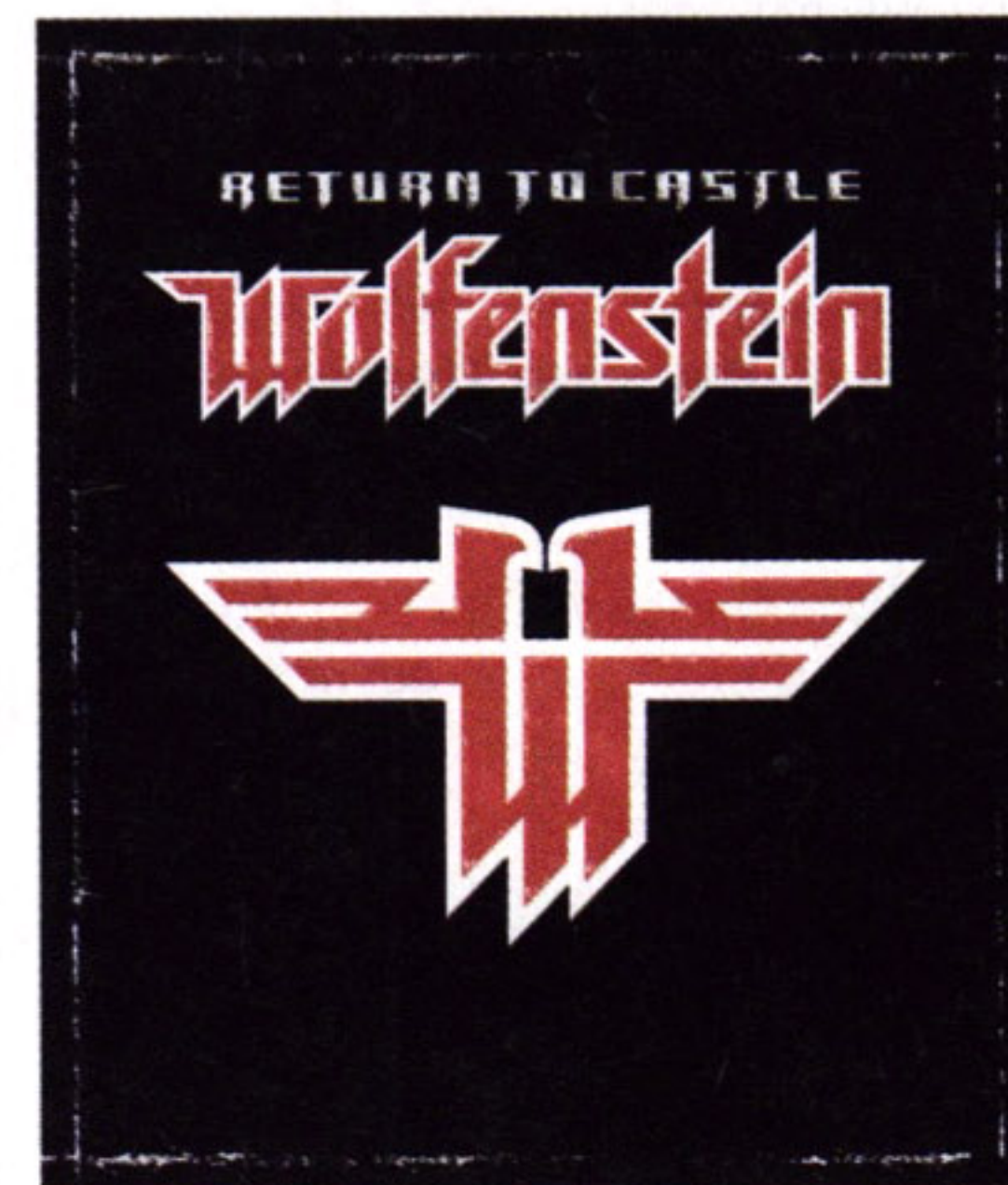


Wolfenstein

With an established series under their belts, id was ready to move on to something bigger. When Muse Software's copyright on 1981's *Castle Wolfenstein* expired due to bankruptcy, the boys found themselves a game setting. Carmack once again created a new game engine that allowed people to experience new ways of playing games on the PC.

Wolfenstein 3D gave birth to the first-person shooter. Carmack and co. later released a prequel expansion called *The Spear of Destiny*.

In November of 2001, *Wolfenstein* made a triumphant comeback in *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. While the game was not developed in house by id, the game ran on the id Tech 3 game engine, formerly known as the Quake 3 engine. Id handed the development to Gray Matter. At id's behest, developer Splash Damage later created a free multiplayer spin-off, *Enemy Territory*. The game set the tone for the recently released *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*.





Doom

Knowing they had created something special with *Wolfenstein*, the staff at id started working fervently on their next game. While *Spear of Destiny* was still in development, Carmack started developing a new engine that could do much more than their previous tech was capable of, such as full texture mapping and varying light levels. John Romero and fellow id co-founder Tom Hall came up with a sci-fi game based around well-known classic films like *Alien*. The result was *Doom*, a fast-paced, bloody FPS that took the industry by storm. The game featured a full-length single-player mode as well as co-op and multiplayer, all gameplay mode standards to this day.

The game's massive popularity spawned an immediate sequel, *Doom II: Hell on Earth*. The game ran on the same engine and contained no major advancements on the technology side. The popularity was two-faced, however. The violence that the game subjected the players to had never been seen before. It helped spark the now age-old violent video game debates that run from kids arguing with their parents to proposed legislative bills to ban or censor them.

In 2004, *Doom* finally returned to the PC in the form of *Doom 3*. The game also introduced id Tech 4, a huge advancement of game software technology at the time. Using techniques like normal mapping, fully dynamic per-pixel lighting, stencil shadowing, and multi channel audio, the engine would help define how developers approach game making to this day.

The engine has gone on to power games like *Quake 4*, *Prey*, and *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. This year, id announced that *Doom 4* is being developed by an internal id Software team.



This Month In Gaming History

In August of 1976, the Fairchild Channel F hit the budding video game scene. The console was a milestone in that it was the first programmable ROM cartridge system. For \$169.95, players were treated to a whopping 1.79MHz CPU, 64 bytes of RAM and eight colors. There were two built-in games, both being semi-altered clones of Pong. Only 26 games were released for the system.



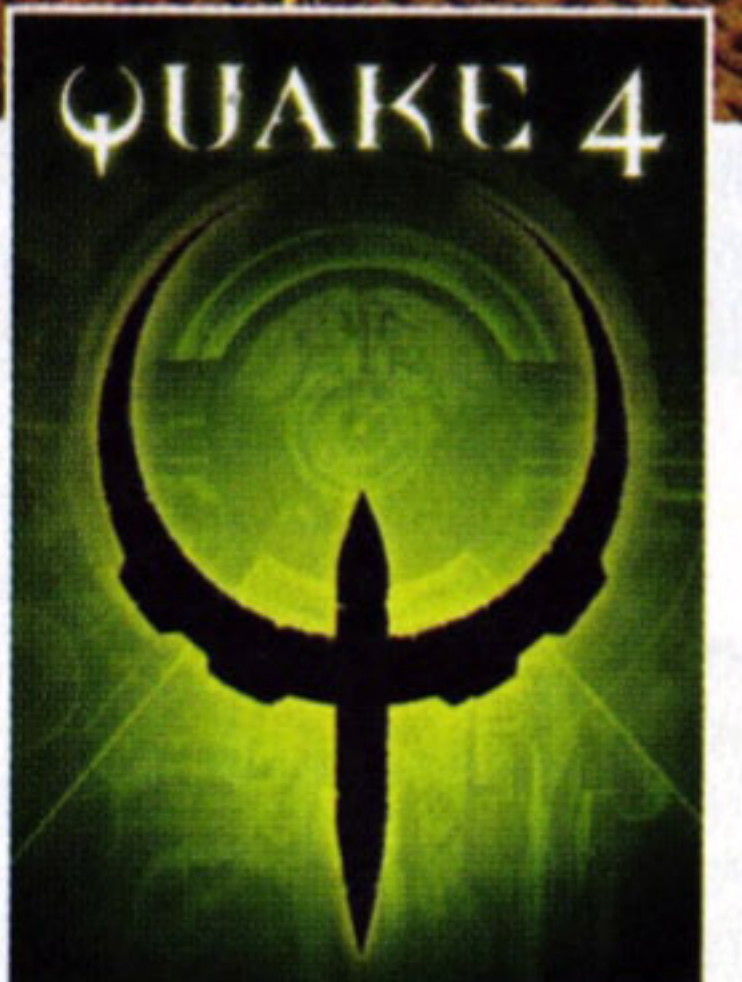
Quake

After the release of *Doom* id had reached rock star status, selling million of copies. Its next gaming endeavor, *Quake*, once again changed how the world viewed video games. Carmack's new game engine could produce a true 3D game world. Now players not only explored in three dimensions, but encountered enemies and objects in 3D as well. While the first *Quake* did not have much of a story, it was a technical achievement and even featured sound effects and music tracks by Nine Inch Nails front-man Trent Reznor. The game engine went on to power many other notable games like *Half-Life*, and id eventually nabbed an Emmy for its work.

In 1997, id upped its own ante by releasing *Quake II* with an all-new game engine. The game featured a single-player mode with a full storyline, but the real success story was the impact on multiplayer gaming. While playing online was nothing new, *Quake II* was the epitome of competitive gaming. When released, it was hailed by many critics as one of the greatest games of all time, much like *Doom* before it.

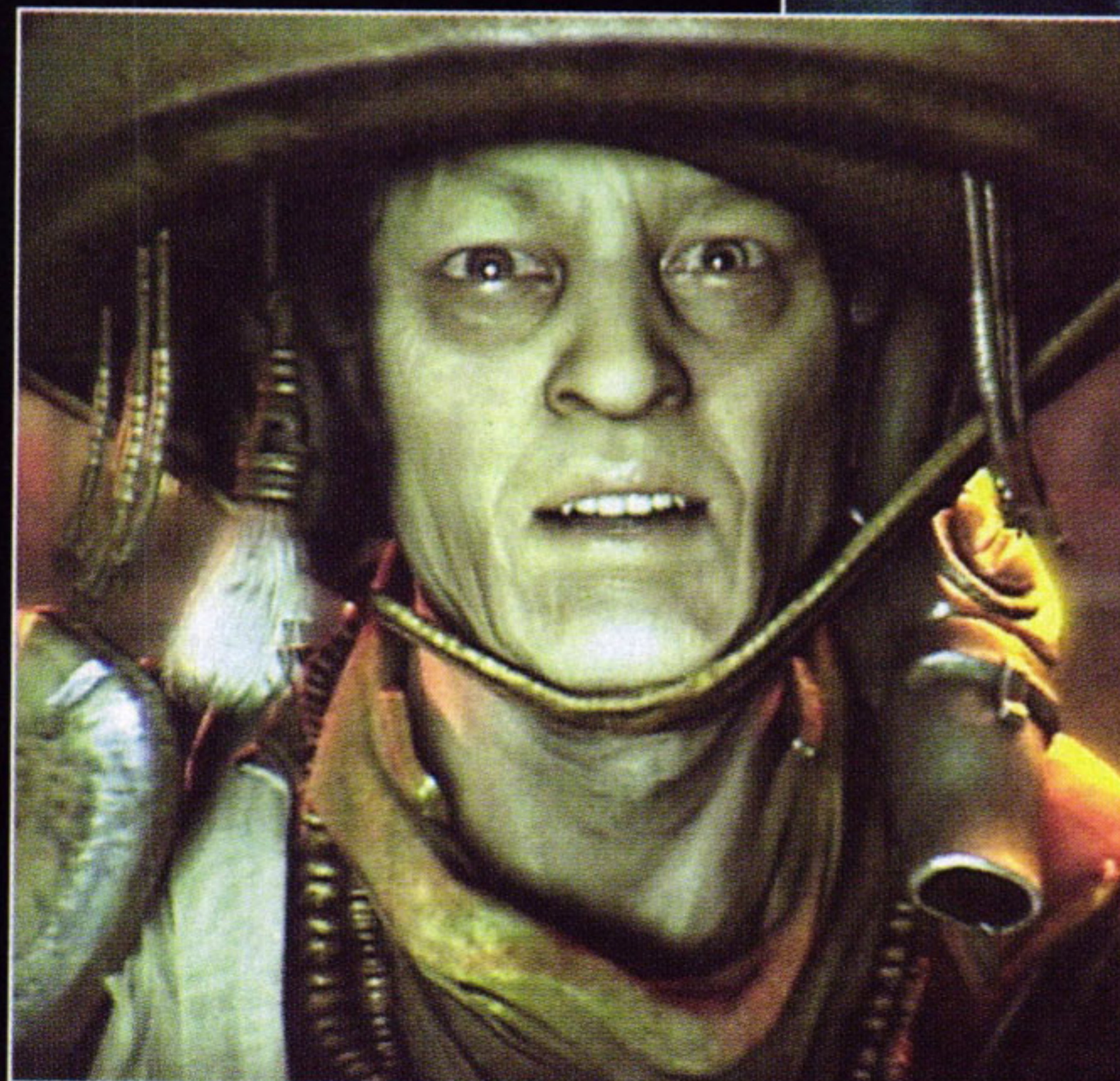
Their next release, *Quake III: Arena*, changed the gaming landscape again — the title was devoted entirely to competitive play. By ditching the single-player story, id's focus shifted to perfecting deathmatch and capture-the-flag matches that pitted players against other human players on the Internet or AI bots. The game also marked the launch of the id Tech 3 game engine, once again opening the doors for other developers to use its technology. Id Tech 3 served as a platform for remarkable titles like *Call of Duty*, *Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, and the company earned over \$1 billion dollars in industry revenue from the *Quake* engines alone.

For *Quake 4*, id handed the reigns to long-time partner Raven Software, which ran on *Doom 3*'s id Tech 4. The title was a direct sequel to *Quake II*'s storyline.



Rage

In 2007, id announced it was hard at work on *Rage*, its first internally developed title since *Doom 3*. Using both familiar and new concepts, the game melds elements of the first-person shooter and vehicular combat genres. Id also announced the new title would run on an all-new game engine dubbed id Tech 5. It's the first new IP from the developer in over a decade.



TIMELINE

- 1991 id Software opens door
- 1991 *Commander Keen*
- 1992 *Wolfenstein 3D*
- 1993 *Doom*
- 1994 *Doom II*
- 1996 *Quake*
- 1997 *Quake II*
- 1999 *Quake III: Arena*
- 2004 *Doom 3*
- 2009+ *Rage, Doom 4*



PSONE

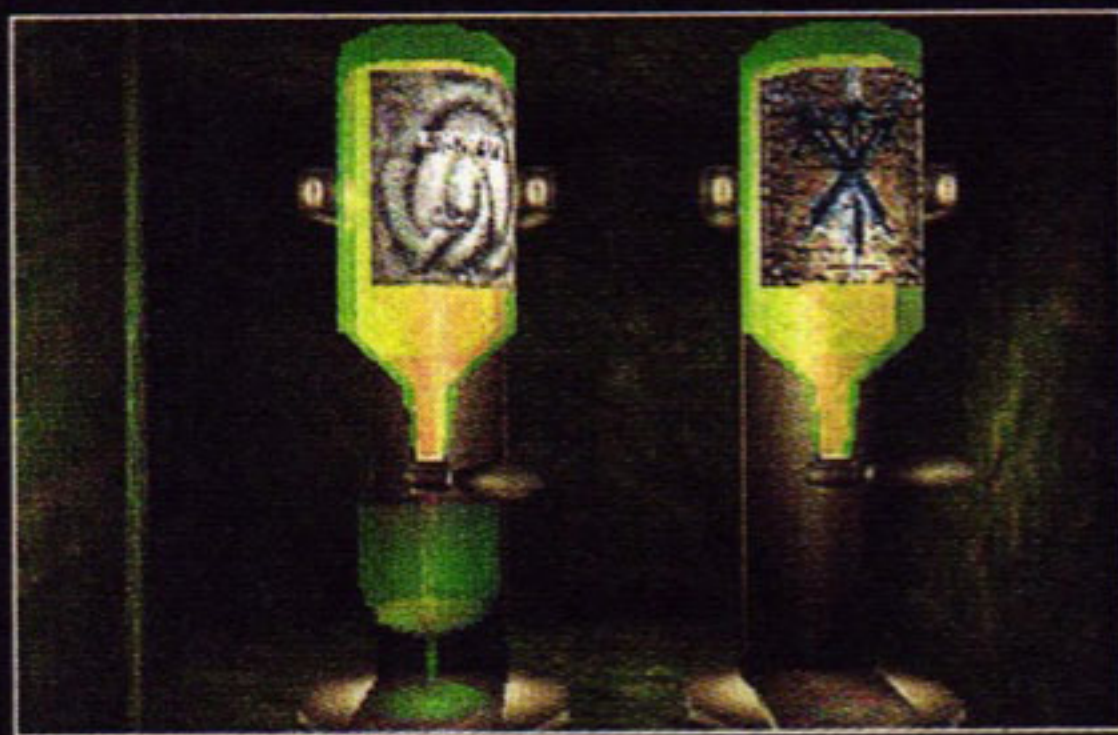
ECHO NIGHT

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER AGETEC > DEVELOPER FROM SOFTWARE > RELEASE 1999

If you like the “first-person” more than the “shooter” in an FPS, you might have liked Echo Night when it released nine years ago. Now? Probably not so much. Drawing on the success of adventure games like Myst, Echo Night gives players full maneuverability as they explore the Orpheus, a wayward ghost ship. The atmosphere aboard the Orpheus conveys a sense of hopelessness and dread through eerie conversations with the ghosts of former passengers. That’s the only thing Echo Night really nails. It’s basically combat-free, but you still have a life meter and are vulnerable to ghost attacks. Your only recourse is to solve puzzles scattered around the ship, but these challenges alternate between simplistic and arbitrary, leaving you with little sense of accomplishment. It’s also surprisingly short, which isn’t bad itself, but it feels like developer From Software had a full game’s worth of explaining to do in half the time. It does weird and creepy right, but Echo Night never really gets the whole “fun to play” thing down.



RETRO RATING
NOW 6
THEN* 6.75



N64

POKÉMON PUZZLE LEAGUE

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO > RELEASE 2000

Because of their simplistic premise, puzzle games age better than Heather Locklear. Perhaps that’s how Nintendo gets away with releasing the same game in a different dress over and over again: Tetris Attack (SNES), Pokémon Puzzle League (N64), and Planet Puzzle League (DS). Apparently, lining up colored blocks never gets boring. This version is overlaid with a Pokémon skin, which fortunately has no significant impact on the actual gameplay. You’ll likely grow tired of hearing the same sounds and phrases every two minutes. When Pikachu isn’t shouting his own name, Ash squeals something like, “I’m gonna win!” Thankfully, the game makes up for that with six different playable modes. Some of the later puzzle challenges give your brain a good workout, and the 3D mode is a fun change of pace. It’s hard to go wrong with classics like this.



RETRO RATING
NOW 8.5
THEN* 8.5



SEGA CD

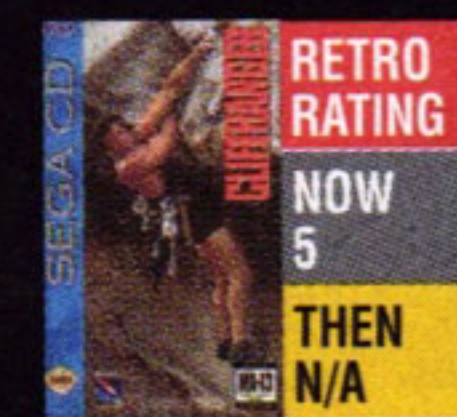
CLIFFHANGER

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SONY IMAGESOFT > DEVELOPER MALIBU INTERACTIVE > RELEASE 1993

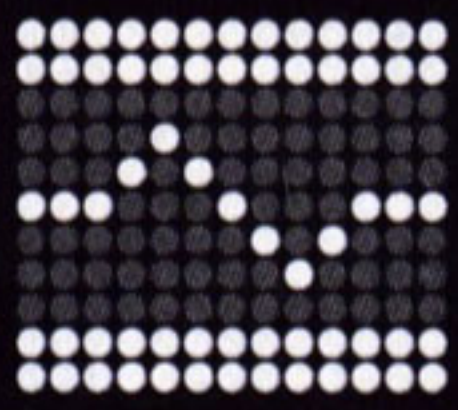
Sylvester Stallone’s early ‘90s mountain action flick has a so-bad-it’s-good appeal to it, and in that respect the game definitely lives up to the license. Of the many ports of Cliffhanger released at the time, the Sega CD version reigns supreme with truly awful-looking clips from the movie, a CD-quality soundtrack, and crotch-hammeringly difficult snowboarding sequences on par with the Battletoads hover bike level. The core of the game, however, is Final Fight-lite brawls on top of the flattest mountains on Earth. Surprisingly, there actually is some climbing in Cliffhanger. You’ll shimmy up a flat gray wall while dudes throw turkeys at you or John Lithgow repeatedly rams you with his chopper. But perhaps the best moment is when you’re chased by a colony of bats and forced into a fast-paced log jumping sequence. By the way, it’s pretty much impossible to get past the first snowboard run without codes, so here you go:

99 LIVES: on the title screen, press up, left, C, B, A, on controller 2.

LEVEL SKIP: on the title screen, press start, C, B, A, right, left, right, left on controller 2. Once in the game, press pause and hit C to skip stages.



RETRO RATING
NOW 5
THEN N/A

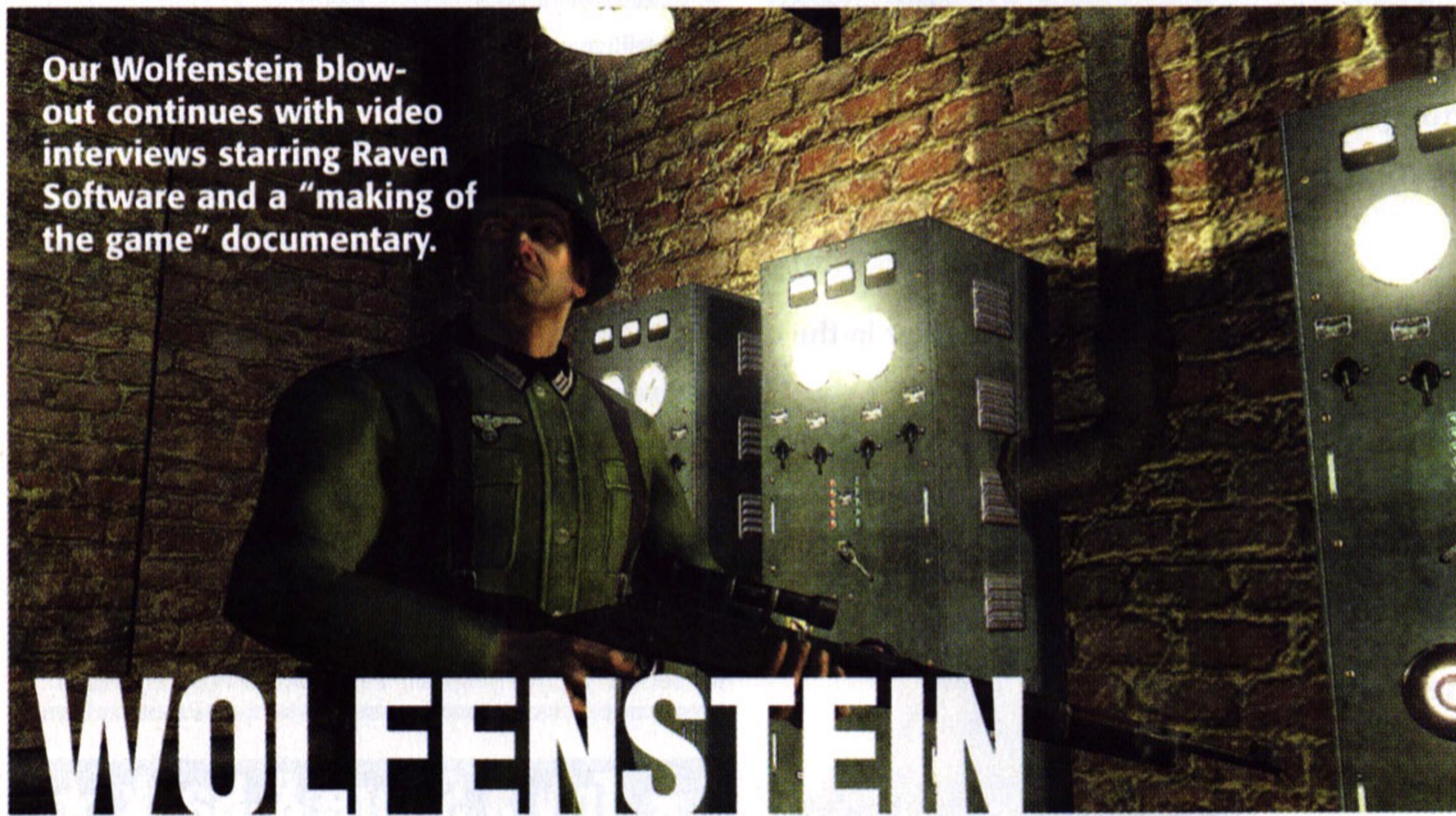


ONLINE

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UNLIMITED LAUNCH: JUL. 15

Our Wolfenstein blow-out continues with video interviews starring Raven Software and a "making of the game" documentary.



WOLFENSTEIN



A History Of Violence

Learn more about the rock star FPS pioneers in our interview with id co-owner Kevin Cloud.



Playing Chicken

Ben sits down with Robot Chicken masterminds Seth Green and Matthew Senreich to grill them about their Star Wars special, plead for a job, and learn the ins and outs of a restraining order.



Caped Crusader Chronicle

After his Robot Chicken ordeal, Ben learns to curb his enthusiasm as he interviews Batman: Gotham Knight producer Bruce Timm. No one was harmed in the making of this Q&A.



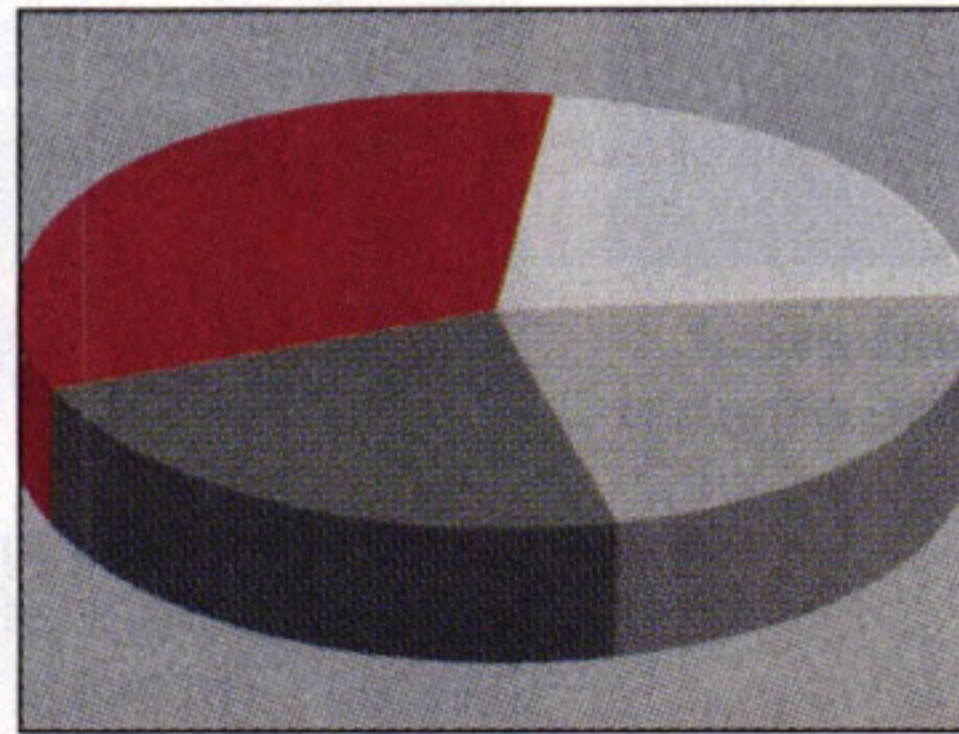
The Write Stuff

Read more of our exclusive interviews with Susan O'Connor (Gears of War, BioShock), Drew Karpysyn (Mass Effect), and Emil Pagliarulo (The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Fallout 3) about the art of game writing.



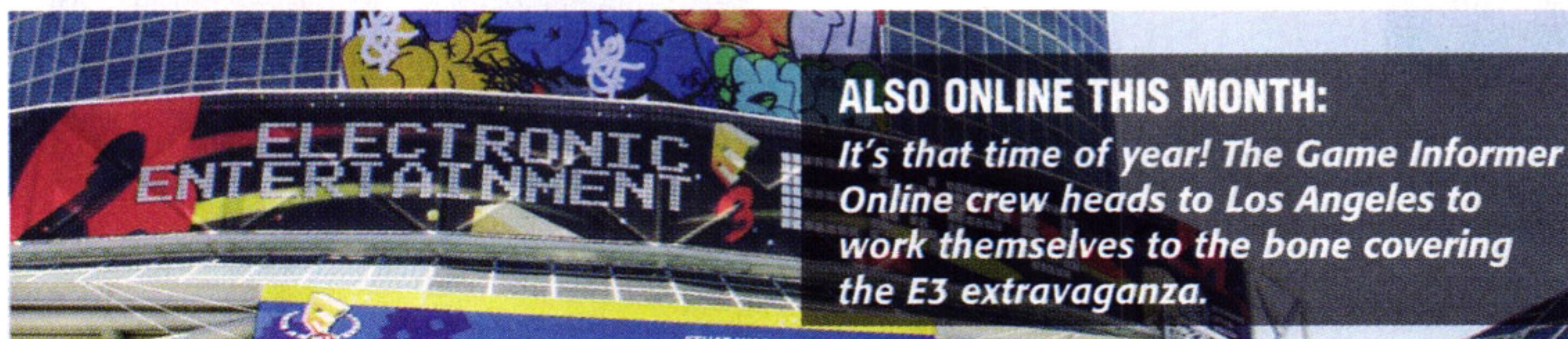
Check The Remix

Want to learn more about the art of remixing video game soundtracks? Read our full interview with OverClocked ReMix's webmaster, curator, and remixologist David Lloyd.



Survey Says

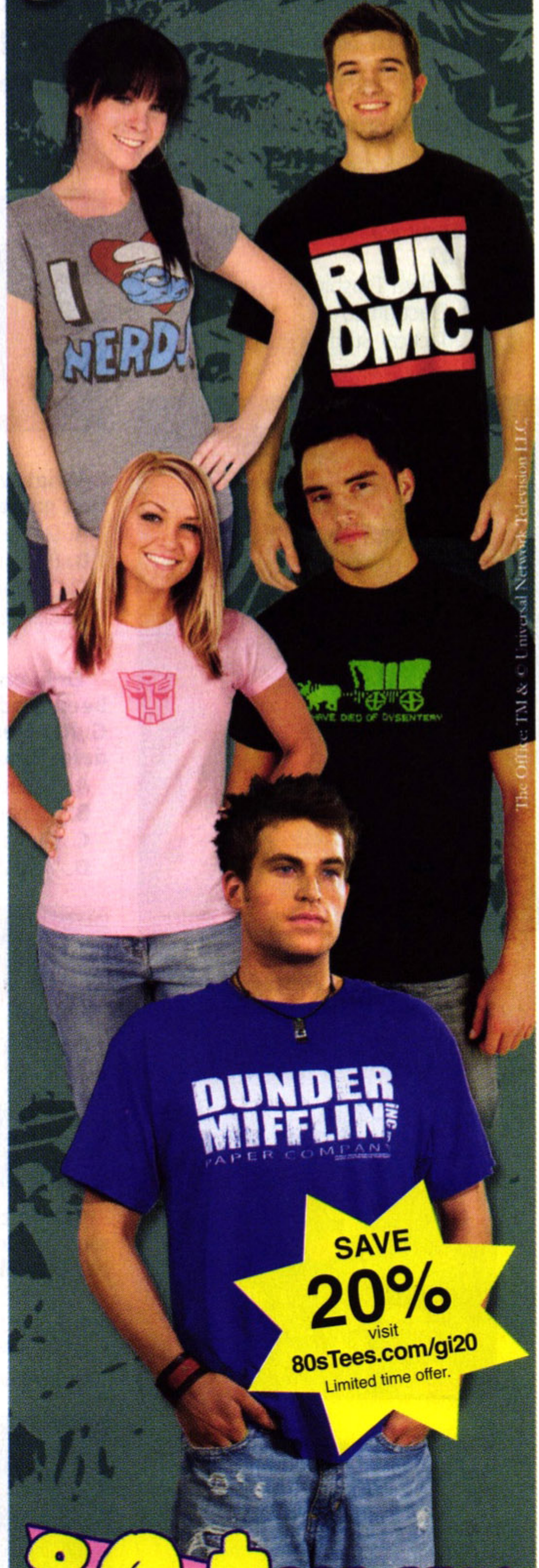
Numbers don't lie. Or do they? Find out with our full-fledged survey about the state of online gaming.



ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

It's that time of year! The Game Informer Online crew heads to Los Angeles to work themselves to the bone covering the E3 extravaganza.

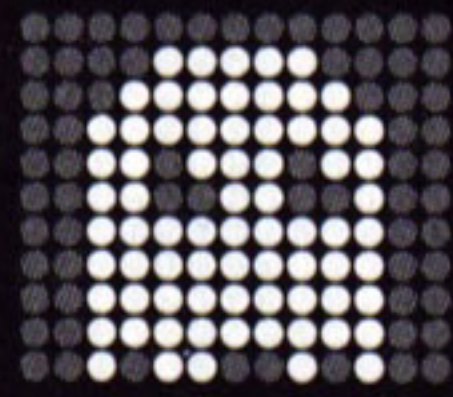
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GAMEOVER

We'll Meet Again Someday Soon.

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Solid Snake is a longtime gaming hero – dignified and awesome. Now that the epic finale of Metal Gear Solid has hit shelves, we thought we'd offer a tribute to our long-time favorite stealth soldier. Complete the following quiz to find out which outfit you'd like to see Snake in, whether he likes it or not.

1 The company now known as Sony was originally called what?

- A. Tokyo Tsushin Kogyo
- B. Electronico
- C. Tactical Studies Rules
- D. Soni Magnetic

2 Ephemeral Fantasia was a PS2 role-playing game released in 2001. What does ephemeral mean, anyway?

- A. Bubbling, or to show high spirits
- B. Lasting a very short time
- C. Light, airy, or tenuous; extremely delicate
- D. A man or boy having traits normally considered feminine



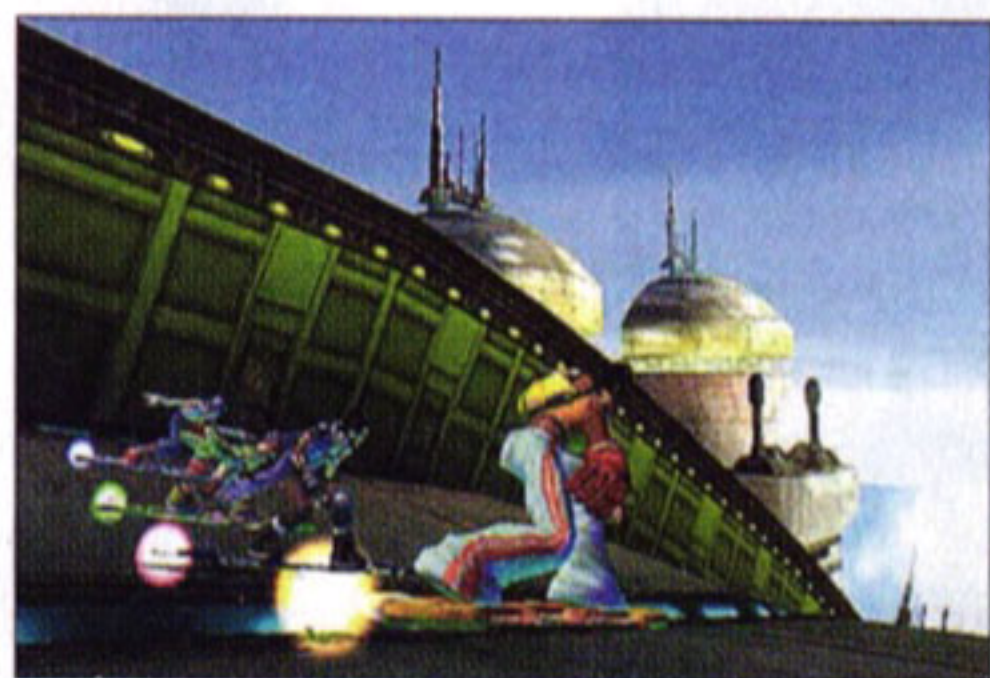
3 Who was the protagonist in 2004's Red Dead Revolver?

- A. Deadeye
- B. Clint Belton
- C. Red
- D. Flying Hawk



4 Which game wasn't made by Harmonix?

- A. Karaoke Revolution
- B. Guitar Hero II
- C. Eye Toy: AntiGrav
- D. Harmonix made all of the above games



5 What was the name of the first game created by Nintendo?

- A. Donkey Kong
- B. Hanafuda
- C. Computer Othello
- D. Game & Watch

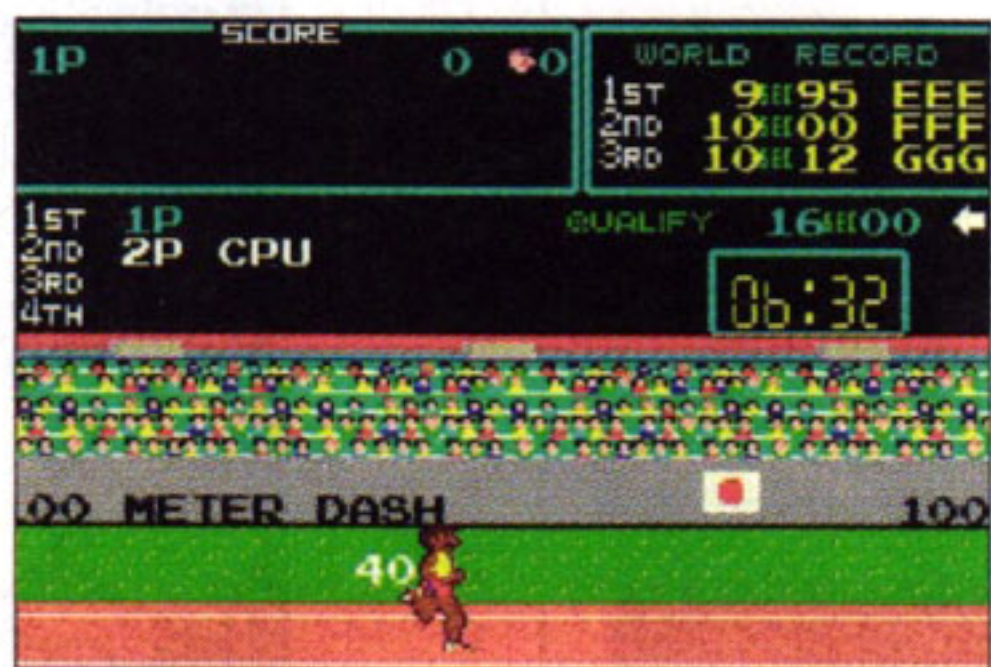
6 Only one Journey song has been made available for either Guitar Hero or Rock Band to date. What is it called?

- A. "Wheel in the Sky"
- B. "Separate Ways"
- C. "Don't Stop Believin'"
- D. "Any Way You Want It"



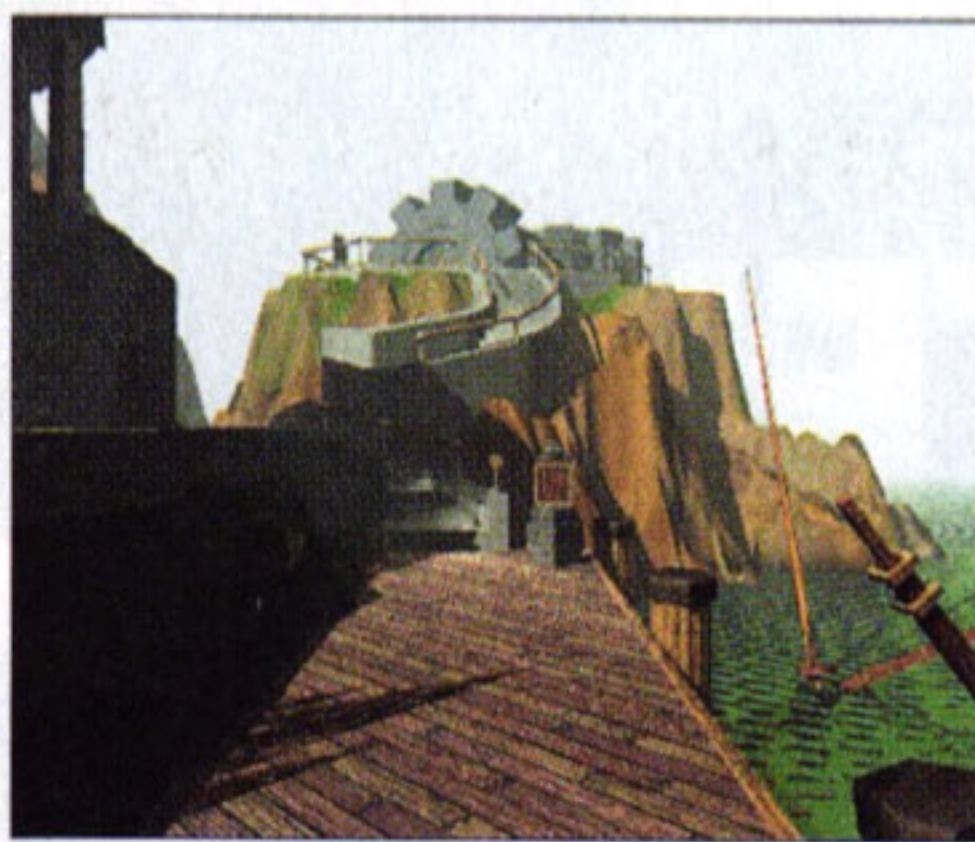
7 Which track and field event was not included in the original arcade release of Track & Field?

- A. Hammer Throw
- B. Long Jump
- C. Shot Put
- D. 100 Meter Dash



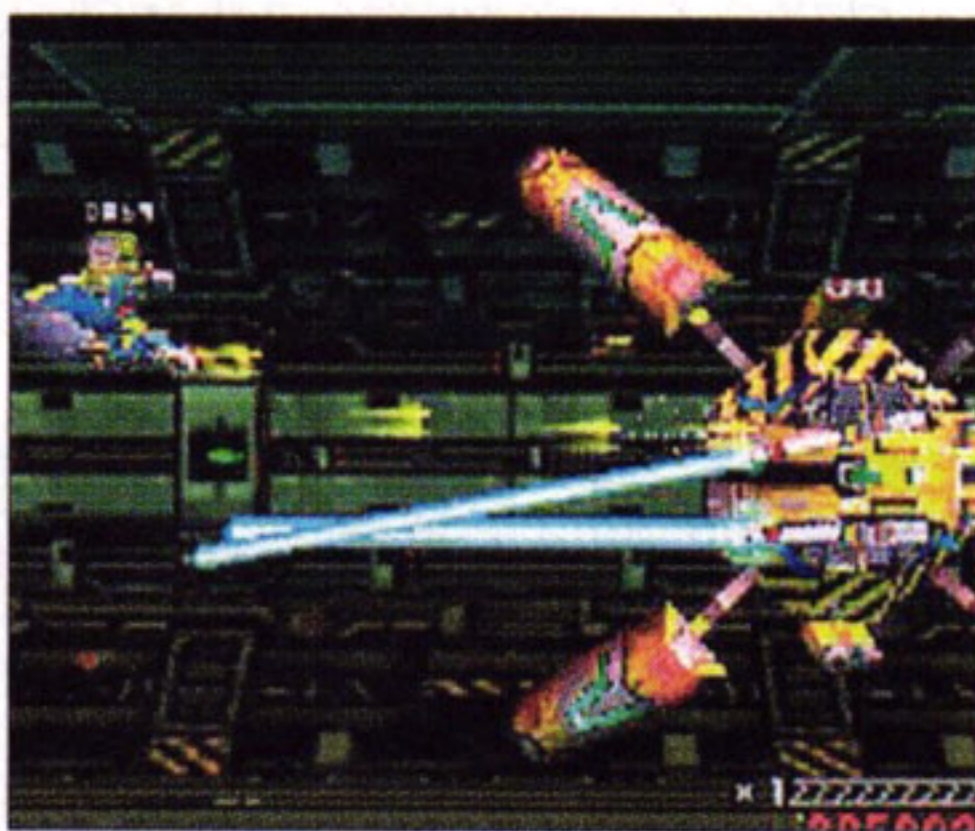
8 Who was Atrus' father in the Myst series?

- A. Gehn
- B. Sirrus
- C. Achenar
- D. Saavedro



9 There's an umlaut somewhere around this game's name. Do you remember where it goes?

- A. Einhander
- B. Einhänder
- C. Einhandër
- D. Einhändër



10 What is the appropriate phrase to utter after having beaten "Through the Fire and Flames" on Expert and hitting 100 percent of the notes?

- A. Eh. That was easy.
- B. You should see me sober.
- C. And lo, thou shall kneel before me, and I will be your God among mortals.
- D. That just %#&@ing happened!

BREAKDOWN

\$23.6 million was the total loss reported by Atari during the last financial year. On the bright side, that's down from the \$69.7 million loss the year before.

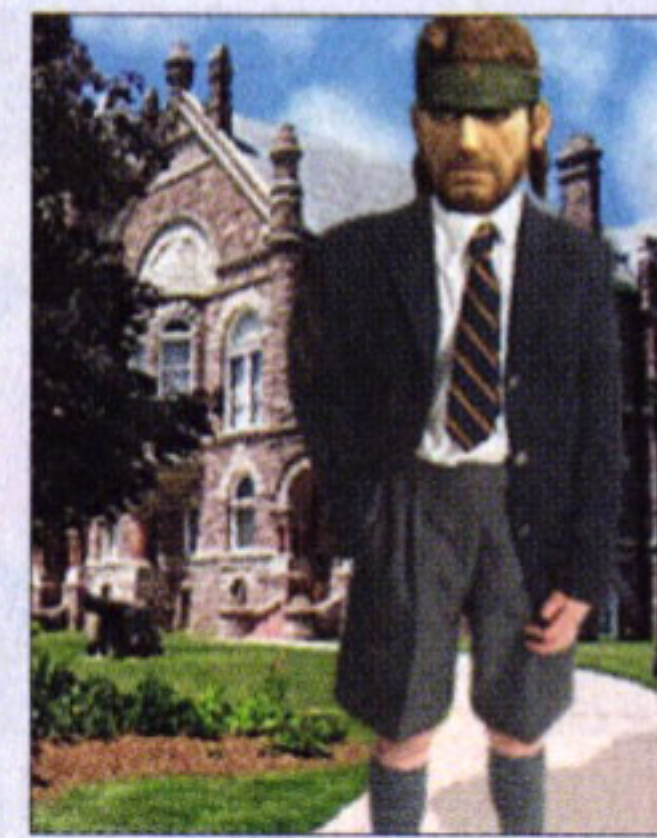
10 million registered users have signed up for the XFire chat and community service.

28 days of every month, the average PS3 owner aged 27 and up uses their console, according to a recent Nielson Media Research study.

65 percent is the average rating Xbox Live Arcade games should aim to surpass if they don't want to be put into danger of being delisted from the service.

7 pages of this issue have super secret messages that can be decoded with a special sequence of letters and numbers hidden within last month's issue. Are you cool enough to find all the secrets? Are we lying? Is it real? Hint: It almost certainly isn't.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



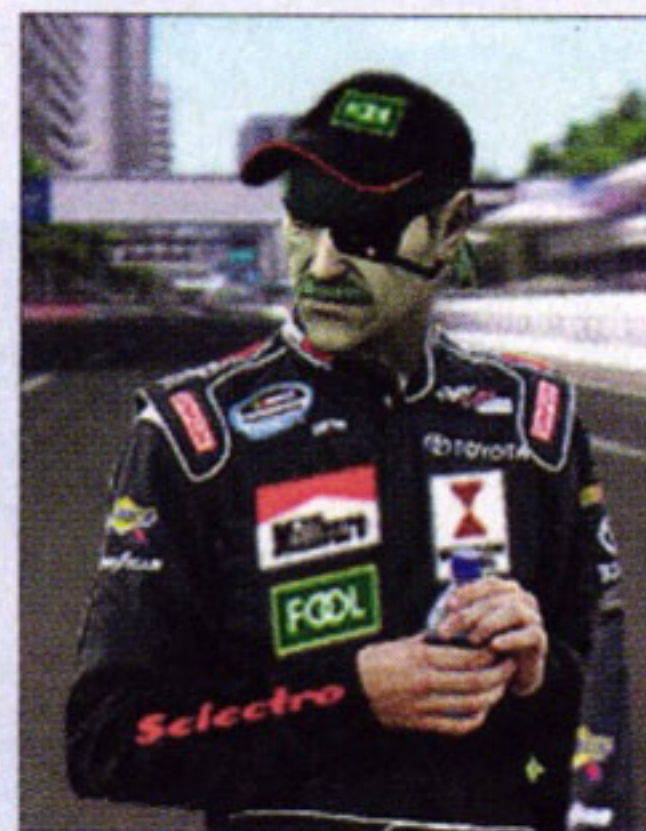
0-1:
Schoolboy Snake



2-3:
Grandma Snake



4-5:
My Little Snake



6-7:
Marketing Shill Snake



8-9:
Teddy Bear Snake



10:
Really Naked Snake

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