

# GAMEINFORMER

THE VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

## BATMAN ARKHAM ASYLUM

A Terrifying Trip Into The Legendary Home  
Of The Dark Knight's Greatest Foes

*Joker plots  
the fall of the  
Dark Knight*

SEPTEMBER 2008



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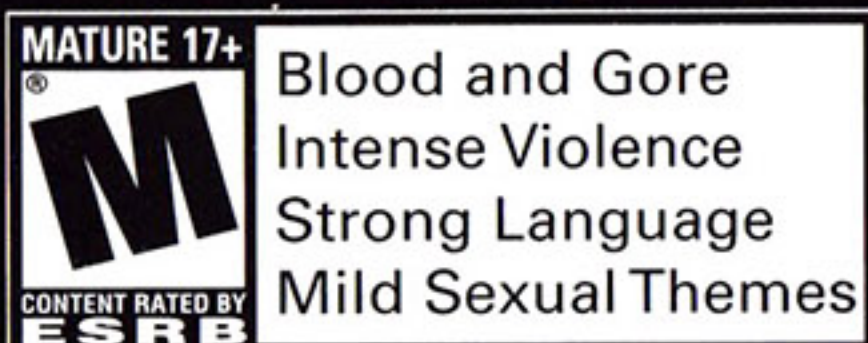


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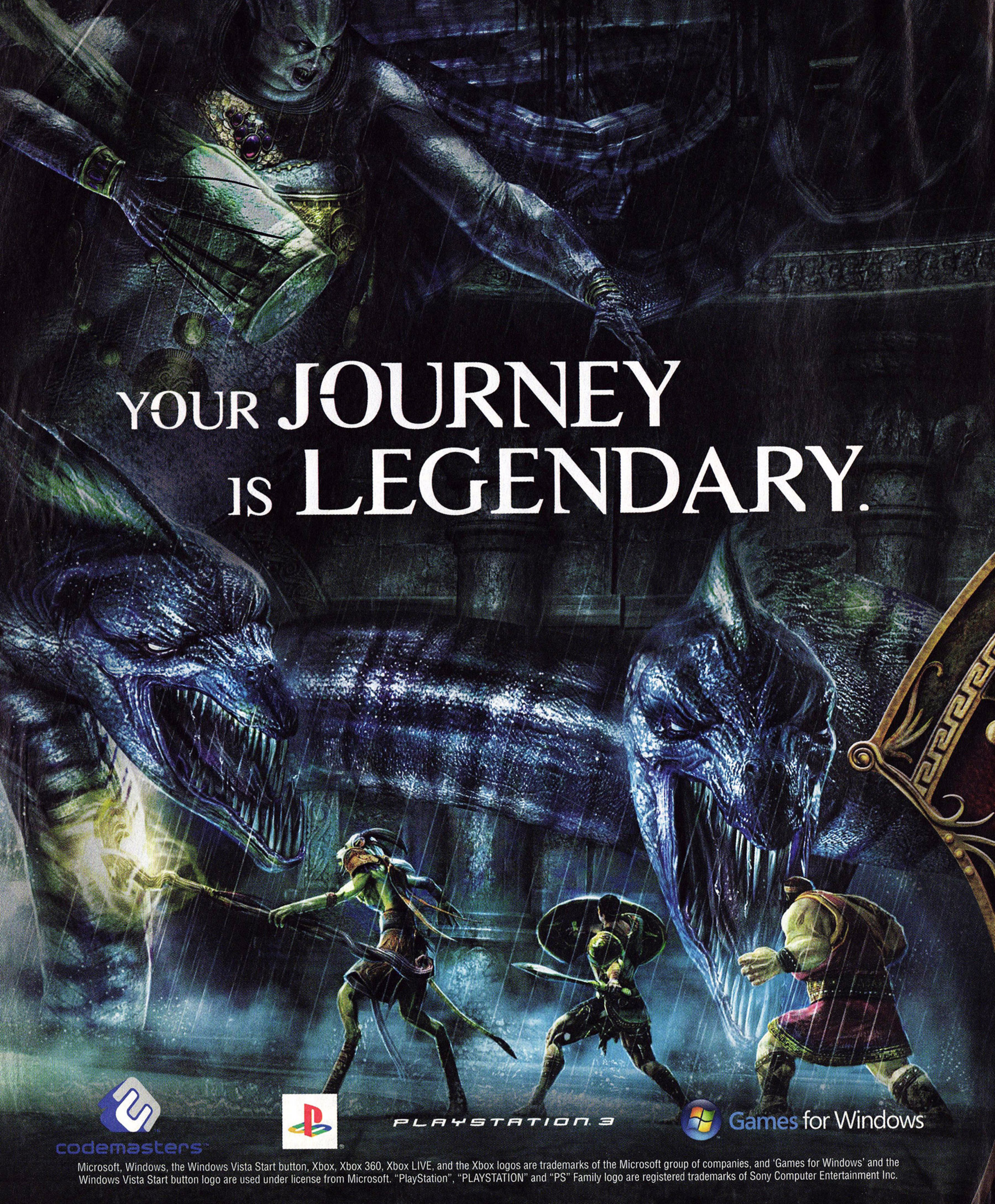
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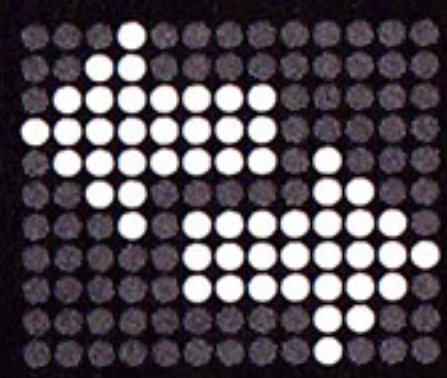
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This Caped Crusader adventure doesn't trace its lineage from any specific TV show or movie, but Eidos is pulling out all the stops to redeem Batman's video game reputation. As he journeys into the chaotic depths of Arkham Asylum, Batman must use criminal stomping abilities and detective skills to foil the Joker's latest dastardly plan. Seeing this world-exclusive story is believing.

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### E3 2008

Eleven pages stuffed full of coverage of this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo await you this month. Get all the news, reaction, and analysis you need right here – as well as interviews with the industry's biggest movers and shakers.



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### THE TOP 25 GAMES OF E3

Just because there weren't any booth babes or sensory-overloading stage shows on the floor this year doesn't mean that there wasn't awesome software on display. We give you the lowdown on the best games the show had to offer in 10 loaded pages.

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# STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



## THE CASUAL CRUSH

**ANDY McNAMARA**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It is hard to believe, but the hottest term in the video game industry is one generally affiliated with the clothing options that corporate headquarters let their employees wear on Fridays. No, it's not interactivity or ingenuity as it should be; it's casual.

In the games business, "casual" caters to a new type of gamer that plays *Cooking Mama*, *The Sims*, or *Bejeweled*. This new sector in the video game market is growing in leaps and bounds. The annoying part about how the new casual craze is presented is that it completely ignores the supposed "hardcore" gamer – a market sector the industry apparently seems to think has reached its saturation point.

All three hardware manufacturers made a special point to address the casual gamer at this year's E3 Media and Business Summit. Nintendo went as far as to basically ignore the hardcore gamer altogether, but I'll address that in another letter.

The thing that drives me crazy in this whole casual crush, as I like to call it, is the misconception that this new business was created in a vacuum – that the hardcore gamer has nothing to do with it and that we don't play these games. This is the biggest bunch of malarkey I've ever heard. Just because a game doesn't have a \$30 million budget or fall into a traditional game genre doesn't mean that a gamer – hardcore or not – won't understand that good games are good games. *Brain Age* isn't just some casual game. It isn't successful because it's casual. It's successful because it's a good game. Nothing more.

Who would have thought? Good games sell. The casual tag, or the hardcore tag for that matter, is just a silly marketing term that the industry uses to make itself seem capable of reaching more people. But the fact of the matter is that games are selling to more people because games have more reach than ever before and developers get better at their craft with each passing moment.

The industry would be wise not to forget that all gamers matter. There are more "casual" gamers because there are more people engaged in the medium. The industry is growing, and more people are playing games than ever before; but the lifeblood of all this success comes from the people who are the beating heart of the industry. I'd call you hardcore if you are reading this letter, but the hardcore label is as stupid as the people who believe that casual gaming is something new or different. It's the same as it ever was: good games rise to the top. And gamers – no matter who you are, what demographic you fit in, or age that appears on your driver's license – love the thrill of great gaming.

Cheers,

**Andy >>** [andy@gameinformer.com](mailto:andy@gameinformer.com)

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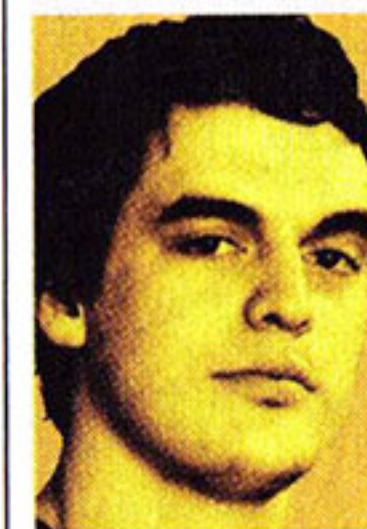
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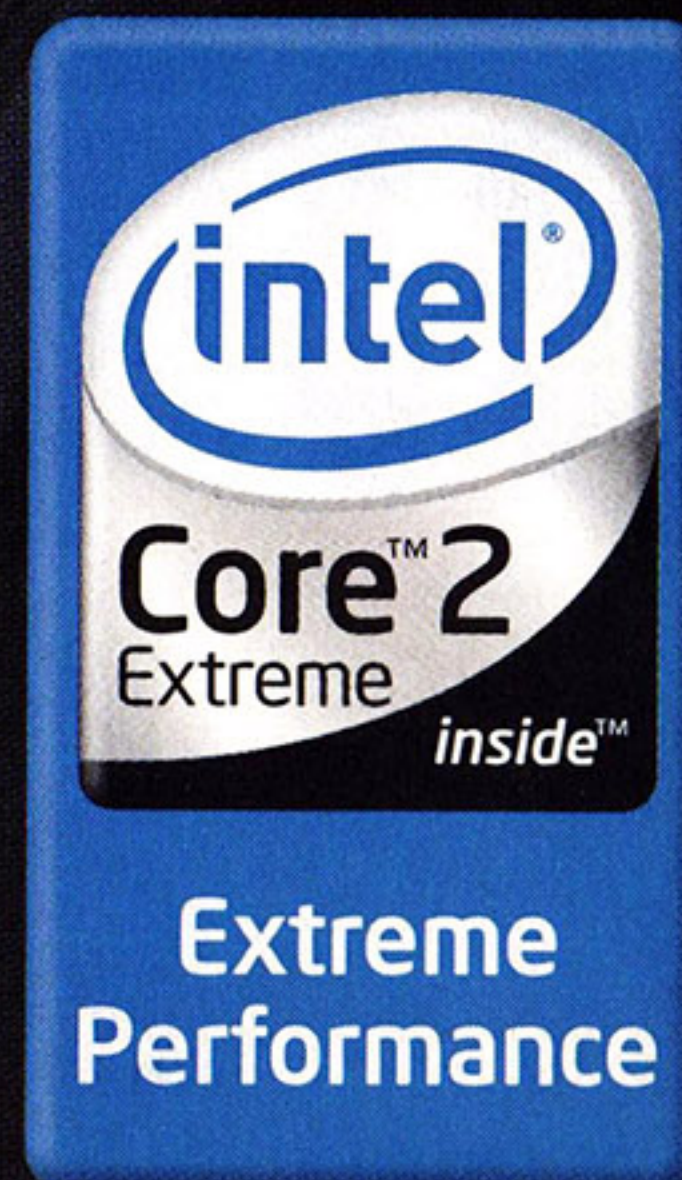
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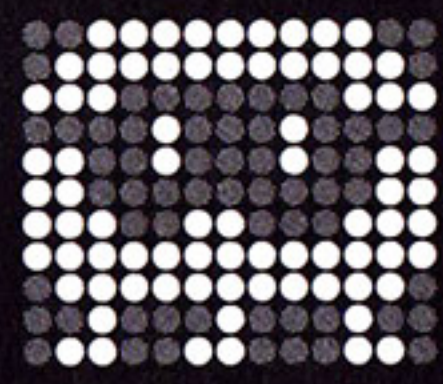
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# GISPY

## Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



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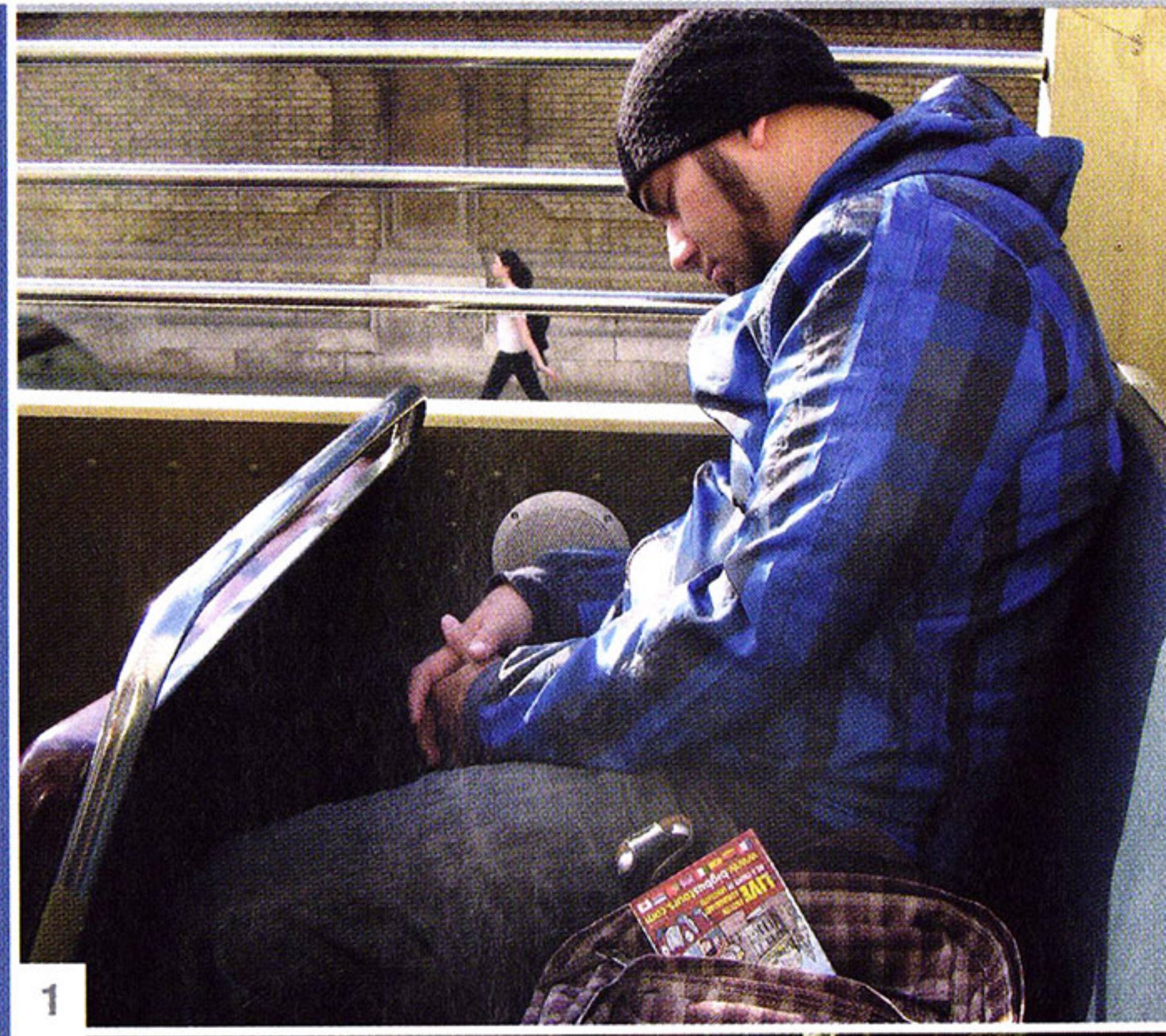
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1  
2



1 Eidos' Stanley Phan is dazzled by the sights of Swinging London!

2 "If you think Gears of War 2 and Borderlands are hot, wait until you see the deals we have on late model Corollas! We won't be undersold! Experienced buyers can qualify for our super low 3.5% APR 'Dog Days of Summer' Special!" Gearbox's Randy Pitchford and Epic's Mark Rein put the hard sell on at Bethesda's E3 party

3 Andy grills and chills with Capcom's Melody Pfeiffer and Plugged In PR's Heather Sorenson

4 Legendary rockers The Who leave LA's Orpheum Theater a smoldering ruin after an amazing two-hour set during MTV Games' Rock Band party

5 Reiner and Joe hang out with gaming journalist Doug Perry and Marvel's Chris Baker

6 Bryan gets the inside scoop on all things id from Todd Hollenshead and Activision's Paul Murphy

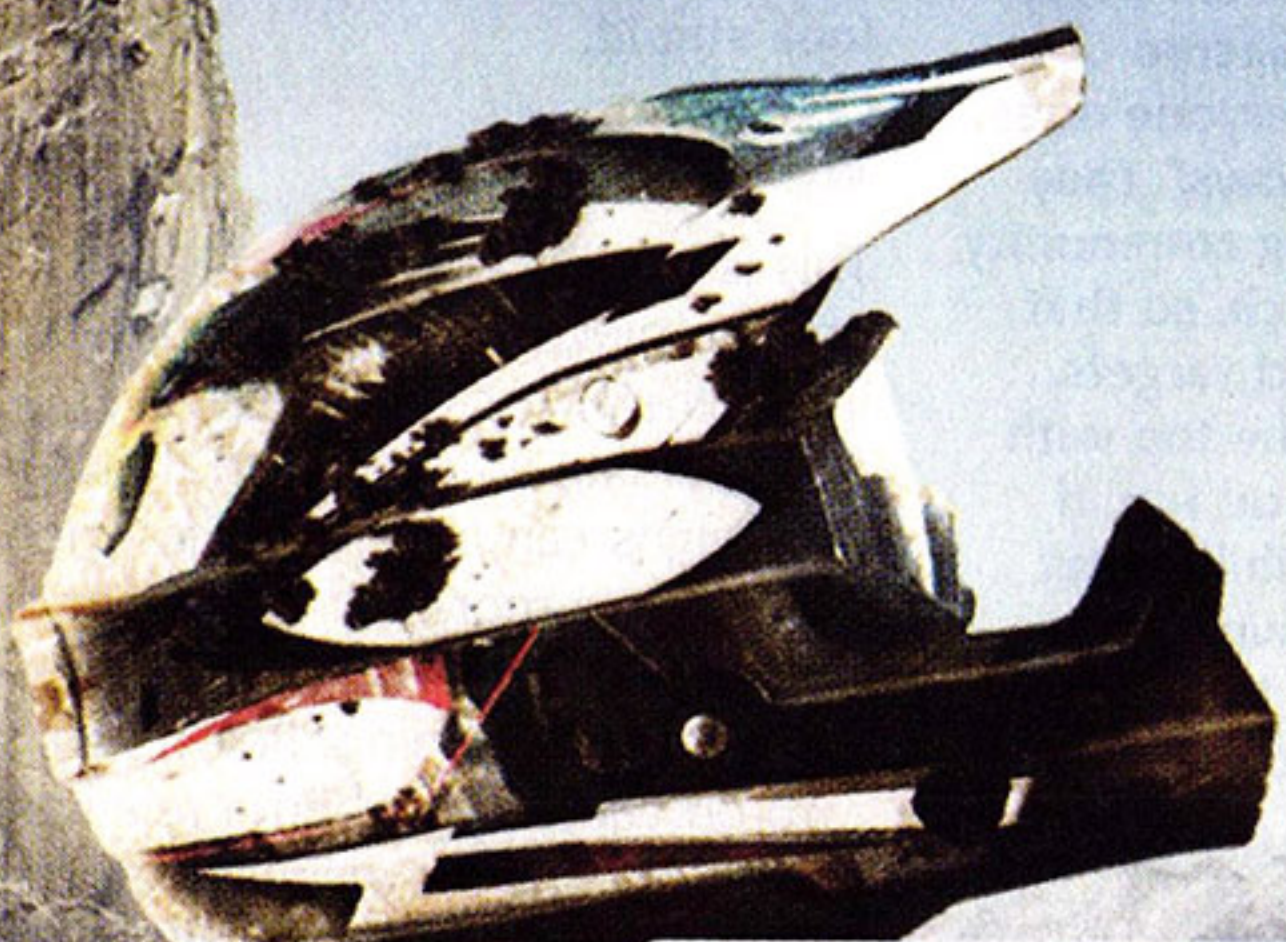
7 Megan hangs with the folks at Treyarch, currently working on Quantum of Solace

8 Matt Bertz shows off his Pogues t-shirt to Sony's Jennifer Clarke



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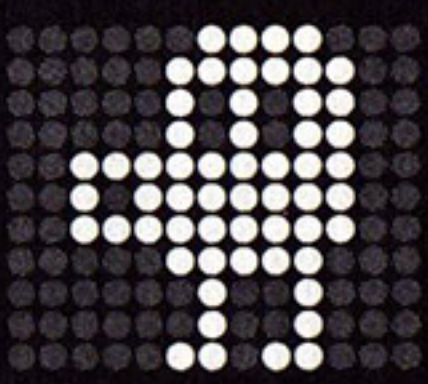
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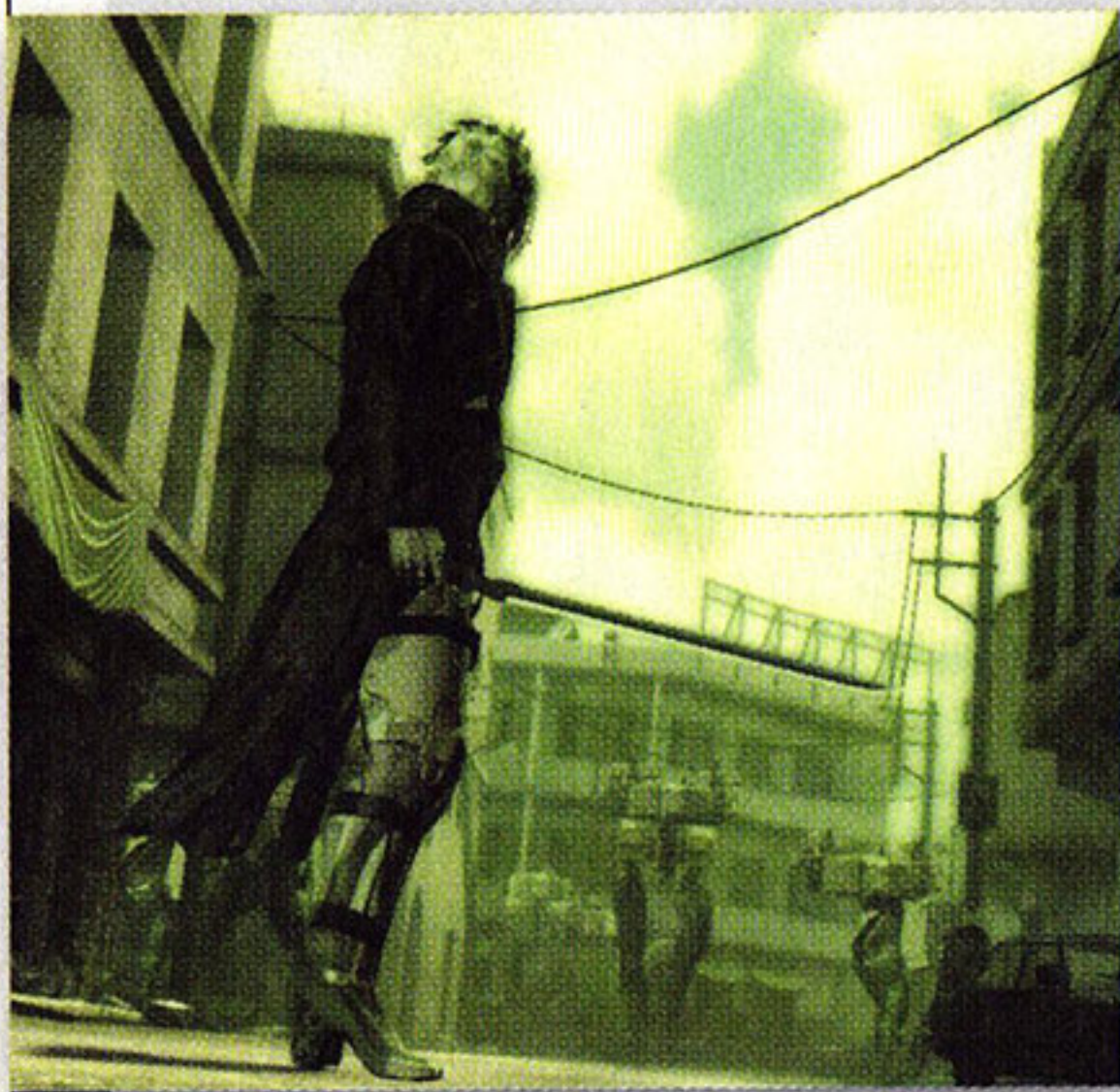


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# DEARGI

## The Readers Strike Back



### Staying Solid

I just beat Metal Gear Solid 4, and while I loved Solid Snake's plot arc, I still feel as if there are stories that need to be finished. It would be great to play as Liquid during Shadow Moses and see things through his eyes, or use Ocelot to tie up loose ends after operation Snake Eater. Do you think Hideo Kojima will ever make another Metal Gear game to conclude these threads?

Anonymous  
via aol.com

**Metal Gear Solid 4 is the end of Solid Snake's story, but according to Konami, it is not the end of Metal Gear as a franchise. We wouldn't be surprised to see future installments mine the fertile ground of the Cold War era, or even deal with more recent events like Raiden rescuing Sunny from the Patriots. It's safe to say that Metal Gear will continue, but series creator Hideo Kojima's involvement is more of an unknown. Kojima has expressed a desire to move on to other projects; he initially wasn't even going to head up the development of MGS 4. We'll just have to wait to see what form the franchise takes from here, and under whose direction.**

appreciation for your apparent optimism for Fallout 3. Having been a fan of the series for the past 11 years or so, it's refreshing to see most of your coverage to be positive and optimistic. Too frequently we fans are lambasted by our own, and it's difficult to get a positive word in without feeling as if I am going to be dipped in the vats for my blasphemy.

Brad Boling  
via email

**It sounds like you've been talking to the wrong kinds of fans. Every series has small contingent of followers who are convinced the next entry will be terrible. In a kind of warped affection, they love the previous games so much that they come to believe that any deviation from the set standards will spell disaster. In Fallout's case, there's nothing wrong with enjoying the first two classic entries, but no gaming series can improve if it just repeats the same pattern in every iteration. Deciding to hate a game you haven't played doesn't show off your refined, discerning taste as a gamer. It makes you look stupid.**

### Working Together

This is in response to Paul Charchian's opinion piece about developers catering to the PVP crowd while overlooking and avoiding co-op. I think that co-op campaigns can be fun, but as mentioned, they require more work, time, and money. You can't blame game developers for not expending their resources on a co-op campaign when a relatively small number of gamers will ever experience it. Nonetheless, co-op in general is very much alive. Counter-Strike, Call of Duty 4, and WoW's battlegrounds are all PVP, but very much co-op if you actually want to win. Good luck being a one-man army in those games if you're playing people with equal skill. Why should multiplayer force us to choose between playing with friends and making enemies? Why can't we do both?

Jason Wu  
via gmail.com

### Overdone

I think you made a mistake with your Sacred Cow Barbecue in issue 183. I understand why you'd bash Half-Life and Gran Turismo, but Smash Bros.? What's with that? Sure, it doesn't take as much skill as Halo 3, but I don't really think I could ever be beaten by a six-year-old. Yeah, items give unfair advantages, but that's where the skill comes in. When your enemy gets the smash ball, you've got to be good or else. But yeah I agree that people like R.O.B., Ice Climbers, and King Dedede need to be cut. Still, it was pretty unnecessary to burn the game so much. It's so much fun!

Pete Somers  
via gmail.com

Your Sacred Cow BBQ was absolutely uncalled for and unacceptable. In all honesty, what is the point of taking beloved gaming titles and publishing flat out blasphemous lies about them? Everything you wrote about them couldn't be any further from the truth. I will never read, purchase, subscribe to, or recommend your magazines ever again. I have zero respect for you now. It's the same as the editors of a sports magazine arbitrarily bashing the best teams in history. It is horribly unprofes-

sional, ignorant, and inexcusable.

John Satterwhite  
via hotmail.com

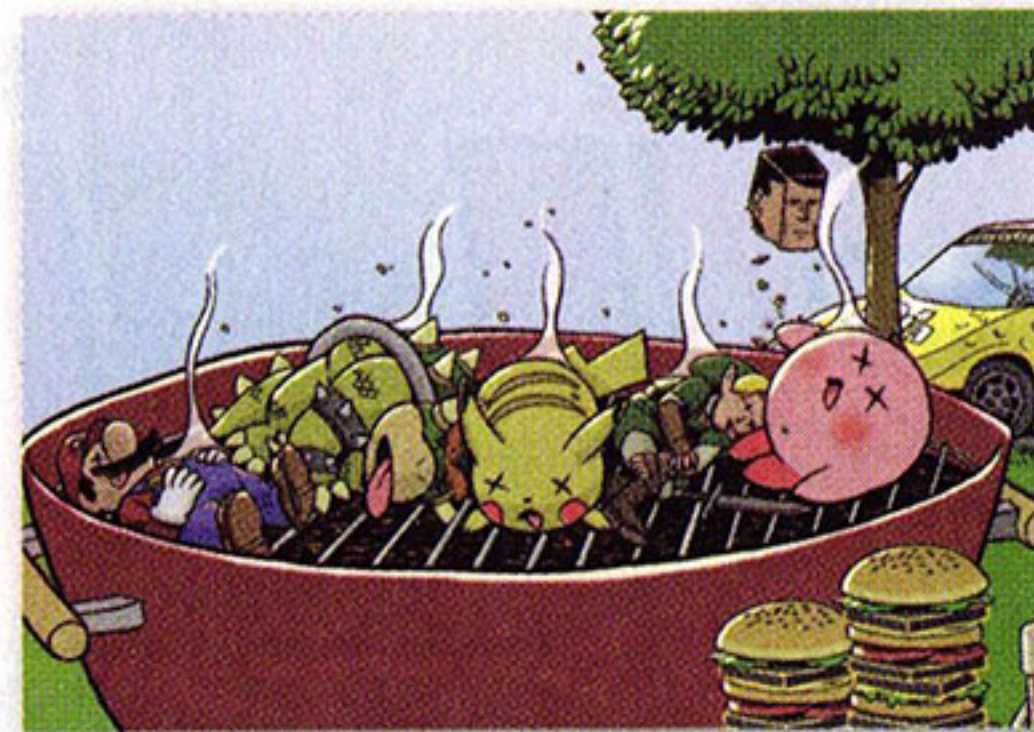
I've never written to a magazine before, but your hating on the Gran Turismo series in the Sacred Cow Barbecue cannot go unanswered. Yes it has a few flaws, like the absence of damage, but I can let that one slide considering I've never lost to someone who couldn't keep his car off the damn wall. As for as saying that Forza 2 has a better career mode, are you f—— delusional!? Forza 2's career mode made me want to puke. Burnout: Paradise and PGR4 are great in their own ways, but they can't compare to GT. Unlike other racing series, Gran Turismo just keeps getting better and better. You can't call yourselves experts if that simple fact escapes you.

Ryan Whitten  
via email

The second annual Sacred Cow Barbecue was excellent, but I was wondering if you guys could do me a favor. I know that several ignorant fanboys will not grasp the concept of a roast, and they'll cry and send in butthurt responses. Can you please publish some of these nerd tantrums so I (and countless others) can laugh at them and rejoice that we're not as obtuse as they are?

Jon Carlos  
via yahoo.com

**We thought the satirical, tongue-in-cheek tone was pretty apparent, but let's set the record straight: We adore every game we mentioned in the Sacred Cow Barbecue. In fact, almost everyone does. That's why they're "sacred cows." They are so revered by the gaming community that they are beyond reproach, so that naturally makes them perfect targets. Sure, we went a little over the top with our jabs, but it was all in good fun. If you're not open to the possibility that your favorite game might have flaws, it's probably a good time to take a step back from the line of fanaticism.**



### Bright Side of the Apocalypse

I wanted to express to you my deep

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 game are you most excited about from E3 2008?



I usually get the most excited about whichever games I know aren't as far off. So Star Wars: The Force Unleashed has my attention the most. Watching a video of the main character single-handedly dismantling an AT-ST has stirred the Force within me.

QuasidodoJr

The snowboarder in me is really excited about the Wii Fit board snowboarding game. Also, the new Wii Sports will be a great addition to the Wii's library - and the new dorm.

breakingthebenjamin

I'm really excited for Mad World. I am not excited for Wii Speak. I wanted to be excited for a Wii hard drive.

littlejoe

Left 4 Dead on the PC. Valve's pedigree can't be denied, and their games are always fun.

forsberg1785

I am looking forward to Fable II. I've been caught up in the Molyneux hype train several times, but he has been pretty reserved when talking about this game. It sounds like the game the original Fable was suppose to be.

not\_a\_bumblebee

Resident Evil 5. How could you not be excited for this game, especially after playing Resident Evil 4? Zombie greatness.

NightPhantom

The excitement I had for Rock Band last year is returning with a vengeance for the sequel. I can't wait to try Painkiller on drums and fail within thirty seconds.

DanteBunny



Do you want to make your voice heard? Weigh in with your opinion at [www.gameinformer.com/forums](http://www.gameinformer.com/forums)



DAMNATION

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YOUR SOUL?

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PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360 LIVE

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## dear gi

Thanks for the article about games losing co-op play. I had only just been talking to my friend about how much better Call of Duty 4 would be if it had co-op, and then I read that article. It's nice to know that I'm not alone. I think it's almost more annoying when games have online co-op only. Isn't the point of co-op so that I can socialize with friends? I'd much rather have them at my house than send them home so we can play co-op.

Nick Glover  
via gmail.com

**If there's one thing we learned from the responses to Paul Charchian's opinion piece, it's that gamers expect different things from their multiplayer experiences. Some want online fragfests, others want strategic team combat, and many are bemoaning the lack of split-screen co-op in many recent releases. In any case, it is hard to deny that it is more fun to play with friends than with strangers. There are more and more gamers who don't care about owning their friends; they just want to have a good time playing games with their buddies. The more ways a game can facilitate that, the better.**

### Patchwork

Now that home consoles have hard drives, developers can patch a game with a download. Unfortunately, this is being used as a crutch so they don't need to properly test their products. I don't want to see developers release half finished games to meet a deadline and patch them later, and I don't want to pay later for downloadable content that should have been included in the original release. Are we just doomed to get shafted on content and to wait a few weeks until our games are made playable via patch?

Matt Richards  
via email

**The situation you describe is imagined, and doesn't reflect the current reality. Patching console games is nowhere near an industry-wide epidemic; there have only been a few that have required patches to play properly. In the old days, you would have just been stuck with a broken game, but now the developers are able to rectify the issue. As for downloadable content, there is not a single game on the market that was only made complete through the release of DLC. Gamers should be happy that developers are willing to support their games after release rather than fussing about how they are entitled to supplemental content for free. Until the situation gets out of hand (and it isn't even close), you're just complaining about functionality that makes your gaming experience better.**



### RICHARD GOLDEN

Sora is a vigilant hero, constantly on the lookout for consignment store dumpsters he can use to augment his wardrobe

## 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.

### Send to:

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### EMILY ASBURY

Before becoming the hero of Hyrule, Link had a successful gourd-in-hat smuggling business



### JOSH ALLAR

The new prince of Persia hasn't hit his "I'm a totally dark and brooding antihero of sorrow" phase. Wait for the sequel



### JERSSON RAMIREZ

It's the summer's blockbuster superheroes crammed into one picture. But where's Hancock? Oh, right. Nevermind



### KELSEY HUDSPETH

Only two girlfriends? Niko isn't playing his cards right



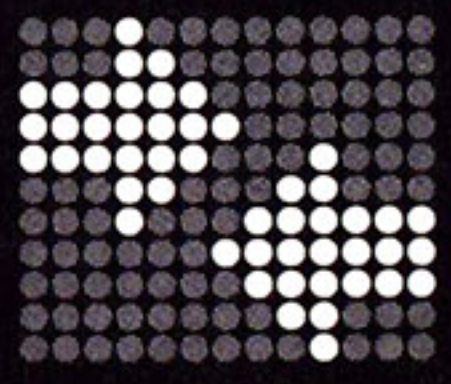


Pictured from left to right: LCDR Mark Simon, ETCM Eric Olis, BMC Dan Ames, BM1 Michael O'Connell,  
EN1 Jason Fetterman, EM2 Mark DiPietro, LT Lewis Baker, MM2 Sergio Rodriguez

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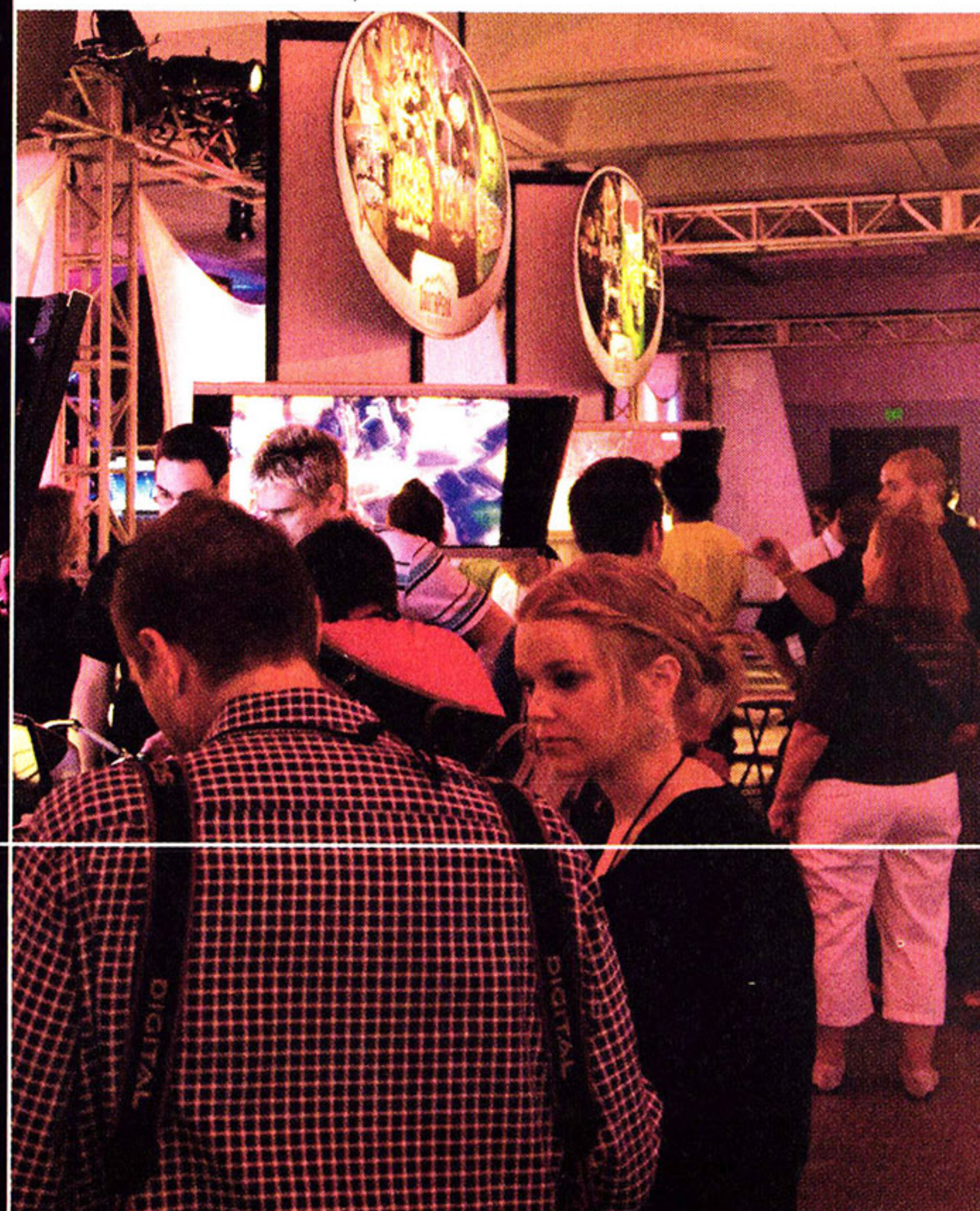


# E3

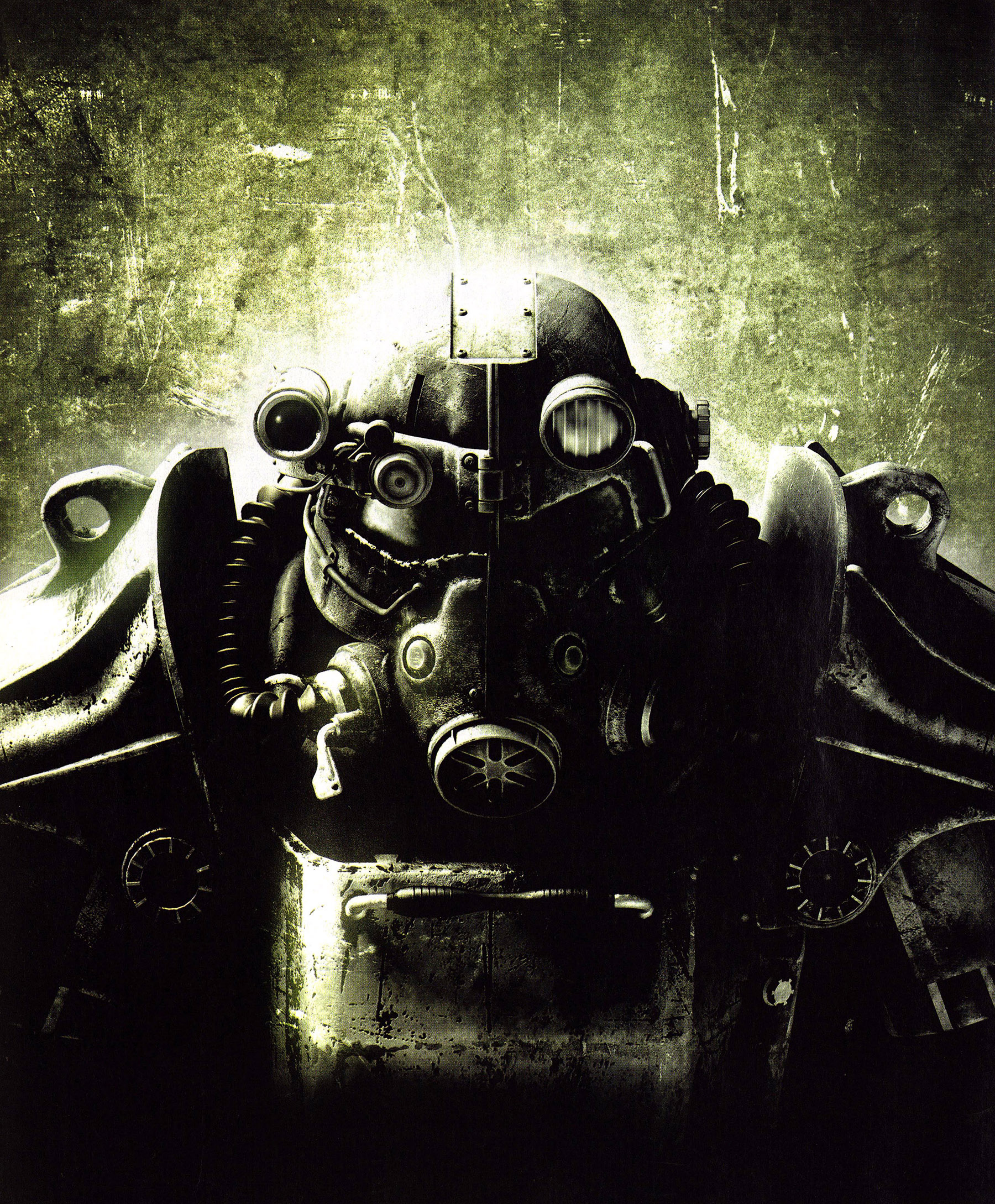
Los Angeles  
2008

The  
Incredible  
Shrinking  
Game  
Convention





After a year's sabbatical in Santa Monica, E3 returned to the familiar confines of the Los Angeles Convention Center. However, the return to a bigger venue did not mean a return to the excess and glitz of shows past. In many ways, this felt like the smallest E3 yet, one marked by the absence of a number of publishers – most notably Activision Blizzard. However much it lacked excitement, there were still a few notable announcements and stellar games. While the future of the beleaguered convention is in doubt, we came away from the show with a better idea of what to expect out of the gaming scene over the next 12 months. Read on for the highlights (and lowlights) of E3 2008.



Prepare for the Future™

# Fallout 3

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PLAYSTATION 3



**Bethesda**  
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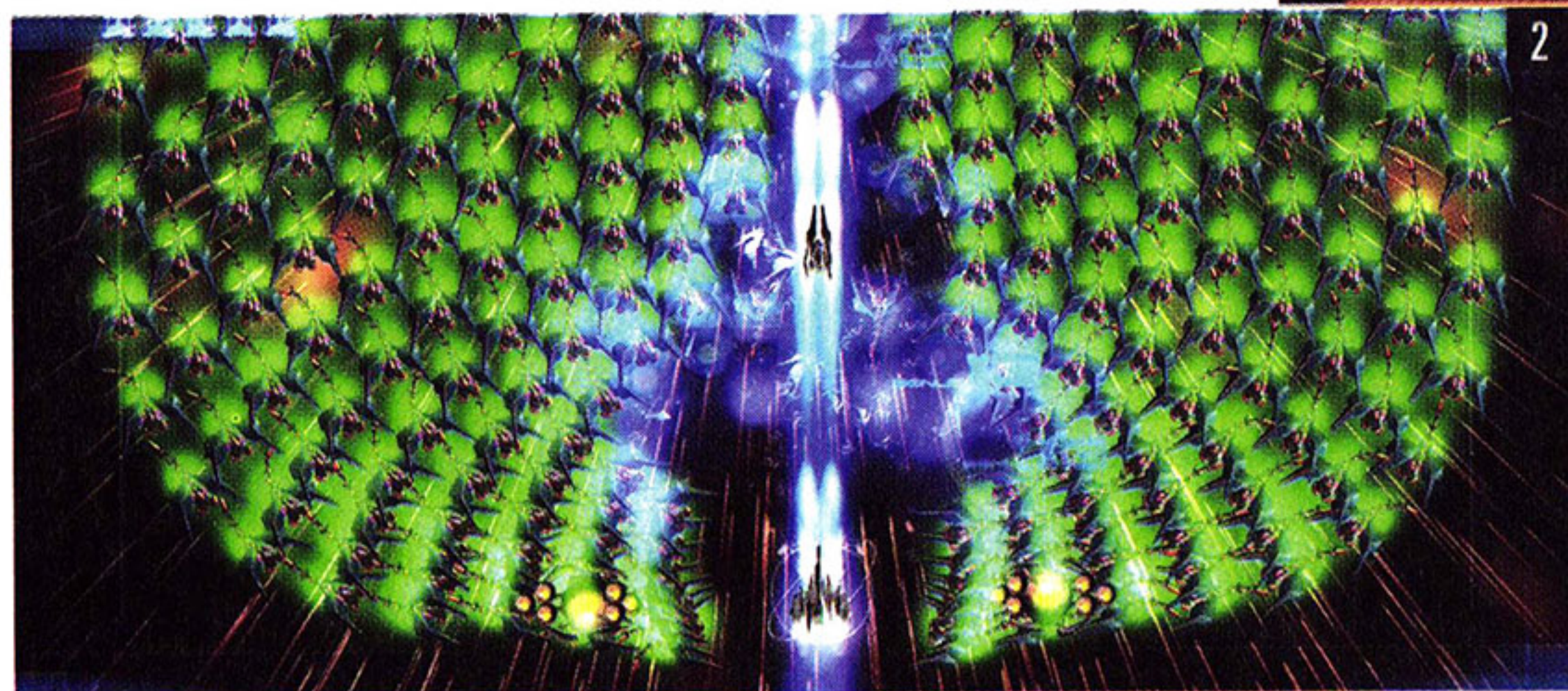
news

# MICROSOFT MOVES ON MULTIPLE FRONTS

## SOFTWARE STARS & AVATARS



1



2



3

Last E3, Microsoft didn't act like the platform manufacturer with the largest installed base or the best online service. This year, it stepped up the rhetoric. "Can we deliver to our fiercely loyal fans, and at the same time continue to transform the industry by delivering to everyone?" asked Don Mattrick, senior vice president of Microsoft's interactive entertainment division. Having established its console in over 10 million American homes, Microsoft's strategy during this E3 press conference was to straddle the fence between the hardcore and casual.

Spearheaded by a strong foundation of games, the presentation began with demos for *Fallout 3* (page 36), *Resident Evil 5* (page 37), *Fable II* (page 86), and *Gears of War 2* (page 78) in impressive succession. While seeing the first playable demo of *RE 5* – including two-player co-op, no less – was cool, *Gears of War 2* was arguably the most memorable. Cliff Bleszinski, Epic's design director, showed off a level where Marcus Fenix and Dom head into a

locust sinkhole and encounter a Brumak amidst a constantly crumbling city. As cool as it was to see Marcus use a locust as a human shield, for the second year in a row Microsoft got caught miming to one of their demos. The *Gears* footage that Bleszinski was supposedly playing in real time blacked out for a few seconds before looping back to its starting point without a console reset or checkpoint load, indicating it was probably a video.

Turning away from bloody chainsaw melees and toward making friends, John Schappert, corporate vice president for Live's interactive entertainment business, took the stage to officially announce avatars (see sidebar). These Mii-like virtual representations are a part of a larger Microsoft initiative called The New Xbox Experience. Another part of this strategy is Xbox Live Primetime – an exclusive partnership with production company Endemol for game shows like *Fear Factor* and *Deal or No Deal* that will feature contests with real, winnable prizes.

The New Xbox Experience also includes

expanded downloadable TV shows and movies through a partnership with NBC/Universal (including the Sci-Fi Channel and USA Network) for 700 new programs and an exclusive deal with online movie rental service Netflix. With the new partnership, Netflix members (who are Xbox Live Gold members) will be able to stream movies from their Instant queue and even share their queues and watch movies (including chat) with avatar party members for free. We suggest you don't do this with John Schappert, otherwise you might be watching *All Dogs Go to Heaven* – the first movie in his Netflix queue!

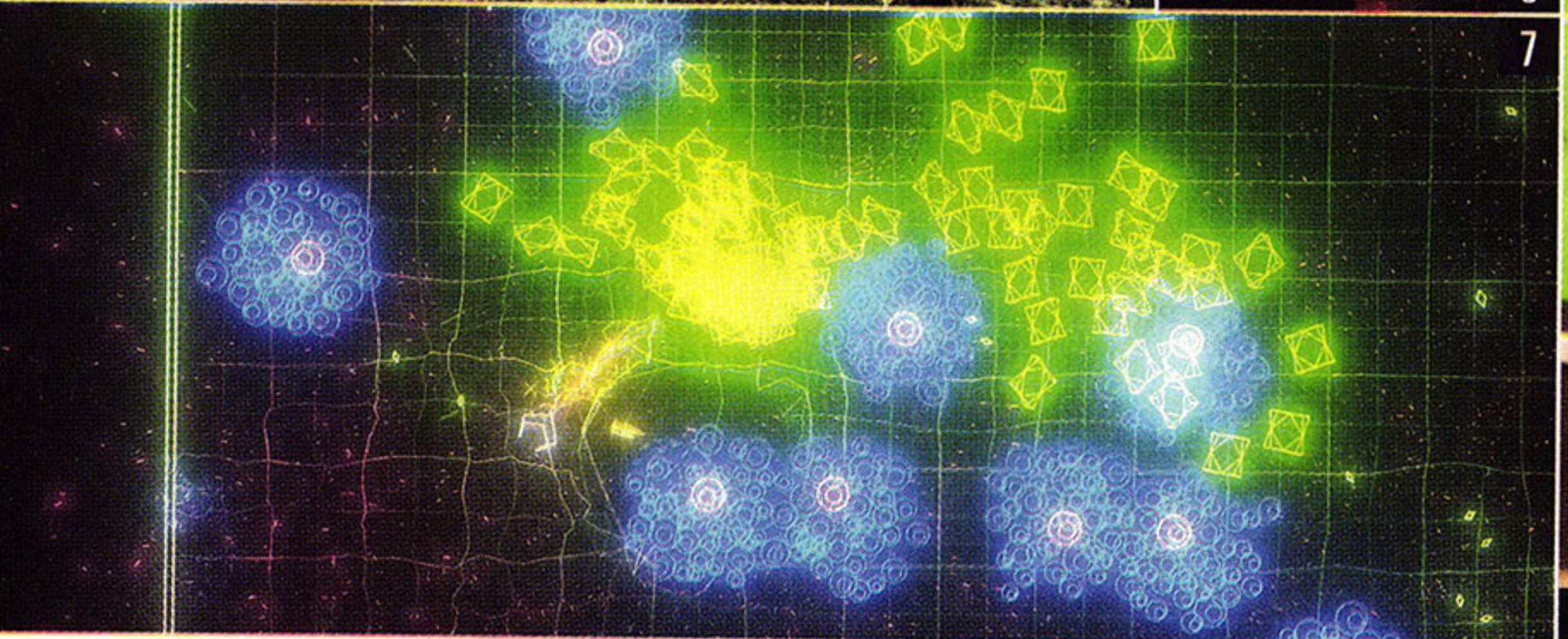
A big part of Live's experience is games, and Live Arcade was not left out. *Galaga Legions* is an exclusive Namco title being developed by the team behind *Pac-Man World Championship*. Sequels *Uno Rush* and *Geometry Wars Retro Evolved 2* also made appearances. *Portal: Still Alive* is a sequel of sorts; this 2008 exclusive features the original game from The Orange Box as well as new levels and Achievements (see

this month's Impulse section on page 46 for more). Finally, 2009 will see an exclusive *South Park Live* title, but nothing was shown of this game.

During this casual gaming segment, Microsoft also introduced and demoed Codemaster's 360 exclusive *You're in the Movies* (see page 94), with Schappert and others acting out the game's movie trailer-making video segments. If you think the height of the embarrassment was Don Mattrick pretending he's a clown being pulled backwards by a bungee cord, then you didn't see Duffy's performance. After *Lips* creator Keiichi Yano (*Gitaroo Man*) introduced the karaoke title (see page 93), the Welsh soul singer took the stage to sing her single "Mercy." While she sang the hell out of the song live – not lip-synched – the laughs came when afterwards she said, "I don't think I've ever had such great fun singing that song." But surely she had, and it was painfully obvious to everyone there.

Despite this, the Microsoft press conference did not go out on a low note. Square





## REPORT CARD

Stripping away the company's avatars and more casual strategy, one of the key things that Microsoft did better than Sony was highlight third-party games. *Fallout 3*, *Rock Band 2*, and *Resident Evil 5* are also coming to PS3, but Microsoft has a better stake in these properties – whether that's by garnering exclusive *Fallout 3* DLC, having an exclusive *Rock Band 2* launch window, or simply by showing the first co-op footage of *RE 5*. Nabbing *Final Fantasy XIII* is also a major coup. All this demonstrates that despite being, in many ways, the industry leader, Microsoft is still fighting to grab and maximize its advantage whenever possible.

FINAL GRADE:

# B

president Yoichi Wada ran through the company's 360 RPG efforts, including *Infinite Undiscovery* and *The Last Remnant*. After giving way to Mattrick, however, Wada returned, interrupting the Microsoft vice president to tell the crowd, "I do have one more big announcement to share." This was the news that *Final Fantasy XIII* – formerly a PS3 exclusive – is coming to the Xbox 360. "At long last, a day we have all been waiting for has arrived," he said triumphantly.

This was one of the few surprises of the press conference, and indeed the whole show. Microsoft's third-party record – a sector in which Microsoft says it has generated more money than the third-party revenue created by Wii and PS3 combined – has greatly helped the system. Now the console maker looks to stretch out its mindshare in different directions with the help of an expanding Xbox Live. "I'm so confident in our momentum and bright future," Mattrick declared early in his presentation, "that I'm willing to declare here today that Xbox 360 will sell more consoles this generation than PlayStation 3."

**1 Microsoft nabs *Final Fantasy XIII*. No release date for this elusive game has been set yet. Although Square Enix says there are no content differences between the 360 and PS3 editions, it will be interesting to see how many discs are required for the 360**

**2 Galaga Legions**

**3 Peter Molyneux's *Fable II* trailer opened up with the main character...getting hit with bird crap. The laughs got bigger when Molyneux took the stage and declared grandly: "*Fable II* is finished!"**

**4 Codemaster's *You're in the Movies* highlights what Microsoft calls The New Xbox Experience**

**5 *Fallout 3***

**6 *Duffy***

**7 *Geometry Wars Retro Evolved 2***

**8 Microsoft VP Don Mattrick**

## A CUTER YOU

Microsoft introduced its already leaked plan for avatars at E3, and many responded by asking, "Do I have to use them?" The answer is no, you can use your existing gamer picture. Avatars will be introduced with a free fall Live update, which will redesign the entire dashboard. However, the old blade system will still be accessible in-game by pushing the Guide button on your 360 controller.

Players can outfit their avatars with a large selection of clothes and other stylistic accessories, and first- and third-party games will offer winnable extras for their avatars. Whatever you think about the look of avatars, one of the undoubtedly cool things about them is that you can host eight-player parties of avatars to chat, take them into games, even share photos, or watch movies.



# interview | Phil Spencer

## General Manager, Microsoft Game Studios'



**You unveiled the new avatars for Xbox Live and the new menu system. I think there's a portion of the audience that didn't really think the blade system was broken and is not excited about avatars. Is there an option for people that aren't into that, or are you going to need an avatar?**

I'll take a few approaches to that. First of all, people obviously have opinions. In Microsoft Game Studios, we have quite a few core gamers – just look at the games we put out over the generation. The avatars were developed at Rare, and we're interacting with the platform team on features like groups, which is a very cool core feature – even if the way we showed it at the conference was around photo-sharing and Primetime. Also, the fact that we can install to disc is a very core feature as well. If the core gamers want their online persona to be their gamer tile, they can do that. They are not forced to use the avatar. I will say – and I read the boards, I see the feedback – I'm also betting that when the avatars go live, the people that will spend the most time in the creator tweaking their avatars will be the core. That's just my bet, but I understand the feedback.

**Another conspicuous absence was any new project from Bungie. What's the status of your relationship with them? There are rumors they have a project with Electronic Arts and that they almost announced it.**

First of all, I won't go into a lot of details on the business relationship in terms of the deal. That's a relationship between Bungie and Microsoft. More important for me is our creative future together and the projects we're working on. We didn't have something we wanted to announce now, but we are working very closely with Bungie. I think it's a great thing for a studio to look at multiple franchises and try to build that. That would be a strength for Bungie if they were to push in that direction.

**So there are projects ongoing?**

Absolutely. We continue to work with Bungie on projects. We don't have anything to announce right now, but it's in our future.

**You announced some exclusive downloadable content for Fallout 3. Is it getting to the point where third parties won't do a game as a console exclusive so now the battle is for the online content?**

The realities of building triple-A games and the costs involved make it difficult for a third party to think about individual console exclusivity in perpetuity. So, in certain cases, you see stuff like windowed exclusivity or [exclusive] DLC. It's great for us that we've had the success rate we've had with things like paid DLC. If you take the music category, our partners are telling us that 80 percent of music downloads are 360 downloads. Those partners see things like DLC and the ongoing relationship between them and their customer as something our platform really supports. So, if they want to make that part of platform exclusivity or part of the 360 experiences for GTA or Fallout, it feels natural in the 360 ecosystem.

**Will the Netflix deal allow you to access every streaming movie on your 360 that you would be able to on your computer?**

It's access to the full 10,000 films. It's going to evolve over time. Netflix has approximately 100,000 movies that you can rent. Then there's a subset that they've ripped and have streaming on their site. But all the movies that they have streaming, depending on the plan that you have, are available on the 360. Everything you can stream on your PC will show up on the 360.

**When you watch and share movies together in the new eight-person party system on Xbox Live, does everyone have to have a Netflix account?**

All viewers have to be Netflix users.

**Are you working on avatar support similar to what Nintendo has done by letting you use Miis as playable characters in games?**

Absolutely. We showed that with Scene It! and 1 Vs. 100, where avatars showed up in the games. We think that relationship between the avatars and the games – potentially a two-way relationship at some point, where games can feed things back to the avatars – is part of our future.

**Are you providing those tools to third parties?**

The avatars are in no way a first-party-only thing, even though we developed them at Rare. It's part of the operating system of the 360 and something we would encourage third parties to use. As a first party, much like back in the day on Live, we did some great early Live games like Counter-Strike, Crimson Skies, and Halo, we're going to try to lead the way and show what can be done with those avatars. But, obviously third parties have their own talented teams that will come up with their own ways of incorporating avatar technology into their games.

**Are you looking at selling items for avatars, like for instance some Nike shoes or other fashion items?**

What we announced was that when we launch the avatars there will be a lot of content for outfitting and stylizing your avatar. If you look forward for the ability for other partners to come in and create different business models around the avatars, I think that's definitely part of the plan there.

**What happened to the "Waggle" motion 360 controller that everyone insisted was being announced at E3 this year?**

Yeah, I was almost disappointed! [Laughs]

**Was that even in discussions? Was it something you looked at or was it just a pure fantasy on the Internet?**

You can imagine that as a first party and as a platform team, we're always investigating new things that we might want to bring to our platform. We don't raise the profile of all the new things we might look at. Many of the technologies don't pan out; others do. So, obviously, our plan for E3 has been solid for quite a while and we weren't surprised by what we showed onstage. I think people speculating about what might come to the platform is healthy; I like the enthusiasm that people have. Even the disappointment shows that people care.

**So you wouldn't rule out the Waggle in the future?**

We're always looking at stuff. It's our duty.

**So there is a waggle!**

[Laughs] The microphone for Lips waggles. You can hit it! That's motion control.

**You announced the version of 1 vs. 100 and your deal with Endemol for the Primetime service. Will there be other types of programming different from the game-show style programs? For example, an interactive crime drama?**

We don't have anything to announce, but we obviously created the Primetime brand and John stood up and did a good job of detailing how we think about that experience: What is on Xbox tonight? We understand that when we create a brand like Primetime and show 1 vs. 100, that we need to be committed to a steady flow of programming for that experience. There are a ton of opportunities.

“


I'm also betting that when the avatars go live, the people that will spend the most time in the creator tweaking their avatars will be the core [gamers].

”



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news

# THE LONG MARCH AHEAD

## SONY SLOWLY BUILDS STEAM

This year's E3 was solid but not jaw dropping, and Sony's press conference was right in line. Featuring a number of key announcements, but lacking an uncontested coup de grace over Microsoft, E3 2008 found Sony building steam on its three main initiatives – PS3, PSP, and PSN – after a PS3 launch that put the company in the hole.

Sony Computer Entertainment America president and CEO Jack Tretton anchored the press conference like he did last year, providing enough self-deprecating humor to make the hour-and-a-half presentation go down relatively easy. Still, Tretton wasn't without teeth, even making a surprising and unverified claim that the PS3 has "more exclusives than any other platform, with more than 75 titles..."

Ted Price from Insomniac and Alex Evans from Media Molecule proceeded to show off two of those exclusives with *Resistance 2* and *LittleBigPlanet*, respectively (check out pages 44 and 38 for more on both). While *Resistance* showed off a scripted gameplay sequence involving a 40-story Chimera Leviathan, Evans used a cutely designed *LittleBigPlanet* level to demonstrate Sony's facts and figures portion of the event.

As *LittleBigPlanet*'s Sack Boy (wearing a Boston Celtics jersey at Tretton's insistence) jumped to activate bar graphs and pulled switches to unfurl Sony's stats, Tretton narrated, declaring that through May – before receiving a 405,500 unit spike courtesy of the *Metal Gear Solid 4* PS3 bundles in June – the PS3 had sold 1.8 million units in America. The PSP and PS2, meanwhile, posted 1.6 and 1.5 million figures, respectively, over the same period. On the software front, Sony hopes to spur the PS3 further with a Greatest Hits program,

announcing its first 10 titles – including *Resistance: Fall of Man*, *Warhawk* (sans headset), *Rainbow Six Vegas*, *Assassin's Creed*, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, and others for \$29.99.

After highlighting 130 new titles planned for the continuing juggernaut that is the PS2, Tretton turned his attention to the PlayStation Network. This is clearly a space Sony hopes to make waves in, but in going up against Microsoft's Xbox Live, Sony better have big plans. Apart from *Home* (which showed off its game-specific spaces such as the *Uncharted* bar but still doesn't have a release date), the company is also working on multiple PSN fronts. *Ratchet & Clank Future: Quest for Booty* is a stand-alone downloadable PSN adventure out this summer for \$14.99 (see page 47). *Gran Turismo TV* (enabled via *Gran Turismo 5: Prologue*) is getting TV shows and even live races. *Life with PlayStation* is a free service available at the end of the month that offers worldwide news and weather on your PS3. The crowd applauded when Sony revealed that it was throwing the switch on its previously delayed offering of downloadable movies and TV shows for rental or purchase (see page 50) the night of the press conference.

Sandwiched in between hardware announcements regarding a new PSP bundle and a quasi-price drop for the 80GB PS3 (see sidebar), Tretton brought the presentation back to software. This year and next, PSP will see *Resistance Retribution*, *LocoRoco 2*, *Patapon 2*, *Super Stardust Portable*, and third-party titles like *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*.

The PS3, meanwhile, will be home to a number of multi-platform third-party titles, and Sony also brought out its chain blades to show that it meant business – a teaser trailer for *God of War III* showed that



Kratos is still deadly, and that the PS3 has plenty of life left in it. Also making the case for the console were two other first-party titles, *DC Universe Online* (a PS3/PC title from Sony Online. See page 85) and *MAG* (see sidebar).

Tretton ended the press conference as he began it, by talking about the PS3's software timeline in comparison to the PS2 and PSone. Tretton preached a message of patience, pointing out that if you compare where the PS3 is in its life (two years old) to the PS2 at the same juncture, that some of that system's better games, like *GTA: San Andreas*, were still two years away. While reassuring, his intangible message of hope was an odd way to end an otherwise solid press conference. The best may be yet to come, but this is the same sentiment that has slowed the PS3's growth thus far.

1 Sony's brief *God of War III* trailer for PS3 implied that after *God War II*, the Titans have overthrown Olympus and that the gods are planning to take it back. Kratos relishes the strife, declaring, "There will only be chaos."

2 *LittleBigPlanet* developer Media Molecule put this level together in a day for Sony's press conference

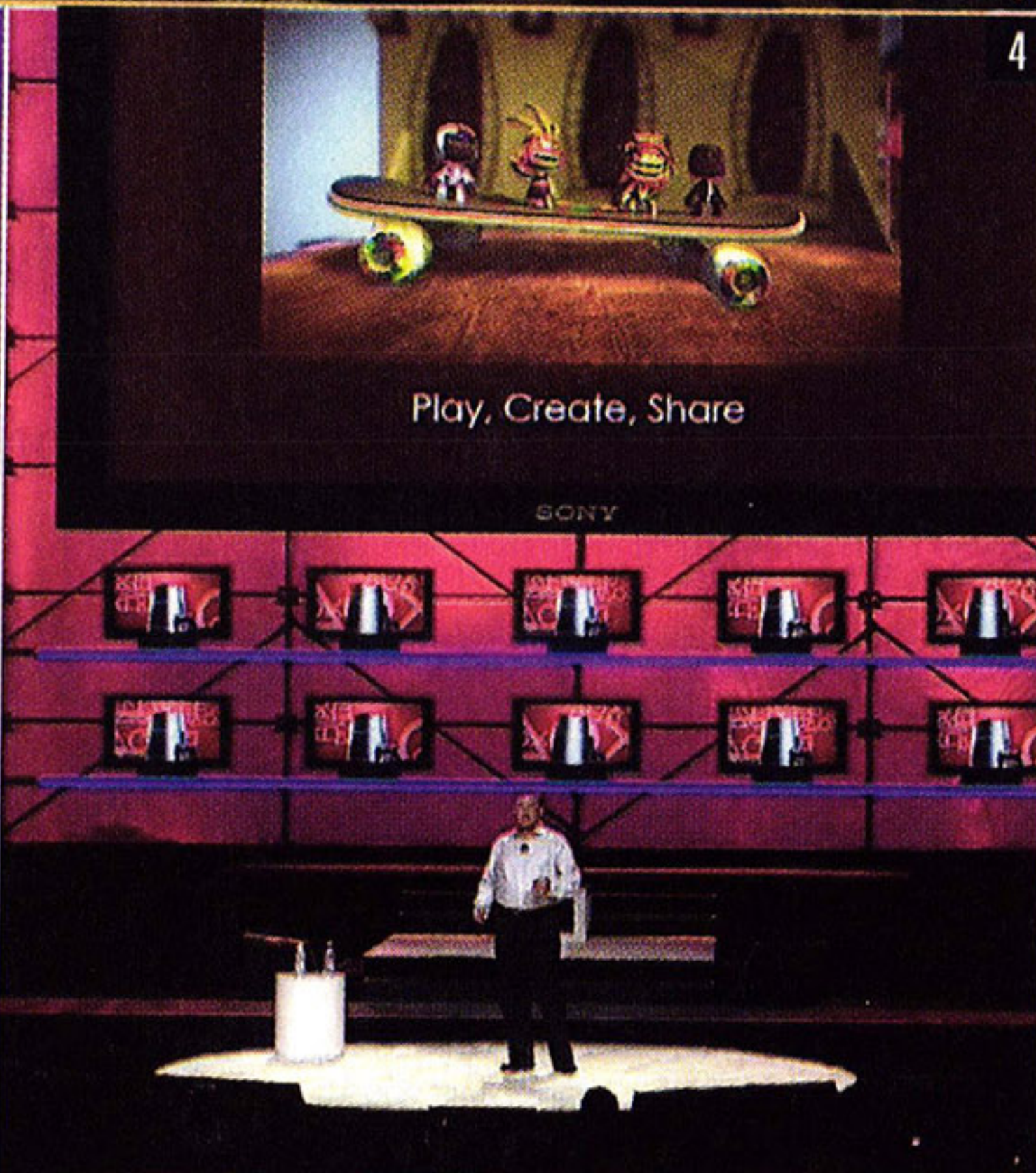
3 Game-specific spaces like this *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* bar will be placed inside *Home*. Sony says it is already working with the likes of Ubisoft, Activision, and EA

4 Sony Computer Entertainment of America president and CEO Jack Tretton

5 *Resistance Retribution* for PSP



3



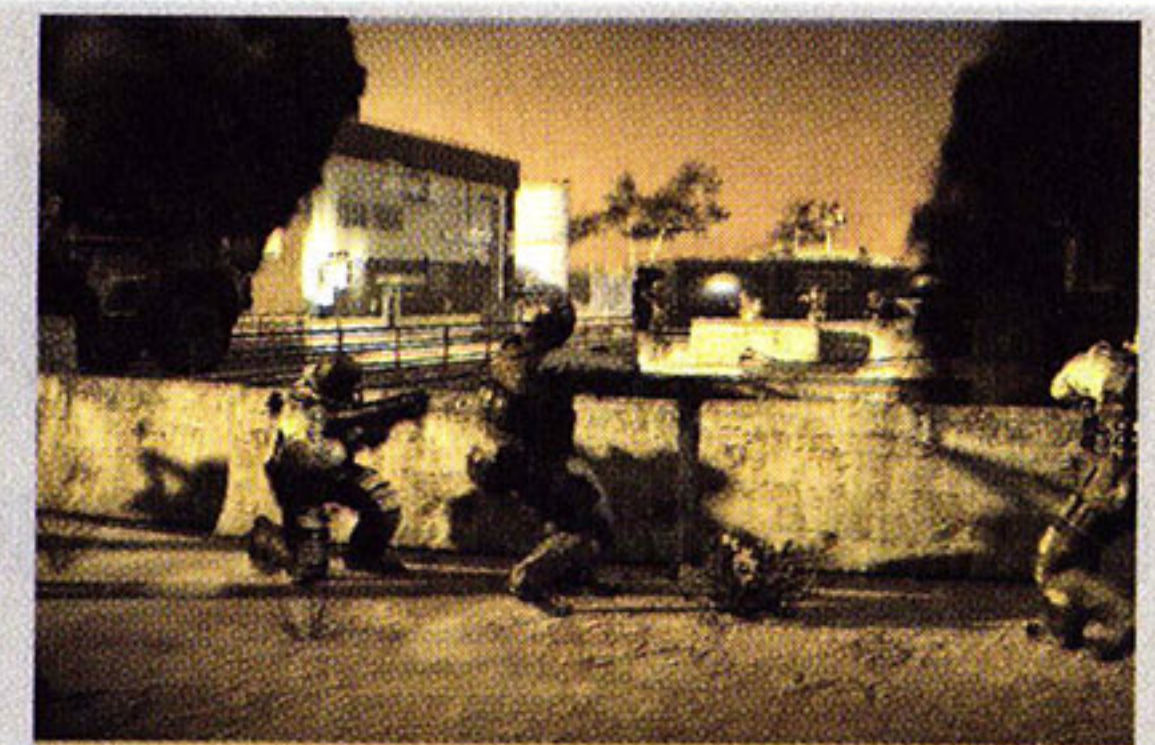
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5

## MASSIVE MULTIPLAYER

We were always curious why Zipper Interactive wasn't handling SOCOM: Confrontation, and now we know why. MAG (representing the horrible acronym Massive Action Game) features 256-player online battles where players are broken up into eight-player squads. The game's unremarkable trailer showed way less than 256 players, but Sony also announced that the game features a command system, character classes/growth, ongoing faction campaigns, and other standard squad-based multiplayer amenities.



## REPORT CARD

Sony's God of War III premiere was certainly welcome – nobody, after all, is going to call Kratos a lightweight – but with first-party software there's always an air of inevitability that undercuts the announcement. On the other hand, third-party deals like Microsoft nabbing Final Fantasy XIII have an inherent shock value in these days of dwindling third-party exclusives. While the press conference was short on shocking announcements, Sony made some moves to help itself out in the short and long term.

FINAL GRADE:

**B-**

## NEW CHOICES

Each of Sony's current platforms – PS3, PS2, and the PSP – received new bundles or forms this year. With the announcement of another themed PSP pack, the bundle strategy Sony introduced with the God of War, Dexter, and Star Wars: Battlefront packs last year must be paying off. Sony says that the new, cheaper 80GB PS3 will be the "primary focus" when it comes out, so we expect a phase out of the other models at that time.

### PS3 80GB MODEL \$399

- This 80GB version has the same functionality as the current 40GB. In other words, it has only two USB slots, no backwards compatibility, and no Memory Stick/SD/CF inputs.
- DualShock 3 rumble controller
- Releases in September

### RATCHET AND CLANK:

#### SIZE MATTERS PSP PACK \$199.99

- Silver PSP
- Ratchet and Clank: Size Matters
- *National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets* UMD
- Coupon to download Echochrome from PSN
- 1GB memory stick
- Releases in October

### LEGO BATMAN PS2 PACK \$149

- PS2
- LEGO Batman: The Videogame
- *Justice League: The New Frontier* DVD
- Releases in fall



# interview | Shuhei Yoshida

President, Sony Worldwide Studios

## Do you have any philosophical differences with the previous head of Sony's worldwide studios, Phil Harrison?

I don't think we have philosophical differences, but he was more pushing for that vision of, "Yeah, let's go to the mass market. Let's make the games simple, easy, and fun from a European standpoint," and we were more – I was head of the U.S. development – more focused on conventional, core gamers' games. I think that's a reflection of the market itself. As you know, the European market is very similar but different. They are more towards mass audience and games based on movies – which do much better over there. It kind of worked well when European studios were focusing on more casual audience, and U.S. studios focusing on the core audience because we released both titles in both territories.

## It seems that western development has taken over in terms of importance from Japanese games development. Do you believe this is true?

I totally believed it. "Believed," meaning, I went to the States eight years ago. Before that I was in Japan. As a Japanese person I'm very proud of the fact that in the video game industry, people in Japan are able to send a message through the [game's] contents. It's one of the cultural things. So when I moved here, I put myself a challenge: "Let's work here with developers in the States to really make something better than Japanese guys." I used to run to the Nintendo booth every year at E3 to see what Miyamoto-san was doing. But after a couple of years, we kind of stopped doing it. We kind of lost interest. We started not to seek inspiration from Japanese development, because there are so many great things happening in the States and Europe as well. When you join a company [in Japan], you tend to stay with that company a long, long time. That makes the know-how knowledge base very fragmented and not shared. So I totally believe technologically and in some gameplay engineering or polish [matters] that we in the U.S. and European development are on par with or exceed in many regards the Japanese industry. However, that was until the Wii came along. So we still have some things to learn from the Japanese industry, I guess.

## How is Sony's PS3 third-party tools support going, and do you think third parties are on equal footing with first parties?

They struggled initially because of their focus on getting the game up and running on the Xbox 360, and they completely underestimated the efforts that it would take to move the game to the PS3 because of the different architecture. Thankfully, since the end of last year, and especially this year, more and more games came out on the PS3 and 360 on the same day and the quality is comparable. Going forward I expect third parties titles to be not only just equal, but some titles will have more content because of the space that's available on the Blu-ray disc or hard drive, which is installed on all PS3s. So I've been saying that this year is the year of parity for the third-party titles, and next year will be the year of differentiation on the PS3.

## Do you think that above-and-beyond factor with the PS3 will still happen when many companies still see the 360 SKU as the lead SKU?

I think the one thing from publishers and developers that they are doing is to shift from making 360 the lead SKU to making simultaneous development on both the PS3 and 360, and talking with some industry friends in third-party publishers, that's exactly what they are doing.

## What is your opinion on Square bringing the formerly Sony exclusive Final Fantasy XIII to the Xbox 360?

From a business standpoint, that's something that people have expected because of the effort it takes to make a big title like that. They must

have pressure from stockholders to recoup as much money as possible. But I'm curious how they will do a Final Fantasy game on the 360. They might have to do a three- or four-disc set. And personally, I was the account manager for SquareSoft when they started working on Final Fantasy VII, so I have some personal attachment to that franchise and that team, so after 12 years, I think the industry is moving...

## During the Sony press conference, Jack Tretton preached a message of patience when it comes to some gamers wanting more high-quality games on the PS3. What do you say to those who point to the Xbox 360 as having more of those experiences already?

[It's] always the case that toward the end of a generation the best games come out because developers are more and more comfortable working on the technology, and they can focus on making games better and better. That's what Jack is saying, and with the fact that we have knowledge of what is in development, and we didn't even announce some teams...some of them haven't even released a PS3 game yet.

## How about the ICO/Shadow of the Colossus team and what they are working on?

That's one of the things that I was alluding to in terms of teams we have that have not released anything on PS3 yet. They are very hard at work, and if you remember, ICO came out in 2001. That took four years to build. And Shadow of Colossus came out in 2005, so I named them the Olympic team. So you shouldn't expect anything quick from that team. Ueda-san [ICO/Shadow of the Colossus creator Fumito Ueda] is a perfectionist, only he can decide what to show, when to show. And even though some say, "Yeah this is good enough, let's announce it." He will say, "No, no, no..." so hopefully when we show something from them you will like it.

## Previously, you've said that you hoped more third-party developers would see the PSP as an attractive platform for their games. How do you think they perceive the PSP, and what has to change in that perception for them to put out more PSP games?

I think it's more of a publisher decision that's driving platform choice than developer. Because of the success of Nintendo Wii and DS, casual gaming, and the entire growth of the industry, including iPhone, there are a lot more viable platforms than a publisher can afford, so they have to make choices of where to put their eggs. And PSP is in a unique situation. It really requires focused development. You cannot just develop one game and port it to the PSP. I really want our third-party relations group to have efforts to talk to third-party publishers to explain how some of the IPs they have really would be perfect for the PSP. I think that realization is happening in Japan first, and more and more Japanese publishers, I hear, are moving more and more resources to the PSP. I hope that will inspire more U.S. and European publishers as well.

## With Home, Life with PlayStation, and the downloadable TV shows/movies, Sony is clearly giving the PS3 more services. But what about those who want more games and not services?

As far as worldwide studios is concerned, our primary focus is games. How to advance games. And we have lots of work we have to do in terms of how we use this connected console. We have more work than we can possibly do, so that's definitely our focus to bring something really new and interesting to the game players.



“

I used to run to the Nintendo booth every year at E3 to see what Miyamoto-san was doing. But after a couple of years, we kind of stopped doing it. We kind of lost interest.

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**You  
Wish you  
were here.**



live in the adidas  
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score 'em nowhere, but

**CHAMPS**  
SPORTS

WHERE SPORT LIVES™

news

# NINTENDO TOUTS SUCCESS, COURTS CASUAL GAMERS

## HAVE HARDCORE GAMERS BEEN LEFT BEHIND?

**N**intendo press conferences have traditionally been celebratory events. Over the years, the company's faithful fans have been dependably animated as we witnessed historic unveilings of consoles, games, and more than a few duds (remember GBA/GameCube "connectivity"? Project H.A.M.M.E.R.?). While Sony and Microsoft puff out their chests amid futuristic sets, giant video displays, and pounding dance music, only Nintendo can reduce members of its audience to tears – yes, real tears! – by debuting footage from a Legend of Zelda title.

A lot has changed for Nintendo in the last two years. After years of chasing Sony's juggernaut PlayStation franchise, the breakout success of the Wii has established Nintendo as the world's number one home console manufacturer. This phenomenon, coupled with the seemingly indestructible Nintendo DS, has the company enjoying its strongest commercial success in recent memory. Things are good, no doubt. So why did this seem like the most awkward, ineffective Nintendo press conference in E3 history?

The reaction to this conference has been fairly poisonous, and there's little doubt why. We've certainly accused Nintendo of being out of touch with reality in the past, but this is the first time they've seemed genuinely out of touch with their notoriously loyal fans. If past conferences were famous for such lines as "I'm about kicking ass and taking names," perhaps it's not surprising that Nintendo's new casual-oriented approach, and a promise to "put more smiles on more faces" didn't resonate with the assembled press in the Kodak Theater.

Nintendo's briefing started off with new vice president of marketing Cammie Dunaway (formerly of Yahoo and Frito-Lay), who kicked off the event with an overly enthusiastic story about breaking her wrist snowboarding and a "letter"

from her son of somewhat questionable authenticity. Of course, this was a perfect opportunity to segue into a live demonstration by her "friend," pro snowboarder Shaun White, who emerged from a metal cylinder to show off his new Ubisoft snowboarding game, which looks to make decent use of the Wii Fit balance board.

Next up was Nintendo head Satoru Iwata, who expounded on what the company views as a "new paradigm" for the game industry. This paradigm – naturally – is one where new types of consumers are drawn into gaming not by graphics but through innovative experiences, fun-for-everyone games, and a handful of "evergreen" titles that sell year after year. Hmm...does this sound like a company you know? While it's clear that Nintendo's new strategy has been phenomenally successful – even Iwata joked that most Nintendo employees would not have believed they would be selling millions of "bathroom scales" (a sly jab at Wii Fit) – the bigger question for gamers who've long since finished Super Smash Bros. and Mario Kart remains: What games will be making us pull our Wiis out of the mothballs for the rest of the year? Sadly, that question went largely unanswered.

Following Iwata was a presentation on the long-awaited new Animal Crossing: City Folk (see page 80), which utilizes a new Wii microphone, called Wii Speak. By allowing roomfuls of people to speak to each other over the Internet, the peripheral should add to the community building functions of this new Animal Crossing. However, aside from this new feature and a few online tweaks, City Folk doesn't look like a large step forward for the series as a whole, sharing many characteristics with past titles. Even worse, Nintendo's success with the Virtual Console means unlockable NES games, one of our favorite features from past games, are a no-show.

Perennial fan favorite Reggie Fils-Aime then took the stage and treated the crowd



to a series of graphs and slides demonstrating just how successful both the Wii and DS have been in the last year. It was easy to be impressed, especially when Fils-Aime predicted the Wii would likely be the top-selling home console in the U.S. by month's end, ousting Xbox 360. Fils-Aime also touted the Wii's increasing third-party software support and sales, citing 19 non-Nintendo Wii titles that have reached the 400,000 mark in the U.S. To illustrate this point, he also showed a trio of new Wii titles, including a Zapper-compatible Call of Duty game, Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels (page 92) animated feature, and Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party.

From here it was back to Nintendo's traditional strong suit: the handheld market. Cammie Dunaway returned to the stage to tout company's growing DS sales among females and the breakout first-week success of Guitar Hero: On Tour. She then introduced new Pokémon titles and Spore: Creatures, a DS spin-off of the fall's most anticipated game. She also engaged in a lit-

tle speculation, talking about how Nintendo is researching ways of using the DS to deliver travel information, baseball scores (which is already being tested at Safeco Field in Seattle), and as an electronic cookbook (in a port of a Japanese title slated to be released in English this fall). In perhaps the biggest news for hardcore gamers, she also unveiled a logo of Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars, a new DS-exclusive title by Rockstar.

Next up was the other big announcement: Wii MotionPlus [see sidebar], an attachment for the Wii remote that uses a small gyroscope to help the remote achieve a true one-to-one motion tracking. Scheduled for spring 2009, the unit comes packaged with Wii Sports Resort, which was demonstrated in the form of quick Frisbee, jet skiing, and sword fighting minigame demonstrations.

As the event wound down, the crowd started to anticipate the "Not Surprising Surprise Appearance By Miyamoto Where He Shows Us Something Actually Cool" part





1 Miyamoto demonstrates Wii Music

2 Animal Crossing

3 Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

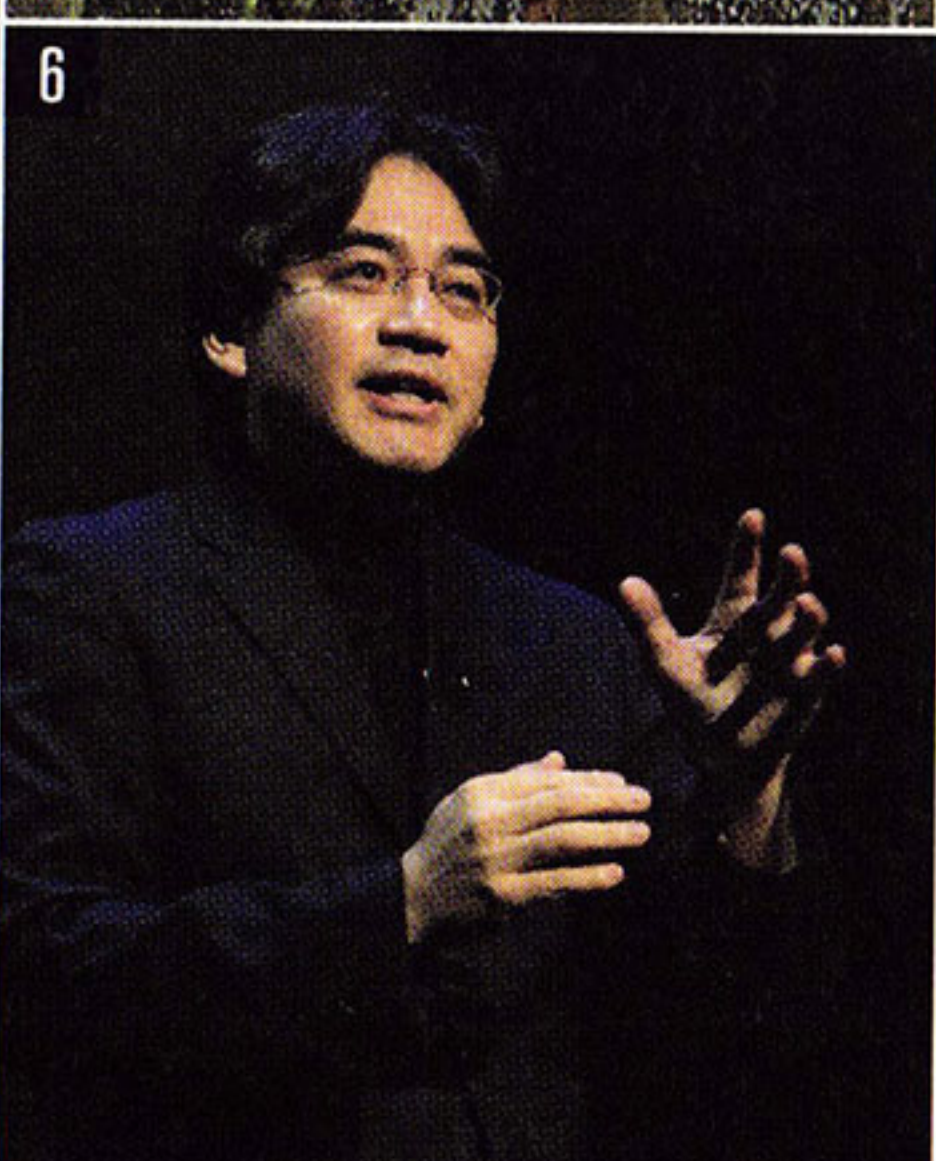
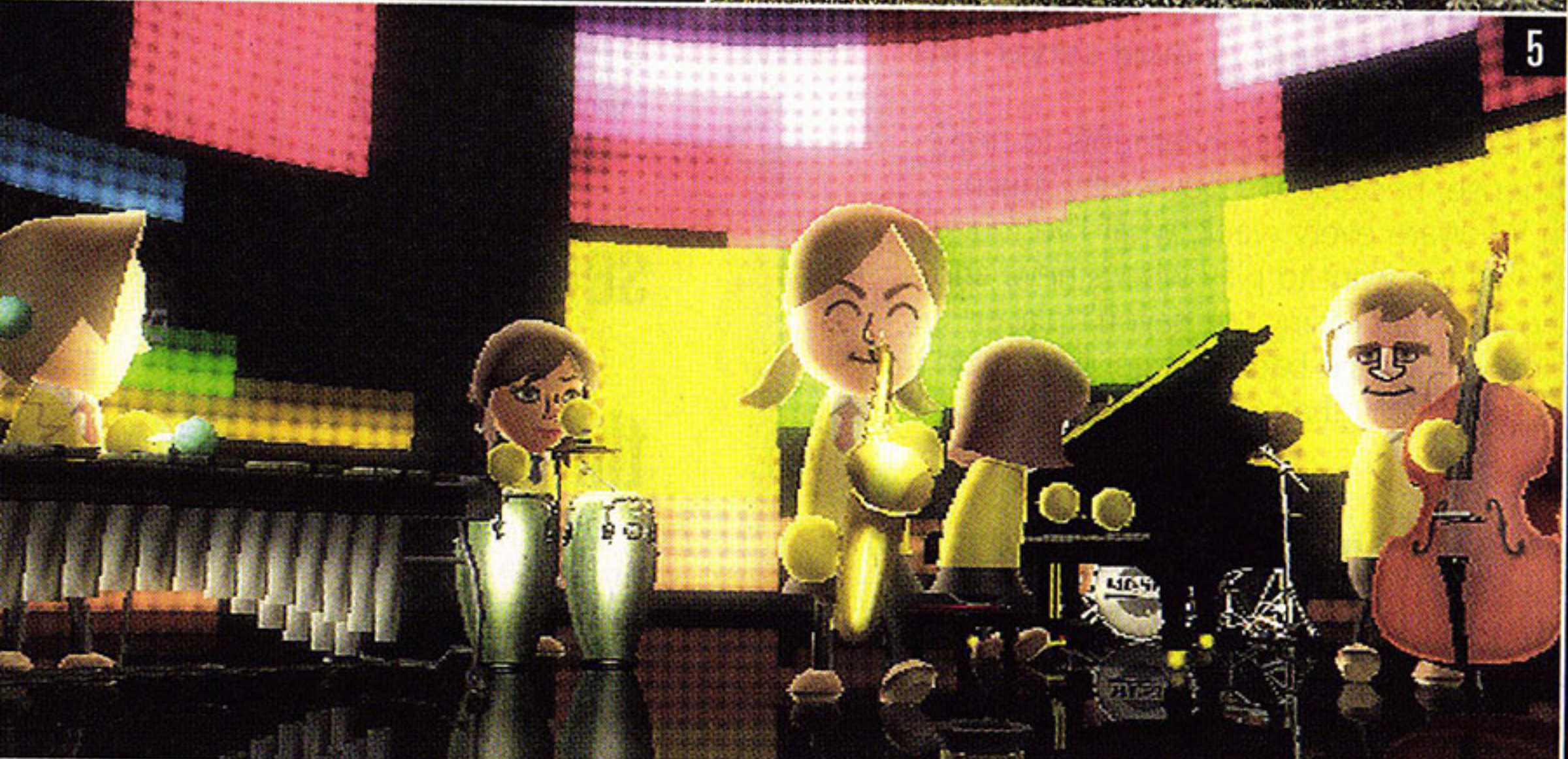
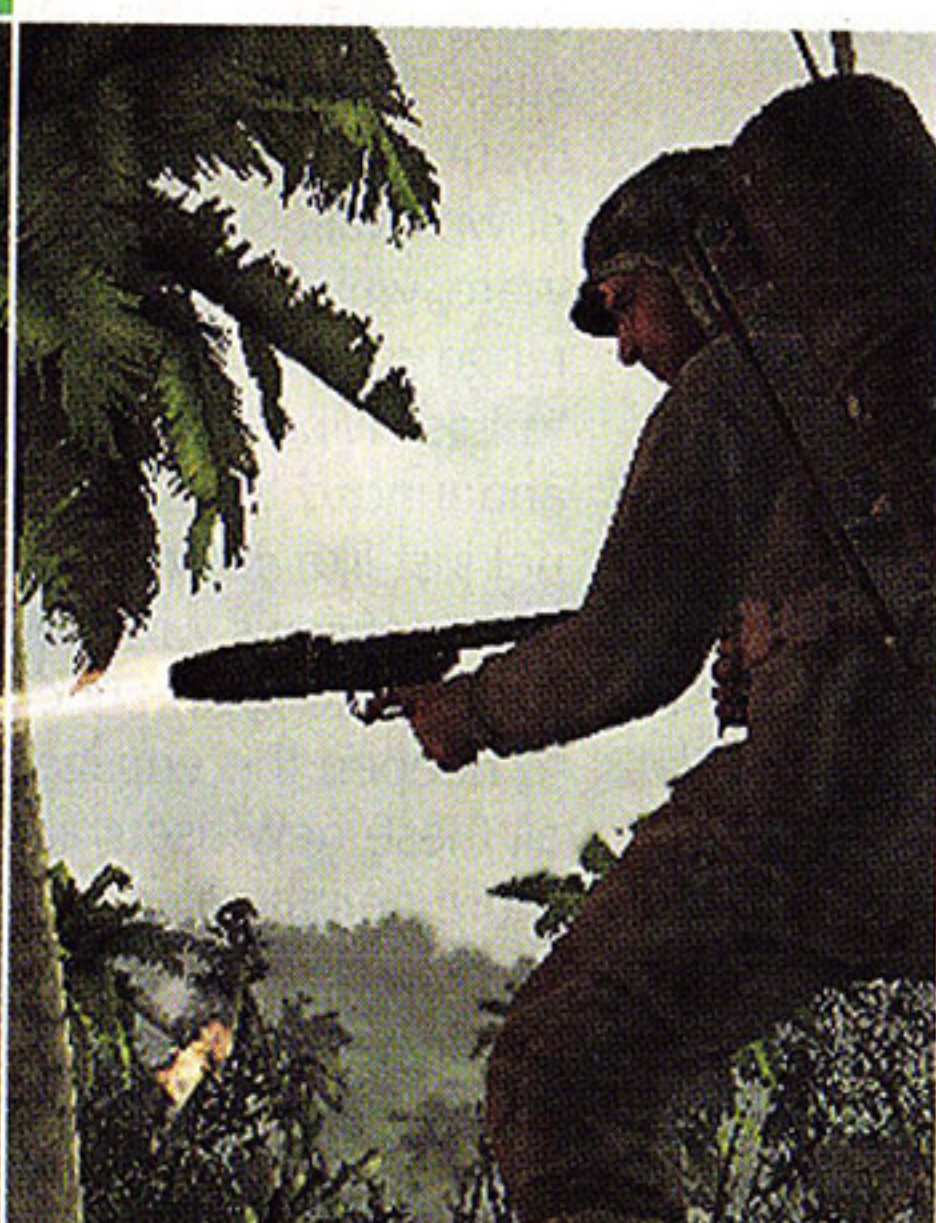
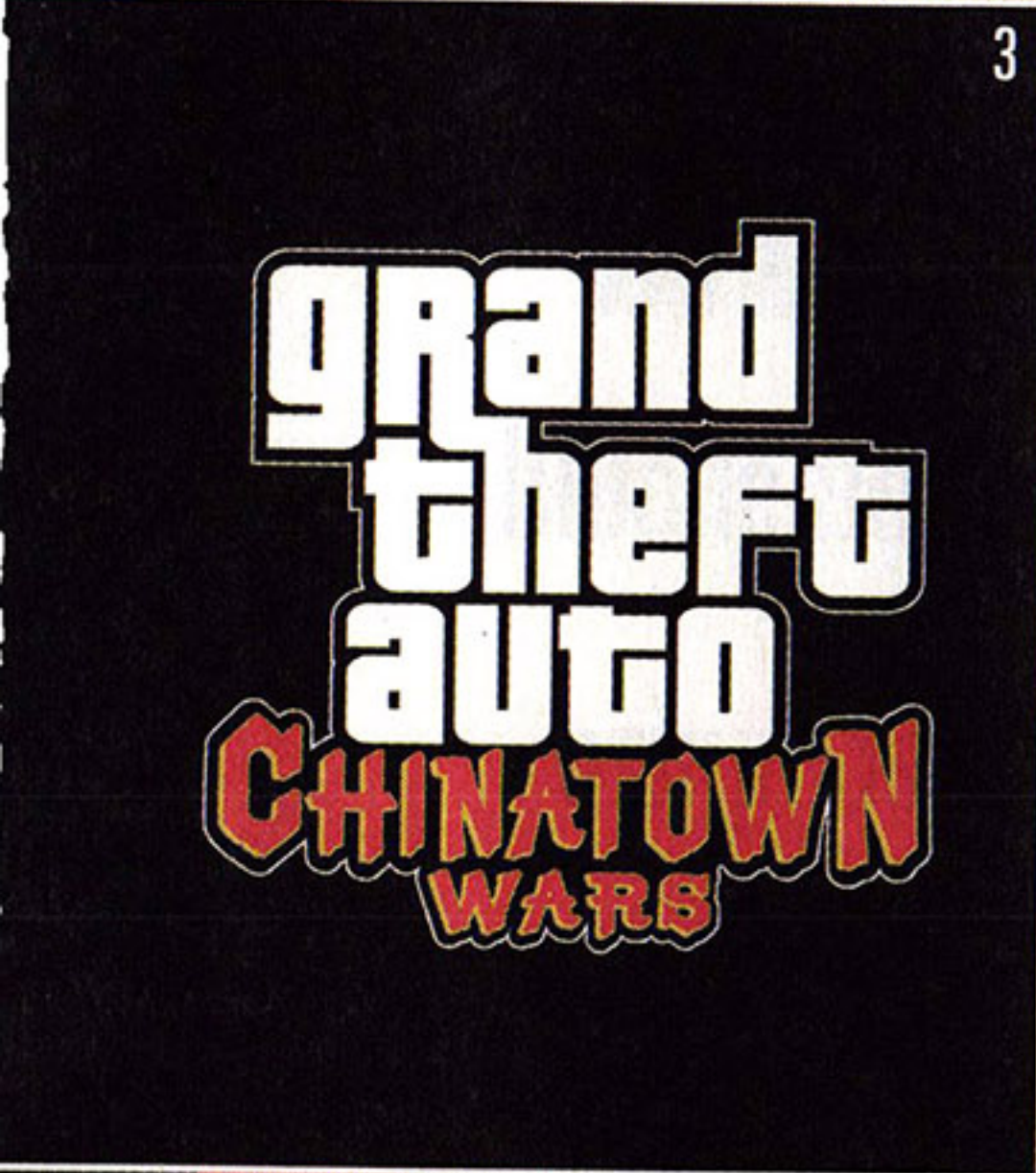
4 Call of Duty: World at War

5 Wii Music

6 Satoru Iwata explains Nintendo's new paradigm

7 Shaun White shows Cammie Dunaway the slopes

8 Spore Creatures



## REPORT CARD

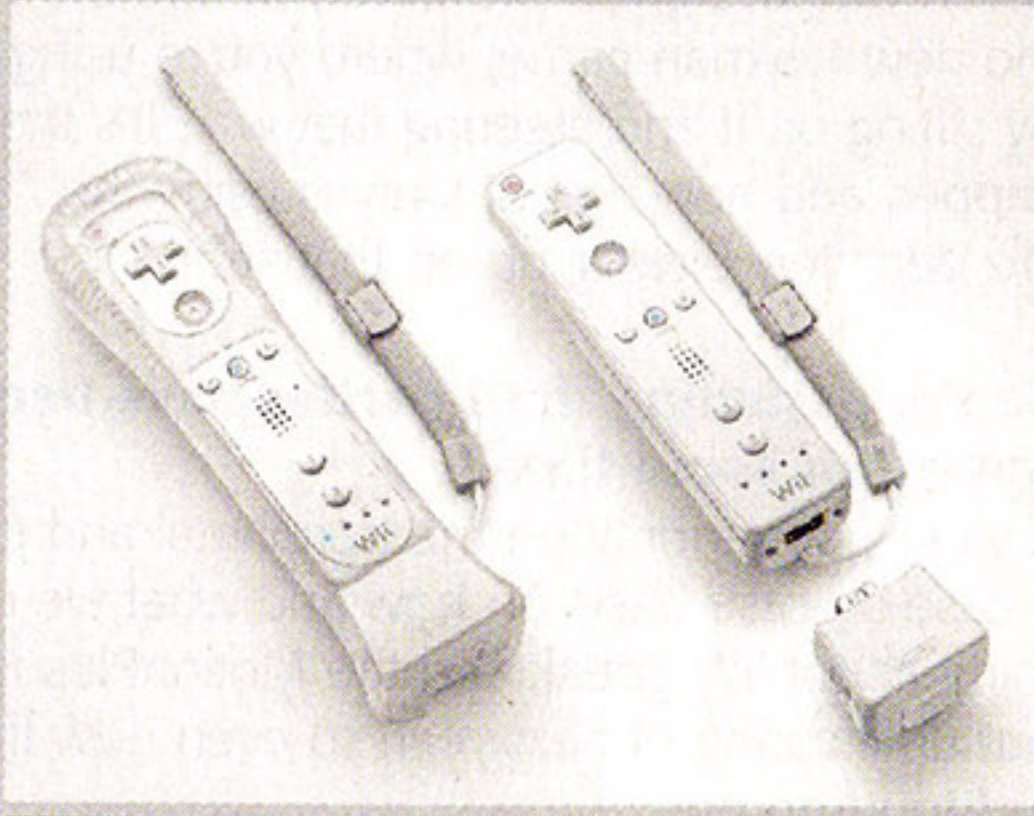
For longtime observers, Nintendo's showing was baffling. While the company is hitting on all cylinders in terms of sales and profits, this magazine is called Game Informer, not Quarterly Financial Reports Informer. Simply put, there just wasn't much to latch onto for most traditional Nintendo fans, especially since two of the big announcements (Wii Music and Animal Crossing: City Folk) aren't technically "games" at all. While Wii Speak and Wii MotionPlus certainly look promising, they also come with their own pricetags, and most third parties we spoke to had no idea they were being released until the conference, causing us to wonder if these will suffer from a lack of software support. While GTA and Spore for DS are nice, it was a mistake to exclude promising Wii titles like Sega's Madworld and the new Pikmin game from the press conference. While we don't doubt that the company will continue to sell as many Wii and DS units as it can manufacture, there isn't much for devoted Wii gamers to look forward to for the remainder of this year.

FINAL GRADE:

# D

## NINTENDO INTRODUCES NEW PERIPHERALS

While game announcements were a bit sparse, a couple of new Wii peripherals caused some excitement at E3. We got to see (and hear) the Wii Speak microphone in action, and despite our concerns about noise levels and sharing one microphone for a group of people, it seemed to work at a base level. Wii MotionPlus was more impressive, allowing for dramatically better motion tracking on the three Wii Sports Resort games we played. Both peripherals, in classic Nintendo fashion, seem to be well made and durable. What remains to be seen is how useful they will be, as both will only work with subsequent titles that are engineered with Wii Speak or Wii MotionPlus compatibility.



of every Nintendo press conference. Well, at least the first half of that statement came to pass. Miyamoto appeared (after a butchered drum solo by some dork in a faux-hawk named "Ravi Drums"), but the results were less than expected. The legendary creator was here not to show off Kid Icarus (as had been rumored), but Wii Music (see page 95 for more), a music "experience" that allows up to four players to create an unholy racket by miming the motions of playing one of over 50 instruments. It's not

a game, per se, but it did provide some of the biggest laughs of the show, especially the ending number where Miyamoto, some unidentified Nintendo employees, and VP of corporate affairs Denise Kaigler butchered the familiar Mario theme. This demonstrated what we soon found out for ourselves – this "game" plays very poorly and inaccurately. For Nintendo stalwarts looking for a triple-A game announcement, this was a huge disappointment, in keeping with the conference as a whole.

# interview | Cammie Dunaway

Vice President of Marketing, Nintendo



**One of your big announcements was the Wii Speak microphone for Animal Crossing: City Folk. Will that be packed in with the game?**

It will be sold separately for \$29.99. The reason being is that Animal Crossing can be a wonderful experience just playing and enjoying the customization and calendar features, so community is a huge enhancement, but it's not a necessity for playing the game. But for people that like to play with friends, the Wii Speak enables a room of people in one place to play with a room of people in another place. We think it's a really exciting piece of innovation.

**When you buy it separately, will it work with other titles?**

That's our hope, that future Nintendo titles and third-party titles will use this technology.

**Packing in Wii Play with your controllers has been extremely successful, as was including Pictochat functionality in the DS. Will you include any software that demonstrates how Wii Speak works with the hardware, even a simple chat program?**

We're still working through some of those issues, but there's nothing I can announce. But those definitely are conversations.

**Would it be fair to say that it will have some functionality out of the box aside from just its use in Animal Crossing?**

I don't want to commit to that. But it will be day and date with Animal Crossing, and merchandized and promoted with Animal Crossing.

**We've slowly started to see third parties using Miis in games. Are you working with them to allow them to use Wii Speak in their games?**

Absolutely, we're always talking to third parties about ways they can use the full set of tools we have. A good example was last year when we announced Wii Fit and the balance board. As you said, Namco came out with We Ski at the same time we released Wii Fit. At this show, we announced Shaun White Snowboarding, which was designed exclusively to use the balance board. You saw the new Rayman game, where you're using the balance board by sitting on it and steering that way. It's the same thing with the Zapper, and now Call of Duty is using the Zapper. So third parties are definitely picking up on that stuff.

**So I'm assuming third parties have been aware of the Wii Speak for some time?**

It varies, depending on the peripheral and the third party. It's really a case-by-case basis on how and what we disclose. But the nice thing about Wii Speak and the MotionPlus is that it's not coming out until spring of next year, so even now there's time for third parties to jump on.

**Your background is with Yahoo.**

Yes, I was thirteen years at Frito-Lay in a bunch of different sales and marketing jobs, then five years as chief marketing officer of Yahoo.

**Because of your background at Yahoo, I am interested to hear your opinion on Nintendo's Wii Internet program. Microsoft and Sony have very ambitious Internet plans that are very front and center in terms of how they market their consoles. It would seem that it would be hard to argue that Nintendo's online is as good as Xbox Live.**

Well, there are a couple of things we're doing in the online space that I'm pretty excited about. Following the success of the Virtual

Console, we announced Wii Ware this year. Wii Ware is really designed to enable new developers to have access to all the consumers that have Wii. There's much more creativity, lower development costs, games priced as low as five dollars to be sold through downloads. Right now, if you look at the lineup of games on Wii Ware, which is only eight weeks on the market, it's a pretty nice range of titles. From Defend Your Castle to Major League Eating to Lost Winds, and then Pokémon Ranch.... We also recently announced the Nintendo Channel. We're programming this channel just like you'd program a television show. We're featuring trailers, interviews with developers. We're doing some original content. We're putting up DS demos for download. All of this is designed to deepen the engagement with the audience. We've brought in all these new users and we want them buying more software and more peripherals.

**One thing we've noticed downloading Wii Ware games at the office is that there's just no way you're going to be able to get much more than a dozen games on your system given the amount of memory available. Something has to give. Are you looking at new hardware or even server-side solutions for this problem?**

I hear you, but we don't have storage announcements to make right now. I know at my house, because we buy pretty much everything that's new on Wii Ware every week, what I've found with my own behavior is that we want to play what's new, and so we buy what's new. We delete something we haven't played in a while, knowing that if we want to go back and get it we won't have to pay again. So that's the way that a lot of consumers are managing it.

**But that seems far from ideal. Are there other solutions being looked at?**

It's just not something I'm prepared to comment on.

**Mr. Iwata talked about a paradigm shift in the game market at the media briefing. As compared to other years, Nintendo seemed extremely focused on the new, casual audience you've been tapping into. For our audience, core gamers, there was very little to really latch on to. What kind of stuff is in the pipeline for them?**

I hope you can help us in communicating to the core gamer that we are absolutely committed to them. As Mr. Iwata mentioned, the Mario and Zelda teams are actively working on games. Mr. Miyamoto announced last night that Pikmin is coming. But Nintendo's policy is that we don't announce games until we're very confident that we're getting close enough. We don't release things until they are amazing. So, for this show, we weren't going to talk about stuff that wasn't ready to be talked about.

**So there's more out there?**

The commitment is there. And certainly we do want people to try out Wii Music, for example. Because you just have to put aside the conventional way you think about video games. First you should recognize that if Mr. Miyamoto sees something in this that it's probably at least worth a second look. The fact that it enables you to be completely unconstrained in your creativity and your collaboration and improvisation, again, represents a new paradigm. But it can be quite a bit about challenge and mastery. The one other thing I hope the core gaming audience will realize is that we all benefit from a really vibrant gaming industry.

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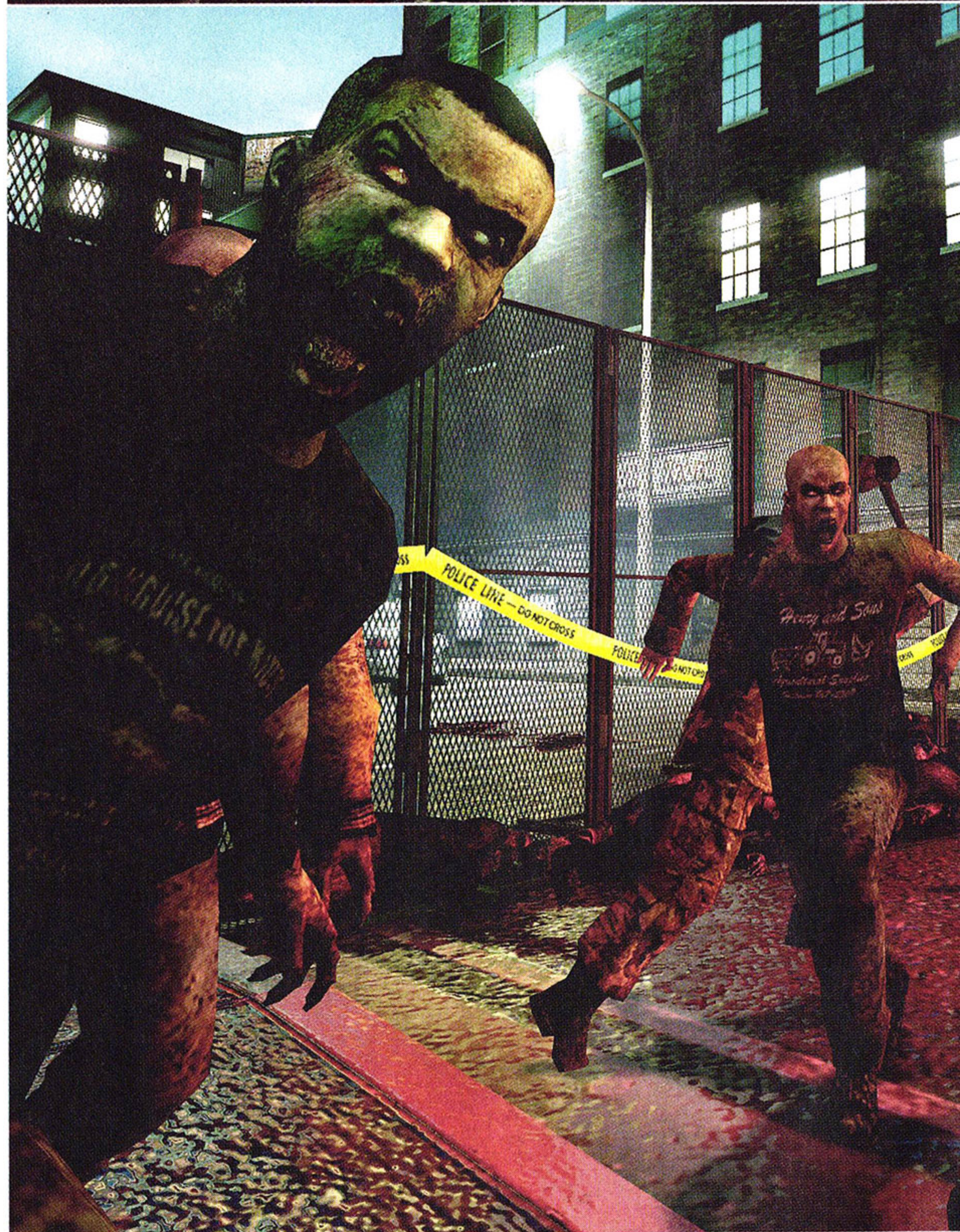
FROM J. J. ABRAMS  
ALEX KURTZMAN & ROBERTO ORCI

# FRINGE

TUESDAY  
SEPT 9 **FOX**

# Top 25 Games of E3

Never mind the press conferences. E3 is about games first, and there were some jaw-dropping titles this year. Our picks for the top 25 games of the show follow, and include updated looks at some excellent games we've seen before (and no, we didn't just copy the Spore and Killzone 2 entries from the last few years) as well as some fantastic new titles shown off for the first time. Don't sweat the exclusion of blockbusters like Diablo III and Batman: Arkham Asylum – only games that were at E3 in playable form or live demonstrations were considered for inclusion in this list.





Xbox 360 | PC

# 01 Left 4 Dead

**WHAT IT IS** Apocalyptic zombie survival horror with the most ingenious co-op mechanics in an action-based first-person shooter to date. Nothing kills you in this intense adventure as quickly as straying from the group or not working together.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Valve's legendary polish takes a solid concept and elevates it to massive heights. Every moment in Left 4 Dead is a struggle to maintain awareness and keep the zombies off of you and your friends, thanks to a clever dynamic spawn system and outstanding cooperative mechanics.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** This is Game of the Show for a reason. Yes, it's an FPS, but this take on the genre is unlike anything we've seen before. The exquisitely crafted gameplay gelled the three strangers we played Left 4 Dead with at E3 into a cohesive group within minutes — that's how strongly the game encourages cooperation.

**Publisher** Valve Software | **Developer** Valve Software | **Release** November 4

Xbox 360



## 02 Gears of War 2

**WHAT IT IS** The sequel to the 360's first blockbuster ups the ante in every way imaginable. The story of Marcus Fenix and the rest of Delta Squad marches on as they strike back against the Locust Horde that destroyed their homes and families.

**WHY IT'S HOT** It's easy to be so overwhelmed by the awesome graphics in Gears of War 2 that you don't notice the huge number of new features, weapons, enemies, and vehicles. Once you pick your jaw up off the floor, Gears of War 2 reveals itself as a profound leap forward from its impressive predecessor, with a more mature single-player campaign and cool multiplayer modes like the five-player cooperative Horde, where players tackle increasingly dangerous waves of Locust.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Action gamers who own a 360 will be playing this game this holiday, and with good reason. Few games can offer comparable visual fidelity, and no title we've played is as explosive and intense.

**Publisher** Microsoft Game Studios  
**Developer** Epic Games | **Release** November

## 03 Fallout 3

**WHAT IT IS** The role-playing classic receives a total makeover by the talented development team behind The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. Emerging from generations in a fallout shelter, players guide their survivor into the wasteland of post-apocalyptic Washington, D.C.

**WHY IT'S HOT** From the ruined husks of long-destroyed buildings to the dark sense of humor the series is known for, Bethesda has crafted the most believable and disturbing vision of a post-nuclear America yet seen in the medium.

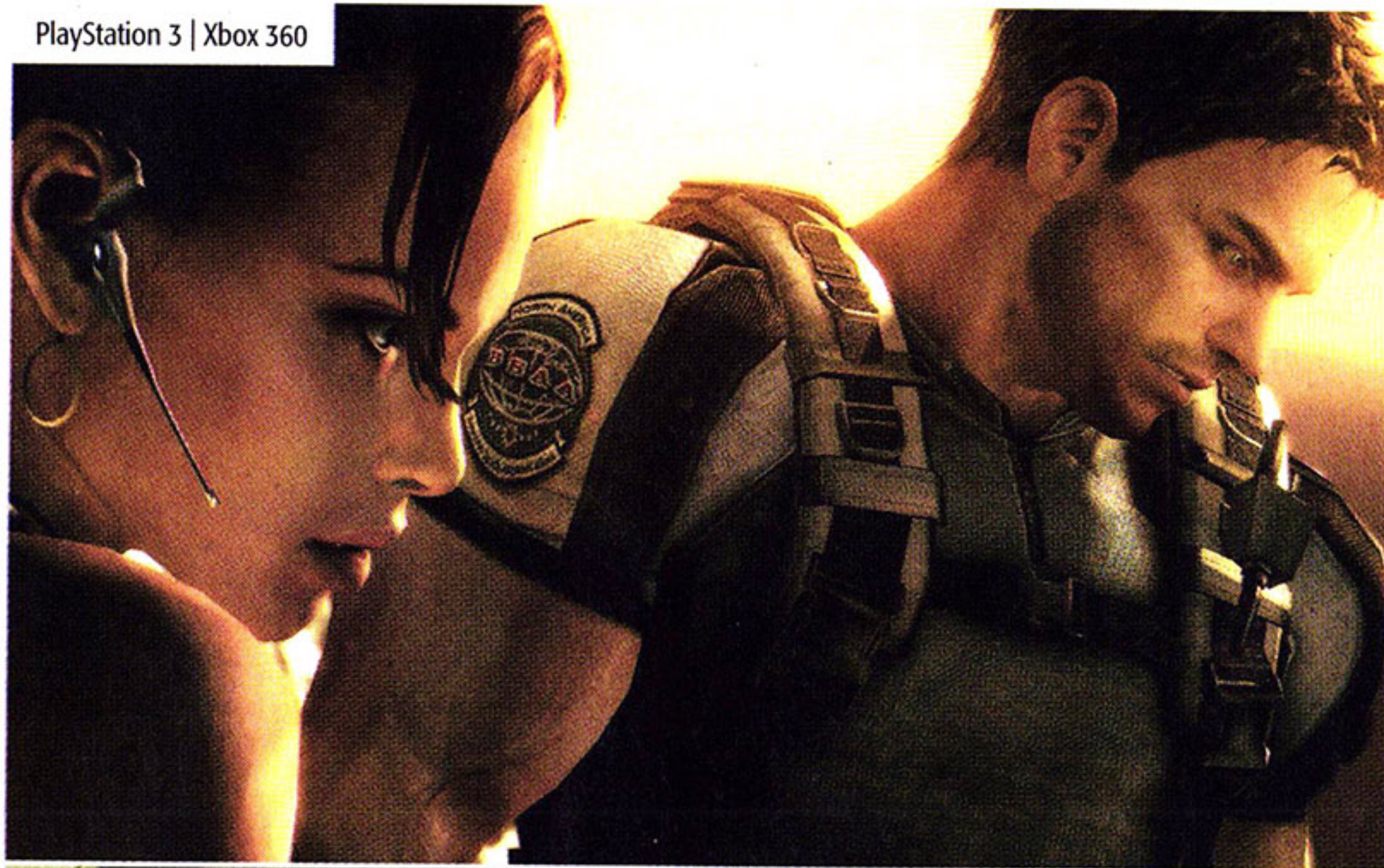
**HOW IT STACKS UP** While we haven't played the final version, it's hard to imagine that this won't be a contender for game of the year in 2008. We've observed the remarkable vision for the world. What remains to be seen is whether the dozens of hours of quests and gameplay will hold our already rapt attention.

**Publisher** Bethesda Softworks  
**Developer** Bethesda Game Studios | **Release** Fall

PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | PC



PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360



## 04 Resident Evil 5

**WHAT IT IS:** The fifth entry in Capcom's flagship survival horror franchise promises to address a few unanswered questions about the origins of a certain zombifying virus. The game also turns horror on its head as it explores the terrifying aspects of simple things like heat and sunlight.

**WHY IT'S HOT:** Chris' new partner finally has a name: Sheva. However, the big news here isn't her name, it's what she's bringing to the gameplay. Players can tackle the entire story mode online with a friend. The action has been designed around this mechanic, requiring players to split up at key points to accomplish independent tasks that will help the team progress.

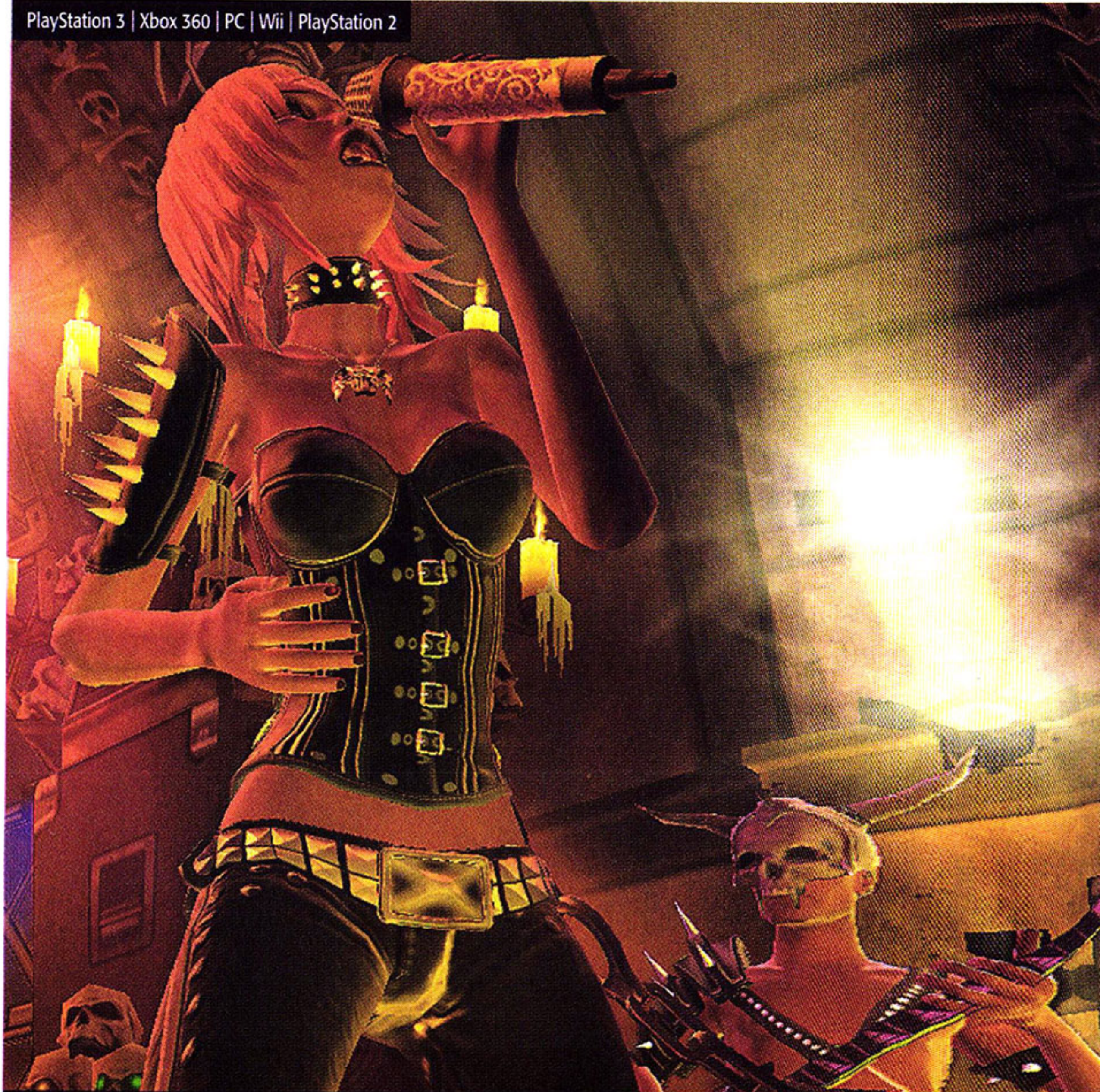
**HOW IT STACKS UP:** Like Resident Evil 4, the game is a horror-filled graphical powerhouse. We expect to be sweating bullets during the whole month of March.

**Publisher** Capcom | **Developer** Capcom | **Release** March 2009

Xbox 360



PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | PC | Wii | PlayStation 2



## 05 Guitar Hero: World Tour

**WHAT IT IS** The music game giant follows in the footsteps of its competitor Rock Band in delivering a full band experience. Not content to emulate without innovation, Neversoft has added a wealth of new features to flesh out the already engrossing music game phenomenon.

**WHY IT'S HOT** A music creator allows gamers to compose their own musical tracks and share them across the Internet. New guitars and an amazing drum kit offer functionality never seen in the genre. There are even massive online band battles for those looking for a more competitive angle.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Both big music games had a remarkable show this year, but Guitar Hero: World Tour garnered more buzz with its wealth of new features. Rock Band 2 may already have a profound head start on the available music library, but World Tour's explosive feature set may make it the music game to beat this holiday season.

**Publisher** Activision/Red Octane | **Developer** Neversoft | **Release** Fall

## 06 Fable II

**WHAT IT IS** Lionhead Studios and Peter Molyneux follow up on the epic hero tale of Fable. Set 500 years after the events of the first game, players once again create and customize a hero to become a savior or a scourge by interacting with the world and its inhabitants.

**WHY IT'S HOT** You'll have a chance to show off the results of your choices by inviting a friend to play co-op in your world, either through online or split-screen. You can complete quests together or just mess around in town. The combat and magic systems have received an overhaul, allowing for fights with a more natural flow than before.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** In many ways, Fable II is what the original Fable was supposed to be. The first game was great in its own right, but many fans felt burned by unfulfilled promises. Now, Lionhead is delivering a wealth of interactions that make the simulation deeper than ever, and a vast array of options that give the game seemingly limitless potential.

**Publisher** Microsoft Game Studios | **Developer** Lionhead Studios | **Release** October

PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | PC



## 07 Prince of Persia

**WHAT IT IS** Out with the old and in with the new. With the Sands of Time trilogy completed, the studio behind Assassin's Creed is crafting a brand new Prince adventure.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Prince of Persia amazed E3 visitors this year with its dramatically reimagined gameplay and illustrative art style and music. Platforming options have increased exponentially with the inclusion of multiple paths through the open game world. Non-linear storytelling is occasionally interrupted by deadly one-on-one duels. Throughout the tale that unfolds, an alluring and mysterious female companion named Elika accompanies the Prince, weaving magic to help strike down foes and save the Prince from death.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Since Assassin's Creed has fully embraced its roots in realism, Ubisoft Montreal has launched its other hero, the Prince, into a sprawling epic of fantasy and magic. No other action platformer comes close to matching the innovative ideas on display.

**Publisher** Ubisoft | **Developer** Ubisoft Montreal | **Release** Holiday

PlayStation 3



## 08 LittleBigPlanet

**WHAT IT IS** Media Molecule's stylish do-it-yourself platformer challenges players with over 50 impressive levels and then urges you to create your own experiences and share them with other gamers online.

**WHY IT'S HOT** LittleBigPlanet melds lovable characters with interesting challenges, humorous death sequences, and cooperative multiplayer to create our most anticipated platformer since Super Mario Galaxy. By finding "fluff" in each level, you can increase the amount of items at your disposal in the unique Create mode. Users can even put easter eggs into their levels to award savvy players with user-created contraptions.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** This wildly original title has limitless replay value with its four-player cooperative mode and the expansive social sharing ecosystem. With the number of traditional platforming titles dwindling, LittleBigPlanet may be the shot in the arm that brings the genre back to prominence.

**Publisher** Sony Computer Entertainment | **Developer** Media Molecule | **Release** October

PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360



## 09 EndWar

**WHAT IT IS** A new approach to real-time strategy set in a near future post-oil world war. Who needs a mouse and keyboard when you can use voice commands to lead your troops into battle?

**WHY IT'S HOT** Lacking bases and economy, EndWar hangs its hat on fast tactical battles and an unmatched presentation. Nearly flawless voice control and units that make their own micro-level decisions let players spend their time controlling the big picture without all the frustration of previous console RTS.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** The sheer fun of diving into the lightning-quick action and trying to stay on top of a fluid battle situation across multiple fronts overshadows some minor concerns about EndWar's strategic depth. Details on the ambitious persistent-world online multiplayer can't come soon enough.

**Publisher** Ubisoft | **Developer** Ubisoft Shanghai | **Release** Holiday



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PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | Wii | PlayStation 2

## 10 Rock Band 2

**WHAT IT IS** Rock Band returns this September as a temporary Xbox 360 exclusive, but with the constant stream of DLC it feels like it never left. This version features new and improved hardware plus a laundry list of requested tweaks.

**WHY IT'S HOT** The awesome 84-song setlist includes artists like Bob Dylan, AC/DC, and Modest Mouse (check it out at [rockband2.com](http://rockband2.com)). But more importantly, all DLC and most of the songs from the original Rock Band are easily imported into one massive Rock Band 2 library, which is expected to reach over 500 tracks by the end of 2008.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** While it may not have big bullet point features like Guitar Hero's music creation system, fan investment in both the hardware and software side carries over. Harmonix was the first to create a band game; now they're aiming to perfect it.

**Publisher** MTV Games/Electronic Arts | **Developer** Harmonix | **Release** September



PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | PC



## 11 Far Cry 2

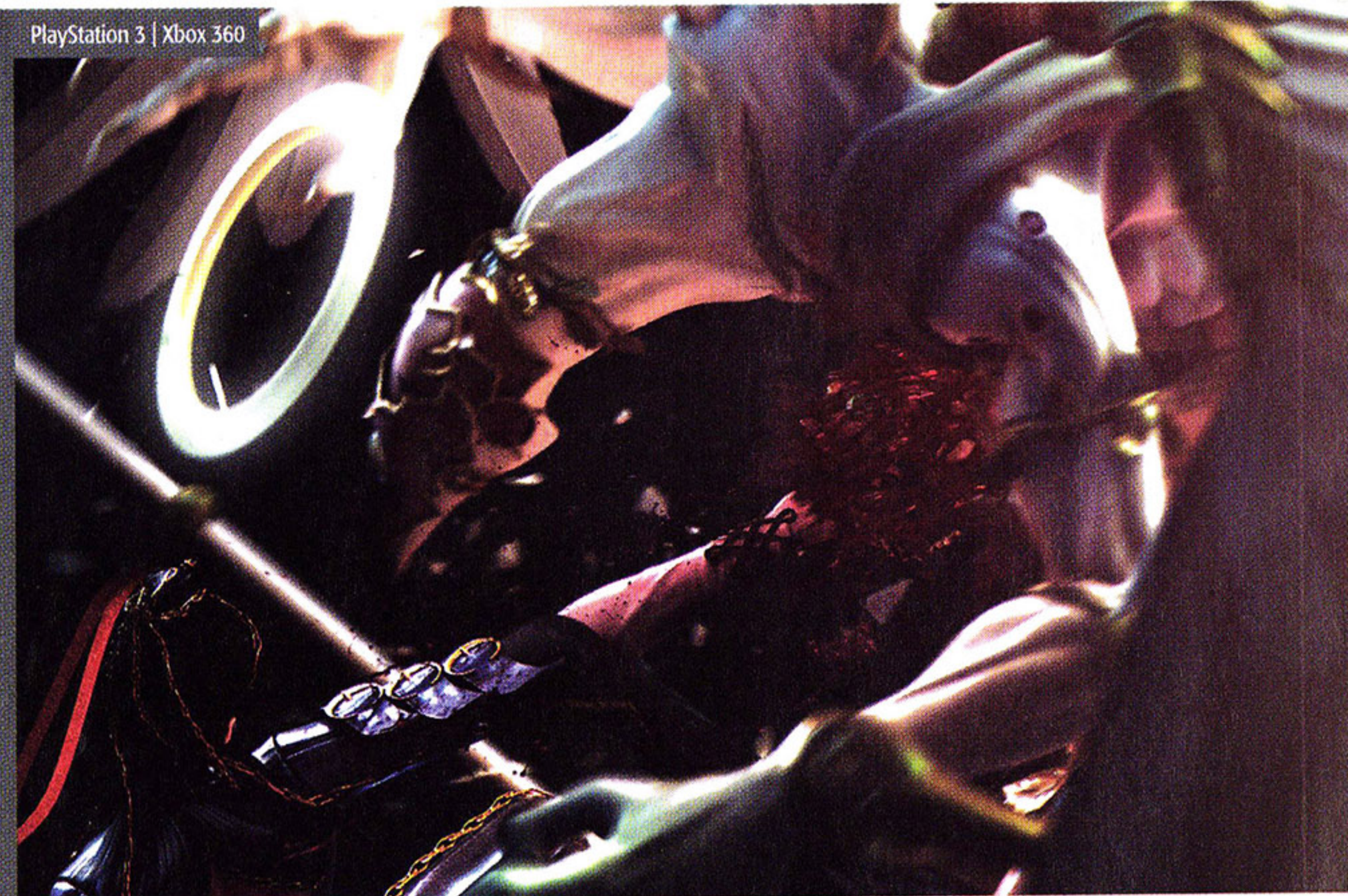
**WHAT IT IS** The sequel to 2004's surprising sandbox shooter returns with a new African environment, a civil war, amazing graphical technology, and several playable characters, each with their own agenda.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Far Cry 2 preserves the freedom of its predecessor and builds on the experience with new tactics. To blow an oil pipeline, we chose to stealthily move our way into the first base to place the charge on the pipe. To disarm a base guarding a radio tower, we started a grassfire to create a distraction before going in guns blazing against the baddies.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Crytek may not be working on the title, but the impressive graphics, branching story, and promising gameplay should keep this sandbox experience from being relegated to also-ran status in a year crowded with shooter sequels.

**Publisher** Ubisoft | **Developer** Ubisoft Montreal | **Release** Fall

PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360



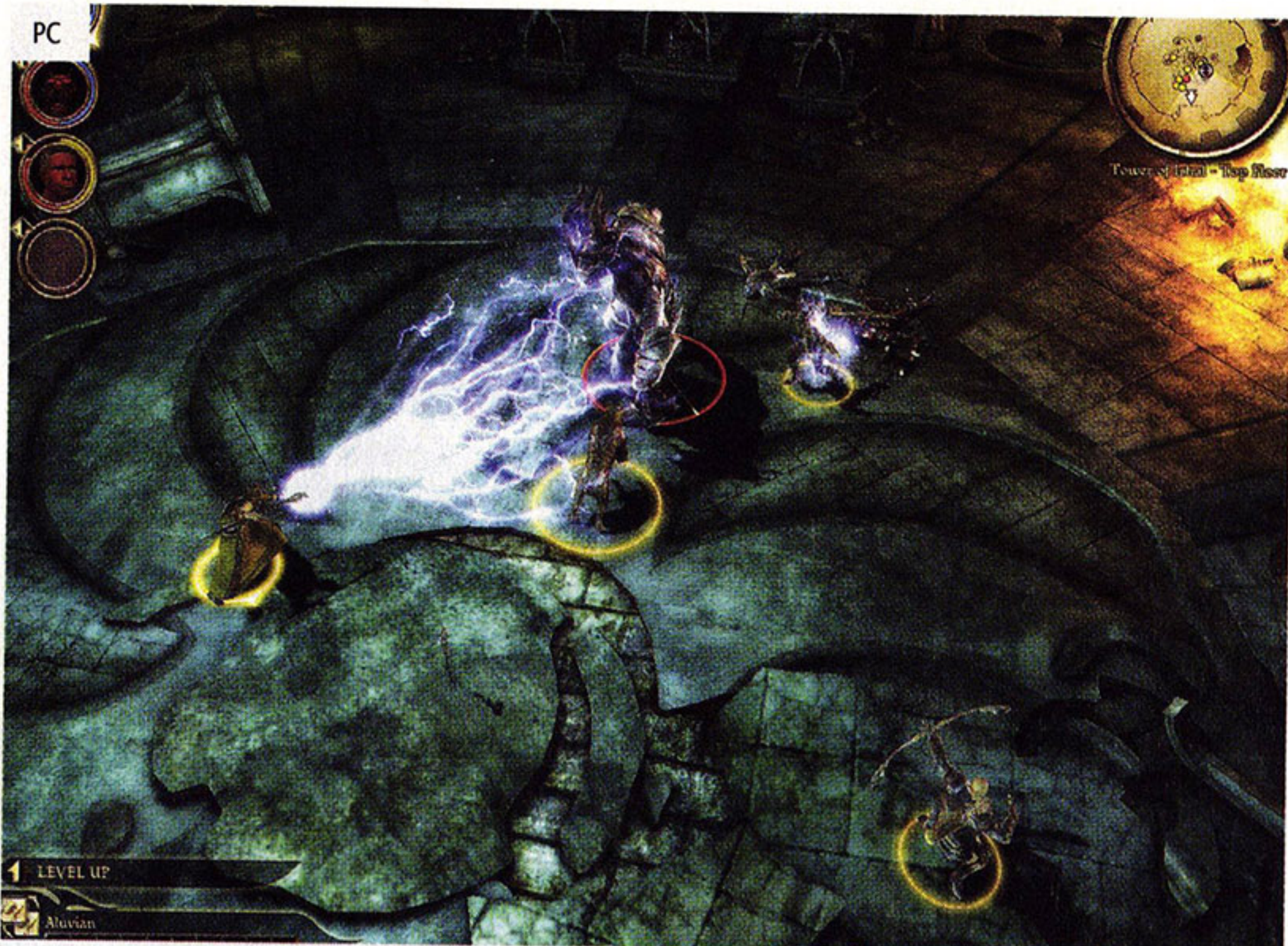
## 12 Bayonetta

**WHAT IT IS** Platinum Games, the development house created by former Clover Studios members, makes its entry into the stylish third-person action genre. This isn't new territory for the studio, though; Devil May Cry creator Hideki Kamiya is directing Bayonetta.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Engage in flashy, fast-paced combat against legions of angels by using combos, skillful dodges, and magical attacks. Even at this early stage, the game looks gorgeous, with amazing special effects sprouting from every press of the button. Plus, the main character embodies just about every adolescent male fantasy imaginable.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Any other game that touts "over-the-top action" will be humbled by the ridiculousness of Bayonetta. The heroine has guns in her shoes, can perform magical attacks with her hair, and conjure medieval torture devices from thin air. It definitely has an element of humor, but the combat steals the spotlight.

**Publisher** Sega | **Developer** Platinum Games | **Release** TBA



## 13 Dragon Age: Origins

**WHAT IT IS** This spiritual successor to the Baldur's Gate franchise (the PC RPGs, not the console hack n' slashers) lets players experience a climactic struggle in a brand-new dark fantasy world from a number of perspectives.

**WHY IT'S HOT** BioWare has earned its legendary status with over a decade of seminal RPGs, and Dragon Age is its next opus. Combat looks substantially deeper than in KOTOR or Mass Effect, with Baldur's Gate-style pause-and-play tactical battles. The titular origins supposedly change how the larger story plays out, though BioWare was unwilling to share specifics.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Dragon Age is a more traditional RPG than we've seen out of BioWare in a while, but we're on board with anything that gives us another chance to bask in the studio's trademark unparalleled storytelling. Genuine tactical combat is a welcome throwback to older western RPGs as well.

**Publisher** Electronic Arts | **Developer** BioWare | **Release** Early 2009



## 14 Halo Wars

**WHAT IT IS** A real-time strategy game built from the ground up for consoles by renowned RTS house Ensemble Studios. This prequel to the Halo trilogy examines the backstory of humanity's struggle against the Covenant from a bird's-eye view.

**WHY IT'S HOT** The deceptively simple control scheme makes commanding troops in Halo Wars far easier than in previous console RTS titles. Streamlined base building and economies let you focus on the action — why would you be farming dirt when you could be telling a Spartan to commandeer an enemy Wraith?

**HOW IT STACKS UP** We went into our hands-on time with Halo Wars with great skepticism, but a bare few minutes with the game had us zooming around the map and kicking Covenant butt with awesome unit specials with ease. It's more of a traditional RTS than fellow console titles EndWar and Stormrise, but this already works better on a gamepad than anything yet released in the genre.

**Publisher** Microsoft Game Studios | **Developer** Ensemble Studios | **Release** Early 2009

## 15 Dead Space

PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | PC

**WHAT IT IS** EA turns the spook factor to 11 in this horrorfest that follows Isaac Clarke, an engineer charged with answering the distress call of a stranded deep space mining ship harboring a deadly alien infestation.

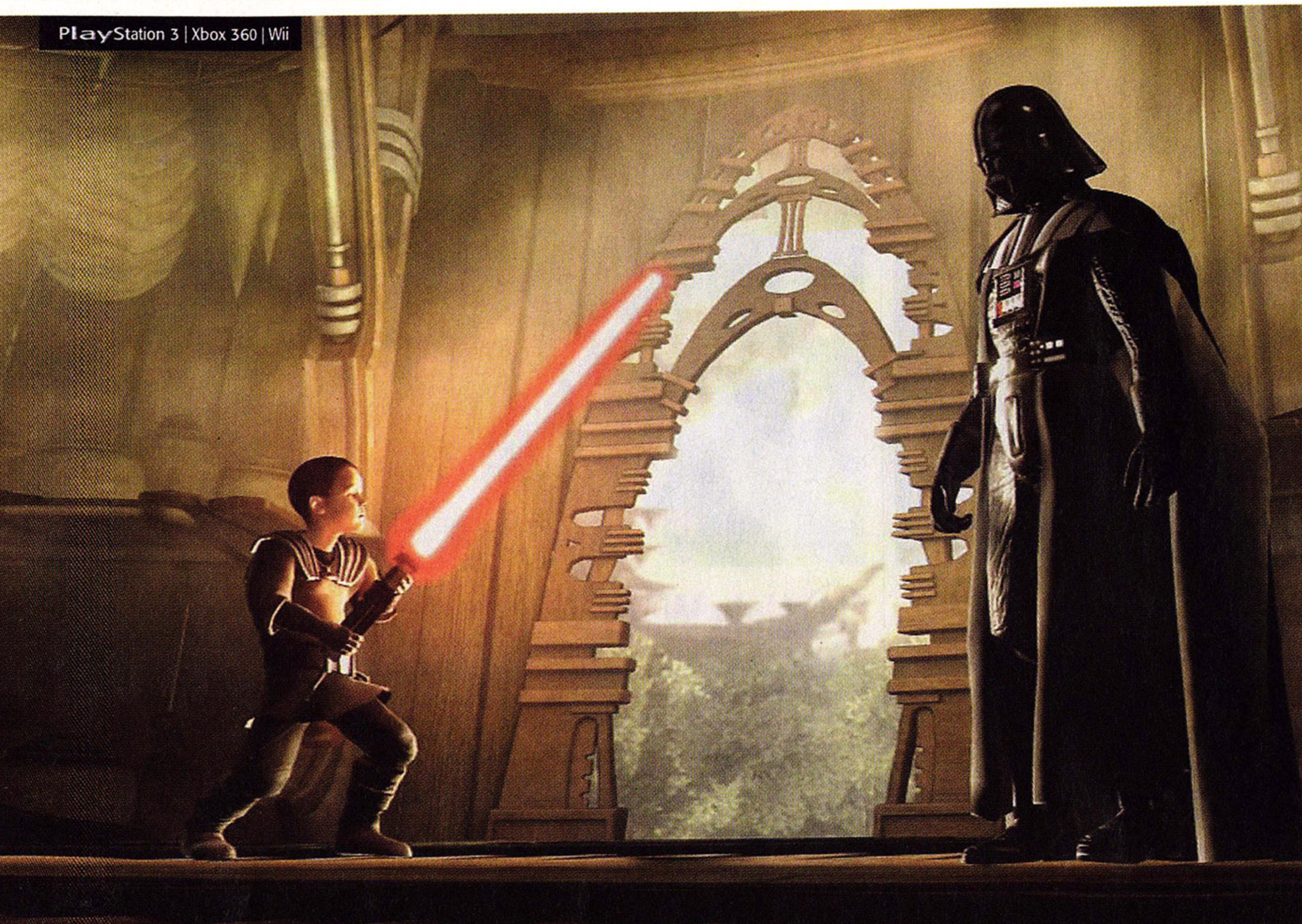
**WHY IT'S HOT** On paper, Dead Space comes off as a focus group developed hybrid of several sci-fi horror clichés. This line of thinking is put to rest the minute you see a necromorph grab Clarke by the boot and drag him through a dimly lit corridor while he struggles to shoot the tentacle. This game's goal is to make you crap your pants, and judging from our experiences it may deliver.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** With Left 4 Dead and Resident Evil 5, horror games are pervasive in our most anticipated titles. If Dead Space can deliver more thrills like those we've seen so far, it may be a three-way race for the best game that gives gamers nightmares.

**Publisher** Electronic Arts | **Developer** EA Redwood Shores | **Release** November



PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | Wii



## 16 Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

**WHAT IT IS** If you think you've played as a Jedi before, think again. The Force Unleashed puts players into the ultimate role: a secret apprentice for the Sith Lord himself, Darth Vader. Armed with Force powers and a lightsaber, you must take on secret missions and countless enemies to do the Dark Lord's bidding.

**WHY IT'S HOT** The game bridges the gap between Episodes III and IV with a canon-based story that shows a new side of Vader no one has ever seen. While there have been Force powers and lightsaber battles in games before, none of it comes close to the wookiee-throwing, rancor-slaying action here.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** If you put Psi-Ops and God of War into a George Lucas blender, you would end up with Star Wars: The Force Unleashed. Amongst the countless Star Wars game before it, none of them have contained this much intense action.

**Publisher** LucasArts | **Developer** LucasArts  
**Release** September 16

PC



## 17 Spore

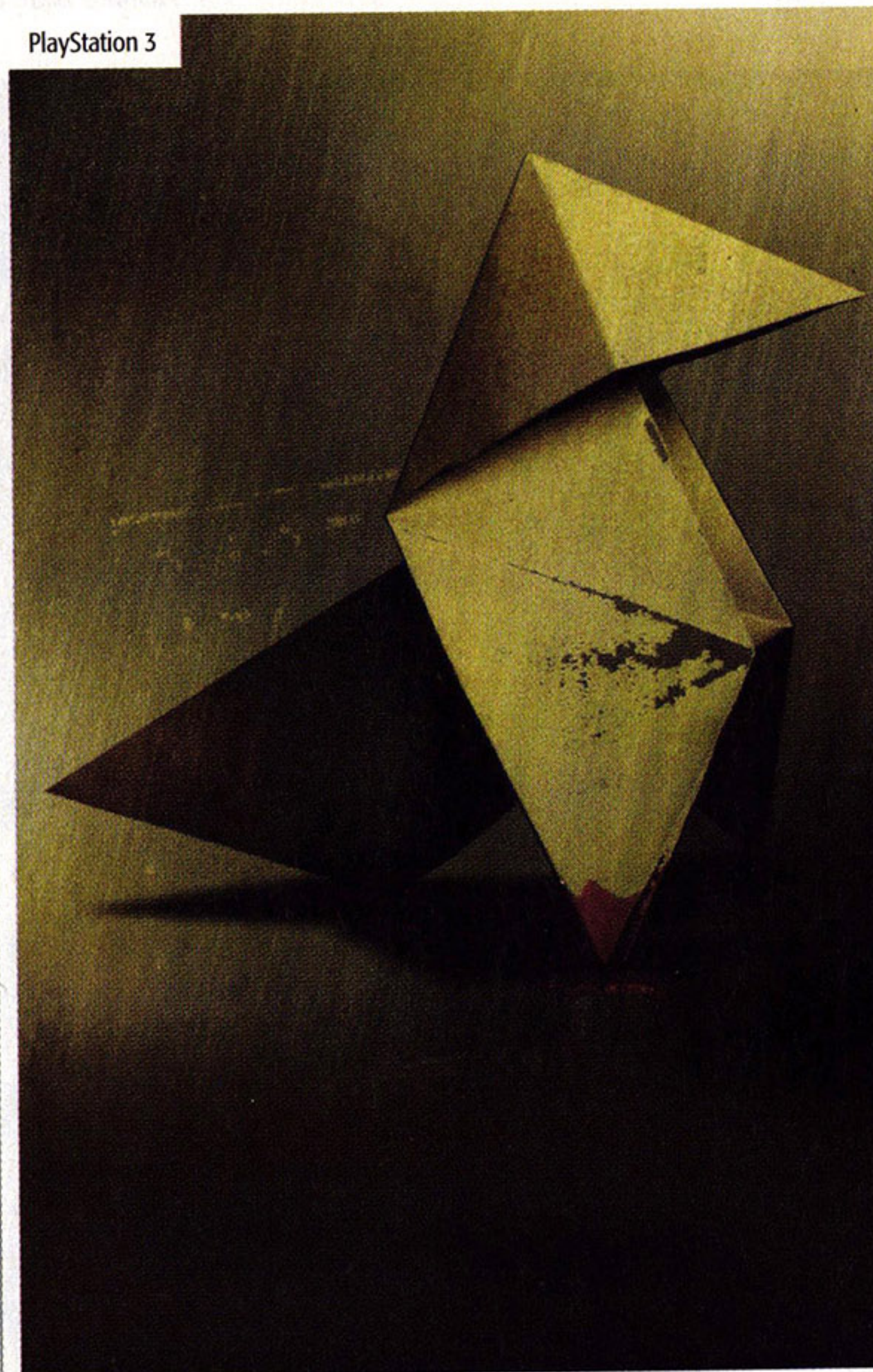
**WHAT IT IS** You don't know about Spore yet? Seriously, where have you been the last four years? This next big project from Sims creator Will Wright is one of the most anticipated games in history.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Start in the primordial soup and evolve into a galactic superpower with a race of creatures you design yourself. You control your creature as it hunts for food, establishes a tribe, and eventually grows into an entire civilization. You can also design your civilization's buildings, vehicles, and spaceships – then share those creations with friends via Spore's expansive social options.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Anyone claiming that Spore will just be a collection of editing interfaces can officially shut their mouths. It plays and feels like an actual game. The customization tools are neat and the underlying gameplay is coming together nicely, blending action and simulation into one intuitive package.

**Publisher** Electronic Arts | **Developer** Maxis | **Release** September 7

PlayStation 3



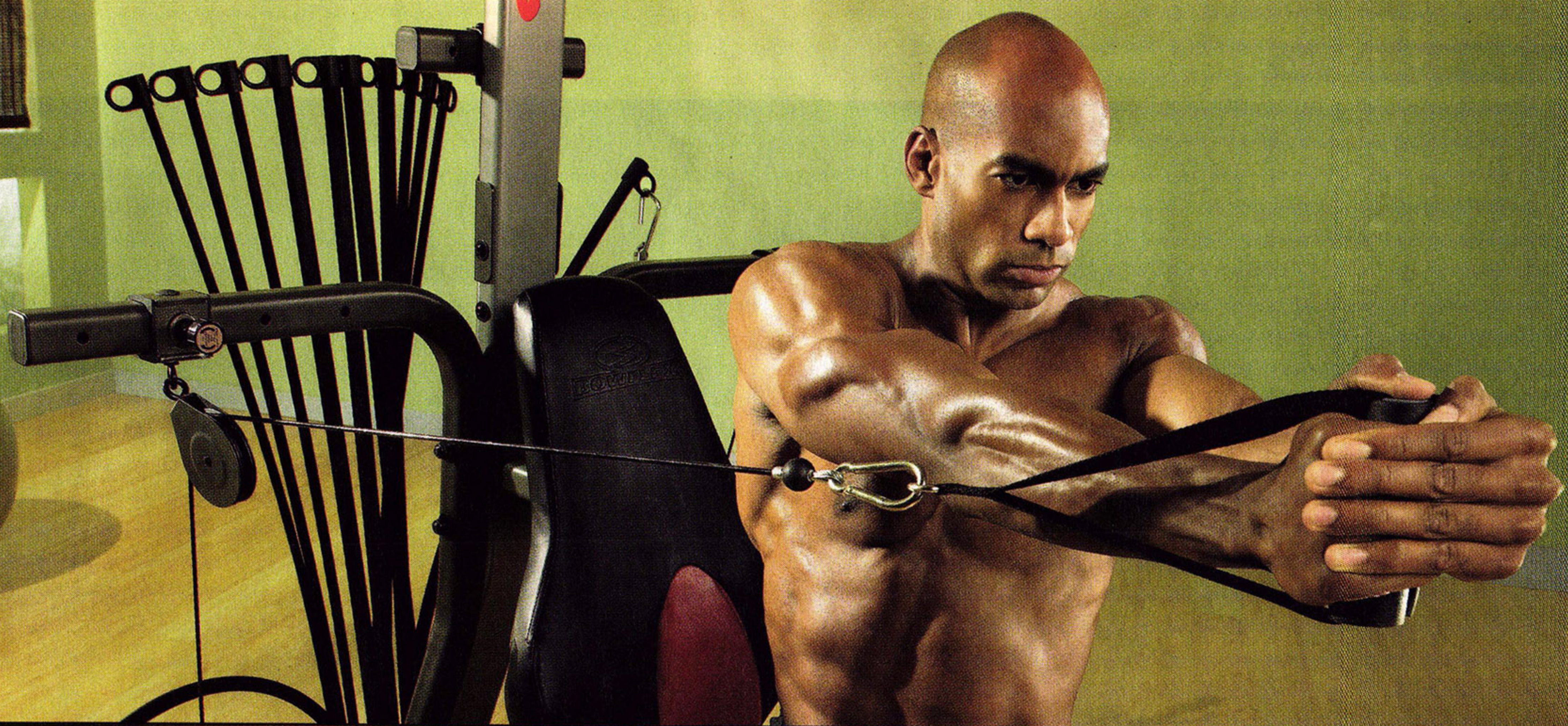
## 18 Heavy Rain: The Origami Killer

**WHAT IT IS** Not all games need big guns and fast cars. Heavy Rain is the next story-driven game from Quantic Dream, the developer behind the cult hit Indigo Prophecy.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Heavy Rain grew out of a technology demo showcased at E3 two years ago. The demo, entitled The Casting, depicted a realistic virtual actress delivering a monologue and going through a wide range of emotions. Quantic Dream says gamers can expect that kind of engaging, believable performance from all of the characters in Heavy Rain.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** With so much focus on narrative, the writing and story will have to maintain a consistently high quality. Indigo Prophecy drew gamers in early on, but the plot had completely unraveled by the end, resulting in an uneven and confusing experience. If Heavy Rain can keep it together, it could be the next evolution of interactive storytelling.

**Publisher** Sony Computer Entertainment  
**Developer** Quantic Dream | **Release** TBA



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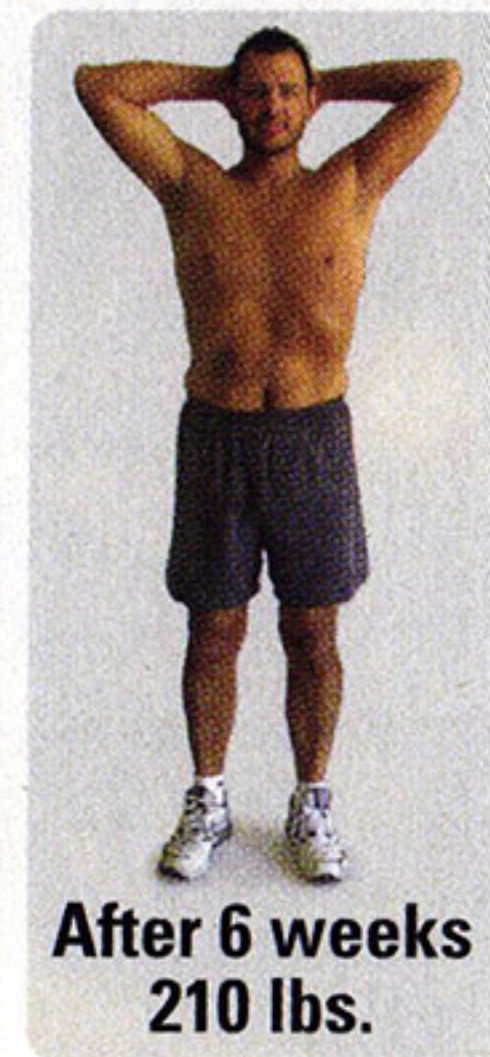
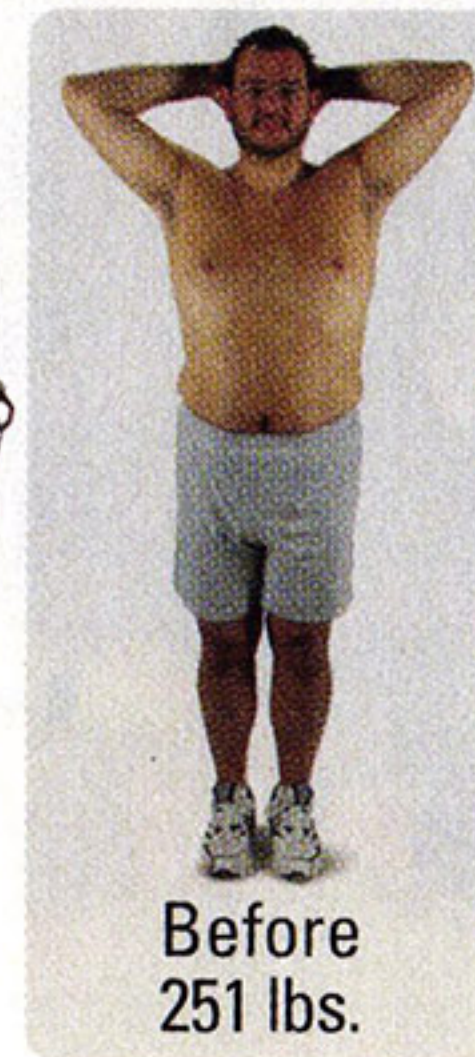
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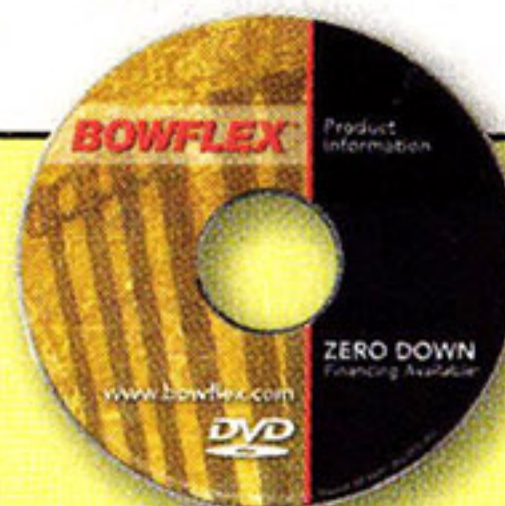
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## 19 Mirror's Edge

**WHAT IT IS** Take the acrobatic platforming of Assassin's Creed and Prince of Persia, bring the camera into first-person, and move the setting to a shining urban utopia with sinister undertones.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Skyscrapers have never felt so nauseatingly high until you're balancing on a thin pipe as main character Faith. Unlike the limited (and painful) platforming present in all other first-person games up to this point, these controls feel more natural and smooth. The unique clean environmental designs just beg to be clambered on.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Instead of unloading endless clips of bullets into enemies like most first-person titles, Faith prefers fast takedowns and escapes. Chaining a wall run into a flying kick, a quick disarm, and a rifle butt to the head works so smoothly that you'll be tossing guns more often than shooting them.

**Publisher** Electronic Arts | **Developer** DICE  
**Release** Winter

PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | PC



Xbox 360



## 20 Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts

**WHAT IT IS** It's more of a LEGO game than any of the official LEGO titles. Nuts & Bolts allows players to build any vehicle they want – whether it's a tank, boat, rocket, or plane – with the ease of clicking bricks together. Building is easy and fun, and the inventive missions push you to tap into your creative side, like building a rocket ship that can jettison its thrusters to reveal glider wings.

**WHY IT'S HOT** The user-created content opens the doors for a wide variety of solutions to the game's diverse challenges. You can share the blueprints for these inventions with your online friends and invite them into your world for co-op and versus play.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** With the platformer genre all but extinct, Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts is a sight for sore eyes. The innovative building aspect gives this genre the kick in the pants it needs.

**Publisher** Microsoft | **Developer** Rare | **Release** November

PlayStation 3



## 21 Resistance 2

**WHAT IT IS** After suffering defeat in London, the Chimerian forces have regrouped and pulled out their big guns for an assault on America. Protagonist Nathan Hale is called back into action, but what can one man do against an armada of nuke-wielding giants?

**WHY IT'S HOT** With 60-player online battles, eight-player online co-op, two separate campaigns, three customizable character classes, and 100-story enemies, Resistance 2 offers the mathematical equation of awesome times infinity.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** With famed developer Insomniac Games at the helm again, this hefty load of numbers is supported by incredible level designs, inventive weapons, and what's shaping up to be an intriguing second chapter of a story. The first-person shooter market is the most competitive in gaming, but Resistance 2 sidesteps the competition with its unique spin on multiplayer and a single-player campaign that turns out larger battles than you'll find anywhere else.

**Publisher** Sony Computer Entertainment | **Developer** Insomniac Games | **Release** November

PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | PC



## 22 Call of Duty: World At War

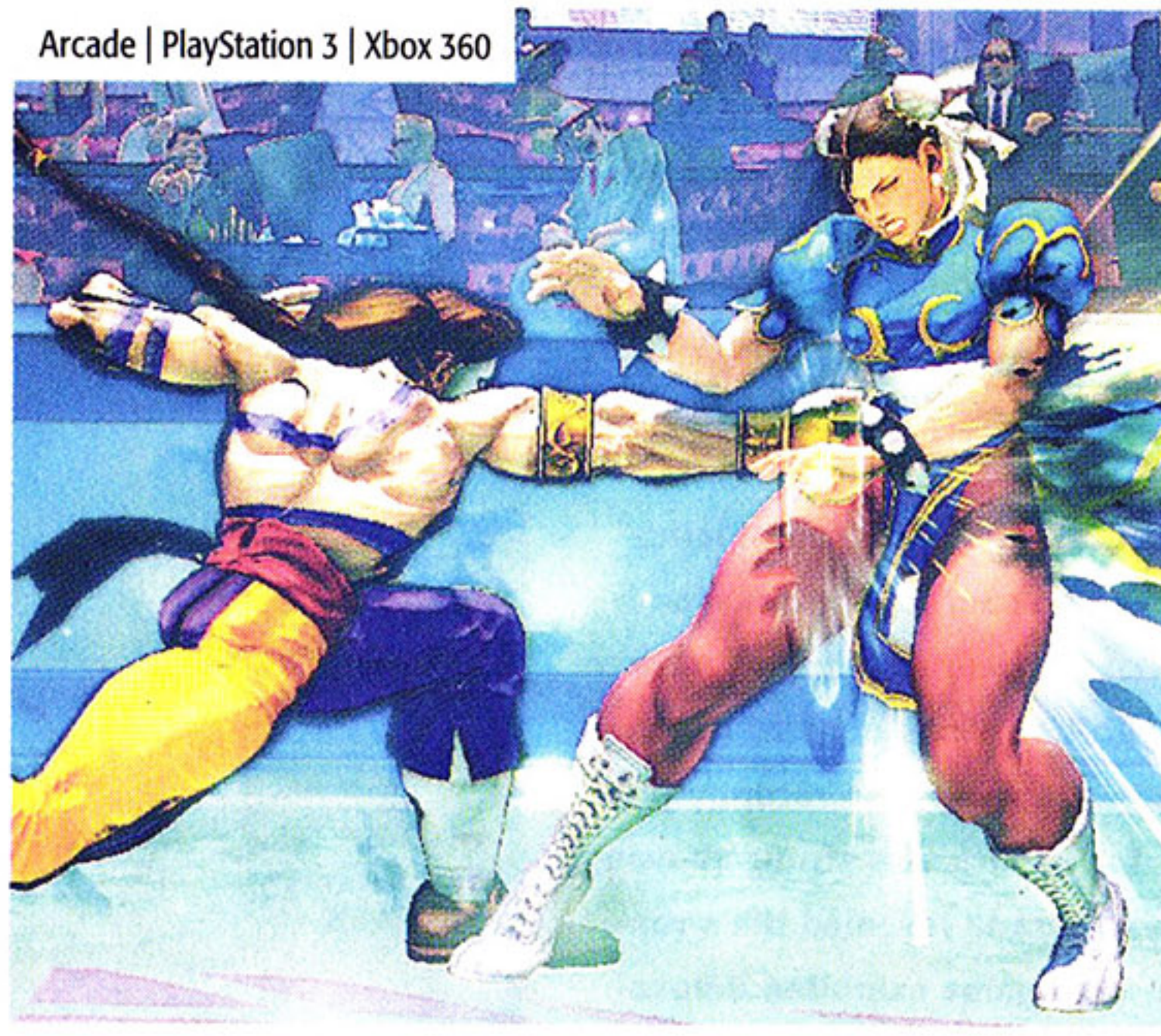
**WHAT IT IS** Call of Duty returns to the World War II battlefield to relive the Russian push into Nazi Germany and explore the American assault in the Pacific Theater for the first time.

**WHY IT'S HOT** To accommodate Japanese tactics, Treyarch has rewritten the CoD action rulebook. Prepare to face Banzai runs, sudden ambushes, and intense amphibious skirmishes as you return the favor to the Empire of the Rising Sun. The game maintains the visual benchmark set by Call of Duty 4 and adds its own flair to the action in the form of flamethrowers and a scorched earth policy.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Many hardcore fans are pissed that Infinity Ward isn't working on the title, but Treyarch's last Call of Duty game was no slouch and this one looks promising. Call of Duty: World At War may even surprise those who have sworn off the bloated WWII genre.

**Publisher** Activision | **Developer** Treyarch | **Release** Fall

Arcade | PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360



## 23 Street Fighter IV

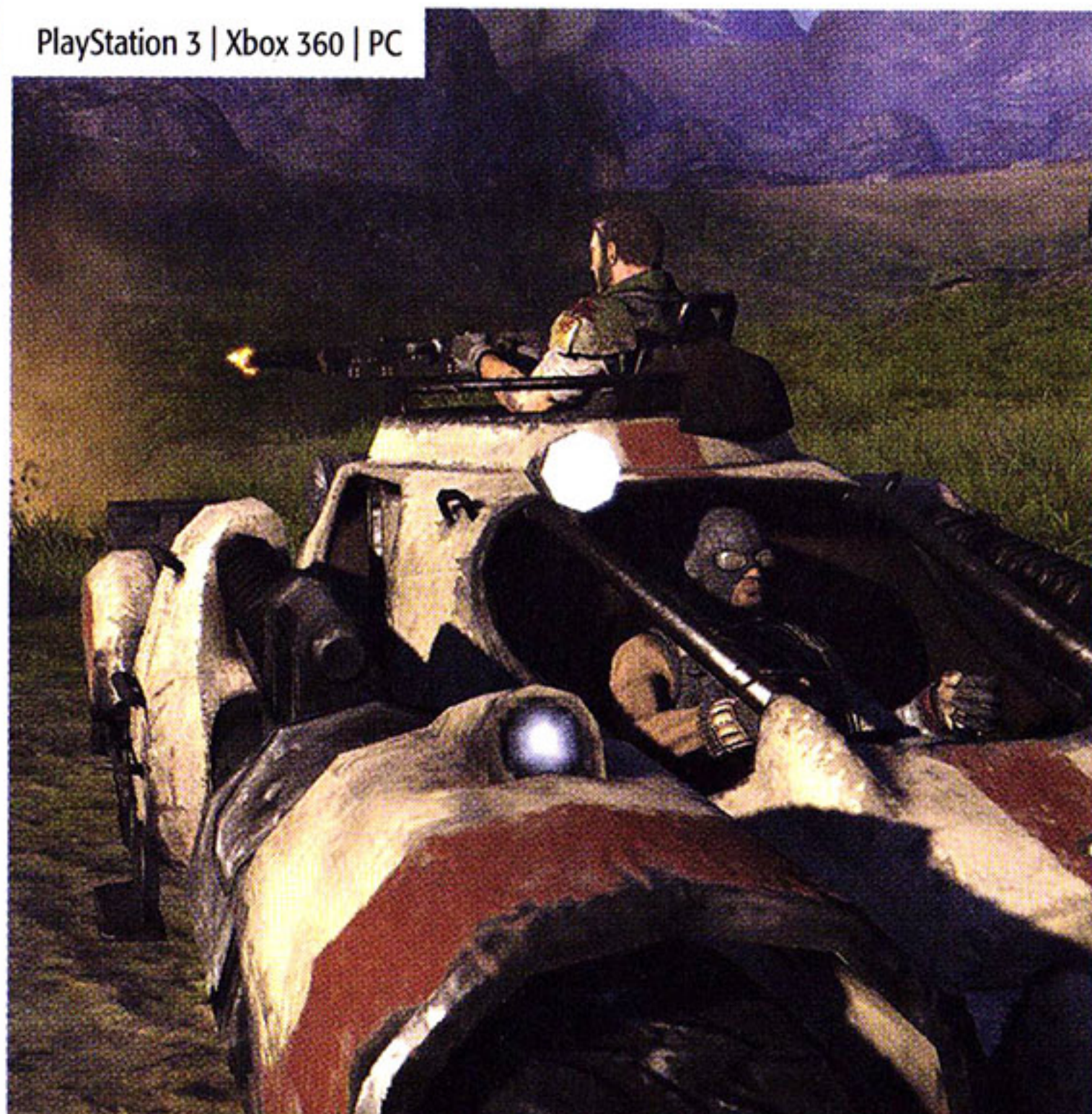
**WHAT IT IS** Capcom's arcade legend returns with new playable characters, new story sequences, online play, and a stylish new art design. Fighting game fans, your messiah is coming.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Street Fighter IV plays eerily like you remember Street Fighter II in your fondest dreams. Capcom has found the perfect balance between fluid controls and deep strategy. Expect to spend a lot of time mastering this game online.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Both MK vs. DC and Soulcalibur IV had strong showings, but Street Fighter IV reminded us why it was once the arcade king. The series looks ready to devour our nation's quarter supply once again.

**Publisher** Capcom | **Developer** Capcom | **Release** Early 2009

PlayStation 3 | Xbox 360 | PC



## 24 Borderlands

**WHAT IT IS** Incorporating elements from fantasy action/RPG titles, first-person shooters, and post-apocalyptic movies like *Mad Max*, Borderlands is compelling mix of genres. Players explore the desolate world of Pandora on foot and in customizable vehicles, fighting and scavenging for survival.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Borderlands features hundreds of thousands of weapons thanks to the game's ability to generate them on the fly according to numerous components, special effects, and manufacturers. You approach quests in multiple ways depending on the weapons you have available, and the four-player online co-op adds even more variety.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** Borderlands looks like fun to play online, and the combination of vehicle and weapon combat promises to keep things fresh. It's an ambitious game, but it's really going to have to nail the shooting mechanics. All those weapons aren't worth much without the gameplay backing them up.

**Publisher** 2K Games | **Developer** Gearbox Software | **Release** 2009

PlayStation 3



## 25 Killzone 2

**WHAT IT IS** Guerrilla Games' ambitious reboot of its PS2 shooter that captivated audiences with its art direction but failed to provide memorable gameplay.

**WHY IT'S HOT** Since its debut three years ago, Killzone 2 has captured our imagination with its gritty sci-fi graphics and epic-scale battles. Now we also know the game brings the big guns to multiplayer, delivering character progression, clan support, and a new badge system that lets you blend skills from different classes.

**HOW IT STACKS UP** No question this game looks and sounds badass. Releasing in February after the rest of the shooters are bloodied by the holiday competition may be just what this game needs to make a splash.

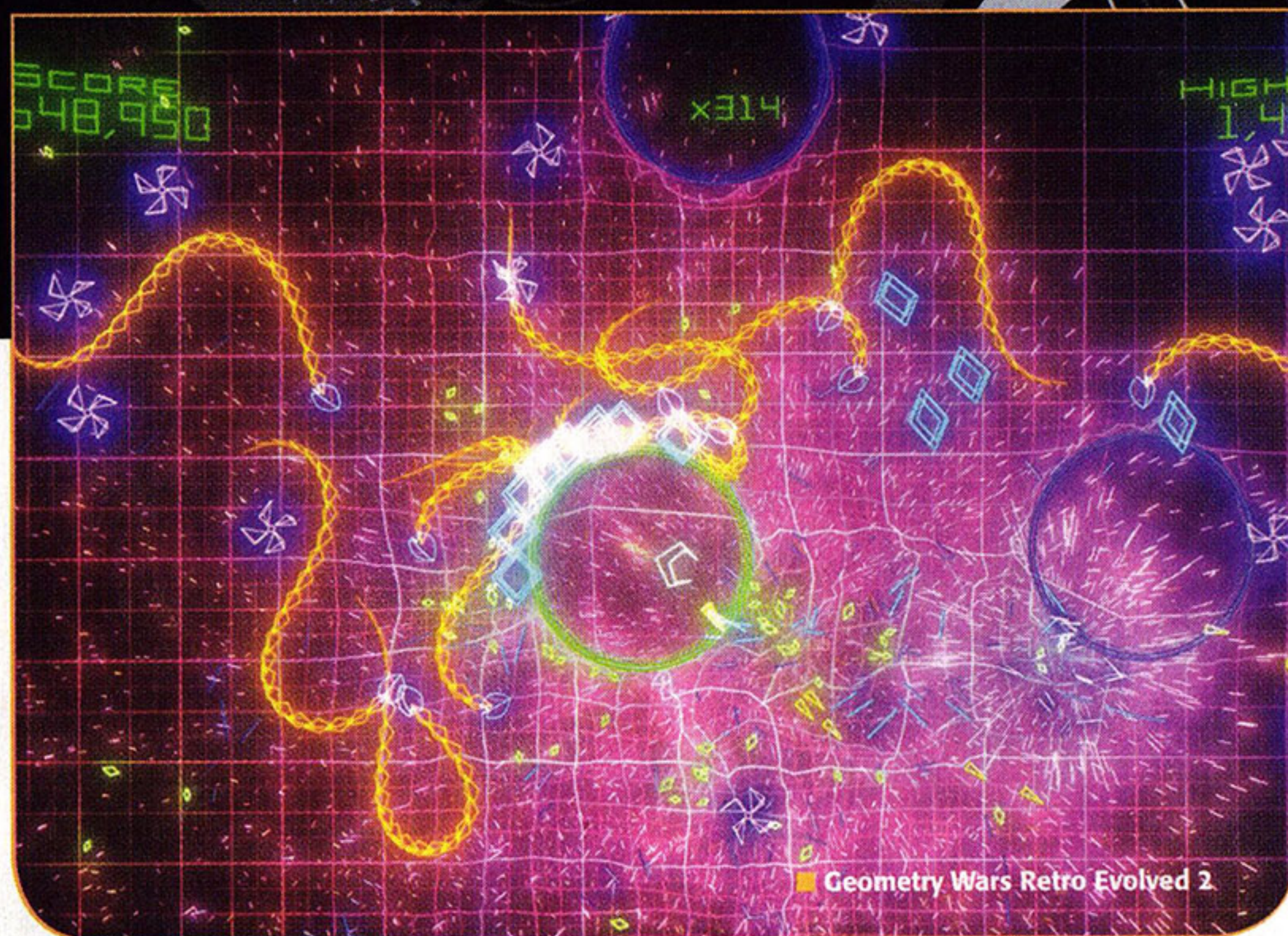
**Publisher** Sony Computer Entertainment  
**Developer** Guerrilla Games | **Release** February 2009

# impulse

BY MATT MILLER

## E3 EDITION

While this year's new title announcements at E3 failed to inspire much excitement on the retail front, the same can't be said for the downloadable scene. Dozens of great short form games appeared at the show, from several brand new announcements to playable versions of some of the hotly anticipated titles we've known about for a while. The recently premiered WiiWare platform can be forgiven for its lack of a strong showing, but both PlayStation Network and Xbox Live Arcade revealed the strongest lineups yet for both platforms. Game after game exhibited innovation and stellar design packed into short bursts of gameplay. While there are too many titles to tackle in two short pages, this should give you a taste of what's to come in the months ahead.



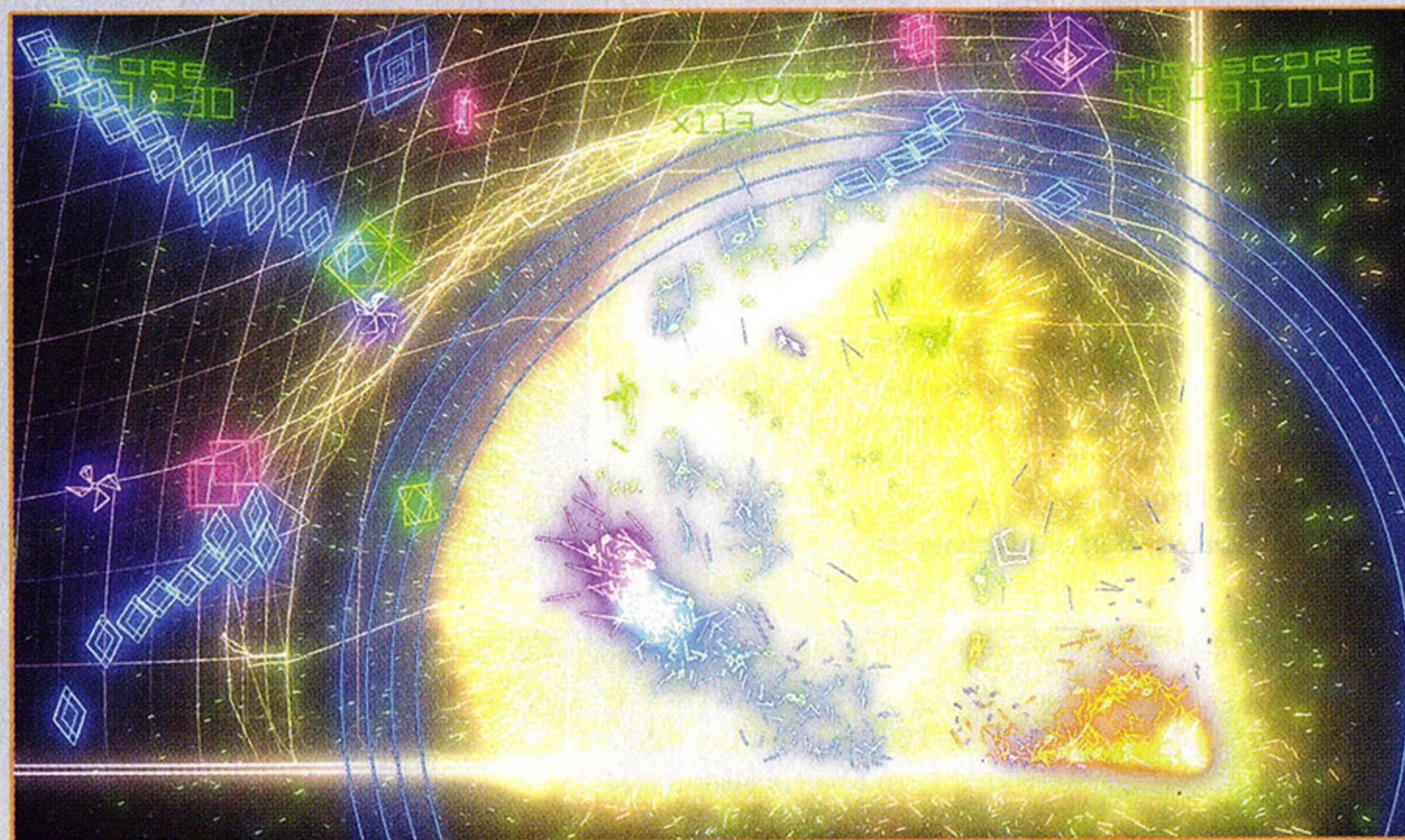
Geometry Wars Retro Evolved 2

### Flower PlayStation Network



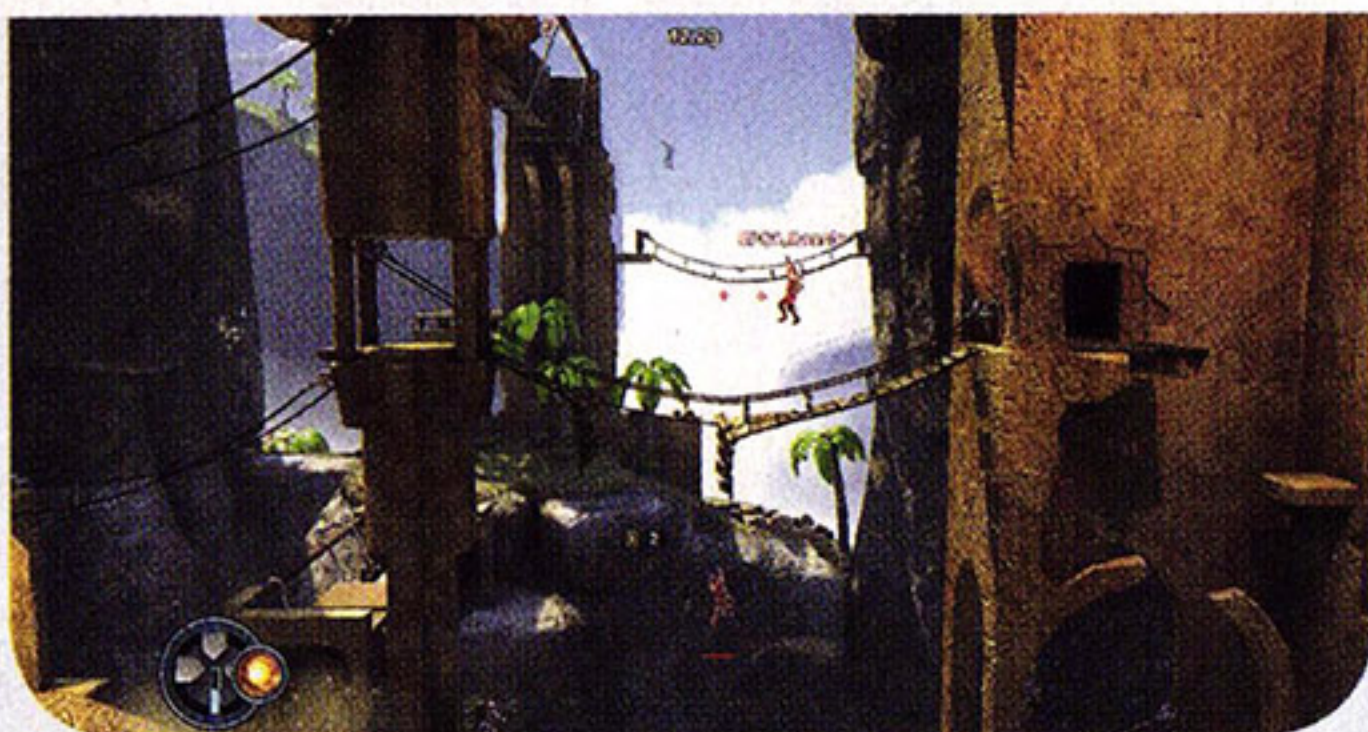
When I asked creative director Jenova Chen to describe his team's latest effort (their last was the enigmatic and enchanting *flow*), he began by describing the project as a video game poem inspired by life in the urban cityscape. Without saying much else, he set me down in front of the game and suggested I play. It's representative of a different approach to game design – valuing art and interpretation in equal measure with interaction and gameplay. Beginning a level, you discover the ability to make the wind blow and cause a single flower petal to twist and turn through the breeze on its way to another flower. You pick up more petals as you pass additional flowers, and as the buds you touch begin to blossom, light and life spreads out across the grassy field. Notes of music burst forth from the flowers as well, leading to a dancing interplay between the score and the rising and falling flow of the wind.

### Geometry Wars Retro Evolved 2 Xbox Live Arcade



Its predecessor was the very first Live Arcade title I played, and the sequel looks to start the obsession all over again. Four-player co-op and competitive modes are the biggest leap forward, making the game play in an entirely new way as you rely on allies (or rivals) to take down enemies. The new game modes are a blast. My favorite was King, where players desperately retreat into shrinking circles of protection as enemies pour out. Eventually, the circle disappears and it's time to make a mad dash for the next safe zone. There's also a Pacifism mode, which involves no shooting, and the return of Evolved, the primary style from the first game. All told, there are six ways to play and rack up points. Fans of the first game are going to flip, and now they'll have an excuse to drag their friends in to play at the same time.

## NOTES



### > Crash Commando

Two of the founders of DICE (creators of *Battlefield*) are behind this game, which arms you with multiple explosive weapons and a jetpack in 12-player deathmatches over PSN. Need I say more? This one is a total blast. Look for it near the holidays.



### > Braid

This time-bending, post-modern, existential crisis of a game is finally set to release on Live Arcade before the end of summer. Whether you dig the mind-expanding puzzles, the gorgeous art style, or the poignant story, this game expands the horizons of what we expect from the medium.



### > Portal: Still Alive

Live Arcade will be receiving a special treat when GLaDOS and her strange spatial puzzles make their way onto the service. The game includes the original game plus expanded additional levels that weren't present on the disc-based release. Early reports indicate the game will be both moist and delicious.



## Galaga Legions

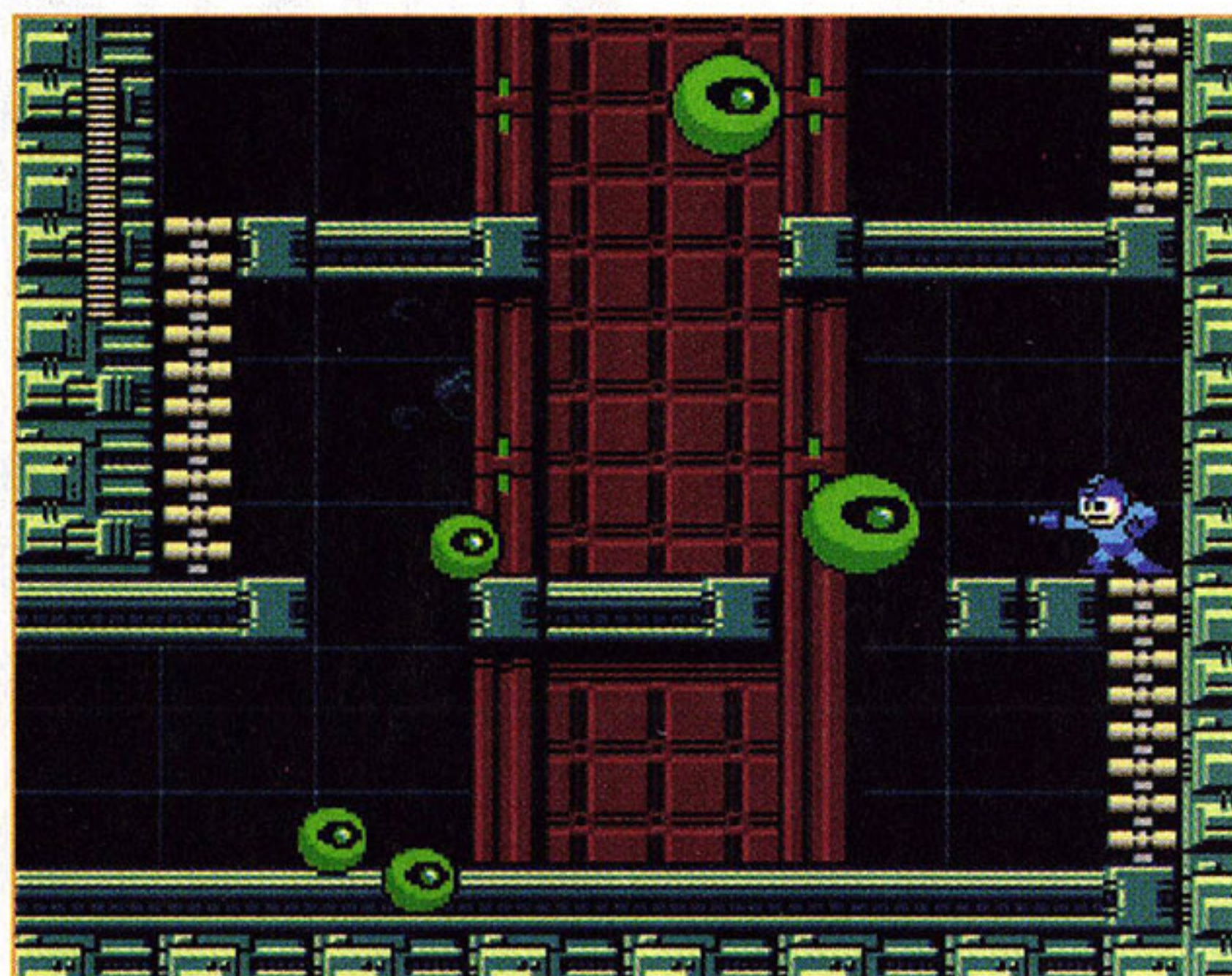
Xbox Live Arcade



The development team behind Pac-Man Championship Edition is tackling another classic game property, and their efforts look to more than meet expectations. Like in the original game, your ship can still only shoot straight ahead to combat the endless waves of enemies diving onto the screen. The game also adds two deployable stationary cannons to the formula that you can place with the right stick. By flicking any which way, one of the cannons will teleport in and begin firing in the specified direction. It remains there until you redeploy it elsewhere. Before each wave, the enemy ships telegraph where they'll be arriving, giving you a split second to set up your defense. Between the gorgeous visuals and the strategy-flavored action, the gameplay is smooth and satisfying.

## Mega Man 9

PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade, WiiWare



Capcom opted for a fascinating approach to delivering retro games with their latest Mega Man announcement. Mega Man 9, planned for release on all three major console download services, is a direct sequel to Mega Man 8, but it is being prepared with the tone and visual presentation of Mega Man 2. That means the whole game looks like a honest-to-goodness new NES game in the classic style, pixels be damned. The game seems like a 1980s dream, but the story, levels, and robot bosses are all brand new. This time, Dr. Light's good name has been smeared, as some of his robot creations are running amok. The insidious Dr. Wily has accused their creator as the evil mastermind behind the attacks. How's the game play? Just like you remember.

## Ratchet & Clank: Quest for Booty

PlayStation Network

Now this is an idea I can get behind. Take an existing game engine (in this case, the one from of Ratchet & Clank: Tools of Destruction) and create a new stand-alone title for download. Make it short and sweet (three to four hours), and set the price tag low enough to pull in the crowds (\$14.99). Quest for Booty takes Ratchet on a pirate-themed voyage to find the missing Clank. You won't have the normal Clank abilities, but you'll gain new ones like the ability to utilize your wrench from afar to manipulate objects. It's a fantastic way to leverage an existing property without the high expense of another full-fledged retail release. Anybody else vote to see more titles like this from the development community?



### > The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom

This ingenious puzzle-platformer hasn't been snatched up by any of the major download services yet, but trust me when I say that it will be sometime soon. As mischief-making gentleman villain P.B. Winterbottom, you travel a world of black and white silent film backdrops attempting to break the time/space continuum in order to get some pie. Keep an eye on this one.



### > Fable II Pub Games

Packed into one fun little Live Arcade release, the Fable II Pub Games will allow fans to get a head start on collecting gold before the big game releases in a couple of months. My favorite is a pyramid-structured card game called Fortune's Tower, but there's also the roulette-style betting of Keystone and a strange game of chance called Spinnerbox.



### > Fat Princess

Picture Capture-the-Flag, but instead of flags, you've got two princesses. Feed the princess enough cake, and she grows more rotund, making her harder to carry away. Each character in this PSN exclusive can change into hats that turn him into classes like the builder, archer, or mage. The cutesy art style is surprisingly riddled with the bloody messes left behind from the massive 16-versus-16 multiplayer matches.

## DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

## MILITARY MOTIONS ON HOLD

Sony brought SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Confrontation to E3 (shown), but the game has been delayed from September until October 14. Likewise, Sierra's World in Conflict: Soviet Assault won't begin until January. The game was originally scheduled to come out this September.



## TECMO BACKS NEW TEAM NINJA

Tecmo is facing employee lawsuits and the loss of famed developer Tomonobu Itagaki (pictured), but the publisher/developer isn't taking things lying down. The Japanese company has appointed a new head for its flagship Team Ninja development studio, whom it hasn't revealed. Headed by the motto, "New title, new genre, new location, new leader," Tecmo says a new big-budget title from Team Ninja will be aimed at western gamers.



## THE RETURN OF APOGEE

Original Duke Nukem publisher Apogee is returning with a trilogy of new Duke adventures for unspecified consoles. The episodes will be entitled Critical Mass, Chain Reaction, and Proving Grounds. Apogee is also planning to mine its back catalogue and sign on developers for new projects.



## A QUIETER, FASTER XBOX 360!

Microsoft is introducing a new feature that lets you install games onto your 360 hard drive to decrease load times and quiet excessive disc drive noise. You will still be required, however, to have your game disc inserted in order to play.

## WARHAMMER AXES FEATURES

Warhammer Online fans aren't happy that Mythic Entertainment has cut some features from the upcoming game, including four classes and a couple capital cities. Mythic defends the move, saying that cutting content that wasn't balanced or complete is actually no great loss at all.



games

# MUSIC FOR THE MASSES

## ROCK BAND 2 AND GUITAR HERO WORLD TOUR REVEAL SETLIST SURPRISES



Both Guitar Hero World Tour and Rock Band 2 come out in a couple of months, and both were at E3 showing off some – if not all in the case of Rock Band 2 – of their songs.

## ROCK BAND 2

Rock Band 2 was a big part of Microsoft's E3 press conference, and developer Harmonix and publisher MTV Games spilled the game's 84-song setlist in all its glory. Twenty more songs are planned as free downloads this fall.

Apart from having AC/DC's "Let There Be Rock" and Guns N' Roses' "Shackler's Revenge" (from the long overdue *Chinese Democracy*), Rock Band 2 lets players bring songs over from the first Rock Band, so you won't have to swap discs if you want to play an old favorite. Rock Band 2 comes out first for Xbox 360 on September 14, and later on PS3 (October), PS2 (October), and Wii (November).

## Guitar Hero World Tour

Although the full song list for Guitar Hero World Tour hasn't been officially released, at E3 Activision revealed that the game will come with 85 songs, including two Jimi Hendrix songs, "The Wind Cries Mary" and "Purple Haze (Live)." The game will also get a three-pack of REM songs from the band's new album, as well as Metallica's full length *Death Magnetic*, which will be available for Guitar Hero III in September and later for World Tour when it releases.

Guitar Hero and Rock Band may be competing series, but that doesn't mean the two don't play well together. Neversoft says that Rock Band's Xbox 360 instruments will work with World Tour.



## ROCK BAND 2 SETLIST

AC/DC "Let There Be Rock"  
 AFI "Girl's Gone Grey"  
 Alanis Morissette "You Oughta Know"  
 Alice in Chains "Man in the Box"  
 Allman Brothers "Ramblin' Man"  
 Avenged Sevenfold "Almost Easy"  
 Bad Company "Shooting Star"  
 Beastie Boys "So Whatcha Want"  
 Beck "E-Pro"  
 Bikini Kill "Rebel Girl"  
 Billy Idol "White Wedding Pt. I"  
 Blondie "One Way or Another"  
 Bob Dylan "Tangled Up in Blue"  
 Bon Jovi "Livin' on a Prayer"  
 Cheap Trick "Hello There"  
 Devo "Uncontrollable Urge"  
 Dinosaur Jr. "Feel the Pain"  
 Disturbed "Down with the Sickness"  
 Dream Theater "Panic Attack"  
 Duran Duran "Hungry Like the Wolf"  
 Elvis Costello "Pump It Up"  
 Fleetwood Mac "Go Your Own Way"  
 Foo Fighters "Everlong"  
 Guns N' Roses "Shackler's Revenge"  
 Interpol "PDA"  
 Jane's Addiction "Mountain Song"  
 Jethro Tull "Aqualung"  
 Jimmy Eat World "The Middle"  
 Joan Jett "Bad Reputation"  
 Journey "Anyway You Want It"  
 Judas Priest "Painkiller"  
 Kansas "Carry On Wayward Son"  
 L7 "Pretend We're Dead"  
 Lacuna Coil "Our Truth"  
 Linkin Park "One Step Closer"  
 Lit "My Own Worst Enemy"  
 Lush "De-Luxe"  
 Mastodon "Colony of Birchmen"  
 Megadeth "Peace Sells"  
 Metallica "Battery"  
 Mighty Mighty Bosstones "Where'd You Go"  
 Modest Mouse "Float On"  
 Motorhead "Ace of Spades"  
 Nirvana "Drain You"  
 Norman Greenbaum "Spirit in the Sky"  
 Panic at the Disco "Nine in the Afternoon"  
 Paramore "That's What You Get"  
 Pearl Jam "Alive"  
 Presidents of the USA "Lump"  
 Rage Against the Machine "Testify"  
 Ratt "Round & Round"  
 Red Hot Chili Peppers "Give it Away"  
 Rise Against "Give it All"  
 Rush "The Trees"  
 Silversun Pickups "Lazy Eye"  
 Smashing Pumpkins "Today"  
 Social Distortion "I Was Wrong"  
 Sonic Youth "Teenage Riot"  
 Soundgarden "Spoonman"  
 Squeeze "Cool for Cats"  
 Steely Dan "Bodhisattva"  
 Steve Miller Band "Rock'n Me"  
 Survivor "Eye of the Tiger"  
 System of a Down "Chop Suey"  
 Talking Heads "Psycho Killer"  
 Tenacious D "Master Exploder"  
 Testament "Souls of Black"  
 The Donnas "New Kid in School"  
 The Go-Go's "We Got the Beat"  
 The Grateful Dead "Alabama Getaway"  
 The Guess Who "American Woman"  
 The Muffs "Kids in America"  
 The Offspring "Come Out & Play (Keep 'em Separated)"  
 The Replacements "Alex Chilton"  
 The Who "Pinball Wizard"

## BONUS SONGS

Abnormality "Visions"  
 Anarchy Club "Get Clean"  
 Bang Camaro "Night Lies"  
 Breaking Wheel "Shoulder to the Plow"  
 The Libyans "Neighborhood"  
 The Main Drag "A Jagged Gorgeous Winter"  
 Speck "Conventional Lover"  
 The Sterns "Supreme Girl"  
 That Handsome Devil "Rob the Prez-O-Dent"

news

# XBOX 360 PRICE CUT TEMPORARY

## CAN NEW 360 INCREASE SALES?

Industry analysts have talked for a while about an impending Xbox 360 price cut, and on the eve of E3 – to little fanfare – Microsoft finally delivered. Like Sony's price cut last year, this move is more of a phasing out of a particular version of the Xbox 360. While supplies last, the 20GB Xbox 360 now sells for \$299 – down from \$349.

Once the 20GB version is cleared out of the retail channel, it will be replaced by a 60GB Xbox 360 that will sell for the old price of \$349. Microsoft says the new 60GB model will go on sale in early August. The \$279 Arcade system (without a hard drive) and the 120GB Elite (\$449) remain unchanged.

Before E3, there were consistent rumors that Microsoft would release a 360 with a Blu-ray drive to compete with the PlayStation 3, but this has yet to happen. According to the newest NPD sales data, in the month of June, the PlayStation 3 outsold the Xbox 360 by almost double – 405,000 units to 219,800, respectively. This was the month Konami released its PS3-exclusive Metal Gear Solid 4, and Sony put forth its MGS 4 PS3 bundle. It will be interesting to see if the discounted 20GB and increased hard drive space at the \$349 price point will boost the 360's sales.



games

# MICROSOFT CANCELS HALO REVEAL

## ...AND YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE THE EXCUSE

Who wouldn't want to see the new Bungie-developed Halo title? Not you, we guess. Even though the studio had created a trailer for Microsoft's E3 press conference – something that would have no doubt been cool to see – the publisher pulled the plug on the big reveal. Bungie's own website had a timer counting down to July 16, 7:07 AM. The timer's confluence of the number seven had everyone believing the studio's announcement was Halo related.

"For the last several months, we've been building toward a reveal of something exciting that Bungie is working on," says a statement from president Harold Ryan on the Bungie website. "We were looking forward to sharing that with our fan community during the week of E3. However, those plans were just changed by our publisher."

At E3, Don Mattrick, senior vice president of Microsoft's interactive entertainment division, told the *Los Angeles Times* that Microsoft pulled the plug on the announcement because the press conference was already running long, and the company wanted to get it down to under 90 minutes. But instead of cutting avatars, Duffy, or Primetime's game shows, Bungie got the axe. According to Mattrick, however, Microsoft plans to dedicate an entire event to the unknown game in the near future.

■ Is Master Chief appearing in a new Bungie-developed Halo game?

# THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

## QUOTE

We are sorry about [the E3] media briefings, specifically for those who were expecting to see Nintendo show something about Super Mario or Legend of Zelda.



– Nintendo president Satoru Iwata

## BAD

Metal Gear Online melted down after the online Gene Expansion pack released. High network traffic forced Konami to close down the MGO and Reward shops, cancel some online events, and issue a straight-up apology.



## GOOD

Since hardly any PC players were willing to pay an annual Xbox Live for Windows fee (unlike the console suckers), Microsoft has waived the \$49.99 Gold Membership fee, making all multiplayer components of the service free.

■ Where the hell was Alan Wake?

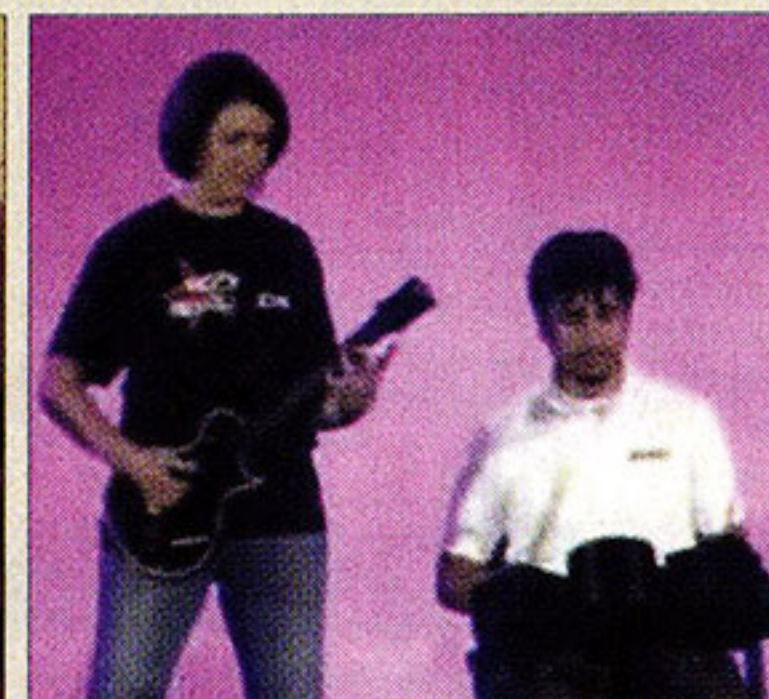


## MISSING

Not at E3: Alan Wake, Brütal Legend, Aliens: Colonial Marines, Beyond Good & Evil 2, Tekken 6, Splinter Cell: Conviction, Ghostbusters, Final Fantasy Versus XIII, Mafia II, APB, Wipeout HD, Indiana Jones, Tiberium, Need for Speed Undercover, Saboteur, Rogue Warrior, and much more.

## UGLY

Nintendo's E3 press conference was light on meaningful games, but afterwards Miyamoto threw everyone not named "grandpa" or "mom" a bone by saying that the company was working on a new Pikmin game for an undisclosed system. Unfortunately, we shouldn't expect it anytime soon, as Nintendo vice president Cammie Dunaway told *Wired* that the company has no surprise game announcements for the rest of 2008. Between Animal Crossing and Wii Music, Nintendo has half a game (if that) planned this holiday season.



## BAD

Rock Revolution senior product manager Lauren Faccidomo failed out of her own game trying to play the Ramones "Blitzkrieg Bop" at the Konami press conference. This is after playing the song – for real – with her band The Sheenas. That's one way to end a presentation on a sour note, but Wii's Castlevania Judgement left an even worse taste in our mouths.

In other news, Konami is suing Rock Band's MTV Networks, Viacom, and Harmonix over what Konami claims are U.S. patent violations regarding Rock Band's instruments and its status as a "music rhythm matching game." If you can't beat 'em, sue 'em.

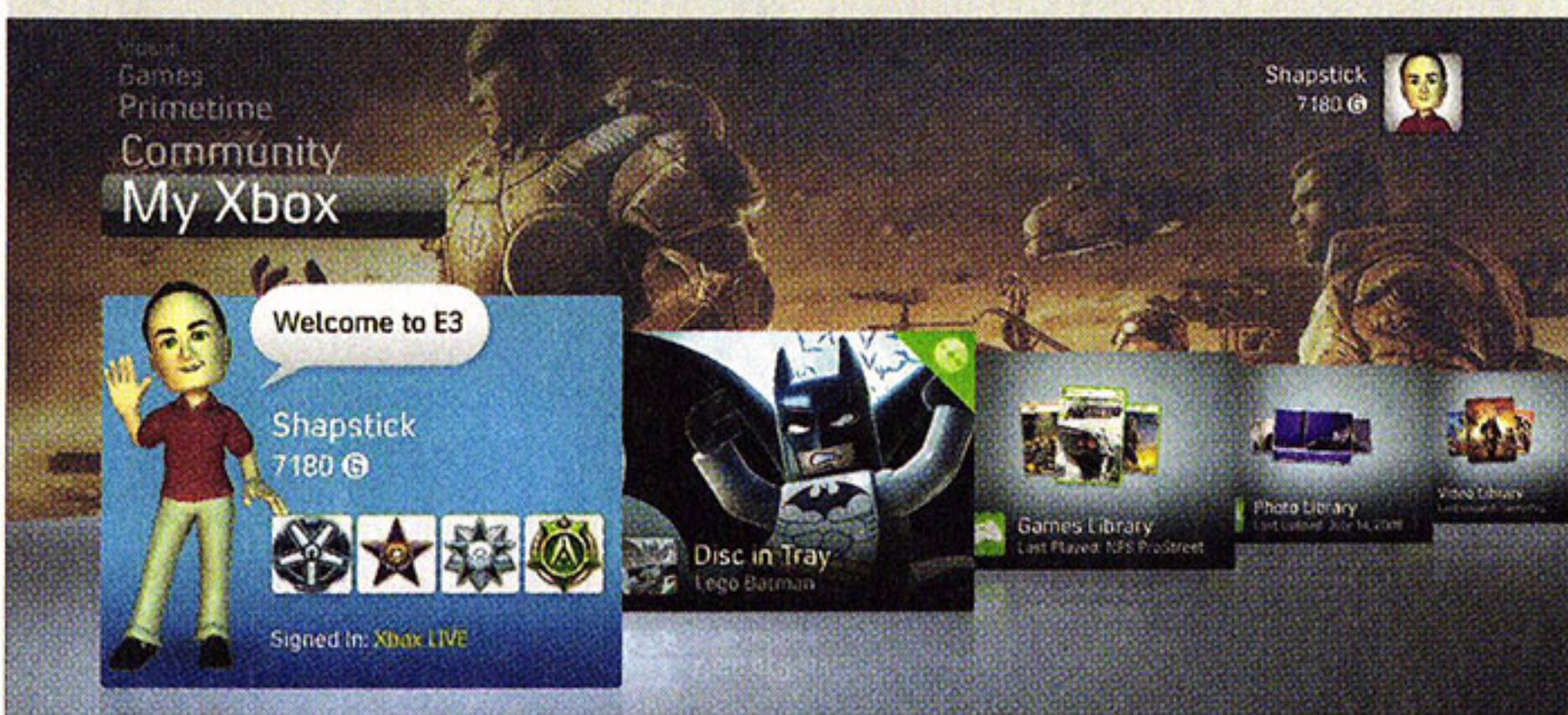
# LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



## NINTENDO WAVES OFF THIRD PARTIES

Nintendo has always been known to be almost antagonistic towards third-party publishers, and from what we heard at E3, things haven't changed. Every developer and publisher we talked to said they hadn't heard about Nintendo's Wii MotionPlus until the actual press conference. That's not a good start if you're trying to get third parties on board with developing for the peripheral and therefore convincing customers that it's worth their while. LucasArts in particular wasn't happy at being kept in the dark – especially since it created Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels (see page 92) specifically for the console. The game was even included in Nintendo's press conference, the setting in which Wii Motion Plus was introduced – which the game doesn't use, much to LucasArts' dismay. If this is Nintendo's attitude regarding its new peripheral and third-party adoption, don't expect Wii MotionPlus to be adopted by many.



## NO SECOND AMENDMENT FOR AVATARS

Microsoft plans to let players earn or buy new clothes for their avatars, but Loose Talk has heard one particular accessory will not be allowed – weapons. We talked to a third-party developer who wanted to allow players to earn weapons from their game, which would be shown on avatars, but Microsoft wouldn't allow it. Whether this is because the interaction with the avatar isn't possible or because Microsoft doesn't want avatars to be toting guns is unknown. Regardless, the company plans for gamers who garner a certain number of Achievements in games to win clothing for their avatars.

## FREEZED OUT?

Fans of Freezepop who are looking for their next dose of the synth group in Rock Band 2 will be disappointed. The band (whose Kasson Crooker works on the game) doesn't appear on the retail disc. This, however, is only a temporary loss, as Loose Talk has heard that material from the group will be made available via a DLC song pack after the title's release.



Got some insider info? Email us at [loosetalk@gameinformer.com](mailto:loosetalk@gameinformer.com) and we'll be all ears.

# NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Aerosmith's appearance in its own Guitar Hero spin off isn't the Boston band's first flirtation with video games. Back in 1994, this Midway arcade game featured first-person rail shooting via a cabinet with pistol controllers. The game was also later released for a variety of home consoles including the Genesis and PlayStation. In the game you're destroying The New Order, a brainwashing organization that has captured your favorite band.

(Answer on page 52)



## news

# AT THE MOVIES

## SONY STARTS TV/MOVIE DOWNLOADS

Gamers expected Sony's downloadable television and movie service to debut last year, but were pleasantly surprised when Sony revealed it was ready to go last month. At E3, the company announced it secured a stable of partners including Sony Pictures, Fox, Paramount, LionsGate, Disney, MGM, Warner, Turner Entertainment, and Funimation. We spent some time with the service and checked out some of its features. This is by no means a definitive review, so we suggest you check out the store yourself and head over to Sony's PlayStation website for more info.

### WHAT'S ON TV

Movie rentals range from \$2.99 to \$5.99 in both standard definition and high definition. You can also purchase films for \$3.99 to \$14.99. TV shows in both formats start at \$1.99 and are readily available for purchase.

Similar to Microsoft's service, after renting a movie you have two weeks to download it and 24 hours to view the content after the first time it's played. Unfortunately, each movie has its own specifications. For example, you can't rent *Spider-Man 2* in standard definition (it's only available as a SD purchase or HD rental), but *3:10 to Yuma* was only available as an SD purchase (\$14.99). Due to the sheer size it would take up on your hard drive and time it would take to download such a large file, there aren't high-definition movies for purchase on your PS3.

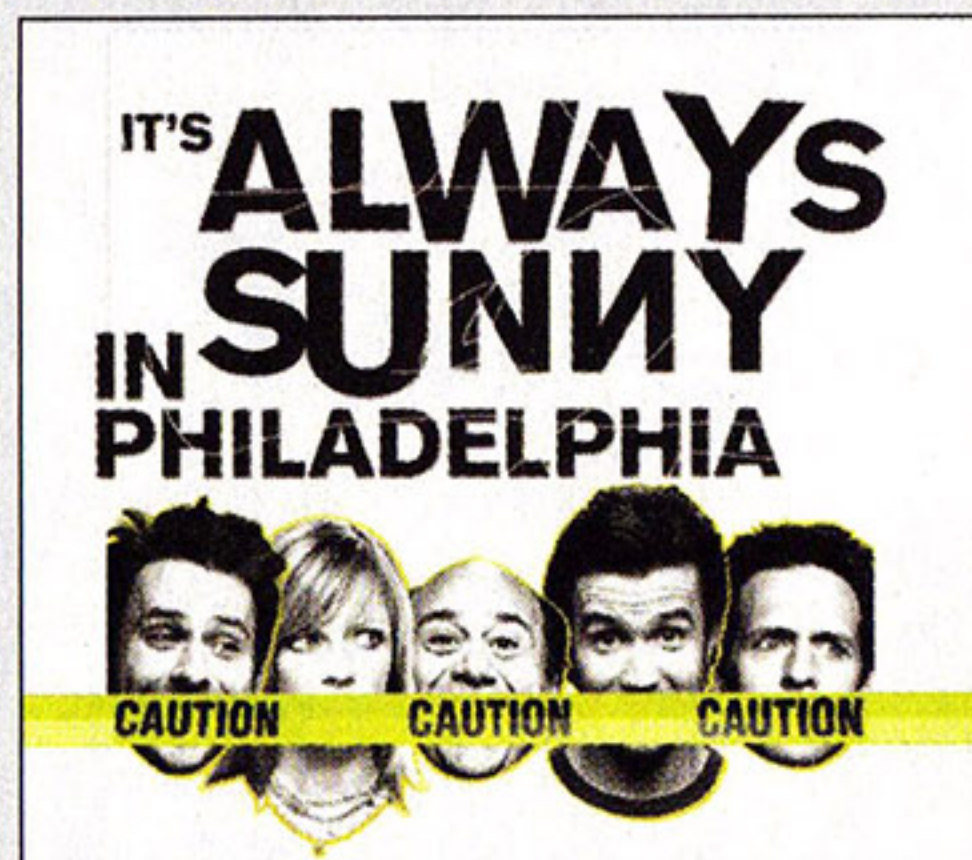
Sony has a PC-based store site (shown) for downloading to your PSP, but it's not the same as what you can access on your PS3. Since the PC front is enabled for you to download content onto your PSP, it doesn't have any HD content.

### DOIN' THE DOWNLOAD

Here's a quick run-through of downloading and watching the new video content on your PSP and PS3.

#### PS3

For \$1.99 we bought a (hilarious) episode of *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* ("Day man..."). The 335MB file took approximately 35 minutes to download on a wired connection. We started watching it after only 13 percent of the file was downloaded, and this got us about seven minutes into the episode before it had to pause and buffer. Waiting until your file is halfway downloaded will probably get you through without having to wait until it's finished. You can also perform the download in the background.



#### PSP

The PSP requires that you download the 4.05 PSP update and the updated PSP Downloader program, which acts as the bridge between your PC and PSP.

### RULES OF THE GAME

Renting or purchasing a show on your PS3 or PSP and then transferring to the other platform is possible with certain caveats, some of which are outlined below.

#### Rentals

- Can only be downloaded/played on a single PS3/PSP
- Cannot be re-downloaded

#### Purchases

- Can exist simultaneously on a single PS3 and up to three PSPs, but it can only be downloaded by one PS3/PSP and cannot be re-downloaded

#### Transferring

- Cannot transfer content from your PSP to PS3
- Rented videos can be transferred to your PSP, but once you do that it can no longer be played on your PS3

# STRONG ONE DAY. ARMY STRONG THE NEXT.



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**ARMY RESERVE**

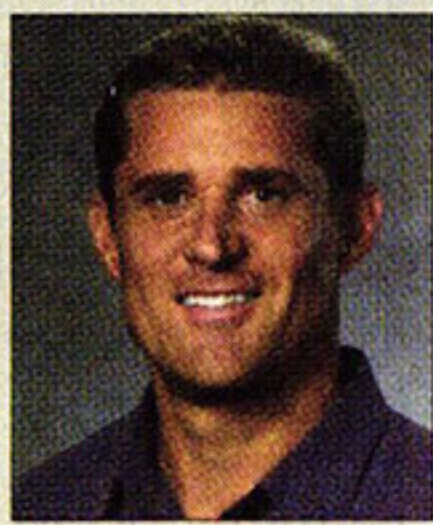


**ARMY STRONG.**<sup>SM</sup>

Jason McCarthy, Construction Job Site Supervisor and Sergeant in the U.S. Army Reserve.  
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## TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



**DEVELOPER**  
**GLEN SCHOEFIELD**  
 Executive Producer, Dead Space

- 1 Resident Evil 4 – GC
- 2 Gunstar Heroes – Sega Genesis
- 3 Silent Hill – PlayStation
- 4 Baldur's Gate II – PC
- 5 Halo – Xbox



**READER**  
**PRESTON BENTON**  
 Commerce, GA

- 1 Guitar Hero series – Multi
- 2 Greg Hastings' Tournament Paintball Max'd – Xbox
- 3 Halo series – Xbox, Xbox 360
- 4 Luigi's Mansion – GC
- 5 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas – Xbox

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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 email: topfive@gameinformer.com  
 (attach digital picture)

## TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

## Top 10 Reactions Heard At E3 2008

- 10 I doubt she's ever been snowboarding
- 9 You know, even if she has been snowboarding, I still don't care
- 8 Excuse me, sir. Am I in the right place? Is this E3?
- 7 Wow! A mashed potato bar!
- 6 TGS is already guaranteed to be so much better than this
- 5 Avatars, eh? This is going to be even worse than I thought
- 4 Are you seriously talking to me about the PS2?
- 3 This is so awesome...psyche!
- 2 [Polite, uncertain applause]
- 1 Wii Music? I quit

Name That Game Answer: Revolution X

games

# KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC MMO CONFIRMED

## EA CEO SPEAKS ON BIOWARE'S MMO PLANS

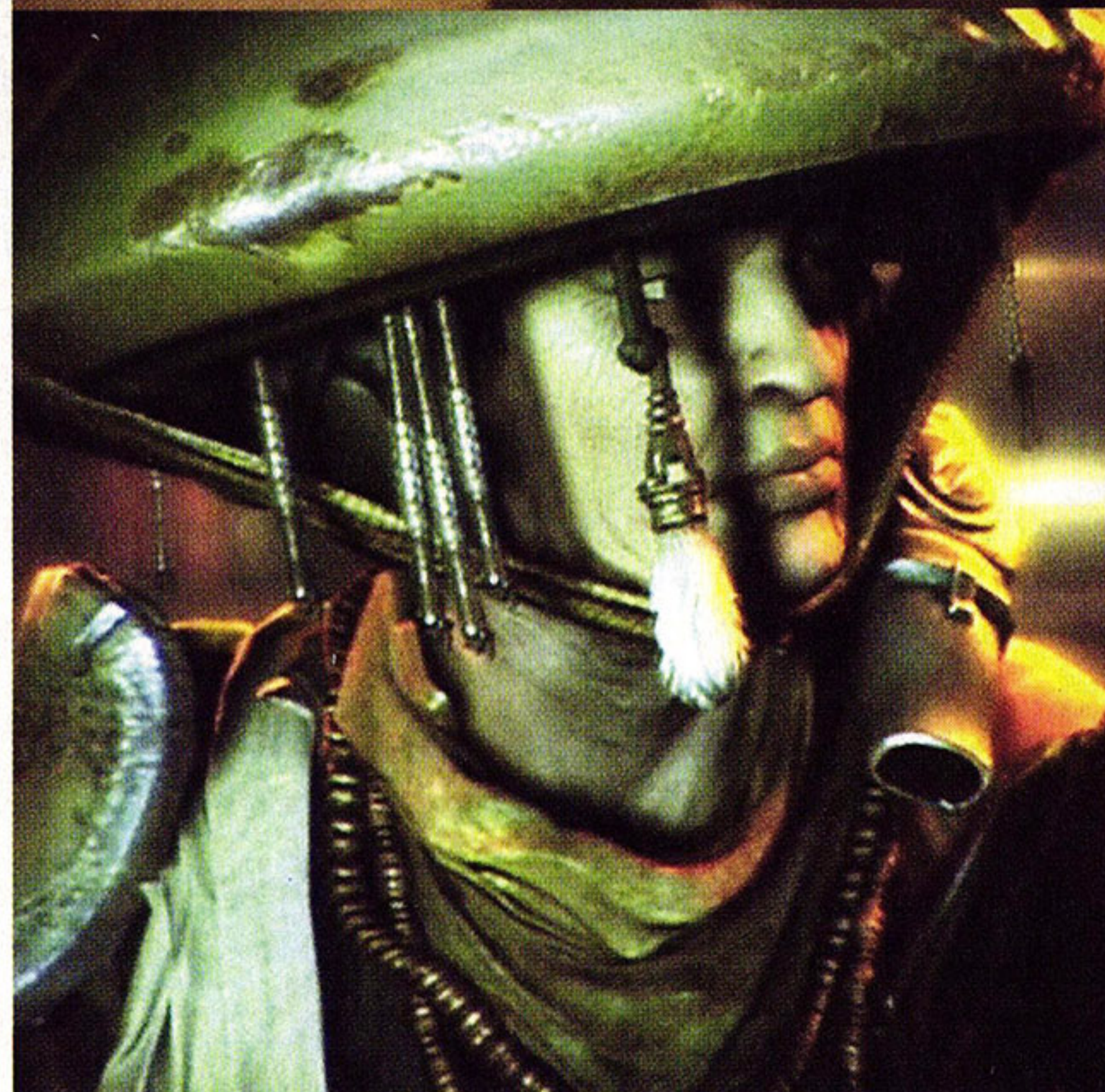
For a while now, we've heard both official and unofficial talk about two BioWare projects: a partnership with LucasArts for a game, and an MMO for which the developer opened a satellite studio in Austin, Texas in 2006. Recently, BioWare parent company Electronic Arts revealed that they are the same game, a Knights of the Old Republic MMO.

EA CEO John Riccitiello revealed the game in speaking to Conde Nast's Portfolio.com. Riccitiello said that EA has "two of the most compelling MMOs in the industry in development. The first title, based on the Warhammer property, will launch soon. And the one that people are dying for us to talk to them about in partnership with Lucas [Arts is] coming out of BioWare, which is, I think, quite possibly the most-anticipated game, full stop, for the industry at the point when we get closer to telling you about it." When asked if he was referring to a KOTOR MMO, Riccitiello replied, "yes."

games

# CARMACK TAKES HIS RAGE TO EA

## id SOFTWARE TO PUBLISH ANTICIPATED RACER WITH NEW PARTNER



John Carmack and id Software have had a long and glorious relationship with Activision, but at this year's E3, that publisher's chief rival – Electronic Arts – announced a new partnership with Carmack and id. The legendary developer took the stage at EA's press conference to announce that Rage will be published by EA. The game is slated to come out for the PS3, Xbox 360, and PC.

"EA Partners really is a good match for an independent studio like id, because it gives us full access to the worldwide marketing muscle of EA without taking away any of our ability to build games and design them the way we think it should be done," Carmack said. "Rage is a new title for us with new technology, a new publishing partner, and it really does signal a new vision for id Software."

Rage is an intriguing mix of first-person action and driving in a barren, desert-like setting. Carmack says that he wants the game to introduce a world of colorful characters, and he showed a brief trailer showing some of the game's drivers.

# MUSHROOM MEN

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**Wii**™

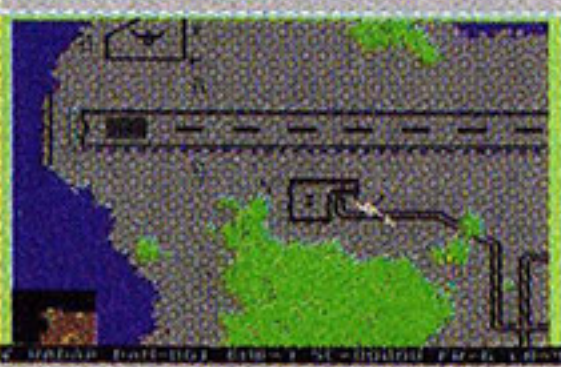
NINTENDO DS™



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**MUSHROOMMEN.COM**

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1985  
Garage Days

Wright creates his first game, the shooter/strategy hybrid *Raid on Bungeling Bay*

1987  
Big Dreams

After meeting Jeff Braun at a pizza party, Wright and Braun form Maxis

1989  
First Hit

Maxis' first game, *SimCity*, is released, and is an instant classic. *SimCity* virtually created an entire genre and remains a top-selling franchise to this day

1990  
Getting Planetary

Wright creates a more ambitious title as a follow-up to *SimCity*, *SimEarth* which took the Sim formula to planet-sized proportion. The title is a clear precursor to *Spore*

1997  
Bought Out

After some less-successful titles, Maxis is acquired by Electronic Arts. Despite some gamers' concerns, Wright and Maxis are given unprecedented freedom within the EA system

2000  
Massive Success

Maxis' first title for EA, *The Sims*, is a huge hit, both critically and commercially. Through a series of expansions packs and sequels, *The Sims* becomes one of the best-selling franchises of all time

2002  
Legendary Status

At the DICE convention in Las Vegas, Wright receives the industry's highest honor, an induction into the AIAS Hall of Fame

2005  
Innovating

Wright announces *Spore*, his most ambitious project to date. The game quickly becomes the most discussed game in years

## WILL WRIGHT

CHIEF DESIGNER, MAXIS

>> As the creator of all things Sim, Will Wright is perhaps the most respected game designer in all of video games. His upcoming *Spore*, the follow-up to his record-breaking *Sims* franchise, looks to be one of the most innovative games in years. <<

**Your entire career has been about letting players experiment with manipulating simulations of the real world. Do you see *Spore* as the culmination of your previous games?**

I don't know if I'd call it a culmination. I think it takes into account a lot of the previous work. Look at things like *SimEarth*, a lot of aspects of that came into [*Spore*]... [also] *SimLife*, *SimCity*, and *The Sims*. I think you learn from every project and try to incorporate that knowledge into what you're working on in the future.

**Is there any one part of the game that proved to be more of a challenge than you thought it was going to be?**

We understood the technical challenges we were facing – aspects of how to make the content really compressible, how to procedurally generate all this stuff, especially the animations. I think the design challenge was larger than expected. One, getting these editors to be easy to use, and number two, incorporating all these genres into what felt like a singular experience. We wanted something that had a single interface. Doing that across genres turned out to be quite a challenge.

generations that life has had to evolve to where it is. So, I think giving someone an overview of life on Earth up to where we are now frames the whole subject in a different way. For most people, a million years is about the same as a billion years, but they are vastly different. Most people can't begin to comprehend those time scales. So, you look at something as complex as a human being and you wonder, "How could this have possibly evolved?" But when you take into account how many generations it's been happening, it's pretty remarkable.

**So do you see the game as promoting evolution?**

I think people can take away different things. If you look at the game, you're actually in the role of an intelligent designer – or not-so-intelligent, depending on the player. [Laughs] I've seen people on the Internet debating whether *Spore* was promoting intelligent design or evolution. Just getting people to have that discussion is worthwhile, but I personally fall very much on the evolution side of things.

the game balanced, you need to control the rough range of functional behavior in what they're making. Then, as we're populating, we want to be in control of what assets we're bringing into your world. We don't want creatures of tremendously higher powers to come in and kick your butt every time. But, on the other hand, with the creature creator, we wanted to give players a wide aesthetic range. We didn't want to have a situation of "This is the ultimate creature design, so don't bother creating anything else because this is always going to win."

**How do you deal with the almost impossibly high expectations that people have for *Spore*? Do you feel that pressure?**

I think it's too much hype. About a year ago, we were realizing how much hype we were getting and we decided we should start to say that it's going to suck just to de-hype it. That is a certain amount of pressure. When people don't know much about something, they tend to fill in the blanks the way you want them to be filled in. That's true of almost anything. Then, when the actual thing comes out some people will be disappointed that it's not "hardcore enough" or it's not "easy

*I was trying to figure out how you get the benefits of an online game without the liabilities of an online game.*

**How do you handle player progression through so many different stages of the game?**

Each level has a particular goal that you are pursuing and there's a progress bar at the bottom for every level showing how far you have progressed against that goal. Within each level we have mission structures, which are incremental goals on the path towards the major goal. We have it on two levels. On the lowest level, things have motivations and health and things like that, but we also have very specific goals for each state to proceed to the next level.

**Obviously, this game emulates the evolution of life on Earth. The theory of evolution has been under fire in recent years. Do you see this game as a commentary on that debate?**

I actually just bought a book on [intelligent design]. It's interesting to read what the arguments for intelligent design are. They totally leave out any numbers in terms of time, for example, the time between the Cambrian explosion and when other forms of life diverge. If you have a timeline of how long it took, you get a totally different sense of it. There are so many millions of

***Spore* has an interesting approach to the audience, allowing them to help create the world and populate your servers with creatures that can be shared but without allowing actual multiplayer.**

I was working on *The Sims Online* around the same time that I started *Spore*, and I saw a lot of issues in designing an online game. There are a lot of design limitations you have to work with. You have to give up a lot of the cool things you can do in a single-player game. So, I was trying to figure out how you get the benefits of an online game – all these people working collectively to build this huge, shared world – without the liabilities of an online game... That's not to say that we won't do one later. We're definitely kicking around ideas about what a multiplayer version of *Spore* would look like.

**How much of a design challenge is it to deal with all the custom content and the sheer amount of randomness that is introduced into the world?**

Well, you have to make firm distinctions when players are making stuff between how much of that is going to be aesthetic versus functional. To keep

enough" or that we didn't do this or that. We've gotten to that point any additional hype isn't serving us well. It's a concern.

**Do you envision *Spore* being supported with a lot of expansion packs like *The Sims* has been?**

I think it will be similar in extent but hopefully not the same strategy we took with *The Sims*. With *The Sims*, we were basically selling expansion packs to the same customers over and over. I think *Spore* lends itself more to horizontal expansion, where we take components of the game like levels or editors into totally different formats and hit people that maybe never even played the hardcore PC game, but would enjoy a lighter experience using one of the editors. Or, using the content in new ways outside of *Spore* the game. I think we're going to see *Spore* expanding in a much wider variety of ways than *The Sims* did, but to the same extent. Different systems, different game styles, things like that. Once you have this much content there's a lot of things you can do with it, gaming and otherwise.



# GRAND DESIGNS

■ Will Wright's long-awaited Spore is one of the most anticipated games in history

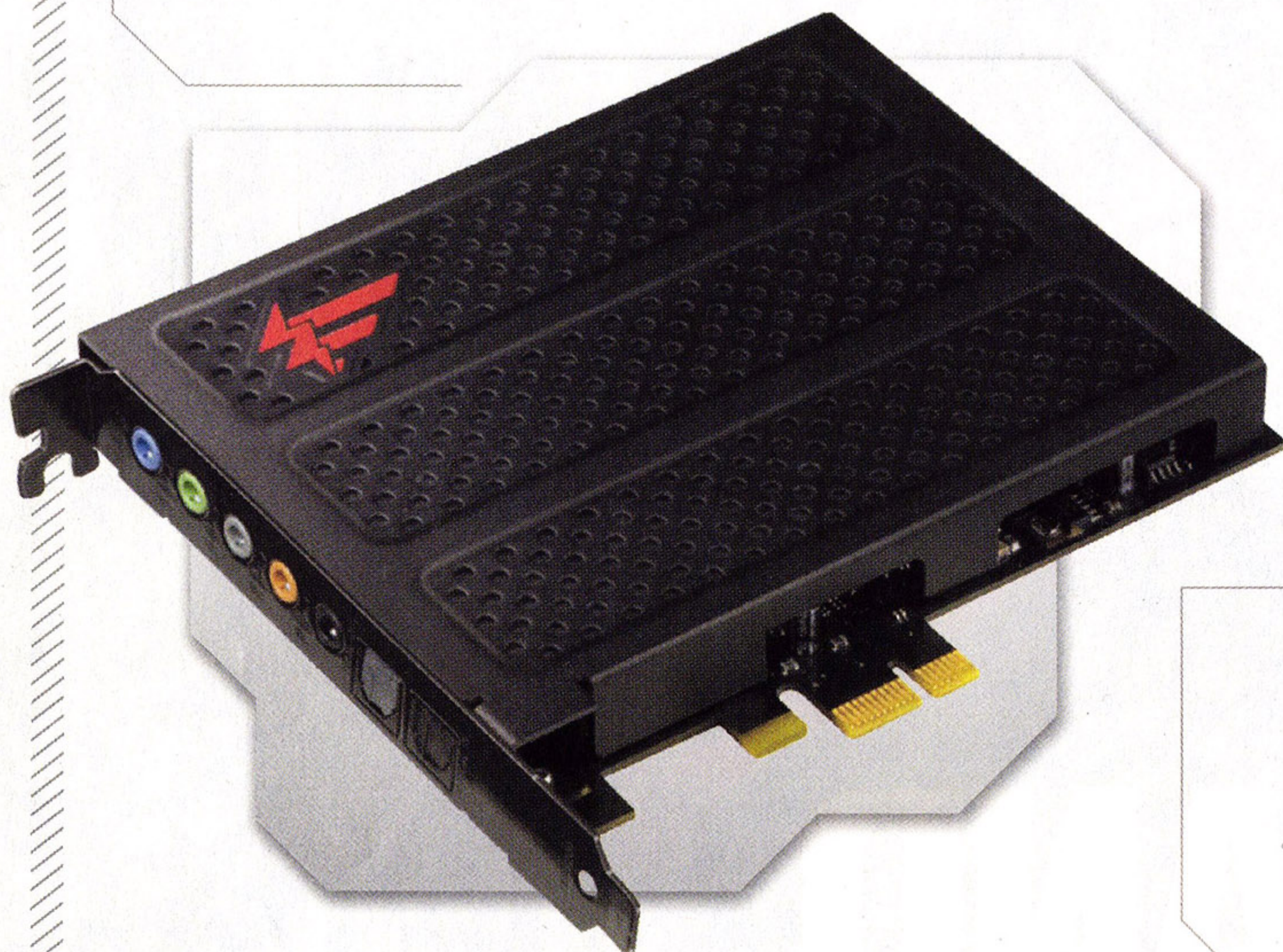
pc

## SOUND BLASTER X-FI TITANIUM FATALITY PROFESSIONAL SERIES SOUND CARD

GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

This sound card might have a mouthful of a name, but it's also got an opera-worthy set of pipes. The new X-Fi Titanium cranks out full, deep audio creating a wonderful illusion of 3D sound even while using headphones. Voice chat and microphone support also benefit from the card's audio processing capabilities. If you need the upgrade, the Titanium produces large sound at a fair price.

**\$149.99** • [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)



tech

## NYKO PS3 MEDIA HUB+

OK ●●●●●●●●●●

Though it won't give you backwards compatibility, Nyko's Media Hub+ will get your core system one step closer to becoming a real PS3. The unit attaches easily and smoothly onto your console, matching the shape and contour of the PS3 while giving you additional USB inputs and a SD card slot.

**\$19.99** • [www.nyko.com](http://www.nyko.com)



etc

## BLIK NINTENDO WALL GRAPHICS

We're not judging, but maybe it's time to swap out those fan posters of Freddie Prinze Jr. Check out these wall graphics from Blik. Each of these Nintendo-themed sets include between 24 and 42 reusable decals that can be arranged to make life-sized wall tableaux of games like Super Mario Bros., Donkey Kong, and New Super Mario Bros.

**\$75.00** • [www.whatisblik.com/nintendo](http://www.whatisblik.com/nintendo)



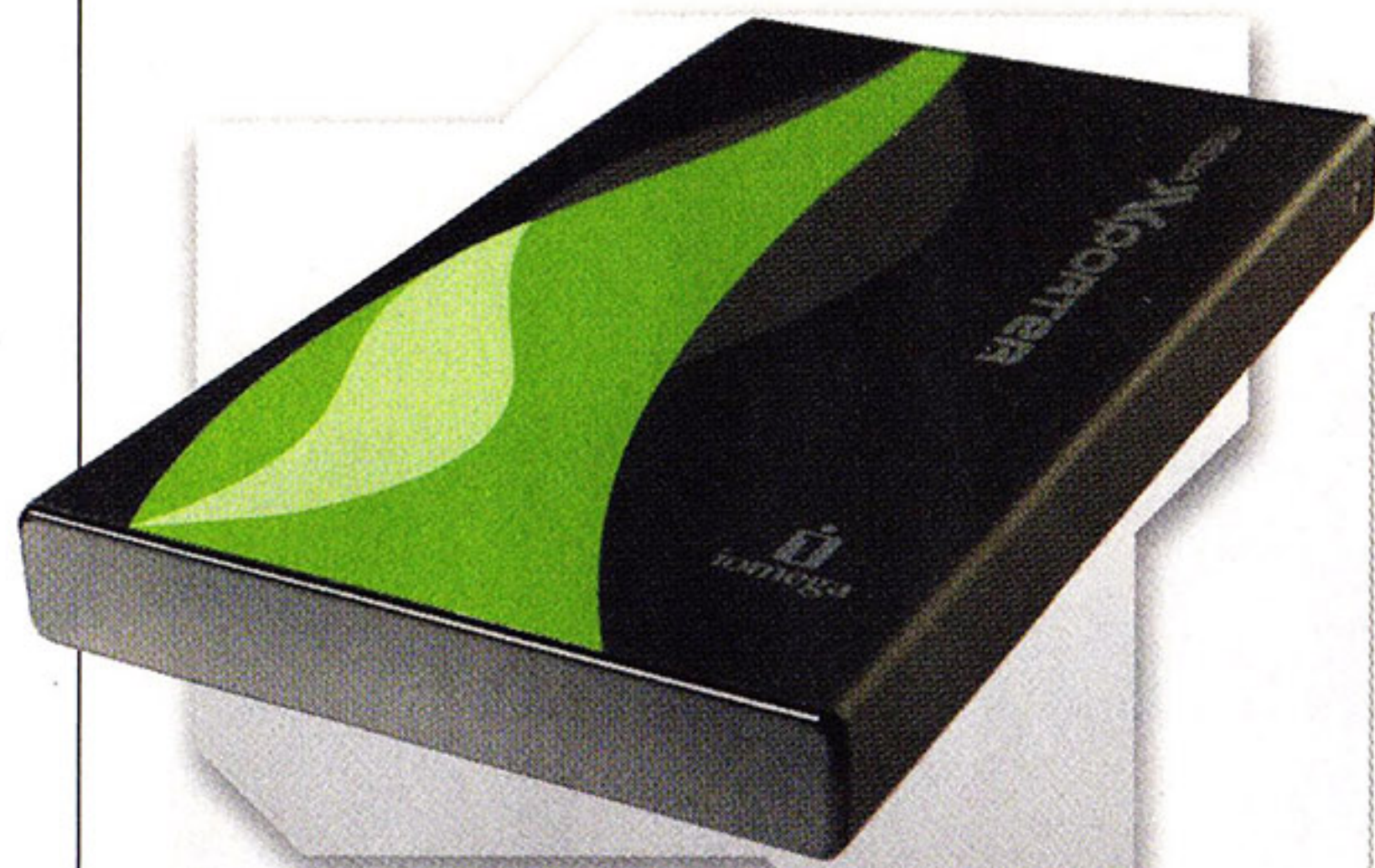
pc

## BENQ G2400WD

AVERAGE ●●●●●●●●●●

For a 24-inch LCD monitor the G24 comes with a great sticker price, but this plain unit lacks many of the bells and whistles found on higher end sets, like USB and component video ports. The 1920 x 1200 resolution, HDMI input, and 5ms response time help videos and games look smooth, but despite all our tweaking, its colors always seemed muted. The minimal features and boring design make this nothing more than an adequate choice for gamers.

**\$399.99** • [www.store.benq.us](http://www.store.benq.us)



**tech**

**IOMEGA MEDIA XPORTER**

AVERAGE ●●●●●○

Small, sleek, and boasting 160GB of storage space, the Media Xporter is a PC storage solution that doubles as a media transfer device for your PS3 and Xbox 360. With the Xporter's simple plug-and-play design and internal video conversion software, it's easy to move entertainment from your PC to your home consoles. Sadly, the price you pay for this comfort is that converted videos don't always look as clean as the originals. Also, the Xporter is pointless if you already have your consoles networked to your PC.

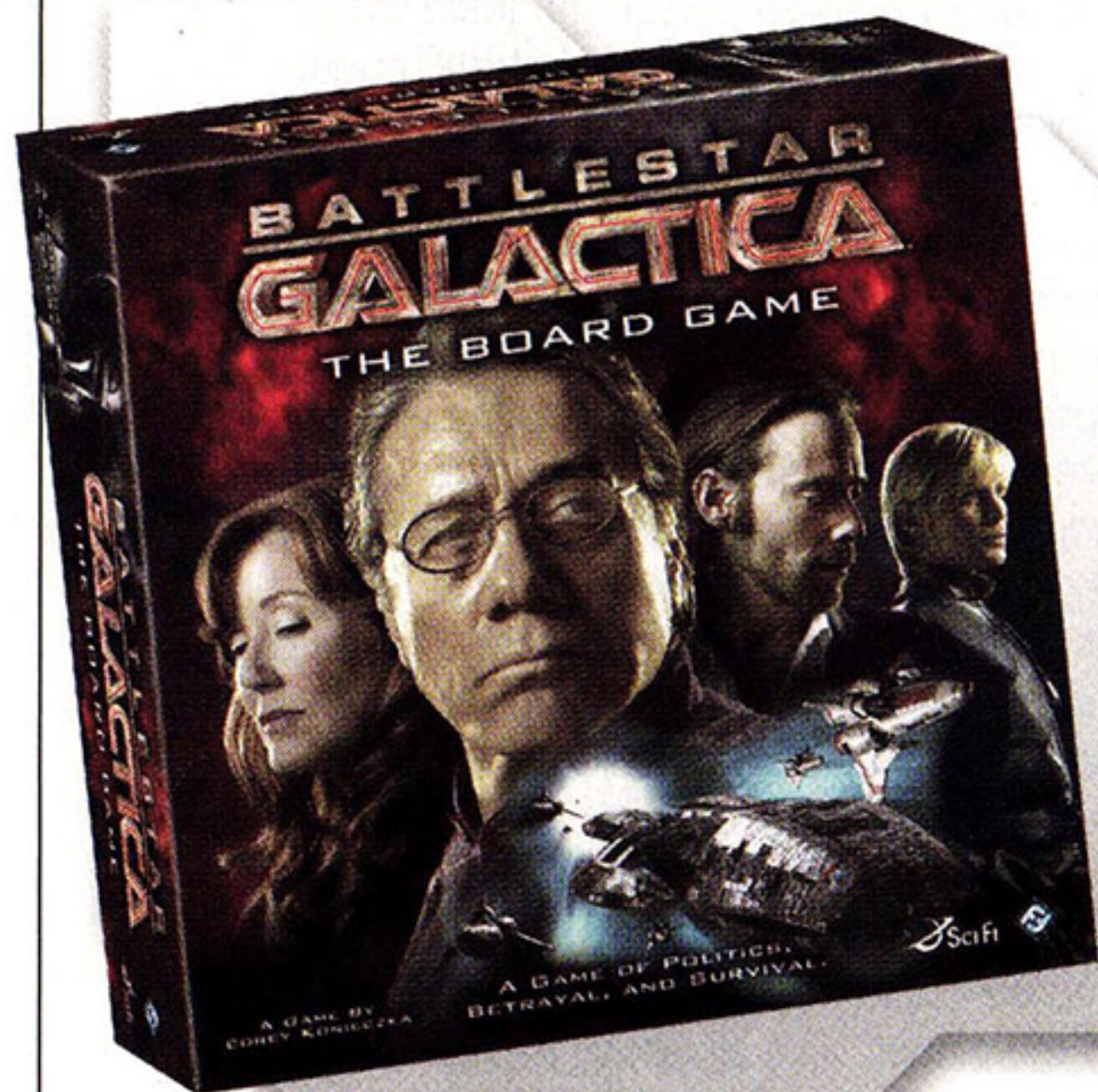
**\$104.45 • [www.store.iomega.com](http://www.store.iomega.com)**

**games**

**BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: THE BOARD GAME**

The Cylons are among us. Fantasy Flight's new board game based on the hit Sci-Fi space drama does an excellent job of capturing the feel of the show. Designed to work with between three and six people, every player has his or her own abilities and weaknesses, and players must work as a team if they want to survive the hazards of fleet life. However, with one or more players secretly working for the Cylons, every game is packed with mistrust, intrigue, and a constant struggle for survival.

**\$39.95 • [www.fantasyflightgames.com](http://www.fantasyflightgames.com)**



**toys**

**THE DARK KNIGHT BATMAN STATUE**

One of the greatest heroes in comic book and silver screen history gets frozen in action for this limited-edition, hand-painted cold cast. This stylish porcelain statue from DC Direct measures approximately 10" high x 8" wide x 8" deep. We think the new costume is all right, but it would be better with nipples.

**\$150.00 • [www.dccomics.com/direct](http://www.dccomics.com/direct)**

**media shelf**



Gamers have a wide variety of interests, and with so many products to choose from it can be hard to know what's worth your time. Check out our recommendations on what's hot this month:

1. Ask a Ninja Presents The Ninja Handbook: This Book Looks Forward to Killing You • Soon  
**\$14.95 • [www.randomhouse.com](http://www.randomhouse.com)**
2. Battlefield: Bad Company Soundtrack  
**\$8.99 • [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)**
3. It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia: Season 3  
**\$39.98 • [www.foxhom.com](http://www.foxhom.com)**
4. Liberty City Invasion (Music From and Inspired By Grand Theft Auto IV)  
**\$39.98 • [www.foxhom.com](http://www.foxhom.com)**
5. The Art and Making of Star Wars: The Force Unleashed  
**\$29.95 • [www.palacepress.com](http://www.palacepress.com)**
6. Y: The Last Man, Vol. 10  
**\$14.99 • [www.dccomics.com](http://www.dccomics.com)**

GARTH DEANGELIS  
 PRODUCER/DESIGNER, "THE WINDS OF ORBIS"  
 FOR MORE INFO: ACTIVEADVENTUREGAME.COM



LEVEL UP:

# EVOLVING THE ACTIVE GAMING WORLD



Our vision is to enable gamers to connect even further with avatars like Cloud by stepping into their shoes and reaping the physical benefits.

International Track & Field. Dance Dance Revolution. Eyetoy: Kinetic. Wii Sports. And now presenting... Wii Fit! What does this broad representation of the exercise gaming industry share? They do a remarkable job of getting gamers off of the couch, but is there an alternative way to reach a wider audience through active gaming? To address this question, there are two disparate themes I'd like to explore about existing exergames: components that these games excel at (fun and fitness) and areas of opportunity (depth of gameplay, freedom, and story). First, the good: Many feel that active games are fun, including myself. Dance Dance Revolution and the Wii titles I mentioned are amongst the most commercially successful games ever released. Even most older exergames upheld appreciative fan bases during their respective times. I still remember desperately trying to outrun the appropriately named Cheetah in hurdles on the Nintendo Power Pad version of World Class Track Meet.

Another bond that these titles share is an overarching fitness or workout theme that encourages non-sedentary activity. Either through direct instruction from a virtual trainer (Yourself! Fitness and Wii Fit) or through an athletic skin (Wii Sports and Athens 2004), active games have been hesitant to break out of this safe, yet admittedly logical, mold. After all, if a game wants you to sweat, it's natural to imitate aspects of the real world that would accomplish this task, such as tennis, sprinting, and aerobics. Even DDR joins the "follow-the-fitness instructor" category in the guise of falling arrows implicitly directing the player.

This leads to a few areas of opportunities. One component that most traditional exergames lack is deep gameplay; meaningful choices and player creativity are kept to a minimum, limiting any sense of agency. How immersed can I truly feel if my choices are step up, down, left, and right? Still, I'm not claiming that all exergames lose their appeal after a few playthroughs. For instance, many gamers

have been addicted to DDR's simple, enjoyable mechanic for years. By deep gameplay, I'm referring to a breadth of options at the player's disposal and discovery of new mechanics as the game evolves. Where are the active games with freedom of open-world navigation and exploration? Games with intricacies that empower imaginative choices and player agency can lead to a longer, more compelling experience. This can inspire the player to persist and improve their virtual hero through traditional leveling up and acquisition of abilities. But the most fascinating possibility is that the player will also be "leveling up" in real life by shedding pounds and toning muscle.

Another opportunity in this industry is the implementation of emotional investment in active games. Most of these games lack any story, other than the fitness element itself. But isn't it possible that there is a sector in the traditional gaming community waiting to be told a new kind of tale while absorbed in an active experience? Wouldn't it be cool to get lost in an immersive world with a narrative that compels you to continue playing as you burn calories without even thinking about exercise? Imagine an active experience built on the foundation of what many gamers originally fell in love with, a classic gaming paradigm that can transcend generations such as The Legend of Zelda or Final Fantasy.

According to the Entertainment Software Association, action, adventure, and RPGs accounted for 40 percent of all software sales in the industry in 2006. It seems feasible that there could be an untapped market that merges these "hero on a quest" action-adventure/RPG gamers with active inputs. Obesity is at an all-time high in the United States, both in adults and children. While there are many reasons for this disturbing fact, it's fair to conclude that the sedentary nature of video games has played some unfortunate role in this trend. There is hope though, as Nintendo has opened the floodgates with the incredibly versatile Wii technology. However, any Twilight Princess or Wii Sports player

will tell you that the infamous "wrist-flick" is the most efficient way to play. Any meaningful upper body exercise is negligible. So can anything be done to address a new way to play traditional adventure video games that nets players actual fitness results?

I'm a part of a seven-person graduate student team at Carnegie Mellon's Entertainment Technology Center (ETC) that is hoping to elucidate this issue. We pitched our project, The Winds of Orbis, as an active-adventure to inspire and motivate video game-loving children to play the kind of game they already value (action/RPG) in a physically productive manner. After meeting with various medical experts, we knew we had to incorporate a method to increase heart rate and cardiovascular activity. The answer was right in front of us with the DDR dance pad. By combining the Nintendo Wii Remote with a re-designed floor input, a user interface was created that could allow gamers to sprint from threatening adversaries, jump over large chasms, and move their entire body dozens of ways in an open-ended fantasy world. Who didn't want to be Cloud Strife in Final Fantasy VII as he saved the planet? Like all classic game heroes, Cloud is cut and lean from traveling countless miles across countryside and engaging in hundreds of physical encounters with foes. Our vision is to enable gamers to connect even further with avatars like Cloud by stepping into their shoes and reaping the physical benefits. By merging both physical and mental stimulation into a "flow" between gaming and exercise, we believe that active-adventures will take that personal connection with a game to the next level.

Dance Dance Revolution, Wii Fit, and Eyetoy: Kinetic, please acquaint yourself with the likes of The Legend of Zelda, Super Mario Bros., and Knights of the Old Republic. There's a beautiful marriage to be had. ■ ■ ■

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

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

# Beauty is the Beast



LURKING IN THE SHADOWS



# VELVET ASSASSIN

World War II Stealth Action



Replay Studios



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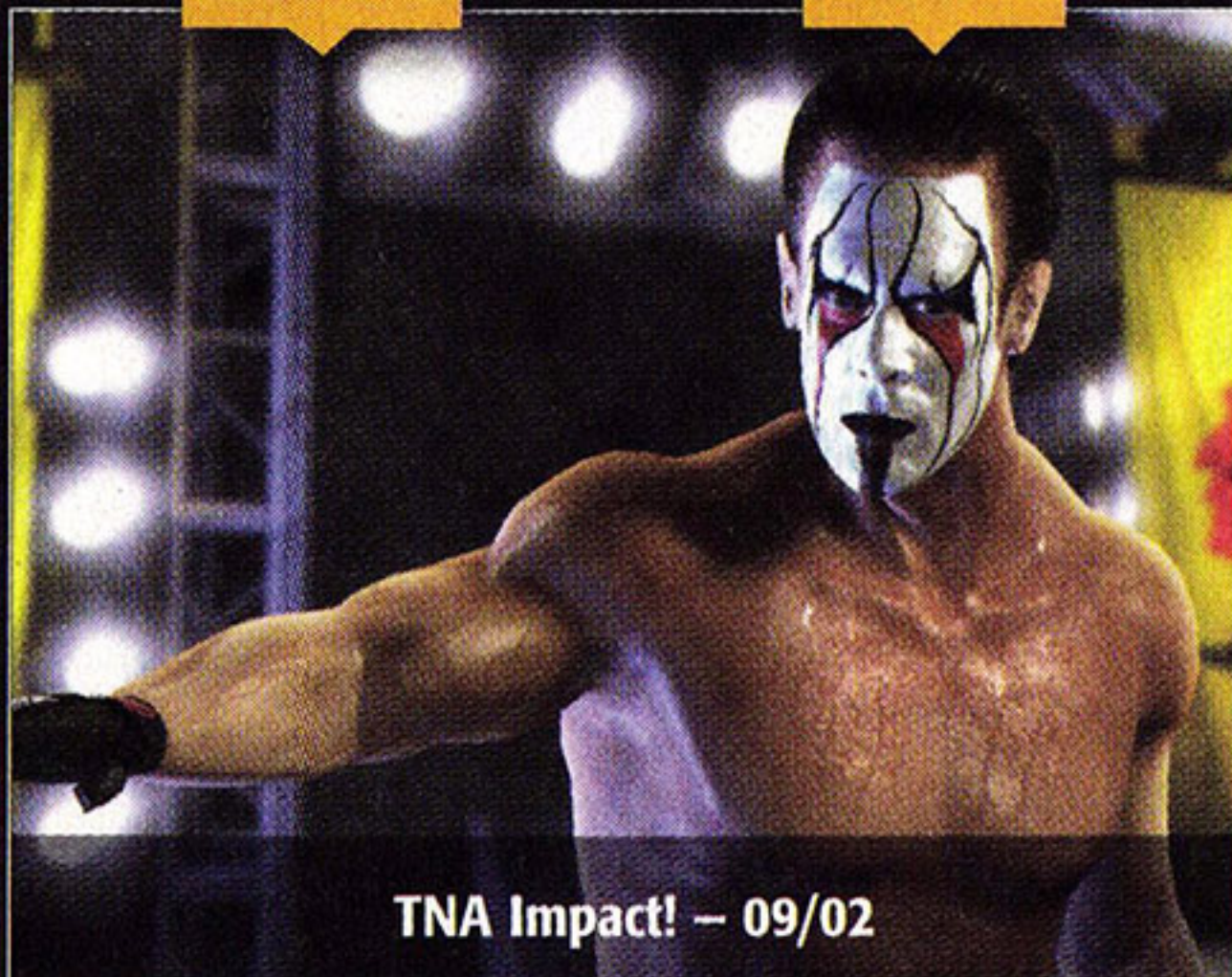
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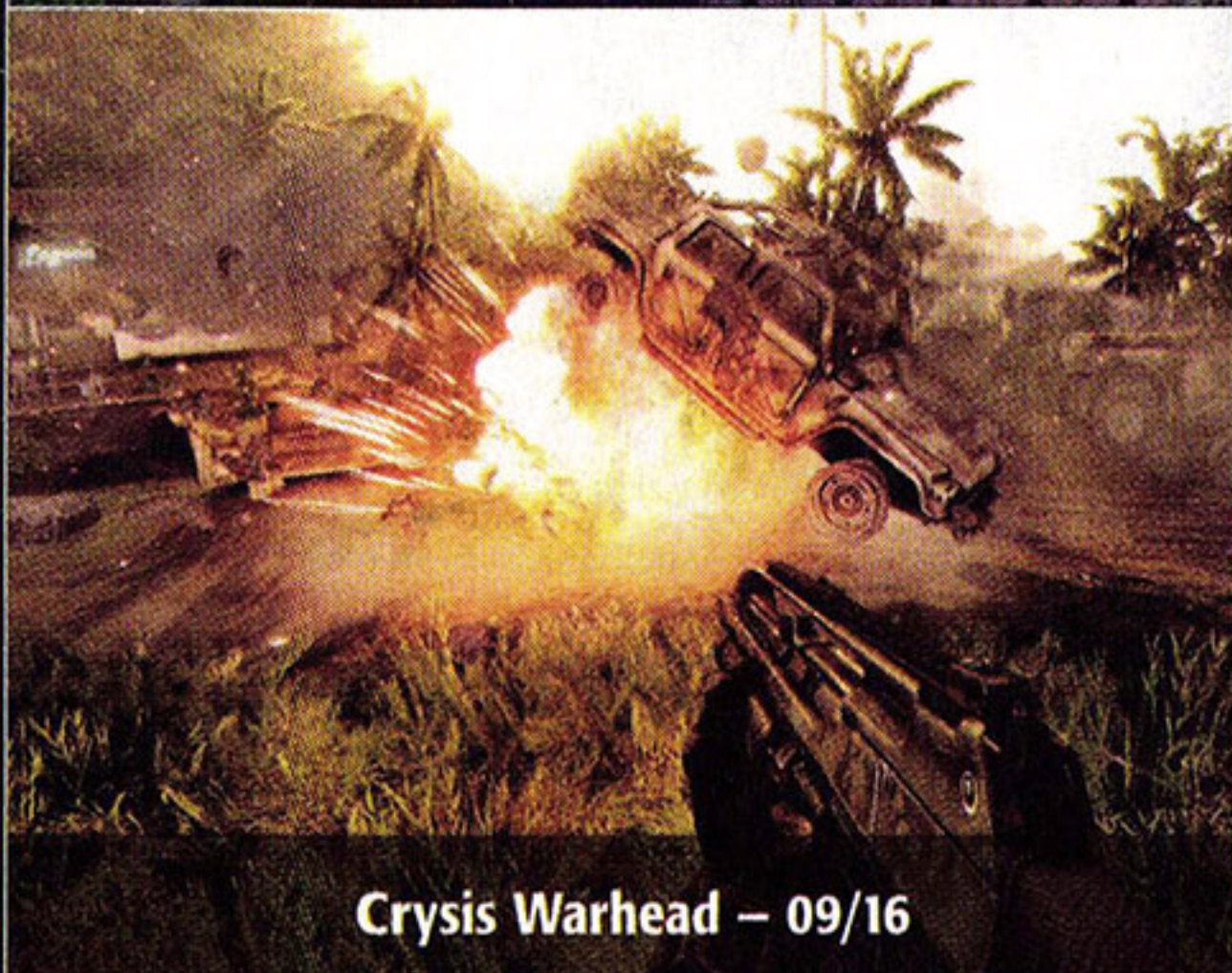
SAT



TNA Impact! – 09/02



Spore – 09/09



Crysis Warhead – 09/16



H.A.W.X. – 09/23

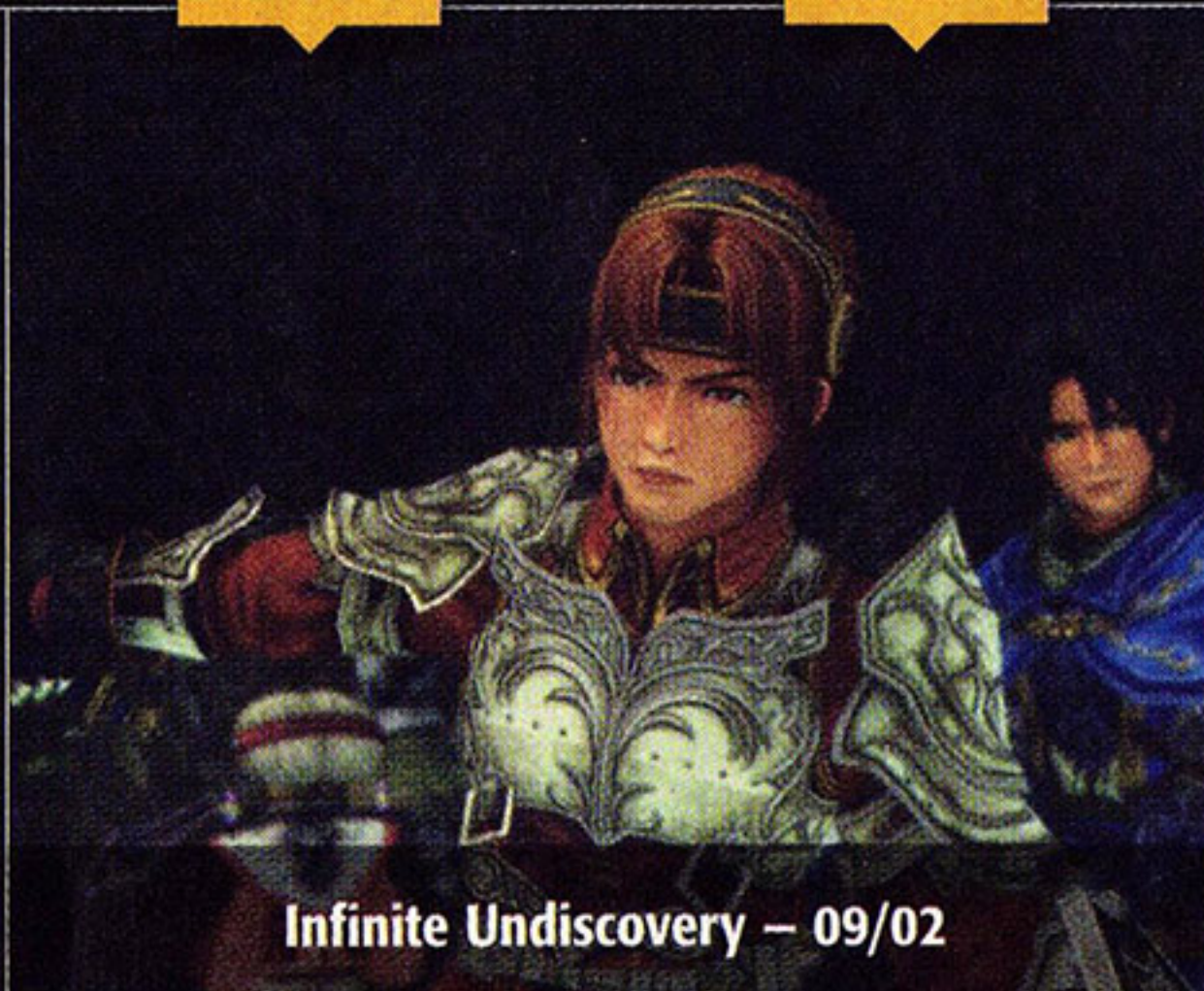


Rock Band 2 – 09/30

02

NEW RELEASES

- Broken Sword – DS
- Facebreaker – PS3, 360
- Infinite Undiscovery – 360
- LEGO Batman – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS, PC
- NFL Head Coach 09 – PS3, 360
- NHL 2K9 – PS3, 360
- Nitrobike – PS2
- *The Office: Season 4* – DVD
- Outcry – PC
- Rapala Fishing Frenzy – 360, Wii
- TNA Impact! – PS3, 360, Wii

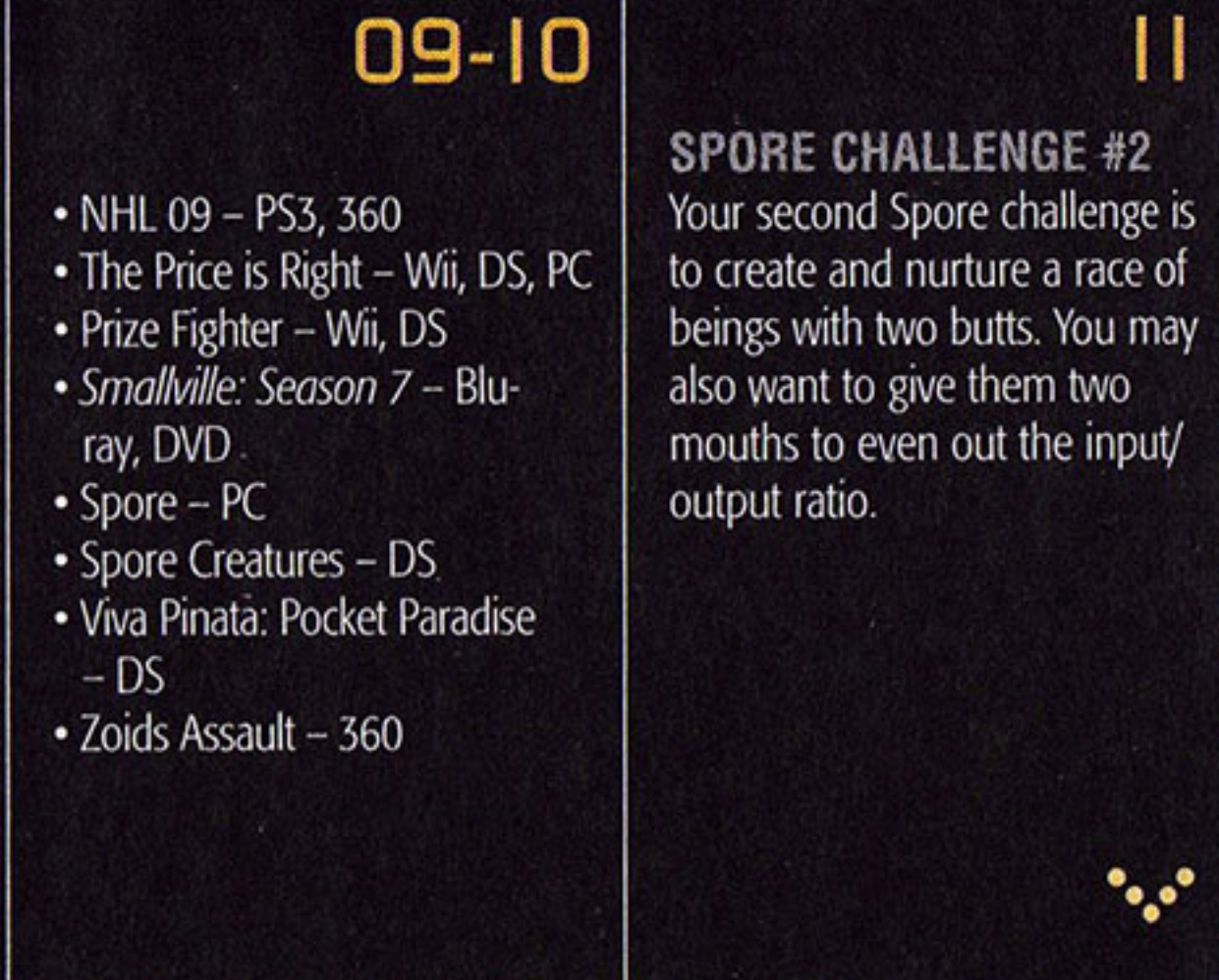


Infinite Undiscovery – 09/02

09-10

NEW RELEASES

- Active Life: Outdoor Challenge – Wii
- Baja: Edge of Control – PS3, 360
- Cabela's Legendary Adventures – PS3, Wii, PS2
- Hell's Kitchen – Wii
- *Kill Bill* – Blu-ray
- Legendary – PS3, 360
- Lock's Quest: Construction Combat – DS
- Midnight Club: Los Angeles – PS3, 360



- NHL 09 – PS3, 360
- *The Price is Right* – Wii, DS, PC
- Prize Fighter – Wii, DS
- *Smallville: Season 7* – Blu-ray, DVD
- Spore – PC
- Spore Creatures – DS
- Viva Pinata: Pocket Paradise – DS
- Zoids Assault – 360

11

SPORE CHALLENGE #2

Your second Spore challenge is to create and nurture a race of beings with two butts. You may also want to give them two mouths to even out the input/output ratio.

12

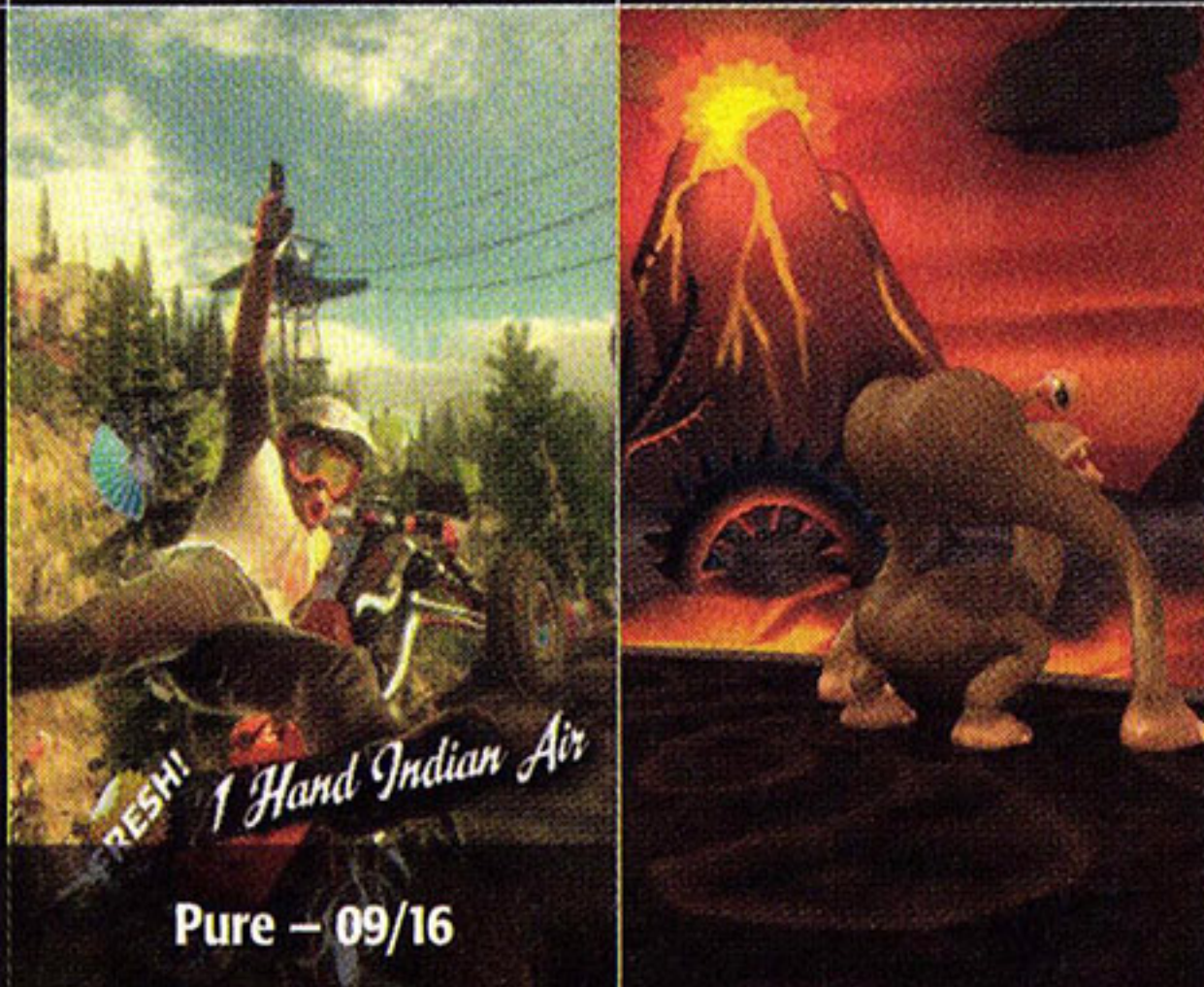
Putting Robert De Niro and Al Pacino together in the same film is like putting together Superman and Jesus. It's an unstoppable pair! *Righteous Kill* opens in theaters today. Here's hoping it's as good as *Heat...* or at least better than *Two for the Money* and *Hide & Seek*.



16

NEW RELEASES

- Crysis Warhead – PC
- Destroy All Humans 3: Path of Furon – PS3, 360
- Dragon Quest IV – DS
- Igor – Wii, DS
- Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust – 360
- Naruto: Path of the Ninja 2 – DS
- Pony Friends: Mini Breeds – DS
- Pure – PS3, 360, PC
- Shaun the Sheep – DS
- Star Wars: The Force Unleashed – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
- We Cheer – Wii



Pure – 09/16

19

If you're a Hollywood producer, here's a free tip: If you're movie script looks like another also-ran hostage situation (like *Taken*), try adding Famke Janssen to your cast. She may not win any Oscars, but at least the theater seats will be filled with male comic book dorks.

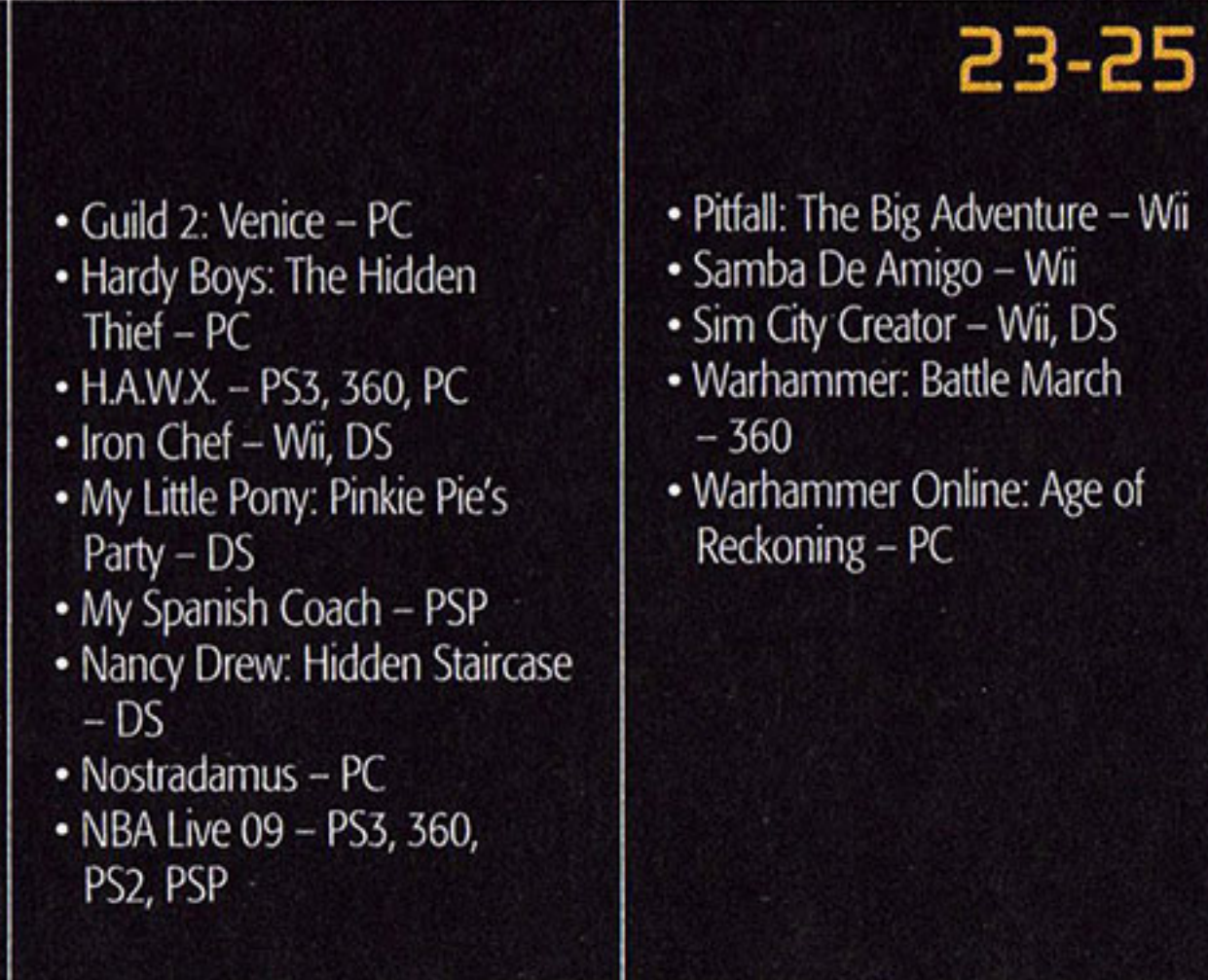


Taken – 09/19

23-25

NEW RELEASES

- Barbie Fashion Show: Eye for Style – DS
- Brain Quest: Grades 3 & 4 – DS
- Brain Quest: Grades 5 & 6 – DS
- Battlelord: King's Bounty – PC
- Buzz: Master Quiz – PSP
- Buzz: Quiz TV – PS3
- Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2009 – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2
- De Blob – Wii
- Dinosaur King – DS
- Drawn to Life: SpongeBob SquarePants – DS



- Guild 2: Venice – PC
- Hardy Boys: The Hidden Thief – PC
- H.A.W.X. – PS3, 360, PC
- Iron Chef – Wii, DS
- My Little Pony: Pinkie Pie's Party – DS
- My Spanish Coach – PSP
- Nancy Drew: Hidden Staircase – DS
- Nostradamus – PC
- NBA Live 09 – PS3, 360, PS2, PSP

- Pitfall: The Big Adventure – Wii
- Samba De Amigo – Wii
- Sim City Creator – Wii, DS
- Warhammer: Battle March – 360
- Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning – PC

26

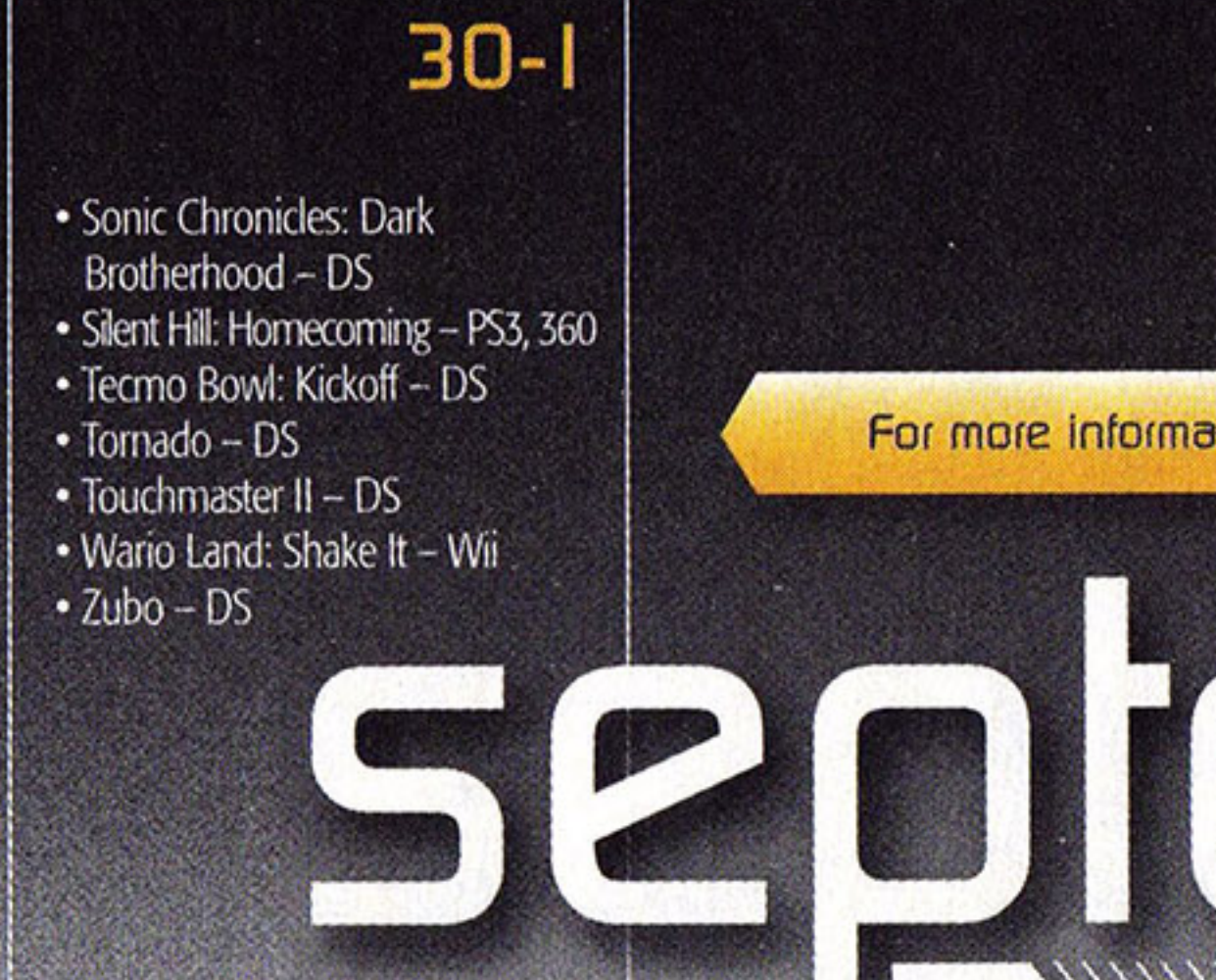
Chuck Palahniuk, author of *Fight Club*, has created some demented protagonists. Sam Rockwell has made a career out of portraying mentally unstable individuals. You put the two together and you get *Choke*, the film adaptation of Palahniuk's acclaimed novel. Since reading anything other than *Game Informer* is stupid, seeing this movie is the best way to get the gist of the story.



30-1

NEW RELEASES

- Belle Sara – DS, PC
- Blitz: The League II – PS3, 360
- Dragonology – Wii, DS, PC
- Far Cry 2 – PS3, 360, PC
- Game Party II – Wii
- Golden Axe: Beast Rider – PS3, 360
- Guilty Gear 2: Overture – 360
- Kirby: Super Star Ultra – DS
- Monster Lab – Wii, PS2, DS
- NBA 2K9 – PS3, 360
- Project: Origin – PS3, 360, PC
- Rock Band 2 – 360



- Sonic Chronicles: Dark Brotherhood – DS
- Silent Hill: Homecoming – PS3, 360
- Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff – DS
- Tornado – DS
- Touchmaster II – DS
- Wario Land: Shake It – Wii
- Zubo – DS

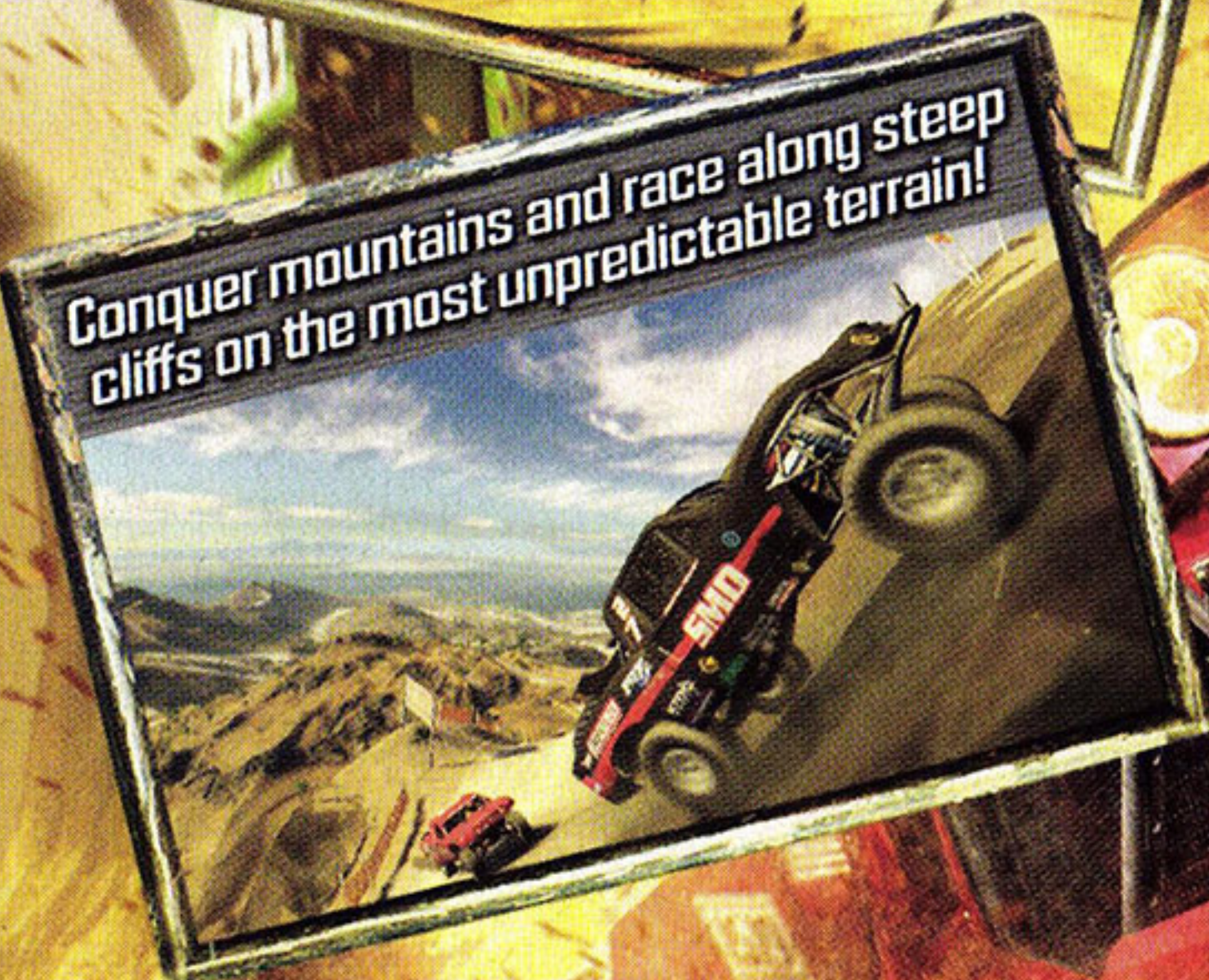
For more information on these games and others go to [www.gameinformer.com](http://www.gameinformer.com)

# september

**DOMINATE THE DESERT™**

# **BAJA**

## **EDGE OF CONTROL™**

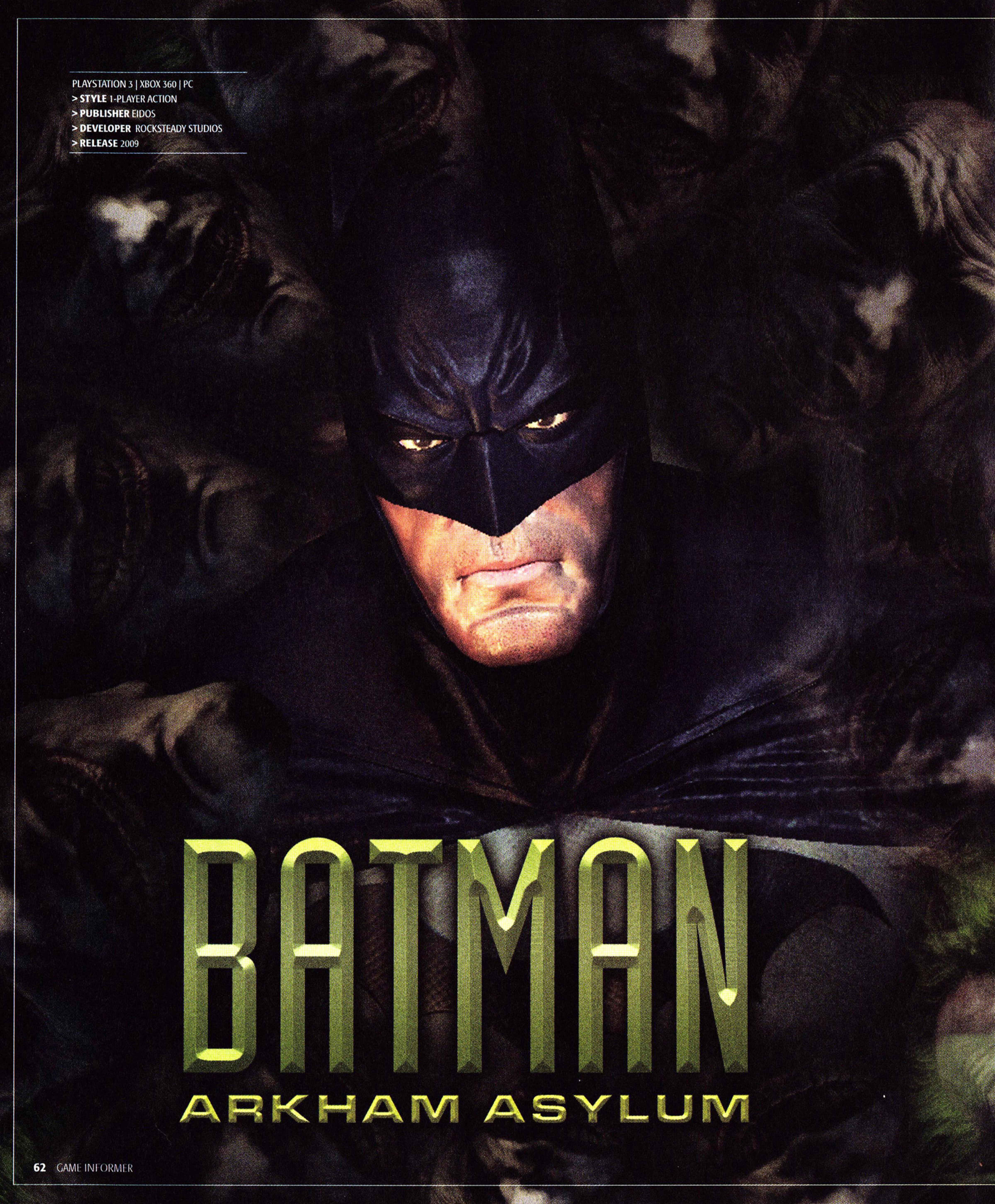


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PLAYSTATION 3

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC  
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION  
> **PUBLISHER** EIDOS  
> **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS  
> **RELEASE** 2009



# BATMAN

## ARKHAM ASYLUM

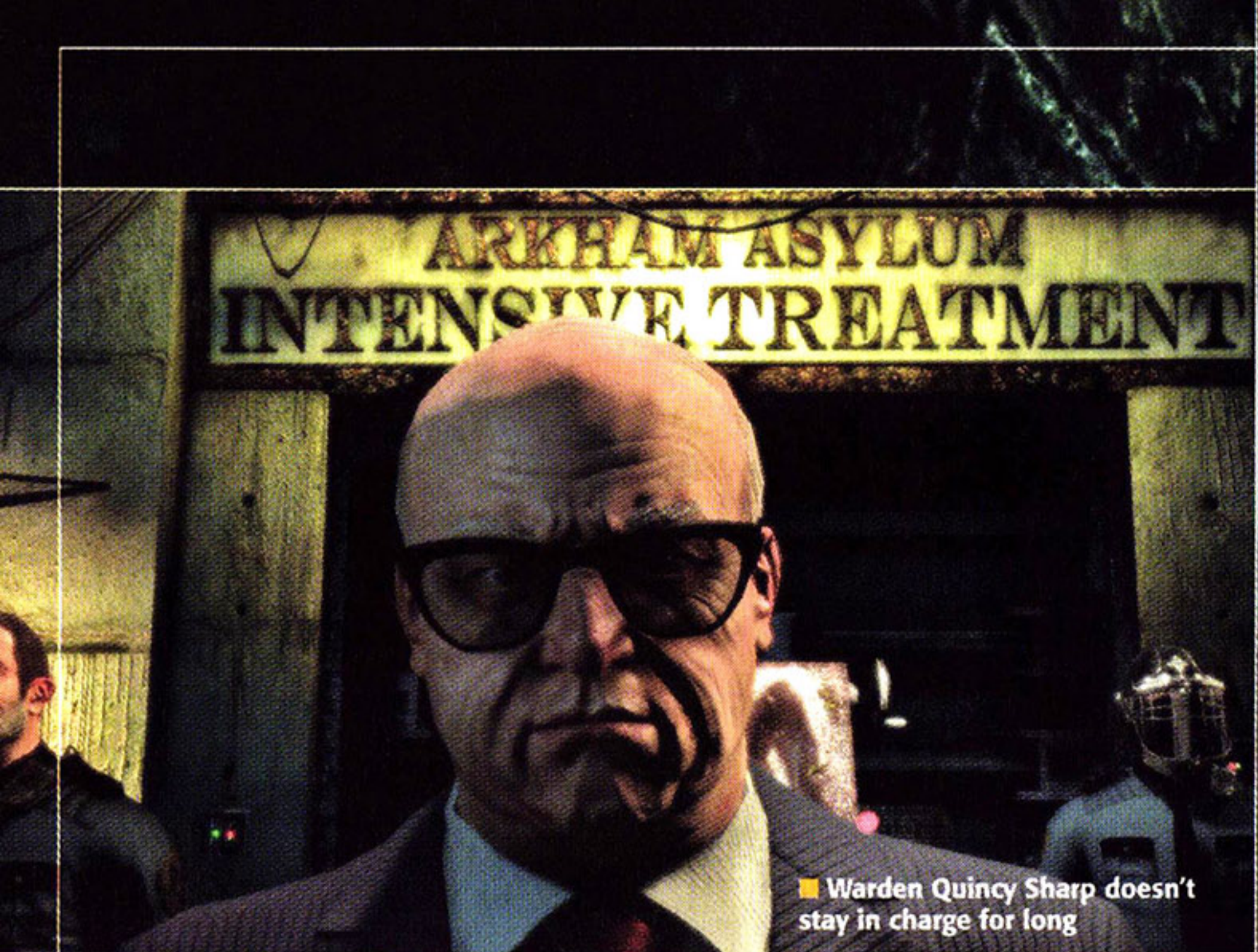


**Compared to nearly 70 years of comic book history, Batman's video game legacy is brief.**

The Dark Knight's gaming debut, simply titled *Batman*, hit European home computers in 1986. Since this isometric adventure, Batman has appeared on almost every console since – brawling, platforming, and driving his way to mediocrity. Average at best and disastrous at worst, these games either discarded everything that made Batman great or ran out of time trying to hit a movie release date.

Now *Batman: Arkham Asylum* comes along. The clever choice of location moves the game away from an open world *Spider-Man* clone and more into the dark and gritty realm of *The Chronicles of Riddick*. Packed with Batman's most dangerous archenemies, *Arkham Asylum* boasts a brand new story reminiscent of the depth and twists of *BioShock* being co-written by Batman veteran Paul Dini (*Batman: The Animated Series*, *Detective Comics*) and developer Rocksteady Studios. Wildstorm, the comic book company founded by famed artist Jim Lee, is crafting the authentic yet distinct new look for all of the key characters. The gameplay places just as much focus on Batman's role as a detective as his combat prowess. Best of all, the game isn't being rushed to accommodate the marketing cycle of a film or TV tie-in. This certainly looks to be Batman's best shot at gaming redemption.

descent into madness



■ Warden Quincy Sharp doesn't stay in charge for long



## ENTER THE ASYLUM

The opening of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* aims to set a serious tone for the game and is already surprisingly polished for still being a year out. The story begins on a dark and stormy night with the Batmobile tearing through deserted city streets. Batman's ride roars like a jet engine, kicking up a storm of fallen leaves and discarded newspapers as it passes a sign for Arkham Asylum that reads: "Warning: hitchhikers may be escaping patients."

The camera pans up Batman as the strobe of streetlights flash on his cowl, showing an expression of calm determination in contrast to the maniacal driving style. A couple of Arkham guards hear the familiar engine rumbling off in the distance and scramble to open the gate. The Batmobile flashes through the recently made opening. An older man in a suit and a cadre of guards stand out front amid the flood of spotlights, awaiting a special delivery. The Batmobile screeches to a halt and a familiar pointed silhouette emerges out of the top. Batman drags a handcuffed Joker along the ground.

"Hey, Sharpy. What's the deal?" the Joker mocks as he's being loaded into an upright gurney straight out of *Silence of the Lambs*. "The old mansion was much more civilized."

"It's Warden Sharp," says the head of Arkham. "Get him out of here."

"Hey, not so tight. You'll crease the suit," Joker complains as he's being strapped in.

"There aren't enough guards. I'm going with him," Batman demands. No one seems to mind. Here the player takes control of Batman and follows Joker deep into Arkham's intensive treatment ward as he taunts security and medical staff. The group comes upon a large freight elevator.

"Hold it! We've got another psycho coming through," shouts a guard. "Keep your weapons trained on it at all times."

A monstrous green form is crammed inside the elevator as it arrives from below. Killer Croc steps out and stretches to his full height of 10 feet.

"I've got your scent, Batman. I'm going to find you," threatens Croc as he lumbers off.

"That reminds me. I really need some new shoes," adds Joker.

The security entourage shuffles into the newly vacant elevator and it quickly descends. All of a sudden, the lights cut out. Joker starts



■ Batman: Arkham Asylum runs on Unreal Engine 3

laughing maniacally.

"What's he doing?!" a guard yells. "Get a light on him!" After a tense moment of panic in complete darkness, the lights flicker on. Batman is calmly clutching Joker by the throat with one hand. The guards breathe a sigh of relief.

"What? Don't you trust me?" Joker taunts as he's wheeled off the elevator. The group meets up with Commissioner Gordon and more Arkham staff. Batman moves to follow them into the cellblock, but an asylum doctor cuts him off.

"Authorized personnel only," he says.

Gordon tries to convince him. "I assure you. If anyone is qualified..."

"I appreciate the assistance, but he'll unsettle the more violent inmates," the doctor replies.

"I think he's talking about you," Joker mocks. Batman relents and joins Gordon in a glass encased observation room that overlooks the check-in room.

"You okay?" Gordon asks.

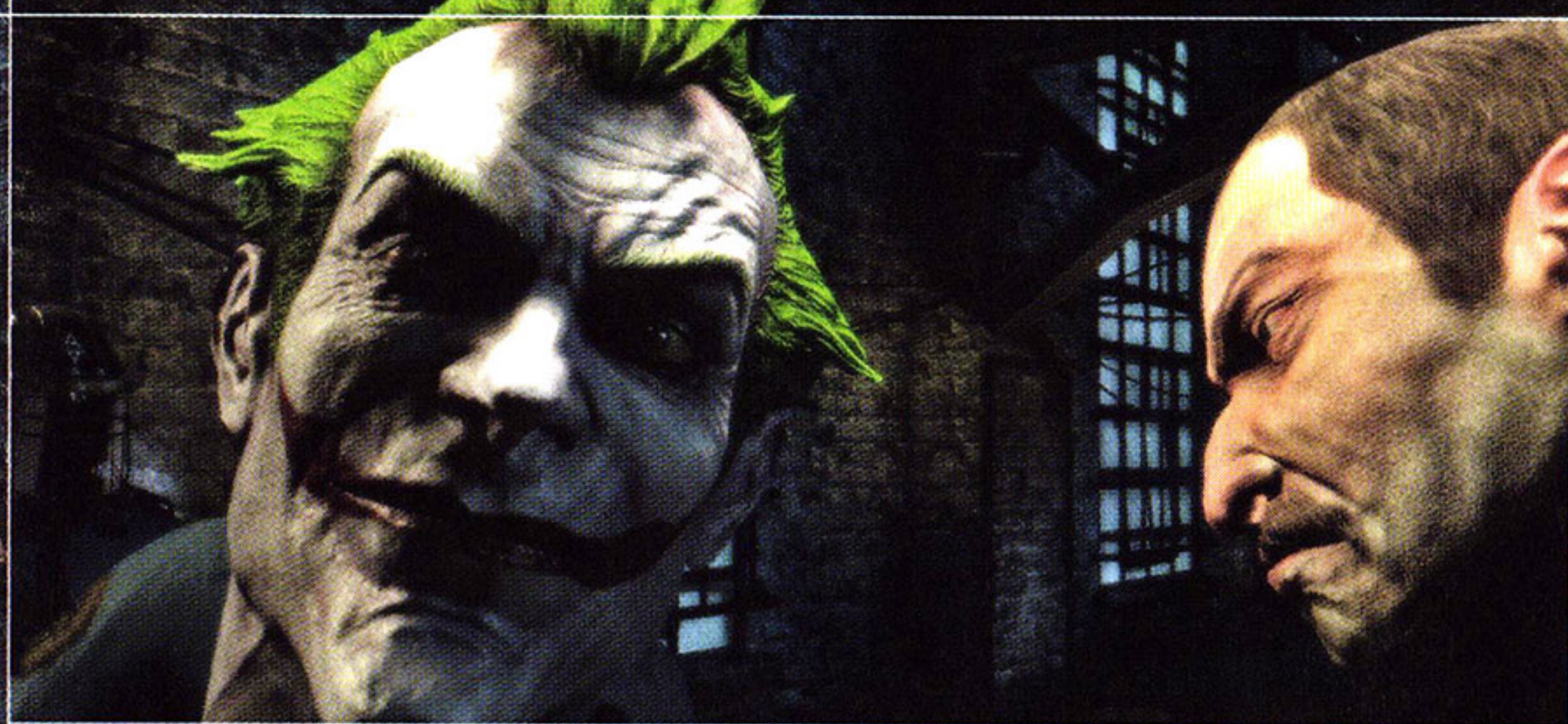
"He surrendered almost without a fight. I don't like it," Batman replies.

"At least he's back where he belongs."

No sooner does Gordon finish speaking than Joker shouts "Hey, Batman. Stop me if you've heard this one."

Joker somehow slips out of his bonds and quickly dispatches his captors, cackling as he runs deeper into the facility. Batman instantly springs into action, punching the observation window, causing a spider web of cracks to extend through the glass. It shatters on the second punch and he uses his cape to glide safely to the floor below. Batman tries to head down the hallway that Joker escaped through, but an electric barrier springs up and Joker's gang comes out of the woodwork. Batman quickly dispatches them as the alarm sirens kick in.

"Welcome to the madhouse, Batman," Joker says over the asylum video screens. The electric field is deactivated and Batman has no choice but to walk right into what is surely a trap. Why would Joker purposely break into Arkham? The answer lies in one of the asylum's darkest secrets.



■ Most of the game is seen through an over-the-shoulder third-person camera



### VILLAINS AND ALLIES

"There are a lot of supervillains in this game," says director Sefton Hill. "This is the first Batman game where you're going to get to see and fight against all of the big supervillains, and they're going to be represented in a way you've never seen before."

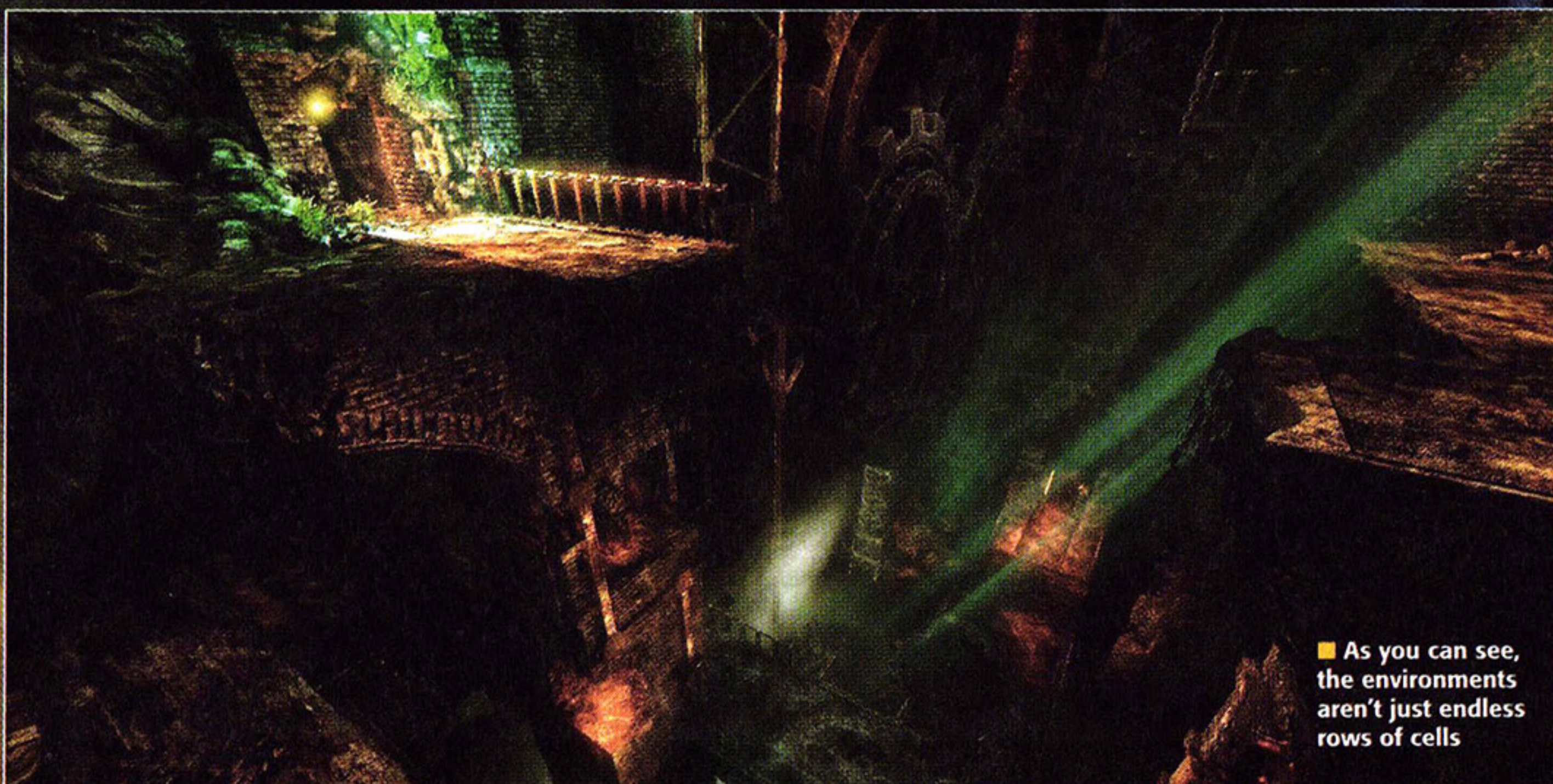
During gameplay we've seen Joker, Harley Quinn, Killer Croc, and Zsasz. When you throw in concept art, in-game clues, and hints around the Rocksteady offices, it widens to the Penguin, Riddler, Scarecrow, Poison Ivy, Mr. Freeze, and a few others that we won't spoil.

As far as allies go, we haven't heard any Robin or Nightwing talk, but Commissioner Gordon is said to play a large role. His daughter, Barbara (a.k.a. Oracle), will be your remote radio contact.

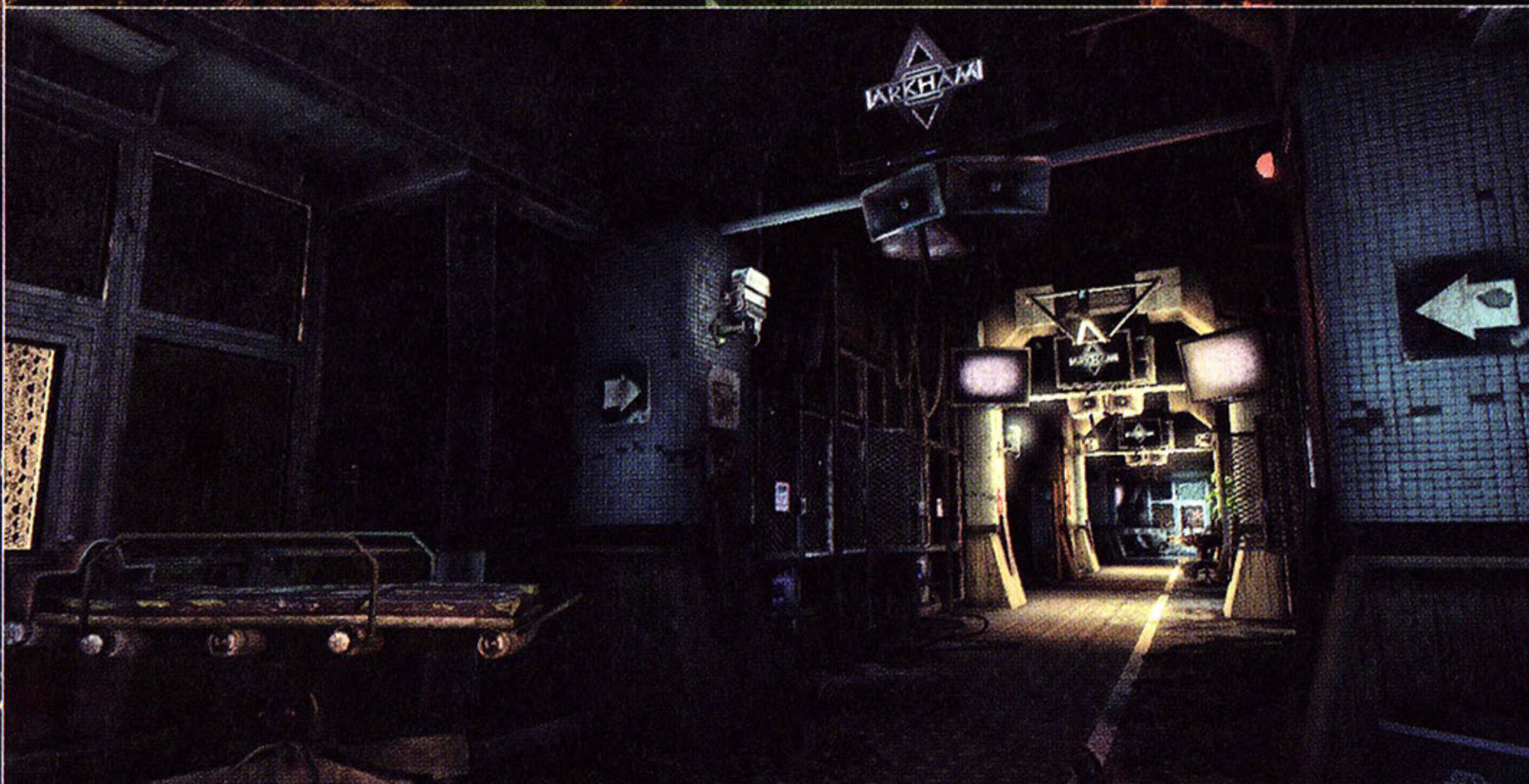


## VOICE CAST

Since Paul Dini is on board it would be easy to assume that key members of the *Batman: The Animated Series* cast like Kevin Conroy and Mark Hamill would be a shoe-in for the roles of Batman and Joker, respectively. But all casting is still tightly under wraps. Hill offers the following tease, however: "This should be the ultimate Batman experience, so the voice actors should be in line with that."



■ As you can see, the environments aren't just endless rows of cells



■ Whose cell could this be? The French writing translates to "I have loved. I have suffered. Right now, I hate."

## A NEW APPROACH

In late 2006, a modest announcement circulated declaring Eidos' acquisition of the Batman core license, along with children's properties like Looney Tunes and the Hanna-Barbera catalogue. The core license strictly covers the nearly 70 years of Batman comics. No movies. No animated shows. And certainly no campy Adam West antics.

"We want to make a Batman game that everyone wants to play. We want to make a triple-A Batman," says Eidos producer Matt O'Driscoll. "The license is great. It allows us to do our own story, our own vision of [the characters]. Obviously, these all have to go through an approval process with Warner, but they're not like 'It's a movie license. It's got to be exactly like this.'"

Eidos took the game straight to its partially owned development house, Rocksteady Studios. "When we approached Batman, we obviously looked at the other Batman games and we looked at other superhero games," says Rocksteady co-founder and director Sefton Hill. "You know there are games where you play as Superman and he gets tired. It's like, 'I'm Superman. That's not wish fulfillment. I want to do what Superman does.'"

So the team drew up a list of the core elements of what they've always wanted from a Batman video game: martial arts expertise, detective smarts, the ability to move through the shadows like no one else, and the freedom to go wherever his grapple gun allows. Once the team decided what Batman should do, the next question was where he should do it.

"Arkham seemed like a perfect location because we wanted a place that we could realize in its entirety and could have as many supervillains as we wanted," says Hill. "Arkham is just perfect because it's a limited location, but the limits are totally natural. Like the water surrounding the island, you don't expect or have any desire to go swimming in that water and try and get across. Everywhere you see you can go. There are no artificial boundaries in the game."

Just because the game takes place on an island prison doesn't mean you'll be wandering through a small set of linear corridors. Arkham's sprawling layout takes into account the destruction and rebuilding of the facility pulled straight from the comics, including underground passages and Batman's secret on-site Batcave. Despite the linear nature of the game's intro, most of *Batman: Arkham Asylum's* progression is completely open.

"[Arkham] is a single persistent location, so you can go to any of these places at any time," says Hill. "[There's also] some of the feeling you get when you play *Metroïd* or *Zelda* where you run past and think, 'I'm going to get in there at some point, but I can't yet.'"

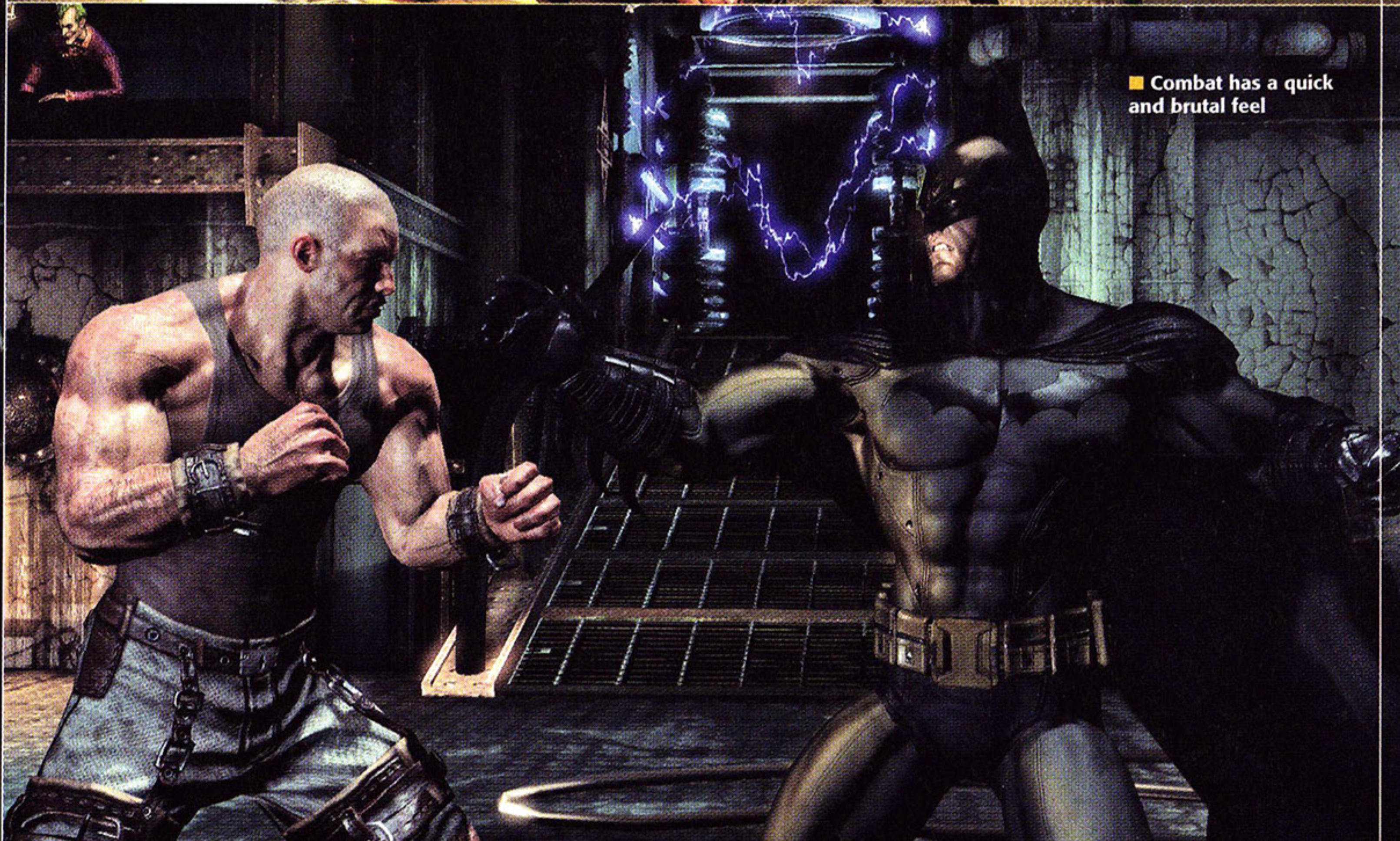
## CAPED CRUSADER COMBAT

To see the core gameplay elements of Batman: Arkham Asylum, we were taken to a section deeper into the game set in the administration department of the mansion. Without giving too much of the story away, certain secret experiments had been taking place in the asylum. A serum originally intended to help patients instead had other side effects (comic fans may be able to deduce what this drug is). Deemed too dangerous, the experiments were cut off. Now Joker wants to make the drug himself and has sent his goons to recover the research notes. Batman has to get there first.

Perched on a high ledge in a wide-open room, Batman surveys the scene. Several members of Joker's gang are rummaging through desk drawers and filing cabinets tossing papers in the air. He switches on investigation mode, a blue-tinted visor that, among other things, allows Batman to see enemies through walls and identify threats like guns and knives. One thug is carrying a machine gun, making him a primary target. Batman leaps off the ledge and spreads his cape. A flying glide kick to the face dispatches him quickly and Batman turns to face the rest of the enemies.

He swipes his cape in a wide arc to stun several enemies and then goes to work on them with a series of stylish punches, kicks, a knee to the face here, a behind-the-back elbow there. With a gymnastic flourish, he performs a flying spin throw that sends one enemy crashing face first into a wall. After breaking one goon's arm, Batman performs a dynamic flying punch on another in satisfying slow motion (indicating that the final foe has fallen). All of these moves are accomplished using a combination of three buttons: attack, stun, and takedown.

"Because combat is only one element of the game — you're not doing it all the time — we didn't want lots of complex moves that you're going to forget the next time you go in," says Hill. "We've made simple moves, but lots of ways those moves can be used and fit together."



■ Combat has a quick and brutal feel



### BOSS BATTLES

"It won't necessarily be a series of straight pugilistic fights. Each of the different bosses represents a different part of what makes Batman who he is. They can't match his wide skill set, but you have Killer Croc who, pound for pound, is stronger. So Batman's going to beat him by being more cunning and using his gadgets. You can't just go head to head and punch away. Each of those fights focuses on a different part of the gameplay. There may be some that are focused on combat, some that are focused more on gadgets, some that are more of a giant, Zelda-style boss."

—Sefton Hill, director

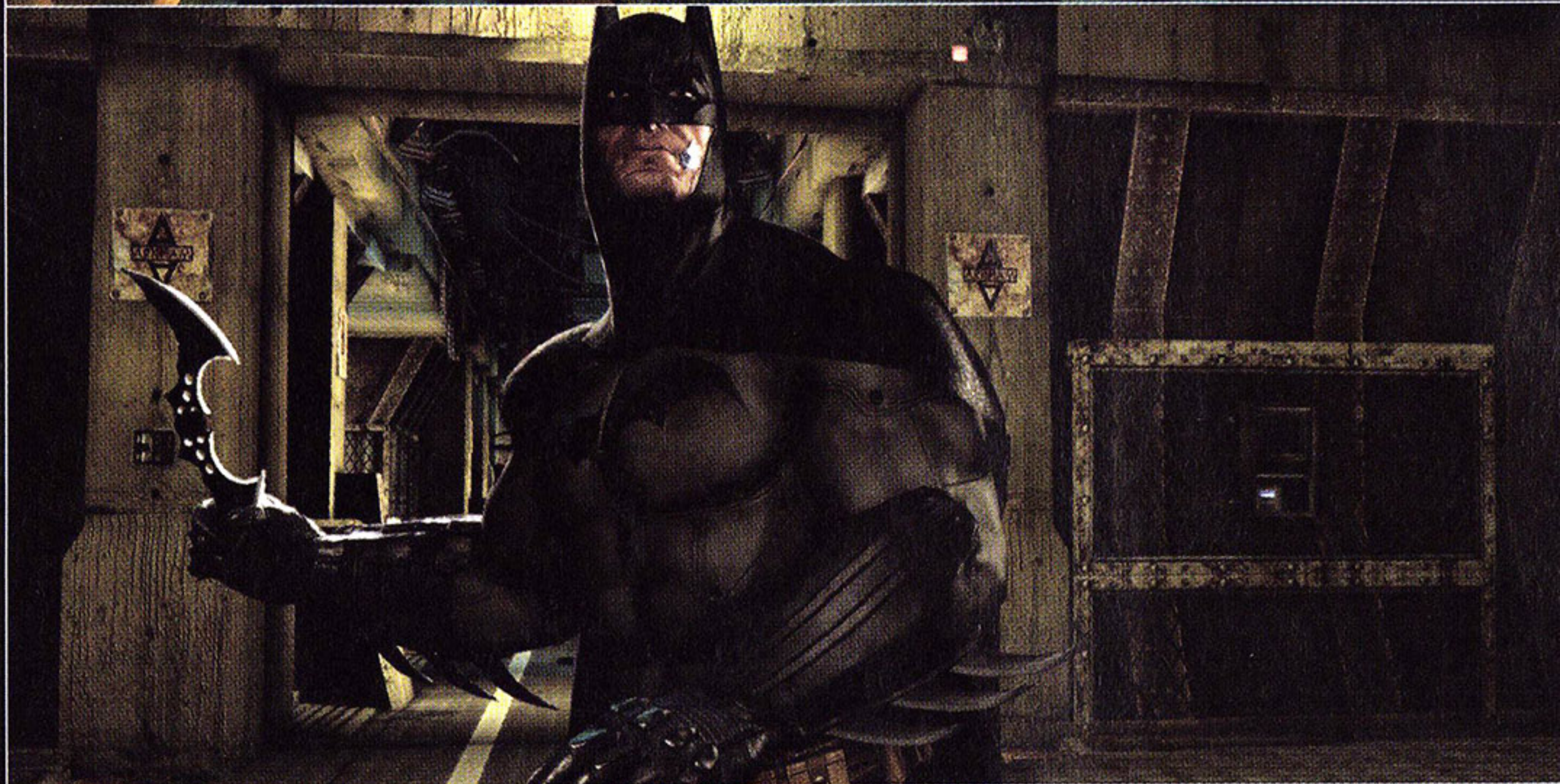
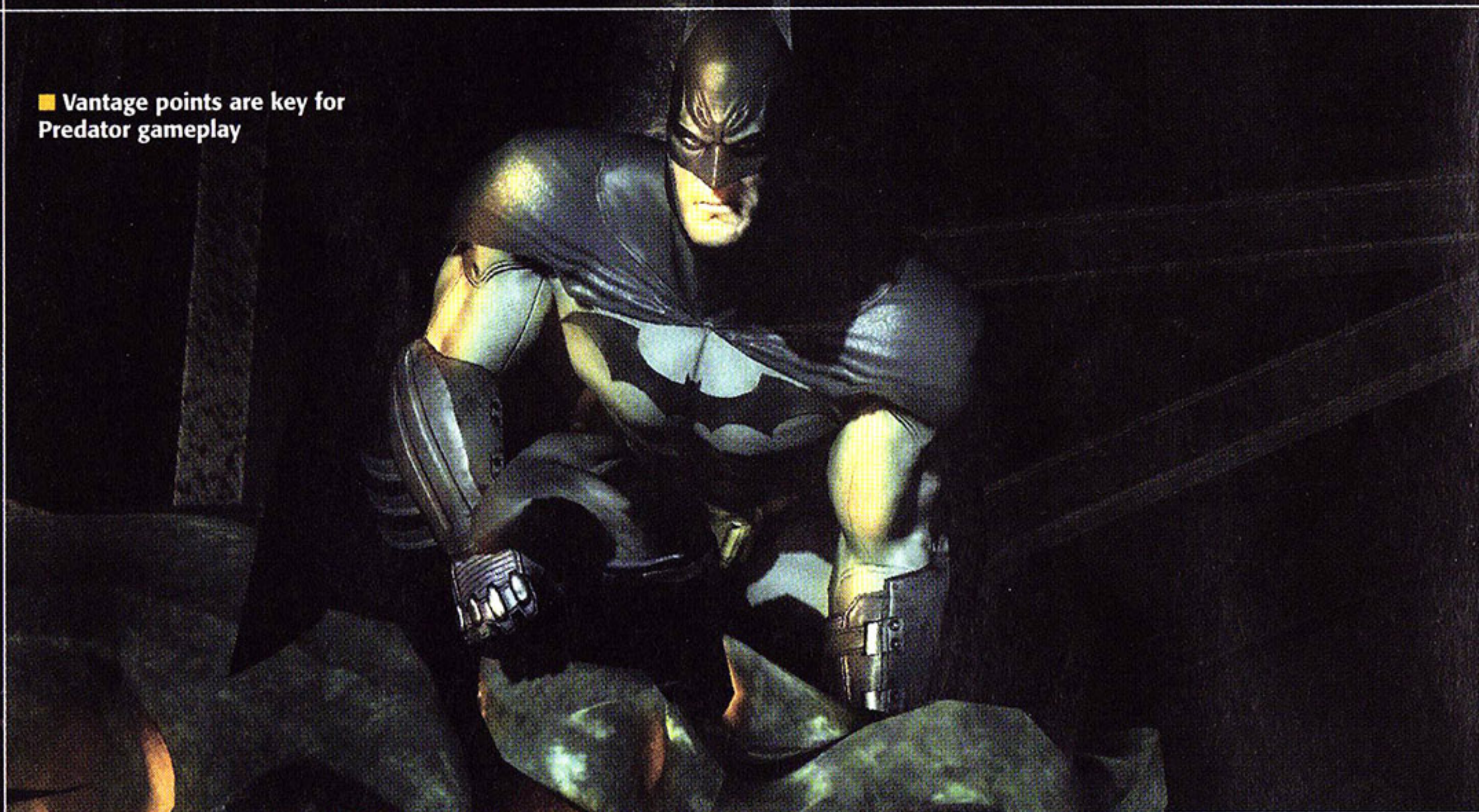
During battle, a combo multiplier at the top of the screen increases with every strike. Once the combo expires, a colony of bats swirls around Batman and then contributes to an experience bar on the left side of the screen. In a kind of RPG-lite skill tree system, players can distribute points where they prefer. Think new combat moves, faster takedowns, or gadget upgrades like the ability to throw multiple Batarangs at the same time. Just because Batman gains new abilities, however, doesn't mean he'll start out as a total wuss.

"One of the things we're really focused on is the Batman you get out of the box feels like Batman," says Hill. "So it isn't a case of you run into two guys and you can't beat them up. Batman can beat up two normal thugs...or ten. But he's going to see things a lot worse than ten henchmen, so he's going to need to develop gadgets to adapt."

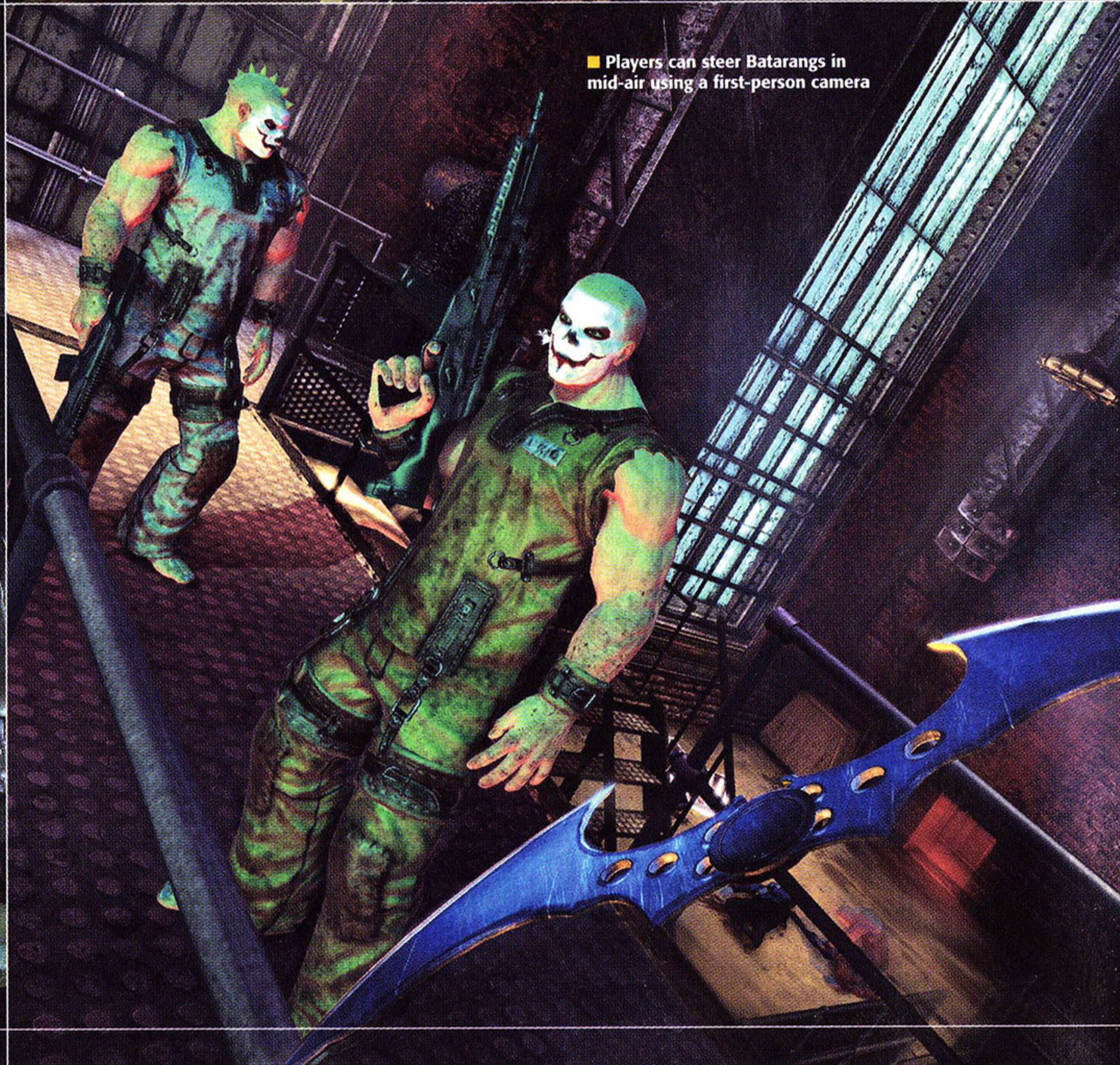
The Batclaw, an upgrade for the grapple gun, is just as handy at yanking the grates off of high air ducts as it is dragging enemies into punching range. All gadgets have both a combat and navigational purpose. For example, explosive gel can open up secret passages like the bombs in Legend of Zelda, or it can be remotely detonated like C4 in Metal Gear.

It'll definitely be worth it to search for hidden areas like these since they usually contain one of 100-plus experience-granting items. Thanks to a new hint system, it won't be a huge headache to track them all down. Every major location of Arkham has a unique map screen with a 25-square grid overlaid on top. Inside every square there's a collectible (i.e. Joker spraycans, Two-Face coins), and if you highlight one of them a message will appear with a tip on how to find it. When an item is retrieved, the tile flips over revealing a piece of a larger picture of an advanced gadget. Once the full image is revealed, you can pick up the new equipment from a "Bat Outlet" such as the Batmobile parked out front or the hidden satellite Batcave inside the asylum. Don't worry. Batman won't be kicking open treasure chests any time soon. One example we saw of these special gadgets was a sonic Batarang that can be used to draw enemies away from your position.

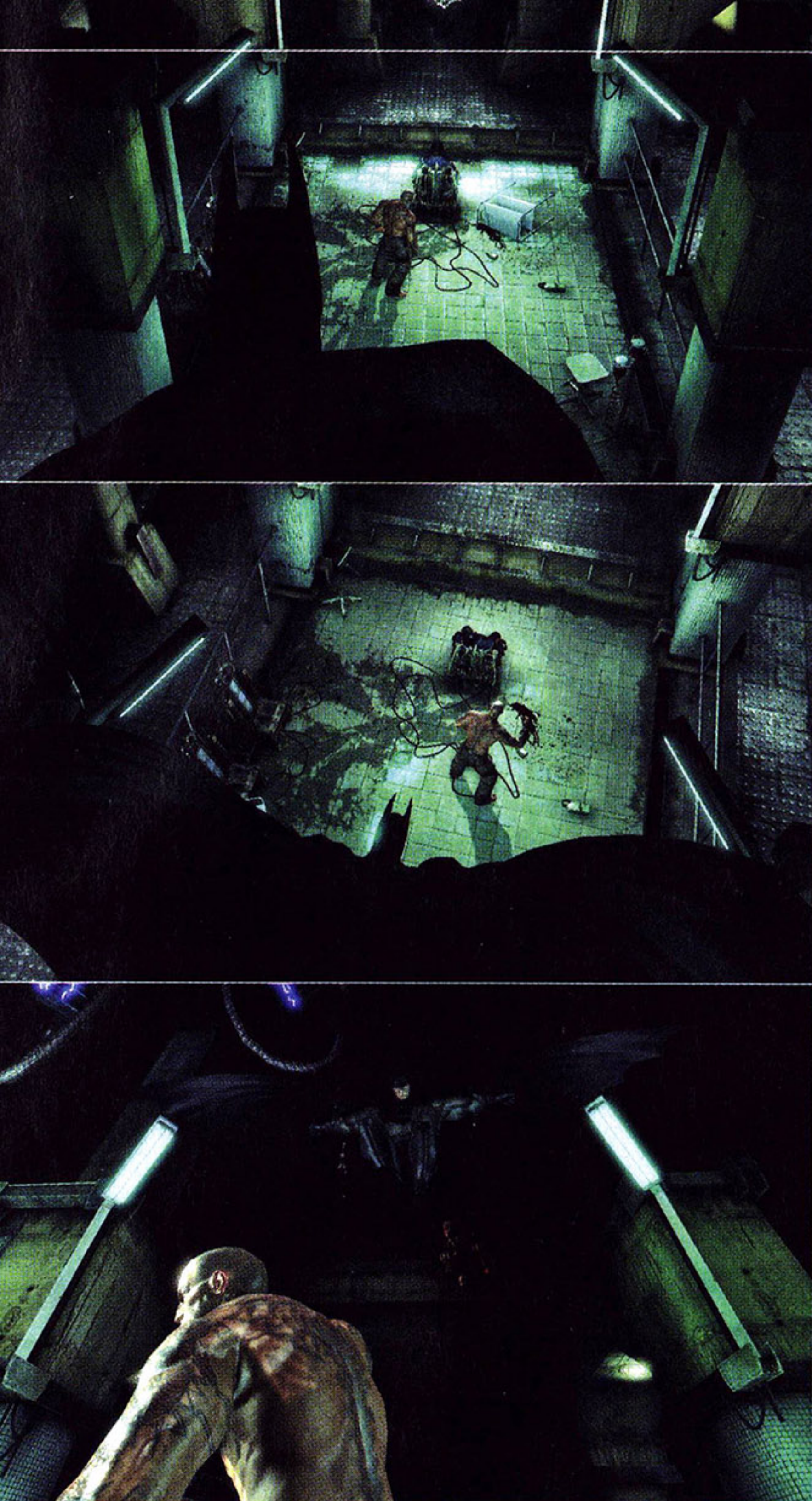
■ Vantage points are key for Predator gameplay



■ Players can steer Batarangs in mid-air using a first-person camera



■ The glide kick in motion



## FROM PREY TO PREDATOR

Proceeding further into the mansion, Batman comes across six henchmen holding two asylum guards hostage. Since each is armed with a machine gun, Batman wouldn't last long in a straight fight. He's going to have to take a sneakier approach – just don't call it stealth.

"If you look at a stealth game, it's about being weak and hiding," says Hill. "This is about being in strong positions and them not knowing where you are. It's a very different feel. Predator gameplay we call it. Picking off the weak people."

To illustrate this point, he shot the Batclaw at an enemy on the opposite side of a chasm and yanked him over the railing. The resounding yell as he plummeted to the floor below drew the attention of the other thugs patrolling there. But instead of going to hide somewhere until an alarm cooled off, he grappled up to a higher vantage point to see what the enemies would do.

"Batman's not afraid of them finding the other bodies because that's part of what he wants them to do," says Hill. "He wants them to become more out of control because it's that fear he's going to play off."

This doesn't mean Rocksteady included a cheesy fear meter; enemy AI simply becomes less and less levelheaded as more of their buddies are taken out.

Speaking of taking out enemies, Hill flips on the investigation mode and scans the room. All enemies are easy to pick out as white skeletons on a muted blue background. Most of them have teamed up to watch each other's backs, but one thug is searching for you on his own. Batman swoops down and lands quietly behind him. After a quick takedown, Batman fires his grapple gun and zips out before anyone sees him.

Next he pulls out a Batarang and throws it directly at another enemy. The camera follows the projectile similarly to the arrows in *Heavenly Sword* and allows him to guide it straight into the henchman's face. The goon falls on the ground clutching his head and Batman swoops down to finish him off.

He then creeps into a vent running beneath the floor. Instead of using the standard video game vent camera, the view stays topside allowing you to see when an enemy is walking over your position. Once the timing's right, Batman bursts out from below and chokes him out. Batman goes to check on the hostages. Comic fans may recognize one of the asylum guards, Aaron Cash,

whose hand was bitten off by Killer Croc and replaced by a hook.

"There are seven guys, all armed," Cash warns.

"Not anymore. Stay silent," Batman assures before grappling up to the catwalk.

This time he hangs upside down like his namesake and waits for an enemy to come within reach. It's not long before he snatches the man and leaves him strung up by his feet. There's only one left now and he's completely lost it, firing blindly around the room and taunting Batman to come out and fight. Joker's sporadic encouragement/teasing over the asylum PA is not helping.

"Listen up! I'm reasonably sure there's no truth to the rumor that Batman drinks human blood. At least I think so..." Joker cackles.

Batman swoops in behind the last goon and simply stands there. The guy backs into Batman's chest and instantly backs away in horror. A punch to the face ends the confrontation. Batman frees the hostages as the strung up thug still struggles in the background. Just for

fun, Batman throws a Batarang to cut the line, and the Joker's hired hand crashes to the floor headfirst.

Batman won't always be safe up in the rafters as the game progresses. Enemies eventually catch on to Batman's aerial tactics and start to destroy his perching spots if they spot him. Unlike the standard combat experience multiplier, predator gameplay awards bonus experience for using a variety of takedowns instead of just spamming the same one over and over. This way, the team hopes there will be equal payoffs to both the straightforward beat 'em up crowd and the sneakier gadget-oriented set.

## WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE

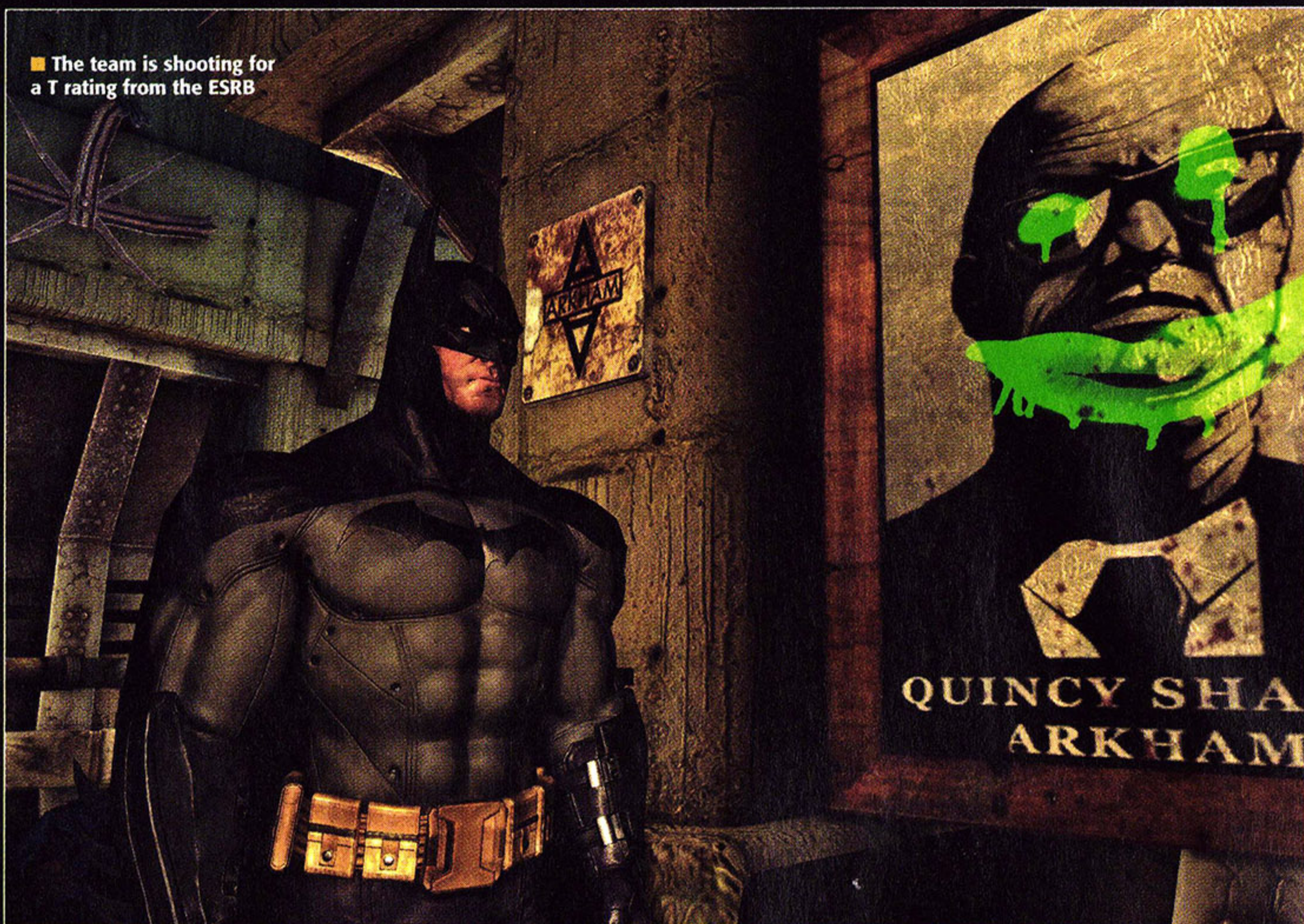
One of the most exciting aspects of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is the renewed focus on Batman's brains as well as brawn.

"Here's the 'world's greatest detective,' and that has never really come across for Batman," Hill says. "We really wanted to get that element across. It isn't just about running through a linear set of rooms. It's about thinking about these puzzles. It's also about the forensics side. We came up with a very sexy *CSI* style for that because Batman would have the very latest gadgets."

Investigation mode is the centerpiece in Batman's detective arsenal. It automatically highlights points of interest, shows weak walls, and, similarly to the *Metrod Prime* series, can scan things around the environment into your database like *The Penguin's* umbrella or writing on the *Riddler's* cell.

This is the first tool Batman uses when he arrives at the research lab. He finds an open safe with nothing inside. He hacks into the computer and examines security footage to see who got to the files first. It turns out that Dr. Young, the head researcher on the project, removed the files from the safe before Joker took over. Now it's up to Batman to track her down.

He turns on the fingerprint tracker and several samples instantly appear throughout the office. They only problem is that they all belong to different people. Thinking back to the security tape, the solution becomes clear. Dr. Young obviously touched the safe and, sure enough, prints appear on the handle. Batman locks in the sample and soon all of the prints gain a percentage indicator to show how closely they match the sample. He's able to follow the trail out through a series of hallways, down a staircase railing, and straight into a trap.



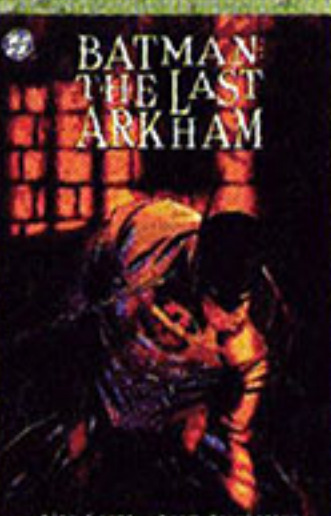
### ARKHAM ASYLUM READING LIST

While it's regarded as such an important part of the Batman universe, the Elizabeth Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane is a relatively new addition. Arkham's first appearance in the comics came in 1974 (*Batman* #258), a full 35 years after Batman was created. Below is a list of graphic novels set almost entirely inside the asylum.

#### **Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth (1989)**

Written by Grant Morrison, drawn by Dave McKean

If you read one Arkham book, make it this one. This modern classic tells the origins of the asylum and is one of the most disturbing comics of all time.



#### **Batman: The Last Arkham (1992)**

Written by Alan Grant, drawn by Norm Breyfogle

Jeremiah Arkham's first act as administrator is to demolish and rebuild the asylum with upgraded security. Batman arranges a stunt to be admitted to Arkham in order to stop homicidal maniac Zsasz, who makes his first appearance in this series.



#### **Arkham Asylum: Living Hell (2003)**

Written by Dan Slott, drawn by Ryan Sook

This series is told from several different perspectives within Arkham, one of which is hook-handed guard Aaron Cash, who plays a large role in the game.





■ Killer Croc says "hello"

It turns out Joker has gotten his hands on the research and trapped two hostages in a room barricaded by an electric field. The clown gives Batman two minutes to figure out a way to rescue the hostages before he kills them with Smilex gas. Batman searches some of the surrounding rooms and finds one with a large circular stained glass floor. It appears there's a tunnel below that will lead to the captives. He tries blowing it with explosive gel, but the glass is too thick. Looking around the room he sees an elaborate chandelier up on the high vaulted ceiling. Batman dashes to the stairs to make his way up, but the path is blocked by another barrier.

"Do you really think I'd let you take the stairs?" Joker mocks over the PA. "One minute left!"

Batman spies an air vent and grapples into it. While shuffling around in the duct he comes across an exit and can see the support chain for the chandelier through the grate. Batman kicks the grate forcefully several times as the Joker counts "seven, six, five."

Batman slides out of the duct and pulls out a Batarang as the timer hits zero. Suddenly, the pause menu flashes up. Rocksteady doesn't want to give away what happens next.

"This whole timer section is sort of my personal homage to timers in games, because I really don't like them," Hill says. "[Games] give you a timer and you're like 'I don't know what I'm supposed to do! It's really unfair until you know the parameters of the puzzle. So I wanted to put in something where you think it's a timer and it's not quite what you think it is when you get there. You'll have to wait to see what it does."

## TOUGH CHOICES

That's just the start of what Rocksteady's keeping under wraps. The team won't comment on multiplayer or the possibility of other playable characters. We did, however, catch wind of the ability to play as villains from

the game. Whether these sequences will be inserted into the main game or available on a second playthrough is unclear, but we're extremely excited at the prospect of wandering the halls of Arkham as Joker himself.

The deeper plot points understandably remain on lockdown as well, but what we've seen so far hints at some dark and compelling places.

"Sometimes you want to push the character into a place that they're not comfortable because that dilemma is what makes them interesting," says Hill. "This isn't actually an example from this game, but in the comics you have a situation like, 'What if Batman had to use a gun to save someone?' There are a few places in the game where you have that kind of dilemma where you have to decide, 'Would he or wouldn't he? How far is Batman going to go to stop Joker?' That's the theme of the game." ■■■



# PREVIEWS

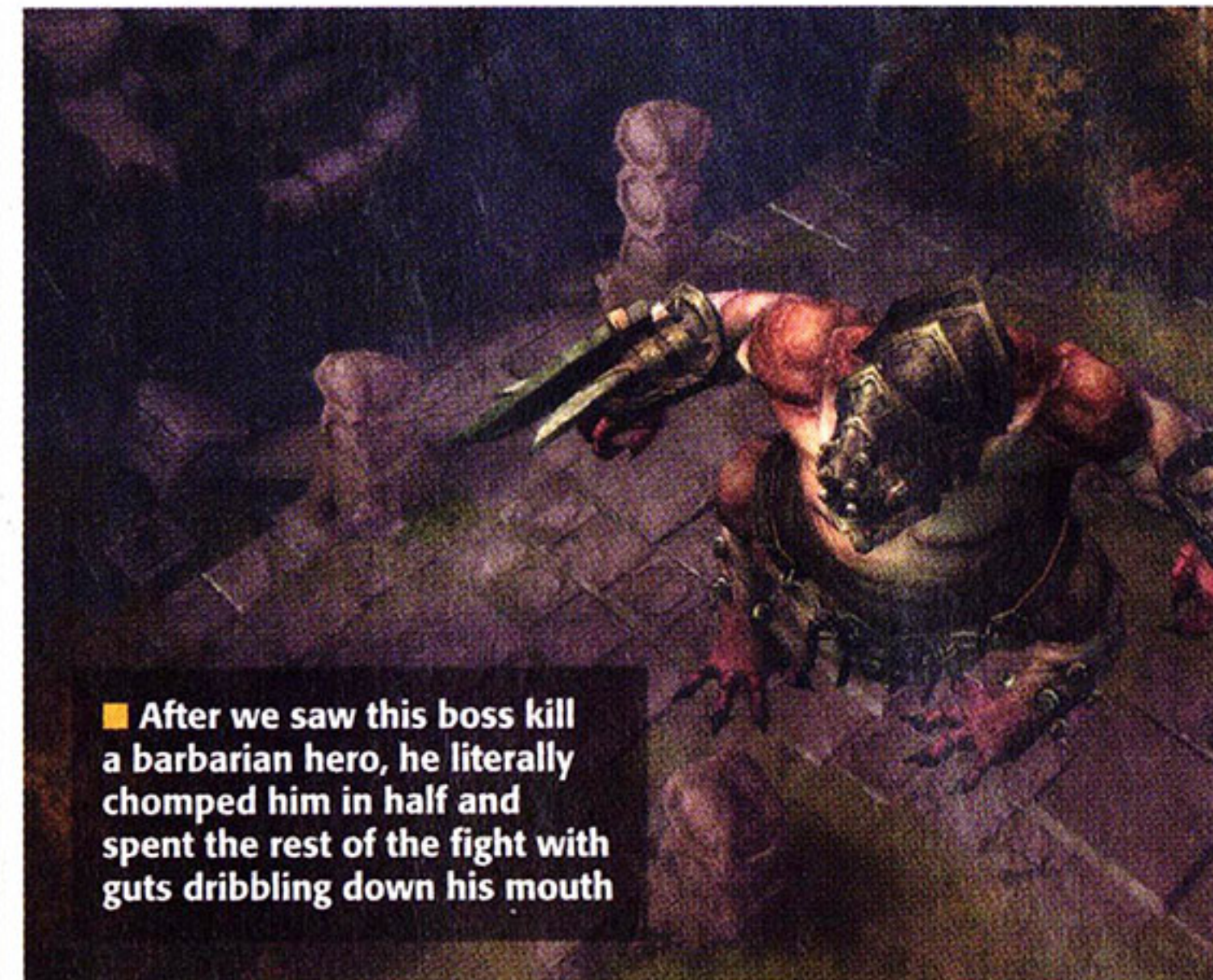
A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



■ Sadly, not pictured: the witch doctor's zombie wall ability. No, that's not a joke. Zombie wall!



■ All five hero classes can be male or female



■ After we saw this boss kill a barbarian hero, he literally chomped him in half and spent the rest of the fight with guts dribbling down his mouth



■ The spectacle of these unfortunate baddies tumbling from the bridge after the hero has his way with them is beautiful

PC

## Diablo III

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT  
> DEVELOPER BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE TBA

### BACK INTO HELL

**W**henever Blizzard announces a new game, it's an event. At this year's Worldwide Invitational in Paris, the esteemed developer revealed its next project: Diablo III. While this demonic apple doesn't fall far from the tree, Blizzard is doing what it does best: refining the hell out of the design and polishing the gameplay until it sparkles.

The general idea of clicking on monsters until they pop like loot piñatas hasn't changed. Likewise, randomly generated levels punctuated by set-piece boss fights are back – with the

addition of the occasional scripted event. However, everything that surrounds these core tenets has gotten a makeover.

A new health mechanic headlines the gameplay changes. Rather than recycling the potion-chugging gameplay seen in most action/RPG titles since the original Diablo, Diablo III's monsters occasionally drop health orbs that restore a portion of your entire party's hit points when touched. As lead designer Jay Wilson explained it, this results in more exciting "positional gameplay" where players have an incentive to charge headlong

into a pack of monsters to get the health they need, or try to lure the enemies away from the health orbs. Ideally, this throws another twist into the endless hack n' slash to keep the experience grind from becoming too repetitive.

One of Blizzard's goals is to encourage players to use more than the one or two skills that most past Diablo character builds utilized. To facilitate this, a more modern MMORPG-like interface replaces Diablo's traditional two-button system. From what we saw, it closely resembles Titan Quest, with numbers bound to hotkeys and a very clean, simplistic HUD

leaving the screen free to showcase the constant carnage. Wilson admitted to exploring a World of Warcraft-like customizable interface for Diablo III, but the idea was ultimately rejected as adding unnecessary and undesirable complexity to what Blizzard envisions as a streamlined, more simplistic RPG.

Blizzard refused to discuss character progression, other than to say that the team is exploring several different ways of handling the acquisition and improvement of skills. Ultimately, the goal is to offer plenty of differentiation between the five hero classes, but the skill sys-



■ The color palette varies dramatically from zone to zone



■ This is a small skirmish in Diablo III terms

**ACT 3 BOSSKILL GOGO**

Diablo III is being built with cooperative play in mind, and Blizzard plans to allow players to play for free over Battle.net. Beyond that, the company isn't saying anything beyond "Battle.net will offer some exciting new features to enhance players' Diablo III experience." What, you expected something more concrete? Fat chance; this is Blizzard we're talking about.



■ Wholesale slaughter is what it's all about



■ This is a mini-boss

tem's specifics are still under wraps. The two classes Blizzard showcased, the Barbarian and the Witch Doctor, seem like the kind of powerful, unique heroes that players expect out of Diablo. Leaping in and out of combat and dispatching swarms of enemies with a giant hammer and dual-wielded axes, the Barbarian appears very similar to the Diablo II version. The Witch Doctor, by contrast, fights with the assistance of pets and disease- and decay-based magic powers. Horrifying groups of monsters with a fear skill, bombing them with lobbed fireballs, and swarm-

ing them with plagues of locusts (which also spread to nearby enemies and the Doctor's own pets, draining the life of baddies and augmenting the pets' attacks), the Witch Doctor is a fitting addition to the Diablo universe. Blizzard was mum on the identity of the final three classes. Moreso than in most other action/RPGs, Diablo III has different enemy types working together to create new combat situations. We witnessed shield-bearing skeletons guarding highly dangerous archers, which were dispatched by first stunning them with a

massive shockwave to remove the nigh-impenetrable shields from the equation. Without the added protection, the soldiers and their archer compatriots were easily annihilated. Wilson stated that this sort of cooperation is something players will see throughout the quest. Blizzard's consistently excellent art direction continues to wring the best presentation possible out of the rendering technology. The graphics speak for themselves, though you have to see the game in motion to truly appreciate how much the smooth animations, environmental destruction, and integrated

Havok physics help bring the world to life. Sending a zombie flying into a wall and watching its limbs flail lifelessly as it crashes to the ground is much more visceral and immediate than seeing yet another pre-canned death animation. For our money, the Diablo III first look was worth the wait. Now we just have to endure the months (hopefully not years) between seeing this glimpse of the game and playing it for ourselves. ■ ■ ■

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# Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS > DEVELOPER LUCASARTS > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 16

## YES, MY MASTER

**B**eing the secret apprentice for Darth Vader isn't a bad job. You get to travel the galaxy, meet new people, and even find out more about yourself. With the Force Unleashed, players will experience an all-new adventure nestled between Episodes III and IV featuring one of the coolest characters in the Star Wars mythology. LucasArts stopped by the Game Informer offices recently, and we played a good chunk of the new game.

During our adventures as Vader's apprentice we visited a variety of locations, including a Star Destroyer, a rich

alien jungle on Felucia, and a planet made completely out of droid and spaceship junk called Raxus Prime. The game's events are considered an official part of the Star Wars canon, an honor that hasn't been bestowed upon previous original Star Wars games. The Force Unleashed brings gamers face to face with a new side of Darth Vader. As the secret apprentice, players must complete black-ops style missions to eradicate the remaining Jedi and try to take down the Emperor.

The standout feature in Force Unleashed is sharper control over an

expanded helping of midi-chlorians. Stronger Jedi have the ability to control objects in the environment around them, and until now it's been difficult for developers to represent that faithfully in a game. The team at LucasArts went back to the drawing board and designed an analog-based control scheme to give gamers an exciting new way to use objects as projectiles. Whether it's a crate, Stormtrooper, or TIE Fighter, the apprentice can target and manipulate just about everything he sees.

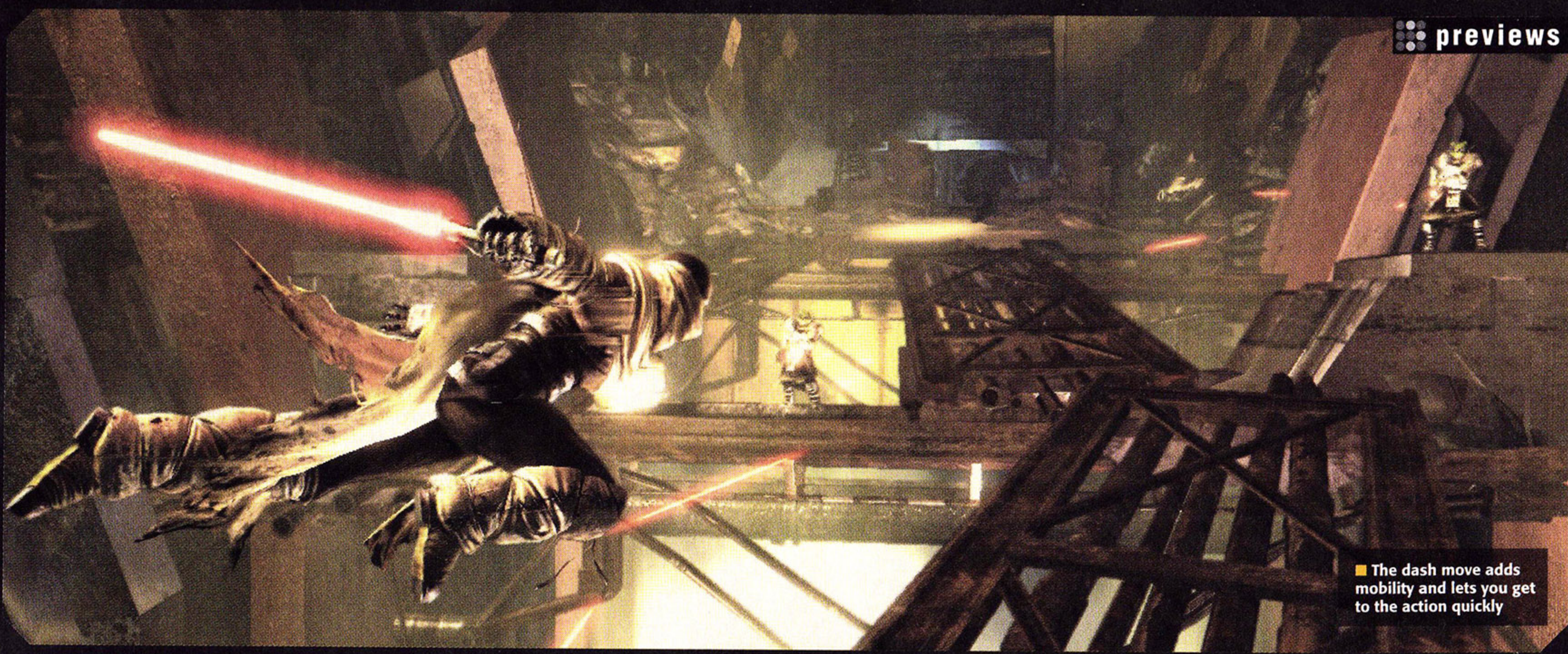
Every time we threw a Stormtrooper into a wall or plunged our lightsaber into

a rancor, we earned experience points. The apprentice then uses these points to level up and learn new attributes, powers, and combos. You can also find new crystals for your lightsaber to change its color and attributes. These RPG elements help players build their own unique character, which should enhance the game's replay value.

When done right, few games are more fun than Star Wars titles featuring lightsabers. The Force Unleashed aims to be the next top-notch entry into the Star Wars catalogue. Don't miss our full review of the game in next month's issue. ■ ■ ■

■ You might think that picking on Jawas gets old. You would be wrong

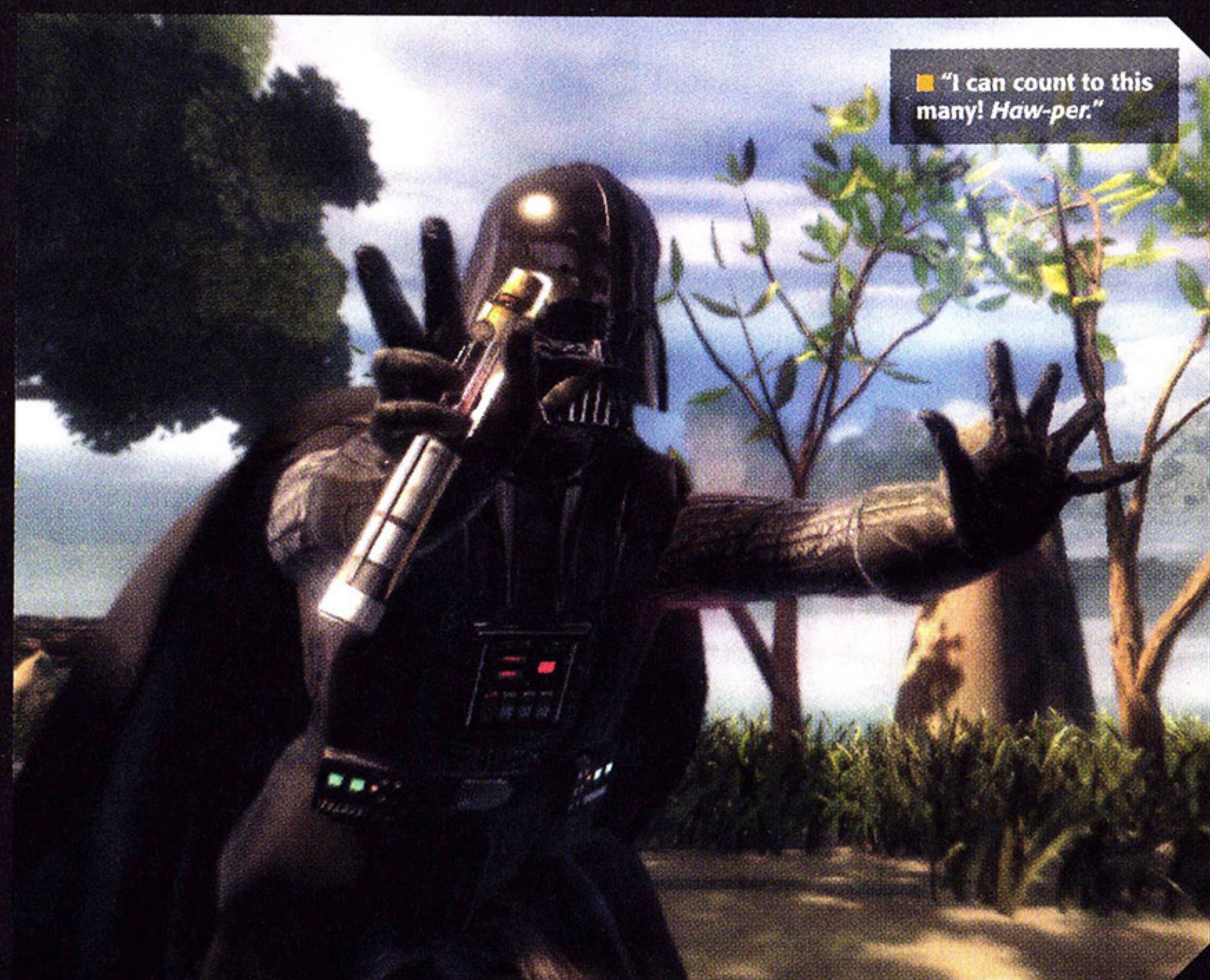
■ Maybe if you kill Greedo's dad, you can resolve the "Greedo shoots first" paradox



■ The dash move adds mobility and lets you get to the action quickly



■ Shaak Ti is one of the few surviving Jedi (No, the Episode III deleted scene isn't canon)



■ "I can count to this many! *Haw-per.*"



■ "I regret you have but one life to give for my amusement."



XBOX 360

# Gears of War 2

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER ONLINE)  
> **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS  
> **DEVELOPER** EPIC GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 7

## HORDE FEST

**E**pic showed off an amazing gameplay demo at E3 this year, which included a wealth of cinematic moments, battles against dozens of enemies, and even the hint that we can ride a Brumak in the final game. However, the most fun we had with the game at E3 was during the all too brief session in which we tackled the all-new cooperative Horde mode.

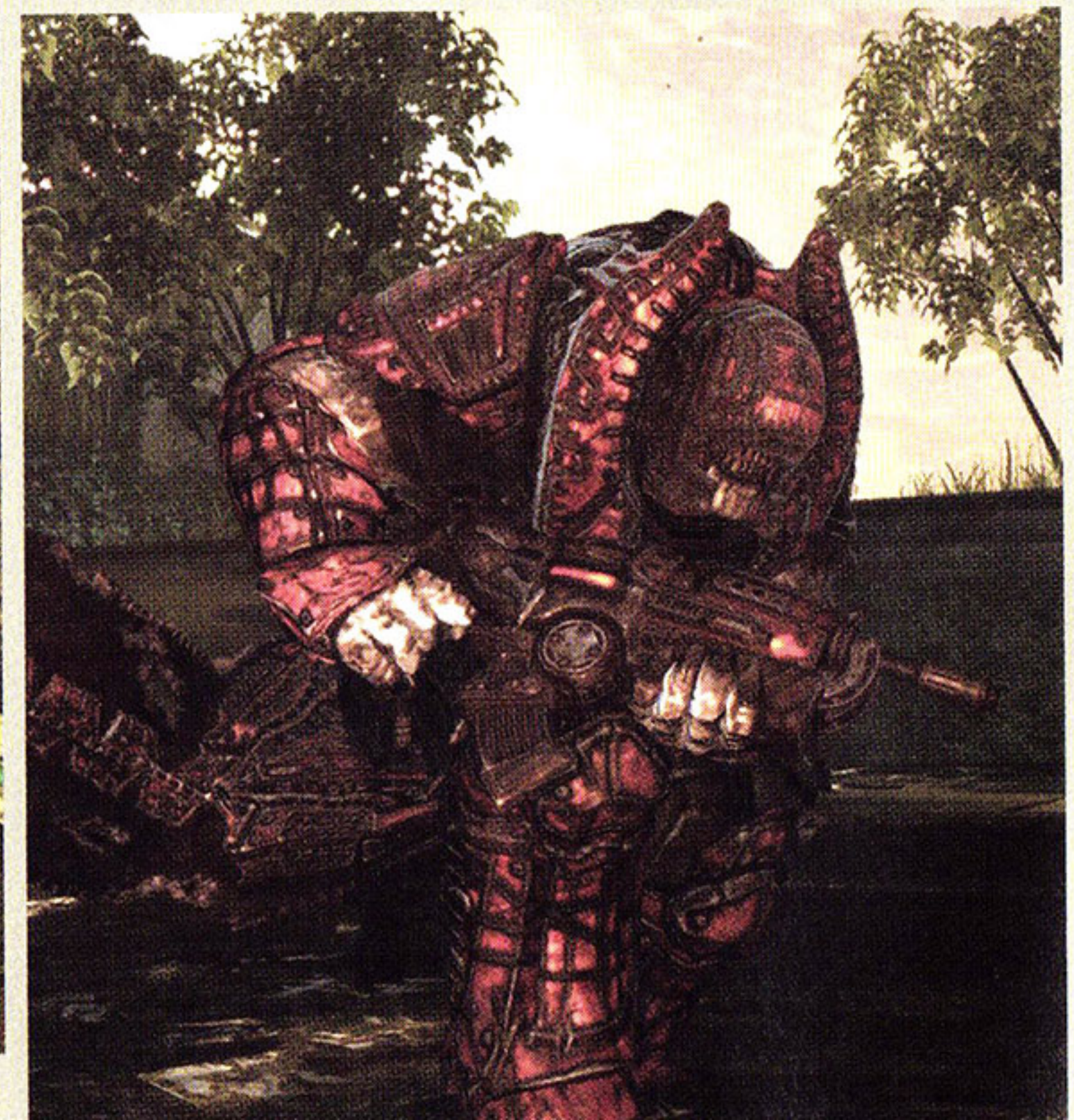
While the campaign still presents the option to tackle two-player co-op, the new Horde mode supports up to five players at once. Rather than a variation on the normal storyline, Horde places players in a vaguely defendable area and tasks them with defeating increasingly dangerous waves of enemies. There are a bunch of new boomers that players must contend with. The simplest is the butcher, who wields a heavy knife as he lumbers towards you. Things get more complicated when the flamer boomer arrives on the scene. Epic is reportedly planning dozens of waves to confront would-be conquerors – a feat that sounds pretty ridiculous after getting to play the first several waves in succession.

New heavy weapons like the mortar should help even the odds. While it's unwieldy, players can take out grouped enemies with a single explosive blast. It can even be planted in the ground and used to target distant targets. To offer a fighting chance to beleaguered soldiers, players can now slowly move about once they've been knocked down. Instead of being incapacitated until a buddy comes to heal you, letting players crawl to safety keeps the experience interactive even after they can't shoot anymore.

Another welcome gameplay adjustment is the ability to use bots to fill slots in a multiplayer team that would otherwise remain empty. Smaller teams can still tackle Horde all by themselves if they're up to the challenge. The main competitive multiplayer mode will support five-versus-five battles. If five opposing attackers aren't enough to keep you busy, you also have to contend with interactive environments that can damage or kill you outright if you're not careful. One stage we saw was blanketed in a killer avalanche partway through the match.

Every new mode we see of Gears of War 2 confirms the feelings we've had for the game since we first saw it. It's on track to be one of the slickest, most over-the-top shooters ever. ■■■

■ Chainsaw duels are everything you'd hope



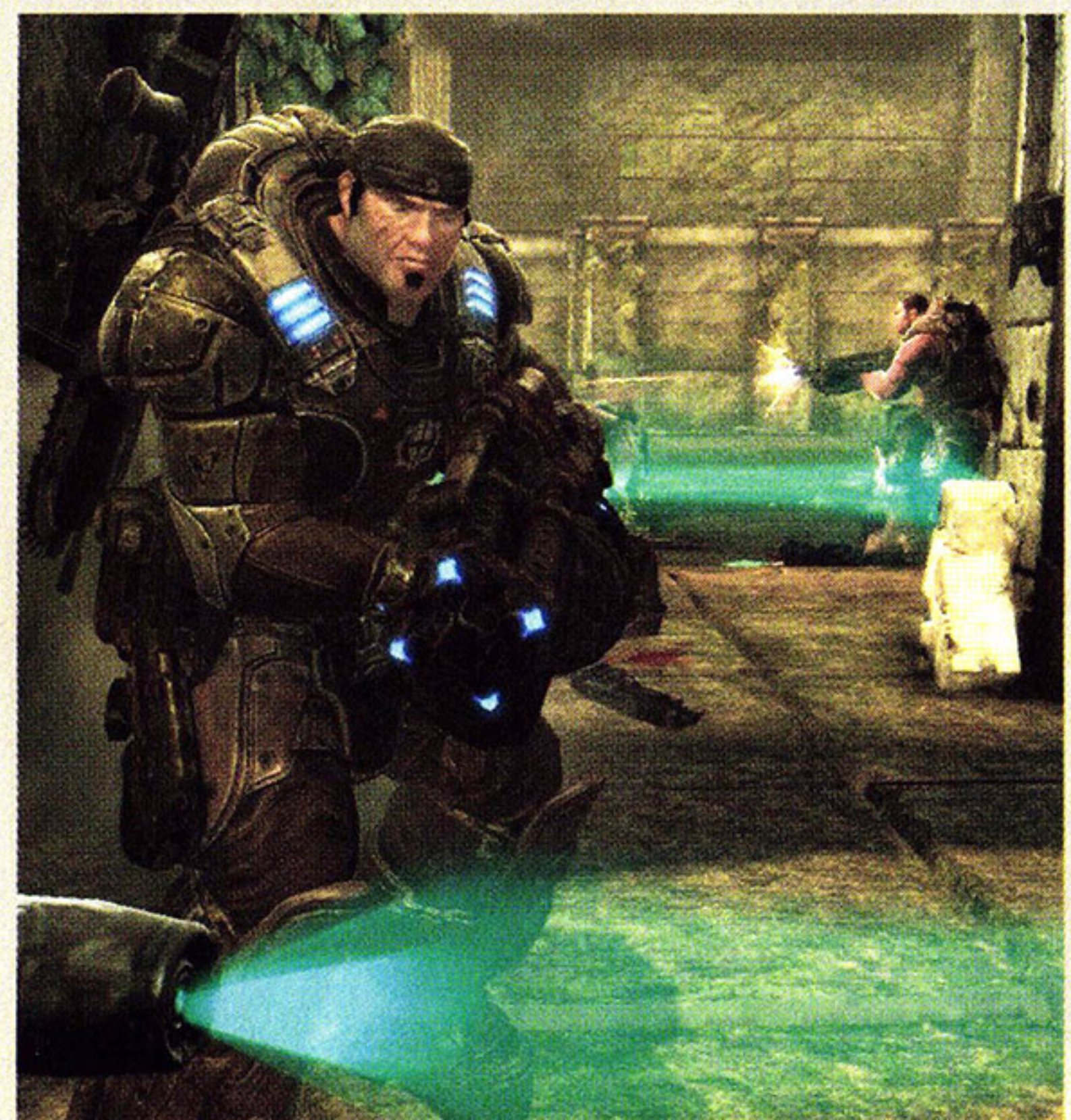
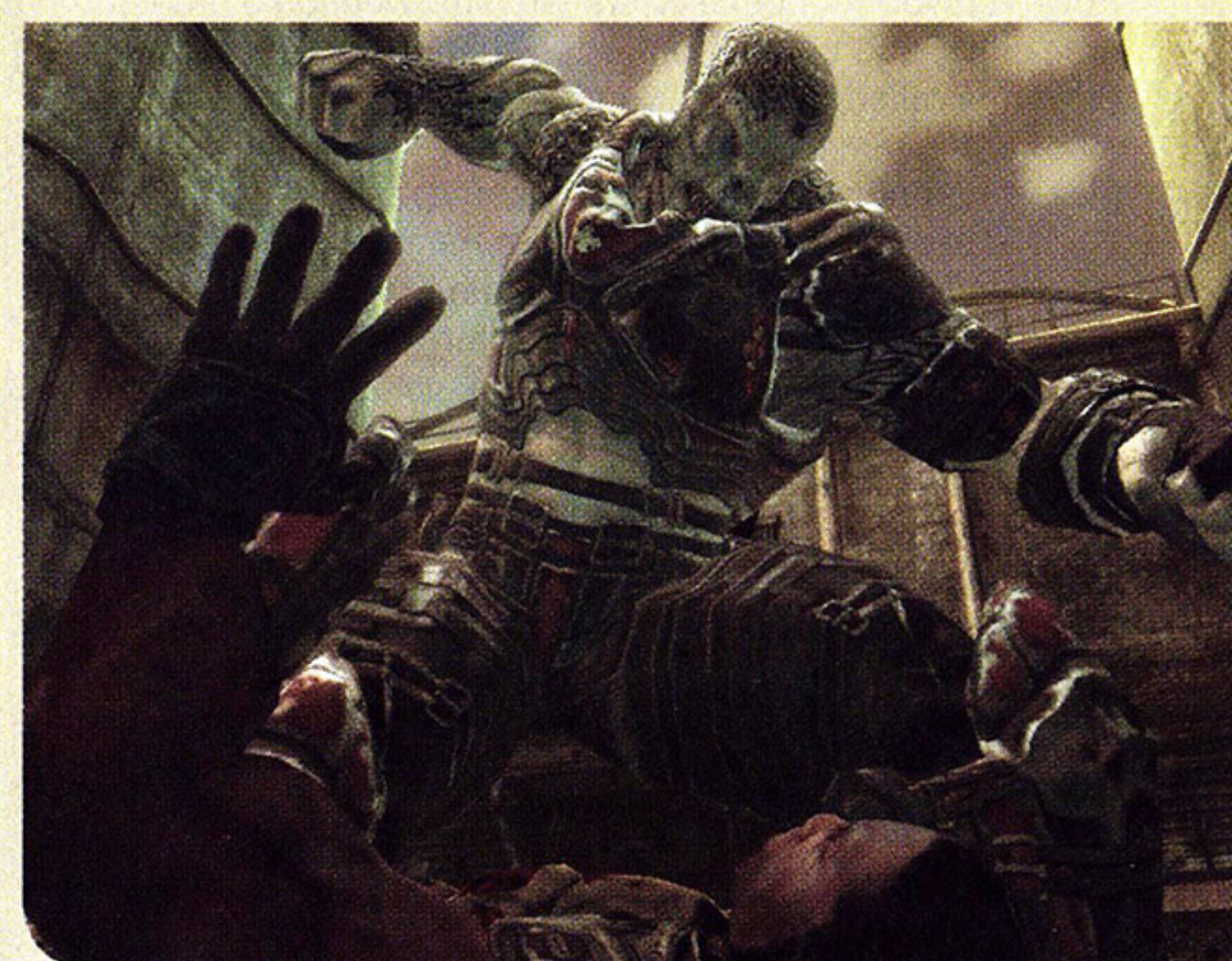




■ New weapons change the way the game is played



■ The confirmation of the new Pope took many days, but everyone seemed satisfied with the final decision



■ Increasingly difficult enemies populate the newly announced Horde mode, which sends wave after wave of Locust to take you down

Wii

# Animal Crossing: City Folk

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE)  
 > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** FALL

## OLD NEWS IS NEW NEWS

**A**t this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, Nintendo turned its back on the hardcore gamer. It instead opened its arms to a new demographic: people who have never thought about carrying a Nintendo DS in their purses or pockets, or spending a lazy Sunday afternoon playing games instead of watching TV. The message to these people isn't "come play games," but rather "these machines can do much more than play games." They'll teach you how to cook, speak in a variety of tongues, lose weight, and they may even teach you how to drum. The only game Nintendo showed that even has a hint of hardcore appeal is the revival of Animal Crossing – a game designed for the casual crowd that has a broad enough appeal to rope in hardcore gamers as well.

At first glance, this new iteration, dubbed City Folk, looks suspiciously like a port of the original GameCube title. Its graphics are stripped from the same "lacks detail" style guide, and much of its gameplay falls into the "same song and dance" category. A typical day in City Folk consists of building relationships with animals in your community and beautifying your house and character with funds earned by selling items (like fish or fruit) that you find or catch. These days work on a real-time clock, and once again factor in holidays like Easter (which is called Bunny Day in the game).

So what's new? As the name of the game implies, players can now leave their suburban dwelling to visit a city that doesn't offer much other than shopping (so it's more like the Mall of America than Chicago). Here, you can purchase clothing and furniture (which are discounted if they are out of season), get a haircut or a Mii facelift, and sell items or bid on them at an auction house. You can also catch a train here to visit friends' cities, but they'll have to be online too.

Up to three people can visit at the same time, but they are just that – visitors. They may not be allowed to purchase a house in your town, but they can help out with your chores or join in on a number of competitions, such as fishing.

Verbal communication is a must for coordinating a day of fun. But it's not done through a headset like you would have expected (or wanted). Instead, Nintendo is handling all verbal communication through a room microphone called WiiSpeak (sold separately).

Oddly, in the time we spent with the game, we noticed that it doesn't make use of motion-based gameplay. You don't swing the remote to chop down trees. You just press the A button. All of the commands use IR and the A and B buttons. Like everything else in the game, the controls have a classic appeal.

If you were hoping that new NES games would be unlockable treasures, we've got bad news for you. Nintendo says that they won't be in the game since they are already available for purchase in the Wii store. Why get something for free when you can buy it, right?

Our first taste of Animal Crossing: City Folk was a bad one. It felt like too much of the same, which isn't enough given how far online interaction has come on other consoles. We're hoping Nintendo didn't want to tip its hand regarding all of the new content in this game, but our gut tells us that getting a Wii game to play online with voice chat is as big as of an addition as Nintendo is going to give us. ■ ■ ■



■ The "N" on his hat stands for nerd. Only nerds water flowers



■ Personalization is still the name of the game. You can choose what goes into your house and, if you're talented, design your own clothing



■ Four people can roam around your village at the same time. Just don't let them chop down all of your trees



Wii

# Madworld

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER PLATINUM GAMES > RELEASE SPRING

## COMIC MAYHEM

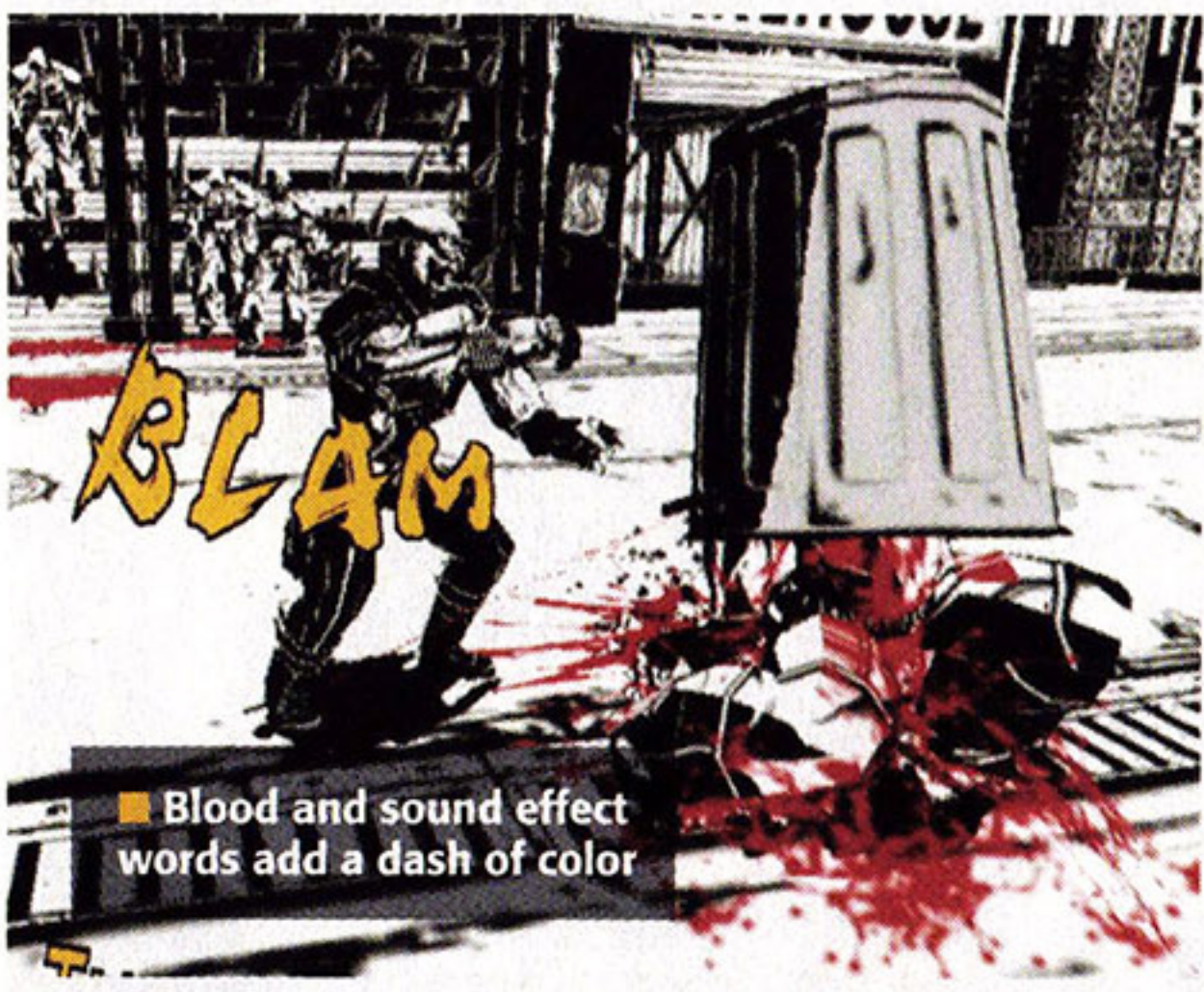
To hear some of Madworld's moments described, you might think it's the most brutal game ever made. Players will slam street signs through opponents' heads, tear them to pieces with chainsaws, and impale them on walls of spikes. If presented with gritty realism, these moments could be profoundly disturbing, but when transformed into exaggerated and stylized displays, they take on a twisted kind of humor for the adult crowd that no game on the Wii matches.

With outstanding artistic direction that focuses on black and white visuals, Madworld strives to emulate the overblown action of a comic book. The story – what little of it exists – is about a man named Jack who is participating in a game show called Death Watch. Contestants score more points for gruesome kills, so Madworld's gameplay revolves around using your environment and an array of weapons to dispatch your foes. While the action is incredibly bloody, it is so far beyond the

bounds of reality that it becomes ridiculous.

That might sound like a dangerous line to walk, but the team at Platinum Games has plenty of experience making stylish titles. The producer of Madworld is Atsushi Inaba, who also produced Clover Studios' Okami and Viewtiful Joe. The stark visuals are reminiscent of graphic novels like Frank Miller's *Sin City*, and the announcers provide some hilarious commentary on the murderous action.

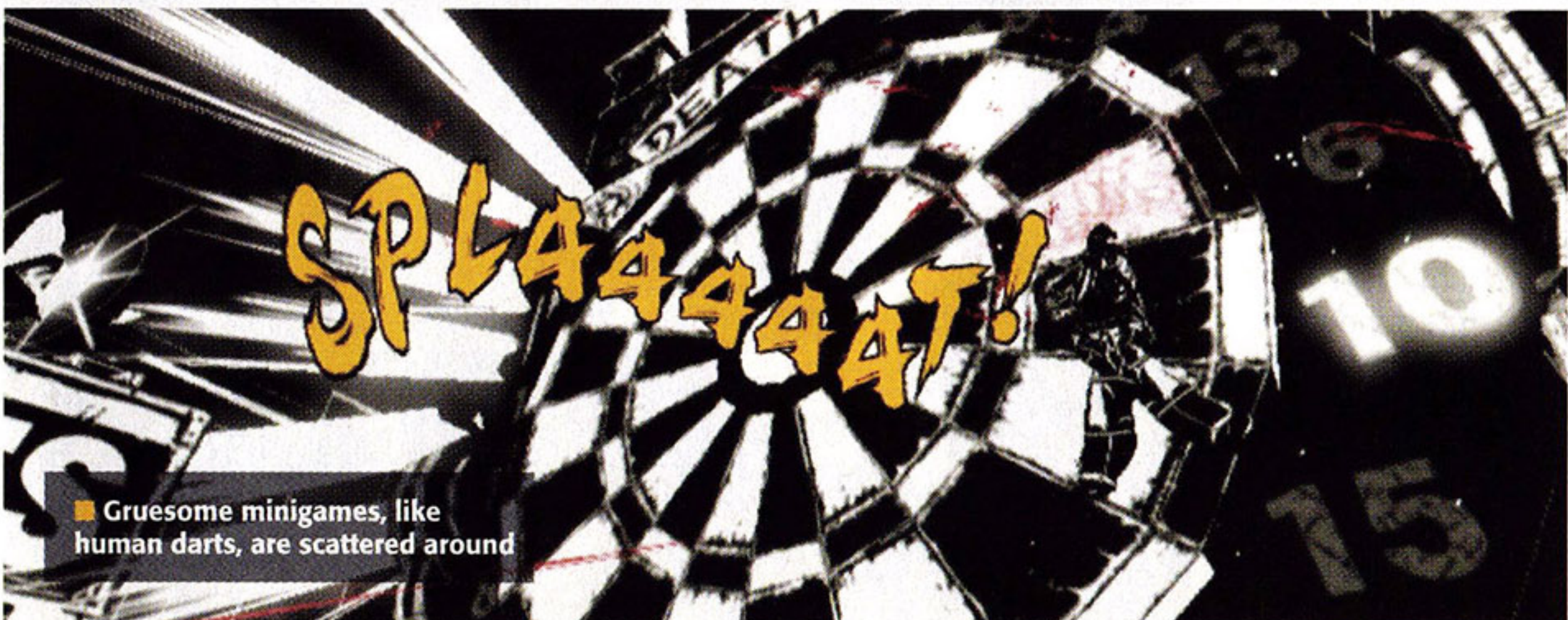
Most of Jack's moves are performed with button presses, but there are also several motions you can perform with the nunchuk and remote. You can pick up objects and weapons from fallen foes, and use numerous nearby hazards to your advantage. Failing all of that, you can just use your default weapon, a chainsaw, to rack up points. Madworld's striking style and irreverent humor will definitely raise a few eyebrows, but there will probably be more cackling than controversy when the dust settles. ■ ■ ■



■ Blood and sound effect words add a dash of color



■ The odds are rarely in your favor



■ Gruesome minigames, like human darts, are scattered around

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# Alpha Protocol

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE FEBRUARY

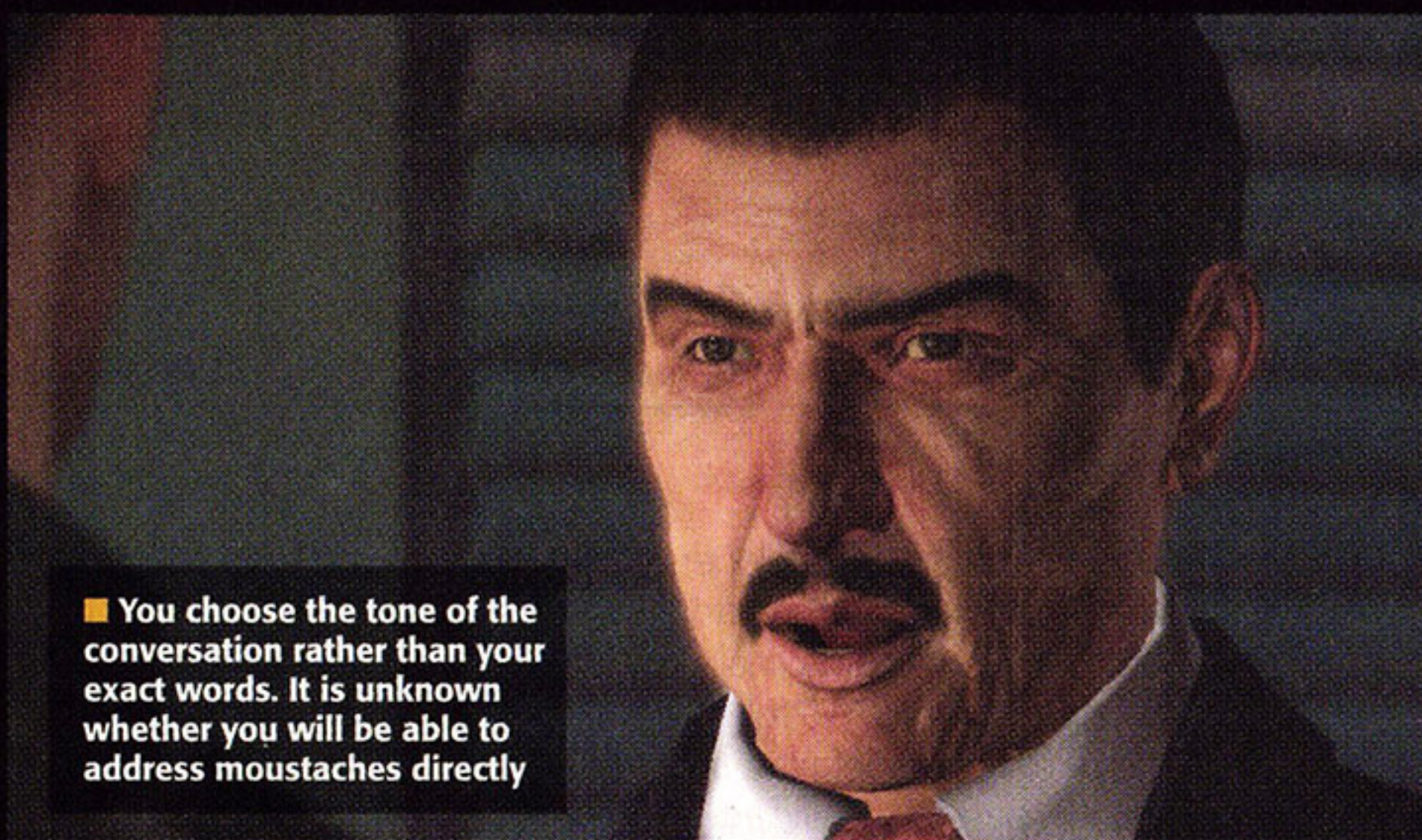
## SPY!

The role-playing genre usually conjures up images of swords, sorcery, and world-destroying archfiends. Casting fireballs is fun and everything, but there is plenty of room for RPGs to explore new settings, which is exactly what Obsidian is attempting with Alpha Protocol. As a modern day espionage tale, the game integrates skill systems and character progression into action-oriented combat to create a role-playing title that casts gamers as a secret agent on the run.

Alpha Protocol uses third-person shooting mechanics and places a heavy emphasis on conversation, which will inevitably draw comparisons to Mass Effect. However, the team at Obsidian is committed to giving the game its own identity. Apart from the drastically different setting, one of the ways this manifests is how player choices will affect the action. You won't just be choosing good or evil; your decisions have actual consequences further down the road.

In one instance, protagonist Michael Thorton tries to get into a building, and a soldier stops him at the door. You can talk your way through, or you can just pull out your gun and kill the guard. If you use lethal force, you still get in the building, but you may have some trouble with the Marines later in the game. Since that feedback isn't immediate, this won't be a "reload and try that again" experience. You must act on your best judgment and live with it.

Thorton also has access to various skills that enhance his combat options, like chaining together multiple precise shots, or lining up a perfect critical hit. Which of these abilities are available depends on the weapons you equip and how you allocate your skill points, leaving you to build an arsenal as you see fit. With elements of just about every secret agent archetype and spy movie integrated into the gameplay, we can't wait to start digging into the conspiracy. ■ ■ ■



■ You choose the tone of the conversation rather than your exact words. It is unknown whether you will be able to address moustaches directly



■ How you resolve certain situations will create narrative ripples at various points in the game





■ Laser planes: the ultimate threat



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# EndWar

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT SHANGHAI > RELEASE FALL

## TALKING IT OUT

**W**e've seen Ubisoft developers bark commands at the troops in *EndWar* a few times already, but it's finally our turn to take the controls. We roll onto the battlefield with a mix of choppers, infantry, transports, and tanks – all of which have a specific advantage and disadvantage over other unit types.

The objective is to take over the capture points and/or wipe out enemy forces. Only infantry can overtake a base, so it's best to clear the way with vehicles and bring the troops in back. Once you earn enough points by destroying enemy units and capturing bases, you can call in fresh reinforcements. We summon some artillery units to wipe out far off enemies, but once they pull in closer we have to haul out due to our artillery's short-range weakness.

Issuing commands into the headset is the primary means of control in *EndWar*, though you can navigate through some branching menus with the controller if you choose. All commands follow a basic uniform structure, e.g. "unit X do Y to Z." All forces on the battlefield have numerical identifiers, so a basic strike sounds like "Unit two, attack hostile four." You can group different unit types together or,

if you have several tank squads spread throughout the map, you can pull them all together for a combined strike using "Calling all tanks, attack hostile three." Outside of attacks, you can command units to move to specific points or overtake bases, among other things.

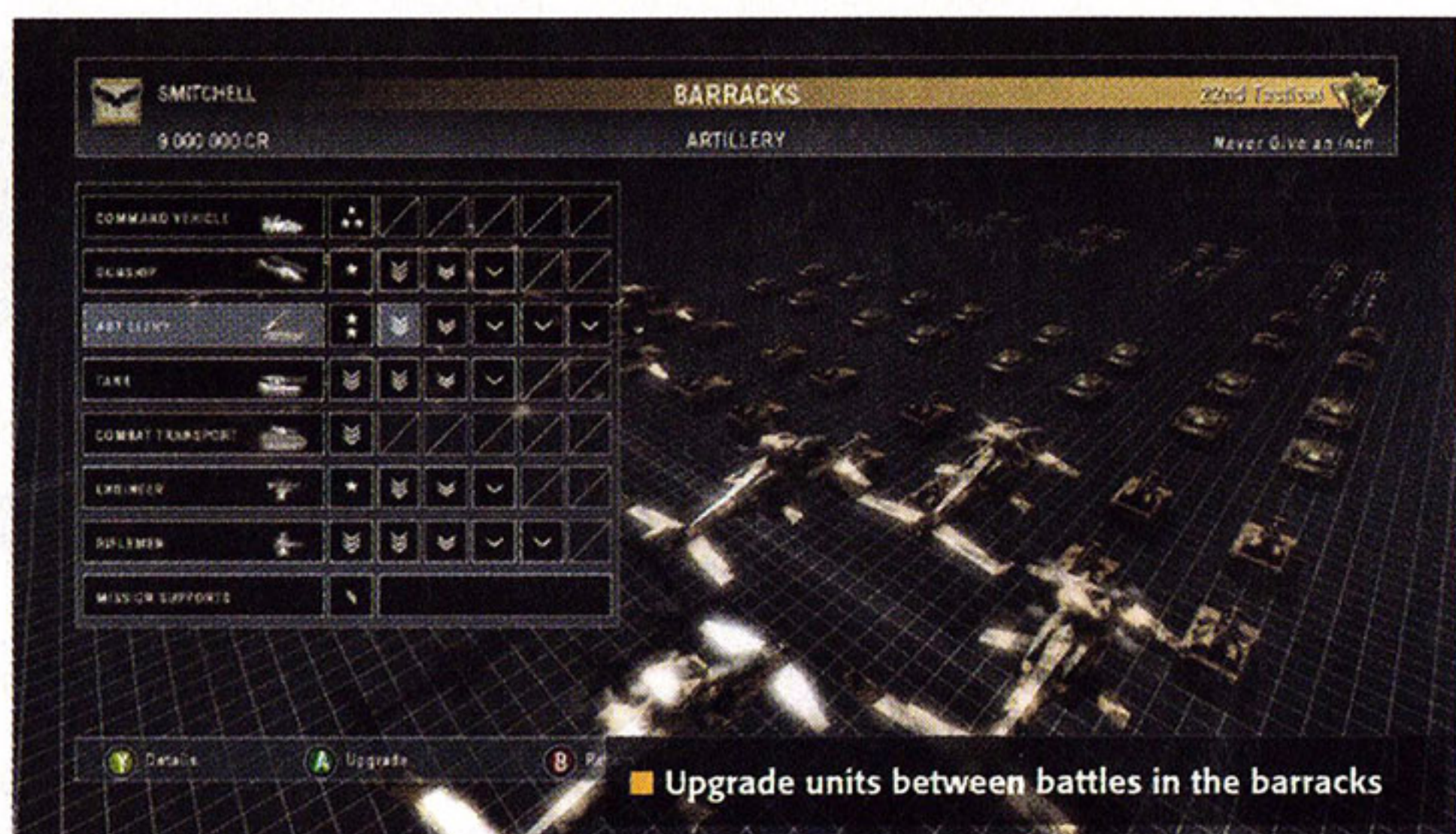
The flexible camera zooms in close enough for a *GRAV*-style view or moves far out for a simplified top-down tactical map. Most of the time, however, you'll be attaching the camera to specific units. By saying "Unit two, camera" the view will fly instantly to the specified unit. In the throes of battle, you'll constantly be zipping the camera around the battlefield to keep track of multiple fronts.

Even though we were playing in a noisy room, the voice recognition worked surprisingly well. The best part about voice commands, however, is that you don't have to be looking at units to direct them. The biggest trouble we had initially was getting all of the phrases straight. This smoothed out over time, however, and we did jump in about halfway through the campaign. We expect the actual opening of the game to introduce the web of commands gradually. No solutions were posed for the problem of looking like a crazy person to friends and family while shouting at your TV, however.

### Rock Paper Scissors

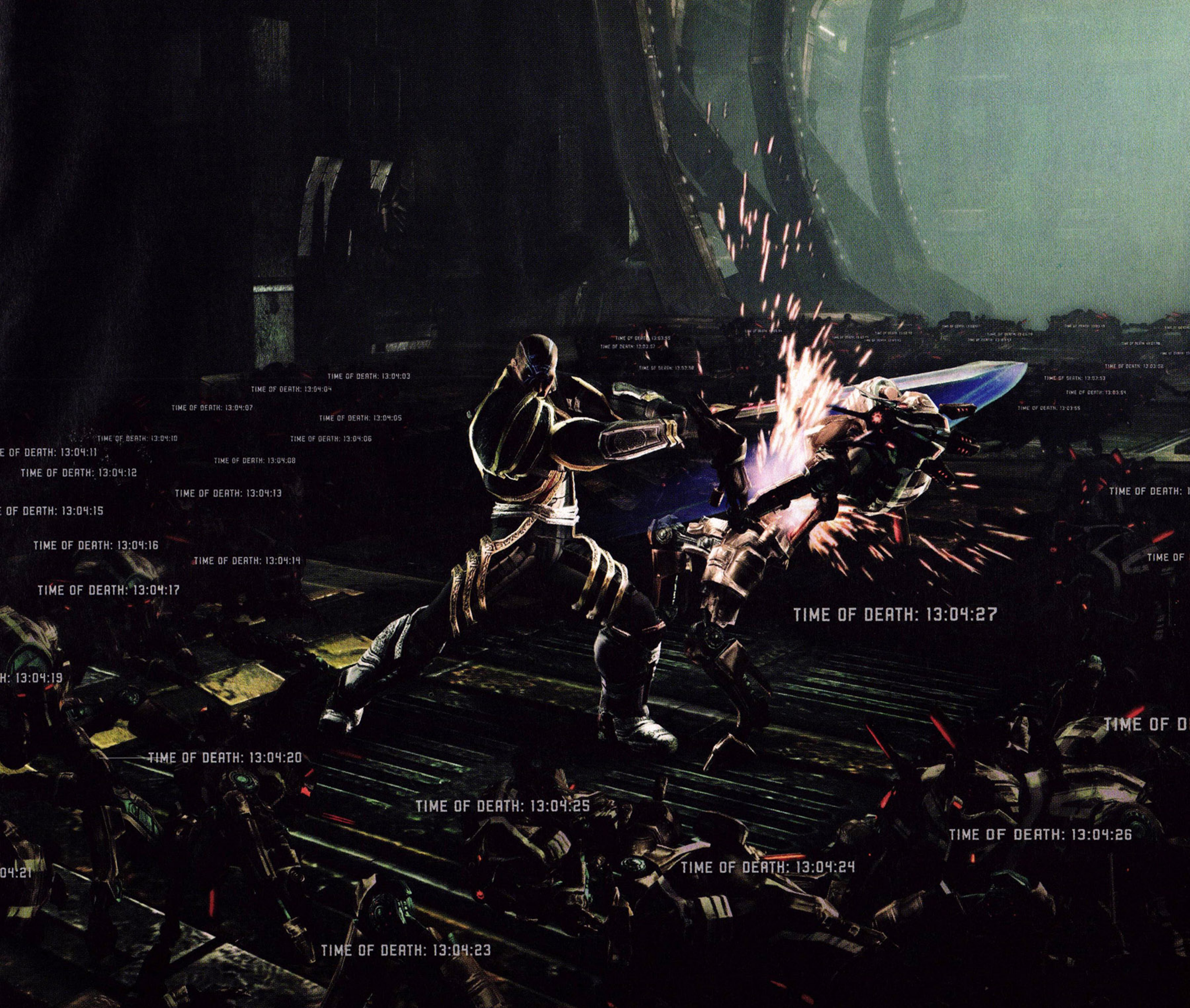
Every unit has a corresponding unit that it is either strong or weak against. For example:

- Tanks beat transports
- Transports beat gunships
- Gunships beat tanks



■ Upgrade units between battles in the barracks





TIME OF DEATH: 13:04:27

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

-FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

# TOO HUMAN

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**TEEN**  
**T**  
 Blood  
 Language  
 Mild Suggestive Themes  
 Violence  
 ESRB CONTENT RATING [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org)

Microsoft  
game studios



Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

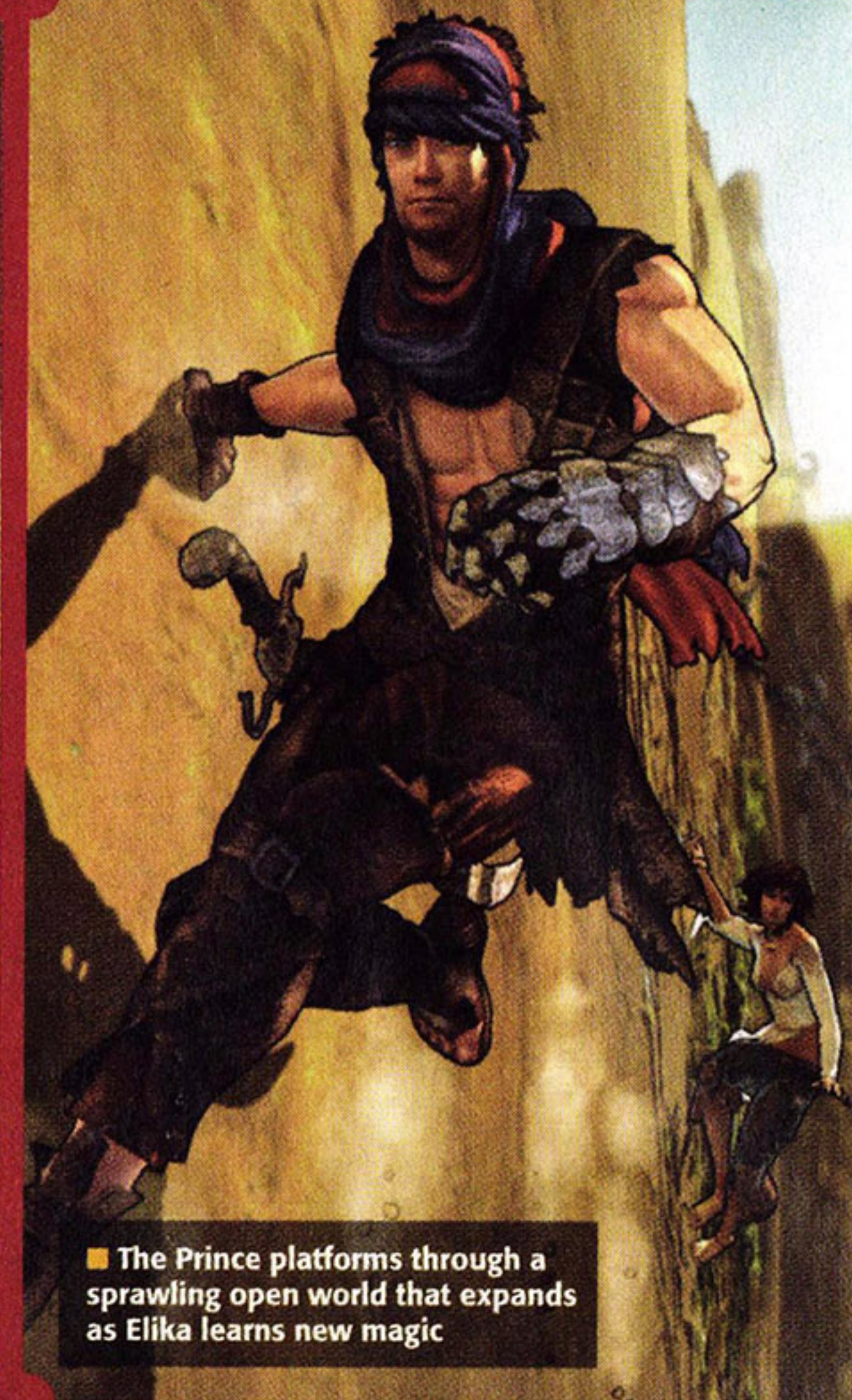


PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# Prince of Persia

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER UBISOFT  
> DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE WINTER

BEHIND EVERY GREAT MAN...



■ The Prince platforms through a sprawling open world that expands as Elika learns new magic

In the same way that *The Sands of Time* helped to revolutionize the way people thought about platforming/action games, the development team at Ubisoft Montreal hopes its new character Elika brings a deeper emotional and story-based connection to the same mechanics once provided by the Sands. The mysterious magic-wielding girl accompanies the Prince throughout the entire game, but she is never a hindrance or anchor that prevents progression. Instead, the team has crafted her character to add to your abilities without ever detracting from your coolness.

You'll never die in the new *Prince of Persia*. There are no traditional checkpoints, you won't fall off cliffs, and enemies won't

kill you in battle. So there's no challenge? Try again. Instead of repeated deaths, situations that might lead to death are interrupted as Elika saves you. If you fall from a cliff or make a bad platforming jump, she will reach her hand down and pull you to safety. Not unlike dying in a game like *God of War*, you'll be shunted back to the last safe area before the jumping sequence. Likewise, if you are struck down by a foe, at the last moment before death Elika will intervene. The Prince is given a few moments to recover, but so too will the enemy you fight, and his health bar will return to full.

Elika does more than save you from certain doom. She platforms along behind you, using her magic to sustain movement,

even as the Prince uses his acrobatic skills to propel him past dangerous obstacles. Throughout the game, as you cleanse the corruption from the world, she can gather concentrated seeds of magic to expand her repertoire of spells and gain new magical abilities that allow the player to progress to new areas. At designated magical platforms, she can utilize a rebound spell to propel both herself and the Prince across wide gaps. In combat, she coordinates with the Prince's attacks to add her own flourishes and strikes. In most cases, all of these abilities are in the player's control, as a single button acts as a cue to bring Elika into play.

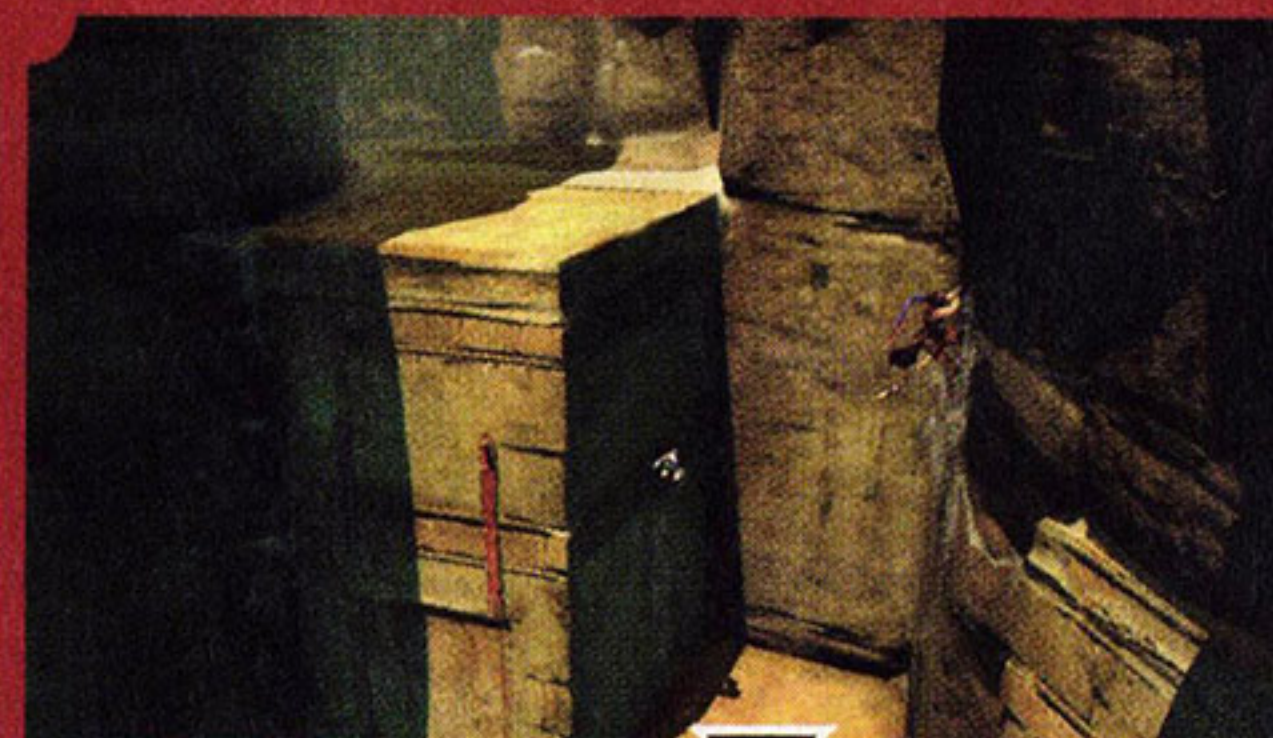
Much of the deeper story elements are also delivered through Elika's interaction

with the Prince. While major plot points are exposed once you reach certain levels of completion through the game, at any other time the Prince can turn to Elika and begin a discussion. For players who only want to leap and fight their way through the title, they can skip these interactions. Others more interested in the details of the world and the relationship between Elika and the Prince can trigger conversations after every event and when new locations are uncovered.

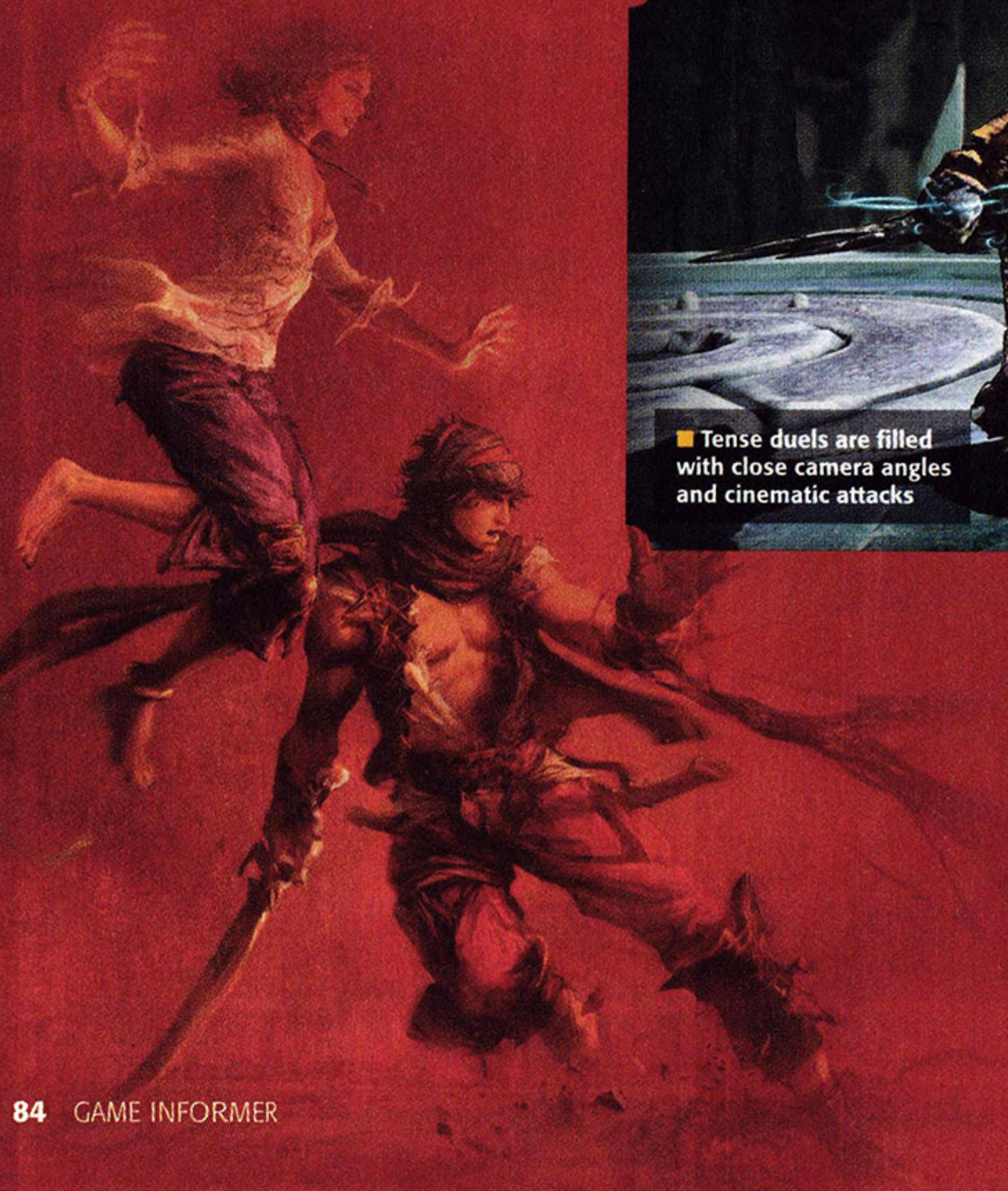
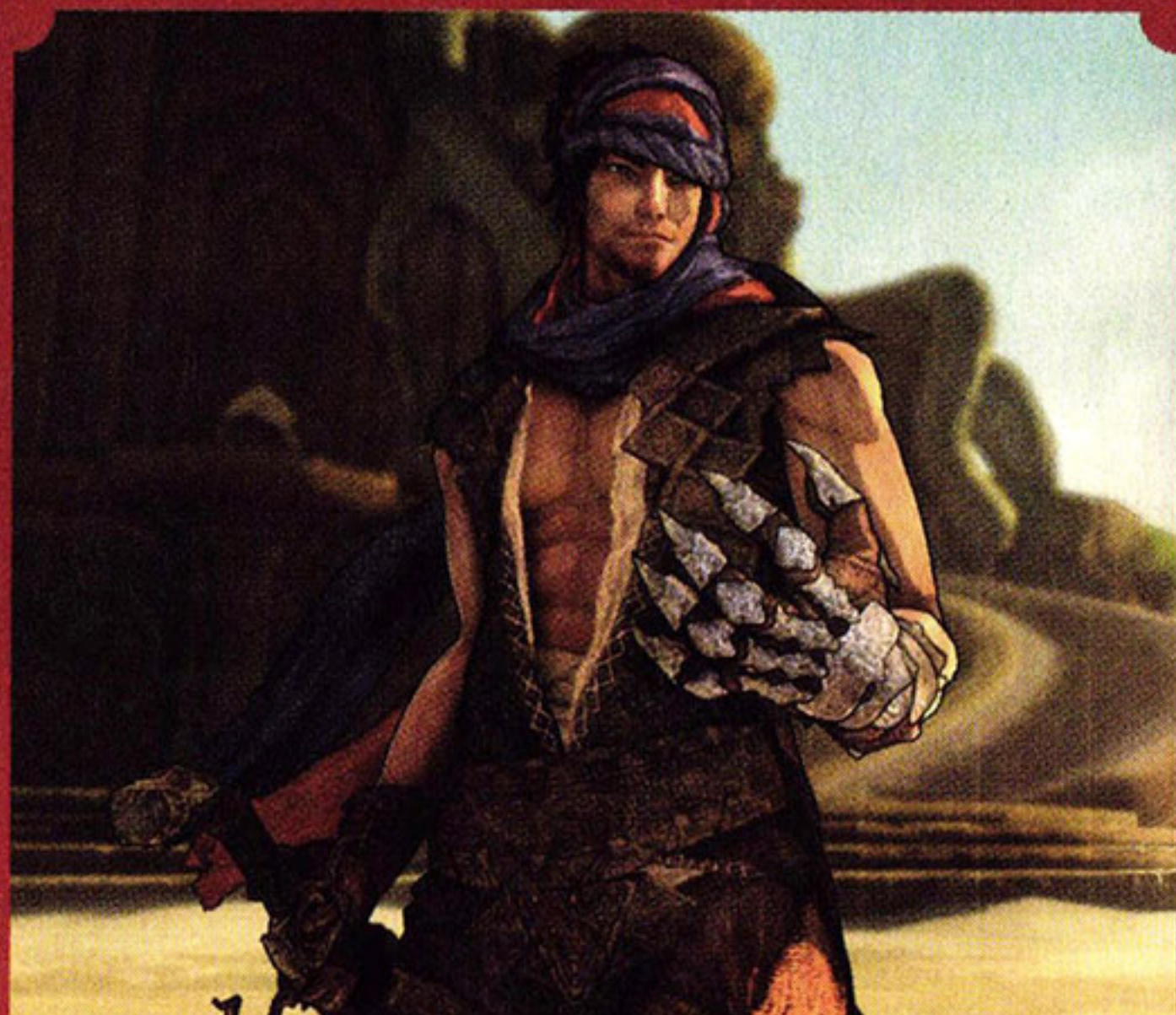
It remains to be seen whether this open structure and numerous other innovations can pan out into a cohesive experience, but we're fascinated to find out for sure when the game releases later in the year. ■ ■ ■



■ Tense duels are filled with close camera angles and cinematic attacks



■ Elika always travels with the Prince, but never falls behind or hinders progress



PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

# DC Universe Online

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT  
> **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** TBA

## BANG! POW! CRACK!

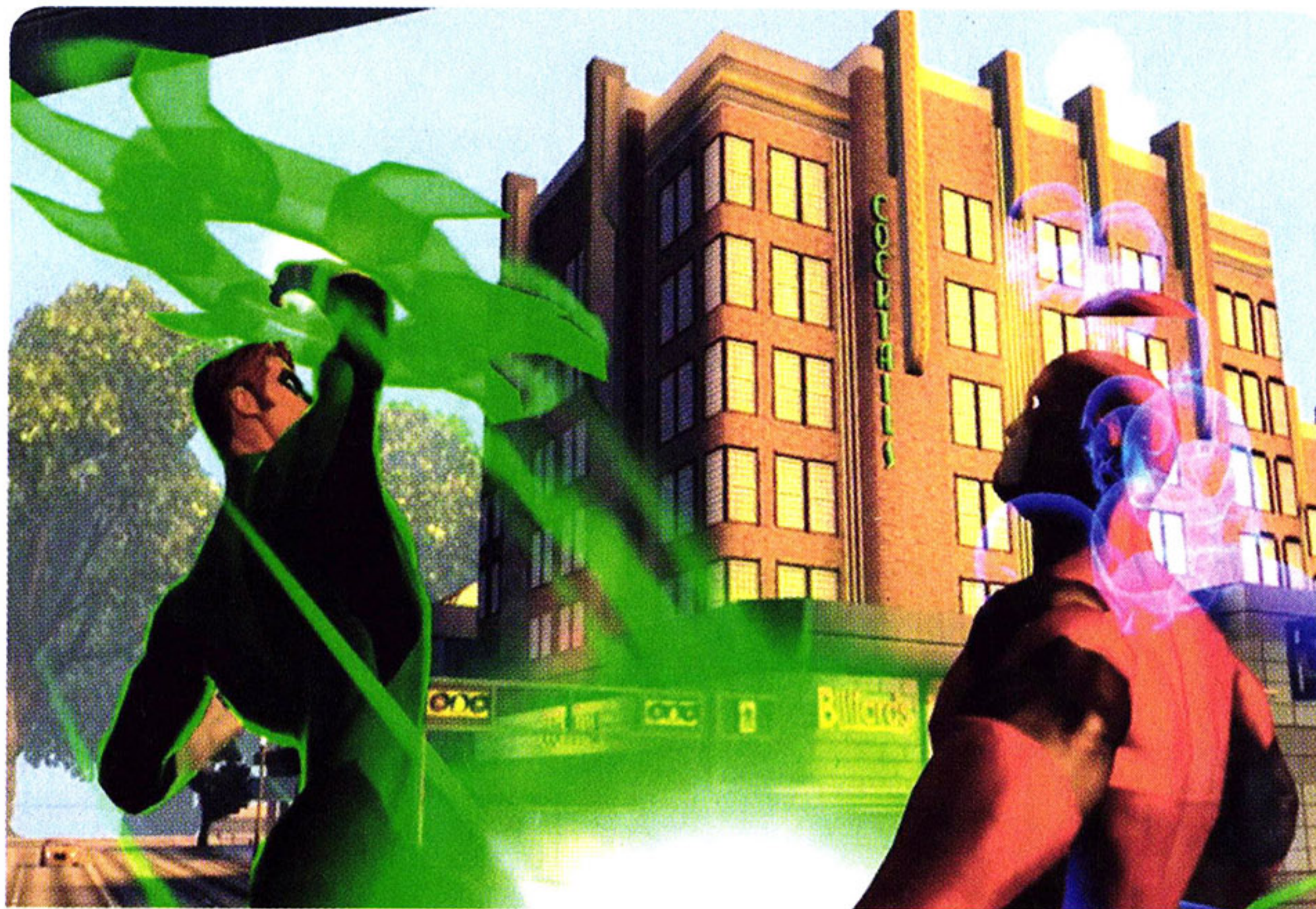
**T**rying to cash in on the classic EverQuest/World of Warcraft formula with a superhero game would be lame, so it's a good thing that MMO veteran Sony Online Entertainment isn't going that route. With legendary comic artist Jim Lee on board to keep the team honest, SOE is creating a different kind of MMORPG with DC Universe Online. The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction has been cited as one of the main inspirations for the gameplay – that should tell you something.

While the game still has levels, inventories, and all of the standard trappings of an RPG, SOE aims for the gameplay to be more interactive than standard MMOs. Technical wizardry allows this title to utilize Havok physics for its combat without paying the price of heavy instancing like other MMOs. The world is mostly shared public space, with a

limited number of instances to allow for more personal storytelling.

The public space features dynamically generated content designed to interest both hero and villain player characters. One example we were given was of an armored car full of money leaving a bank. Heroes and villains in the vicinity receive a notification and an objective: good guys want to get the car safely to its destination, while criminals naturally want to knock it over and steal the cash. It's easy to see how this could lead to meaningful, dynamic PvP if SOE pulls it off.

DC Universe has a long way to go yet – we were only shown a teaser trailer with little gameplay footage – but there are some interesting ideas at play here that make it worth keeping an eye on. ■ ■ ■



■ "I said 'down low', not 'up high!' Your life is now forfeit."

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Mortal Kombat vs DC Universe

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY  
> **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

## LESS BLOOD, BUT STILL BRUTAL

**I**t's only natural to view this game with mixed emotions. On one hand, it's hard to wrap your brain around a T-rated Mortal Kombat title. At the same time, it's nice to see the likes of Batman and Superman in a game loaded with potential. At this year's E3, we entered this strange amalgamation of worlds, and as we pummeled the Flash's face, developed a good sense of what this game offers. You can't rip Superman's head off or disembowel Batman with his own pointy ears, but you can still finish them in style.

When you deliver the final blow to your opponent, you are still prompted to finish them. If you are playing as a DC villain or Mortal Kombat character you can perform a Fatality. Midway wouldn't say how many Fatalities each character has, but we did see one of Scorpion's classics in action. He pulls off his mask, leans forward, and showers his opponent in flames. They dance in burning agony for a few seconds before falling to the ground as a lifeless, charred mess. If you are playing as a DC hero – characters sworn to protect all life – you cannot perform a life-sucking finisher, but rather, you can beat your nemesis senseless with a Brutality. Superman's finisher, a series of punches that culminates with his opponent being driven deep into the Earth's crust,

holds true to MK's over-the-top killing blows **without** actually killing the opponent.

The combat system also pays homage to Mortal Kombat's history. Series creator Ed Boon opted to throw out the alternate fighting styles and bring the series back to its basics, where players create combos by stringing together special moves on a two-dimensional plane. The DC characters blend in nicely with this simplistic arrangement, allowing Flash to tap into his super speed, or Batman to toss a batarang just like Scorpion throws his harpoon.

On top of the traditional combat, players can also knock their adversaries through walls in a new Test Your Might. Additionally, the new freefall mechanic lets you beat the snot out of your foe while plummeting multiple stories. The last new combat variation is close combat. By pressing the right bumper, you'll pull your opponent closer to you for a quick exchange of blows.

We were worried about Mortal Kombat Vs. DC Universe, but it ended up being the surprise of the show. Even in its early stages, the gameplay is extremely tight, and its graphical fidelity (which shows battle damage on the costumes) is equally impressive. Midway hopes to have it on store shelves this November. ■ ■ ■



■ Can wizards be arrested for telekinetic groping?



■ Safe!



XBOX 360

# Fable II

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (2-PLAYER ONLINE)  
> PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS  
> DEVELOPER LIONHEAD STUDIOS > RELEASE OCTOBER

## LIVING THE GOOD LIFE

It's almost time to stop dreaming about what kind of hero you want to be and start making it a reality. The release of Fable II is drawing close, and more details are surfacing regarding the vast options gamers will have to construct legendary heroes, build their mythologies, and show them off to fellow adventurers.

Anyone who played the original Fable should be familiar with the game's emphasis on customization, combat, and story. The sequel definitely makes strides in those areas, but one of the most exciting additions to this sequel is co-op play. When playing while logged into Xbox Live, you will see floating orbs in-game that represent where the people on your friends list are standing (providing they are also playing the game). To invite them into your world, just interact with the orb; there is no need to fuss with lobbies or other menus in order to team up. If you're not

online, you can still play with a friend via the split-screen co-op support.

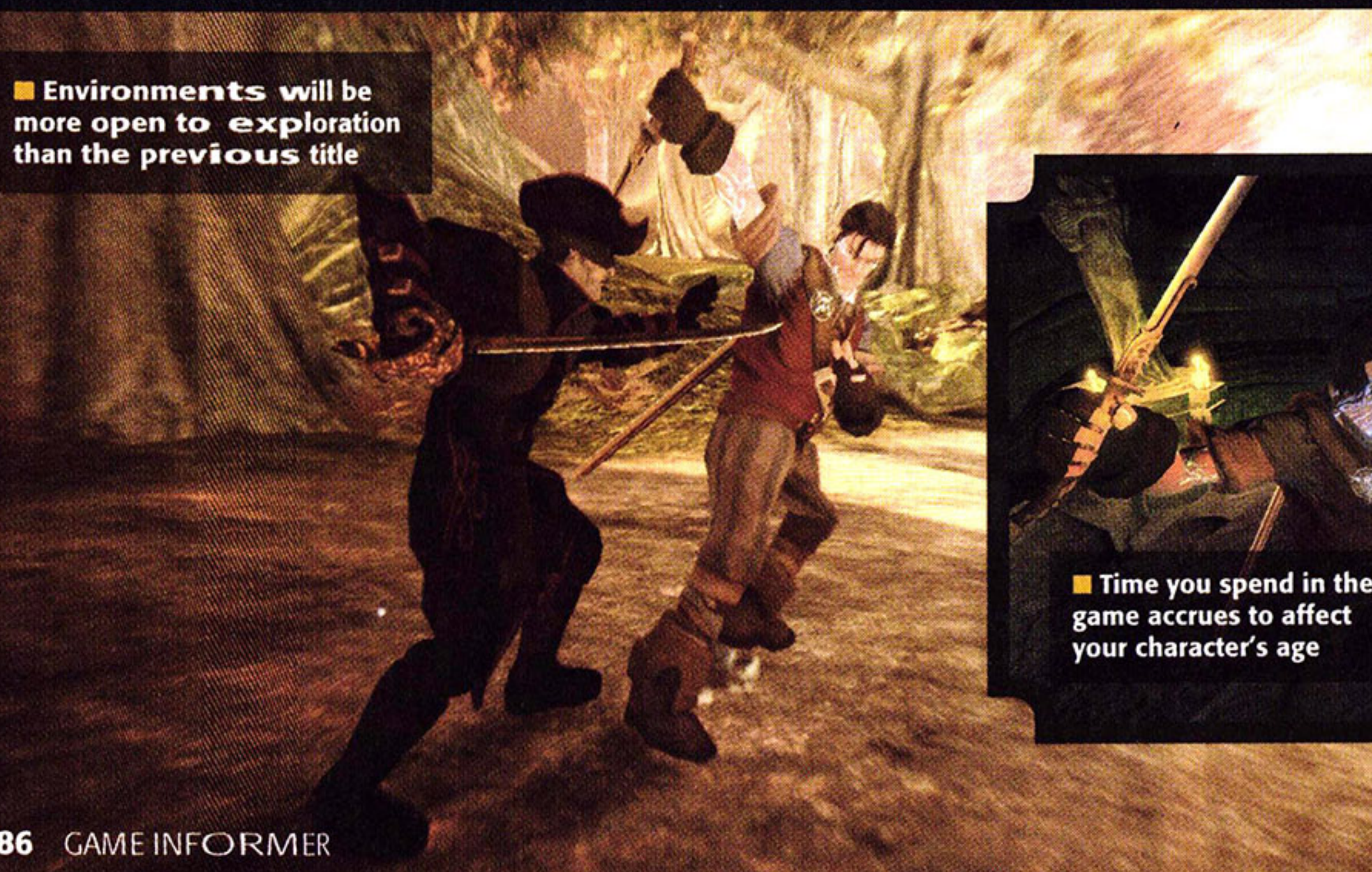
Bringing another player into your version of Fable II's universe allows you to showcase the decisions you've made that shaped the world. You may have killed a bard that was singing disparaging songs about you, or purchased prime pieces of real estate that you can inhabit. You can even add your own touch to the villages by renaming the townspeople, who each have distinct personalities, likes, and dislikes. Heck, some of them may even find constant belching hilarious, in which case you should name them "Joe."

Your co-op buddies can observe all of these things when they join you, but you should keep an eye on your esteemed guest. Other players can also affect your world, so you may want to make sure your spouse isn't entertaining the idea of leaving you for a mysterious stranger – especially since divorce leaves your former

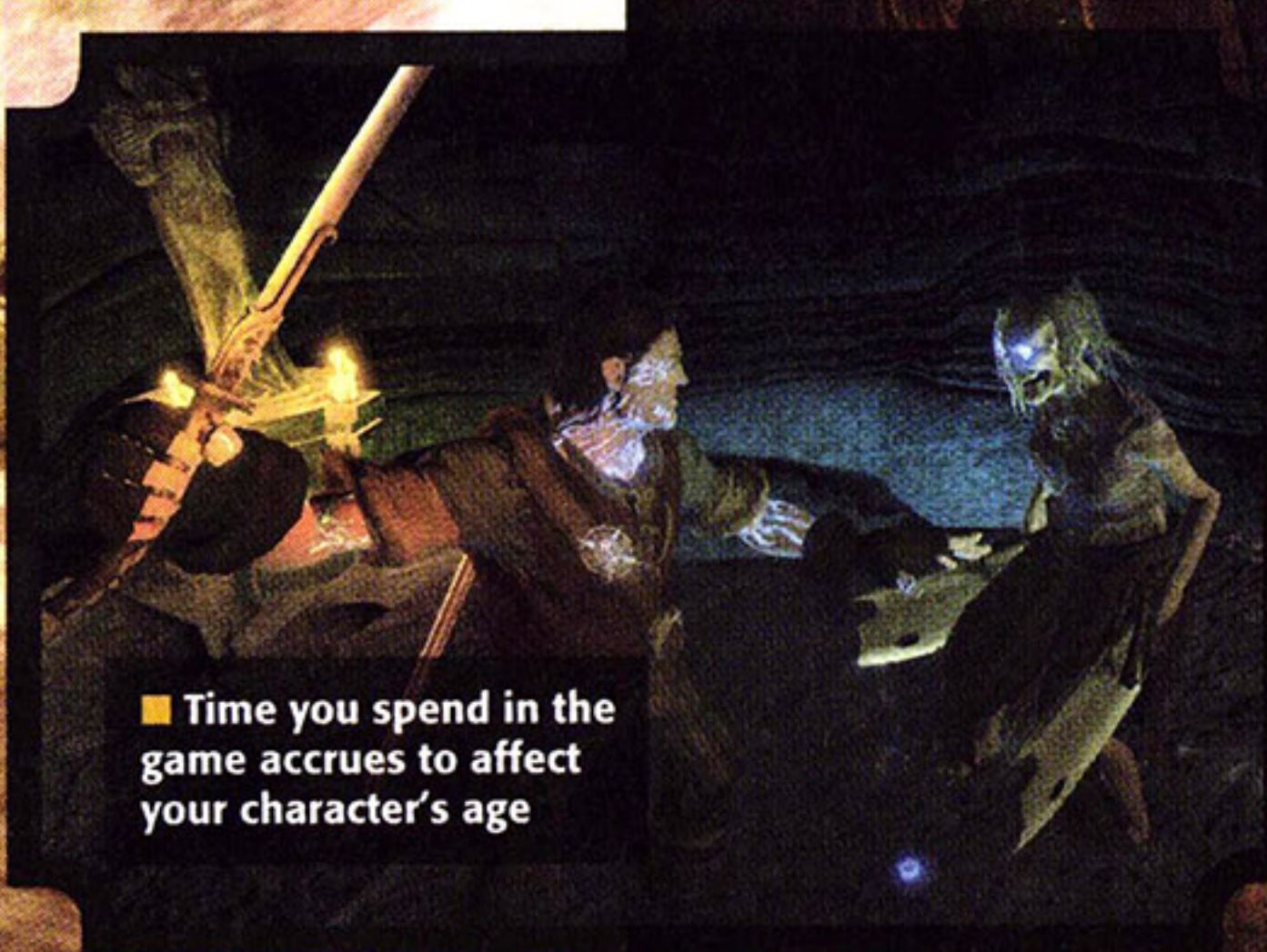
mate with half of your assets. At least you get to keep the dog.

You can always earn back what you lose, but being a hero doesn't pay the bills alone since the game separates wealth from your heroic deeds. By completing your quests, you will win renown and respect, but not gold. If you want to earn your fortune, you can learn a trade like blacksmithing. Alternately, you could hope for a lucky streak while gambling on pub games, which works about as well as it does in real life.

The core of Fable II is still all about adventure, combat, and storytelling. But details like these illustrate the many ways that players can personalize the game experience outside of the central plot. If you want to just plow through the main story, you can do that. As for us, we can't wait to sink hours into building a truly heroic legacy. ■ ■ ■



■ Environments will be more open to exploration than the previous title

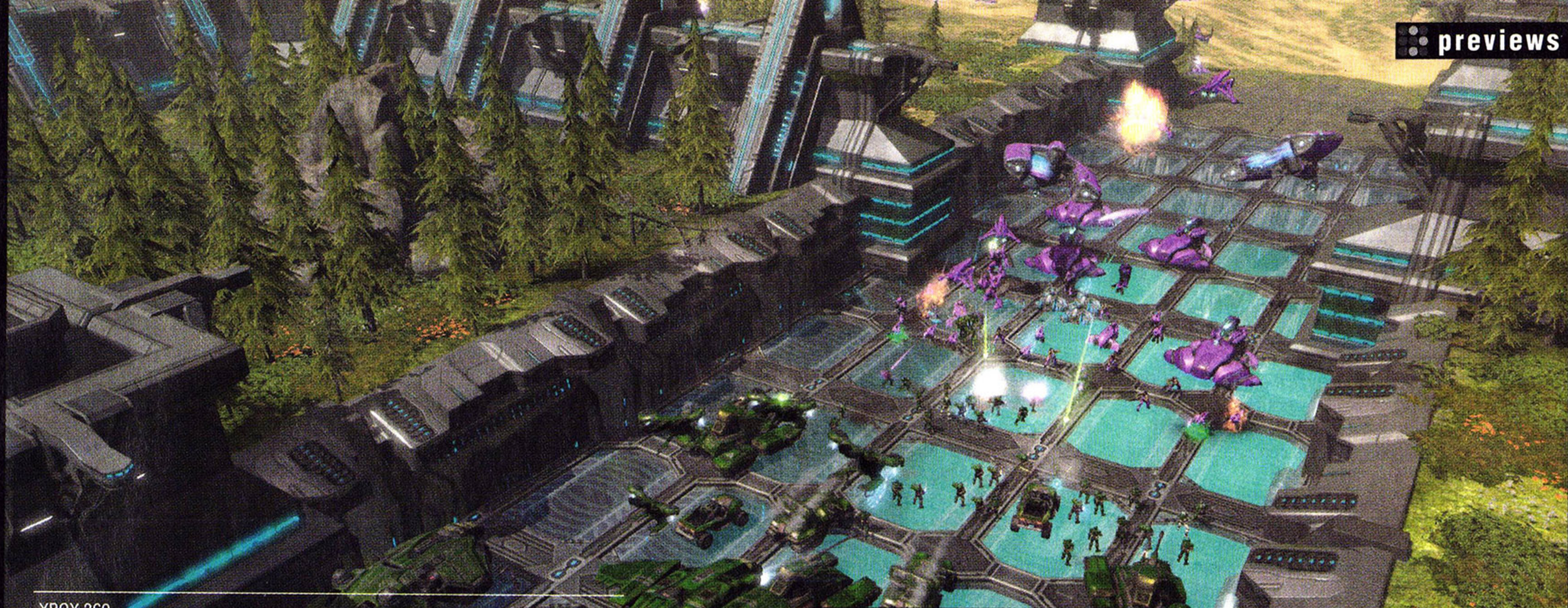


■ Time you spend in the game accrues to affect your character's age



■ Experience will still be distributed in four general pools: skill, melee, magic, and general





XBOX 360

# Halo Wars

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS  
 > **DEVELOPER** ENSEMBLE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** EARLY 2009

## A NEW VIEW

**P**ublishers have been shoving poor gamepad control schemes for real-time strategy titles down our throats for a while now, but if our playtime with Halo Wars at E3 is any indication, Ensemble Studios might be the ones to finally get it right. If we're lucky, this prequel to the trilogy may make Bungie's convoluted story make some sense.

We already knew about the cool physics simulations that give us the iconic fishtailing Warthogs and the story that follows the UNSC vessel Spirit of Fire 20 years before the events of Halo. Now we've finally got our hands on the game to command terrestrial forces in a skirmish against the dastardly Covenant. The most surprising part of the whole experience is that using the 360 gamepad in this traditional-style RTS actually felt good.

As in EA's several console RTSs, the left stick controls your camera, with the targeting reticle staying centered on the screen. The A button selects units or buildings, B cancels any existing selection, X gives contextual orders (generally "move" or "attack"), and Y activates special abilities. Most units have a single special, be it grenades (or awesome rocket launchers after you research the upgrade) for UNSC troopers or vehicle hijacking for Spartans. Buildings pop up a radial production menu upon selection, but that's the only layered command structure in the entire game. At one point Ensemble had programmed one of the triggers to act as a modifier key, like many other titles in the genre, but took it out because the team felt it added complexity without increasing depth.

The new control scheme is absolutely critical to the gameplay. Few would deny, for instance, that Supreme Commander

is a good game – but it's terrible on console because of the interface. By contrast, we were thoroughly enjoying kicking Covenant butt within five minutes of picking up the controller. Halo Wars is relatively easy to control with basic commands, but a few shortcuts make waging war even easier once you wrap your brain around them. The orthogonal directions on the d-pad are assigned to dynamic map locations. You can cycle through your bases with one direction, armies with another, and enemy troops with a third, which makes keeping tabs on the entire battlefield much easier than in other console RTS games. Left bumper selects every unit you own, while right bumper grabs everything on the screen. Right trigger cycles through each unit type in the currently selected group, granting easy access to their game-changing special abilities.

The final d-pad direction is our favorite. Pressing up calls on the Spirit of Fire to lend its considerable support to the battle on the ground. Its impressive displays of firepower range from bombing runs by its strike craft to the MAC Blast that annihilates anything nearby. These throw a needed curveball at the by-the-numbers RTS action, and give players a nice visual treat to boot.

A simplified economy, where certain buildings passively stream resources into your bank, keeps the focus on the action while the plotted-out base locations present a very basic idea of map control.

This is RTS stripped down to its core, but the elements at work in Halo Wars capture the spirit of the genre effectively without making players waste their time with constant low-level decisions. Halo Wars has a chance to make traditional RTS work much better on console than any genre release to date. ■ ■ ■



■ Jacking Wraiths is very satisfying



■ The visuals do not disappoint in any way



■ Infantry may seem pointless, but they are often key to victory

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# Dragon Age: Origins

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER BOWARE > RELEASE EARLY 2009

## BIOWARE IS BACK

Sometimes a name is all you need to know to get excited for a product. When it comes to role-playing games, the BioWare logo can even make a Sonic the Hedgehog RPG worthy of attention. This time, though, the company is heading back to its fantasy roots and creating a heroic epic that the developers consider the spiritual successor to Baldur's Gate.

We were shown live gameplay from Dragon Age: Origins at E3, and the Baldur's Gate comparison couldn't be more apt. The old-school silent protagonist dialogue offered several different approaches to any interaction, which BioWare referred to as the choice between hero, tyrant, and martyr. The obligatory moral quandaries were well represented, as well as a healthy dose of cheeky repartee.

The story of Dragon Age is still under wraps, but we do know that it is epic fantasy in the style of Tolkien or George R.R. Martin. This may surprise some, but the impression we got is that there's an evil a-brewin' that threatens the world, and it may well fall on the player's shoulders to stem the tide of darkness that would otherwise consume all that is good and right in the world. We saw a protagonist who had just joined the Grey Wardens – a non-state military organization dedicated to defending the free peoples from the darkspawn – to help defend a ruined citadel from a massive assault by orc-like monsters. The plot sounds clichéd, but the dialogue and character portrayals we saw lived up to our sky-high expectations of BioWare.

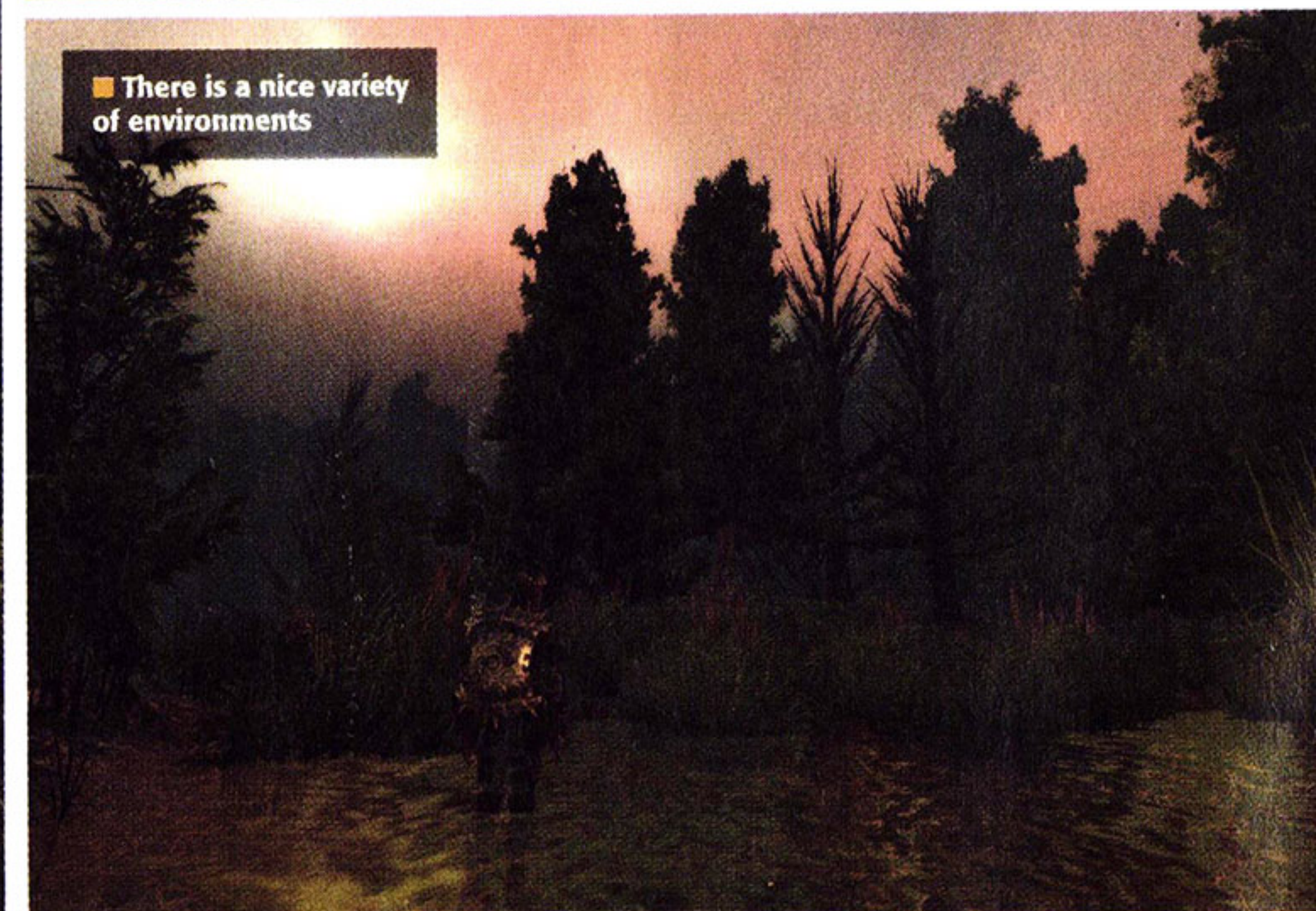
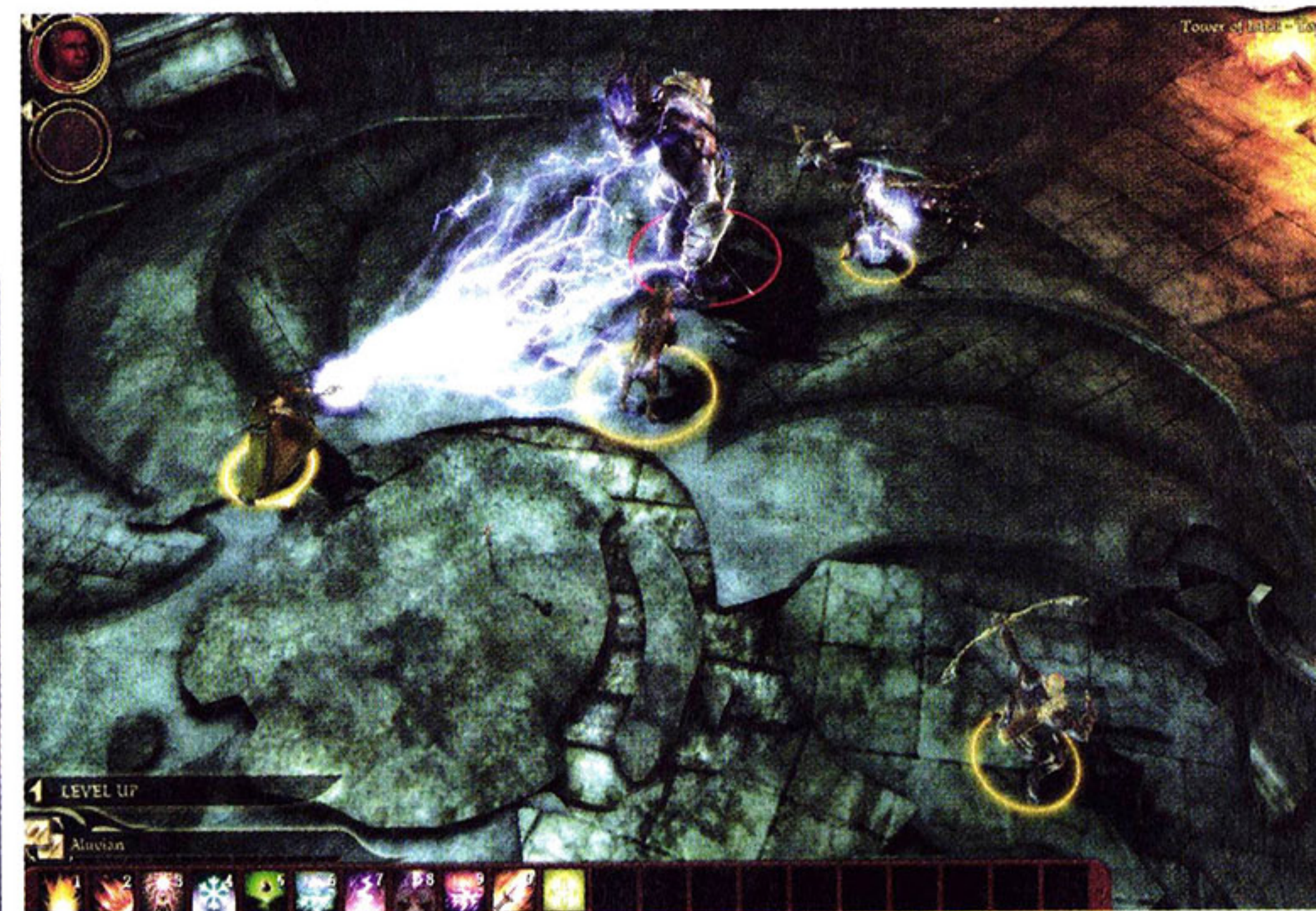
The "Origins" in the title refers to the fact that players will choose one of several origins to define their protagonists during character creation (you will

also choose race, gender, class, etc., but BioWare wouldn't say how those relate to your origin). Your origin determines the prologue you experience, and will purportedly have major ramifications to how the plot develops later on. BioWare declined to say how extensively your origin alters the story arc, other than to suggest that you're going to want to play through Dragon Age multiple times.

Combat flows in real time, with the option to pause time and give orders to your party members. Though you can play in a Mass Effect or KOTOR-like style from a third-person view, you also have the option to smoothly zoom out to an overhead tactical camera and control the action from there.

We witnessed both enemies and player characters using spell combos to drastically increase the power of their magic users. Dropping a greasy film over the floor to slow movement is a nice tactical tool, but lighting it on fire when a bunch of enemies are stuck in it is brutally effective. Using a blizzard spell to extinguish the flames afterward to allow your fighters to cross unharmed makes sense as soon as you start thinking in terms of magical interactions. Hopefully this aspect of the game is expanded beyond these simple examples, because it has the potential to be a great addition to standard sword-and-sorcery combat.

Details on Dragon Age are still scarce, but the developer's impeccable pedigree makes it impossible to not be excited for it even at this early stage. BioWare plans to release the console version at a later date, but nothing specific has been announced. ■ ■ ■





PC

# Crysis Warhead

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE)  
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** CRYTEK > **RELEASE** FALL

## GRAVITY RULES

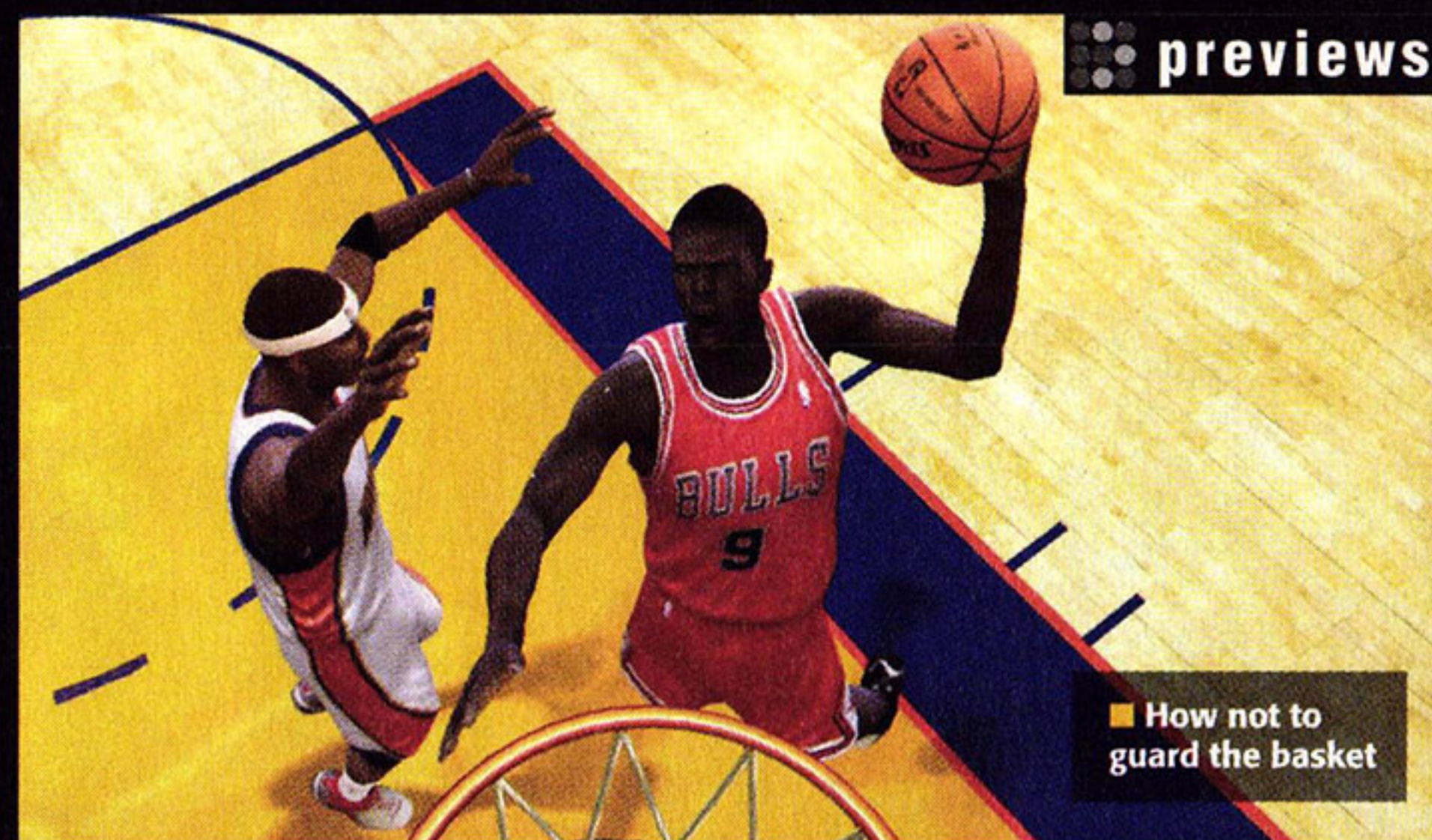
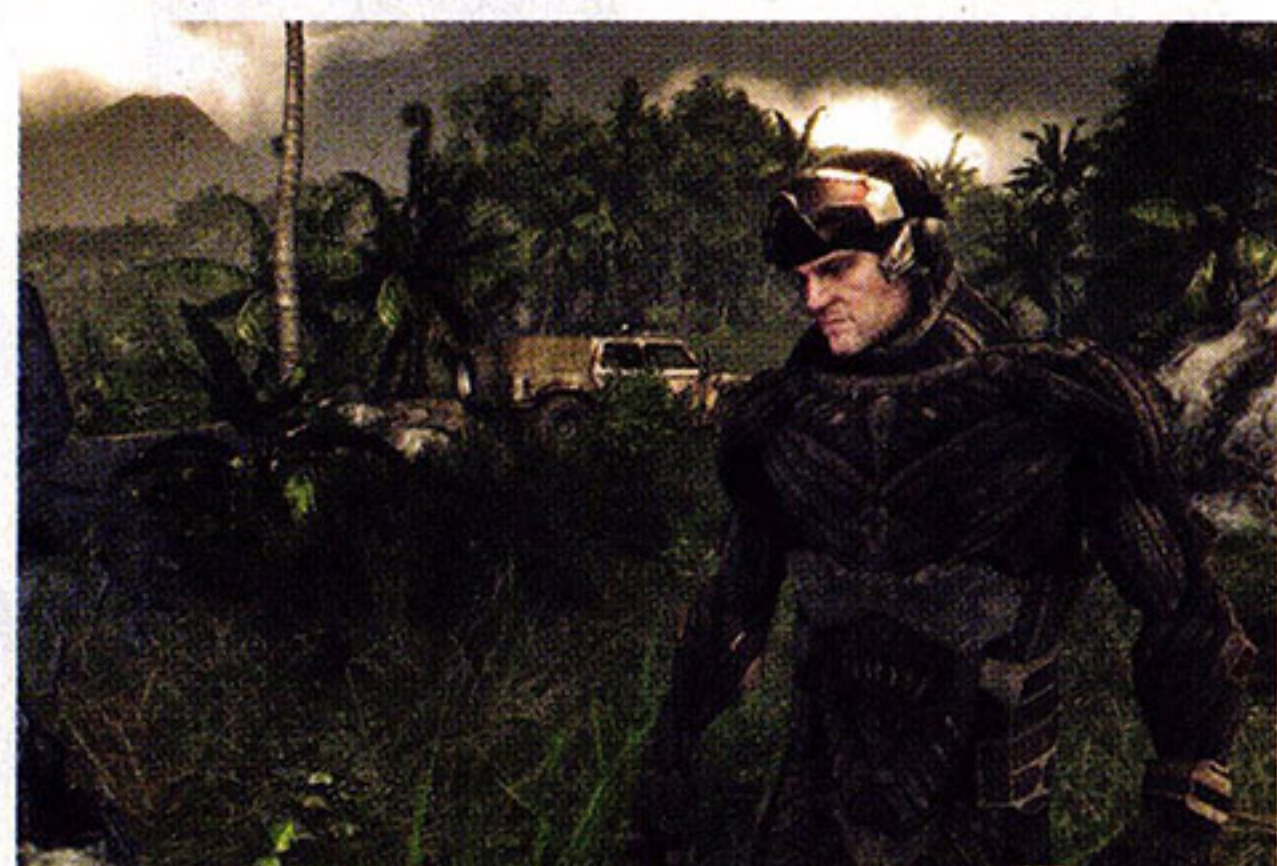
**Y**ou have to love the recent trend in PC gaming to release expansions that don't require the original title. Crysis Warhead is yet another example, and it purports to focus on guns-blazing sandbox-style action more than the oddly paced original.

Warhead takes place during the events of Crysis, but from the perspective of a different nanosuit-equipped operative on the other side of the island. The brief playtime we had with the game at E3 was reminiscent of the better segments of the first game, featuring an explosive vehicle chase followed by a wide-open dock area that was ours to assault as we saw fit. The hapless North Koreans we faced had no chance against the sniper rifles, shotguns, grenade launchers, and

right hook we threw at them. Furthermore, players won't have to suffer through any null-gravity sections in Warhead.

According to EA, Warhead will be a more accessible game to the masses thanks to Crytek's ongoing work in making the gorgeous engine run acceptably on mid-level machines. Multiplayer is also getting a boost with fan feedback-inspired reworked modes and the addition of a team deathmatch game type.

Warhead may seem like more of the same. But when more of the same is a tweaked and polished experience that takes one of last year's best PC titles and amps it up with better action and pacing, we're not going to complain. ■ ■ ■



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# NBA Live 09

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 10-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 17

## WELCOME TO THE ACADEMY

**F**resh off its solid, if unspectacular run from last season, the team at EA Canada is confident this year NBA Live is making a title run. Let's go to the tape to see if they've got a fighting chance.

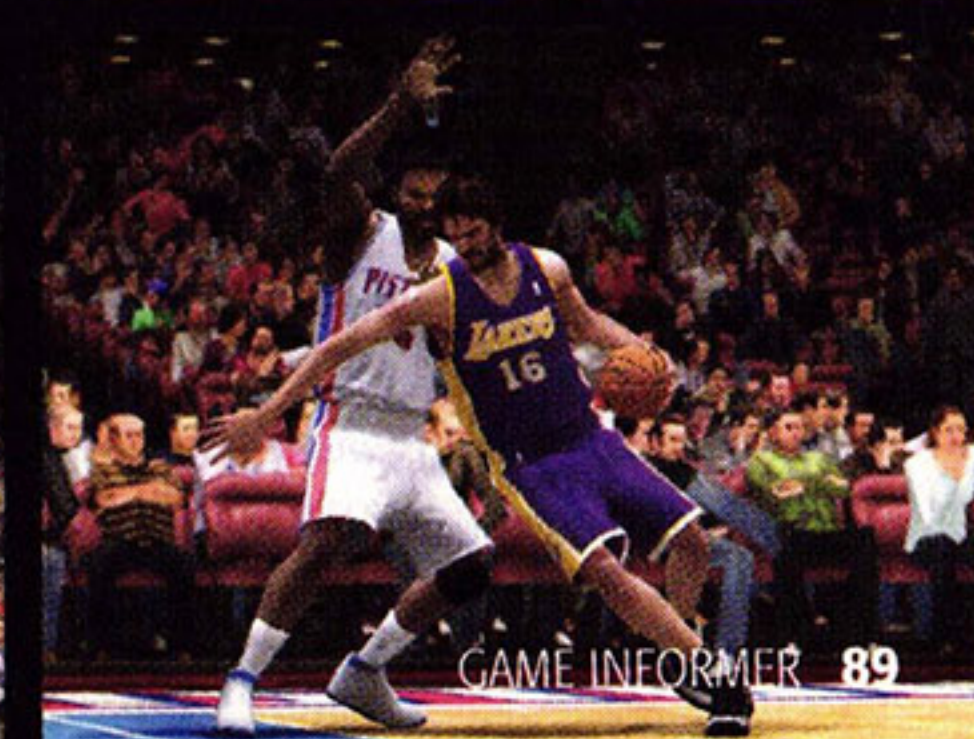
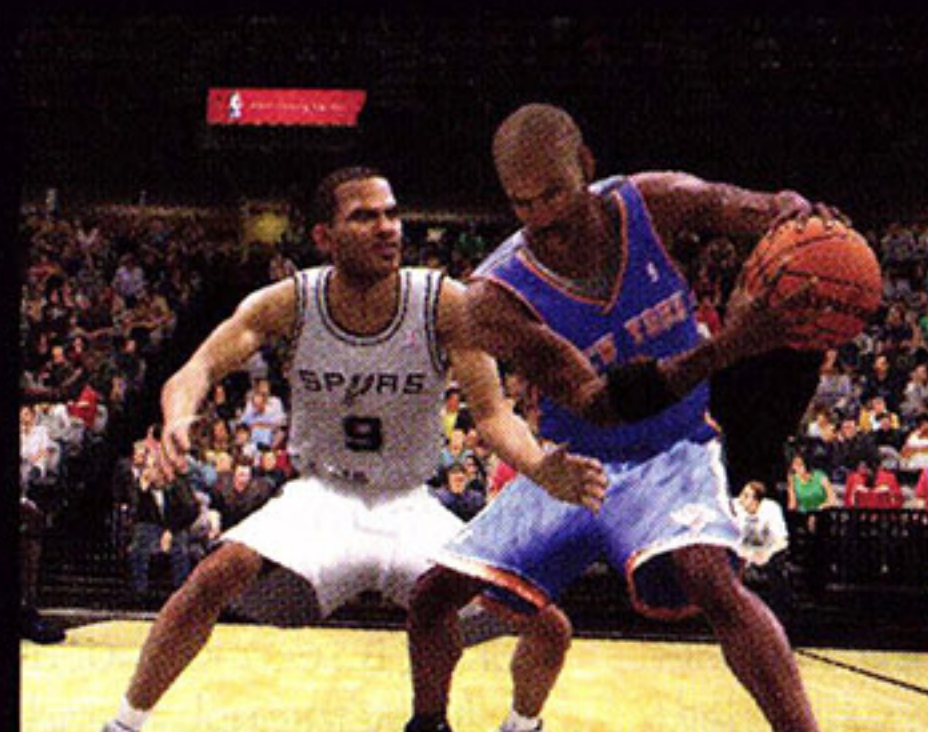
The star feature of NBA Live 09 is the Dynamic DNA system. With the help of Synergy Sports, which supplies statistical analysis to NBA teams, EA has developed a new simulation engine that analyzes and recreates players' offensive tendencies. Using information from past performances, the system judges how likely a player is to isolate, participate in a pick and roll, post up, spot up, use an off-screen, or cut to the basket. The intended result is a basketball experience so entrenched in reality that the game receives daily updates to take into account last night's games. The statistical information also translates to playcalling, as the game dynamically adjusts strategy to offer plays teams are most likely to run with the personnel package on the court.

On the hardwood, Live 09 boasts several tweaks to the gameplay, like a new pick and roll mechanic, free throw system, and improved

lockdown defense. The new system makes isolation defense more of a cat and mouse game. As long as the defender properly guesses the direction the dribbler is moving, it is much easier to stay in position and block penetration lanes. To help players master the new controls, EA has added the NBA Academy, a practice gym where players can participate in 40 challenges aimed at developing fundamental skills. The Academy also comes into play in the Dynasty mode, as you can improve younger players during the season and bring in potential draftees for workouts.

As with NHL 09, EA's latest hoops game now includes the Be A Pro mode, which lets you play through a season as one player, and an online multiplayer mode that allows up to 10 gamers to play in online pickup games.

This rounds out what looks to be a promising b-ball package. But like the Bulls of last year, a good team on paper doesn't necessarily add up to a good team on the court. We're anxious to see if these improvements will be enough to dethrone the superior NBA 2K franchise. ■ ■ ■





■ Using your last stand well is key

XBOX 360 | PC

# Left 4 Dead

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** VALVE SOFTWARE  
 > **DEVELOPER** VALVE SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4

## ZOMBIES, ZOMBIES EVERYWHERE AND NOT A BRAIN TO EAT

**N**othing dropped more GI staffers' jaws this year at E3 than Valve's next project. Left 4 Dead is poised to blow away every co-op action title to date when it drops on November 4. Half an hour behind the keyboard made a believer out of everyone who played this fast-paced survival horror first-person shooter.

It's easy to hear Left 4 Dead's concept — "get from point A to point B alive" — and think "Meh, co-op Painkiller." Valve's obsessive attention to detail and commitment to releasing only triple-A products takes this idea and elevates it far beyond a simple shooter. Everything about the game is geared toward making players work together; a quick death is all that awaits the fools who run off on their own.

When players are working together to cover each other's backs and stay close, run-of-the-mill zombies don't stand much of a chance against their automatic weapons. However, the game is more than happy to throw curveballs at the players in the form of special enemy types. Tanks break up the group by charging in and shrugging off dozens of bullets while dealing massive damage to anyone in melee range. Hunters leap long distances and pin players down while clawing their faces off. Boomers vomit at players, blinding them and causing all the other enemies to focus exclusively on them. These challenges seem simple enough to deal with when you have a buddy around to help you out, but trying to stay on top of everything while getting distracted by the zombies trying to eat your own brains is a never-ending struggle.

The health system is particularly clever as well. If you're reduced to zero health, you'll go down and pull

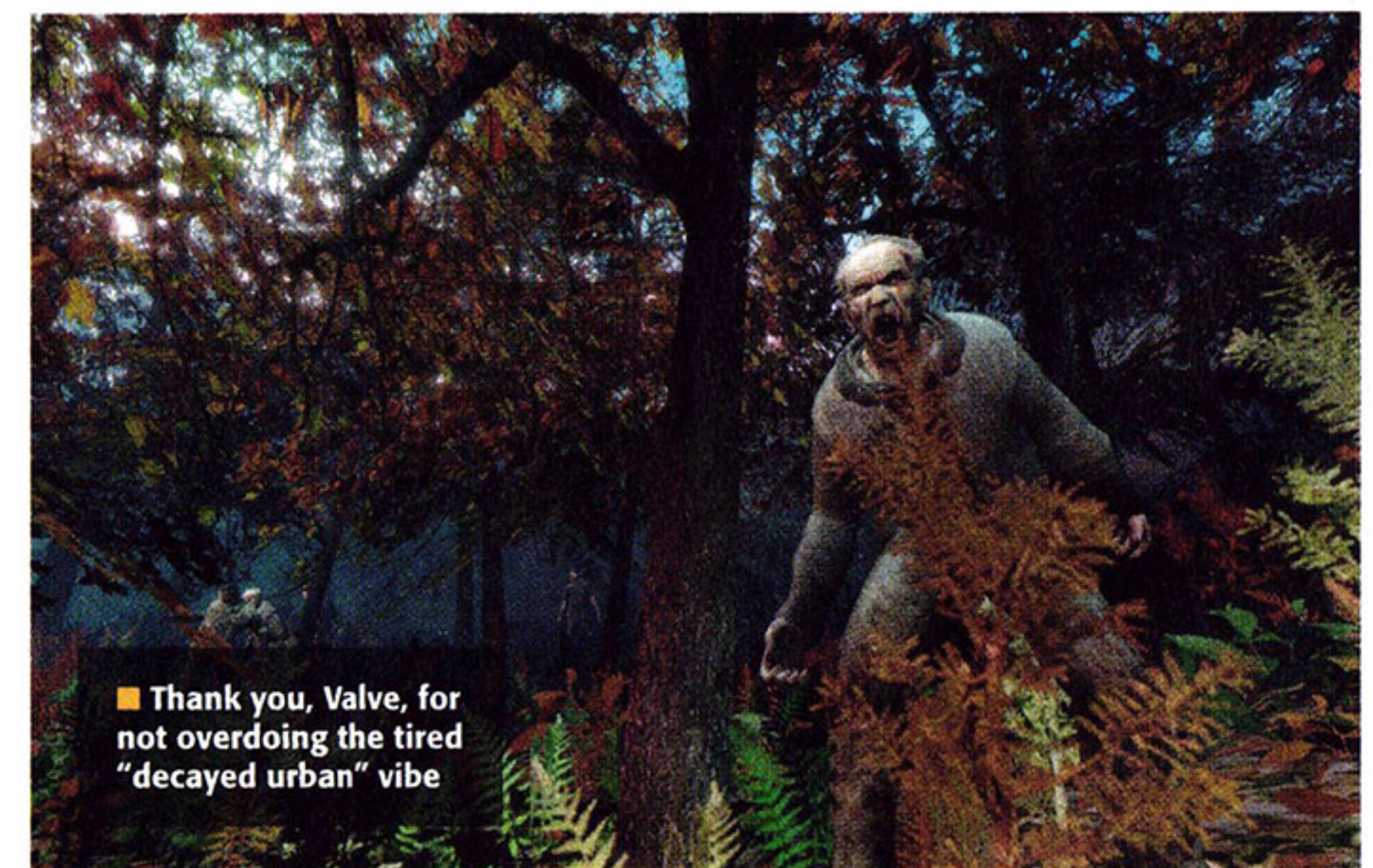
out your pistol just like the last stand perk in Call of Duty 4. Your health bar switches to your reserve hit points, which slowly drain over time while under the pressure of further zombie attacks. Should a teammate make it to you and revive you, you're back on your feet with some health left — but after the third time you'll continue to bleed until you get healed by a first aid kit. The genius of this is that it pushes player cooperation. While it takes some of the sting out of running out of health (since it's easy to get hosed by the super-zombies), it still makes getting mauled bad enough to keep zombie attacks tension filled.

Tying this all together is the unique dynamic spawn system. Outside of a few set pieces, nothing in a level is pre-scripted. The game will throw in the right number and types of zombies to challenge the group without being totally overwhelming, based on how you've been progressing so far. If you're rolling through the horde without trouble, expect a whole lot more super-zombies and fewer health packs. Newbies will find themselves faced with fewer and easier foes. In our time playing Left 4 Dead, we found ourselves taking a second shot at a level after dying about halfway through — and it was a completely different experience thanks to the dynamic spawning.

The game is still months away from release, yet the build we played was already one of the tightest and most polished FPS experiences in gaming. Left 4 Dead also features eight-player competitive multiplayer that we weren't able to try out. We can't wait to see what the final product looks like after Valve spends even more time on it. ■ ■ ■



■ She'll be fine



■ Thank you, Valve, for not overdoing the tired "decayed urban" vibe



■ This is not a game for children. Not even a little bit



■ Zombies are scarily fast and aggressive – this isn't Dynasty Warriors: Undead

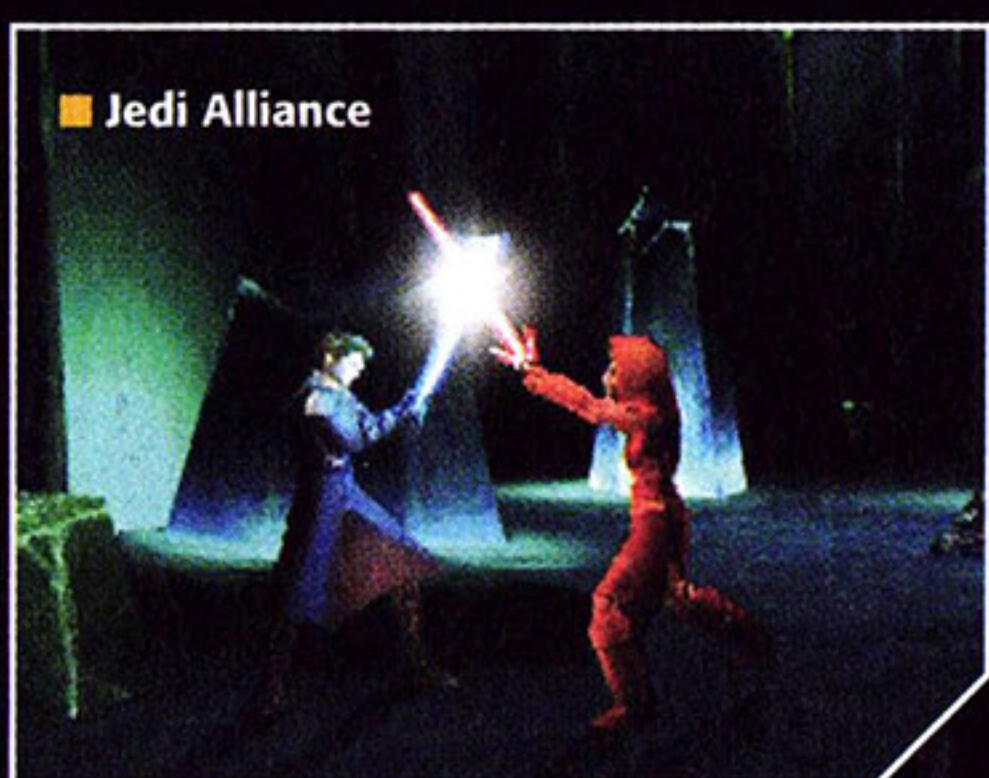


■ Trying to hide is entirely ineffective



# PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



Jedi Alliance



Wii

## Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels

In life, two things are certain. One: We're all going to die. Two: All nerds pick up a Wii remote and pretend it's a lightsaber. As much fun as it is to run around your house swinging the remote, your energy is better served in *The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels*. The game doesn't track the remote movement as well as we hoped, but it does deliver intense head-to-head dueling and some serious arm flailing. Most of the battles are stripped from the forthcoming *The Clone Wars* movie and TV series, placing players into the formidable cloaks of Anakin Skywalker, Asajj Ventress, Ahsoka Tano (Anakin's padawan), and a handful of other skilled fighters. As you flick and swing the remote to create devastating combos, the world around you crumbles and explodes to reveal hidden battlegrounds and new objects you can Force throw at your opponent. This title should be on store shelves this holiday. At the same time, LucasArts will also release *The Clone Wars: Jedi Alliance* for Nintendo DS. This handheld brawler features stylus-based combat, a new story that adds to the Clone Wars saga, and wireless drop-in/drop-out co-op.



XBOX 360 | PC

## Postal 3

Hide your children! The highly controversial and incredibly violent *Postal* series is back and bloodier than ever before. Why punch someone in the back of the head when you can use a badger (pictured above) to maul them? Why waste ammo on a group of people when you can douse them with gasoline and light them on fire? Why spend money on dog food, when you can lead a dog with a laser pointer to a fresh slab of meat? The gameplay is violent but inventive, and it looks great running on Valve's Source engine. Developer Running With Scissors and publisher Akella are keeping most details surrounding this third-person shooter under wraps, but we do know that it will launch simultaneously in 2009 on PC and Xbox 360.



NINTENDO DS

## Kirby Super Star Ultra

While it would have been nice to get a follow up to 2005's innovative *Canvas Curse*, we don't think old school Kirby fans will mind HAL Laboratory's remake of SNES classic *Kirby Super Star*. Originally billed as "eight games in one," *Super Star* mixes five distinct platforming concepts with three minigames. All of the traditional content returns with updated graphics and cutscenes, along with two new stages and three new minigames. Up to four players can face off using a single game card. Get ready to take on King Dedede and Meta Knight on September 22.





Wii  
**Wario Land: Shake It**

On September 22, Nintendo is actually releasing a 2D platformer at retail on the Wii. It's good to see a genre long exiled to handhelds or DLC actually get burned onto a disc. Maybe if this does well, we'll actually get a home console 2D Metroid! New developer Good-Feel is incorporating a shake mechanic in with Wario's trademark shoulder dash and butt stomp. Players wiggle the Wii remote, which is held sideways, to punch the ground. The resulting quake dazes enemies and affects the environment for puzzle-solving purposes. Burping, farting, and a ridiculous story come standard.



XBOX 360  
**Lips**

Guitar Hero and Rock Band may be hogging the limelight right now (for good reason) but Lips is another exciting new franchise announcement in the burgeoning music game market. Microsoft's karaoke-style game comes from Keiichi Yano, the mind behind Elite Beat Agents and Gitaroo Man. The game ships with two snazzy wireless microphones that light up in response to your singing and actions, and double as percussion instruments that respond to your movements. While the game includes some quality tracks from the likes of Duffy ("Mercy") and Young MC ("Bust a Move"), the real story is the ability to plug in a digital audio player and sing along to your favorite songs. No word yet on how well that functionality works, but we're eager to give it a try before the game's holiday release.



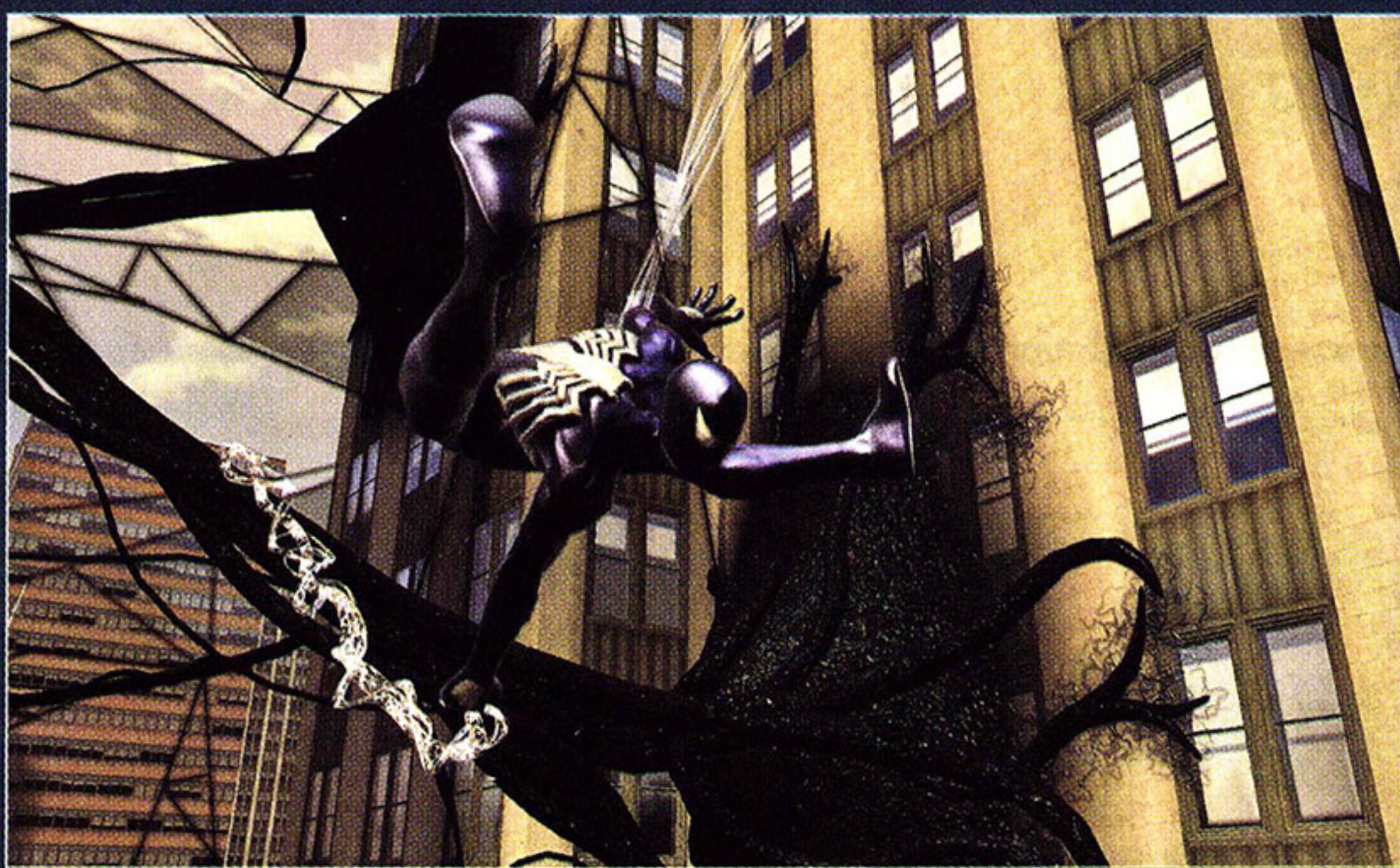
PSP  
**Patapon 2**

While the beans had already been spilled on a Japanese release for Pyramid's follow up to the music/strategy hit, Patapon 2's U.S. plans were confirmed briefly during Sony's E3 press conference (though no release date was given). The sequel features powerful hero characters that lead your patapon into battle. Known by their special colorized armor, the heroes also represent you in new four-player local co-op missions in which you team up to escort a giant egg through the battlefield. New flying units are included as well, and should offer some helpful immunity against quake-happy bosses.



Wii  
**Wii Sports Resort**

So you've finally managed to buy enough remotes to get your whole family playing along to Wii Sports. Congratulations! Time to start over by purchasing Wii Sports Resort and the packaged Wii MotionPlus accessory! This sure-to-be bestselling sequel to the system's original pack-in game features a bunch of new simple activities that emulate a trip to the beach. Sword Play involves bashing your buddy off a raised platform by blocking and swinging with the remote. Disc Dog brings a ridiculously cute Mii-like puppy into the picture that chases and catches your disc throws. Power Cruising involves steering through a watery obstacle course as you rev up the engines by twisting the remote like a handlebar. Along with the other unannounced minigames, it'll be enough to keep you busy for literally dozens of minutes when it releases next spring.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2  
**Spider-Man: Web of Shadows**

Just because he doesn't have a big-budget feature film coming out this year doesn't mean Activision can't bring us a new video game starring everyone's favorite wall crawler. Developer Shaba Games – the team behind Wakeboarding Unleashed – brings its extreme sports expertise over to Web of Shadow's more acrobatic combat system that finds Spidey battling foes up the sides New York's tallest skyscrapers. Spider-Man now has the ability to switch between two different suits on the fly: the agile red suit and the stronger black suit. Players who take advantage of both play styles will earn more XP, which can be used to buy and upgrade more than 100 new moves. Web-heads can look forward to an October release.



Wii

## The Conduit

If you thought Washington D.C. sucked right now with its political bickering and countless scandals, wait until it becomes the first strike point for a large-scale alien invasion. It's up to secret agent Mr. Ford to shoot his way through waves of the incoming armada and ultimately discover the truth behind the attack with the help of the recovered alien technology known as the All-Seeing Eye. The Conduit deceptively looks too good to be on the Wii. This futuristic shooter also features customizable controls, a first for the FPS genre on Wii. Developer High Voltage hasn't found a publisher yet, but we hope this game gets picked up soon because it looks like one of the most promising third-party Wii titles we've seen in a while.



NINTENDO DS

## Cooking Guide: Can't Decide What to Eat?

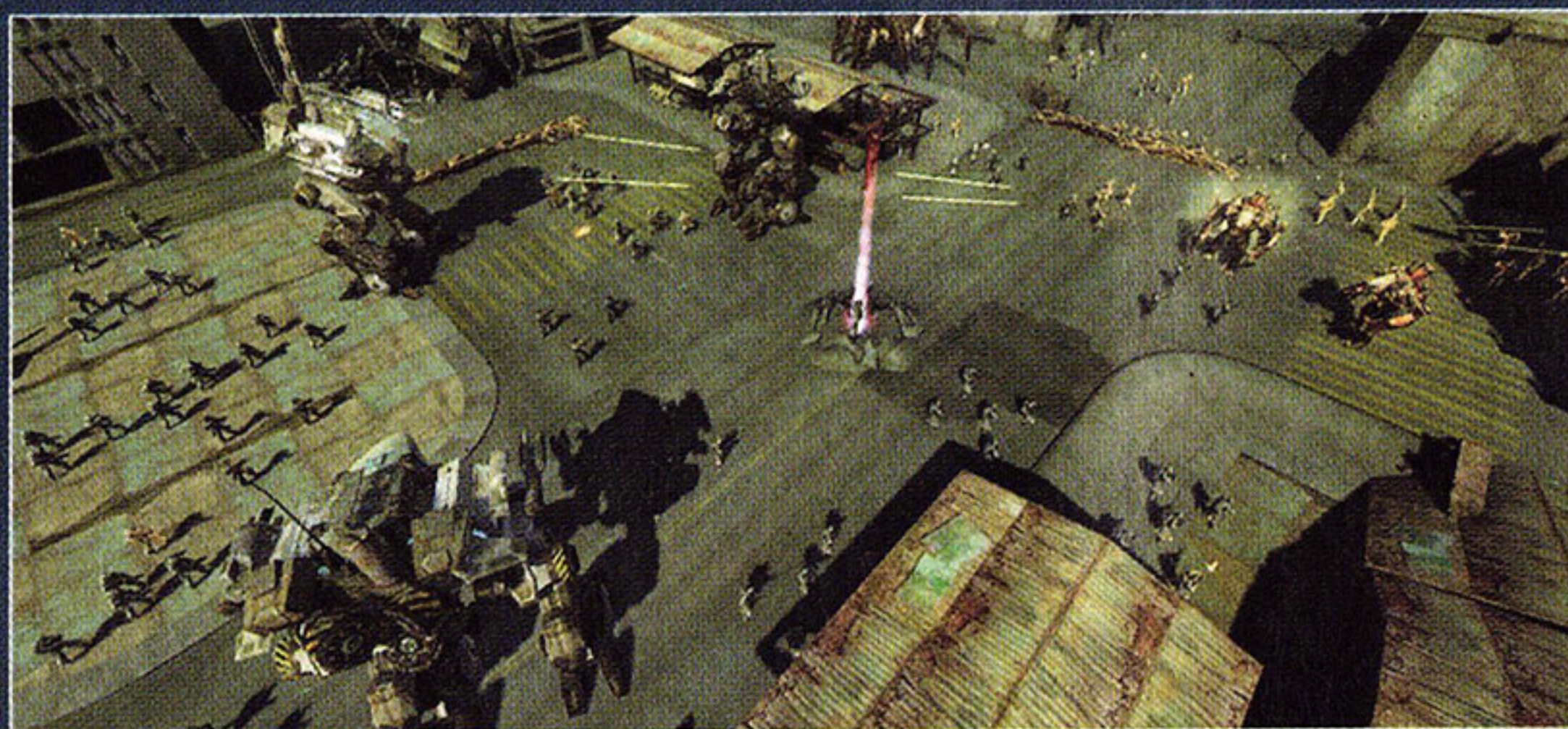
The name may be ridiculous, but this is actually one of the coolest things to come out of Nintendo's press conference this year. The software isn't even remotely a game – it's an interactive cookbook. It includes more than 200 recipes to make for dinner. Each dish includes full color pictures and clear instructions on making the meal and short videos on the techniques you might need, such as how to chop an onion. Turn the "page" with either your voice or a tap of the stylus, adjust number of servings automatically, and even use the DS as a timer. A fully voiced chef will walk you through the whole process if you wish. There's even an ingredient checklist to take with you to the store. Your first hint? The touch screen is not a good cutting surface.



XBOX 360

## You're in the Movies

You've mocked Keanu Reeves endlessly for his acting abilities, but now's your chance to back up your words with a big screen performance of your own. You're in the Movies utilizes the Xbox Live vision camera to record footage for use in a variety of different movie trailers. The game sets up the shots, but it's up to you to make them look good. In one scene, you're asked to make it look like you are being pulled backwards. In another, you have to pretend that you are riding a scooter. Many of these shots are presented through minigames, but you can always go into the Director's mode to get different shots if you need them. You're in the Movies is developed by Zoë Mode, and will be published this holiday through the collaborative efforts of Codemasters and Microsoft.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

## Stormrise

The team at Creative Assembly behind Medieval II: Total War is bringing its real-time strategy expertise to consoles with the help of publisher Sega. Stormrise pits two factions of post-apocalyptic humans against each other in a struggle for supremacy. Instead of the genre's traditional bird's-eye view, the action is controlled from the perspective of the units; players can switch their camera to any of their forces with a flick of an analog stick. Maps are designed to take advantage of three dimensions, making it massively advantageous to have a scout perched atop a ruined building or other high point. We'll have more details as we get nearer to Stormrise's 2009 release.



XBOX 360

## Star Ocean: The Last Hope

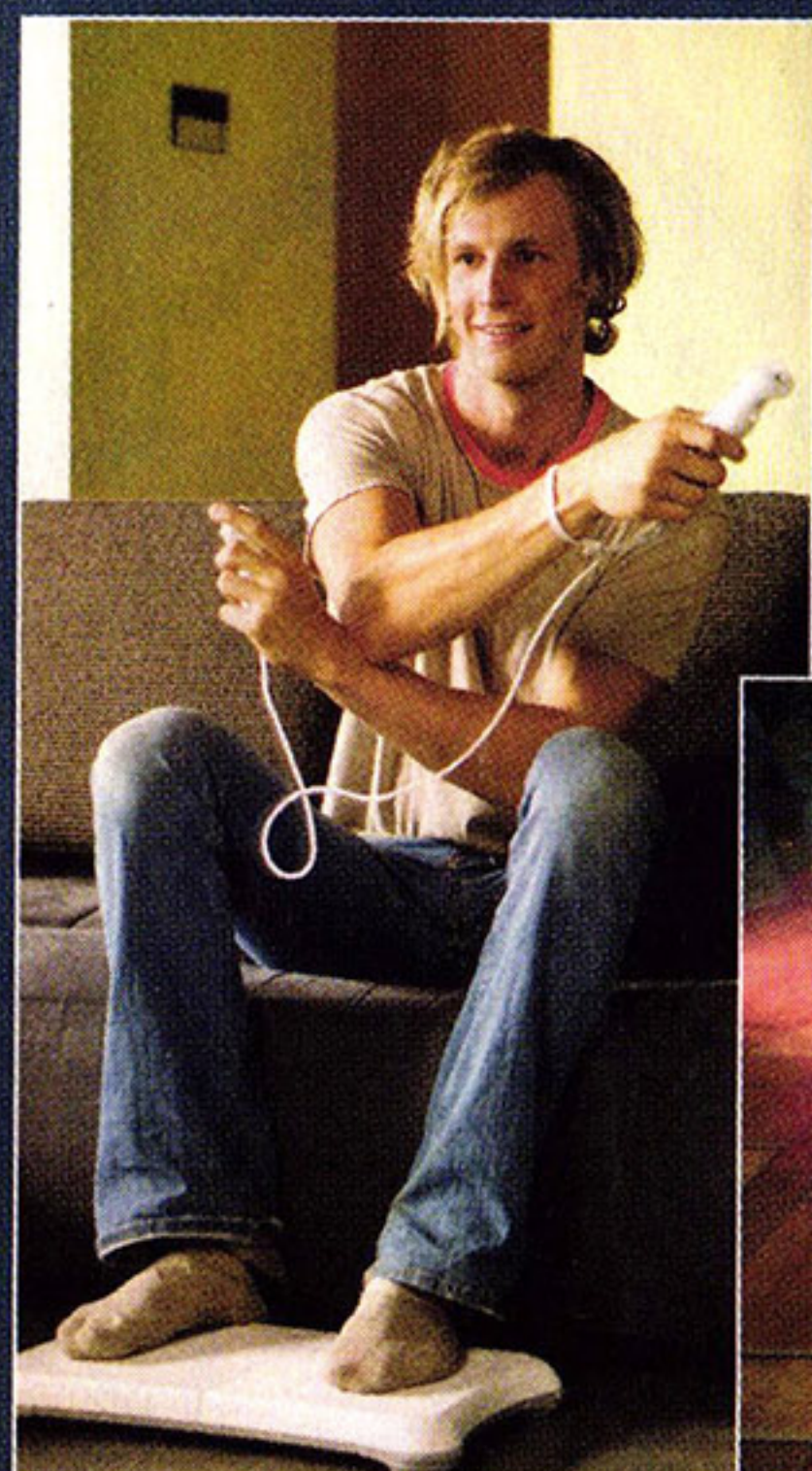
What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the words "sci-fi space opera"? Okay, after *Star Wars*. That's right, it's *Star Ocean*! Tri-Ace and Square Enix are bringing this saga back with a fourth installment due this spring. *Star Ocean: The Last Hope* is an Xbox 360 exclusive title that uses the series' signature real-time battle system and stunning cinematics to convey a story about humanity searching for a new home in space. Think of it as *Final Fantasy* meets *Battlestar Galactica*. Now, if only Edward James Olmos were a playable character, this could be the best RPG ever... but we're still excited even if he isn't.



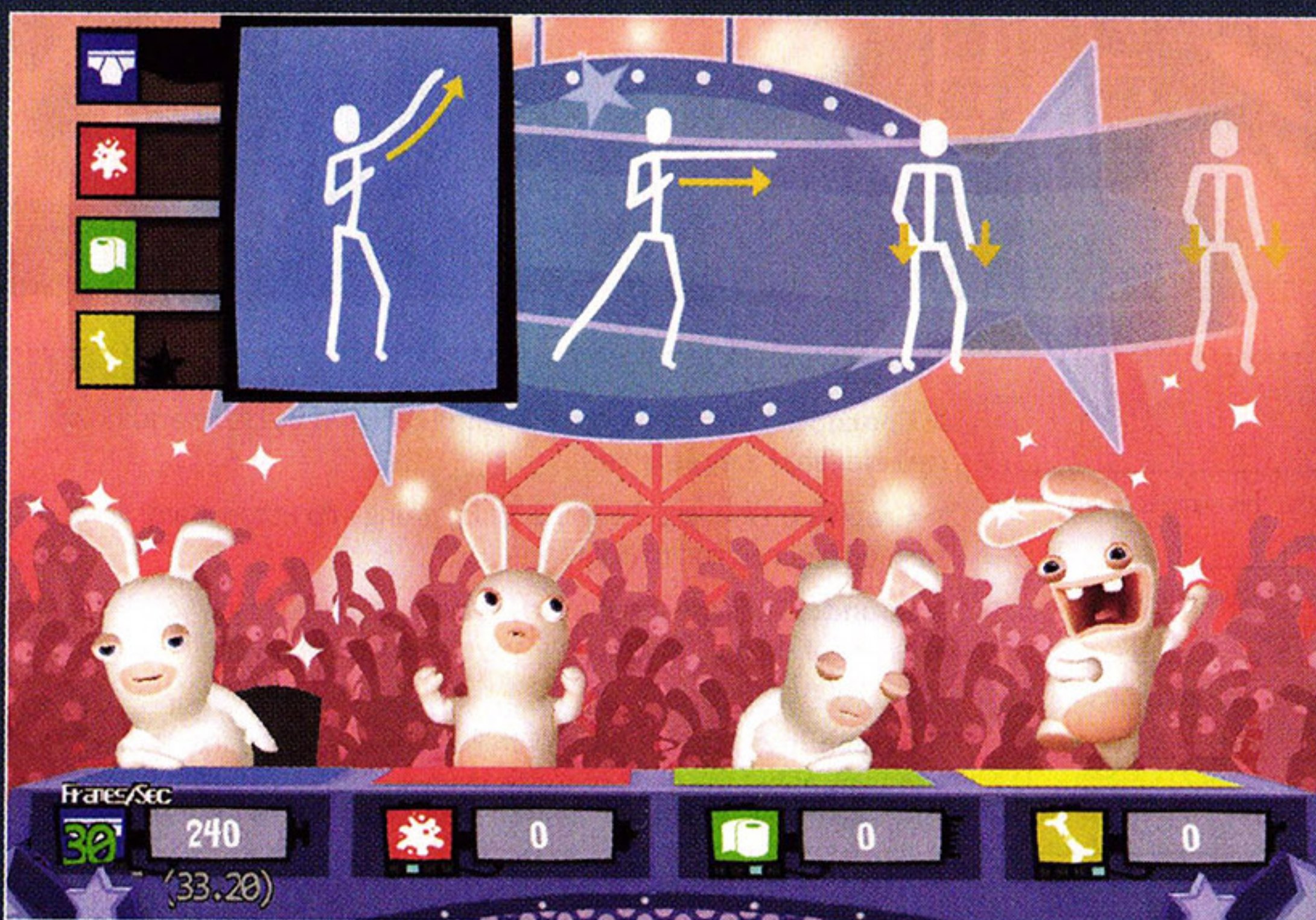


Wii  
**Wii Music**

Wii Music isn't a game. It's an experience akin to a bunch of sugar-drunk third graders breaking into the school's band room. No skill is required to make noise in this game, simply mimic the motions required to play your instrument of choice. There are over 60 instruments to choose from, including a wide variety of oddities like jaw harp, beat box, and the one that will surely drive parents batty, the dog suit – an instrument that barks and howls with each shake of the remote. It doesn't matter if you play to the music's rhythm, you cannot fail in this game. You can throw in extra beats, or shave them off. It's up to you and three other players to determine how the song sounds. Nintendo is keeping a tight lid on the track list, but five songs have been announced thus far. You can rock out to "Yankee Doodle", the Super Mario Bros. theme, and "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star", with more public domain tunes sure to follow. Take that Guitar Hero! Wii Music will be available this holiday exclusively on Wii.



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Wii  
**Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party**

Since TV Party's appearance in last month's issue, we've tried some of the 50-plus minigames in the rabbids' attempt to control TV for a week. About 30 percent of the game is playable with the Wii Balance Board, though it's not a requirement to have one. You can use it to surf through rings in outer space or sit on it and steer a wildebeest down a snowy mountain. Non-board challenges include navigating a motorcycle through the desert and mimicking dance poses with the remote and nunchuk. Ubisoft is still offering a vague "late 2008" Rabbid release window.



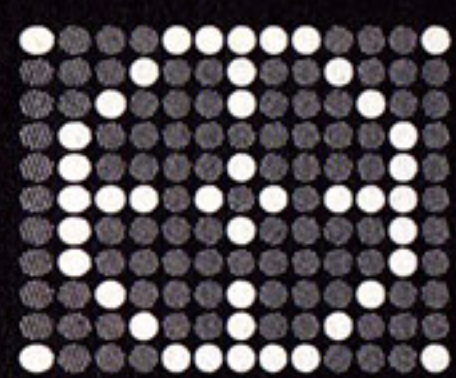
NINTENDO DS  
**Chrono Trigger**

Magus, Frog, The Green Ambler – the legendary SNES RPG Chrono Trigger introduced us to several classic video game characters, and now they are poised to make a return this holiday on the Nintendo DS. This version of Chrono Trigger barely deviates from the game you know and love; it contains one new dungeon, a wireless mode, and all of the menus are displayed and used on the lower screen. Otherwise, everything is just as you remember it. Some may criticize Square Enix's tendency to re-release existing games, but we're so hungry for more Chrono Trigger that we'll take it any way we can get it. Maybe one of the endings will unlock a direct sequel! Oh, to dream.



PLAYSTATION 2  
**Persona 4**

Current generation role-playing titles are just starting to hit their stride, but the console with the best catalogue of awesome RPGs is still the PlayStation 2. It looks like we may add another game to that list when Atlus releases Persona 4. As a murder mystery set in a small town, the game has a similar artistic style to Persona 3, but has received a handful of gameplay tweaks. For instance, players can control the actions of every party member, not just the main character. Social interactions and Persona creation will still play a key role, so prepare to get addicted again when the game comes Stateside this winter.



# REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



100

Madden NFL 09

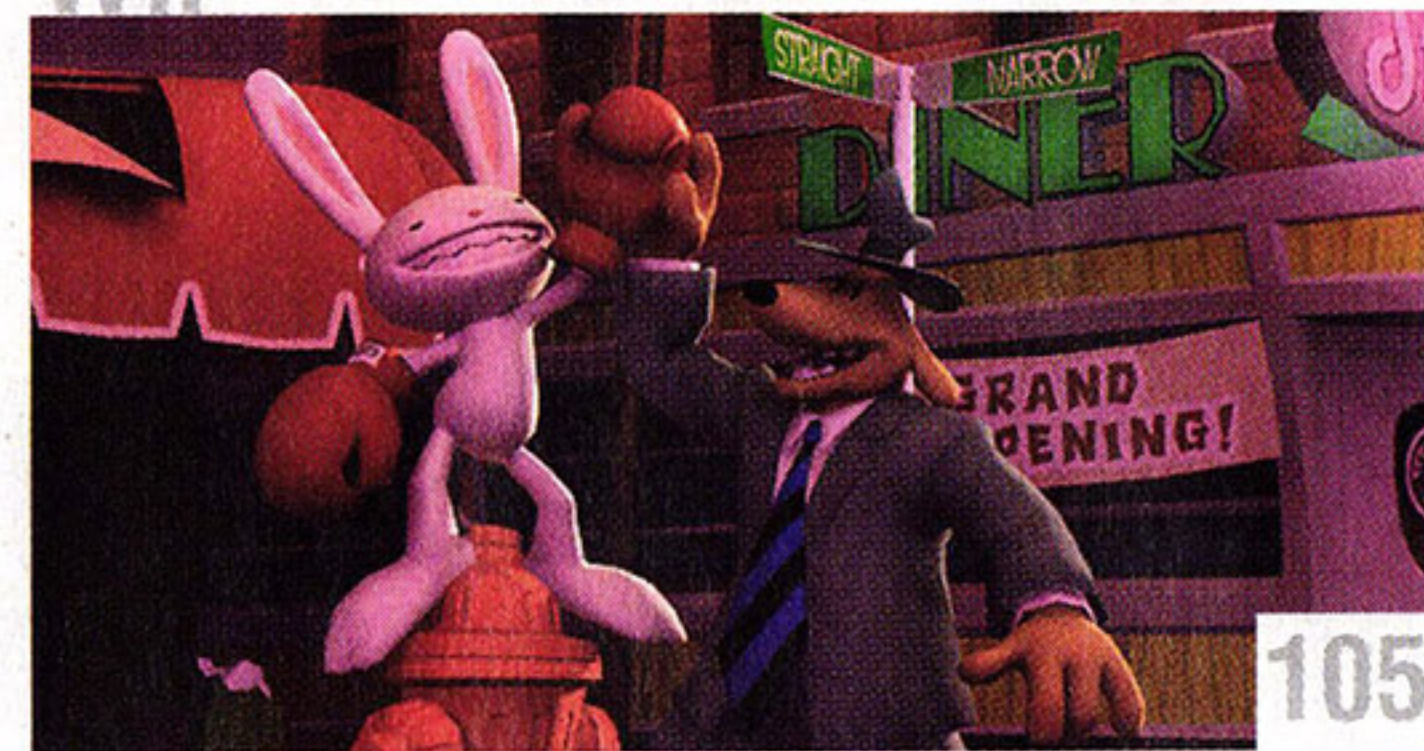
XBOX 360



104

Too Human

Wii



105

Sam & Max Season One



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** Slam poets. Get a job, you no-talent hacks.

- > **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.

PLAYSTATION 3



Disgaea 3: Absence of Justice 106

HANDHELD



Guitar Hero On Tour 107



Soulcalibur IV

Namco Bandai is at long last bringing its flagship fighting franchise into the current generation, and it's mostly a success. The visuals that Soulcalibur is known for do not disappoint, and smooth online play is long overdue. A deep character creation/editing tool gives single-player a purpose again – unlocking new gear and customizing brawlers' loadouts is as addictive here as anywhere else. There's a lot to get excited about here, not least of which is another reason to dive back into the series' excellent battles.

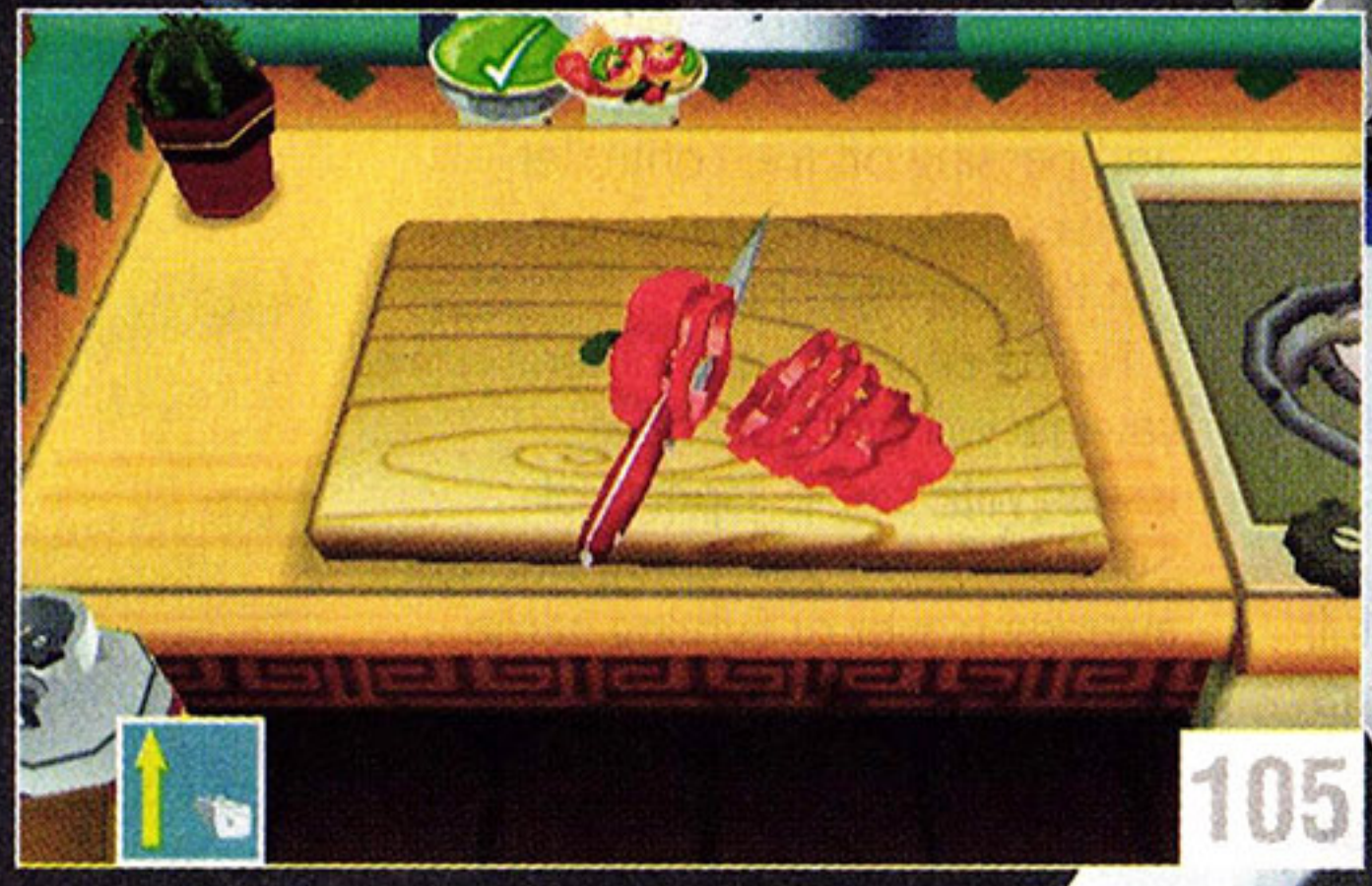
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pg. 107

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.		

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
- big nose tears** – What Too Human fanatics will be crying when they actually play it
- 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
- sports** – A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin
- strategy** – A term we use for games like Disgaea and Fire Emblem
- third-party** – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Soulcalibur IV

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI  
> **DEVELOPER** PROJECT SOUL > **RELEASE** JULY 29 > **ESRB** T



## A NEW STAGE OF HISTORY

I've always loved Soulcalibur's brand of weapon-based one-on-one combat, from its precursor on PSone to the amazing multiplatform sequel and the mediocre third entry on PS2. This latest iteration falls somewhere in the middle of the series' legacy. While it doesn't recreate the finely tuned excellence of Soulcalibur II, it sidesteps many of the issues found in III and adds a ton of single-player depth and lag-free online play. Plus, on an HD display, you really have to see this thing in motion.

Mechanically, Soulcalibur IV is nearly identical to its predecessors. Equipment breakage and a simplistic blocking gauge strongly discourage turtling, but otherwise you could easily be playing the first game with new characters and tweaked move sets. Unfortunately, sideways dodging in IV is just as bad as it was in III, with vertical attacks magically tracking to negate lateral movement on the defender's part. The flow of a round still finds that magical balance between combos, juggles, defense, and positioning more often than not, which is the most important thing.

Venturing outside of the traditional Arcade or Versus modes is finally worth your time here, and not just for unlocking the full roster of characters. The plethora of challenges, many of which hearken back to the totally unfair (in a good way) adventures in Soul Edge, will take even dedicated Soulcalibur nuts months to clear. Nearly everything you do works toward leveling up your fighters, unlocking new ones, and padding your in-game wallet. In most other titles in the genre, this would be an afterthought. Here, the introduction of an astoundingly deep character creator/editor allows you

to customize the look and capabilities of created characters and stock fighters to an impressive degree. I normally don't bother with this sort of peripheral frippery no matter the genre, but I spent almost as much time playing with the character editor as I did beating the crap out of Miller or the CPU.

Skills like "Auto Grapple Break" and "Invisible" add a wacky element to the game, but it's all fun and games in single-player since setting up your favorite fighter to handle some of the more unfair challenges can be an entertaining metagame. Hardcore fans can relax, though – Arcade and Standard Versus modes still require unmodified characters, so you don't have to deal with the lack of gameplay balance these new skills present.

Online play, a first for the series, is well implemented. Most of the matches I played were lag-free, and the matchmaking system works well. It still doesn't beat having a couple of buddies over and passing off the controller between bouts of smack talking, but the option is nice.

Frame-counters and other savants will probably have issues with some aspects of Soulcalibur IV's gameplay, but the average player or fighting game enthusiast is well served by this title's array of game types and tight weapon-based duels. I know I'm more than satisfied. —ADAM

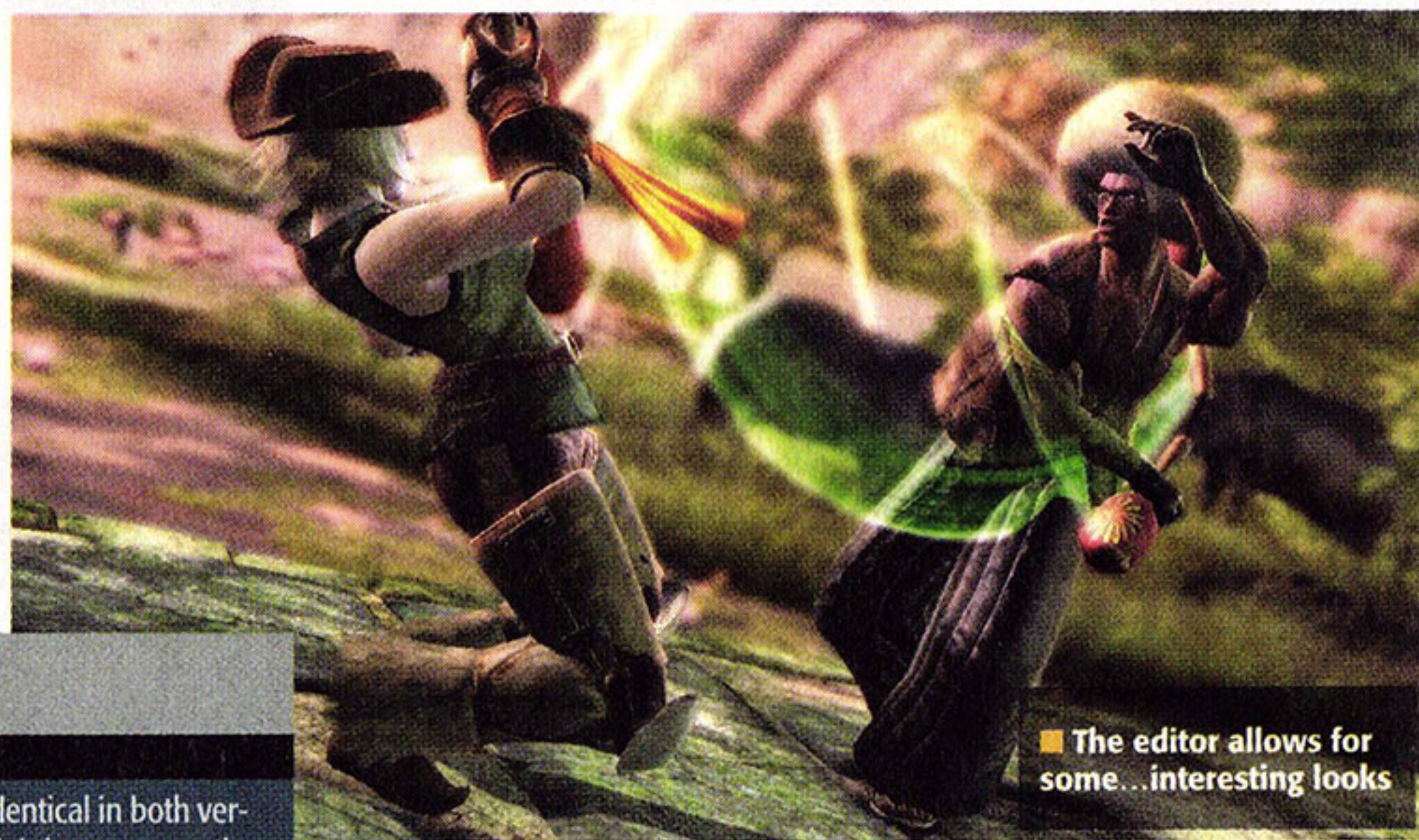
### the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Visuals, load times, and online features are identical in both versions, but I cannot recommend playing any fighting game on the 360 controller – unless you're some kind of Philistine that uses the analog stick instead of the d-pad or a hardcore enthusiast who owns an arcade stick. Neither of the exclusive characters (Vader on PS3, Yoda on 360) are anything terribly special, so pick up the PS3 version for the superior gamepad if you have the option.



Hilde (left) is the best of any new fighter from Soulcalibur III or IV



The editor allows for some...interesting looks



Someone needs to learn their moves' ranges a little better



Some modes let each player switch characters, Marvel vs. Capcom style

**BOTTOM LINE** **8.75**

> **Concept:** Bring Soulcalibur into the current generation, complete with smooth online play and matchmaking

> **Graphics:** The series has always looked great, and this is the best of the lot

> **Sound:** The voices are often hilariously bad. The clash of steel is what it is

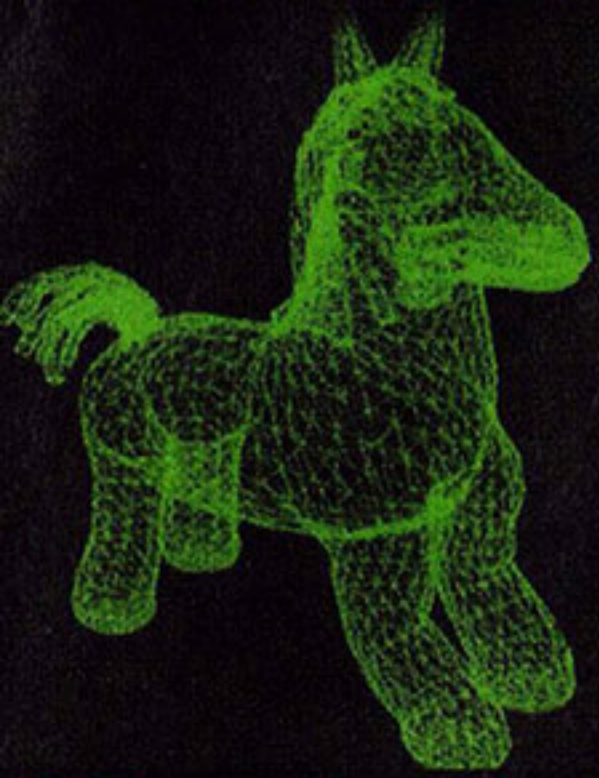
> **Playability:** Just about perfect on PS3, but the 360 pad is very poorly suited to this style of game

> **Entertainment:** This is undeniably Soulcalibur, with all the brilliance and flaws therein

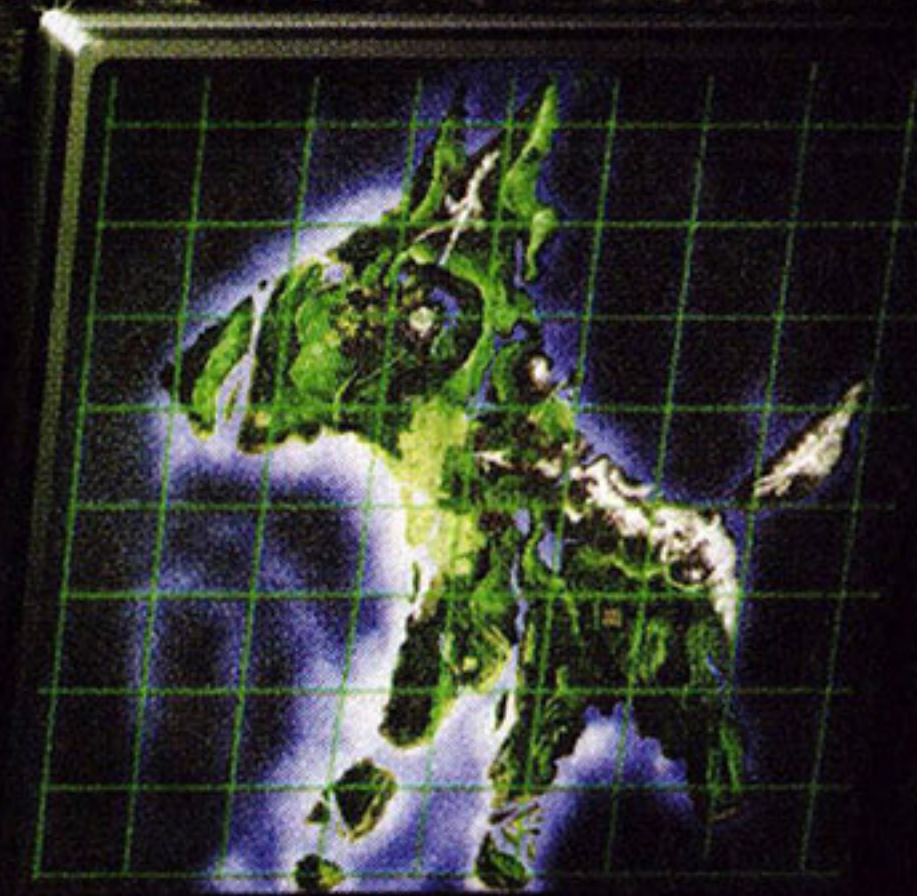
> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

### Second Opinion 8.75

The latest Soulcalibur is at its best in the first few hours of play. During this time, I marveled at the exhilarating combat, gorgeous visuals, and wide roster of fantastically varied characters. These features still shine even when some of the game's less enjoyable elements surface. The writing, which might seem charmingly quaint at first, is actually quite awful, with text crafted so poorly that it isn't even grammatically correct. An inability to customize the difficulty on most of the major game modes becomes increasingly problematic. All but the veteran player will find it difficult to progress very far in the survival-style Tower of Lost Souls mode, which would otherwise be the most enjoyable way to play alone. These issues are countered by an astounding character creator, silky smooth online implementation, and an addictive method of progression that allows for increased character abilities after a lengthy time commitment. Soulcalibur is rife with opportunities to expand the genre in terms of story and more varied gameplay. Those features don't come together this time around, but it's a breathtaking fighter nonetheless. —MILLER



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## His list of demands is short and sweet.

The days of peaceful piñata gardens are over. The evil Professor Pester is back and he won't rest until he's got your piñatas and all the candy in 'em. And with dozens of new piñata species and two brand-new environments to take care of, this garden is anything but relaxing.

[xbox.com/vivapinata](http://xbox.com/vivapinata)

**EVERYONE**  
**E** Comic Mischief  
Mild Cartoon Violence  
ESRB CONTENT RATING [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org)

**VIVA**  
**PIÑATA**  
**TROUBLE IN PARADISE**

**Microsoft**  
game studios  
RARE

Jump in.

**XBOX 360** LIVE



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Madden NFL 09

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS  
> DEVELOPER EA TIBURON > RELEASE AUGUST 12 > ESRB E



## THE PAST AND PRESENT

There's a lot of talk amongst Madden fans about what the series used to be. The last couple years we've watched the franchise to see if it could climb back up to the high standard that might even be a myth for all we know. After all, we complain about Madden's legacy issues, but the existence of that very concept (and boy, do they exist!) means that the past simply couldn't have been as good as we remember it. It's clear that there is not going to be any magic jump for the series — it is what it is, for better and worse.

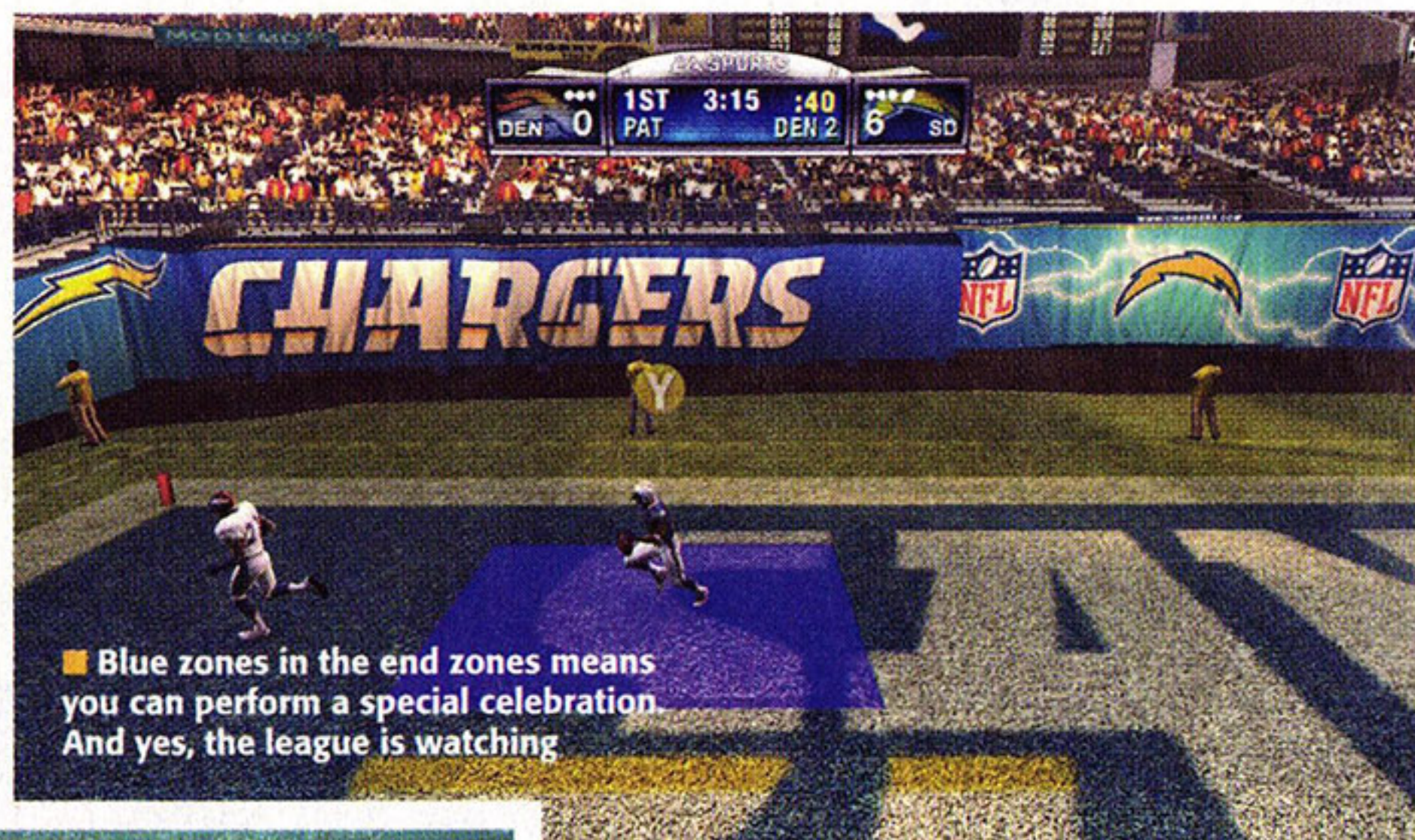
Each game — hell, each series — plays out like a highlight reel full of exciting catches, de-cleating tackles, and big-play runs. The game plays fast, which for me ramps up the excitement an extra notch. The downside of seeing wide receivers getting creamed over the middle in a spectacular tackle by a defensive back, for instance, is that these animations are more or less pre-determined, leaving you with a loss of control before the inevitable end result. The one animation I despise is when a receiver throws up his hands for an improbable highlight catch instead of simply running his route, getting under the ball, and catching it in stride.

As a ball carrier, thankfully you have the Highlight (right analog) stick at your disposal, which offers a measure of control by letting you combo moves together to escape tackles, make directional changes, and navigate line traffic. It sounds gimmicky, but it's well balanced. The downside is you never know what you're going to get with the Highlight stick.

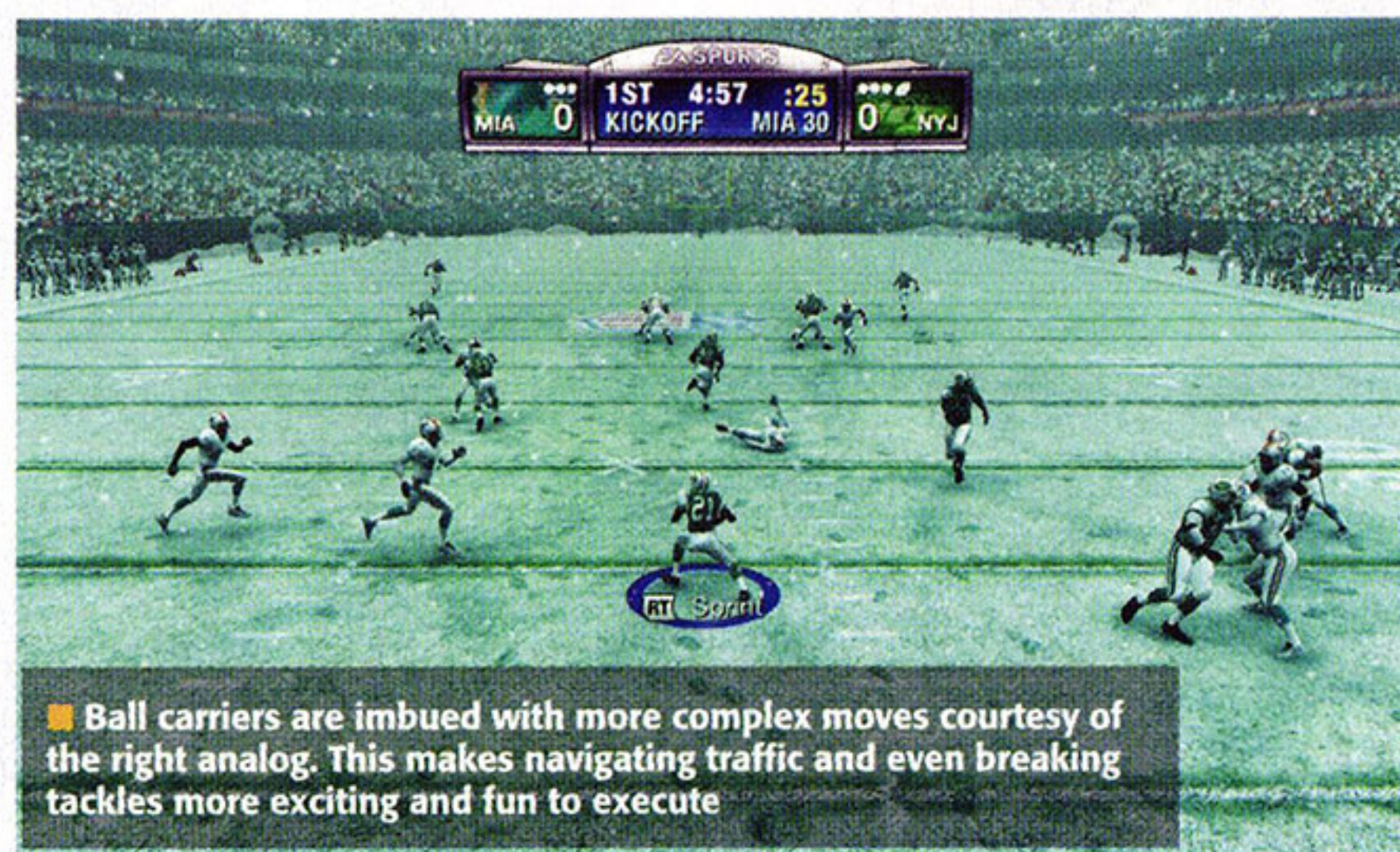
Madden nowadays ditches the complex input of button presses for a more simplified read-and-react system. Whether you agree with this direction or not, there are moments that everyone will scratch their head after seeing — linebackers going from omnipotent to clueless in the same play, dropped interceptions, wide receivers

who inexplicably break off routes, ball carriers who walk out of bounds, and the iffy collisions. Gaffes like these put the lie to Madden's continued improvement and stand in curious opposition to the great football moments that this game is capable of delivering.

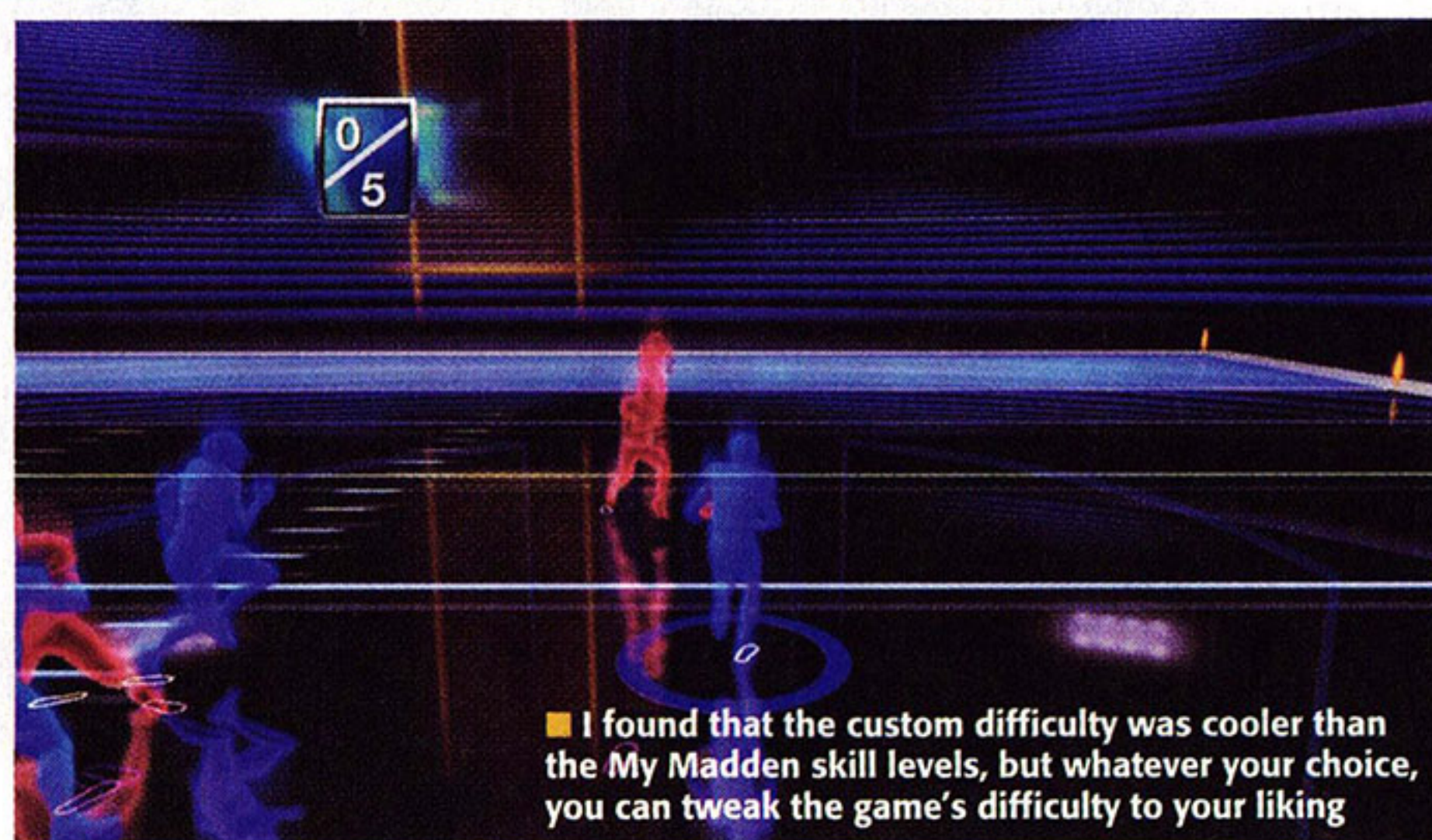
While the play-to-play action has some awesome moments,



■ Blue zones in the end zones means you can perform a special celebration. And yes, the league is watching



■ Ball carriers are imbued with more complex moves courtesy of the right analog. This makes navigating traffic and even breaking tackles more exciting and fun to execute



■ I found that the custom difficulty was cooler than the My Madden skill levels, but whatever your choice, you can tweak the game's difficulty to your liking

**BOTTOM LINE** 8.25

> **Concept:** Madden continues to be fun to play, which makes its continuing mistakes frustrating

> **Graphics:** Seeing the dirty uniforms (except for kickers' lily white duds) are pretty cool

> **Sound:** Collinsworth is awesome as a commentator, but the other guy's only role is to act as a shill for EA Sports. Dare I say maybe Bryant Gumbel would have been better?

> **Playability:** The secondary ball carrier moves are a great addition that are balanced well

> **Entertainment:** Some of the football is over the top, but the off-the-field action is pretty tame

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 8.25

Madden 09 improves superficially on its previous iterations — fantastic player models, refined gameplay, a brilliantly re-imagined playcall screen, and quality broadcast presentation. Between the hashmarks, the game has overcome many shortcomings, and in doing so highlighted others. The improved secondary positioning gives the passing game a more realistic feel, but the lack of head-tracking still makes it hard to tell if a defender will break for the ball or not. The lack of subtlety in the quarterback's throws becomes the new problem. Hard throws have no arc and are therefore constantly intercepted by well-positioned linebackers, while the lack of velocity on touch passes gives the secondary too much time to catch up to that previously wide open receiver. What I wouldn't give for a "some speed with arc" throw. Even worse, running backs and receivers still don't know how to negotiate the sidelines. The Madden IQ fluctuates too rapidly between games to be of any worth to anyone but novices. That being said, Madden is still a solid football game. The only feature Tiburon truly fumbled is the online leagues. The flex scheduling takes away the drama of a week-to-week season, the fantasy draft is automated, there is no instant replay, and the communication and stat collecting tools are a joke. But if you want an NFL fix, what else are you going to play? —BERTZ

# THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD.



**WELCOME TO THE ULTIMATE PARTY HOUSE: YOURS.**

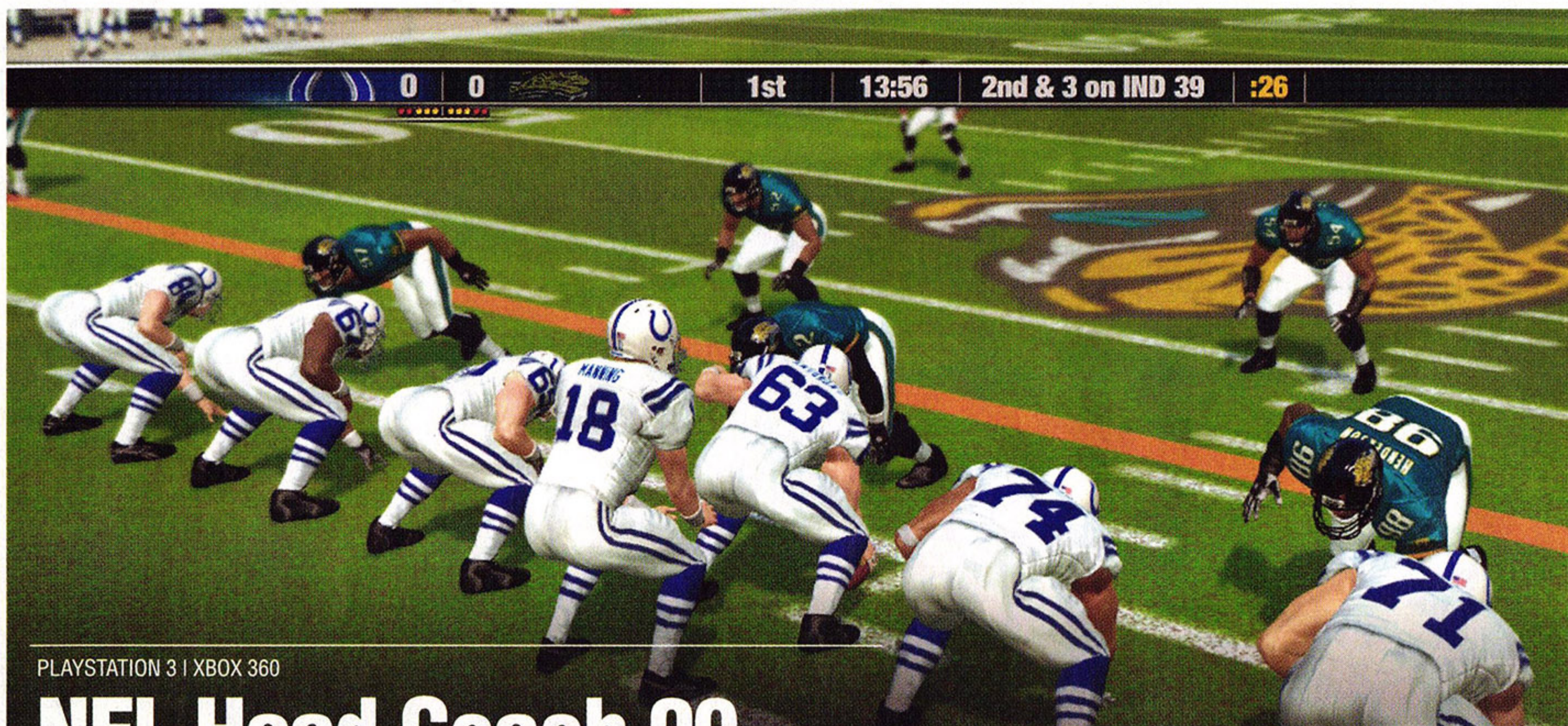
Go bananas with your friends and shake, shake, shake the Wii controllers like maracas in crazy environments filled with zany characters! Get the party started with over 40 samba-infused songs and when you're ready for more music mania, download new songs to keep the fiesta jumping all night long.

# SAMBA DE AMIGO



**Wii**





**BOTTOM LINE** **6.75**

- > **Concept:** Put you in the NFL hot seat and watch some of your best-laid plans go to waste
- > **Graphics:** Lots of coach close-ups and zoomed-in viewing options are available, but it's pretty standard fare
- > **Sound:** The audio snippets from your coordinators unfortunately don't help much
- > **Playability:** The action queue and revolving clipboard put all the info you need easily at your fingertips
- > **Entertainment:** As much better than the last Head Coach as this title is, the game doesn't deliver satisfaction equal to the energy you invest
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately High

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# NFL Head Coach 09

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS  
> **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 3 > **ESRB** E

**TECHNICAL ADVANTAGE**

**OVERALL COACH KNOWLEDGE**

Progress bars for various metrics are shown, including Overall Coach Knowledge, which is highlighted.

## HANG UP THE HEADSET

**A**s improved as this game is from the clunky last version, Head Coach 09 remains a game in search of a reason for being. While it lets you get your hands dirty with the ins-and-outs of being a coach, it also frustrates the player with its numerous missed opportunities, taking away control at crucial moments, and failing to inspire excitement.

Ditching the fake office setup of the last game, Head Coach's revolving clipboard tool is a great one-stop shop for everything you need to know. The primary face of the clipboard is the action queue, where the game feeds you important events you can either act on or ignore. No longer will you have to sim forward just to have something to do (although you can sim, too). It's a very passive way to be active, if that makes sense. It didn't take long to get comfortable with the flow of the game, but as soon as you do, the game puts a wall between you and control of your football team. For instance, the computer controls which free agent bids come across your desk (including those for your own freakin' players!), and the computer's bizarre draft suggestions control your approval rating.

During games this feeling of relative powerlessness continues. Although you can design plays on

the fly, which is cool, I was bugged by the fact that you can't audible or even watch replays from different angles in order to study the game film. The former problem means you're stuck running the same play when your team automatically goes into the hurry-up offense. The game asks you to show emotion during key moments, but you don't know how it affects your team. The CPU coordinators do a decent job of calling plays if you let them, but the overall execution is questionable. Players can be unaware of the ball, running backs juke out of open holes while they are in them, and QBs take unnecessary sacks or get way too addicted to the dump-off pass.

Perhaps most frustrating of all is the overall lack of excitement during games. There are no halftime speeches or adjustments or even NCAA-like in-game quizzes to sharpen your players or motivational choices during timeouts. The latter has been in NCAA for years. I also wish there were more connections with the work your team puts in during the week, such as seeing the positives/negatives during a game of scripted play sequences (which some NFL teams do) or having more feedback in what parts of your pre-game gameplan are/aren't working and how to work with your coordinators at fixing any problems. This year's game has added Defining Moments — where a key gametime decision can reduce your approval rating, but that's more about what the fans and media think you should do than what's a smart football decision. Great. Rube nation has more power than I do?!

This game is like your favorite team going from a 5-11 season one year to a 6-10 record the next. Regardless of whatever improvements have occurred, you aren't going anywhere with that kind of record. —KATO

**TRADE NEGOTIATIONS**  
This offer is decent, but... We'd like you to match this offer.

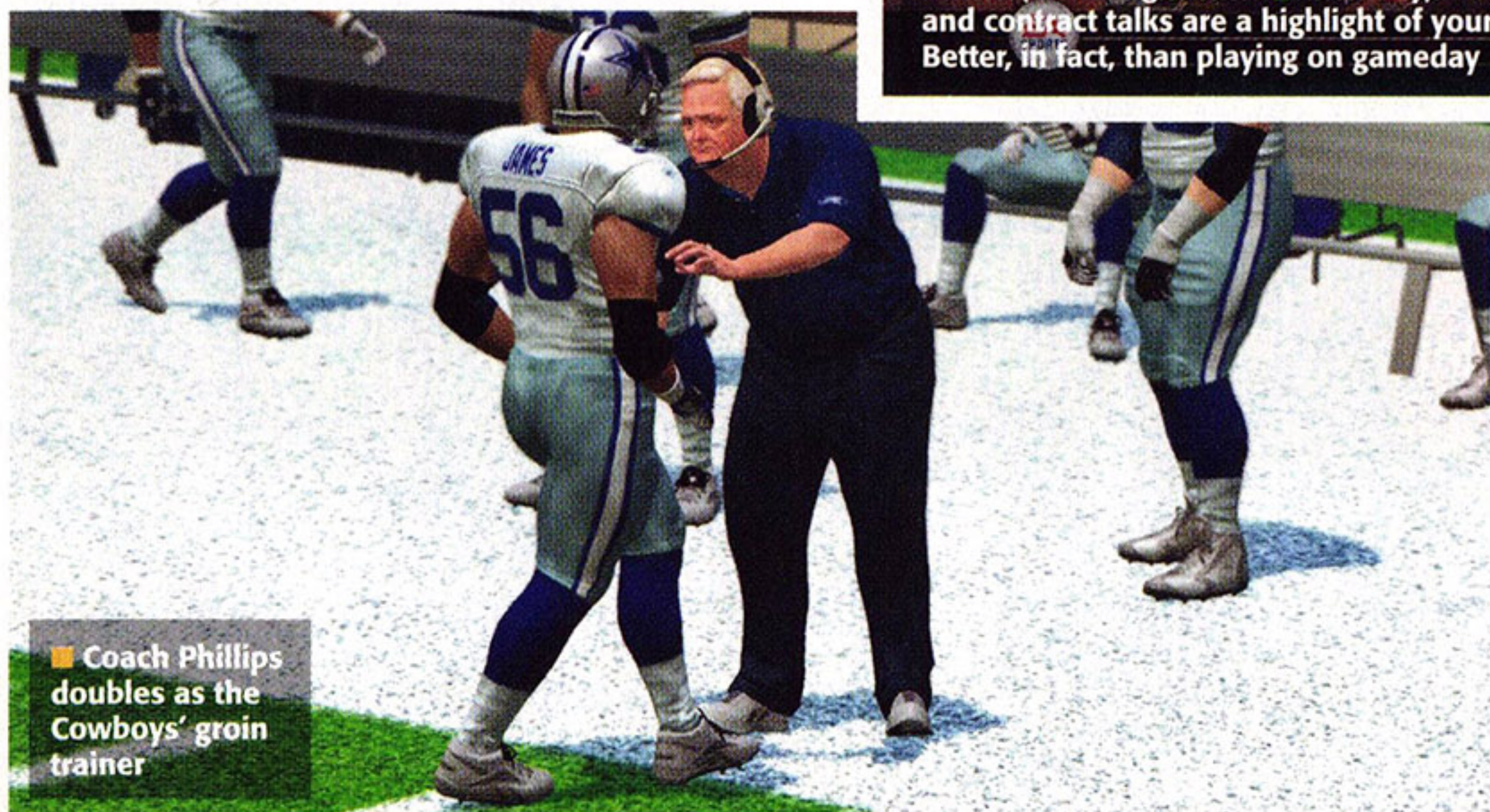
**BEST OFFER** ON THE BLOCK TIME REMAINING  
LOLB Chike Okefor (77) 1:37

**SELECT A PACKAGE TO OFFER FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST:**

- ★★★ RB Ryan Moats (63) 2009 5th round pick 2010 8th round pick
- ★★★ RB Ryan Moats (63) 2009 4th round pick 2010 7th round pick
- ★★★ 2009 3rd round pick 2009 6th round pick

83 APPROVAL

■ The back-and-forth negotiations mechanic for trades (including those on draft day), free agency, and contract talks are a highlight of your offseason. Better, in fact, than playing on gameday



■ Coach Phillips doubles as the Cowboys' groin trainer

**SUBSTITUTE PLAYER**

WR 67

- J. Porter
- D. Northcutt
- R. Williams
- M. Jones
- T. Williamson
- J. Broussard

1st & 10 on JAX 25 :16  
1 of 1 ACTIONS

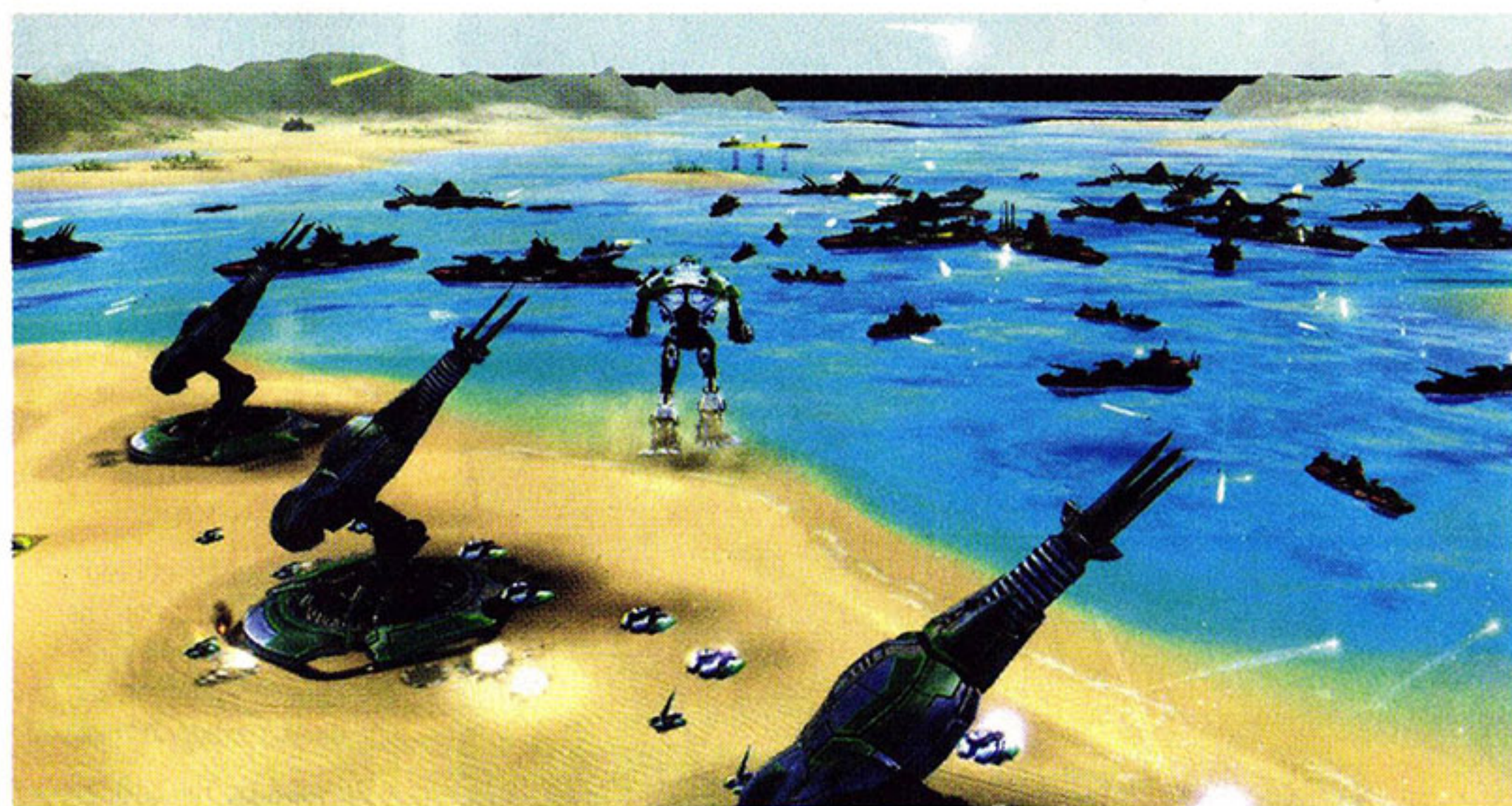
83 APPROVAL

■ Being able to tweak plays during games is great, but it's about the only coach-worthy thing you'll do

## Second Opinion 6.75

Making mindless management fun is a daunting task, especially when much of the drama of being a head coach — dealing with gigantic egos, player arrests, backstabbing assistants, volatile fans, smiting columnists, and clueless owners — is likely off limits due to the self-imposed sacred cow status of the NFL license. But unlike its disastrous predecessor, at least NFL Head Coach 09 finds some worth amidst the film sessions and training programs. The crown jewel of the game is the NFL draft. From the realistic scouting to the draft day spectacle, Head Coach captures the thrill in selecting studs, uncovering sleepers, and trading up and down the board. Unfortunately, this excitement doesn't translate to the rest of the experience. The free agency system — which presents you players in no particular order — fails to capture the franticness of the opening hours of bidding. The trading system is too limiting, and game planning doesn't give you enough freedom to sculpt a team the way you want. The games are equally anti-climatic; in-game adjustments hardly seem to impact your quirky and unreliable AI-controlled team. Maybe next year EA will inject some personality into the game, but until then I can't recommend this to anyone but those fans who belong to 15 fantasy football leagues and sleep in NFL-licensed pajamas. —BERTZ





XBOX 360

# Supreme Commander

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ASPYR > **DEVELOPER** HELLBENT GAMES  
> **RELEASE** JUNE 16 > **ESRB** E10+

## SUPREME DUD

**A**wful. Just awful. You'll have to excuse the poor grammatical structure, but this game lends itself to muttered one word vitriolic complaints. Supreme Commander is a unique RTS that challenges many of the traditional conventions. Very little of its innovation can be enjoyed in this stumbling and poorly executed port. It's a fantastic example of how controls can make or break a game. It also serves as evidence that not every game is best served by a seat at the bountiful console gaming table.

The opening missions of a campaign in Supreme Commander are infuriating, as the controls never seem to allow me to implement my strategies in the way I envision them. Clumsy troop movements are the order of the day for a long time until you slowly begin to grasp the control scheme. While I love the ability to pan my view in

and out at a moment's notice, I never found a camera position where I was happy. At extremely close views, units look blurry and ill defined. At a medium view, it's hard to keep the camera from twitching and shifting. At a distant view, I'm just looking at icons – I may as well be playing a board game. Even selecting the appropriate units is a chore; completing the most simple of tasks is often ponderous and time-consuming. If you were looking forward to watching a smooth flowing sequence where units fly in on their attack runs or the excitement of a massive exchange of laser fire, I'll save you the trouble. Constant framerate problems dramatically damage the visual experience, often making it hard to even move the cursor to where you want it as the game chugs slowly forward.

I was really looking forward to this release in the months leading up to its launch. But the reality of said launch is a relative disaster. The PC version of the game still comes highly recommended, but steer clear of this console iteration. —**MILLER**



**BOTTOM LINE** **5.5**

> **Concept:** Command in a not-so supreme way in a poor port of the excellent PC RTS

> **Graphics:** The world doesn't look very good, whether panned close or far away. And then there's the framerate...

> **Sound:** Decent voice work, but the sound effects combine into a din of explosive noise

> **Playability:** A questionable tutorial doesn't make the obtuse controls any better

> **Entertainment:** This is a horrendous version of a good game. Not recommended to those who like to enjoy their recreational time

> **Replay Value:** Low

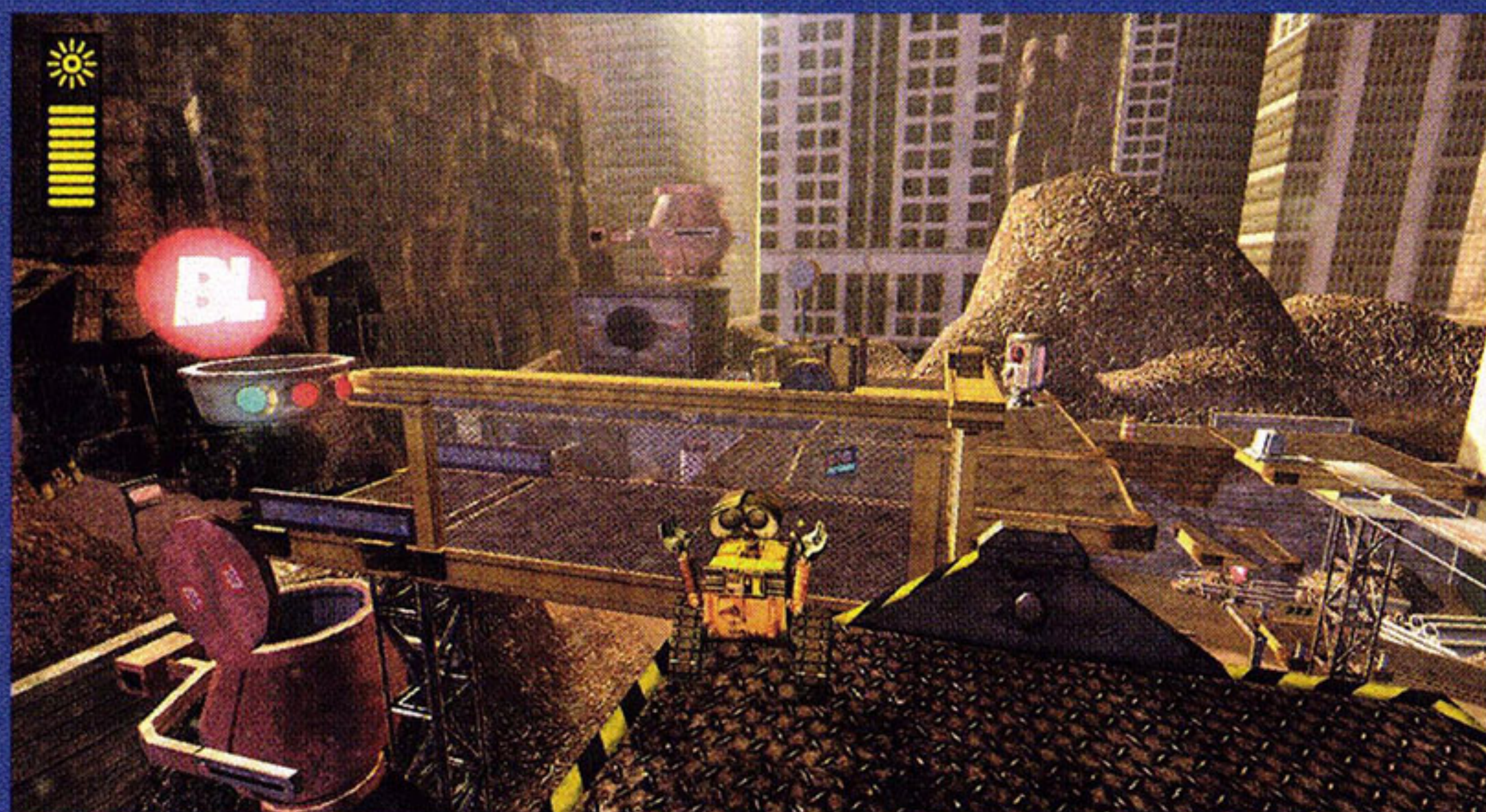
**Second Opinion** **4**

I love Supreme Commander's focus on economy, unbelievably massive scale, and innovative interface – on PC. However, I can't think of a single game less suited to gamepad control. This Xbox 360 port fails to capture any of those elements in a meaningful way, instead miring players in turgid minutiae that couldn't be more frustrating to control if you were using your nose to hit the buttons. All of the good parts about SupCom's interface – cool advanced controls like ferrying for transports, build queue templates, and commander upgrades – are buried under layers upon layers of tough-to-navigate radial menus. To top it all off, the framerate constantly chugs. Play Supreme Commander with a mouse and keyboard, or don't play it at all. —**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

# Wall-E

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ  
> **DEVELOPER** HEAVY IRON STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 24 > **ESRB** E



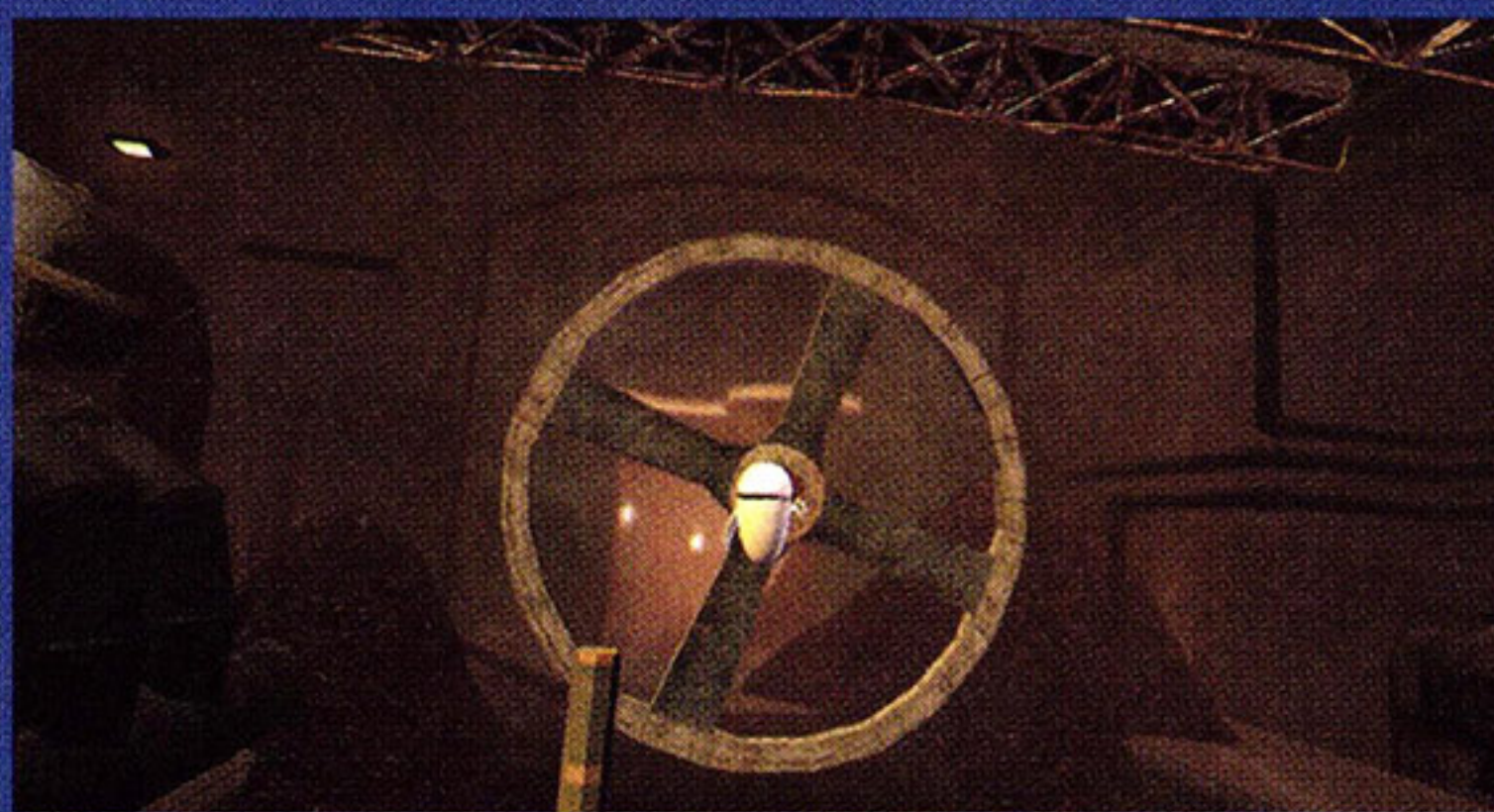
## CRAP-E

**I**n the past, I've lamented that Pixar, perhaps the best popular filmmakers of the last decade, has to settle for run-of-the-mill video game interpretations of its films. Even some of the better Pixar-based games, like Ratatouille, seem content to be pleasantly mediocre. However, after playing Wall-E, I want to apologize for even thinking those thoughts. Because, I have to tell you, I'd gouge my eyes out to play a decent game after this. Seriously. I'd probably pay you \$10 just to let me play your kid's copy of Kung Fu Panda for an hour.

It's been awhile since I played a game that butchered so many of the basics of gameplay and design. The levels and puzzles are exceedingly boring and repetitive. The combat, aiming, and flight mechanics

are just horrendous and completely devoid of fun – even worse since the game will randomly flip between a complete lack of challenge to horrendously frustrating sequences with schizophrenic frequency. However, of all the things I dislike about the game, there's a special place reserved in video game infamy for the camera system. When it's not getting stuck on corners and bugging out, it's devoted to providing you with the absolute worst view of the action. I can't even bear to talk about the auto-targeting.

To add to the fun, most of the level goals are along the lines of "find all the keycards" or "kill all the robots" – i.e. stuff you grew tired of in the days of the original PlayStation. Avoid at all costs. —**MATT**



**BOTTOM LINE** **4**

> **Concept:** Turn a great movie into a crappy, by-the-numbers action/platformer

> **Graphics:** Decent, but this isn't pushing the limits of any of the systems it's being released for

> **Sound:** Minimal dialogue (which is appropriate in this case) and some cinematic tunes

> **Playability:** So many problems, I don't know where to start

> **Entertainment:** It's a shame some Pixar movies don't get the game treatment they deserve

> **Replay Value:** Low

**Second Opinion** **4**

Pixar's magic lies in bringing a fresh approach to movie storytelling. This video game adaptation of Wall-E sucks out all of the movie's charm and replaces it with a stale retread of platforming stereotypes. The buggy, collectible-focused gameplay is filled with "puzzles" that are either so simple they're insulting (throw the box at the spinning icon), or so unintuitive the developer has to tell you what to do. Even the flying segments are so easy you can complete them by just holding down a button. While Pixar remains a studio that can't miss, this Wall-E hopefully won't hit anything but the bargain bin. —**BEN**

## the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

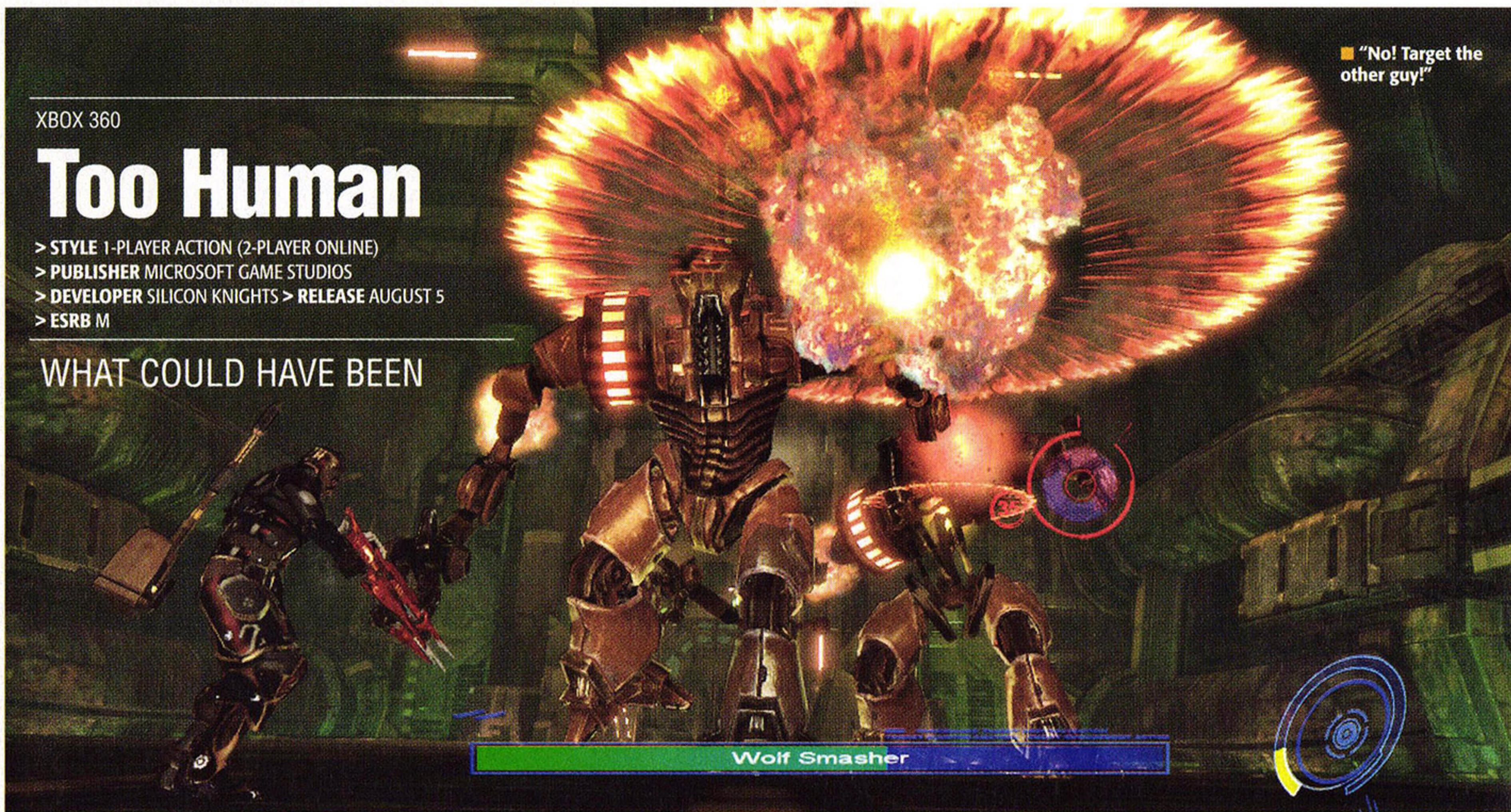
While all versions are a special kind of suck, the Wii version managed to be worse through a combination of muddled controls and frequent collision detection errors. Apparently, Wall-E has the magical ability to fall through platforms.

XBOX 360

# Too Human

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER ONLINE)  
 > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS  
 > **DEVELOPER** SILICON KNIGHTS > **RELEASE** AUGUST 5  
 > **ESRB** M

## WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN



■ "No! Target the other guy!"

Wolf Smasher

**M**y chronology of world history might be off the mark, but I believe Too Human's conception predates the Boston Tea Party. More of an ancient relic than a new release, this game entered development 14 years ago and was originally slated to be a PlayStation One title. Sliding from one console generation to the next, time turned this lost game into a pixelated Sasquatch – some people claimed to have seen it, gushing that it innovates in ways that gamers have never seen, while others heard it was going to be the largest game ever made, requiring no fewer than four discs to contain its weighty content. After all these years and stories, this mythical game is finally upon us. Like most exposed legends, the truth behind it is a monumental letdown.

Unless you find yourself waking up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat craving a Diablo-like loot fest, you'll likely never want to hear anything about Too Human again. It's not a terrible game, but even huge fans of looting will think twice about calling it average. If your fondest gaming memories consist of reworking skill trees, and enhancing weapons and armor with effects, you'll be pleased to hear that the best parts of this game are all found within the menus. You can customize everything. There are tons of weapons and armor to find and purchase, and a dizzying amount of effects you can apply to them. You can even apply a rune that changes the color of your gear so it all matches.

When you peel away the extensive customization and...well...menus, Too Human runs into a world of trouble. The main offender is the combat. I like the idea behind the analog-based system, and I did occasionally catch glimpses of why it could be brilliant. But I mostly found it an uncooperative mess that doesn't give the precision needed for specific combat situations. By tapping the right analog in different directions, you can bounce between enemy troops all day long. But what happens when you throw an enemy that explodes on contact into the mix? The logical choice is to abandon melee and use long-range firearms. This would work if you could actually target the desired enemy. All you can do is point in the general direction and hope the targeting system highlights your enemy. If it doesn't

pick up your target, enjoy dying and watching the lengthy regeneration sequence. Standard battles are bothersome for all the wrong reasons, and the boss fights are so poorly designed or overcharged with hit points that they seem like parodies of real boss battles.

Too Human is an unbalanced mess. Of the five selectable classes, only the Bio Engineer can heal himself. The other classes must rely on the dumb luck of a downed enemy dropping a use-on-contact health boost. Player death for the other four classes is routine. While playing through the single-player campaign, the game seems to be designed exclusively with cooperative play in mind – with one person playing the healer and the other a tank. Co-op is definitely the way to play this game.

However, you will be doing so at the expense of the story. None of the cutscenes from the single-player game are integrated into the co-op mix.

This may sound like a bad thing, but it's actually a blessing in disguise. This tale, which throws Norse mythology and science fiction into a malfunctioning blender, is a sizeable

train wreck that doesn't stop. It just keeps getting worse as it goes, unintentionally turning hallowed characters Thor and Loki into stooges that you can't help but point at and openly mock. On one hand, you want the game to provide more narrative to tie things together. On the other hand, you want less, because it's hard to endure as is.

In the end, Too Human is all about players sculpting their ideal killing machines. If you enjoy leveling and looting, it's well worth a look. If you only have a moderate interest, Too Human's aggravating gameplay and irreparable plot won't deliver many thrills. Maybe another nine years of development time would have helped.—**REINER**



■ You can customize the color of your weapons and armor



**BOTTOM LINE** **6.75**

> **Concept:** An action/RPG that tosses tons of loot at players, but little in terms of solid gameplay

> **Graphics:** The effects are vibrant, and the character models look fantastic. The environments are drab, however, and the animation is stiff in both combat and cutscenes

> **Sound:** Outside of hearing yourself say, "Why won't he target him?!", the pounding orchestrated score roots you on and the voicework isn't half bad

> **Playability:** The analog controls work...sometimes. Balancing and targeting issues run rampant throughout the game

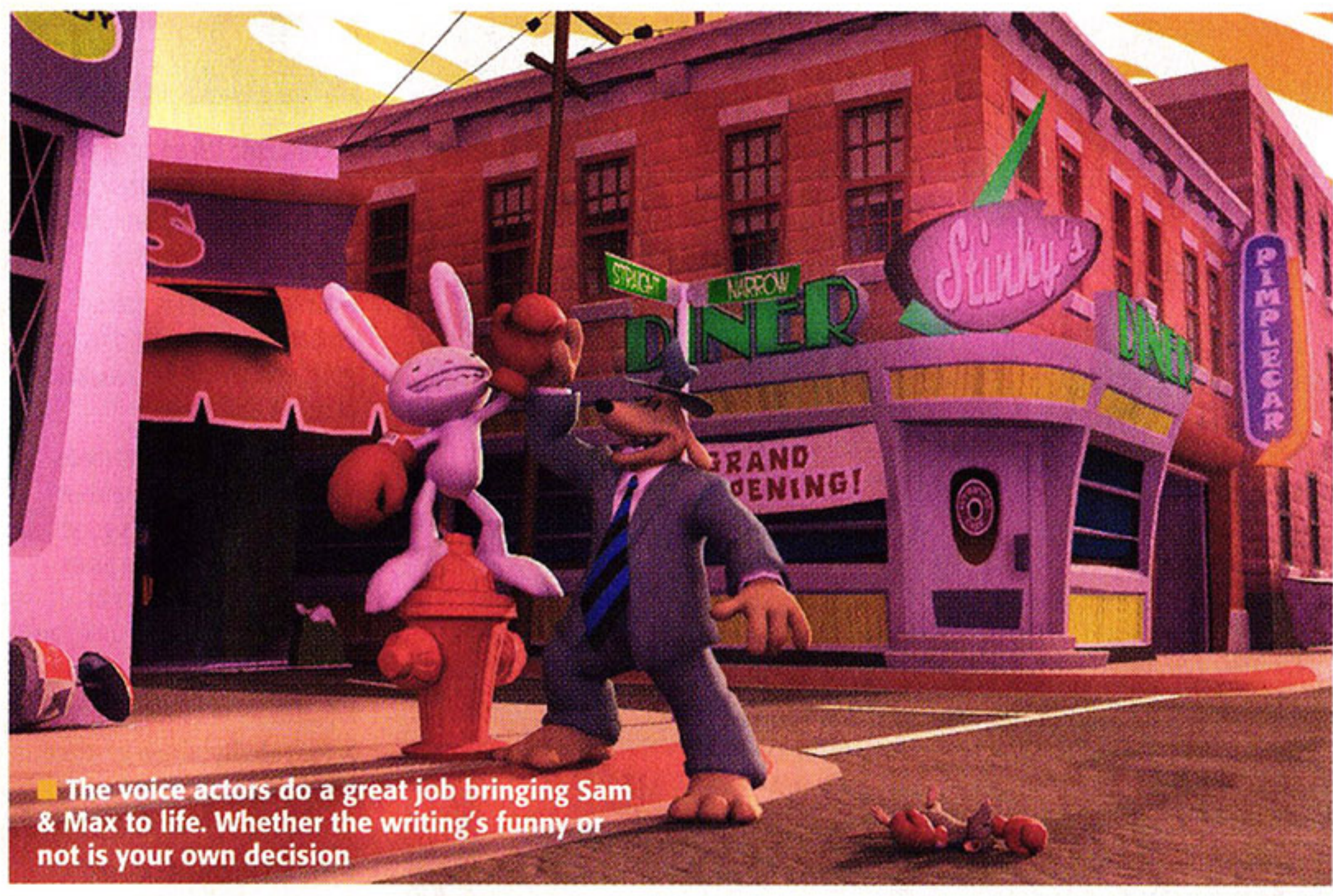
> **Entertainment:** You can dive head first into the customization, but when you try to dive into the gameplay, you run into a wall made of frustration and odd design decisions

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High



### Second Opinion 7

Now is the time to temper your expectations. Too Human is not a bad game – it employs a unique approach to action that provides some solid thrills – but the occasional combat high isn't enough to bridge the gaps in other areas. It feels like substantial pieces of the game are missing: Only one class can heal itself, targeting is an absolute mess, and the overwrought story is average at best (and unintentionally funny at worst). The analog fighting mechanic does its job, but the real problem is in the balancing. Encounters in the single-player campaign feel designed for multiplayer, since the specialized skillset of a single class is easily out-matched by enemies with varying abilities. You can play co-op to circumvent the issue, but the multiplayer is inexplicably separate from the campaign mode despite the fact you use the same character and play the same stages. I enjoyed upgrading my character and gathering new gear, but if you are under the impression that Too Human is anything more than a mildly entertaining (and mildly flawed) way to collect loot and experience, you're going to be disappointed.—**JOE**



The voice actors do a great job bringing Sam & Max to life. Whether the writing's funny or not is your own decision

# Wii Sam & Max Season One

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** TELLTALE GAMES > **DEVELOPER** TELLTALE GAMES  
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 26 > **ESRB** T

## RE-RUNS AREN'T ALWAYS FUN

**S**am & Max enjoys a cult following for the pair's sense of humor, and that's a good thing for an adventure game, since elements like humor or storyline add some weight to the physically mundane tasks of pointing and clicking. When the laughter dies and some of the jokes fall flat, however, Sam & Max teeters as its gameplay is unable to support much interest for some stretches. The game doesn't veer much from the standard point-and-click adventure genre formula of navigating static environments collecting useful items and searching for clues. This means you spend lots of time running around trying to interact with whatever you can to solve puzzles. The problems I have with this title's puzzles start with the trial-and-error variety and continue with some puzzles that you wouldn't know the answer to until you exhaust all your options. In other words, at times you're trying to solve a puzzle you don't necessarily know is a puzzle or whose

start point is a little outside the boundaries of logic. Thankfully, at other times the game lets the player simply enjoy or create their own fun outside of puzzle solving, such as the sheer amount of dialogue that has been recorded for the characters for you to enjoy. You can even make up your own lyrics for a song on a show called "Embarrassing Idol." Some memories are cherished because they are a part of your past. That doesn't always mean they are good ones, however. This game is enjoyable in limited contexts — whether you're a Sam & Max fan or more just after an old fashioned adventure game with occasional good laughs. Unfortunately, that's too many caveats to make Sam & Max an adventure truly worth recommending. —**KATO**



**BOTTOM LINE** 7

- > **Concept:** This game encapsulates the six new Sam & Max episodes originally released via GameTap on the PC
- > **Graphics:** A perfect, naturally cartoony fit for the Wii
- > **Sound:** I was amazed at the sheer number of lines recorded for the main characters, with some good jokes tucked away throughout the game
- > **Playability:** A dash mechanic makes getting around this adventure title thankfully easy
- > **Entertainment:** There are some laughs to be had here, but they can be as scarce as the gameplay at times
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

**Second Opinion** 7

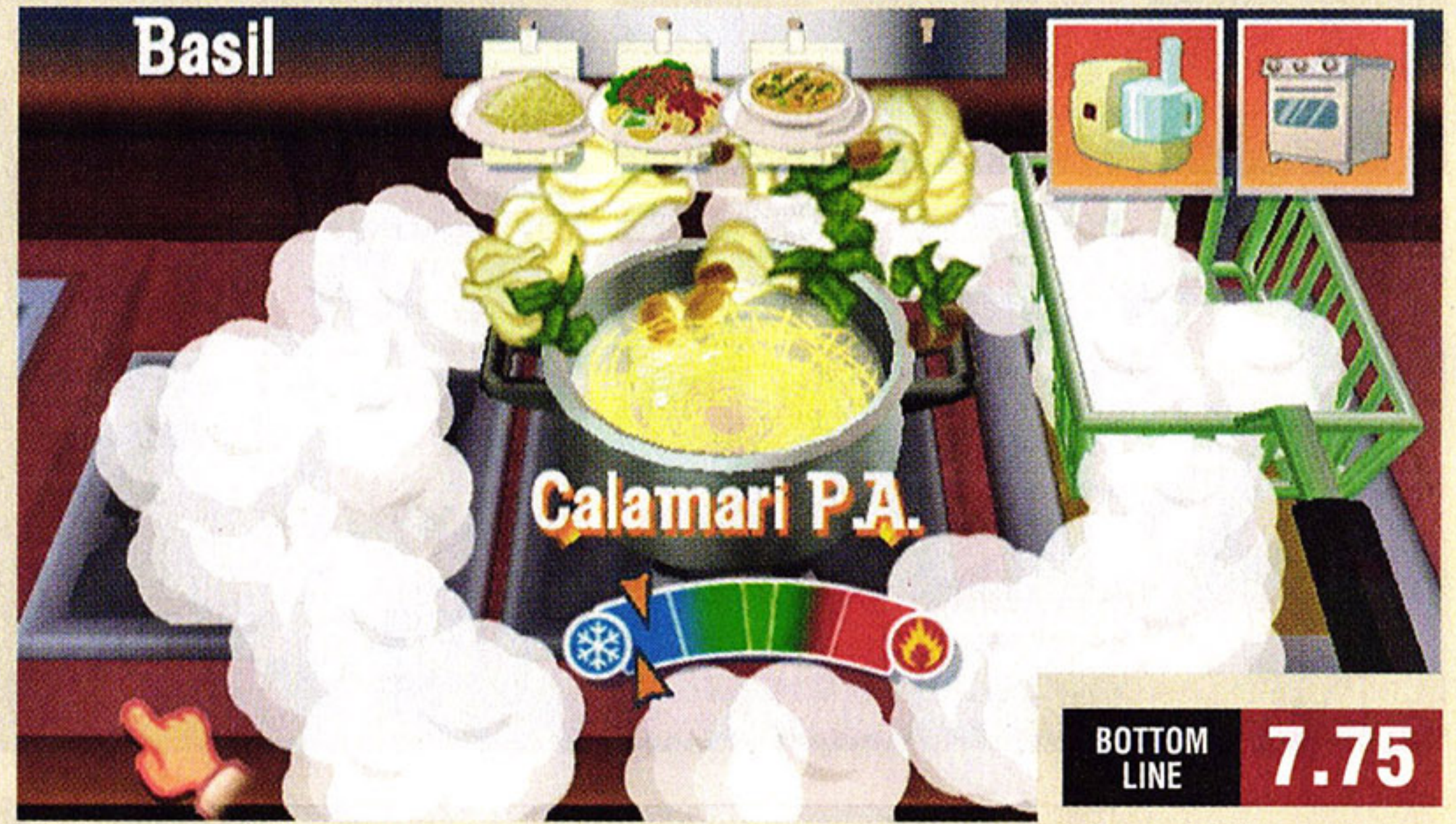
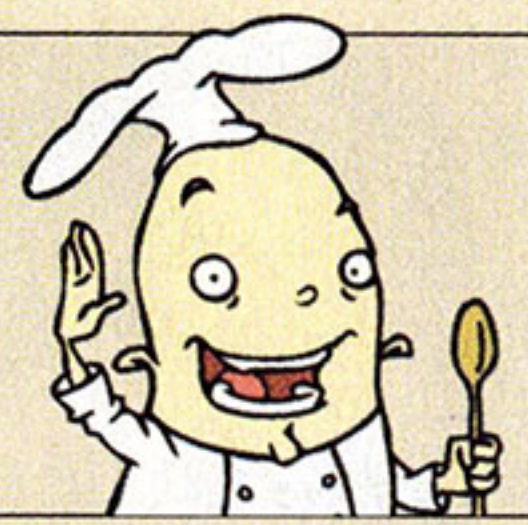
This isn't easy for me. I've been a fan of adventure games for my entire gaming life, and the original Sam & Max is a classic. But this collection of cases is painfully uneven. While the script contains a lot of jokes, most of them can't really be called "humor." Random and funny aren't always the same thing, which is a distinction the game fails to make on all but a few occasions. The puzzles fare much better; the fun and inventive solutions outnumber the frustrating and obtuse ones. With its point-and-click interface, the Wii is a good home for Sam & Max, but I wouldn't say the adventure genre is out of the morgue quite yet. —**JOE**



The driving sequences are pretty basic, but can have their own puzzle elements

# Wii Order Up

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ZOO GAMES  
> **DEVELOPER** SUPERVILLAIN STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JULY 22 > **ESRB** E



**BOTTOM LINE** 7.75

## TOP CHEF

**A**s novel as it is to throw together food with touch/motion controls in the Cooking Mama series, it feels like you are creating meals to display in a museum rather than for people to eat. The developers of Order Up get this, and let a series of wacky customers give voiced feedback on your cooking rather than using a sterile grading system. You'll start to recognize certain patrons' preferences, like the cowboy who likes his meat extra burnt or the uptight food critic who makes no attempt to avoid special treatment. This injection of personality adds a lot to what could have been another minigame collection.

In fact there really isn't a way to fail, per se, at Order Up. Poor playing merely results in a smaller payday. I'd prefer a little more stress and risk, especially in the end. Even though the game's not particularly tough, the quest for maximum kitchen efficiency is just as addicting as task management sims. After all, the better you are, the faster you earn new assistant chefs, equipment upgrades, recipes, and restaurants. Completing Order Up shouldn't take more than 10 hours (take note that the in-game clock only counts kitchen time). About halfway through, however, repetition fatigue sets in. You perform the same five feats for four separate restaurants (earn X dollars, buy X number of recipes, etc.) with only a negligible blip in difficulty.

Players start out flipping burgers in a fast food joint and move on to purchase their own Mexican, Italian, and French-themed restaurants, eventually competing in an Iron Chef send up. You're encouraged to prepare multiple elements at once (boil pasta, grill kebabs, dice tomatoes, etc.), but you have to move extremely slowly to come close to angering a customer.

The final sequence is so charming that it makes me wish there were more story cut-scenes throughout the game. As it stands, all of the light drama is mashed into the last 15 minutes. —**BRYAN**



- > **Concept:** A clever mash up of Cooking Mama food prep and Diner Dash task managing
- > **Graphics:** The bright cartoon look fits well
- > **Sound:** Voicework is solid, though it at times wanders into stereotype territory
- > **Playability:** Some remote cooking maneuvers register better than others, but you can usually pass off the Charlie work to assistants
- > **Entertainment:** The deepest cooking game to date
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 8

I served meat to vegetarians and vegetables to vampires. I fired my assistant cook and replaced him with a knife-wielding monkey. From these strange events, Order Up may not sound like a respectable cooking simulator, but if you overlook its fantastical patrons, anthropoidian labor, and light-hearted approach, it works wonders with the culinary arts and ends up being a hearty meal of a game. It offers an enjoyable career path (something no cooking game has had before), and whips up a tasty dish of gameplay with its frantic pace and solid cooking mechanics. Most of the skill required doesn't come from waving the remote, but rather multi-tasking with your assistant cooks. There's a lot of pressure and quick thinking involved in making four dishes at once. It rewards players well for their efforts, as money earned can be used to upgrade the kitchen. It does suffer from repetition (you'll often be asked to make the same dishes for repeat customers), but it remains fun for roughly 10 hours, and concludes in style with a hilarious spoof on the Iron Chef competition. —**REINER**



24dm BONUS  
 ■ The new geo blocks mechanic adds variety to the maps



Saucy Mao  
 Kill all Salt and Pepper Lovers!  
 ■ The game's tone is very gonzo

27dm BONUS

■ Maps display a lot of creativity

Enemy 10x + 30%

NAME	CLASS
Mao	Hero

HP	4361 / 4361	SP	927 / 927	-25%
ATK	1063	DEF	704	0%
INT	1028	RES	575	0%
HIT	688	SPD	576	10%
5	20	1	5	2
				10%
				50%

LV 125

- Equip ↔ Status
- Display move range
- Main Menu
- R2 Ally Character

**BOTTOM LINE** 8.25

> **Concept:** Tell an amusing, cute story that constantly breaks the fourth wall and isn't afraid to poke fun at nerd culture

> **Graphics:** This is getting embarrassing. The art direction is great and all, but this would look at home on PSone

> **Sound:** The music is more hit-and-miss than in previous Disgaea, but when it's good it's great. Do yourself a favor and turn the voiceovers to Japanese – the English ones are on par with crappy anime from the '80s

> **Playability:** A few interface tweaks make the intimidating complexity easy to absorb

> **Entertainment:** It's still enjoyable, but the Disgaea's level grinding formula is starting to get stale

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

PLAYSTATION 3

# Disgaea 3: Absence of Justice

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NIPPON ICHI > **DEVELOPER** NIPPON ICHI  
 > **RELEASE** AUGUST 18 > **ESRB** T

## EVIL IS THE NEW GOOD

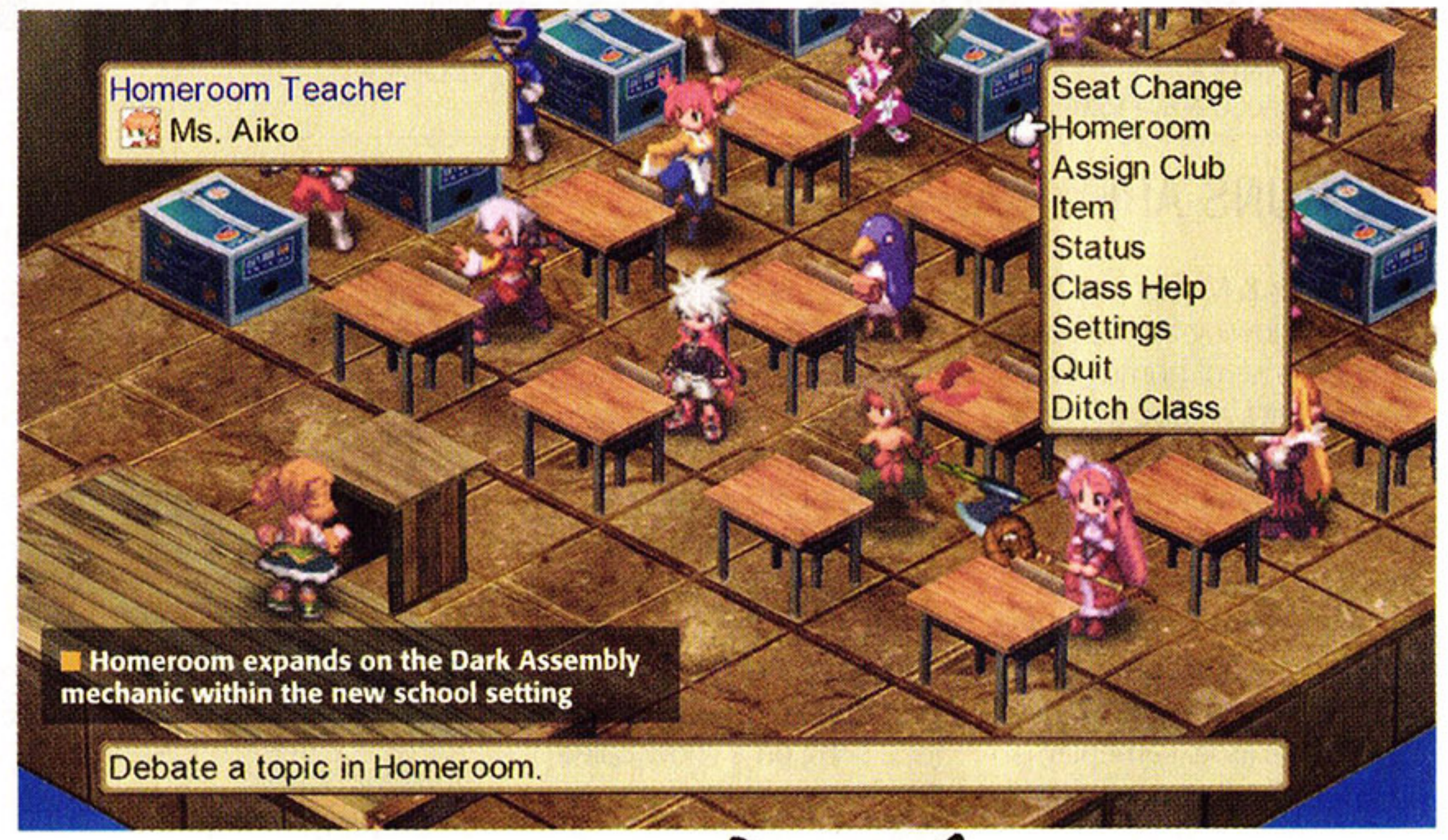
If you're a fan of the series, run out and pick up Disgaea 3 right now. The franchise hallmarks – endearing yet funny characters, varied tactical battles, and crazy challenges to dig into – are better than ever. However, that's all Disgaea 3 has to offer. I can't hate too much since the Disgaea formula scratches deep-seated itches in my psyche, but this feels more like a remake with a new setting and a few minor changes than a true sequel.

This edition follows the story of a young demon named Mao. Son of the Overlord of the Netherworld, Mao plans to take out his father and claim the throne for himself. While he's overly enthusiastic about his ruthlessness and lack of morals, it turns out he may have a compassionate heart under all the bluster. Sound familiar? It should, because the plot is basically a rehash of the original Disgaea. The supporting cast is different enough and the dialogue clever enough to be worthwhile, but like Disgaea 2, Disgaea 3 fails to entirely

recapture the magic that made Laharl's tale so captivating.

Nonetheless, this tactical RPG is a joy to play once you get the hang of how its systems interact. The story levels are endlessly creative, offering a great variety of challenges to overcome. Diving into the randomly generated levels for the unique rewards contained therein provides an excellent contrast. Unlocking new classes, gaining new abilities through the Dark Assembly-like Homeroom, and the nearly infinite leveling give players enough to soak up hundreds of hours.

In terms of gameplay, this is the best the franchise has to offer. The balancing is much improved, particularly at super-high levels. Destructible doodads in the environment add another dimension. Learning skills, reincarnating, and everything else about character progression is much more interactive and less of a grind. Using the right stick to flick through different status displays drastically reduces



the amount of menu diving. Disgaea's iteration has certainly paid dividends.

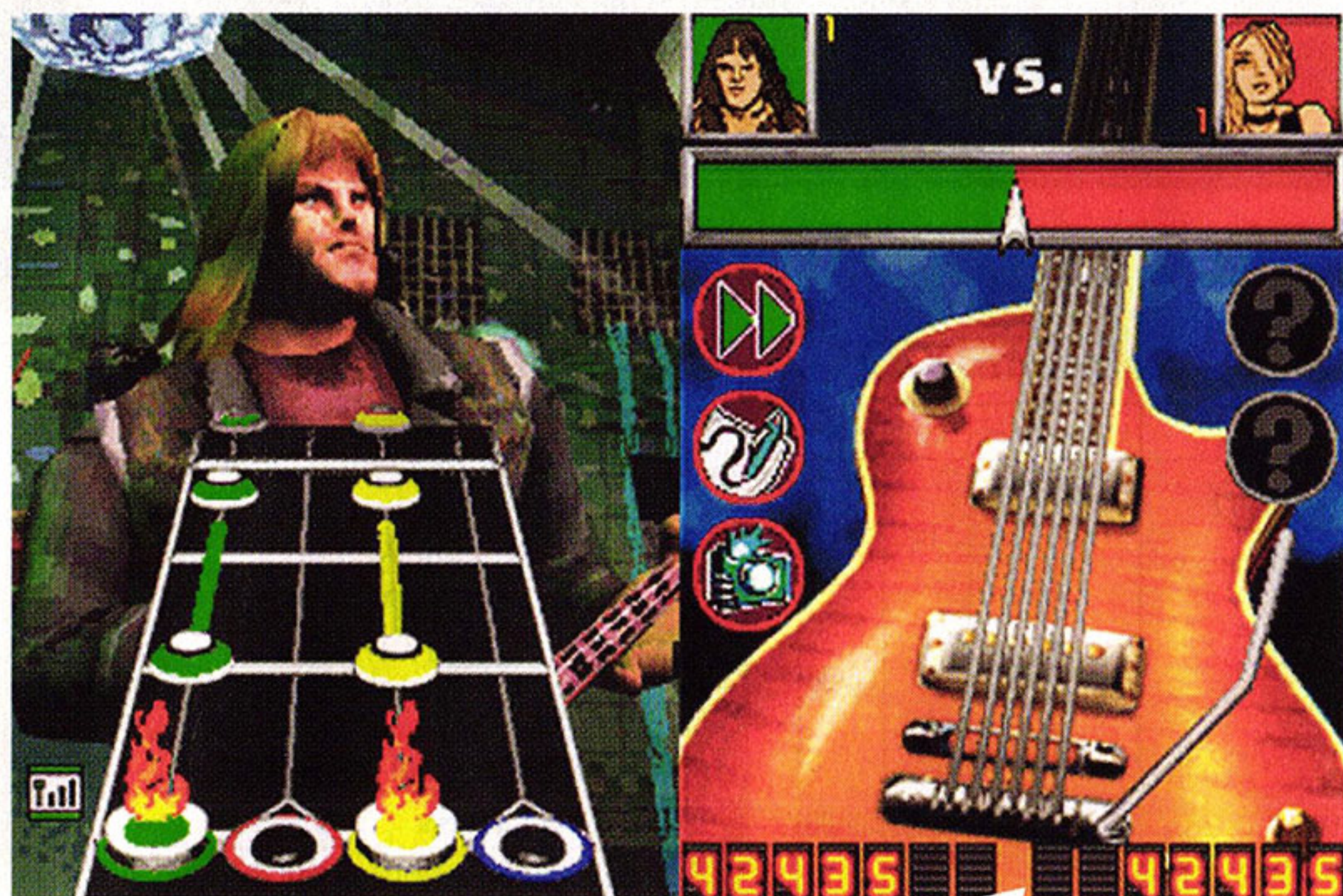
Even with its extremely dated graphics, rehashed story, and strikingly similar gameplay, Disgaea 3 has plenty to offer fans of the series and the genre. I still recommend newcomers start with the original or its PSP remake for the amazing story, but I'd be lying through my teeth if I said I'm not enjoying the hell out of my time with Disgaea 3. —ADAM



**Second Opinion** 8

In Disgaea's demonic school, bad is good, and being good is rebellious. It's a premise that works well for the game's playfully twisted story, which had me frequently cracking up. Traditionally, Disgaea has been known for its good looking graphical sprites, but considering the series move to the PS3, Disgaea 3 looks unimpressively similar (read: exactly the same) as its PS2 brothers. But that complaint is a small pebble in the deep sea of the Disgaea experience. Each battle provided a new opportunity for me to use my team in new and strategically creative ways. I coordinated my character's attacks for massive combos, stacked them atop one another for strong tower attacks, and dealt with the status effects of colored tiles. Strategy fans should set aside some time for this one, because Disgaea's strategy will swallow months of your life. —BEN





NINTENDO DS

# Guitar Hero: On Tour

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER MUSIC (2-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** RED OCTANE/ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** VICARIOUS VISIONS > **RELEASE** JUNE 22 > **ESRB** E10+



**BOTTOM LINE** 7

> **Concept:** Play some honest to goodness Guitar Hero on a handheld, albeit with some limitations

> **Graphics:** This is a passable approximation of the real thing, but the novelty fades fast

> **Sound:** Several fun songs delivered at a low quality you'll balk at

> **Playability:** Functionally, the peripheral you attach to the DS works okay, but expect some serious hand cramps

> **Entertainment:** It can't compare to the real thing, but this is certainly a unique experience for the DS

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 6.75

I commend the developers of this game for figuring out a way to bring Guitar Hero to the DS. It's an extremely clever bit of programming and peripheral design. However, we do not grade on effort. However much I admire the ingenuity, this is by far the least enjoyable Guitar Hero title. The fretboard attachment, along with the somewhat unreliable detection of the touch-screen strumming, makes for a game that forces you into cramped, uncomfortable positions while muddying the intuitive mechanics for which the series is known. I couldn't play more than four or five songs without serious hand and wrist pain – even after experimenting with dozens of playing positions. The track list is disappointing as well. Eight songs have appeared in either previous Guitar Heroes or Rock Band, and some of the new tracks are very odd selections ("All Star" by Smashmouth? Seriously??). The addictive and robust multiplayer is excellent, but On Tour just doesn't have that old GH magic. —MATT

## ROCK OUT WITH YOUR DS OUT

Someone deserves credit for concocting how this concept would work, and succeeding. While it's not the most comfortable configuration, the DS attachment that plugs into your system works quite well. From timing to strumming, the game works way better than I thought it would. It's a functional way to handle Guitar Hero on a portable machine, but is it really that much fun?

At the core of any music game are its songs, and recent years have dramatically raised the bar of expectation. In this case, the mix of music is questionable for several reasons. The songs skew away from great guitar rock and into the territory of pop/rock regularly. This isn't inherently a bad thing, but some of the tracks just aren't as exciting to play. There are also way fewer songs on this portable version. Of the 26 songs in the game, 6 of them have been on other Guitar Hero games or downloads, and another 2

have shown up on Rock Band. Finally, the music itself has been pushed, squeezed, and compressed within an inch of its life to fit on that little DS cartridge. I don't know whether to criticize the poor sound quality or praise Vicarious Visions for getting it to fit, but either way, all of these songs have sounded better.

The mechanics are familiar and unique at the same time. Instead of a strum bar, you'll be strumming the touch screen, and the attached peripheral only has four buttons instead of five. Co-op and competitive multiplayer is a great addition that goes a long way to boosting my opinion of the game. In a few important ways, it feels a lot like playing the game on a home console. I almost wrote, "on the real thing" just then, and that's ultimately the problem. Guitar Hero is a game best suited for home consoles. Even with some clever adjustments, On Tour just doesn't feel the same. —MILLER



NINTENDO DS

# Bangai-O Spirits

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** D3PUBLISHER OF AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** TREASURE > **RELEASE** AUGUST 12 > **ESRB** E10+



## MORE THAN A LITTLE DIFFERENT

Only an obscure niche of gamer is looking for a game like Bangai-O Spirits. Any genius the game has only reveals itself after a hefty time commitment – the early hours are baffling and complex. The game is plagued by slowdown and confusing controls. But if you push past these issues you'll find a rich and varied experience filled with brain-teasing puzzles, insanely intense action, plus a fully featured level editor and sharing system to keep fans addicted even after finishing every stage.

The Bangai-O Spirits introduction mixes innovative design elements with irritating technical and balancing problems. Constant frustration assails players in even the earliest levels past the lengthy tutorial. Incidentally, the only story in the game comes from the brief, amusing anime interludes during that tutorial. Once you finish that, there



of picking the appropriate weapons and following the right path to completion. It can be tedious, but it's also awash in interesting strategies and puzzle solutions. Repeated level restarts aren't just likely, they're expected. With homages to video game classics, enigmatic box puzzles, and fights against gigantic foes, every new level brings new challenges – many of which are extremely fun.

Four-player co-op is a blast, even if it's also where the already questionable slowdown becomes the worst. The flexible level editor adds some great replay value. These new levels can be exchanged with another DS by an ingenious method of sound exchange, even if getting it to work is sometimes a little iffy.

Bangai-O Spirits is a revival of an original franchise that blends puzzle solving and action in a way few other games can. An unfair learning curve and some noticeable technical bugs haunt the title, but it's also filled with varied content. Given enough patience, it reveals some refreshingly challenging gameplay. For me, it was a vacillating mix of frustration and brilliance. —MILLER

**BOTTOM LINE** 7.5

> **Concept:** Battle your way through a surprisingly deep and complex puzzle game that masquerades as a shooter

> **Graphics:** Explosions look great, but onscreen characters are hard to identify amid the insanity, and slowdown is constant

> **Sound:** Some fun music and sound effects accompany your battles

> **Playability:** An incredibly steep learning curve, high challenge, and complex controls aren't for everybody

> **Entertainment:** Targeted to a uniquely hardcore crowd, the game is hard to penetrate, but offers a wealth of content to the committed player

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 7.5

For all of the innovation and freshness offered in Bangai-O Spirits, the final implementation is just off the mark. Combat's fast and stylish, but the most exciting feature is the versatile level editor and its restriction-free sound transfer system. I can't wait to see what players come up with once this is out in the open. Unfortunately, it can take some serious work to get the data to transfer, everything's unlocked from the start so there's no sense of progression, you have to quit to the menu to swap out weapons, and slowdown is a common issue (especially in co-op). —BRYAN



# CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

## TOP 20

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

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



(Day 1) Today we embarked on our expedition to observe video games in their natural habitat. In extraordinary stroke of fortune, we happened upon a wild Metal Gear Solid just hours ago. Proud but confused beasts, Metal Gears once grazed freely on these hills, but sadly they are now a dying breed, and one can't help but feel the world is a darker place without them.

### 2 GUITAR HERO: ON TOUR (DS)



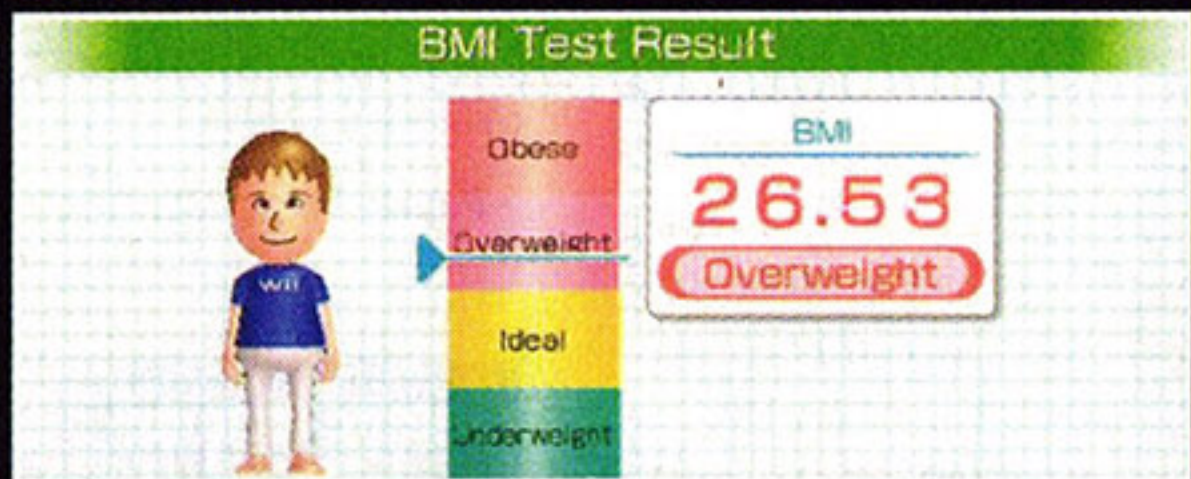
(Day 28) Guitar Heroes litter the countryside these days. Thanks to an extensive breeding program, these charmingly musical creatures have become quite plentiful. I was able to hold one of the smaller Heroes in my hand. Even though not all of its buttons had grown in, it squawked eagerly trying to sound like its older brethren.

### 3 NINJA GAIDEN II (360)



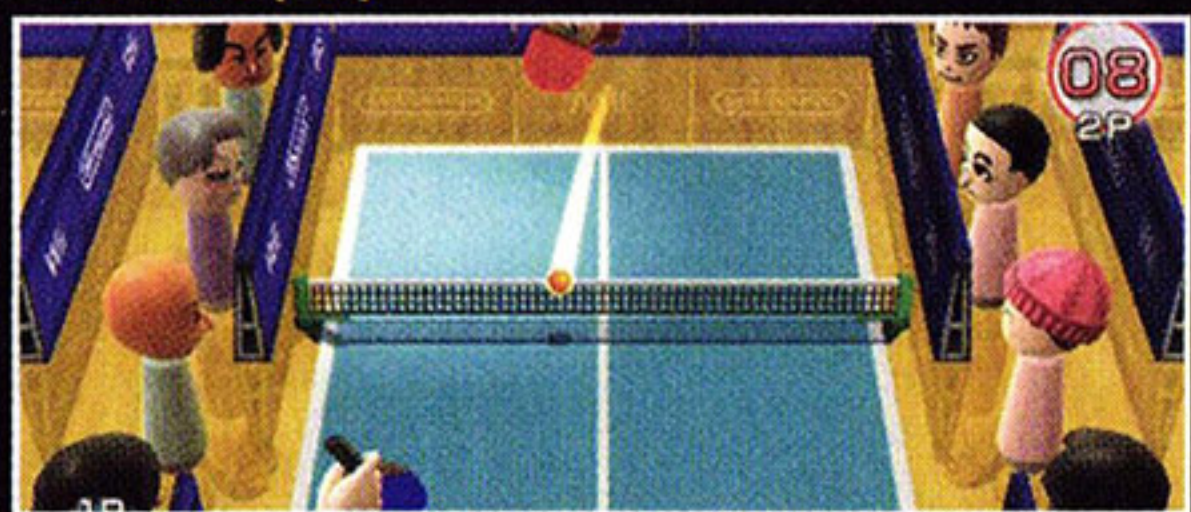
(Day 45) The Ninja Gaiden are socially awkward and highly elusive creatures. Despite their small stature and mostly harmless nature, they seem to believe that they are capable of damn near any impossible feat. We saw a large herd of God of Wars approach a nearby watering hole and the Ninja Gaiden pounced upon the oblivious herd with a toothless fury. Like watching cubs play, it was a charming spectacle.

### 4 WII FIT (Wii)



(Day 89) We've pitched our camp outside a community of older Wii Fits. These large creatures lumber slowly across the countryside. The earth actually thunders under the weight of their considerable girth. I find them fascinating to watch, but I worry these monsters might someday consume us all.

### 5 WII PLAY (Wii)



(Day 154) We ran into a group of Wii Plays this afternoon and lost two members of our group in the frenzied escape. Wii Plays are fast and jittery little hellions that breed like wildfire. Traveling has become all but impossible with these demons so firmly entrenched within the environment. Tell mum I love her, for I fear we shall not escape these tortured lands with our lives.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	N/A	PS3	10	06-08
2	Guitar Hero: On Tour	N/A	DS	7	06-08
3	Ninja Gaiden II	N/A	360	8.75	06-08
4	Wii Fit	3	Wii	8	04-08
5	Wii Play	5	Wii	7	02-07
6	Battlefield: Bad Company	N/A	360	9.25	06-08
7	Mario Kart Wii	2	Wii	8.5	04-08
8	LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	N/A	Wii	7	06-08
9	LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	N/A	DS	N/A	06-08
10	LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	N/A	PS2	7	06-08
11	Grand Theft Auto IV	1	360	10	04-08
12	Rock Band	N/A	Wii	8.25	06-08
13	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	6	Wii	9.5	03-08
14	Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	N/A	Wii	8	06-08
15	Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games	N/A	DS	N/A	01-08
16	Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	N/A	360	8	06-08
17	Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	N/A	PS2	8	06-08
18	New Super Mario Bros.	15	DS	9.25	05-06
19	Grand Theft Auto IV	4	PS3	10	04-08
20	LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	N/A	360	7	06-08

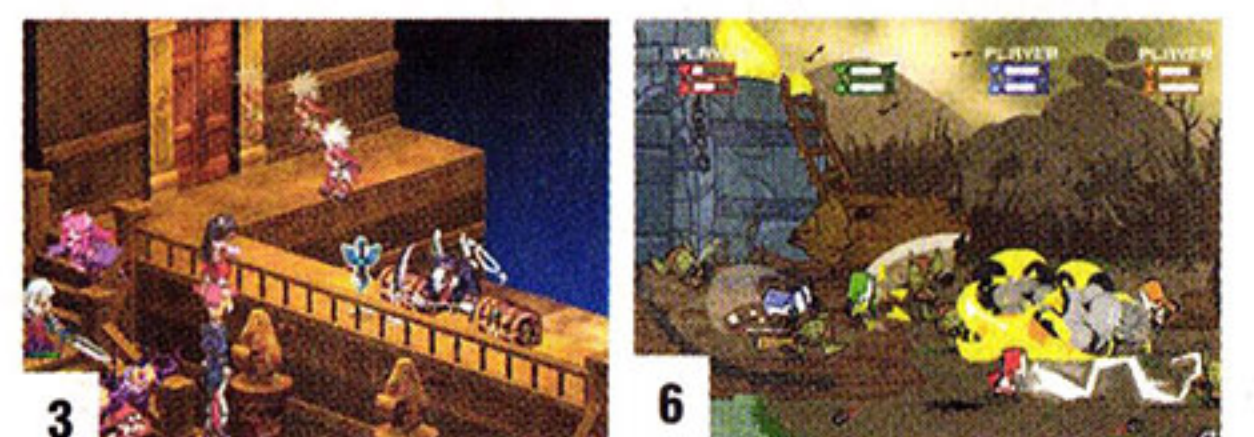
## TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Persona 4	PS2
2	Wii Fit	Wii
3	Legend of Starfi	DS
4	Mario Kart Wii	Wii
5	Daigasso! Band Brothers DX	DS
6	Resident Evil Zero	Wii
7	Derby Stallion DS	DS
8	Hanayori Danjo Final	DS
9	GeGeGe No Kitarou	DS
10	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP



## TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	1	PS3
2	Soulcalibur IV	N/A	multi
3	Disgaea 3	N/A	PS3
4	Madden NFL 09	N/A	multi
5	Schizoid	N/A	360
6	Castle Crashers	N/A	360
7	Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures	2	PC
8	Grid	5	multi
9	Battlefield: Bad Company	6	multi
10	Civilization Revolution	7	multi



## TOP 10 PC

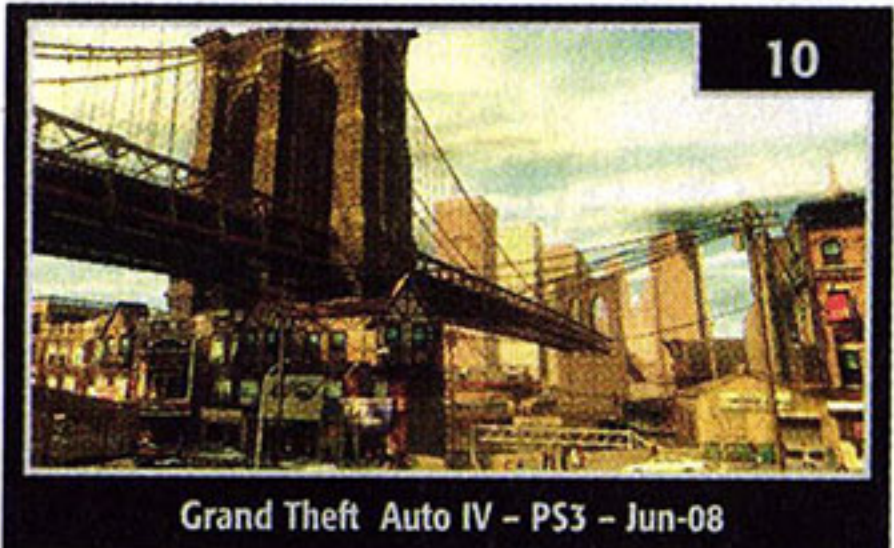
Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Spore Creature Creator	N/A	\$10
2	The Sims 2 IKEA Home Stuff	N/A	\$19
3	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	2	\$28
4	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	4	\$35
5	Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures	1	\$50
6	World Of Warcraft	6	\$20
7	The Sims 2 FreeTime	8	\$28
8	The Sims 2 Kitchen & Bath Interior Design Stuff	5	\$18
9	Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	N/A	\$47
10	Diablo Battle Chest	N/A	\$39



# REVIEWSARCHIVE

## PLAYSTATION 3

Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
Bourne Conspiracy, The	6.75	Aug-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
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-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
Incredible Hulk, The	6.75	Aug-08
Iron Man	3.75	Jul-08



Grand Theft Auto IV - PS3 - Jun-08

Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-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
MLB 08: The Show	8.5	May-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
Monster Madness: Grave Danger	7.25	Aug-08
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NCAA Football 09	8.25	Aug-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
SingStar	8	Aug-08
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-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

Alone in the Dark	6.5	Aug-08
Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
Bourne Conspiracy, The	6.75	Aug-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
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	7.25	Aug-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
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	7.5	Aug-08
Dynasty Warriors 6	7.25	Mar-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8	Jul-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
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-08
Hail to the Chimp	4	Jul-08
Hellboy: The Science of Evil	7	Jul-08
Incredible Hulk, The	6.75	Aug-08
Iron Man	3.75	Jul-08
Jumper: Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08

## Karaoke Revolution Presents:

American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom	5.25	Feb-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-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
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NCAA Football 09	8.25	Aug-08
NCAA March Madness 08	7.25	Feb-08
NFL Tour	5	Feb-08
Ninja Gaiden II	8.75	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
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08
Universe at War: Earth Assault	5	Jun-08
Unreal Tournament 3	8.5	Aug-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08

## Wii

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



Boom Blox - Wii - Jul-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
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	5.5	Jul-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
Jumper: Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08

## Karaoke Revolution Presents:

American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-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
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
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles	8.25	Jan-08
Rock Band	8.25	Aug-08
Samurai Warriors: Katana	6	Mar-08
Sega Bass Fishing	5	Apr-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.5	May-08
Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity	6	Mar-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
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

Age of Conan: Hybriian Adventures	8	Aug-08
Alone in the Dark	6.5	Aug-08
Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut Edition	9	Jun-08
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	7.75	May-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Crysis	9	Jan-08
Frontlines: Fuel of War	7.25	Apr-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
Civilization Revolution	8.5	Aug-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 IV	8.5	Aug-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
LOL	1	Aug-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
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	7.75	May-08
Professor Layton and the Curious Village	7.5	Apr-08
Puchi Puchi Virus	7.5	May-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08



Trauma Center - DS - Aug-08

Summon Night: Twin Age	7	Jun-08
Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingys!	6.75	May-08
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	8.25	Aug-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

# UAT GEEK.



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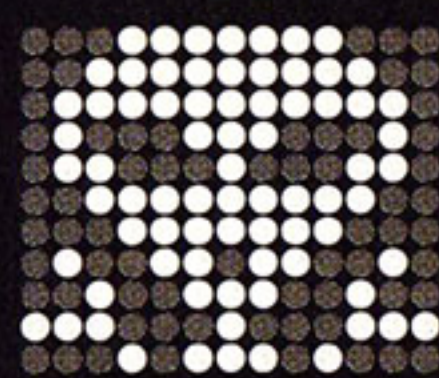


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GAME DESIGN	SOFTWARE ENGINEERING
ARTIFICIAL LIFE PROGRAMMING	WEB ARCHITECTURE
COMPUTER FORENSICS	ROBOTICS



## Unreal Tournament III



### Weapons Training

By Jim Brown, Lead Level Designer, Epic Games



#### COMBO KING

Like most weapons, the Shock Rifle has two firing modes. The primary fire is an instant hit beam, and the alternate fire is a slow moving plasma sphere called a core. Unlike most other weapons, the Shock Rifle's two firing modes can be combined into one devastating combo attack. While the slow moving core is in the air, you can shoot it with the primary beam and it will explode, creating an all-consuming singularity that is one of the most powerful attacks in the game. Most people don't realize that the combo can also be used defensively, as you can use your beam to ignite someone else's core. What's even better is that you'll get the credit for any frags from the explosion whether it was your core or not.

#### GOO!

Never underestimate the effectiveness of biosludge. The slow moving projectiles and short range of the Biorifle can mislead you into thinking that the weapon is weak, but it is designed that way to balance the fact that it is actually one of the most powerful weapons in your arsenal. A fully loaded ball of goo will take down most enemies in one shot, and will easily burn through massive amounts of both health and armor. If you miss your target, the ball will stick to the first surface it touches and stay there like a powerful landmine. Even if you miss your shot, there's a good chance that your enemy will step into the sticky, deadly mess and catch the damage anyway. Intentionally dropping blobs behind you is also a very effective way to run the flag, as you can seal off corridors or surprise enemies as they round blind corners.

#### SUPERSHIELD

Not all armor is created equal. The helmet will deflect a very small amount of incoming damage, or keep you alive after being hit by a single sniper's headshot. The thigh pads will absorb slightly more incoming fire, while the vest will absorb more than half of all damage you take. But the ultimate defense is still the Shieldbelt, which absorbs 100% of all incoming damage. The implications of this are huge. At low health, the Shieldbelt alone will keep you alive when all the other armor pieces combined can't; you fall off your Hoverboard when you take damage, but the belt prevents you from taking any damage so you won't go tumbling if you're hit. Best of all, the Shieldbelt stacks on

top of all the other armor pieces, so you can have full health, full armor, and still stack 100 points of pure Shieldbelt protection on top. The only drawback is that the belt constantly glows as a warning to your enemies, and will give away your position even if you're invisible.

#### HEALTH

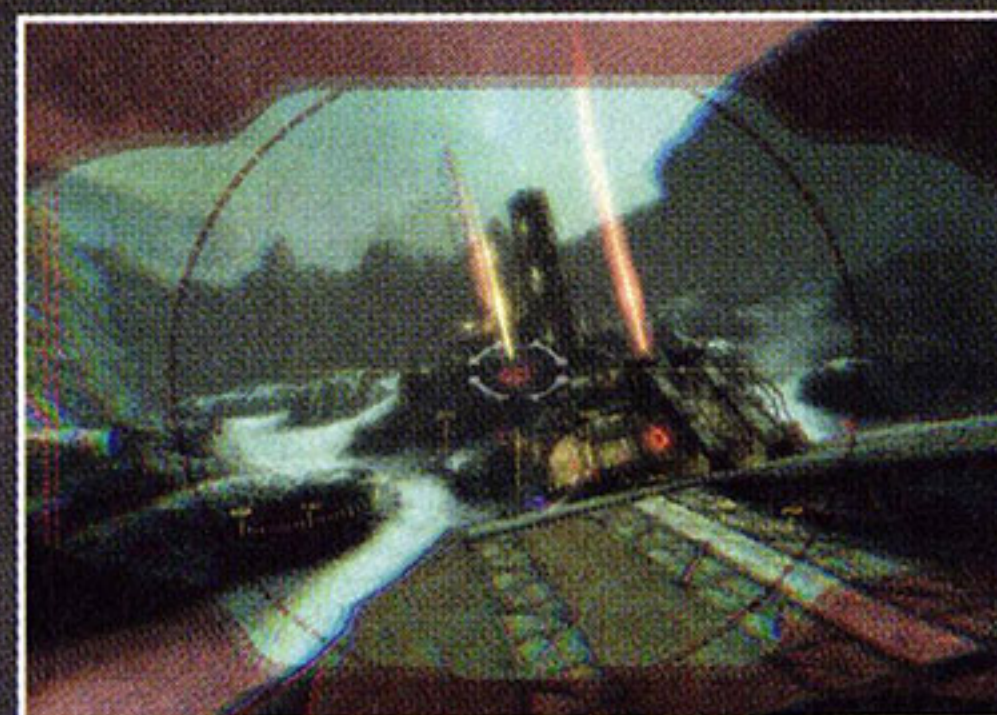
Despite all the cool power-ups and fancy weapons you'll find scattered through levels, health packs remain the single most important thing you can pick up. Don't be lured away from them! You'll always have a weapon of some sort, and other items can definitely increase your firepower, but UT is a level playing field so chances are that someone else always has an arsenal to match (or better) yours. Even if you can potentially deal out a truckload of damage, it won't do you any good if you can't survive long enough to get off a shot. There's no shame in running away to find more health; it's better than giving away points to the enemy team. One important note that most people miss comes directly from the health bases on the floor. The bases help key you to health spawn locations even when none is available, and they start to pulse when they're about to spawn a new health pack. If you notice the pulsing light, it's worth waiting a few seconds to grab the goods before heading on your way.



#### ADJUST YOUR STRATEGY

Deathmatch is fragalicious fun. It's also the perfect place to experiment and practice, but it plays completely different from all the other game types. When all is said and done, deaths don't really matter in a pure DM game – the only part of your score that matters is your frag count. In a team game, everything changes. When you die in a Team Deathmatch game, you're not only contributing to the enemy team's score, but you're punishing your own team in the process. Your team has to maintain a high frag to death ratio in order to succeed. Duel games are like a really intense version of TDM boiled down to 2 players; stay alive at all costs, even if you have to run away to recover. In Warfare and CTF games, deaths mean almost nothing, and you have to be willing to make sacrifices for your team. Always cover the flag carrier or orb runner, as their task is almost always more important than yours. Throw bodies at the enemy defenses until they break. Use your Linkgun to supercharge your allies and heal friendly vehicles; it's worth taking some personal damage if you can keep the powerful

Goliath on the battlefield. UT offers tons of gameplay options, so find the game type and role that suits you best, and have a blast!



#### PISTON POWER

People will generally only use their Impact Hammer as a last resort, or in tight, small DM maps where it is difficult to evade. But good piston players can be formidable foes beneficial to their team. Most people will panic if you get close to them with your Impact Hammer blaring, and they're more prone to make a mistake or simply run away. The alt-fire EMP is very effective against vehicles, but its main benefit is that it can be used to knock power-ups off enemy players. You can use it to steal a Shieldbelt, U Damage, or Berserk, and it's the only way in the game to counter the Invulnerability. There's nothing more satisfying than facing someone who thinks they're invulnerable to all your attacks, and then turning the tables on them and scoring the ultimate frag.

#### DEPLOY AHoy

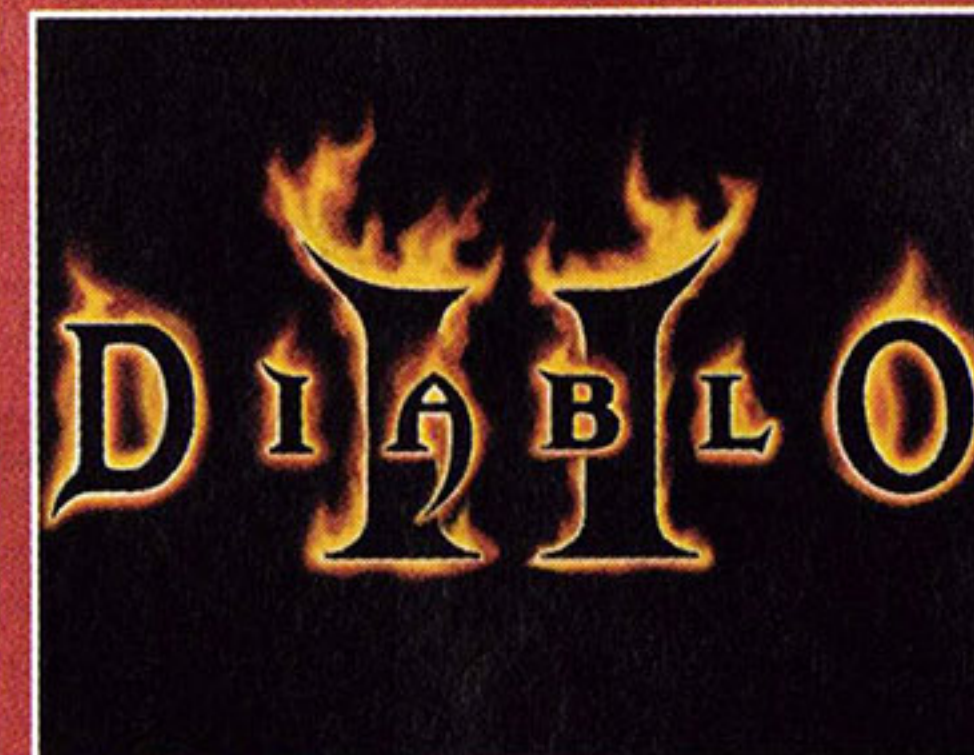
Deployables are great fun, and can be used in creative ways to benefit your team. Spidermines can be dropped to defend key locations and perform quite well on their own, but you can also use the alt-fire targeting system of the AVRIL Longbow to manually guide the spiders toward a target of your choice. Deployables can be attached to vehicles, so you can put an EMP mine on your bumper, then charge in and ram an enemy to instantly disable their vehicle and leave them vulnerable to attack. Shaped Charges are designed to take down barricades, but they will deal massive amounts of damage to Power Cores, Nodes, or groups of enemies that don't know well enough to spread out their attack force. Like slow volumes, they're also a great item to drop behind you in a choke point when you're trying to escape with the flag.



### Mod World

#### DIABLO II

What better way to celebrate the announcement of Diablo III than by reinstalling Diablo II and running Pindleskin until your wrist seizes up? Here are a couple of mods that make reinstalling the classic the best way to grind up some loot until the sequel releases. Note that these only work in single-player or Open Battle.net; Closed Battle.net is (ostensibly) mod-free.



#### ATMA

[atma.diabloii.net](http://atma.diabloii.net)

Not so much a mod as a character editor, ATMA works by directly modifying your save game files. However, it's not a cheat program – its functionality is strictly limited to making inventory management easier. ATMA lets you move items and gold between characters and a virtual stash, which is a godsend since otherwise you're limited to braving the wilds of Open Battle.net as the only way of moving equipment. A snazzy graphical interface makes ATMA a snap to use, and we can't imagine playing single-player Diablo II without it any more.



#### Red Rune Mod & Rune Words Mod

[www.twilightdesert.com/d2/mods.html](http://www.twilightdesert.com/d2/mods.html)

All Red Rune Mod does is make rune names show up in red when they're on the ground. It's more useful than you think. Especially after a few hours of grinding when you just stop seeing white text on the screen from all the garbage that mobs insist on dropping. Rune Words Mod simply enables the high-end "ladder only" rune words for single-player use as well. You may not think it's a big deal, but when you finally get that Vex rune you'll be glad you have it.



## Code of the Month

PS3

# Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots



You probably already know that Snake's iPod can be used to acquire tons of great music from the series that can be listened to at any time, but did you know that many of the songs in the game also create secret effects while they play? Here is a list of some of the more useful and enjoyable songs. Warning: Read no further if you don't want the game's locations spoiled.

**Beyond the Bounds** – Located in the Tank Hangar of Shadow Moses. After power is restored, backtrack to the upper catwalk and you'll find this in one of the rooms. This tune increases stun damage to all enemies from non-lethal weapons.

**Bio-hazard** – Located in Midtown in the Europe level. You find it by holding-up a resistance soldier and performing a body search. This tune will cause soldiers to scream in terror when Snake gets them in a hold.

**Destiny's Call** – This is a random gift you can receive from a militia or rebel soldier after Snake gives them a healing item. The

faction must be allied or neutral for this to work. This tune will cause soldiers held by Snake to become enraged.

**Flowing Destiny** – Located in the Canyon of Shadow Moses, you'll find this one by examining the rocky walls for a holes just before leaving the canyon. This tune will cause soldiers held by Snake to weep like a little girl.

**Fury** – Located in South America in the Cove Valley Village. You'll find it inside the fire ravaged house. This tune will cause soldiers held by Snake to go enraged.

**MGS 4 Love Theme/Action** – Another random gift from a militia or rebel soldier if Snake gives them a healing item. This tune will also cause soldiers held by Snake to weep uncontrollably.

**Opening - Old L.A. 2040** – Located on Shadow Moses in Nuclear Warhead Storage B2. Input 78925 into Otacon's lab computer when he prompts you. This tune will increase Snake's accuracy.

**Policenaughts Ending** – Located in Shadow

Moses in Nuclear Warhead Storage B2. Input 13462 into Otacon's lab computer when he prompts you. This tune will cause soldiers held by Snake to fall asleep when touched.

**Rock Me** – Located in South America in the Confinement Facility. You'll find it on the island in the south-eastern quadrant. This tune increases Snake's amount of life recovered from both items and other means.

**Sailor** – Located in South America in the Vista Mansion. Find this one between the east wall and a cargo container. This tune also increases Snake's life recovery.

**Show Time** – A random gift from a militia or rebel soldier when Snake gives them a healing item. This tune will cause soldiers held by Snake to scream in terror.

**Snake Eater** – Unlocked by earning all 40 game clear emblems. This tune will increase the life recovery rate of Snake through items and other actions.

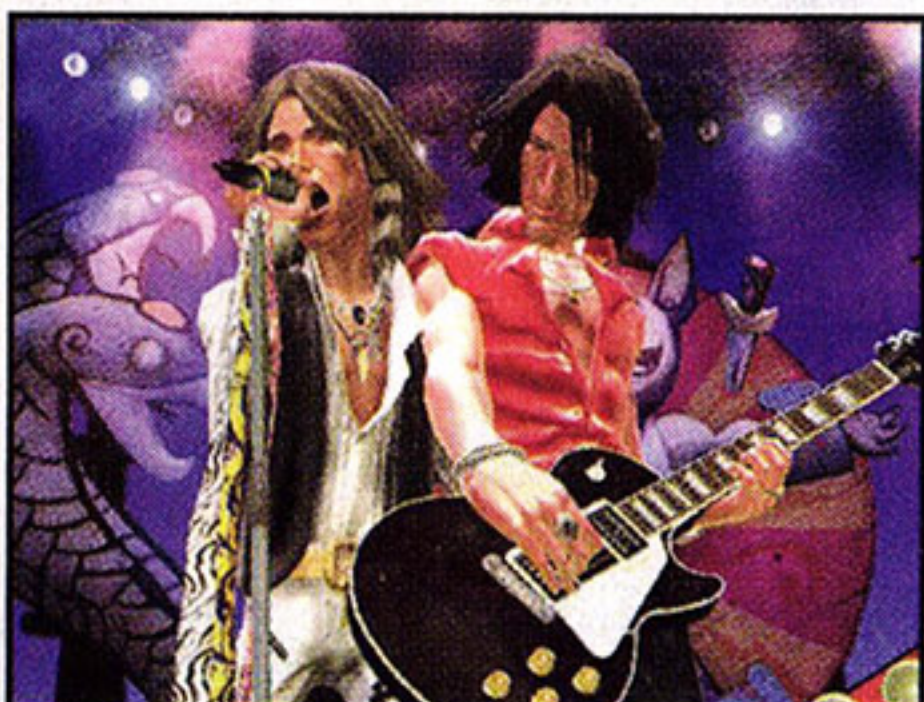
**Subsistence** – Play at least one game of Metal Gear Online. This tune will increase Snake's accuracy

### 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](mailto:secretaccess@gameinformer.com) for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

## MULTI-SYSTEM



### Guitar Hero: Aerosmith

From the Main Menu select Options and then Cheats to enter these codes.

**Air Guitar Mode** – R+Y, G+R, R+Y, R+Y, R+B, R+B, R+B, R+B, R+B, Y+B, Y+B, Y+O

**Hyperspeed Mode** – Y+O, Y+O, Y+O, Y+O, Y+O, R+Y, R+Y, R+Y, R+B, R+B, R+B, R+B, Y+B, Y+O, Y+O

**Large Gems** – G, R, G, Y, G, B, G, O, G, B, G, Y, G, R, G, G+R, R+Y, G+R, Y+B, G+R, B+O, G+R, Y+B, G+R, R+Y, G+R, G+Y

**No Failure Mode** – G+R, B, G+R, G+Y, B, G+Y, R+Y, O, R+Y, G+Y, Y, G+Y, G+R

**Performance Mode** – G+R, G+R, R+O, R+B, G+R, G+R, R+O, R+B

**Unlock All Songs** – R+Y, G+R, G+R, R+Y, R+Y, G+R, R+Y, R+Y, G+R, G+R, R+Y, R+Y, G+R, R+Y, R+B

**Precision Mode** – R+Y, R+B, R+B, R+Y, R+Y, Y+B, Y+B, Y+B, R+B, R+Y, R+B, R+B, R+Y, R+Y, Y+B, Y+B, Y+B, R+B

## Wii



### Boom Blox

To input these codes first pull up the cheats menu by hitting up, right, down, then left on the d-pad while at the titles screen. Use this keyboard to enter the rest of these cheats for some interesting results.

#### Convert Base Blocks to Jingle Blocks

– Maestro

#### Convert All Explosion Effects to Flower Explosions

– Flower Power

#### Convert All Cheerleaders to Profile Character

– My Team

#### Enable Slow-mo in Single Player

– Blox Time

#### Unlocks All Tools in Create Mode

– Tool Pool

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – last seen standing at the men's urinal trying to talk to the guy next to him)

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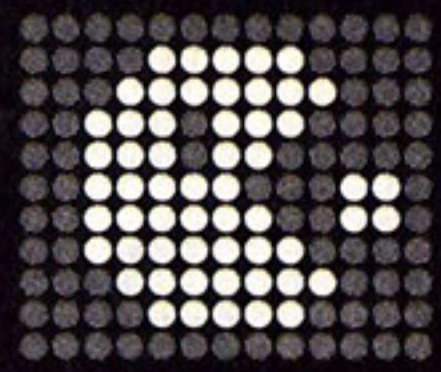
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PROGRAMS  
IN THE WORLD

– Electronic Gaming Monthly

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## PlayStation 2

# TOP 25

### The Games That Defined a Generation

With over 100 million units sold worldwide and a lifespan stretching far beyond any other console to date, the PlayStation 2 is the most successful video game platform of all time. As they say, a system is only as good as its games, and the PlayStation 2 provides a library fit for its 100 million players. As we compiled this list, we found hundreds of games that we would love to play again. Paring down to just 25 proved to be difficult, as the PlayStation 2 wasn't graced by just great individual games, but entire series worthy of playing. Here is Game Informer's selection for the Top 25 must-play PlayStation 2 games or series.



#### Metal Gear Solid series

Hideo Kojima is the gaming industry's consummate auteur. As a writer, director, and designer, he has crafted a series frequently cited as a work of video game art. Both PS2 Metal Gear titles, Sons of Liberty and Snake Eater, feature epic storytelling, cinematography, and gameplay. They paved the way for action games in multiple genres, and showed us that games can be just as much fun to watch as they are to play.



#### Resident Evil 4

This next statement will likely make you tear up a little, but if you've played Resident Evil 4, you know it's true. This series is better without zombies. The one game not featuring brain-eaters is the series' most impressive act. In all fairness, however, this is a complete departure for the series. RE 4's revolutionary over-the-shoulder targeting system, heart-pounding pacing, and inventive enemy designs make it nearly impossible to put down.



#### God of War series

In an afternoon, you could say that you toppled a giant, dethroned a god, and wowed the ladies. Both God of War games turn you into an unstoppable wrecking machine, and you can feel Kratos' fury with every brutal slash of his blades. In addition to a well-oiled combat system, this series uses mind-bending puzzles and cinematic flair to create a classic Greek tale of vengeance.

#### Grand Theft Auto series

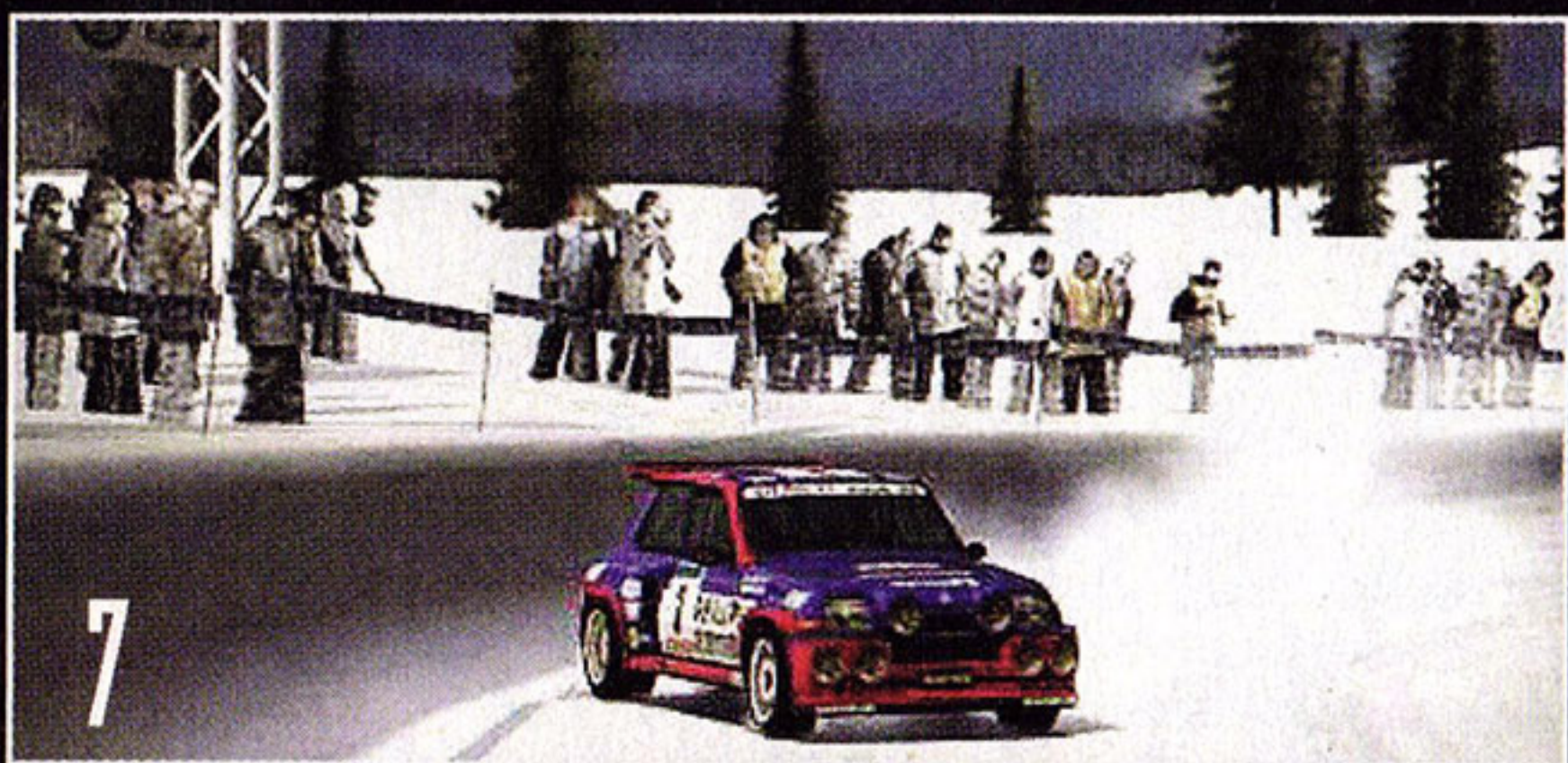
Grand Theft Auto has proven it can sell millions of copies on any system it touches, but its true rise to power began on PlayStation 2. The first installment to grace this console was Grand Theft Auto III. Its revolutionary open world gameplay changed the landscape of gaming, and its exclusivity to PlayStation 2 (at least for a time) helped cement this console as the generation leader. In the United States, Grand Theft Auto III has sold 5.7 million copies on PlayStation 2. Its sequel, Vice City, which allowed players to tower over society like a kingpin, significantly expanded the series' fan base with 6.8 million copies sold. The third entry, San Andreas, blew the doors off of what we could expect from the sandbox experience with not one, but three cities, and was handsomely rewarded for its innovative gameplay with a staggering 7.6 million copies sold in the States. There was no bigger event in the PS2 era than the release of a new GTA. It was truly the Grand Theft Auto generation.





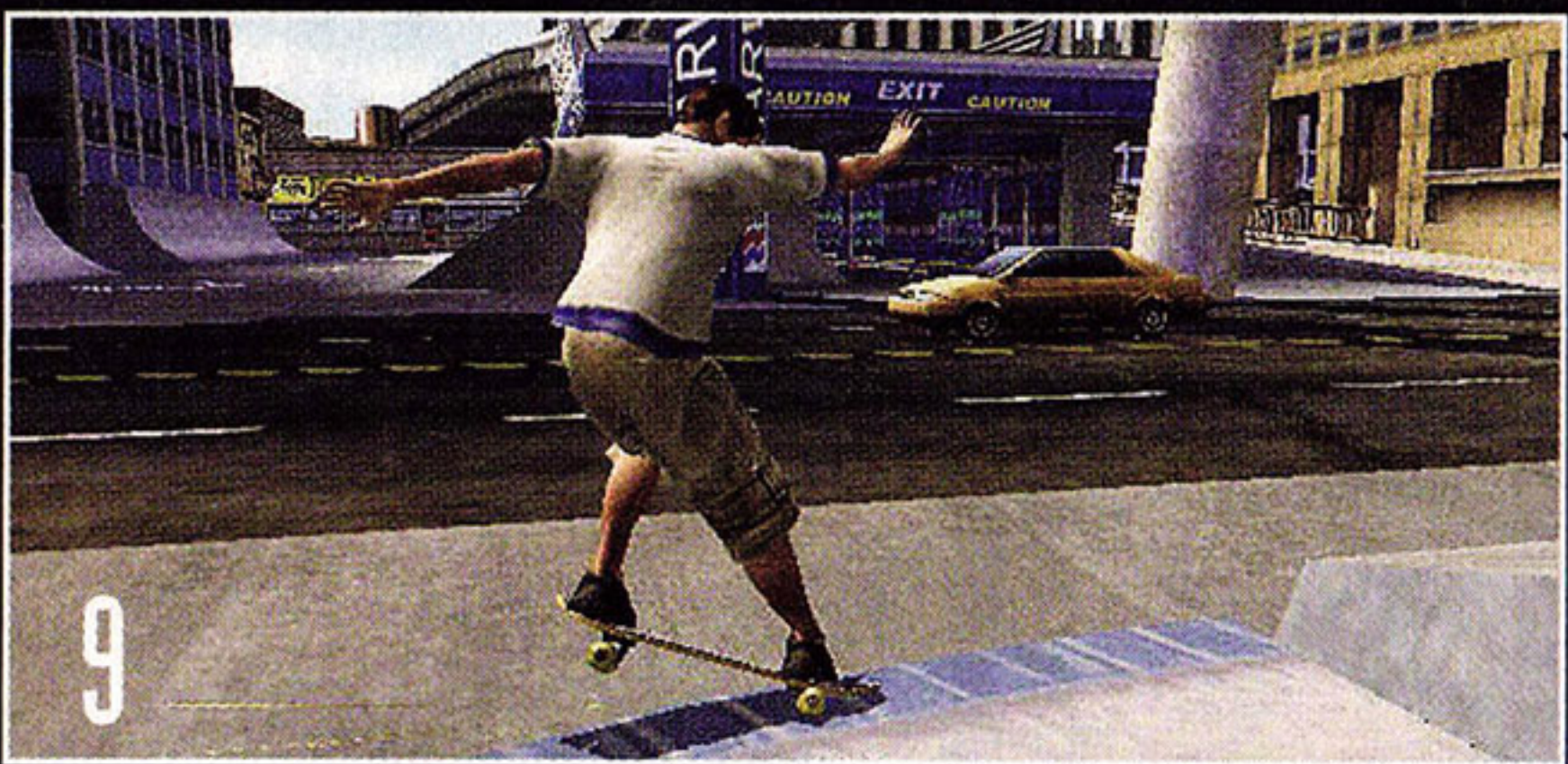
## 5 Final Fantasy X & XII

Forget about the side-stories and massively multiplayer forays; these two Final Fantasy titles are the best role-playing experiences you'll find on the PS2. Whether it's through the touching stories, fantastic visuals, or innovative gameplay mechanics, these games exemplify why Final Fantasy is the industry's most trusted name in console RPGs.



## 7 Gran Turismo series

Hundreds of photo-realistic cars all tuned to mimic their real-life counterparts set the bar for the racing simulation genre. Thanks to Gran Turismo, we expect our racing games to not only offer a wealth of real-life cars, but also test our racing abilities and push our engine to the limit.



## 9 Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

The PS2 was gifted with a new Tony Hawk title every year, but only one is deserving of skating immortality. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 introduced the revert maneuver, which allows a combo to be continued after a vert trick. This move opens the way to lengthy million-point runs that we dedicated hundreds of hours to perfecting.



## 11 Kingdom Hearts series

Seeing Goofy prance around with your favorite Final Fantasy characters might be hard to digest, but once you get a taste of Kingdom Hearts' spellbinding storytelling and razor-sharp combat, you won't hold back from placing your Sephiroth statue next to your Winnie the Pooh teddy bear.



## 6 Guitar Hero series

It may not have been the first music game, but Guitar Hero is certainly the one that popularized the genre. By mixing the best of rock music with a control scheme that scales remarkably well for beginners and long-time music aficionados, the game couldn't help but blossom into a worldwide phenomenon.



## 8 Ratchet & Clank series

Who says the platforming genre has grown stale? Who says cartoon graphics can't look fantastic? Who says you shouldn't turn your enemies into farm animals? Not Insomniac. The company consistently combined action, platforming, and RPG elements to create one of the funniest, most polished video game series on the market.



## 10 Devil May Cry 1 & 3

Swords and guns are nothing new to gaming, but Devil May Cry combines them in a fast and fluid combat system that essentially created the "stylish action" genre. Using crazy combos and lightning quick reflexes, this series pushes your skills to the limit while dishing out hardcore thrills – providing you overlook the second game.



## 12 Madden NFL series

The long-running Madden series made several significant evolutionary steps on the PlayStation 2. While it should be remembered for its introduction to online play and remarkably deep gameplay, most people will remember it for Michael Vick – the most skilled video game athlete since Bo Jackson.

## 13 Ico

Who would have thought a game with so much hand-holding and stick swinging would become a masterpiece?

## 14 Jak & Daxter series

Though there is a huge seam in the middle of the series separating the playful, kid-friendly atmospheres of the first game from the darker, more story-centric narratives of the second two, all three Jak and Daxter titles have a perfect blend of action and platforming. You never do the same thing twice in a Jak game, and that means you're never bored.

## 15 Burnout Revenge

It managed to outride the excellent Burnout 3 and was the last appearance of Crash Mode. God rest its soul.

## 16 Prince of Persia series

Running along walls and leaping over spinning blades can be a blast, especially when you can rewind time if you happen to lose a leg in the process. The Prince of Persia trilogy is an adventurer's dream come true, blending flashy swordplay with a good dose of puzzle solving.

## 17 Onimusha series

If we told you there is a series about famous Japanese legends retold and embellished with supernatural elements using popular modern day actors, you'd probably expect it to be marketing crap. However, Onimusha's blend of constant action, Resident Evil-style puzzles, and stunning CG sequences made it a game you'd be wrong to judge harshly.

## 18 Okami

Painting with a wolf may sound like a potential throat being ripped out, but Capcom proved that this unlikely combination could deliver one of the most memorable and unique adventures of this generation. Okami looks like a painting that came to life, and offers amazing gameplay with its inventive brush-stroke techniques.

## 19 Hot Shots Golf series

Hot Shots doesn't change much, but it doesn't have to when it's the master of the three-click swing and offers so many fun customization items and wacky characters. Hot Shots excels at being easy to learn, but the game also throws up plenty of challenges and requires nerves of steel.

## 20 SSX 3

With one gigantic mountain beneath your boots, you don't need to hop around the world in SSX 3. Players can nibble on it bite by bite, or bomb the entire thing, trying to keep one combo going from summit to lodge.

## 21 Need for Speed: Underground

With four outstanding racing types, insanely deep vehicle customization, and a look that could kill, Need for Speed: Underground lights the fires and kicks the tires like few racing games can. It made tuning a mainstay in gaming, and has led to many gamers "pimping" out their Camrys.

## 22 Dark Cloud series

This imaginative role-playing series put developer Level-5 on the map, and its world building, wealth of customization, and rich environments delivers an experience unlike any other.

## 23 Shadow of the Colossus

Dangle from the chin hairs of a beast 100 times your size as it tries to swat you like a fly. Nothing compares.

## 24 Fatal Frame series

If you've played the Fatal Frame games, there is no shame in sleeping with a flashlight or second-guessing what goes bump in the night. This series' unnerving atmosphere and expertise in scare tactics warrant a high pitched scream and perhaps even a stain in your pants.

## 25 Disgaea series

How deep can a turn-based strategy game get? Disgaea shows us that they can get absurdly deep. You can customize your troops, enhance your weapons, and be treated to some big laughs with its kooky cast of characters.



ARCADE

## STREET FIGHTER

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 1988

Sometimes willful ignorance is your best option. If you ever have mused to yourself, "Street Fighter II was really fun. I wonder what the first game was like?" you should just kill that train of thought. There is a reason why the second entry in this series is the one that took off: The original is not good. It deserves some credit for its place in history, but that doesn't make it fun to play. Series star Ryu (or Ken, if you're player two) punches, kicks, and fireballs through 12 opponents, including Sagat, Gen, and Adon (who reappear in later games). The problem is that the fighting is imprecise, unresponsive, and generally broken. The animation is stilted and jerky, the collision is erratic, and special moves are difficult to pull off with regularity. Street Fighter fans curious about the story shouldn't even bother, since the game doesn't even depict Ryu's legendary dragon punch scarring Sagat's chest – that's pure Street Fighter II ret-con. It's interesting to see the Street Fighter franchise's beginnings, but gamers should be thankful it grew beyond its origin.

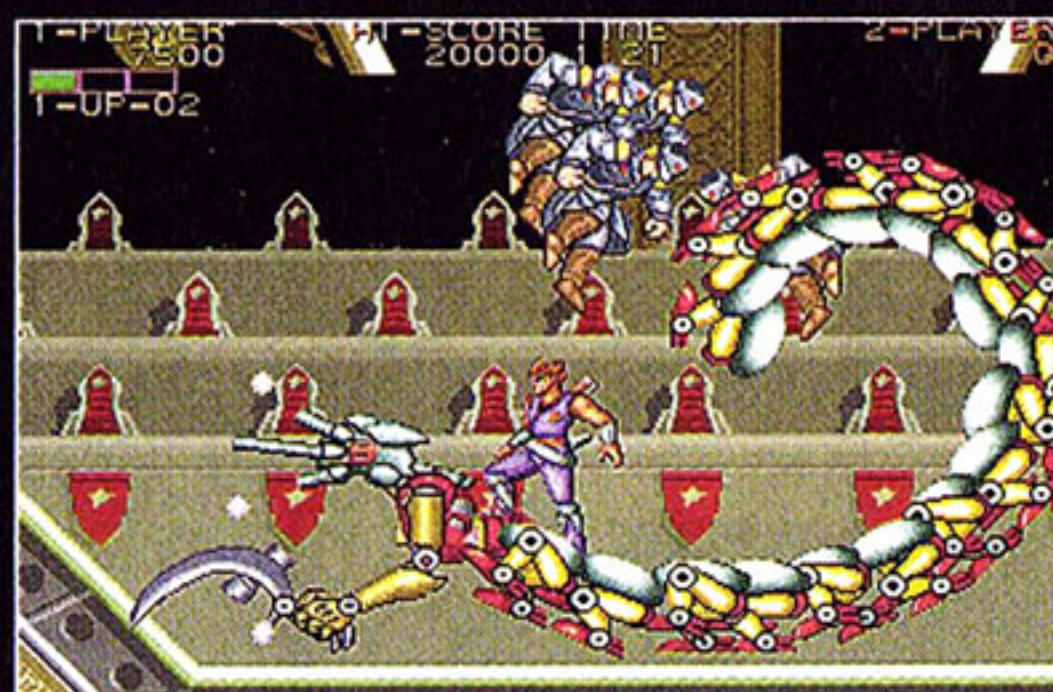


ARCADE

## STRIDER

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 1989

Strider Hiryu has it all: cool hair, a space glider, a sweet-looking sword slash, and the ability to climb on almost any surface. Even his death looks awesome (something you'll be seeing a lot). Plus, you'll run into a memorable set piece every 10 steps on average. In the globe-spanning five stages, you'll sprint down an exploding mountain, climb out of a trash compactor, run along the ceiling, and ride on top of a brontosaurus (which gets vaporized by a mecha-dino). Bosses include a snake made out of a couple dozen communist generals, a zero gravity energy core you orbit around, and a pirate. You can definitely tell, however, that this game was made for quarter popping. Loads of cheap deaths abound – mostly due to the fact that you can't fine tune jumps. Why Capcom hasn't released a Nintendo DS Strider yet is beyond us. Imagine if it was done with the same retro reverence as Contra 4!



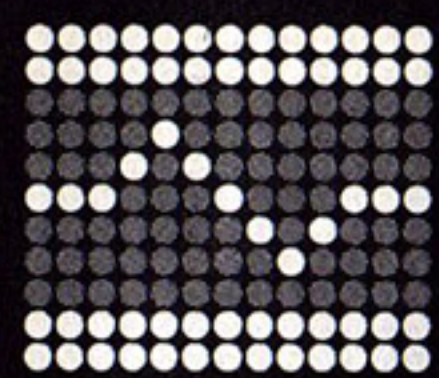
GENESIS

## STREETS OF RAGE 3

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SEGA > RELEASE 1994

The world of video games in the mid-nineties was a surreal place. Modern rules of sanity just didn't apply. Your main character could easily be a bald cybernetic scientist with an Einstein 'stache, your enemies could be mind-controlled kangaroos with boxing gloves, and every alley trash-can could reasonably contain a samurai sword. Part of the charm of late beat 'em ups like Streets of Rage was that they were so gratifyingly simple in their approach to gameplay. Every punch in the face felt somehow rewarding. Streets of Rage 3 had a few issues, such as choppy sound, slowdown, and weapons that disintegrated after only a few uses. The story is also the epitome of why many gamers still skip cutscenes to this day, but when you are smacking down hundreds of street punks who all auspiciously share names like Bono, Donovan, and Ice you have to just take the game for what it is. While preteens with backwards hats and rollerblades never make acceptable protagonists, it's fun to revisit a time when rules like this were ignored.

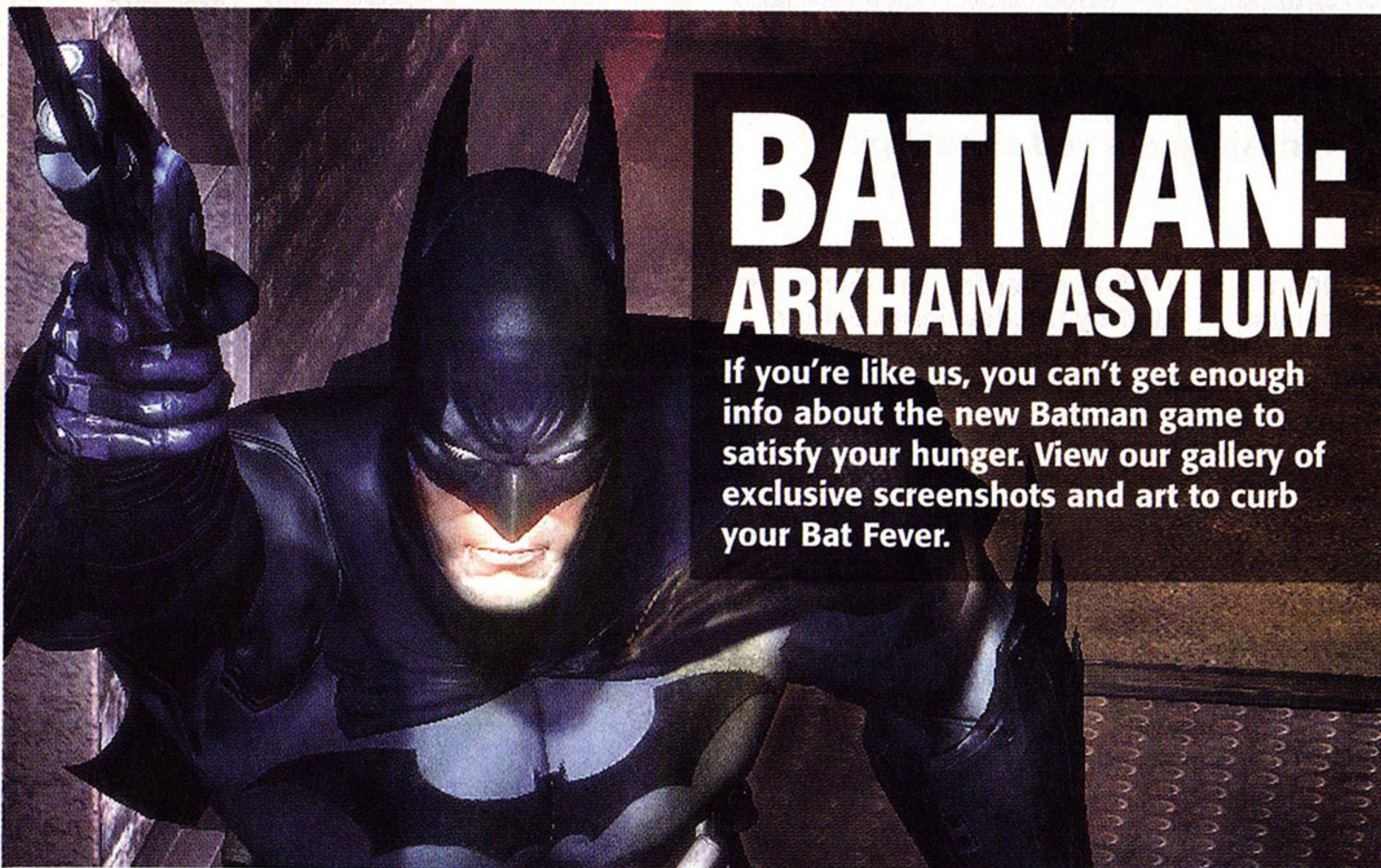




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## UNLIMITED LAUNCH: AUG. 18



# BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

If you're like us, you can't get enough info about the new Batman game to satisfy your hunger. View our gallery of exclusive screenshots and art to curb your Bat Fever.



### Batman: Behind the Cape

Read our full-length interview with Paul Dini, writer for *Batman: The Animated Series*, *Detective Comics*, and *Batman: Arkham Asylum*.



### Places: Rocksteady Studios

Take a tour of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* developer Rocksteady Studio's Batcave in North London.



### Roll Call

We don't know all the faces that will make an appearance in *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe*, but we did see several beloved characters in action. Read our reveals online.

### Best of E3: Editor's Edition

Check out how your E3 enthusiasm stacks up with your favorite editors in our individual top 10 lists.



### ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

*Game Informer Online* heads to *Deutschland* to report on all the beer – er, gaming news – from the Games Convention in Leipzig.

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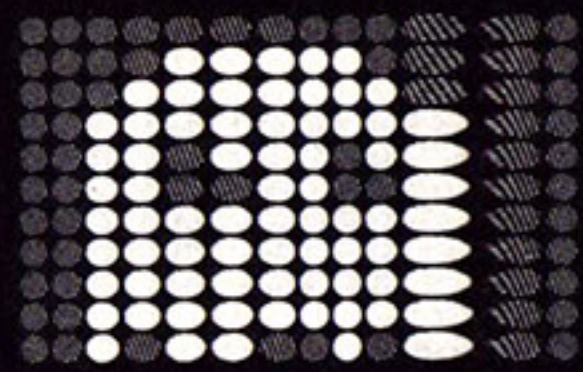
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# GAMEOVER

Oh, Cody!

## VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Maybe there weren't a lot of new games at E3 this year. But there sure were a lot of music games, both good and bad. Do you know which ones to be interested in? Complete this quiz to find out which music game you should play this holiday. No backsies!

**1** Which of the following is a Protoss unit in Starcraft?

- A. Firebat
- B. Battlecruiser
- C. Carrier
- D. Goliath



**2** How would you describe South Park: Chef's Luv Shack?

- A. A fast-paced racing game through the animated streets of South Park
- B. A side-scrolling multiplayer brawler in which you play one of the four boys
- C. An irreverent quiz show with interspersed minigames
- D. A cooking game that includes salty chocolate balls



**3** Bangai-O Spirits releases on Nintendo DS this month (read the review on page 107). On which other system has the franchise also appeared?

- A. PlayStation 2
- B. Dreamcast
- C. NES
- D. Arcade

**4** As presented in the 2000 PC release, F.A.K.K. is an acronym for what four words in the Heavy Metal mythology?

- A. Federation Assigned Ketogenic Killzone
- B. Fully Adjustable Killer Kinetics
- C. Fueled Assault Kryptonomic Knight
- D. Foes Always Kiss Keys



**5** Who has not been a main character in the Tenchu series?

- A. Rikimaru
- B. Tatsumaru
- C. Hayabusa
- D. Ayame



**6** In which Final Fantasy will you find the character named FuSoYa?

- A. Final Fantasy IV
- B. Final Fantasy VI
- C. Final Fantasy IX
- D. Final Fantasy XII



**7** What other franchise was created by the developer behind Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy?

- A. Gex
- B. Sly Cooper
- C. Ratchet and Clank
- D. Crash Bandicoot

**8** In the 1997 game MDK, what was the name of your strange six-legged mechanical dog sidekick?

- A. Dogmeat
- B. Bones
- C. Fido
- D. Dog



**9** Which of these isn't a snowmobiling game?

- A. Whiteout
- B. Sled Storm
- C. Arctic Thunder
- D. Snowcrash



**10** Which system is clearly the best?

- A. Wii
- B. PlayStation 3
- C. Xbox 360

## BREAKDOWN

5 fantastic Live Arcade games have been promised by Microsoft before September 21: Castle Crashers, Galaga Legions, Geometry Wars Retro Evolved 2, Bionic Commando Rearmed, and Braid

\$6.6 billion of game industry revenue was reported in the first five months of 2008, according to NPD numbers

40% of all gamers are now women, according to a recent survey by the ESA

500 songs is the minimum number of playable tunes in Rock Band 2 by the end of this year, according to Harmonix CEO Alex Rigopulos

1 person we met at E3 was still on their first Xbox 360. Everyone else wasn't.

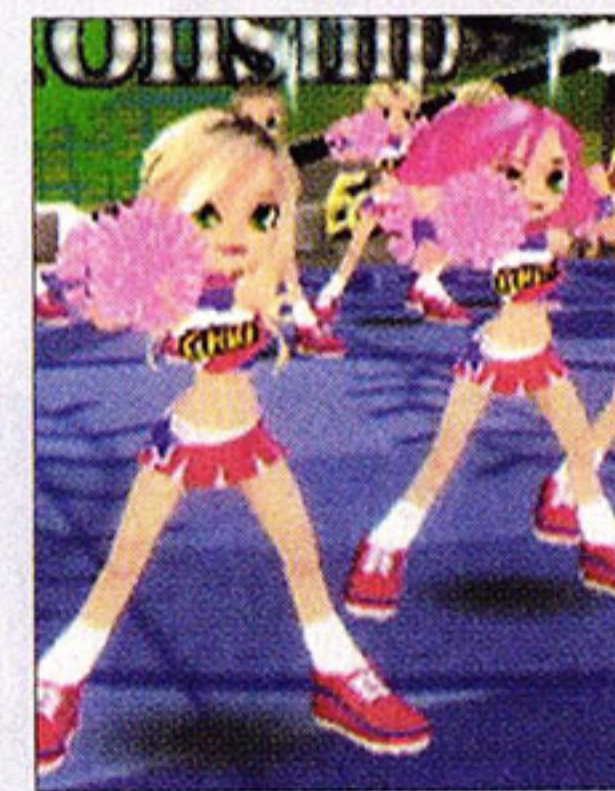
## ★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



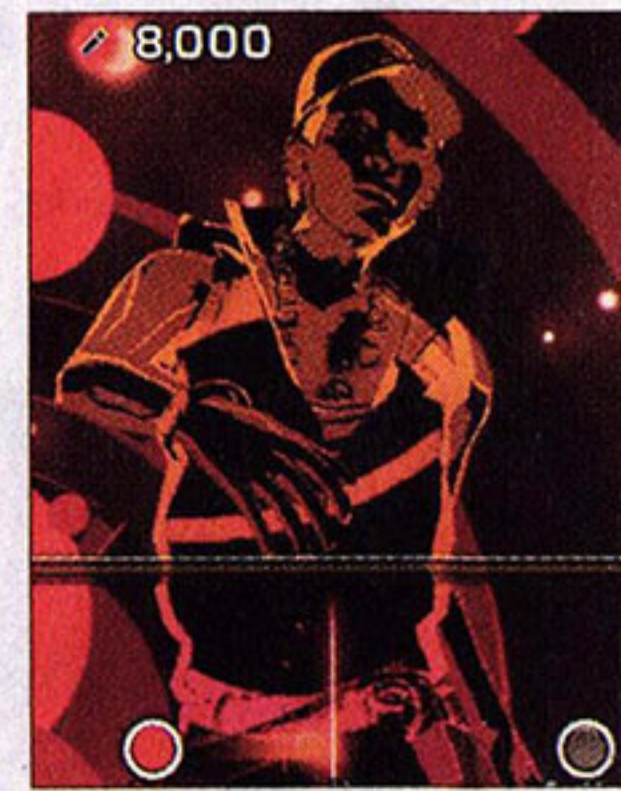
**0-1:**  
Wii Music



**2-3:**  
Rock Revolution



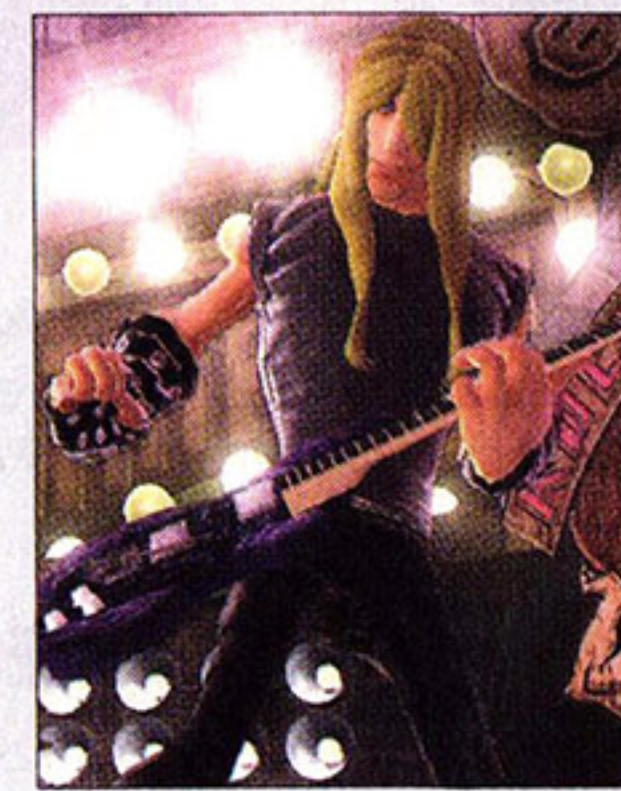
**4-5:**  
We Cheer



**6-7:**  
Lips



**8-9:**  
Rock Band 2



**10:**  
Guitar Hero: World Tour

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UNIVERSE  
AT WAR

SEGA



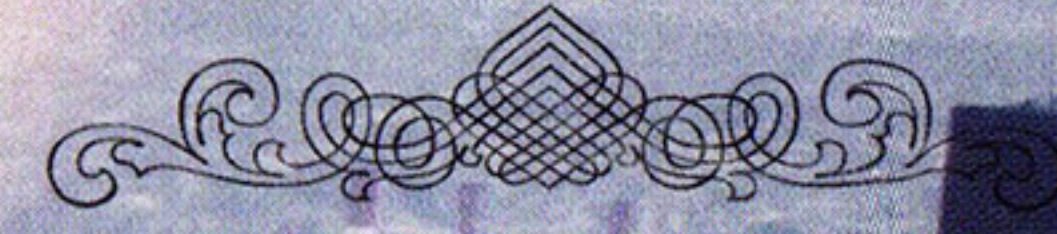
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MYTHS  
ARE PASSED DOWN  
THROUGH THE GENERATIONS.

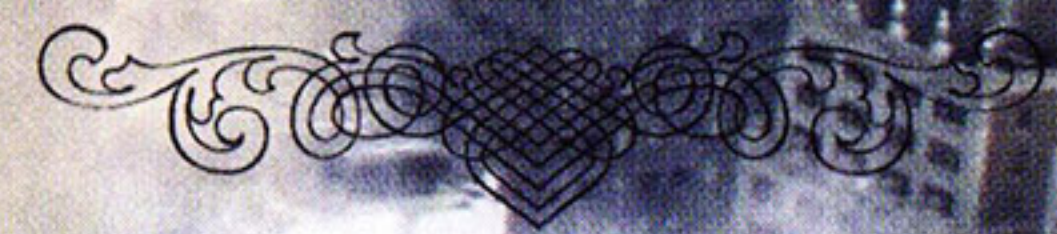
THEY APPEAR  
IN OUR STORYBOOKS.

THEY ARE  
THE STONE  
GUARDIANS  
OF OUR BUILDINGS.

THEY ARE  
OUR FEARS  
MADE MANIFEST.

DENIED. CONTAINED. SAFE.

*Until Now.*



Blood and Gore  
Intense Violence

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