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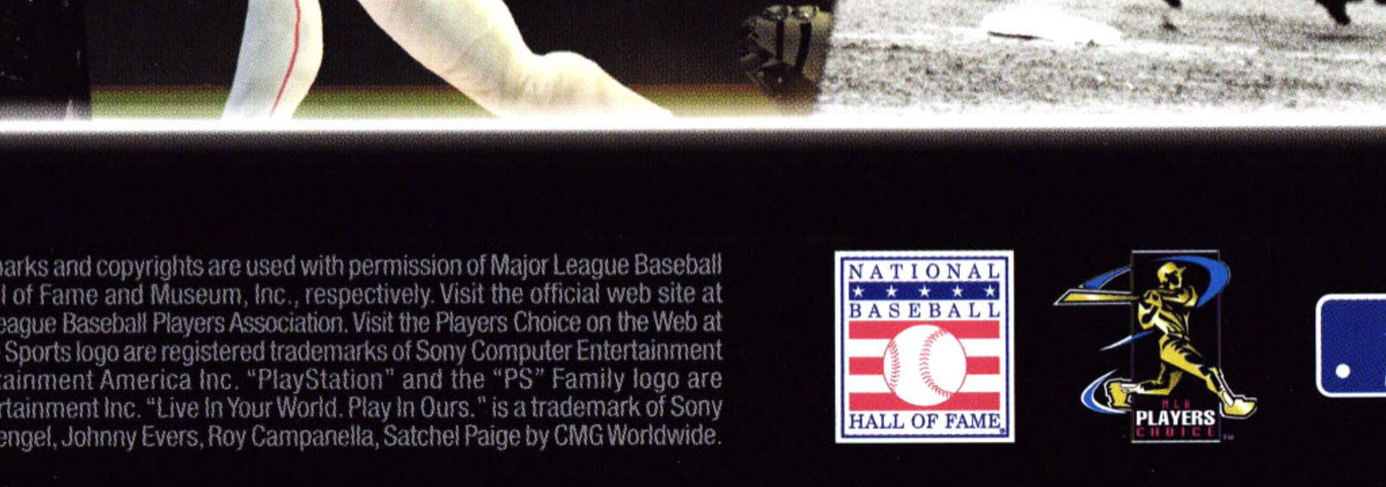

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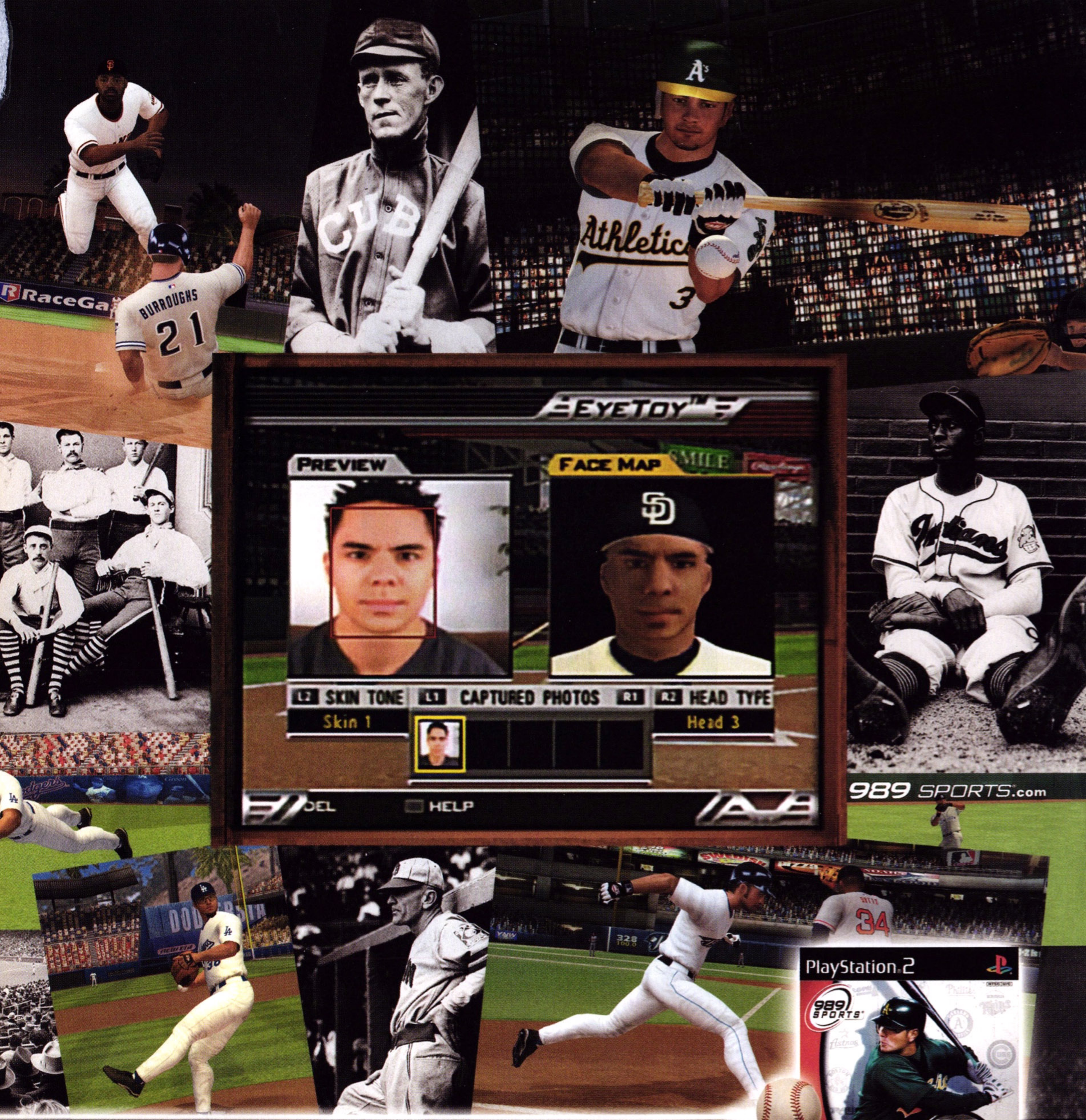
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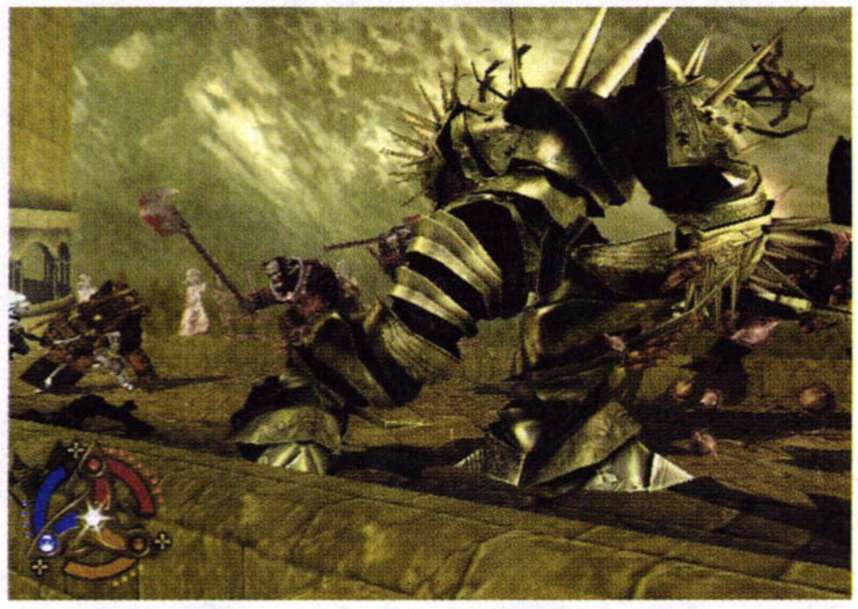

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PlayStation.2

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CHECK.

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cover story

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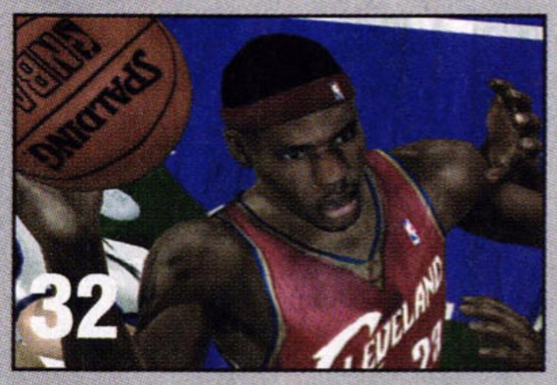
THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Is there anything we need to say beyond "next-gen game" to create interest in this? Game Informer gets the scoop on not only the future of one of the hottest RPG series around, but the technology behind the future of console gaming as well. Oh, and there are some screenshots you may want to see, too. Seeing as they're more drool-worthy than Princess Leia in a brass bikini and all. Get the full story on page 50.

features



BASKETBALL BLOWOUT

Shaq's in Miami. Kobe's on trial. The good news is that KG is still MVP and the next season is dead ahead. That, of course, means that the next round of basketball games is just around the corner, and we take a look at who's going to rule the paint this year.

THE 25 MOST INFLUENTIAL GAMES EVER MADE

Fear not, loyal readers! GI once again comes to the rescue with a list to argue over. The staff takes a long, hard look at the history of the best hobby ever, and marks the most significant milestones along the way. From Computer Space to GTA III, get your slice of history on page 64.

MERCENARIES

What's better than rolling around in stolen cars and wasting unsuspecting fools? Doing it in helicopters and tanks equipped with the best firepower known to modern militaries, of course. This new LucasArts title impressed at E3, and we get the inside scoop on just why it looks so awesome.

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VIDEO: YES. GAME: NO.

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

THE SMALL TEXT

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Xbox 2, or whatever codename you like – Xbox Next or Xenon – is the worst-kept secret in the history of hardware. While Microsoft won't comment officially on its next-generation plans, the amount of leaked and confirmed information is almost staggering. From the white paper we reported on in the August issue to the bevy of new information you will find in this issue, Xbox 2 is very real. I've seen it.

However, it is important to note that all this information is a snapshot of a place and time. The specs and capabilities that we talk about concerning the next-gen systems, be it Xbox 2 or PS3, are all subject to change.

Our cover story, Bethesda's newest game The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, on the other hand, is not subject to change – this is how the game will appear on Xbox 2, PC, and presumably PS3.

We also doubt that there will be many changes to the Xbox 2 technology or its planned launch in 2005. Microsoft is gearing up for a battle of epic proportions, and this time it knows that hardware isn't the key to victory (not that Xbox 2 is lacking in any sense), the war is won or lost on the software front.

It seems Microsoft has done its homework. The list of developers that have approached Game Informer with information is remarkable. On the opposite end of the spectrum, we have yet to find any developers with any solid information on PS3 or Nintendo's Revolution. It seems Microsoft is that far ahead of the game.

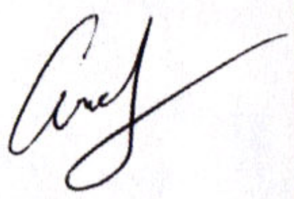
So, with many of pieces in play, it makes me wonder whether Xbox 2 is "pulling a Dreamcast" or making a masterful move that could very well put Nintendo and Sony at a disadvantage. Nine months ago I would have said Microsoft was committing too early in the cycle, and would leave itself open to a Sony barrage of marketing that would make it an immediate failure.

Now, after months of investigation, I'm singing a different tune. I'm starting to believe in the strategy. Of course, there are many unanswered questions that could change the landscape in a heartbeat, but it does seem Microsoft is on the right track for the moment.

But you can't help but wonder: Are developers and publishers willing to spend the massive dollars it takes to support Xbox 2, when PlayStation 2 has so many units out there, which in turn equals more sales and profits? Or, at the other end of the spectrum, can the PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Revolution offer up consoles that are enough of a forward leap in technology and innovation that they can cancel Microsoft's head start?

No one knows the answers to these questions, and I'm not willing to guess...yet. There are far too many variables still in play. Sony's PlayStation is a behemoth in this business and supplanting it will be incredibly difficult. And you can never count out Nintendo, with its amazing stable of licenses and countless innovations. Still, you can't help but think that Microsoft is doing everything right.

No matter what happens, the gamers of the world win. Plus, nothing is more fun to watch than multi-billion dollar companies battling it out for our entertainment dollars.



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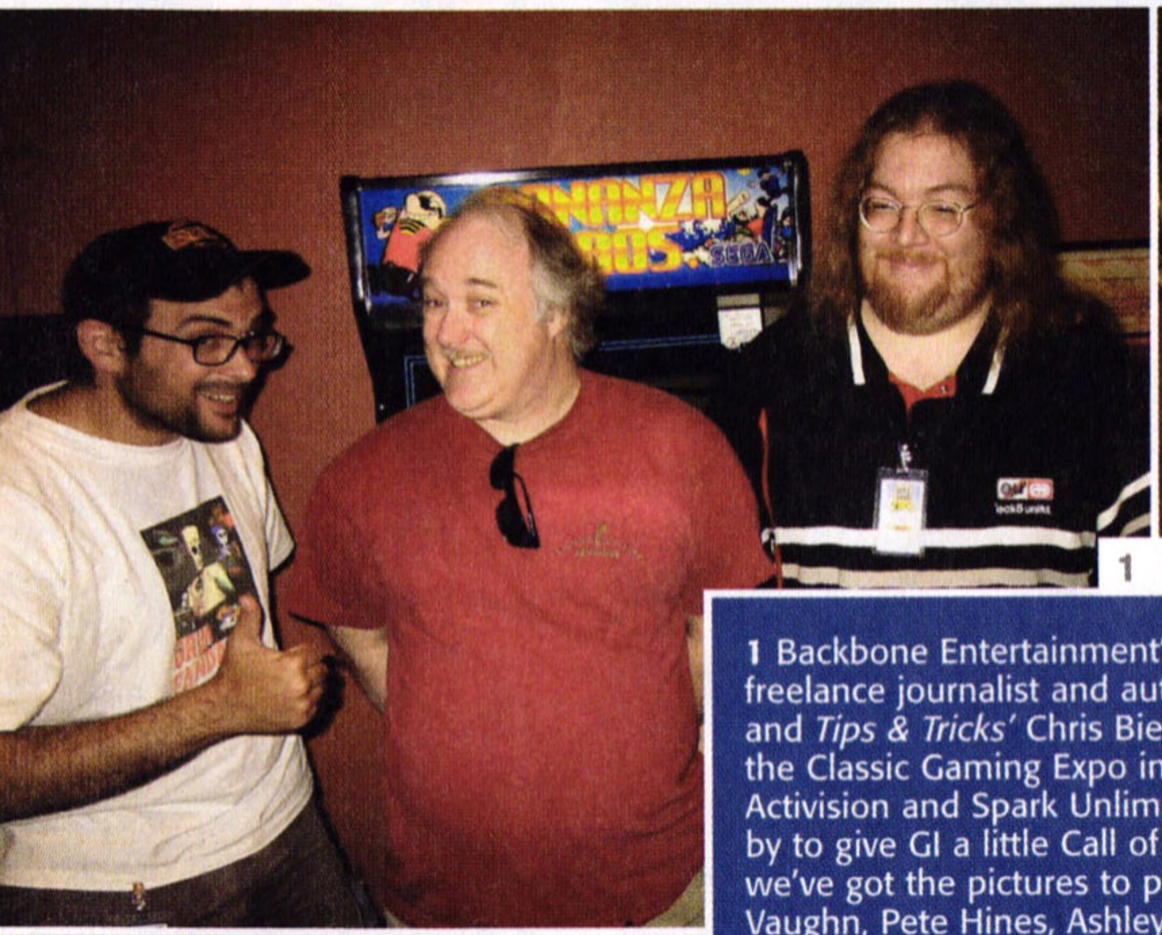
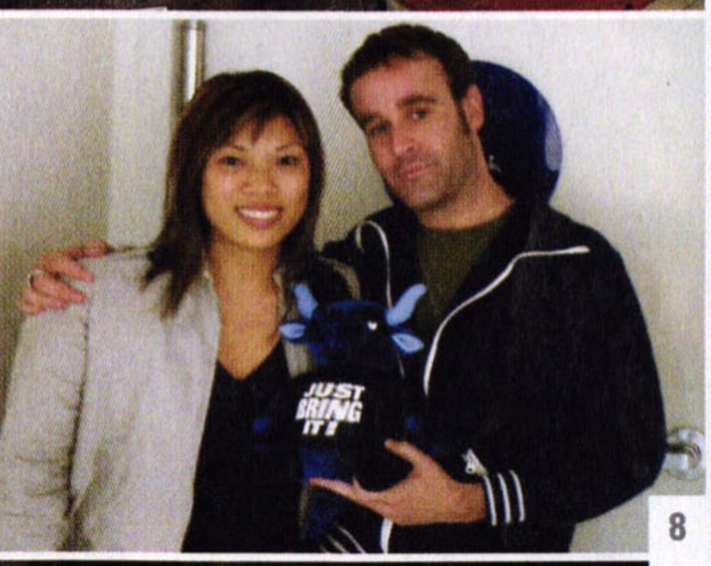
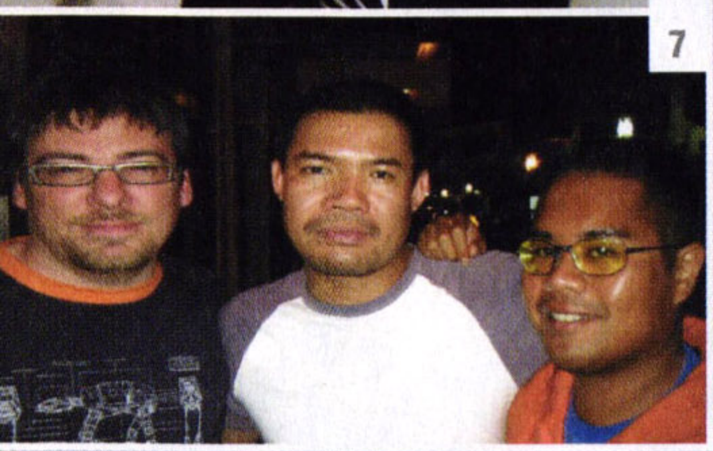


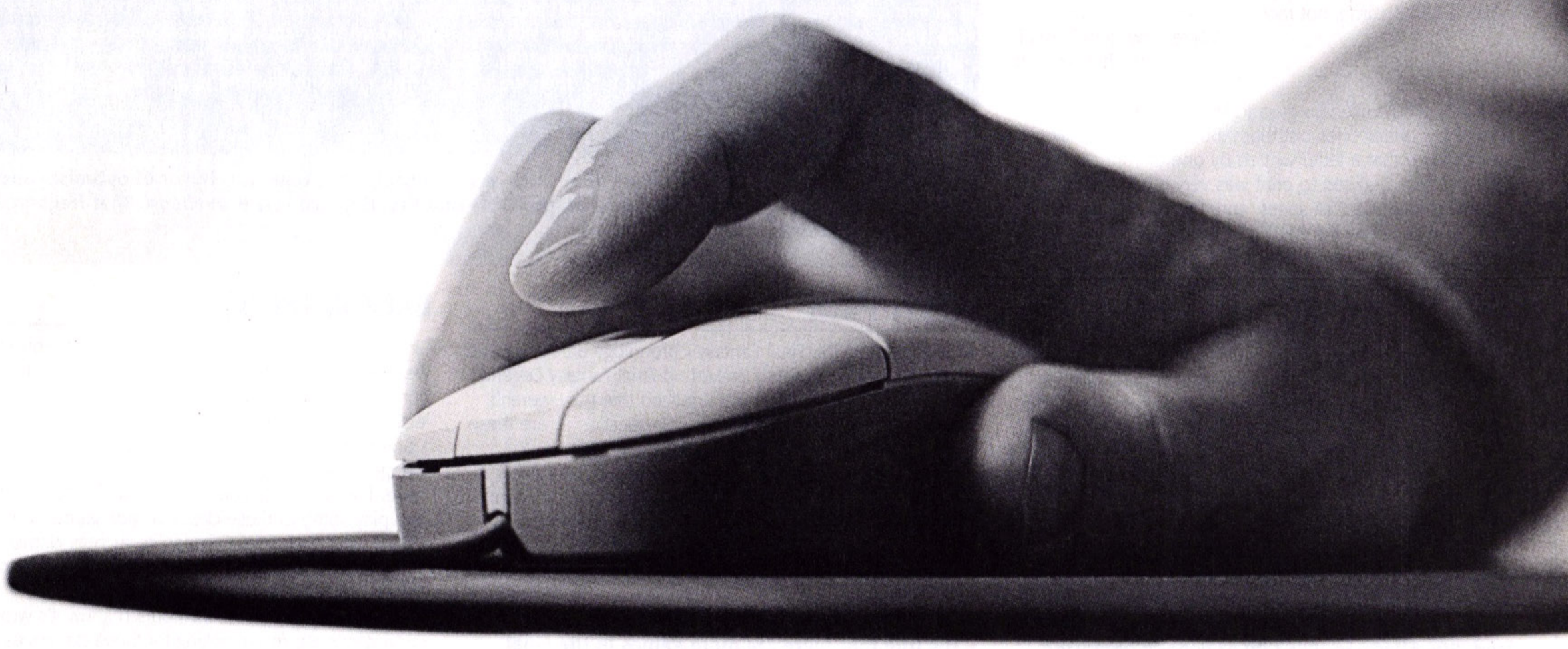




1 Backbone Entertainment's Chris Charla, freelance journalist and author Andy Eddy, and *Tips & Tricks'* Chris Bieniek chill at the Classic Gaming Expo in San Jose **2** Activision and Spark Unlimited stopped by to give GI a little Call of Duty love, and we've got the pictures to prove it! **3** Todd Vaughn, Pete Hines, Ashley Cheng, and Todd Howard, who make up Bethesda's "Hunk Squad," hit the town with GI Spy **4** "Yes, I hear what you're saying, but I still think that the first *Ginger Snaps* had a better use of Romero-esque editing techniques than *Ginger Snaps 2*." Electric Playground's Victor Lucas and EA's Scott Gamel discuss the finer points of cinema at EA's Hot Summer Nights event **5** Billy and Adam, seen here "working" with members of the Atari PR posse in Cabo San Lucas. [The ironic quotation marks around the word "working" are to indicate that we suspect they were not actually working at the time – Ed.] **6** Konami's Peter Nguyen, Lisa, and Marc Franklin ponder life's great mysteries in front of Alcatraz in San Francisco **7** Andy Mac and GameSpy's Raymond Padilla (right) pose with the world's craziest bartender (seriously!), Mark from the Buddha Bar in San Francisco **8** Ubisoft's Carol Quito and David Hawk just got done taking their pet stuffed ox for a potty break!

YOU CAN CLICK BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

I	**ILLEGAL DOWNLOADING** Inappropriate for All Ages



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DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

TOO FAR FOR US?

I am a 23-year-old African American student who has enjoyed your magazine for over a year now. Though I admit to not being an ardent gamer, I do love video games. I write today to respond to a letter from one of your readers, Elak Swindell, who argued that maybe Rockstar had gone too far [with Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas].

Your magazine once brought up commentary on race and video games [Race and Video Games: An Unequal Face, issue #130], and I fully agree with that article. The problem is evident in games like Bushido Blade 2, Tekken 3 and quite a few others that have many stereotypical black characters. However, I would ask that reader, Elak Swindell, if the issue of race didn't bother him in this latest endeavor by Rockstar, then why would one state "African American gangster" or point out the fact that the Bloods and Crips faced "Asian and Latino" rivals? If race doesn't matter, then why point it out? Isn't it hypocrisy to disagree with one brand of criminal activity, but then to accept another form? Saying the Mafia formula is tried and true is to say "organized crime" is much more acceptable. Do the glamour, glitz, and suits make it a more lovely crime, thus it is perfectly fine to present it to the public?

Crime is crime and criminals are criminals. If someone believes something else, then they aren't only small-minded, they are also ignorant. I, for one, thought Rockstar was aiming for a feel more like movies such as *Boys 'N the Hood*, *Menace II Society*, or *Juice*. The race of the characters never crossed my mind, because it was still just a game about crime, not race.

Walter Mwasi Williams III
Via hotmail.com

First off, I would like you guys to know that your mag is one of the better ones out there. But, I would also like you to know that a letter written by one of your readers that you guys decided to print was very offensive. I am black and love the GTA series, and the fact that they are using a main character that is black is great beyond words could say. I have been waiting for the day that a game company would step up and do something other video game companies (besides EA Sports) would not do. The writer contradicted himself when saying that we should not be idolizing street gangs, but the Mafia. Why not? What has the Mafia done to make America so great? Nothing. They were no better people than the Enron crooks or the LA street gangs.

Enbeezy
Via email

■ **The response to Elak's letter in issue #136 was almost as strong as the initial opinions on the game in question – Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. The controversial franchise is taking on an era that hits closer to home than the stylized '80s Miami in Vice City or generic organized crime of GTA III did. The first round of letters was interesting because most people were defending the Mafia mentality while decrying the street gang theme, while this second wave focuses mostly on how an honest portrayal of the culture and times is something to look forward to. We're still in wait-and-see mode and hoping that San Andreas lives up to the responsibility, and just as importantly, the shameless fun of the series.**

TRUE ROMANCE

Video games have given me some of the best laughs, most joyful tears, and happiest memories of my life. I remember a day when sitting down and playing Excitebike, Kung Fu, Super Adventure Island, Wizards and Warriors, and RC Pro Am were the reason to get my homework done. The reason for doing my chores. And all the while I was learning, I was becoming greater than I was, and I didn't even know it. It saddens me to see where video games are going. Connectivity with Hollywood is great, but the more mainstream video games become, the more junk will be pushed on us.

The console market is one of the only markets in which money is spent on potential. We as gamers shell out the cash because some great game might be released on a certain console. Does a person buy a car because some new floor mat might be produced in the future? Does a person buy a house because someday there might be a new type of garage door? I don't think so. The fact that Nintendo and Sony are so secretive about their new games is, in a way, upsetting to me. Just let us in. We are investors and we need to know as much as possible.

I love video games, and I consider myself to be a hardcore gamer. I have a top-loading Nintendo. I had the Sega Nomad, Sega CD, and I even was the proud owner of a Virtual Boy…and the licensed Virtual Boy Barf Bag (just kidding). I was, and most of me still is, in love with Princess Zelda from the Saturday morning cartoon show. The point I'm making here is that I care about the video game world because in life I'm just Ryan Telles, 21-year old bartender. But in my games I am Link, I am Spider-Man, I am Master Chief, I am a hero, savior of the world. Nothing else besides video games gives me the ability to be loved by everyone, to be a protector of life. Video games are an alternate universe that not everyone understands, and I would be very sad to see that universe be ripped to shreds by the want for money. Love creates games, love keeps them alive, and hopefully someday everyone can be a hero. But until then we must rely on games to give the people that feeling of joy.

Ryan Telles
Via email

■ **…Sorry, one second…just need a tissue. That was beautiful, man. Yours is a flavor of optimism and idealism that we haven't seen since, well, probably that first time we saw *Braveheart*. That freedom speech still gives us goosebumps.**

FOGGY PATH

I really enjoyed the Final Fantasy Chronology article in issue #136. However, I recently picked up Final Fantasy Legend I, II, and III for Game Boy and I noticed that they weren't even mentioned in the article. So my question is, are these true Final Fantasy games, or was it an oversight not to include them? I would just like to know, because I'd like to experience all the Final Fantasy games. If not, I will keep them sealed for collection purposes. Thanks for another classic GI article, the best part of the magazine!

Rodney Gonzalez
Palatine, IL

■ **It's true that there are more games in the Final Fantasy lineage than we listed in the FF Chronology piece. Besides the three Legend titles (which are close to traditional FF games) on GBA there is the Tactics line to consider (Final Fantasy Tactics on PSone and Tactics Advance on GBA) and a handful of tenuously connected games like Kingdom Hearts and Ehrgeiz. Being a Final Fantasy fan has never been cheap, and it never will be – break open that college fund because learnin' is for suckers, but FF is forever.**

BACK IN THE DAY

Since arcades had some of the best games around, and we have seen many of those great titles come to life on our home consoles, wouldn't it be nice to finally get a collection of the missing arcade rarities?

Some arcade games like The Simpsons, X-Men, Dungeons and Dragons, and Aliens vs. Predator have never had a console conversion. I would love to sit down and play some of these classic arcade games in the comfort of my own home. Companies such as Namco and Atari have already come out with classics on one disc, but they should consider other arcade greats.

I have searched online for hours (I know it's wrong, but I'm a desperate man) looking for these classics as ROMs on the Super Nintendo emulator, since their graphics are about equal. I found none, and I searched all the biggest sites. I have thought about trying through an arcade emulator, but I have dial-up and it would take me years to download the file.

You all know "people," so maybe they would listen to you and not some ranting, raving, whining guy wanting good old classics in his home. I am sure there are many others who want to see this happen as well. Please, help gamers that don't want to stand upright for the hours it

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

TERMINATOR® 3
THE REDEMPTION

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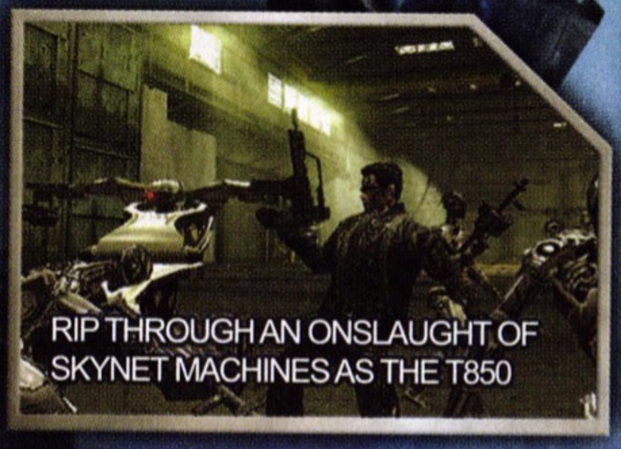
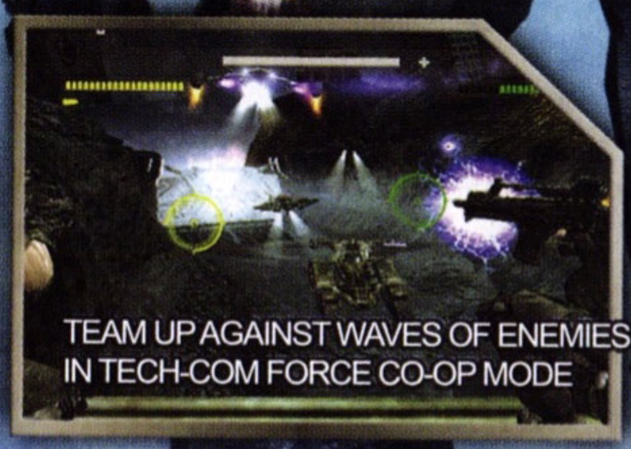
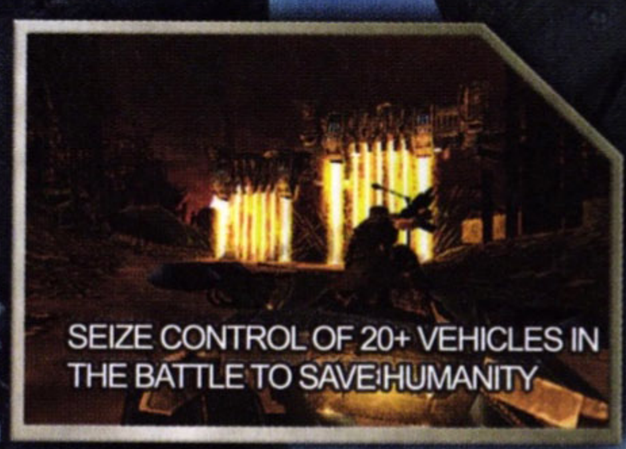
TO KILL ONE YOU MUST BECOME ONE



RIP THROUGH AN ONSLAUGHT OF SKYNET MACHINES AS THE T850



TEAM UP AGAINST WAVES OF ENEMIES IN TECH-COM FORCE CO-OP MODE



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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Language
Partial Nudity
Violence

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ATARI

takes to beat the game! Try to get these on home consoles so everyone can have some fun.

Chris Owens and
Phillip Fannin
Via email

■ **Dudes, gaming used to involve sacrifice and fortitude, now it's all people that want to sit on their couches and lounge in the comfort of their own media nooks. Well, back in the old days, we had to stand up to play games! And, we had to go somewhere else to enjoy them – away from our pets, our phones, our personally stocked refrigerators featuring favorite munchies (mmm…red velvet cake)! We even had to deal with people that we didn't like; honestly, we don't like most people, but still… Wait! Actually, this "playing at home on our own terms with the comfort of a seat" thing doesn't sound so bad. Chris and Philip, we salute you for a good idea well stated.**

IT HURTS INSIDE

Normally I would protest about games you guys have either underrated or overrated. However, based on the loony e-mails you guys get, I decided to try to fit in with everyone else, so here goes my impression of a video game extremist who is completely horrified of the rating you gave Mario Party 5.

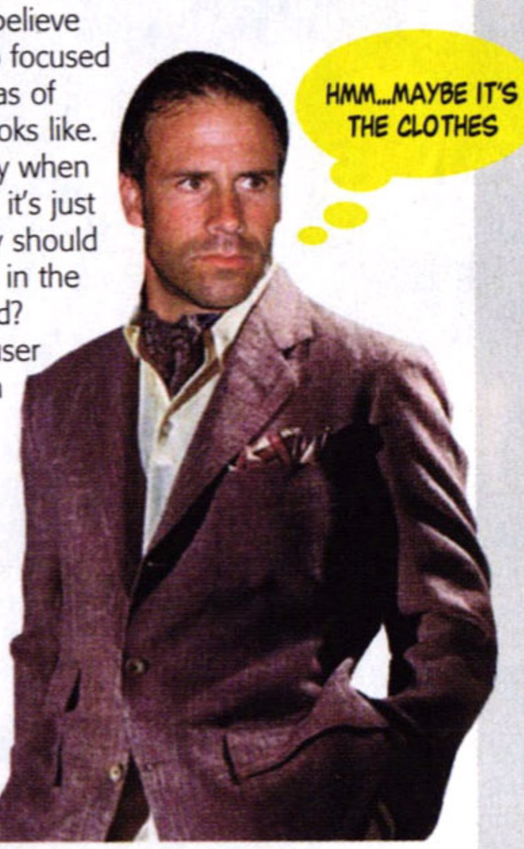
WHY DID YOU GIVE A CHILD'S GAME SUCH A CRAZY LOW RATING? I MEAN I HAVE A CHILD! AND NOW HE'S NOT [expletive deleted] PLAYING HIS [expletive deleted] GAME! I [expletive deleted] PAYED FOR THAT PIECE OF [expletive deleted]!

Andrew Doe
Via gmail.com

■ **You are painfully correct. Seriously, it hurt a little when we read your letter, although that could have been the Taco Pocket we ate an hour earlier. Sometimes it's hard to tell with these things.**

WEEPING FOR THE PRETTY ONES

I'll be the first to say that I don't think I am the most handsome person on the planet, but I am a decent looking guy. But whenever I tell someone how obsessed I am with video games, they never believe me. I think people are too focused on their preconceived ideas of what a hardcore gamer looks like. No one takes me seriously when it comes to gaming – and it's just because of my looks. Why should I have to school everyone in the room before I am believed?



Luke Avichouser
Via hotmail.com

■ **Wow Luke, it's really sad that you've been exposed to such derogatory and unsavory conduct because of the way you appear. We get a lot of email from hot people just struggling to be taken seriously as gamers – something that current society doesn't readily accept. There's a long road ahead of you; but keep fighting the good fight for yourself, and more importantly, for the next generation who will follow in your footsteps. Charge on, brave attractive one, and godspeed.**

ENVELOPE ART

KATIE HOLTKAMP
Once Pikachu went from Pokéballs to Goofballs, things went downhill

Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn envelope art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address on the back of the envelope. 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.

Send to:
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Envelope Art Contest
724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
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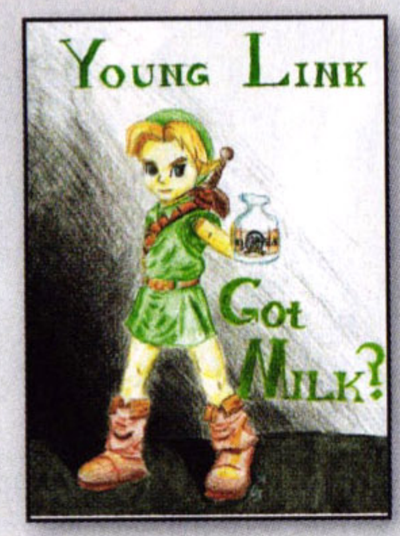
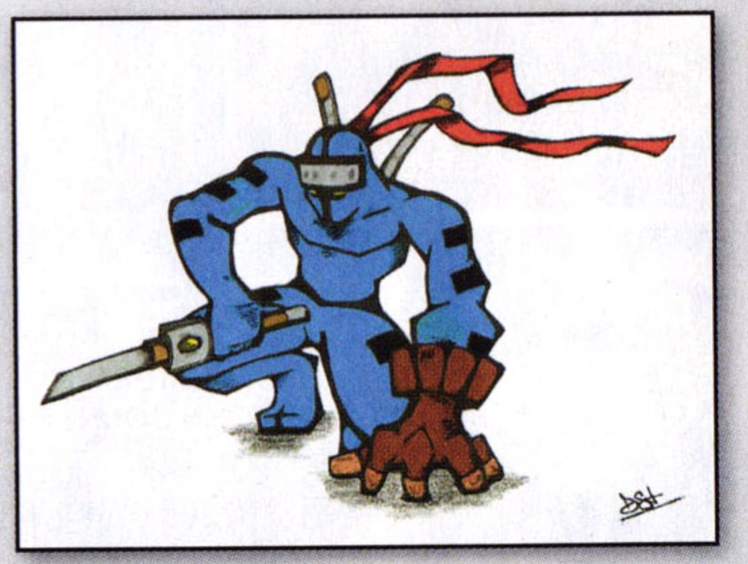
OCTOBER WINNER!
CIMINO
Warning: Prolonged exposure to Master Chief may cause Majesty poisoning.

ALEXANDER JORGE
"Seriously, feel this! I am so buff!"



CASEY ROBINSON
Sure do! Got pants?

VIRI BALDERAS
Who's out? Angelina Jolie.
Who's in? Rosanne Barr



DIDIER SAINT LOUIS
Smurf-cenaries: Blue assassins-for-hire

CORRECTIONS
In last month's issue, Gran Turismo 4 was mistakenly listed as a PS2, Xbox, and GC release. This title is exclusive to PS2. Conversely, Kirby and the Amazing Mirror is not a PS2 game. It's only available for GBA.

"We have SOLID proof of their weapons of mass destruction."

-October 16, 1962

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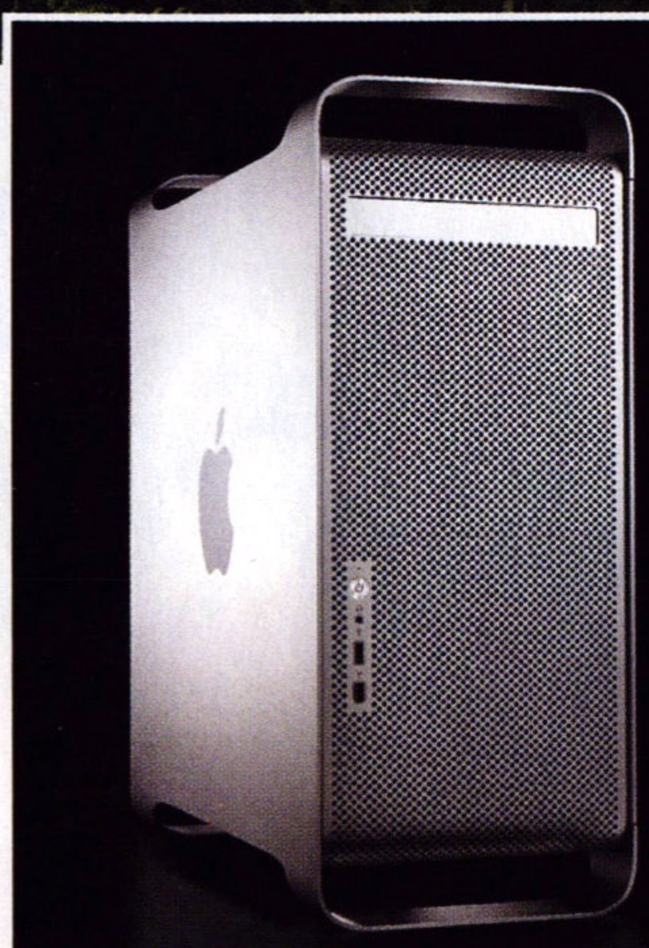
news

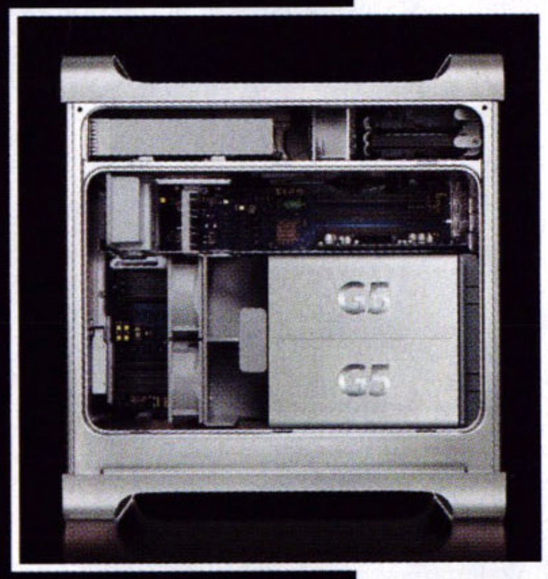
XBOX 2 LAUNCH TITLES UNCOVERED?

GUESS WHAT'S POWERING THE GAMES

■ Bethesda's The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion will appear on Xbox 2. For more, turn to page 50



■ Xbox 2 developers have dev kits in hand, which are modified versions of the Apple G5



Following our rundown of what the next generation of home consoles may look like (see issue #136, page 18), including leaked tech specs for the Xbox 2, Game Informer has learned more about the technology that is behind Microsoft's next system, codenamed Xenon. Dev kits are now in the hands of several studios, and we can confirm that the current Xenon dev unit is ironically a modified version of Apple's G5.

Despite the leaked specs of the system, and our knowledge of the technology behind its games, Game Informer has heard that Microsoft won't focus on the Xbox 2's technical prowess when talking about the console, unlike the marketing for the first Xbox. Instead, the company wants gamers to become excited about the games themselves. Our sources have revealed to us the titles you can expect to see at launch: Perfect Dark Zero, a new Project Gotham Racing title, and a new game from Epic (published by Microsoft) that is based on the Unreal 3 engine. In an interview with Game Informer Online, Cliff Bleszinski stated that this title won't be a first-person shooter, and would stress co-op play. The Xbox 2 is fully expected to appear before the end of 2005, and be out several months (if not years) ahead of the release of Sony's PlayStation 3.

Rumors are also flying about a couple other high profile games: Half-Life 2 is likely to be among the first releases, and the big M has hinted that a little game called Halo 3 may release the same day that the PlayStation 3 launches. Sources tell us that Microsoft wants to keep rolling out a steady stream of quality titles right up until the launch of the rival platform.

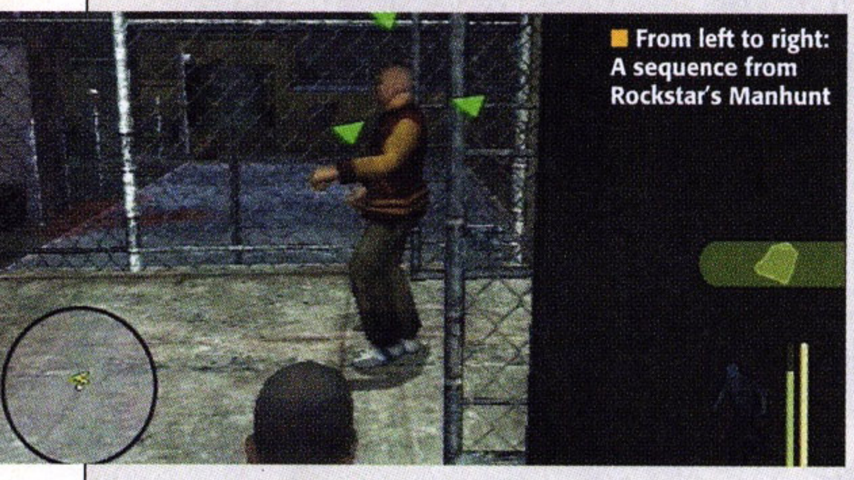
The battle for next-generation dominance will certainly be much different than the current state of video games, and many predict a much closer battle between Microsoft and Sony. "Microsoft is the best 'version two' company in the world," says Bethesda executive producer Todd Howard, meaning that the company excels in upgrading its products to crush their competition. While most people in the industry aren't predicting a clear victor, most agree that the next round of the console wars will probably be the tightest ever.

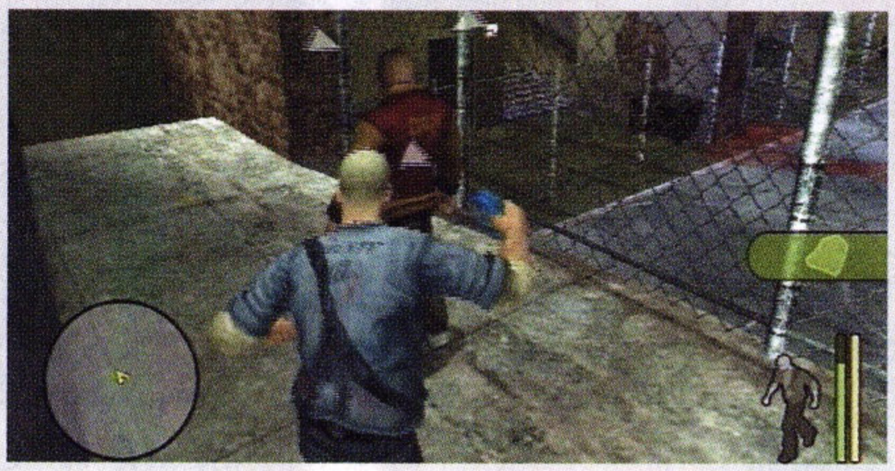
"MURDER BY PLAYSTATION"?

MANHUNT GETS CAUGHT UP IN THE DEBATE ON VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE

On Wednesday, February 25 of this year, police in the U.K. found the body of 14-year-old Stefan Pakeerah dead in a park. The subsequent investigation has thrown Rockstar's Manhunt into the spotlight. However, some parties wanting to villainize video games have found that it's not as easy as that. But don't be fooled, there are still dangers for the industry and the games you play yet ahead.

The Pakeerah murder case took a sensational turn when the parents of the victim blamed Manhunt, calling for a ban of the game. Stefan's father, Patrick Pakeerah, recalled how Stefan and his 17-year-old friend Warren LeBlanc – who pleaded guilty to beating Stefan with a claw hammer and stabbing him with a knife – used to play the game together. Patrick Pakeerah feels the murder mimicked the title. U.K. tabloid *The Daily Mail* ran the sensational headline "Murder by PlayStation" and called for a ban on violent games. Some retailers in the U.K. even pulled the title from their shelves.





From left to right: A sequence from Rockstar's Manhunt

The ensuing witch-hunt for Manhunt, however, isn't supported by hard facts. The police said Manhunt is not responsible, and reprimanded papers like *The Daily Mail* for ignoring this fact. LeBlanc says that he only wanted to rob Pakeerah for money to pay back drug debts to another party.

If you think that an unfortunate incident in the U.K. cannot have any bearing on American gamers, then think again. At least, that's what Florida lawyer Jack Thompson says. In an interview with Game Informer, Thompson declared that he wants to "destroy" both Rockstar and Sony, and characterizes Doug Lowenstein – the president of video game industry political advocacy group The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) – as worse than Saddam Hussein. Will Thompson's views shape the future of the video game industry?

Thompson thrives on controversy. He's shadowed the industry on events such as Columbine and the Beltway Sniper (Lee Malvo used Halo to practice his skills). Now he is assisting Pakeerah's parents, and believes that the ESRB ratings system and retail compliance of it is flawed. In turn, he wants to punish the ESA, Rockstar, and Sony for what he perceives as their complicity. Rockstar issued a statement that read: "We would like to extend our sympathies to the Pakeerah family. We reject any suggestion or association between the tragic events and the sale of Manhunt. There is a clear certification structure in place, and Manhunt should not be in the possession of a juvenile."

Thompson says video game companies are deceitful in how they market titles for adults to children – an issue the Federal Trade Commision has cleared the industry of. "They can lie all they want about who's playing the games and who's buying them. The fact is, a huge amount of money is being made by the industry on mature-rated games that are being sold to and/or played by children, period."

It's regarding this point where Thompson told us that ESA president Lowenstein was worse than Saddam Hussein by claiming he allows companies to market inappropriate games towards children. When we asked Thompson if that was going too far, not flinching in the face of hyperbole he said, "No, not far enough, actually. He's better educated than Saddam Hussein, so he knows better."

Game Informer asked Lowenstein for a response to this outrageous claim, but he simply told us in a statement, "We believe that name-calling is counterproductive."

Apart from his audacious comparisons of Lowenstein and his promises to go after Rockstar and Sony, Thompson's use of Manhunt is opportunistic scapegoating and skirts the basic question of responsibility. Studies widely vary as to how much parents are involved in the purchase of games by their kids. In the Pakeerah case, it was revealed that a copy of Manhunt was found in the home of the victim, not the perpetrator, which asks: If Pakeerah's mother thinks Rockstar is responsible, is she responsible for allowing her underage son to play the game in her house?

The role of parents and stores highlights the imbalance in people like Thompson and their actions. He would like to use the courts and the law to enforce the issue, but it's already being addressed on its most important levels – at the stores and in the home. And although Thompson states that movie theaters do a better job than video game retailers in barring underage kids from restricted material, he ignores the fact that video games already rely on exactly the same methods that movie theaters do.

For his part, Thompson suggests legal solutions to ensure enforcement. "Maybe there has to be some liability that's spelled out for parents who let their kids play the game after getting it for them." He even believes federal and local governments may have to get involved. State bills restricting the sale of video games to minors have already failed in Washington and California, and the ban of violent video games that Thompson warns about are bogey man claims.

"Any adult who would spend an entire day playing Grand Theft Auto is daft."

In the meantime, things should stay where they are: concentrating on retail enforcement of age restrictions and continuing to raise parental awareness. If you disagree with Rockstar, capitalism is the bottom line. Consumers can change what kind of content publishers and developer offer the public better than the courts or government. Betraying the fact that he is out of touch, Thompson eventually exposed his own thoughts on video games. "Any adult who would spend an entire day playing Grand Theft Auto is daft."

The overall issue, apart from responsibility, is the effect games have on kids. Thompson absurdly claims that the ESA buys off scientists to support its claim that there is no direct link that video games cause violence, citing studies at Harvard and elsewhere. However, we doubt that the U.S. Surgeon General, Washington State Department of Health, and the government of Australia (who back the ESA's non-causal belief) are on the ESA's payroll.

Many gamers have questioned whether Manhunt should even let players commit such heinous acts. However, it has correctly preached its message to many gamers simply by making them sick to their stomach. The lesson is that violence is not a casual act, but an abnormal one that players will flinch at performing. If gamers liked GTA because of its casual attitude towards violence, then Manhunt was Rockstar's way of turning the tables on the public. Do you have the stomach to strangle a flailing man with a bag over his head? Is that funny? If anything, Rockstar's lesson is just a little too clever and subtle for our society. Of course, Rockstar makes money on both sides of the question.

It's not dangerous to imply that there's a relationship between video games and behavior. Despite what critics of video games would have you believe, a link between what you play and how you act is not a silver bullet that convincingly confirms that games breed violence. Human beings have higher thought processes, and when the vast majority of us understand the difference between right and wrong, it is going to take much more than a game to make us step over such a line into murder.

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AND YOUR FOOT DOWN.

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When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

UGLY

After taking this year off for its team sports games like NFL Fever, Microsoft has now dumped its traditional sports lineup for the forseeable future, laying off 76 people and closing its sports studio. Titles like Amped, Top Spin, and Links will remain. Game Informer has heard a rumor that Microsoft sports titles could be back for Xbox 2, but who is going to miss NFL Fever?

GOOD

Nintendo knows you've been lathered up about Metroid Prime 2: Echoes ever since our cover story in issue #135, and it is giving gamers their first taste of the title in the Metroid Prime Bonus Bundle. For $99, you can get a GameCube, Metroid Prime, and a bonus disc containing a demo of Echoes. Also included is Metroid Chronicles (an interactive history of the franchise), two Echoes trailers, and a Metroid Prime art gallery.

GOOD

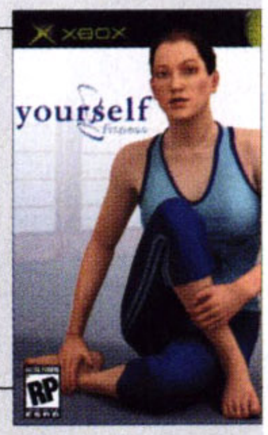
The revolution is being televised. Sony has started to put PS2 chips into its flat panel TVs in Japan. The TVs won't enable gameplay, but will offer new functions and are a step towards using PS3's Cell chip in future consumer products.

UGLY

There were reports of mass suicide out of the Nintendo fanatics camp upon hearing "news" out of Europe that Bill Gates wanted to buy Nintendo. Gates' comments were purely delivered as an off-the-cuff joke, so everyone can resume their normal breathing.

ODD

Game Informer Online's Billy Berghammer switches his Halo 2 pre-order to the game he's really looking for: Yourself! Fitness. Touting itself as the first "fitness gaming experience," the October title offers over 400 exercises which can be customized for your routine, a meal planner, and Maya – the Yourself personal trainer. Of course, we won't be laughing after we need to slim down 20 pounds this holiday season.



GOOD

Obsidian has announced Neverwinter Nights 2 for release in 2006. Meanwhile, BioWare has trademarked a new engine, called Eclipse, but it is not known for which current or future titles it is being used in. Atari and BioWare are releasing the Neverwinter Nights Platinum Edition in October, containing the Shadows of Undrentide and Hordes of the Underdark expansion packs, as well as the Aurora Toolset, for only $39.95.

games

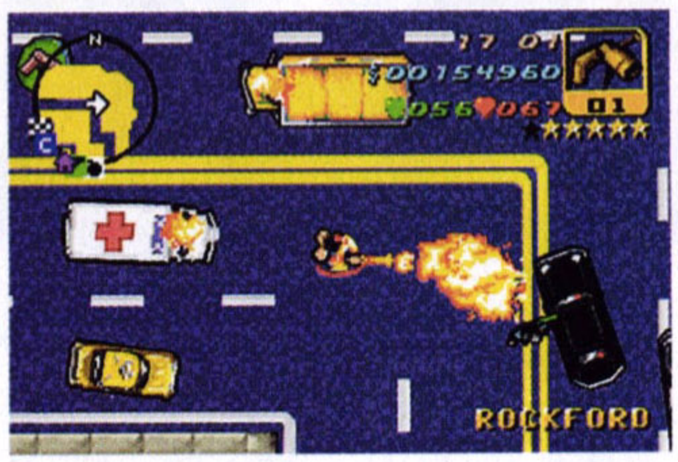
GBA GOES TO LIBERTY CITY

SERIES RETURNS TO ITS ROOTS

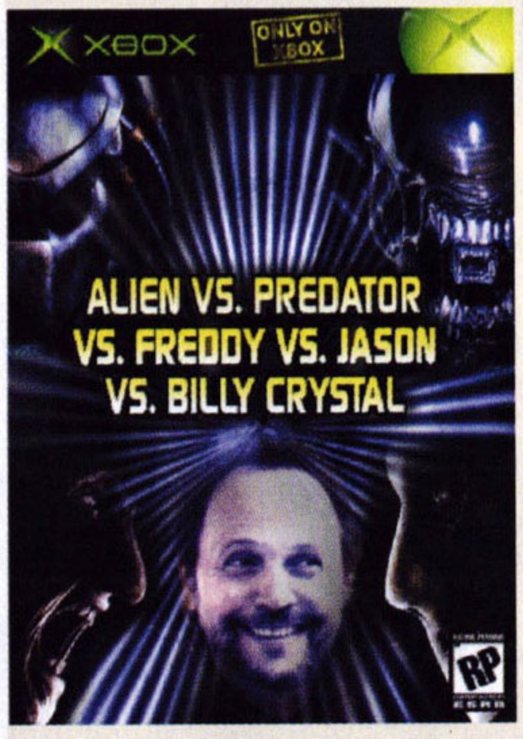
Rockstar is returning to its top-down beginnings on October 19 with the release of Grand Theft Auto for Game Boy Advance. Taking place approximately one year before your exploits in Liberty City in Grand Theft Auto III, this GBA title shares more than just a timeline with its blockbuster cousin.

Simply put, this game is like shrinking GTA III into a GBA-friendly size – except that Rockstar is saying this title has twice the surface area of GTA III. All the great features of the hit console game are here: Liberty City's different islands and neighborhoods (each with their own distinct look and feel), dozens of different vehicles to commandeer (including SWAT vans and tanks), over 300 side missions (such as rampages, street racing, and taxi pickups), and the series' trademark open-ended gameplay.

Grand Theft Auto for the GBA introduces two new characters to the GTA universe. You play as Mike, a guy trying to raise enough cash to blow town and quit the lifestyle. Unfortunately, on your last job, your mentor Vinny gets gunned down in a doublecross. Your future on hold, you vow to go after Vinny's killers. Who knows? You might even bump into some old friends in the process.



R & D Game Informer brings the world's worst game ideas to life



Alien vs. Predator vs. Freddy vs. Jason vs. Billy Crystal

Crossover movies are all the rage these days, and we noticed that two of the most recent crossovers didn't spawn video game adaptations. The films *Alien vs. Predator* and *Freddy vs. Jason* both lacked the obligatory game release, so we figured they should be combined into the same title. But we felt that simply wasn't enough concentrated evil, so we've added a fifth combatant: the prince of darkness himself, Billy Crystal. Don't believe he's evil? Try watching *America's Sweethearts*, *Analyze That*, or *My Giant*. We dare you. In this all-out slugfest, the five titans of terror duke it out with one another to prove who really is the most evil creature of them all. Players can choose from any of the five playable characters and work their evil way through the others in this action title. Will you choose the stealth of the Alien, the weaponry of the Predator, the treachery of Freddy, the brute strength of Jason, or the nausea-inducing humor of Mr. Saturday Night? The five nightmarish creatures have their own unique endings, demonstrating how they would subjugate the human race under their evil thumbs. Billy's ending involves an Oscar night ceremony that never ends…ever! Whoever wins, we lose, indeed.

JUST LOOK AROUND, MAN.

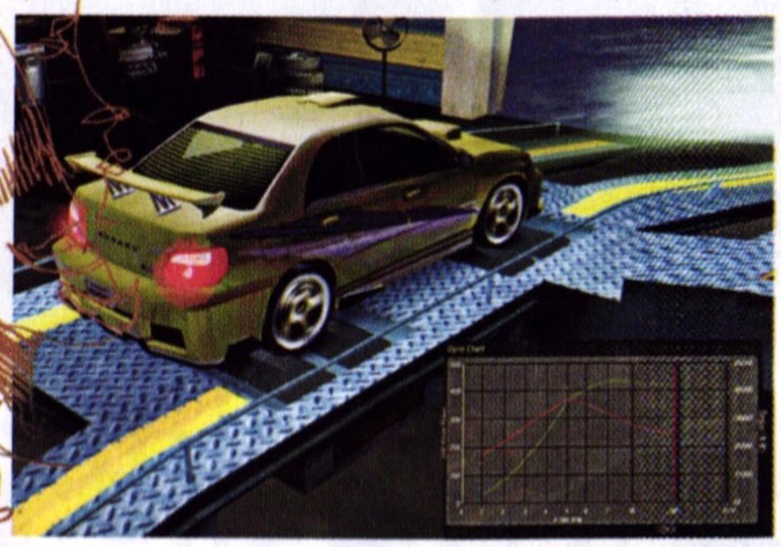
Roam and **race on** more than 125 miles of open road.

Encounter underground races, secret **specialty shops** and unexpected **challengers.**

Customize your ride inside and out– **spinners,** scissor doors, audio upgrades and detailed **performance tuning.**

Choose from hundreds of authentic **aftermarket** parts for endless expressions of **style.**

Compete in eight exciting game **modes, including** all-new Outrun, Downhill Drift, **Street-X** and Showcase.



PRODUCTS RANGE FROM RATING PENDING TO EVERYONE
RP-E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PLAYABLE

XBOX

XBOX LIVE

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PlayStation.2

ONLINE
BROADBAND AND DIAL-UP

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

Da-Luck HKS GReddy sparco

INTERNET CONNECTION REQUIRED for online play. PlayStation 2 online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). The Online icon is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. See product pack for details. Not all features available on all platforms.

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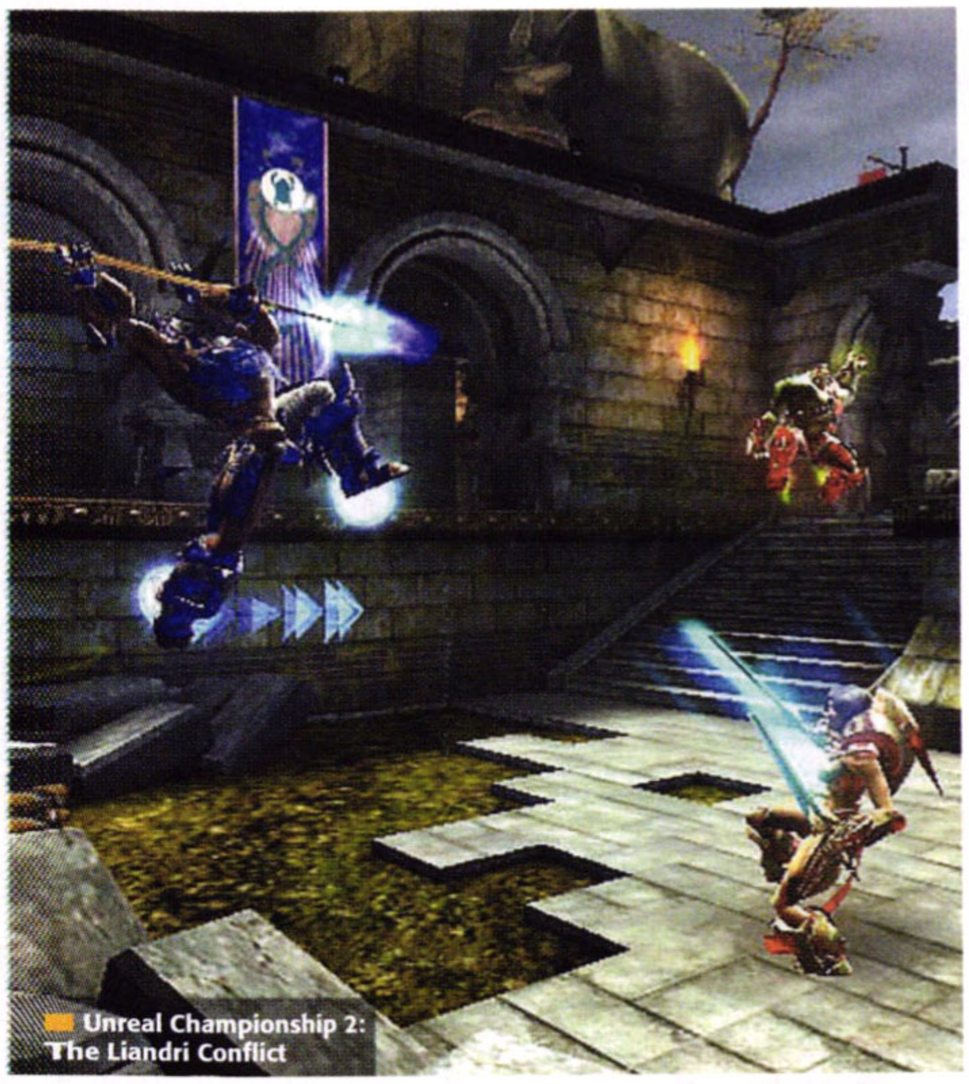


Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

news

THE UNREAL DEAL

MIDWAY GETS EPIC'S UNREAL GAMES

In an aggressive move, publisher/developer Midway has signed a multi-year agreement with Epic Games to publish three titles based on the Unreal franchise: Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict and two future installments of Unreal Tournament on PC and upcoming next generation consoles.

Some important factors of the deal are worth pointing out. Epic retains the rights to its all-important engine licensing program (for more on the upcoming Unreal engine, check out issue #135, page 18), although Midway can use Unreal technology throughout its own games. Also, non-Unreal titles remain with Epic. For example, Cliff Bleszinkski's new non-Unreal, non-FPS game (see page 18) will not be published by Midway.

Midway's snatching up of these Unreal titles appears to be due to Atari's inability to agree to terms with Epic Games. Atari CEO Bruno Bonnell cryptically explained, "I wish Midway the best of luck, but it was not, from our point of view, acceptable to sign a deal of this structure."

news

"THE GORIEST GAME EVER MADE"

GEORGE ROMERO AND AMERICAN MCGEE TEAM UP

Film legend and *Dawn of the Dead* creator George Romero is teaming up with gaming luminary American McGee for City of the Dead, which McGee claims will be "The goriest game ever made." The title, developed by Asylum Entertainment, will naturally have an aggressive survival horror aspect guided with input from the man who put zombies on the map in the first place – Romero (who is currently planning two new zombie flicks: *The Night of the Living Dead* sequel *Land of the Dead*, and the undead rock 'n roll musical, *Diamond Dead*). As the pair are currently shopping the title around to publishers, there are no known gameplay details or a release date.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

NO NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

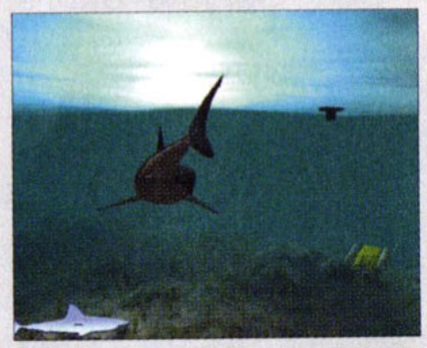
The adventures of Jack Skellington will have to wait until 2005, missing this Christmas. Capcom has delayed the release of the title until sometime next year.

EA REINFORCES PACIFIC ASSAULT

It's another delay for Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault (now expected this November), but EA says that it is tweaking the title and adding a new feature called Combat Squad Control, which gives players more control over AI teammates.

NOT SAFE TO GO IN THE WATER

Appaloosa, the developer behind Dreamcast's cult curiosity Ecco the Dolphin, is teaming with Majesco to bring you a Jaws video game next summer. Best of all – you get to play as the great white shark! Our enthusiasm to gobble up bikini-wearing swimmers is only dampened by the fact that the game will feature puzzle solving.



PSI-OSCAR?

From the people who have yet to bring you the *Spy Hunter* film, comes…Psi-Ops. Adrian Askarieh and Chuck Gordon, producers of the upcoming *Spy Hunter* film starring The Rock (see issue #125), have picked up the rights to the psychic powers title. Can you read our minds to see how well we think this'll fare?

STORMFRONT: FULL STEAM AHEAD

Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone developer Stormfront Studios is stuffing its face with work. Not only is it hiring for a PSP title, but also an action/adventure game based on a "major new Hollywood film" and next-gen projects.

STORMFRONT STUDIOS

WARIO RETURNS

Those craving the craziness of WarioWare will be excited by Nintendo's announcement of a new GBA title named Mawaru Made in Wario in Japan. The game debuts over there this October with over 300 minigames, but a U.S. date is unknown. The title will make use of a built-in tilt sensor instead of the d-pad for movement.

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THE ULTIMATE ELECTRONIC GAME OF TAG™

Your HUD provides audio and visual feedback to signal who's GETTING TAGGED and who's DOING THE TAGGING.

HUD™ UNIT (Heads Up Display)

2 TAGGER & HUD UNITS
with the Team Comm Headset!

VISUAL CONFIRMATION SYMBOLS

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Someone's got you in their sights. You know because you see it in your Heads Up Display. You hear the tagger audio warning you. This is Lazer Tag – the best game of Lazer Tag ever. Features like wireless data transfer to synchronize the game clock and score tracking make Lazer Tag Team OPS the superior Lazer Tag system! Whether you're customizing your game, or playing the classic game of tag, Lazer Tag puts you in the game like no console can.

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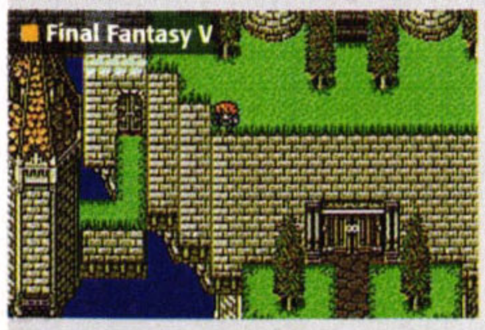
LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

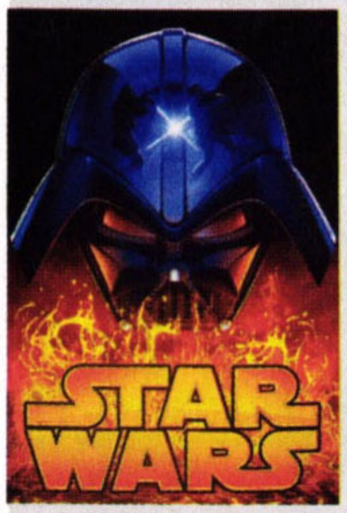
FINAL FANTASY ON THE DS?

Japanese gamers who bought Final Fantasy I & II for the GBA were given a choice. In an inserted questionnaire, Square Enix asked which game they would most like to see on Nintendo's dual-screen device. Final Fantasy III, FF IV, FF V, FF VI, Chrono Trigger, Secret of Mana, Front Mission, the Saga series, and others were listed as options. In other Square Enix news, the company has trademarked "Dawn of Souls" and "Dirge of Cerberus" with the U.S. patent office.



MASTER OF MAGIC 2?

Galactic Civilizations' developer Stardock is seriously contemplating making a sequel to Microprose's fantasy strategy PC title Master of Magic. Stardock is looking for around 5,000 people to pre-order the title to gauge whether it would be worth spending the money to acquire the rights from Microprose. Go to www.galciv.com for more.



REVENGE OF THE SITH AND BEYOND

Last month we told you about the upcoming Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith video game tie-in (being done by The Collective), but there's more. Several non-movie titles are also being planned by LucasArts, and rumor has it that these will be based instead on the Star Wars live action and animated shows. Also, as George Lucas plans his fourth Indiana Jones film, a corresponding game is also being sketched out. It is unknown if these titles will be affected by the recent layoffs at LucasArts – which included the dismissal of the team that had started early work on Knights of the Old Republic 3.

ANOTHER PRICE DROP?

Some in the industry are calling for and predicting another round of price drops for the consoles this holiday season. However, it seems unlikely that Nintendo would budge from its already criminally low price of $99 for the GameCube. Likewise, Microsoft probably doesn't want to lose more money per unit on the $149 Xbox. Does this mean Sony could undercut the Xbox in price?

N-GAGE MK. 3?

Nokia has had a hard time in getting gamers to bite on its N-Gage handheld, but it hasn't been for a lack of trying. The Finnish mobile phone company is going to take a third stab at it with the release of an all-new N-Gage. That's right, unlike the N-Gage QD, this isn't going to merely be a repackaging of the original unit, but an evolution for the system. We don't know what features this upcoming handheld will contain, but hopefully it'll be another step towards a more gamer-friendly experience.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Many will remember this game for the lengthy sessions it spawned with friends, but the series never survived after hitting the Dreamcast. Capcom brought this brawler over from the Japanese arcade, and the game pulled the developer's traditional 2D-fighting into full 3D. The point of the game was to simply beat up everyone else onscreen with objects in the environment and to collect (and prevent others from getting) the special stones littered on the board which would give you super moves.

(Answer on page 28)

news

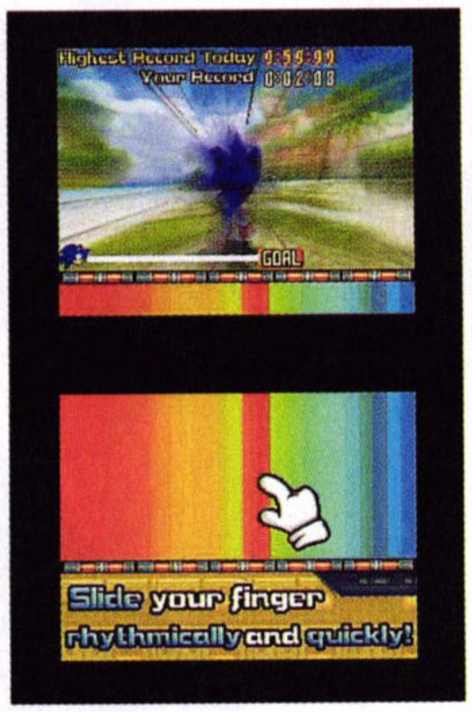
THIRD-PARTIES SUPPORT DS

BUT REGGIE AXES "CONTEMPORARY" WIRELESS HEAD-TO-HEAD

Nintendo officially unveiled a list of more than 45 games that will be available for the Nintendo DS dual-screen handheld – including 22 additional titles that are in development. This list contains three more games than were revealed for the Japanese version of the handheld.

Although some of these titles were mentioned at E3, such as contributions from EA, Sega, and Capcom, specific games such as Konami's Castlevania, Square Enix's Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles, and EA's GoldenEye are welcome additions for Nintendo's new platform. The DS will release before the end of the year, and some rumors say that it will even appear before Thanksgiving. It is not know which of these titles will appear at the DS' launch.

Despite this good news, however, famed Nintendo executive vice president of sales and marketing, Reggie Fils-Aime, doused water on the notion that the Nintendo DS would allow for wireless online play across any significant distance. "The DS will also be equipped to allow long distance connections via wireless internet browser…but as we know, we're still some time away from actually having wireless head-to-head play in any contemporary game sense."



Sonic DS

Egg Monster Heroes

Bomberman

Mobile Suit Gundam Seed

Atari
- Atari Classics

Atlus USA
- Caduceus
- Snowboard Kids DS

Bandai
- Meteos
- Mobile Suit Gundam Seed

Capcom
- Mega Man Battle Network
- Viewtiful Joe

Electronic Arts
- GoldenEye
- Madden NFL
- Need For Speed Underground
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf
- The URBZ: Sims in the City

Hudson Soft
- Bomberman

Koei
- Dynasty Warriors (working title)

Konami
- Boktai (working title)
- Castlevania (working title)
- Dragon Booster (working title)
- Frogger 2005 (working title)
- Survival Kids (working title)
- Vandal Hearts (working titles)
- WINX (working title)
- World Soccer Winning Eleven series (working title)
- Yu-Gi-Oh! Nightmare Troubadour

Majesco
- Moonlight Fables
- Nanostray

Namco
- New Mr. Driller (working title)
- Pac 'n Roll (working title)
- Pac-Pix (working title)

Sega of America
- Project Rub (working title)
- Sonic DS (working title)

Square Enix
- A new story of Secret of Mana
- A new story of Slime Morimori Dragon Quest
- Dragon Quest Monsters series
- Egg Monster Heroes
- Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles series

Summitsoft
- Air Assault 2
- Organizer Plus

Tecmo
- Monster Rancher

Telegames
- Ultimate Brain Games
- Ultimate Card Games
- Ultimate Pocket Games

THQ
- SpongeBob SquarePants

Ubisoft
- Asphalt GT
- Rayman

Vivendi Universal Games
- Robots

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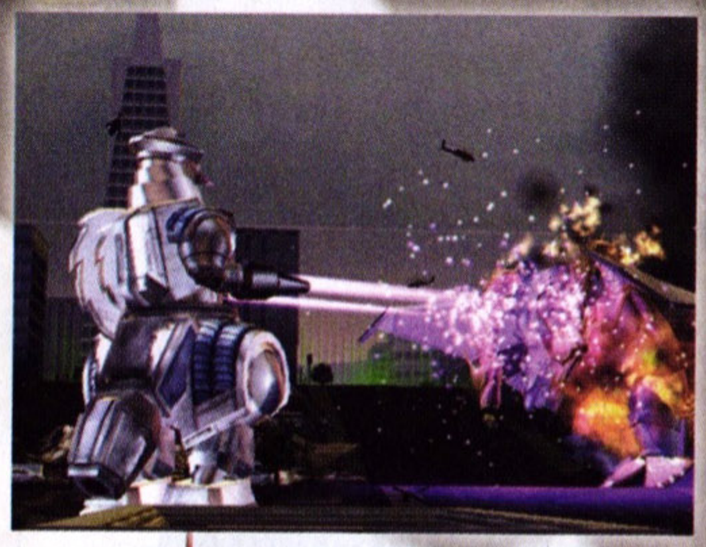

Online showdowns for 2-4 players

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

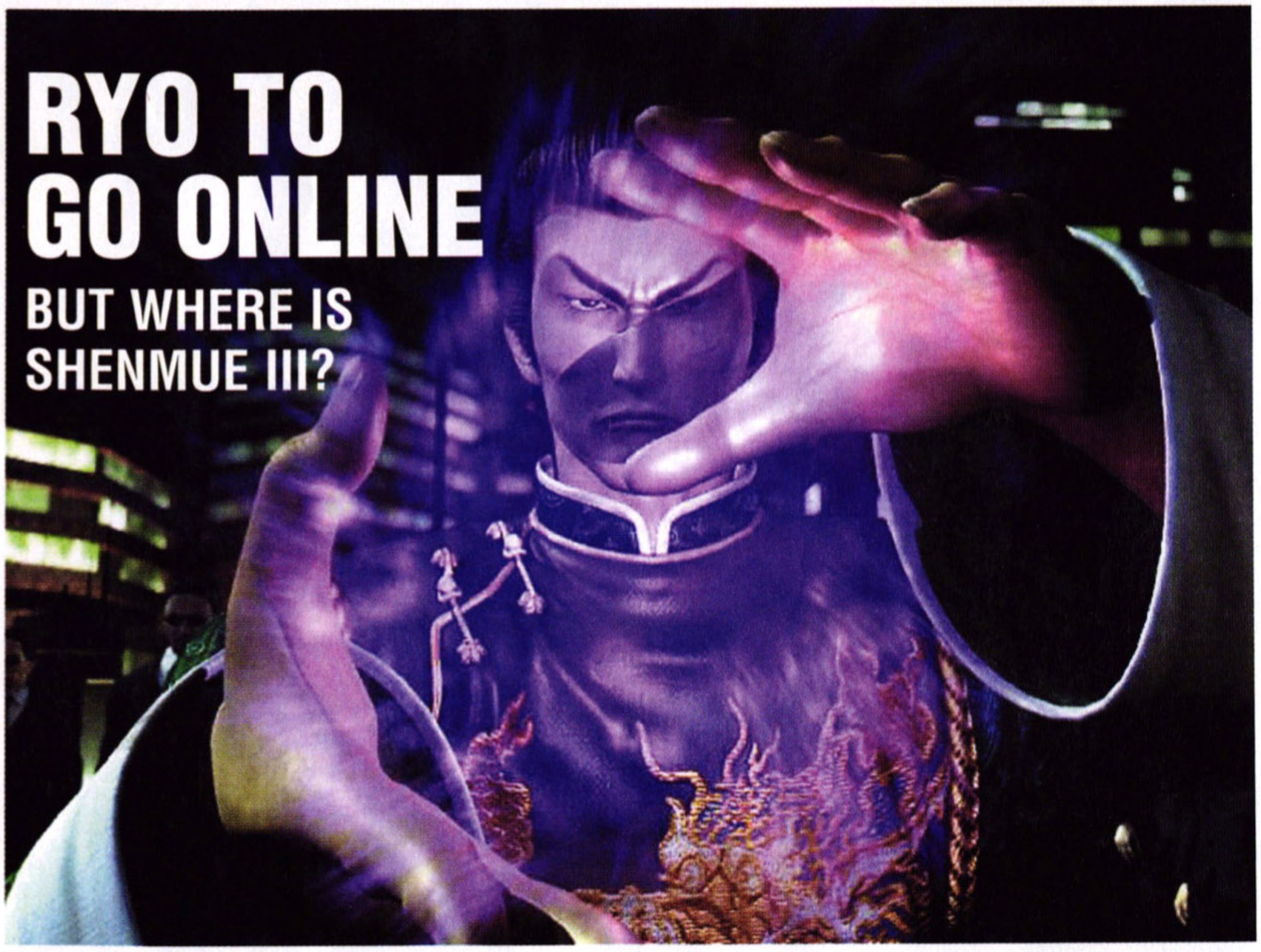
Violence

XBOX XBOX LIVE PlayStation.2 ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY POWERED BY gamespy PIPEWORKS

ATARI

RYO TO GO ONLINE

BUT WHERE IS SHENMUE III?



It's almost a monthly ritual here at Game Informer: Fans writing in wanting to know when Shenume III will finally appear. While we have no concrete answers to this oft-asked question, Sega is taking the series in a new direction – Shenmue Online for PC. Interestingly, with as many stateside fans as the series has, the title is actually aimed at the Asian market, including China. Shenmue Online is being overseen by franchise father Yu Suzuki and his Digital Rex studio. The game is expected to ship in Asia next year, but as of now, Sega is not planning a U.S. release.

Shenmue Online will be a massively multiplayer title, but it is unknown if it will close out the story of the first two games or instead be a stand-alone experience. Little is known about the focus of the title, but Sega promises that it will contain familiar elements, such as villain Lan Di (above) and the game's real-time martial arts system. Apart from being a free-for-all brawler, it will be interesting to see if the title integrates any sort of storyline, and if other Shenmue staples like Quick Time Events, an internal game clock, or arcade cabinets like Hang On are included.

news

WELCOME TO AMERICA

VU INTRODUCES SCARFACE'S TONY MONTANA

Who wants to live the American dream? You know, get rich dealing drugs, shoot up rival lords, and avoid the DEA. Maybe you could die in your very own swimming pool! Vivendi Universal Games is entering into the world of Tony Montana in a Scarface title set for next fall. Developer Radical Games (best known for The Hulk and The Simpsons: Road Rage) is recreating the eighties Miami that is the backdrop of Tony's rise and fall.

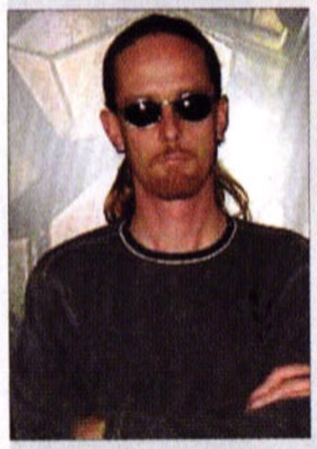
Actually, whether Tony meets his cocaine-filled end bobbing dead in his pool is up to you. The game occurs after the film, and pretends that Tony didn't die, but rather went to track down rival Alejandro Sosa. VU Games says that Scarface will take you to other locations such as the Florida Keys, the Bahamas, and more. Of course, dealing drugs, lots of cussing, trouble with the law, and violence will follow you every step of the way. The story is being penned by screenwriter David McKenna, and the game will be filled with everything from eighties music to references to the politics and news events of the period.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

TJ WAGNER
Producer,
Day One Studios



1 Defender – Arcade
2 CounterStrike – PC
3 Red Planet – VWE's Virtual Reality POD
4 Bushido Blade – PSone
5 Quake – PC

READER

RICE AKERS IV
Callaway, Va

1 The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past – SNES
2 Super Mario 64 – N64
3 Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 – PS2
4 Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 – PSone
5 Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX – PSone

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists…Everybody Loves Lists…

Top 10 Halloween Costume Ideas

10 Carth Onasi: Just dress like a wanker
9 Tidus: Sew together any mismatched combination of old soccer uniforms and wading pants
8 Drake of the 99 Dragons: Do anything and everything to suck harder than anyone else in existence
7 Sam Fisher: Ding-dong-ditch every house, hiding in the bushes to observe the hilarity
6 Jean Reno: No costume required (only works if you are actually Jean Reno)
5 Astro Boy: Strip down to your skivvies and you're set!
4 Carl Johnson: Candy is for chumps. Joyride all night, G!
3 Mario: Get chubby, wear a moustache, and dribble pasta down your pants. Also doubles as a Ron Jeremy costume
2 Tarutaru Black Mage: Make yourself an exact replica of the level 20 Mage's Tunic…and never take it off
1 Reggie Fils-Aime: Put on a suit and sit motionless on porches, waiting to terrify approaching small children

Name That Game Answer: Power Stone

MIDWAY

Wield the Power of the Judgment Ring to Fullfill Your Destiny

A fantastical world filled with ancient magic, mystical lore, unspeakable curses and a diabolical plot

Combine split second timing and skillful combat strategy to master the Judgment Ring's powerful and stackable attacks

Fight as a Harmonizer and transform into more than 20 astonishing creatures

SHADOW HEARTS® COVENANT

Amidst the chaos of World War I, Yuri and Karin embark on an epic journey testing their power and magic skills with the Judgment Ring to combat terrifying creatures and conquer the evil that Rasputin plans to unleash upon the world.

shadowheartscovenant.com

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Language
Partial Nudity
Suggestive Themes
Violence

Nautilus

ARUZE GROUP Global Entertainment

PlayStation 2

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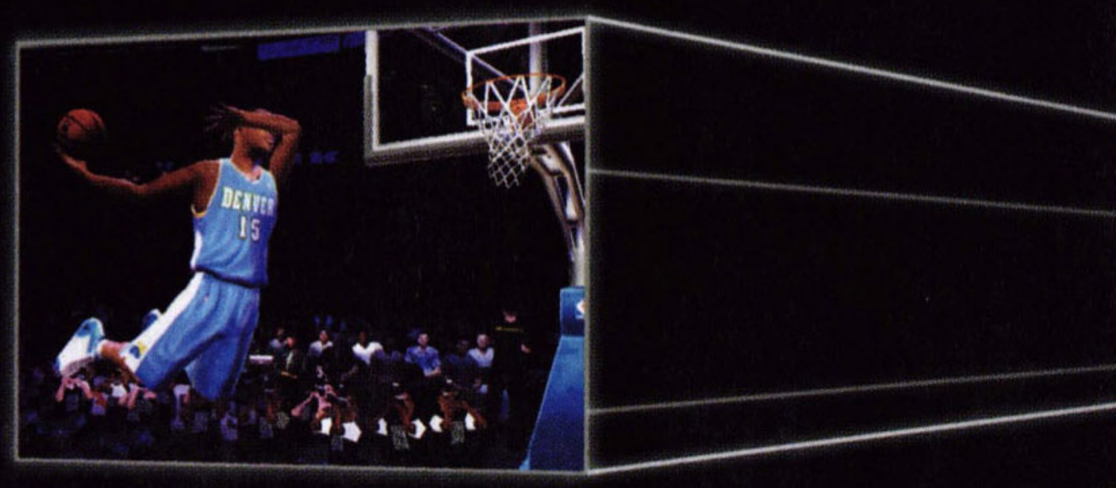
EA SPORTS

IT'S IN THE GAME.™



WINDMILL?

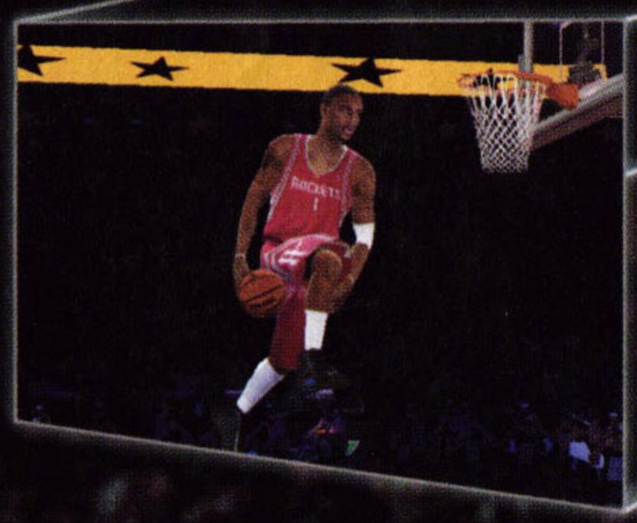
PUMP REVERSE?

DOUBLE CLUTCH?

360?

ALLEY OOP?

OFF THE GLASS?



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SWITCH HANDS?

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ROCK THE CRADLE?

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EA SPORTS NBA LIVE 2005

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NBALIVE05.COM

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THE DUKES OF THE DUNK

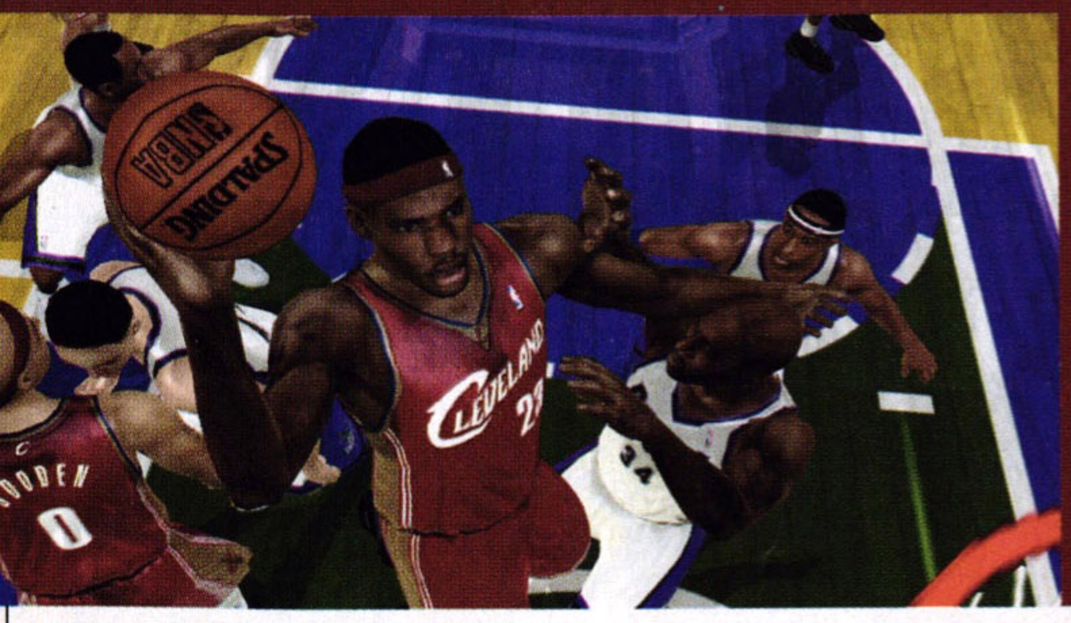
Last year's NBA season was dominated by 'Mello vs. King James – not to mention a Shaq vs. Kobe tiff that now has them living on opposite coasts. Likewise, the video game basketball scene is ruled by two superstars in ESPN and EA Sports (including, of course, the non-sim stylings of EA Big's slamming NBA Street franchise) that have elbowed out the mediocre likes of Microsoft and Sony. ESPN has been holding on to the crown, but EA Sports' NBA Live is charging hard to make up ground. We've gotten an early look at this year's hoops titles, and we're here to give you a little bit to chew on about each before the season starts.

ESPN NBA 2K5

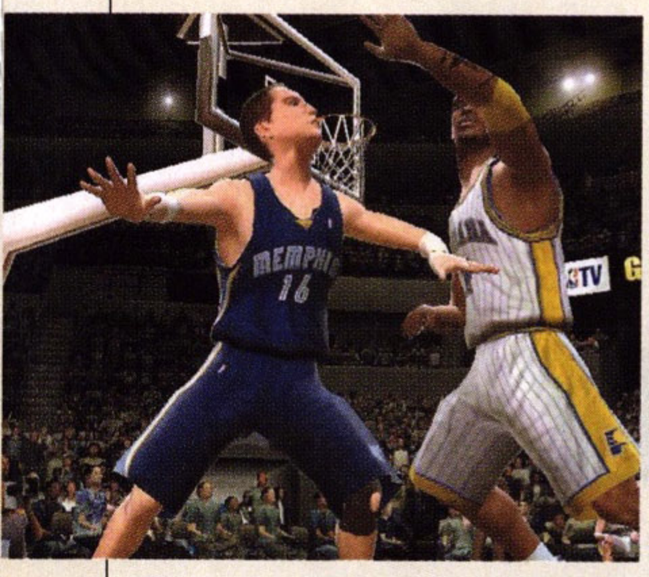
You wouldn't think that ESPN has much work to do on its already great b-ball title, but that's not how Visual Concepts sees it. All new AI has been implemented, making offenses more opportunistic, and the effectiveness of pump fakes in the 24/7 mode has been fixed (and that's not all that's in store). More strategic choices also govern the AI, with sliders letting you adjust your team's attitude. Turn up the Tempo and they'll go after rebounds more aggressively. Crank down the Pressure and your defense will be more conservative and preserve your lead. The movements of your team are more realistic as well, redefining IsoMotion with more momentum. For example, to curb being able to just turbo past a defender, players will have to plant their feet before driving the lane.

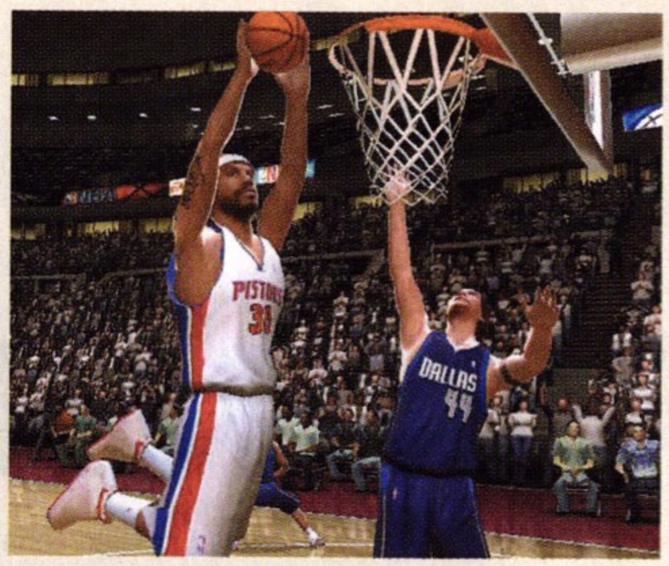
The game uses ESPN NFL's triple pass rendering for a high sheen, and players even sweat as the game rolls on! It is also sharing all the same great online features as the NFL game, which includes online seasons with living rosters which transfer injuries from week to week.

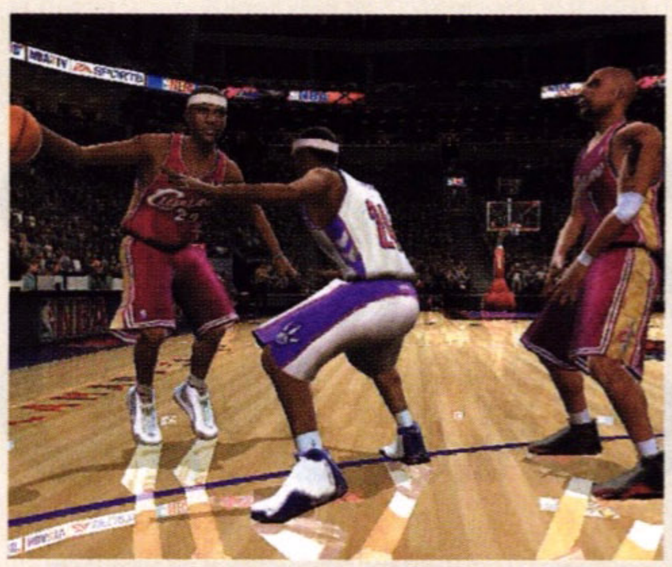
> **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX > **STYLE** 1 TO 10-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX), (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA/ GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE > **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 5



■ **ESPN brought in an NBA scout and took a close look at teams' playbooks to create AI that would run offenses more naturally. The results, (left and right) speak for themselves**





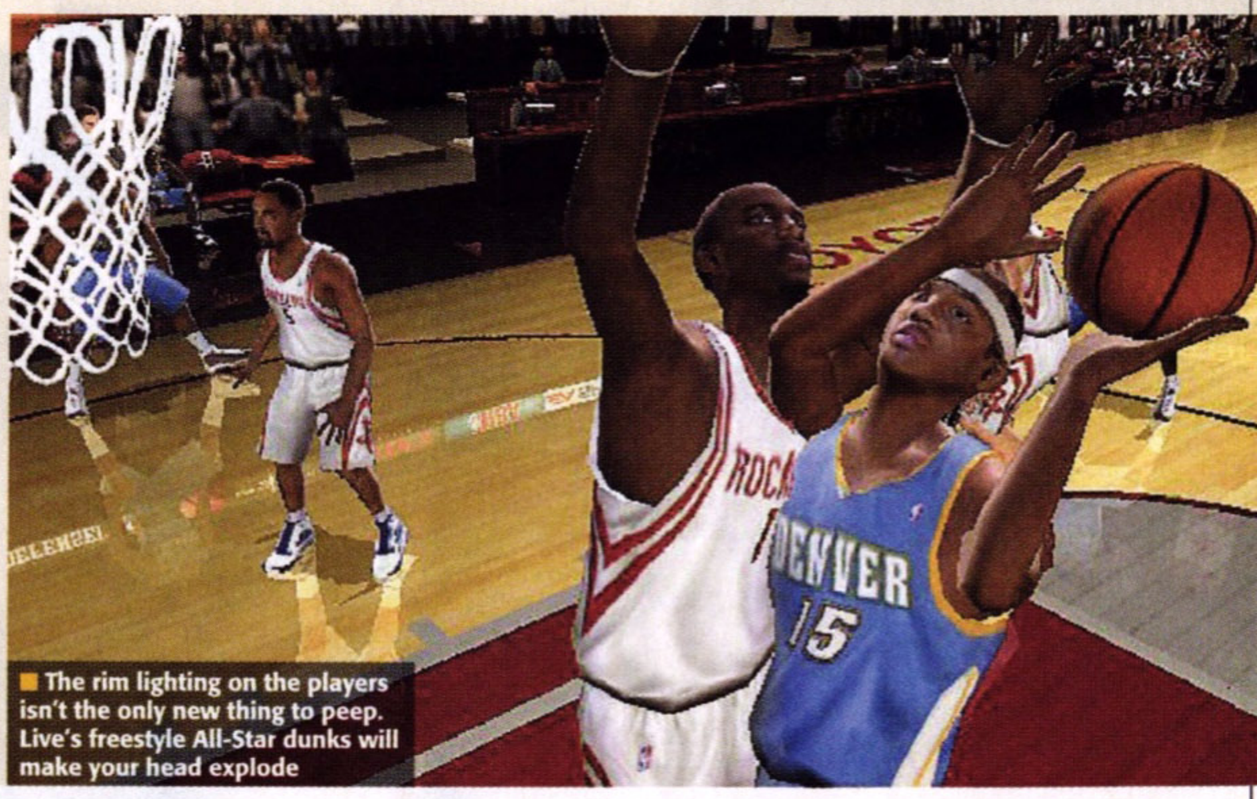


NBA LIVE 2004

Freestyle control is nothing new to NBA Live, but the control you get in the Slam Dunk Contest is unreal. Giving it a Tony Hawk-like feel, everything from your toss to your celebration is user controlled though button combos and the right analog. More user control also exists for offensive rebounds, where separate face buttons dictate whether you pull the ball down or go for a tip in or dunk, with varying chances of success.

Right away, gamers will also notice some new changes for this year's Live. Players are noticeably more detailed, and even feature rim lighting. On the court, EA Canada has toned down the effectiveness of the pro hop, forcing you to pass the ball in mid-jump to avoid the foul or loss of possession. EA won't talk about Live's franchise mode yet, but it promises its depth will be similar to Madden's. As the series continues to stiffen its defense, we eagerly await to see if it has enough offense in its other areas to take on ESPN.

> FORMAT PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PC **> STYLE** 1 TO 5-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 OR 2-PLAYER (XBOX), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (GC), (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS **> DEVELOPER** EA CANADA **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 5

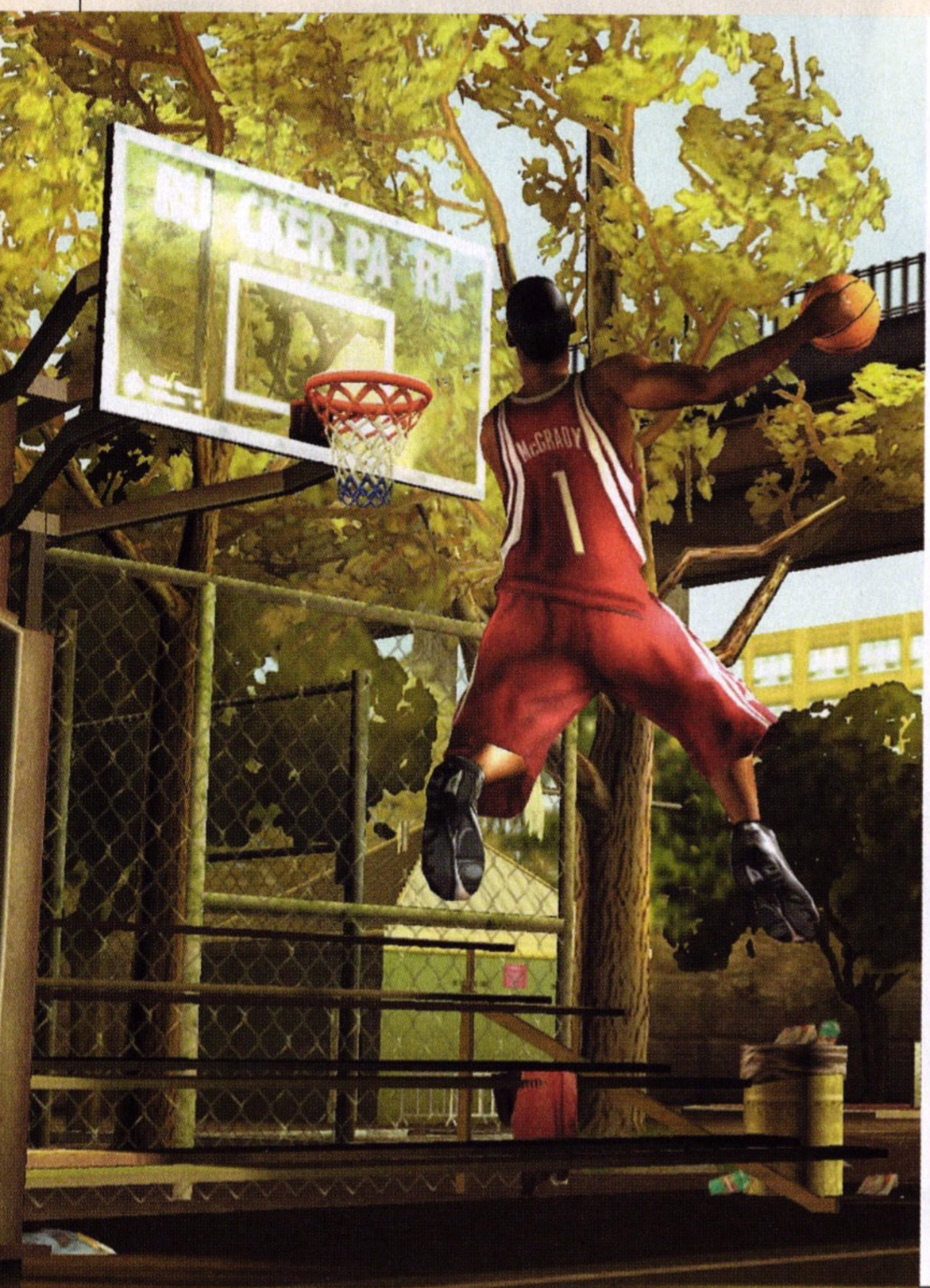


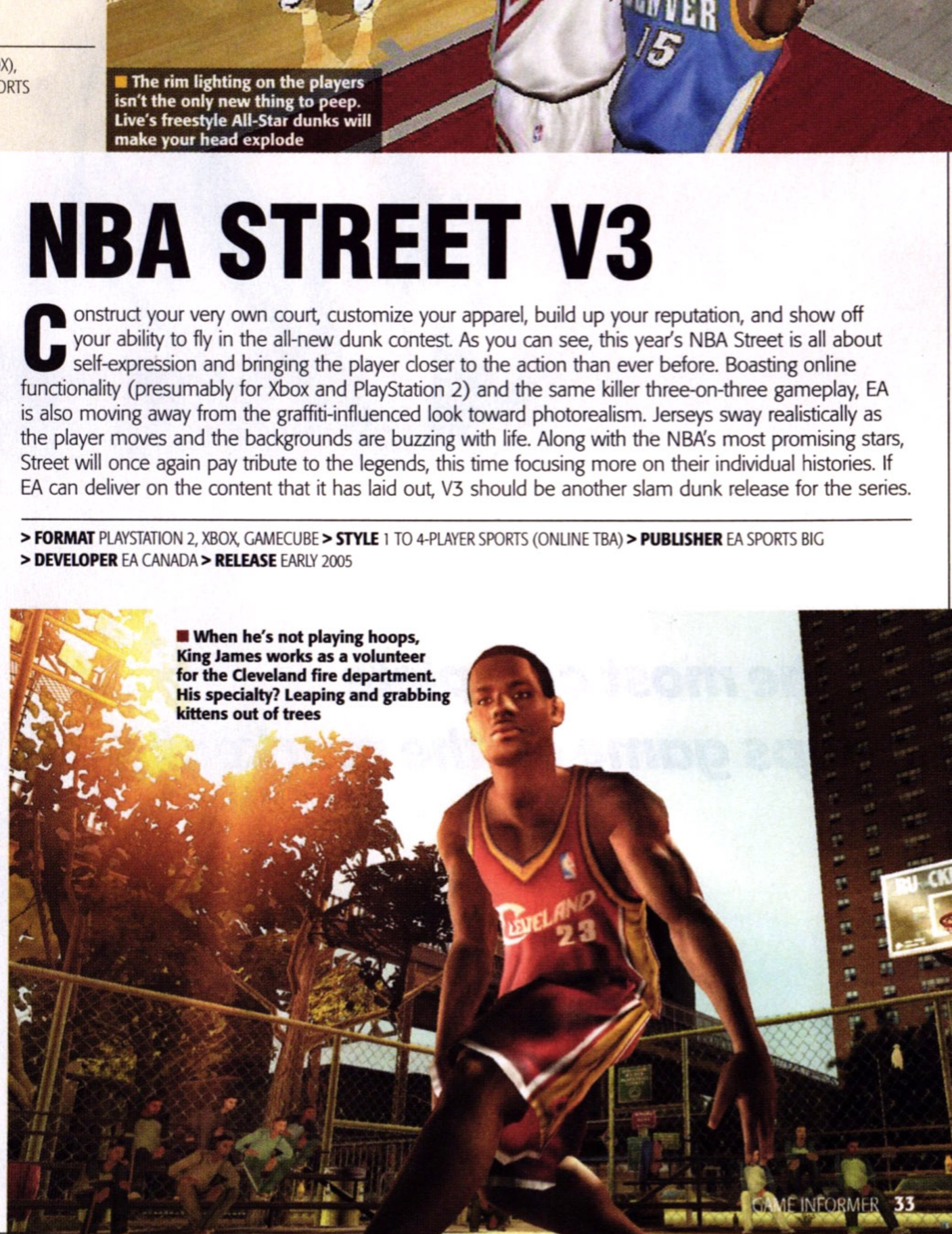
■ **The rim lighting on the players isn't the only new thing to peep. Live's freestyle All-Star dunks will make your head explode**

NBA STREET V3

Construct your very own court, customize your apparel, build up your reputation, and show off your ability to fly in the all-new dunk contest. As you can see, this year's NBA Street is all about self-expression and bringing the player closer to the action than ever before. Boasting online functionality (presumably for Xbox and PlayStation 2) and the same killer three-on-three gameplay, EA is also moving away from the graffiti-influenced look toward photorealism. Jerseys sway realistically as the player moves and the backgrounds are buzzing with life. Along with the NBA's most promising stars, Street will once again pay tribute to the legends, this time focusing more on their individual histories. If EA can deliver on the content that it has laid out, V3 should be another slam dunk release for the series.

> FORMAT PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE **> STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (ONLINE TBA) **> PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS BIG **> DEVELOPER** EA CANADA **> RELEASE** EARLY 2005





■ **When he's not playing hoops, King James works as a volunteer for the Cleveland fire department. His specialty? Leaping and grabbing kittens out of trees**

Join the Next Movement

All players are not created equal. Some big men look for the open 19-footer, others crash the boards like a wrecking ball with an afro. That's what Next Movement with IsoMotion² technology is all about. Every player performs with the same skills and style as he does in real life, which makes ESPN NBA 2K5 the most complete, most authentic NBA video game you can buy. Check out ESPN NBA 2K5... and let the Next Movement begin.

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XBOX

XBOX LIVE

SEGA

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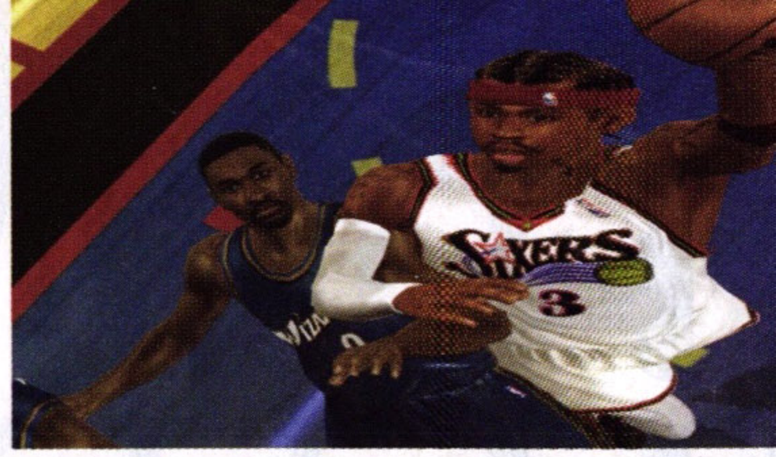

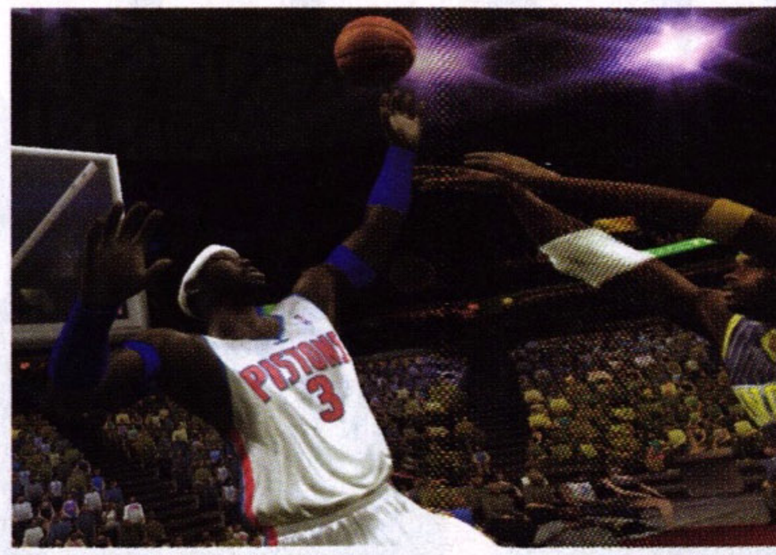

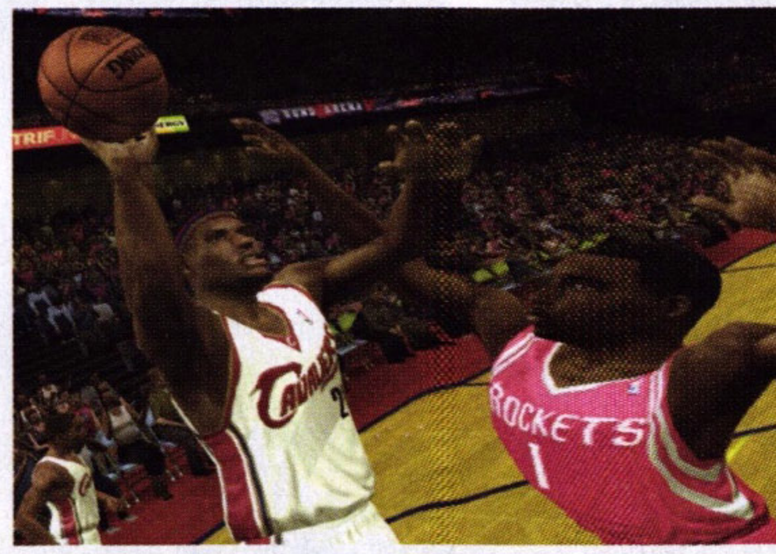

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ESPN NBA 2K5

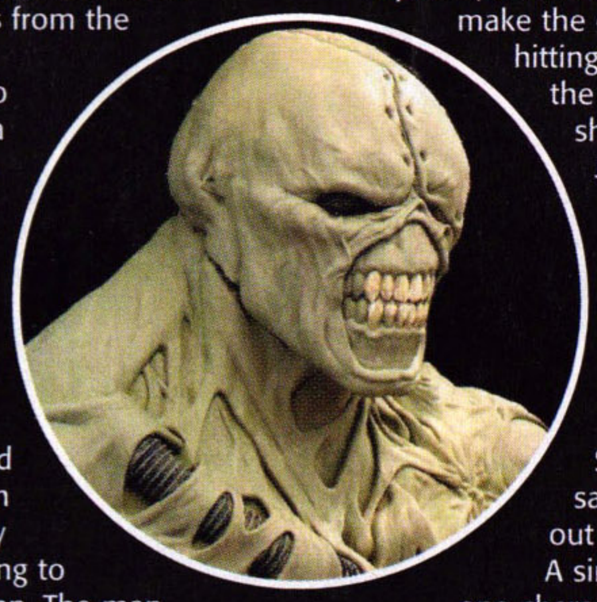
NBA.COM

CREATURE KEEPER

GI LOOKS AT THE CREATION OF NEMESIS FOR *RESIDENT EVIL: APOCALYPSE*

Nemesis as seen in the upcoming *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*...and really close to what he looks like in our worst nightmares

"They offered me the whole movie, they told me to bid on the whole job. I looked at it and thought that the zombies had been done, the dogs had been done, the licker had been done...but not Nemesis. I want to do just the Nemesis," says special-effects maestro Paul Jones, whose work includes the *Hellraiser* sequels, *FX: The Series*, *The Bride of Chucky*, and *Ginger Snaps*. He is the man responsible for bringing one of the most iconic villains in video games to the big screen. In *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*, Nemesis, in all of his hulking, snarling glory, trades blows with Milla Jovovich's Alice, who returns from the first movie.

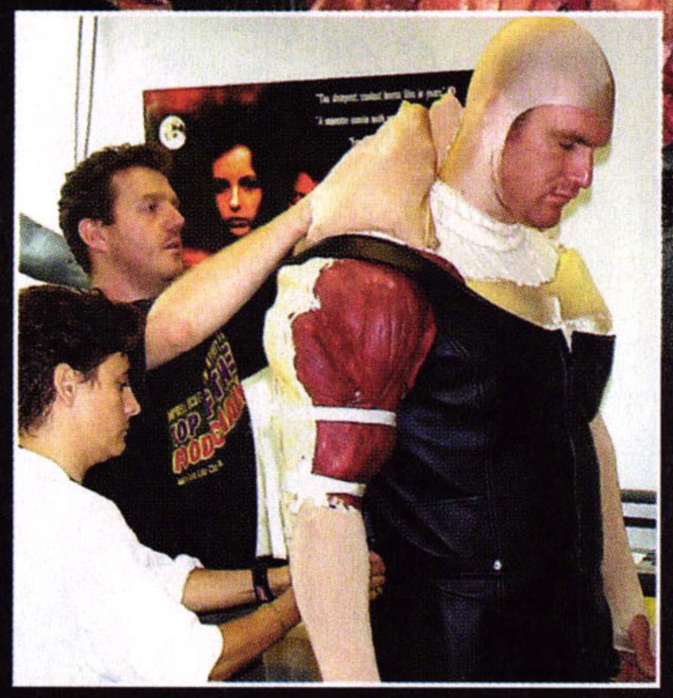


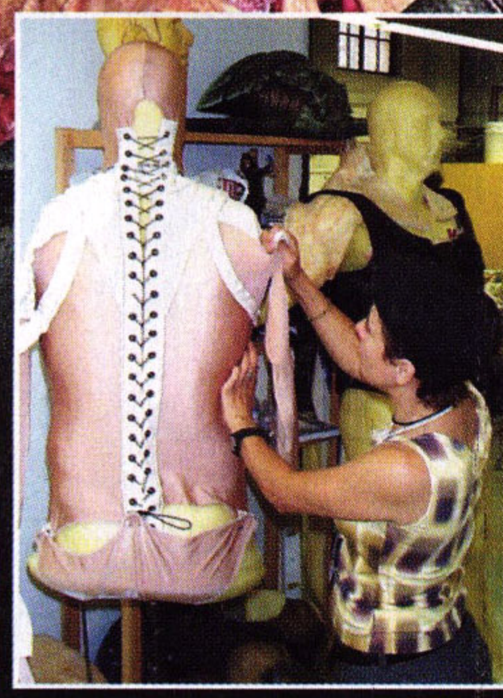
It should be no surprise to anyone that Nemesis plays a big part in *Apocalypse* – his appearance was foreshadowed at the end of 2002's franchise opener, and a tougher Alice needs someone to spar with. We were on set last October and got to see Nemesis' headpiece first-hand, and finally realized that someone who had been such a terror during so many hours of game time was going to be played by an actual human. The man who fills those shoes and fits into Jones' costume is Matthew Taylor. A giant block of a man at about 250 lbs. and well over six feet tall, the final costume gets him to just under seven feet, making him believably huge enough that the telescoping rocket launcher looks just right when perched on his shoulder.

Just as he had planned after reading the script, Jones was hired to work exclusively on the Nemesis costume. "Everyone is going to go to this movie expecting [specific things] of the Nemesis. All that they're going to get is a real, three-dimensional interpretation of the character." To start the process, Jones went to the concept art, screenshots, and even fan-produced paintings of the games and this character. As it turns out, the first sculpt that they did was a keeper – something that almost never happens when translating a character between mediums.

This approval started a 10-week break-neck construction process to build the seven leather outfits, three heads (one "hero" headpiece with animatronics and the others which were visually identical, but lacking machinery, for stunt work and distance shots), and three muscle suits. The big problems were twofold: Nemesis would need to move fast and do a lot of stunt-heavy action sequences, and the character would be filmed close-up on multiple occasions. A hybrid suit of silicone and rubber was designed along with a handful of black, buckled leather outfits to put on top.

Three machinists were brought in to make the leather costumes, and the end of filming saw every single one of them destroyed. One particularly abused outfit was strapped with 400 squibs (small charges used to make the effect of bullets hitting something) – at the end, it was totally shredded. After Jovovich asked in rehearsals if she could hit the costume, another copy of the suit was created entirely in rubber. Why? So that she could safely beat the crap out of it.



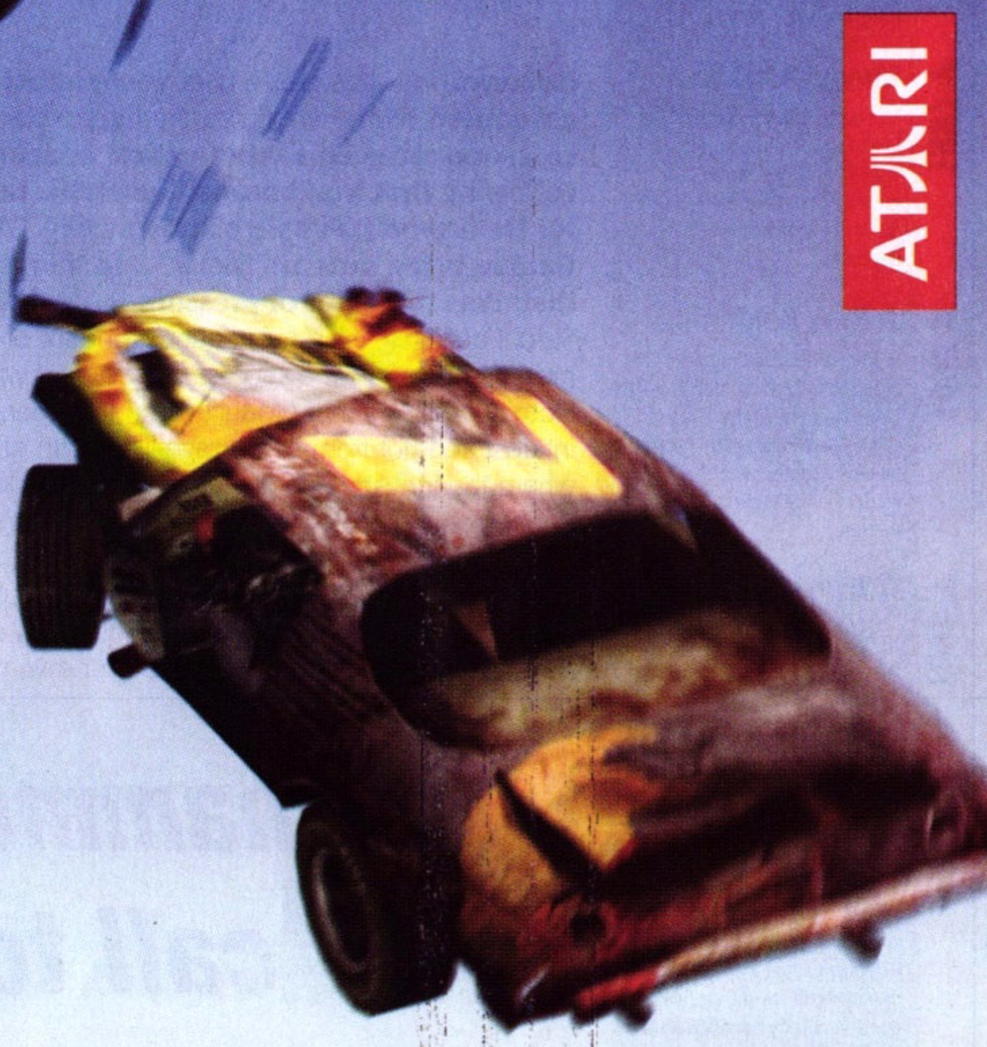


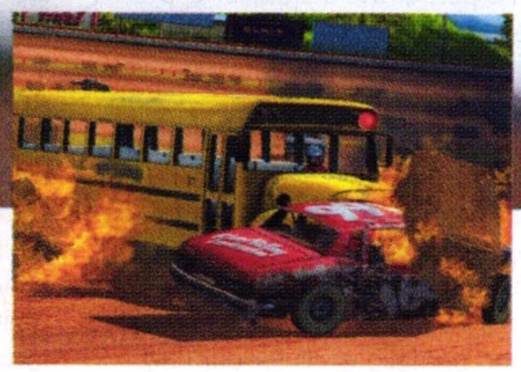
A single studio focusing on one character isn't necessarily a groundbreaking decision, but the result is immediately apparent – Nemesis looks badass in the flick. With critical video game fans on the hunt for anything out of place, it appears as though Paul Jones has pulled it off and made the Nemesis an actual lead character, life-like and intimidating as hell.

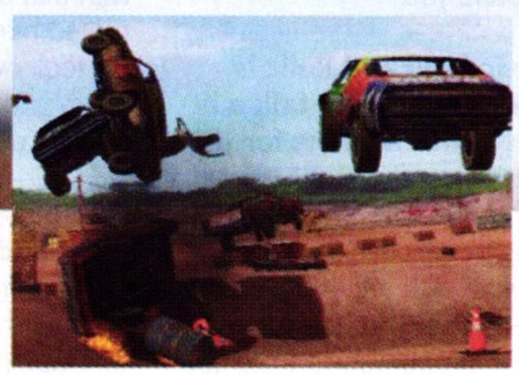
Paul Jones, shown below sculpting Nemesis' headpiece, opted to work exclusively on the iconic villian. The full costume, at right, weighs more than a small sofa and was totally destroyed by the end of filming

IN STORES SEPTEMBER

THE CARS ARE UGLY. THE RACES ARE UGLY. AND IF THERE WAS A GIRL WHO HANDED OUT TROPHIES, SHE'D BE UGLY TOO.







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ALEX GARDEN

CO-FOUNDER, RELIC ENTERTAINMENT/DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT, THQ

>> Although still young in comparison to many of his contemporaries, Relic Entertainment co-founder Alex Garden has already had a career that many would envy. Game Informer sat down with Garden to get his take on Relic's recent acquisition by THQ, and what the future holds for both companies. <<

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1989 ▶ Testing the Waters
Aspiring developer Garden meets future EA president of worldwide studios Don Mattrick, who then worked for Distinctive Software. Mattrick gives Garden his first big break in games, letting him work as a game tester for the summer at the tender age of 15.

1994 ▶ Programming For Success
Garden breaks out on his own, working for Radical Entertainment as a graphics programmer.

1997 ▶ Moving On Up
Not content to stay put for long, Garden moves up to a job at Electronic Arts, again as a graphics programmer, working on such franchises as Triple Play Baseball.

1997 ▶ A New Beginning
In May of 1997, along with Luke Molony, Garden co-founds Relic Entertainment. In the years to come, the development house would become one of the leaders in the real-time strategy market.

1999 ▶ A True Classic

Homeworld, the game that Relic was created to build, is finally released to the public. Its finely crafted formula of interstellar RTS play causes a huge sensation in the PC world, and the game is quickly heralded as a classic of the genre.

2003 ▶ An Interesting Detour

Seeking to bring RTS to the masses, Relic releases Impossible Creatures, a streamlined yet inventive strategy title that allowed players to combine different types of beasts in mad-scientist fashion.

2003 ▶ Coming Back Strong

Bringing back the franchise that put it on the map, Relic releases Homeworld 2, one of the year's most anticipated sequels.

2004 ▶ Merging For The Future
Relic, a long-standing independent development house, makes big waves in the industry by being acquired by THQ.

Homeworld – the game that you're most associated with – was a really huge success, and received a lot of critical acclaim. Following that, you became the public face for Homeworld. People started saying, "Alex Garden is the next Sid Meier" and things like that. Was that a lot of pressure to deal with?
Sure. I definitely felt a tremendous amount of pressure to repeat the success that we had with Homeworld. And that product came from personal interest and not from some sage-like vision of where the industry was going. So, I went back to my personal interest and built Impossible Creatures. And, the truth is, I don't think that was the right product at the right time. That was very difficult, but on the other hand, it taught me an incredibly valuable lesson. That is: "Don't believe your own press, remember your roots, and stay true to those no matter what happens around you."

The big news recently for you and Relic is being purchased by THQ. Could you talk a little bit about some of the motivations for the deal and why you felt it was the right move for Relic at this time?
When it came time for us to start thinking about our next big RTS, we worked with a group of consultants at Price-Waterhouse who helped us understand where each of the publishers were strategically. They identified THQ as a rising star. And so we went and looked at the portfolio of licensed products that THQ had available, and we saw that the Warhammer 40,000 license was really appealing to us. We felt like it would do a lot to bring depth and richness to the world that we were going to create. We started working on a deal around Warhammer, and it was actually, without sounding like too much of a lackey, the easiest deal we've ever done. We had so much success working with THQ that we decided to do our next [two] products with them. At that point, we started to think, "Well, we're doing so much work with this one company. Wouldn't it be great to remove all of the overhead associated with working on business development and focus all of that same effort on making our games even better?"

Was it hard emotionally to sell your "baby," the company that you helped build?
Well, a lot of people have asked me that question, but I can tell you this. Relic was started with a goal, and we stayed very focused on the goal of becoming the number one RTS company in the world on every platform. Partnering with THQ is a move that is definitely going to help us reach our goals faster. [So far], it's been such a positive experience that I really don't think that there's been any regret or emotional downside whatsoever.

Are you staying on at the Relic offices in Canada, or are you relocating to THQ's headquarters in California? What is your position going to be after the merger?
Relic is probably up around a little over 100 people now, and that studio has really grown creatively and professionally beyond anything I could have hoped for. Ron Morovek, who was our chief operating officer at Relic, has had a tremendous amount to do with that success. As part of the acquisition, I promoted him to the general manager of that studio. He took over my job. And THQ asked me to come down and work actually in the office as director of product development.

So, you're basically going to aid THQ in evaluating and picking titles to publish.
That's a pretty good summary. There are three areas of focus that I have right now. The first is working on helping shape the portfolio goals for our next generation handheld plan – with a special focus on Nintendo DS and Sony PSP. And the second is starting to think about what THQ's goals are going to be for the next generation of the consoles, for Xbox 2 and PS3. And third is that THQ has a deepening focus on the triple-A, high-end market. That's showing with some bets they're making in Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War and S.T.A.L.K.E.R.. But we remain focused on our core business, and that's the licensed stuff. We're growing our business and deepening our relationship with companies like Nickelodeon and Pixar. We're really starting to double-down on that space and increase the quality of the work that we're doing. A big part of the focus that I have right now is evaluating those licenses and helping match them to the right developers.

What are your plans in terms of supporting the PSP and the Nintendo DS?
THQ has a clear reputation as being the number one third party publisher of products for handheld systems, and that is something in which we plan to continue. I can tell you that some of the stuff we have planned for the DS and the PSP is going to be pretty revolutionary.

What excites you about those systems and their capabilities?
I think that you have to look at the platforms separately, because they really talk to different demographics and different markets. With the DS, I think that having the touch screen is going to bring a tremendous amount of control that wasn't possible before to that console. With the PSP, you know, it's just a very, very powerful piece of hardware. I've had a chance to finally take a look at it now and it has an incredibly robust feature set. Something that's exciting about both the DS and the PSP is their Wi-Fi connectivity. It's just great to see that we're going to be able to play together on those platforms now.

Are people going to really take advantage of the dual- and touch-screen features of the DS, and do enough developers have good ideas about how to use the DS to its full capabilities?
Well, when they put Neil Armstrong on the moon, they started off by sending a small satellite into orbit first. I mean, everybody has to take small steps towards the eventual goal. I think that expecting people to turn their full creative genius on like a tap sometimes is unrealistic. The goal I think now is to provide consumers with an experience which is demonstrably more fun than they could have had on a single screen system, one that didn't have the touch screen interface. Once we learn more about the DS and start to understand what it's really capable of with that interface, I think you're going to see a lot of creativity flourish as a result of that.

What else can we expect from Relic?
We're making much bigger bets, and we're investing more in the character and the quality and the depth of our products than we've ever invested in the past. [We're] competing at a level that I think people would be surprised by. Know that Warhammer's going to be a big wake-up call to a lot of our competitors. But what we're doing next is a significant leap forward in what's been seen in the RTS space. And people are going to be very surprised by it.

> ***"Warhammer's going to be a big wake-up call to a lot of our competitors."***

HOMEWORLD CREATOR SUITS UP FOR THQ

■ Relic founder Alex Garden is now helping THQ plot the course of its next-gen games publishing

Photo: Ed Carreón

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DOLBY PRO LOGIC II

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SQUARE ENIX MOBILE
WWW.SQEXM.COM

Home Theater

KENWOOD HTB-S715DV

Manufacturer: Kenwood
Website: www.kenwoodusa.com
List Price: $1,000

Home theater in a box systems, like most technology bundled together for the sake of the masses, gets a bum rap sometimes. Usually it's because sub-par components are grouped together or the system won't allow for upgrades later in the product's lifecycle. So, how does a home theater bundle "designed for gamers" play out in real life? We got our hands on a Kenwood HTB-S715DV (not the catchiest name, is it?) and set the sucker up in our office for a test drive.

First off, it's is put together so that anyone who isn't colorblind can set it up. It's a 6.1 channel system (meaning that there are front center, front left, front right, rear left, rear right, and rear center speakers along with a separate, powered subwoofer) where each end of the supplied speaker wire is color-coded to a specific speaker and to the receiver. The instructions let you know which speaker should go in which position within the room. People will have more problems finding the shrimp-flavored ramen noodles in a supermarket than they will have setting this unit up.

In addition to the normal bells and whistles of a complete theater setup (progressive-scan DVD player, the whole suite of Dolby technologies, and multiple supported formats for playback like MP3, JPEG, DVD, and CD), the system has a few that are geared towards gaming enthusiasts. Audio and video inputs on the front of the unit automatically detect when a gaming system is turned on, and change the receiver settings accordingly. The other two "gamer features" revolve around headphone use. The system will simulate a surround sound environment, even with standard stereo headphones – something that you can get with expensive headsets, but don't need with this unit. The other is what Kenwood calls Dual-Source/Single Zone operation, which lets the headphones and the speakers output different audio sources, like gaming sounds through the headphones and a CD through the speakers.

The gaming features are a mixed bag of usefulness for those with multiple systems, but overall the unit is a really nice option for those who don't want to (or don't care enough) to pick out their own individual components for a home theater. It's a good choice for a living room system, and the added goodies are a nice touch.

GAME TUNES ON THE GO

DRIV3R THE SOUNDTRACK
$12.98

HALO
$15.99

KINGDOM HEARTS
$29.99

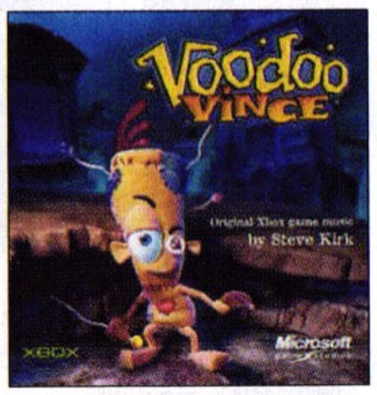
etc

Video game music has always stuck in our heads long after playtime is done, but some titles deserve to have their greatest musical moments captured on CD. Gaming tunes are becoming more readily available every month, and all of these are available from a variety of both brick-and-mortar and online retailers (we found great listings on Amazon.com).

PARAPPA THE RAPPER
[import]
$32.49

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS
[import]
$23.99

METAL GEAR SOLID
[import]
$39.99



VOODOO VINCE
$12.98

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WHO YOU WILL BECOME.

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What if the choices you made had everlasting repercussions? Your every action would immediately affect your appearance and change the way people perceive you. Would you wield a sword in the name of virtue, create a path of evil with spells and treachery, or become something in between? Before you create your destiny, know this: no two Fables are the same. What will yours be?

xbox.com/fable

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Violence

LIONHEAD STUDIOS

Microsoft game studios

XBOX

it's good to play together

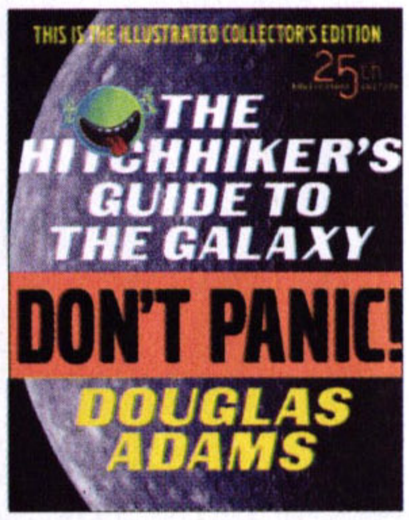
etc

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Deluxe 25th Anniversary Edition

Manufacturer: Harmony Books
Website: www.42words.com
List Price: $35.00

Everyone has read Hitchhiker, right? What, you haven't? It'll be okay. Don't tell anyone! Just go to the store, grab a copy from the shelf (try to find it yourself, you really don't want anyone to know that you're without), and walk calmly to the checkout. On your way there, take a look at the illustrated Anniversary Edition – we've gotten to check the book out and can safely assert that it kicks total butt. Quotes and anecdotes from Douglas Adams' friends and colleagues share space with "interesting" Hitchhiker memorabilia and history. Oh, and read the freakin' book or you have no right to call yourself a human. Seriously.



pc

ZBOARD DOOM 3 KEYSET

Manufacturer: Ideazon
Website: www.ideazon.com
List Price: (Zboard) $49.99, (Doom 3 Keyset) $19.99

Ideazon's Zboard is an interesting product – the base unit accepts different modules designed for wildly varying applications. The gaming ones (like their limited edition Doom 3 keyset) feature licensed graphics and labeled keys for common commands. Each set is different (the Age of Empires set, for example, doesn't have a "Throw grenade into mouth of hellspawn" key) and they also offer more work-related sets for programs like Excel and Photoshop. The modules are hot swappable, and all have a bucketload of programmable hotkeys for further customization.

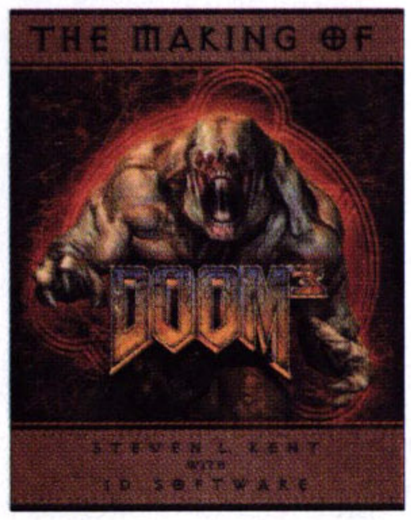
UNLIMITED ENABLED
SAMPLE CHAPTER

etc

THE MAKING OF DOOM 3

Manufacturer: McGraw-Hill/Osborne
Website: www.mcgraw-hill.com
List Price: $19.99

Steve Kent (who astute readers will remember from our first Opinion piece, "A Shift in the Game," issue 133) got unprecedented access to id Software while the company worked on creating a game that would live up to the world's epic expectations. We make lots of "when it's done" jokes about the developer, but Kent lays it all out (in a far more mature manner) in this book, due out near the end of September.



toys

POINTS OF ARTICULATION

The San Diego Comic Con, along with a few other collectable-related events, has brought announcements of some nice gaming-related toys. HeroClix is putting out a City of Heroes-themed figure, the first series in the World of Warcraft line is due out with the game's launch, and the Star Ocean figures should show up by the end of the year.

Star Ocean ▶

Manufacturer: Kotobukiya/Diamond Select
Website: www.artfx-kotobukiya.com
List Price: $15.99 – $16.99

◀ City of Heroes HeroClix – The Statesman

Manufacturer: WizKids
Website: www.wizkidsgames.com
List Price: $6.95

World of Warcraft ▶

Manufacturer: SOTA Toys
Website: www.sotatoys.com
List Price: $38.99 for set

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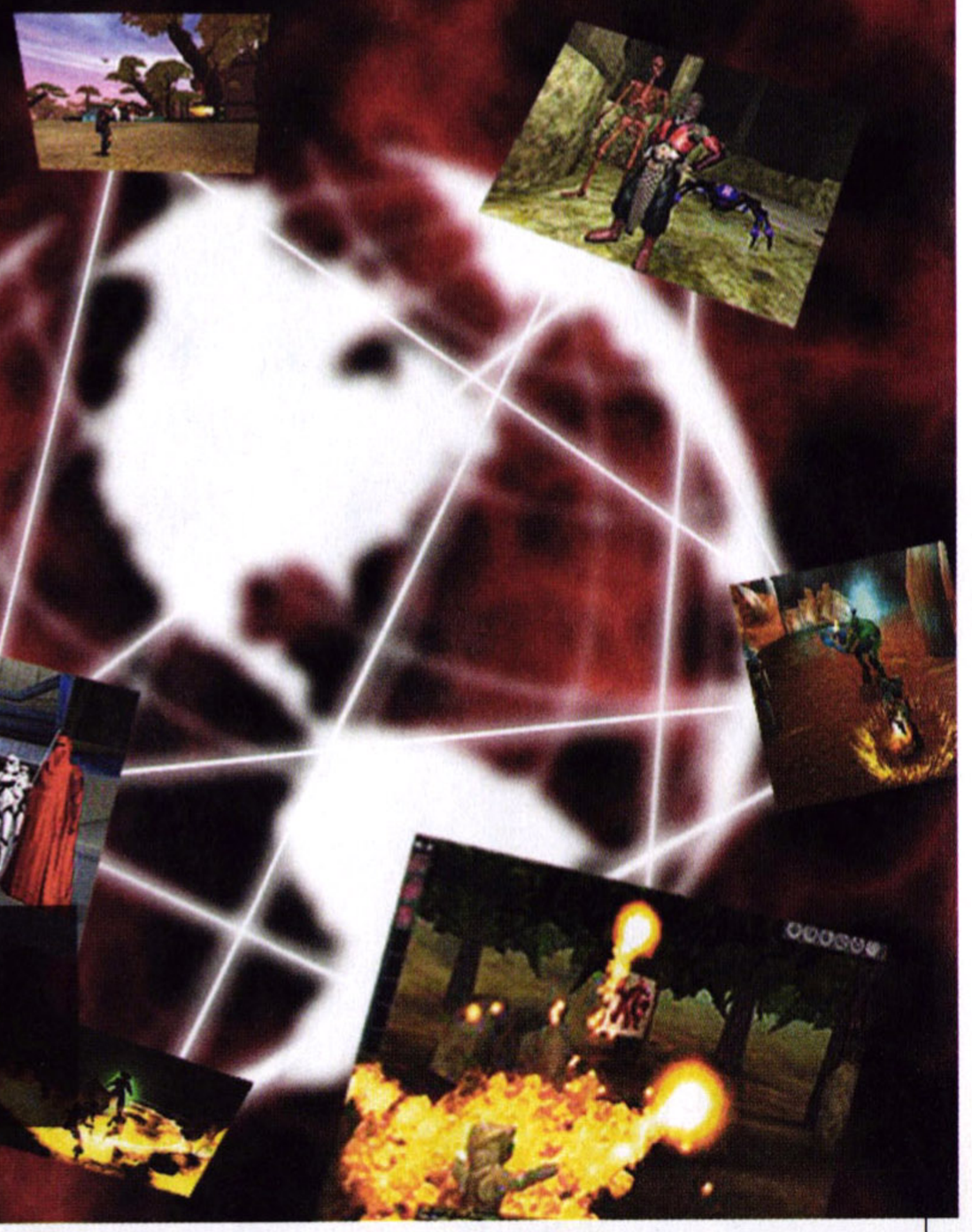
WHITHER ONLINE?

WHAT'S KEEPING MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER GAMING FROM REACHING ITS FULL POTENTIAL?



BY RAPH KOSTER, CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

Anyone remember what cyberspace looked like a decade ago? There we were, all fresh arrivals in the Metaverse, dreaming of *Snow Crash's* virtual bars and William Gibson's skies like televisions on dead channels. We wondered if the Holodeck would require one of those new-fangled 3D hardware video cards or not. If we were really old-school sci-fi fans, maybe we thought about Bradbury's Veldt or Vernor Vinge's "True Names."

Back then, we dreamed about dynamic worlds that we could morph on the fly with a thought (or a twitch of the mouse). We had a lot of grand visions about really realistic NPCs that would move about the world like the ones in Ultima VII did. We thought maybe the orcs would be invading virtual towns because they wanted to, not because there were spawn points set up by the city gates.

These days, after suffering through *Lawnmower Man* and *Disclosure*, maybe our dreams are a bit less lofty. Heck, these days, a lot of kids don't even know what static on a dead channel looks like. As gamers, we're all a bit more familiar with how online worlds and virtual realities work. We know about NPC schedules, and we've sunk enough hours into the games to see exactly where Maid Marian walks every day on her predefined path, until we wish she'd trip and fall head-first into her milk bucket. We know how spawn points work, and (thanks to strategy websites) exactly how often the watery floozy will raise her hand and offer us Excalibur.

Even worse, we're all starting to wonder where exactly the stories are. After all, there was a plot in those novels and on those TV shows. Yes, even in *VR.5* (if a plot falls in the forest and nobody is there to watch it, does it make a sound? What about if it makes no sense?). These stories were full of a sense of purpose, and we look around our adventures in Norrath, Vana'diel, Dereth, Rubi-Ka, Britannia, and Paragon City, and sometimes wonder if "phat lewt" is really what it's all about.

MMO fans will, of course, tell you in a heartbeat that it's the friendships they make online that make the difference, that they have experienced epic sagas and incredible gripping stories. But even they will probably admit that we're not quite at the dream of cyberspace yet.

Online worlds offer us more than just a game – they offer a virtual space into which many games can be placed. The problem, really, is that it's a bit too broad a canvas for us game developers. The issues facing the genre today are mostly still a matter of learning curve on the part of game creators. The curious thing about online worlds is that the first ones – text MUDs [multi-user dungeons – Ed.] got going in the late '70s and early '80s, but we still have a lot to learn.

Let me tell you where I think we're going. I think we're heading for a time and place where Maid Marian sometimes does trip. She might even cuss a bit sometimes. Where the orcs invade the town because there's something there they want, and where players fight them off because the town is too important to lose. I think that the grass will die where players trample it too much, and enterprising players might divert a river to grow their crops. I think we're heading for a game where purpose arises organically out of the game, because Evil Overlords dwelling in the Misty Mountains who try to bring about the Worldending Winter are just part of how the game world works.

These aren't unsolvable problems. They're hard, don't get me wrong, but they can be dealt with. It's more a matter of having the will than not being able to find a way. And, of course, it needs to make commercial sense, and it needs to be fun in the end. Too often, the simulations built into games make them less fun, rather than more so. But that, too, is something we can solve, I think.

> **"I think we're heading for a game where purpose arises organically out of the game."**

A bigger question is whether the game industry will be willing to be patient while we work on licking these problems. There's going to be a lot of false starts and mistakes made along the way. We're already seeing a lot of announced MMORPGs fail to make it to market because publishers are seeing the costs skyrocket and the development challenges rise. But there's encouraging signs all over the world – the rate of growth of MMORPGs as a whole is exceeding the rate of growth of the Internet, and in some countries, it's the accepted normal way of gaming. Try picking up a console in China. Xbox? What's that?

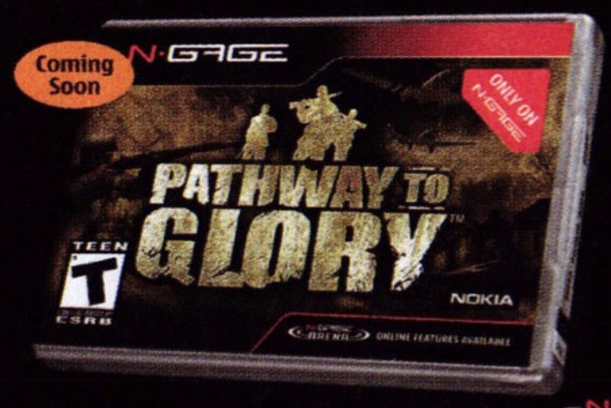
We're also seeing the single-player gaming world start to converge towards a lot of the basic premises of online worlds – shared profiles, online items, regularly updated content. I think we're going to see more of this in the coming years. Right now a lot of folks get hung up on the business model – paying subscription fees – but business models change in response to the market. The way the money flows may change over time, but I'm betting that online gaming is not only here to stay, but that it is going to absorb a pretty large portion of the games market as a whole.

Just a few years ago, that last sentence would have seemed not radical, but loopy crazy. And in the end, that's why I have faith that online worlds will eventually reach that wacky impossible cyberspace dream. We've come a long way from "> North. You see an orc here." So I'll meet ya in the virtual bar, and maybe we can take a whack at stopping the Worldending Winter. I'll introduce ya to Marian. Heck, even the invading orcs are kinda nice guys once you get to know them. ■ ■ ■

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 associate editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com.

Five great new ways to take on your rivals on the new N-Gage QD.



Pathway to Glory
N-GAGE ARENA
Game exclusive to N-Gage game deck:
- historically accurate strategic missions
- take on players from around the world via N-Gage Arena

Crash Nitro Kart
N-GAGE ARENA
Exclusive N-Gage Arena features:
- time trial shadow racing
- one unlockable secret character

Ghost Recon
Features exclusive to N-Gage game deck:
- play up to 8 players via Bluetooth
- all maps, missions and modes are original for N-Gage

Spider-Man 2 The Game
N-GAGE ARENA
Swing through the skyline to defeat Doc Ock:
- exclusive N-Gage Arena features
- multiple 2D and 3D environments

Operation Shadow
N-GAGE ARENA
Game exclusive to N-Gage game deck:
- up to 4 players in a variety of death-match modes via Bluetooth
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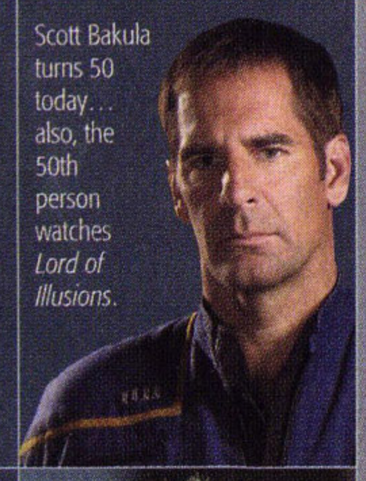
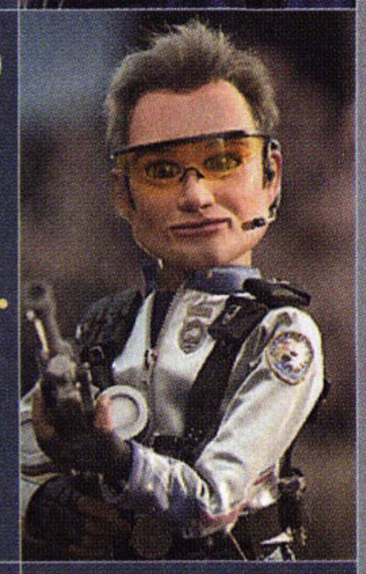
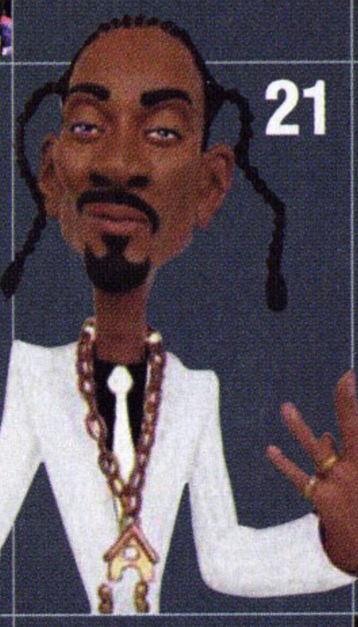
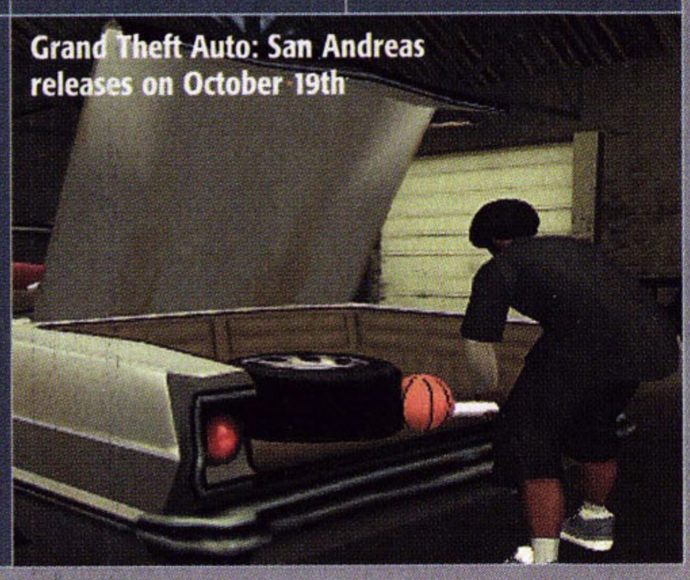
october

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
			Killzone releases on October 26th		**01** **NEW RELEASES** • Colin McRae Rally 2005 – Xbox • Dead or Alive Ultimate – Xbox • ESPN NBA 2K5 – PS2, Xbox • Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly – Xbox • Robotech: Invasion – PS2, Xbox	**02** **MAGFEST M3 (OCTOBER 1-3)** Held in Willamsburg, VA, MagFest is an event run for fans by fans. In addition to a rockin' concert with video game cover bands, 24-hour game and LAN rooms, MagFest hosts tons of tournaments from Halo to Puzzle Fighter. This is the place to be if you're a hardcore gamer.
03 The creepy serial killer movie *Saw* opens in theaters on October 1. World declares this the finest Danny Glover film since *Predator 2*.	**04** **NEW RELEASES** • Mario Pinball Land – GBA • Metal Slug Advance – GBA • Mortal Kombat: Deception – PS2, Xbox • Ten Pin Alley II – PS2	**05** **NEW RELEASES** • Conflict: Vietnam – PS2, Xbox • Get on Da Mic – PS2, Xbox • Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude – PS2, Xbox, PC • NBA Live 2005 – PS2, Xbox, GC • Tony Hawk's Underground 2: World Destruction Tour – PS2, Xbox, GC • Tribes: Vengeance – PC	**06** **MADDEN CHALLENGE** 10/3 Jacksonville The Avenues 10/9 Miami Bayside Market 10/10 Tampa Raymond James Stadium 10/16 Nashville Opry Mills 10/17 St. Louis Union Station 10/23 New Orleans Riverwalk Marketplace 10/24 Houston Galleria 10/30 Dallas Valley View Center 10/31 San Antonio River Wal		**08** **COMIC, ANIME & HORROR FEST (OCTOBER 9-10)** There's nothing we'd like to see more than an axe-wielding Jason chasing a pasty, fat comic dork around a convention center as people dressed up as Goku look on in horror. Celebrity guests include Troma's Lloyd Kauffman, director Jeff Burr, and Jackson Bostwick (a.k.a. Shazam).	**09** Scott Bakula turns 50 today… also, the 50th person watches *Lord of Illusions*. 
10 **XTREME GAME DEVELOPERS XPO (OCTOBER 9-10)** Aptly held at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, CA, the Xtreme Xpo is a place where game developers can mingle and explore the future of the industry…to the Xtreme! Keynote speakers include Shiny's David Perry and Nvidia's Sim Dietrich.	**11** **NEW RELEASES** • Midway Arcade Treasures 2 – PS2, Xbox, GC • Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door – GC • Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams – PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA	**12** **NEW RELEASES** • Bloodrayne 2 – PS2, Xbox • FIFA Soccer 2005 – PS2, Xbox, GC • King of Fighters 2002 & 2003 – Xbox • Outrun 2 – Xbox • Street Fighter Anniversary Collection – Xbox • Under the Skin – PS2 • Worms Forts: Under Seige – PS2	Bloodrayne 2	**14** **PROJECT BAR-B-Q (OCTOBER 14-17)** Celebrating its ninth year, many of video games top sound professionals will attend Project Bar-B-Q, a conference that focuses on influencing music hardware and software over the next five years. Of course, you'll have to bring your own wieners!	**15** *Team America: World Police* opens in theaters. Matt Parker and Trey Stone suddenly favored for Presidential election.	
17 **NECRONOMICON '04** If you fancy science fiction or fantasy, then you'll probably feel right at home at this year's Necronomicon. Shop till you drop, drool on Timothy Zahn, or join in the Create-a-Character Origami session.	**18** **SERIOUS GAMES SUMMIT (OCTOBER 18-19)** The focus of this conference is using interactive gaming technology in non-entertainment sectors. Just imagine what would happen if rumble technology was combined with ice cream, or better yet, memory cards with brain implants. Serious Games will be held at Loews L'Enfant Plaza Hotel in Washington D.C.	**19** **NEW RELEASES** • Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django – GBA • Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas – PS2 • Kirby and the Amazing Mirror – GBA • Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors – Xbox • Outlaw Golf 2 – PS2, Xbox • Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2 – PS2, Xbox, GC • Tron 2.0: Killer App – Xbox	**20** Snoop Dogg turns 32…has birthday dinner at 3 a.m. at White Castle.	 **21**	**22**	**23** **CLASSIC COMPUTER AND GAMING SHOW (OCTOBER 23)** Deep within the halls of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Mentor, OH, gamers will be shopping, swapping, and getting their geek on. If you're in the market for classic gaming merchandise, this might be a good place to look. Also, be sure to give a shout out to the Lord while you are there.
31 Peter Jackson celebrates 43rd birthday at a fancy restaurant and is thrown out when mistaken for a hobo.	**25** **NEW RELEASES** • Ace Combat 5 – PS2 • Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex – PS2 • The Incredibles – PS2, Xbox, GC	**26** **NEW RELEASES** • Close Combat: First to Fight – Xbox • Godzilla: Save the Earth – PS2, Xbox • Killzone – PS2 • Kuon – PS2 • Neo Contra – PS2 • Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed – PC • Vampire – The Masquerade: Bloodlines – PC	**27** **NEW RELEASES** • Men of Valor – PC • SpongeBob SquarePants: The Movie – PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA • Taiko Drum Master – PS2	**28** Bill Gates celebrates 49th birthday by buying a diamond-studded thong.	 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas releases on October 19th

For future release dates, go to www.gameinformer.com

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Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence
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UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 2 | PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
> **DEVELOPER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
> **RELEASE** WINTER 2005

The Elder Scrolls IV
OBLIVION

Bethesda Softworks is a company well known to fans of the role-playing genre. Its long-running The Elder Scrolls series won legions of followers on PC, garnering critical acclaim and winning scores of awards. With The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, Bethesda introduced the series to the Xbox, resulting in the first hit role-playing game on the console. Now, the independent-minded company is taking the series into bold new territory. Another Elder Scrolls game for the Xbox would be a sure-fire moneymaker, but Bethesda has far loftier goals. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion is on its way, and it's being developed for next-generation consoles. Once the gaming world sees what it has in store, Bethesda will be the developer everyone, not just the RPG fans, will be talking about.

The next generation, as most gaming fans know, refers to the upcoming consoles currently known as Microsoft's Xbox 2 (also referred to by the codename Xenon), Sony's PlayStation 3, and the Nintendo Revolution. Officially, Oblivion is scheduled for PC and unspecified next-generation consoles. Bethesda is unable to formally confirm which platforms the game will be released on. There is enough evidence out there to support an educated guess about which consoles it will come to – but we don't need it. We can confirm beyond a shadow of a doubt that The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion is coming to Xbox 2. Barring any sort of exclusivity deal that may pop up between now and the game's release, it's also coming to PlayStation 3. We can guarantee here and now that this is the real deal – the start of next-generation gaming.

While many of the details about the actual consoles remained secret, Bethesda's executive producer Todd Howard was surprisingly forthcoming about the new Elder Scrolls project. He walked us through Bethesda's goals for the title and the technology used to create it, and revealed to us the game's absolutely stunning visuals. One look at Oblivion will shatter your conceptions about what is possible in a video game. Every shot on these pages is real – nothing has been retouched or altered. This is what games on the Xbox 2 will look like. As the PS3 development tools have yet to make it into the U.S., it is still unknown what exactly that system will be capable of. If and when Oblivion comes to PS3, there's no telling how it will look.

We visited Bethesda's headquarters in Rockville, Maryland to get the world's first glimpse at a next-generation game in development.

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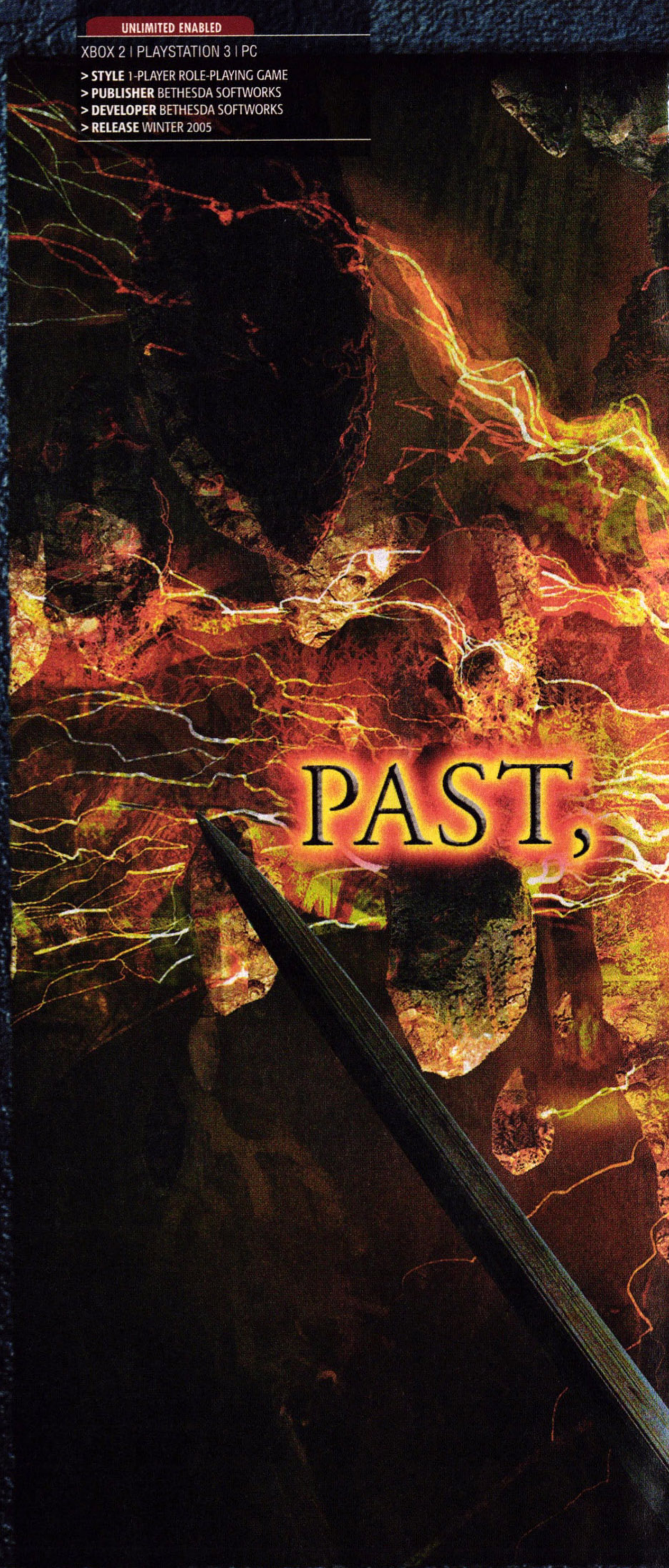


PRESENT, AND FUTURE

■ Everything in this shot is a real part of the world. You can ride your horse through the forests and up to the very top of the mountains in the distance

During our visit, we spied on the desks of several programmers a PC-sized object draped in black cloth. Could these mysterious objects be the vaunted Xenon development kits? We weren't permitted a look, but one thing is for certain: what Bethesda is doing with Oblivion is far beyond the capabilities of current-generation machines.

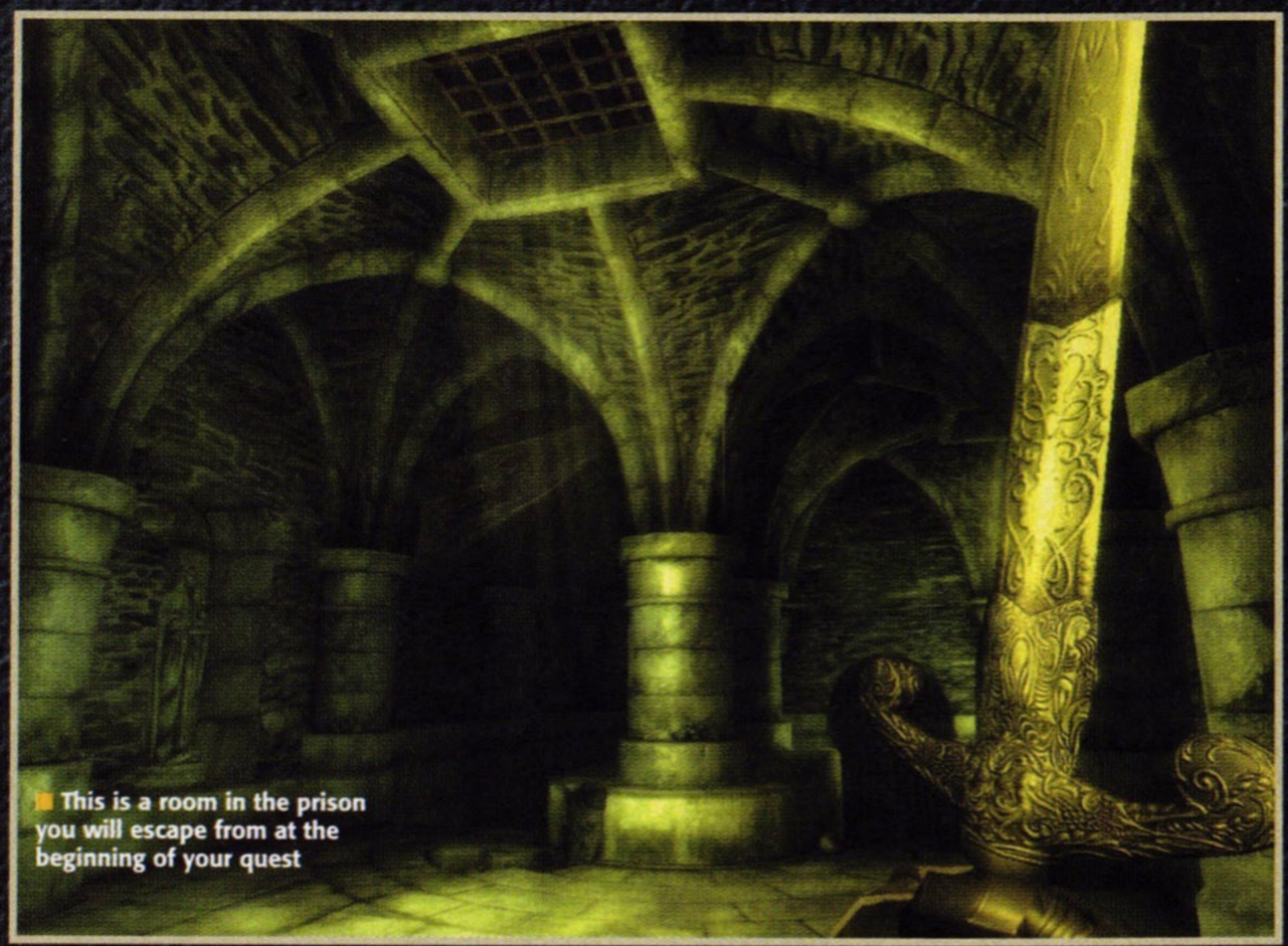
"Right after Morrowind, our motto was 'go big, go early,' and be ready for whatever Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo do next," Howard energetically exclaims. Work on Oblivion began almost immediately after the completion of Morrowind. If the title is anything, it's big. Oblivion will actually be a smaller game than the massive Morrowind, but Howard expects that it will still be much larger than most early next-generation titles. He predicts that the average length of a next-gen game will shrink for two primary reasons: First, budgets and schedules for games will not change much, while the enhanced graphics will require more development time. Secondly, it's a fact that, statistically, gamers prefer shorter games, and often do not finish more involved titles. Creating one of the most expansive titles for the early days of the next generation is one of Bethesda's key goals.

Another of its goals with Oblivion is to produce the definitive role-playing game of the generation. Bethesda's strategy, states Howard, is to make the game as appealing as possible to mainstream gamers without alienating the hardcore players who prefer more complex RPGs. This is no small task, and Bethesda plans to accomplish it by making sure that every basic activity is entertaining. Success in activities like picking locks, mixing potions, and forging armor will no longer be determined by an off-screen dice roll; each of these activities will be a separate mini-game which can be completed through skill and luck. Of course, these games will be harder when your skill level in these areas is low, and become easier as you increase your proficiencies.

The first-person perspective of the game is another technique used to increase Oblivion's appeal to the average gamer. Like the older games in the series, a third-person option is available, but it is inherently designed for the first-person view. While by no means a twitch-based game, the action element has been ramped up: Combat will be bloody and visceral, and is designed to recall the intense swordplay seen in movies like *Braveheart* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. According to Howard, the combat will be every bit as exciting as it is in a first-person shooter. Contrary to the RPG convention, the outcome of combat will not be decided by virtual "dice rolls." The damage that you dole out will be determined by your strength, your opponent's armor, and the attack you unleash. Your opponents will block and dodge, so taking down an enemy is entirely on the player's shoulders.

Engaging combat is certainly a huge part of a successful game, but Bethesda's final goal is something even bigger. Oblivion will function as a "fantasy world simulator." It should feel every bit as vibrant as the Middle-earth seen onscreen in Peter Jackson's version of Tolkien's trilogy. Thanks to the amazing technologies fueling the future of game development, this goal is entirely feasible. Oblivion, like the other Elder Scrolls games before it, takes place in the world of Tamriel, specifically in the Imperial Province of Cyrodiil. The world of Tamriel is a beautiful place; these are, without a doubt, the most amazing graphics that the console gaming world has ever seen. Dungeon walls look rough, uneven, and glisten with vague, indefinable dampness. Light plays off of all objects realistically, from human faces

■ At the beginning of your quest, you can tweak your appearance to your liking



■ This is a room in the prison you will escape from at the beginning of your quest

to armor. Creatures display a savage menace that is both intimidating and captivating, like a lion in a cage. But most impressive of all is something that would seem like a mere backdrop in many games: the forests.

While Morrowind's quest took players primarily through dark interior locations, Howard and the rest of the team at Bethesda see exteriors as integral parts of a convincing fantasy world. "Fantasy, for us, is a knight on horseback running around and killing things," says Howard excitedly. In Oblivion, you will do just that. Either on foot or on horseback, players can explore a huge exterior world that looks shockingly real. The trees in Oblivion look like photos of the woods not far from Bethesda's headquarters. Light shines realistically through the branches, and wind causes the leaves and underbrush to sway naturally. This truly is a virtual fantasy world, and it is all thanks to the powerful new development tools that make next-generation games possible.

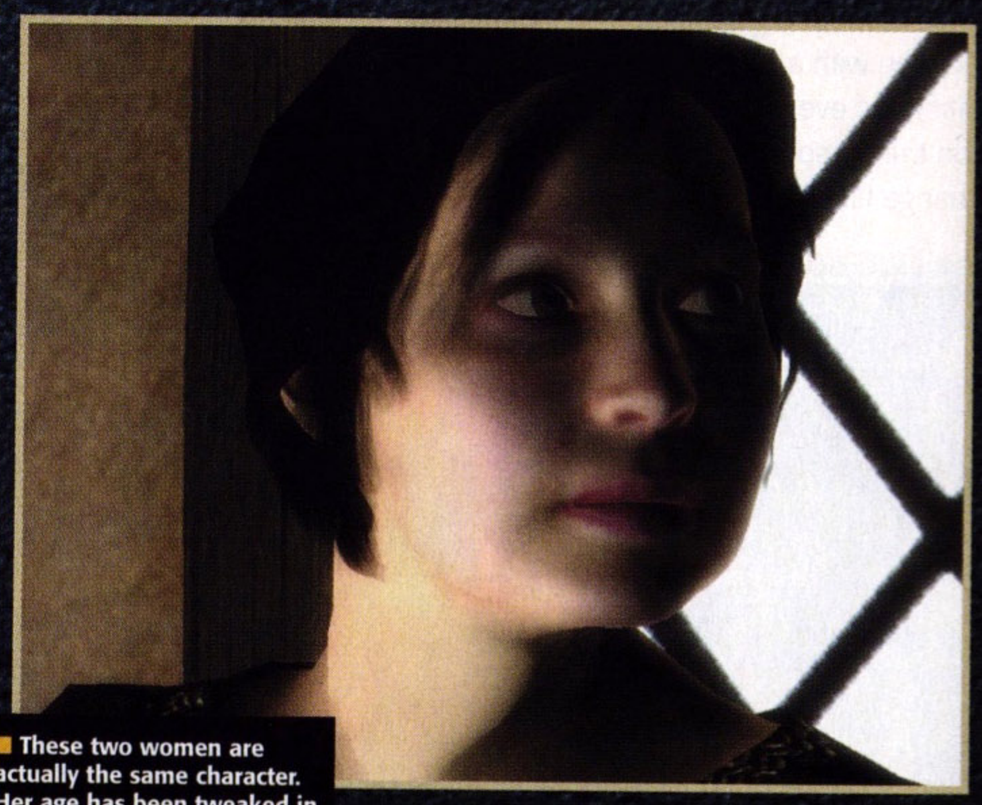
There is a trick to creating a world as huge and lifelike as this – the development tools used to make the game can be taught to do much of the work. In Morrowind, every single object in the game was built by hand. Artists modeled every rock, sword, barrel, and building individually. Handcrafting objects is still a huge part of Oblivion's creation – it will always be necessary in game development – but much of the environments can be generated automatically by Oblivion's powerful Elder Scrolls Construction Set program. With this tool, artists can pick an area of the map, set parameters for what should be there, and the program will randomly populate the area according to the input. For example, an area can be designated as a forest, and the artist can select the types of trees and bushes that grow there. Intricate details such as the soil type can also be set – as many or as few parameters can be used as the creator sees fit. The Construction Set will then build the area, place trees, adjust the landscape based on how the soil erodes, and cover it with vegetation. The areas can be (and are) tweaked by hand by the artists, moving or placing certain objects, or simply adjusting the Construction Set's results. In essence, the program helps create a world that looks more real than any game to date, while making the process faster and easier so time can be devoted to other areas.

Of course, the Construction Set has other applications as well. It can also be used

■ This shot demonstrates the incredible forests that can be generated by the Xbox 2

"...these are, without a doubt, the most amazing graphics the console gaming world has ever seen."

These two shots illustrate how an NPC can display how he feels about your character



These two women are actually the same character. Her age has been tweaked in the Elder Scrolls Construction Set program to demonstrate the power of the tool

to generate more complex creations, like characters. The world of Oblivion will be populated by 1,000 non-player characters. Each of these denizens will be completely unique – just like the foliage, the Construction Set can be given a set of parameters to generate a random individual. The generated model can then be tweaked by hand. With a series of sliders, artists can lighten or darken a character's skin, alter his or her hairstyle, or instantly change the character's age by decades. The program dictates not only how the NPC looks, but how they behave. The character's aggression, energy level, confidence, and social responsibility can all be set, dictating how he or she will act in certain situations and react to various stimuli.

Not only does the Construction Set program make things simpler for the artists at Bethesda, it will also help players make the world their own. The program is slated to be included with the PC version, so gamers will be able to utilize the powerful technology to create their own characters and mods. Whether or not the tool will be included in the Xbox 2 or PlayStation 3 versions is up in the air, as user-created content is inherently more difficult on a console. However, Bethesda hopes to provide downloadable content for all versions.

The Construction Set, which is responsible for what Bethesda calls "procedural" world building, is one tool the company is using to create the vast world of Cyrodiil. However, the lush look of the virtual realm is thanks to several other impressive technologies. Many steps are required to make the visually stunning dungeons, vistas, and castles, and the terminology can be confusing. In simple terms, an area is created with polygons – let's say for this example that the area is a dungeon. The basic shape is modeled out of polygons – the walls, floor, and ceiling are created, including any major changes in shape, like a pillar sticking out of a wall. Then, a series of tools called pixel shaders are used to add layers of detail. The layers they create are called maps, and each map is responsible for adding an effect to increase the realism of the finished dungeon. A diffuse map sets the color of the dungeon, while a parallax map adds a grayscale textured surface that creates the illusion of depth, although it is actually flat. In the dungeon, that texture would be a brick wall, and the parallax map creates the look of volume without actually rendering the individual

bricks. The color set by the diffuse map is moved by the parallax map to coincide with the textured surface.

Several more layers are added before the dungeon is finished. A normal map sets lighting info – it dictates how light reflects off of the dungeon wall from every angle. Specular highlighting determines how shiny a surface looks – the wet look of the dungeon walls is a result of this technique. The lighting is further augmented by a rendering process called high dynamic range shading, which creates the most realistic lighting ever. High dynamic range shading simulates how the human eye adjusts to let certain amounts of light in. This causes the brightness of objects or spaces to increase or decrease, based on the overall light level of the scene. The best example is how bright an outside area looks after walking out of a dimly-lit cavern. These technologies are representative of the capabilities of the Xenon and DirectX 9.0's Shader Model 3.0.

There are obviously many more techniques used to create the astonishing look of this game, much of which is too complex for those of us who aren't programmers. But there is so much more to Oblivion than its look. As Todd Howard says, "You don't need a pixel shader to make good gameplay." The technology powering this next generation title is doing so much more than simply making everything look great, it's also changing the rules of how virtual game worlds function. As mentioned before, the area of Tamriel that is the setting for Oblivion is populated with 1,000 NPCs. Unlike current games, these characters don't simply disappear once the player leaves the area, they exist 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Every character has its own virtual life and its own schedule to follow.

Each of the 1,000 characters in the game is given a basic schedule of events to follow throughout each virtual day. They will shop, explore, eat, report for work, and more. However, while the characters are told what goals they need to accomplish, they are not told how to complete them. For example, a peasant who wants food may acquire it in several different ways. If the character has money, he will probably buy food; but if he is broke, he will try to obtain it some other way. He may go out into the forest to hunt, but hunting in the wrong place may get the guards on his case for poaching. So, the character may opt to steal food – he may even try to steal from you.

Interaction between the player and the virtual characters that populate the game is yet another area in which Oblivion is pointing towards the future of gaming. Characters will converse with one another in free-flowing, non-scripted discussions. Every NPC features unique spoken dialogue. Listening to the characters may reveal hints about a quest, or it could simply be a random conversation about shopping habits. When a player joins into a conversation with an NPC, you will actually be able to tell how they feel about you and how willing they are to cooperate with you. A character that dislikes you will scowl and furrow his brow, while someone who likes you will greet you with a smile. The facial animations of every character are generated on the fly, so their expressions can change fluidly and instantly, just like a real person.

The way characters respond to your actions adds another level of realism to the world of Oblivion. As The Elder Scrolls games have always encouraged player freedom, you can attack NPCs without provocation if you so choose. An assaulted townsperson may stand and fight, he may run, or he may simply cower and wait for the finishing blow. Players can stroll through town killing everyone in sight, but guards can and will be summoned to pursue you. The province of Cyrodiil is the capital of Tamriel, so a full law enforcement system is in place to protect the people. Guards will certainly be sent out after you if you scoff at the law, but you may also witness them hunting down an NPC who has committed a crime.

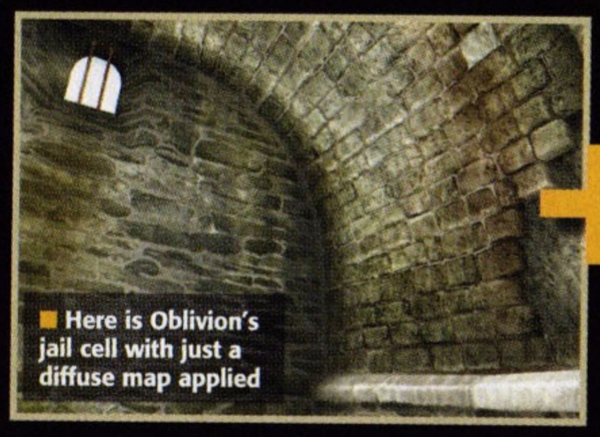
Crime and punishment is not only a crucial piece of the gameplay mechanics, but also the story of Oblivion. As is traditional with The Elder Scrolls games, it begins with the central character in prison. Unbeknownst to you, an assassin has entered the Imperial

CONTINUED ON PAGE 59

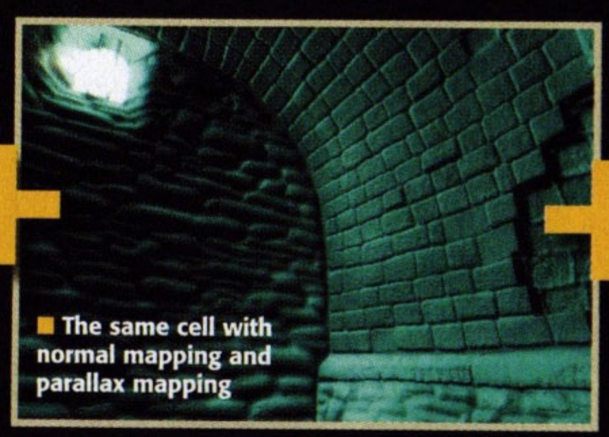
■ Each of these weapons is real and can be picked up and tested on the combat dummy in the background

■ Goblins are only one of the many kinds of monsters you will face

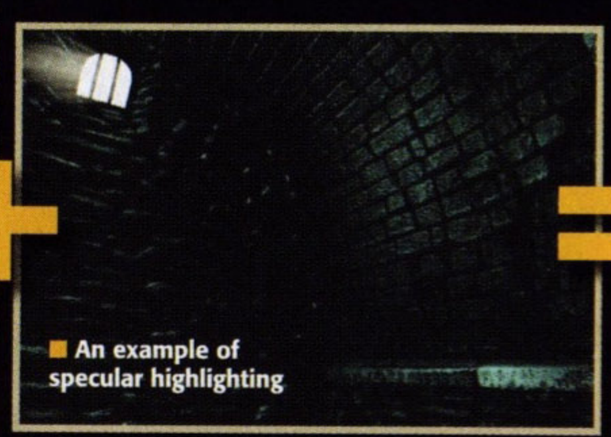
These shots demonstrate the effects that are used to create Oblivion's lush look. The diffuse map sets the base color of each pixel, then normal mapping sets the lighting, and parallax mapping makes the bricks pop out. Specular highlighting is added, and then all the effects are combined to make the final product.



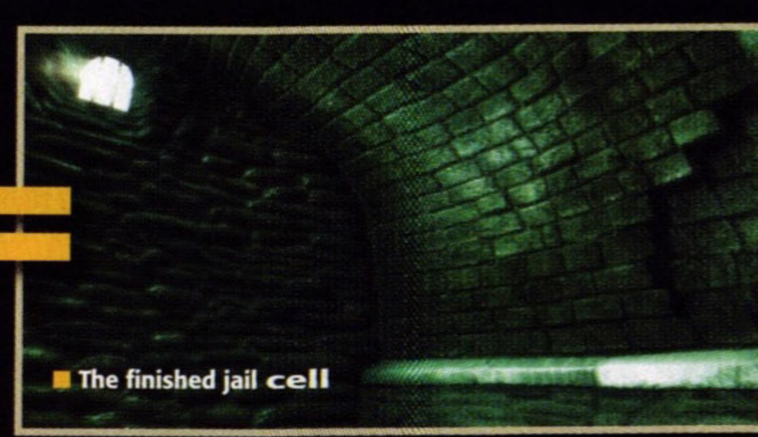
■ Here is Oblivion's jail cell with just a diffuse map applied



■ The same cell with normal mapping and parallax mapping



■ An example of specular highlighting



■ The finished jail cell

"As graphics get more powerful, the artistic nature of things increases."

—Todd Howard, executive producer

■ Every item on this table is fully modeled and interactive. Each piece will move realistically when manipulated, thanks to the Havok physics used by the game

city on a mission to kill the Emperor of Tamriel. The Emperor's guards decide to evacuate him through a secret tunnel that leads through the prison. More specifically, it runs straight through your cell. As the guards appear in your cell with the Emperor, they warn you to stay back and not to follow as they open your steel door. However, the pursuing assassin kills a guard, so you pick up his gear and make your escape. Running along with the Emperor, the assassin kills off the guards until you are the last man standing with him. While you help him escape the prison, he is mortally wounded by the assassin. Before dying, he hands you an item called the Amulet of Kings and instructs you to "find him and close shut the marble jaws of Oblivion."

Oblivion, in simple terms, is Hell. The death of the Emperor weakens the magic that prevented the foul beasts of Oblivion from entering the world of Tamriel. But with his death, portals from Oblivion begin to open, allowing demons to enter the world. Your task, as appointed by the Emperor, is to find the one person who can close the gates to Oblivion and save Tamriel from destruction.

While the central quest in this game is clearly defined, there is much more to it than its basic premise. "We wanted to do a 'save the world' thing that is also a character drama," explains Howard. Much of the game focuses on how your character grows as a person, as well as your relationship with the person you are tasked to find. The central character can be as heroic or evil as the player sees fit – the main quest, as well as the countless side missions, can be completed in any number of possible ways. The Elder Scrolls games are about freedom, and Oblivion takes that freedom to a whole new level.

"Compared to Morrowind, it's night and day," says Howard. "Not just in terms of visuals, but how it plays." First of all, the combat is a much bigger focus than in the earlier

CONTINUED ON PAGE 61

■ These candles demonstrate high dynamic range shading, a technique that results in the most realistic lighting ever

The view can be changed to third-person, so you can appreciate the beauty of the character model

"Oblivion, in simple terms, is Hell. The death of the Emperor weakens the magic that prevented the foul beasts of Oblivion from entering the world of Tamriel."

This creature is a Daedrorth, one of the monsters from Oblivion that invades Tamriel

games. Attacks will be mapped to the right trigger and blocking to the left on the Xbox 2 controller. Hitting the trigger activates basic swipes, while holding it down and pushing a direction on the analog stick results in a power swing. Each direction performs a different power swing (which will improve as the character increases his combat skills), so the combat system offers a wide range of attacks in as simple of a way possible. A weapon selection that includes swords, axes, maces, and daggers adds to the combat variety.

Of course, any fantasy game worth its salt has to include magic as well, and Oblivion features six different mystic schools: Destruction, Restoration, Alteration, Illusion, Conjuration, and Mysticism. Each school focuses on a different type of magic, and players can mix magic effects to create their own custom spells. Not only can you create your own magic, you can join one (or all) of the different factions that exist in Cyrodiil. The factions include the Fighters Guild, the Mages Guild, the Thieves Guild, The Dark Brotherhood, The Nine Divines, and the Arena Guild. The Fighters and Mages Guilds are noble factions, while the Thieves Guild and The Dark Brotherhood are much more sinister. The Nine Divines are a religious order that the player can join if he or she wishes to become a monk, and the Arena Guild logically focuses on gladiatorial combat.

Players can advance through the ranks of the various guilds to the point where they become the leader. Each faction has its own unique missions associated with it, which players can tackle at their discretion. While a player could conceivably join (and become the head of) every faction all during the course of one game, the multiple guilds are designed to keep the replay value high. Should you join a different sect each time you play, you will have a completely different experience. You will take on different missions, your skills will grow in different ways, and you will discover new ways to tackle familiar situations. "The experience of our game," says Howard, "is seeing all the choices that pass you by."

Choices are something that Todd Howard and the rest of the team at Bethesda see as a huge part of the next generation of gaming. Not only will massive, open-ended games like Oblivion let the player experience a greater scope of choices, but the possibilities in game development will increase as well. Howard vehemently disagrees with the notion that the increased emphasis the next generation will place on graphics could have an unintentionally detrimental effect. While graphics will be closer than ever to being truly photorealistic, we will never see games that look exactly like the real world – that would be boring. While obviously highly detailed, Oblivion is intended to look "like a fantasy painting – realistic, but just a tinge off," says Howard. If anything, he adds, the ability to create realistic graphics will only increase the imaginative and fantastic things we see in games. "As graphics get more powerful," Howard explains, "the artistic nature of things increases." More powerful technology means the artists have fewer limitations, and are capable of bigger and wilder things. The creatures that populate the world of Tamriel are evidence of that. We witnessed a minotaur strolling through the lush forest, and our first reaction was how natural and at home it looked. While the forest looks completely real, the imaginary creature was rendered in such detail that it too looked like it could have come from the real world. Over 40 types of creatures will populate Tamriel, including mythical beasts like goblins and animate skeletons, real-world animals like deer and horses (which you can ride to speed your travel through the massive world), and demons from Oblivion. You'll also face huge boss monsters, treacherous humans, and devious deathtraps. You will slog through dimly lit subterranean dungeons, explore ancient ruins, and travel through cities and towns teeming with people going about their daily lives. You will experience a truly living, breathing world brought to life through cutting edge technology that will power the games of tomorrow. With The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Bethesda Softworks is pioneering the future of gaming. As an indicator of what the Xbox 2 and PlayStation 3 are capable of, Oblivion proves that the future is bright indeed. ■■■

BEYOND OBLIVION

The Fallout Franchise Goes Next-Gen

Last month it was announced that Bethesda had acquired the Fallout license from Interplay, and the company has confirmed that Fallout 3 will follow The Elder Scrolls IV as a new next-generation title. While only in preproduction stages at the moment, the game will use the same technology as Oblivion, and is planned as another open-ended role-playing game. This game however, will be decidedly darker. Imagine a survival horror-esque version of the Fallout world, with all the things you expect out of the series still intact, but with deeper, more immersive gamplay.

The post-apocalyptic theme (and tongue-in-cheek humor) of the series is still present, with your character having spent the first 20 years of his life living underground. Because of this, his eyes are unaccustomed to the light of day, thus players will have to train their eyes away from light sensitivity by using a special pair of goggles. Todd Howard claims that Fallout 3 will be one of the most original and violent titles ever, and will be set in a familiar U.S. city.

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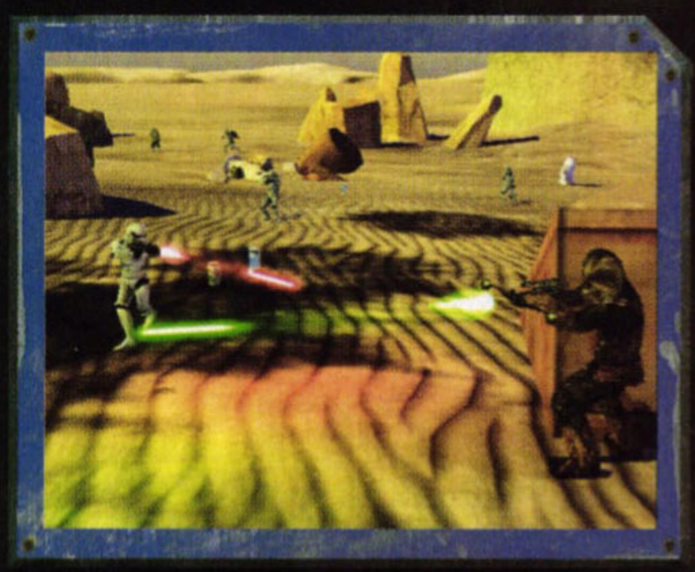

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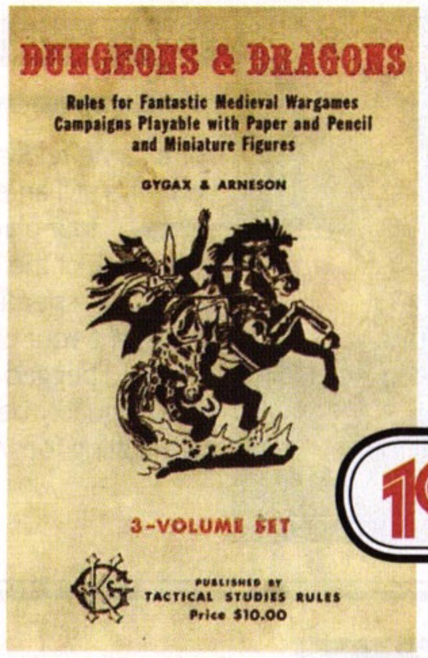
the top 25 most influential games of all time

The urge to list and quantify the titles that create our obsession with gaming is a natural one. However, most of the time, lists in magazines seek only to rank games by their commercial success or overall quality. This month, Game Informer presents a list with a subtler goal in mind: to present the titles that we feel have made the largest impact on the art and science of game creation. To that end, we've created the 25 Most Influential Games of All Time, a chronological listing of the products that have changed the way games are played, made, and experienced. Some of the entries might be controversial – one isn't even a video game at all – but all have made an impact on the industry in one way or another. Hopefully, this list will help spark a dialogue about how we got to where we are, and where we might be headed in the future.

Computer Space – Arcade

You'll often see a game called "ahead of its time," but that phrase has never been more accurately used than when being applied to Computer Space, the very first video game ever commercially released. Yes, kids, the first game wasn't Pong or Pac-Man, but future Atari founder Nolan Bushnell's Computer Space, released back before most of our readers were born, in 1971. Based on MIT student Steve Russell's Spacewar program (which had only been circulated in the academic community), Bushnell was the first to attempt to bring gaming to the mass audience. We say "attempt" because Computer Space's complex space shooter gameplay was too difficult for most to grasp, and only 1,500 were ever produced. Still, if you had to identify one point at which the video game industry began, this would be it. Every game released hence owes a debt of gratitude to Computer Space. Also, this is basically the prototype for any game that ever featured a spaceship shooting things, from Asteroids to Star Wars: Rogue Leader.

1971



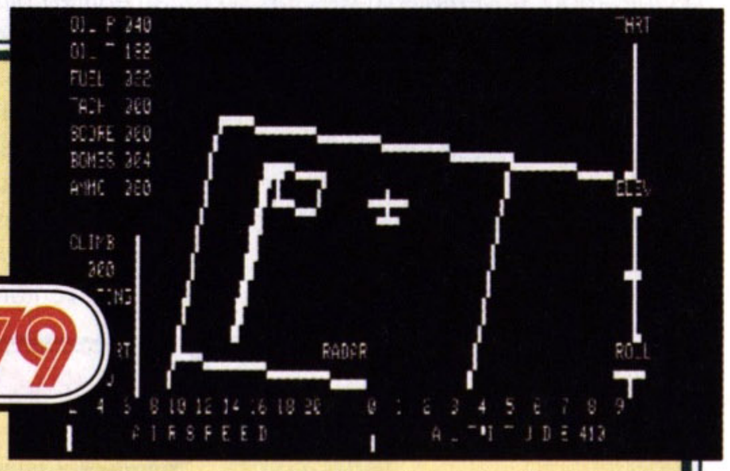
Dungeons & Dragons – tabletop

1974

Though not actually a video game, it can certainly be argued that this paper-and-pencil RPG has had more impact on the industry than any other entry on this list. Created by epic-level nerds Gary Gygax and David Arneson, the game was published by Tactical Studies Rules and became the world's first commercially available role-playing game. Thankfully, the influence of Dungeons and Dragons is seen far beyond just the games soaked in its mythology, like Baldur's Gate and Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone. Expanding on the ruleset of other popular wargames of its era (like Chainmail), its guidelines governing combat, character growth, and interactions cleared the way for the modern story-driven RPG, and still serves as the foundation for even the most basic hack n' slash games. Wherever you see a list of statistics including Strength and Dexterity, when you gain new abilities as you level up, and every time you create and customize a character, you are witnessing the impact that D&D continues to have on the world of gaming.

FSI Flight Simulator – Apple II

1979



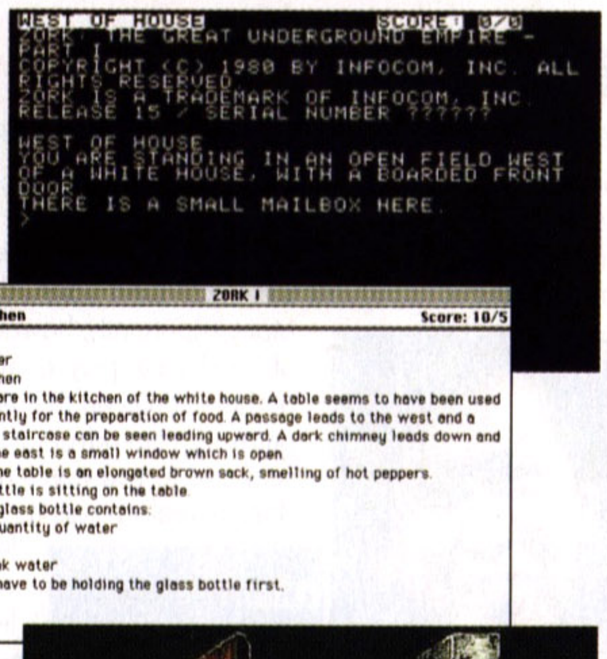
Widely recognized as the first entertainment flight simulator, FS1 had a far-reaching impact on how games were perceived and what they could do. With every last basic function present, from altitude and heading to airspeed and fuel indicator, it showed that games could be more than an abstract concept – they could emulate reality. Originally playable only on an Apple II with a black/white display and a whopping 16K of memory, it was a daunting programming task that was accomplished by Sub Logic's Bruce Artwick. With FS1, he not only established himself as the father of modern flight simulators, but also laid the groundwork for games like SimCity and Full Spectrum Warrior, which use reality as the basis for compelling gameplay. In addition, Gran Turismos of the world, which seek to accurately mimic the physics of real cars, must also tip their hat to FS1. While other titles sought to be become more and more fanciful, FS1 made itself unique by going the other way. With his early flight sim, Artwick created a world where the player's actions and goals were tied to real-life situations, and the success of the game was based on the authenticity of the experience.

FS1 Creator Bruce Artwick

Zork – TRS-80

1980

Adventure gaming of today, with its alarmingly realistic environments, complex puzzles, and player motivation provided solely by well-told stories, has a more low-tech ancestor that made the entire genre what it is. Zork is a text-based adventure, and although it wasn't the first, it was the first to become popular. Started on the internet-precursor called ARPANET, the students who would become Infocom's founders had made one of the first games to require player interaction with environments, creative use of items, character development, and "hands-on" problem solving. Current survival horror, stealth, and RPG games each have something different to thank their forefather Zork for.

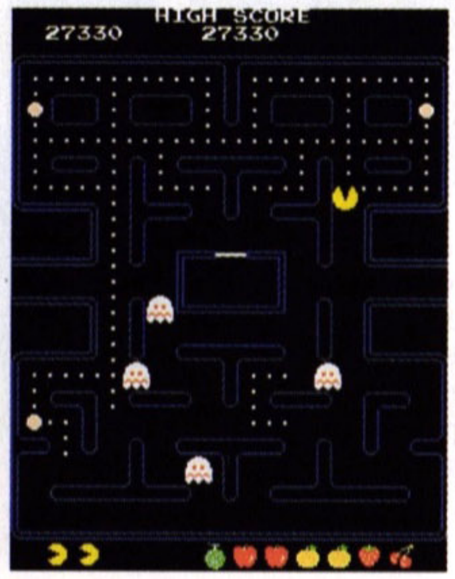


1980

Pac-Man – Arcade

Created when programmer Toru Iwatani saw a pizza with one slice missing, Pac-Man was undoubtedly the first true blockbuster title ever released. To this day, it remains one of the most popular games of all time and has reportedly sucked up more than a billion dollars in quarters. But more importantly – and a huge reason why the game was so successful – was that it was the first one ever with a real central character. Before Pac-Man added a name, a face, and a personality to video games, they were populated by generic cars, spaceships, and even featureless cubes. The Pac-Man character was so popular that he spawned toys, a TV show, lunch boxes, cereal, and even a hit song. He was conceived by Iwatani as a non-violent protagonist who would appeal to women as well as men. But Pac-Man wasn't alone in bringing a face to video games – his enemies the ghosts each had their own names, and even nicknames. These days, practically every single video game released features a protagonist with a personality, and it's all due to a little yellow maze runner inspired by an Italian meal.

Pac-Man lunchbox and phone



Pac-Man's maze-based gameplay was so addictive that it spawned a pop culture phenomenon that endures to this day

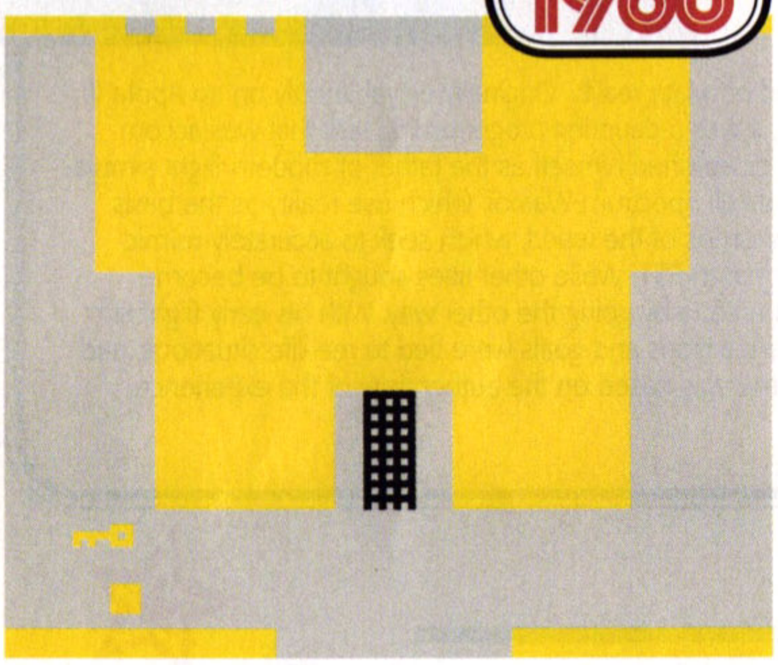
1980

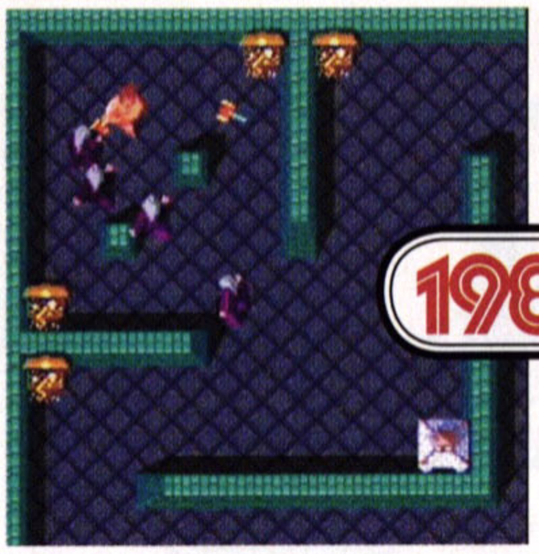
Adventure – Atari 2600

■ Adventure creator Warren Robinett

Few games can claim a title that is now a literally a genre in and of itself. Adventure did just that, putting you in the role of an enterprising square pixel that wandered labyrinths, searched out keys to castles, and slew dragons with a sword. Incredibly complex to program, it was a graphical recreation of a text game of the same name by Willie Crowther and Don Woods. One of the richest gameplay experiences available on the 2600, Adventure makes this list for an entirely different reason: the first Easter egg. Due to Atari's tendency at the time to not give programmers credit for their creations, creator Warren Robinett placed a secret room in the game that revealed his name illuminated in flashing lights. This established a precedent for hidden secrets, codes, and unlockables that are an integral aspect of today's gaming culture. From Contra's famous extra lives code to unlockable Dead or Alive characters, it all started with a little game called Adventure that let us know sometimes that what you see is not all you get.

1980





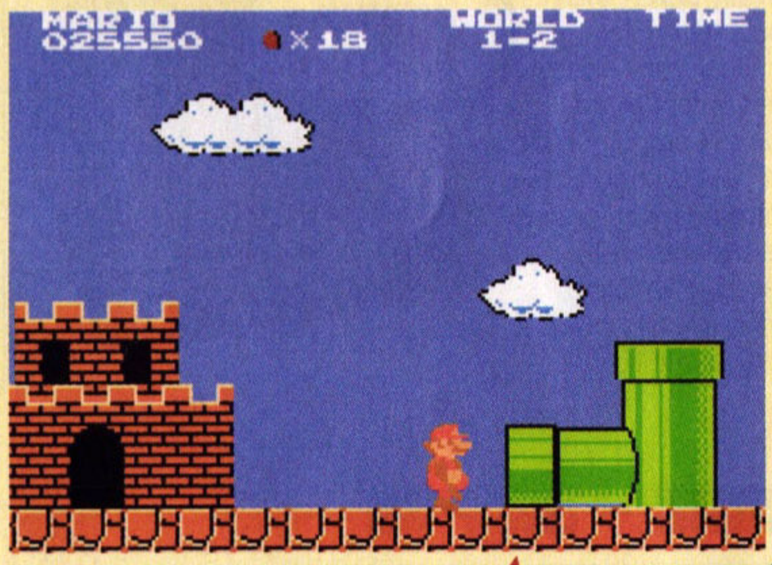
1985

Gauntlet – Arcade

For a game released almost 20 years ago, Gauntlet holds a very special position – it's still an entirely relevant title to compare today's games to. One of the first four-player cooperative hack 'n slash dungeon crawlers, direct imitations of the classic are produced in staggering numbers every year. While their specific tales may differ, the idea of grouping with friends, coordinating your efforts, and escaping the perilous mazes as a group is constantly begged for by gamers of all ages. What Gauntlet brought to the table could arguably be called the greatest gameplay convention known to this industry – cutting foes to bits with your friends will always be a good time.

Super Mario Bros. – NES

1985



Super Mario Bros. is arguably the most important title in the history of video games. Everyone can remember the time and place that they first saw this game in action. It changed the industry and the way that we look at the games we play. As the grandfather of the platforming genre, its significance stretches far and wide. Building off the work of pioneering titles of Pitfall! and Moon Patrol, its side-scrolling gameplay sounded the death knell for the single-screen games of the past, and started us down the path towards the lush 3D adventures we enjoy now. Super Mario Bros. also brought about an age of gameplay finesse, where complexity of control and user skill blended seamlessly. Whether you were simply jumping on a goomba's head or running and leaping to the flag at the end of a level, the level of control at your fingertips was unprecedented at the time, and again, its effect on the industry can be seen in virtually every game you play. As if it could be any more influential, Super Mario Bros. also ushered in the age of unpredictability with its array of mind-boggling secrets – whether it be hidden warp pipes, extra life loops, or invisible blocks. To this very day, there has yet to be a platformer that even comes close to touching its brilliance.

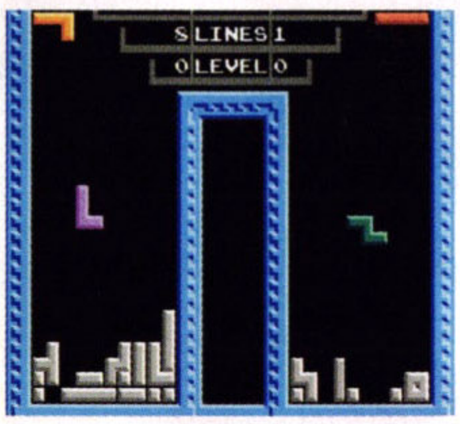
Tetris – PC

1985

■ Tetris creator Alexey Pajitnov

The story of Tetris isn't just about a game that spawned a pop culture phenomenon in the eighties. It's one of those titles that impacted the public's perception of video games the world over. First of all, it's synonymous with the term "puzzle game," and its influence is so strong that it has not only spawned countless imitations and direct copies (even the new Mortal Kombat includes a Tetris-like minigame), but the title hasn't even bettered itself. Secondly, Tetris has changed the landscape of who plays video games. Like Ms. Pac-Man, Tetris brought many casual and female players into the fold, and by being packed in with Nintendo's Game Boy, one could make a strong argument that the handheld – and the company's dominance in the handheld market – is owed to the universal appeal of Tetris. Two decades later, the gameplay of Tetris is still instantly addictive. Created by Russian mathematician Alexey Pajitnov, Tetris is based on the game pentominoes, and its staying power is an everlasting testament to the pure power of gameplay above all else.

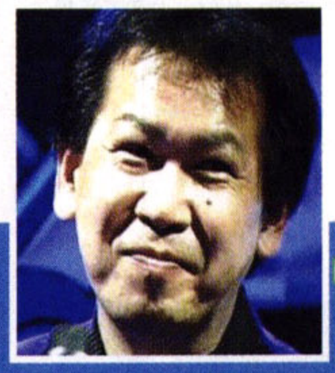
■ Tengen's superior version featured two-player, but wasn't widely released due to a lawsuit from Nintendo



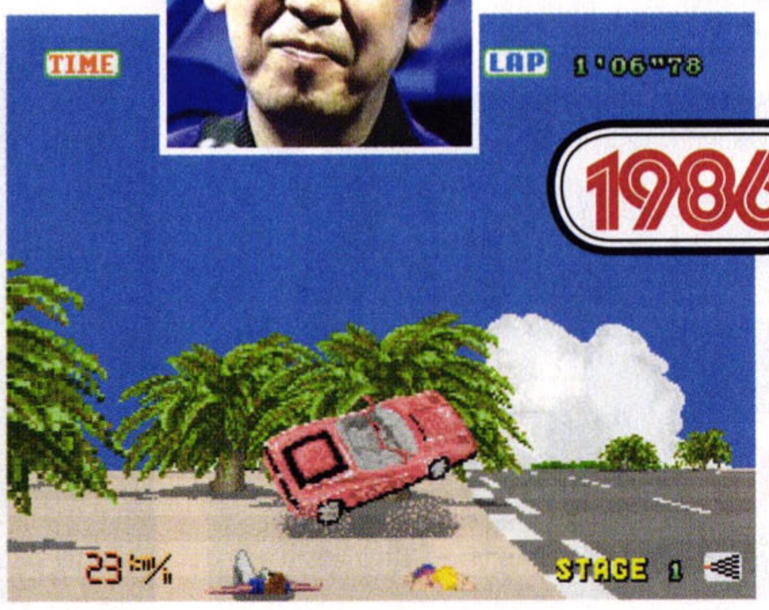
OutRun – Arcade

Gamers have been racing since the very beginning of video games, but 1986's OutRun from Sega (developed by the legendary Yu Suzuki) brought together many of the elements now commonplace in racing games. Although Pole Position was wildly popular, it took OutRun for the genre to break out of racing that involved a fixed point in the middle of the screen. More importantly, however, it really brought a feeling of freedom to players. You could choose from one of three songs on the radio, there were branching paths for your adventure, and the eye candy in the seat next to you was a nice cherry on top. An added dose of realism was thrown in with road traffic and letting you get behind the wheel of a Ferrari – a licensing leap from the generic Formula One cars of cabinets like Pole Position. Speaking of cabinets, OutRun also came in a sit-down version, and both had force feedback wheels. All of this proved that driving was more than just steering a car, it was an immersive experience – something that all video games strive to do, regardless of genre.

■ OutRun creator Yu Suzuki



1986



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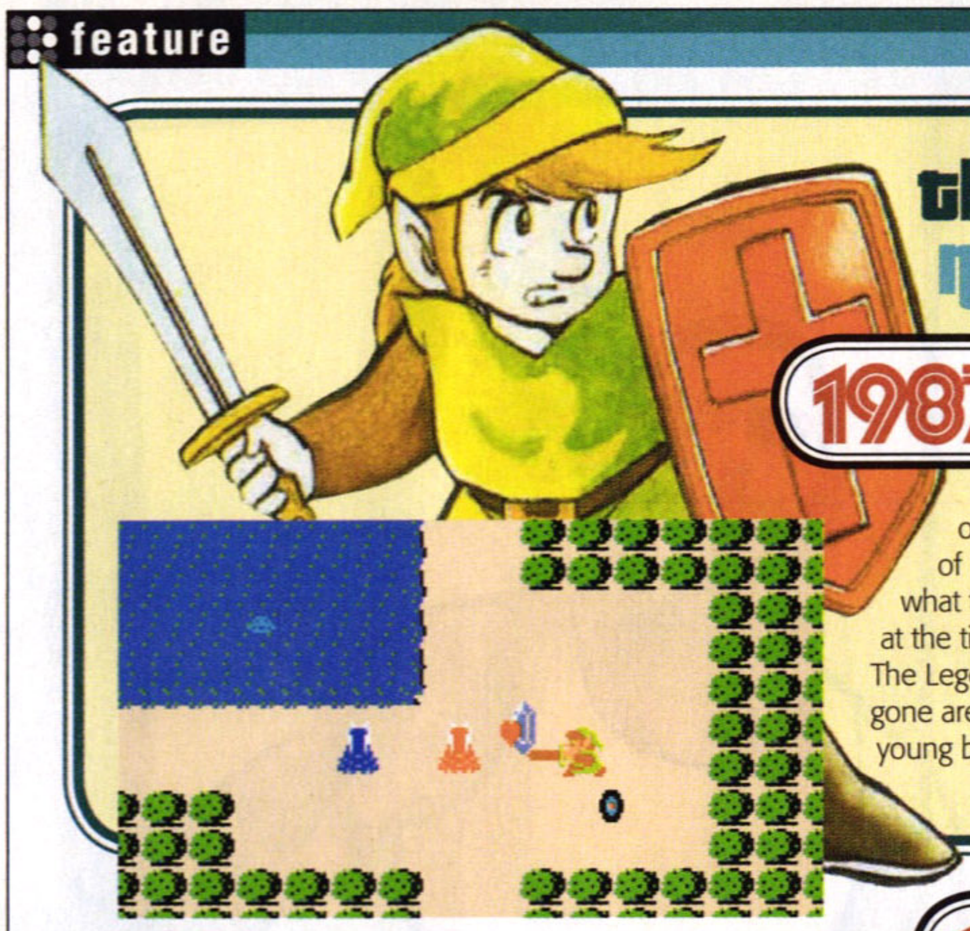


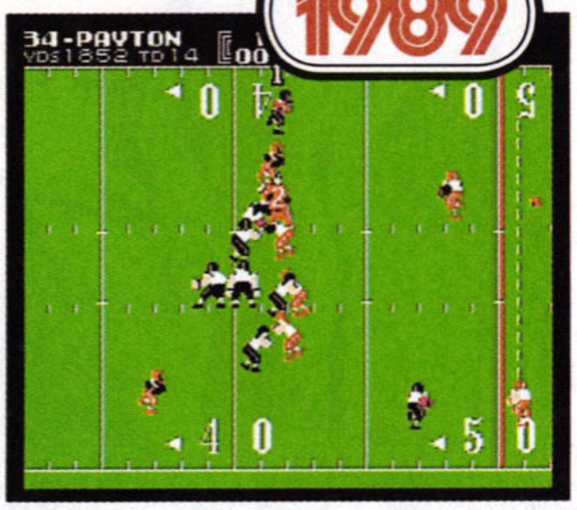
the Legend of Zelda – NES

1987

From the looping forest maze and ingenious dungeon designs to the lake of Fairies and almighty Magical (Master) Sword, The Legend of Zelda will forever be remembered for its revolutionary non-linear approach to adventure gaming. From the first second that gamers were dropped into the world of Hyrule, no guidance was provided and no clues were given. It was up to the player to figure out where to go and what to do next. The complexity of puzzles, incredible boss battles, and robust inventory system were unprecedented at the time, and set the stage for all adventure games to follow. With a tiny battery tucked inside its golden chrome case, The Legend of Zelda also became the first NES game to feature back-up save capabilities. Thanks to this historic release, gone are the days of scribbling down lengthy, time-consuming passwords. When the gameplay is powerful enough to make young boys wearing tight green spandex seem heroic and badass, you know you've got a hit on your hands.

Tecmo Bowl – NES

1989

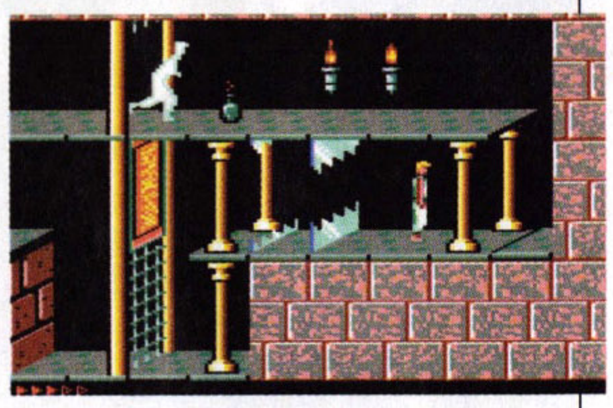


Atari's trackball, tabletop football game introduced the masses to a literal representation of the Xs and Os of America's real favorite pastime, but Tecmo Bowl brought something much more lasting and important: the passion. When EA Sports' Madden tournament rolls into town and plays host to hundreds of gamers, or when sports athletes spend copious amounts of their free time throwing down with video game football, Tecmo Bowl is largely to thank. Although introduced to arcades in 1987 (with four players and two screens), it's the NES edition that was the first to give us the all-important staple of real players, and it helped spawn a ravenous sports video game culture fueled by intense multiplayer and the all-important bragging rights. Sure, it may have also introduced the phrase, "money play," but everyone loved kicking ass with Lawrence Taylor and Walter Payton. In this day and age where the nuances of realism make most football games almost unplayable to those without years of experience, Tecmo Bowl taught us that making someone your biatch with an 80-yard run is what's fun about football, not salary caps.

Prince of Persia – PC

1989

Zelda slashes and Mario jumps; but be honest here, real people don't move like that. Prince of Persia's rotoscoped animations (an early version of motion capture) created the first popular character that moved like a real person. He'd pull himself up from ledges and leap across pits, all with the illusion of weight, physics, and an actual human anatomy. Prince of Persia's longstanding resonance is largely because of the game's realistic movement – something that we still are impressed by when it shows up in current games. Motion capture and hand-drawn animations are often mixed to produce a staggering amount of realistic movements for each modern character. Still, the Prince was the first to really pull it off.



SimCity – PC

1989

■ 2003's SimCity 4

■ Will Wright, creator of SimCity

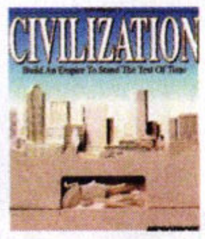
The Sims is a phenomenon matched only by the hugest of the huge in the world of video games. Eleven years before Sim-speak charmed the nation, however, the simulation genre was popularized by Maxis' first masterpiece: SimCity. While its contemporary and rival Populous (also released in 1989) had its own innovations built on a similar concept of influencing a working system in real-time (rather than directly controlling a character, empire, or whatever), SimCity opened people's eyes to the fun of non-competetive sandbox gaming. Like building a big castle out of Legos, it challenged players to make something cool bound only by the rules of the system – no worries about "winning," just trying to create. Indeed, a well-designed SimCity was a work of art to a fan. Not only that, but prior to this, who would have thought that planning a city and dealing with tornadoes and the like could be entertaining? Even better, the interactions within a SimCity and the strategies they created were deep and intricate without being brain-crampingly complex. Because it was based on real life, it made sense immediately even to non-gamers; no longer was gaming accessible only to those with a BA in Dorkology.

Sid Meier's Civilization – PC

Everyone wants to take over the world. Admit it – you know that all those international crises wouldn't be an issue if you were crowned Dictator-for-Life. Sid Meier's Civilization allowed gamers to test their mettle in the school of hard knocks, as the player was responsible for molding their tribe of hunter-gatherers into an empire to put Rome's to shame. Its incredibly layered strategy was leagues beyond any of its contemporaries. You were tasked with a delicate balancing act in several arenas: keeping your people both happy and productive, supporting both the cost of government and funding research, and building a healthy economy while waging wars of conquest or discouraging aggressors. Also, you had to contend with rival AI leaders, each of whom had distinct personality traits. Civilization also included a random map generator with mutable parameters like continent size, providing nearly infinite replayability. In many ways, the gameplay of Civilization is still the bar that strategy games must measure up to – even Sid Meier's own later titles have been unfavorably compared at times.

1991

■ Civilization III, released in 2001



■ Sid Meier, father of Civilization

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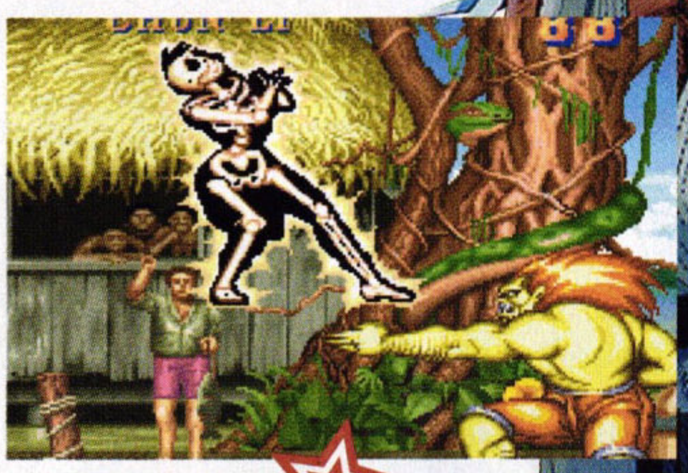
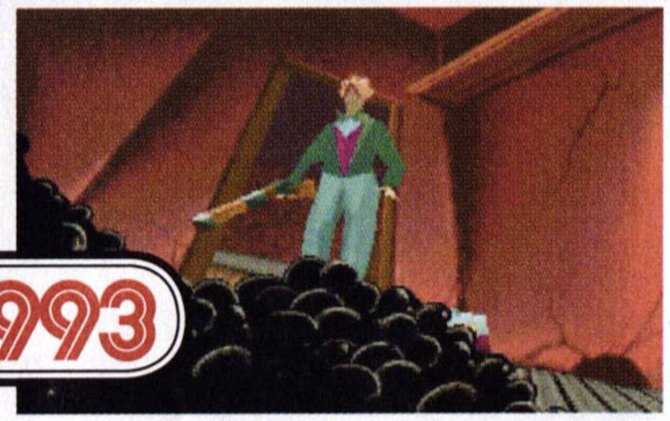
Street Fighter II: The World Warrior – Arcade

If there's one thing you can count on when you pick up a fighting game, it's that quarter circle forward+punch will do something. You have Street Fighter II to thank for that. Just one simple motion introduced "Hadouken" into the national vocabulary, and changed the face of gaming forever. In the months after its release, arcades replaced schoolyards as proving grounds, and feuds were resolved in just a few rounds for the low arbitration fee of 25 cents. As the number after its name implies, SF II did have a predecessor, but the original Street Fighter didn't have an array of quirky characters or myriad special moves that would appear in its sequel – and subsequently every other 2D fighter that followed. However, not only do franchises like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive owe a debt to SF II; extreme sports games that focus on completing complicated button sequences to string together combos, like Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, also have roots in this historic game's mechanics.

1991



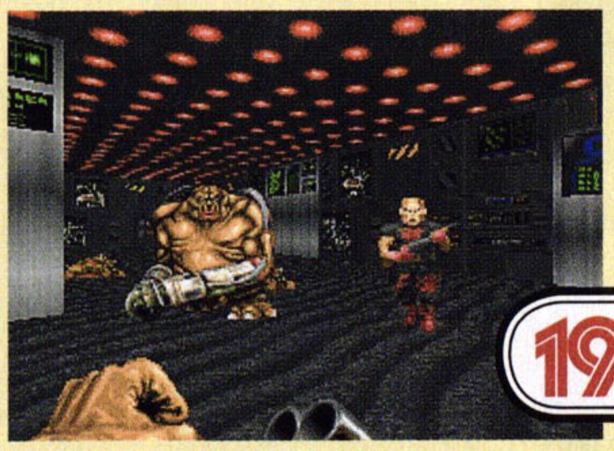
Alone in the Dark – PC



1993

Although Resident Evil is typically credited with popularizing horror games, its major inspiration was Interplay's Alone in the Dark. Not only was it one of the first games to draw upon the works of classic horror writers like H.P. Lovecraft, it also established many of the genre conventions later utilized by Resident Evil. It featured a spooky supernatural story along with two playable characters, one of each gender. It discarded the traditional video game camera system in exchange for cinematic camera angles that set the mood and highlighted the tension. Audio was also used to great effect, with both an atmospheric score and genuinely creepy monster sounds. But perhaps its greatest contribution to the horror genre was its gameplay, which established the even mix of action and puzzles that is still used in nearly every horror game. The combat engine was robust, but it was always better to avoid fighting if possible. Nearly every aspect of Alone in the Dark's gameplay was replicated in Resident Evil, which in turn influenced countless scary games. Resident Evil may have spread fear, but Alone in the Dark created it.

Doom – PC



1993

Yes, we hear the cries already: "Heresy! Wolfenstein 3D is clearly the godfather of the first-person shooter genre!" And yes, we agree. However, Doom's place on this list is assured by far more than its contribution to a single gaming genre. While it did take the FPS seeds that Wolfenstein planted and spread them to an even wider audience, Doom's biggest contribution to the world of gaming happened in bedrooms and basements, not the development studio. The mod community that swelled up around Doom is truly amazing, and it popularized the practice of taking an already great game and tweaking it to your liking. Whether it was merely creating an original arsenal of weapons or replacing the hellspawn with presidential candidates, the possible variants of this game seemed endless. It is true that many prior titles included level editor and creation tools, but Doom was the first to introduce global modifications and have them widely distributed, used, and evaluated among an enthusiastically receptive fanbase.

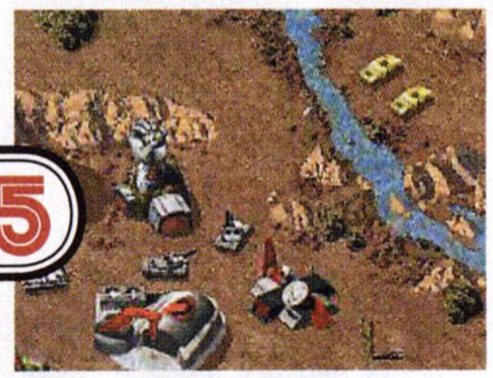
Road Rash – 3DO

■ Soundgarden

Before you start posting "Road Rash - OMG WTF LOL" on our forums, hear us out. No one is suggesting that Road Rash's automotive combat – although admittedly cool – was a visionary glimpse of things to come. Rather than the gameplay itself, this title's real influence is felt today in its soundtrack, which used the 3DO's then state-of-the-art CD-ROM drive to deliver tracks by a host of the early-'90's hottest up-and-coming alt-rockers, including Soundgarden, Monster Magnet, Swervedriver (remember them?), and Paw. In the coming years, mining the sounds of the Billboard charts became a common practice in video gaming, sounding a death knell for the catchy MIDI tunes of our NES youth. Today, a slot on a best-selling title like Tony Hawk's Underground or Madden NFL is as coveted by record companies as heavy rotation on MTV. More importantly, Road Rash showed that the future of video games would be won by companies that embraced the larger world of popular culture, setting the stage for everything from Def Jam Vendetta to Grand Theft Auto.

1994

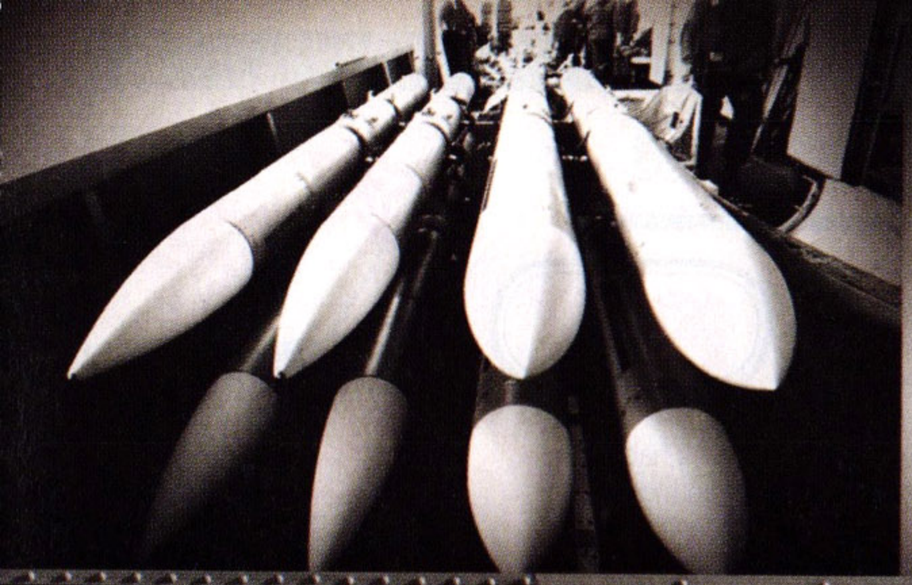
Command & Conquer – PC



1995

Anyone who has dabbled in PC gaming in the last decade knows about real-time strategy, either by reputation or experience. At this point, it's no longer just popular – it's ubiquitous. While many people credit Dune: The Battle For Arrakis (1993, also by Westwood) with being the first RTS, and others point to WarCraft: Orcs & Humans (1994, by a little studio called Blizzard Entertainment) as bringing the genre into the limelight, Westwood Studios' C&C really pushed it forward into what we know and love today. For one thing, the two factions are very different, with unique strengths and weaknesses which have a huge impact on tactics and strategy. For another, the interface put other games to shame with the smooth way it put the action right at your fingertips – something any RTS veteran will call out as absolutely critical to a title's worth. Finally, it was simply a hell of a good time in a way that no other RTS had managed until that point. C&C paved the way for the genre to become one of the major factors in PC gaming – after gamers got their hands on this, it was abundantly clear that RTS was here to stay.

■ C&C Generals, the latest C&C installment



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Super Mario 64 – Nintendo 64

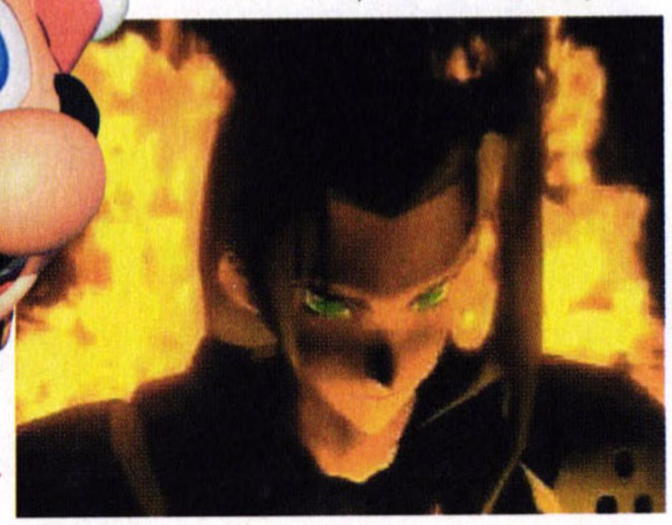
Launching with the Nintendo 64, Super Mario 64 was a true system seller – a game so popular and well received that it inspired people to buy the N64 console specifically to play it. The game moved Nintendo's mascot from the world of side-scrolling action to a fully three-dimensional realm. Everything about Mario's first 3D adventure – such as the move set, level design, objectives, and the camera controls – seemed so well-executed at the time that Super Mario 64 has become the template for all 3D platformers to follow. In addition, this was the first title to tap into the power of the analog stick – now an industry standard for controllers. No matter what current generation action games try to differentiate themselves from the other titles on the market, all owe a debt to Super Mario 64 and its brilliant establishment of how a virtual 3D world should look and feel. Unfortunately, some of the conventions established by the game have become lazy developer shortcuts – item collection is all too common in platformers these days. But as a whole, Super Mario 64's contributions to the gaming world remain largely positive, and many claim it is still the best title to ever emerge from the 3D platformer subgenre.

1996

Final Fantasy VII – PS one

1997

Many call it the greatest RPG of all time. They could be right. Final Fantasy VII ushered in a new era for RPGs, assuring their place in the gaming mainstream and changing the way people thought about storytelling and scope in a game. With an epic and emotional story spanning an impossibly large three discs, FF VII had an enormous budget and was three years in development, both of which were unheard of at the time. But perhaps its greatest legacy for the future was its incredible use of cinematics to tell the story. Full motion computer graphic cutscenes served not only as a storytelling tool, but as one of the primary reward systems for progressing through the world-spanning tale. Consider the integral nature of cut scenes in Ninja Gaiden, Warcraft III, or Metal Gear Solid – all games where the cinematic weaves seamlessly together with the story and gameplay. It's now unusual for a game to not have staff members devoted exclusively to the production of the in-game movies. The seventh volume of Final Fantasy pioneered the strategy with its innovative use of CG – giving birth to a whole new aspect of the industry.



Ultima Online – PC

As much as the hardcore PC gamers may complain that they've only got a couple of genres left to them, there's a reason those few are popular to the exclusion of everything else. Prior to UO, there were ways to get your geek on over a modem, notably through text-only Multi-User Dungeons. Unless you're Zork, though, it's hard to build much of a following without graphics. Ultima Online more or less single-handedly spawned the massively multiplayer online phenomenon, bringing thousands of dorks the world around together in a virtual fantasy playground for the first time. It was graphical, easy to use, and garnered the critical mass of players for a functioning community. The concept of building entire societies, economies, and relationships within the game world proved so compelling that the march of imitators, everything from EverQuest to City of Heroes, continues to this day – and PC gamers continue to line up to buy the MMO du jour. Other genres are even starting to incorporate elements pioneered by UO, whether it's something like PlanetSide transplanting first-person shooting into a massively multiplayer context or the forthcoming Mechassault 2: Lone Wolf's Live-only Conquest mode.

■ **Richard Garriot, aka Lord British, creator of Ultima Online**

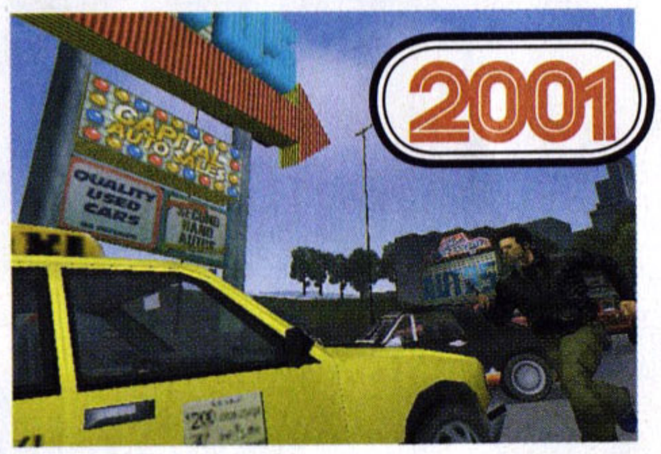
1997

Metal Gear Solid – PSone

While many make the claim that Thief is the originator of gameplay related to shadows and darkness, any game that claims to have stealth elements should probably be paying royalty checks to Hideo Kojima and Konami. With the utmost silence, Metal Gear Solid came out of nowhere and created the stealth genre. Clinging to walls, crawling through ventilation shafts, hiding under boxes, sneaking up behind guards and silently disposing of them, and tapping into an array of high-tech spy gadgetry proved to be a sexy alternative to the popular running and gunning of the time. Metal Gear Solid is also one of the first action games to focus heavily on character development and plot. Solid Snake actually has depth of character; and the supporting cast, whether it be Revolver Ocelot or Psycho Mantis, instantly became as famous as Batman's rogue gallery. Along with games like Final Fantasy, Metal Gear Solid is one of the first to feature motion picture-quality cinematics and voice acting – showing that games are not only fun to play, they are fun to watch.

1998

Grand Theft Auto III – Playstation 2



Every generation of consoles has its "defining" game, and we expect that Grand Theft Auto III will be associated with gaming in the early 2000s as much as Super Mario Bros. is with the NES era. GTA III's genius isn't necessarily in coming up with new forms of gameplay like the greats of the past did, but rather combining existing genres in a framework that creates the illusion that you're taking part in a living, breathing world. From the minute it was released, GTA quickly became a pop cultural phenomenon, garnering millions in sales and even becoming a hip touchstone for celebrity gamers like Dave Chappelle. However, GTA is important for much more than just its popularity. Even in the three years since it's been released, we've seen scores of companies trying to emulate the GTA formula, and even more titles from very different genres (like SSX 3 or Jak II) incorporating its "open world" level designs.

the end

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS
> **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JANUARY

A soldier is a warrior of honor. With steadfast dedication, a country's army does its best to defend its nation's interests at home and abroad. However, sometimes an army simply isn't enough, and specialists need to be brought in for some of the dirtier assignments. A mercenary is a warrior of desperation. They may come with a high price tag, and they may switch loyalty at the drop of a hat, but despite their questionable moral fiber, they have the skills, the weapons, and the training to get the job done.

MERCENARIES

When one thinks of LucasArts, the first thing that comes to mind is Star Wars – and rightly so. Many of this developer/publisher's most recognizable works have been affiliated with that galaxy far, far away, including its most current release, Star Wars: Battlefront. However, with recent critically acclaimed games under its belt like Gladius and Armed and Dangerous, LucasArts is beginning to flex its muscles in other areas. Ironically, one of the games that will draw attention to the fact that LucasArts is capable of more than just Skywalker-centric games is coming out of Star Wars: Battlefront developer Pandemic Studios. That title, about the exploits of highly trained soldiers-for-hire, is Mercenaries.

Thanks to the smashing success of Grand Theft Auto III in 2001, there have since been many games trying to duplicate its free exploration and mission-based structure. However, very few games have actually innovated in the genre; it has largely been about reproducing the same effect rather than improving it. LucasArts and Pandemic hope to change that with Mercenaries. Pandemic Director Cameron Brown explains one of the things that he believes sets Mercenaries apart from other games in its genre: "One of the major things is the sheer interactivity of the environment. Pretty much anything you encounter can be destroyed, stolen, or used somehow. In a lot of games, buildings and other structures are pretty much treated as terrain, but in Mercenaries you can – and sometimes have to – level entire cities. It's cool!"

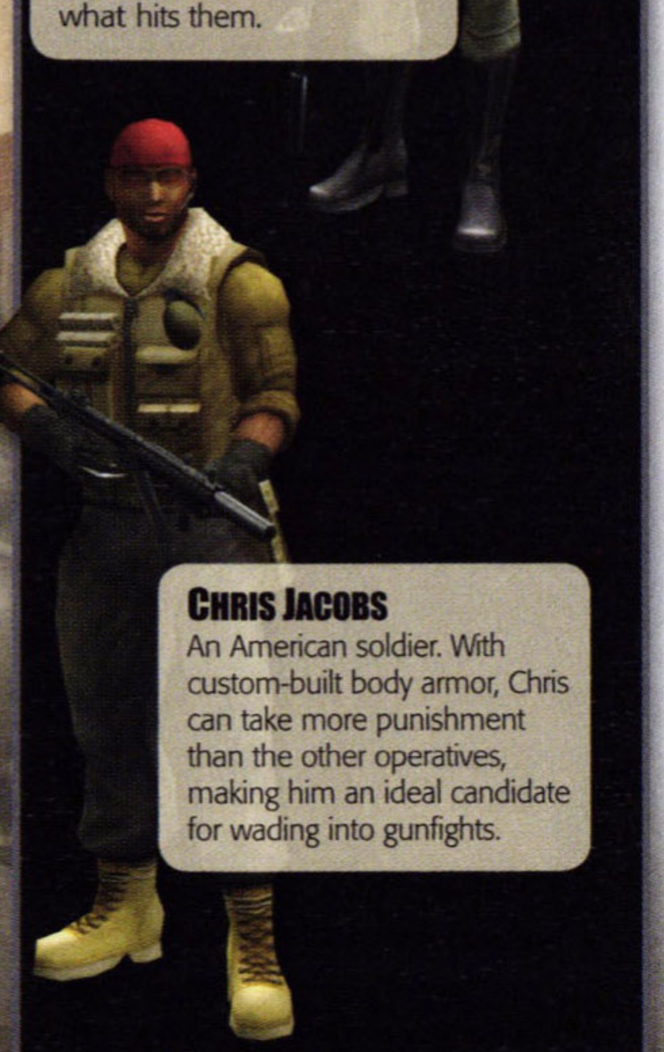
While it borrows familiar concepts from similar titles, it also takes them in different directions by fleshing out areas that have been lacking. By observing the player's relationships with various clients, multiple (and equally viable) solutions to nearly every problem, and an array of weaponry that feels more like Battlefield 1942 than Driv3r, it is clear that Mercenaries is more than a mere clone. Get ready to take on the role of highly qualified warrior in a politically unstable environment, where it is up to you to mollify the hostilities or fan the flames of conflict.

Pick Your Poison

Though you are working with several armies (sometimes simultaneously), the job of the mercenary is ultimately a lonely one. Choose your character wisely, because you won't be able to switch among them between missions. After all, you're in this for yourself. If you need teammates to babysit you, then you're in the wrong profession.

Mattias Nilsson

One crazy Swede. A natural athlete and very agile, Mattias is surly and built like a brick house. If he can't intimidate the enemy into retreat, he'll pound them into submission.



Jennifer Mui

A former member of British Intelligence. Jennifer's strengths are striking from afar with a sniper rifle, and sneaking up close to wipe out opposition before they know what hits them.

Chris Jacobs

An American soldier. With custom-built body armor, Chris can take more punishment than the other operatives, making him an ideal candidate for wading into gunfights.

By its very nature, war involves two or more groups of people who want different things. It is no different with Mercenaries. Once you assume the identity of one of the three available characters, it becomes your job to not only suppress the threat of dozens of key terrorists dubbed the "Deck of 52," but also negotiate the favor of feuding factions in the area. And, try as you might, it's nearly impossible to keep everybody happy.

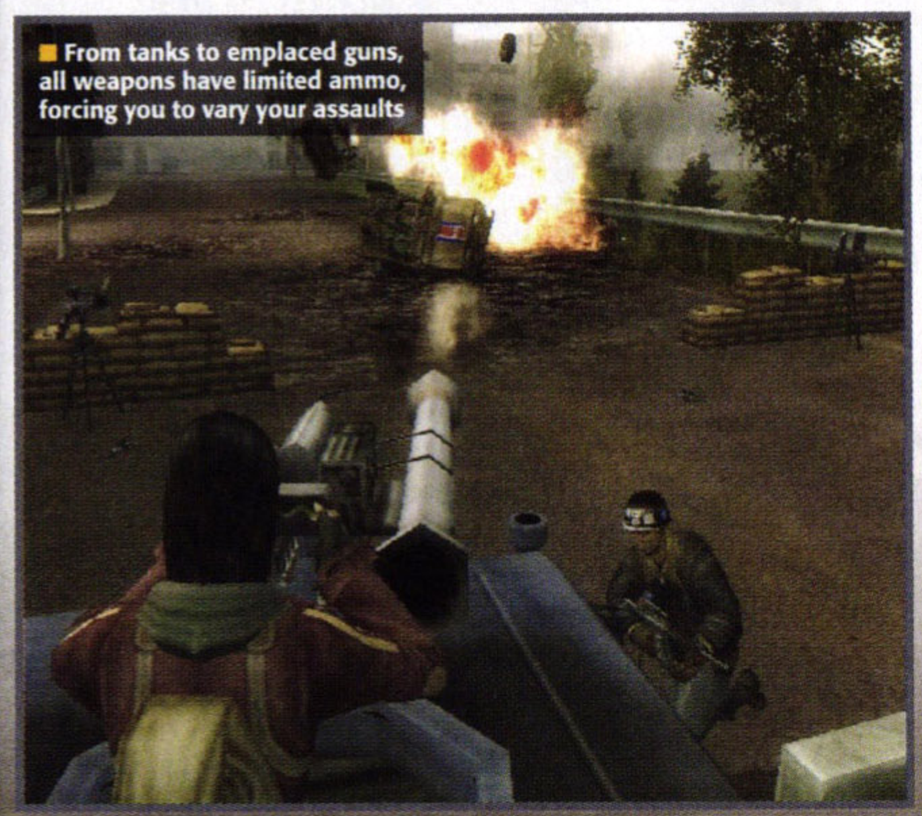
To set the stage, Brown described the game's basic story, which serves as the reason your character is in North Korea to begin with: "The overall goal is to apprehend terrorists all the way up the ladder until you get the Ace of Spades. An international coalition has invaded North Korea in response to a nuclear situation. You work your way through the Deck of 52's high-value targets, collecting bounties all the way, to get to the Ace, a man named General Song, who's staged a violent military coup and is generally an unpleasant gentleman."

Among all of the conflict, there are five active groups in the North Korean Theater of Operations, each one with its own goals and objectives. The Allied Forces are always friendly to you, the North Koreans always hostile, and the Russian Mafia, South Koreans, and Chinese are all vying for power – and their opinions of you vary depending on how often you help them out…or how much you tick them off. "Each faction has a specialty," Brown informs us. "The South Koreans have a lot of stealth tech; the Chinese a lot of armor; the Russians are all about cheap, plentiful munitions; [and] the Allies have all the kick-ass air strikes – and by working with a faction you define the kind of support you'll be using."

The game progresses on a contract-by-contract basis, which are assigned to you personally when you visit a faction's HQ and talk to the head honcho. Sometimes these jobs will just be simple protection or delivery missions, but usually they revolve around nabbing one of the cards in the infamous deck, typically involving some blazing firefights and heavy artillery. Successful completion of these objectives not only makes the world a little bit safer, but it also makes you exorbitant sums of money. After all, as a soldier for hire, your main goal (in addition to causing enough political unrest to ensure your job) is to accumulate vast wealth. Sure, it's great that you are ridding the world of 52 dangerous militants, but what good is having a peaceful world if you don't have the funding to enjoy it?

Implements of War Made Easy

As a mercenary, could there be anything more embarrassing than barging onto the battlefield with last year's model of an assault rifle? Of course not, which is why you need



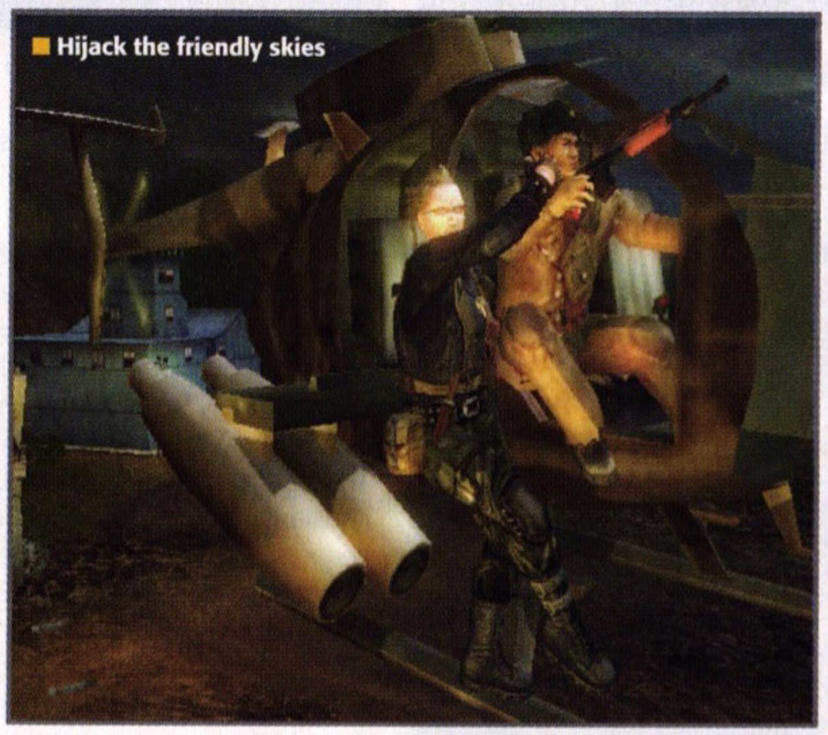
From tanks to emplaced guns, all weapons have limited ammo, forcing you to vary your assaults

"Hold still, I think I stepped in something."

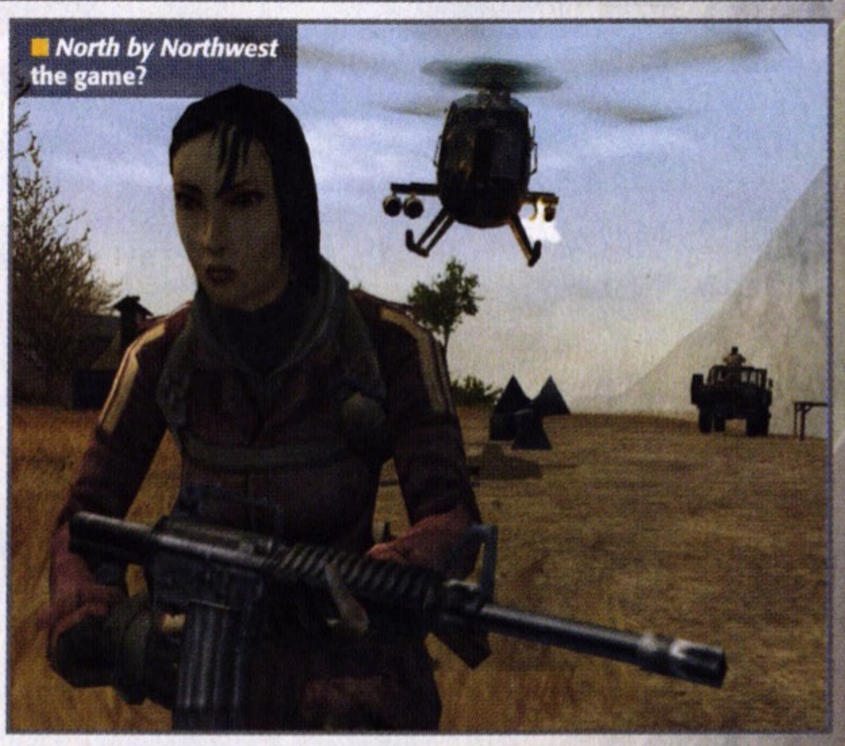
■ Some factions will generously provide you with vehicles and free air strikes if the situation warrants

■ Thanks to awesome particle effects, all of the carnage is incredibly vivid

■ Whether it's a military installment or a civilian building, all structures can feel your wrath



■ Hijack the friendly skies



■ *North by Northwest* the game?

to dish out some cash to keep up with the latest and greatest in carnage-causing contraptions. As usual, you can nab guns off of fallen foes, which is good in a pinch, but if you have the bankroll, you can constantly make sure you have the optimum equipment for any job.

All told, players will have access to 30 weapons and 70 vehicles, all of which are surprisingly similar to their real life counterparts. "They're all based on real life with some tweaks and adjustments where necessary," Brown says. "Let's just say that we have some serious, hardcore military geeks on the team, and they keep us pretty honest in terms of realism. It's not exact – Mercenaries is not a simulator – but you'll definitely recognize [the vehicles and weapons]."

The game features a unique system for getting the gear that you want. At first, you'll just need to take what you can find, but as you progress, you'll be able to use your paychecks (as a freelance warrior, no one covers your expenses) to acquire all sorts of weapons, vehicles, and special attacks to make you a more efficient killer-for-hire. By getting in the Mafia's good graces, you gain access to their underground, black-market website, the Merchant of Menace (www.menace.ru) via your handy-dandy PDA's Wi-Fi connection. From the site you can order supply drops delivered right to your location, ranging from basic health and rifles to weapons only good for destroying small chunks of the planet. The Merchant of Menace has an alarmingly wide (and illegal) selection, offering you other such quality wares as rocket launchers, surface-to-air missiles, and sniper rifles. The Mafia has also got its hands in hot wheels, allowing you to order various tanks, Jeeps, and cargo vans all from the comfort of your bunker.

When the situation arises where you've got someplace to be, but are running too low on cash to utilize your black market connections, you won't need to settle for traipsing around on foot. In addition to "borrowing" any of the empty vehicles you run across, you can also hijack just about anything that moves. In one case, we had angered South Korean troops to the point that they called in a helicopter to cut us down. However, as it flew overhead, we managed to jump up and grab a hold on the low-flying bird, do a gymnast-like flip up to the cockpit, and chuck the stunned pilot to the ground below. After that, the air was ours, with easy controls that made flying the friendly skies as pleasant (and explosion-riddled) as driving a tank on land. Naturally, the Chinese were happy we had cheesed off the South Koreans, the South Koreans were upset that we stole their equipment (especially since we had just completed a contract for them), and no one was quite sure to whom we owed allegiance.

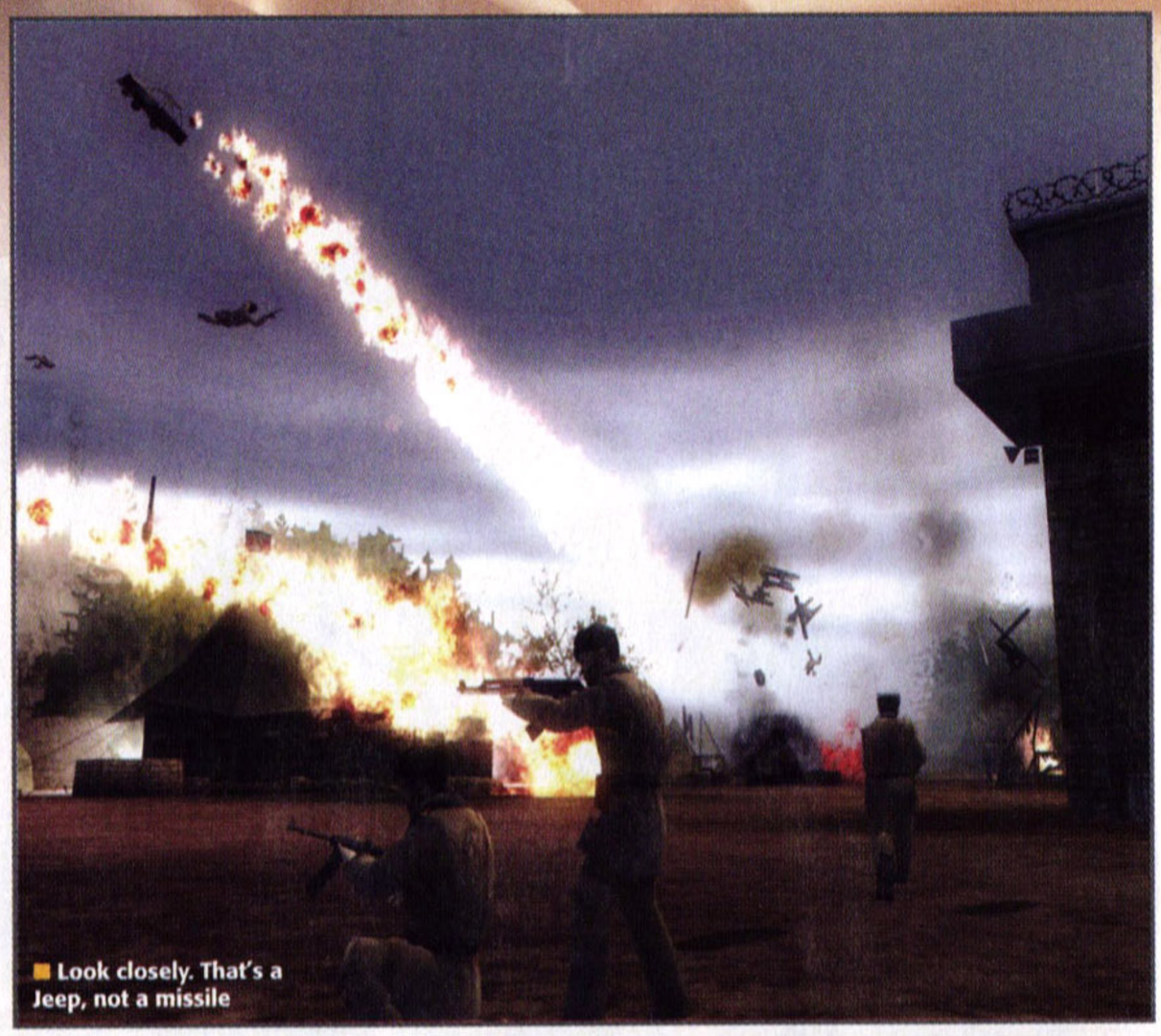
A Strike for All Occasions

While many of the weapons you acquire are staples of the action genre, such as assault rifles and grenades, you also have a set of special tactical strikes that can be accessed for a price. Order up an air strike and reduce an enemy encampment to cinders. Call in a laser-guided missile to hit your targets with unerring precision. Once the world around you is smoking in ruin and you've subdued your target, throw a signal grenade to call for aerial extraction to get the scum out of your sight. Each of these tricks comes at a cost, but you've got to spend money to make money, and the price on some of those bounty heads is pretty sweet.

Flexible Loyalties

Nothing is certain when fealty is up for sale. Though it is in your best interest to follow through on the contracts you have accepted (you do get paid for completing them, after all), there is nothing that prevents you from deciding to play for the other team. This means that if your contract is to help the South Korean troops maintain morale by fighting back the advancing North Korean forces, you can beat down a few NK troops to keep up appearances before turning your

Mattias practices amateur phrenology to make some extra dough



Look closely. That's a Jeep, not a missile

Oops!

One of the key aspects of being a warrior-for-hire is making sure that there are actually people alive who can request your services. Nearly every building in Mercenaries is destructible, which also includes the headquarters for the five major factions. So, if by some freak accident (or an overly itchy trigger finger) you find that you've annihilated all of your employers' strongholds, you'll either have to load a previously saved game or roam the expansive environment creating mayhem without purpose.

recoilless rifle turret on the unsuspecting and weakened SK army. You will lose your contract, as well as pay for your betrayal in both blood and cash, but you're pretty hardy, and another army in need is never far away. Plus, you'll be surprised how much you can sabotage a faction before it categorically refuses to deal with you.

Unlike games like GTA III, in which gangs turn on you as soon as you move against them, the relationships in Mercenaries are more nuanced. Each faction has a bar that displays its current affinity (or lack thereof) for you at any moment, and every time you successfully complete a contract for a group, your relation with it improves. However, whenever you destroy a vehicle, shoot a soldier, or otherwise act like a pain in the ass, your relationship worsens. At first, this doesn't sound too challenging to manage; you could just try to play the consummate soldier who only shoots the bad guys. Unfortunately, who exactly the "bad guys" are is ambiguous, and most of your contracts for the factions necessitate gaining prestige with one at the expense of your trust with another.

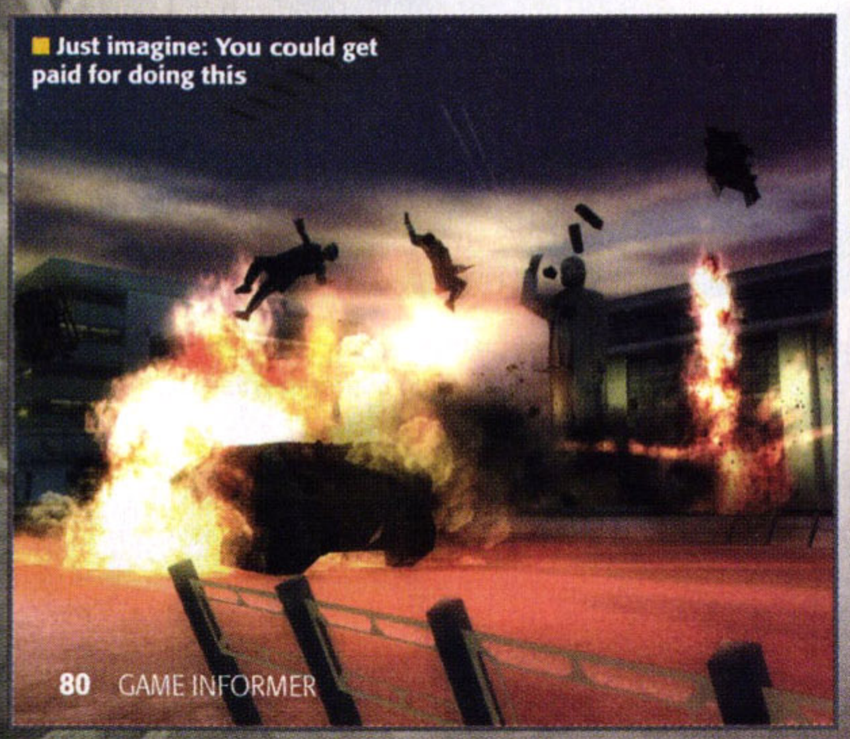
In one example, we accepted a contract from the Chinese involving the destruction of South Korean gun emplacements. When we succeeded, China rewarded us for our effort, but the South Koreans were (with good cause) a bit miffed at our aggression. Thus, as you progress, you are playing a constant game of push and pull, trying to keep as many people satisfied as possible. Eventually, you might just be better off to choose one faction to neglect while building on the others. You'll have to carefully consider which faction you can risk offending, though. For instance, you'd want to think twice before double-crossing the Mafia. Not only is it their garage a source of some bonus challenges (like stealing vehicles and returning them to a chop shop), but the number and type of items available from the Merchant of Menace website is directly dependant on whether or not you're on the mob's good side.

Even with the sliding scale, it doesn't mean that you need to plunge into the negatives before a faction will attack you. You may be able to "accidentally" shoot someone's reinforcement-bearing helicopter out of the sky once or twice, but you'll only get the benefit of the doubt for so long. The troops in the game aren't stupid, and they will meet repeated aggression with appropriate force, regardless of your standing with their leaders. In other words, we hope you enjoyed shooting down that chopper, because won't get another freebie for a while.

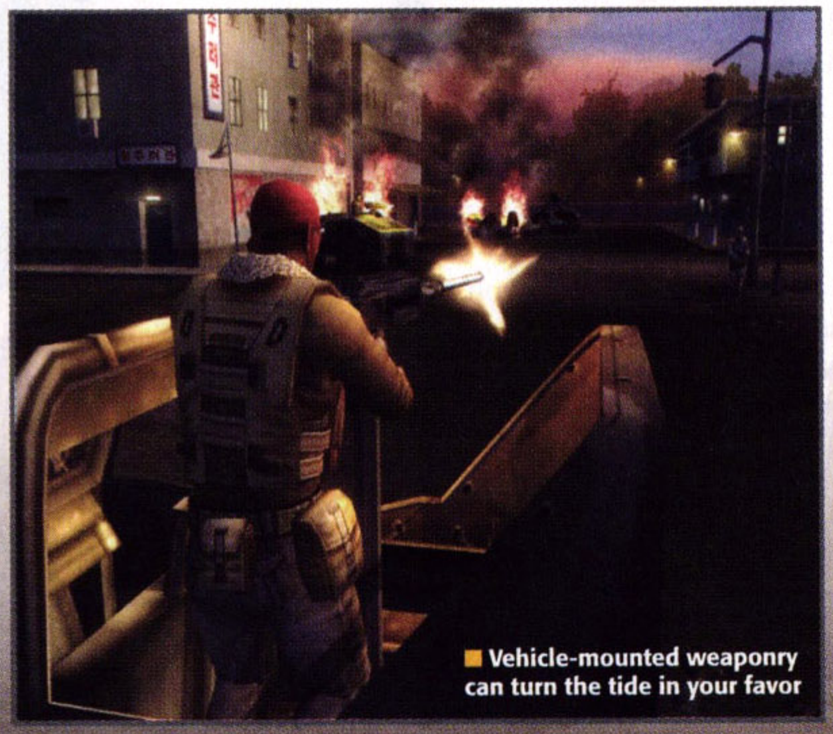
Any Way You Want It

Offering multiple paths to a goal isn't new to gaming. There are many titles that claim to offer several viable solutions to their problems, but there usually ends up being a distinct right way and wrong way. If you're given a choice of walking, swimming, or driving to a destination, and the only difference among them is travel time – that isn't variety. When you can drive to a warehouse in 30 seconds, why would you want to spend five minutes swimming there? Fortunately, Mercenaries provides a great deal of genuine flexibility in the ways you can approach your objectives, as well as reasons to vary your technique.

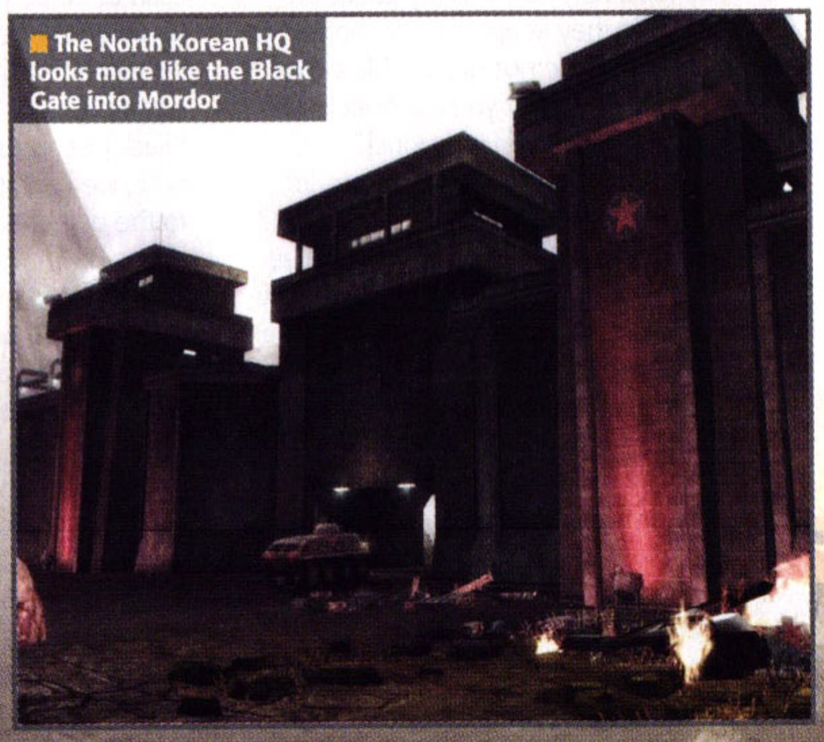
For instance, when you accept a contract to destroy a museum (take that, culture!) doubling as a North Korean communications base, you have multiple options available. You can steal a North Korean Jeep and drive undetected right into the battle zone (providing you don't honk your horn



Just imagine: You could get paid for doing this



Vehicle-mounted weaponry can turn the tide in your favor



The North Korean HQ looks more like the Black Gate into Mordor

d draw attention to yourself) and then rk behind the museum to plant some . Alternately, you can call in for a sniper pply crate (your Mafia hook-ups can help u with this) and pick off all of the opposi- n as they scramble around trying to find e source of the attack. Lastly, if you prefer ng stompy to being stealthy, you can hop o one of the many heavy artillery vehicles mow down your foes – just hope they n't have rocket launchers.

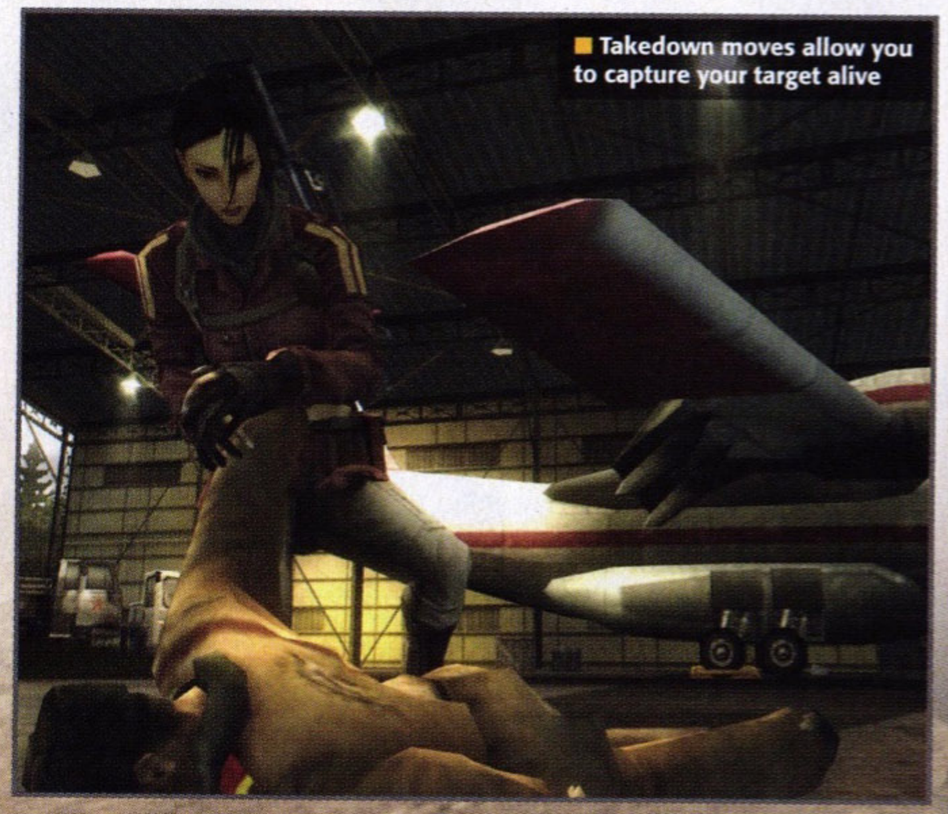
ven as you are apprehending your high- el bounty targets, you will be faced with noice on how to confront them. One ion is to get up close and use a takedown neuver, which involves an animation of ur character beating the daylights out of an emy before slapping on the cuffs. While it is ssible to use this technique against anyone en friendly soldiers and civilians), you'll inly want to bring it out only when dealing n members of the Deck of 52. "You want ake them alive," clarifies Brown. "You get everely reduced bounty for bringing them . er…not alive, so taking them down and sing them up before throwing them into extraction 'copter is good for business. course, the downside is that you have to ly get up close and personal, and that can oad for your health."

World of Whims

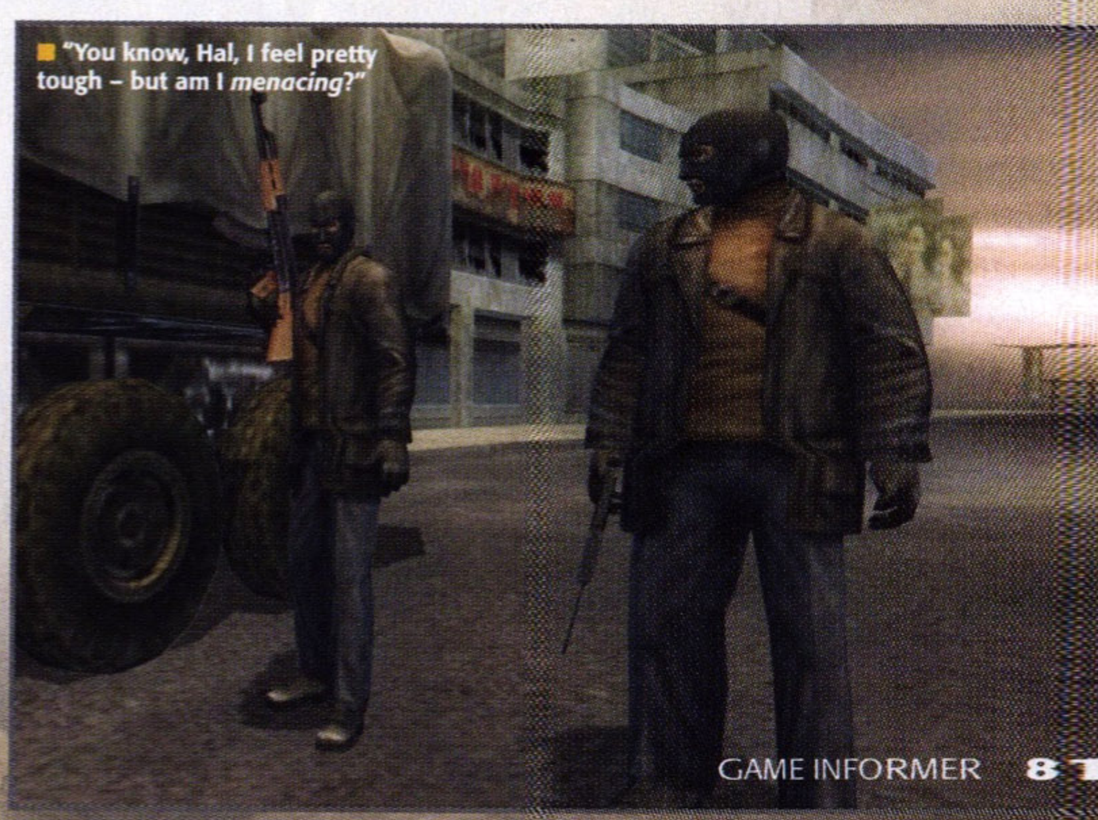
ugh the plot of the game advances by ng on contracts, there is plenty of fun to be had in between jobs, too. After all, the ultimate goal of Mercenaries is for players to enjoy themselves and find their own way. Engaging in this philosophy to the fullest, at one point we were able to hijack an Apache helicopter, fire off anti-ground missiles in the middle of city, and then lower a winch cable to pick up a Jeep loaded with passengers. Now, we could have set them down gently, but it was much more entertaining to repeatedly ram them in into buildings before hurling the poor saps off into a canyon. Was it a contract? Nope. Was it good for any of our faction relations? No way. Was it entertaining as all get-out? Hell yes.

Even with all of freedom that Mercenaries offers, the world needs to be carefully assembled so that everything can fall into place. For instance, you'll notice some amazing explosions and mesmerizing particle effects thanks to the implementation of the Havok physics engine. "It's been so much fun developing with a robust physics engine like Havok," explains Brown. "It's really allowed us to do some crazy stuff. Mind you, I think people get the impression that you just drop something like Havok in and everything magically works. It's not quite like that – it takes talented people to get the best out of any technology, and Mercenaries team is brimming with tale dedicated people."

Underneath all of the gorgeous graph intricate relations, and tenuous alliances its core Mercenaries will deliver pure fu a way that is a refreshing twist on famili territory. As Brown puts it, "We have the Havok physics, and a bunch of vehicles, weapons, and air strikes, all with differe strengths and weaknesses. When you th it all together, you can get very creative your destruction." ■ ■ ■



■ Takedown moves allow you to capture your target alive



■ "You know, Hal, I feel pretty tough – but am I *menacing*?"

CHAMPIONS

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Language
Lyrics
Sexual Themes
Violence

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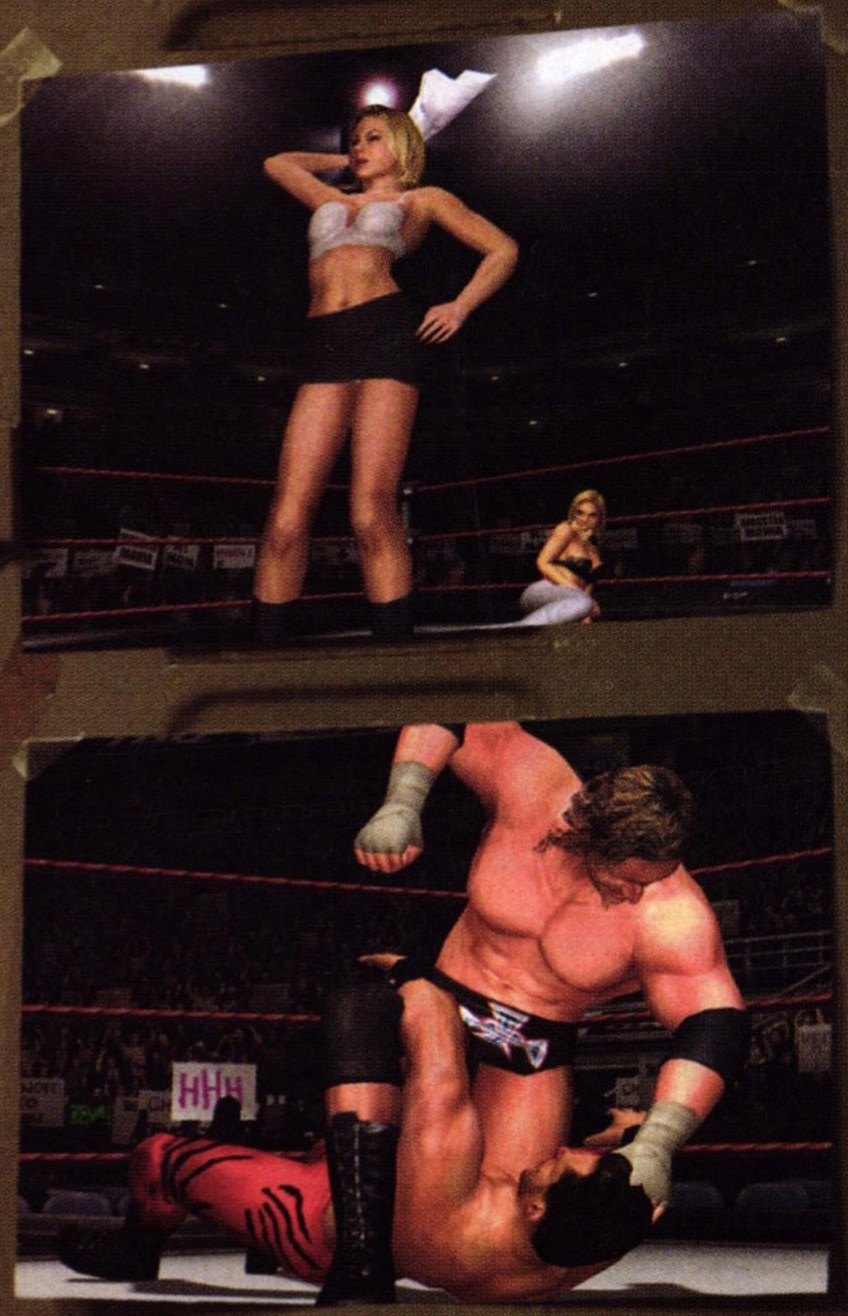

On your way from the street to stardom you'll betray and be betrayed. You'll face humiliation and taste revenge. And that's just the beginning.

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EALA **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER

A LICENSE TO KILL EVERYBODY

The Bond franchise has officially been shaken, stirred, and blown up in an entirely new direction, and just wait until you see the explosive results. In Rogue Agent, you play as an exiled member of MI6. Think Bond, but way meaner. Your tactics were apparently so brutal and unconscionable as to warrant being thrown out of Her Majesty's Secret Service. With your leash taken off, you'll waste no time becoming embroiled in a turf war between archvillains Auric Goldfinger and Dr. No. – and that's where the fun starts.

The new GoldenEye is all about being bad. Real bad. And from what we've seen, that's a really good thing. After losing your natural eye to Dr. No, Goldfinger equips you with a new "golden eye" that outfits you with some cool powers. There's a magnetic polarity shield to block bullets, and the magnetic induction field picks up enemies and sends them flying acrosss the room or through a window. MRI Vision lets you see through walls, and the EM Hack allows for the manipulation of electronics – including enemy weapons. The Rogue Scoring System rewards sinister and villainous acts, like taking a human hostage/shield or flinging enemies to their deaths. You'll spend much of the rest of your time dual wielding weapons like the handheld rail gun, setting off death traps on hapless enemy minions, or sliding down zip lines at your foes.

As you're killing, you'll be accompanied by a fully realized musical score by mixmaster Paul Oakenfold. Senior Producer Chris Plummer filled us in on the creative process between EA's game developers and the world famous DJ. "It's a fully interactive, context sensitive music system that's like Paul spinning in your living room. When the action is hot, it totally kicks in, and when building anticipation it gets quiet, and Paul has created all of it. Every level has its own score which is fully dynamic." Apparently, much of the music was created with developers playing the game in front of Oakenfold while he would mix and create music in response to onscreen action. These mixes were then refined for use in the game. Sweet? Indeed.

The original GoldenEye game is most fondly remembered for its multiplayer mayhem, and this new version should be no different. "We focused completely on two-and four-player split-screen first, before anything else, and then we also have up to eight-player online," Plummer informed us. "Our duel maps are made for one-on-one – they're not huge giant maps. These are maps pulled right out of the movie – where Bond and Trevelyan had a showdown at the end of GoldenEye on the satellite uplink. Or Golden Gate Bridge, from *A View To A Kill*." We got a chance to play this last level and see exactly what Plummer was talking about. The Golden Gate map is one of at least 15 that will show up in the final version, and it's perfect for some quick one-on-one. High atop one of the spires of the world's most well-known bridge, you can frag a buddy to your heart's content, dropping him with a rocket launcher, or sending him tumbling off into space by deploying a pit death trap.

We also played one of the brand new single-player levels, where we got a sneak peek at the invasion of Dr. No's secret base near the end of the game. With the archvillain's minions swarming everywhere, we can happily report that the original GoldenEye's blistering difficulty has happily remained intact in this villainous sequel. Expect to get down with your bad self when Rogue Agent releases to stores in November. ■ ■ ■

EVIL AI

Your enemies in GoldenEye are as lifelike as they are deadly. EA created its own system for describing the approach to enemy intelligence, which we've detailed below:

Emotion: All your foes have behaviors motivated by emotions that you can influence. Intimidate your foes and they will respond with fear.

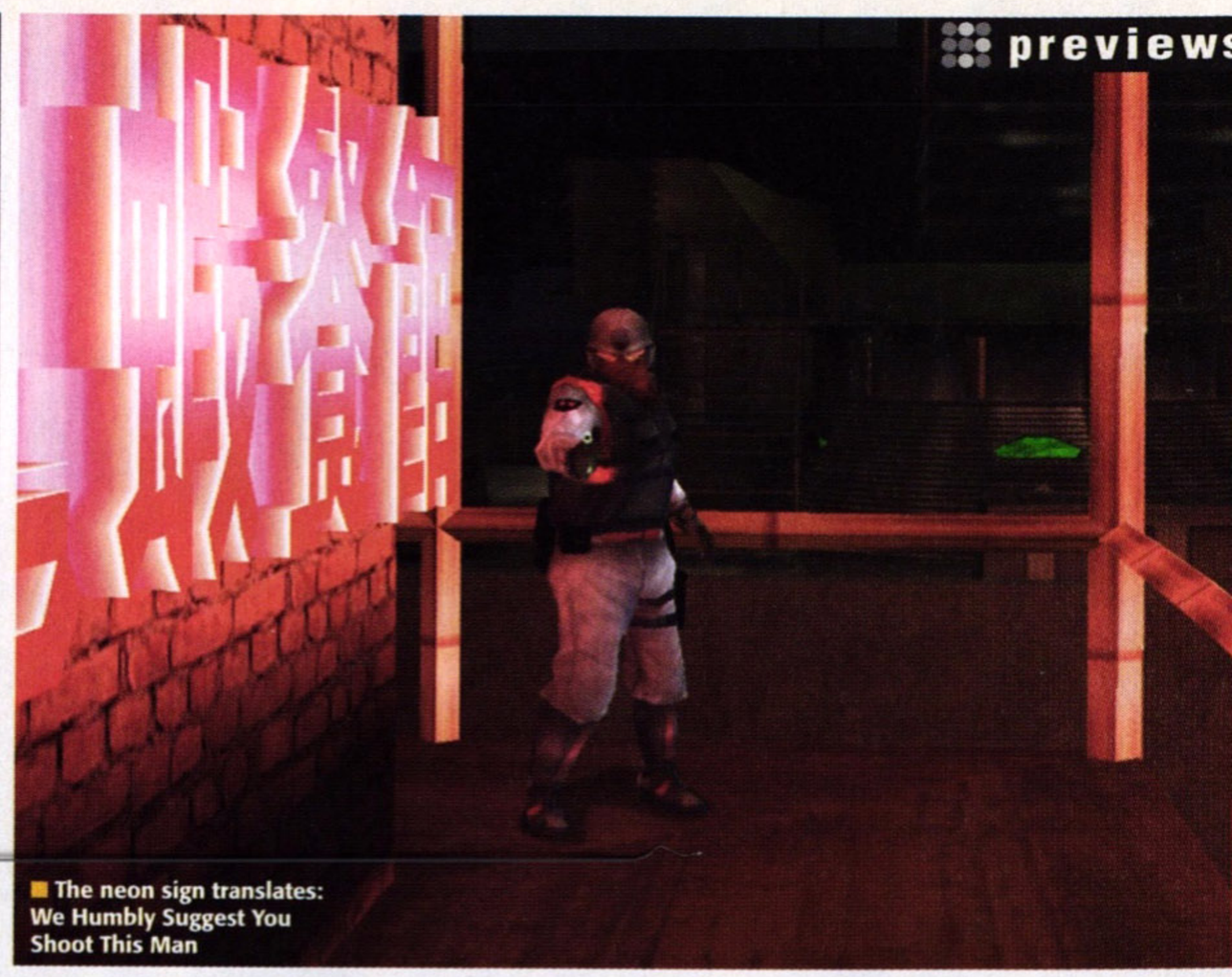
Visceral moments: Many in-level events are unscripted. Instead, the AI will trigger unique actions to match the situation, thereby creating a more involving experience. In some instances, baddies will trigger a trap on you – other times they'll take a hostage.

Intelligence. Fully aware of their environment, they'll aggressively use cover, peek around corners, and shoot while running between safe areas.

Learning. Enemies will observe your actions and respond in kind. They'll watch what weapons you're utilizing, and then move into an area to best react. And if you destroy their cover, they'll realize it and move somewhere else.

Ah, the relaxing Hong Kong nightlife

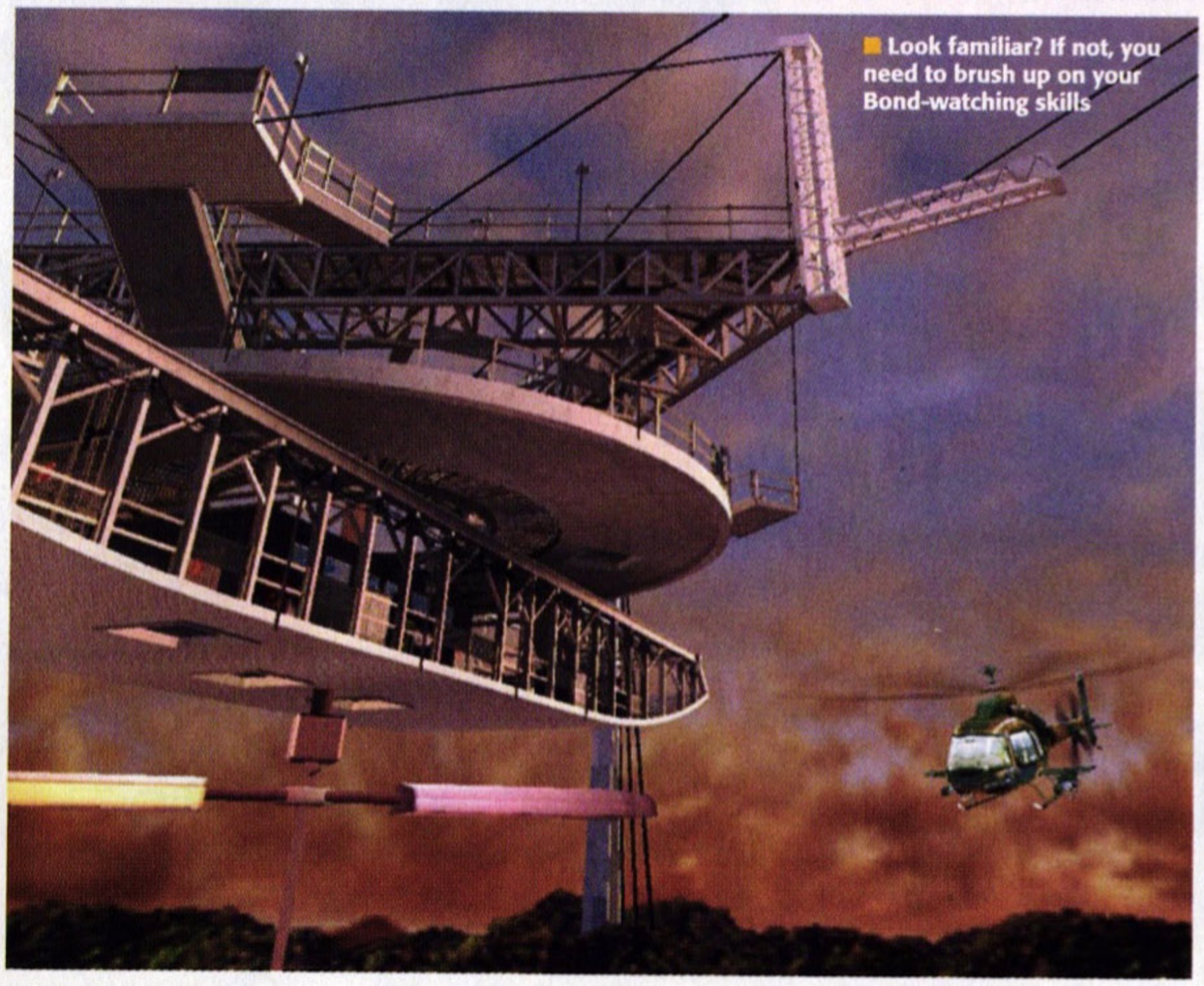
Eat your heart out, 007



The neon sign translates: We Humbly Suggest You Shoot This Man

Sometimes they take the hostage...

...and sometimes you take them



Look familiar? If not, you need to brush up on your Bond-watching skills

Zorin Industries – passing dangerously close to bridges since 1914

There is nothing I can't do
No truth I can't find
No evil I can't stop

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Mild Language
Violence

XBOX

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PlayStation®2

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■ With one well-placed shot, Leon takes out Emperor Palpatine before he can rise to power

■ This character is named Luis. All we know about him is that he's sexy and loves long walks on the beach

■ "I seriously doubt we'll get our damage deposit back now."

GAMECUBE

Resident Evil 4

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** PRODUCTION STUDIO 4 **> RELEASE** JANUARY 11

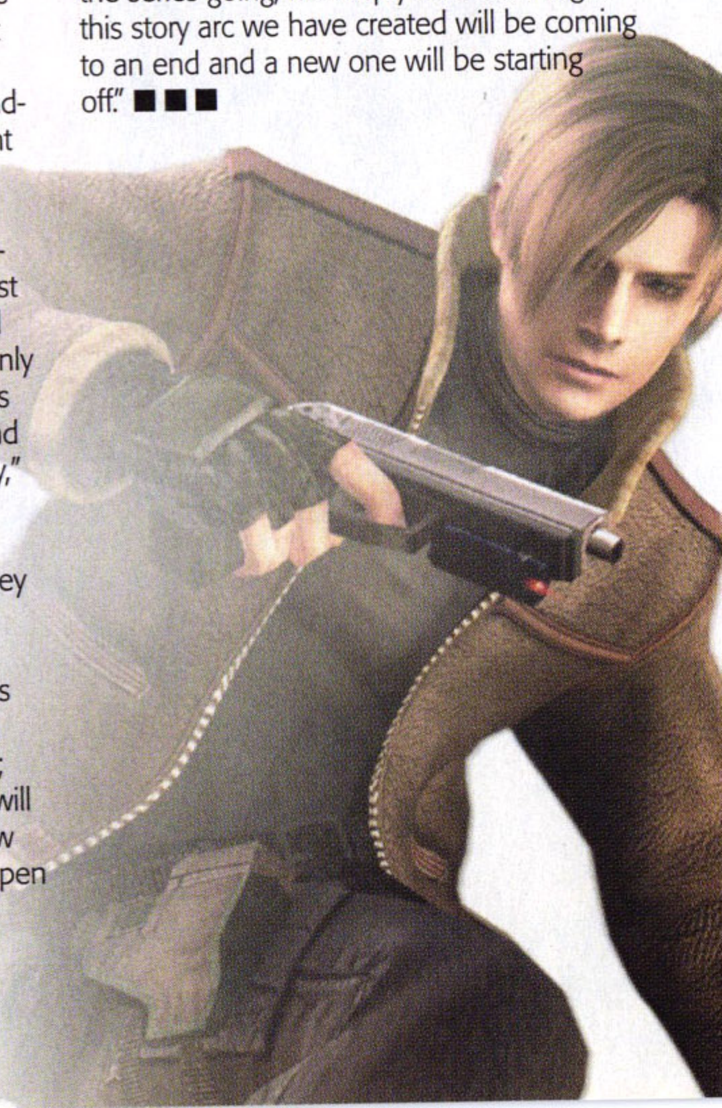
THE KING OF THE DEAD SPEAKS

Capcom's Resident Evil 4 is undoubtedly one of the hottest titles coming to the GameCube in the next few months. While the game is set to hit in January, Capcom has maintained an air of mystery around the title, which has led to much speculation about we can expect to see in the latest chapter of the esteemed horror franchise. Fortunately, Resident Evil 4's Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi was good enough to speak with us about what he considers a fresh start for the series, and set the record straight on several issues.

One point Kobayashi made sure to drive home is the emphasis this entry places on action versus problem solving. While puzzles – a Resident Evil standard – will still be present, they will take on a noticeably different tack. "There's more action in this one for sure," says Kobayashi. "You will see fewer puzzles in this game than you have in other RE games, but that is because they have been replaced by 'action puzzles,' which will require more hand-eye coordination and timing than just straight thinking." How these puzzles fit into the plot is still unknown, as Kobayashi is reluctant to share any more information on the still mysterious plot. We know that much of the quest requires Leon to protect a young girl named Ashley, but Kobayashi revealed that she is only with you for about half the game. "Leon gets sloppy and will get captured at one point and have to escape before he can rescue Ashley," he says. He also revealed that there will be other playable characters, but declined to comment on who they would be or how they figured into the plot.

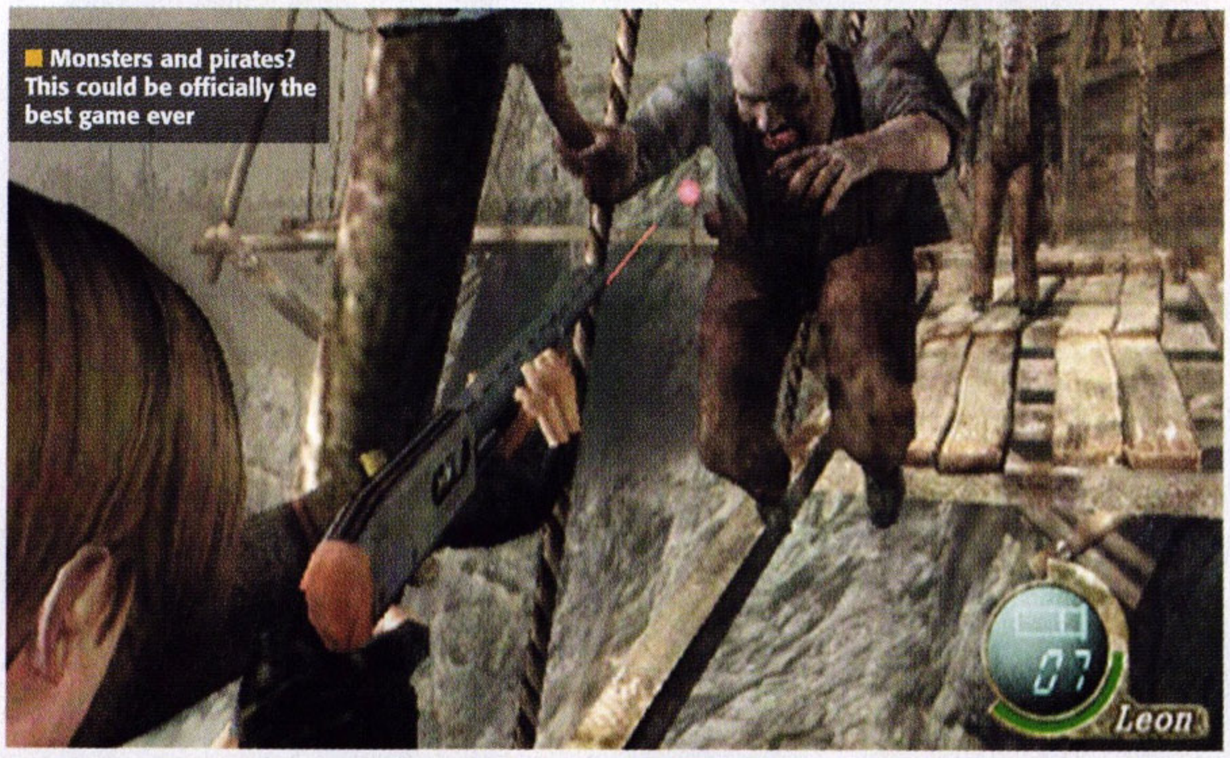
Whatever the plot turns out to be (which, judging by the new screens released, seems to involve a strange type of cult), Kobayashi assured us that it would scare our pants off; like all Resident Evil games, the fourth title will be quite scary, but this one will create a new kind of fear. Unlike the previous titles, the open level design won't stress the close-quarters horror the series is known for. "You can still create fear without being claustrophobic," says Kobayashi. "With the large amount of enemies, and the fact that they will try to sneak around behind you and throw a sickle in your back, you can be sure that the tension is still all there. However, the later Castle levels in the game are pretty enclosed, so basically you are getting the best of both worlds."

The Resident Evil series, while certainly beloved, isn't exactly known for making huge leaps from one entry to the next. Resident Evil 4 represents the biggest evolution the series has yet undertaken, and we have no doubt that its departure from the formula will please both fans and neophytes. Kobayashi even hinted that fans should prepare for change to become the rule for the series rather than the exception. When asked where he saw the series going, he simply said "I'd imagine this story arc we have created will be coming to an end and a new one will be starting off." ■■■



Leon takes a time out from fighting evil to throw firecrackers at frogs

"Hey guys, who wants to go visit Frankenstein?"



Monsters and pirates? This could be officially the best game ever

This guy is affectionately known as "El Gigante," and there will be more than one of these enemies in the game

This creepy cult will soon be creepy chunklets

"By placing this webcam, I should be able to find out who's been stealing my Teddy Grahams."

"This is for that awful Gregorian Monks album!"

Leon takes care of Racoon City's homeless problem

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Blood
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XBOX

Dead or Alive Ultimate

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** TECMO **> DEVELOPER** TECMO/TEAM NINJA
> RELEASE OCTOBER 15

HOT ONLINE CATFIGHTING!

Did you know that if you go online, you can meet some really hot girls? Lots of them aren't even wearing many clothes. We're talking about Dead or Alive Ultimate, the new online fighting game from Team Ninja, of course. What did you think we were talking about?

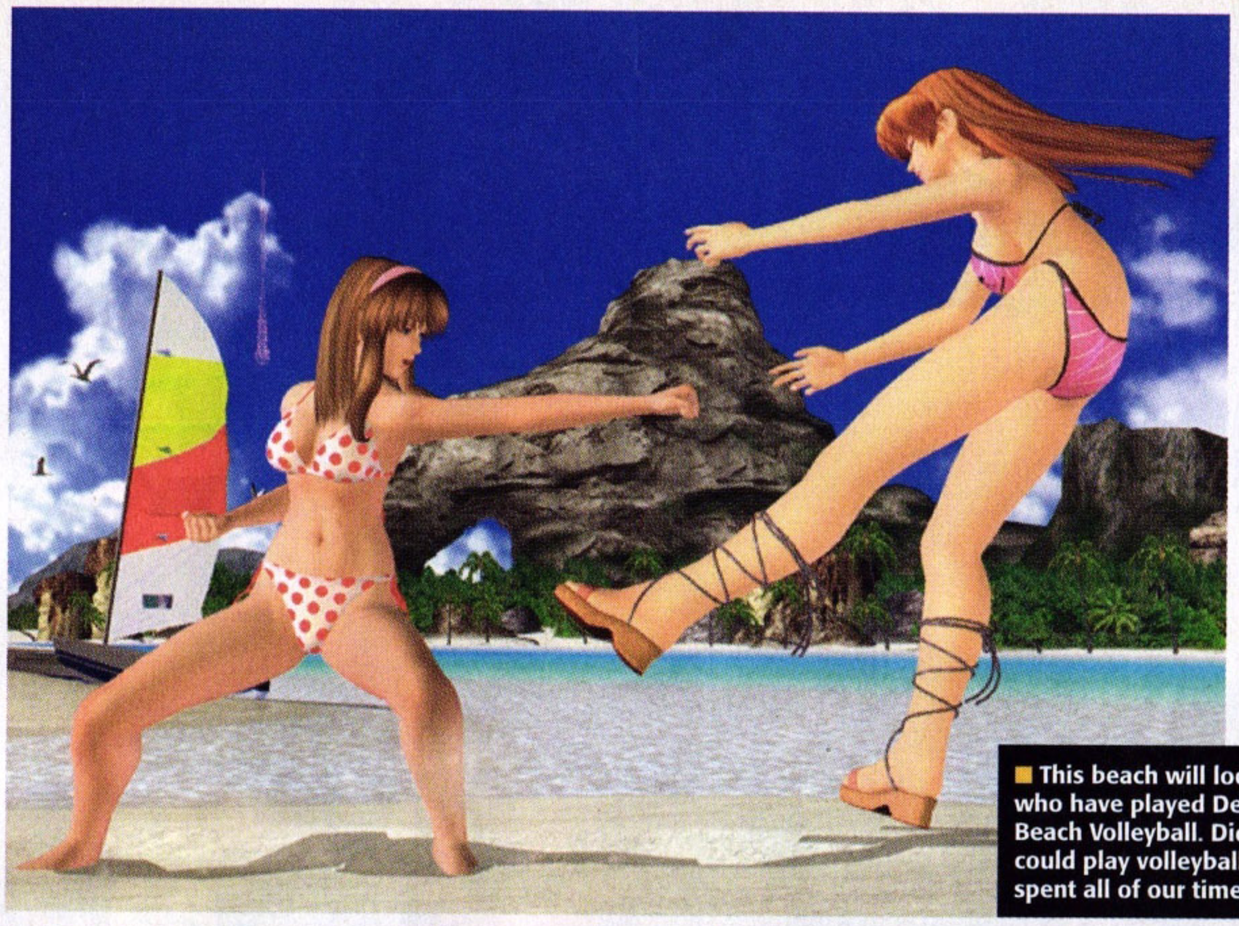
The Dead or Alive series has always been known for its great-looking female characters, and Dead or Alive Ultimate will showcase just how far the series has come. It's a deluxe two-disc set, the first of which is an exact port of the original Dead or Alive with added online play. The second disc features a tricked-out port of Dead or Alive 2, which has been rebuilt with the graphics technology from Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball and Ninja Gaiden. If you thought Dead or Alive 3 looked good, wait until you see DOA Ultimate in action. Characters are even more lifelike and move more fluidly; which means, of course, that the girls are even hotter. You'll even be able to dress them in some of the outfits from DOA Beach Volleyball (you dirty dog!) – every character has a huge collection of costumes, some as many as 20.

Of course, dressing up your character in sexy outfits isn't the main draw of this collection (although it is a nice bonus). The main attraction is the online play. We've had a chance to take it for a spin on Xbox Live, and will attest that it runs silky smooth, with nary a framerate hiccup to be seen and no discernable lag. Online play features several different game types, including one-on-one, team battle, survival, kumite, loser stays, and tournament. Thanks to the "virtual arcade" technology used for online play, you can set up game rooms for up to eight players and define your rule set. One option allows players to vote on which type of game to play, and those not actively playing can watch a match and talk smack about the players with full voicechat support.

There are several other online goodies as well, including a quirky naming system that allows you to add fun things like bunnies and pandas to your name, US/Japanese compatibility, and more. These bells and whistles are nice, but they wouldn't make up for a sub-par fighting engine. Fortunately, DOA Ultimate plays as well as the previous entries, and features a tweaked countering system for an extra layer of strategy. The game is just as sweet offline for those poor souls living without Xbox Live. Story mode is back and has been fleshed out with new cutscenes that explain the origins and motivations of some of the characters more fully. DOA's story mode has always been fun, but the real draw of this release is the online play. Judging by what we've seen so far, we have no doubt that this fully stacked collection will be the hottest thing online since that celebrity video you heard so much about. ■■■

IS PREORDER IN ORDER?

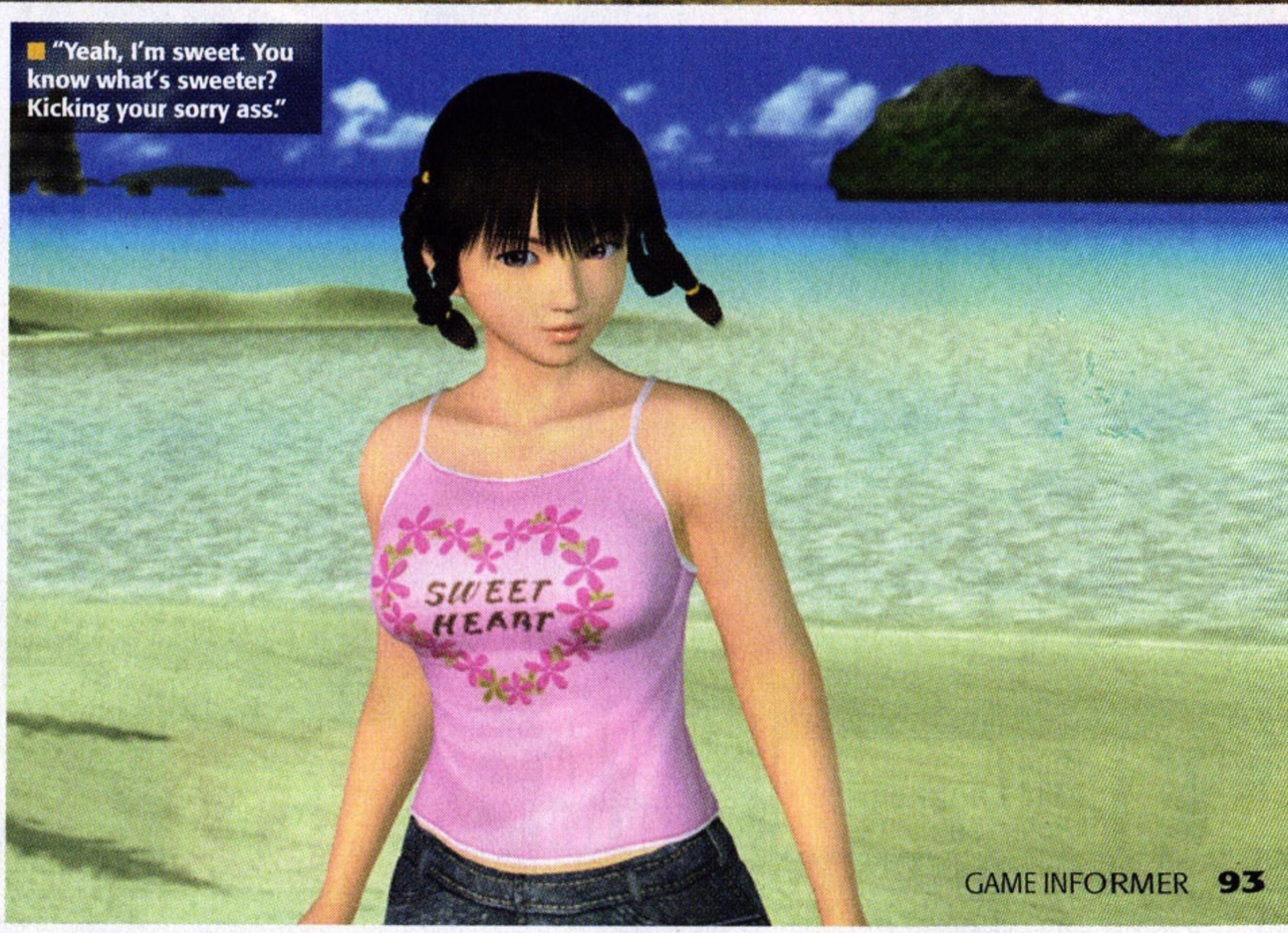
Preorder bonuses for big games are more and more common these days, and gamers in Japan have been receiving a pretty nice gift for reserving this one. The "Digital Venus" disc is a CD-ROM that includes DOA wallpapers, icons, and sound clips for your PC. It's fairly likely that the Digital Venus disc will make it stateside. However, there's little chance that we'll see the DOA Ultimate Xbox bundle, a special blue console that comes with a life-size Kasumi "love pillow." Yikes.



■ This beach will look familiar to those who have played Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball. Did you know you could play volleyball in that game? We spent all of our time tanning

■ "This is what you get for wearing the same outfit as me, skank!"

■ Ten new levels are included, along with ten classic stages



■ "Yeah, I'm sweet. You know what's sweeter? Kicking your sorry ass."

VENGEANCE REIGNS FROM ABOVE.

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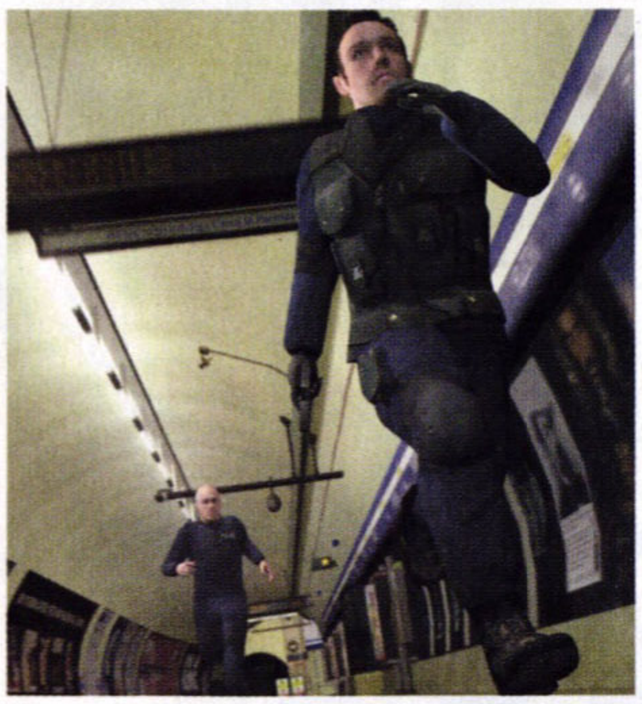
PLAYSTATION 2

The Getaway: Black Monday

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** TEAM SOHO **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY

ENGLAND SWINGS

Hitting during the first wave of GTA III mania, The Getaway's rough-hewn English gangland saga was a massive sales hit. Despite this success, critical reception was mixed, with some praising (Game Informer among them) its hard-boiled storytelling and ambitious structure, while others decried its often erratic control.



In order to make its upcoming sequel, The Getaway: Black Monday, a title that appeals to both camps, Team Soho has been hard at work on improving the nuts-and-bolts issues while at the same time continuing to innovate in the realm of video game storytelling. If these efforts are successful, Black Monday could indeed be a new benchmark in cinematic game development. If not, well, the path that leads to Driv3r is a hard road.

Black Monday begins two years after the conclusion of The Getaway, and focuses on a trio of all-new characters. Central to the events is Ben Mitchell, a police officer who is back on the force after a long suspension. Sadly, his reemergence is going to be marked by a series of shocking and dramatic events, most of which are related to the plight of another main character, amateur boxer and hoodlum Eddie O'Conner. O'Conner has taken part in a bank robbery that went tragically awry, and is now fighting for his life and for revenge on those who did him wrong. Luckily, Eddie will have the help of a beautiful hacker and sometimes criminal named Sam. Each of these three characters will be playable during your adventure, and you'll often make choices that influence the outcome of the story, as Team Soho has revealed that there are multiple endings to this crime saga.

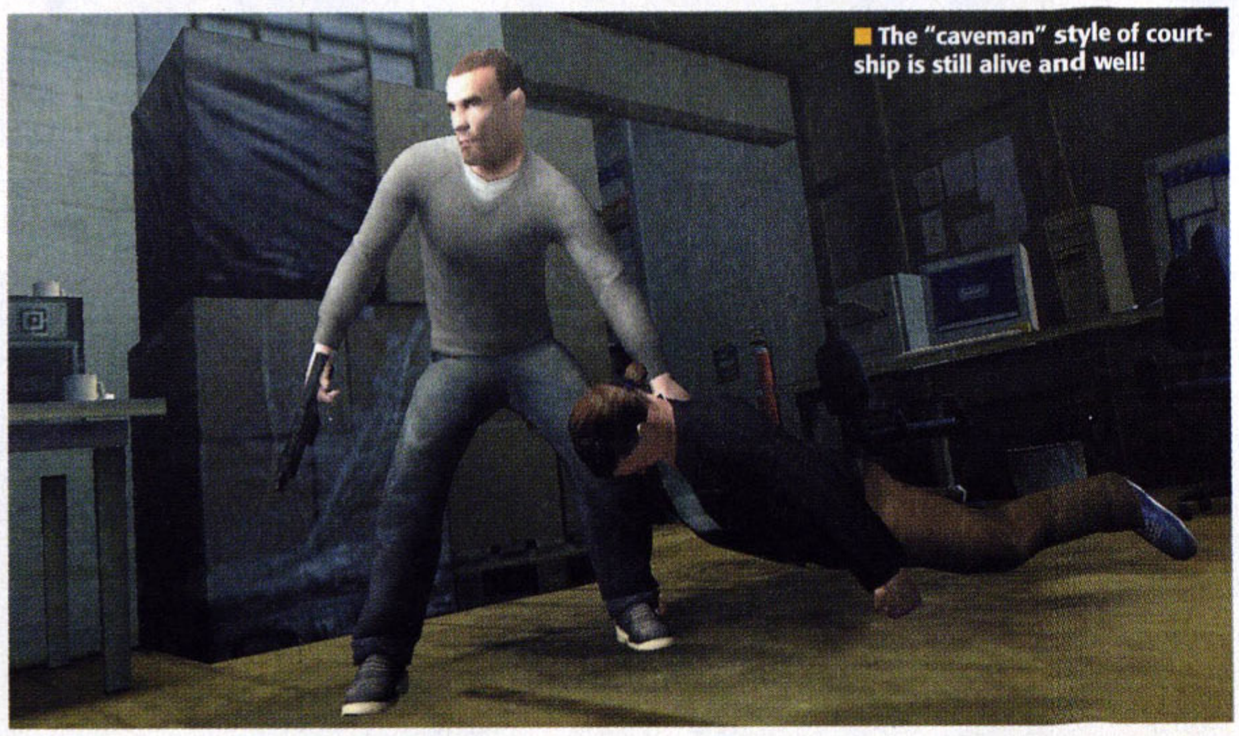
The Getaway won praise for its storytelling, and Team Soho has even more ambitious plans for Black Monday. Much like Quentin Tarantino's epochal *Pulp Fiction*, the tale will be told in a fractured manner, with events unfolding in a nonlinear fashion, at different times and from the perspective of different characters. Of course, the conclusion you end up with will finally unveil what Team Soho promises will be a stunning finale that ties all the stray threads together in a shocking ending.

Just as much effort is going in to the gameplay and environmental side of the project. Although the game still takes place in roughly the same area of London, the city has been modified to incorporate much more depth. You can now traverse rooftops or head into the grim sewers. Underground will also hold a new mode of transport: a fully operational subway system (or "tube" as they say in the U.K.). On the streets, you'll notice a whole new level of graphical detail, including many shortcuts, some of which are so narrow you'll only be able to use them on motorcycles, which have been added to the game's stable of vehicle types.

Although it remains to be seen whether the original's sometimes sticky camera has been righted, targeting and hand-to-hand combat has been greatly improved. You can now grapple an enemy, then administer head butts, knees, punches, kicks, throws, and even a few cool finishing moves. The targeting also seems to be heading in the right direction, and now allows you to strafe more easily if you don't have a ready target. The already excellent driving engine has been revamped as well, actually making the physics less realistic to better implement some of the team's more outrageous new vehicle sequences.

Let's keep our fingers crossed that Team Soho's grand designs come to reality, because we honestly can't get enough of this franchise's profane Cockney jive and tough-guy theatrics. ■■■

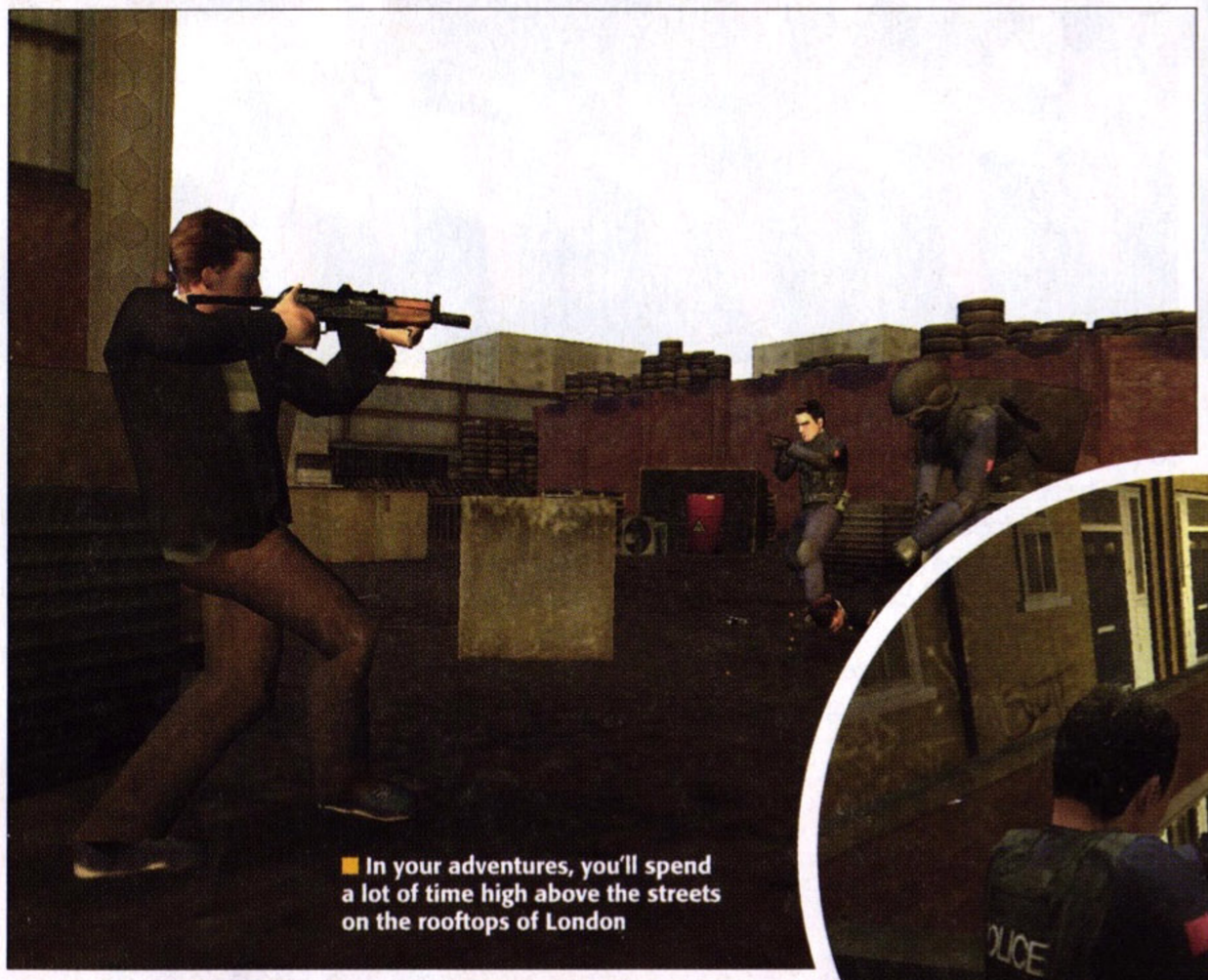
■ **Motorcycles have been added to the already potent driving portion of The Getaway**



■ **The "caveman" style of courtship is still alive and well!**

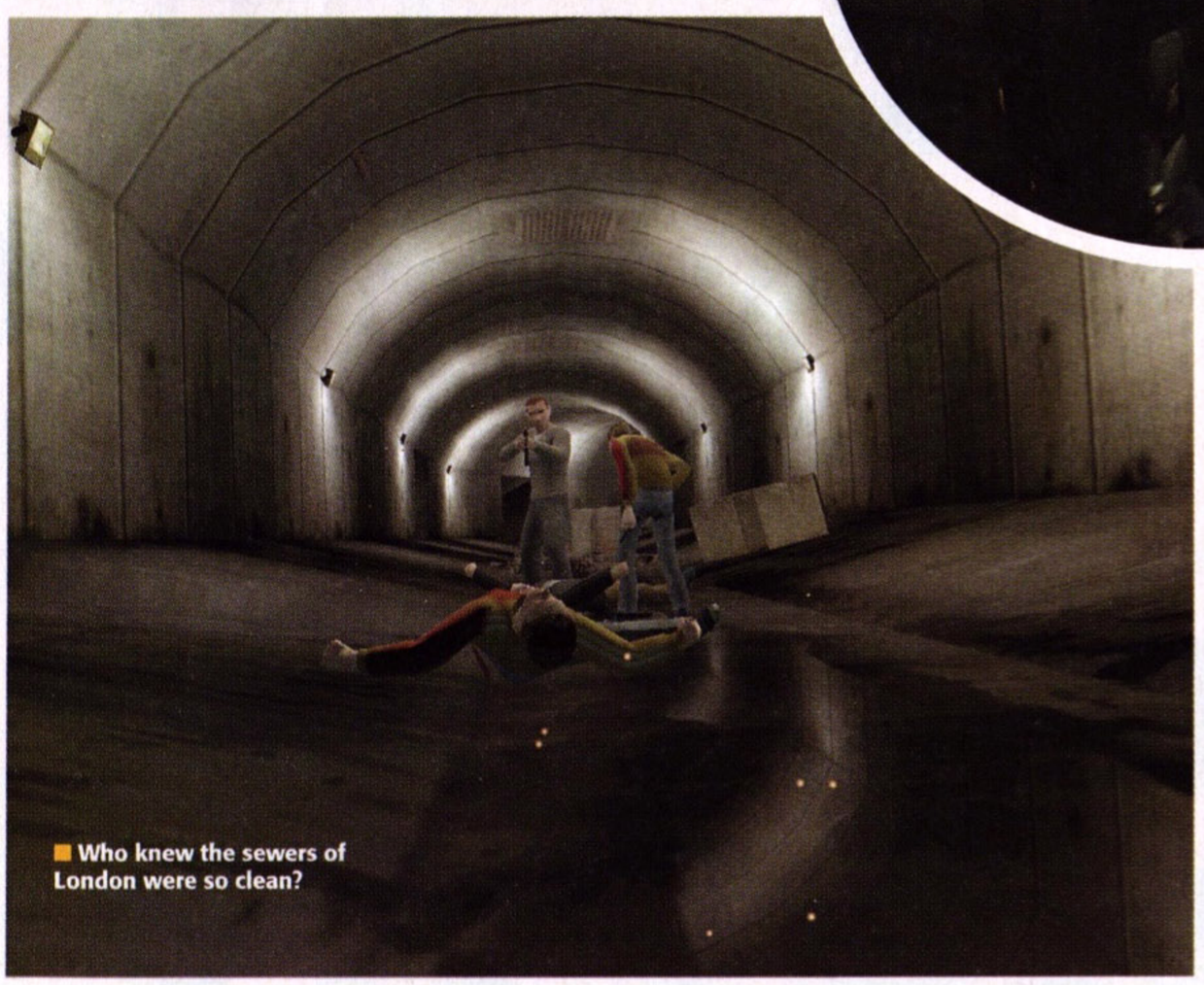
■ Computer hacker Sam is one of three playable characters, and relies on brains more than brawn

■ Expect bloody gunfights to be the order of the day

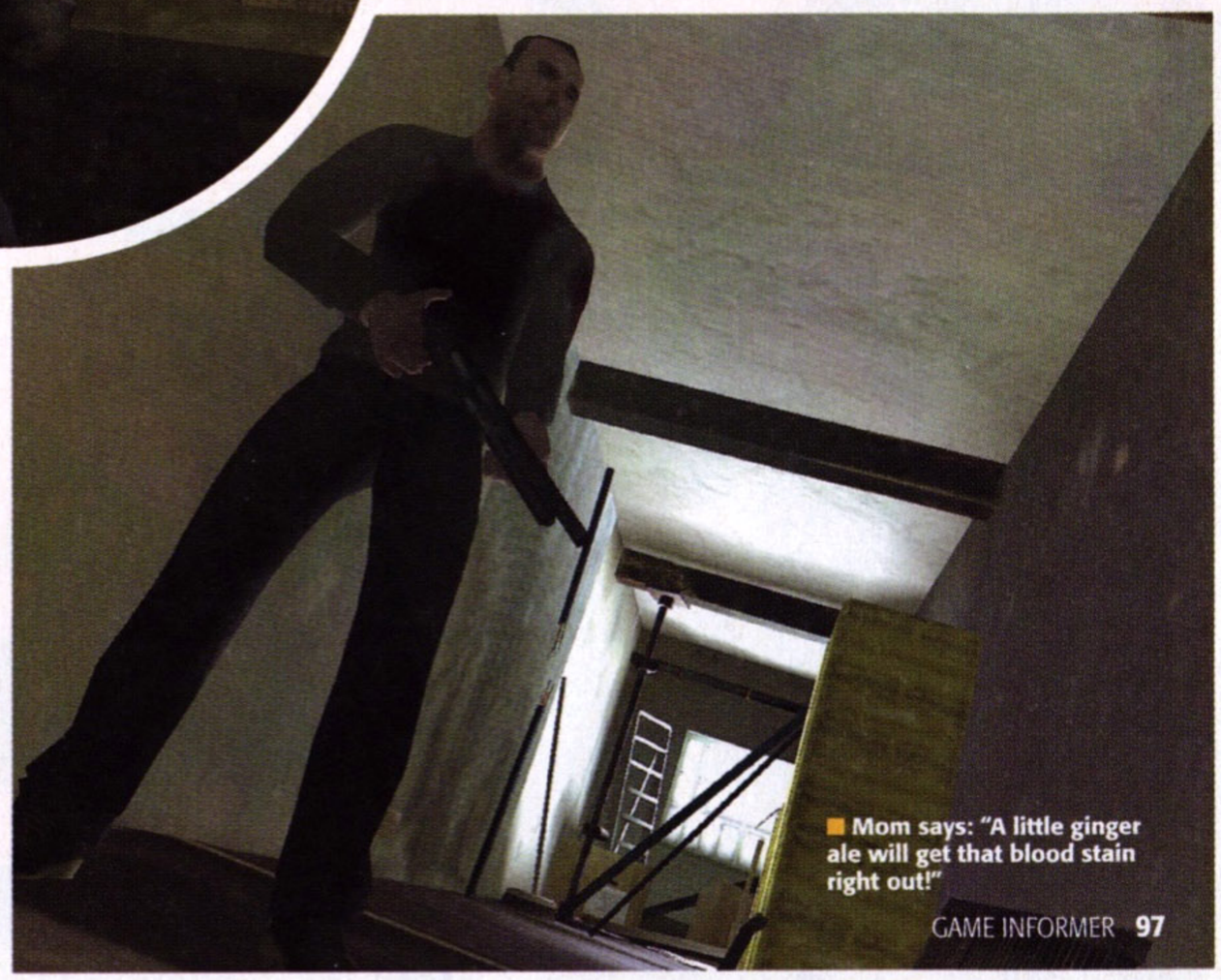


■ In your adventures, you'll spend a lot of time high above the streets on the rooftops of London

■ On some missions, you'll work with an AI-controlled squad



■ Who knew the sewers of London were so clean?



■ Mom says: "A little ginger ale will get that blood stain right out!"

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PLAYSTATION 2

Kessen III

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY **> PUBLISHER** KOEI **> DEVELOPER** KOEI
> RELEASE JANUARY

NOBUNAGA'S AMBITION

■ Kessen III is historically based, but it ditches the kimonos and goes for the jugular

■ Kessen's Cluster engine has been reworked for even more spectacular results

Koei has been travelling a long road in search of a series that can rival its blockbuster Dynasty Warriors franchise. It's tried an anime-inspired title (Mystic Heroes) similar to Dynasty Warriors. It's tried to give the DW series an RPG bent (Crimson Sea), but that also failed to distinguish itself. Koei even did a kick-ass music game (Gitaroo Man) that has left fans screaming for more – but it didn't sell enough to garner a sequel. By the way Koei, if you're listening, we promise Adam's first child and second finger for another Gitaroo Man (What?! No deal? What the hell are we supposed to do with this bloody finger, then?!).

Anyway, the company is bringing back an old favorite – Kessen – to try and rouse gamers. Ironically, the last Kessen worked well because it attempted to sprinkle in some strategy to bolster its Dynasty Warriors-esque hack 'n slash element which has since grown stale. Hopefully Kessen III will more fully realize this promise, and give gamers a meaty mix of shrewd decisions and decisive sword strokes.

The first Kessen introduced the Cluster Engine, which Koei used to great effect not only in presenting large numbers of units onscreen, but to imbue them with AI to help determine the outcomes of its large scale battles. For Kessen III, the Cluster Engine has been revamped to fully render everything in 3D, and also give players real-time control over troops' movements and actions. This should help bridge the gap between being a commander and a battlefield warrior by let-

■ More RPG-esque elements will help you shape both officers (above) and soldiers (below)

■ Hopefully castle sieges (below) will be more interactive than in the last Kessen

ting you make decisions on the fly, merging the planning and combat stages of the game into one fluid segment. This new Cluster Engine also lets allied units join your forces to unleash combo attacks. Unfortunately for fans of Kessen II's breathtaking spells, it's unclear whether that Chinese magic will return in this new title due to this game's Japanese history storyline.

The game takes place in Japan's warring states period, setting the stage for the infamous Oda Nobunaga to rise to power in the squabbling and shifting alliances of the land (Yes, that's you!). In the course of this conquest, you'll face real life historical figures such as Kenshin Uesugi and the cavalry units of Shingen Takeda. Although Nobunaga's inclusion is old hat to fans of the series, Koei is trying to answer some of fans' criticisms from the last Kessen. This title contains a non-linear story path, and it also adds more RPG elements – including growth for both your officers and troops. Hopefully this means you'll be able to shape your forces more to your liking than in the previous games.

Is this the step forward for Koei that we've been looking for? Seeing that the company has a chance to spectacularly marry action with strategy, we think that the answer lies in just how many strategy and RPG elements Kessen III contains (and how well they are implemented) to augment its familiar Dynasty Warriors fighting formula. The results could even outmuscle Koei's most famous franchise in the end. ■■■

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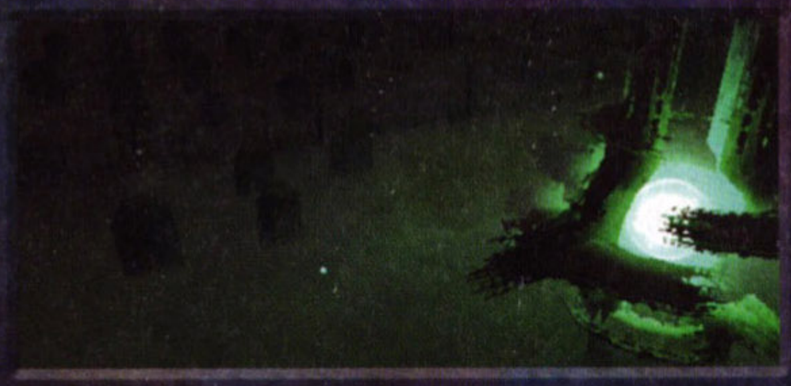

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PlayStation.2

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Mild Language
Violence
Game Experience May Change During Online Play

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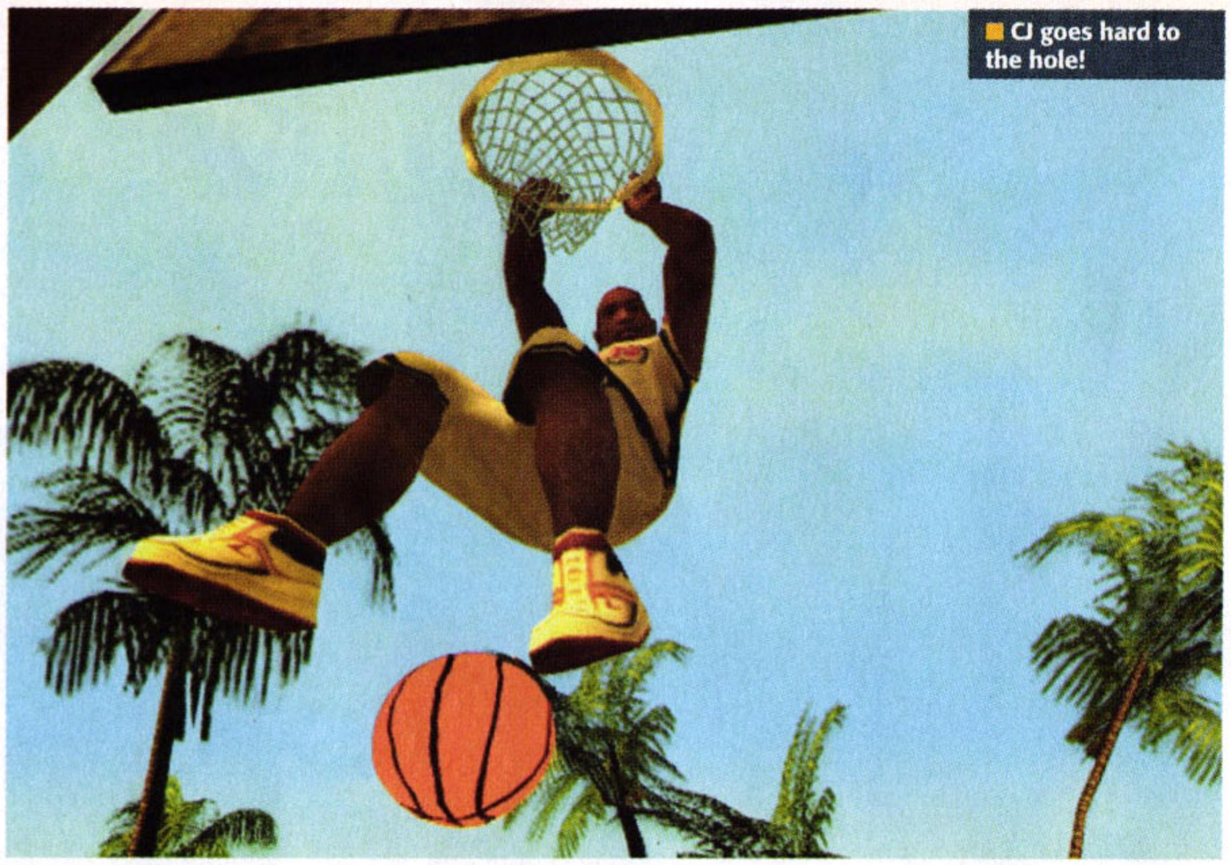
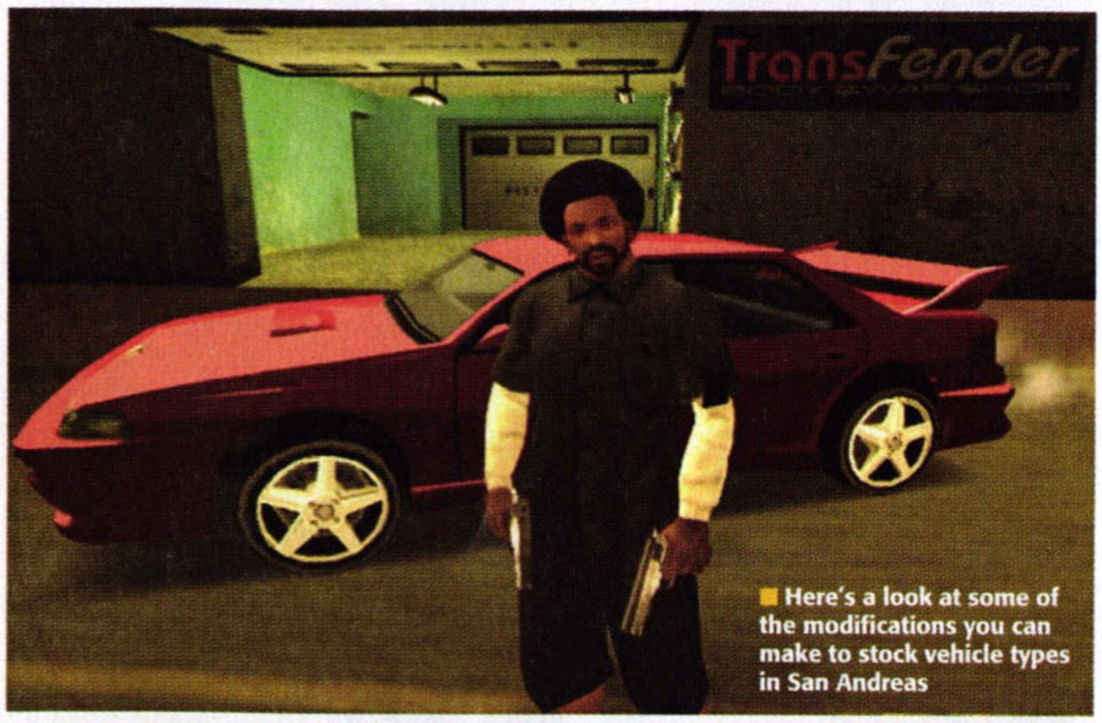
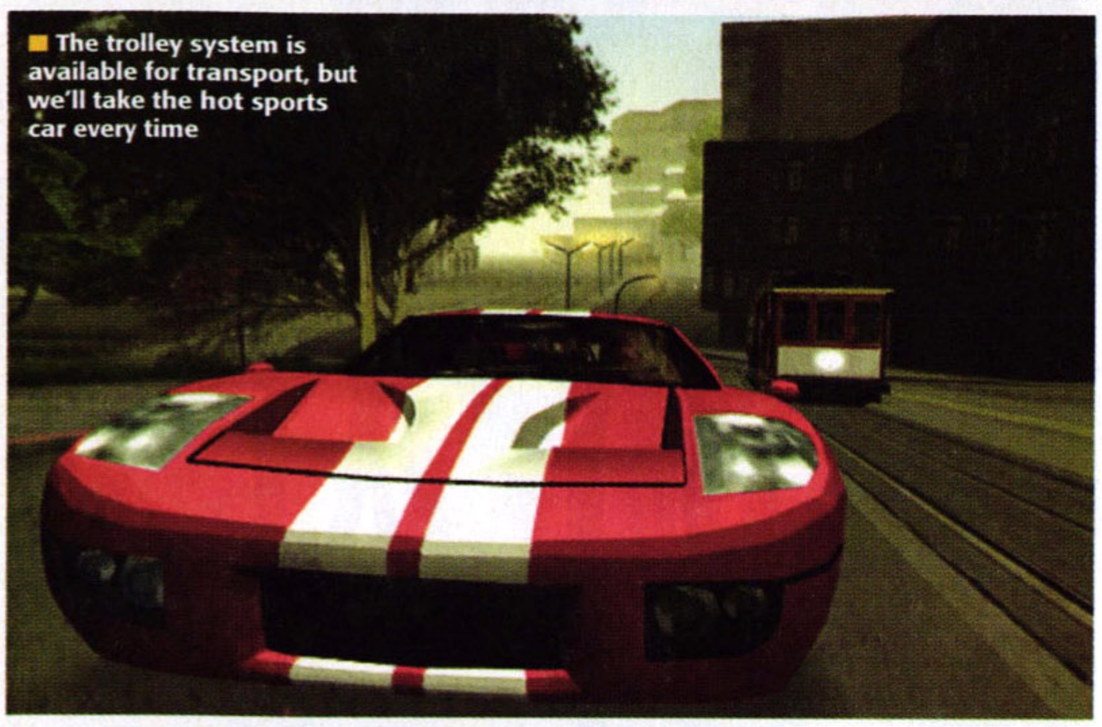


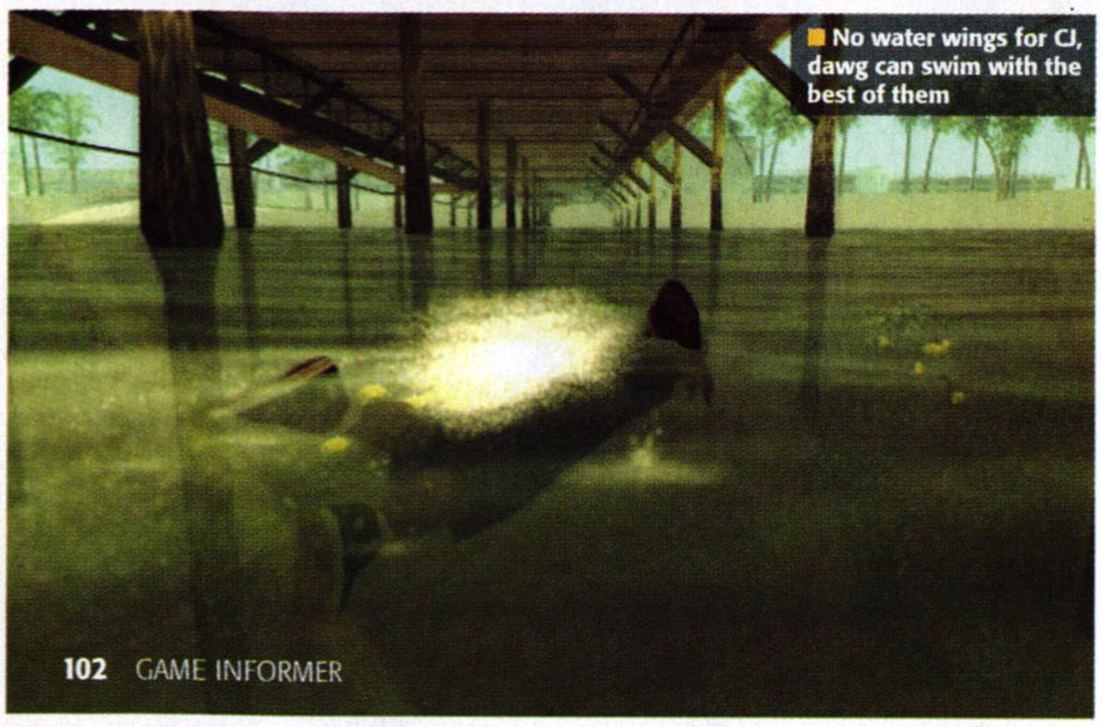
CJ goes hard to the hole!



Here's a look at some of the modifications you can make to stock vehicle types in San Andreas



The trolley system is available for transport, but we'll take the hot sports car every time



No water wings for CJ, dawg can swim with the best of them

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PLAYSTATION 2

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING **> PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES **> DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 19

THE STREETS OF SAN FIERRO

With each passing week bringing us closer to Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas' release, and Rockstar steadily revealing new gameplay details and screenshots regarding this blockbuster project, it's becoming increasingly apparent that October 19th will likely be a day for the video game sales chart record books.

By now, it's obvious that San Andreas is going to simply blow any and all of the GTA copycats out of the water, and that – in terms of size and scope – this title is in a league all of its own. This impression is only strengthened by a recent batch of information we received regarding the game's second city, San Fierro, and a host of new gameplay mechanics.

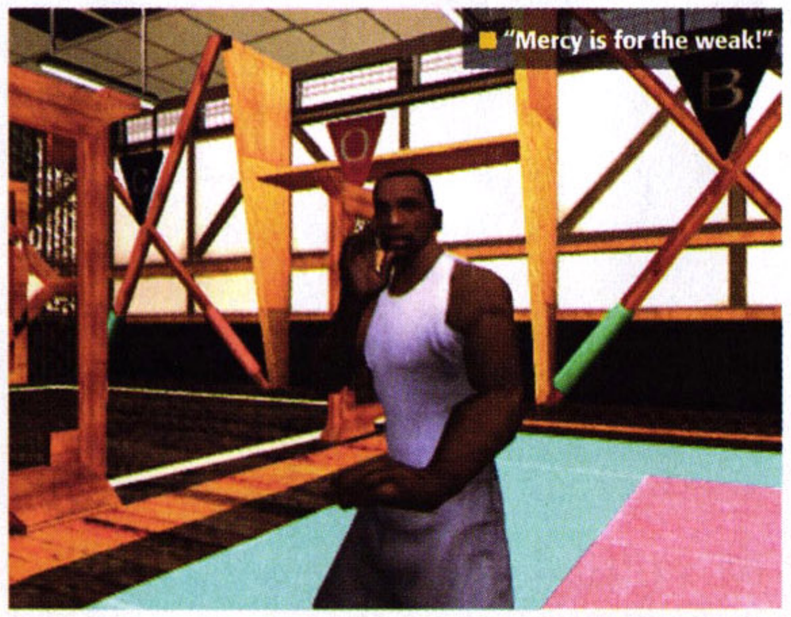
As you probably know by now, San Fierro is the game's doppelganger for San Francisco, one of the world's most beautiful and culturally rich urban areas. Fittingly, many of the Bay Area's iconic landmarks have been recreated in adapted form, including the Bay Bridge (Garver Bridge), Golden Gate (Gant Bridge), Chinatown, and the Haight-Asbury District (know here as Hashbury, home of the Hashbury & Garcia "Joint Festival"). In addition, you'll be able to ride the city's legendary trolley car system or motor around in the classic hippie "Camper" (based on the VW minibus). Rockstar also hinted that San Fierro will see the return of the feared Triads, in the form of longtime friend of CJ's, gang leader Wu Zi Mu.

Even more exciting are revelations regarding some completely new types of gameplay and character development being implemented in San Andreas. For example, keeping in the spirit of the urban culture that has inspired the game, CJ can now take part in fully playable street basketball games (another good way of keeping the fat off). Also, in Chinatown you'll be able to hit the Cobra Martial Arts dojo to learn new hand-to-hand combat moves like the roundhouse kick, drop heel kick, running front kick, and CJ's own unique "street fighting" style.

In addition, despite the jabs that Driv3r took at GTA's non-swimming character, CJ (and other characters in the game) will be able to swim. There are three basic styles of swimming: the default dog paddle (for treading water), the breaststroke (done by simply pressing forward on the analog stick), and the faster freestyle swim (performed by timed pressing of the X button). This should make for some killer getaway scenes. For example, you can now drive off the Santa Maria (née Santa Monica) Pier in Los Santos, get out of the car, start swimming out to sea, and then jack a motorboat for a quick escape.

Rockstar North is also implementing elements from some of the company's other successful titles, additions that will make the GTA experience even more immersive and complex. In a nod to Midnight Club, you can now take your stolen rides to various part and chop shops and outfit them with custom paint jobs, bumpers, exhausts, spoilers, rims, and even nitrous boost systems. The influence of Rockstar North's own Manhunt is felt in the new "silent kill" abilities, which allow CJ to sneak up on an unsuspecting enemy, raise his hand as he approaches, and deal a sudden and quick death.

What more can we say? All that's left now is to break up with your significant other in time for October 19th, because we expect gamers the world over will be occupied for months after San Andreas hits the streets. ■■■



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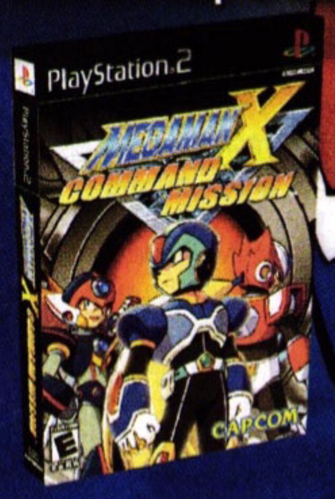

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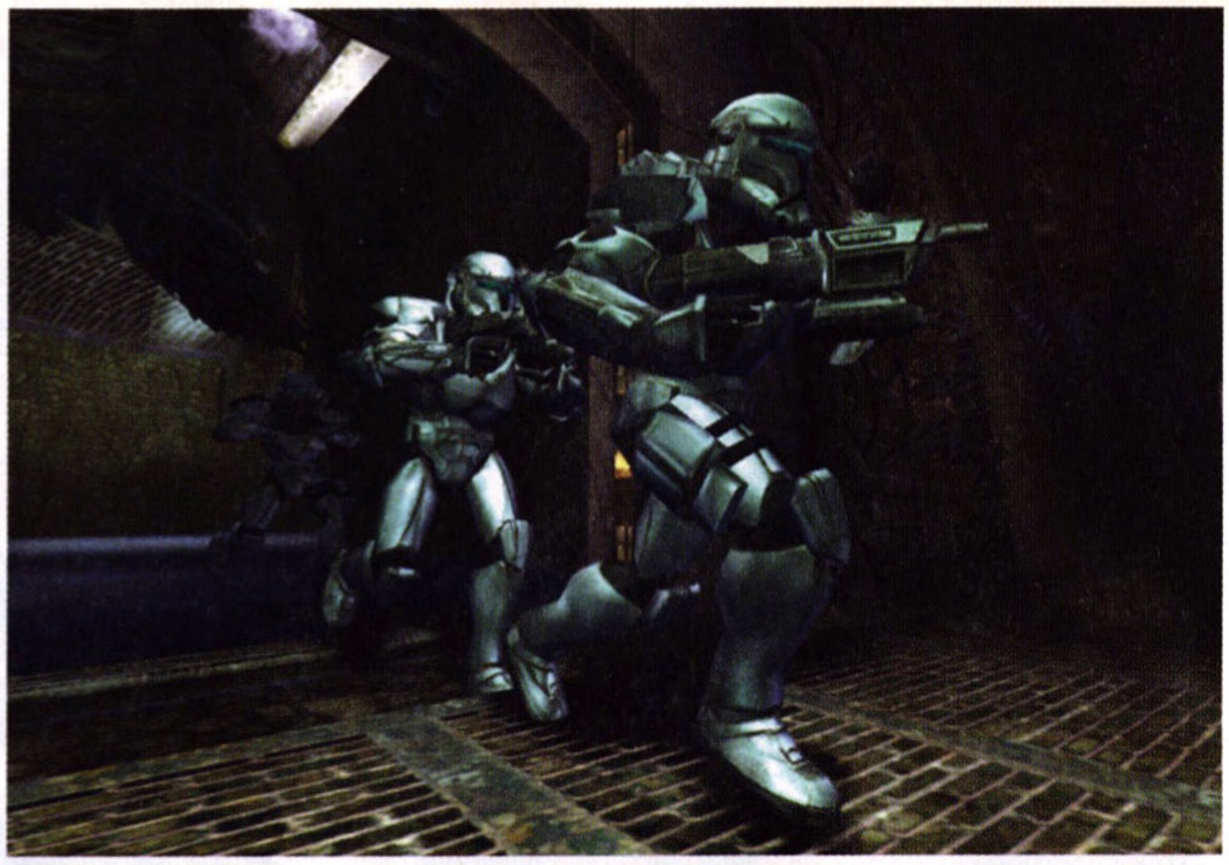
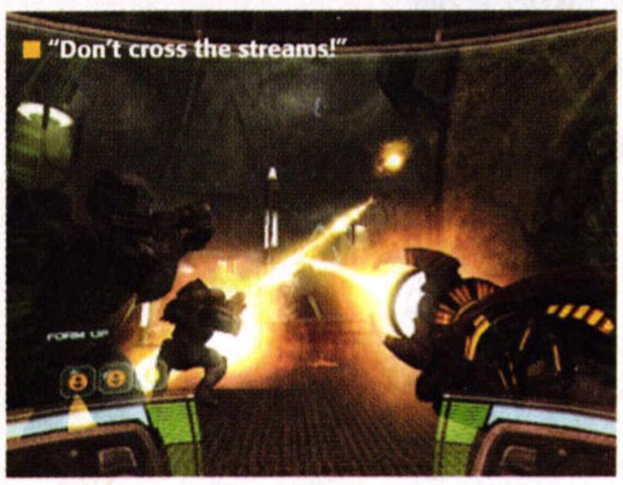
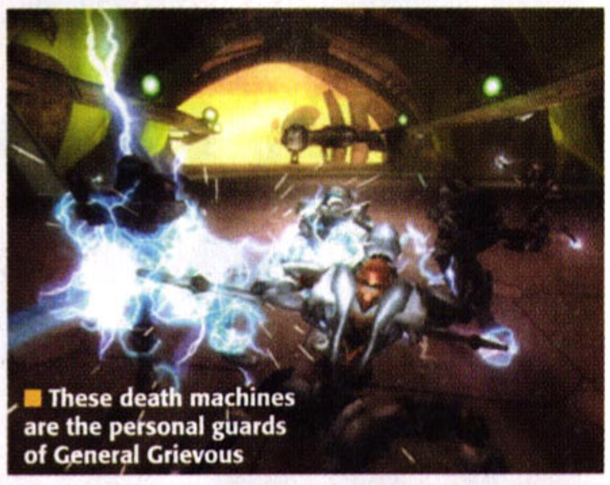




■ "Don't cross the streams!"

■ Multiplayer will support up to 16 players, and includes popular game types like Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, and Assault

■ The Trandoshans are one of the races you'll be gunning down en masse



■ These death machines are the personal guards of General Grievous

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XBOX | PC

Star Wars: Republic Commando

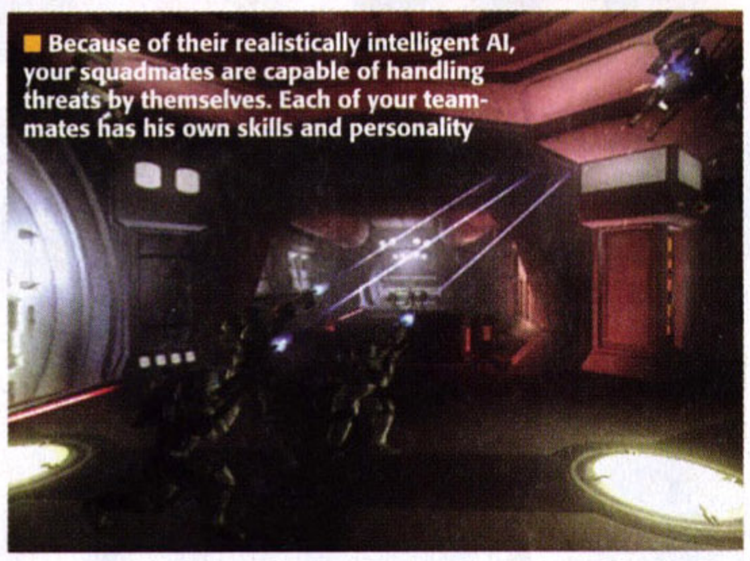
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS **> DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY

BEGUN THIS CLONE WAR HAS

LucasArts has some exciting news for Star Wars fans. "Republic Commando is the bridge between Episode II and Episode III. The game ends as Episode III begins," say Steve Matulac and Tim Longo, the producer and director of the game respectively. "Your team of Republic Commandos, Delta Squad, are an elite branch of the Star Wars military. They are the best of the best, and as such, are visibly beefier and stronger than the clone troopers seen in Episode II. They have special equipment, which allows them to stay in the field longer than a clone trooper." If you are a Star Wars fan, Matulac and Longo's claims are probably enough to sell you on Star Wars: Republic Commando. The duo was more than happy to talk with us about the game, and what they had to say will make Star Wars fans foam at the mouth in anticipation.

"The game begins at the Battle of Geonosis," Matulac and Longo continue. "Amidst the chaos of the infantry battle, the elite Republic Commandos are deployed to hunt down the Separatist leader Sun Fac – a job only they can handle. The squad is then turned loose on a mysterious Republic ghost ship. Little do they know fierce Trandoshan mercenaries, intent on turning the ship over to the Separatists, have captured it. But why are these two strange factions allied? All becomes clear when the commandos take a covert mission to the Wookiee planet of Kashyyyk, where they uncover a Separatist plot, conceived by none other than General Grievous, the new villain from the upcoming Episode III. The commandos fight alongside brutal Wookiee warriors against Trandoshan slavers and the mechanized droid armies, in a battle to take back a city balanced high in the trees."

The story alone should be enough to get fans of the movie series on board, and the squad-based gameplay should appeal to action fans who aren't necessarily Star Wars experts. According to Matulac and Longo, the squad mechanic is "completely flexible and dynamic. The player can be just as effective if he either chooses to run ahead of the squad and eliminate all the threats himself, or just sits back and orchestrates squad positions and assignments, or a combination of both approaches. Each of the three squadmates have their own unique characteristics. One squadmate is the team's paranoid psycho-path, but also happens to be a sharpshooter. Another is the explosives expert and anti-armor wise guy. He's very sarcastic, but professional. The third is the foundation of the group. His 'by-the-book' attitude is the base of his authority. He is the squad's second in command, he's military through and through. He salutes his breakfast in the morning."



■ Because of their realistically intelligent AI, your squadmates are capable of handling threats by themselves. Each of your teammates has his own skills and personality

"The central character is our clean slate," they continue. "We want the player to relate to him in the way they wish to. He is voiced by Temuera Morrison, who played Jango Fett in Episode II, but he is more militaristic and official about his actions. He is the leader of the squad, and is really who holds the whole thing together. The central character is also the jack-of-all-trades. He is able to use each weapon and perform each squad maneuver just like all the others, but by doing so he sets an example of perfection for the rest of his squad."

With a story that blends seamlessly with the Star Wars universe, frenetic squad-based gameplay, and, of course, online play, Star Wars: Republic Commando is easily one of this winter's most exciting Xbox/PC titles. We have a feeling that the Force is truly strong with this one. ■ ■ ■

■ Wookiees will play a larger role in Republic Commando, and we mean large. Some Wookiees will appear noticeably bigger than they ever have before

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Somehow, no one cowered in fear at the sight of the happy sunshine cannon

PLAYSTATION 2

Killzone

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** GUERRILLA/SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE/SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 26

HISTORICAL FUTURE

After a long wait, Killzone is nearly upon us, and we're more than ready for the challenge. Promising a blistering level of realism within the context of a sci-fi military shooter, Killzone looks to raise the bar for the PS2 FPS. The setup has you pick among four playable characters that make up your squad, each with unique abilities and strengths to exploit as you move through the game. Though you won't be commanding your team, they will react intelligently to your actions by pursuing objectives utilizing their own individual strengths.

Perhaps the coolest aspect of Killzone is its attempt to meld historical warfare authenticity with a futuristic setting. All of the 27 distinct weapon designs are based on past or modern instruments of war, so you won't be seeing any laser guns here. Instead, as with all aspects of the game, the goal has been to craft a predictive version of the not-so-distant future, with all of the technology seeming familiar but out of reach at the same time. This strategy has extended to the design of the world called Vecta, a colony planet being attacked by the antagonistic Helghast. As elite military members of the Earth-loyal ISA, it's your job to halt the blitzkrieg of the Separatists. Many of the levels are designed to emulate famous battlefields of the past. Areas outside Vecta City are reminiscent of the killing fields of WW I, with gouged out trenches and a devastated countryside. City areas are modeled after the tattered remains of Stalingrad during the Second World War. Even the jungle fighting of Vietnam has been tapped and reimagined for this eerie sci-fi future. Enemy AI should be similarly sweet – foes will provide cover fire for their comrades and peek around corners to check for a clear field before moving out as coordinated teams. All these elements should combine to create an intense vision of the future of war.

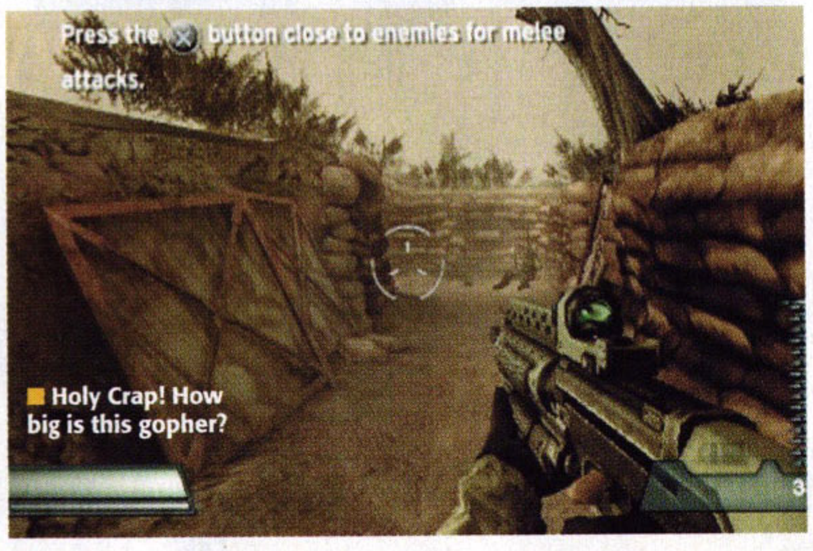
While the single-player experience should be stellar, it might be the multiplayer features that end up truly impressing the crowd. Killzone will be available for play by up to 16 players online, and will include USB headset support for voice-chat. Alternately, you can play offline with 4-player split-screen and the other 12 slots filled by AI bots.

Killzone seems poised to wrest its own spot in the crowded shooter genre. If everything comes together as promised, we can chalk this one up on our growing list of holiday must-haves. ■ ■ ■

The Rockford, Illinois of the future is even more of a dive than it is now

Finally, a game with a Peeping Tom Mode

Twenty-seven distinct weapons make an appearance


Press the ⊗ button close to enemies for melee attacks.

Holy Crap! How big is this gopher?

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Tony Hawk's Underground 2: World Destruction Tour

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> DEVELOPER NEVERSOFT **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 5

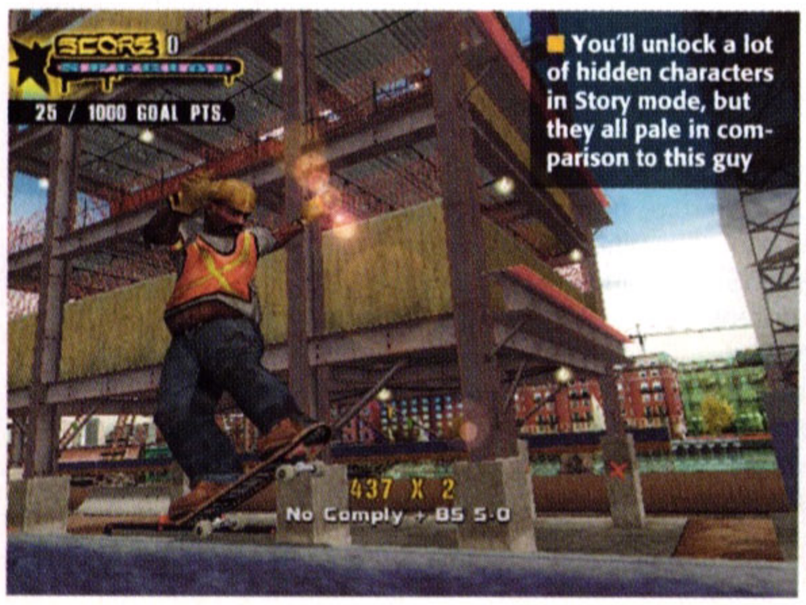
HIT THE STREETS

Last year's skateboarding title from Neversoft, Tony Hawk's Underground, was undoubtedly a departure for the series. Featuring a story mode in which the player is the central character, THUG changed the series drastically by revamping your goals, changing the look, and placing a new emphasis on plot. While THUG was certainly well received, some players longed for the classic Tony Hawk gameplay as seen in the earlier titles. Fortunately for everyone, THUG 2 will feature both the Story mode and Classic mode. Each will have its own set of levels. In many ways, it's two skating games for the price of one.

We had a chance to get our grubby little hands on THUG 2 recently, and spent some time checking out one of the new levels in Classic mode – Barcelona. Not only does this Spanish city feature plenty of great lines and choice ramps, it also features a level-changing event, much like the earthquake in the popular Los Angeles level in Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3. This event is triggered when you throw an apple at a bull, causing him to freak out and chase a mime. Obviously, chaos ensues.

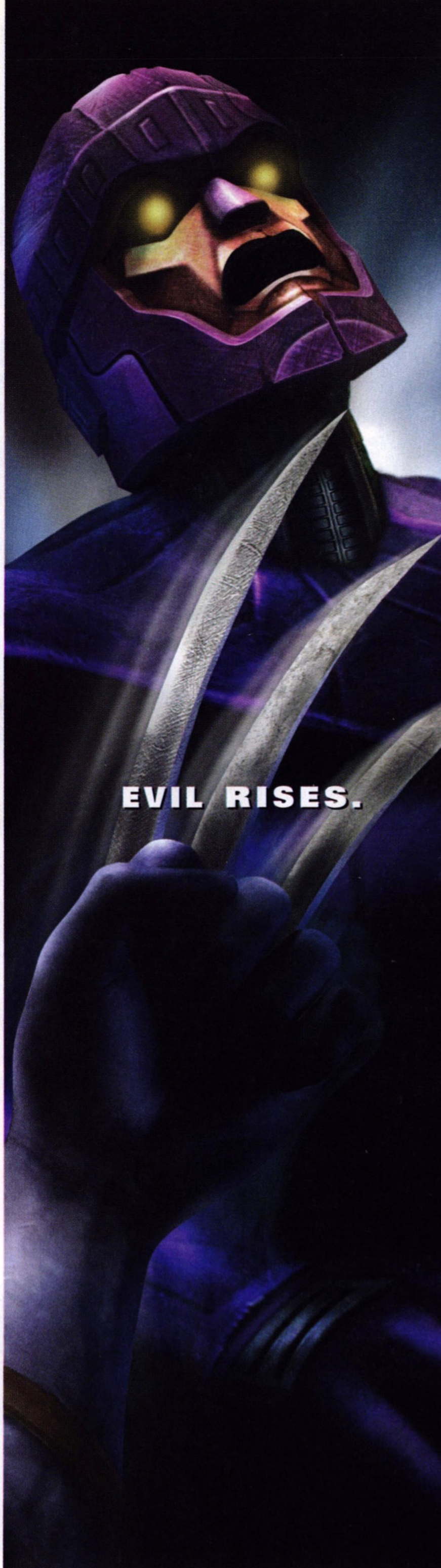
Throwing objects is one of the new moves added this year, which has all kinds of fun applications, most that involve causing mischief. Other new moves include a 360-degree flatland spin, the sticker slap (which can be used to push off against walls and change your direction), graffiti tagging, and a new special mode that slows time and zooms in on your skater. All of these new moves can be used in Classic mode as well as Story, and some of the series' best stages from the past will show up again, so you can test out your new moves in your old favorite runs.

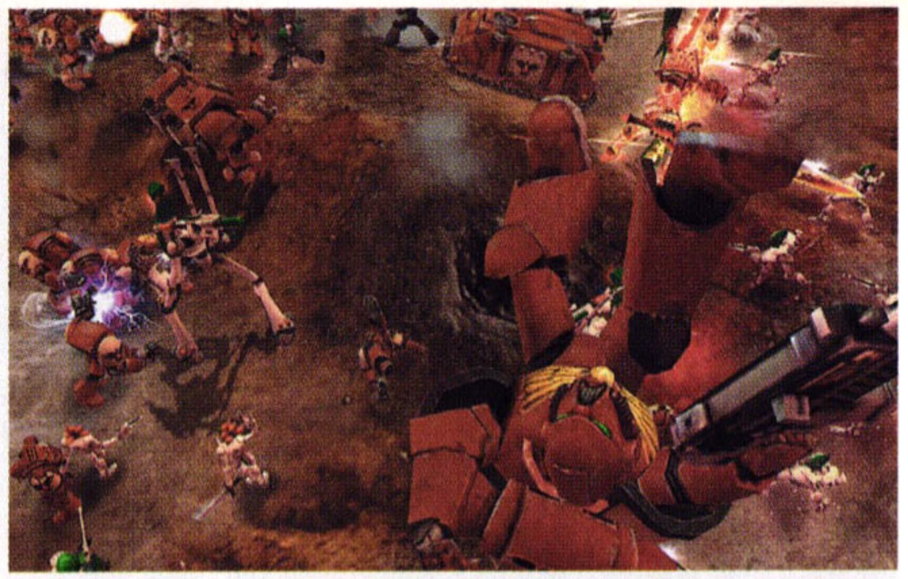
Classic mode is only one part of the huge amount of new content added to this year's title. Unlockable characters populate every stage in Story mode, including new pros, strange characters, and a few celebrity guests like Jesse James from the show *Monster Garage*. With all of this new content, as well as a gameplay mode for every type of virtual skater, we have no doubt that this will be the finest Tony Hawk title yet. ■■■



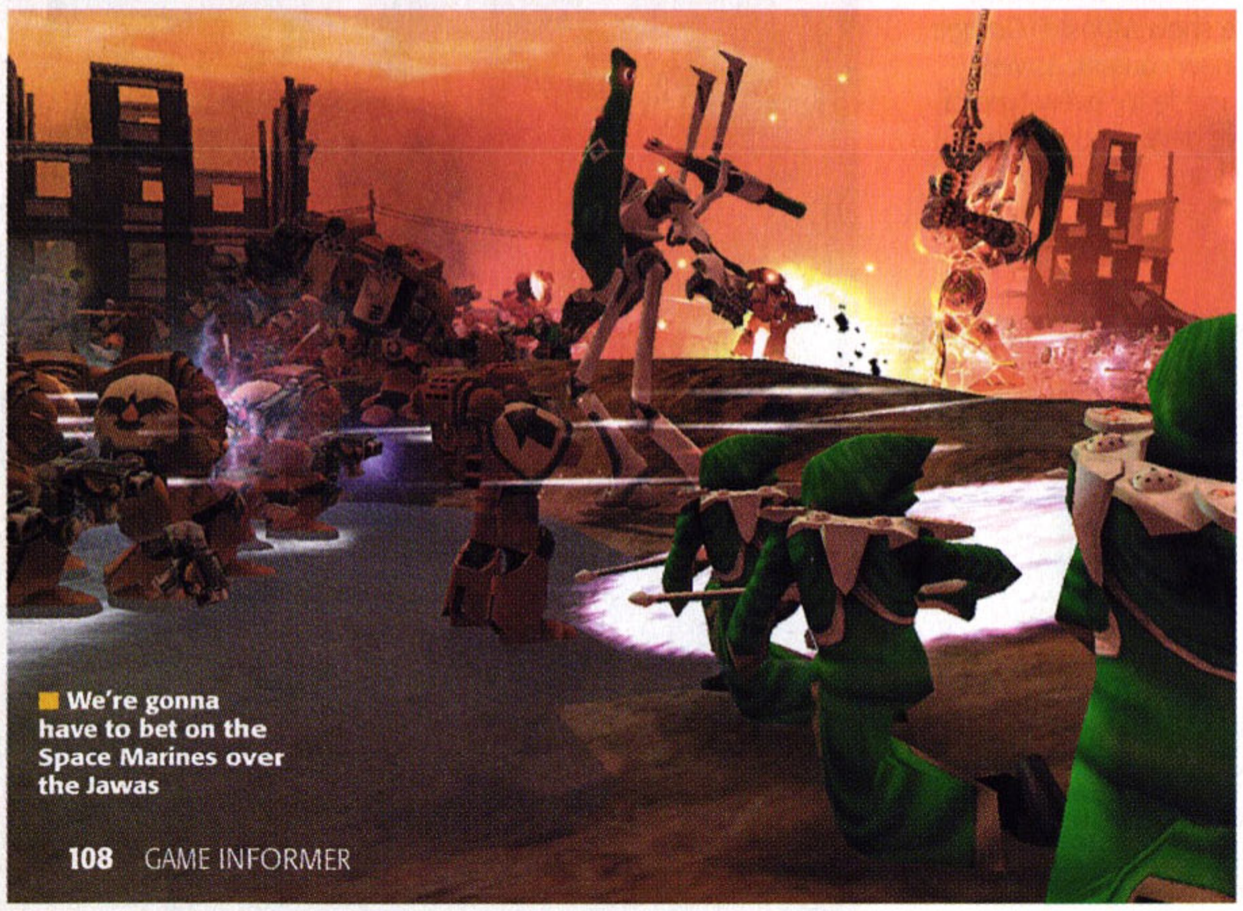
■ You'll unlock a lot of hidden characters in Story mode, but they all pale in comparison to this guy

■ Best tag ever. Officially





■ The bigger units are downright impressive



■ We're gonna have to bet on the Space Marines over the Jawas

PC

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** THQ
> **DEVELOPER** RELIC ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

THE NEW STANDARD?

What is it with licensed games these days? Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War, from everything we've seen so far, looks to be another one that not only doesn't suck – in all honesty, we can't wait for this thing to release so that we can play the full version. The obvious care and passion that veteran real-time strategy developer Relic Entertainment has put into the title, along with the rich background fiction of the Warhammer universe, is shaping up into one of the best RTS titles we've had the pleasure of playing in a long time.

For one, the graphics are top-notch. Models are detailed and very well-animated, lending much more personality to typically faceless troops. Even the structures reflect the characteristics of their builders, from the immaculate Space Marines' Chapel-Barracks to the ramshackle, thrown-together Orkish Pile o' Gunz. The sound design is likewise brilliant, with explosions rocking the house and professional voice actors giving life to the cutscenes. From a presentation standpoint, Dawn of War definitely has nothing to worry about.

In terms of gameplay, Relic is aiming to make one of the widest and deepest RTS titles ever created. Each faction has dozens of units, from anti-tank squads to stealthy snipers and gigantic war machines of every description. Furthermore, the number of upgrades available is staggering. Sure, you can do the normal things like increase the armor of your infantry, but there are also specific weapons to outfit your grunts with, special abilities for various troops, and different types of ordnance for tanks. That's just the beginning, too – when you consider that no two factions progress up the tech tree the same way, much less share units or tech, it's clear that there's a whole lot of meat to the strategy in Dawn of War.

Finally, some interesting concepts are integrated into the RTS framework. Resource-gathering takes place largely through controlling strategic nodes on the map, which makes being aggressive and holding territory the name of the game. Infantry is commanded on the squad level, and can have heroes, captains, or support units like medics attached to increase their effectiveness in battle. And finally, most every unit in the game has both a melee and ranged attack that you can tell them to favor – Space Marines with their high-tech weaponry will want to keep their distance from hulking Ork Slugga Boyz. Should enough of their comrades bite it, however, or if they catch sight of something intimidating like an avatar of the Eldar gods, they'll break and run.

All in all, there are enough new ideas, excellent technology, and veteran polish in Dawn of War to have any RTS gamer frothing at the mouth in anticipation. Fortunately, we don't have long to wait for its (as of press time) late September release. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

The Bard's Tale

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** INXILE ENTERTAINMENT/VIVENDI UNIVERSAL **> DEVELOPER** INXILE ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** OCTOBER

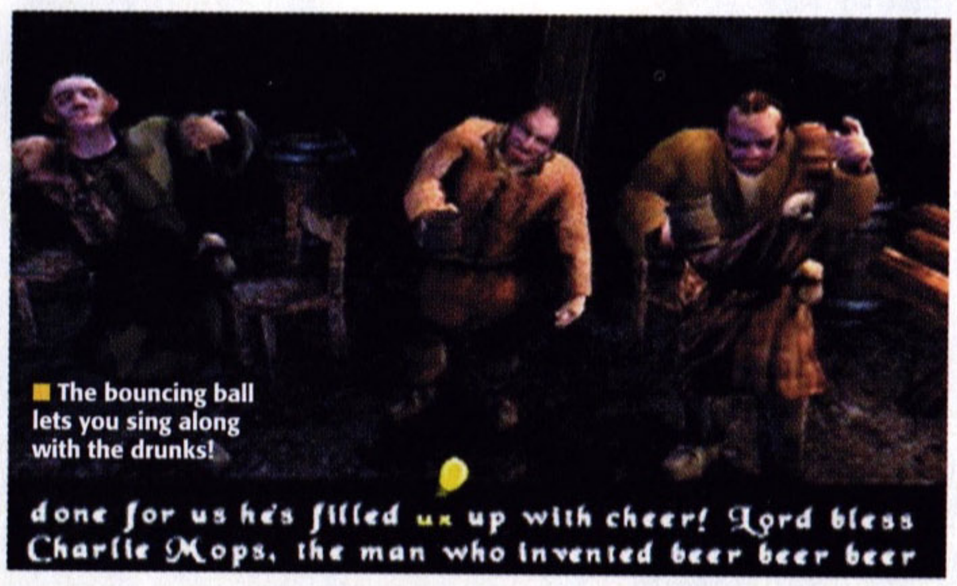
WE PROMISE, HE'S NOT SPOONY

A few of you old-school PC RPG gamers may remember the Bard's Tale franchise from way back in the day – 1985, to be exact. However, the original producer, Brian Fargo (who also had a hand in founding Interplay), and several other refugees of that sinking company have come together to form new studio inXile Entertainment for the express purpose of retelling the original Bard's Tale.

Powered by a version of Snowblind Studios' engine (which showed up first in Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance), The Bard's Tale is obviously an action/RPG. More than capable of taking care of himself in a fight with a variety of weapons, the Bard can also summon magical creatures to help him out of tight spots. Though you start with only the capability to call a measly rat, behemoths and elementals will eventually fight by your side. Between the summoning spicing things up and the certified hack 'n slash pedigree of the Snowblind engine, it's hard to foresee any problems with the action in The Bard's Tale.

■ You'll have to keep track of your allies' health as well as your own

What's unique about this title, however, is the flavor that permeates the entire game. The main character, known simply as the Bard, is a charming rogue, selfish and mercenary by nature. Cary Elwes (The Man in Black from *The Princess Bride*) voices the Bard, and the narrator is played by Tony Jay, known as the Elder God from the Legacy of Kain games among many other roles. This level of voice talent is really only the tip of the iceberg, though. What we've seen of the script is clever, funny, and saucier than just about any other game we've seen. Having "snarky" and "nice" dialogue options doesn't sound that cool, but when you choose to snap back at someone who ticked you off and the Bard cuts them down with a scathingly witty rejoinder, it's all worth it. Developer inXile assures us that the choices you make determine how the story progresses as well, which you can't help but love.



■ The bouncing ball lets you sing along with the drunks!

Those who may be looking for a slightly more intelligent action game ought to keep an eye on The Bard's Tale. If it all comes together like we hope, it could very well deliver one of the best adventures around. ■■■

HEROES UNITE.

PC

Dungeons & Dragons Online

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** TURBINE **> RELEASE** 2005

NOT WHAT YOU THINK

It's a good thing that veteran online developer Turbine knows what they're doing. If ever there was a title that looked ripe for a generic, uninspired knock-off, Dungeons & Dragons Online is it. This, however, is anything but. Turbine is gladly jettisoning MMORPG conventions by the truckload and making a game more akin to tabletop D&D than any existing video game on the market.

One surprising design decision is to stick very closely to D&D character progression. As anyone who has played D&D knows, that means an incredible amount of room for customizing your hero – two human Fighters of the same level can easily have radically different abilities. Another departure from MMORPG canon is the fact that players don't get experience or loot from killing monsters. However, the world of D&D Online will teem with quests and missions, all of which take place in instanced (private to you and your group) settings and reward players handsomely with goods and experience. The quest areas will also change depending on which ones you've undertaken; for instance, if the king hasn't asked you to save his daughter from the trolls, that entire encounter won't even spawn.

For another thing, combat is more Maximo than EverQuest. A mouse click will swing your weapon, while missile targeting takes place in a first-person view. If you acquire the Dodge feat, you'll even be able to perform an evasive roll. Also, as characters level up and gain more martial skill, attack combos become available. The battle system looks a bit more involved and interactive than is usually found in the genre – no pressing the attack key, making a sandwich, and coming back to your PC to find the monster dead.

Between the true-to-the-books hero creation, the lack of grinding rats to death for fifteen hours to level up, and the more action-oriented fighting, D&D Online could very well be the MMORPG that shows us all what the genre has been missing these last seven years. Here's hoping it lives up to its potential between now and its 2005 release. ■■■

PC

Dragonshard

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** LIQUID ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** SPRING 2005

DUNGEONS TOO, BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Frankly, when first we heard that Atari had a Dungeons & Dragons real-time strategy game planned, we were far from excited. After getting a chance to see Dragonshard in action, however, it looks as though it wasn't a bad idea after all. You see, this is anything but another WarCraft wannabe.

For one thing, your army isn't structured in the normal way. Troops are all organized into squads; you can't command individual ones or focus fire more specifically than on the squad level. Your captains, which are heroes in the D&D sense – Clerics, Wizards, Rogues, and such – are tough in their own right, but can also lead troops to give them bonuses. A Cleric in charge of knights might make them tougher to kill through healing, while a Rogue with a group of archers could allow them to sneak past enemy lines. Also, the game world is segmented into surface and underground levels. Yes, it's been done before, but here's the catch – most of your troops can't go below ground; only the captains (and champions, who are the true badasses of the game) are allowed. Down in the darkness, they band together to slay the monsters and grab the loot in classic D&D style.

The other innovative element of Dragonshard we saw was the city construction. Unlike other RTSs, your towns are laid out on a grid where you place your buildings. What's cool about it is that each structure has an effect on whatever's next to it, so if you want enchanted weapons you'll have to put a wizard tower next to the blacksmith. Also, settlements are very well defended right away, so players are encouraged to get their butts downstairs and beat up some monsters.

Given the loving that Atari has been showing the D&D license lately, and from what we've seen of Liquid's efforts to make this a unique and entertaining title, Dragonshard is one worth tracking even if you've never seen the inside of the *Player's Handbook*. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 2

Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 1

APE ON APE ACTION

Whether they're wearing a diaper with a goofy, good-humored grin or viciously attacking each other in underground kickboxing tournaments, no one can seem to get enough of monkeys. Well, Ubisoft is giving the people what they want in Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed by offering players a chance to pit these pink-rumped primates against each other in a variety of minigames.

In a deviation from its platforming roots, Pumped and Primed will be more of a party game, with two distinct modes of play. In Versus mode, up to four people compete in 21 pre-made tournaments, with events such as races and melee battles. Even though the format is different, you can still count on using a wide array of gadgets to gain the edge, such as the stunclub, slingshot, and RC car.

The other way to play Pumped and Primed is Story mode. The plot is some nonsense about Jake and the Professor being trapped in a computer-generated world fighting off the bad guy from Ape Escape 2, Specter. Sure, it won't win any Pulitzers, but it does give you an excuse to go through 44 levels and eight boss battles either solo or in competitive two-player. Additionally, you can use the levels from Story mode to customize your own tournaments in Versus mode!

Expect a return of your favorite heroes, like Natalie and Spike, as well as the introduction of some new faces, like Pipotron. Plus, with over 400 unlockables like new gadgets and clothes, Pumped and Primed promises to turn a whole new crop of respectable citizens into a mob of depraved monkey-lovers. ■■■

■ Somehow, Calvin Klein's "Monkey Rage" line of underwear wasn't successful

PC

Call of Duty: United Offensive

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** GRAY MATTER INTERACTIVE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL

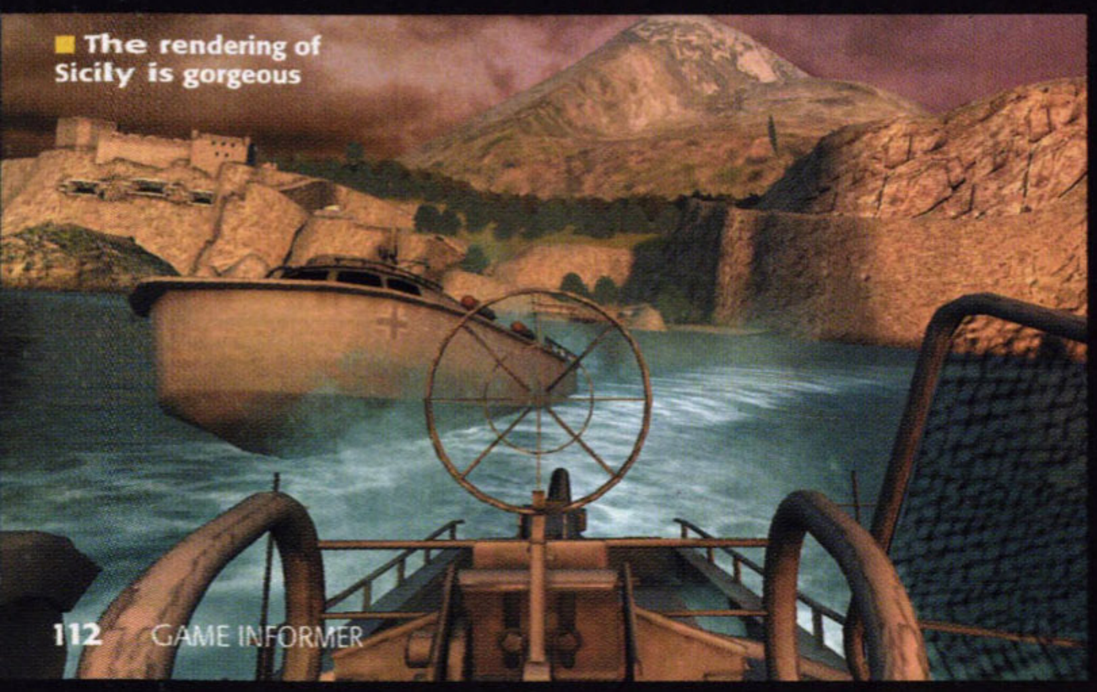
OFFENSIVE IN A GOOD WAY

Last year's Call of Duty accomplished a feat against all odds: established itself as a brand-new World War II franchise in a market glutted by well-known titles. A year later, the spectacular shooter is getting this expansion, aimed at remedying the two big flaws in the original as well as refining and growing the multiplayer portion of the game. Twelve huge new single-player missions – they're all significantly larger than the ones in the original – should please fans that didn't get enough cinematic action last time around, while the addition of vehicles will help open up the gameplay of the three new multiplayer modes.

Plenty of content is being added besides new missions. Bazookas and Panzerfausts can now be utilized to crack those nasty panzers, smoke grenades can buy valuable time, and flamethrowers will lay down some serious short-range hurt. Soldiers can also sprint for a limited time, and while you can't shoot while doing so, it's great for crossing killzones. Some portable machine guns have deployable legs for extra stability, and cooking off grenades will add a bit to their usefulness.

On the multiplayer side of things, the new modes all look cool: Capture the Flag, a Battlefield-esque Domination, and something new called Base Assault. The interesting part about multiplayer, though, is the ranking system. As you capture objectives (depending on the gametype) and rack up kills, your carrying capacity increases and you'll gain access to sweet abilities like calling in airstrikes. Controllable tanks and Jeeps are also present in all modes, so between the additional weapons, 11 fresh maps, and everything else, there should be no shortage whatsoever of mayhem to be had online.

The Call of Duty franchise is one of the better ones to come out of 2003, and with the upcoming console title Finest Hour and this expansion pushing the PC game forward, the future is pretty bright for World War II enthusiasts. ■■■



■ The rendering of Sicily is gorgeous

XBOX

Blinx 2: Masters of Time and Space

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** ARTOON, CO. LTD. > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16

NEW TITLE, NEW ATTITUDE

No longer content with the dubious janitorial designation of "Time Sweeper," Blinx has upgraded significantly to the lofty title of a Master of Time and Space. After playing through several levels of the time travelling cat's new adventure, we can assure you that's not all that's been improved. Blinx 2 is faster, sleeker, and more varied than its first incarnation, with some cool new options that should make it more than worth a look in this crowded holiday season. For one, you'll be playing for both the cats and their enemies – the nefarious pigs. Half of the single-player campaign has you adopting the role of one of the time-travelling felines again. However, the other half of the game you'll control the space-warping pigs in a stealth oriented attempt to avoid the clever sweeper cats.

We got to talk with director Naoto Oshima about the changes, and he filled us in. "First, the entire game is much faster – Blinx moves quicker, ammunition can be swept as you move, and the crystal collection has been automated. The game is now mission-based – there are no time limits and the worlds are much larger and non-linear to promote exploration." We also learned about the plan to include an extensive multiplayer component (no Xbox Live) enabling both two player co-op and a four player battle mode. "As a result of the new features the volume of the game has become quite large. The worlds are about twice as large as [the first Blinx] and the length of play for each round is much longer."

In our time with the game, we got to try out some sweet actions, like dodging projectiles (à la The Matrix) by slowing down time, or playing as a pig and tossing a portable black hole on some unsuspecting cats. With its surprising new features and impressive array of play modes, Blinx 2 looks primed to steal time from a lot of gamers when it hits this November. ■■■

■ Make that eight lives...

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Alien Hominid

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** 0~3 ENTERTAINMENT **> DEVELOPER** THE BEHEMOTH **> RELEASE** FALL

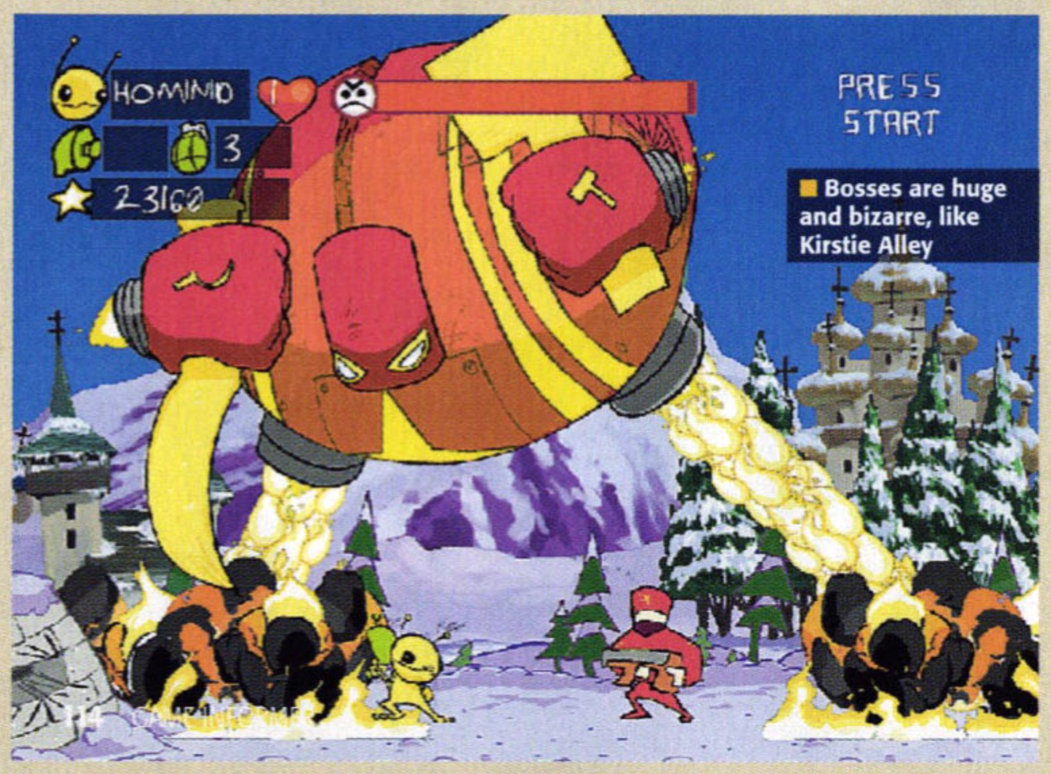
IT CAME FROM THE INTERNET

Beware, Earth people. Aliens from a strange world are planning an invasion of your homes. These creatures come from an odd and frightening place called the World Wide Web, and their goal is to infiltrate and take over your video game consoles. Judging by the results of their trial mission, they just might succeed.

The aliens are coming your way thanks to Alien Hominid, the new title from rookie publisher 0~3 Entertainment. Many gamers are probably already familiar with this title; it began life as a Flash game on the popular site newgrounds.com. Over six million people downloaded the early version of Alien Hominid, and now a more polished version is coming to PlayStation 2 and GameCube. It's a fairly simple game, and by that we mean it simply rocks. It may be a basic side-scrolling shooter, but its intense action, bizarre sensibilities, and colorful visuals make Alien Hominid stand out as one of the most unique titles of the fall.

While the hand-drawn graphics may look kiddie, the frantic gameplay recalls hardcore series like Metal Slug and Contra. Like those games, the action is so fast and manic that you will die a lot, but a bountiful amount of lives will keep you in the game. Co-op play only adds another level to the madness, and the variety of humorous stages keep the action fresh. In the first part of the game alone, you'll jump from car to car fighting a giant robot bee in traffic, battle an animate mound of butterscotch, take to the skies in a UFO, get a lift from a Yeti, and battle hordes of identical FBI agents.

With its engagingly old school gameplay, creative graphics, and indie sensibility, it's hard not to root for Alien Hominid. Like the titular protagonist, this game is the little guy, going up against the overwhelmingly powerful forces. Everyone likes to root for the underdog, and this time the underdog is packing one hell of a game. ■■■



■ Bosses are huge and bizarre, like Kirstie Alley

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Rome: Total War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** CREATIVE ASSEMBLY **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22

ALL ROADS LEAD TO WAR

Developer Creative Assembly has strategy cred coming out of its collective behind. With its first two Total War titles, Shogun and Medieval, Creative Assembly opened previously unimagined vistas of strategic joy for PC dorks around the world. To nobody's surprise, Rome: Total War looks to be the best one yet, and the kind of franchise installment that satisfies the fan base as well as bringing newbies into the Total War fold.

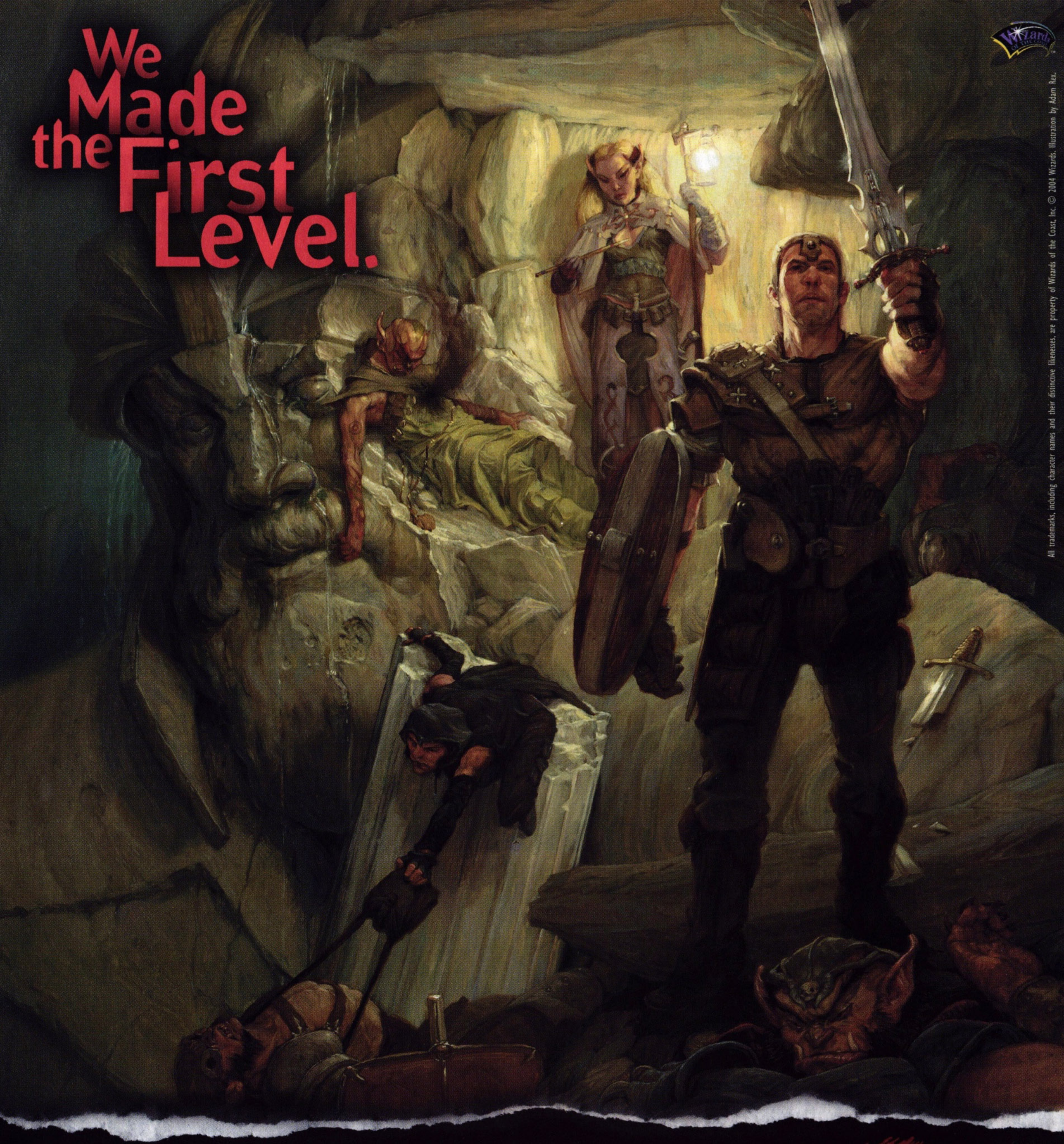
For those unfamiliar with how Total War works, the basic structure breaks down like this: You control your faction (in this case, a noble Roman family) on a complex, Civilization-like overworld map where you move your armies around, develop cities, and make empire-wide policy decisions. Once your forces clash with an enemy's, though, you take real-time command over the battle – complete with a contextual speech from your general to pump the troops up. Having seen the combat engine in action, we've got to say that it simulates enormous conflicts with authority. How huge, you ask? Up to 10,000 soldiers, all of whom are imbued with their own morale model, attributes, and abilities. Even the terrain you'll be fighting on is determined wholly on where the action takes place, since the entire span of Rome's empire at its zenith is mapped out for the combat engine.

Like any good strategy title, Rome: Total War looks to deliver some serious replay value. Besides the fact that you can replay the roughly 20-hour campaign from any of 11 different factions' viewpoints (which all have their own tech trees and troopsets), you can play through ten historical scenarios. Then, once you've gotten your fix there, Rome allows you to take the action online and slug it out with up to seven other players using fully customizable armies. Sadly, the overworld map can't make the transition to the 'Net, but given the scale of the conflicts that this engine is capable of, there's still plenty of multiplayer goodness to be had.

Rome: Total War impressed us at E3, and our recent hands-on was even more tantalizing. Keep your eyes on this one; it has definitely earned its place as one of the premier PC titles of 2004. ■■■

■ Discipline is an important attribute when being charged by barbarian hordes

We Made the First Level.



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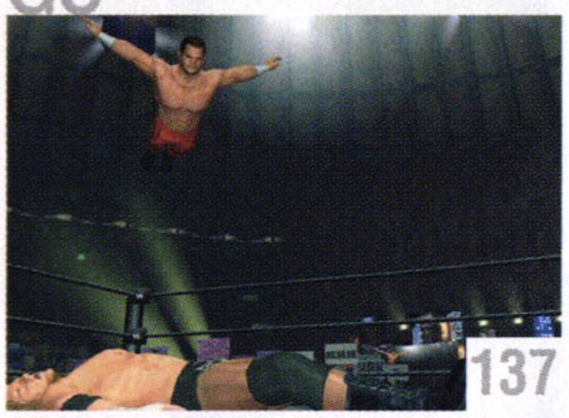

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WWE: Day of Reckoning

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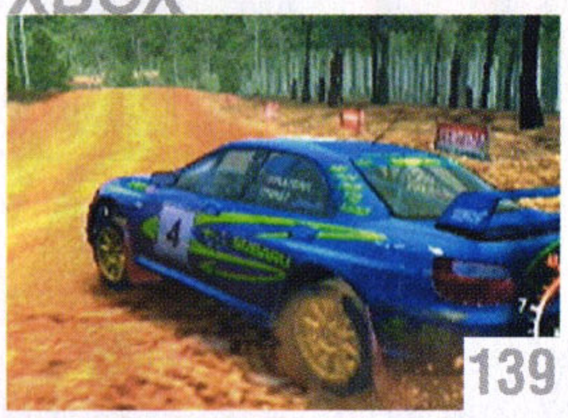

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Colin McRae Rally 2005

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GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

Fable

Years of anticipation finally pay off, and trust us when we say the wait was more than worth it. Weaving together vivid visuals, an artful story, and the ability to do anything and everything you could want to do in a living fantasy world, Fable is an experience not to be missed. Truly become a hero, or probe the depths of human depravity. The choice is entirely yours, as you live through childhood, adulthood, and into your elder years, all the while wielding sword, bow, and spell against your foes. Find your own moral to the story on page 138.

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	Lamentable. A foresaken title so bad it causes the strongest gamers to weep and tremble like bereaved widows.

> **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.

PC

Kohan II: Kings of War

HANDHELD

Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice of the Force

GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

Doom 3

It's finally here, and it was worth the wait. The atmosphere is one of the best ever created bar none, and the action comes fast and furious as the legions of Hell overrun you at every turn. Oh, and remember those screenshots you've been seeing? Doom 3 looks about a ho-jillion times better when it's actually running. Head on over to page 142 to meet your doom.

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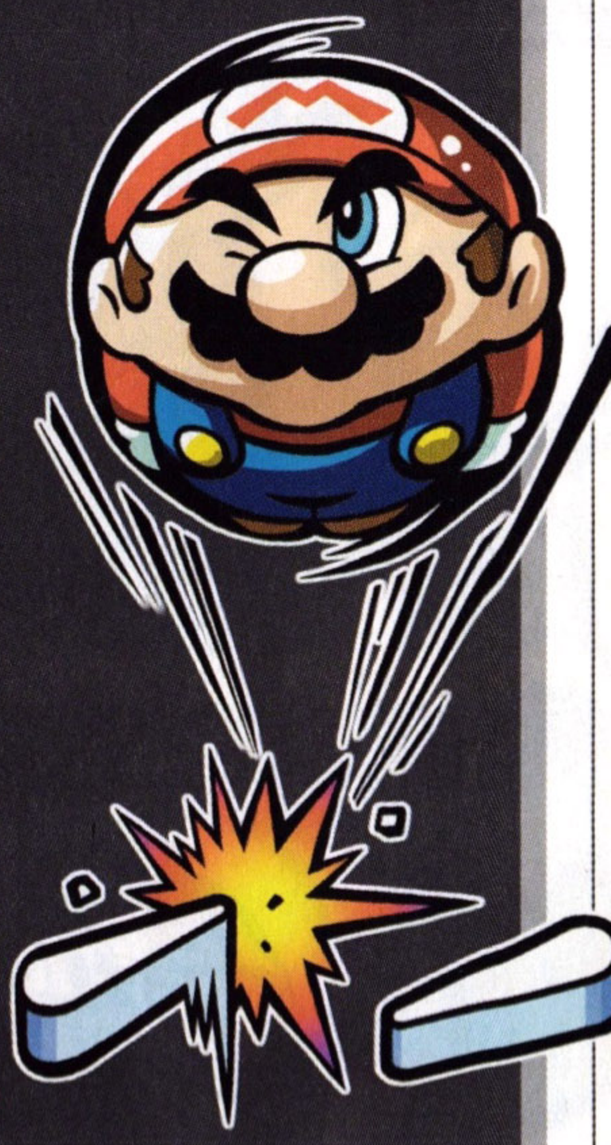

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theedge

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.

EARLY CHILDHOOD eC	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.	MATURE M	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
EVERYONE E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.	ADULTS ONLY AO	Content suitable only for adults.
TEEN T	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.	RATING PENDING RP	Product is awaiting final rating.

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

1080i – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced

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 Zone of the Enders and Gauntlet

adventure – A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island

AI – Artificial Intelligence. Usually used to refer to how well the computer reacts to a human opponent

board – A term we use for games like Jeopardy! and Mario Party

bump mapping – A technique where varying light effects simulate depth on textures

cel shading – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels

CG – Computer-Generated graphics

dorkgasm – The shuddering moaning sound that comes out of gamers' mouths when they first see the Oblivion screenshots

E3 – Electronic Entertainment Expo. The world's largest convention for video games

fighting – A term we use for games like Street Fighter and Dead or Alive

FMV – Full Motion Video. Usually refers to an animated CG cutscene

FPS – Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First-Person Shooters like Doom, GoldenEye, and Unreal Tournament

framerate – The frames of animation used to create the illusion of movement

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GBC – Game Boy Color

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like StarCraft or Red Alert 2

ISP – Internet Service Provider. The company that provides you with access to the Internet

jaggies – Graphical lines that are 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

minigame – A small, simple game within a larger one

motion-capture – Using human models and infrared cameras to record movement for game animation. Also mo-cap

motion blur – Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed

N64 – Nintendo 64

NES – Nintendo Entertainment System

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

PKer – Player Killer. This is a person who thrives on killing newbie or vulnerable characters in MMORPGs or shooting their teammates in games like Counter-Strike

platform – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Crash Bandicoot

pop-up – When onscreen objects, usually distant, suddenly appear

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

PSone – Sony PlayStation

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Chu Chu Rocket

racing – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart

RPG – Role-Playing Game. A game that involves character improvement through collecting and spending points. A term we use for games like Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior

shooter – A term we use for games like Mars Matrix and Gradius

SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System

sports – A term we use for games like MaddenNFL

strategy – A term we use for games like Command & Conquer and Fallout Tactics

third-party – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer

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PlayStation 2

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■ Noob's appearance may be familiar, but just wait until you see what he can do on the battlefield

■ Blood never looked so beautiful

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Mortal Kombat: Deception

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING/PUZZLE/BOARD (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
> DEVELOPER MIDWAY **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 4 **> ESRB** M

FLAWLESS VICTORY

Trumping its predecessor with a barbaric decapitation and sending a clear-cut message to other developers that the bar of excellence for fighting games has officially been raised, Mortal Kombat: Deception emerges as the consummate fighter and one of the most ambitious releases of the year. The gameplay has evolved to a frightening degree, and exacting painful death upon your opponent is only the tip of the bloody iceberg. Ed Boon and his Midway team have fine-tuned the fray, implemented a legion of amazing new characters, and even turned their gaze to other genres to expand upon the experience even futher.

Building upon the combat formula in Deadly Alliance, the focus of this year's release is to apply balance. If you played a fair bit of the previous entry, you know that success usually revolved around your ability to chain together combo strings. If an opponent was well-versed in these techniques, there really was little you could do to stop his or her assault other than praying that your blocking was on that day. In Deception, when a combo sequence is initiated, the player on the receiving end can now perform a Breaker to stop the chain. This little addition completely changes the fighting dynamic and opens the window for new strategies to be applied. One technique, which I quickly fell in love with, is to use the environment as a weapon. Not only can you knock your adversary through walls, off of ledges, and through the floor, you can quickly dispose of them by launching the enemy into a vat of molten lava, onto a bed of spikes, and even into the mouth of a mechanized monstrosity.

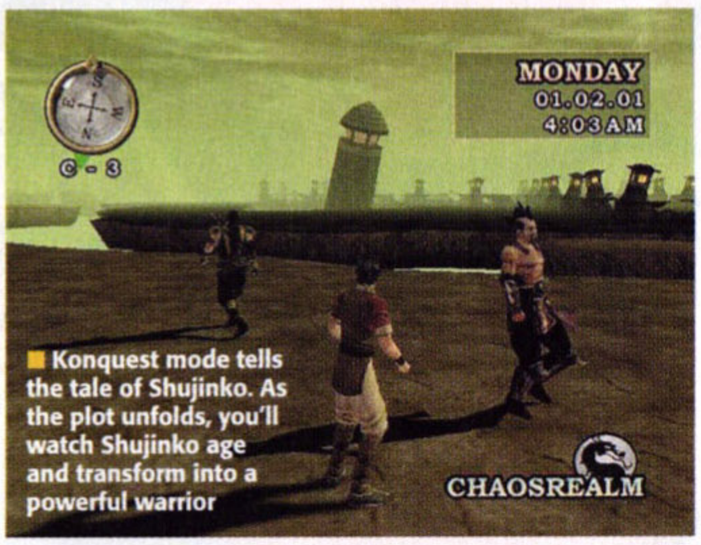
Watching your opponent get diced into tiny bits through a laser grid is a fitting death, but you may feel that it's a bit impersonal. To ensure that your foe truly suffers, each character in the game can now tap into two different Fatalities. In a twist, the character on the losing end can input a Hara-Kiri suicide to avoid getting annihilated by their foe. Whoever enters their finisher sequences first gets the satisfaction of either killing their opponent or saving face by offing themselves. Brilliant.

While this is more than enough material to keep rabid fans of the series content, Midway is expanding upon the experience with a wildly addictive puzzle game, a variation of the thinking man's game of chess, and a highly-competitive online component that allows players to compete in all three of these modes. Puzzle Kombat draws obvious inspiration from Dr. Mario. By dropping detonating blocks on same colored blocks, you will in turn send unwanted blocks to your opponent. By doing this enough, you will build up a special move to unleash upon your adversary. For instance, Scorpion can jumble his foe's pieces. The chess game plays as you would expect, but you'll have to fight to occupy squares, traps can be set, and you can tap into spells ranging from resurrect to imprison.

Kicking it up another notch, Konquest mode now features an extensive story and a sprawling open world with people to interact with and secrets to unearth. At its core, however, this is still a glorified training mode that teaches you how to fight with each of the characters. The Krypt is also loaded to the hilt with new material.

Through its razor-sharp fighting, array of playing options, and unyielding desire to please fans of the series, Deception is easily the most-accomplished fighter to date. Mortal Kombat is once again the game to beat. —**REINER**

■ Along with a host of new arenas (this one suddenly changes from tropical paradise to violent monsoon), players can battle on several classic stages like the forest



■ Konquest mode tells the tale of Shujinko. As the plot unfolds, you'll watch Shujinko age and transform into a powerful warrior

■ After you defeat your opponent in Puzzle Kombat, you'll be treated to one of the many mode-specific Fatalities

Kollector's Kombat

Taking a tip from the motion picture industry, Midway is offering two different versions of Deception. There's a standard edition release (retailing for $49.95), and a limited Kollector's Edition. This version features an arcade-perfect port of the original Mortal Kombat, 40 minutes of DVD bonuses, plus a serialized embossed collector's card of the character on the cover. Speaking of which, the PS2 version of the Kollector's Edition (called the Premium Pack) has SubZero on the front of the box, whereas the Xbox version is releasing with four different cover options.

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> Concept: Tighten up the combat; bring the battle online; and keep players engrossed with new puzzle and chess modes and a bevy of secrets

> Graphics: An artistic masterpiece that continually impresses with its fluid animations, gorgeous effects, and striking details

> Sound: Classic MK goodness. Toasty!

> Playability: The Breaker opens up a world of possibilities. The new assortment of death maneuvers are also welcome additions

> Entertainment: Everything but the kitchen sink. This is the complete fighting package

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 9

The latest entry in the Mortal Kombat series is a lot like a DVD with a ridiculous amount of quality extras, like that three-disc version of *Brotherhood of the Wolf* you imported from Canada. Or maybe that was just me. Well, this one will be making it out to a much larger audience, because it's absolutely stuffed with cool things to do. The combat engine is awesome, and will feel completely familiar to anyone who played Deadly Alliance. In terms of gameplay and graphics, it's not a quantum leap beyond the last title – the freshness comes from the additional gameplay types. There's Kombat, Konquest, Chess Kombat, Puzzle Kombat, online play, and a baker's buttload of unlockables. Each mode is a blast to play, although most feel like they are designed for play in small increments. But considering how many different things there are to do here, that's hardly a complaint. Deception delivers a lot of game, and it's all killer stuff. —**JEREMY**

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, the saying "crapping your pants" was officially coined

Almost every noteworthy Star Wars vehicle is playable

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Star Wars: Battlefront

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND OR 24-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS
> DEVELOPER PANDEMIC **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 21 **> ESRB** T

SEIZING CONTROL OF THE GALAXY ONE PLANET AT A TIME

At one point in your life, you've had a Star Wars fantasy. Some people daydream about saving the scantily clad Princess Leia from the clutches of the detestable crime lord Jabba the Hutt. Others long to be as virtuous as Luke Skywalker, as rugged as Han Solo, or as drop dead sexy as Lando Calrissian. I, on the other hand, dream of sitting in the pilot's chair of a lumbering AT-AT, cackling nefariously as I rain death down from above upon hapless rebel soldiers. Afterwards, I celebrate my victory with a juicy Ewok burger.

Call me sick and twisted if you wish, but it would appear that Battlefront's premise was created specifically to fulfill my sick reverie. Pandemic has developed a title that hones in on the intensity and sheer size of the battles from both motion picture trilogies. War is waged on 10 different planets, including Hoth, Geonosis, Endor, and *Revenge of the Sith*'s Kashyyyk. Players have the freedom to choose who they'll align themselves with in each of these conflicts. Naturally, vehicular units and personnel types vary by map. Players can pilot any vehicle, and upon death, can respawn as any trooper that they wish. In some cases, you may want a sniper. Other times you may need to fortify a base with someone wielding a rocket launcher. You really have to watch the battle unfold to determine the strategy that should be applied.

Tossing thermal detonators into a squad of unsuspecting soldiers, unloading countless blasts into a Tusken Raider camp with an AAT, running side-by-side with Darth Vader in the streets of Mos Espa: I can't stress enough just how entertaining Battlefront's gameplay is. All of the maps are wonderfully diverse and feature great advantage points for each of the teams. The controls are perfectly fashioned for the action at hand, and variety in the character types allows players to change things up on the fly.

Given the enormity of some of the maps, I do feel that several of the class types move way too slowly. This is a minor quibble, but it did drive me slightly nuts when I had significant ground to cover. I guess you could make the argument that this is just part of strategizing your attack. As you can imagine, vehicle controls can be a bit frustrating as well. Vessels like the TIE fighter and X-Wing are limited in movement, and the controls are a bit chaotic. Units like the AT-AT, AT-TE, and homing spider droid deal great damage, which is always fun, but move as slow as molasses.

Although three single player modes are available, Battlefront's true calling is online play. This game thrives off of a fragfest mentality and the coordination of attacks via headset. Customization for online is limited, but you can adjust the intelligence and number of bots, and determine if NPC heroes like Darth Vader and Mace Windu will join your ranks. At match end, statistics like headshots, favorite class, longest living streak, narrow escapes, and who was your main nemesis are tracked. Unfortunately, no leaderboards or persistent stats are accumulated within the game. You'll have to log onto a computer and head to www.lucasarts.com to see the player standings.

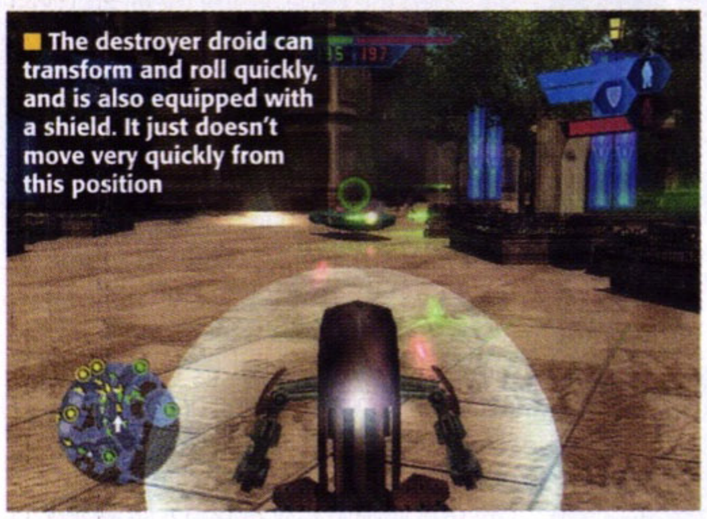
This is one of those games that is successful in the delivering of instant action, but doesn't offer up much in terms of depth. If you thrive off of the online deathmatch scene, you'll fall head over heels in love with Battlefront. Otherwise, it'll likely only hold your interest for a few hours tops.—**REINER**

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

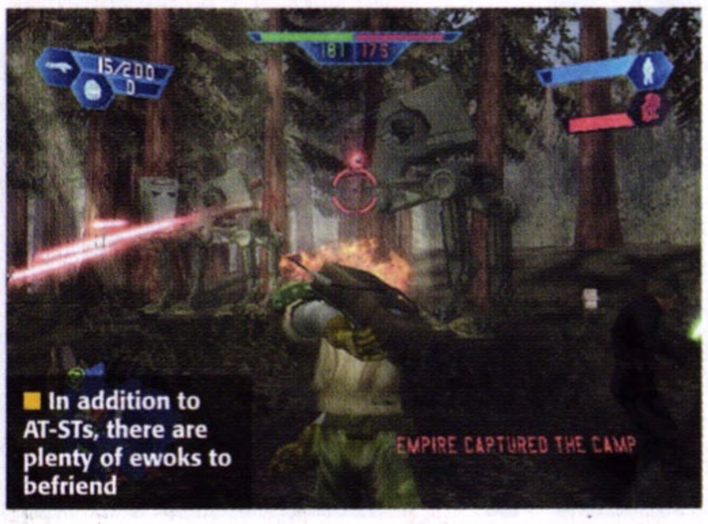
Both versions look and play identically. It just happens that the Xbox version supports 24 human players online, while the PS2 handles only 16. It's not much of an advantage, but the Xbox version gets The Edge.

Most of the battles are taken straight from the films

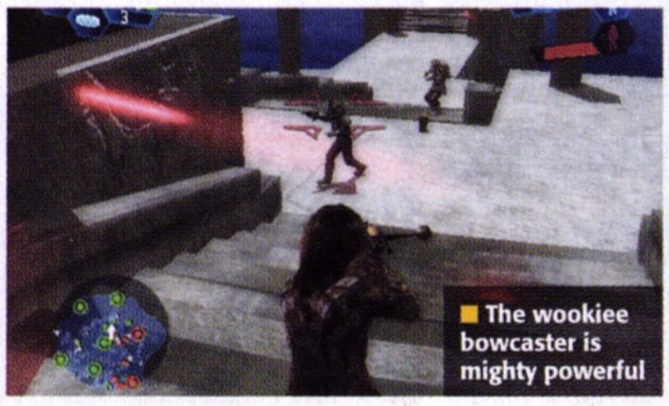


The destroyer droid can transform and roll quickly, and is also equipped with a shield. It just doesn't move very quickly from this position

On Naboo, you'll have to take down the Gungan shield



In addition to AT-STs, there are plenty of ewoks to befriend


The wookiee bowcaster is mighty powerful

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> Concept: An epic frag-a-thon that allows players to experience the legendary Star Wars battles firsthand

> Graphics: Given how much action is on screen at once, this game is surprisingly gorgeous

> Sound: The soundtrack and battle sounds are phenomenal (of course). This is also one of the best games for voice chat

> Playability: Fast-paced and explosive. Controlling vehicles can be a bit frustrating, however

> Entertainment: This is the experience that Star Wars fans have been clamoring for

> Replay Value: Moderate

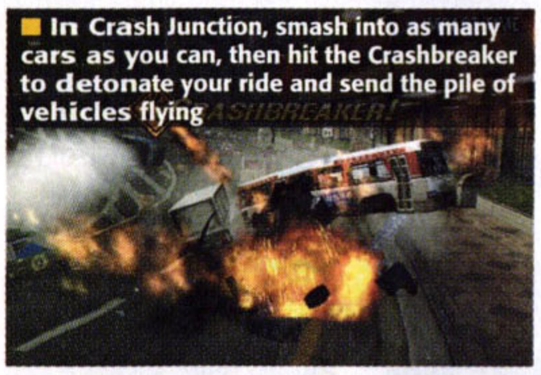
Second Opinion 7.75

The frustration of many Star Wars fans at the decline of the franchise can be avenged in one visual: Shooting an Ewok (or Gungan) right between the eyes. Now your wish comes true in a title that also happens to deliver one of the best Star Wars video games. It's not untrue that this is a title designed for frag-happy onliners, but as simple as the premise is, you will cackle with glee shooting down snowspeeders as an AT-AT or rolling through Naboo as a Droideka. The scale of the battles is breathtaking, but although this isn't some simple Dynasty Warriors hackfest, I'm not sure all the troop classes are balanced completely. The best strategy is brute force, which leaves secondary skills like Wookiees planting bombs or the use of droids out in the cold. Some may yearn for a little more strategy from Battlefront, but this title may be as much fun as that time you set Chief Chirpa on fire in your garage. —KATO

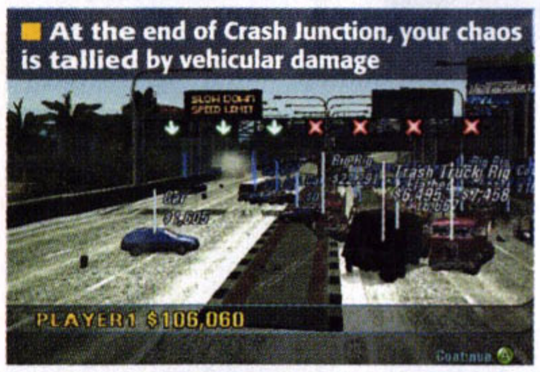
To win races, you'll constantly need to be driving on the wrong side of the road to gain boost

The slow-motion crash replays never get old

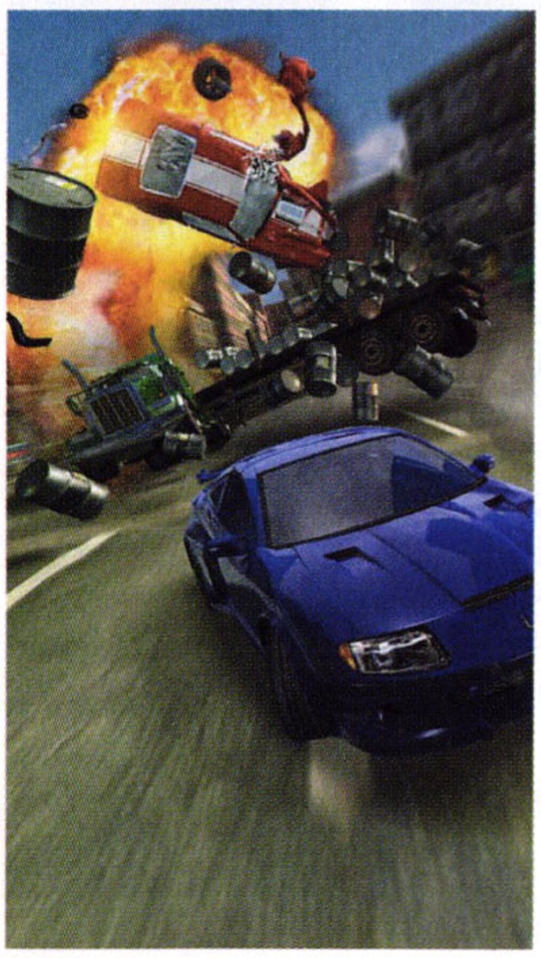
As you progress through the game's 173 events, your garage will grow with fast rides and wrecking machines



In Crash Junction, smash into as many cars as you can, then hit the Crashbreaker to detonate your ride and send the pile of vehicles flying



At the end of Crash Junction, your chaos is tallied by vehicular damage



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Burnout 3: Takedown

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER CRITERION GAMES **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 8 **> ESRB** E

THE ART OF WRECKING

Deep down inside, even the most humble of personalities have pondered the question "What would happen if I slammed the pedal to the metal and launched my car into that fuel tanker?" Of course, that little thing called a "conscience" flares into effect and you find yourself re-adjusting your seat-belt and feathering the brakes rather than speeding forth into an explosive inferno of smoldering death. As it turns out, Burnout 3 is a celebration of these reckless driving dreams. It rewards players for swerving through oncoming traffic, applauds knocking opponents off of cliffs, and ultimately begs the question, "Just how much damage can one vehicle inflict upon a crowded highway or a busy city street?"

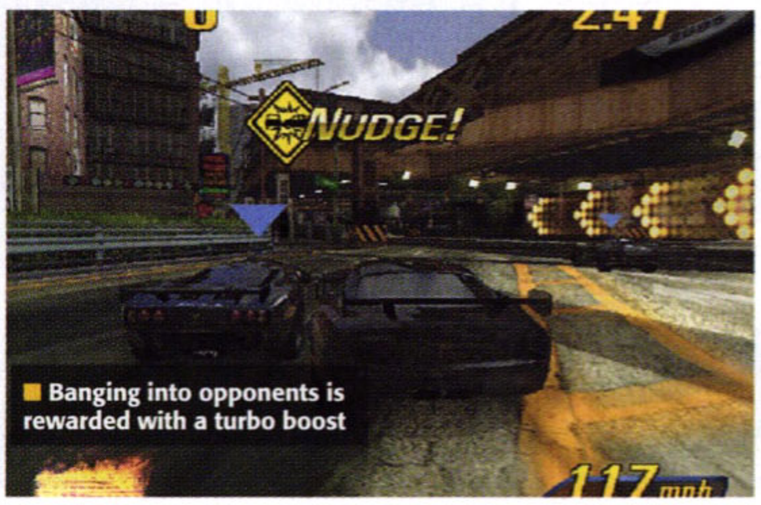
While the previous entries in the series have embraced the same destructive qualities, developer Criterion Games has overhauled the engine, applied a new coat of paint, and tuned Burnout 3 to the point that it roars with excitement and makes its predecessors feel like dreary driver's education tutorials. Criterion has expanded upon the series' gameplay significantly to create one of the most addictive racing games of all time.

With incredibly realistic damage modelling transforming every crash into a work of art fit to be framed and hung on the walls of Paris' Louvre museum, Burnout 3 is a visual dynamo that will floor players with its speed and gorgeous vistas.

Criterion has even gone to great lengths to recompense gamers for the damage that they inflict upon their opponents. When you wallop another driver with enough force or railroad them into a no-win situation, the game will pan away from your car to show your opponent's ride breaking apart, catching fire, and getting totaled with brilliant *Matrix*-like slow-motion effects. In a stroke of brilliance, Criterion has also implemented gameplay into wrecking. When your ride gets banged up, players have the choice to enter Impact Time – a segment presented in slow-motion which allows players to maneuver their demolished car until it comes to a stop. With this, a flaming wreck that was destined to rest on a rail can be moved to the center of the road in hopes of clipping the competition.

In a similar vein to EA's other big racing franchise, Need for Speed: Underground, the action in Burnout 3 unfolds in numerous ways. In total, players will be asked to achieve a gold medal in a staggering 173 events spread throughout the U.S., Europe, and the Far East. Achieving gold will unlock new vehicles, tracks, and different racing series. Players will also be rewarded with newspaper headlines, signature crash photographs, videos, and trophies for achieving certain things during races. From elimination heats and time trials to circuits and knockout competitions, you'll find yourself competing in just about every event that the racing genre can bring to the table. Of course, the popular Crash Mode makes a triumphant return and has been reworked to offer bigger pile-ups and magnificent blinding explosions. In my opinion, this is the heart and soul of this game. I couldn't stop playing these events. I just kept plowing my car into vehicles to try and create larger chain reactions and higher damage totals. Watching your car slam into a fuel tanker, which in turn sends a dozen vehicles and debris hurling into the air, is one of gaming's finest spectacles.

A celebration of breakneck speeds and pile-ups, Burnout 3 achieves racing omnipotence, giving the industry's most pimped-out racers a serious run for their money.—**REINER**



Banging into opponents is rewarded with a turbo boost

From the warping metal to the shower of debris, Burnout 3's crashes are unmatched

BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

> Concept: The ideal racer and master of vehicular carnage

> Graphics: Explosions and twisted metal reign supreme, giving you reason to look foolish as you jump up and down and clap with glee

> Sound: You can't go wrong with the Ramones. Overall, the soundtrack is decent, but the car sounds are a bit too generic

> Playability: The array of vehicles control admirably and the unique turbo system is integrated perfectly

> Entertainment: There are few games out there that are this fun to play

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 9

Imagine that each morning you woke up and realized it was your birthday (the best birthday, not the one with the scary clown and the annoying neighbor kid who peed on himself). There's cake and presents with big bows and you get to eat whatever you want and play games all day. Well, after Burnout 3 comes out, every day will be like this, because the crash 'n smash gameplay is so unbelievably fun. You'll giggle, you'll swoon, you'll have reactions that are inappropriate to talk about in polite company (you don't want to know). Burnout 3 is heaven in disc form. If you have multiple systems, the game is slightly more heavenly on Xbox, just because of the graphical upgrade (but I started on the PS2 version and it still looks smoking). The physics are rock solid, and the only place that I'd like to see some change is in the cars (I'm a car dork, and real rides would be a nice addition). Still, I haven't played for about two hours, and the time away has been a worse withdrawal than any game in recent memory.—**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Street Racing Syndicate

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA SYSTEM LINK, LAN, XBOX LIVE, OR PS2 ONLINE)
> PUBLISHER NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** EUTECHNYX **> RELEASE** AUGUST 31 **> ESRB** T

HACK 'N SLASH

After playing Street Racing Syndicate, I'm left with two overriding feelings: the racing itself is pretty good, and the rest of the game feels like a total hackjob. The title offers free-roaming cities, which it delivers on with versions of Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Miami. The wide-open feel is really there, and each gameplay option is available from this mode – you just ride up to people and start burning rubber.

From a racing physics standpoint, SRS is pretty solid. Each car feels different, and the upgrades available tangibly change your experience. These are very good things, and the high point of the game. The rest of the required pieces are generally cobbled together and left me thinking that this game was supposed to come out years ago…many years ago.

The interface for nearly every action is convoluted and hard to follow – you'll go into upwards of four menus before seeing exactly how a particular turbo kit changes your car (if you can remember the ride's base stats before you go in). Also, the free-roaming city is a great idea (one that other racers are introducing in the near future), but I almost always warped to places because I just didn't feel like cruising. It's not really much fun.

Also, I don't like the reward system. Here's where it comes down to a little personal preference – the biggest and easiest to find rewards are low-res videos of models dancing. Me? Not interested. Other offerings for good performances are things like cars, parts, and new events. The showroom doesn't readily tell you which cars are newly available, the tuning options are aggravating to implement, and the races are exceptionally short.

SRS could have been a contender; instead it feels like an unpolished, exploitative dud that falls short in the margins.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

> Concept: Open-city environments, street racing, and hot chicks

> Graphics: Very NFS: Underground-looking at night and interesting lens flare effects during the day – cars look a little flat

> Sound: The girls' videos feature some of the worst techno I've ever heard, and no, I'm not exaggerating

> Playability: Fairly solid car physics overall, and each car and customization changes the experience

> Entertainment: Certainly a more successful amalgamation than Juiced (see page 129), but still not something I'd be excited to play more of

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 6.75

SRS is basically an amalgamation of Midnight Club II, Need for Speed: Underground, and Project Gotham Racing. Even though it draws from each of these titles, it's like puréeing a Thanksgiving dinner and then sucking it through a straw – there's much lost in the translation. The main reason SRS doesn't grab me is because it has no sense of speed. But there's something else missing in its assemblage of parts, and it certainly isn't made up by being able to dabble in the flesh trade for exploitative videos of girls dancing. No, it's gonna take a lot more than that to make a good game.—KATO

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Test Drive: Eve of Destruction

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** MONSTER GAMES
> RELEASE AUGUST 24 **> ESRB** T

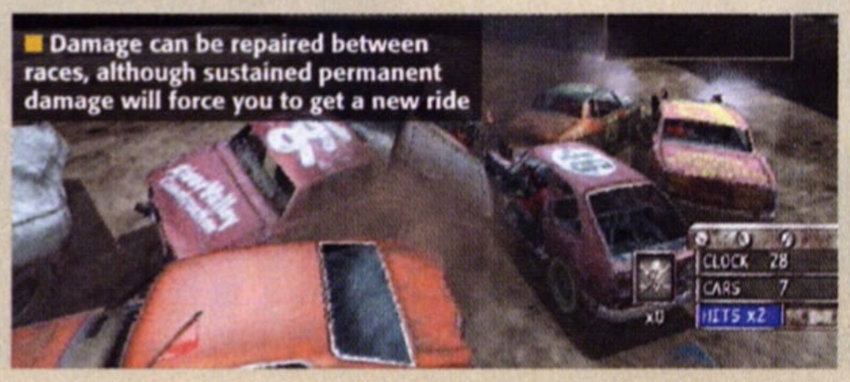
REDNECK RAMPAGE

Leaving the bright lights of NASCAR (the other No Fun League), Monster Games has headed to the Friday night lights of the local racetrack. Only instead of just kicking up dirt as the drivers go round-and-round, junked cars are bursting into flames and the winner isn't necessarily the best driver, he's just the craziest mother$#@%&* still left standing. Eve of Destruction's got a styrofoam cooler full of cans of whoop-ass, and one of them's got your name on it.

They say that half the journey is getting there, and this title proves that racing and wanting to smash someone into pieces while doing so aren't mutually exclusive gameplay elements. Whether it's the guaranteed mayhem of a suicide race (where half the field races in the opposite direction) or the high-flying thrills of a figure-eight jump track, this game's numerous events will make daredevils of everyone. A large part of the fun is due to the randomness of the AI drivers, who cause all sorts of trouble on their own (as do the myriad persistent objects littered around the track). One of my favorite moments was when my car was broadsided in mid-air by another car on the last lap of a figure-eight jump race. I didn't care in the least, as long as my car flipped end over end across the finish line in first.

I appreciate that the career mode gives you some races to pick up for extra cash for new cars and upgrades. Although your progression through the career mode is smooth because there's always something to do, I didn't feel that the tracks themselves gave me enough surprises once I mastered the different types of races. I guess it's at times like this that one should turn to the game's multiplayer – which regretfully has no online.

The racing genre has been looking for a new hook for a while now, and I think that Monster has started its own fun method of mayhem.—**KATO**



■ Damage can be repaired between races, although sustained permanent damage will force you to get a new ride

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> Concept: It's like crushing a beer can on your head. Only with cars

> Graphics: Car models crumple beautifully and the persistent objects are impressive

> Sound: The announcer gives good play-by-play and calls out monikers. They call me Mr. Fist

> Playability: Although your damaged car won't drive differently, everything feels like it should

> Entertainment: Ultimately it's a limiting game, but I think we can all relate to the twisted metal

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.25

You want to know what Test Drive taught me? That I had no idea what really happens on Friday nights with a beater car, a carton of generic cigarettes, and a trunk full of Schlitz beer. The race types are the biggest draw for me, but the actual driving to different game functions (like repairs, used car lot, and home base) rate a close second. I do wish that the damage meant more with regard to driving physics and that there were more "characters" to deal with – these people could be freakin' hilarious. Instead, they are a little flat and the racing is slower-paced than others in the genre. Of course, that's because your car is only worth $20, but still, the thrills are for a specific type of racing fan.—**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

The Red Star

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM **> DEVELOPER** ACCLAIM STUDIOS AUSTIN **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 6
> ESRB T

LESS THAN STELLAR MAGNITUDE

The Red Star has a lot of things going for it. Based on the award-winning comic of the same name, this title combines Gradius and Gauntlet in a mixture of combo-laden weapon wielding and frantic bullet dodging. In theory, this sounds like a sure-fire hit. However, though it does have fun moments, the game suffers from the "10-year-old building an indestructible snow fort" syndrome: A lot of excitement is poured into the planning and concept, but all enthusiasm peters out when the time comes to actually execute it.

There will be plenty of people who appreciate Red Star for what it does best – unabated action. You start the campaign as either Kyuzo (a beefy dude with a giant sword) or Makita (complete with fuzzy hat and a sickle), and use a combination of gunplay and melee attacks to combat an oppressive army. Eventually you can also gain control of another character from the comic, Maya, but she needs to be unlocked first. Each character has several unique moves, and they face an abundant supply of enemies to soak up your aggression. Of course, while you're unleashing your Russian fury, you'll also need to maneuver through a hail of bullets and energy beams to keep the ass-kicking apace. The situation gets even more hectic when you add a second player for some co-op mayhem. Because of the mix between brawler and shooter, the perspective alternates between standard side-scrolling and a more Ikaruga-esque top-down view, but the level of action onscreen always stays consistently high.

However, just because there is a lot of action doesn't necessarily mean that it is well done. The targeting system is ridiculous and counter-intuitive. Every time you want to lock on to enemies, you need to face them directly and hold the lock-on button. Once your selected foe is defeated, continuing to hold the button doesn't automatically cycle to the next logical target; you need to release the button and press it again, making sure you're staring your new prey directly in the eye. This may not seem like a big deal at first, but when you are surrounded by foes and shimmying in all directions trying to duck bullets, locking on to an appropriate target is a laborious chore that results in enough time for the opposition to score some cheap hits. On another note, I also found it disappointing that, for a game based on a comic with such an involved story, the plot is surprisingly weak and relayed solely though boring text screens between missions.

"Just because there is a lot of action doesn't necessarily mean that it is well done."

If there is one lesson to be learned from The Red Star, it is this: No matter how acclaimed the source material, a cool setting isn't worth anything if you can't take advantage of it. If I'm in the land of puntable puppies, but my legs have been sewn together, it doesn't do me any good, does it? Likewise, if I'm in the world of The Red Star, but I can't make my characters shoot or slice straight, I'm just not going to be too excited.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> Concept: Transform a complex graphic novel into a twitchy, simplistic action game

> Graphics: The environments are a drab, colorless mix of spaceships and Eastern Bloc, but the main character models are pretty sweet

> Sound: The grunts and screams your character makes while executing a combo are strangely satisfying, and the score appropriately dismal

> Playability: Just mash buttons. It will save you the frustration of dealing with the lack of precision

> Entertainment: If you like shooting and stabbing, but not going to jail for it, this is your chance

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

The stunning graphic novel *The Red Star* is filled with a unique mixture of magic and high technology within a world strongly reminiscent of the bygone Soviet Union. The translation from paper to game has succeeded admirably, and the game is chock full of intense action. Unfortunately, it loses out in the story department, which comes across as almost an afterthought amid the constant fighting. Those gamers who enjoy the frantic shooting of Contra, but could do without the pattern memorization inherent to those titles, should be pleased with Red Star. Here, success in combat is more about timing and spatial observation than memorization. My biggest complaint involves the levels, which start to look predictably similar – the unceasing snow and the machines of industry can only hold my attention so long. However, the game does get my award for best way to announce a boss battle: "Decisive encounter. Fealty is due."—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Outlaw Golf 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR
> DEVELOPER HYPNOTIX **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 19 **> ESRB** M

MORE ACCOUTREMENT THAN ACCURACY

Hypnotix's Outlaw Golf 2 is a dividing force in the golf game wonderland – some will think that its creativity and humor make up for the questionable gameplay, while others will be so aggravated that no amount of humorously poor taste will redeem the experience. I fall somewhere in-between the two, leaning like a poorly propped shanty towards the "humor overrides the aggravation" camp.

Personally, and I know that I'm in the minority here, I think that real golf is stodgy. I don't like playing actual golf – it's hot, slow, and requires certain feats of accuracy that I'm just not capable of. I do, on the other hand, like golf simulations that don't make me scream, "Aw! Come on! Physics my butt!" This, friends, is probably why I liked the first Outlaw Golf (and, in turn, am more accepting with this entry). It's got the quirk that I need with a reasonable approximation of the realism that I want.

So then what's the deal with Outlaw Golf 2? Well, the added features are really good. But the ball physics, camera, and composure meter could use some tuning. The weather, a first for the series, is a constant problem. Rain and wind have unpredictable and unbelievable results. The camera is unwieldy when trying to see the entire hole or even just the pin in relation to, and I know it's weird to ask for this, the ball. The composure meter, one of my favorite features from the last game, is back and still unpredictable. What determines if a shot was good or not is totally mystifying to me, and it almost appears to be random.

Outlaw Golf 2 still tries hard, though, to make people laugh. Dave Attell from Comedy Central's *Insomniac* is hysterical, instantly recognizable, and money well spent. There aren't many people who could say things after a poor shot along the lines of, "Like a priest at a Boy Scout convention, that's a bad lie," and have it still be funny. Did I mention before that this is a game for adults? Well, it is.

Another big addition is the cart racing. Like the earlier game, you earn tokens for a birdie or better which can be used (as in the first game) to beat up your caddie and restore composure, or to race a golf cart and earn a perfect shot. Not to overstate, but the idea is awesome. Cart racing is genius, but the actual mechanics could use some work, so I rarely did it during tournaments.

What the game really boils down to is this: The humor is certainly there, but Hypnotix really needs to get the polish onto this simulation before people will revere its hilarity. Well, most people that is. I'm still going to hit these links, but it won't be my only weapon of golfing choice.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> Concept: Pump up the popular first game in every possible direction – courses, modes, customization, graphics, and style

> Graphics: Despite the subject matter, it is fair to say that everything looks nice and clean

> Sound: Dave Attell's voice work is genius, and the tunes are serviceable

> Playability: I've got some quibbles with the finer points, but a decent golf sim overall

> Entertainment: Definitely for adults and those that like a little arcade mentality in their sim

> Replay Value: Moderately High

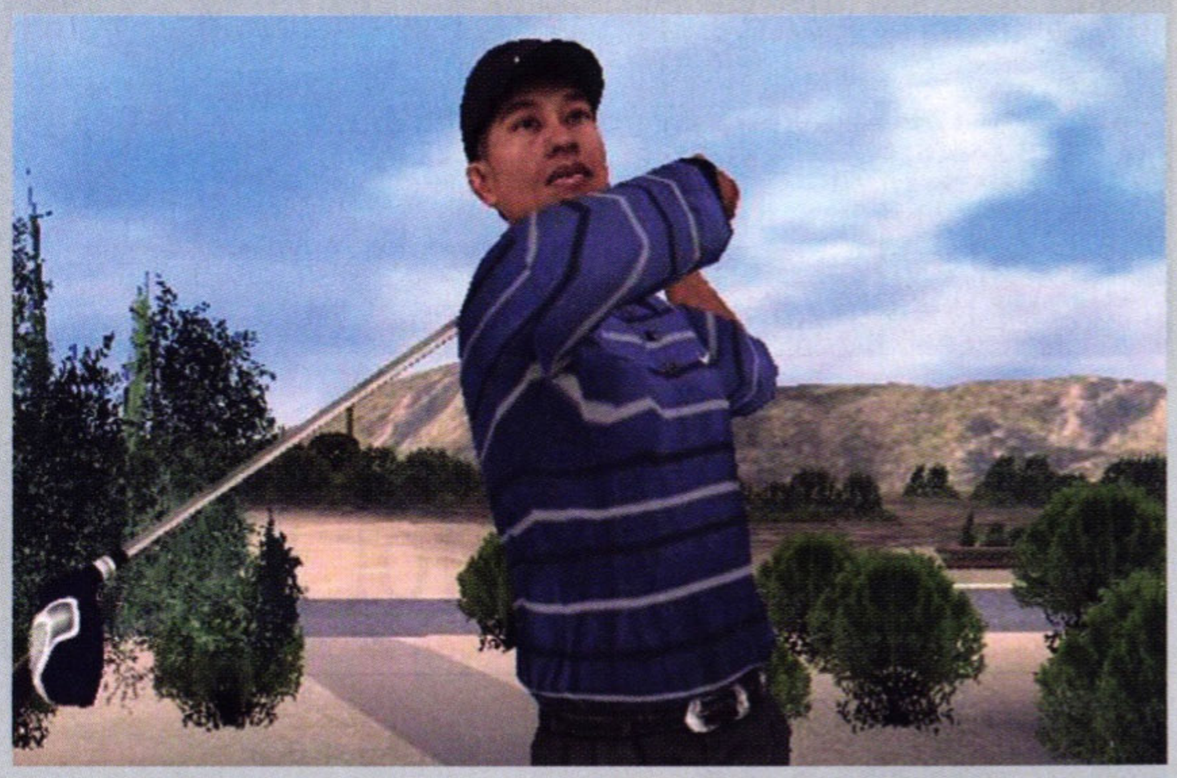
Second Opinion 6.75

Even though my golf game is in the 120s, and for me a double bogey on a par three is shooting an eight (four times two – get it?), the unpredictable results in Outlaw Golf 2 are more wild than when I take to the links in real life. Although this game has gotten better along the margins, with challenges to award skill points, cart races, more courses, and a cool tour structure, the fact that its physics haven't improved isn't good. I once hit a ball in the pouring rain and it rolled across the green like it had wheels on it. Then there was the time when I hit into a nine mph cross wind with no effect to my ball. At $20, you get what you pay for.—KATO

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (1 OR 2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE AND PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> DEVELOPER EA REDWOOD SHORES **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 **> ESRB** E



FROM BIRDIE TO BOGEY

There's a nasty rumor going around that EA Sports' development teams are preoccupied with developing for the next-generation consoles, leaving less time for the giant leaps of innovation that defined games like last year's Madden and Tiger. Of course, there's no way to substantiate this gossip, but there's as much smoke as there is fire with this game.

If I told you you'd get to play against legends like Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Arnold Palmer, and Ben Hogan, that would probably get your attention, wouldn't it? EA is hoping so, because the game's career mode is the same as last year's mix of versus matches and scenarios, only they end in you facing off with these legends. But unless you're dripping with anticipation to get your wood out and compare shafts with Palmer, the average player probably won't find these old guys that exciting. Elsewhere, the title hasn't really changed. Of course, more GameFace options and stuff to buy are here, but I wasn't impressed with the Tour difficulty, new chip shot (it's more limiting than anything else), and Create A Swing. Tigerproofing isn't the true course creator that fans are looking for, but it's cool that you can get the legends to come play you there. And like buying stuff in the pro shop, you get addicted to collecting Tigerproofing options like a diamond sand trap raking pattern (Wow!). By the way, turn off Tiger Vision, because it's a cheat that serves little purpose other than telling you Tiger is so great he can see the green with x-ray-like vision. Tiger Woods? Never heard of him! I'll bet he's no Nancy Lopez.

Don't get me wrong – this is a good game. But when I haven't even fully digested last year's weighty offering, I can't get myself to shell out the cash to get this game just so I can change my stance in relation to the ball and make myself look even older and uglier than I am in real life with the new GameFace options. Of course, if legends are your thing, then you'll be over the moon. But after last year's revolutionary success, this game – like Madden – is slowing down with age.—**KATO**

He's single, ladies, and he won't protest giving you bunion rubs

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: Put Tiger in his historical place with other golf legends. Who knows, maybe there's a place for your ugly mug, too

> Graphics: Virtually unchanged from last year

> Sound: The announcers are great…when they aren't talking in the middle of your backswing

> Playability: Inaccuracies in reconciling the caddy tips with the actual lay of the green still exist – particularly when aiming left or right

> Entertainment: Tigerproofing is an attempt at a course creator, but despite a face lift, the game remains essentially unchanged

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 8.75

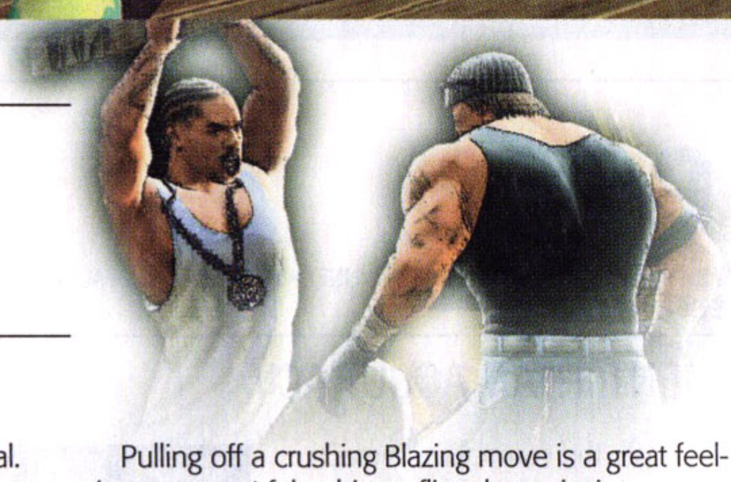
This year, it would appear that EA is targeting senior citizens. Not only does the game boast legendary players, you can now age your facial texturing to the point where you have the desired number of wrinkles. Furthermore, if your vision is no longer what it used to be, EA has also implemented Tiger Vision, which highlights exactly where you need to place your putt. The only element missing is virtual Viagra. Jokes aside, you can't go wrong with new courses, and the legend-related modes are fantastic. I especially enjoy how old-timers challenge you to a round on your user-made Dream 18 course. Although familiar, EA is still shooting par for the course.—**REINER**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Def Jam: Fight for NY

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** EA BIG **> DEVELOPER** AKI CORPORATION **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 **> ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> Concept: Take this hip-hop inspired brawler far beyond the squared circle

> Graphics: Excellent character models and effects, although these rappers would kill to be this cock diesel in real life

> Sound: Aside from a few selections that are probably the work of Def Jam's PR department, there's a ton of bangers for your listening pleasure

> Playability: Easy to learn, difficult to master – expect to get your ass handed to you a lot!

> Entertainment: Fans are going to love it, despite its wicked learning curve

> Replay Value: Moderate

OPERATION: MASH OUT!

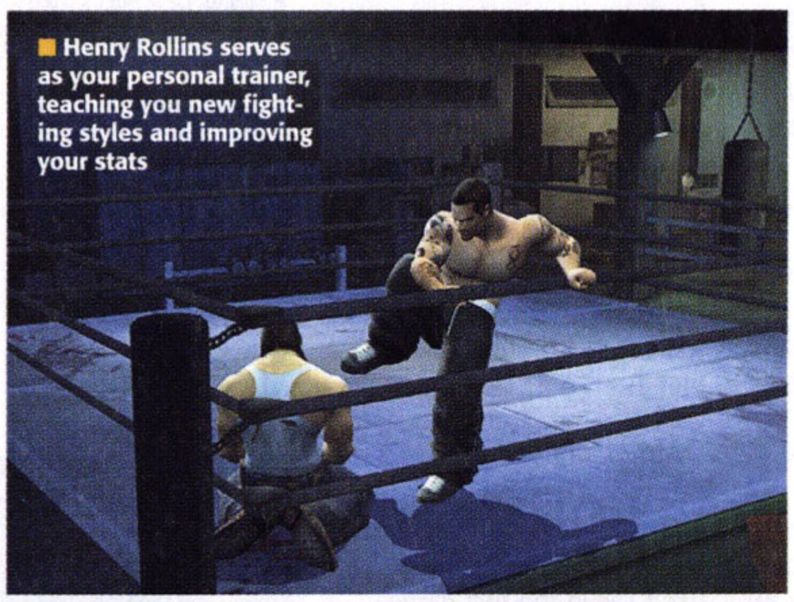
Def Jam Vendetta, although it didn't bear the WWE license, was one of the best wrestling games to come down the pike in a while. Apparently, EA Big and Def Jam wanted to distance it a bit from the genre, as Def Jam: Fight for NY is going farther away from its roots, and has been crafted as more of a comprehensive *Fight Club*-inspired street brawler.

The biggest changes have taken place in the game's Story mode and frontend features, which now rival almost any fighting or wrestling game on the market. You start by creating a character in a "police sketch," filling in details like head shape, haircut, eyes, facial hair, and so on. You can then outfit him with a wide variety of the flyest gear, at retailers like New York's legendary Jacob & Co. (home of Jacob the Jeweler) and Syndicate Urban Streetwear, which stocks many popular urban clothing brands. To be honest, these "dress-up" features were probably the most compelling part of the game to me. More importantly, you can also use earned points to upgrade your fighter's stats, buy new moves, and even learn new fighting styles. The career mode has been greatly expanded, now encompassing a large number of venues and even adding in gimmick events, like cage matches and a bout where you must smash your opponent's car into scrap metal.

The game's also got a host of hip-hop star power, including Snoop, Method Man, Slick Rick, and Ghostface, as well as actors Omar Epps and Danny Trejo. There are over 70 characters both fictional and real to unlock, and I think most people will be thankful for the long and eventful story mode that's been implemented here.

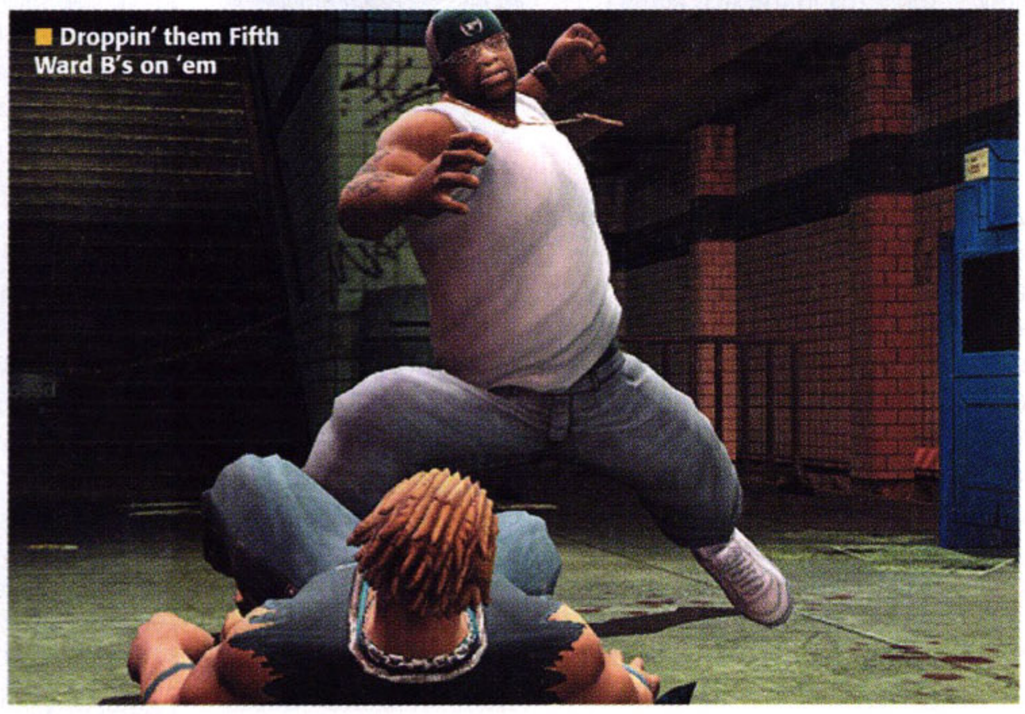
As for the action itself, this is some very fast-paced and brutal – very brutal – action. Although the control scheme is relatively simple, you'll quickly learn that there is an exact science to administering grapples and harsh environmental moves at just the right moment. You'll learn this lesson the hard way: by getting your brains bashed in like overripe squash by the challenging computer AI. Though difficult, it never feels unfair or that the computer is "cheating," with the exception of counters, which the AI seems to be able to do more often than you can. Hang in there, though, because soon you'll be pulling off some amazing Blazing moves and the especially cool maneuvers where you work against your opponent with members of the audience.

Pulling off a crushing Blazing move is a great feeling, even as I felt a bit conflicted at enjoying a game that portrays hip-hop culture as little more than beating up people and buying expensive jewelry. Where have you gone, Chuck D? To the rest home, probably, and no one seems to mind anyway. Rap music used to mean more than this, but all art ends up getting turned into product, and as products go, this is a good one.—**MATT**



Henry Rollins serves as your personal trainer, teaching you new fighting styles and improving your stats

"So, The *Meth & Red Show's* scripts were hackneyed drivel?! Take that Tom Shales!"



Droppin' them Fifth Ward B's on 'em

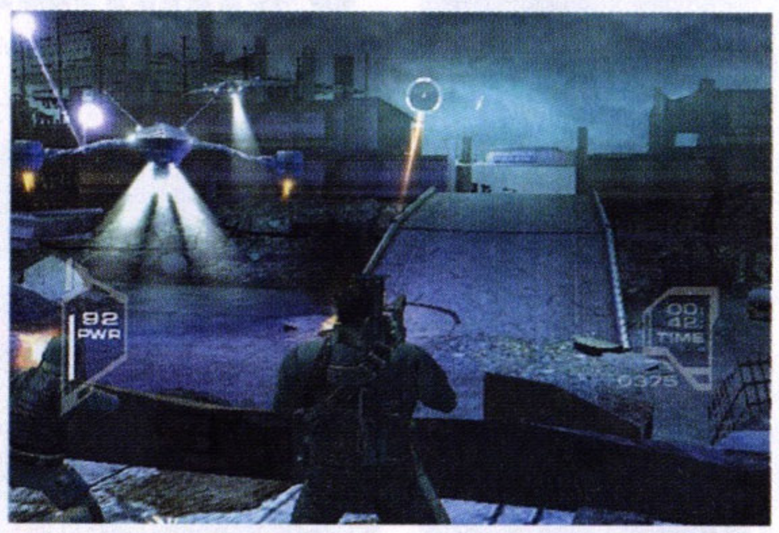
Second Opinion 9

As hard-hitting as the original Def Jam's gameplay was, there wasn't much in terms of depth. Story mode proved to be highly amusing, but also incredibly short. Gimmick matches, create-a-character, and unlockable content were noticeably absent as well. With this sequel, AKI has flexed its development muscle and implemented everything that you could possibly want from a wrestling game. Gimmick matches are plentiful, you can purchase tons of cosmetics for your created character (think Tiger Woods), story mode has been lengthened considerably, and get this: There are 74 playable characters. With gameplay, the maneuvers that you have at your fingertips are limited, but the action that unfolds is a real showstopper. Ramming heads through fences, tossing people to the crowd for a beat down, breaking spines with a flashy finisher – AKI has found the perfect balance between sheer violence and complete bliss. —**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Terminator 3: Redemption

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** PARADIGM **> RELEASE** AUGUST 24 **> ESRB** T



YOUR CLOTHES, YOUR BOOTS, AND YOUR MOTORCYCLE

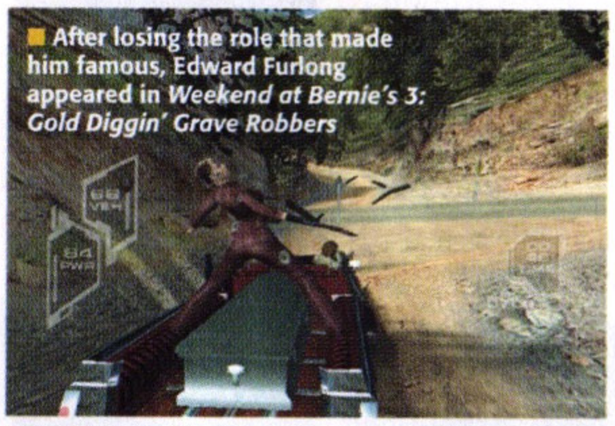
Someday, my dream of owning games based on *Raw Deal* and *Junior* will come true, but until then Terminator 3: Redemption will tide me over. Not only is it the best Arnold or Terminator-themed game ever (which isn't saying all that much), but it's also one of the best licensed games around. The craptacular first T3 game, Rise of the Machines, may make some a bit skittish about picking up Redemption, but this new entry is actually a solid action title that should please those looking for a simple, hardcore experience.

The participation of Schwarzenegger himself was touted as one of the big draws for this title. He lends his voice and the character model is eerily perfect, but this is no simple star vehicle. This game, at its core, is about shootin' stuff. As the Terminator, you'll spend most of the game spewing out enough ammo to take over Rhode Island.

The story plays out like a director's cut of *Terminator 3*. It follows the plot of the film and includes all the major action scenes, flashing out the story with additional sequences, many in the war-ravaged future. Not only does it reveal how Terminators travel back in time, but it also gives us a glimpse at the desolate post-Judgement Day world. As a whole, Redemption is a visually stunning game – your character model is awesome, especially when damaged. Energy blasts look great, and environments are huge. On all three systems, Redemption looks fantastic.

Of course, graphics are nothing without gameplay. It's a little on the simple side: The auto-targeting system is a bit wonky, and some vehicles control better than others, but overall the gameplay works as it should, and offers up a good action experience. The Terminator can utilize hand-to-hand combat, dual wield ridiculously huge guns, and steal vehicles with the touch of a button. You will find yourself driving Jeeps, a hearse, trucks, and all kinds of robotic war machines. Several levels also feature on-rails segments, which require you to serve as a gunner while on board a vehicle driving a set path. In one level you must gun down Terminators from a helicopter, while in another you must shoot at the evil T-X as she attempts to ram you with her huge crane truck.

Over the course of a single stage, you may find yourself playing up to four different variations on the action. While this does keep the action fresh, it also keeps things difficult. Die in the final leg of a level, and you'll have to do the entire stage over. At first, this game feels tough but fair. By the final three stages, you'll be throwing your controller in disgust and inventing new swear words. It's a pretty hard game, one which will require you to replay the same areas time and again to get things right. But the campaign is compelling enough that Terminator fans will need to play through it, and action fans looking for a challenge will be plenty satisfied. Much like a summer movie, it delivers explosive action, looks fantastic, and doesn't require much from your brain.—**JEREMY**



■ After losing the role that made him famous, Edward Furlong appeared in *Weekend at Bernie's 3: Gold Diggin' Grave Robbers*

TERMINATION TIMES TWO

As a nice little bonus, Redemption features a co-op mode, which places gamers in the roles of two humans who gun down evil robots from a helicopter. Here, you'll fly through areas from the single-player campaign and lend aerial support to the human resistance. Not only does this mode feature a different perspective on the levels, it has a competitive scoring system to keep you coming back. Like the campaign, it's simple but fun.

BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: As the T-101, play through an extended version of the third *Terminator* story

> Graphics: Good environments, great character models, and nice lighting effects make for one good-looking game

> Sound: It's got Arnold saying "Talk to the hand." What more do you need?

> Playability: Targeting could use a little work and gameplay is fairly basic, but overall everything is as solid as Arnold himself

> Entertainment: Who would have thought that the worst Terminator movie would be adapted into the best game?

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

Most Terminator games are as forgettable as Edward Furlong's movie career. While Redemption is plagued by an appalling targeting system, horrifying one-liners by Schwarzenegger, and a handful of gimmick-driven action sequences that are in desperate need of polish, by and large the game is surprisingly solid. A track shooter in the simplest sense, Redemption unloads non-stop carnage and lights up the screen with mouth-watering visuals. By changing up the gameplay mechanics from stage to stage, it never feels like you are doing the same thing twice. The gameplay could definitely be tighter, but the manic firefights and rapid pacing keep you on your toes and enthralled by the action at hand. Much like Enter the Matrix, Redemption rewards players nicely with new plot points that expand upon the third Terminator film. I never thought I'd see the day, but there's finally a Terminator game worth playing.
—**REINER**

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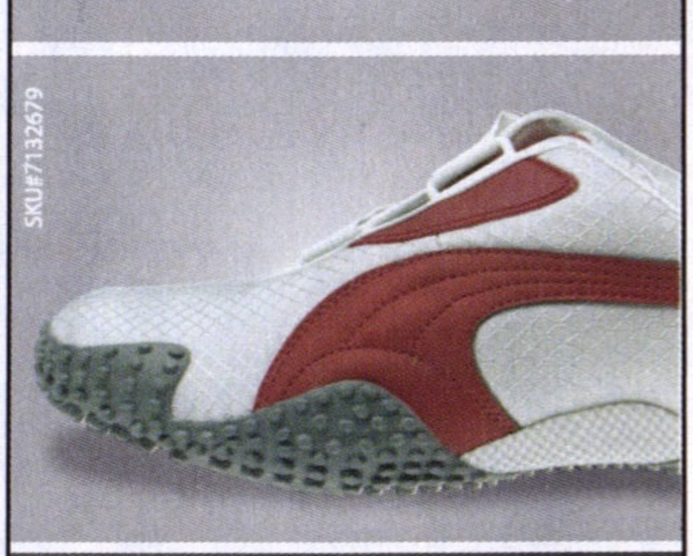

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Robotech: Invasion

> STYLE 1 TO 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE **> DEVELOPER** VICIOUS CYCLE **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 5 **> ESRB** T

LONELY SOLDIER BOY

Being an avid follower of the Robotech anime series, I was excited to get my hands on its most recent game version. Like most fans, I was pleasantly surprised with the quality treatment that Robotech received with 2002's Battlecry. Invasion dramatically departs from the formula established with that game, opting instead for a darker, grittier tone that seems somehow at odds with the source material. In fact, much of the iconic music, sounds, and emotive quality of the classic cartoon are absent here, making the game a fairly standard sci-fi romp with little of the magic it might have had.

With that said, I actually had some genuine fun with Invasion. Occasionally, firefights with the Invid invaders can reach a fever pitch, and juggling your different combat options becomes a real challenge. Controlling a transformable Cyclone motorcycle/mech is quite sweet, even if the bike physics are flawed at best. I was impressed by the capable use of both first- and third-person perspectives, both of which control well enough. I also thought several of the levels were cool to look at, accurately relaying a sense of the ruin and desolation wrought by the years of warfare that Earth has faced by this point in the story.

Unfortunately, the level design is linear and drab, including significant portions of backtracking and wide expanses of empty space. Also, your transformable power armor is rendered impotent anytime you go indoors, as the suit will refuse to transform unless outside in the open. This slows down the action considerably. There are also a few poorly balanced sections of difficulty scattered throughout the game, where after long periods of simplistic shooting, you are suddenly thrown up against a nearly insurmountable army of foes.

Some clever cameos by Scott Bernard and his crew should please those with the know-how to recognize them. And, a worthwhile multiplayer component adds some value. But without very much of the authentic magic of the series, Invasion never really takes off.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> Concept: The lesser-known New Generation Robotech era receives its first game treatment with this sci-fi shooter

> Graphics: Too many darkened backgrounds and questionable texturing, but some original backgrounds create a believable version of Earth ravaged by years of war

> Sound: Decent original music is mixed with smidgens of familiar Robotech themes. While the music repeats frequently, the voice work is excellent

> Playability: Both first- and third-person views work well, and the controls feel natural and unstrained

> Entertainment: Straddling the complicated line between pleasing the fans and appealing to the mainstream, it ends up being mediocre on both sides

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 6.75

The last Robotech had a no-nonsense approach to action, but this game strips away even more, which doesn't leave you with much. I wanted the series to incorporate more touches from the anime show, but without the cel shading, it now uses even fewer. But perhaps the most damning aspect of the game is that it barely manages to hold your attention through its linear mission structure, troublesome targeting (which doesn't scroll through targets easily), and wonky bike physics. I also would have liked a dodge maneuver besides the jump button. Rick, Max, and Miriya – you are sorely missed.—**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Mega Man X Command Mission

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 3 **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 **> ESRB** E

NOT A MEGA MAN, NOT YET AN RPG

Mega Man has never been a thinking man's game. Honestly, if I had an X-Buster grafted onto my arm, I wouldn't spend my time reasoning things out, either. With all of his experience in the action genre, it's no surprise that the battle system is the best part of Command Mission, Mega Man's most recent foray into the RPG realm. Every character you recruit has multiple weapons, a super move, and a hyper mode that makes them extra-awesome for a few rounds. Though not exactly innovative, it is incredibly fun to use these powers to bust up legions of robotic ne'er-do-wells.

However, for all of the cool special moves and boss fights, the heart of any RPG is the story. Sadly, Command Mission doesn't just fail in this area; it is a discotheque fire disaster with no survivors. This game's plot isn't merely bad – it's embarrassing and painful. Whereas most RPGs present cinematics and cutscenes as incentives, Command Mission uses them (along with shameful voice acting) as deterrents in its unrelenting effort to make you put down the controller. It punishes you for your progress, seeming to say, "Congratulations, you beat the mission! Here is our digital equivalent of a throat jab: exposition!"

Though the story may be more palatable to a younger audience, the difficulty levels are so uneven that any player young enough to stomach the weak plot is probably not up to the frustration some of the boss fights provide. These challenging battles were a highlight for me, but it takes inhuman endurance to slog through all of the garbage to get to them. Despite its stylish cel shading and cool combat, much of the game just feels derivative, providing fun only for the extremely patient or extremely deaf.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> Concept: Make a Mega Man RPG with as much story as a Mega Man action game

> Graphics: The blue bomber was simply meant to be cel shaded. The character models are awesome, but the environments all look like the inside of a metal crate

> Sound: Gone are the days of Mega Man's catchy, classic NES music. Generic cyber-tunes and terrible voice work will crush your will to rock

> Playability: Everything is familiar, borrowing heavily from Xenosaga in terms of both mechanics and difficulty

> Entertainment: All of the excitement of your everyday chores. Feed cat. Do dishes. Play Command Mission

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

Given the dubious track record of Mega Man RPGs, I had serious doubts on this one. I'm happy to report that those concerns were mostly unfounded, and Command Mission emerges as a solid but basically garden-variety RPG experience. Some vivid cel shading makes the character models a particular strong point. And while the combat system is familiar, that's not necessarily a bad thing. The big disappointment came with the story, which was rife with predictability and clichés. Also, the environments all looked mechanical and drab – designed with the same robotic single-mindedness with which X vanquishes his foes. Still, all in all, I walked away pleasantly surprised.—**MILLER**

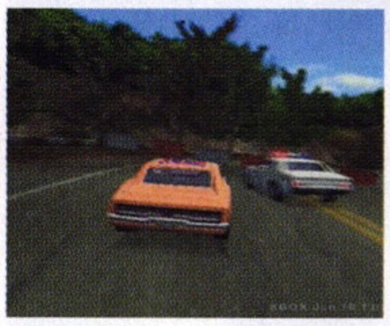
MULTI-PLATFORM QUICKIES

The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** RATBAG GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 28 > **ESRB** E

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



If Driver married its cousin, there's a good chance the spawn of said union would look a lot like The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee. Sure as shootin', this new licensed racer based on the beloved TV show takes the PSone-era mission-based racing formula into the backwoods of the deep South, to little effect. While fans of the series will like all the Dukes minutia on display (including voiceovers from Tom Wopat, John Schneider, and Catherine Bach), everyone else will get little more than a few headaches and a bad case of déjà vu. The basic racing is decent, but the dull missions and lack of polish (there's some really bad collision going on in parts of Hazzard County) make this little more than a "me-too" product designed to sell solely on the appeal of the franchise.—**MATT**

The Guy Game

BOTTOM LINE 3

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER BOARD > **PUBLISHER** GATHERING > **DEVELOPER** TOPHEAVY STUDIOS > **RELEASE** AUGUST 31 > **ESRB** M

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

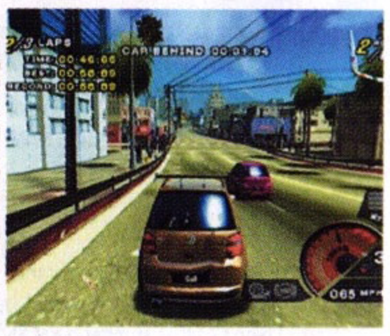
Now, I like nudity as much as the next guy, but this is just sad. The point is to slog through some basic trivia in order to earn a glimpse at some topless sorority sisters. Both the player and the girls are asked a trivia question. If they get it wrong, they must flash their breasts, and if you get it right, your points fill up a meter that unlocks an uncensored view of the nudity. Here's the problem: If you're old enough (and desperate enough) to buy this game, you're old enough to buy *Girls Gone Wild*, subscribe to Cinemax, or just rent some soft-core skin flicks, all of which offer more nudity with less effort. The Guy Game is touted as a fun time for a bunch of dudes to sit around and ogle some boobies, but it's just not. If you're seriously interested in this "game," you're probably a loser who's embarrassed to buy porn, and way too chicken to actually talk to a real girl.—**JEREMY**

Juiced

BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM > **DEVELOPER** JUICE GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 7 > **ESRB** T

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



With all of the racing games I've played, even just the ones this month, Juiced falls to the lower end of the goodness scale. It's not that it doesn't have some nice ideas, or even that all of those concepts were executed poorly; it's more that Juiced is an amalgamation of the best racing titles' worst parts. The graphics are good, but the soundtrack is terrible. The showoff functionality is a unique diversion, but it makes the racing physics very spin-happy. The car customization is flush with licensed parts, but the budgetary constraints take away from some of the over-the-top fun shown in other titles. Depending on what I am doing, I yearn for any of the more-polished (and more playable) racing titles that it tries to emulate. Juiced's particular mix of sim and arcade racing is best summed up as a failed experiment.—**LISA**

Midway Arcade Treasures 2

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (DEPENDING ON GAME) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11 > **ESRB** E

PS2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

I think I'm going to cry. With arcade-perfect ports of Mortal Kombat II and 3, NARC, Rampage World Tour, Total Carnage, and Gauntlet II, classic compilations really don't get much better than this. Not to sound too much like a sleazy infomercial salesman, but this amazing collection offers so much more! You can also play A.P.B., Arch Rivals, Championship Sprint, Cyberball 2072, Hard Drivin, Kozmik Krooz'r, Primal Rage, Spy Hunter 2, Timber Wacko, Wizard of Wor, Xenophobe, and Xybots. Oh yeah, that miserable quarter-stealer Pit Fighter is included as well. That game always sucked. Several of the titles, such as MK 3, feature behind-the-scenes videos and histories. As if I need to say it, Midway Arcade Treasures 2 is a nostalgic dream come true.—**REINER**

Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005

BOTTOM LINE 4

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** FUN LABS > **RELEASE** AUGUST 26 > **ESRB** T

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

I've learned something about deer hunting from playing these games: it's boring. We're talking like Weather Channel boring here. Guinness World Record boring. Deer Hunt 2005 simulates that boredom like you wouldn't believe, so I guess I have to give it points for being accurate. If you're into that sort of thing, then you'll appreciate this game's wide equipment options, big environments, and all that jazz. In all honestly, it's a pretty solid simulation. It just so happens that it's simulating something most gamers wouldn't do in a million years. We fear natural light. You deer hunters can have this title. The rest of us have more fun things to do, like regrouting bathroom tile.—**JEREMY**

ShellShock: Nam '67

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** GUERILLA GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 > **ESRB** M

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

If telling the shocking truth of Vietnam is this title's trump card, then it doesn't have a whole lot to cling to. There are gruesome scenes, but that's nothing new to gamers. The shocking truth of Vietnam is more subtly embedded in the American mind than someone getting his head blown off. The poor treatment of returning vets, the protests at home, the bombing of Laos, etc. – these are the things that have scarred the country – but they don't translate into gameplay. Thus, the most the title can conjure up as shocking is hookers on duty behind base camp. The enemy AI is weak, and fog blankets backgrounds like a tarp of ugly. Unlike the war itself, Shellshock is nothing to write home about.—**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Conflict: Vietnam

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** GATHERING
> **DEVELOPER** SCI > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 5 > **ESRB** M

CONFLICTED

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Gathering's action/strategy title ships off to Vietnam with mixed results

> **Graphics:** Pretty good looking with some dense foliage to show for it, too

> **Sound:** SCI and Gathering must have had to take up a blood collection for Keith Richards to get the rights to "Paint it Black"

> **Playability:** Movement for your character and targeting reticle is sluggish. You'll unfortunately have to switch to auto-aim

> **Entertainment:** Conflict doesn't work brilliantly as either a pure action or strategy game, but has its charms

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

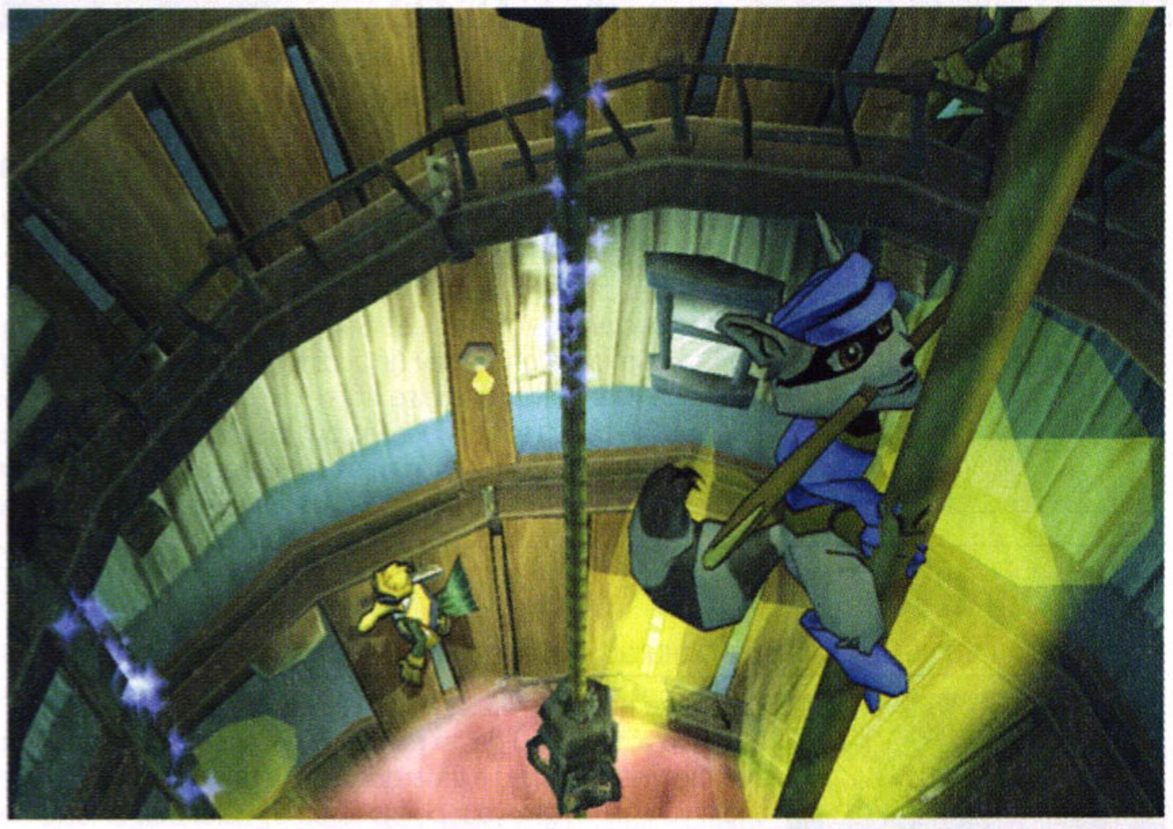
Just like Britney Spears confessed that she is not a girl, not yet a woman, Conflict: Vietnam finds itself between genres as it only gives average results with its mix of regular ol' war action and squad strategy.

There are plenty of benefits to Conflict's squad structure, particularly being able to customize the skill set of each one of your four soldiers through points. I also liked being able to fully share supplies at any time. The problem this brings, however, is that you then must often micromanage your ammo or medical kits so you aren't leaving your guys high and dry. So although your squad AI is proficient enough to keep things exciting and moving along nicely by covering its flanks and lobbing grenades, it's not smart enough to heal itself. Thus, I played this game like I was half soldier from hell and half communist medic – making sure that everyone got the same allotment of medical kits. I never knew when I'd have to switch to a guy mid-battle because he didn't have enough of a survival instinct to heal himself. However, the game does have split-screen co-op for those who find themselves frustrated. Overall, squad commands are easily dispensed, but I wish I could tell my soldiers to scatter and find cover (instead of just lying prone).

On the other side of the genre coin, many will find the combat not up to snuff with what you'd expect from an FPS or even a third-person title – specifically if you don't like the auto-target. The target reticle is slow and gets hung up too often, and your soldier's movements are clunky. It's at times like this when I wish the game was more restrictive like Full Spectrum Warrior, but I appreciate Conflict's attempt at trying to please everyone. All in all, the action does get intense, and if anything else, having to keep your eye on your comrades in a way highlights the grim fight for survival and tight-knit nature that all soldiers need in battle.—**KATO**

Second Opinion 6.25

The third-person shooting genre is one that I feel needs to take a long, hard look at itself. Conflict: Vietnam simply reaffirms that belief – between glitchy targeting, poor collision detection, and frustrating controls I just don't see any reason to play this. To be fair, this title does present one of the better-looking jungles on console. Buying new skills for your characters is cool, too, but still not enough to save this from mediocrity.
—**ADAM**



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Sly 2: Band of Thieves

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SUCKER PUNCH
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E

HE STOLE OUR HEARTS AWAY

While Jak and Ratchet are Sony's commercial stars, the company's lesser known mascot, Sly Cooper, has proven to be one of this generation's most endearing cuddly console heroes. Now, the Cooper gang is back for more in a finely crafted sequel that nearly achieves immortality.

I think the real triumph of Sly Cooper's developer Sucker Punch is the way it has managed to make 3D platforming as fluid and effortless as the 8-bit 2D classics we cut our teeth on. By allowing Sly to instantly land on tightropes and small peaks by pressing the circle button, the game goes a long way towards taking away the frustration and camera problems that can often be the result of platforming in a fully rendered environment. This mechanic works just as well as it did in the first game, and allows Sly 2 to maintain an effortless feel that most action titles would kill for.

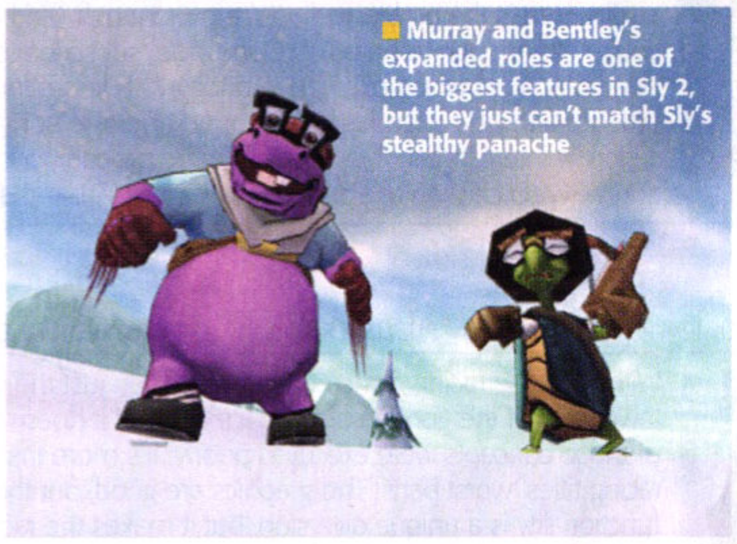
Sly 2 sees our hero and his companions Bentley (the technologically adept turtle) and Murray (the dimwitted but strong hippo) taking on the nefarious Klaww Gang, which is involved in all manner of illegal hi-jinks. The brilliant cutscenes tell the story between levels in artfully illustrated, animated comic book sequences which rival many popular animated kid's television series in both writing and artistry.

Per usual, the bulk of the gameplay revolves around Sly's unique, user-friendly brand of stealth, as you infiltrate palaces, prisons, and the like by avoiding guards and discovering precarious hidden entrances. By pickpocketing guards, you can gather money and items, which can then be sold between missions to purchase new super-spy moves like the smoke bomb or quick-dodge combat move.

The levels are expertly designed, allowing Sly huge areas of rooftops and power lines to explore vertically, as well as some fairly aware enemies to avoid or eradicate on the ground. In addition, minigames (like destroying a dam with a mounted gun turret or guarding the gang's van from above with an R/C helicopter) are interspersed to add a little variety to the proceedings.

While it is much appreciated, this desire to add diversity also leads to Sly 2's biggest downfall. Unlike the first game, where Murray and Bentley were used primarily in the smaller, minigame-style sequences, this time they are playable in proper levels, and more often than in the past. While this does add interest at times, I was sometimes frustrated by the fact that the fighting-oriented Murray and the frail and uncoordinated Bentley just weren't as fun to play as Sly. While it's cool to check out some of their unique abilities (like Bentley's sleep darts and bombs), neither one can pull off the tightrope walks or precise platforming that Sly performs with ease. About halfway through, I began to wish that Sly's posse had been given a lesser role in the proceedings.

However, that's about the only thing I didn't like about Band of Thieves, as nearly every other aspect of this title is done with aplomb and style to spare. Adding stealth-style gameplay to the platformer genre is a great hook, and Sucker Punch has a real knack for implementing new and unique types of playstyles at just the right time in the adventure. What's more, the story is actually fairly engrossing and does a great job of playfully tweaking spy movie cliches.—**MATT**



Murray and Bentley's expanded roles are one of the biggest features in Sly 2, but they just can't match Sly's stealthy panache

Often, you'll get keys by pickpocketing guards or other characters

Graphically, this game is gorgeous, offering up beautiful vistas like this

BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> **Concept:** Continuing the adventures of platforming's furry Sam Fisher

> **Graphics:** Really captures the look and feel of a well-done cartoon, probably the most appropriate use of cel shading in gaming history

> **Sound:** Simply amazing, evoking the cool, jazzy feel of a 1960s Henry Mancini score

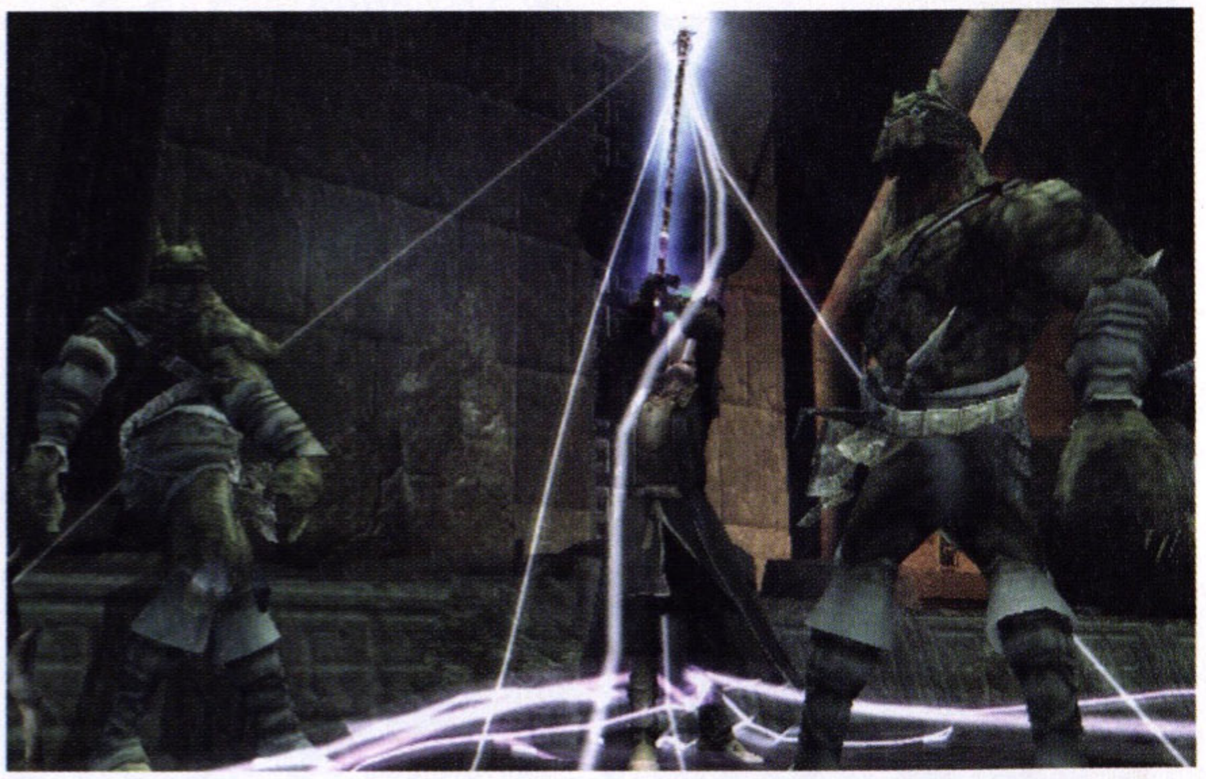
> **Playability:** Sly's still a silky smooth spy, I just wish his cohorts could match his acrobatic flair

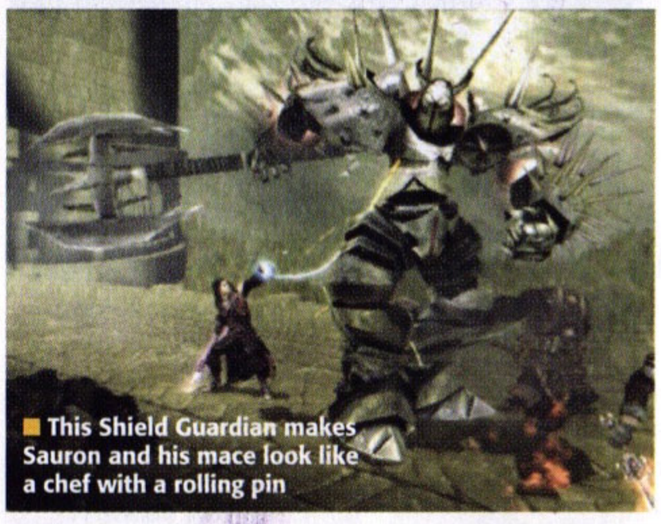
> **Entertainment:** It's not the most groundbreaking sequel, but I won't sniff at another go at Sly's slick and inventive platforming

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **8.5**

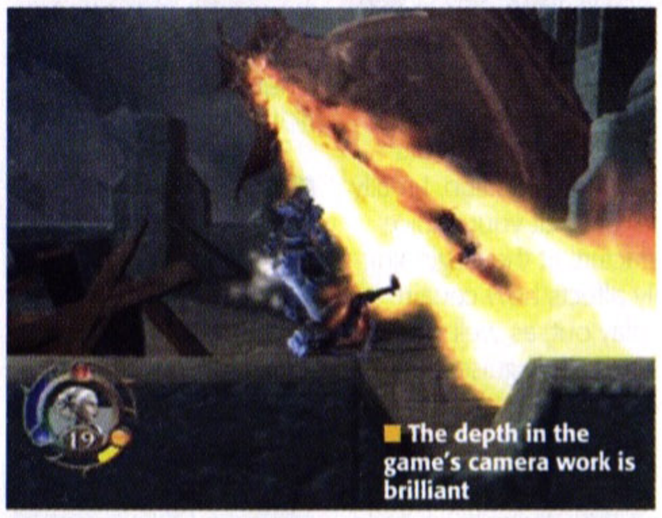
Like the ability to use the headset to put Bentley's communications in your ear, Sly 2 has a lot of new innovations to make the game bigger and better. However, more often than not I found myself wishing for the original game's straight-to-the-point gameplay, not this newfangled 3D adventure with multiple characters. In fact, for about the first three hours, I was disappointed. But then Sly, the devious ringtail that he is, started to suck me in with some ingenious level designs that culminate with these over-the-top heists that just have to be seen to be believed. In fact, the story and these odes to *Ocean's 11* quickly became the driving force to why I wanted to play, because, frankly, playing as Murray and Bentley really isn't all it could be, and the game suffers for it. That said, Sly 2 is definitely a good game that I would recommend to platform fans, but it could be better, as the platforming elements don't quite live up to the original.—**ANDY**





■ This Shield Guardian makes Sauron and his mace look like a chef with a rolling pin

■ The cavalry is here: Team Supers will save your butt



■ The depth in the game's camera work is brilliant

■ Co-op play would have been nice, but it's absent

PLAYSTATION 2

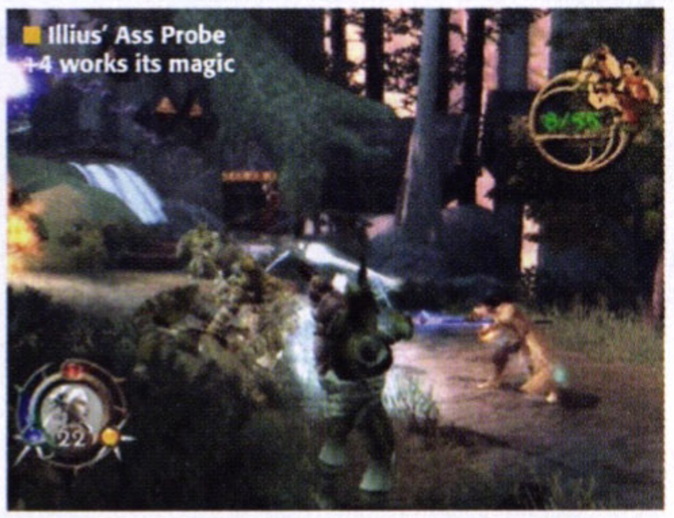
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** STORMFRONT STUDIOS **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 **> ESRB** T

THE BLOODTHIRSTY REALM

The challenge before Stormfront Studios couldn't be any higher. The company's name probably isn't synonymous with its creation The Two Towers to your average kid due to the overpowering recognition level of that title's publisher: Electronic Arts. Therefore, Stormfront (with Atari) is in the difficult position of convincing gamers that Demon Stone isn't just a retread of an action formula that, ironically, Stormfront itself mastered in the first place. The simple reason the company and this title succeeds is because it cleanly cleaves through any questions before it with blistering action that cuts like a mighty axe through a neck.

Initially I thought that this game had to have a great story, because simply killing large numbers of enemies is old. But, even though R.A. Salvatore penned the tale, it quickly becomes a non-factor – in fact, it's not even great. You'll soon forget everything as you adjust to switching characters on the fly and creating bloody havoc. Salvatore and D&D fans can still take comfort in the fact that the game is rife with references to the Dungeons & Dragons universe. These aren't forced, but are instead comforting in their familiarity. They also allow a greater variety of enemies from the staid orcs and cave trolls of Two Towers.



■ Illius' Ass Probe +4 works its magic

Using your trio of characters is more than a gimmick. Everything from resource management (who gets the health potion in the midst of battle?) to the ferocity of conflict is influenced by it. Your typical fight swells into giant proportions because you have the help of your two other characters. For its part, the AI is serviceable, if uneven, and it'll usually work as a team. The other characters will even unleash combos so everyone can perform a Super attack. The AI doesn't always do the right thing, but it isn't stupid, either. Better yet, having the extra heroes makes battles replete with possibilities. It's not like Zhai's stealth kills are only highlighted in all-stealth levels. No, the action in Demon Stone is more robust than that, with everyone fluidly using their skills during confrontations. Each character can grow as they choose. For example, I made sorcerer Illius more of a melee man with the hand attack Ghoul Touch. You'll spend a lot of time upgrading and outfitting everyone between levels.

To understand how Demon Stone beats the odds, all you have to do is play through the first level, with its epic battle and brilliant camera work. You'll feel the incredible power this game surges through your veins, and there's no turning back. Although work is still needed on the AI, in-game cameras (a little control would be nice), and ranged attacks, Demon Stone is better than any of the Lord of the Rings action games, and it doesn't take long to figure out why.—**KATO**

DEATH BY DRIZZT

Yes, controlling the legendary drow Drizzt Do'Urden is everything you would hope and so much more. Let's put it this way: Demon Stone's Drizzt makes Lord of the Rings' Legolas look like a prancing ninny in green. Gamers will meet up with Drizzt at Mithral Hall, and then proceed to wrack up a body count of epic proportions. Although there are many reasons to get this game, I'd say that Drizzt definitely seals the deal.

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> Concept: Do what Two Towers did for Lord of the Rings on the action/D&D front and much more

> Graphics: Stormfront brings the world of D&D alive with great richness

> Sound: Funniest moment in Demon Stone: Hearing Patrick Stewart announce each chapter in his rich baritone

> Playability: Stormfront needs to work on the projectile targeting that's been a problem since Two Towers

> Entertainment: This game is more fun than both Two Towers and Return of the King, and is a must-have for all

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 8.75

As Drizzt Do'Urden pulled out his two flaming blades and single-handedly cut through an army of trolls, I knew I was hooked. This appearance of the famed drow is just one of many startlingly sweet moments to be found in Demon Stone. Featuring solid AI, tons of ambient action surrounding the battlegrounds, and more Dungeons & Dragons tie-ins than you can shake a +1 Bastard Sword at, Demon Stone has just about everything you could want. The only thing missing (besides a co-op mode) is a more precise targeting system; "Power Word: Kill" isn't exactly a spell you want flying off in the wrong direction. Still, this game focuses on mowing down monsters with overwhelming force and brutal combos, and with each character's wide array of different abilities, I never got tired of discovering new ways to make my foes bleed. You'll need to make a will save with a pretty hefty DC to successfully put down the controller for this one.—**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2

Shadow Hearts: Covenant

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** MIDWAY **> DEVELOPER** NAUTILUS
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 1 **> ESRB** T

HEARTS OF DARKNESS

I guess that World War I was different than I had thought. If Shadow Hearts: Covenant is to be taken as a truthful approximation of the times and places it shows, people said things like "Bite me," and wore stuff like metal codpieces and shoulder-pads fashioned with steel spikes. Dude, 1915 sounds so bitchin'.

Okay, Shadow Hearts doesn't make any actual claims to being an authentic representation of WW I era Europe – the crazy plot brings back demonic Yuri from the first game. Yuri can physically transform and use new abilities with each iteration, the problem is that a secret society of madcap characters has cursed the lovelorn man and taken away his powers. Through the game, Yuri will earn back his abilities and stop the evildoers from taking over the world.

While this is a pretty traditional RPG (players talk to many NPCs, do a lot of wandering through various labyrinths, and participate in turn-based random encounters), Covenant revives and reforms the franchise's trademark Judgement Ring. For every action, a ring with colored segments pops and players must stop the spinning arm in each section to be successful. Throughout the game, upgrades to change the size of segments or speed of the dial are offered and allow players to customize each character's usability. Magic and item use also requires a successful spin of the Judgement Ring, which determines the item or spell's strength.

The game's combo system is deep enough to make up for its relatively slow skill upgrade system. It takes a lot of time to get characters to badass status, but most of it will be spent learning and tweaking Judgement Rings and mastering two to four-person combos, which are (like 1915) so bitchin'.

Shadow Hearts: Covenant is one of those games where the real delight comes out in the details. Things like NPC names (like Sue, Who Likes Younger Men) and cutscenes are nice rewards for advancing, but the overall pace of the game is so pokey that a decent number of players will be turned off before it gets really good. The time required is certainly worth it, because Covenant is such an interesting mix of old-world immersion, nice plot twists, layered (and super-quirky) characters, and rewarding combat.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: Bring back Yuri from the first game and up the complexity of the Judgement Ring

> Graphics: Jaggy, but really nicely detailed environments, characters, and enemies

> Sound: Apparently, German soldiers get bad butt-metal riffs to accompany their crusading

> Playability: The action section of this RPG is addictive and deep enough to almost make it a strategy title

> Entertainment: Fans of the first will be happy, and the game is clever enough that anyone curious should check it out

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

I'm not generally a fan of "alternate history" storylines; I don't care how colonial America would have worked with magical powers, or how World War II might have turned out if Hitler had opened a portal to hell. Still, despite my bias, Covenant manages to weave a truly engaging world around an alternate (though still war-torn) 1915. The quirky and colorful characters drive the sometimes disjointed story, and the return of the Judgment Ring, which can now be used to join hero attacks for complex combo moves, adds new depth to the combat. A seriously fun battle system combined with some genuinely hilarious moments round out a solid package worthy of your attention and (platonic) affection.—**JOE**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Spy Fiction

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SAMMY STUDIOS **> DEVELOPER** ACCESS GAMES **> RELEASE** AUGUST 31
> ESRB M

AN ALMOST-BRILLIANT DISGUISE

Spy Fiction, a Japanese stealth hit being put out on American shores by Sammy Studios, is a worthy contender in the stealth sweepstakes. It must be noted that you can detect the influence of Konami's Metal Gear Solid in nearly every second of this game, right down to the fonts on the menu screens. However, I'm not one that believes every new title has to reinvent the wheel. Thankfully, Spy Fiction does bring enough new things to the table to make this a tasty snack for stealth/action fans.

The game's primary innovation is the 3DA camera, a gadget that allows whichever of the game's two playable covert operatives you've chosen to capture the likeness (and sometime voice) of an NPC and disguise yourself as that character. It's a neat gimmick, and one that you'll use often to complete puzzles and mission objectives. That's not the only cool trick you have up your sleeve, either, as you're equipped with deadly playing cards, cigarette flares, retinal scanners, and a host of other sweet spy devices. You are also able to wait out tense situations by crouching against a wall, where your super-scientific spy suit will turn you invisible.

The levels and gameplay are a bit of a mixed bag. Too often, the level objectives are heavily centered around mechanics like "Get Keycard X so you can enter Room Y to get Item Z," and similar tedious tasks. In addition, the enemy AI is very erratic and somewhat dim. For example, don't you think that when I run into the person whose identity I've stolen, they should react with a little more than the game's stock, "Wait, you're not a guest! Well, maybe you are! Sorry!" line? Also, because bodies disappear as soon as you shoot them, it's often pretty easy to just blast through an area, and hide until the high alert status goes away.

Despite its flaws, Spy Fiction does deliver enough "wow moments" and inventive set pieces to make up for the too-frequent bouts of tedium or spotty AI. In addition, I really like the fact that your choice of characters at the beginning actually affects how certain levels play out, as well as what kinds of disguises you can wear. While I can't say this is the most original game I've played – one of the its best sequences is highjacked wholesale from *Mission: Impossible* – it's definitely a fair entry in the genre.—**MATT**

■ The rappelling kit is key to some of the game's most gripping sequences

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> Concept: Expand on the Metal Gear Solid formula with cool skills and the ability to disguise yourself as any character in the game

> Graphics: Very nice character models, but you can see Solid Snake's fingerprints all over the visual presentation

> Sound: Solid on all fronts, but I found the voice actors to be a little pretentious

> Playability: Everything works as it should, but it's not nearly as dynamic or versatile as Splinter Cell

> Entertainment: A little cheesy, a little derivative, but overall I think stealth fans will find enough in this to make it a solid buy

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

In many respects, Spy Fiction has a lot of the necessary ingredients to be a good stealth/action game. The disguise mechanic is cool, the gadgets are neat, and the minigame elements are pretty slick. But what I really want in a stealth game is realism, and that is the one area that really felt lacking in Spy Fiction. Civilians will call the guards if you bump into them or walk into the wrong bathroom, bodies disappear, and enemies infinitely spawn during alarms. The graphics are decent, but not realistic enough that I really feel immersed in the world. All in all, it's not a bad little spy game, but the emphasis really is on the "fiction" part.—**JEREMY**

2D Fighters don't change until the King decrees it so.

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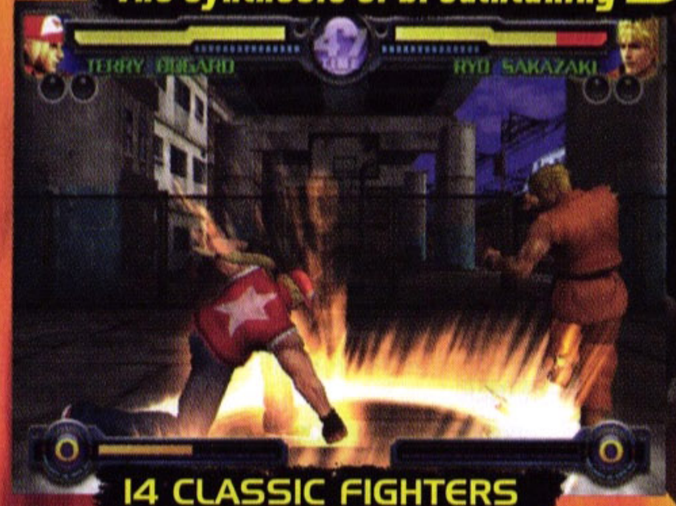

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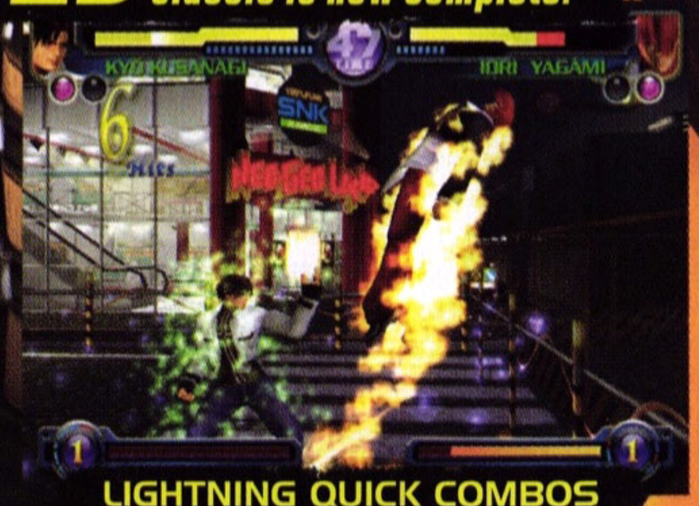

LIGHTNING QUICK COMBOS

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Suggestive Themes
Violence

PlayStation 2

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PLAYSTATION 2

Katamari Damacy

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 21 **> ESRB** E

I FEEL THE COSMOS

While it's not explicitly spelled out in the American release of Katamari Damacy, it is implied that the whole reason you need a katamari is to restore the stars that your father bashed from the sky during an *Animal House*-styled bender. You play through this If-The-Monty-Python-Guys-Made-A-Game game by collecting enough Earth junk on a ball to please your overbearing, mentally abusive, egotistical father. But it's funny…honest!

Here's how my time with the game went. I start it up, watch the opening cinema, and laugh my butt off. There are singing ducks and rainbow pandas. I watch it again and then start a short training mode showing how to use the forklift-like controls (both analog sticks are used to maneuver the katamari [i.e. the ball] around). I'd like to say that they're intuitive, but for myself at least, they weren't exactly second nature. Still, the scheme is workable and gets more comfortable as you go. I start playing levels by flying to Earth and picking from a selection of challenges (either making a star or a specific constellation covers most of the mission base). The King of All Cosmos pontificates on the best intentions he had about getting you a gift, how it was accidentally tossed to Earth, and how the King of All Cosmos can only be expected to believe in you for a X minutes. Therefore, you must make a katamari of X size in X Earth minutes. If you find a present, sometimes you get to wear it later (I found a crown, it's the bomb).

The point of the game is to collect random Earth crap – but it's not the number of items collected that's important, it's their size. Objects can be picked up if they are a certain size relative to the katamari; therefore, with a 5 centimeter ball you can get screws, tacks, hazelnuts, and the like. Once the ball gets to a meter, people, bikes, fences, and vending machines are just a short roll away. Specific items make noises when they're picked up – phones ring, children giggle, adults scream in agony, and chickens squawk. The sick giggles of sadistic glee? Those are coming from you, not the game.

Katamari Damacy is honestly one of the weirdest games, style-wise, that I've played in years. It beats Cubivore, Vib Ribbon, and even Mister Mosquito in sheer quirk factor – and this fact makes up for a lot of the game's faults. The action and goals are truly repetitive, and the graphics are horrifically awful. Then again, good Japanese quirk only shows up once in a while, and the characters are more memorable than any new stars in recent memory. Between levels, a small cubix family is traveling to see their father in a rocketship. The little girl says things like, "I feel it. I can feel the cosmos." What's unclear, though, is if she's feeling the celestial wonderland or a few too many pink cocktails.—**LISA**

Multiplayer is offered, but it's not the game's strongest point

BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: Save your dad's butt by restoring the heavens smote during his last drinking bender – no really, that's the truth

> Graphics: Honestly, the worst-looking game I've seen in the last three years

> Sound: Each location gets its own pop ditty and they are all catchy without being too grating

> Playability: You push a ball around with controls like a forklift, but it's weirdly satisfying

> Entertainment: Extremely quirky and a must-have for practically anyone

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 7.5

I have played some insane and odd Japanese games before, but Katamari Damacy takes the cake for being the weirdest of the weird, and at the same time, one of the most charming games I have ever had the pleasure to play. Sure, the game has its fair share of camera problems with graphics that are, at best, average, but you can't help finding yourself sucked into its wacky world. Driving the katamari is like operating a wobbling tank that becomes more and more unwieldy as it grows in size, which is surprisingly fun. Plus, the whole world plays off this odd theme, with a story that will make your head spin and music that reminded me of Laurie Anderson crossed with quirky Japanese jazz. Damacy isn't for everyone, but if you are a fan of the weird, this game is exactly what you are looking for.—**ANDY**

PLAYSTATION 2

Gallop Racer 2004

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING **> PUBLISHER** TECMO **> DEVELOPER** TECMO
> RELEASE AUGUST 30 **> ESRB** E

THE BEST HORSERACING GAME YOU'LL PLAY THIS YEAR

From Smarty Jones' near Triple Crown win to *Seabiscuit*'s box office success, America is once again embracing the Sport of Kings. Hopefully, horseracing enthusiasts and those swept up in today's resurgence will acknowledge Tecmo's brilliant Gallop Racer series. I'm sure many of you are wondering how a horseracing title could deliver an engaging gameplay experience. I was a non-believer myself, but after investing many hours with last year's game, I found myself completely transfixed and in utter awe of the sophisticated racing and interlaced role-playing elements.

Does your thoroughbred like racing on dirt or turf? Does it like the middle of the pack or the front? Is it a late sprinter? Can it handle a 15-furlong race? How much heart and stamina does it have? Is it ill tempered? Does it have a southpaw ability or a bear's latent ability? Every little detail is factored in, and it's up to you to find that winning formula and stride for each horse. Tecmo has had a firm grasp on the gameplay reins for many years now, but this year's installment is easily the most polished and true to the sport. Success no longer rests so heavily on player tendencies, as your horse's attributes are the true determinant.

Tecmo has also reworked Season mode. In addition to running your own horses, players can freelance for other trainers by accepting a request or testing to see if they are qualified to run a specific horse. The freelance work seems goofy at first, but it does allow players to race higher-classed horses earlier in the game, and it's also a good way to earn additional cash and experience points. Additionally, players can breed up to eight horses at a time for personal use, or in a twist, for your rivals.

It may be horseracing, but Gallop Racer once again proves to be a surprisingly irresistible and incredibly deep play. —**REINER**

"Smarty Jones? I lapped that pony porker in the Kentucky Derby!"

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> Concept: Builds upon the franchise with tighter gameplay and a deeper season mode

> Graphics: The detail in the horses is amazing, but the super-deformed humans are still scary

> Sound: Annoying melodies not fit for elevator music and a noticeable silence on the track

> Playability: Incredibly complex racing. Variety stems from the horse abilities and techniques it takes to ride them

> Entertainment: It's horseracing…and it's addictive and fun…nuff said

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

Horse racing games have never really taken off in America, and it's people like me that are the reason why. Basically, my attention span has been withering ever since I saw my first Duran Duran video on MTV as a little kid, and to be honest, all of the depth and subtlety on display in Gallop Racer 2004 (and there is a lot) is lost on me. Overall, there are just not enough thrills to be had in the Sport of Kings, and too much of the time I felt like a spectator and not a participant in the action. If, perhaps, you're one of those who gets wrapped up in what Gallop Racer has to offer, you'll be pleased with its in-depth career mode and extensive breeding options. I will say that this is a quality piece of software for fans of the series. I'm sorry I'm not one of them.—**MATT**

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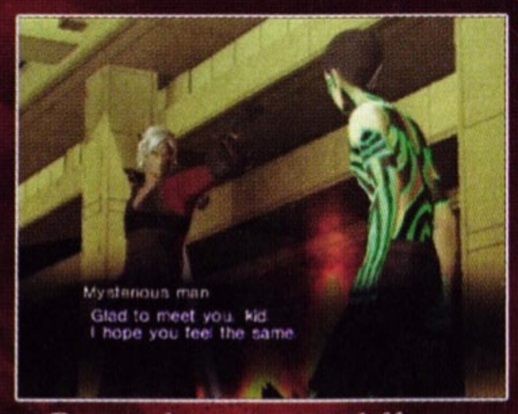

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PLAYSTATION 2

Gradius V

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SHOOTER **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> DEVELOPER KONAMI **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 **> ESRB** T

EXPERIENCE VIC VIPER'S COCKPIT

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

I like good AI as much as the next guy. I enjoy the challenge that comes from having to outwit my opponents and deal with their realistic responses. However, no matter how cunning AI becomes, there will always be a special place in my heart reserved for a game that is difficult simply because there are too many damn things flying at you at once. This, friends, is why I like Gradius V.

Whether you're squeezing through a barrage of lasers or avoiding the walls in a cramped passageway, Gradius goes after you like it has a centuries-old blood feud against you and your ancestors. Even the two-player co-op mode, which typically makes things a bit easier, is no picnic. Both players share continues, and your companion's shots are more distracting than helpful. However, though the difficulty level is steep, it isn't the type that sends you home with a gauzy head and a fractured spine. It's more of a glove slap to the face – a challenge from a worthy foe that keeps you coming back for more.

Of course, difficulty alone isn't enough to keep a game interesting. Gradius features increased control over your multiples, allowing you to alter their spacing or rotate them around your ship, which adds a new level of strategy to a previously simple mechanic. Plus, the levels are some of the best designed that I've seen in a shooter, keeping the gameplay from getting stale in the face of repeated button-mashing. Though it has a disappointing dearth of unlockables and replay, as well as inconsistent hit detection, I must have a little bit of masochist in me, because I loved the old-school pain that Gradius V was dishing out. Still, don't go sending me any *Showgirls* special edition DVDs – I'm not that hungry for punishment.—**JOE**

> Concept: One of the 2D juggernauts illustrates why it deserves its place in gaming history

> Graphics: Silky smooth movement, a clean framerate, and huge spaceships all live up to expectations

> Sound: You could make little lasery "pssshew" noises yourself and it would have the same aural impact

> Playability: Pretty straightforward, with the famous Konami code present and accounted for

> Entertainment: For shooter fans, this will be unfiltered rapture. All others will experience a burning sensation in their Furious Maximus

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

Only by renaming this title "Gravy-us" and pouring it all over some nice juicy turkey breast could it be a more delicious shooter. If you, like me, dream of ingesting some old school shooter action, then Gradius V is a can't miss title. Even on the lowest difficulty level, it's pretty hardcore and definitely not recommended for casual gamers; but if you want a game that can make your thumbs ache for days, this is the title for you. Bosses are huge, the graphics are pretty, and the action is intense – in other words, it's everything a side-scrolling shooter should be.—**JEREMY**

PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

Funkmaster Flex Digital Hitz Factory

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION **> PUBLISHER** XS GAMES **> DEVELOPER** JESTER INTERACTIVE **> RELEASE** AUGUST 2 **> ESRB** E

Damn. I feel like somebody took a dump in my soup. I've been a huge fan of Jester's work in the music creation field with MTV Music Generator and Music 3000. Unfortunately, they have screwed up the once-intuitive interface, replacing it with this monstrosity, which makes everything dependent on using the right analog stick and the clumsy R3 button. It's console, not PC, guys – I want to steer with my left hand! The overly complex menu system is impossible to memorize, and the thin manual offers no help, forcing you to save your song and go back to the tutorial every time you have a question. Yuck. In addition, the samples themselves are surprisingly behind-the-times.—**MATT**

Under the Skin

BOTTOM LINE 5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 12 **> ESRB** E

This just in, from the Department of All Style and No Substance: Under the Skin, a "wacky" and "inventive" new cel-shaded title from Capcom. While there are probably a few whimsy fanatics that are going to convince themselves that this is more than a simple minigame stretched over a bunch of levels, I really couldn't be bothered. The core concept (you play as a shape-shifting alien who scares Earthlings with a variety of strange gadgets) is sound, but the dreary level designs and overly repetitive gameplay sours the overall experience. Also, for the love of God, please stop with the coin collecting. It's over.—**MATT**

Rapala Pro Fishing

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** SAND GRAIN STUDIOS **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER **> ESRB** E

Rapala Pro Fishing is easily the best fishing game I have played in a long, long time, and instantly climbs to the top of my list of all-time fishing titles. It's that good. From Lake Minnetonka to the Sacramento River, there are a wide variety of fishing venues, and an even wider variety of fish to catch, including trout, pike, and bass. There is just so much to like about this title. The casting interface actually requires some skill, your guide's helpful hints and smart-apple remarks are genius, and the pacing of the game is just about perfect so that catching a fish means something, but you don't get too bored waiting for the bite to hit. If you like fishing you don't just want this title, you need it.—**ANDY**

Headhunter: Redemption

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** AMUZE **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 21 **> ESRB** M

Redemption takes place 20 years after the first Headhunter title, and offers two playable characters and a choice between stealth and run-and-gun action. The stealthy approach is generally more successful with Leeza, but the mechanics leave a lot to be desired. Enemy AI is as dumb as a crumbling brick wall and there are no shadow or cover effects. Couple this minimalism with floaty character movement and sluggish camera controls, and there are more headaches than necessary. Our Headhunter's gun-heavy action is a little more palatable, but still has the same control issues. Even though the game's general execution is basic at best, there are nice ideas here and great production values (especially with regard to dialogue and the opening cutscene).—**LISA**

Dance Dance Revolution Extreme

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

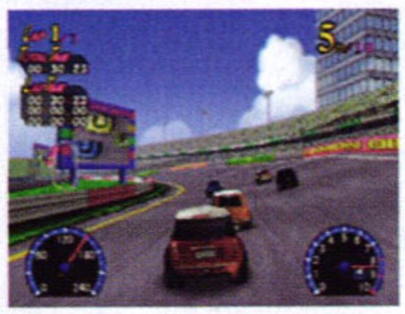
> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT TOKYO
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 21 **> ESRB** E

Dozens of unlockables and a whopping 70 song playlist truly make DDR Extreme the crème de la crème of party games. Not content to rest on its laurels from previous installments, this version wisely incorporates the EyeToy – significantly enhancing both the enjoyability and inherent humor of watching yourself flail wildly about on the screen. Several new minigames are incorporated specifically for use with the USB camera, while popular styles from earlier versions including workout and edit modes return. Though much of the music sounds similar, all the tracks are uniformly excellent both in their mixing and in their suitability for the game. If you have the required peripherals, you owe it to yourself to check out the best version of DDR yet released.—**MILLER**

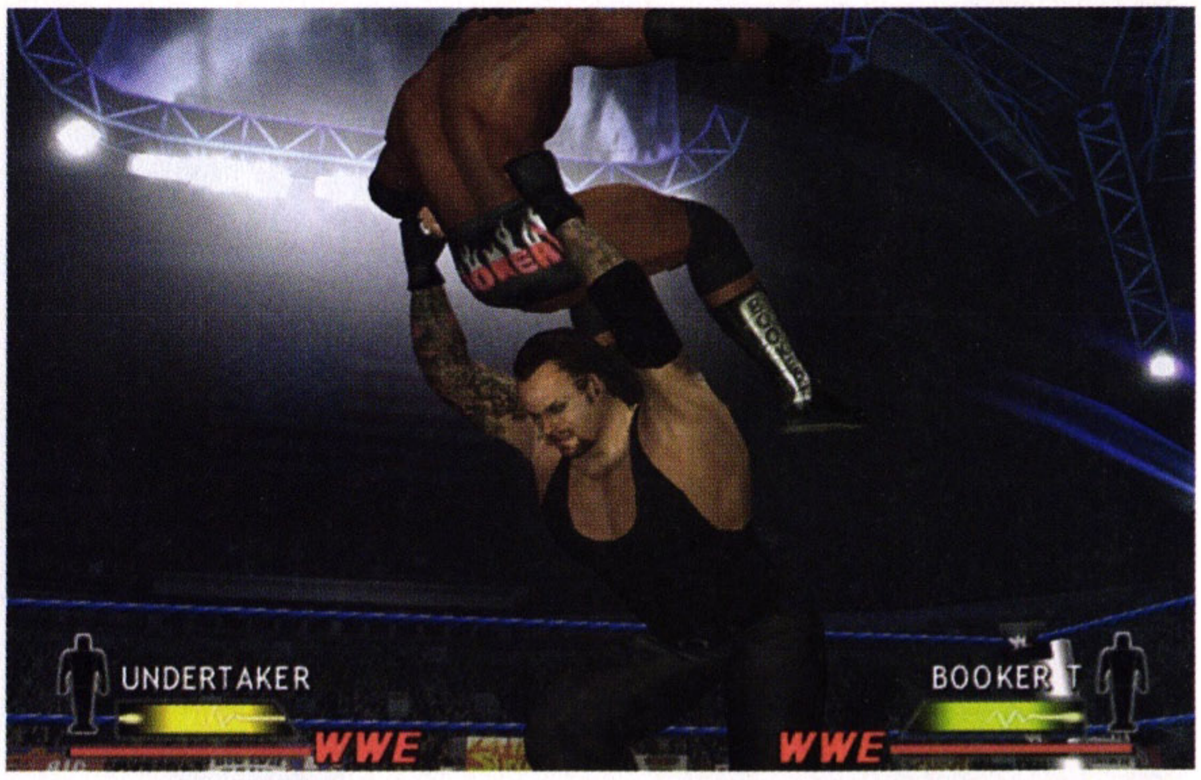
ChoroQ

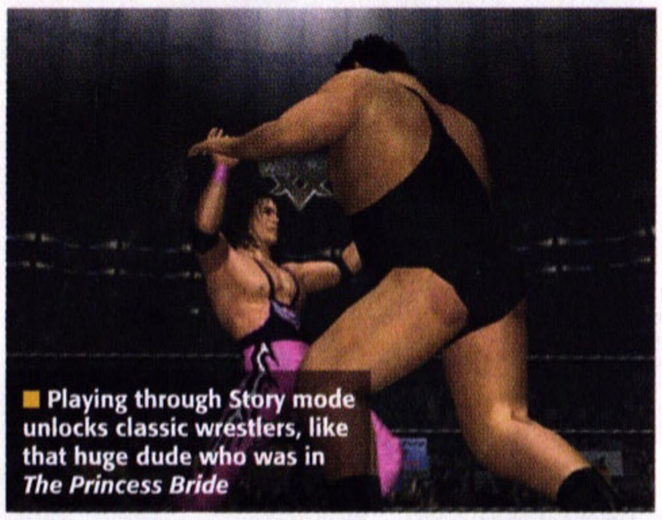
BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ATLUS **> DEVELOPER** TAKARA **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 **> ESRB** T

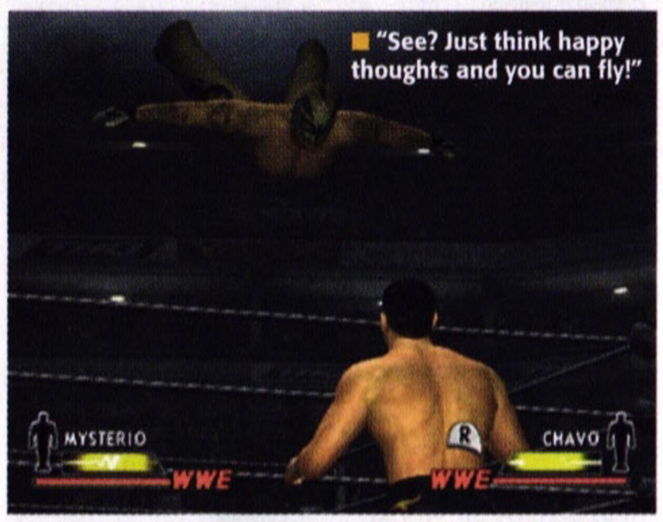


Jokingly referred to as a CARPG, ChoroQ seamlessly blends racing with traditional RPG elements. In such, you'll be asked to cruise around town, chat with other cars, enter various shops and locales, and even do a little fishing. There's also a story that unfolds as you progress through the quest. Of course, competitive racing is also a part of the game. By winning various cups and events, you'll earn cash that can be used to purchase parts. You can even install a CD player to listen to music as you race. To be quite frank, I absolutely love this off-the-wall concept. The tracks, while graphically challenged, are equally as wacky. The only thing that truly holds this title back is the racing. It's just way too slow and clunky. Regardless, this is still a novelty title for the ages. Collectors take note.—**REINER**

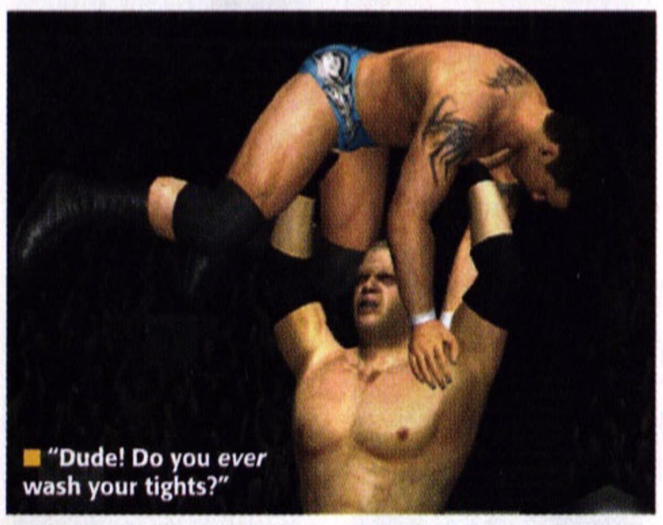




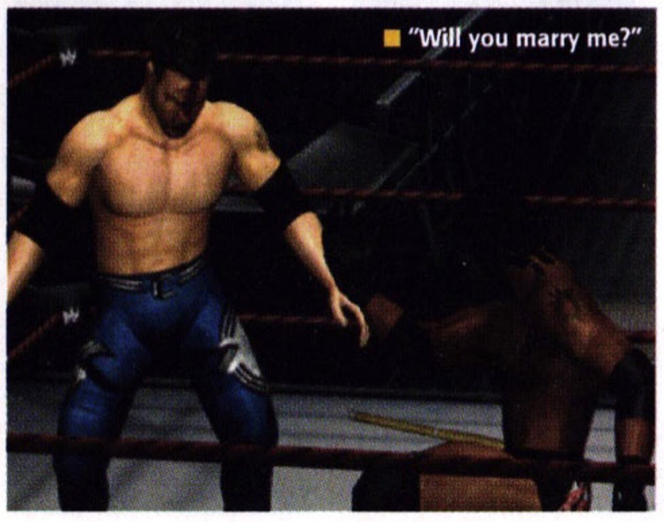
■ Playing through Story mode unlocks classic wrestlers, like that huge dude who was in *The Princess Bride*



■ "See? Just think happy thoughts and you can fly!"



■ "Dude! Do you *ever* wash your tights?"



■ "Will you marry me?"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAMECUBE

WWE: Day of Reckoning

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** YUKE'S **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 7 **> ESRB** T

READY FOR YOUR TITLE SHOT?

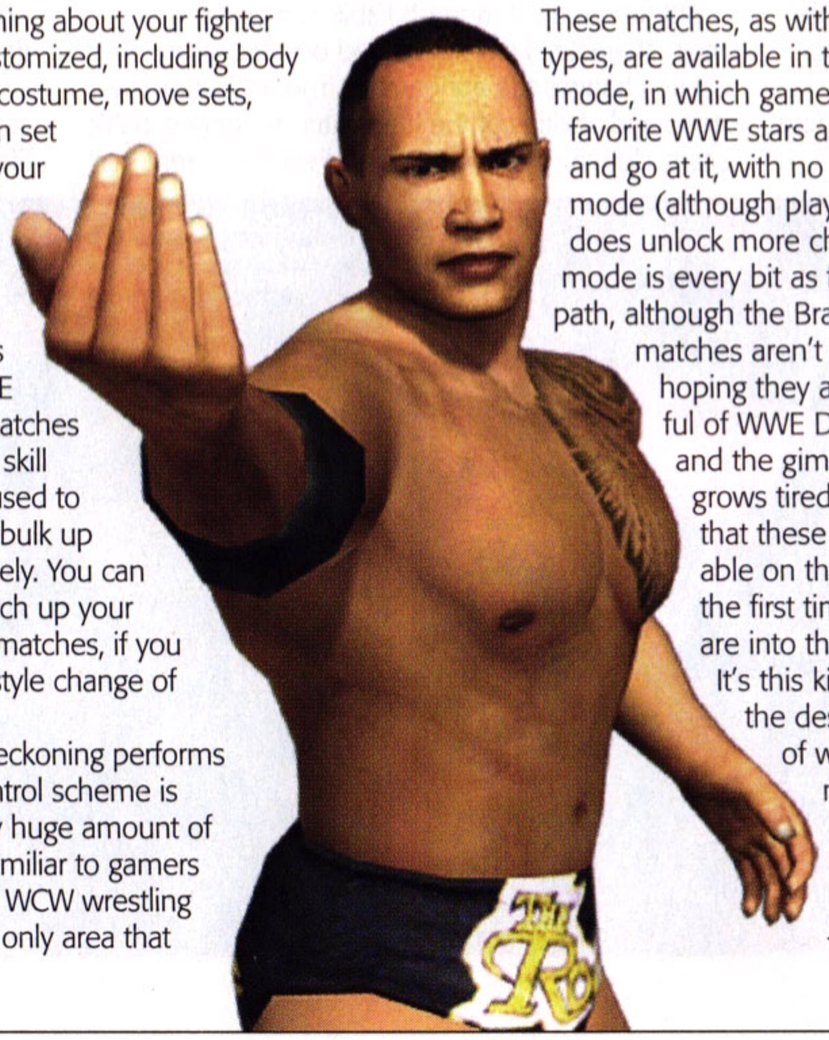
Now I finally have an answer to a question that has plagued me for years: If I wrestled The Rock and Kurt Angle with a woman dressed like a hooker for my tag partner, who would win? Turns out that I would. Thanks to an amazingly deep character creation mode, I was able to make a wrestler who looked a lot like me (although with much bigger pecs and a much smaller gut), and fight my way from the WWE training camps to a bona fide star on RAW. Now honestly I don't dream of being a famous wrestler, but WWE: Day of Reckoning showed me how addictive it could be to step into that role for a while.

The main mode in Day of Reckoning charges you with the task of creating a wrestler and starting his career at the bottom. Right off the bat, the Create A Superstar mode impressed me. Everything about your fighter can be completely customized, including body shape, facial features, costume, move sets, and gear. You can even set the camera angles in your character's entrance video. Of course, if you want to get started more quickly, you can use templates based on existing WWE Superstars. Winning matches earns you money and skill points, which can be used to buy new goodies and bulk up your wrestler respectively. You can even go back and switch up your appearance between matches, if you want to have a WWE-style change of character.

In the ring, Day of Reckoning performs nearly as well. The control scheme is intuitive, offers a pretty huge amount of moves, and will feel familiar to gamers weaned on the classic WCW wrestling titles for the N64. The only area that disappoints me a bit is the counter mechanic. The two separate counter buttons (for throws and strikes) make it a little hard to hit the right one in the nanosecond you have to block a potentially deadly move. Still, this is a minor quibble about an otherwise tight control scheme.

One other area that seems a bit lacking is sound – where are the wrestler voices and ring announcers? In this day and age, it's odd to watch dialogue cutscenes with just text. Again, it's not a huge detriment, and where Day of Reckoning fails in the audio department, it excels in the visual arena. The character models are awesome, and are far and away the most accurate WWE wrestler representations to hit the GameCube. Some fans will truly appreciate the lovely models when playing the much-hyped Bra and Panties matches. These matches, as with several other types, are available in the Exhibition mode, in which gamers can choose their favorite WWE stars and match types and go at it, with no effect on Story mode (although playing Story mode does unlock more characters). This mode is every bit as fun as the career path, although the Bra and Panties matches aren't as fun as you're hoping they are. Only a handful of WWE Divas are playable, and the gimmicky gameplay grows tired fast. Still, it's nice that these matches are available on the GameCube for the first time for those who are into that kind of thing. It's this kind of catering to the desires of all kinds of wrestling fans that makes this the definitive wrestling title for the GameCube.

"...the definitive wrestling title for the GameCube."



—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> Concept: Create your own wrestler, then fight your way up the ladder to become WWE champion

> Graphics: Character models are dead on, except for the merciful omission of Ric Flair's manboobs

> Sound: Licensed music but no voiceovers? How very odd

> Playability: The control scheme is simple, but still offers a freakishly huge roster of moves

> Entertainment: This is one solid wrestling title, and non-fans will get sucked in as well

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 7.75

I honestly don't understand why THQ tries to reinvent the wheel with each wrestling game that it releases. Once again, I find myself liking bits and pieces, but also longing for material from THQ's other wrestling titles. While the gameplay is far superior to that in either Raw or SmackDown!, the shallowness of Story mode is a real turnoff. With each match featuring a goal, it feels more like you are working your way through levels instead of being an integral part of the WWE. Never once will you see what else is happening in the league. To make matters worse, the soundtrack only features a handful of songs. Your CPU opponents also have difficulty landing running attacks, and can often counter everything. The only truly redeemable aspect of this game is multiplayer. Gimmick matches are great (TLC rules), the list of moves is insanely deep, and the controls are beautifully designed. THQ simply needs to combine the standout features of each of its games to create a truly remarkable wrestling title.—**REINER**

XBOX

Fable

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
> DEVELOPER LIONHEAD/BIG BLUE BOX **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 **> ESRB** M

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

THE WILL TO POWER

Once, I had another name. But that was long ago. Now the people simply whisper my epithet as I pass – Pilgrim. I have tales to tell of trust and revenge, love and betrayal. I have walked the dark and twisted paths of Albion, and I have basked in its warm, sun-dappled forests. I've fought unspeakable horrors and come back, scarred but triumphant. I am what they say I am – a hero.

You'll have to excuse the self-reverential foolishness. As it turns out, I'm not even remotely as cool as my character. This game just has that effect on you. When you step into the world of Fable, you'll emerge into a unique and evocative artistic style of intense depth and beauty. Ancient trees and time-worn buildings immediately establish a storybook fantasy setting. Incredible lighting means that when you walk beneath a street lamp, your skin exhibits a bright sheen. Wander a forested path, and shadows fall realistically across your body. The palette is vivid and colorful. The world seems vibrantly alive.

While moving through Albion, you'll be accompanied by a spirited orchestral score that defines the mood of every place you visit. A single expressive motif weaves in and out of the music, and you'll find yourself whistling that memorable theme as you walk away from the game. Sound design elsewhere is equally arresting, with thousands of lines of spoken dialogue from the NPCs that inhabit the world. What makes it even more incredible is how much of that speech is reactive to your situation. I wasn't kidding before. I paid the local town crier to change my title to "Pilgrim," and afterwards people literally whispered my hero's name in hushed awe as I passed. Belch in front of a flirtatious lady, and she will happily voice her disgust. Kill all of a merchant's companions, and he will fall to his knees and beg for mercy.

Combat is a relatively simple affair that is nonetheless highly satisfying. You can swing and block with your melee weapon, or lock on to circle your foe or launch an arrow. The magic system has gorgeous spell effects and an ingenious system of casting that allows you to switch between your library of incantations in real time. Monsters look phenomenal, and their AI allows them to switch tactics in response to your actions.

But the greatest triumph Fable can claim is its main character. From childhood onward, every action changes the appearance, morality, attractiveness, and abilities of the lead. Intricate tattoos, battle scars, clothing combinations and even different hair

and beard choices all define a distinct look. The food he eats and the actions he takes will change his physique and how people will react to him. You'll watch time have its way with him as he ages. Drink beer and get drunk. Fall in love and marry the woman (or man) of your dreams. Cold-bloodedly murder townspeople in the dark of night or learn to wield incredible forces of magic to defend the city. It's more than just clear-cut options of good and evil – you are creating a person.

The choices and consequences available allow not only for incredible gameplay, but also for a compelling thematic musing on the nature of power. Given the chance for great wealth, would you betray a friend? With the might to destroy all, would you spare the meek? Fable gives you the power to do great and terrible deeds, and leaves the rest up to you. And, in the end, it leaves you with one final irrevocable choice that, either way, will haunt you for a long time. With its moving story and deft execution, Fable is quite literally the adventure of a lifetime.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> Concept: Live the life of a hero in one of the deepest and most absorbing role-playing experiences ever

> Graphics: The stunning art style is both unique and detailed – simply breathtaking

> Sound: The stirring orchestral score weaves seamlessly through the story, while thousands of lines of spoken dialogue create a living, breathing world

> Playability: So many choices and options make it hard not to become totally immersed in the life of your character. Only the frequent load screens mar the experience

> Entertainment: Moving and engaging, humorous and at times bittersweet and sad, Fable is an experience like no other

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 9.5

Granting players an unparalleled level of freedom, Fable blows the doors off of what we can expect from character development and persistent world interaction. In many ways, the game uses reality as its conceptual basis. Your character will grow old over time, junk food leads to obesity, and the little things in life like getting haircuts, finding that special someone, and buying a house are all brilliantly interlaced. Divorce, hair loss, and alcohol abuse are also factored in. The actions that your character makes will determine whether your standing in the world is good or evil. As amusing as it is just to interact with your surroundings, Fable's combat is just as noteworthy. The swiftness of battle, ease of control, and multitude of options at your disposal are staggering. For lack of better description, it plays like Zelda and features the depth of KOTOR, but comes together to create a unique and hugely entertaining game.—**REINER**

■ **A wide vista-filled world sets the tone**

■ **Tolkien's oft-maligned work *Gandalf Jr.* may never see the big screen treatment it deserves**

XBOX

Colin McRae Rally 2005

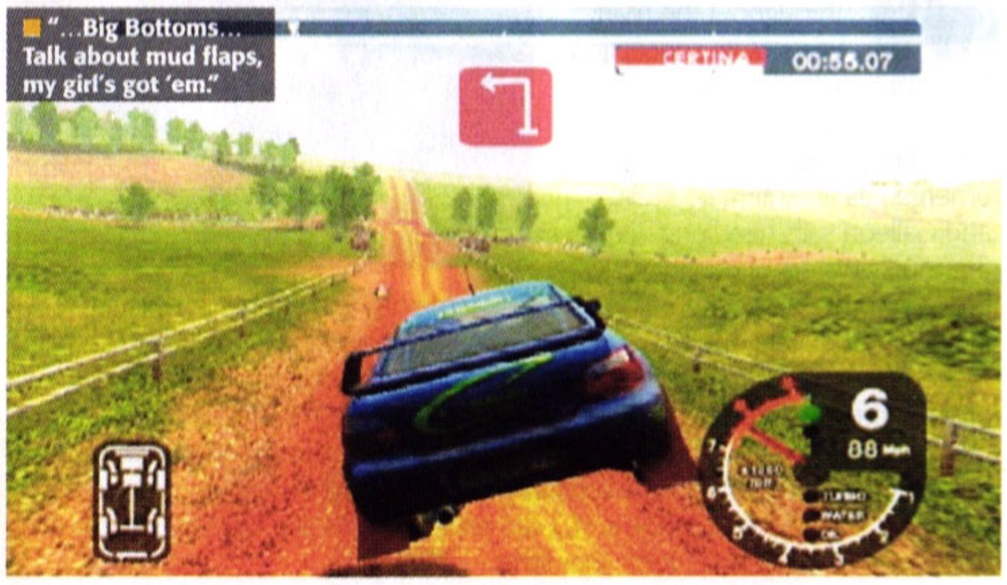
> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS **> DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 28 **> ESRB** E

MCRAE'S GOT BIG MCNUGGETS

While nobody would argue with you if you said that all Scotsmen talk like Sean Connery and are skirt-wearing nancy boys, I'm going to have to take exception with you if you said that all Colin McRae games are the same. Saying they are rather similar isn't far from the truth, but that's thankfully not entirely the case with this new Rally title.

Just when I thought that the series didn't have to do anything with the gameplay, I was proven wrong by the subtle differences in feel that 2005 ushers in. The offroad collision has been firmed up (the sides of the stages are littered with things to run into), and you'll really pay the price for driving out of control. Not only will going off the road slow you down, but all the different terrain types will keep you guessing. You'll also have to really watch your acceleration so you don't spin out in areas with bad traction (depending on your car and the gearbox setting). As the stages switched from gravel to dirt, for instance, I really had to concentrate on changing my driving style to suit the terrain. The way I approached and executed a slide was different for each. Particularly hard is the increase in the number of hairpin turns and switchbacks, which will test your instincts in a flash and literally have you so confused you don't know which way you are going.

Visually, the game is pumping on all cylinders, and I particularly like the daze effect that washes over the screen when you smack a tree nice and hard. While I was hoping that this installment would give more meat to the career mode (and there are some changes here, along with a more fleshed-out Xbox Live experience), once I got the whiff of dirt and exhaust, I left my worries about the game in the dust. For the long term, I think the series needs to take a year off and concentrate on this mode, but for now, Colin once again manages to strap you in tight and take you to the edge in back in one thrilling ride.—**KATO**



"...Big Bottoms... Talk about mud flaps, my girl's got 'em."

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> Concept: Convince gamers why they've got to get yet another rendition of Colin McRae Rally

> Graphics: The best yet in the series, even with some minor pop-up here and there

> Sound: Maybe it's just me, but it seemed like my co-pilot was getting ahead of himself at times

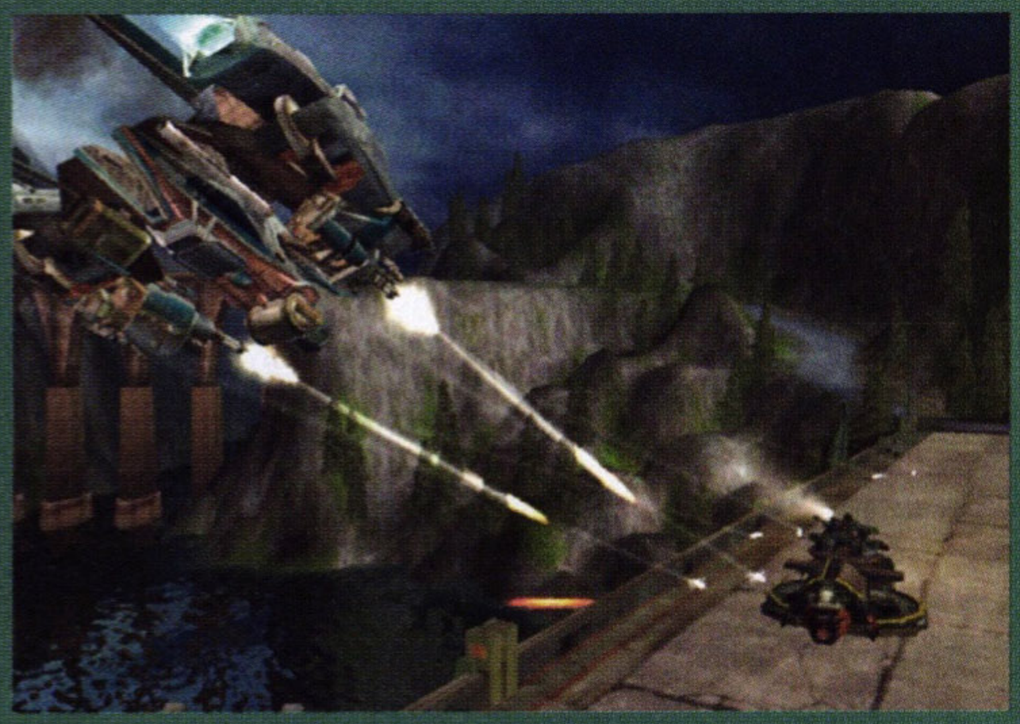
> Playability: There's a subtle camera change that makes a big difference in your perception of the car

> Entertainment: It's ten dollars more than last year, but trust me when I say it's worth it

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.5

For my money, Colin is the king of rally. The physics are right on, the damage models are unequaled, the graphics are stunning, and the tracks are crazy. Each of the courses I ran covered the gamut from gentle bends that test your nerves by daring just a little more speed, to hairpin insanity requiring a lifetime's training to get right. I didn't think it could be done, but the feel of the road conditions is even better than before and the objects along the shoulders are more realistic in how they thwart your progress. Still, while I love the series more each year, I also feel that this entry doesn't offer a big enough incentive to buy it if you already own '04.—**LISA**



XBOX

Yager

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** KEMCO **> DEVELOPER** YAGER DEVELOPMENT
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 14 **> ESRB** T

A GAME ON THE ROCKS

In my history of playing video games, I've had the opportunity to do some pretty sweet things with a starfighter, from blasting through a hail of pixellated asteroids to being Darth Vader's wingman. Sadly, nothing I did in Yager came close to matching the glee I felt in any of these moments. This isn't to say that it is a bad game – it is just unremarkable. It fails to build on any of the foundations laid by the titles that came before it, and hits that "totally mediocre" target right on the nose.

By modern standards, Magnus Tide's ride, the Sagittarius, is a Fisher Price "My First Spaceship." It has two modes, and each is about as difficult to understand as a spoon. In hover mode, you either stand still or move slowly. In flight mode, you move at a constant, slightly faster speed. Unfortunately, any operation of the ship beyond making it move forward gets to be frustrating due to sluggish controls and sub-par targeting. When you finally do get the hang of it, all you end up using your ship for is laborious dogfights and aggravating protect missions.

Not everything about the title is so familiar, though. The ships look surprisingly good, and there are some interesting ways to use the hover vs. flight dynamic. Sometimes you need to remain stationary to use your sniper cannon (*sniper cannon*...I like the sound of that), while other times you need to weave back and forth at top speed to avoid homing missiles. Still, when my time with Yager was done, rather than think about all of the sinister space pirates I had obliterated, I just wanted to go play some TIE Fighter.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Fly a laser-equipped fighter over a lot of familiar ground

> Graphics: The ships look pretty sleek, but the characters are all hideous approximations of humanity

> Sound: The voicework on Magnus attempts to be roguish and debonair. Instead, it sounds like a guy who might try to make friends by accosting people as they enter and exit public bathrooms

> Playability: The controls aren't very complicated, just unresponsive

> Entertainment: It isn't the worst of its kind, but an unoriginal concept and lack of polish mean that you should check out other options first

> Replay Value: Low

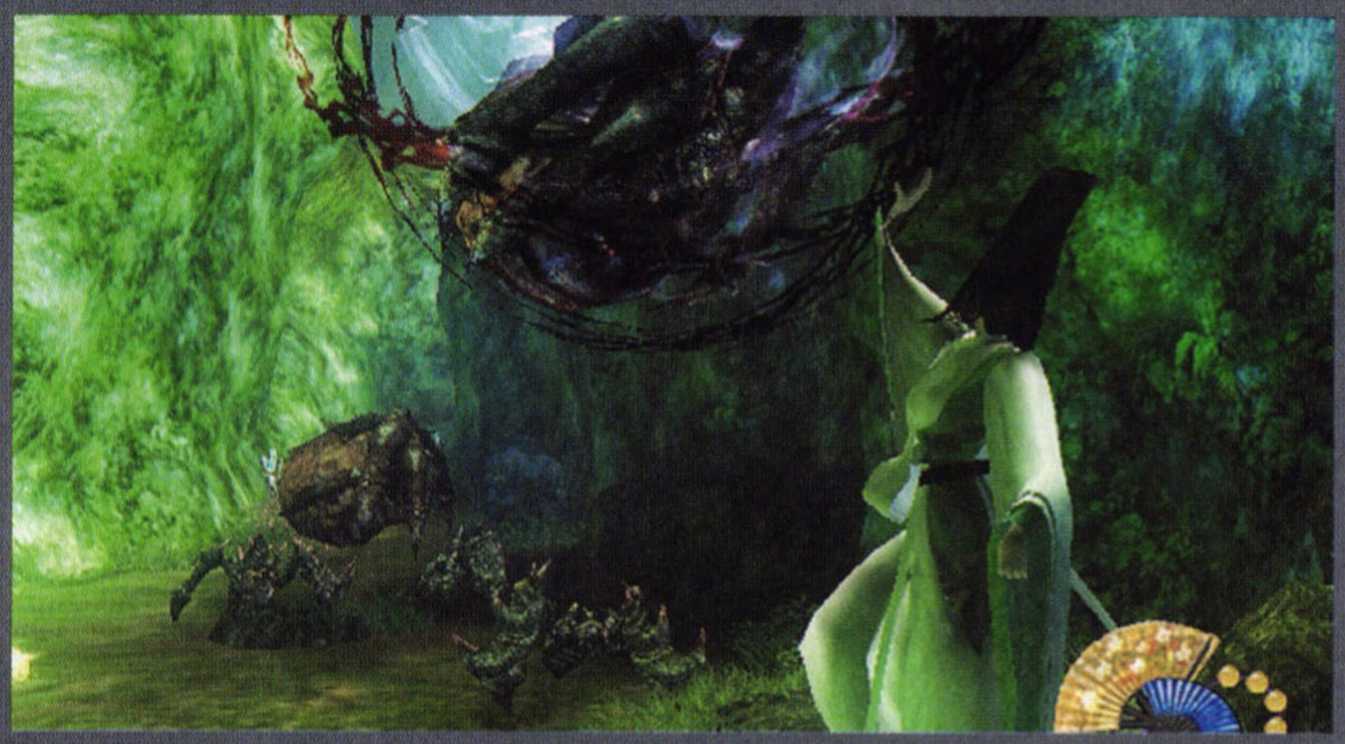
Second Opinion 7.5

If you can get past the ludicrously dorky antics of main character Magnus Tide, you'll find that Yager does a good job of delivering some meat-and-potatoes shooter action for Xbox fans. It's not amazing, but I like the fact that you can easily toggle between two different control mechanics (one for a "hovercraft" style of control and a more traditional jet-style scheme). If you haven't played the sadly overlooked Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge, get that first, but hardcore shooter fanatics will get their money's worth with Yager. Also, if it sells like I think it will, this will probably be a decent bargain bin title in a few months.—**MATT**

XBOX

Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** FROMSOFTWARE **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 19 **> ESRB** T



POETIC DESTRUCTION

From the moment you turn it on, the second installment of the Otogi series is dazzling. Heavily shrouded in the myths and sensations of Japan, the visual presentation is top notch. I don't think I've ever enjoyed sitting through loading screens and scrolling through menus as much as I did here. Lotus blossoms float gently down the screen while native Japanese instruments pluck out meditative strains. Everything looks fantastic. Then I started to play the game, and that's where the trouble began.

I'll start with the most egregious offender: the camera. I define a good gaming camera by how much I have to think about it. If it does what I want and moves where I like it, then it doesn't take me out of the action. That's a good thing. Let's just say that I found myself thinking about this camera an awful lot. I won't share most of those thoughts, as they are generally unfit to print. Suffice it to say, the camera ticked me off. Zeroing in far too close to the character, I never seemed to be facing the right way to make attacks, and I was constantly blindsided by enemies I wasn't even aware of.

This leads me to the combat. Though by no means bad, much of the action here was about destroying absolutely everything I came across by pressing random buttons as quickly as possible. The most hilarious situations involved areas where I was trying to protect a shrine or some such holy site from demons, and the only way to destroy the hellspawn was by completely decimating the building myself. There's very little skill connected to the combat scheme, and not even the mind-boggling particle effects and blinding explosive flashes can hide it.

The most significant addition from this sequel's predecessor is the inclusion of multiple playable characters – each with their own weapon and combat style. While I really liked trying them all out, I didn't enjoy the wild guessing that went into figuring out which one to use on any given stage. Also, while there are power-ups to be purchased between levels, getting enough money to do so almost certainly involves replaying levels you've already beaten.

The stages themselves maintain the unrelenting beauty of the rest of the game, filled with dojo-style buildings and graceful oriental arches. Of course, these architectural wonders are doomed to an early grave as you blithely destroy all in your path. In addition, the level objectives are often frustrating, and many of them will take more than a few attempts before satisfactory completion.

No one can argue the deep visual and aural allure of this title. But personally, I found myself frequently resisting the urge to throw down my controller in frustration. This wasn't my cup of tea, but I can't help but admire its dramatic artistic sheen.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Return from the dead yet again to fight off the demonic spawn that threaten a world steeped in Asian folklore

> Graphics: The exquisite use of particle effects amid wildly flashing splashes of color and light is phenomenal

> Sound: Haunting ambient Japanese music perfectly accompanies the austere beauty of the game

> Playability: Frustrating objectives and a sadly inadequate camera ruin the fun

> Entertainment: Much like a rose – delicate and beautiful, but painful and difficult to handle once you get your hands on it

Second Opinion 7.25

With blinding particle effects showering the screen in nearly every second of play, Otogi 2's visuals will make your jaw hit the floor, your knees wobbly, and may even make you blurt out, "It's so gorgeous. I want to marry it." While it is one of the sexiest things geeks will ever see, the gameplay is a bit on the unattractive side. The game does boast great variance in its five playable characters, but at its heart, Otogi 2 is all about mindless button flailing. Much like the Dynasty Warriors titles, you'll unleash the same combo hundreds of times in succession. As you can imagine, this is one of those games that grows old rather quickly. Commonplace mission objectives and a confusing premise only bring about greater disinterest. Don't get me wrong, it's a fun game to play, but the monotony of it will drive you batty. —**REINER**

XBOX QUICKIES

XBOX

Army Men: Sarge's War

BOTTOM LINE 5

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR **> DEVELOPER** 3DO **> RELEASE** AUGUST 3 **> ESRB** T

The Army Men series is a lot like herpes. You see, a long time ago, I wrote a scathing review of an Army Men game. I thought I was pretty funny, and it was fun ripping into its horrid gameplay and graphics. Because Reiner was so tickled by that review, he now assigns me to review every single Army Men game that comes down the pike. So, for that one moment of pleasure, I must deal with a lifetime of burning, stinging gameplay sensations. This was the last game the now-defunct 3DO made in the series, and I thought it was left for dead on PS2, but Satan apparently paid Global Star to bring it to Xbox. I'm sure Microsoft fans are thankful for the chance to experience the painfully simple level designs, erratic targeting, inane storyline, and hideous graphics of Sarge's War for themselves. This game makes me want to die – and it's actually one of the better titles in the Army Men series!—**MATT**

XBOX

Pure Pinball

BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** XS GAMES **> DEVELOPER** IRIDON INTERACTIVE **> RELEASE** JULY 26 **> ESRB** E

If nothing else, Pure Pinball is aptly named; it's a bare-bones title that delivers nothing more than realistic ball physics on a small assortment of four pinball machines. I can't imagine the conversations that led someone to decide that this sparse (though accurate) game would be a good idea, so instead I'll imagine conversations in the laboratory where pure pinball is refined. First Scientist: "Gentlemen, using the wondrous miracles of science, we have managed to isolate and contain pure pinball." Second Scientist: "Astonishing! Does it have any unlockables, replay value, or sense of achievement?" First Scientist: "Heavens, no! In order to retain purity, we've successfully filtered out anything of that nature, though there do appear to be trace elements of fun remaining." Second Scientist: "Unfortunate. Hey, are those Hot Pockets in your cryogenic freezer?" First Scientist: "Um…no. Those are Science Pockets."—**JOE**

XBOX

Galleon

BOTTOM LINE 4.25

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE **> PUBLISHER** ATLUS SOFTWARE **> DEVELOPER** CONFOUNDING FACTOR **> RELEASE** AUGUST 3 **> ESRB** T

With the numerous pitfalls that Galleon faced throughout the many years of its conception, it's something of a miracle that it has finally crawled out to see the light of day. Alas, the final result has emerged as an antiquated relic, and Galleon sails headlong into the murky waters of dangerously broken games. A schizophrenic control scheme has you effortlessly executing deft maneuvers one moment, and mistakenly climbing a bookcase like a retarded monkey the next. Meanwhile, combat is severely flawed – enemies will often pop into existence directly in front of you, only to mindlessly charge off a cliff or foolishly tumble into a nearby lava pit. These issues, along with the horribly rough-textured graphics, hopelessly mar what might otherwise have been a worthwhile excursion. In the end, I can either pity this title, or I can tell you the truth – Galleon just isn't worth your time.—**MILLER**

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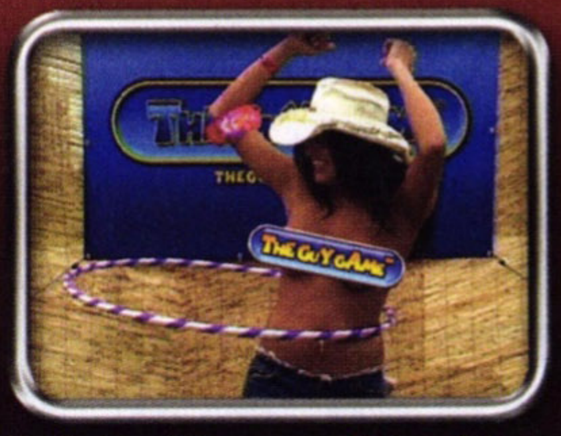

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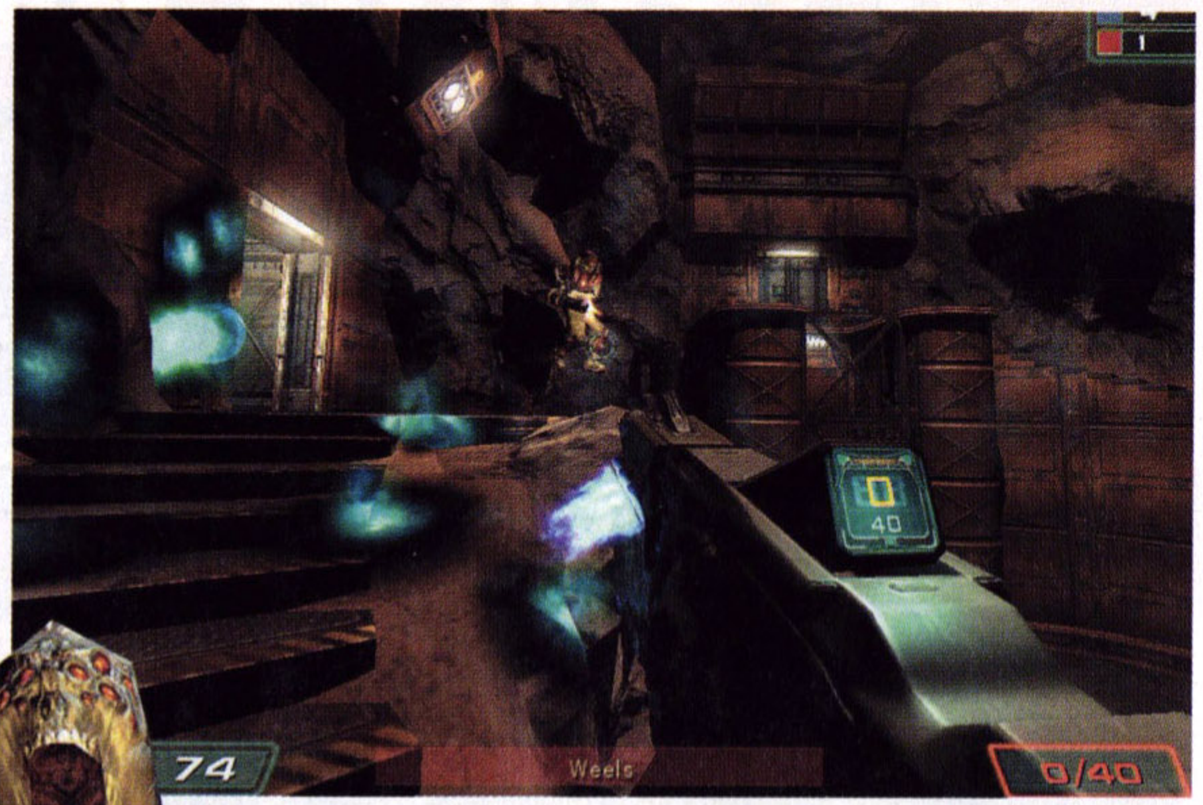


PC

Doom 3

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> DEVELOPER ID SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** AUGUST 3 **> ESRB** M

ON DARKEST MARS

John Carmack, the man behind Doom, has long been heralded as a genius and the godfather of first-person shooters. After a long absence from the scene, his triumphant return to prominence is finally at hand with Doom 3. To be sure, this title is in many ways as much of a landmark in gaming as its ancestor; however, the FPS landscape is no longer the clean slate it was back in the day, and there are definite cracks that show through Doom 3's design.

"...nearly every encounter is pulse-poundingly intense."

The thing you'll notice first when playing Doom 3 is that it's no Painkiller-esque run-and-gun through hordes of enemies. The emphasis here is on mood – and by mood I mean making the player so on-edge at all times that nearly every encounter is pulse-poundingly intense. Everything about every area that you explore screams terror, and the lighting engine is absolutely brilliant. Enemies are disturbing to the point that to look upon one is to know fear, especially when they slither out from complete darkness into sickly lighting with your death on their minds. Frequently while playing you'll have to stop and marvel at how well technology and design have melded to create an atmosphere that will likely be held up as the standard for years to come.

In Doom 3, you're constantly faced with the dilemma of keeping your flashlight out to try and pierce the omnipresent darkness, or having your weapon ready for when you inevitably get jumped. Fortunately, the flashlight effect is the best to be done to date and, together with the general ambience of the game, it's very easy to feel that you really are a stranded space marine on a Mars that's being slowly corrupted by Satan. I'm not afraid to say that more than once I jumped and cursed in fear to the amusement of my fellow editors.

Though there are some cool sequences sprinkled throughout your quest to fight back the legions of Hell, like piloting a freight lift through an area infested by evil, gameplay does fall into a bit of a formulaic rut at times. "Kill some demons, get some power-ups, more demons spawn behind you, kill them, repeat" is the order of the day more often than not. The weapons, too, are nothing you haven't seen before, and they lack any sort of scope or more precise aiming mechanism. Also, while I do like the way the story is told through the PDAs of fallen personnel, it is kind of hammy and predictable. The screams of dying allies through your radio and audio logs of people now dead do give the world more of a personal feel, though.

As much as I may nitpick and call out some minor flaws here and there, at the end of the day Doom 3 is one hell of a play. Even if you get bored with the somewhat repetitive single-player after a few hours, that time will be one of the most intense, visceral gaming experiences you'll probably ever have. And it's no secret that there's a gigantic mod community already starting to find its groove (see Mod World on page 153), so it's a pretty good bet that a few months from now we'll start seeing some crazy things done with this amazing technology.—**ADAM**

MULTIPLAYER MIA?

As great as the single-player mode is, one of the main attractions of any FPS is online multiplayer. Unfortunately, in Doom 3's case it just isn't much fun. At press time, the server browser was broken, which made finding a tolerable server an exercise in utter frustration. Id has promised a patch to fix the browser, but even with that working I'd stick to UT, Battlefield, or Joint Ops for your online fragging fix.

GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: You're a space marine. Hell is literally breaking loose. You know what to do

> Graphics: What you see on this page is hardly representative. The ambience id has created is truly terrifying

> Sound: This wouldn't be half so suspenseful without the masterful audio design

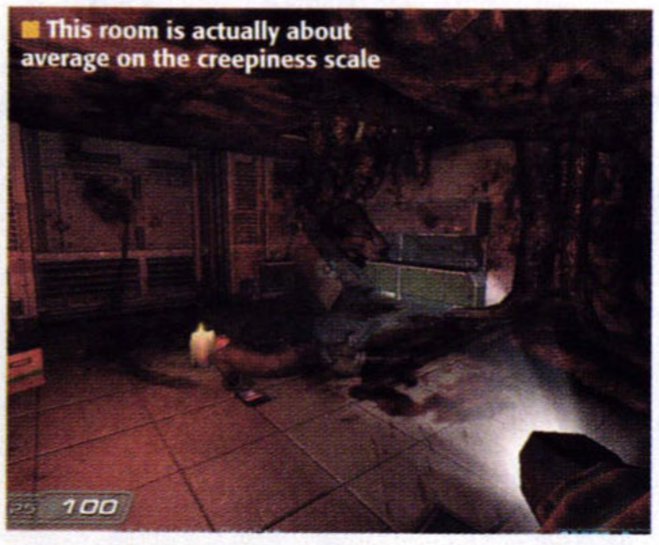
> Playability: Par for the course, though the interaction with computers and other objects is a new standard for the genre

> Entertainment: Barring a slight problem with repetition, this is hands-down one of the best single-player experiences to date

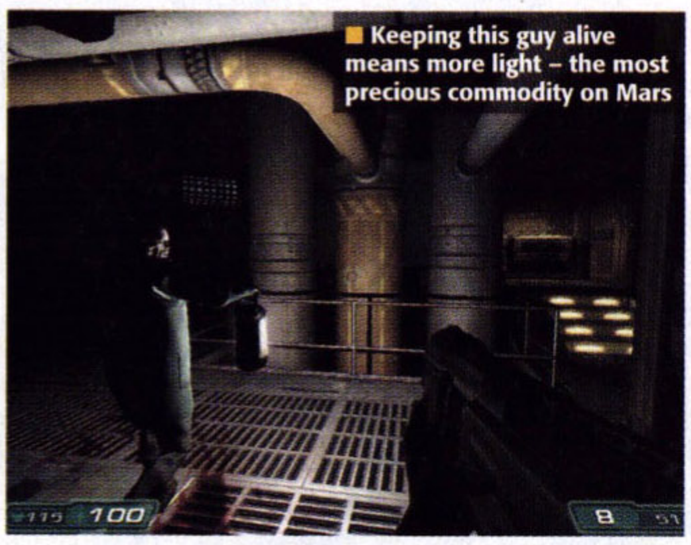
> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 9

I have been waiting for this title for so long that once it arrived and I started playing through it, the game was both just as sweet as I thought it was going to be, and disappointing at the same time. On the plus side, the game is gorgeous and even ran well on my less-than-cutting-edge computer at home. The horror elements – like the dark corridors and surprise attacks from the shadows – had me shaking in my boots and screaming expletives at the screen on a fairly constant basis, but the game itself is rather basic in design. Add to that the fact that the multiplayer elements are rather limited, and Doom 3 ends up being a solid game, but not the life-changing event I had so hoped it would be. Definitely worth playing, but Far Cry is still the best shooter I've played so far this year.—**ANDY**



This room is actually about average on the creepiness scale



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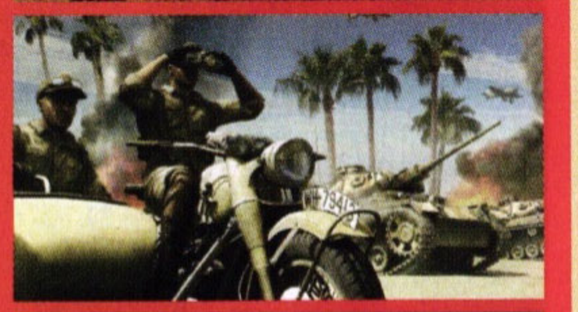

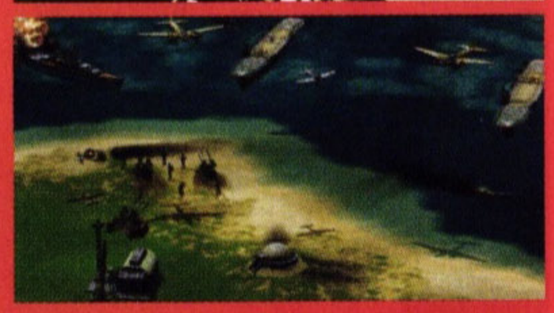

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Violence

PC CD ROM

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Companies will break and flee if their morale drops too far

PC

Kohan II: Kings of War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** GATHERING
> DEVELOPER TIMEGATE STUDIOS **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 7 **> ESRB** T

MICROMANAGE THIS

If you're unfamiliar with 2001's Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns, the short and sweet is that it was a breath of fresh air in a then-stagnant genre. By smoothly incorporating traditionally board-game concepts into a real-time strategy framework, it garnered several awards and a healthy fanbase. Strangely enough, those same fans are likely going to be the ones who are the most upset with Kohan II. For better or worse, much of the innovation of the first title has been boiled down to its core concepts, and the majority of the gameplay is shoehorned into a more standard RTS framework. The upshot of this, though, is that Kohan II is an extremely accessible game to veterans and newbies alike.

The most distinguishing feature of Kohan II is that you don't control your units much at all. Beyond choosing their formation and telling them where to move and when to run for their lives, you don't have much hands-on control. All on their own, they'll choose targets, fire off special abilities, and manage buffs/debuffs. Whether or not that sounds like a good idea to you should indicate if you'll like this game. However, keep in mind that it does free up your attention to deal with managing multiple armies, building up your towns, and keeping your economy rolling.

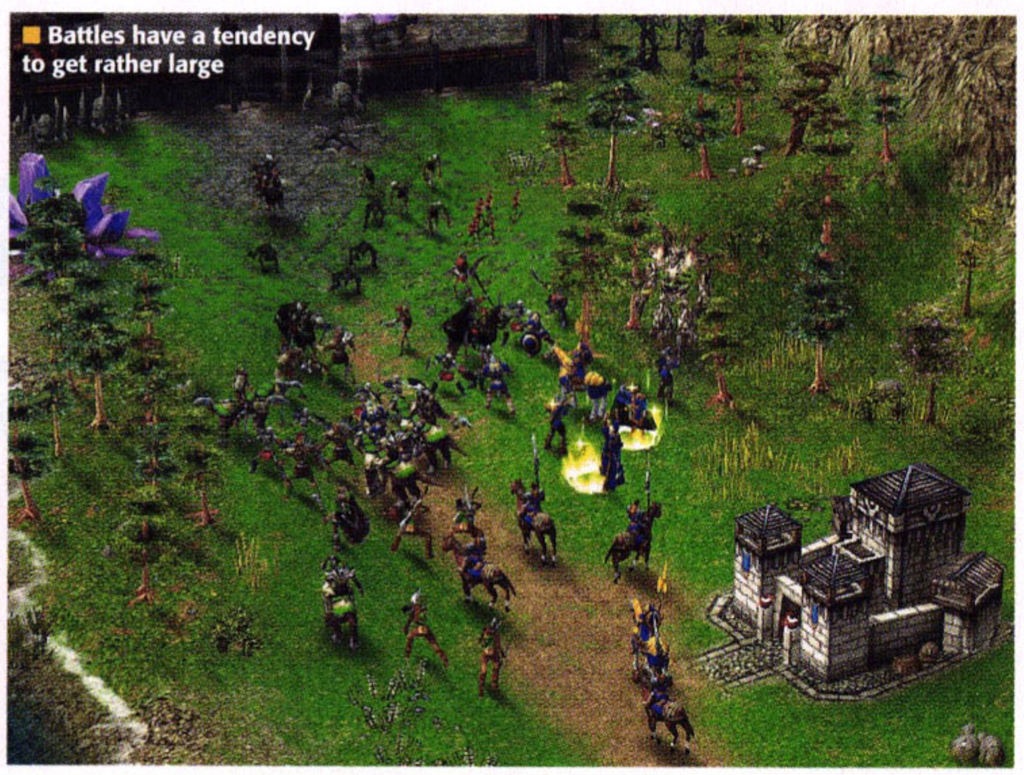
The rest of Kohan II's structure is very well done. The ability to create custom companies of troops is really the foundation of everything – what resources you have will determine what sort of units you'll be able to afford and supply, and your opponents' army composition may be open to stomping by a certain combination of your own forces. Additionally, you'll need different units for various tasks. Smashing their city's walls with your Bone Golems or catapults and marching in with your infantry while outflanking their reinforcements with your cavalry will net much better results than futilely trying to shoot over the ramparts with vulnerable archers.

Unfortunately, while Kohan II really nails most of the elements of gameplay and strategy, the single-player campaign is a bit of a joke. The story is cliched and uninteresting, cutscenes are good for nothing but being fast-forwarded, and the heroes are so far from balanced it makes me cranky. Plus, even RTS newbies might want to pump up the difficulty once they get over the initial learning curve – normal mode is a total pushover for anyone with any understanding of basic strategy. Multiplayer can, as always, really extend your time with Kohan II, though. As unfair as the campaign heroes may be, I didn't notice any glaring imbalances in skirmish games.

"...an extremely accessible game to veterans and newbies alike."

All in all, Kohan II is a good solid RTS slugfest with some interesting elements. Veterans of the genre should enjoy the variations on strategy that it brings, while the AI-controlled combat keeps gameplay accessible to newcomers to the genre. It may not be the revolution that fans of the original might have wanted, but you can't argue with the fact that it's a hell of a good time.—**ADAM**

Creatures mysterious and magical populate Kohan's world



Battles have a tendency to get rather large

BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: Keep the core ideas of Kohan intact while moving the series more into line with RTS conventions

> Graphics: More or less average. Environments are often bland, but models are nicely detailed

> Sound: Other than the wretched cutscene voiceovers, you won't notice it one way or the other

> Playability: There's less to micromanage here than in most RTSs, letting you concentrate more on overall strategy – which is a good thing

> Entertainment: Ain't nothing wrong with mixing up the RTS genre a bit, so long as it's done well. Fortunately, this is

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

Yes, friend, I know why you're here – you've been hurt before. You're weary of being told something is the next big RTS, only to find that it has the exact same formulaic approach to strategy. You're sick of micromanaging units, and stockpiling generic resources is a burden on your soul. Don't worry – you don't need to live in those dark days anymore. Kohan II (continuing the mission of its older brother, Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns) throws off the decrepit mantle of these conventions that have poisoned and plagued legions of false kings, and rises as a true breath of fresh air amid the stagnant remnants of a once glorious genre. Now, I'm not telling you that Kohan will be all of the healing you need, for like all of us it has its faults, but it will remind you what it was that led you to put your faith in RTS in the first place. Testify!—**JOE**

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GAME BOY ADVANCE

Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice of the Force

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT/LUCASARTS **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 21 **> ESRB** E

THESE AREN'T THE GAMES YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

You might be under the impression that there is something new to be found and enjoyed by partaking of Apprentice. I'll save you the trouble and tell you that there isn't. You could fit the amount of innovation this game has into Yoda's shoe. What's that you say? Yoda doesn't wear shoes? Exactly.

Apprentice of the Force can't help but draw comparisons to the memorable Super Star Wars series of the SNES days. In fact, some aspects of the game are nearly identical, down to the moves available to Luke with his lightsaber. As I started playing, I was pretty excited to rejoin my childhood heroes in the tale I know so well. But it only takes a few minutes to realize that the boring level design and endlessly repetitive combat is going to kill that buzz before you know it. Let me tell you what lies in store: Expect to spend most of your time jamming the B button again and again to mow down stormtroopers (who knew Luke was so violent?). Then you'll play a derivative version of Asteroids as you approach the Death Star. No, I'm not kidding. You'll also have some frustrating platform jumping to navigate. Finally, expect to have beaten and be done with the game within a few hours.

That about sums it up. While this new entry into the Star Wars canon certainly looks good, it somehow loses the magic of the movies and feels flat and lifeless. But, if you don't mind the lack of innovation, this new Star Wars game might keep you entertained for an afternoon.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> Concept: The original trilogy is rehashed yet again in a side-scroller you'll swear you've played before

> Graphics: Excellent animation and familiar backgrounds look great on the GBA

> Sound: You've heard these tunes so many times your unborn children will come out humming them

> Playability: This simplistic fighting system leads you down that well-trodden path to the dark side – button mashing

> Entertainment: Lacking the charm of its namesake, this plays like a million other games you've already beaten

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 6

When I first picked up the GBA, I made a fool of myself as I loudly proclaimed, "Sweet! It's just like Super Star Wars" to everyone in the office. Unfortunately, my enthusiasm was short-lived, as the game is highly repetitive, incredibly short, and mostly uneventful. The platforming segments and lightsaber-dueling are brought to life with silky smooth controls, the sound captures the authenticity of the movies, and the visuals are loaded with striking details. All of the pieces are in place, but with abysmal level designs and nauseating flying/speeder bike sequences, Apprentice of the Force is more destined to be Master of the Bargain Bin.—**REINER**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Kirby and the Amazing Mirror

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK) **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** HAL LABORATORY/FLAGSHIP **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 **> ESRB** E

KIRBY YOUR ENTHUSIASM

Here's the gist: It's Kirby, and as you would expect, it's fun. There's more to get into, but the series has basically boiled down to an expected level of consistently solid entries with a few upgrades to differentiate one from another. The Amazing Mirror falls squarely into this pattern.

The new game's big selling point is its four-player mode. In the beginning of the adventure, Kirby is quartered by Meta Knight and four differently-colored marshmallows set off on their journey to (shock!) save the world. When playing solo, gamers can call the other Kirby colors (on a cell phone, natch) to come help out – usually they'll have been off exploring and will have absorbed different copy abilities that could be useful. You have a limited number of times to get in touch with the peeps, so I used mine mostly for boss fights and the occasional puzzle where I needed a different skill. What this plot device does facilitate though, is a built-in way to do four-player gameplay.

Each player who wants in on the story mode needs a cartridge, but it isn't that way with all of the game's multiplayer options. Three four-player minigames, which are bizarre at best, are available with just one cart. A good time for sure, but nothing to rock the average person's socks right off their stinky little feet.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: Kirby four-play (get it? There are four Kirby guys) with the franchise's signature bells and whistles

> Graphics: As delightful and colorful as one would expect from a Nintendo handheld title

> Sound: Nice little sound effects and subtle enough ditties that you won't immediately be turning the volume down

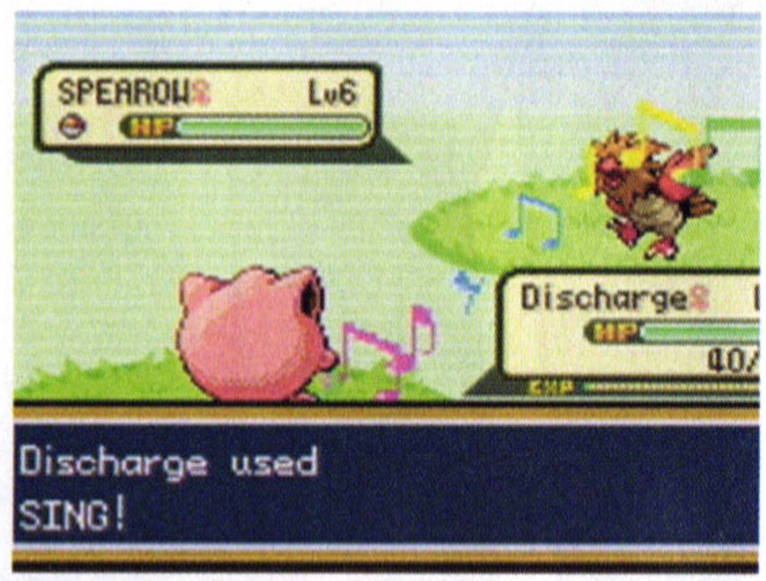
> Playability: Like Othello – a minute to learn, and a lifetime to master

> Entertainment: It's Kirby; it's fun

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

Kirby's cute as hell, and his ability to suck up and absorb the abilities of his enemies makes him one of the most versatile action stars ever. Kirby and the Amazing Mirror is a fine little platformer, but one that doesn't quite reach the heights of immortality. At times, the level layout is a bit obtuse, and the minigames wouldn't cut the mustard in Mario Party, but all told this is another good platformer for the Game Boy Advance.—**MATT**



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Pokémon Fire Red/ Leaf Green

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (2 OR 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS ADAPTER) **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** GAME FREAK **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 7 **> ESRB** E

DIFFERENT SHADES OF THE SAME COLOR

In all honesty, I had a lot of fun with this game. The immature child in me loved giving nicknames like "Dumpface" to my captured companions, and the collector in me became absorbed in leveling the little guys up. However, these features are nothing new or innovative; they were all intact when Pokémon Red and Blue released six years ago, and this game is really more of a director's cut than a new installment. However, the new bells and whistles streamline gameplay and make this title much more fun than I was expecting.

There are some strides in new directions with the addition of the wireless adapter (included with the game), which allows up to 40 trainers to hang out in the Union Room where they can organize battles or just chat with each other. Though the adapter is pretty slick, and much more portable than a link cable, it doesn't feel like a tool to strengthen gameplay as much as it seems like a gimmick to mask the fact that this is a marginally enhanced re-release of a Game Boy game.

Yes, the graphics and animations are improved, along with some updated moves and the option to select a female trainer. Still, like mortuary cosmetics, these things just serve to gussy up a corpse to make it more appealing. Now, I like a good round of kick-the-cadaver as much as the next guy, but only diehard Pokémon fans will notice the new features. Though they do ease up the gameplay considerably, it'll still look like the same old Pokémon to everyone else.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: Remake Pokémon Red and Blue, the Romulus and Remus of the Pokémon empire

> Graphics: Compared to other handheld Pokémon titles, this is tops. Compared to other handheld games in general, utterly unremarkable

> Sound: On par with the best internal speakers of 1987

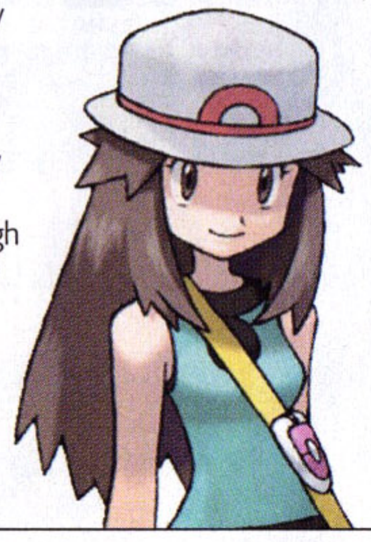
> Playability: The new interface is nice, but at its core the game is still just a bunch of menus

> Entertainment: If you enjoy obsessive collecting, this is your holy grail. Otherwise, it can be a toilet bowl of tedium

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.25

I really played the heck out of the first Pokémon set that Fire Red/Leaf Green is a remake of. Still, the deluge of too-similar additions that came after my first blush of Poké -frenzy lessened the series' appeal for me and I fell off the wagon. These shiny carts bring back my nostalgia by updating the graphics, adding a few new features (the Union Room and drastically improved menus), and keeping the rest essentially unchanged.—**LISA**



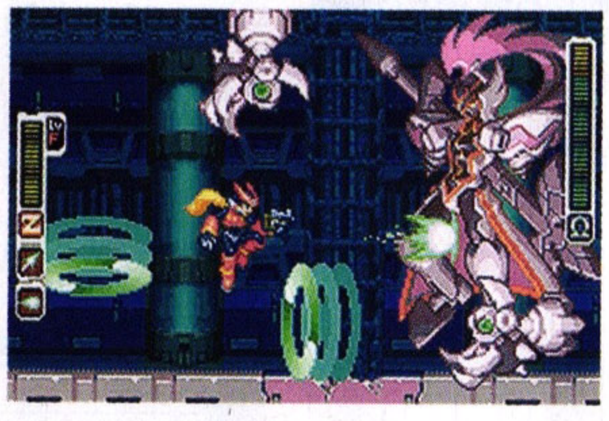
HANDHELD QUICKIES

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Mega Man Zero 3

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 > **ESRB** E



If you always wondered how Zero got so much more awesome than X, here's your answer: While X was brought up largely on forgiving, well-planned stages, Zero was weaned on merciless and poorly-designed levels packed with treacherous terrain and one-hit kills around every corner. Growing up in a neighborhood like that is liable to toughen a robot up a bit. Sadly, even his thick skin isn't enough to save Zero from the frustrations that plague his third solo outing. It follows the same familiar Mega Man pattern, though few improvements have been made from the previous two entries. While Zero is still a sweet character, this game is just too much of the same, and virtually inaccessible to anyone who doesn't want to memorize every inch of it.—**JOE**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Dragon Ball Z: Buu's Fury

BOTTOM LINE 4.5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE OR WIRELESS ADAPTER) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI
> **DEVELOPER** WEBFOOT TECHNOLOGIES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 > **ESRB** E

When I was in first grade, I wrote a story about flying sentient deodorant invading earth, and it was up to a young hero to stop them. The storyline was incoherent, the illustrations were appalling, and the characters were devoid of personality or nuance. Still, my story was better than Dragon Ball Z: Buu's Fury. The scope of this title covers the final third of the Legacy of Goku storyline, but it does so in splotchy, episodic segments relying on the most generic "walk around, talk to people, and fight things" formula. If you're not a DBZ fan, this game will remind you why. If you are, it will fill you with an urge to plug in your VHS recordings of the real show and leave this rubbish alone. Buu-urns.—**JOE**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Thunderbirds

BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 4 > **ESRB** E

"Hey kids, why don't you go get the keycard to open the hangar? It's in the basement, right past the columns of fire." Thunderbirds takes flame avoidance and box pushing to new levels. The supposed draw of this title is that you can control three characters at once, but the reality is that you just have more to worry about as you progress through various puzzle rooms. After each box-shoving, flame-dodging, pit-jumping fiesta you're rewarded with an isometric flying stage that would have been really cool by 1984 standards, in which you try to avoid such incredible hazards as birds and weather balloons. Both styles of play work perfectly, but you'd be hard pressed to find a title with more sheer, concentrated boringosity. Like the movie, expect this one to fly way below everyone's radar. —**JEREMY**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Mario Pinball Land

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 4 > **ESRB** E

THE PLUMBER'S SILVER BALLS

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

Mario Pinball Land's greatest strength – the developers' ability to transform pinball to take on design elements of platforming and adventure games – is also its greatest weakness. For this reason, I suspect your opinion of Mario Pinball Land will depend on which part of its title you most crave – "Mario" or "Pinball."

One thing is sure – this is a fascinating experiment. Instead of traditional pinball table designs, each level is more akin to that of an isometric action title. They are usually fairly sparse, populated by goombas, ghosts, and other familiar Mario foes that roam the expanse. Instead of really mastering one board, the key is to advance past a series of gates (which oftentimes are opened by hitting switches or performing other feats of pinball skill) to further areas of each world. Usually, these journeys will take you to a "boss battle" of sorts, which can often open up something in another stage. You can also drop your ball into cannons, which can be used to "warp" to other worlds. All in all, it's a fairly impressive bit of level design. In addition, there are shops where you can buy power-ups and a few minigames.

However, I think this desire to innovate in the genre comes at the expense of what's ultimately good about pinball itself. Many of the things that I consider necessary for a good pinball table – like cool ramps, good bumper layouts, and "traps" – are missing from Mario Pinball Land. After awhile, you'll have seen every cool trick and hidden area that the game throws at you, but you won't keep coming back because there's not one individual stage that has that incredibly addictive "I could play this until I die" feeling that you get from a well-made traditional pinball machine.—**MATT**

> **Concept:** A novel melding of platformer level design and classic pinball action

> **Graphics:** As always, Nintendo delivers top quality on the GBA

> **Sound:** Catchy tunes in the tradition of Mario's 8- and 16-bit games

> **Playability:** The flipper action is dead-on, and the ball physics seem fairly accurate

> **Entertainment:** It's good, but I can't help but thinking this could have been so much better

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 6

As a longtime fan of Kirby's Pinball Land and The Pinball of the Dead on Game Boy, I was excited to see what Nintendo could come up with having Mario as the star of his own game. Unfortunately, while this title certainly has its high points and some inventive puzzles, I quickly found myself rather bored with the small playfields and repetitive gameplay. Mostly, because the game lacks any real drama – since your punishment for poor shots or flipper response was usually just to start an area again from the beginning. I guess I'm just a pinball purist at heart, and would rather have a wide selection of complex boards to master, rather than a deluge of tiny ones that create an "adventure." Mario Pinball is moderately entertaining, but in the end I have a hard time recommending it. Go find yourself a copy of The Pinball Of the Dead instead.—**ANDY**

CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

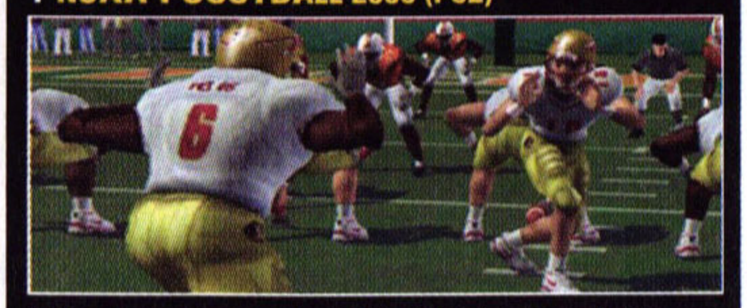
TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For July 2004 Based On Units Sold

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	NCAA Football 2005	N/A	PS2	9.25	07/04	$49
2	ESPN NFL 2K5	N/A	PS2	9.5	07/04	$19
3	Spider-Man 2	1	PS2	8	07/04	$49
4	ESPN NFL 2K5	N/A	XBOX	9.5	07/04	$19
5	NCAA Football 2005	N/A	XBOX	9.25	06/04	$49
6	Spider-Man 2	5	XBOX	8	06/04	$49
7	Spider-Man 2	N/A	GBA	7	05/04	$28
8	Spider-Man 2	N/A	GC	8	06/04	$48
9	Driv3r	4	PS2	6	06/04	$49
10	Tales of Symphonia	N/A	GC	8.75	07/04	$50
11	Yu-Gi-Oh! Reshef of Destruction	N/A	GBA	4.5	06/04	$30
12	Halo	12	XBOX	9.5	11/01	$28
13	Mario vs. Donkey Kong	10	GBA	7.5	05/04	$31
14	Super Mario Bros.	9	GBA	9	06/04	$19
15	Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors	N/A	GBA	5.5	05/04	$29
16	Pokémon Ruby	N/A	GBA	7.25	03/03	$33
17	MVP Baseball 2004	13	PS2	9.25	03/04	$48
18	Driv3r	14	XBOX	6	06/04	$49
19	Mega Man Anniversary Collection	N/A	PS2	9	06/04	$30
20	Mega Man Anniversary Collection	N/A	GC	9	06/04	$30

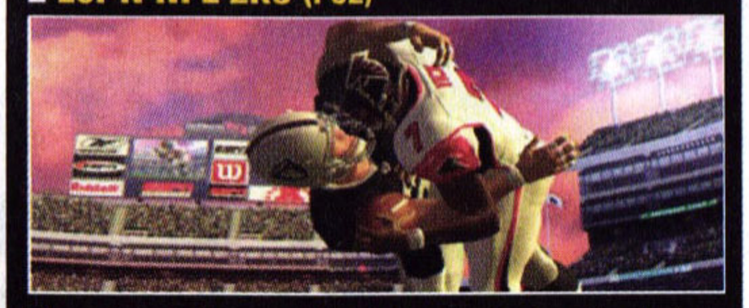
Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

1 NCAA FOOTBALL 2005 (PS2)



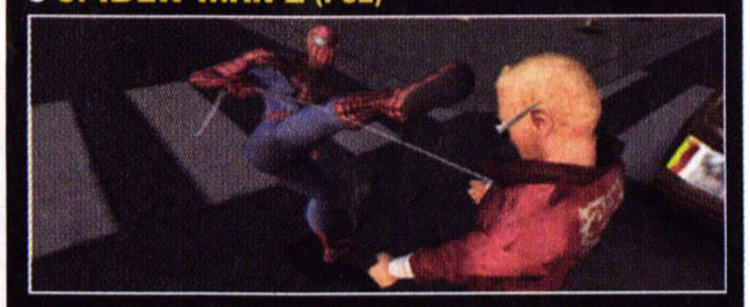
Welcome to a very special "Thoughts from a nerd who accidentally went to a football game" edition of charts. The following are all actual reactions that were recorded with an advanced mind-reading technology that is, quite frankly, beyond your comprehension.

2 ESPN NFL 2K5 (PS2)



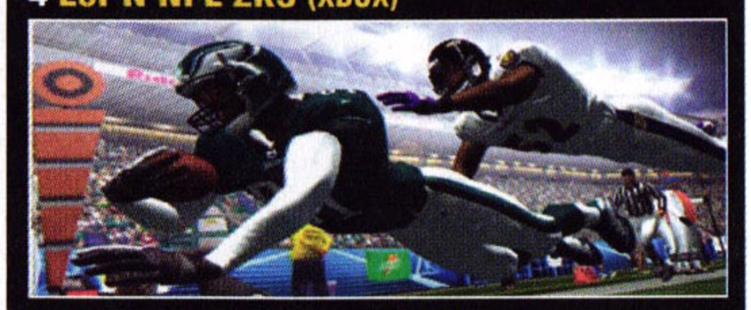
"I'm a bit embarrassed – I don't understand anything that's happening. Then again, everyone around me seems to get it…even that guy in the 'Coed Naked Sex' shirt. Well, I'm sure that if this makes sense to these ignorami, my towering intellect is simply being underwhelmed. I must focus my chi."

3 SPIDER-MAN 2 (PS2)



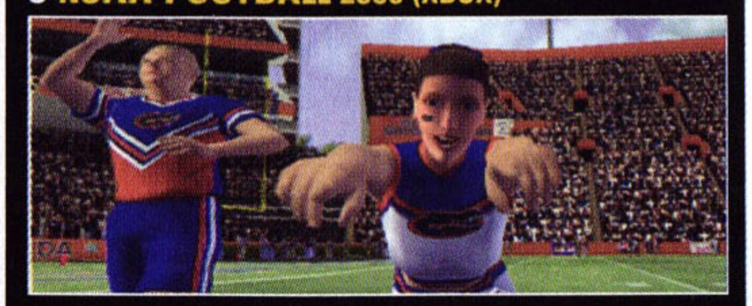
"You know, with all the padding and helmets, those characters down there look just like Gizmoduck! Without the unicycle wheel, I guess. That reminds me, I should plug in some of those *Duck Tales* VHS tapes I bought on eBay when I get home. It's no *Gargoyles*, but it'll pass the time until Mom goes to bed and I can dip into my *USA Up All Night* collection."

4 ESPN NFL 2K5 (XBOX)



"Hey, where did that guy get frozen custard? Mmm, I could go for one of those. Or maybe just a custard-filled Bismarck. Better yet, a custard-filled swimming pool, crammed with beautiful, cat-eared women purring contentedly as they rub oil on Dr. Spock. Meow!"

5 NCAA FOOTBALL 2005 (XBOX)



"Wait a second, that jumbotron says that this is a *football* game! I thought this was the *Puppetshow Erotique*! No wonder I couldn't see any strings. I should demand my money back! On the other hand, I must admit that I am not entirely unaroused. Tight end, indeed!"

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Final Fantasy I & II Advance	N/A	GBA
2	Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	N/A	GC
3	Guilty Gear Isuka	N/A	PS2
4	One Piece Land Land	N/A	PS2
5	Boktai 2	N/A	GBA
6	Power Pro Baseball 11	N/A	PS2
7	Full Metal Alchemist	N/A	GBA
8	Power Pro Compact 1 & 2	N/A	GBA
9	Legends	N/A	GBA
10	Mega Man X Command Mission	N/A	PS2

Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Fable	N/A	Xbox
2	Doom 3	N/A	PC
3	Mortal Kombat: Deception	N/A	Multi
4	Burnout 3: Takedown	N/A	Multi
5	Sly 2: Band of Thieves	N/A	PS2
6	Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	N/A	PS2
7	ESPN NFL 2k5	1	Multi
8	Colin McRae Rally 2005	N/A	Xbox
9	Kohan II: Kings of War	N/A	PC
10	Katamari Damacy	N/A	PS2

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	City of Heroes	1	$48
2	Rise of Nations	3	$36
3	The Sims Deluxe	10	$20
4	Far Cry	5	$38
5	The Sims: Superstar	N/A	$21
6	The Sims Mega Deluxe	N/A	$36
7	Age of Mythology	N/A	$33
8	Battlefield Vietnam	4	$38
9	Flight Simulator 2004: A Century of Flight	N/A	$32
10	Halo: Combat Evolved	7	$32

Based On Monthly Units Sold

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ENOUGH TALK. LET'S PLAY.

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REVIEWSARCHIVE The Really Ugly Page Where You Can See Lots Of Old Review Scores

PLAYSTATION 2

Airforce Delta Strike	7	Feb-04
Alias	7.5	Apr-04
All-Star Baseball 2005	7	Apr-04
American Idol	6.25	Feb-04
Armored Core: Nexus	7.25	Sep-04
Asterix & Obelix XXL	6	Sep-04
Astro Boy	5.5	Sep-04
Athens 2004	6	Aug-04
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	8.5	Feb-04
Battlestar Galactica	6	Jan-04

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Bujingai: The Forsaken City	7.25	Jul-04
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts	4.75	Jan-04
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Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest	8.75	Feb-04
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GAMECUBE

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Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	9.25	Mar-04
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NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
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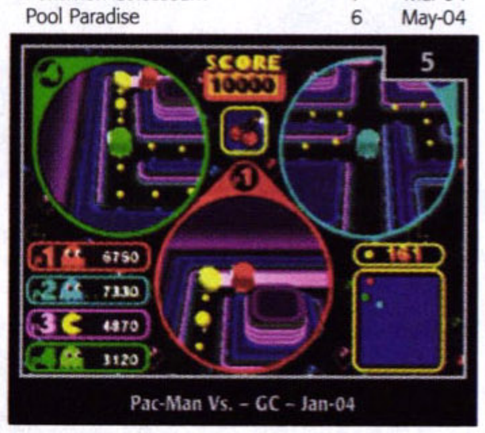
Pokémon Channel	6.5	Jan-04
Pokémon Colosseum	7	Mar-04
Pool Paradise	6	May-04



Pac-Man Vs. – GC – Jan-04

R: Racing Evolution	7	Feb-04
Rainbow Six 3	5.75	Sep-04
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Spirits and Spells	2	Dec-03
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Tales of Symphonia	8.75	Jul-04
Tony Hawk's Underground	8.75	Feb-04
True Crime: Streets of LA	8	Jan-04
WarioWare, Inc.: Mega Party Games	7	Apr-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Falsebound Kingdom	6.5	Jan-04

XBOX

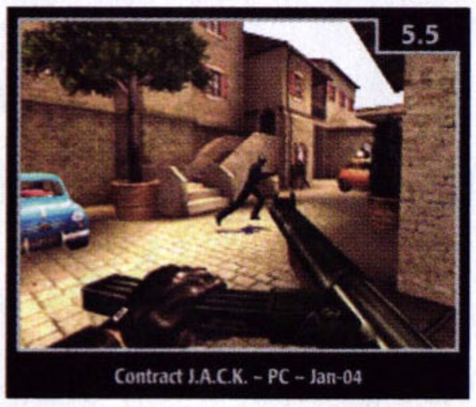
Alias	7.5	Apr-04
All-Star Baseball 2005	7	Apr-04
Armed and Dangerous	8	Jan-04
Arx Fatalis	7.5	Jan-04
Auto Modellista	7.5	Apr-04
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	5.5	Dec-03
Battlestar Galactica	6.5	Jan-04
Beyond Good and Evil	8	Dec-03
Blowout	6.5	Feb-04
Breakdown	7.5	Apr-04
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	8	Jan-04
Carve	6.5	Feb-04
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Celebrity Deathmatch	2.75	Jan-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, The	9.5	Jul-04
Colin McRae Rally 4	8.5	Apr-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Counter-Strike	7.5	Jan-04
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	9	Dec-03
Curse: The Eye of Isis	6.75	Feb-04
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix	8	Jan-04
Dead Man's Hand	7.75	Apr-04
Deus Ex: Invisible War	9	Jan-04

Beyond Good and Evil – Xbox – Dec-03

Dinosaur Hunting	7	Feb-04
Drake of the 99 Dragons	1.25	Jan-04
Driv3r	6	Aug-04
Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind GOTY Edition, The	7.75	Jan-04
ESPN Major League Baseball	7.5	Apr-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	8	Feb-04
Fight Night 2004	9	Apr-04
Freestyle Street Soccer	4	Feb-04
Full Spectrum Warrior	8.25	Jul-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Grabbed by the Ghoulies	4.5	Dec-03
Grand Theft Auto III/Vice City	10	Jan-04
Guilty Gear X2 #Reload	8.25	Sep-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Haunted Mansion, The	7	Feb-04
Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jun-04
IndyCar Series 2005	6.5	Aug-04
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death	6.75	May-04
Kill.Switch	7.5	Dec-03
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	8	Jan-04
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8.25	Dec-03
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Mafia	8	Jun-04
Magic: The Gathering Battlegrounds	6.5	Dec-03
Malice	5.5	Aug-04
Manhunt	9	Jun-04
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	8.75	Feb-04
Maximum Chase	7	Jan-04
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	7.75	Dec-03
Metal Slug 3	8	Jul-04
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	7.75	Feb-04
MLB Slugfest Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
MTV Music Generator 3	8	Aug-04
MTX: Mototrax	7.5	Apr-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
MX Unleashed	8	Mar-04
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Ballers	8	May-04
NBA Inside Drive 2004	6.5	Dec-03
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
Need For Speed: Underground	9.25	Dec-03
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
NHL Rivals 2004	5.75	Dec-03
Ninja Gaiden	9.5	Apr-04
Pikmin 2	8.75	Aug-04
Pitfall Harry	6	Apr-04
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	9.5	Jan-04
Pro Fishing Challenge	4.25	Sep-04
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Rainbow Six 3	8.5	Jan-04
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	8	Sep-04
RalliSport Challenge 2	7.25	Jun-04
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	6.75	Dec-03
Samurai Warriors	7.75	Sep-04
Scooby Doo!: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	7.5	Jan-04
Sega GT Online	7.75	Dec-03
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	5.75	Aug-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Silent Scope Complete	8	Feb-04
Spawn: Armageddon	6.5	Jan-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	9.5	May-04
Spy Hunter 2	6	Feb-04
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	5.5	Apr-04
Star Wars: Jedi Academy	8	Jan-04
Steel Battalion: Line of Contact	7.5	May-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Sudeki	7.75	Sep-04
Suffering, The	8.25	Apr-04
Tenchu: Return From Darkness	7.25	Apr-04
Thief: Deadly Shadows	7.25	Jul-04
TOCA Race Driver 2	7.5	May-04
Tony Hawk's Underground	8.75	Dec-03
Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	5	Aug-04
True Crime: Streets of LA	8.5	Jan-04
Unreal II: The Awakening	8	Apr-04
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Whiplash	4	Jan-04
World Championship Pool 2004	6.75	Feb-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrath Unleashed	7.5	Feb-04
XIII	7	Dec-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Dawn of Destiny	6	Jun-04

PC

Age of Mythology: The Titans	9	Dec-03
Aura: Fate of the Ages	7.25	Sep-04
Battlefield Vietnam	8	May-04
Besieger	6	Aug-04
Black Mirror, The	4.5	Jan-04
Breed	5.75	Jun-04
Call of Duty	9	Dec-03
City of Heroes	9	Jul-04
Civilization III: Conquests	9	Jan-04
Command & Conquer Generals: Zero Hour	8	Dec-03
Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	6	Jan-04
Contract J.A.C.K.	5.5	Jan-04
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	7.75	Apr-04
Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis	8	Feb-04
Delta Force – Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	8	Mar-04
Desert Rats vs. Afrika Korps	6	Jun-04
Deus Ex: Invisible War	9.5	Jan-04
Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna	7.5	Jan-04
Empires: Dawn of the Modern World	8.25	Dec-03
Far Cry	9.25	May-04
Final Fantasy XI	8	Jan-04
Gangland	6.5	May-04
Ground Control II: Operation Exodus	8.5	Aug-04
Halo: Combat Evolved	8.75	Dec-03
Hidden & Dangerous 2	6	Jan-04
Horizons: Empire of Istaria	7	Feb-04
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	8.5	Aug-04

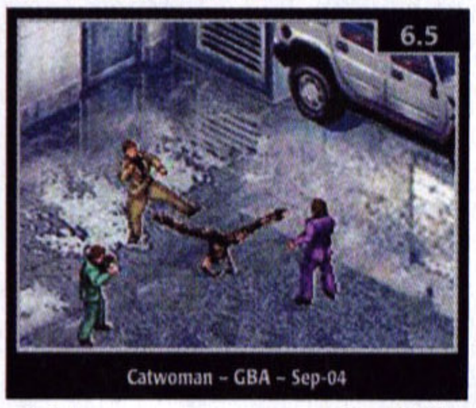


Contract J.A.C.K. – PC – Jan-04

Korea: Fogotten Conflict	5	Jan-04
Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle	7.25	Jul-04
Lord of the Rings: The War of the Ring, The	6.75	Jan-04
Lords of EverQuest	7.5	Feb-04
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	9.25	Dec-03
Medal of Honor Allied Assault: Breakthrough	9	Dec-03
Missing: Since January	6.5	Sep-04
Nemesis of the Roman Empire	7.75	Jun-04
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	8.5	Feb-04
Northland	8	Mar-04
Nosferatu: The Wrath of Malachi	3	Jan-04
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	8	Feb-04
Painkiller	8.5	Jun-04
Patrician III	7	Jan-04
Perimeter	7.75	Jul-04
Pirate Hunter: Seize and Destroy	6	Jan-04
PlanetSide: Core Combat	2	Jan-04
Republic: The Revolution	6	Dec-03
Rise of Nations: Thrones and Patriots	9	Jul-04
Sacred	7.75	Jun-04
Silent Storm	7.75	Feb-04
SimCity 4: Rush Hour	7.5	Dec-03
Sims: Makin' Magic, The	7.75	Dec-03
Singles: Flirt Up Your Life	7	Aug-04
Soldiers: Heroes of World War II	5	Aug-04
Space Colony	7	Dec-03
SpellForce: The Order of Dawn	7.75	Mar-04
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	9.5	Feb-04
Syberia II	6.75	Apr-04
Thief: Deadly Shadows	7.25	Jul-04
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	7.25	May-04
UFO: Aftermath	8.25	Dec-03
Unreal Tournament 2004	9.5	May-04
Uru: Ages Beyond Myst	8.25	Dec-03
Uru: The Path of the Shell	8.25	Sep-04
Warlords Battlecry III	7.75	Aug-04
Wars and Warriors: Joan of Arc	7.5	Apr-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
X2: The Threat	7	Feb-04

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Astro Boy: Omega Factor	8.5	Aug-04
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	8.25	Feb-04
Batman: The Rise of Sin Tzu	7	Mar-04



Catwoman – GBA – Sep-04

Blackthorne	8	Dec-03
Catwoman	6.5	Sep-04
Cima: The Enemy	8	Dec-03
Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Rage	5.75	Jun-04
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	7	Dec-03
Donkey Kong	8	Jun-04
Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors	5.5	Sep-04
Dragon Ball Z Taiketsu	6	Dec-03
Duel Masters: Sempai Legends	7.5	Aug-04
Fire Emblem	8.75	Dec-03
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	8	Jul-04
Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	7	Dec-03
Ice Nine	3.75	Apr-04
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	6.25	Feb-04
Justice League Chronicles	3	Dec-03
King of Fighters EX2: Howling Blood, The	7.75	Mar-04
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8	Dec-03
Madden NFL 2005	7	Sep-04
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	8	Jun-04
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	9.5	Jan-04
Mario vs. Donkey Kong	7.5	Jun-04
Max Payne	7.75	Jan-04
Mega Man Battle Chip Challenge	6	Mar-04
Mega Man Battle Network 4: Red Sun/Blue Moon	7	Jun-04
Metroid Zero Mission	9.5	Feb-04
Mighty Beanz Pocket Puzzles	6	Sep-04
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	6.25	Mar-04
Pitfall: The Lost Expedition	6	Apr-04
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	8.25	Dec-03
River City Ransom EX	8	Jun-04
R-Type III: The Third Lightning	6.25	May-04
Sabrewulf	6.5	Aug-04
Scooby Doo! Mystery Mayhem	6	Jan-04
Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon	7.5	Jun-04
Shining Soul II	7.5	Feb-04
Sims: Bustin' Out, The	8.5	Jan-04
Sonic Advance 3	6.75	Jul-04
Sonic Battle	6	Apr-04
Sound of Thunder, A	4.5	Apr-04
Spider-Man 2	7	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8	May-04
Spyro: Attack of the Rhynocs	5.5	Jan-04
Spyro Orange: The Cortex Conspiracy	5.75	Jun-04
SSX 3	4	Dec-03
Star Wars: Flight of the Falcon	2.25	Jan-04
Super Duper Sumos	6	Jan-04
Super Mario Bros.	9	Jun-04
Sword of Mana	7.75	Jan-04
Tak and the Power of Juju	5	Jan-04
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	7.5	Feb-04
Tony Hawk's Underground	7.5	Dec-03
Top Gear Rally	8	Jan-04
Ultimate Card Games	7	Sep-04
Wade Hixton's Counter Punch	7.5	May-04
Yu-Gi-Oh!: Reshef of Destruction	4.5	Sep-04
Yu-Gi-Oh!: The Sacred Cards	7.5	Feb-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship 2004	6.5	May-04

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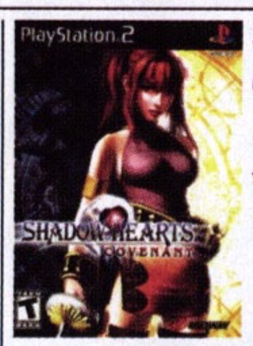

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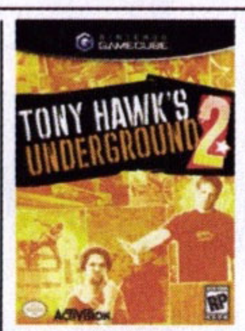

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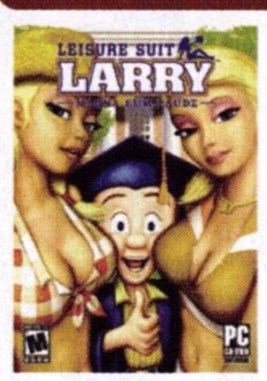
PC Games



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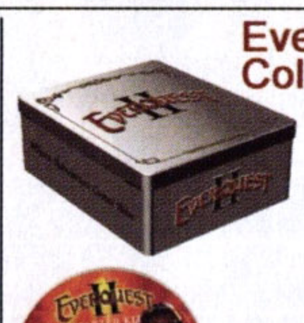

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SECRET ACCESS

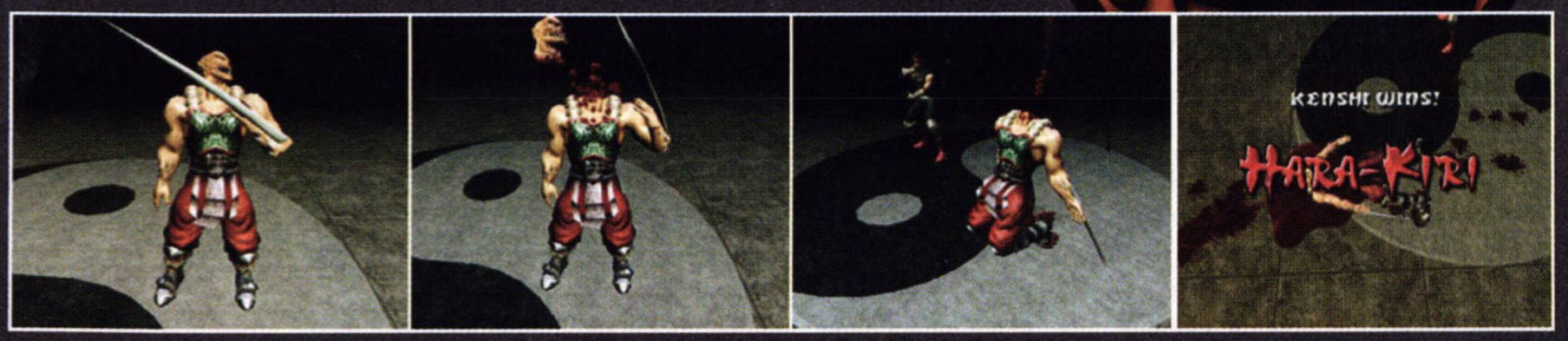
Codes, Strategies, Hints, Droids, And Tips

UNLIMITED ENABLED

Mortal Kombat: Deception

Bloody Finishers Straight From The Creators

Ed Boon and the good people at Midway are unveiling five of Deception's bloody finishers right here in the pages of Game Informer. These sequences must be entered at the end of the match.

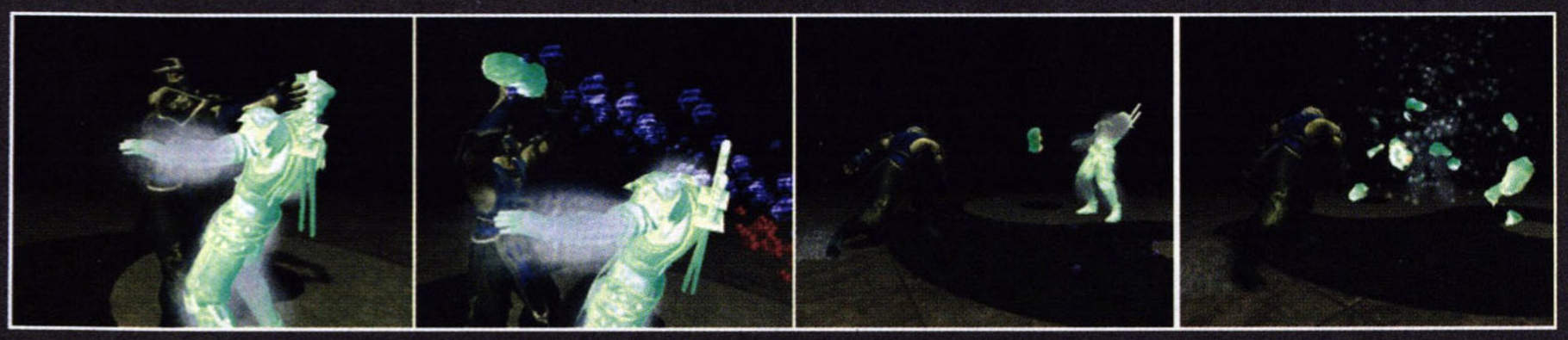


Baraka's Decap Hara-Kiri – Down, Away, Up, Away, Attack 4

Jade's Spear Fatality – Away, Towards, Up, Towards, Attack 1

Kobra's Heart Rip Fatality – Down, Away, Towards, Down, Attack 4

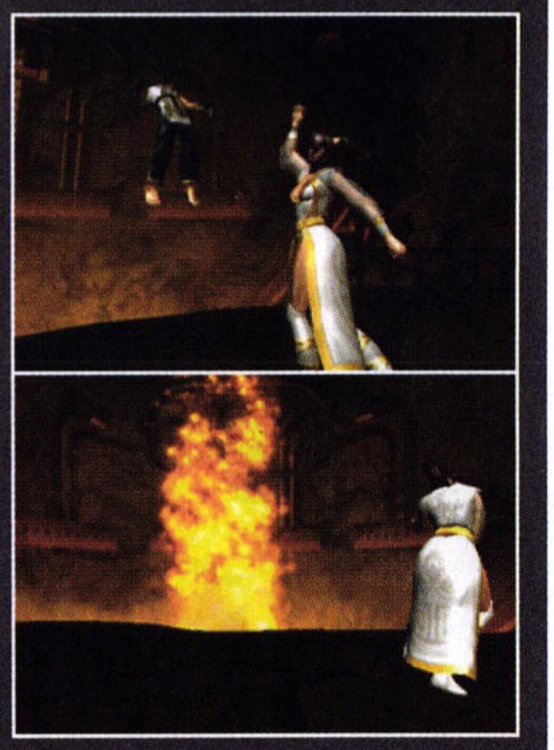
Nightwolf's Axe Throw Fatality – Away, Towards, Away, Towards, Attack 1 (must be far away from opponent)



SubZero's Head Rip Fatality – Towards, Away, Down, Towards, Attack 2

Lower Mines Death Traps

Pictured here are the three locations of the Death Traps in the lower mines level. You'll need to knock your opponent into these areas to finish them off.



Area 1

Area 2

Area 3

Attention All Cheaters!
Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

PLAYSTATION 2

Funkmaster Flex's Digital Hitz Factory

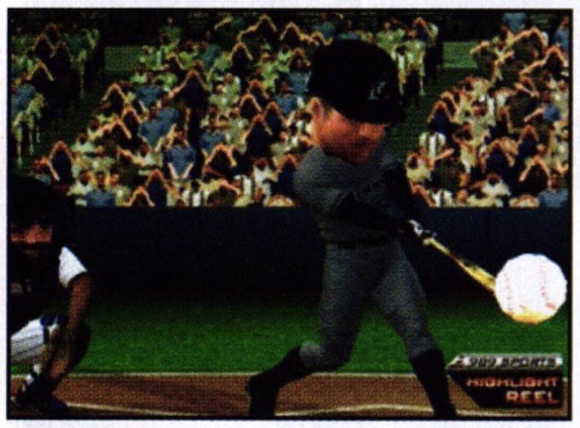
Enter these at the main menu. A message will confirm correct entry.

Unlock Hidden Skin 1 – Select, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right
Unlock Hidden Skin 2 – Select, Left (x2), Right (x2), Left (x2), Right (x2), Left (x2), Right (x2)
Unlock Hidden Skin 3 – Select, Left (x3), Right (x3), Left (x3), Right (x3)
Unlock Hidden Skin 4 – Select, Left (x4), Right (x4), Left (x4)
Unlock Hidden Track – Select, Up, Down, Left, Right, Up, Down, Left, Right, Up, Down, Left, Right

Future Tactics: The Uprising

Enter these during gameplay, except for the Level Skip code which should be entered at the Story Mode game select menu. A sound will confirm correct entry.

Big Heads – Up, Left, Down, Left, Down, Up (x2), Left
Blur Effect – L1, Left, L1, Left, R1, Right, R1, Right
Low-Grav – Up (x6), Down, Right, Up



MLB 2005

Enter these codes at the main menu or while paused during gameplay. Your controller will vibrate to confirm entry.

Extra Pitch Break – Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Up (x2)
Extra Pitch Speed – Up (x3), Left (x4), Right
Extra Pitches – Down, Up, Down, Right (x4), Left
Huge Ball – Up (x2), Right, Left, Up (x2), Right, Left
Huge Heads – Left, Right, Left, Right, Up, Down, Up, Down
Noxious Sound Effects – Right (x6), Left, Down
Run Faster – Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Up (x2)
Run Slower – Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Down (x2)
Tiny Heads – Up, Down, Up (x2), Right (x3), Left
Unlock Players – Left, Up, Left, Right, Down, Right, Left, Up
Unlock Stadiums – Down, Up, Left, Right, Up, Right, Up, Down
Unlock Teams – Left, Right (x2), Down (x2), Left, Up (x2)
Unlock Uniforms – Up, Down, Right, Left, Down, Right, Down, Up

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen peeing in the Olympic swimming pool. How do you like your gold now, Michael Phelps?)

Code of the Month

Doom 3

Hordes of Hell proving a bit much for you? Just really want to blow some stuff up? These are for you. During gameplay hold Ctrl+Alt+tilde [~] to drop the command console, then enter these codes to hook it up.

CHEATS
All Keys – give keys
All Weapons, Ammo, Health, and Armor – give all
Freeze Everything Onscreen – freeze
God Mode – god
Most Enemies Won't Attack – notarget
Pass Through Objects – noclip

LEVELS
Type "devmap game/[map name]" in the console to teleport yourself to the beginning of whichever map you want. The levels are listed in order.

marscity1.map
mcunderground.map
marscity2.map
admin.map
alpha1.map
alpha2.map
alpha3.map
alpha4.map
enpro.map
commout.map
communications.map
recycling1.map
recycling2.map
monorail.map
delta1.map
delta2a.map
delta2b.map
delta3.map
delta4.map
hell.map
delta5.map
cpu1.map
cpuboss.map
site3.map
caverns1.map
caverns2.map
hellhole.map

MONSTERS
Type "spawn monster_[name]" to spawn the monster right in front of you. The type of monster spawned should be fairly obvious. Note that Hellknights and Archviles are bad for your health – consider using the notarget or god codes so you're not quite as doomed.

boss_cyberdemon
boss_guardian
boss_guardian_seeker
boss_sabaoth
boss_vagary
demon_archvile
demon_cherub
demon_hellknight
demon_imp
demon_maggot
demon_mancubus
demon_pinky
demon_revenant
demon_tick
demon_trite
demon_wraith
zombie_bernie
zombie_commando
zombie_commando_cgun
zombie_fat2
zombie_fat_wrench
zombie_jumpsuit
zombie_jumpsuit_eating
zombie_labcoat
zombie_limb
zombie_maint_bald
zombie_maint_nojaw
zombie_maint_skinny
zombie_maint_wrench
zombie_maint
zombie_maint2
zombie_maint_flashlight
zombie_pipe
zombie_sawyer
zombie_skinny
zombie_suit_neckstump
zombie_suit_bloodymouth
zombie_suit_skinny
zombie_tshirt_bald
zombie_tshirt_blown
zombie_zsec_machinegun
zombie_zsec_pistol
zombie_zsec_shield
zombie_zsec_shotgun

POWERUPS
Adrenaline – spawn powerup_adrenaline
Berserk – give berserk
Megahealth – spawn powerup_megahealth
Invisibility – spawn powerup_invisibility

Robert Yorbling
Wichita, KS

Mod World

Doom 3

Was there any doubt that the mod community at large would kick it into high gear the instant they got their hands on id's latest masterpiece? Well, they did, but at the moment there aren't too many around, and most of them are minor tweaks – everything from the well-publicized Duct Tape mod (which adds a flashlight effect to certain weapons) to other things like weapon sound packs, a mod that changes grenades to flares, and one that allows you to crank multiplayer games up to 32 players. Here are some of our favorites so far.

Hello Kitty

When Hell is encroaching, even the stoutest Marine can find the icy tendrils of fear clutching at his heart. What better way to increase morale than to distribute Hello Kitty-brand flashlights to the grunts? Put a smile on that crucified, disemboweled corpse! Wake the caring in a demon's soul with the incarnation of joy and cuteness shining on their several eyes! Just stop by **www.download.com** for this and more. You can even pick up the Bat-signal or the Thundercats logo as alternate flashlights.

VariLight

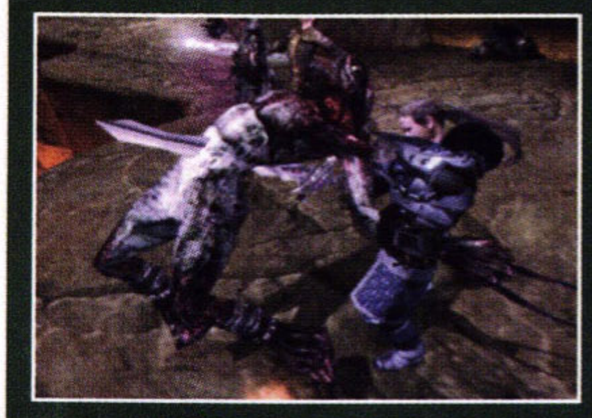
Similar to and based on the Duct Tape mod, VariLight effectively glues a flashlight to your weapons. The differences between the two are minor, but we like this one better – the light projected is based on the weapon, so the shotgun will illuminate a wide area while the assault rifle will throw off a tight, focused beam. As an added bonus, the pistol gets a laser sight. You can find this several places on the Web; we got ours from **doom3.filefront.com**.

CelShader

Yep, this does about what you would assume, goofy as it is. Doom 3 becomes cel-shaded. You've really got to see it to believe it, but it actually does work. The only caveat is that it boosts the system requirements even higher than they already are – don't bother trying this unless you've got a fairly high-end card. This is likewise available all over the Web, but **doom3.filefront.com** had the shortest queues for us.

Demon Stone

Exclusive Tips From Alyssa Finley, Producer at Stormfront Studios



Demon Stone is an intense action game that is equal parts cinematic experience and frenzied gameplay. The game immerses the audience in a story written by best-selling author R.A. Salvatore, bringing some of the classic Forgotten Realms locations and D&D enemies to life. We designed the game to appeal to both hardcore and casual gamers, meaning there's a lot of depth beneath the simple button mash. Here are a few tips and tricks to maximize your playing experience:

SWITCH ON THE FLY: PLAY THE PARTY

The crux of the Demon Stone experience is the interaction of the party – they travel together, they fight together, and ultimately, they work as a team. You can switch characters any time you want to during most of the action, which is important because each of our characters has strengths and weaknesses. The most rewarding way to play is to take advantage of all three characters, choosing the right one to take on the current challenge.

RANNEK, THE FIGHTER

Rannek can dish out the most punishment and can also withstand it the best. This gives him an advantage fighting large groups of enemies. His history as a fighter includes devastating losses as well as glorious success, and he brings the rage of those losses to bear in every fight he takes on. Rannek can cause grievous damage to multiple enemies with a single combo.

ZHAI, THE ROGUE

A half-drow raised among Wood Elves, Zhai learned to take care of herself in an often cruel world. Stealth, jumping, and agility are her strengths. She can effectively dodge attacks, making her a powerful asset against enemies with the strength to break through a normal parry. Zhai also has the ability to hide in shadows and ruthlessly backstab enemies who foolishly turn their backs on her, killing them in a single stealthy blow.

ILLIUS, THE SORCERER

What's a sorcerer's best weapon? Ranged attacks, of course, and Illius has a powerful set of ranged spells that he can upgrade as the game unfolds. He also possesses the most powerful shield available in the game. Of course, magic is not all he's got going for him – he had some significant combat training in his past, and can hold his own in hand to hand combat.

BLOCKING: A PLAYER'S BEST FRIEND

You may be able to survive for a while in Demon Stone without using Block/Evade/Shield, but your game will really improve once you start using it. It's especially critical against enemies with ranged attacks.

Rannek can block continually against enemies, even if multiple enemies are attacking him. Zhai doesn't block, but instead evades, ducking out of the way of hits and out of the clutches of enemies. Illius's shield is magical, growing more powerful throughout the game, eventually acting as a weapon as well as a defense.

Beware – when you block for too long, clever enemies may use it as an opportunity to pull off a special move on you.

COMBOS: VARY THE CARNAGE

Combos are a key part of the gameplay experience – so we made them easy to use and remember. Combos are the same for all characters, so it's fluid and seamless to switch characters and keep playing. It's important to note that using combos will charge up your Hero Meter quickly – allowing you to access some über-powerful special attacks.

There are three combos to buy for each player:
Bull Rush – Sends an enemy reeling backwards
Knock-Down – Knocks an enemy to the ground
Power Critical – Does maximum damage

Different enemies have different weaknesses – so while you may be able to quickly dispatch a Yuan-ti Mutation by knocking him off a cliff, a Troll may not be so vulnerable to this technique. Experimenting with the different combos on the different enemies will help you find the most effective killing path.

USING THE HERO METER: TEAM ATTACK, SUPER ATTACK, AND THE TEAM SUPER

As you connect with combos and attack with ranged attacks, your "Hero Meter" (the meter in the middle of the HUD) will charge up. There are several different ways to use this power: the Team Attack, the Super Attack, and the Team Super.

The team attack button allows you to call one of the other party members over to give you a hand when you really need it. When your "Hero Meter" is at least 1/3 full, you can call the team attack. This makes the game go into a special "team attack mode," giving your allies the chance to come to your aid and wreak major havoc on the enemy who is currently attacking you. It is important to note that your teammates cannot be summoned unless they are within a certain distance.

The Fighter's Whirlwind Attack, the Rogue's Manyshot, and the Sorcerer's Mystra's Might are all "Super" attacks that have a powerful effect on all enemies in the area around the player. In order to use these attacks, you must build up your Hero Meter by attacking enemies until the character's Hero Meter Gem lights up. Once it is lit, you can jump into the middle of the fray and unleash some serious killing power.

The most powerful attack in the game is the Team Super – a combination of all three individual Super attacks. If all three characters' Hero Meters are charged, you can use the Team Super to attack with massive damage, and in most cases kill almost every enemy on screen. As an added incentive to charge up and use this über-powerful attack, every time you use a Team Super you will get bonus experience points awarded at the end of the level – allowing you to upgrade your characters even more for the next set of challenges.

UPGRADES: SOME "DON'T MISS" ITEMS

Demon Stone offers a lot of skill and item upgrades, and there are some that the players really won't want to miss.

All characters – Knock Down Combo and Coup de Grace. The Knock Down combo combined with the Coup de Grace is one of the most effective ways to dispatch enemies quickly – minimizing the damage to you and maximizing the damage to the baddies.
Rannek – Riposte Attack. This attack allows Rannek to attack after a block, and can be a VERY effective strategic addition to the fighter's abilities. This attack also stuns most enemies and is worth saving up for!
Zhai – Skill Focus: Hide and Skill Focus: Move Silently. Zhai's stealth abilities are critical in some of the later levels of the game. Give yourself every advantage by snagging her Stealth upgrades.
Illius – Pearls of Power. Pearls of Power add additional punch to Illius's spells, making them even more effective and powerful, especially early in the game.

USING YOUR TEAM: STRATEGIC PLACEMENT

Although the AI handles the characters you're not playing to make sure they're helping out

in fights, advanced Demon Stone players can employ certain team based tactics and eliminate enemies even more efficiently.

If you switch between the characters at the start of the fight and place them strategically, they will generally stay in the areas you put them as long as they have someone to fight. For instance, the clever player might place Illius behind the party – thereby maximizing the use of his ranged spells. Try positioning Zhai in a patch of shadow; this allows her to use her stealth abilities. Rannek's place is in the middle of the fray where he can take advantage of his multi-character damaging attacks.

You can also switch characters when the one you're playing gets caught in an enemy's "linked" special attack – let the AI take the hit of being disabled for a short period, while you proceed with payback.

And last, but not least, when you see a health pickup or a super pickup appear, make sure to get the most out of them. The AI won't grab a pickup with a player who needs it, so when you see a health pickup appear, switch to the character who really needs health and go get it!

THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE: BEATING THE BOSSES

The best way to beat the bosses in Demon Stone is to use the power of the entire team against them.

Try attacking, then switching to another character and attacking again – for example, use the Fighter to draw the boss's attention, then get in some ranged hits from the Sorcerer or a quick attack from the Rogue.

Make every hit count for maximum damage to the boss by using Power Critical combos and Team Attacks.

When a boss is doing a lot of damage to your character, make sure to switch to the teammate with the most health before doing an attack pass – spreading the damage out between heroes lets you fight longer!

We hope these tips and tricks help you enjoy Demon Stone!

XBOX

Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow

A message will confirm correct entry for the gameplay codes, while the Hall of Fame code sends you into the Hall of Fame where you can walk around.

Hall of Fame – At the main menu, enter L3 (x2), R3 (x2), X, Y, B, A, B, A
Laser Trails – During gameplay, enter Up, Down, Up, Down, R3 (x2)
Toggle Invincibility – During gameplay, enter Up (x2), Down (x2), Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu

Enter these codes at the continue screen to jump to the indicated level

Boss 1 – HLNZXJ
Boss 2 – NGHR4R
Boss 3 – PD4LQD
Final Boss – ZQFY81
Level 1-1 – MG7L4R
Level 1-2 – RZHLXM
Level 1-3 – WGRLN_
Level 1-4 – 3G7L47
Level 2-1 – 7ZHLX3
Level 2-2 – BBBCBG
Level 2-3 – GVLC2B
Level 2-4 – LBVCVQ
Level 3-1 – QV2CLL
Level 3-2 – VBBCBZ
Level 3-3 – ZVLC2B
Level 3-4 – 2BVCV6
Level 4-1 – RL4XGS
Level 4-2 – _LNXZ0
Level 4-3 – 7L4XG8
Level 4-4 – C2DX64
Level 4-5 – VGWPN_
Level 5-1 – ZZ3PDW
Level 5-2 – 63MPXE
Level 5-3 – PBZGQV
Level 5-4 – TV6GLL
Level 5-5 – 1VQG2V
Level 5-6 – 9V6GL2
Level 6-1 – 0D7RDW
Level 6-2 – DG_RNH
Level 6-3 – JZ7RDC
Level 6-4 – RB2JVQ
Level 6-5 – WVBJLL
Level 6-6 – _BLJBZ
Level 6-7 – 3VVJ2V
Level 6-8 – 7B2JB6
Level 7-1 – CVBJ2L
Level 7-2 – HBLJBG
Level 7-3 – MVVJ2B
Level 7-4 – QQT9ST
Level 7-5 – V619JP
Level 7-6 – ZQ9981
Level 7-7 – 26K90Y
Level 7-8 – Y2NL6N
Level 7-9 – 524LQX
Level 7-10 – F2NL64
Level 8-1 – XG3CN_
Level 8-2 – 4GMC47
Level 8-3 – 8ZWCX3
Level 8-4 – DG3CNH
Level 8-5 – JZCCDC
Level 8-6 – NGMC4R
Level 8-7 – _BQ4BZ
Level 9-1 – 3VZ42V
Level 9-2 – 7B64B6
Level 9-3 – CVG4L2
Level 9-4 – HBQ4BG
Level 9-5 – MVZ42B

Silent Hill 4

How The Creators Control The Fear

Insider tips from Suguru Murakoshi, Team Director of Silent Hill 4

THE RECOMMENDED GAMEPLAY ENVIRONMENT

I would like to recommend that gamers turn off the lights and turn up the TV volume when they're playing the game. By doing this, there will be a link between your own room and room #302 (the room in the game). This will let you have the best experience to fully capture the survival-horror gameplay.

SWORD OF OBEDIENCE

Ghosts are a new enemy that appear for the first time in the series.
Since it's a ghost, it will not die. However, by using the Sword of Obedience, you can stop them from moving. If you manage to exert normal damage to ghosts and knock them down, you can use the Sword of Obedience to pin them to the ground. Unless you remove the sword, the ghosts cannot move any longer.

There are two warnings about using the Sword of Obedience, though.

1. Knock down the ghosts completely. By exerting damage when jabbing at the ghosts, the damage amount can be accumulated over time to knock them down. If you knock them down without accumulating lots of damage, the ghost can stand up quickly and you will not be able to use the Sword of Obedience to keep him in place.

2. There are only five Sword of Obedience weapons available. You need to be careful where and when to use it. (You can remove the stabbed sword to re-use it. One idea is to pin the ghost in place and once you are done exploring, you can take the sword out.)

SILVER BULLETS

With a pistol, you can cause an infinite amount of damage to any ghosts. No matter how strong the ghost is, it will be knocked down for a while after using Silver Bullets. By combining this with the Sword of Obedience, your attack ability against ghosts is perfect. However, since there are only two bullets available, you need to be careful about when to use them.

GROUPED ENEMIES

In confronting groups of enemies, shooting-type weapons (such as a pistol) are very effective because they penetrate multiple enemies. From your viewpoint, focus on which enemies you want to attack and shoot!

STAMINA RECOVERY

Whenever you go back to your room (#302), your stamina recovers. Try to go back to your room as often as possible if you're having trouble staying alive.

MELEE WEAPONS

Silent Hill 4 gives players a variety of melee weapons to use (such as a metal bat, golf club, shovel, etc). Since each weapon has its own characteristics, the best way to use these weapons is to differentiate them according to specific enemies you will be confronting. For example, for quick moving enemies, you may not want to use a pick axe since it takes much more time to execute. The axe does more damage, and is more effective against slower and larger enemies.

Also, the weapons have different ways of making final blows on enemies. The more you try different weapons, the more variety you will see. Please check it out!

We hope this game doesn't keep you up all night. Remember, it's only a game…or is it?

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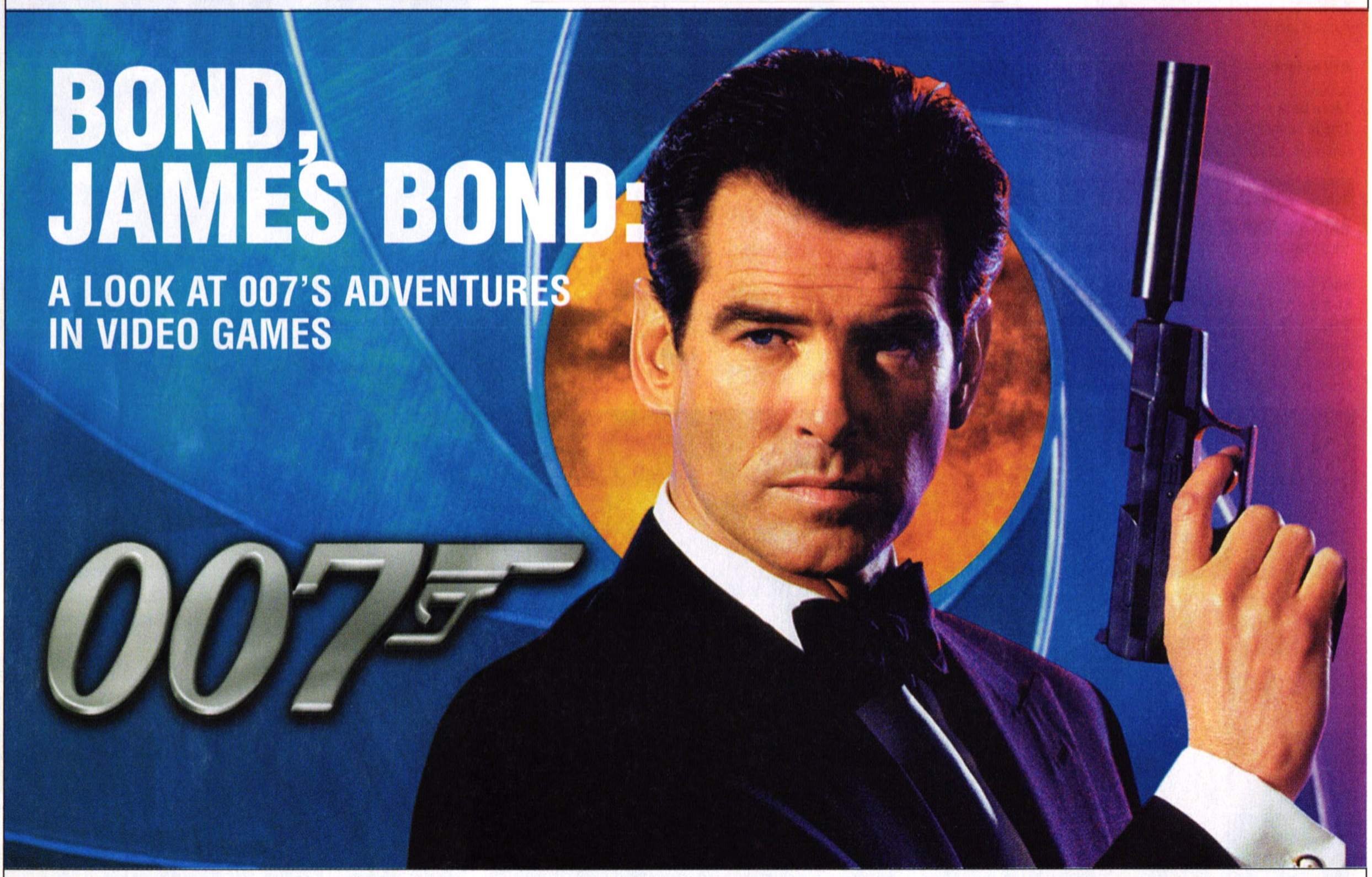
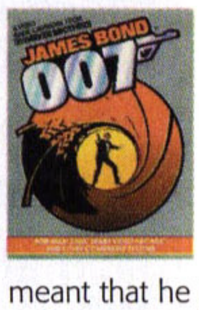
BOND, JAMES BOND:

A LOOK AT 007'S ADVENTURES IN VIDEO GAMES



Years before Neo, Luke Skywalker, Indiana Jones, or Aragorn became action stars, James Bond wrote the rules of the genre. Starting with 1962's Dr. No, *Sean Connery established the British super-spy as an icon of unflappable cool. Throughout the years, the Bond torch was passed to Roger Moore and Pierce Brosnan (as well as the less successful agents George Lazenby and Timothy Dalton). More recently, rumors have been circulating that Clive Owen (*Gosford Park, Croupier*) is next in line to sip the shaken-not-stirred martini and grab the keys to the Aston Martin.*

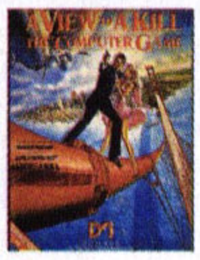
While Bond, with a few exceptions, has been box office gold, his career in video games is a little more checkered, as 007 has been involved in games ranging from all-time classics to out-and-out duds. Here we present James Bond's history in games, highlighting most of the major titles from his digital resume. For space considerations, a few games have been cut, most notably some early computer text adventures written by Bond author Raymond Benson and the latest edition in the series, Everything or Nothing.



James Bond 007 – 1983

(Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Colecovision)

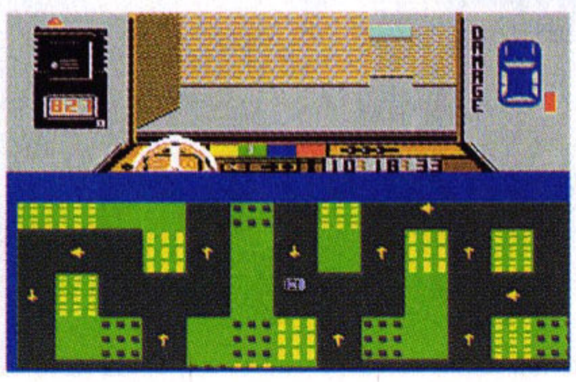
Bond is old-school, but his eye for high-tech gadgets meant that he jumped on the video game train at the start in James Bond 007, a title that was released in slightly modified forms for the Atari 2600, 5200, and Colecovision. Like many titles from the early era of the industry, the gameplay and graphics are pretty simplistic, but the level design was quite ambitious, incorporating sequences inspired by not one, but four Bond films: *Diamonds are Forever*, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, *Moonraker*, and *For Your Eyes Only*.

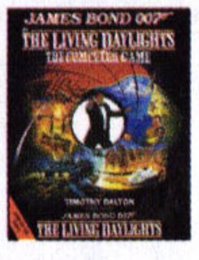


A View to A Kill – 1985

(Commodore 64)

A quirky title that has been all but forgotten by history, this Commodore 64 adaptation of the film *A View to A Kill* was an ambitious attempt at a Bond action game, one that can be seen as a precursor of sorts to some of the more current 007 projects. One particularly unique level has you driving through the streets of Paris as you attempt to catch a parachuting comrade. Sadly, this title is pretty hard to track down these days. Like many early Bond games, it was published by Domark, which was later absorbed by Eidos.

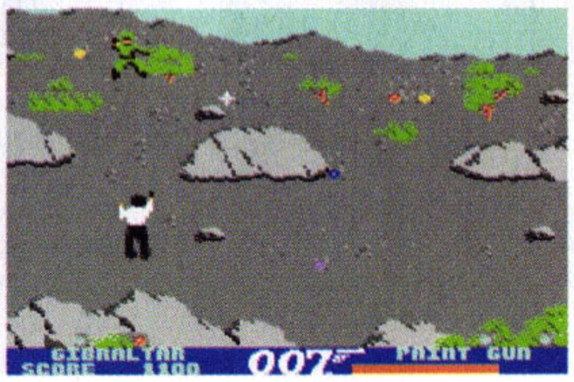


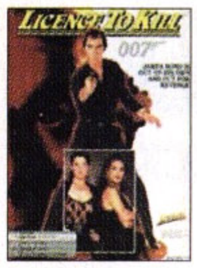


The Living Daylights – 1987

(Commodore 64)

Based on the film of the same name (which served as dour Timothy Dalton's coming-out as 007), this 2D action game scales back the ambitions of *A View to A Kill*, which while not as admirable, produced a simple platform/shooter hybrid that ended up being a playable and fun title for Commodore 64 fans. Graphically, it's no masterpiece, even for its day, but the game is remembered as a worthy addition to the Bond legacy – something many Bond fans wouldn't say of the movie that inspired it.

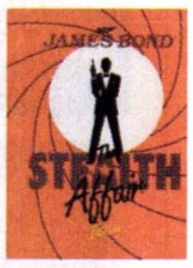




007: License to Kill – 1989

(PC)

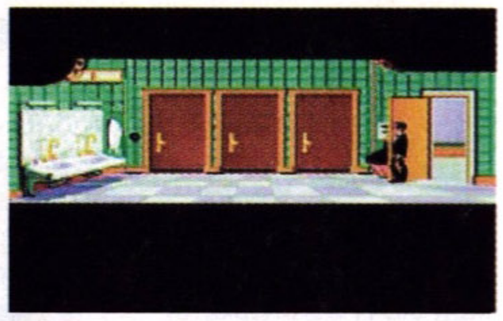
In Bond's period of exile from the consoles, he made frequent appearances on the home computer, here taking a break from his escapades on the Commodore 64 to star in this PC title. There isn't much information out there regarding this rare game, other than the odd screenshot and the very briefest of summaries. License to Kill was a top-down, free-roaming shooter, and a pretty good one at that.

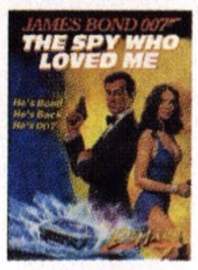


James Bond: The Stealth Affair – 1990

(PC)

Bond is the world's sexiest adventurer (sorry *Relic Hunter's* Tia Carrerre!), so it's only natural that 007 got busy in the once-ubiquitous PC adventure game genre. The Stealth Affair featured graphics that were very nifty for their day, and a cool interface that harked back to the days of text titles like Zork: You actually typed out commands using a limited vocabulary. Seeking to track down a stealth fighter plane that had gone missing and was now in the hands of an organization seeking to destroy the world, James had to solve puzzles and navigate his way through a long series of static scenes.

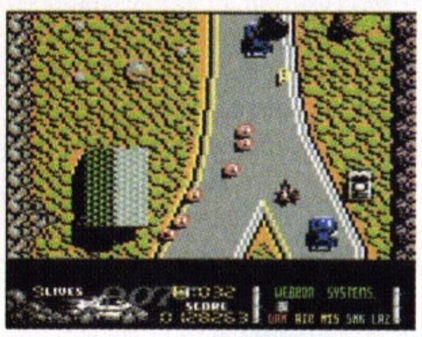


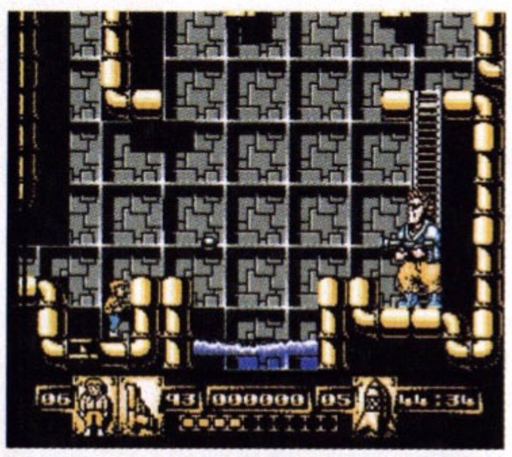


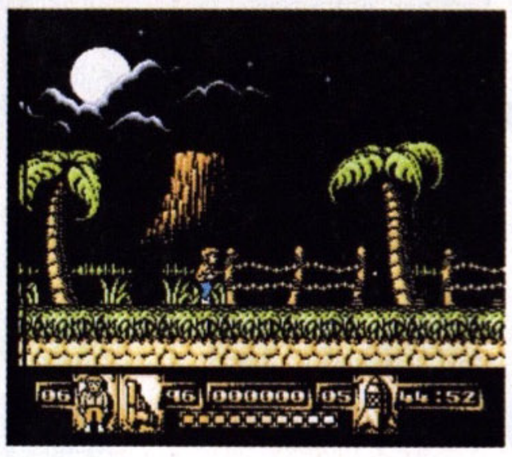
The Spy Who Loved Me – 1990

(Commodore 64)

Coming out extremely late in the Commodore 64's lifecycle, this title not only starred MI-6's most famous spy – it took a clear inspiration from Spy Hunter, a famous arcade classic from years earlier. Like Spy Hunter, this was a top-down driving game, and it featured Bond's Lotus Esprit, a hot ride that was able to drive underwater and came equipped with weapons and gadgets like the oil slick. It wasn't original or state of the art even for its time period, but it is a fun little curio of Bond history.



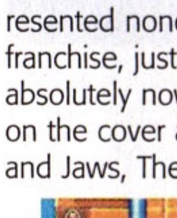




James Bond Jr. – 1992

(NES, SNES)

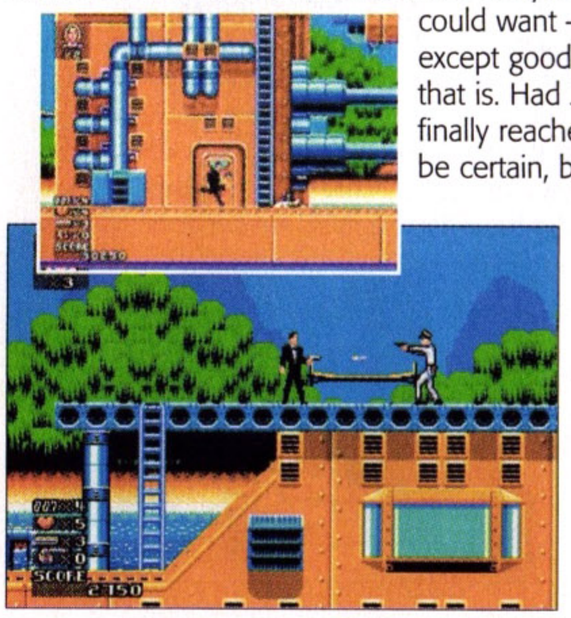
James Bond comes back to the console world as…um…some punk little kid! Rip-off! Actually, James Bond Jr. (a tie-in with a short-lived animated TV show of the same name) was a fairly competent little action/platformer that at least attempted to do some unique things with the various puzzles that would appear between levels. Sadly, it also suffered from the usual inconsistencies of 8-bit platformers: annoying control that had the propensity to throw your wee little 007 falling off of ledges and platforms to his death. However, in these "dark days" of the Bond video game franchise, this was as good as it got.

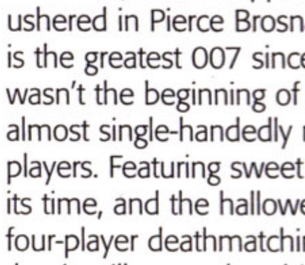


James Bond 007: The Duel – 1993

(Genesis)

A side-scrolling action/shooter heavily inspired by the popular Namco series Rolling Thunder, James Bond 007: The Duel represented none of the quality gameplay of that well-loved franchise, just a hodge-podge of interesting ideas that went absolutely nowhere. Featuring the mug of Timothy Dalton on the cover and some classic Bond villains like Oddjob and Jaws, The Duel seemed to have everything a 007 fan could want – everything except good gameplay, that is. Had James Bond finally reached a low? To be certain, but the mid-'90s would bring about a Bond renaissance – both in film and in the digital realm.





007: GoldenEye – 1997

(Nintendo 64)

Now we come to the game that truly established Bond as a video game power player. In a happy case of kismet, it also happened to be based on the film that ushered in Pierce Brosnan as Bond, an actor who many feel is the greatest 007 since Sean Connery. 007: GoldenEye wasn't the beginning of the first-person shooter, but it did almost single-handedly make the genre a staple for console players. Featuring sweet weapons, very good graphics for its time, and the hallowed four-player deathmatching that is still revered to this day, GoldenEye represented a high point for Bond video games, developer Rare, and the Nintendo 64 as a console. Other titles would follow, but none would have the earth-shaking impact of GoldenEye.

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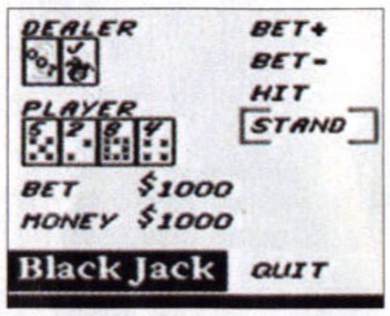
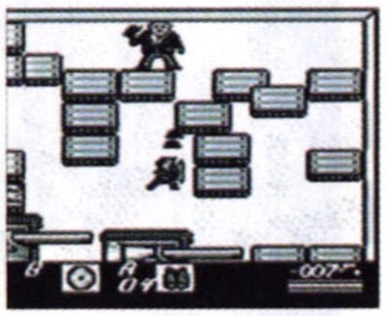
James Bond 007 – 1998
(Game Boy)

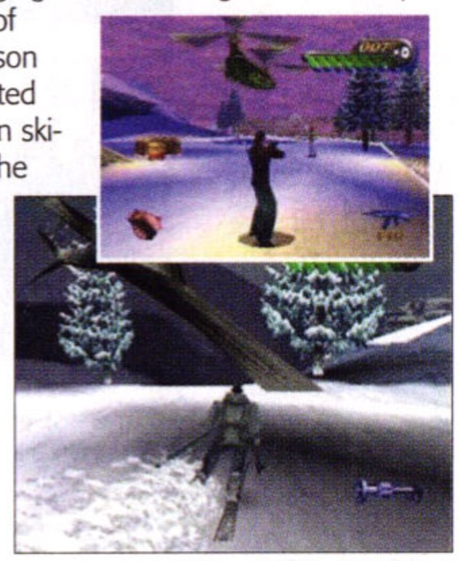
Oddly enough, Rare didn't jump on the chance to bring about a Bond sequel on the heels of the white-hot GoldenEye. Instead, Bond went into video game hibernation, rearing his immaculately coifed head in a low-key fashion in this largely forgotten Game Boy title. Is it a worthy part of the Bond legacy? Well, let's just say that top-down handheld action games of this era haven't exactly proven to be a particularly enduring part of game history. However, one amusing feature does allow you to play casino games like blackjack, one of 007's favorite pastimes.





Tomorrow Never Dies – 1999
(PSone)

Although the Bond/Rare partnership was a fruitful one, it was not lasting. Smelling the dollars, super-publisher Electronic Arts scooped up the Bond license (which it retains to this day). This new publishing agreement brought a shift away from the FPS gameplay of GoldenEye in a third-person action title that incorporated stealth, gunplay, and even skiing sequences. Despite the bold concept, Tomorrow Never Dies' unsightly mish-mash of half-baked gameplay was a huge disappointment to gamers eager for another 007 masterpiece.

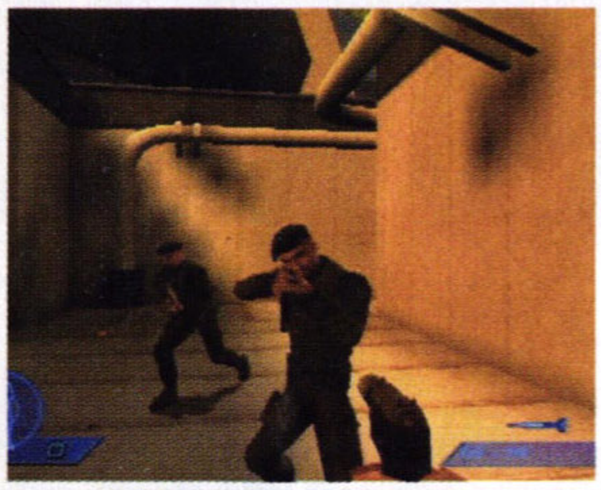


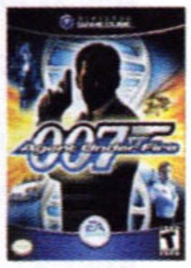
007 Racing – 2000
(PSone)

007 Racing is certainly a unique part of Bond game lore; however, it's not a very important one. That's a bit of an exaggeration, as this title was a passable action/racing game. However, it sure didn't make anyone forget titles like Twisted Metal or Driver. Perhaps its biggest failing is the fact that it just doesn't make the most of the Bond license. Yes, it did feature some iconic 007 rides, but at the end of the day, simple racing just isn't a substitute for high-flying spy hijinks.

The World Is Not Enough – 2000
(PSone, N64, Game Boy Advance)

Fans, gamers, and the press made it pretty clear how they felt about Tomorrow Never Dies (subtle gagging motions can really drive a point home!). In the spirit of making peace with its fanbase, EA wisely decided to give people what they wanted in the first place: more exacting FPS action. The World is Not Enough isn't remembered as fondly as its GoldenEye, but that doesn't mean that this title isn't worth checking out. Last-gen enthusiasts will find a winning combination of turn-of-the-century FPS conventions. Groundbreaking? No, but it's certainly one of Bond's better video adventures.





James Bond 007 in... Agent Under Fire – 2001
(PS2, Xbox, GC)

EA decided that it didn't want to wait around for another Bond film to put out a new game, so it went the way of constructing Agent Under Fire as a standalone title, one with a "generic" James that was not based on the likeness of current Bond star Pierce Brosnan, whose image they were unable to secure for the project. The title expanded the now-traditional FPS Bond gameplay with sequences of track-shooting and racing action, resulting in a game that was very popular with fans and generally well-received by critics (although there were those who felt that it was too short and too shallow).

007: NightFire – 2002
(PS2, Xbox, GC, PC, Game Boy Advance)

Perhaps after realizing that, hey, a lot of people actually buy these darn video games, Hollywood got hip to playing a larger role in Bond's virtual adventures. So, after some gentle prodding (and a truckful of cash), Pierce Brosnan signed off on the rights to his likeness being used in NightFire. While this definitely helped the game recapture the Bond mojo, some fans felt that NightFire didn't do enough to distinguish itself from Agent Under Fire, as it did stick to the latter's FPS/track shooting/racing formula. Perhaps sensing that mediocrity was creeping into it the Bond franchise, EA decided to take the series in a third-person direction with the next Bond title, the recently released Everything or Nothing.

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME
By Kelan Lyons

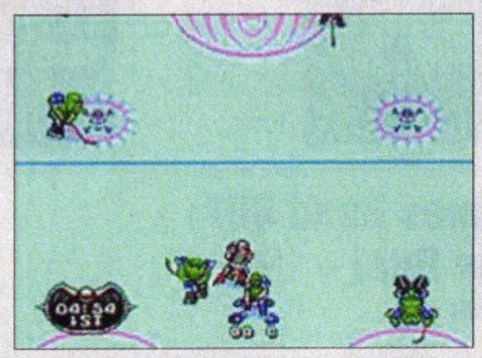
MUTANT LEAGUE HOCKEY
> **FORMAT** SEGA GENESIS
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS

The Sega Genesis was my first video game system, so it obviously holds a very special place in my heart. I played Sonic, Vectorman, and Golden Axe, but none of these have kept me coming back for more. Once I beat them, they were quickly shelved as I bought another game. But there is one game that has always made me come back for more, even to this day. That game is Mutant League Hockey for the Sega Genesis.

I was only seven when I first discovered this game. I was immediately drawn to it because of two reasons: It had my favorite sport, hockey, and evil mutants to play with. MLH had you not only trying to score, but it also had you avoiding hazards such as shark fins and holes in the ice. In between plays, your coaches will yell at you from the bench in an alien-like language. I got lost in the nearly endless supply of teams, and although they all play essentially the same, the characters have personality.

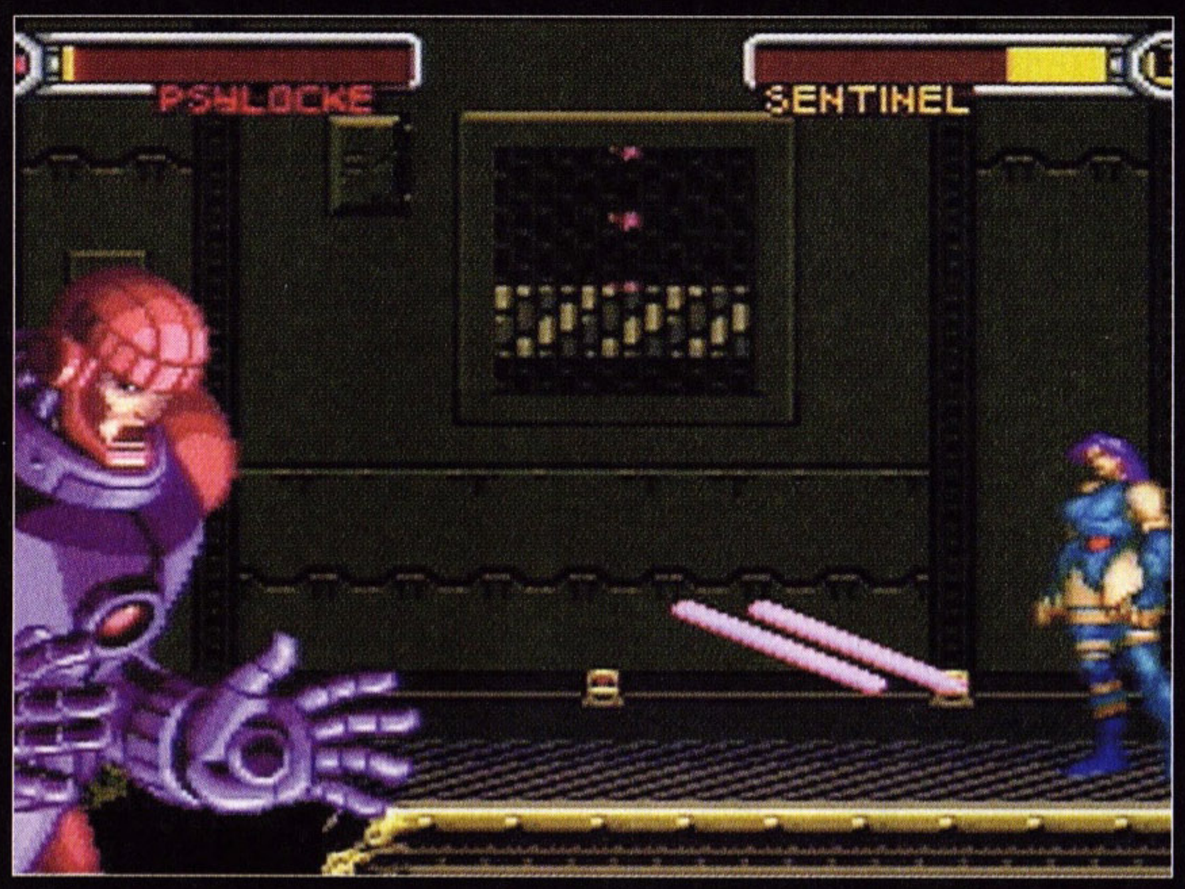
Even better is the multiplayer, letting your friend/family member share in the humor and fun. MLH's multiplayer rivals anything that has been released on any other console thus far. It's the only game that can make me giggle like a twelve-year-old schoolgirl when my opponent falls into the ice. Fighting is also more fun in multiplayer than it is in single-player mode. Unlike other "normal" hockey games, MLH puts your two players into a boxing ring and lets them duke it out. While it is button-mashing, it still presents itself as a fun minigame.

While there were other games that were set in the Mutant franchise (including a football game), in my opinion, none measured up to the greatness of Mutant League Hockey. There's an endless amount of replayibility here, and your fun will never end, especially as long as you still have friends. There were a few rumors of a sequel a few years ago, but no one bought the rights. I would love to see this game get a sequel down the road by EA, but it is unlikely. But until that day occurs, we have the next best thing. So, if you want an amazing game for both single-player and multiplayer, you really can't go wrong with Mutant League Hockey. I highly recommend it to anyone who is either starting videogames or is just looking for another good game to play.



THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

This month in 1996, Nintendo launched the Nintendo 64, a groundbreaking system that would ultimately fail to maintain the company's position as the dominant corporation in the video game industry. Although it definitely had some classic titles, most notably Super Mario 64 and two Zelda titles (The Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask), it couldn't make a dent in the breakneck success of Sony's PlayStation. Third-party software support was lackluster, mostly due to the cost associated with the system's game cartridges. This will likely stand as the last cartridge-based home console. Another of the system's innovative features, the analog stick, made a more lasting impression in the gaming world.



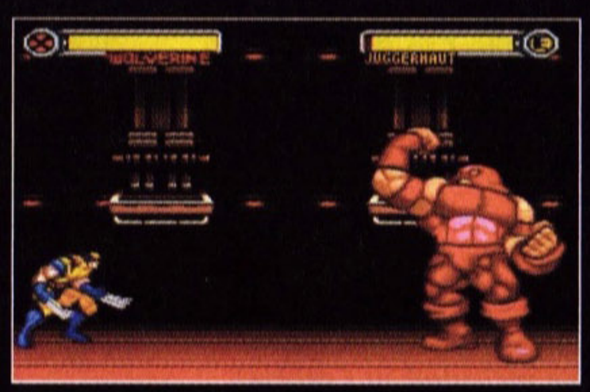
SNES

X-MEN: MUTANT APOCALYPSE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM USA **> RELEASE** 1995

RETRO RATING
NOW 8.25
THEN* 8.75

Long before they stormed the multiplexes, the X-Men were going strong with their comic books and several solid video games. One of the best was X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse for Super Nintendo. The gameplay of this side-scroller was simple, but it was greatly enhanced by Street Fighter-esque special moves, a solid story, and characters that looked exactly like their comic book counterparts. Wolverine, Cyclops, Beast, Gambit, and Psylocke are all playable; and several familiar X-Men baddies make appearances. Each X-Man has unique moves, and playing through the stages with different characters yields profoundly different results. For example, Beast can walk on ceilings and Wolverine can climb walls with his claws, which can lead to secret areas. Unfortunately, the game is so tough that many players may not see all of the various levels and colorful characters. Gameplay is unrelenting and requires precision playing to make it through even the early levels. But those who have the patience to work their way through this challenging quest will be rewarded with one of the best comic book games out there.



PSONE

FANTASTIC FOUR

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM **> DEVELOPER** PROBO ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** 1997

RETRO RATING
NOW 5
THEN N/A

Let's face it: the Fantastic Four has never been the coolest superteam around. Perhaps it's the dorky blue costumes or lame names like "Mr. Fantastic" that have kept them down. But even a somewhat weaksauce team like them deserves a better game than this. Fantastic Four was filled with the same problems that mar most substandard side-scrolling brawlers: limited move sets, a dearth of enemy types, and simplistic button-mashing combat. If you like punishment, the entire quest can be cruised through in one sitting, and the five playable characters don't offer enough differentiation to make it worth picking up again. While some backgrounds look nice, character models are shabby and the animation is incredibly stiff, even by PSone standards. The Hulk looks like he's carrying a load in his pants! Wrap the whole package up with an enormously grating smooth jazz soundtrack, and you have a superhero game that even The Power Pack wouldn't put its name on. If you're not familiar with that sub-par superhero team, we recommend you dig up some of their comics in a 25-cent bin rather than play this piece of pulpy trash.

SNES

SPAWN

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SONY ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING COMPANY
> DEVELOPER ACCLAIM ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** 1995

RETRO RATING
NOW 6
THEN* 6.75

Spawn may have been the hottest thing in comics for a while in the mid-nineties, but it didn't help him get a great video game. Like many side-scrolling superhero games for the Super Nintendo, Spawn wasn't bad, but was far from great, too. Much like the comic, the visuals are pretty nice – characters are large and colorful, and resemble their printed counterparts. Spawn also has a nice selection of magic powers, just like in the comic. Faithfulness to its source material is definitely not the issue for this game. The real problem is the gameplay, which can at best be described as lacking. The control is so sluggish that it feels like Spawn's entire adventure takes place underwater. The delayed reaction of your onscreen character is where this title derives most of its challenge, but it's still easy – most players can burn through it in a few hours. Add to the mix some inane level design and some poor hit detection, and you have a game that handles poorly with low replay value. But, like the comics that inspired it, it looks nice while lacking substance.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse (GI #21 01/95), Spawn (GI #32 12/95)

GAMEOVER

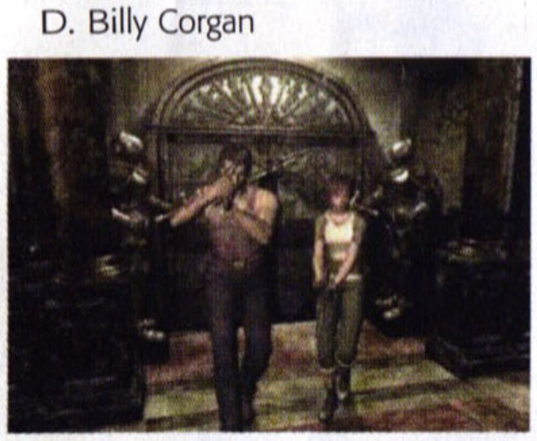
Hasta La Vista, Baby!

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

The holiday season is nearly upon us, and that means blockbuster games will start to line the shelves. But it also means that smaller companies will be competing for your holiday dollar by releasing titles of their own. You might overlook a lot of these smaller games, so take our trivia challenge to see which unknown game you should pick up this winter.

1. What was the name of the escaped prisoner who was a playable character in Resident Evil 0?

A. Billy Coen
B. Leon Kennedy
C. Ethan Coen
D. Billy Corgan



2. Which NES game stars a character with the same name as an Aquaman Villain?

A. Tempest
B. The Adventures of Lagoon Boy
C. Ocean Master
D. Wrath of the Black Manta

3. Besides spawning one of the worst video game movies ever, the House of the Dead series was also adapted into an action game. What was it called?

A. Typing of the Dead
B. Zombie Revenge
C. Zombie Holocaust
D. Rise of the Undead

4. The memorable theme song for the game Spy Hunter was actually taken from which detective/spy TV show?

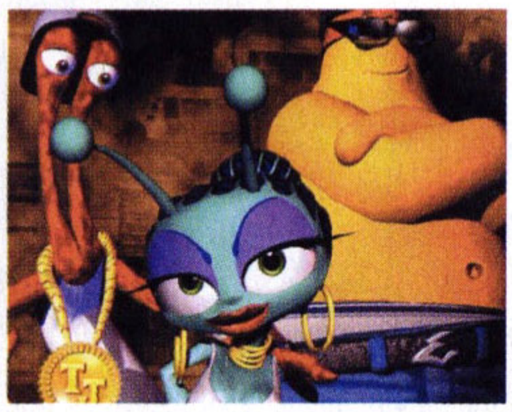
A. *Dragnet*
B. *Naked City*
C. *Peter Gunn*
D. *The Hogan Family*

5. Which famous video game character appeared in a "Got Milk?" print ad?

A. Lara Croft
B. Mario
C. Pac-Man
D. Sonic the Hedgehog

6. What was the name of the new alien character who debuted in ToeJam and Earl 3: Mission to Earth?

A. Funkobulous
B. Earlene Mae
C. Latisha
D. Georgia Clinton



7. The boss robots in Mega Man X5 are all named after members of which nifty rock and roll ensemble?

A. The Beatles
B. Bon Jovi
C. Aerosmith
D. Guns 'N Roses

8. Who invented the "Poltergust 3000," the vacuum-like weapon used by Luigi in his starring role in Luigi's Mansion?

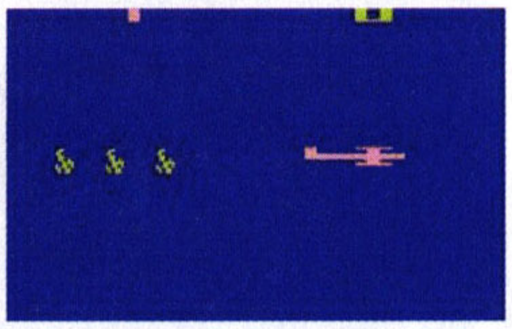
A. Dr. E. Gadd
B. Waluigi
C. Professor G.D. Zooks
D. Luigi did – he's much more than a pretty face, you know!

9. In Gladius, what character class can only be unlocked by beating the Historian's League challenge in the Cro Beska arena?

A. Satyr
B. Minotaur
C. Balladeer
D. Pastry Chef

10. How many different game types were included in Combat for the Atari 2600?

A. 2
B. 27
C. 99
D. 666



BREAKDOWN

35% of the reader mail received in the Game Informer office has been classified as "Suspicious Packages." Please stop sending us anthrax, people

100% of upcoming titles based on Pixar studio's wholly-owned CGI films will be published by THQ

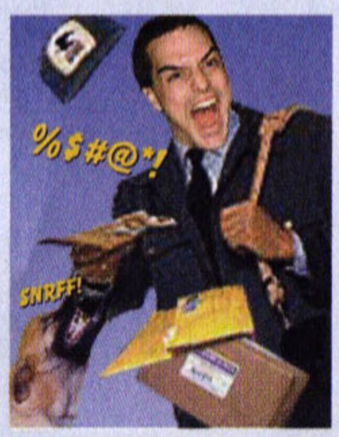
60% The amount that Electronic Arts' revenue from in-game advertising is expected to increase this year, according to *The Wall Street Journal*

44% of the GI editors are cat owners. Every Wednesday is Cat Day, where cats are pitted against each other in tests of strength and speed

100% of unwanted swag is dumped on Miller's desk. He now has the largest collection of Rogue Ops promotional material in the known world

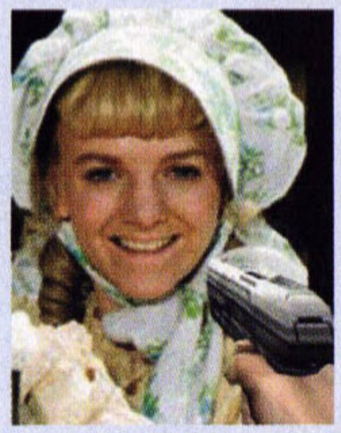
★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

0-1
Virtual Lawn Mower



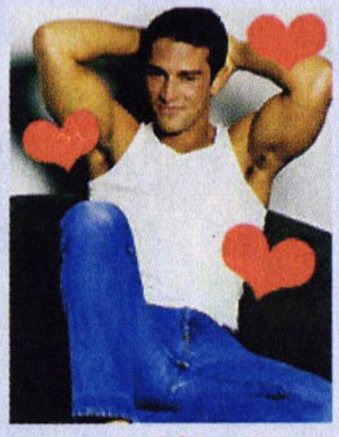
2-3
Super Mail Carrier 64

4-5
Celebrity Poker Showdown: The Game



6-7
The Little House on the Prairie First-Person Shooter

8-9
David Hasselhoff's Hip Hop Music Mixer



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Cabela's Man Hunt 2005 Season

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Video Game Trivia Answers: 1.A 2.D 3.B 4.C 5.B 6.C 7.D 8.A 9.B10.B

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Violence

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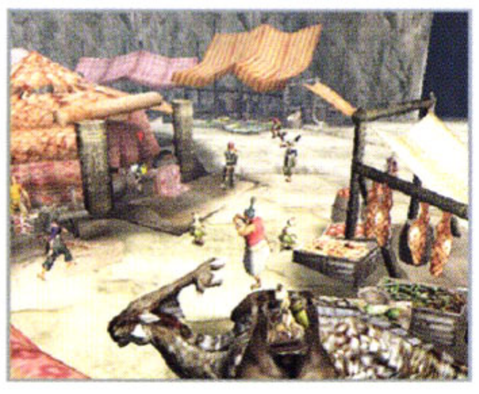

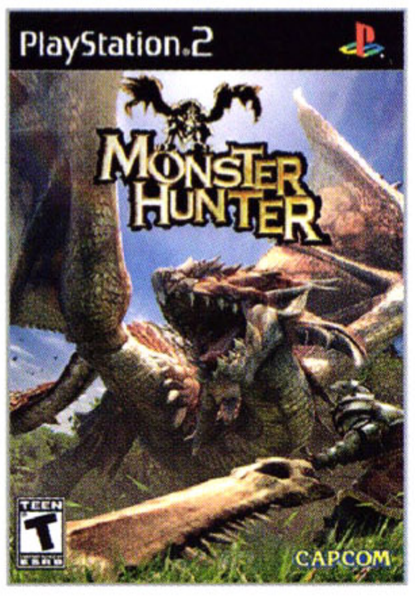

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