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The Incredible Hulk [PG.56]

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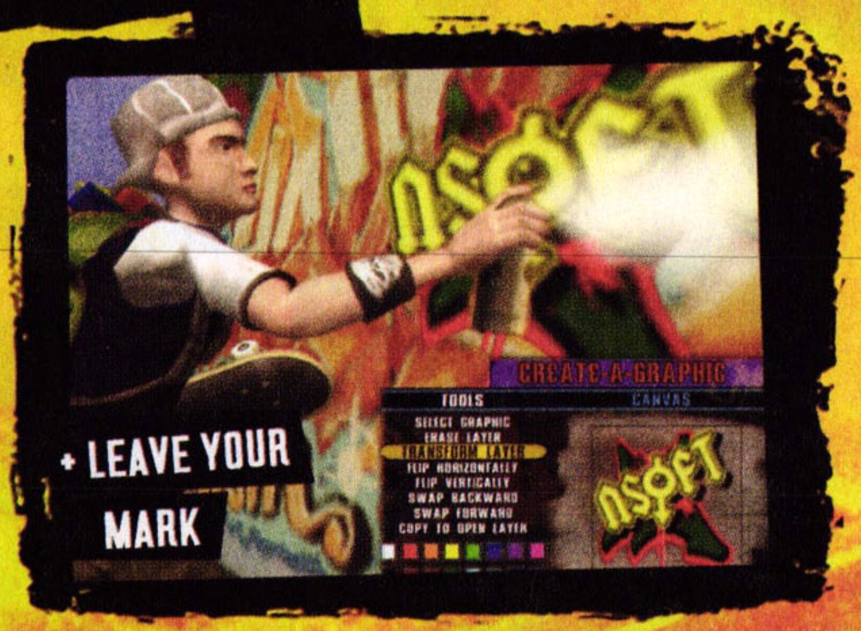

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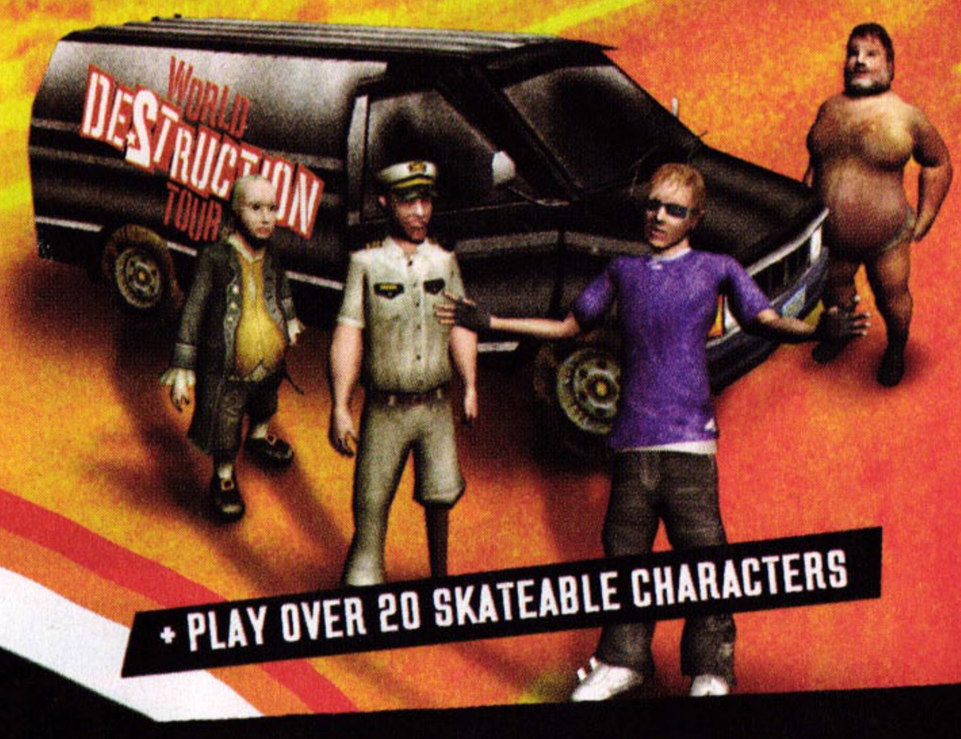

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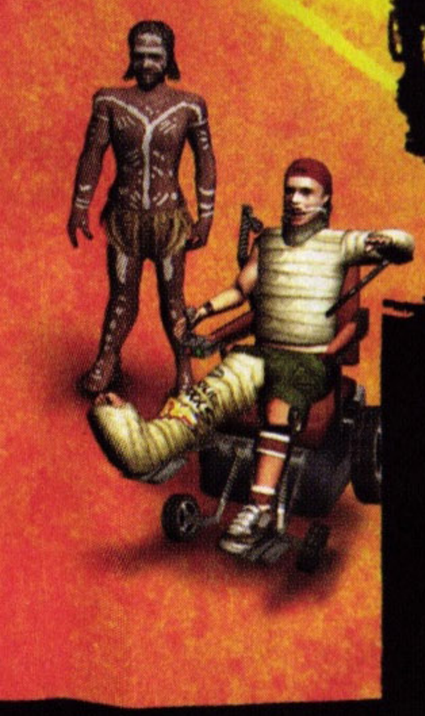

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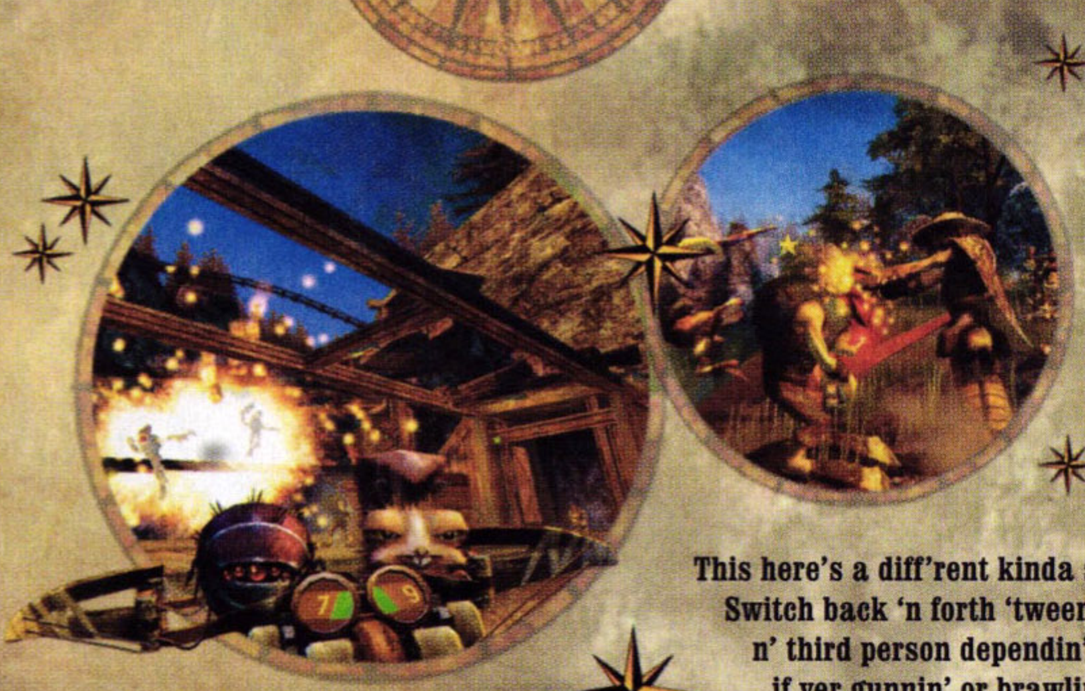

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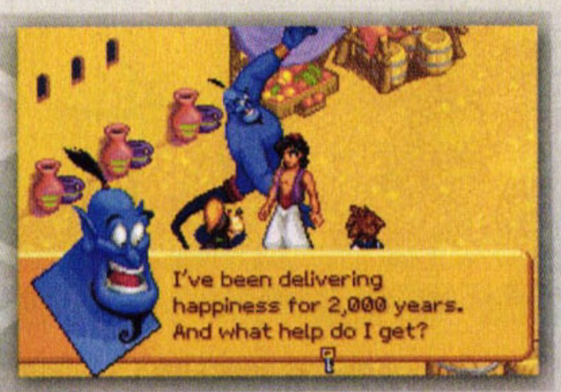

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Midway wanted to make something edgy. Oscar-nominated director and lifelong gamer John Singleton wanted to design a game, and Snoop Dogg was already in discussion to star in another title. These three entities are on a crash course to bring gaming the most realistic, nuanced depiction of L.A. that players have ever experienced.

features

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

A character that's all about power is making a comeback on consoles and bringing a heaping helping of destruction, mayhem, and chaos along for the ride. Check out our extensive coverage of the green machine's next big thing.

WRESTLEMANIA 21

Some see wrestling as a niche activity with strangely bulky, sweaty men. While they may be correct on some fronts, the combative style of wrestling should appeal to almost all fighting game fans, and Wrestlemania 21 is hoping to bring in the whole gaming world with its Xbox offering.

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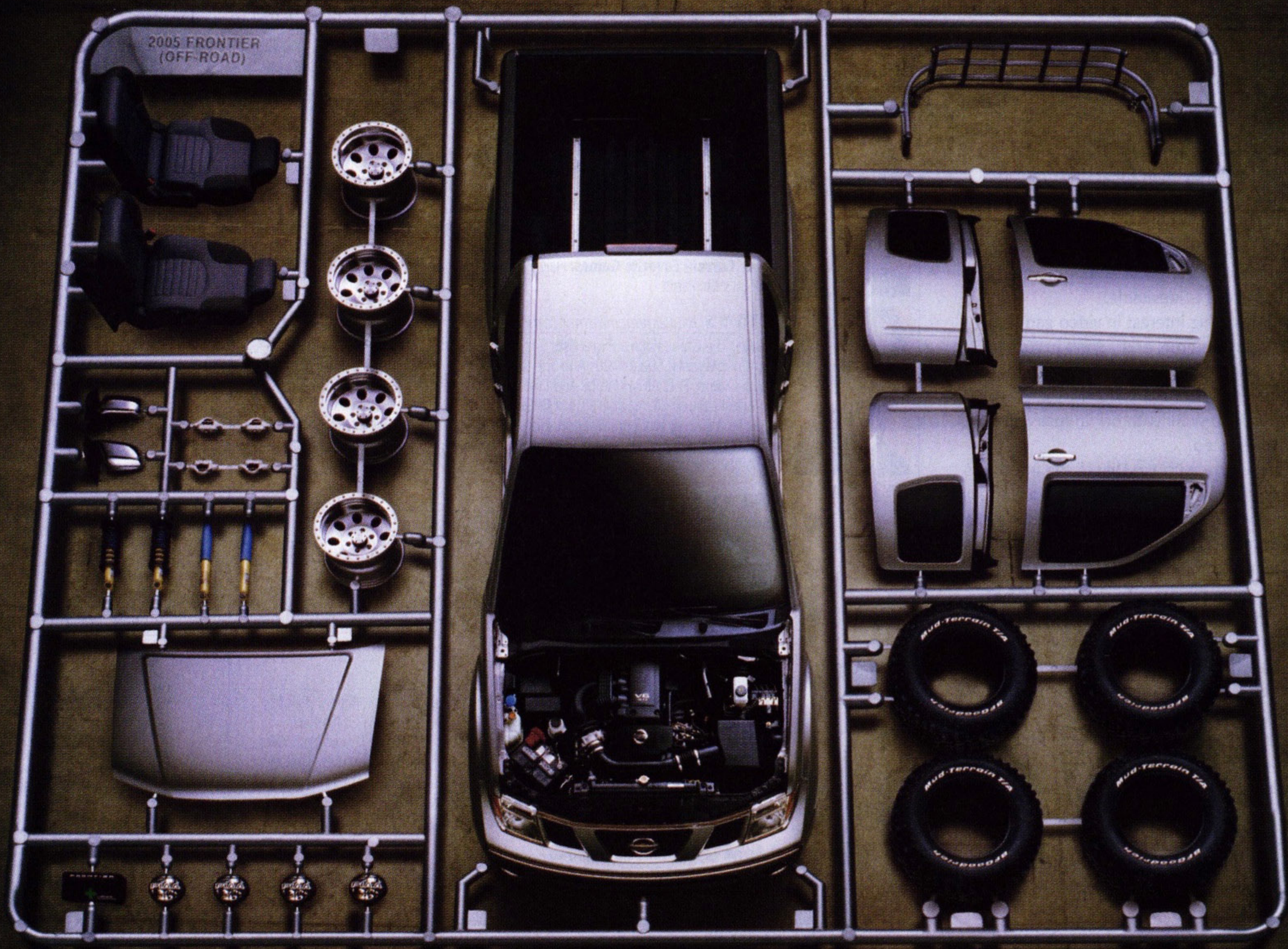

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

SMELL THE GLOVE...ERRR, MONEY

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Hollywood is an amazing entity. Though according to the always outspoken Cliff Bleszinski, the video game industry should never give credence to the Hollywood model by referencing it or even recognizing it. I tend to agree with him, but you can't ignore its influence on video games, and that the marriage of the two industries is inevitable.

Hollywood has a big interest in video games. I come across it all the time, and I don't just mean games based on movies. Most of the major motion picture companies now have executives in place whose sole job is to work with our industry. Even the talent is interested.

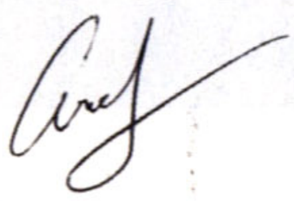
In some cases, like with Vin Diesel, the interest is genuine. This is a guy that really likes video games and wants to be a part of them (much like our cover boy this month, Snoop Dogg). But there are far too many people and companies that are only here because they can smell the money like sharks in blood-infested waters. There are Hollywood agents out there right now working their tails off trying to squeeze as much cash as they possibly can out of the video game industry, simply because they know the money is out there.

The good news is, gamers are a hardy lot and have an amazingly keen sense for smelling and picking out those that are, for lack of a better term, full of bull.

Actors and movie companies that are just going through the motions to rake in a little more cash will find that gamers aren't as easily fooled as many would have you think.

Those that learn and adapt will take the good from both industries and propel video games and Hollywood forward, and take us all along with them for the ride. This month, our cover story is about one of these rare instances where the combination offers gamers and movie fans something you can't always get. A game – in all its interactive glory – combined with the storytelling know-how of Oscar-nominated director John Singleton.

Let's just make sure we don't forget the unsung heroes of this industry in the process. In case you aren't making the connection, those heroes are the overworked and under-appreciated game developers who are the lifeblood that makes gaming possible in the first place.



Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** Substituting Halo 2 For Sleep (Shut-Eye Is For Suckas!), *Star Wars: Revenge Of The Sith* (My Pants Feel Funny), *House Of Flying Daggers*, The Return Of Underoos (Horray! I Never Have To Be An Adult!), Orion Pax **Dislikes:** Snipers In Halo 2 (Shoot Me Again And...Well...You'll Be Sorry!), The Gaming Lull After The Holidays (Where's My Halo 3?!) **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 2, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, Star Wars Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords, Call Of Duty: Finest Hour

Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Comets On Fire's *Blue Cathedral*, "What's Love Got To Do With It?" By Tina Turner (Middle-Aged Mercenary Sex Anthem Ahoy!), The Reopening Of First Avenue, Dr. Pepper **Dislikes:** Putting My Video Game Hook-Ups And Controllers In A "Safe Place" Then Forgetting Where That Is, Mice, The Closing Of First Avenue **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 2, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, Super Mario 64 DS, It's Mr. Pants

Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Suedeheads And The Style Council, *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou*, *Casino*, That All My Limbs And Digits Are Where They Are Supposed To Be, Ron Artest's Brand Of Vigilante Justice **Dislikes:** That I Don't Have The Balls For A Life Of Crime, Wanting To Clean My Entire House At 3:00 AM Like A Manic Depressive **Current Favorite Games:** Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, God Of War, The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-Earth

Lisa >> *lisa@gameinformer.com*

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Survival Horror, Adventure, RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing **Interests:** *The Incredibles*, Timing How Long It Takes For Someone To Draw Something Crass On The DS Chat (About 3.7 Seconds, On Average), Sourdough Bread **Dislikes:** Puke On TV, Some Features Of Knockoff DVRs (HDTV Is Rocking My World, Though), Eminem's *Encore* **Current Favorite Games:** Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within, Halo 2, Star Wars Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords, Resident Evil 4, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

Jeremy >> *jeremy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Platform, Fighting, Strategy/RPGs **Interests:** Games That Let Me Eat The Brains Of My Foes (Finally!), *Coupling* Season Four On DVD, *Seed Of Chucky* (A Family Drama With Killer Dolls!!) **Dislikes:** The Fact That All Movies Aren't As Good As *The Incredibles*, Dreaming About Playing Halo 2 (Please, Let Me Out Of Your Grasp!), The Amount Of Money I Spend On Comics, DVD Overload **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 2, Def Jam: Fight For NY, WWE Wrestlemania 21, Sid Meier's Pirates!, Astro Boy: The Omega Factor

Adam >> *adam@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** *Red vs. Blue* (Why Didn't I Know About This Sooner?), Long-Awaited Games Being Released, Halloween In Madison, Meat & Cheese Fest 2004 (Turns Out Some Good Stuff Does Come From Wisconsin) **Dislikes:** Hockey Withdrawal, Trying To Put Together A Baseball Team On $54 Million, Fans Who Think They're Entitled To Abuse Players **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 2, The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-Earth, Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault, World of Warcraft, Guild Wars

Joe >> *joe@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** *The Incredibles*, Becoming A Demon Barber In London, Thunderwear, Spiced Apple Brew (Pour That Down Your Holiday Hole!), Punchin' Lumberjacks For Fun **Dislikes:** Movies That Are Not Entitled "The Incredibles", Games That Are Entitled "The Incredibles," *Saw* (Use Your Shirt To Reach The Phone, Dummy!), All Nogs (Egg And Otherwise) **Current Favorite Games:** Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, Devil May Cry 3, God of War, Kingdom Hearts, It's Mr. Pants

Miller >> *miller@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Halo 2 As A Near Religious Experience, Caramel Apple Empanadas, *The Incredibles* Movie, Snowmobiling Season **Dislikes:** Getting Kicked In The Face, Watching My Coworkers Eat Scorpions, Reality TV Taking Over The World (I Will Fight You To My Last Breath, Villain!), My Time Away From Halo 2 **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 2, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, Immortal Cities: Children Of The Nile, The Incredible Hulk, World Of Warcraft, Dead Or Alive Ultimate

Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Owning Punks On Halo 2 Multiplayer, *Freaks & Geeks*, *The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King* Special Extended DVD Edition **Dislikes:** Punks On Halo 2 Multiplayer, The Vikings' Defense (Or Lack Thereof), Colds That Never Seem To Go Away **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 2, Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal, Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf

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PUBLISHER
Cathy Preston

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Andrew McNamara

EDITORS
Executive Editor Andrew Reiner
Senior Associate Editor Matt Helgeson
Associate Editors
Matthew Kato • Lisa Mason • Jeremy Zoss
Adam Biessener • Joe Juba • Matt Miller
Mascot Arthur

PRODUCTION
Art Director Thomas Blustin
Production Director Curtis Fung
Production Assistant Rachel Nimerfroh

CONTRIBUTORS
Photography
Bryce Pincham

GAME INFORMER ONLINE
Managing Online Editor Billy Berghammer
Associate Online Editor Chris Cook

ADVERTISING SALES

SAN FRANCISCO
Doug Faust
Vice President Advertising Sales
(650) 728-5647 • Fax: (650) 728-5648
doug@gameinformer.com

MINNEAPOLIS
Rob Borm
Director of Marketing and Midwest/East Coast Sales Manager
(612) 486-6155 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
rob@gameinformer.com

LOS ANGELES
Marc Minasian
Southwest Regional Sales Manager
(818) 991-9923 • Fax: (818) 991-9923
marc@gameinformer.com

EAST COAST
Suzanne Lang
East Coast Consumer Sales Director
(718) 832-5575 • Fax: (718) 832-5569
suzanne@gameinformer.com

MINNEAPOLIS
Amy Arnold
Advertising Coordinator and Online Sales
(612) 486-6154 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
amy@gameinformer.com

Bryan Vore
Advertising Assistant
(612) 486-6152 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
bryan@gameinformer.com

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Minneapolis, MN 55401 • Attn: CIS Dept

Circulation Manager
Paul Anderson • (612) 486-6104
paul@gameinformer.com

Information Systems Manager
Paul Hedgpeth
paulhedgpeth@gameinformer.com

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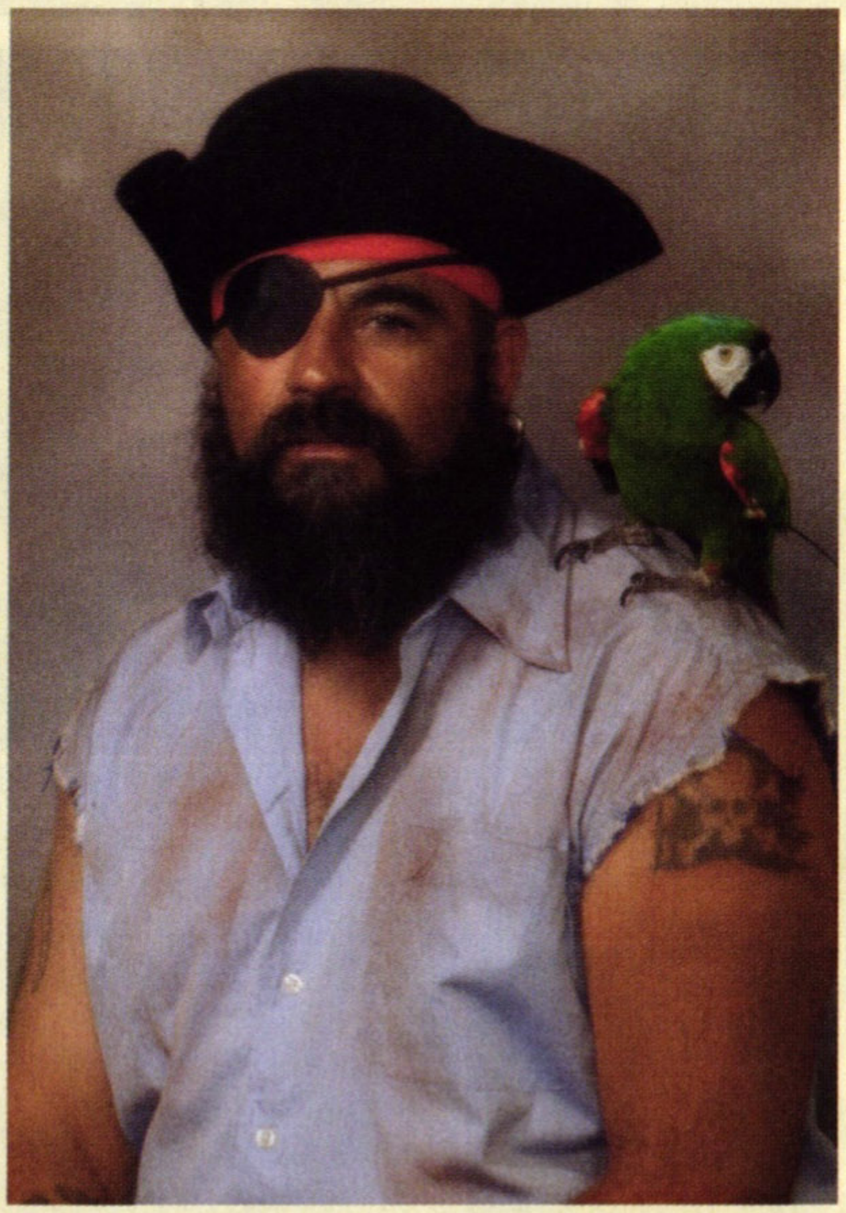

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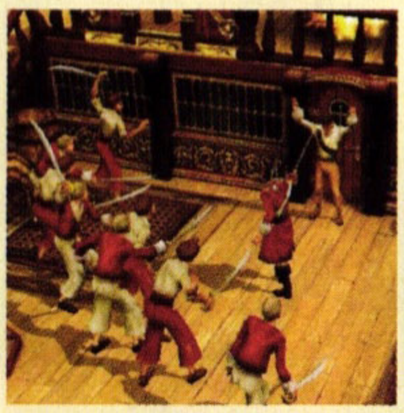

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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry

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1 Sammy's Anna Pacheco, Richard Iggo, and Meelad Sadat brace themselves for the Minnesota winter **2** GI's Jeremy Zoss shows off his Minnesota Magazine Publishers Association gold medal award for "Best Feature Story"! Take that, *Cabin Life* and *Lake Superior Magazine*! **3** Capcom's Alicia Kim hangs with Game Informer's Adam! Hi Adam! We miss you! We'll leave some supper in the fridge for you to reheat when you get home **4** Tecmo's Melody Pfeiffer shows GI Spy the joys of fresh-ground wasabi **5** Koei's Jarik Sicat pow-wows with Ubi Soft's Jocelyn Portacio **6** Vampire vixen BloodRayne stopped by MTV's *Headbanger's Ball*, along with Majesco founder Morris Sutton and new company CEO Carl Yankowski **7** Matt "keeps it real" with famed director John Singleton (*Boyz N the Hood*), and by "keeping in real" we mean "acting like a tool" **8** NovaLogic's Marcus Beer, Sony Online's Tamara Sanderson, and Digital Extremes' Meredith Braun put aside the frenzied competition of the video game world and share a tender moment! See, world peace is possible!

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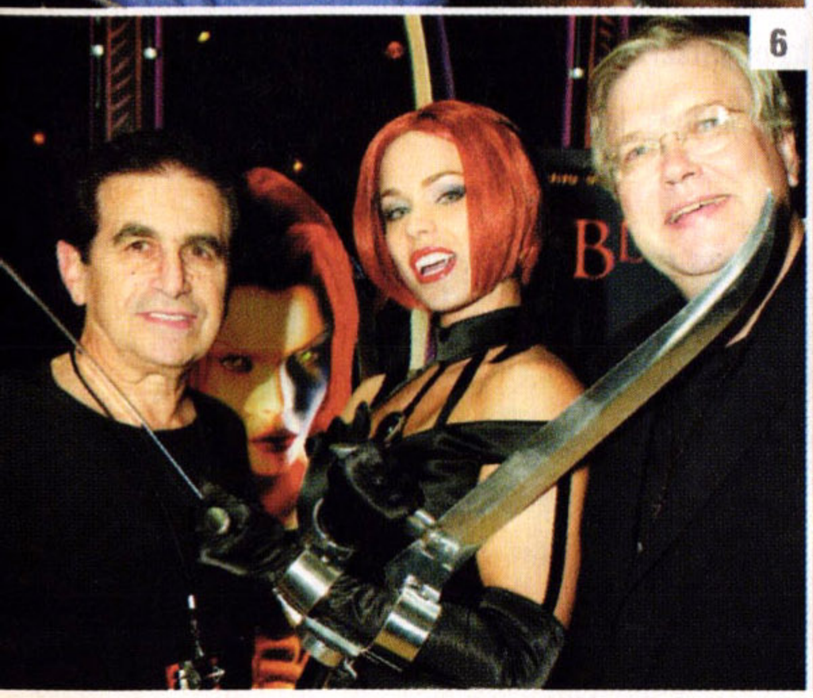

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"DROP-DEAD GORGEOUS" — GAMESPY

"EQII IS INCREDIBLY IMPRESSIVE AS A MONUMENTAL MMO" — PC GAMER

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DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

PRIMAL INK

One of my favorite video games is Primal for PS2, and I have decided to adorn myself with the same tattoo as the game's heroine Jen. Now, a friend of mine insists that SCEE Cambridge could sue me for copyright infringement. I say no way. Could you help us to settle this dispute?

Lindsay Cook
Orlando, FL

■ Since you're contemplating transforming yourself into a walking advertisement for its product, Sony probably won't be too upset. Just don't get all entrepreneurial and start a small business in which you charge people admission to gaze at the (admittedly cool) symbol emblazoned onto your back. Then you might have some trouble – especially if you also set up the obligatory gift shop selling "I Saw Lindsay's Copyright Infringement" and "Cram it, Sony!" t-shirts. Otherwise, you should be okay.

TALKIN' PURTY

I've been a subscriber to Game Informer for quite a while now, and as a reader I've disagreed with some reviews and agreed with others. To disagree with your opinion is one thing, but I rarely take issue with the words you use to express that opinion. However, in your Rome: Total War review, I saw a classic example of what I like to call "pretentious word use," and that would be the usage of verisimilitude.

I've studied Latin (which is where the word comes from), and I have a robust vocabulary, so I perfectly understood what you were trying to say. I can estimate, though, that only a small percentage of your readership even knows what verisimilitude means; it is an obscure word that has an easy substitute – truthfulness. It struck me as odd that you would use a word of this caliber; this isn't an intellectual magazine, it is a magazine that reviews video games.

John Levine
via e-mail

■ You might be on to something, John! All of these years of having faith in our readers' intelligence feel like such a waste. It makes so much more sense to assume that all gamers are all intellectually vacant dullards fit only for single-syllable fare like "good," "ugh," and "lint." However, for you lucky readers who, like John, have a robust vocabulary and perfectly understand those big, scary words, we have a real treat this month. We managed to obtain special permission from the Federal Department of Pretentious Words to use both "moribund" and "puerile" in the same issue! Read on, you fortunate few literati, and turn your mind into an erudite cudgel with which to bash the overripe heads of linguistic plebeians.

WHEN PHILIPS ATTACKS!

In your November issue of GI [#139] you mentioned something about Nintendo losing a court case to Philips over the Legend of Zelda franchise. Please explain this, and be serious.

Lance Howard
via msn.com

■ When it comes to Zelda, we're always serious – except for the odd "boy in green tights" crack. In all honesty, the story behind the CD-i titles featuring Nintendo icons isn't as simple as a single court case. Nintendo and Philips had been working together to create compact disc-driven hardware that would be compatible with the SNES (a partnership that later drove Nintendo's former ally, Sony, to release a little machine we now call PlayStation). While their collaboration was underway, Nintendo granted Philips permission to use Mario and Link in a limited number of titles. However, when Nintendo abandoned the SNES disc-based project (and its partnership), Philips still retained the legal right to make those games. Of course, it lacked Nintendo's development prowess, and as a result Hotel Mario, Link: Faces of Evil, Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon, and Zelda's Adventure will forever be remembered as stains on Mario and Link's respective overalls and uncannily fashionable hosiery.

TALES OF OVERSIGHT

In your article about the Tokyo Game Show 2004 [#139] you wrote that Tales of Eternia is a new RPG coming out for the PSP. Isn't it just a remake of the PlayStation's Tales of Destiny II? It sure looks like it from the screenshot.

Nicolle
via e-mail

■ You have indeed caught us in the throes of a filthy, detestable lie. Tales of Eternia is essentially the same game that American gamers got in Tales of Destiny II, not a new entry in the series. However, remember that the PSP version is a remake, not a direct port. With enhanced gameplay and graphics, fans should still find something new to enjoy this time around. No U.S. plans for the title have been officially announced, but given the success of Tales of Symphonia on GameCube last year, the time is certainly ripe for Namco to start cashing in on the Tales series once again.

DEALING WITH LOSS

As a hardcore fan of the Tony Hawk series, I had planned on obliterating THUG 2 by completing absolutely every goal on every difficulty setting, plus finding all of the gaps. It took hours upon hours of constant playing, but eventually I got everything done except a few little things. I decided to take a break, but when I went to save my game, the PS2 froze on the overwriting screen. I sat there for about 20 minutes, but eventually I gave up and shut off the system. I came back later, anticipating that I would attain my goal and earn my bragging rights, but when I tried to load my game, I only see the word "damaged" by the save file. All my hard work, down the toilet! Only a gamer knows true anger, hatred, and regret.

David Bierhaus
via e-mail

I recently came home from a hard day at work, looking forward to sitting on my couch and playing some games, when I realized that someone broke into my house and stole my PS2, controllers, and memory cards! The funny thing is the thief took it all across the street and sold it at a pawn shop (I went there first to ask if anyone had traded in my things). I called the police and filed a report, asking if I could get my gear returned to me. I was told that the detectives might need it for evidence, so it could be a while before I get anything back. I would go buy it all again, but without my memory cards, what's the point? I'm just screwed, I guess.

B. Hall
via yahoo.com

BLIZZARD'S COLD SHOULDER

Blizzard has always been my favorite developer, but I was shocked to hear that a subscription to World of Warcraft would cost at least $12.99 per month. That is the highest I've ever seen for an MMORPG, and it is simply unacceptable. I understand that most online games have fees, but this means I would be paying over $200 for one game and the right to play it for a year! It's just outrageous.

Kyle Donovan
via e-mail

■ Welcome to the online gaming business strategy. Before you go crying foul play, let's do a little research. EverQuest, Final Fantasy XI, and Star Wars Galaxies, three of the most popular MMORPGs, are all currently in the $13-$15 per month range. It shouldn't be too surprising that World of Warcraft and EverQuest II, the two most anticipated additions to the genre, will fall into the higher range of that spectrum. Gaming isn't like surgery – you can't just roam the shadowy streets hoping to find someone who'll do it for cheap. If you want quality, you've gotta pay.

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

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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No matter who you are, there are certain things in this life that will form a bond between you and other people who have suffered the same tragedy. It might be the death of a pet, an emotionally harrowing experience, or the sudden loss of hours of your video gaming career. Gentlemen, we speak for all gamers when we say that you have our deepest sympathies, and you need only look as far as your fellow gamers for hope, support, and memory cards with saves to copy. Anything to help ease the pain.

GETTING COZY WITH CJ

I just wanted to say that you guys were right on in declaring Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas one of your favorite games. I recently picked it up, and it is absolutely unbelievable. It has more content than I could have ever asked for. I declare it the video game of the century.

Jeff Fitzpatrick
via yahoo.com

I think that I am going to have to cancel my subscription to GI. I don't have time to read or take showers or sleep now that Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is in my PS2 disc tray. I hope it's comfortable, because it isn't going anywhere soon.

Kyle
via e-mail

The world of San Andreas is so vast, it might even seem alive at times. And, like anything else alive in your home (like animals and plants), it requires proper care. To keep your game from getting hungry, be sure to leave several plates of lunchmeats lying on tables and under radiators (it especially likes the variety with little embedded pimentos). It might get tired and sore as well, so it's probably a good idea to buy an old Castle Grayskull playset and stuff it full of Kleenex and cotton balls. That way, GTA: SA has a comfy (and totally awesome) place to rest when it isn't ardently spinning in your disc try, tirelessly dancing for your affection.

THE CORRELATION

I am a proud subscriber to your magazine, and it is the best sleazy (with all due respect) one out there. Why sleazy, you ask? Lately you seem to just be printing articles and ads about naked video game girls. What happened to all of those random elements you used to include? Please stop with all the nekkid hooey and bring back the unexpected laughs.

Aaron Johan
via yahoo.com

In the interest of academics, we decided to get to the bottom of this "increased nudity, decreased randomness" relationship. We asked our resident statistician, Professor Science, to analyze the trend and offer his professional opinion. What follows is a transcript of our discussion:

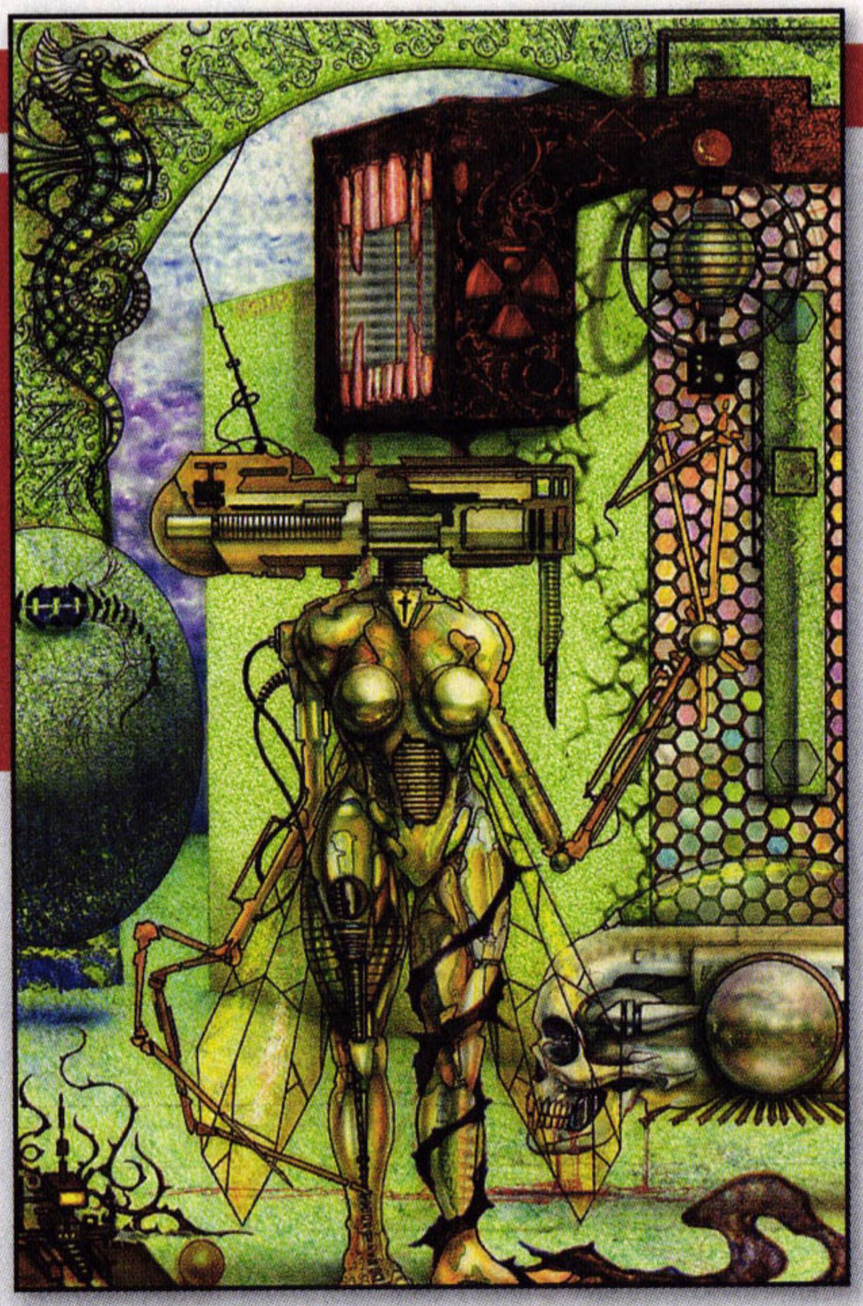
Professor Science: ***It seems obvious to me your humor-secreting glands mysteriously shut down in the presence of nudity.***
Game Informer: ***How do we funny ourselves back up? Classes? Drugs? Watching*** **Johnny Dangerously*?***
PS: ***The problem: I'm itchy, and too lazy to scratch myself. The solution: killer bees.***
GI: ***[Backing away slowly] Of course. Thank you for your time and expertise.***
PS: ***[Waltzing by himself] I have a Ph.D. in Lipstick!***

So, despite inconclusive results, we've decided try to refrain from "nekkid hooey" in the future, though we make no similar promises regarding horsefeathers, poppycock, or balderdash. We're only so strong, after all.

ENVELOPE ART

JANUARY WINNER!

GEORGE HINCKLE
Another masterpiece by George Hinckle, the mystery genius of GI envelope art



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.

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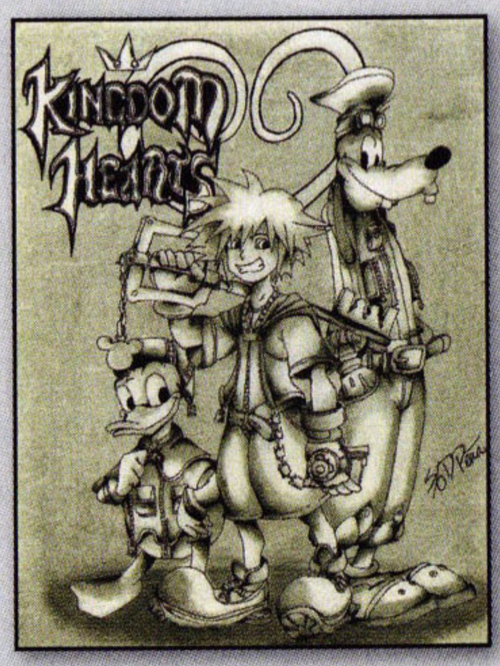
Mpls, MN 55401

RUO LIN LI
"Okay, first we kick ass, then we go to Claire's for more fabulous accessories"

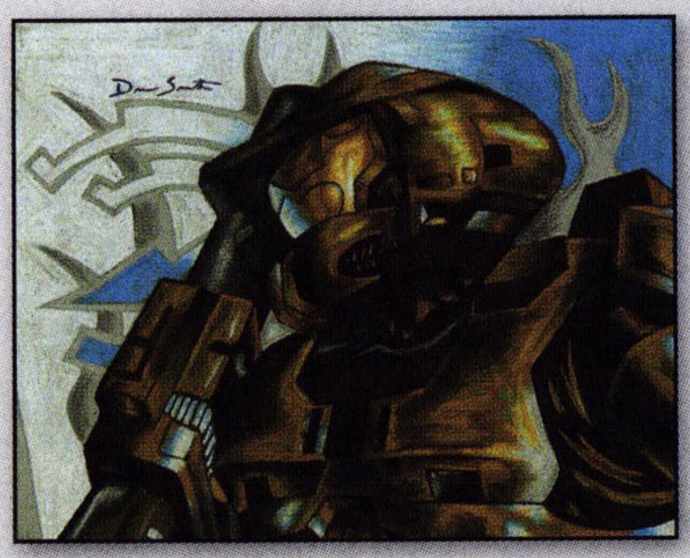
MARTIN SANCHEZ
When Kato drives into the parking lot, we all feel a little bit smaller

TIM KELLY
"Of course you can trust me. Now just close your eyes and you'll get a big surprise!"

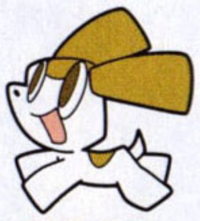


DAVID PEÑA
Sora's a sucker for those old-timey black and white glamour shots

DAVID SMITH
The way this guy's striking a pose, you'd think he was humanity's savior or something



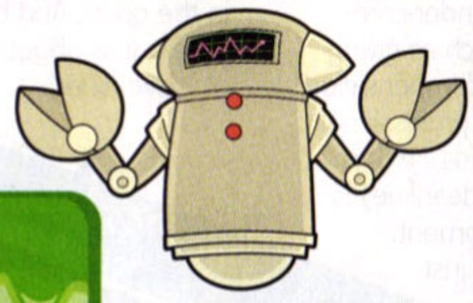
You're racing against time.



You're running out of air.

You have a pink football head.

You're Mr. Driller.



The addictive action-puzzle game is now on Nintendo DS™ with wireless multiplayer support for up to 5 players.*

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*Note: Wireless multiplayer gameplay requires each player to have their own Nintendo DS system and a copy of the game.

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news

AT WHAT COST?

EA, INDUSTRY COMES UNDER FIRE FOR LABOR PRACTICES

Electronic Arts employees are planning a class-action lawsuit in a Santa Monica court against the most prosperous third-party publisher in the industry. The issue at hand relates to the alleged non-compensation by EA to employees for working overtime. As of the time of this writing, lawyers were still trying to obtain "class action" status from the court (a type of suit which covers a large group of individuals).

Game Informer talked with Miranda Colby, who spoke on behalf of the plaintiff's law firm, Schubert & Reed, who told us that should they be granted class status, the lawsuit would ask for settlement of unpaid overtime, plus statutory penalties and punitive damages. According to Colby, EA has already unsuccessfully tried to have the punitive damages and the class certification in the case dismissed.

This may just be the tip of the iceberg. According to a white paper survey from the International Game Developers Association criticizing the "immaturity of current business and production practices" that are "severely crippling the industry," 46 percent of overtime is under-compensated by employers (such as giving "comp time" – days off as compensation). Furthermore, the non-profit professional association claims that studios' "crunch time" (the period before a deadline) is omnipresent during development 35 percent of the time, not just during certain periods, causing employees to work 65 to 80 hours routinely.

EA would not comment on the litigation specifically, but did send us a statement that in part read, "As the industry leader, EA generates a lot of attention on issues common to all game developers. Everyone who works in a game studio knows that the hard work that comes with finaling [sic] games isn't unique to EA. EA remains committed to our customers and our employees, and will continue to do all we can to ensure EA is a great place to work." The statement also cited that the company has an anonymous bi-annual employee survey that is used to make changes in policy.

This potential lawsuit comes on the heels of a spate of tell-all accounts from a variety of sources. Game Informer contacted one current EA employee who reiterated the unique position many developers in the industry face: It's undeniably hard work, but it's worth it. "We're all sick of the working conditions and hope something happens to fix the situation – but we also like our jobs, and no one wants to lose them or hurt their career by talking about it in the open. And believe me, if you do raise a fuss about overtime or 'slave labor' you will be blacklisted, and at the very least, get f——d over come raise time. Even with all this though, there's still nothing else I'd rather be doing."

According to our source at EA, a crunch time schedule of 10 a.m. until past midnight, six days a week for three months from alpha to final wasn't out of the ordinary. Sometimes these hours extended to seven days a week towards the end of development. Our source said that comp time of a week or two off was "usually" awarded.

According to one blog from an anonymous spouse of an EA employee at www.livejournal.com, comp time may be a thing of the past from the publisher. "EA recently announced that, although in the past they have offered essentially a type of comp time in the form of a few weeks off at the end of a project, they no longer wish to do this, and employees shouldn't expect it." Furthermore, this blog claims that there is concern among EA developers that the company will reassign them to other teams' crunch times once their projects are finished, thus keeping them in a perpetual crunch. "EA's response was that they would attempt to minimize this, but would make no guarantees."

"We're all sick of the working conditions and hope something happens to fix the situation..."

Of course, even within EA, experiences do vary. Game Informer spoke to some other developers who noted that crunch times are inevitable, but it doesn't have to be hell. In its survey paper, the IGDA even singled out companies like BioWare and Firaxis as among those who successfully balance the work and well-being of their employees. Unfortunately, making games – especially given the market's insistence on both quality and timeliness – is always going to be the hard work that it is, requiring the dedication of a cadre of focused people. Not helping the situation, ironically, is the masochistic culture of some workaholics in the industry that see putting in outrageous numbers of hours as a test to weed out those who truly want to make video games. Our anonymous development source pointed out that the desire to work in the industry is used against employees at EA, which uses this fact as leverage. "[Management's] attitude towards most does seem to be, 'If you don't like it, quit. We'll find someone else.' There is the odd exception here and there for the really good engineers and artists, and they'll be more accommodating for them. But for most of us? They don't admit there is a problem and consider the hours the price you pay to work in the industry. But as the blogs have said, we get to make games for a living, and that's what keeps most people here."

ONE MAN. MANY WEAPONS.
INFINITE DESTRUCTION.

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xbox.com/mechassault2

MECHASSAULT 2 LONE WOLF

XBOX

it's good to play together

XBOX LIVE

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Note: U.S. launch accessories and their prices have not been officially announced

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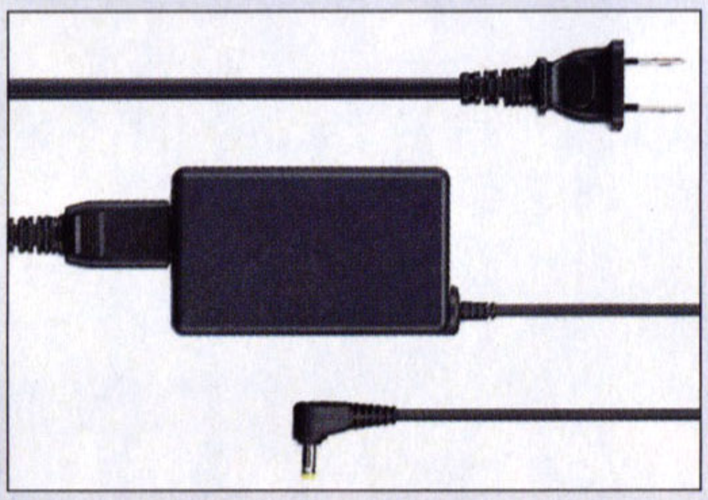
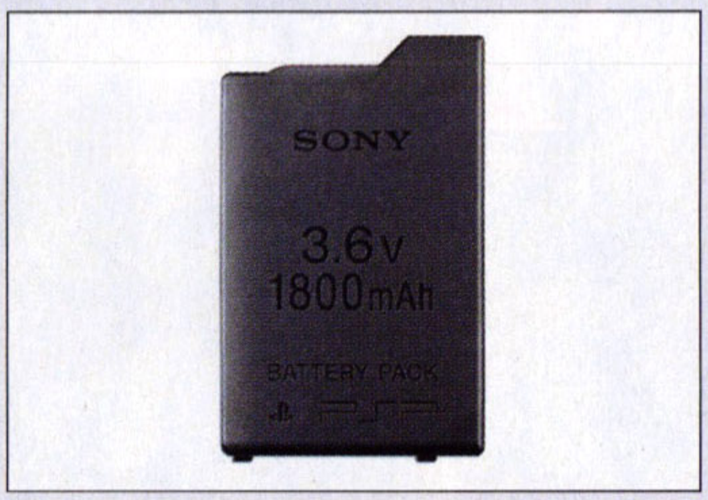
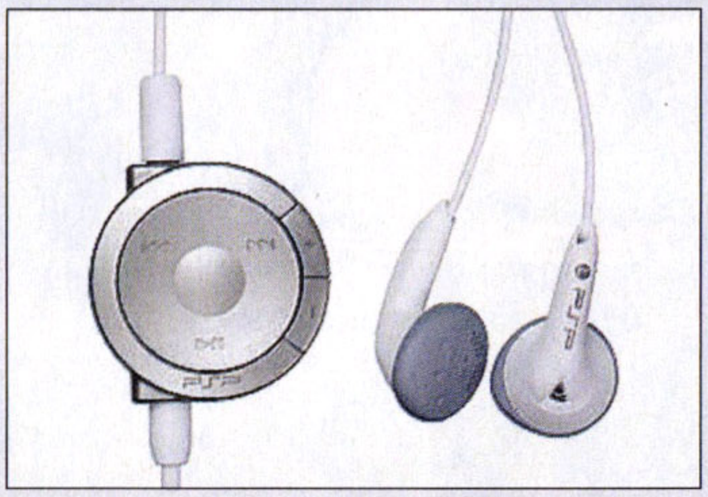


PSP Battery Pack
(rechargeable)
Price:
4,800 yen ($45)



PSP Soft Case
(black)
Hand Strap
(white)
Price:
2,000 yen ($19)

PSP Headphones
with Remote Control
(white)
Price:
2,800 yen ($26)
Remote Control functions:
play, pause, fast-forward, fast-rewind, volume, and hold



news

PSP FOR UNDER $200

SONY ALSO TALKS ABOUT BATTERY, REGION CODING

Sony has helped clear up some of the lingering questions regarding the PlayStation Portable – most noticeably by revealing a 19,800 yen price tag for the Japanese model. That translates to under $200 – a price that is expected to hold true for the PSP when it releases in America during the first quarter of 2005. The handheld will also come with an AC adapter and battery pack. Apart from this basic package, Sony is offering a "Value Pack" that costs 24,800 yen ($234) which includes the system and the accessories, that will also be sold separately. The handheld is scheduled to appear first in Japan on December 12, 2004. Sony is expecting a dozen games to support the system at its launch, with 20 more rolling out before the end of the year.

When the final design unit for the platform was announced at this year's E3, many in the industry and public thought that the unit would retail for $300 or more. Creator Ken Kutaragi recently denied that the PSP's price was influenced by rival Nintendo's decision to charge only $149 for the Nintendo DS. Instead he said that it was because many of the parts used in the PSP were made by Sony itself. "We set a price that's just right to hit a sweet spot," said Kutaragi.

The PlayStation mastermind also weighed in on the hot topic of the PSP's battery life, doubling the early figure that Sony gave. Kutaragi said that the rechargeable battery should be able to play games for four to six hours of continuous play when the screen brightness is set to maximum, the headphone volume to medium (instead of using the built-in speakers), and without wireless LAN play. However, this wasn't absolute, as Kutaragi pointed out, "A puzzle game will last longer, but Ridge Racer [for example] will probably be shorter than that." As the lifespan of the PSP goes on however, and developers utilize it more efficiently, he said that he expects the battery to eventually last for a flight from Tokyo to New York – a 14-hour journey.

PSP creator Ken Kutaragi

For import gamers, Sony gave some good news by saying that the PSPs titles won't be region encoded. It did stipulate, however that games are tested for quality assurances purposes in the region that the title is intended for. So if you play a Japanese game on your U.S. PSP, for example, it may not be 100 percent bug free.

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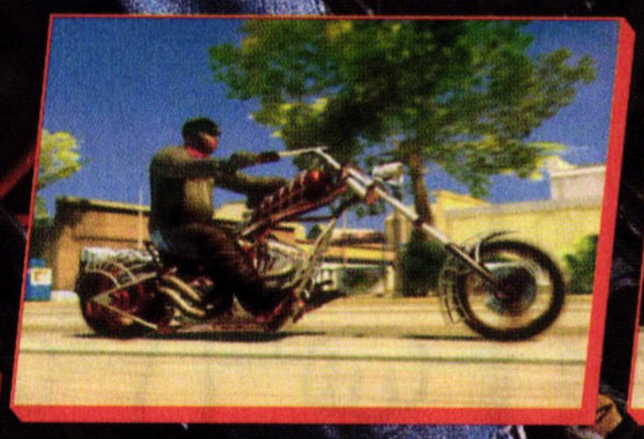

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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

BAD

Sean Burke of California is giving power to the people. The gamer has filed a class-action lawsuit against Microsoft on behalf of anyone who owns an Xbox, citing that his console stopped reading any and all discs after less than a year of use. Don't laugh, Sony – what does "disk read error" mean?

UGLY

Gran Turismo fans can look forward to importing the special edition Nike version of GT 4 that comes with limited edition shoes and a shirt that works with your EyeToy, or rejoice because creator Kazanori Yamauchi wants to make a game called Gran Turismo for Boys. What you can't look forward to is a GT 4 coming out this year. The game's been delayed until the first quarter of 2005.

GOOD

MEDAL OF HONOR DOGS OF WAR™

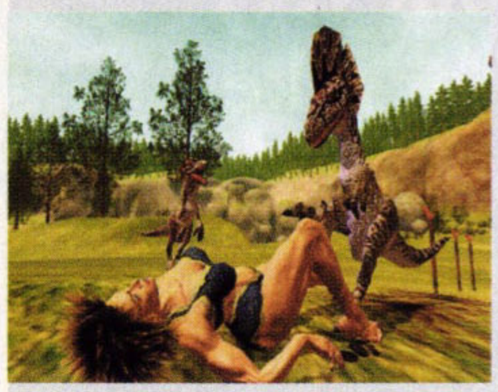
Despite the dishonorable discharge of Rising Sun, EA is back with another Medal of Honor console game subtitled Dogs of War. The PS2, Xbox, GameCube shooter puts you in the boots of Lt. William Holt. He and his squad have been given a secret mission directly from the President which will take you to four decisive battles in WW II.

BAD

Rare is at it again. This time the notorious developer is delaying the Xbox game Kameo for an unspecified amount of time. The company says that the changes will be both major and minor.

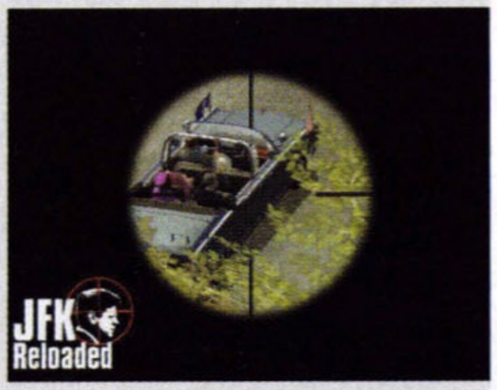
GOOD

LucasArts president Jim Ward let slip on the publisher's new plans for an upcoming Star Wars RTS – a title to be developed by Petroglyph, which has employees formerly with Command & Conquer creators Westwood.



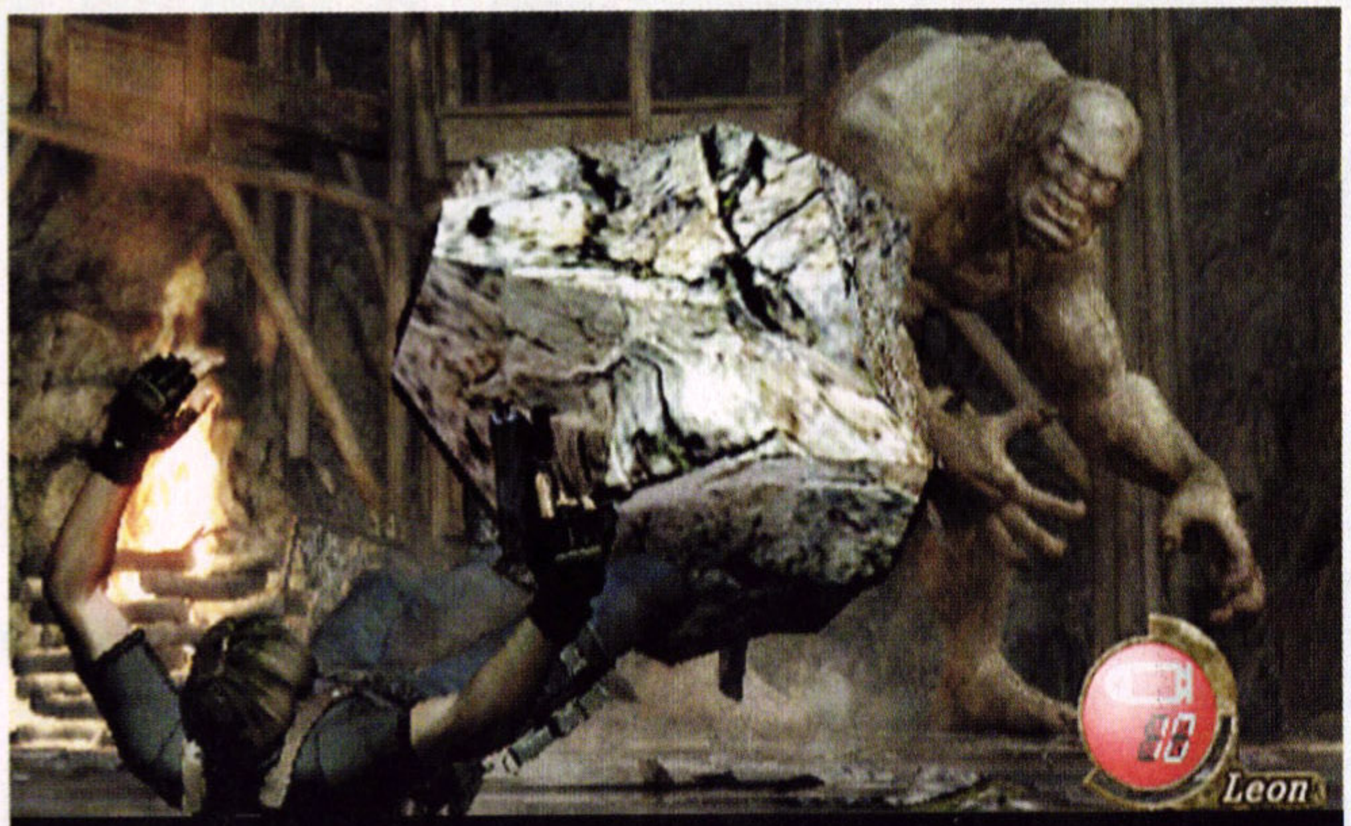
BAD

After admitting as much in our one-on-one interview last issue, Lionhead godhead Peter Molyneux officially announced that work was being suspended on BC (which was being developed by Intrepid). The title was supposed to come out for the Xbox early next year, but will be indefinitely shelved – probably to appear on Xbox 2 at some time in the future.



UGLY

What better way to mark the 41st anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy than by shooting him yourself? A furor has developed over Traffic Games' JFK Reloaded, which puts you in the shoes of Lee Harvey Oswald as he fires on the President's motorcade in Dealey Plaza. The aim of this game is, ironically, to prove that Oswald was the lone shooter – so the game is not only tasteless, it's also historically inaccurate.



news

RESIDENT EVIL 4 TO PS2

GAMECUBE STILL GETS HEADSTART

Confirming rumors that have been running wild for some time now, Capcom announced that Resident Evil 4 will appear on the PlayStation 2 at the end of 2005. The company says that the decision to break the exclusivity with the GameCube is due to requests from fans around the world. Without citing any specifics, Capcom said that each version would play to the strengths of its respective console. Whether this means any exclusive levels or features remains to be seen. Rumors are that Capcom is also preparing a move to the Xbox for this game, but that is highly unlikely seeing as how the company has dramatically scaled back its business on the console. Director Shinji Mikami is said to be very unhappy about RE 4 being ported to the PS2.

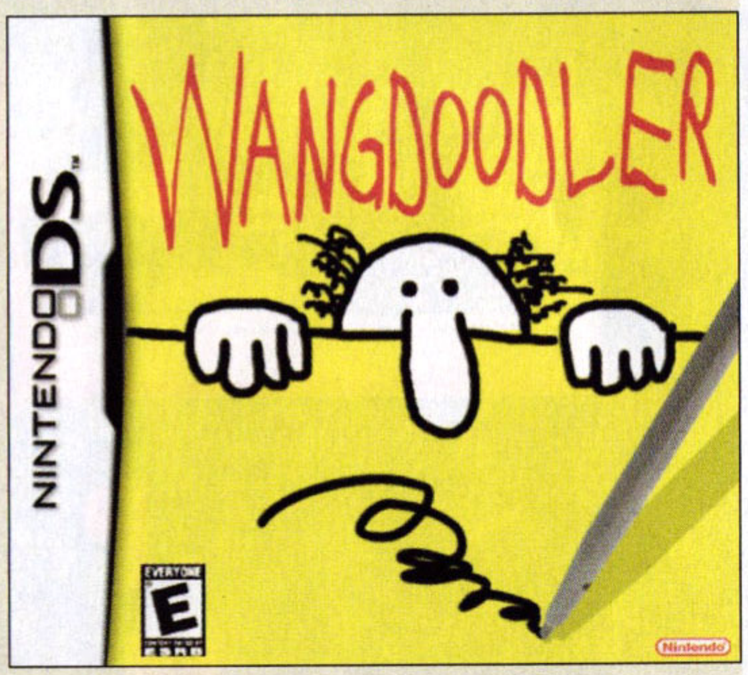
Since announcing that Resident Evil would only appear on Nintendo's GameCube in the fall of 2001, the relationship between the two companies has become less than tight. Seemingly destroying the exclusivity of the franchise, Resident Evil: Outbreak (and its expansion pack subtitled File #2) appeared on Sony's system. There is even talk of Killer 7 hitting the platform, but no official date has been announced. The relationship between the two companies has also been strained by other one-time exclusives such as Viewtiful Joe (which now appears on PS2). Then again, these days the word "exclusive" often only applies to a limited time period, as we see is now the case with Resident Evil 4.

The GameCube version of RE 4 is scheduled to appear on January 11, 2005.

R & D

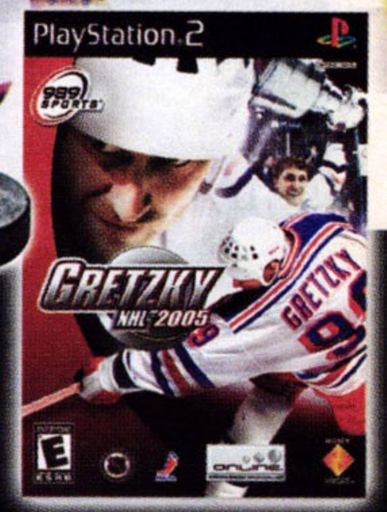
Game Informer brings the world's worst game ideas to life

You can tell yourself you bought it for Mario and Metroid, but the world knows that the true joy of the DS lies in sending crudely-drawn dirty sketches. In Wangdoodler, an expansion of PictoChat, all pretenses of casual discourse have been swept aside, clearing the way for a bevy of features that allow users to draw obscene and offensive illustrations with greater efficiency and precision. A variety of stencils will be pre-loaded, ready to trace and transmit with just a touch of the stylus. Wangdoodler will also feature competitive multiplayer, pushing the bounds of good taste by challenging users to create increasingly horrifying and disproportionate approximations of you-know-what. If you don't feel that your skills are up to par, the training mode will include various connect-the-dots designs to prepare you for the exciting world of freehand wangdoodling. With its high giggle-factor and likelihood to offend everyone near it, this game will be ideal for school and various formal occasions populated by squares who need a good freakin' out. While much of the soundtrack has yet to be ironed out, it is certain that Ted Nugent's "Wango Tango" will be the musical cornerstone upon which this game stands firm.



SEE THE GAME THE WAY HE SAW IT.

He saw it all. With Gretzky™ NHL® 2005, you can too. See yourself as The Great One, from four different teams. See yourself break his records with Gretzky Challenge. See yourself play others online or in Rivalry Mode. And with EyeToy's™ USB camera, you can even see yourself as yourself.



EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Violence

989 SPORTS

PlayStation.2

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD
PLAY IN OURS™

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DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

UEMATSU LEAVES SQUARE

After 20 years of memorable music, famed Square Enix composer Nobuo Uematsu is leaving the company to form his own studio called Smile Please – which will continue to work with the developer/publisher on RPGs.

ODDWORLD'S NEW STRANGER

The name of the upcoming Oddworld title has been changed to Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath.

EA SPORTS BARGAINS FOR SALE

Electronic Arts is lowering prices again. Just in time for the holiday season, Madden NFL 2005, NBA Live 2005, and NHL 2005 will all retail from now on for $29.95. Meanwhile, NCAA Football 2005 will sell for $39.95.

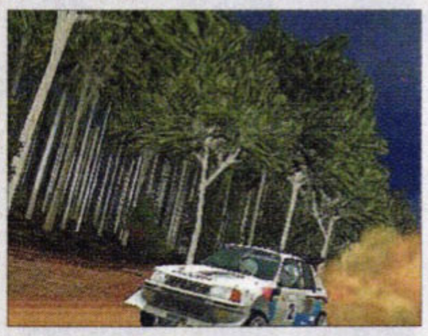
MUTIE SCUM LIVE ON

Before the dust even settled on X-Men: Legends, publisher Activision and developer Raven Software announced that they were already working on a sequel. In other Marvel news, the comic publisher is suing NCsoft and Cryptic Studios over the MMORPG City of Heroes, arguing that the game's character creation feature allows players to create heroes that are too close to Marvel's own.

X-Men Legends

CODEMASTERS RACES TO PSP

The PSP got two of Codemasters' best: Colin McRae Rally 2005 (pictured) and TOCA Race Driver 2: The Ultimate Racing Simulator will both appear on the handheld this spring.



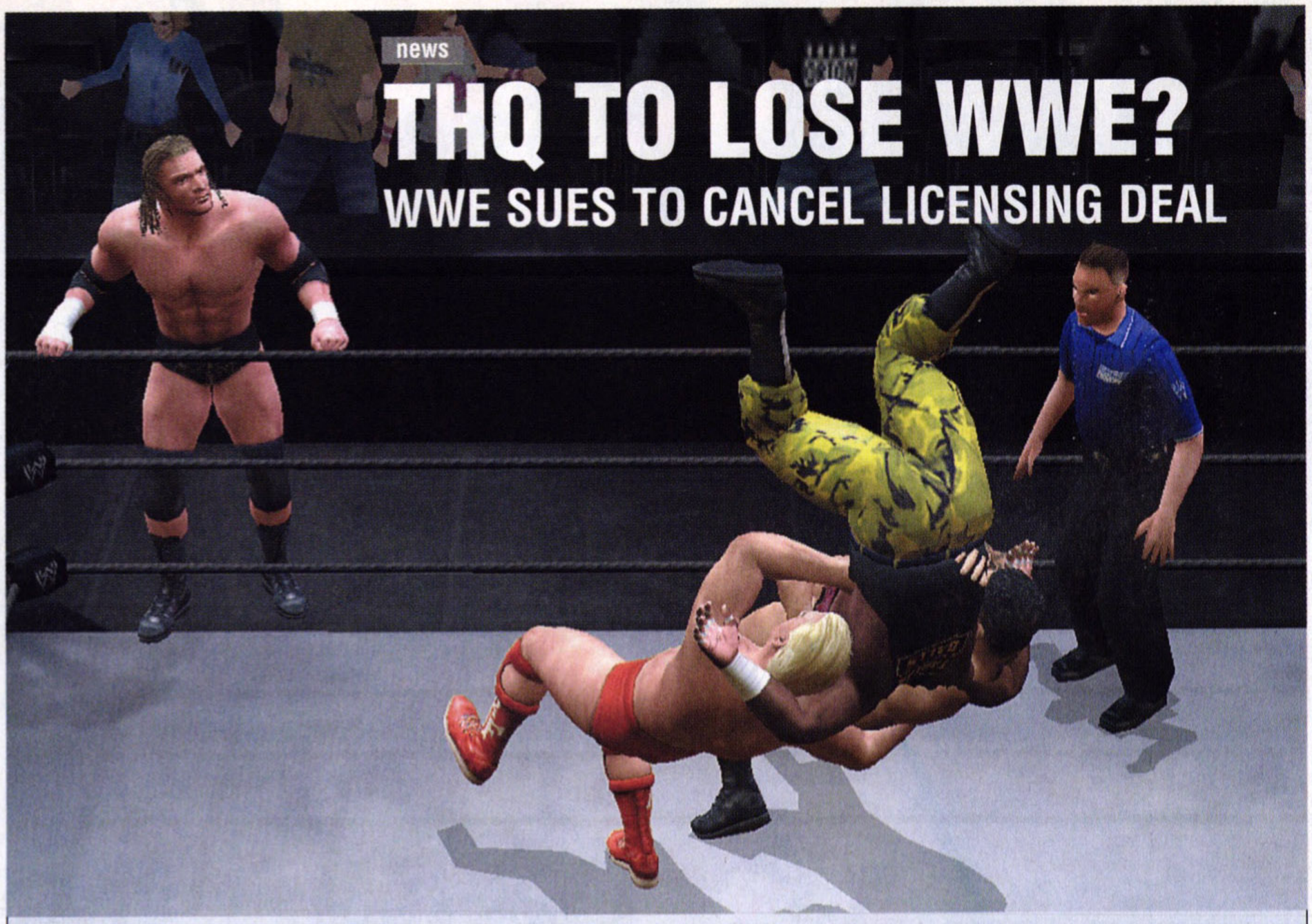
NEVERWINTER WARES FOR SALE

BioWare has opened the doors to its online store, which is selling three Neverwinter Nights expansions made by either the developer itself or members of its tools community. The packs can be downloaded for anywhere from free to $5. They also range in playing time from three to eight hours. Check them out at www.bioware.com.

news

THQ TO LOSE WWE?

WWE SUES TO CANCEL LICENSING DEAL



WWE has filed suit against Jakks Pacific and THQ over alleged charges of bribery in the negotiations for the WWE video game license, which is co-owned by both Jakks and THQ. The suit claims that Jakks bribed a former WWE executive who was in cahoots with the company in order to secure the contract, specifically naming Jakks CFO Joel Bennett, chairman and CEO Jack Friedman, and the president and co-founder Stephen Berman. WWE is not only seeking punitive damages, but the dissolution of the video game license contract.

Although the lawsuit mentions THQ, the publisher is not being directly targeted for wrongdoing. The company is involved solely because WWE is seeking to terminate all Jakks contracts – which therefore includes the one THQ secured to make video games. In a statement THQ says it was unaware of Jakks' dealings, and that it believes that "the WWE is pleased with the manner in which THQ has managed their brand…."

The publisher's current contract with WWE was signed in 1998, and is scheduled to run until 2009 – barring any changes brought about by this litigation. Before the contract was awarded to THQ and Jakks, Activision had submitted a higher bid, but was refused. It is unknown if Activision would once again pursue a licensing deal with WWE should things fall apart with THQ. Game Informer contacted representatives at Activision, but they would not speak on the matter.

For the time being, THQ says that none of its games – including Wrestlmania 21 (see our feature on page 66) will currently be effected by the lawsuit.

news

SPECTOR QUITS ION STORM

SHIFTS TO CONSULTANT FOR EIDOS

After months of rumors, Eidos announced that Warren Spector has left his position as studio director at Ion Storm (an Eidos subsidiary). An excerpt from an official Eidos statement reads as follows: "Warren has chosen to pursue personal interests outside the company, but he will continue to work for Eidos as an IP consultant. His insight and expertise is highly valued by Eidos, and the company looks forward to continuing its relationship with Warren in his new role."

Back in May, it was prematurely reported that Spector had been laid off along with a round of other employees from the Austin-based subsidiary. He was even rumored to have entertained an offer from Midway to head up that company's Austin studio. Regardless, all has not been well at Ion Storm. Deus Ex: Invisible War fell short of its predecessor, and didn't sell up to expectations.

Spector was alleged to be working with Crystal Dynamics on the new Tomb Raider, but that hasn't been confirmed. Game Informer contacted Eidos about Spector's new role, but the company could not comment on any new projects he would be consulting on.

Ex-Ion Storm director Warren Spector

news

ROCKSTAR REINTRODUCES SAN ANDREAS

SOUNDTRACK FEATURES STORY PREQUEL

We've become accustomed to Rockstar delivering a killer soundtrack to its Grand Theft Auto games, but the publisher is going one step further by offering a prequel story that leads up to events in San Andreas when you buy the double-disc edition of the soundtrack (an eight-disc box set is also available). This extra DVD entitled "The Introduction" shows key moments leading up to the beginning of San Andreas in cinematic form as told through the eyes of various characters in the game. It touches on events such as the corruption within the LSPD, the history of the Grove Street Family conflicts, and the rift between Sweet and Carl, among other things.

Track listing for the GTA: San Andreas double-disc soundtrack

CD 1

1. The Theme From San Andreas
2. Rage Against The Machine – Killing In The Name
3. 2 Pac – I Don't Give A F---k
4. James Brown – The Payback
5. Ronnie Hudson – West Coast Poplock
6. Guy – Groove Me
7. Eddie Money – Two Tickets To Paradise
8. Cypress Hill – How I Could Just Kill A Man
9. The Maytals – Pressure Drop
10. Slick Rick – Children's Story
11. Rick James – Cold Blooded
12. Raze – Break 4 Love

CD 2

1. Ohio Players – Funky Worm
2. Heart – Barracuda
3. Compton's Most Wanted – Hood Took Me Under
4. Lyn Collins – Think About It
5. Public Enemy – Rebel Without A Pause
6. Faith No More – Midlife Crisis
7. Bell Biv Devoe – Poison
8. Max Romeo & The Upsetters – Chase The Devil
9. Eric B & Rakim – I Know You Got Soul
10. Willie Nelson – Crazy

Bonus Track:

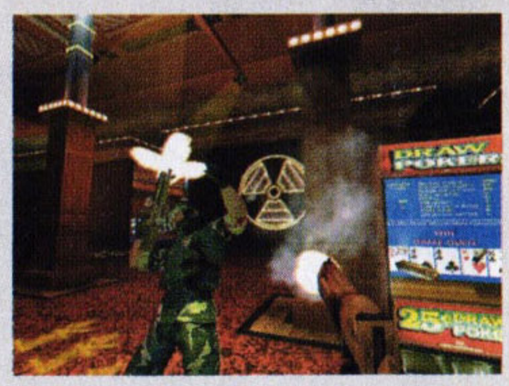
11. AFI – Head Like A Hole

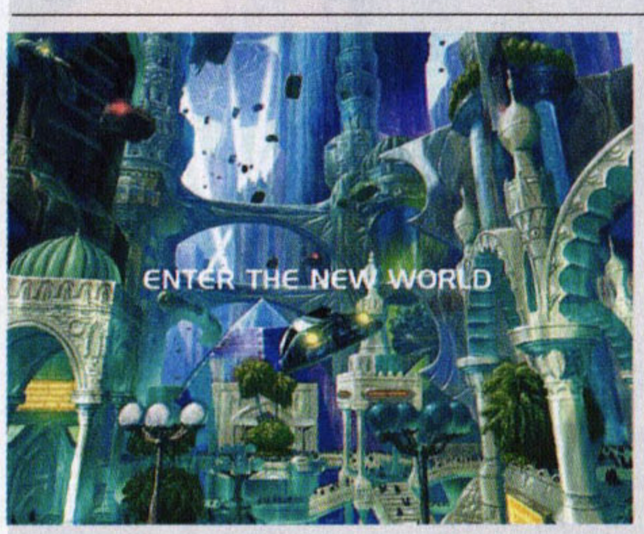
LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

HOPE FOR DUKE NUKEM FOREVER?

We know that nobody cares anymore, but a trusted development source told us that Duke Nukem Forever is actually looking quite good. And no, said source didn't try to sell us a bridge in Brooklyn at the same time.





LEVEL 5 TO PSP

Dragon Quest VIII, Dark Cloud, and True Fantasy Live Online (cancelled) developer Level 5 (in conjunction with Sony) has declared it is working on an RPG for the PlayStation Portable. The question remains whether this new game is the one hinted at on the studio's website, which has been advertised for over a year now. Sony has used the name Dark Cloud 3 on some promotional materials, but the game has yet to officially surface. This PSP adventure is being touted as "new" and "original."

THE MANY FACES OF XBOX NEXT

A hot rumor has surfaced that Microsoft plans to offer more than one version of Xbox Next. Xbox Next HD would feature a built-in hard drive, and go on sale about the same time as the normal Xbox Next. Meanwhile, Xbox Next PC – which would come with a keyboard, mouse, CD burner, a version of Windows, and the capability to play PC games and surf the 'Net – is rumored to hit in the fall of 2006. While Microsoft has long contemplated such an integrated system (including for the original Xbox), it's unknown if this time it's for real.

MIDWAY POISED FOR NEXT-GEN

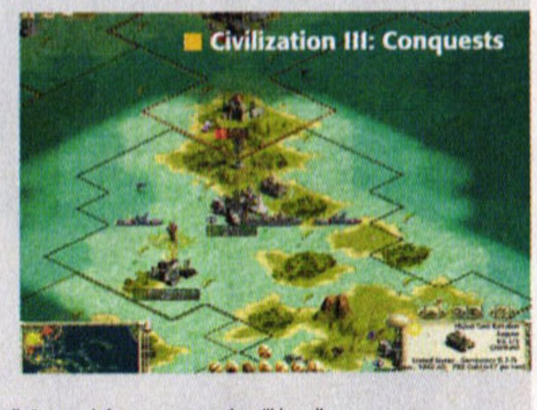
While announcing some recent financial results, Midway president and CEO David Zucker promised that the company would come out of the next-gen gate stronger than compared to previous launches in years past. Perhaps to meet this goal, Zucker also said that Midway would be looking to acquiring other unnamed developers.

ATARI SAFE FROM TAKEOVER

Bad financial news could be good news for Atari. Recently, takeover talks have swirled around the company, but the debt burden that it carries could make it too unattractive for someone else to purchase the publisher/developer. Electronic Arts has been rumored to have been looking at buying Atari, but its bad financial state could put the brakes on that deal.

CIV IV NOW UNDERWAY

Atari's website recently gaffed and listed some upcoming products – most notably mentioning Civilization IV. Other previously unannounced titles were Chronos (for PC and Xbox), Rat Race (PC), and Enemy in Sight (PC, Xbox). No other info was given on any of these games and, later in the day, they were removed from the company's site.



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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

A year after developer DMA Designs (later to become Rockstar North) inaugurated the Grand Theft Auto series, there was jacking of a different kind going on in this N64-exclusive title. Aboard a lost space station, you hijack and control mechanical animals to complete tasks and find the pieces of your robotic body. You can only survive for a limited amount of time outside when not attached to a host animal. The game's space station contains four different environments such as Arctic Kingdom and Euro Eden.

(Answer on page 28)

RIDICULOUSLY POWERFUL NEW WEAPONS AND GADGETS. YOU'LL WANT TO SPEND

ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY

PlayStation.2

INSOMNIAC GAMES

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Crude Humor
Fantasy Violence

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.™

TIME WITH EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM.

RATCHET & CLANK UP YOUR ARSENAL

This time the destruction is personal. Take on fellow destructophiles from across the nation online. Upgrade weapons to planet-vaporizing levels of firepower. Nuke enemies and friends alike in the single-player and split-screen multiplayer modes. Blast, whip, electrocute or melt your way through amazing new galaxies. So lock, load and gather the troops. You've got some destroying to do.

NOW ONLINE

news

KUROSAWA COMES ALIVE

KOEI PLANS FIRST PLAYSTATION 3 TITLE

Kou Shibusawa, the creator of Dynasty Warriors and Kessen, is teaming up with Hisao Kurosawa, the son of the late Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa, for Koei's first next-generation game. Tentatively titled Oni (which translates into "demon" in Japanese), this new project is being developed exclusively for the PlayStation 3, and will appear simultaneously with a film planned for a 2006 release.

The film and game are based upon an unfinished script that Kurosawa left upon his death in 1998. The film will be directed by son Hisao, who will also provide input for the video game. Likewise, Koei's Kou Shibusawa will provide production assistance for the movie. Oni's story is set during the popular Warring States period of Japan in the 16th century, where a blonde-haired samurai discovers his destiny.

Due to the 2001 Bungie/Rockstar PS2 game of the same title, we're sure Oni's name will change before the game comes stateside, and we also hope that it fares better than the last Kurosawa production – the stinker that was Seven Samurai 20XX (by Sammy). No gameplay information is known at this time, but with Shibusawa's propensity for developing spectacular game engines, we're hopeful that Oni really makes use of the PS3.

(inset) Akira Kurosawa's son and Oni director Hisao Kurosawa

news

PSP GETS NEW FF VII

ACTION/RPG TO HANDHELD

Square Enix is delivering its second title to Sony's PlayStation Portable: the tentatively named Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII. The game is the fourth entry in what Square Enix is calling "Compilation of Final Fantasy VII," which includes Before Crisis: Final Fantasy VII (for mobile phones), Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children (PSP and DVD movie), and Final Fantasy VII: Dirge of Cerberus (PS2). Crisis Core is expected to appear first in Japan sometime in early 2006.

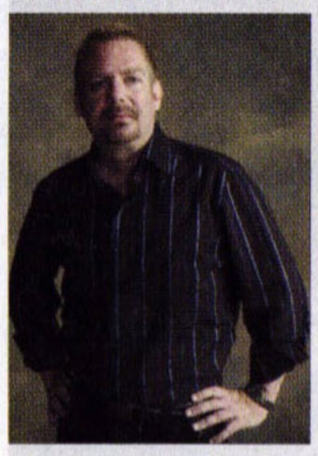
The game is being headed by the director of the original FF VII, Yoshinori Kitase. Character designs will be done by the legendary Tetsuya Nomura. Crisis Core is being billed as an action/RPG title, but the exact gameplay particulars have yet to be revealed.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

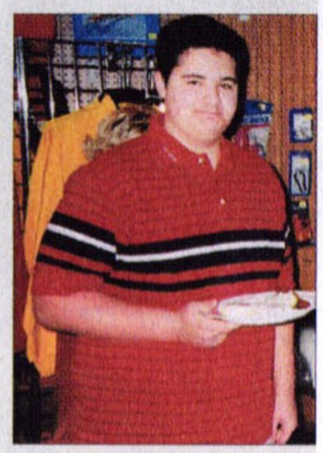
STEVE GRAY
Executive Producer, The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age



1 Asteroids – Arcade
2 Mortal Kombat – Arcade
3 Bushido Blade – PSone
4 Final Fantasy VI – PSone
5 Devil May Cry – PS2

READER

JOSEPH BACHI
Eddyville, KY



1 Cruis'n World – N64
2 Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins – GB
3 Super Mario Kart – SNES
4 GoldenEye 007 – N64
5 RollerCoaster Tycoon – PC

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Responses From GI Staff When Told Our Building is on Fire

10 Joe says a fond and teary farewell to his action figures. Bahamut, we hardly knew ye.

9 Reiner looks up momentarily, then continues playing Call of Duty.

8 Lisa weighs her options: exiting the building, or waiting for her toaster strudel to pop up.

7 Jeremy grabs his copy of Halo 2, secures it in his trousers, and exits in an orderly fashion.

6 Adam draws strange looks after shouting "the apocalypse is nigh, suckas!" Too much Painkiller, we think.

5 Matt is calm and collected, since he's chillin' with John Singleton on the West Coast.

4 Miller creates makeshift talismans using memory cards, certain they will protect him.

3 Kato ensures that his iPod, plus all relevant cables, are safely stowed in his pockets.

2 Arthur, the GI mascot, goes barking to little Timmy, telling him we were all in danger. Good boy!

1 Andy somberly considers the cost of replacing the game vault. Weeping follows.

Name That Game Answer: Space Station: Silicon Valley

"The alert level has been raised to RED!"

"Scored 9.0, 9.5 And 10 Out Of 10. Awarded Editor's Choice: Gold"
-Electronic Gaming Monthly

"MGS3 Looks Astounding, From Its Inspiration To Its Story To Its Gameplay."
-GameSpy.com

"5 Out Of 5"
-Official PlayStation Magazine

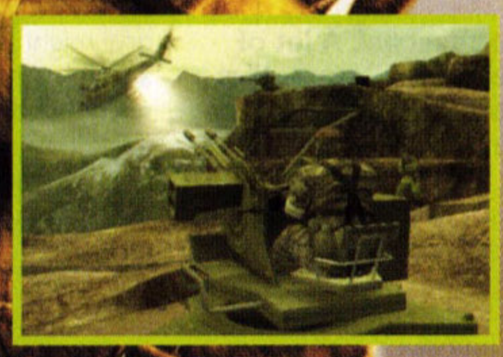
"10 Out Of 10"
-PlayStation Magazine

"The Finest Installment In Konami's Acclaimed Stealth-Espionage Series."
-Electronic Gaming Monthly

TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

METAL GEAR SOLID 3

SNAKE EATER



WWW.METALGEARSOLID.COM

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
Sexual Themes

PlayStation.2

ONLY ON PLAYSTATION2

KONAMI

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SAM HOUSER

PRESIDENT, ROCKSTAR GAMES

>> Rockstar's Sam Houser is one of video game's most interesting characters, a man who speaks passionately about his company's mission and the industry as a whole. Granting Game Informer a rare interview, Houser expounds on a variety of topics, including the future of Grand Theft Auto. <<

Rockstar's been an innovator in how to establish a really cutting-edge brand – much like Def Jam has done in music. You really promote your brand and logo as a cultural force.
With regard to Def Jam, I love Russell Simmons and he's an inspiration to any young businessman, but my hero was Rick Rubin. To me, he's the f----g king. Growing up seeing a white hippie rocker making music with the Beastie Boys and Run-DMC – what an incredible man. Labels like Def Jam were what we wanted to create. It's a label where when people that like our games see the label, they'll know they're picking up something that's quality. [They'll know] a lot of love and passion has gone into this game. We care about the people that buy our games. If someone's going to hand over $50 for your game – that's a lot of money.

Looking back, did you have any idea of the impact that GTA III was going to have? Was this unexpected or did you really believe that this was going to be an important game?
We always knew from GTA 1 that, when you took GTA into 3D, it was going get people over the leap of faith you had to make in that top-down, 2D perspective. Sometime in the summer of 2000, when the geniuses in Edinburgh [Rockstar North] had a city up and running. You could jack a car and drive around, but it was very crude compared to where we ended up. Just being able to do that, you thought, "Okay, this is interesting." Every month, something new was finished. That following summer something happened that made me think, "We're going to new places with this stuff. This is the start of something interesting. It may be 15 or 20 years before we really get there, but this is the foundation." That, to me, was a moment.

GTA has always been controversial. A lot of charges have been leveled at Rockstar – that the games are pornographic, violent, and psychologically damaging to people. Does that bother you?
There's a total lack of understanding that games are an art form. I think people need something to talk about. In the '80s, it was Ozzy Osbourne and those guys. It was rap music in the '90s. You have to have someone to blame. We've seen the patterns before. The other issue we have is that we're pretty sure the people that come at us really aggressively have never played the games. That's like slagging off a rap record without listening to it or a movie without having seen it. If someone wants to sit down and have a thoughtful, constructive debate that's not about political agendas and isn't about someone trying to make some money off us, then we'll have that conversation. I find that a little bit upsetting… We're all human beings here. If there was any proven connection between what we do and things actually going wrong in the world, we wouldn't do it. But there is no connection.

Is it odd for you to see more traditional companies like EA and Activision putting out products like Def Jam Vendetta and True Crime: Streets of LA? Do you think those would have ever been released if not for GTA III?
No, I don't think it would have happened. I think these guys are good at using formulas, aren't they? I've got a lot of respect for all the companies in the business, and I love this industry. I respect EA because they're at the other end of the spectrum from what we do. But they do approach it from a tracking trends and "what's hot, what's not" perspective. We make games from our guts. We say, "This is a vibe, we're into this – let's do it." We didn't make San Andreas into an "urban" or "hip-hop" game because we want to be urban or hip-hop. We grew up in Britain looking at the East Coast and West Coast hip-hop and aspiring to it. This isn't some bandwagon we've jumped on. I'm glad these other companies are doing [these kinds of games]; we need to work together as an industry to prevent the detractors from trying to pull us back.

Is this the last new Grand Theft Auto game we'll see on this generation of hardware? It seems like you've probably pushed the PS2 hardware about as far as you can.
Terry [Donovan, CEO of Rockstar] will batter me if I answer that question! [Laughs] It is the last full-blown thing we're going to see for now. But someone might come up with a wacky idea that's fun and relevant tomorrow. I'm one of those "never say never" kind of people. It was really important for us to do this trilogy. A fictional New York in a contemporary setting, Miami in the '80s, and a '90s Cali – that was the trilogy. That was the plan from a long time ago. I'm not the biggest fan of games coming out with new versions year after year. Putting out the same game every year, plus ten percent, that's not our thing.

Many gamers fantasize about a Grand Theft Auto online experience. Do you think GTA would translate well to the online area? Is that something you're going to try?
Definitely. It's something that's been talked about for an awfully long time. It's something that presses all of our buttons. Like the way that from 2D to 3D was a magnificent jump, I think the same is true when we do that jump into online. How we do it, when we do it, and what it is that we do – those are the question marks. Just giving people deathmatch, or even a cooperative deathmatch – that's not GTA. When we [go] online with GTA, it's got to be right. I'm more inclined to look at areas, believe it or not, like EverQuest and use that for inspiration. Because we know we can make the action fun and engaging.

How do you see the competition between Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo breaking down?
I'm a fan of all of them. I think that Nintendo will have their work cut out, but I'd never discount them. I've learned so much from playing their games. I think the battle between Microsoft and Sony will be very interesting. I think Microsoft has done an impressive job. They didn't come out particularly strong, but the way over the last three years they've been able to keep the machine alive and really grow it in people's minds is incredibly impressive. This is not a company one can afford to not take very seriously. At the same time, Sony is the master of consumer home electronics. Between these two companies, I think you've got a fight on your hands.

What about PSP or Nintendo DS?
We'll definitely be involved in that area. We acquired a company in the UK earlier in the year called Mobius, which did Max Payne for Game Boy. They're incredibly bright and tuned in. We got involved with these guys to see what we could do in the handheld arena, with a clear eye on PSP. I can't talk about specifics, but we will be appearing in the near future with some announcements. I absolutely love [the Nintendo DS] from an interactive point of view. Love the tap screen – very interesting. Not sure, for us, that I can see an application.

It's pretty clear that Xbox 2 is coming out in fall of 2005. Is Rockstar going to be there at launch? Perhaps with a Xbox 2 port of San Andreas?
We're going to be supporting all the next generation systems. That's the most diplomatic answer I can give. I don't think a Xenon port of San Andreas is that likely, because for us next generation means next generation. But I'd never rule everything out. What we built the company on when we moved from PSone to PlayStation 2 was a desire to make games that you couldn't play on the existing platforms. That's very important.

> ***"We make games from our guts."***

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1989 ▶ Pop Life

While attending college, Houser scores a job at music business giant BMG. During his long tenure with the company, he would go on to work with such artists as the ultra-popular British boy band Take That (featuring Robbie Williams) and David Bowie.

1995 ▶ Game On

Houser joins BMG's fledgling games division, beginning work on the original Grand Theft Auto, a game that would come to define his career.

1998 ▶ A (Rock)star Is Born

BMG sells its games division to Take 2 Interactive. Houser and friend Terry Donovan move to New York City and begin pitching Take 2 on their vision for Rockstar Games.

2001 ▶ The Revolution

After struggling in its early years, Rockstar delivers a masterpiece – Grand Theft Auto III. The game is an instant best-seller, becoming this generation's defining title.

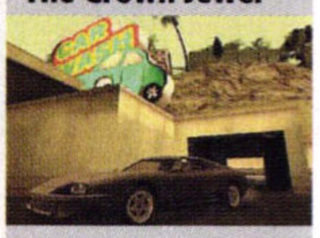
2002 ▶ Going Way Back

Taking a detour back to the '80s, Rockstar releases the epic Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, along with an unprecedented seven-CD soundtrack box set.

2003 ▶ Controversy

Despite the furor over GTA, Rockstar releases its most controversial title to date, the brilliant but disturbing stealth title Manhunt.

2004 ▶ The Crown Jewel



Pushing the series to even greater heights, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas expands to incorporate three full cities, a more mature plot, and tons of innovative gameplay.

Photo: Bryce Pincham

AMERICA'S MOST WANTED

Rockstar Games' president Sam Houser, in the heart of money-makin' Manhattan

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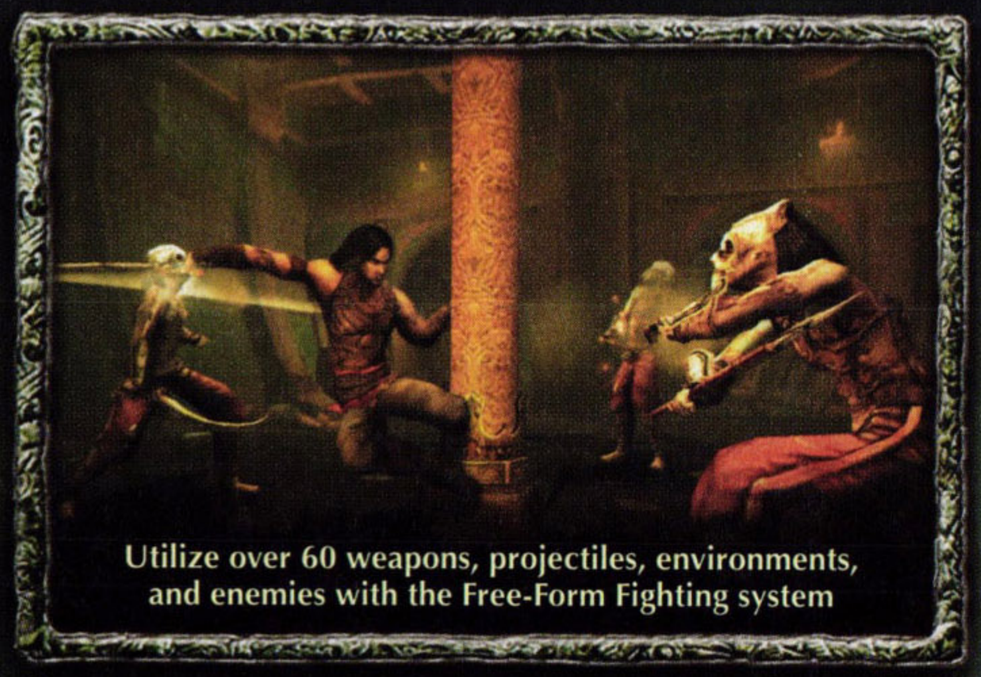

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"Our Most Wanted Game of 2004" - PSE2

"9.6" - Official Xbox Magazine

"10 out of 10" - PSM

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX

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NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PlayStation 2

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*Game of the Year: Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences, *U.S. Official PlayStation Magazine*, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, *Official Xbox Magazine* (Staff Pick), *PSE2*

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pc

VIBE

Manufacturer: Voodoo PC
Website: www.voodoopc.com
List Price: Starts at $3,300

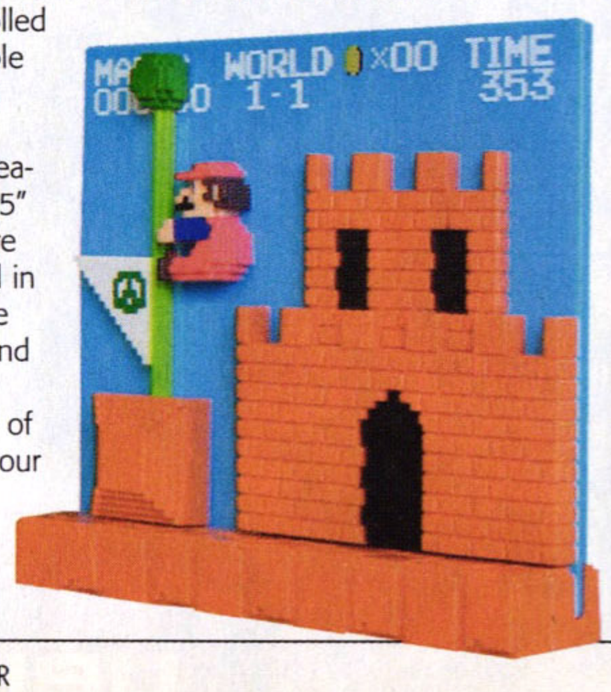
Voodoo PC's first media center unit pulls out all the stops – besides their usual component pimping, the Vibe offers Microsoft Media Center OS 2005, a custom-painted Xbox (optional) with built in Media Center Extender Kit, and a Logitech Harmony remote. Essentially, this will take care of gaming (both console and PC), normal home PC duties, and efficient media management through the operating system. TiVo-like program recording, streaming audio and video, and photo sharing are just the beginning of things with this setup.

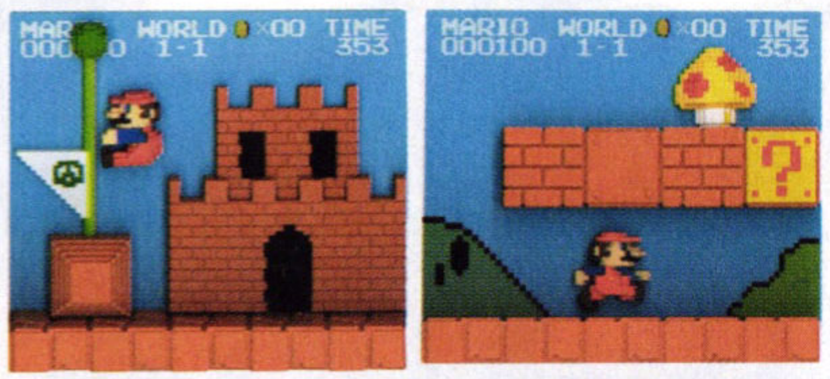
toys

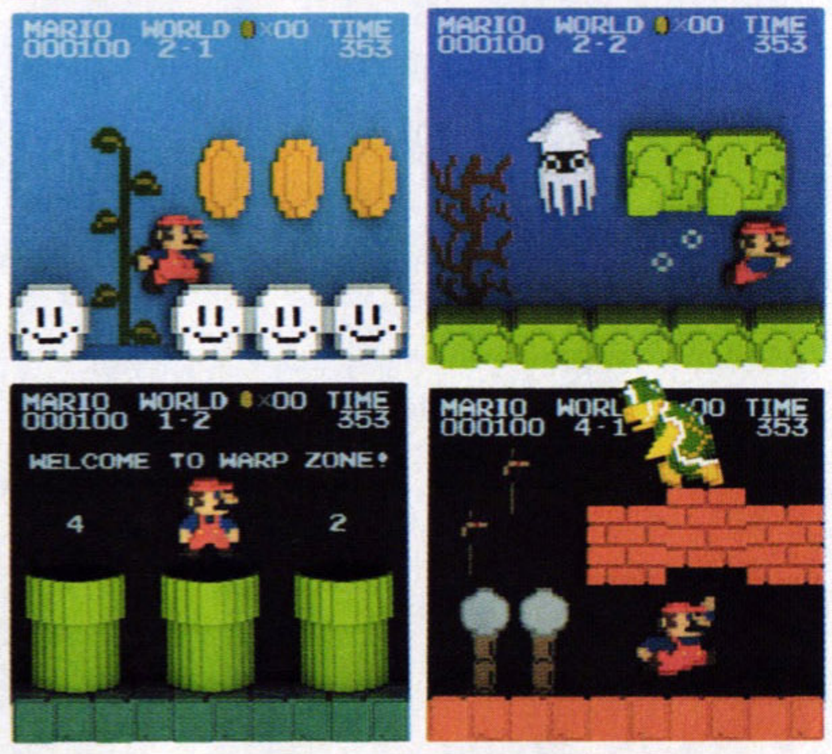
MARIO PVC STAGE FIGURES

Manufacturer: Banpresto
Website: www.unifive.co.jp
List Price: $25.00

A handful of online import sites are carrying these awesome Super Mario Bros. dioramas that feature a magnet-controlled Mario so people can move him through the stage. Each measures about 3.5" by 5" and there are seven total in the series (one is rare, we found places selling sets of six and of seven – pick your poison).







etc

AXIO MINI

Manufacturer: Haro Design
Website: www.axio-usa.com
List Price: $125

Sometimes, when we're playing real-life Super Mario Bros., Joe wears these hard-sided backpacks and gets down on all fours. Then Miller jumps on his back to simulate the long-standing feud between the Koopas and Nintendo's plumber. Other times we try to fit a now old-school PS2 (with hard drive and network adapter) into the sacks and find that they hold it quite nicely while protecting the console from bumps and bruises.

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MATURE 17+

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Blood
Violence
Strong Language

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peripherals

SLIME CONTROLLER

Manufacturer: Hori Japan
Website: www.hori.co.jp
List Price: Around $30

Recommended for use as a controller and a nifty slime figurine, this gadget launches in Japan with the highly anticipated Dragon Quest VIII. Users report that (despite their unorthodox shape), these are comfortable and easy to use controllers. The units come with a stand and the cords wind up inside for easy displaying. If we're lucky, Hori will bring these stateside with our launch of the Square Enix RPG.

peripherals

CORDLESS HEADSET FOR XBOX

Manufacturer: Logitech
Website: www.logitech.com
List Price: $79.99

With a 30-foot range and six hours of playtime on a single charge, it's hard to fault much of anything with Logitech's latest wireless console headset. Even the sticker price, which looks a little high at face value, is something to be happy about – the box includes the whole Xbox Live starter package (the communicator, setup guide, and two months of Live service). This is one-stop shopping at its best.

toys

SCARFACE FIGURES

Manufacturer: Mezco Toyz
Website: www.mezcotoyz.com
List Price: $17.99

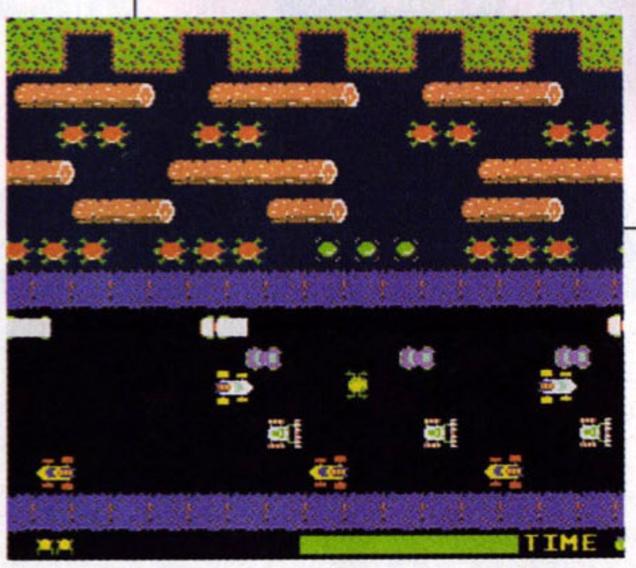
This first line of toys in the Scarface series features 10-inch Tony Montana figures depicting a series of scenes from the movie. Other lines are planned (like busts, statues, and Mez-itz entries), and this grouping should be out before the end of the year.

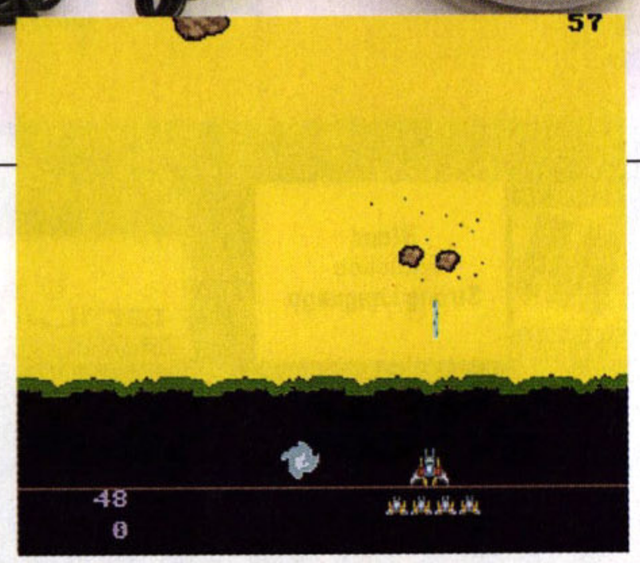
tech

XGAMESTATION MICRO EDITION

Manufacturer: Nurve Networks
Website: www.xgamestation.com
List Price: $199

We're constantly getting letters from people who want to make games. Our largely incoherent responses boil down to an overused Nike slogan, but now we have something a little more educational to recommend. The XGameStation is designed as a hands-on learning course covering hardware development and programming, Atari 2600 style. The games you'll be making won't rule the hill in the graphics department, but solid gameplay knows no pixel boundaries. Works with Windows-based PCs.





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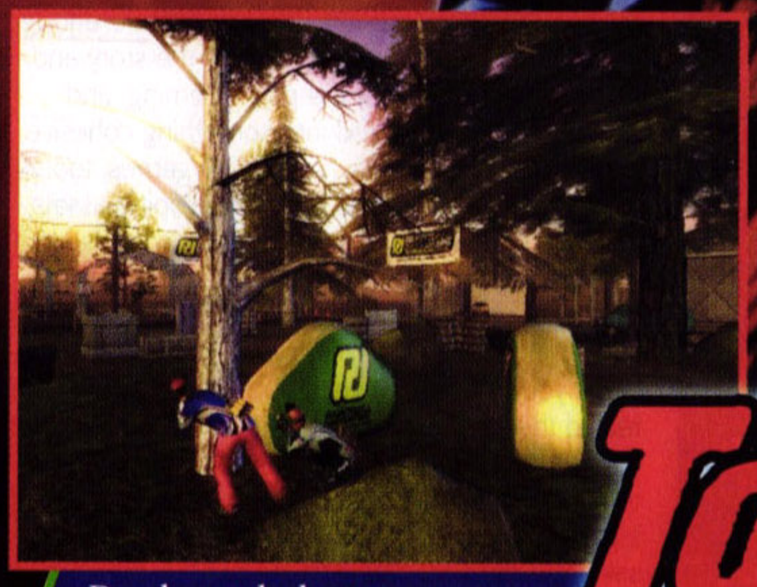

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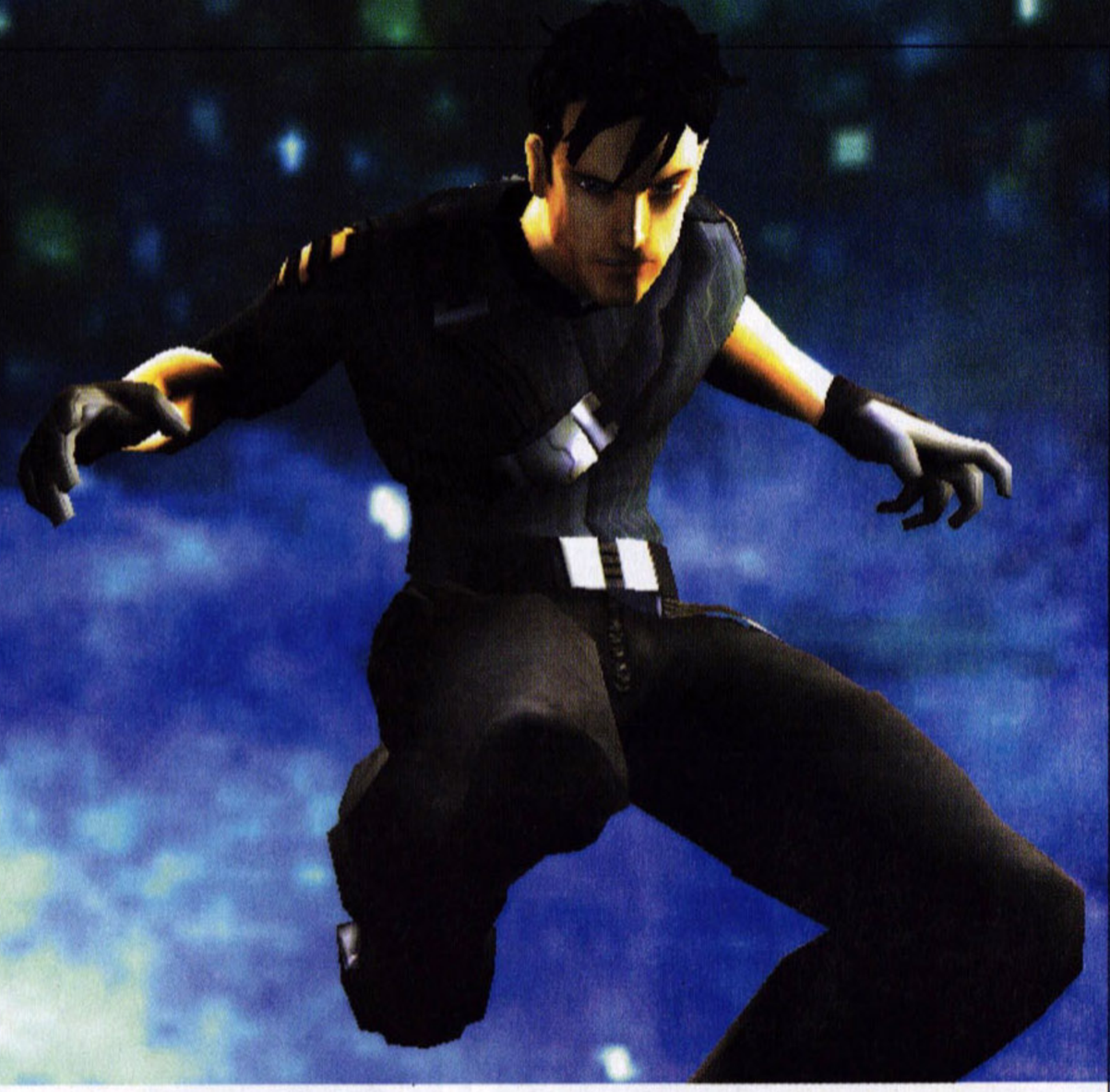
CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES IN GAMING

BY DONALD MUSTARD
LEAD DESIGNER/DIRECTOR OF MAJESCO'S ADVENT TRILOGY



High polygon counts. Check. Complex physics systems. Check. Bump mapping, light mapping, normal mapping. Check, check, check. These are just a small sampling of the features and technologies that will be standard in every video game that is released on next generation hardware. It's cool that we have reached the point where the once vast limitations of hardware technology have been minimized to the point where they no longer plague the creative process of realizing the vision of a game. Now that developers have the tools needed, they can begin to focus more on the storytelling and narrative techniques necessary to create compelling, emotional experiences similar to what is done in film. I feel there are three primary areas that gamers can hope to see pushed to the frontlines of their next-generation gaming experiences: Stronger emotional characters, an expansion of one-off gameplay, and a heavier focus on editing.

GAMES THAT MAKE US CRY

We need to learn what Peter Jackson has learned: People are drawn to stories that have an emotional core centered on characters and their relationships. Look at what he did with *The Lord of the Rings* films. Jackson had all of the elements and bullet points needed to have a big Hollywood action blockbuster popcorn movie. But the films he made were just packed full of non-action movie elements. They were full of emotion and long character close-ups – sometimes with tears, blood, and sweat streaming down their faces or with a slow, knowing smile of love and friendship. The core themes were centered on strong characters and the emotional relationships they share together. This is what has made great stories from the beginning of time – not the huge action set piece, not the incredible setting or environment, but the emotional journey of the hero. What Jackson did was so unconventional and yet was such a massive and beloved success because it tapped into *everybody*. Essentially, *The Lord of the Rings* was a character film disguised as an action movie. That's just brilliant.

Right now I think games are squarely rooted in the action set piece and the incredible setting mentality: Level after beautiful level and awesome particle effect after awesome particle effect. High on style, low on substance. If the goal is to create games that are more "cinematic" then we must begin to make games with strong characters that are then placed into emotionally compelling situations and relationships. This must become the focus of any story that is aspiring to be more than just drivel.

GAMES WITH "WATER COOLER" MOMENTS

I think it's great that we are seeing a lot of cross-genre blending in games. We see games where elements of shooters, RPGs, platformers, and racing games are combined to great effect. This is a good place to be: games that provide a solid but varied palette of gameplay as their base. But they could be so much more…

I'm definitely not the guy who wants to rely solely on cutscenes to tell a story. With interactive media, there are so many unique devices that can be used to further the emotional immersion and impact of narrative. I hope to see more story-driven events; gameplay that is dictated by the narrative and not by the base palette. For example, the first level of Halo 2 has you fighting off the Covenant as they attack the space stations defending Earth. The level takes advantage of most of Halo's base palette – dual-wielding, friendly units fighting with you, grenades, advanced enemy AI, etc. The level culminates with a spectacular cinematic in which Master Chief dives into space dragging a huge bomb behind him. He directs his zero-gravity fall towards one of the larger invading capital ships, passes through its hollow center, and at the last moment, kicks off away from the bomb as it explodes dramatically, engulfing the capital ship and propelling our hero towards Earth. Pretty cool, huh? Well, what if that cutscene was playable? How amazing and rewarding would it be if you got to leap from the space station, free fall through space weaving in and out of ships as they flew by. If you got to be the one to kick-off from the bomb, sending it careening into the exposed core of the Covenant flagship. *That* would be an awesome climax to a level and a definitive moment in the game. *That* would be narrative-driven gameplay: a new gameplay mechanic caused by a playable event that was dictated by the story.

> **"I'm definitely not the guy who wants to rely solely on cutscenes to tell a story."**

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.

Developers need to do all they can to put the gamer in the driver's seat. Let them play through the big moments and the establishing shots; let them experience first-hand as much as possible. This will be a huge step – taking the moments typically relegated to a highly produced cinematic and making them playable.

GAMES THAT ARE CONCISE

There is a reason movies are edited. No filmmaker is ever going to shoot a movie to the exact frame they need for a shot. You must shoot much more than you will ever use. You have to capture enough footage so that you can then shape the story and find the scenes, so that the pacing, timing, and flow can be manipulated into something cohesive and whole. This process happens in games, too. A lot of time and money is spent developing assets, writing and recording dialogue, building levels, and engineering content. The danger in this is that, as designers, we don't want to waste time developing something that's not going to ship in the final product. If you're going to spend the time and money to record the dialogue and animate the cutscene, then you are going to keep it. We must fight this urge to bloat games with levels just for levels' sake, dialogue for dialogue's sake, and features for features' sake. We must be willing to cut our favorite level, scene, or feature if it helps the game as a whole. I am convinced that the games that will become the definitive titles of the next generation will come from developers who can master the art of editing.

These are some of the key concepts we focused on when designing the Advent Trilogy, as we believe they are essential to crafting a compelling narrative gameplay experience.

We are so lucky to be alive right now. In the coming months and years we will get to experience stories and narrative entertainment in a way that nobody in history has ever experienced before. I believe that video games are the epitome of storytelling; they combine the best elements of music, sound, film, writing, comics, painting, and let us experience it first hand. Some people think that video games are nipping at the heels of Hollywood. I think that they are poised to revolutionize entertainment as we know it. ■■■

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

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
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Strong Language

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january

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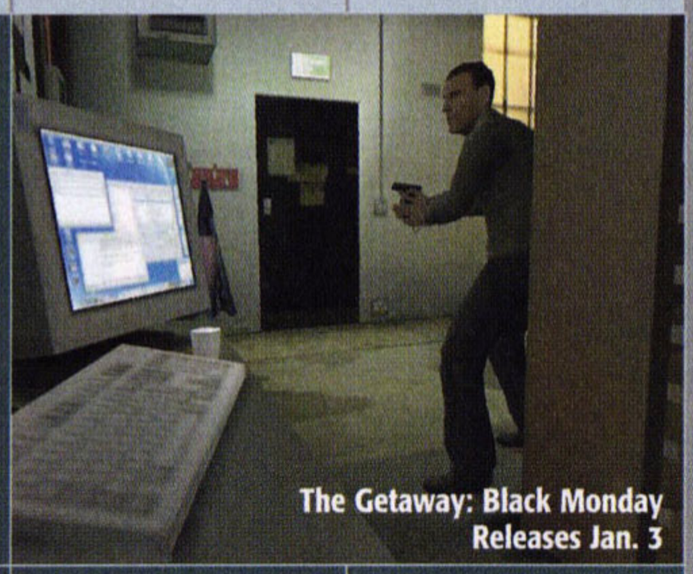

The Getaway: Black Monday
Releases Jan. 3

02

03

NEW RELEASES
- Chulip – PS2
- Digital Devil Saga – PS2
- The Getaway: Black Monday – PS2
- The Lord of the Rings: Middle-Earth Online – PC
- Project: Snowblind – PS2, Xbox

04

NEW RELEASES
- *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind: Special Edition* – DVD
- Forza Motor Sport – Xbox
- *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* – DVD
- The Punisher – PS2, Xbox
- *Troy* – DVD

06

07

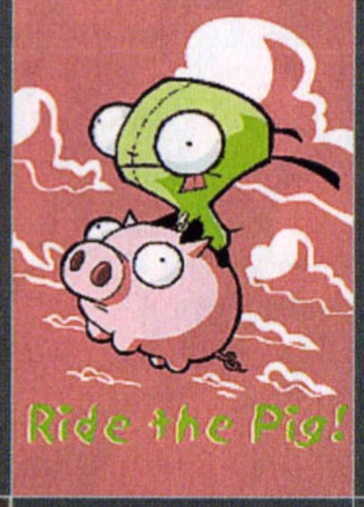
The supernatural thriller *White Noise* opens in theaters. Audiences everywhere scream at the sight of star Michael Keaton, thinking they've seen a ghost.

08

CHILLER THEATRE TOY, MODEL, AND FILM EXPO JAN 7 – 9
Held in East Rutherford, New Jersey, this convention celebrates all things horror related. Stars of your favorite cult horror movies regularly appear, and there will be plenty of horror memorabilia for sale. Plus, there will probably be some cute spooky chicks.

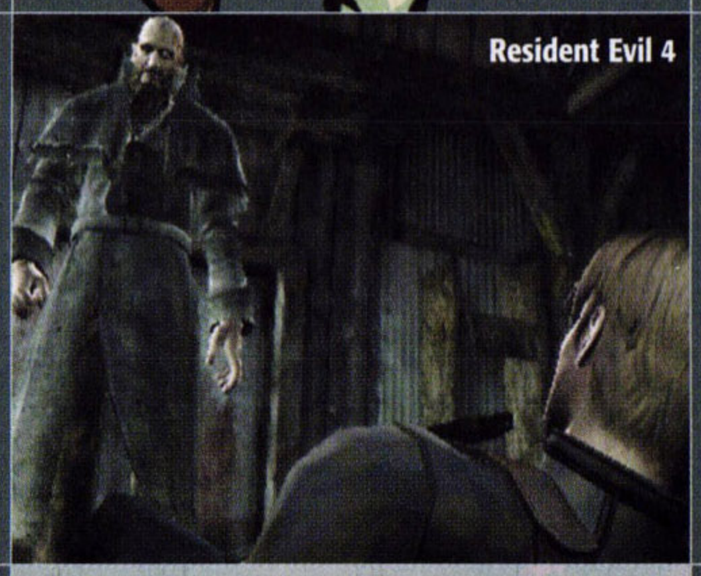
09

THE ALTERNATIVE PARTY JANUARY 9-11
Held in Helsinki Finland, this international gathering celebrates the use of non-mainstream video game consoles and computers, as well as music and art. If you can get out there, this should be a truly unique experience.



11

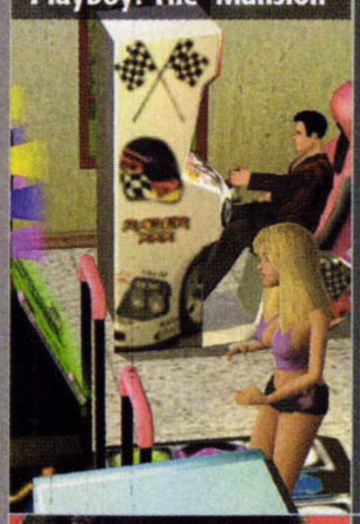
NEW RELEASES
- *Invader Zim* Box Set – DVD
- NFL Street Vol. 2 – PS2, Xbox, GC
- The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap – GBA
- Mercenaries – PS2, GC
- Resident Evil 4 – GC
- Suikoden IV – PS2
- *The Village* – DVD
- Virtua Quest – PS2, GC


Resident Evil 4

14

Jennifer Garner's *Elektra* hits theaters. Hey, it's gotta be better than *Daredevil*.

Playboy: The Mansion



17

NEW RELEASES
- Army Men: Sarge's War – PS2
- Playboy: The Mansion – PC
- Fullmetal Alchemist – PS2
- Spy vs. Spy – PS2, Xbox
- Wild Arms: Alter Code F – PS2

18

NEW RELEASES
- *Catwoman* – DVD
- The Matrix Online – PC

The Matrix Online

21

CHATTACON XXX JAN 21 – 23
For 30 years, this Chattanooga, Tennessee convention has celebrated everything science fiction related. Amidst all the role-playing and sci-fi writers will be several rooms of video game tournaments. If you live in the area, this is the most concentrated geekiness around.

24

Everyone's favorite comedian turns 54 today. That's right, we're talking about Yakov Smirnoff!

25

NEW RELEASES
- *Alien vs. Predator* – DVD
- Close Combat: First to Fight – PC
- Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition – PS2, Xbox

26

G.A.M.E.S. SYNERGY SUMMIT JAN 26-28
Held in Orlando Florida, The G.A.M.E.S. (Government, Academic, Military, Entertainment, and Simulation) Synergy Summit is all about informing game developers on how they can find new revenue sources by creating titles for the U.S. government and military. I'm George W. Bush, and I approved this game.

28

Hobbit-riffic actor Elijah Wood celebrates his birthday today. Despite what you might think, he turns 24, not 14.

29

FX: THE FLORIDA EXTRAVAGANZA JAN 28 – 30
This annual comic book/toy/general nerddom convention is absolutely ginormous. Expect to see card game tournaments, comic artists, and celebrity guests from movies like *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Crow*, and more. It's totally geektacular!

30

31

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

Touching is not good.

Or so we're told. Please do not touch ...
yourself, your nose, wet paint, that zit,
grandma's best china. You name it,
you can't touch it. We think that's wrong.
Why shouldn't you touch what you want?
What if you could touch the games you
play? What if you could make something
jump or shoot or run just by touching it?
Let's face it, touching the game means
controlling the game. And when we say
control, we mean precision control.
One right touch and you're master of the
universe. One wrong touch and you're toast.
Forget everything you've ever been told
and repeat after us. Touching is good.

Touching is good.

NINTENDO DS™

touch control • wireless chat • voice control • wireless play

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JOHN SINGLETON'S

FEAR & RESPECT

There is a gun in your hand. It's pointed at his temple. He's kneeling on the floor, pleading for mercy. You look at the ugly gray carpet on the floor below you. It's the cheap kind, hard and uncomfortable, the kind they put in hospital waiting rooms and apartment buildings like this one. If you pull the trigger, you will put his brains on that carpet. It occurs to you that you don't even know what brains look like. Do they look like they do in horror movies? One flinch of your right index finger, and you will find out.

His mother is screaming. Don't kill my baby; don't kill my baby. You tell her to shut up. She sits down on the couch and starts quietly sobbing. The TV is on. 106 & Park is on. 50 Cent took nine bullets and lived. If you pull the trigger, this guy won't survive one. It's hot. You're starting to sweat. A single drop slides down your forehead, stinging your eyes. He's getting angry. Shoot me if you're gonna shoot me. You tell him shut up. Shut up. Lemme think. Turn off that g--damn television. Lemme think. Time seems like it's stopped. Just crying and the heat.

You need to make a decision. Cap this guy now or get the hell out of here. It wasn't supposed to go down like this. Just run him down and snatch his chain. Easy. But he was faster than you thought and here you are. Sitting in this hot apartment staring down at his head and the carpet.

Kill him, and it's three strikes. Nothing but an overworked public defender between you and life in San

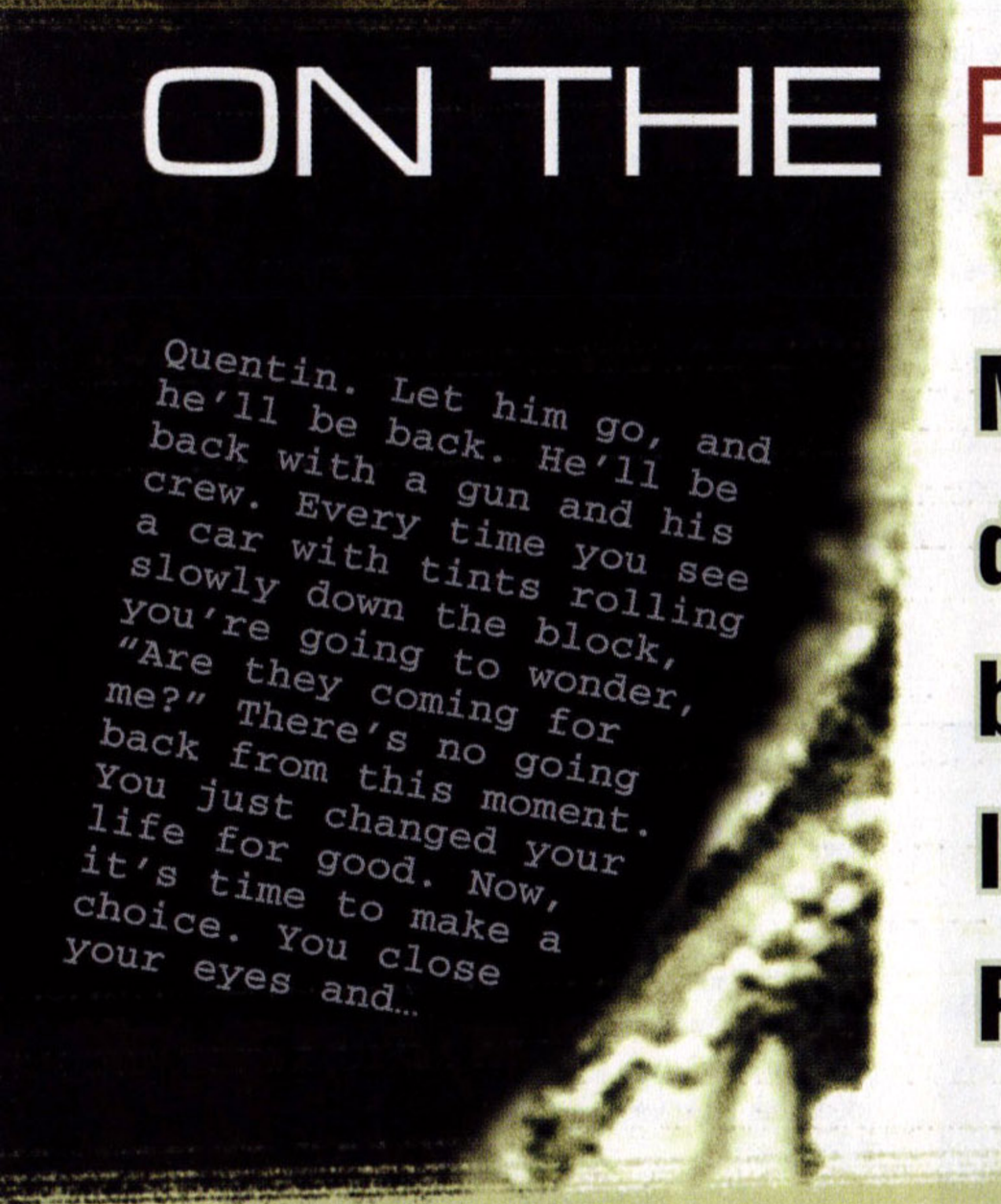
UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
> **DEVELOPER** EDGE OF REALITY/MIDWAY > **RELEASE** FALL 2005

ON THE REAL

Midway and *Boyz N the Hood* director John Singleton bring the harsh realities of life in South Central L.A. to PlayStation 2 and Xbox

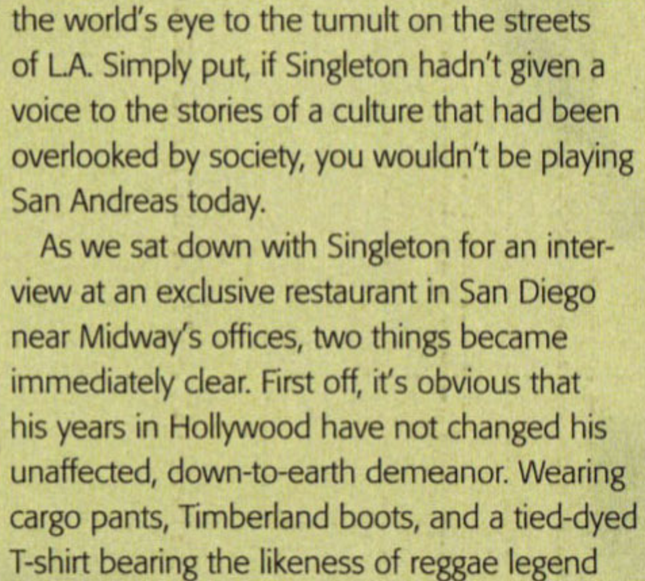


Video games are largely a violent form of art. Pundits protest and scold the industry, but year by year the games we play keep getting bloodier. Even the cuddly platform stars pack heat now, and games like Doom 3 and Silent Hill keep pushing the boundaries of gore to even more sickly visceral heights. But the violence in games never really means much. Kill an enemy in one area and four more will spawn to take its place. Shoot one of your companions and the worst that will happen is they'll jump a little and give a stern word of warning.

However, in the real world, violence has consequences that are both swift and severe. Every day, in some part of the U.S., a situation like the one we just described takes place. Even in the post-Grand Theft Auto III world of games, where publishers are jumping over each other in an attempt to prove they have the "edgy" content that gamers are demanding in increasing numbers, most of the games that attempt to shock us with violence have very little to do with the real world.

Midway's Fear & Respect, slated to be released in the fall of 2005, is attempting to deal with some now-familiar themes in a new way – by trying to paint a realistic picture of urban violence in South Central Los Angeles and the gang-related lifestyle that breeds it. The game hopes to illustrate not only the violence that too often occurs in L.A., but the reasons for and the effects of that violence. To do that, they've entered into a partnership with one of the most respected filmmakers in the world: John Singleton.

Based solely on appearances, some will tag Fear & Respect as just another GTA knockoff. However, it's worth noting that Singleton was the first to bring Hollywood a true and nuanced view of the world of South Central Los Angeles. Over a decade before Carl Johnson stepped on to the streets of Los Santos, Singleton's unforgettable *Boyz N the Hood* told a tale of inner-city tragedy and redemption, introducing us



to such indelible characters as Doughboy (Ice Cube, in a breakout role), Furious Styles (Laurence Fishburne), and Tré (Cuba Gooding Jr.). Keep in mind that this was back in 1991, when the then-burgeoning "gangsta rap" genre was still largely absent from radio and MTV airplay. Before the Rodney King riots turned the world's eye to the tumult on the streets of L.A. Simply put, if Singleton hadn't given a voice to the stories of a culture that had been overlooked by society, you wouldn't be playing San Andreas today.

As we sat down with Singleton for an interview at an exclusive restaurant in San Diego near Midway's offices, two things became immediately clear. First off, it's obvious that his years in Hollywood have not changed his unaffected, down-to-earth demeanor. Wearing cargo pants, Timberland boots, and a tied-dyed T-shirt bearing the likeness of reggae legend Peter Tosh, Singleton is laid back and eager to talk. The second thing that we realize is the fact that he is a gamer – as hardcore as they come.

Right off the bat, he begins asking us questions about games. What have we been playing lately? Do we play on Xbox Live? At the moment, Singleton is enjoying two of his recent purchases – X-Men Legends and Star Wars: Battlefront for Xbox. When we casually mention that Halo 2 is coming out the next morning, Singleton starts excitedly talking with the Midway PR people at our meeting. Soon, there are plans being made to hit a game store before their morning meeting the next day so Singleton can pick up Bungie's latest

masterpiece. When we ask him about his history with gaming, it's clear that his roots run deep.

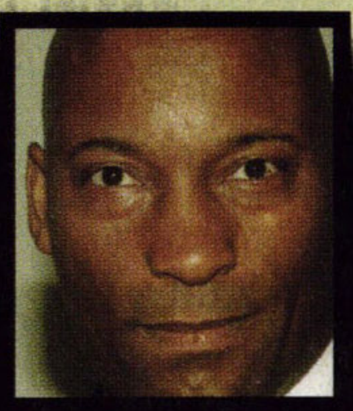
"I've been a gamer all my life, you know? I grew up playing all of the early games of the eighties," he reminisces. "We're talking about periods of my life. Back in the day, it was Super Mario. You know what I mean? Before that it was the old Atari 2600 games. I've been [going from] console to console throughout the history of gaming, because I think I'm from the first generation that actually grew up with home gaming."

This is not a marketing-driven, manufactured Hollywood/Silicon Valley collaboration, seeking to cash in on the success of games like GTA and True Crime. If anything, the success of those titles, and the skyrocketing popularity of hip-hop and street culture in general, is providing Singleton the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong ambition.

"I've always wanted to be a filmmaker but I think it's kind of natural for me to do video game design because it's something I grew up doing," Singleton states. "I actually have been pitching games around for awhile. I have my agent hook me up with different companies. I've been flown around the world by companies – France and different places – pitching games. And then it came up that Midway was interested in doing a street game. So, I got a meeting with them and I talked about one of the ideas that I had for a game and it evolved into being [Fear & Respect]."

Although the game industry has traditionally been slow to adapt to the changing times, and has often been

John Singleton: A History



John Singleton made a huge impact when he came on the Hollywood scene in 1991 with *Boyz N the Hood*, the film that opened America's eyes to the realities of life in urban Los Angeles. Since then, he's demonstrated his skill in a number of genres, from romance to big-budget action, transcending his image as "hood" filmmaker. Here's a brief summary of his career as a director.

From left: ***2 Fast 2 Furious, Baby Boy, Poetic Justice, Higher Learning, Boyz N the Hood, Rosewood, Shaft***

Boyz N the Hood (1991)

Starring Ice Cube and Cuba Gooding Jr. in roles that would make them stars, *Boyz N the Hood* remains one of the greatest films ever made about the black experience in 1990s America. This gripping drama explores the story of a group of friends growing up in South Central Los Angeles.

Poetic Justice (1993)

Defying expectations, Singleton's next movie was not another gang epic, but rather a touching look at a romance between a young African American poet (Janet Jackson) and a mail carrier (Tupac Shakur). Even early in his career, Singleton is already showing his versatility as a filmmaker.

Higher Learning (1995)

Another left turn for Singleton, this time with *Higher Learning*, an incendiary take on racism on a college campus. While sometimes the film's message seemed a bit heavy handed, the film is still recommended for its strong performances, especially Michael Rapaport as a racist skinhead.

Rosewood (1997)

Singleton does his first period piece, *Rosewood*, a chilling film based on the true story of an African American town that was attacked by a lynch mob and burned to the ground in 1923 in Florida. Starring Ving Rhames, *Rosewood* casts light on a tragic and often overlooked chapter in American history.

Shaft (2000)

In a nod to an earlier generation of black filmmakers, Singleton directs Samuel L. Jackson in a remake of the 1971 classic detective drama *Shaft*. While not as hard hitting as some of his work, Singleton nonetheless crafts a fun and fast-paced action film, and generally pleases fans of the original.

Baby Boy (2001)

Returning to the same world that inspired *Boyz N the Hood*, Singleton creates what may be his best film, *Baby Boy*. The movie, while still containing elements of the gang violence of *Boyz N the Hood*, focuses on the relationships that African American men have with women in their lives. Features stunning performances by model Tyrese Gibson and Ving Rhames.

2 Fast 2 Furious (2003)

In a rather puzzling move, Singleton opts to helm this sequel to the Vin Diesel vehicle *The Fast and the Furious*, without Diesel's involvement. As with the first, the chase sequences are thrilling, but the plot and acting very lacking. Probably the least of Singleton's films. Co-starred rapper Ludacris, who will be working with Singleton on his next project, *Hustle & Flow*.

■ The game won't have a huge selection of weapons, as Singleton wants to keep the feel as realistic as possible

■ Snoop's character looks exactly like the real thing, and has the same hobbies!

criticized by the lack of cultural and racial diversity its products; Singleton feels that projects like Fear & Respect represent the future. As gaming becomes a part of mainstream entertainment, it's only natural that it mirrors the larger trends emerging in the culture as a whole.

"Hip-Hop culture is not a subset of pop culture anymore," observes Singleton. "It is pop culture. So it's just natural for gaming to reflect that."

The partnership has proved to be a perfect solution for Midway as well. The company wanted to make a game with a hard-edged, street-oriented feel, but wanted to make sure that it felt true to the culture that inspired it. Singleton, who grew up in South Central and still has his offices there, proved to be an invaluable asset to the team.

Executive producer Scott Lane is clearly thrilled to be working with Singleton.

"If you walk down Crenshaw with John, he's a hero," Lane says. "People were stopping to get their picture taken with him, to say hello, to shake his hand, to thank him."

Lane also feels that Singleton's presence will help blunt criticism of the game from all quarters, be it the residents of South Central or media watchdogs. "John is making it real," he continues. "That's what made him so attractive to us, on top of the great movies he's done. It's going to be credible and real. So, I don't think either the Moral Majority or the people in L.A. are going to have a problem with it if it's real. We're not saying these people are bad or these people are good, we're just saying that this is how life is when you're in urban L.A. – this is it."

The team hasn't limited their quest towards authenticity to simply picking Singleton's brain for information. To ensure that they would be successful in visually recreating South Central's neighborhoods, several members of the team went on trips through the area. While there, they took photos, spoke with the locals, and soaked up the details of a world far removed from their suburban San Diego office building.

In Watts, they went to the infamous Nickerson Gardens housing projects, home of the notorious Bounty Hunter Bloods street gang. At first, the residents, who are all too familiar with police surveillance and harassment, viewed them with skepticism.

Scott Lane recalls, "We were in two big Suburbans, and every time we pulled around a corner, people would scatter because the thought we were FBI." They were later informed that the police often take photos of young men on the streets for possible use as identification in future cases. As you might expect, living under this kind of scrutiny breeds a great degree of suspicion of outsiders.

THERE'S not graffiti everywhere; it's not like you think...It's another world, and it's so hard to explain unless you've been there. That's what we want to capture in the game; we want people to see just how

Producer Nathan Rose recalls, "We talked to whoever we could. There were people that would talk to us, mostly the younger kids. Some people didn't want to anything to do with us. The younger kids, once they heard 'video games,' they didn't run. But the older kids, 15 or 16, just took off when they saw our cameras."

These interviews helped the team observe some of the subtleties of life in South Central. Beneath the surface, even seemingly banal details show themselves to have deeper meanings. For example, Rose points out that the clotheslines that crisscross the backyards of South Central are made of metal, not cord, to make it difficult for the police to chase a suspect. Local gang members have memorized the grids of lines, but someone unfamiliar with the turf will have to proceed slowly, or risk receiving a nasty cut.

More importantly, the experience reminded them of just how important it was to convey the reality of life in South Central, not just glorify the gangs that persist there. In recent years, the popularity of hard-edged hip-hop has made it popular for people from more affluent backgrounds to take on the accoutrements of the gang lifestyle. However, life as it's lived in South Central is not a joke; it's not a fashion; and it's far from the one-dimensional caricature that's routinely portrayed in the media. To emphasize just how serious it can be, Rose said that people told stories of the Rodney King riots and how security guards at the well-known retail center the Slauson Swap Meet were shooting automatic weapons into the crowd of looters. For most of us, events like this are simply unimaginable.

Despite the sometimes harsh circumstances that plague South Central, Scott Lane was quick to point out that the area is by and large full of hard-working, proud people that simply want

YOU see his father get killed in front of his eyes. You see him as this kid that's locked in a shell, that doesn't want to come out of the house, but then is forced to go out in the streets and survive. And he has to make choices.

to make a life for themselves. "When people think of inner city L.A.," Lane comments, "they think of slums and ghettos. But, [the residents] take a lot of pride in their neighborhood. [Pointing to a reference photo] Look at how clean everything is. There's not graffiti everywhere; it's not like you think… It's another world, and it's so hard to explain unless you've been there. That's what we want to capture in the game; we want people to see just how cool it is."

For Singleton, Fear & Respect represents an opportunity to present a story that he feels could not be told in any other medium. As an avid gamer, he sees the art form evolving in an exciting new direction, one that allows for a greater degree of freedom than he enjoys in films.

"I think that what was interesting to me as a filmmaker was when the parameters [of games] became bigger in terms of multiple paths," he notes. "They talked about it years ago happening in cinema. But I don't think it will happen in cinema, to be able to have a story that takes multiple paths."

While the story of Fear & Respect was initially one he conceived for the big screen, Singleton began to realize that his true vision of an interactive and branching storyline could only be realized in a video game.

"It's better suited to a game," Singleton states. "I think it makes it more interesting for the gamer when you play the game and every time you play it you can have a different experience…depending on the randomness of human interaction with what's programmed. That's what makes contemporary gaming different from what I grew up with. When I grew up they had a set pattern within a game. Now, there are no set patterns. With the permutations in different games, the story changes from playability. I think that's great."

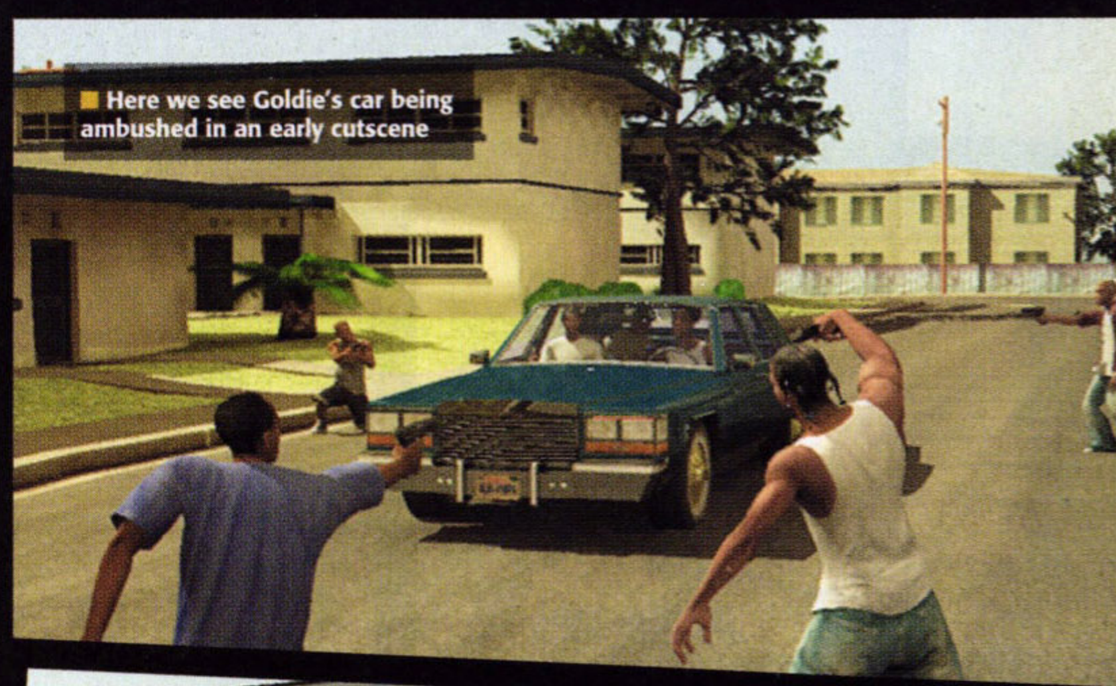
The story Singleton tells in Fear & Respect is ambitious in both concept and execution. The saga centers on Goldie, a South Central native who we encounter as he's being released from prison. With two strikes against him [according to California's mandatory sentencing laws, three felonies – "strikes" – means an automatic life sentence - *Ed.*], Goldie is hoping to lead a quiet life and avoid the drama of the streets. As you might suspect, fate intervenes in the form of an ambush. As he leaves prison, a hit is put out on him, orchestrated by two enemies he made while doing time.

From here, the story takes an interesting turn back to the past.

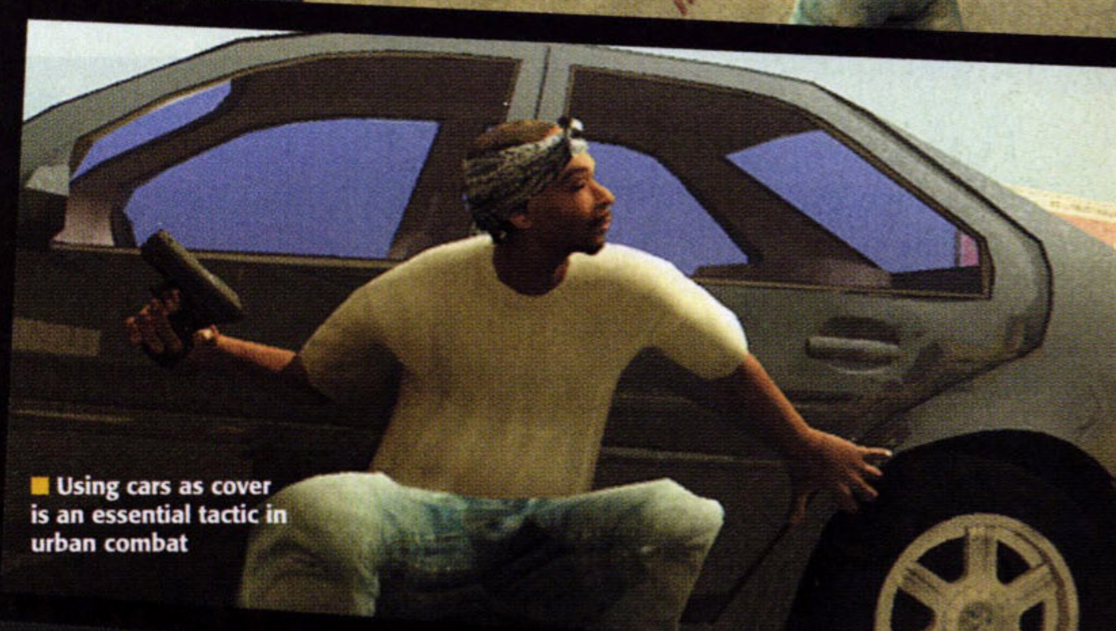
"It's almost like an urban epic," claims Singleton. "Because when you go back to him as a teenager, you see how the seeds were laid for him to be the person that he is right now. You see his father get killed in front of his eyes. You see him as this kid that's locked in a shell, that doesn't want to come out of the house, but then is forced to go out in the streets and survive. And he has to make choices."

■ You'll be able to explore some building interiors

■ At night, stealth tactics will be important to survival



■ Here we see Goldie's car being ambushed in an early cutscene

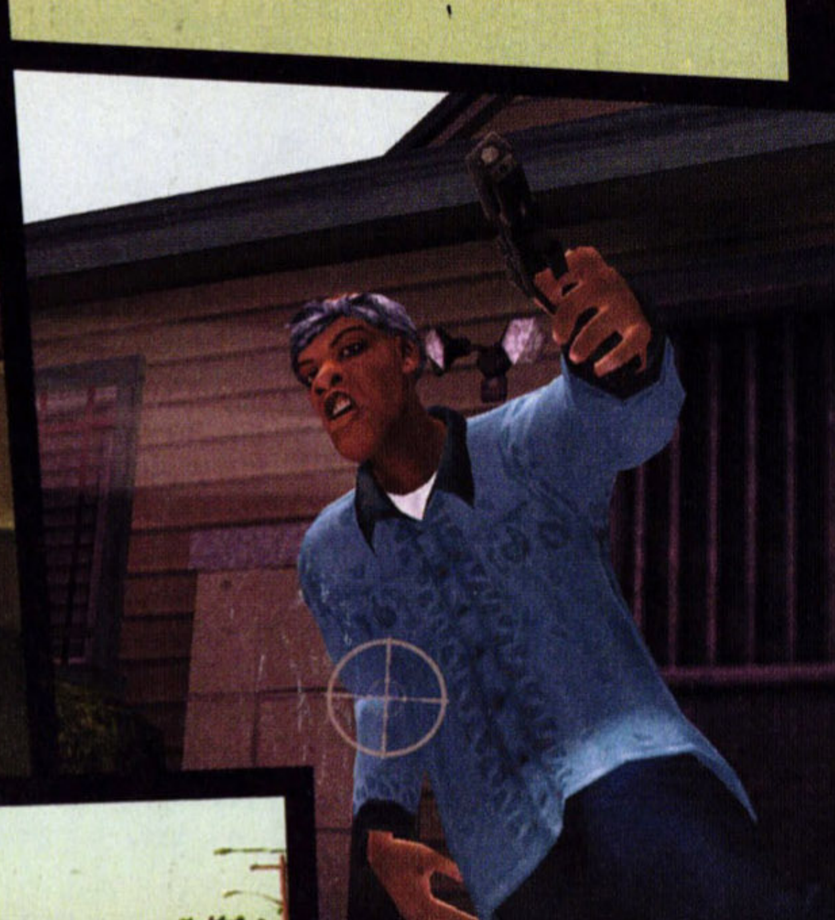


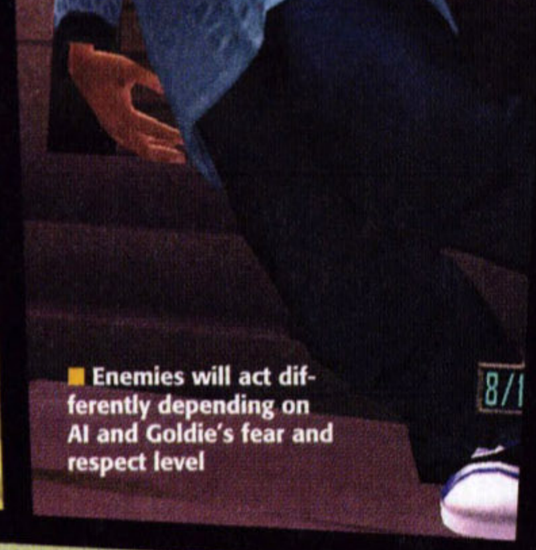
■ Using cars as cover is an essential tactic in urban combat

■ Fear & Respect will control much like the console Max Payne titles

■ There will be 15 minutes of rendered cutscenes. The other 30 will be done with the game engine

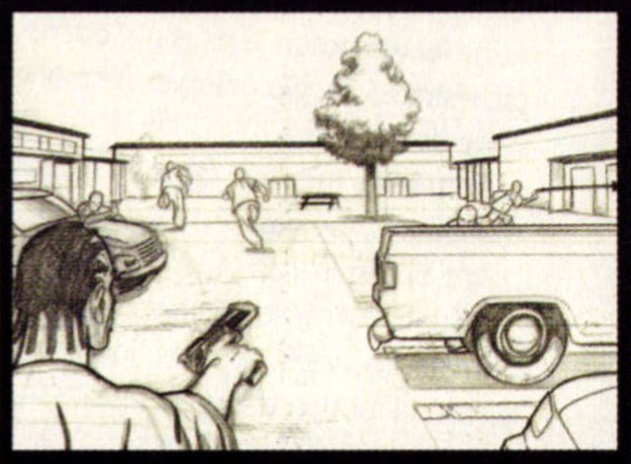
■ Not a good time for a nap

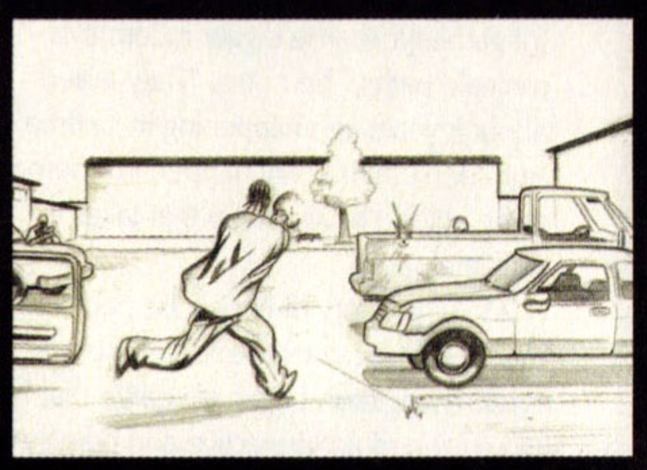




■ Enemies will act differently depending on AI and Goldie's fear and respect level

■ Singleton is directing and storyboarding every one of the cinematics





A full third of the game will be told through flashbacks, and most of them will be playable, but the present day will hold the greatest challenges for Goldie. In addition to his considerable trouble with past enemies and being forced back into a life of crime to make rent, he's also struggling to keep his younger cousin, Lil' Red, from going down the same path that he chose as a child on the streets.

Singleton promises that Goldie's story will have huge repercussions throughout the city, and that the game's climax will change the lives of people in South Central forever. As an accomplished filmmaker, he hopes to evoke a greater depth of feeling from the audience than games have been able to achieve in the past.

"In film, there's this thing called the rhythm of the picture that the director dictates," said Singleton. "You make calculated measures to pull emotion out of an audience – to make people cry, to make people laugh, to get some type of emotion. But nobody, I think, has really actively tried to do that in gaming yet. In a few places they have. But these guys have been telling me about all these filmmakers who have tried to do games and they've been failing left and right because they're seeing the sensational aspects like the big explosions. [To me] the big explosion is to actually have something people want to play again and again because it's pulling something out of them. And I think that that's what I'm lending to this game."

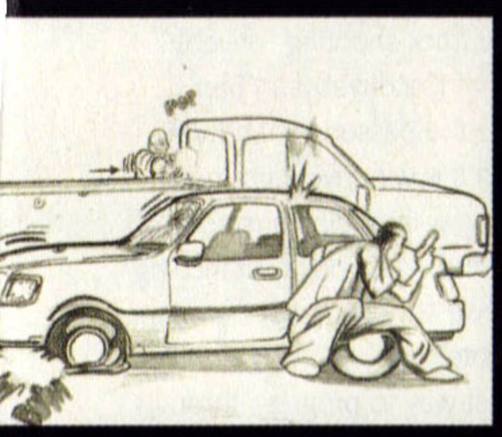
Every great tale needs a compelling central figure, and Midway and Singleton have found theirs in iconic West Coast rapper/actor Snoop Dogg. Aside from the instant name recognition and credibility that comes with the Snoop brand, the collaboration has gone a long way towards making this the ultimate Westside epic. Interestingly, the two hooked up again through a chance occurrence.

"Actually Snoop was talking to them about doing a video game when I came on [with Fear & Respect]," recalls Singleton. "Me and Dogg got together and just talked. He and I are a team. We did a movie together. I've known him for 14 years, since the beginning of his career. Any time we find an excuse to work together, we work together."

In recent years, Snoop has found himself a hot commodity in both video games and film. He's contributed his music to games such as Gran Turismo 3 and NBA Live 2003, as well as his likeness to Activision's True Crime: Streets of L.A. He's also received critical praise for his acting in such high-profile movies as *Training Day* and *Starsky & Hutch*. "For a lot of the film and video game stuff I do," Snoop laughs, "the work comes to me. A lot of these companies want to be in the Snoop Dogg business."

However, it's apparent that Snoop has a huge respect for Singleton, and that his work on Fear & Respect goes far above and beyond anything he's done in the past.

"John Singleton is a cinematic genius," said Snoop. "With Fear & Respect, it's my baby with John Singleton. I treat Fear & Respect just like I would treat an album – top to bottom. Just like I would executive produce an album,



I'm putting that same sort of focus and touch on this game. As far as making sure my character looks right, making sure that the storyline is realistic, making sure that there are the most realistic characters around me. [I want] anyone who plays this game to feel like they are really trying to survive in the hood. I'm even [showing] the way that I can shoot my gun in the game, going into the details of the way I hold it."

Snoop will also be lending his musical expertise to the soundtrack, and is in the process of writing and recording two new original tracks for the game. As you would expect, Singleton is placing a great deal of emphasis on the game's audio, detailing every bit of incidental dialogue and handpicking a mix of "new and old-school" hip-hop to set the mood.

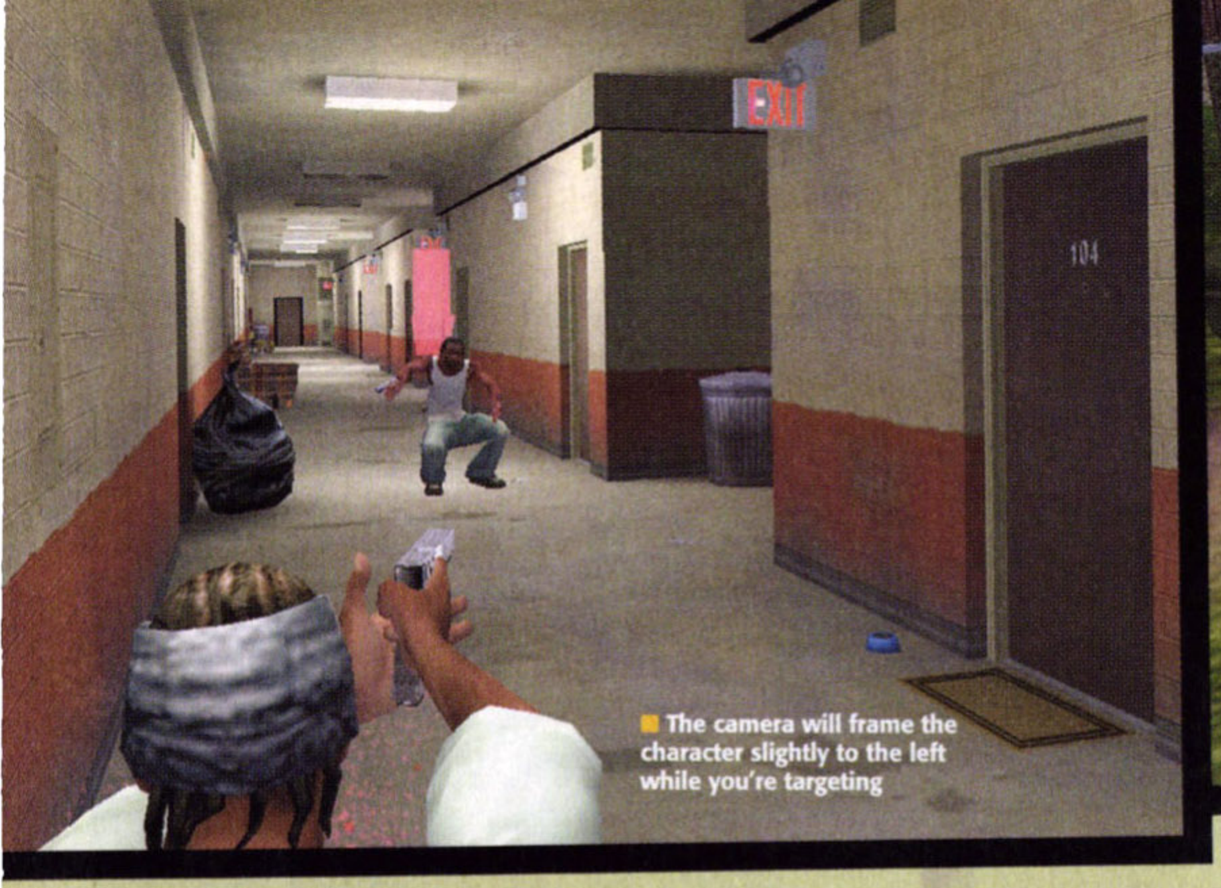
For Midway's part, they couldn't be more pleased with Snoop's contributions thus far. "People don't realize how good an actor Snoop is," claims Scott Lane. "His people told us that he was originally supposed to be in *Starsky & Hutch* for four minutes, but he was so good they knocked him up to 16 or 18 minutes. I thought he was the best part of the movie."

As you can see by the screenshots of this game, Snoop has been rendered very realistically in the game (although the in-game model is based on a 23-year-old version of him and was recreated from reference photos). The voiceover recording sessions are being booked, and Midway is hopeful that Snoop will be able to do motion-capture sessions for Fear & Respect as well – although finding a mo-cap suit that will accomodate the rapper's six-foot, five-inch frame might be a challenge.

Given all the care that's going in to the production values and the storyline, Fear & Respect's design and gameplay has to be every bit as exciting as the plot. Again, Singleton and Midway are utilizing some unique concepts to add a much-needed depth to the third-person action genre. The most interesting of these precepts is the "Fear & Respect" meter, which was conceived by Singleton himself. Yes, this is a game about violence, but as we said before, the way the player chooses to (or not to) use violence will ultimately decide the kind of experience you'll have in the game.

"I think it's exciting to have a game [in which] where you go in the game is dictated by the consequences of your actions," comments Singleton. "That's where the title comes in – Fear & Respect. You make choices in this game that lead to you

PEOPLE don't realize how good an actor Snoop is, claims Scott Lane. His people told us that he was originally supposed to be in Starsky & Hutch for four minutes, but he was so good they knocked him up to 16 or 18 minutes.



The camera will frame the character slightly to the left while you're targeting

Shooting sideways while running will be much less accurate

having more fear or more respect on the streets. You can't just go through the game just mindlessly killing anybody. But you're put in certain situations where if you do have to kill, it's your choice. And what you decide to do dictates where the story's going to go."

Where you fall on the continuum of fear and respect affects nearly everything in the game. Characters will react to you in different ways depending on your reputation. For example, fear can cause some weaker-willed NPCs to run away from you in order to avoid confrontation. However, more aggressive types might try to purposely attack you to claim your spot in the hierarchy of the streets.

At various moments in the game, you'll literally be required to make a decision whether or not to end someone's life. These choices will have a dramatic impact on how the game unfolds from that point on.

"You can ride around and pull out your gun and cap people," comments Scott Lane, "or you can try to solve things with words and your fists, and not resort to gunplay unless you have to. You can't re-holster your gun in real life. Once you pull a gun in the hood, it becomes a different type of fight."

For every action you take, there is a consequence. Choose to execute someone, and you may find that a key character later in the game will refuse to come to your aid. Or, if you let an enemy live, they may come back to exact a deadly revenge later. One decision could save your life, or end it. In fact, the game will have three separate endings, depending on whether your actions have tended towards fear, respect, or a more neutral approach.

Although its appearance might cause some to expect that Fear & Respect will be modeled on Grand Theft Auto's free-roaming design, Scott Lane was quick to disabuse us of this notion.

"It's not an open-world, streaming game like GTA. That's not our goal. I don't want to be in the same category as GTA. We want to stand on our own two feet," states Lane.

While in the default camera mode, the player will control Goldie from the standard third-person viewpoint. However, as soon as you draw your weapon, the camera will move in tighter on the character, who will be slightly to the left on the screen, similar to Resident Evil 4. Gunplay will be the main focus of Fear & Respect, allowing you to blast at your enemies using a control scheme that is derived from the Max Payne console titles, where you move with the left analog while adjusting your aim with the right.

A reticle is used for more accurate targeting, but – in keeping with the realism inherent in the game's storyline – much of the gunplay will be more frenzied and less accurate, just like it is on the streets. You can take cover behind cars and other objects, laying down blind suppression fire over your head. Running between cover points you'll shoot wildly at your foes, holding your gun sideways.

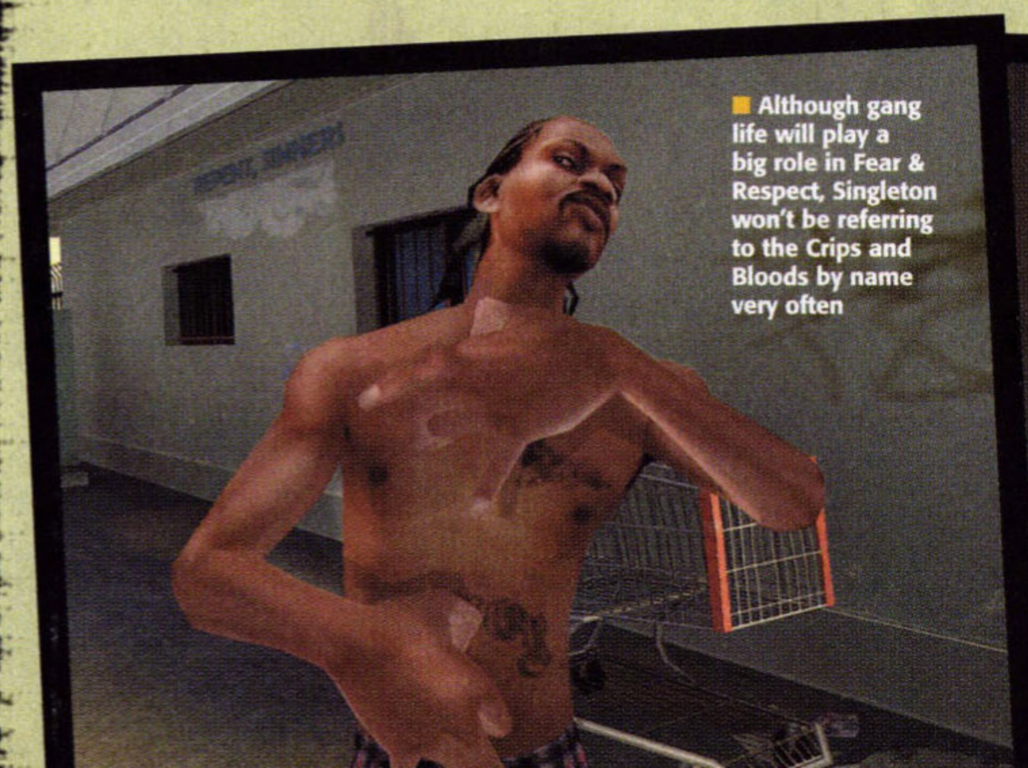
Unlike many third-person action games, you can also interact with the environment, climbing over fences and onto roofs. As is expected of any triple-A title today, full Havok and rag-doll physics are used on everything in the levels. Downed opponents will sprawl and fall realistically, parked cars will slump as their wheels are shot out, and you'll even be able to shatter and shoot through windows.

Although the bulk of the gameplay will be of the sort we just described, Midway and development house Edge of Reality are adding some new twists, in the form of interactive track-shooting "driveby" sequences. In a reverse of the drivebys in San Andreas, this time you're the passenger, and will target your mark through the window. Right now, the team is experimenting with adding a mechanic that allows you to direct the driver down branching paths with one hand, while shooting with the other.

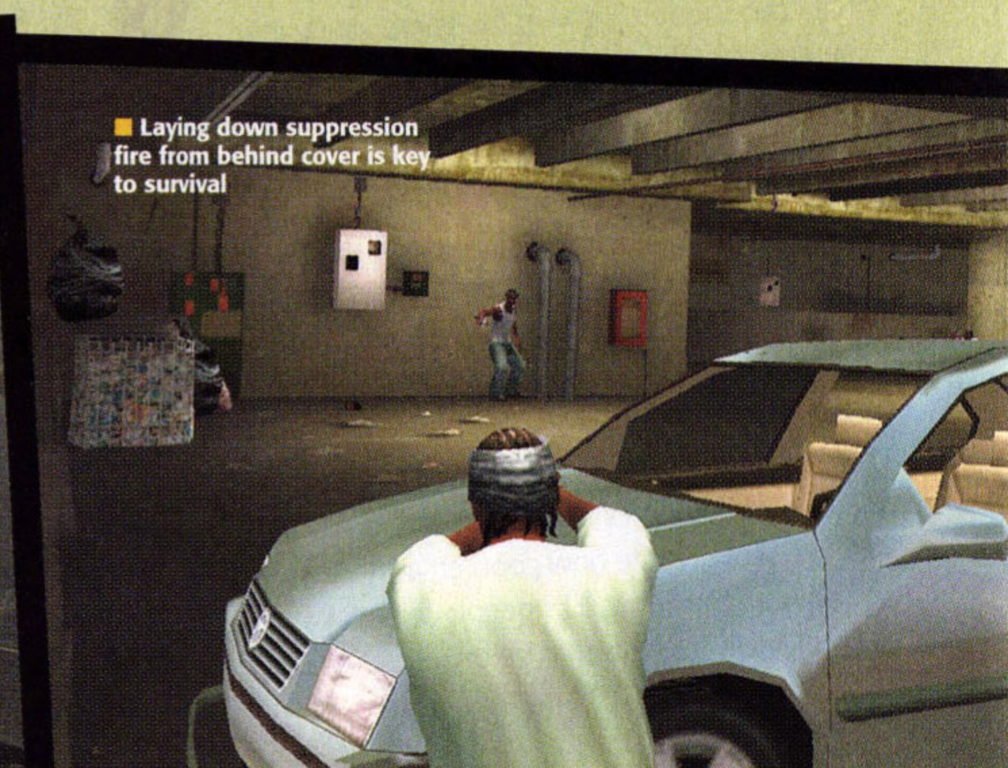
Of course, as we've stated before, using deadly force isn't always the best way to progress through the game, which means you must also be able to defend yourself with your fists. Again, the fighting engine is designed to reflect the way that fights occur on the real streets of Los Angeles.

"There's going to be grappling, ground-fighting, things like that," comments Nathan Rose. "The majority of the fighters in the game aren't very disciplined. There will be a lot of wild punches – wild but powerful. All the kicks will be when your opponents on the ground or [when you're] trying to get them off their feet."

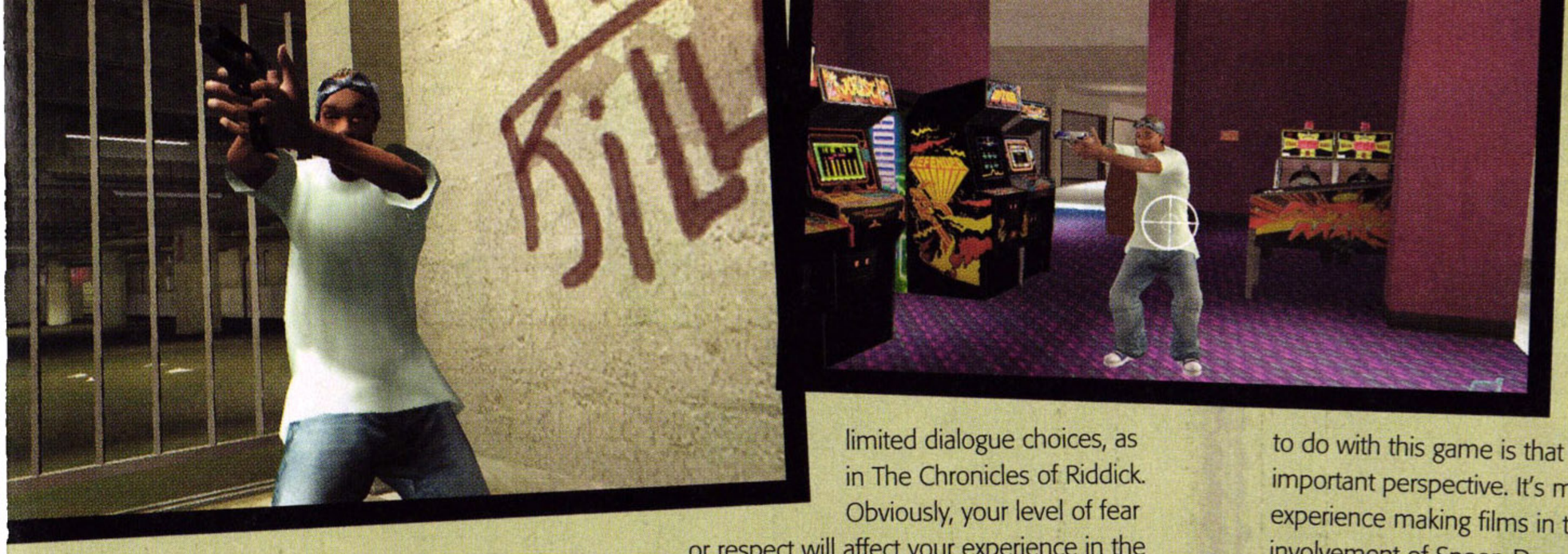
IT'S NOT an open-world, streaming game like GTA. That's not our goal. I don't want to be in the same category as GTA. We want to stand on our own two feet



Although gang life will play a big role in Fear & Respect, Singleton won't be referring to the Crips and Bloods by name very often



Laying down suppression fire from behind cover is key to survival



When a fight begins, the camera will again switch to a close view, showing the characters from the knees up and from a more sideways perspective. Midway and Edge of Reality feel that this will make the battles more immediate and powerful in the eyes of the player.

"We want to put you right in the fistfight," said Scott Lane, "so you're really feeling it, so you can see the blood fly at the camera."

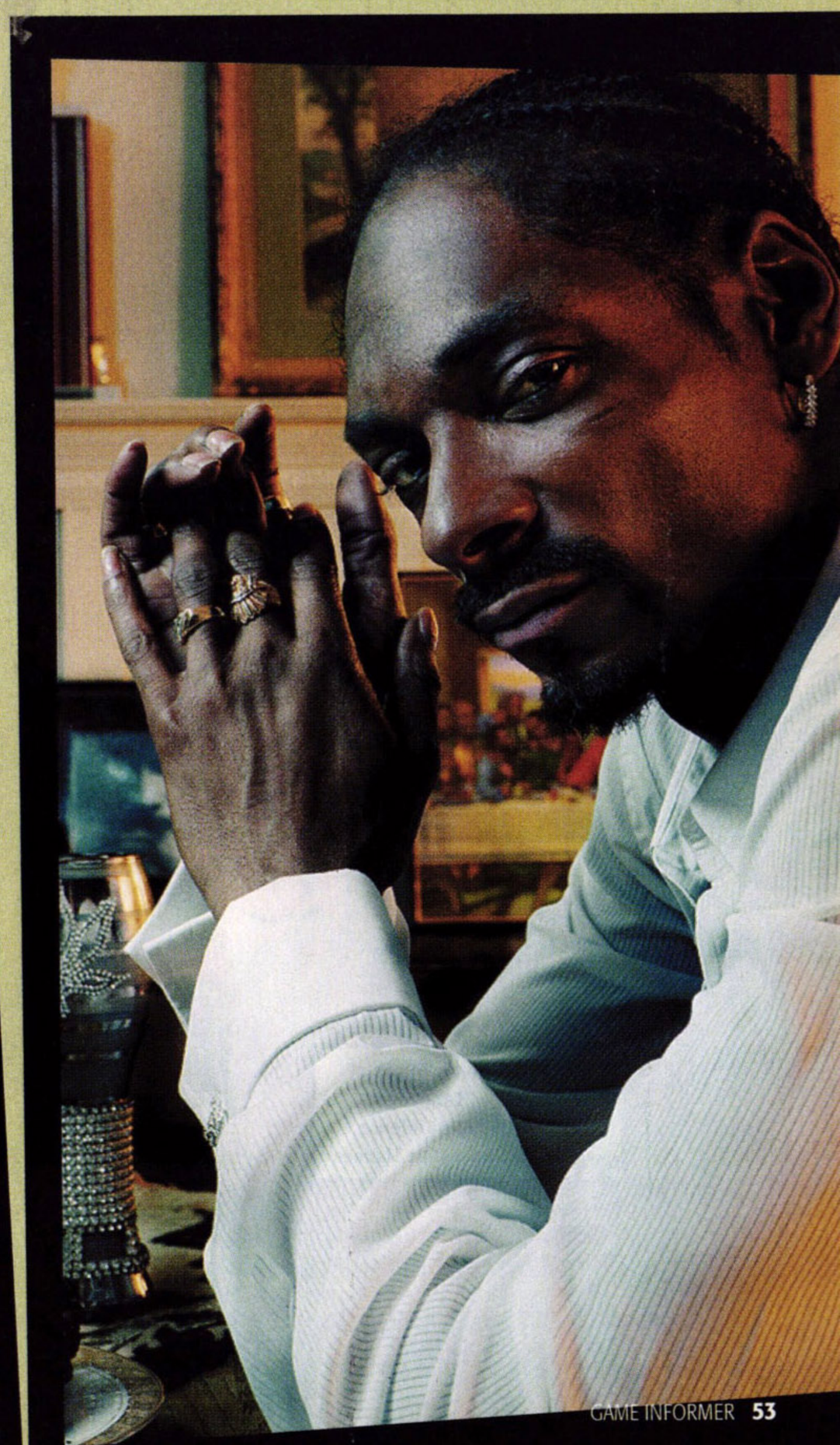
In some situations, especially when you're in an enemy gang's turf at night, it's wisest to avoid conflict altogether. Goldie will also be able to use some basic stealth techniques to sneak his way through the hood unscathed. Much like Manhunt, you'll have no high-tech spy gadgets to help you, only your wits and steely nerve. Using cover and shadows, you will be able to silently progress through a level, observing small icons that appear over enemies' heads that show whether or not you are in their cone of awareness.

Although Fear & Respect's levels are generally linear, Singleton wanted to make sure that it delivers the real atmosphere of daily life in South Central. To accomplish this, the developers have created what they call "sandbox" areas, two-to-three square block regions where you can freely walk around, learning more about the storyline, missions, and characters in the game. In the sandbox, you'll be able to get side quests, items, and information. In this way, it functions like a village in an RPG. You'll even be able to engage in conversations with NPCs, where you will have some limited dialogue choices, as in The Chronicles of Riddick. Obviously, your level of fear or respect will affect your experience in the sandboxes as well, and you'll often have to avoid getting jumped by enemies or be rewarded for past action with some helpful item or hint. Some sandboxes are controlled either by the Crips or the Bloods, which adds an even greater element of danger.

More importantly, the sandboxes allow Singleton to really capture the details of South Central. You'll see barbecues, hear boom-boxes blasting classic West Coast hip-hop, and see people betting on pitbull fights. From young kids playing to old men conversing in the afternoon heat, it's in the sandboxes that Fear & Respect's urban environment really comes alive. The proprietary graphics engine that Edge of Reality has created, coupled with Singleton's insight and Midway's extensive research, has resulted in the most accurate representation of South Central ever accomplished in a game. Comparing reference photos from the Imperial Gardens housing projects (where *Menace II Society* was filmed) to the game's own recreation of the area, you'd be hard-pressed to tell the difference.

And it's in this way that Fear & Respect will distance itself from the increasingly crowded "urban" game market. This is not marketing; this is not hype; this is a story and game being conceived by someone who grew up in South Central, someone who has lived alongside the people that he writes about. John Singleton has already changed the movie industry, and now he's got his sights on a new medium with which to tell the stories of urban America.

"I think what's interesting about what we're trying to do with this game is that this is coming from a really important perspective. It's me coming with 15 years of experience making films in this environment and the involvement of Snoop Dogg," observes Singleton. "They can do whatever they want with all of those other games, but nine times out of ten they're like a bunch of designers being influenced by pop culture, saying, 'Maybe if we put this in it'll be cool.' But this is a whole different thing. I'm going to do it ten times better, because I'm not researching this stuff. It's coming straight from real life, so that people who are from [South Central] will say, 'Oh my God, I can't believe they put that in the video game.' Unless you've lived some of these things you wouldn't be able to put it in there." ■■■



■ Here's a visual nod to Midway's arcade heritage

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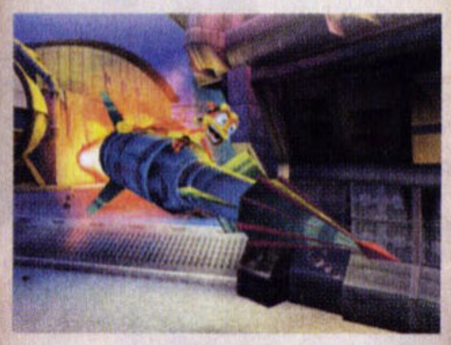

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TO ITS DRAMATIC CONCLUSION.

The conclusion,

the answers,

the end of the epic.

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PLAY IN OURS.™

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

EVERYONE GETS ANGRY FROM TIME TO TIME. SOME PEOPLE BOTTLE IT UP AND DON'T TALK ABOUT IT. OTHERS TAKE OUT THEIR FRUSTRATION AT THE GYM OR ON A SPORTS FIELD. BUT WHEN BRUCE BANNER GETS ANGRY, HE TAKES IT OUT ON THE NEAREST CITY BLOCK. WHEN BRUCE BANNER GETS FED UP WITH THE WORLD AND ITS PETTY FRUSTRATIONS AND STUPID PEOPLE, WHOLE TOWNS COWER IN TERROR. BECAUSE WHEN BRUCE BANNER HITS HIS BOILING POINT, HE BECOMES A WALKING GREEN MACHINE OF MASS DESTRUCTION. HE BECOMES THE HULK, AND PITY THE FOOL WHO STANDS IN HIS WAY.

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> **DEVELOPER** RADICAL GAMES
> **RELEASE** SUMMER

AAAARRRRGGGGHHH!!!

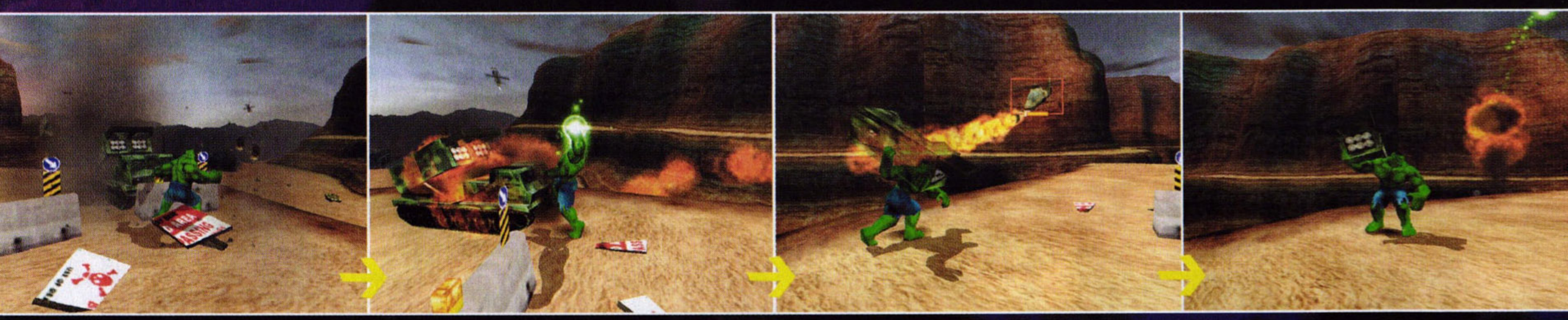
■ SOME OF THE ENEMIES ARE SO MASSIVE, YOU'LL HAVE TO CLAMBER UP ONTO THEM TO WREAK HAVOC

The Incredible Hulk is all about power. So when Radical Games took up the challenge of following up its last Hulk game (based on the recent movie) with a new one entirely centered on the comic mythology, that power was a big focus. "We're really dialing things up for this game – redefining 'over-the-top.' One of our game goals was 'Action on the Richter Scale,' and I feel that's something we've delivered on," we were told by Eric Holmes, the lead designer on the game. "We sought to make the Hulk's power a central element of the game."

After some time playing the new game, we can confidently say there's no doubt that the team is set to deliver on that idea in full. The Incredible Hulk plays like a giant free roaming destruction derby. Think Grand Theft Auto, but instead of stealing cars and swerving around buildings, you'll be destroying the cars and smashing through buildings. A guiding principle throughout development has been that anything the Hulk touches, he destroys. Like an unstoppable force of nature, the green menace leaves a wake of mayhem behind everywhere he passes. At one point in our time with the game, we bore down on a hapless car. While screaming pedestrians scattered at our approach, we hefted the car up and literally shredded it in half. As the tearing metal sounds and explosive visuals attested to, a lot has changed since the last Hulk game.

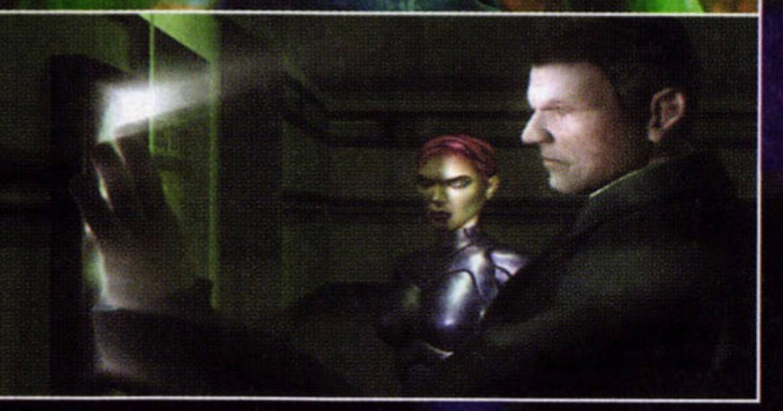
First and perhaps most importantly, the Banner stealth missions from the movie game have been completely removed. While we will still be seeing the mild-mannered Banner, he now appears only in the gorgeously rendered cutscenes that are interspersed between missions. "We feel that with the breadth, depth, and scope of the Hulk gameplay in this new game there was no need for Banner content. It would be a completely different experience to what we've tried to build here, and I think the Hulk gameplay speaks for itself. I think that people buying this game want to feel power, and that means they want to be the Hulk," said Holmes. Another big change comes in the scope of the project. In the earlier game, the green goliath moved around in largely interior environments and was severely limited in his speed and movement. That strategy has been completely rethought this time around, allowing the Hulk to leap over entire buildings, crossing city blocks in a matter of seconds. In fact, leaping has become a major focus of gameplay, very similar in practice to the web-slinging of the recent Spider-Man games. The Hulk can charge his jumps before taking off, and then recharge while in midair. This means he'll land and immediately be able to bound off again (leaving a crater-like hole where he landed). To add to the unstoppable movement idea, all the buildings and vertical surfaces can be utilized as well. You can grasp a wall and climb it; or, if you're in a rush, you can just run up or along the wall. If you're leaping through the city, you can land against a wall, and then go soaring off in another direction. From the city streets to the highest building top, the Hulk can go anywhere and do anything.

Another big change is in the combat department. Not content to stick with the limited move set of the first game, Radical has drastically expanded the available fighting so there are now approximately 180 unique actions. Many of these are unlockable moves that show up as the game progresses. Holmes explains, "The game constantly rewards the player's combat actions and mission completion with smash points; smash points lead to new moves and new moves lead to a whole host of new ways to kick ass." Beyond simply giving players new moves to play around with, these unlockables serve the purpose of maintaining a delicate balancing act in the difficulty and continuous challenge of the game. "I wanted to capture that feeling of two players enjoying a versus fighter together, but within the context of a single player action/adventure game. This means the player gets a new move and Hulk kicks the [enemy's] ass for a while, then the AI brings out a new trick and the player has to adjust his play style to accommodate this new opponent. With enough smash points the player can buy a move that trumps that enemy ability – and the cycle begins again." Among these moves are the new and insanely fun weaponization techniques. Instead of just tossing those hunks of metal that used to be a car to the curbside, you'll be able to grind them down into huge metal fists for pummelling your opponents. Yank out a lightpost and throw it javelin-style to impale enemy mechs against nearby buildings. Holmes describes yet another option: "My current favorite weaponization is when he rips off the missile pack from the rear of an army missile artillery vehicle; he holds the entire missile pack on his shoulder and tosses missiles at his enemy rapid-fire style. Charge up the attack, and the rocket motor engages – BOOM!"



■ THE HULK SHOWS OFF ONE OF HIS NEW WEAPONIZATION TECHNIQUES

■ THE ABOMINATION SERVES AS THE HULK'S PRIMARY NEMESIS



FMV

MUCH OF PAUL JENKIN'S INVOLVING STORY IS TOLD THROUGH FULLY RENDERED CINEMATIC SEQUENCES

With the extreme moves now available to the Hulk, it is a true challenge to create foes worthy of his might. One strategy in that regard was having enemies so huge they simply couldn't be ignored. We'll be seeing the return of the Hulkbuster enemies, familiar to comic fans as tanks designed to combat the green machine's abilities. This time around, however, the Hulkbusters are totally redesigned to be giant mechs meant to go toe-to-toe with our reluctant protagonist. Many of these enemies, along with some of the other beast-like creatures that the Hulk encounters, are simply huge. Since the Hulk is already enormous, one way to make enemies impressive was to make them even bigger. Consequently, a significant portion of combat is about clambering up onto these giant foes and beating them senseless, despite their size. We saw one of the largest creatures in the form of the Devil Hulk. This boss fight effectively occurs in Banner's own subconscious, as the gigantic Devil Hulk vies for the supremacy of his mind. Hurling enormous fireballs and flinging the green Hulk about like a ragdoll, the hateful monster is impressive to say the least.

The huge scale of many of these monsters truly amps up the experience. In order to survive combat with such foes, an innovative idea was implemented to indicate the Hulk's current status. "Any comic fan knows, a core rule of the Hulk is that 'the madder he gets, the stronger he gets.' As Hulk defeats enemies, his health – his power – builds up. This means he causes more damage and can build momentum to destroy more enemies." Holmes told us. "Once Hulk has built up a critical mass of this Power, he can unleash a blast of that power in some of the special moves he has access to. If he runs out, he's toast; it's a risk-reward balancing game that is usually dealt with in several meters in other games, but due to the nature of the Hulk we managed to simplify it down to one bar." Some

■ *HUMAN OPPONENTS ARE JUST A MINOR NUISANCE*

of the coolest features of this power bar are the times when special moves become available. Normally, these super-strong attacks show up only after the Hulk has defeated numerous enemies and he truly has his adrenaline pumping. But, as a compelling expression of the way the Hulk would really function, he receives a second wind after getting badly hurt. When his power meter reaches critically low levels, he becomes thoroughly enraged, and once again has access to his super attacks. Not only is this fun, but it also helps to keep the player engaged and in the game, rather than consistently dealing with "Game Over" screens when his health has depleted.

With the consistent focus on intense and over-the-top combat and demolition, it might come as a surprise how much effort has been put into establishing a compelling and artful story. To help facilitate that goal, the team recruited the talents of Eisner award winner Paul Jenkins, a man intimately familiar with the Hulk from his long run on the comic series. Jenkins has had his hand on the spread of comics' biggest names, penning everything from Batman stories to Spider-Man tales. He was even the man Marvel tapped to write the enormously popular Wolverine "Origin" tale from 2001. Not only did Jenkins write the overall story for the new Incredible Hulk game, but also offered up much of the script as well. The game's story revolves around Banner's attempt to rid himself of the beast that has haunted his life since the infusion of gamma radiation. To do so, he enlists the aid of long time comic mainstay Doc Samson. As his psychiatrist, Doc Samson uses hypnosis to help Banner and to give him a guiding purpose and direction once he becomes the Hulk. Out to take down the Hulk is his constant foe General Ross, but the main villain this time is a man named Emil Blonsky, the head of an elite military branch called "The Division." Blonsky despises Banner for his inability to control the Hulk, and he seems to have some sort of personal grudge against the man. But after a dangerous radioactive exposure begins to alter Blonsky, the villain's hate turns inward as well. We learn early on that Blonsky is on track to become one of the Hulk's greatest foes: the Abomination. As Blonsky marshals all his forces to strike down the Hulk, a story plays out about the nature of power, the sacrifice that is often inherent to doing the right thing, and the price of giving in to one's own rage.

Given Jenkins' complex story, a powerful cast was required to voice the tale of these two warring personalities. To play Banner, the development team tapped Neal McDonough, an actor you might recognize from his roles in *Minority Report* and the intense WWII epic *Band of Brothers*. But choosing him for this role had much more to do with a lesser known credit: he was the voice of Bruce Banner in the 1996 Incredible Hulk cartoon. For Blonsky, an equally commanding vocal presence was required, and that was found in Ron Perlman. Best known for his portrayal of Hellboy in the summer comic movie, you may have most recently heard him voicing one of the key characters in Bungie's masterpiece, Halo 2. In order to give these voices an adequate background, Radical also hired Bill Brown to compose the orchestral score to the game. Brown has composed for films such as *Any Given Sunday* as well as games including the Rainbow Six and Ghost Recon series. Subsequently, with the help of the L.A. Orchestra, the soundtrack has the sweeping power of a fine film score.

■ TITANIC STRUGGLES WILL LAY WASTE TO THE CITY

■ LATCH ON TO AERIAL ENEMIES AND WRESTLE THEM TO THE GROUND

■ LEAP TALL BUILDINGS IN A SINGLE BOUND

■ TO COMBAT THE HULK'S AWESOME MIGHT, BOSSES LIKE THE DEVIL HULK ARE TRULY GIGANTIC

■ THE ABOMINATION WILL GROW AND CHANGE FORM AS THE GAME PROGRESSES

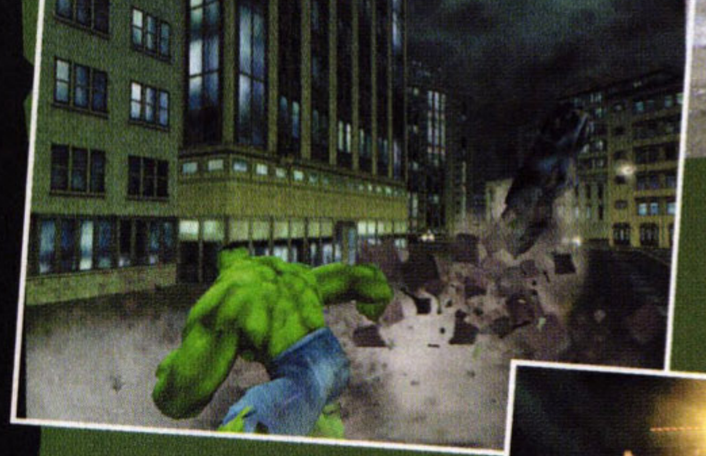
The story itself is told through a sequence of 27 distinct missions. Banner hopes to rid himself of the curse of his alter ego by building a machine that will purge the Hulk from his body. The one problem is that the ingredients needed to build such a machine are guarded deep in the heart of the city and under the protection of the military. The massive metropolis is divided up into five immense sections: downtown, city hall, urban residential, ghetto, and Chinatown. The city itself is loosely modeled after New York and Chicago, but the layout and buildings are all entirely fictional. Part of the reasoning for that decision involved the desire to create clearly recognizable locations. Often, the problem with free-roaming games like these is that the entire city starts to look the same, and it becomes impossible to figure out where you are. To avoid this dilemma, the team has worked hard to clearly delineate your location at any given time. The art director for the game, Martin Bae, filled us in on the approach to differentiating the diverse areas. "Each section has its own lighting and architectural style. The player will identify with changes to the environment lighting as they cross district areas. The cold blue lighting scheme of the financial district is a dramatic contrast to the warm red glow of Chinatown." To further give the player a sense of direction and location, landmarks were placed in each area. "Each area is lit and dressed with props and signs to enhance the visual experience as well as the look and feel of the area. We used references from major cities around the world to help define the mood and architectural aesthetic in our environments."

Though a majority of the action takes place in the newly designed city, there's also a desert landscape complete with military base where some of the missions will occur. Here, you'll be able to jump off high desert cliffs and challenge your foes in giant sandy ravines. A third location serves as a sort of central hub for the game – an abandoned church where Bruce Banner has sequestered himself as he seeks to find a cure to his monstrous affliction.

To help fill in the gaps between missions, and to give players some extra fun to boot, over 20 side quests will be scattered about the city. Remember in Spider-Man 2 when you had to rescue people and bring them to the hospital for treatment? Well, Hulk lacks some of that subtlety. Instead, he'll have a mission during which he'll try to get an entire ambulance to the hospital. That's right. You'll pick up the ambulance, smash your way through anything between you and

HULK SMASH!!!

For a beast with the destructive capability of the Hulk, a big component for believability was going to be the sounds accompanying his rampages through the city. To achieve those sounds, Radical turned to Radius 360°, a sound design studio specializing in destruction. For the phenomenal noise that the Hulk's fury could create, no simple crushing of tin cans was adequate. Instead, the group traveled to a car junkyard deep in the desert and completed an extensive recording session of destroying cars. That's right. As the pictures clearly attest, they spent a day dropping cars from obscene heights and recording the results for posterity. In addition, to simulate the Hulk's ability to rip apart vehicles, the team used heavy machinery to literally tear a van apart, piece by piece. With destructive noises in hand, the team then cooperated with Scott Morgan, the sound director on The Incredible Hulk, in integrating the chaotic noise into the larger surround sound experience. The result, when combined with the musical score and ambient noise, is an unprecedented level of immersion in the aural experience of being the Hulk.



the emergency room, and then, once there, you'll throw the vehicle into the health care facility. Hilarious. Another sidequest has you indulging the Hulk's fancy to stack as many cars on top of a skyscraper as you can manage during the time limit. There will also be 60 comic book covers hidden throughout the game world. All of them show great issues from the history of the Hulk comics. Each of these extras helps to expand the concept of a little boy's giant sandbox – a really mean, ugly, and hyper-actively destructive little boy.

The Incredible Hulk plays great even now, several months prior to release. The world of the game is suitably gigantic in order to house the huge persona that is the Hulk. Destruction is downright rampant, and the Hulk's savage fury in the game is exceeded only by his unbelievable strength and speed. With the goal in mind of making the best superhero game ever, Radical Games is pushing the boundaries of mayhem with their re-imagining of the Hulk's universe. As for the green beast himself, he looks to be embroiled in a tale fully worthy of the comic legacy from which he emerged. His power is immense, but even in the throes of his unbridled rage, he still somehow manages to be a force for good. Just don't make him angry. You wouldn't like him when he's angry. ■■■

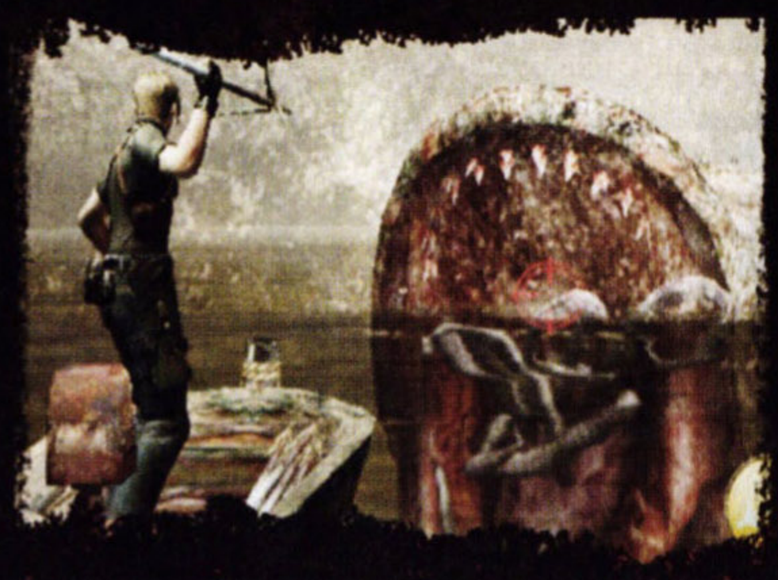
MAKING THE HULK INCREDIBLE →

To truly capture the essence of the Hulk, Radical worked with comic artist Brian Hitch (*Uncanny X-Men*, *The Ultimates*, *The Authority*) in the design for the character. Numerous sketches and full fledged comic art pieces were created as inspiration for the style and look that the game designers and animators could work towards. The character design that has emerged is a Hulk that is massive and intense. His overwrought breathing and powerful movement make the Hulk pulse with power and energy.

■ EVERY EXPLOSION IS LIKE A SNOWFLAKE – UNIQUE AND PRECIOUS

■ EVEN CLIMBING WALLS LEAVES BEHIND A SWATH OF DESTRUCTION

FORGET WHAT YOU THINK YOU KNOW



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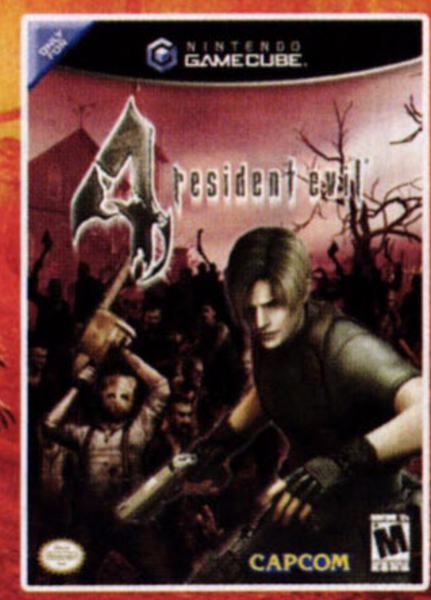

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WWE'S RISING STAR

Wrestling is fake. At least, that's what its detractors say. They say that no one really gets hurt, and wrestlers aren't real athletes. Nothing could be further from the truth. While the outcome of the matches may be predetermined, the men and women in the ring have been conditioned to pull off amazing feats of agility and withstand punishment far greater than what even the toughest "real" athlete could take. Wrestling is very, very real, and anyone who says otherwise obviously has no clue as to what wrestling is actually about. It's about competition, drama, and the astonishing limits of human ability.

Such energizing activity obviously makes good material for video games. With its WWE license, THQ has recently released some truly engaging wrestling titles that devoted fans have eaten up. Both the PlayStation 2 and GameCube have seen WWE titles that pleased critics and were embraced by fans. The Xbox, however, has not – until now. With the release of WWE Wrestlemania 21 THQ hopes to provide a wrestling game that will be just as beloved by fans, and bring in some new players who may have never touched a wrestling title with its exciting new features.

XBOX

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** STUDIO GIGANTE **> RELEASE** MARCH

Many players unfortunately view wrestling games as niche titles, and the Xbox series is a somewhat unlikely choice to change their minds. The two RAW titles released on Xbox were not critical hits and were easily eclipsed by their PS2 and GameCube counterparts. Since no one was really in love with the series, THQ chose it to start a wrestling renaissance, building a new game entirely from scratch. The publisher wanted a developer with fighting game experience and enlisted the skills of Studio Gigante, the team behind the Xbox fighter Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus. Studio Gigante is led by none other than John Tobias, one of the co-creators of Mortal Kombat. It's safe to say that this development team knows something about fighting games.

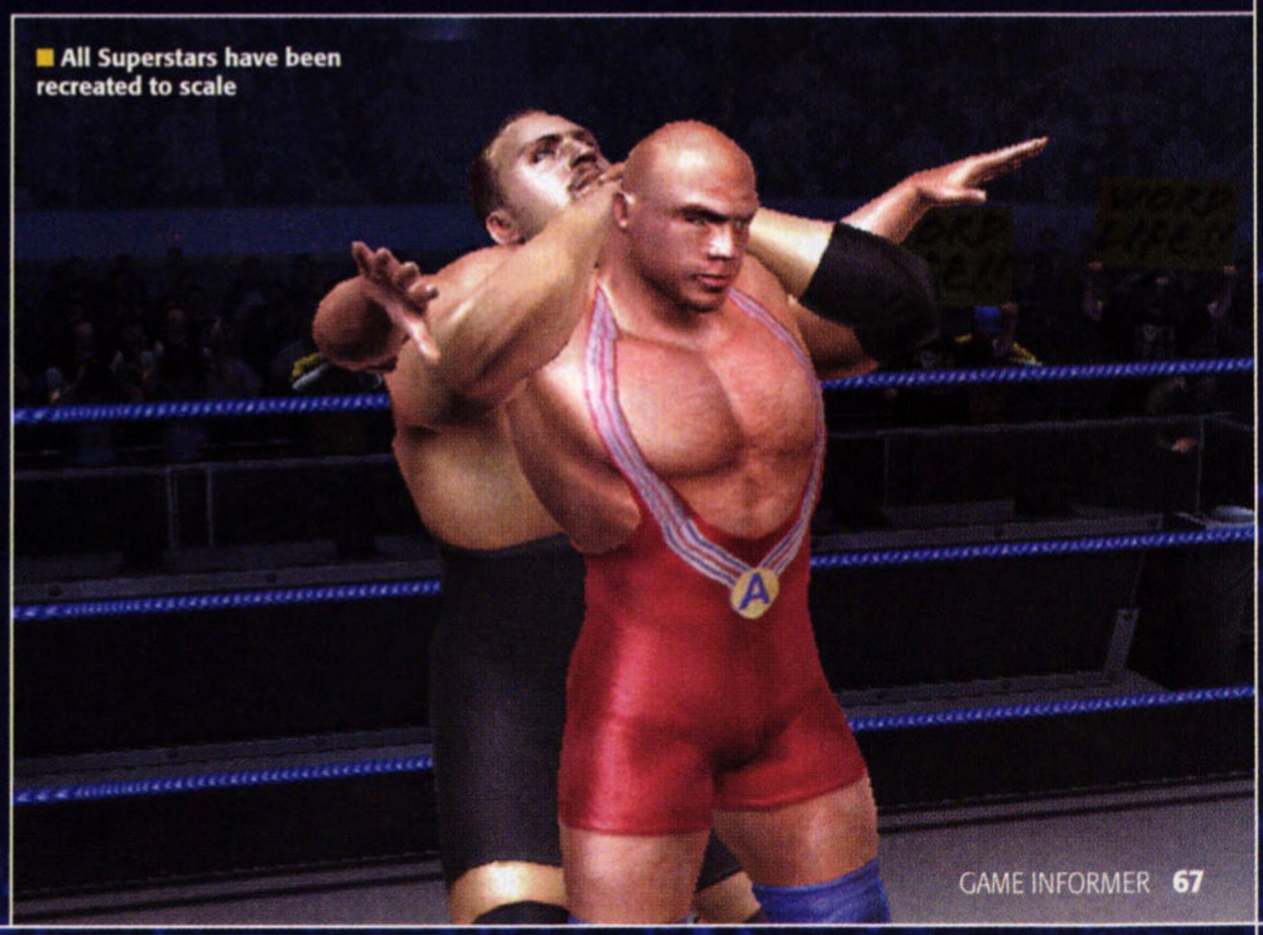
Studio Gigante defined four clear goals when designing Wrestlemania 21: first impression, gameplay, online functions, and presentation. The first impression goal is all about stunning potential gamers with graphics and fluid animation, while the gameplay goal is obviously to ensure that it plays as good as it looks and offers a compelling story mode. Unique online features add incentive to play on Xbox Live, and the presentation creates the overall look, feel, sound, and mood of a real WWE event. Based on what we've seen and played, it looks like WWE Wrestlemania will succeed on all counts.

It would be hard to have anything other than a strongly positive first reaction to this title. Without a doubt, Wrestlemania 21 is the best-looking wrestling game to date. The character models are the most accurate representations of their real-life counterparts yet; not only are their faces dead on, but their physiques are as well. Hundreds of reference photos of each Superstar were consulted, and everything from the grain of their hair to the material of their costumes has been painstakingly recreated.

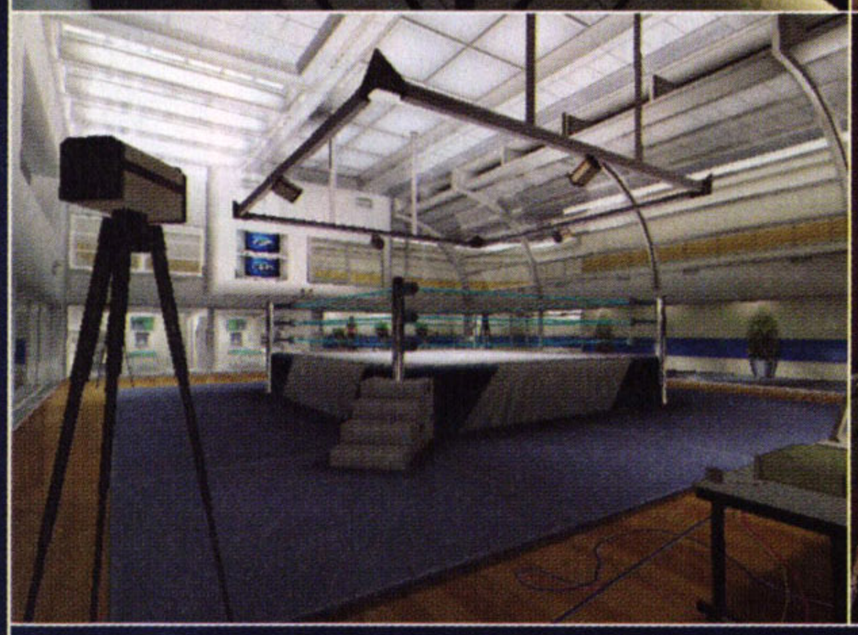
Even standing still in the ring, the characters look great. But once they're in motion, they look amazing. For the first time, the moves of every single playable character are based on motion capturing actual WWE wrestlers. The combatants move with such fluidity and grace that Wrestlemania 21 captures the flow of an actual WWE match better than any game that has come before.

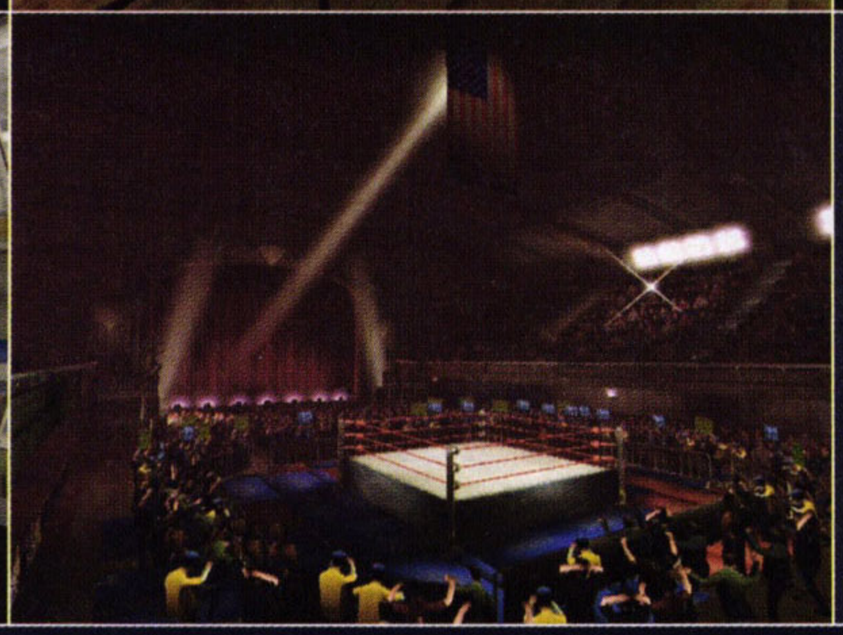
As incredible as the wrestlers themselves are, they are only one part of what makes the overall look so impressive. The environments themselves take the illusion of reality even further. The various arenas, including both SmackDown! and RAW venues, as well as all major Pay Per View locations, have been recreated with the same

■ Thirty-five Superstars are playable, along with five Legends and six Divas



■ All Superstars have been recreated to scale





Before you can enter the WWE, you'll have to prove yourself in the world of independent wrestling. You will find yourself fighting in environments like these until you earn an invitation to compete on WWE Velocity

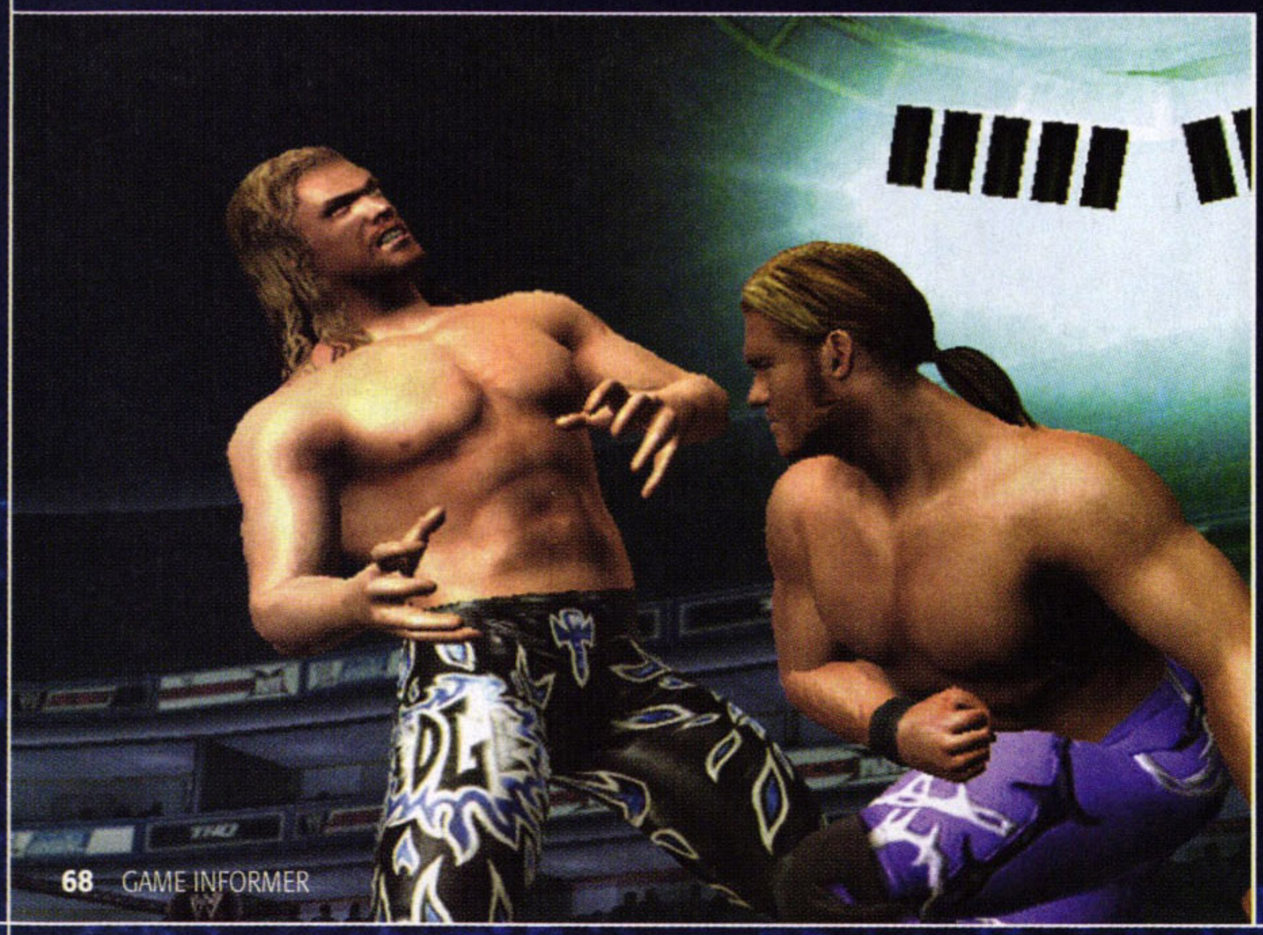
attention to detail as the wrestlers. Gigantic crowds surge and swell in the background, reacting to the match unfolding before them. Each arena has its own color scheme, and the various light sources illuminate your wrestler in real time. In short, the game never looks anything short of stunning.

Equally as impressive is the actual gameplay. The basic controls will feel familiar to anyone who has played the recent WWE titles, but with a few important tweaks. First of all, there are now two grapple buttons, which greatly increases the amount of moves in a Superstar's arsenal. The first grapple button locks up your opponent for powerful slams, throws, and other damaging moves, while the second slaps on submission holds. As is traditional in wrestling titles, the direction pressed on the d-pad in conjunction with the grapple button determines the move performed, as does the length of the button press itself. The addition of a second grapple button thus results in a huge move set for each playable character.

The second grapple button is a pretty noticeable departure for a wrestling game, and the countering system features a similarly large enhancement. The basics are unchanged: The right trigger counters strikes, and the left trigger counters grapples. The added depth comes from a new addition called pro reversals. A grapple can be countered initially by pulling the left trigger, but if you miss your chance, you still have an opportunity to turn things around with a pro reversal. Every grapple move in the game has a point where the defender can turn the tables. Based on real wrestling reactions, hitting the left trigger at just the right moment will allow you to turn the move against your attacker. Watching the animation of a move will reveal the split second in which your attacker makes himself vulnerable – pulling the trigger at this precise moment will put him in a world of pain.

It sounds tricky, but actually works amazingly smoothly. In our time with the game, we used pro reversals so frequently (and had them used on us) it was sometimes difficult to remember who initially attacked whom. Pro reversals can be used against any move, from the quickest slam to the mightiest finishing blow. Every single move in the game has its own unique pro reversal, meaning you can play for weeks before you see all of the possible counters.

There are a few other tweaks to gameplay, such as the addition of a dedicated Irish whip button and the Heat meter, which will make Finishing Moves available when filled by pull-



Every move can be countered with the pro reversal system

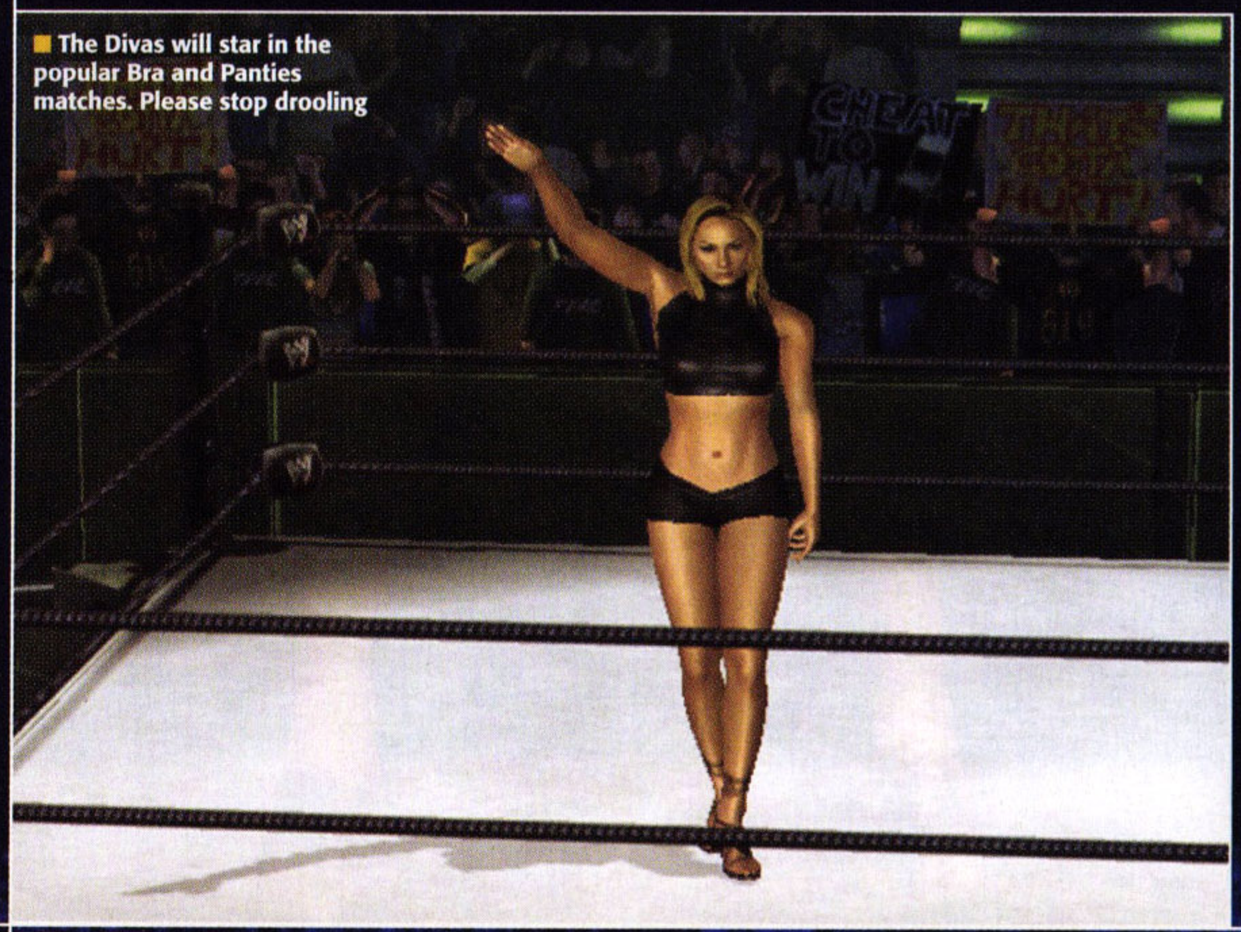
Each wrestler's entrance has been recreated as exactly as possible

ing off impressive moves. Otherwise, the controls feel quite similar to the other WWE titles. Also like those other titles, Wrestlemania 21 features a robust create-a-wrestler area and story mode. The character creation mode won't allow you to design disproportionate fighters, but will still offer plenty of accessories and costumes to make your character look like a freak. Studio Gigante president John Tobias explained that they wanted to ensure that the created wrestlers looked as good as the real WWE stars, and thus removed the ability to create deformed characters. But, they replaced that ability with something more interesting: wrestling expertise selections. When you initially create a character, you can choose from four different classes: Aerialist, Traditionalist, Power Wrestler, and Technician. Each class has a different focus, and changes the way your character's stats increase. Aerialists focus on high-flying moves, while Traditionalists are balanced warriors. Power Wrestlers focus on strength and big moves, and Technicians are adept at countering and submissions. Aerialists can't become as strong as the other classes, but are faster and more agile, while Power Wrestlers have a low top speed and develop strength faster.

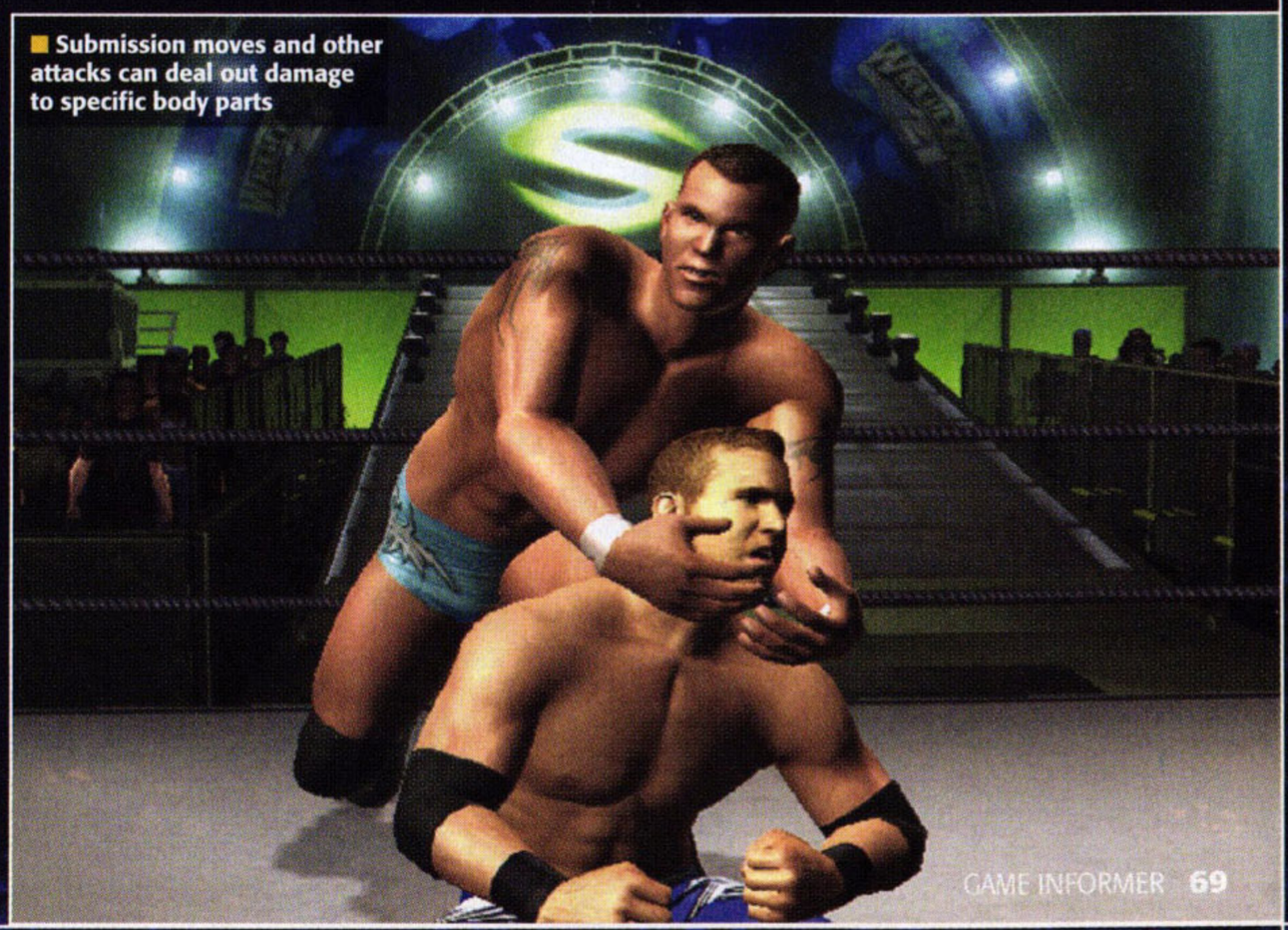
Regardless of which expertise you choose, story mode will take you through the rise from amateur wrestler to the star of the Wrestlemania 21 event. Before you enter the WWE, you must build your character's skills by proving yourself in venues like high school gyms, independent wrestling clubs, VFW-style halls, training facilities and the like. Each of these environments is as fully realized as the WWE arenas, and offer added touches like environmental interactions. By starting you off in such unglamorous locations, Studio Gigante hopes to offer something different and create the sensation that players are climbing the ladder to fame, starting with the bottom rung.

While these locations are a nice change of pace for a wrestling game, the majority of career mode takes place with your character in the WWE, and true to the source material, expect the story to take plenty of twists and turns. The goal, of course, is to win in the main event at Wrestlemania 21. But this expansive story mode isn't the only place you can use your created character; both existing Superstars and created characters can duke it out with others across the world through Wrestlemania 21's online mode.

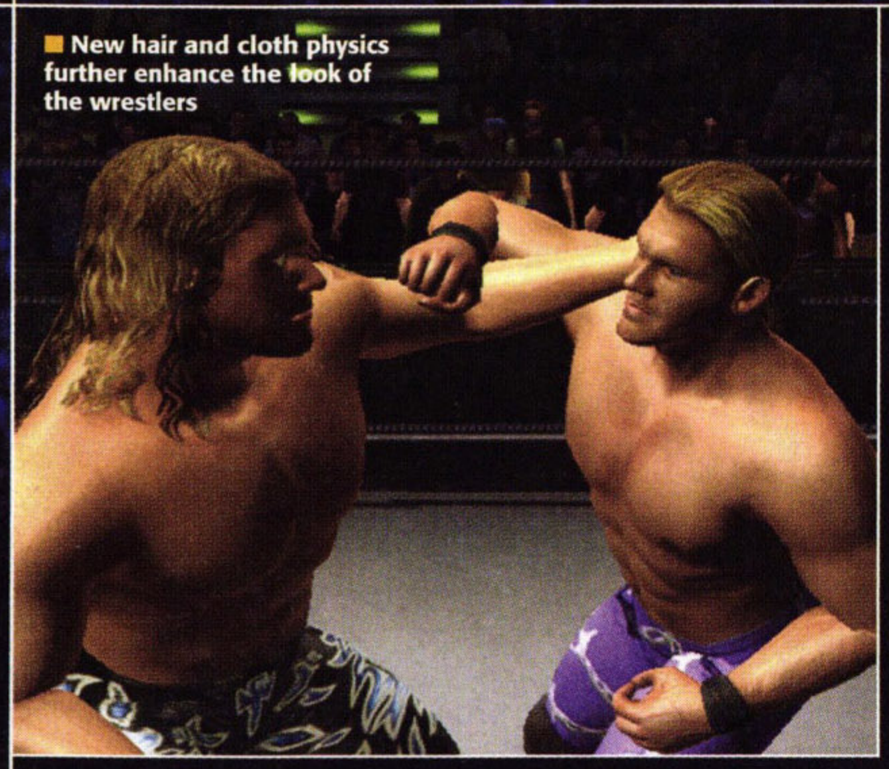
The online function of Wrestlemania 21 is one of the most impressive aspects of the game. Every single match type is playable online, and up to four players can battle it out via Xbox Live. As if the prospect of duking it out with three other gamers in an online Hell in the Cell match weren't enough, Studio Gigante wanted to give players an actual attainable goal. Much like SmackDown! vs. RAW, Wrestlemania 21 allows you to create your own belt, name it, and decorate it any way you like. By playing on your local Xbox, you'll build the level of prestige and desirability of your belt. Once it has attained a certain level of prestige, you can put that belt on the line by taking it online. Should you lose your belt to a challenger, you've lost it. It's gone from your Xbox forever – unless you win it back.



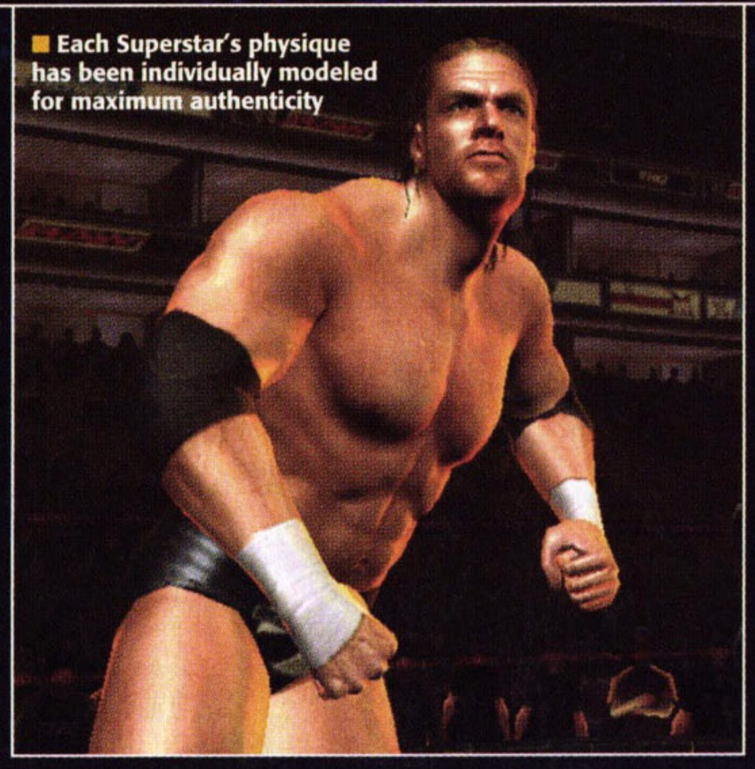
The Divas will star in the popular Bra and Panties matches. Please stop drooling



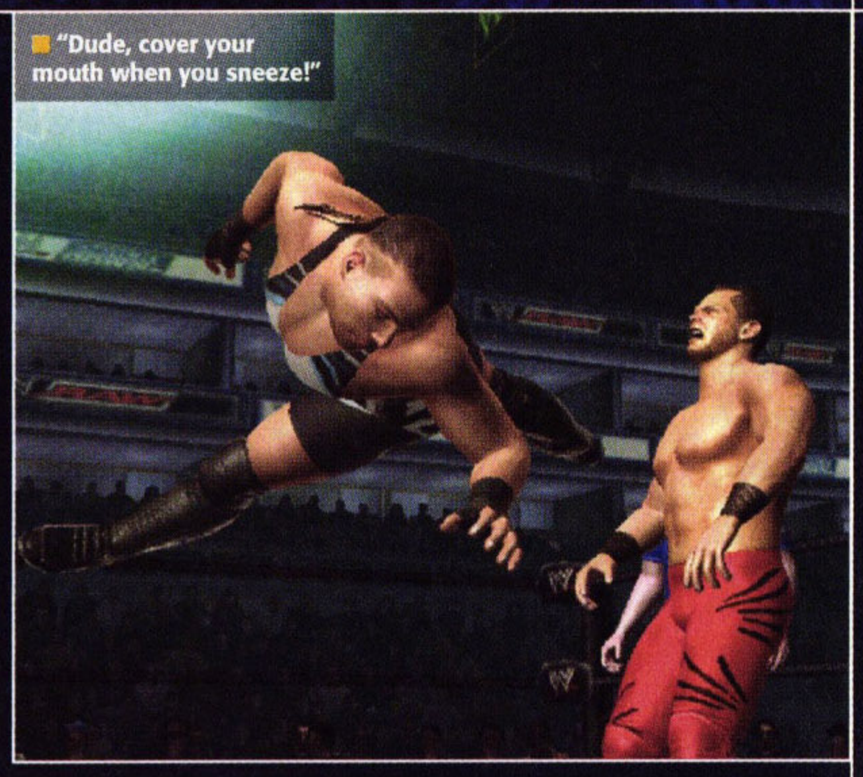
Submission moves and other attacks can deal out damage to specific body parts



New hair and cloth physics further enhance the look of the wrestlers



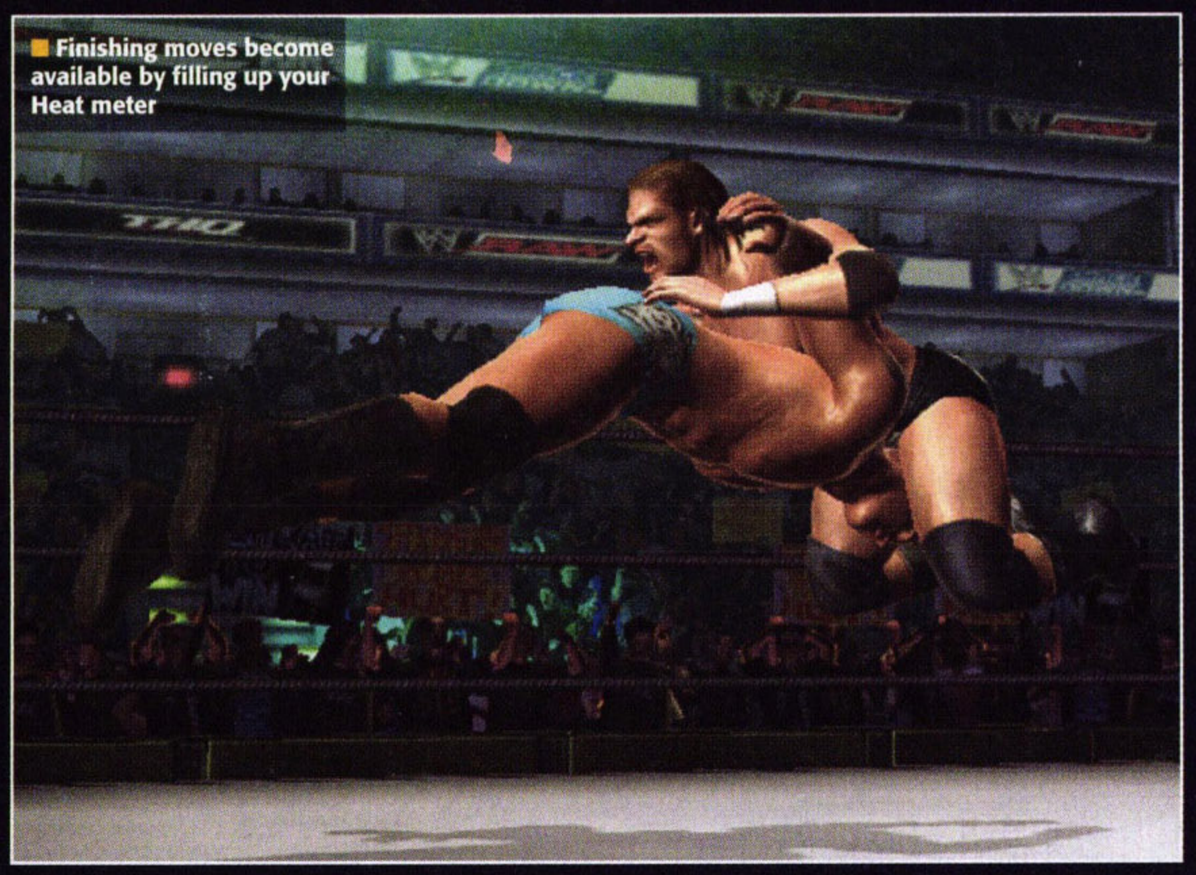
Each Superstar's physique has been individually modeled for maximum authenticity



"Dude, cover your mouth when you sneeze!"

Similar to the create-a-belt feature in SmackDown! vs. RAW, earning cash in the game allows you to design and decorate your belt any way you please. Any belts you win online will become unified with your belt, and you'll be able to view both the history and appearances of all the belts you've won. With this competitive collection aspect, Studio Gigante hopes to give gamers a clearly defined reason to play online that's more than just climbing a leader board. Of course, those and the other aspects of Xbox Live 3.0 will be included as well.

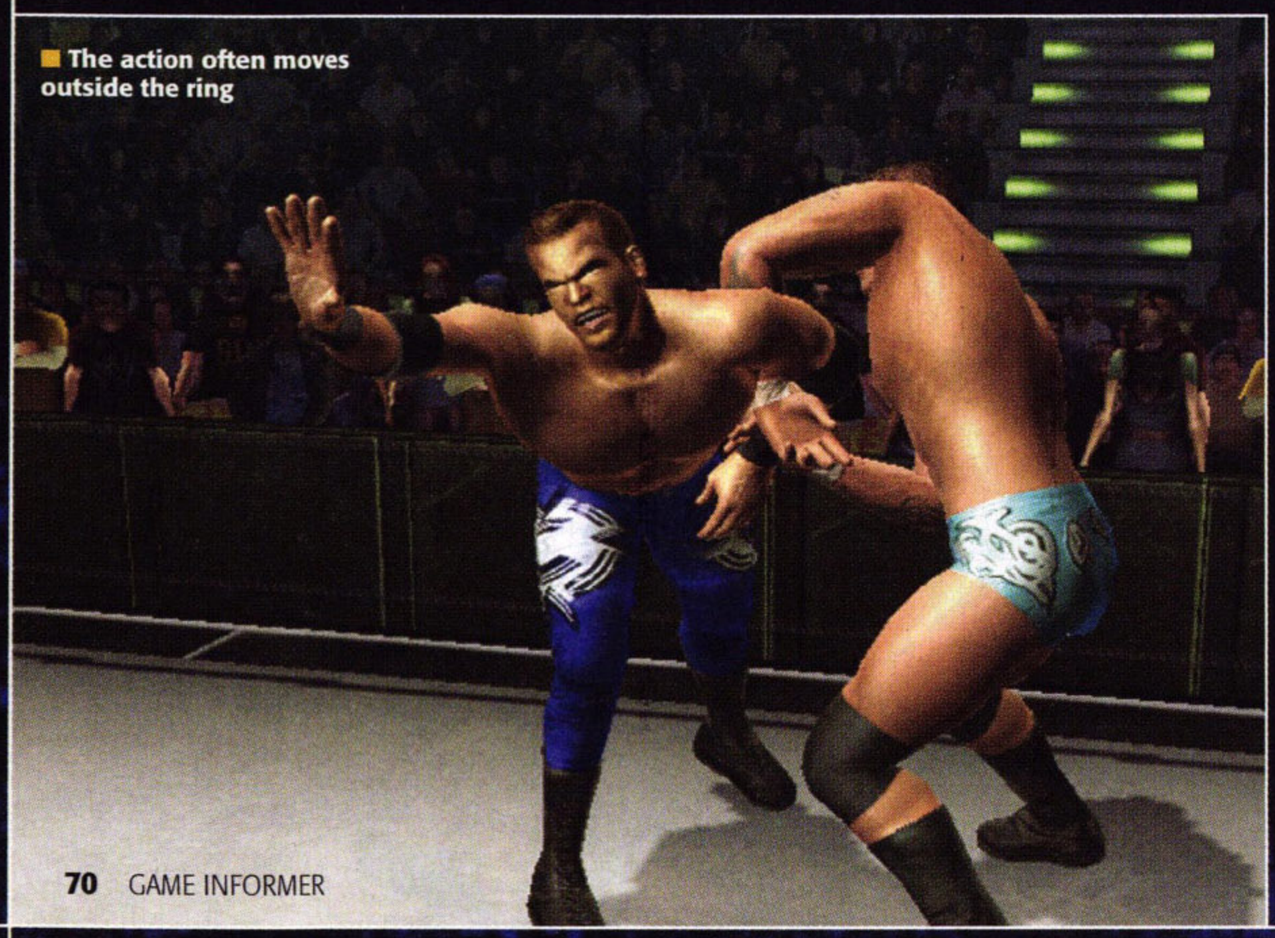
The Xbox Live features are present to ensure that Wrestlemania 21 has a full and rewarding online experience, but those who aren't yet wired to the information highway will find the title every bit as engaging. Thanks to the developer's goal of creating the ultimate presentation for a wrestling game, players will be immersed in the world of the WWE like never before. Obviously the character models are amazing, and they look even more stunning in motion, thanks to their motion-captured performances. Actual WWE wrestlers motion captured every entrance, every taunt, and every move in the game. Each movement captured onscreen is directly lifted from real wrestlers, creating the most authentic animation the genre has yet seen. Reactions are also contextual; kick your foe in the arm, and he'll grab the injured limb. Stomp his stomach and he'll double up. Many wrestling games have had part-specific damage, and this one is no different, but few have animated specific injuries for every attack.



Finishing moves become available by filling up your Heat meter

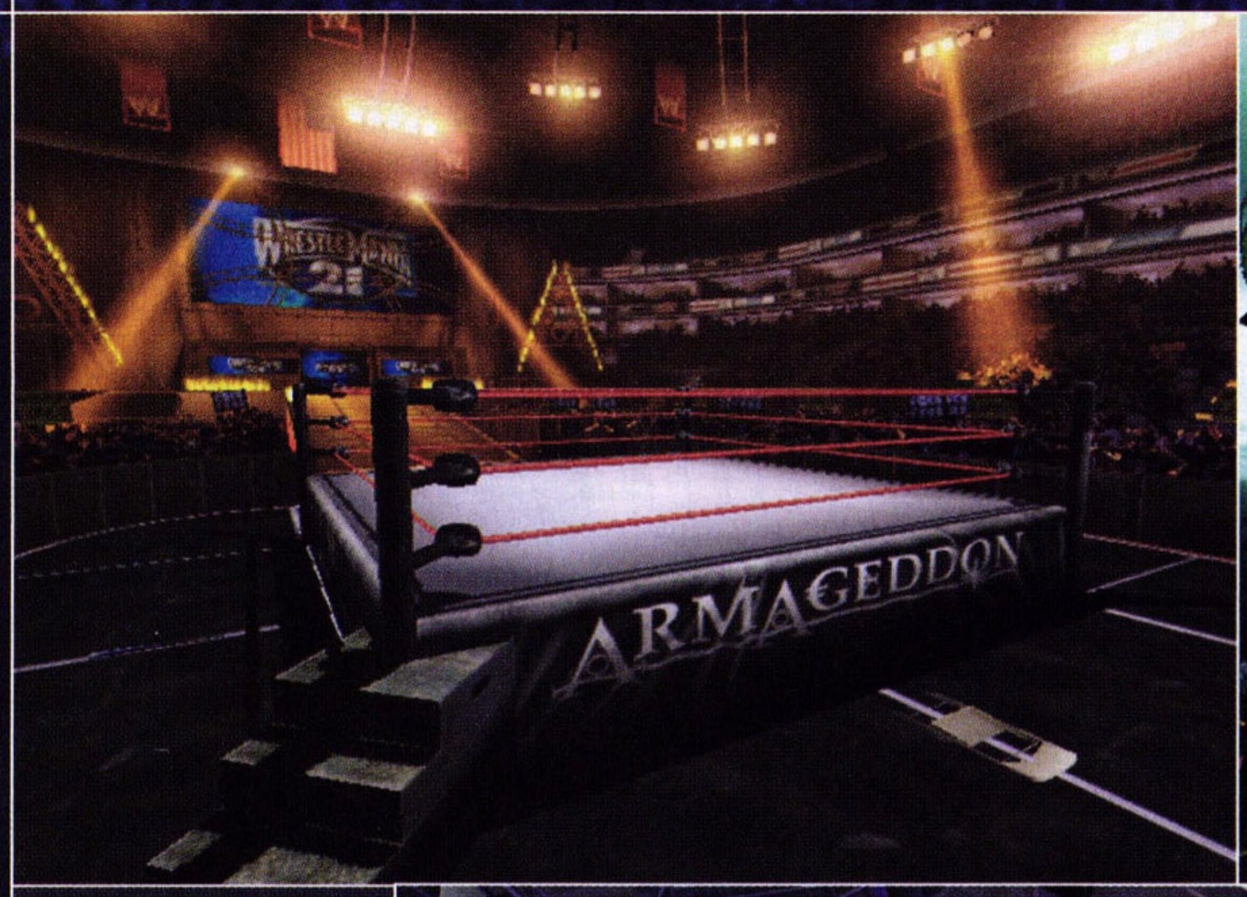
The faces of the combatants will also reveal their status, as their expressions will change in real time as they give or take punishing damage.

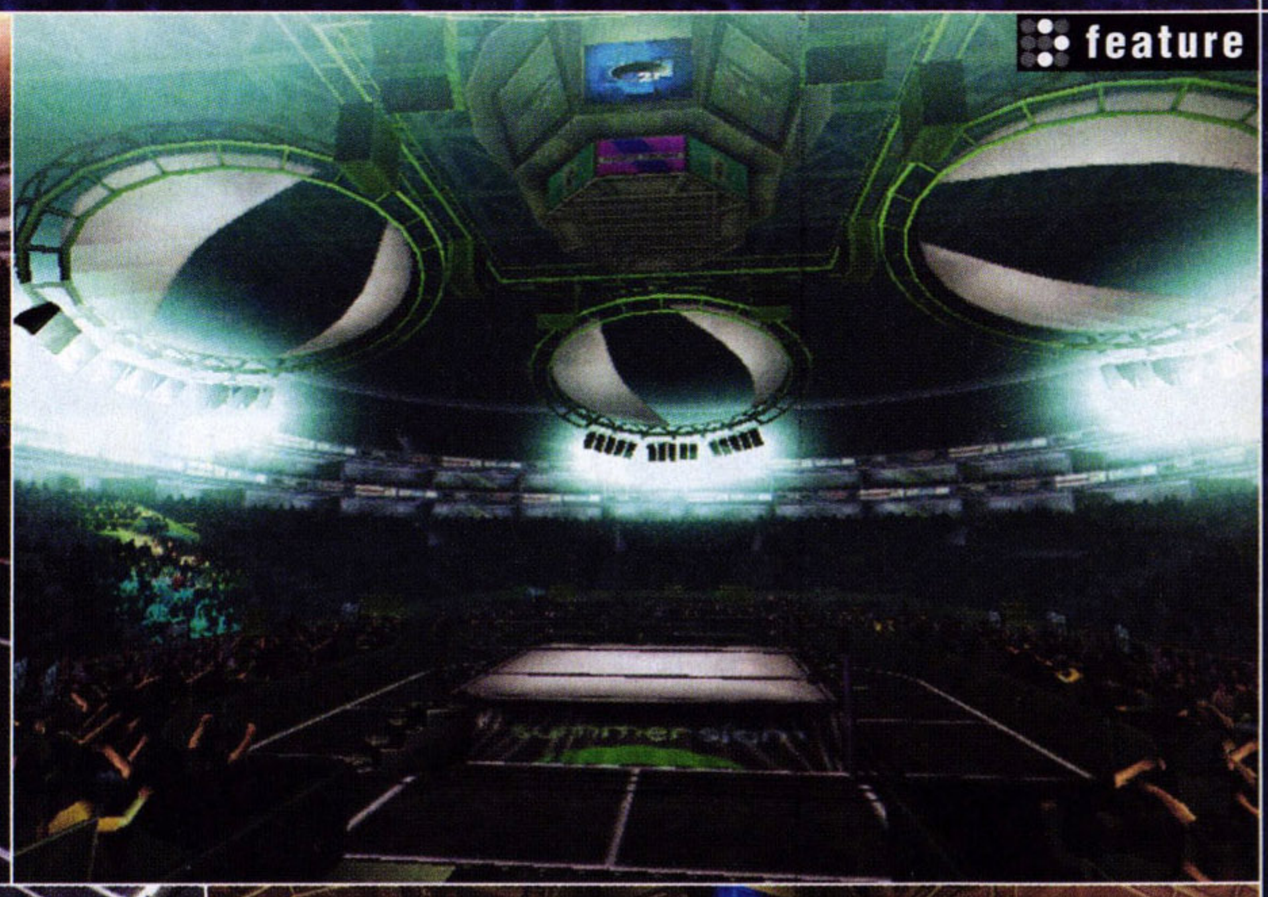
Each and every Superstar also lent their voice to the game, and for the first time, all character models feature full lip-syncing. Your created character will also speak (a feature missing from earlier WWE titles) and you'll even have your choice of voices. Obviously, sound is a huge part of recreating the WWE atmosphere. Both SmackDown! and RAW's announcer teams will provide commentary to your matches, and will sport about 50 percent more lines than SmackDown! vs. RAW. But just as important as sound is the TV-style camera system. Cameras will cut and zoom to get the best view on the action, as well as to recreate the show as exactly as possible. However, Wrestlemania 21 will also use camera angles and tricks that aren't possible in real life to accentuate the action. Finishing Moves are especially dramatic. When a player pulls off a successful Finisher, the camera will zoom in, play in slow motion, replay the



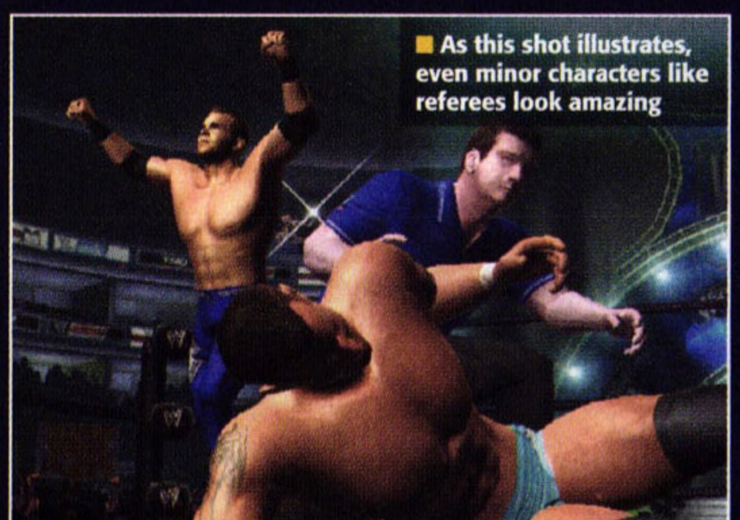
The action often moves outside the ring

"Uhh...hi."





Sixteen major WWE arenas are present, and have been recreated in painstaking detail



■ As this shot illustrates, even minor characters like referees look amazing

move, or otherwise highlight the action. The effect truly emphasizes how powerful and extreme these moves are.

Wrestling is all about being over the top. The moves are crippling, the story lines are filled with twists and turns that put soap operas to shame, and the wrestlers are simultaneously athletes, actors, and comedians. Those who understand the appeal of wrestling will immediately recognize that all of these things have been incorporated into Wrestlemania 21, and move this title to the top of their most anticipated games list. The people at Studio Gigante have poured their experience and love of wrestling into this title, and it shows. It shows so much, in fact, that Wrestlemania 21 looks likely to reach across the lines of wrestling fans and appeal to those gamers simply searching for a fun, good-looking game with a solid career mode and enticing online play. This is a game that will help people understand why wrestling has such a devoted fan base. The energy and excitement of the WWE is in this game, perhaps more so than any title to come before. It goes without saying that those who watch wrestling will certainly play this game, and we wouldn't be surprised if many people who play the game, discovering the excitement of pro wrestling, find themselves checking out the TV shows for the first time. ■■■

■ This shot details how much drama the new facial expressions add to a match

■ Just like real life, Christian looks like a jerk

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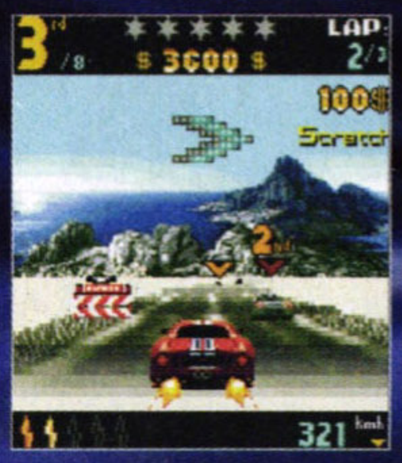

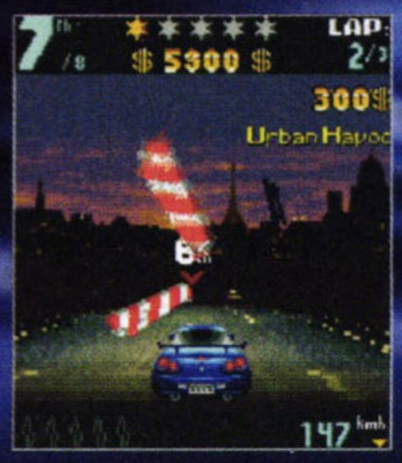

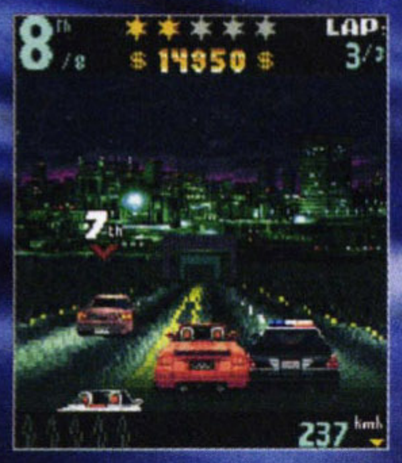

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■ Check out Law's pumped up shoulder region – it looks like he's implanted a bevy of woodland creatures under his skin

■ Dynamic lighting and a completely overhauled graphics engine make the game look smokin'

PLAYSTATION 2

Tekken 5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO LTD **> RELEASE** SPRING

KING OF IRON FIST

With a solid decade under its belt, the Tekken franchise has flourished by distinguishing itself among the fighting elite. Namco is digging deep into the company's bag of tricks to really make the latest entry, Tekken 5, a dream come true for fans and a celebration of all that the series has achieved (20 million units sold worldwide is certainly something to honor). We recently got a healthy amount of hands-on time with the two-player fighter and are pleased to see how well the new game is balancing tradition and innovation.

After E3, we knew of three new characters (Asuka Kazama, Raven, and Feng Wei). Playing with each of them, the balance they bring to the 20-character lineup (not counting unlockable, unannounced characters) is perfect. Feng Wei and Raven are both great fighters to choose if you're looking for a balance between power and speed. Other fighters, although not new to the series, have decisively new looks. Check out the screenshot of Law – the fan favorite has been pumped up to near WWE standards, but hasn't sacrificed any of his unquestionable swiftness.

One big change for the series is how the characters' appearances will change through the game – not because you unlock new costumes, but because characters' appearance can be customized to a degree we've never seen in a Tekken title. Throughout the game, players will be able to use fight money earned in battles to buy hats, glasses, full costumes, and a number of other hilarious additions. We didn't get to see this feature in action, but what we heard certainly has our interest piqued.

From our time with the game, it's also abundantly clear how much the Tekken series has been updated from a graphical point of view – the stages and characters really rival other recent fighters, which is saying a lot. We played in a handful of different areas, each with different graphical touches. The fiery temple stage has heat distortion when fighters near the flames, and a moonlit field features soft lighting, waving grasses, and a really nice dreamy feel.

With all of this technical and gameplay innovation (we've also heard of an action/adventure side game, although we didn't get to see any of it), it's good to see how the core fighting still holds up, and the graphics only make it that much more of a joy to play. Honestly, we can't think of a better way to honor this series' tenth anniversary than to pump up the game in exactly the ways that Namco has planned. ■■■

■ Dirty, underground warehouses are only one example of new stage types in the game

Old favorites (and their historic movesets) are returning

Characters each have some piece of their wardrobe that sways with real physics

Blade lookalike? Maybe, but we played as him and he's a nicely balanced fighter

Swaying plants and a soft lighting effect are stunning in motion

Internet Connection required for PlayStation®2 online play and Xbox LIVE™. 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

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Think you know what's up?

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NFL STREET 2

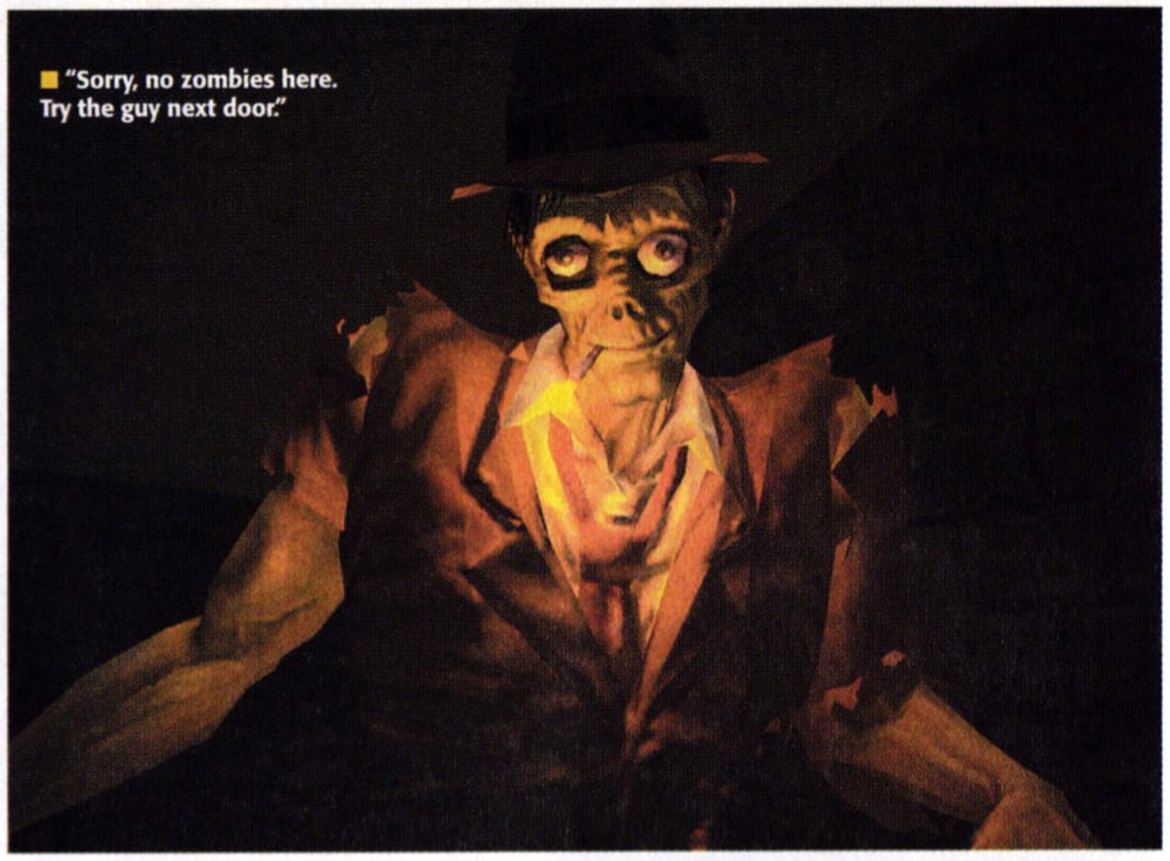
in stores December 26

The game's played in the streets, but it's won in the air. Master off-the-wall, "I can peep my crib from up here" catches, jukes and end zone dives. Then take your game around Bay City and tax other neighborhood squads whether they play Jump Ball Battle or Crush the Carrier — all while building your skills and recruiting players on your quest to Own the City.

The high flyin' football season takes off at nflstreet2.com.

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Mild Violence

XBOX · XBOX LIVE · NINTENDO GAMECUBE · PlayStation 2 · ONLINE BROADBAND AND DIAL-UP · NFL · PLAYERS INC

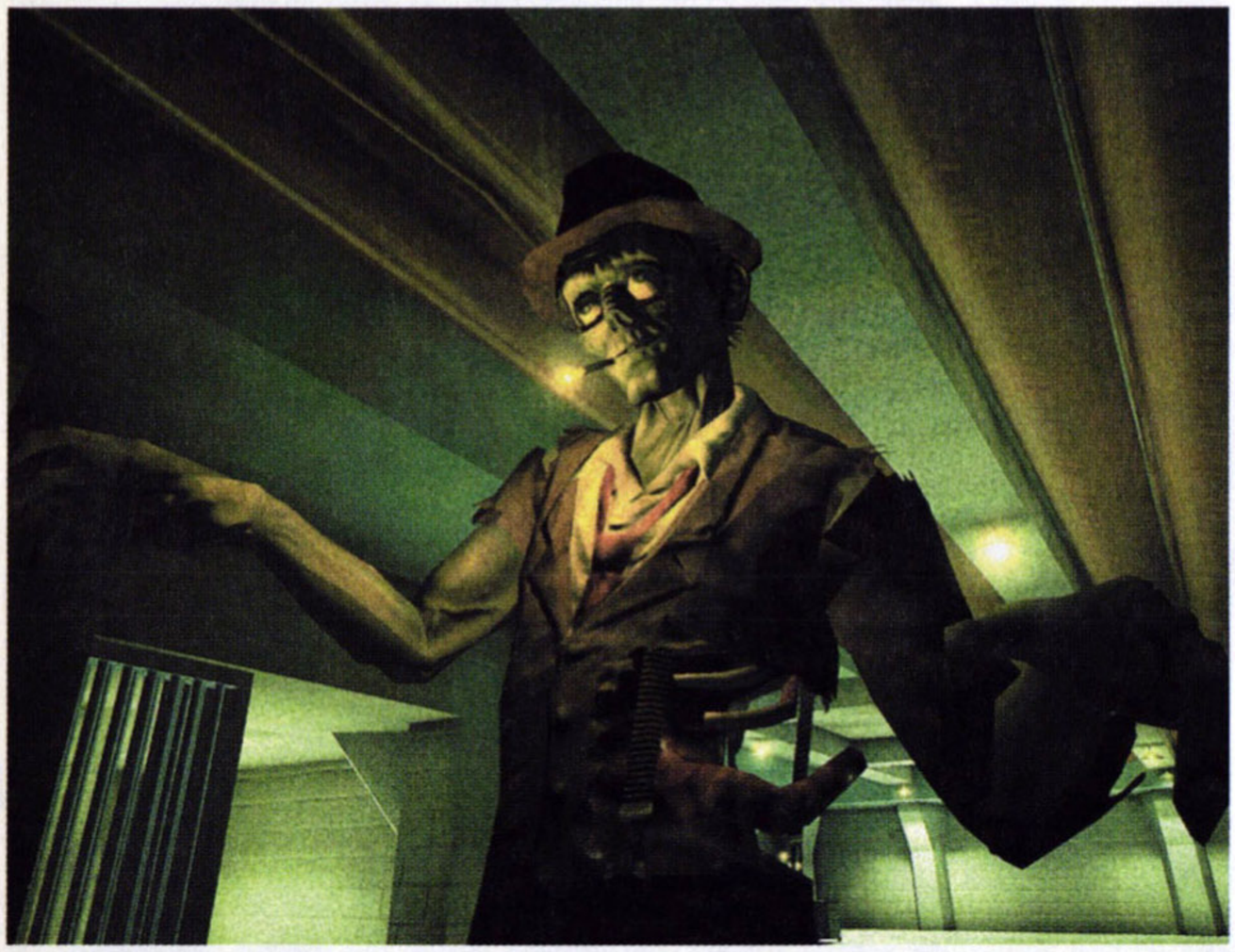


■ "Sorry, no zombies here. Try the guy next door."

XBOX | PC | MAC

Stubbs the Zombie in "Rebel Without a Pulse"

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ASPYR MEDIA **> DEVELOPER** WIDELOAD GAMES **> RELEASE** SUMMER



RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD

When Bungie founder Alex Seropian left the company to start Wideload Games, speculation on the studio's first project quickly became the talk of the gaming world. Word spread that it would be an action game based on the Halo engine – and it is. But nobody expected it to be a game like this.

In "Rebel Without a Pulse," players take on the role of Stubbs the Zombie, who is, you guessed it, not exactly alive. The game takes place in 1959 in the town of Punchbowl, PA, a city envisioned as an example of what all towns would be like in the 21st century. Awakening 26 years after being murdered, the former traveling salesman decides that Punchbowl seems like a good place to rule with an iron (yet rotting) fist. However, the town's founder – a wealthy industrialist named Andrew Monday – won't allow this, leading to an all-out war between the living and the dead. This time, however, the dead are the ones interested in truth, justice, and love. Yes, there is a love story in all this madness.

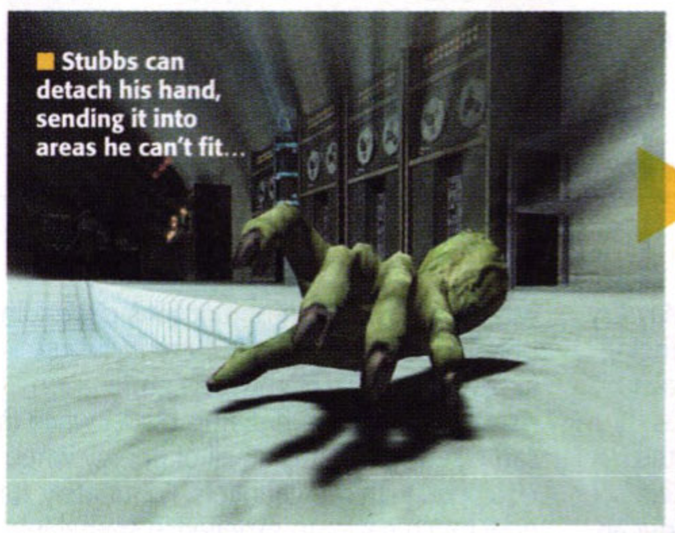
Although zombies are widely known to be slow, shuffling beasts, expect this game to deliver a fast-paced action experience – one like no game you have ever seen before. Wideload promises an experience every bit as intense and frenetic as Halo, only with a more twisted bent. As a zombie, Stubbs' main attack involves cracking open peoples' heads and feasting on the goo inside, but it is far from the only trick in his arsenal. Stubbs can use parts of his own decaying body as weapons: he can throw explosive bits of his own stomach, spit vile zombie juices, kill with his deadly

■ Guys like these make your (un)life hell, but they sure taste great

■ Stubbs loves the taste of brains, but is otherwise a pretty nice guy

"Hold still while I adjust your neck...there"

Creating a zombie horde is key to taking on some of the tougher enemies



Stubbs can detach his hand, sending it into areas he can't fit...

...and use it to possess unsuspecting humans

undead stench, and even throw his own head like a bowling ball. He can also detach his hand and send it scurrying into tight places and can even use the severed limb to possess people. Once taken over, the helpless human's weapon is totally under Stubbs'control. The heroic zombie will never actually fire a single bullet in the game, although his possessed pals will certainly lay down heavy curtains of lead.

Possession isn't the only way Stubbs can bring the living to his side. As anyone who has ever seen a George Romero movie knows, those bitten by zombies become zombies. Anyone Stubbs kills will rise again and join him in an unholy zombie army. The walking dead will seek out the living, attack them, and turn the poor souls into the zombies themselves. These hordes of the undead will certainly be one of Stubbs' most powerful weapons in his battle against the horrors of the living world. Of course, the humans will have quite an arsenal to use against him. As Punchbowl is a city of the future, expect to see sci-fi influenced weapons along with the full host of conventional firearms.

On his quest, Stubbs will encounter foes like mad scientists, angry militiamen, Monday's elite guards, and even a deadly barbershop quartet. Our hero will battle them all with his unique arsenal, cracking jokes and destroying the city with his zombie strength all the while. This title is definitely sounding like one of the most unique games to come down the pike in a long time, and we certainly can't wait. Any game in which you can feast on the brains of the living is okay with us. ■■■

Man, *Thriller* is a good video!

Even though you're a zombie, you'll still meet some guys who can kick your ass

"Oh man! The inside of your skull really stinks"

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PLAYSTATION 2

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 1 **> RELEASE** MARCH 8

THE PRODIGAL SON OF SPARDA

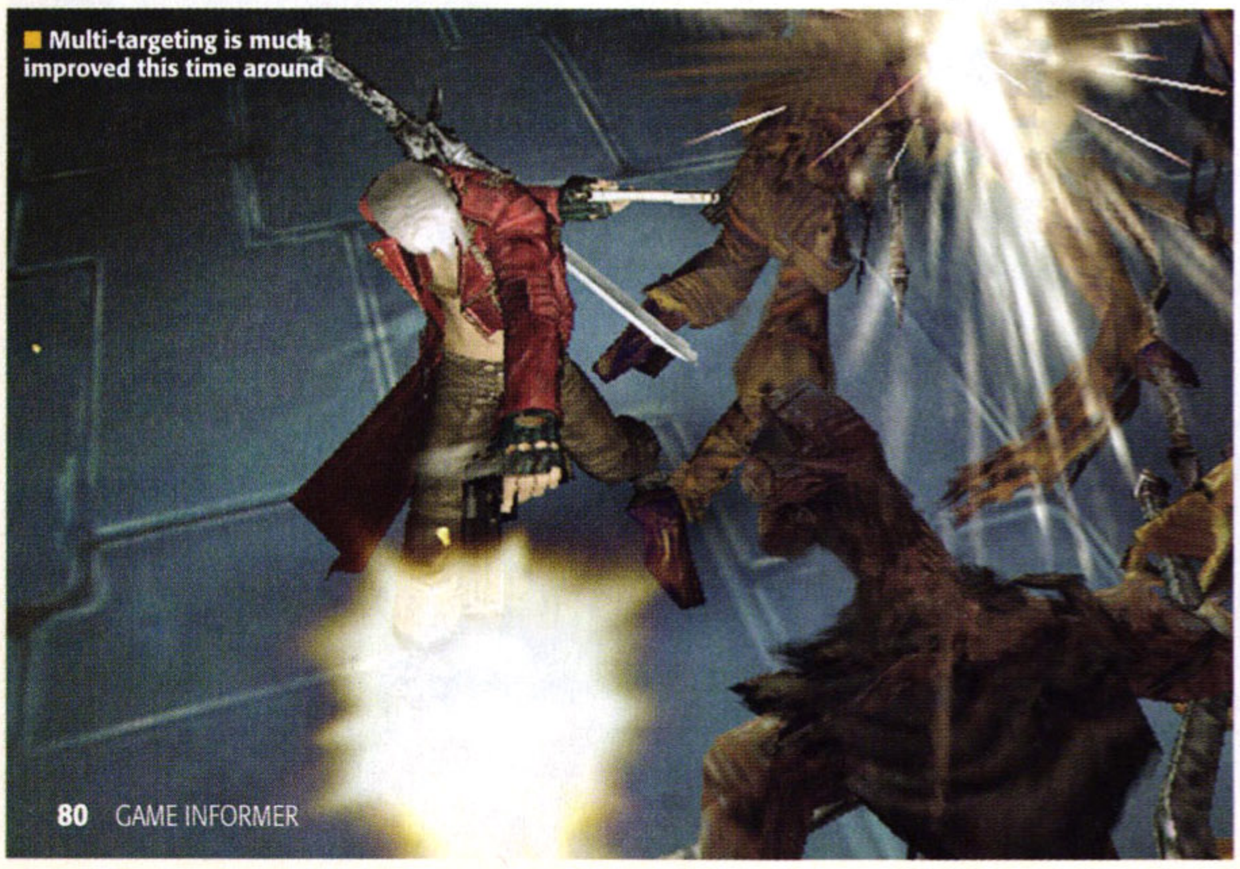
It's time to make demonic powers and homemade handguns cool again. After starring in one of the biggest video game disappointments in history, Dante has some work to do in regaining the respect of gamers. Fortunately, we were able to spend some time getting reacquainted with the devil hunter in Capcom's new Devil May Cry 3 and are happy to say that Dante is up to the task. We could spend this entire preview rattling off the ways that DMC 3 is different from DMC 2 (the list is long and encouraging), but even more interesting are the new features being added to augment and expand the addictive gameplay we all came to love in the series' first iteration.

We don't want to give away too much of the story, but can say that the game centers on Dante discovering his latent demonic abilities as he pursues his brother Vergil. Along the way he encounters a female demon hunter named Lady, who fights alongside him on some occasions and shoots him in the face on others. Compelling plots have never been a trademark of the Devil May Cry series, but this is one of the things changing with the new entry. Before and after each mission, players are treated to gorgeous cinematic scenes (most of which use the in-game engine) that flesh out characters and their relationships. Don't worry about an overdose of jibber-jabber, though – most of the cutscenes are loaded with insane, jaw-dropping action spectacles choreographed by Yuji Shimomura (the action director of the stylish Japanese film *Versus*).

The addition of styles (fighting techniques that give Dante different abilities) to the battle mechanic is old news, but we uncovered two new styles in addition to the four available at the game's outset (Trickster, Gunslinger, Swordmaster, and Royal Guard). Though we can't detail exactly what the new styles entail, we will say that if you've played certain other Capcom games, the concepts will be pleasantly familiar. The addition of more styles means even more variety to Dante's flashy fighting, since most weapons have different functions depending on which technique he is currently using. In Swordmaster, one button combination might make Dante throw his blade, while the same sequence fires a ball of energy when equipped with the gauntlets. Fortunately, it is now much easier to experience everything each piece of armament has to offer.

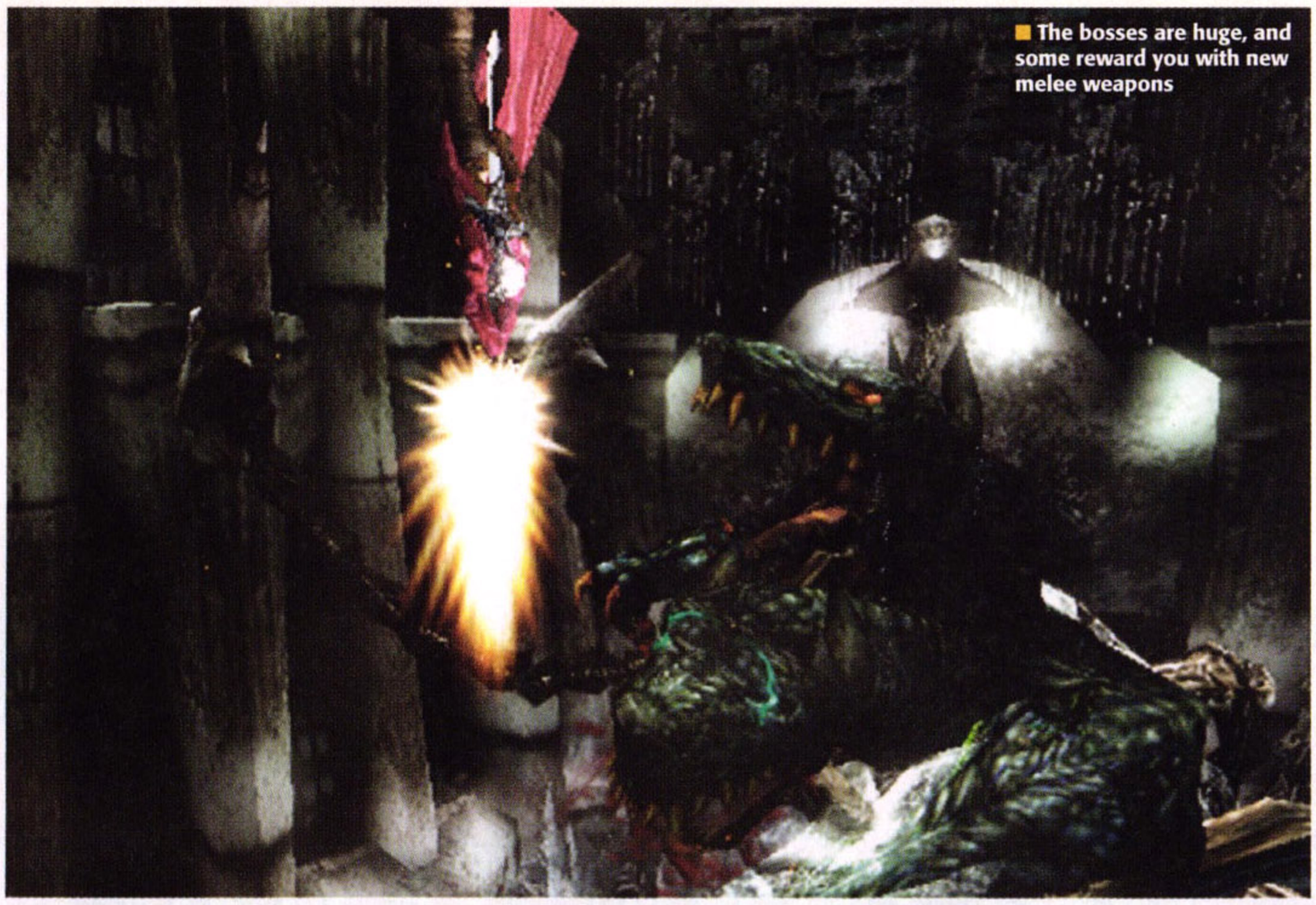
Another new element of DMC 3's combat is the ability to switch weapons on the fly. Instead of being forced to enter menu screens to change equipment, the L2 and R2 buttons will now swap between two melee and two ranged weapons that you choose at the start of each of the game's 20 levels (though there will usually be opportunities to alter your selections mid-mission). This quick change opens up a whole new world of combo possibilities. Players can launch enemies into the air with a sword, suspend them there with Ebony and Ivory, then switch to nunchucks and whale on them as they hit the ground before finishing the job with a close-range shotgun blast to the head. These outrageous strings of attacks, in addition to being easy to pull off, are also required to attain the "Stylish" combo designation, which means that if you're the kind of player who needs S ranks on every mission, you'll get very familiar with the weapon-swapping mechanic. As far as rewards for this kind of hardcore dedication are concerned, Capcom is keeping quiet about possible unlockable features. However, we couldn't help but notice that both Vergil and Lady are carrying some extremely cool weapons, and it would be a shame if players don't get to take them for a spin.

To those of you who still feel the sting of DMC 2, don't be afraid to love again. In Devil May Cry 3, Capcom seems to be returning Dante to his roots by excising all that was terrible about DMC 2, strategically borrowing elements from Ninja Gaiden, and firmly steering this series back on course to becoming the name to beat in stylish action and pure devilish entertainment. ■■■



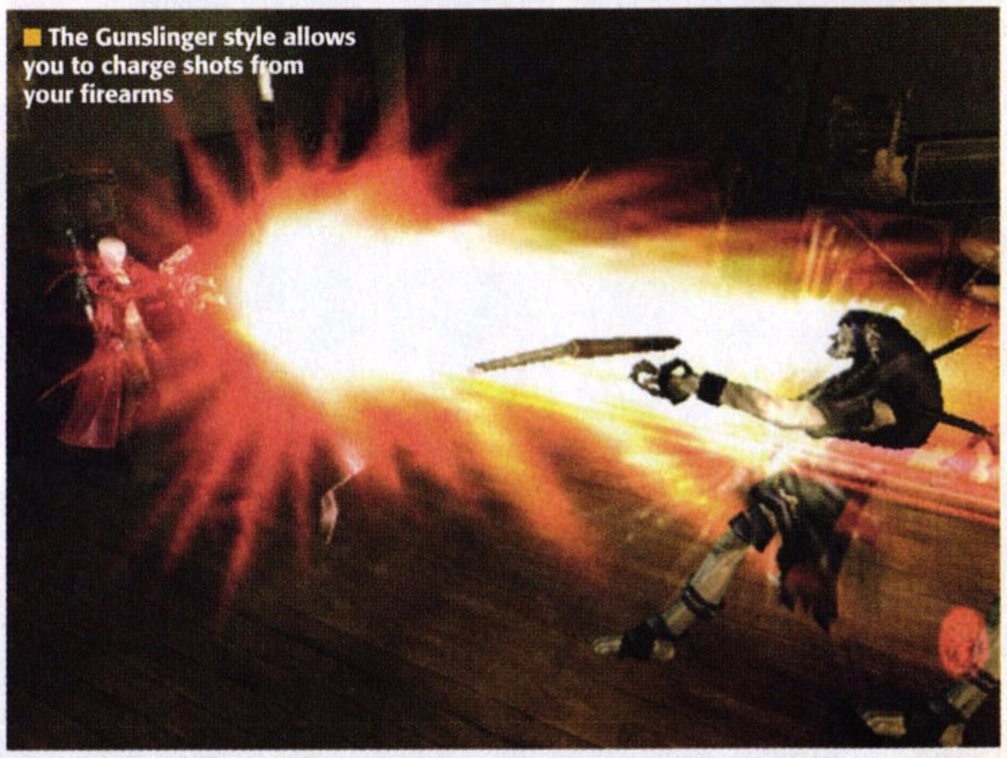
■ Multi-targeting is much improved this time around

■ Certain enemies are modeled after the seven deadly sins. This guy's got a great big ball of wrath



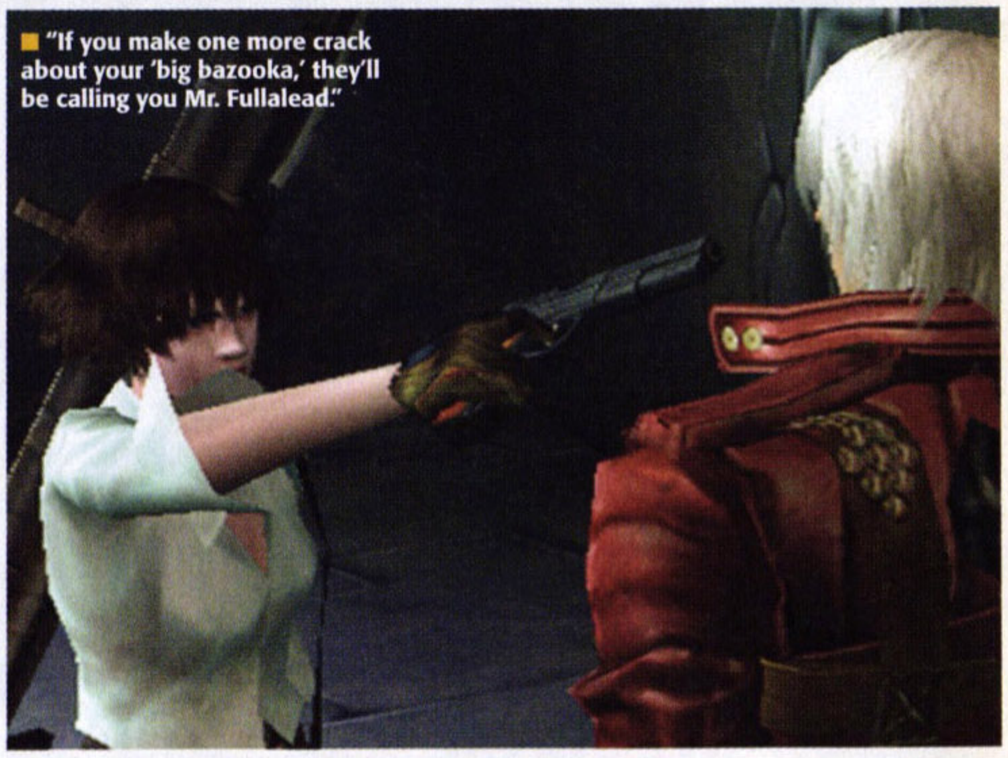
■ The bosses are huge, and some reward you with new melee weapons

■ Vergil and Arkham are unquestionably evil and fashion-conscious



■ The Gunslinger style allows you to charge shots from your firearms

■ The cinematics have Dante performing some crazy, circus-caliber stunts



■ "If you make one more crack about your 'big bazooka,' they'll be calling you Mr. Fullalead."

■ A vast array of new weapons awaits Dante

■ Dante's demon form comes complete with butt-wings

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PLAYSTATION 2

God of War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS **> RELEASE** LATE MARCH

HEAVENLY ASSAULT

The premise of God of War is simple, but it's done so well that it never gets old. As we sat and watched Kratos rip an enemy in two with his bare hands or pummel the skull of some poor bastard on the ground repeatedly, our lust for blood was hardly sated – even if it was literally splattering in our faces. However, to say that the game is mindless is to dishonor the imagination and care that clearly has gone into it. And that's certainly not something we're going to do to Kratos' face. Not when he's wielding a pulsing thunderbolt, we won't.

God of War's combat strikes that delicate balance between button-mashing and set combos. It's neither thoughtless nor contrived because it gives you so many options. Since E3, two important moves have been added: parry counterattacks and an air dash. The latter allows you to perform a downward kick while in the air. Together, this pair provides all sorts of combo possibilities, letting you link offensive and defensive maneuvers into an endless barrage. Parry counterattacks also create another new aspect to combat. While doing this, the game will slow down momentarily like in Max Payne's Bullet Time. Although it can take getting used to, Sony says that it gives you a second to consider your follow-up attack options.

Apart from letting you create your own offensive combos, the game lets you build up the skills you choose. As you collect orbs from those you've struck down, you'll earn upgrades. Your Blades of Chaos have five levels of destruction. Likewise, your magic spells have three. Pick your favorite, build its power up, and wreak havoc however you see fit. Maybe you want to spend your orbs on building up Zeus' Thunderbolt. This magic's second stage lets you grab two enemies and throw bolts at them in mid-air, while the third allows you to increase the bolts' damage. Meanwhile, each level of the spell requires a different gameplay mechanic for execution.

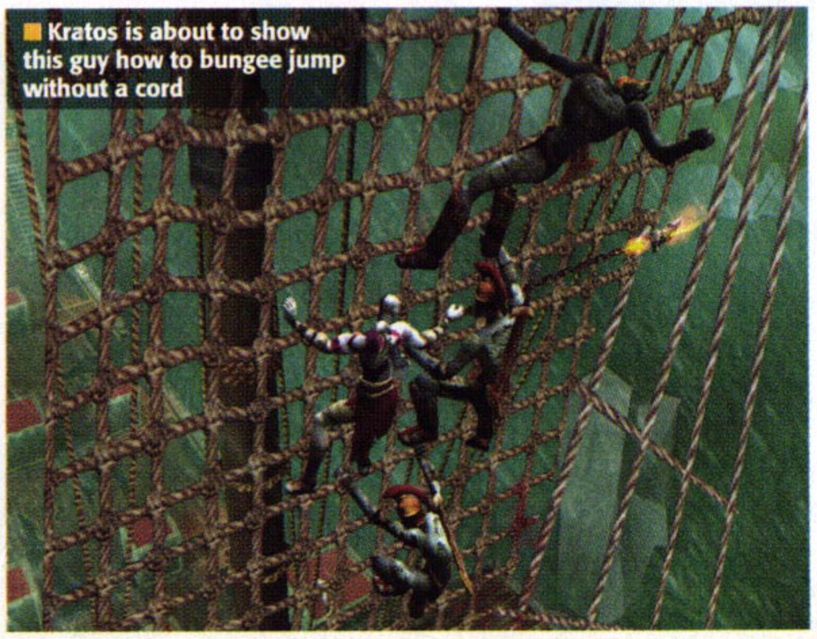
When you aren't hacking enemies to bits, God of War will test your noodle with some puzzles. Perhaps the best use of this is when combat and problem solving are combined in one encounter. One easy but impressive example of this is when you battle a three-headed hydra that has crashed up through the deck of the ship you are on early in the game. In order to get to the main head, you have to dispatch the two alongside it first. Taking on one at a time, you first have to beat each lunging hydra head into a dazed state. This will give you just enough time to climb the cargo stacks beside it. From here you can leap onto a harpoon platform which will then come crashing down on the monster, piercing one of its heads to the deck.

Of course, this scene is played out in epic proportions (at one point you'll even find yourself in the very jaws of the hydra) – which is only befitting a game based on a legendary struggle with the gods themselves. Apart from the sheer gore and vividness of the game's combat, the cinematic approach to your every action elevates it to a befittingly heroic level. You don't just fight a few enemies onscreen – you are often thrust into large battles with the conflict filling the foreground of your TV. A ceiling beam you must balance across isn't just a piece of wood, it's a precarious tightrope barely saving you from a chasm of death below.

Oftentimes the beauty of a well-made game is in its ability to make even difficult development processes appear simple to the player. God of War's elegance is in the way it unleashes your savage desires. ■■■

■ The Blades of Chaos weapon can be upgraded five times

■ Kratos has more than one look besides "Blue Steel"



■ Kratos is about to show this guy how to bungee jump without a cord

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TEEN
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Blood
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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PlayStation®2

How could anything possibly protect you from the awesomeness of an undead pirate?

Chain lightning is always the best option, no matter the situation

PLAYSTATION 2

Champions of Norrath: Return To Arms

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT **> DEVELOPER** SNOWBLIND STUDIOS **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY

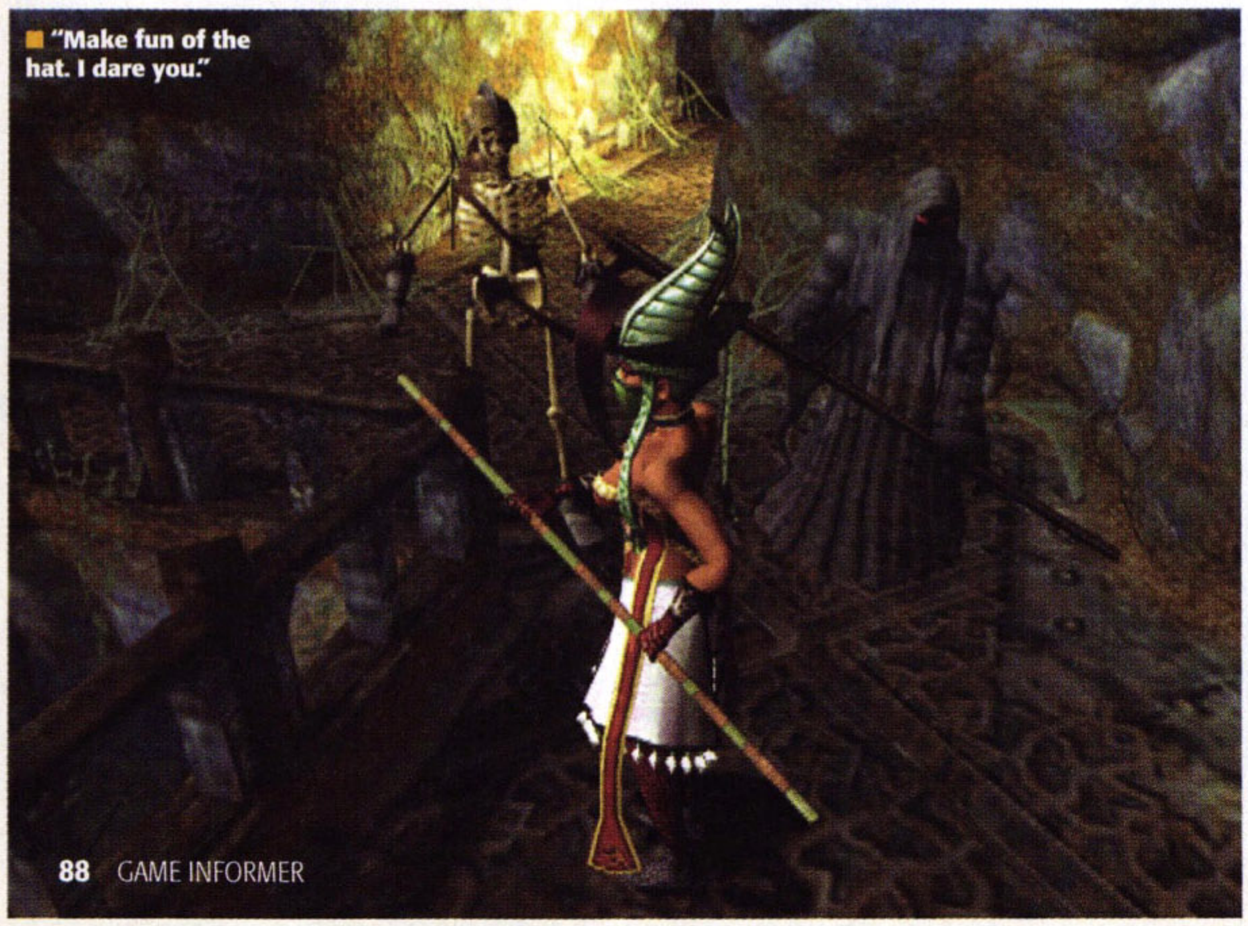
TO SERVE, OR TO DESTROY?

In our recent hands-on time with Champions of Norrath: Return to Arms, we got a good long look at how Snowblind Studio's latest project is shaping up. The word is good – even in its unfinished state, Return to Arms is a blast, offering up huge dungeons, lots of enemies, and endless loot to appease even the most voracious of item hogs. Though it is very similar to the original Champions of Norrath, plenty of under-the-hood tweaks have been made, making RtA a much smoother experience overall.

The addition of new online modes (both competetive and cooperative), along with significantly improved netcode and a better interface, are the most notable changes in this sequel. Players will be able to maintain friends and ignore lists, hook up with others in the online lobby, and play using either local characters (stored on your own memory card) or heroes stored server-side (which are typically more secure and exploit-free). You'll even be able to access your server-side characters from any online-enabled PS2. Another big change in RtA is the removal of the random map generator. Snowblind decided that the minor hit to replayability was a small price to pay for more interesting dungeon design and the option of having more enemies onscreen.

Finishing each mission unlocks a "Medal Round," which is kind of like a mini-level with a specific requirement ranging from beating a bunch of enemies using four or fewer potions to tests of aiming or timed events. Completing that challenge will earn you a medal, which are in turn tied to unlocking the 11 bonus missions. And finally, bonus missions lead to the epic artifacts that everyone wants. So, despite not having randomly generated maps, it seems that there will be no shortage of variety in Return to Arms.

Players will need to make a choice between good and evil early in the game. Based on your decision, you'll fight different bosses, see another ending, and even get to play through some alignment-specific dungeons. Obviously, the storyline will differ quite a bit depending on whom you decide to serve. At the end of the day, though, you'll be doing what fantasy heroes do best – beat the bejeezus out of anyone in your way. Snowblind Studios knows how to make that fun as well as anyone in the business, and Return To Arms looks to showcase that talent once again. ■■■



"Make fun of the hat. I dare you."

The Snowblind engine still has some of the best water effects around

And Then There Were Seven

In true sequel form, Return to Arms will have two new races to play as. These iconic EverQuest archetypes join the five original classes for a total of seven options at character creation, and the new races bring something different to the table. These are our findings from playtesting the new heroes.

A Berserker with only one weapon is no Berserker at all

Vah Shir Berserker

These guys are man-sized anthropomorphic tigers with a talent for throwing axes and a serious thirst for battle. The Berserker is capable of holding his own in melee with the best of them, as the name would imply. In that respect, he plays similarly to the Barbarian Warrior (and even shares several skills like Dual Wield, Critical Hit, and Cyclone) without the mana-regeneration goofiness of that class. However, the Berserker has an entire line of skills that buff his ability with throwing weapons of all kinds, and can even summon axes for some free ammo. Berserkers can't absorb damage quite as well as Barbarians, but their range capability helps a lot to shore up their defensive shortcomings.

Casters can look like bad mothers, too

Iksar Shaman

There are hybrid classes, and then there are hybrid classes. Shamans are hybrids of hybrids – their skills are a mixture of offensive magic, defensive spells, and melee. Obviously, they don't fulfill any one of those roles perfectly, but they are surprisingly fun to play. In particular, it's convenient to be able to pick the fighting style that's most efficient against whichever enemies you're facing. Huge ogres coming after you? Stay away and blast them from afar with your poison spells. Archers are trying to mow you down? Get up in their faces and bash their skulls with your mace. Running out of potions in a boss battle? Play conservatively and use your healing magic to outlast them. Shamans have a variety of talents, and are a much more multifaceted class than most of the others. Plus, they're lizard-people. How can you go wrong?

You only get one guess at what the undead's primary harvest is

With that fancy armor, you'd think she could afford a better weapon than a simple club

She's apparently evolved past the need for armor

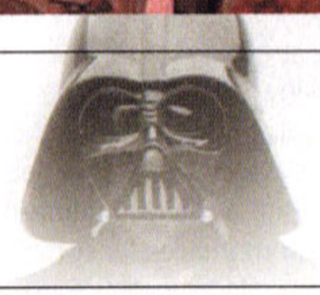
Why do those silly droids even try?

See that girl, watch that scene, dig in the Dancing Queen

The fateful encounter between Obi-Wan and Anakin

TBA

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith



> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS **> DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS **> RELEASE** MAY 5

GIVE IN TO YOUR ANGER

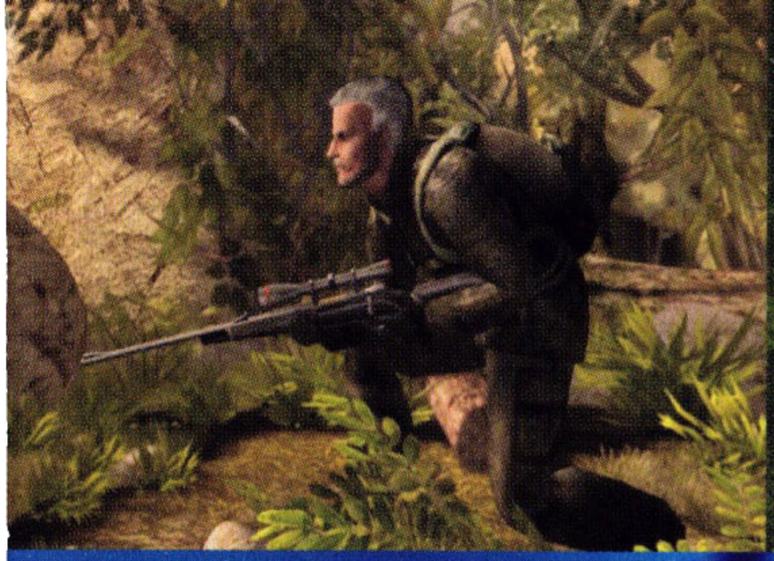
We at GI have what might best be described as a rabid fascination with all things Star Wars. We rejoice in its triumphs, and openly weep when George Lucas goes wrong (Jar Jar, we're looking at you…). But from the tantalizing glimpses we've seen of the new Episode III game, hopes are high that Revenge of the Sith may be exactly the story we've all been waiting for. Footage we've seen of the game revealed a disturbed and seething Anakin, unafraid of harnessing the dark side to enforce a twisted will on his surroundings. An eerily familiar scene was revealed showing Anakin facing off against Count Dooku as Palpatine watches impassively upon his throne. We also saw Obi-Wan single-handedly tackle an army of droids with a combination of acrobatic finesse and lightsaber prowess. Game developers have been working extensively in cooperation with the stunt coordinator from the movie as well as doing motion-capture on Hayden Christensen in order to create saber fighting beyond anything Star Wars games have attempted before, and it looks as if they're more than on track to succeed.

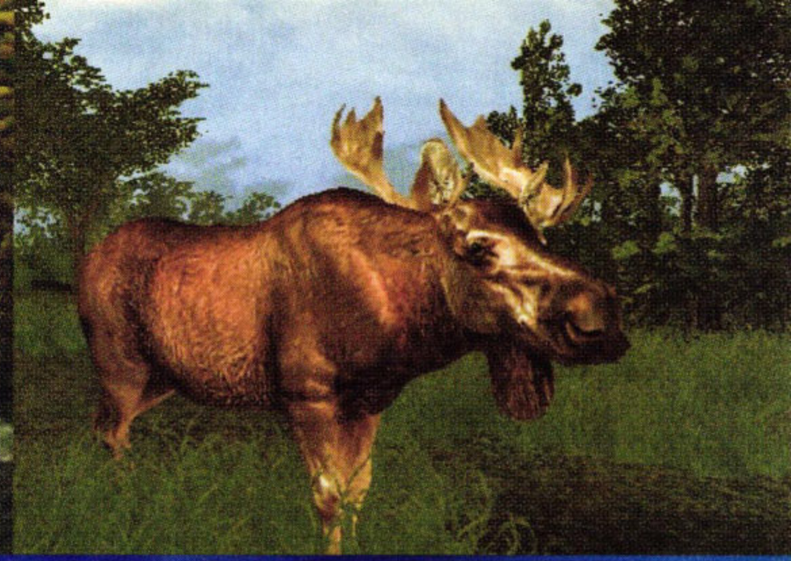
Beyond flashy lightsaber fights, we also know that the two playable characters of Obi-Wan and Anakin will have access to a variety of Force powers they can utilize against obstacles and foes. Anakin can Force throw heavy objects to break down doors and barriers, and his dark side leanings have given him access to Force lightning. Meanwhile, Obi-Wan has unprecedented agility, as he leaps and flips high in the air over his foes to outmaneuver them. These abilities are no doubt only a taste of the sweetness we can expect from the full range of powers available in the final game.

All signs seem to indicate that *Episode III* will be the darkest and most disturbing of the Star Wars movies. The game is following suit by allowing players to experience the duality of not just the heroic path, but the villainous one as well. So take up your weapon. Your journey towards the dark side will be complete. We've always wanted to say that. ■■■

The stunt coordinator from the movie helped design the lightsaber fighting for the game

Obi-Wan was always overextending himself





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TEEN
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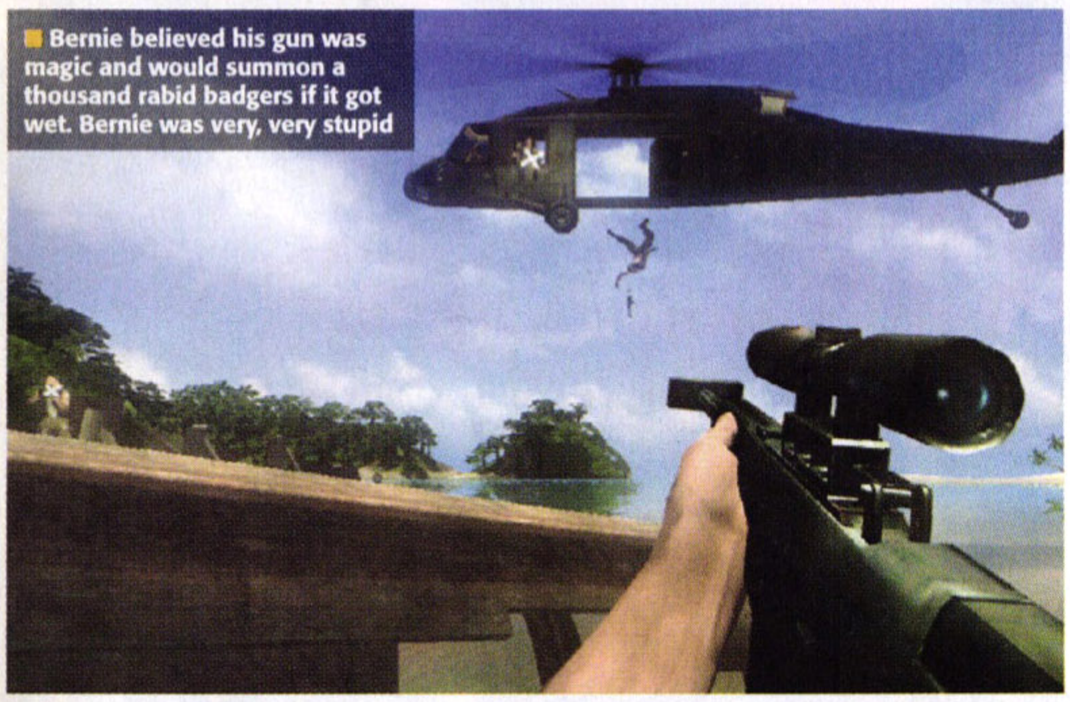
Blood
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Jack takes the "no motorized vehicles on the beach" rule very seriously



Bernie believed his gun was magic and would summon a thousand rabid badgers if it got wet. Bernie was very, very stupid

"Finally! That's the last *Baywatch* cast member!"

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Far Cry Instincts

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL **> RELEASE** MARCH

TRAPPED IN PARADISE

There's nothing like a tropical vacation. There's the surf, the sun, the beautiful, bikini-clad women, and the horrific death-traps that dispatch your foes with terrifying efficiency. What do you mean that doesn't happen on your vacations? Well, then you're apparently not visiting the same islands as Jack Carver, star of the Far Cry series. You see, one aspect of the new title Far Cry Instincts that hasn't been covered much is its innovative use of traps to take out large numbers of enemies at once.

While Far Cry Instincts will sport all the features that the PC title is known for (lush graphics, wide open environments, brutal AI, and the like), the trap system is new and adds a lot of depth to the FPS experience. As Jack wasn't fortunate enough to be a Boy Scout in his younger days, he'll have to learn how to make a trap before he unleashes it on his foes. Once he learns how (we're assuming it won't be as easy as reading the hit instructional book *Deathtraps for Dummies*), he'll have to find the right spot to construct the trap, then build it, and (if he likes) try to lure enemies into it by making noise or planting a body.

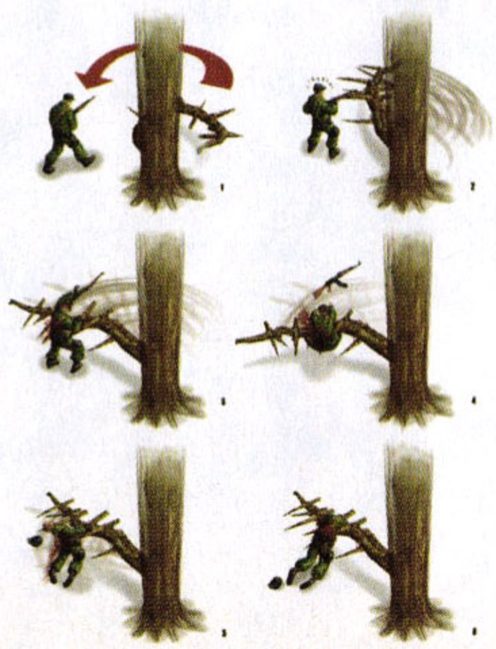
Carver can construct several different types of devious traps, such as a branch whip, which impales enemies with a powerful strike. Another trap launches arrows, while a third takes out fools with a Claymore mine. But be careful, any trap that you set can catch you as well. Should you step into one, you'll hear a noise alerting you to the trap's activation. Seconds later, you'll be toast if you don't get out of the way.

Such devious and lethal devices make us think of one thing: using them against our closest friends! Multiplayer will allow you to build deathtraps as well – but then again, so can your opponents. Combining these lethal tricks with high-powered FPS action will certainly lead to some addictive multiplayer.

We certainly like our vacations to be tainted with wickedness, so Far Cry Instinct's trap building feature has got us anxious to visit Jack Carver's island. If you're like us, then you're feeling the same urge. But then again, if you're like us, you need help. ■■■

The Handyman's Guide to Deathtraps

These diagrams show how the deathtraps you can build take chumps out in easy to follow step-by-step instructions. The branch whip and arrow traps are detailed here. Follow these simple steps, and you too can dispatch your enemies with style and ease!



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FAST PACED CHARIOT RACES AND BATTLES

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MATURE 17+
M
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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

CAPCOM PlayStation 2

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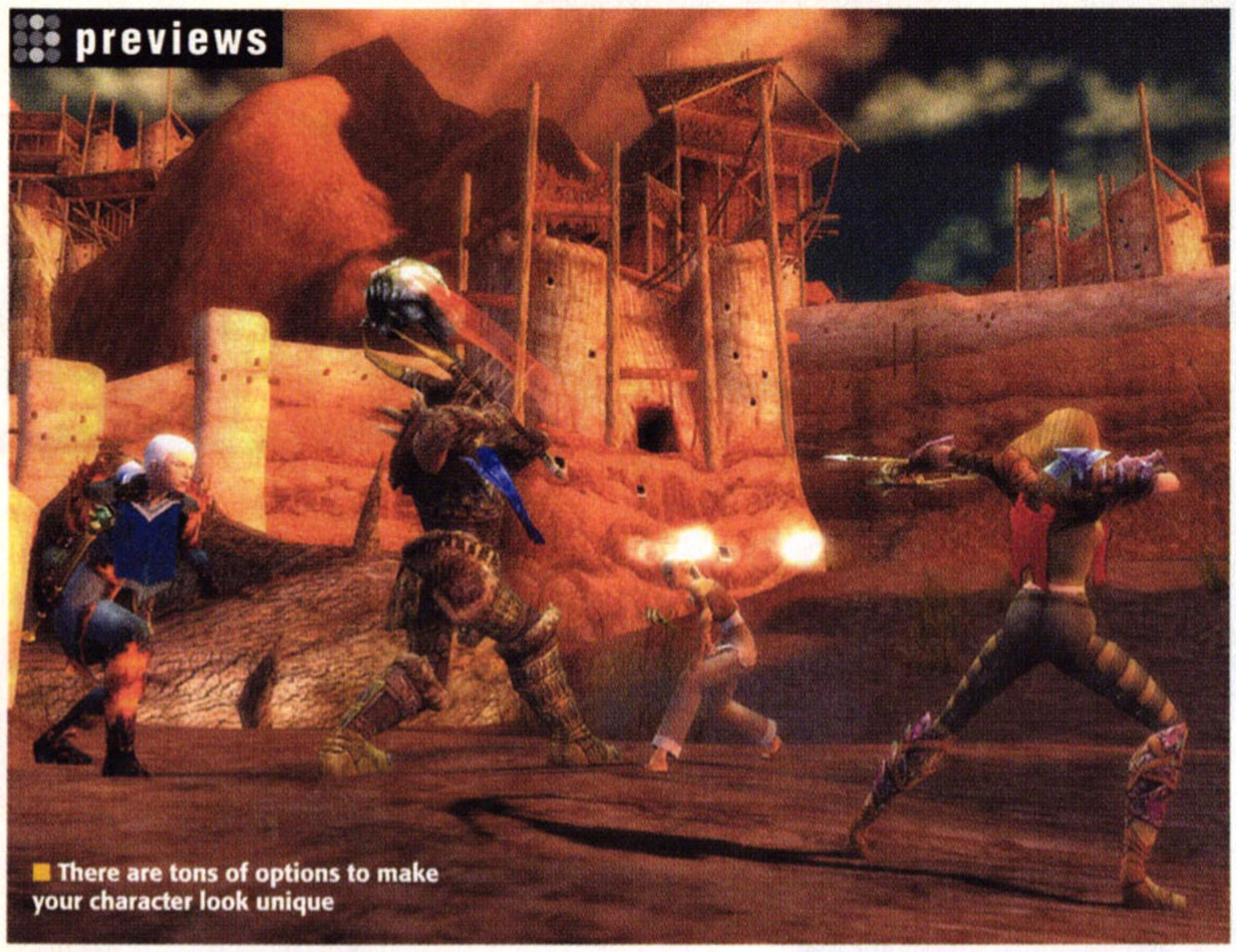
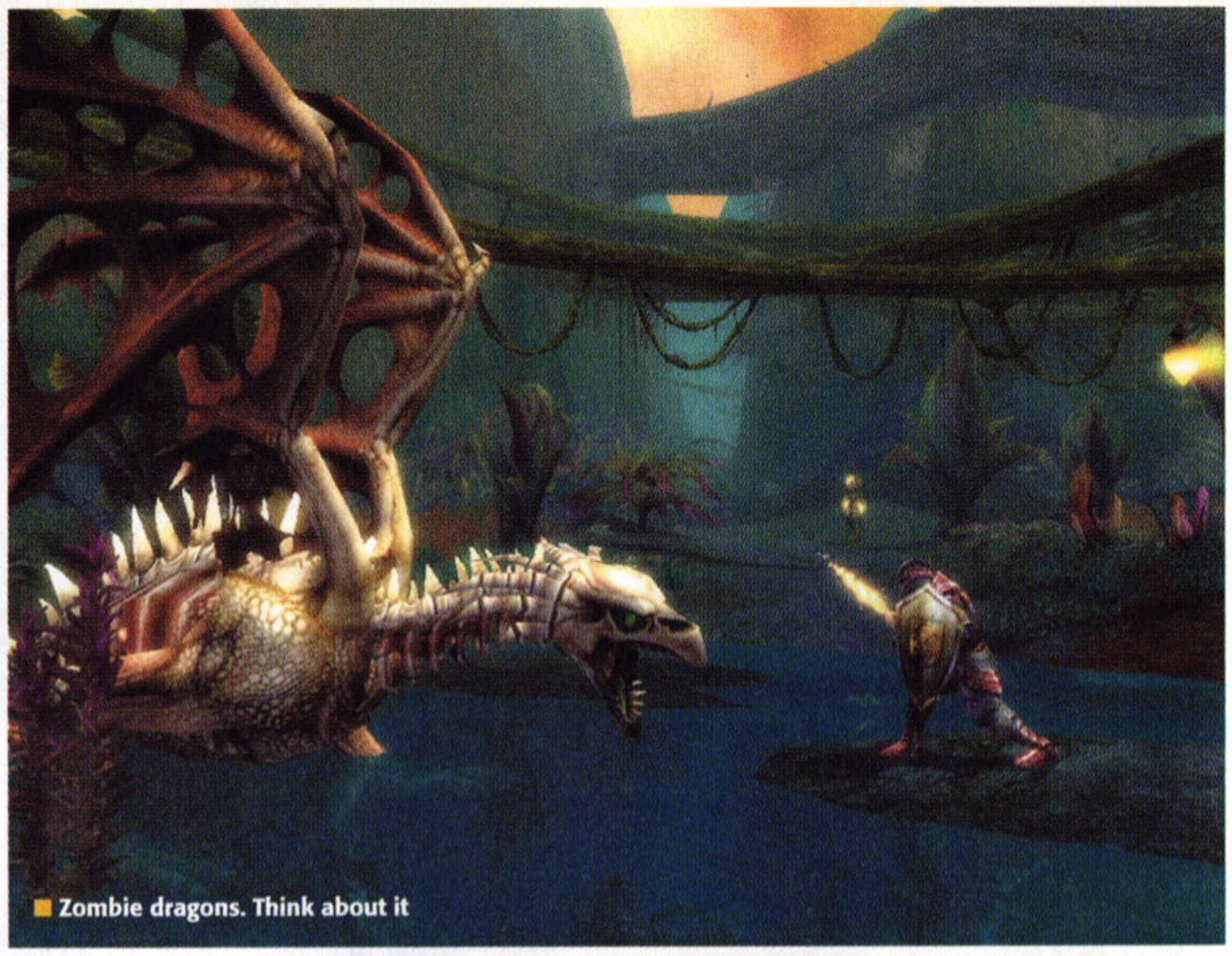
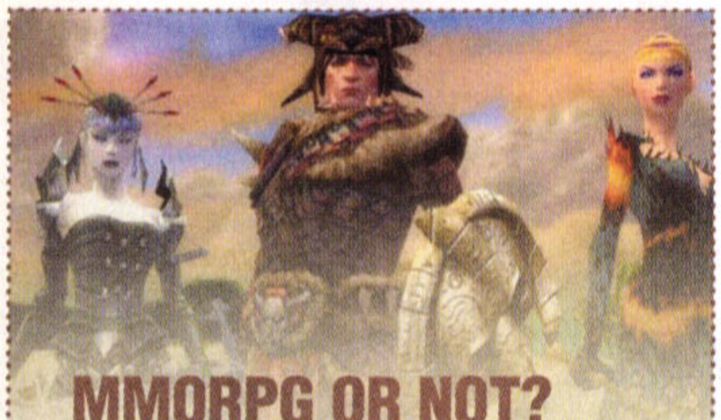


There are tons of options to make your character look unique



Zombie dragons. Think about it



MMORPG OR NOT?

There has been a fair amount of discussion going around as to whether Guild Wars is a "actual" MMORPG or not. The truth, as usual, lies somewhere in the middle. While Guild Wars does feature thousands of people playing with and against each other, it also has some key differences from most MMORPGs:

Character Development

The maximum level a hero can achieve in Guild Wars is 20. Plus, you can hit that in a fairly short amount of time – ArenaNet estimates around 40 hours. The idea is that everyone has the same base power level, and the strategies involved in choosing your skills and knowing when to use them will make the difference. A character can know up to 150 skills, but can only bring eight of them into any given mission – so knowing how to play your character is a much bigger deal than simply having the most "über" loot.

No Overworld

Guild Wars doesn't have a constant, persistent overworld that players run around in other than the towns where you find missions. There is no hunting, camping, or zone control. Also, you don't travel at all – just bring up the map and click where you want to go, and there you are. So, there's really no downtime between adventures.

Instanced Everything

Any combat you'll have in Guild Wars takes place in instanced mission zones. What that means is that the zone you're in is private to you and your group, and nobody else can go there to mess with you. Other players might be doing the same quest at the same time, but they'll be in their own private instance as well. Unless you're doing a player vs. player battle, of course.

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Guild Wars

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> PUBLISHER NCSOFT **> DEVELOPER** ARENANET **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY

It wouldn't surprise us if this wasn't even a boss

A NEW PARADIGM

Residing somewhere in the no-man's-land between EverQuest and Starcraft, Guild Wars looks to bring something uniquely compelling to the table in the next few months. We recently got the chance to check out developer ArenaNet's inaugural game at their offices and came away even more pumped up about Guild Wars than we were before.

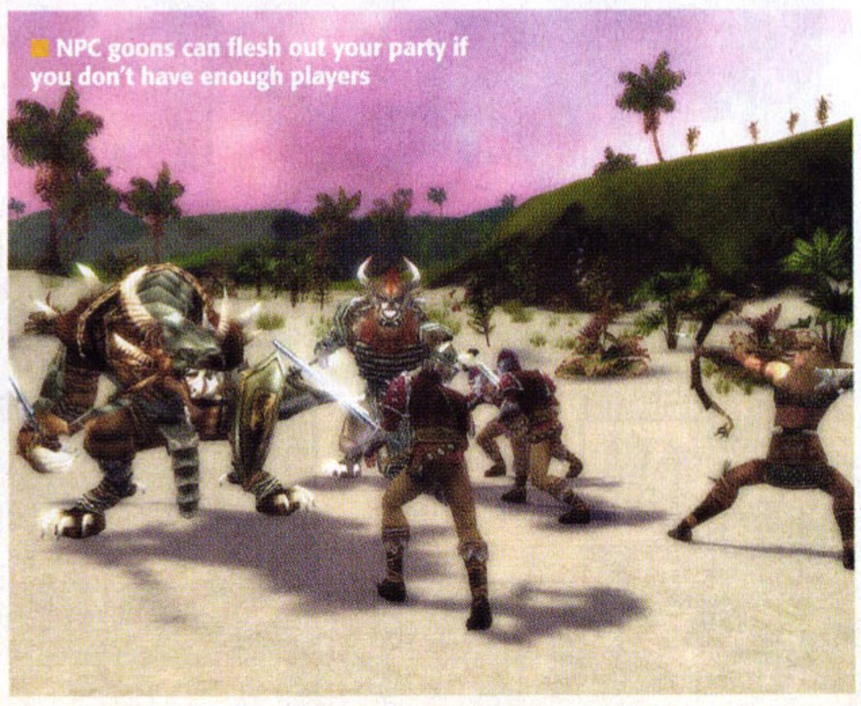
Due to the fact that the team at ArenaNet has a radically different way of looking at things, it's able to largely sidestep most of the issues that plague online RPGs and surgically remove everything that's not fun about the genre. Quests are 45-minute to two and a half hour affairs that involve interesting set pieces and sequences more reminiscent of Final Fantasy than Ultima Online, since you're not competing for space or spawns with anyone else. There is no grinding or travel time. And most importantly, PvP is a totally new experience – believe us, there's no comparison to anything you've seen before.

PvP in Guild Wars is unique because of many, many reasons. First, it takes place in team matches, much like your favorite RTS or Counter-Strike. Each side starts on an equal footing, and it's up to player skill and strategy to carry the day. And skill you must have, because each map has several strategic points (gates, flags, etc.) which must be controlled or utilized to prevail. In our playtest, these elements came together to create a very compelling team-based competitive environment, the likes of which we'd never seen before.

The interface for setting up PvP matches is great, too. Much like Blizzard's battle.net (in fact, several designers who worked on that service are part of the Guild Wars team), guilds can participate in tournaments, "optimatch" against other guilds of their skill level, and track their stats and rankings. ArenaNet is also exploring some really cool PvP incentives, such as providing hefty PvE (player versus environment) bonuses when a team from your world holds the top position on the ladder. What these would be is yet undetermined, but ArenaNet is thinking of serious rewards, like statues coming to life, bonus quests, or powerful artifacts.

If you haven't played in any of the open preview events, trust us – this is a new kind of game, and an amazingly fun one at that. ArenaNet wants to change the way we think about online RPGs, and from what we've seen thus far it's on the right track to do just that when Guild Wars launches in February. ■■■

The ambient lighting effects lend serious atmosphere to the environments



NPC goons can flesh out your party if you don't have enough players

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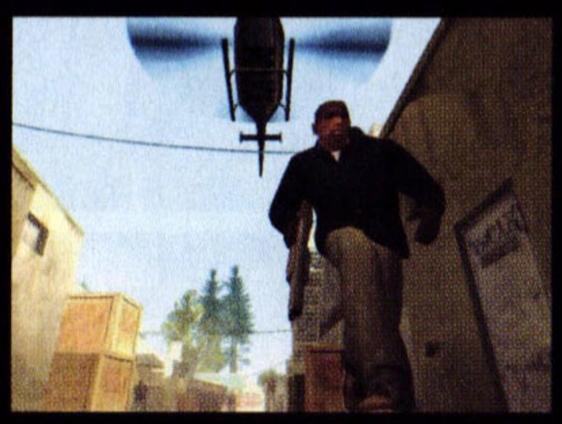

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MATURE 17+
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Strong Sexual Content
Use of Drugs

INTERSCOPE RECORDS

PlayStation®2

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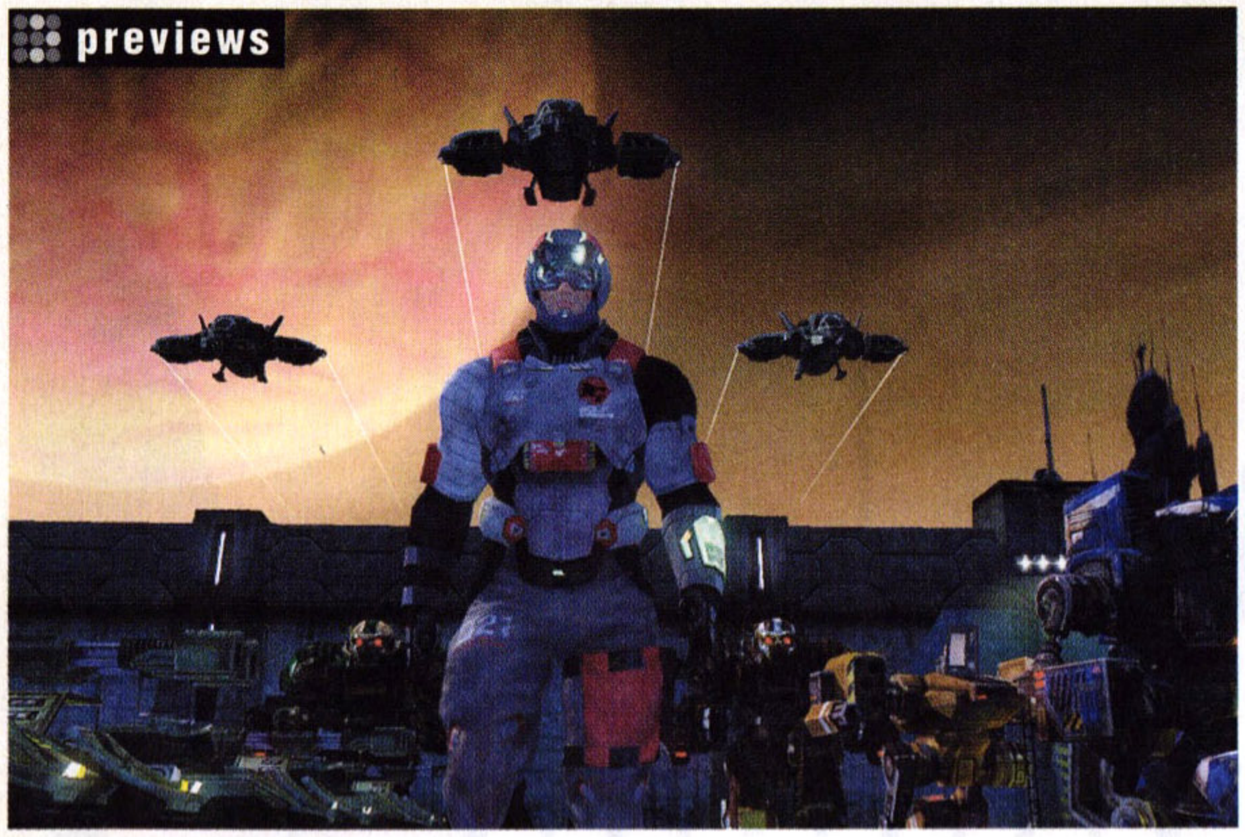
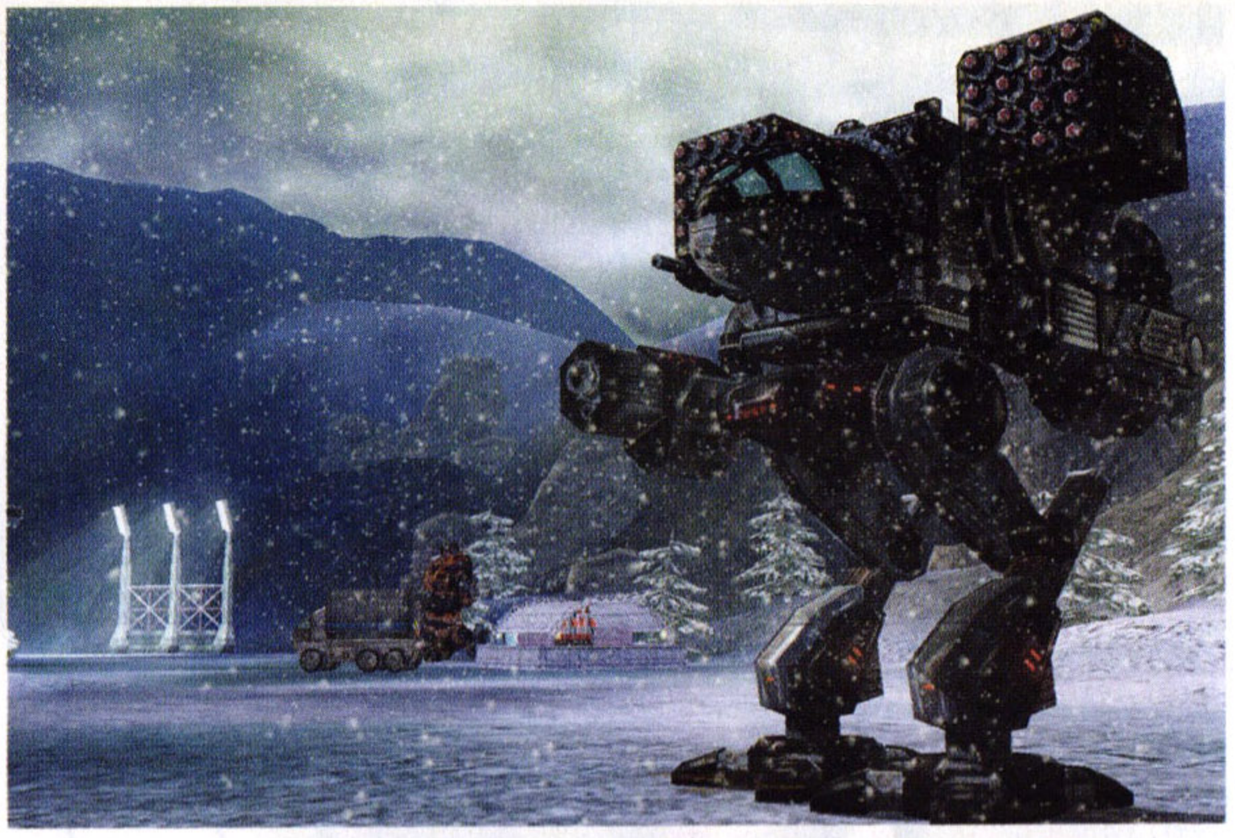




UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER DAY 1 STUDIOS **> RELEASE** DECEMBER 28

IRON GIANTS

Right now, a snowy winter is probably the number one wish for every Xbox gamer out there. With so many great titles to play, who would ever want to leave the house? Day 1 Studios is just about to launch another reason to stay inside this winter – MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf. We got to spend some hands-on time with this title recently, and are hoping that plenty of snow days are coming our way.

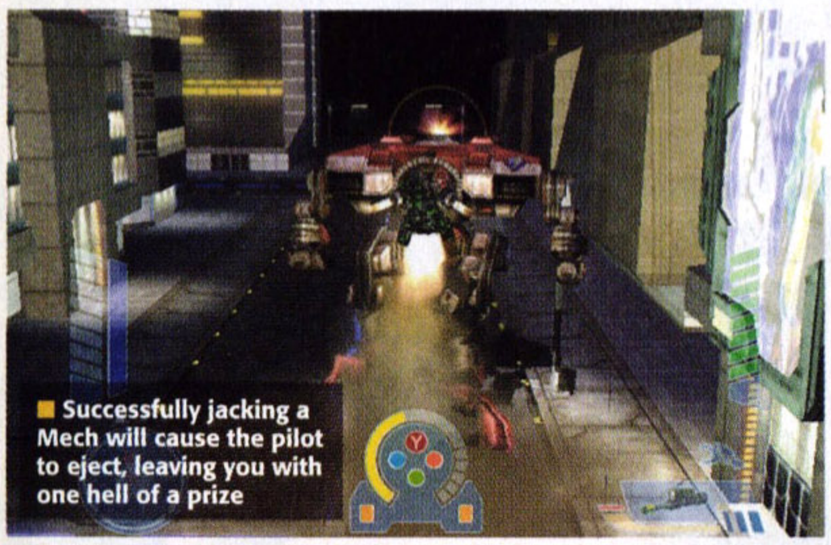
We debuted tons of new information on MechAssault 2's multiplayer modes in issue 137, including its ambitious Conquest mode in which players form clans and battle it out with other teams to claim planets as their territory. This unique online mode is certainly one of the most innovative multiplayer games around, and now we've had a chance to check out how the single-player campaign compares. We played through the opening levels of the story mode, and were more than impressed by the tight gameplay, clever mission objectives, and beautiful graphics.

Lone Wolf plays identically to the original title, with a couple noticeable additions. The sequel allows you to leave your Mech and switch vehicles at any time during a mission – giant robots aside, tanks, VTOLS, and battle armor are also driveable. There may even be a few other vehicle types as well. The battle armor is one of the most exciting new rides, featuring the ability to hack into enemy Mechs, taking them over. In the first few missions, we found ourselves hopping through a besieged city in the battle armor, escorting friendly units in a tank, and – of course – going toe-to-toe with other giant war machines in several huge, deadly Mechs. One of the more creative missions even had us don the battle armor, hitch a ride on a VTOL aircraft, drop into an enemy base, and steal their Mechs one by one. The nice variety of objectives in just the first few missions had us hankering for more of MechAssault 2's single-player mode.

The original MechAssault is better known for its popular online options, and MechAssault 2 looks poised to become even more popular, thanks to its inclusion of simple competitive play along with the team-based gameplay of Conquest mode. But its single-player campaign, which is even more engaging than the stellar original, makes MechAssault 2 a worthy purchase even for those without Xbox Live. Besides, it's a game about huge mechanical war machines – how can you say no to that? ■■■

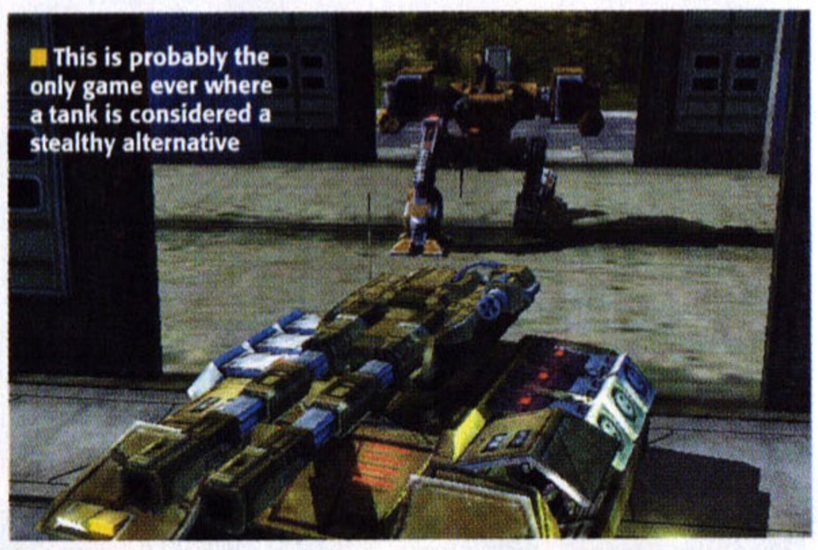
SUPER SPECIAL MECH MADNESS

Special editions of games have been very popular as of late, so it's no surprise that a limited edition version of MechAssault 2 is on the way. This version of the game features two exclusive Xbox Live maps, as well as a "Making Of" documentary. The limited edition will launch on the same day (and for the same price) as the standard version, but as the name implies, will only be available for a short time.

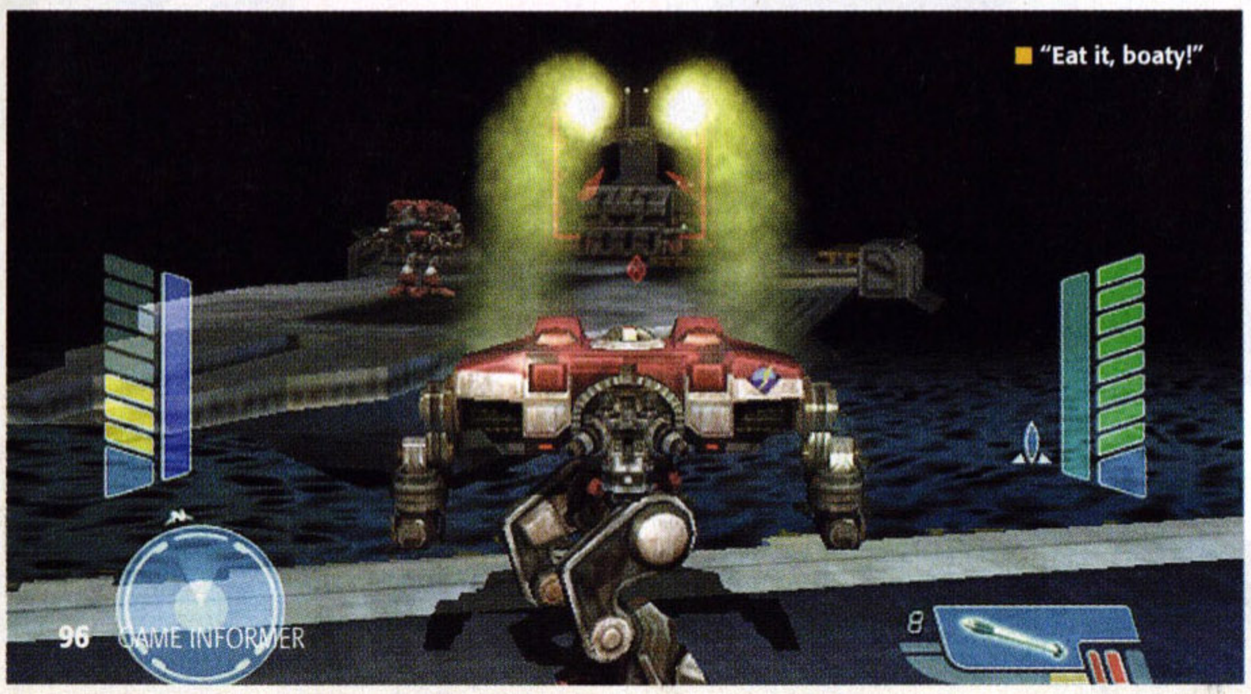


■ Successfully jacking a Mech will cause the pilot to eject, leaving you with one hell of a prize

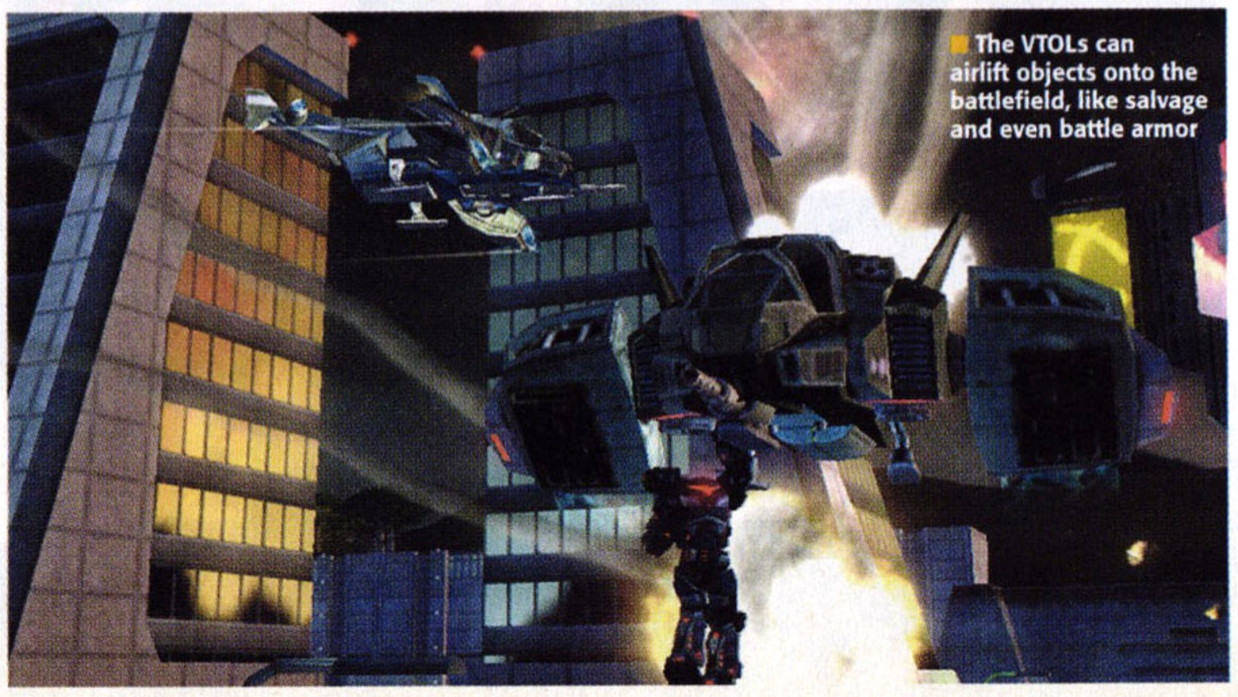
■ Even Mechs celebrate Independence Day



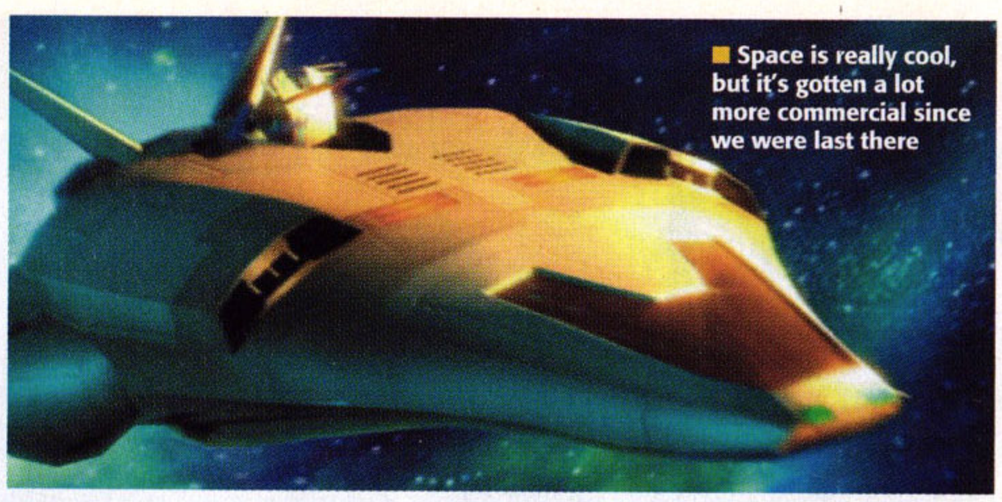
■ This is probably the only game ever where a tank is considered a stealthy alternative



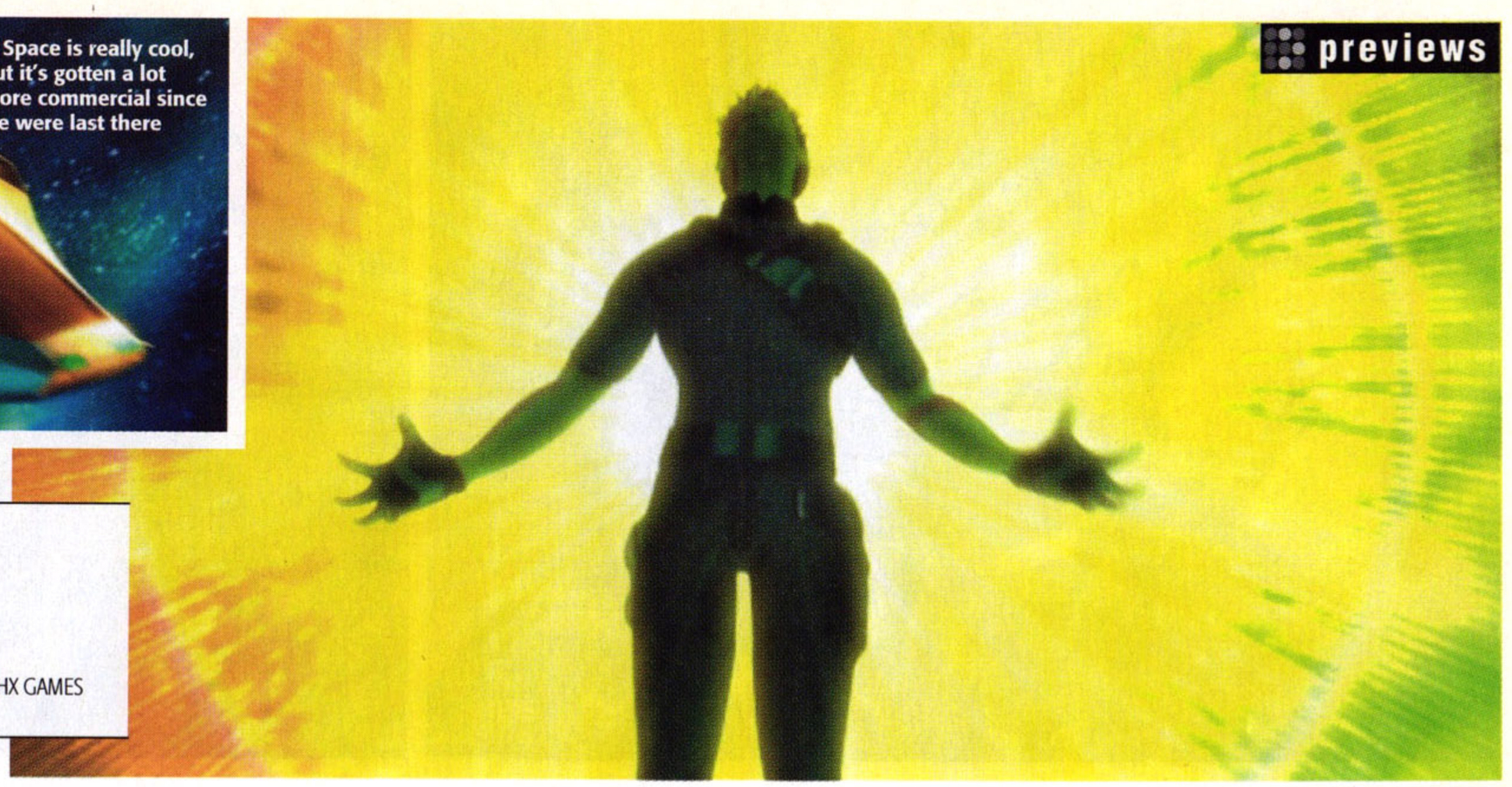
■ "Eat it, boaty!"



■ The VTOLs can airlift objects onto the battlefield, like salvage and even battle armor



■ Space is really cool, but it's gotten a lot more commercial since we were last there



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX | PC

Advent Rising

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** MAJESCO **> DEVELOPER** GLYPHX GAMES
> RELEASE MAY

THE START OF AN EPIC JOURNEY

Since it's been a while since the game has graced our pages, we'd like to remind our readers why no one can accuse the creators of Advent Rising of having low expectations. Not only is the team at GlyphX Games aiming to make one of the most cinematic titles of all time, they see it as just the beginning. Advent Rising is the first game in the planned Advent Trilogy, which even has a side story planned in the PSP's Advent Shadow (see last issue for more on this game). According to GlyphX, your actions in Advent Rising will not only influence how the game plays out, but it will also affect the course of the entire trilogy. This alone is a lofty goal, but GlyphX and publisher Majesco have even more tricks in store to ensure that Advent Rising plays out like an epic Hollywood blockbuster.

In coordination with award-winning sci-fi author Orson Scott Card, GlyphX has crafted an intricate story about a legendary alien race. Some see them as the messiah, others see them as a symbol of hope, while others still consider them pure fiction. Regardless of what they believe, all recognize their name: human. Only a race called the Seekers know them to be real, and see them as a threat that must be wiped from the universe. They travel through known space, eliminating all members of the mysterious species they find. But now, it is time for the humans to fight back.

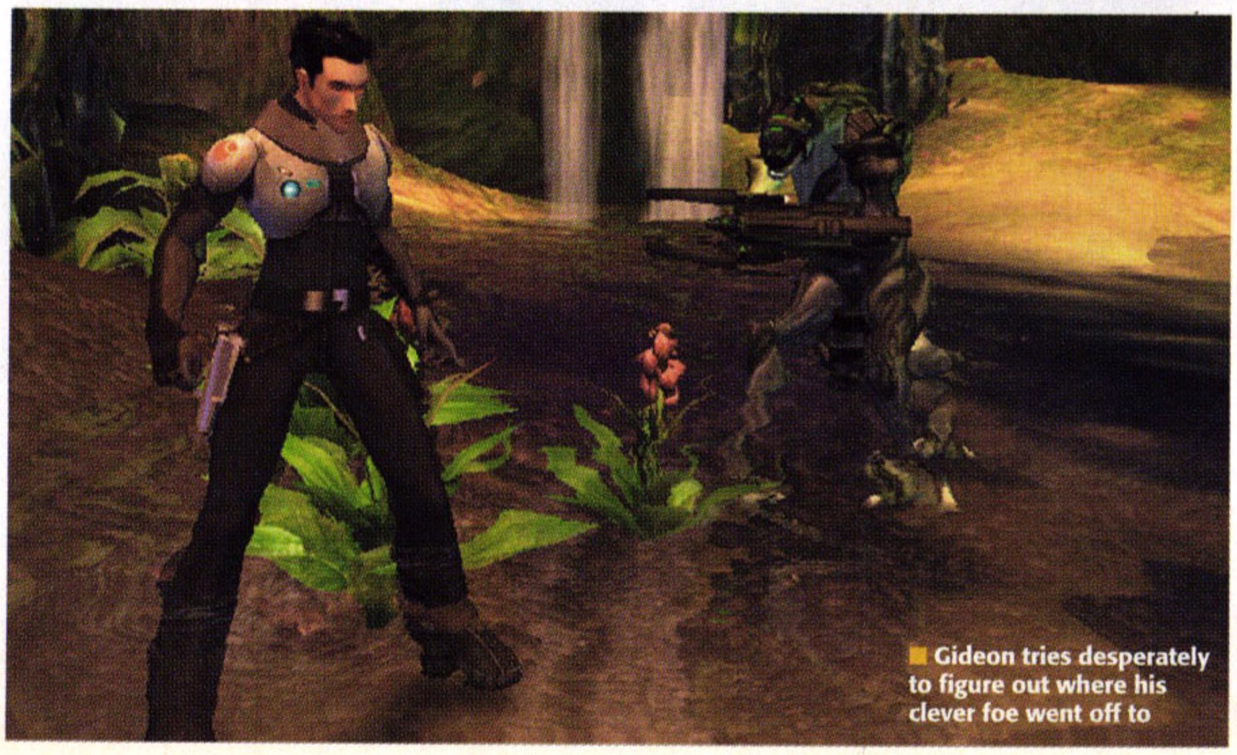
Using the Unreal Warfare engine, the action will unfold in both first and third-person perspectives. As Gideon Wyeth, players will battle the villainous Seekers using futuristic weapons, a staggering fleet of vehicles, and incredible superhuman powers. Gideon will be able to tap into mental abilities such as energy blasts, psychic shields, and levitation. Players will be able to switch quickly between the host of powers and conventional weapons, allowing Gideon to fluidly unleash a huge variety of attacks.

The action certainly sounds like something straight out of a big budget sci-fi epic, and GlyphX hopes to accentuate the cinematic mood even further with the promising soundtrack. An impressive array of Hollywood musicians has been tapped to provide the score, including a 63-piece live orchestra, mixed and engineered by veterans of movies like *Finding Nemo*, *The Matrix*, *The Specialist*, and more. Up and coming singer Charlotte Martin also contributed, as did the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

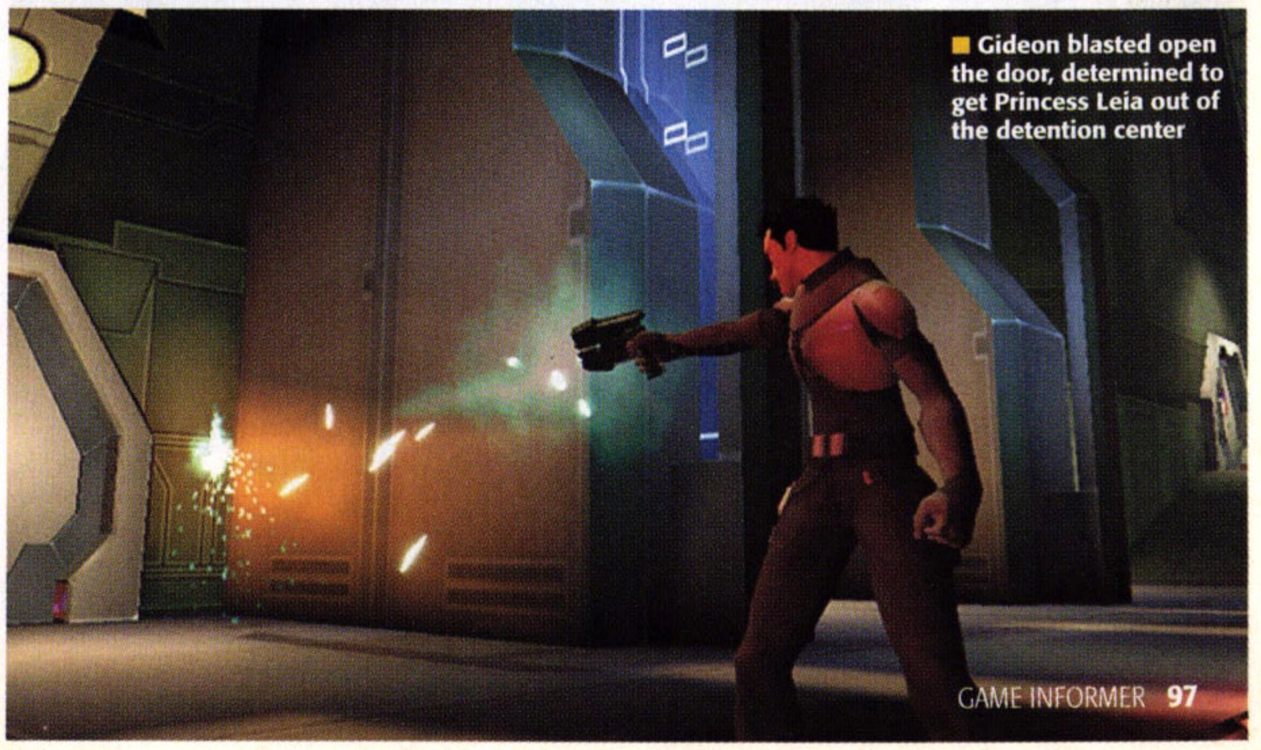
The soundtrack lineup is certainly something to look forward to, as is the involved and constantly evolving story. With such lofty goals for this title and its planned sequels, its hard not to wonder if it will accomplish everything that the developer claims it will. But based on what we've seen so far, things are looking very positive. This is certainly one title to keep an eye on until it releases in May. Should it live up to its potential, Advent Rising could be the start of the next big series. ■■■

■ "Got any spare change?"

■ "If only I didn't have this blaster arm, I would drink soothing tea and write poetry all day."



■ Gideon tries desperately to figure out where his clever foe went off to



■ Gideon blasted open the door, determined to get Princess Leia out of the detention center

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

TimeSplitters Future Perfect

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** EA GAMES **> DEVELOPER** FREE RADICAL **> RELEASE** MARCH

THE GAME OF TOMORROW

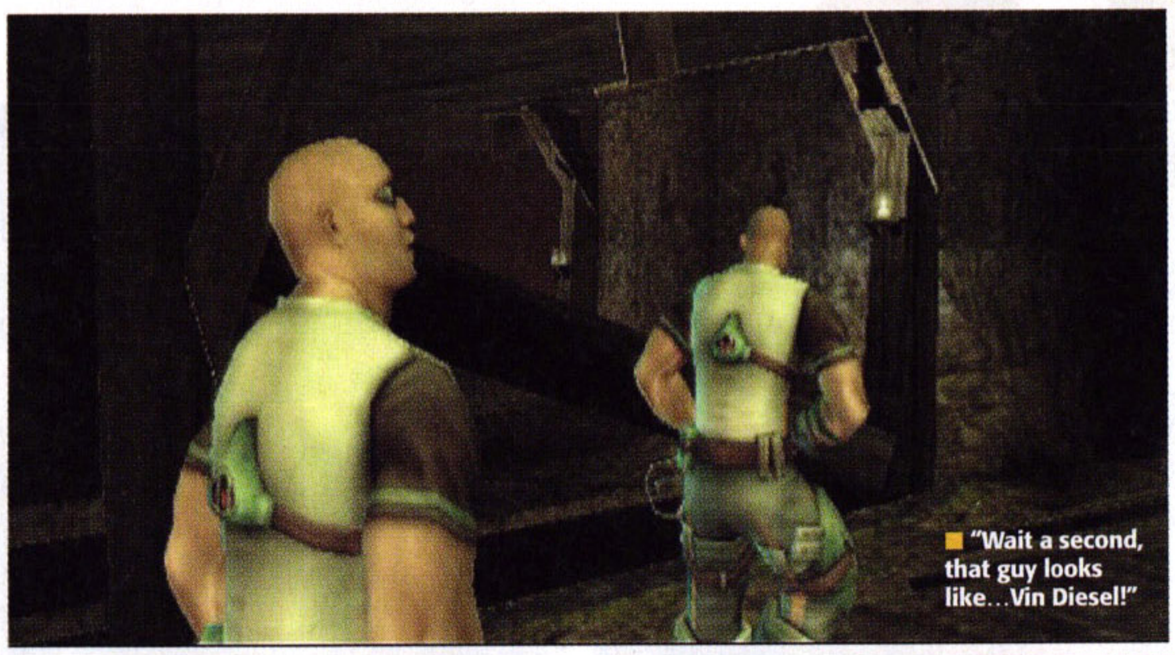
Did you know that the staff of Game Informer can travel through time? Yeah, it's true – you know we wouldn't lie to you. We actually just got back from a trip to the future, using our ChronoTravel FutureBus 4000. It's a lot like a cargo van, only it travels through time. While we were in the future, we checked out one of the games that those crazy future gamers were playing: TimeSplitters Future Perfect. We liked what we saw, and luckily for those of you poor souls without a FutureBus of your own, its coming your way this March.

Like the previous TimeSplitters titles, Future Perfect offers a single-player story mode, a bevy of multiplayer modes, a map editor, and more. But unlike the first two games, the story mode is now a much more cohesive experience, and online play is supported for both the PS2 and Xbox versions.

In Future Perfect, our hero Cortez must track a mysterious time traveler through many different time periods and locations. In his quest, he teams up with a variety of colorful allies, visits the past and the future, and (hopefully) discovers the origins of the evil TimeSplitters. His adventures take him to the 1920s, 1960s, 1990s, and more as he tracks the time traveler and encounters past and present versions of himself, thanks to time paradoxes. This nice little twist allows you to team up with yourself, help yourself solve puzzles, and otherwise play with yourself. We saw our future selves on our time traveling trip, but we were just sleeping…in a kiddie pool filled with mayonnaise. Disgusting.

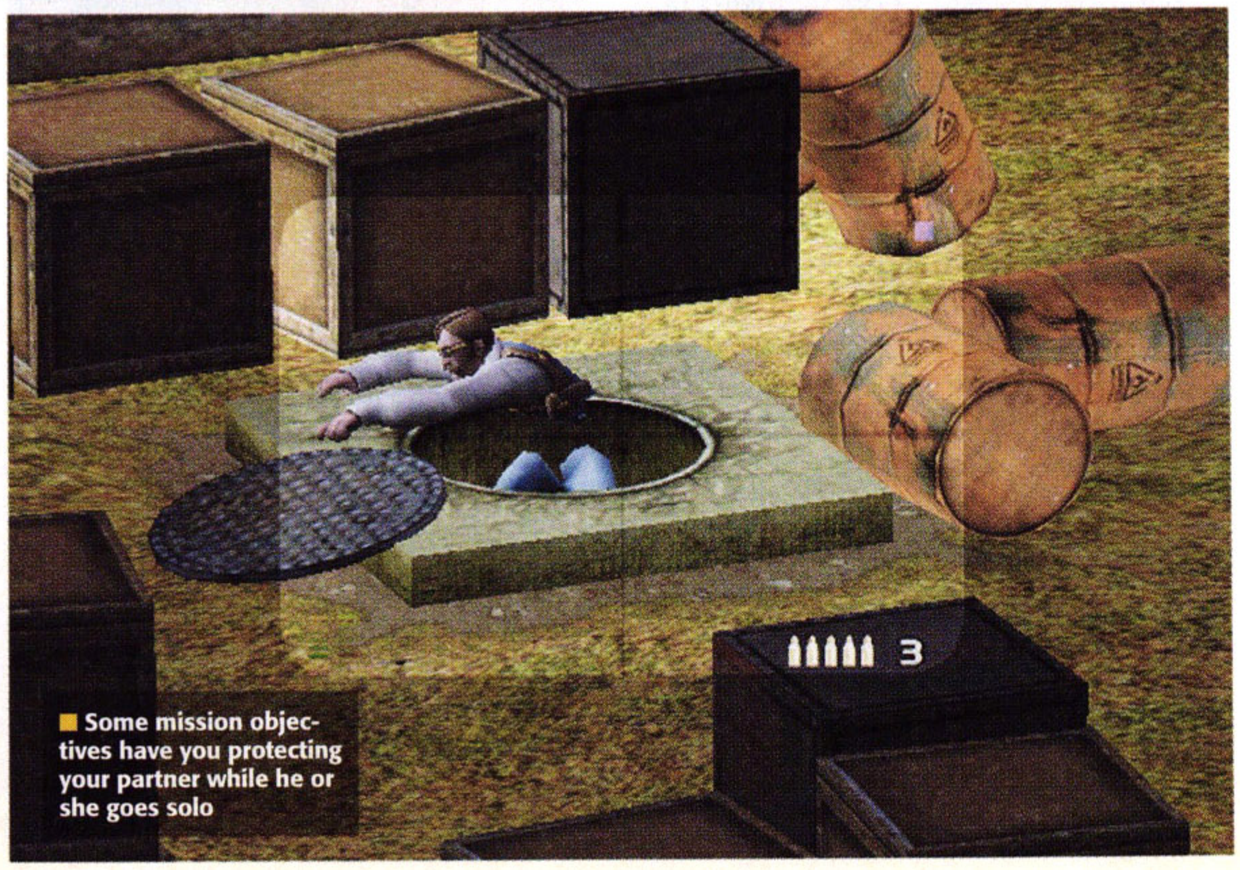
What isn't disgusting is the amount of goodies stuffed into this game. The arcade mode pits you against several highly intelligent bots in deathmatches that recall the glory days of GoldenEye on N64. Playing against these computer-controlled opponents is certainly fun, but the 16-player online for the Xbox and PS2 versions brings things to the next level. You can even take on your online pals in maps you created – the stages you craft in the level editor can be used online, meaning that you can create stages with hidden nooks that only you know about, you sneaky devil. The map editor is also easier to use than ever before, so you won't have to spend as much time to design the ultimate death trap.

We've been to the future, so we know that there are a lot of quality games coming out soon, and it can be hard to decide which titles are worth your hard-earned dollar. Take some words of advice from wise and experienced time travelers: If you like games with a unique art style, a creative and engaging story mode, robust multiplayer options, and hundreds of unlockables, then TimeSplitters Future Perfect should be a perfect choice. ■■■



■ "Wait a second, that guy looks like…Vin Diesel!"

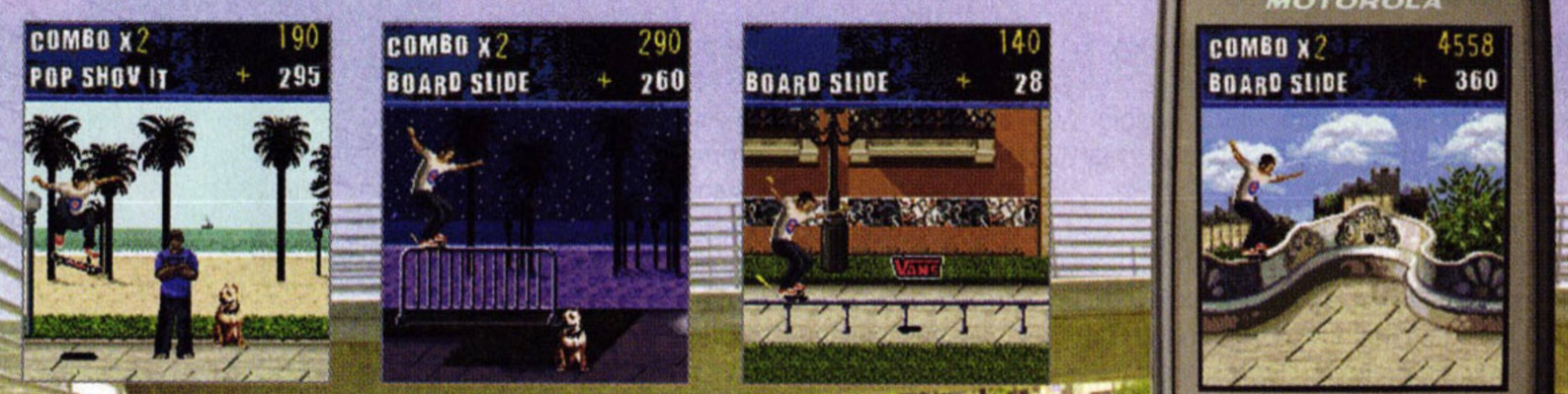
■ Cyber Butlers, the domestic help of the future



■ Some mission objectives have you protecting your partner while he or she goes solo

RAW SKATEBOARDING FOR YOUR MOBILE!

VANS Skate & Slam
FEAT. GEOFF ROWLEY



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"According to Nazi Information Stand, we should have turned left at Pottery Barn."

Few things are crazier than a superhero frat party

PC

Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL/IRRATIONAL GAMES
> DEVELOPER IRRATIONAL GAMES **> RELEASE** MARCH

THE INCREDIBLES

Never fear citizens, the Freedom Force is here! The original PC superhero title recalled the glory days of Silver Age comics with its original characters and old-school charm. With the second game in the series, Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich, Irrational Games hopes to capture the same gleeful mood while adding new depth and polish. We talked with Irrational Games head honcho Ken Levine about this new super-powered software and he gave us a glimpse into its secret lair.

As the name implies, Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich pits the heroes of the first game against the Nazis, with a few new faces at their side to help them sock it to Adolf and his cronies. It seems that in an alternate history, the Nazis used Energy X to take over the world. Those no-good bums! The Freedom Force travels back in time to defeat them, and meets up with new heroes like Tombstone and Sky King.

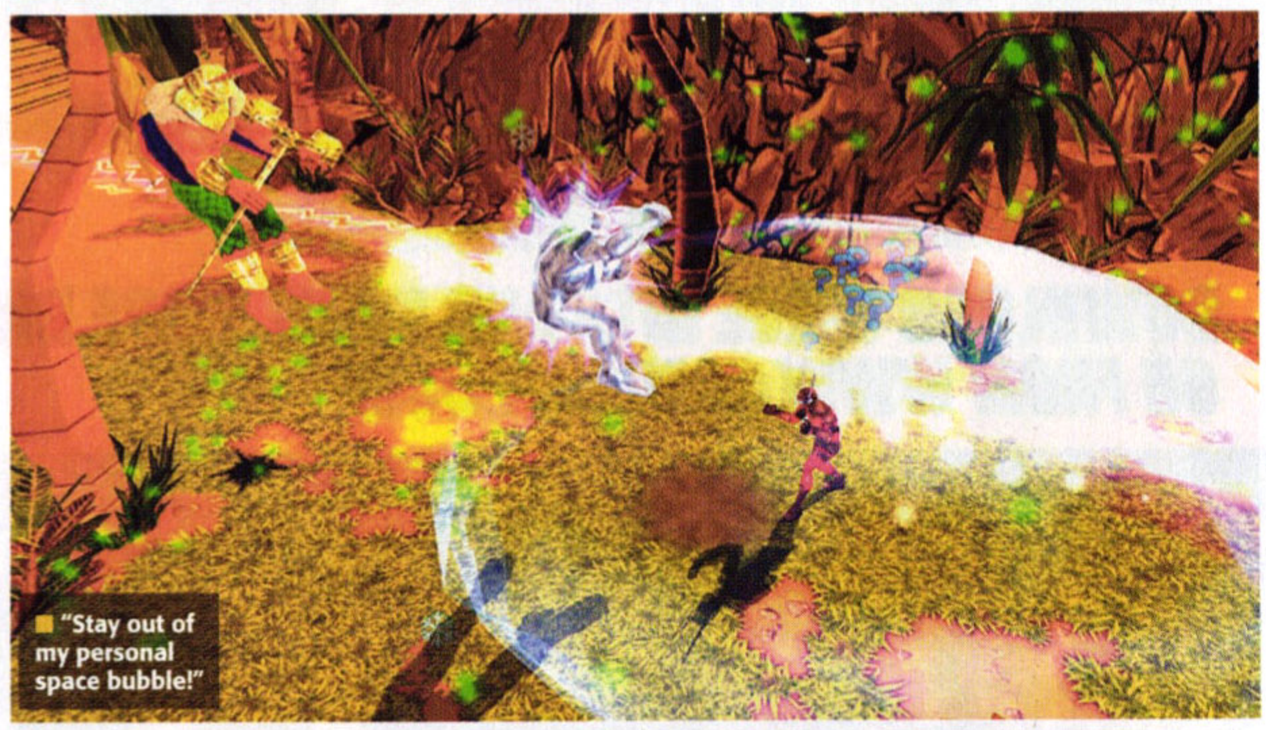
Although it is set in World War II, don't expect this title to play anything like those other WW II games on the market. "What other WW II games have floating brains in jars or flying Italian baritones?" asks Levine. "Also, the game isn't limited strictly to war-torn Europe. You'll be traveling everywhere from Cuba during the height of the Cold War to distant dimensions and beyond."

The story is pretty much guaranteed to be unique, and the graphics and gameplay are bound to whip the entire experience into lean, mean, fightin' shape. By using the new Gamebryo engine, the second Freedom Force title will certainly eclipse the original. Levine explained how the engine was helping Irrational take the game to new heights, "We're creating much bigger worlds with a much higher level of interactivity and object density," he says. "With all the new rendering effects, including dynamic lighting, we're able to make the game pop off the monitor. While we're psyched to have all the latest and greatest rendering capabilities at our fingertips, the most important thing is how you use them. With a game like Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich, it's all about style. We think we've got the look we're shooting for down pat." Gadzooks!

Levine is just as confident about the gameplay as he is about the graphics, and says the Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich will offer something for everyone, including, "A huge single player campaign with tons of unique and vastly different characters, solid multiplayer, tools for modders, and more." Fans can also expect a more robust character creation mode to build the hero of their dreams (just don't make anyone that looks like a Marvel character!). This mode has been revamped, making it easier to use, with new built-in characters, powers and effects. Irrational is so good to us mere mortals.

With so much to offer, Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich looks certain to deliver a knockout punch to the ugly face of Evil when it arrives in stores this March. Frankly, we can't wait to see Evil get its clock cleaned. We can't stand that rotten Evil. ■■■

"Burritos!"



"Stay out of my personal space bubble!"

"There's a fly on your back. Hold still."

All were in awe of the Great Nazini's magic act

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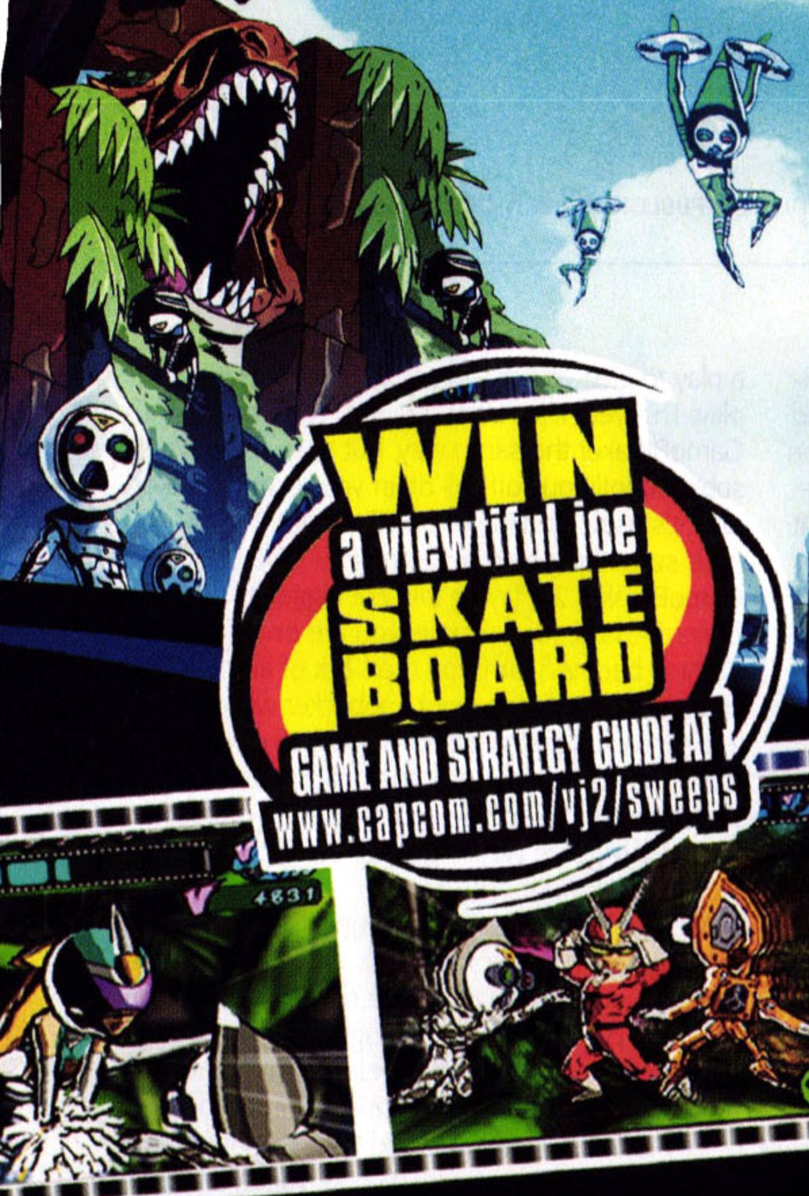

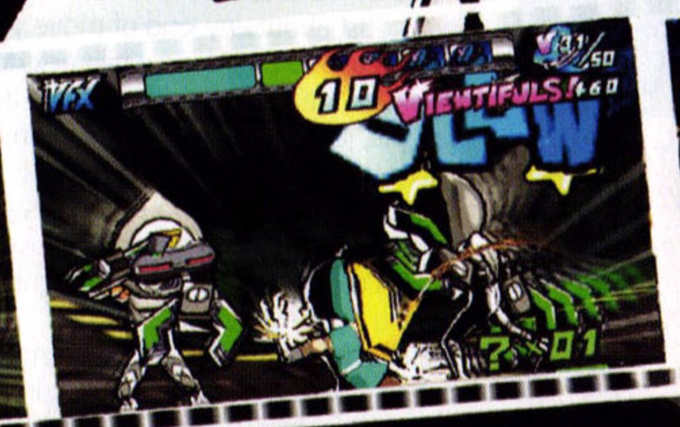

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Cartoon Violence

BRADYGAMES Strategy Guide AVAILABLE

NINTENDO GAMECUBE. PlayStation.2

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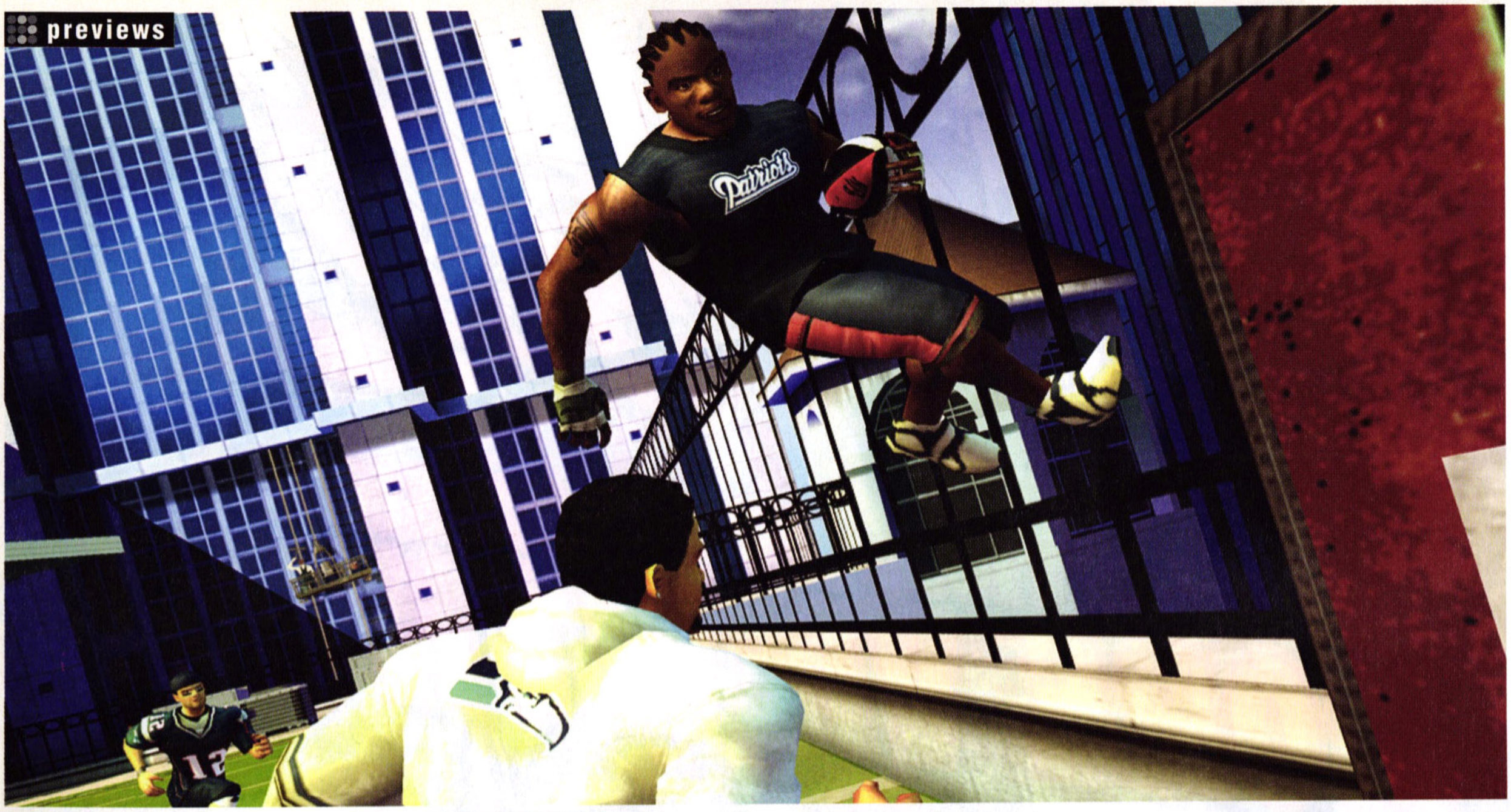

Even QBs can use walls for style-infused passes

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NFL Street 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** EA BIG **> DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
> RELEASE DECEMBER 22

NECESSARY ROUGHNESS

Smash mouth football is back with a new edition of NFL Street. Taking cues from fans and building off of the original, this year's iteration of the trash-talking pigskin series is introducing a host of new changes for anyone wanting to put their nut cup on the line.

Style is still the name of the game and the added wall moves not only make use of the title's environments, but also help you rack up some extra points. Just about any kind of move you can pull in the game can be done while next to a wall. QBs can chuck the rock after jumping off a fence, for example, just as well as receivers can launch off of one to snare a pass, or running backs can use them for a juke. There are even specific pass plays that intentionally bring your receivers close to a wall for a stylish catch. Do this near a designated Hot Spot and you'll get even more points.

Of course, the reason you're doing all this showboating is to earn a GameBreaker. In the first NFL Street, these special tokens could be used before a play to give you an advantage for that entire play. This year it's a little different. You'll activate a GameBreaker the same way, but each move you subsequently pull off will drain your GameBreaker until it's used up. However, NFL Street 2 also adds something new by letting you save up for a GameBreaker 2. Playing this will trigger its own kind of craziness. If, for example, you are on offense, your running back will jump off the back of an offensive lineman. On defense, your linebacker will pick up and throw a defensive back at the ball carrier. It looks as cool as it sounds, the only problem is that this is a non-interactive sequence, so you unfortunately only get to watch GameBreaker 2s and not actually perform them.

Another big change for the franchise is the reworking of the career mode. It's a lot more diverse this year, putting you in charge of making your way around a big city; playing through scenarios to recruit for your team, earn them development points, participate in tournaments, and take over and defend city turf. It's more bite-sized than slogging through the first NFL Street, giving you a variety of tasks such as battling against someone else one-on-one, fighting over jump balls with other receivers, and even participating in a free-for-all.

If you've already got your hands full thinking of the new additions to this franchise, there is all sorts of new craziness waiting for you when you hop online. Apart from head-to-head play, NFL Street 2 is offering other game modes to keep you busy. Are you ready for some football? You better be ready for much more than that. ■■■

That NFL sign on the wall denotes a Hot Spot

Ronde Barber and Joe Horn work on their cheerleading throw routines

SOME GHOSTS COME FROM THE AFTERLIFE.
SOME SEND YOU THERE.

Tom Clancy's

GHOST RECON 2

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

Red Storm

XBOX

XBOX LIVE

ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY

PlayStation.2

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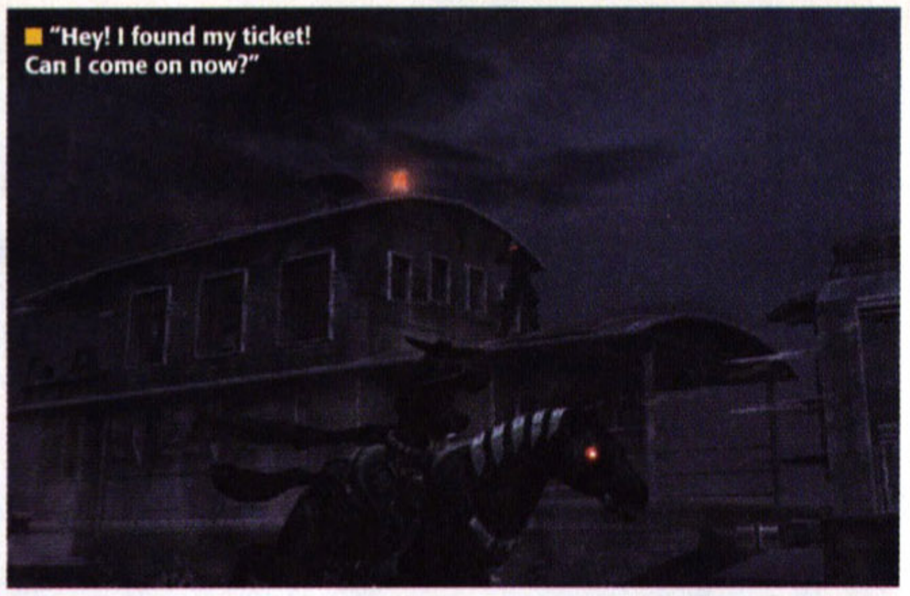
■ "Hey! I found my ticket! Can I come on now?"

■ All Darkwatch weapons feature blades for melee kills

■ "Hello sir. Would you like me to carve you a few slices of roast beef?"

■ This guy is dangerously underweight. We prescribe bacon

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Darkwatch

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TBD) > **PUBLISHER** SAMMY STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** SAMMY STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** MARCH

THE GUNSLINGER

In the gray, dusty night, a lanky figure strolls alone through the ruins of a western settlement. A slight breeze and the jangling of his spurs are the only sounds that reach his ears. Still, his hand goes to the revolver on his hips; he senses that a sinister presence lurks somewhere in the crumbling town. If there is one thing the stranger can sense, it's evil. He himself is unnatural, a dark stain upon the world of the living.

This man is Jericho Cross, the star of Sammy Studios' upcoming western horror shooter Darkwatch. In life, Cross was a scoundrel, taking what he needed to survive. Raiding a train in search of a final big score turned out to be the end of his life, but not the end of the story. The train belonged to the Darkwatch, a secret society tasked with protecting the world from supernatural forces. While searching for treasure on the train, Cross unleashed a captive vampire that turned him into one of the undead and escaped, reawakening evil across the land. The Darkwatch agents gave Cross the choice to destroy the powerful vampire, or face extermination. Thus, his adventure began.

As Jericho Cross, players will battle their way through the haunted old West in search of evil. Although it is a first-person shooter, Darkwatch offers gamers new abilities not seen in other shooters, thanks to Cross' vampiric nature. Cross can detect supernatural elements with his blood vision, leap high into the air with his vampire jump, and take out enemies with melee combat, thanks to his bladed firearms. He'll even earn new vampire powers, although not simply by volume killing. Throughout the adventure, Cross will encounter situations that have good and evil choices, and each will reward Cross with a different power. For example, in the demo we played, an innocent woman had been bitten by a vampire. Finishing her off unlocked a melee frenzy mode, while sucking the tainted blood out of her (thus saving her) rewarded us with a mode that temporarily supercharged our bullets, killing everything in one shot.

Like Fable or Knights of the Old Republic, Darkwatch features branching paths of good and evil. But unlike those role-playing based games, Darkwatch is all about action. In our time with the game, we jumped onto a moving train from atop our undead horse, cut down enemies with a mystical shotgun, fired exploding crossbow rounds into zombies, and sprayed hot lead into gargantuan, acid-vomiting vampires. The enemies we faced sported location-specific damage and Havok physics, so we shot their arms off, took off their heads with melee attacks, and watched as our bullets tore them from the roof of a train and sent them spiraling to the ground.

There are certainly a lot of shooters out there, but we think that Darkwatch has what it takes to stand out in the crowd. The action is fun and frantic, and the unique setting and abilities instantly set it apart from the others. Online support will offer the competitive aspect shooter fans crave, and the mature story should appeal to gamers looking for something a little deeper than the average action game plot. In a genre comprised largely of sequels and knockoffs, Darkwatch is as refreshing as a tall glass of blood when you're thirsty. ■■■

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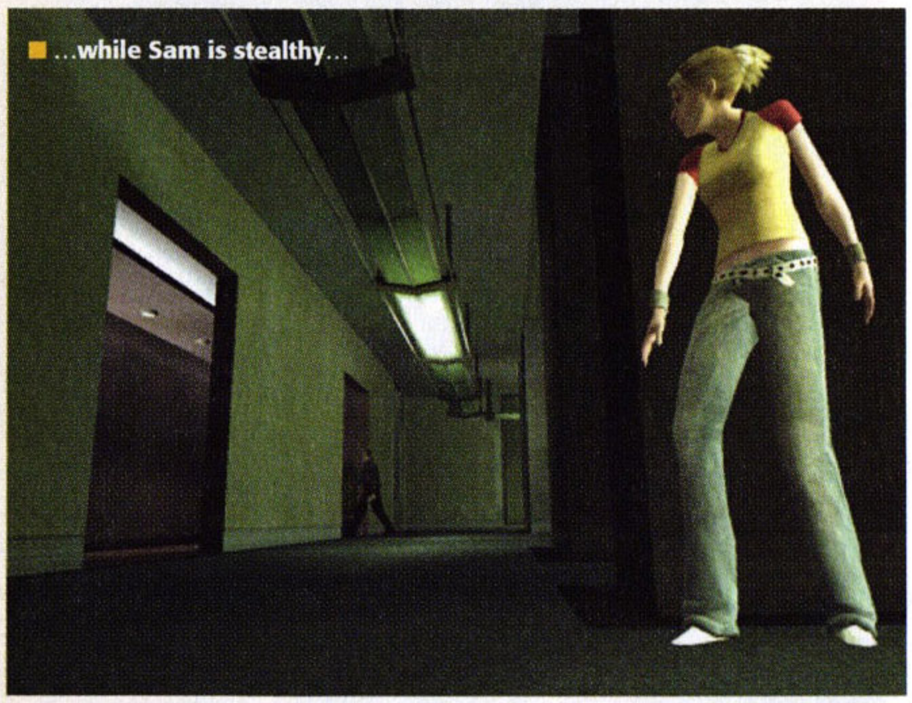
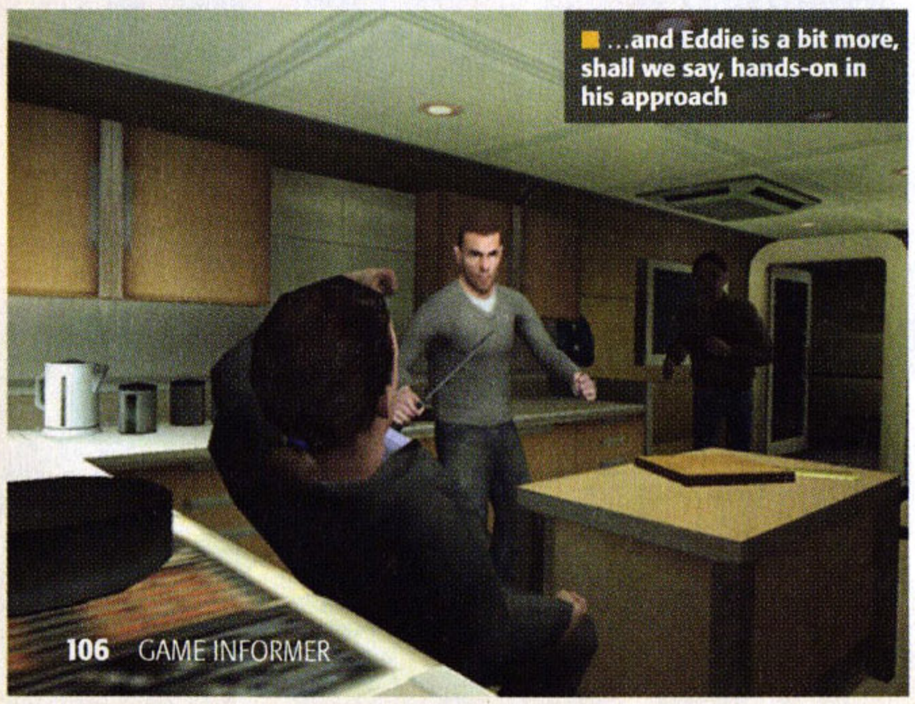
■ Ben Mitchell uses organized, militaristic techniques when stalking his foes...



■ ...while Sam is stealthy...



■ ...and Eddie is a bit more, shall we say, hands-on in his approach

PLAYSTATION 2

The Getaway: Black Monday

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

RETURN TO THE MEAN STREETS

As Grand Theft Auto continues to make exponential leaps with each successive entry in the series (as demonstrated by the epic San Andreas), most of its direct competition seems to be content to take baby steps towards progress. Game Informer praised the first Getaway for its gripping storytelling and hardboiled British wit, which helped make the title a hit despite some fairly significant technical and control deficiencies. We recently got a new playable build of the upcoming sequel, The Getaway: Black Monday, and were pleased to see that the game is maintaining much of what made its predecessor so engrossing, while at the same time taking some steps to remedy the problems of the first. Although it's not a drastic step above the last one, it does appear to be improved on a number of fronts.

Once again, Team Soho is relying on its storytelling skills to provide much of Black Monday's appeal. The tale at hand is quite epic, encompassing the fates of three playable characters: troubled super-cop Sgt. Ben Mitchell, two-bit thug and amateur boxer Eddie O'Conner, and comely computer whiz Sam, who sometimes dabbles in illegal hacking. At the outset, you're instantly drawn into the action as Mitchell is thrown into a deadly tussle with some Latvian gangsters that have kidnapped an investigative reporter who has looked too closely into their nefarious operation. It's a bracing beginning to a game that holds a number of shocking revelations, which are played out from several different points of view and time frames.

From a gameplay perspective, little appears to have changed. The majority of this game still revolves around the ever-present activities of driving and gunplay. The automotive portion of the package seems largely the same as before, but that's a good thing considering that the epic car chases down claustrophobic London streets were really the strong points of the first title. The autos still handle well, and there are some new rides to indulge your lead-foot, most notably motorcycles. One thing that did seem much improved was the navigation system, which again directs players via the turning lights on the back of the vehicles. However, the AI that drives these signals seems a bit more sensible and less erratic, resulting in less confusing tours through London. Also, the cars – in general – have a bit more acceleration and top-end speed.

On foot, you'd be hard-pressed to find many significant differences in comparing The Getaway to Black Monday. This said, there has been some polish added. The character models are more detailed, and the animation (especially the previously awkward "staggering" walk of the characters) is more fluid. However, we'd be remiss if we didn't point out the fact that – on this build, at least – some of The Getaway's more nagging deficiencies, particularly in the camera and auto-targeting, seem to persist in Black Monday. Also, the controversial "lean on a wall to restore health" and minimalist heads-up display are back as well. However, little touches like being able to pick up and drag bodies and working with teams of police special forces (while playing as Mitchell) do add some intrigue to the package.

While it would be nice to see a bit more advancement made over the first title, we're still quite excited for Black Monday. Few developers have delivered cinematic characters and experiences like Team Soho, and the thrill of hurtling down crowded London streets is still as invigorating as it's always been. Expect fans of the franchise to get much more of what they love come January. ■■■

■ The levels are more dynamic, often going above and below the London streets

■ "Note to self: Next time, get a Capital One 'No Hassle' Visa."

XBOX

Iron Phoenix

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** SAMMY STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER INTERSERV INTERNATIONAL **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY

EVERYBODY WAS KUNG FU FIGHTING

When nine mystical weapons are forged from the remains of a meteor that fell to Earth in the distant past, you can't be surprised when there are years of bloodshed and war to determine their ownership. As it turns out, that's exactly what has happened in Iron Phoenix, a chaotic 16-player online melee game that drops you right in the middle of the whole mess.

You'll play as one of more than 10 fighters and have your choice between any of the nine ultra-powerful magical blades, hammers, or spears. While there is a single player component against bots, the real mayhem begins when you jump on Xbox Live, where all 16 players can have at it simultaneously in a smorgasbord of wire-fu style action. Run up walls, flip high in the air, and master the unique moves of your chosen weapon. All the battlegrounds are large and spacious, with numerous pick-ups and extra weapons to be found by the curious searcher. Combat itself involves the trading of combo-heavy moves against your opponent, balanced with the judicious use of blocks and dodging. In large matches, you can wade into the conflagration and take your chances against everyone, or single out a particular opponent and lock your attacks on them. If you have an unstoppable grudge to settle, you can challenge a single opponent to a duel. When they accept, the two of you will be isolated away in a bubble, where only the best fighter will emerge victorious. Each of the available weapons has an impressive array of individual actions for you to master, and when you've built up your Chi, you can unleash a devastating, wide-radius attack for massive damage.

Iron Phoenix plays as an alternative to games like Unreal Championship. Focusing entirely on the third person melee perspective, and couched in the myths of the ancient far east, it could be right up your alley if movies like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* or *Hero* get your blood boiling. ■■■

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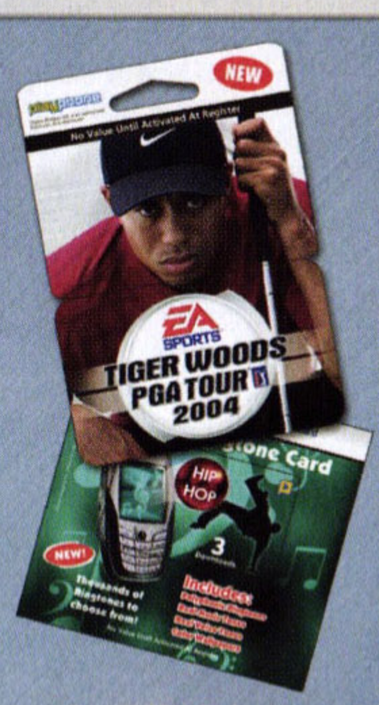

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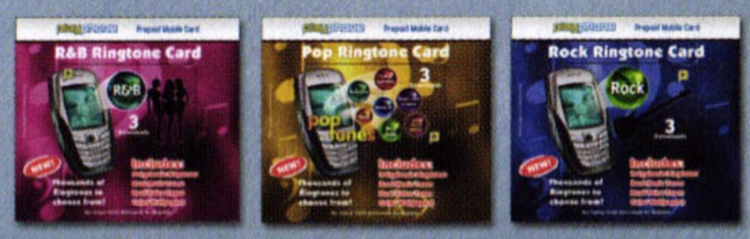

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Twice the marines means twice the carnage

XBOX

Doom 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** ID SOFTWARE/VICARIOUS VISIONS > **RELEASE** 2005

SURVIVING THE TRANSITION

Id Software's landmark PC FPS, Doom 3, is well on its way to being crunched down into an Xbox-sized package of fear. Game Informer had the good fortune to play quite a bit of both single-player and system link co-op of the forthcoming console port, and all signs point towards this ambitious project being as incredible an experience on the Xbox as it is on PC.

Single-player is much the same in this version as in the original. A small amount of assisted aiming (similar to that in Halo 2) is present to ease the frustrations inherent to FPS on a controller, but that's about the only difference. Of particular note is the fact that you can map a weapon to each direction on the d-pad, allowing quick and easy switching. Flashlight and quick-save are also assigned to individual buttons, so there's really no reason to have to drag yourself away from the action to dig through menus.

Co-op on Xbox is a completely different animal than the co-op mods available for the PC. Since much of the ambiance of fear is lost when you have a buddy to watch your back, co-op functions more as a highlight reel of the best action segments of the game; id estimates that about two-thirds of the single-player campaign will be available for co-op play. However, more demons will assault you and power-ups are set up a bit differently. Some pickups are even flagged for one player or the other, so you can't jack all of the armor from your poor teammate. Competitive multiplayer works just like the non-modded Internet play of the PC version. Except, of course, the server browser should actually work properly from day one.

The real feat of this port, though, is that it's just as creepy, plays just as smoothly, and delivers the same level of tension as the original. While it will obviously not have quite as much graphical fidelity, it does have more than enough – you won't be missing much at all by playing Doom 3 on the Xbox rather than PC. ■■■

The monsters are just as cool looking on Xbox

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** ID SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** 2005

WHEN IT'S DONE

This is one of Hell's hunters that is after you

True, legendary developer id did finally release their latest opus in August. Now the company is hard at work on the expansion and still sticking to the line that it'll be unleashed on the public "when it's done." The good news, though, is that even the small bits of it we saw look great – for our money, this is shaping up to be a worthy expansion pack to one of the most popular PC games of all time.

Resurrection of Evil is set two years after the events of Doom 3, with the Cyberdemon dead and the evil Dr. Betruger having fled. You play as a different marine this time, sent down by the UAC (which covered up the demonic invasion as a reactor meltdown) to assist Dr. Elizabeth McNeal in investigating a strange beacon at the first alien dig site. This, of course, turns out to be an artifact of evil power and it draws Betruger's malefic attention the moment you lay hands on it. He sends three hell-spawned hunters after you, and thus your quest begins. You'll have to face down each of these three demons in single combat while Dr. McNeal attempts to unravel the secrets of the ancient civilization on Mars before Betruger can retrieve the artifact and mount another invasion of the mortal plane. You just might get a chance to end the malevolent doctor's threat for good by the time the campaign is done.

New weapons will aid you in your task. An antique double-barreled shotgun is the first, followed by the "Grabber." This is an obvious knockoff of Half-Life's gravity gun, but is not without its own charms. In particular, you can grab enemy projectiles and return them to their senders. It's about as amusing as you'd think. The evil artifact itself, though, is far and away the coolest new toy. After defeating each of the three demonic hunters, the artifact will absorb their power and allow you to utilize it. In order, you get a slow-time effect, a berserk ability (much like the Berserk power-up), and limited invulnerability – and they stack. You'll have to feed the artifact good souls (found off of dead humans) for it to work, though.

Between the campaign, which id estimates at one-half to two-thirds as long as the original one, the sweet new weapons, and the three new enemy types, Resurrection of Evil looks to be everything an expansion should be. Let's just hope that "when it's done" doesn't mean "three years from now" this time. ■■■

Nothing's creepier than death babies

They Fought For Freedom...
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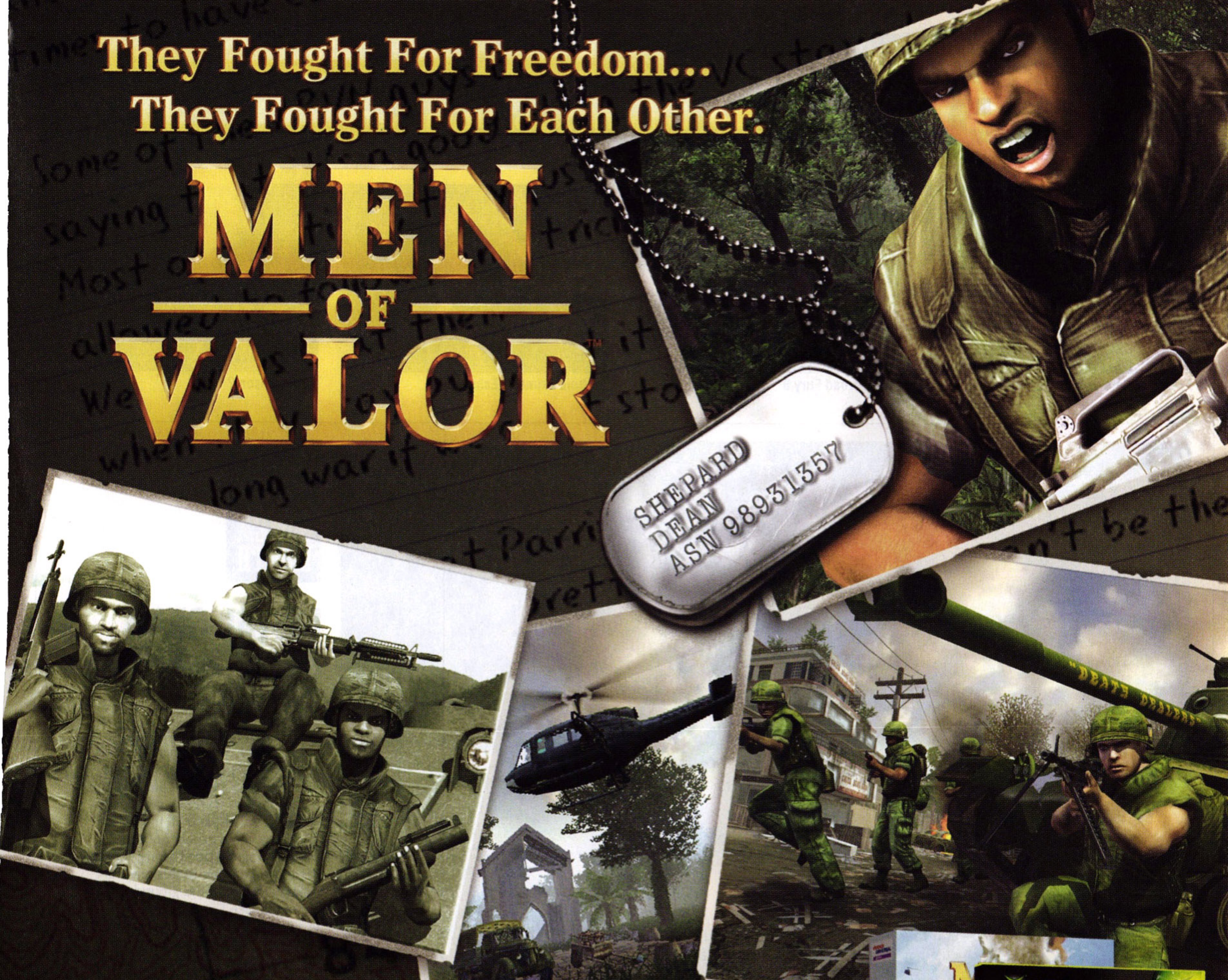

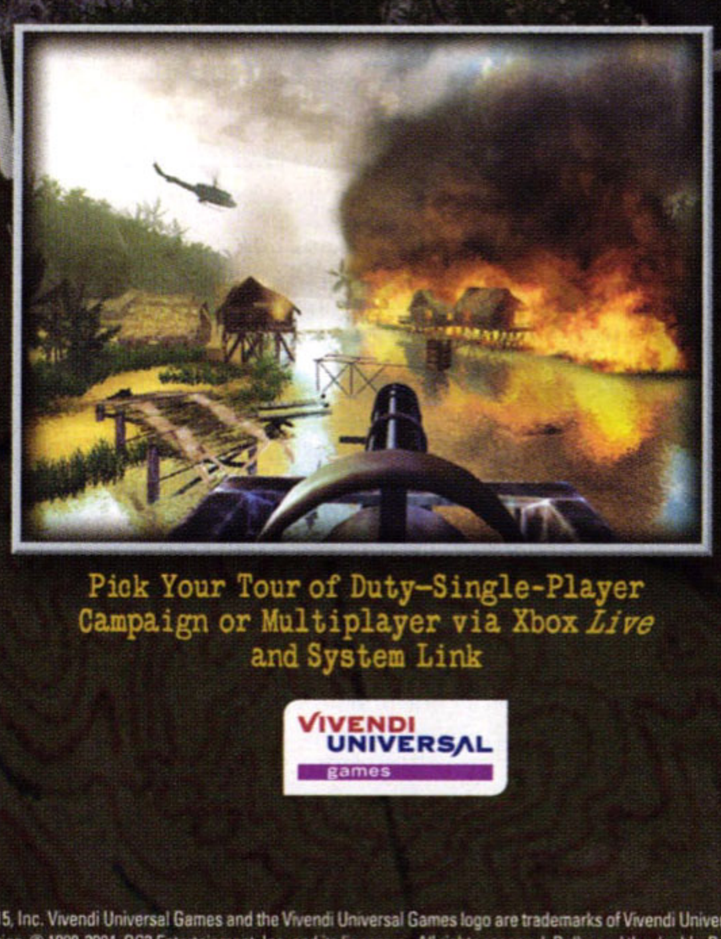

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GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

Never send a soldier in to do a Snake's work. Hideo Kojima's latest Metal Gear creation drops gamers into the middle of the Cold War and envelopes you with rich gameplay, stunning visuals, and all the twists and turns you'd expect from the mind of Kojima. Don't worry, though, there is a lot more to this tale than rolling around on the ground eating vermin. Snake Eater features a collection of some the franchise's most memorable boss fights – and that's a strong statement. Turn to page 120 for the ride of your life.

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	Felonious. A game so offensively awful that it's illegal to own. Buyers will be registered on the National Video Game Offenders list and forced to introduce themselves as such to their neighbors.

> **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

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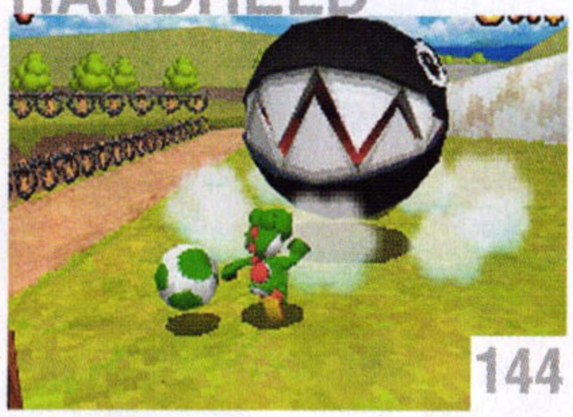
The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth

HANDHELD



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Super Mario 64 DS

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GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

Electronic Arts' juggernaut first-person shooter franchise may have been giving the appearance of missing the bus recently, but there's a big treat waiting for all of you World War II gamers out there. Pacific Assault takes everything that made the series great, mixes in some new elements, and puts players right into the thick of combat with startling proficiency. Learn what makes it great on page 142.

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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

Blow 'n Suck – Being unable to successfully perform the blow functions featured in Nintendo DS games

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

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

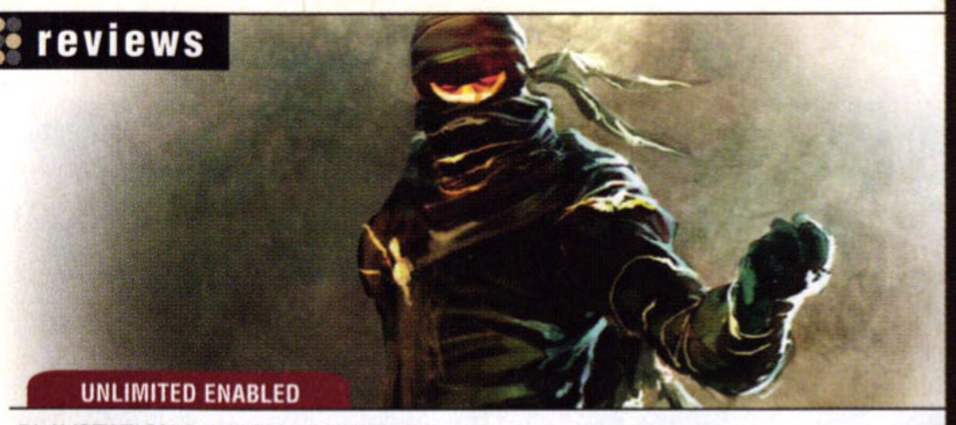
shooter – A term we use for games like Mars Matrix and Gradius

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



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Prince of Persia: Warrior Within

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 30 **> ESRB** M

■ The Prince is much more aggressive but, while there is some blood, the gore is kept fairly low key

BATTLE YOUR DEMONS

Everyone loves Prince of Persia: Sands of Time. The overwhelming majority of those who played it remember its story, its look, and its platforming as some of the finest examples of recent video game design. Now it's sequel time and we all wonder if this new entry measures up. As a whole, Warrior Within does an incredible job of differentiating itself while still maintaining the series' high level of quality.

In many, many ways Warrior Within ably carries the torch left by Sands of Time. The platforming is one of the closest things to gaming nirvana that I have ever had the pleasure to participate in – there were honestly times where, when I died, I was actually happy to do certain segments over again. The level design is just as good as the first game and, in certain sections, I would argue that it's dramatically improved. It seems to me that the environments are used to their fullest and the development team takes advantage of every path, every moment of tension, every joy of movement that is possible in a three-dimensional space.

This achievement is harder than one would guess, because the story of Warrior Within has the Prince traveling between the present and the past of the same environment (at least through a hearty chunk of the tale). Repetition of design could have easily been a problem here, but the differences due to decay and destruction mean that, while you'll recognize rooms, you won't be taking anywhere near the same path through them on your subsequent visits.

But what about the main complaint many had with Sands of Time? The much-discussed combat has received enough of an overhaul that I am now a big fan, but retains the right amount of the first game's scheme that I felt instantly comfortable with the Prince's abilities. I actually developed two different fighting styles that I would switch between. On the safety of solid ground, my Prince was an acrobatic wonder, somersaulting over and throwing enemies into each other with abandon. On a platform, I made every effort to avoid wall flipping, and developed an entirely different method of destruction. Versatility like this isn't something that you come across every day, and I'm grateful that it's here.

Still, when it comes down to it, I'm giving Warrior Within a one-quarter point lower than Sands of Time. Why? It mostly has to do with the story, which was so exceptional in Sands of Time that the franchise set the bar for itself incredibly high. Warrior Within just misses this mark by a hair. It's not at all that the story is bad or that the dialogue is trite or unconvincing, it's that the pace at which players learn more is skewed. I really wanted the narrative structure to be integrated more evenly into the entire game – something that Sands of Time did expertly and was a high point for many players, myself included.

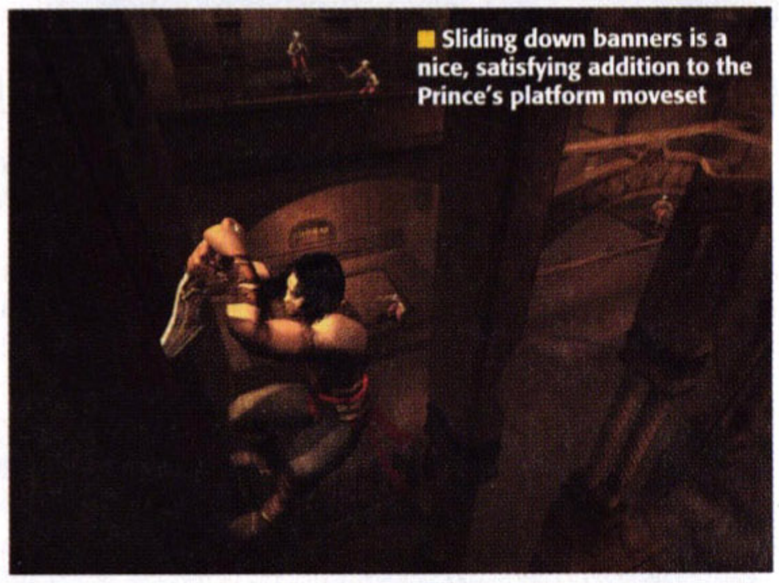
At the end of the day, my occasional frustration or quibble with story pacing is practically null because Warrior Within is such an exceptional game. Its change of pace and maturity feels just right, the platforming is divine, and the action is something to be very happy about.—**LISA**

theedge

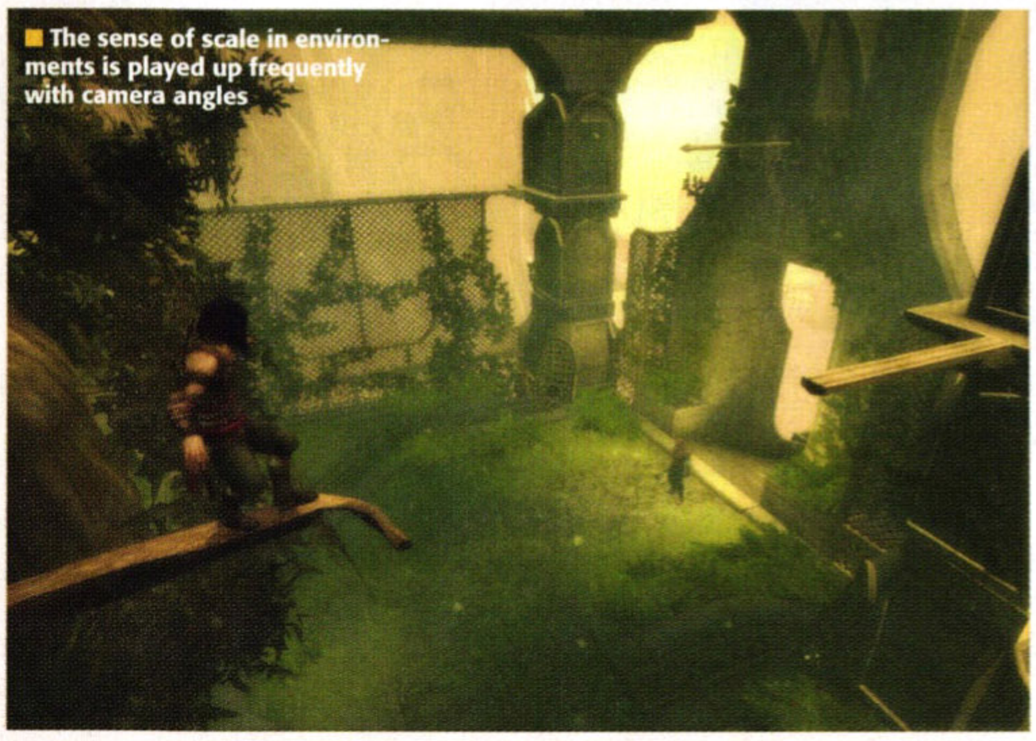
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

With widescreen, 480p, downloadable content, and Dolby Digital sound, the Xbox version takes the edge in the tech and graphics departments.

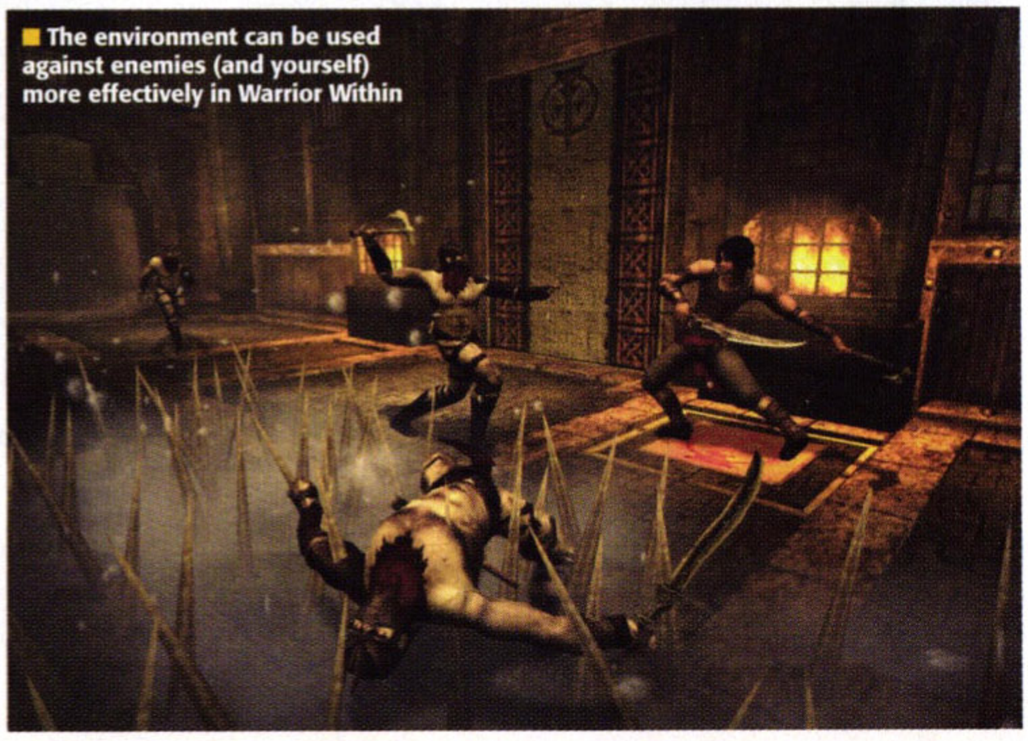
■ This guy is about to get gutted, in a good way



■ Sliding down banners is a nice, satisfying addition to the Prince's platform moveset



■ The sense of scale in environments is played up frequently with camera angles



■ The environment can be used against enemies (and yourself) more effectively in Warrior Within

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> Concept: Reunite players with the Prince – now a wearied, worried, ass-kicking action/platforming machine

> Graphics: Positively stunning. Maintains the art style of Sands of Time, but dirties it up to great effect

> Sound: Excellent voice acting and chattier enemies are a nice addition that keeps up the menacing feel while still describing the characters

> Playability: Improved combat and platforming that is at least as good as the first game (and in some stages, even better)

> Entertainment: I wanted more from the story in the early stages, but the gameplay is so tight that it carries you through

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 9

The battle system from the first Prince was easily my least favorite part of the adventure, but perhaps not for the obvious reasons. Many thought the combat was too shallow. I, on the other hand, actually liked the simple combat. I just felt there was too much of it. It seemed the designers used wave after wave of enemies to artificially increase the length of the game. This time around, the combat is certainly deeper with improved pacing, but I don't feel it's all that much better. Sometimes it feels spot on, others times it just feels sloppy; but all the time I feel I'm just doing it to get back to the story and exploration parts of the game that I so enjoy. Combat complaints aside, Warrior Within is still a gripping adventure that shouldn't be missed by fans of the original.—**ANDY**

CHRG ASST

F

INTEGRATED MOTOR ASSIST IMA

BAT

E

C

H

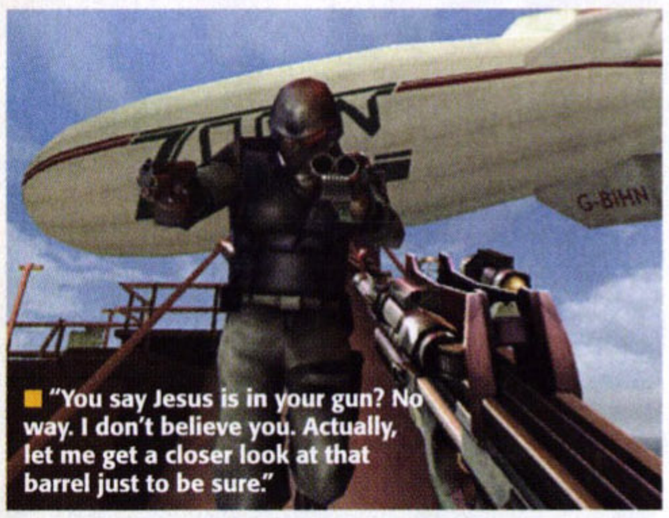
SELECT
RESET

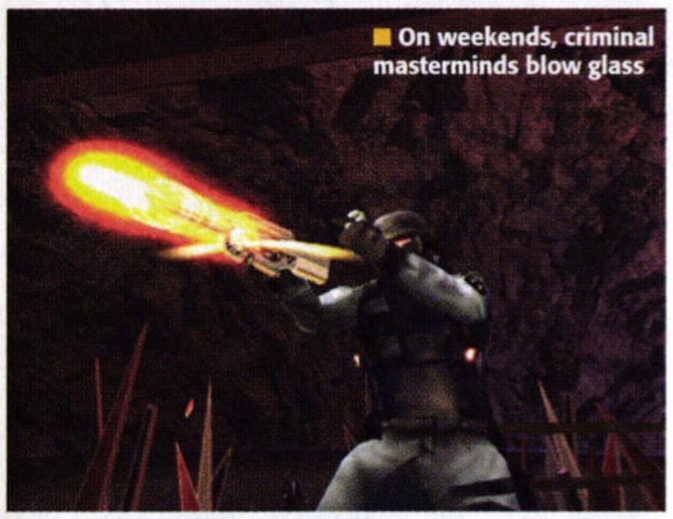
A fuel gauge? Or a gauge of intelligence?

47 city. 48 highway.* The Civic Hybrid. HONDA

honda.com 1-800-33-Honda *Based on 2005 EPA mileage estimates. Use for comparison purposes only. Actual mileage may vary. CVT, ATPZEV model only. ©2004 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

Before he perished, Jim showed the world his so-called "Pretty, Happy Dance"


"You say Jesus is in your gun? No way. I don't believe you. Actually, let me get a closer look at that barrel just to be sure."


On weekends, criminal masterminds blow glass

Take a human shield and mow them down

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, SYSTEM LINK, OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER ELECTRONIC ARTS LOS ANGELES **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17 **> ESRB** T

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

So you're telling me that this GoldenEye chap was unceremoniously discharged from MI6 because he didn't save James Bond in a virtual reality simulator? That's really what sets this guy off? This is the trigger that unleashes his unbridled hatred for human life? Man, what would happen if he showed up 15 minutes late for work?

In case you can't read into my tone, I'm not impressed with EA's latest James Bond game. In fact, I would even go as far to say that it tarnishes the hallowed GoldenEye name that gamers have held close to their hearts since 1997, and is the equivalent of tossing a martini into Bond's face and then shooting him in the family jewels with a tranquilizer dart. Believe me, I am just as stunned and disappointed as you are. I thought Agent Under Fire was an amazing game. Nightfire wasn't as explosive, but it was still a fun play. And Everything or Nothing completely blew my mind. I loved it.

With Rogue Agent it feels like a gigantic vacuum cleaner sucked all the creativity out of the game. Assuredly, punching enemies and using them as human shields never seems to get old, but there's little else that put a smile on my face. The level designs are painfully desolate. Although the deathtraps are more creative (like activating a rocket engine with people behind it), the means of using them is not as elegant. In previous Bond titles, these traps were hidden in the levels. It was up to the player to find them and figure out how to use them. In this iteration, you just have to locate a terminal and press the button. Keep in mind that these terminals all look the same and can be seen from a mile away. Watching enemies bite the big one in a multitude of ways certainly brings about a devious cackle or two, but it's just too mindless of an approach.

The gameplay is also quite frustrating. For a guy who is a so-called secret agent, GoldenEye can't change a weapon magazine to save his life. Could these weapons take any longer to reload? Dual wielding is executed well, but I rarely found my visionary tools to be useful. Since an enemy can never keep still and squirms like a five-year-old that slammed a bag of Pop Rocks, the M.R.I. ability of seeing through walls didn't reveal much for me, and by the time that I used my weapon hack, the enemy was already zipped up in a body bag. The shield is the only tool that I would use successfully. The gameplay may lead to frustration, but I do have to hand it to EA for tracking so many end-of-level stats. I'm a big sucker for performance breakdown, and this game tallies everything (perfect shots, machine traps, melee throws, hostages, explosions, cheap shots, and so on).

The multiplayer maps are nice and small, and work well for both online and split-screen. Deathtraps are abundant, and like a mousetrap with cheese, feature a powerful weapon smack dab in the middle of them. If not for the lackluster gameplay, this multiplayer package would have been pretty slick.

As always, EA did a bang-up job with this game's presentation. The characters in the CG cutscenes look fantastic, Paul Oakenfold's rhythmic score is music to the ears, and you just gotta love seeing more of Pussy Galore.

I like EA's approach of putting players into the shoes of a loose cannon, but the game just lacks that Bond chemistry that we've come to expect. Much like Timothy Dalton as James Bond, Rogue Agent doesn't fit well into this secret agent's universe.—**REINER**

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

From a graphical standpoint, the Xbox version edges out the PS2 and GC with more detailed faces, higher resolution texturing, and 480p HDTV support. Gameplay wise, the PS2 and Xbox are pretty much tied. Both versions feature online gameplay that boasts Countdown MP mode and a Temple map (neither of which are present for the GC's splitscreen). Bonus features lean in the favor of PS2 and Xbox as well, with unlockable concept art movies (again, not on GC). In the end, The Edge is a tossup between the PS2 and Xbox.

GoldenEye hated guns until he learned that the barrel was the perfect holder for Fourth of July sparklers

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> Concept: An outlaw agent named GoldenEye wages a war against Bond's greatest villains, yet comes across as a hack in this unfulfilling game

> Graphics: Very drab. Environments are blocky and sterile, the character movements are stiff and floaty, and the effects are not very vibrant

> Sound: Paul Oakenfold's soundtrack is one of the best you'll hear all year. The weapon sounds and voiceovers are solid as well

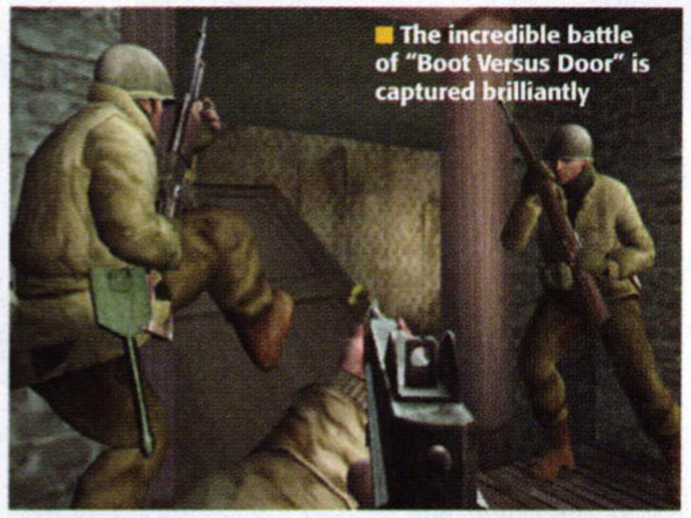
> Playability: Weapon reloading is way too slow and the level designs are poorly constructed

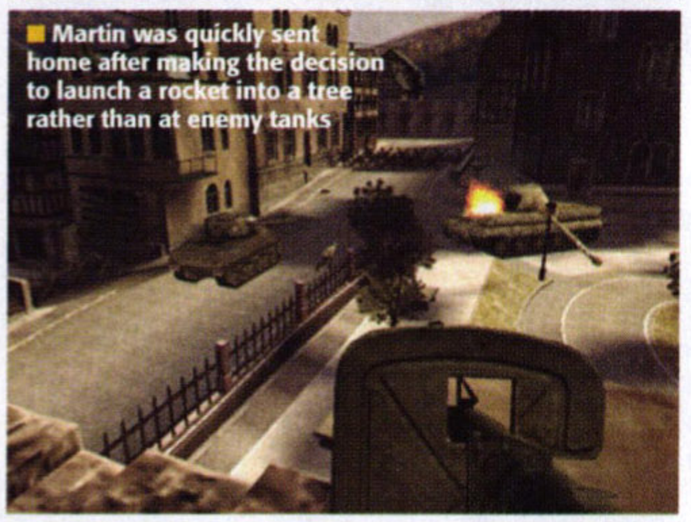
> Entertainment: A lower quality than EA's previous efforts. There are some good ideas at work, but the game just doesn't deliver the thrills

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

I don't want to burst anyone's bubble here, but if you're expecting a return to the glory days of the GoldenEye franchise, you're in for a disappointment. Environments are lacking in detail and the level designs are often downright boring. Multiplayer seems to chug along at a snail's pace compared with current Xbox Live competitors. But, just to be clear, the game has some truly glowing aspects to it. Paul Oakenfold's interactive electronica score is awesome, and the voiceover work from many of the Bond villains from over the years is stellar. Playing as the bad guy is a pretty cool change of pace, as heartlessly taking hostages and slyly activating deathtraps can be a lot of fun. But pick this game up because it sounds interesting on its own merits, not because they pimped out the GoldenEye name to boost sales.—**MILLER**


■ The incredible battle of "Boot Versus Door" is captured brilliantly


■ Martin was quickly sent home after making the decision to launch a rocket into a tree rather than at enemy tanks

■ No matter where you are, teammates are always at your side

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Call of Duty: Finest Hour

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, SYSTEM LINK, OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** SPARK UNLIMITED **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 **> ESRB** T

THE REAL MEDAL OF HONOR

Orange is the new blue, *Smallville* is the new *Lois and Clark*, and Call of Duty is the new Medal of Honor. With a development team that consists of over 30 people who defected from the console and PC Medal of Honor teams, it's no small coincidence that Call of Duty: Finest Hour feels vaguely familiar. At times it may feel like you are taking the Pepsi Challenge when you try to distinguish the differences between Medal of Honor: Rising Sun and Call of Duty: Finest Hour. Both games use stock World War II footage to introduce new levels, and within the first level of Finest Hour, which is an explosive recreation of the Russian infantry's charge at Stalingrad, it appears that Spark has made the same mistake of focusing on cinematic sequences rather than gritty gunplay.

It's not until you reach the second stage that you see that these two titles couldn't contrast more. Where the entire experience in Rising Sun felt like sightseeing at Disney World, Finest Hour drops you into the frontlines of an epic battle that will have you gasping for air as the firefights intensify, ducking as grenades fly overhead, and chewing off your nails as a teammate runs into a field that is being showered with bullets by a well-hidden machine gun nest. Long story short, the gameplay is the main attraction in Finest Hour, not the spectacles.

Much like the PC Call of Duty (which I should note is a completely different game), this console title features a brilliant targeting mechanic that allows players to zoom in and aim down the sight of the firearm. Couple this with nice hit detection and decent enemy AI, and you'll have the time of your life as you lean around corners to pick off one enemy after another. Grenades can also be thrown with pinpoint accuracy, and enemies react appropriately if they see it by diving for cover. Although shying away from realism, I also like how your targeting reticle flashes red when an enemy is tagged with a shot. The linearity of the missions is a bit disappointing, but Spark did a commendable job of mixing things up with the objectives and locations. As the war unfolds, you'll witness key conflicts through the eyes of American, British, and Russian soldiers in North Africa and the western and eastern fronts.

Another nice change of pace is that you never really feel like a one-man wrecking crew. Within each level, you always have a handful of teammates at your side and lending a hand. Since your comrades are prone to running into firefights without thinking twice and often like to stand in your line of fire, they obviously rode the short bus to school. Regardless, it's nice to have them there. Checkpoints are few and far between, but thankfully, health packs are always there if you need one. On this note, Spark really did a great job of balancing the difficulty.

In addition to an enjoyable and intense single-player experience, Finest Hour features a robust multiplayer experience for both Xbox and PS2. Thanks to levels that are ripe with sniper points and expansive open areas, deathmatching is a blast, and there's actually some strategy that can be built around Capture the Flag and Search and Destroy.

It may not be as memorable as the first Medal of Honor, but Call of Duty is paving the path that console war shooters should take.—**REINER**

Armored Destruction

Most of the game is spent on foot, but you'll also spend significant time driving tanks. Thanks in part to a handy turret-positioning indicator and the ability to switch between first and third-person perspectives, controlling these mechanical goliaths is remarkably easy and a blast to boot.

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The GameCube version doesn't offer the robust multiplayer experience that you'll find on PS2 or Xbox. Additionally, the Xbox supports 480p and Dolby Digital 5.1. The PS2 and GC utilize Dolby Pro-Logic II.

■ Multiplayer has a distinct flavor that separates it from other console FPSs

■ The Guinness World Record for "Largest Dump in Pants" was achieved at this exact moment when the shooter realizes that the plane he just downed is going to crash onto his Jeep

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> Concept: A World War II shooter that excels in control and online play

> Graphics: Simply gorgeous. From dozens of troops scurrying up a hill to the detail in the environments, this game looks almost too good to be true

> Sound: An amazing orchestrated score is joined by excellent voice acting and larger-than-life war effects

> Playability: The teammate AI is questionable, but the controls are excellent and targeting couldn't be easier

> Entertainment: Delivers direct hits on all fronts and shows great legs with its multiplayer options

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.5

Maybe I was too pumped for this game. Where I was expecting a new benchmark in World War II gaming, I got a smooth, fun, hectic, and fairly standard wartime FPS. Finest Hour plays well and gives you some great moments, but never made me stand up at attention and salute. In particular, despite the solemn level intros with their stock footage, I never much cared about the mission I was on or the enemies I was supposed to fight. The campaign switches to new characters with such frequency that I had no chance to develop any sort of connection to any of them.
I also take issue with the infrequency of checkpoints in certain levels – I can think of several points during the game that I was forced to reload and waltz through ten minutes of cakewalk to get to the part that killed me over and over. However, these really are small complaints in the grand scheme of things. Finest Hour is still definitely in the triple-A class of console FPS.—**ADAM**

Nothing is off limits. Nothing is impossible. Drive any vehicle. Use any weapon. Destroy anything and everything. You are a mercenary in a completely interactive battlefield environment and the only rule is this: there are no rules.

HIJACK

BURN

DESTROY

BETRAY

CAPTURE

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

XBOX

PANDEMIC

PlayStation.2

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

The Incredibles

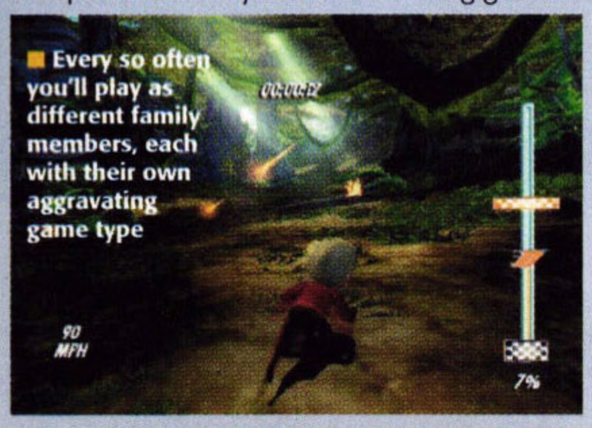
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** HEAVY IRON STUDIOS
> RELEASE OCTOBER 31 **> ESRB** T

INCREDIBLOWS

I was actually excited to play this game at first, since *The Incredibles* is one of my favorite movies in years. Once I picked up the controller and experienced the voices from the film, the jazzy music, and cartoony flair, I was convinced that this would be a game to remember. However, after the first few levels, the glow began to fade and I realized that all of my enthusiasm was just residue from the source material – the game itself doesn't have any legs to stand on. Despite my love for the movie, there are forms of villainy conspiring here that even the Incredibles cannot defeat.

Considering this title has a family of superheroes with awesome powers at its disposal, I was hoping it could muster enough strength to overcome the average platforming that plagues many licensed games. It could not. Take the regular offenses, such as poor hit detection and camerawork, and then add in some new transgressions like foggy objectives and dull enemy designs, and you have a rich tapestry of frustration that pervades every second of the game. You'll fall to your death, whiff on your Incredipunches, and wander around baffled as to what exactly you're supposed to do next. Sure, you might be saving the world, but this sure seems like an uninspired and roundabout way to do it.

One way to break up the tiresome pace would have been to frequently switch up the characters. After all, each of the family members has a power that could potentially translate into awesome gameplay. That way, even if the game were boring, it wouldn't always be the same kind of boring. Unfortunately, apart from a few assorted levels with Elastigirl and the two kids, the game is mostly just Mr. Incredible running, jumping, and punching things. The same things. I might have recommended this simplistic formula for younger gamers except for the fact that encounters with the Omnidroid are some of the most tedious and unforgiving bouts I've ever fought. If you loved the movie *The Incredibles*, enjoy superheroes in any form, or just like playing games in general, you are (and this is probably the only time anyone will tell you this, so pay attention) officially too cool to lower yourself to this title's level.—**JOE**



■ Every so often you'll play as different family members, each with their own aggravating game type

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> Concept: Superheroes turned ordinary citizens turned boring video game

> Graphics: Despite some repetitive level designs, it retains much of the film's unique visual style

> Sound: The game's high point. An excellent super-spy soundtrack and superb voice-work set the mood, only to have the actual gameplay destroy it

> Playability: Not unplayable, though imprecise controls and questionable hit detection foil the do-gooders at every turn

> Entertainment: Slightly more fun than watching Superman applying his medicated hemorrhoid ointment

Second Opinion 6.25

Much like Superman's mentally challenged clone Bizarro, *The Incredibles* motion picture has spawned a callow and unpolished video game counterpart that I've sympathetically dubbed The Intolerables. In a world where invisibility and elasticity are commonplace, it would only seem natural that this game's atmosphere would be filled with an electrifying excitement. Sadly, nothing could be further from the truth. The entire game is enveloped by frustration. Loose controls, poor camerawork, shady hit detection, and unforgiving boss battles completely overshadow this fantastic family's efficacy. Some of the gameplay mechanics are quite clever, and the lushness of the jungle environment is a feast for the eyes, but there really is nothing super about this game. —**REINER**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes the Neighborhood

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING **> PUBLISHER** EIDOS **> DEVELOPER** PARADOX DEVELOPMENT
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 17 **> ESRB** M

HERE COMES THE PAIN

For those who are unfamiliar with Backyard Wrestling, as a "sport," it is basically the store brand version of pro wrestling. It has essentially the same ingredients, but tastes slightly different and just feels cheap. I wouldn't be surprised to see this game come in white box that simply says "Fightin'" on it. It has the same basic content as all the other wrestling games out there, but none of the finesse or enjoyment.

Admittedly, Backyard Wrestling 2 isn't as bad as the blight upon humanity that was the original. The combat engine is simple yet functional, and the environmental interactions are pretty fun. Sadly, almost every single element is highly unpolished, and it does nothing as well as any of the other recent wrestling titles. Movement feels floaty, hit detection and collision issues are everywhere, and enemy AI is painfully stupid. In several matches, my opponent decided to run face first into a wall and stay there until attacked. I'm sure that repeated blows to the head have given brain damage to many of these semi-pro wrestlers, but they can't be that dumb.

Unfortunately, this game's flaws don't end there. The soundtrack features a decent selection of songs, but the voice acting is terrible – even the characters in the game sound disinterested in what's happening onscreen. The character models are as bland and ugly as the guys in Barenaked Ladies, and the create-a-character mode offers pathetically few options. Aside from the highly interactive environments, I really couldn't find anything I liked about this title.

Playing Backyard Wrestling 2 is a lot like going to the Humane Society and seeing a really ugly dog. I'm sure it means well, I'm sure someone will like it, but I'll be damned if I'm going to take it home. —**JEREMY**

■ She's what they call "trailer park pretty"

BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> Concept: Find a way to make the WWE's brand of sports entertainment seem classy and highbrow

> Graphics: There is a lot going on in each environment, but nothing is very detailed and the character models are as bland as can be

> Sound: The voice actors sound ashamed to be a part of this game

> Playability: The combat engine basically works, but smaller technical issues abound. Hit detection is wildly inconsistent

> Entertainment: Who knew you could make no-holds-barred combat joyless and dull?

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6

The first entry in this series held about as much appeal as a gorilla taking a dump. It was mechanically flawed to the point that even a blind man could recognize that something wasn't right. With this sequel, Paradox Development fixed many of the problems and implemented a host of interesting new features, but it's kind of like putting a Band-Aid on a decapitation. Opening the gameplay up with more grapples and submissions helps, as does the new block button, but hit detection remains problematic and your opponents are as dumb as bricks. I won most of my matches by wildly flailing with a bat. They just kept running into my swings. The series is definitely moving in the right direction, but it's still a far cry from where it needs to be. —**REINER**

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Although there is no difference in playability, the PS2 version is noticeably more jaggy than the other. Thus, the Edge goes to the Xbox.

MULTI QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events

BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** AMAZE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E

When a series of children's novels captures imaginations across the land and spawns a movie which, of course, means that a platform game of the same name must release concurrently, the game usually does one thing with brutal efficiency: suck a huge amount of what is great in the books forcefully from the experience. The problems in Snicket aren't from a technical standpoint, as the controls work mostly as they should and the graphics are right around average. Instead, the issues are extreme repetition, simplistic challenges, and the general blandness of every other feature that a game could possibly possess. The wry subtlety of the novels' text pops up once in a while, but not nearly enough, which leaves only a derivative and dull game where there could have been a humorous misadventure.—**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Fight Club

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** GENUINE GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** M

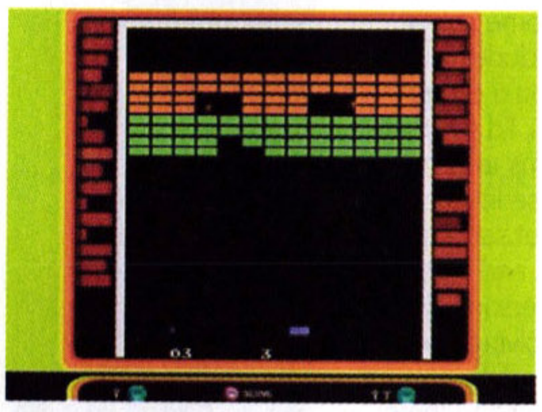
If Tyler Durden saw you sitting on your comfy couch, staring at a television, and playing Fight Club (possibly over your fancy-pants Internet connection), he would probably hit you as hard as he could. Furthermore, if you had been playing the game for more than ten minutes, you'd thank him for it. To its credit, this fighter takes a new approach to being unoriginal and substandard. The combat mechanic is generally passable, but the game fails to achieve the "gritty" mark it was shooting for, instead hitting "boring" head-on with dull character models, lifeless cutscenes, and a total lack of charm. Yes, Mr. Durden, I may not be a beautiful and unique snowflake, but you are in a crappy video game, so go stuff that up your soap-hole.—**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Atari Anthology!

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** ATARI/DIGITAL ECLIPSE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 (PS2), NOVEMBER 23 (XBOX) > **ESRB** E



There have been a fair amount of Atari museum titles released for a variety of platforms over the years, but I think that Atari Anthology comes closest to summing up the era. It has 62 Atari 2600 hits, but I'm really pleased to see the inclusion of a good selection of original arcade ports as well, as the stand-up units were always better than their home cousins back in the day. Atari has also included some great DVD style extras, as well as newly created game modes that increase the speed of play or display "trippy" psychedelic light trails onscreen. The biggest downside for me was the fact that many of the games that originally used a paddle (like Super Breakout or Circus Atari) seem much more difficult and frustrating using a console controller. Also, it must be said that some of these old-timers are good for little more than nostalgia value.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Virtua Quest

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA OF AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** JANUARY 11 > **ESRB** E

VIRTUAL AGONY

When I was young, I discovered that if you say one word over and over again, it doesn't even sound like a real word anymore. Now, thanks to Virtua Quest, the word "stupid" has lost all meaning for me, since I found myself repeating it endlessly as I writhed and winced my way through this lifeless and contrived adventure.

I won't even bother complaining about the story – it's just your typical "cyber-world in peril" nonsense, and it doesn't figure too much into the core mechanic: fighting. Now, since most of the game revolves around pounding groups of enemies, you would think that it would give you the basic tools required for the task, like a lock-on feature and camera control. You are provided with neither, making combat annoying busywork in between bouts of aimless exploration. Along the way you get new special moves, which means you can kill enemies quicker and get back to that pointless wandering as soon as possible.

Of course, the way you acquire these special moves is the heart of the game's concept; you fight the digitized souls of Virtua Fighter characters. If you win, you and the combatant do a suspiciously synchronized dance, and afterwards you have a new ability at your disposal, like a shoulder ram or spinning leap. There are over 45 of these to collect, which allows for a vast and impressive customizable moveset, but the game fails to provide situations in which players are excited to flex their newfound muscles. The whole package just feels like a board meeting gone wrong – Suit One: "Gamers like collecting, fighting, and cyber-worlds. Has anyone taken advantage of that yet?" Suit Two: "Probably not. Plus, since we'll be the first to try it, people will be forgiving of substandard gameplay and lack of fun." Sorry, chumps. Try again.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> **Concept:** Virtua Fighter meets Poindexter McStupid's adventures in Totalsuckland

> **Graphics:** Though the generic enemies get tiresome, the game looks clean and most of the key characters have pretty cool designs

> **Sound:** Loaded with grit-your-teeth terrible voicework and forgettable tunes

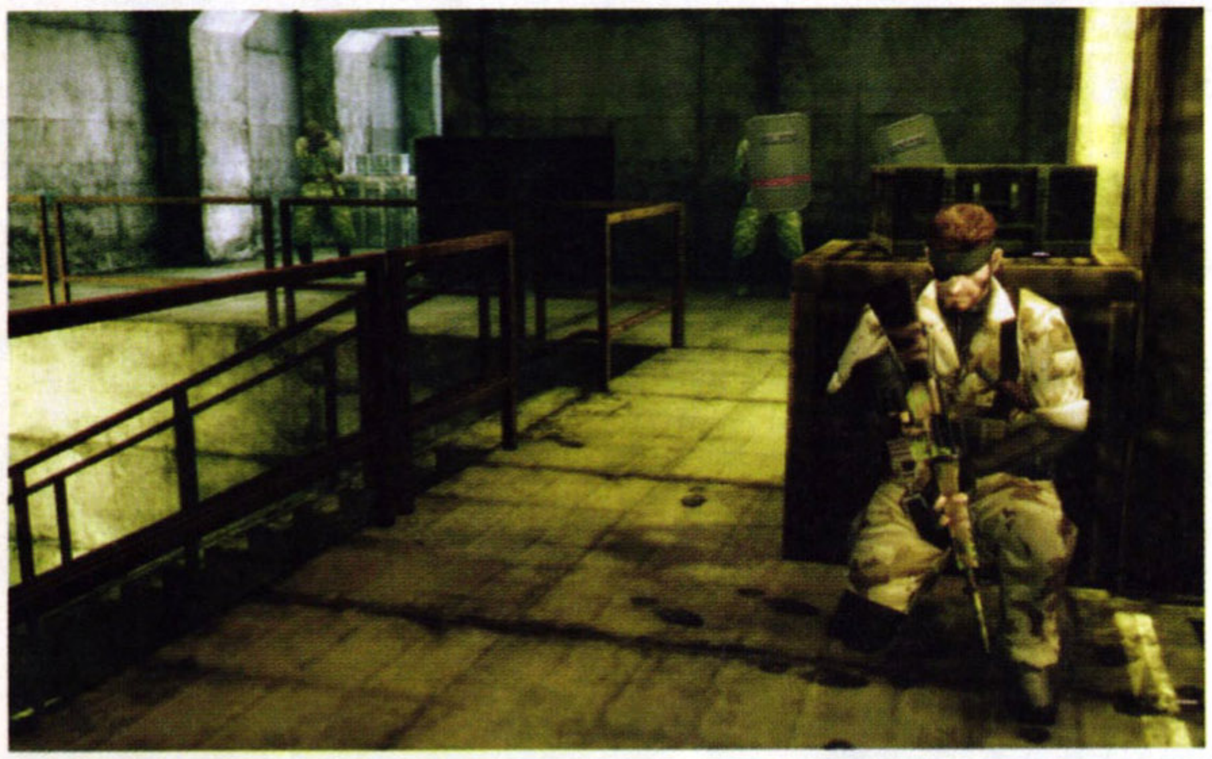
> **Playability:** Though you can re-center the camera, you can't rotate it, and nearly every moment of the game suffers for it

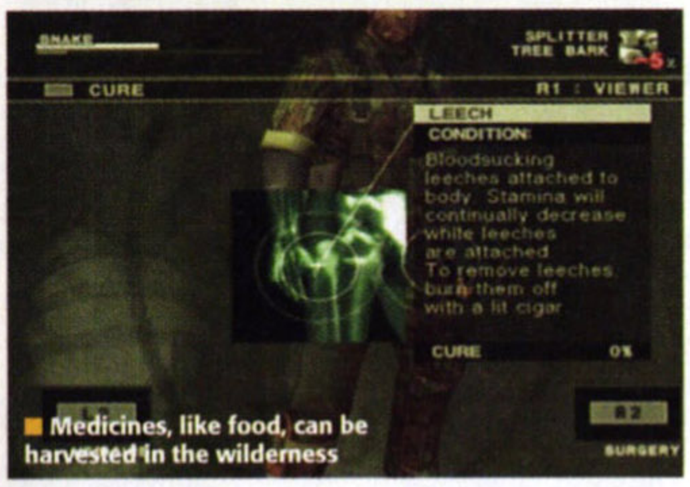
> **Entertainment:** It isn't so much fun as it is an exercise in anger management

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.5

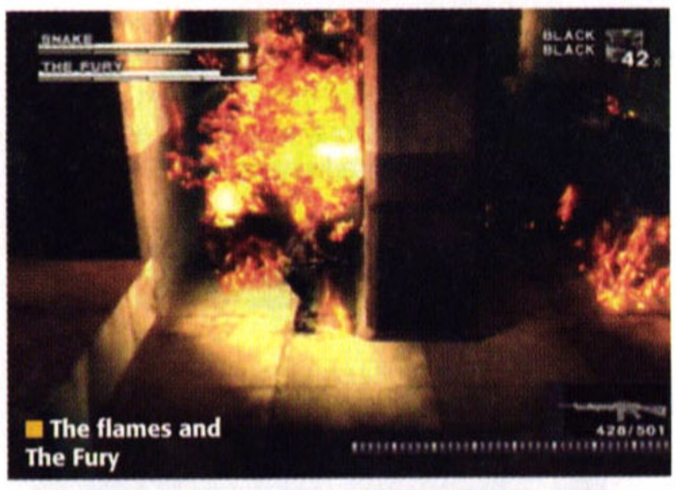
I want to die. Seeing the characters from Virtua Fighter sink to this level is analogous to watching Chewbacca and company in *The Star Wars Holiday Special*. It is just flat out painful, people. The only good that can come from this is the hope that Sega may redeem itself by making main character Sei into a punching dummy in Virtua Fighter 5. I would pay good money to pummel this annoying little brat. Where exactly does Virtua Quest go wrong? The better question is, where exactly doesn't it go wrong? I really can't find anything redeemable about this game. Trainwreck controls, abysmal level designs, and detestable characters (I'll get my revenge, Sei) translate to a fun factor of negative one trillion.—**REINER**





■ Medicines, like food, can be harvested in the wilderness

■ The graphics are simply gorgeous, the foliage is amazing, and your enemies' camo will fool you as much as you fool them



■ The flames and The Fury

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17 > **ESRB** M

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

When Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty came out, there were two camps of thought: One said that the game was ushering in a new era where gorgeous cutscenes would be key to the future of gaming as it inevitably moved towards the realm of cinema. The other agreed, but didn't like that fact, nor creator Hideo Kojima's lofty brand of storytelling. People – including developers – snickered and sneered that the industry is about making video games, not movies. To anyone who thinks that Metal Gear Solid 3 (or MGS 2, for that matter) is all about flash and no substance, I say this: You are an idiot.

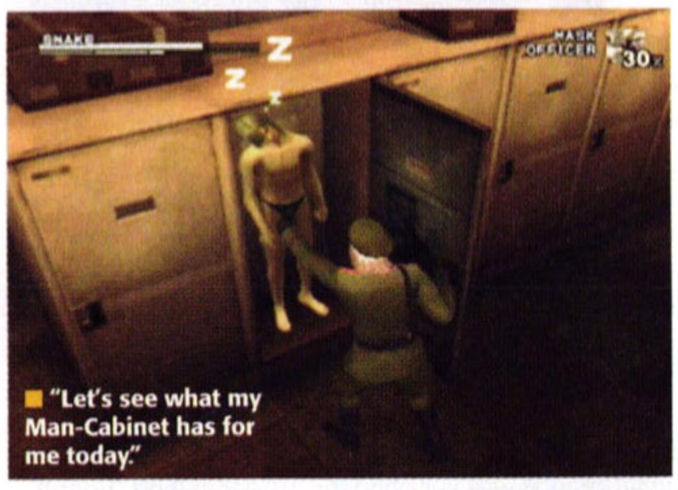
Kojima hasn't changed his approach to making games in Snake Eater, and I'm thankful for that. Using gameplay, graphics, cinematics, humor, and intrigue to the fullest, he creates a masterpiece that begs to be experienced. I defy anyone who thinks that this series is about nothing but cutscenes and convoluted stories. Gameplay is at the heart of the title, and it's got more to chew on in this department than most. MGS 3 ditches the contrived sight cones of patrolling guards and the tell-all radar of past MGSs and instead asks you to rely on your smarts. The game's food-gathering isn't the self-indulgent capriciousness of Kojima; it's key to keeping your stamina up, which governs your shooting accuracy, health regeneration, and even vision. In other words, it's a nice melding of immersion, realism, and gameplay. The same can be said for the new health system. This isn't all, however. True to form, the game contains a slew of interactive environments, goodies for the imaginative, and the revival pill. What's that? You'll have to find out.

Further underlying MGS 3's commitment to gameplay are the boss battles. In an era where lesser companies think that throwing swear words and a soundtrack at a game makes it good, Kojima holds fast to this old-school convention. And in MGS 3 you'll find a cast of baddies that will easily stand alongside the series' best battles. The game itself, however, isn't perfect. In the three years since MGS 2, I find that the melee combat (despite some nice moves from the CQC) is showing its age with some problematic hit detection, collision, and a lack of overall smoothness. Furthermore, I think that Snake sticks to environments too easily – something that'll frustrate you when, in the middle of a fight, he unexpectedly decides to shimmy against some railing.

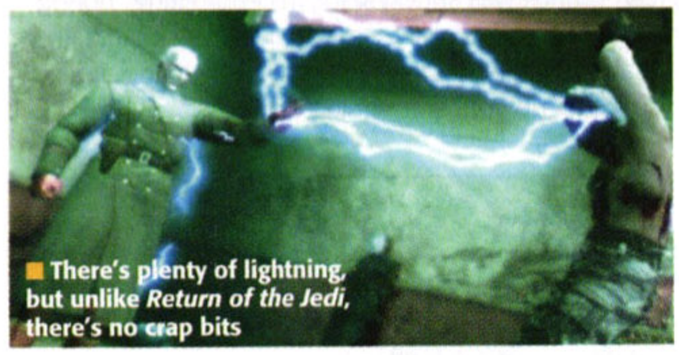
"To anyone who thinks that MGS 3 is all about flash and no substance, I say this: You are an idiot."

Needless to say, Snake Eater also includes all the beautiful cutscenes and story twists you'd expect. Even for those tired of these elements, I'd say that the pacing is brilliant, and Kojima seems to have made a conscious attempt to rein these in (including some of the Codec chatter) without sacrificing much. The Cold War setting is perfect, and fans will enjoy seeing the shaping of Snake's personality and the excellent supporting storylines involving The Boss and Ocelot.

Despite some intentional tweaks here and there to appease some of the criticisms of the last installment, make no mistake about it – Snake Eater is a Metal Gear game in every way, shape, and form. If you find a cutscene a minute too long or don't want to adhere to the title's survival mantra, then you're not willing to experience all it has to offer. And if you can't sink your teeth into Snake Eater, than you must not like playing video games very much.—**KATO**



■ "Let's see what my Man-Cabinet has for me today."



■ There's plenty of lightning, but unlike *Return of the Jedi*, there's no crap bits

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Hits a sweet spot between the ambition of Kojima and the wishes of fans

> **Graphics:** There is some draw-in of trees while in dense forest, but the look is noticeably better than MGS 2

> **Sound:** The Bond-like theme song makes you chuckle at first, but later it'll make your breast swell

> **Playability:** The only complaint I have is that the hand-to-hand combat is showing its age

> **Entertainment:** Thrilling from beginning to end, Kojima once again presents us with a near-perfect marriage of gameplay, cinematics, and cool

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.75

After spending the first several hours of Metal Gear Solid 3 hiding in the underbrush, rationing supplies, and eating local wildlife, I was afraid that this series had sacrificed its fantastical roots for gritty realism. Then it rained blood and a swarm of hornets airlifted some guy into a helicopter, and that's when I knew that I would feel at home in the jungle. With a new era and fresh surroundings, Snake Eater is a superbly crafted game that delivers intense gaming bliss while introducing some brilliant innovations to the series. It loses just a little ground on MGS 2 in terms of storytelling and supporting cast (due mainly to a decreased emphasis on Codec communication), but it also makes astounding strides forward in terms of immersion and sheer beauty. The boss fights alone feel like epic, once-in-a-lifetime gaming events. Listen to me – for the love of all that is pure is and good, you need to play Snake Eater.—**JOE**

PLAY ONLINE

AUTHENTIC SUPERSTAR
AND ANNOUNCER VOICE OVER

CHOOSE TO FIGHT
DIRTY OR CLEAN

NEW LEGENDS

TWO WORLDS COLLIDE.

SMACKDOWN! VS RAW

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Language
Sexual Themes
Violence

POWERED BY gamespy

PlayStation.2

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PLAYSTATION 2

ATV Offroad Fury 3

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> DEVELOPER CLIMAX **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 **> ESRB** E

NO TRACTION

This series has to be one of those quiet surprises of the PlayStation 2 console. It has sold millions of units and nobody can figure out why. The past two iterations in the franchise were done by developer Rainbow, who has since gone on and joined THQ. Rainbow must have taken the magic with them, because while this title is about ATVs – of course – it does very little for me.

Maybe this is because its formula remains so shockingly stationary in a video game world where a series like Tony Hawk practically reinvents itself with each successive iteration. Not this franchise, however. As if not wanting to do any of the heavy lifting for itself, its improvements are rudimentary – being able to buy parts and tool through different racing circuits in single-player and some minigames in multiplayer. That's the kind of evolutionary leap that other titles made eons ago, making this a freak of nature. The departure of Rainbow is evident in the fact that the developer turned around and did something different with MX Unleashed, but this title holds no such ambitions.

As if this wasn't enough, the game's look needs an overhaul as well. A lot of the environments were bland, and there were even some texture tears. On the bright side, I liked that the collision was fair to the player. If you hit a track barrier while going slow enough, you could push it around instead of automatically being bucked from your ride. Barriers could even end up in the middle of the course and get in the way of other riders. Overall, while the racing itself and the tracks were acceptable, it felt a little looser than previous ATVs, and I thought that the preload was too inconsistent. I'd end up doing wheelies half the time instead of preparing for jumps. Where's the fury? I just don't feel the passion.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Spread some new features on, but don't overload it with flavor

> Graphics: They look like something that would have come out at the beginning of the PS2's lifecycle, not the end

> Sound: I wonder if more attention was paid to the building of the soundtrack than the game itself

> Playability: The preload is notorious for finking out on you at the wrong times

> Entertainment: This must be one of those ATV accidents you hear so much about these days

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.75

ATV Offroad Fury is a good series. It's not a great series; it's not a bad series; it just soldiers on, delivering barely improved, workmanlike ATV racing with each new edition. It's also the secret blockbuster franchise of this generation, moving millions of units on the PS2 with the first two titles. As with many sequels, the changes here are largely slight, adding more expansive parts and tuning options, more visual customization, some minigames, and a power-slide control. Even though this series is no longer being handled by Rainbow Studios, Climax ably steps to the fore and delivers a game that will appease the fans, but likely win few new converts.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

Battle Assault 3 Featuring Gundam Seed

BOTTOM LINE 4

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING **> PUBLISHER** BANDAI **> DEVELOPER** BANDAI
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 11 **> ESRB** T

Each time I thought I hated this game, it got worse. To be fair, Battle Ass 3 (as I like to call it) does well with its mech upgrades done in real-time and useable environmental objects. However, I never felt at home in my Suit because its abilities would change. One fight I had this large, kick-ass sword. The next I had two puny daggers that worked as well as socks at a gun fight. I've never seen a fighter fail so completely in 3D space. Movement is stiff, and you'll often be next to your enemy but miss him completely. It's like whiffing in T-ball – and that's what this game is: one big, huge miss.—**KATO**

Samurai Warriors Xtreme Legends

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** KOEI **> DEVELOPER** OMEGA-FORCE
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 9 **> ESRB** T

Alright Koei, I'm afraid this is where I get off. I've sat through the various Dynasty Warriors spin-offs that you shovel out on store shelves on a near-quarterly basis, but I've finally had my fill. As with every Dynasty/Samurai Warriors sequel, this title adds some new modes, characters, environments, weapons options, and historical data entries to the simple hack n' slash combat formula – which has scarcely evolved since the first Dynasty Warriors. There is nothing that makes this worthy as a standalone release. In fact, many games, like MechAssault, have released new material of this caliber as free downloads on Xbox Live. Expecting people to pay $30 for a slightly upgraded version of a game that released just six months ago is a sham.—**MATT**

Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3

BOTTOM LINE 5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** REMEDY
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 16 **> ESRB** T

Those who enjoy DBZ have already decided that they will buy Budokai 3 and that it will be their favorite game of all time. If you fall into that category, congratulations – this game will reward your loyalty and faith. It has a boatload of unlockables, character customization, and some unique maneuvers that give it the series' trademark world-crushing flair. However, don't be upset if the rest of the world doesn't share your enthusiasm for this puerile wasteland; it's simplistic, clumsy, unresponsive, and boring, even with the improvements over last year's entry. I've never seen a title that puts so much effort into pleasing franchise fans at the expense of being playable and enjoyable. It's more of an interactive fan-gasm than a "game" in the traditional sense.—**JOE**

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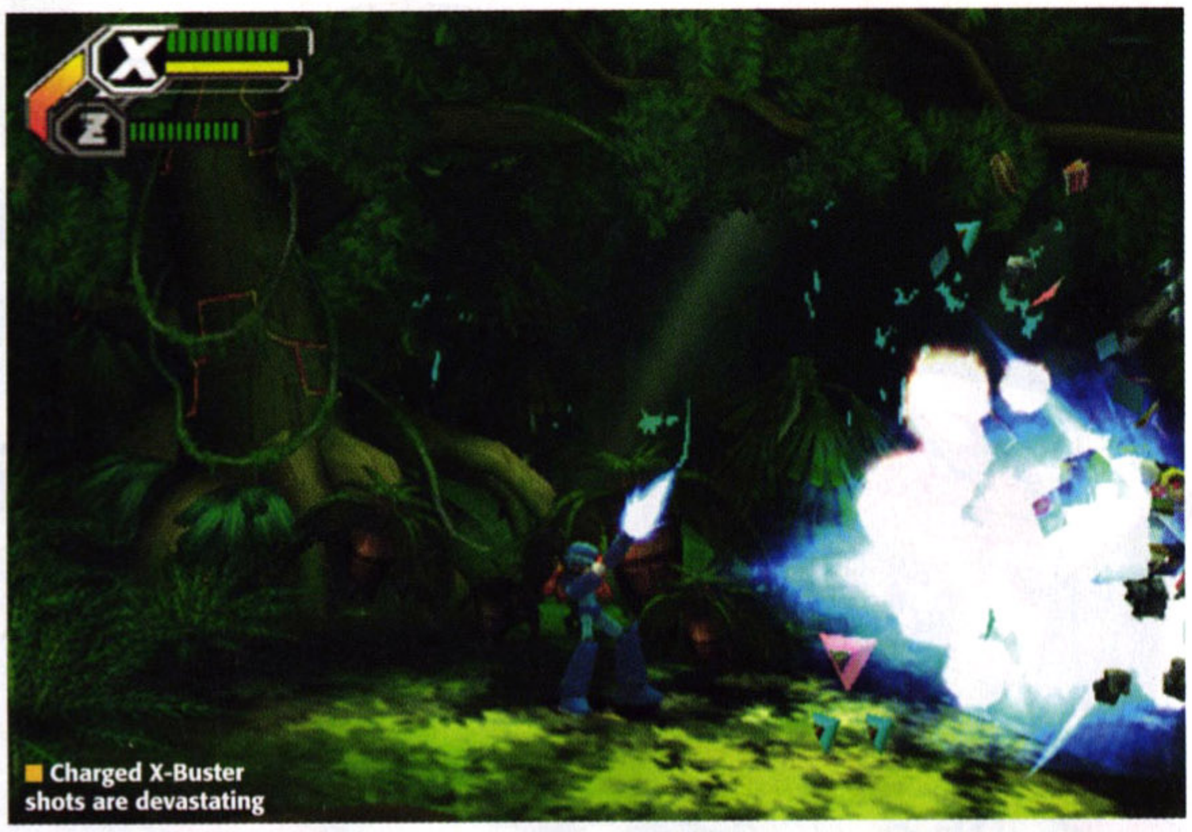
Switching characters on the fly is a great mechanic


Charged X-Buster shots are devastating

X and Axl took the red pill

Each character has his own use

Shooting in any direction? Heresy!

Is Zero a robot samurai or a robot ninja? We can never tell

PLAYSTATION 2

Mega Man X8

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** PRODUCTION STUDIO 1 **> RELEASE** DECEMBER 7 **> ESRB** E

FANS REJOICE!

From my own standpoint as a long time fan of the blue bomber, Mega Man X8 is nearly everything I wanted from a next-gen MMX game. What's even better, though, is that it is able to stand on its own merits as a solid, entertaining side-scrolling action title. X8 may not do anything incredibly revolutionary, but it makes up for it by bringing back everything that was good from the first seven MMX titles and mixing some new elements into a tight, well-crafted experience.

The reasons I love the X series – the responsive control, interesting levels, and cool upgrades – are in full effect. I'm especially enamored of the alternate weapons for Zero; the only thing cooler than a robot with a plasma sword is a robot with a gigantic plasma naginata. The secrets hidden within the levels are also sweet, ranging from data which unlocks new upgrades to armor for X himself. But most of all, the fast-paced action is better than ever. All three heroes can dash, dash-jump, and wall-cling, and mastering these maneuvers propels the gameplay along at a breakneck pace at all times. X8 gave me a sense of freedom of movement unrivaled by any but the best Mario platformers.

All of this would be pointless, however, without good level design to back it up. Fortunately, I had a better time exploring the world of X8 than I have in ages. For one thing, the challenges vary from stage to stage. On one a huge invulnerable Mechanoloid will chase you, while on another you'll be trying to avoid security beams. I know it sounds kind of dumb and contrived, but each of the levels has been put together with the craftsmanship to pull off whatever goofy idea they're built around. Only the two F-Zero-esque stages bothered me, but even those are merely mediocre and not tiresome and stupid like the 3D levels of X7.

As much as I clearly enjoy this title, X8 is not without its flaws. For one, the weapons X receives from defeating bosses are lame – most of them have attack patterns so wonky that they're only good for the boss you're supposed to use them against. The soundtrack is disappointing as well – as someone who literally listens to Mega Man 2 songs while I type (yes, I am a huge nerd), I expect a lot more than weaksauce generic techno to accompany my single-handed defense of Earth. Oh, and in case you were wondering, the story continues to somehow be both incomprehensible and banal.

Though the adventure is somewhat short, I can't help but feel that Capcom has finally done it right with X8. This title simply captures the mystique of 2D action of old. It's fast-paced, good-looking, and straight up fun. Not since Viewtiful Joe have I lost myself completely in a flat-out test of my side-scrolling skills like I did in my time with X8. Old-school fans will rejoice, and maybe a new generation will now understand why Mega Man is awesome.–**ADAM**

"Capcom has finally done it right with X8."

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> Concept: Return X and Zero (and Axl) to where they belong – 2D side-scrolling action

> Graphics: Just because it's 2D doesn't mean it can't be beautiful. Effects, in particular, look sweet

> Sound: The soundtrack does anything but rock, but the mediocre voice acting is a huge step up from X7

> Playability: Three difficulty modes make X8 a lot more accessible than previous entries in the series

> Entertainment: This will remind you why the little blue robot is an iconic character

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

Ah, it's good to see Mega Man alive and well after the debacle that was X7. This new installment revitalizes the series with stunning cel-shading and a difficulty that is just this side of impossible – exactly the way a Mega Man game should be. Honestly, X8 is pretty playable even for newbies on the easiest difficulty setting, and that might even be the place for veteran players on their first run-through. Several of the levels have some surprising elements to them, an accomplishment that is no easy task after the dozens of previous titles in the series. The biggest hit in my mind is the game's length. Even with replays, you're not looking at much more than a weekend for the whole affair. But if you're an old fan who has dropped off the bandwagon, this is the time to get back on.—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

Growlanser: Generations

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

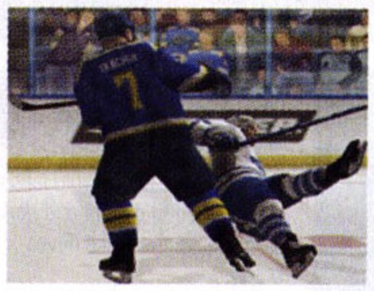
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** WORKING DESIGNS > **DEVELOPER** CAREER SOFT
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** T

Even though the Growlanser games have been cult hits in Japan for the last few years, the gameplay and graphics in Generations (which includes Growlansers II and III) reveal the fact that these titles are a bit behind their tactical RPG peers. Though the battles themselves get incredibly complex, the combat system remains simple and sometimes frustrating due to the use of an awkward real-time/turn-based combat hybrid. Also, Growlanser just doesn't have the same depth and humor of the Nippon Ichi titles like Disgaea, but the highly variable stories and unique character designs still make Generations worth a look for genre enthusiasts. I wish I could dress up in what was popular seven years ago and still be lauded as charming instead of a walking fashion aberration.—**JOE**

Gretzky NHL 2005

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** PAGE 44 STUDIOS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E



The Great One? Not exactly. On several of my goals, the puck would just sail into the net uncontested. Was the goalie staring at a hottie in the stands or what? Additionally, teammates rarely react that way that you would want them to. Where are you going? The puck is behind you! As problematic as the AI can be, I do have to point out that player movements have a nice feel to them, the shot power and aiming functions work perfectly, and the quick give-and-go pass is a great way to break defenses. The player model detailing is respectable, yet out-of-game sequences are scarce. Off of the ice, the game boasts a fairly deep franchise mode and a stellar create-a-team option (more games need this). It's a decent attempt by 989, but the play just doesn't stack up to the lofty standards set by EA and ESPN.—**REINER**

Ape Escape: Pumped & Primed

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 19 > **ESRB** T

This recent election has been very divisive, but I think that, as Americans, we still share some core values. One of these is the belief that mischievous cartoon monkeys are cute. The Ape Escape series always delivers on that promise, but unfortunately this is not another edition of the platforming series, but rather a detour into party games that more resembles the Japanese-only Ape Escape 2001. The games themselves range from mildly interesting (the platforming coin collection stages) to outright aggravating (the raft racing levels). A handful of scattered boss battles do little to convince me that this is worth your time or money. All told, this seems like a half-measure, despite the cel-shaded visuals that are a vast improvement over Ape Escape 2's graphics. In summary: Cartoon monkeys are cool. This game is not.—**MATT**

Shaman King: Power of Spirit

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** T

These kinds of titles (namely anime licenses and odd mixes of standard gaming genres) usually end up with far more problems than highlights; and while Shaman King does falter in a few areas, it's also wonderfully charming in other categories. The voice work, script, and localization capture a quirky juxtaposition between traditional and modern – characters use the words "dude" and "endured" in practically the same sentence, and to good effect. On the other hand, the fighting/RPG/strategy hybrid gameplay is serviceable, but shallow on all fronts. The humor and art style will charm many, but those looking for a hardcore experience in any of the game's genres should look elsewhere.—**LISA**

Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 > **ESRB** E

More Yu-Gi-Oh! games come out every year, and with each one, I'm less interested than the last. While Capsule Monster Coliseum does tread on some vaguely new territory as a sort of strategy board game, it falls entirely short of similar games like Disgaea. This is due largely to the tedious and slow-paced battles, making the whole experience feel less board and more bored. Instead of the familiar "I'm a monster trapped in a card!", the gimmick this time around is "I'm a monster trapped in a capsule!" Whoopee. Alas, this means I have to spend the first interminable turns of battle unpacking my monsters before I can deploy them against my foes. There is some decent music and graphics that don't make me want to die. I guess that's the highest recommendation I can offer on this one.—**MILLER**

Inuyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask

BOTTOM LINE 4.25

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** BANDAI > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 1 > **ESRB** T

For many fans of niche-brand-licensed games, the actual quality of the gameplay offered is a secondary concern to how well their beloved franchise is treated in the video game world. Fans will be pleased with the cast's voice work, all-new storyline, and original characters designed for the game. For those with no time or emotional investment in the series, this role-playing game is slower than milkshake moving up a cocktail straw, blander in appearance than most PSone titles, and has more grating dialogue than a rerun of *The Facts of Life*. There is not a single above-average feature here, but the game does get a .25 bonus for onomatopoeia during battles.—**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2

Rumble Roses

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** YUKE'S > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** M

COMPELLING CATFIGHTS

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

At first glance, you would be tempted to claim that Konami's all-female wrestling title Rumble Roses is just about sexy, scantily clad women – and you'd be right. However, the strong combat mechanics featured in the game keep this admittedly sexual title separate from absolute trash like The Guy Game.

The idea behind Rumble Roses is simple: There are a bunch of sexy girls in revealing clothes, and they fight, occasionally in mud. Obviously, the girls look great (they were created by the team behind the girls in Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball), and there are plenty of cheap thrills to be had. But, fortunately, there's more to this game than sex appeal. Each fighter has an alternate ego, which can be unlocked by completing special "vows" in a match. Vows dictate how you wrestle (for example, one vow prohibits attacking downed enemies), and therefore your alignment. Fulfill enough evil vows as a good wrestler, and her evil alter ego is unlocked. Or, fight cleanly as a villain to score the girl's good persona. Each version has its own moves, animations, and costume, effectively doubling the number of characters.

Unlocking the girls' alter egos and using them in title matches opens up their galleries, in which they can be ogled, but the sex appeal is really secondary to the impressive fighting system. The countering mechanic is easily my favorite of all the current brawlers – it's so easy to use that two-player matches have a great back and forth flow to them. Matches are fast and the animation is great. I would have liked to see a create-a-character mode, and the single-player is too easy, but overall Rumble Roses is a surprisingly fun time. And yes, the girls are pretty hot.—**JEREMY**

> **Concept:** Erotic combat in the squared circle! Rejoice!

> **Graphics:** As you would expect from a game like this, the character models are awesome – or, if you prefer, smoking hot

> **Sound:** Yes, it has it, but you won't notice. Your eyes will get a workout, though

> **Playability:** The combat mechanic is one of the best in the current crop of wrestling titles

> **Entertainment:** Cheesecake thrills and a rock solid fighting mechanic makes for a surprisingly good wrestling title. Mmm… cheesecake

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

You can fool around with this scantily clad game for a weekend, but if you desire a lasting relationship, you had best stick with sweaty men in their briefs. While I can make the claim that Rumble Roses is the first game to give me a neck cramp (the excessive bouncing had to be gauged carefully), I wasn't fooled by its siren song. The fiery vixens are certainly divine (call me, girls!), and the gameplay is most definitely enjoyable (general movement is a tad clunky, but I really like how grapples, countering, and finishers are executed), but this game really has no substance to it. Single player can be completed in a matter of minutes, the CPU AI is too forgiving, multiplayer only supports two players, and outside of mud fights, gimmick matches are nowhere to be found. It may show a bit of skin, but Rumble Roses doesn't have what it takes to hang with the big boys of wrestling.—**REINER**

GAMECUBE

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** RETRO STUDIOS
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 17 **> ESRB** T

A TALE OF LIGHT AND DARK

Retro Studios' 3D vision of Metroid inspires polar responses from many – people seem to either love it or hate it. I am most definitely part of the former group. And Echoes is most certainly a game designed for those with an affinity for the series, as it is a relentless adventure that will take you from feeling lost, confused, and beaten one moment to triumphant and jubilant seconds later when you master its difficult bosses and labyrinth-like world.

"...a Metroid fan's dream come true."

On one level, Echoes is more of the same. Like the previous installment, Prime 2 is beautiful to look at and, at times, difficult to control as the game sticks to its single-analog control scheme that brings both benefits and annoyances throughout the adventure. While I would like to see Nintendo someday give people the option to choose a dual-analog layout, its lock-on gameplay isn't as bad as many would have you believe – it just takes some getting used to.

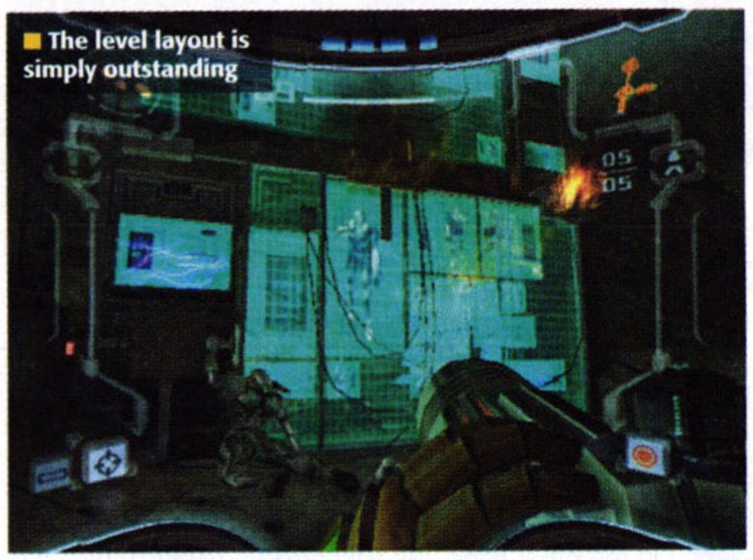
Although Prime 2 is the same as the original Prime on the surface, as you dig deeper into the adventure you find that this sequel is a Metroid fan's dream come true. For one, Prime 2 is much more difficult than the previous entry, so much so that there were times in this adventure when I contemplated giving up. Not only are the boss fights unforgiving, the environment is sometimes difficult to follow as Samus is able to travel back and forth between a light and dark version of the world, much like the SNES's The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past.

However, if you can manage to push your way through some of the game's more difficult moments as I did, the reward is well worth it – you just have to want it. The puzzles are some of the best the Retro team has put together, and the quest (if you don't use a strategy guide) will have you looking for keys and pathways for at least 20 hours. I personally finished the game in 23 hours, but I'm sure I put in more time than that looking for the Sky Temple keys, which forces the player to basically scour every inch of the world. Some would call this overkill, and claim there is too much backtracking – I call it Metroid and enjoy the exploration.

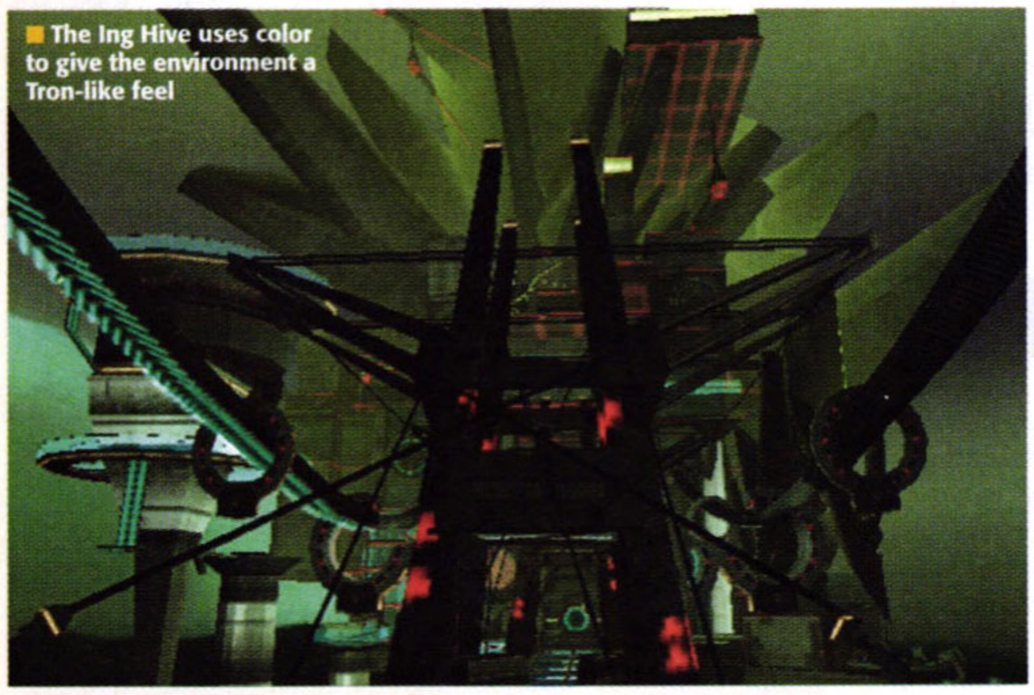
Besides the single-player adventure, Retro also added a multiplayer component to this title, for those that are looking for some split-screen action for up to four players. Since the game utilizes lock-on technology, I found the multiplayer to only be mildly amusing, and look at it as a nice bonus to an excellent single-player experience.

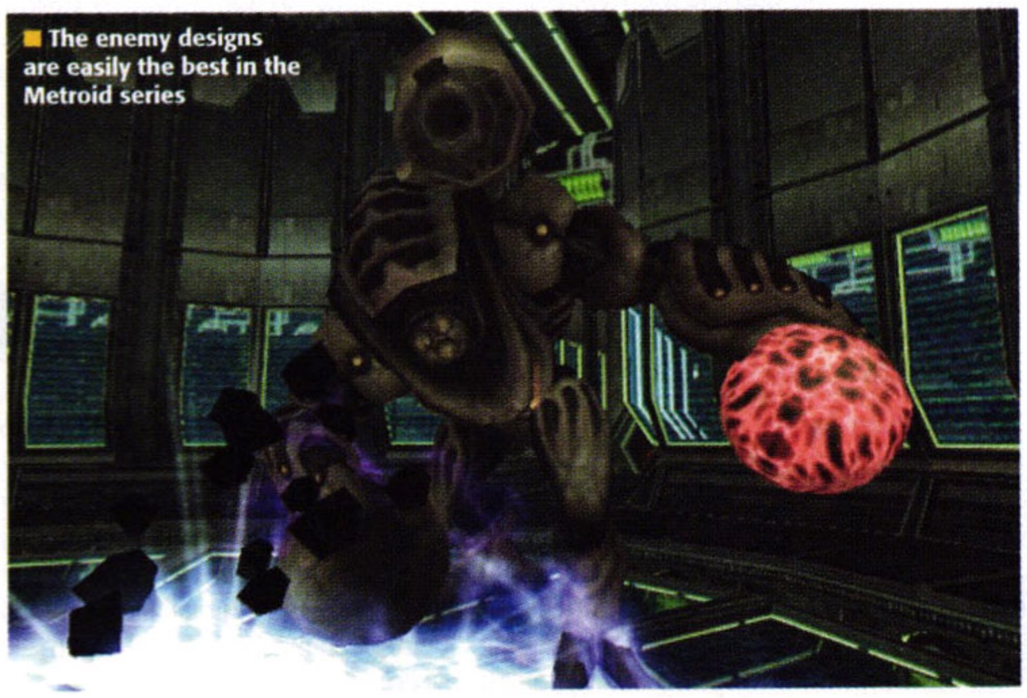
I doubt Echoes will bring too many new players into the Metroid fold, but if you are an addict like myself, you will enjoy each and every frustrating minute.—**ANDY**

■ Even the minibosses are difficult to master



■ The level layout is simply outstanding


■ The Ing Hive uses color to give the environment a Tron-like feel


■ The enemy designs are easily the best in the Metroid series

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> Concept: Give Metroid fans a complex world of light and dark to challenge them like never before

> Graphics: Like the original, Echoes is gorgeous with some truly awe-inspiring environments

> Sound: Some of the tracks seem out of place, but overall it fits well with the universe

> Playability: The lock-on control scheme still annoys from time to time, but it's nothing you can't get used to

> Entertainment: If you loved Prime, you won't be disappointed by Echoes' gigantic quest

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 9.5

It makes me really happy that I can always count on Metroid to be a fantastic gaming experience, and this new installment is no exception. Offering more of what made the first game phenomenal, I found myself once again fully absorbed in the adventures of Samus Aran. Some players are likely to be frustrated by the constant backtracking. Aimless wandering can get tiresome rather quickly, especially in a game world as massive as this one is. However, the endless secret areas and immersive visuals give you more than reason enough to continue past any annoyances that pop up. The game would have been just fine remaining purely for the lone bounty hunter, but the addition of multiplayer is a nice extra. Personally, I didn't see that component as much more than a small bonus, as I felt the multiplayer stages had limited appeal. Nonetheless, Prime 2 succeeds on all the levels that mattered to me, and its dark/light world dynamic brings an entirely new approach to the table. Retro's still got it where it counts.—**MILLER**

Using Power Shots is key to victory

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Bring back what has always been Nintendo's strongest sports franchise

> **Graphics:** As colorful and vibrant as Nintendo fans have come to expect

> **Sound:** The music is negligible, but I like the humorous grumblings and exclamations of the characters

> **Playability:** I like several things they've done here, most specifically the combos for lobs and dropshots

> **Entertainment:** Camelot delivers a very solid sequel – one that will please fans of the series

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAMECUBE

Mario Power Tennis

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** CAMELOT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 8 > **ESRB** E

NINTENDO'S RACKET ATTACK!

In many ways, Mario Power Tennis exemplifies the things that Nintendo does better than any company in video games. It's got a great graphical look – the screen is packed with bright colors, clever animations, and amazing particle effects. As usual, Nintendo's most popular and lesser-known characters are available for play, featuring everybody from heavy hitters like Mario and Peach to more obscure heroes like Bowser Jr. and Wiggler. More importantly, the game offers up that finely tuned gameplay that has been a trademark of the company's best games for years.

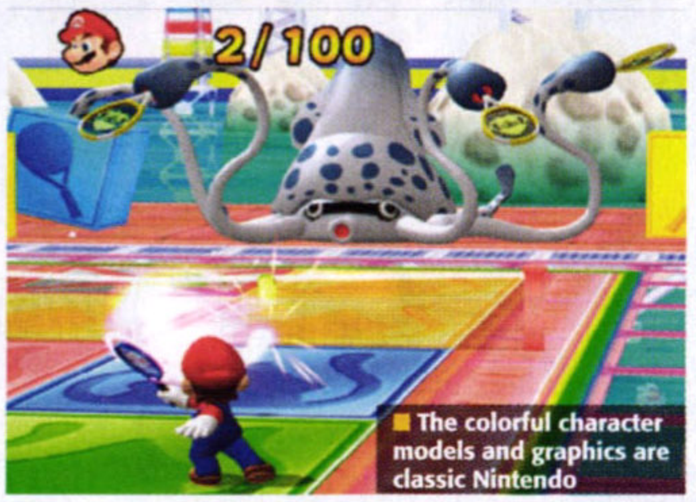
At a base(line) level, this is tennis, but it's far from more traditional sims like Top Spin. After all, this is a Mario title, and with that comes a host of whimsical special shots, minigames, and "gimmick courts" that feature heavily animated and often changing playfields. Some of the minigames include the Chain-Chomp challenge, in which you must hit tennis balls and activate a water cannon to keep the chomps at bay. Other novel contests include Artist on the Court, where you hit colored paintballs on specific areas of a mural to recreate the image on the bottom of the screen. There are a few others, but I didn't really feel that any of them were compelling enough in their own right to garner much extended play. Predictably, the best minigame is actually an old one: Ring Shot, which can be played in Exhibition mode.

Thankfully, the more traditional contests are very enjoyable. There are three main tournaments: Star, World, and Gimmick. Star and World pit you against all comers on a variety of normal surface types, while Gimmick takes you everywhere from Wario's factory to the jungle. Many of these unique courts add some intriguing new elements to the contest, like having to deal with a court that is constantly opening up trap doors over a swimming pool.

Another big part of the gameplay is the Power Shots. Each character has a couple of different Power Shots. One is typically an offensive shot, best for putting a volley to rest with a crushing blow. The other is more defensive, and can be used to grab a ball that would otherwise be far out of reach. In the more advanced control schemes, you can actually manually select which shot you want to use, but I found that the computer generally did a good job of choosing the shot for me depending on my proximity to the ball. However, there were times when I felt like the outcome of a point depended too heavily on the use of Power Shots. It can be a bit frustrating to play a perfect volley, only to have opponents save themselves with a special move. Still, the animations that accompany these shots are uniformly amazing, and having to judiciously use your power-ups does add its own unique form of strategy to the game. It would have been nice if you could turn off the Power Shots during tournaments like you can during Exhibition mode, but overall I think these over-the-top elements add to the experience more than they detract from it. Also I must give props to whoever thought of allowing you to automatically switch your character to the bottom of the screen at will – I've always hated playing from the top baseline in video tennis.

All in all, this an extremely solid game that maintains the great tradition of the franchise. While I doubt it will be remembered as a classic, it will definitely provide fans with many great moments of fun.—**MATT**

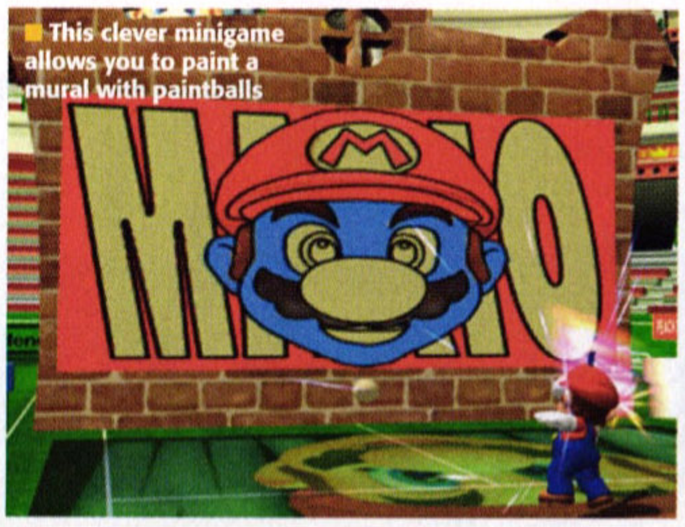
Waluigi is so underrated!



The colorful character models and graphics are classic Nintendo

Second Opinion 8.5

Nintendo has served up another ace that emphasizes the importance of gameplay finesse while giving fanboys a hefty dosage of Mario-themed goodness. Whether you are charging up a snap volley or setting your opponent up for a killer special move in the corner, you can't help but marvel at this game's tight controls and unique strategies. Being able to play gimmick matches (which have ties to other Mario games) gives players a multitude of options. The balancing between the different characters is also quite impressive. As enjoyable as this game is, I have to stress the fact that the single-player experience has little in terms of depth. Tournaments are easy to complete, and the majority of minigames are fairly weak (although I couldn't get enough of Artist on the Court). This is a game that thrives off of heated multiplayer battles. Trust me, there are few things crazier than couples play in Mario Power Tennis. I expected more from single-player, but walked away knowing that I now have another great game to play with friends on the couch.—**REINER**



This clever minigame allows you to paint a mural with paintballs

This court seems inspired by Super Mario World

It's feeding time for the crocs

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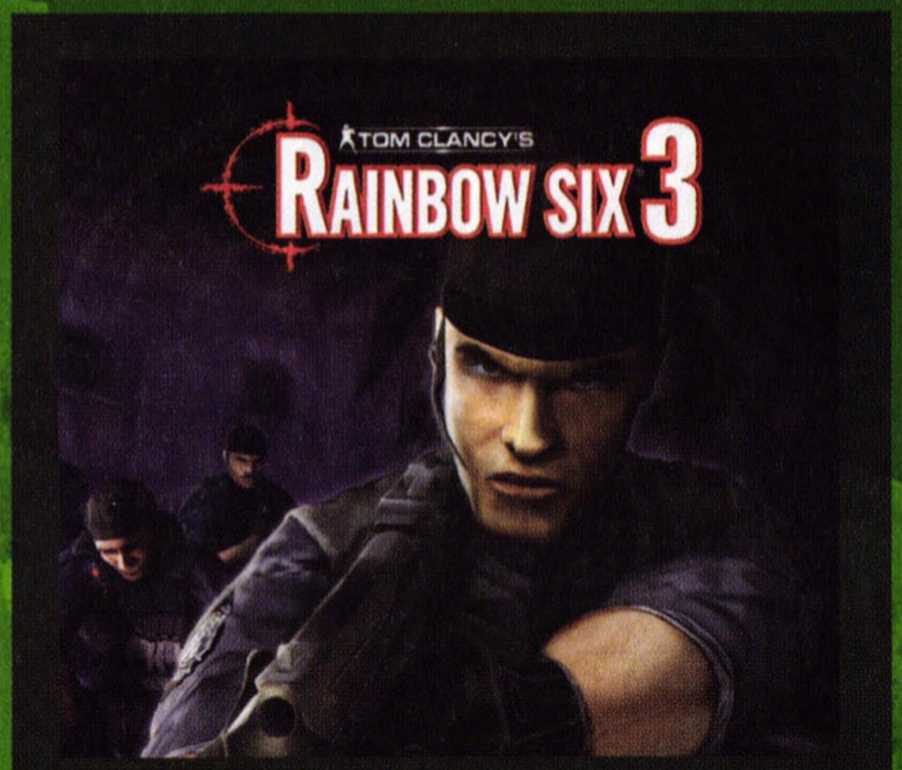

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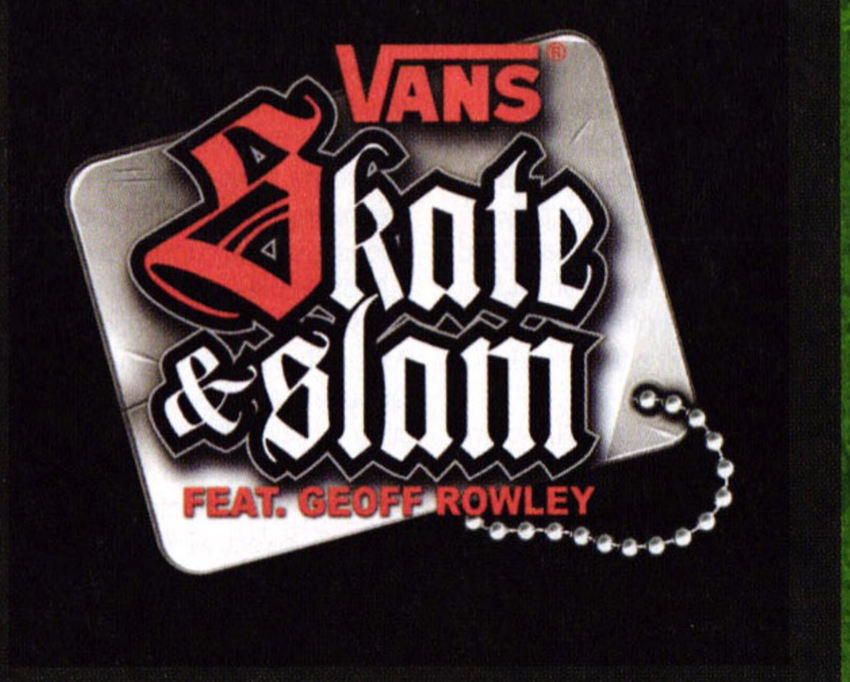

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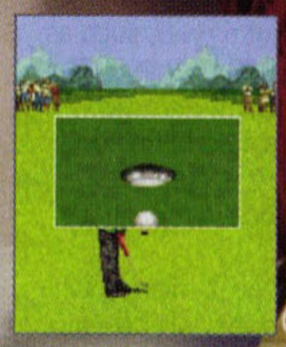

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XBOX

Ghost Recon 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 30 > **ESRB** T

MILITARY MADNESS

I'm officially getting a little tired of the Tom Clancy squad-based shooters. Now, don't get me wrong – I think they're good games and deserving of the devoted following that they have, but they're all starting to blend together. Take Ghost Recon 2, for example. On paper, it seems to have a lot of novel features, like a new third-person perspective, improved squad controls, and a graphical overhaul. While it indeed has all those things, it feels more like a merger of the Ghost Recon and Rainbow Six franchises than a new game.

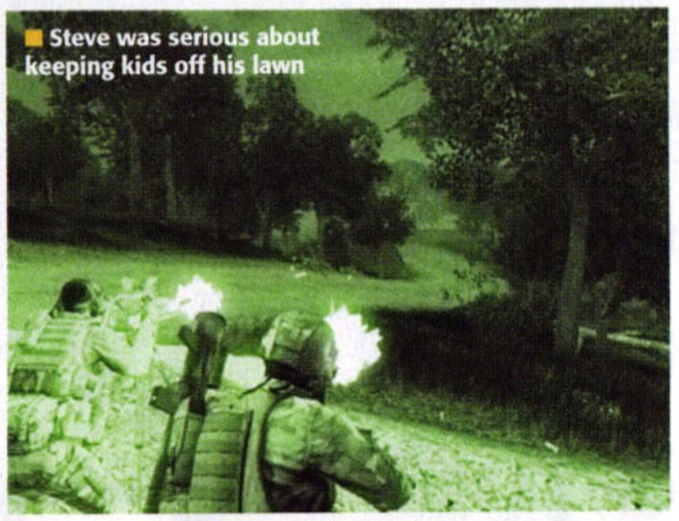
The look of Ghost Recon 2 is pretty similar to Rainbow Six 3, although with an outdoor setting. Your character model is awesome, as are those of your squadmates. The foliage is impressive, and the levels feel gritty and realistic. However, enemies look a tad blocky and die stiffly-animated deaths. Textures are a bit on the simple side, and the overall color palette is muted and feels washed out. Overall, Ghost Recon 2 is a pretty good-looking game, but falls short of looking great, due to these minor issues.

Gameplay is also solid, with only a few hitches. The squad control mechanic (borrowed from Rainbow Six 3) is far superior to that in the original Ghost Recon, and your team is actually pretty useful. They make decisions for themselves, but also follow orders as they are supposed to. However, enemies seem a little dumb (they never hesitate to walk through a pile of their comrades' bodies towards my waiting sniper rifle). Even with the less than brilliant enemies, I found the campaign pretty hard, and tended to save multiple times per level. Combat is no more difficult than it is in the other Tom Clancy shooters; it's the protect missions that gave me a hard time. Friendly units you are tasked to guard are no smarter than your enemies about walking into that line of fire.

"...like a merger of the Ghost Recon and Rainbow Six franchises..."

Of course, the main draw of all the Clancy shooters is the multiplayer component, and this aspect really shines. It offers traditional deathmatches, as well as several co-op modes for Xbox Live, System Link, and even split-screen. All the nice Xbox Live bells and whistles are present as well, such as downloadable content. Fans of the multiplayer aspects of Ghost Recon and Rainbow Six will still dig it in Ghost Recon 2 – like I said before, it's very similar. But that doesn't mean it's not fun.

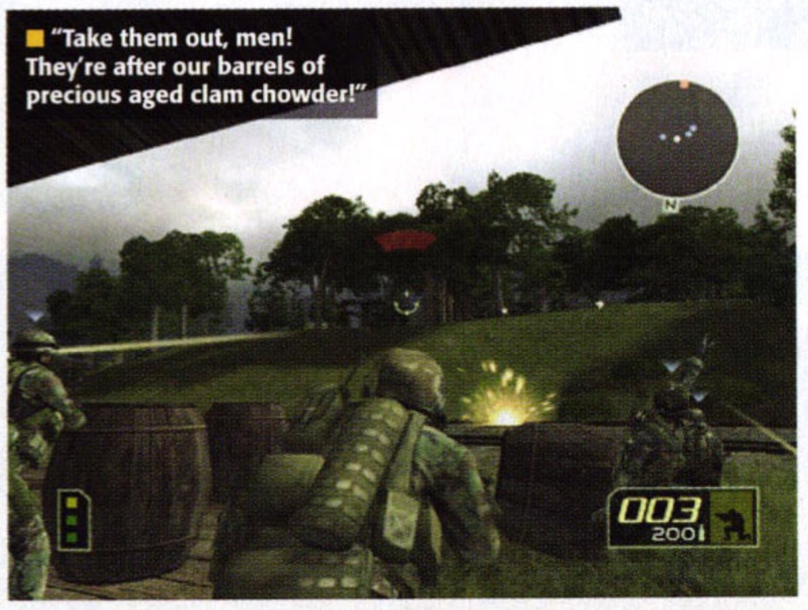
Both online and off, Ghost Recon 2 offers a lot of content, so that all types of players will be satisfied. Campaign missions can be replayed with different objectives, a first-person view is available, and special features are unlockable. Overall, it's a hell of a package. I just wish the gameplay had evolved more. It feels pretty familiar to me, but those who haven't played every tactical shooter in the last couple years will find a fresh and exciting experience. Fans of the genre will likely enjoy Ghost Recon 2 as much as the games that came before it.—**JEREMY**



Steve was serious about keeping kids off his lawn

"Attack! They hold the cure to my freakishly huge hand disease!"

Sgt. Bob made sure the shipment of Richard Simmons videos didn't make it to their destination



"Take them out, men! They're after our barrels of precious aged clam chowder!"

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Ghost Recon gets a new perspective, look, and control scheme, and still manages to feel familiar

> **Graphics:** Many elements look great, but some cut corners prevent this game from looking truly stunning

> **Sound:** Bang, Boom, "Yes Sir!" You get the picture

> **Playability:** The clunky squad control mechanic is gone, replaced with a more manageable scheme reminiscent of Rainbow Six 3

> **Entertainment:** Frustrations abound in the campaign, but like Rainbow Six 3, the multiplayer is where this game excels

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

Ghost Recon 2 is gorgeous, plays smoothly, and offers very robust multiplayer, especially over Xbox Live. And you know what? I still didn't have much fun playing it. The single-player campaign is the same old "shoot the terrorists at maximum range before they can get to you" gameplay that we've seen in Tom Clancy games for the last several years, and I for one am sick of it. Yes, the squad command is now implemented Rainbow Six 3-style and is therefore much easier to use – but the open environments of GR 2 don't allow for the same kind of tactical thinking that R6 3 does. Plus, enemies don't react very much to getting shot; they just kind of go limp for a second, which looks artificial and lame. However, if you're looking for a well-done multiplayer title, GR 2 should be right up your alley. There are a bunch of modes, the play is very smooth, and I do like the weapons a lot. Unless you plan on taking this online, though, I'd spend your $50 elsewhere.—**ADAM**

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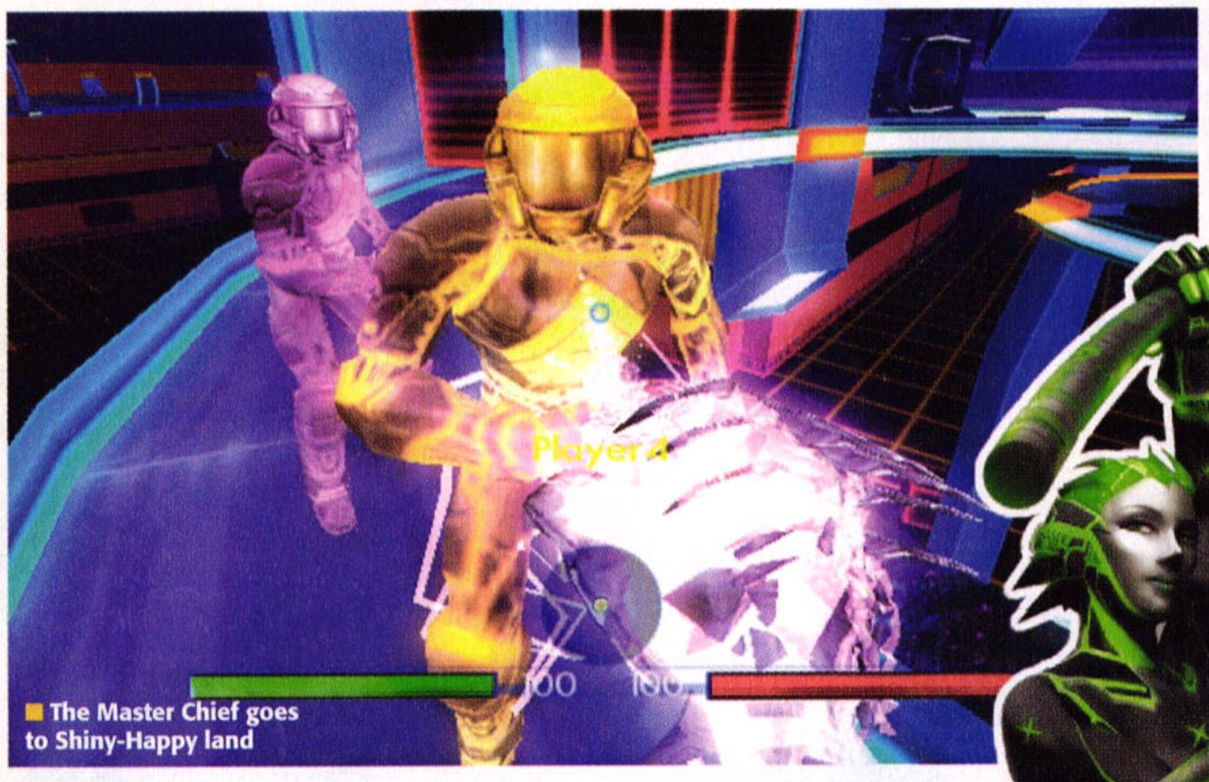
PlayStation.2 XBOX PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE DANGER HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE SIERRA™



The Master Chief goes to Shiny-Happy land

Syd Mead designed new light cycles for the game

XBOX

Tron 2.0 Killer App

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** BUENA VISTA INTERACTIVE **> DEVELOPER** CLIMAX **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 **> ESRB** T

CORRUPT PROGRAM

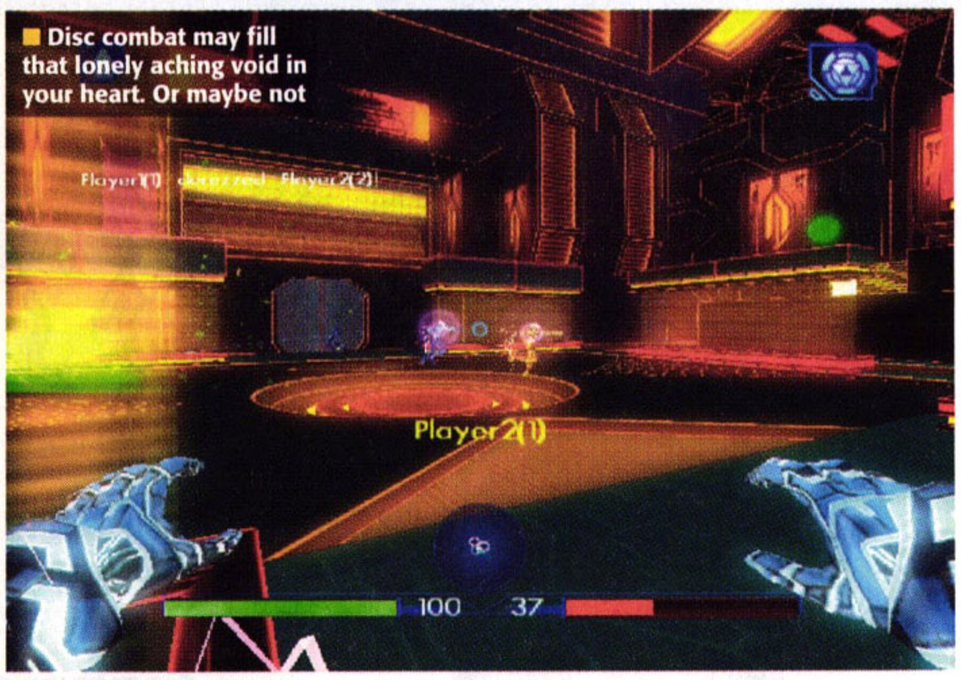
It's unfortunate that an otherwise excellent game has been hampered by a sub-par transition to the Xbox. I'm a big fan of the Tron universe, and had a lot of anticipation for this title. It was only after hours of playing through exhaustively long load times, unimpressive graphics, and frustrating combat targeting that I was forced to conclude my general dislike of the entire experience.

Killer App suffers from almost all the problems that can occur in a transition to console from PC. It ends up being a lot of little things that add up into one big predicament. Onscreen text is often too small and hard to read, resulting in a great deal of the subtle ideas and story elements being lost if you don't want to strain your eyes. Targeting hasn't been optimized for the console very well, making combat a chore. The inventory screen is never well explained, and the interface to use new subroutines (power-up items) is a complete mystery for the first several hours of play. With the loss of resolution inherent to the change in platform, the graphics move from the unique look that was visible on the PC to a textureless block world on the Xbox.

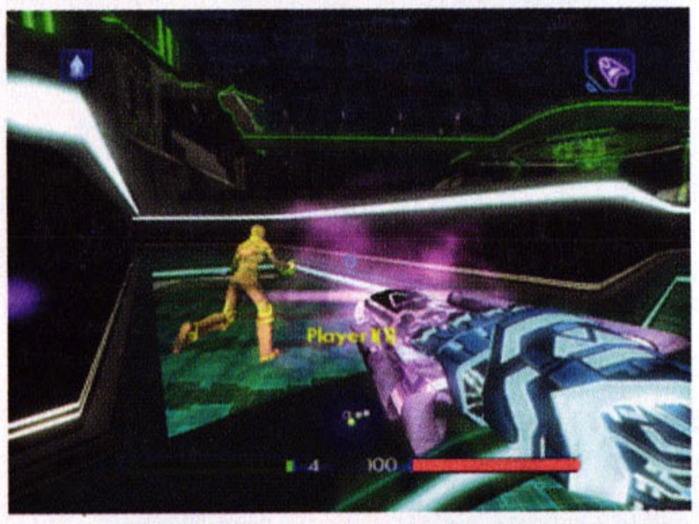
Honestly, the biggest issue I encountered was the out of control load times. Gameplay sections between loads were way too short, and some of the waits between areas seemed endless. The problem extends into every aspect of the game experience. There were even sporadic times where pausing to get to the inventory screen would take five to ten seconds. Consequently, I never really felt drawn into the action. As soon as I got excited about something, I'd have a nice long sit to calm down as I stared at a loading screen.

There are some bright points that still may make this a worthwhile play for many players. Once you get a handle on the light cycle grid it can be a lot of fun, particularly online against other real Users. In fact, the multiplayer features work just fine, and the ability to engage in disc combat with a buddy is pretty sweet. The ambient glow inherent to the entire game is definitely the bright point (sorry about the pun) of the visuals, as it bathes everything on screen in a wash of vivid primary colors. Voicework is uniformly excellent, and the inclusion of actors from the original movie gives a genuine sense of continuity to the franchise. Perhaps the greatest triumph of the game is the way it has advanced the concepts of the old movie into modern computer lingo. Tech buffs will get a kick out of the way basic programming ideas have been integrated into the fanciful Tron universe.

For those who have longed for a sequel to the classic '80s movie, this is as close as you're likely to get. I'd advise playing the PC version instead, but if that's not an option, this new Xbox port is certainly an okay choice. If you're willing to look past its numerous problems, there's a compelling game world and an enjoyable story to be had. I guess the world of Tron just doesn't do well when you take it out of the computer.—**MILLER**



Disc combat may fill that lonely aching void in your heart. Or maybe not



BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Return to the incandescent movie world of Tron in a port of last year's PC game

> Graphics: Resolution took a particularly heavy hit in the step down to the console, with little use of texturing to make up for the problem

> Sound: Reminiscent of the '80s movie, but otherwise lacking in luster

> Playability: Controls feel sort of clumsy, jumping is spotty at best, and the inventory screen is a confusing for a good while before you figure it out. Horrendous load times

> Entertainment: Despite some major problems in its conversion to the Xbox, the game still offers some clever concepts involving the world inside your computer

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 6

The most significant element of this port of 2003's excellent PC title is that you can almost read it like a guide of how not to adapt a game to a new format. Seriously, there are nearly no accommodations in Killer App to account for the use of a dual-analog rather than a mouse-and-keyboard setup. Interactive objects are a pain, since the area you have to look at is so tiny. The menu system is cumbersome and frustrating. Platforming is even more painful than is usual for an FPS. The implementation of the lightcycles is a study in how not to design a control scheme. And the load times...let's just say that they'll approximately double your playtime. Tron 2.0 is a very well-designed game, with its simple yet fun RPG elements and unique aesthetic, but this is one of the most poorly-executed ports I've seen in my life. Do yourself a favor and play the PC version or play a different game.—**ADAM**

XBOX

Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS **> DEVELOPER** ARTOON **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 **> ESRB** E

SLUGGISH SOPHOMORE

Sophomore releases always have similar goals – to keep existing fans by bringing back what they like and growing the love tree through improvements, additions, and modifications. Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space takes an interesting path toward achieving these aims.

Kept from the first game is the world populated with time-defending, garbage sucking, "radical" cats and their adversaries (bipedal porkers intent on controlling the space/time continuum). Time crystals and powers also return, but the clunky management of them from the first game is entirely gone. This is a very, very good thing.

What developer Artoon (who also handled the franchise's first entry) has done to shake things up comes entirely in the gameplay department. The story mode is told from both the cat and pig points of view. As such, players switch levels between the species and their respective gameplay types. Cats offer an action/platform feel, while the pigs' moveset leans toward the action/stealth genre. Each style or species offers only the barest minimum of features and moves from their respective gameplay types, which is one of my big issues with the title.

For example, the kitty levels are interesting because there are usually multiple options given for reaching one goal (like, "destroy six statues or flip eight switches"). In theory, and sometimes in practice, this offers two highly differing paths through the game's decently sized levels. Generally, one is more action focused and the other is more platformy. My problem with this plan is that neither the action nor the platforming is very compelling. Shooter fans will never have the tense sensation of many foes attacking from all sides because the level design has to accommodate platforming conventions (varied terrain and enemies with a small range of movement, for example). Platforming is hindered a bit by the control scheme and smaller moveset of an action game. The double-edged sword swings widely, my friends.

Another facet of Blinx 2 that features good and bad results of the same decision is where the franchise has upgraded the most – multiplayer. The story mode can be played co-op, although it's not really much of a different experience than single player; and a four-player split screen mode with buckets of options is also available. Here's where the slower speed of adorable lead characters really turns into an ugly decision. The plodding pace that seems exactly right when platforming or solving puzzles just feels sluggish in the context of a multiplayer deathmatch.

From the technology and longevity standpoints, Blinx 2 makes huge (gargantuan is probably a more apt word) leaps forward for the franchise. The multiplayer modes and variety of level types are certainly admirable. My problem with the design is that, to make room for all of this stuff, all of these different options, all of this variety in every sense of the word, the game is the worst type of Renaissance man – Jack of all trades, master of none.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Gamers the world 'round begged for the time sweeping cat's return. Their prayers have been answered

> Graphics: Weirdly muddy and lacking the akimbo-angle look of the first title

> Sound: More Sonic-like than any Sonic game in recent memory – weird pop/metal riffs prevail

> Playability: Generally solid, but some of the stealth moves are unnecessarily difficult to perform

> Entertainment: A middle of the road, moderate appeal title if I've ever seen one

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7

The lack of Xbox Live in Blinx 2 says it all – this is a game that doesn't have the highest of ambitions. The changes in this title from the original equal less of a quantum leap for the sequel than a damnation of the incomplete state of the first. And yet Blinx 2 is not quite the fully-formed game or flagship Xbox action/platformer that it could be. The puzzles are easy, neither the action nor the platforming are demanding, and everything is broken up into bite-sized chunks. Without even one coat of polish, Blinx 2 is what you get when you strip a genre game naked to an unimaginative core. And as Seinfeld would say, it's not good naked.—**KATO**

"Without guys like me, you'd still be playing Pong."

—Mark Hartlieb
B.A. in Game Design
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A stampeding Mumakil is a danger to everyone around it

Good luck convincing your soldiers to engage the Balrog

The campaigns take several liberties with the storyline

Cinematic moments like this are all over the place in the campaign

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PC

The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EALA
> **RELEASE** DECEMBER 6 > **ESRB** T

COMMAND ISENGARD AND CONQUER ROHAN

When much of the formerly Westwood team behind Command & Conquer Generals gets a mandate from EA to make use of the LOTR film license for a new RTS title, it's no shocker that the game in question is great. Though it's plagued by some surprisingly basic flaws (given the experience of the team), The Battle for Middle-Earth comes through as one of the best entries in the RTS genre this year.

At first glance, grabbing the reins of one of the four factions (Rohan, Gondor, Isengard, or Mordor) and shaping the destiny of Middle-earth is everything you could want it to be. The visuals are stunning, film clips and voice-acting are cunningly used to create an epic atmosphere, and the gameplay is easy to dig right into. Whether you're fighting battles ripped straight from the movies like Amon Hen or Helm's Deep, or enacting conflicts peripheral to the main story such as Eomer defending Rohan from Saruman's roving Uruk-hai, the action always has a cinematic feel to it that I've never experienced in an RTS before. It's fun, fast, and simple without being dumbed-down. Once you get deeper into the campaign (or go online) and start pushing the limits of your RTS ability, though, some annoyances pop up and never really go away.

"...fun, fast, and simple without being dumbed-down."

The biggest problem in BFME is the lack of a unit display in the interface. Because of the way squads are structured, it's nearly impossible to figure out which of your troops are in trouble. This quickly leads into the frustration of losing experienced units because you couldn't tell they were getting schooled until it was too late. It doesn't help matters that the AI for your forces when you're not directly controlling them is abysmal. They're happy to do exactly what you tell them to, but I can't count the number of times that my Ents, Uruk-hai, and even heroes would stand not twenty feet from the archers that were unloading on them and not engage. I didn't lose any battles because of this, but it adds a lot to the micro-management overhead.

These complaints aside, BFME does a lot right above and beyond the presentation. Base building and resource-gathering have all of the tedium taken out, but still impact the game as much as in any RTS. Unit morale is basic but cool; seeing armies cower in fear once their heroes die or when cave trolls are bearing down on them is pretty awesome. The powers you gain through winning battles range from simple healing to calling the Army of the Dead or the Balrog, and they're as sweet as you'd expect. And, the limited freedom of choice in both campaigns is a nice alternative to the standard map-by-map progression.

Though The Battle for Middle-earth is somewhat bogged down by a few irritating problems, it offers an excellent way to get your Tolkien fix now that the film trilogy is done. And really, the feeling you get when you've barely managed to hold Helm's Deep against the sickeningly overpowering hordes of Isengard is amazing – and it's only the tip of the iceberg. BFME manufactures moments like that almost at will, and is easily worth the price of admission.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Give the iconic film trilogy the first-class video game treatment again, this time as an RTS

> **Graphics:** From the big map of Middle-earth down to the individual unit detail, this title sparkles

> **Sound:** Wonderful use of the films' sound design, plus contextual unit voices – brilliant!

> **Playability:** If there were a unit window in the interface, it'd be perfect. There's not, so it's often frustrating

> **Entertainment:** Even if you can't tell Sauron from Samwise, this is a great RTS

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8

I'm a big enough Tolkien geek that I still get a rush watching the movies or reading the books. I've now played every Electronic Arts Lord of the Rings title, and this one showed me that while I'm willing to accept new directions in the license, it's lost a little of its luster. It's not because I'm bored of the story or that the title lacks polish. It's because when playing the game, I wanted to do more than I was allowed. I wanted to step outside the story more. I liked the idea of being able to choose which areas of land I was going to claim (and their inherent bonuses), but I didn't like being pulled away from my own designs to have to play a plot point. That being said, this title is a stripped-down RTS that smartly focuses in on all the action to be had in Middle-earth, and anyone who's not a genre snob will get a belly full of a good time.—KATO

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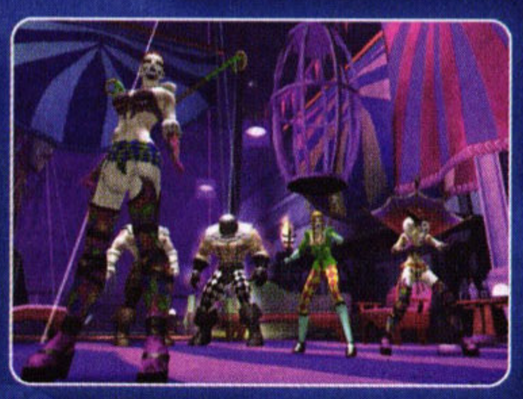

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This game lets you do manly pirate things like...the waltz!?!

"Your look is SO last season. You must die!"

Obviously, since you can stay out on your ships for months, they are quite full of seamen

If you don't spend some of your time fleeing for your life, you're not living up to the Code of the Pirate

PC

Sid Meier's Pirates!

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 **> ESRB** E

BOOTY AND DANCING

I have a disease called piratism. For those who aren't afflicted, piratism is the condition of being enormously entertained by the concept of pirates. Yes, sufferers of this disease know there's nothing funny about a bunch of dirty thieves who travel the world pillaging all they see. But we can't help ourselves – it must be something about the goofy hats. Fortunately, inspired souls like legendary designer Sid Meier understand our condition and have provided us with the perfect outlet for our bizarre obsession: Pirates!

Like the original game of the same name, Sid Meier's Pirates! removes the nasty reality of buccaneers and drops players into an idealized version of a pirate's life. The main character is a young man on a mission to find his missing family who takes up with a group of sailors to learn the ways of the mighty pirate. Most of the game is spent sailing around an overworld map, which is rich with settlements and a large variety of ships. When you land in a port, you can visit with the town's mayor (or governor), hit the tavern to hire crew and learn gossip, trade with the merchant, and get your ship repaired or upgraded. These towns are basically little more than animated menus, but your actions in them can determine what happens on the high seas. You can join any or all of the available armies, which will dictate who you should attack in the open waters.

Of course, ship-to-ship combat is the heart of the game. While your alliances determine who you should attack, any and all boats you encounter are

"...it's the way everything fits together that's so much fun."

fair game. Sometimes, I would agree to escort a colony's mayor to another town, only to blow him out of the water as soon as his ship left port. Serves him right for trusting a pirate! Sinking ships is fun, but it's far more profitable to board ships and take them over. Sometimes, crews will simply surrender when you board, but often you must beat the captain in a simple fencing minigame. Either way, the ship, its goods, gold, and crew are yours if you're successful.

At sea, lover's quarrels get quite messy

On a basic level, Pirates! is all about ship combat, the fencing minigame, visiting towns, and a dull dancing minigame. These elements are all pretty basic, but it's the way everything fits together that's so much fun. Capturing Spanish ships helped me quickly climb the ladder of the English army, but the Spanish forgave me because I sunk so many French boats. My exploits got me in good with a Dutch governor, which made his daughter invite me to a ball. The attention she paid me made her fiancee jealous, which meant I had to duel the poor sucker. I helped monks travel from one settlement to another, then turned around and blasted ships filled with grain out of the water to starve my enemies. The simple nature of this game masks a surprisingly deep and engaging experience. If you have the same bizarre condition as me, you'll find yourself losing several days sailing the seven seas.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: A high seas-sailing, swashbuckling PC classic returns for a whole new generation of gamers

> Graphics: The stylized graphics aren't mind-blowing, but fit the mood of the game perfectly

> Sound: Some rousing sea chanties and not much else

> Playability: Anyone who can accomplish the complicated task of surfing the web can master this game

> Entertainment: All of the fun of being a pirate, with none of the scurvy

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

Pirates is an interesting game to score. On the one hand, it has nearly unlimited freedom and tons and tons of stuff to do, almost like a high-seas Grand Theft Auto. It also does an incredible job of capturing the lighthearted, adventurous feel of the better Disney animated films. The graphical style, animations, and music made me feel more of an intrepid adventurer than Cary Elwes' Man In Black – I buckled more swash in my time with Pirates! than many real-life buccaneers probably have. The problem is that it gets sort of old after a while – gameplay eventually starts to feel like a vehicle to deliver the exact same minigames over and over. Don't get me wrong; it's a blast to cruise the Caribbean, plunder fat merchantmen, and hunt for buried treasure. However, I have a feeling that the thrills of amassing booty and fame will prove short-lived for most people.—**ADAM**

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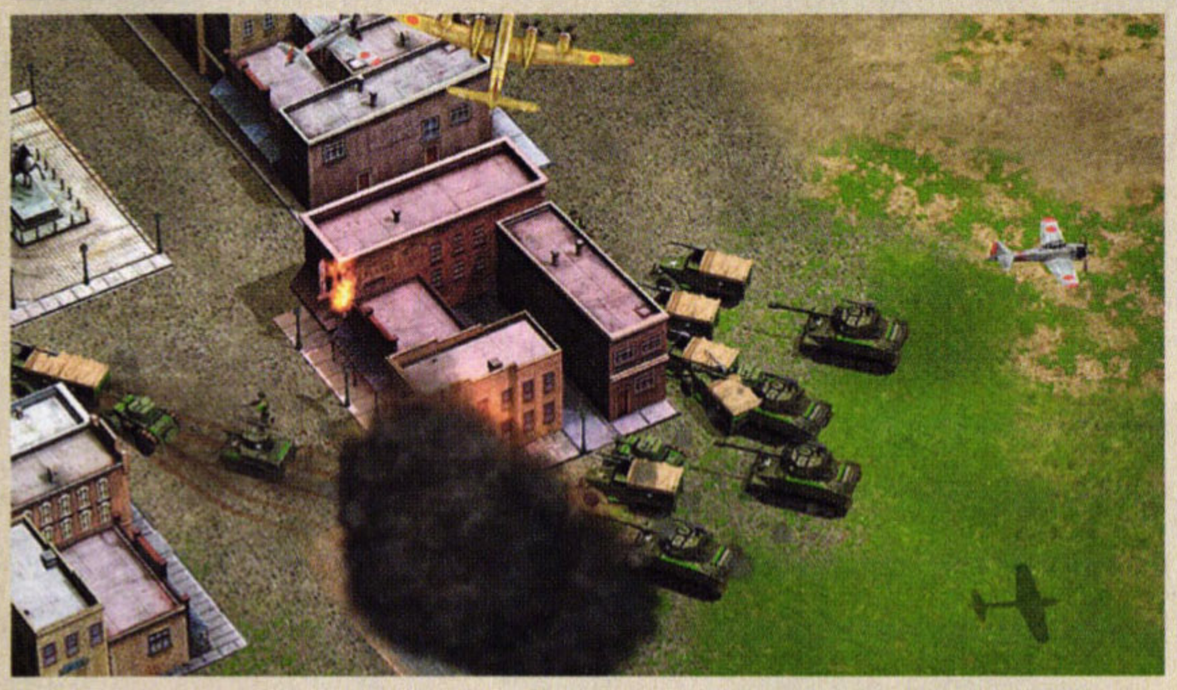
PC

Axis & Allies

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** TIMEGATE STUDIOS **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 **> ESRB** T



THE CASE FOR KARELIA

I've had a lot of good times with the old board-game version of Axis & Allies. Hunkering down in Moscow overshadowed by the Nazi war machine. Rolling British tanks through Africa and using Gibraltar as a bombing waystation. A few times I even created a Japanese stronghold in Canada thanks to the Bering Strait. My friends and I played the game so much that the question became not who would win, but how creative you could get in order to do so. In setting up its own strategy for this PC edition of the game, developer TimeGate was neither terribly adventurous nor boring. In the end, this is definitely a title from the creators of Kohan (which says a lot), but for what it's worth, this fan of the board game wished that it took more inspiration from the source material.

Resources are always important to an RTS, and Axis & Allies is no different. However, I was impressed by the fact that it took the burden off of the physical collection of resources and recast this feature in military terms – your supply line. As long as you are in the sphere of your supply line, your units can regenerate their health. Since you can literally pack up and move your ammo depots, regimental HQs, etc., your supply line can always be increased. This makes it easier for your units to survive. Hardcore players may feel it's a cop-out, but I liked that – along with your units being able to advance in rank – it helped keep your regiments and their identities intact.

I enjoyed the multi-battle campaigns you could play, but was up in the air about the WW II mode, which is a Risk-styled board game where conflicts are solved in a separate RTS portion. It was nice to see this homage to the original, but I didn't like that you could win battles by simply building up your forces to the point of invincibility or that you could run out the timer for a victory. Although I loved that each general had his own special attacks (such as kamikaze fighters, a stat de-buff called Communist Purge, or even a nuclear strike for America), I never felt that the there were as many options available to me as in the board game. The worst of which is that you can only attack once per turn. Overall, the title feels disjointed when going between map strategy and RTS combat. Axis & Allies clearly can stand on its own two feet thanks to the good work by TimeGate, but it missed the opportunity to be exceptional.—**KATO**

■ Apart from your regiments, you can coordinate ally attacks. The British, for instance, can get help from the Australians in certain campaigns

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: Deliver an RTS in the footsteps of Kohan, but include an homage to the original board game as well

> Graphics: There is a good amount of detail and specialization among all the different units

> Sound: As repetitive and generic as any other RTS out there

> Playability: Grouping your units with hotkeys is a breeze and the regimental icons keep things straight

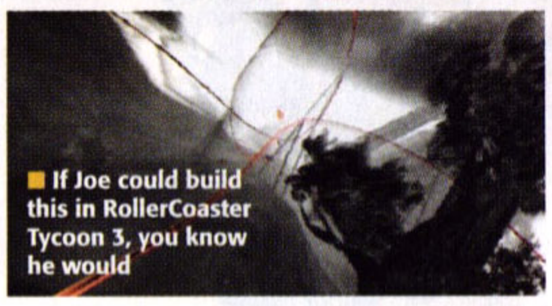
> Entertainment: Adding the Risk-like veneer to the WW II mode is cool and the game is solid, but it's not Earth shattering

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8

Coming as it does right on the heels of Kohan II (also by developer Timegate Studios), Axis & Allies plays very similarly to that title. It does, however, do many things better – the graphics are more advanced, there is a wealth of units to use, and the new Dynamic Campaign (which resembles the old Axis & Allies board game) is a blast. A few things bothered me, like not being able to design your own squads, but they're far from game breaking. Overall, A&A stands easily above the crowd of average RTS titles, and delivers a solid and fun experience – it just doesn't quite have the magic that the genre's elite titles do.—**ADAM**

■ The flame-thrower effect is in a league of its own



■ If Joe could build this in RollerCoaster Tycoon 3, you know he would

PC

Painkiller: Battle Out Of Hell

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER **> DEVELOPER** PEOPLE CAN FLY **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 22 **> ESRB** M

ZOMBIE EVERYTHING

If I had to pick a game to be the poster child for the concept of expansion packs, Painkiller: Battle Out Of Hell might well be it. It does exactly what the original did – throw a hojillion enemies at you while treating your eyes to some of the best visuals in the business. Mix in some new weapons, huge bosses, and a silly generic heavy metal soundtrack, and away we go. Not that there's a problem with that; I certainly enjoy Painkiller's brand of mindless mayhem, and Battle Out Of Hell delivers rather a lot of it.

One thing must be brought up beyond the standard "If you liked the original, there's more here for you to enjoy" line. The difficulty in BOOH is seriously wack. Through the first three levels it does a good job of being challenging but not frustrating (though it is much, much harder than the first campaign), but then something terrible happens. When you get to the Leningrad stage, the difficulty instantly triples through a combination of enemies with guns, extra-tough generals and tanks, and surprise attacks. I kid you not, it took me a good twenty tries just to get to the first checkpoint. And then, once you finally get through Leningrad and into the Coliseum, the worst jumping puzzle ever awaits. I have no idea why there's a poorly executed platforming segment in the most mindlessly violent title in recent memory. I actually had to invent new curses to adequately express my frustration at this ill-conceived train wreck of a level.

Even taking these moments of idiocy into account, though, BOOH is still a hell of a good time. The new multiplayer modes are fun, the weapons are interesting, and it's not like shooting zombies has lost its charm since Wolfenstein 3D. If you're one of the enlightened gamers who bought Painkiller, this expansion is definitely worth your money.—**ADAM**

■ Combat is just as frenzied as it always has been

BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: Go back into hell and kill more demons. Preferably while rocking out as hard as possible

> Graphics: The art direction is second to none, on top of running one of the best engines around

> Sound: If a bunch of ninjas got really pumped up and formed into one giant ninja and wailed on a guitar the size of New York, this is the music he would play

> Playability: I've never seen a difficulty level this uneven

> Entertainment: If the original didn't give you enough demons to dismember, this should fill the void in your life

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.75

From the moment you start the first level by massacring the orphaned children of Purgatory, it's clear that Battle Out of Hell isn't pulling any punches. Whereas the original Painkiller was gory and violent in the extreme, this expansion's imagery is downright disturbing. There are some frustrating collision detection issues which cause you to snag on the environment, a few too many overly confining spaces for a run and gun, plus the foolish use of platform jumping. Still, fans should be pleased by this expansion, which is designed purely for those who've thoroughly mastered the first installment. It's damn hard.—**MILLER**

Vampires need to get down with their funky selves too, you know

Mere polic are no match for your undead might

PC

Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** TROIKA STUDIOS **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 **> ESRB** M

A BIT SHORT

In a perfect world, Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines would have been a strong contender for my favorite game of all time. It's got a mutable and intriguing storyline, strong RPG elements, lets you play through missions however you want, and it's even built largely on Half-Life 2's Source engine. It may have been a bit too tall of an order, though, because there are enough flaws in this title's execution to downgrade it from amazing to enjoyable.

The tone of Bloodlines, from the very beginning, is completely over-the-top in a way that seemed really cool when I was an angsty fourteen-year old. Whether you like the genre or not, it's hard not to get sucked into Bloodlines' gritty, dark world. Its tone stays nicely consistent, and it's populated with characters who have their own motivations, alliances, and feuds. It certainly doesn't hurt that your many choices affect the progression of the story to an extent, and can even determine who lives and who dies. As much as I enjoy having a say over the plotline for its own sake, Bloodlines also presents you with serious consequences for your actions. This lends weight to your choices, and creates a great feeling of connection to the game world.

The role-playing aspects, ripped as they are straight from the pages of a White Wolf tabletop RPG sourcebook, are deep and well-utilized. Don't go in expecting to seduce the guard into letting you into the art gallery if you've been spending all of your points in combat skills. Likewise, good luck blasting your way into the warehouse if your character is built as a stealthy thief. Of course, most missions will allow you to choose your course of action, so it's hard to get stuck by a poorly-built character.

This sort of thing is all fine and good, and I appreciate it. However, there is really no way to use your own skills as a player to compensate for your avatar's deficiencies. If you don't have enough Persuasion skill, the dialogue option won't even show up. And just try using your Counter-Strike sniping proficiency to make up for lacking in Dexterity – the cone of fire on guns is ridiculous without the relevant feats. The melee combat is particularly suspect. Even though I built my guy up as a shapechanging juggernaut of destruction, I still had a hard time beating enemies down. Don't get me started on the sloppy stealth implementation, either. My issue with this is that you're forced into the role you've tried to master, with little recourse to try something different.

That's right, you can beat innocent people with a severed arm

For all of the deep storyline, freedom of action, and cool ambience that Bloodlines delivers, I still have some pretty serious issues with the game. I liked the more adventure-oriented and RPG aspects of it quite a lot, and there's a ton of things to do and experience here. It's just that there are also many poorly-executed components to slog through to get to the good parts. Some people will surely love this game, but I feel that it'll be a much better time for adventure and RPG types than action fans.——**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> Concept: Deus Ex rocked! But what if instead of cyborgs, it had vampires?

> Graphics: Good, but considering the Source engine nature of the game, I expected more

> Sound: Call me a dork, but I liked the gothy music. The many voiceovers are mostly well-done, too

> Playability: Take every cliché of poor third-person action on the PC, and apply it here

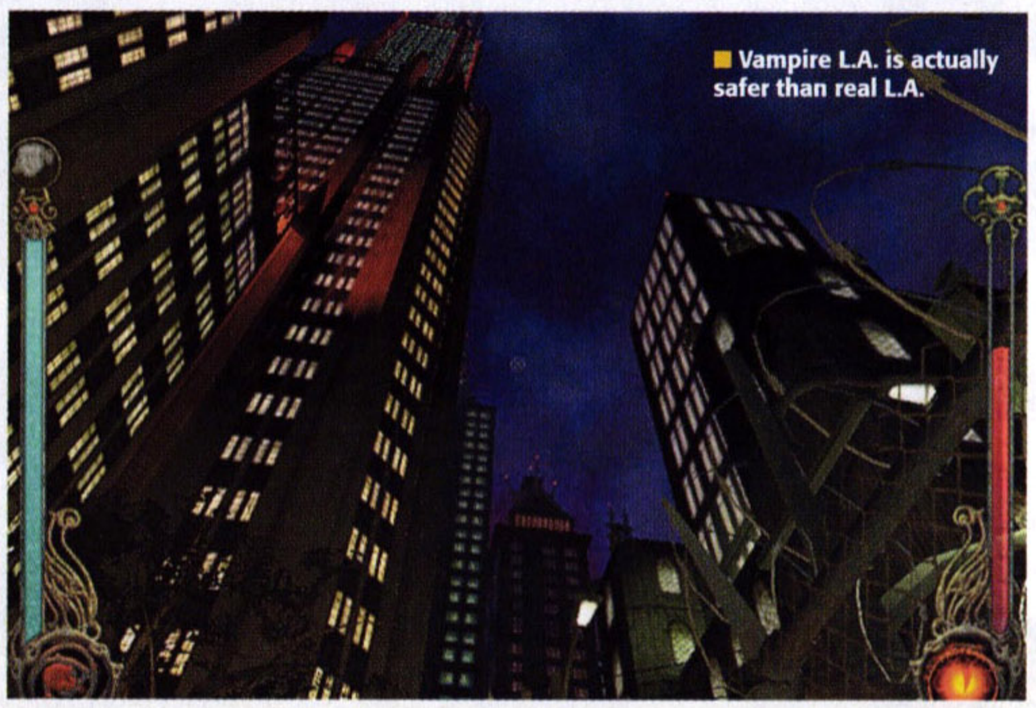
> Entertainment: Not everything works as well as it could, but this still manages to be fun

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.75

Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines is getting big bonus points from me for what it does well, because the good things in this game are very good indeed. There's a real sense of ambiance and an extremely well-developed universe here that any player will instantly latch onto. This depth obviously comes from the immense source material provided by the long-running pen and paper game. Developing my character and learning about the politics in this take on the vampire mythos are by far the best moments of this game. The action and stealth mechanics, on the other hand, along with some technical issues like getting shot through walls and falling through the world, drag down the entire experience with their hamfisted execution. It's sad, really, because the dialogue, story, and stat allocation are pretty cool, but you have to fight through some clunky action junk to get to the good stuff. —LISA

The haunted, abandoned hotel is a brilliant level


Vampire L.A. is actually safer than real L.A.

Escape from the Ordinary

"Riddick is a must-see, must-play, must-buy Xbox classic."

Electronic Gaming Monthly

Available on PC December 2004

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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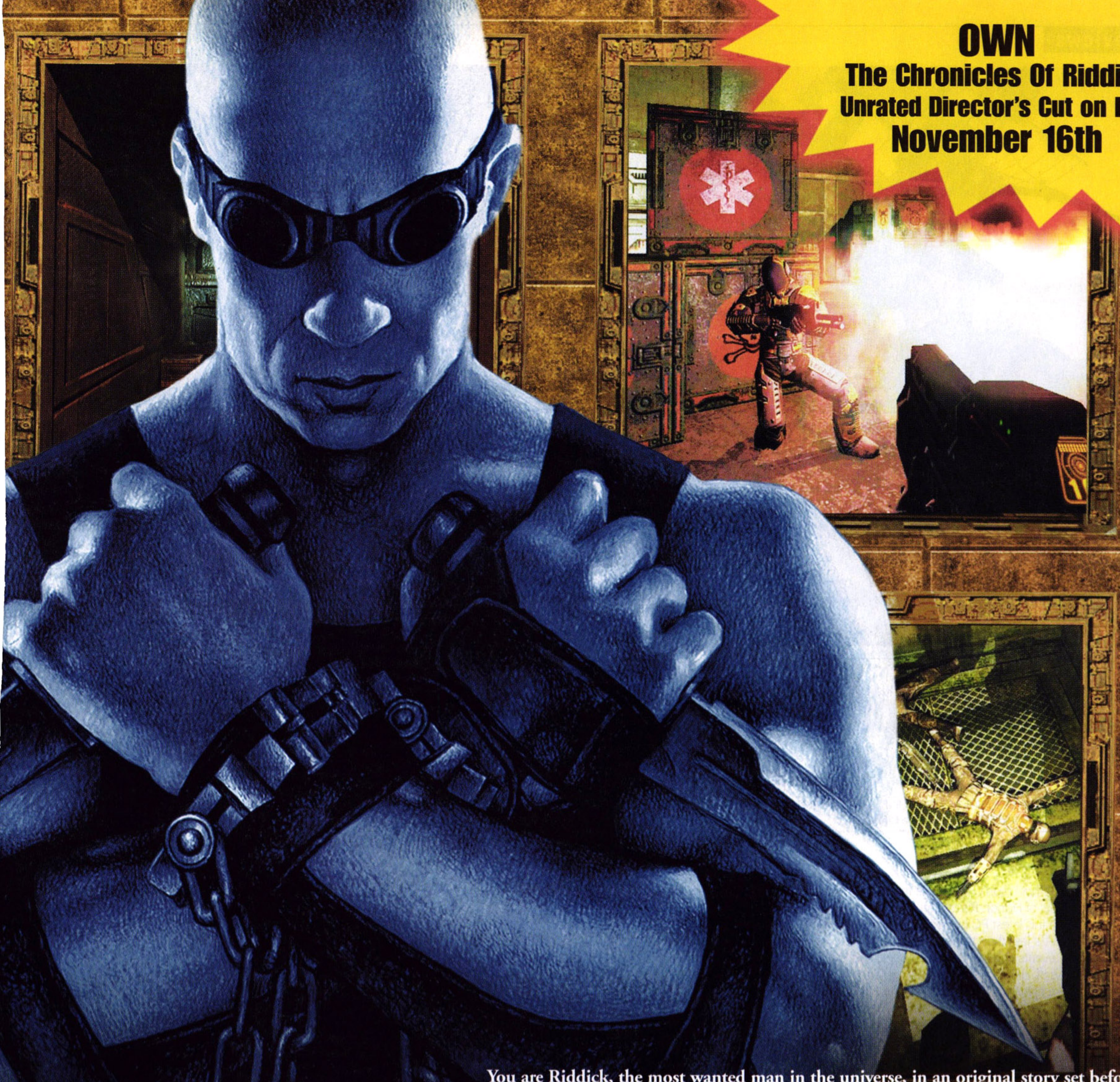
Parental Advisory: A Note to Parents: The original motion picture The Chronicles of Riddick is rated PG-13. Please consult www.filmratings.com for information regarding movie ratings in making viewing choices for children.

OWN

The Chronicles Of Riddick

Unrated Director's Cut on DVD

November 16th



Available on DVD
November 16th

You are Riddick, the most wanted man in the universe, in an original story set before the events in Universal Pictures' *The Chronicles of Riddick*™ (starring Vin Diesel), and the breakout hit *Pitch Black*, which first introduced the enigmatic anti-hero Riddick. Make a dramatic escape from Butcher Bay, the galaxy's deadliest prison, in this intense fusion of first-person shooter, fighter, and stealth adventure.

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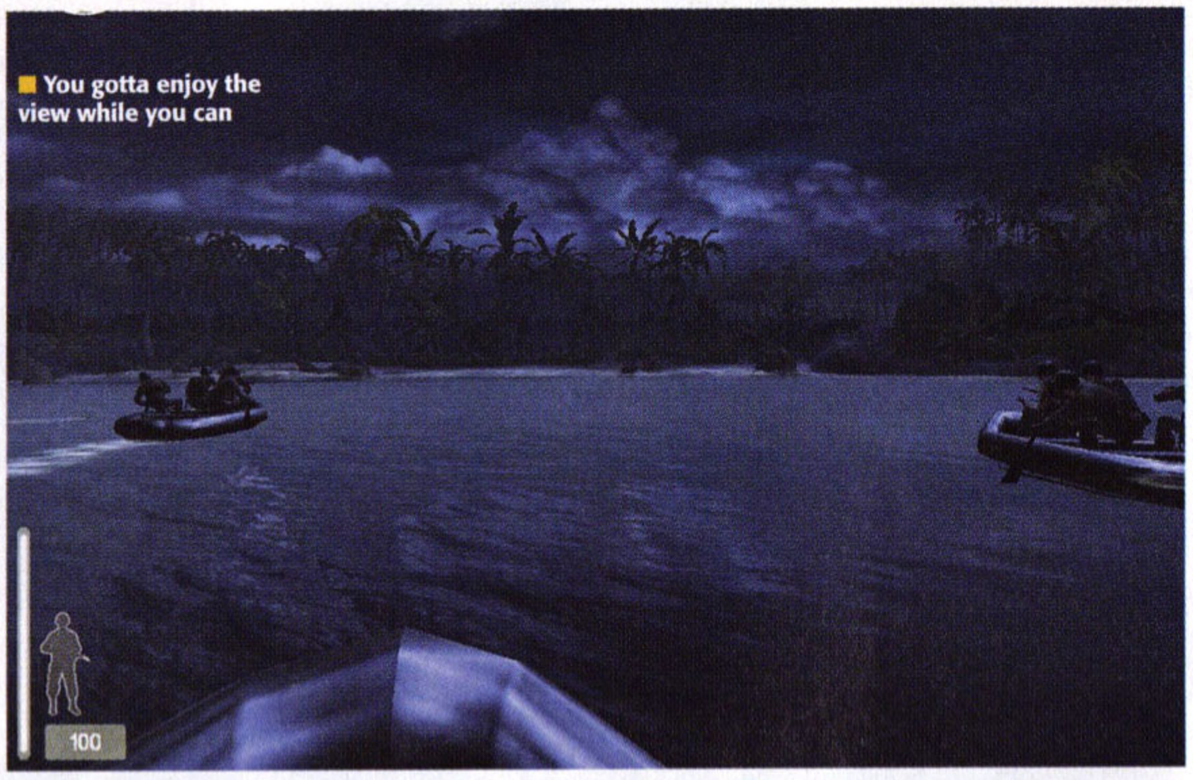
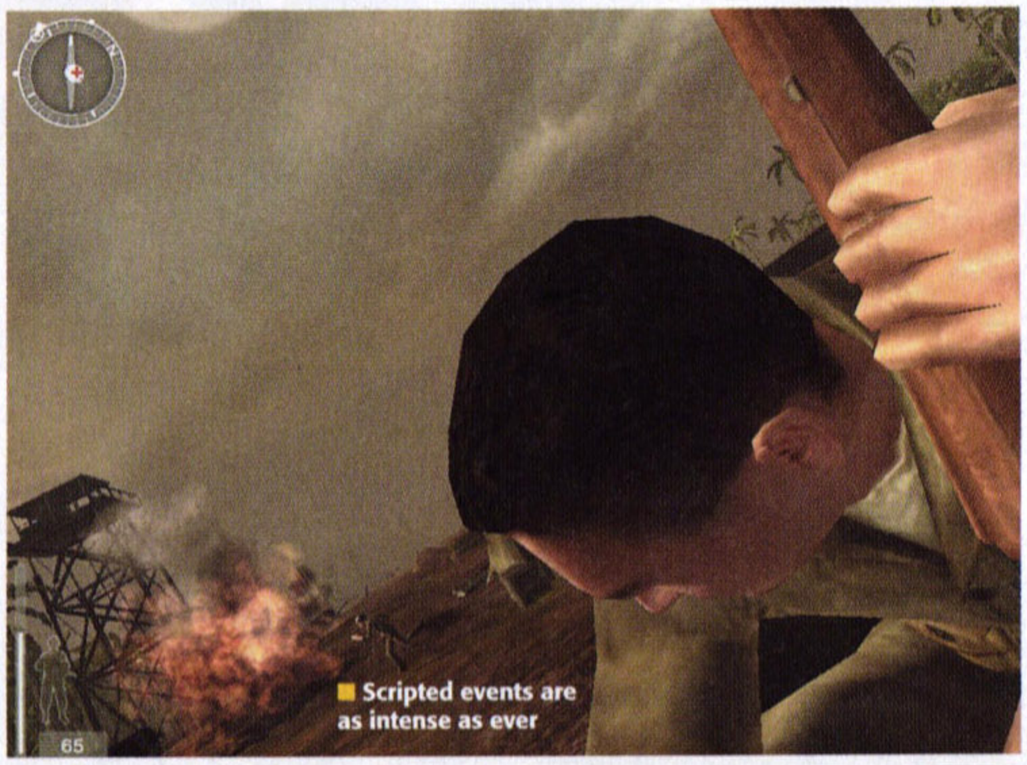
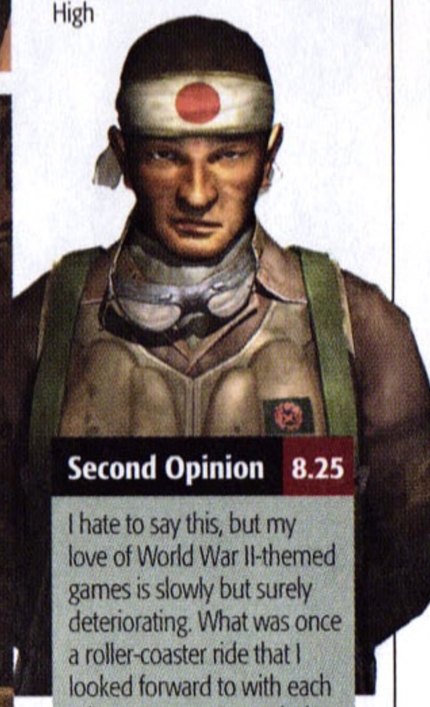






BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Do your part to win the Pacific Theatre of Operations for the U.S. of A.

> **Graphics:** Yes, there are games that do it better, but not very many

> **Sound:** Absolutely top-notch. This is the new benchmark for wartime audio

> **Playability:** Worse than you'd think – switching in and out of aim mode is cumbersome

> **Entertainment:** It may not be the best of the bunch, but this is still more than worth playing

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **8.25**

I hate to say this, but my love of World War II-themed games is slowly but surely deteriorating. What was once a roller-coaster ride that I looked forward to with each release, I now approach the sub-genre with more than just a little bit of trepidation. However, it didn't take long for Pacific Assault to suck me back in with its outstanding production and nail-biting firefights. While the game certainly has its share of problems, for every one of its minor annoyances (like the ridiculous load times), the game delivers a clever twist that takes the drama and dread of war to a whole new level. I still like Call of Duty's gameplay, but Pacific Assault is without a doubt solid from beginning to end if you have a machine powerful enough to handle it.—**ANDY**

PC

Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** EALA **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4 **> ESRB** T

ISLANDS OF DEATH

It's no secret that I didn't much care for the recent Medal of Honor: Rising Sun on console. Thus, when this latest PC version of the series came in, I was less than thrilled. "Yay, more clearly scripted events and linear mission objectives," I thought to myself. Here's the funny bit: I couldn't have been more right about that, and yet I still had a grand time with this title. Pacific Assault, while seemingly sharing many core design elements with its console cousin, does nearly everything right – and it does it with more distinctive flavor and gut-twisting immersion than any WW II title I can think of. Call of Duty may own the gameplay front, but Medal of Honor has regained its role as the most intense wartime FPS.

What really made me realize how deep Pacific Assault had sunk its hooks into me was the first time I got genuinely upset when a squadmate went down. These guys, though AI controlled, had been through the hell of Tawara Atoll with me, and damned if I was going to let them die in this god-forsaken jungle. So, against my better judgement, I called for some covering fire and went into no-man's-land to carry Willy back behind a fallen tree where our corpsman Timmy could patch him back up. This feeling of connection with the game world is better developed in MOH: PA than I've ever seen before, and is an experience I highly recommend.

Obviously, this depth of involvement wouldn't be possible without an excellent presentation to sell it, and you'd better believe that MOH: PA has it. The graphics are a treat, especially in the ambient lighting (it's amazing how different the same jungle can look at different times of day) and full-screen effects. Your vision blurs when unloading with an automatic weapon, colors fade as you become more and more wounded, and nearby explosions seriously mess with your perceptions. The aural environment is just as rich – firearms have distinctive reports, both enemies and allies spout dynamic chatter constantly, and the instrumental score fits the action and mood perfectly. I honestly can't think of anything EA did wrong in this department.

The gameplay is a bit more problematic, but not to the point where it detracts hugely from the experience. Your squad largely goes about their business in an intelligent fashion, but it seemed that about once per level something would go horribly awry in their pathfinding and the mission would get borked. Likewise, the flow of each level is mostly smooth, but occasionally an event is a little too clearly scripted and feels artificial. My biggest complaint, however, is that toggling the aiming mode is clumsy. I mean, this is something that has been done perfectly in FPS games for several years, and somehow MOH: PA screws it up.

Despite these problems (and obscenely long load times, even on GI's high-end gaming PC), Pacific Assault is a great game. I still stick to my guns and give Call of Duty the nod for overall gameplay, but it's a close call. If your personal preferences tend more toward single-player immersion and involving characters and storyline, by all means go with MOH: PA – you won't be disappointed.—**ADAM**

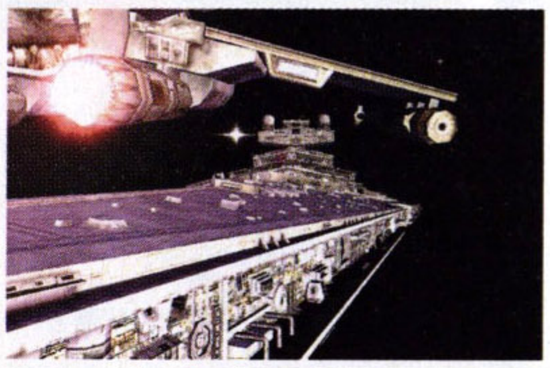
PC QUICKIES

PC

Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS
> **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 > **ESRB** T



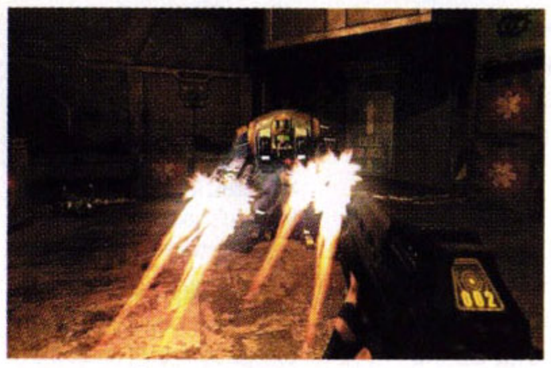
Galaxies has wandered between the light and dark sides of the Force for many months now. It's been a phenomenal extension of the Star Wars experience, but it's also frequently angered players with dramatic gameplay changes and continually frustrating balance issues. Thankfully, Jump to Lightspeed is both fun and impressively integrated with the ground game already in place. New players only interested in the space combat features can immediately jump into the pilot's seat as a rebel, imperial, or freelance pilot. Meanwhile, long-time players should have no trouble beginning their spacefaring careers alongside the professions they have already mastered. Outer space in a galaxy far, far away is simply gorgeous. Plus, the skill-based ship-to-ship combat is a breath of fresh air for the MMO scene.—**MILLER**

PC

The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay Developer's Cut

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > **DEVELOPER** STARBREEZE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 7 > **ESRB** M



I would say that this game is every bit as good as the movie, but that wouldn't exactly be a compliment. Okay, the film isn't that bad, but this game is the best thing that the Riddick character has ever been involved with. The PC edition has everything that made the Xbox version great, plus some nice bonuses. The Commentary mode, in which you can listen to the developers talk about certain aspects of the game while playing is a particularly nice touch. While few games could compete with Riddick's graphics on the Xbox, there are certainly better-looking games out there for the PC. But it still looks great, and has one of the best single-player stories out there. If you haven't played it yet, now's the time to head into Riddick's world.—**JEREMY**

PC

Joint Operations: Escalation

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 150-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** NOVALOGIC
> **DEVELOPER** NOVALOGIC > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** T

So, have you ever read a review of an expansion pack before? If you haven't, pay attention – most of what I'm about to say can be generalized and applied to many, many games. The original Joint Operations offered some pretty good online multiplayer FPS action, which became great when you found a nice stable server with good people on it. Escalation does nothing to change that – it only improves the core of Joint Ops' gameplay with its new weapons, body armor, and especially the assault vehicles. Also, my experience on NovaWorld was much better this time around; it seems that NovaLogic has ironed out many of the annoying little problems with its matchmaking service. However, it's doubtful that if you didn't like the original you would find much to love in Escalation.—**ADAM**

PC

Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** MYELIN MEDIA > **DEVELOPER** TILTED MILL > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E

STATE OF DE NILE

Some of the most mainstream and recognizable PC games are simulations, but that doesn't mean that the entire genre is populated with friendly and accessible titles. Children of the Nile is a prime example of the well-done, engaging, and unavoidably complicated side of simulation. Gamers most familiar with RollerCoaster Tycoon or SimCity might be a bit lost at first, but given a little time, all will see how this game grows into an incredibly enjoyable and complex city-builder.

What makes this title so deep is the web of social interactions that govern the satisfaction of various groups within the populace. Nobles like to shop at fancy-pants stores. Merchants need to live close to raw materials. People want to worship various gods, and temples require priests to lead the religious services. If you satisfy these needs, your kingdom prospers. If you ignore them, you can be overthrown and expelled from your own empire. Plus, even if you just want to add something simple to your city, you'll often need to start changes at the bottom of the hierarchy to effect change at the top. Once you learn these basics (the tutorial takes about three to four hours), you'll have plenty of time to exercise your authority in the Campaign and Scenario modes.

The main area where Children of the Nile falters is in providing content that can be engaged at different levels. This game has no middle ground between "off" and "mired knee-deep in intricate societal balancing acts," which means that it lacks any casual appeal. I don't always want to please my followers; sometimes I just want to issue cruel edicts from high atop my palace and laugh at their misfortune. Still, even though I didn't have the freedom to ignore my people from time to time, I still had plenty of elbow room to explore the fertile land of this involved and inventive title.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Build pyramids without the religiously oppressed slave labor

> **Graphics:** Whether you view the city from high above or roam the streets with the commoners, it looks beautiful

> **Sound:** Excellent ambient soundtrack, despite the shameful absence of The Bangles' "Walk Like an Egyptian"

> **Playability:** The information-rich interface is well-organized and easy to access

> **Entertainment:** As if becoming God-emperor weren't enough, you also get an in-game encyclopedia of Egyptian culture and history. Woo-hoo!

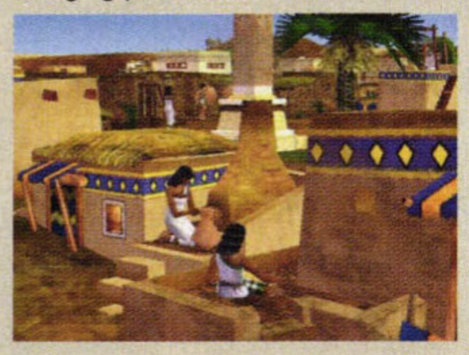
> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.25

Did you ever have one of those little green ant farms when you were a kid? As hundreds of unique individuals all scuttle about to do your will in Children of the Nile, you'll get that same indescribable joy of watching their society expand into the sands. Unfortunately, like the true pharaohs of ancient Egypt, you're going to do a lot of waiting around and watching as your pyramid gets built or the harvest gets collected. You'll be in charge of dictating every single aspect of how your people build their Nile civilization, down to the tiniest detail. If you're happy with that, it is an intricate recreation of life in the olden days. If you bore easily, you'd best go blow something up in a different game.—**MILLER**

A WORLD WITHOUT MONEY

It may seem odd at first, but Children of the Nile doesn't use the standard mechanic of amassing wealth to expand your empire. Once you have a system set up to supply a steady flow of food and bricks to your city, the only way to advance your culture is by managing your citizens rather than your wealth. By building homes for priests, scribes, merchants, and nobles, you determine the number of your workers that rise from their lowly ranks and are able to serve your city in more illustrious positions. Essentially, your citizens determine the quality of your empire, not just how many gaudy monuments you can afford to build.



NINTENDO DS

Super Mario 64 DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21 > **ESRB** E

THE MARIO: RELOADED

Nintendo will likely never make the mistake of launching a system without a Mario title again, so to that end DS owners are getting Super Mario 64 DS, a new version of the classic title that made 3D platforming a reality. I say "new version" instead of "port" because the new content and graphical overhaul performed on this title is more than you'd expect from just a standard conversion. For one, it's not just a Mario game – you can now play as and switch between other notables like Yoshi, Wario, and Luigi, each of which add their own distinct flavor to the action.

Of course, this being a DS title, Nintendo has incorporated some touch screen, wireless, and dual-screen functionality. There is up to four-player multiplayer, which – while it works great – doesn't really offer much beyond "run around and collect these stars." In addition, there are some "Rec Room" minigames that exclusively utilize the DS's touch pad. Most of these are akin to WarioWare, like using an (admittedly cool) "slingshot" mechanic to launch bombs at falling enemies or playing the classic children's card game Concentration. Neat? Sure, but missing that promised mind-blowing touch gameplay that Nintendo has been touting.

So, stripping away all the extraneous material, what we have here is a new version of Super Mario 64 – a game that's a true classic of its genre. Judged as such, it's a bit of a mixed bag. Graphically, there's no question: this looks much better than the N64 original. The texturing and character models are gorgeous. It's really encouraging to see this system (that some have dubbed underpowered in comparison to PSP) handle 3D and handle it well. Also, added content abounds, in the form of the aforementioned playable characters, new and altered levels, and a bevy of new stars to collect.

So, it's clearly better than the original, right? No so fast, grasshopper. You've got to remember that this title was really the one that established the analog stick as a staple of console gaming. The DS, lacking an analog pad, forces you to either play with the d-pad (which is much clunkier) or a couple of touch-pad control options that seek to replace the analog. I found none of the three options to be as good as playing with the original N64 controller. I did have some moments of frustration, particularly during the more arduous platforming sequences. That's not to say that the control is a dealbreaker; you'll get used to it in time. However, all things considered, I'd still rather boot up my old school cart than this handheld upstart. But, a great game is a great game on any system, especially one that looks this good. However, I think it's ironic that what will no doubt be the best of the DS launch lineup is a game that makes little use of its unique technology.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Recreate the legendary platformer for a new handheld, with some added content

> **Graphics:** Really vivid and much better than the Nintendo 64 version. Speaks well of the DS's graphical capabilities

> **Sound:** Nintendo has always had expertly composed game music

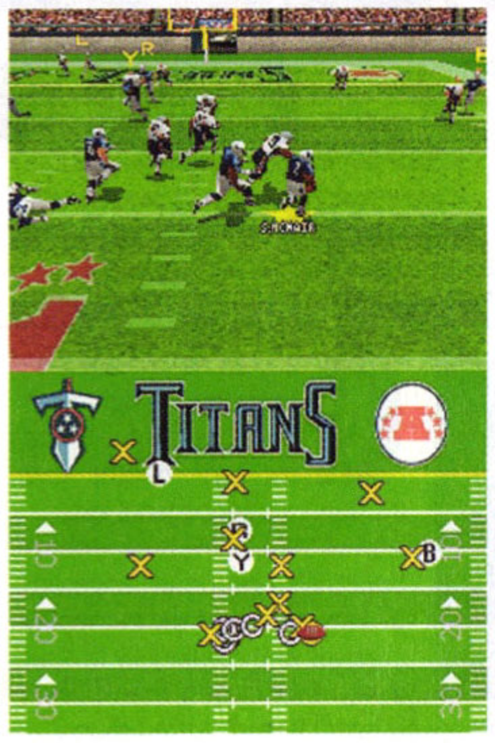
> **Playability:** The d-pad makes the platforming more difficult, and the touch-screen options aren't a good substitute for the analog stick

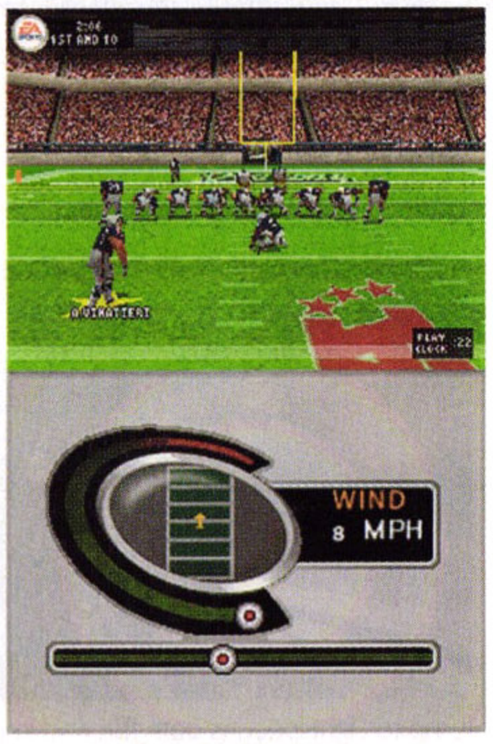
> **Entertainment:** At the end of the day, Super Mario 64 is a great game, and nothing can change that fact

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7

Before I say anything else, I want to make it perfectly clear that Super Mario 64 is a spectacular game. One of the greatest of all time, easily. That said, Super Mario 64 on DS isn't quite the experience I wanted it to be. The biggest problem is the lack of an analog stick, as the digital pad or the touch screen doesn't quite give the player that same intuitive link to the game that made the original so special. That said, the new content is most certainly compelling. So much so that I'd like to beg Nintendo to bring this title to the GameCube so I don't have to suffer through the clumsy DS control scheme. Some of the minigames are all right for short bursts of entertainment, but like the multiplayer aspect of this title, it's more gimmick than substance.—**ANDY**





NINTENDO DS

Madden NFL 2005

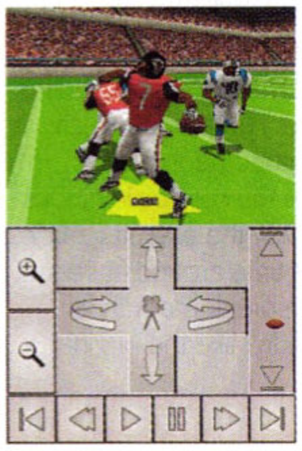
> **STYLE** 1 TO 10-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17 > **ESRB** E

TOUCH FOOTBALL IS FOR WUSSIES

Handheld football – no matter how many screens you throw at the problem – has yet to be very attractive in portable form. I'd go so far as to say that those 1980's Mattel handheld LED units were as close to exciting as the sport has gotten in miniature. Just to prove this point, take out your Nintendo DS stylus and, instead of calling a hot route when playing Madden, poke your brother/sister in the arm with it. Wasn't that more fun? Now ask them if they can feel the Nintendo difference.

EA Tiburon has done a good job of replicating the look of the series' first 3D incarnation: Madden NFL '99. While not quite as good looking, this game has one great thing going for it – it plays pretty fast. I'd say that it's so quick that during plays, the bottom DS screen (the one showing the action in real-time Xs and Os) is useless. Glance down at it and you're liable to get sacked. The other DS feature, the stylus, isn't practical either. While it is used for kicking and pre-play options, it was simply annoying to have to pick it up and put it down all the time. I suggest just poking the screen with your finger – unless, of course, you're eating a plate of delicious ribs. Then I'd put the DS aside, skip the football, and chow down. As for multiplayer, wireless contests make my shoulders shrug, and the game's 10-player feature is merely you passing the DS among nine other people while playing Two Minute Drill.

You know what? Apart from the fact that I felt the handheld's d-pad didn't offer fluid-enough movement, this game's poor performance isn't really the DS' fault. It's because PSone-era football isn't fun anymore, and I doubt it ever will be. Not with the relics of that bygone area still hanging around, such as outrageous dive tackles, a poor interior running game, jump-ball scrums for passes, slow response to player selection/QB passes, and more. Want to play football on the go? Take a piece of paper, fold it into a small triangle, and flick it into someone's face instead.—**KATO**



BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** This game is very Mark Brunell-like: old and not worth much

> **Graphics:** Not quite on par with Madden's first 3D effort in its '99 edition, but similar and complete with player celebrations

> **Sound:** It's the All Al Show. Madden's voice parts are few and far between

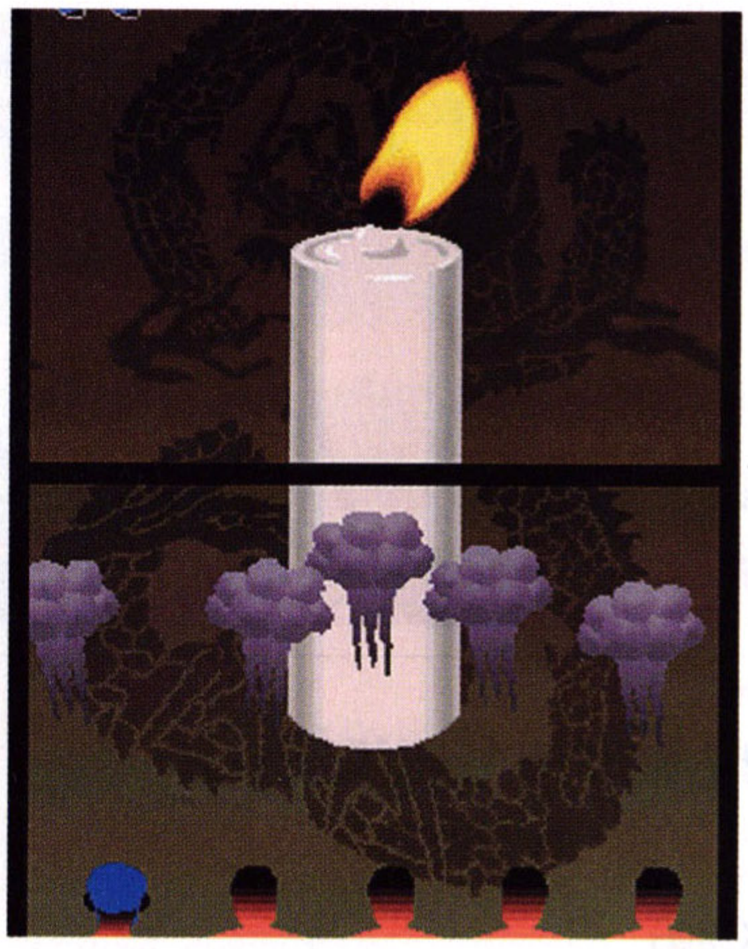
> **Playability:** I'm not a fan of the DS's SNES button configuration, but I dislike the stylus more

> **Entertainment:** Good enough to stave off life-threatening boredom if need be, but that's about it

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.5

If you haven't been frozen in a block of Lambeau Field ice for the last five years, and have actually played a pigskin game recently, Madden DS is a painful reminder of just how poorly football games of yesteryear have held up over time. Selecting plays via the touch screen is a novel idea, and it is nice to see a complete season with stat tracking, but the gameplay feels prehistoric. It's incredibly difficult to go back to slippery player movements, poor passing, choppy animations, and bare-bones play calling. Much like the Minnesota Vikings and Buffalo Bills, looking back to the past is just painful.—**REINER**



NINTENDO DS

Feel the Magic XY/XX

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SEGA
> DEVELOPER SONIC TEAM **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21 **> ESRB** T

RUB IN AN UPWARD MOTION AND BLOW

Before you get too excited, those are the instructions for one of the numerous minigames packed into this silly, strange, and enormously amusing little game. Utilizing the DS hardware to the greatest potential of any of the launch titles, Feel the Magic is unlike any game you've played before, and just like dozens you've played for years.

Let me explain. Feel the Magic tells the ludicrous story of a young man infatuated with a girl he meets on the street. I don't want to ruin the epic quality of the game for you, but suffice to say it involves a truck full of scorpions, some rampaging bulls, and some magical mohawks. The tale progresses through a series of completely deranged and unique minigames, each of which uses the DS in a new way. You'll tap the screen to throw things, guide your character around with the stylus, and blow on the microphone to produce wind in a boat's sail. The quirky mix of game types keep things fun and exciting, and the constant change-up assures you'll never get bored. The thing is, most of these vignettes will look familiar to anyone who knows his Mario from his Wario. The innovation lies solely in the new control mechanic.

Nonetheless, Feel the Magic is a genuine treat, and even its short length doesn't hold me back from granting it my solid seal of approval.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: Court the hand of a young lady through a series of drug-induced minigames

> Graphics: The clever art style is both unique and attractive

> Sound: The music is as haphazard and quirky as the rest of the game, and the sound effects should elicit more than a few giggles

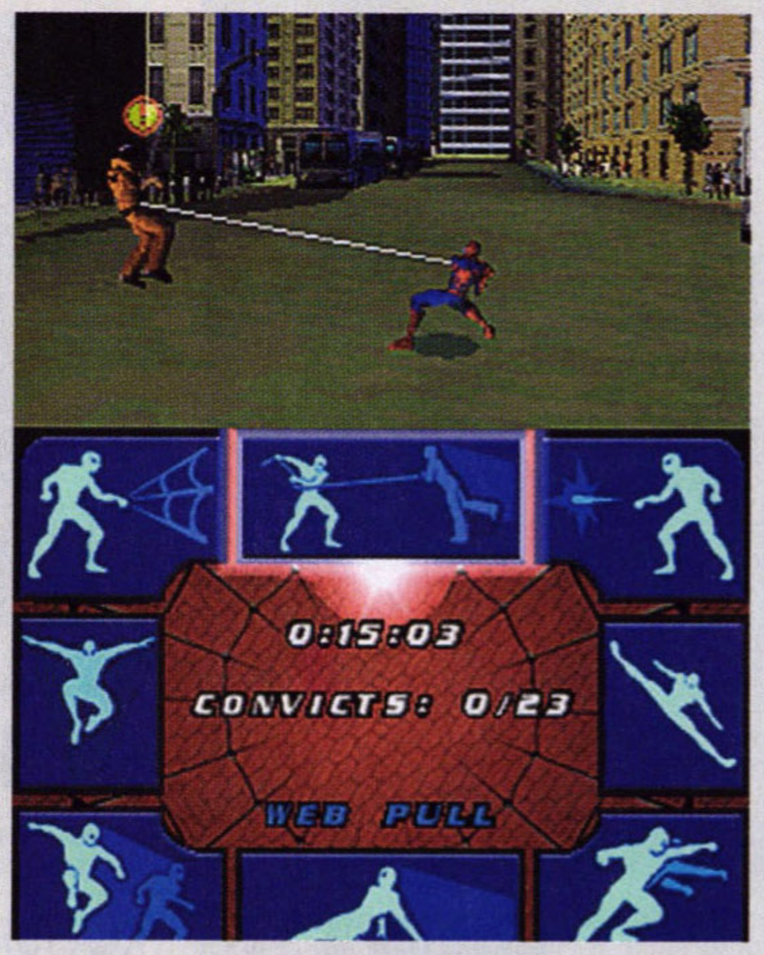
> Playability: While some of the games can initially seem challenging, no one should have trouble grasping the simple controls

> Entertainment: Truly unique, humorous, and loads of fun. Too bad it only lasts a few hours

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

This is one of those wonderfully strange ducks of a game – the art style is amazingly cool, the music begs comparisons to Katamari Damacy (a high compliment), and the minigames walk the thin line between random weirdness and solid gamplay with general success. Still, this is just a collection of minigame types doled out in quick tidbits that we've (mostly) seen before. Personally, I think that the aforementioned successes in the game's design coupled with the few moments that only the DS hardware could provide make up for the otherwise conventional gameplay, and should nudge anyone who's curious toward this title. —LISA



NINTENDO DS

Spider-Man 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> DEVELOPER VICARIOUS VISIONS **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21 **> ESRB** T

SUPER HEROES ARE DUMB

REINER SMASH! As an unwanted surprise, Spider-Man 2's gameplay is so sinister and unjust that it has the uncanny ability of transforming players into rampaging Hulks. By the final stage of this game, I was so distraught and filled with rage that I actually tried to use the stylus to squish the life out of Spider-Man. Unfortunately, the game isn't equipped with this functionality.

The itsy bitsy spider does a good job of luring gamers into his web. The three-dimensional backdrops are nicely detailed, the combat and web swinging controls are mapped well, and the DS touch screen is used in a number of interesting ways throughout play.

Just when it seems that this could be a must-play game, the spider pounces and injects you with a lethal dosage of venom. The level designs are simply atrocious and have no flow to them whatsoever. Many of the stages ask players to either save a number of hostages or defeat a number of adversaries before the clock hits zero. Scouring the stages for the last hostage on your checklist is just as time consuming, pointless, and frustrating as searching for a needle in a haystack. It drove me nuts. Many times I was forced to memorize my target locations (which takes numerous attempts) just to complete a stage. I can't remember the last time that a game stressed me out so much. This one flaw runs rampant throughout the entire game and completely taints the experience.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> Concept: Exciting side-scrolling gameplay that loses its luster due to horrendous level designs

> Graphics: The 3D backdrops look great, Spidey's animations are very lifelike, and the CG cutscenes are as sharp as can be

> Sound: The soundtrack is decent, but there isn't much in terms of voice or ambient noise

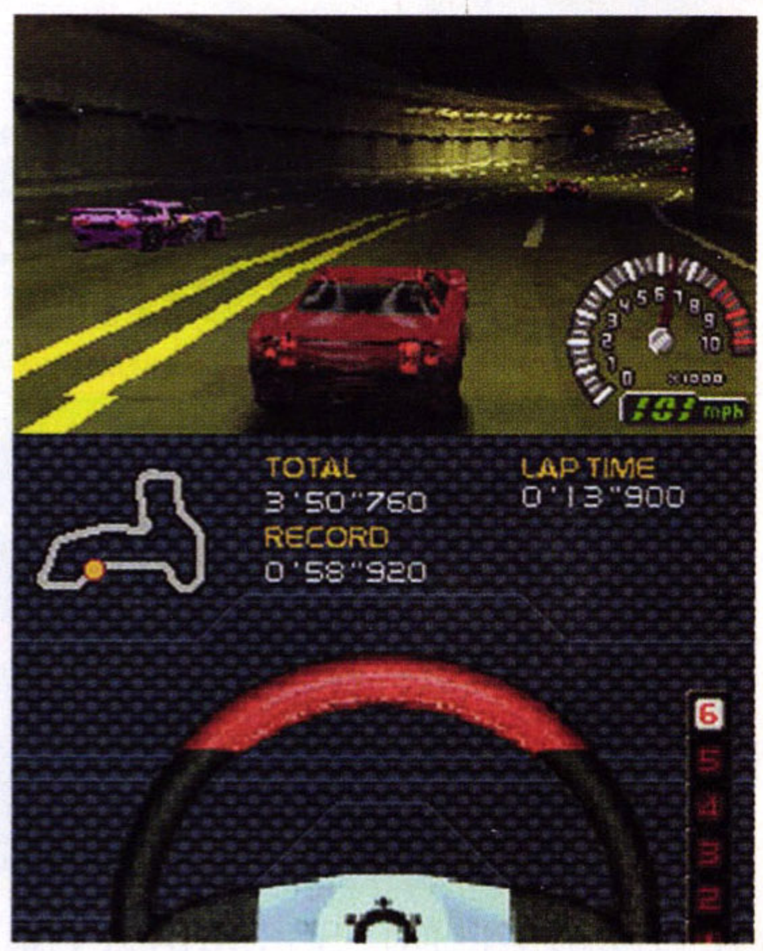
> Playability: The controls are fashioned nicely, but the lack of direction in the stages leads to an aggravating play

> Entertainment: A complete waste unless you don't mind scouring levels for 20 minutes

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.5

With great power comes great responsibility, but this game isn't up to the task. The large levels are very impressive, but become less so with each passing second that you're lost in them. I marveled at how Spider-Man could interact with every surface in the levels, but hated how easy it was to get stuck in the crouch position in the middle of a battle. This title sets its sights high, but fails to execute on the basics. —KATO



NINTENDO DS

Ridge Racer DS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS LAN)
> PUBLISHER NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO **> RELEASE** DECEMBER 7
> ESRB E

DS GETS A DWI

Driving in this game is the equivalent of watching a fish out of water. There's a lot of desperate flopping around. And there's a sadness to it, too. There are a lot of things that make this title fun to play, but actually getting your hands on the wheel isn't one of them.

The problem I had is that you cannot calibrate your cars' steering wheel to your liking in order to get rid of its large dead spot. The result is there isn't a lot of gradation of control. This is where the image of a dying fish comes in. Until you get a good feel for it, you'll be jerking the wheel from side to side trying to gain control of your car. This applies to the d-pad steering as well as the touch screen.

Once you get the hang of things, you can sit back enjoy yourself. The sense of speed is faster than some console games I've played, and this even holds true when you're playing wireless (you only need one cart).

Racing titles on handhelds have traditionally had the ambition of a wet noodle. Although Ridge Racer isn't too far up the evolutionary chain, it's a glimpse of the future. One where features like blistering speed and visual effects aren't just the property of home consoles anymore.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Despite a very suitable use of the touch screen, this game is less than solid

> Graphics: I was most impressed with the camera shake and light trails from cars' tail lights

> Sound: There are few sound cues to tell you when someone is behind you

> Playability: A non-adjustable dead spot in the steering wheel means you'll be oversteering and flopping around like a dead fish

> Entertainment: It's more fun than some racers on non-handhelds, but it's basic and not without problems

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

This being one title on a short list of handheld racing games that I could actually see myself playing through again, I have a lot of respect for what Ridge Racer DS does well. The sense of speed is great and the touch-screen driving controls add a truly unique (and generally good) gameplay experience. Collision inconsistencies, old-school AI dirty tricks, and no way to tune the touch steering sensitivity are my only notable problems with this otherwise able racer. —LISA

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX **> RELEASE** DECEMBER 7 **> ESRB** E

RELIVING THE NOT-SO-DISTANT PAST

Struggling to differentiate reality with fabrications of the mind, Sora is clearly troubled. As he works his way through events that could be memory pockets or complete illusions, an unfamiliar face warns, "When your sleeping memories awaken, you may no longer be you." With esoteric dialogue that simply demands answers, Square knows exactly how to keep gamers glued to the events at hand. The introductory moments of this tale lead gamers along an irresistible bread-crumb trail that is loaded with intrigue and the promise of something spectacular.

The sensation that you've just stepped foot into another Square Enix masterpiece is quickly snatched away when your journey truly begins. Though brimming with mystery, Chain of Memories is overflowing with recycled material from the original Kingdom Hearts game. The concept of revisiting your past to regain your memory is sound, but truth be told, my memories of the original game are still very fresh, and helping Aladdin defeat Jafar again just doesn't get my blood pumping. In my opinion, this is a cheap cop out on Square's part. Reusing characters and locations is acceptable to an extent, but you have to do something different with these elements to truly keep people engrossed. Since Square has fashioned this game as a sequel that bridges the gap between the original entry and the forthcoming sequel, fanatics who must see it all will have to wade through hours of familiarity just to soak in a handful of cutscenes that point toward the future.

This really is a shame too, as Square's ability to fuse frenzied hack 'n slash melee with collectible cards has paid off with enjoyable results. Rather than simply flailing with a keyblade, players now scroll through a deck and activate specific cards to initiate attacks. This may sound odd, but the system that Square created is lightning quick in its execution and is very easy to use. With every action demanding split-second timing, each battle is tension-filled and ripe with strategy. Counter attacks, three card combos, magic, and character summons are brilliantly interlaced and allow players to assail foes in a multitude of ways. As enjoyable as combat is, enemy encounters are way too frequent. On average, you'll be lucky to get a five-second breather before the next bout.

While it would have been nice to join Sora and company on a new adventure, it seems that Square would rather have us rekindle our fond memories until the sequel arrives. This is an enjoyable handheld, but like the direct-to-video Disney sequels, it just doesn't have the magic of the original.—**REINER**

SLEIGHT OF HAND

When cycling through cards in the deck, if the player simultaneously presses the L and R buttons on a certain card, that card will be removed from the deck and placed at the top of the screen. When three cards are removed, if the player hits L and R again, the three cards will be used in unison to unleash a powerful combo. As advantageous as this technique is, the first card that the player stacked will be removed from the deck for the remainder of battle.

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: A sequel that lives completely in the past, yet offers up satisfying combat and a little taste of things to come in Kingdom Hearts II

> Graphics: A visual masterpiece that showcases amazing character detailing, stellar animations, and beautiful CG movie sequences (That's right…CG on a GBA)

> Sound: Not having voice hurts (especially for Donald), but the soundtrack is nicely done

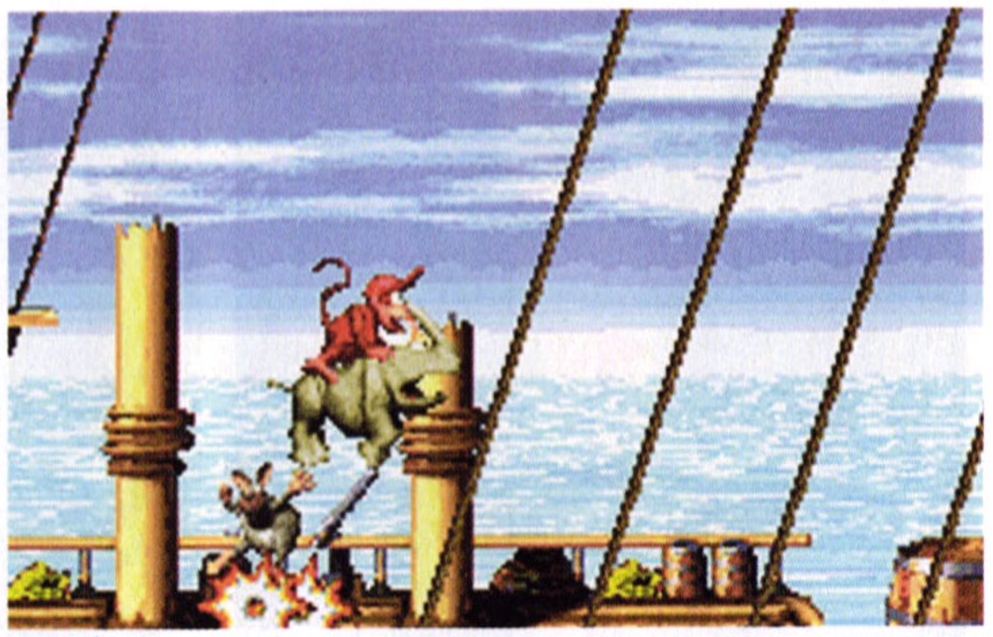
> Playability: Hack n' slash collides with collectible cards to create a highly original and immensely satisfying combat engine

> Entertainment: Too much is recycled from the original game to make it truly compelling for everyone

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7.25

As much as it pains me to say this, I think I'm starting to like card combat – especially the way it's done in Chain of Memories. The combination of reflex and strategy required to play the cards correctly is fun and involving, but I wish the whole mechanic had stopped there. Instead, you also need cards to open doors, and not in that crazy hijinks "slip the lock with a credit card" kind of way. They are like magical keys, which means that to get past a particular room, you may spend 30 minutes killing enemies, hoping that they randomly drop the card you need to keep going. This just serves to break up the flow of an already dull story that simply retreads old material instead of providing the epic new chapter fans were hoping for.—**JOE**



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Donkey Kong Country 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** RARE **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15 **> ESRB** E

KLASSIC KONG

Despite the company's acquisition by rival Microsoft, Nintendo still allowed Rare to handle the GBA conversion of its 16-bit classic Donkey Kong Country 2. As you might suspect, Rare seems to have managed this task with care and attention to detail, in a title that recalls the gaming magic that the developer made with Nintendo in the past.

It's been awhile since I've played DK Country 2, and it definitely remains a top-flight platforming experience. Whether you're switching between two playable characters (or playing in co-op mode with a friend), riding a selection of wild beasts, or shooting yourself through a treacherous series of cannons, you'll always find yourself engaged in the action onscreen. In addition, the visuals are truly some of the best I've seen in a side-scrolling title on the GBA.

As is typical of Nintendo's handheld reissues, there have been new modes added, some of which can be tackled by up to four players. However, the minigames themselves don't really hold up for more than a few tries, with the exception of the cool Diddy's Dash time trials.

Re-releases are always hard to evaluate, because you're really dealing with a number of things other than the actual gameplay itself. Historical context, nostalgia, and your personal history with a game all play a factor here, as well they should when you're talking about a title that's generally regarded as a classic of its time. As with any piece of art, your reaction to it changes over time, based on your experiences in life and the games you've played since.

In this light, I'd place Donkey Kong Country 2 just shy of "classic" status. While it's no doubt a well-designed and finely crafted experience, I don't think that it really holds up to the passage of time as well as other Nintendo series like Super Mario Bros. and Zelda. There are bits of platforming that can be a little annoying, often forcing you to constantly hold down the run button in order to get enough altitude on your jumps, which makes things more difficult than they need to be at times. Also, while the levels are fairly large and do hold their share of secrets, you don't the get same sense of discovery as you do from a Mario title.

That said, they rarely make 'em like this anymore. This is hardcore platforming for the true believers, a game that dazzles the eye and even tickles the funny bone with its satirical dialogue. You certainly won't find many GBA titles with this level of polish and design in stores this holiday season.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: A GBA re-release of a Rare/Nintendo 16-bit hit

> Graphics: Not quite as beautiful as the original, but this is a great-looking GBA game to be sure

> Sound: Remember when developers used to rely on good songwriting instead of licensed music gimmicks?

> Playability: Challenging, perhaps even frustrating at times, but overall this is quality platforming in the classic 2D style

> Entertainment: A great platformer, although it hasn't aged as well as the Super Mario Bros. series

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

For those of you who never had the joy of checking these platforming treasures out in their original forms on the SNES, you owe it to yourself to partake in this new re-release of DKC 2 – my personal favorite of the series. This version has left all the running and jumping goodness intact, while taking the time to add in some worthwhile new minigames and a more reasonable save system (allowing for game saves at any time, rather than every few levels). There's an intricate sort of jigsaw pattern in really great platformers that makes everything fit together just right, and this game's got it.—**MILLER**

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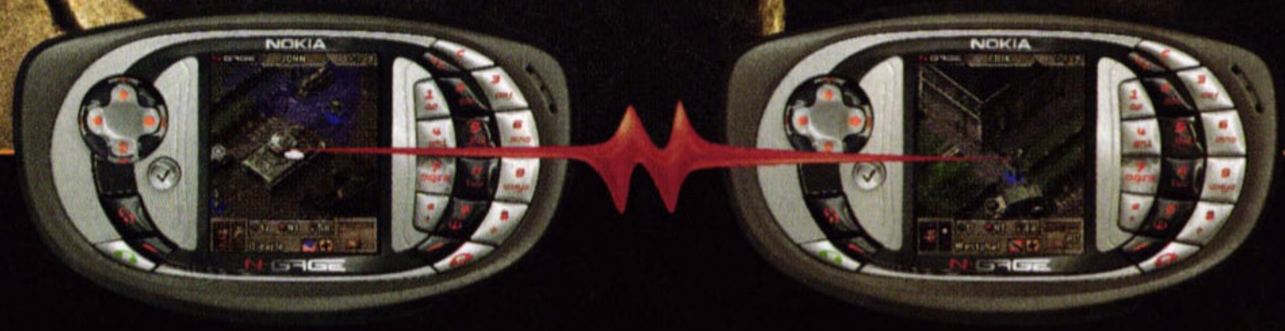

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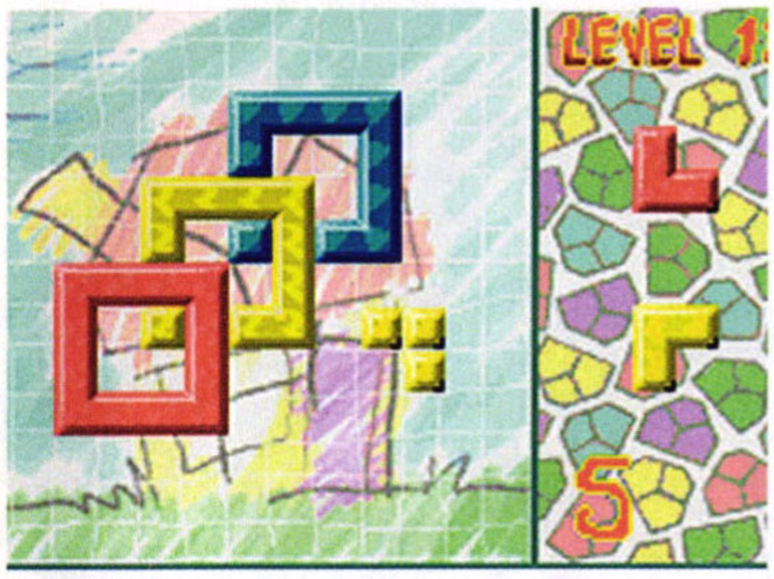


GAME BOY ADVANCE

It's Mr. Pants

> STYLE 1-PLAYER PUZZLE **> PUBLISHER** THQ
> DEVELOPER RARE **> RELEASE** DECEMBER 6 **> ESRB** E

A TASTE OF PANTS LAND

Given the number of constrictive, chafing SquarePants that THQ has been rolling out lately, it's good to see a bulging gameplay package protruding from Mr. Pants' soft, plushy Underoos. A pure puzzle game in the tradition of Tetris and Dr. Mario, developer Rare's latest project is an addictive and oddly likeable revisitation of the genre's heyday.

On paper, it sounds boring: You place various geometric blocks in an attempt to create rectangular shapes of the same color. However, the game's spirit and humor go a long way to inject new life into the simple premise. From the unique characters to the heavily crayon-influenced visuals, the trimmings around the actual puzzlers are just as inviting as the core gameplay.

Despite its childish art style, Mr. Pants is no stroll through the sandbox. Especially on the higher difficulty levels, it will challenge even the most accomplished puzzle game savant. It's like my clumsy third grade drawings are coming back to taunt me, saying "not so clever anymore, are you, Juba?" Apart from making me relive playground ridicule, my only other qualm is the lack of multiplayer; the Marathon mode would have been ideal for head-to-head play. Though not revolutionary, jolly ol' Mr. Pants is certainly a fun way to gird your gaming loins.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: A puzzle game with gratuitous references to underwear

> Graphics: It's mainly a bunch of colored blocks, but the style is endearing

> Sound: Quirky music during the puzzles and funny voices between them set a playful mood

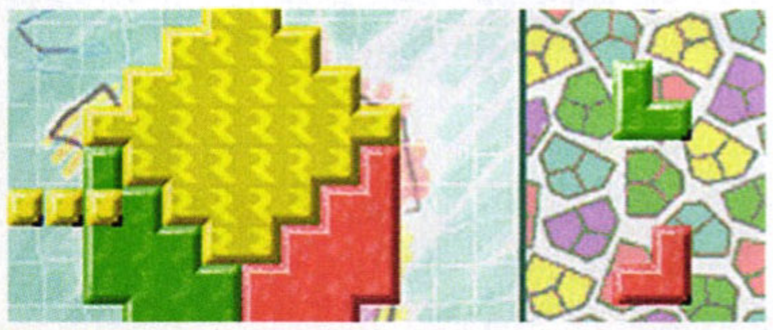
> Playability: The easy setting does a great job of preparing you for the challenges ahead, teaching you new tricks as you go

> Entertainment: Just try exclaiming "It's Mr. Pants!" without laughing

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

Not only does Rare's It's Mr. Pants have the best game name I've seen in years, it's also a breath of fresh air in the largely moribund puzzle genre. Yes, it's still a derivation of the deathless Tetris formula, but it does innovate a new type of gameplay using the familiar "place differently shaped blocks on a board" mechanic. It can be a bit frustrating and abtruse at times, but I'd rather have a puzzler that keeps me on my toes than another iteration of Puyo Pop or Bubble Bobble. Bonus points awarded for a bizarre sense of humor and oddly charming graphical style. —MATT



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Banjo Pilot

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE)
> PUBLISHER THQ **> DEVELOPER** RARE **> RELEASE** JANUARY 10 **> ESRB** E

THE FRIENDLY SKIES

Originally titled Diddy Kong Pilot (and based on the flying sequences of Diddy Kong Racing for N64), Rare retooled the game following its split with Nintendo, replacing Diddy and co. with characters from the Banjo-Kazooie universe and inking a publishing deal with THQ.

The game is a graphical masterpiece, especially considering the limitations of the hardware. Its very advanced Mode 7 scaling effects do a great job of creating the illusion of true 3D. Kudos to all involved.

However, I didn't find the gameplay to be as involving as the technical aspects of this title. Without the cart and hoverboard racing segments that added variety to Diddy Kong Racing, the "flying" gets a little repetitive. I use quotes around flying because this game's vehicles are still essentially tied to the track as much as any racing title. You can fly up about 20 virtual feet in the air, and cannot really veer beyond the sides of the roadway. Yes, it's good, solid stuff, but it could be so much more. The "boss battles" where you have to shoot down the champion of each circuit do add some interest, but I'd really like to see the developers use this technology to break the bounds of the genre (and the track) and send Banjo on some more creative dynamic battles in the skies. — **MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Resurrect the scuttled Diddy Kong Pilot by giving it a Banjo-Kazooie makover

> Graphics: Very impressive quasi-3D techniques that are well beyond most Mode 7 racers

> Sound: The phrase "meh" comes to mind

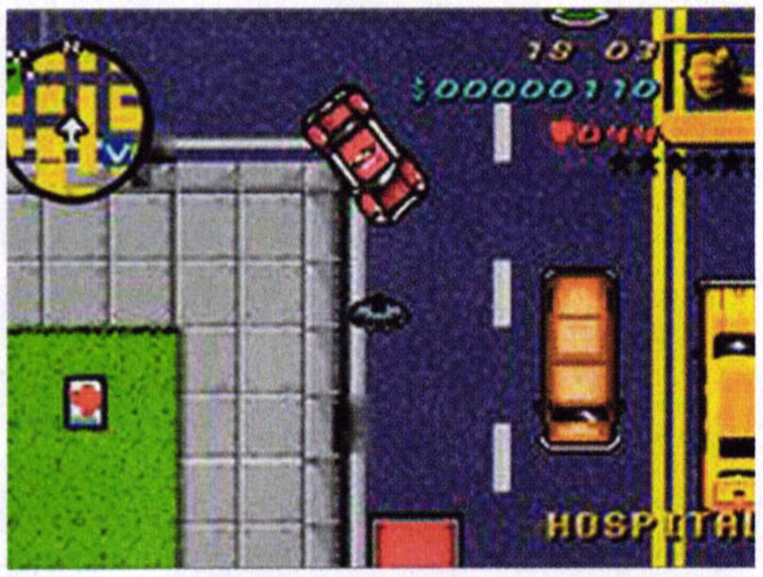
> Playability: The control is fairly tight, although the weapons are a bit of a mixed bag

> Entertainment: An impressive technical feat that I admire more than I enjoy

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Don't let anyone fool you. Sure, those cutesy characters may be zooming around in planes, but like so many titles that have come before, Banjo Pilot aspires to the lofty goal of being compared to Mario Kart. As it is, it ends up being pretty mediocre in that regard, with only an occasional funny moment or thrilling race finish thrown in to keep your interest. There are boss battles of sorts at the end of each race set, but these fights are all basically identical. And while there are several courses, all of them are based on just a few templates, making many of the stages look and sound the same. Still, the Mode 7 graphics work remarkably well on the GBA, and it's hard to dislike characters this silly.—MILLER



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Grand Theft Auto Advance

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING **> PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
> DEVELOPER DIGITAL ECLIPSE **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 **> ESRB** M

YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

I must start this review by giving credit to developer Digital Eclipse, which did a fine job in translating the top-down gameplay of the early Grand Theft Auto titles to the GBA. This game is just a large as the console titles and a good deal of the little extras we've come to expect (like checkpoint races and Rampage missions) are present as well. In fact, I dare say this is as faithful a translation of the GTA experience as could be accomplished on a handheld.

So, why the mediocre score? Well, to be frank, it's very hard to go back to the old-school GTA experience after being wowed by three amazing 3D titles. The graphics, while great for a handheld, don't really give you the feeling that you're part of a living world. The static cutscenes are bereft of the humor that's become a trademark of the series. Driving, while manageable, is often more frustrating than fun. Also, the missions are largely limited to the simple "pizza delivery" formula. None of this makes Grand Theft Auto for GBA a bad game. However, it's not very engrossing. It's a bit like the version of *Star Wars*, animated in ASCII characters, that circulated the Internet a few years back: You can admire the effort that went into it, but it's ultimately only a bare-bones reminder of a much greater work of art. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> Concept: A return to the series' top-down roots, this time on the world's most popular handheld

> Graphics: Considering the size of the environments, everything looks terrific, if a bit dinky

> Sound: You'll really miss the awesome soundtracks of the console games, but this is very good in terms of the GBA music and effects

> Playability: Driving is doable, if not actually very fun. Out-of-the-car action is similarly underwhelming

> Entertainment: An amazing feat of GBA programming that didn't grab me as much as I thought it would

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

From console to handheld, there's nothing quite like the feeling of being a part of a high speed police chase moments after you litter the streets with flaming wrecks and stain the pavement with blood. Even in microscopic form, Grand Theft Auto kicks serious ass. It may not deliver the cinematic punch or visual extravagance of its console brethren, but the gameplay is fired from the same smoking gun. Jacking cars in the free-roaming city is a blast, the story and missions are done quite well, and I'd love to see this game's Save and Quit option in the console titles. Not having a viewable map does lead to frustration, and the sound is a bit garbled as well. All told, however, I couldn't get enough of it. I didn't think it would work, but Digital Eclipse made GTA on the go a reality. —REINER

HANDHELD QUICKIES

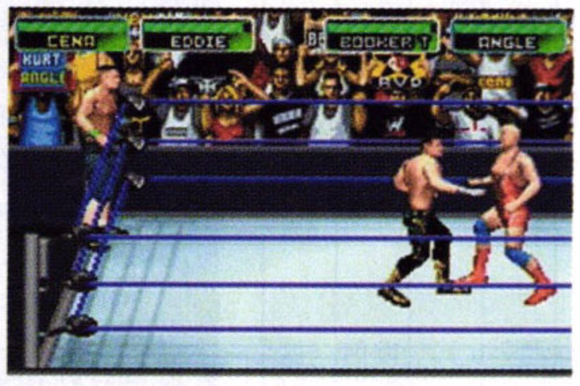
UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAME BOY ADVANCE

WWE Survivor Series

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA LINK) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** NATSUME > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 > **ESRB** T



WWE Survivor Series is a lot like that one big loud guy you went to high school with; slow and clunky, obnoxious and a bit stupid, but ultimately somehow likeable. It took me a while to get into this game thanks to the sluggish and bare bones control scheme, but once I did, I had a surprisingly good time. The fighters move like they have asthma and two broken legs, and the lack of a block button is a drag, but the career progression still manages to suck you in. There is a nice variety of match types, the wrestlers look surprisingly decent, and movesets are fairly large. This game certainly doesn't hang with the recent crop of console wrestling games, but for portable brawling, you can't really do much better.—**JEREMY**

NINTENDO DS

Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **STYLE** 1 TO 5-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21 > **ESRB** E

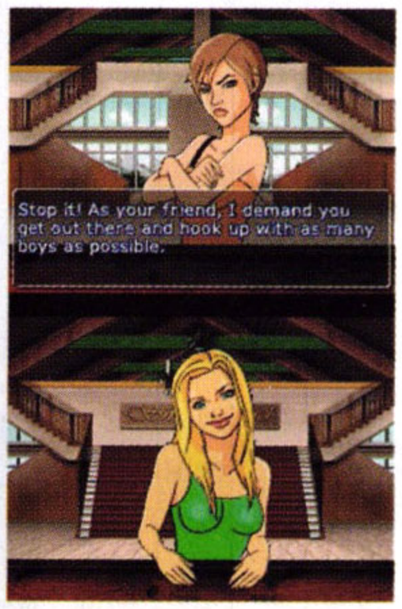
Mr. Driller is a perennial second-stringer on "Team Puzzle Game," but I've always had a soft spot for the little dude with a drill. By combining the classic color-block concepts that most puzzlers utilize with a Dig Dug-influenced action game mechanic, Mr. Driller stakes out a unique niche in the genre. However, it's not nearly as deep or endlessly replayable as the true classics like Super Puzzle Fighter or Tetris. The DS gives Drill Spirits a slicker look, and players the ability to use the touch pad to control the characters (of which there are now a few to unlock and choose from) onscreen, along with some new modes like the tense Pressure Driller. Wireless multiplayer has been added as well, and the two screens allow you to get a better view on what's lurking above you. It's nothing spectacular, but all systems need good puzzle games and this seems to fit the bill nicely.—**MATT**

NINTENDO DS

Sprung

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** GUILLEMOT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21 > **ESRB** T

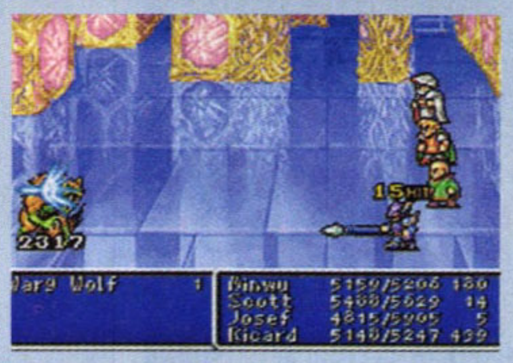


Sprung is a naughty choose-your-own-adventure styled romp without much discernable "gameplay." Players navigate through a respectably long story mode that is honestly funny, nuanced, and unquestionably more adult-oriented than most handheld games (although there is no swearing or nudity, there is some mighty blatant innuendo). The art style and the game's many animations are very reminiscent of Dragon's Lair, and make nice use of the DS's two screens. During conversations, each participant has his or her own screen and you get to see all of the reaction shots. There's good humor and writing to be had here, but it's not so much a game as an interactive comic book with a backlight.—**LISA**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 29 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Final Fantasy I and II in a more efficient package

> **Graphics:** Charming and nostalgic if you played RPGs during the 8-bit era. Below average if you didn't

> **Sound:** A few minutes listening to the soundtrack and you'll realize why video game music continues to gain artistic credibility

> **Playability:** Improvements to both titles allow smoother gameplay and more coherent objectives

> **Entertainment:** Addictive and fun regardless of the shallow (though slightly reworked) stories

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

REORIGINATION

Square Enix's flagship franchise has been the subject of some criticism lately. With no concrete date set for Final Fantasy XII, all fans of the series have to hold them over are movie offshoots, spin-offs, and remakes of earlier entries. However, I challenge anyone who thinks that the RPG giant is running out of steam to spend just a few hours with Dawn of Souls and not have their confidence in Square Enix restored all over again.

By now, you're probably familiar with the games that kicked off the console RPG phenomenon, so I won't waste your time with basic mechanics. These titles still play more or less the same as they always did, but with the added amenities of better graphics and a rewritten story. Plus, they still retain that indefinable fun factor that has kept me ferociously addicted to the series for years.

It is important to note, though, that these versions of Final Fantasy I and II sport new tweaks to the battle system and menus that weren't even in place for Final Fantasy Origins. While the improvements generally streamline the gameplay, they also take something away from these classics. The first few Final Fantasies could be relentlessly difficult, forcing the player to save judiciously and ration magic carefully. Now, with the save-anywhere feature and the addition of magic points, much of the old-school challenge has been extinguished. The games still keep the spirit of the originals, but much of the gravity of the key encounters has been lifted; WarMech shouldn't be this easy.

If Final Fantasy Origins was like an obscure but revered John Hughes movie that finally came out on DVD, Dawn of Souls is the elusive special edition that never gets released (*Uncle Buck*, where are you?). I buy the first one to get my greedy hands on it as soon as possible, but I hope for a follow-up of this caliber to deliver the reverent treatment and irresistible special features I crave.—**JOE**

Second Opinion 9

When George Lucas rolls up his sleeves and tinkers with the classic Star Wars trilogy, memorable scenes are forever ruined, fanboys openly weep, and the Force dies a little bit in all of us. The almighty plaid-wearing one could learn a thing or two about special editions from Square Enix. I don't know how this company does it, but I am once again hopelessly addicted to both of these games. The new dungeons in the original Final Fantasy speak volumes to your inner nerd as they contain bosses from later in the series. Equally as rewarding, Final Fantasy II boasts an extended story that outlines the fate of Scott, Josef, Ricard, and Minwu. The technology may not be as flashy as today's RPGs, and the gameplay may not be nearly as deep, but both of these titles can still stand on their own. I really can't think of a better way to take a stroll down memory lane.
—**REINER**

THE UNTOLD STORIES

In addition to the revamped menus and battle systems, each of the two games included in Dawn of Souls features special bonus dungeons. In Final Fantasy, new areas become available after defeating each of the four fiends. In these randomly generated halls, you'll encounter some familiar creatures from subsequent games in the series like Gilgamesh, Cerberus, and Rubicante. As for Final Fantasy II, the extra content takes the form of a new adventure detailing the fate of four characters that leave your party at various points in the main story. For games that have already been re-released once, this expanded gameplay is quite impressive, and far more than simple trimming included to dupe gamers into shelling out more money.

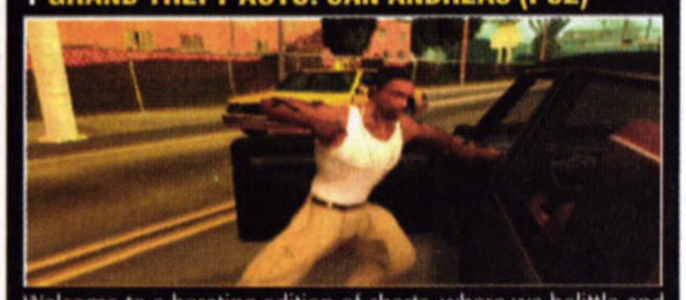
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

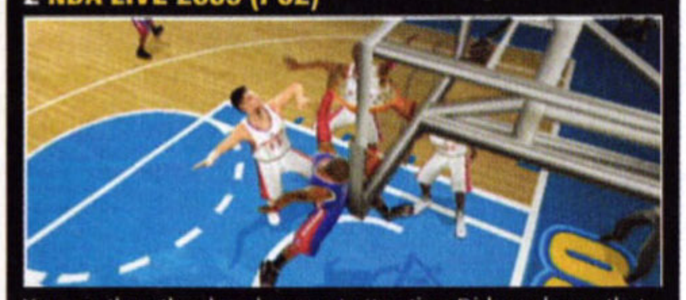
Listings Based Upon NPD Data For September 2004 Based On Units Sold

1 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS (PS2)



Welcome to a berating edition of charts, where we belittle and demean those titles that, though they are awesome games with solid sales, have still failed in one key area: They aren't Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. Well, all them except this first one. We really like you, San Andreas. Do you like us? Yes or No (circle one).

2 NBA LIVE 2005 (PS2)

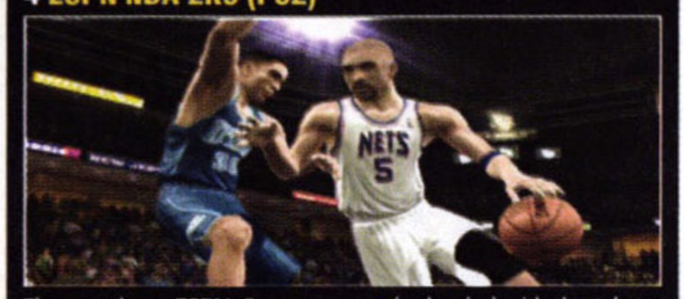


You, on the other hand, are not attractive. Did you know that San Andreas has basketball in it? Yeah, so unless you can also offer speeding vehicles, illegal firearm possesion, and extensive criminal activities (apart from the seedy private lives of your professional athletes), you should just go clean out your locker.

3 MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION (PS2)

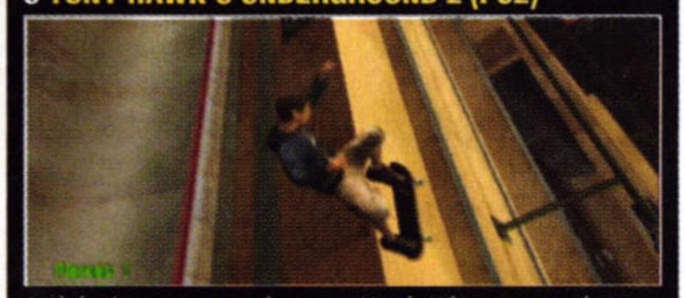
Here we have MK, the "edgy" fighter because it has so much blood. If you want a lesson in gratuitous violence, watch CJ as he runs pedestrians down in a forklift and shoots rockets into crowded intersections. Now, that's a fatality! Hey, don't go flashing those arm-swords at us, buddy.

4 ESPN NBA 2K5 (PS2)



Then we have ESPN. Sure, you may be loaded with the talents and likenesses of NBA superstars, but can they really compare with Hollywood heavyweights like James Woods, Samuel L. Jackson, Ice T, and Peter Fonda? Of course not. The movie industry crushes yet another soul.

5 TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2 (PS2)



And don't get us started on you, Hawk. What are you about, a plank with wheels? Please. Oh, but you're anti-establishment, so you're cool, right? Bah! Let's see how far that attitude gets you in a few years as you try to hold a steady job and you're on a first-name basis with the malodorous repo man. Actually, we didn't mean that. Horace is good people.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	N/A	PS2	10	10-04	$49
2	NBA Live 2005	8	PS2	8.25	09-04	$39
3	Mortal Kombat: Deception	N/A	PS2	9.5	10-04	$51
4	ESPN NBA 2K5	N/A	PS2	9	09-04	$19
5	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	N/A	PS2	9.75	10-04	$47
6	Mortal Kombat: Deception	N/A	XBOX	9.5	10-04	$52
7	ESPN NBA 2K5	N/A	XBOX	9	09-04	$19
8	Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door	N/A	GC	6.75	10-04	$47
9	Madden NFL 2005	4	PS2	8.75	08-04	$44
10	X-Men Legends	N/A	PS2	9	09-04	$47
11	Pokémon Fire Red	1	GBA	8	09-04	$33
12	NBA Live 2005	N/A	XBOX	8.25	09-04	$39
13	Pokémon Leaf Green	3	GBA	8	09-04	$32
14	Star Wars: Battlefront	6	PS2	8	09-04	$48
15	Fable	2	XBOX	9.5	09-04	$48
16	Star Wars: Battlefront	5	XBOX	8	09-04	$49
17	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	N/A	XBOX	9.75	10-04	$48
18	X-Men Legends	N/A	XBOX	9	09-04	$48
19	Tiger Woods PGA 2005	10	PS2	8.5	09-04	$48
20	ESPN NFL 2K5	9	PS2	9.5	07-04	$20

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

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	N/A	PS2
2	Mawaru Made in Wario	N/A	GBA
3	Pokémon Emerald	2	GBA
4	Naruto: Narutainment Hero 2	N/A	PS2
5	La Pucelle: The Second Cycle	N/A	PS2
6	Burnout 3: Takedown	N/A	PS2
7	Fire Emblem: Seima No Kouseki	N/A	GBA
8	Super Famicom Mini: Super Mario Bros. 2	7	GBA
9	Tales of Symphonia	1	PS2
10	The Nightmare Before Christmas	N/A	PS2

Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

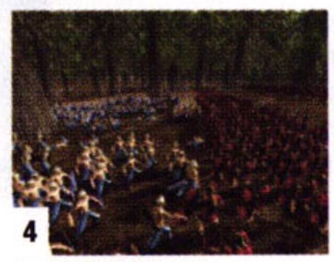
TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	N/A	PS2
2	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	N/A	GC
3	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	1	PS2
4	Halo 2	1	Xbox
5	Half-Life 2	2	PC
6	Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	N/A	Multi
7	Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	N/A	PC
8	Call of Duty: Finest Hour	N/A	Multi
9	Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	3	PS2
10	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	4	Multi

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed	N/A	$27
2	The Sims 2	1	$48
3	The Sims 2 Special Edition	2	$50
4	Rome: Total War	3	$46
5	Call Of Duty: United Offensive	5	$27
6	RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	N/A	$38
7	Star Wars: Battlefront	4	$49
8	Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	N/A	$16
9	The Sims Deluxe	8	$20
10	Doom 3	9	$46

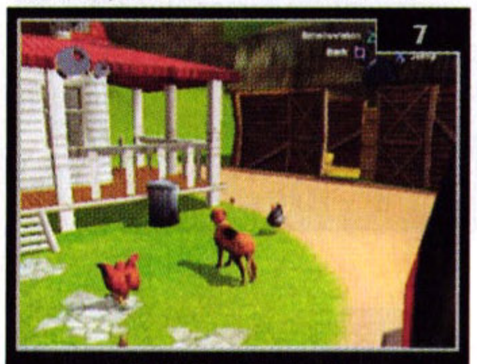


Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWSARCHIVE The Really Ugly Page Where You Can See Lots Of Old Review Scores

PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	9	Dec-04
Alias	7.5	Apr-04
Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
All-Star Baseball 2005	7	Apr-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
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04



Dog's Life – PS2 – Sep-04

Blood Will Tell	5	Nov-04
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	7.25	Jul-04
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Capcom Fighting Evolution	6	Dec-04
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
ChoroQ	6.25	Oct-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Corvette	5	Jun-04
Crash 'n' Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Crimson Sea 2	7	Apr-04
Crimson Tears	5	Aug-04
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme	8.25	Oct-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Destruction Derby Arenas	6.75	May-04
Dog's Life	7	Sep-04
Driv3r	6	Aug-04
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	7	Sep-04
Echo Night: Beyond	6	Aug-04
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN Major League Baseball	7.5	Apr-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
EyeToy: AntiGrav	7	Dec-04
EyeToy: Groove	6	Jun-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
Fight Night 2004	9	Apr-04
Final Fantasy XI	7.75	May-04
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	7.75	Dec-04
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	8.75	Oct-04
Front Mission 4	7.25	Jun-04
Funkmaster Flex Digital Hitz Factory	6.75	Oct-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Galactic Wrestling Featuring Ultimate Muscle	4.25	Jul-04
Gallop Racer 2004	8.25	Oct-04
Get On Da Mic	5	Dec-04
Ghosthunter	6.5	Sep-04
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	7.25	Dec-04
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
Gradius V	8.25	Oct-04
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	10	Dec-04
Guilty Gear Isuka	6.75	Dec-04
Gungrave: Overdose	4.25	Nov-04
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Headhunter: Redemption	6.75	Oct-04
Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jun-04
Hot Shots Golf Fore!	9	Sep-04
Jak 3	9.25	Nov-04
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	8.25	Aug-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	8.25	Nov-04
Katamari Damacy	8	Oct-04
Killzone	7.5	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	6.5	Nov-04
Kuon	6	Nov-04
La Pucelle: Tactics	8	Jun-04
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	4	Aug-04
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
MLB 2005	8.5	Apr-04
MLB Slugfest Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
Monster Hunter	5	Nov-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
MTV Music Generator 3	8	Aug-04
MTX: Mototrax	7.5	Apr-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
Naval Ops: Commander	6	Apr-04
NBA Ballers	8	May-04
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
Neo Contra	7.75	Nov-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Nightmare of Druaga: Fushigino Dungeon, The	4	Nov-04
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	9	Jun-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
Phantom Brave	8	Sep-04
Pitfall Harry	6	Apr-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Puyo Pop Fever	7.25	Aug-04
Rachet and Clank: Up Your Arsenal	10	Nov-04
Rainbow Six 3	7	Apr-04
Rapala Pro Fishing	8.25	Oct-04
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Resident Evil: Outbreak	7.5	May-04
Ribbit King	7	Jun-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	6	May-04
Samurai Warriors	7.5	May-04
Scooby Doo!: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Sega Superstars	8	Dec-04
Serious Sam: The Next Encounter	7.75	May-04
Seven Samurai 20XX	5	May-04
Shadow Hearts: Covenant	8	Oct-04
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Shellshock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	7.5	Nov-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Siren	6.25	May-04
Sly 2: Band of Thieves	8.75	Oct-04
Smash Court Pro Tournament 2	5	Jul-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spy Fiction	7.5	Oct-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	8.25	Aug-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	8	Sep-04
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Suffering, The	8.25	Apr-04
Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	8.5	May-04
Taiko Drum Master	7.75	Dec-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Technic Beat	7.5	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	6.75	Nov-04
TOCA Race Driver: Ultimate Racing Simulator	7.5	Nov-04
Tony Hawk's Undeground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Transformers	7	Jun-04
Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	5	Aug-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
UFC Sudden Impact	6.5	Jul-04
Under the Skin	5	Oct-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe	9.5	Sep-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Way of the Samurai 2	3.25	Jul-04
World Tour Soccer 2005	6.5	May-04
WWE Smackdown! Vs. RAW	8.5	Dec-04
X-Files: Resist Or Serve	6.5	May-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	3.25	Dec-04

GAMECUBE

Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Amazing Island	7.25	Sep-04
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Baten Kaitos: Wings of Eternity and the Lost Ocean	8.75	Dec-04
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Custom Robo	5.75	Apr-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Donkey Konga	7	Nov-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04

Mega Man X Command Mission – GC – Oct-04

Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	8	Apr-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures, The	8	Jun-04
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Paper Mario 2: The Thousand-Year Door	6.75	Nov-04
Phantasy Star Online Episode III	8	Apr-04
Pitfall Harry	6	Apr-04
Pokémon Colosseum	7	Mar-04
Pool Paradise	6	May-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Rainbow Six 3	5.75	Sep-04
Ribbit King	7	Jun-04
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	6	May-04
Scooby Doo!: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Serious Sam: The Next Encounter	7.75	May-04
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Tales of Symphonia	8.75	Jul-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
WarioWare, Inc.: Mega Party Games	7	Apr-04
WWE Day of Reckoning	8.25	Oct-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04

XBOX

Alias	7.5	Apr-04
All-Star Baseball 2005	7	Apr-04
Army Men: Sarge's War	5	Oct-04
Auto Modellista	7.5	Apr-04
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04

Sudeki – Xbox – Sep-04

BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Breakdown	7.5	Apr-04
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, The	9.5	Jul-04
Colin McRae Rally 2005	8.25	Oct-04
Colin McRae Rally 4	8.5	Apr-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Crash 'n' Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 2	7.75	Dec-04
Dead Man's Hand	7.75	Apr-04
Dead or Alive Ultimate	9	Dec-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Driv3r	6	Aug-04
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN Major League Baseball	7.5	Apr-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
Fable	9.5	Oct-04
Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut	9.25	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
Fight Night 2004	9	Apr-04
Full Spectrum Warrior	8.25	Jul-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Galleon	4.25	Oct-04
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
Guilty Gear X2 #Reload	8.25	Sep-04
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Halo 2	10	Dec-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-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
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Karaoke Revolution	7.75	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders	7.75	Nov-04
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Mafia	8	Jun-04
Malice	5.5	Aug-04
Manhunt	9	Jun-04
Men of Valor	7.75	Nov-04
Metal Slug 3	8	Jul-04
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
MLB Slugfest Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-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 Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Ninja Gaiden	9.5	Apr-04
Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors	7	Oct-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
OutRun 2	6.5	Dec-04
Pikmin 2	8.75	Aug-04
Pitfall Harry	6	Apr-04
Pro Fishing Challenge	4.25	Sep-04
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Pure Pinball	5.75	Oct-04
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	8	Sep-04
RalliSport Challenge 2	7.25	Jun-04
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Samurai Warriors	7.75	Sep-04
Scooby Doo!: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	5.75	Aug-04
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
ShellShock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Sims 2, The	8.75	Nov-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	9.5	May-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	5.5	Apr-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Steel Battalion: Line of Contact	7.5	May-04
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Sudeki	7.75	Sep-04
Suffering, The	8.25	Apr-04
SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom	6.5	Nov-04
Syberia II	6.25	Nov-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Tenchu: Return From Darkness	7.25	Apr-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Thief: Deadly Shadows	7.25	Jul-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
TOCA Race Driver 2	7.5	May-04
Tony Hawk's Undeground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	5	Aug-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
Ultra Bust-A-Move	7	Dec-04
Unreal II: The Awakening	8	Apr-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Wings of War	6.5	Nov-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Yager	7	Oct-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Dawn of Destiny	6	Jun-04

PC

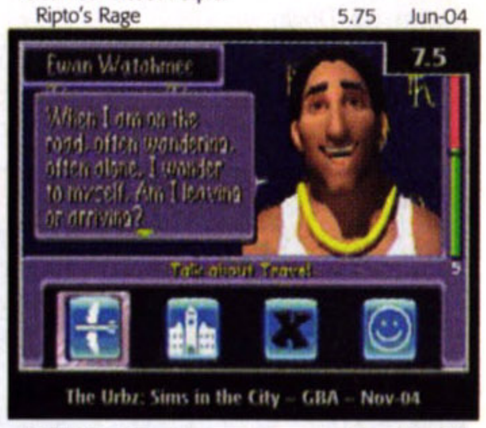
Armies of Exigo	8	Dec-04
Aura: Fate of the Ages	7.25	Sep-04
Battlefield Vietnam	8	May-04
Besieger	6	Aug-04
Breed	5.75	Jun-04
Call of Duty: United Offensive	8.75	Nov-04
City of Heroes	9	Jul-04

Unreal Tournament 2004 – PC – May-04

Chris Sawyer's Locomotion	7	Nov-04
Codename: Panzers	7.75	Dec-04
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	7.75	Apr-04
Delta Force – Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	8	Mar-04
Desert Rats vs. Afrika Korps	6	Jun-04
Doom 3	9	Oct-04
Evil Genius	8.5	Nov-04
Far Cry	9.25	May-04
Gangland	6.5	May-04
Ground Control II: Operation Exodus	8.5	Aug-04
Half-Life 2	9.5	Dec-04
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	8.5	Aug-04
Kohan II: Kings of War	8	Oct-04
Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle	7.25	Jul-04
Missing: Since January	6.5	Sep-04
Myst IV: Revelation	8	Nov-04
Nemesis of the Roman Empire	7.75	Jun-04
Northland	8	Mar-04
Painkiller	8.5	Jun-04
Perimeter	7.75	Jul-04
Political Machine, The	7	Nov-04
Rise of Nations: Thrones and Patriots	9	Jul-04
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	8.75	Dec-04
Rome: Total War	7.75	Nov-04
Sacred	7.75	Jun-04
Scrapland	6	Dec-04
Singles: Flirt Up Your Life	7	Aug-04
Soldiers: Heroes of World War II	5	Aug-04
SpellForce: The Order of Dawn	7.75	Mar-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
Tribes: Vengeance	8.5	Dec-04
Unreal Tournament 2004	9.5	May-04
Uru: The Path of the Shell	8.25	Sep-04
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	9.25	Nov-04
Warlords Battlecry III	7.75	Aug-04
Wars and Warriors: Joan of Arc	7.5	Apr-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Advance Guardian Heroes	7	Dec-04
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	8.5	Aug-04
Batman: The Rise of Sin Tzu	7	Mar-04
Boktai 2: Solar boy Django	6.25	Dec-04
Catwoman	6.5	Sep-04
Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Rage	5.75	Jun-04



The Urbz: Sims in the City – GBA – Nov-04

Donkey Kong	8	Jun-04
Dragon Ball Z: Buu's Fury	4.5	Oct-04
Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors	5.5	Sep-04
Duel Masters: Sempai Legends	7.5	Aug-04
F-Zero: GP Legend	6.5	Nov-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	8	Jul-04
Ice Nine	3.75	Apr-04
King of Fighters EX2: Howling Blood, The	7.75	Mar-04
Kirby and the Amazing Mirror	7.75	Oct-04
Madden NFL 2005	7	Sep-04
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	8	Jun-04
Mario Pinball Land	7.5	Oct-04
Mario vs. Donkey Kong	7.5	Jun-04
Mega Man Battle Chip Challenge	6	Mar-04
Mega Man Battle Network 4: Red Sun/Blue Moon	7	Jun-04
Mega Man Zero 3	6.75	Oct-04
Metal Slug Advance	7	Dec-04
Mighty Beanz Pocket Puzzles	6	Sep-04
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	6.25	Mar-04
Pitfall: The Lost Expedition	6	Apr-04
Pokémon Fire Red/Leaf Green	8	Oct-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	3.5	Dec-04
River City Ransom EX	8	Jun-04
R-Type III: The Third Lightning	6.25	May-04
Sabrewulf	6.5	Aug-04
Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon	7.5	Jun-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 Orange: The Cortex Conspiracy	5.75	Jun-04
Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice of the Force	6	Oct-04
Super Mario Bros.	9	Jun-04
Thunderbirds	5.75	Oct-04
Tron 2.0: Killer App	6.5	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6	Dec-04
Ultimate Card Games	7	Sep-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.5	Nov-04
Wade Hixton's Counter Punch	7.5	May-04
Yu-Gi-Oh!: Reshef of Destruction	4.5	Sep-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship 2004	6.5	May-04

SECRET ACCESS

Codes, Strategies, Hints, Droids, And Tips

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!

MULTI-SYSTEM

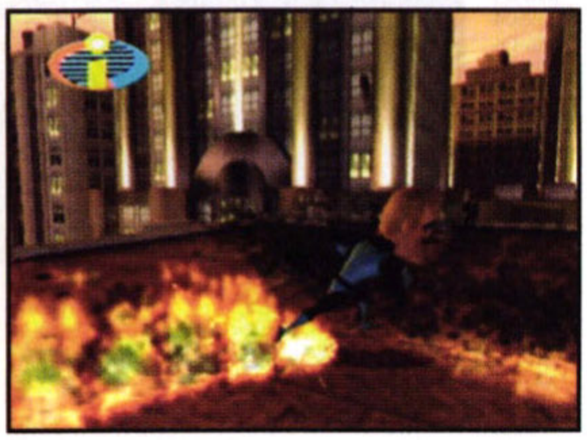
The Bard's Tale

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX**

Hold L and R (Xbox) or L1 and R1 (PS2) down and enter these codes during gameplay. They have to be entered pretty quickly, though.

10,000 Silver And 100 Adderstones – Up (x2), Down (x2), Left, Right, Left, Right
Can't Be Hurt – Right, Left, Right, Left, Up, Down, Up, Down
Can't Be Struck – Left, Right, Left, Right, Up, Down, Up, Down
Damage x100 – Up, Down, Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right
Refill Health And Mana – Left (x2), Right (x2), Up, Down, Up, Down
Unlock All Levels – Right (x2), Left (x2), Up, Down, Up, Down

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen filming racy NFL commercials)



The Incredibles

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

Enter these codes at the Secrets screen, located in the pause menu.

Big Head Mode	EINSTEINIUM
Blur Effect & Extra Damage	KRONOS
Burning Footsteps	ATHLETESFOOT
Destroy Nearby Object	SMARTBOMB
Eye Lasers!	GAZERBEAM
Refill Health	UUDDLRLRBAS
Refill Incredimeter	SHOWTIME
Super-Fast Mode	SASSMODE

NBA Live 2005

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

From the main menu, go to My NBA Live, then EA SPORTS Lounge, then NBA Codes. Enter these there. Keep in mind that these are case-sensitive. For the Dynasty Points code, you have to go to Dynasty Mode first, then My NBA to EA SPORTS Lounge to NBA Codes.

50,000 Dynasty Points	YISS55CZ0E
All Hardwood Clasics Jerseys	PRYI234N0B
All Shoes	FHM389HU80
All Team Gear	1NVDR89ER2
Nike Air Huarache 2K4	VNBA60230T
Nike Air Unlimited	XVLJD9895V
Nike Air Zoom Generation Low	234SDJF9W4
Nike Air Zoom LeBron II	1KENZO23XZ
Nike BG Rollout	0984ADF90P
Nike Shox Elite	2388HDFCBJ

ALTERNATE JERSEYS

Celtics 2004-05	XCV43MGMDS
Hawks 2004-05	HDI834NN9N
Hornets 2004-05	JRE7H4D90F
Mavericks 2004-05	AAPSEUD09U
Supersonics 2004-05	BHD87YY27Q
Warriors 2004-05	NAVNY29548

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

From the main menu, go to Options and then Password. Enter these there.

Abyss	SDSDRLD
All-You-Can-Throw Shuriken	RSRLRSM
Endurance	MRMDRMD
Fatal Blow	LRSRDRD
Health	DSRDMRM
Lose Shuriken	RLMRDSL
Mighty Turtle	LSDRRDR
Nightmare	SLSDRDL
Nexus Outfit (Donatello)	DSLRDRM
Nexus Outfit (Leonardo)	LMRMDRD
Nexus Outfit (Michelangelo)	MLMRDRM
Nexus Outfit (Raphael)	RMSRMDR
Pizza Paradise	MRLMRMR
Playmates Bonus Material	SRMLDDR
Poison	DRSLLSR
Self-Recovery	DRMSRLR
Squeaking	MLDSRDM
Super Defense Power	LDRMRLM
Super Offense Power	SDLSRLL
Super Tough	RDSRMRL
Toddling	SSSMRDD

Tony Hawk's Underground 2

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

From the main menu, select Game Options, then Cheat Codes. Enter this there.

Perfect Rail & Lip Balance – straightedge

PLAYSTATION 2

ATV Offroad Fury 3

From the main menu, select Options, then Player Profile, then Enter Cheat. Put this in there.

Unlock Everything (Except Fury Bike) – !SLACKER!

Code of the Month

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

It's that time of year again – a new GTA is out, and the codes blowout inevitably follows. These should be entered during gameplay (not paused), and a message will come up onscreen if you enter the code properly. And, just to reiterate, use these on a backup save file! Save yourself the frustration of getting your hundred-hour save corrupted.

Aggressive Traffic – R2, ○, R1, L2, Left, R1, L1, R2, L2
Black Cars – ○, L2, Up, R1, Left, ✕, R1, L1, Left, ○
Blow Up Cars – R2, L2, R1, L1, L2, R2, □, △, ○, △, L2, L1
Bounty On You – Down, Up (x3), ✕, R2, R1, L2 (x2)
Change Time Of Day – R2, ✕, L1 (x2), L2 (x3), □
Change Time Of Day – R2, ✕, L1 (x2), L2 (x3), △
Change Time Of Day – R2, ✕, L1 (x2), L2 (x3), Down
Flying Boats – R2, ○, Up, L1, Right, R1, Right, Up, □, △
Foggy Weather – R2, ✕, L1 (x2), L2 (x3), ✕
Health, Armor, Money – R1, R2, L1, ✕, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up
Invisible Vehicles – △, L1, △, R2, □, L1, L1
Make Cars Hovercraft – Right, R2, ○, R1, L2, □, R1, R2
Pedestrian Riot (can't turn off) – Down, Left, Up, Left, ✕, R2, R1, L2, L1
Pedestrians Attack (can't turn off) – Down, Up (x3), ✕, R2, R1, L2 (x2)
Pedestrians Get Armed – R2, R1, ✕, △, ✕, △, Up, Down
Pink Cars – ○, L1, Down, L2, Left, ✕, R1, L1, Right, ○
Repair Current Vehicle – R1, R2, L1, ✕, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up
Slow Down Gameplay – △, Up, Right, Down, □, R2, R1
Spawn Bloodring Banger – Down, R1, ○, L2 (x2), ✕, R1, L1, Left (x2)
Spawn Caddy – ○, L1, Up, R1, L2, ✕, R1, L1, ○, ✕
Spawn Hotring Racer – R1, ○, R2, Right, L1, L2, ✕ (x2) □, R1
Spawn Hotring Racer (alternate) – R2, L1, ○, Right, L1, R1, Right, Up, ○, R2
Spawn Jetpack – L1, L2, R1, R2, Up, Down, Left, Right, L1, L2, R1, R2, Up, Down, Left, Right
Spawn Rancher – Up, Right (x2), L1, Right, Up, □, L2
Spawn Rhino Tank – ○ (x2), L1, ○ (x3), L1, L2, R1, △, ○, △
Spawn Romero – Down, R2, Down, R1, L2, Left, R1, L1, Left, Right
Spawn Stretch – R2, Up, L2, Left (x2), R1, L1, ○, Right
Spawn Trashmaster – ○, R1, ○, R1, Left (x2), R1, L1, ○, Right
Speed Up Cars – Right, R1, Up, L2 (x2), Left, R1, L1, R1 (x2)
Speed Up Game Clock – ○ (x2), L1, □, L1, □ (x3), L1, △, ○, △
Speed Up Gameplay – △, Up, Right, Down, L2, L1, □
Stormy Weather – R2, ✕, L1 (x2), L2 (x3), ○
Suicide – Right, L2, Down, R1, Left (x2), R1, L1, L2, L1
Super-Tight Handling – △, R1 (x2), Left, R1, L1, R2, L1
Traffic Lights Always Green – Right, R1, Up, L2 (x2), Left, R1, L1, R1 (x2)
Wanted Level Down – R1 (x2), ○, R2, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down
Wanted Level Up – R1 (x2), ○, R2, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right
Weapon Set 1 – R1, R2, L1, R2, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up
Weapon Set 2 – R1, R2, L1, R2, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down (x2), Left
Weapon Set 3 – R1, R2, L1, R2, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down (x3)

Greg Marduk
Nashville, TN

Neo Contra

Enter this at the title screen.

19 Lives – Up (x2), Down (x2), L1, R1, L2, R2, L3, R3

Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal

Enter these at the indicated screen. For the Vidcomic codes, you have to press □ when you're at the Vidcomic level select to bring up the password screen. Press Start after entering the code to enable the cheat.

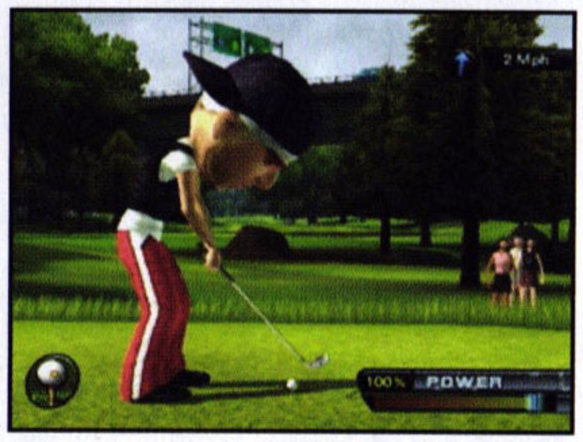
Sly 2: Band of Thieves Demo – At the main menu, press L1, L2, R1, and R2 at the same time
Two-Bladed Energy Sword – While paused, press ○, □, ○, □, Up, Down, Left (x2)
Vidcomic Bomberman – YING_TZU
Vidcomic Pirate Vs. Ninja – _MEGHAN_

The Urbz: Sims in the City

Enter all of these during gameplay. First, enable the cheat gnome. Then enter the codes to unlock cheat gnome actions.

Acquire Skill Objects – L, R2, Right, □, L3
Enable Cheat Gnome – ○, L1, L2, R2, R1
Fill All Motives – R2, L1, R1, L2, Left, ○
Give All Powersocial Items – △, R2, L1, ✕, □
Max Artistic Skill – L3, R3, R1, R2, ○
Max Physical Skill – L1, R1, Down, ✕, L3
Unlock All Socials – L2, R2, Up, △, L3, ✕

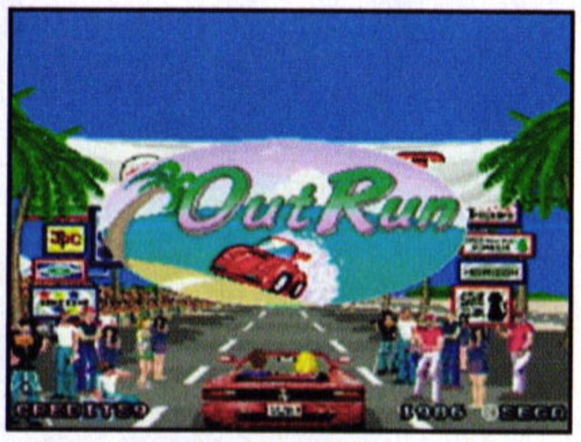
XBOX



Outlaw Golf 2

Enter the appearance-modifying codes while holding the L button during gameplay. For the Unlock Everything code, create a save file with that name.

Big Heads – B, A, B, Y, Back
Huge...Tracts Of Land – B, Up (x2), B, Y
Unlock Everything – I Have No Time



Outrun 2

From the main menu, go to OutRun Challenge, then press X to enter the gallery. From there, select Enter Code.

Unlock All Bonus Tracks	TIMELESS
Unlock All Cars	DREAMING
Unlock All Mission Stages	THEJOURNEY
Unlock All Music	RADIOSEGA
Unlock Original OutRun	NINETEEN86
Unlock Reversed Tracks	DESREVER

The Urbz: Sims in the City

Enter all of these during gameplay. First, enable the cheat gnome. Then enter the codes to unlock cheat gnome actions.

Acquire Skill Objects – L, Black, Right, X, Left
Enable Cheat Gnome – Left, Y, Down, A, X
Give All Powersocial Items – Down, Black, Right, X, Left
Max Artistic Skill – Y, Down, Black, A, B
Max Physical Skill – L, R, A, Down, Black
Unlock All Socials – Black, Up, Y, Down, R

GAMECUBE

Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike

In the Passcodes screen, enter these codes. For the cheats with two codes, enter the first and choose "Enter Passcode" and then immediately enter the second and choose "Enter Passcode" again. If you did it correctly, the code will stay up on the screen and you'll have to exit and return to enter another one.

Black & White Mode – NOCOLOR? (Note: You'll have to reset the game to go back to color)
Infinite Lives – IIOUAOYE, WIMPIAM!
Level Select (Co-op) – SWGRCQPL, UCHEATED
Level Select (Single-player) – HYWSC!WS, NONGAMER
Level Select With Bonus Missions (Single-player) – EEQQ?YPL, CHE!ATER
Unlock Asteroid Field Level (Co-op) – RWALPIGC, NOWAYOUT
Unlock Beggar's Canyon Level (Co-op) – FRLL!CSF, FARMBOY?
Unlock Death Star Escape Level (Co-op) – YFCEDFRH, DSAGAIN?
Unlock Endurance Level (Co-op) – WPX?FGC!, EXCERSIZ
Unlock Jedi Starfighter – BBGMYWSX, JEDIWHO?
Unlock Millennium Falcon – QZCRPTG!, HANSRIDE
Unlock Naboo Starfighter – RTWCVBSH, BFNAGAIN
Unlock Slave I – TGBCWLPN, ZZBOUNTY
Unlock TIE Advance – VDX?WK!H, ANOKSHIP
Unlock TIE Bomber – JASDJWFA, !DABOMB!
Unlock TIE Fighter – MCKEMAKD, ONESHOT!
Unlock TIE Hunter – FRRVBMJK, LOOKOUT!

Extras Menu Cheats
To access these cheats, after entering the passcodes, go to the "Extras" menu and from there to the "Special Features" screen.

Ace Mode – YNMSFY?P, YOUDAMAN
Art Gallery – !KOOLART
Credits – LOOKMOM!
Documentary – THEDUDES
Music Hall – HARKHARK
Original Star Wars Arcade Game – RTJPFC!G, TIMEWARP
Original The Empire Strikes Back Arcade Game – !H!F?HXS, KOOLSTUF

The Urbz: Sims in the City

Enter all of these during gameplay. First, enable the cheat gnome. Then enter the codes to unlock cheat gnome actions.

Acquire Skill Objects – Down, Z, Up, Y, R
Enable Cheat Gnome – Down, L, Z, R, X, Left
Give All Powersocial Items – B, Left, X, R, L, A
Max Artistic Skill – R, Y, Up, Z, Down
Max Mental Skill – Down, X, Left, R, Down
Max Physical Skill – R, Z, Down, Y (x2)
Unlock All Socials – L, R, Down, A, Y

GAME BOY ADVANCE

The Incredibles

Enter these codes at the password entry screen to start the indicated level.

Level 1-1-1	MSW5
Level 1-1-2	BK8V
Level 1-2-1	69NN
Level 1-3-1	GFVY
Level 1-3-2	V34K
Level 2-1-1	94HR
Level 2-1-2	ZWLG
Level 2-1-3	SP??
Level 2-2-1	KDY3
Level 2-3-1	Y27F
Level 2-3-2	6!2N
Level 2-3-3	BHBV
Level 2-4-1	MQR5
Level 2-4-2	3YTK
Level 2-4-3	?6DS
Level 2-5-2	6?SR
Level 2-5-3	SNJ5
Level 3-1-1	MNW9
Level 3-2-1	BF8Z
Level 3-2-2	65NS
Level 3-2-3	YVKK
Level 3-2-4	KGTY
Level 3-3-1	SDR6
Level 3-4-1	Z3ZB
Level 3-5-1	9?5M
Level 3-5-2	FC73
Level 3-5-3	NL2?
Level 3-6-1	VXBG
Level 3-6-2	YWKJ
Level 3-6-3	GJQZ
Level 3-7-1	KHP2
Level 3-7-2	313K
Level 4-1-1	?!JT
Level 4-2-1	ML17
Level 4-3-1	YXFC
Level 4-4-1	GHV1
Level 4-5-1	VW4C
Level 4-6-1	YX!F

Mod World

Wyvern

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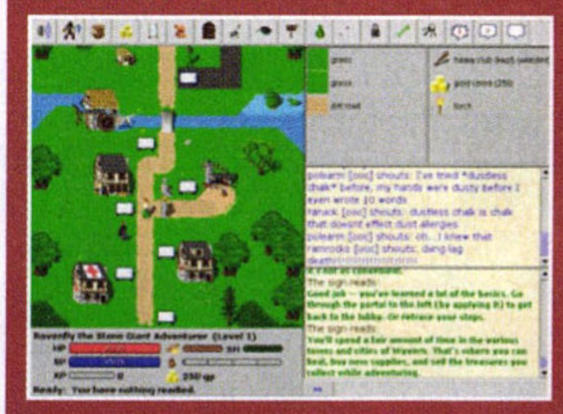
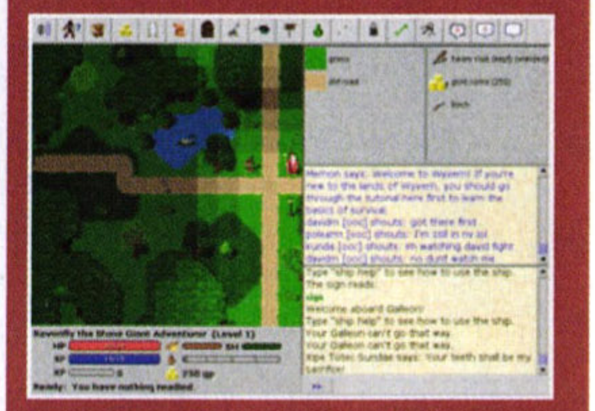


Maybe you don't like the time investment required for EverQuest, or superheroes aren't your bag and you've no inclination to live in a city of them. And if you think about it, paying twelve to fifteen bucks a month to play a game can be a lot of money. Well, if these statements echo your own feelings and Kingdom of Loathing is too sarcastic for you, Wyvern might tickle your fancybone. With a style very reminiscent of the delightful Exile series (if you don't know about Exile, it's your loss), this completely free MMORPG has a lot to offer. And there are even MacOS and Linux clients available!

Wyvern is classic western fantasy to the core. It's also tiny and can probably even run on your grandma's Pentium-60. It's got deep character customization, plenty of dungeons to adventure through, and a welcoming online community. The only downside is that it looks an awful lot like an NES game. But we guarantee that shiny $50 bill you didn't spend will help ease the pain of these primitive graphics (although the creators would surely appreciate any support you give them, since they're paying for the bandwidth costs out of their own pockets).



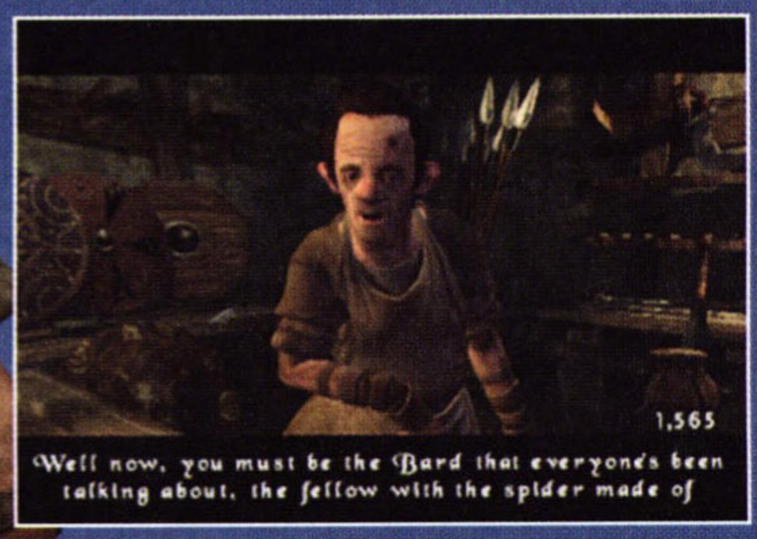
Though Wyvern is very clearly rooted in the glory days of text MUDing (you can play it just like a MUD, simply typing in commands and moving with the arrow keys), it also has a surprisingly easy to use graphical interface. Anyone who's familiar with the concept of right clicking to open a contextual menu should pick it up pretty quickly. Wyvern is still in beta, but the plan is to keep it free even when it becomes final (or as final as an online game ever is, what with updates and content additions and such). And at that price, it's definitely worth the 18MB download.

The Bard's Tale

Tips On Hooking Yourself Up With Maximum Booty

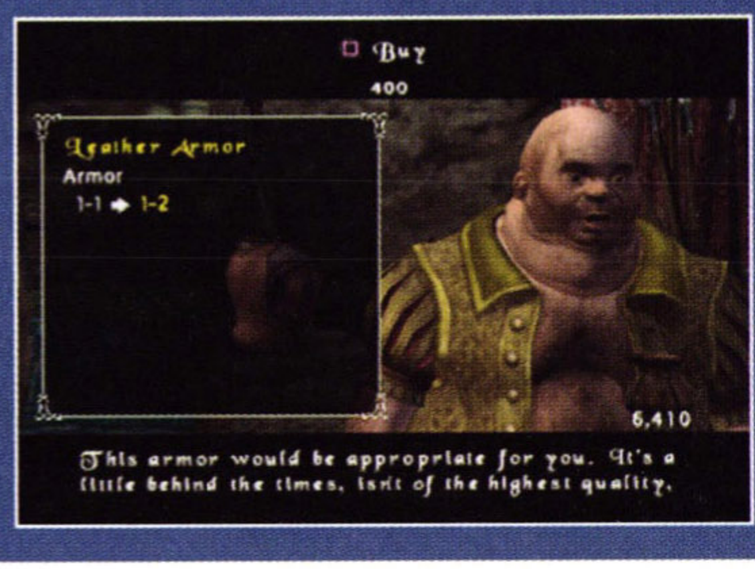
By Dennis Miller, Writer/Designer, inXile Entertainment

While the Bard himself may appear to have a one track mind toward coin and cleavage (or does that count as two tracks?), strategies to keeping him alive to fight another battle are multidimensional. You will find yourself asking many questions as you make your way through the game. How do I beat a Kunal Trow? Where is that cool weapon I've heard about? Will these blisters on my thumbs ever heal? And the all important, how can the Bard be carrying all those items without having as much as a bulge in his pocket? Well, we're here to help you with those questions, except the last one of course – that's just something you're going to have to live with. So sit down, sharpen your pencils, grab a pad of paper, and prepare to write everything down. Of course you could just read directly from the magazine, but The Bard's Tale is not for those who like to take the easy way out.



BUILDING A BETTER BARD

Before the game begins, you must carefully distribute valuable points into the Bard's talent pool. Now those who know the Bard may accuse him of being a bit shallow, so don't dive head first into his talent pool without careful consideration. When spreading points amongst his attributes, you may want to initially concentrate on his stamina and strength. This will allow the Bard to maximize his damage potential as well as help him stay alive when things get rough. When it comes to choosing an initial talent, choosing 'critical strike' right off the bat is an excellent choice. If you follow this up down the road with the 'duel wield' talent, you will have a Bard with a whirlwind of offensive power…as if the Bard wasn't offensive enough to begin with. Once into the game, buy yourself a dirk. This is the least expensive weapon in the game, which will leave plenty of money left over for an all-important armor upgrade. Making the right decisions for the early levels can be the difference between a walk in the park and a nap in the dirt…a permanent nap.



KNOW YOUR WEAPONS

As the game moves forward, you will begin to realize two things. The first being that the Bard should learn to keep his big mouth shut, and secondly that you have several different choices of weaponry. The first you can't really do much about, though many have tried. So while the Bard is running off at the mouth, run around looking for different weapons. Some will be given as rewards, some will be obtained by defeating certain enemies, or you can just go shopping. As you find yourself in different combat situations, it is important to recognize when a change of weapons might come in handy. Dual-wielding is very effective in less crowded situations, especially against bosses where it's best to maximize your damage against a single target. The flail is great against enemies who love to block, especially Druids and dual-wielding Kunal Trow. While it's true that flail attacks are slow, the upside is they are unblockable and have a chance to stun the enemy. The sword and shield combination is a good balance of offense and defense, perhaps making it the most versatile weapon choice available. To clear out hordes of weaker enemies, break out the two-handed weapons and cleave away. The longer reach and large sweeping blows of two-handed weapons are ideal against swarming baddies. Later in the game when you begin to encounter zombies of all shapes and sizes, the bow is great for setting them aflame. The bow is also good for keeping a nice distance between the Bard and the often short-ranged zombie attackers.

THE BARD'S BEST FRIEND

The Bard will be the first to tell you that he prefers to travel alone. This is not because he is valiant, but simply because no one in their right mind would travel with him. However, there are certain species of the animal world that don't know any better and will actually find the Bard someone to look up to. For this reason, be sure to be nice to the little

puppy you encounter early in the game. Not only is the puppy great at digging up extra loot for the Bard and acting as a distraction in combat, but he has a mean bite that can actually inflict a bit of damage. You will also have the option of utilizing the Dog Training talent which turns your cute little puppy into a fighting machine. Now, the Bard could also be nice to chickens, but he finds it much more amusing to whack them with his sword.

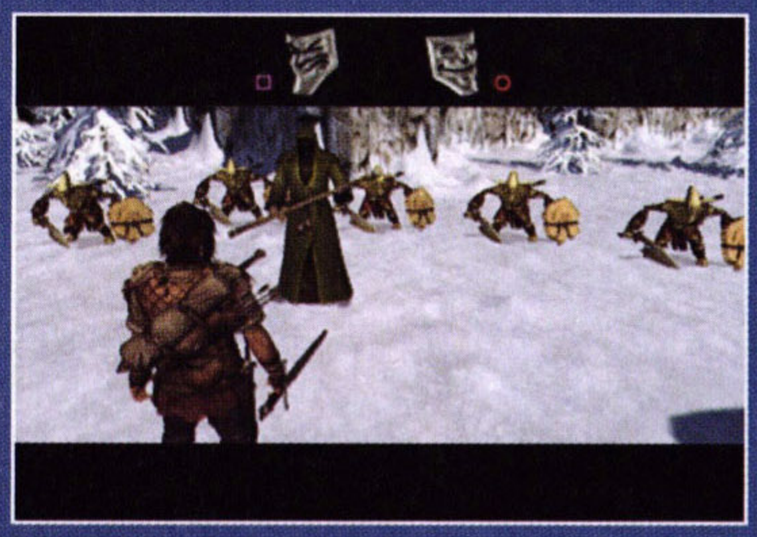
EXPERIMENT WITH YOUR SUMMONS

Throughout the game you will pick up a wide array of summoned creatures to help the Bard in his fight to save the princess. Each one of these summons will have a time and place to shine on their own, but some of them work particularly well in combination. If you find yourself getting your butt kicked in certain battles, try switching up your summoned character combos.

The Enchantress and the Vorpal Rat: This is a prime example of one summoned creature counterbalancing the weakness of another. The Vorpal Rat inflicts massive amounts of damage, but its main drawback is low health. With the Enchantress around to keep things healthy, the Bard can let the rat die knowing it will be back in a few seconds.

The Light Fairy and the Bodyguard: This is a great combination to use when you want the enemy to focus their attention away from the Bard. Both of these characters can absorb a lot of punishment, and the Light Fairy will help out even more by occasionally stunning enemies.

The Brute and the Knight: A pretty classic combination of strong melee warrior with ranged damage dealer. The fact that both of them have attacks which can stun enemies makes them all the more effective.



SNARKY OR NICE

Throughout the game, there will be numerous opportunities to choose if the Bard's response will be all warm and fuzzy, or just plain fuzzy like mold growing on a piece of old lunch meat. We must admit it can be difficult to determine with any given situation whether it would be best handled with a snarky response or a nice response. That being said, we will tell you there are really no right or wrong answers here. If you are looking for the most favorable results, it's always wise to pay attention to how someone is treating you. It may not be in your best interest to be snarky to a grieving mother or nice to someone who is giving you the run around. Of course there are exceptions to every situation, and once again experimenting with different paths is often the most amusing way to go.

EXPLORE EXPLORE EXPLORE

Not to be redundant or repetitive (too late, we know) but perhaps your best weapon in the game is to explore everywhere that you can. You never know when you'll find a hidden weapon or alternate quest that can lead to a really cool item you might have otherwise missed. The trap finder is a good summoned character to have when you are out exploring. If you find yourself overwhelmed in a particular area, try heading to the world map to fight some random battles. You can pick up extra loot and even a level or two in experience. And who knows, you might also find other surprises as well.

WILL THE BLISTERS ON YOUR THUMBS EVER HEAL?

Most likely not, but if they do, then you should be ashamed of yourself for using those cheat codes.

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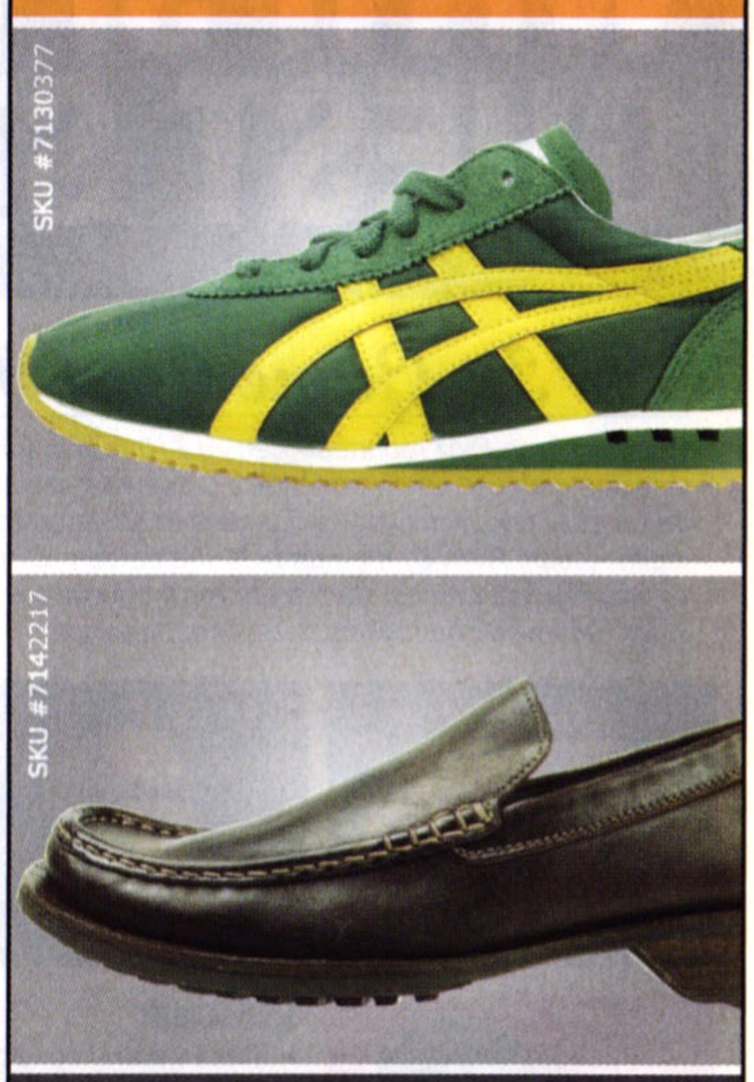

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WITH SPECIAL GUEST STAR...

Video games have been chock full of Hollywood talent lately, with Atari's Enter the Matrix and EA's Lord of the Rings series perhaps being the pinnacles of celebrity/license/video game fusion. To some it may seem like all of this star power is a recent trend, but recognizable actors lending their voice and/or likeness to a game is as old as the industry itself. Outside of direct franchise uses, games like Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, the Onimusha series (especially Demon Siege), and XIII have big-name talent portraying all-new characters. The games listed here highlight some of the more interesting turns by Hollywood elite, and not necessarily their most shining moments.

★ In-Game Chat ★

With Cameron Diaz reportedly getting $10 million for the week of work she put in on Shrek 2, *voicework seems to be an easy and lucrative way for stars to get in on the digital action. From by-the-numbers line delivery to overly bizarre concept games, stars seem most adventurous when they won't be making a visual appearance.*

Seaman

★ **Star Power:** Leonard Nimoy
★ **Released:** 2000
★ **Publisher:** Sega
★ **Platforms:** Dreamcast

Clincher: Undeniably weird, Nimoy seems to take particular pleasure in mocking players who check on their pets frequently – Mr. Spock can belittle a gamer in no time.

Discworld

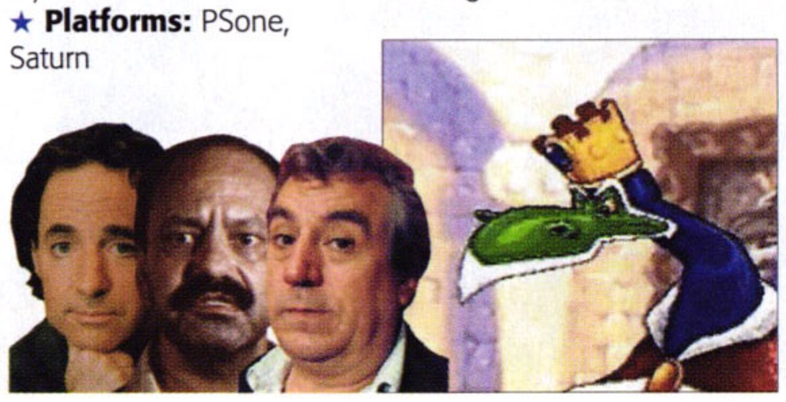
★ **Star Power:** Eric Idle
★ **Released:** 1995
★ **Publisher:** Psygnosis
★ **Platforms:** PSone, PC

Clincher: Based on the famed Terry Pratchett novel, this game has a very specific brand of humor (namely British). Monty Python alum Eric Idle supplies his voice to this adventure game.

Blazing Dragons

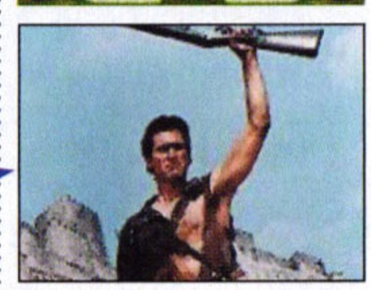
★ **Star Power:** Cheech Marin, Terry Jones, and Harry Shearer
★ **Released:** 1996
★ **Publisher:** Crystal Dynamics
★ **Platforms:** PSone, Saturn

Clincher: Terry Jones of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* fame created the characters in this comedy adventure title with a few minigames thrown in for good measure.



Broken Helix

★ **Star Power:** Bruce Campbell
★ **Released:** 1997
★ **Publisher:** Konami
★ **Platforms:** PSone



Clincher: The world's most famous B-actor takes up the genre-stretching role of an explosives expert in Area 51. Deep, man. Really deep.

Blasto

★ **Star Power:** Phil Hartman
★ **Released:** 1998
★ **Publisher:** Sony Computer Entertainment America
★ **Platforms:** PSone

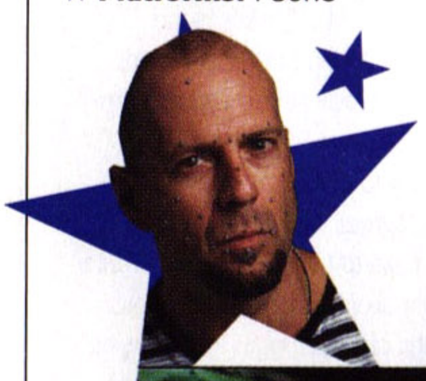
Clincher: The legendary comedian took only six hours to record everything that Blasto said in this action game, and every word of it was funny. We miss Phil Hartman.

★ The Full-Body Experience ★

There are some stars that take the leap into digital form full-on – opting to provide voice and body (often as a playable character) to a video game. For all the trouble of being scanned and recorded, these intrepid thespians have often been rewarded with substandard action or fighting games, but playing as a superstar at least has a definite amusement factor for gamers.

Apocalypse

★ **Star Power:** Bruce Willis
★ **Released:** 1998
★ **Publisher:** Activision
★ **Platforms:** PSone

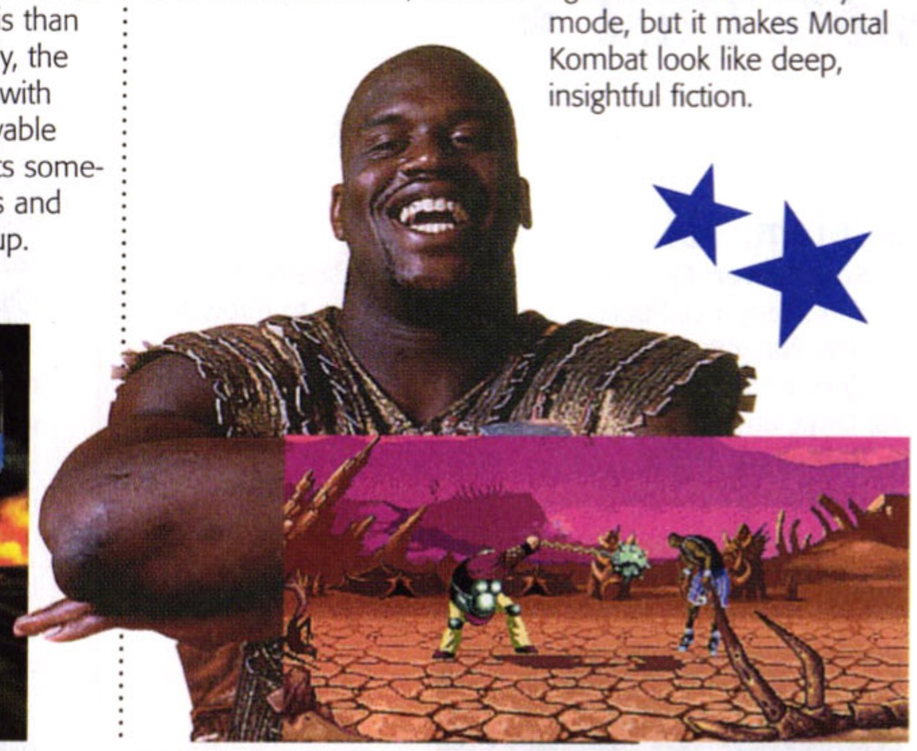


Clincher: Neversoft, the game's developer, originally planned for Bruce Willis' character to be a sidekick. Realizing that people would rather be Bruce Willis than have him as a buddy, the game was released with the actor as the playable character who spouts somewhat-witty one-liners and blows a lot of stuff up.

Shaq Fu

★ **Star Power:** Shaquille O'Neal
★ **Released:** 1994
★ **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
★ **Platforms:** SNES, Genesis

Clincher: This truly bad fighting game lets you play as Shaq or beat him senseless with a handful of other fighters. There is a story mode, but it makes Mortal Kombat look like deep, insightful fiction.



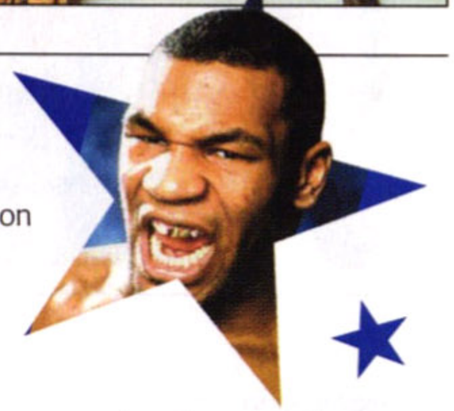
Revolution X

★ **Star Power:** Aerosmith
★ **Released:** 1994
★ **Publisher:** Midway
★ **Platforms:** Arcade

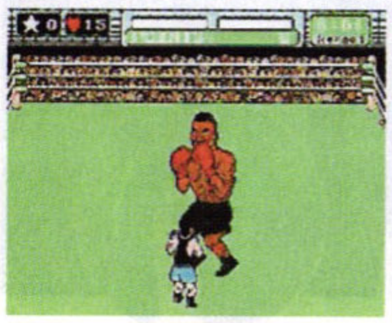
Clincher: After shooting New Order Nation bad guys with your auto-load multi-CD launcher in Los Angeles, a chemical factory in the Amazon, a brainwashing operation in the Middle East, and a warehouse in the Pacific Rim, you'll defeat Headmistress Helga during an Aerosmith concert at Wembley Stadium. Rock power!

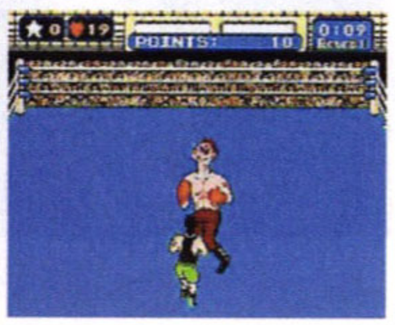
Mike Tyson's Punch Out!!

★ **Star Power:** Mike Tyson
★ **Released:** 1987
★ **Publisher:** Nintendo
★ **Platforms:** NES



Clincher: Defeating Tyson was a rite of passage for many gamers in the late '80s, but after his unsavory encounters with law enforcement, Nintendo pulled Tyson from a re-release of the title. Simply called Punch-Out!!, the heavyweight pugilist was replaced with the fictional Mr. Dream in the final title bout.





Journey Escape

★ **Star Power:** Journey
★ **Released:** 1982
★ **Publisher:** Data Age
★ **Platforms:** Atari 2600

Clincher: Besides the heart-with-arms to represent groupies and disembodied heads symbolizing promoters, this title features admirably translated versions of Journey's biggest hits. Rock out to "Don't Stop Believin'" as if your life depended on it.

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★ Lifetime Achievment Award ★

On behalf of video game players everywhere, we would like to present the award for most appearances in the video game medium to the very special Michael Jackson. Being held captive by aliens who feared his elaborate dance steps in Space Channel 5 and offering himself as a playable boxer in Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2 are only two of the singer's more memorable roles. Moonwalker, the action adventure opus, had the most famous Jackson saving dozens of kidnapped tykes and playing with his pet monkey, Bubbles.

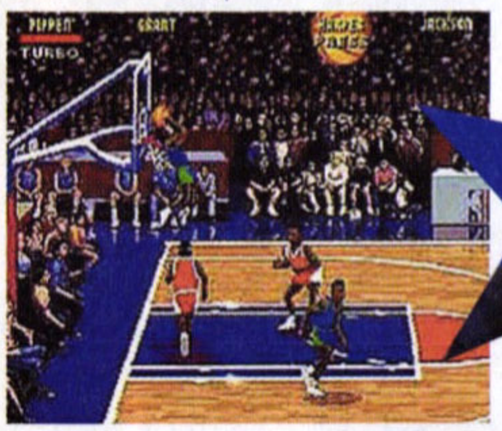
★ Best Ensemble Cast ★

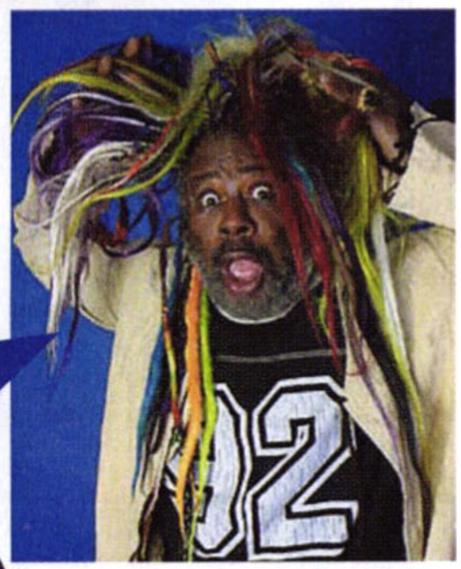
Collecting a group of similar celebrities into one game can make for either a long-remembered entertainment experience or a snapshot of one very small moment in pop culture history. While many titles have one big celeb, these each offer a bounty.

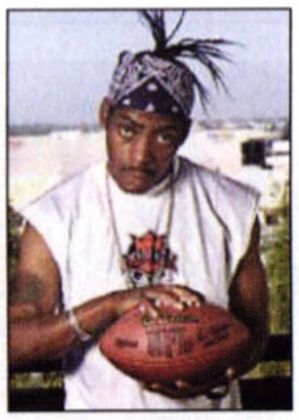
NBA Jam

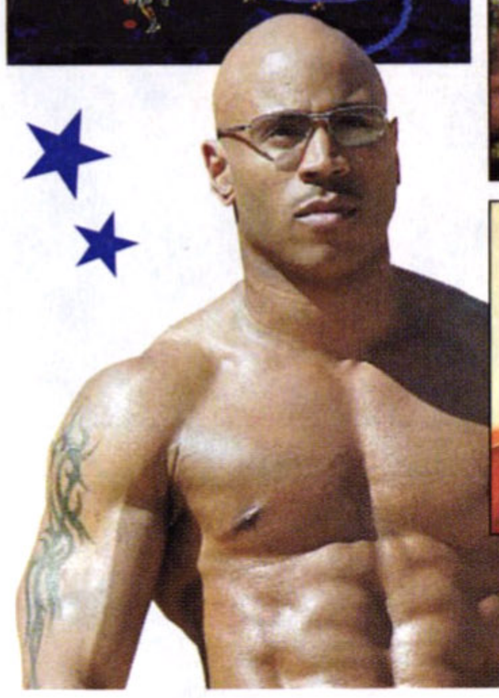
★ **Star Power:** Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and George Clinton
★ **Released:** 1994
★ **Publisher:** Arena Entertainment
★ **Platforms:** SNES, Genesis

Clincher: Sports games (especially when based on actual leagues) are by their very nature loaded with recognizable folk – but we don't remember the former president's stint with the NBA. Luckily, the home versions of Jam let us live the magic that could have been.





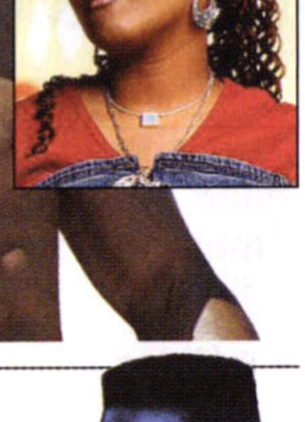




Rapjam: Vol. 1

★ **Star Power:** Queen Latifah, Warren G, Public Enemy, Naughty by Nature, LL Cool J, House of Pain, Yo-Yo, Onyx, and Coolio
★ **Released:** 1995
★ **Publisher:** Motown Games
★ **Platforms:** SNES

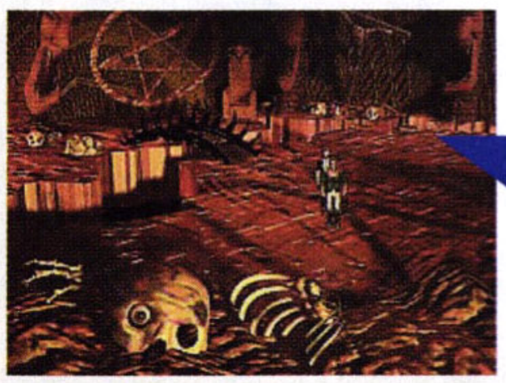
Clincher: It seems a little presumptuous to throw a Vol. 1 moniker at a brand-new franchise, and Rapjam ultimately proved why such an addition was a bad plan. Although the superstar lineup is everything that a gamer could hope for, the game itself just plain sucks.



Hell: A Cyberpunk Thriller

★ **Star Power:** Dennis Hopper, Grace Jones, and Stephanie Seymour
★ **Released:** 1994
★ **Publisher:** Take 2 Interactive
★ **Platform:** 3DO

Clincher: Without any explanation, Stephanie Seymore is the only character whose likeness is digitized into the game. The rest of the principal actors have CG models that the players move through this demonic adventure game.



GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Tristan J. Clark

SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

> **FORMAT** SNES
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO

Towards the waning years of a console's life, some of the most impressive titles are released, as the programmers have adapted to making the most out of their electronic limitations. It was during this time for the SNES that Nintendo released a superb sidescroller known as Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island.

The gameplay mechanics of Yoshi's Island never grow old, as new abilities or environmental interactions are steadily introduced practically every few minutes.

One place may find Yoshi having to transform into one of many vehicle types in order to progress, while another will switch the main character from Yoshi to baby Mario. My favorite section includes having the player avoid fuzzy hallucinogenic spores that, having touched Yoshi, cause the poor fool to swing out of control in a euphoric daze. Watching a Crayola-colored dinosaur suffer from an addictive contact high is one of the greatest digital experiences I have ever witnessed and was quite enjoyable, until Yoshi uncontrollably stumbled into a very lethal bottomless pit.

The graphics sport brilliant mock-ups of paint-stroked environments, while the sprite characters are left crisp and clear. Overworld stages are filled with bright flowers and trees, while caves reflect light from their polished stone walls. Most importantly, each of these locales complements each other by having a consistent graphical style.

The processing technique that allowed the SNES to smoothly scale sprites, dubbed Mode 7, is seen in full effect in Yoshi's Island. Walls collapse toward the view of the player. Bosses quickly expand and shrink in size. And I won't give away the final boss battle, but suffice it to say that it rocks, using Mode 7 to create an entirely new gameplay mechanic, just for this climactic final scene.

From light and blissful tunes to dark, secretive tones, Yoshi's Island engulfs the player in music and sound effects that have grown from the roots of the Nintendo sound library. Cheerful and bright levels have appropriate melodies, all feeding off of a tromping, bopping synthetic beat. Boss lairs swiftly change the mood, playing an eerie tune to passively remind the player to tread lightly for traps.

SNES copies of this game are a little harder to find today, but if you are an owner of the GBA, then find yourself a version of Yoshi's Island: Super Mario Advance 3. Either way, grab this title and experience one of the best 16-bit era games.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

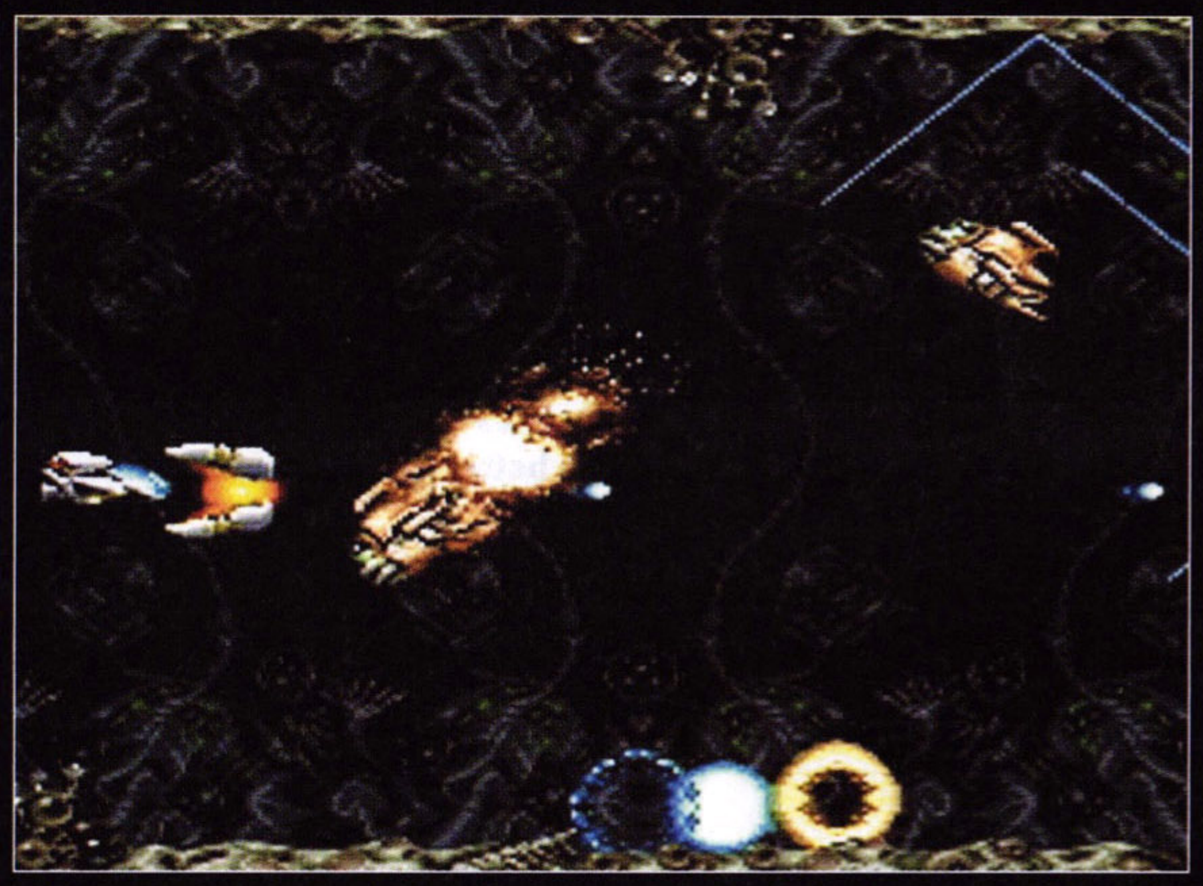
On January 6, 2001 at the CES opening keynote speech in Las Vegas, Microsoft head honcho Bill Gates officially unveiled the company's Xbox game system. Games in the spotlight included Malice and Oddworld: Munch's Odyssey among a collection of very impressive tech demos. Heralded as the most powerful home game console on the market, the software giant promised big things and, especially in the last two years, has delivered.

PSONE

REVELATIONS SERIES: PERSONA

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** ATLUS > **RELEASE** 1996

It can be dangerous to break from the time-honored "troubled hero with a fancy sword saves the world" formula in RPGs. However, when Persona released it satisfied gamers with darker and more mature subject matter detailing a demonic invasion in modern Japan. A welcome break from convention at the time, even today the apocalyptic setting of Persona remains engaging and is still used in the latest entry in the series, Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne. Unfortunately, the gameplay of Persona doesn't have the same longevity. The title's greatest strength, the option to interact with enemies instead of always fighting, is amazingly fun at first, but eventually you'll just want to kill the creatures and keep moving. Not that moving is something you'll enjoy, though. There are three ways to get from place to place (an overworld map, a first person view for maze-like dungeons, and an isometric perspective for general exploring), all of which are awkward and frustrating. The ideas and premise behind Persona are solid, but its progression and mechanics will try the patience of all but the most hardcore old school gamers.

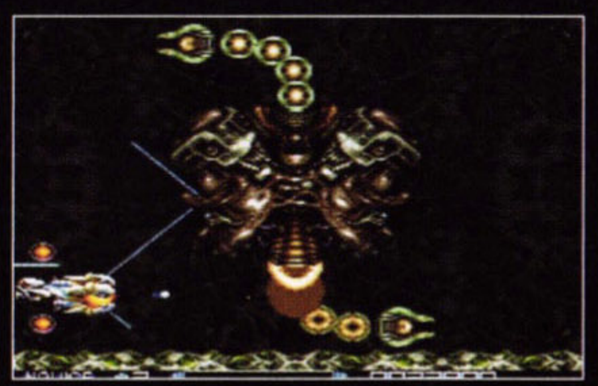


SNES

SUPER R-TYPE

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** IREM AMERICA CORP. > **DEVELOPER** IREM ENGINEERING > **RELEASE** 1991

Although considered niche titles in today's market, the shooter genre still has a substantial and vocal fan base, and it's easy to see why. Shooters like Super R-Type have a simple yet addictive formula, plenty of challenge, and solid graphics with engaging art design. They also age fairly well in many respects – Super R-Type is every bit as fun today as it was when it originally released. However, in one respect, it hasn't. The slowdown in Super R-Type is absolutely horrible; whenever there are more than three or four objects on screen, the action slows down to a crawl. But despite the slow motion that plagues this title, Super R-Type holds up admirably well. The challenge level is still high, (except on the lowest difficulty level), the enemies are cool, and the power-ups are varied and fun. It won't change the minds of those who aren't already shooter fans, but those who love old school action will be pleased with its challenging gameplay.



PSONE

BUST A GROOVE

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** 989 STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** ENIX > **RELEASE** 1998

Helping to pioneer many of the concepts that are inherent to most rhythm games that come out these days, Bust A Groove stands up remarkably well to the test of time. The vivid backgrounds and imaginatively designed characters look really good given that they are on PSone, and this was one of the early games to actually use real motion-capture to create their dance moves. The music is simultaneously ridiculous and addictive, and you may feel stupid to be tapping your feet to it, but you will anyway. There's a level of concentration and precision that sets good rhythm games apart from the way most other games are played, and Bust A Groove requires those qualities in abundance. Take a chance and look past the asinine presentation and you'll see a highly enjoyable offering from Enix in the days before they had a Square attached to its front end.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Revelations Series: Persona (GI #47 3/97), Bust A Groove (GI #69 1/99)

GAMEOVER

This Issue Will Self-Destruct In Five Seconds...

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

The New Year is upon us, which means it's time for everyone to start ignoring their New Year's resolutions. But forget lame ideas like losing weight, quitting smoking, or ending your nasty habit of fleeing crime scenes – we've got some New Year's resolutions you can live with! The higher you score, the better gaming-related resolution you get for the year.

1 What is the name of the terrorist organization that you must destroy in the original Shinobi?

- **A.** The Hand
- **B.** The Ring of Five
- **C.** Al-Qaeda
- **D.** Menudo

2 What was the first Star Wars game released for the N64?

- **A.** Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire
- **B.** Star Wars: Rogue Squadron
- **C.** Star Wars: Episode I Racer
- **D.** Star Wars: Out of Ideas

3 After beating Punch-Out star Mike Tyson for the Heavyweight Champ, which pugilist went on to star in the first boxing title for the Sega Genesis?

- **A.** George Foreman
- **B.** Riddick Bowe
- **C.** James "Buster" Douglas
- **D.** Julio Caesar Chavez

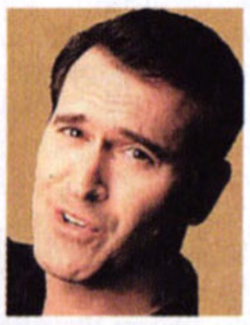
4 Rash, Pimple, and Zitz are the individual names of what video game super team?

- **A.** Three Dirty Dwarves
- **B.** The Lost Vikings
- **C.** Guardian Heroes
- **D.** Battletoads

5 How many players are supported for multiplayer in Saturn Bomberman (for the Sega Saturn, duh)?

- **A.** 10
- **B.** 4
- **C.** 16
- **D.** 2

6 Which of the following games did not feature voice work by the world's best actor, Bruce Campbell?



- **A.** Tachyon: The Fringe
- **B.** Broken Helix
- **C.** Pitfall 3D: Beyond The Jungle
- **D.** Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter

7 Reissuing the adventures of everyone's favorite plumber has been going on for a while now. How many games appeared on the Super Mario All Stars collection for Super Nintendo?

- **A.** 3
- **B.** 4
- **C.** 5
- **D.** 6

8 X-Men Legends is the hottest mutant title out right now, but Xavier's students have starred in several other quality games. Which X-Man was not playable in X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse for the Super Nintendo?

- **A.** Wolverine
- **B.** Gambit
- **C.** Iceman
- **D.** Cyclops

9 Which of the following Xbox titles was available the same day as the console?

- **A.** Blood Wake
- **B.** Star Wars: Obi-Wan
- **C.** Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2X
- **D.** SSX Tricky

10 What was the final entry in serialized PS2 RPG series .hack?

- **A.** .hack//QUARANTINE
- **B.** .hack//INFECTION
- **C.** .hack//OUTBREAK
- **D.** .hack//MUTATION

BREAKDOWN

60.9% of those polled at the Tokyo Game Show feel that the DS is appropriately priced. Everyone else thinks it should come with a per-screen tax credit.

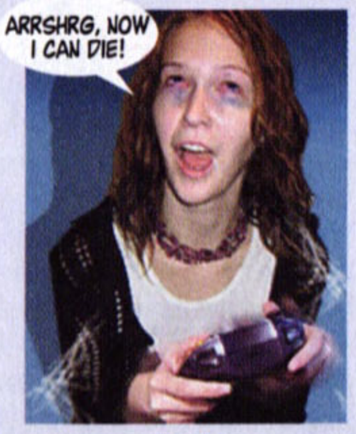
92% of the staff refuses to ride to lunch with Adam. The dilapidated milk truck he drives reeks of expired dairy products and no one likes to sit on the old sofa in back.

76.5% of those polled at TGS say they never play PlayStation 2 games online. Asked the same question about the GameCube, 91.9% said no.

47% of the staff has never worked in a circus freak show. One staff member was previously known as "Snappy the Turtle Man." Try to guess which one!

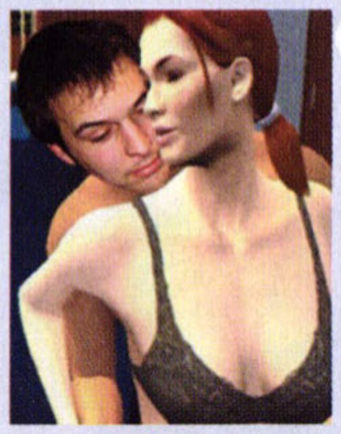
40% of male gamers aged 13-34 said in a recent study that they were more likely to buy a product advertised in a video game. The same study also revealed that many gamers found product placement increased a game's realism, and 30% said that ads in game are more memorable than those on TV.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1
Finally finish Drake of the 99 Dragons

2-3
Move into your own place in Animal Crossing



4-5
Go "all the way" in Singles: Flirt Up Your Life

6-7
Beat Ninja Gaiden Hurricane Pack #2

8-9
Take the world championship in Halo 2

10
Forget the job – play games 24/7/365!

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Video Game Trivia Answers: 1.B 2.A 3.C 4.D 5.A 6.D 7.B 8.C 9.C 10.A

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PlayStation 2

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