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TEEN
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Comic Mischief
Mild Language
Mild Violence
Suggestive Themes

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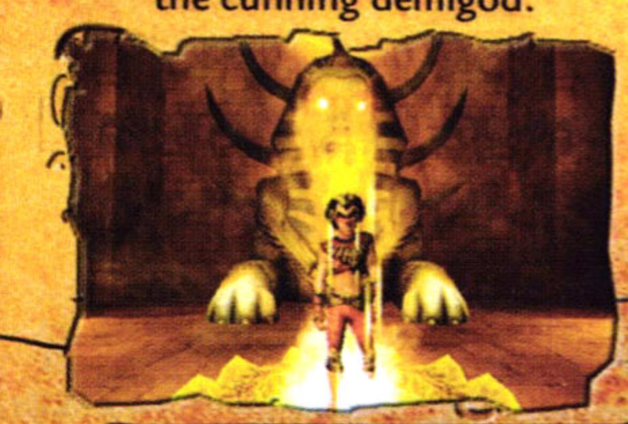

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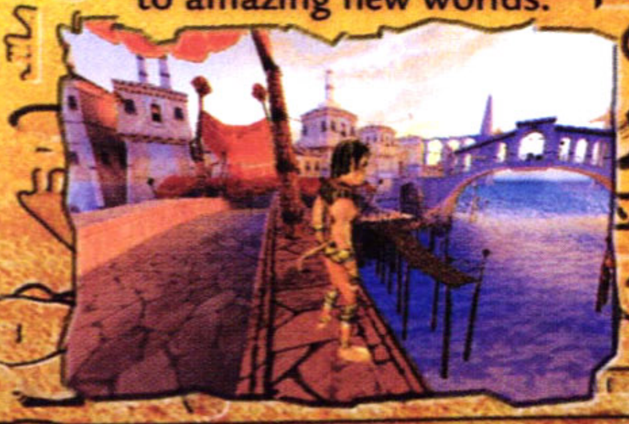

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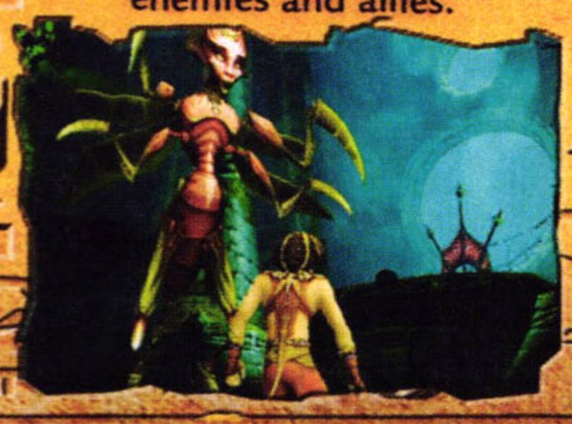

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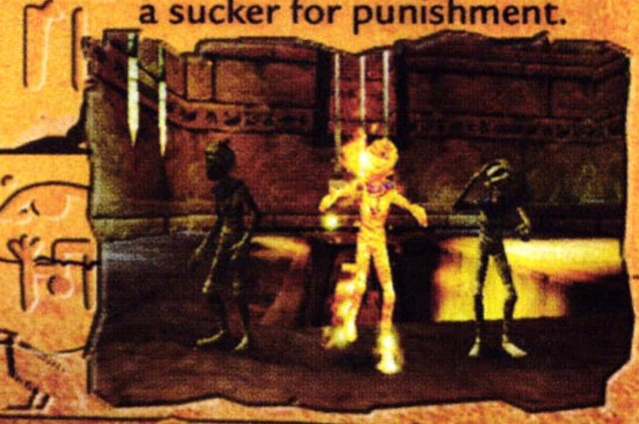

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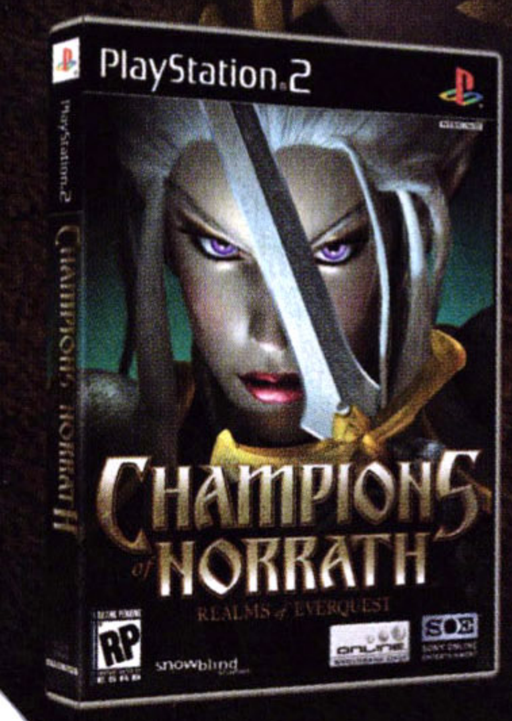

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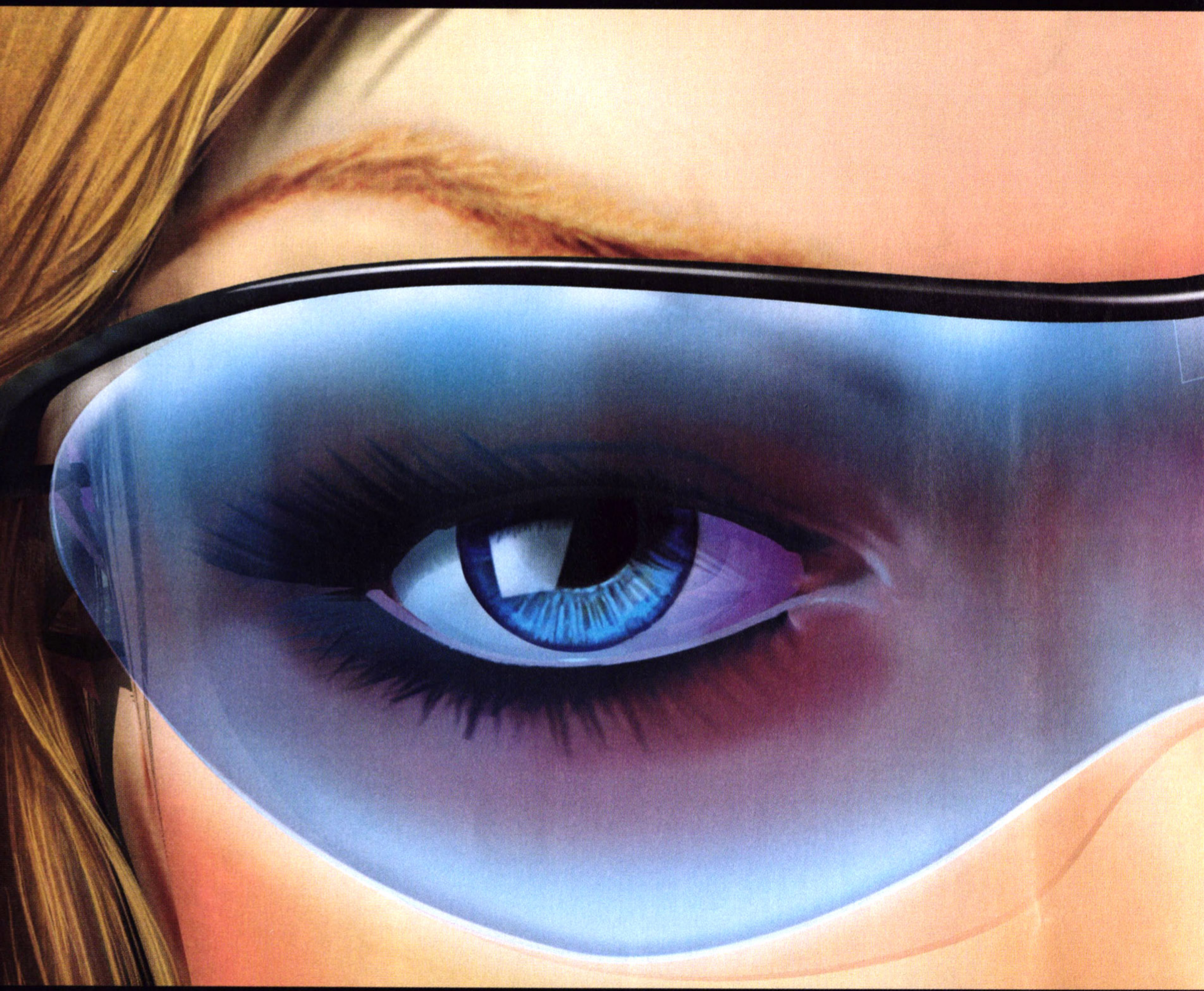

MATURE
M
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Blood
Mild Language
Violence

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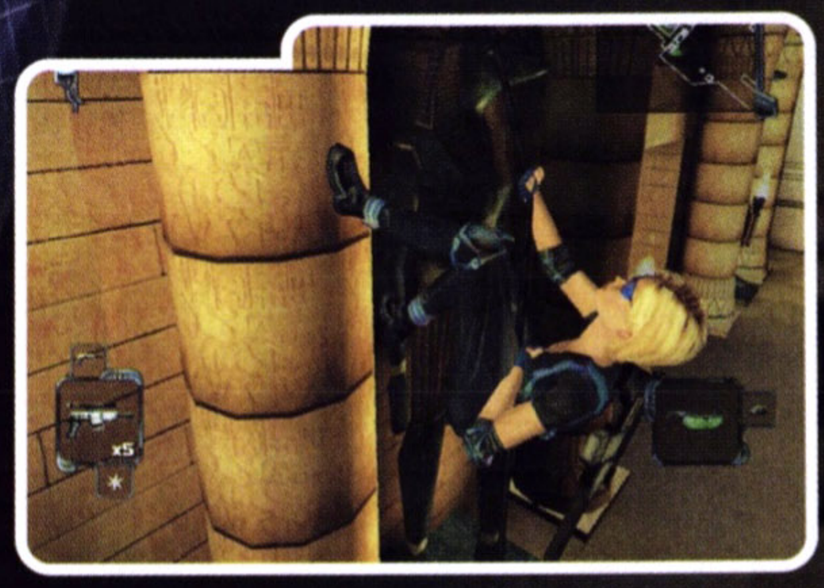

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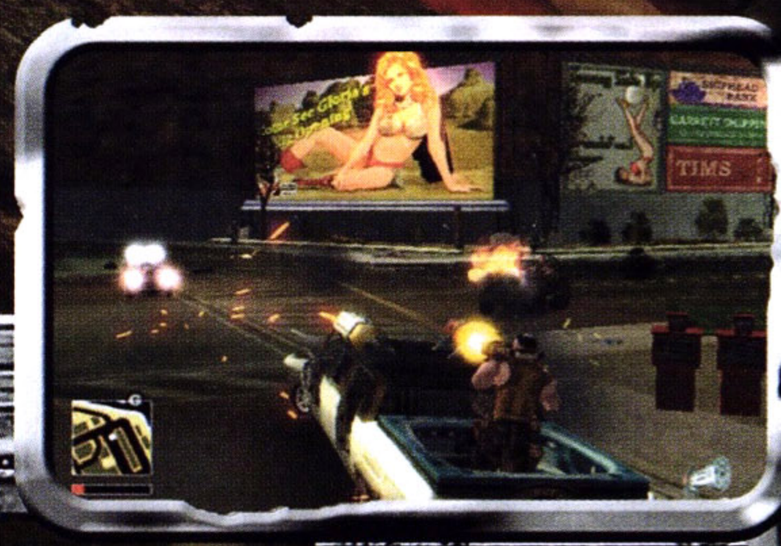

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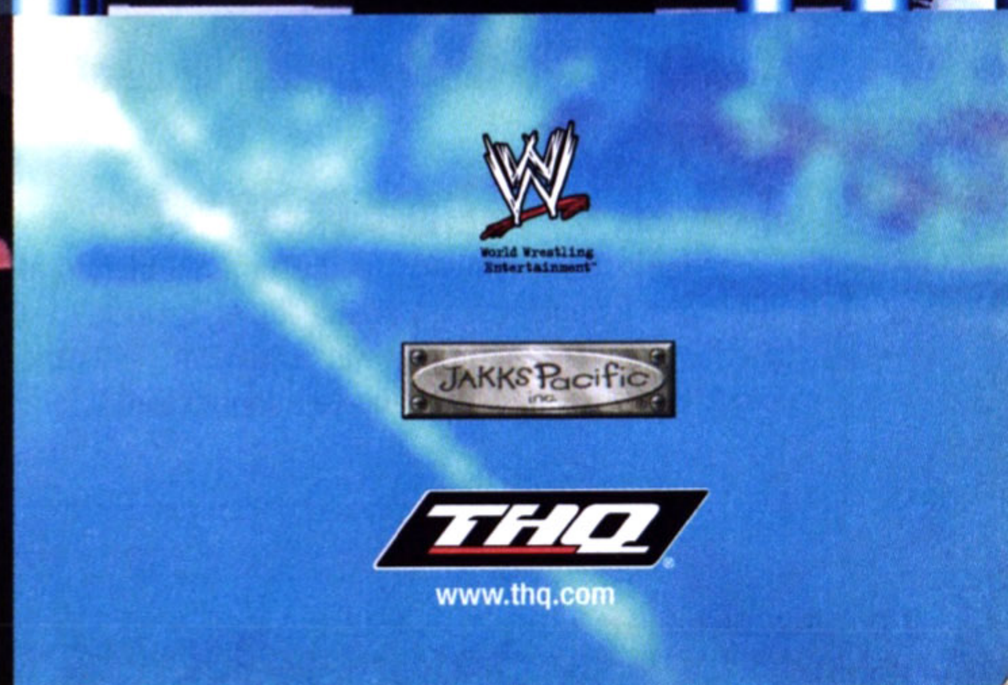
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GAMEINFORMER

COVER STORY

34 DEAD TO RIGHTS II: HELL TO PAY

Jack Slate has more ways to kill you than a butcher's got meat: His disarming style, his willingness to take a dive, and his sharp wit/sword come to mind. He's also a dog lover. See what Namco has in store for the sequel to the Platinum Hit, Dead to Rights. Here's a hint: bigger, better, more.

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46 MY GENERATION

It's halftime, boys and girls, and your good friends at Game Informer have been compiling a list and checking it twice – a list of games from this console generation that will be revered, referenced, and remembered. We're digging 'em, and you should too!

78 SQUARE ENIX

The revered RPG masterminds have more than a few surprises up their sleeves. We got the skinny early and share the wealth instead of acting all superior and keeping the dish to ourselves. We'll be looking for the "Thank You" cards in the mail shortly.

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This is the one place that those of us who write this monthly ditty get to have some personal time for a cleansing diatribe. See what we're talking about this month.

18 GI SPY
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20 DEAR GI
First, multiple readers want to know what's on our party cheese plates, and now it's Smurfs? What's with you people? Others round out the collection of the obscure, insightful, and insipid.

24 NEWS
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92 PREVIEWS
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132 REVIEWS
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181 CHARTS
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188 CLASSIC GI
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192 ETC
Looking for some holiday ideas you can take advantage of, and still offer a cheap excuse to get into a video game or toy emporium? Check out our selection that covers almost any gift need.

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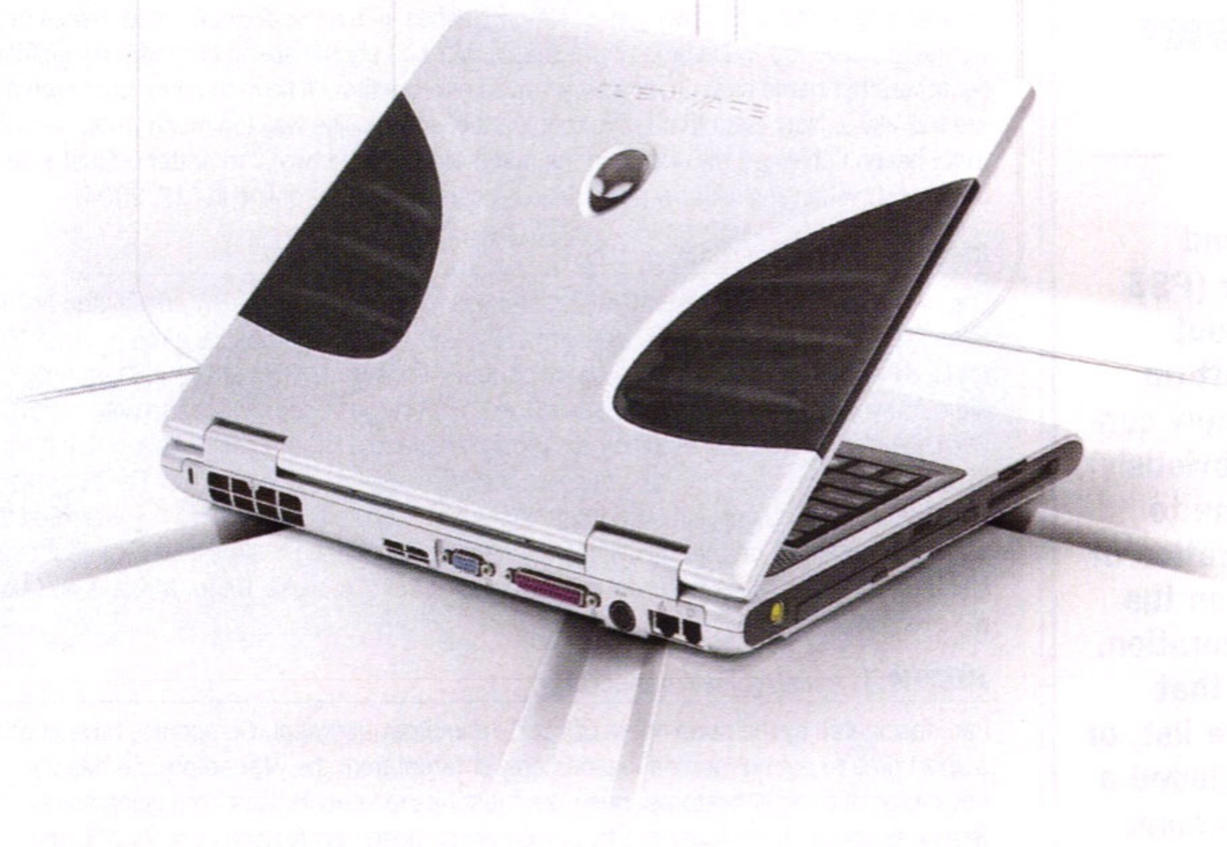

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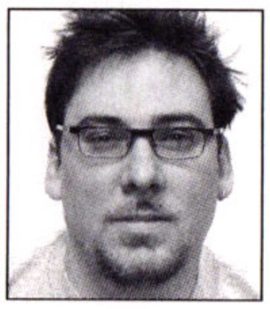

LISTS: THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

ANDY McNAMARA
andy@gameinformer.com
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

With the rumors of new systems and their release dates flying in the air (PS3 and Next-box have been talked about for 2005/2006, and the scuttlebutt on Nintendo is that it will launch its new console next year – all unconfirmed obviously), we thought it would be a great time to look at the highlights of this generation of machines. Enter our huge feature on the Top 50 Games of This Current Generation.

Now, before people start crying that their favorite game didn't make the list, or that our list sucks because we included a game you hate, I want to lay down some ground rules on lists.

First rule: no whiners. As the Rolling Stones so eloquently said, "You can't always get what you want," and the same holds true even here at Game Informer. Every editor on staff had games that they wanted on the list that didn't make it, and ones that they despise made it. Such are the pitfalls of a list. They always cause controversy, which is easily one of the reasons why I love them so.

Second rule: no whiners. Since the list will continue to evolve as new games come out, please consider the Top 50 a "snapshot" of a time and place. Some games didn't get to us in time for this issue and others come out after its creation. Such is life.

If people enjoy the feature I will most certainly look at creating an updated list next year so make sure to let me know what you think, or hit our forums at www.gameinformer.com.

REINER | reiner@gameinformer.com

Not only am I Game Informer's resident dork and biggest Star Wars fan, having reviewed every sports game this year, I'm now the biggest jock as well. This throws a huge kink in my wardrobe – the Brett Favre jersey simply clashes with my Jedi cloak – and makes me wonder if I have too much time on my hands. Maybe I should spend time with my girlfriend (what was her name again?), or go visit my family (but first I'll have to figure out which ones are still alive). Now that I think of it, though, that sounds like way too much work. Seeing that I haven't changed my undies in the last month (maybe two), I'm better off just sitting on the couch hanging with my best friends (people I just met online in NHL 2004).

MATT | matt@gameinformer.com

This year has been pretty strong so far, and this month sees the highly anticipated holiday titles start to roll out. However, what I'm still missing is that game that gives me that "Oh-my-God-I-think-I-just-dropped-a-load-in-my-pants!!!" feeling like Halo or Grand Theft Auto III did a few years ago. That's not to say there's a shortage of good games to play – with KOTOR, Jak II, SSX 3 and many others recently released, my plate is definitely full; it's just that none of them seem to really blow my mind or redefine gaming for me. For this reason, I may be building up unrealistically high hopes for Tecmo's Ninja Gaiden, the one title I think has the potential to be this year's defining gaming experience. Seriously, to say that this game has good graphics and cool gameplay is kind of like saying Randy Moss is an "okay" wide receiver.

JUSTIN | justin@gameinformer.com

I am fascinated by the soap opera of sports game development. Companies have such a short time to put out something markedly different from the year before. EA has the advantage of a larger customer base, so it just has to keep its fans from going astray. Sega has shown its seriousness by implementing huge new features into its NFL and NBA games – Cribs and 24/7 mode, respectively. However, the curse of time strikes both companies, as their titles have new elements that couldn't be fully realized by ship date. While there's always next year's edition, it's still an unfortunate situation for both the hard-working developers and the demanding consumer.

KATO | kato@gameinformer.com

Although you can read my rantings on Rogue Squadron III in my review on page 155, I just don't get that game. I'm just talking out loud here, but c'mon, Factor 5 and LucasArts must have known that the gameplay was painful. That title's an interesting study in video game sequel psychology. It gives us something new (cool), drops the ball on gameplay (bad), and by failing in its new frontiers, makes us yearn for more of the original – a clear contradiction of our desire for sequels to break the mold. Moreover, the game features a wealth of peripheral features (like the unlockable arcade titles), which is a popular thing to do these days. However, we must not let them obscure the bigger picture.

LISA | lisa@gameinformer.com

Everyone in the office knows that I am a puzzle dork. As such, I am also something of a puzzle snob. Those of us who feel the same can concur on one point: Puzzles may be hard, but the solutions must be found through logic. Personally, I'm sick of games that babysit me through a challenge; or, even worse, require what seems to be random combining of objects to reach a resolution. I'm insistent that poor puzzles are just caused by lazy development, and I don't want to have to deal with it anymore. Personally, I get more satisfaction from coming to a rational solution than blowing the brains out of an evil reptilian kitten-eater from another planet.

JEREMY | jeremy@gameinformer.com

I've seen a lot of familiar ideas in games lately, which makes me believe we're in dire need of a new game genre. My suggestion is the survival horror/platformer with stealth elements. Here's my idea: The setting is a haunted space station (the walls never stop bleeding) that's been damaged by alien invasion. The attack caused all kinds of jumpy parts to open up, and you must use the platforms and shadows to avoid all the alien monsters and ghosts. Of course, you could shoot them, but ammo is scarce. If done properly, it'd be completely different, which is something that's desperately needed. Oh, game developers – if you like my idea, you'd best cut me a check tomorrow.

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TOPGEAR RALLY

EVERYONE
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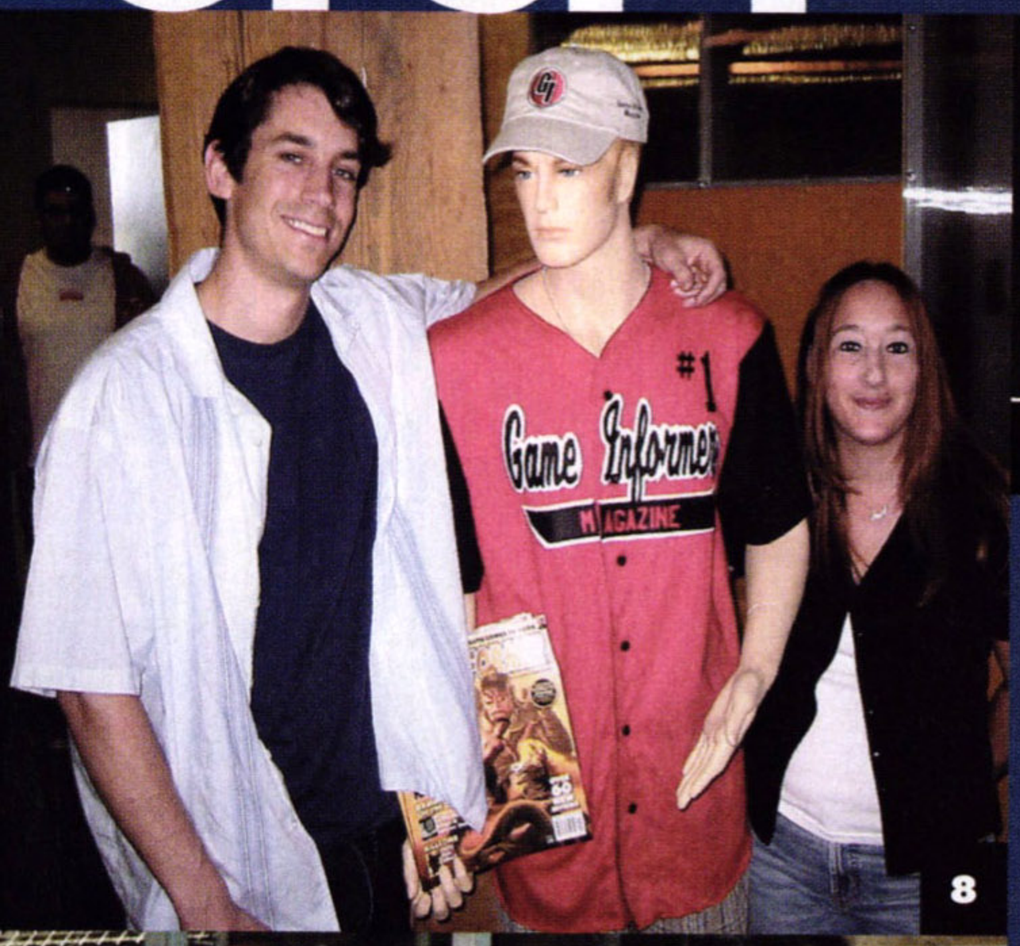
GI SPY



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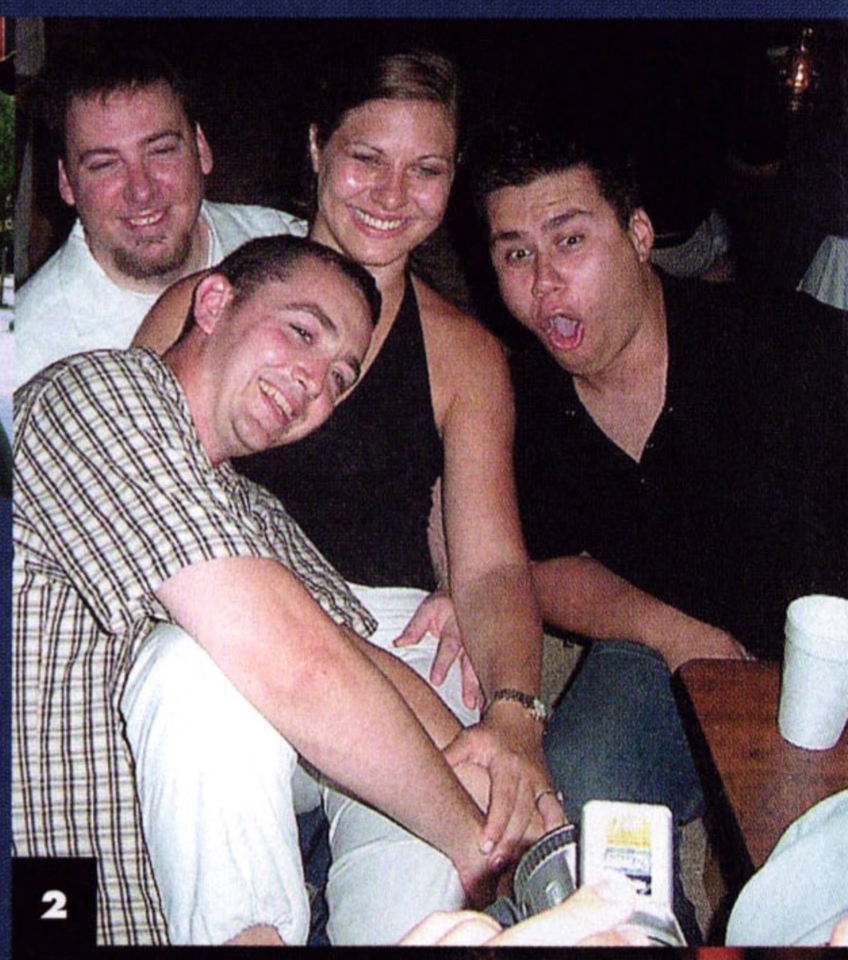

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CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE SEAMY UNDERBELLY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

1 SCI Games' Emily Britt and Bender/Helper's Eric Duncan, seen here outside of the ultra-exclusive Monte Carlo restaurant in Minneapolis **2** Andy, Highwater Group's Tara Blanco, Atari's Matt Frary, and Dave Brown go for a group snuggle in Cabo San Lucas, a.k.a. "The Land of Hagar" **3** Epic Games' Cliff Bleszinski, video games' most accomplished celebrity photo-op master, poses with Jenna Jameson, a highly respected film actress **4** Nintendo's Perrin Kaplan relaxes with her GBA after giving birth to her new baby girl, Princess Peach Kaplan **5** Activision's Ryh-Ming Poon lives out her fantasy of strangling Andy...harder... harder!!! **6** Game Informer's Amy Arnold celebrates selling her first ad the only way she knows how: by getting all crunk up in da club! Holla! **7** Visual Concepts' Matt Atwood (center) gets ready to put up the rock for a jump ball between fellow VC homies Rob Jones (left) and Derrick Aynaga (right) **8** Insomniac's Ted Price and Sony's Tina Casalino audition for *Mannequin 3: The Legend of Curly's Gold*

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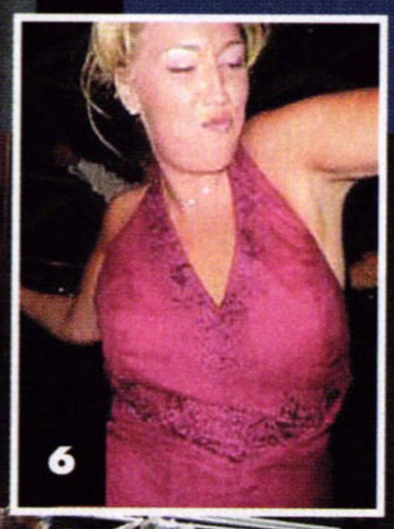

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DEAR GI

"WE'RE NOT NERDS" >>>

Warhammer 40,000 is not a "pen and paper" game, nor is it in any way an RPG! Do your freaking homework people! It is a miniatures-based war game.

Jeff
Via cox.net

I'm writing this email in response to your preview of Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior in issue 125. Overall, there is nothing wrong with the article: It does a good job informing gamers about the title while keeping the story hush-hush. But, the way that the writer described Warhammer 40,000 is as far off the target as one can be.

The preview said, "Widely considered to be the science-fiction Dungeons & Dragons, Games Workshop's Warhammer 40,000 is a unit-based pen and paper role-playing game...." Whoever wrote this article obviously has no idea what Warhammer 40,000 really is. There is nothing even remotely D&D-like about it, and to be compared to that is like a slap directly to my face.

I've been playing the game for about eight years now, and I'd like to explain what Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 really are. The object of the game is to smash the opposing player's army to oblivion while keeping yours somewhat intact. The only thing that involves pen and paper is when you form your army and write their stats down. The very core of the game is not pen and paper, but the physical army. Go to any Games Workshop store and they will sell small plastic Warhammer models that you must assemble and paint yourself. The amount of time needed to build an army can range from weeks to years – depending on how much detail you want. After all the hours of assembling and painting are over, you have a great sense of achievement, as your army is now ready to wreak havoc on the battlefield. The game itself is turn-based and can last for a couple hours.

Dungeons & Dragons is a nerdy little game where you build a character and go around on various quests doing things. There is no visual representation, no skill at all involved in playing the game, and no overall sense of achievement other than slaying the Teresk at level 21 or whatever. I'm not saying that Warhammer isn't nerdy, but for Pete's sake, it's far from Dungeons & Dragons. Warhammer requires smart people to play it, and you have to have a sense of tactics to win. You can't just assemble an army and go to it with any expectation of doing well.

I don't mean to sound like a ranting, pissed off, little closet nerd, but not very many people know what Warhammer is or do their best to understand it. But, as journalists, at least have an understanding of what it is that you're writing about before printing horrible comparisons like this.

Kevin
[Email address withheld to stave the flow of D&D players' hatred pointed at his inbox]

And now we stoke the fires.... Did you see that, D&D fans? You're all stupid nerds with no concept of strategy or appreciation for the visual representation of your gaming passion of choice! We didn't say it, Kevin did.

For those who aren't blinded by rage and rereading that last letter, the sentence above is a diversionary tactic. We're displacing blame from ourselves to Kevin. That's what we call journalism! GI does apologize to those who felt, like Kevin, that they were physically assaulted by our description of Warhammer 40,000 as a pen and paper game. In our meager defense, the wording we offered was only as a way to quickly get across the very broad concept of WH40K; which, apparently, requires neither pen nor paper.

FINALLY SEE THE VAULT >>>

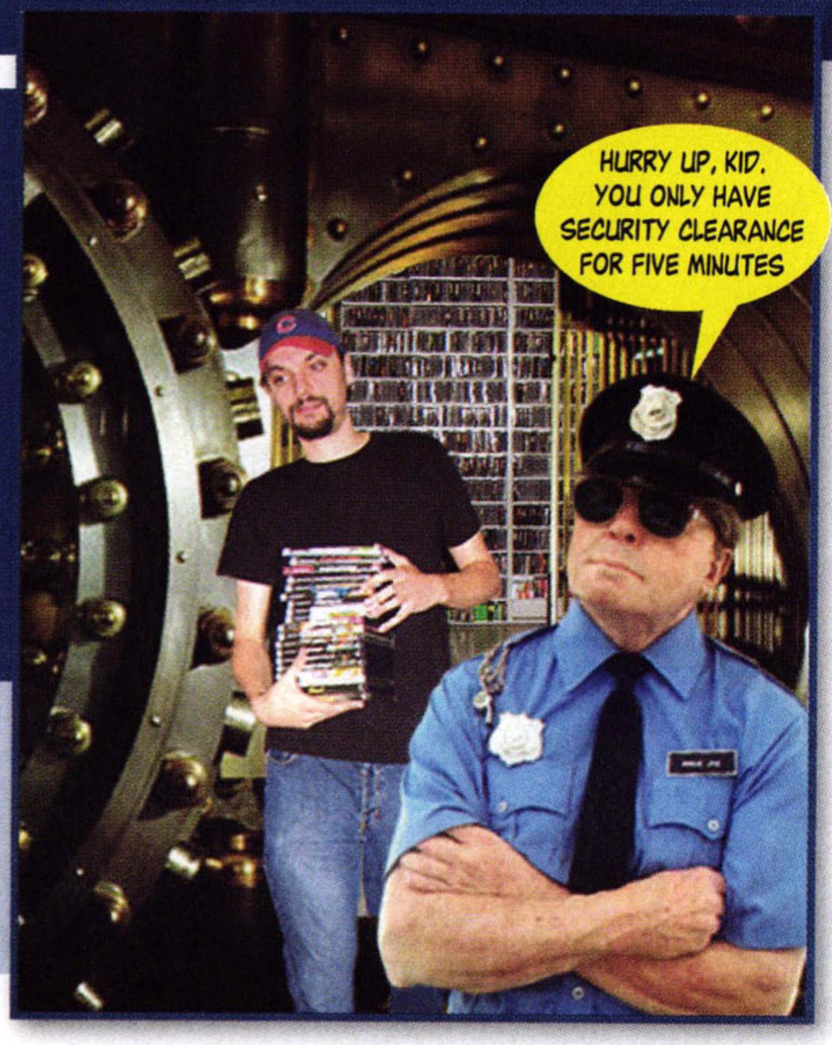
I just saw the episode of Pulse (on G4TV) where they interviewed Andy. But, I was a bit disappointed, because nothing was happening – you were all just sitting around working. What the hell? I expected you to be running around naked, snapping each other in the asses with towels. Well, whatever, it rocked.

Kevin (not the Warhammer guy) Jones
Via email

Dudes, your vault rocks. I just saw the piece about GI on G4, with the tour of your office. Awesome!

Samuel
San Francisco, CA

As G4TV illustrated, even at the madcap offices of this magazine, a sensitive work environment must be maintained. We were strongly advised to stop the hazing and general *Animal House*-like debauchery that could be submitted as evidence at a later date. And yes, as many noticed from their coverage, the vault really does rock.



GRUDGINGLY ADMIT >>>

I've been a subscriber to GI for only a couple of months now, and I would've been the first to tell you that I was not impressed with your magazine at all. But then I had to decide what my football gaming fate would be for the rest of the year.

Well, let me be the first to say that your August 2003 issue simply astonished me with the great depth and detail you put into the Redzone Offenses feature. It means a lot to a serious player like myself when I can refer to this wealth of information in selecting my $50 dollar product. I mean, seriously, chances are that I'll be playing this thing for the next year; and after what I went through this with last year's NFL Fever, having those facts and figures available now is helping me make a wiser decision this year. Thanks for the help, and I'll certainly be renewing my subscriptions in the future.

Bryan McKeller
Via email

We don't necessarily appreciate your early trepidation to our monthly tome, but do heartily appreciate your change of heart. The sports features, as a yearly tradition here at GI, are something we take great pride in and offer them in flavors of baseball, football, hockey, and basketball. We're glad to hear that they're helpful and thanks for the compliments.

ANGEL OF CRAPNESS >>>

Let me start off by saying that I have been waiting for Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness to come out for quite some time. After it was delayed for the sixth or seventh time, I was certain that when it was released, the game would be nothing short of awe-inspiring. Unfortunately, I have come to find out that I was completely wrong.

Using the word awkward to describe this game's controls is generous, and I'm using it only because I can't find the right word off the top of my head to truly describe how terrible it is. The character models, as a highlight, are only adequate; and I am very disappointed in nearly every aspect of this game. It appears that Core Design spent more time developing the physics for Lara's tush than working on the rest of the game. As a fan, I'm pissed.

Shaun Horine
Via email

Why, oh why didn't I listen to you guys? Why didn't I believe your oh-so-brilliant review of Angel of Darkness? But, no, I had to go out and see for myself, and I wasted my money on that stupid piece of crap. I was expecting an action-packed adventure like the good old days of Tomb Raider, but crap was I disappointed.

Trey
Via yahoo.com

The firestorm of accusation around this title, coupled with resoundingly harsh reviews, has tainted Core Design's previously "good" reputation. Movie studios are blaming the game for the film's stateside performance, publisher Eidos has moved development from Core to Crystal Dynamics, execs are stepping down, and fans are enraged.

But what does this mean for Lara's empire and her (as Justin so aptly put it) pair of gigantic...movies? Well, they will probably continue to spawn – except in China, where *The Cradle of Life* was banned for its portrayal of the country. Game development is supposed to continue, and fans who bought the game...well, they should just read our reviews more often.

NINTENDO SAVES A LIFE >>>

I'd like to let all the readers know why everyone should own a Game Boy Advance SP. Even if you're not a fan of handhelds, this system could one day save your life.

I live in NYC, and during the recent blackout, it was my first week at a new job as a file clerk at a hospital. Most of my workday is spent in the basement, in a tiny room, filled with a maze of boxes piled up to the ceiling, pulling out files, sorting through them, and scanning them. This is exactly what I was doing when the power went out. So here I am, in the basement of an unfamiliar building, surrounded by a maze of boxes. What was I to do? I wasn't familiar enough with my surroundings to navigate through the catacombs by memory alone, and I didn't want to risk blindly stumbling through the dark and possibly have a stack of boxes collapse on me.

But I didn't panic. Instead, I was hit by a quick flashback of yelling at my friend for playing Game Boy next to me while I was trying to sleep. That was it – the Game Boy Advance SP is a really powerful light source! So, I pulled

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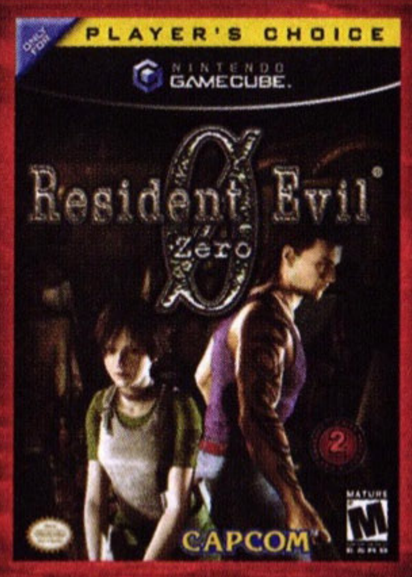

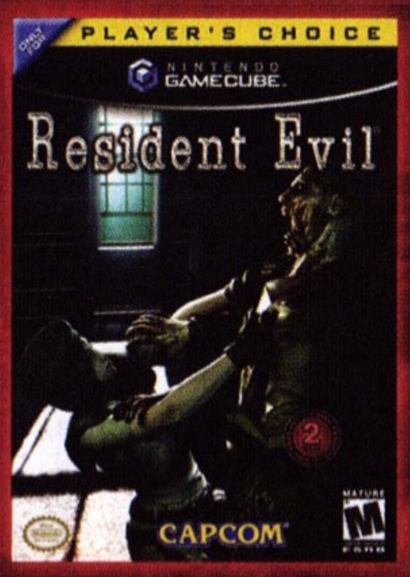

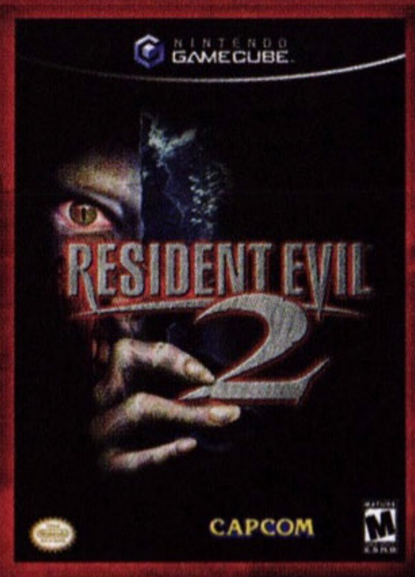

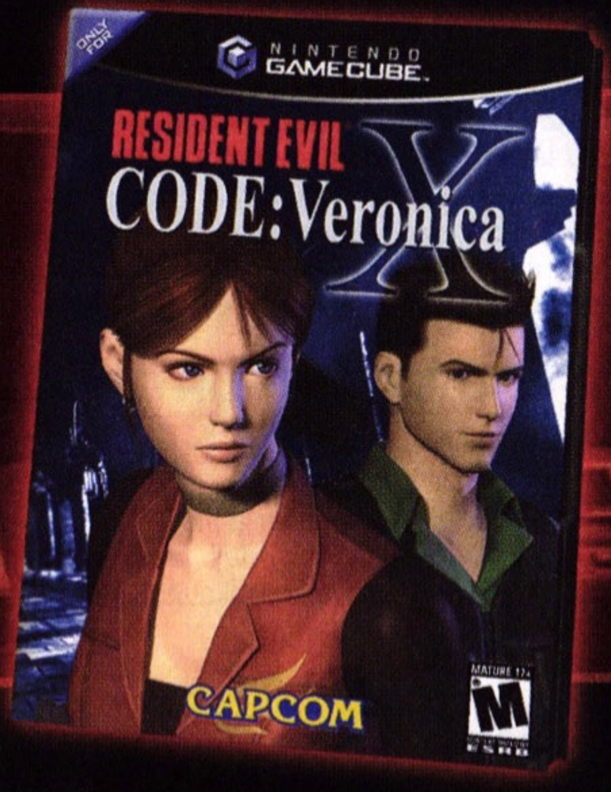

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out my trusty Game Boy, turned it on, and successfully navigated out of the treacherous maze and up the stairs to safety.

"Goresaw" Greg Draudt
Via email

▪ Greg deserves to be applauded on a handful of levels. He, in a MacGyver-like stroke of ingenuity, took advantage of the tools available, however bizarre. In addition, the young filer has found a job that allows him to play games on the clock! Nice work!

MYTH VS. FABLE >>>

Do you believe in Smurfs, or do you think they're just a myth?
Dfairdealdan
Via email

▪ Because of the peaceful resolution of all problems within a half-hour timeframe, their clearly demonstrated ability to speak, the obvious categorization of said creatures as "animals," and their inexplicable ability to create abodes from mushrooms; we herald the Smurf population as fully believable.

SPLIT THE DIFFERENCE >>>

Gentlemen, though it is nice to see you put an honest effort into explaining the rank structure and breakdown of the Army, it would have been better if you had fully researched your info.

It is true that most of the Army does not use "regiments" anymore. However, there is one active Army regiment left to this day. You may have heard of the 75 Ranger Regiment. It is composed of three line battalions and a headquarters element. As one of the soldiers in the 3rd battalion 75th Ranger Regiment, I would appreciate that our unit gets the respect it deserves as standing alone as the last official active regiment in the Army.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Rangers Lead the Way!
SSG. Hunt
Charlie Company
3/75

▪ We really were wrong to prematurely add regiments to the extinction list. But, we noticed that you prefaced your letter with "Gentlemen." There are more than a few issues with that salutation (i.e. calling any male member of this staff a gentleman could be a bit of a stretch, and there are more than a few people of the female persuasion here), so how about we call it even? Deal? Good.

HYDROPONICS FOR GAMERS >>>

I read the review of Boktai. To get around the sunlight issue, try a plant light (the blue-ish ones that put out UV rays). I play the game under a plant light bulb and my solar meter is always around 3/4 full. It makes the game much easier and more enjoyable. Take that, Hideo Kojima!

Jason Eversole
Via email

▪ We've heard a handful of different suggestions to get past the light sensor, but the universally accepted workaround seems to be the plant bulbs. We haven't tested the theory, but have been wondering what it is that all of these peeps are growing in their closets. Hmmm? African Violets?

ENVELOPE ART

Name Unknown
It says funk...really.

Emon O'Connor
Link has more children than ODB

NOVEMBER WINNER!
Nicholas Hinojosa
Where are the seven dwarves?

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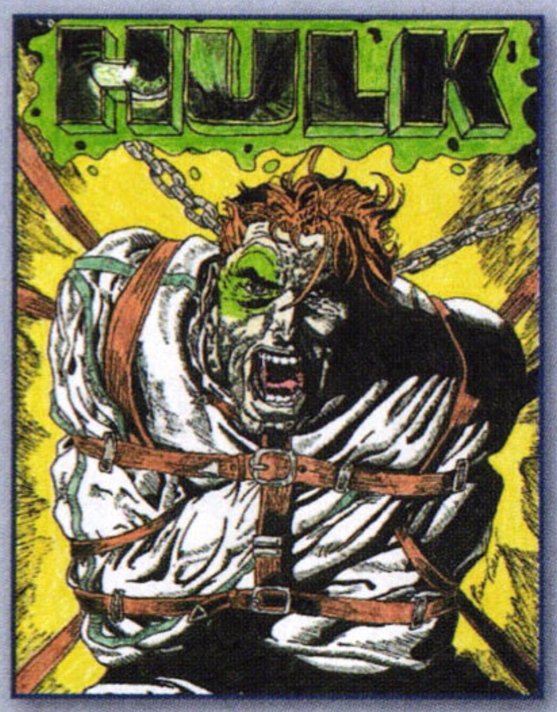
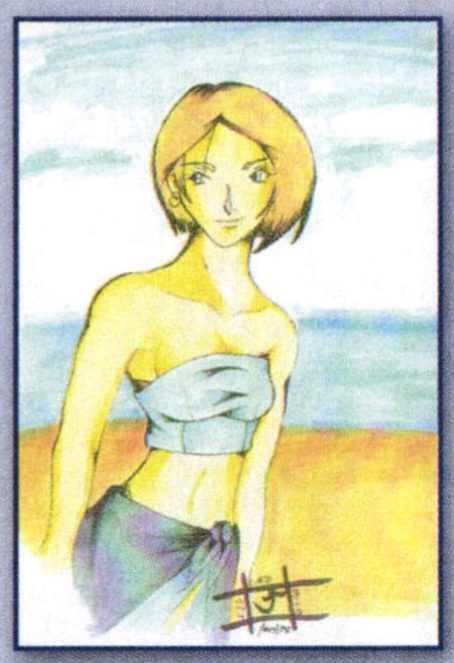


Brian Fisher
Is this a tribute to Iron Maiden's *Piece of Mind*?



Elisa Luevanos
This is Britney Spears before she started making out with Madonna all the time...

Carolyn Clarkson
...and this is Britney Spears after she started making out with Madonna all the time

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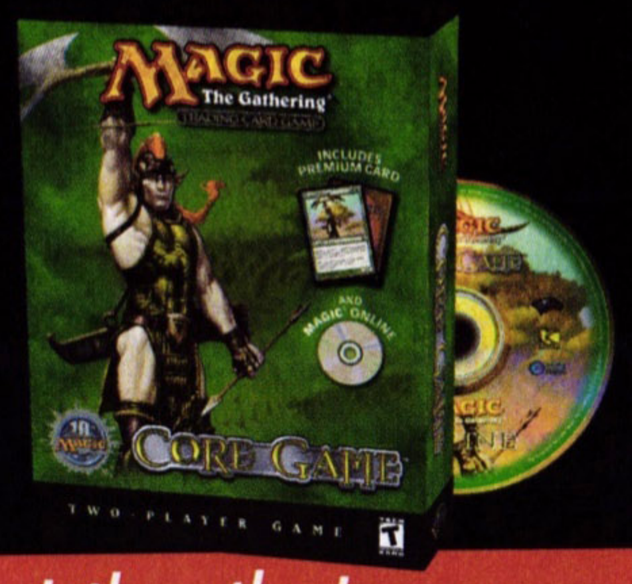

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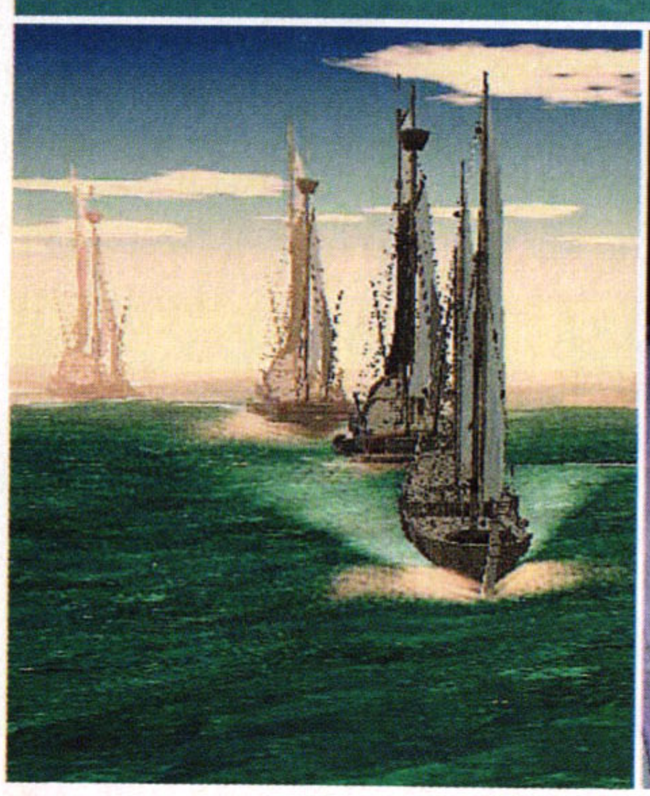
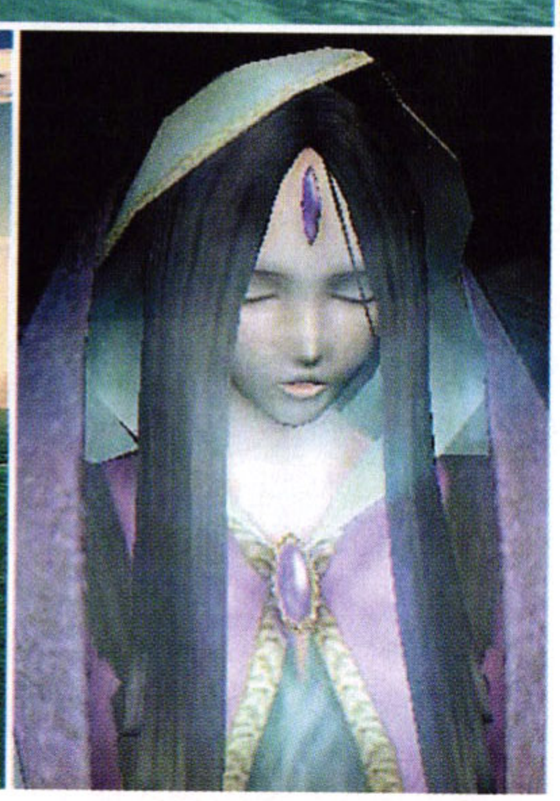
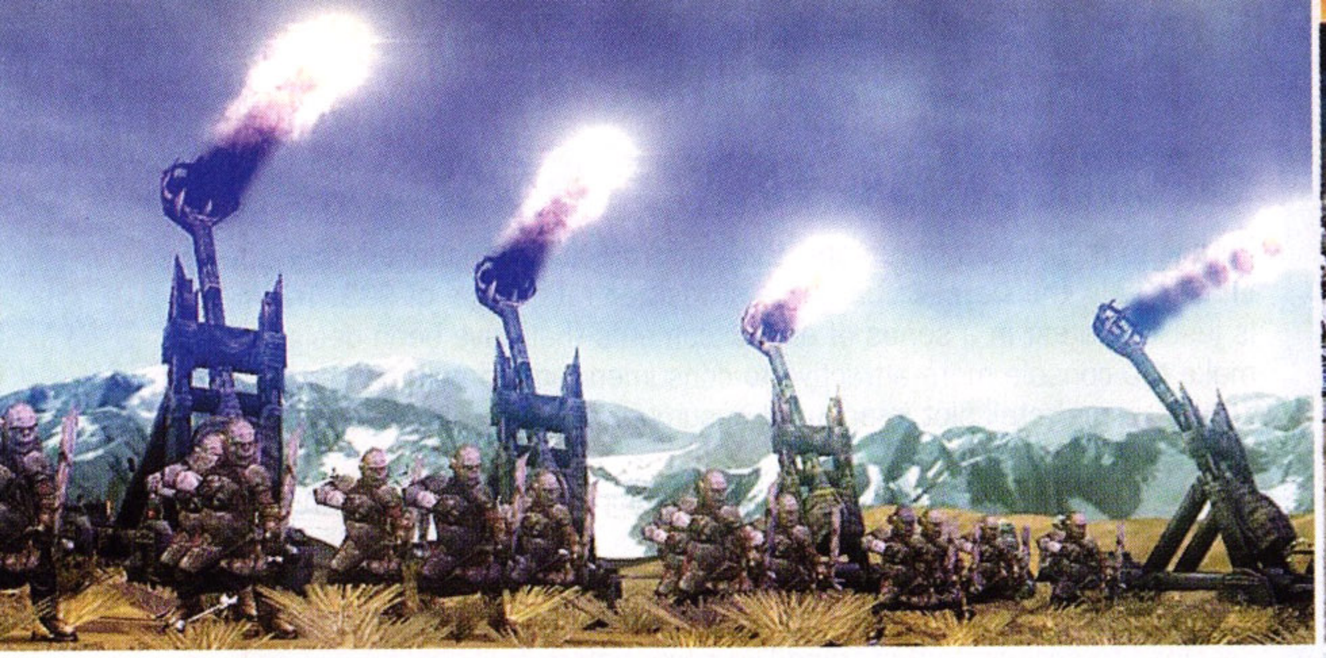




SWEET SUIKODEN IV

Konami has sent RPG gamers into a tizzy with the announcement of ***Suikoden IV*** for the **PlayStation 2.** The title debuted at this year's **Tokyo Game Show**, and is expected to come stateside in fall 2004.

Suikoden IV takes place 150 years before the original, and promises all the intelligent plot twists fans of the series expect. The game will also feature an all-new battle system, ship-to-ship combat, enhanced visuals, and the return of the 108 Stars of Destiny. Your character is the as-yet-unnamed lad whose only companion thus far is called Snow (who is not – repeat not – based on the Canadian rapper behind the hit song "Informer"). The protagonist is the keeper of the Curse Rune – one of 27 fragments which give the land its energy. While it bestows power on the user, it also drains that person's life away and stores it for future users. Talk about a double-edged sword!



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EA'S BATTLE FOR MIDDLE EARTH CONTINUES

Electronic Arts has struck gold with the hack n' slash exploits of ***The Two Towers***, but now it is going the real-time strategy route with ***The Battle for Middle-Earth*** on **PC**. The summer 2004 title will be developed at EA Los Angeles, by the same team that did both ***Command & Conquer: Red Alert*** and ***Generals***. In fact, *Battle for Middle-Earth* will use the *Generals* game engine. Besides the obvious attention to detail paid to the graphics, the game will allow players to be either good or evil. Continuing its ties to the **Peter Jackson** films, this title will utilize movie footage from all three theatrical releases, voicework from the real actors, and digital assets from the films.

SONY TALKS HARD DRIVE, PSP, AND PS3

At its annual Gamer's Day, **Sony** finally officially announced that the 40 GB **Hard Disc Drive** (HDD) for the **PlayStation 2** will be available for $99 in March 2004. The unit is already out in Japan, and has been a topic of discussion for Sony the past couple of years.

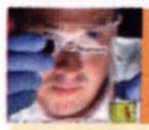
The Hard Disc Drive will come pre-installed with **Square Enix's** massively multiplayer online role-playing game ***Final Fantasy XI***, which allows for cross-platform play between the console and **PC** players (for more, see our Square Enix feature on page 78). It will also include some as-yet-unannounced preloaded game demos. Besides storage space, the 40 GB disc drive allows for a personal music jukebox, a media player, faster load times, and downloadable content. The HDD will attach to the **Network Adaptor**.

Sony has announced that the first two in-house games to utilize downloadable content for the HDD are ***SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs*** and ***Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain***. While numerous third-party games take advantage of online play with the console, none have officially come forward with their plans for downloadable content.

SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs

In other Sony news, PlayStation creator **Ken Kutaragi** has been bragging about some of the new features that the **PlayStation Portable** (PSP) will be capable of. The late 2004 product will have peripherals that turn the unit into a mobile phone and a digital camera. "Not only will it be a form of entertainment," claims Kutaragi, "but a valuable communications device."

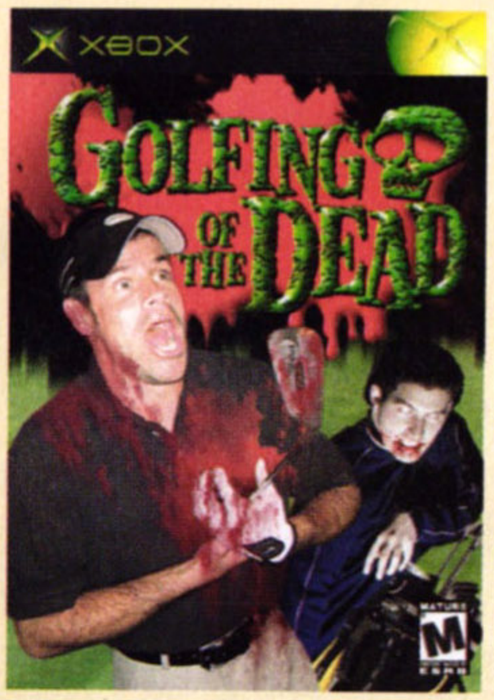
Finally, Kutaragi also shed some light on a future feature of the **PlayStation 3** – backwards compatibility. Speaking to the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shinbum, he revealed that it is essential that the PS3 play PS2 software. "PlayStation 3 will offer the same compatibility for PS2 software and the format will continue forever. Just like personal computers or music CDs, the format continues by incorporating it into new products."



R&D

Game Informer's research and development operatives search the globe, seeking out the untapped licenses that will become tomorrow's killer games. If you have any great ideas for games of the future, be sure to drop us a line. Maybe we'll use our god-like power over the video game industry to turn you into a millionaire – or just steal your idea.

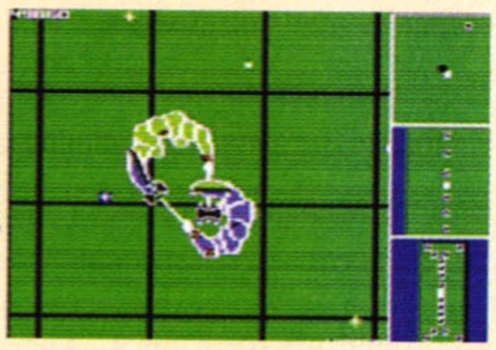
GOLFING OF THE DEAD



Blurring the line between two popular genres, Golfing of the Dead stands alone as the world's first survival horror/sports game. To start, you're just another average human golfer, but your favorite course has been overrun by zombies! Choice swings will send the ball sailing into their skulls, killing them and clearing a path to the green. Botch a stroke, however, and the zombies will close in. Winning tournaments will grant you money that you can use for better golf equipment and weapons to defend yourself between rounds. Should you allow a zombie to bite you, you'll reemerge on the grass as an undead sportsman. No longer driven by the spirit of competition or financial reward, you'll golf for a more valuable prize: the flesh of the living. Win, and your victims will keep you fresh and lively. Lose, and rigor mortis will set in, making your shots progressively more difficult. Attacking human golfers between rounds can increase your vitality, but they will fight back with both golf clubs and guns. Multiplayer is included, so you and your friends can see who would win in the ultimate sporting competition between the living and the dead!

NAME THAT GAME

One-on-one fighting was popularized by the Karate Champ arcade cabinet, but this Apple II 1982 title preceded it. Featuring a top-down perspective, a scrolling game board, and radar, this title pitted two men with axes and shields against each other. The hacking and hewing results in severed limbs and blood trails, as well as an experience that was remembered by all who played it.



(Answer on page 32)

TOP 10 GAMES WE MAKE NEW EDITORS PLAY

10 If there's ever a game involving Pamela Anderson again, they're on it

9 One word: unicorns

8 "Who hid my keys?"

7 Go-Pher

6 Bunion Rub (featuring Reiner's feet)

5 They have instant dibs on any Army Men game

4 The Blame Game

3 Mario Party until they blow a 2.0

2 Hide the salami. No, really, we've got too much of it around here

1 Any title with a large, green hero. Hulk, Shrek, Aquaman – what's the difference?

DEVELOPER TOP 5

TODD HOWARD
Executive Producer, Bethesda Softworks

1 Ultima VII – PC

2 Doom – PC

3 Karateka – Apple II

4 Pac-Man – Arcade

5 Civilization – PC

READER TOP 5

HEATHER MCDONALD
Honolulu, HI

1 Phantasy Star Online – Xbox

2 Halo – Xbox

3 Legend of Legaia – PSone

4 Yoshi – NES

5 Strawberry Shortcake – Atari 2600

Game Informer is looking for your Top Five favorite games. Please send your Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine
Attn: Top Five
724 North First St., 4th Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

Everyone that enters each month will be entered in a drawing to win a GI T-Shirt! So get writing!

GAMECUBE NOW $99

Putting to rest weeks of rumors, **Nintendo** officially announced, that effective immediately, the **GameCube** has a suggested retail price of $99. This move is just the latest in a series of announcements that have been designed to make the console more attractive to consumers and to pull the system out of its third-place retail slot (measured in number of units sold) behind **Sony** and **Microsoft**.

In a conference call, George Harrison, senior vice president of marketing and corporate communications at Nintendo of America said, "Every time a generation of technology has moved into the true mass market, Nintendo has prospered. This incredible new price and our great software offers are designed to accelerate that trend like never before."

However, this low price brings into question exactly how much money per unit sold the company is making with this new price. Industry analysts predict that at $99, Nintendo is actually losing money on each purchase when considering the overhead costs just to manufacture the GameCube in the first place.

Whatever the fiscal ramifications, consumers will find an incredible deal waiting for them this holiday season.

MICROSOFT SNAGS SQUARE EXECUTIVE

Microsoft continues its bid to become a serious force in Japanese gaming with the announcement that **Yoshihiro Maruyama** has been named the new general manager of the **Xbox** Division of Microsoft Japan. Maruyama started his career at the electronics/auto giant **Mitsubishi** and most recently served as senior vice president and CEO of the legendary publisher **Square Soft**.

Maruyama will spearhead Microsoft's Japanese Xbox plans alongside his new boss, former **Sega of America** president and COO **Peter Moore** – who recently joined Microsoft as its corporate vice president of worldwide retail sales and marketing.

"Yoshihiro is going to be a tremendous asset to Microsoft and our Japanese initiatives," commented Moore. "He has proven to be a stellar trans-Pacific talent over the years, and he has a great depth of understanding of Japanese and U.S. market issues as well as solid relationships with many industry leaders."

TAKE-TWO TAKES ON TDK

Take-Two (already home to subsidiaries **Rockstar** and **Gotham Games**) will widen its empire with the acquisition of **TDK Mediactive**. Take-Two will take over all the outstanding shares of the company and will purchase TDK for approximately $22.7 million.

In the meantime, it looks like Take-Two will take over the publishing rights for some as-yet-unreleased products from the company such as ***Star Trek: Shattered Universe*** and ***The Haunted Mansion***. TDK currently also has the licenses to ***He-Man***, ***Robotech***, ***Shrek***, ***Ultimate Fighting Championship***, and others.

This deal is expected to be sealed by early November, although it is unclear if TDK will retain its name as a wholly owned subsidiary or what other measures Take-Two has in store for the publisher and its licenses.

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to do it right.

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ONLINE MUD IN YOUR EYE

Microsoft and the crew at developer **Digital Illusions CE** are busying buffing and shining the hood of the newly announced ***RalliSport Challenge 2***. Why? So you can promptly slog the game's amazing-looking selection of cars (including the dangerous Group B rally racers) through mud, rain, snow, and gravel on your way to the finish line. *RalliSport Challenge 2* is the first racing game under **Xbox's XSN Sports** banner. Exact details of the game's online features have not been announced, but we imagine that you'll be setting up racing tourneys with your friends in no time.

Despite the brilliant shine applied to the last *RalliSport*, Digital Illusions has updated the graphics engine, and is also adding new tracks, presentation, and Crossover Duels, where two cars race on the same enclosed track.

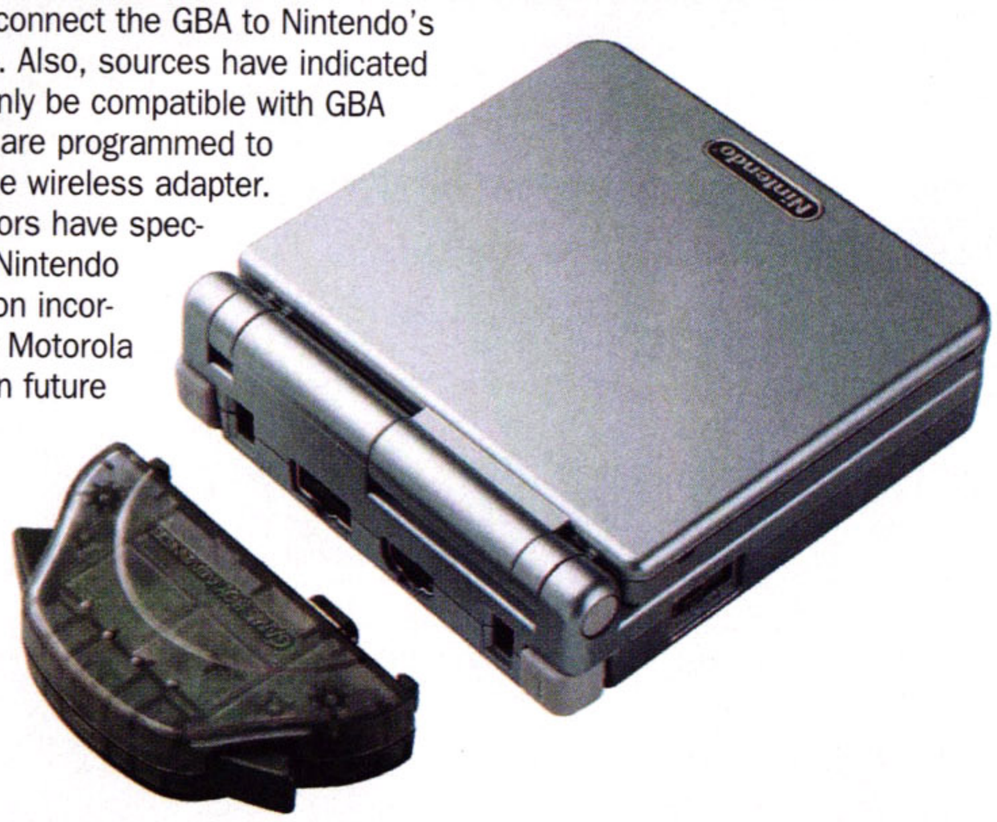
RalliSport Challenge 2 will appear in the spring of 2004.

MOTOROLA, NINTENDO TEAM FOR GBA WIRELESS

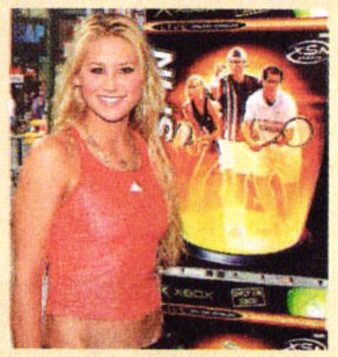
Recently, **Nintendo** announced that it has tapped the respected semiconductor manufacturer **Motorola** to create a wireless adapter for the ultra-successful **Game Boy Advance**. Scheduled to be released in the first half of 2004 in Japan, the device will come packed in with the much-anticipated ***Pokémon*** remakes ***FireRed*** and ***LeafGreen*** (***Blue*** in the U.S.). Purchased alone, the unit is expected to retail for around $40 (4800 yen).

The adapter will enable up to five GBA owners to engage in multiplayer games or trade data over the stable, 2.4GHz Industrial, Scientific, and Medical band. The RF chipset Motorola has designed to accomplish this drew praise from Nintendo general manager of R&D **Satoru Okada**, who commented, "Motorola's wireless chipset realized high-speed and low-power consumption. This is one of the most important solutions for portable gaming."

As of press time, there was no word as to whether the unit will also be used to connect the GBA to Nintendo's **GameCube**. Also, sources have indicated that it will only be compatible with GBA games that are programmed to work with the wireless adapter. Further rumors have speculated that Nintendo is planning on incorporating the Motorola technology in future handhelds.



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY



GOOD – **Anna Kournikova** pauses to promote **Microsoft's *Top Spin*** tennis game and to remind us to get a good grip on our rackets.

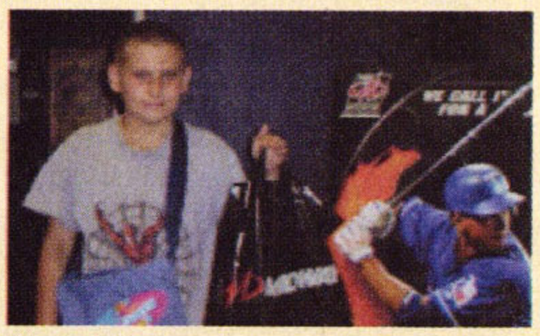
BAD – ***Treason of Isengard*** sucks. That's not our opinion, that's the reasoning behind the cancellation of the game, according to publisher **Vivendi Universal**. In a statement, the company told us, "the game was not shaping up as strongly as anticipated."

UGLY – **Nintendo** is hooking up with **AOL** to make it the preferred ISP for **GameCube** titles – and to give away the service's demo disc with the console. Nintendo has gone out of its way to declare that this move doesn't mean more online titles for the GameCube. Figures.

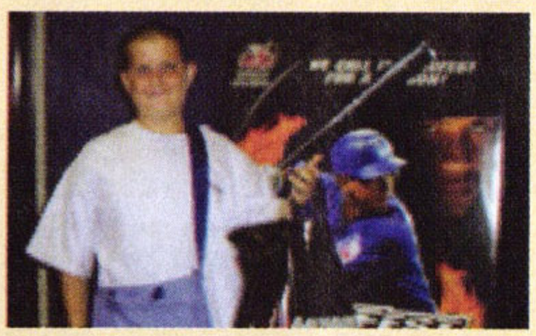
BAD – **Eidos** is abandoning the **GameCube** from now on. Also, the publisher won't put out the third installment of ***TimeSplitters***.

GOOD – In an ode to its past and fans, **Team Ninja's Tomonobu Itagaki** says that fully playable versions of the first three ***Ninja Gaiden*** titles on **NES** will be included in the **Xbox** iteration of the series.

GOOD – **Mark Miller** of Newark, DE and **Aaron Morris** from Whittier, CA are the proud winners of *Game Informer's* June **Nestle SweeTARTS** Gummy Bugs contest. For submitting their winning game ideas, the pair enjoyed a day at **Midway's Game Development Studio**. Congratulations.



Mark Miller



Aaron Morris

LOOSE TALK

If loose lips are spraying hot video game gossip, we're sucking up the secret saliva and drooling it all over this section. Got a secret to tell? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

Atari's *Dragon Ball Z* games have been applauded by fans for their accuracy in dealing with the animated television show. *Loose Talk* has heard a rumor that the creators of the games are now looking to apply their expertise to other, more mature animated franchises.

What does **Nintendo** have up its sleeve? According to comments made recently by president **Satoru Iwata**, the company has something it plans to announce next spring (see GI issue #126). The buzz going around is that this new product is definitely hardware, and could either be a handheld to compete with **Sony's** upcoming **PSP** or an all-new console. *Loose Talk* has heard that developers can expect to see dev kits for the new mystery hardware by next year.

Also on the Nintendo front, rumor has it that the company is preparing a **Zelda** disc that includes the following: ***The Legend of Zelda***, ***Zelda II: The Adventure of Link***, ***Ocarina of Time***, ***Majora's Mask***, and a Zelda documentary. This may be part of a **GameCube** bundle or offered separately.

After forgettable titles like ***Starsky & Hutch*** and ***The Great Escape*** (there's nothing great about it), **Take-Two** may be pulling the plug on its subsidiary **Gotham Games**. Not only have these two crashed and burned, but another one of its "marquee" titles, ***MTV's Celebrity Death Match***, has been delayed numerous times and is now pushed to the side as a budget game. This speculation comes on the heels of Gotham Games president **Jamie Leece's** recent resignation.

This is where
I spun out of control.

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VIDEO GAME **TRIVIA**

Let's face it – you're no Calvin Klein model. In fact, when you were a kid, your mom had to tie a steak around your neck so the dog would play with you. But fret not; that doesn't mean you can't be successful. Just look at the NBA. It's full of odd-looking gentlemen, and they're all millionaires! Take this month's trivia quiz, and find out which hoop hero should be your idol.

Question 1: Bizarre Creations made an Amiga title in 1990 which was based on a futuristic TV show. The premise had players trying to escape huge rooms before deadly liquid filled them, killing you. It was later brought to the Genesis by EA, under the new name Fatal Rewind. What was its original title?

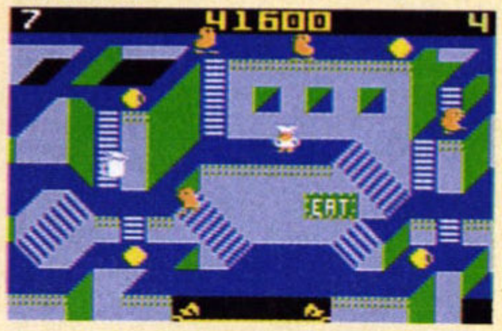
A. Ratings Renegade
B. Future Shock
C. The Killing Game Show
D. Max Capacity

Question 2: Our own Kato may be the Game Katana, but which console had the code-name of Katana?

A. Sega Saturn
B. Sega Dreamcast
C. Neo Geo Pocket Color
D. NEC PC/FX

Question 3: Burgertime was an arcade classic. A sequel was made featuring cherries and deadly root beer, but was exclusive to the Intellivision. What was its name?

A. Just Desserts
B. Lunch Hour
C. Dinnertime
D. Diner



Question 4: The Battletoads were a trio of face-smashing frogs who starred in an incredibly difficult NES classic, developed by Rare. Which of the following was not the name of one of the 'Toads?

A. Hive
B. Pimple
C. Rash
D. Zits

Question 5: Williams' late-eighties arcade game NARC starred a pair of heavily armored drug enforcement agents. What was the evil cartel they were fighting against called?

A. DOPE
B. The "Say Yes" Express
C. KRAK
D. The Ill-Eagles

Question 6: Sony released a semi-sequel to PaRappa the Rapper, Um Jammer Lammy, about a guitar-playing sheep gal. A few of the songs were changed between Japan and American versions, because they were deemed too controversial for the game. Which of the following is an example of a lyric that was changed?

A. The lumberjack sings, "Chop all of 'em down, every single one of 'em down," in reference to trees
B. The fire-fighting dog sings, "Kids shouldn't smoke; the fire makes you choke"
C. The impoverished Chop Chop Master Onion laments "selling my blood to pay my debts"
D. The baby screams, "I wanna suckle; I want my milk!" to Lammy expectantly

Question 7: Early Sega game icon Alex Kidd visited several odd locales in his Sega Master System days. Which place did he never set foot in?

A. Miracle World
B. Prehistoric World
C. Shinobi World
D. High Tech World

Question 8: The popular alternative rock band Soundgarden loaned its song "Rusty Cage," off the album *Badmotorfinger*, to what video game?

A. Dead To Rights
B. Road Rash
C. Rollcage
D. Thrill Kill

Question 9: Knuckles' Chaotix, the 32X extension of the Sonic series, introduced a new armadillo character. What was his name?

A. Mighty
B. Aggro
C. Duke
D. Flex

Question 10: Abe, star of the Oddworld games, is what kind of creature?

A. Muglok
B. Tronkin
C. Scrab
D. Mudokan

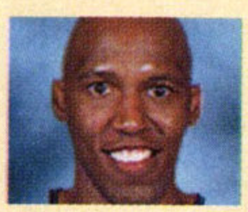
Score & Rank

0-1 Cherokee Parks

2-3 Jamal Mashburn

4-5 Vlade Divac

6-7 Scottie Pippen


8-9 Popeye Jones

10 Sam Cassell

Video Game Trivia Answers:

1.C 2.B 3.D 4.A 5.C 6.A 7.B 8.B 9.A 10.D

NINA'S TEKKEN BOARDS THE PS2 LOVE BOAT

Nina from the **Namco** fighting franchise ***Tekken*** is striking out on her own in a self-titled 3D **PlayStation 2** game due sometime in late 2004. *Nina* is currently about 30 percent complete, and will feature Ms. Williams in brand new territory for the company.

A secret terrorist operation called the Camietta is holding an underground fighting tournament aboard a luxury liner (where's Julie the cruise director?). Nina enters the competition undercover to infiltrate this nefarious organization's plans – and to get a tan. Players will spend their time roaming around the boat, abusing the wait staff and beating up baddies.

Nina has several weapons at her disposal beyond her hand-to-hand skills. These include being able to wield two guns or swords at once. She can also charge up a blast strike special attack that devastates all in a radius around her. If these methods don't work, she can use stealth to uncover and foil Camietta's plans. *Nina* will also feature appearences by *Tekken's* Dr. Boskonovitch, as well as others.

BREAK**DOWN**

17% of gamers are over the age of 50, according to a study by the Entertainment Software Association (formerly the IDSA). The report also found that women over 18 represented 26% of gamers

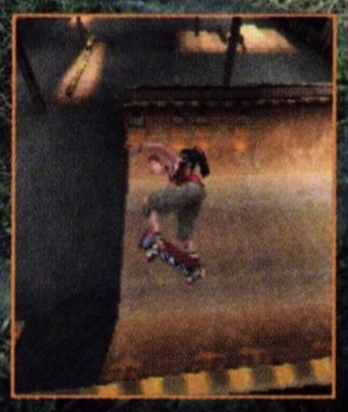
83% of the time, parents are involved in video game purchases or rentals of their children, says the Entertainment Software Association

75% of the staff post regularly on the Game Informer Online forums

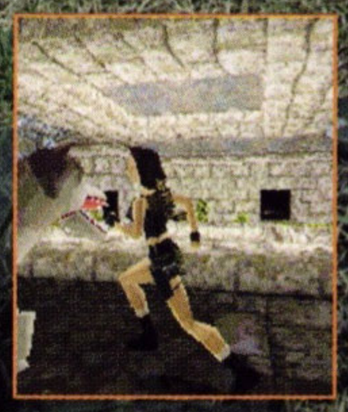
12% of the editors confessed to preferring Bon Jovi over Stevie Ray Vaughan. The rest confess to liking neither

0% of our time is spent playing our GameCubes online

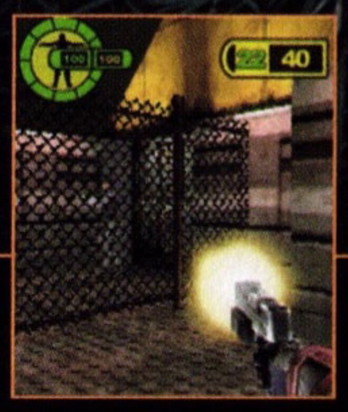
This is where
I came back to life.



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater®



Tomb Raider



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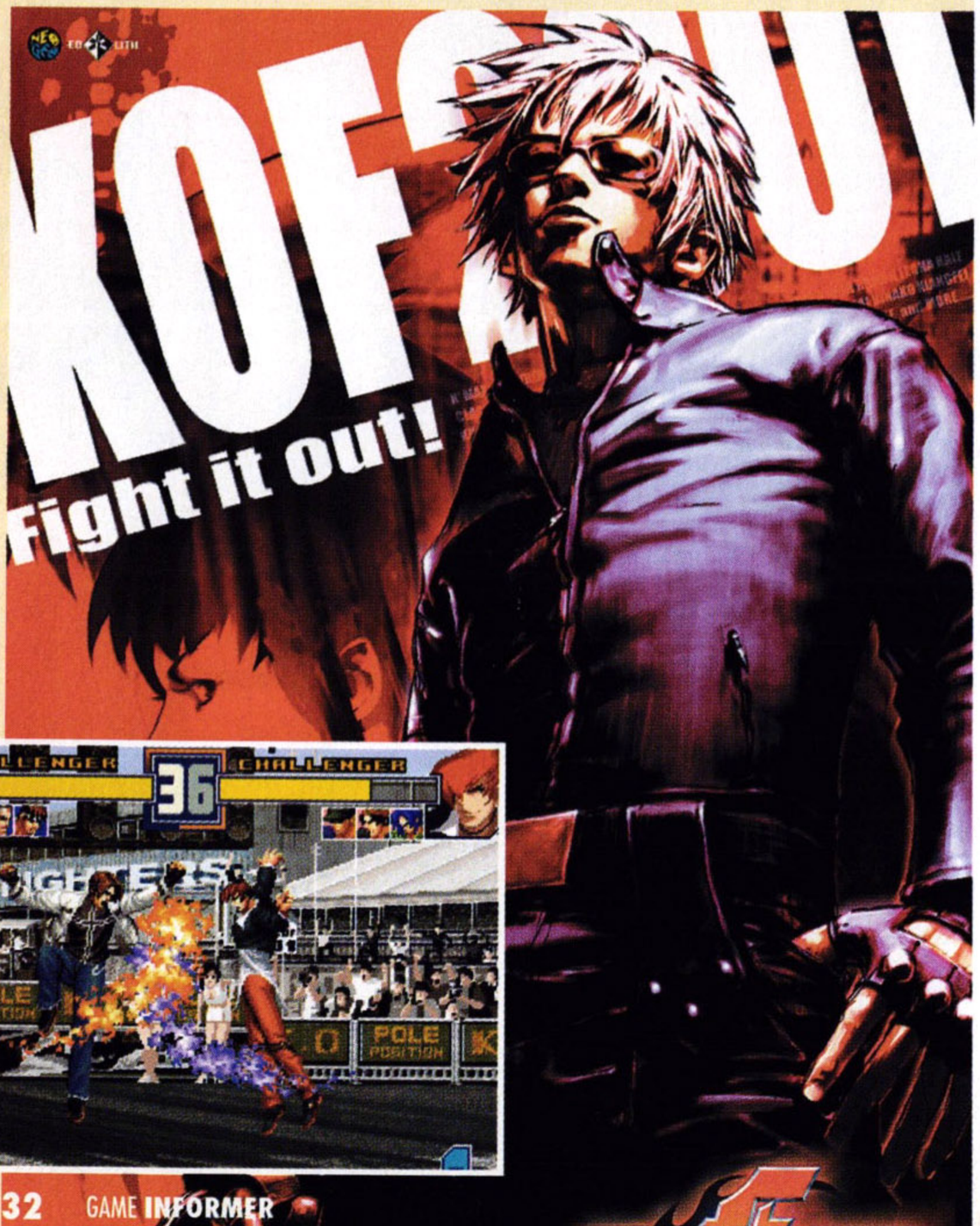
THE LEGENDS RETURN

The dramatic exploits of shirtless men is a timeless hobby, and **Acclaim** is back to give you more of what you want with ***Legends of Wrestling: Showdown*** for unspecified next-gen consoles next spring. This third iteration of the series sports an all-new developer and engine, while still retaining all the action of yesteryear's wrestling greats – including **Jake "The Snake" Roberts, Bobby "The Brain" Heenan, and the British Bulldogs**. In total, the game will feature a roster of over 70 old-school grapplers.

Also along for the ride this time around are improved controls and more classic venues. Add on top of this more of the DVD interviews, and it looks like Acclaim may be gaining some serious ground on **THQ** in the video wrestling arms race.

KING OF FIGHTERS RECLAIMS THRONE

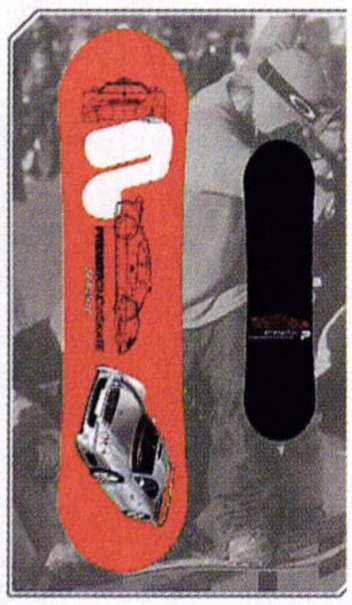
We were all sad when long-time arcade/**NeoGeo** developer and publisher **SNK** closed its doors in Japan. However, the company is more or less back after bankruptcy. **SNK NeoGeo USA** has announced its first release: a **PlayStation 2** combo pack dubbed ***The King of Fighters 2000 & 2001***. These two games originally appeared on the **NeoGeo Pocket Color** handheld, and this re-release coming out in November will feature such improvements as new modes, strikers, and movies. Also, *KOF 2001* contains original 3D stages. In the future, the company is planning multiple *King of Fighters* games for the PlayStation 2 (including one in 3D), as well as a new ***Metal Slug*** titles for both that system and the **Game Boy Advance**.



CONTEST

SNOWSKATE OR DIE!

Being able to snowskate in Microsoft's Amped 2 for Xbox is one of the game's best moments, as you free yourself from the shackles of a regular snowboard and bust tricks never before seen on snow. Game Informer, in conjunction with the good people at Premier Snowskate, is here to give away a JP Walker signature series snowskate to one lucky winner. Then you can hit the hills, bust some sweet tricks, biff a few, have to wear one of those foam neck braces, and we can all laugh. Just kidding.



Grand Prize (1)

One grand prize winner will receive a JP Walker signature series snowskate from Premier Snowskate.

- 36" length
- 8.75" width
- 7 Ply wood/dual pressed/ CNC construction
- P-Tex 2000 Base/marine grade resin
- 6lb concaved top sheet
- 2-4-1 compatible

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(1) Send a POSTCARD with your NAME, ADDRESS, & TELEPHONE NUMBER to:

GI's Snowskate
Game Informer Magazine
724 N. 1ST ST. 4TH FLOOR
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55401

(2) Send an EMAIL with your NAME, ADDRESS & TELEPHONE NUMBER to:

snowskate@gameinformer.com

Your name will be placed in a pool of valid entrants for a random drawing to be conducted on January 6, 2004.

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DATA FILE

➤ This **Pokémon** thing won't die! **Nintendo** plans to re-release ***Pokémon: Fire Red*** and ***Pokémon Leaf Green***. The pair are **Game Boy Advance** remakes of ***Red*** and ***Green*** from 1996. These new titles can be linked with ***Pokémon Ruby*** and ***Sapphire***, as well as the upcoming ***Pokémon Coliseum*** for **GameCube**.

➤ ***Dragon Quest*** creator **Akira Toriyama** recently made waves in Japan when he announced that the franchise's classic slime monster would receive its own **Game Boy Advance** treatment in the future.

➤ To celebrate its contract with **Nokia's N-Gage**, **EA Sports** says it will put out ***NCAA Football*** for the handheld/mobile phone by the end of this year.

➤ **Snoop Dogg** is lending an original song to **Activision's** ***True Crime: Streets of LA*** title. We hear Snoop's officially clean, which could be a detriment.

➤ Oh, James! **EA** has shaken and stirred the release date for ***James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing***, moving it to early 2004. Maybe the team needed more time to render every inch of star **Shannon Elizabeth**.

➤ **Nintendo** fans shouldn't look for ***Pikmin 2*** in their stockings. The game has been officially delayed all the way until next summer.

➤ Sure to win the Oscar for Best Female Lead While Mounting a Nazi is ***BloodRayne***. The video game's movie rights just got picked up by the Boll KG production company – the people behind the ***House of the Dead*** and ***Alone in the Dark*** film adaptations.

➤ **Codemasters** has confirmed a sequel to ***Pro Race Driver*** for **Xbox** and **PC**. ***Race Driver 2: The Ultimate Racing Simulator*** is set to appear in 2004, and will utilize **Xbox Live**.

➤ A Japanese company has created a peripheral that will make the **Game Boy Advance** capable of video conferencing once hooked up to a telephone line. However, like the whiskey bottle vending machines in Japan, this one will probably not make it to the U.S.

➤ **Epic Games**, makers of ***Unreal Tournament*** (and its engine), have signed a several year deal to make titles exclusively for **Xbox** and **PC**.

Name That Game Answer:

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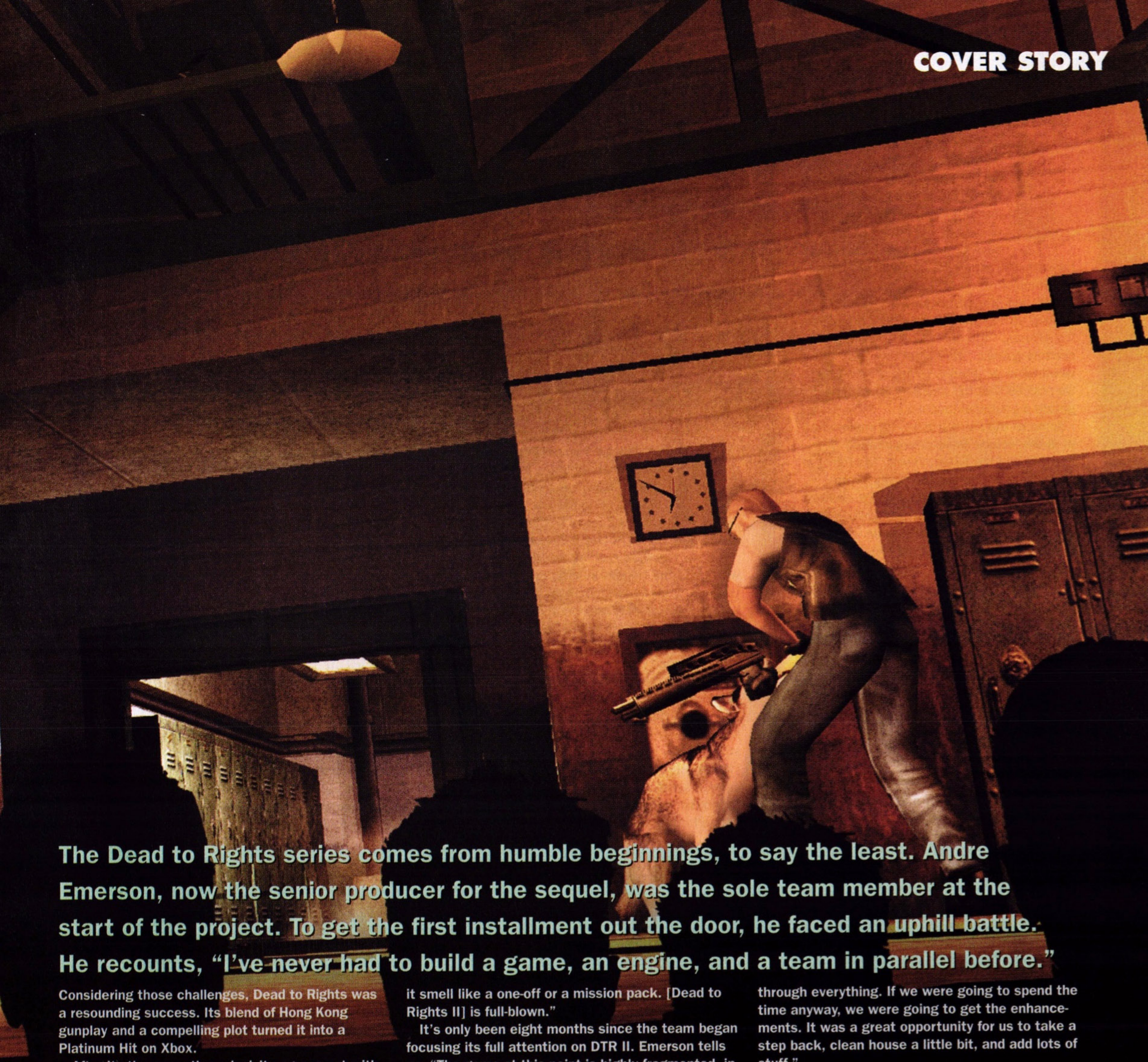
Dead to Rights II

Hell to Pay

A SEQUEL WITH A CLEAN SLATE



The Dead to Rights series comes from humble beginnings, to say the least. Andre Emerson, now the senior producer for the sequel, was the sole team member at the start of the project. To get the first installment out the door, he faced an uphill battle. He recounts, "I've never had to build a game, an engine, and a team in parallel before."

Considering those challenges, Dead to Rights was a resounding success. Its blend of Hong Kong gunplay and a compelling plot turned it into a Platinum Hit on Xbox.

After its three-month exclusivity agreement with Microsoft ended, an updated version hit GameCube and PlayStation 2 (where it's qualified for Greatest Hit status). Namco showed its commitment to the series, as well as its open ear to feedback, by tweaking the later ports. Emerson says, "It's the first time I ever had the opportunity to ship a product, get feedback, and do something with that feedback quickly for another release."

When the time came for a sequel, Emerson and the team wanted to do it right the first time. He tells us, "We could've put together 10 or 12 new areas and said, 'Here's a new dilemma for the character,' but we feel so strongly about Jack Slate and the DTR franchise that we didn't want to have it smell like a one-off or a mission pack. [Dead to Rights II] is full-blown."

It's only been eight months since the team began focusing its full attention on DTR II. Emerson tells us, "The game at this point is highly fragmented, in a sense that we're still at the phase where artists, designers, programmers are working on building the core mechanics and core assets [for the] game. We're just starting to get the art, the code, and the programming playing nice in one place."

The team of 30 – considered small for a triple-A title – is focused on improving every aspect of the precursor. This meant scrapping their old engine, which wasn't up to snuff with the plans they had for Jack Slate's further adventures. The new engine means every iota of coding from the original had to be redone. Turning a negative into a positive, Emerson says, "We took the development hit of knowing we had to rewrite things, and went through everything. If we were going to spend the time anyway, we were going to get the enhancements. It was a great opportunity for us to take a step back, clean house a little bit, and add lots of stuff."

That's saying a lot, since Dead to Rights was chock full of gameplay. The goal, as Emerson states, was to "create a game that had a gigantic toolbox of gameplay mechanics that the player could creatively jump in, pick the tool they want, and deal with the situation." Of course, every one of these gameplay mechanics is in place for a very specific reason: to help Jack kick ass and look good doing it. In Dead to Rights II, all of the tools have been shined up and enhanced with some new parts. What's more, Namco has constructed a host of novel new predicaments to use them in. Following is a look at every one that we got our grubby little hands on.

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2/XBOX ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** NAMCO ■ **DEVELOPER** NAMCO ■ **RELEASE** FALL 2004

FIREARMS

"MAKING FRESH MEAT CHUNKS"

Jack is a man of few words. So, instead of shooting his mouth off, he prefers to blow enemies' heads off. DTR II gives him many firearms for that purpose. All of these guns fit one of these distinct poses: one-handed, two-handed, rifle, shotgun, shoulder-mounted, and minigun.

Each one is accompanied by real-time lighting on the guns themselves, as well as the effects. "You don't see it that often in console games," chimes in Emerson, as he devastates an enemy. During the firefight, we noticed that the muzzle flashes have also gotten a graphical touchup.

Some of the more interesting implements of death include the aforementioned minigun and the flamethrower. The minigun is anything but small, and really slows Jack down when it's equipped. For obvious reasons, he's not able to dive while carrying it. The flamethrower spews fire in impressive fashion, and turns bad guys into flaming lumps of coal. However, as Emerson helpfully points out, any of the guns can be used to make "fresh meat chunks."

Non-firearms add some strategy to the fray. The Molotov cocktail is like the explosive canisters in DTR, except they blow up when they hit the ground. If you shoot them in flight, however, you'll cause damage around the cocktail's radius. The game also has two types of mines – explosive and flechette. The explosive mines are self-explanatory; the flechette variety send out a deadly mixture of nails, bolts, and other shrapnel in all directions. Jack will generally want to avoid them, but they too can be turned against an enemy. You can step on mines just fine; it's when you get off of them that the trouble starts. You have about a second to get out of the way, but they'll take out any nearby enemies rather effectively.

The only thing mini about this gun is the pieces of flesh it leaves behind. Pay no attention the urinating dog, 'tis merely an illusion

TARGETING

"TAKING IT UP ANOTHER LEVEL"

Namco was a pioneer in color-coded auto-targeting in the first Dead to Rights. Now, the team thinks it's time to raise the bar. In DTR II, different factors affect the quality of the lock-on. For example, if you're running around, your shots won't hit their targets as effectively as if you're in a stationary position. If you lay on the trigger, your aim will become more and more off. The crosshairs may pull back a bit, or get downgraded a color.

The variance of lock-on quality changes is different for each weapon. An M4 recovers quickly, so it can be fired for a long time without losing accuracy. The minigun, however, won't hit the broad side of a barn unless you stay still and only shoot a few rounds at a time. "It'll encourage people to use burst fire for various types of weapons," says Emerson. "Just locking-on and pressing a button till they die doesn't cut it anymore."

Another new aspect of the targeting is the critical hit cursor. Get an enemy in red-target range, and a cursor starts going around the circle. Once it makes a revolution around the target, you can execute a special shot. Emerson fills us in, "Whether it's decapitation or just blowing someone apart or maybe a guy gets so devastated he takes his own life; we'll definitely do cool things with the criticals."

The cursor's speed, like the targeting accuracy, depends on movement. It fills fastest if you're crouching and still. Second fastest is if you're stationary but standing. Then comes crouching and walking, walking, then running. If you back out of range, everything resets.

The Adrenaline meter, which is used to instigate slow-motion, comes into play for manual targeting. You can go into the first-person view, activate it, and everyone else will slow down. This gives you more time to set up crucial shots, for example against an enemy with body armor or a thug holding a hostage.

"How dost thou kill, flechette mine? Let me count the ways."

WHO IS

In the first DTR, we got to witness the birth of Jack Slate as an action hero. However, it's no coincidence that he so easily slides into the role of bad-ass, John Woo-firing killer. Jack definitely has a past – one that's rooted in the U.S. Army Special Forces, but goes much deeper than that.

Hell To Pay takes place one-and-a-half years after the first game, but shows events that both preceded and followed the original. One of Jack's few friends, Preacher-Man Jones, gets in trouble in DTR II, and Jack's not one to sit by and let a pal suffer. Mike Kennedy, who wrote the sequel's

"Unhand her, Principal Vickers! She wasn't lying when she said the dog ate her science project."

HUMAN SHIELD

"THE BRUTAL DISMISSAL"

Nothing preserves the sanctity of Jack's life like grabbing a baddie and holding him out in front of you. Obviously, after he's outlived his usefulness, you can always put a bullet in his brain. Of course, the team has dreamt up a bevy of new, slightly disturbing execution moves. That isn't the big news, however. We may have ruined the surprise with the pictures on this page, but enemies will now take human shields of their own. This is one of the new elements that will keep you from just running into a room with guns blazing. If you take out an innocent hostage, you will automatically fail the mission.

"Jack's quests are about morally good stuff. If he kills five civilians to save one, it throws things out of whack," reasons Emerson. "That's just part of his own mission parameters. He won't kill or harm civilians or innocents." To avoid collateral damage, you have to use that nifty manual targeting we talked about before to take out the hostage-taker, and there will be much rejoicing.

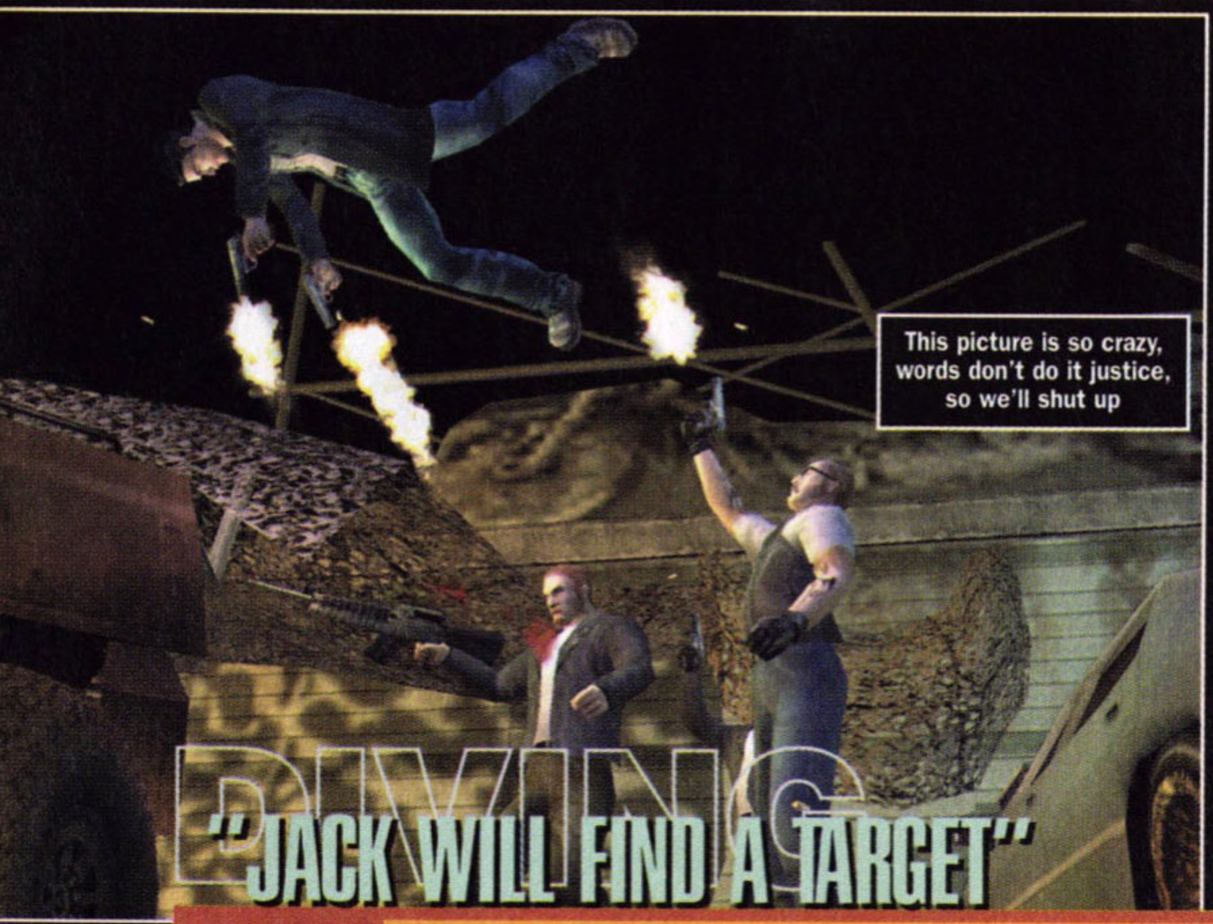
Oh, to be that man's leg...er, um, this is an example of the Adrenaline manual targeting is what we meant to say

JACK?

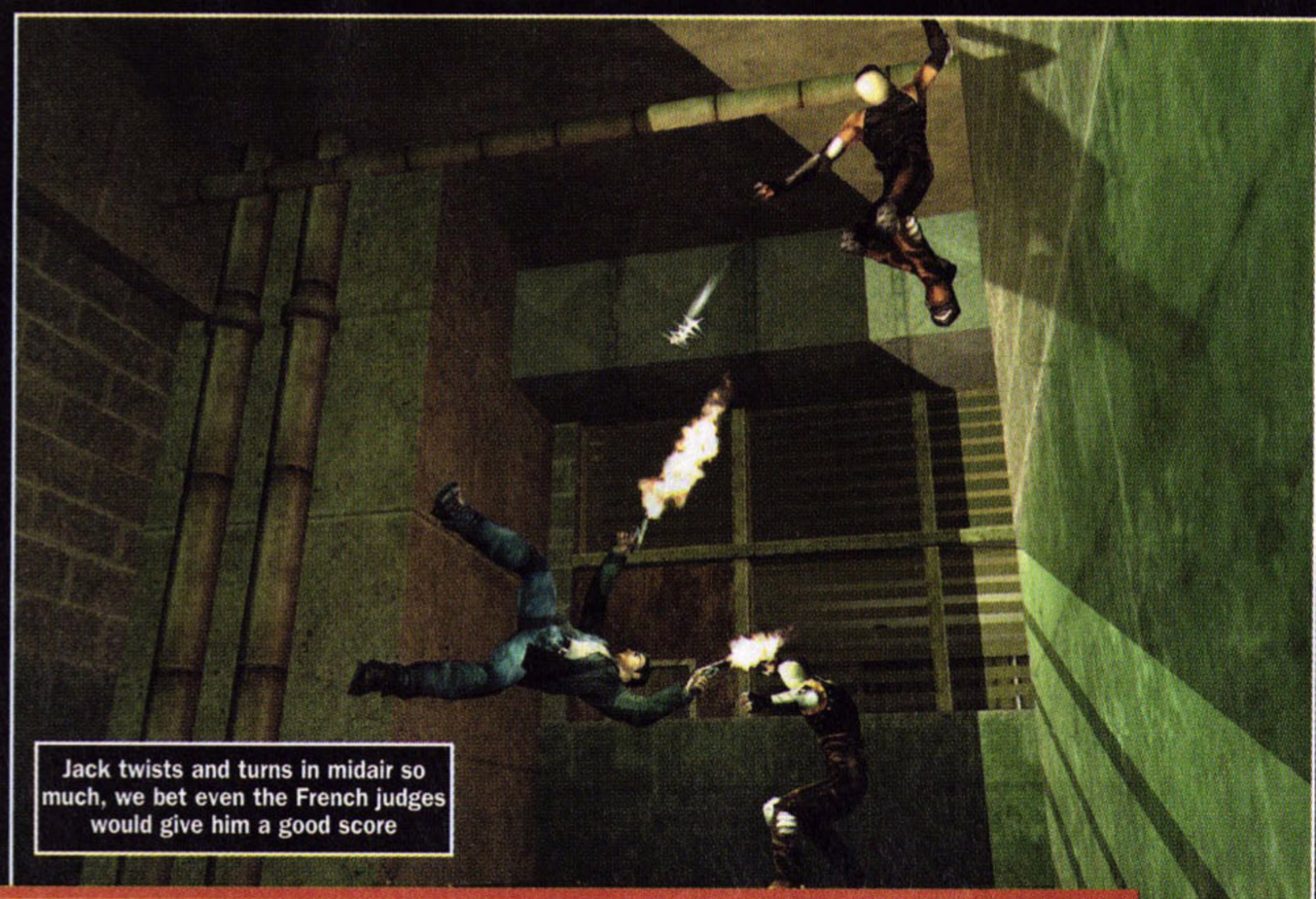
script, says, "Jack's not looking for trouble; he's reacting to it."

Emerson concurs, saying, "You're killing your way to the truth. In Jack's world, that's the only way he gets truth. Nobody's volunteering information."

As far as the origins of the character, Emerson says he wanted to combine the gracefulness of a Chow Yun Fat with the North American appeal of a John McClane. "I think he's a good hybrid of power and grace," he tells us. "I've seen a lot of heroes – whether it be in film or games – try to get that balance, and one or the other feels a bit clunky. In many ways, he's kind or the opposite of James Bond. Bond tries to get in, get out, maybe meet a girl and hopefully not get any blood on his shirt. Jack, no matter how much he tries, can't help but make a big noise wherever he goes."



This picture is so crazy, words don't do it justice, so we'll shut up



Jack twists and turns in midair so much, we bet even the French judges would give him a good score

DIVING "JACK WILL FIND A TARGET"

Diving is one of the great mechanics for this console generation's action games. Few things are more gratifying than leaping out from behind a wall and capping some asses. The first Dead to Rights let Jack dive forward, backward, and side to side – all in slo-mo. Emerson illustrates the problem with this mechanic: "If you passed your target, you were screwed." Thus, Hell to Pay features a brilliant new 360-degree system with dives.

Basically, when you dive, Jack will contort his body to pick up on and blast targets. This could mean arching his back on a backwards dive or tucking under and shooting behind him. Says Emerson, "The goal was to make sure that, if anyone was to do a dive ever, and they are holding a weapon that is in range, it's going to work and you're going to be cool."

This isn't an easy process. One guy on the team has the unenviable task of making the 360-degree dive work. How does he do this? Emerson explains, "There's so much code going on with blending. We basically created lots of positions for Jack. His arms move independently; his torso moves independently. There's code that tells him when he has to quit and tuck-and-roll. There's code for how much time he has. We've got every direction covered, so if you run past this guy, you're going to reach back and get him." Even this early, the effect is stunning.

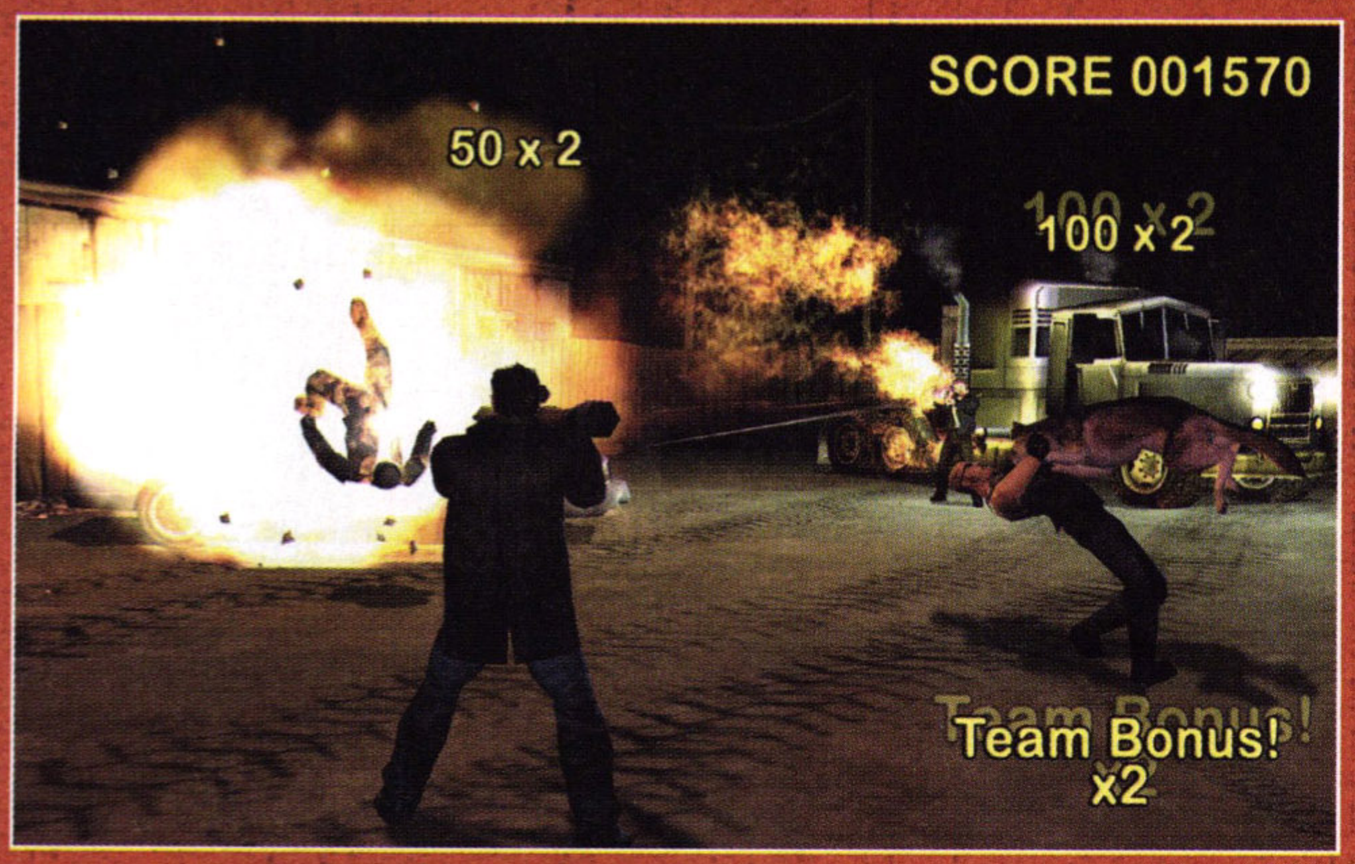
Since the levels are designed with elevation in mind, you'll be able to take massive, two-story leaps. Also, dives have become a regular navigating move. You can dive over things, or use it to cross over large gaps – which comes in handy in the rooftop stage.

PLAYING WITH REPLAY

Emerson knows full well the Achilles' heel of plot-driven action games. He tells us, "You play through it like a movie and know the story; why play again?" Because of this concern, DTR II will have two additional modes – both designed to add replay and keep the game disc in your console even after you've beaten it.

Arcade mode is the first. It takes the normal game, but removes the story elements and cinematic sequences. Instead, you cruise through the levels (all of the stages are included), and try to amass as many points as possible through them. Says Emerson, "Everything Jack can do is assigned a point value. There are special multipliers and bonuses, too."

For instance, every time you plainly shoot a foe, you may get five points. Use a slo-mo dive, and you'll get more. Take out multiple targets in one dive, and that will be a multiplier. Make that dive from atop a stack of boxes, and you'll be rewarded a bonus for elevation. Get the picture?



Through repetition and experimentation in Arcade mode, you'll find new ways to get more points. This takes things that may have just been used to show off to your friends in the normal mode, and gives you a reason to do them. When you have a score that you're proud of, enter it into an Internet leader board and see how you rate. This may open up a sense of community, too, as gamers share their strategies and stories of their top-scoring accomplishments. Also, high scores may unlock extras.

The second is called Challenge Mode. These are specially designed missions that don't have to follow the parameters of Grant City. Most of the challenges will be designed later in the development cycle, when the core game is complete, but Emerson says they've come up with about 15 good ones so far. Parameters may be looking for a specific person in a crowd, and having to use first-person targeting to find their tattoo so you don't kill the wrong target. Some have gotten as goofy as covering yourself in tar and rolling around in feathers. Though no set number has been given, the team definitely wants enough to constitute an entire mode. More challenges could easily be added through online download to keep the content coming.

"Our goal for DTR 2 is we want to make it a library title," says Emerson. "We want you to show it to your friends. We want you to have fun with it for a long time. These games are $50. You have a lot of kids and adults where $50 is a huge investment. You want something that you can pull out of the closet three months from now and have some fun with it."

MELEE WEAPONS

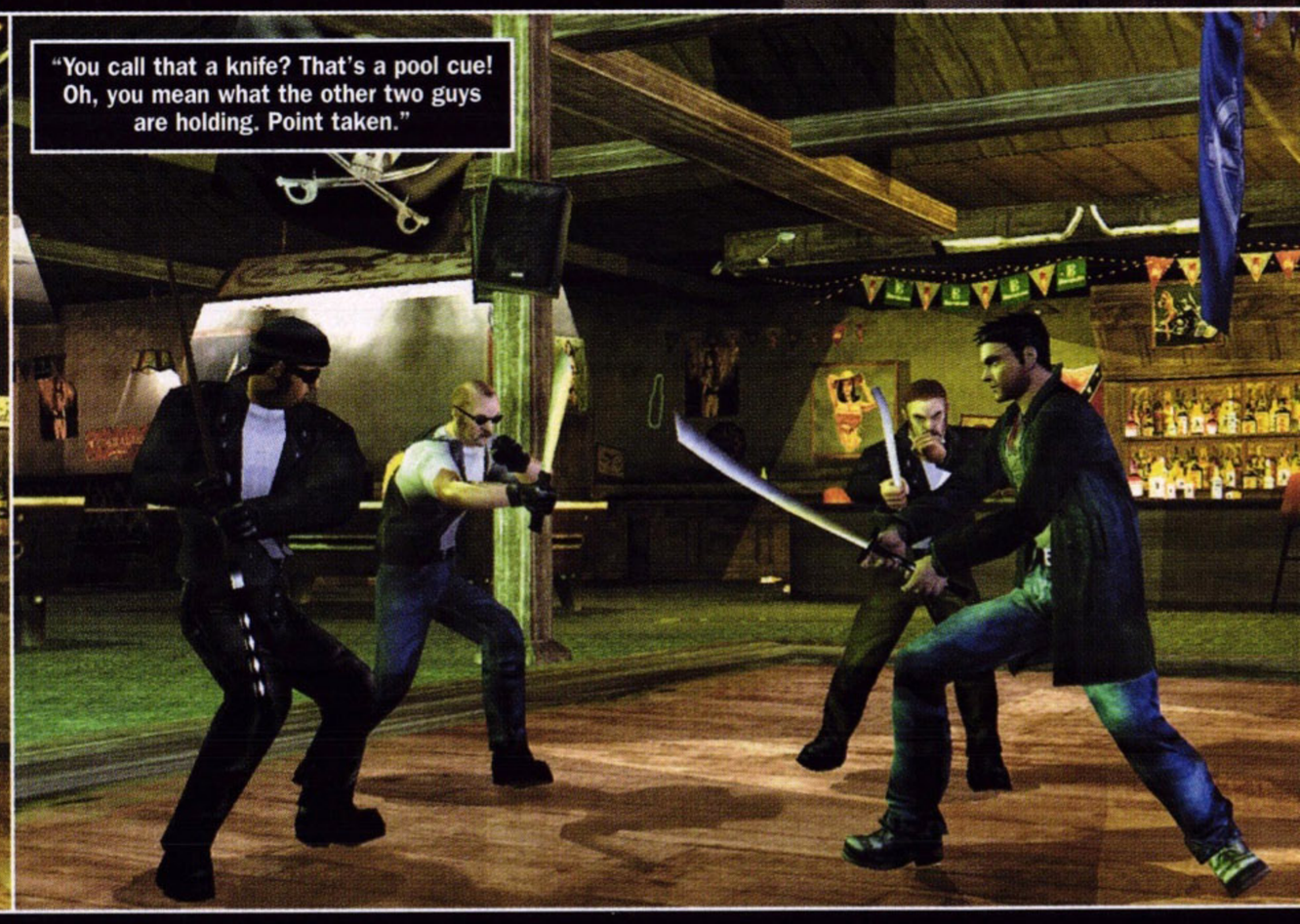
"UNIQUE FEEL"

Without a gun, Jack's still far from defenseless. DTR II is loaded with melee weapons for up-close and personal fighting. Like with firearms, there are certain poses: one-handed, two-handed, and swords. The creative juices are currently flowing as the team designs a bountiful list of items to fall into each of those categories. There are shovels, wrenches, and lamps – oh, my! "We let the artists have fun with it," says Emerson. "I laughed the first time someone chased me with the Jason ax."

Each melee weapon will have its own attributes. For example, Jack holds a baseball bat and a golf club the same way. However, the golf club's speed is increased to reflect its lighter weight. Conversely, the bat will cause more damage when it connects. They all have combos – some unique to the weapon – and all attacks can be charged for more damage. Also, there will be some custom blocks. The team is experimenting with giving hit points to the weapons, so if a two-handed pool cue breaks for example, you can still use the remaining part of it as a one-handed device.

Swords are a science in themselves. With these deadly blades in hand, Jack can take out almost any adversary. To really get your point across, you can execute a finishing move like jumping up and planting your sword into the torso of a downed foe.

This ain't *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*, and we don't hear any "Tequila"



"You call that a knife? That's a pool cue! Oh, you mean what the other two guys are holding. Point taken."

HAND TO HAND COMBAT

"A MORE CHOREOGRAPHED LOOK"

The team admits that the hand-to-hand fighting in DTR wasn't going to win any awards. It worked and provided some compelling battles, but depth was a little limited – especially in comparison to the gunplay. Rather than nix this aspect from of the sequel, Namco has set forth to fix the problems.

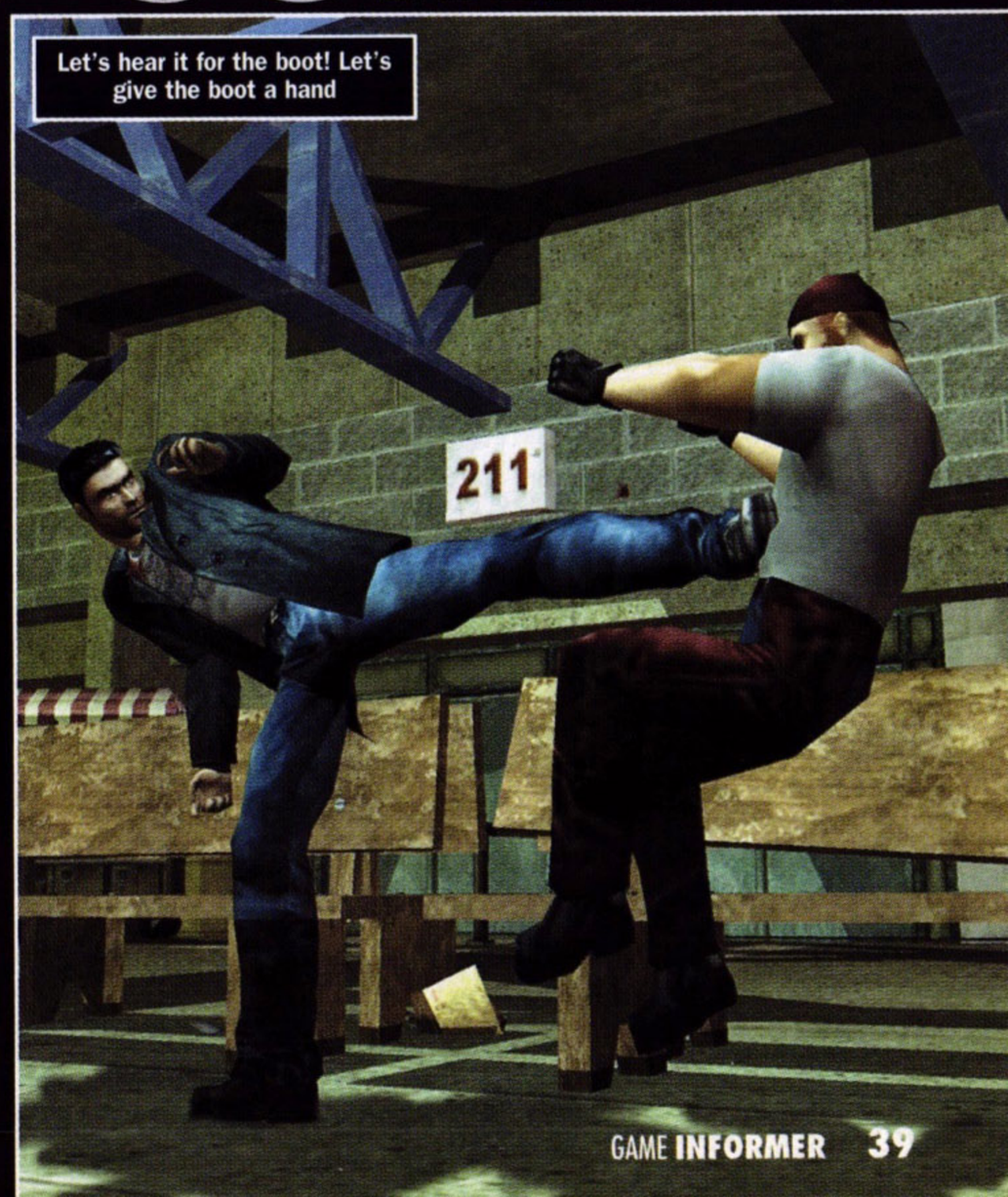
The unarmed combat system, like the diving, now encompasses 360 degrees of movement. This means that Jack can defend himself from multiple bad guys with ease. If you're facing away from an enemy, Jack will throw a sidekick or a backfist to get himself turned towards his foe again. Being surrounded is a hairy situation for both gamer and developer, but Emerson tells us, "If you're focused on a guy, our code helps keep you lined up with who you're facing. If you do a transition attack and don't want to face that new enemy, you can just point the direction to that old enemy to keep facing the original target."

Jack's arsenal of attacks is much larger. Combos have exponentially increased, and none of them will require you to press the same button more than twice in a row. Combos are all step-through and exhibit weight shifts, meaning they will flow more naturally and realistically like actual martial arts.

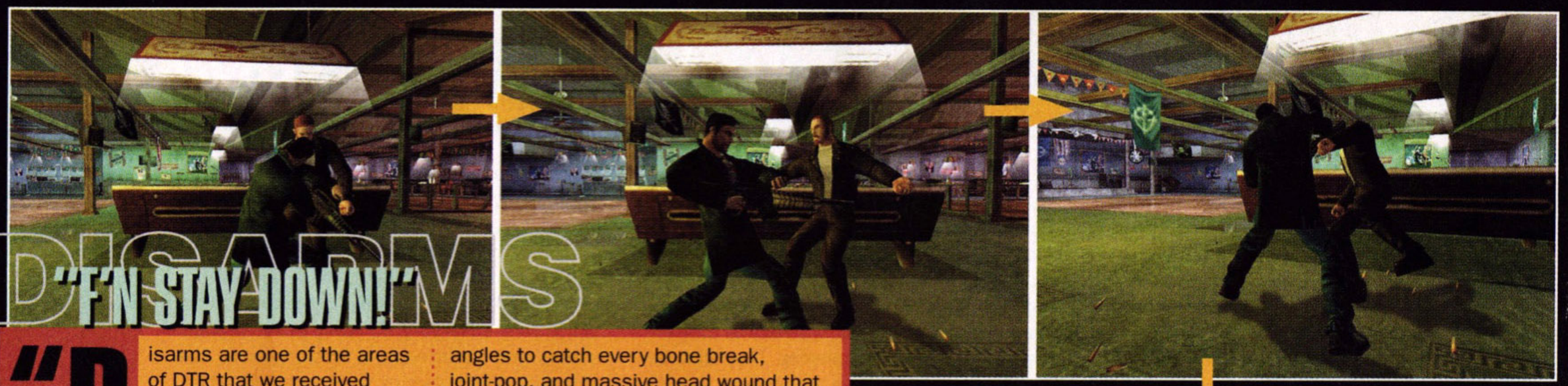
There are different attacks for running, or when an enemy is already down on the ground. Also, as with melee weapons, attacks can be charged up. Many times, this results in temporary *Matrix*-style slowdown. Emerson says, "It's a gratuity, but it also lets you know the immediate space is clear."

Throws are more advanced now, too. You can pick up an evildoer and carry them around a bit before tossing them. Wait too long, however, and he'll break the hold. Tossing one guy into a group will likely knock everyone over.

Fights aren't all about offense. Enemies throw punches too, you know. We'll let Emerson break down blocking: "In a lot of fighting games, you get in a block pose, and it just scoots you back. We want Jack to have dramatic blocks, so when you're playing more defensively, you're not this boring avatar. We want all of Jack's blocks to have a lot of motion, so fights have a more choreographed look."



Let's hear it for the boot! Let's give the boot a hand



DISARMS

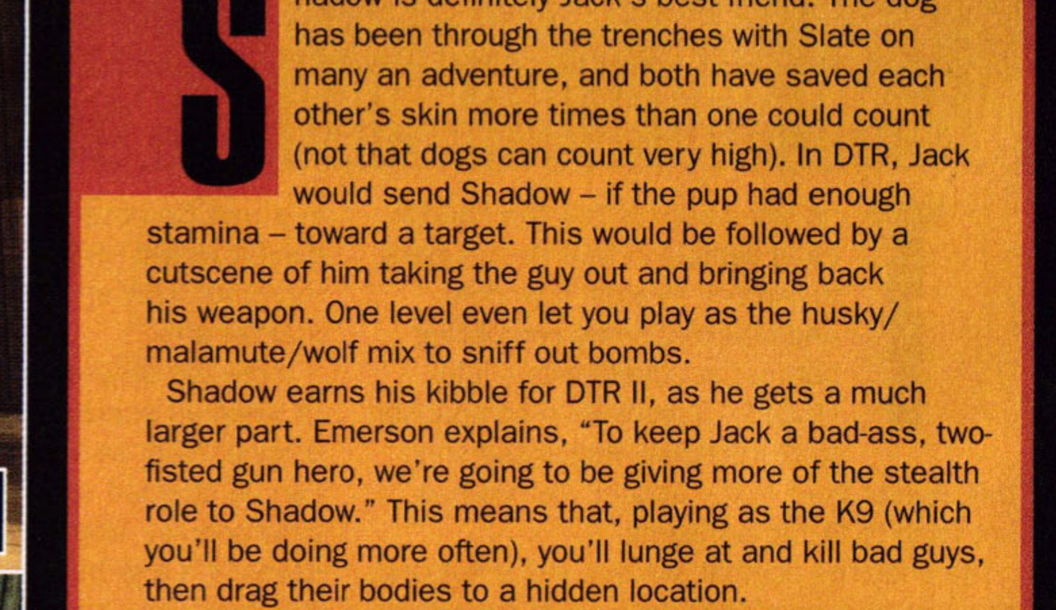
"F'N STAY DOWN!"

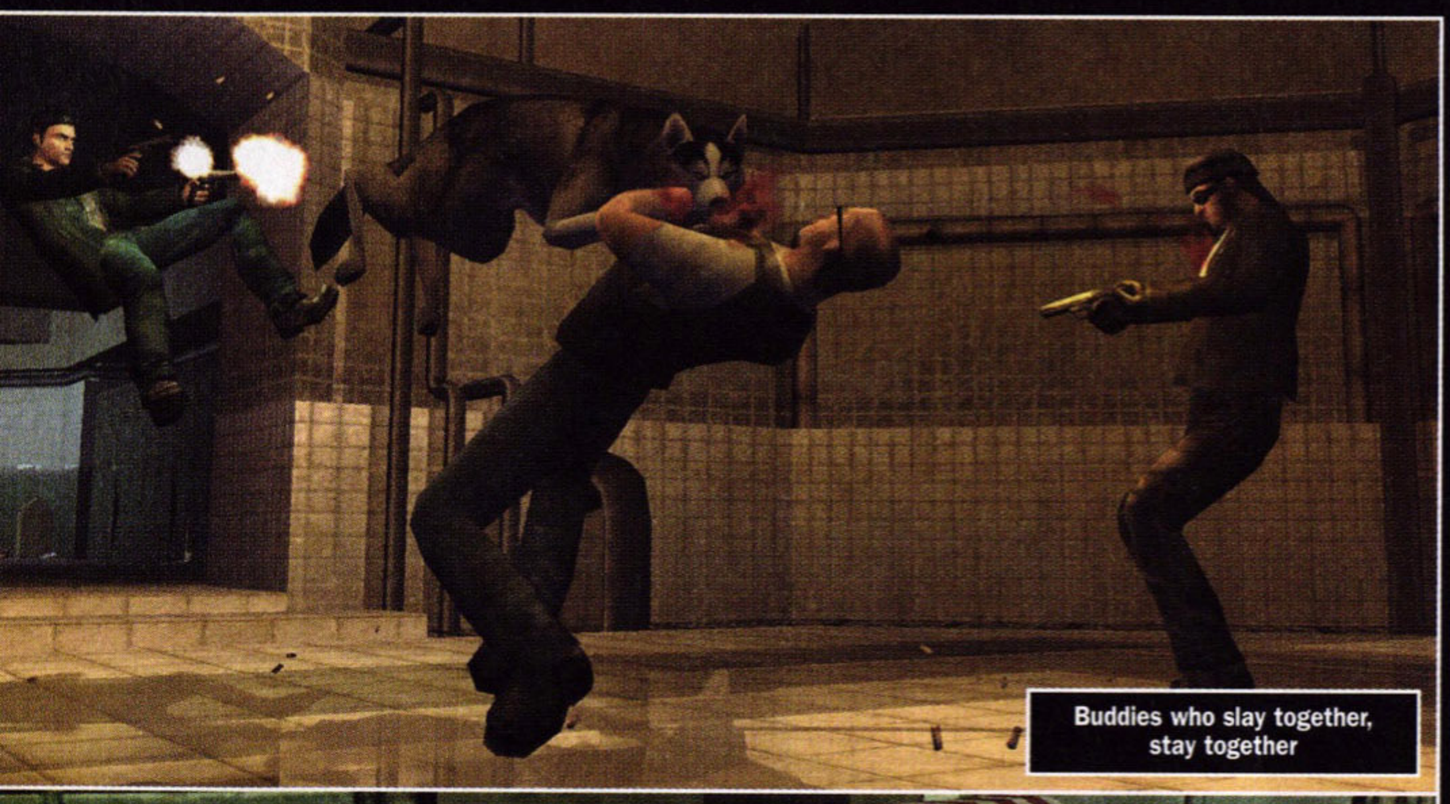
"Disarms are one of the areas of DTR that we received almost zero negative feedback on," says Emerson. That's no surprise, as they're an incredibly cool way to snag someone's weapon and kill them off in the process. It's also crucial when you're an unarmed Jack, facing a bunch of strapped thugs.

All of your favorite disarms are back, and the new ones are outrageous. If there is one area where DTR II will escape its quest for realism, it's in the new disarms. We're talking about putting the barrel of a shotgun under a foe's chin and watching him do a double backwards somersault, or flipping on your back and keeping him suspended in midair with your gunfire alone. However, Namco is also showing a softer side by giving you non-lethal options to take a weapon. The team is working on dynamic camera angles to catch every bone break, joint-pop, and massive head wound that comes with turning the tides on your enemy.

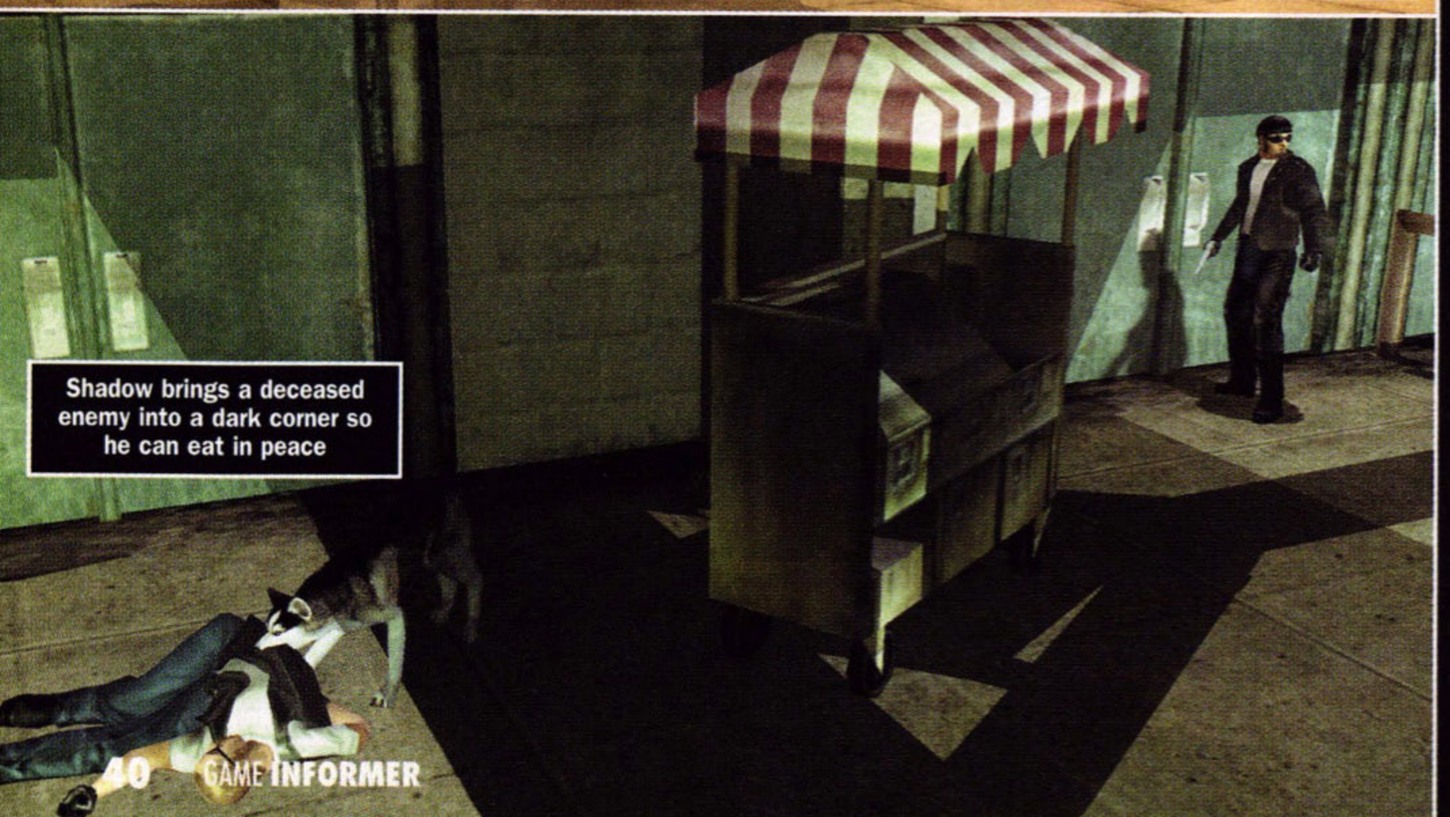
Blending two great mechanics into one, the team is hard at work to perfect a disarm-to-human-shield combo. Says Emerson, "If you see that there's a group of guys in the room and they're armored, disarming one doesn't really put you in a good situation. Maybe you get a gun, but now you're standing in a room with three guys that you're not going to take out before they take you out. Doing a disarm to human shield gives you both armor and a gun."

The pictures shown above illustrate a disarm scenario step by step. Jack grabs a thug's machine gun. He pulls it away, then brings the butt of the gun crashing against the guy's face – making him hit the pavement. Then, it's all about some burst-fire to the face.





Buddies who slay together, stay together



Shadow brings a deceased enemy into a dark corner so he can eat in peace

SHADOW

"FETCH"

Shadow is definitely Jack's best friend. The dog has been through the trenches with Slate on many an adventure, and both have saved each other's skin more times than one could count (not that dogs can count very high). In DTR, Jack would send Shadow – if the pup had enough stamina – toward a target. This would be followed by a cutscene of him taking the guy out and bringing back his weapon. One level even let you play as the husky/malamute/wolf mix to sniff out bombs.

Shadow earns his kibble for DTR II, as he gets a much larger part. Emerson explains, "To keep Jack a bad-ass, two-fisted gun hero, we're going to be giving more of the stealth role to Shadow." This means that, playing as the K9 (which you'll be doing more often), you'll lunge at and kill bad guys, then drag their bodies to a hidden location.

Jack can still send Shadow towards enemies in this sequel, but it won't always make for an instant kill. Depending on the enemy type and Shadow's stamina, the pooch may tie up an enemy's gun hand or, in the case of a miniboss, have his charging leap dodged. Regardless of the outcome, the action happens in real time, rather than via a cutscene. Shadow can also be sent to retrieve any item you can target in first-person.

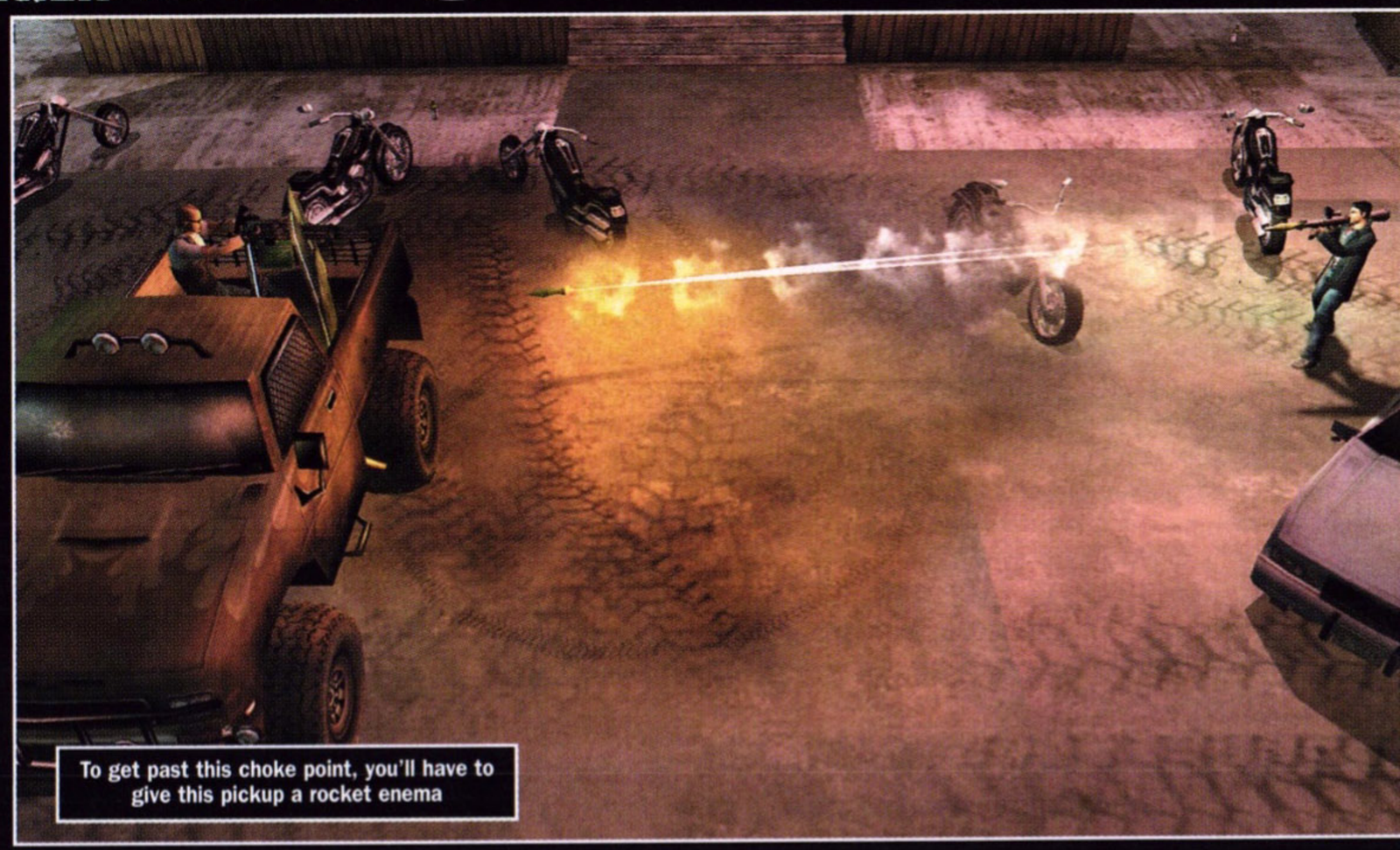
The team is playing with the idea of keeping Shadow onscreen through the entire game, always at Jack's side. You may even be able to give him simple commands to relegate his AI, such as attack, defend, or seek. "We just don't want to look stupid," reasons Emerson. "In some games with squads, characters end up getting hung up in doorways; they just don't look that good when they're close. For a game as fast-paced as DTR, we've got to make sure you're not tripping over him."

CHOKE POINTS

"BRINGING EVERYTHING TOGETHER"

You're given all of these rockin' abilities and death-bringing options, and are released in the game's levels to use them as you see fit. Yes, free-form gameplay is cool, but the team wants to challenge you at various points along the way – sort of an end-of-lesson pop quiz. These are being called "choke points." Choke points challenge you to use some thought and strategy in a specific situation. A number of techniques will likely work, but here's a hint: Very few of them have "run in and blast the nearest enemy" as a solution.

Emerson sets the scene for a potential early choke point: "You may fight through a parking lot that leads to an alley. The alley's going to have a particular challenge that has to be figured out. It's not about finding the key; it's about, 'How do I get past these guys behind cover, who will blow me to bits if I just run down there?' You want to do stuff like use the Adrenaline Manual Targeting. You may want to send Shadow to kill the guy with the most lethal weapon, then take out the two guys supporting him."



To get past this choke point, you'll have to give this pickup a rocket enema

DTR II's graphics are so hot, they're cool; so cool, they're hot

VISUALS

"CATCHING UP"

Dead to Rights was not a visual masterpiece, and Namco knows this. "That's one of the key decisions to tossing out the old engine," admits Emerson. "By upgrading it, we can put more of a focus on art." From what we've seen, the aesthetic differences between predecessor and sequel are staggering.

Last game, the team didn't have much it could play with. That meant low polygons and few textures. For DTR 2, it's the total opposite. The graphical flair is what you'd expect in a slow game with few enemies, such as Splinter Cell, but it takes place within the context of the intense action of this series with a high bodycount.

Bathing the world with realistic lighting was a big graphical focus for Namco, and its proudest achievement so far. Emerson says, "All characters and environments are being lit in real time. This gives us a really edgy, film-type look." This means the exit sign will illuminate its corner of the redneck bar in a dazzling red glow, and Jack's face will be obscured by shadows when he's hiding from his pursuers. We've already mentioned that weapons cast their own light, which then is affected by characters and the environment. Conversely, there really wasn't any lighting to speak of in the first game, which left it either looking too dark in spots or unrealistically bright in others.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about Dead to Rights II is that all of this technology is being worked out for the PlayStation 2 version...first. Says Emerson, "Our goal is to make an awesome PS2 game that would be very easy for us to do whatever we want to do on Xbox." Look at the pictures in this story again; but this time tell yourself, "These are on PS2."

ENEMIES & AI

"IT'S LIKE SEA MONKEYS"

Every hero needs fodder, and DTR II's enemies are getting a lot of attention in terms of both appearance and their respective abilities. These punks are also smarter, and will incorporate a lot of the same techniques Jack will use. This isn't just a shooting gallery.

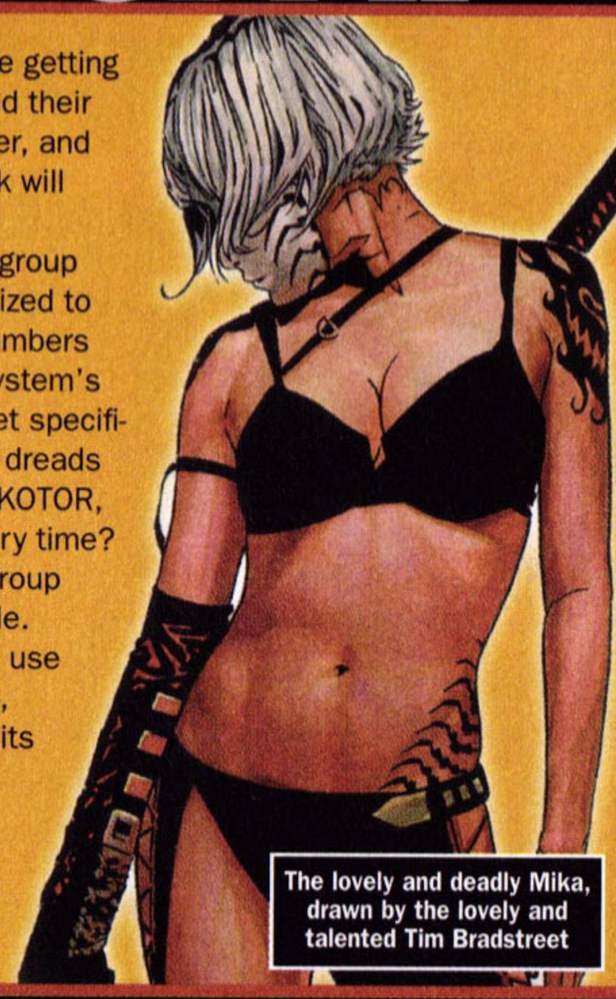
Grant City is full of various gang factions. Each group will have dozens of physical parameters that will be randomized to avoid the impression that you're constantly fighting large numbers of identical twins. One character model is loaded into the system's memory,, but its head and clothes can be randomized, or set specifically to denote certain types (i.e. the Rafandi with bleached dreads may always pack a rocket launcher). We all love Star Wars: KOTOR, but who didn't get sick of staring at the same five NPCs every time?

A good example of a faction is the Cabal. This is a ninja group which moves around the levels like Yoda in *Episode II*'s finale. They can block bullets with their swords, toss shuriken, and use experimental weapons that fire various bolts (explosive, gas, and poison). Another group, a drug-peddling gang, will send its addict drones after you as suicide bombers, with explosives strapped onto their backs or chests.

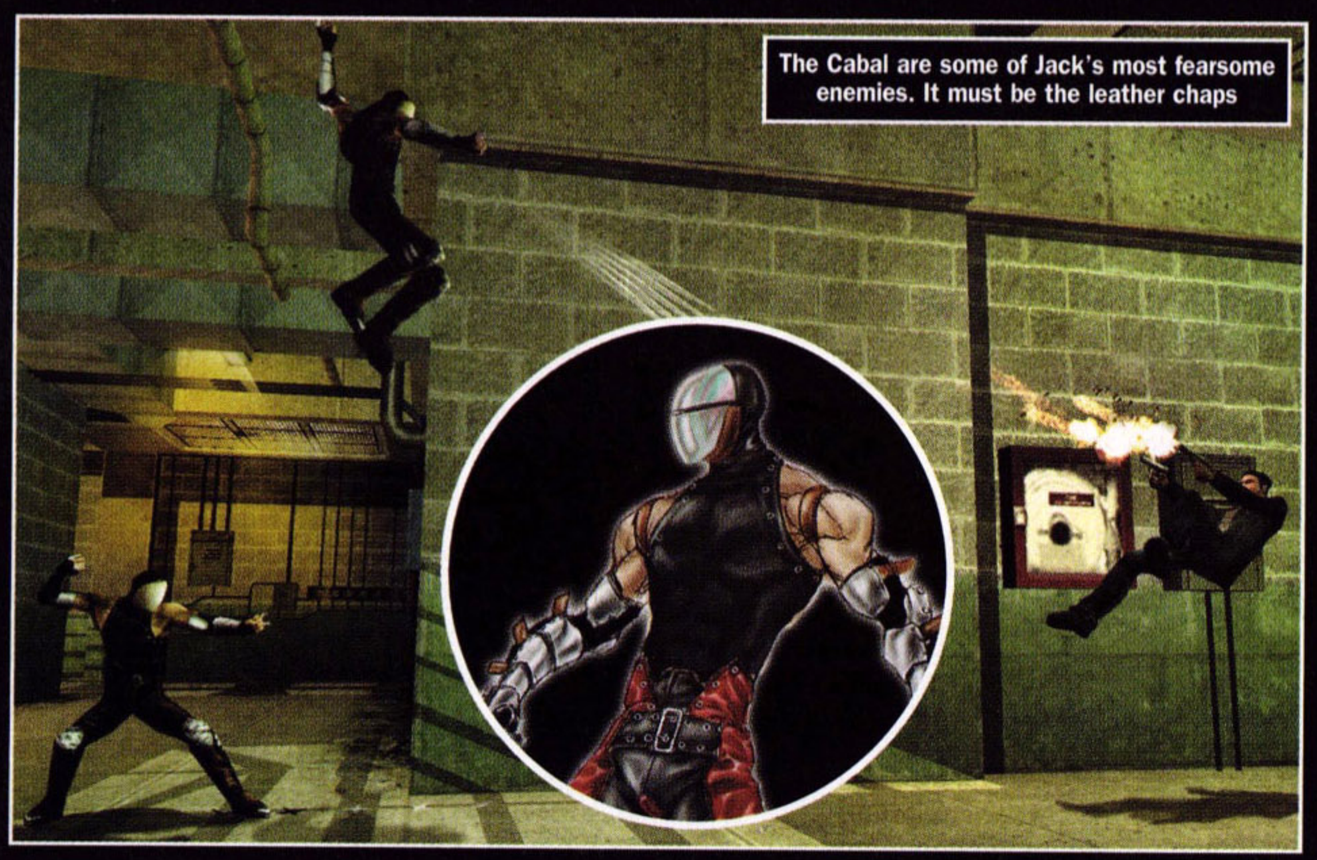
While not a stealth game, DTR II's enemies now have simulated sight and hearing. They react to what they sense. This is a mere fraction of the work done on the AI. Bad guys will flank Jack to draw him out, take cover (especially after being popped once), dive to avoid explosions, collect melee weapons, and even switch weapons depending on the situation.

We even witnessed a wickedly clever scene during the demo, but we'll let Emerson describe it: "You're on a rooftop level against a very offensive enemy who's hunting Jack. You pull out the minigun; he starts backtracking. You back him into a corner where he has nowhere else to go. He'll try to get off a few shots, and then says goodbye." You read that right – the guy turns the gun on himself!

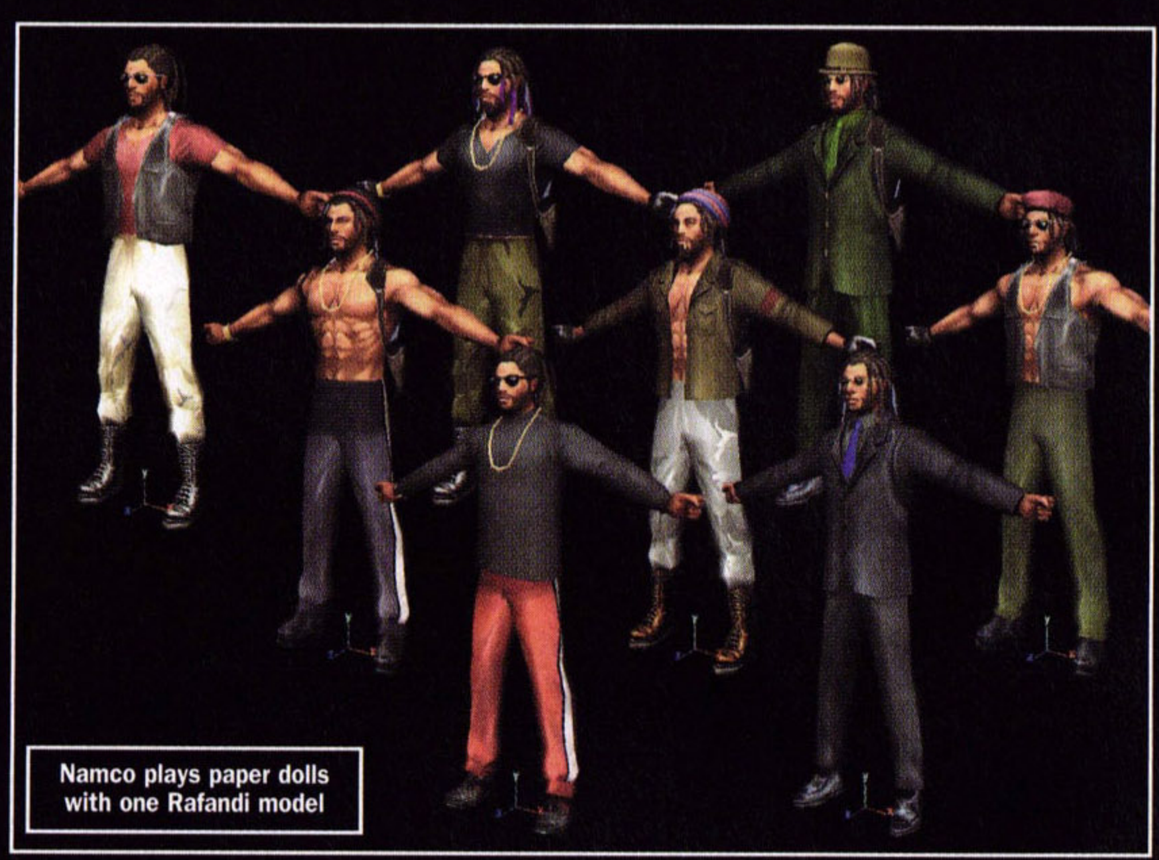
With all the cool ways for Jack to dispatch his foes, the team is working hard to give realistic reactions to damage. Usually, this would entail having various hit zones, so an enemy would do different things if you hit him in the knee rather than the head, for example. However, auto-targeting generally focuses on the torso. When getting shot there, foes will react in many different ways. We saw them rolling their shoulders back, taking a knee, and even shooting guns or falling over railings as they took their last breath. Emerson sums it up by calling it a "bullet ballet of death."



The lovely and deadly Mika, drawn by the lovely and talented Tim Bradstreet

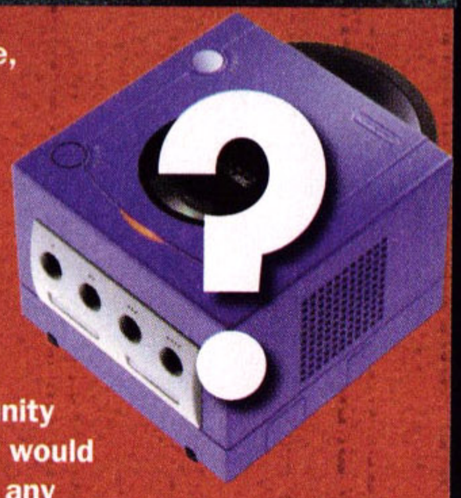


The Cabal are some of Jack's most fearsome enemies. It must be the leather chaps



Namco plays paper dolls with one Rafandi model

WHERE IS GAMECUBE?



"DTR was fairly successful on GameCube, compared to other mature action titles," says Emerson. However, whether Namco will do a GC version of DTR II is still undecided. It's basically a business decision by the publisher. Mature action titles just aren't a very popular genre for Nintendo's family-friendly machine.

Emerson tells us, "I'd love to see every person with every system have an opportunity to play what we're doing." The technology would make it easy to put the game on basically any platform. However, it's still up in the air. Namco could possibly farm out development to a third-party company after the PS2 and Xbox releases, but that's just speculation.

Petrol Eddie looks pretty impressive on paper...

...and like a fat, psycho dynamo in-game

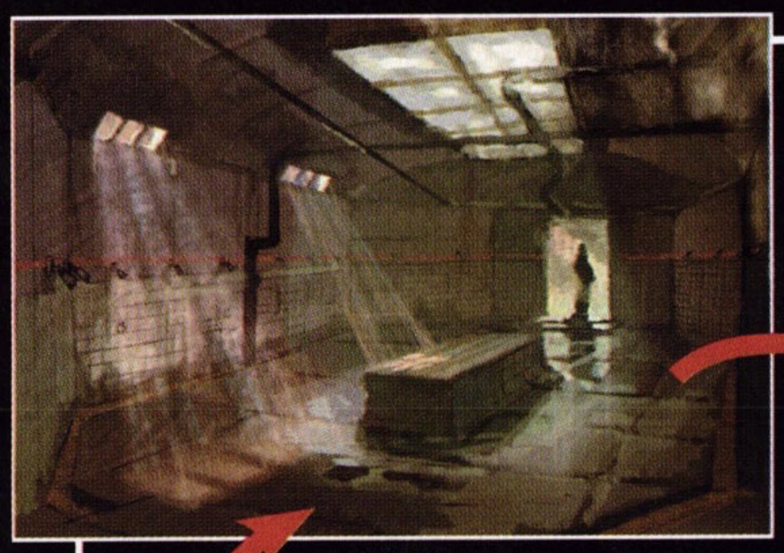
LEVEL DESIGN

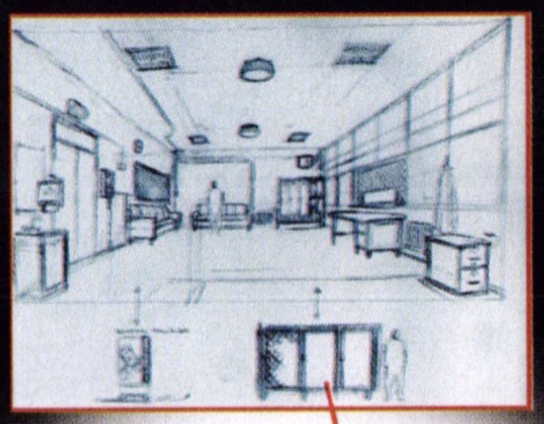
"PAD TO PAD: FROM SKETCH TO ENVIRONMENT"

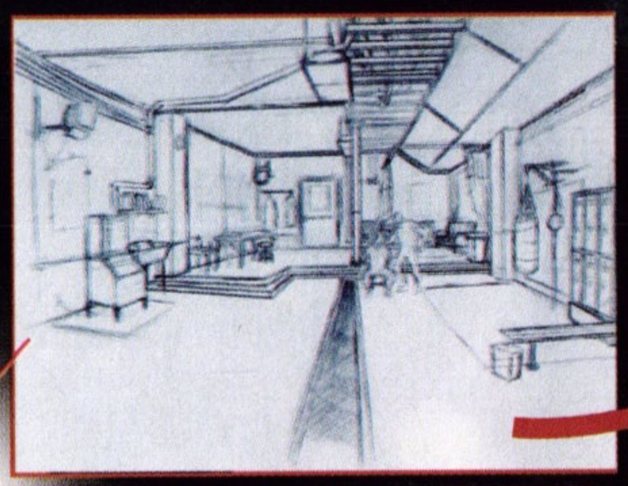
Even the levels themselves take an incredible amount of work to become a digital reality. In DTR II, they will be equal parts indoor and outdoor settings. The development process starts with an overhead map of a stage, highlighting the rooms or sections of it. Sketches off to the side give better detail of what these specific parts will look like. These are then given color and more and more refinement. Finally, in-game representations of these areas are made. Changes are made to the 3D layouts accordingly. Later, ambient objects will fill them up, giving them that "lived-in" look before Jack gives them that "killed-in" look.

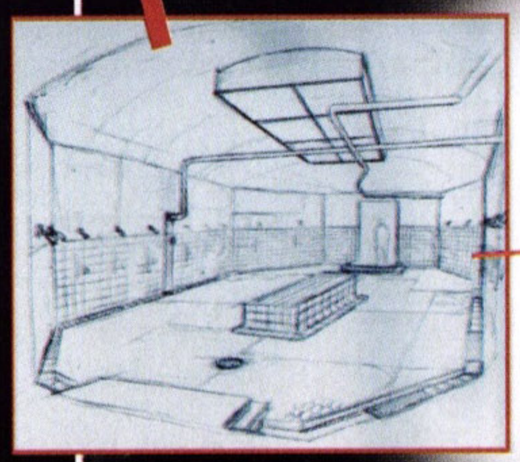
The levels, which were barren in the previous entry, now have three times the detail. They're still far from done at this point, but the artists' visions on the concept art are being almost identically implemented into the in-game environment. As a bonus, these areas are replete with many destructible elements, and everything has its own collision field. That means you can climb over boxes and other objects, instead of being forced to tediously go around them.

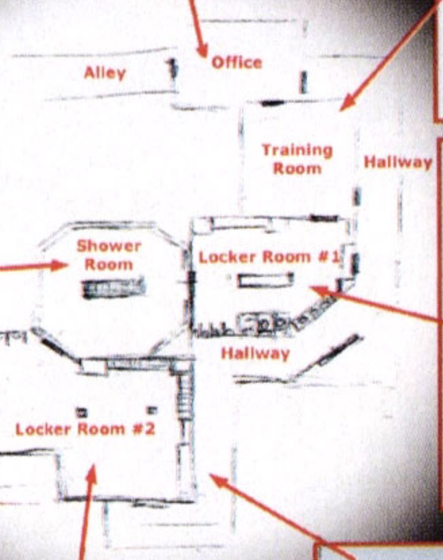
Observe the overall layout of the local gym, a pretty simple area in Grant City. The artists have made colored details of the training room, shower room, and locker room. In-game models follow that. You'll notice the locker room is virtually unchanged from the sketch; the shower room is slightly changed, mainly in the omission of the island; and the training room is very different from the drawings. Not pictured: old, fat, naked guys walking around aimlessly.

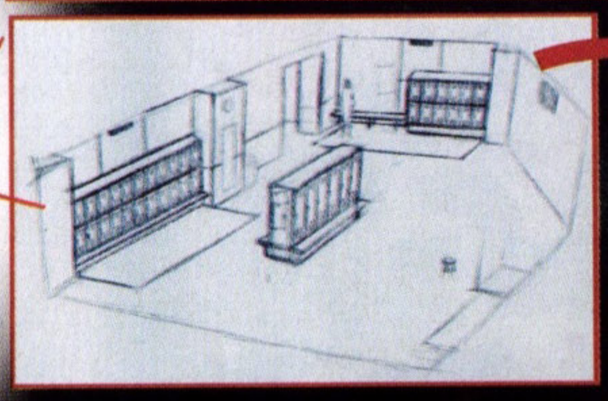


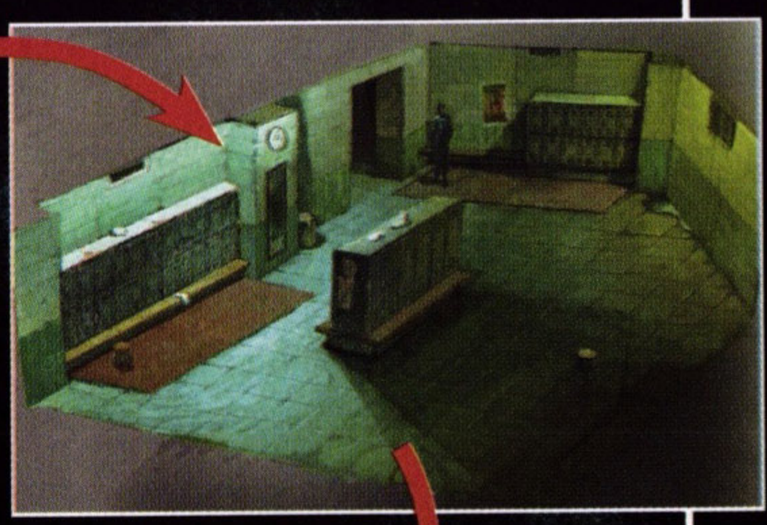


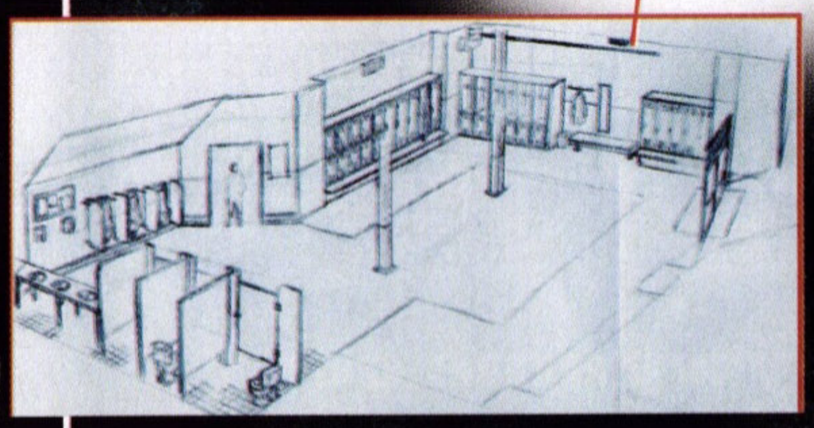


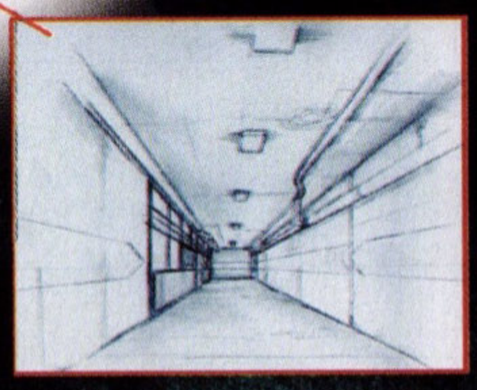


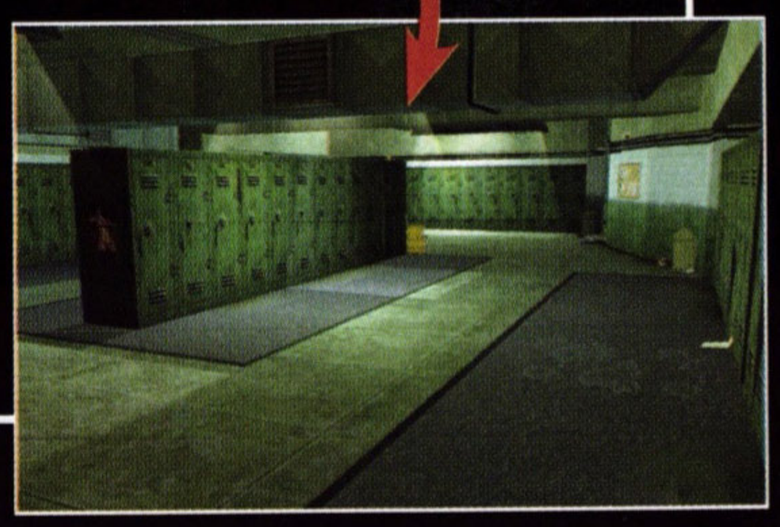












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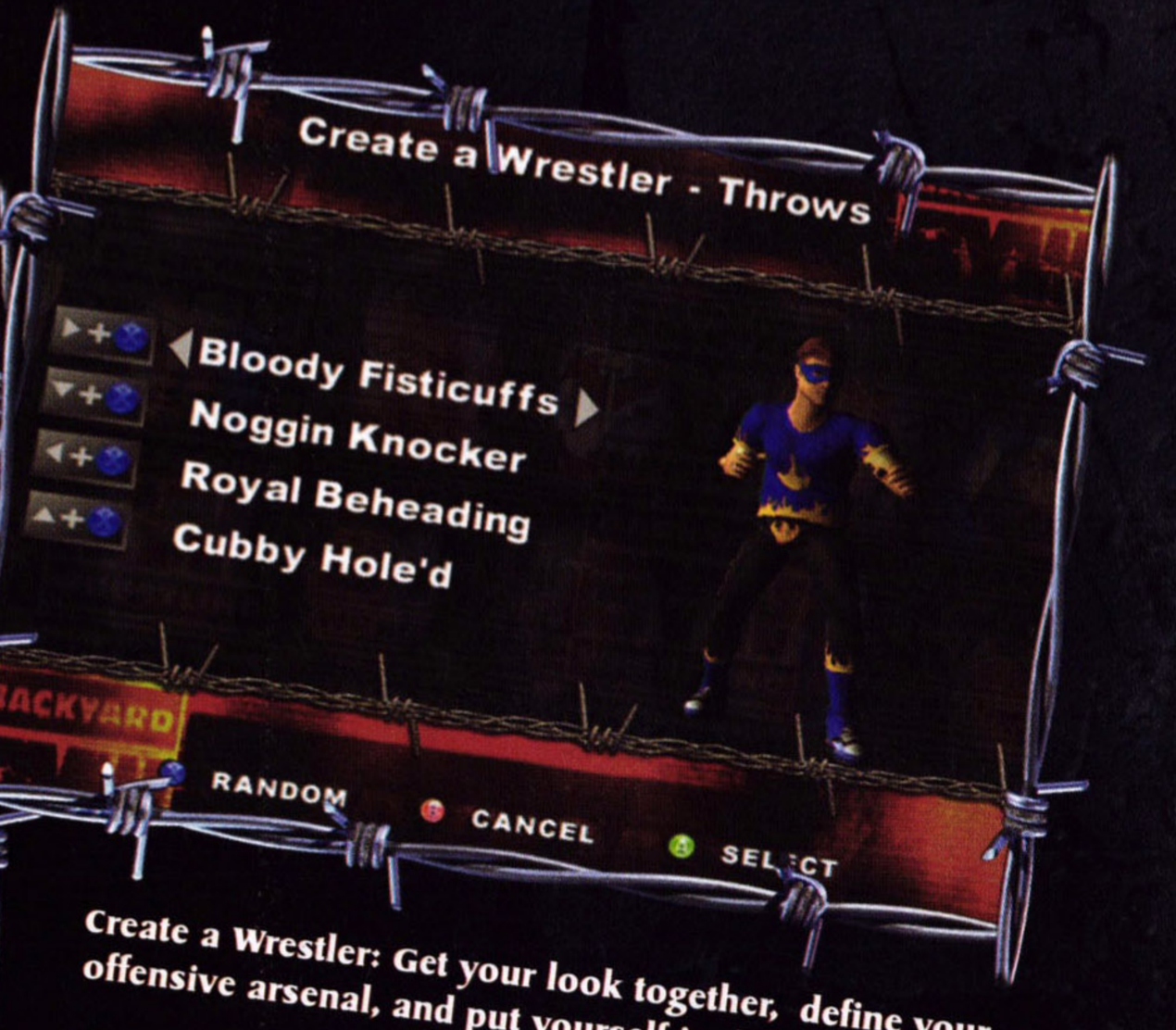

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XBOX

PlayStation 2

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Intense Violence
Mature Sexual Themes
Strong Language

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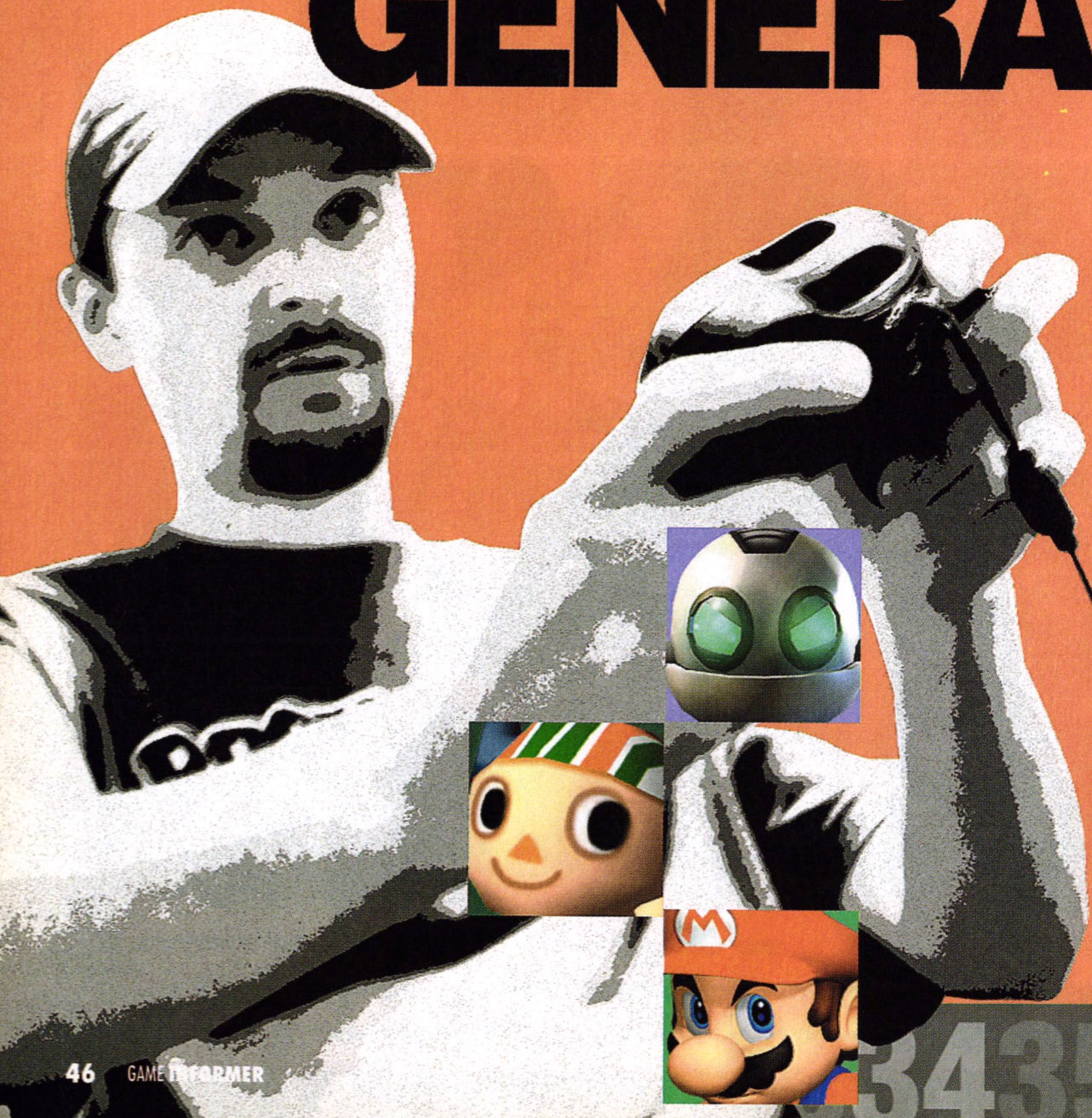
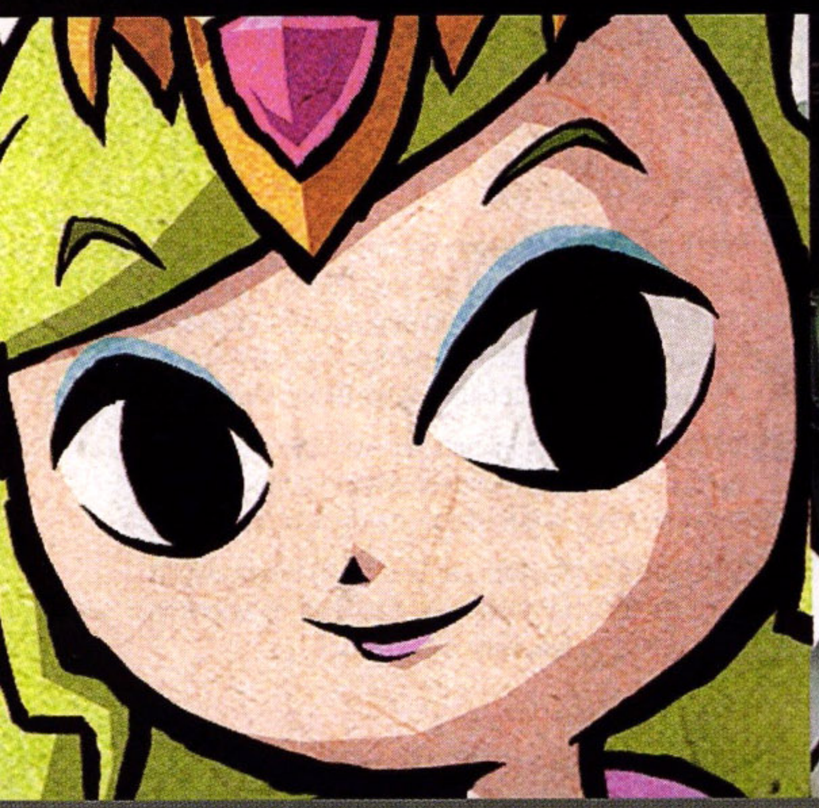
TALKIN' 'BOUT

MY GENERATION

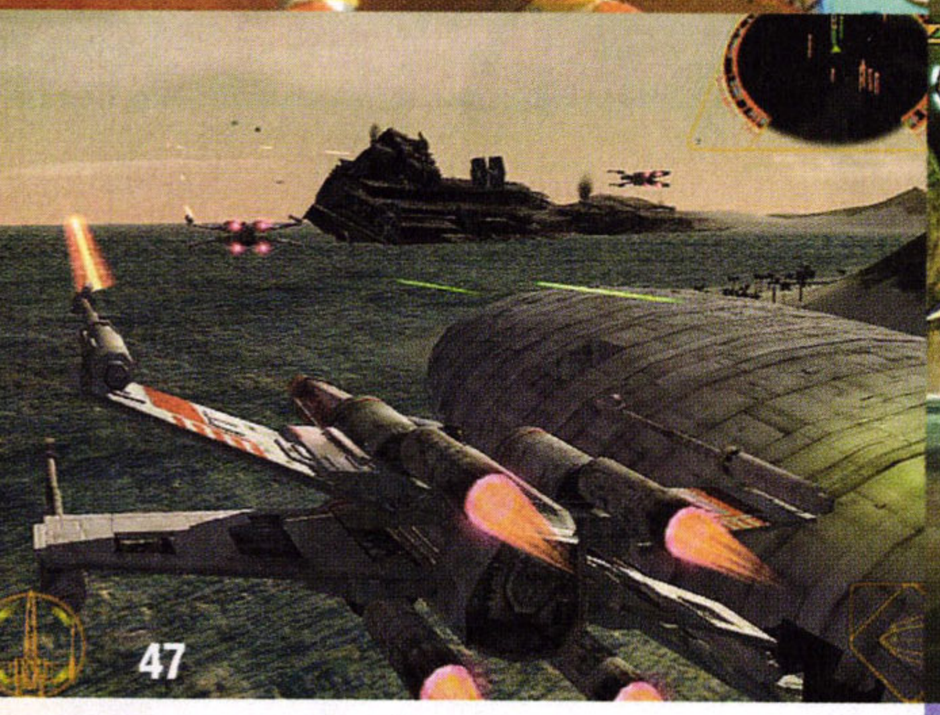
[PS2 GAMECUBE XBOX]



THE 50 GREATEST GAMES OF THIS CONSOLE GENERATION



We gamers are standing at an important marker in this console generation – what will probably be looked back on as the era's halftime. It is with that idea in mind that we present this list that we think sums up the best that the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube have offered us thus far. This collection of 50 great titles encompasses games that sold well, tugged at our heartstrings, revolutionized their genre, and are just plain great.



50 GITAROO MAN PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: This rhythm game has more quirky charm than PaRappa and Ulala combined. The original music is hilarious and toe-tapping at the same time.

DEFINING MOMENT: Main character U1 serenades his dream girl with a touching, acoustic song by campfire. If you play well, she'll put her head on your shoulder.

INTERESTING FACT: Your talking dog sidekick, Puma, makes a cameo appearance in a more serious Koei game, Kessen II.

49 THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Standing as perhaps the best video game translation of a movie, Two Towers manages to capture the essence of the film, even with its hack n' slash format.

DEFINING MOMENT: Jumping in as Isildur at Mt. Doom (after the spliced-in movie footage) is an awesome opening.

INTERESTING FACT: The developers got constant feedback direct from the movie set during the making of this game.

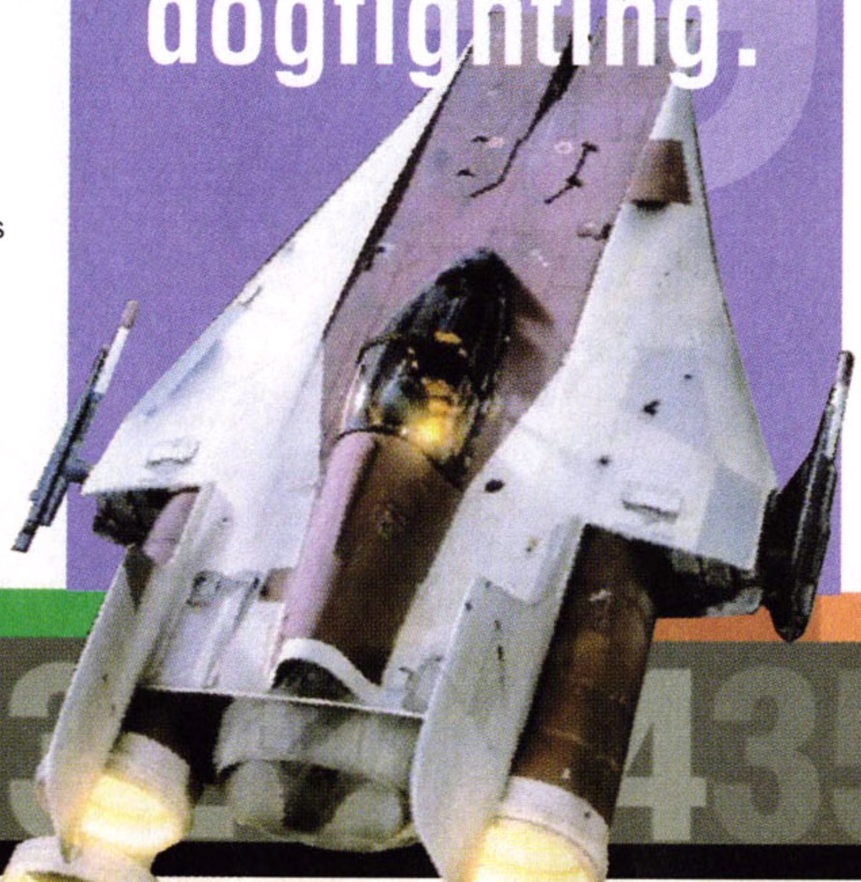
48 NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT 2 PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: The sensation of speed is what this game is all about, and it does it very, very well. The action is so intense that you almost have to take a break after every chase or risk heart failure.

DEFINING MOMENT: Hauling away from the 5-0 so fast that you nearly lose control and have to rely on instinct to not become a fireball.

INTERESTING FACT: This franchise started as a 1994 3DO game released in Japan. Its PC legs are just as lengthy, with around a dozen versions launched for the home computer.

For console gamers, this is the epitome of Star Wars dogfighting.



47 STAR WARS: ROGUE LEADER GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: For console gamers, this is the epitome of Star Wars dogfighting. The title's ability to put up a sea of TIEs on the screen with no slowdown is a breathtaking feat.

DEFINING MOMENT: Having a swarm of TIE fighters take you head-on during the Battle of Endor.

INTERESTING FACT: Get enough gold medals and you can unlock director's commentary on the stages.

46 DARK CLOUD 2 PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: The game can be called a dungeon crawler, but it's so much more. Combining two compelling features – world-building and real-time action with a pair of characters – Dark Cloud 2 wraps both in a deep RPG shell and vibrant graphics.

DEFINING MOMENT: Every time you successfully combine pictures you've taken to make any of the 400 in-game items.

INTERESTING FACT: Max's ride pod, Steve, is named after Xiao's slingshot from the first Dark Cloud.

45 PIKMIN GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: With a heavy injection of humor and some of the cutest characters in all of gaming, Pikmin turns the real-time strategy genre on its head and shows that famed creator Shigeru Miyamoto still has plenty of great ideas. The complex strategies and gameplay are perfectly balanced.

DEFINING MOMENT: Since Pikmin lack will and intelligence, players are forced to throw their leaf-headed comrades onto their adversaries. Many are tossed...hardly any return.

INTERESTING FACT: Miyamoto came up with Pikmin while tending to his garden. He must have had a lot of weeds in that garden (nudge, nudge, wink wink).

44 MECHASSAULT Xbox

WHY IT BELONGS: One of the earliest Xbox Live titles, this trigger-happy fragfest features an engaging story mode as well as addictive multiplayer. Even with a bevy of new games available on the service, MechAssault is still one of the most popular Live titles.

DEFINING MOMENT: The first time you go Live with the Prometheus mech and unleash a barrel full of hot magma on some poor 12-year-old from Alabama who just badmouthed yo' mama.

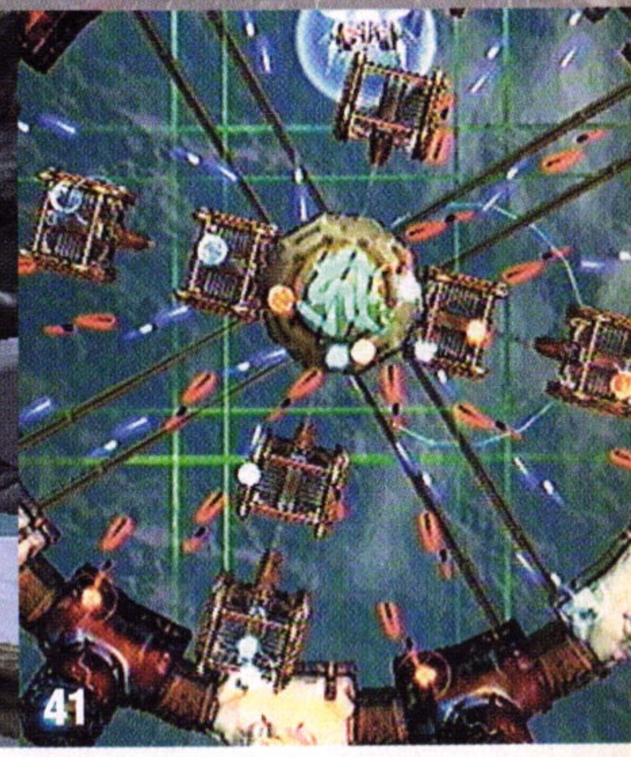
INTERESTING FACT: Via Xbox Live, MechAssault players have been able to download content such as new mechs, new maps, and even new play modes like Capture the Flag and Giant Killers.

43 TWISTED METAL: BLACK PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: Twisted Metal has a somewhat checkered history. After the runaway success of the first two titles, the third and fourth made a departure from the original gameplay and were less well received. With Twisted Metal: Black, much of the original team got back together and modeled this installment after TM 2. The result is brilliant – mayhem, carnage, speed, and more mayhem.

DEFINING MOMENT: Battling Warhawk, a gigantic helicopter from an old PSone title by the same team.

INTERESTING FACT: Sweet Tooth, the signature character in the series, appeared as a hidden character in Hot Shots Golf 2.



42 GLADIUS PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Unlike most relatively passive strategy games, the unique meter-based combat system in Gladius results in fast-paced, active gameplay without losing what makes the genre interesting in the first place.

DEFINING MOMENT: Climbing atop a pile of boxes and delivering a crushing blow to the back of a giant barbarian's head never gets old.

INTERESTING FACT: With two separate storylines – each offering multiple side quests – Gladius boasts approximately 300 hours of gameplay if everything is completed. But since it's so damn fun, that might not be enough.

41 IKARUGA GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: The shooter genre is often ignored, especially on current consoles. Ikaruga brings it screaming back into the limelight, with dazzling graphics and a new gimmick. Every enemy is of either light or dark persuasion. You must instantly switch between the two to combat both types. The game can either be played in a formatted vertical style, or sideways across your television.

DEFINING MOMENT: Watching the appropriately spectacular explosion when you finally defeat any of the insanely tough bosses.

INTERESTING FACT: One translation of "ikaruga" is "mottled dove," a reference to the ship you control having two differently colored sides.

40 RATCHET & CLANK PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: Insomniac has lots of experience with 3D platformers, and Ratchet & Clank exemplifies this. Blowing away your enemy rather than just crushing them with your butt is much more satisfying and the variety of weapons is awesome. Clank, your robot sidekick, pitches in with many useful abilities – such as turning into a helicopter to allow you both to sail over trouble.

DEFINING MOMENT: Getting to the Rilgar stage and having your earlier efforts pay off in intense action.

INTERESTING FACT: Ratchet & Clank shares its engine with Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy.

WARHAMMER 40,000

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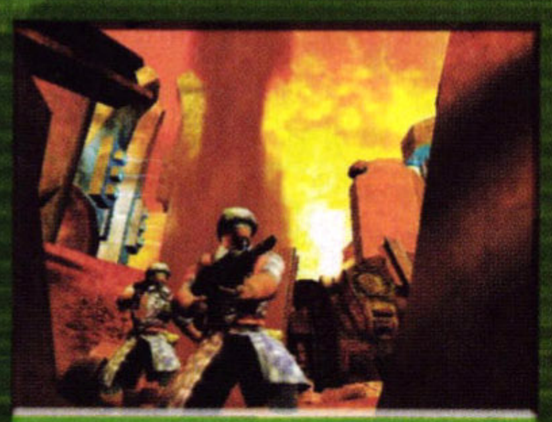
8 PLAYER PLAYSTATION 2 ONLINE SUPPORT



15 DEVASTATING WEAPONS

ENCOUNTER TREACHERY, BETRAYAL AND HORROR

INTENSE FIRST PERSON ACTION ACROSS 21 LEVELS

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence
Blood and Gore

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NAME: IRWIN FINKLE

SCREEN NAME: THE EXTIRWINATOR

PROFESSION: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

SPECS: HUSBAND, FATHER OF FOUR

WEAPON OF CHOICE:

PLASMA GUN

NOTES: COLD-BLOODED KILLER WHO WON'T THINK TWICE ABOUT PUTTING ONE IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD OF HIS ENEMIES.

TURN-ONS: "PREYING ON YOU AND OTHERS WITH WEAK SCREEN NAMES."

FAVORITE PREY: CHAOS RAPTOR

MANTRA: ONLY IN DEATH DOES DUTY END.

POWERED BY gamespy

PlayStation.2

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39 RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: TIDES OF WAR Xbox

WHY IT BELONGS: Despite being released two years after the PC original, the Xbox version of Return to Castle Wolfenstein stands out as one of the best first-person shooters ever to hit consoles. The controls are tight, which is a welcome change from the slapdash efforts that plague many PC ports. Plenty of added content, a co-op mode, and nice Xbox Live support make Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War one of the top FPSs of this generation.

DEFINING MOMENT: Turning the tides of online war in your favor by using the unique ability of your character type. Yes, all four of them are useful in their own ways.

INTERESTING FACT: If you want to see just how far the FPS genre has come since its inception, the old-school Wolfenstein 3D can be unlocked by completing the single-player campaign.

38 SUIKODEN III PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: It's a masterful RPG from a respected series. This game features great cinematography and a compelling story that is viewed from three different characters' perspectives. Their tales intertwine with one another to create some gripping scenes.

DEFINING MOMENT: Watching Lulu, the young friend of one of the main characters, being slain by Chris (another main character). Your reaction to the matter will likely differ depending on which character you are controlling at the time, though you'll eventually view it from two points of view. This event shows how each story has more than one side.

INTERESTING FACT: If you have a PSone memory card with Suikoden II data on it (you must have beaten that game), you can load it into Suikoden III to access new scripts, get boosted stats, and other little bonuses.

37 DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: This strategy/RPG title brings many new things to the genre. Every item is unique, and each has a randomly created 10-level dungeon inside it – which can be played to boost its stats. You can toss your friends over gaps and quadruple-team enemies. The main character is one cheeky little devil to boot.

DEFINING MOMENT: When main character Laharl finally confronts the much-hyped assassin roaming his castle, only to find a sweet, cute angel. Their odd couple relationship plays out after that, and is extremely entertaining.

INTERESTING FACT: The Prinny squad, which are expendable zombie-like penguin characters, were created just so the developers would include someone for you to blow up during the game.

36 DEAD OR ALIVE 3 Xbox

WHY IT BELONGS: Even three years into this console life cycle, DOA 3 is still the prettiest fighter on the market. The environments and characters are all absolutely gorgeous, and gameplay is just as impressive. The controls are tight and responsive, and the wide variety of characters means there is a perfect choice for every type of player. Oh, and the girls are hot, too.

DEFINING MOMENT: For our money, nothing beats watching one hot girl kick another off a rooftop onto a neon sign and crack the pavement beneath, only to have her get up and continue the fight on the street.

INTERESTING FACT: Although they appeared in the skintacular DOA Extreme Beach Volleyball, series creator Tomonobu Itagaki considers the DOA girls his children and would never allow them to be seen naked. Just very, very close to naked.

35 TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4

PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Though its prequel is higher on this list, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 is a great title in its own right. It has the numerous customization options and huge stages of its predecessor, but changes the flow of the game. Rather than a laundry list of goals like in Pro Skaters past, Tony 4 has you skate around huge environments and accept missions from people. Many change the face of the level, but just as many stray too far from the skateboarding basics.

DEFINING MOMENT: Going online and finding out that you are not, in fact, the true master of the spin-revert-grind-repeat maneuver.

INTERESTING FACT: Bob Burnquist, one of the playable skaters, came back after not appearing in THPS 3. He had an exclusive contract with Konami for ESPN X-Games Skateboarding – a terrible game. Thankfully, he was welcomed back to Pro Skater.

34 SUPER MONKEY BALL GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: It would have been awfully hard to justify placing a mere collection of minigames on this list if Super Monkey Ball wasn't such a wonderfully fun play. Amusement Vision, the developer, created a simple yet engrossing variety of styles that keeps GameCube owners amused for endless hours. Monkey Ball is the perfect fix for a depressing day – it's almost impossible to be in a bad mood when you're doing something as silly as rolling around as a cartoon monkey in a ball.

DEFINING MOMENT: Using your mad skills to land on what you previously assumed was just a buoy and getting a whopping 500 points in Monkey Target.

INTERESTING FACT: In the single-player mode, the monkey in the ball doesn't actually roll it hamster-style. The player controls the tilt of the board and gravity makes the ball move.

THEY SHOULD'VE JUST STAYED DEAD!

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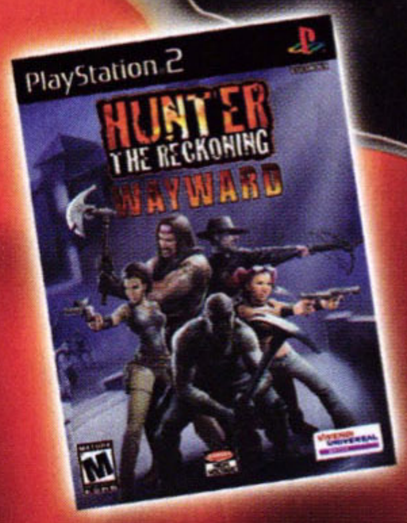

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33 JAK II PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: Naughty Dog's design team was clearly bored with run-of-the-mill platformers, and Jak II is their answer to the lack of innovation in the genre. Players have a ton of different actions at their disposal, from transformations and weapons to martial arts and piloting vehicles. The graphics are some of the best on the PS2, and the compelling story is told through cinematic cutscenes that rival RPGs in production quality. Control is well done and makes the many different types of action a lot of fun to play. Jak II is an ambitious project that lives up to the visions of the developers.

DEFINING MOMENT: Transforming into the ultra-powerful Hulk-like Dark Jak and annihilating everything.

INTERESTING FACT: The first reward you get in Jak II allows you to shave off that pubescent soul patch of his.

32 MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Everybody who cares knows just what the Mortal Kombat franchise has done for the fighting genre, and Deadly Alliance is no exception. Martial arts-accurate animations and unique weapons for each character, impressive models, and skintight control guarantee this title a spot on this list. Staples like multiplayer and new ideas like the 600-plus graves to open will keep kombatants enthralled for hours at a time.

DEFINING MOMENT: Feeling your chest contract as signature character Liu Kang dies in the opening cinematic.

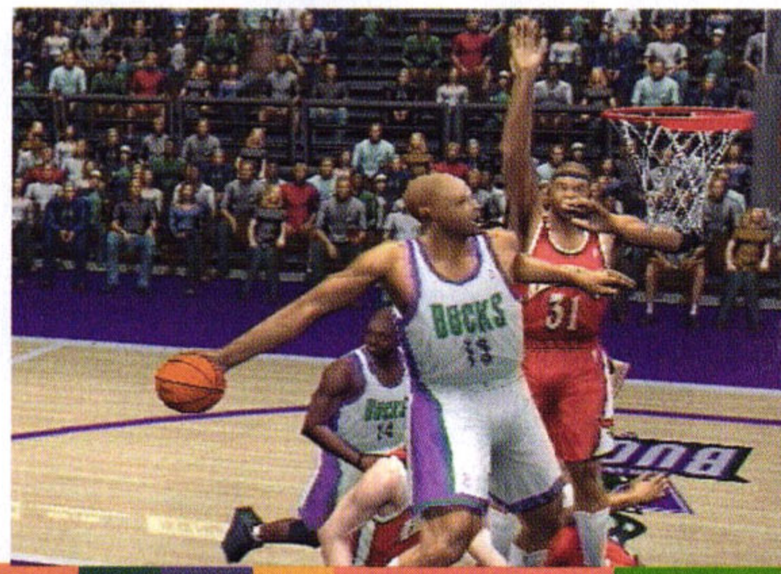
INTERESTING FACT: Fan response to the lack of stage fatalities in Deadly Alliance was so overwhelmingly negative that Midway has confirmed their return in MK 6.

31 ESPN NBA BASKETBALL PlayStation 2 | Xbox

WHY IT BELONGS: This carries on the tradition of Sega and Visual Concepts' NBA 2K series, which means it's got the tightest gameplay of any hoops title on the market. Moves like the lead pass and jab step open up the gameplay immensely. The addition of 24/7 mode – street ball where you win items based on the time of day – gives you double the bang for your buck. ESPN brings basketball to the forefront of video game sports.

DEFINING MOMENT: Executing a jab step to clear some space between you and a defender, then knocking down a clutch three-pointer in the waning seconds of the fourth quarter.

INTERESTING FACT: One of the items you can unlock in 24/7 mode is the head of AiAi, star of the Super Monkey Ball games. Put it on, and you'll look just like the banana-loving roller from the GameCube series.

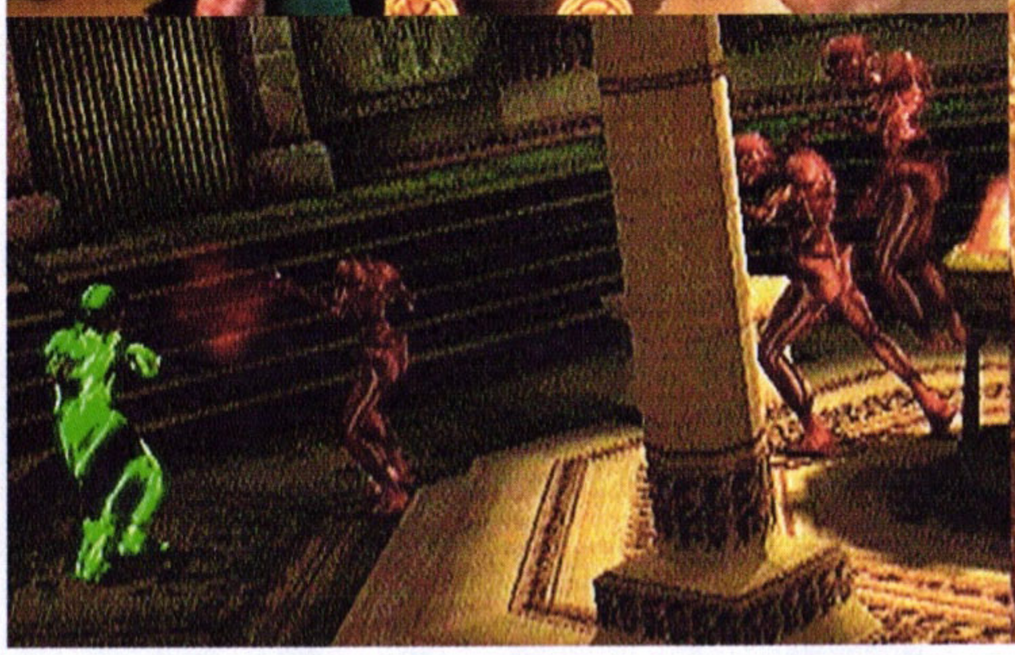


30 ETERNAL DARKNESS
GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: A psychological take on the survival horror genre, Eternal Darkness stands as one of the few games that's actually scary. Really, really scary. As you encounter monsters, your character's sanity drops and the game becomes more frightening and bizarre. But because of a bevy of fourth-wall-breaking tricks, your character isn't the only one who might go insane.

DEFINING MOMENT: Feeling your heart jump in your chest because, as you sit alone in the dark playing, the TV screen goes suddenly, inexplicably black right in the middle of an important battle.

INTERESTING FACT: The police officer at the start of the game is named Inspector Legrasse – the same as the police officer in H. P. Lovecraft's story "The Call of Cthulhu." This is only one of many references to classic horror tales found throughout the game.



29 STEEL BATTALION Xbox

WHY IT BELONGS: Few titles in the history of consoles have been innovative on the level of Steel Battalion. Expanding the premise of giant robot combat to an entirely new scale, Steel Battalion is easily one of the most immersive experiences available. The rewards for climbing the steep learning curve justify the price tag as players enter into a unique gestalt with their machines. Options that other titles can only dream of abound, courtesy of the coffee table-sized control board. The opportunity to play this is one that should definitely not be passed up.

DEFINING MOMENT: Going through the lengthy start-up sequence and seeing your mech come to life around you for the first time.

INTERESTING FACT: Your save file will actually be deleted if you fail to eject when your mech gets blown up in the single-player mode.

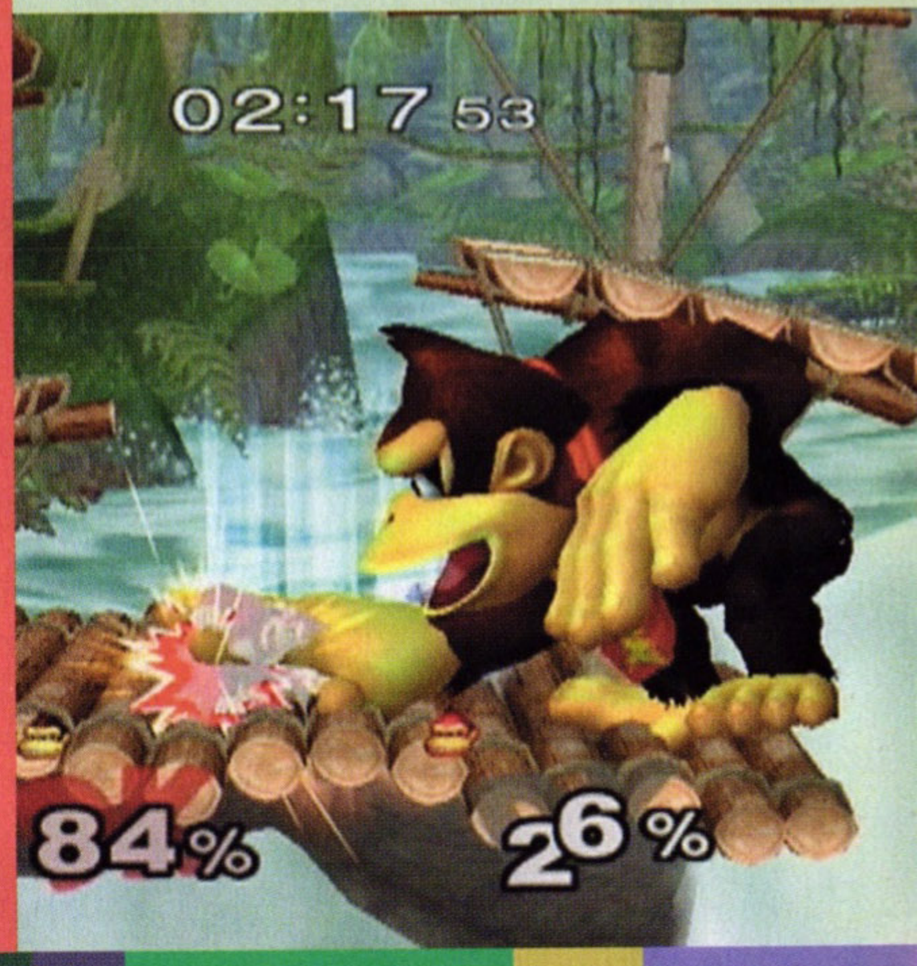
28 SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: The sequel to the genre-defining N64 original, Super Smash Bros. Melee keeps the premise of the original intact while expanding on it in a number of ways. The game executes perfectly the concept of four players beating the heck out of each other with a minimum of delay and a maximum of pretty animations. Though it's almost two years old, it still shows what the GameCube can do. Dynamic backgrounds, four detailed character models, and lots of explosions with no frame loss is a sight to behold.

DEFINING MOMENT: Looking up at the clock and realizing that you and your friends have just lost three hours of your lives.

INTERESTING FACT: The unlockable characters Marth and Roy are from the Fire Emblem series, which has never appeared in America. They are getting a Game Boy Advance translation in November.

> **The rewards for climbing the steep learning curve justify the price tag...**

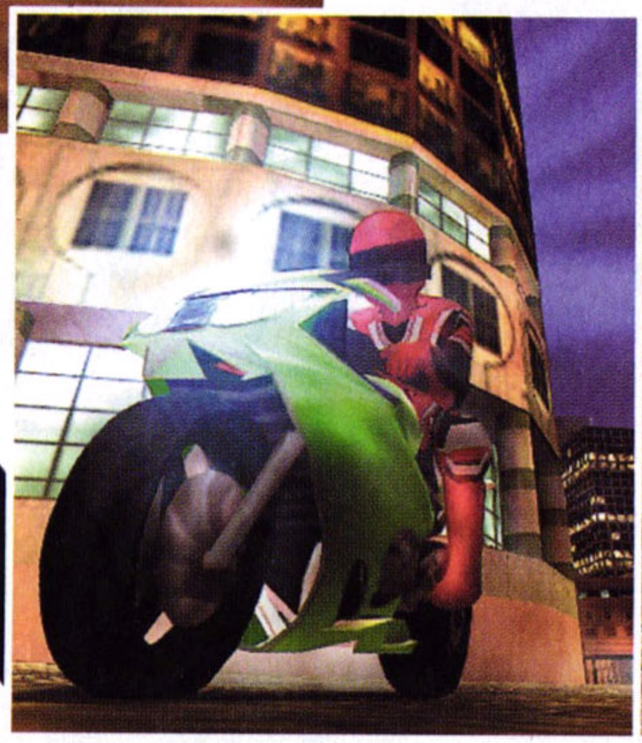


27 MIDNIGHT CLUB II PlayStation 2 | Xbox

WHY IT BELONGS: Underground racing is cool and Midnight Club II is here to show you why. At its heart, this is a racing title, but there are so many variants and different options within it that it almost deserves a genre of its own. Midnight Club II recreates the thrill of being part of an exclusive cadre of insane drivers who compete primarily for the accolades of their peers. Well, that and the fact that losers forfeit ownership of their rides to the winners. Midnight Club II is a unique experience, and one worth owning.

DEFINING MOMENT: Wedging your car under a semi while barreling through an intersection at completely illegal speeds.

INTERESTING FACT: Developer Rockstar San Diego brought in dozens of real street racers and their cars not only to get audio and visual samples, but also to get the feel for the whole culture.



26 RESIDENT EVIL GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: The original release of this game, although not the first survival horror title, so terrified players that it became an instant classic. This iteration updates the graphics, gameplay, pacing, and squeal-inducing shock moments so perfectly that it is a must-own for survival horror fanatics. Being the peg in Nintendo's "adults too" strategy means that the company poured all of their usual quality controls and innovation into the title and added defensive moves along with new voice recording, to replace the stilted and hysterical utterances of the original's main characters.

DEFINING MOMENT: The first time that the mindless zombies run down a hallway and follow you into a room (a previously unseen skill from RE's undead forces), most gamers needed to find a new pair of pants.

INTERESTING FACT: George Romero (director of *Night of the Living Dead*) directed a commercial for the first RE release on PSone, which was banned in the US.

25 SSX 3 PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: With the release of SSX 3, snowboarders finally have a digital representation of their sport that can compare to Tony Hawk. EA Sports Big found that balance of outlandish quasi-physics and gameplay depth that has made titles like THPS and the Midway sports games so addictive. The ability to bust a 300-trick combo is not to be underestimated. Having the option to "warp" around the mountain via transport vehicles or explore freely is a wonderful thing, allowing players to choose the style of play they prefer. The SSX series has truly come into its own with this latest installment.

DEFINING MOMENT: Riding down the entire mountain without having to take part in any events.

INTERESTING FACT: The celebrity voiceover budget from previous iterations was used for licensing killer songs in SSX 3.

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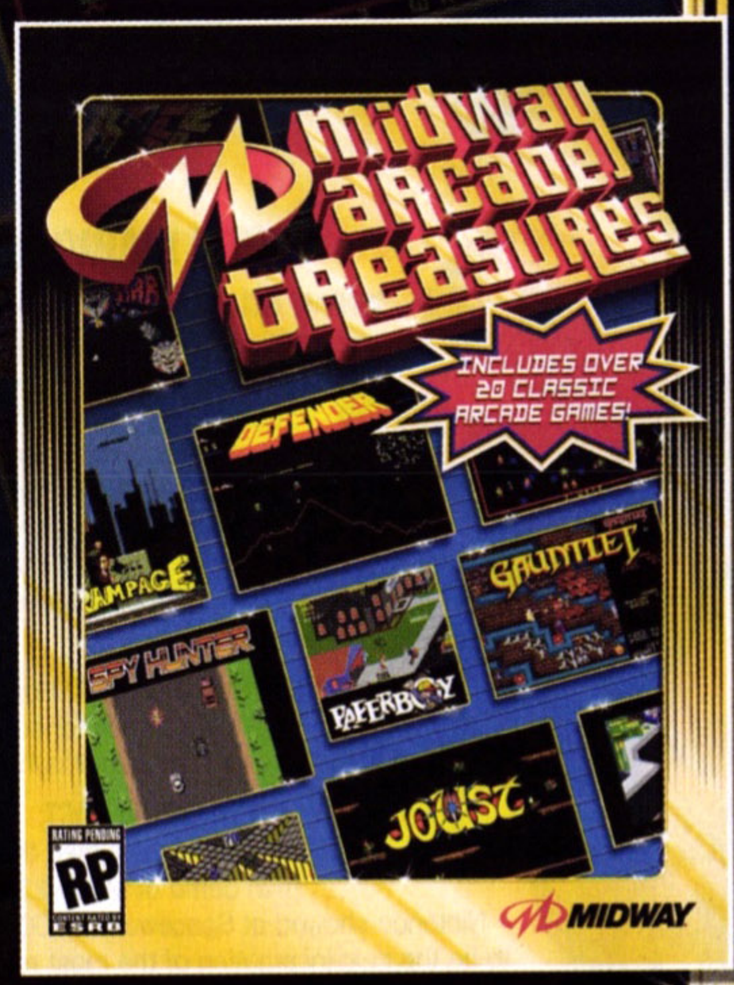

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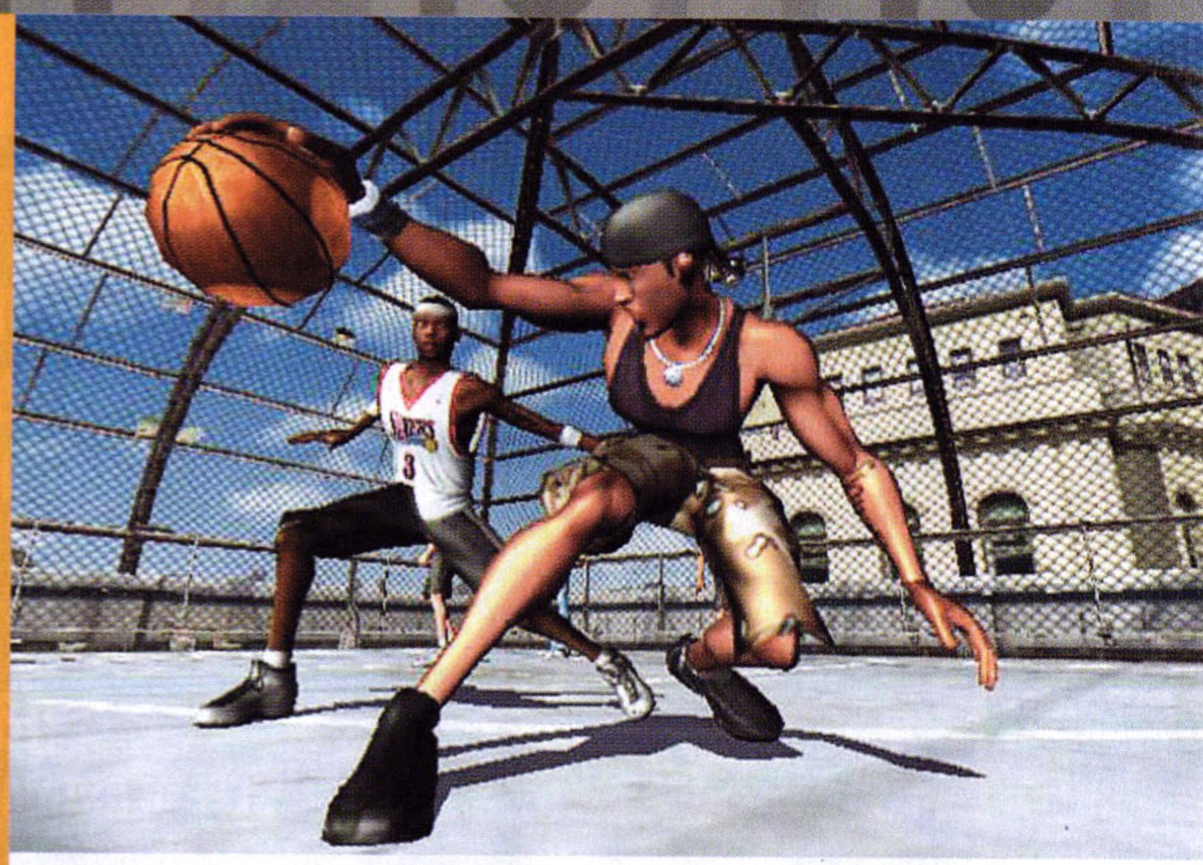
24 ANIMAL CROSSING
GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: So you fish? And you pull weeds? Then, you buy stuff for your house? And that's a game? Yeah, and it's a lot of fun. Animal Crossing stands alone as a title that can convert the most hardcore skeptics in the shortest amount of time. Its open-ended style and lack of a definitive ending just heightens the title's laid-back style. To this day, completists are updating fan sites and swapping tips on how to fill up the museum, get all of the insects, and design the best face for Blanca.

DEFINING MOMENT: The first time that an FPS junky and their significant non-gaming other join forces to go collect fruit and decorate their living room.

INTERESTING FACT: As of this writing, a complete set of Animal Crossing e-Cards (Series 2) goes for $89.99 on eBay.

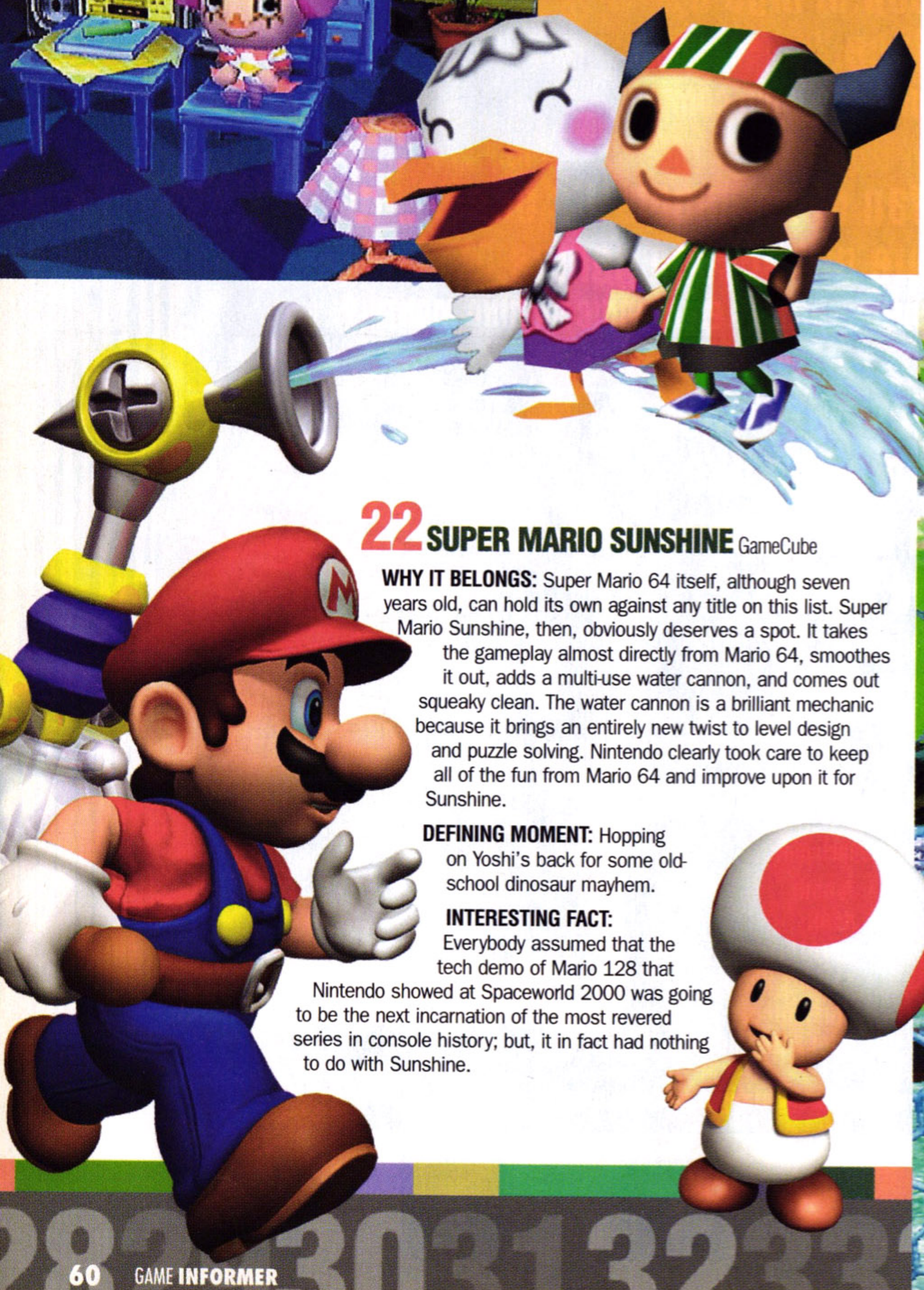


23 NBA STREET VOL. 2 PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: The Street series has made basketball a mainstream game. It's easy enough for anyone to pick up and play, yet it's loaded with strategy and depth. For Vol. 2, there is much more to play through. Also, being able to kick-pass and do the unstoppable Gamebreaker 2 are awesome additions.

DEFINING MOMENT: In Be A Legend mode, you start as a stat-starved scrub and play against fellow scrubs. When you first play against an NBA player – usually a bench guy in real life – you realize how far you really have to go to become a good baller, as they're so much better than you.

INTERESTING FACT: In order to get the Off the Hezay move done correctly in motion-capture, the assistant producer got a ball bounced off of his head for 15 takes.

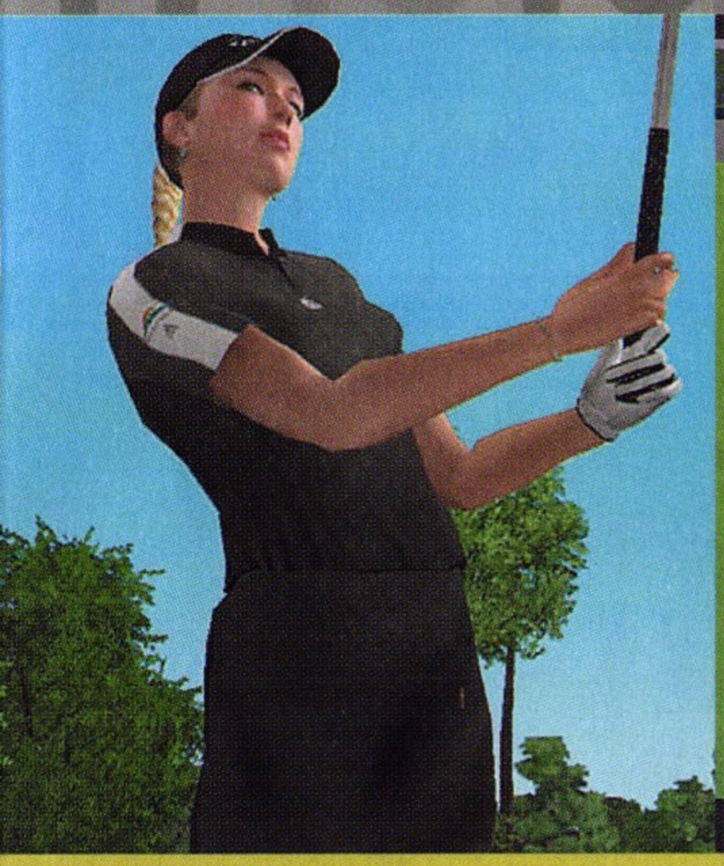


22 SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Super Mario 64 itself, although seven years old, can hold its own against any title on this list. Super Mario Sunshine, then, obviously deserves a spot. It takes the gameplay almost directly from Mario 64, smoothes it out, adds a multi-use water cannon, and comes out squeaky clean. The water cannon is a brilliant mechanic because it brings an entirely new twist to level design and puzzle solving. Nintendo clearly took care to keep all of the fun from Mario 64 and improve upon it for Sunshine.

DEFINING MOMENT: Hopping on Yoshi's back for some old-school dinosaur mayhem.

INTERESTING FACT: Everybody assumed that the tech demo of Mario 128 that Nintendo showed at Spaceworld 2000 was going to be the next incarnation of the most revered series in console history; but, it in fact had nothing to do with Sunshine.



21 TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004 PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: The three-click swing in golf is legendary. But, like the real life Tiger, this series is all about breaking the rules. By using an analog swing, this title has grown popular through its more hands-on approach to the video game sport. With 2004, it becomes even more attractive with its exhaustive unlockables system that helps your player accrue sponsorship money and attribute points. There's no going back now.

DEFINING MOMENT: When you sell your golfer's soul by wearing some ugly visor just so you can smile for the cameras and collect your sponsorship check. Tool.

INTERESTING FACT: Although Cedric the Entertainer is the only unlockable celebrity, Tiger's character creation matrix lets you create any number of people, famous or otherwise, on your own.

19 TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL
PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Few titles can set a graphical benchmark that stands strong long after its release. Splinter Cell is one of the few. The character models, particularly the protagonist's, are beautiful. Lighting effects are incredible in their own right, and coupled with the astounding shadowing, they blow the competition away. The gameplay is equally smooth. Stealth action developers and gamers alike got a swift lesson in visual design from Splinter Cell the day that it was released.

DEFINING MOMENT: Doing the splits in a hallway to hide up out of sight, then dropping down silently behind a guard to take him out.

INTERESTING FACT: The cloth effects in Splinter Cell were made for Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time, and the lighting effects in Prince of Persia were made for Splinter Cell.

20 DEVIL MAY CRY PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: The console action genre received a severe beatdown – thanks to Resident Evil creator Shinji Mikami – when Devil May Cry came out. Packing both two-fisted pistols and a big-ass sword, Dante uses them in tandem – while also possessing the ability to transform into a bad-ass demon. A good variety of weapons are available, and they all work together in spectacular ways to lay waste to the hordes of demons in your path.

DEFINING MOMENT: The first time you successfully use your sword to pop an enemy up and juggle it with the pistols until it blows apart. Tricky to pull off at first, but this move quickly becomes second nature.

INTERESTING FACT: The protagonist Dante was modeled largely after the main character Cobra from the director's favorite Japanese manga, *Space Adventure Cobra*.

NOT EVEN MY
DEATH

IN MY QUEST
FOR REDEMPTION

DECEIVED BY A TREACHEROUS VIZIER, I WAS LED TO UNLEASH THE DARK POWERS OF THE SANDS OF TIME UPON THE SULTAN'S KINGDOM. NOW, AS DARKNESS CONSUMES ALL IN ITS PATH, MY SPEED, AGILITY, AND SKILL AS A WARRIOR ARE NOT ENOUGH. I MUST LEARN TO COMMAND THE SANDS TO SLOW, FREEZE, ACCELERATE, AND EVEN REVERSE TIME ITSELF. IF I FAIL TO UNDO MY FATAL MISTAKE, ALL SHALL PERISH WITH ME.

MINE IS A FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL...NOT GLORY.

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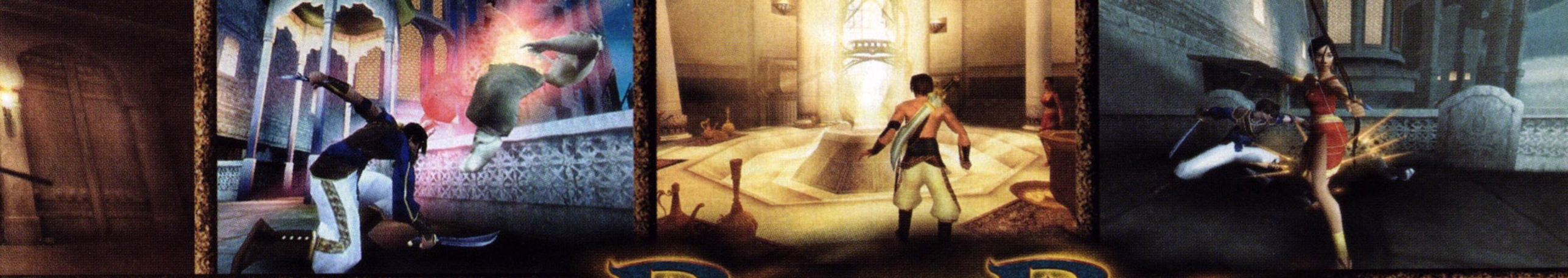

PRINCE OF PERSIA
THE SANDS OF TIME™

CAN STOP ME

"INSPIRED, GORGEOUS, AND SMOOTH - WE'RE SOLD."
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18 SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: Not only is SOCOM one of the finest squad-based shooters of all time, it also has the best command interface ever in the USB headset. Barking orders at your team is much more fun than issuing commands via the menu system; but even without the headset, you can still enjoy the clever mission designs, strong team member AI, and solid graphics. To make the whole package even sexier, SOCOM has easily the best online gaming on the PS2.

DEFINING MOMENT: The first time you hear a voice in your ear tensely murmur "Enemy at twelve o'clock" can't be topped, except for when you hear "Target neutralized" quickly thereafter.

INTERESTING FACT: Every day, the SOCOM database reports between 50 to 60,000 unique gamers playing online. Every single one of these players considers themselves to be the absolute master of the sniper rifle.

17 VIEWTIFUL JOE GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Along with Metroid Prime and The Wind Waker, Viewtiful Joe is one of those exclusive titles that makes owning a GameCube so great. Capcom did an excellent job, not just on the visual presentation, but also in creating varied gameplay and level design as well as a perfect control scheme. All of these elements combine to make Viewtiful Joe a brawler that is not only fun to play but also a blast to watch. The styles of art and animation demonstrate that not only RPGs can have an enthralling, cohesive sense of setting. Long live 2D!

DEFINING MOMENT: Successfully executing a bullet-time dodge of your opponent's ammo is cooler than *The Matrix* or Max Payne could ever hope to make the effect.

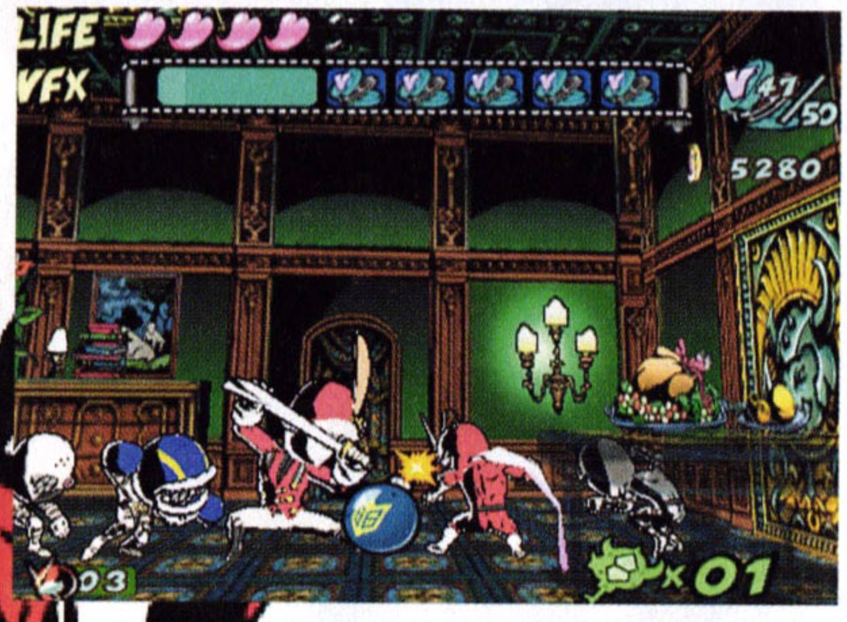
INTERESTING FACT: The studio that developed Viewtiful Joe, Production Studio 4, was created by Capcom specifically to make GameCube-exclusive titles. It also made P.N. 03, and the upcoming titles Killer 7 and Resident Evil 4.

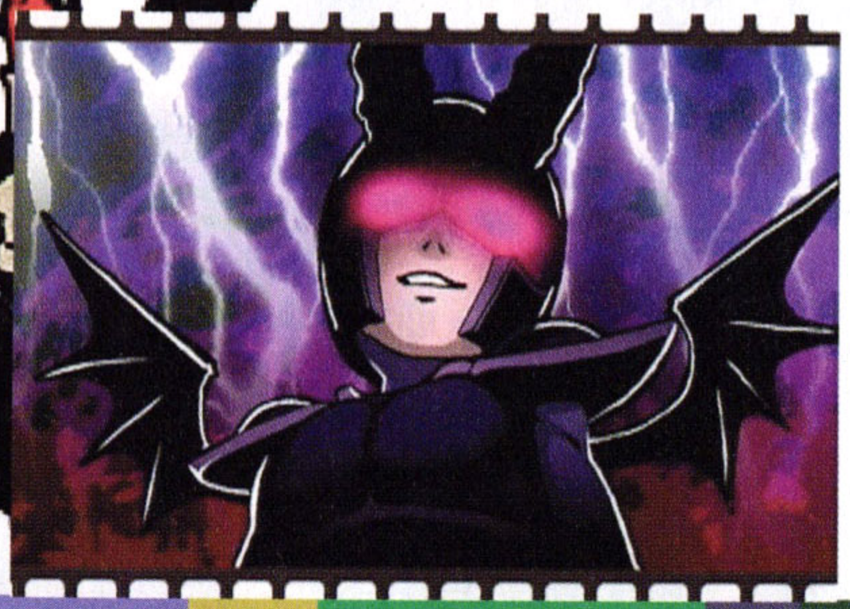
16 XENOSAGA EPISODE 1: DER WILLE ZUR MACHT PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: Following in FF X's footsteps, Xenosaga continued to push the envelope in console cinematography. Its convoluted story tops many Hollywood films in terms of depth and interesting characters – all are painstakingly developed and usually have two or three levels of motivation. In addition, the plot is layered so deeply that reading the in-game database is practically required to understand all the twists and turns.

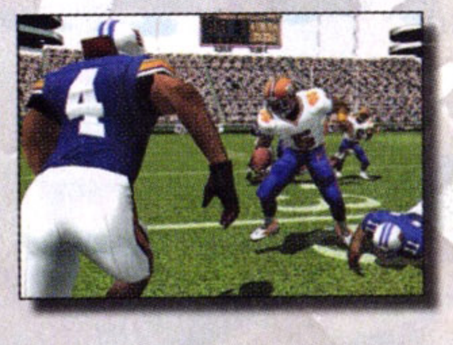
DEFINING MOMENT: Jr., one of your party members, turns out to be much, much more than he seems. This twist blows the entire story into another dimension, far beyond the realms of standard console RPG fare.

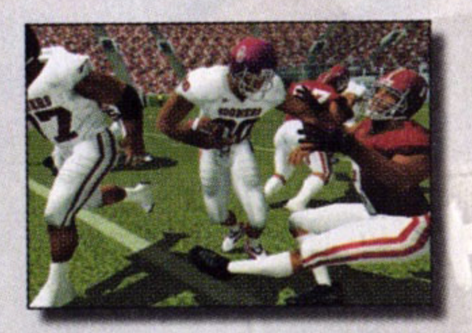
INTERESTING FACT: Tetsuya Takahashi, the director of Xenosaga, brought most of his development team from Squaresoft's Xenogears over to Namco to make Xenosaga.

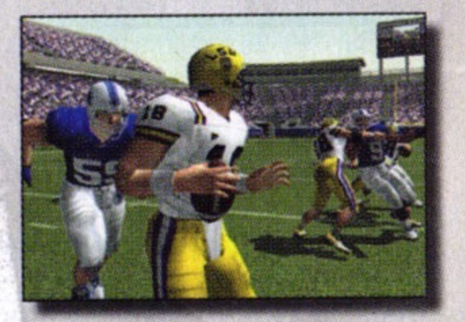


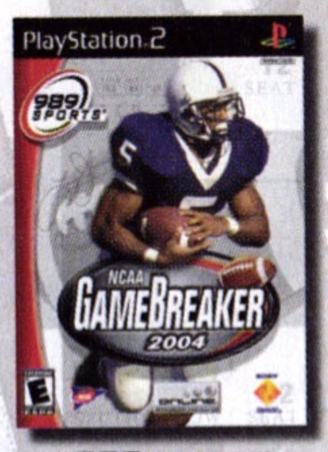


NCAA GAMEBREAKER 2004









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15 VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: Since the first Virtua Fighter released in 1995 for the 32X, the series has been a major player in console fighting. Virtua Fighter 4 was a hell of a game, and Evolution takes it to the next level of greatness. Evolution retains the almost-ridiculous depth of VF4, which allows players to truly master the fighting style of any character; and added single-player modes make it clearly superior to the competition's solo offerings. The graphics are lovely, bringing the matches to brilliant life. Evolution is, in our opinion, the best 3D fighter ever released.

DEFINING MOMENT: Actually beating the highest-skill AI opponents. Yes, it can be done.

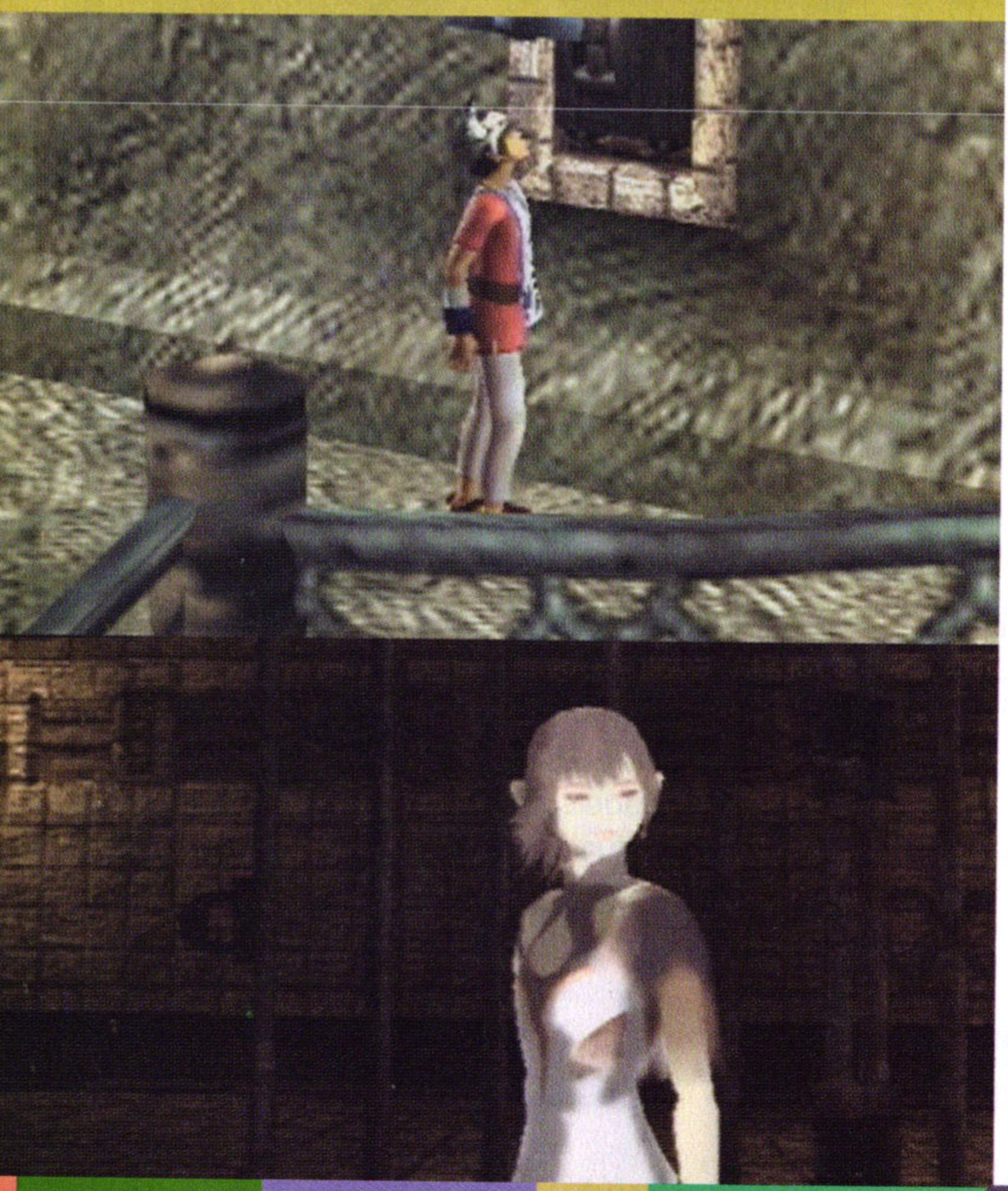
INTERESTING FACT: AM2, the developer, had the 15 best players in Japan come to their office so their skills could be transferred into the Evolution AI.

14 ICO PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: The lucky few that gave this game a chance were richly rewarded. Besides top-notch character animation, a haunting soundtrack, stunning graphics, and exceptional level design; this game also offers one of the most emotional stories in video games to date. We say that no one can beat the game without shedding a tear or two (people claiming otherwise are lying), and even jaded gamers have to admit that you really feel for these two misfit main characters.

DEFINING MOMENT: After Yorda puts you into the boat and you watch the castle crumble around her, there won't be a dry eye in the house. But, if you wait after the credits, a hopeful surprise waits on the beach.

INTERESTING FACT: European and Asian versions of this game include a light saber, a watermelon-eating end scene, various film effects, translations of Yorda's dialogue, and a two-player co-op mode.

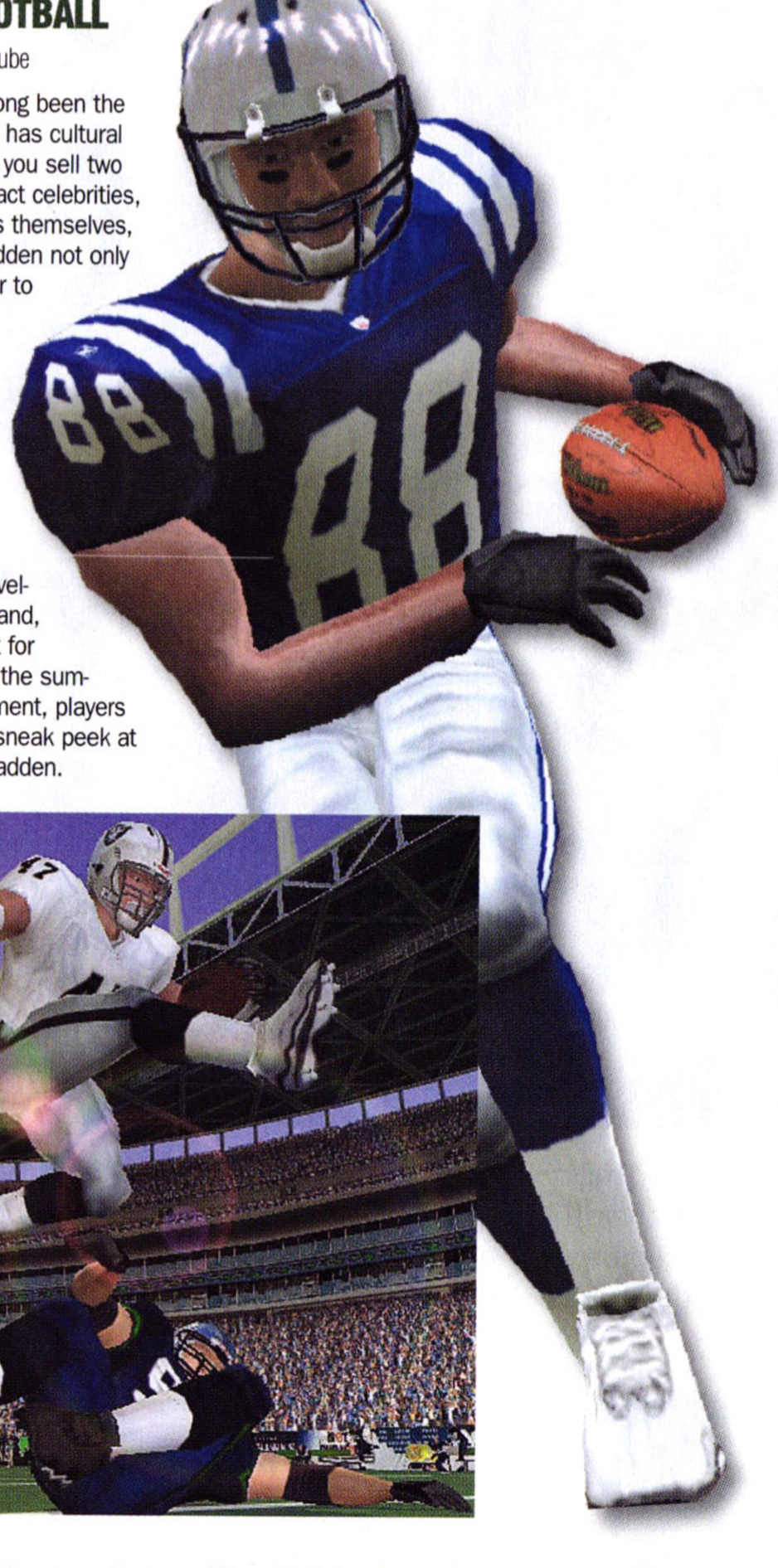


13 MADDEN NFL FOOTBALL 2004 PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Madden has long been the face of video game football, and it has cultural significance like few others. When you sell two million copies in three weeks, attract celebrities, and are even played by the players themselves, you've got a good thing going. Madden not only keeps its gameplay edge from year to year, but it has basically created the career mode template that you see being used in so many sports games.

DEFINING MOMENT: When you actually feel bad about raising the price of foam fingers for your fans in Owner's Mode.

INTERESTING FACT: Madden's developer, EA Tiburon, is based in Maitland, Florida, and has become a magnet for several NFL players in the area. In the summer, when the game is in development, players will stop by just so they can get a sneak peek at what's coming up in next year's Madden.



12 ESPN NFL FOOTBALL PlayStation 2 | Xbox

WHY IT BELONGS: ESPN has been fighting a battle against EA Sports' Madden, but this is the year that it truly made its mark. With First-Person Football and The Crib, developer Visual Concepts changes the way we play the sport and gives us the coolest unlockables in sports games. Playing via the first-person perspective delivers a true feeling of realism that few video games have ever conveyed.

DEFINING MOMENT: You know you're hooked on First-Person Football when you start looking forward to kickoffs and punts – just so you can run down the field and smack the jock off of the poor return man.

INTERESTING FACT: Holding an opponent to zero total yards gets you a Julius Peppers bobblehead and Ronnie Lott as a classic free agent for your Crib.

11 KINGDOM HEARTS PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: When Kingdom Hearts was announced, many gamers feared it as an abomination, the product of a sick and unholy union between Square Soft and Disney. After the reviews started coming in, people were slowly, unwillingly convinced to think of it as a possible purchase. Once the disc was in the PS2, all doubts were erased. A truly seamless blend of standard RPG exploration and character growth melds with real-time action-style combat, making Kingdom Hearts one of the best efforts by Square Soft to date, and that's quite the stamp of approval.

DEFINING MOMENT: Facing Sephiroth's own bad self in the arena and being abjectly humbled by his awesome powers of destruction.

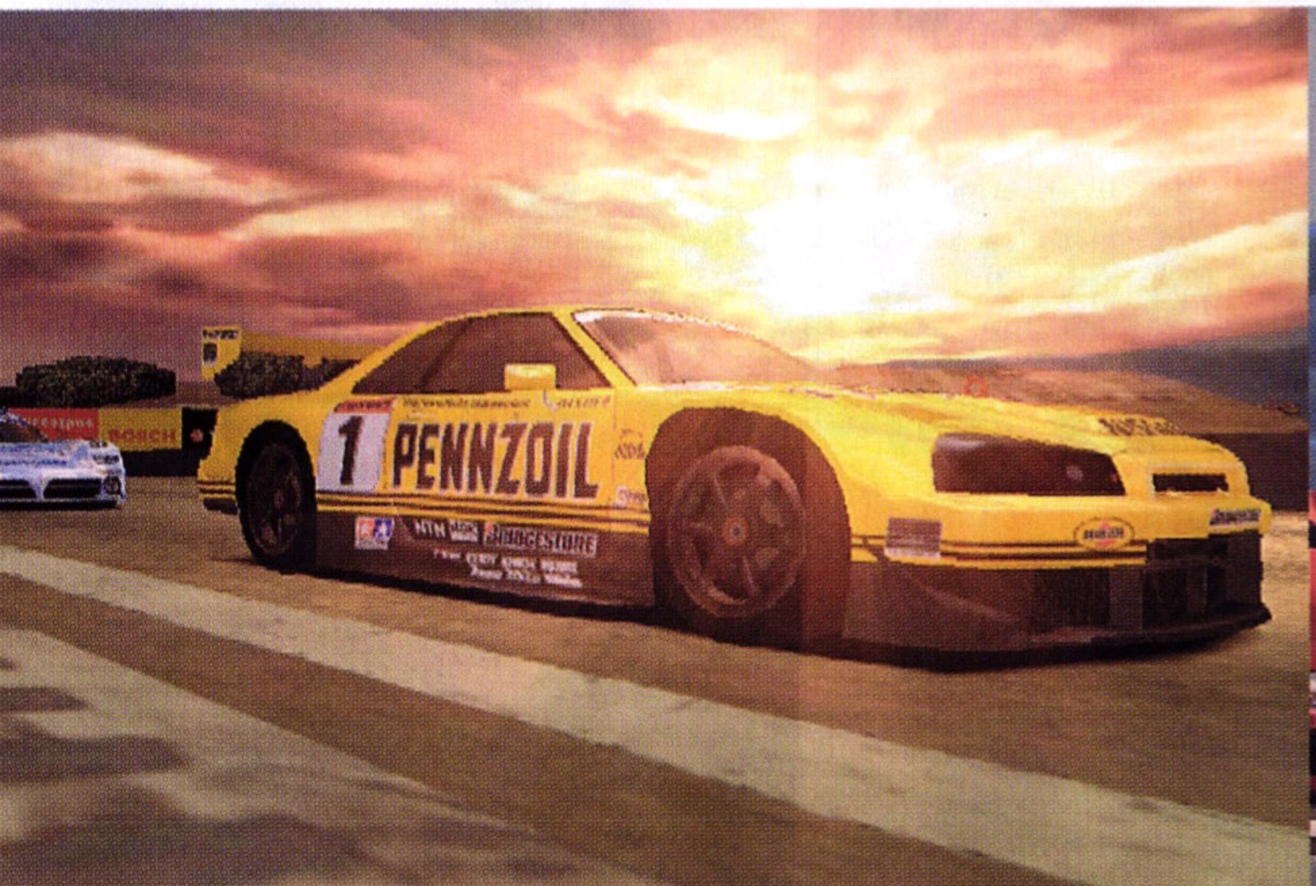
INTERESTING FACT: Square Soft had more people working on this project than they had ever had developing any individual Final Fantasy title.

10 GRAN TURISMO 3 PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: Gran Turismo was one of the first big series to be born on the original PlayStation, and although the sequels haven't added much in terms of gameplay, it can be argued that even now there isn't a whole lot of room for improvement. Gran Turismo 3 was one of the most highly anticipated early titles for the PS2, and it did nothing to disappoint. The physics engine is as accurate is ever, the graphics look awesome (especially coming off of GT 2), and there are over 150 cars to race in. GT 3 still stands as one of the best racing sims ever created.

DEFINING MOMENT: Checking out your garage full of cars and realizing that there's nothing finer you could want to lead the pack with.

INTERESTING FACT: Polyphony Digital, the authors of GT, has the columns in their Tokyo headquarters labeled to look like a parking garage.



9 METROID PRIME GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Bringing the exploration and platforming from the 2D installments of the acclaimed Metroid series to a first-person, 3D perspective is one of the most ambitious moves in video games. However, Nintendo and developer Retro Studios pulled it off with flying colors. The strange planet is both beautiful and deadly, and Samus finds many useful items to make her battles and traversing much easier. This is a stellar action game disguised as an FPS.

DEFINING MOMENT: The first time the lights go out and you do battle with the Chozo Ghosts – tainted spirits of the planet's former inhabitants. You must switch visors to be able to see them. Even then, they warp around the room with speed and fire dangerous bursts at Samus.

INTERESTING FACT: If you use GBA connectivity and a beaten version of Metroid Fusion – the GBA Metroid that came out around the same time – you will unlock the full version of the NES Metroid to play on your GameCube. Thanks, Nintendo!

Handheld TOP 10

Since this is a list of the current console generation, we would be remiss to discount our handheld friends. Here are our picks for handheld games released since the Game Boy Advance's launch in June of 2001.

1 Metroid Fusion

2 Super Mario World: Super Mario Advance 2

3 Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising

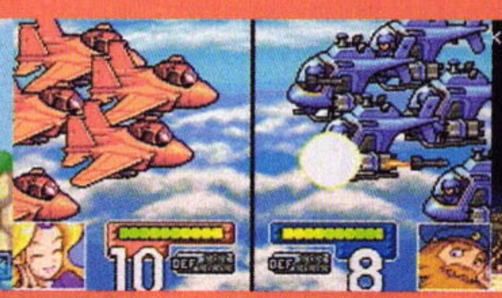
4 The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past

5 Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance

6 Mario Kart Super Circuit

7 Final Fantasy Tactics Advance

8 Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3



9 Advance Wars

10 Street Fighter Alpha 3

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8 STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC Xbox

WHY IT BELONGS: KOTOR is one of the few Star Wars titles that draws in new fans instead of alienating current ones. The mix of free exploration, interesting (and somewhat player-determined) story, and smooth combat that Bioware created for this release works perfectly. The level of customization available is unrivaled in the console universe and, combined with unforeseen plot twists, keeps the player involved throughout the entire game. The action takes place in real time, but can be paused lest the player get overwhelmed by the number of options they have. Every facet comes together in a way that demands to be played at least once by anyone who even mildly enjoys RPGs.

DEFINING MOMENT: Meeting Lord Malak in the middle of the quest. It's a "jaw-dropping" experience.

INTERESTING FACT: Knights ties in with the Star Wars expanded universe by allowing players to obtain the armor of Exar Kun, an ancient Sith lord mentioned in several works.

PC TOP 10

For the purposes of this numbered organization (a.k.a. "list"), we set the cut-off date for eligible titles as November 1, 2000. Because, see, there aren't really "generations" in the PC universe, like there are for consoles, but there are some truly awesome games here that we wanted included.

1 Warcraft III: Frozen Throne

2 Battlefield 1942

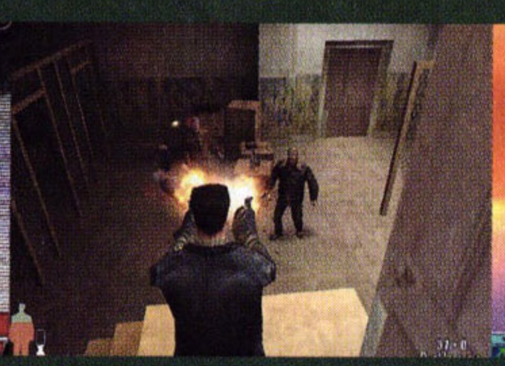
3 Age of Mythology

4 Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

5 Icewind Dale II

6 SimCity 4

7 Unreal Tournament 2003



8 Max Payne

9 Homeworld 2

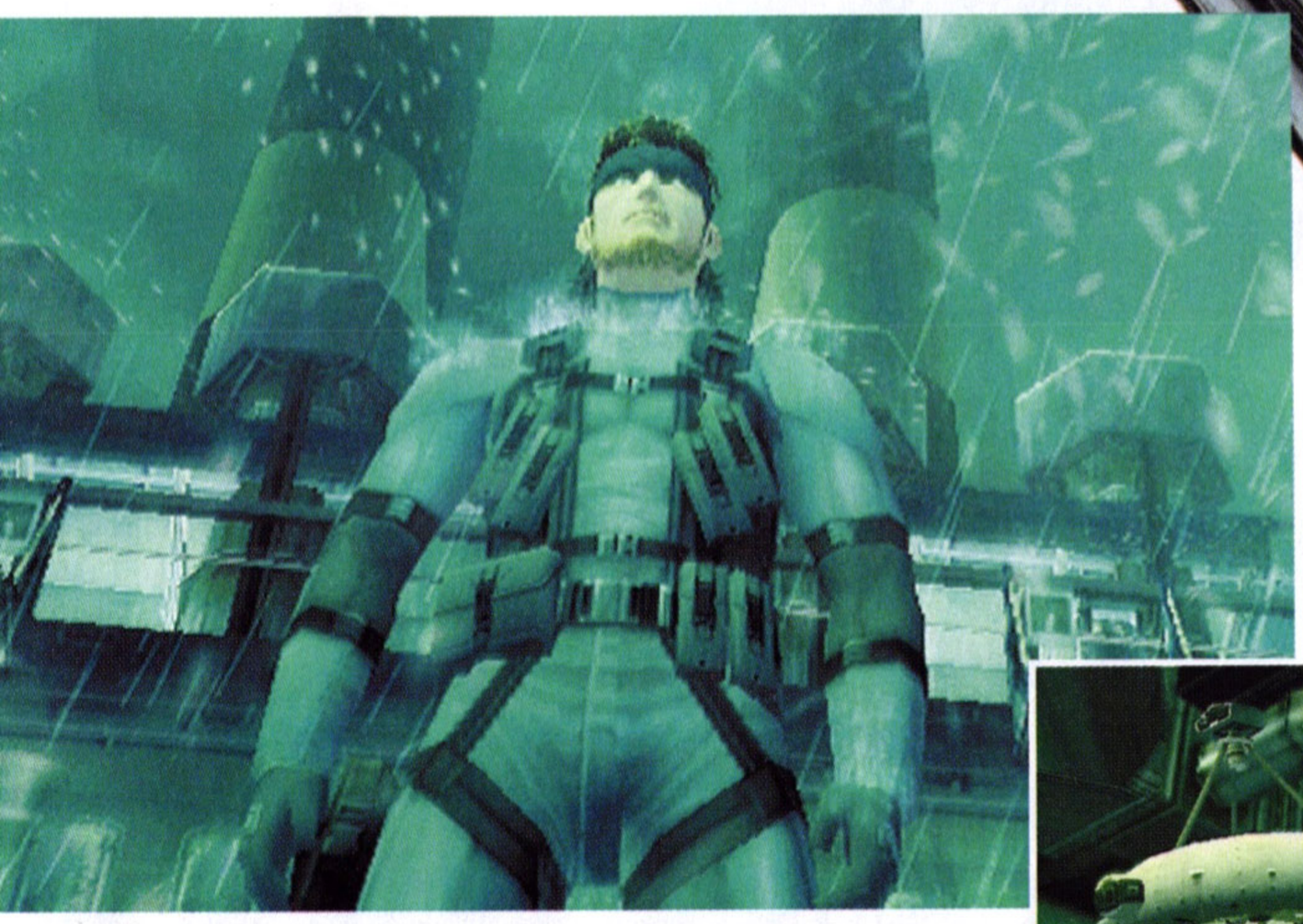
10 Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast

7 GRAND THEFT AUTO III PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: GTA III takes the free-form gameplay of its top-down predecessors and brings it into full 3D. Three sections of Liberty City can be explored at your leisure, and players can do everything from stealing any vehicle and beating random passersby, to hunting for hidden packages and doing side missions. The audio is revolutionary, with a handful of stations packed with original content and an eclectic musical blend. The main missions can be accomplished a number of ways, always giving you a choice in the action.

DEFINING MOMENT: When you get to pay back that fat cat, money-grubbing, back-stabbing Salvatore. You did all his dirty work and he gave you the shaft, so it's very satisfying to snipe him in the first mission on Staunton Island.

INTERESTING FACT: Listening to the radio, you'll hear several funny ads for made up products – including Pogo the Monkey and Pets Overnight. All of the web addresses they give actually lead to real sites that Rockstar made up just for fun.

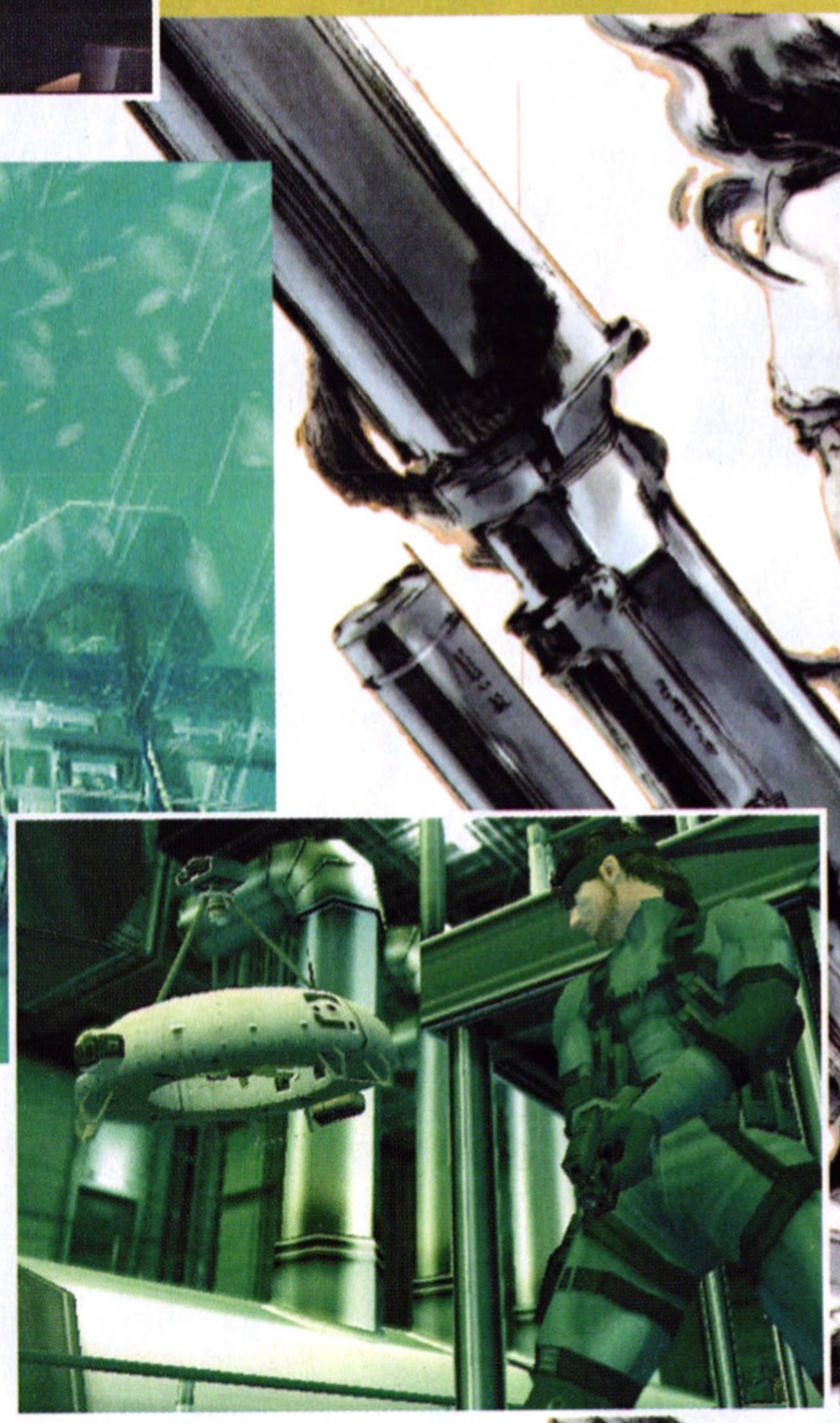


6 METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: Metal Gear Solid 2 was hyped like no PlayStation 2 game before it. Whatever your thoughts on the story or controlling Raiden, it pays off in both the gameplay and graphics. What is often overlooked in the title is its merging of visual fidelity while still maintaining a high degree of user interaction. It also features some sweet firefights, such as the first-person corridor shootout on the tanker. Sons of Liberty remains a sophisticated blend of storytelling, deep gameplay, and thrills that has yet to be topped on any console.

DEFINING MOMENT: Upon regaining control of Raiden after a very stirring cutscene, the Chief's transmissions become incoherent, and reality starts to turn in on itself as you hallucinate.

INTERESTING FACT: In talking to Metal Gear creator Hideo Kojima, we were told that, in Japan, the character of Raiden (who is reviled by many American gamers) was almost universally liked. Interestingly, he probably won't be making a return for Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater.



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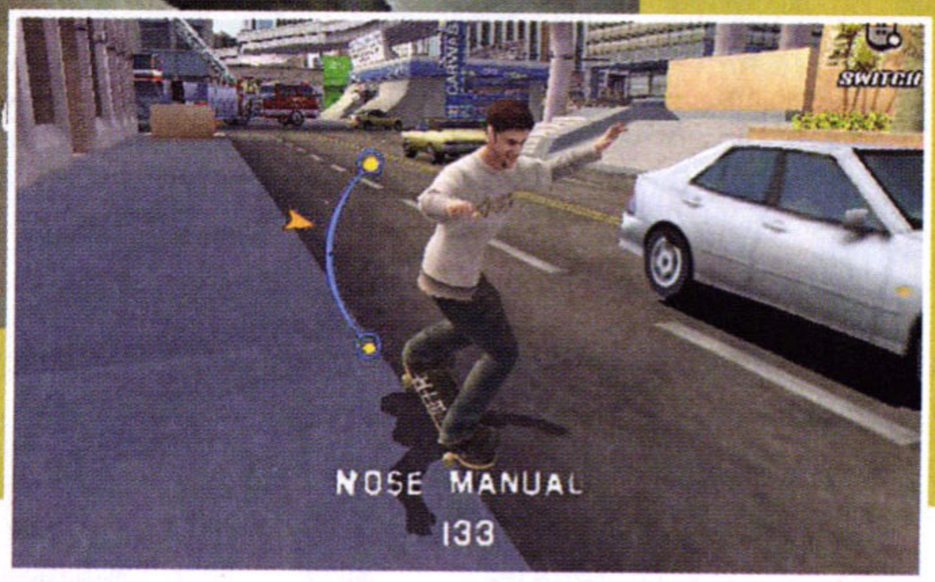


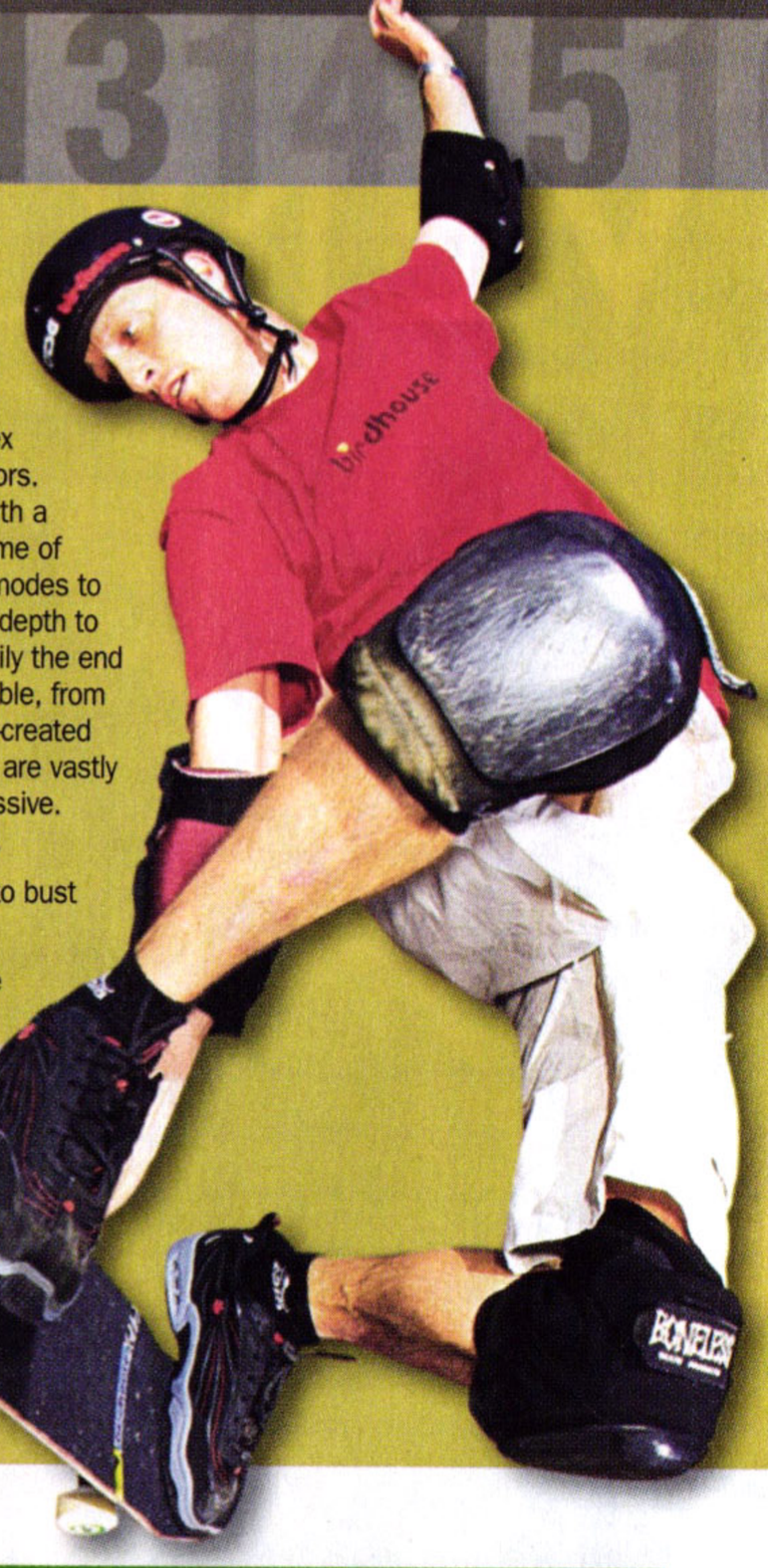
5 TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

PlayStation 2 | Xbox | GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 is the apex of the evolutionary progression started in its predecessors. Everything from the previous titles is there, combined with a whole host of kick-ass new stuff. The game features some of the best-designed levels of the series, more two-player modes to school your friends in, and reverts. Reverts add a lot of depth to the game by making it so that a vert trick isn't necessarily the end of a combo. Almost everything in the game is customizable, from your skater's appearance to button combos to fully user-created parks. The character models, animations, and collisions are vastly improved from the earlier games, and the levels are massive. THPS 3 reigns supreme as the pinnacle of skating titles.

DEFINING MOMENT: Using all the skills you've learned to bust your first million-point trick.

INTERESTING FACT: In a bizarre licensing twist, *Star Wars: Episode I* bad-boy Darth Maul is a hidden, playable character in THPS 3.

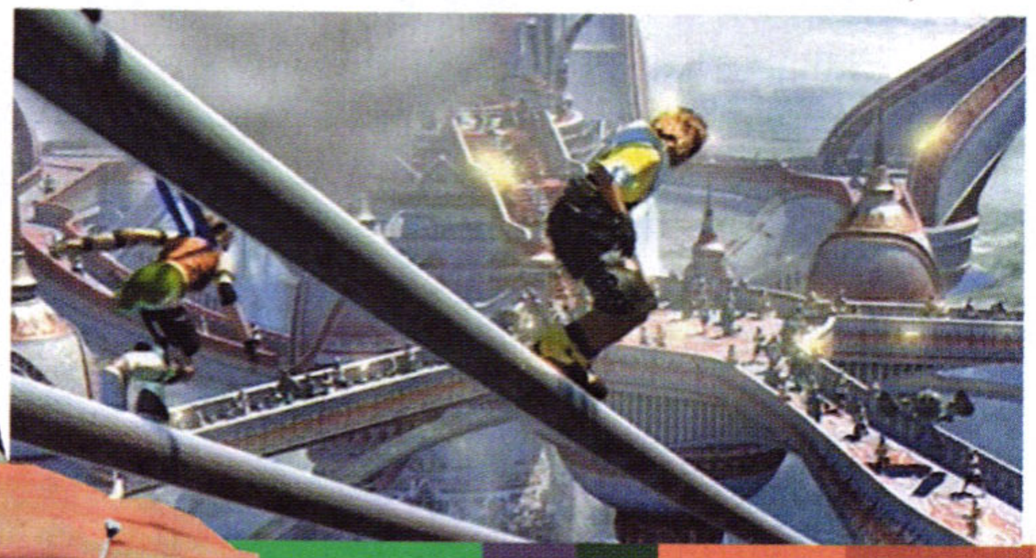


4 FINAL FANTASY X PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: Redefining the way that we look at the role-playing genre and video games as a whole, Final Fantasy X single-handedly raised the bar for cinematic sequences, spoken dialogue, and storytelling. The plot twists will prey on your very senses and will make you pull out the Kleenex more than you would ever care to admit. Main character Tidus is certainly easy to hate, but you'd be hard-pressed not to feel for him when you learn that he will never get the chance to fall in love. You'll also watch him kill his father in desperate plea to save the world. Final Fantasy X is also a breakthrough success on the gameplay front. With over 40 hours of side quests and a brilliantly diverse combat system, it has every facet of an irresistible game.

DEFINING MOMENT: At the end of the game, Tidus and Yuna run to one another for a loving embrace. Just as their bodies touch, Tidus passes through Yuna like a ghost through a wall. At this point, it becomes clear that it could never be, as Tidus has already crossed over.

INTERESTING FACT: In the Japanese Ryukyu dialect, Tidus means "sun," Wakka means "water," and Yuna means "moon, flower."



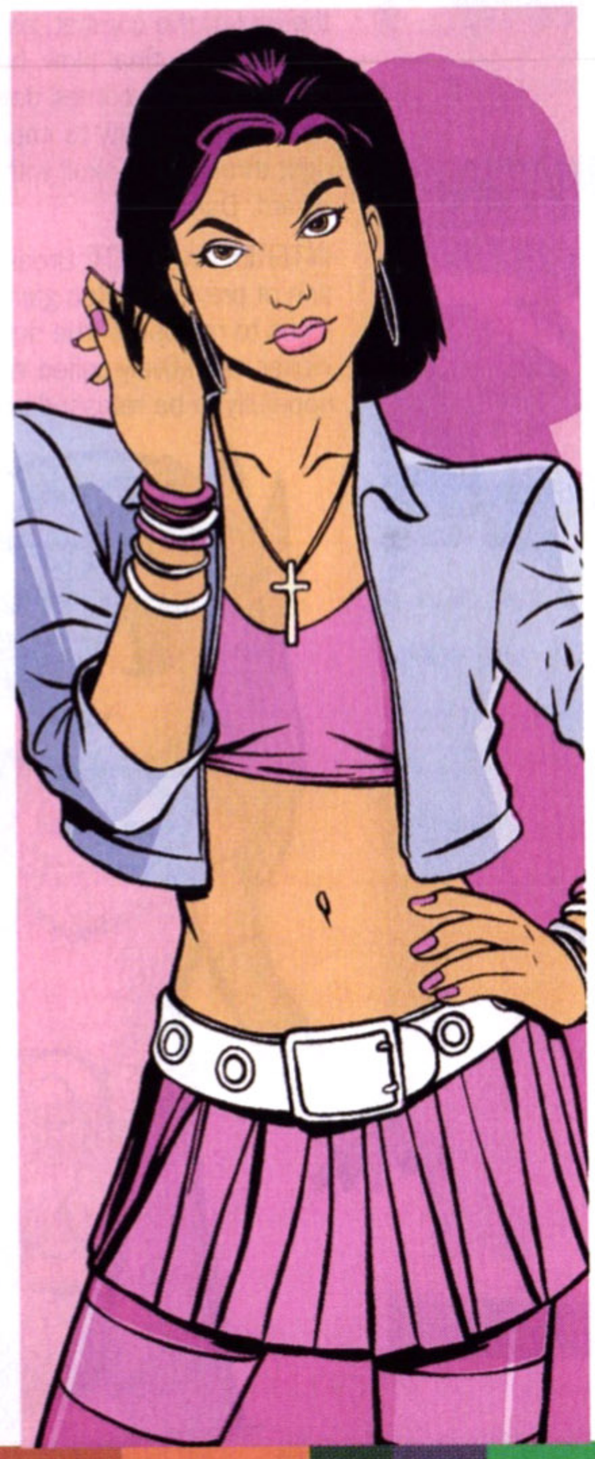
> "Redefining the way that we look at the role-playing genre..."

3 HALO Xbox

WHY IT BELONGS: Nobody can possibly argue that Halo is not, to this day, the definitive title for the Xbox. Explosive goodness is found in every aspect of both single and multiplayer modes; stunning graphics combine with tight control and incredibly smooth, exciting gameplay to make a nearly perfect gem of a title. The selection of weapons is a blast to mess around with and multiplayer allows up to 16-players through the System Link Cable for maximum destruction. Certainly, this has been the focus of many a LAN party. The vehicles, though, are what brought Halo up to the pinnacle of its potential, with the depths of strategy and mayhem they added to gameplay. To be honest, you'd have to be a fool to own an Xbox without Halo.

DEFINING MOMENT: Hopping on the Warthog and laying down the law for the first time in the Silent Cartographer level.

INTERESTING FACT: Developer Bungie, before Microsoft absorbed them, was originally creating Halo for the Macintosh.



2 GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY PlayStation 2

WHY IT BELONGS: GTA III was a phenomenal title, but Vice City surpassed it in nearly every way. Bringing the violent gameplay to the self-absorbed, style-addicted '80s is a compelling contrast. Main character Tommy Versetti, voiced by Ray Liotta, embarks on a captivating journey to become the big cheese in Vice City. Helicopters and motorcycles are the new vehicles; the soundtrack, full of classic tunes, is a monumental achievement; and issues with GTA III (like targeting and graphics) were addressed.

DEFINING MOMENT: Your friend, Lance Vance, gets captured. To save him, you've got to bust into a compound, bop your way over to where he's being held, take out his captors, and then drive him to the hospital with a whole gang of thugs on your tail. This mission requires almost all of your skills to be successfully completed.

INTERESTING FACT: You can hold up nearly any store in Vice City. Just aim at the clerk, and he should cough up some cash. He'll also hit the alarm, so you may want to end his pitiful existence quickly.

1 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER GameCube

WHY IT BELONGS: Why wouldn't it belong? Some misguided individuals would argue that there is too much sailing, too many recycled ideas from Ocarina of Time, or that Zelda shouldn't be cel-shaded. We at Game Informer are here to tell them they're wrong. Everything about this title is excellent. Sound, graphics, and animation come together to bring Hyrule to life in a way that makes you forget your living room. Link has never looked so good, and each character has been crafted with such exquisite care that five months after finishing the quest, players are still able to identify individual characters. Attack animations and the sounds that accompany them are colorful and enthralling, while the control is so tight you might as well be wired directly into the GameCube. Combat never gets old with the amount of combos, moves, and powers available. The story, though in the same vein as previous Zelda titles, is completely new and riveting; and the sheer number of ways Link interacts with his environments and must use them to his advantage is unparalleled. This facet of gameplay greatly facilitates the creation of innovative dungeons that are exciting and fun to explore.

Still don't think The Wind Waker deserves to be number one? Ocarina of Time was a breakthrough in the way video games are made. Believe us when we say that The Wind Waker improves in every way upon its predecessor. This title is definitely one that no GameCube owner should be without.

DEFINING MOMENT: In the final battle against Ganondorf, the Princess herself is there with you, helping Link out against the Prince of Thieves. That would be enough of a defining moment itself, but there's more. At the end of the combat, as Link is about to deliver the final blow, he leaps high into the air and comes down sword-first at terminal velocity to impale Ganon right through the skull with the Master Sword. Damn.

INTERESTING FACT: Breaking the tradition of previous Zelda games, Nintendo plans to release a true sequel to The Wind Waker, tentatively called Wind Waker 2, hopefully to be released sometime in 2004.

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THE FUTURE ACCORDING TO SQUARE ENIX

When Square Soft and Enix announced that they would merge with one another, a hush fell over the video game community. It was only natural that every self-respecting role-playing fanatic would gasp and hold their breath until the newly formed company revealed what would become of the Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest franchises.

After much begging (and a little bit of prodding), Square Enix has granted Game Informer an exclusive look at the games (and movies) that will shape the future of the role-playing genre. With Final Fantasy VII, Kingdom Hearts II, Dragon Quest VIII, and an onslaught of Front Mission titles leading the charge; the future really does belong to Square Enix. We've already blown the doors off Dragon Quest VIII, Final Fantasy X-2, and Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles, but that's just the beginning. Here's a taste of what 2004 will bring!

FINAL FANTASY VII
ADVENT CHILDREN

THE FINAL FANTASY MOVIE YOU ALWAYS WANTED

When someone within Square Soft said, "Hey guys, we should do a sequel to Final Fantasy X," a new door was opened. Instead of constantly abandoning the work of the past, the entire series could theoretically be expanded upon. Naturally, when gamers caught wind that Square Soft was creating a follow-up to Final Fantasy X, everyone requested that Final Fantasy VII should be the next title to be revisited.

Apparently, Square Enix listens to its fan base. Final Fantasy VII is indeed making a return, but not in the way that you were expecting. As of now, Square Soft is planning on re-releasing the original PSone Final Fantasy VII on the PlayStation 2. No details have been given as to whether the game will feature any new content or upgrades in graphics and gameplay. We do know, however, that Square Enix hopes to include a bonus DVD featuring an hour-long CG movie dubbed Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children.

Additionally, it is not known if this movie can play on regular DVD players or if it will only work on the PlayStation 2. Square Enix also didn't reveal if the DVD would be sold separately.

Regardless, what we've seen thus far can only be described as mind-blowing. The story in the movie takes place two years after the end of Final Fantasy VII. Some mysterious force is disturbing the peace.

Seeing footage of Cloud almost brought a tear to our eye. Watching Sephiroth walk through the fire just as he did in Final Fantasy VII made us jump out of our seats and say, "Kick ass! When does this movie come out?"

Square Enix hasn't set a firm release date just yet, but it is hoping for summer 2004 in Japan. The U.S. release will follow shortly thereafter.

■ **FORMAT** TBA ■ **STYLE** MOVIE ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **RELEASE** SUMMER 2004

Square has successfully captured the look of the original game, but on a much grander scale

No story details have been given just yet, but we have a feeling that it focuses on the conflict between Cloud and Sephiroth

Is this a Sephiroth clone?

Newfound realism...still the same bad-ass

Who is the cloaked person in the wheelchair?

Notice the rust-ridden Shin-Ra sign in the distance

The character designs bear a striking resemblance to those in Final Fantasy X

"Let's dance!"

Does this scene look familiar?

Even with the high level of realism accompanying the environments and character models, Cloud still wields a ridiculously long sword

The U.S. division of Square Enix will localize the game with script treatments and new dialogue tracks. As of now, no voice actors have been announced

There's a good chance that half of our readers fainted when they looked at this picture

"I'm gonna need a bigger sword."

It just wouldn't be Final Fantasy without some kind of motorcycle chase scene

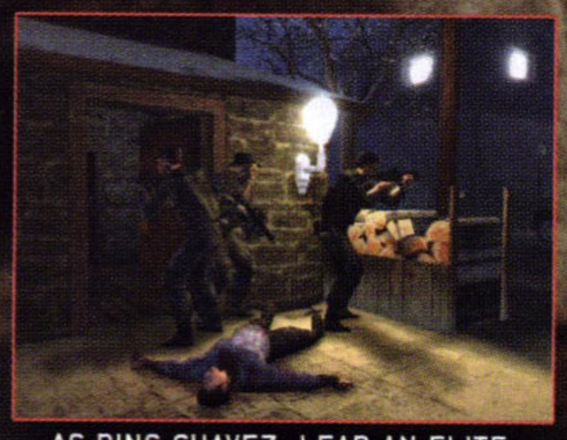
"Going...going...gone!!!"

WORLD

Foreign Ambassadors Report Peaceful Face-to-Face Negotiations with Terrorists in Venezuela

By Michael Golden
GLOBAL PRESS NETWORK

Venezuela – A government official [illegible] was relieved that the situation did not turn violent despite the heightened tensions between the two sides. As of yet, [illegible] is [illegible]



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Tom Clancy's RAINBOW SIX 3

XBOX LIVE

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Violence

Red Storm Entertainment

UBISOFT™

RETURN TO THE MAGIC KINGDOM

No one really knew what to expect of Kingdom Hearts. The concept of dropping well-respected Final Fantasy characters into familiar Disney worlds wasn't a thought that sat well with the gaming community. In fact, gamers were irate.

Amazingly, what sounded like a surefire train wreck went on to become one of the PlayStation 2's best-selling titles both in Japan and in the U.S. With an emotional roller coaster of a story, cameos by almost every Disney character fathomable, a highly entertaining combat system, and all the role-playing goodness that Square could cram onto one disc; Kingdom Hearts truly does have an undeniable charm, and is quickly becoming one of Square's most sought-after properties.

Keeping up with consumer demand, Square Enix hopes to have Sora and company back in the gaming fold in 2004. Since Square had already tapped into almost every Disney movie in the first game, there was speculation that the sequel might, in fact, take place in a different universe. There were rumors going around that we'd see Final Fantasy characters locked in combat with the Dragon Quest heroes. As amazing as this amalgamation sounds, it has proved to be just a myth. The game is once again set within Disney's magic kingdom. Naturally, Goofy and Donald will remain at Sora's side as teammate NPCs.

Square hasn't revealed any of the Disney licenses that will be used in this follow-up, but we're guessing that *Snow White*, *Atlantis*, and *Mulan* will be involved in some capacity. Also, don't rule out the possibility of Square returning to some of the more popular locations like *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.

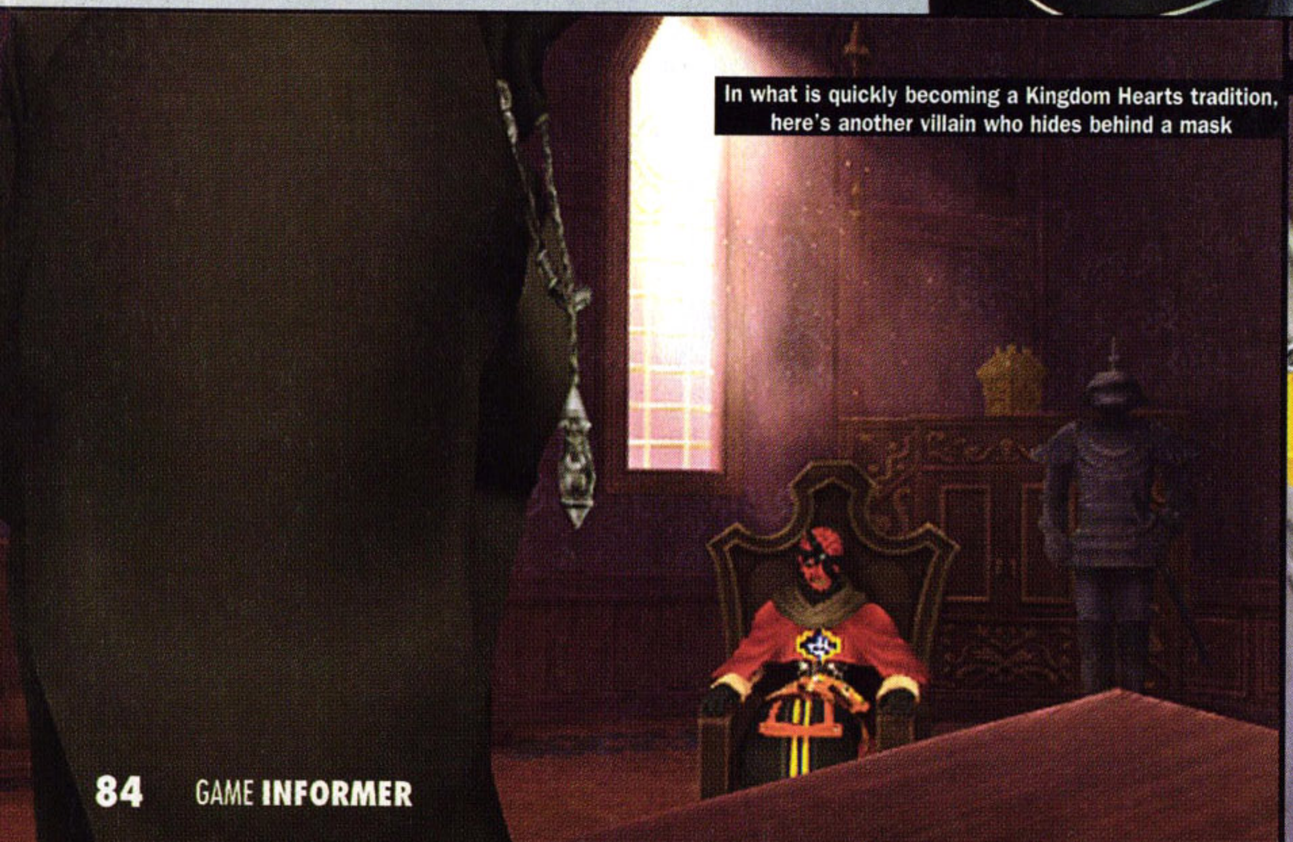
We have learned that a new force called the Nobody is tearing the land apart. Much like the Heartless (who are also returning), Nobodies are shape shifting creatures that serve a higher power.

Square has confirmed that the gameplay will be very similar to the previous chapters, and will include a host of enhancements. If you look closely at one of the pictures, you'll see that there's a character that is dual-wielding key blades. We've been told that this is a young boy who wishes to protect Sora. You'll also notice that Square won't show this youngster's face. Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

Representatives from Square's U.S. branch simply laughed at us when we asked them if Kingdom Hearts II would come stateside. It's definitely coming. It's just a matter of whether it will be late 2004 or early 2005.

Destiny Island is still the base of operations

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG
■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
■ **RELEASE** WINTER 2004/2005



In what is quickly becoming a Kingdom Hearts tradition, here's another villain who hides behind a mask

Something bad is about to happen

"Run, Frodo! The dark riders have returned!"

Kairi?

おまえをソラに会わせるわけにはいかない!

If you can, in fact, dual-wield like this mysterious tyke, imagine the level of destruction you could bring

急いで! 寝ぼけてる場合じゃないよ!

Which one of these Disney characters found the caterpillar's hookah? Which one is upset that he didn't find it first?

We get the feeling that this new character will be a major player (and possibly playable) through a good portion of the quest

It's unconfirmed at this time, but Haley Joel Osment will likely reprise his role as the voice of Sora

A new foe...

...unleashes pain in a big way

SORA ON THE GO

When we first caught wind of this title, insiders were calling it Kingdom Hearts 1.5. We later heard that it was going to be a Kingdom Hearts card game. As it turns out, Chain of Memories is actually a little of both. True enough, it's a follow-up to the original PlayStation 2 title that features card-based combat.

We're not exactly certain how the battle system will break down, but it is known that players will have complete control over Sora's general movements. Every action is linked to the cards that players collect throughout the course of the game. Cards with a red border represent key blade attacks. Blue is magic, green is item usage, and white is special. To unlock the abilities tied to the cards, players must play three of the same card. Unfortunately, no details have been given as to how these cards are earned.

From what we've seen, it appears as though all of the Disney-themed worlds and characters from the PlayStation 2 game are included in this handheld conversion. Square Enix is also hinting at the possibility of additional content. Does playing as Cloud sound enticing?

On the technology front, Chain of Memories will push the Game Boy Advance technology to the limit with compressed CG movies and sound from the PlayStation 2 title.

Square Enix has yet to set a release date in stone, but it is believed that it will release early in the new year both within the U.S. and Japan.

■ **FORMAT** GAME BOY ADVANCE ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **RELEASE** 2004

Here's the kitchen from the *Alice in Wonderland* world

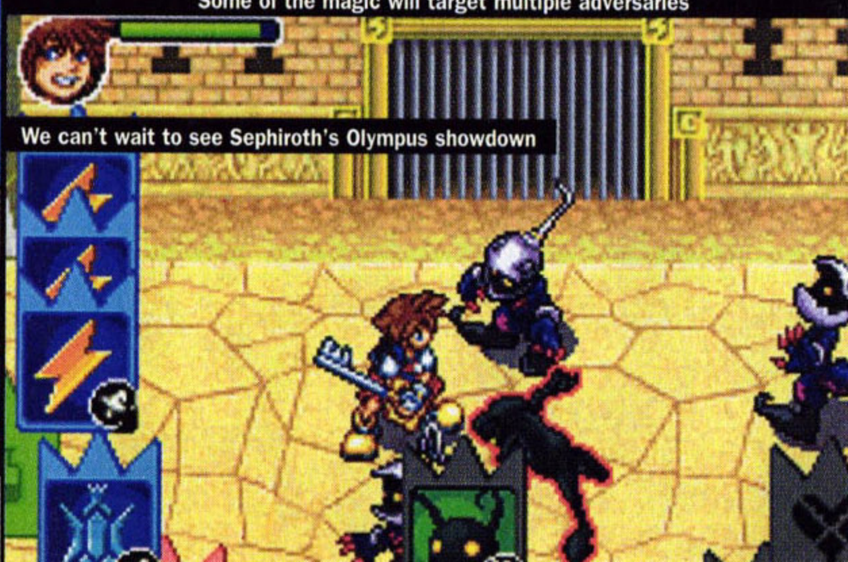
Playing three key blade cards results in a massive assault

"Billy Zane? Is that you?"

Some of the magic will target multiple adversaries

Platforming is just as abundant as it was in the PlayStation 2 game

Goofy opens up a can of you-know-what



We can't wait to see Sephiroth's Olympus showdown

MECHIN' A COMEBACK

Set in 2096, six years after the Second Huffman Conflict and conclusion of Front Mission 1st, Front Mission 4's story unfolds through the eyes of two different characters who just happen to be stationed in two completely different regions. Darril's tale begins in the U.C.S. (Unified Continental States), while Elsa resides in the E.C. (European Community). As the plot for each of these characters unfolds, the two become unintentionally involved and eventually stumble upon the same horrific truths. They both know that the secrets they've found could lead to the end of the world.

Players will have the option to select which character they begin the game with. Naturally, both quests are unique and should feature hardly any overlapping material. For the first time in the series, everything in the game is fully rendered. The dense urban cityscapes are now 10 times larger than they were in Front Mission 3, and feature painstaking details in all of their structures and texturing. Graphical realism is also expressed within the combat scenarios. You'll see chunks of armor flying off of wanzers and smoke effects rising from defeated units. As of yet, Square hasn't revealed whether or not players will be able to interact and possibly destroy the cities, but we have a sneaking suspicion that destruction is the name of the game.

Holding true to the series' roots, all of the action unfolds on a battle map with turn-based actions. Units can only move a certain number of squares per turn, and concocting strategies is paramount. When a unit targets another, the game zooms down to give players front row seats of the action at hand. We can only assume that individual body part targeting, counterattacks, and the EBS (Ejection Battle System) are still here. Interestingly, multiple officer windows are now represented onscreen for the wanzers during combat sequences. For what purpose, we have yet to discover. Wanzers are broken down into classes and, from what we hear, the upgrades that you apply to them will be shown cosmetically.

Square has given the game a tentative Japanese release date of winter 2003/2004, and while no U.S. details were given, a stateside release is inevitable.

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
■ **RELEASE** WINTER (JAPAN), TBD (U.S.)

"Lenny, are you sure this is the way to Mickey D's? We've been walking for hours!"

"Hadou-Ken!!!"

"Wow. That's some shaft you got there, Hank."

Look at the size of the city!

As they say, the bigger the gun the better

FINAL FANTASY XI

At Sony's annual Gamer's Day, it was revealed that the PlayStation 2 Hard Disk Drive will ship bundled with Final Fantasy XI in March 2004 for $99 (see pg. 25 for more). Interestingly, Final Fantasy XI will be pre-installed on the drive. Sony also announced that players will get a free 30 day trial of Final Fantasy XI, but after that, the online subscription fee will be $12.95 a month. Players will also be charged an additional $1 for every new character that he or she creates.

On the PC side, Square Enix is confident that the game will ship on October 28. Much like the PlayStation 2 title, the monthly fee will be $12.95.

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2, PC ■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX (PC), SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA (PLAYSTATION 2)
■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER (PC), MARCH 2004 (PLAYSTATION 2)

FINAL FANTASY X-2 INTERNATIONAL + LAST MISSION

Much like America is obsessed with director's cuts and special editions of movies, Japan is infatuated with extended versions of video games. Final Fantasy X-2 International + Last Mission is crammed to capacity with new content. The game features a new dungeon called the Tower of Yadonoki. Here, you'll stumble upon a slew of new weapons. With each new floor that you reach, it becomes more challenging. The game will also boast new costumes and classes. Pictured, you can see Yuna wearing a sailor outfit from the new Psychic class. From what we hear, if a player loads up a finished save file from the original X-2, an alternate ending can be accessed. Unfortunately, none of this bonus content is included in the forthcoming U.S. release. As of now, Square has no plans to release this updated version in the States.

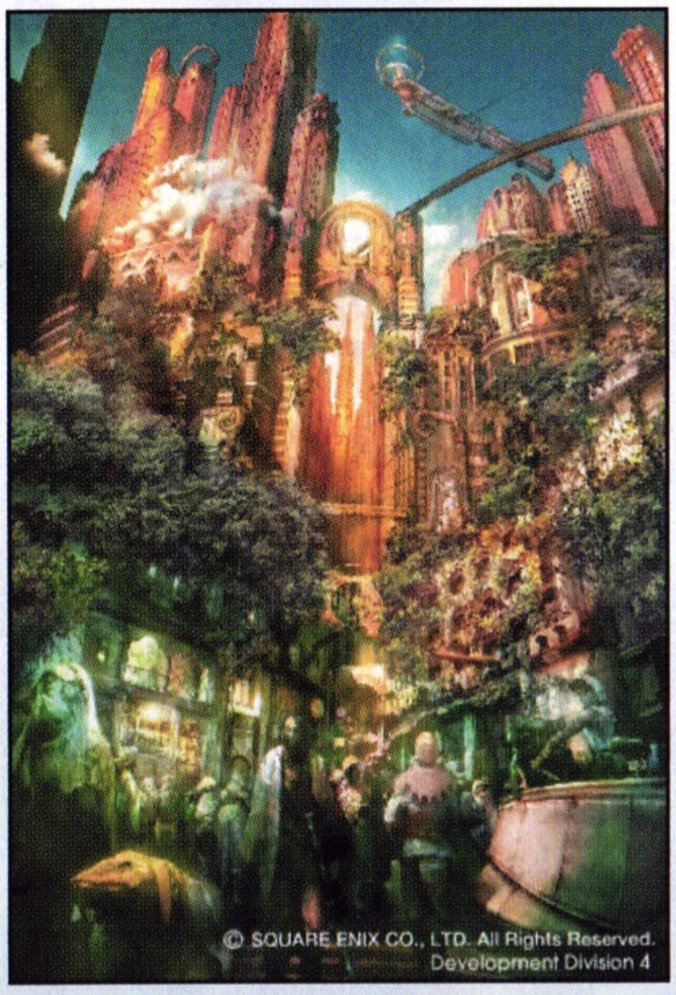
■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **RELEASE** WINTER (JAPAN ONLY)

STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

The Japanese release of Star Ocean III didn't exactly go as planned. Due to a conflict between the game's coding and the PlayStation 2 hardware, people ran into a handful of problems like not being able to enter certain combat scenarios. Square Soft has assured us that the same problem won't occur when the title hits our shores next spring. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Star Ocean III, it features a sci-fi setting similar to Xenosaga, and is just as lengthy as any of the Final Fantasy games. Most of the dialogue in the game is voiced, and the real-time battle sequences prove to be enthralling. We can't wait to see how this title translates to the U.S. market.

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2, PC ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE ■ **RELEASE** SPRING 2004

FINAL FANTASY 12



On November 19 at the Virgin Cinema in Tokyo, Japan, Square Enix will at last unveil Final Fantasy 12. True enough, we still don't have X-2 or XI, but Japan's been frothing at the mouth for details regarding 12 for far too long. Sources inside Square have commented that 12 is a bold new direction for the series and it will be unlike any Final Fantasy title before it (It doesn't use roman numerals – Gasp!). The pastel art style is definitely a new look for the series, but we have a feeling that this is just the tip of the iceberg for the changes that the game will introduce. Final Fantasy XI brought the series online. What will 12 do? We'll have to wait until November to find out. Stay tuned!

■ **FORMAT** TBA ■ **STYLE** TBA ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX DEVELOPMENT DIVISION 4 ■ **RELEASE** TBA

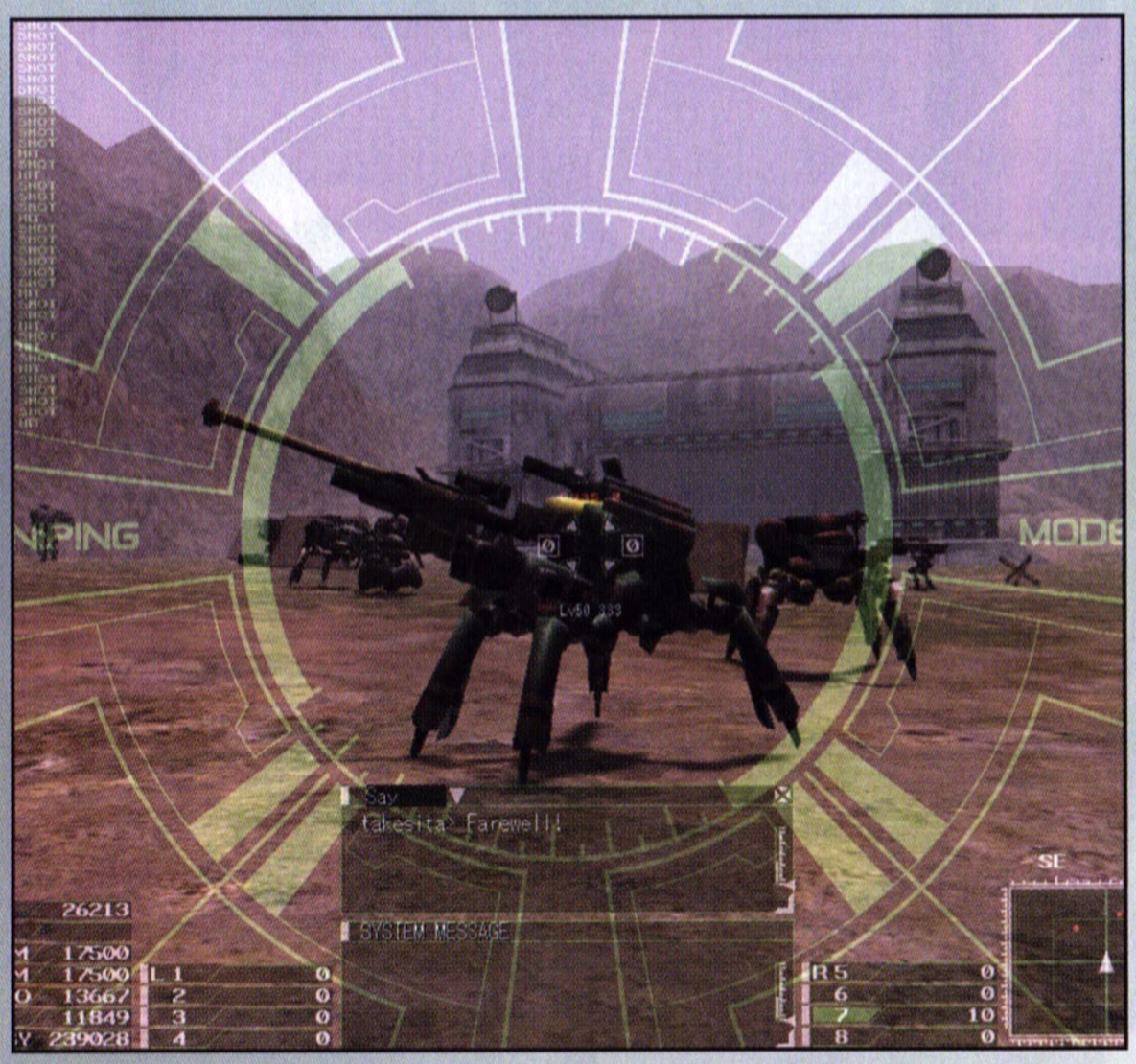
SWORD OF MANA

Sword of Mana (known as Shinyaku Seiken Densetsu in Japan) is a remake of the original Game Boy title Final Fantasy Adventure (which was originally Seiken Densetsu in Japan). Along with a major graphical upgrade, the title now boasts two playable characters (a male fighter and a female from the Mana tribe). Both characters have unique story lines and differences in the stages. The game will also feature a combat system and item ring that are reminiscent of the SNES Secret of Mana. Of course, two players can quest together by using a GBA link cable. If the gaming gods smile upon us, Nintendo will stick to its December 8 stateside release date for Sword of Mana.

■ **FORMAT** GAME BOY ADVANCE ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** BROWIE BROWN ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 29 (JAPAN), DECEMBER 8 (U.S.)

JUNK METAL

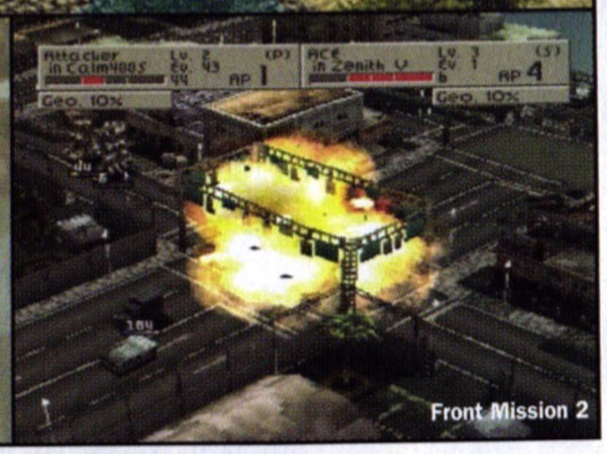
Square Enix is continuing its PC support with a game that can best be described as a cross between PlanetSide and Armored Core. In addition to the barrage of excitement that accompanies the base battles, players will be asked to customize and upgrade their very own mechs (or Junk, as they are referred to in the game). Payload limitations, system compatibility, and every dorky thing that you can think of related to mechs or robots is included in some fashion.



■ **FORMAT** PC ■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** METRO/BRAINNAVI/SQUARE ENIX ■ **RELEASE** TBA

FRONT MISSION HISTORY

We have yet to see the first two games here in America, but it looks like we'll get our chance to pick up both with one fell swoop with the release of Front Mission History – a collection of the first three titles in the series. No details regarding the U.S. street date (or Japan for that matter) have been given as of press time, but we have learned that both Front Mission 1st and Front Mission 2 will feature new material. A bonus campaign that reveals many of the secrets surrounding the Second Huffman Conflict will be included in Front Mission 1st. Front Mission 2's bonus material isn't as exciting, but the added Short Battle option will allow gamers to digest the story at a quicker pace. Square has found success with the Final Fantasy re-releases on the PSone, and we have a feeling that Front Mission's return will be just as celebrated.



■ **FORMAT** PSONE ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **RELEASE** TBA

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

Flaming Fur Ball or Radioactive Rabbit? Choose your weapon wisely or you and your fellow fugitive will be forever subjected to a life of twisted animal testing. Shackled together, Spanx must use the indestructible Redmond as a weapon of mass destruction and tool for escape from an evil corporation.

BUNNY CANNON

HELIUM BUNNY

HARE-SICLE

HARE CLOG

- Flaming Fur Ball
- Bunny Grinder
- Radioactive Rabbit
- Bunny Fuse
- Hare-sicle
- Electro Static Rabbit
- Hungry Bunny
- Hare Clog
- Tug-O-Rabbit
- 10 Ton Bunny
- Bunny Cannon
- Helium Bunny
- Hyper Hare
- Stuffed Rabbit
- Chocolate Bunny

BUST

BIOHAZARD WARNING

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for Rating Information.

WhiplashGame.com

CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

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IT UP!

Dip Redmond in toxic waste to poison enemies, electro-charge him to zap attackers and more!

Demolish everything in the lab from security cameras to test equipment.

Knock out the evil lab staff with loads of attack combos.

"Side-splitting and hysterical, Whiplash is a blast to play!" — PSE2

Whiplash™

PlayStation 2

XBOX

OCTOBER 2003

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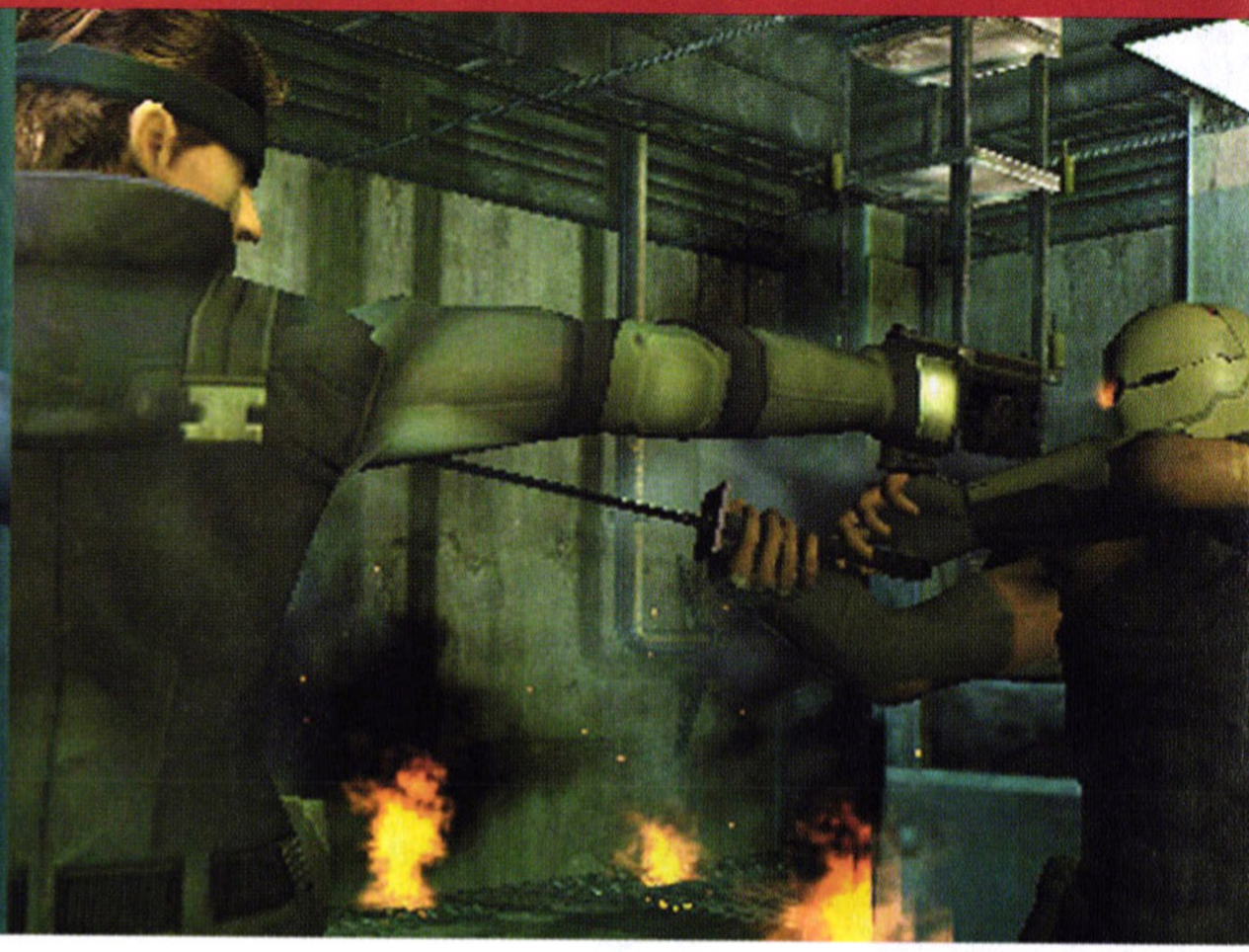
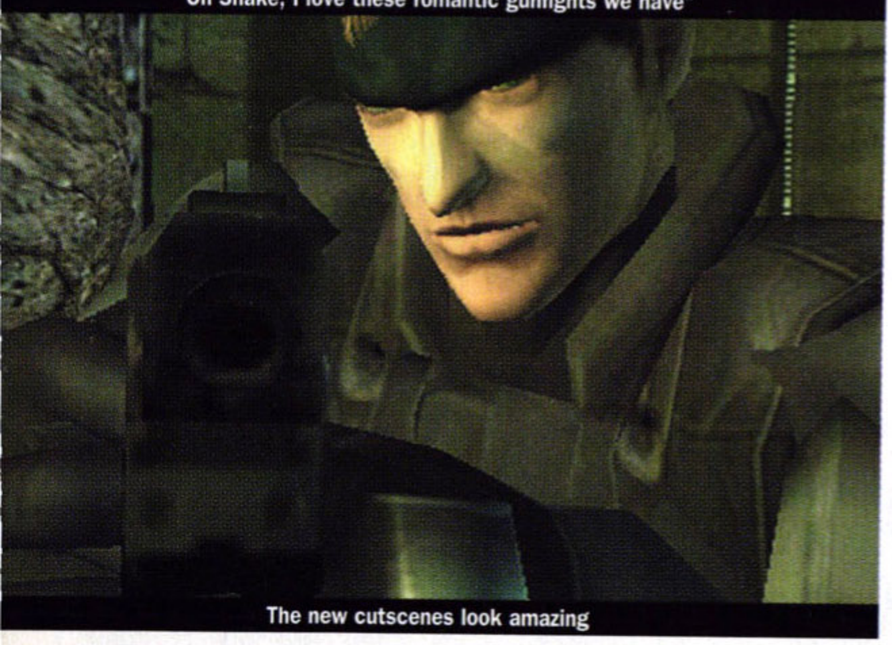


The hanging move has been added into the mix

"Oh Snake, I love these romantic gunfights we have"



The new cutscenes look amazing

GAMECUBE

METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES

METAL GEAR SOLID, TOO

There are a lot of great combinations out there: chocolate and vanilla, chocolate and peanut butter, chocolate and lobster…okay, that last one might not be so hot. But here's a combo that is sure to sound appetizing: the plot of Metal Gear Solid, combined with the graphics and gameplay of its sequel. This tasty dish is being brought to you by the three-way tag-team of Konami, Nintendo, and Silicon Knights.

For those of you who missed the first game (you were obviously living on Mars, in a cave, with rocks in your ears and your hands over your eyes), Metal Gear Solid relays the tale of Solid Snake as he investigates a military facility in Alaska. In the course of this epic adventure he encounters genetic super soldiers, villains with names like Psycho Mantis, and his evil twin brother Liquid Snake. Faced with overwhelming odds, Snake's primary ally inside the base is a young trooper named Meryl, and together they must avert a nuclear apocalypse.

Metal Gear Solid is without a doubt one of the best games of all time, but when compared to the sequel, the gameplay seemed a little rusty. And although the Metal Gear games originated on Nintendo, the Metal Gear Solid titles have only showed up on PlayStation and Xbox. Not only will The Twin Snakes return the series to the big N, it will patch up the few issues of the first game by adopting the engine of the second. The original's shoddy laser sight has been replaced with the first-person view found in the second game; and all of Snake's other tricks from the sequel, like hanging off ledges and opening lockers to hide bodies, have been added as well.

As exciting as new moves and improved graphics are, they aren't the only things The Twin Snakes has to offer: it also features all-new full motion video scenes directed by Ryuhei Kitamura – the hot young Japanese film director best know for the zombie/gangster flick *Versus*. These cinematics will sport re-recorded voiceovers from the original cast, including the voice of Solid Snake, screenwriter David Hayter. The gameplay is being adapted by Silicon Knights, the Canadian team behind the survival horror hit Eternal Darkness. Of course, the whole process is being supervised by Hideo Kojima, the creator of the Metal Gear series.

Based on his original story, The Twin Snakes will follow it closely, but offer a few updates and surprises. While their nature may still be secret, Kojima has said that The Twin Snakes will feature many things never before seen in the Metal Gear universe. The more we hear about it, the more delicious this exciting new title is looking.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI/NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI/SILICON KNIGHTS
■ **RELEASE** 2004

Combat plays as well as it does in MGS2

All the classic boss battles are recreated

That wacky Snake is always getting into trouble

Chances are, Otacon is still annoying

Psycho Mantis is the coolest villain ever. Don't argue; he is

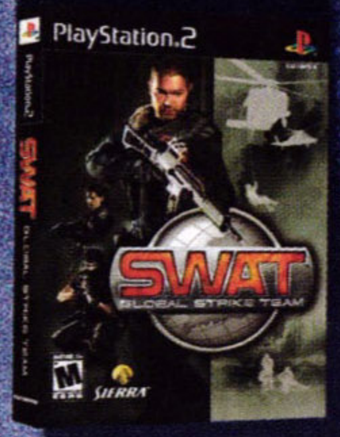
The Genome soldiers are effective, intelligent fighters

Despite the giant gun, Vulcan Raven is actually a gentle soul who enjoys crafts and poetry

The new graphics improve significantly on the original

RUSSIAN OIL REFINERY.
LONDON UNDERGROUND.
PARIS ROOFTOPS.

Where did your team go today?



Go on hazardous missions, including hostage rescue, bomb diffusion, and surprise raids.

Use assault rifles, fiber optics, night vision, and other hi-tech SWAT weapons and gear.

Breach and clear rooms, crack computer systems, and take down the bad guys–all in a fast-paced environment.

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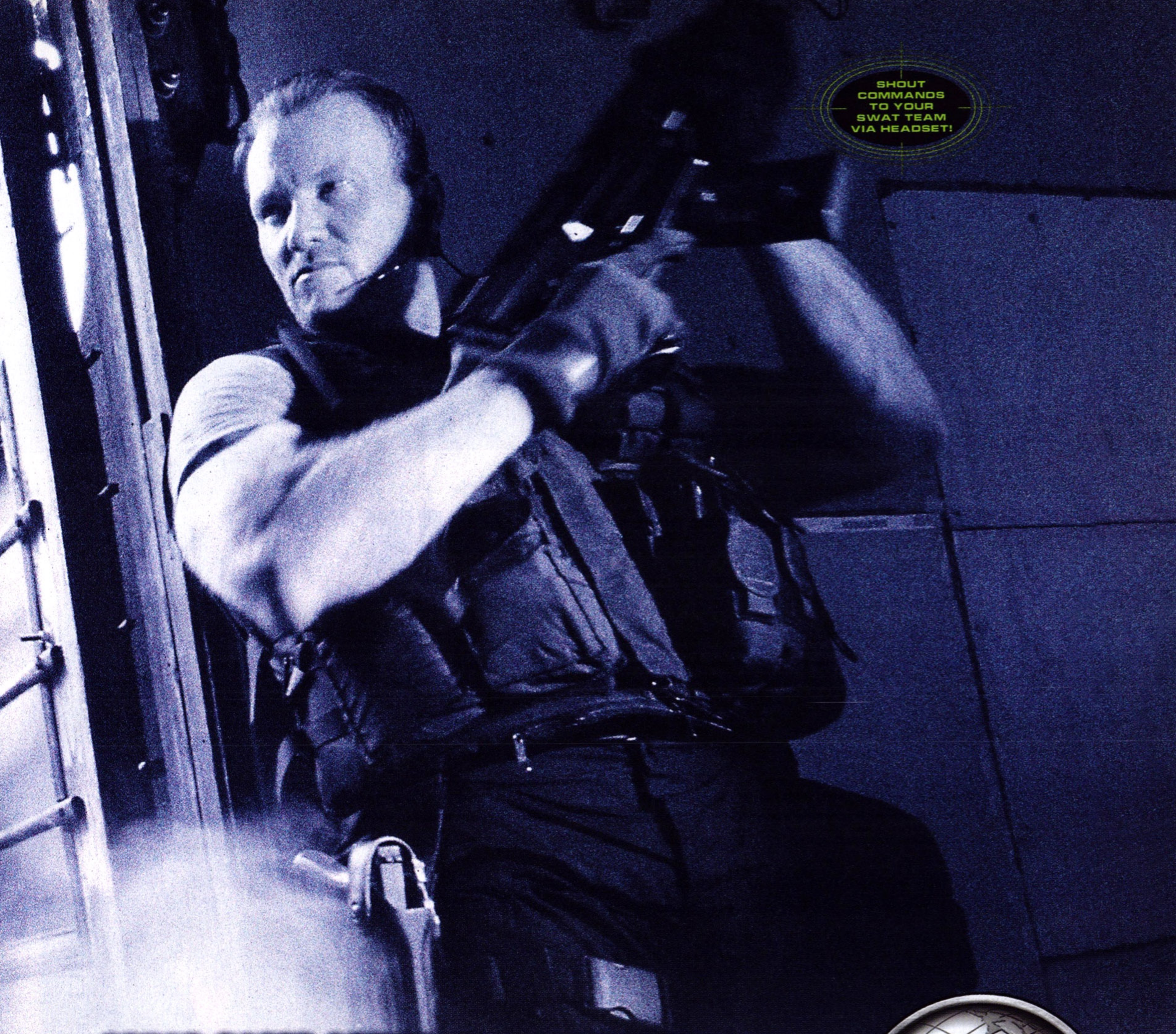

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MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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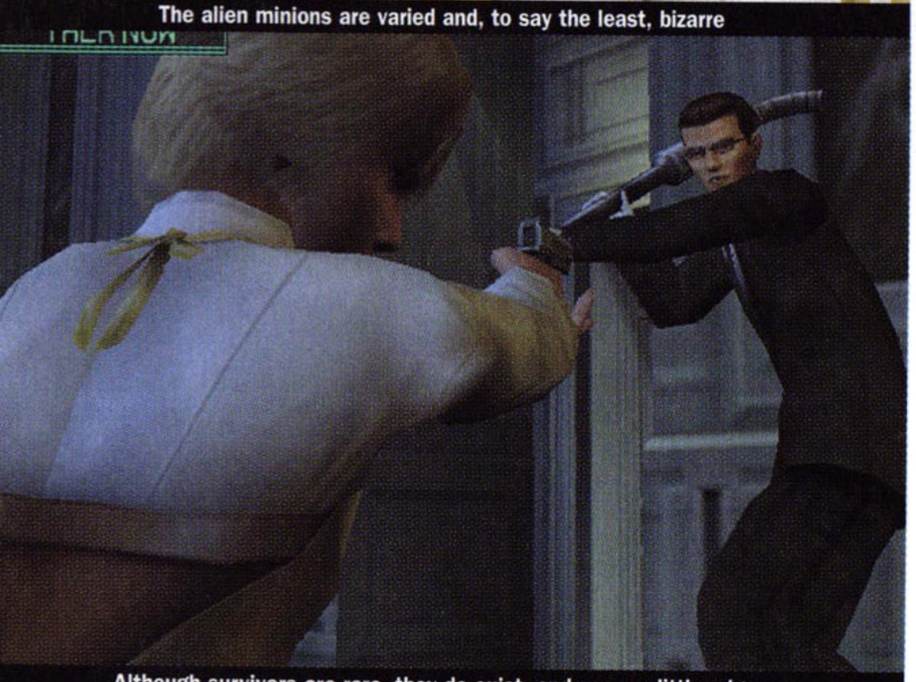
The alien minions are varied and, to say the least, bizarre



Although survivors are rare, they do exist, and seem a little edgy

Walking Rio through hacking the Gibson? Nice

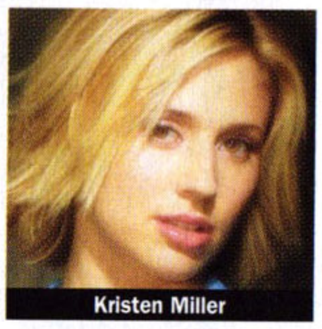
PLAYSTATION 2 UNLIMITED ENABLED

LIFELINE

TALK TO HER

Lifeline, which has already been released in Japan under the title Operator's Side, will be showing up Stateside sometime in February. This Konami import has a shockingly unique feature – it's the first entirely voice-activated action game. Players will use only a USB headset to guide the main character through a messy space hotel after it's attacked by alien hordes. You won't use a controller; only voice commands like "Run," "Look for another door," or even "Reload. Shoot enemy one in the eye."

Lifeline's scenario is that you are trapped in the security control room of the aforementioned hotel and can interact with Rio (an employee who is voiced by Kristen Miller of TV's *She Spies*) via headsets and surveillance cameras. The goal is to figure out what happened, gather any survivors, and get everyone off of the vacation-gone-amuck center. But Rio isn't really a trusting soul at the beginning of the game. You have to prove to her that you are dependable, and build a relationship of trust. Rio definitely has personality and isn't just a robot taking orders.



Kristen Miller

Sony's past voice-enabled outing, SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs, offered a similar, but not as robust, system as Lifeline is promising. There will be no commands listed onscreen, as the total of recognized words and phrases now numbers in the tens of thousands. The recent time we were able to spend with the game revealed how this massive vocabulary will be executed: Each enemy will be assigned a number, and besides simply telling Rio which one to attack, you can also have her target different areas of the foe's body. Besides felling the forces of an alien race, Rio will also search for puzzle clues and items by opening lockers, digging through bags, and exploring rooms.

You hear that boom? It's our minds blowing.

Cynics of how well this dynamic actually works, take note. *Famitsu*, the Japanese weekly gaming publication notorious for its harsh and uncompromising critiques of video games, recently awarded the title a 37 out of 40.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
■ **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN
■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY

JIVE TALKIN'

Lifeline's voice-enabled control scheme raises a few interesting queries. First off, any USB headset will work just fine, so that one you got with SOCOM is good to go, as well as any of the newer/more comfortable units that are now available. ScanSoft, the company behind SOCOM's audio command technology, supplied updated tools to developers allowing Rio to recognize 5,000 words and 10,000 different phrases. While it's still unclear how localized the game is going to be, ScanSoft reports that their software supports American English, British English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, and Korean. Think of the foreign language-learning opportunities!

"Shoot enemy three" tells Rio to bust a cap into the baddie with a 3 over its health bar

After the attack, Rio locked herself in this cell

Here are a few instructions that Rio will respond to. We also heard that she knows some key four-letter proclamations we shouldn't print here.

Shoot
Run
Dodge and reload
Look under the table
Open the second door on the left
Low kick
Read the magazine
Put on the coat
Go to guest room number two
Look behind you
Move back
Jump
Go to the bedroom
Use the rocket launcher
Move the chair
Get in the lift
Check on the shelves
Read the note

Detailed animations exist for all of the characters' actions

Players walk Rio through using the hotel's equipment

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

A DAY IN THE LIFE

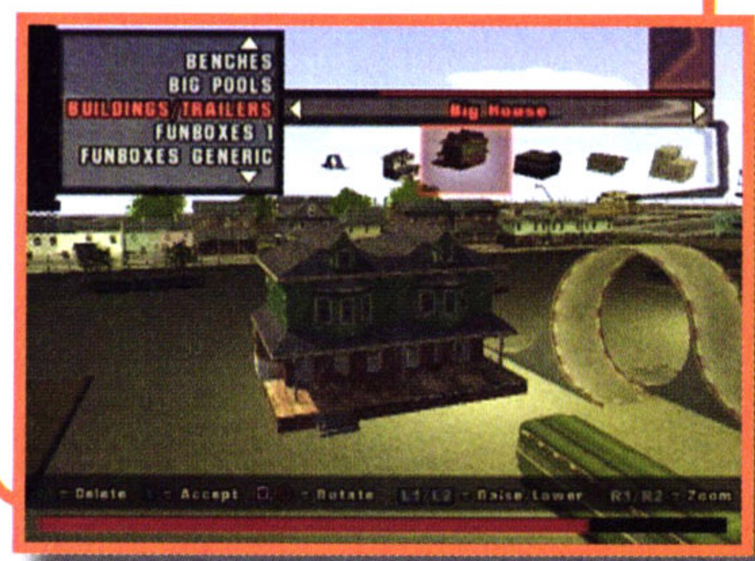
We spent an entire day (all 24 hours of it) tricking out and eating pavement in Neversoft's newly designed Tony Hawk game. For those skeptics out there who have been wondering if the series would eventually run out of steam, worry not. Underground is a complete evolution that enables the user to achieve the highest level of interaction possible. In addition to a refined gameplay engine that finally allows players to hop off of their boards and freely roam, you'll be able to create your own tricks, upload parks for online consumption, and even take a glamour shot so that you can insert your ugly mug into the game.

The amount of variety that went into the goals for each of the Story mode stages is mind-boggling. Not only will you find yourself skitching on cars, you'll be able to jack them for racing purposes. Since we vested so much time into the game and unearthed everything that could be found in the demo version we wrapped our hands around, we've broken down all of the new features for your viewing and reading pleasure. Enjoy!

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

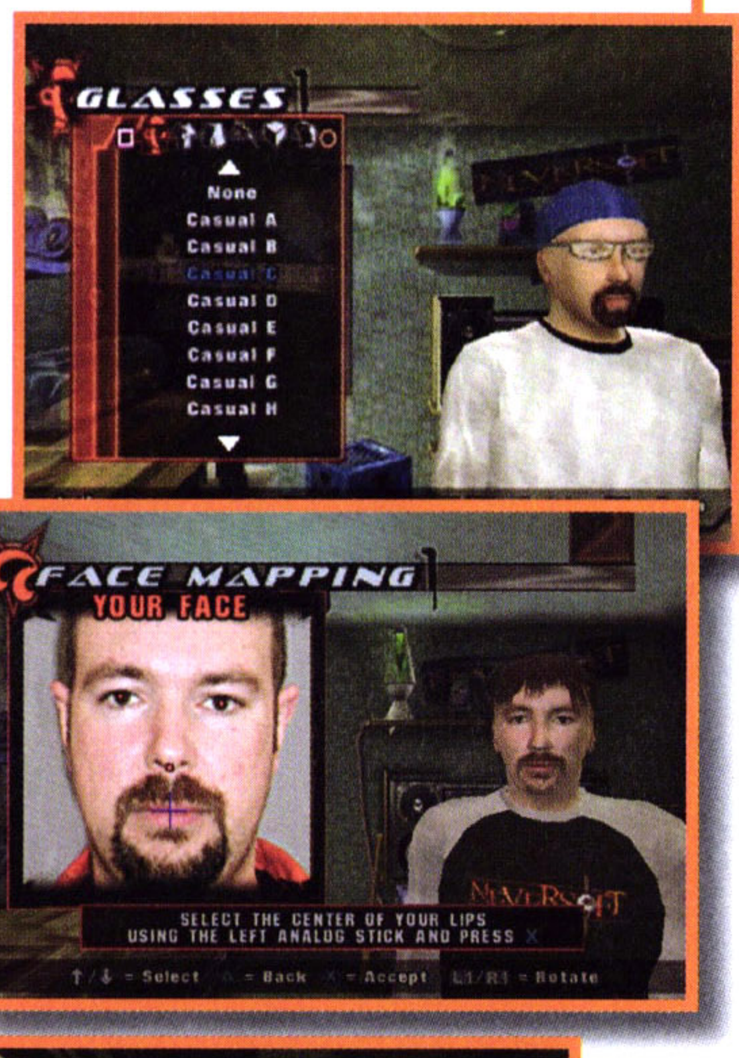
CREATE-A-PARK

Judging by the amount of customizable options that gamers can play with, calling it "Create-A-City" would be more appropriate. If you spend enough time with Underground's editor, you can design levels just as sophisticated as they are in Story mode. You can even set your own goals (like Skate and Combo letters, Gap, Skatetetris, high combo, high score, Combo skatetetris, and tricktris).



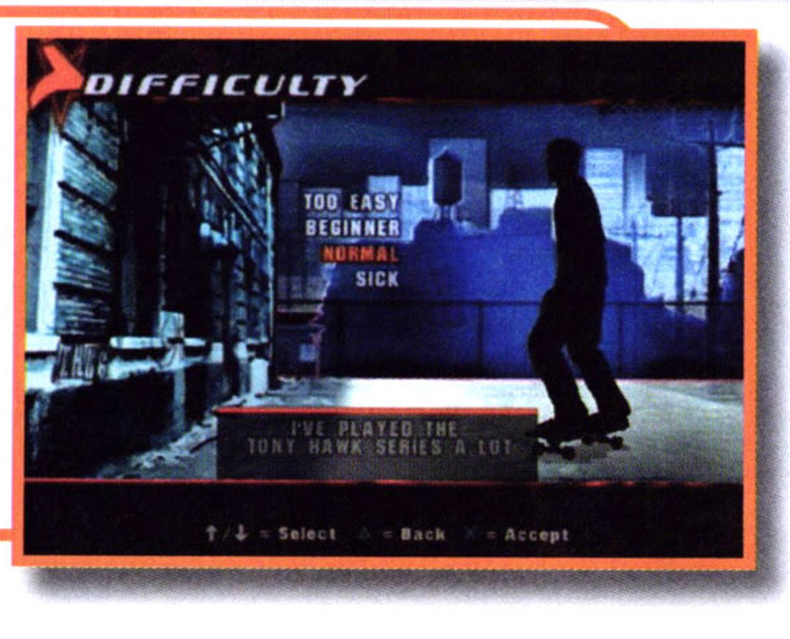
CREATE-A-SKATER

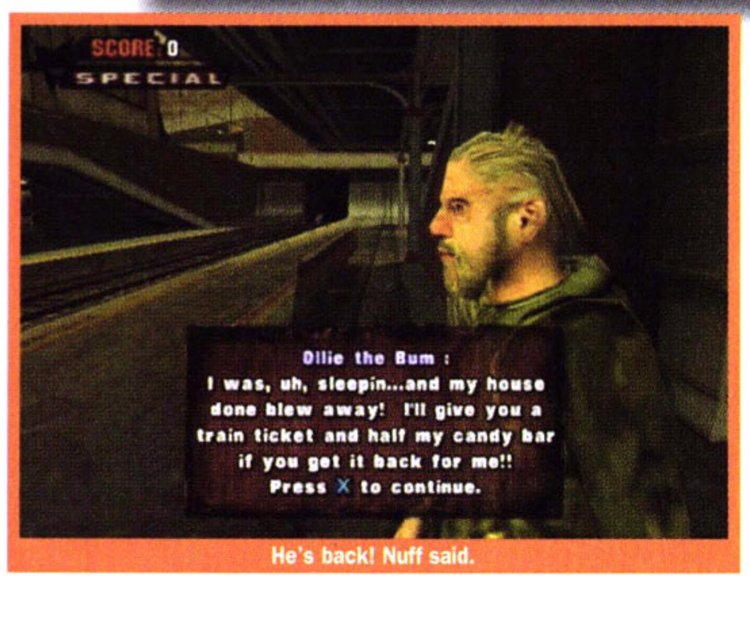
Once again, players will be able to inject a wealth of personality into the game via Create-A-Skater. It's even deeper than before; your custom skaters can be tweaked at any point in the game, and pictures from digital cameras or camera phones can be loaded into the title (PS2 only). But, due to time constraints, Neversoft wasn't able to implement EyeToy compatibility.



GOT SKILLS?

This series has always thrived off of a player's ability to progress in skill. Unfortunately, the difficulty level of the game wouldn't adjust appropriately to each player's skating prowess. Whether you felt the game didn't offer up enough of a challenge or broke your controller because it was way too hard, Neversoft has inserted four different difficulty levels into Story mode. The challenges and goals within each level feature a bump in the difficulty. In Beginner, you may be asked to score 50,000 points in a set time, whereas in Sick, you're looking at million-point competitions.





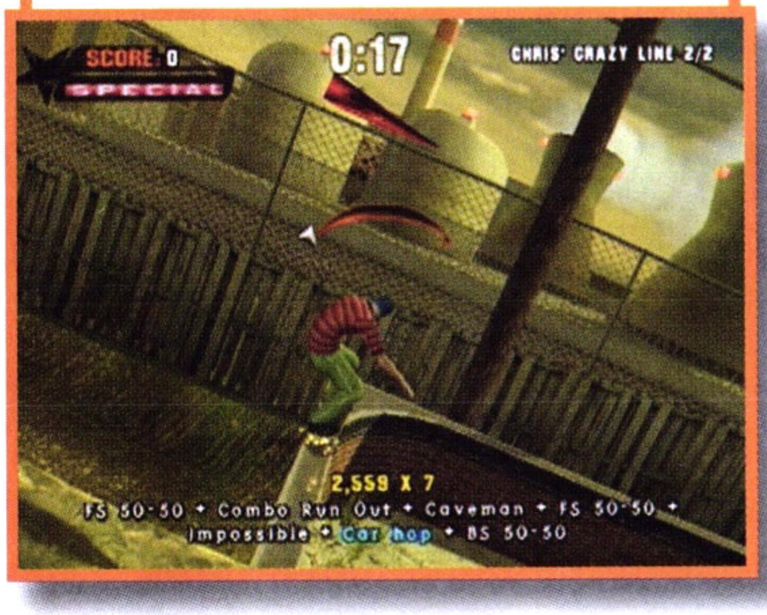
He's back! Nuff said.

CREATE-A-TRICK

This option's functionality is similar to a music editor program. You can combine any tricks together, set its duration, idle in seconds, tweak, and can even blend its animation with other moves.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Throughout many of the sages, the lighting in the levels will change between morning, day, and night. You'll also see changing weather conditions.



RUNNING COMBO

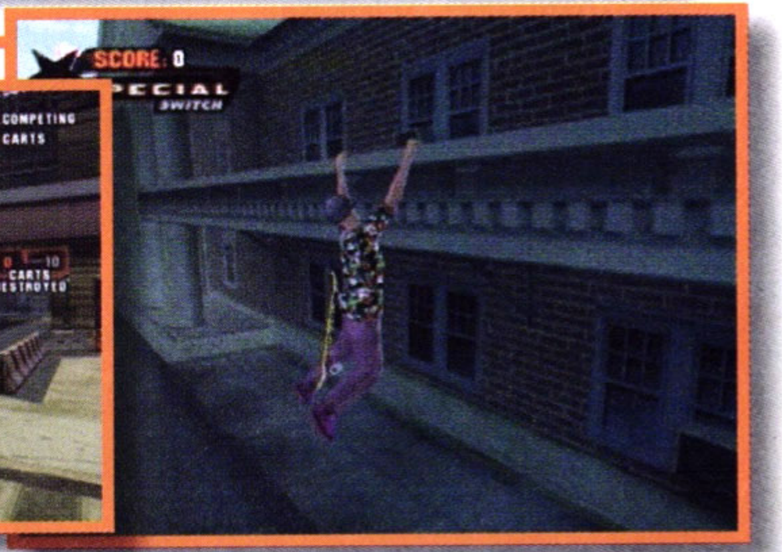
One of the coolest new moves in Underground is the ability to hop off of your board, run to another spot, and then continue the combo on a different line. To hop off of your board, you simply need to initiate the new walk command. When this action is executed as a continuation of a combo, a timer will appear indicating how much time you can be on foot and still link together new moves to the same combo. Those who are truly skilled will be able to scale buildings and various other obstacles while still comboing.

A CINEMATIC PUNCH

Story plays an integral role in Underground. By finishing certain objectives, players will be rewarded with a cutscene that progresses the plot and gives your skater a little face time with the pros. In the picture on the right, Chad Muska visits your neighborhood and shows admiration for your skills. The real Chad Muska did the voiceover work, as did all of the other pros in the game. And yes, he really drives that truck while wearing gloves! Now that's attention to detail!

VARIETY NEVER HURTS

Much like Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4, skating is just one of the gameplay avenues. You'll find yourself doing a wide variety of things like racing pimped out cars, sneaking on foot stealth-like past dealers, and pulling yourself up onto rooftops to grab hard to reach items.



WALL PUSH & PLANT

Neversoft has added two new moves that should prove useful in saving combo strings. If you find yourself in a position where your character is going to run into a wall, hit the grind button and your character will extend his or her arms to push off of it. Likewise, if you jump into a wall and hit down and the ollie button simultaneously, your skater will kick off and continue the combo. Both of these moves also act as multipliers.

ACID DROP

If you're on foot and you want to drop into a pipe, simply press L2 and R2 together after jumping in the general direction to perform the new Acid Drop maneuver.

IT'S PERFECT!

Neversoft has reinserted the popular Perfect landing as a 1,000 point scoring bonus. Who knows? That 1,000 point boost may make the difference in completing a mission.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM SAYS THAT I KILLED THE PRESIDENT...

AND FOR ALL I KNOW...

BANG!

I DID.

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MATURE 17+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Intense Violence

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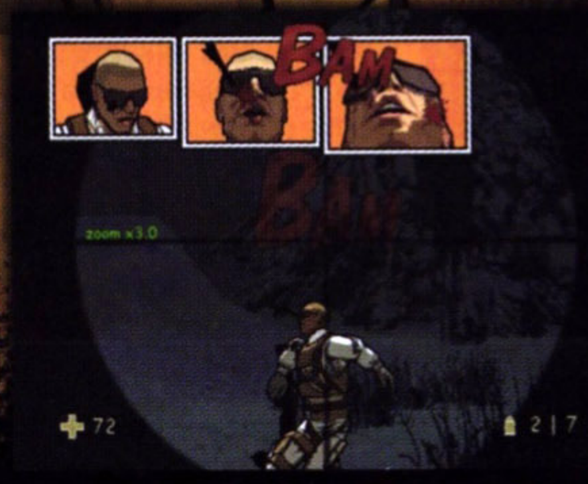

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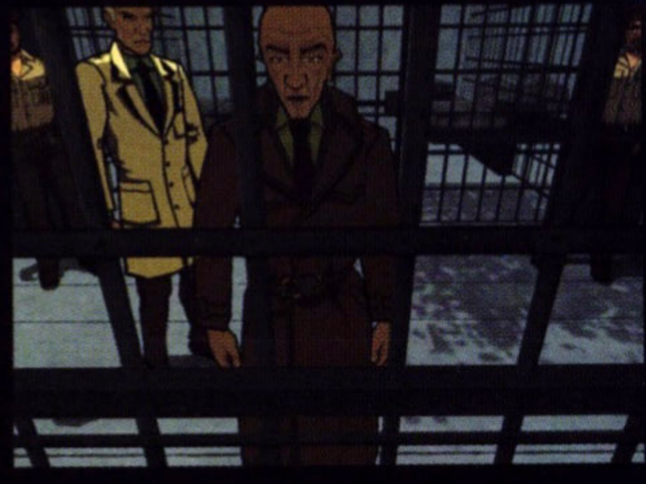

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If only this was a scene from *Heat*

XBOX UNLIMITED ENABLED

COUNTER-STRIKE

LET'S GO CAMPING!

Counter-Strike is a legend in the PC community, and the excitement for this game has even caused a number of console fans to cross the platform divide in search of happiness in a warm gun. The game's origin as a fan-based mod of Half-Life bears out Counter-Strike's populist appeal. What then are the masses going to think when the Xbox version goes against some of the principles of the original? Well, we have a feeling that owners of the console will become smitten with the title just like everyone else.

True to form, Counter-Strike is an Xbox Live game. Better yet, it contains all your favorite maps from the PC edition. Now you too can sound like Gavin from *Kids in the Hall* when recalling some awesome firefight at one of the series' storied locations. "This one time, at Dust, there was this guy...who had an exploding tomato for a head. It's true, you know." In all, there are 20 maps with seven exclusive to the Xbox. Also, as a nice detail, this version will include the item purchase timer that PC players have used for years. This all sounds exactly like the game you've come to know and love. Well, Microsoft's console mixes things up by offering a single-player mode. That may sound like anathema to any hardcore Strike fan, but this move has its benefits. Developer Valve sees it as an opportunity to teach console players what to expect once they step up to the online competition. This is actually a pretty smart decision, as many offline gamers are intimidated by the skill level of those who've been notching kills on the servers for years. For Microsoft, it's a great chance to nudge people toward Xbox Live.

Achieving this is a lot harder than it sounds. No video game has ever completely simulated the sometimes totally unpredictable behavior of humans. So, when you're with your terrorist buddies in the single-player missions, for example, Valve is working hard to make them mimic the actions that your real-life online compatriots might make – this includes making mistakes that might cost them their lives. Although, there is no totally accurate way to replicate the way some guy named Ass_munch69 will act via CPU AI, so the developer has its work cut out for it if it wants to fully prepare you for the online world in the single-player mode.

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
■ **DEVELOPER** VALVE SOFTWARE/RITUAL ENTERTAINMENT
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18

"I got your back, Jimmy...and what a nice back it is."

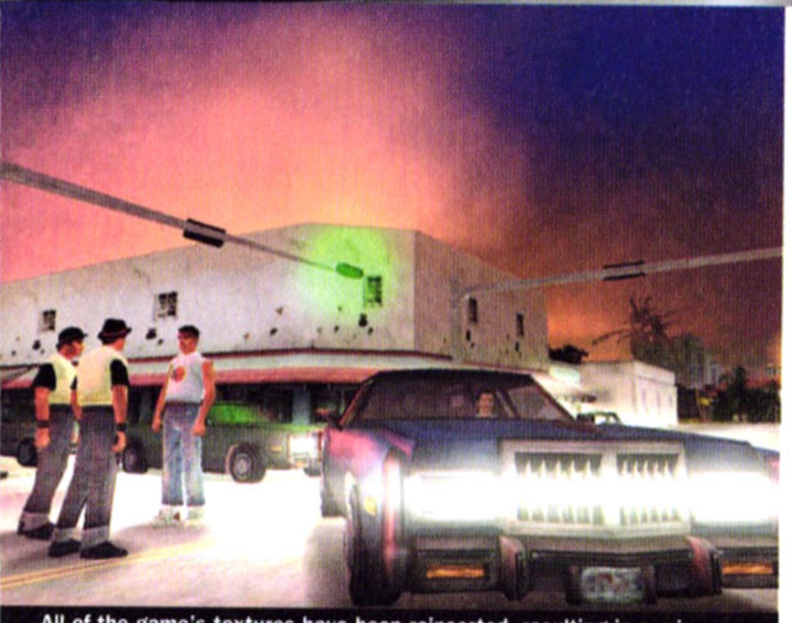
This AI challenge not only applies to your teammates, but your foes as well. One of the challenges that Valve had is duplicating things such as search routines. Like a real human player who doesn't know the map, the AI bots will have to learn it as they go along until they are eventually able to set up their own routes. Also, bots' brains will have to be programmed after human Counter-Strike players' proclivities towards actions like camping, avoiding killzone choke points, and even unpredictable behavior.

Another un-Counter-Strike-like Xbox accommodation that has to be made is the fact that, as of this writing, the chances for gamers to be able to design their own mods for the title (as PC players can) are slim. Still, Valve is considering all manner of downloads, but hasn't decided exactly what will happen yet. The developer will probably offer some maps, so the evolving nature of the franchise hopefully won't suffer on the system.

The graphics have received a significant upgrade from the original Counter-Strike

One area in which the game is easily surpassing its past is in the graphics department. The original commercial version of Counter-Strike has been around for more than three years, and while fans are still digging it as much as ever, its look is dated. For the Xbox version, Valve has upped the polygon count, added more buildings and other scenery, and much more. In our hands-on time with the game, however, it still seems that the game could be better looking. Perhaps sacrifices have been made to optimize it for all users.

With Halo 2 not appearing until next year, Counter-Strike is the perfect choice for Microsoft to hang its Xbox Live hat on. This game looks to be a great mix of tried-and-true thrills and exciting new territory for fans of both Bill's box and the PC. With its utilization of everything from headset voice commands to blistering FPS play, it looks like this version of the famed PC series is, ironically, tailor-made for the Xbox.



All of the game's textures have been reinserted, resulting in a crisp, clean look that rivals the PC version of GTA III

The clothing effects have been improved, so fabric will move even more realistically when you're riding the hog

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

GRAND THEFT AUTO III/VICE CITY

XBOX OWNERS, YOUR PRAYERS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED

In a shocking move, Rockstar recently announced that it was bringing its landmark hits Grand Theft Auto III and Grand Theft Auto: Vice City to the Xbox. A nation of Microsoft fans collectively crapped their pants from cheering so hard. This November, one and all can now finally consume the two games that their PS2-owning friends have been waving in their faces like a thick steak in front of a Doberman for a low, low price of only $49.99! Now, that's not $49.99 each, mind you; that's $49.99 for a double-pack that contains both mammoth hits. PlayStation 2 owners who have yet to take the GTA plunge (all five of you) get an even better deal, snagging the bundle for a cool $39.99. Dude, forget Sam's Club, Rockstar is handing out the deals!

Rockstar was also nice enough to stop by our offices with a playable demo of the game, and left us with our mouths watering at the title's vastly improved visuals. Rather than just porting over the (great-looking) PC version to the Xbox, the company actually took the time and effort to tailor it to the system, a move that has resulted in a host of technological upgrades.

So, let's pop the hood and take a look at what they've done. The first thing you'll notice is how much crisper everything looks. There's good reason for this – Rockstar took the major step of reinserting all the textures in the game, so everything is running at a much higher resolution. It also looked better on our new HDTV, thanks to the fact that the Xbox version supports 16:9 aspect ratio, 1280 x 720 resolution, and progressive scan. Simply put, GTA has never looked better. It sounds better as well, with Dolby 5.1 surround sound. Of course, if you get sick of Vice City's bountiful selection of '80s music, you can take things into the modern day with custom playlists (which are billed as the "CD Changer" in GTA III and, natch, the "Tape Deck" in Vice City). Keep in mind that the PS2 pack features none of these enhancements, so don't bother buying it again. For more on the revamped GTA III, see our preview from last month's issue.

Beyond the improvement in the audio and display functionality, Rockstar North has also implemented an overhaul of the lighting system. You'll notice many more light sources, and see real-time reflections on autos from passing streetlights. There is also now "rim-shading" on all characters, which means that you'll see light reflections around the edges of the models. Said models look better as well, with higher polygon counts and – gasp! – articulated hands that don't look like deformed lobster claws!

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, it's been a long wait for GTA on Xbox, but one that Rockstar is going out of its way to make sure is well worth it.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES ■ **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4

The Xbox version should stop people from saying, "GTA is great, but it looks like crap."

New reflection mapping means that VC's rides are shinier than ever

The lighting has been completely redone, meaning that individual light sources will cast shadows. Also, the game still has lots of guns!

The Xbox now allows you to see the spinning rims on vehicles

PC

TERMINATOR 3: WAR OF THE MACHINES

HASTA LA VISTA, VOTERS!

Starring the voice and likeness of the Terminator himself, Arnold Schwarzenegger, War of the Machines recreates some of the best scenes from the popular trilogy, and expands on the Terminator universe. Never-before-seen footage filmed specifically for the game is also included. These exclusive scenes are certainly appealing, but the main draw of this title is clearly the multiplayer experience. Imagine Battlefield 1942, but replace the Nazis with robots. Set in the post-Judgement Day future, players can join the conflict from either side and several classes are offered for each team. The puny human army features the regular assortment of troops, whereas the machines offer the T-900, Hunter-Killer warplanes, and robotic tanks as playable classes! The humans clearly don't stand a chance.

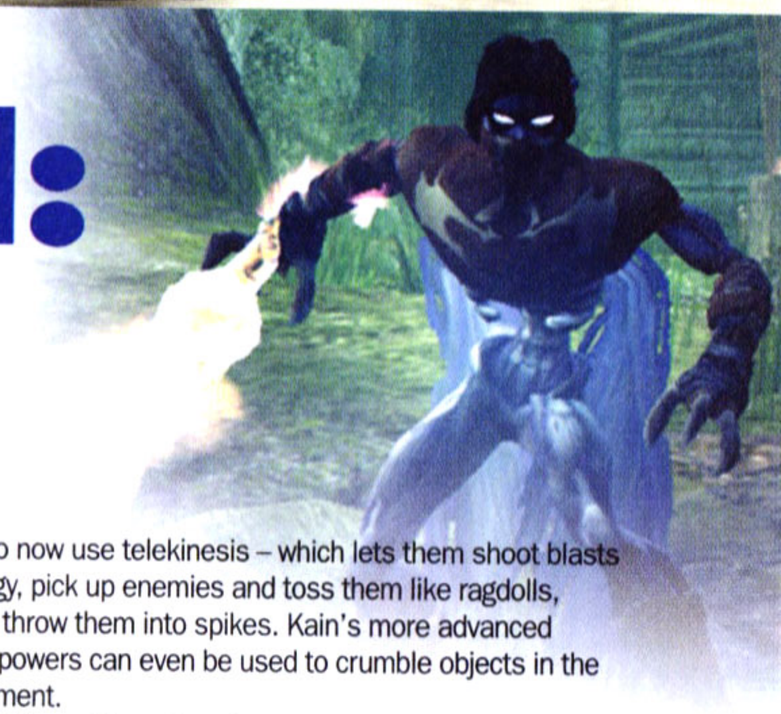
Of course, T3 offers a single player mode as well. This recreates this summer's blockbuster by putting you in the shoes of Arnie himself as you battle to protect John Conner from the delectable but deadly T-X. Stretching across more than 20 areas, War of the Machines features all the explosive action that you would expect from an actor like Arnold. Err…politician…acto-litician…whatever.

In the future, all governors must have at one point used a chain gun

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI
■ **DEVELOPER** CLEVER'S GAMES ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE



RE-VAMPED

Trust us, this game will suck.

Blood, that is. Oh, and souls, too, but that's about the extent of the sucking in Legacy of Kain: Defiance. By bringing many new elements to the series while retaining the best of the earlier titles, Defiance may very well be the best Kain game to date.

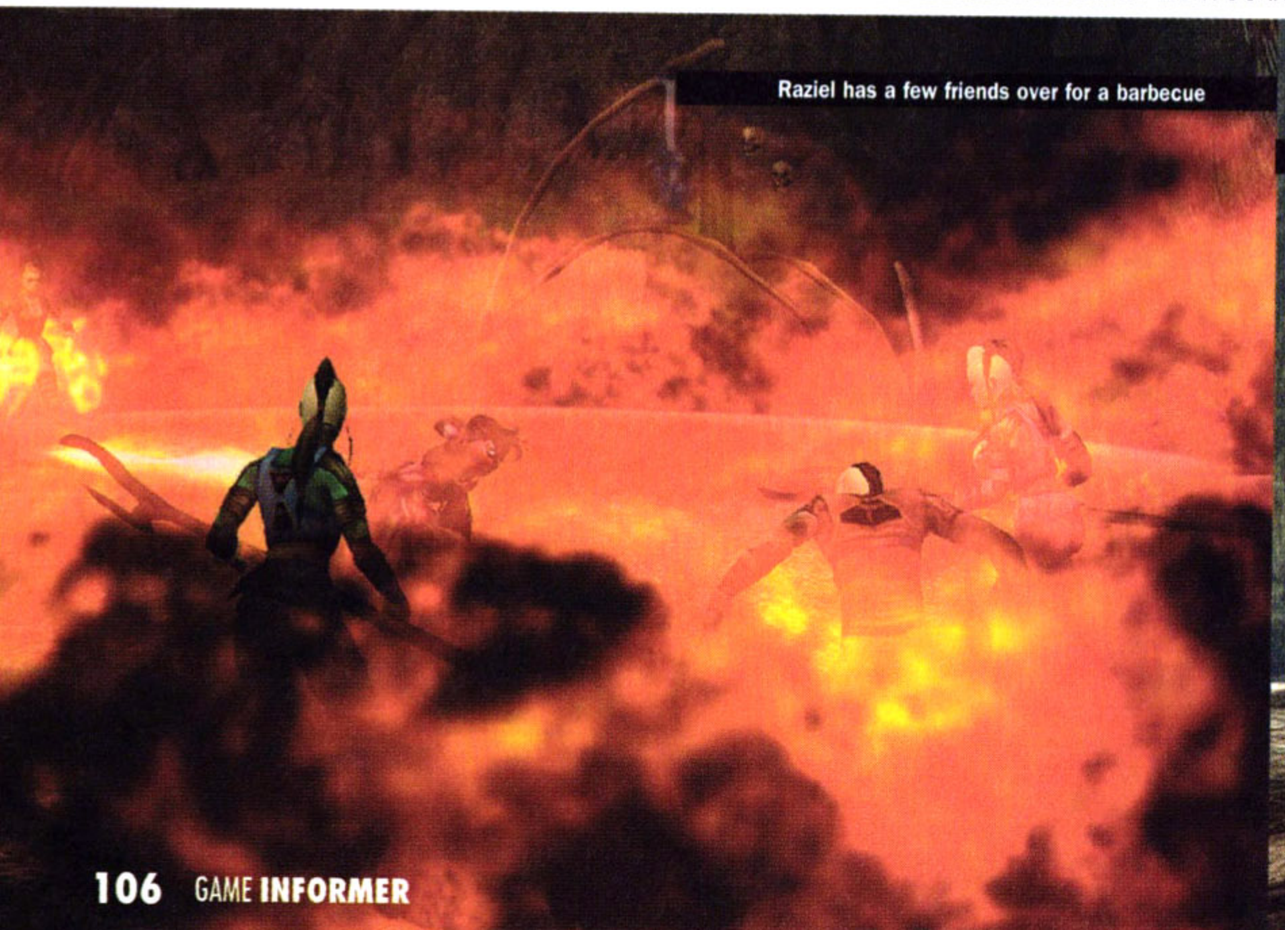
For the first time ever, both Kain and his bitter enemy Raziel will be playable in the same title. Control switches between the two characters at set points as they progress towards their shared destiny. While the pair will initially hunt each other down, they will eventually discover a more deadly shared enemy. Who this may be is still a mystery, but at the outset, Kain is thrust into conflict with the Sarafan warriors, while Raziel battles his one-time benefactor in the underworld, the mysterious elder god. Further details on the plot are still unclear, but as the Legacy of Kain games are oft-praised for their mature, twisting plots, Defiance should not disappoint.

One area of the Kain games that has historically let gamers down is the gameplay. Many complained that the combat was shallow and too many puzzles involved pushing boxes. Developer Crystal Dynamics heard these complaints and addressed them by completely recreating the combat system. Defiance uses all four face buttons on the PS2 and Xbox controllers for combat, which results in a much richer experience, complete with combos and unlockable moves. The emphasis on puzzle solving has also been greatly scaled back, making for a much faster, action-oriented gameplay experience.

Kain and Raziel also have a bevy of other moves at their disposal. Each can jump and climb walls; Kain can also transform into mist to phase through solid objects, while Raziel can glide and shift between the physical and spectral planes. Both can also now use telekinesis – which lets them shoot blasts of energy, pick up enemies and toss them like ragdolls, or even throw them into spikes. Kain's more advanced mental powers can even be used to crumble objects in the environment.

Why Kain would want to damage his surroundings is a different matter altogether; the environments in Defiance are easily the prettiest of the series. The castles and cities of the physical world are highly detailed and intricate, and the spectral plane is mysterious and creepy. One of the most impressive sights from the early version we played was Raziel's trippy, gruesome shift between the two planes, in which he breaks down on one side and reconstructs himself on the other using the flesh of the dead. With such bizarre sights and its newly revamped combat, Defiance looks like one of the winter's most exciting action titles.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS INTERACTIVE ■ **DEVELOPER** CRYSTAL DYNAMICS ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER



Raziel has a few friends over for a barbecue

The vamps will face both human and spectral enemies

GAME LIVE

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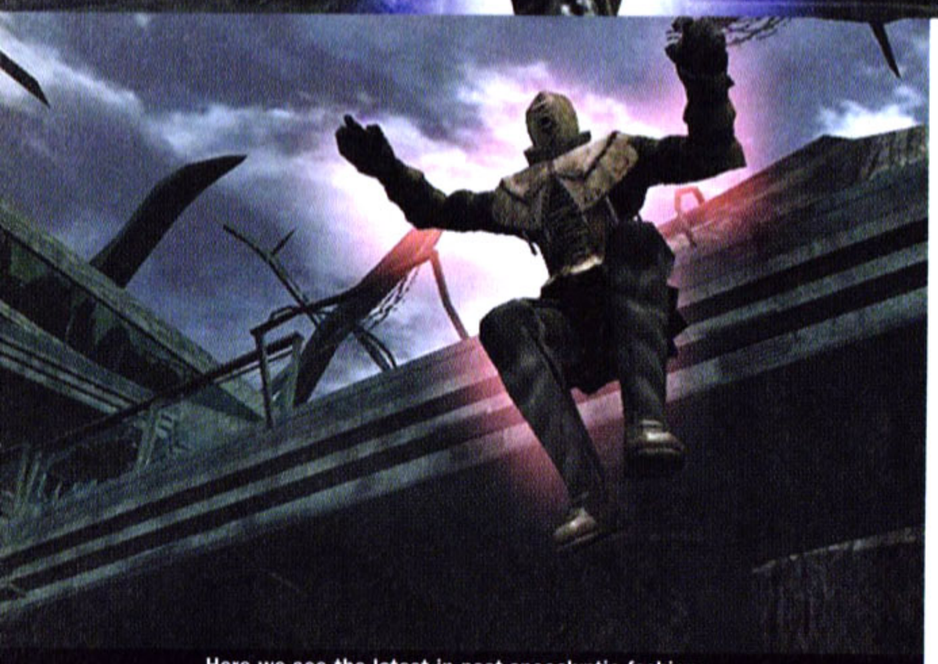


Here we see the latest in post-apocalyptic fashions

The main focus of the title will be multiplayer

A huge variety of powers will be offered

XBOX

PHANTOM DUST

UNLEASH YOUR MIND

As much as we love Xbox Live, we must admit that at this early stage, the variety of games it has to offer is still a bit lacking. That's why we are so excited about Phantom Dust, the new title from Microsoft Game Studios Japan. With its singular combination of gameplay elements, it should bring something new to Xbox Live and stand as one of the most unique titles the service has to offer.

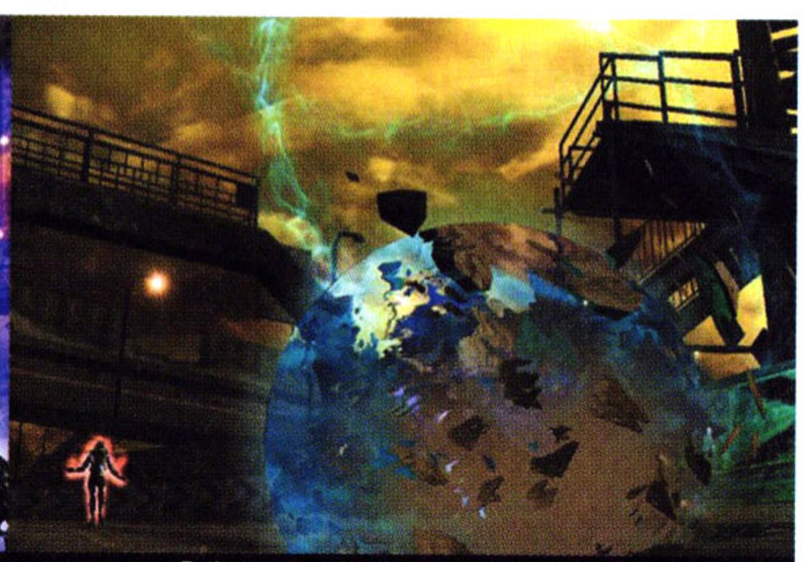
On the surface, Phantom Dust is basically a third-person arena shooter. Up to four players battle it out in huge maps via Xbox Live or system link. This setup is pretty typical for action games, but thanks to a creative combat system, it actually sounds more like a fast-paced strategy game. Before entering the arena, each player chooses character skills from a list of roughly 300 options. The combinations of skills determine what combat abilities each character has, making for a highly individual and customizable set of attacks. To make things more interesting, these moves are not available to the player from the start of the match. Orbs representing the different powers are dispersed randomly throughout the arena, and the ability contained within can only be used after collecting the orb. Since each attack drains your power reserves, strategy is derived from resource management: use up too much energy before you collect more powerful attacks and you won't have the ability to use it.

Phantom Dust producer Yukio Futatsugi (primarily known for his work on the Panzer Dragoon series) promises that the combat design will favor those who leave the run-and-gun mentality behind. He also promises an engaging story with breathtaking graphics. The setup behind the Phantom Dust universe is a post-apocalyptic world where much of the planet has been decimated by a mysterious force. Those who have survived have lost their memories, but gained something else: psychic powers. A substance in the air (the phantom dust of the title) is responsible for both. The survivors battle each other for control of the precious resources in the game's gorgeous arenas, each of which can and will be damaged in combat. These environments can actually be so extensively decimated that the levels effectively transform, opening up new areas and dangers.

With a single-player story mode as well as Live combat, Phantom Dust certainly looks like it has much to offer. Scheduled for a Japanese release sometime in 2004, it may be the hit the Xbox needs to expand its market share in Japan. A U.S. release date has yet to be announced, but expect to hear much more about this exciting title in the upcoming months.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
■ **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS JAPAN ■ **RELEASE** 2004

Many attacks can destroy the environments



Both powers and environments look amazing

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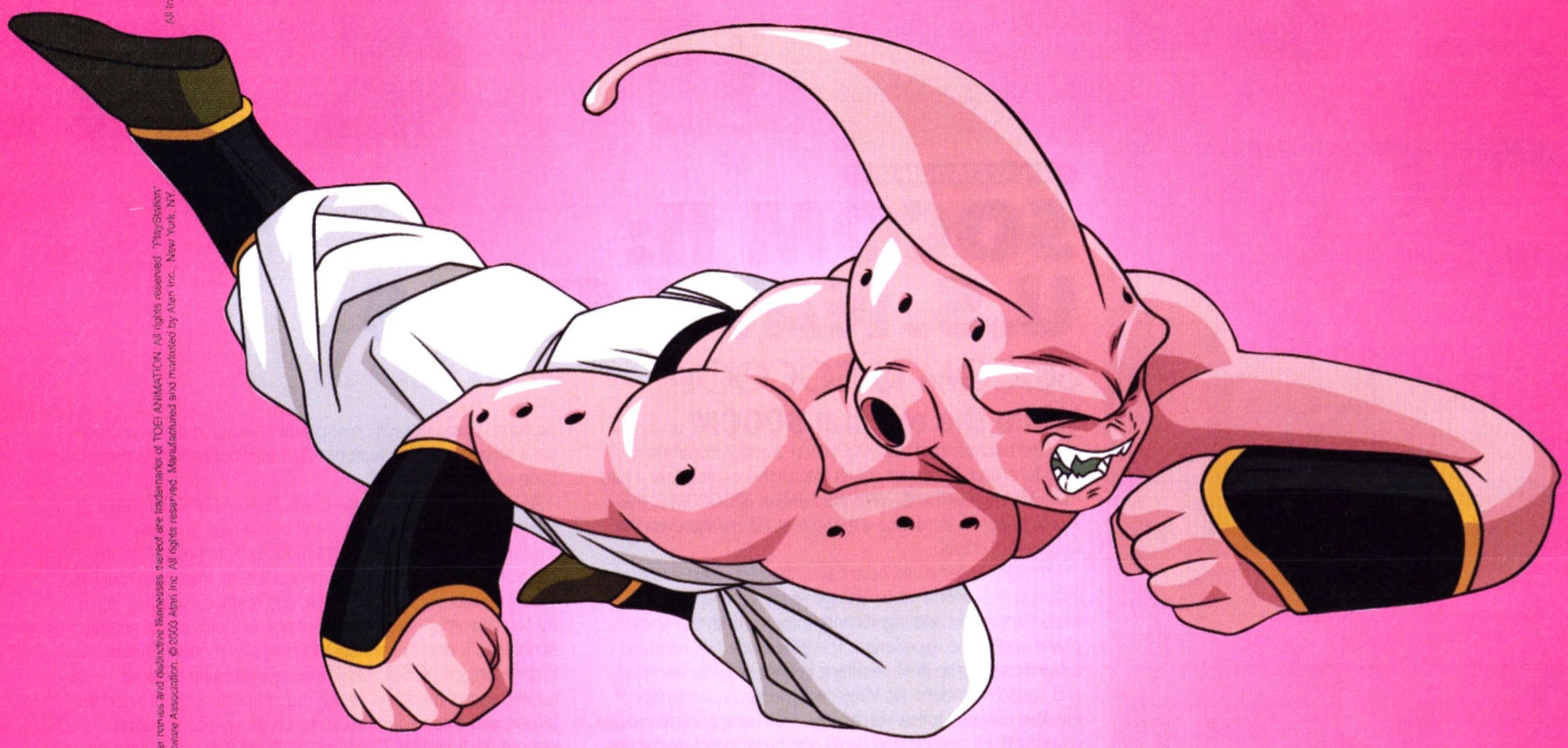
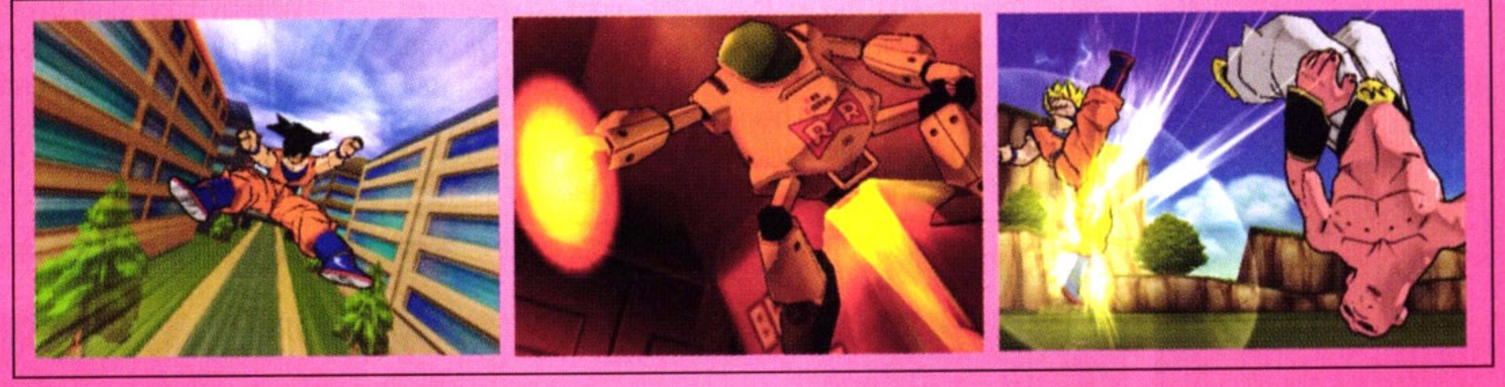
Ah, the joys of evil.

ATARI





Not only has Buu™ arrived, but you can fight as any of his three evil forms. Plus there's all new graphics, new fusions, new absorptions, and Dragon World, a new single player mode that lets you create your own DBZ® adventure. If you've got a favorite character, you've got a fight.

DRAGON BALL Z BUDOKAI 2 武道会

PlayStation.2

FUNimation Productions, Ltd.

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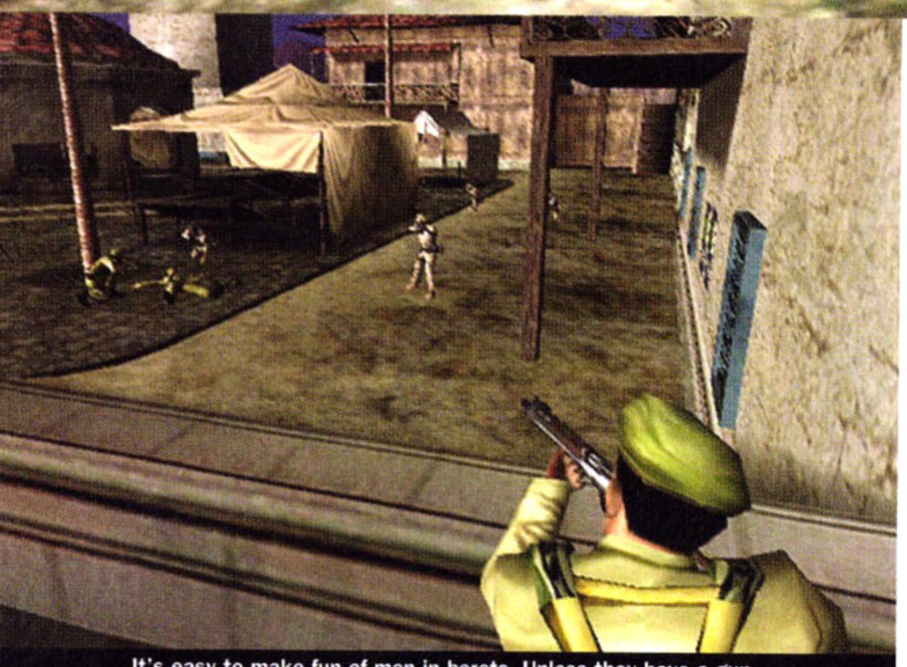
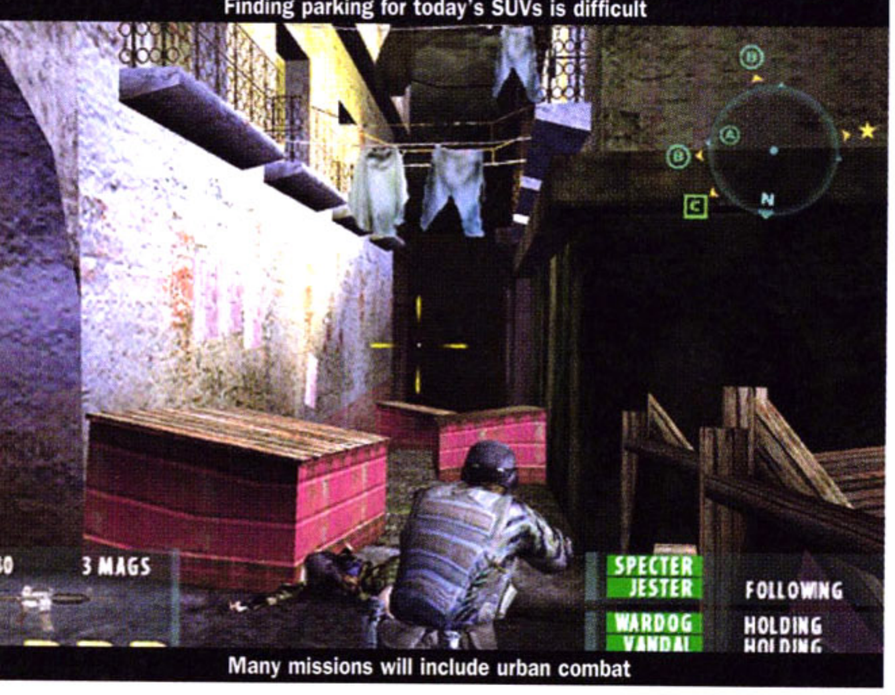


It's easy to make fun of men in berets. Unless they have a gun

Finding parking for today's SUVs is difficult



Many missions will include urban combat

PLAYSTATION 2

SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS

SOCOM IS SOCOOL!

While the original SOCOM is undeniably the backbone of the PlayStation 2 online community, both fans and developer Zipper Interactive agreed that it had room for improvement. With the release of SOCOM II, the studio hopes to introduce a game that will please even the toughest of critics.

Although Zipper could have taken the easy road and merely included new online maps and game types, they decided to do things right and significantly improve both the single-player and online experience. The solo mode has received a significant bump in AI, resulting in both smarter enemies and squad members. No longer will the second member of the Able element follow you blindly; he'll hang back to provide covering fire if needed and avoid putting himself into dangerous situations. Of course, the terrorists will also react more naturally. Gone are the days when a guard would take a hit and stand his ground. Now he'll immediately take cover and call for backup. And, thanks to new-and-improved vegetation, he'll have an easier time hiding – but then again, so will you.

Should the smarter enemies put you in a tough spot, your new squad commands will help pull your butt out of the fryer. The "get down" command will send your teammates diving for cover, and you can now even tell a troop to take up a sniper position. This order will be especially helpful in the new urban area missions, which feature full, multi-floor buildings and even civilians.

As cool as all these single player features are, the real draw of SOCOM has always been online play. The new multiplayer elements are certain not to disappoint. Not only will SOCOM II support a new friends list, an improved ranking system (including clan rankings), and restrictive games (such as "ensign-only," so newbies can play without fear of getting schooled), it also boasts several new play modes. These include breach games, which involve infiltrating terrorist bases; escort missions, which require protection of a certain player; and a spectator mode, which allows you to watch without participating. Of course, SOCOM II will sport all new maps, as well as every board from the original game, along with deadly new additions like airstrikes. Yup, you heard right, Private! Airstrikes! Duck and cover!

With so much more to offer in nearly every respect, SOCOM II looks certain to eclipse the popularity of the original. New campaigns with a deeper story should entertain those who don't have a Network Adaptor, while the new online features should appease those who do. Just like Christmas, SOCOM II should offer something exciting for everyone.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY ■ **DEVELOPER** ZIPPER INTERACTIVE
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4

Isn't it cute when couples dress alike?

Vegetation has received a huge makeover

PRE-ORDER NOW

It's fun. In a don't mess with me kind of way.

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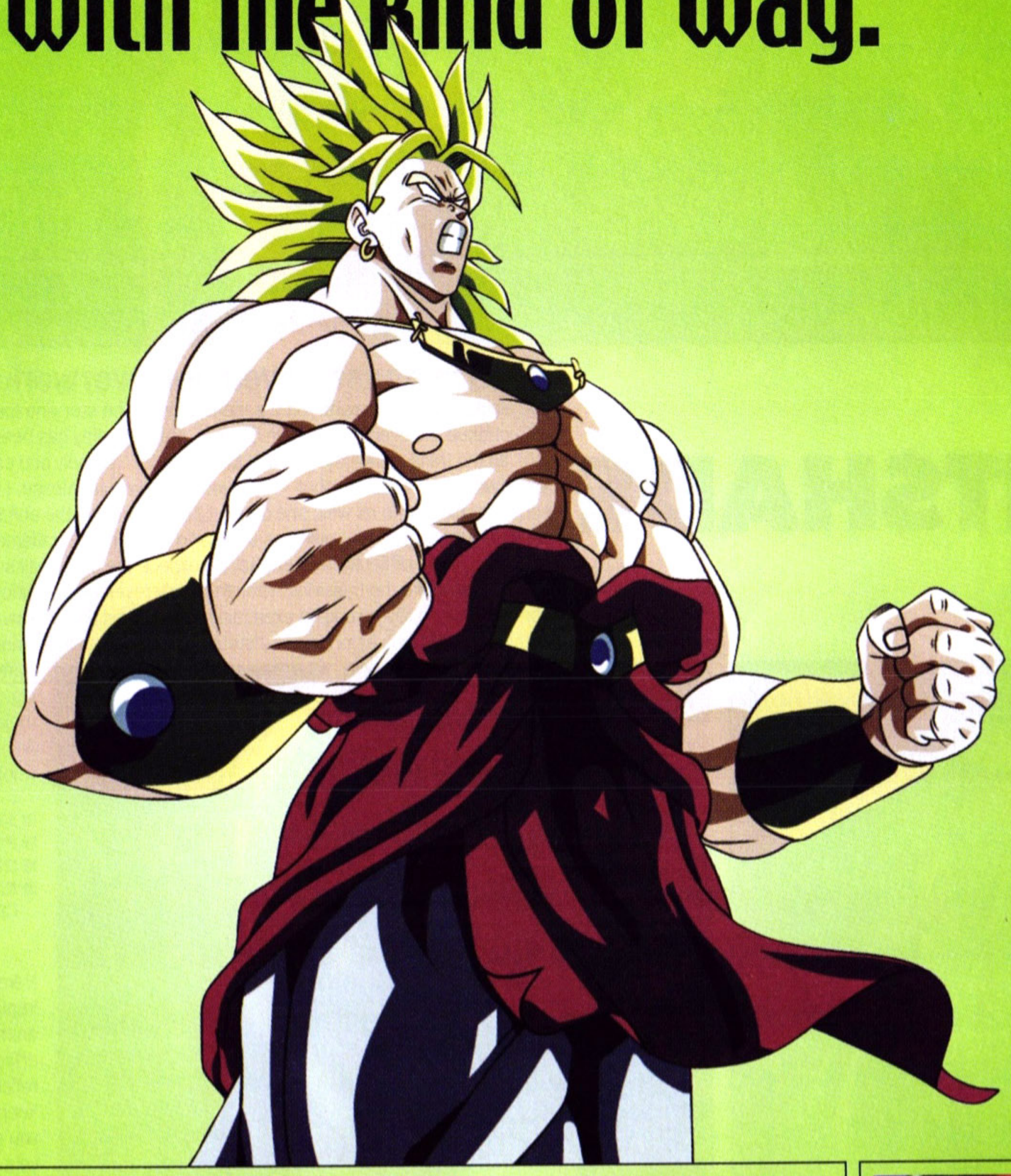

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GAME BOY ADVANCE

FUNimation Productions, Ltd.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Cartoon Violence

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PLAYSTATION 2

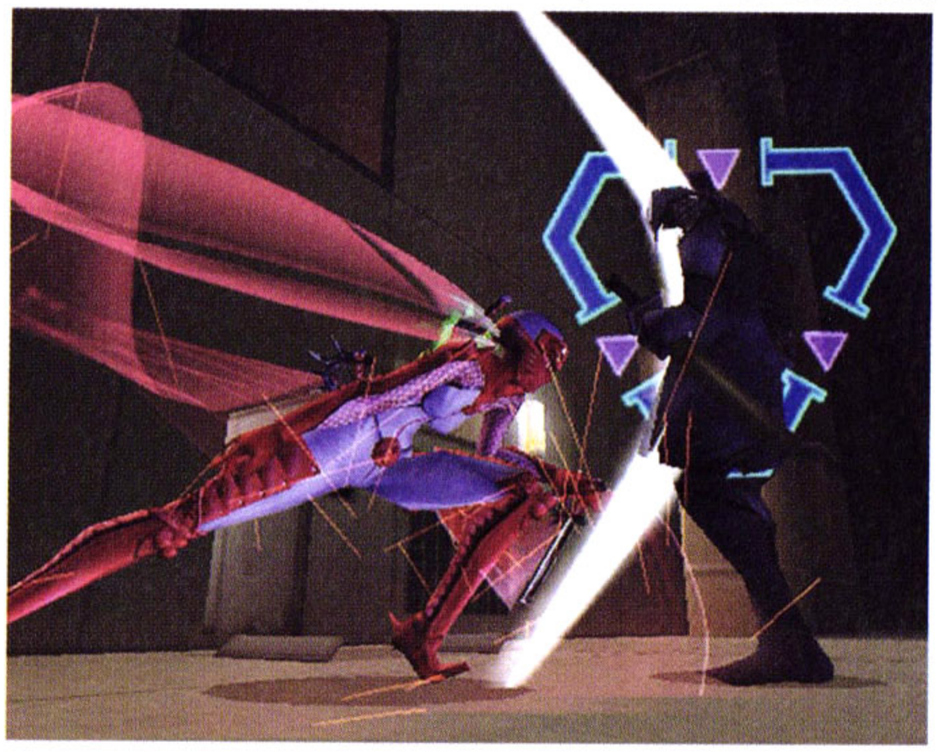
NIGHTSHADE

SHINOBI 1.5?

Sega in-house developer Overworks has taken fans' complaints about the first Shinobi title for PlayStation 2 seriously. While the storyline for Nightshade (known as Kunoichi in Japan) will continue the events started in Shinobi, the gameplay has been heavily tweaked. Overworks basically took all the things players didn't like from Shinobi – namely bad camera views, infrequent checkpoints, and less-than-stellar aerial combat – and fixed them for this release. Like her predecessor, Nightshade has a sense for ninja style as well; she doesn't just mow down the enemies with her unmatched skill in the mystical and martial arts. She also has access to a number of trademark moves like running up walls and such. Of course, if the difficulty level is what we expect, the player will surely have to master these maneuvers in order to complete the missions. Though simply re-releasing Shinobi might be good enough for some development houses, Overworks is expanding upon the original in a number of areas as well. Unusual locales for ninja action such as on top of a stealth bomber or an industrial crane are promised. A deeper combo system has been implemented, and performing combos successfully will fill up your Chakra meter, which powers devestating ninja magic. All of these improvements should add up to a whole lot of stealth ninja fun.

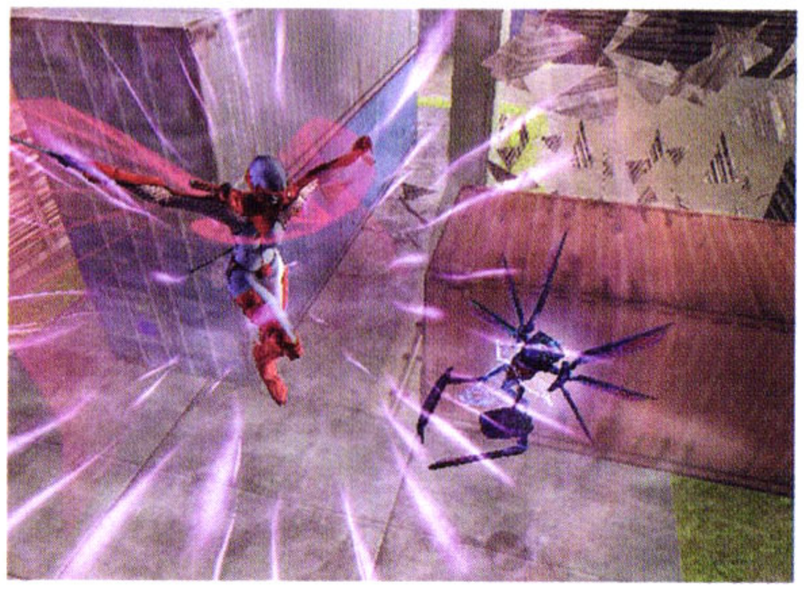
- **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
- **PUBLISHER** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER** OVERWORKS
- **RELEASE** DECEMBER 4 (JAPAN), 1ST QUARTER (US)

The artwork for the protagonist looks incredibly cool. As if being a female version of Shinobi wasn't bad-ass enough, Overworks has gone out of its way to give Nightshade her own visual footprint, and one slick enough to compare to the big boys like Dante and Auron at that.



Here we can see the high level of detail implemented in Nightshade's combat animations. Spiffy-looking motion blur effects and a nice, easily visible targeting reticle should go a long way towards keeping your friends occupied while you assert mastery over everything in your path.

Nightshade will feature cutscenes like this as well. Care has been taken to present the story scenes in such a fashion that the player feels that there is an actual plot deeper than the "Kill the bad guys, already!" device that is unfortunately standard in so many action titles.

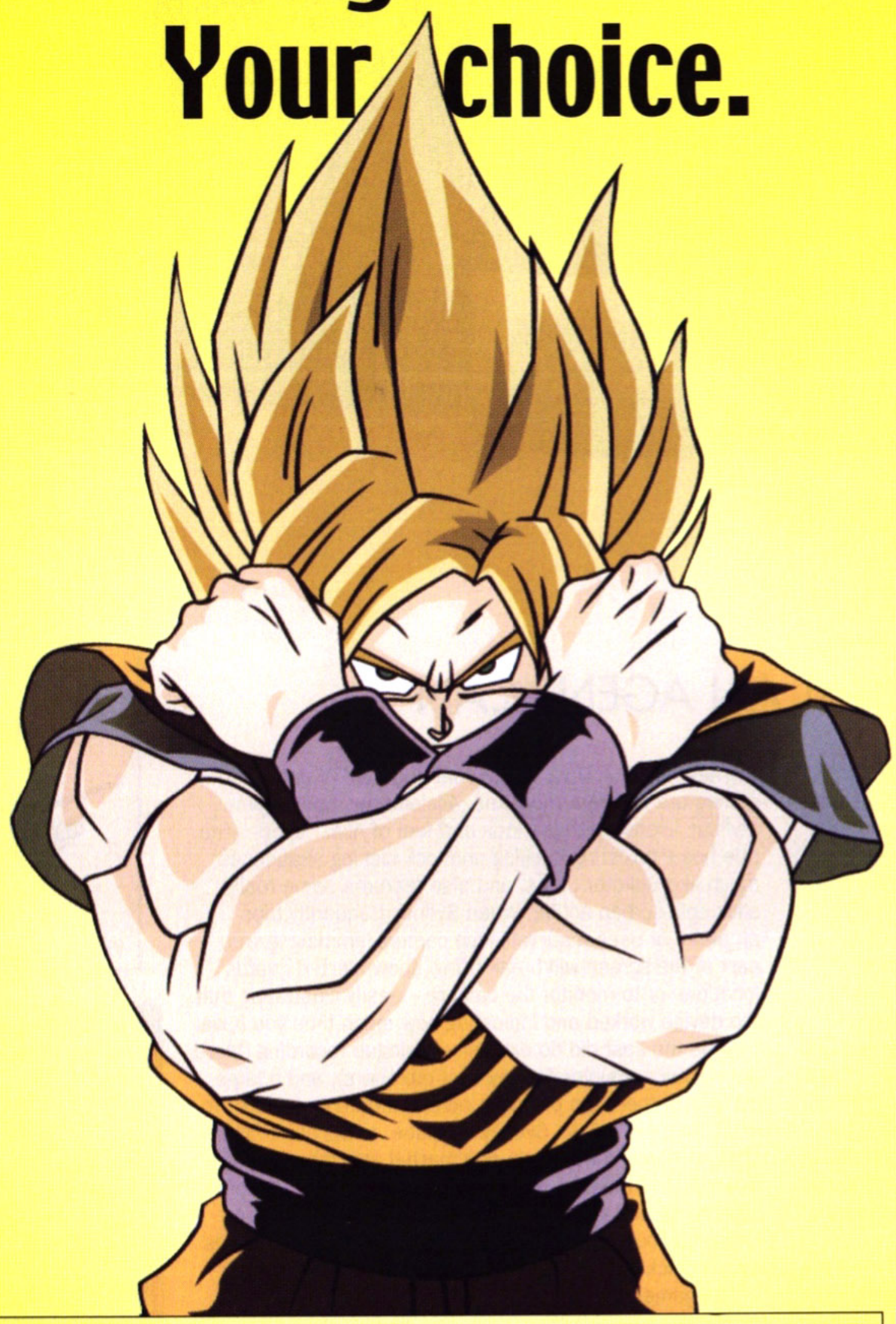


Aerial combat in Shinobi may not have been all that we wanted it to be, but Overworks is dedicated to making Nightshade's acrobatic manuevers fun and interesting as well as stylish. Look for this title to be the last word in high-flying melee combat for quite a while.

PRE-ORDER NOW

Walk away. Crawl away. Your choice.

ATARI



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NINTENDO GAMECUBE

FUNimation Productions, Ltd.

TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Blood
Violence

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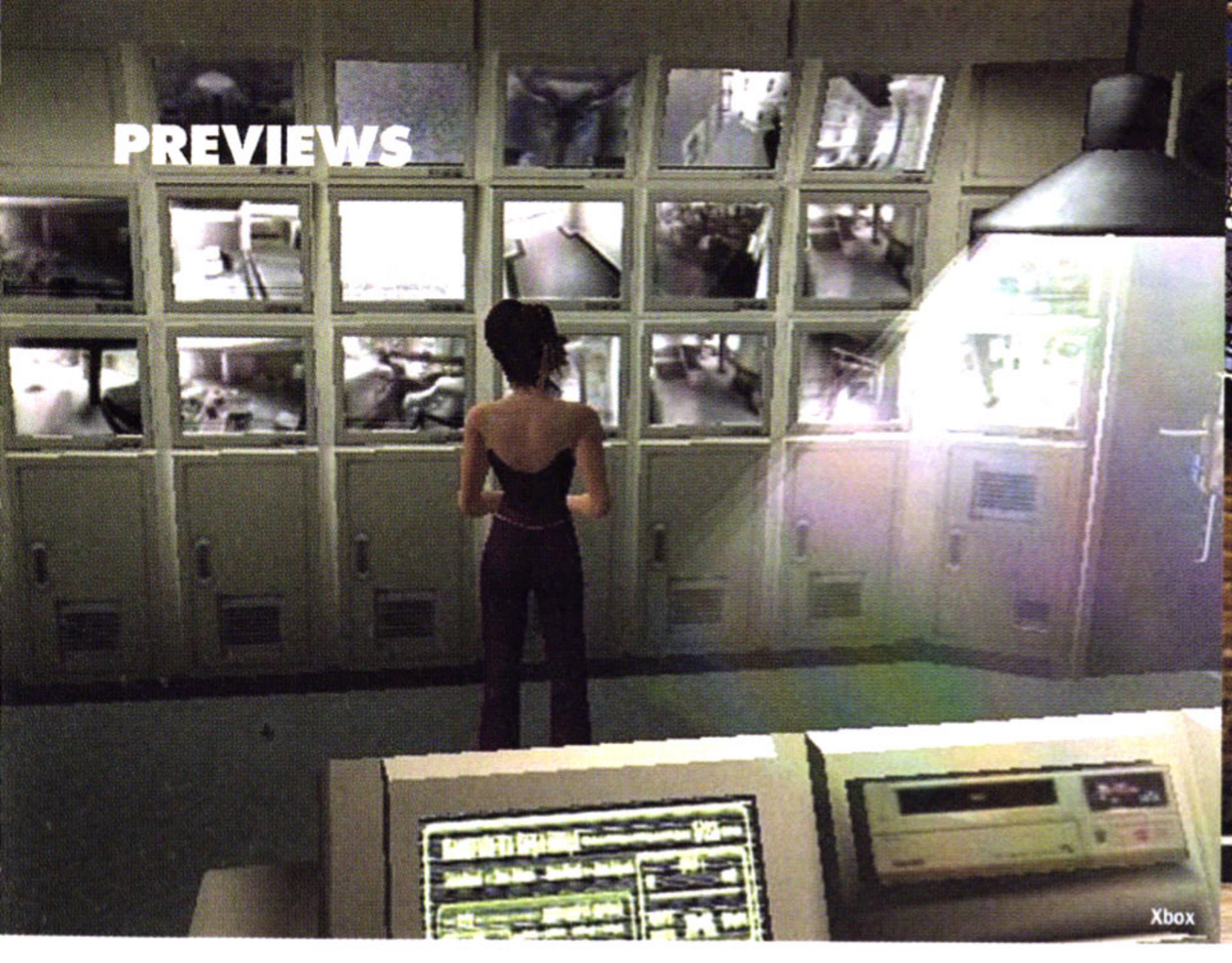

Xbox

PS2

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

ALIAS

DOING THE THINGS THAT AN AGENT CAN

Acclaim's forthcoming Alias game, based on the award-winning show that not enough people are watching, has all the things that a good licensed title should: voiceovers by the cast, a script by the creator, plot lines tying into the show, and action that mimics the series' style.

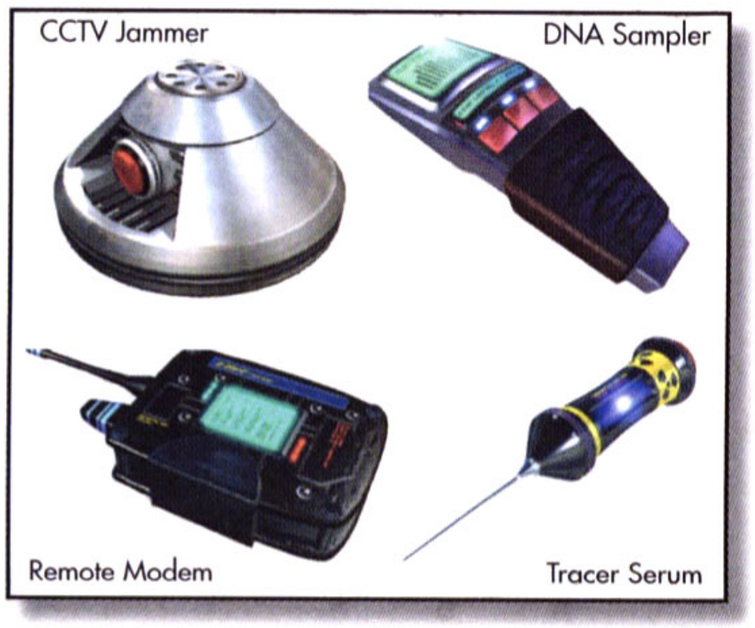
Those of you who haven't been keeping weekly tabs on the Bristows' activities won't feel entirely left out in the cold plot-wise, as the game's story is written as an episode from late in season two. However, it isn't dependent on extensive knowledge of the show's frequent twists. Here's the primer course and all you'll need to get going: Sydney Bristow (played by Jennifer Garner) is an agent for the CIA. Sydney (along with her father) was a double agent inside the SD-6 crime organization headed by Arvin Sloane, taking it down from the inside. Sloane is still at large, and as you can probably guess, that means that Sydney still has some wigs to split.

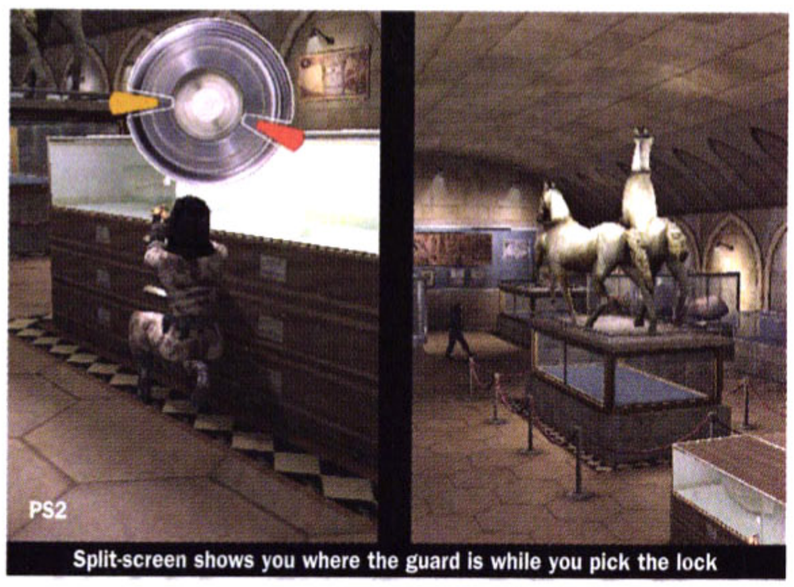
In the game (as in the show), Sydney is sent on frequent missions to exotic locales. Since most involve infiltrating a building that you have no business being in, wardrobe will be important, as will gadgets supplied by Marshal, the head of Tech Ops. Wisely realizing that TV and video games are different mediums, Acclaim has taken some stylistic license with the look and feel of Alias' action. The title has interesting hacking and lock picking sequences much like Splinter Cell's, and also features some really slick split-screen action. When Sydney frequently trips an alarm or uses a surveillance camera-jamming gizmo, part of the screen will break off to show alerted guards' locations or to monitor the camera – easily illustrating that the device worked and indicating how much time you have.

While the cast did do extensive dialogue recording (there are no voice doubles for any cast members), and a large number of them are playable, none did motion capture. To effectively get across Sydney's unique, to-the-point fighting style, various stunt people and martial arts masters were used. As in the show, Sydney will make frequent use of stealth attacks and environmental objects to inflict the largest amount of damage. The brief demo we played was easy to pick up, but still offered a lot of combat depth.

The game is coming out soon and shaping up quite nicely as a respectable espionage/spy title in its own right. And, if you're not watching the show, tune in, dammit.

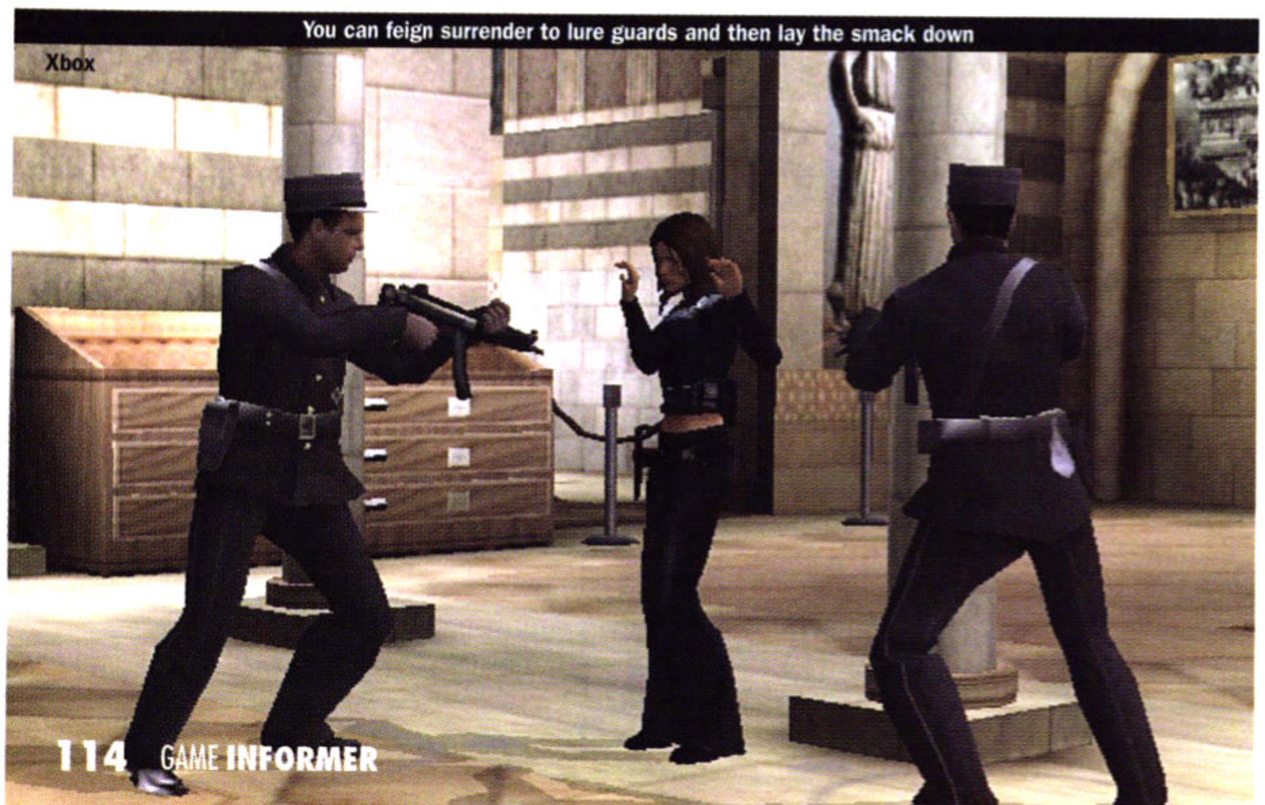
TOOLS OF THE TRADE




PS2

Split-screen shows you where the guard is while you pick the lock

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM ■ **DEVELOPER** ACCLAIM STUDIOS CHELTENHAM ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 2


You can feign surrender to lure guards and then lay the smack down

Xbox

Sydney's fighting style is efficient, to say the least

Xbox

Back... in black.

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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XBOX

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PLAYSTATION 2

FATAL FRAME 2: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

CRAZY FREAKY

We recently got some time with a Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly demo, and can say with the utmost certainty that Resident Evil and Silent Hill have nothing on the cinematic creepiness of this newest camera-combat freak-fest.

While the first game focused on a deserted Japanese mansion and one character at a time, this outing is all about doubling the best parts of the first entry. There are two main characters (twins Mio and Mayu), an entire village of horrors to explore, and more ways to upgrade your antique soul-capturing camera.

The game starts with you controlling Mio – the stronger of the twin girls. Mayu trails behind, but provides important clues to their history and sibling dynamic. We certainly don't want to give much away, but the first game focused on an ancient rite with horrific requirements. This game...well, there are twins and a ritual that requires an act more awful than the original ever hinted at.

With the extra main character, Tecmo has the opportunity to add a totally different art style for the second twin. The crimson butterflies that seem to lead the twins through the village captivate Mayu. Although the art direction favors dark earth tones, each of the girls has a shockingly red bow on their outfits, and the only other color is on the alluring butterflies. When you play as Mayu, the screen has a grainy '30s black and white (except for the butterflies) film stock quality and extremely static camera controls. It's interesting and infinitely creepy.

Tecmo's earlier title featured some of the best sound design we've ever heard in a game, heightening the tension to previously unheard of levels. With what we've gotten to play of the sequel, it is obvious that the company has upped the ante and is attempting to terrify gamers in previously unexplored ways. A bevy of environmental details and old-school terror-inducing techniques are used, like candle flames swaying when you run by and the main characters opening doors without being able to see what's behind them. In the context of this game, it's unnerving to say the least.

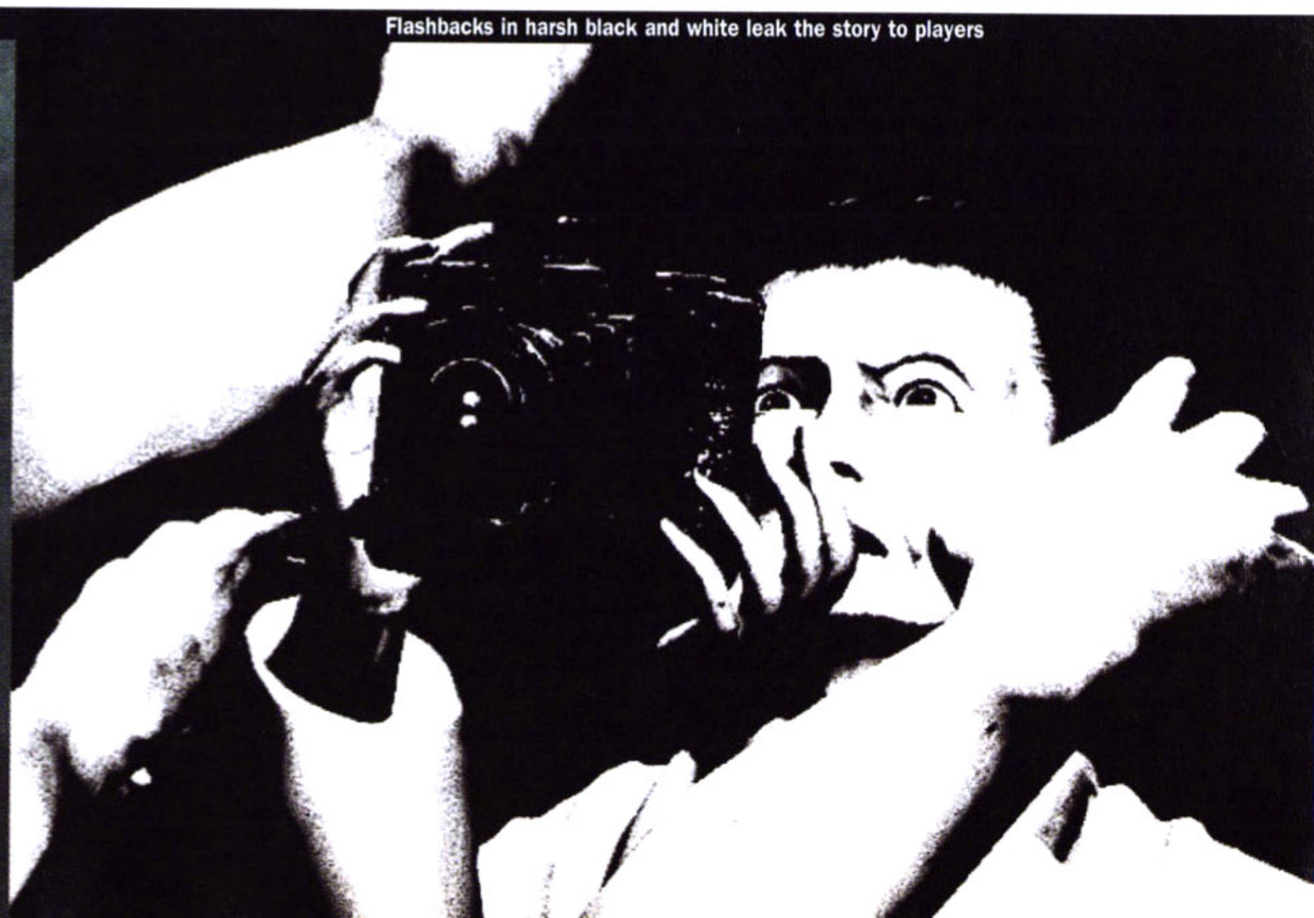
Critics were all over the board on the first Fatal Frame – some thought that the camera combat was slow and that the mansion itself felt almost sterile because there wasn't much "stuff" around. With the Xbox release a few months later, they added more environmental items and improved the menu system. Crimson Butterfly seems to have taken the lessons of the past and applied them in an exponentially more horrifying way. The village feels alive and the forest around it makes *The Lord of the Rings'* Fangorn Forest feel like a McDonald's playground. In addition, you can now move and shoot pics of the spirits more quickly.

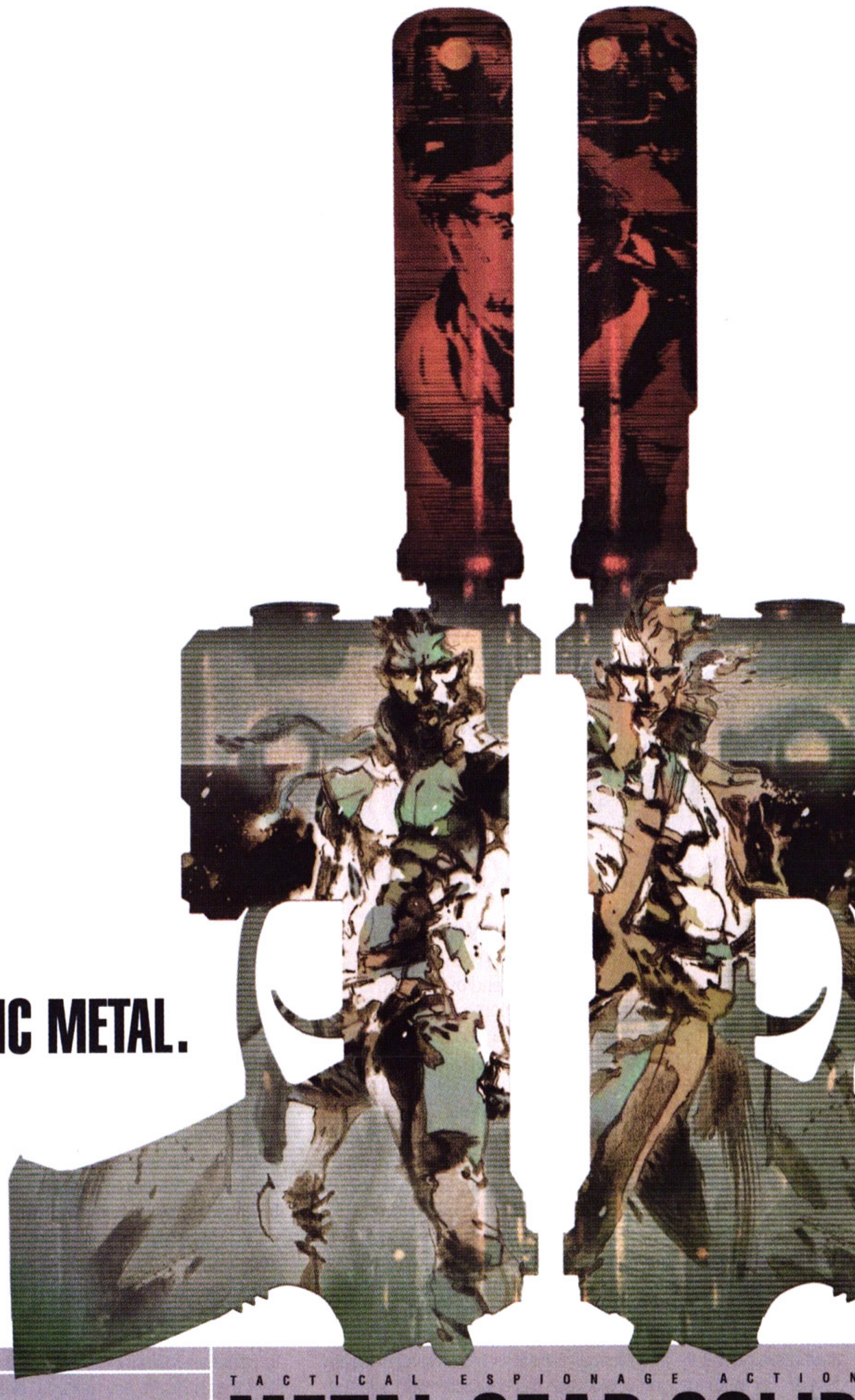
This game is never going to be a fast-paced survival horror title, but Crimson Butterfly may make the series the scariest and most suspenseful game franchise ever to hit living rooms.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** TECMO ■ **DEVELOPER** TECMO ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15

Like in the first game, a photo album will help you keep track of ghosts you've encountered

Flashbacks in harsh black and white leak the story to players





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THE TWIN SNAKES

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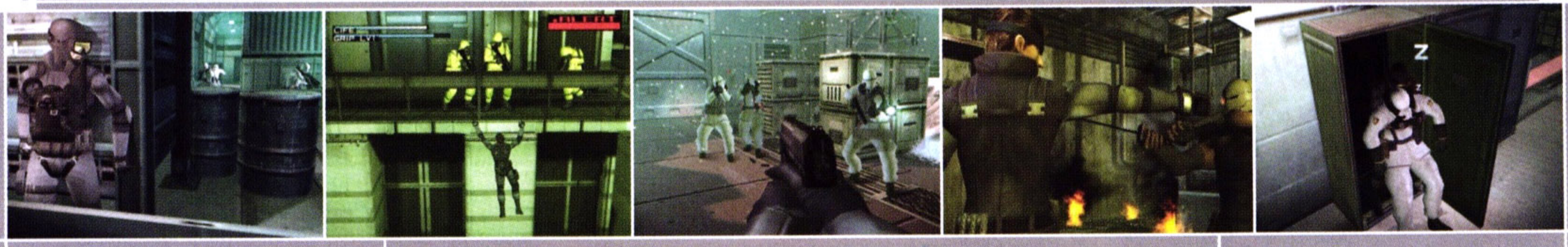

MATURE 17+

Blood and Gore
Suggestive Themes
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

The legendary storyline of the original *Metal Gear Solid.*® The cutting-edge gameplay of *Metal Gear Solid*® *2: Sons of Liberty.*™ Fused together in *Metal Gear Solid*® *The Twin Snakes,*™ the best of both worlds available exclusively for Nintendo GameCube. With new cut scenes, new game design and the creative vision of the game's originator, Hideo Kojima, it's a brand new game that's already a classic.

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Mushroom Kingdom is trying mass-transit

"C'mon, you drive like my grandmama!"

Two-player is as chaotic as we had hoped

GAMECUBE *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

NINTENDO IS BACK ON THE FIELD

Recently, GameCube owners have been missing the stellar first-party support that Nintendo previously delivered with landmark titles like The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker and Metroid Prime. This six-month drought will be over with the release of Mario Kart: Double Dash in November. Without compromising its original vision of combining racing with mayhem, Nintendo has boosted the franchise into the next generation through a clever twist on the premise.

Beyond the obvious updates to animations, character models, and backgrounds which make the game look shiny and new; the gameplay has received a huge increase in depth over its predecessors. The titular twist is the fact that upon each kart rides not one but two characters, one of whom is in charge of reaching the finish line and the other making sure the opponents don't. As with the previous games, each character has certain strengths and weaknesses which must be considered on the course. Add the fact that players can switch the positions of the characters on the fly, and tactical decisions become significantly deeper. For instance, you could have the character with a faster top speed driving on a straightaway, then switch to the character who turns better when you are confronted with a windy section of the course.

The characters that the players pick are not the only step in preparing for the race in Double Dash. Each team also chooses a kart to race in. The selection is somewhat limited by the size of the characters – for example, Donkey Kong and Bowser won't both fit into a small kart, and a large kart is too big for Baby Mario and Baby Luigi to handle. The kart affects the things you would expect it to, such as top speed, handling, defense, and acceleration.

In Double Dash, Nintendo gives players the option to race head-to-head in the traditional Mario Kart style or to team up so that one player is driving while the other mans the turtle shells. Grand Prix mode can be played either competitively (players in different karts) or cooperatively (players in the same kart). All of the old favorite game modes like Vs. and Battle are still around, as are several new game types. One of these is similar to Hold the Bag in TimeSplitters 2, where players try to hold the Shine for a total of one minute. The various game styles can be played with up to 16 players (each as part of a team) together on eight TVs through the GameCube's broadband adapter, making for some true battle royales.

Lest the player controlling the gunner character become bored with merely unleashing furious attacks at their opponents, Nintendo has given them something to do when not holding a power-up, or when they don't feel like using one. Gunners can punch, kick, and lean to slide the kart somewhat from left to right, in case they see a hazard coming that the driver may have missed. Also, both the driver and the gunner can hold power-ups, and when the latter needs one to deal with some rivals, the driver can toss it to them to enable them to keep up the barrage of turtleshells, stars, bananas, and anything else handy.

Each character in Mario Kart: Double Dash has a unique special power which is available through picking up the appropriate power-up off the course. These awe-inspiring tactics range from Baby Mario's signature move of releasing a Chomp-Chomp that pulls the kart along behind it as it eats everything in its way, to Princess Toadstool's technique of raising a shield around her kart that absorbs any hazards, like bananas or fake boxes, for her own use. On November 17th, GameCube owners might have to take Soul Calibur II out of their console when they have friends over, as Mario Kart: Double Dash looks like it could be one of the best, most addictive multiplayer titles ever released – period.

Get used to this screen layout

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYER OVER LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17

For more information go to thugonline.com

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Mild Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes

Game experience may change during online play.

PlayStation 2 | ONLINE BROADBAND AND DIAL-UP | XBOX | NINTENDO GAMECUBE | GAME BOY ADVANCE | Vicarious Visions | POWERED BY gamespy

ACTIVISION.
NEVERSOFT

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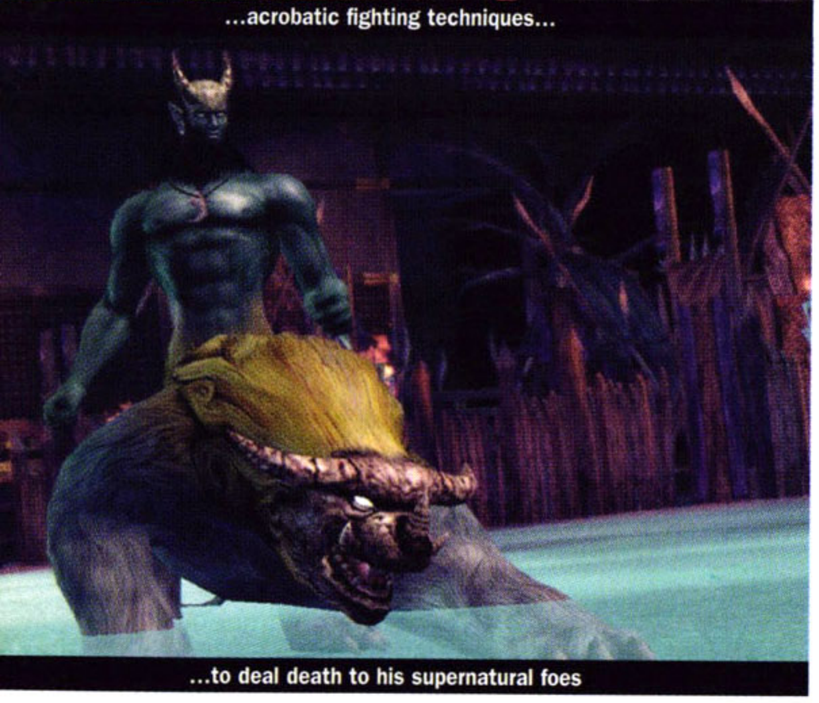
Shinato will use a variety of...

...acrobatic fighting techniques...



...to deal death to his supernatural foes

XBOX

MAGATAMA

THE BEST XBOX GAME YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

It's no secret that Microsoft has struggled to succeed in Japan with its Xbox initiative. However, the Seattle super-corporation doesn't like to lose, and has vowed that it is serious about creating games that will appeal to the Japanese audience. To this end, the company recently released screen-shots of a previously unknown title named Magatama to the Asian press. Although little is known about it, we can say that it's one of the most intriguing Xbox titles that we've seen so far.

Here's what we do know: Magatama is a third-person action game that is the first product internally developed by the Japanese wing of Microsoft Game Studios. It is set in an alternate version of 15th century Japan, and centers around an ongoing civil war between the Ashikaga shogunate and the Monkan rebels. The Monkan are drawing on various super-natural forces and infernal yokai (monsters from traditional Japanese myths) to win the battle. The game's hero, Shinato, is a warrior monk who is called upon by his order to help defend the land from the rebel forces.

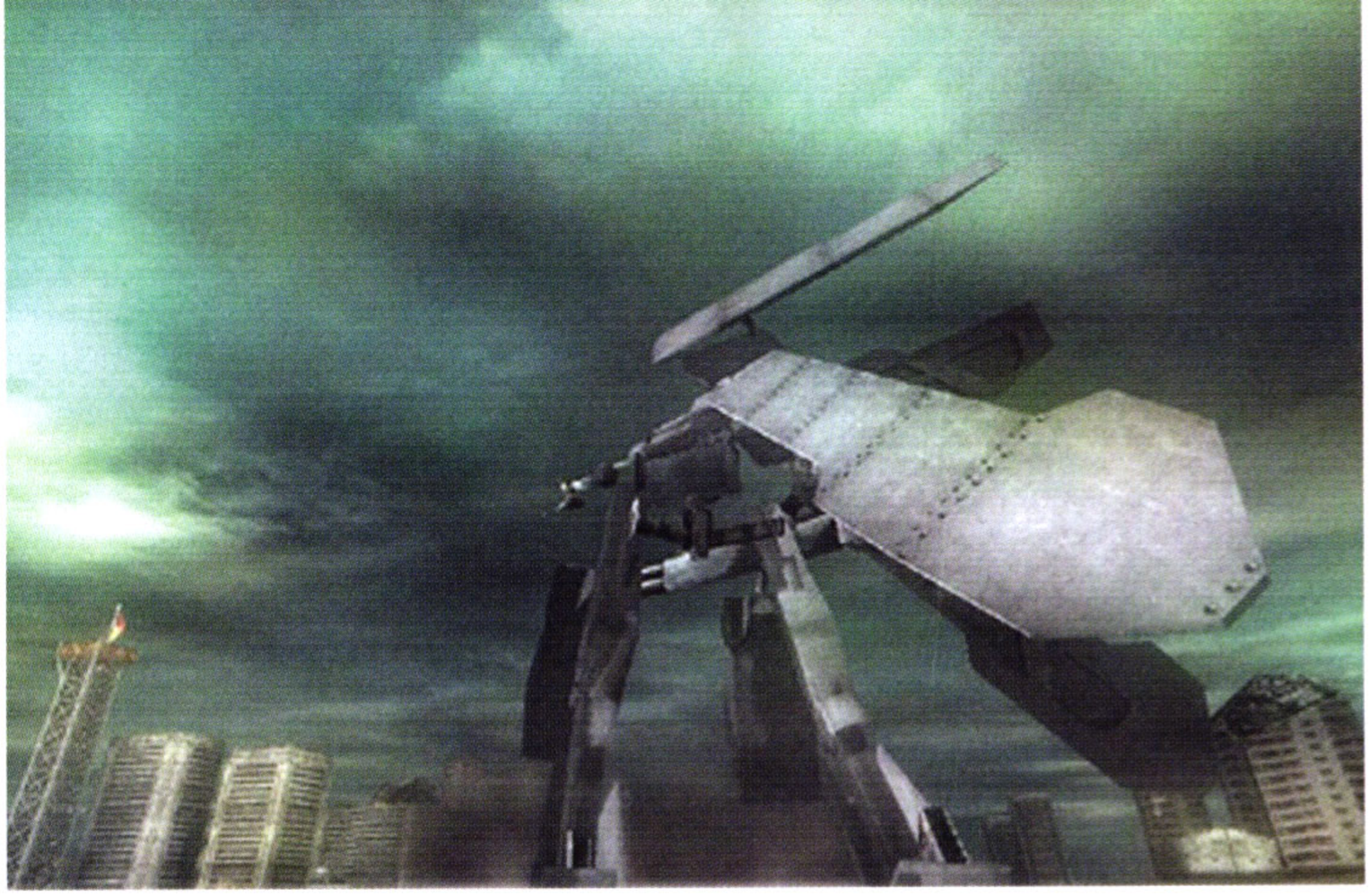
Shinato fights with a two-sword style, and will be capable of various acrobatic means to hack and slash the enemy to shreds. However, he also draws upon the power of Orochi, an otherworldly being that Microsoft describes as "your faithful companion [that] will always be afloat by your side." Other reports have described Orochi not as a human character, but as some sort of divine entity. Using Orochi's magic abilities, you will apparently be able to apply occult powers to your weapons, creating devastating cooperative attacks. We don't know exactly how this will work, but we do know that the control scheme is very simple, using only one button to perform offen-sive maneuvers, and is promised to be "quite different from any other game in the past."

Even more noteworthy are rumored reports that the game's leader is none other than Kawai Hiroshi, a former Square programmer who worked extensively on both Final Fantasy VII and Final Fantasy IX. Yes, there is much speculation centering around Magatama, but we believe that one look at these screens will tell you why this unknown property is being watched very closely by the industry. Microsoft has not confirmed that the game will make its way stateside, but we seriously doubt that a title this amazing-looking would be held back from our shores.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS JAPAN ■ **RELEASE** TBA

The influence of Japanese legend is prevalent in Magatama's design

Could this be the hidden face of the evil that threatens the Ashikaga?



XBOX

STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT

IMMERSIVE MECH WARFARE

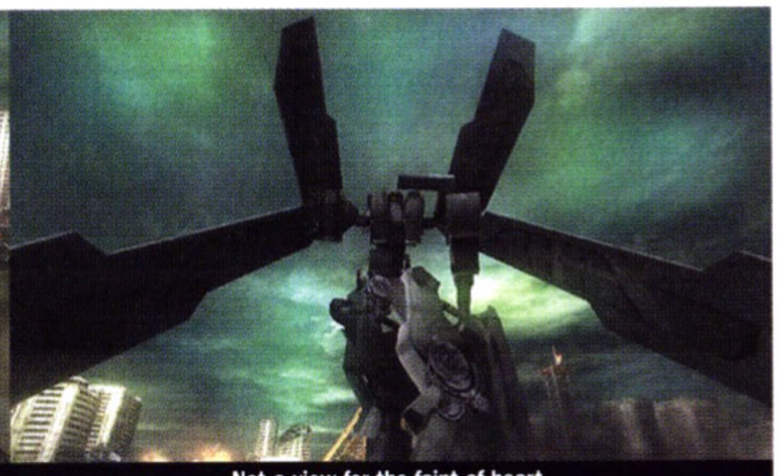
Last year's Steel Battalion was a breakthrough in gaming. Though the price point was a bit steep, many gamers found it worth their $200 to be able to literally get behind the control board of a giant robotic fighting machine. Capcom's sequel promises to be every bit as ambitious and revolutionary as the original. Supporting up to ten players in a game, the focus of Steel Battalion: Line of Contact is the online experience. Heaps of Xbox Live support have been added, from downloadable content like maps and mechs, to fully customizable clan symbols emblazoned on the side of your Vertical Tank and voice chat support. An interesting twist on the use of the Xbox Communicator is that pilots can utilize the transmission-tuning dial on their controllers (yes, such a thing exists on that behemoth of an input device) to intercept their opponents' command frequency!

Capcom has also pledged to bring some form of persistent world to the online mech warfare community. Clans will gain and lose territory depending on how they fare in skirmishes with rivals. The added dimension of virtual real estate will add to the excitement by making something, no matter how fictional, hinge on the outcome of a battle.

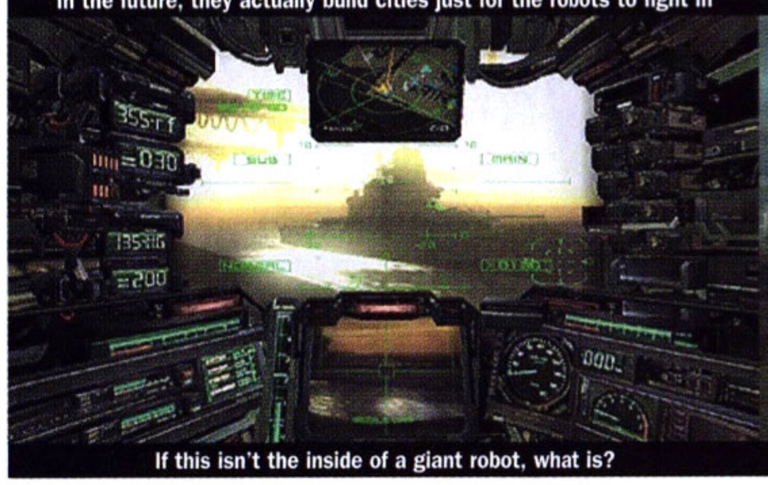
Not much has been announced as far as enhancements to the actual gameplay other than the addition of a third-person camera view. While this is certainly welcome, it seems as though the meat of Line of Contact will be in the online play and the 10 new mechs available for player use. Well, that and the fact that owners of the original will be able to get some more use out of the aforementioned $200 controller.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA LAN OR INTERNET) ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
■ **RELEASE** 2004

In the future, they actually build cities just for the robots to fight in



Not a view for the faint of heart



If this isn't the inside of a giant robot, what is?

Buildings will tremble before your might

PC

MIDDLE EARTH ONLINE

THE LOST TALES OF TOLKIEN

We won't be able to see you when you're playing Middle Earth Online. However, if you're half the fan that we think you are, then we know that you'll be sitting in front of your PC in your imitation mithril with a cardboard Sting at your side. Has developer Turbine (creator of Asheron's Call) got a game for you. Bring on the dorks, as the studio believes that it can satisfy both the high scrutiny of avid Tolkien fans, hardcore MMORPG players, and anyone who claims to know Elvish.

For all of those who would read the books and wonder what the other points on the maps were for, listen up. Middle Earth Online won't let you play the Fellowship. Instead, you are a normal citizen who will flesh out Tolkien's world and explore other areas and conflicts that the author himself alluded to, but couldn't write about. There will be well-known locations and characters, but players will often have to deal with all-new situations. For example, what happens to Moria after the defeat of the Balrog? As far as specific dates go, each region will be set in a specific time, as the game cannot practically follow a linear flow to follow the Fellowship. You can create your own groups, go on quests, and live in Middle Earth as it teeters between the forces of good and evil.

The game's map will start out with greater Eriador, featuring the Shire, Bree, Rivendell and the Grey Havens. Eventually it will expand to include Lindon, Forochel, and more. Turbine estimates that the monthly fee should be about $15, which will get you free periodic expansions, with retail boxed additions available less frequently. Players choose from four races: humans, elves, dwarves, and hobbits. As you live in the world, whether you align yourself as good or evil is up to you. Although you can't become an orc or Nazgul, your actions will determine whose side you are on. Even using corrupted items or magic will aid Sauron. Common with most MMORPGs, how you live is just as important as the enemies you slay. Housing can be upgraded as you advance, and characters with craft skills will have to be befriended to mend weapons. Turbine says that special Legendary items will be available, but wouldn't say if you'll actually get to posses Sting or Narsil, for example.

Middle Earth Online will have to straddle a fine line between playability and authenticity. To this end, Turbine has had to tread carefully. Player-versus-player battles are only consensual, as you can't have people just slaughtering hobbits for profit. Also, wizards are not available, even if magic is prevalent. Balancing has been done to ensure that elves aren't too powerful, and, hobbits can't cast magic (but can use charmed items). Even your playing time is being considered. The developer wants to ensure that casual players can get as much out of the game as the hardcore ones do. Turbine has a tall order in front of it, but also has the benefit of time, as MEO won't appear until late next year, with beta testing planned for this summer. Don't worry, you'll be ready. Once Jo-Ann Fabrics gets that silk you ordered, you'll be making your elvish cape and getting all gussied up in no time.

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** TURBINE ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** LATE 2004

This is as close to a woman as some of you will ever get without hyperventilating

Characters will be fully customizable, of course. Check out that sweet cape

PC

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

NOOBS BEWARE

Co-developed by Epic Games and Digital Extremes, Unreal Tournament's latest incarnation is shaping up to be the first truly amazing next-generation first-person shooter to hit shelves. Without departing from the winning UT formula, nearly every aspect of the game has been upgraded, improved, and expanded. All of the weapons, maps, and sepulchral "Killing Spree!" voiceovers that FPS aficionados know and love are present, proving that UT 2K4 stays true to the vision.

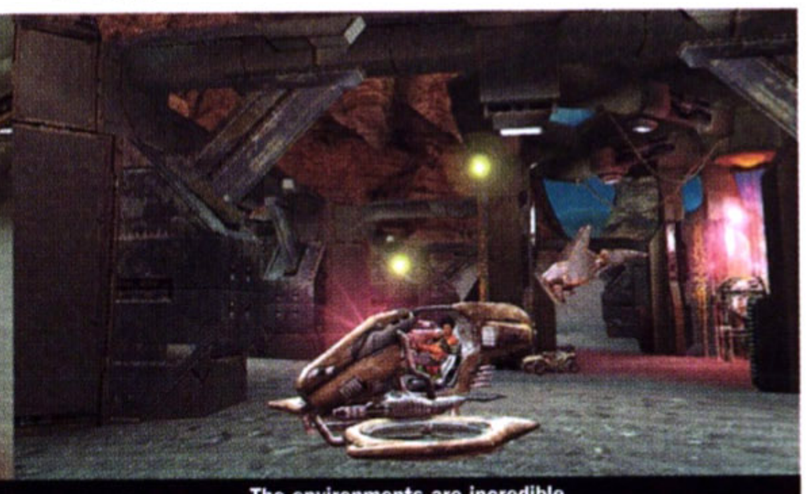
Beyond the overall overhaul of the title, a couple of things stand out. Assault mode is back, with six maps prepackaged. In one, teams vie for control of a Skaarj mothership. The assault team starts in ships actually flown by the players, and they must knock out the shield generators before they can move on to boarding the vessel. Defenders are hardly passive, though, as they man the turrets or board their own ships to intercept.

A new mode has been implemented as well, called Onslaught. This type takes place on huge maps and can currently have up to 16 players on a server. In this format, clans vie for territory, scoring points for each section of the map they control.

A bevy of vehicles has been incorporated as well. Nine in total; spaceships, buggies and aircraft are all available. The online support which makes the Unreal titles so addictive is getting several new features as well, including a broadcast mode which will allow hundreds of people to view combat in realtime with little server strain. Voice chat is now supported, and the modmaking interface has been redesigned to give authors an easier time pushing UT 2K4 past its already grandiose scale.

November will be a grand month for future commandos as their arsenal becomes even deadlier with the release of UT 2K4.

One of the multi-person vehicles

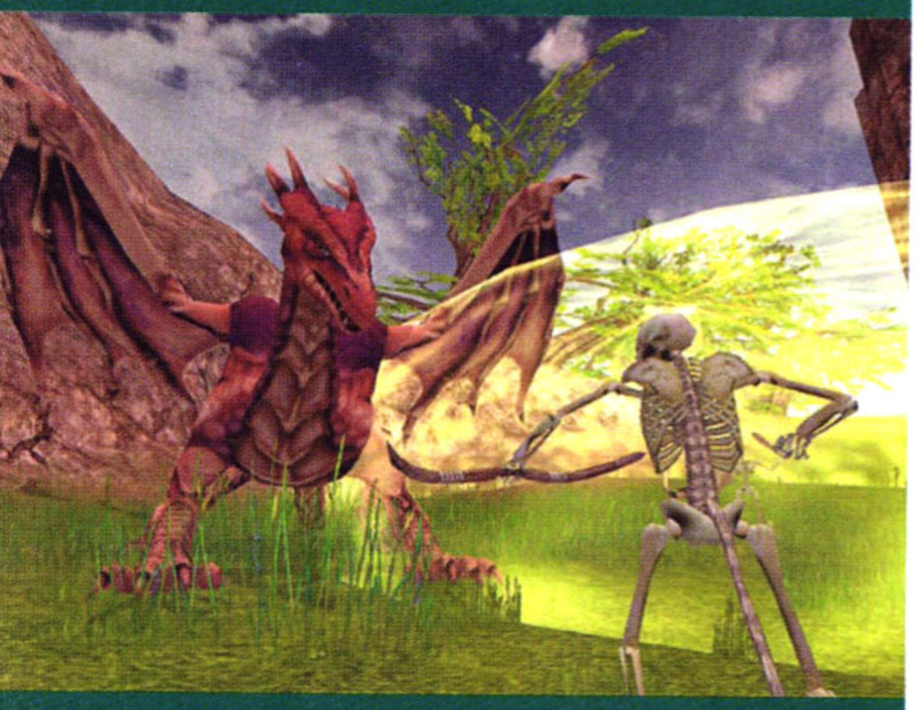


The environments are incredible

John Woo this, sucka

Who says the future doesn't have flava?

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA LAN OR ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** EPIC GAMES/DIGITAL EXTREMES ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16



PC

HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA

A NEW WORLD ON THE HORIZON

Like no other MMORPG before it, Horizons features a world created by its players. Each item in the game can be crafted from raw materials, including everything from weapons to cities. Land can even be purchased to build a fortress. But first players must learn the proper skills, as well as locate the necessary items. This is no medieval version of Sim City, however; Horizons features all the questing, combat, and magic that MMORPG aficionados expect. Craftsmen can even be commissioned to create items for you if you choose to focus on adventuring.

Initially offering nine playable races, Horizons gives character creation the same flexibility granted to the world of Istaria itself. Skills can be learned by utilizing the school system, and at any time during the game a new course of study can be adopted. A warrior can suddenly decide to become a mage or vice versa. By offering such a huge range of options, Artifact has created a title that will make open-ended RPG fans salivate with anticipation. Thanks to its massive, highly detailed world, Horizons is as visually appealing as it is technically staggering. With so much to offer, Horizons has the potential to become a major player in the MMORPG scene.

Players can fight evil as one of several races

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** ARTIFACT
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11

XBOX

MAGIC: THE GATHERING - BATTLEGROUNDS

DUELISTS, GATHER 'ROUND

Developer Secret Level looks to be making not only the best Magic: The Gathering game yet, but also a legitimately good strategy game in its own right. Battlegrounds takes place in real-time and enacts a duel between two opposing mages. The object, as in the card game, is to reduce your adversary to zero health through the use of spells and creatures. Duelists have a limited selection of spells to choose from, making mana management, timing, and positioning the key elements of strategy.

The action takes place on a flat dueling ground, with one mage on either side. Summoned creatures start next to their master and charge forward until they reach an enemy. If they should make it to the opposing mage, they unleash their wrath upon his/her mortal frame, bringing their lord that much closer to victory. Of course, your enemy will use his spells and creatures to prevent that from happening.

Veterans of the card game will see many things they recognize, such as creatures and sorceries, and the structure of the original Magic is largely maintained in Battlegrounds. References to 'cards' are absent, however, and the world is presented as a fully realized fantasy setting rather than being an electronic representation of the card game. This decision makes it easier for non-fans to enjoy the game, as well as creating a more immersive atmosphere.

The single-player portion of Battlegrounds primarily features a rather large Quest mode, in which a continuous story unfolds and players can gain new spells, creatures, and other upgrades as they advance. The multiplayer experience consists of a standard Vs. mode, as well as robust Xbox Live support including downloadable content and a worldwide ranking system. As good real-time strategy titles are few and far between in the console universe, Magic: The Gathering - Battlegrounds should receive a warm welcome when it arrives November 11th from card gamers and Xbox owners alike.

Angels apparently don't need armor

We wouldn't want to be that goblin

Spell animations are dramatic

In-game explosions abound

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** SECRET LEVEL ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Language
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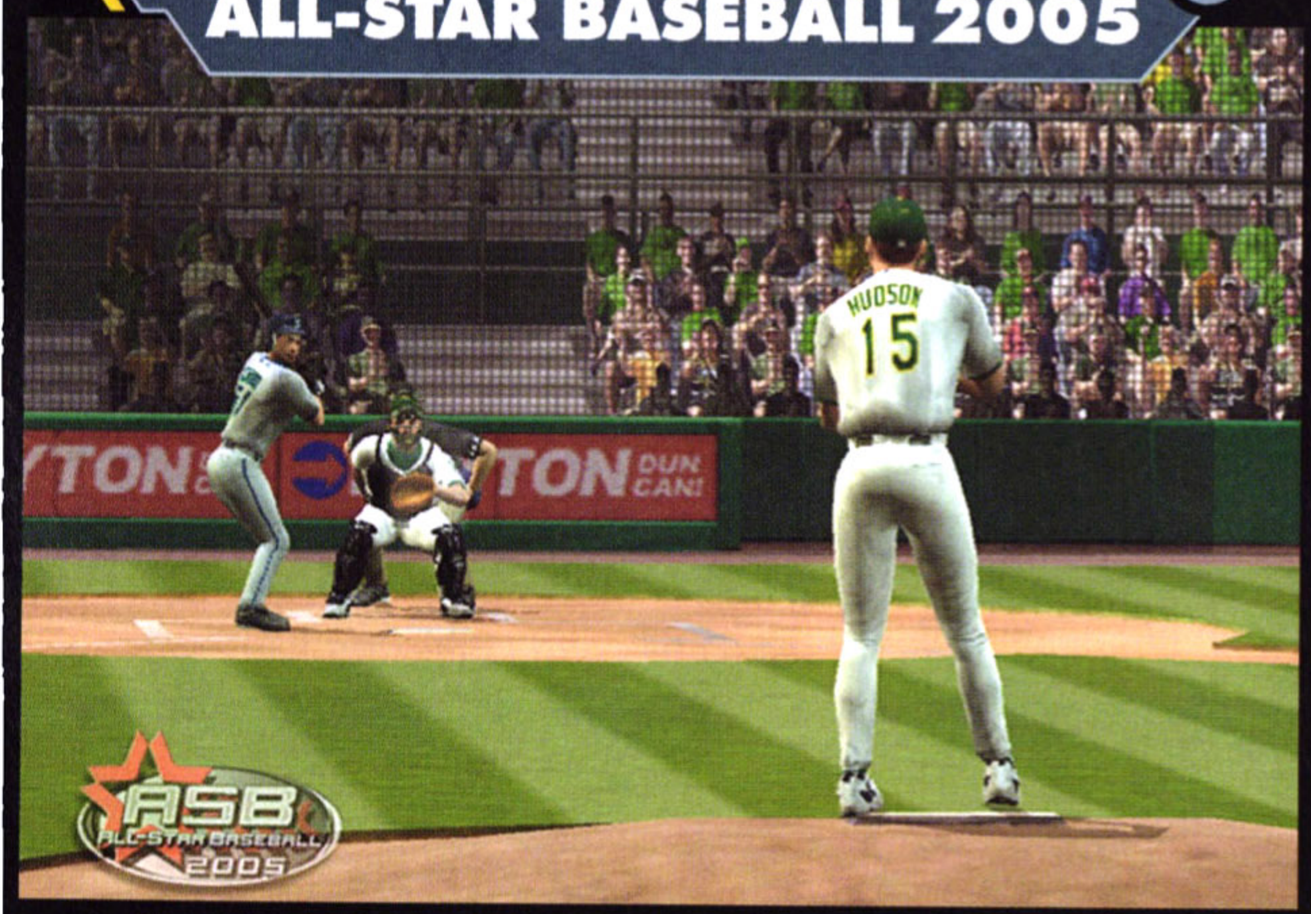
PlayStation®2

PHOTOPHILE

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005



The 2003 baseball season is just now wrapping up, but Acclaim is already looking ahead to 2005. Derek Jeter will once again be the cover athlete, but from what we hear, everything else in the game will change in one way or another. Along with online play, Expansion mode will feature a new Create-A-Team option and random schedules. The game will also boast over 80 fully animated stadiums, more than 4,000 player animations, new models, and upgraded batting, fielding and base running interfaces. Acclaim hopes to have the game shrink-wrapped and ready for consumption no later than February.

XBOX

KAMEO: THE ELEMENTS OF POWER

Rare's 3D fantasy action title aims to bolster the Xbox's lineup of quality games. Players must capture and raise the flora and fauna of the land into helpful allies, and use their unique abilities to conquer challenges on the way to the Troll Castle. Action takes place largely by remote control, as Kameo's allies engage the baddies of their own free will. Impatient gamers can take the reins of the monsters for a more hands-on experience. Will Kameo's ability to tame and control over 60 creatures enable her to become a true classic? Find out later this year when this hits shelves.

PC

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR OF THE RING

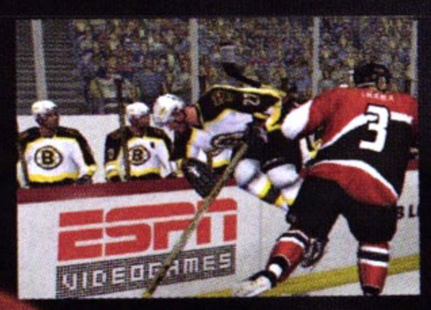
With the cancellation of hack n' slasher Treason of Isengard, this game looks to be Vivendi's first good Tolkien title. This real-time strategy effort lets you control both sides in the battle for the fate of Middle Earth, as good and evil collect resources, upgrade hero units, and climb up the tech tree to domination. Visually, developer Liquid Entertainment has worked hard to deliver the thematic and physical contrasts between the nature-worship of the Fellowship and the withering scourge of Sauron. Furthermore, because of Vivendi's unitque license with the book, care is being taken to faithfully recreate the all-important geography of Tolkien's saga. War of the Ring is scheduled to appear in stores in early November.

YO, J.R.

YOUR SKILLS NEED WORK.

I pummeled you in the skills competition. My slapshot's been clocked at 99mph. I've hit four targets in four attempts. I got speed. I got moves. And I'm ready to take you on. Three periods. Hockey the way it should be. You and me. Let's dance.

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 12TH.



EVERYONE
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

XBOX LIVE

PlayStation.2

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ONLINE
BROADBAND AND DIAL-UP

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

R: RACING EVOLUTION

This December, the new racing game from genre experts Namco is set to peel off the line. In R: Racing Evolution, you'll assume the role of fetching female driver Rena Hayami and play out her rivalries with other drivers. During the race, your competitors will trash talk you, and cutscenes will expound on Rena's relationships with her rivals. Of course, the main focus will be on the driving. Racing Evolution features licensed vehicles, 14 tracks, and graphics that rival those of Gran Turismo 3. With more personality than most racing games, Racing Evolution should get your motor running.

PLAYSTATION 2

CULDCEPT

What can best be described as Magic: The Gathering meets Monopoly, Culdcept is one of Japan's biggest obsessions. A few years ago, a person become so helplessly addicted that he pulled a gun and shot nearly a dozen people after losing a round in a Culdcept tournament. Yikes! This irresistible game is now coming stateside through publisher NEC Interchannel. The concept is fairly easy to grasp: Players roll dice to move across a game board. After landing on a square, the player can use Mana Points to purchase the space. If another player lands on this space, they can pay a fee to progress safely, or play one of their combat cards. If they win, they have the option to claim the territory. If they lose, their card disappears and they still have to pay the fee. It's an exciting game that features over 480 different cards. Look for it this November.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

SABRE WULF

If the name Sabre Wulf sounds familiar to you, you're probably older and British. That's because the game was originally released by UK developer Ultimate: Play the Game for Commodore 64. Ultimate now goes by the name Rare (you've heard of them, haven't you?), and Sabre Wulf goes by the name "Rare's new GBA adventure game." As the hero Sabreman, you'll go on a Donkey Kong Country-styled quest to imprison the legendary Sabre Wulf, an angry magic blue beast. Gameplay will involve using the abilities of the animals you encounter to fight the Wulf, and probably drinking tea as well. Those Brits love their tea.

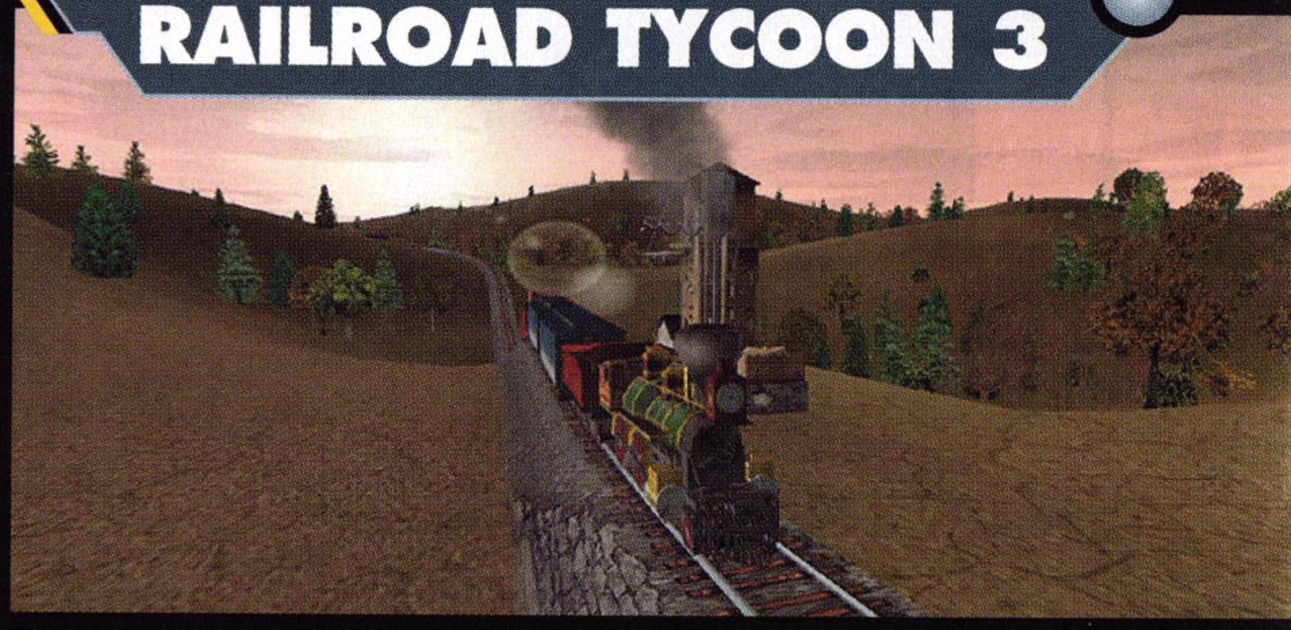
PLAYSTATION 2

CRIMSON TEARS

Fifty years in the future, Tokyo is ruled by a evil corporation called Weaponix, and only three "human biological weapons" can bring them down. We don't know yet if this means they just eat too much Taco Bell. What we do know is that this exciting new title from Capcom will feature randomly generated dungeons, snazzy cel-shaded graphics, and should be out in Japan before the end of the year. We also know that all futuristic corporations are evil. It's just what they do.

PC

RAILROAD TYCOON 3



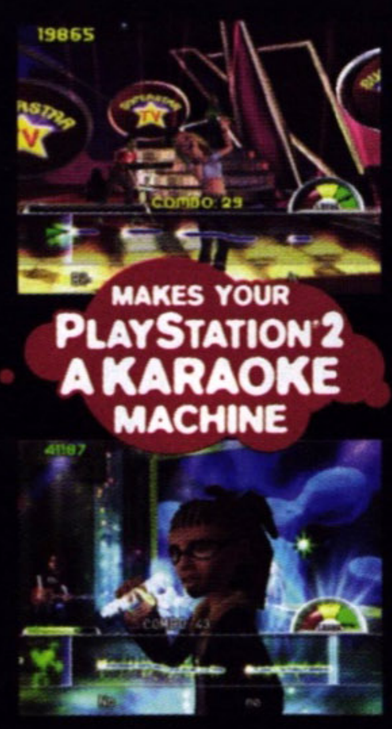
At its core, Railroad Tycoon 3 is a virtual model train set. Developer PopTop Software hasn't said whether or not you can build your virtual landscape in your virtual parents' virtual basement, but they have confirmed over 40 real train types and 25 different scenarios, all created with a shiny new 3D graphics engine (no pun intended). Railroad Tycoon 3 will also feature a simplified interface, a map editor, and multiplayer via online or LAN. Who will dominate the cutthroat field of being the best train...runner...eh...guy? Find out in November.

THE THRILL OF SINGING MEETS THE AGONY OF DEFEAT.

Karaoke Revolution™

When it comes to singing, you may already be a winner. Find out with the first karaoke video game that actually judges your vocal talents. Karaoke Revolution™ turns you into a star and your PlayStation®2 into an interactive karaoke machine, complete with scoring, training and a built-in audience.

Sing along with 35 hit songs, including chart-toppers popularized by **Michelle Branch**, **R.E.M.**, **Avril Lavigne**, **Nickelback**, **Barenaked Ladies** and more. It's the ultimate party game with multiplayer for up to 8 of your friends, so step up to the mic and discover how well you carry a tune. And just how much fun agony can be.



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PlayStation.2

HARMONIX

KONAMI

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PC

NOSFERATU: THE WRATH OF MALACHI

Do you wear gobs of black eyeliner, shun natural light, or write spooky poetry? Then video game and comic developer Idol FX has just the title for you in Nosferatu: The Wrath of Malachi. Combining elements of survival horror and first-person shooters, you must rescue your loved ones from the clutches of the foul vampires that have overrun your quiet little town. Set in 1912, this title features appropriate weapons such as crosses, stakes, and muskets. When it is released this October, Nosferatu should be the perfect complement to your Johnny the Homicidal Maniac comics and Cure CDs.

PLAYSTATION 2

CY GIRLS

Based on a popular line of Japanese action figures, this new stealth action game from Konami will bring a little something new to the genre when it hits in February: sex appeal. Hotties Ice and Aska have all the acrobatic moves, firepower, and attitude of those old fogies Sam Fisher and Solid Snake, and they also have the ability to enter a Matrix-esque cyber world. Together they'll fight evil and look darn good doing it. It's like Metal Girl Solid!

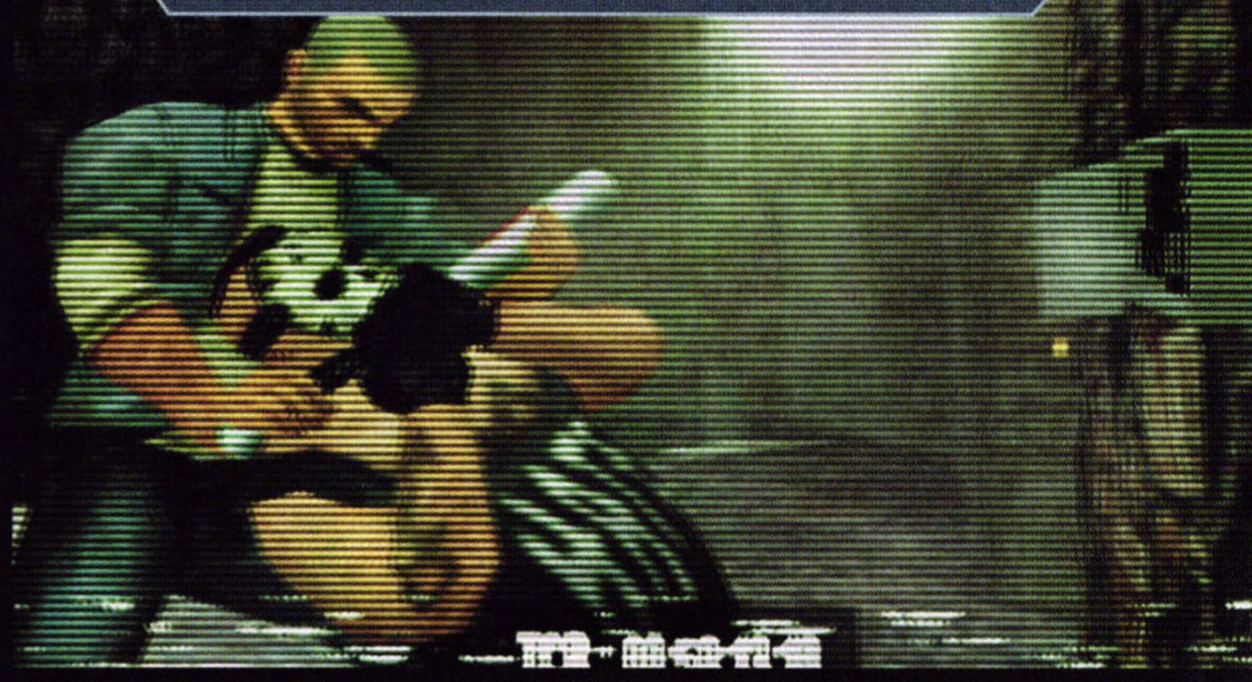
PLAYSTATION 2

DRIFT RACER: KAIDO BATTLE

We have long felt that underground street racing simply wasn't dangerous enough. Thankfully, now there's drift racing. Based around the concept of power-sliding around precarious mountain roads referred to as "kaido," drift racing is becoming all the rage. The first video game representation of this sport, Genki's Drift Racer features over 150 licensed vehicles and music from several renowned DJs – which means you can nearly kill yourself in style! Drift Racer slides onto PS2 in February.

PLAYSTATION 2 *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

MANHUNT



Following up on last month's story on Rockstar's Manhunt, we got this first picture of an execution in action. There are three levels of executions, each more brutal and disturbing than the last. These are determined by how much time you spend behind an enemy – the reticle changes color the longer you stalk your target. Here you can see a hunter getting done by a baseball bat in a somewhat unconventional fashion, though it's no less graphic and shocking for it. Parental campaigns will begin against Manhunt on November 19 when it lands in retail outlets.

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

MEGA MAN X: COMMAND MISSION

Everyone's favorite blue robot (no, not the cyborg version of Cookie Monster from *Muppets Destroy the World*. He's our second favorite) is coming back in a new an unexpected way. Next year, Capcom will release Command Mission, the first ever Mega Man role-playing game. Is your mind blown yet? Ours are. Command Mission will feature familiar Mega Man characters like X and Zero, and you will be able to form three-man squads for adventuring. We hope those adorable Servbots can join your party. There's just so darn cute!

PLAYSTATION 2

MONSTER HUNTER

In real life, hunting would probably be much more popular if you got to go after dragons and other monsters. That may never happen, but thanks to Capcom's aptly titled Monster Hunter, you'll get to live the dream. In this broadband-only online game (eat it, dial-up users!), players can go online and form parties to take on mythical beasts, which will react with realistic AI based on actual animal behavior. Of course, you'll have loads of weapons and equipment to choose from before each hunt. Grab some brews and head out into the woods with the guys next year.

PLAYSTATION 2

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Next year, the Tim Burton classic *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is coming to PS2 thanks to game legends Capcom. Very little is known about the title so far, other than that Jack Skellington is playable, and both combat and puzzles will be involved. But do you really need to know anything else? You knew you were going to buy this game as soon as you read the title, didn't you? Don't lie, we know where you live. When we know more, you'll be the first one we tell. Honest.

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DEGREE PROGRAM

Artwork by Full Sail Student-
William "Forrest" Crump

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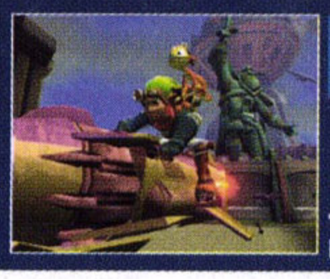
REVIEWS



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Jak II
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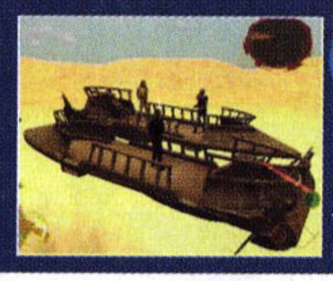

GC

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ANDY

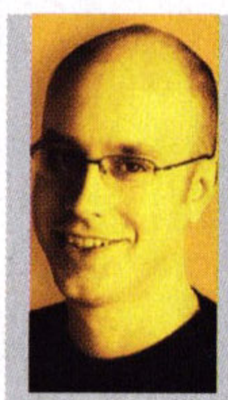
Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Sushi, Football Season, T-Wolves, TiVo **Dislikes:** Colds, Restaurants That Don't Have Dr. Pepper, Computer Viruses, My Cell Phone **Current Favorite Games:** SSX 3, Jak II, SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALS, Tony Hawk's Underground, Unreal Tournament 2004, Viewtiful Joe, Mario Kart: Double Dash!!, Call of Duty, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando, Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Now retired from the rock scene, Andy spends endless hours locked in his home office; enjoying the benefits of high definition television and surround sound far away from those scary things he has often heard referred to as people. A longtime fan of Metroid, Andy has been reviewing video games professionally since the days of the 8-bit NES. While a big sports fan in real life, Andy isn't the first to line up for sports titles, but is always willing to put in the extra hours to play a good RPG or strategy game.

REINER

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** A Perfect Circle, Deep-Fried Twinkies (Mmmm...Death), *Batman: Hush*, McFarlane's Twisted Land Of Oz Toys, *Dead Like Me* **Dislikes:** Cool People, Justin Trying To Do The People's Eyebrow In His Picture, Forum Trolls, Fable Still Not Having A Release Date **Current Favorite Games:** SSX 3, Gladius, Viewtiful Joe, NHL 2004, Final Fantasy X-2, Jak II, Simpsons Hit & Run, Monster Rancher 4

Reiner considers himself the biggest Star Wars fan in the world. Along with his impressive collection of Star Wars action figures, he has seen the trilogy 673 times. A fan of all game types, role-playing games are his strong suit. In his nine years as a professional gamer, Reiner has achieved the impossible. Penetrating the pixel boundary, he not only plays games, he's in them. Thus far, Reiner has appeared in Dragon Force, Alundra, and Perfect Dark. He will also be featured as a playable character in two forthcoming releases.



MATT

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Puzzle, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** *Once Upon A Time In Mexico* (Fact: Johnny Depp Is Our Most Consistently Great Actor), Manitoba's *Up In Flames*, ILM, Gameinformer.com **Dislikes:** Johnny Cash Passing Away (RIP), The Fact That Johnny Is Being Remembered Primarily For A Nine Inch Nails Cover, Platformers With Great Ideas And Poor Execution **Current Favorite Games:** SSX 3, Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3, Jak II, Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior, Metal Arms: A Glitch In The System

While record collecting, watching reality television, and playing video games might sound like a state of retarded adolescence, Matt manages to scrap together an almost meaningful existence out of these activities. His encyclopedic knowledge of pop culture is either amazing or annoying, depending on how close your desk is to his. Less esoteric than his colleagues, Matt prefers traditional action and platform games.

JUSTIN

Handle: The Digital Deviant **Expertise:** Action/Sports, Action/Adventure, Fighting, RPGs **Interests:** The Taco Bell Carnivorous Plant, Pocari Sweat, Mochi Balls, Indian Food, Thanking The People Who Made It Out To The Big Neo Pro Wrestling Show, The Doors **Dislikes:** Don't Ask **Current Favorite Games:** ESPN NBA Basketball, SSX 3, Karaoke Revolution, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004, Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness, Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance, Diablo

Unlike most gaming jabronis, Justin knows there's life outside video vegetation. He's a former GWAR slave and moonlights as wrestler Justin "Violent" Lee in the Minnesota independent scene, where he violently bonds with other sweaty males – a practice that just gets blank stares when attempted on other GI reviewers. Justin's gaming tastes are highly old-school, and he plays 16-bit classics as often as he plugs into the latest titles.

LISA

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Puzzle, RPGs, Action/Platform, Horror **Interests:** King-Sized Twix Bars, New Jeans, TV Show DVD Sets (*Alias*, *24*, *Farscape*, And *My So-Called Life*), Tapwave, Fall **Dislikes:** I Am Happy, So No Dislikes This Month...Except Stogy Spinach, I Hate That Stuff **Current Favorite Games:** Fatal Frame II, SSX 3, Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3, Uru: Ages Beyond Myst, Prince of Persia: The Sands Of Time

Barring a brief and ill advised "I want to be popular, so I'll stop playing games" phase in late junior high, Lisa has been subjecting her friends to drawn out boss battles since age 8. She has been known to wax philosophically about why Jigglypuff is desperately under-appreciated and wish that some "big" games were more fun, even if that means less pretty.

KATO

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Temporary Bouts Of Forum Niceness, The Duvets In *Lost In Translation*, Justin's Left-Handed Football Throw, David Sedaris **Dislikes:** "Tobacco", Paraphernalia Record Stores, Donavon McNabb, Moving To A New Operating System **Current Favorite Games:** ESPN NFL Football, SSX 3, NHL 2004, The Game I Play Where I Think I Can Squeeze 15 Minutes Out Of A Nine-Minute Snooze Alarm

When not buying copious amounts of records, Kato can be found exercising good taste, feeding the goats, and trying in vain to update his wardrobe into the 21st century. Like other young men of his generation, he quickly found out that the one true real world application of good grades was the free arcade tokens that were given out at as reward. With allegiance to none, he takes on every game with an equal eye.

JEREMY

Handle: Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Adventure, Fighting, RPGs **Interests:** The Choco Taco, *Carnivale*, Lucky McKee, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, Belle and Sebastian's Upcoming Album **Dislikes:** The Death of Movie Trivia, Mystery Movies Without Any Mystery, Embarrassing Photos Of Myself From The Past **Current Favorite Games:** Homeworld 2, Metal Arms: A Glitch In The System, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Gladius, Hunter: The Reckoning Redeemer

Obsessed with anything on a shiny silver disc, Jeremy fanatically collects video games, music and movies. When not buying bigger media storage systems or filling his mind with useless trivia, Jeremy likes to write silly books, short stories and comics that no one ever reads. Although he will never be able to stop himself from buying new games, Jeremy firmly believes the best system of all time was the Super Nintendo.

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

Game Informer's rating system ranges from 0 to 10, and is similar to school grading. 7 is average, 9 and above is exemplary work, 5 and below is a failure. Aside from concept, entertainment, graphics, playability, sound, and replay value (all explained to the right), other factors that influence a game's final score are how much game you get for your money and how all the game's elements come together.

10	Perfection. One of the best games of all time, if not THE best game of all time. This game is virtually flawless, and thus this rating is rarely given out.
9	Worth owning. Fans of the genre should definitely enjoy this game, but even those who don't normally like this type of game may find themselves getting hooked.
8	Worth playing. Still a great game, but arguably so. It may not be the best ever, but there's enough to keep your fingers wrapped around the controller for some time.
7	Worth renting. Unless you're a fledgling gamer, you've probably seen everything this game has to offer before. Still, just checking it out won't ruin your weekend.
6	Limited appeal. There are always a few people who will fall in love with a game of this caliber, but for the most part, those playing it will be yearning for something more.
5 below	Garbage. From this point down, it's just a matter of how much of a failure the game is. The lower the score, the more you're hating life for playing it.

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?

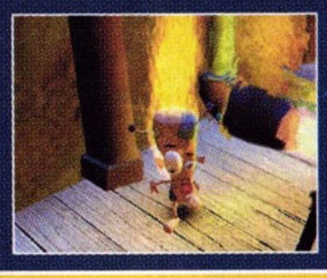
PLAYABILITY
Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

ENTERTAINMENT
Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

REPLAY VALUE
The longevity of the title.

- **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.

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



XBOX

Voodoo Vince
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PC

Star Wars: Jedi Academy
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HANDHELD

Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3
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NEWBIE CHEAT SHEET

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

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

480p – Progressive scanning, this option ("p"= progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture, 480i (i=interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting

720p – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The "p" means that the video is in progressive format

action – A term we use for games like Zone of the Enders and Gauntlet

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

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

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

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

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

CG – Computer-Generated graphics

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

funtarded– Something so blatantly idiotic, it's entertaining

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 Diablo

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 Puyo Pop

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 Madden NFL

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

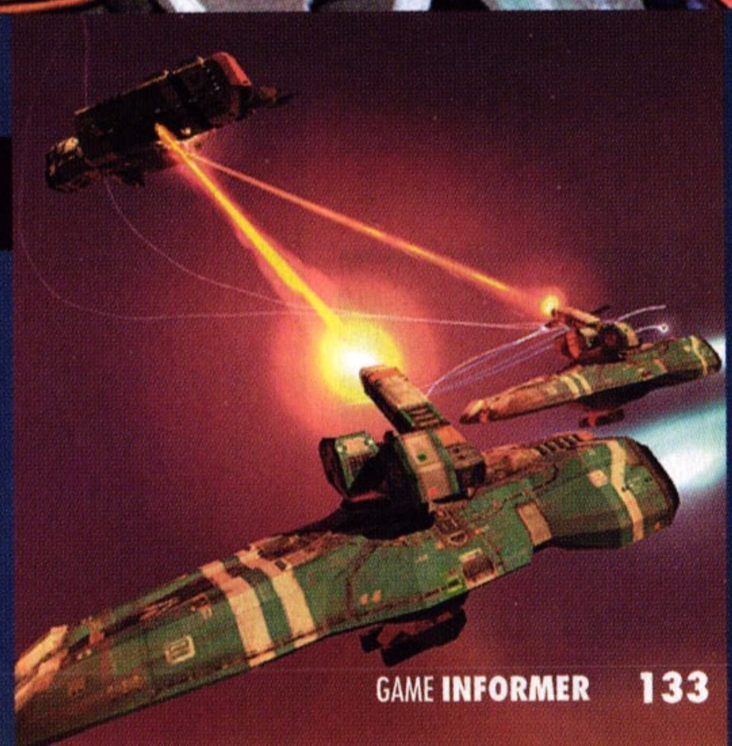
third-party – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer

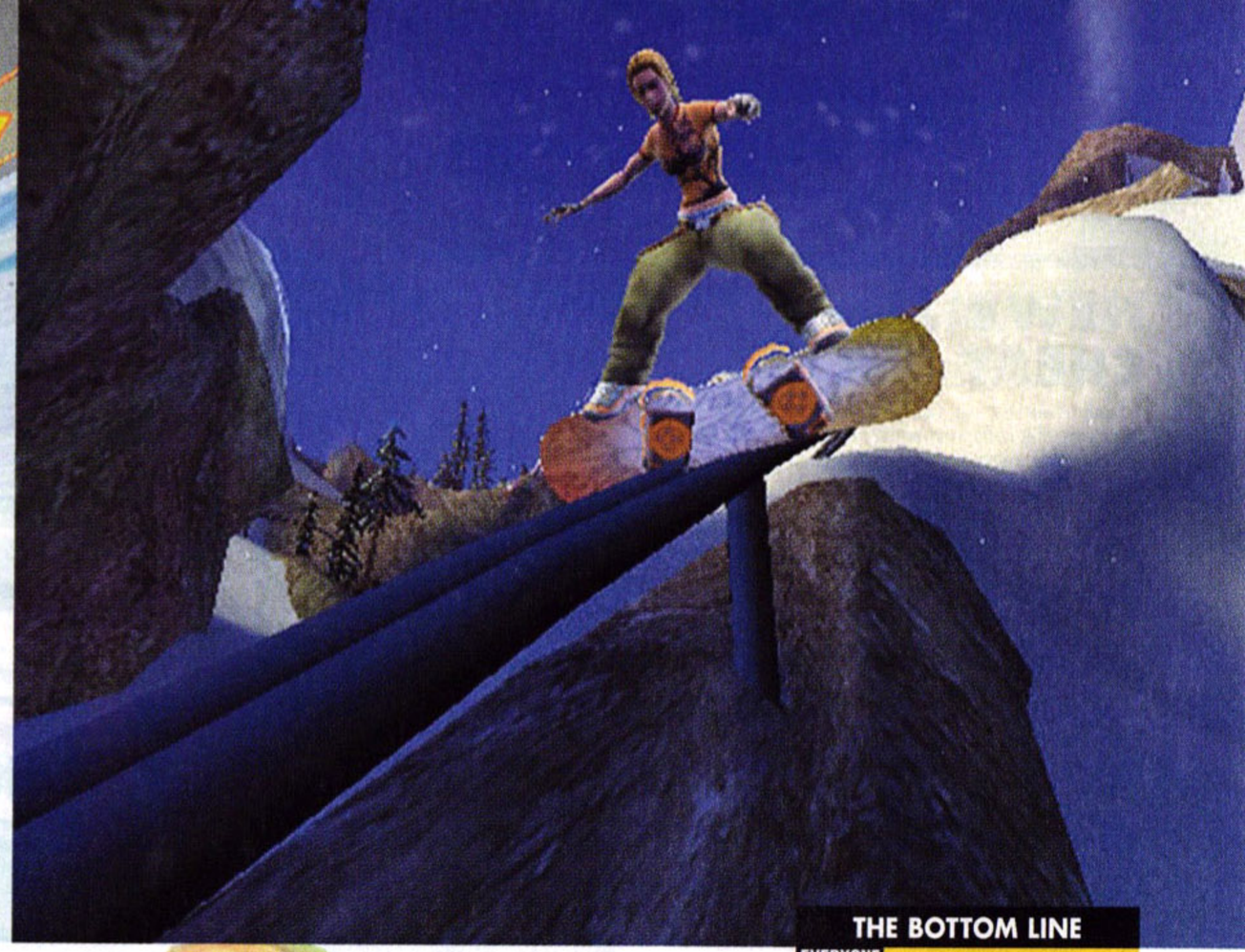
GAME OF THE MONTH
SSX 3

Snowboarding games have always been a tangle of short but madly fun runs interrupted by menu screens to choose the next event. SSX 3 blows the doors off of the competition with its open-mountain concept, physics-mocking tricks, and rider customization. Couple the hours of replay with a perfect skill ramp-up that satisfies newbies and carving gods alike, and SSX 3 has surely rocked our socks. Check out our reviews for the PlayStation 2 (page 134), GameCube (page 154), and Xbox (page 158) versions.

PC GAME OF THE MONTH
HOMEWORLD 2

This RTS sequel rocked our world with unbelievable 3D-space combat strategy action. There's an acronym just waiting to happen in that last sentence. Although not a total revolution in the Homeworld odyssey, this sequel has much to offer and impressed us to no end. Check out the full review of this stellar (like space, and this is a space game, get it?) title on page 172.





PLAYSTATION 2

SSX 3

LOOK OUT, TONY HAWK!

"...one of those games that you can play forever..."

From its mile-high drops to its outlandish tricks, the SSX series is renowned for its larger-than-life experience. With the release of the third installment, that's all about to change. Rather than being remembered as a title that has a lot of character and visual flair, SSX 3 will instead be remembered for its gameplay. It's still laden with over-the-top escapades, but it now has depth within its play.

With the inclusion of the new nose- and tailslide maneuvers, which are performed by pressing up or down on the right analog, players can now link together massive combo strings. It took three games, but SSX now has a progressive skill system that is just as robust as it is in the Tony Hawk titles. In addition to the slides, the trick system now features Uber Grinds, mid-air stalls, and plant maneuvers. I can't even begin to describe how addictive the gameplay has become. I actually found myself bouncing around in my chair and holding my breath when I would try to throw one more rotation into a trick.

EA has also implemented an open-mountain design that allows players to progress through the game in a non-linear fashion. No longer are you railroaded into moving from one stage to the next. You can do as you please and tackle the game at your own pace. The entire mountain is rendered and every inch of it can be traversed. To speed things up a tad, if you don't feel like navigating the treacherous slopes to reach a competition, you can simply call for a charter plane or use a gondola to warp there in no time flat. While it does seem logical to get there quickly, EA has littered the landscape with over 150 bonus challenges that appear on the terrain as glowing beacons.

Like the previous entries in the series, every snowboarding event is included and the difficulty level targets pros. As incentive, the game rewards players nicely. By winning competitions, not only will you get medals and trophies; you'll earn cash that can be used to purchase attribute points, gear, trading cards, toys, posters, artwork, and 20 hidden characters. Even if you're just messing around for the fun of it, you'll receive cash for the tricks that you perform.

Along with the standard two-player split-screen, SSX 3 features two-player online play that is compatible with both dial-up and broadband. The only difference is that broadband features voice chat.

The courses and selection of characters are just as crazy as before, and the graphics are once again to die for. The series was captivating to begin with, but now that it has gameplay that you can really wrap your hands around, it's impossible to put down. At the outset, a 50-trick combo is doable. After spending a month with it, there's a good chance that you could combo an entire level with a 300-trick string. It's one of those games that you can play forever and continue getting better while at you do it. – **REINER**

Winning competitions and tricking out to the max grants players money that can be spent on attribute points...

...and an assortment of goodies like SSX action figures

Rather than just grinding, players can perform plant maneuvers

If you don't jam on the ■ button to recover quickly, you'll find yourself buried in snow

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (2 PLAYERS VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS BIG ■ **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

By jostling the right analog stick up or down upon landing, players can link together tricks. Pictured here is a 65-trick combo that lasted for over a minute and a half

The Uber Tricks are just as outrageous as they've always been

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

9.5

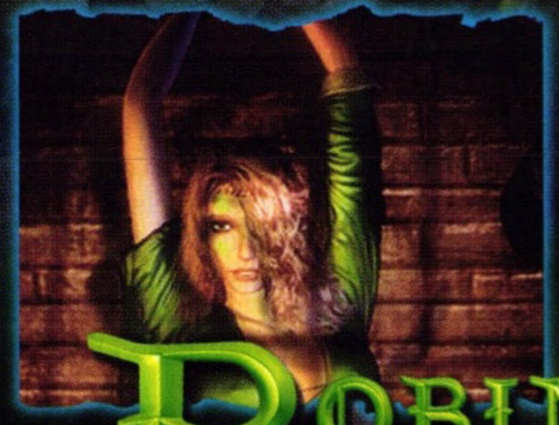
- **Concept:** A monster of a sequel that focuses on replay and the progression of players' skills
- **Graphics:** Pushes the PS2 hardware to the limit with massive environments and blazing gameplay speeds
- **Sound:** THX, baby! The game also boasts a GTA-styled radio program with a DJ who chooses songs at random
- **Playability:** Still the SSX you know and love, but you can now link together massive combo strings much like Tony Hawk
- **Entertainment:** Dangerously addictive and never once disappointing. It'll take over 40 hours to unlock everything
- **Replay Value:** High

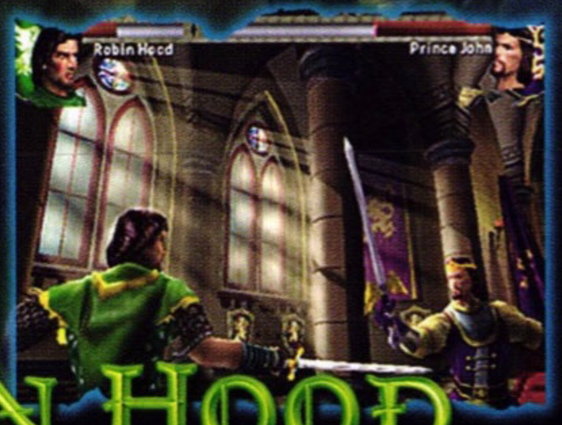
SECOND OPINION

Although it feels odd to say this about a series that has been so successful and critically acclaimed in the past few years, it seems to me that SSX is finally coming into its own. Don't get me wrong – this has always been a great game. It's just that SSX 3 has that "classic" feel to it. EA Big has accomplished that with a new level design, which basically lets you freely explore the entirety of the mountain – passing through various competitions via gates on the slopes. The effect of all this is that you finally feel like you're riding a real mountain, not just being shuttled between races and events. Likewise, the trick system has opened up as well, adding layers of new depth to the Uber Tricks, and allowing you to connect combo strings with nose- and tail-presses. Basically, it's one of the first games I've played since Tony 3 that I can pick up simply for the joy of busting tricks and the thrill of hurtling through the gorgeous environments.

MATT – 9.5

Outlaw. Renegade. Hero.





Robin Hood Defender of the Crown

From daring archery ambushes to swashbuckling swordfights, from the battlefield to the jousting field, live the legend of Robin Hood. Use every ounce of cunning, strategy and wit to bring the tyranny of Prince John to an end!

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

PlayStation®2

PC CD ROM

XBOX

CINEMAWARE
HEROES LIVE FOREVER
cinemaware.com

CAPCOM
capcom.com

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"This sequel embraces a darker side where violence and adult themes prevail."

PLAYSTATION 2

JAK II

GRAND THEFT PLATFORMER

Adapting to the current trends that shape the video game industry, Jak II is not a title about collecting random doodads scattered across a kiddie wonderland. The atmosphere within this sequel embraces a darker side where violence and adult themes prevail.

From a design standpoint, the game is less of a platformer and more of a Grand Theft Auto clone. Players are dropped into a sprawling city where they can freely jack flying cars from unsuspecting motorists, shoot random citizens, and more or less do as they please. Of course, your crimes won't go unnoticed. Local authorities will converge on your location in a heartbeat and apply the force needed to take you down.

From a mission standpoint, Jak II again appears to draw inspiration from Rockstar's juggernaut. To reach your next destination, you simply need to follow an icon that appears on your onscreen map.

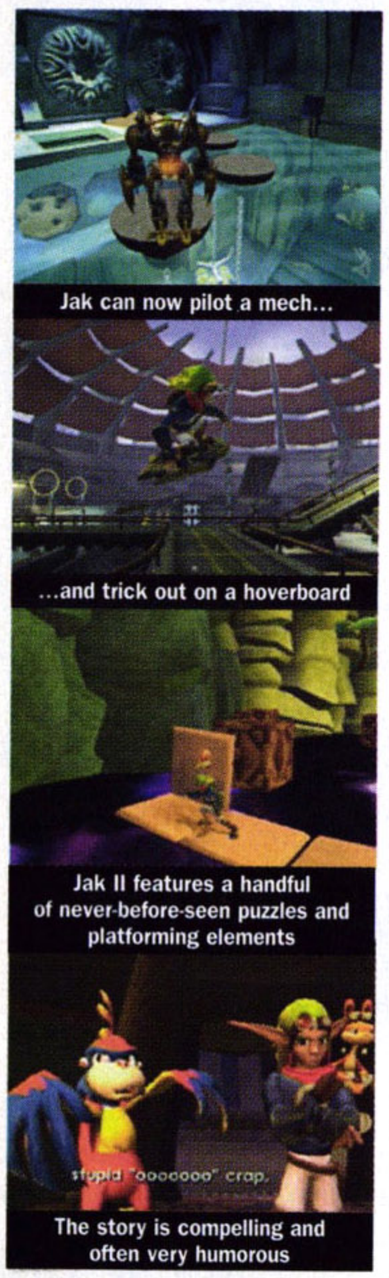
Having the freedom to tackle challenges in a less linear fashion is definitely a strength, but the open-ended play that comes with traversing a massive city is more of a curse than anything. Unfortunately, since there really is nothing to do in the city outside of moving from one waypoint to another, you quickly lose interest in the environment and freedom that you have at your fingertips. Driving a car and causing a ruckus in GTA never gets old. On the other hand, there really is nothing exciting about flying a hover car in Jak II's world. The concept is certainly sound, but there really needed to be more interaction with the city.

While this is a major complaint, it only covers but a fraction of the game. Most of the missions in Jak II remain true to the series' roots and are comprised of platforming segments. As expected, the action in Jak II is ingenious. The controls are fashioned perfectly, and the challenges are are very difficult. To spice things up even more, a handful of weapons have been implemented into the mix, and Jak can morph into a Hulk-like rampaging beast. If you're not flipping off of poles or leaping from ledges that crumble beneath your feet, there's a good chance you'll be mowing down dozens of critters with a chain gun.

Once you get out of the city, Jak II truly is a rip-roaring good time. The story has received a dramatic facelift as well. The cutscenes are actually ripe with action, shocking plot twists, and Hollywood-caliber cinematics – whereas every sequence in the first game was limited to characters conversing.

Like its precursor, Jak II truly is one of the most gorgeous games on the PlayStation 2. With each new environment I entered, I found myself staring in disbelief at not just the detail, but the scale of the visuals that unfolded around me.

As a whole, Jak II is a much better play than the first, but it does fall victim to unnecessary lulls in the action. – **REINER**



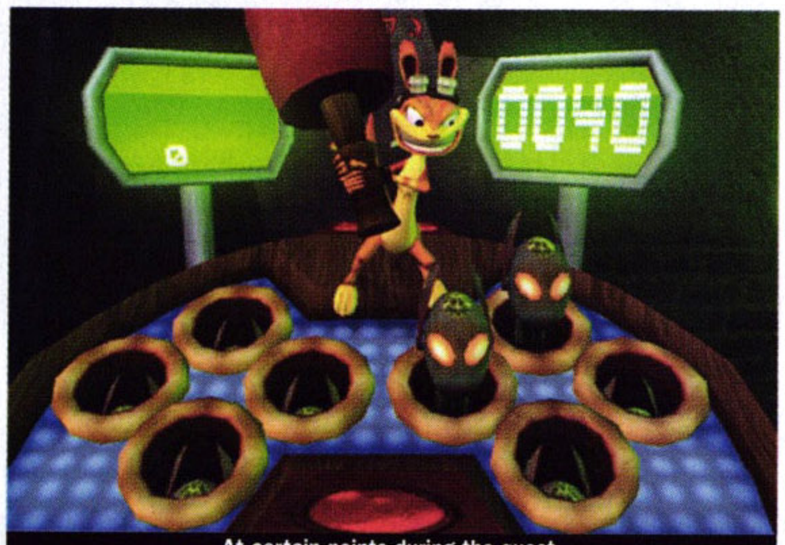
Jak can now pilot a mech...

...and trick out on a hoverboard

Jak II features a handful of never-before-seen puzzles and platforming elements

The story is compelling and often very humorous

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA ■ **DEVELOPER** NAUGHTY DOG ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14



At certain points during the quest, Daxter is playable...usually in minigames

Some of the races within the city are entertaining; unfortunately the same cannot be said about flying from one mission to the next

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

9.25

- **Concept:** If Jak and Tommy Versetti hooked up and somehow had a baby together, this is what it would look like
- **Graphics:** The most drool-worthy visuals around. The scale and detail that went into every little object really is unheard of
- **Sound:** A great soundtrack, but more importantly, Jak talks!!!
- **Playability:** Outside of the awkward vehicle physics, the gameplay couldn't have been done better
- **Entertainment:** Longer and more challenging than the original, but due to the GTA material, the pace is much slower as well
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

This is the best-looking platformer to date – on any system. It's also one of the most ambitious attempts to move the genre forward. Constructed in a manner similar to GTA III, you'll cruise around an enormous city – checking into various locations to tackle platforming, hoverbike racing, and other unique minigames. For the most part, it's a successful experiment. Heck, it even has a story I care about! As you would expect from Naughty Dog, the platforming is second to none; featuring new gun combat, accurate physics, and extremely canny enemies. I especially like the way that each level offers unique gameplay sequences that only happen once during the course of the game. The only real flaw of Jak II is the fact that traversing the city and completing Crazy Taxi-style challenges got to be a bit of chore, mostly due to the hard-to-handle vehicle physics. Other than that, it's as good as gaming gets.

MATT – 9

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September 2003

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Alcohol Reference
Violence

Brave souls,come forth!

Romance of the Three Kingdoms® VIII

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EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence

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PLAYSTATION 2 | UNLIMITED ENABLED

CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

A LONG-LOST RELATIVE

"Castlevania is a gameplay experience that remains not fully realized."

The Castlevania franchise finds itself in an interesting predicament. Although Lament of Innocence is a prequel that explores some of the series' untold past, it once again must try to propel itself into the future. Castlevania tried moving into the third dimension before (starting with the self-titled adventure for the N64), with spectacularly bad results. Away from its beginnings as a top-notch two-dimensional, side-scrolling franchise, Castlevania must not only contend with overcoming the mistakes of the past, but it must also grapple with action series that have been born, bred, and highly successful on the PlayStation 2, such as Devil May Cry. What is a Belmont to do?

Gamers are no doubt familiar with this family name, and they will feel equally at home once they step into the graphic gothic splendor of this adventure. Outside appearances wouldn't suggest anything out of the ordinary from other 3D action titles, but the devil is in the details. This game speaks brilliantly through the attention paid to its ornate woodwork carvings and beautiful stained-glass windows. Of course, the sheen applied to the game's sub-weapon effects is stunning as well.

Staying true to the franchise, this title utilizes five sub-weapons that you can switch between only at certain points. However, it is the game's introduction of seven orbs which really gives you variety. Pair these with a sub-weapon and the results are eye opening to you and painful to your foes. Meanwhile, I wasn't as impressed with the Relics. Many of these merely provide you with attribute bumps that unlock more of the game's customarily large maps. Furthermore, while I am basically pleased that the menu system is fluid and in real-time, utilizing the right analog for items was sometimes troublesome.

The sum of these gameplay segments, Lament's combat, is a fluid affair whose pleasure comes from an intoxicating give and take of combo attacks and defensive moves. However, once you master battles, the title holds few other elements that are as attractive. When it comes down to it, it feels like I was playing a war of attrition with the large maps in a dungeon crawler rather than an epic adventure for the ages. For instance, the enemy AI wasn't great, and as rich as the environments were, I wanted to double-jump and platform my way to uncover more of their secrets. Unfortunately, this is a minor element that is not helped whatsoever by the computer-controlled camera.

Lament of Innocence almost feels like an exercise (albeit a beautiful-looking one) exploring many of the franchise's classic components. But the end result just proves that Castlevania is more than a set of ideas, it's a gameplay experience that remains not fully realized. – **KATO**

Medusa takes her bad hair day out on Leon

Defense against the dark arts

This Castlevania has no shortage of sights to see

Platforming punctuates the action

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT TOKYO
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

The mixing and matching of sub-weapons and Orbs makes you more than formidable

There will be no references to whips or Devo here

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T

8

- **Concept:** Bring the franchise into the third dimension once again (with better results). 3D? Yeah, I've heard of that
- **Graphics:** True to the rococo nature of the age, some of the details are exquisite.
- **Sound:** Music from classic Castlevania composer Michiru Yamane does not disappoint
- **Playability:** The camera is sometimes as unhelpful as two left feet
- **Entertainment:** It's called Castlevania and it plays like Castlevania, but there's something missing here
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

I cringe every time one of my favorite 2D series goes to 3D, but much of what you'd expect from a Castlevania game is here. Lament of Innocence has phenomenal graphics. I can't believe how cool the enemies look, and the castle itself is a sight to behold – albeit with very few objects to interact with. The soundtrack is another masterpiece. I'm impressed by the amount of combos and defensive maneuvers you can do with Leon – the "first" Belmont. It's also got a relatively nonlinear path. This – along with the orbs, relics, and equipment – gives it more depth than most Devil May Cry-esque titles. Having to select and use items in real time is a big pain, though, and there doesn't seem to be quite as many hidden things to discover. Also, a lot of the jumping is imprecise – even on things you're *supposed to* land on. Lament is as good as this series can be in 3D; but it's not in the same class as its 2D predecessors.

JUSTIN – 8.5

Out Of Myth

Comes Mayhem

Ancient Japanese monsters and mysticism explode into the 21st century with Otogi/Myth of Demons for the Xbox™ video game system from Microsoft.® Triumph over terror in tombs, temples, and celestial islands in the sky – deformable, destructible environments that allow you to destroy everything that surrounds you.

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Fantasy Violence

XBOX

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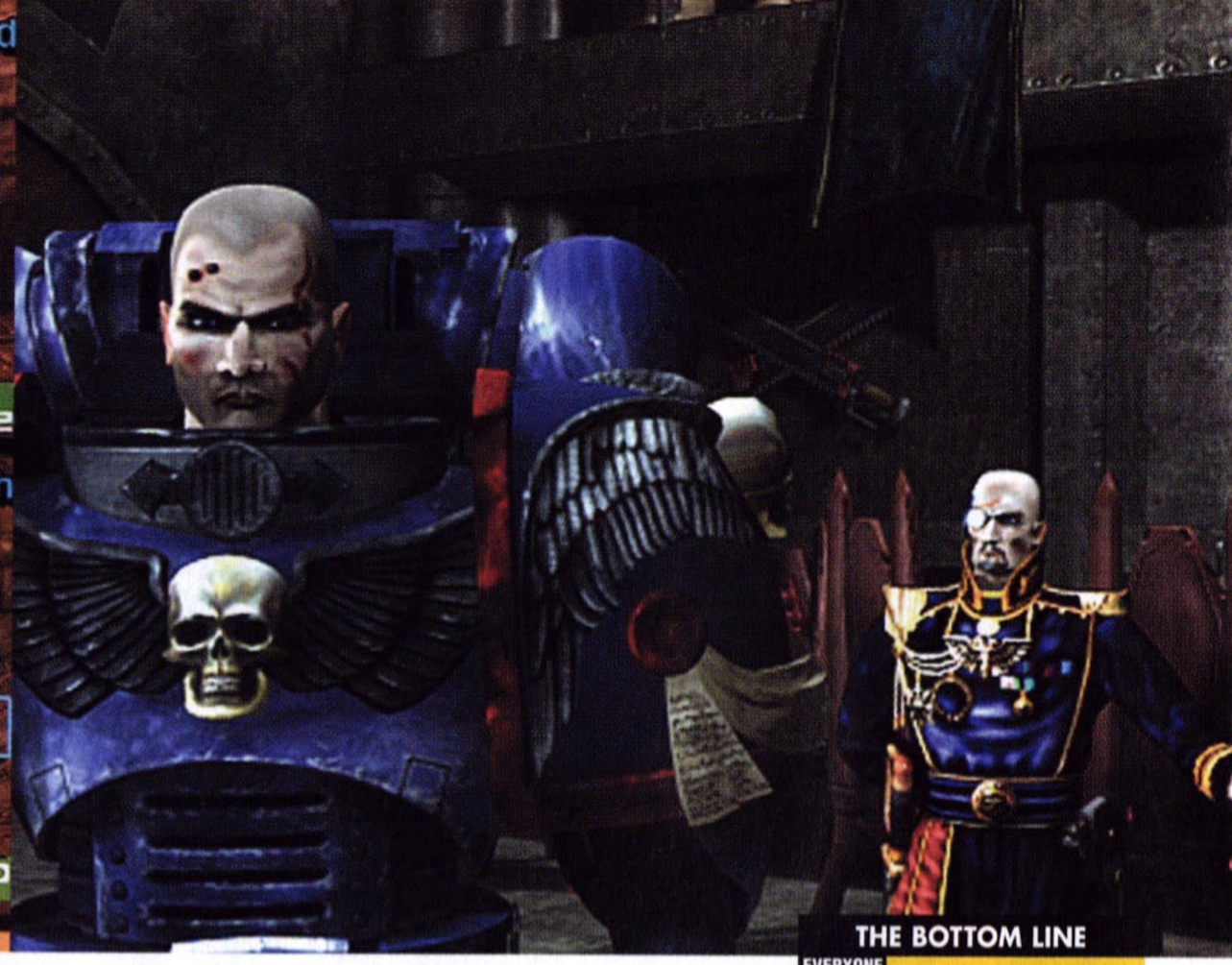

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.25

- **Concept:** Deliver compelling single and multiplayer FPS action on PS2
- **Graphics:** It's not the best-looking FPS ever, but it is most definitely stunning
- **Sound:** Not much of a soundtrack, but fantastic voice-over and sound effects work
- **Playability:** Think Halo, but not as precise
- **Entertainment:** Both the single and multiplayer elements are good enough that even people who don't know what a Warhammer is will enjoy it
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

"I would easily put it above Mace Griffn and Return to Castle Wolfenstein."

PLAYSTATION 2

WARHAMMER 40,000: FIRE WARRIOR

FEAR THE IMPERIUM

We ran a preview a couple issues ago that generalized Warhammer as a pen & paper-based game. This, of course, sent the Warhammer fanatics into a tizzy. "It's a miniature battlefield game," they screamed. Okay, if it's a miniature battlefield game then why does it use dice and a huge rulebook? Sounds like a pen & paper game that uses dolls…err, figures to me.

Joking aside (and I am joking, Warhammer and D&D fans…I'm a dork too so calm down), whatever level of involvement you have with the Warhammer universe, you can rest assured that it won't hinder your Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior experience. In fact, I'm willing to bet the fans will revel in seeing their favorite hobby come to life.

Featuring a robust single-player experience that delivers 21 levels of play and both split-screen and online multiplayer, Fire Warrior has a lot to offer. From the moment I turned the game on, I couldn't help but be impressed by the graphic fidelity of the title. I wouldn't quite put it in the league of an Xbox first-person shooter, but it is most certainly close. The artwork in particular stands out to me. The game's developer, Kuju, certainly made sure that the character models and the environments were top-notch and you can see that commitment throughout the entire game. Sadly, the game doesn't run in 480 progressive scan, but it does support widescreen, so HDTV users do receive some benefits.

Not only is the game easy on the eyes, it is also easy on your patience. The load times are most definitely reasonable, and the stages do a great job of streaming to keep the action fierce. The levels themselves feature a large number of scripted events to help flesh out the experience. From soldiers by your side to various story-related cutscenes, Fire Warrior does a great job of immersing the player.

The gameplay itself reminds me in many ways of Halo. Unfortunately, the control is not nearly as precise, but it does manage to be competent enough to not detract from the overall game. Could the control have been better? Yes. Does it matter once you are five levels in? No, not really.

In fact, if I had to compare this game to all the FPSs on PS2, I would easily put it above Mace Griffin and Return to Castle Wolfenstein. I think that is saying a lot. That's not to say that Fire Warrior doesn't have problems. For one, the auto targeting in the game just doesn't feel right to me; and when you turn it off, hitting an enemy becomes next to impossible. Also, the enemy AI at times can be a little suspect.

I know I certainly enjoyed my time with Fire Warrior, and FPS players on PS2 will certainly appreciate both the single and multiplayer experience. Personally, I liked the single player game more than the multiplayer action, as the control issues I had really stood out in multiplayer. However, don't let its minor drawbacks stop you from checking this game out, as Fire Warrior is most definitely one of the top FPS games on the PS2. – **ANDY**

SECOND OPINION

You could fit everything I know about Warhammer into a cereal bowl and still have room for a bunch of Count Chocula. However, Warhammer 40,000 really doesn't have much to do with the franchise. This is an FPS, and therefore, about running around and killing things. That, my friends, is something I can relate to. Judged purely as such, Warhammer 40,000 is a pretty good. No, this is not the Halo-killer PS2 fans are waiting for, but it maintains the status quo nicely. In many ways, it reminds me of a sci-fi Medal of Honor: Frontline. Like Frontline, it's a bit too linear and doesn't have a very compelling set of weapons (other than the fact that you have a sword, which isn't that useful) but the well-paced missions, occasional cooperation with ally NPCs, and solid enemy AI makes up for the lack of innovation. This should tide you over until the next big thing comes around. However, I suspect this may be a bit shallow for hardcore Warhammer devotees.

MATT – 8

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ ■ **DEVELOPER** KUJU ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 22

Here is a collection of shots from the absolutely gorgeous cutscenes in the game

The in-game graphics are impressive

Particle effects and careful use of lighting gives the game a great sense of depth

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PLAYSTATION 2

HARRY POTTER: QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP

EXCEPTIONALLY PROMISING

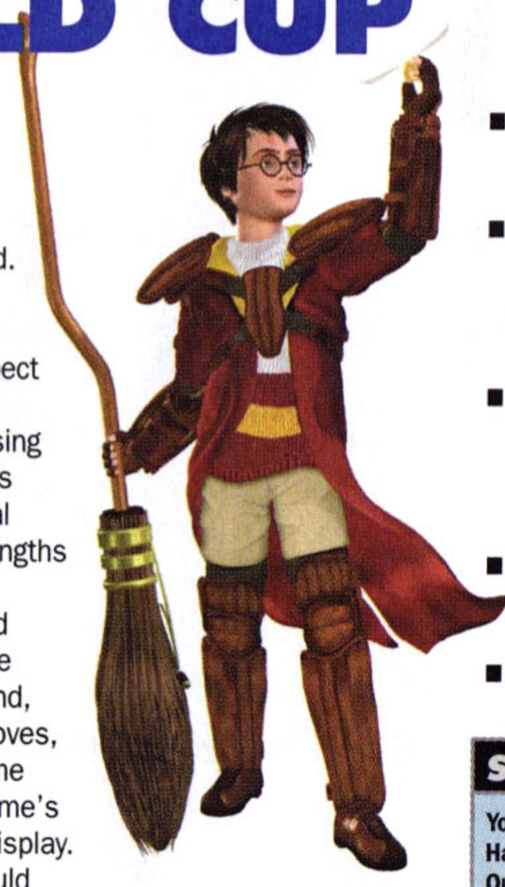
"Technically solid, entertaining, original, and unbelievably fun."

Here's the game: three different player positions, three extremely unique balls, three goal posts per team, and you're flying in three dimensions on a broom. There's also a scoring system that, at first glance, doesn't make a lick of sense. Who is going to make this fabled sport of wizards into a video game that transcends the Potter universe? The only company that has earned much of the credit for where sports games are now – Electronic Arts.

What EA has so successfully done is taken a franchise that scares away most hardcore sports fans and built a game that's technically solid, entertaining, original, and unbelievably fun. As a fan of the books, I was already familiar with the concepts of Quidditch, but to read a match play-by-play in Rowling's novels, I couldn't imagine how to make the activity playable.

At the start, you are competing in the Hogwarts Quidditch Cup. Each match introduces a new skill or player position, and training exercises are mixed in between the games. Taking into account how complicated this sport is, the training levels are well paced and definitely necessary. Winning matches and setting time records for the training exercises unlocks Quidditch cards that, in addition to just looking nifty, open up special moves and arenas.

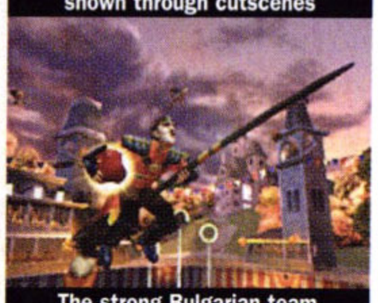
Although there are the above-mentioned unlockable items, this was my only area of complaint with Quidditch World Cup – it's just not very deep. If you go into this title with the expectations of an old-school hockey game, you won't be disappointed. But, keep in mind that most of the features gamers have come to expect from current sports titles are stripped down or missing entirely. Each of the teams (including the international groups) has different strengths and weaknesses, but the feature is not really played up enough to make a huge difference in gameplay. And, while there are special moves, most of them use the same button command – the game's AI will pick which one to display.



It's not that people should expect a Madden experience from this game, and Quidditch World Cup being a straightforward title doesn't mean that it's bad. As it stands, and with its $40 price point, few can truly go wrong here. It's fun and pretty enough that even a few years from now, people will still be throwing it in for a few quick matches alongside friends. – **LISA**

Catching the snitch and...

...executing special moves are shown through cutscenes



The strong Bulgarian team is unlockable

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

Scoring requires players to pick from the three goalposts

Dodging doesn't become crucial until later in the World Cup

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.75

- **Concept:** The first video game interpretation of Quidditch, the ultimate wizard pastime. Treat it like a full-fledged sport
- **Graphics:** Clean character models and great environments to play in
- **Sound:** The score is mostly in the background, but occasionally bursts with overblown orchestral mixes
- **Playability:** Going through the training levels is necessary as they set you up perfectly for the rest of the game
- **Entertainment:** Quidditch is a blast, if a little short-lived
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

You don't have to be a fan of Harry Potter to enjoy playing Quidditch, and I'm living proof. I have never read a Harry Potter book (nor do I intend to), I didn't care for the movies, and I had a great time with this game. Thanks to the tutorials, the rules of the chaotic sport are pretty easy to learn, as is the actual gameplay. Matches are high-energy and frantic, but thanks to a solid camera, following the flow of action is simple and fun. However, outside of playing Quidditch, there's nothing to do. I couldn't sit down and play more than a couple matches in a row, and I would have liked a little more to do. Some minigames beyond the training session would have been nice, as would more unlockables. But overall, Quidditch did a good job pleasing this Harry Potter non-fan. I can only imagine the Muggles out there will enjoy it even more.

JEREMY – 7.75

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PLAYSTATION 2

BATMAN: RISE OF SIN TZU

BAT AS IN GUANO

"...lacks all the fundamentals that a game of this type so desperately needs."

Within the world of game development, I would imagine that it is standard practice for developers to study the market to see how their game stacks up against others. Not only that, it would also seem logical that the developer would try to one-up the competition. Judging by the multitude of mistakes that pollute almost every second of Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu, I get the sneaking suspicion that the developer had never played a game before.

Okay, I may be exaggerating this statement just a teensy bit, but I can honestly say that the people behind this monstrosity of a game hadn't researched what makes a great beat 'em up. The most important element for this style of game is user-friendly control. It has been, and always will be, the driving force of this genre. While Rise of Sin Tzu is loaded to the hilt with an impressive arsenal for each of the four playable characters (Batman, Robin, Nightwing, Batgirl), all of the their movements are mechanical and sluggish. You never really feel comfortable constructing combos or unleashing special attacks.

The targeting that displays which enemy you'll pound into a pulp is also executed poorly. You'll find yourself swinging at thin air more than you care to admit. The computer AI is fairly pathetic, so you won't necessarily find yourself down and out if you accidentally punch a dumpster instead of the thug beside it, but you do need to worry about the clock.

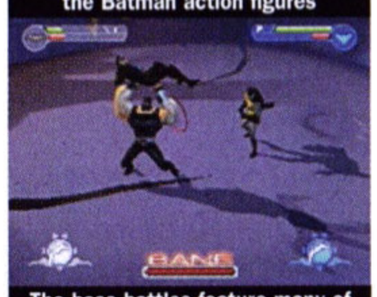
As if the game could get any worse, each stage or goal must be completed within a specific time limit. For instance, you may be asked to save eight civilians. You'll have a minute and a half to rescue each one. If you don't reach one in time, you'll have to start the stage over. I've never attempted to design a game before, but I can honestly say that applying a timer to a Batman game, let alone a beat 'em up, is the last thing that I would ever think of doing.

As if I need to say it, Rise of Sin Tzu lacks all the fundamentals that a game of this type so desperately needs. Beating the living daylights out of hundreds of baddies in an hour's time always sounds fun, but in Rise of Sin Tzu's case, it's an unbearable chore that will have you pulling out your hair in frustration.

Some of the graphical effects are decent. I really like how the screen warps and the enemy designs grow more sinister when your characters are subject to the Scarecrow's toxins. The smoke effects are also pleasing to the eye. The remainder of the game, however, is a complete loss. There's nothing I'd like to see more than a Batman brawler done well, but it looks like we'll be waiting awhile for one to surface. – **REINER**

Between stages, players can exchange the points they earned during gameplay for new moves and combos

Players can also spend their points on tokens that can unlock worthless random things like character models and pictures of the Batman action figures



The boss battles feature many of Batman's formidable foes

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL STUDIOS
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

Combat is diverse, yet sticky and unresponsive

By chaining together combos, players receive a rating that ranges from Fair and Good to Awesome and Perfect

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

5

- **Concept:** A fundamentally flawed arcade-styled brawler with the dynamic duo
- **Graphics:** The animations are fairly choppy. Some of the effects are cool, however
- **Sound:** The ambiguous comments between Batman and Nightwing are hilarious: "You really raised the bar, Batman."
- **Playability:** A rock has more articulation and finesse than the characters in this game. Simply put, it plays horrendously
- **Entertainment:** Playing through the entire game is like taking a wrecking ball to the face
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Who did Batman piss off? These days, the guy can't get a decent movie or game. Okay, Rise of Sin Tzu is probably the best Batman game out there, but that's not saying very much, is it? The missions sorely lack variety, the camera has issues, and combat is overly simplistic. New moves can be unlocked as the game progresses, but no matter how many you learn, you'll still just pound out the most basic three hit combo. The worst thing about Sin Tzu is that it could have easily been so much better. Sin Tzu is a decent villain, co-op play is mildly enjoyable, the cutscenes aren't bad (although Batman looks a bit like Buzz Lightyear), and the boss battles are a blast. But without more variety to the stages or combat, there's no incentive to keep playing. So instead of finally getting a decent Batman game, we comic fans are left with another underachieving letdown.

JEREMY – 5.5

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE M ESRB

5.75

- **Concept:** Take down a corrupt emperor as a gladiator who has returned from the grave for revenge
- **Graphics:** The swaying grass in the Elysium level will quickly become a gaming legend
- **Sound:** While the voice-acting and sound effects are unmemorable, they're still better than the combat
- **Playability:** The controls are as simple as could be, but in this case, that's not a good thing
- **Entertainment:** When faced with a game this mindless, I'd rather see a bloated, elderly Russell Crowe in *Gladiator 7: Geriatric Coliseum*
- **Replay Value:** Low

PLAYSTATION 2

GLADIATOR: SWORD OF VENGEANCE

FALL OF AN EMPIRE

"... Acclaim lost sight of what made gladiators cool in the first place."

Gladiatorial combat should be the perfect basis for an action game. It involves ultra-violence, cool weapons, fantastic settings and, occasionally, tigers. How could you go wrong? Sadly, Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance is a colossal disappointment, largely because Acclaim lost sight of what made gladiators cool in the first place.

The only traditional gladiatorial combat takes place in the beginning of the game, and even this opening board is highly stylized and unrealistic. At the end of this stage, the undefeated champion Invictus Thrax is murdered by the scheming emperor. In the afterlife known as the Elysium, Thrax is informed by a pair of childlike beings that the emperor gained his power from two chaotic spirits. He is then sent on a quest to overthrow the emperor and his supernatural accomplices, thus restoring balance to both the physical and spiritual world. To aid him on his task, he first needs to gain spells and abilities by completing quests assigned by his guardian spirits.

While the story is admittedly cool, it quickly strips away all the familiar aspects of the gladiator story by sending Thrax on a long fetch quest. Each stage involves the same basic set up: find keys to make it to the next area by pulling switches and defeating enemies. Foes attack in swarms, but aren't particularly difficult because combat basically involves rapidly hitting one of two buttons. These quests quickly grow repetitive, and the only reprieve from the scavenger hunting are sub-quests – which consist entirely of the same old repetitive combat. The side missions each offer rewards like life meter power-ups, but by the time these become essential to survival, combat has grown so stale that these rewards don't seem like enough incentive to engage in more deathly dull action.

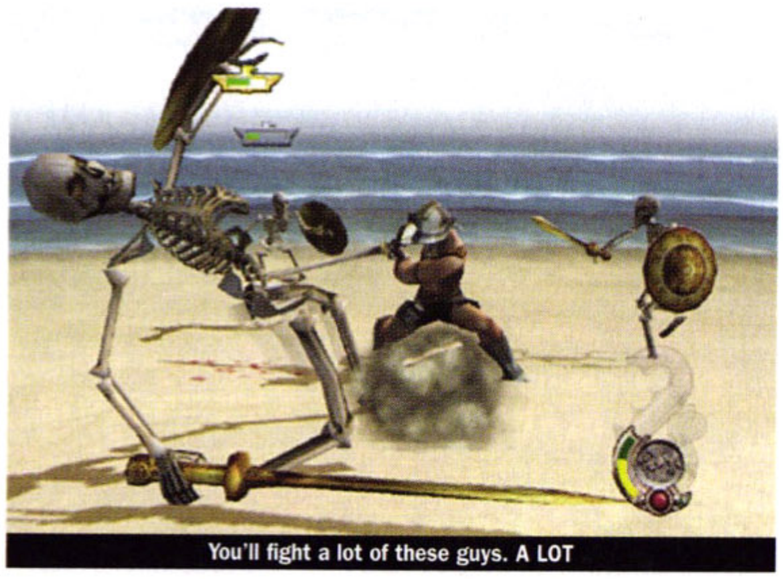
Obviously, I wasn't a big fan of this title, but I have to admit, it's not entirely without merit. The opening level is (in comparison to the rest of the game) fun in a mindless, hack n' slash sense, and the graphics are definitely impressive. Honestly, the absolute high point of the entire game is the swaying grass in the Elysium stage. The movement and shading of this plant life is absolutely staggering. These are the visuals that people mention when arguing the artistic beauty video games are capable of. If the gameplay was even half as cool as the in-game grass (there's something I never thought I'd write), then Gladiator would be one hell of a game. – **JEREMY**

"Hmm, which pot to smash first?"

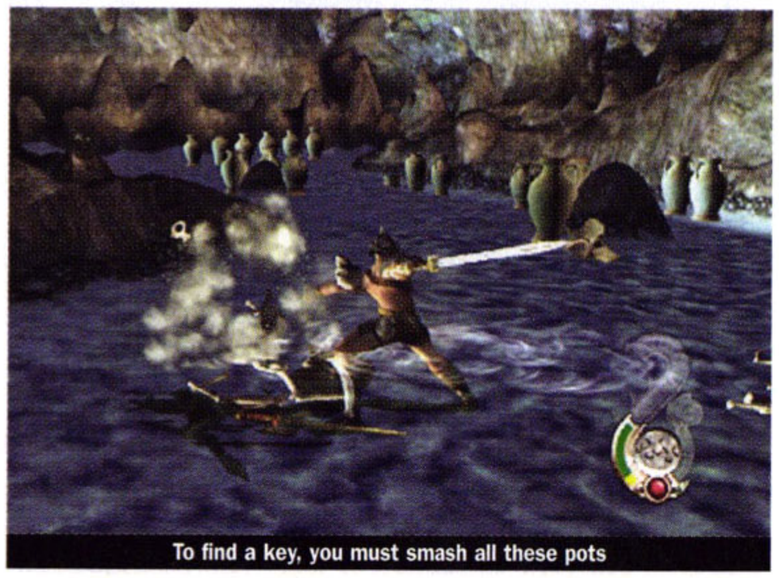
You will head through many caves, which all look the same

Murder looks best in the tall grass

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **■ PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM **■ DEVELOPER** ACCLAIM STUDIOS MANCHESTER **■ RELEASE** OCTOBER 16



You'll fight a lot of these guys. A LOT



To find a key, you must smash all these pots

SECOND OPINION

Gladiator is an amazing-looking game. Even on PlayStation 2, its gauzy, ethereal lighting and watercolor vistas are quite breathtaking, almost (but not quite) matching the underrated Rygar in terms of artistry. Although you could argue that the gameplay doesn't match up to the visuals, I enjoy this game, if only because there is something inherently cool about chopping the living crap out of hapless fodder in style (or maybe it's because I fantasize about wearing skirts – who knows?). There are some nice touches incorporated into what is basically a simple hack n' slash affair. By completing challenges, you'll add new powers (like double damage) to your sword meter, which increases based on how many baddies you're laying the ax to with the cool dual targeting combos. Good, but I see this as probably more of a rental than a purchase, due to the repetitive nature of the level designs.

MATT – 7

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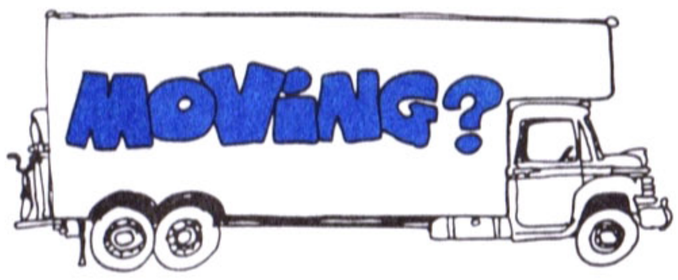

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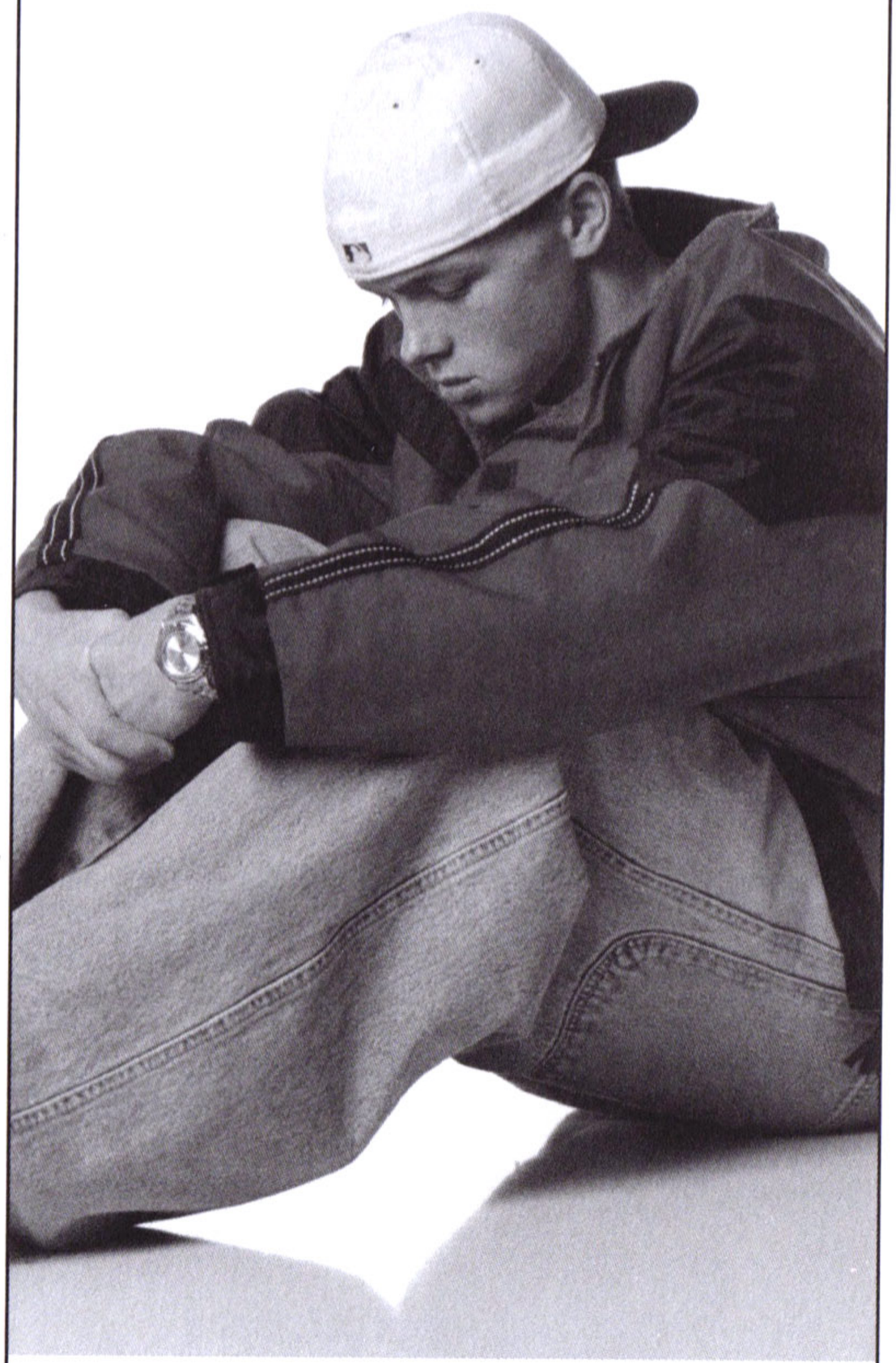

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PLAYSTATION 2

KYA: DARK LINEAGE

DEMANDING

"All of the obstacles...can be handled in two different ways: the smart way and the fighting way."

Kya is a typically curious and strong-willed teenager whose brother finds a magic amulet hidden in a secret room under their staircase. He and Kya are sucked into another dimension and separated. Her journey starts in Nativ City, a generally unpopulated square that was once a thriving area of commerce, where you are told that Wolfen are mutated Nativs working for Brazul, the token maniacal overlord.

From this point, you have to start completing quests for the Nativ leaders still left in their somewhat cuter forms. In exchange, they will help you find your brother and return to your world. By defeating Wolfen and freeing them from their magical spell, they turn into Nativs who set up new shops in Nativ City. This is how Kya will learn new combat abilities, upgrade her items, and participate in a handful of multiplayer beat-the-score-style minigames.

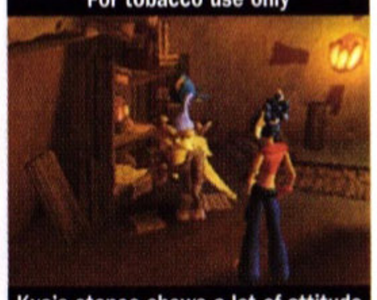
Dark Lineage is trying to do a lot of things in a very short period of time. The game has you battling against Wolfen that learn to block any of the 30-plus combo moves you prefer, sliding down organic halfpipes, freefalling along air currents, riding various animals (including enemies), and using extensive stealth and puzzle-solving skills. Some of these tasks are executed better than others.

All of the obstacles Kya will face in her journey can be handled in two different ways: the smart way and the fighting way. In the beginning, kicking and punching can get you pretty far. The combat mode is entered when an enemy spots you, and Kya has a basketful of high-flying kung fu-inspired skills at her disposal. By the end of the game, you'll be flipping around like a juiced-up Bruce Lee and enjoying the computer-determined slow-motion sequences, designed to highlight your most "cinematic" moves.

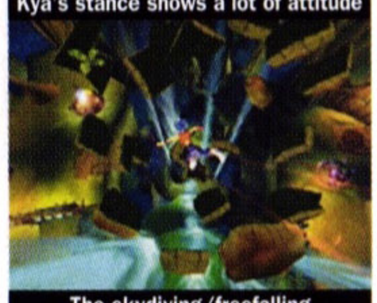
Despite a nicely robust combat setup, Kya must learn to stealthily solve puzzles – as the Wolfen will become smarter, more numerous, and better armed. These puzzle sequences are ingenious, well crafted, and yet don't require a ridiculous amount of trial-and-error deaths.

Dark Lineage is certainly an ambitious project to say the least, and definitely not without its charms. The use of air currents is fresh and interesting, but the sliding levels could have offered a little more. The biggest reason that I'm not ga-ga about this game is that I don't feel like I know Kya as a character. Because of that limitation, your desire to spend some serious time in her company isn't as high as, say, Voodoo Vince – who makes up for more predictable gameplay with loads of personality. – **LISA**

For tobacco use only



Kya's stance shows a lot of attitude



The skydiving/freefalling segments are a blast

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** EDEN STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4

Sliding is a whole new experience after you buy the board

The evil Brazul at least looks the part

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

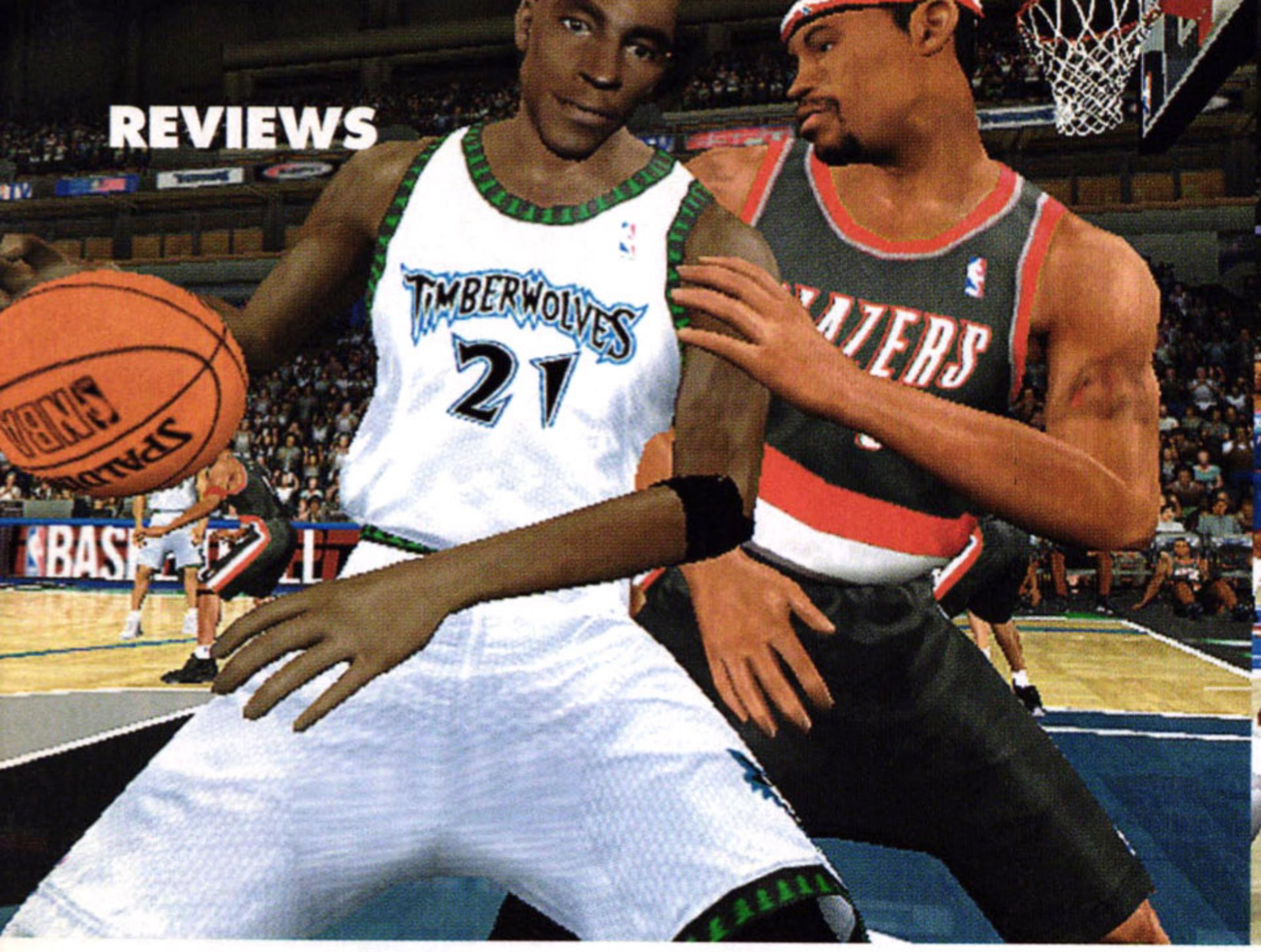
7.5

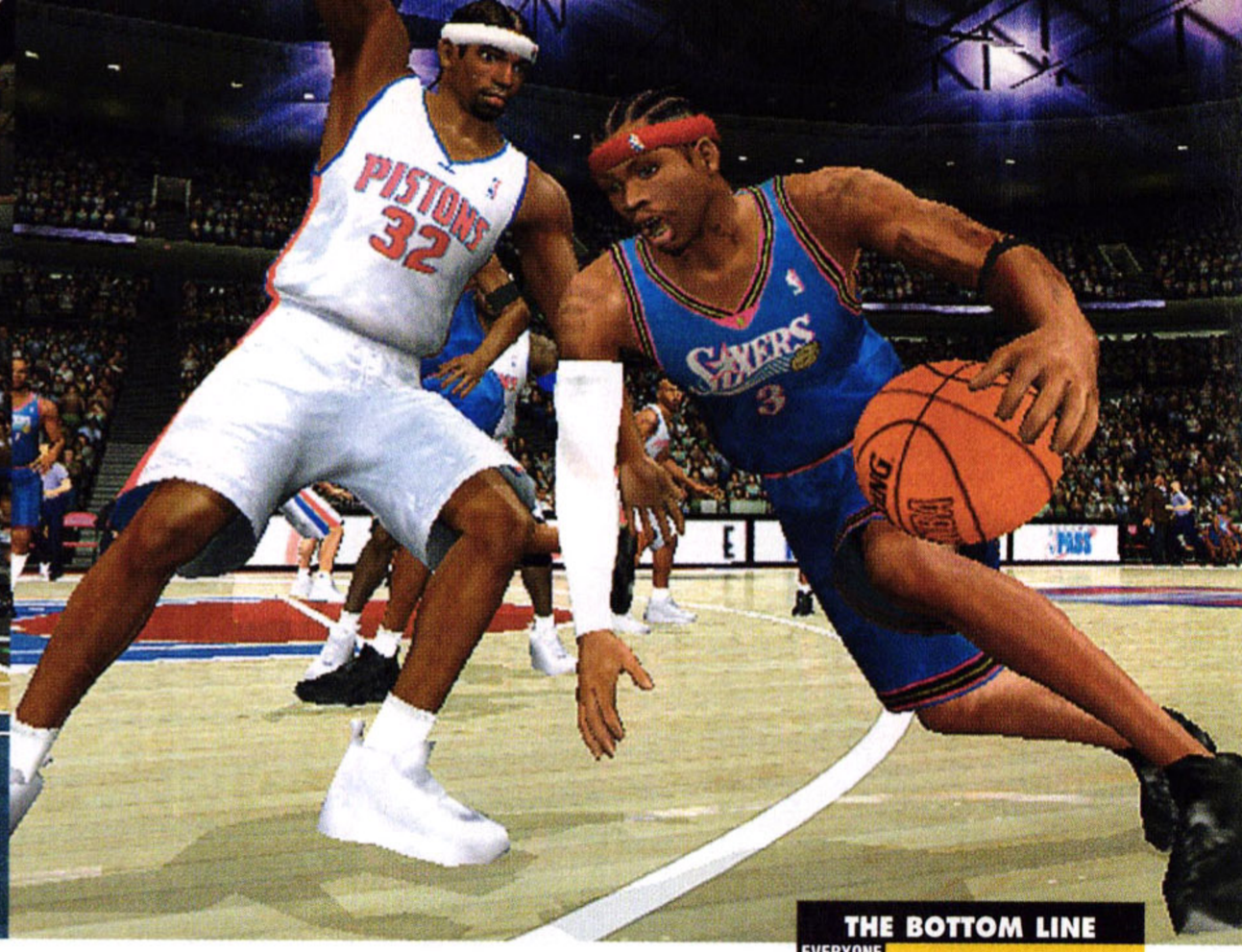
- **Concept:** Put your typical stubborn teenager in a fantasyland that she must save
- **Graphics:** Creative and dynamic level design and general appearance
- **Sound:** Dramatic orchestral scores pop up in moments of high stress
- **Playability:** The camera (like most games of this type) is a problem, maybe even more so than most 3D action games
- **Entertainment:** I wanted more personality from Kya and the Nativs, but the puzzles are well-done
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Eden Studios came to play. It's obvious that the company wants to compete in the platforming big leagues. To this end, it's created Kya, an ambitious but ultimately flawed adventure that shoots for the stars and ends up stalling out in the middle reaches of the video game atmosphere. There are many things I liked about Kya: the evolving combat system, the attempt to incorporate stealth gameplay into the mix, the cool skydiving sequences, and the ingenious puzzles. However, I too often found myself simply bored. This is mostly due to the fact that the basic character movement is so slow and plodding. Kya is awkward to control, which makes any platforming sequence seem like a chore instead of a pleasure, especially when you figure in the sub-par camera. Perhaps a good plot would have made up for it, but the characters and cutscenes are incredibly banal. Yet another platformer that I admired much more than I enjoyed.

MATT – 7.5





PLAYSTATION 2

ESPN NBA BASKETBALL

THE ODDBALL COUPLE

"ESPN NBA is not one game but two, and they both kick ass."

NBA 2K3 ruled – it's likely the best basketball game of its time. For a renamed sequel, Sega and Visual Concepts needed only keep tinkering with greatness to come closer to perfection. They did that. But, they also did much more, basically doubling your pleasure, doubling your fun.

ESPN NBA is not one game but two, and they both kick ass. The first is the simulation you know and love. The second is the new 24/7 mode. Here, your created player goes through training to increase his stats, as well as competing in street ball contests with wearable items as prizes.

The training drills are fun in their own right, and get you up to speed with the gameplay. Here, you can decide which type of player to craft. I chose to hone my shooting and become a Ray Allen-like marksman. I could have just as easily made Jif Choosy, my alter-ego, into a defensive monster or a human highlight reel.

The contests vary depending on the time of day you're playing. Examples include losing points if you're blocked, having turbo use limited, and needing to win by a set time. The defeated may concede his phone number – allowing you to choose him as an AI-independent partner for two-on-two. Of course, the key reward is amassing items. I fitted Jif with a hockey mask, fanny pack, moon boots, and tons of other hilarious apparel. The list is endless. It's like Animal Crossing meets Virtua Tennis' World Tour. My only beef is that the AI is a little too easy, falling prey to pump fakes (literally) all day.

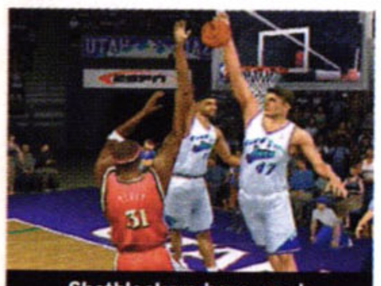
The game itself has undergone major improvements, too. Passing is no longer a hassle. Finally, the ball consistently goes where you tell it. Moves like the lead pass and give-and-go are great additions. You can also jab step to try to fake out the opposition. Blocking happens much more often, forcing you out of the paint.

Combating Live's Freestyle is IsoMotion. It's not as flashy, but is more functional on defense. It's like rock-scissors-paper in that, if you pick the right way, you'll win. This means either a clear path for the ballhandler, or you'll draw a charge or get a steal on D. It's a little charge-happy, but I like where it's going.

Franchise mode is still ahead of Live, but hasn't made many strides. It's good to see other modes get a boost, though, like adding 21 to Street and having NFL's Scramble Starters options in Exhibition – picking your starters at random from the whole league (and all-star teams).

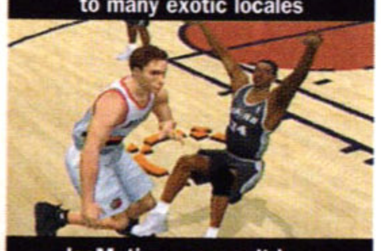
ESPN's graphics and presentation are amazing. The models are unbelievable in detail, and jerseys and shorts even sway. If only the camera angles were pulled tighter to the action. Sega and VC really ran with the ESPN license to make some brilliant menus and entertaining wrap-ups.

This series has definitely stepped up, and now stands even taller as the best in video game basketball. Sim junkies and casual fans alike are strongly advised to pick it up. – **JUSTIN**



Shotblockers have much more authority in ESPN

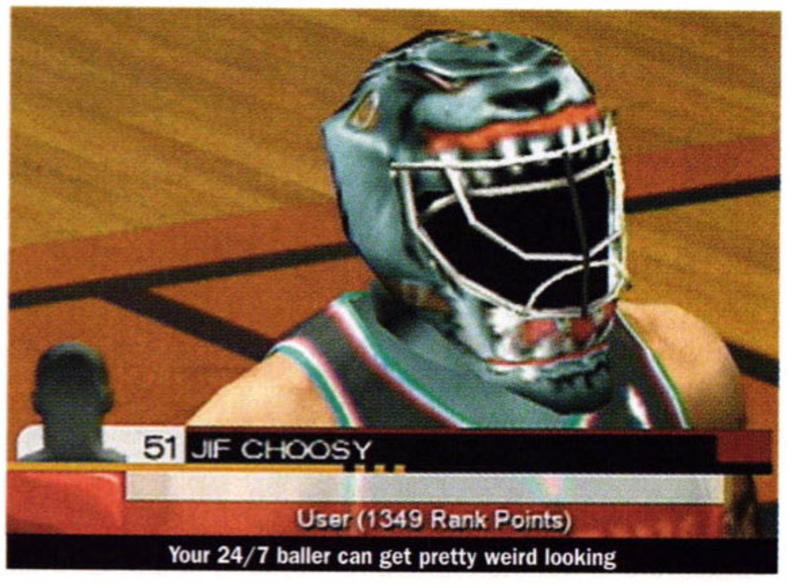
24/7 mode will take you to many exotic locales



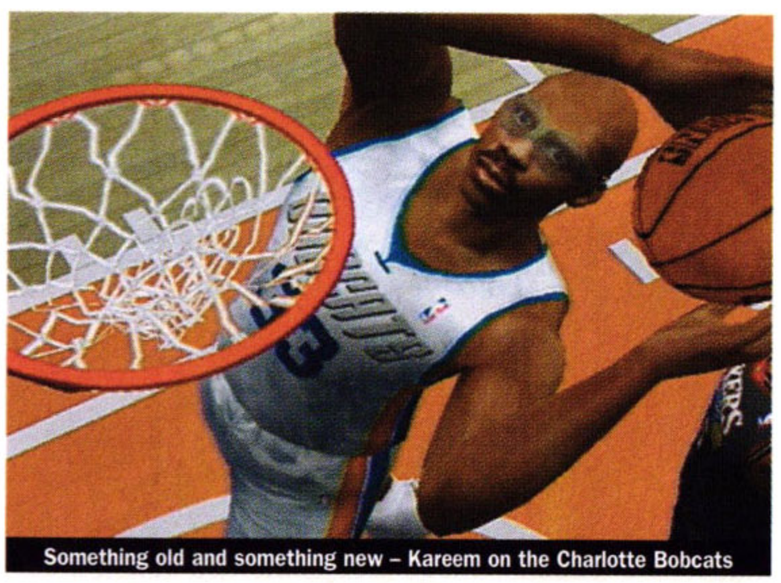
IsoMotion can result in a charge or broken ankles

The ESPN presentation is awesome

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 5-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA ■ **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21



Your 24/7 baller can get pretty weird looking



Something old and something new – Kareem on the Charlotte Bobcats

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

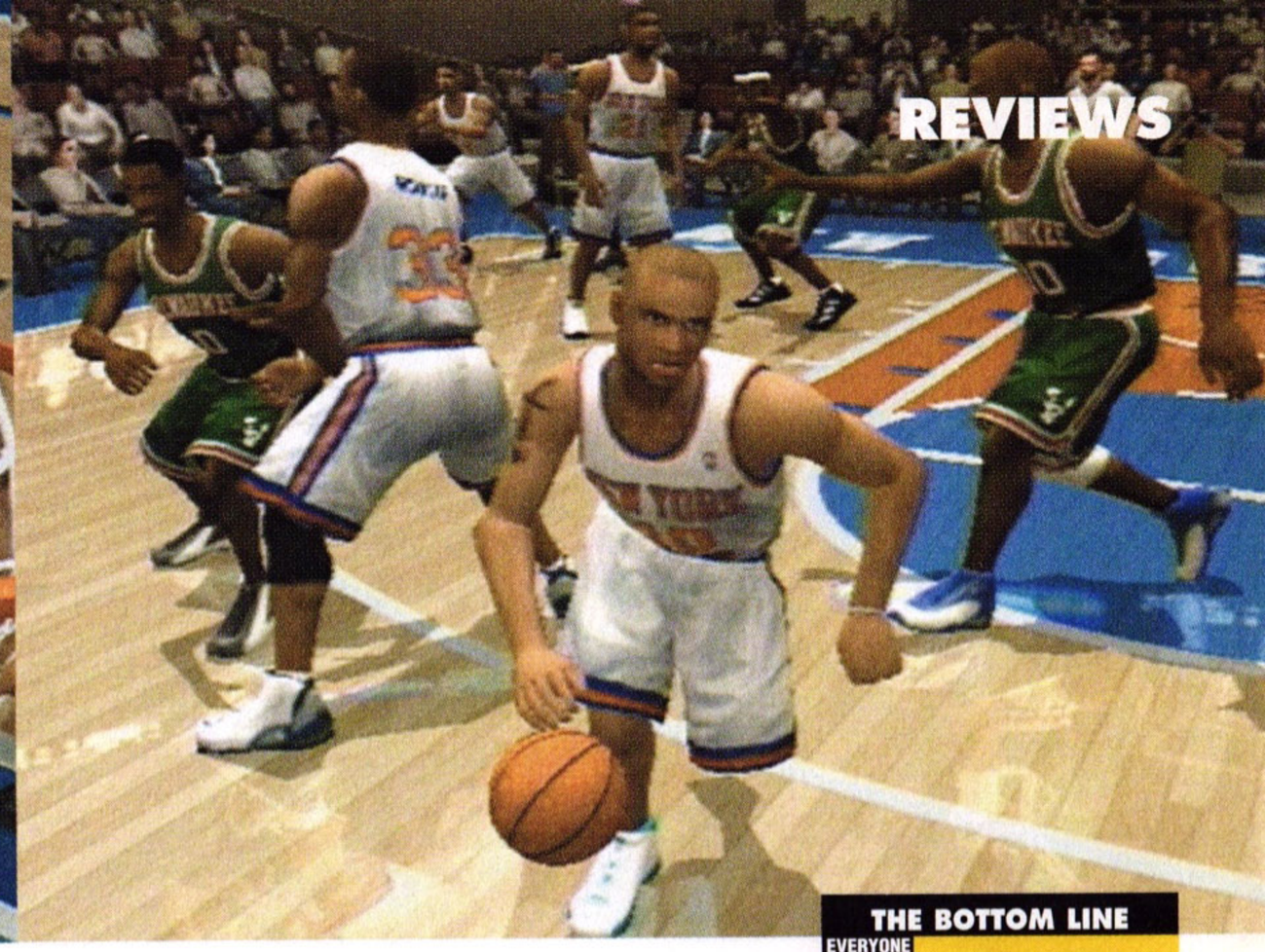
9.5

- **Concept:** Make the requisite enhancements, but also give gamers an addictive new mode
- **Graphics:** The character models are gold, the crowd is improved, and the animation is silky
- **Sound:** It's good to see some licensed music, though I prefer EA's hip-hop Trax
- **Playability:** IsoMotion makes every possession a chess game. Passing, one of last year's few problems, is much improved
- **Entertainment:** This series has elevated to the point where it's worth buying for hardcore and casual sports gamers alike
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

ESPN towers over the competition like Yao Ming dwarfs Damon Stoudamire. With the inclusion of the phenomenal 24/7 mode, major gameplay enhancements like IsoMotion control, voice-supported online, and an even higher level of realism in its player models; ESPN makes Live seem Dead. The complexity of gameplay is better than I ever could have hoped. Swatting the rock, setting up a give-and-go, leading passes, and spinning off in the post are executed flawlessly. Creating a player and raising his attributes through the street-styled events in 24/7 is just as enjoyable as the standard 5-on-5 play. The only thing that the game really needs is a camera view that better showcases the action in the paint and detail in the players. ESPN not only raises the bar for basketball, but video game sports as a whole.

REINER – 9.5



THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.5

- **Concept:** Enhance the realism of the physical aspects of NBA ball
- **Graphics:** I'd call them hyper-realistic, as the models are slightly exaggerated. I like 'em
- **Sound:** Some really good Trax, and noteworthy commentary by Albert and Fratello
- **Playability:** Live plays more realistically (and is more difficult) this season. Collision may be a bit too strict, though
- **Entertainment:** If ESPN wasn't around, Live would reign. It rocks, but many of the new things will need a year to fully come to fruition
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Live's gameplay no longer resembles a slam dunk contest. Last year, you could drive to the hoop all day long. This year, if you make a move into the paint, you'll either run into a brick wall or get knocked back to the three point line. To say the least, the CPU's defensive AI has improved greatly. Having to move the ball around and set up offense is definitely a good move for the series. I also marveled at the realism that accompanies animations for double teams, posts, and out-of-bounds dives. The play is definitely improving, but for every achievement it seems as though the game comes up short elsewhere. Refs are inconsistent; blocking shots is way too easy; players rarely converge for offensive boards; you'll miss more lay-ups than Helen Keller; and double teams can be tapped to create a consistent stream of loose balls. The new direction works, but the play still needs tweaking.

REINER – 8.5

"EA has made significant strides in creating a more realistic flow to digital hoops."

PLAYSTATION 2

NBA LIVE 2004

NO SOUP FOR YOU!

I liked Live's direction last year, with its cutscenes and Freestyle control; but it was too easy to throw down. For 2004, it's like the developers said, "You want difficulty? Here's your damn difficulty!" This makes for a world of difference, but not necessarily a world of improvement.

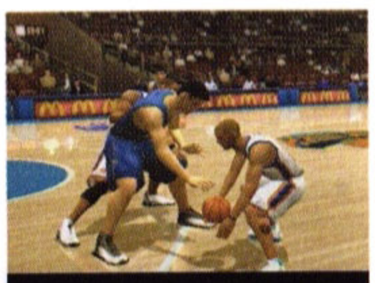
Collision is the name of the game this season. Players push, smack, and bump off one another. Very few baskets come easy, which I respect. You'll need to use the one-touch alley-oops, and the cleverly done individual buttons for dunk/layup and jump shot, to keep from being blown out. Let's not forget the returning Freestyle control with the right analog stick. Blocking is amped, so if you drive on Shaq with Iverson, you'll be watching the ball fly into the cheap seats.

Unfortunately, I think Live's gameplay is too physical – at times, this resembles playground ball more than the NBA. Kick the ball into the post, and the defender will likely push you back to the three-point line. Offensive rebounds are extremely difficult in the same respect. Also, I don't like how the refs treat the physicality, making some ridiculous calls – or non-calls, as the case may be.

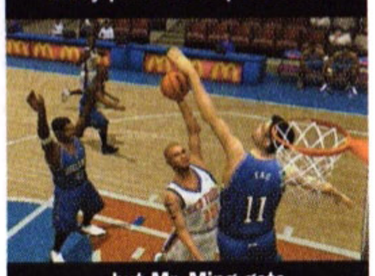
New Dynasty (franchise) additions like training camp and hiring trainers mid-season don't do much for me – especially when my players leave camp worse than when they entered. Also, things like sliders, options, and trading lag behind Sega's game. I want to do things like disable the overly critical salary "point" restrictions. This is nitpicking, but I don't like the way player ratings are in Live, either. It makes most of the league look like scrubs when they're all rated around 60, and lessens the fun of fantasy draft.

What I do like in Dynasty are the cutscenes during your GM moves. It's hilarious to watch a waived player hang his head as he leaves the locker room, or to see the GM shake hands with a newly acquired sixth man. EA already owned cutscenes during games, so it's only natural it would blaze this trail, too. I must add that, while a small thing, the menus for substitutions and stats are a lot more manageable than in other games.

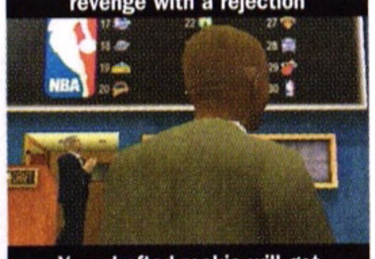
EA has made significant strides in creating a more realistic flow to digital hoops. Converging on ballhandlers, easy playcalling, and more interceptions are all great. Like I said before, it makes each contest a challenge – which I definitely prefer to the blowouts I would have in past Live incarnations. However, many of these new things that the company tried aren't working as well as they should; blame it on a short development cycle. I have to give the nod to ESPN, but I eagerly look toward next year's Live where many of these choppier aspects will hopefully fully realize the developer's vision. – **JUSTIN**



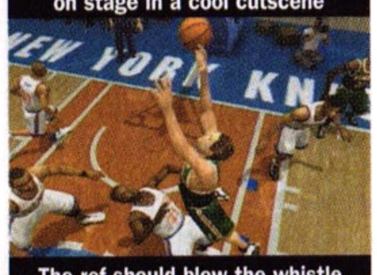
Bibby picks Yao's pockets...



...but Mr. Ming gets revenge with a rejection



Your drafted rookie will get on stage in a cool cutscene



The ref should blow the whistle here – don't ask us who against

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

Perform a picture-perfect alley-oop with the mere touch of a button

You can really tie up ballhandlers on defense

"It manages to turn what appears to be its weakness... into a pure positive."

PLAYSTATION 2

SPHINX AND THE CURSED MUMMY

DORK BY DESIGN

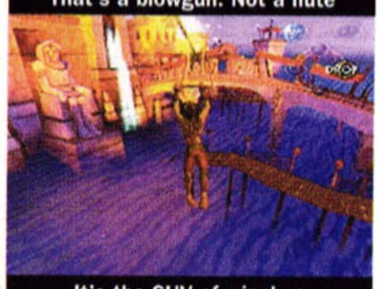
When you've got a pair as uncool as Sphinx and the mummy Tutankhamen, it's basically like the game has already shot itself in the foot as soon as you turn it on. And when you say the word "lever" to a prospective buyer, you will likely be met with a roll of the eyes so exaggerated, it makes you dizzy. But when you spend some time with this game, you'll find that it slowly pulls you in, as it manages to turn what appears to be its weaknesses into pure positives.

I don't like to think of this as a dual-hero game. That implies that Sphinx gets all the action while Tutankhamen is the stealth/puzzle guy, which is not the experience you will necessarily be getting. While the mummy's stages are all puzzles (and contain some humorous abuse of the sap), Sphinx isn't a brainless barbarian. In fact, I think that the game's combat is one thing that needed more sharpening. I keep thinking that if this title had added some more enemies, it would have had its action/puzzle cake and ate it, too. Instead of thinking that you'll pause in your slaying ways to solve a riddle every now and again or platform across some chasm, it's almost the other way around.

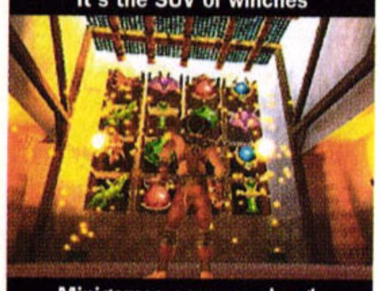
If there's an advantage to the game's structure, it's that it contains a strong background of exploration and variety that raises it above the label "lever-puller" or "platformer." First of all, the stages can be quite big, gorgeous, and stuffed with things to do – and that doesn't include doing dumb crap like collecting coins. This game definitely feels like an entire world, not just missions. One great ally to this overall structure is the pacing. Although the game starts out pretty slow at first, it eventually rewards you with new powers and demands that you retrace your steps to discover new secrets in old locations. I don't think of this as backtracking, but as a welcome epiphany. I got satisfaction out of unlocking more of the maps by figuring out how to make use of all my new gear. You'll get blowguns, animal catchers, and many other neat things to play with.

You probably won't describe this game to your friends as "cool." No, it doesn't have that Devil May Cry aura to it. I grew to like the mummy's hapless personality, but Sphinx himself is a non-entity – which is a missed opportunity on THQ's part. Also, some may simply not dig its weight of platforms and puzzles. One fond memory I have was when a band of rabid Chihuahuas got a death grip on Sphinx's arm, and he flailed around trying to shake them off. I simply laughed and wondered how many people would understand and appreciate this game. – **KATO**

That's a blowgun. Not a flute



It's the SUV of winches

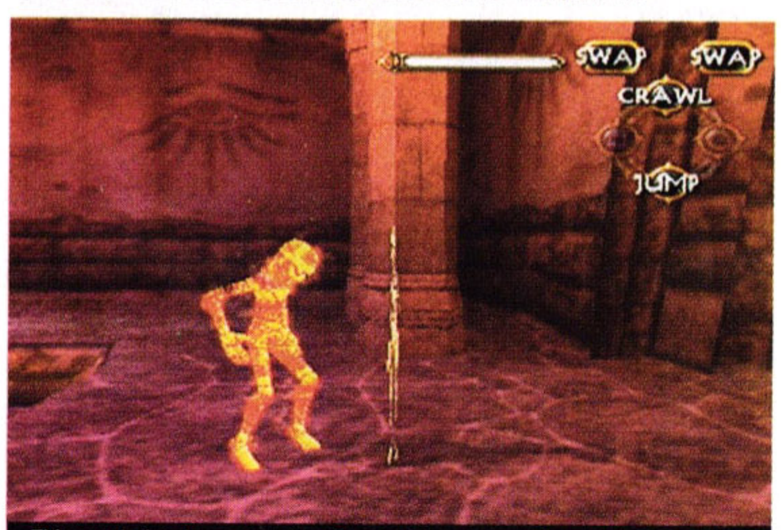


Minigames earn you dough

The shield is like a g-string. It just covers your butt

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ ■ **DEVELOPER** EUROCOM ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 10

If you're lucky, maybe someone will chop off your tail



This puzzle involves managing three different mummies, including setting yourself on fire and squishing yourself wafer-thin

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.75

- **Concept:** Two partners in a fight against evil, many puzzles, and to see who's more of a dork
- **Graphics:** They seem inconspicuous at first, but they deliver in both style and a little detail as well
- **Sound:** The orchestral score is subtle, engaging, and effective
- **Playability:** The game's customizable button-mapping is very well implemented
- **Entertainment:** This is a title that definitely grows on you as the pacing picks up and it shows you its true breadth
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Alternate versions of historical periods are always cool in my book, but it's done wrong as often as it's done right. Sphinx offers a little of both. The Egyptian setting is cool, but as the movie *Stargate* proved, it's not enough on its own. Fortunately, this title has more to offer. The mummy's puzzle-based segments are high points, and later stages offer lots of variety. However, many of the early levels are simply boring. I could go my whole life without another generic fetch-quest or Zelda-esque "help the townspeople" task. Coupled with a weak camera and some ugly textures, the initial gameplay makes Sphinx seem like a total dud. But once you're a few hours in, it grabs you with a solid story and increasingly creative obstacles. It's definitely a slow starter, but once you're past the initial lag, Sphinx is not without its charms.

JEREMY – 7.75

PLAYSTATION 2

ROGUE OPS

PASSING LARA, CHASING SNAKE

I tell you, it's a roller coaster ride with Rogue Ops. Every time I was about ready to demolish my television and PS2 in a rock-star room-trashing fit, some neat little gadget or cool sequence came back to keep me hooked.

The character, plot, and premise are a hodge-podge of spy movie cliches; but the level design, thankfully, is more original. You have some cool devices at your disposal, like a grappling hook and a retinal scanner that allows you to capture guards' eyes to get past security locks. The methods you must use to get past obstacles are varied and unique. Also, the stealth kills, which use PaRappa-style button presses, are a nice touch.

This development team definitely has some cool ideas, so it's a shame that they couldn't execute them better. Nikki's movement is very choppy, especially because she doesn't run backwards or sideways; rather, she does an odd, slow trot, which sucks when you're in a firefight (which you'll want to avoid anyway, as ammo is extremely scarce). Another thing that bothered me was the fact that many of your moves, like climbing and hanging from ledges, can only be accomplished at certain set points. I could go on and on about the flaws with Rogue Ops, but I will end this review on a positive note: I think this franchise has potential, and I hope Bits Studios will get another crack at it. However, for now, it's a long way away from competing with the likes of Splinter Cell or Hitman 2. – **MATT**

Nikki is purty, but she has the personality of a twice-baked potato

You can perform acrobatic moves, but only in certain situations

Sneak up behind guards to pickpocket security badges

She's capable of hiding bodies, but it doesn't play a big factor in the game

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KEMCO ■ **DEVELOPER** BITS STUDIOS
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.5

- **Concept:** Sam Fisher not sexy enough for you? Kemco offers up a stealth/action hottie for your approval
- **Graphics:** Not groundbreaking, but definitely state of the art for PS2
- **Sound:** Music is almost non-existent, but it has some decent ambient NPC chatter
- **Playability:** The inventive level designs are betrayed by suspect execution
- **Entertainment:** For stealth fans, it might be enough, but it can be a real bear at times
- **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

SECOND OPINION

Rogue Ops just screams low budget. And I say that with respect to developer Bit Studios, who I think managed to make a game that is pretty deep and does a good job of capturing the stealth military genre for what it had to work with. But on the other side of the coin, this game is just ugly. It's also light years behind Splinter Cell or Metal Gear Solid in terms of overall polish and execution. What this game really needed was for a company with a little bit deeper pockets to come in and really give Rogue Ops some shine. Instead, the game ends up being just as generic as its name. Rogue Ops certainly isn't a bad title, but you can see the diamond in the rough here and dream how this game could have been so much better. It you love the stealth genre, Rogue Ops is definitely worth a look. Just don't expect to be blown away.

ANDY – 7

PLAYSTATION 2

NBA JAM

A VETERAN'S COMEBACK?

I have fond memories of Jam – mostly in the 16-bit days. Much has changed since then, though, and NBA Street has set the bar extremely high. NBA Jam doesn't try to usurp Street, but instead reinvents itself while still keeping its core. How fresh that core still is may be debatable.

This is a dunk-fest, plain and simple. Defense consists of trying to push guys over before they get in jam range. Each possession, the computer takes around three seconds to put up a shot. Alley-oops, double alley-oops, and a crazy-dunk-inducing hot spot are the major enhancements from the Jams of old. Also, playing against old-school teams in black-and-white is really funny.

Off-court staples like create-a-player, codes, and unlockables do show up. However, there isn't a lot to keep you interested past a few parties and a trip around the league. I need more strategy than this, as well as a mode that keeps me coming back.

Jam goes to show how far the arcade hoops genre has come in the last few years. This game tries to catch up, but is just routed by the gameplay, options, and depth of Street. If you look back fondly on the series, you'll find some things to like here; but if Jam doesn't bring a tear of nostalgia to your eye, you'll probably want to pass. – **JUSTIN**

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

6.5

- **Concept:** Acclaim hopes Jam nostalgia with arcade hoops' resurgence equals for a successful remake
- **Graphics:** Stays faithful to the original, disproportional models with some slight touches
- **Sound:** I will never like the announcer guy. Licensing all those songs for four-second clips is a shame
- **Playability:** A few new moves – alley-oops and fancy dribbles
- **Entertainment:** It's a fun little game, but lacks depth and strategy
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

I wouldn't necessarily say that NBA Jam resembles a substance that you'd find in Shaquille O'Neal's toilet after he consumed 15 bean burritos, but it definitely doesn't have the awe-inspiring glimmer of NBA Street. Rather than trying to outperform EA's skilled trickster, Acclaim stuck with what worked for the series in the past. Yes, it is still enjoyable, but in a nostalgic sort of way. Its play and look are severely dated.

REINER – 6.5

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM
■ **DEVELOPER** ACCLAIM STUDIOS AUSTIN
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30

PLAYSTATION 2

TAK AND THE POWER OF JUJU

IF LOOKS COULD SCORE

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

6.75

Tak starts out with a bang. The town shaman (Jibolba) is having problems with the prophesized warrior savior of their people, Lok, who has been turned into a sheep. Jibolba is trying to summon Juju (spirit/god things) who can help in the matter and thinks that you – the player – are a Juju that he's never seen before. This cutscene, like all others in the game, is well written, beautiful, witty, and far and away the highlight of Tak.

Sadly, though, Tak becomes more pedestrian and predictable as each area unfolds. I want to make a blanket statement that no game should be a series of "go-get-me-a-lot-of-these" missions. There is no reason – in a world as visually appealing as Tak's – that I need to get 2,000 feathers, nine Venus flytraps, 13 floaty orb things, and a handful of Tiki. I'm sick of running errands for everyone else.

With the usual issues of most quintessentially average platform titles (camera inconveniences, repetitive missions, inconsistent jumping controls, etc.); Tak also has some shining moments, and I don't want to imply that this game has nothing to offer. Chicken Island's second half has you floating around, pooing explosive eggs, and trying to not get wet. – **LISA**

- **Concept:** Create a new action/platform icon that wears a loincloth. Insert potty humor and lots of item collecting
- **Graphics:** A skillful balance between lush realism and cartoon world proportions. Character design is (at least) really imaginative
- **Sound:** Tak spouts off one liners that waver between horribly annoying and sickly funny
- **Playability:** Constant camera babysitting and sticky jumping
- **Entertainment:** Literally all over the scale, from hysterical to painful
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

I really wanted to like Tak. It has a great visual style, fun stuff like the chicken suit, and genuinely funny cutscenes with likeable characters. But it also has tedious fetch quests, a horrible camera, and little mission variety. I really think the upcoming Tak cartoon will be good stuff, so I think I'll stick to that and avoid the game.

JEREMY – 6.75

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ
■ **DEVELOPER** AVALANCHE SOFTWARE ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 17

PLAYSTATION 2

KARAOKE REVOLUTION

SING A SONG. SING OUT LOUD

There are few things in life that people have more fun sucking at than karaoke. Instead of being forced to go to run-down VFWs or smoky bowling alleys, Konami is giving you the luxury of sounding like a strangled cat in the privacy of your own home. Karaoke Revolution is far deeper and more enjoyable than Konami's DDR series, and nearly every other rhythm game.

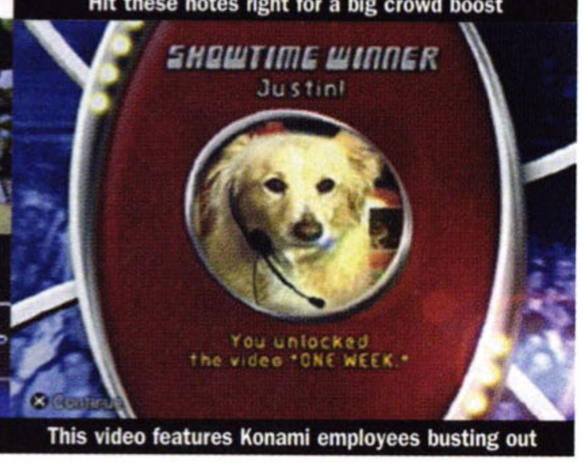
Quite a few modes are in here, but to break it down, Revolution judges you on your pitch and how closely it matches the actual song. Do I have to mention you need a headset to play this? Lyrical accuracy isn't crucial, but stammering through "Billie Jean" won't help your score. Combos bring multipliers, and special verses can provide a boost. High scores give you either a gold or platinum record, which may unlock new songs or character costumes.

I was unfamiliar with many of the game's songs or just plain didn't like them. After learning them, however, I got a new appreciation for the tunes. I'm happy with the amount, especially after unlocking more. You can always try a practice run to become accustomed to a track. There are too many which required me to use a falsetto voice to hit the high notes, but that's just part of the variety. Besides, this is a rare title that will have as much appeal to gals as to guys – if not more so. Future expansion discs are planned, and one with hip hop had better get top priority. I need my "Baby Got Back!"

Karaoke Revolution is too fun for words, and its enjoyment factor far outweighs the imperfections. Sure, you don't always sing in it like you would in real life; but no one dances like they're playing DDR, either. If you're a ham or a closet performer, I predict you'll love this game, and your neighbors will hate you for it. – **JUSTIN**

Hit these notes right for a big crowd boost

The player models look really freaking good



This video features Konami employees busting out

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI/HARMONIX ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

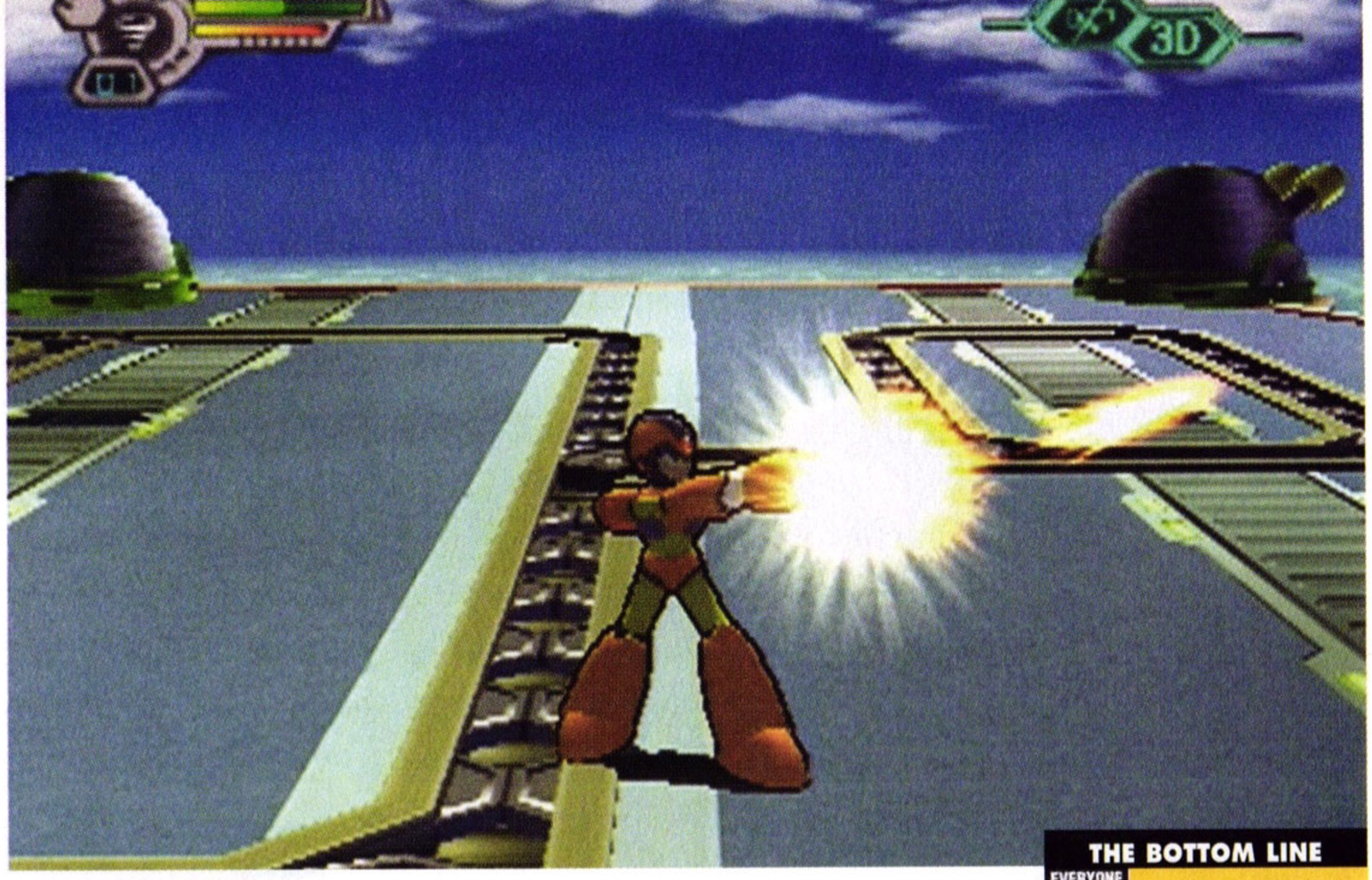
8.5

- **Concept:** Give gamers a nonviolent, must-have title for the PS2 headset
- **Graphics:** Surprisingly sharp for this type of game
- **Sound:** These aren't the original artists, but the cover bands do a remarkable job of reproducing the songs
- **Playability:** The headset microphone was made for this kind of game, and it works accordingly
- **Entertainment:** Shut the windows and have some water handy, because you'll be singing the night away
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

I learned a lot from Karaoke Revolution. I learned that I am capable of saying the sentence, "Dude, 'Wind Beneath My Wings' is no f&*&ing joke!" I learned that I could make Mr. Mister's "Broken Wings" sound like Michael Jackson being beaten to death by Johnny Rotten at a Mike + the Mechanics concert. But, most importantly, I learned that I'm a terrible, terrible singer. This is a new twist on Konami's Bemani series, and it's as fun a party game as you could want. The way it grades you on pitch and accuracy is cool (although there is a way to cheat). On the downside, it would be cool if you could save your performances, and the selection of songs is a little slim after a while. It's too bad we couldn't find a way to merge the technology of Microsoft's Xbox Music Mixer and the gameplay of Karaoke Revolution.

MATT – 7.75



PLAYSTATION 2

MEGA MAN X7

KICK SOME RO-BUTT

Mega Man has finally found his way to the PlayStation 2 (about time, loser! Next time ask for directions). This time, he's brought a new friend along named Axl. But despite these seemingly significant changes, Mega Man X7 is actually more of the same.

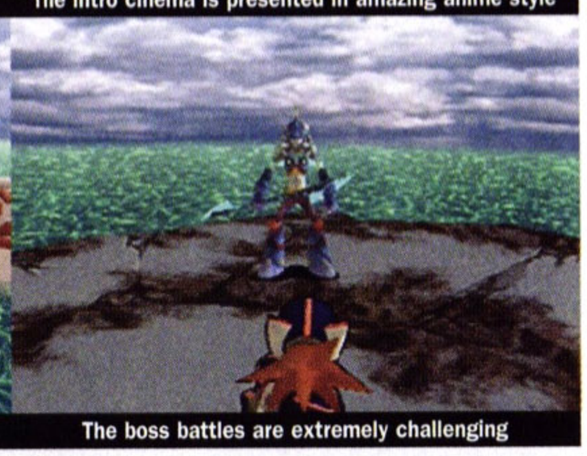
Although X's name is in the title, the story centers on Axl and Zero. The two characters meet up after Axl escapes from his former gang – a crew of criminal robots called Red Alert. X joins the pair later in the game, and as the three heroic robots, you battle the Red Alert gang. In true Mega Man fashion, you'll face off against bosses like Hellride Boarski and Snipe Anteater. As always, you can challenge the stages in any order, and you can switch between your two selected characters at any time in the stage.

Each robot has unique abilities: X can charge his shot, Zero has a sword and a double-jump, and Axl can mimic enemies and hover. This adds a nice variety to the gameplay, but not enough to make it feel any different than all the Mega Man games before it. Even the new 3D environments do little to advance the series; levels still progress along a set path, they just have more depth now. Considering the highly frustrating boss battles and some irritating level designs, Mega Man X7 is likely to only appeal to the Blue Bomber's hardcore fans. – **JEREMY**

Zero is initially the most powerful character

The intro cinema is presented in amazing anime style

X becomes playable after beating two bosses



The boss battles are extremely challenging

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

7.5

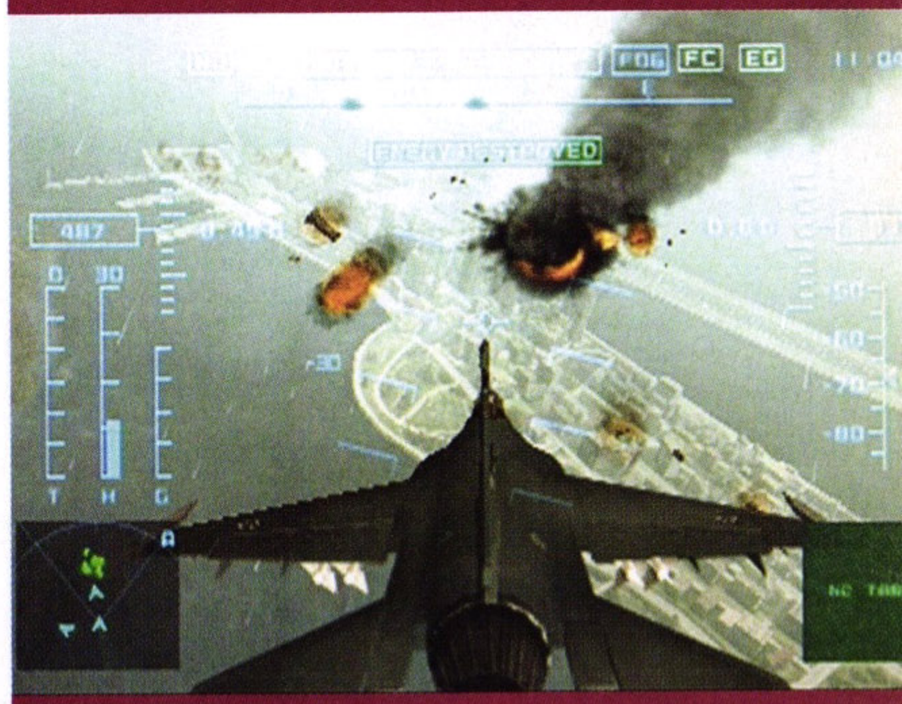
- **Concept:** The Mega Man X series comes to the PS2 and makes the switch to 3D
- **Graphics:** The anime-inspired visuals look nearly as good as the real thing
- **Sound:** The fight with the Hyena boss is the most annoying thing I have ever heard. Ever
- **Playability:** The control scheme is simple enough, but the camera is occasionally an issue
- **Entertainment:** Like most games in this series, X7 skates the fine line between entertaining and supremely frustrating
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Having played through almost every Mega Man game ever created, I can safely say that I'm an avid fan of the Blue Bomber. As intriguing as X7's plot may be, I actually had a difficult time digesting its content and gameplay. I love the gritty story, but the spoken dialogue is so bad that I often found myself muting my TV. The same goes for gameplay. Switching characters on the fly and tapping into their unique moves is lot of fun and brings about a host of new challenges. Unfortunately, the controls (especially in the 3D sequences) just don't have that exactness that the series is built on. I love how Zero can knock back bullets with his sword, and Axl's morphing ability makes for some interesting gameplay. Conversely, I'm not a fan of the lock-on targeting, and Axl's hover ability is fairly weak. Moving the series into 3D was a poor decision. X was great the way it was. It just needed a little variety.

REINER – 7.25

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14



PLAYSTATION 2

LETHAL SKIES II

AFTERBURNED

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN

6

I wanted to parachute out of this one almost as soon as I took off. I understand the attempt to emulate the controls and behavior of actual airplanes, but games like this always get the most crucial element – speed – wrong. In real life, dogfights take seconds to sort themselves out, which, of course, is too quick for a compelling video game experience. Lethal Skies, however, takes the opposite tack. It just doesn't feel like I'm screaming through the great blue yonder. In this case, it seems more like I'm driving a Lincoln Continental with some guns strapped to the hood.

A lack of speed isn't the only reason this title doesn't hold water. I'm just not sure this is a huge upgrade from the first Lethal Skies. The weather effects are cool, however, as they not only obscure your view, but also reflect some light onto your plane. Moreover, they actually contain volume and aren't just digital walls. Some more work has been done on the story, but it is still barely engaging.

This sequel already takes liberties by taking place in the future, so why must it so selfishly stick to replicating a stale sensation of flying that isn't even accurate in the first place? For the next title in this series, I'd like to see some innovation. Anywhere would be fine, because it would instantly be an improvement. – **KATO**

- **Concept:** Make a sequel to a game that many didn't play the first time
- **Graphics:** Although the weather lighting is cool, ground textures are basic
- **Sound:** If you're going to have voiceovers like this, it's better not to have them at all
- **Playability:** This fails to break the video game sound barrier for fighters
- **Entertainment:** I'd rather be put on lavatory duty during burrito night at the barracks
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Much like its predecessor, Lethal Skies II is an arcade-styled aerial combat game that favors ease of play over realism. Not much has changed in terms of gameplay, but the graphics are incrementally better and the missions are more interesting. Even without a ton of new content, it's still a largely satisfying game. By no means does it soar with the likes of Ace Combat, but it does deliver some thrills in an otherwise barren flight sim market.

REINER – 7

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** SAMMY STUDIOS ■ **DEVELOPER** ASMIK ACE ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9

PLAYSTATION 2

FIFA SOCCER 2004

YOUR ARSENAL

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E ESRB **8.5**

Earlier this year, Konami finally brought the best soccer franchise stateside – Winning Eleven. Previously, EA Sports had grown complacent with its FIFA series, preferring to tinker with the gameplay instead of honing it to perfection. Now it has built a foundation I think it will successfully add to for years to come.

The series still hasn't found a way to make the ball and player feel like two separate entities. Thus, this game does retain some of that "hockey on grass" feel. What helps change this, however, is the Off the Ball controls. You can control offensive runs for players without the ball, letting you orchestrate moves into open space like Claudio Reyna. Some of these methods work better than others. Set plays like corners have been given new life with the ability to fight for positioning with the right analog. Finally, the defensive AI hasn't totally gotten the makeover it should.

This series now has a worthy career mode. You'll get Prestige points as you hit job milestones, and you can even set up a training regimen. There are more teams and leagues than ever, allowing for promotion and relegation. These inclusions really make the game feel like the international drama that it is, and help make FIFA a party that I recommend everybody gets on board with. – **KATO**

- **Concept:** EA melds great new gameplay features with a career mode worthy of the times
- **Graphics:** The player's faces have finally been cleaned up
- **Sound:** Motson and McCoist's chatter improves, and there are team-specific chants
- **Playability:** The Off the Ball controls are great for setting up attacks, and are easy to command. Set plays have gotten a makeover, too
- **Entertainment:** While shadows of the old FIFA remain, this is a great template for things to come
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

I don't think that there will be any rioting or stampeding surrounding the release of this year's FIFA, but it is better than past efforts and gives football (the real one) fans something to cheer about. The new Off the Ball controls open up the play nicely and Career mode finally has some depth. I still prefer Winning Eleven, but EA is closing the gap.

REINER – 8

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE)
■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

PLAYSTATION 2

METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM

WILD ARMS

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T ESRB **8**

Sometimes a story needs an unlikely hero, and sometimes you need an unlikely game. There is little that seems certain about Metal Arms. Is it an FPS? Is it a cute-as-punch platformer? Will anyone notice this gem of a game? This title plays like a first-person shooter, but has the look of a third-person action/platformer. Metal Arms does what a lot of titles fall well short of – delivering an engaging mix of styles to form a cohesive whole that spurs you on every step of the way.

This game is like that lovable mutt in the dog store window. Eager to please and irresistible to the eye, it begs for your attention and it easily gets it. It's not just that you can mow down your adversaries with an array of weapons, it's that the game's pacing and rewards are spot on. The gameplay always seems to shift at just the right moment, such as with the inclusion of vehicles every now and then. While platforming with first-person controls is usually more painful than Justin's karaoke, this game makes it easy and very worth your while, with hidden chips and goodies for explorers. I found the targeting to be slightly off, and this iteration isn't visually on par with the others. However, it never leaves you wanting and it has its own surprises.

Metal Arms works because its core is made up of tried-and-true gameplay styles. However, this game is definitely not anonymous – an asset that you'll never fully appreciate until you pop this one in your PS2. – **KATO**

- **Concept:** This game is way more than a mix of first-person controls into a third-person skin
- **Graphics:** This is not the best console to play it on, but unlike Corey Haim, the graphics are gainfully employed
- **Sound:** A very good mix of ambient sounds, the cacophony of combat, and voice-acting
- **Playability:** I'm not a fan of the Halo controls on the vehicles, but what are you going to do?
- **Entertainment:** Even several hours in, I was still being amazed and delighted
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

Humor is as important as the combat in this game

You can hijack certain vehicles and 'bots

Unlike the Xbox Arms, this multiplayer is only for two

This game blows chunks – the good way

SECOND OPINION

I must admit that Metal Arms came out of nowhere, and does manage to entertain. The wacky robot storyline mixed with some clever writing makes for some laughs. The control is also spot-on for a third-person shooter. That said, Glitch has some problems. Namely, the graphics technology. After playing Ratchet & Clank and Jak II, this game just doesn't come anywhere near that level of quality. Now I will give this game some props and say that the controls are playing in the same league as those two titles, but it still doesn't change the fact that it would come in last place. On Xbox or GameCube, I think this game is much more attractive, since it doesn't have those PS2 exclusives to compete with. But here, Glitch just manages to be average in my book. A funny and entertaining average, but average nonetheless.

ANDY – 7.25

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES ■ **DEVELOPER** MASS MEDIA ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 20

PLAYSTATION 2

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: ENCOUNTERS IN SPACE

LOSING CONTROL

Space combat plays a prevalent role in the assortment of Gundam animated series and films, but it has yet to be fully expressed in video games. Federation vs. Zeon tinkered with this concept, but failed to capitalize on the grand scale wars and fast-paced dogfighting that Gundam fans have come to expect. Encounters in Space is designed specifically around these aspects.

To successfully integrate both elements, Bandai created two different gameplay styles. In such, the action switches on the fly between free-roaming 360-degree combat and Star Fox-esque track shooting. Free-roaming is usually tapped for dogfighting and assaults on large pockets of vessels, whereas track-shooting is used primarily for intense sequences along the lines of weaving through an asteroid field.

As intriguing as this setup may be, it comes up short on the gameplay end. The controls are unconventional and your general movement is implemented poorly. Worse yet, if an enemy isn't directly upon you, there really is no way to gauge the trajectory of your shots. It suffers from the age-old problem of giving players the ability to lock an enemy in their sights, but not allowing their shots to make contact because the foe just happens to be moving. It really doesn't get much more frustrating than this.

The track-shooting elements do add a level of excitement and urgency that the other Gundam titles have been lacking, but again, the clumsy controls get in the way.

If anything, I can see Gundam fans tolerating the shoddily designed gameplay and finding moderate thrills. It does target the fan boy with over 80 minutes of animated clips from the show, and 70 different mobile suits from the Gundam Wing, Gundam G, and Gundam Seed universes. On the other hand, for the casual gamer, there's a lot to like, but more to loathe. – **REINER**

The team-based strategies in multiplayer are interesting, but the gameplay becomes even more chaotic

Successfully shooting enemies from a distance is a terribly frustrating action

The track-shooting segments are fast-paced and usually set in narrow quarters

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** BANDAI ■ **DEVELOPER** SOTSU AGENCY/SUNRISE/BANDAI ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 5

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

6.5

■ **Concept:** A track-shooting/free-roaming space combat hybrid that doesn't do the Gundam name justice

■ **Graphics:** The mech designs look fantastic, yet the environments are fairly bland. There really is nothing to look at in space

■ **Sound:** A respectable score and tons of spoken dialogue

■ **Playability:** The controls and gameplay are way too sluggish for the frenzied 360-degree combat

■ **Entertainment:** If you can come to terms with the shoddy play, multiplayer is decent

■ **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

It's probably not a good idea to tinker with your control schemes within a game. It's kind of like changing Dicks on *Bewitched*. Bandai's Gundam series has slowly grown, and it's safe to say that this title is the most enjoyable. The problem is that the two different combat sequences can take getting used to. Moreover, while engaging, the action can be too straightforward. It combines rail shooting with the close-quarters melee fights of Zone of the Enders – only without the speed or graphical splendor. Visually, the game looks like it's taken a step up for the series, and I'm happy to see the frequent anime sequences. Bandai has experimented with all sorts of gameplay options in previous Gundam titles, and I fear that while this latest work can be fun, it too will be abandoned. Instead, more compelling gameplay is needed to push this franchise to the top.

KATO – 7

REVIEWS

PLAYSTATION 2

SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: BATTLE FOR BIKINI BOTTOM

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** TDK MEDIACTIVE
■ **RELEASE** JULY 31

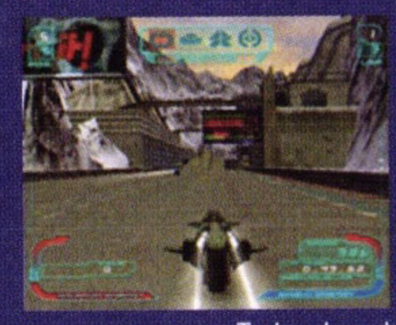
While it is deserving of the hallowed rank of the best SpongeBob SquarePants game yet, in the broader scheme of things it's still not a very good title. For some reason, the industry really seems to be stuck in a rut. Why does every cartoon-based license need to be transformed into a platformer where you need to collect a billion different items? I don't get it. In SpongeBob's case, the gameplay engine is solid, and I love the animations that Heavy Iron Studios came up with. I also like the fact that you can play as Patrick. That fat oaf slays me. The challenges are not so flattering, and the characters' move sets are very bizarre. If you've had neurosurgery more than twice, you may (and I stress the word) find a thimble's worth of entertainment here. If not, you'll get more kicks out of a sponge...just an ordinary pantless sponge. – **REINER**

E **4.25**

PLAYSTATION 2

XGRA

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16



You know what? I think I'm done with futuristic racing. Seriously. I mean, it was cool back in the day when F-Zero first came out, and Wipeout was fantastic, but it's getting harder for me to have any sort of interest in these games anymore. Today, I could play a game like Midnight Club II, which feels faster than XGRA; and also has a huge city to explore, cool shortcuts, and wicked AI competition. I'm sorry, but running around the same old loopy track designs in generic space bikes just isn't cutting it, and I really think developers need to either totally reinvent this genre or abandon it. Yes, I used to love futuristic racing. But I used to love Def Leppard, too, and I don't go out and buy their new CDs. – **MATT**

E **5**

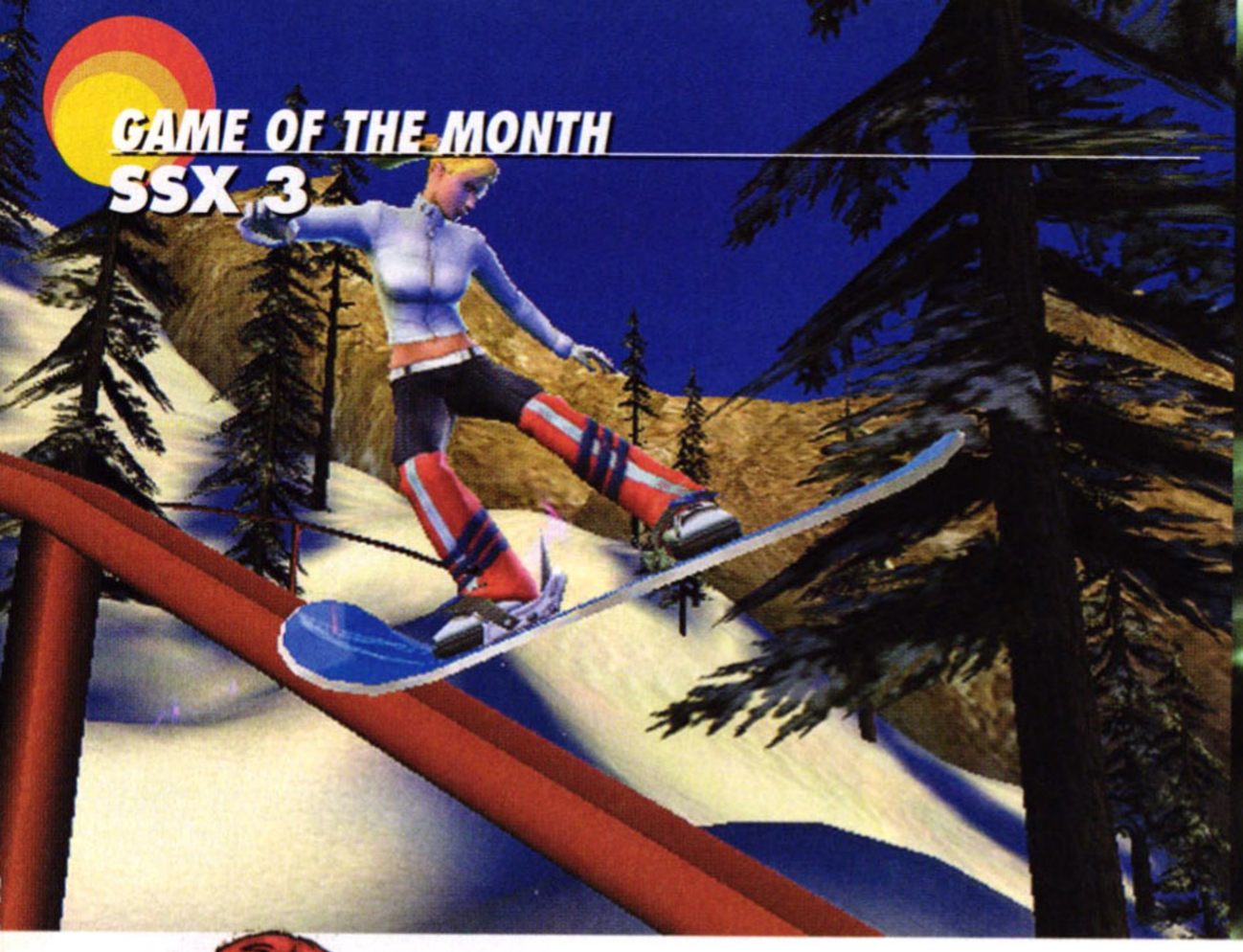
PLAYSTATION 2

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II BACK TO BAGHDAD

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** GOTHAM GAMES
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

I really applaud developer SCI/Pivotal for making a good faith effort to correct the flaws in a franchise that met with very mixed reviews its first time around. Graphically, it's definitely improved, and the framerate seems relatively stable except in the most hectic of circumstances. The interface for inventory and commanding your troops is also better. You still might have your share of frustrations, but I think that's par for the course for a game that's trying to incorporate PC depth into a console title. It's a solid squad-based shooter. FYI: I am scoring this lower than the Xbox version because it lacks four-player support, which is the preferred way to experience this game. – **MATT**

T **7.75**



GAMECUBE

SSX 3

EATING TRICKY FOR BREAKFAST

"Then, the game got harder, and I got better."

I found one flaw in SSX 3. Sometimes when I'm in the middle of a turn, going 80 mph, doing a tail grind, the camera would swing out and show the insides of things you're not supposed to see the insides of.

Then again, when this glitch (which very well may have been the most random and infrequently occurring bug in the history of software development) did poke out its tiny head, I was doing a tail grind at 80 mph – and it really felt fast and almost out of control. I wish I could say that I was past the stage of physically swinging the controller around, hoping for increased control; but without fail, in my time spent with this game, I could not hold myself back.

Then again, SSX 3 has little to no basis in reality. The last time I saw someone leap off of a cliff while outrunning an avalanche and execute a series of tricks so acrobatic and stunning that particle effects burst from their limbs… Wait, I've never seen that. But during each and every run, you can do it in SSX 3. And, as someone who isn't known for their Tricky skills, I was doing stuff that at least looked neat right away. Then, the game got harder, and I got better. This is one of the title's strongest points – a perfect ramp-up of difficulty and skill acquisition.

Some of the abilities that you have from the outset, but aren't entirely crucial in the first few events are the new nose- and tailslides. These quickie balancing acts are used to link moves together and form combo strings of legendary proportions. Beginners will be able to get a few strings going pretty quickly, and those familiar with Tony Hawk's manuals will (in theory) be able to combo the entire way down the mountain – a half-hour or more venture.

The full mountain approach introduced with this game is really the clincher for me. Entering contests is as easy as following signs and sliding up to the start gate, or you can cruise around the events and trick the whole way with no loading time. Oh…my…God. How did we play snowboarding games before this?

All of this gushing, and I haven't even talked about this being the latest (and best, in my opinion) in a string of truly great soundtracks. The DJ somehow manages to be helpful, funny, and not even a little bit annoying. Genius. There's also the character customization. Then there are the 150 BIG challenges sprinkled through the world; and the stall move with handstand option; and the posters, action figures, trading cards, boots, halos, hairdos, and t-shirts you unlock through competition and then buy with your winnings; and… Well, just believe me. It's good, okay? – **LISA**

Physics be damned…especially in a half pipe on Main Street

That's a beautiful mountain vista if I've ever seen one

The camera seamlessly swoops around to show off your moves

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS BIG ■ **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

Even just tooling around the mountain is a blast

Unbelievable drops are commonplace on SSX's peaks

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB **9.5**

- **Concept:** Blow the doors off of past snowboarding games
- **Graphics:** A really spectacular mix of mountain horizons, crazy metropolitan half pipes, nifty particle effects, and physics-defying animations
- **Sound:** This DJ really does rock and his playlist must be miles long
- **Playability:** One unfortunate button placement, but it's something that a bit of concentrated play will get you used to
- **Entertainment:** How much fun is the proverbial barrel of monkeys? This is more
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

This SSX lays an entire mountain at our fingertips, and it's such a liberating feeling. It's like switching from briefs to boxers. I loved being freed from the restraints of the typical race structure. Thanks to the all-encompassing nature of the game, there's always some way to pick up some cash – even on something as plain as a freestyle run. It sets up a gameplay flow that feeds you along and sucks you in as you try and conquer the whole mountain. Of course, the tricks are bigger and badder and the vistas are breathtaking, but I don't think the tricks flow as much as in the Tony Hawk series. However, this game matches it in the customization, upgrades, and unlockables category. Not only that, but EA Big has really stepped up and turned what was once just a mountain into a living, breathing world that will grab your attention for hours on end.

KATO – 9

GAMECUBE | UNLIMITED ENABLED

STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

AND YOU THOUGHT GEORGE LUCAS RUINED STAR WARS?

"...one of the biggest disappointments in all of gaming."

Trust me, I'm just as shocked as you are. Watching the once-infallible Rogue Squadron series fall from grace and crash and burn within the palm of my hands had me reeling and nearly in tears. The butchery that Factor 5 has inflicted upon this game has led to a disastrous release that will likely be remembered as one of the biggest disappointments in all of gaming.

Much like the previous two titles in the series, Rebel Strike is an interactive retelling of the classic Star Wars trilogy. Hence, you'll find yourself rescuing Princess Leia from the Death Star; battling the Imperial Forces on Hoth; and assaulting Lord Vader's personal Super Star Destroyer. All of the memorable moments are included in some fashion. The game also fills in the gaps that were unanswered in the films with new missions and story sequences.

Rather than sticking with the fever-pitch space combat that people couldn't seem to get enough of, Factor 5 decided to expand its horizons, and has injected gameplay variety. You'll actually find yourself running and gunning on foot through the treacherous Death Star halls, across Yoda's training grounds on Dagobah, and even upon Jabba's sail barge. As exciting as these sequences are in the films, they are simply atrocious in this game. The targeting system is entirely incomprehensible. You could be within kissing range of a stormtrooper, but the game still targets a foe 30 feet off screen. The jump mechanic is just as frustrating, and the general character movements feels like you're skating on ice.

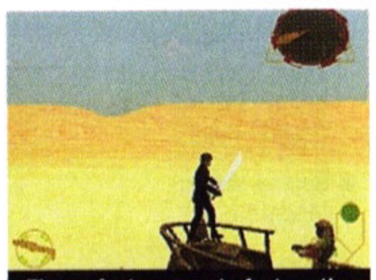
Factor 5 also honed in on arguably the most intense sequence in any Star Wars movie – the speeder bikes. While the game does deliver the true sensation of speed for these vehicles, taming a wild lion is easier than mastering the bike controls.

While I'd like to say that these gameplay elements are few and far between, they are an integral part of this game and appear within a majority of the stages.

As one could only hope, the space combat is still the heart and soul of the experience. After wading through crap, piloting an X-Wing again is such a good feeling, but it's not nearly as intense as it used to be. Factor 5 must have thought that Rogue Leader was way too hard because the difficulty has been butchered in this sequel. Getting shot down is a rare occurrence, and medals are thrown out for the sloppiest of performances.

As if I need to say it, the gameplay is damaged goods. The only thrills that I garnered were of the visual type. Standing like an ant beneath a lumbering AT-AT is too cool to describe. There's also something stimulating about 50 TIE Fighters crowding the screen at once.

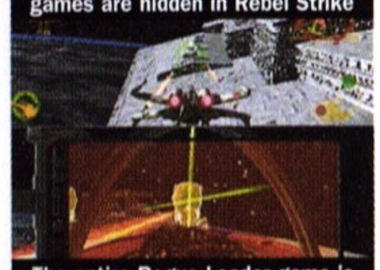
Factor 5 simply tried too much with this game. I really get the impression that it became too ambitious of a project and the company lost control of it. – **REINER**



The on-foot segments feature the worst controls in any Star Wars game to date

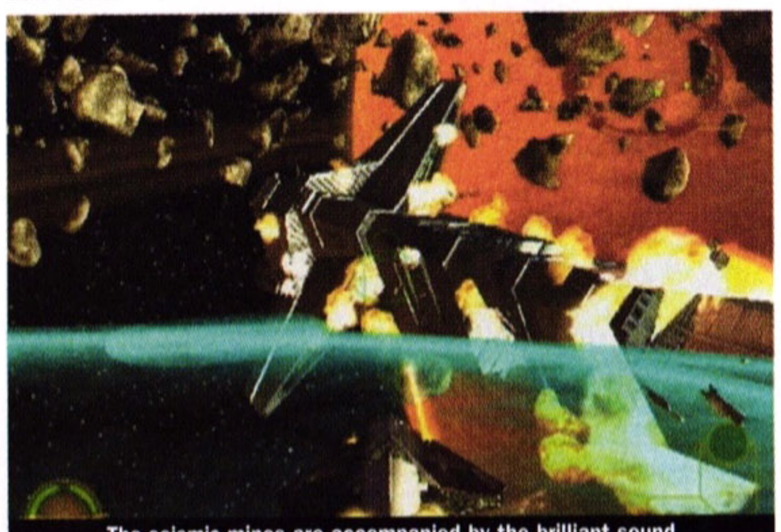
Along with the A-, B-, X-, and Y-Wings, Imperial craft such as the prototype TIE Hunter are playable

All three of the Star Wars arcade games are hidden in Rebel Strike



The entire Rogue Leader game is available for two-player split-screen

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** FACTOR 5 ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21



The seismic mines are accompanied by the brilliant sound effects from *Attack of the Clones*

The difficulty level is not nearly as taxing as it was in Rogue Leader. Therefore, achieving medals is much easier this time around

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

6.5

- **Concept:** Beat the living tar out of something beautiful, then release it as a sequel
- **Graphics:** The size and detail within the vehicles is very impressive. Texturing and lighting are top-notch as well
- **Sound:** The soundtrack rocks, but where did they find these voice actors? Yoda sounds like Cookie Monster
- **Playability:** The flying is as fluid as always. As for the speeder bikes and on foot segments, worse controls are hard to come by
- **Entertainment:** The only thrills are generated from two-player split-screen
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

The embarrassing Star Wars disco sequence at the beginning sums up this game. Because you don't control the targeting system, the portions on foot are excruciatingly bad. It feels like you're a Cadillac (without reverse) with a gun strapped to its hood. The pinnacle of how bad the on-foot segments are is when Luke goes to Dagobah and encounters – not a metaphorical Darth Vader – but a boring platforming exercise. I call it Luke: The Frogger Years. Sadly, not even the space portions are that good. TIEs have been stripped of their evasive AI routines; instead, they cruise around in packs, waiting to get hit like a kid with a "kick me" sign on his back. Finally, I love the movie clips, but they not only break up what little action there is here, but they remind us of one of the most shameful moments in Star Wars history – the disgraceful death of Boba Fett. How appropriate.

KATO – 6.75

GAMECUBE

METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK

"It's a rare sighting of a beast that's increasingly hard to find in the wild: the pure third-person shooter."

It's little surprises like Metal Arms that keep bitter hack game journalists like myself from becoming totally jaded. I'd seen a few pictures of it before, but understandably had not followed its development with much interest. Really, one look at the main character and I instantly thought, "Yay, a platformer with a cute robot! Can't wait!"

Needless to say, Metal Arms is not just another platformer. Actually, it's not really a platformer at all. Although you do your fairly share of running and jumping, this game packs more heat than [dork trying to sound cool alert! - *Ed.*], say, 50 Cent at a Ja Rule concert. [Yo, Matt, you're totally crunk! - *Ed.*] If anything, it's a rare sighting of a beast that's increasingly hard to find in the wild: the pure third-person shooter.

The control scheme puts your character's movement on the left analog and aiming on the C-stick, a scheme that will be instantly familiar to FPS fans. With an assortment of guns in one hand and a variety of high-tech explosives in the other, you'll travel through the guts of a desiccated mining planet to save a bunch of robots from...um...a bunch of *bad* robots.

Okay, the plot makes Whoopi Goldberg's new sitcom look like *Seinfeld*, but who needs plot when you've got this much firepower and a host of surprisingly canny enemies to unleash it on. These bad hunks of metal are really the core of what makes Metal Arms a good time. For one, they are fully modeled piece by piece, allowing you shoot off limbs and then watch the whole contraption shatter to the ground. A few times, I even saw a few sets of legs running around on their own after I'd blasted their torsos and heads to bits. They are fun to kill, but they are no pushovers. I'm seriously still afraid of the spider-like trash robots in Metal Arms. These maniacal mechs can reassemble themselves out of scrap on the floor (which is shown in cool animation sequences), forcing you to blow them up multiple times before they stay down for the count. Even the rank-and-file guards are fairly intelligent, taking cover, pursuing in formation, and sniping at you from afar.

Although there is a bit of platforming (which is more of an annoyance than anything), Metal Arms succeeds by staying focused on hectic shooting action. It also has some surprises in store, in the form of some land and air vehicles, and computer terminals that allow you to take control of other types of robots.

Is it without flaws? Certainly not. At times, the frenzied frag-fest can both overwhelm the camera and slow the framerate. During these times (which usually means some trash-bots or a boss is on your tail), you'll really notice that aiming is not always dead accurate, especially for some of the standard-fare weapons.

However, I look at Metal Arm's shortcomings as a positive. Here's an overlooked, unpretentious little game that is more fun than half the big-budget blockbusters out there, and it's still got a ton of room to improve in a (cross your fingers) sequel. I'm telling you, with a little more polish, Swingin' Ape and Metal Arms could do truly amazing things. – **MATT**

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.5

- **Concept:** Like MDK 2, it's an FPS in platformer clothing
- **Graphics:** The basics are adequate, with a few flourishes here and there
- **Sound:** The least engaging aspect of this game
- **Playability:** With a few rare exceptions, the controls are solid and accessible
- **Entertainment:** This looks like a cuddly platformer, but kicks like a friggin' mule!
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

I'm a sucker for anything with robots in it, especially when it's this cool. Metal Arms one of the most engaging new action titles I've played in some time. The look of the game is unique, and the details of Glitch are simply amazing. I really dig how much variety all the missions offer; the various play types ensure that Glitch's journey is anything but boring, and the jokes are actually funny. Multiplayer rocks as well, and in a strange way feels like the heir to GoldenEye (blasphemy, I know). All around, Metal Arms is a solid little shooter that would be all too easy to dismiss as kiddie fare. My only real issue with the GameCube version is that the C-stick doesn't work as well as the right analog stick on a PS2 or Xbox controller. However, I gotta recommend you pick up this title on your console of choice. It's robo-riffic!

JEREMY – 8.5

Some of the enemies are huge

You can unleash some serious firepower

Multiplayer is a blast

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** SWINGIN' APE STUDIOS
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16

A number of times, you'll take control of vehicles...

...or other robots

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.5

GAMECUBE

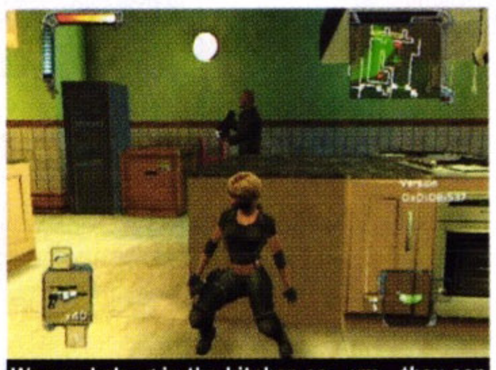
ROGUE OPS

SAM AND NIKKI SITTIN' IN A TREE!

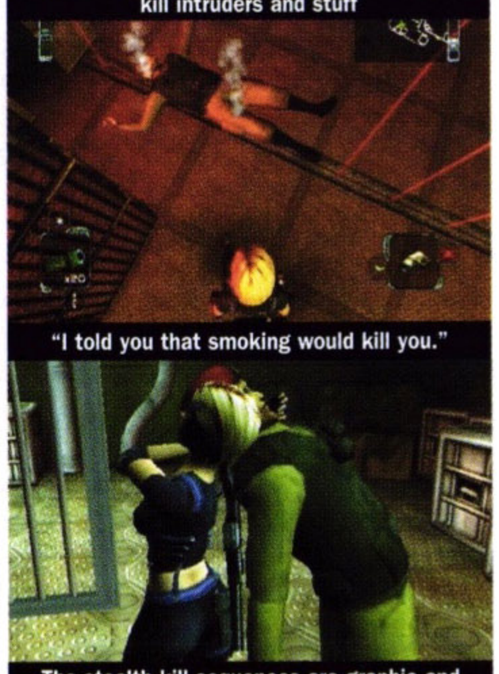
Rogue Ops draws inspiration from Splinter Cell to such a degree that the main character can best be described as Sam Fischer with boobs. After playing through Rogue Ops, I get the distinct impression that the developer cloned specific elements with the sole intent that players would draw comparisons between the two titles. Kemco really wanted gamers to walk away saying, "It's like Splinter Cell, only better."

True enough, the most complex gameplay elements from Splinter Cell represent the basics in Rogue Ops. Carrying bodies, hiding in shadows, shimmying along ledges, you can do it all in your sleep. The material that really catches your eye actually has nothing to do with Ubisoft's stealth-driven blockbuster. Rogue Ops is loaded to the hilt with innovations and clever ideas.

In most games, stealth kills are usually fairly simplistic. In Rogue Ops, you'll kill people in style, and it takes skill to do it. When you sneak up behind someone, a circular meter with an array of directional presses will appear. If you press each one quick enough, you'll perform an over-the-top, bone-breaking maneuver. Each bone that is broken is highlighted with *Romeo Must Die*-like x-ray effects. Watching these sequences is a satisfying reward and great reason to use stealth instead of shooting enemies.



Women belong in the kitchen so...um...they can kill intruders and stuff



"I told you that smoking would kill you."

The stealth kill sequences are graphic and animated beautifully

The tools of the trade that you have at your disposal are equally as impressive. The grappling hook and long-range retinal scanner are just plain cool. You can even trail someone and pick their pocket, and there's just something alluring about a girl with throwing stars.

The area where the game shines the most, however, is in environment interaction. If you turn on the lights when in a room where guards are wearing night-vision goggles, they'll scream in pain and grab their eyes. You can also push over heavy objects to crush enemies or drop a candle-lit chandelier on someone to start them on fire. I even solved a laser puzzle by placing a guard's body across the beams. I simply hopped over the corpse (which just happened to be smoking in the areas where the lasers were trapped).

Like most stealth games, Rogue Ops does have some serious flaws. The controls are a little sloppy around the edges; highlighting interactive items can be a pain; and enemies can often see you when you're clearly hidden from their view. Regardless, it plays fairly well and the targeting system is far superior to Splinter Cell's.

With originality and gameplay variety fueling every second of play, Rogue Ops is a mission that's worth taking – **REINER**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KEMCO ■ **DEVELOPER** KOTOBUKI SYSTEMS/BITS STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

- **Concept:** A familiar, yet completely original look at stealth action
- **Graphics:** The character models and environments look fantastic. The animations in the CG sequences are a little stiff
- **Sound:** The voices are a little tinny and muffled on the 'Cube
- **Playability:** Do or die stealth gameplay with unique environmental interaction and varied objectives. Enemy vision is a little inconsistent, however
- **Entertainment:** It may be under the radar, but it does a lot to move the stealth genre forward
- **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

SECOND OPINION

While I'm all for new additions to the stealth/action family, Rouge Ops simply doesn't have what it takes to hang with big brothers Metal Gear Solid and Splinter Cell. While it tries some cool new tricks, nothing about it seems to work as well as it should. The stealth kills are cool but difficult, the AI is poor, and the default control scheme didn't work for me. I also wasn't a fan of the point-and-click action function. Most grievously, whoever thought it was a good idea to have the same button fire and holster your gun should probably be shot, but chances are if you tried, you'd end up putting the gun away instead. These problems, coupled with a fairly generic main character, derivative plot, and horrible framerate mean there is little to recommend about this title. I guess if you've always loved stealth/action, but wished your character had tighter buns, you might see around its flaws.

JEREMY – 7

GAMECUBE

DISNEY'S PARTY

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER BOARD
■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

In utter honesty, there are few titles that have inspired such immediate and long-lasting malice in my heart and mind. The game moves as players participate in asinine activities set in various hell portals (oops, I mean, "adventure islands"); and, despite their Disney ties, none of the creatures have respectable dialogue or any of the personality that we expect from the long-standing characters. These icons should be mortified that their image has been sullied in this manner. – **LISA**

EVERYONE E **2.5**

GAMECUBE

FIFA SOCCER 2004

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

The achievements this series has added this year are underlined by many of the similarities from the past. The Off the Ball controls don't entirely solve the "magnet ball" feel of the franchise, but they go a long way to used space in your offensive attacks. I like how the C-stick is now used for both dekes and pushing off – especially in set pieces like corner kicks, which are much more fun now. Rounding out this package is a good career mode and a wealth of new clubs and divisions. – **KATO**

EVERYONE E **8.25**

GAMECUBE

SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

Simpsons Hit & Run may be the best GTA-style game that the GameCube library is going to get. It's not just worthy by default, though. The levels are huge, the show references are abundant, and it looks and plays solid. A lack of mission variety – chase this, collect that – is the only thing I have against it, but it goes with the territory. This thing's sweeter than that beer with candy pieces in it; y'know, Skittlebrau. – **JUSTIN**

TEEN T **8.5**

"In this game, you choose where you have your fun; and fun you shall have."

XBOX

SSX 3

TO AIR IS DIVINE

Giving gamers choices is something you don't see in many releases. The developers put you in a situation, and you play through it. The freedom for the user usually comes in how you do your tasks. In SSX 3, there are added options of what you do, and when you do it. This opens up gameplay immensely, and takes the genre to a new level.

The environment is made up of three massive peaks. In each one is a bevy of races, freestyle areas, halfpipe challenges, collectibles, etc. At basically any time, you can transport to whichever of these tasks you feel like competing in at the moment. Beat certain elements, and you can move on to the next peak. All events earn you money, which you can use at the Lodge – but more on that later.

One of the cooler things about this system is when you get to race down one entire peak. These runs take at least 12 minutes (usually much more), and you'll see many familiar locations along the way. Sometimes you'll be racing a rival; other times you'll be trying to beat a score total.

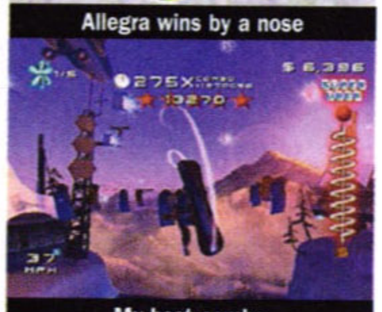
The gameplay is smooth like well-packed powder. While I don't find it as deep as Tony, executing Uber Tricks high into the air is exhilarating. Grinds are automatic, and there are Uber varieties of them as well. A manual-esque move can be pulled off by manipulating the right stick, and can be turned into some sweet flatland tricks. This lets you form combos that can run all the way down the mountain, or endlessly in a free run on the halfpipe. It's almost too easy for my tastes, but it's still very cool.

Now then, about the Lodge mentioned earlier. Each peak has one, and they're great places to blow your cash. You'll obviously want to upgrade your attributes to better your boarder, but it's also a good idea to switch up your gear every now and then. Each character has tons of different shirts, hats, boots, and accessories to mix and match. Extras abound as well, with art, toys, and even hidden characters to be purchased. These new boarders can replace your chosen one on the mountain whenever you want a different alter ego for a spell.

Graphically, SSX 3 is astounding. Tricks blend seamlessly into one another, and the all-around ambience of the mountains is breathtaking. Snow banks sparkle, avalanches rain debris, and the view from up on high has to be seen.

I'm not a big fan of this game's racing, perhaps because it's not as much fun as Sony's Downhill Domination at capturing the essence of speed and the sharp decline of the terrain. The beauty of SSX 3 is that I don't have to do the race events if I don't want to. In this game, you choose where you have your fun; and fun you shall have. – **JUSTIN**

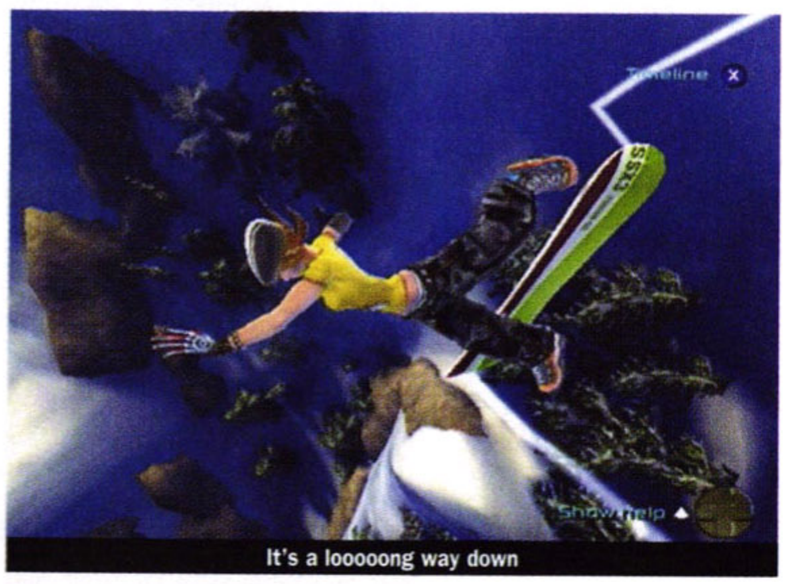
Allegra wins by a nose


My best combo

Unlock a new character and use him/her for a while

This is just a little snow shower

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS BIG ■ **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14T



It's a looooong way down

Not everything takes place in the desolate tundra

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB **9.5**

- **Concept:** Open up the mountain and let the gamer decide where to go and what to do
- **Graphics:** Who would've thought that snow could look so good? Nice real-time lighting
- **Sound:** A clever radio mechanic with a bunch of great music and a not-too-annoying DJ. Subtle ambient sounds are appreciated
- **Playability:** Combos can go almost forever. Very user-friendly
- **Entertainment:** Second only to Tony Hawk 3 in the extreme sports game competition. A must-have
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

The SSX series has always kept me captivated, but not to the point where I lose track of time, perspire like Patrick Ewing at the free throw line, and physically react to the actions onscreen. I usually mock people who bounce around while they play games, but no matter how much I tried to keep my butt planted, I often found myself leaping out of my chair. It sucked me in like few titles have been able to. The gameplay is very much like Tony Hawk in that you can now create massive combo strings. When I say massive, think one combo extended across a five minute run. It's an amazing feeling when you best your highest score. The game also rewards players with a mountain of unlockables. As always, the visuals in SSX are simply breathtaking, and the open-ended design allows players to tackle the title at their own pace. It's the most noteworthy action/sports game since Tony 3, and one of the greatest games period.

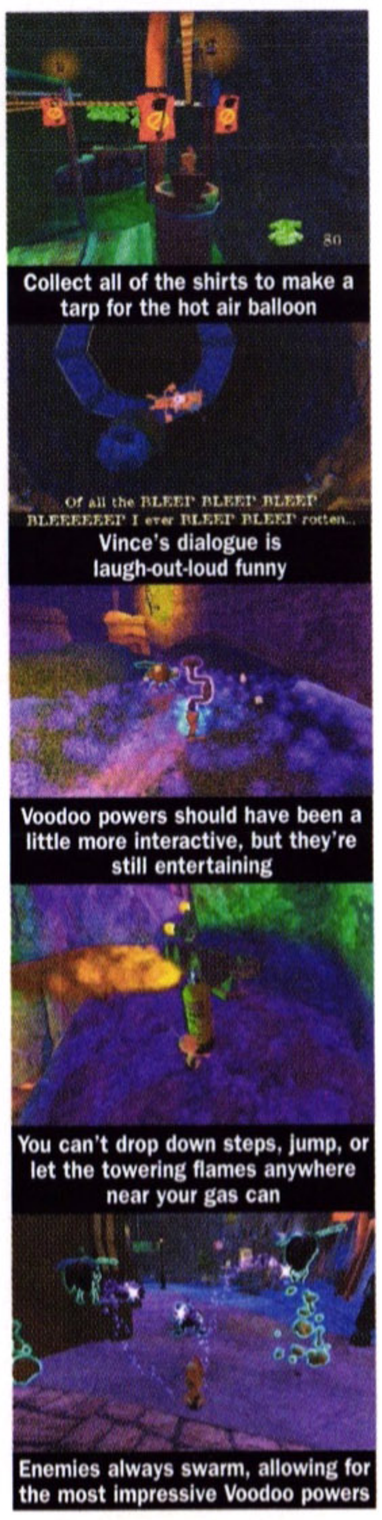
REINER – 9.5

XBOX UNLIMITED ENABLED

VOODOO VINCE

VINCE-A-RIFIC

"Vince is just so darn cute with that big tank of gas."



Collect all of the shirts to make a tarp for the hot air balloon

Vince's dialogue is laugh-out-loud funny

Voodoo powers should have been a little more interactive, but they're still entertaining

You can't drop down steps, jump, or let the towering flames anywhere near your gas can

Enemies always swarm, allowing for the most impressive Voodoo powers

To date, no one has been able to say, "Wow. Xbox. There are some good platformers there." Well, they could, but the dripping sarcasm would be a dead giveaway to their lie. Microsoft's big box has tried and failed miserably with other mascot hopefuls. Blinx the time-changing cat and Dr. Muto the laser-humping mad scientist haven't done it for myself or many other gamers.

But Vince. Sweet, sweet Vince. When first brought to life by the mistakenly unleashed Voodoo powder in Miss Charmaine's shop, all the doll wants to do is check for some junk…a package…a unit. A shrug of the shoulders shows his indifference and players are now introduced to their charge – a burlap voodoo doll that has to save his creator by cruising around messed up versions of New Orleans and the surrounding areas.

Since Vince is supposed to be 10 inches tall, and the Voodoo powder is warping the world as we know it, perspective and design are greatly skewed. Most of the French Quarter, for instance, has Vince-sized balconies with giant cracks intersecting the streets. A graveyard overrun with imps and Mondo Moles has decrepit crypts, underground tunnels, and off-kilter tombstones. In addition to the graphical creativity and sheer amount of personality that Vince has, the title features some of the best and most appropriate soundtrack tunes I've heard lately. The jazz- and bluegrass-infused set is so good, I would play the freaking thing just for my musical enjoyment.

All of that would be moot if the game were painful to play, though. Although the missions (when broken down into their base procedures) have all been seen before, the justification for the actions and execution of puzzles is a lot of fun. Finding canister A and taking it to point B is certainly not breaking new ground in the gaming industry. But the fact that canister A is pressurized gas and getting it to point B means that you have to weave up a spiraled walkway strewn with jet engines makes the whole process a little more interesting. That, and Vince is just so darn cute with that big tank of gas.

Speaking of that spiraled walkway, it's sometimes hard to see. The camera, to be gentle, certainly does require frequent user intervention; but I wouldn't say that it's dramatically more so than with other titles of the same ilk. Being picky, I think that it's the one thing truly holding this title back from toppling a few platforming giants out there.

Vince's quirky cast of characters, interesting landscapes, frequent Easter eggs (check out the tombstone markings and mausoleum entries), and wide variety of missions makes this a platformer that's hard to put down. Even the many vehicle-based levels are solid enough that you can't ask for much more in a platform game. – **LISA**

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.5

- **Concept:** Masochistic voodoo doll has to save humanity – or just greater New Orleans
- **Graphics:** Not a jaggie in sight, but some of the voodoo powers are hard to tell apart
- **Sound:** The best soundtrack in recent memory. I would buy a copy and play it in my car
- **Playability:** Camera babysitting is about average for the genre, and Vince sure does move fast. Even the vehicle levels are solid
- **Entertainment:** Vince has more character and personality in his burlap legs than almost any other platform star
- **Replay Value:** High

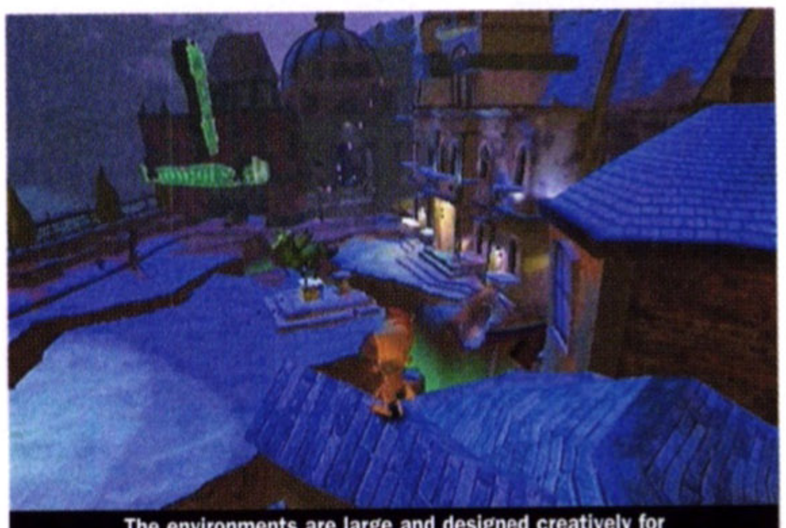
SECOND OPINION

You really want to pull for Vince. It's got visual style, offbeat humor, and a moody jazz-influenced score that is simply wonderful. I love the character as well; it's a hoot to see the masochistic lil' fella get mangled in a wide variety of ways. In terms of charm and creativity, it's one of the best out there. However, even the most novel characters and graphics need gameplay that is equally as compelling. For all its conspicuous quirk, Voodoo Vince is really more of the same old bonking critters, pulling switches, and jumping around routine we've been playing for years. Even the game's genius move, Vince's self-annihilating voodoo attacks, are only animated sight gags. I wish that – when I did a chainsaw attack – instead of getting cut in half and watching the enemies magically die, I actually grabbed the blade and started wreaking havoc myself. A more visceral approach would have made this more than just another interesting, but unessential, platformer.

MATT – 7.75

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS ■ **DEVELOPER** BEEP INDUSTRIES
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23

"Does my butt look big in this?"


The environments are large and designed creatively for aesthetics and exploration

"Even the most trivial gameplay elements become keys to puzzles."

XBOX

ROGUE OPS

"GENERIC GAME NAME" AWARD WINNER

It's a sad fact in video games, but it's a fact nonetheless: To have a big game, you need a big budget. Rogue Ops is the most ambitious title Kemco has published in recent memory, and it makes a good effort at bringing the best of Splinter Cell, Metal Gear, and Hitman 2 together; but it's not in the same league as any of those games.

If there was an *American Idol*-style show for video game character hopefuls, Nikki Conners may have been one of the prospective stars whose auditions they show for you to laugh at. While I admire the blond hairdo that screams Geena Davis in *Long Kiss Goodnight*; she seriously lacks in voiceover talent and witty one-liners, as both do little more than make you shake your head in disgust. It's as if some suit's wife nagged him until he let her do Nikki's voice.

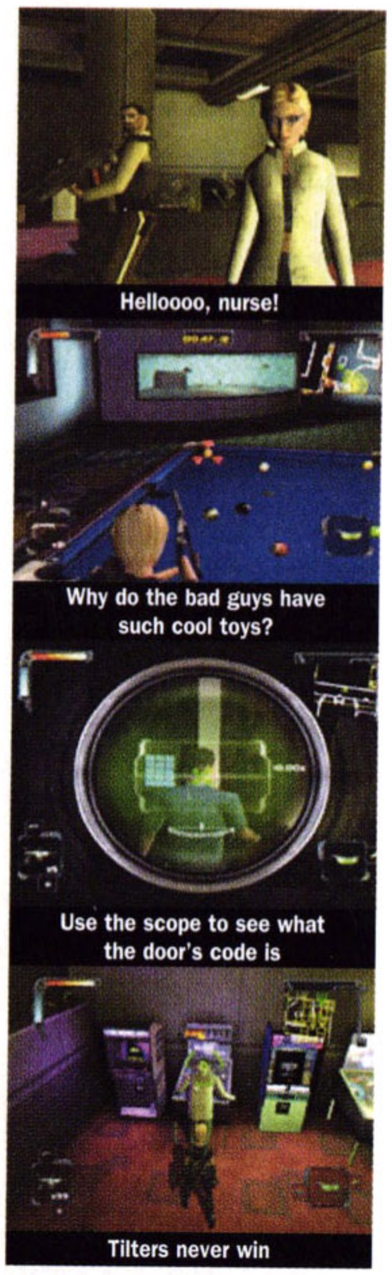
Thankfully, the situations she is cast in are much more engaging. It's obvious that a lot of thought went into them. Like Hitman 2, you're sometimes left wondering what the hell your next move should be; but, like that game, there is a sense of accomplishment when you finally figure things out. Nikki's got a Bond-worthy arsenal, bringing out retinal scanners, flycams, and a pair of advanced X-ray specs when the situation calls for them. Still, stealth kills and sniper head-shots are just as fun.

Even the most trivial gameplay elements become keys to puzzles. Picking pockets is original, and is vital when you can't cause fatalities. Carrying bodies around sounds played out, but needing to drop them over sensors to avoid red-hot death is clever. Stealth is a big factor, and there are several high-tension spots when you're desperate for some cover. Developer Bits Studios should be commended with what it did with the game's missions and scenarios.

A checkpoint system means you won't have to start from scratch when you die. The exception is when you want to turn off your Xbox. In that case, you're doomed to restart the mission you were on. Many of the levels are very long, so this can be a drag.

Graphically, I can take or leave Rogue Ops. While the lighting is nice and the camera is more manageable than the vast majority of third-person titles, it's not all peaches and cream. The CG is worse than a lot of PSone titles, and I just expect more from a game with this few enemies onscreen at a time.

People who love to pick their brains while they pick off enemies will get their kicks with Rogue Ops. However, going into it expecting Metal Gear or Splinter Cell is like trying to get a buzz off non-alcoholic beer. Like it for what it is, or you'll hate it for what it's not. – **JUSTIN**



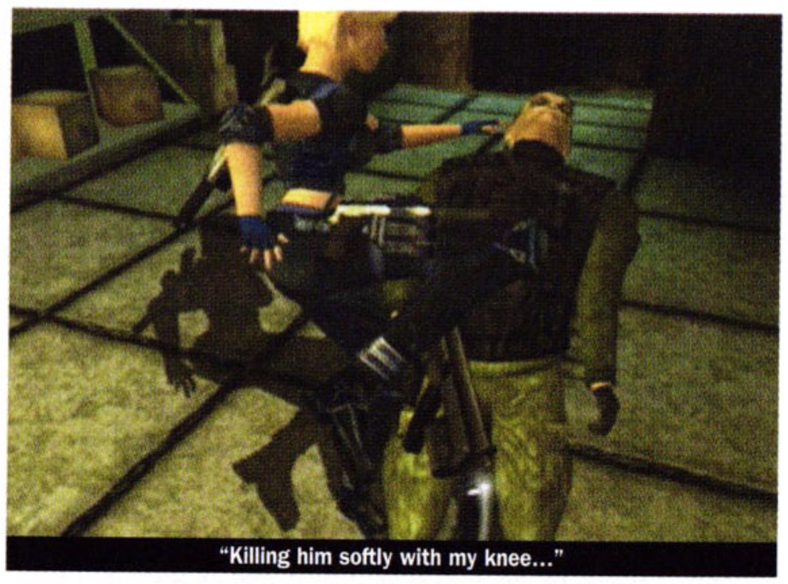
Helloooo, nurse!

Why do the bad guys have such cool toys?

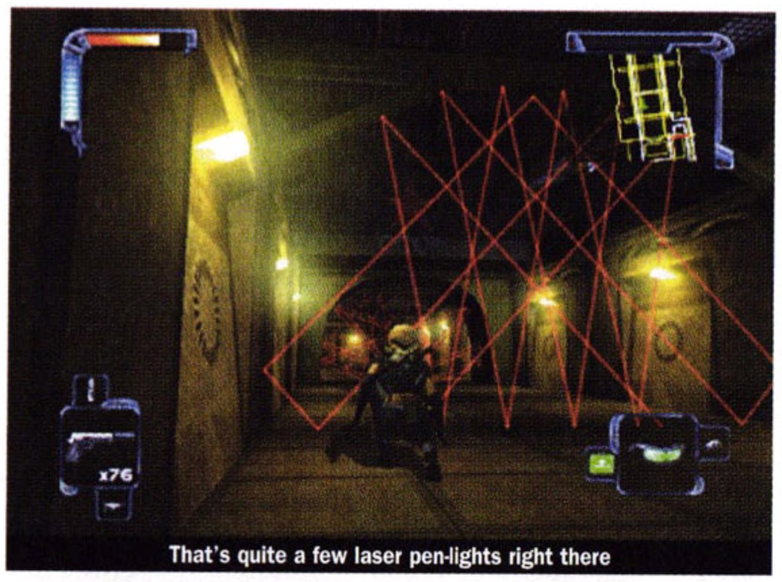
Use the scope to see what the door's code is

Tilters never win

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** KEMCO ■ **DEVELOPER** BITS STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28



"Killing him softly with my knee..."



That's quite a few laser pen-lights right there

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.5

- **Concept:** Meet Nikki Conners and her traveling stealth/action sideshow
- **Graphics:** The lighting is done well, but many other graphical aspects are below the standard
- **Sound:** Bad voiceovers. We're talking cable-access bad
- **Playability:** The context-sensitive action button makes everything a snap. Targeting works well, too
- **Entertainment:** Rogue Ops isn't the most advanced game by any means, but it has some good ideas and does an admirable job of implementing them
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

On its surface, Rogue Ops looks like a winner: Throw together a hot babe, Splinter Cell's gameplay, and a bunch of cool spy gadgets and you should have a perfect combination. However, when it comes to stealth-oriented gameplay, it's pretty much got to be perfect to be a good experience; and this game just doesn't have what it takes to compete with the Solid Snakes and Sam Fishers of the world. Rogue Ops succeeds in some unexpected ways, like a cool assortment of novel spy gadgets and stealth kills that utilize PaRappa-style timed directional presses. This game has a ton of potential and a nice look. However, it is brought back down to earth by the usual suspects: inconsistent enemy AI, oftentimes frustrating level designs, and a general lack of polish. It's worth a look, but proceed with caution.

MATT – 7.5

FULL THROTTLE ADRENALINE RUSH!

Like a blast of nitro, Group S Challenge pushes high performance street racing to the limit. State-of-the-art polygonal cars. Massive racing environments. Unbelievable speed! Choose from over 50 of the world's finest, turbo-charged street machines and get ready to dominate the circuit!

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E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

XBOX

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"Raw 2 is like a hardcore match: thrilling but sloppy."

XBOX

WWE RAW 2

VERY RAW INDEED

Let me put your mind at ease right off: This is nothing like the first Raw Xbox game. We're talking going back to the drawing board on nearly all accounts. Does this make it better than the first? It's true; it's true. Does it make Raw 2 the best wrestling game out there? Oh, hell no.

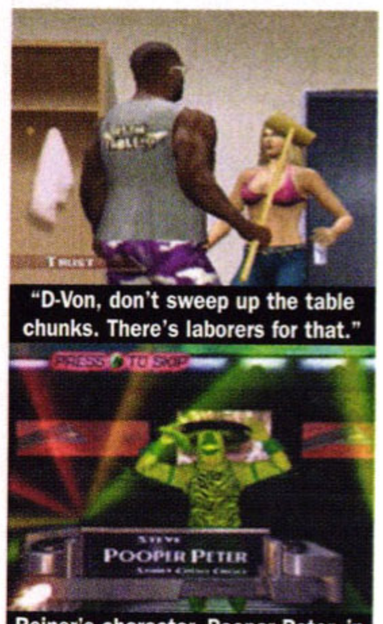
Raw's biggest strength is its revolutionary Season mode. Here, up to four human players can get in on all the drama and backstabbing of WWE programming. Before the start of an event, you can pick from a long list of actions for between matches. These include (but aren't limited to) Rest, where you regain spirit (energy); Set Trap, which consists of dropping a heavy object on a foe; Surprise Attack, where you jack someone in the locker room; and Steal, which is going into someone else's bags and taking items for the Create-a-Wrestler mode. Of course, you have your normal matches, too, and a lot of things happen behind the scenes with NPCs.

With one or more friends involved, you can get into some hilarious situations. You can help or hurt each other, or do a mixture of both. A hint: Make your friends turn away while you decide the day's scheming. The game does a good job of making matches according to your feuds. Also, if one of your buds is AWOL, you can choose to have his character be CPU-controlled, so the action doesn't have to stop. This mode is extremely fun, and is something all future WWE games should incorporate.

Raw's gameplay isn't so admirable. I find it shallower than SmackDown, which is saying something. Using the analog stick instead of the d-pad is futile because your wrestler is always running, and it's impossible to target your opponent. You can counter moves, but this mechanic is not very advanced. Bugs run rampant: Interfering characters attack the wrong person, you sometimes lose control of your wrestler, and tables don't break consistently. A flaw in the matches makes countouts very quick, so they happen way too often and too easily.

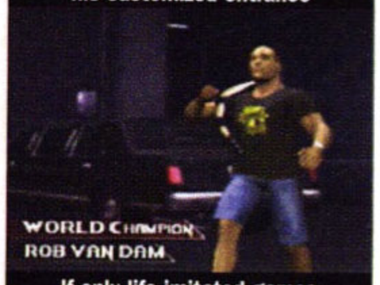
A few additions have been made to the typical character creation system. Songs burned on your hard drive can be used for your entrance music – meaning Justin "Violent" Lee got to come out to his trademark GWAR tune. Entrances as a whole are very customizable, from the lighting and pyro to what item you come out with and putting your own message on the TitanTron. When picking what to put on arms and legs, a "Symmetry" option lets you mirror on the opposite appendage. While it's cool that your character looks different in backstage sequences, you must go through the work of designing an alternate costume for him or her.

Raw's Season mode makes it worth a play – especially with friends – but its engine has nothing on WrestleMania. I'd inch last year's SmackDown ahead of this game, too. Raw 2 is like a hardcore match: thrilling but sloppy. – **JUSTIN**



"D-Von, don't sweep up the table chunks. There's laborers for that."

Reiner's character, Pooper Peter, in his customized entrance

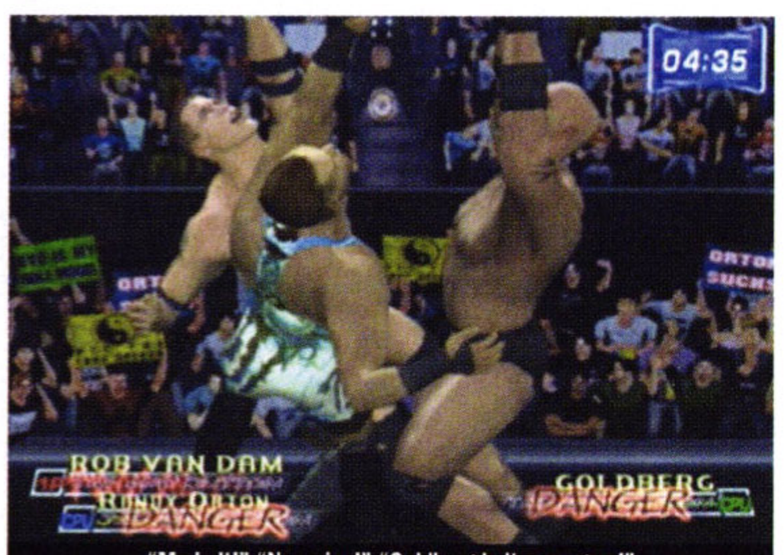


If only life imitated games

"Damnit, Nash, ya graying goof! I'm supposed to be resting!"

STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ ■ **DEVELOPER** ANCHOR ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

Hurricane prepares to chokeslam Big Show through a table



"My belt!" "No, mine!" "Goldberg belt now, grrrr!"

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.25

- **Concept:** Redo Xbox's WWE franchise from the ground up
- **Graphics:** The crowd is great, and the highlight on the character models is impressive. Slight collision issues, though
- **Sound:** Use your own entrance music! No voices to speak of, save for grunts
- **Playability:** Plays like a slightly dumbed-down version of SmackDown
- **Entertainment:** Season mode is a blast, especially in multiplayer. The bugs and loose gameplay hold it back
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Will there ever be another truly spectacular wrestling game? After seeing what THQ has done recently, I'm going to have to say no...not in a million years. While Raw does showcase a handful of interesting elements, the shallowness of play does little to keep you hooked. Sadly, Hulk Hogan has more moves than this game. The basic movements are also clunky. Being able to rip your own entrance music for your created wrestler is an excellent addition, and I love Season mode's show-to-show structuring and user-defined backstage activities. Stealing items from people's lockers, setting traps for them, and interfering in their matches really gives the game the WWE flair. Unfortunately, all of Raw's noteworthy material takes place outside of the ring. Once you get inside it, everything comes crashing down. It's more entertaining than the other WWE games, but as we all know, that's not saying much.

REINER – 7.5

"...always keeps a mesmerizing drumbeat of baddies at the tip of your sword."

XBOX

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS HEROES

4 THE d20 IN U

Before I dig too deep into this review, I should make it very clear to you that any game that has experience automatically becomes addicting to me. Year upon year of playing RPGs has taught me to revel in the repetitive killing of rats/snakes/you-name-it to gain levels. Don't ask me why I love it so, because I couldn't explain it, but it should give you some insight as to why I enjoy D&D Heroes.

That point made, Dungeons & Dragons Heroes offers the fantasy nerd in you a great outlet to waste away hours of time, even though the game may be a little generic. For example, you can't create your own D&D character; you must choose between the standard human warrior, dwarf cleric, halfling rogue, and elf sorcerer (and the only thing you can change on them at the beginning is their name). Yawn.

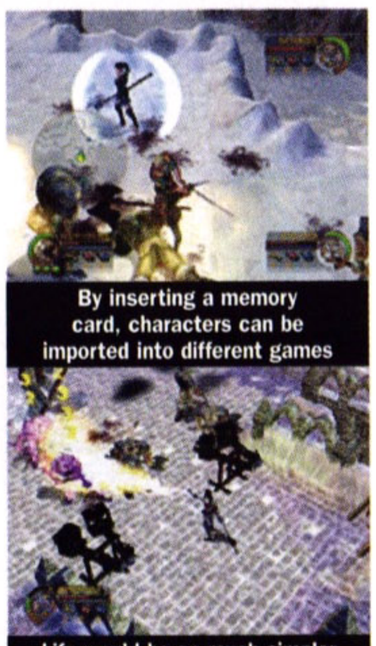
However, once you set out on the adventure things really start to heat up. Featuring a number of feats, plenty of weapons, and lots of fodder, the levels in D&D Heroes are actually quite entertaining. About the first five hours of the game are a tad easy, but they do teach you how to best deal with archers, fighters, and magic-users. At this point, you reach the portals to various realms and the game really starts to get going.

You soon find yourself knee-deep in Mind Flayers, who summon creatures to do their bidding while they throw crates and barrels at you, Darth Vader-style, or dark elf wizards who use invisibility and deadly magic to bring an end to your adventure.

While the action certainly does get more intense, it never reaches the level of impossible (at least not on normal difficulty), which is a good thing in my book. Heroes is constantly moving forward, and the game always keeps a mesmerizing drumbeat of baddies at the tip of your sword.

For all that Heroes does well, it does have a number of drawbacks. The biggest and most annoying is the fact that the game does not feature Xbox Live support. While I certainly enjoyed my time playing four-player co-op on the couch, the game is far longer than any three friends of mine can stay away from their wives/girlfriends/booze. Also, the graphics and overall tech of the game is only average at best.

So if you fancy yourself an experience geek, and are looking for a fun romp through the D&D universe, Heroes most certainly delivers. I know I enjoyed my time with the title, but for most, the lack of variety and options will disappoint. – **ANDY**



By inserting a memory card, characters can be imported into different games

Life would be so much simpler if you could shoot fire out of the palm of your hand

Character customization is incredibly deep

All of the armor and weapons are accompanied by cosmetic changes

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** ATARI HUNT VALLEY ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

"Crap! I knew we should have made a right instead of a left!"

Players can map their own moves to the face buttons on the Xbox controller

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

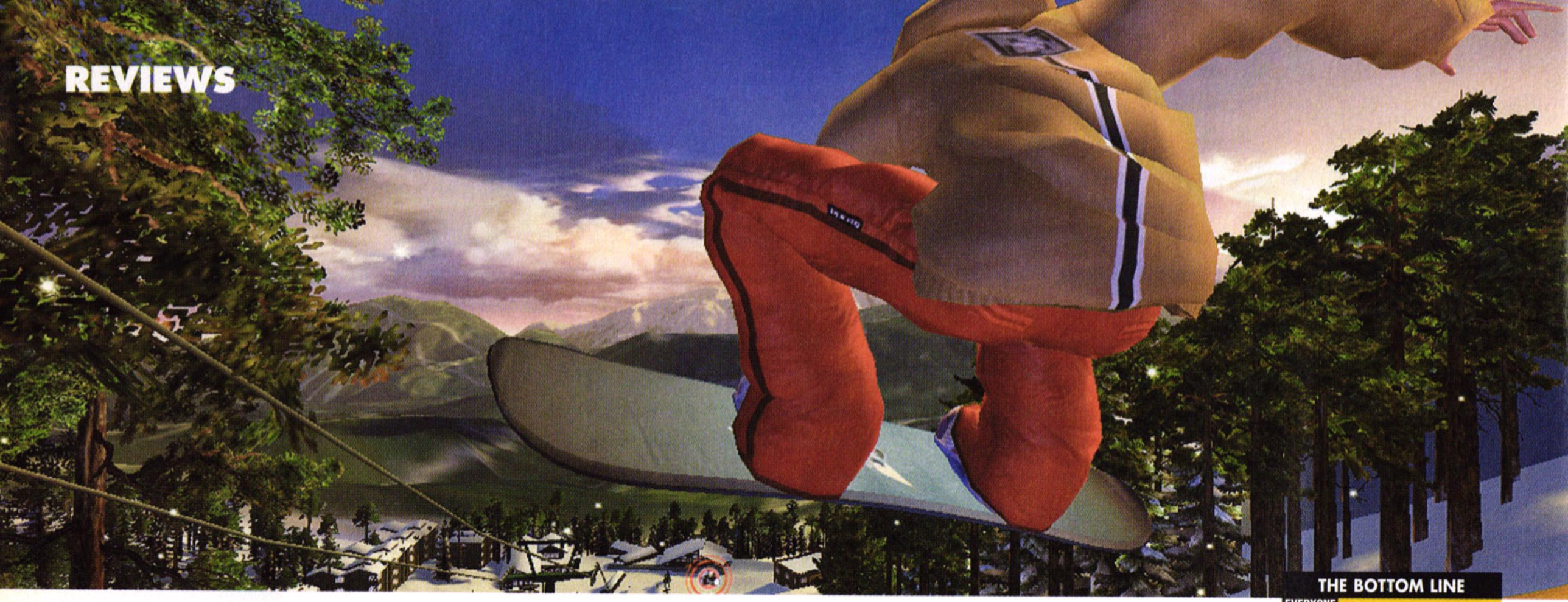
8

- **Concept:** Make Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance but call it something else
- **Graphics:** They are most certainly well done, but I still expect more out of the Xbox
- **Sound:** Great sound effects and music make up for the voiceover work
- **Playability:** Nothing you haven't seen before: kill, level, repeat
- **Entertainment:** Heroes offers a lot of value for experience and fantasy freaks
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

With a heavy infusion of the 3rd Edition rules, the game features extensive character customization and all of the feats and familiar monsters that you can shake a +2 stick at. The combat system is also quite impressive. Not only are the basic hack n' slash controls and functions smooth and responsive, you can map your own moves on the fly. Furthermore, you never have to fumble through menus to select potions, as the White button is always set to Heal and the Black to Mystical Will. The graphics are comparable to rival Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance, but the texturing isn't nearly as good, and the cosmetic changes for armor and weapons are not illustrated with the greatest of detail. Of course, it's fun to team up with a friend, but I found the four-player parties to be more chaotic than anything. It's not nearly as polished as Baldur's, but it is longer and just as worthy of playing.

REINER – 8



XBOX

AMPED 2

FREE TACOS FOR A WEEK!

"Playing Amped 2 is like eating a yellow snowball."

Playing Amped 2 is like eating a yellow snowball. Microsoft has gone out of its way to add more than enough new content to the mix, but has done little to alleviate the bad taste that the gameplay leaves in your mouth.

Once again, Amped's biggest strength is the variety that is packed into the challenges. Not only will you be asked to trick out to achieve massive scores; you'll have to pull off flashy moves at specific photographer locations, win competitions, and destroy scattered objects. If you get flustered by one event, you can always move on to something else and come back later.

I also got a chuckle or two out of the presents that sponsors hand out. Early on, I won a slice of pizza (just one), tickets to a punk rock show, and free tacos for a week. The bizarre nature of these rewards certainly kept me playing and wondering what could possibly come next.

The remainder of the game did little to hold my interest, though. Snowskating allows players to do flip tricks and one-footed grinds (just like you would on a skateboard), but there is really nothing to it. The game also boasts manual-like maneuvers, but they're terribly inconsistent in linking together combo moves. You're rewarded with scoring bonuses (called Steez) for slow spins, perfect rail balancing, and flawless tweak timing. For the second edition running, realism in physics and the sensation of speed elude this title. Your boarder floats through the air and you never really get a sense of gravity upon landing. Many of the stages are quite flat and don't do a good job of conveying movement downhill.

Grinding rails is a terribly sloppy affair. The transition animations from shredding to landing on a rail are often choppy, and it's difficult to perform vert tricks upon dismounting.

Seeing the game in 720p is a real treat; however, the boost in resolution does little to hide the fact that SSX's graphics simply smoke this title's. Being able to listen to your own tunes is fantastic as always, yet it's not necessary with this title. The game features a monster of a soundtrack with over 300 different tracks from mostly unknown indie artists. True enough, there's good reason why some of these bands aren't signed yet. Regardless of the quality of some of the songs, it's easily the most ambitious and diverse video game score yet.

The only strength that Amped has over the Xbox version of SSX 3 is the fact that it can be played online. Tearing it up with friends is fun, I'll give it that, but you're still doing it with disappointing controls.

It's definitely a bigger game, but it's in no shape or form better. Due to its inconsistencies and problematic gameplay, frustration abounds in Amped 2. Do me a favor, avoid the frostbite and stick with SSX. – **REINER**

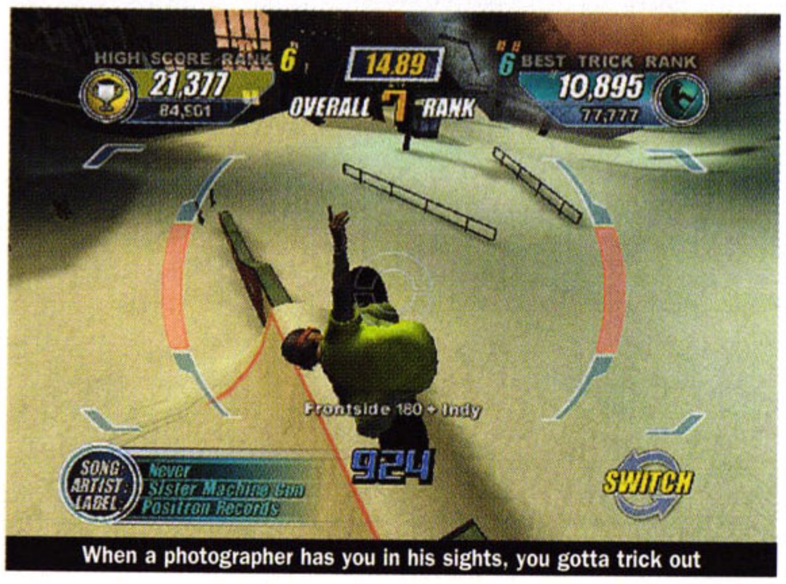
It's easy to catch mad air, but comprehending the game's physics is a different story altogether

Congratulations! You just won 500 samples of sunblock!

The butter move (which is a lot like a manual) can be used to string tricks together

Grab moves are performed on the right analog stick

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA SYSTEM LINK OR XBOX LIVE) ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
■ **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28



When a photographer has you in his sights, you gotta trick out

Snowskating brings the functionality of skateboarding to the slopes

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

6.75

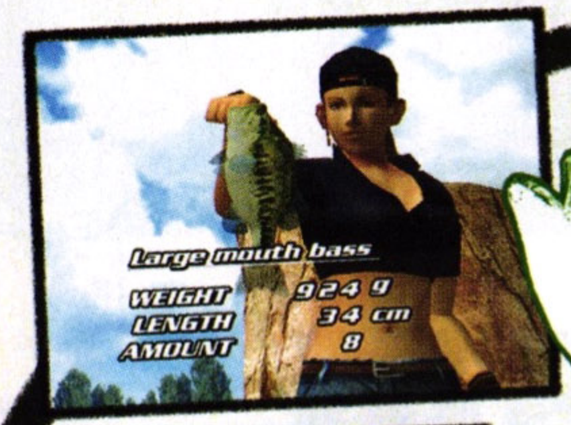
- **Concept:** Stick with reality-based gameplay and add snowskating and Xbox Live to the mix
- **Graphics:** Features 720p support, gorgeous snow effects, flowing garments, and massive environments
- **Sound:** Over 300 songs from indie artists, amusing in-game voiceovers, and the ability to rip your own music
- **Playability:** Combos are now possible, but the physics are still unpredictable and difficult to master
- **Entertainment:** There's plenty to do and see, but none of it holds the excitement level of the SSX series
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

With SSX 3 going off the rails this year, Amped 2 is here to offer an intriguing alternative. With a new engine in tow, this follows true to Microsoft's usual sports practice of being a year or so behind the competition in terms of feature set. The result is that Amped 2 plays a lot like the early Tony Hawks. That's actually not bad, now that the gameplay has caught up with the rest of its package. Fill out the objectives on the myriad courses and paths by busting out tricks till you are blue in the face. Amped 2's one problem area is that, even with a much-improved feel, the engine isn't 100 percent there yet. Coming off of grinds can be tricky; butters (manuals) are hard to engage; and although the dual analogs make tricks easy, I found myself torqued in some unrecoverable positions. SSX 3 is glitzier than Amped 2, but this franchise is building for the future and is no longer getting snow kicked in its face.

KATO – 7.75

KISS MY BASS!



PRO CAST

SPORTS FISHING GAME

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XBOX

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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XBOX

SWAT: GLOBAL STRIKE TEAM

100 MEELION DOLLARS!!

"...missions offer little challenge and quickly grow boring."

Because of the name, you may think that the Colin Farrell/Sam Jackson masterwork *SWAT* had received the video game treatment. However, SWAT: Global Strike Team is actually the continuation of the long-running Sierra series. In its first console iteration, SWAT has drawn inspiration from some of the hottest first-person shooters out there and reemerged as a squad-based FPS, complete with voice control.

On a strictly mechanical level, SWAT does everything right. The combat controls are basically lifted straight from Halo – although here they feel a bit simplified. The d-pad serves as a squad control menu, with each key changing function depending on the situation. For example, if you shoot an enemy, the word "restrain" will appear to the right of his body; pushing right on the d-pad will send one of your troops to cuff him. This system works so intuitively that it requires almost no thought at all.

Similarly effective is the voice command, which works in very nearly the same way. Using the Xbox Live communicator, you simply speak the word that appears on screen for the same result. It's a fun little gimmick and can be used in conjunction with the d-pad controls, although neither method is clearly superior to the other. Voice command is a little more fun, but shouting monosyllabic phrases at the TV tends to make one feel a bit silly and incur laughter from those around you.

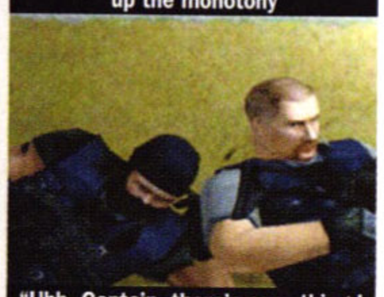
While the gameplay is fundamentally sound, SWAT has plenty of issues. Graphically, it's uglier than a backwoods beauty pageant. Environments are drab and washed out and character models are blocky and lack detail. Each mission has only a handful of different enemies, which results in combat déjà vu. Every gunfight feels exactly the same, and the missions all revolve around killing bad guys and rescuing hostages. There are a couple sniper missions and bomb-disposal boards, but even these essentially break down into more of the same. On the default difficulty setting, the missions offer little challenge and quickly grow boring. The plot doesn't help any either; while there are mission briefings between levels, they all say basically the same thing and can easily be skipped without consequence.

Even the squad control commands have little actual effect on gameplay. Sure, you can decide to have a team member pick a lock, blow it open, or just push it open. No matter which option you choose, your team is going to go through the door and shoot whatever moves on the other side. That is not to say that they don't follow your orders, simply that your orders make little difference. As a result, SWAT stands as one of the more fluffy and simplistic squad-based shooters out there. It's a decent enough game, but the genre has far better things to offer. – **JEREMY**

"May I have this dance?"

Use night vision to explore dark corners

The sniper boards do little to break up the monotony


"Uhh, Captain, there's something I want to tell you...I love you."

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** ARGONAUT ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 23

Attempting to take crooks alive just makes combat feel slower

The gauge indicates how close this thug is to giving up

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE M

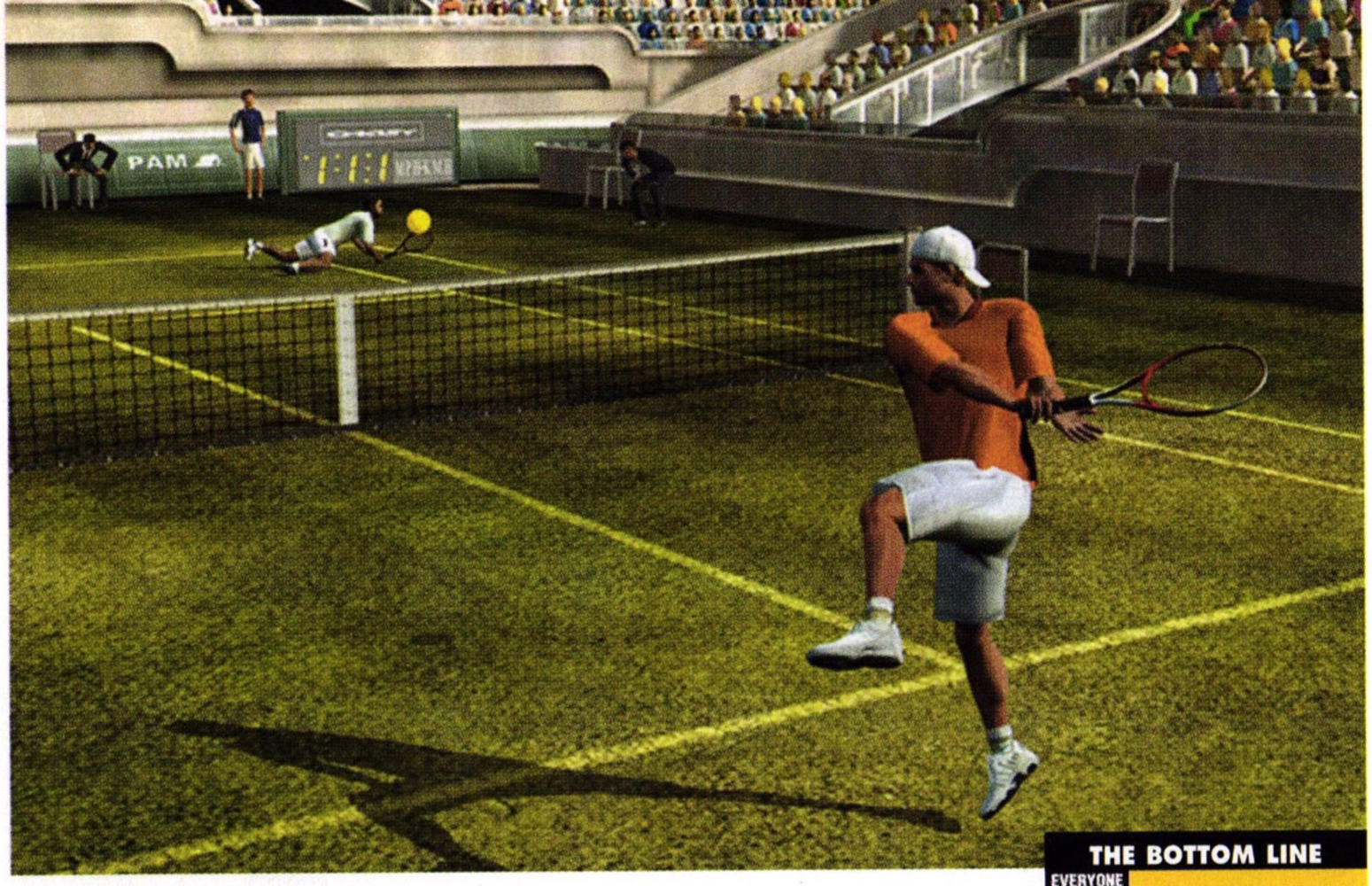
7.5

- **Concept:** Use voice recognition to lead a small squad of SWAT officers to victory over various terrorist groups
- **Graphics:** Compared to other Xbox shooters, this is a granny in a land of supermodels
- **Sound:** The realistic sound effects, especially the grenades, are easily one of the game's high points
- **Playability:** Both the voice command and d-pad squad menus work incredibly smoothly
- **Entertainment:** While the voice control is a lot of fun, the missions grow repetitive quickly
- **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

SECOND OPINION

You never have a burger and marvel at how good the ketchup on it was. Likewise, SWAT will be swallowed up by obscurity because its gameplay condiments can't make up for the fact that the meat of the matter doesn't leave you coming back for more. Despite the cuffing aspect and the ability to do things like crack a door and throw in a grenade, these aren't actions that make up for the repetitive and simplistic core gameplay. I will say this, though: I like that the levels can be long and some of the graphical details that splash Global Strike's otherwise vanilla look. With below-average AI and generous collision, SWAT is the kind of title I expect newbie FPS players to get a lot out of. Otherwise, I could see you renting it and playing it for an hour or two before that *Seinfeld* rerun comes on at 10:00. Don't miss it – and by that I mean the TV sitcom, not the game.

KATO – 7.5



XBOX

TOP SPIN

ADVANTAGE MICROSOFT

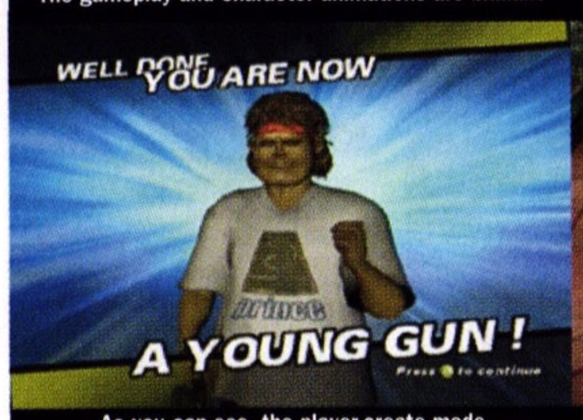
Top Spin seeks to innovate in the tennis genre, and does so on several fronts. In addition to the usual control scheme (using the four face buttons for top spin, slice, flat, and lob swings), Developer Power and Magic added unique mechanics for drop and "risk" shots (high-powered shots that can turn the tide of a volley, or veer far out of bounds). Using the left or right analog trigger will bring up a small, golf-style meter. If you hit it in the middle, your drop or risk shot has a good chance of making it. If not, it's basically a wasted opportunity.

The career mode is also deep. You start by creating a character with a DNA sample (which selects race, body type, and skills) and then tweak his or her appearance with a wide variety of slider bars. From there, you compete in tournaments; win endorsements from real-world companies like Prince, Yonex, and K-Swiss; and even shoot television commercials. Coupled with the dynamic and responsive gameplay, this career mode – and the ability to create a variety of custom tournaments (of up to 32 players) on Xbox Live – makes Top Spin the complete package for tennis fans.

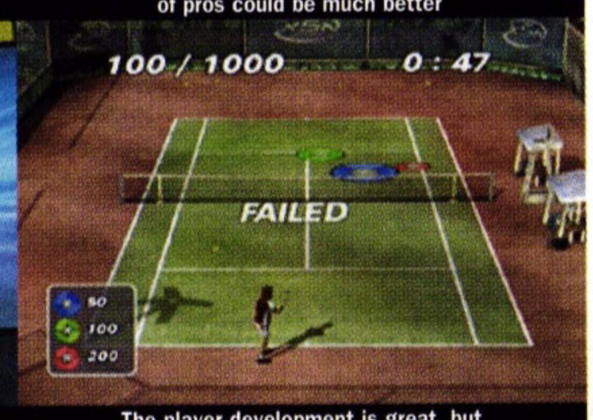
The only flaws are a distinct lack of star power (Agassi, Roddick, and the Williams sisters are MIA) and real Grand Slams and stadiums; and the fact that I thought the serving drills (which you need to improve you stats in that area) were way too difficult and frustrating. Still, these are small complaints, and don't change the excellence that is Top Spin. – **MATT**

The gameplay and character animations are brilliant

The great Sampras is here, but the roster of pros could be much better



As you can see, the player-create mode lets you unleash your twisted imagination



The player development is great, but the serving drills will drive you nuts

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
■ **DEVELOPER** POWER AND MAGIC/MICROSOFT ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

9

- **Concept:** Try to top Sega's Virtua Tennis series with a comprehensive tennis sim
- **Graphics:** Nice character models and some cool speed effects on the ball
- **Sound:** It's like making out on the couch at a kegger – lots of squeaking and some polite applause
- **Playability:** Handles the basics well, and does some new things, too
- **Entertainment:** If you enjoy video tennis, this is a mandatory purchase
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Top Spin, at its worst, is a serviceable game; and, at its best, is a smashing one. The gameplay adds some new things to this dark-horse genre (copping an attitude is nice), and the animations are worthy of being on Xbox. Graphical detail easily surpasses any tennis game before it, both in the venues and that hottie Anna Kournikova. From character creation to stat increasing to picking up sponsors, single-player thrills abound. For multiplayer fans, you can't beat Xbox Live support – which is far more advanced than just a few one-on-one contests. I think Microsoft has found its sports niche here. Instead of going after genres like football and golf, which get honed to perfection every year by other companies, it should tackle sports that have sporadic entries. I want to see bowling next. It's going to take a long time for another tennis game to volley with Top Spin.

JUSTIN – 8.75

XBOX

BATMAN: RISE OF SIN TZU

BATMAN BOREDOM

I mean, come on! I know that many developers over the years have struggled to create the perfect Batman game – one that would incorporate all the wicked combat, cool gadgets, acrobatic moves, and gripping stealth that the comic book icon deserves – but now it seems like Ubisoft isn't even trying. Maybe after seeing so many try and fail, the company just said, "Oh screw it, let's just sign the license and rush out a quick beat 'em up."

However, it's obvious that this isn't shovelware. Comic legend Jim Lee actually created a brand new villain exclusively for the game, Sin Tzu; and the graphics nicely emulate the look and feel of the popular Batman shows. It's too bad none of this care and effort went into the actual combat engine, which is a simplistic throwback to 8-bit brawlers like Double Dragon, minus the old-school charm. Seriously, other than buying new moves and a cool warped screen effect, this game just doesn't evolve past the old two-button shuffle. All you do is run down streets, pummel criminals, and then move on. I'm pretty damn sure the Xbox (and Ubisoft) is capable of more than this. – **MATT**

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN

5

- **Concept:** Batman's video game woes continue in a tepid beat 'em up
- **Graphics:** Does a fantastic job of capturing the animated series
- **Sound:** I have no recollection of any audio in this game, but I'm sure it was there
- **Playability:** If you like pressing the A and X buttons, you'll be in heaven here
- **Entertainment:** Batman games are like the Cincinnati Bengals – you'd think they'd get something right once in awhile
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

In my lifetime I hope for a dark, sophisticated, shocking, beautiful Batman game. Today, sadly, is not that day. The look of this title is certainly a shining moment in the franchise's sordid gaming history, but the gameplay is one-dimensional. Sin Tzu's fighting system and missions are predictable and, well, boring.

LISA – 5

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
■ **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

XBOX

GLADIATOR: SWORD OF VENGEANCE

A VIBRANT SHEEN, BUT DULL BLADE

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

5.75

The famous shadow work in Splinter Cell now has a graphical rival. This may sound completely crazy, but the fields of grass exhibited in Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance are a visual tour de force. Yes, it is just grass, but I guarantee that it'll take your breath away. The entire game, for that matter, is loaded with eye candy. Instead of creating large vistas, Acclaim focused its processing power on small arenas and the little details within. Unfortunately, while the dwarfish nature of the worlds enhanced the graphics, it proved to be detrimental to gameplay.

We all know that being confined to a small area and combating wave after wave of enemies grows tiresome rather quickly. Interestingly, Acclaim recognized this and tried to add variety to the mix. Rather than doing this through the makeup of the levels or types of battles, Gladiator is home to some of the most asinine door and switch elements to date. I'll even go as far to say that you may throw more levers in this game than you have in your entire life of gaming.

To add to the dullness, I only used two combos to march from the beginning to end. Other than grass, there really is nothing to this title. Focusing on detail over substance is definitely an interesting design, but without a solid gameplay package, it amounts to nothing. – **REINER**

- **Concept:** An ultra-gory hack n' slash that focuses on graphics over gameplay
- **Graphics:** Some of the most impressive visuals around. Grass has never looked better. The massive amount of blood is amusing as well
- **Sound:** The score complements the action nicely, but ambient effects are noticeably missing
- **Playability:** Lame two-button combat, and tons of switches to throw and keys to use
- **Entertainment:** The visuals will definitely draw you in, but after a while, not even the highest levels of realism can save this mindless game
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

I've give credit to Acclaim for going out of its way to try and deliver something new to the gladiator canon. On the visuals alone, this game has achieved great things. Meanwhile, I like some of the ideas behind the combat, but it is a couple ticks off. Although repetitive, there are enough intangibles here to recommend a rental.

KATO – 7

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM
■ **DEVELOPER** ACCLAIM STUDIOS MANCHESTER
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

XBOX

HUNTER: THE RECKONING REDEEMER

GAUNTLET FOR GOTHS

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8

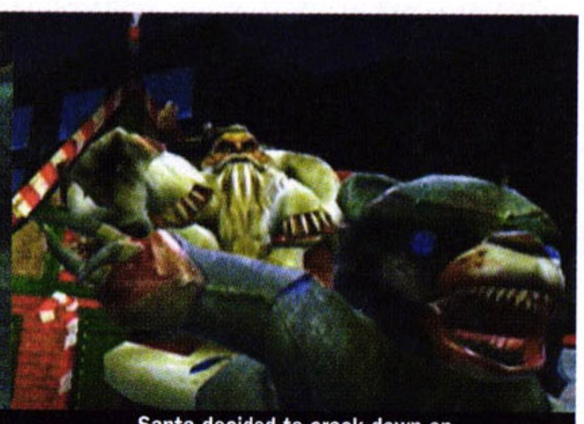
Like a low-budget gorefest horror movie, Hunter: the Reckoning Redeemer is a fun time for a very specific reason: It knows exactly what is expected of it and delivers just that. Like the other Hunter games before it, Redeemer is a simplistic isometric hank n' slash game that plays like a blood-soaked version of Gauntlet.

A title like this needs three basic things: decent combat; a mature, spooky mood; and multiplayer. Redeemer delivers on all three. The melee combat is simplistic, but ranged weapons and spells spice it up. The environments are beautifully gloomy and the real-time lighting techniques are fantastic. Five playable characters are initially offered, and several more can be unlocked for a dynamic multiplayer experience.

While multiplayer is the heart of the game, it also reveals some of the title's shortcomings. Due to the mostly static camera, players will often work against each other by moving in opposite directions, resulting in the classic "offscreen monster" conundrum. The various playable characters aren't equally balanced either, so it is critical that each player choose a character appropriate to their skill level. But the rudimentary experience system, unlockable content, and varied mission objectives make up for these shortcomings. Redeemer is by no means a revolutionary game, just one that knows what players want. – **JEREMY**

- **Concept:** Chop and shoot your way through hordes of gross, sloppy things with up to three friends
- **Graphics:** Although characters are small, the environments are some of the spookiest on Xbox
- **Sound:** The minimalist score does a lot to maintain the consistently creepy atmosphere
- **Playability:** While not incredibly deep, combat is simple to learn without being too boring
- **Entertainment:** If you love killing zombies, but find the Resident Evil games too slow, Redeemer is for you
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

Each hunter learns different spells



Santa decided to crack down on those who'd been naughty

Various monsters roam the streets of Ashcroft

The lighting effects are impressive

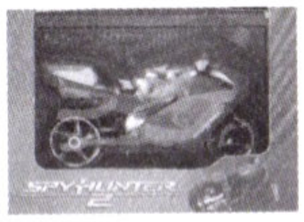
■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** INTERPLAY ■ **DEVELOPER** HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 23

SECOND OPINION

Many people liked the first Hunter more than I did, and after having played this admittedly improved sequel, I'm still unconvinced. I know one thing – I do like Reckoning better than the PS2's recent sister title Wayward. The Xbox allows the developers to do some cool tricks with lighting, which factors heavily into a few levels; and I think I like this cheesy horror plot better than Wayward's cheesy horror plot. The basics of hacking and slashing are done well enough, but I still don't like not being able to cut off a combo animation mid-stream in order to focus on a more imminent threat. Also, a few of the guns are more frustrating than useful, and some characters are just plain worthless. I have no doubt that some people will have some fun with this (especially in multiplayer), but it is by no means an essential gaming experience.

MATT – 7.5

GRAB SOMETHING TO CUT WITH



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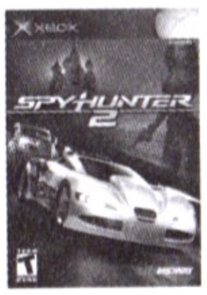

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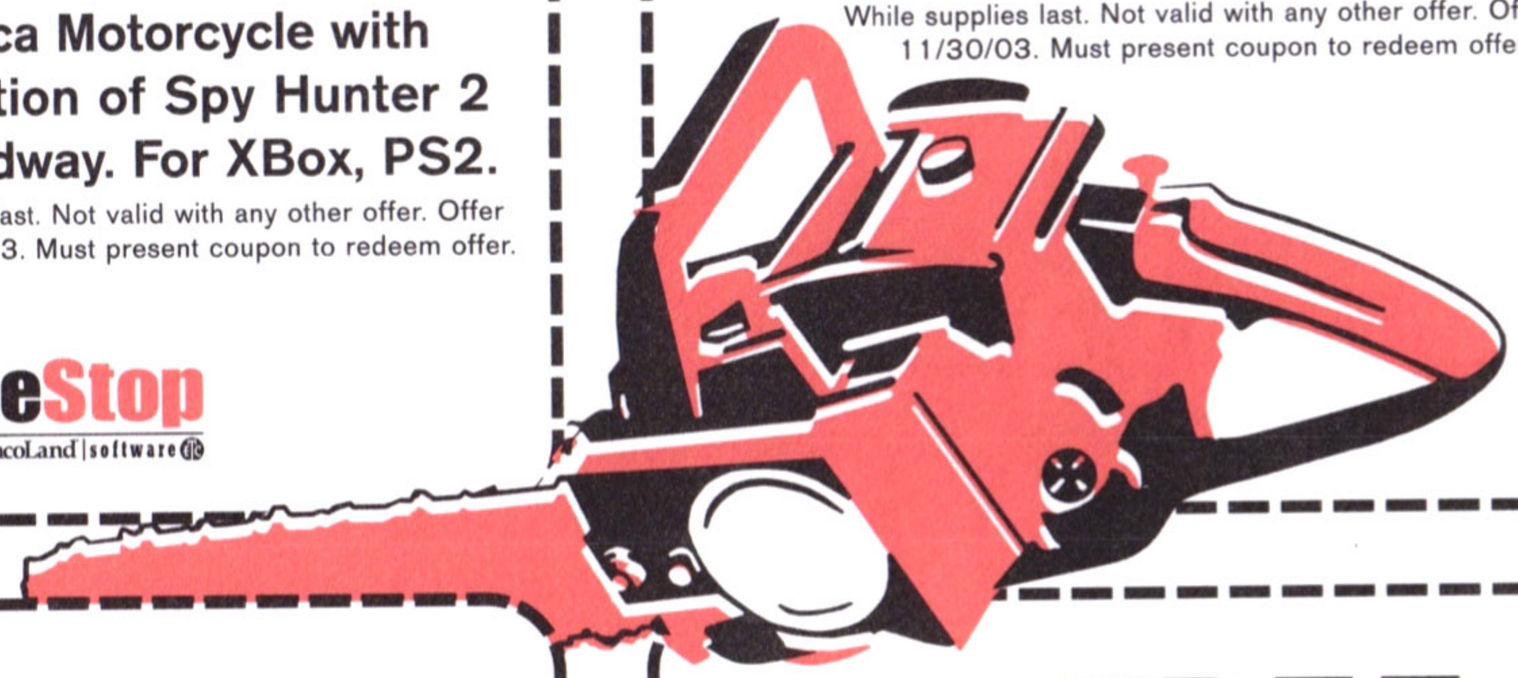

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...AND CLEANSE THE EARTH OF BAD HOLIDAY GIFTS.

GIVE GAMES

XBOX

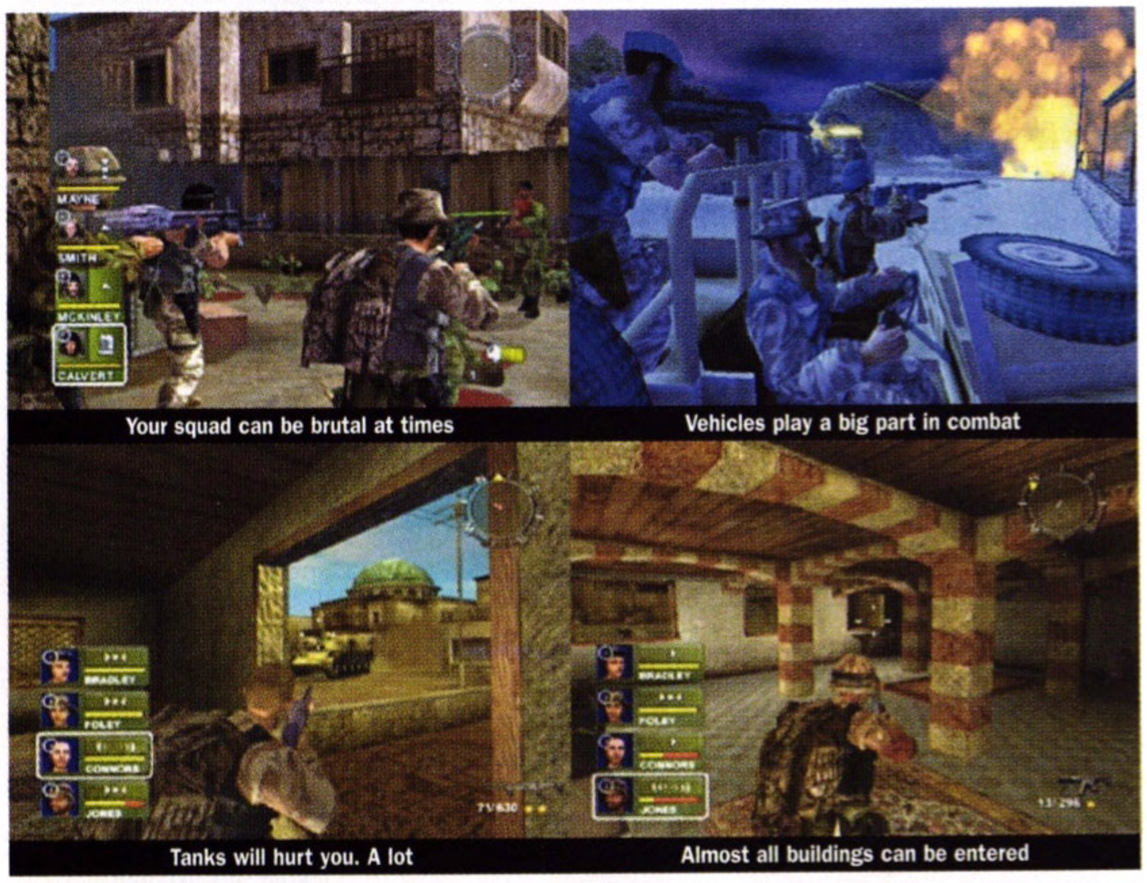
CONFLICT DESERT STORM II: BACK TO BAGHDAD

GO LOUD!

The original Conflict Desert Storm is something of an anomaly: it had quite a few serious problems, but it still sold very well. Back to Baghdad does a lot to correct many of these mistakes in hopes of generating bigger dollars, and while it is admittedly superior to the original, fails to ascend to the top of the squad-based shooter class.

Although the squad command system has improved from the original release, I still found myself wishing for the superior menus of SOCOM, or even SWAT: Global Strike Team (see review pg. 166). I often found myself issuing the wrong orders to my troops. Usually, it was easily corrected, but led to death by tank fire at least once. The troops themselves straddle the fine line between indispensable and utterly useless. On some occasions they'll clear an area for you; at others, they'll stand around to get shot.

Outside of these flaws, I find this title to be fairly solid. The graphics, while certainly not amazing, are good and capture the gritty feeling of the Gulf War quite well. The sound is also well done, and the level design is nicely twisty without seeming totally unrealistic. Conflict Desert Storm II may not be a perfect game, but with a whole new war in Iraq to draw inspiration from, there are plenty of reasons to do another sequel. – **JEREMY**



Your squad can be brutal at times

Vehicles play a big part in combat

Tanks will hurt you. A lot

Almost all buildings can be entered

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** GOTHAM GAMES ■ **DEVELOPER** PIVOTAL GAMES ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.75

- **Concept:** Lead a four-man squad into the desert to dethrone the Wacky Iraqi
- **Graphics:** The decimated environments certainly aren't pretty, but war never is. Overall, visuals are solid without truly impressing
- **Sound:** Combat effects are pretty average, although the voice acting is a bit stiff
- **Playability:** The squad commands aren't perfect, but manageable
- **Entertainment:** This might be the perfect game for History Channel buffs who don't like leaving the couch
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

It's obvious that the developers started this game intent on fixing the numerous problems of the first. For the most part, they've succeeded. The graphics are improved, and the framerate is thankfully now much more stable. They've definitely tried to make the sometimes-unruly control scheme more manageable, and – while not as cool as SOCOM's headset control – it does work better than before. As with any game of this sort, multiplayer is preferred, as even with improved AI your comrades do sometimes feel like dead weight. However, this is some pretty gripping action. Whether you're sniping from a safe position, or desperately trying to call in an air strike with your laser sight, you'll always have that pulse-pounding, frantic feeling that war games should deliver. With no online functionality, and somewhat pedestrian missions; it's no classic, but I definitely recommend CDS II.

MATT – 8

XBOX

METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM

A CALL TO ARMS

You might be tempted to dismiss Metal Arms as yet another generic platformer or simple kiddie fare. That, my friends, would be a mistake. Metal Arms is actually an incredibly engaging action game with a good dose of humor and scads of originality. You play as Glitch, a robot miner who turns the tide in a robot civil war against the evil General Corrosive. This might sound like a fairly banal plot, but the genuinely funny cutscenes lend the story tons of heart.

Gameplay is similarly charming. While basically a third-person shooter, the various missions offer tons of variety, including squad-based sequences, vehicular levels, and even taking control of enemy robots. Unlike many games which attempt various gameplay styles, each is handled here with the same expertise.

Only a few things keep Metal Arms short of reaching perfection. Jumping is a tad tricky and the difficulty level is a bit uneven. It's often unclear where to go, which could have been resolved by having mission objectives appear onscreen instead of the pause menu. However, these issues are easily overlooked considering how much this game has to offer. Metal Arms has all the makings of a new hit franchise. – **JEREMY**

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.5

- **Concept:** As the robot miner Glitch, you lead your fellow robots to victory in a robot civil war
- **Graphics:** The environments are solid but unexceptional. The character models, however, are fantastic
- **Sound:** This is one of the few games with "hilarious" dialogue that's actually funny
- **Playability:** Other than some wonky jumping, Glitch controls perfectly
- **Entertainment:** Thanks to the variety of missions and humorous story, this title is hard to put down
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

What would appear to be the sequel to the ill-fated PSone title Tiny Tank is actually an inventive and wildly entertaining shooter. Tapping into the Xbox's graphical capabilities, Metal Arms delivers gameplay that is ripe with variety and edge-of-your seat excitement. In many ways, it's a lighthearted Halo. The controls are one and the same, the enemy AI is just as good, and the split-screen multiplayer is a hell of a lot of fun. Don't pass this one up!

REINER – 8.5

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** SWINGIN' APE STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

XBOX

ESPN NBA BASKETBALL

ANOTHER SLAM DUNK

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

9.5

With the development philosophy of "more is better," ESPN NBA Basketball has a little something for everyone and is essentially two games for the price of one.

Along with the dynamic 5-on-5 gameplay that you've come to expect; it still has the deepest Franchise mode around, online play with voice chat, and now features a remarkable new world tour-like mode called 24/7. It's easily the best deal in all of video game sports.

All around, ESPN still has the best play in the paint. Rebounding rocks, the new give-and-go move is brilliantly conceived, and you really get a good feel for posting up and blocking shots.

As polished as the main game is, I actually found myself hopelessly addicted to 24/7. For each street ball match that you win (many feature different goals or parameters), you unlock new gear for your player. You can also train in different events to raise your player's attribute points.

For reasons I'll never fully comprehend, Visual Concepts decided to alter the camera views so that players could see the full three point arc. As panoramic as the play field may be, the view is so far back that your players look like ants.

Minor gripe asides, Visual Concepts has elevated its game to an untouchable level. Live really has nothing on it – **REINER**

- **Concept:** Add everything that a player could ever want, and change things that didn't need changing
- **Graphics:** The camera views are awful and you can no longer tweak each one to your liking. The animations and player models still rock, though
- **Sound:** The in-game and weekly wrap-up commentary is amazing. The crowd ambience is impressive as well
- **Playability:** Solid all around. The street-style games in 24/7 are a riot, and the gameplay is incredibly tight
- **Entertainment:** The best gameplay, the most impressive graphics, Xbox Live support – what more do you want?!
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

ESPN breaks new ground for video game basketball – not only in its deep and realistic gameplay (IsoMotion is hot), but the new 24/7 mode – which is almost as addicting as NBA Street. The Xbox features a slew of graphical enhancements that aren't in the PS2 version, but the free throw shooting is less user-friendly. Ladies and gentlemen, we have a new benchmark.

JUSTIN – 9.5

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21

B. RUSSELL RE-SIGNS WITH THE WIZARDS

XBOX

NBA LIVE 2004

MISSING THE BASICS

No longer a game of fast breaks and razzle-dazzle, this year's Live hones in on the realism of the sport both on and off the court. CPU defenders will do everything they can to keep you out of the paint and draw offensive charging calls. Flashy Freestyle maneuvers are still a part of the package, but they no longer bring about an uncontested drive to the hoop. You really have to work for your points by setting up offense and freeing up open shooters. The gameplay is very fluid (even more so than ESPN), and has a nice feel to it. I love the individual buttons for dunks and shots. The game also embodies visual authenticity. The animations and collision between players are illustrated beautifully.

While it does deliver the sensation of a true simulation, the game still comes up short in a number of ways. Players rarely go for offensive rebounds, passing is erratic, players miss too many easy shots in the paint, and steals and blocked shots are overabundant. It's a more physical and challenging play, but it still struggles with the fundamentals. – **REINER**

SECOND OPINION

Live is good. Live is better than last year. Live is no ESPN, though – not by a long shot. It's got a better soundtrack and the difficulty is at a nice level; but I know where I'll be spending most of my time this season, and it ain't here.

JUSTIN – 8.5

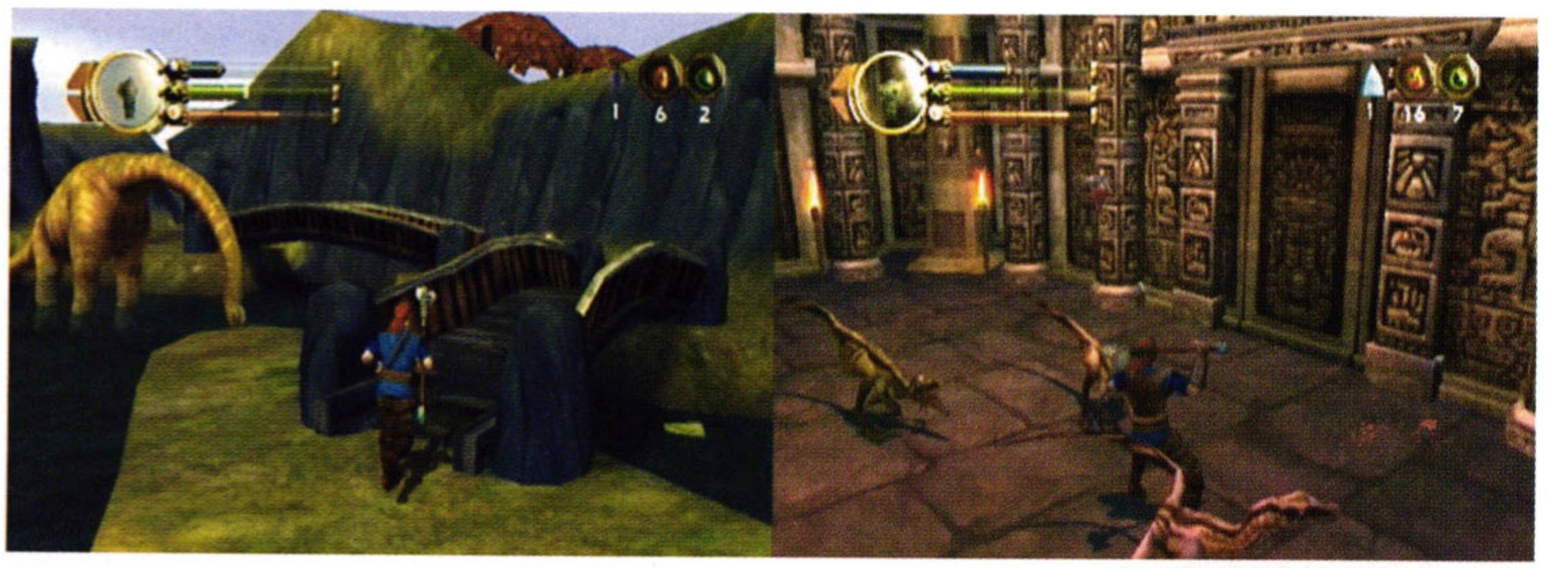
THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

8.25

- **Concept:** A complete turnaround from last year. Live now strives for realism
- **Graphics:** The collision and animated actions between players are implemented perfectly
- **Sound:** "The Teeth" Albert gives new meaning to dry commentary
- **Playability:** The CPU AI is impressive and the Freestyle moves rock, but it still has issues
- **Entertainment:** Lacks the online play of the PS2 version and the overall polish of ESPN NBA
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA VANCOUVER ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14



XBOX

DINOTOPIA: THE SUNSTONE ODYSSEY

DINO DISAPPOINTMENT

I am not what anyone would call a rabid scholar of James Gurney's Dinotopia universe, but I am reasonably certain that it doesn't contain the trite dialogue, mindless quests, bland gameplay, and boring textures of this Xbox game.

What is this title all about? One would think that it's an epic quest to preserve the peaceful dignity of Dinotopia, a land where dinosaurs and people coexist. Instead, it's a one-button mashing, long-winded running-fest through a land that shows less wonder and whimsy than an investment firm's quarterly financial meeting. People, I'm telling you that slide shows with pie charts are more engaging.

If you want to know about gameplay, it really boils down to one action: pressing that handy A button. The first three combos? A; A,A; and A,A,A. Besides the repetitive gameplay; the tasks and dialogue are so bad that they're unintentionally funny, the environments are forgettable at best, and the sound is painfully unbalanced. – **LISA**

SECOND OPINION

So this is why we have opposable thumbs (one for fetch-quests, the other for mindless combat)? Thank the maker! Actually, if there's a reason for living, it's to avoid this game.

KATO – 3

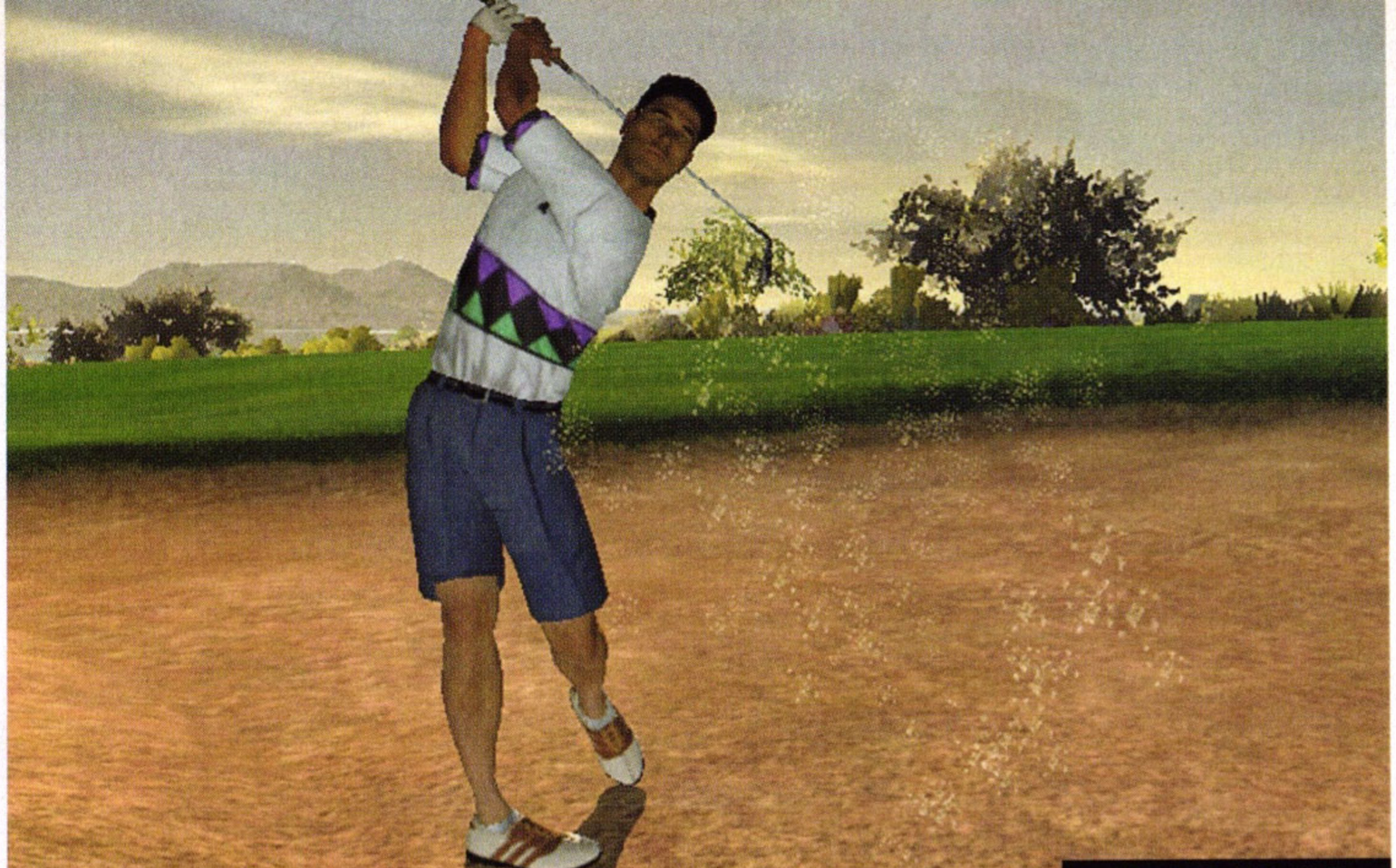
THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN

3.25

- **Concept:** Based in the dino/human wonderland of Dinotopia
- **Graphics:** Repetitive doesn't adequately describe the frequency of recurring objects and environments
- **Sound:** The soundtrack features the timeless sound of tubular bells
- **Playability:** Lots of pressing A – combos are pushing A repeatedly, opening boxes is pushing A...
- **Entertainment:** Think about shoving something under your toenail. It's like that
- **Replay Value:** Low

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** TDK MEDIACTIVE ■ **DEVELOPER** VICIOUS CYCLE ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 5



XBOX

LINKS 2004

GOPHERS, NOT GOLFERS

THE BOTTOM LINE

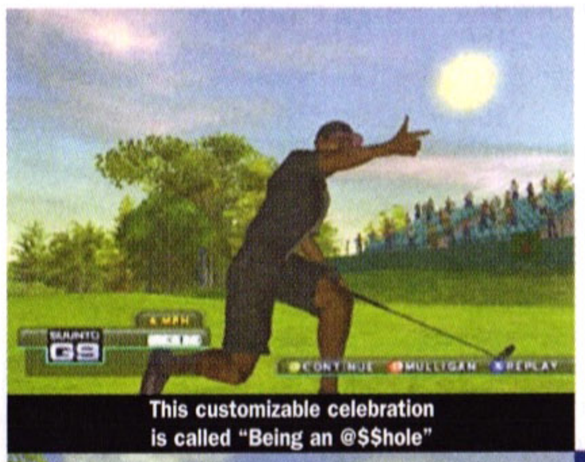
EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7

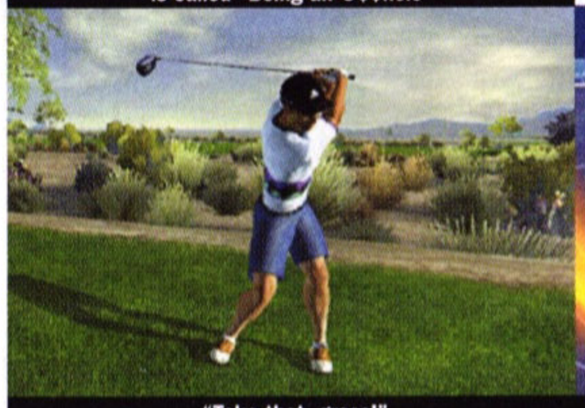
This game reminds me of being out on the country club and seeing that guy who's got everything. He's wearing the nice tour polo shirt. He's got the newest, nicest set of clubs. This dude looks like the real deal, and you're thinking, "Wow, this guy must be Arnold Palmer's illegitimate son." Then when he goes up to tee off, he shoots it right into the trees.

On the surface, there's a lot to like. Whether it's the upgradeable real-life equipment, the awesome-looking golfers, or the online play, you'd better get your shaking stick out if you want to keep track of everything. The problem is that it just doesn't play right. The physics system for the ball is out of whack. There is often no predicting what it will do, whether it's windy, the green is heavy, or whatever. I like that precision is needed for putting and chipping via the analog swing, but I never got a feel for what the results themselves would be. I often got top and backspin when I never asked for it.

No doubt about it, there's a lot of game here. The problem with Links, however, is that it's quantity over quality. What this equates to is the fact that, after playing this game, about the only thing you'll really remember is that golf courses are green. – **KATO**

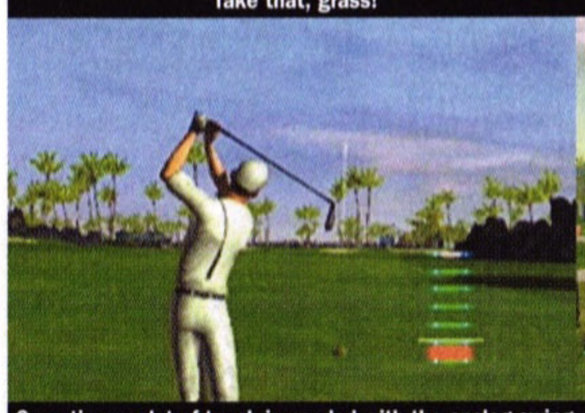


This customizable celebration is called "Being an @$$hole"

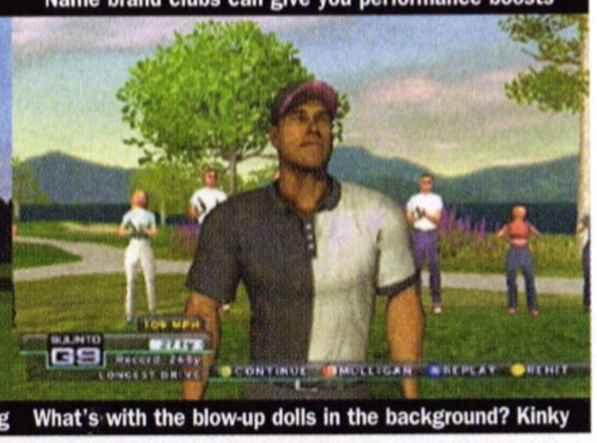


"Take that, grass!"

Name brand clubs can give you performance boosts



Sometimes a lot of touch is needed with the analog swing



What's with the blow-up dolls in the background? Kinky

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
■ **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT GAMES STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11

■ **Concept:** Bring the PC franchise to the Xbox for a duel with EA Sports' Tiger Woods

■ **Graphics:** The graphics are pretty damn sharp, with some slo-mo thrown in for good measure

■ **Sound:** The commentary is a bit stiff, despite the nicknames they try to spice it up with

■ **Playability:** I like the intermediate putting and chipping, but the physics are off

■ **Entertainment:** There's something missing from this title that makes it the golf game that non-fans dread

■ **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

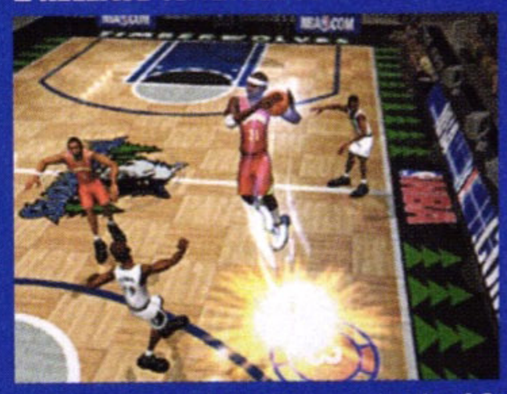
I was never a fan of the gameplay in the PC series, and I'm not terribly impressed with it in this console version, either. If anything, the game lacks difficulty. The analog swing system is way too easy to perfect. Reading putts is just as hassle-free of an exercise. I also found that the ball physics are a little off and the ball tends to roll too much on the greens and fairways. Microsoft did its part to keep the player occupied with tons of different skill modes and difficulty levels. The problem is, there really is no reward for completing challenges. You can purchase attribute points and earn medals, but that's about the extent of it. Competing in organized tournaments via Xbox Live is the most rewarding aspect of Links. It's a better game than Outlaw Golf, but I wouldn't even put it in the same league as Tiger Woods. If you're into the online scene, it's well worth it. For every other need, Tiger is the way to go.

REINER – 7

XBOX

NBA JAM

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM SPORTS
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30



From a gameplay perspective, NBA Jam doesn't hold a candle to NBA Street. It's like comparing a granny shot to a Michael Jordan dunk. Jam is certainly over the top and zany, but it doesn't have the grace, sophistication, or depth of Street. There are a few standout features, however. I love how the pre-'70s Legends games are shot through a grainy black and white filter. I also got some kicks out of the high-flying Hot Spot dunks (which can be performed from 3-point range). It's a decent play that holds true to the Jam arcade heritage, but that really doesn't mean much in this day and age. Street took arcade-styled hoops to the next level and Jam still needs to do a lot more to catch up. – **REINER**

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB **6.5**

XBOX

XGRA

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 19

It's not that XGRA is bad per se, it's that the game has absolutely no soul. None. Zip. Zero. I have never played a game so devoid of personality. The racers and the commentators deliver their lines like robots, and the tracks go from boost to boost in such a way that you feel more like you are connecting dots than racing at hyperspeed in the future. XGRA does have some moments, but they aren't frequent enough to make you want to buy this game. If you must play XGRA, please rent it first. You will thank me for it later. – **ANDY**

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB **5**

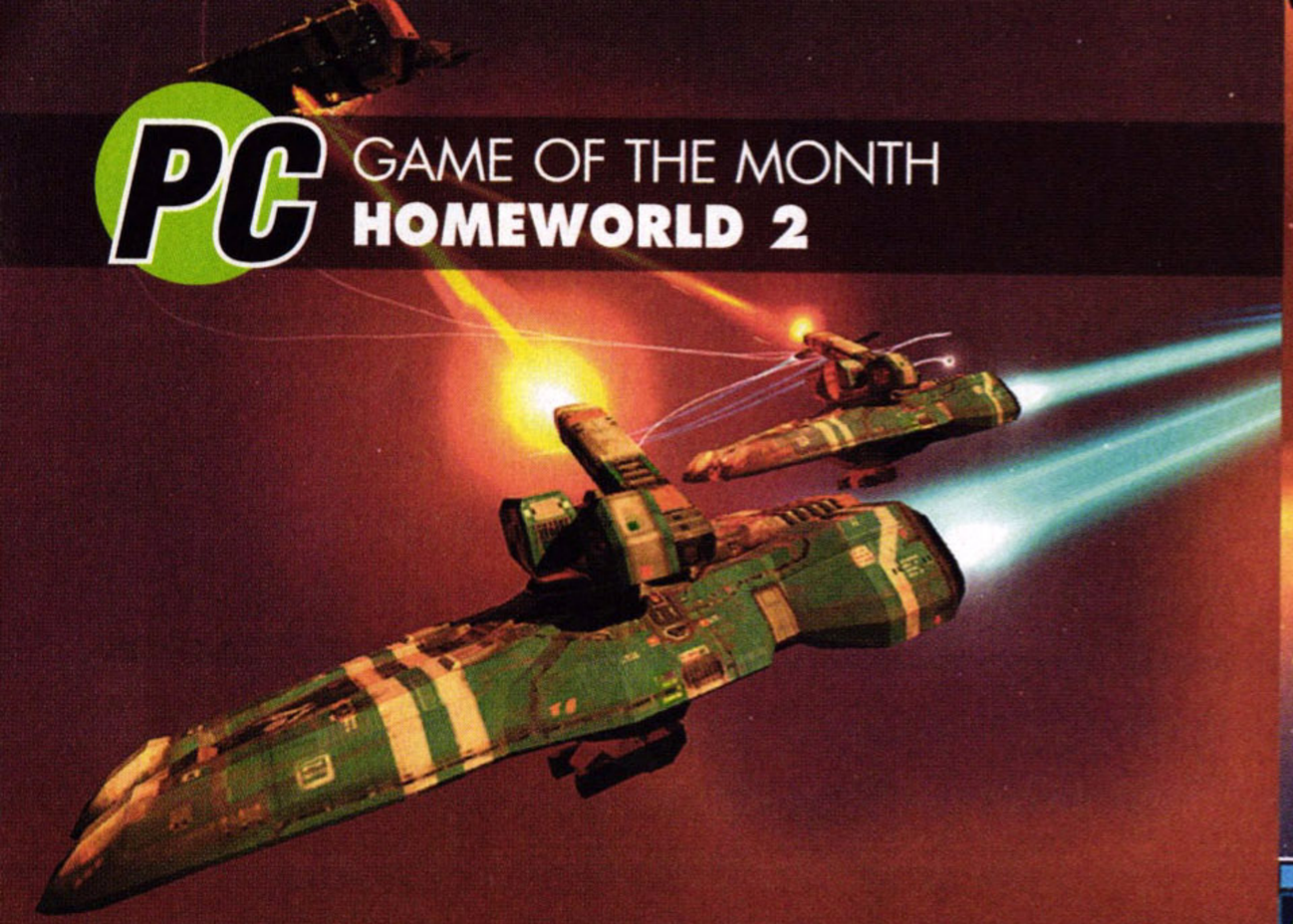
XBOX

CABELA'S DEER HUNT: 2004 SEASON

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26

For real deer hunters, Cabela's Deer Hunt is a dream come true. It features nine species of deer, dozens of guns, and all the accessories you'd expect, like deer urine. But for everyone who didn't just say, "Sweet! Deer urine!" this title is pure pain. Like sitting alone in the woods with a bottle of peepee tends to be, this game is damn boring. Listening to my hunter gasp and wheeze as he ran made me feel physically tired, and shooting illegal game only relieves the monotony for so long. Looking at trophy antlers in my log cabin is a nice extra, but it doesn't change the fact that acquiring them is tedious work. – **JEREMY**

TEEN T **4.75**



PC GAME OF THE MONTH
HOMEWORLD 2

"The backgrounds are absolutely amazing, and you may find yourself studying your ships to admire their incredible detail..."

PC

HOMEWORLD 2

A SPACE ODYSSEY

Deep space is a problematic area for the entertainment industry. For every *Star Wars*, there's a *Leprechaun in Space*. The universe is so nebulous and mysterious to most of us that games set in space tend to be equally hit and miss. Bringing real-time strategy to three-dimensional space is an intimidating chore, but Relic's Homeworld did just that with fantastic results. Building on the success of the first game, Homeworld 2 brings the fledgling 3D RTS genre one step closer to perfection.

Like most RTS games, the story isn't overly important – the focus is clearly the multiplayer experience. The thin plot continues where the first title left off in the ongoing struggle between the Hiigaran and Vaygr races, who are locked in battle over possession of a sacred item called the Second Core. The plot unfurls over the single-player campaign mode, which assigns you the task of defending the Hiigaran mothership from Vaygr raids.

As the campaign mode assigns the player the defensive position right off the bat, the steep learning curve is immediately apparent. Vaygr ships attack in wave after wave even in the first mission, and their competent AI ensures that no fight is a walk in the park. The included tutorials are absolutely essential to survival – with an extra dimension to worry about, Homeworld 2 requires more focus than an average RTS. Fortunately, the controls are simple and intuitive enough that, once learned, they feel like second nature. However, the difficulty level of Homeworld 2 is so high that a familiarity with the genre's conventions is absolutely essential.

Despite the incredible challenge, Homeworld 2 is tough to put down; the visuals alone will provide enough incentive to keep playing. Instead of an inky void, space is presented as a colorful place of gas clouds and nebulas. The backgrounds are absolutely amazing, and you may find yourself studying your ships to admire their incredible detail instead of focusing on combat. Nearly as impressive is the sound. As you zoom in on a ship, the sound of its exhaust grows louder in your ear. A masterfully orchestrated ambient soundtrack provides an appropriate mood, and dogfights sound wonderfully frantic.

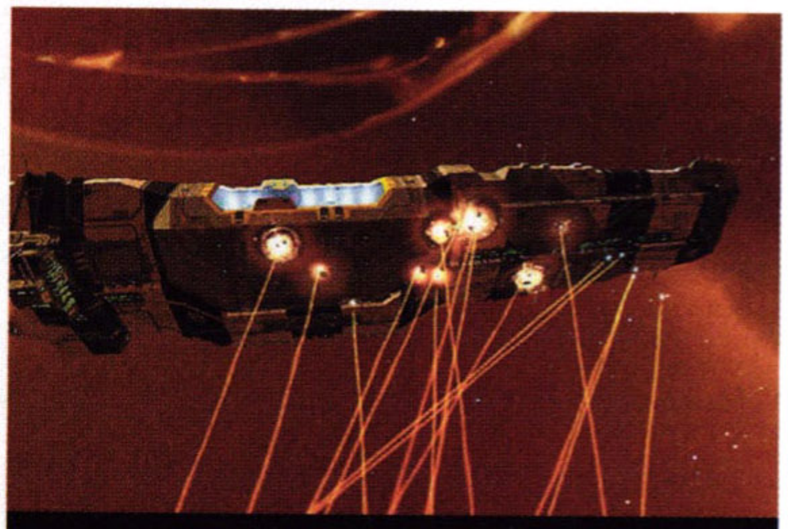
While Homeworld 2 is not a huge step beyond the original game, the new units, simplified control scheme and breathtaking visuals will certainly provide enough additional content to please fans of the series and draw in new players. Homeworld 2 is the best thing to happen to outer space since Luke found his lightsaber. – **JEREMY**

Individual areas of ships can be targeted and attacked

Capital ships can build and deploy smaller units

Combat is intense and looks beautiful

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) **■ PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL **■ DEVELOPER** RELIC ENTERTAINMENT **■ RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16



Larger ships sport multiple weapon systems

Each unit type has both strengths and weaknesses. This ship reacts poorly to getting shot

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

9.25

- **Concept:** Command squadrons of different ships in an intergalactic RTS struggle for domination of the galaxy
- **Graphics:** Cosmic anomalies look so realistic you'll feel like you're watching Laser Floyd at the Planetarium
- **Sound:** Weird, trippy space noises sound exactly the way I remembered them. I'm an astronaut, you know
- **Playability:** The interface handles the depth of commands absolutely smoothly
- **Entertainment:** You may scream your head off at the incredibly tough enemies, but you won't stop playing
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

In the four years that it took Relic to bring this sequel to the masses, very little has changed since the first installment. Rather than focusing on innovations and the next step for the series, Relic opted to spend its time fine-tuning gameplay. Hence, every mission is smartly structured and ripe with variety. Successfully manipulating a squadron in 3D space can be a little disorienting at first, but after vesting an hour into play, you'll have a better understanding of space navigation than NASA. The menus are easy to comprehend and the tutorial does a great job of bringing you up to speed. The biggest change that the series has made is in its appearance. The newfound graphical realism really enhances the time you spend with the product. It's not a revolutionary play, but I guess that's what I like about it the most. Relic stuck with what worked and simply tried to make the experience more rewarding. It's well worth the wait.

REINER – 9.25

PC

STAR WARS: JEDI ACADEMY

A NOOKIE FROM A WOOKIE

"...you just can't help but love the gameplay."

I was a huge fan of the original Jedi Knight. Sure, it started off as perhaps the most painful and boring first-person shooter ever made, but I always thought that was a great point of reference for when you started to kick ass after getting a lightsaber and Force powers. It just made the rest of the game feel so much better.

With this new installment, Jedi Academy, gone are the lack-luster Force-deprived opening levels. Unfortunately, in its place Raven decided to give the player an endless sea of uninspired and unconnected levels to wade through before you get to the true appeal of this game (which is when you choose between dual sabers, or a double-bladed one).

The single-player adventure basically goes like this. Choose a character between various races, then pick a lightsaber hilt and color (this part is good). Now the adventure starts, which is easily one of the worst plots I have ever seen in a Star Wars game (and that's saying a lot). Not only that, but your character's voice and those of every character in the game (minus the dark Jedi) are awful.

So after you finish this beginning scene, you are sent off to complete five utterly unrelated missions. Complete them, then you're off on a small set of levels that actually mean something. Then guess what? You go back to five meaningless missions. And after that? You guessed it: another set of story-driven levels, then yet another five random missions.

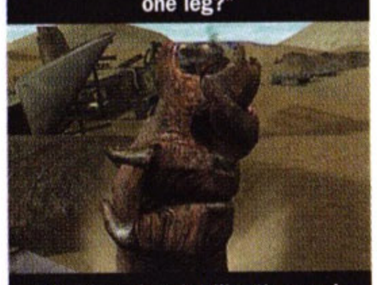
Now, not all the random missions are bad. In one you get to fight alongside Chewbacca; and in others you fight Boba Fett, a nuclear-powered rancor, and Timothy Zahn's noghri. But more often than not, the missions are pretty poor in design and execution – even the levels that let you ride on the tauntauns and swoops suck beyond belief.

For all my complaining, there is one thing about this game that does rule, and that is the combat. It is still amazingly fun to slice and dice as a Jedi. It just feels good on so many levels. From reflecting shots back at stormtroopers, to making super leaps combined with Force pulls, you just can't help but love the gameplay.

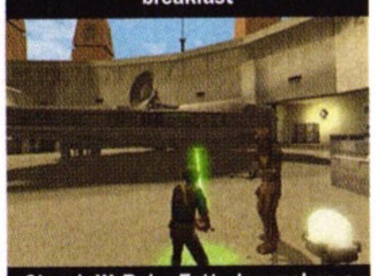
For Star Wars fans, this game must be played even for all its drawbacks. It has two endings that just must be seen and played for fans of the series. Just do like I do and complain about the game the entire time you blast through all 14 hours of the single-player experience, and then mock it with friends as you play multiplayer for hours on end. – **ANDY**

"Yeah, this picture is cool...

...but did I tell you about the time I got picked up by a wompa and I cut his arm off while hanging from one leg?"



This stage is a lot like the movie Tremors. If you make vibrations on the ground, an ugly slug will track you down and have you for breakfast



Chewie!!! Boba Fett also makes a cameo appearance

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** RAVEN
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

Riding tauntauns and swoops looks good on paper, but the execution sucks bantha poodoo

"The master has taught you well. You know how to strike a pose better than anyone."

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.5

- **Concept:** The last game was a success, so just try hard enough to get by
- **Graphics:** Other than more lightsabers flashes, I sure didn't notice a difference
- **Sound:** I would rather tell Darth Vader about losing the Millennium Falcon than listen to the main character's annoying voice again
- **Playability:** Using lightsabers and the Force are fun
- **Entertainment:** It takes a while to ramp up, and once it does, the single player experience is over
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

While I will never get sick of lopping off stormtrooper limbs with my double-sided lightsaber, I walked away from Jedi Academy disappointed and craving something far more compelling. The swordplay and array of Force powers are implemented beautifully; everything else feels disjointed and rushed. The missions are much shorter than before; some of the new objectives are simply ludicrous; you rarely have to use any of the weapons outside of the saber; and all of the new vehicles control atrociously. I like how the story branches toward the end (think light and dark side), but what's up with the spoken dialogue? Why does my Jedi, who looks like Plo Koon, sound like Jar Jar? Raven should have considered creating different dialogue tracks for the alien races. The multiplayer component is still a riot and a half, and the action is just as fascinating; but the series has definitely lost some of its luster.

REINER – 8.5

PC

THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL: A CLASSIC GREYHAWK ADVENTURE

CREATED BY NERDS FOR NERDS

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7

Written by Gary Gygax, The Temple of Elemental Evil is the one of Dungeons & Dragons most popular campaign settings of all time, according to the press release. Personally, that means just about nothing to me, but to D&D fans across the world, I presume it means that it's good.

There are even more reasons for D&D fans to rejoice. Temple is the first PC title to utilize the 3.5 rule set, and that includes most – but not quite all – of the feats it brings. There are even two separate quests (one each for good and evil alignments), and two difficulties (one that allows rerolls and the ability to load saves, and another that offers a single roll of the dice and permanent death).

For all the hoopla that the module and rule set bring, I found the game itself to be fairly dry. From the graphics to the gameplay, in the eye of this beholder, Temple of Elemental Evil screams mediocrity. – **ANDY**

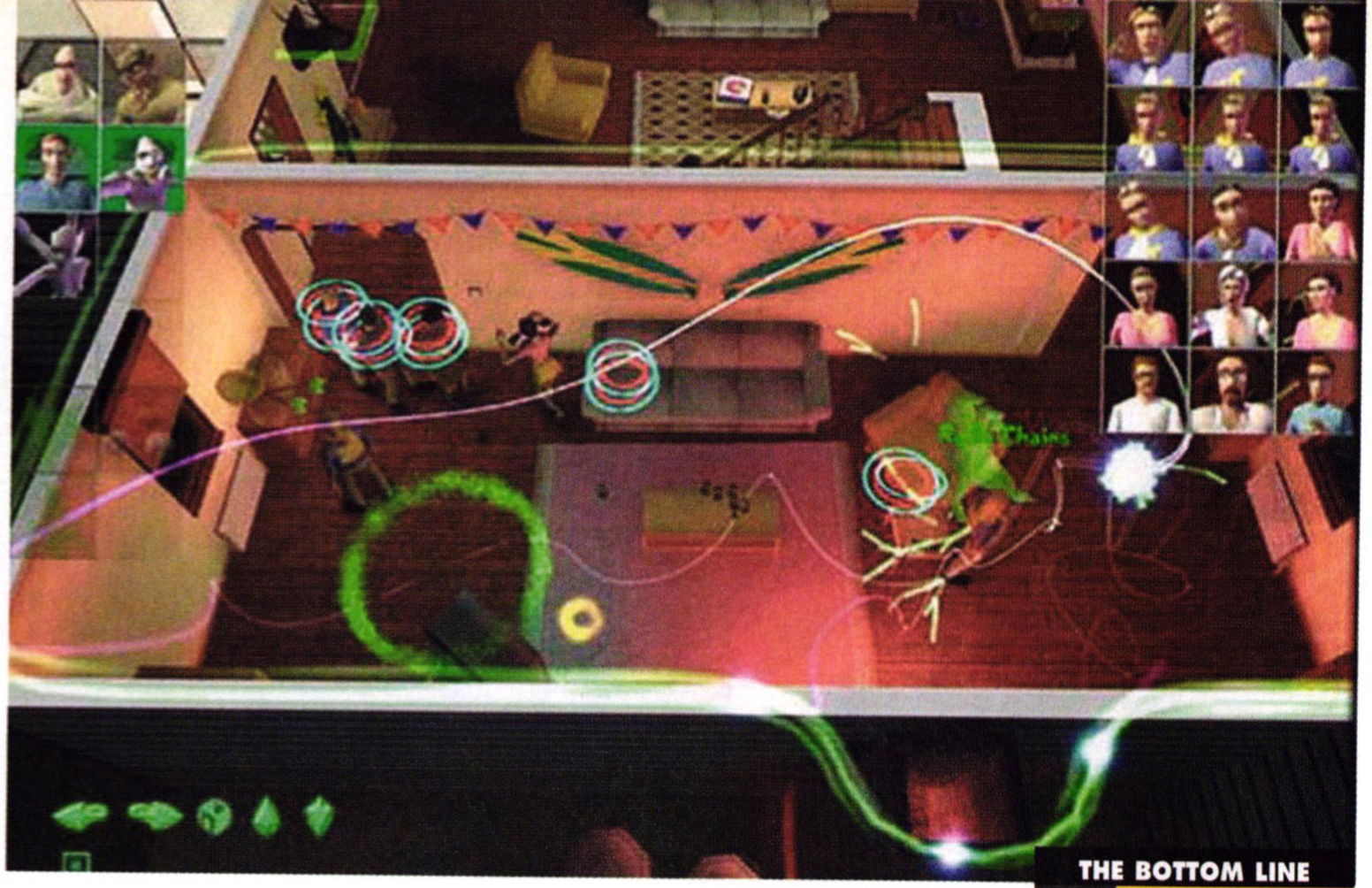
- **Concept:** Bring the greatest pen & paper adventure to life
- **Graphics:** Some nice detail, but nothing you haven't seen before
- **Sound:** It sounds like they got the voice actors at the local renaissance fair
- **Playability:** Simple and easy menus hide the complex 3.5 edition rule set
- **Entertainment:** For AD&D fanatics this is yet another way to avoid contact with the opposite sex
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

This Dungeons and Dragons wonderland will more than likely be the ultimate visual representation of that fabled pen and paper game, but as someone who isn't a scholar of D&D lore, this is sort of bland. The graphics are nice, but as with any game of this size, it's a really slow starter. Good for fans, annoying for laymen.

LISA – 7

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI
■ **DEVELOPER** TROIKA ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16



THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.25

PC

GHOST MASTER

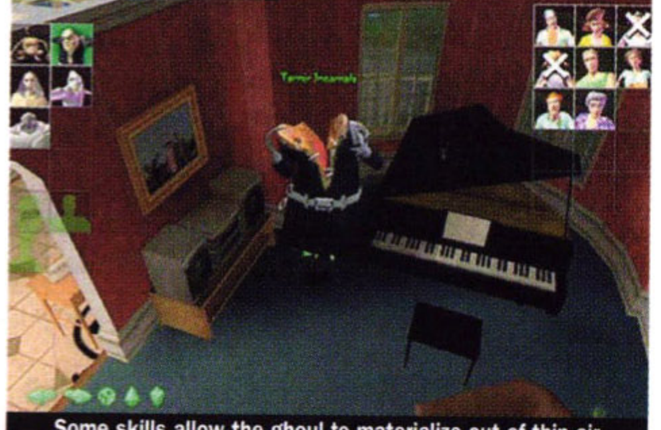
MY OWN PRIVATE MINION

I've always wanted to organize the spirit world and sic them on unsuspecting residents. Ghost Master lets me live through most of that dream, but comes across as a Sims expansion pack without as much user testing.

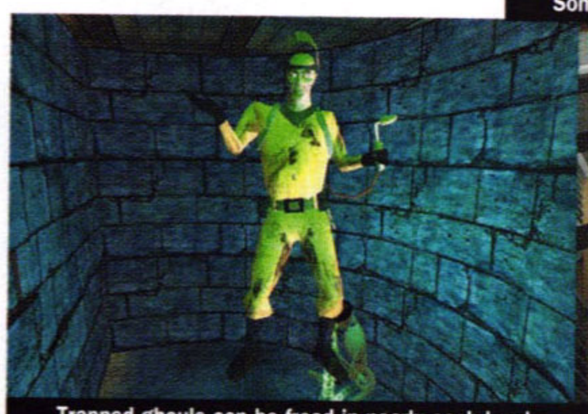
Before the start of each mission, you are asked to form a team from your stable of ghouls that you will then use to execute missions in locales swiped from classic horror flicks (*The Amityville Horror* and *Evil Dead* are two). Some are pretty clear-cut – get the towel-swathed sorority girls to flee in panic by unleashing everything you've got. Others are more puzzle-oriented like getting the living inhabitants to discover corpses. The trick for that one is that you need them to find the bodies, but you can't scare them so much that they leave.

Ghost Master certainly has a lot going for it, and I think that the sequel will be a truly great, fun game that everyone will need to have. This first edition, however doesn't use disappearing walls (and this is particularly problematic in the hospital, which has very small rooms); and the ghosts' effects, while having really great descriptions, all start to look the same in execution. The game is staggeringly addictive at the outset, but starts to get repetitive a few hours in. A really excellent start and worth the money, but it leaves me salivating for a sequel. – **LISA**

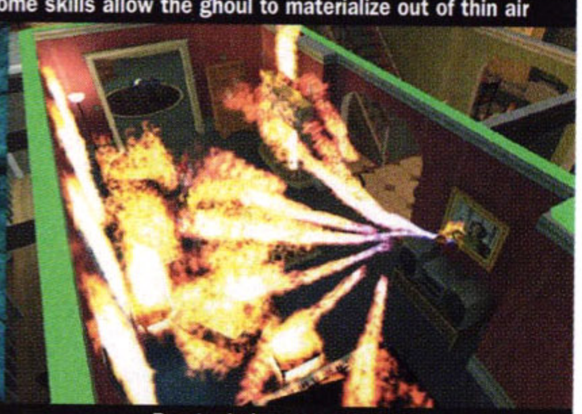
Haunting effects involve lots of crazy neon effects



Some skills allow the ghoul to materialize out of thin air



Trapped ghouls can be freed in nearly each level



Pyrotechnics are a highlight

- **Concept:** Scare the pants off (not literally, you sickos) of mostly innocent citizens in classic horror movie-themed locales
- **Graphics:** Everything is solid, if a little underwhelming
- **Sound:** Sims chatter from the humans and ghostly cackles from your minion
- **Playability:** Walls that go transparent would have been extremely handy, and the interface is generally a little hard to get used to
- **Entertainment:** Laugh out loud funny and frighteningly addictive
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

If scaring people was this game's only mission, there wouldn't be much to it. Instead, it has the harder task of creating some depth in its gameplay. This is where it falters. Luring humans to locations by using your ghosts' scare powers so they can complete tasks (but not making them so freaked they flee) is a delicate line that the game doesn't always walk well. At worst, you stop being impressed by being a ghost, and you start thinking of it as any other trial-and-error puzzler. Furthermore, you can't anticipate what kind of powers you are going to need for a stage, so sometimes you are ill-equipped. I appreciate Ghost Master's attempt to make the Sims-like AI of your human targets a variable for its puzzles, but I swear I heard one of them say, "I ain't afraid of no ghost."

KATO – 6.75

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** SICK PUPPIES STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26

PC

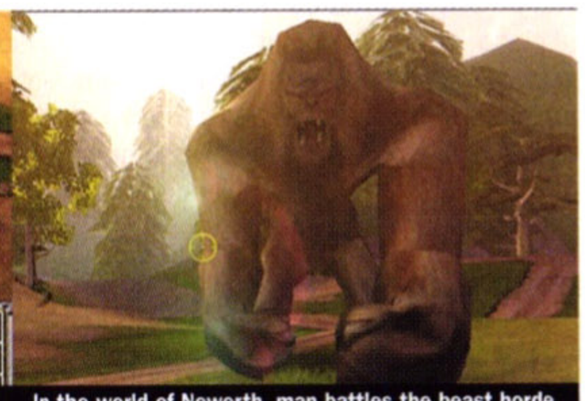
SAVAGE: THE BATTLE FOR NEWERTH

DELIGHTFULLY DIFFERENT

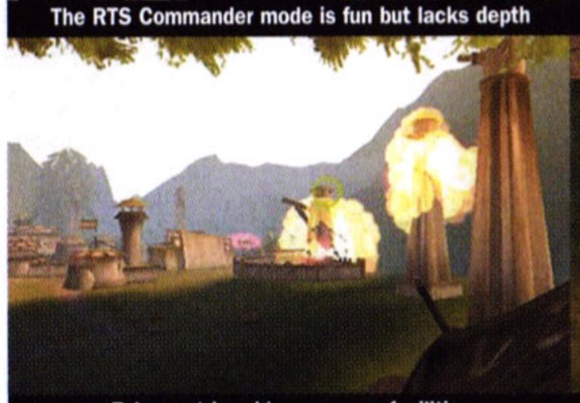
I really appreciate where S2 Games was trying to go with this title, although I think it still has room for improvement. Combining a real-time strategy game with a first-person shooter is a great idea, but I feel a bit like Savage is two separate, decent games rather than one great one. The RTS mode feels especially shallow and lacks the depth offered by the genre's better titles. This mode is also behind the times graphically, while the FPS portions are on par with the rest of the genre. Neither play style offers a single-player mode, which simply amazes me: Even if the focus is multiplayer, solo missions would help to learn the control scheme, if nothing else.

To Savage's credit, it is a sharp-looking game with a lot of potential. As an online multiplayer title, Savage is tons of fun and really brings something different to the online gaming table. I really, really dig the basic concept; the idea that you have a master strategist looking over your shoulder as you're frantically running and gunning is so cool it could really elevate the shooter genre to another level. Hopefully, Savage will do well enough to justify a sequel, because S2 Games were so close to getting it right this time around. There's no reason that part two should be anything short of amazing. – **JEREMY**

The RTS Commander mode is fun but lacks depth



In the world of Newerth, man battles the beast horde



Take part in raids on enemy facilities

The Commander will issue orders to each player

■ **STYLE** 2 TO 32-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE ONLY) ■ **PUBLISHER** S2 GAMES
■ **DEVELOPER** IGAMES ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 10

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

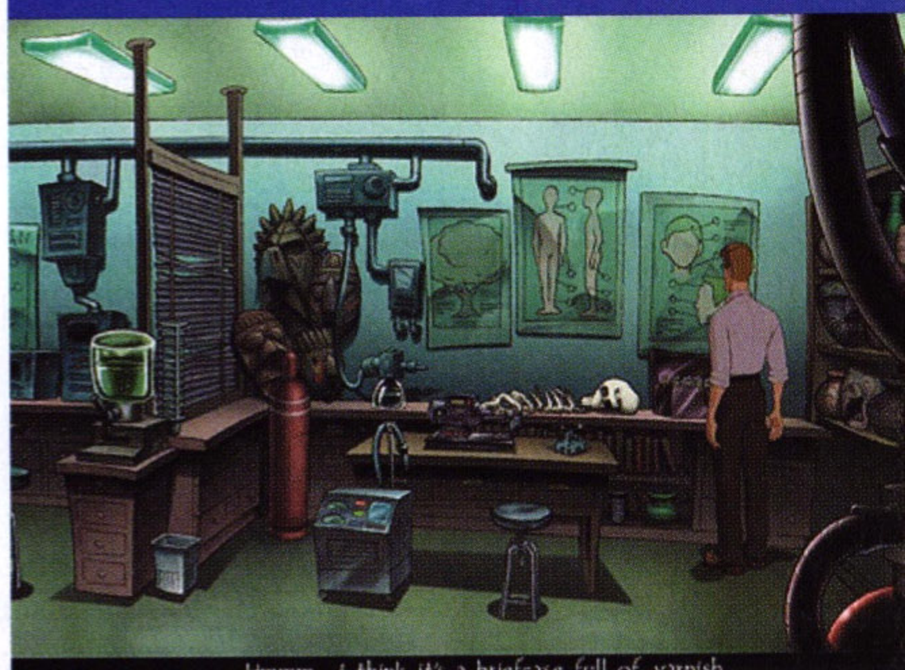
8.5

- **Concept:** One player per team assumes the role of the commander, and all other gamers play a unit in their RTS game
- **Graphics:** The FPS mode looks pretty solid, but the RTS sections look a bit underdeveloped
- **Sound:** I'm sure I heard music, but couldn't tell you what it sounded like
- **Playability:** The RTS and FPS control schemes are completely separate, but should feel very familiar to fans of those genres
- **Entertainment:** In a saturated FPS market, Savage actually manages to do something new
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

This is an RTS/FPS hybrid that kicks ASS. Mining resources and building sub-lairs is just as important as offing members of the opposing squad or hunting local wildlife. Additionally, these all give you experience. As complex as it may sound to meld the two genres, it really couldn't be simpler. If you're the commander, you have a little more responsibility – such as determining sites for structures and dishing out other orders. You'd better think things through, or your teammates may vote to impeach you. The number of maps and weapons blew me away. I loved the debate between picking a worse weapon that's free or taking money out of your team's funds to buy something that does a little more damage. In truth, this is the first RTS-type title I've ever played that I find myself craving later. I'm a neophyte to the genre in many ways, but at least I'm an entertained one – thanks to Savage.

JUSTIN – 8.75



Hmmm... I think it's a briefcase full of varnish.

PC

RUNAWAY: A ROAD ADVENTURE

ADULT CARTOONY

Point-and-click junkies will be very happy with this debut title from Pendulo Studios, as it is a game with great characters, decently designed puzzles, and nifty graphics.

Runaway looks and feels a lot like Dragon's Lair, but doesn't require the precise hand/eye coordination that made that classic so much fun to watch and such a pain to play. Instead of timed button presses, this game forces you to draw from information rarely used, but almost universally known. For instance, one puzzle requires a mini tape recorder. The only problem is that the batteries just died, but there is a liquid nitrogen tank nearby one can use to freeze the battery and squeeze out just enough charge to get the job done.

Where Runaway feels inconsistent (and the reason that this isn't a Second Coming for the genre) is in the pacing, some puzzle design, and certain side characters that just talk too damn much. Adventure fans have more patience than most, but stretches of this game feel like you're watching a documentary on the migratory habits of earthworms. Mostly solid and featuring an interesting art style, Runaway is worth a shot for most point and click enthusiasts. – **LISA**

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.25

- **Concept:** Make an adventure game that looks a little like Toon Town and forces players have the skills of MacGyver
- **Graphics:** Except for that painful lip-syncing, the look is stylish, clean, and fresh
- **Sound:** Voice work varies from really, really funny (on purpose) to annoyingly overacted
- **Playability:** An adventure game that actually takes advantage of the right mouse button! No, seriously, this is nice
- **Entertainment:** Drawn out at times, but through most of the journey, you won't be checking the time
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

Right off the bat, Runaway gets props for its cool visual style. It's graphically pretty and well-animated – except for when someone is talking. I like the one-button gameplay, too, but am less enamored with the puzzles. I always knew what I had to do, but sometimes couldn't make it work. But once I figured out these small frustrations, Runaway satisfied my puzzle needs. It's no Day of the Tentacle, but it'll do.

JEREMY – 7

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** TRI SYNERGY
■ **DEVELOPER** PENDULO STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 20

ESRB EVERYONE E — **9.5**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

THE GREAT ONE RETURNS

"We finally have a high quality port of the game that is probably my favorite ever: Super Mario Bros. 3."

Well, it's about time. We waited patiently as Nintendo overlooked what is widely considered the best of its 8-bit era games in favor of the slightly inferior (but still amazing) Super Mario Bros. 2, then suddenly skipped ahead to the SNES with revamped versions of Yoshi's Island and Super Mario World. Now, we finally have a high quality port of the game that is probably my favorite of all time: Super Mario Bros. 3.

Here's what best defines the genius of Super Mario Bros. 3: I hadn't actually played this game in over 10 years, but in world 1-4, I landed on a pipe and instinctively pressed down. Suddenly, I was sucked down and reappeared at the end of the level. Keep in mind that this was the first time I had tried it in four levels – somehow Shigeru Miyamoto's level design is still stuck into the DNA of my lizard brain. Of course, this won't be the only trick you'll remember, whether it's the warp on level 4 or the 99 1-up trick you perform with the raccoon suit. In this game (and the series as a whole), Miyamoto was starting to teach us how to play games that were real worlds, not just simple arcade twitch reflex tests. Every time you solve a puzzle or find a cool alternate route in a game, you're using the core principles that the Super Mario Bros. and Zelda franchises pioneered.

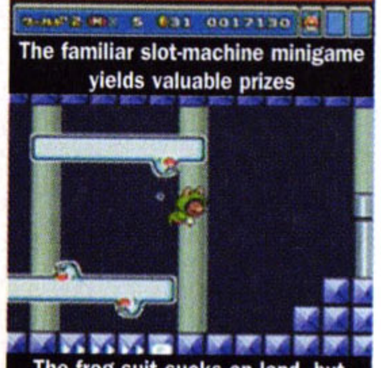
Super Mario Bros. 3 also sees Miyamoto expanding the horizons of the genre he all but single-handedly invented. Mario is now equipped with a variety of animal suits, which allow him to fly, swim, and do other various things. This is the beginning of characters in games that evolve over time: getting bigger, stronger, and even morphing into new forms altogether.

Just as Mario is constantly changing, the levels and worlds are constantly throwing new surprises at the player. At this point in his career, Miyamoto had basically mastered the 2D platformer, and can now boldly improvise on its basic elements as confidently as Miles Davis riffing on a jazz standard. You see this dizzying creativity in every level, as Miyamoto plays with his audience's expectations. Simple bricks suddenly grow feet and hop towards you; the sun (usually just a happy graphic detail) turns angry and drops out of the sky to chase you. In the surreal World 4, the familiar blocks and Goombas are suddenly giant-sized. You simply never know what to expect, and many current games with infinitely more complex graphics don't offer this sense of discovery.

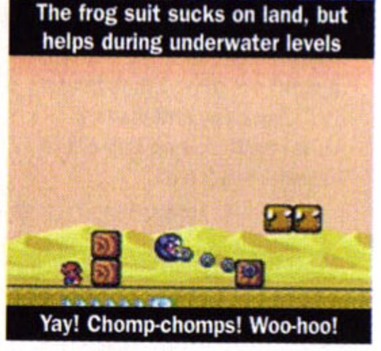
This is much more than just a fun game, although it certainly is that, too. This is a significant part of gaming history – one that you can now experience again on the bus, in a plane, or in your doctor's waiting room. Also, old fans can anticipate a host of new features that Nintendo plans to implement with special edition e-Reader cards, which should give this already worthy purchase some new legs. – **MATT**

- **Concept:** Finally, Nintendo gets around to re-releasing the greatest of its 8-bit Mario trilogy
- **Graphics:** Aside from some little improvements, it's the same sharp graphics you're used to
- **Sound:** Some of the catchiest tunes ever plunked out on a cheap Casio
- **Playability:** As perfect as Super Mario Bros., but infinitely deeper
- **Entertainment:** If you've never played this game, play it. If you have, play it again
- **Replay Value:** High

The familiar slot-machine minigame yields valuable prizes

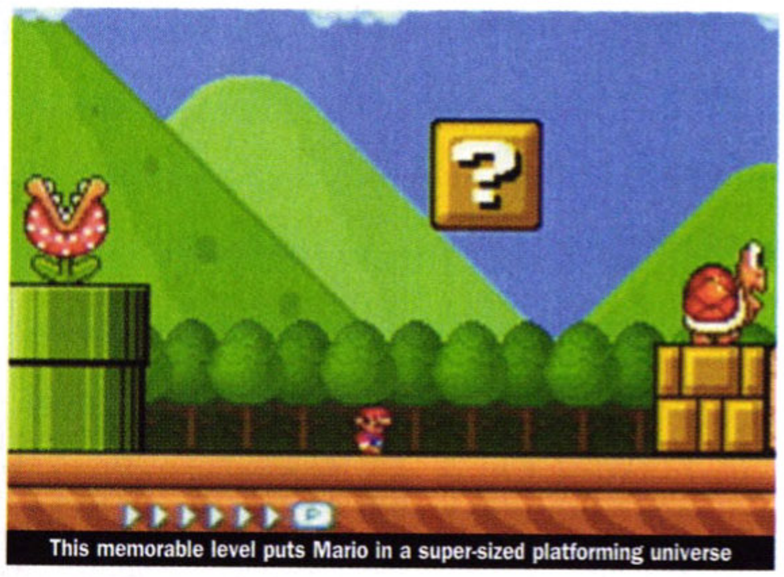


The frog suit sucks on land, but helps during underwater levels

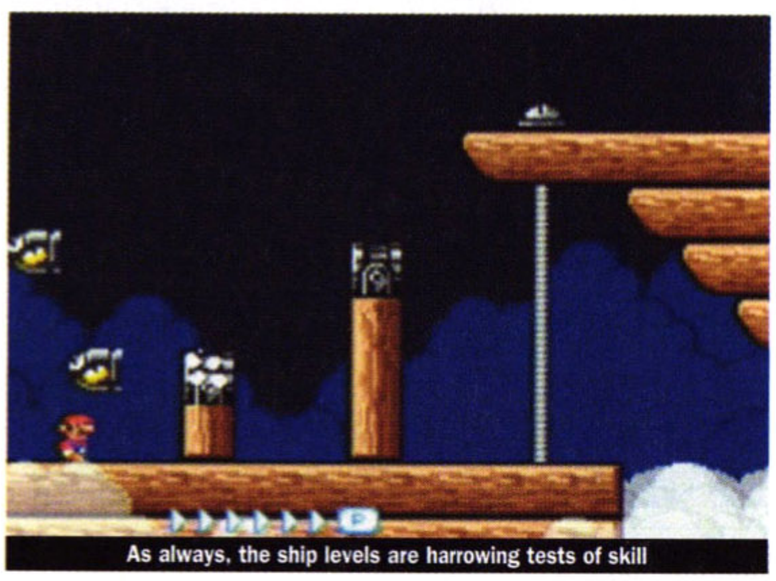


Yay! Chomp-chomps! Woo-hoo!

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO ■ **RELAUNCH** OCTOBER 21



This memorable level puts Mario in a super-sized platforming universe



As always, the ship levels are harrowing tests of skill

SECOND OPINION

It certainly took long enough, but Super Mario Bros. 3 is finally on GBA and I love it. SMB 3 is a classic in every sense. Sure it may not be as long or difficult as Super Mario World (which appeared on Super Mario Advance 2), but I still consider this game to be the second-best Mario title ever made and an absolute must-play. The whole e-Reader thing to get the bonus goodies is completely ridiculous since I refuse to pay for worthless peripherals, but it is a nice extra for those with the cash burning in their pockets. On a side note, perhaps now that SMB 3 is out of the way, Nintendo will finally create some new adventures for us to enjoy. I do love playing these classics again, but it is fairly pathetic that Nintendo has yet to create original Mario content for this hardware. This game is a definite 10 in the history books, but remakes need to do more than just repeat former glories.

ANDY – 9.5

GAME BOY ADVANCE

BANJO-KAZOOIE: GRUNTY'S REVENGE

WHAT HAPPENED?

Sporting an isometric view akin to Spryo's Seasons of Ice and Flame, your job in Grunty's Revenge is to stop the evil plot of Gruntilda, the resident witch. Chronologically occurring between the duo's N64 releases, Gruntilda has decided to travel back in time and manipulate key events so that Banjo and Kazooie never meet. Obviously, this cannot happen.

Banjo spends the first part of this mission sans Kazooie and can only execute skills after a mole tells him of the ability. Usually I'm grudgingly okay with this cheap way of leveling characters up; but, to give a frame of reference, climbing up ladders is the third skill you learn. Think about that for a second. You can't even climb without someone telling you how to do it first.

My problems with this title don't end there. The collision (particularly between you and enemies) is, to be generous, not quite heinous; and the isometric view means that you can frequently get stuck behind things or die because you misjudged distance and/or height. Grunty's Revenge hopes to bring back the surprise and wonder that people felt in days of yore. Unfortunately, this GBA title is not the game to do it. – **LISA**

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

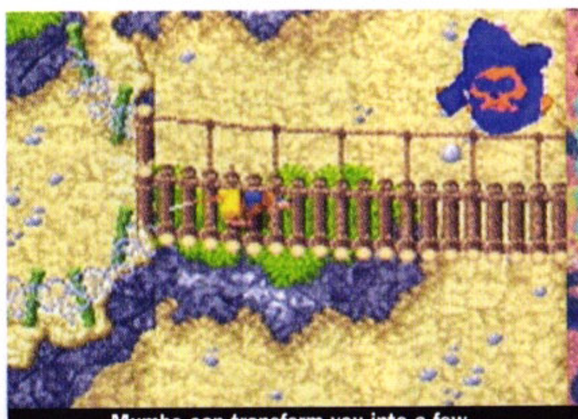
5.25

- **Concept:** Bring Banjo and that crazy Kazooie to the handheld masses
- **Graphics:** Most areas look like a bland rip-off of a Grandma Moses painting, the rest are poor imitations of Super Mario Bros.
- **Sound:** Never been a fan of banjos, but to each his own
- **Playability:** Questionable collision, slow controller response, getting stuck behind landmasses because there's no camera control, etc.
- **Entertainment:** There's nothing here that hasn't been seen before – and in better form
- **Replay Value:** Low

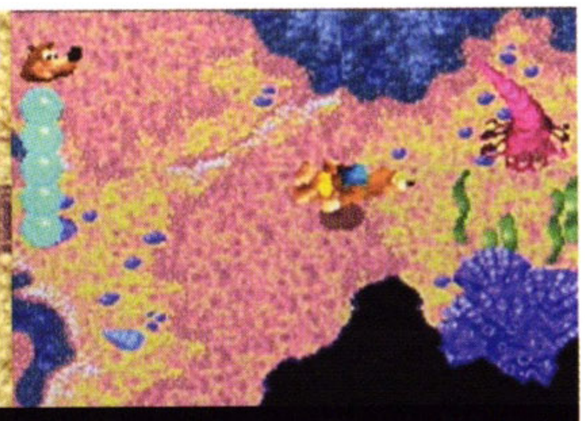
SECOND OPINION

While I'm not the world's biggest platformer fan, I have positive memories of the N64 Banjo titles. I can honestly say that almost all of their elements are in this cartridge. I can also honestly say that these elements just don't work in Grunty's Revenge. The overhead perspective complicates depth perception immensely, and exploration just isn't fun – thus making collecting the multitude of Jinjos, Jiggys, and notes even more of a feather-ruffling chore than before. The garbled voices, which I actually liked on N64, are grating enough for me to ponder the easiest, most painless way to remove my ears. Rare's trademark humor is here and the gameplay is still solid (though it takes too long to earn your moves), but I'd rather play one of GBA's plethora of excellent 2D platformers than this.

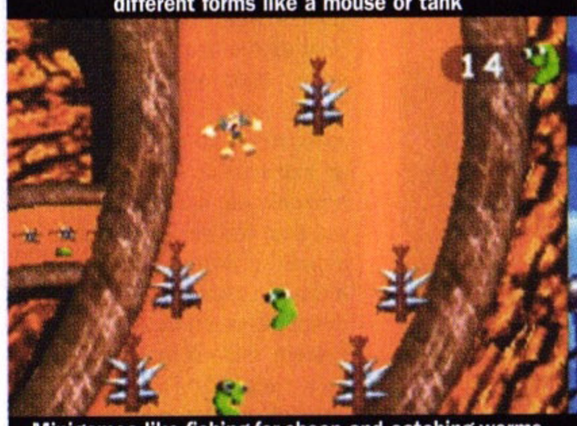
JUSTIN – 6.5



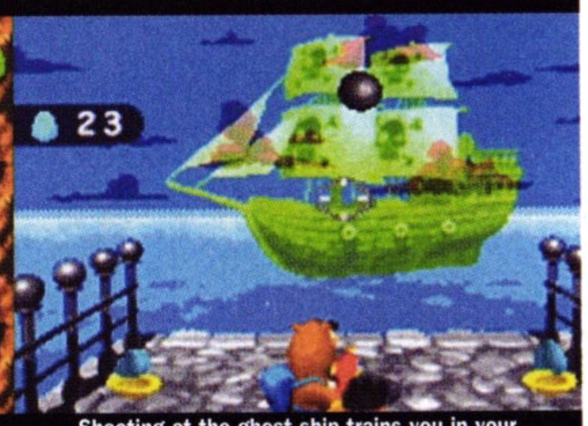
Mumbo can transform you into a few different forms like a mouse or tank



Some small underwater jaunts offer a teeny bit of variety



Minigames like fishing-for-sheep and catching-worms-on-the-slide are almost as much fun as they sound



Shooting at the ghost ship trains you in your newly discovered skill – egg launching

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ ■ **DEVELOPER** RARE
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 10

GAME BOY ADVANCE

MEDAL OF HONOR: INFILTRATOR

SMALL SOLDIERS

Hey, even cautious EA has to take chances sometimes. Medal of Honor: Infiltrator is a departure from the franchise's FPS roots – gameplay styles that cooks up a somewhat unsatisfying mix of Commando, Duck Hunt, and the 8-bit Metal Gear. Now, before you classic game aficionados wet your pants, let me stress that Infiltrator manages to be like all those games without being as good.

Although I did think that the Duck Hunt-style levels were a nice (and all too brief) change of pace, the basic meat-and-potatoes of Infiltrator just leaves me cold. The "stealth" (which isn't too terribly deep or gripping) only manages to bog down the action, creating a game that misses the frenzied fun of Commando or Gun.Smoke. Also, I really came to appreciate how much the PC and console versions of Medal of Honor rely on their excellent sound, stories, and production values. Honestly, it was just hard to get into the Nazi-killing vibe with tinny MIDI music and a few pixilated newsreel clips between levels. – **MATT**

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN

6

- **Concept:** Recast Medal of Honor as a top-down shooter
- **Graphics:** Nice, especially during the "Duck Hunt" style levels
- **Sound:** Let's just say it's not going to give you chills like the console version's sound can
- **Playability:** I like the target lock/strafe, but there are some frustrations
- **Entertainment:** It's pretty hard to pull off MoH's cinematic grandeur on a small scale
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

While I appreciate the solid graphics and old-school feel of this game, I can't say that I was impressed. The core gameplay just doesn't work for me. Shooting feels like a chore, and I find it far easier just to club enemies to death with my gun. It may have captured the style of several old NES games, but not the magic.

JEREMY – 6

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** HOTGEN STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16

GAME BOY ADVANCE

ODDWORLD: MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

AN ODDYSEE AS FUN AS IT IS CORRECTLY SPELLED

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

4

Boy, remember when Microsoft was crowing at the top of its lungs about how it had snagged Munch's Oddysee as an Xbox exclusive? That seems like a long time ago, doesn't it? Unfortunately, this tedious handheld port will do nothing to revive the franchise's ailing reputation.

The knock against Oddworld is that it's great at creating worlds and characters, and pretty bad at crafting good gameplay. Stripped of all the visual splendor and amusing sound effects, this GBA version of Munch's Oddysee just emphasizes its design problems. Basically, this is a puzzle game, forcing you to open gates and pull levers ad nauseum, all the while leading your troop of Fuzzles or Mudukons around like toddlers. What I really hate about this game is all the restrictions placed on your character. Munch is worthless on land; Abe can't swim; neither one can fight worth a damn. For this reason, you always have to make sure your little lemmings are around to do the dirty work for you. I want games that make me feel more powerful than I am in real life, not less. Figuring out how to unlock gates just doesn't do it for me. – **MATT**

- **Concept:** An isometric version of the much-hyped, but little-loved Xbox launch title
- **Graphics:** Good, I suppose, but not good enough to save this game
- **Sound:** Audio's always been a big part of Oddworld's games, and the GBA is too limited in that regard
- **Playability:** The platforming is sloppy, and performing even simple actions can be a trial and error process
- **Entertainment:** I'm not a big fan of the original, and definitely not a fan of this port
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

That this GBA game works as well as the Xbox version is a testament to the complexity of the controls allowed by the handheld. Yet it also makes the console edition transparent and almost unnecessary. While sometimes numbingly repetitive, Munch lovers will definitely find what they need here.

KATO – 7

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ
■ **DEVELOPER** ART/MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23

GAME BOY ADVANCE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

SHELLSHOCKED

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

7.25

Now that side-scrolling brawlers are starting to make a comeback, I am reminded of why they fell from grace to begin with. The new Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles GBA adventure is, to me, the perfect illustration of why this style of game went out of favor with the gaming public. The problem with this genre, and Ninja Turtles specifically, is that there is no reason to play through the game more than once. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is a fun little title with decent combat controls, but there is absolutely no incentive to play it again after beating it the first time. And since it only takes an hour or two to finish, it doesn't exactly give you your money's worth.

What Ninja Turtles does give you is five storylines, one based on each of the turtles and a final story in which the team goes after the dastardly Shredder – the best villain ever named after a kitchen appliance. Each story features four levels, one of which is a vehicular stage and one is a boss battle, meaning that each turtle has only two levels of actual combat. This does keep the fighting from growing stale, but also adds to the feeling that you get very little "game" from this title. The combat, while surprisingly deep, becomes fairly repetitive as you'll be facing the same goons over and over again. A classic Turtles multiplayer mode could have helped, but sadly isn't included. While the graphics are sharp and the sound is decent, there simply isn't enough content here to recommend it, unless you are a diehard Turtles fan. Even then, you probably won't find yourself playing this often. If brawlers are truly going to return to the limelight, they'll have to do better than this. – **JEREMY**

The character models are expressive and detailed

Vehicular stages add variety to the gameplay

You'll face a variety of enemy types

Each turtle has their own unique moves and abilities

- **Concept:** An old-school, side-scrolling brawler starring your favorite old-school mutants
- **Graphics:** Using the Game Boy Player, you'll swear it's a Super Nintendo game (that's a good thing)
- **Sound:** The music tends to blend into the background, but the rare voicework is hilarious
- **Playability:** The combat offers just the right amount of depth and simplicity to keep things fresh
- **Entertainment:** The levels have a lot of variety, but once you've beaten it, there's no reason to pick it up again
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

I give props to the Turtles, because they know what's good for them. This Double Dragon-derived beat 'em up is perfect for the license, but may be a bit predictable and short for most gamers. Granted, there are five different storylines (one for each of the main characters), but each revolves around the same tasks – save the innocent, beat up the bad guys, and drive a hard-to-control vehicle. The graphics are nice, and the addition of sub-characters we all know and love is certainly appreciated, but I just can't get past the quick finish and somewhat bland execution of missions. Fans will enjoy the deeper than average combat system, but will quickly grow tired of the recycled characters, plot, missions, and overall presentation of their heroes in a half shell.

LISA – 7.25

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21

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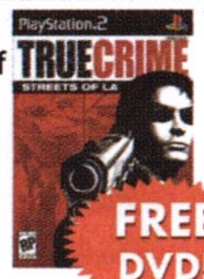

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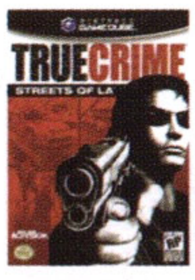

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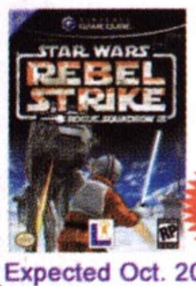

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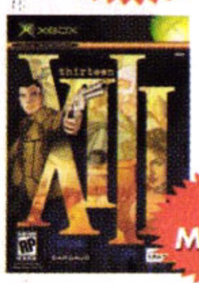

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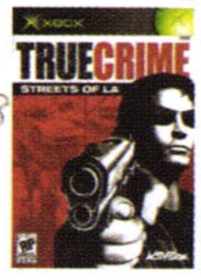

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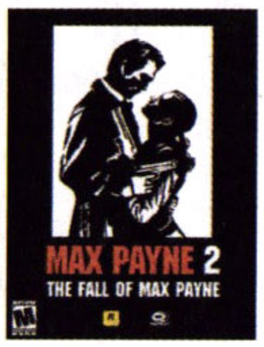

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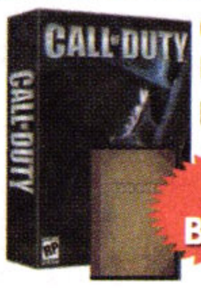

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NWN: Shadows of Undrentide	$29.99	645147
Savage: Battle for Newerth	$39.99	645189
Star Trek Elite Force 2	$49.99	644901
Star Wars Galaxies	$49.99	644815
SW: Jedi Knight Jedi Academy	$49.99	645323
Greyhawk: Temple of Elemental Evil	$49.99	645273
Tron 2.0	$49.99	645094

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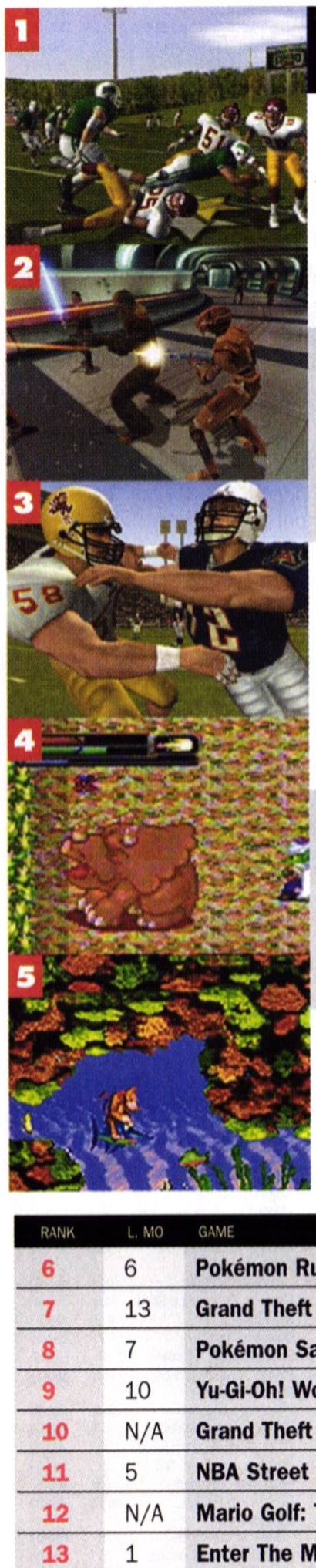
CHARTS

In association with the NPD TRSTS Video Games Service, Charts presents an in-depth listing of the best-selling software on a month-to-month basis. Are the games you spend your hard-earned dollars on top sellers? Take a look below to find out. We've also compiled a listing of the top-selling Japanese software, and, of course, we included a Top 10 list of the games the GI staff is currently enjoying.



NPD TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For July 2003 Based On Units Sold

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
1	N/A	**NCAA Football 2004**	PS2	8.75	Jul-03	$49

In honor of college school spirit, we've written "The Game Informer Fight Song." Like to hear it? Here it go: "We've got spirit, yes we do! We don't wash much so we smell like poo! We like playing games with a joystick. We stay inside, cuz sun makes us sick! GI #1! Woooo!!!" We admit, it needs a little work.

2	N/A	**Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic**	Xbox	9.5	Jul-03	$50

<Statement> HK-47 is here to serve, Master. I was created to do your bidding, which will hopefully involve mass destruction followed by a moderate amount of looting. <Opinion> You don't look like you can cause much damage, Master. In fact, you are the most swollen meatbag I've ever laid my optical sensors upon. <Lament> Woe is me to be paired up with a lowly meatbag like this. Where is my self-destruct mechanism?

3	N/A	**NCAA Football 2004**	Xbox	8.5	Jul-03	$50

<Query> Why is HK-47 still here, Master? I know nothing about this college football. HK stands for Hunter-Killer, not Howard Kosell (sic). <Observation> It looks like a ballet of fat meatbags all vying for a large flap of skin for no other reason than the glory of possession of this inflated sac. <Opinion> I would derive greater pleasure from turning my blaster rifle toward the cheering masses and letting their blood flow onto the enclosed field, creating what would appear to be an enlarged bowl of tomato soup.

4	9	**Dragon Ball Z: Legacy of Goku II**	GBA	7.5	Jun-03	$29

The "Z" in Dragon Ball Z stands for Zelda, as this action/RPG is more than slightly reminiscent of one of the greatest video game series of all time. This title lacks the tigers in leather jackets we know and love from the original, but has a fascinating story and a few added elements. It does not, however, have a whistle that warps you to dungeon doors or a flame to burn down bushes.

5	3	**Donkey Kong Country**	GBA	9	Jun-03	$30

July was another huge month for GBA titles. Donkey Kong is just one of eight handheld games making the top 20 list. Playing this on a Game Boy Player is far superior to dusting off your SNES for the original. Besides, Super Nintendo's controller and the console itself had those sissy purple buttons. We're no sissies. Are you, Sister Sissy?

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
6	6	**Pokémon Ruby**	GBA	7.25	Mar-03	$33
7	13	**Grand Theft Auto III**	PS2	9.5	Oct-01	$19
8	7	**Pokémon Sapphire**	GBA	7.25	Mar-03	$33
9	10	**Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition: Stairway to Destined Duel**	GBA	7.5	Apr-03	$36
10	N/A	**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City**	PS2	10	Oct-02	$43
11	5	**NBA Street Vol. 2**	PS2	9	Apr-03	$50
12	N/A	**Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour**	GC	8	Jul-03	$49
13	1	**Enter The Matrix**	PS2	8.5	May-03	$49
14	N/A	**Big Mutha Truckers**	PS2	7.5	Jun-03	$20
15	12	**Midnight Club II**	PS2	9	Apr-03	$49
16	8	**Finding Nemo**	GBA	N/A	May-03	$30
17	N/A	**Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising**	GBA	9.25	Jun-03	$30
18	15	**The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker**	GC	10	Mar-03	$34
19	2	**Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness**	PS2	5.5	Jun-03	$50
20	N/A	**Sonic Advance 2**	GBA	7.5	Mar-03	$30

Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Service • Kristin Barnett-Von-Korff (516) 625-2481

JAPAN TOP 10

Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	**Gundam: Meguriai Uchuu**	PS2
2	N/A	**Length of Starfi**	GBA
3	N/A	**Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour**	GC
4	N/A	**Secret of Mana**	GBA
5	2	**Tales of Phantasia**	GC
6	N/A	**World Soccer Winning Eleven 7**	PS2
7	N/A	**Zoids VSII**	GC
8	N/A	**Winning Post 6**	PS2
9	N/A	**Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles**	GC
10	3	**Pokémon Pinball: Ruby and Sapphire**	GBA

GAME INFORMER TOP 10

The Staff's Favorite Picks

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	**SSX 3**	Xbox
2	2	**Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004**	PS2
3	N/A	**ESPN NBA Basketball**	Xbox
4	1	**Viewtiful Joe**	GC
5	3	**Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic**	Xbox
6	N/A	**Jak II**	PS2
7	5	**Final Fantasy Tactics Advance**	GBA
8	4	**ESPN NFL Football**	Xbox
9	N/A	**Homeworld 2**	PC
10	N/A	**Disgaea: Hour of Darkness**	PS2

PC TOP 10

Based On Monthly Units Sold. Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Sevice Kristin Barnett-Von-Korff (516) 625-2481

POS.	L. MO	GAME	MONTH	PRICE
1	1	**Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne**	Jun-03	$33
2	5	**Flight Simulator 2004: Century of Flight**	Jul-03	$52
3	2	**The Sims: Superstar**	May-03	$28
4	N/A	**Madden NFL 2004**	Aug-03	$37
5	4	**The Sims Deluxe**	Sep-02	$43
6	3	**Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided**	Jun-03	$48
7	7	**Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos**	Jul-02	$39
8	N/A	**Zoo Tycoon: Complete Collection**	Aug-03	$28
9	N/A	**Age of Mythology**	Nov-02	$31
10	8	**The Sims: Unleashed**	Sep-02	$28

REVIEWS ARCHIVE NOVEMBER 2003

WAR OF THE MONSTERS

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING
■ **PUBLISHER** SONY ■ **REVIEWED** FEB-03

This game gets the award for the biggest smile-to-frown turnaround in history. I'd like to see every gamer's face who plays it. First, you're having fun, destroying every building and car in sight. Then, you wonder if the deck is stacked against you. Finally, you holler how the gods have forsaken you, and you reach in the silverware drawer for a fork to dig your eyes out with. Even multiplayer is tainted with a simple, lame Versus mode. How this could've come from the team behind Twisted Metal: Black is almost unfathomable. Stick to cars, boys. – **JUSTIN**

6.25

PLAYSTATION 2

Aero Elite: Combat Academy	6.75	May-03
Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	6.75	Aug-03
All-Star Baseball 2004	8	Apr-03
Alter Echo	8	Sep-03
Amplitude	8.75	May-03
Ape Escape 2	7.5	Jul-03
Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits	8.75	Jul-03
ATV Offroad Fury 2	9	Jan-03
Auto Modellista	8	Jun-03
Battle Engine Aquila	7	Feb-03
Big Mutha Truckers	7.5	May-03
Black & Bruised	7.5	Mar-03
BMX XXX	7.75	Jan-03
Bombastic	8	Sep-03
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	8	Mar-03
Butt-Ugly Martians: Zoom or Doom!	5	Oct-03
Cabela's Big Game Hunter	7	Mar-03
Chaos Legion	8.5	Jun-03
Choplifter: Crisis Shield	6.5	May-03
Clock Tower 3	8.5	May-03
Colin McRae Rally 3	8.75	May-03
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	6	Oct-03
Dark Cloud 2	9.25	Mar-03
DDR Max 2	7	Oct-03
Dead to Rights	9.25	Jan-03
Def Jam Vendetta	8.5	Apr-03
Devil May Cry 2	7	Mar-03
Disaster Report	8	Mar-03
Disney Extreme Skate Adventure	7.75	Oct-03
Dot Hack Vol. 1: Infection	8.25	Mar-03
Dot Hack Vol. 2: Mutation	7.75	Jun-03
Dot Hack Vol. 3: Outbreak	7.5	Sep-03
Downhill Domination	8.25	Aug-03
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	7.25	Jan-03
Drome Racers	7	Jan-03
Dynasty Tactics 2	7.5	Oct-03
Dynasty Warriors 3: Xtreme Legends	6.75	Jan-03
Dynasty Warriors 4	7	Apr-03
Ejay Clubworld	7	Aug-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jun-03
ESPN NHL Hockey	8.5	Oct-03
Everblue 2	8.75	Mar-03
EverQuest: Online Adventures	9	Feb-03
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	7.75	Jun-03
Eyetoy: Play	9	Oct-03
F1 Career Championship	7	Aug-03
Fighter Maker 2	6.5	Feb-03
Finding Nemo	6.5	Jul-03
Fisherman's Challenge	7.5	Mar-03
Freaky Flyers	6	Aug-03
Freedom Fighters	8	Oct-03
Freestyle MetalX	7	Aug-03
Futurama	5.25	Sep-03
G1 Jockey 3	8	Jun-03
Gallop Racer 2003: A New Breed	8.5	May-03
Getaway, The	9	Feb-03
Gladius	9	Oct-03
Grand Prix Challenge	7.5	May-03
Great Escape, The	6.5	Sep-03
Guilty Gear X2	8.75	Mar-03
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	6	Jan-03
Haven: Call of the King	8.25	Jan-03
High Heat 2004	7	Apr-03
Hot Wheels: Velocity X	6	Feb-03
Hulk, The	5.5	Jul-03
Hunter: The Reckoning - Wayward	6.25	Sep-03
Hypersonic Extreme	7.25	Mar-03
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	8.25	Aug-03
IndyCar Series	7	Jun-03
Island Extreme Stunts	6	Feb-03
Italian Job, The	5	Aug-03
James Bond 007: NightFire	7.75	Jan-03
James Cameron's Dark Angel	5.25	Jan-03
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	8.75	Apr-03
K-1 World Grand Prix	6.5	Jul-03
King of Route 66, The	7	Apr-03
Legends of Wrestling II	7	Feb-03
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	7.25	Aug-03
Madden NFL 2004	9.25	Sep-03
Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color	8	Sep-03
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	8.5	Apr-03
Midnight Club II	9	May-03
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MLB Slugfest 2004	6	Apr-03
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MVP Baseball 2003	9.25	Apr-03
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NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA College Basketball 2K3	5.75	Jan-03
NCAA Final Four	1.25	Jan-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.75	Jul-03
NCAA Gamebreaker 2004	7	Oct-03
NCAA March Madness 2003	8	Jan-03
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NHL 2004	9.25	Oct-03
NHL Hitz Pro	8.25	Oct-03
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Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	8.5	Mar-03
Reel Fishing III	3	Jul-03
Resident Evil Dead Aim	6	Jun-03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Operation Resurrection	7.5	Jul-03
Risk: Global Domination	7	Oct-03
Roadkill	6	Oct-03
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	5.25	Oct-03
Romance of Three Kingdoms VIII	7	Sep-03
RTX Red Rock	6.5	Jul-03
Rugby 2004	6	Oct-03
Silent Hill 3	8.25	Aug-03
Silent Line: Armored Core	7.5	Jul-03
Sims, The	9	Feb-03
Smash Cars	4	Aug-03
Soul Calibur II	8.5	Oct-03
Speed Kings	6.5	Jul-03
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World Tour Soccer 2003	8.5	Feb-03
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X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.5	Jun-03
Xenosaga Episode 1: Der Wille Zur Macht	9.75	Mar-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Duelists of the Roses	8	Apr-03
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	8.5	May-03

GAMECUBE

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Army Men: Sarge's War	6	May-03
ATV: Quad Power Racing 2	8	Mar-03
Batman: Dark Tomorrow	0.75	May-03
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Def Jam Vendetta	8.75	Apr-03
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Hulk, The	5.75	Jul-03
Ikaruga	9	May-03
Italian Job, The	5	Aug-03
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Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, The	10	Apr-03
Legends of Wrestling II	6.75	Feb-03
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, The	9.25	Jan-03
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Madden NFL 2004	8.75	Sep-03
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	8	Sep-03
Mega Man: Network Transmission	6.25	Jun-03
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Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	9	Jan-03
NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.5	Jul-03
NHL 2004	9	Oct-03
NHL Hitz Pro	8	Oct-03
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P.N. 03	5.75	Sep-03
Red Faction II	8.75	Apr-03
Resident Evil 2	8	Apr-03
Resident Evil 3: Nemesis	7.75	Apr-03
Shrek: Extra Large	3	Jan-03
Sims, The	8.75	May-03
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Speed Kings	7	Jul-03
Splinter Cell	8.5	May-03
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Star Wars: Bounty Hunter	5	Feb-03
Star Wars: Jedi Outcast	8.75	Jan-03
Sum of All Fears, The	5.5	Apr-03
Summoner: A Goddess Reborn	9	Apr-03
Super Bubble Pop	8	Feb-03
Superman: Shadow of Apokolips	6.5	May-03
Swingerz Golf	7.75	Jan-03
SX Superstar	6	Aug-03
Tiger Wodds PGA Tour 2004	9	Oct-03
Transworld Surf: Next Wave	5.5	May-03
Tube Slider	6.5	Jun-03
Ultimate Muscle	7.5	Jul-03
Vexx	8.25	Mar-03
Viewtiful Joe	9.5	Oct-03
Wario World	8.5	Jul-03
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions	7.75	Jan-03
Wrestlemania XIX	7.75	Oct-03
WWE Crush Hour	4	May-03
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.75	Jun-03

XBOX

Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	6.75	Aug-03
All-Star Baseball 2004	8	Apr-03
Alter Echo	8	Sep-03
Apex	7.75	May-03
Aquaman: Battle for Atlantis	2	Oct-03
ATV: Quad Power Racing 2	7.5	Apr-03
Battle Engine Aquila	7	Feb-03
Big Mutha Truckers	7.25	Sep-03
Black Stone: Magic & Steel	3	Feb-03
Bloody Roar Extreme	6.5	Jul-03
Brute Force	8.25	Jul-03
Buffy: Chaos Bleeds	8	Sep-03
Burnout 2: Point of Impact Developer's Cut	8.5	Jun-03
Crimson Sea	7.75	Feb-03
Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	7.5	Mar-03
Defender	8.25	Feb-03
Dino Crisis 3	6.25	Oct-03
Disney Extreme Skate Adventure	7.75	Oct-03
Dynasty Warriors 4	7	Oct-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jul-03
ESPN NHL Hockey	8.5	Oct-03
ESPN NFL Football	9.25	Sep-03
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	8	Jun-03
Freaky Flyers	5.75	Aug-03
Freedom Fighters	8	Oct-03
Freestyle MetalX	7	Aug-03
Furious Karting	6	Jun-03
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	8.25	Aug-03
Gladius	9.25	Oct-03
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	7.5	Jun-03
Great Escape, The	7	Sep-03
Grooverider	2	Sep-03
Group S Challenge	6.75	Sep-03
High Heat 2004	7.25	Apr-03
Hulk, The	5.75	Jul-03
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	8.5	Mar-03
Indycar Series	7.5	Aug-03
Italian Job, The	5	Aug-03
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	8.25	Apr-03
Kung Fu Chaos	6.5	Mar-03
Legends of Wrestling II	6.75	Feb-03
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, The	9.25	Feb-03
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	8	Jul-03
Madden NFL 2004	9	Sep-03
Marvel Vs. Capcom 2	8.5	May-03
Metal Dungeon	6	Feb-03
Micro Machines	6	May-03
Midnight Club II	9	Jul-03
Midtown Madness 3	5.25	Jul-03
Minority Report: Everybody Runs	6.75	Feb-03
MLB Inside Pitch 2003	5.5	Jun-03
MLB Slugfest 2004	6.75	Apr-03
MotoGP 2	8	Jun-03
Murakumo	5.75	Mar-03
MVP Baseball 2003	9.25	Apr-03
NASCAR Thunder 2004	8.5	Oct-03
NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.5	Jul-03
NFL Fever 2004	7.5	Sep-03
NHL 2004	9	Oct-03
NHL Hitz Pro	8	Oct-03
Nightcaster II: Equinox	5.75	Feb-03
Otogi: Myth of Demons	6.75	Oct-03
Outlaw Volleyball	8.25	Sep-03
Panzer Dragoon Orta	8.25	Jan-03
Phantom Crash	7.5	Jan-03
Pirates of the Caribbean	7.75	Aug-03
Pro Cast Fishing	5.5	Sep-03
Pro Race Driver	9	Apr-03
Pulse Racer	3	Feb-03
Rally Fusion: Race of Champions	8	Jan-03
Red Faction II	8.25	Apr-03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	9.25	Jun-03
Roadkill	6.5	Oct-03
Robocop	3.5	May-03
Roller Coaster Tycoon	2	Jun-03
Run Like Hell	8	May-03
Seablade	4	Jan-03
Shenmue II	8	Jan-03
Shrek: Super Party	3.25	Jan-03
Simpsons Hit & Run	8.5	Oct-03
Sims, The	8.75	Apr-03
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	8	Jul-03
Soul Calibur II	8.5	Oct-03
Speed Kings	7	Jul-03
Splinter Cell	8.75	Jan-03
Starsky And Hutch	5.75	Oct-03
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	9.5	Aug-03
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	8.5	Jun-03
State of Emergency	7	May-03
Superman: The Man of Steel	4.75	Jan-03
SX Superstar	6.5	Aug-03
Syberia	7	Oct-03
Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus	7.25	Apr-03
Tennis Masters Series 2003	8	Oct-03
Tiger Wodds PGA Tour 2004	9.25	Oct-03
Total Immersion Racing	6.5	Jan-03
Toxic Grind	6.25	Feb-03
Transworld Snowboarding	6.5	Jan-03
UFC: Tapout 2	6.25	May-03
Unreal Championship	8.75	Jan-03
Vexx	8	Mar-03
Wakeboarding Unleashed Featuring Shaun Murray	8.5	Jul-03
World Racing	5	Jun-03
World Series Baseball 2K3	7	Apr-03
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.5	Jun-03

PC

1503 A.D.: The New World	7.5	Apr-03
Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings	8.5	Feb-03
Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WW II	8.75	Sep-03
Day of Defeat	8.5	Aug-03
Command & Conquer Generals	9.25	Apr-03
Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind – Bloodmoon, The	9	Aug-03
Europa 1400: The Guild	8.5	Feb-03
Eve: The Second Genesis	6.75	Aug-03
Freelancer	9.5	May-03
Harbinger	6	May-03
Highland Warriors	6.5	Apr-03
IGI 2: Covert Strike	7.25	Apr-03
Impossible Creatures	7.5	Mar-03
Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader	8.5	Oct-03
Master of Orion III	8	Apr-03
Medieval: Total War - Viking Invasion	8.75	Jun-03
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	8.25	Aug-03
Pirates of the Caribbean	7.75	Sep-03
PlanetSide	9.25	Jul-03
Postal 2	7.5	Jun-03
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	7.25	May-03
Restaurant Empire	6.75	Jul-03
Rise of Nations	9	Jul-03
Shadowbane	6.75	Jun-03
SimCity 4	9.75	Feb-03
Sims Online, The	9	Mar-03
Sims: Superstar, The	8	Jul-03
Star Trek: Elite Force II	8.5	Aug-03
Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided	9.5	Jun-03
Tron 2.0	8.75	Oct-03
Tropico 2: Pirate Cove	8	Jun-03
Unreal II: The Awakening	9.5	Mar-03
Warcraft 3: Frozen Throne	9	Sep-03
Will Rock	7.75	Aug-03

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	9.25	Jul-03
Aladdin	8	Oct-03
All-Star Baseball 2004	6.5	Apr-03
Altered Beast: Guardian of the Realms	7.5	Feb-03
Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	6.75	Oct-03
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Wrath of Darkhul King	4	Sep-03
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	9.25	Jun-03
Crazy Taxi: Catch a Ride	4	May-03
Daredevil	5	Mar-03
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 3	8.25	Mar-03
Defender	2	Feb-03
Demikids Light/Dark	8.25	Sep-03
Disney Extreme Skate Adventure	6	Oct-03
Disney's Magical Quest 2	6.75	Oct-03
Donkey Kong Country	9	Jun-03
Dragon Ball Z: Legacy of Goku II	7.5	Jul-03
Dungeons & Dragons: Eye of the Beholder	5.5	Mar-03
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	9.5	Sep-03
Fire Pro Wrestling 2	9	Mar-03
Freekstyle	7.5	Aug-03
Game & Watch: Gallery 4	3	Feb-03
Godzilla Domination!	4.5	May-03
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	8	Apr-03
GT Advance 3: Pro Concept Racing	7.25	Mar-03
Incredible Hulk, The	4	Jul-03
Iridion II	8	May-03
Jet Grind Radio	7	Sep-03
Justice League: Injustice for All	4.25	Feb-03
Legends of Wrestling II	0.75	Mar-03
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, The	6.75	Feb-03
Lost Vikings, The	7	Jun-03
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	7.75	Apr-03
Lunar Legend	7.5	Feb-03
Mega Man & Bass	8	Mar-03
Mega Man Battle Network 3: Blue and White	8	Jun-03
Mega Man Zero 2	7	Oct-03
Monster Truck Madnees	4.5	Oct-03
Mortal Kombat: Tournament Edition	8.25	Aug-03
Muppets: On With the Show	5.5	Jun-03
Ninja Five-O	8.25	Jul-03
Onimusha Tactics	7	Oct-03
Phantasy Star Collection	8	Feb-03
Pirates of the Caribbean	5.5	Sep-03
Pokémon Pinall Ruby and Sapphire	8.5	Oct-03
Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire	7.25	Apr-03
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	8	Mar-03
Revenge of Shinobi, The	6	Feb-03
Road Rash: Jailbreak	4.5	Aug-03
Rock 'n Roll Racing	8.75	Sep-03
Samurai Jack: The Amulet of Time	8	Feb-03
Sega Rally Championship	5	Mar-03
Shining Soul	6.5	Sep-03
Simpsons Road Rage	2.25	Aug-03
Sonic Advance 2	7.5	May-03
Sonic Pinball Party	6	Jul-03
Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack	7	Sep-03
Splinter Cell	8.5	Jun-03
Star Wars: The New Droid Army	6	Feb-03
Stuntman	8.75	Sep-03
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	8	Feb-03
Super Puzzle Fighter II	9	Apr-03
Wario Ware, Inc.: Mega Microgames	7.5	Jun-03
Wing Commander Prophecy	7	Aug-03
WWE Road to Wrestlemania X8	7	Mar-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! Dungeon Dice Monsters	8	Apr-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition: Stairway to the Destined Duel	7.5	Jun-03

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: TIDES OF WAR

■ **FORMAT** XBOX ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
■ **REVIEWED** JUN-03

While Tides of War includes the entire PC game, it also adds a one- to two-hour prologue that leads seamlessly into the existing adventure. You will also notice the addition of some nice Xbox extras, including complete Xbox Live and system link support, so up to 16 players can experience four different multiplayer modes as either the Axis or the Allies. Without a doubt, Tides of War is one of the most impressive console FPSs – displaced only by the almighty Halo. It may be a port, but the added elements make the package well worth the price of admission. – **ANDY**

9.25

MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE

■ **FORMAT** GAMECUBE ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING
■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY ■ **REVIEWED** JAN-03

The biggest advancement that Deadly Alliance brings to the genre is the addition of fighting stances. Each of Mortal Kombat's 21 fighters has three fighting styles they can access with a simple press of the left trigger. This opens an array of strategies, because each one has its own set of combos. Luckily, learning these new techniques is easy through Deadly Alliance's rather helpful Konquest mode, which also reward the player with "koins" that you can then use to purchase one of the game's 676 secrets. For GameCube fighting gurus there really isn't much choice: You must get this game. It's that good. – **ANDY**

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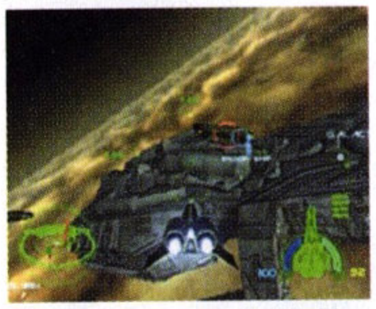
NEW RELEASES ALL DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE. CALL YOUR LOCAL RETAILER FOR MORE DETAILS

Release Date	Title	Publisher/ Distributor
PLAYSTATION 2		
11/4/03	Barbie Horse Adventures: Wild Rescue	Vivendi Universal
11/18/03	Battlestar Galactica	Vivendi Universal
11/11/03	Beyond Good and Evil	Ubisoft
11/4/03	Bloody Roar 4	Konami
10/28/03	Blowout	Majesco
11/11/03	Bratz: Formal Funk	Ubisoft
11/12/03	Cabela's Dangerous Hunts	Activision

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18



Battlestar Galactica doesn't have the continued support of Star Trek or Star Wars, but it does have a strong cult following based on its quasi-mythological sci-fi camp and, presumably, its menagerie of bad '70s haircuts. In any case, Vivendi has teamed with Mace Griffin developer Warthog to create a hectic space flight shooter based on the series. Excelsior! Oops, wait, that's Stan Lee. Nevermind.

11/18/03	Carmen Sandiego: Secret Stolen Drums	Bam Entertainment
10/28/03	Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami
11/4/03	Cat in the Hat	Vivendi Universal
11/24/03	Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest	Sony
11/11/03	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi Universal
10/28/03	Deer Hunter	Atari
11/11/03	Dynasty Warriors 4: Xtreme Legends	Koei
11/3/03	ESPN College Hoops	Sega
11/17/03	EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers	Sony
11/4/03	EyeToy	Sony
11/3/03	Fairly Odd Parents: Breakin Da Rules	THQ
11/3/03	Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly	Tecmo
10/28/03	FIFA Soccer 2004	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	Frogger's Adventure: The Rescue	Konami
11/25/03	Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	Ubisoft
10/28/03	Gladius	Lucas Arts
11/11/03	Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	Jaleco
11/19/03	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	He-Man: Defender of Grayskull	TDK Mediactive
11/11/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
11/18/03	I-Ninja	Namco
11/18/03	IHRA Drag Racing 3	Bethesda Softworks
11/17/03	James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	Karaoke Revolution	Konami
10/28/03	Kill.Switch	Namco
11/18/03	King of Fighters 2000 & 2001	SNK
11/4/03	Kya: Dark Lineage	Atari
11/18/03	Legacy of Kain: Defiance	Eidos
11/11/03	Looney Tunes: Back In Action	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	Lord of the Rings: Return of the King, The	Electronic Arts
11/24/03	Lowrider	Jaleco
11/11/03	Mafia	Take 2
11/18/03	Manhunt	Take 2
11/11/03	Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts
11/18/03	Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	Vivendi Universal
11/3/03	Midway Arcade Treasures	Midway
11/11/03	Monster 4x4: Masters of Metal	Ubisoft
10/28/03	Monster Rancher 4	Tecmo
11/4/03	Muppets Party Cruise	TDK Mediactive
10/28/03	NBA ShootOut 2004	Sony
11/11/03	NCAA Final Four 2004	Sony
11/17/03	NCAA March Madness 2004	Electronic Arts
11/19/03	Need for Speed: Underground	Electronic Arts
11/18/03	PBA Bowling 2004	Bethesda Softworks
11/4/03	Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft
11/11/03	Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	Sony
11/4/03	Rogue Ops	Kemco
10/28/03	RPG Maker 2	Tommo
11/18/03	Secret Weapons Over Normandy	Lucas Arts
11/4/03	SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony
11/18/03	Space Channel 5	Tommo
11/11/03	Spawn	Namco
11/10/03	Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	THQ
10/29/03	SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom	THQ
11/21/03	Spy Hunter 2	Midway
11/4/03	Star Trek: Shattered Universe	TDK Mediactive
11/4/03	Super Trucks	Bethesda Softworks
11/11/03	Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	Atari
10/28/03	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision
11/4/03	Trivial Pursuit: Straight Up With a Twist	Atari
11/4/03	True Crime: Streets of LA	Activision
11/3/03	Warhammer 40,000: Firewarrior	THQ
11/11/03	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco
10/27/03	WWE SmackDown: Here Comes the Pain	THQ

GAMECUBE		
11/11/03	Beyond Good and Evil	Ubisoft
10/28/03	Bomberman Jeeters	Majesco
11/11/03	Bratz: Formal Funk	Ubisoft
11/18/03	Carmen Sandiego: Secret Stolen Drums	Bam Entertainment
11/11/03	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi Universal
10/28/03	Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	Atari
11/3/03	Fairly Odd Parents: Breakin Da Rules	THQ
10/28/03	FIFA Soccer 2004	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	Frogger's Adventure: The Rescue	Konami
10/28/03	Gladius	Lucas Arts
11/25/03	Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	Jaleco
11/19/03	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	He-Man: Defender of Grayskull	TDK Mediactive
11/18/03	Hide & Sneak	Capcom
11/17/03	James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Electronic Arts
11/11/03	Looney Tunes: Back In Action	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	Lord of the Rings: Return of the King, The	Electronic Arts
11/17/03	Mario Kart: Double Dash	Nintendo
11/11/03	Mario Party 5	Nintendo

Release Date	Title	Publisher/ Distributor
11/11/03	Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts
11/18/03	Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	Vivendi Universal
11/18/03	Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami
11/3/03	Midway Arcade Treasures	Midway
11/18/03	Mission Impossible 2: Operation Surma	Atari
11/25/03	Monster 4x4: Masters of Metal	Ubisoft
11/4/03	Muppets Party Cruise	TDK Mediactive
11/19/03	Need for Speed: Underground	Electronic Arts
11/17/03	NFL Blitz: Pro	Midway
11/4/03	Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft
11/4/03	Rogue Ops	Kemco
11/11/03	Spawn	Namco
11/10/03	Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	THQ
10/29/03	SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom	THQ
11/21/03	Spy Hunter 2	Midway
11/4/03	Tonka Rescue Patrol	TDK Mediactive
10/28/03	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision
11/4/03	True Crime: Streets of LA	Activision
11/18/03	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco
11/4/03	Yu-Gi-Oh! Falsebound Kingdom	Konami

XBOX		
10/27/03	Arx Fatalis	Dreamcatcher
11/4/03	Barbie Horse Adventures: Wild Rescue	Vivendi Universal
11/18/03	Battlestar Galactica	Vivendi Universal
11/11/03	Beyond Good and Evil	Ubisoft
10/28/03	Black 9	Majesco
10/28/03	Blowout	Majesco
11/17/03	Broken Sword	Dreamcatcher
11/12/03	Cabela's Dangerous Hunts	Activision
11/18/03	Carmen Sandiego: Secret Stolen Drums	Bam Entertainment
11/4/03	Cat in the Hat	Vivendi Universal
11/18/03	Counter-Strike	Microsoft
11/11/03	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi Universal
11/11/03	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubisoft
10/28/03	Drake	Majesco
11/3/03	ESPN College Hoops	Sega
11/3/03	Fairly Odd Parents: Breakin Da Rules	THQ
10/28/03	FIFA Soccer 2004	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Gladius	Lucas Arts
11/11/03	Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	Jaleco
10/28/03	Grabbed by the Ghoulies	Microsoft
11/4/03	Grand Theft Auto III/Vice City	Take 2
11/19/03	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	He-Man: Defender of Grayskull	TDK Mediactive
11/11/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
11/18/03	IHRA Drag Racing 3	Bethesda Softworks
11/17/03	James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Kill.Switch	Namco
11/18/03	Legacy of Kain: Defiance	Eidos
11/11/03	Links 2004	Microsoft
11/4/03	Lord of the Rings: Return of the King, The	Electronic Arts
11/11/03	Mafia	Take 2
11/18/03	Magic The Gathering: Battle Grounds	Atari
11/11/03	Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts
11/18/03	Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	Vivendi Universal
11/3/03	Midway Arcade Treasures	Midway
10/28/03	NBA Inside Drive 2004	Microsoft
11/17/03	NCAA March Madness 2004	Electronic Arts
11/19/03	Need for Speed: Underground	Electronic Arts
10/27/03	NFL Blitz: Pro	Midway
11/18/03	NHL Rivals 2004	Microsoft
11/18/03	Ninja Gaiden	Tecmo
11/18/03	PBA Bowling 2004	Bethesda Softworks
11/3/03	Pilot Down	Dreamcatcher
11/4/03	Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft
11/18/03	Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft
11/4/03	Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft
10/28/03	Rogue Ops	Kemco

HE-MAN: DEFENDER OF GRAYSKULL

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** TDK MEDIACTIVE ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4

He-Man, like fellow '80s animated heroes Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, is back in both cartoon (on a new Cartoon Network series) and digital form. Developer Savage Entertainment, which helmed the cancelled Jurassic Park: Survival, is crafting a savvy beat 'em up that will let you go toe-to-toe with Skeletor's minions in Eternia, and even ride the legendary Battlecat (who shoots missiles from his back! Sweet!).

11/18/03	Secret Weapons Over Normandy	Lucas Arts
11/18/03	Sega GT	Sega
11/11/03	Spawn	Namco
11/10/03	Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	THQ
10/29/03	SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom	THQ
11/21/03	Spy Hunter 2	Midway
11/4/03	Star Trek: Shattered Universe	TDK Mediactive
11/18/03	Star Wars: Jedi Academy	Lucas Arts
11/11/03	Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	Atari
10/28/03	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision
11/18/03	Top Gun Live	Titus
10/28/03	Top Spin	Microsoft
11/4/03	True Crime: Streets of LA	Activision
11/18/03	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco

PC		
11/11/03	Alias	Acclaim
11/11/03	Apocalyptica	Konami
11/11/03	Beyond Good and Evil	Ubisoft
10/28/03	Black 9	Majesco
10/28/03	Blowout	Majesco

Release Date	Title	Publisher/ Distributor
11/11/03	Breed	Hip Interactive
11/17/03	Broken Sword: Sleeping Dragon	Dreamcatcher
11/4/03	Call of Duty	Activision
11/4/03	Cat in the Hat	Vivendi Universal
10/28/03	Civilization III: Conquests	Atari
10/28/03	Civilization III: Gold	Atari
11/3/03	Counter-Strike: Condition-Zero	Vivendi Universal
11/3/03	Crusaders Kings	Strategy First
11/18/03	Crystal Key II: The Far Realm	Dreamcatcher
10/28/03	Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis	Vivendi Universal
10/28/03	Drake	Majesco
11/4/03	Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna	Microsoft
10/28/03	FIFA Soccer 2004	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Final Fantasy XI Online	Square-Enix
11/24/03	Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension	Electronic Arts
11/11/03	Gladiator Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim
10/28/03	Gothic II	Atari
10/28/03	Harpoon IV	Ubisoft
10/28/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
11/11/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
11/11/03	Horizons: Empire of Istaria Online	Atari
11/18/03	Lock On: Modern Air Combat	Ubisoft
11/4/03	Lord of the Rings: Return of the King, The	Electronic Arts
11/11/03	Lord of the Rings: War of the Ring, The	Vivendi Universal
11/11/03	Lords of the Realm III	Vivendi Universal
11/18/03	Magic The Gathering: Battle Grounds	Atari
11/10/03	Mysterious Journey II: Chameleon	Dreamcatcher
11/20/03	Need for Speed: Underground	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	Neverwinter Nights: Gold Edition	Atari
11/25/03	Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	Atari
11/11/03	No One Lives Forever 2: Contract JACK	Vivendi Universal
10/27/03	One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	Tri-Synergy
11/18/03	Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft

CRASH NITRO KART

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX GAMECUBE ■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER (UP TO 8 PLAYERS VIA SYSTEM LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11

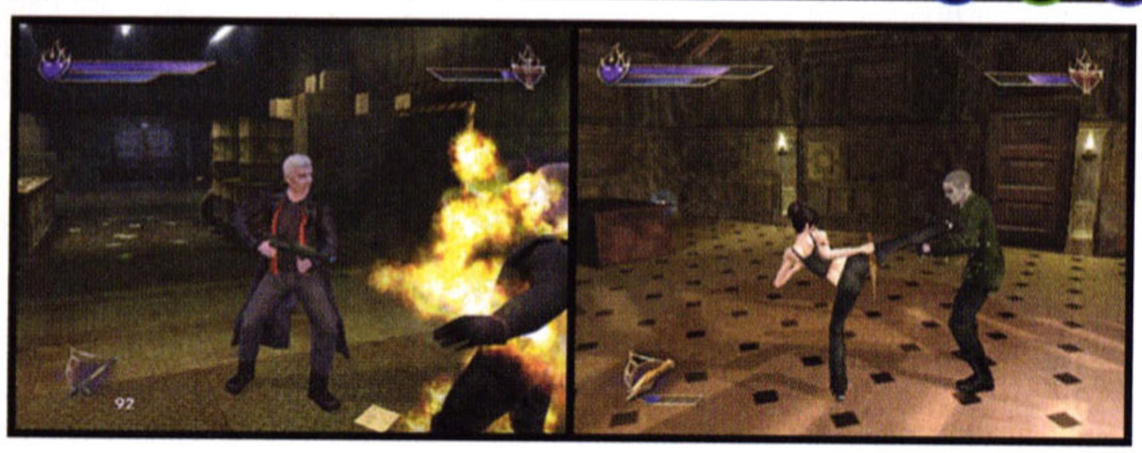
Mario's always been known for his karting prowess, but back in the waning days of the original PlayStation, Naughty Dog created one of our favorite kart racers of all time: Crash Team Racing. Of course, Naughty Dog doesn't work on Crash games anymore, but thankfully, this game is being made by Vicarious Visions, a team so talented that the legendary id Software tapped them to work on the highly anticipated Xbox port of Doom 3.

11/18/03	Rainbow Six 3: Mission Pack 2	Ubisoft
11/3/03	Rebel Trucker	Global Star Software
11/18/03	Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts
11/18/03	Shadowbane: The Rise of Chaos	Ubisoft
10/28/03	Silent Hill 3	Konami
10/28/03	Sims 2.0 ,The	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Sims: Makin' Magic, The	Electronic Arts
11/11/03	Sitting Ducks	Hip Interactive
11/18/03	Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts
10/28/03	Syberia II	Vivendi Universal
11/11/03	Terminator 3: War of the Machines	Atari
10/29/03	Traitors Gate II: Cypher	Dreamcatcher
11/18/03	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari
11/11/03	Uru: Ages Beyond Myst	Ubisoft
11/18/03	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco
11/18/03	Yu-Gi-Oh! Power of Chaos	Konami

GAME BOY ADVANCE		
11/11/03	Beyblade: Ultimate Blader Jam	Atari
11/4/03	Brother Bear	Disney Interactive
10/28/03	Cartoon Network Speedway	Majesco
11/4/03	Cat in the Hat	Vivendi Universal
11/11/03	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi Universal
11/18/03	Double Dragon	Atlus
11/4/03	Dr. Seuss: The Cat in the Hat	Take 2
11/18/03	Dragon Ball Z: Taiketsu	Atari
11/3/03	Fairly Odd Parents: Breakin Da Rules	THQ
10/28/03	FIFA Soccer 2004	Electronic Arts
11/3/03	Fire Emblem	Nintendo
11/4/03	Frogger's Journey: Forgotten Relic	Konami
11/26/03	Hardcore Pool	Telegames
10/28/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
10/30/03	Hot Wheels World Race	THQ
11/17/03	James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts
10/27/03	Justice League: Chronicles	Midway
11/11/03	Looney Tunes: Back In Action	Electronic Arts
11/4/03	Lord of the Rings: Return of the King, The	Electronic Arts
11/11/03	Magical Quest 2	Capcom
11/17/03	Mario & Luigi	Nintendo
11/17/03	Medal of Honor: Infiltrator	Electronic Arts
11/18/03	Mucha Lucha	Ubisoft
11/3/03	Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed	Destination Software
10/28/03	Onimusha Tactics	Capcom
11/4/03	Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft
10/30/03	R-Type III	Destination Software
10/29/03	SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom	THQ
11/3/03	Spy Muppets: License to Croak	TDK Mediactive
10/28/03	Spyro 3: Attack of the Rhynocs	Vivendi Universal
11/4/03	SSX 3	Electronic Arts
11/5/03	Star Wars: Flight of the Falcon	THQ
11/11/03	Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	Atari
10/28/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
10/27/03	Top Gear Rally	Nintendo
11/17/03	Ultimate Card Games	Telegames
11/4/03	Yu-Gi-Oh! The Sacred Card	Konami

SECRET ACCESS

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: CHAOS BLEEDS



Like, vampires are gross! Here's how to unlock a whole dumptruck full of stuff to flesh out the game.

UNLOCKABLE EXTRAS

Amber Benson Interview – Complete Mission 2
Amber Benson Voice Over Session – Complete Mission 8
Anthony Stewart Head Interview – Complete Mission 1
Anthony Stewart Head Voice Over Session – Complete Mission 7
Chaos Bleeds Comic Book – Complete Mission 5
James Marsters Voice Over Session – Complete Mission 6
Joss Whedon Voice Over Session – Complete Mission 11
Nicholas Brendan Interview – Complete Mission 3
Nicholas Brendon Voice Over Session – Complete Mission 9
Outtakes – Complete Mission 12
Robin Sachs Interview – Complete Mission 4
Robin Sachs Voice Over Session – Complete Mission 10

UNLOCKABLE MULTIPLAYER CHARACTERS

Abominator – Finish Mission 10 with Professional rating
Bat Beast – Finish Mission 4 with Professional rating
Chainz – Finish Mission 10 with Slayer rating
Chris – Finish Mission 12 with Slayer rating
Faith – Finish Mission 8 with Professional rating
Female Vampire – Finish Mission 1 with Slayer rating
Joss Whedon – Finish Mission 12 with Professional rating
Kakistos – Finish Mission 9 with Slayer rating
Male Vampire – Finish Mission 1 with Professional rating
Materani – Finish Mission 5 with Professional rating
Psycho Patient – Finish Mission 6 with Professional rating
S&M Mistress – Finish Mission 7 with Slayer rating
S&M Slave – Finish Mission 7 with Professional rating
Sid the Dummy – Finish Mission 6 with Slayer rating
Tara – Finish Mission 3 with Slayer rating
Zombie Demon – Finish Mission 3 with Professional rating
Zombie Devil – Finish Mission 4 with Slayer rating
Zombie Gorilla – Finish Mission 11 with Professional rating
Zombie Skeleton – Finish Mission 2 with Professional rating
Zombie Soldier – Finish Mission 9 with Professional rating

Jason Mewes
Seattle, WA

SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN

Input all of these cheats at the Options menu located in the Simpson's living room. When a code is entered correctly, you'll hear a horn.

Alternate Camera – Hold L and R, then press B (x3), A.
Brick Car – Hold L and R, then press B, B, Y, X.
Faster Cars – Hold L and R, then press X (x4).
Jumping Cars – Hold L and R, then press X (x3), Y.
No Car Damage – Hold L and R, then press Y, A, Y, A.
One-Hit Car Explosions – Hold L and R, then press Y (x2), X (x2).
See Credits – Hold L and R, then press A, X (x2), Y.
Show Grid – Hold L and R, then press B, A, B, Y.
Show Speedometer – Hold L and R, then press Y, Y, B, X.
Super Fast Cars – Hold L and R, then press Y (x4).
Trails Mode – Hold L and R, then press Y, B, Y, B.

Jack Bauer
Los Angeles, CA

CODE OF THE MONTH

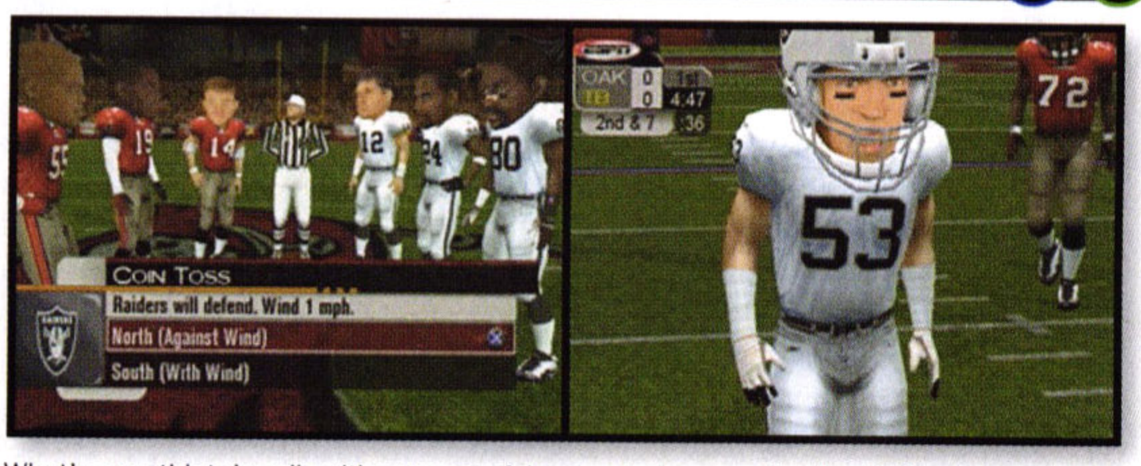
STARSKY & HUTCH

If Starsky & Hutch isn't funkadelic enough as it is, this will pump it up that much more. Enter the code below as your User Name.

All Bonuses – VADKRAM

Charles DeGaulle
Long Beach, CA

ESPN NFL FOOTBALL



What's an athlete's crib without some fake sports to pass the time? Here's how to get that and more.

Air Hockey in the Crib – Win the Super Bowl
Big Head Mode – Make a custom player
Kickin' or Stickin' Cheat – Log three hours on one username
Paper Football Game in the Crib – Finish one entire game in First Person Mode

Lawrence Oliver
Sussex, England

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Enter these codes at the Main Menu.

All Movies – L2 (x2), □, ○ (x2), R2, R1, □ (x2), ○, L1, R1
Level Select – □, L2, □, R2, ○, R1, ○, L1, L2, R2, ○, □
Unlimited Ammo – □, ○, L2, R1, R2, L1, ○, □, L1, R1, L1, R1

Greatest Escape Mode – Available once you beat the game.

Dustin Fedie
Williamsburg, NC

ENTER TO WIN

Send in your codes and passwords, and if we choose your entry as Code of the Month you'll win a wonderful prize from the Game Informer Vault! All other entries printed within these hallowed pages will receive a Secret Access t-shirt.

Send To:
Secret Access
Game Informer Magazine
724 North First Street, 4th Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401
secretaccess@gameinformer.com

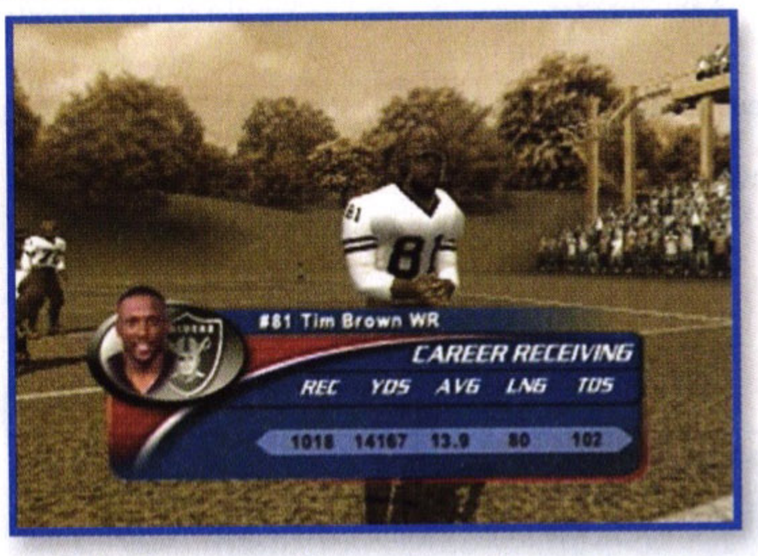
Dot Hack Vol. 3: Outbreak

The DVD that you get with the game has some hidden stuff in this volume as well.

On the DVD that comes with the game, go to the "Extras" menu. Press Right on the D-Pad and choose anything but the DVD credits. ✕ or Enter will reveal the secrets.

Ryu Hadouken
Forgestan, NH

NFL GameDay 2004



Go to the Preseason Options screen, then scroll waaaay over to select a red-text stadium. Enter these passwords to unlock two of the secret stadiums.

Good Ol' Days – SEPIA TONE
Old Carolina – CAROL

Peter Cushing
Orlando, FL

Romance of the Three Kingdoms 8

You can command the armies of the East with your favorite American hero by doing the following. From the New Officer menu, choose Create New Officer and input one of these case-sensitive names. Ignore the order of the first and last name boxes, for instance "Thomas" as a last name and then "Edison" as a first name. The game will give you a confirmation tone and set the new officer's abilities after you put in a birth date.

Abraham Lincoln
Albert Einstein
Ben Franklin
Benedict Arnold
Davy Crockett
Jedidiah Smith
Jim Bridger
John Adams
John Henry
JohnPaul Jones
Kit Carson
Patrick Henry
Paul Bunyan
Paul Revere
Pecos Bill
Red Cloud
Sam Houston
Sitting Bull
Thomas Edison
William Cody
William Seward

Capt. John T. Falcon
Her Majesty's Secret Service

Hunter: The Reckoning – Wayward

You have to beat the game to use these cheats, which you input during gameplay. Also, trophies must be earned before the cheat can be used. Here's a list of the codes, what trophies you need to use them, and how to get them.

All Weapons – Looter Trophy (Collect all silver pieces), □, ✕, ○, ✕, Up, Down, Up, Down
Enable Cheats – Nephrack Trophy (Beat Nephrack), ○, □, △, ✕, L1 (x2), Left (x2)
Max Ammo – Gun Bunny Trophy (Beat Downtown killing all enemies with only the starting ranged weapon), Right (x4), Up, Down, Up, Down
Max Health – Pit Fighter Trophy (Beat Downtown killing all enemies with only the starting melee weapon), △ (x2), ○ (x2), □, L1, □, R1
Mega Melee Damage – The Machine Trophy (Beat the Machine boss), Down (x2), R1 (x2), Up, ✕, Up, ○
Monster Spawn Toggle – Werewolf Trophy (Beat the Werewolf), □ (x2), ○ (x2), △, L1 (x2)
No Conviction Lost for Edges – Life Saver Trophy (Save all the Innocents in the Prison Hospital lower level), L2, Up, ✕, Up, □, Down (x2)
Tougher Monsters – Team Up Trophy (Beat the game with two players), □ (x2), △, □, L2 (x2), Up, Down
Unlimited Ammo – Rogue Hunter Trophy (Beat the Rogue Hunter), ✕, △, ○, □, △, Up, Down (x2)
Unlimited Life – Warrior Trophy (Beat all the enemies in Midtown), Right (x3), ✕, Up, △, Up, □

"GI Droid"
(location unkown – last seen swapping spit with Madonna)

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NOKIA
CONNECTING PEOPLE

SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN

Input all of these cheats at the Options menu located in the Simpson's living room. When a code is entered correctly, you'll hear a horn.

Alternate Camera – Hold L1 and R1, then press ○ (x3), ✕.
Brick Car – Hold L1 and R1, then press ○ (x2), △, □.
Faster Cars – Hold L1 and R1, then press □ (x4).
Jumping Cars – Hold L1 and R1, then press □ (x3), △.
No Car Damage – Hold L1 and R1, then press △, ✕, △, ✕.
One-Hit Car Explosions – Hold L1 and R1, then press △ (x2), □ (x2).
See Credits – Hold L1 and R1, then press ✕, □ (x2), △.
Show Grid – Hold L1 and R1, then press ○, ✕, ○, ✕.
Show Speedometer – Hold L1 and R1, then press △ (x2), ○, □.
Super Fast Cars – Hold L1 and R1, then press △ (x4).
Trails Mode – Hold L1 and R1, then press △, ○, △, ○.

Randy Moss
Miami, FL

OTOGI: MYTH OF DEMONS

Here's a whole host of weapons to unlock.

Black Swallow – Kill the Death Serpent behind the beginning of Canyon of Death (Stage 23).
Butterfly Staff – If you destroy some plants to your left close to the beginning of The Green Cave (Stage 10), you should find a hidden hallway. Look there.
Dragon Point – Kill 30 enemies in Restless Sea (Stage 7).
Dragon Staff – Finish Palace of Gold (Stage 5) with a time of 3:20 or better.
Golden Dragon – Look in the narrow passage near the beginning of Inner Sanctum (Stage 20).
Holy Staff – Beat Sea of Fire (Stage 15) with a time of 2:47 or better.
Jaws of Mountain – Take the narrow path to your right as you start in Spirit Wood (Stage 11) and go over the bridge.
Moonlight Sword – Free all of the souls through the first 28 stages.
Ogre's Horn – Defeat the Blaze Ogre near the beginning of Darkfire Cave (Stage 18).
Orchid Malevolence – Kill the Hydra in Stage 25.
Punisher – Look at the base of the hill to the right in A Clouded Moon (Stage 6).
Rune Scimitars – Successfully pull off a 20-hit combo in Mountain Gates (Stage 3).
Skylarks – Beat Stage 14 in under 2 minutes.
Staff of Duality – Inside a tree stump lies a passageway within the Forest of Wind (Stage 24). Look there.
Sword of Voracity – Kill 60 enemies in the Valley of Prayer (Stage 26).
Thunder – Look underneath the bridge between the center island and the statue in Lair of Fire (Stage 22).
Training Sword – Successfully pull off a 400-hit combo in Sprit Wood (Stage 11).

Tom Servo
Puerto Rico

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Here are some tricks that weren't printed in the last issue.

Hilarious Alternate Ending & Easy Malak Battle – Right before you open the doors to the final battle with Malak, press both triggers and the Y button on two controllers simultaneously. If your Jedi takes out their lightsaber, you're on the right track.
Easy Heal – If you are not in combat or inside a room, go to the Map screen. On that screen, press the X button to jump back to the Ebon Hawk. All of your characters will go back up to full health, and you can then press X again to jump back to where you were.

Jimmy "Pop" Ali
Santa Monica, CA

THE GREAT ESCAPE

The Xbox version has a separate set of codes from the PS2 version. These are a couple that we found.

Level Select & Greatest Escape Mode – At the main menu, enter this code: Y, R Button, Y, X, Y, R Button, X, L Button, X (x3), Y.
Unlimited Health & Ammo – With a gun and a health kit in your inventory, pause the game and enter this code: Y, X, L Button, R Button, L Button, R Button, X, Y, L Button, Y (x2), R.

"Space Emperor" Raul Ibanez
Kansas City, MO

F-ZERO GX

Codes, stuff to unlock, and special names for custom machines are all hidden in the new F-Zero. This is how to hook yourself up.

Character Theme Music – You can change the music that plays during a replay to any of the character theme songs that you've unlocked. At any time, push the L and R triggers to do so.
Sounds Of Big Blue – Go to the F-Zero Shop and at the screen where you buy stuff enter this code (use the D-Pad for directions): Z, Left, Right, Left, Z, Y, X, Z, Left, Right, Left, Right, Z, X, Z, X, Z. You can now buy Sounds of Big Blue in the shop for 99 tickets, which will let you hear it by pressing the L button while highlighting any Big Blue track.
Subtitles in Story Mode – Press the Z button during a cutscene to bring up subtitles.

UNLOCKABLES

AX Machine Parts – Beat all Story mode chapters on Hard difficulty.
AX Pilots – Beat all Story mode chapters on Very Hard difficulty.
AX Tracks – Win AX Machine Tracks or beat all the grand prix on Master difficulty.
Dark Schneider – Beat all chapters in Story Mode.
Master Class – Come in first place in the Ruby, Emerald and Sapphire Cups on Expert.
Sonic Oval – Beat the AX Cup.

SPECIAL CUSTOM MACHINES

When building custom machines out of the parts that you earn, you can get some with special names. Here's a partial list.

Beat The Beast – Fire Wolf (B), Muscle Gorilla (B), Titan -G4 (C), 1740 kg
Desert Camel – Big Tyrant (A), Blast Camel (D), Bazooka -Y5 (D), 2030 kg
Gargoyle – Funny Swallow (D), Bright Spear (C), Boxer -2C (C), 1170 kg
King Neptune – Grand Base (A), Super Lynx (B), Titan -G4 (B), 2380 kg
Long Shot – Rapid Barrel (C), Aerial Bullet (C), Scorpion -R (E), 1220 kg
Master Work – Sky Horse (C), Moon Snail (B), Titan -G4 (D), 1440 kg
Out Rider – Funny Swallow (D), Windy Shark (D), Bazooka -Y5 (E), 960 kg
Salvation – Rapid Barrel (C), Blast Camel (B), Raiden -88 (D), 1390 kg
Sockdolager – Big Tyrant (A), Muscle Gorilla (C), Boxer -2C (C), 2210 kg

David Hasselhoff
Spooner, WI

Mortal Kombat: Tournament Edition

Here are some unlockables for the latest GBA fighter, as well as the fatality moves.

CHARACTERS

Do these tasks to unlock the rest of the characters.
Drahmin – Finish 1-Player Tag Team mode on Normal or higher difficulty with anyone.
Hsu Hao – Finish 1-Player Arcade mode on Normal or higher difficulty.
Noob Saibot – Finish both 1-Player Arcade (on Normal or higher difficulty) and Tag Team modes with every other character (except Sektor). (Characters count as having finished Tag Team mode as long as they have been part of a winning team). After you've done that, finish 1-Player Arcade mode with Scorpion in his Reaper costume on Hard or higher difficulty.
Reptile – Finish 1-Player Arcade mode with every character (except for Sektor and Noob Saibot) on Normal or higher difficulty.
Sektor – Beat Tag Team mode on Hard difficulty without using continues.

WEAPON FATALITIES

Here's what you have to do to enable the weapon fatalities.
Bo' Rai Cho – Finish Tag Team mode with everyone except Noob Saibot and Sektor.
Cyrax – Defeat 10 opponents with Cyrax in Survival mode.
Drahmin – Purchase in the Krypt. (Koffin HM)
Hsu Hao – Purchase in the Krypt. (Koffin FP)
Johnny Cage – Purchase in the Krypt. (Koffin FJ)
Mavado – Purchase in the Krypt. (Koffin DK)
Nitara – Purchase in the Krypt. (Koffin DN)
Noob Saibot – Finish Tag Team mode with Noob Saibot and Scorpion on a team.
Quan Chi – Finish Tag Team mode with Quan Chi and Sareena on a team.
Raiden – Defeat 10 opponents with Raiden in Survival mode.
Reptile – Purchase in the Krypt. (Koffin GC)
Sareena – Purchase in the Krypt. (Koffin HI)
Scorpion – Defeat 10 opponents with Scorpion in Survival mode.
Sektor – Finish Tag Team mode with Sector and Cyrax on a team.
Shang Tsung – Finish Tag Team mode with Shang Tsung and Quan Chi on a team.

ALTERNATE WEAPON COLORS

Do these while a fight is loading or between rounds.
Black – Hold Up + L + R Buttons
Blue – Hold Up + A or B Buttons
Red – Hold R Button
Brown – Hold R + L Buttons
Green – Hold Up + L Buttons
Purple – Hold Up + R Buttons
Yellow – Hold L Button

FATALITIES

Enter these button combos for a grisly finishing move.
Bo Rai Cho – Back (x3), A
Cyrax – Down (x2), Up, A
Drahmin – Back, Up, B
Hsu Hao – Back (x2), Forward, A
Johnny Cage – Forward, Back, B
Mavado – Forward, Back, B
Nitara – Up, Forward, B
Noob Saibot – Up, Forward, A
Quan Chi – Back, Back, A
Raiden – Down (x2), Up, A
Sareena – Back (x3), A
Scorpion – Forward, Back, A
Sektor – Back (x2), Forward, A
Shang Tsung – Down, Up, A

WEAPON FATALITIES

Do these button combos to finish your opponent using your weapon.
Bo Rai Cho – Down, Back, A
Cyrax – Up (x2), B
Drahmin – Down (x2), A
Hsu Hao – Up, Forward, B
Johnny Cage – Up, Down, A
Mavado – Down, Back, A
Nitara – Down (x2), B
Noob Saibot – Up, Back, A
Quan Chi – Down, Forward, A
Raiden – Up, Down, A
Reptile – Up, Back, A
Sareena – Down, Up, A
Scorpion – Up, Down, A
Sektor – Down (x2), A
Shang Tsung – Back (x2), B

"Mr. X-citement"
Key West, FL

Shining Soul

When you start a new game, if you name your characters special things, they get stat bonuses.

Archer – Hans – +10 Vit
DragonNewt – Bleu – +10 Dex
Mage – Anri – +10 Int
Warrior – Max – +10 Str

Rolfe Trtrnx
Vancouver, Canada

Jet Grind Radio

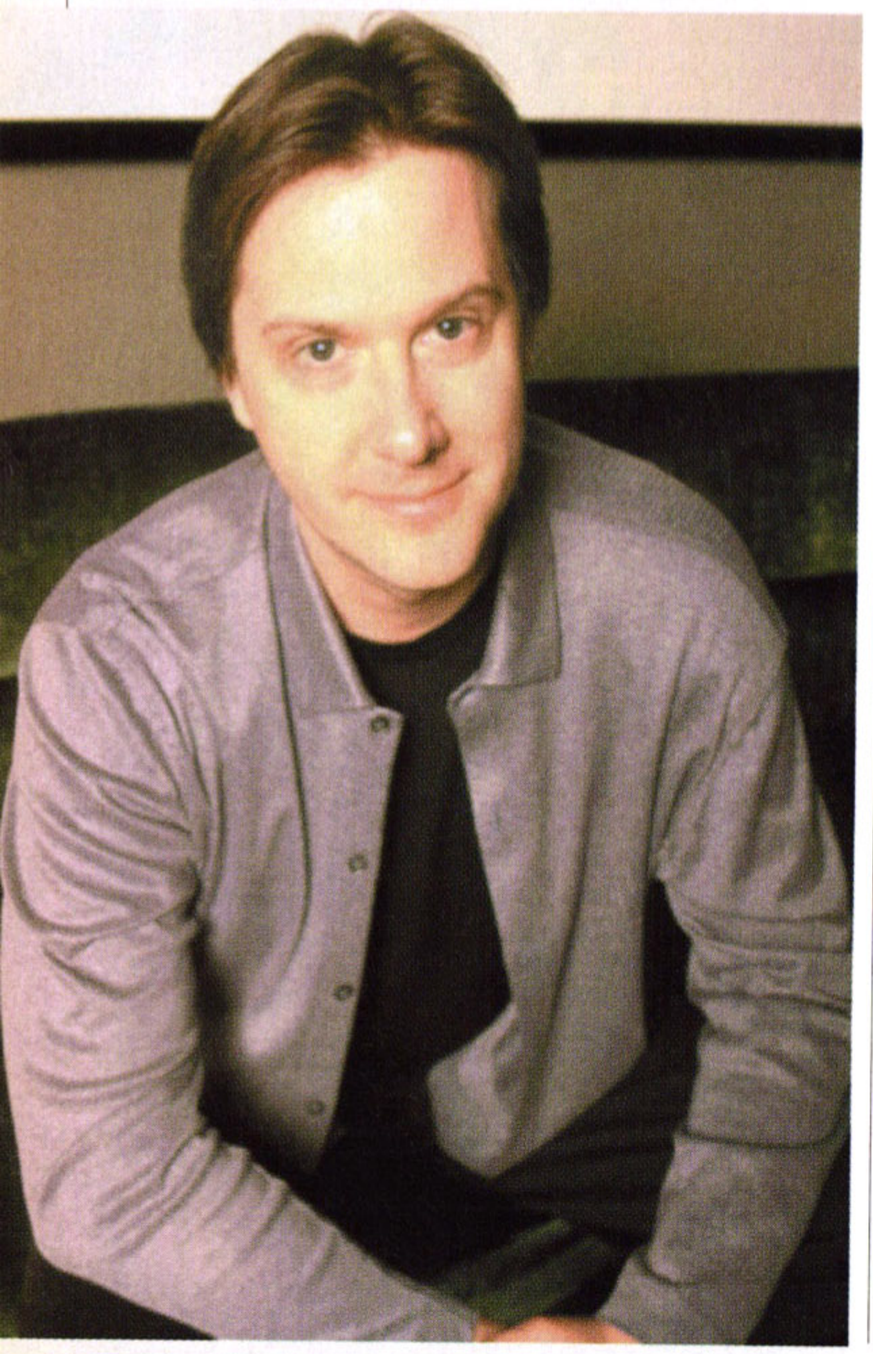
This game has a few things to unlock.

Love Shockers – Get a Jet ranking on the Shibuya-Cho levels.
Noise Tanks – Get a Jet ranking on the Benten-Cho levels.
Poison Jam – Get a Jet ranking on the Kogane-Cho levels.
Prof. K – Beat the game and save.

Mohammed Ali
Des Moines, IA

GAMING'S GO-TO GUY: MARK CERNY

In a career that spans over 20 years, Mark Cerny has become one of the most respected professionals in the industry. He began a lifetime of game creation at the age of 13 and was hired at Atari before he was old enough to vote. Since then, he's played a number of roles in the creation of games ranging from Marble Madness to Jak II (reviewed in this issue on page 136). As a programmer, game designer, and producer, Cerny has worn just about every hat you can wear in the world of games, and is one of the few members of the old-school days that is still working on triple-A titles – as a for-hire design and technology consultant. He was nice enough to grant us this interview, and share the insights he's learned from over two decades in video games.



Talk a little bit about your childhood and how you became a programming enthusiast.

I grew up in Berkeley, California. I started attending classes at UC Berkeley when I was 13. The funny thing is that I spent more time playing games at the college's rec center and hobbyist programming than I did going to class. [Laughs] So, at some point I decided to turn those two hobbies into a job.

So, you started making your own games?

What I was trying to do was to make a full-blown, 3D RPG in 1977 on some minicomputers. Needless to say, I didn't get to the end of that project; it was overly ambitious. The game didn't have a name, but it had a very involved combat system and I was very excited about graphics technology, as I am today.

We were trying to do vector display, but also hidden surface. So you can imagine Battlezone, but with opaque objects rather than transparent ones.

When I decided to turn my hobbies into a job, I looked at two companies and ultimately ended up working at Atari's coin-op group.

Did you get involved with Atari through a contest?

That's not true. That is out there, it's even been published in a book, but there was no contest.

So, you just submitted a game to Atari?

No. I was a very good arcade player and I'd been interviewed by a reporter who was writing a book about how to play arcade games. When I started looking for a job, I gave him a call and he agreed to talk to some people on my behalf. He ended up spending an hour with the vice president of R&D at Atari coin-op, and that got me an interview.

Once you started at Atari, what projects did they put you on?

I first made a game that ended up not getting published. It was hard in those days; about half the games were cancelled at the point at which they could be location tested, which means that you would put the game in an arcade and see how much money it earned each week. The game had to look completely done, which meant that about 80 percent of its features had to be in it. Over half of the games went to that point and then died, games even by very famous people like Ed Logg, the creator of Asteroids and Centipede.

So, I took my game to that point, you can see it on MAME these days, it's called Qwak!. That was '82, and then in '83 I helped Owen Rubin get Major Havoc out the door. I ended up doing a lot of level design and helped program the space combat in that. [The following year] was Marble Madness and in '85 I left Atari.

Marble Madness still stands up as a great game and was a really unique concept. What was the inspiration for such a novel title?

It has a sort of aesthetic purity to it, which is nice. There are no creatures with eyes or anything, it's all very abstract. The concept with it was that I wanted to do very clean 3D, something with dimensionality in it. I laid out the concept before Crystal Castles came out, so I had the concept in early '83 but didn't get to do the game until '84 because I spent that year doing Major Havoc. The idea was that, by using that kind of isometric perspective and a few other things like shadows to give it depth, you could really create imagery that looked solid. There were actually machines like I, Robot that could do 3D, but it wasn't a particularly clean 3D. It was large, flat-shaded polygons.

So, there's the concept for what the playfields should look like, but what do you do in that context? I started out thinking miniature golf, but it quickly became clear that it would be much more exciting if you could actually control the ball, rather than hitting it.

Talk about your experiences working for Atari. You were there through the serious downturn in video games – how was Atari to work for from an employee's perspective?

The arcade downturn happened before the consumer downturn, starting in the summer of 1982. We went through four or five rounds of layoffs in the three years I was at Atari. The company president changed I believe four times; I reported to five different people over those three years – it was very chaotic. But, I was safe job-wise because I was cheap and I had demonstrated that I could get a game out the door.

What went wrong at Atari? Were they caught up in a trend larger than Atari, or were they a victim of their own mistakes?

The company lost a billion dollars, mostly through the consumer side of the business. That was, by the way, a corporate record in those days. Coin-op wasn't as bad, although we did have some problems. The top games went from selling 50,000 units in 1981 to selling less than 10,000 units in 1985 when Marble Madness and Paperboy came out.

After Atari, you worked for Sega, correct?

Yes, I worked for Sega for seven years.

How did that come about? Did you know people at Sega who brought you on?

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME | BY MONTE DRISCOLL

Every month one of Game Informer's readers picks his or her personal choice for Greatest Game Of All Time.

SHADOWRUN

- **FORMAT** GENESIS
- **PUBLISHER** SEGA

I am more than sure that I am not the only person in the world that considers Shadowrun for Genesis worthy of the title "Greatest Game of All Time." I've come to this conclusion because of the hysterical popularity of Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. Many elements of the engrossing PlayStation2 mega-hit are clearly displayed by the cyberpunk adventure that debuted nearly 10 years previous. Accepting random jobs like delivering packages or eliminating rival gangs for cash; a sprawling metropolis with several sections of the city that are ruled by said gang factions; a giant mall prime for shopping or causing chaos at leisure; and a weapon selection between pistols, machine guns, and shotguns are all prime examples of similarities between the two games. In my opinion, however, I feel that Shadowrun definitely provides a much deeper playing experience, especially when you factor in such features like contacts that you call on the vid-phone who can provide you with services, goods, and advice; or upgradable attributes and abilities ranging

I wanted to set up my own coin-operated game developer, which I did, but it was very hard. For one thing, in coin-op, you have to make both the hardware and the software – at least you did in those days. After a year of struggling with that, I went to Japan and wrote various games for Sega's Master System. I worked with really cutting-edge – bleeding edge? [laughs] – 8- and 16-bit technologies. I got Sega to make 3D glasses along with the Master System, then I constructed a gaming network using a 1200-baud modem for the Sega Genesis that spanned all four of the Japanese islands and deployed in 1990. It was much too early for that sort of technology, there wasn't much you could do...this was years before the Sega Channel.

What were some of the games that you worked on at Sega that were highlights for you?

A couple of Master System titles – Shooting Gallery and Missile Defense 3D, which was the bundled title with the 3D glasses. It had missiles that seemed like they were coming out of the screen at you. I did conversions to Sega's hardware of Shanghai and California Games. Sega was a pretty cool place; I was in the same office as [Sonic the Hedgehog co-creator] Yuji Naka.

How was Sega as compared to Atari?

Well, I was instantly a much bigger fish, because at that time there wasn't anyone at Sega with the reputation of Ed Logg or Dave Theurer, the Atari arcade greats. Yu Suzuki had just had his first success and Yuji Naka was still doing very high-quality conversions of arcade games, but he had not yet established himself as being a world-class game creator.

What was next for you after Japan?

Well, I came to the States and set up the Sega Technical Institute, which is where I ended up reassembling the whole Sonic Team after they blew apart in 1991. [Hirokazu] Yasuhara [interviewed in issue 124] had already been assigned to be a part of my team in the States, and Yuji Naka had had some real difficulties with Sega of Japan in those days. He was not getting the appreciation he deserved for Sonic, which was their first million-selling title. So, I managed to get him to come to work for me in the States as part of my R&D group in Sega of America. Sonic 2, 3, and 4 came out of that group.

When did you leave Sega?

I left Sega in '92. I was the first game guy through the door at Crystal Dynamics. I worked on Crash and Burn and Total Eclipse, and I was their chief technologist.

Next was Universal Interactive which was a pretty important part of your career. Talk about that....

I was at Crystal Dynamics for two years, and then I went to Universal. I was VP of product development and then president.

This was where you met Naughty Dog and Insomniac, two companies that became longtime partners of yours.

That's right. Naughty Dog was already there when I arrived, and we signed Insomniac shortly thereafter. Then I was a producer or executive producer for all of Naughty Dog and Insomniac's titles. I was executive producer of Crash 1, producer for Crash 2 and 3; and executive producer for Spyro 1, 2, and 3. I also had the opportunity to do a lot of design work, including almost all of the Crash 2 level layouts. So, if you picked up an apple, I put that apple there! [Laughs]

These ended up being fruitful relationships with these two companies. What was your take on them? Did you know they would do great things?

Oh, it was instantly obvious that the Dogs were going somewhere; they were very ambitious, savvy, hardworking guys. Insomniac had a demo that they had worked up and I thought they were the most talented amateurs I'd ever seen. I say "amateurs" because they weren't getting money to do it; they'd done it all on their own dime! That was the game that was eventually released as Disruptor after about five design iterations.

What are some of the differences between Naughty Dog and Insomniac?

Well, both companies are run by people with an incredible amount of drive. I don't know how they do it, but they live games. They're also very flexible. We've gone from me being a producer on the project to me being a contractor on the project – which is a real flip in the relationship – but it hasn't changed the way we talk to each other. It's always been a pleasure working with those guys.

In terms of differences, they really don't share the same sense of humor. Frequently one of the companies will get a hold of an alpha disc of the other company's game to take a look at. The funniest scenes in the game are playing and there is dead silence in the room from everybody watching it – and that goes both ways. It's a good thing, though, because if they had the same sense of humor, the games would be very similar.

Of course, now you have your consulting company, Cerny Games, which you've been doing for a while. What was the impetus behind starting your own company?

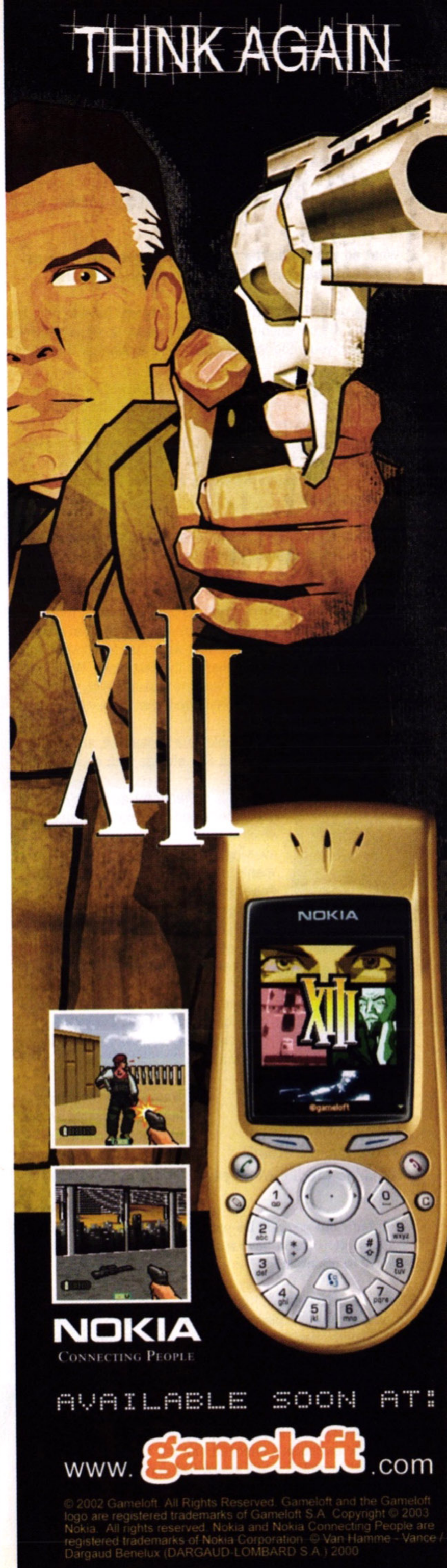
I'm a consultant, but my only clients are Naughty Dog, Insomniac, and Sony – it's all in the family. I've been doing this since the end of 1998. The impetus was that it was difficult for all of us as games people to be at Universal,

CERNY GAMES

Today, Mark is one of the most in-demand consultants in the industry

from Body and Intelligence to Electronics and Negotiation. Add in fellow Shadowrunners that are available for hire and cybernetics buyable from hospitals that allow you to customize your player to the extreme – and you have a game that has stolen entire summers from me.

I knew this was my game the moment I loaded it up from Sega Channel and the first thing I had to was select what I was going to say to the Hotel Manager who was keeping my slain brother's stuff. I had never before chosen my virtual words, and from that moment on I was absolutely hooked. Thank you, Sega Channel! I had no idea at the time what my life was going to be like but I did know that it would involve Shadowrun in a big way. Shadowrun for Genesis is the Greatest Game of All Time and probably the game most deserving of a next-gen remake. I wish I had the space to fully represent everything this game has to offer, including its addicting clue-driven storyline. This truly was one for the ages.



which wasn't focused on games. When it became clear that Naughty Dog and Insomniac were in fact leaving, I chose to go with them rather than stay in an executive role at Universal. I traded a very nice executive office for a desk and a computer in the bullpen. [Laughs] But, I have to say it was worth it.

What do you like better about what you're doing now as opposed to being a part of a company or publisher?

The big problem with a publisher is that you have to find the talent. It's a continuous process because, at a company like Universal, you either have to buy out the talent or the talent will leave.

The great advantage about working the way I work now is I get to work with the talent. It's all about the craftmanship of writing code and laying out levels and helping to put together a game, which is why you won't be seeing a game with the tagline "Created by Mark Cerny" anytime soon. To me, running an organization has very little to do with that craftsmanship.

So basically, it allows you to focus on your talents as a game designer without having to deal with any administrative issues?

The natural career flow is that, as people become more experienced and more senior, they move away from creative work. The tragedy is that it's that work that they loved, and that's why they got into games in the first place. What I've been doing for the last five years is leveraging my success to allow myself to do that basic work that I enjoy so much.

What do you bring to the table as a consultant, and what role do you fill? Or, does that role change with each project?

Cerny is the creator of the classic arcade machine Marble Madness

The role is different for each project. What I do is find out what's needed, which is different depending on the evolving programming and design departments at these companies. But, I do have a good skill set, so we always find something for me to do. Typically, that's perhaps laying out a third of the levels in the game and participating in the construction of the macro game design. Or, it could be some heavy-duty graphics technology work. For example, I wrote the core code that displays the foreground characters in Jak and Daxter.

You've seen an almost incomprehensible amount of change from when you started at Atari until now. Obviously, the technology is much more complex. How has that affected what you do? Do you have to change how you work, or do you still have a set of core philosophies that you try to maintain?

The core philosophy is that, at the end of the day, you have to take care of the player. That hasn't changed at all in the last 20-odd years. In the old days, we'd build our prototypes and take them to an arcade and watch people play them and see if they had fun. These days, we have rooms with one-way mirrors where we'll have 10 people play through these 20-hour games and watch them and interview them and try to address any issues they had.

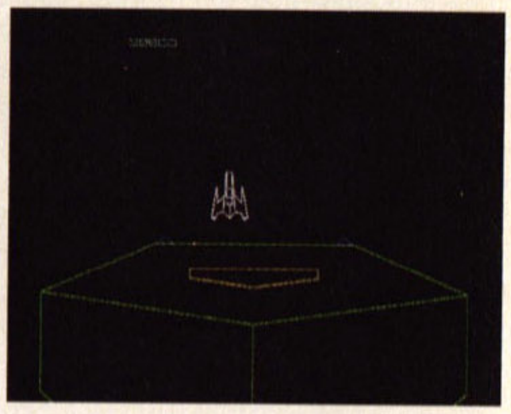
So, the structure's changed, but the fundamentals haven't changed. It's still interactive entertainment.

FOR THE RECORD: MARK CERNY

Although he's not as well-known as many other high-profile game creators, Mark Cerny has a resumé that most would envy. There's one thing that's sure: from the early days of Atari to his work on the upcoming Jak II and Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando, Cerny has done it all, from programming to producing. Here's a few of the highlights of his career:

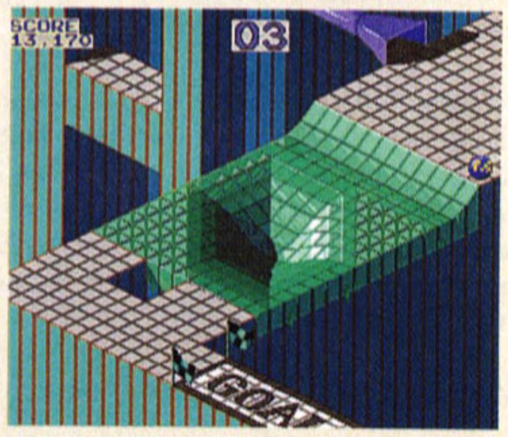
Major Havoc
Arcade 1983

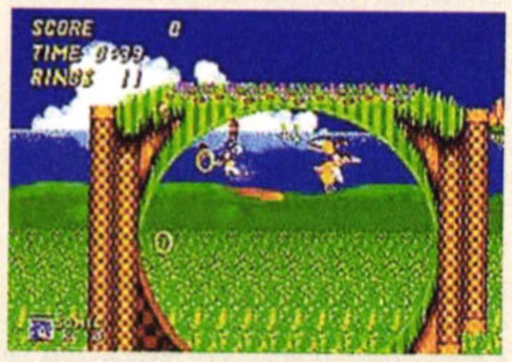
As a rookie in Atari's arcade division, Mark Cerny worked under esteemed programmer Owen Rubin to create this hectic sci-fi shooter.



Marble Madness
Arcade 1984

This was the game the first established Cerny's reputation. Marble Madness still stands today as a visionary game, and its influence is felt in games like Super Monkey Ball.





Sonic the Hedgehog 2
Genesis 1992

Cerny oversaw Sega's American development wing, allowing Yuji Naka and Hirokazu Yasuhara to create some of the 16-bit era's classic titles.

Crash Bandicoot
PlayStation 1996

Even as Mario 64 brought 3D to the forefront, Cerny and Naughty Dog kept 2D gameplay alive with Crash Bandicoot, the character that would be the mascot for the PlayStation.

Spyro the Dragon
PlayStation 1998

With Insomniac, Cerny helped craft Spyro the Dragon. This series would establish many of the basics for 3D platforming, and was one of the best-selling franchises of the nineties.

Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy
PlayStation 2
2001

Continuing his partnership with Naughty Dog, Cerny had a hand in Jak and Daxter, the platformer that dazzled with its gigantic, "no-load" environments.

Ratchet & Clank
PlayStation 2 2002

Moving beyond Spyro's kiddie-oriented gameplay, Cerny and Insomniac brought forth Ratchet & Clank, a comic sci-fi adventure that introduced blazing gunplay to the platformer.

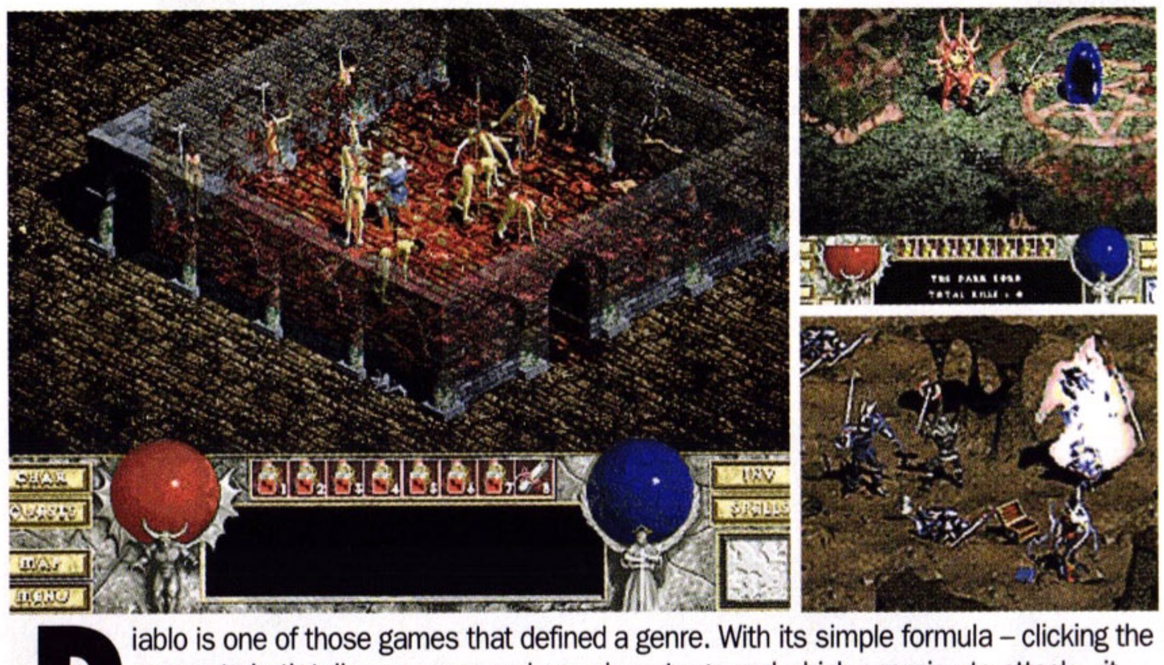
THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

On November 21st, 1998, Nintendo released what would go on to become one of the (if not the) most successful video game systems in history: the Game Boy Color. First debuted in America at E3 1998, the unit was backwards compatible with the monochrome Game Boy, but could display 54 simultaneous colors out from a total of 32,000 and also operated at twice the clock speed. It initially retailed for an affordable $79.99, and would soon become a commercial juggernaut due to the Pokémon phenomenon.

PC

DIABLO

RETRO RATING **9.75**



Diablo is one of those games that defined a genre. With its simple formula – clicking the mouse to both tell your onscreen hero where to go and which enemies to attack – it would be easy to think the title has no depth. However, its RPG elements, storylines, and spells put it in a class by itself – especially at the time. Returning to your hometown, you find the place in shambles. Many are dead, and the survivors are scared out of their wits. The source is a church, with a basement that hides untold horrors. Equip your character with various weapons, and armor for every part of their body. Gold and items (including special, rare ones) come from fallen foes and chests. Of course, each kill gets you a few points closer to leveling up. These aspects keep you trudging along in the randomly-created dungeons, and online play makes the addiction that much stronger. We can't forget the voice actors that hilariously imitate Sean Connery, Catherine Hepburn, and *Monty Python & The Holy Grail*'s Tim the Enchanter.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD
■ **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD NORTH ■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1997

GENESIS

KID CHAMELEON

RETRO RATING **7.75**

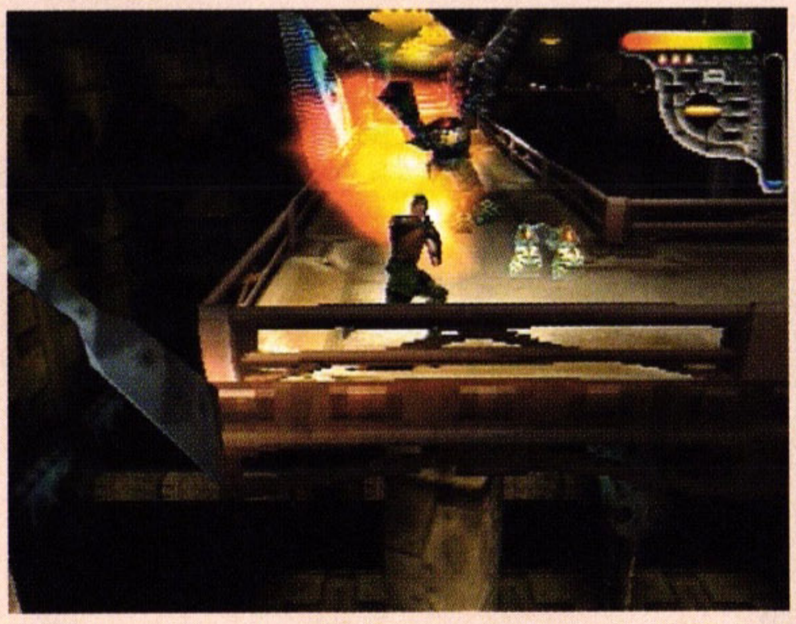
Remember the days when a game would boast about how many screens it took up? Kid Chameleon has over 1,850 screens! Kidding aside, this title takes Sonic's brilliant level design, but slows things down a bit and adds extra abilities in the form of masks. While the cornball "video game that kills real people" storyline is lame, it doesn't affect the gameplay in the least. Each of the eight masks does something cool, such as the hockey mask's ax-tossing or the iron knight's wall-crawling. Each one – including the unmasked Kid – possesses a general, Mario-esque move set (run, jump on enemies, break blocks with head, etc.). The levels are chock full of secrets, ranging from hidden power-up blocks to secret shortcuts. This, coupled with the number of masks, greatly enhances replay. The enemies and Kid himself don't have the personality of a Sonic or Mario, however, and the level backdrops are ho-hum. Bonus trivia: Mark Cerny, this month's Classic GI interviewee, worked on this title.

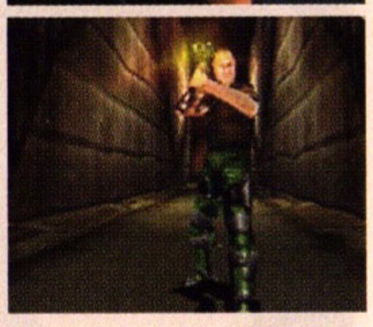
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA ■ **DEVELOPER** SEGA
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1992

PSONE

APOCALYPSE

RETRO RATING **6**





Apocalypse is notable for two reasons. The first is that its engine was modified for the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater series, which is the best extreme sports series of all time. The second is that it stars the legendary Bruce Willis. With the star of *Die Hard* giving it mainstream credibility like no game before it, one would hope Apocalypse would live up to the hype. Wrong. The gameplay is little more than 3D Robotron with a jump button. While the face of the main character is a great Willis likeness, the rest of the game looks über-pixelated. Also, the man who spoke such classic lines as "Yippee-ki-yay," "Zed's dead," and "I'm a meat popsicle" only has "You need more lead in your diet" to offer here. Thankfully, Neversoft has gone on to better things, and Brucey boy has stuck to movies. Video games learned a valuable lesson with Apocalypse: Celebrities don't know much about games, and don't do much to help bad games. Now that you know, you don't need to play Apocalypse yourself to discover it.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1998

SNES

ACTRAISER

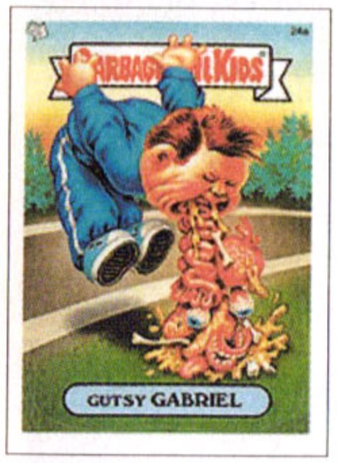
RETRO RATING **7**

Being "The Master" isn't easy work (just ask Lee Van Cleef). The lands of ActRaiser need help in a big way, and it's up to you to make things right. Each of the game's six cities consists of two portions. You first clear the area of enemies through side-scrolling combat similar to Rygar. This enables citizens to build homes and farmland. Then, you nurture civilization by directing cities' growth and protecting the populace from enemy lairs – all in real-time. This formula serves the game well, and has influenced series like Sony's Dark Cloud, among others. While it attempts to give you the feeling of a living world (you have to revisit old lands throughout the game) ActRaiser is a collection of simple concepts that don't meld. When you think that SimCity was already out by this time, and ActRaiser's brand of action was already widely available on the NES, this game is like going to a Halloween party nowadays dressed up as one of the guys from *The Commitments*. Never heard of it? Well, it was big at the time.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** QUINTET
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1991

ETC

GARBAGE PAIL KIDS

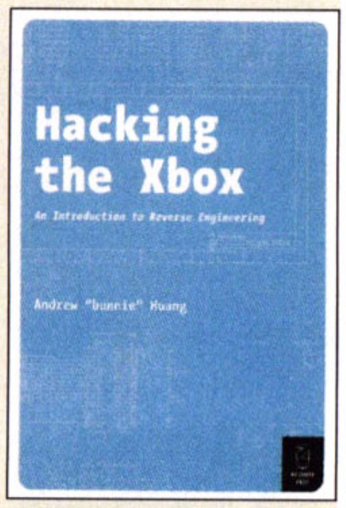


> **Manufacturer: Topps**
> **Website: topps.com**
> **List Price: $1.75**

Not content to remain a fond memory of childhood (or a nightmare, if you actually saw the hideously bad movie), the Garbage Pail Kids are back with a vengeance, and coming for your lint-encrusted pocket change. In their newest incarnation, every pack contains four pieces of "gross gum" wrapped in a mini GPK card, three big stickers, and one foil sticker. The new series features unreleased cards from the original run, as well as all-new work by the same creative team behind the first release. You mean the guys who created the Garbage Pail Kids weren't busy with other work? Shocking.

HACKING THE XBOX

> **Manufacturer: No Starch Press**
> **Website: nostarch.com**
> **List Price: $24.99**

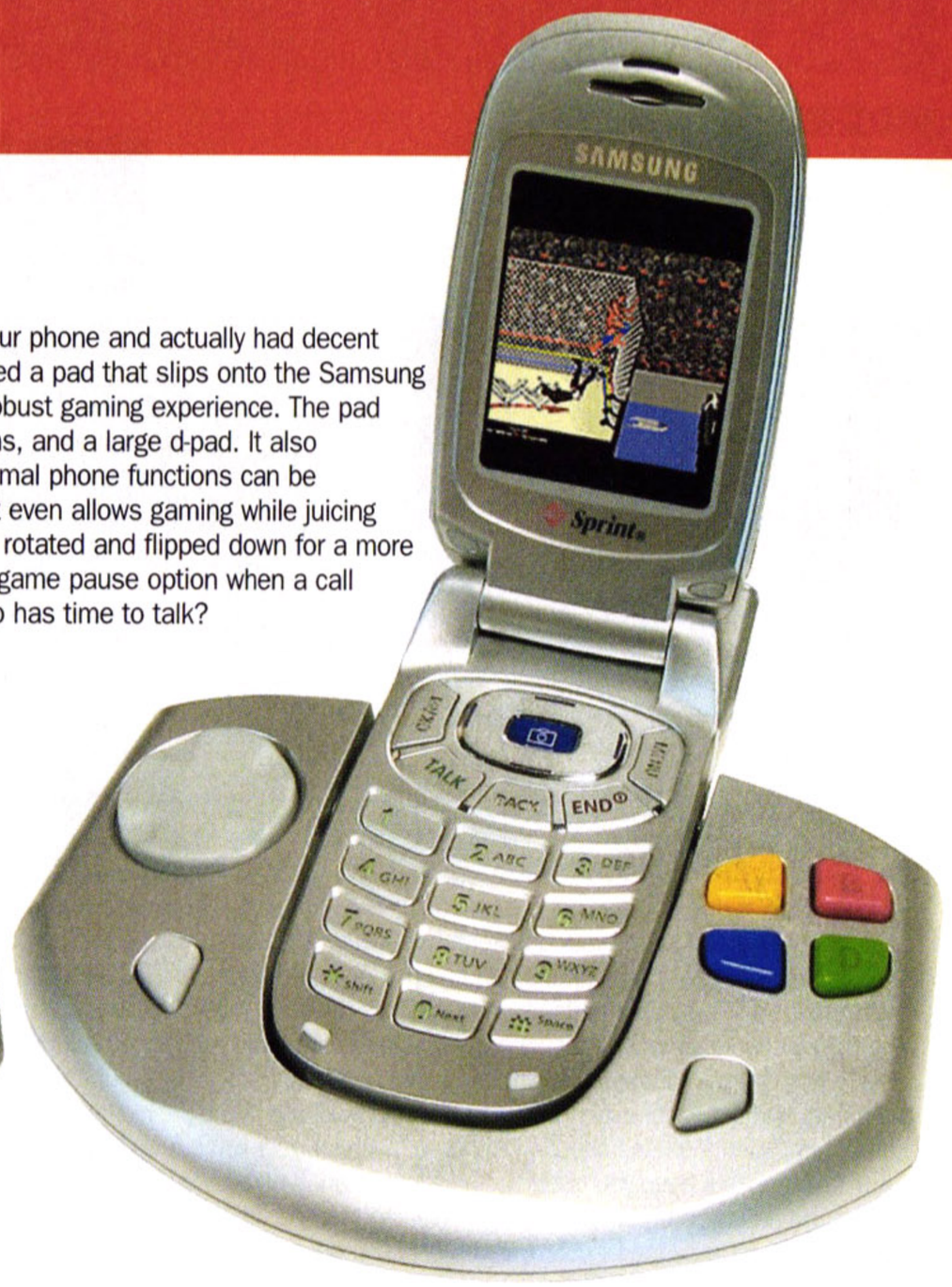


Written by MIT student Andrew "bunnie" Huang, *Hacking the Xbox* was dropped by its original publisher for fear of a lawsuit. Covering both hacking techniques and First Amendment rights, Huang hopes his book will stir the reader's interest in general computer technology, and therefore inspire a new generation of Bill Gates or Steve Jobs wannabes. He maintains that by teaching people the ins and outs of a standardized piece of computing hardware, they will be better able to understand computer technology in general. As such, the book is designed to be accessible to all readers, but by its very nature is a pretty technical read.

PCS GAMEPAD

> **Manufacturer: Samsung**
> **Website: sprintpcsaccessories.com**
> **List Price: $39.99 (Phone not included)**

How many times have you played games on your phone and actually had decent controls? Now Sprint and Samsung have created a pad that slips onto the Samsung A600 phone (and similar models) for a more robust gaming experience. The pad features four face buttons, two shoulder buttons, and a large d-pad. It also features "ok" and "menu" buttons, so that normal phone functions can be executed with the cradle. A built-in charger port even allows gaming while juicing up the battery! The screen of the A600 can be rotated and flipped down for a more compact gaming unit. The phone also offers a game pause option when a call comes in; but with so many games to play, who has time to talk?



THE XIII SOUNDTRACK

> **Manufacturer: Ubisoft** > **Website: whoisthirteen.com**
> **List Price: Free with pre-order from select retailers**

A game as funky-looking as XIII needs music with equal levels of funkosity, which is why Ubisoft teamed up with Future Primitive Sound for the soundtrack. The San Francisco record label features such pioneering rare groove and funk artists and DJs as Jack Dangers (of Meat Beat Manifesto fame), DJ Faust and Shortee, DJ Zeph, and Bing Ji Ling. The CD includes dialogue from the game, but the real draw is the music. Loaded with chilled, retro sounds, each track blends with the next for an uninterrupted groove experience. Remember, doctors today recommend at least 80g of funk per day, so this disc could be the first step to a longer, healthier gaming career.

DIGITAL COMIC BOOKS

> **Manufacturer: Intec Interactive**
> **Website: N/A** > **List Price: $9.99**

In an attempt to create comics for a new generation, Intec Interactive has joined the medium with DVD technology. By photographing comics and adding music, voices, and camera movement, Intec has created a new way to experience comic books. Each disc includes six full comic book issues and bonus features like trailers, documentaries, and character histories. With so much on one disc, Digital Comics are easily cheaper than buying individual comic books. The first wave of Digital Comics features popular CrossGen comics like *Negation*, *Way of the Rat*, and *Sojourn*. Upcoming releases will include popular Marvel Comics titles like *Spider-Man* and the *Hulk*, which means your DVD player, PS2, or Xbox can get some comic book love even if you hated the movies.

SENNHEISER PC 150 HEADSET

> **Manufacturer: Sennheiser Communications**
> **Website: sennheiserusa.com**
> **List Price: $69.95**

Already well-known in the audiophile community for its high-end headsets, the PC 150 marks the first Sennheiser product designed specifically for the gaming community. Most gaming headsets are created with price as the first priority, resulting in units that either don't sound great or simply fall apart quickly. The PC 150 is admittedly a little on the steep side, but offers gamers quality sound and essential features in a package that was designed to last. The PC 150 is equipped with a 3.5mm stereo jack to fit all standard sound cards, noise-canceling, in-line volume control, and a built-in microphone for games with voice support. Talking smack to the guy you just hosed with a flak cannon never sounded so good!

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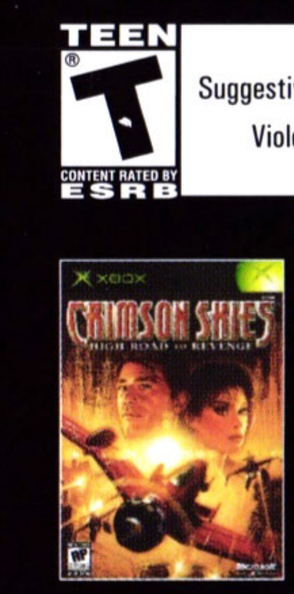
Certain death at your
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12 o'clock



Buckle up because Crimson Skies® is a deadly ride. Play single player as an air pirate at the helm of a tricked-out 1930s warplane. Because you're fueled by revenge, anyone foolish enough to enter your airspace is an enemy. Play on Xbox *Live*™ to pick a dogfight with up to 15 friends and strangers. Just remember, as you enjoy sending opponents into a fiery death spiral, someone probably has you in their crosshairs. Good luck, you are cleared to rule the skies.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

fasa studio
Microsoft game studios

CRIMSON SKIES
HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE

XBOX LIVE

XBOX

it's good to play together

xbox.com/crimsonskies

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