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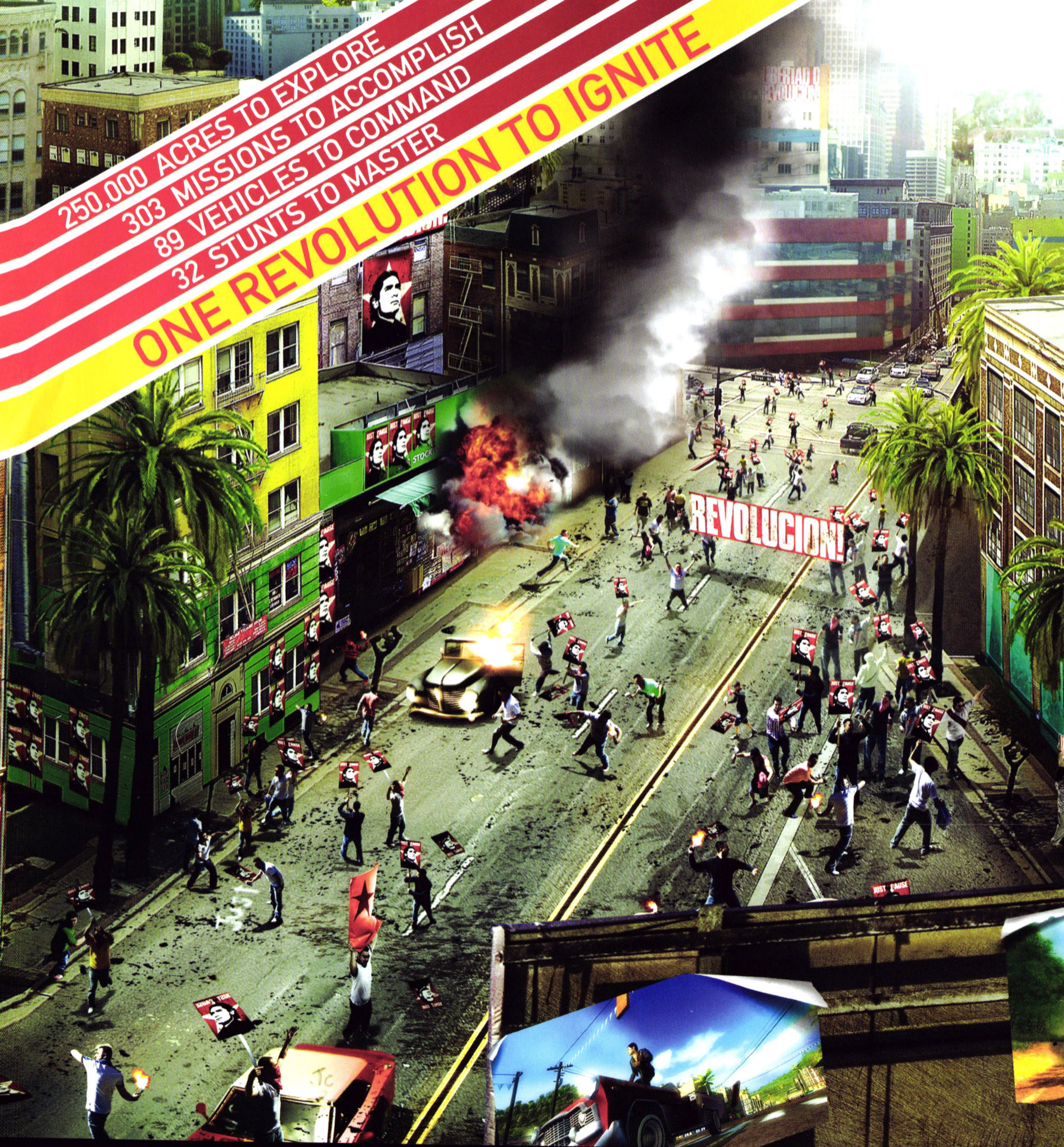
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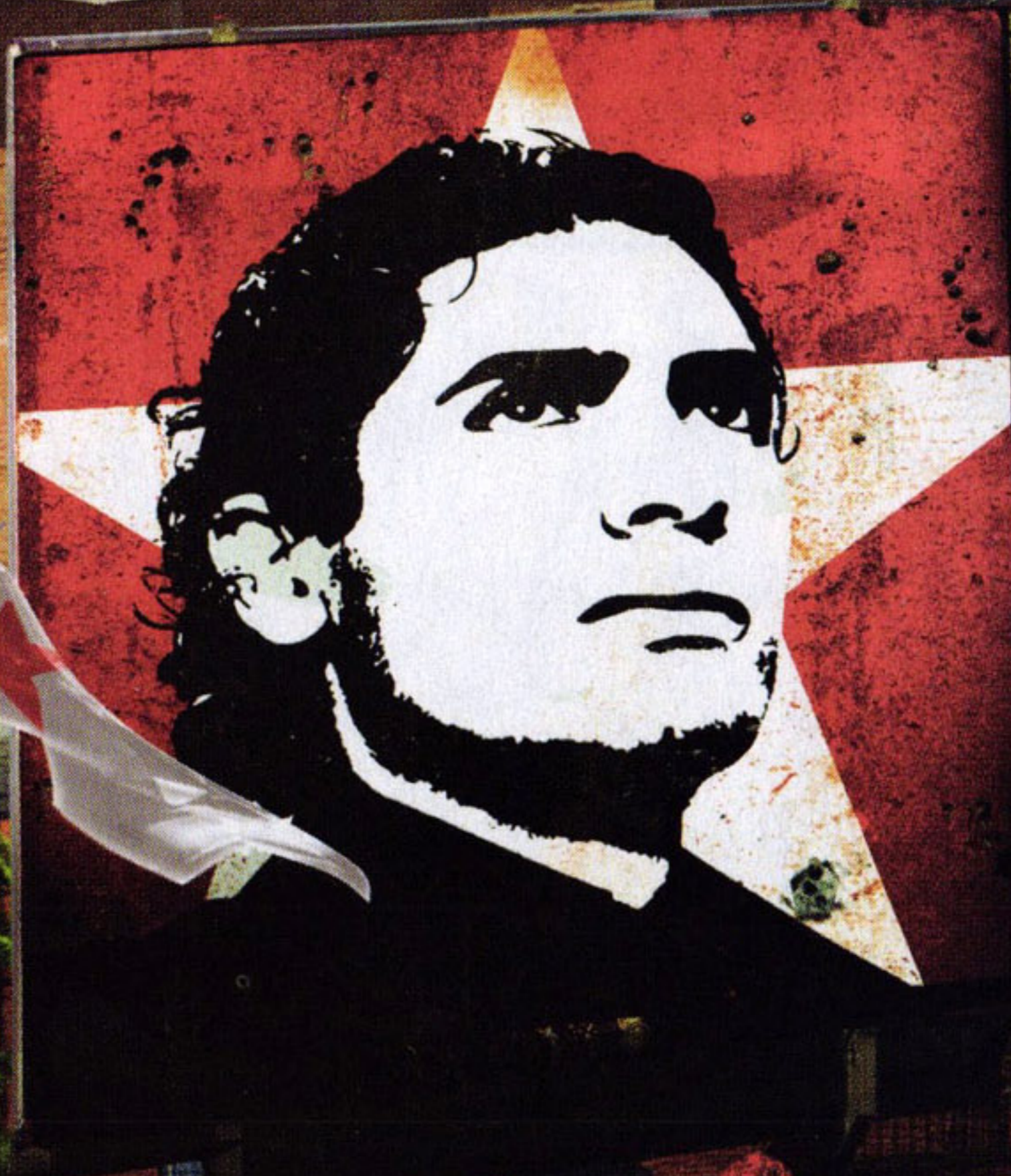


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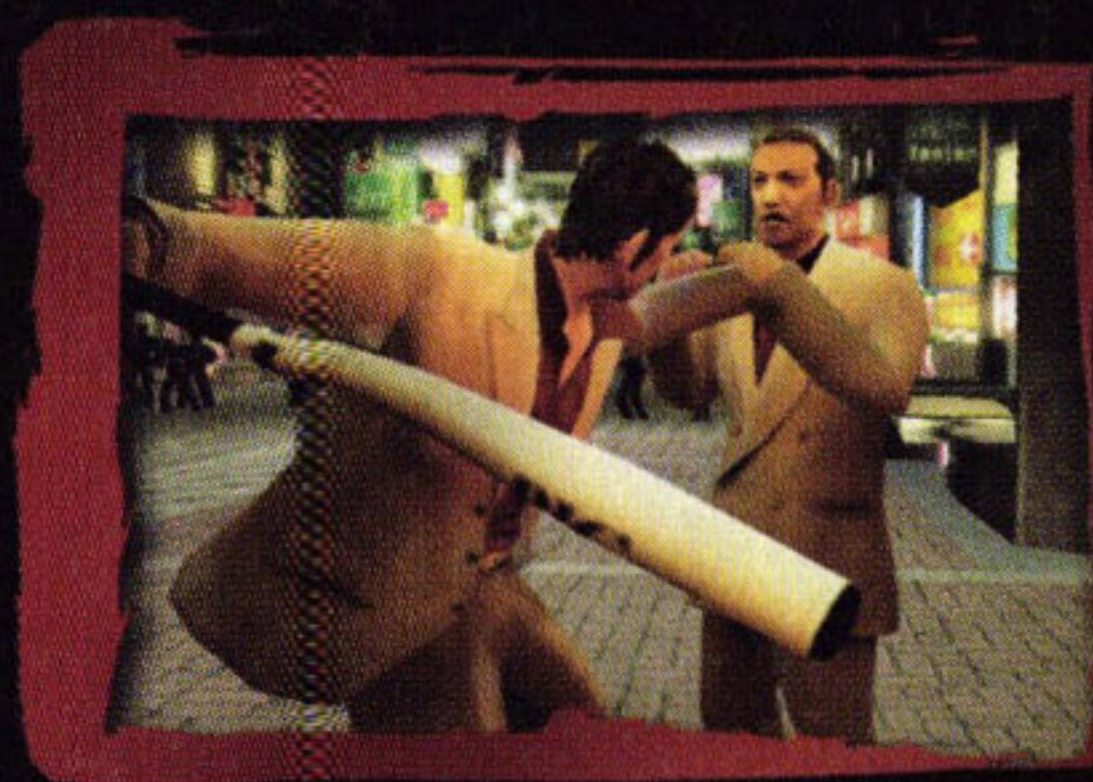
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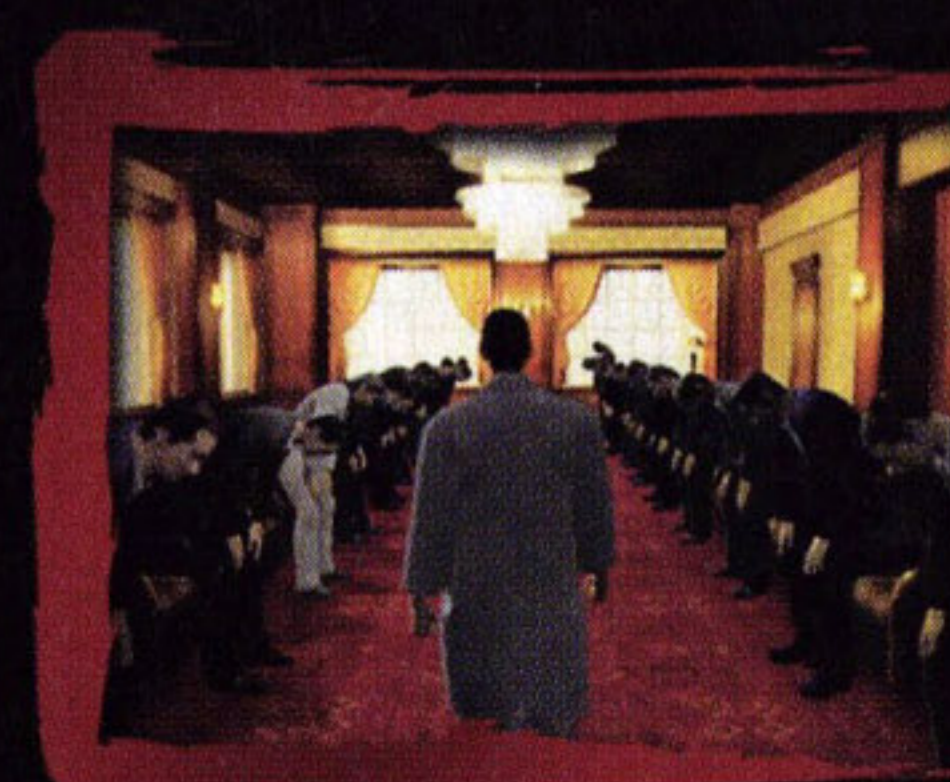
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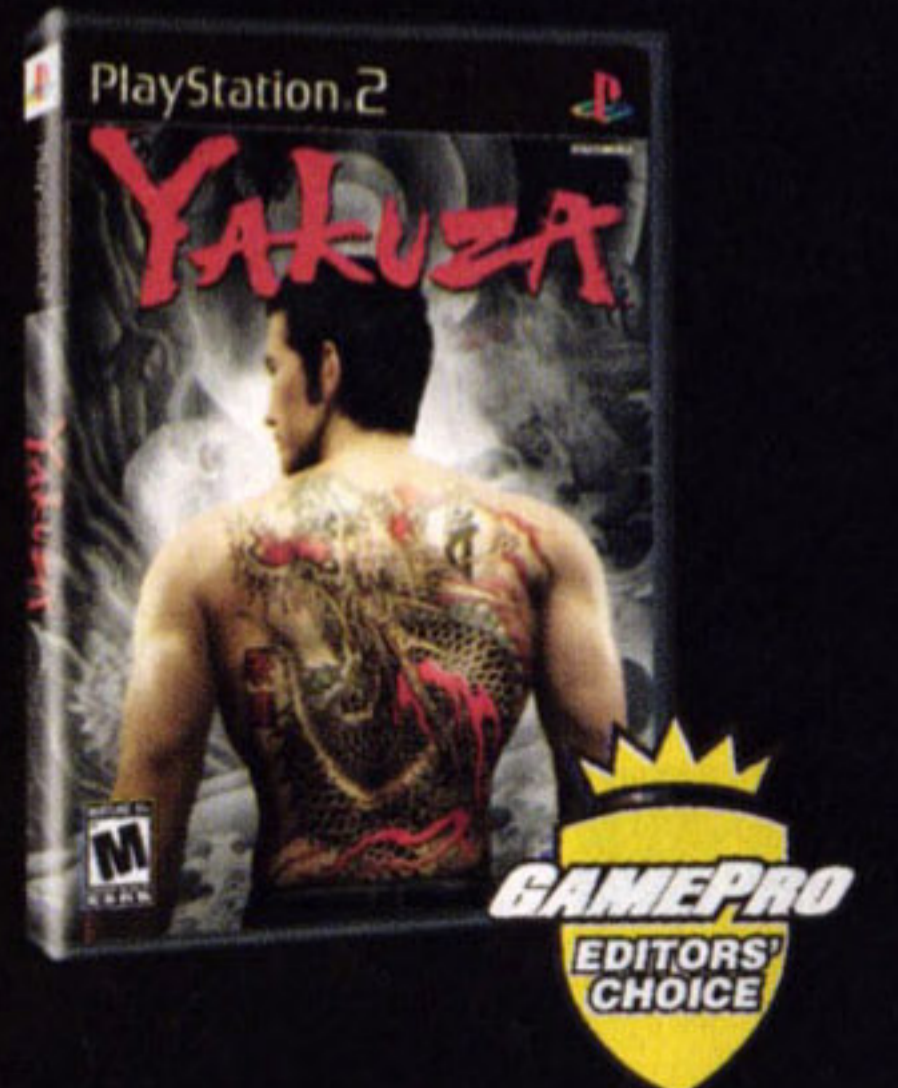




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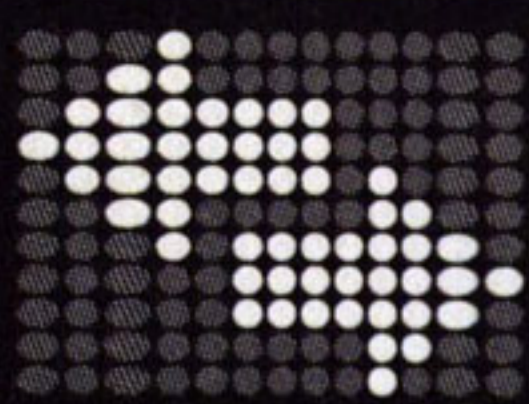
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The "We'll Miss You, Lisa!" Issue



cover story

46 DEVIL MAY CRY 4

Capcom's stylishly violent franchise is coming only to PlayStation 3, and we have the exclusive first info on the game. The original Devil May Cry producer is back on the job for this installment, and a new main character will fight the forces of darkness in Dante's stead. Join us for this world-first look at one of the most exciting PS3 games around.

features



COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

Working for the Japanese isn't always easy. Speaking to secret, anonymous industry sources with direct experience working with Japanese companies, we explore the trials and tribulations that domestic employees face in their daily lives.



Wii FEATURE

We tracked down every single title that's even remotely close to being announced for Nintendo's next-gen console, and now we're sharing everything we know with you. Check out the comprehensive breakdown for the Wii's early life.

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The end...or is it?



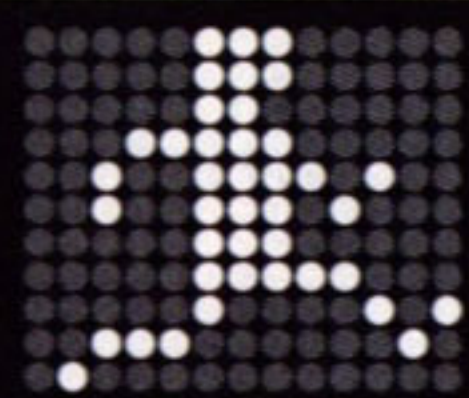
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People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



THE NOT-SO-GREAT ONLINE DEBATE

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I fear I may be alone on this, but am I the only person left in this world that can just love a single-player game and not complain about online this or online that?

Now don't get me wrong, I love a good online game as much as the next person. In fact, I'm quite the World of Warcraft fanatic. Who can deny the wonders of community that a great massively multiplayer game can deliver, or the classic battle of swearing and bullets that is the online first-person shooter experience? You'd be a fool to think that these aren't some of the greatest experiences gaming has to offer.

On the other side of the coin is The Legend of Zelda or Capcom's recent Okami. Are these games worse because they don't have an online component? Of course not.

However, too many times I read a review or find myself in long a discussion about how this game or that game should have gone online. It's a review of a game based on omission; not looking at what is there, what is good or great about a particular product.

The point I'm trying to make here is that games can be many things. In fact, they can be many great things, and they are without a doubt the center of the entertainment universe as far as I'm concerned, but let's remember to love them for what they are, not what they could be. I'll take a killer offline single-player game any day.

As a final note, it's with a sad heart that Game Informer bids adieu to Lisa Mason, who after hanging with us for all these years has decided to jump off the journalism ship and head to the development side of the industry. We will most certainly miss her. I'm already on the prowl for the next great member of the team, so hopefully soon we will have some fresh faces.

Andy >>> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** The World Series Of Poker, *Firefly*, *Arrested Development* (I Still Can't Believe This Show Was Cancelled), *Entourage* **Dislikes:** Heavy Nintendo Lock Boxes (When We Review Nintendo's DS Games They Are Shackled By A Giant Metal Casing That Makes The DS Weigh About Five Pounds), Losing Lisa To Game Development (Good Luck Lisa, You Better Not Make A Game That Sucks) **Current Favorite Games:** Brain Age: Train Your Brain In Just Minutes A Day, World Of Warcraft, Tetris DS, Cash Money Chaos, Okami, NASCAR 07



Reiner >>> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Transforming Into Destructor 5 (An Xbox Live Persona That Kills Teammates), Reinerflix (Like Netflix, But You Don't Get Your Movies), Spending A Weekend At Wrigley Field (Go Cubs!) **Dislikes:** Publishers Still Insisting That Most Of Their Games Should Come Out In November, My Failed Attempt At Convincing A Friend To Name His Son Sephiroth (It's Unique!) **Current Favorite Games:** Dead Rising, Final Fantasy XII, Star Fox Command, Madden NFL 06, LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy, Okami



Matt >>> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, *Steely Dan*, *Firefly*, Running, Finally Seeing Bonnie Prince Billy In Concert, The Amazing Amount Of Great Games Available Right Now, Wishing Lisa Well In Her New Career, DJ Envy Presents: *Lupe Fiasco's Chi-Town Guevara Mixtape* **Dislikes:** 250 Amp Fuses That Blow During My Band's CD Release Party, Current Events, Not Being Able To Read Faster, Saying Goodbye To Lisa **Current Favorite Games:** Okami, Saints Row, Loco Roco, Prey, Dead Rising



Kato >>> kato@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** *Calder's Circus*, *Talladega Nights*, T-Jack City, The Greg Kinnear Double-Feature: *Little Miss Sunshine* And *The Matador*, Dock Ellis' No-Hitter On LSD (Don't Try That At Home Or Anywhere Else Kids), Lisa Heading To The Other Side (No, She's Not Dead!) **Dislikes:** Working In A Brazilian Gold Mine (Or Just Seeing Pictures Of It), The Sound & The Smell Of Sandals, Jub Jubbery, Anyone Who Doesn't Chew Big Red **Current Favorite Games:** Madden NFL 07 (Current-Gen), NHL 2K7, NASCAR 07



Lisa >>> lisa@gameinformer.com

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Survival Horror, Adventure, RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing **Interests:** Heading Off To Blaze Some New Trails (Hopefully), Getting To Work On Some Games And Not Just Talk About Them After They're Done (It's Scary But Really Cool) **Dislikes:** Not Getting To Hang Out With This Crew Every Day, Losing One Of My Favorite Pastimes: Talking To People Who Want To Tell Me About Cool New Games From Their Companies **Current Favorite Games:** Dead Rising, World Of Warcraft (Finally, My Rogue Review), Valkyrie Profile (Both), Okami, Silent Hill 3



Jeremy >>> jeremy@gameinformer.com

Handle: Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Platform, Fighting, Strategy/RPGs **Interests:** Lisa's Excellent Career Adventure, Miller's Fascination With The Jeremy Dance, Andy's Crime-Fighting Career, Adam's Hip Hop-Lovin' Ways **Dislikes:** People Mentioning Joe In Their Bio (Crap!), Reinerflix (Where's *Final Destination 3*, Jerk?), Matt's Sherry-Drinking, Kato's Box Office Predictions **Current Favorite Games:** Dead Rising, Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime, Prey, MechAssault: Phantom War, Bankshot Billiards 2, Castlevania: Dawn Of Sorrow



Adam >>> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Spam Filters That Actually Filter Spam, Seeing Friends Take Advantage Of Exciting New Opportunities, Driving The Alliance Before Me (Learn 2 PvP, Scrubs), Jurassic 5 - *Feedback* **Dislikes:** Losing Longtime Co-Workers, Guys Not Named Brosnan Or Connery Trying To Be Bond, Server Restarts Hosing My Raid, People Who Think That Buying WoW Gold Is Defendable **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Company Of Heroes, New Super Mario Bros., Painkiller: Hell Wars, Rise Of Nations: Rise Of Legends



Joe >>> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Hrist (a.k.a. The Cool Valkyrie), *Snakes On A Plane* (Samuel L. Jackson Called Me Personally To Recommend It!), Max Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide* **Dislikes:** The Substandard Customer Service Of Reinerflix (I'm Still Waiting For *Smallville*), Playing Light Side, Celebrity Character Models In Non-Licensed Games, Transparent Viral Marketing **Current Favorite Games:** Devil May Cry 4, Valkyrie Profiles Silmeria And Lenneth, Final Fantasy XII, Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime, LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy



Miller >>> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Fall TV Lineups (So Many Sci-Fi Series, So Little Time), Excellent Service From Reinerflix (Joe And Jeremy, You Must Be Doing Something Wrong), The Looming Tidal Wave Of November Games **Dislikes:** The Looming Tidal Wave Of November Games (It's As Much A Curse As A Blessing), Taking Down Wallpaper, When Cool Girls Go To Work Somewhere Else **Current Favorite Games:** Dead Rising, Company Of Heroes, Okami, Starfox: Command, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess

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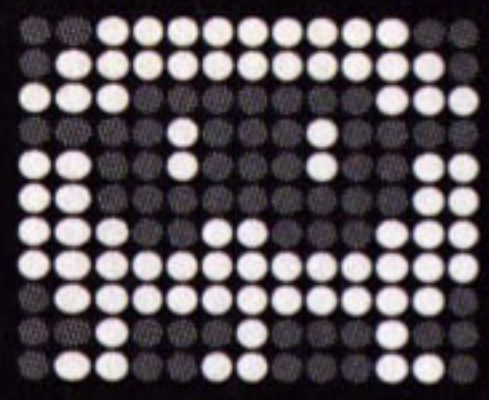
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GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly
Of The Video Game Industry



1 *Wired Magazine's* Chris Kohler and LucasArts' Alexis Mervin pay homage to Yoda 2 Sony Online's Katie Uhlman, Nicholas Beliaeff, and Todd Carson came by to show off the company's upcoming PS3 title, *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom* to Reiner and GI Online's Bryan Vore 3 GI Online's Billy Berghammer and Nick Ahrens bookend the THQ crew at a *Saints Row* event in San Francisco 4 Ubisoft's Kjell Vistad doing what he does best: threatening bunny rabbits with a toilet plunger 5 Sierra Entertainment's Lisa Douet, Mike Graham, and Chris Wilson spread love and happiness throughout the GI Kingdom 6 At a recent gamer's day, Electronic Arts pays tribute to the Fleetwood Mac classic "Tusk" 7 Spc. Nathan Gants and some fellow men in uniform show GI Spy readers that, even in Iraq, gaming is the hobby of choice





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GI COMMUNITY

Game Informer has a thriving online community, and this is where they can sound off about issues facing the gaming industry today

THE QUESTION:
What do you think about the changes in store for E3?



It's a bittersweet situation. I've never been to E3 but I've always wanted to, so now I won't be able to. But like others have said, it's a financially good idea and from what I've heard it did tend to go off focus.

Gamereaper22

Despite the appeal of the old E3's craziness, the new direction is definitely better for the industry. With the rising cost of development, it doesn't make sense to spend millions of dollars buying food, liquor, and exhibit space for internet fanboys who claim to be journalists. Or even for "real" journalists.

Durandal

It will give some of the smaller conventions that go unnoticed sometimes a chance to shine. E3 has been becoming more flashy and less gaming oriented. For me E3 has been a convention of false hopes. Hopefully that will change.

th_epin_kpoo

What would be nice is if there's a show for commoners and one for professionals. Narrowing your audiences isn't really a good thing. But if it helps developers focus on their product development more rather than advertising it, then this could be a good thing.

JediZero666

Going to the old E3, with all the parties, extravagant displays and booth babes, has been one of my dreams ever since I started gaming. Obviously, this was a very economically sound decision, but I think that E3 losing its soul and energy can be considered a near gaming tragedy.

fuglysheep

As long as I get the gaming news I want, it's fine by me. They could set it in a Motel 6 for all I care.

dragonballjoseph



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

WINGS AND ARROWS

I really enjoyed reading your Classic GI piece about Kid Icarus, but I was wondering why you failed to mention Hikari Shinwa: Palutena no Kagami for the GBA. It came out in August 2004 in Japan, and is just another example of how this gem of a title isn't forgotten.

Carrie Clouse
via gmail.com

■ Before all of you Kid Icarus fans get too excited, Hikari Shinwa: Palutena no Kagami was simply the Japanese name for the original Kid Icarus.

It isn't a long-lost sequel or anything like that, which is why it escaped mention in the article. Carrie is referring to a Japan-only re-release for the Famicom Mini, much like how Nintendo put out classic NES games like Metroid and Ice Climbers on GBA here in the States. In fact, as far as getting sequels to Kid Icarus goes, American gamers are actually the lucky ones; the only true follow-up, Kid Icarus: Of Myths and Monsters, never even came out in Japan. Sadly, the joke's still kind of on us, since the game doesn't quite recapture the glow of the original.

THAT'S RICH

In GI Spy in issue 160, I came across a tiny blurb about the great generosity of the most beneficent Lisa that claimed she would buy an Xbox 360 for any subscriber that sent her an e-mail. I want an Xbox 360 of my own, so if you find the kindness in your heart to make my wish come true I would be eternally grateful to you and sing your praises to the ends of the very earth.

Andrew Dillehay
Crofton, MD

I was reading this month's issue of Game Informer and on page 7 it said that Lisa is rich and would probably buy someone an Xbox 360 if they emailed her. I know Xbox 360s are expensive, so I was wondering if I could get a copy of Guild Wars instead.

Joe Cuif
via yahoo.com

Tell me if you are going to give me an Xbox 360. If you can't, then at least give me a PS2. But if you can, please give me a 360.

Ryan Rushing
via aol.com

■ We can't really blame you guys for trying, but Lisa is not actually a philanthropic

billionaire, nor does she own a fleet of extravagant luxury cars. She drives a Focus, and isn't buying you a 360. Sorry for the misunderstanding. However, considering its long history of erroneous claims and suspect

character judgment, GI Spy probably isn't your best source for credible insider info.

I LIKE TO MOVE IT, MOVE IT

I was under the impression that the Wii's motion-sensing technology was much more advanced than the PlayStation 3's. I heard that the PS3 will only sense tilt, but the Wii will

sense a whole range of motion. Everyone always talks about graphical differences in consoles, but I think it's important to talk about these gameplay differences, too.

Jonathan Davis
Leavenworth, KS

■ In the debate over which console will dominate this holiday season, this is a point often brought up against Sony, and wrongly

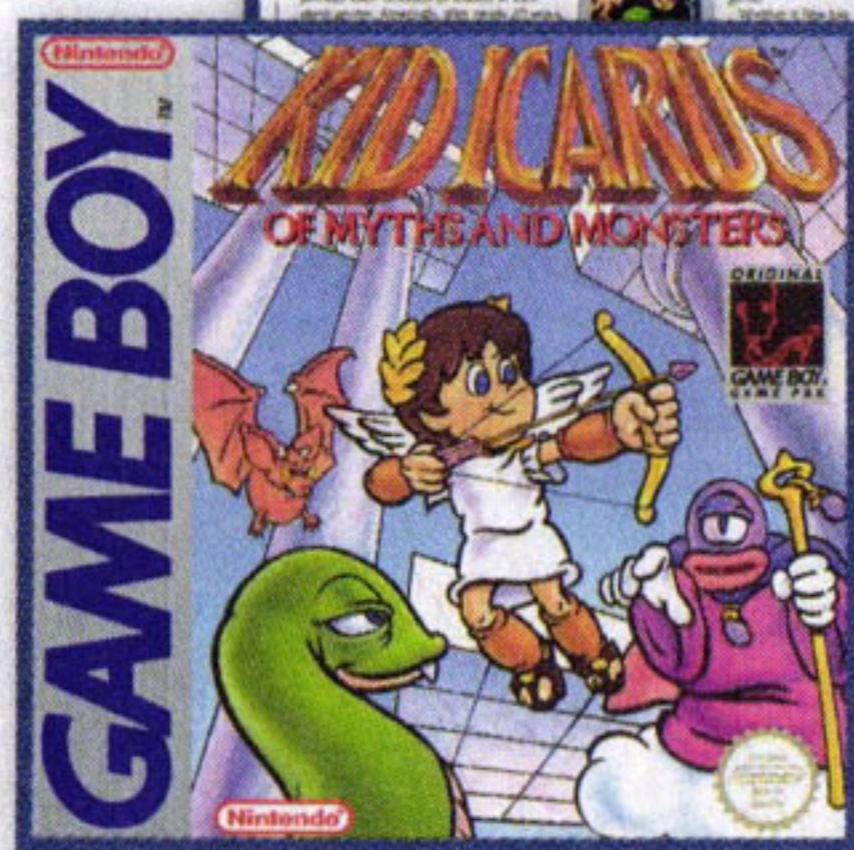
so. At this year's E3, the only game at Sony's booth to showcase the motion-sensing capabilities of the controller was Warhawk, and because that game only sensed tilt, the misconception spread that it was a limit of the controller's function. We recently spoke to Sony representatives who confirmed that the PS3 controller is capable of recognizing all three axes (X, Y, Z), as well as positive and negative distance. In short, this means that the controller theoretically has the same motion-sensing potential as the Wii remote, but we won't be able to compare how well either system uses that potential until we're playing games on the final hardware.

GOING THE DISTANCE

I am beginning to lose my mind. I have had Twilight Princess pre-ordered for as long as I can remember! It is getting really annoying. Do you have any suggestions to help ease the pre-release jibbles?

Drew Settlemire
Waxahachie, TX

■ You're asking for suggestions now?! You should have started training months ago! There is a strict regimen all gamers must go through to mentally and physically prepare themselves for the full Zelda experience. First of all, you need to don your finest Link costume - you know, the one you only bust out for weddings. Then take to the streets to practice your dungeon-delving skills: avoiding moving obstacles, searching for rupees under garbage, and taking the longest possible



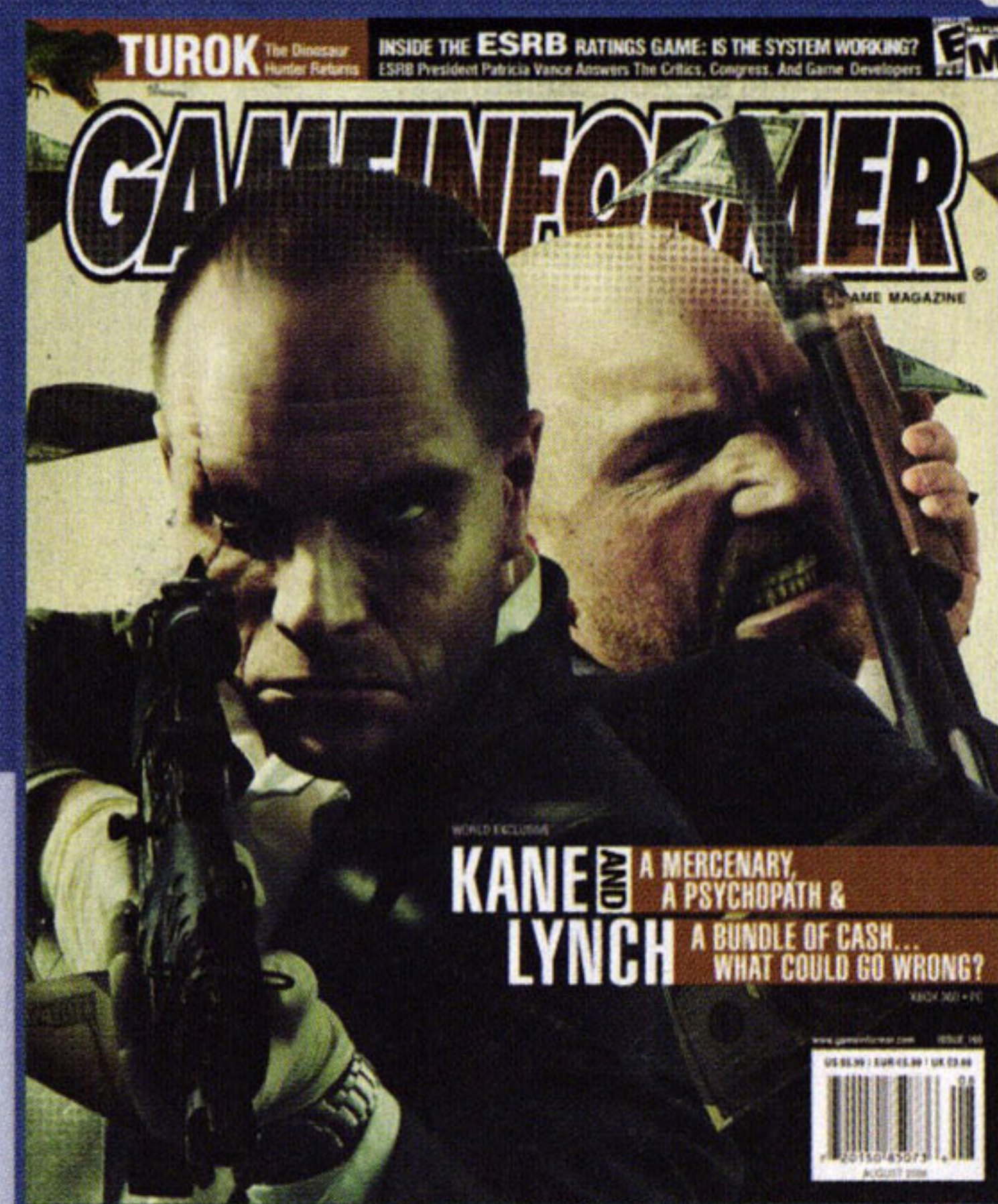
DEAD AIM

I noticed an odd thing about your August cover. Kane obviously has no sight in his right eye due to some unfortunate work-related injury, but he is holding the gun right handed and seems to be looking down the barrel of his gun with that jacked-up eye. In case you've never tried it, it's pretty hard to fire a weapon accurately aiming cross over like that. Just wondering if this was an oversight or is he that damn good?

Jim Scott
Augusta, GA

■ Nice catch! Or should we say "good eye"? Terrible puns aside, to find out whether this detail was intentional, we went straight to the source at Kane & Lynch developer IO Interactive. "Kane is an ambidextrous weapons expert, and as such he switches stance based on the situation and the surroundings," explains director J.P. Kurup. "In the cover image he's in close-quarters combat

and prefers his right hand. Kane's right eye isn't completely blind - but for using the scope he'll prefer switching to the better left eye" Hey, if we can believe a doofus Tatooine farmboy can deflect blaster bolts with the helmet blast shield down (who uses those, anyway?), we'll buy that a battle-hardened mercenary can aim through whichever eye he damn well pleases, blind or not.





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route to a nearby location. We also encourage you to throw boomerangs at stationary objects like street lamps and mailboxes (they might be hiding switches!). And don't forget, anyone who looks at you funny is a Moblin.

A BRIDGE TOO FAR

Your article "The Ratings Game" [issue 160] clearly explained the problems with the ESRB ratings systems, while not endorsing or damning them. The ESRB is the problem; they claim to have numerous checks and balances that prevent the fiasco we have recently seen from occurring. How does the highest authority on censorship in gaming make mistakes, then turn around and blame the developers? I am an avid gamer, and I cannot abide with the scrutiny, public distrust, and malice that the general media has instilled in the public with the help of the ESRB.

Angelique Wurlp
via yahoo.com

Thank you for the your article about the game ratings and the ESRB. While I agree that the television and movie rating system has gotten too lenient, the voyeuristic nature of sexual content in movies and television is different from the interactive nature of sexual content in video games, and therefore must be regulated more stringently with respect to youth. If, as Wanat says, "the majority of gamers are over 20" and they want the more graphic content in the video games that they play, then they should have no problem buying or renting games with an AO rating.

Samuel A. Burchard
Mesa, Arizona

Being a parent of a five-year-old who has become obsessed with video games, my husband and I understand that although the ERSB rating on games can provide an insight into the content of the game, it is our responsibility to make the decision of what video games are played by our children. As parents we must make the decision for what games our children play. We must be nosey and stay on top of what our children are doing. The rating system provided by the ERSB provides a nice starting point, however, ultimately the responsibility is ours.

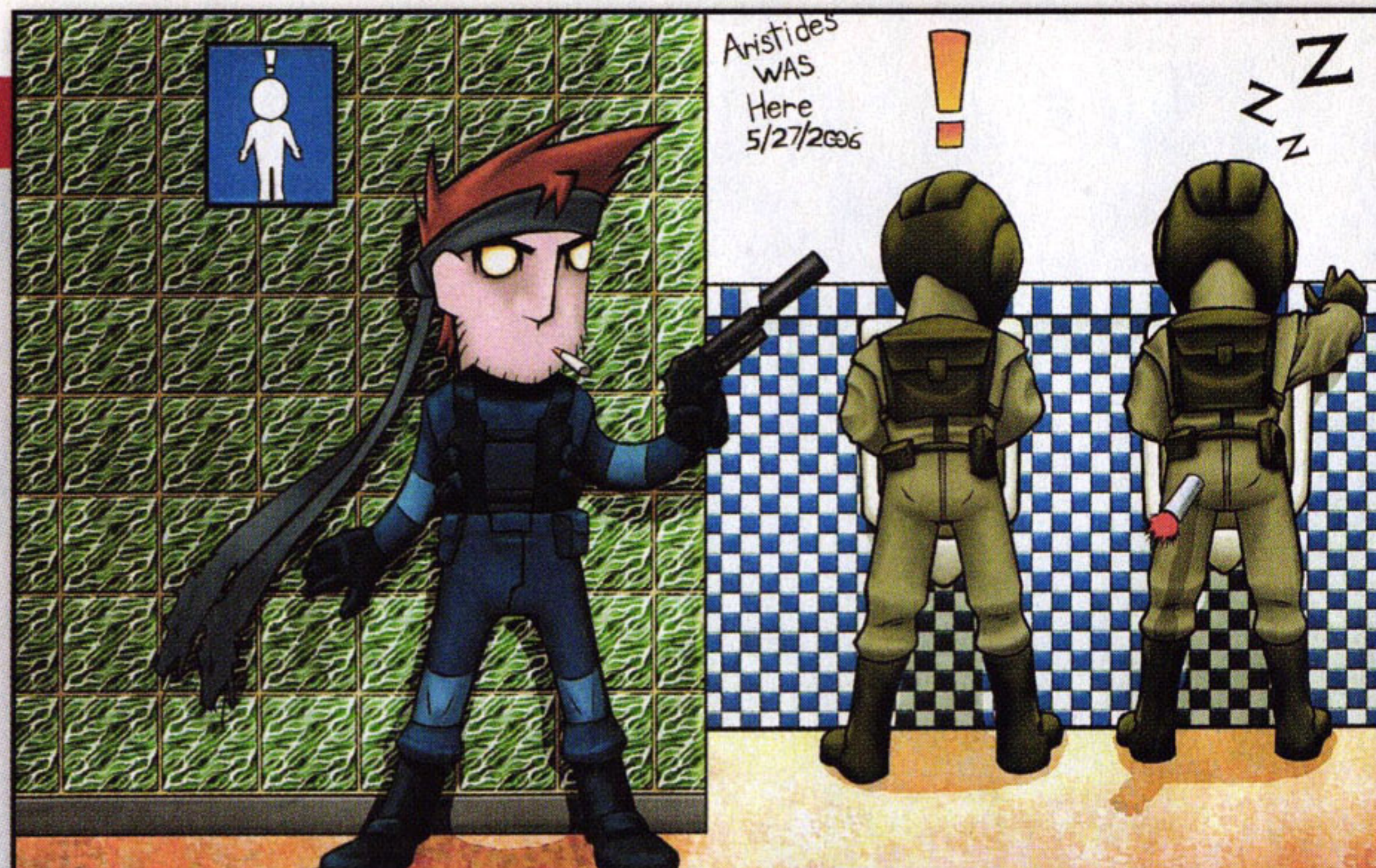
Alicia Romano
Garfield Heights, OH

■ To say that issues pertaining to sex and violence in video games are a hot topic today is obviously an understatement, as evidenced by the countless letters we received in response to our article about the ESRB and its ratings. Since the ESRB is the organization charged with quantifying this controversial content in games, it is receiving a lot of attention from groups on both sides of the issue. On one hand, there is mainstream America who relies on the ESRB to identify potential problems and accurately distill an entire gaming experience to a single rating. On the other hand, there is the gaming industry that wants to ensure that developers' creative freedom is being protected. In essence, as the only entity that is commonly held accountable for the video game content in general, the ESRB is like a mediator between two feuding factions. Not everyone is going to be happy with every decision, but a lot more progress is being made than if the two sides were just left to shout at each other.

ENVELOPE ART

Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn envelope art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address on the back of the envelope. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault.

Send to:
Game Informer
Envelope Art Contest
724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401



OCTOBER WINNER!

ARISTIDES RODRIGUEZ

Serves him right. You never use a urinal if someone's using the one next to it

ADAM HERRING

Finally, Yoshi makes himself useful. Now mush, or no Goomba stew for you



CHARLES ATKINS

"Mmmm! This could be your brother, kupo!"



PATRICK WAUGH

Did you know those dots in Pac-Man are actually arsenic pellets? Every second you play, you kill him a little bit more



SARAH REAR

"Camera one... Camera two..."



CHIN FONG

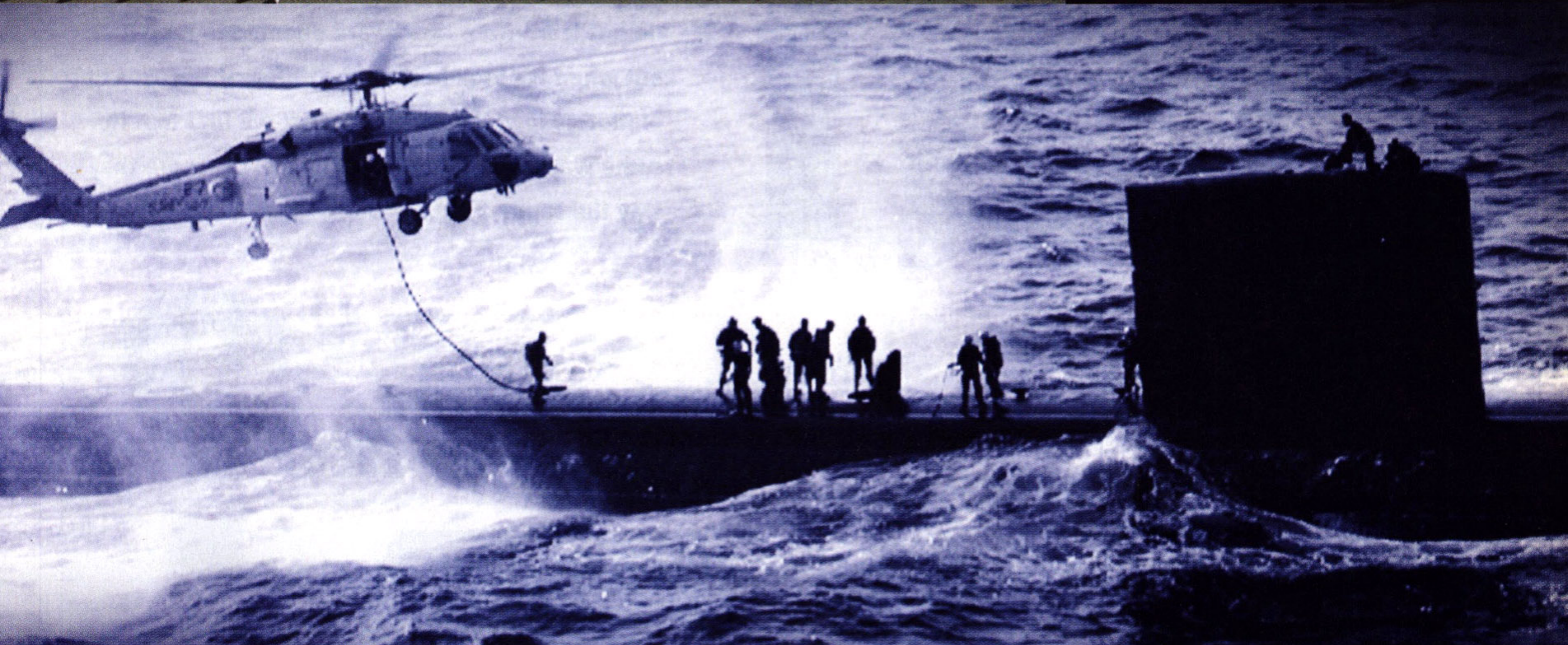
Nice try, Raiden. Dressing up like Gray Fox doesn't automatically make you cool

CORRECTIONS

In our last issue (September 2006, GI #161), we misprinted the multiplayer information on Call of Duty 3. The Wii version of the game should have listed the online specification as "TBA" rather than 16-player. We apologize for the oversight. Activision has not at this time confirmed the online multiplayer numbers for Call of Duty 3 on the Wii.



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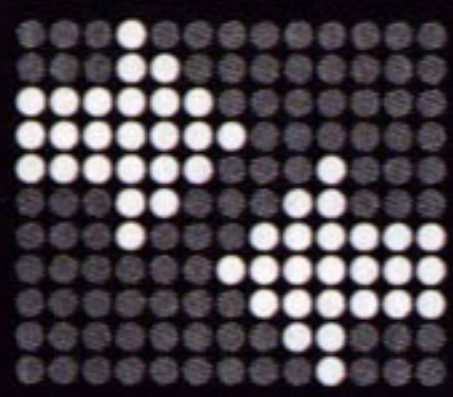


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news

DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

WHAT DO PAST CONSOLE LAUNCHES TELL US ABOUT THE FUTURE?

It's hard not to blanch when faced with PlayStation 3's dual \$500 and \$600 price tags. But imagine the look on your face if you were shelling out \$672 for an Atari 2600 system! That's what that classic console would cost if you adjusted for inflation and bought it today at its original 1977 \$200 price point. They say that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, but when we look back at the different releases of platforms in video game's history, we find that in some ways the more things change, the more they stay the same.

The Sega Genesis confused consumers with multiple formats and other late-to-the-party add-ons like the 32X



Which would you rather have for \$600



The PlayStation 3's high price points are certainly not the norm for the industry. Most consoles – even after adjusting for inflation – have come in at under or around \$400, and many of gaming history's most beloved platforms even today would retail for under that. But if you think that price alone puts the system in dire straits, one has to look no further than consoles such as the N64 or Dreamcast (with adjusted prices of \$258 and \$244 respectively in 2006 dollars) to see that more modestly priced platforms don't always succeed either. Of course, aside from the Atari 2600, when you take a look at other high-priced systems through the years, you do find a graveyard. Neo Geo, 3DO, and Intellivision are some of the examples.

In fact, when you look at the various console launches throughout history, you find many commonalities with today's systems apart from the issue of price. Selling two different versions? It's been done. Systems like the NES debuted with different versions at separate price points, and consoles like the popular Sega Genesis threw a multitude of console add-ons at consumers above and beyond the core system. The ever-changing landscape of the Genesis, for example, led to issues of backwards compatibility as Sega wanted to introduce the CD format (Sega CD) without freezing out its legion of cart-based Genesis players. Nintendo even promised a NES adapter for the

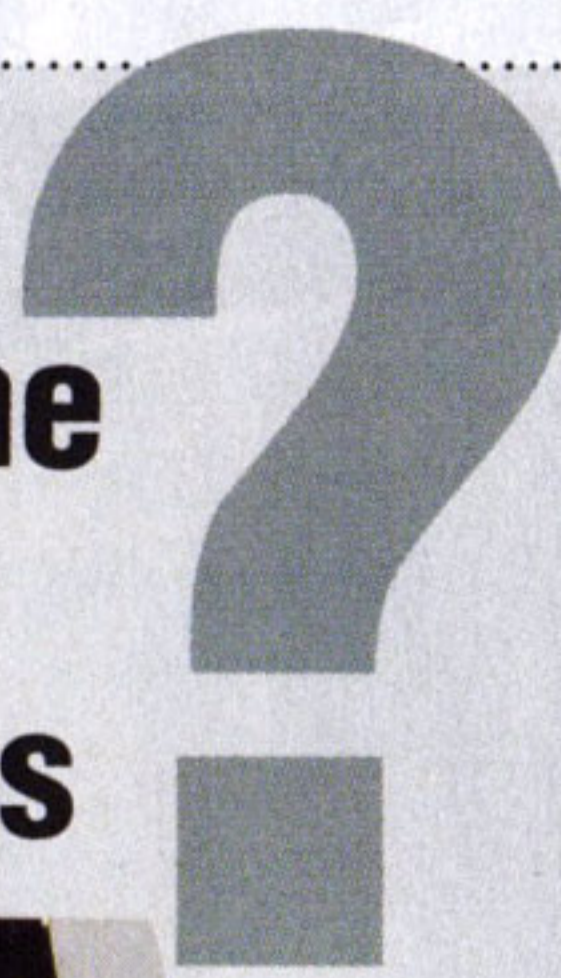
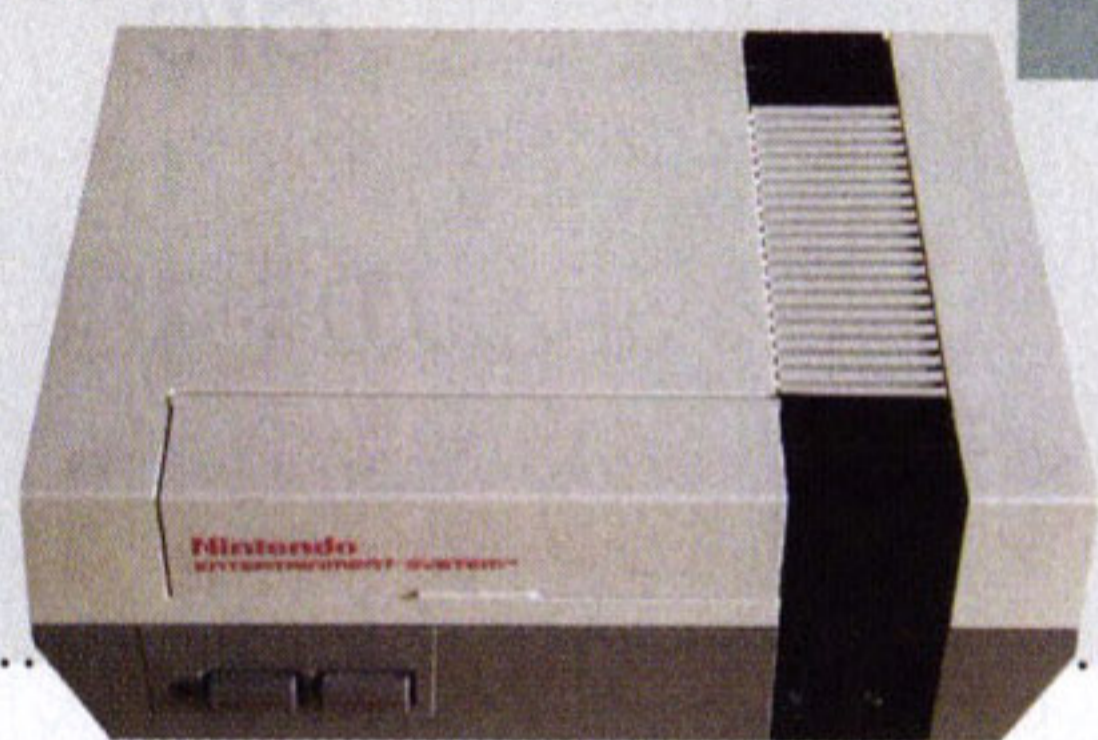
SNES that it never produced.

In fact, unfulfilled features have been a hallmark of almost every system put out on the market. Early platforms like the NES often featured expansion ports that went underutilized or sometimes not used at all. Console makers were always trying to hedge their bets in case a new add-on, software format, or gadget would capture the public's attention, and would be demanded of systems already out on the market. Considering all the bells, whistles, and Blu-ray players that today's systems come with, and the fact that they are more forward-looking than platforms of the past, and it seems that consumers these days are simply getting more for their money.

If there's one thing we can come away with when looking at the history of console launches, it is that it's the software that perhaps has the most say regarding a platform's success. The Atari 5200 and 7800 sank in part because the public was sick of the company trying to force them to buy barely re-vamped 2600

titles on these new systems. Nintendo learned the hard way that cartridges were not the way to go when third-party publishers flocked to the PlayStation and its CD-based medium. With the Xbox 360, Wii, and the PlayStation 3 all delivering a wide range of software, history tells us that predicting success for these consoles isn't hard.

Think today's consoles are the only ones with two price points



Console (Year)	Console's Original Cost	Console's Cost After Inflation
Magnavox Odyssey (1972)	\$100	\$487
Atari VCS (1977)	\$200	\$672
Mattel Intellivision (1979)	\$299	\$838
*NES (w/R.O.B.) (1985)	\$249	\$471
*NES (1985)	\$199	\$376
Sega Master System (1986)	\$199	\$369
Sega Genesis (1989)	\$200	\$328
Neo Geo (1990)	\$650	\$1,012
SNES (1991)	\$199	\$297
3DO (1993)	\$700	\$986
Sega Saturn (1995)	\$399	\$533
PlayStation (1995)	\$299	\$399
N64 (1996)	\$199	\$258
Dreamcast (1999)	\$200	\$244
PlayStation 2 (2000)	\$299	\$353
GameCube (2001)	\$199	\$228
Xbox (2001)	\$299	\$343
*Xbox 360 (Premium) (2005)	\$399	\$416
*Xbox 360 (Core) (2005)	\$299	\$312
**PS3 (60 GB HD) (2006)	\$599	
**PS3 (20 GB HD) (2006)	\$499	

* Note: The list prices for the NES and Xbox 360 were released with two price points.

** Note: The list prices for the PS3 are the suggested retail prices and are not subject to inflation

Source: U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics

DATA FILE

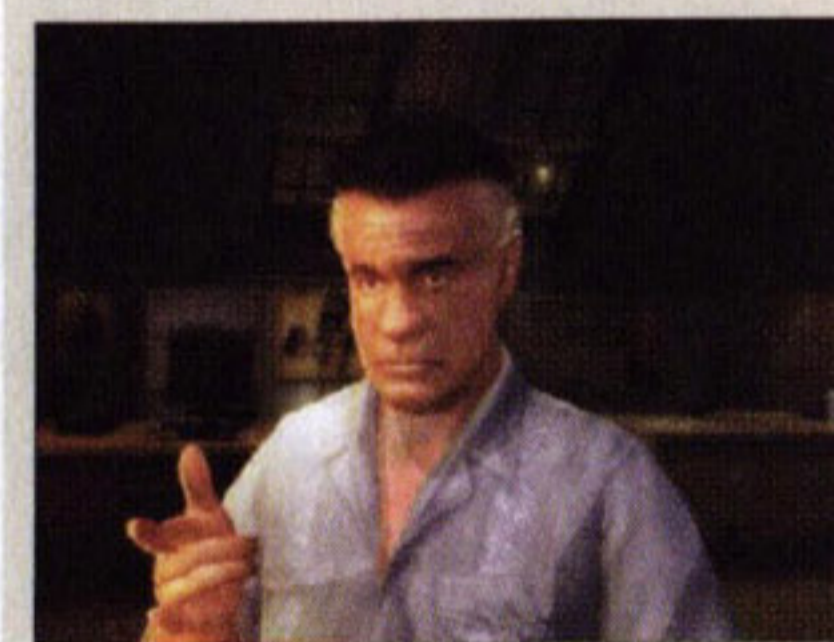
More News You Can Use

ONE STOP SHOP

Instead of having separate DVD and video game mail subscriptions, www.gameznflx.com combines both movies and games into a single account. For \$16.99 a month, customers can have any combination of up to three games and movies (including Blu-ray discs and HD-DVDs) checked out and mailed to their home at one time.

SOPRANOS 360 SLEEPS WITH THE FISHES

THQ has whacked the Xbox 360 version of *The Sopranos*, although the company says it still plans to release the PS2 edition this holiday season. Seeing as how Seven Studios (*Fantastic Four*) is heading up the project, however, it's probably just as well. That game might have turned out to be uglier than the daytime dancers at Da Bing.



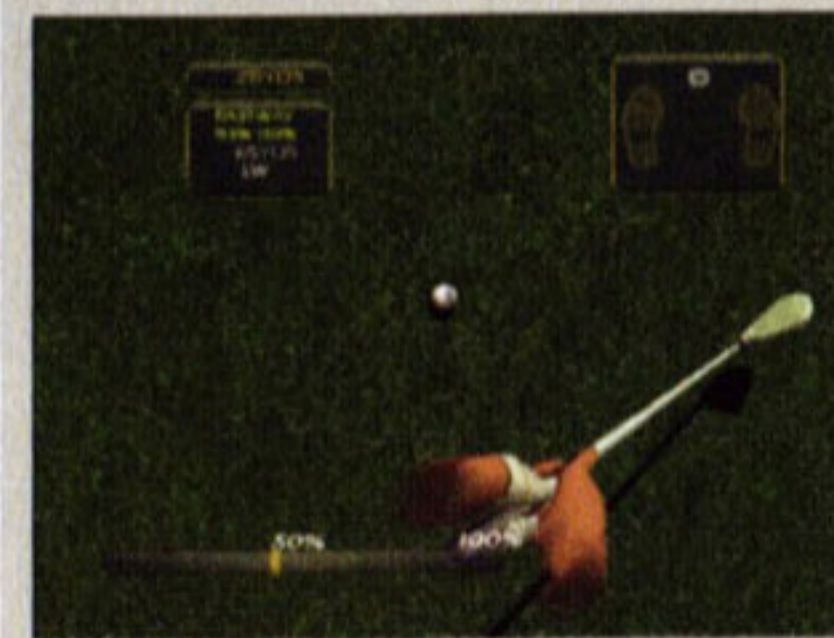
SAM & MAX BACK IN ACTION

Cult heroes to gamers, canines, and lagomorphs, Sam & Max are hopping onto the subscription-based GameTap service through episodic content that will chronicle the further exploits of the adventure game stars. The games will also be available via developer TellTale Games' website after appearing on GameTap sometime this year, and every episode of the first "season" will eventually be collected and released through retail channels.




CALLING ALL COUNTRY CLUB PROS

You've played EA's *Tiger Woods* golf, but do you want to play golf like Tiger really does? Then Oxygen's *Pro Stroke Golf* (PS2, Xbox, PC, PSP) may be for you, because there's no three-click swing or spinning the ball in mid-air. Just an attempt to make swinging the wrenches as accurate and real as possible. And another thing it has over EA's *Tiger* – a full-fledged course designer!



DAY 1/FREE RADICAL JOIN LUCASARTS

F.E.A.R. 360/PS3 developer and MechAssault vets Day 1 Studios are teaming up with LucasArts for an unnamed next-gen project. Despite this shroud of secrecy, the pair have said that the game will be a new intellectual property and would span multiple systems. Also joining up with LucasArts for another original IP is TimeSplitters developer Free Radical.



Some
people
are
meant
for
something
more.

HEER





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COMMUNICATIONS



>> Video games are a global phenomenon, with people playing and creating games in every corner of the Earth. Yet, when retracing the history of games, it is clear that the United States and Japan are the two most significant tentpoles of the gaming world. Despite a shared history in moving the game arts forward, the gaming cultures of Japan and America are worlds apart, and these differences affect U.S. gamers in a number of ways. We spoke to several industry insiders who are employed at American branches of Japanese companies to learn about how cultural differences affect their lives, and by extension, the games you play. <<

22 GAME INFORMER

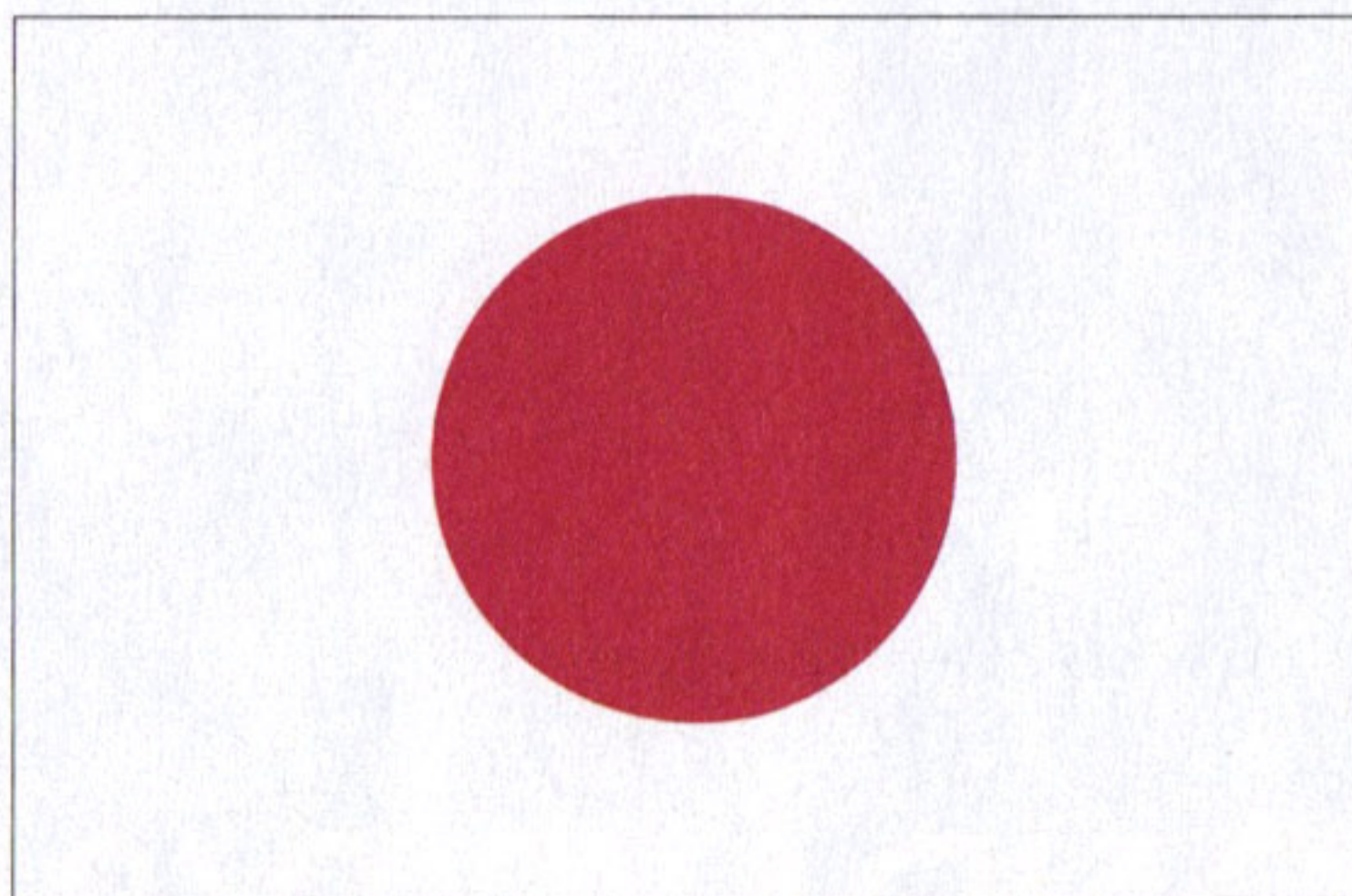
“ I’m sure you’ve probably heard it from a lot of people before,” said one employee of a Japanese company’s American branch, speaking to us on the condition of anonymity. “You can basically take the name of a company and swap it out,

and you’ll have exactly the same stories. There really isn’t that much autonomy at all. All the bureaucracy rests in Japan. So while it’s easy for us to communicate our ideas to the highest levels of management here, there are still several layers of management left in Japan. We can make recommendations by providing as much background information as possible. The decision will come from Japan. The final decision. And once that decision is made, it is very hard to change their minds.” The decisions range from the largest choices, like which Japanese games will be brought over to America, to the most minute detail, like which magazines to place ads in, or even which screenshots to release to

the media. The control that Japanese parent companies exert over their American branches ultimately influences the games that Game Informer and all other magazines cover. For example, our readers regularly request that we add more Nintendo coverage. But even if we have a great idea for a Nintendo story that Nintendo of America loves,

it simply won’t happen unless Nintendo of Japan (a notoriously private and secretive company) agrees to it and provides assets and information in a timely manner. Every individual we spoke to told a similar story of a Japanese parent company with tight control over what game assets were released to the American media. “We ultimately have to go through Japan to get assets, and then they’ll ask

why we need them,” said one source. “Then they have to go through the producer. The producers there retain a lot of creative control, although the upper management has veto power. The producer can affect marketing decisions, which I think is very different from American companies.” Another



HOW THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JAPAN AND AMERICA

BREAKDOWN

AFFECTS THE GAMES YOU PLAY

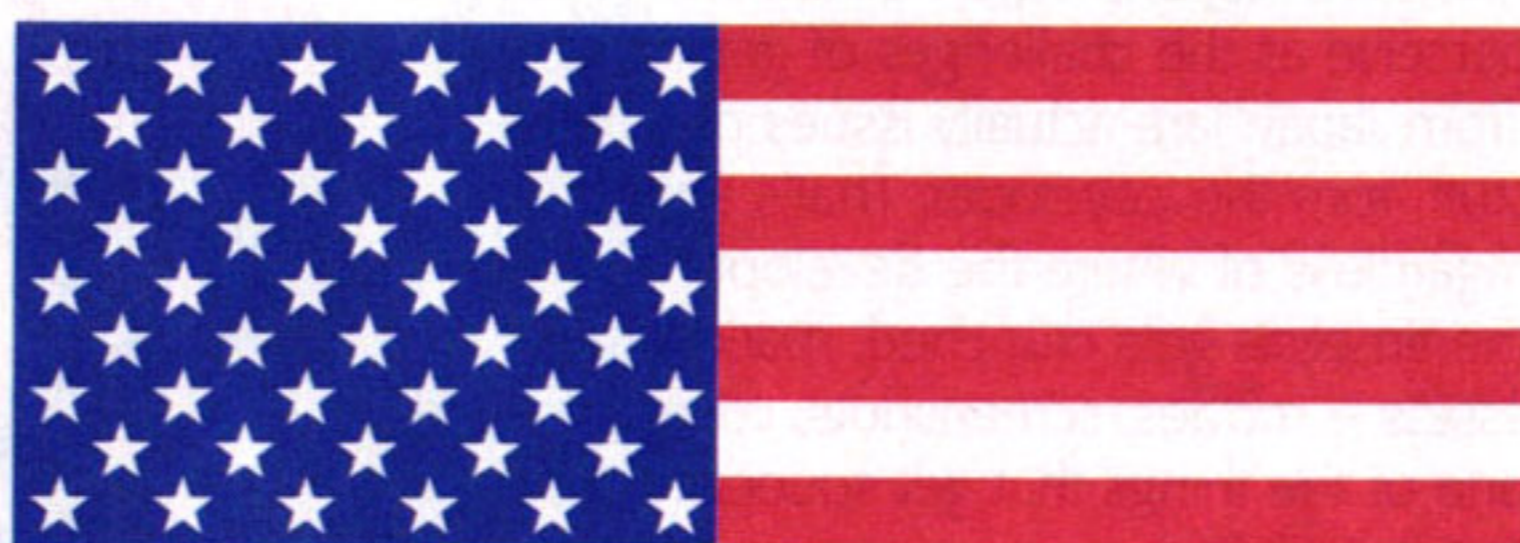


source explained to us that their office would receive a batch of assets from Japan, but before they were allowed to distribute them, they would have to show the home office each shot individually – and yes, that makes as little sense as it sounds.

The level of control that is exerted over American subsidiaries by their parent companies is a constant source of frustration for nearly everyone we spoke to. "It's like there's always a hand up your ass, and you're a puppet," exclaimed one particularly incensed source. "The problem with that is that they know how to make and sell games in Japan, but they don't know a damn thing about the American market. What they'll do is that they keep reinforcing these ideas that work in Japan, but don't necessarily meld with American audiences. They just don't know a damn thing about the market."

Many people we spoke with suggested that the difficulties involved with working at a satellite branch of a Japanese video game company was a result of our different cultures, but the more we investigated, the more clear it became that it's not quite that simple. Sure, Japan and America are very different places with different customs and languages, but there are many more factors at play which make a conclusion of simple culture clash far too easy. One person we spoke to told countless stories of how hard it was to work with one Japanese company, then

quickly turned around and told us how easy it is working with another. Therefore, differences in corporate structure and size need to be taken into consideration, as well as corporate philosophy. "For a lot of Japanese companies, they're very product-driven, rather than market-driven," one insider stated. "The successful American game companies



understand that they need to be market-driven. They create products for the market, rather than taking existing products and carving a niche for it. I think that the smart ones can look at the marketplace and find where their opportunities are, and go after those opportunities with a specific type of

product. With Japanese companies, they take an existing product, and say, "Where are our opportunities?" Also, the challenges of working with an international partner certainly aren't unique to the U.S. and Japan. "It's difficult for us in the U.S. to manage a company that doesn't speak English, like Sweden or France or something. We run into the same complications," one source reminded us.

"I think one of the differences is that video games, like manga and anime, are pop culture that have been well-accepted as part of mass culture," says Mike Fischer, General Manager of Marketing for Xbox and Games for Windows. "That's something that's just starting to happen today in the U.S.. So, it was actually a lot easier to work in the game industry in Japan, because it was more accepted and understood by people throughout the business world." While Microsoft is not the first name that pops up when discussing the Japanese video game market, Fischer is in a unique place to speak about how it varies from the American market. An American who first joined the game industry after moving to Japan in the late 1980s, Fischer lived roughly half his adult life working in Japan, including Sega and Microsoft Japan, as well as stints in the U.S. offices of companies like Namco. "While I was at Sega in Japan, I was a local hire. I learned the language, I learned to work in Japanese, think in Japanese, I lived a normal Japanese middle-class lifestyle," says Fischer. "I actually

I think one of the differences is that video games, like manga and anime are pop culture that have been well-accepted as part of mass culture

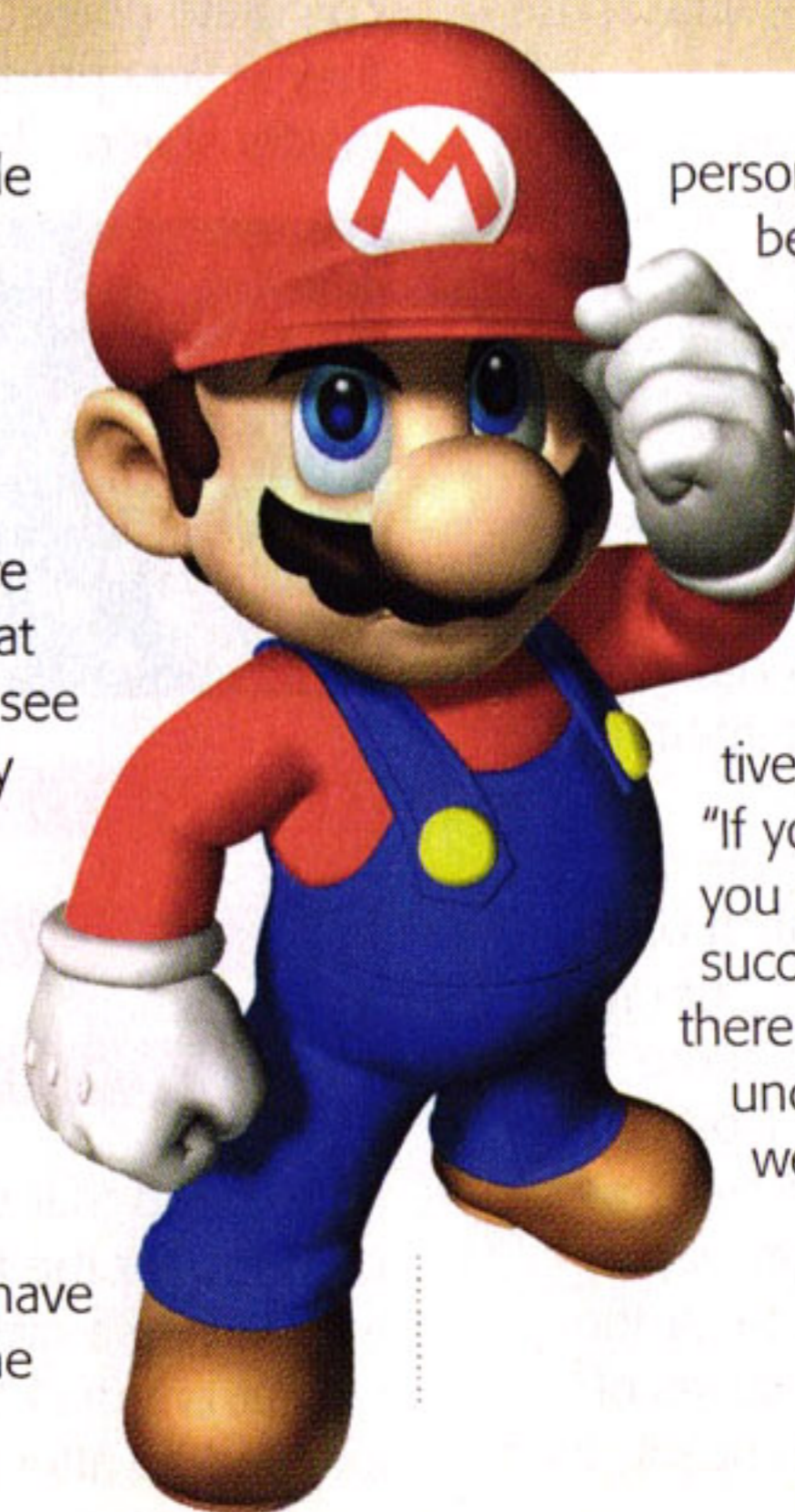


had some reverse culture shock when I came to Sega of America, because I was working for basically an American company with a Japanese parent company. So I kind of took for granted things like you go to your peers or your boss at the end of the day and say, 'I apologize for going home before you.' So some of these small things about living and working in a Japanese company I was fortunate enough to absorb when I was still very young. I remember that I'd get in a meeting at the end of the day, and I would want to know how long it was going to last. I'd look over at the senior guy in the room and see how many smokes were left in his pack. If he had a full pack, I knew that we were going to go all night. But I knew that if he only had one or two left that we'd be leaving early and I could get home in time for dinner."

As Fischer sees it, many of the difficulties that are ascribed to working with Japanese companies are fairly universal. "When you're working for a Japanese publisher based in the U.S., chances are that most of your develop-

ment is in Japan," says Fischer. "What people perceive as the challenges of getting stuff 'from Japan' are actually issues of getting stuff from the developer. That's a problem regardless of where the developer is. When the timeline gets crunched, marketing assets – movies, screenshots, cover art – are one of the things that get squeezed. So what some people perceive as Japan wanting to see everything and control everything are simply the same issues that everyone faces with every developer."

Regardless of where they felt the difficulties stemmed from, most individuals we spoke with felt, like Fischer, that the challenges of working for a Japanese company still largely resulted in a positive experience. "I really like the company, and have always respected what they create," said one



person. "Everyone in Japan just wants to make the best game possible. All these guys have a real passion for what they do. Everything they do they want to do right. I understand and respect that." Another felt that the insight you gain into the industry from the situation was unique. "I think that you see the entire scope of gaming from the Japanese perspective, from the American perspective, from the European perspective," he said. "If you're just focused on the American market, you might not understand what is needed to succeed in Japan or in Europe. So I think that there are these challenges, but we have a better understanding globally of what works. And then we get to go to Japan, too!" ■■■

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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

HOME CONSOLE SQUARE'S FINAL FANTASY?



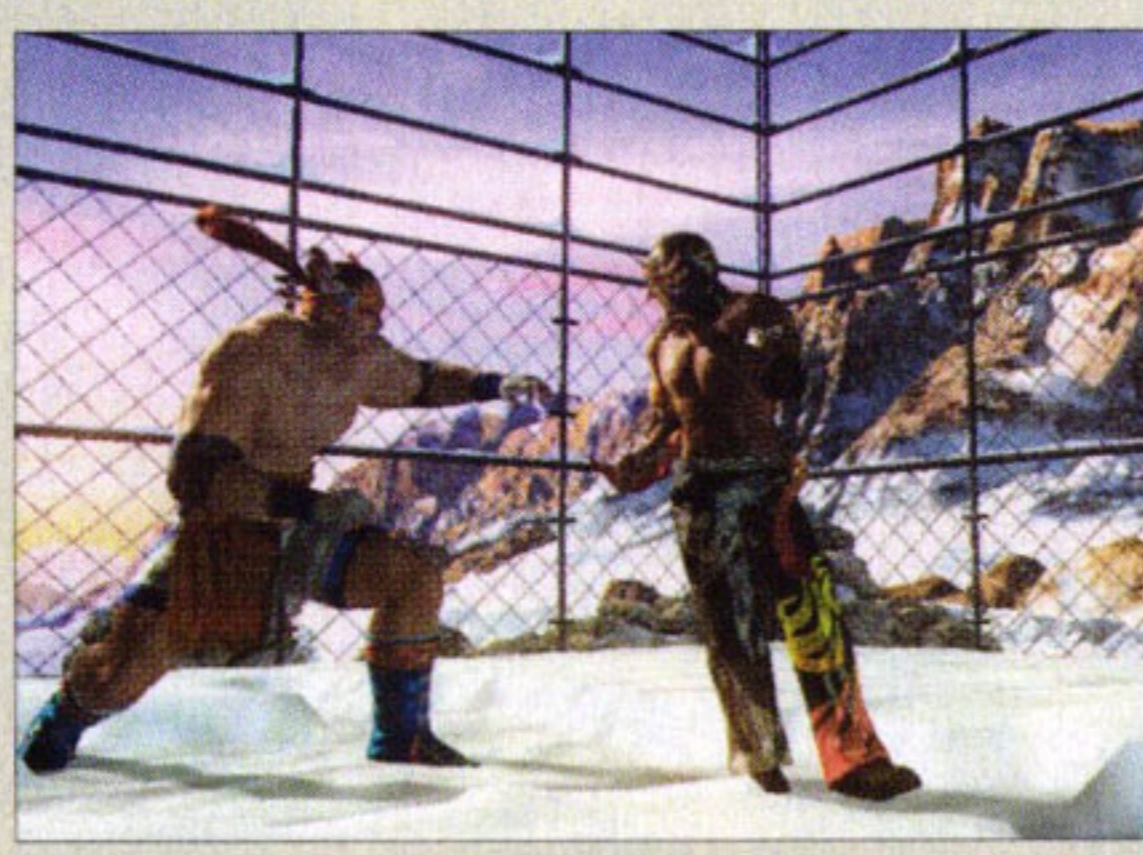
With series' like Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest, publisher Square Enix has forever left its mark on video games through its blockbuster software titles. However, recently company president Yoichi Wada hinted at a new future for Square Enix that could possibly include making some sort of console. Speaking to Japan's Nikkei Business Online, Wada talked about how the company must change its strategy, which is dependent on perpetual software releases of series like Final Fantasy. Citing the success of the iPod, Wada said that "to create a new environment based on hardware is completely valid." Continuing, Wada commented, "In our talks with Taito, ideas for an actual physical product have come up. In any case, we will be releasing some 'thing.' It's interesting in that it's not the sort of thing you expect from Square Enix."

NO REALLY, A PSP PRICE DROP

It's usual for industry analysts – particularly the financial kind – to prophesize a price drop in a system's future, but this month's price drop du jour is not just routine speculation. Despite that fact that some Sony officials have gone on record as saying that there is no price drop planned for the PSP, Loose Talk has heard from a reputable source that the system will indeed lower its price. Currently the handheld retails for \$200, and there is some deliberation whether the unit will move down to either \$150 or even \$100. We think it'll be \$150, but something's better than nothing.

VF 5 KNOCKED OUT

It's no secret that the U.S. arcade scene is dead, but we're still a little sad to hear news that Sega's Virtua Fighter 5 cabinet won't be showing up on these shores. The game is already out in Japan arcades, and is slated to appear on the PlayStation 3 next summer. Don't know what to do with your quarters anymore? We suggest you go to your favorite sporting event and throw them at fans of the opposing team. That'll teach 'em.



MORE MARVEL FOR EA

EA's Marvel Nemesis game went over worse than Iron Spidey, but the publisher is recuperating and working on a sequel. To help the project chances, EA is giving the project to its Chicago studio – the brains behind the Fight Night series and the upcoming next-gen Def Jam title.

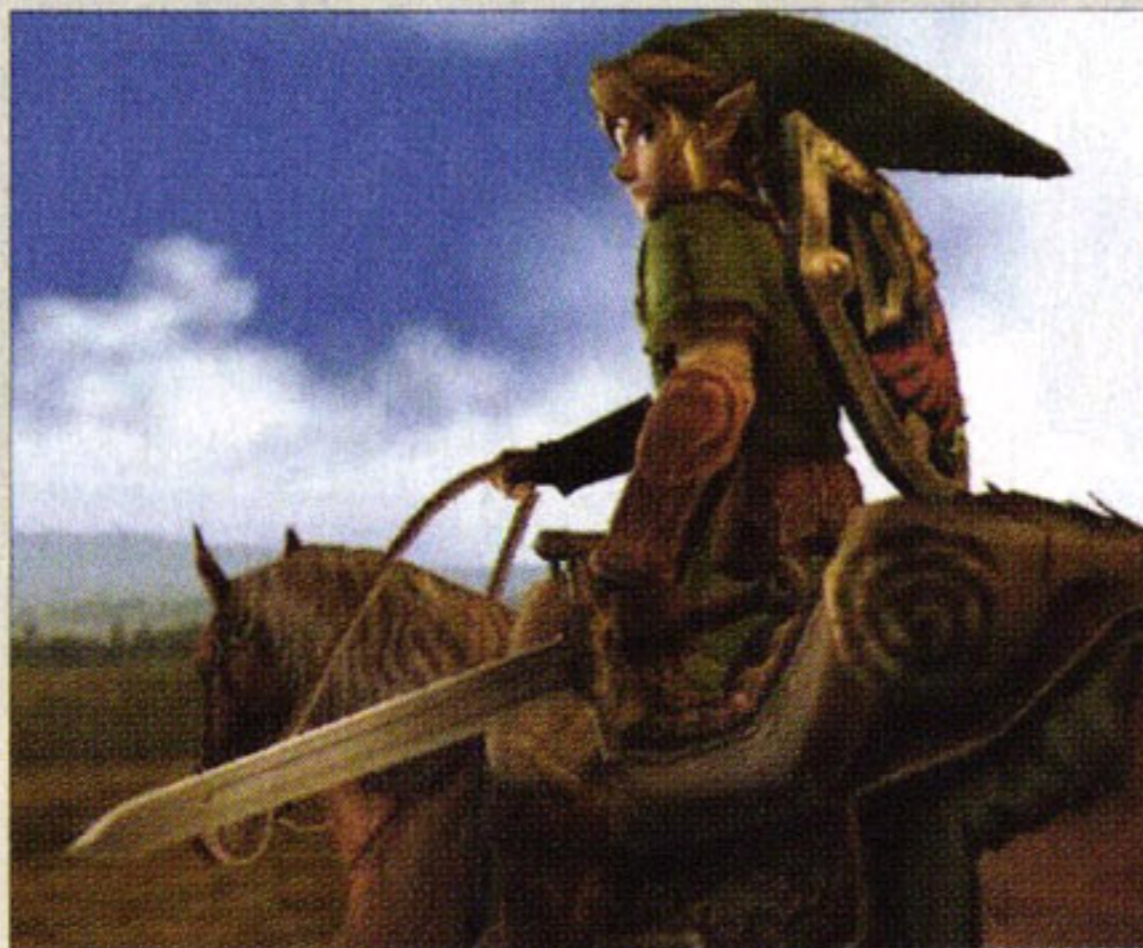


SQUARE RETURNS FROM THE DEAD

If you're wondering what the next Square Enix game is going to be, we can't tell you what it's going to be about, but we can say that it will be called Revenant Wings. The company has filed trademark paperwork to secure the name in the U.S. What does "revenant" mean? What, do we look like a dictionary to you, kid?!

WII TO REVOLUTIONIZE GAMECUBE GAMES?

Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto delighted fans when he recently told them that sword-slashing motions were being added to the Wii version of The Legend of Zelda: The Twilight Princess, but the Nintendo legend has also hinted that there's more in store. In a recent interview with Japan's Nintendo Dream, Miyamoto said that the company is considering re-releasing some old GameCube games with Wii motion-sensing controls for the new system.



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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Microsoft tried to run with the big boys in the sports genre, but the company's ill-fated first-party sports label didn't last long. Apart from the terrible NFL Fever football title, Microsoft put out this baseball franchise which actually only lasted one year. It's probably a good thing, because the game was very rough around the edges and inferior when compared to powerhouses such as EA and Visual Concepts.



(Answer on page 32)

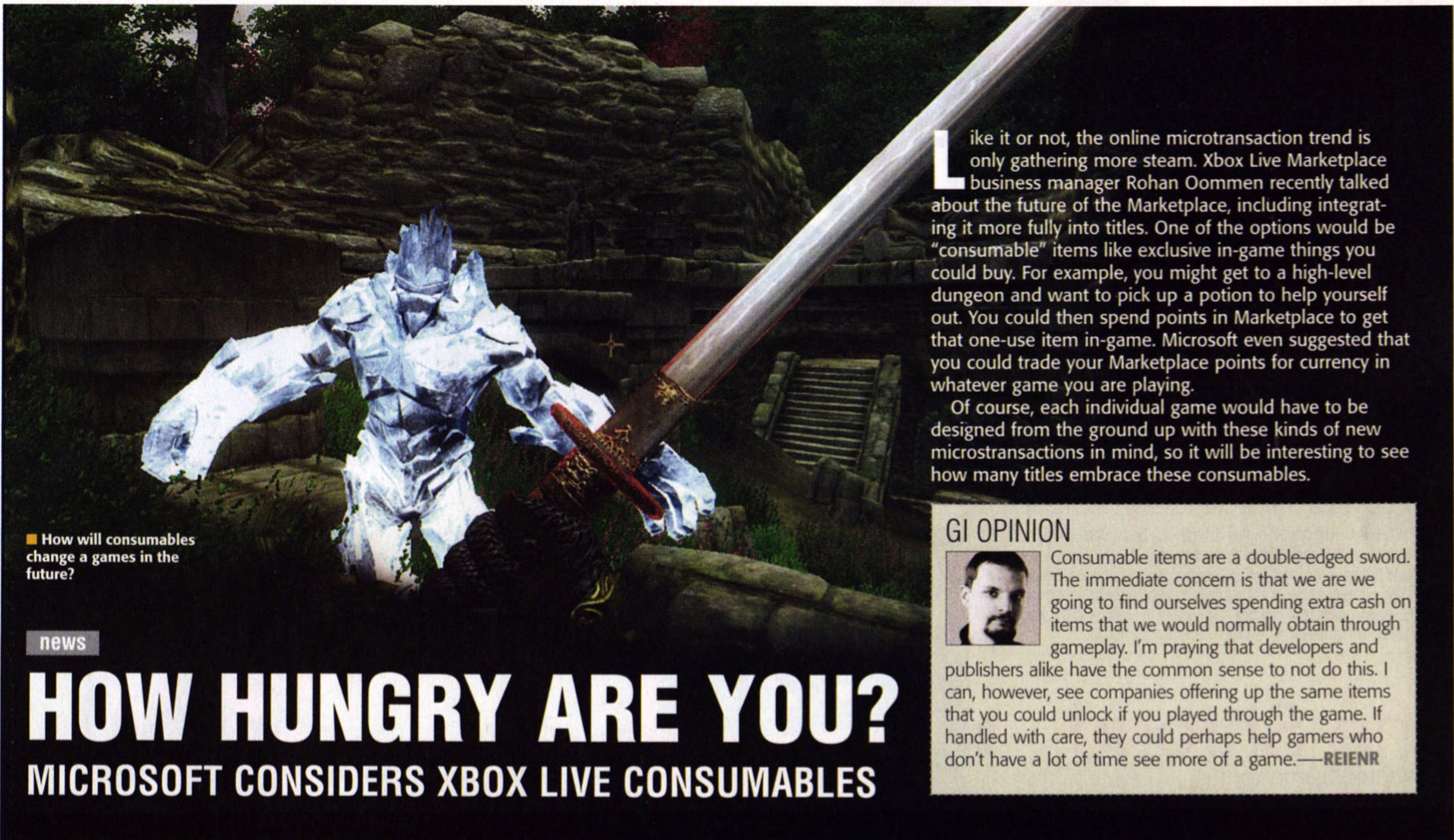


games

THE WITCH KING RISES!

EA EXPANDS BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II

The PC version of EA's Battle for Middle-earth II is getting an expansion pack this holiday season entitled The Rise of the Witch-king, letting players delve more deeply into the RTS' Mordor minions. The game features a new evil faction, as well as a new single-player campaign and additional units. The single-player portion will chronicle how the Witch-king took over Angmar and invaded Arnor, the home of Aragorn's ancestors. Leave the pillow fights to the hobbits, we're here to conquer!



■ How will consumables change a games in the future?

news

HOW HUNGRY ARE YOU?

MICROSOFT CONSIDERS XBOX LIVE CONSUMABLES

Like it or not, the online microtransaction trend is only gathering more steam. Xbox Live Marketplace business manager Rohan Oommen recently talked about the future of the Marketplace, including integrating it more fully into titles. One of the options would be “consumable” items like exclusive in-game things you could buy. For example, you might get to a high-level dungeon and want to pick up a potion to help yourself out. You could then spend points in Marketplace to get that one-use item in-game. Microsoft even suggested that you could trade your Marketplace points for currency in whatever game you are playing.

Of course, each individual game would have to be designed from the ground up with these kinds of new microtransactions in mind, so it will be interesting to see how many titles embrace these consumables.

GI OPINION



Consumable items are a double-edged sword. The immediate concern is that we are we going to find ourselves spending extra cash on items that we would normally obtain through gameplay. I'm praying that developers and publishers alike have the common sense to not do this. I can, however, see companies offering up the same items that you could unlock if you played through the game. If handled with care, they could perhaps help gamers who don't have a lot of time see more of a game.—REIENR



nowwhat.com

the top 10 mobile games outright now

Gamers and the media that covers their obsession have had a problem for the last few years: How do you cover a game that's only available on certain hardware, through varied carriers, or in specific parts of the country? How do you score a title whose technology is much more reminiscent of the mid '80s when the rest of the industry is trumpeting dynamic lighting and volumetric particle effects? While we might not have come up with all the answers, we have come up with a list of titles more than worth checking out. Here are ten wireless games running the gamut from quick, retro play to complex RPGs. They're not all pretty, but at a few dollars a pop, they provide way more entertainment than running text message time trials. And, the console is always in your pocket, so get to it and give some low-res creative games a try.

YOUR CELL PHONE MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO MORE THAN YOU THINK, LIKE PLAY SOME PRETTY SWEET GAMES

FAIR WARNING: The games in this list may not be available on all carriers or for all phones, although we were careful to include widely-available examples that will run on common, current phones. Check with your wireless carrier or the publisher's website for price and availability. Internet download charges might apply in addition to the game's cost, which will probably be between three and six dollars.

The Shroud

www.shroudgame.com

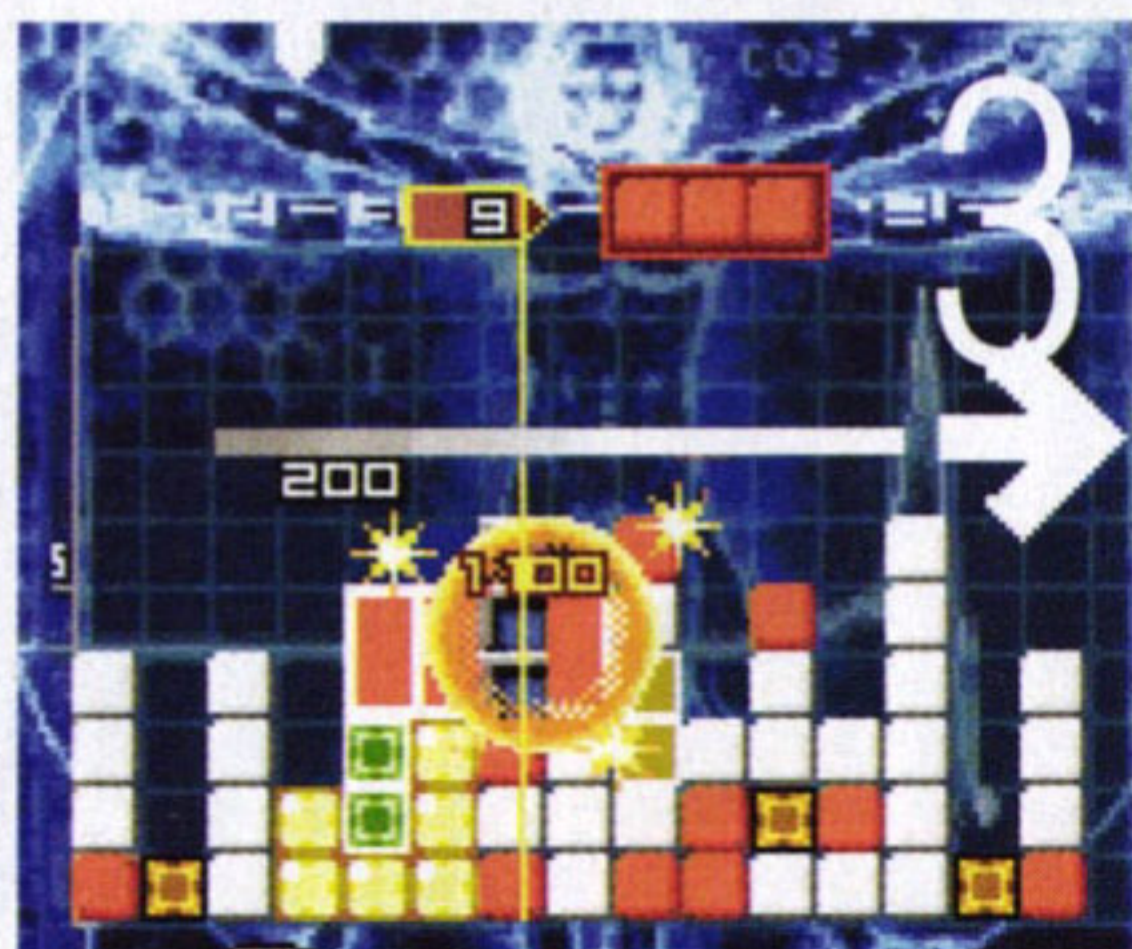
Without a doubt, Your World Game's Zelda- and Harvest Moon-inspired RPG **The Shroud** is the most ambitious game on the list. Players help Taro defend and restore his farm after demons break free from the city's mine. In addition to the full-featured single-player mode, GPS-enabled phones can participate in location-based gameplay, an area where cell phones unquestionably trump current handhelds.



Orcs and Elves

www.orcsandelves.com

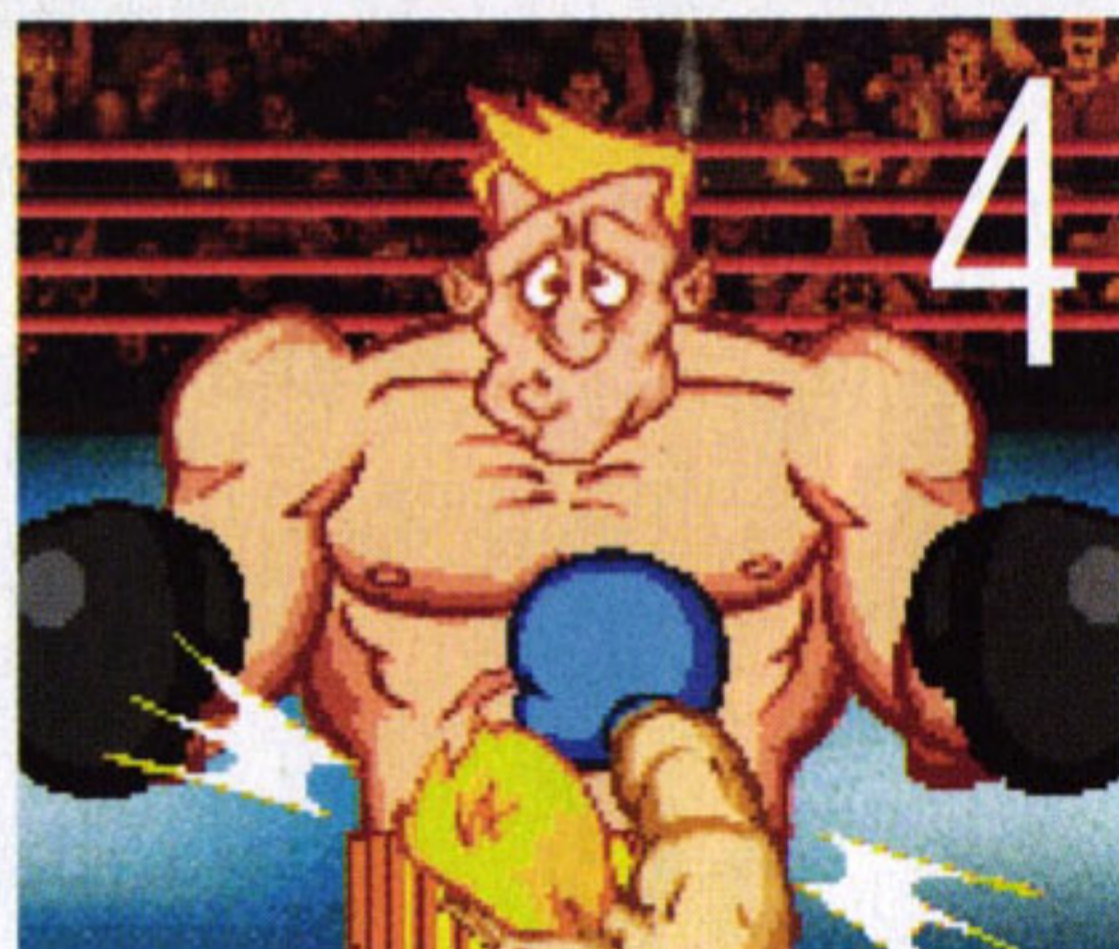
Old school D&D from the creator of Doom? What? Back in our July issue, we ran an interview with John Carmack, the aforementioned creator and, now that it's out, Orcs and Elves proves that turn-based RPGs are great for quick bouts of play in the high fantasy setting.



Lumines Mobile

www.gameloft.com/lumines-mobile

To some, Lumines is an addiction of a higher power than even Tetris. Good thing that phones have decent batteries nowadays. This mobile variant of the PSP hit does an amazing job of translating Lumines' precise, fast play to cell phones with different button configurations and response rates.



Super K.O. Boxing

glu.com/sko/

Do you remember Punch Out! with great fondness? Then Glu Mobile's Super K.O. Boxing is your ticket to that classic boxing feel. Super wacky opponents fill the game's three circuits (with a total of nearly a dozen foes) and each has classic weaknesses to exploit and varied tolerances to your taunts.



SimCity

www.eamobile.com

SimCity is but one example of the recent EA/Jamdat partnership, but the strategic play is particularly well-suited to cell gaming and the power of modern phones makes this iteration look even better than the one we grew up with.



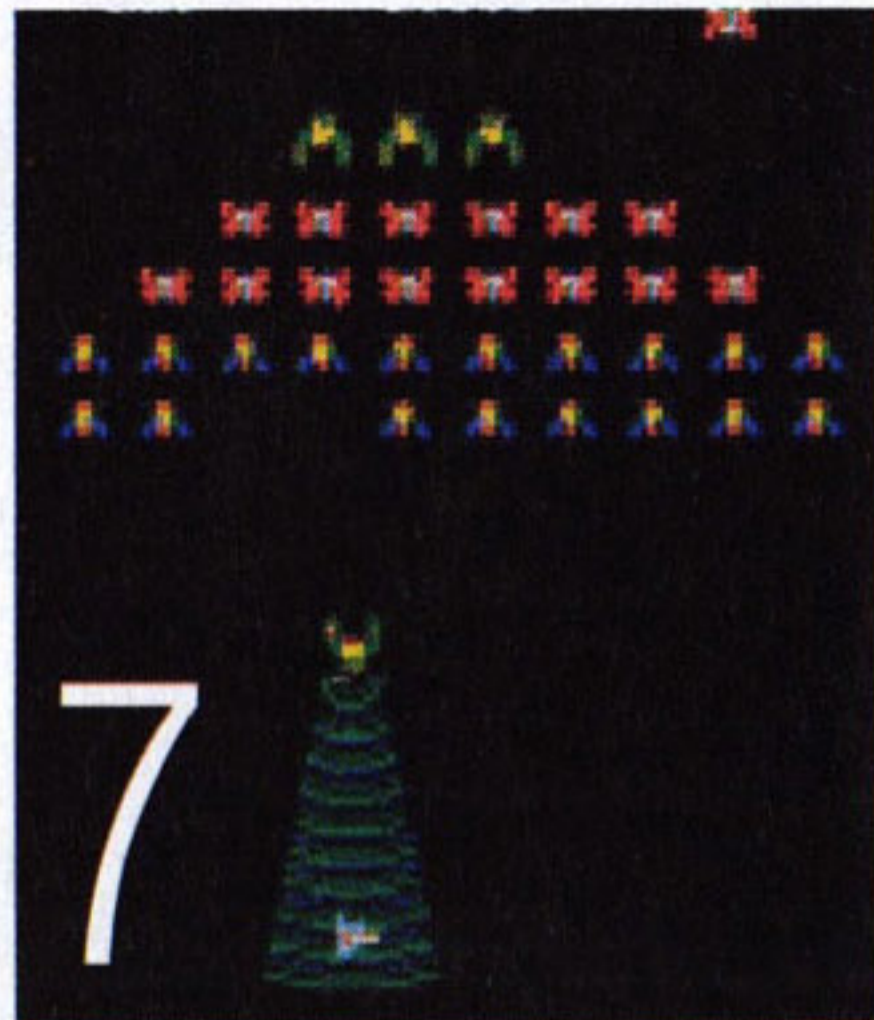
To some, Lumines is an addiction of a higher power than even Tetris.



6

Fatal Fury

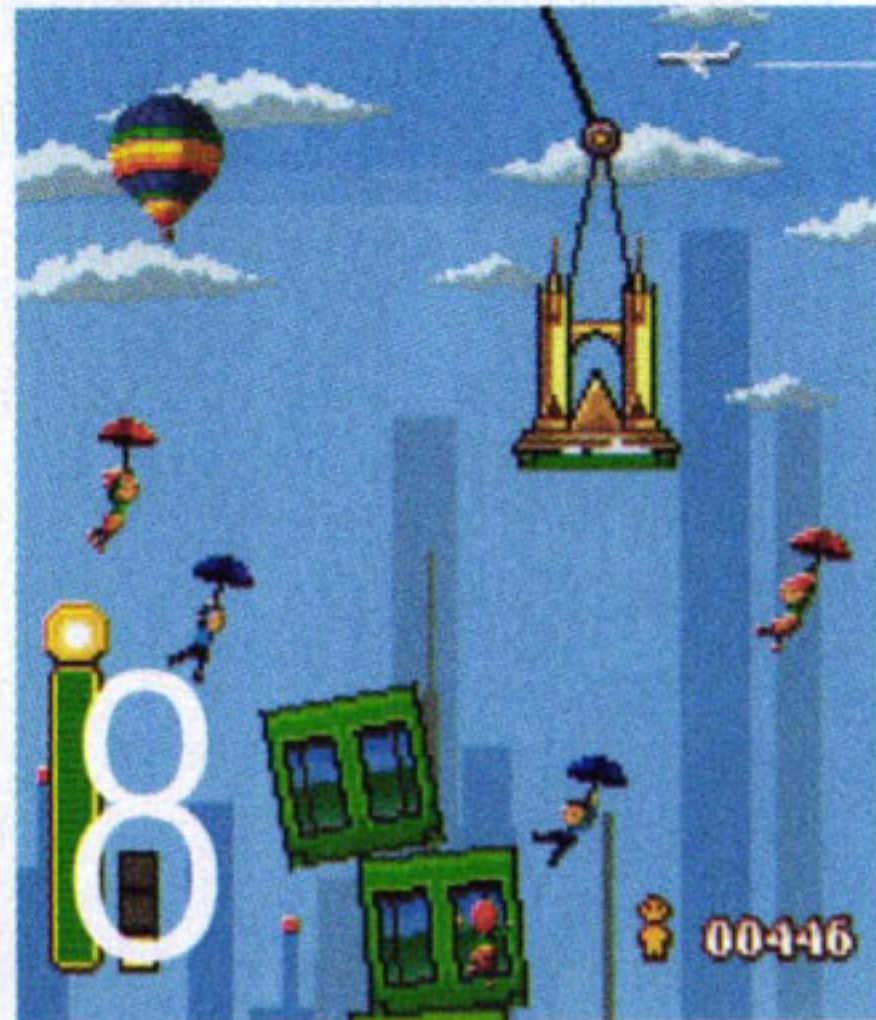
www.hudsonentertainment.com
Fatal Fury, as a series, is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year and, in honor of the series' staying power, Hudson Entertainment is releasing a partial port of the second game to cell phones around the world. With eight fighters and just as many stages, the game really spreads its wings with play modes. Five different options – Quick Play, Single Match, Training, Survival, and Tournament pump up the replay value.



7

Galaga

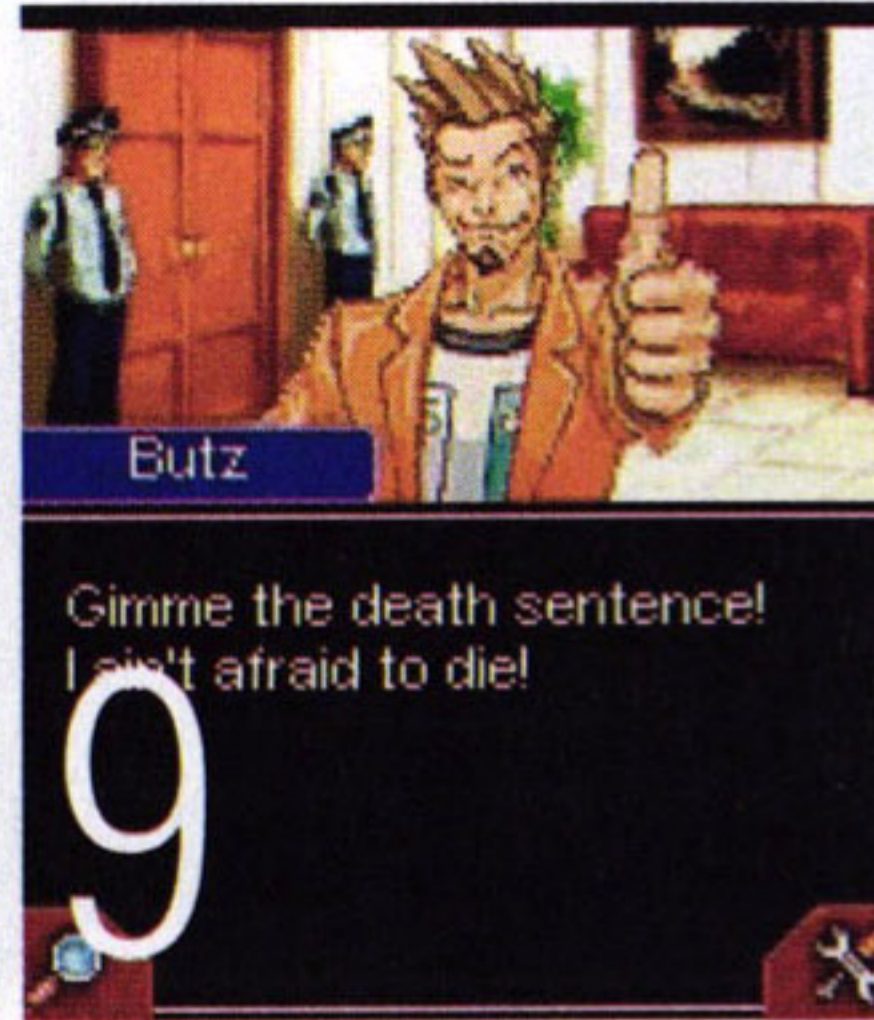
www.namcogames.com
It's a classic, but the irresistible combo of pick-up-and-play controls and constantly escalating difficulty is hard to deny. Namco has been pumping out their old franchises on cell phones for a few years (and in the name of full disclosure, this release isn't super new, but it's so good that we couldn't resist). Both Pac-Man and the Ms. are available along with Dig Dug, Mr. Driller, and even Time Crisis.



8

Tower Bloxx

www.digitalchocolate.com
Digital Chocolate's action/puzzle hybrid came out of nowhere earlier this year and its flexibility is a strong point in many different ways. The game's two play options are one of the title's strongest suits. The action side is easy for anyone to figure out (stack boxes as straight as possible – it's better than it sounds) and the puzzling city builder side offers depth for those who are a little more hardcore.



9

Phoenix Wright

www.capcommobile.com
Capcom let loose on the mobile front at this year's E3, showing off a port of Super Puzzle Fighter 2, an alternate take on Lost Planet, and this full edition (minus some extra frames of animation) of the DS cult hit Phoenix Wright. The plan includes cases to be offered in the future as additional downloads. This game (like many adventure titles) is a great fit for mobile, since the action is already in nice, bite-sized bits.



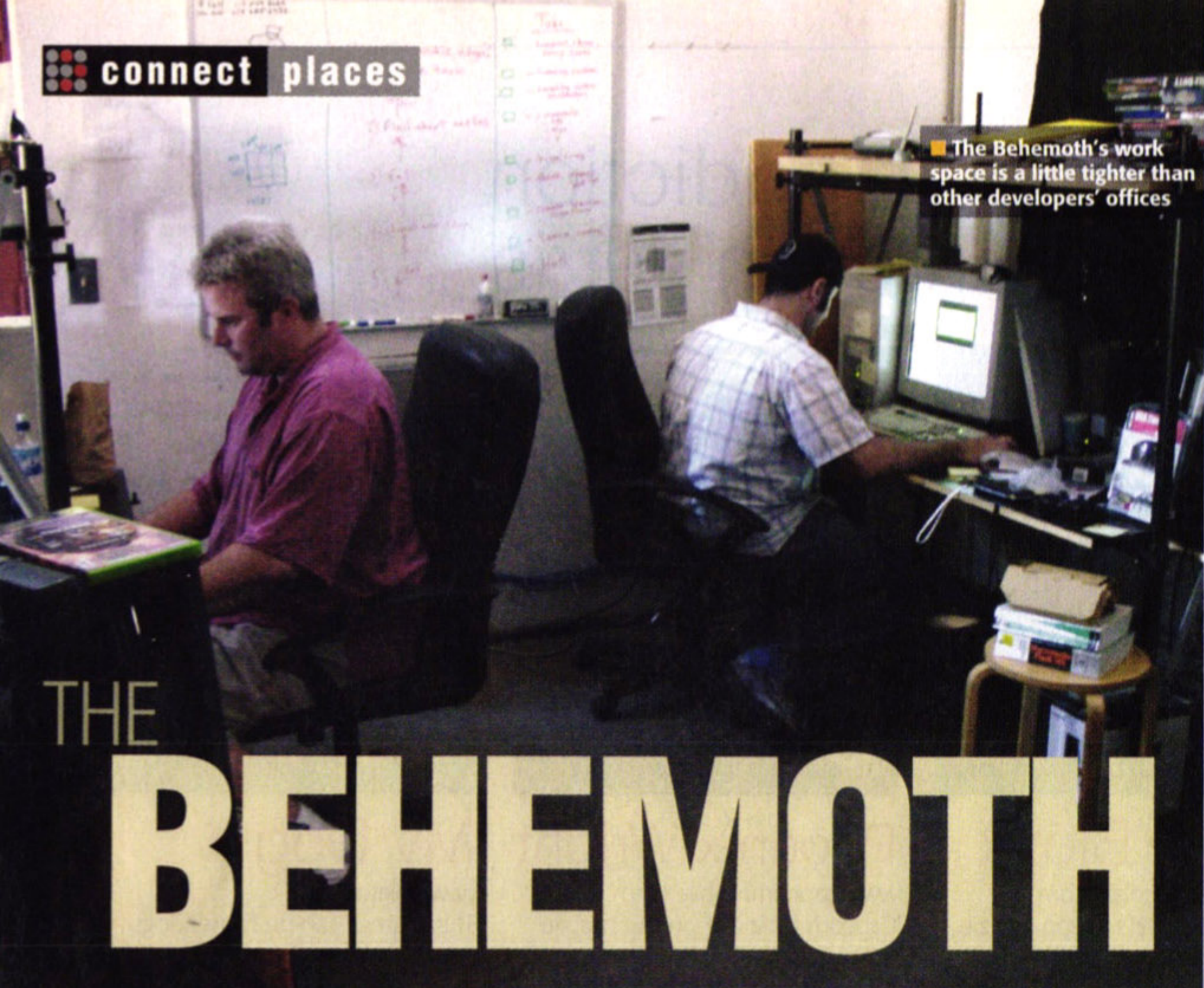
10

My Dog

www.iplay.com
This cute-as-can-be Nintendogs rip-off makes up for its lack of voice recognition with tons of options and even more liberal doses of innovative graphics. Through the different modes (object, petting, walk, and follow), players train their dogs to win Best in Show and, most importantly, bond with their virtual pooch. Sims with a heart? Sweet!



nowwhat.com



■ The Behemoth's work space is a little tighter than other developers' offices

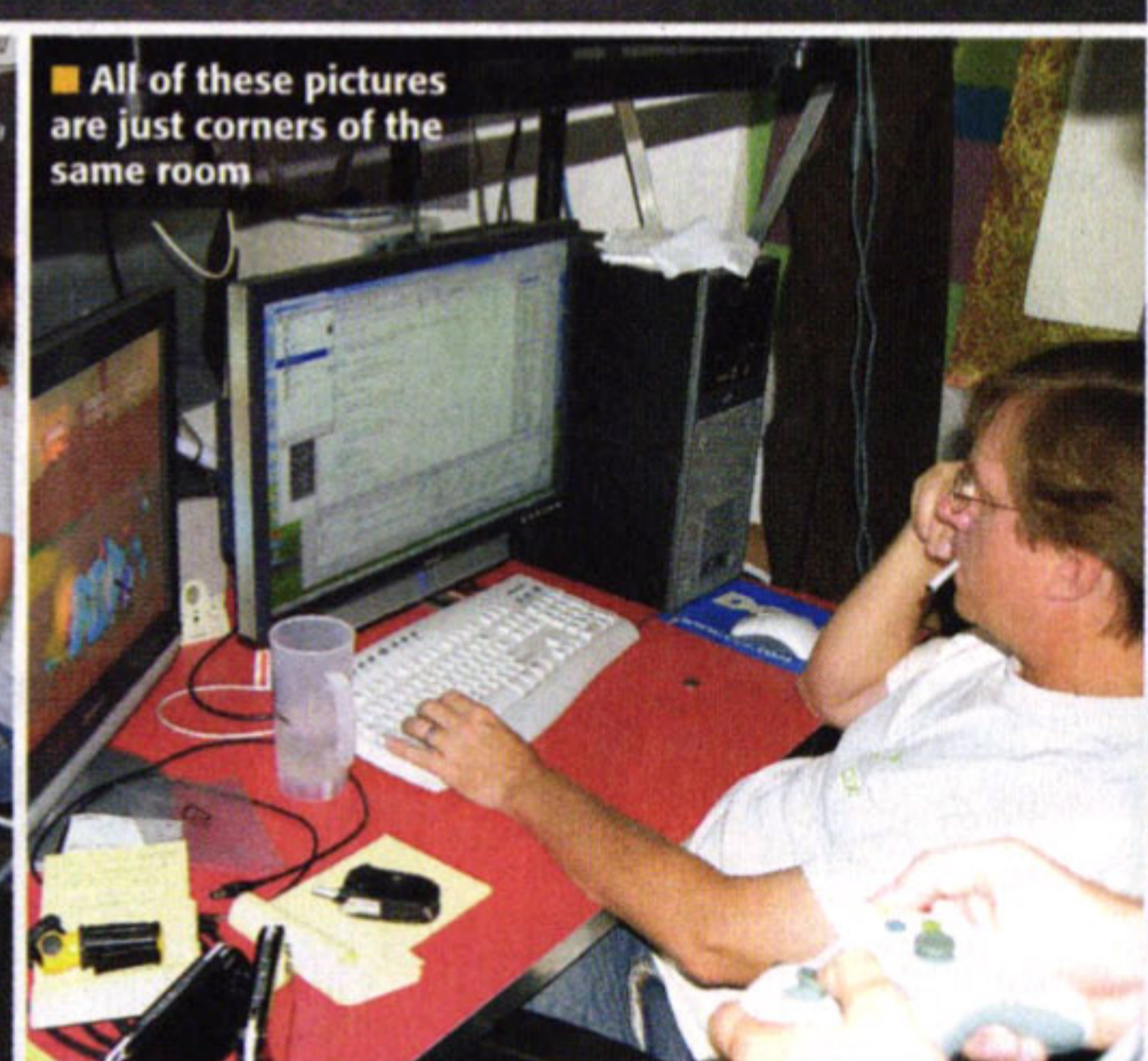


■ Artist Dan Paladin, a.k.a. Synj, signs boxes of Alien Hominid toys

THE BEHEMOTH



■ Giveaway items like buttons are assembled by the staff and their friends



■ All of these pictures are just corners of the same room



■ Buttons! Everybody likes buttons!



■ The Behemoth's Tom Fulp displays a promotional sword that didn't turn out quite as planned

Over the years, Game Informer has visited the offices of some of the world's biggest developers and witnessed some of the largest studio staffs in the video game industry. On other occasions, we get a chance to spend time with talented individuals on the other end of the spectrum. Recently, we stopped in at the San Diego office of The Behemoth, the developer behind the cult hit Alien Hominid. With only eight employees, The Behemoth is (as far as its employees know) the smallest studio to release a console title in today's big budget gaming world.

The Behemoth has its roots in the popular flash site Newgrounds, which was launched in 1995 by creator Tom Fulp. In 2002, Fulp and his friend Dan Paladin (also known as Synj) created the original flash game Alien Hominid, which quickly developed a strong fanbase. At that time Paladin was working with John Baez, a huge fan of Alien Hominid, at a game developer that folded soon afterwards. Baez approached Paladin about founding a company to make a console version of Alien Hominid and, once Fulp joined the pair, The Behemoth was born. Baez

mortgaged his house to start in the company, and they set up shop in downtown San Diego.

The Behemoth's office occupies one floor of a small but stylish office building that was designed by Baez in his previous career as an architect. About the size of a large studio apartment, the office holds little more than a few desks, a worktable, and a loft where the often-tired developers have been known to crash after long nights. Despite the small number of employees, not everyone in the company even works out of the intimate space – or even the state. Fulp still runs Newgrounds out of his hometown Philadelphia, and Paladin is based in Cleveland.

Within walking distance of the San Diego convention center, The Behemoth has been an active participant in the San Diego Comic-Con for the last four years. Held

at the convention center, the Con draws over 100,000 people annually, making it the biggest comic book convention in the world. The Behemoth built a large portion of its fanbase at the Con, selling Alien Hominid figurines at the show to help fund the game's development. At this year's convention, The Behemoth showcased its new Xbox Live Arcade title Castle Crashers with a full playable level, as well as the rebuilt Xbox Live Arcade version of Alien Hominid, both of which drew large, enthusiastic crowds. Ironically, an early version of Castle Crashers was unveiled at the Con a year before, but it kept crashing.

Like Alien Hominid, Castle Crashers will see some merchandise like figurines released, but this time around, they're more about appeasing fans than raising money. With the success of Alien Hominid and the developer-friendly nature of Xbox Live Arcade, this indie studio is on far more stable ground. But The Behemoth's crew doesn't want their small group to get much bigger. They may not be large, but they've already enjoyed great success, and, from the looks of their new project, have more big things in their future. ■ ■ ■



■ Castle Crashers is headed to Xbox Live Arcade early next year



■ Alien Hominid put The Behemoth on the map, and is also coming to Xbox Live Arcade



GEARS OF WAR

EMERGENCE DAY 11.12.06

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language



Microsoft
game studios

XBOX
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Jump in.



TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
FELICE STANDIFER
Senior Producer, SCEA

READER
RICKY RUFF
Plainfield, ILL



- 1 Centipede – Arcade
- 2 Pac-Man – Arcade
- 3 Super Mario Bros. – NES
- 4 Donkey Kong – Arcade
- 5 Bomberman – NES

- 1 Kingdom Hearts II – PS2
- 2 The Legend of Dragoon – PSone
- 3 Chrono Cross – PSone
- 4 Golden Sun – GBA
- 5 FIFA 06 – PS2

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top Ten Things Microsoft Should Do To Thwart The PS3 Launch

- 10 Voodoo Vince 2. MGS 4-killer, baby!
- 9 Unprovoked missile strikes against consumers who buy the machine
- 8 Bill Gates removes pants, drinks scotch, and hopes everything turns out okay
- 7 Electronic tampering. Dual Shock will now deliver 10,000 volts to all users
- 6 Release Halo 2: Sony Sucks Edition day and date with PS3
- 5 Pretend like it has no credibility in Japan, so as to give the illusion of weakness...then strike!
- 4 Distribute Kaz Hirai's 9th grade yearbook photo
- 3 Xbox Live automatically subtracts 1 million from your Gamerscore if it detects a PS3
- 2 Randomly package copies of Kameo with PS3
- 1 Buy Sony

Name That Game Answer: MLB Inside Pitch 2003

news

THE PS3 HANDS ON CONTROLLER/PLATFORM UNDER CHANGES

It's been a long and sometimes strange journey for the PlayStation 3 controller, from boomerang back to reality, but the final design has come down and Game Informer had an opportunity to get our hands on it.

Answering once and for all a lingering question from E3, we discovered that the PlayStation logo button in the middle of the controller does indeed trigger access to the PSP-like crossbar menu, just like how the similar button on the Xbox 360 controller brings you into the Xbox guide. Overall, the PS3 controller felt very good in our hands, despite some reports out of E3 that it was too light. The whole unit feels remarkably similar to the current PS2 controller, and the new L2 and R2 triggers have been streamlined and changed slightly from their more bulky E3 incarnation. The unit's wireless capabilities are charged by a detachable USB cable, and unlike the Xbox 360, this controller does not require a sold-separately recharge kit.

The PlayStation 3 system as a whole has also undergone a slight cosmetic change, the 60GB hard drive version (\$599) is differentiated from the 20GB version (\$499) by a silver lining around the unit's disc tray.



games

THE FATE OF THE REBEL ALLIANCE IS IN YOUR HANDS!

PSP/DS TITLE SPANS EPISODES III & IV

Forget the formation of the Rebel Alliance. Forget about the exile of Obi-Wan Kenobi. The number one thing about the time between Star Wars' episodes III and IV that we want to know is about a scantily clad Twi'lek and her droid. LucasArts and Ubisoft are teaming up to bring us this unlikely story in Star Wars: Lethal Alliance for the PSP and DS.

After the death of Aayla Secura, someone had to take over the reigns of being the ubiquitous busty Twi'lek, and Rianna Saren is here to fill Aayla Secura's... uh... spot. Saren and her trusty droid Zeeo uncover the Empire's plans for the Death Star using the game's "collaborative fighting" system. You'll also pilot ships, use stealth tactics, and run into the likes of Boba Fett, Kyle Katarn, and Darth Vader.

Lethal Alliance is slated for release this December.



■ You'll use Saren and her droid companion together to combat your foes

■ "I said, hands off the lekku, scumbag!"

NO ONE ELSE IS IN THEIR LEAGUE



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Available on the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system and PSP® (PlayStation®Portable) system.

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NINTENDO DS

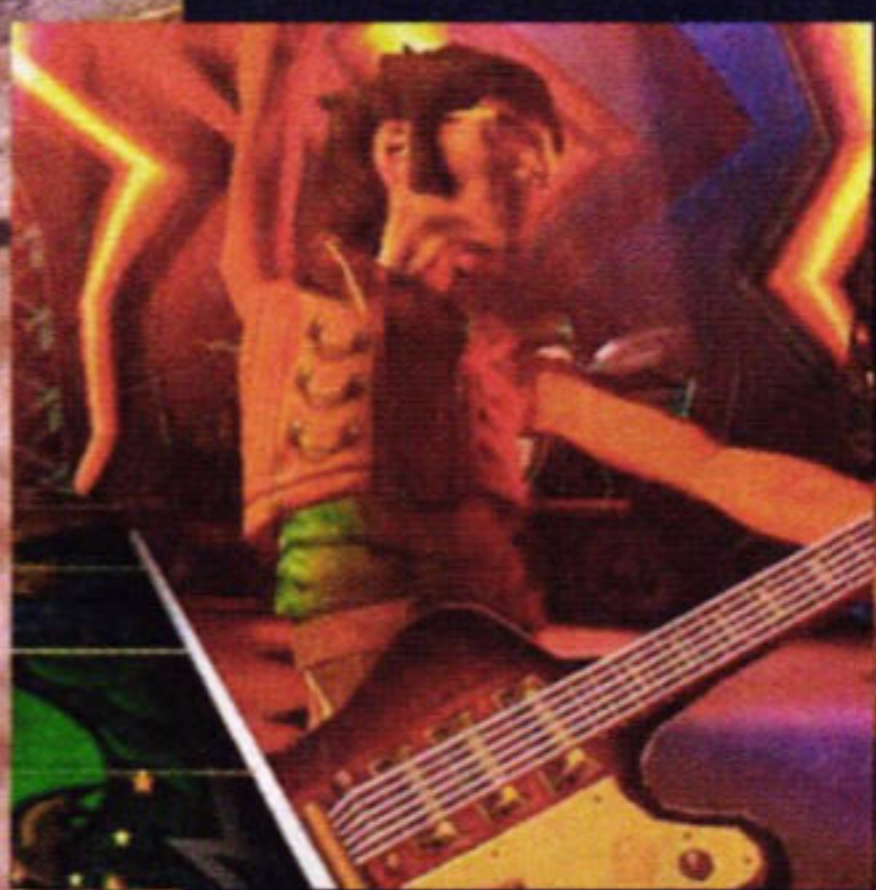
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(s06)

ARE GAMES BECOMING TOO EASY?



The video game industry is faced with a number of difficult questions and many ways to look at them. In Game Informer's debate section, we will attempt to analyze these scenarios from different angles. Like a typical debate club, our editors have been assigned to defend a position whether it agrees with their personal views or not. In this edition, we tackle the issue of the decreasing difficulty in games.



PRO

DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT YOU WOULD be buzzing with excitement if the police in *Need for Speed* could never catch you? Would you still run from zombies in *Resident Evil* if you could never die? Can you really see yourself playing video games if they didn't challenge you? As games

continue to extend their reach as mainstream entertainment, they are evolving to accommodate the casual gamer and people who never would have thought about touching a controller. This is having a great effect on the difficulty of games. Some games like *Prey* and *LEGO Star Wars* don't let the player die. Others like *King Kong* adjust the difficulty level as the player progresses. Long-running franchises like *Tony Hawk* are also feeling the effect by guiding players step by step through each challenge with huge flashing signs. These changes certainly lead to higher accessibility, but are we still playing games? Or are we playing interactive movies and tutorials? Games need to continue to challenge players. That's why we play them. We want to feel the sense of accomplishment that comes from toppling a rampaging 10-story monster that could squash us in one blow. It's these larger-than-life moments that really make games stand out as a unique entertainment medium. As much as developers need to be conscious of expanding the audience, it is equally important that gamers of all types continue to experience the satisfaction that only this art form is capable of delivering.—**REINER**



CON

ARE THERE MORE GAMES THESE DAYS that more people can fully experience from beginning to end without tearing their hair out in frustration? You bet. Does that mean that our favorite hobby is becoming too easy? No way. If you're not encountering enough challenging games on the

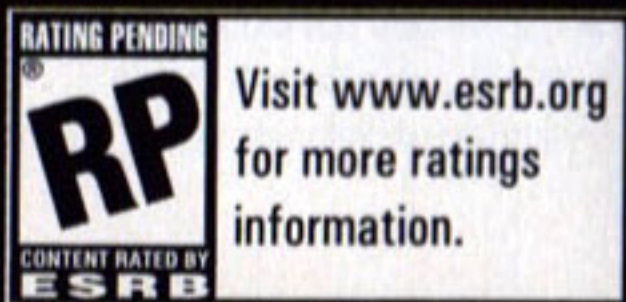
market, you're not paying attention. Whether it's pushing your way through to the end of *Ninja Gaiden*, beating *Guitar Hero* on Expert, or finally having your guild topple the Old God C'thun in *World of Warcraft*, there are plenty of feathers to pursue for your cap in even the most recent and popular games. For every game that any child could play (which is often the point), there are still plenty emerging for us hardcore players that have been doing this for years. Meanwhile, smart design decisions like adaptive difficulty settings and intuitive controls for systems like the *Wii* ensure that a new generation of game players can begin to climb the ranks, whether that freshmen class is made up of your five-year-old son or your 85-year-old grandma. Complex controls and ridiculously challenging bosses aren't going extinct, but suggesting that every game have them is tantamount to proclaiming that no one new should ever be allowed to start playing video games. Then we won't just have fewer challenging games — we won't have any at all.—**MILLER**



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PLAYSTATION 3



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



■ Midway's Stranglehold just blew its way into the spring



■ Aliens invade South Africa in Blomkamp's short *Alive in Joburg*

UGLY

This month sees a number of games getting their release dates pushed back. Ubisoft's *Splinter Cell Double Agent* has been delayed for the second time, meaning it won't hit until the end of October, while we won't see the publisher's *Dark Messiah of Might and Magic* until mid-October. Meanwhile, Midway's John Woo fun-fest *Stranglehold* is now slated for some date in the spring.

GOOD

The Halo movie now has a director and his name is Neill Blomkamp. Blomkamp only has experience in commercials and short films, but when you take a look at his work in *Alive in Joburg*, *Tempbot*, and in his Citroen transforming car commercial, you can quickly see his command of using special effects. Perhaps this is why Halo's executive producer Peter Jackson chose him, despite his lack of feature-length experience. Head over to YouTube to check out Blomkamp's work.



BAD

PlayStation fans salivating over the Xbox 360/PC title *F.E.A.R.* are going to have something new to drool over. Publisher Sierra is bringing a version of the game with exclusive content to the launch of the PlayStation 3 on November 17. That's great for you, but bad for us, because even after we threatened to kill ourselves, Sierra still wouldn't divulge what the exclusive content would be. Oh well, goodbye cruel world.

GOOD

In a move to further strengthen its backwards compatibility plans, Sony says that it is allowing gamers to use their old PS2 saves on the PS3 via an adapter. Unfortunately, there is no word yet how this adapter will be sold, used, or how much it may cost. In other PS3 news, company president Phil Harrison says that there are over 100 games in development for the system and that more than 10,000 dev. kits have been shipped to studios.

GOOD

Microsoft has handed down prices and dates for some Xbox 360 peripherals, including the Xbox Live Vision Camera (Sept. 19/\$39.99 or \$79.99), Wireless Racing Wheel (Nov./\$149.99), Wireless Headset (Nov./\$59.99), and the Xbox 360 Wireless Gaming Receiver for Windows – which allows you to use your Xbox 360 wireless peripherals (Dec.) with your PC for \$19.99.



GOOD

Pay up, suckas! An Illinois district judge tells the state of Illinois to pay the legal fees of the ESA (Entertainment Software Association) for trying to enact an unconstitutional law. The state was ordered to pay \$510,528.64 after a law trying to restrict access to violent video games was thrown out by Judge Matthew Kennelly, who wrote, "...in our society, that role is properly accorded to parents and families, not the state."

GOOD

For all you who've said, "I could make a game better than this!" it's time to put up or shut up. Microsoft has made available a trial tools program called XNA Game Studio Express where PC users can make their own games and put them up on Xbox Live. There is an annual subscription cost of \$99 (?), and although the program should be useful to students, we advise all you wannabe developers out there to please keep your crap to yourself!

RESERVE NOW
and Get the

DESTROY ALL
HUMANS! 2

Demo

for the PlayStation²
Computer Entertainment System

* While Supplies Last. See Cashier for Details.

PlayStation²



DESTROY ALL
HUMANS! 2

DEMO DISC

NOT FOR RESALE

THQ

GameStop

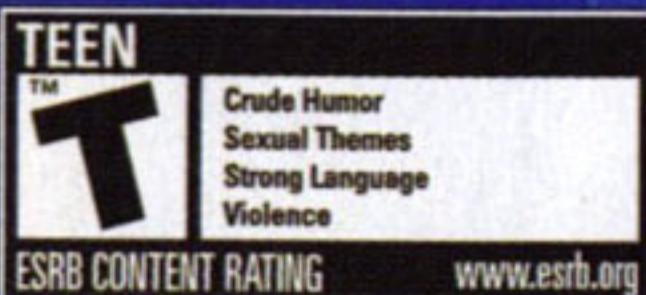
EBGAMES
electronics boutique



PlayStation²



www.destroyallhumansgame.com



THQ

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DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2

Tune In

The world is your stomping ground as you unleash a devastating new arsenal of weapons and abilities, like the Dislocator and Body Snatching

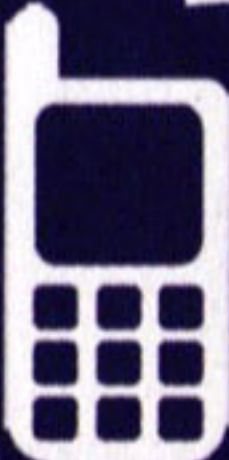
Turn On

Drop into the Swinging 60's and explore 5 huge open world environments around the globe, from Bay City to Tunguska

Team Up

Play with a friend and wreak havoc as you vaporize the human race together

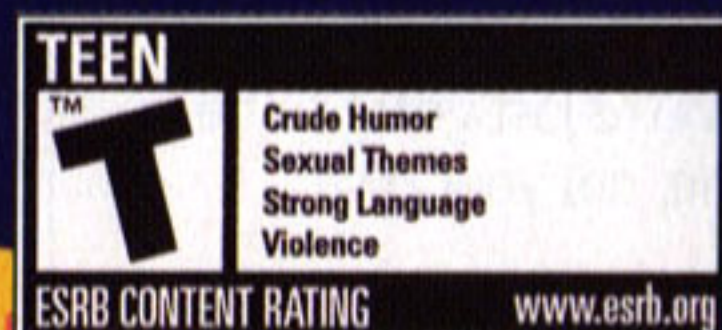
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DAH2
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to get the Destroy All Humans! 2 game on your phone!

Compatible phone coverage required. Standard text and game cost apply. To opt out text STOP to 69847.



PlayStation 2



www.thq.com

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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1982 Beginnings

Levine, at the tender age of 15, begins his career as a writer, penning an original one-act play.

1989 Hollywood Nights

After attending prestigious Vassar College, Levine gets a job for Paramount, rewriting a script for an ill-fated romantic comedy called *The Devil's Advocate*.

1995 A Big Break

After leaving Hollywood and drifting for a few years, Levine, a longtime gamer, gets a job at Looking Glass, working under esteemed developer Doug Church.

1998 Sticky Fingers



Levine's first project, *Thief: The Dark Project*, is released on PC. The acclaimed title, along with the *Metal Gear* series, is often given credit for establishing the modern stealth genre.

1999 A Cult Classic



Levine's second project would be his most acclaimed. After leaving the company for a brief period, Levine reunites with Looking Glass to create the amazing, futuristic action/RPG *System Shock 2*, which still enjoys a rabid following.

2000 The Lost Game

Irrational announces *The Lost*, a title that would prove to be aptly named. Inspired by Dante's *Inferno*, the survival horror game would fall into disarray, and is currently not in development, according to Levine.

2006 Bold New Directions



Levine and Irrational reveal their most ambitious title to date, the dystopian FPS *BioShock*, which is hailed as the "spiritual successor" to *System Shock 2*. It quickly becomes one of the most talked about games in the industry.

KEN LEVINE

PRESIDENT, IRRATIONAL GAMES

>> Irrational Games' Ken Levine, who made his name on such classic PC titles as *Thief* and *System Shock 2*, has consistently been one of gaming's most creative minds. Recently, we spoke with Levine about his background and his plans for the highly anticipated *BioShock*. <<

We've read that you started your career as a playwright and screenwriter.

When I was a teenager, I sat down and said, "I think I want to write a play." I had no idea if I could write. I sat down and wrote a play in a few hours. That was a very powerful thing, I'd never written anything before.... I started entering these play contests. There were readings of my stuff in New York. I got some letters from this very famous Broadway composer named Stephen Sondheim. That really had an effect on me – I grew up listening to Broadway; my parents were big Broadway fans. When I was a kid, I didn't know what I was going to do. [Writing] was a path... Eventually, I got a job right out of college re-writing a [Paramount] film called *The Devil's Advocate* – not the film that came out a few years ago, this was a goofy romantic comedy. I made [the] script like 22 percent less terrible. [Laughs]

thing better or similar to the type of game that *System Shock 2* is.

In an interview, someone asked you about EA still owning the *System Shock* franchise, and you made a statement that they "didn't give a s—t" about *System Shock*. Do you regret having said that?

Well, it's funny; people act like I was dissing EA. I wasn't really dissing EA. Look, you have a franchise and you haven't used it for eight years, it's kind of hard to say you do give a s—t about it. I hope they do; I hope they make *System Shock 3* and it's great, as a fan I would love to play that. But I don't really think it was a diss, it was a statement of fact.

***BioShock* has a lot of parallels to things that are happening right now – human cloning,**

you listen as you're doing the things you normally do in the game. I think that's powerful, and one of the reasons that world has so much resonance.... We tell the story in every frame of action – the world of Rapture and *BioShock* and what happened in this world. We talk about a scene in the game where you come across this museum – the central museum to the ideology that created Rapture. But the action of the game, the combat, the monsters you face, are a contrast to that ideology. You see what's going on in the world compared to the idealized version the museum is trying to present, because clearly the perfect world they were talking about in this museum fell apart. You see that in the gameplay, right in front of you. That, to me, is a much better way of telling a story than a cutscene that tries to give that same message.

BioShock is the deepest first-person shooter ever made

How did you get into games?

I was always a gamer, but it never occurred to me to be in the game industry. I was looking through this magazine called *Next Gen* and they had an ad for a game design job. It was Looking Glass, and I'd always loved their games – *Ultima Underworld* is probably the game that had the most influence on me. I didn't know exactly what "game design" meant, but I thought I could do it. Frankly, the only reason I think they hired me was because this was 1995 and the whole Hollywood and games merging together thing was really happening. They said, "Oh, this guy's worked in Hollywood, he'll help us figure this out." So they hired me, fortunately for me, because I didn't have any qualifications. The second day at Looking Glass, they put me in a room with Doug Church, who was really the guy who led the projects of *Ultima Underworld* and *System Shock*. It was like being put in a room with your hero the second day of your career.

Probably the best-loved game you worked on is *System Shock 2*, which has a huge cult following. To what do you attribute its ongoing popularity?

Uniqueness. What forms dedication is that there's nothing to replace it. When you have a cult around something, people can be drawn away by something similar and better. But nobody's done some-

genetic engineering, and things like that. Is this game a comment on the dangers of society going down that path?

We use the cloning and genetic engineering as themes in the game, but what the game is really about – and a lot of our games, if you look at *Thief* and *System Shock 2* – is about you being caught between two extreme ideologies. In *BioShock*, it's the same – there are these two powers in the world you get caught between. I think the comment we're making is that two elements taken to their extreme – even if they appear to be opposite philosophies – become identical because they become radicalized and very dangerous. Technology without ideology isn't particularly dangerous. I think that's what the game is really about, not a hot button topic like genetics.

What do you think of the current state of storytelling in games? Is it getting better?

I think the more you integrate the storytelling into the gameplay itself, the better it is.... *BioShock* doesn't have any cutscenes – it's all interactive. That's really important, because you don't want to break up the experience. I think a great example is the radio stations in *GTA*. What people miss about *GTA* is that it's a really funny satire, a comment on society and culture. Those radio stations are a great example of it. You're not forced to watch them;

***BioShock* seems to have a much more deliberate pace than most first-person games. Are you worried about the audience expecting more hectic action?**

Well, to me *BioShock* is the deepest first-person shooter ever made – that's how I view it and that's how we're building it. If a "shooter" just means mindless hordes in a hallway that jump out when you cross over a trigger in the floor, then I would say that's a substandard definition of a shooter.

Your games are critically acclaimed, but haven't been blockbusters. Is that frustrating for you? Do you ever consider making a game with a Marine going around shooting stuff?

When I was a screenwriter; someone asked me, "Why don't you go write something commercial?" If I knew what that was, I'd write it. I can only make what makes sense to me. If I was to go make some Marine game, I don't think it would be very good because I can't make something I don't think is cool. We've had games that have sold almost nothing, but we've had *Freedom Force*, which sold almost half a million units.... I make things I think are cool, and eventually I think enough people will agree with me. Otherwise, you're just going to be making someone else's game, not your own.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

■ Ken Levine and Irrational Games hope that BioShock will be the next great step forward for the first-person shooter genre

pc

THE REAL NEXT GEN?

Intel recently announced availability of their new processor: the Core 2 line. Currently made up of the Core 2 Duo and the Core 2 Extreme (a gaming-focused chipset), the clunky names belie some serious technology with tremendous potential. Designed for higher performance with substantially reduced energy requirements, the effects on tower design could be immense. Intel's benchmarks suggest 40-percent faster performance along with 40-percent more energy efficiency. Maybe, just maybe, we could be looking at faster machines that stay cooler (and are quieter without four fans pumping air through the case) and suck way less juice from the grid (or your laptop battery). The machines listed here are some of the debut models with the chipset and they aren't cheap, but they're all top of the line and you know how these bad boys come down in price with each season that passes.

1 DELL XPS 700

Manufacturer: Dell
Website: www.dell.com
List Price: starts at \$2,849

SPECS:

- Core 2 Duo processor E6400, dual 2.13GHz cores
- 2 GB Dual Channel DDR2 SDRAM
- Dual 256 MB NVIDIA GeForce 7900 GS
- 640 GB RAID HDD
- 20-inch widescreen flat-panel monitor included

2 VECTOR GX CAMPUS EDITION

Manufacturer: Velocity Micro
Website: www.velocitymicro.com
List Price: starts at \$899

SPECS:

- Core 2 Duo processor E6300, dual 1.86GHz cores
- 1,024 MB Corsair RAM
- NVIDIA GeForce 7600 GS
- 250 GB 7,200 rpm HDD

3 HEXX

Manufacturer: Voodoo PC
Website: www.voodoopc.com
List Price: starts at \$3,500

SPECS:

- Core 2 Extreme processor X6800
- 2,048 MB Corsair RAM
- NVIDIA GeForce 7900 GT 256
- 80 GB 7,200 rpm HDD

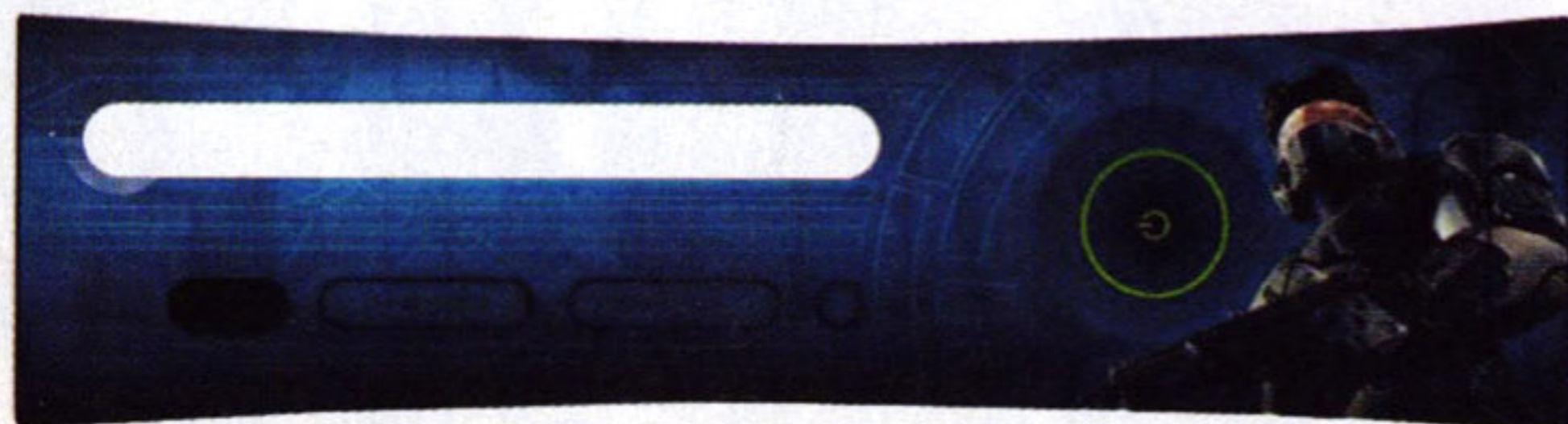


etc

XBOX 360 HALO FACEPLATE

Manufacturer: Microsoft
Website: www.xbox.com
List Price: \$19.99

This is no Halo 3 sitting in our disc trays, but this is nice looking and involves Master Chief, right? The Xbox's juggernaut franchise will get its faceplate homage and future releases along the same lines are planned for Forza Motorsport2 and Viva Piñata.



etc

NINTENDO ART CLOCKS

Manufacturer: Banpresto
Website: www.banpresto.co.jp
List Price: \$20.00

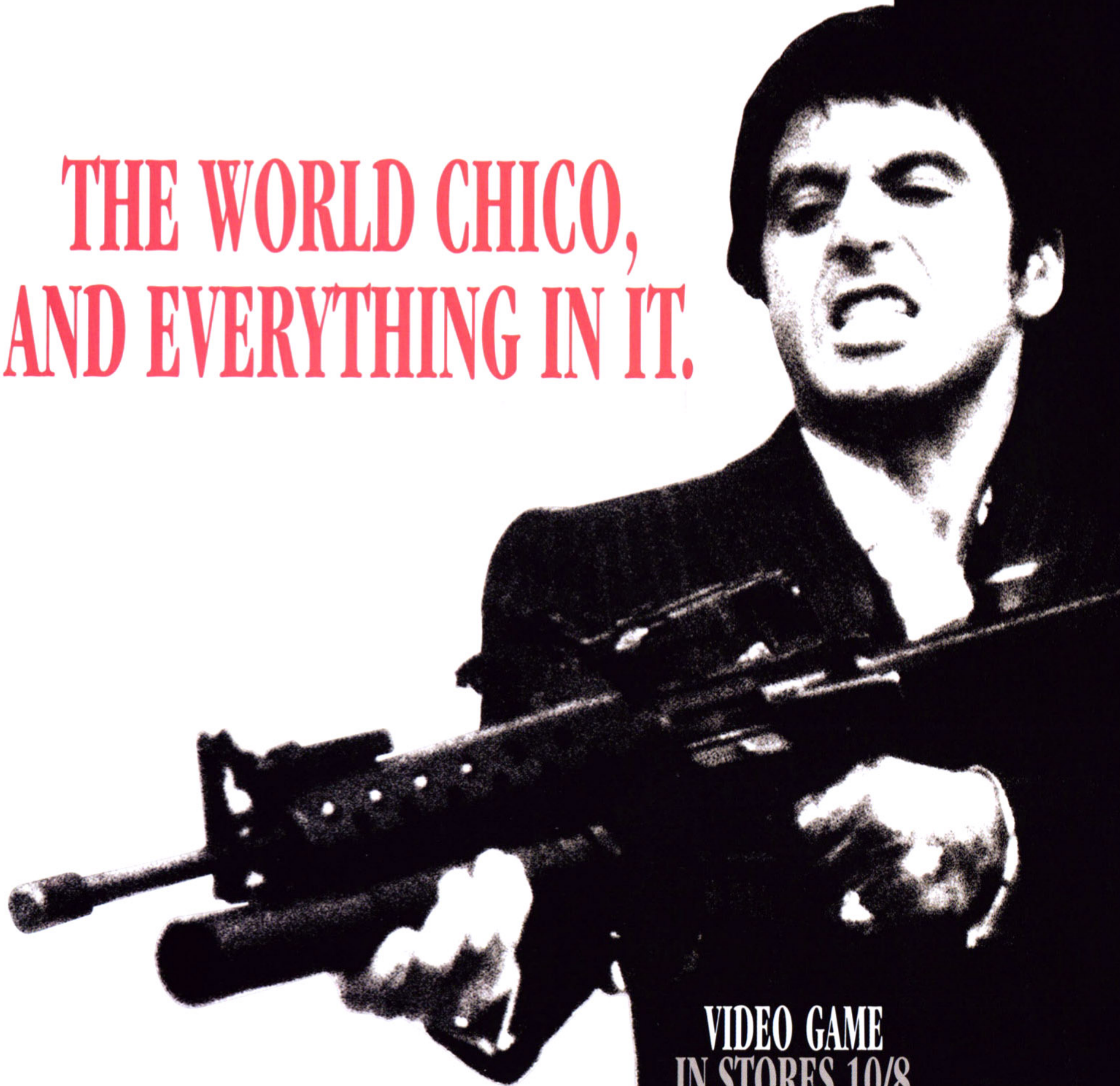
Japanese manufacturer Banpresto seriously needs to set up an official North American presence – they are always coming out with the coolest retro Nintendo stuff. These cleverly designed clocks could handily fill a gap in any gaming shrine. We found these ready to ship from National Console Support (www.ncsx.com).





ME, I WANT WHAT'S COMING TO ME.

THE WORLD CHICO, AND EVERYTHING IN IT.

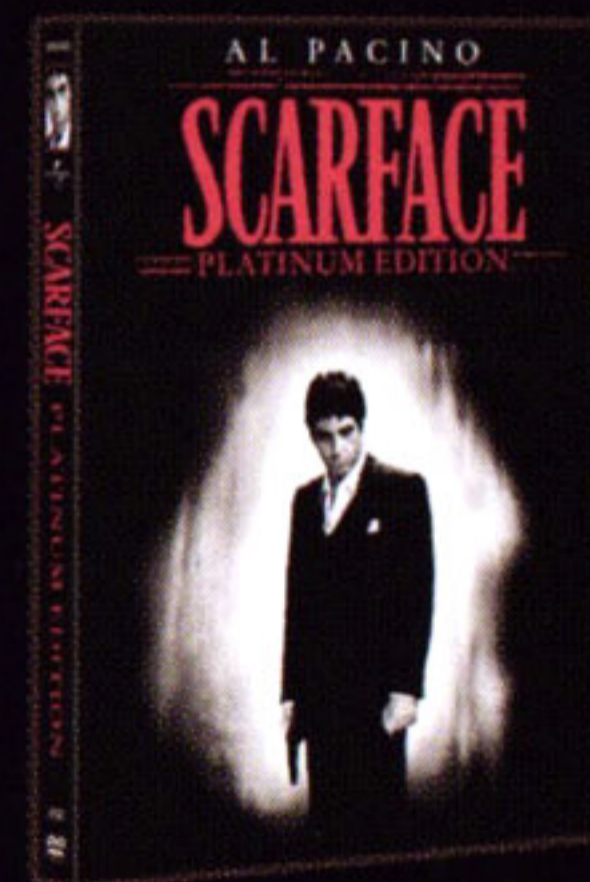


VIDEO GAME
IN STORES 10/8

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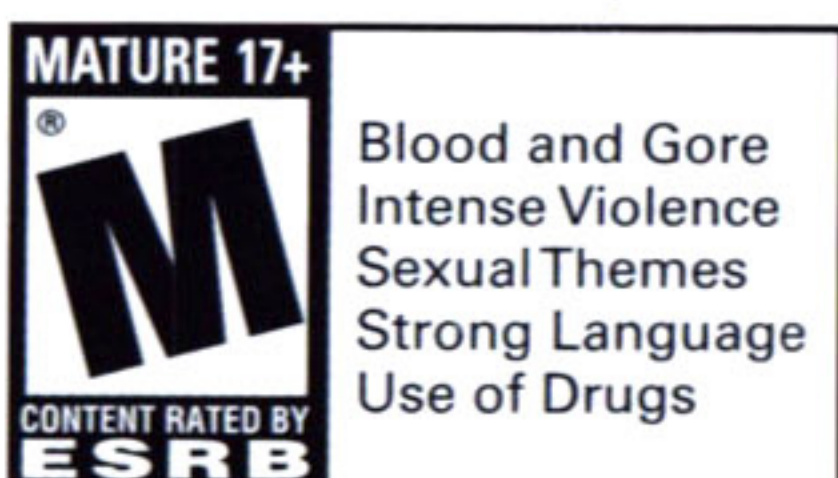
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SCARFACEGAME.COM



A Note to Parents: Scarface is rated R. Consult www.filmratings.com for further information.



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peripherals

XPLODER HDTV GAME PLAYER AND DVD MOVIE PLAYER

Manufacturer: Fire International **Website:** www.xploder.net **List Price:** TBA
 This is actually a repackaged combo of two products: the HDTV Game Player and the HDTV DVD Movie Player. Both essentially do the same thing – upgrade the PS2 video output to Xploder’s recommendation of 480p for all media in the console. While games like *Gran Turismo 4* took great advantage of the PS2’s high-def abilities, scads of other titles don’t and this software will up the resolution and output in progressive scan to make games look just plain prettier. The included disc gets loaded before starting a game or movie and doesn’t require the hard drive accessory, so it’s a one-stop shop.



etc

COLLECTOR'S EDITIONS

Manufacturer: Various
Website: Various
List Price: \$49.99 – \$69.99

It isn't uncommon for a limited edition of a game to appear alongside its standard release, but it seems like the bonuses included in these packages are getting better these days. Keep an eye out for the following goodies to be included in their corresponding games' special editions before the end of the year: the official *Bully* dodgeball, the *Gears of War* art book *Destroyed Beauty*, history of *Final Fantasy* featurettes with *Final Fantasy XII*, and exclusive in-game cars for *Need for Speed: Carbon*.

tech

MYLO

Manufacturer: Sony
Website: www.sony.com/mylo
List Price: \$350

Set to release in September, this personal communicator from Sony spits in the face of cell providers, service plans, Sidekicks, and business-friendly Blackberries. Apparently in marketing land, Mylo stands for “my life online” and the device uses readily available 802.11b networks to transmit all sorts of useful stuff. Instant messaging from Google Talk, Skype, and Yahoo Messenger make up the device’s starting lineup, but other services could certainly be added down the line. Skype is also offering free voice-over-IP calls to other Skype users (all 113 million of them) along with a limited time offer of free calls to regular landlines in the U.S. and Canada. All of this works through the device’s full web browser, which means that general surfing, Gmail, and MySpace, for example are all fair game. One gig of onboard memory (and an expansion slot for Memory Stick Duos) can hold music or downloaded videos and ad-hoc connections between units can share playlists and streaming music, even if you’re not in a hotspot. Like most Sony stuff, it’s pricey, but the Mylo doesn’t use service plans of any type, so it is a one-time investment.



toys

FIERCE DEITY LINK

Manufacturer: First 4 Figures
Website: www.first4figures.com
List Price: \$129.99

This unbelievably sweet resin statue is the first in a planned *Zelda* line from First 4 Figures. Topping off at 14.5 inches, *Fierce Deity Link* will be in scale with other upcoming *Zelda* resin statues and we suspect that the rest will follow this one’s limited run of 2,500, so pre-order with speed.

WHY E3 HAD TO CHANGE



BY ANDY MCNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, GAME
INFORMER MAGAZINE

The death of the Electronic Entertainment Expo (or E3) is perhaps the most misunderstood story the video game industry has faced this year, more so than why the PlayStation 3 is 600 bucks, or that Rockstar's *Bully* isn't a schoolyard "murder simulator."

I remember back in the early '90s at the Consumer Electronic Show when I was first handed a flyer for this new convention that was made specifically for the video game industry. Everyone – and I mean everyone – was talking about it. It was what the industry needed.

It was painfully obvious to all of us that attended the Consumer Electronic Show [the precursor to E3] back in those days that the video game industry was treated like a redheaded stepchild of the convention – at best. It may be hard to believe, but back then almost every video game company had to set up their wares and their meetings in these giant tents set up alongside the "real" convention center, where the supposedly "real" consumer electronics were housed.

Not only was it hot, it was most definitely second rate. One year, when it rained, a small river formed down the middle of the pavilion creating not only a putrid smell, but a visible symbol that at the Consumer Electronic Show, video games were always going to be second-class citizens – second-class citizens with wet shoes.

Thankfully, the video game world wasn't going to put up with that. The industry was growing up and raking in some big dollars. Video gaming was going somewhere. It deserved better. It deserved E3.

An important fact to understand about this time in video game history is that, before easily manufactured CD-ROMs enabled game publishers to restock retail stores in a matter of days instead of months, CES and E3 were the places that retailers went to plan their holiday season. In fact, the whole show was basically centered around the retailer and selling games. The games media and the mainstream media that came along with it were just an added bonus.

As history shows, the game industry grew and so did attendance to E3. However, as technology

changed, so did the relationships game publishers had with their retail and media partners. The death of cartridges meant that the show was much less useful to retailers, and became more of a media-centered event.

This led to the E3 that we have come to know over the last eight years since its return to Los Angeles after a short stint in Atlanta. This version of E3 was about the industry standing tall in Hollywood, middle fingers erect, screaming at the top of its lungs how important video games are in the world of entertainment.

Depending on how you look at it, video games got noticed. Whether it was a product of E3 or just plain old good games getting more people interested in the medium (I'm going with the latter), the plan worked.

Of course, to the thousands of gamers out there who dreamed of attending E3, the change to the event is a tough one to swallow. I must admit that before I was working for Game Informer, going to CES was my life's ambition, so I completely understand your frustration. But E3 wasn't E3 anymore.

The game industry had made its point. We are indeed the entertainment medium of today and tomorrow, and now we need to start answering a more important question. A question that the current E3 simply couldn't answer, and that question is why.

Whenever I walked up to someone in or out of the industry at the show, the first question out of his or her mouth was always the same, "So, what's cool here?" Unfortunately, E3 had grown too loud and too clouded by its own parade of pomp and circumstance so there really wasn't a way to understand the more important issue: Which games were pushing the envelope and changing the way we play.

Add on to that the fact that developers, who were required to get something playable at the show, were getting sidetracked by E3. All for the sake of creating a single level or area that had to sum up their entire experience in a neat 10-minute package – right in the middle of the most important part of their development cycle. I think the industry benefits from developers working on making good product for release, rather than a demo for a bunch of picky journalists, who quite frankly don't all

“...E3 had

grown too

loud and

too clouded

by its own

parade of

pomp and

circum-

stance...”

understand the development cycle or how development works.

Do you think Hollywood would show a movie seven months away from release that was still in development to a horde of critics and consumers who could just walk up and watch for five minutes in a crowded and extremely loud convention center?

To understand a game in development you have to understand the vision of the creators. These are the people that are shaping our world. And herein lie my hopes for the new and improved E3.

A *Spore* demo is cool. A *Spore* demo given by its creator Will Wright is about as an amazing experience any gamer could have. He gets it, because it's his team's work. He can explain why he is making this game. Why it will make people change the way they look at games. Why it will be a huge hit that will bring more players to the wonderful world of gaming.

Some game journalists get to see this, but far too often, for everyone else in the world – from important decision makers to the most casual of casual gamers – there was little chance to do this amid the madness of the show.

And Will Wright isn't the only one. There are legions of talented and outspoken game developers out there who have a vision that you need to understand to see where his or her game is going and why. In fact, there are just far too many for me to list (but I will give you a hint, you will see interviews with them here in Game Informer each and every month).

So this is why E3 had to change, and I believe this change is for the better. There are amazing times ahead for the video game industry as we usher in more powerful machines and more powerful game designs. E3 needs to be about why video games are so important to our culture, not about multi-million dollar booths and paid babes in bikinis. Because, in case you haven't noticed, no one else is going to do it but the industry itself. So cheers to the death of E3 as we know it. It was a great run. ■■■

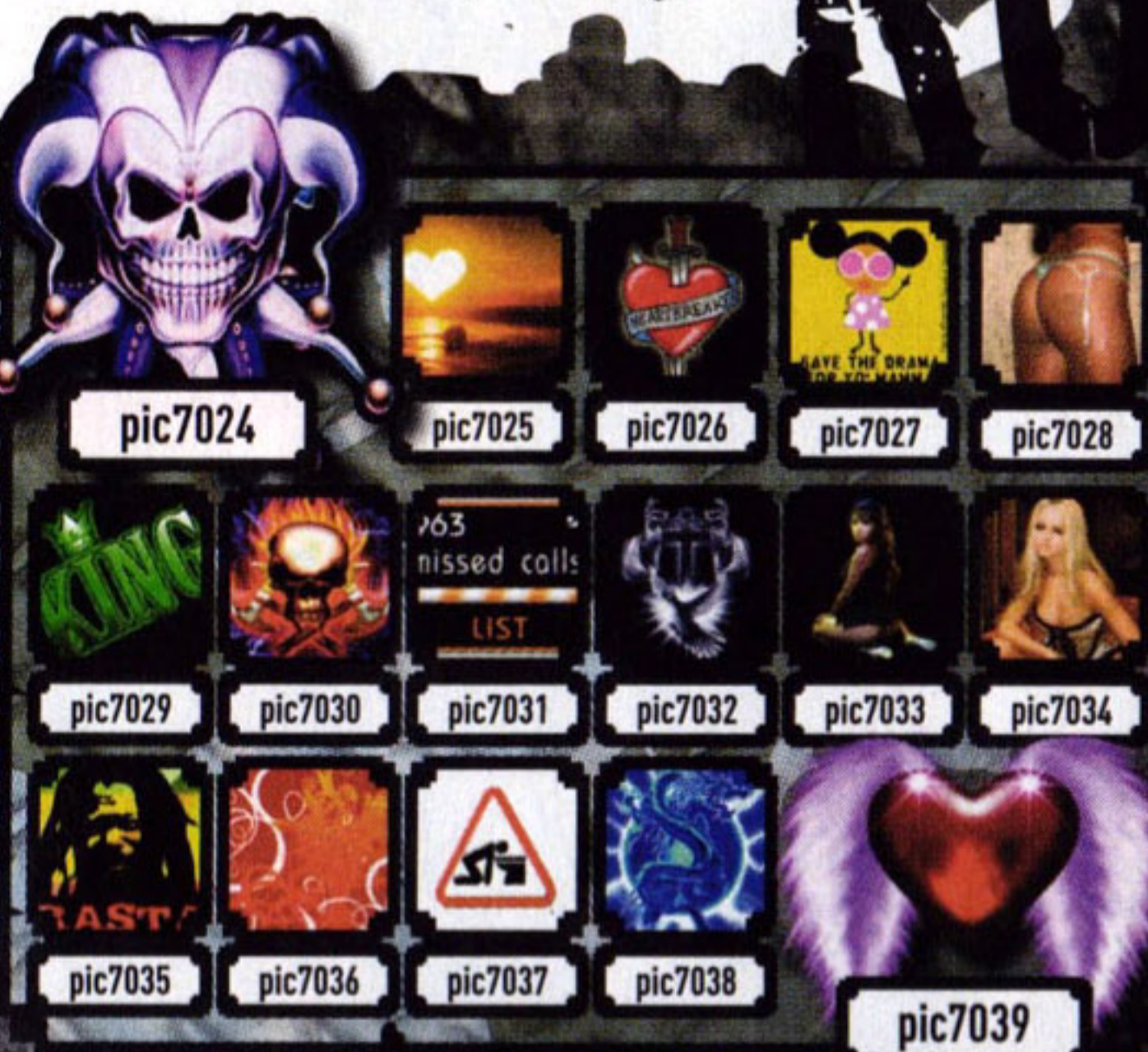
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If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com.



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Stuntin' Like My	Birdman & Lil Wayne	true2366
U And Dat	E-40	true2367
Unfaithful	Rihanna	true2368
Vans	The Pack	true2369
(When You Gonna)	S.Paul	true2370

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GAMES

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sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
 <p>Family Guy</p>	<p>NEW RELEASES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of Empires III: The Warchiefs – PC • Archlord: The Legend of Chantra – PC • College Hoops 2K7 – PS2, Xbox • Dungeon Siege: Throne of Agony – PSP • Family Guy – PS2, Xbox, PSP • FIFA Soccer 07 – PS2, Xbox, GC, PSP, DS 	<p>3-4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gangs of London – PSP • M.A.C.H. – PSP • NBA Live 07 – PSP • Over the Hedge: Hammy Goes Nuts – PSP, DS • Powerstone Collection – PSP • Sid Meier's Railroads! – PC • SNK vs Capcom: Card Fighters – DS • Tokobot Plus: Mysteries of the Karakuri – PS2 	<p>Gangs of London</p> 	<p>6</p> <p>DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS</p> <p>The creators of Psychonauts are hard at work on new projects, but they also like goofing off. For instance, their website news outlines Tim Schafer's battle against the Oscar Mayer Weinermobile. Pretty much everything they write will make you laugh out loud.</p> <p>www.doublefine.com</p>		
 <p>Mortal Kombat Armageddon</p>	<p>10-11</p> <p>NEW RELEASES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battlefield 2142 – PC • Crash Boom Bang! – DS • God Hand – PS2 • Justice League Heroes – PS2, Xbox, PSP, DS • The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning – PS2, Xbox, GC, DS • Mortal Kombat: Armageddon – PS2, Xbox • Mortal Kombat: Deception 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unchained – PSP • Reservoir Dogs – PS2, Xbox, PC • Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner – PS2 • Star Trek: Tactical Assault – PSP • Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07 – 360, PS2, Xbox • Touch Detective – DS • Warhammer 40,000 Dawn of War: Dark Crusade – PC 	<p>12</p> <p>KINGDOM HEARTS FORMATION ARTS SERIES 2</p> <p>The first series of this highly detailed toy line sold out in a blink of an eye. We're just going to throw a guess out there, but we have a feeling that the Cloud figure will fly off of shelves just as fast. Some idiot might buy Goofy, too.</p>			
 <p>Destroy All Humans 2</p>	<p>17-18</p> <p>NEW RELEASES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ATV Off Road Fury Pro – PSP • Blitz: The League – 360, PSP • Crackdown – 360 • Destroy All Humans 2 – PS2, Xbox • Every Extend Extra – PSP • Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories – PSP • The Guild 2 – PC • Lumines II – PSP • Lumines Plus – PS2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neverwinter Nights 2 – PC • Nintendogs: Dalmation – DS • The Sims 2: Pets – PS2, PC, GC, PSP, DS • Spectral Souls – PSP • SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature From the Krusty Krab – PS2, GC, DS • Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam – DS • Zoo Tycoon 2: Marina Mania – PC 	<p>19</p> <p>ITAGAKI APPRECIATION DAY</p> <p>Tomonobu Itagaki has given so much to gamers: Ninja Gaiden, Dead or Alive, and Ninja Gaiden. It's time that we gave something back. From now on, October 19 will be known as Itagaki Day. This should be a day filled with beach volleyball and ninjas. It is properly celebrated with Shuriken-shaped cupcakes.</p>	<p>21</p> <p>FINAL FANTASY MASTER CREATURES</p> <p>We've been waiting for more summon creatures to be released in toy form, and now it looks like we are going to be getting a ton of them. The first series of these six inch figures also includes Bahamut and Ifrit. Joe's favorite summon, the Magus Sisters, will be in series two.</p>		
 <p>Phantasy Star Universe</p>	<p>24-25</p> <p>NEW RELEASES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battle Zone – PSP • Capcom Classics Collection Reloaded – PSP • DotHack G.U. – PS2 • Dynasty Warriors 2' – PSP • F.E.A.R.: Extraction Point – PC • Flushed Away – PS2, GC, DS • Magical Starsign – DS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marvel Ultimate Alliance – 360, PS2, Xbox, GC, PSP, DS • Nicktoons – PS2, GC, DS • Phantasy Star Universe – 360, PS2, PC • Spider-Man: Battle for NY – DS • Test Drive Unlimited – PS2, PC 	<p>26</p>			
 <p>Need for Speed Carbon</p>	<p>31</p> <p>NEW RELEASES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway – 360, PC • Cars – 360 • Children of Mana – DS • Death Jr. The Root of Evil – PSP • Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2 – PS2 • F.E.A.R. – 360 • Final Fantasy XII – PS2 • Guitar Hero 2 – PS2 • Killzone: Liberation – PSP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legend of Dragon – PS2, PSP • The Lord of the Rings Online – PC • Metal Slug Anthology – PSP • Need for Speed Carbon – 360, PS2, Xbox, GC, PSP, DS • Pokémon Ranger – DS • The Sopranos – PS2 • Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07 – PSP 				

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and spice...

and everything nice...

Rule of Rose™

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood
Intense Violence
Suggestive Themes



PlayStation®2

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PLAYSTATION 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION

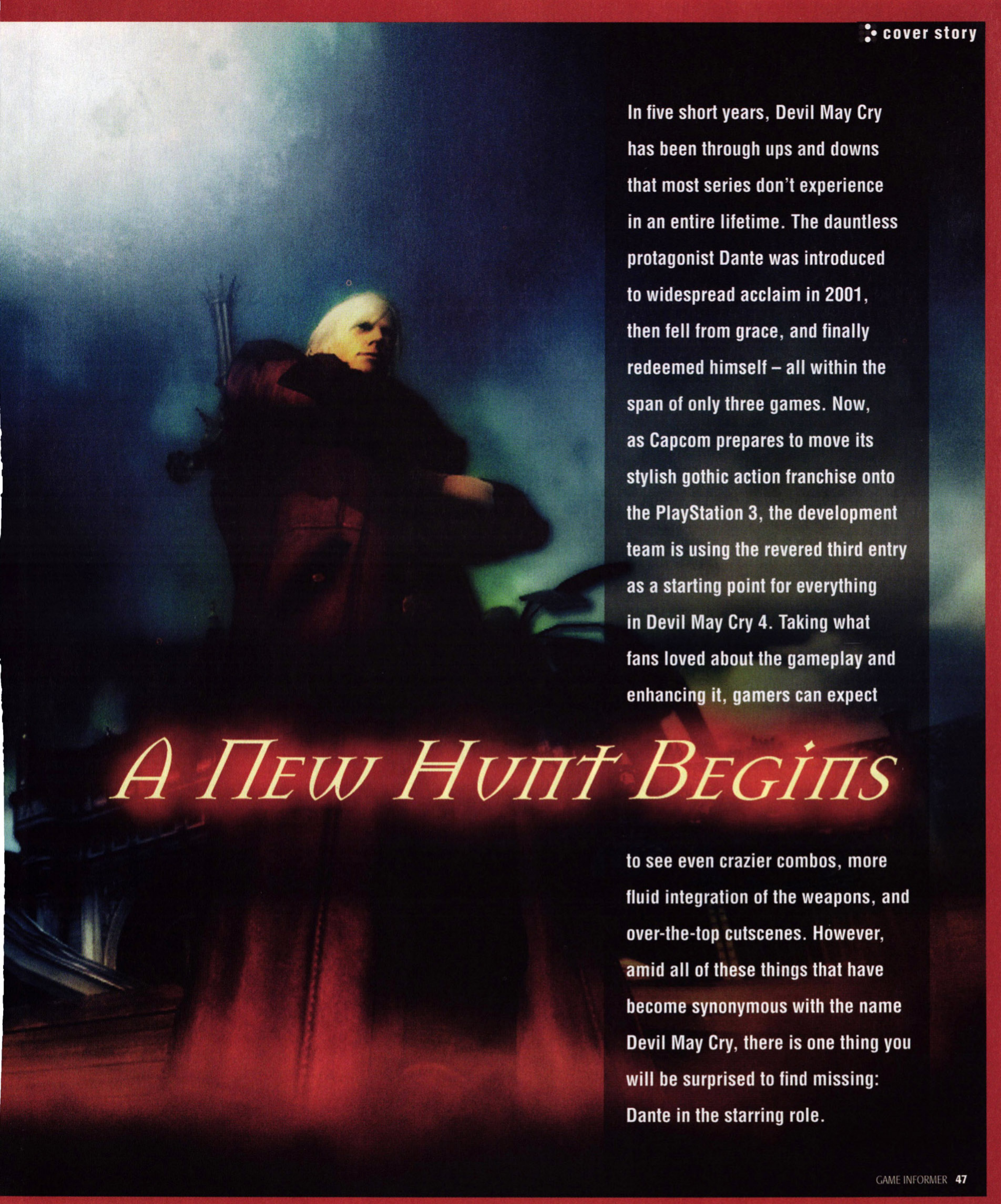
> **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM

> **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM

> **RELEASE** WINTER 2007



DEVIL MAY CRY



In five short years, Devil May Cry has been through ups and downs that most series don't experience in an entire lifetime. The dauntless protagonist Dante was introduced to widespread acclaim in 2001, then fell from grace, and finally redeemed himself – all within the span of only three games. Now, as Capcom prepares to move its stylish gothic action franchise onto the PlayStation 3, the development team is using the revered third entry as a starting point for everything in Devil May Cry 4. Taking what fans loved about the gameplay and enhancing it, gamers can expect

A NEW HUNT BEGINS

to see even crazier combos, more fluid integration of the weapons, and over-the-top cutscenes. However, amid all of these things that have become synonymous with the name Devil May Cry, there is one thing you will be surprised to find missing: Dante in the starring role.

■ Nero's gun is a vertically double-barreled revolver. However, reload times won't be an issue in the gameplay



■ There will be a new batch of phrases that indicate how well your combos are going (like "Big up!")



■ Initially the arm maneuvers will only set enemies up, but later in the game they will do damage as well

As we walk down a row of desks at Capcom's Osaka headquarters, we assume that the figure in the violet coat that adorns concept art and computer screens is just a new design for Dante. However, as soon as we pick up the controller for some exclusive hands-on time, producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi (of Resident Evil 4 fame, not to mention the original Devil May Cry) drops a bomb that will change the face of DMC in the next generation. "That is not Dante," he reveals. "There is a new main character. His name is Nero."

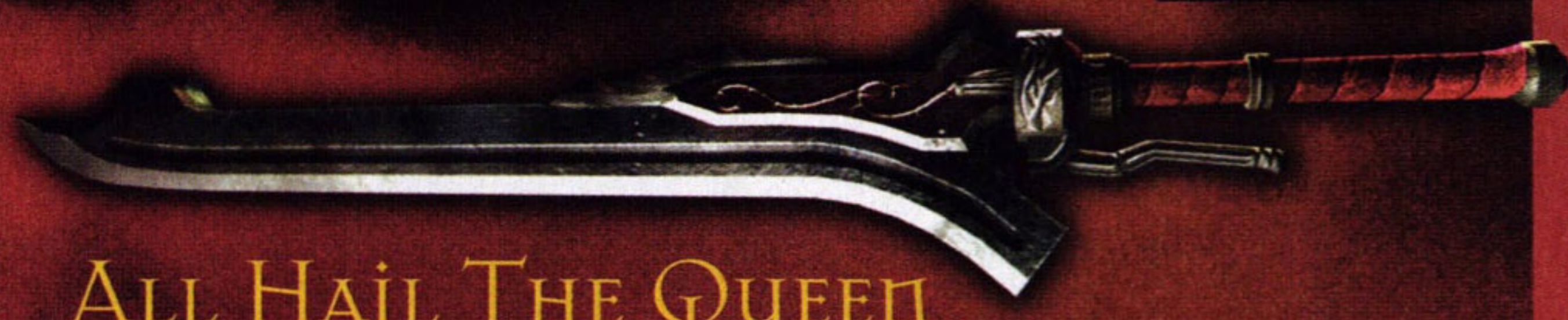
The first question that comes to mind is what did Dante do wrong? After all, his latest adventure is credited with salvaging the viability of this franchise after the dismal reception of Devil May Cry 2. Why would Capcom, just when Dante's star is on the rise again, exchange him for a rookie demon slayer? "The reason

we switched to Nero is, when you consider how we want to open up new avenues for the core user and that we're switching hardware to the PS3, the easiest way to have these new gameplay mechanics...was to introduce a new character," Kobayashi clarifies. "If we gave Dante [Nero's abilities], in my opinion, it wouldn't be Dante anymore."

Though their combat abilities will differ, it doesn't take a particularly keen eye to notice that Nero and Dante have strikingly similar appearances. Same white hair. Same long coat. Same big sword. Even so, Kobayashi insists that unlike Dante and Vergil's connection, there is no story-based reason why Nero bears a resemblance to the sons of Sparda. Instead, Nero's look is about finding a design that is different yet familiar: "Devil May Cry is about guns and

swords, and we want people to be able to see that and understand that," he tells us.

This swap is especially surprising considering that the trailers for DMC 4 so far have featured Dante, not Nero. Unlike other games that have changed main characters (like Metal Gear Solid 2), these trailers were not a deliberate attempt to mislead gamers. Instead, the specifics of DMC 4 were still in flux, but as Kobayashi says, "We wanted to let people know, 'Hey, we're making DMC 4 for PS3.'" With that knowledge out there, the team began to nail down the specifics of how it wanted to improve and expand the DMC formula, and every answer pointed toward the necessity of creating a brand new protagonist.



ALL HAIL THE QUEEN

Nero may be a new character, but he has the same affection for customized weaponry as Dante. Nero's blade, the Red Queen, is a tricked-out version of the standard-issue weapon for members of his order. "Nero is a bit of a tuner," explains Kobayashi. "Just like people will take off rev limiters on their bikes, he's played around a bit with his sword." This motorcycle analogy actually extends into the sword's in-game design, as it has what appears to be a brake lever coming down from the cross guard. When asked whether this device is just for decoration, Kobayashi evasively responds: "There is something to do with the grip on his sword which we can't reveal yet." We're guessing it doesn't just make him decelerate.



Normally, no demonic power or improbable maneuver is beyond Dante's ability, so it might be difficult to imagine something he can't pull off. In this case though, it isn't something Nero can do but rather something attached to him that makes him unique. In an event before the game's story begins, Nero's arm is possessed by an evil force – an occurrence he works hard to conceal, going so far as to wear his arm in a sling to keep it from sight. Of course, the time comes when it can no longer be hidden, and Nero discovers, along with the player, the immense combat possibilities of his demonic appendage.

At first the arm may appear to be just another weapon added to an ever-expanding arsenal, but it actually represents a shift in the way gamers will experience Devil May Cry. Like

Dante, Nero will still use guns and swords to blast his way through evil, but this new tool will provide a much-needed focus on positioning in addition to dealing damage. Using the arm, players will set up enemies as desired, gaining more control over the shape of each encounter; regardless of whether you're on the ground or airborne, you can grab enemies from a distance and pull them toward you, push encroaching foes away, and even slam them into the ground.

To fans of the series who have played DMC 3: Special Edition thoroughly, this angle on the combat will not be entirely unfamiliar. As a playable character, Vergil uses a fighting style called Dark Slayer based solely on teleportation. He can basically transport himself up, down, and in front of enemies to reduce downtime between each attack. The arm takes this concept and

fleshes it out, bringing the monsters to you rather than sending you to them and opening up more opportunities for follow-up attacks.

One example of how this translates into in-game fights involves a classic DMC move, the stinger. This attack, in which the character lunges forward with his sword, has always been a kind of crowd control, since it knocks enemies down as well as sends them reeling backwards. Now, the stinger is a great beginning, not an end, to a killer combo; after the stinger connects, you will be able to immediately lash out with Nero's arm to pull your foe in close again, ready for another assault. In short, this means that you will be able to string multiple stingers together one after another, which should be enough to get any fan salivating.

"DMC 3 was about how to combine guns with swords," Kobayashi observes. "To me, DMC 4 is not this binary relationship. It's a

continued on page 51



■ The targeting system will work much like the last game, so there won't be any annoying DMC 2-style target selection

THE OTHER SON OF SPARDA

With the presence of Dante and newcomer Nero, one must also wonder about the whereabouts of the other white-haired hero/villain, Vergil. Devil May Cry 3 and its special edition cemented Dante's brother as an integral part of the series, and though he appeared to die (as Nelo Angelo) in the first game, he apparently still has a place in DMC 4. "We're not ready to say what role Vergil himself plays in the story," Kobayashi tells us. "But the existence of Vergil as a character is something very important to the story of the games. That's something that I don't think is going to end."



■ Combining guns, the arm, and the sword is the key to DMC 4





■ The arm can't reach across the entire screen, but its range is still impressive



■ Grabbing is only one option. You will also be able to slam foes into the ground or toss them away from you

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triangle, combining the gun, the sword, and the arm." When deciding how to tune the combat for DMC 4, the team used DMC 3 as a starting point. Determining what made that game successful, as well as the areas it could be improved, is what gave rise to this expanded and streamlined system that relies on the interplay of all three weapons. In essence, the idea is to allow players to keep the flow of combat unbroken.

However, there were a few sacrifices made along the way to this goal. For instance, Nero does not have access to a variety of weapon-specific styles like Dante did in the last entry. Even though that mechanic provided players with a certain degree of customization, it was

also limiting. It took most of one playthrough to max out a single style, which meant that certain abilities in other styles were closed off to the player. "The DMC 3 battle system is very good, but it feels kind of split up. I wish it were more cohesive as a system," confesses Kobayashi. "It's not about replacing Dante's style system. What we want to do is increase the number of ways you can go about battling. You have your sword, you have your gun, and now you have this arm." A whole category of moves for this new weapon will essentially maintain the same level of depth while opening up more avenues of combat to a single player.

This will also shine through in the kinds of enemies Nero finds himself faced with. Even though the core DMC experience necessitates

plenty of enemies that are easily dispatched, Nero will also have run-ins with foes that require a different approach. As we played through the demo, all of the beasts we encountered could be handled with standard shoot and slash tactics, but Kobayashi hinted that there will be monsters who won't go down so quickly. "We are definitely experimenting with enemies like the shadow cats," confirms Kobayashi. The shadow cats he is referencing are possibly the most difficult foes from the original game. These beasts, in addition to being incredibly strong, were invulnerable to sword attacks until they had taken a certain amount of damage from firearms. A room full of monsters like these would not make for a fun game, but if they appeared alongside simpler foes, it could make for an intense battle.

Naturally, boss encounters will also prove to be a critical test of Nero's demon-hunting skills. We saw one of these titanic monsters named Variel, a flame-engulfed devil about the size of a small building. The team wouldn't reveal the trick to defeating him, but the creature's blazing form did set all nearby structures on fire, so it's probably not going to be easy getting close enough to land a solid hit.

Even by expanding the horizons of the combat, there is still one piece of the DMC puzzle missing from Nero's unique brand of fighting: the devil trigger. Going into a demon form and tearing up everything in sight is an important part of the series, and adds an



■ We saw Dante in cinematics, but this screen suggests he will have a role as a playable character as well



JUST BECAUSE NERO'S IN THE GAME DOESN'T MEAN DANTE ISN'T. DANTE DOES APPEAR.

HIROYUKI KOBAYASHI, PRODUCER

element of strategy to the frantic combos. Since Nero isn't one of Sparda's progeny, he probably won't be able to undergo a full transformation, but that doesn't mean the mechanic will vanish entirely from DMC 4. Unfortunately, this is one of the game's aspects that is still undergoing development, and Kobayashi could only tease us with a clue as to where it's going: "The key word in devil trigger is 'devil,' but that's something – as far as its relation to Nero – we're not ready to explore yet."

Apart from his possessed demonic arm, there is little concrete information about Devil May Cry's new leading man. Nero lives on the remote island of Fortuna, which serves as the setting for most of the game. He belongs to an ancient group of religious crusaders known as the Order of the Sword, who worship Sparda and fight demons in his name. Prior to the beginning of the game, Nero's life involves doing special jobs for the Order cleaning up particularly messy situations. All of that changes one day when a white-haired man in a long red coat breaks into the Order's temple and starts slaying the high clergy. "Just because Nero's in the game doesn't mean Dante isn't. Dante does appear," Kobayashi admits.

In the ensuing cutscene, we witness a heated battle between the two demon hunters that

includes all of stylish sword-swinging and acrobatic action one could hope for. Nero even appears to have the upper hand at one point after landing a dropkick right in Dante's face. From the ground below, an unidentified woman watches the conflict unfold ("All we can tell you about her is that you've seen her," jokes Kobayashi), until Dante escapes with Nero in pursuit.

The exact role Dante plays in the story is still a mystery. At first, he serves as the primary antagonist that Nero chases across Fortuna. But it seems unlikely that Dante would be positioned as the ultimate evil of the adventure, which means that he and Nero will probably team up after they clear up a few misunderstandings. No one at Capcom is confirming or denying that Dante will become a playable character at this point, but we think that the screenshots on these pages that prominently feature Dante speak for themselves. Assuming that players will eventually control Dante in some capacity, it still isn't clear whether he will use a style system, if he'll have his devil trigger, or what other abilities from previous games he will retain.

Dante may be the most recognizable aspect

of the Devil May Cry series, but he isn't the only element that isn't quite returning in full force. For all of the great things that DMC 3 had to offer, there are a few things that gamers may not be so eager to see return, like the brutal and unforgiving difficulty. While the hardcore crowd ate up the challenge, even the "normal" setting was prohibitively hard for less dedicated (or fanatical) gamers. While this issue was addressed later with the special edition, DMC 3 is still known as the toughest in the series, and it's going to stay that way, according to Kobayashi. To illustrate, he draws a scale for us that ranks the difficulty of the games, with 2 at the bottom, 3 at the top, 1 in the middle, and DMC 3: Special Edition between the first and third entries. "When you start off, it's going to be a bit easier than 3 because we want people to be able to get in to it," he points out. "Then, we want to start bringing them up and getting them better and better so at the end, we're throwing the really hard DMC 3 stuff at them."

Thankfully, the diehard fans who adored the series' newfound difficulty won't be left in the cold; this curve only applies to DMC 4's default setting, which is only one of several options.

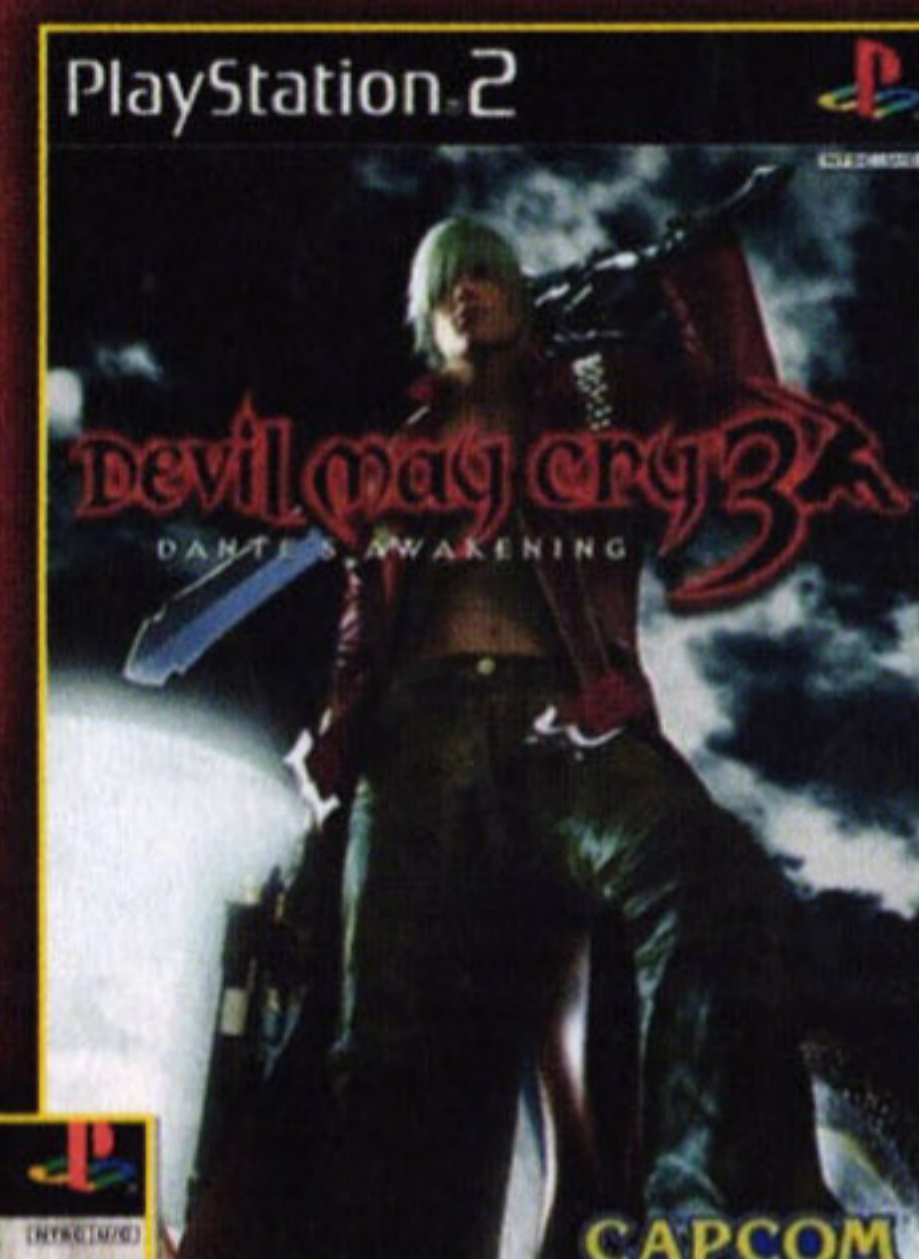


THE FLOW OF TIME

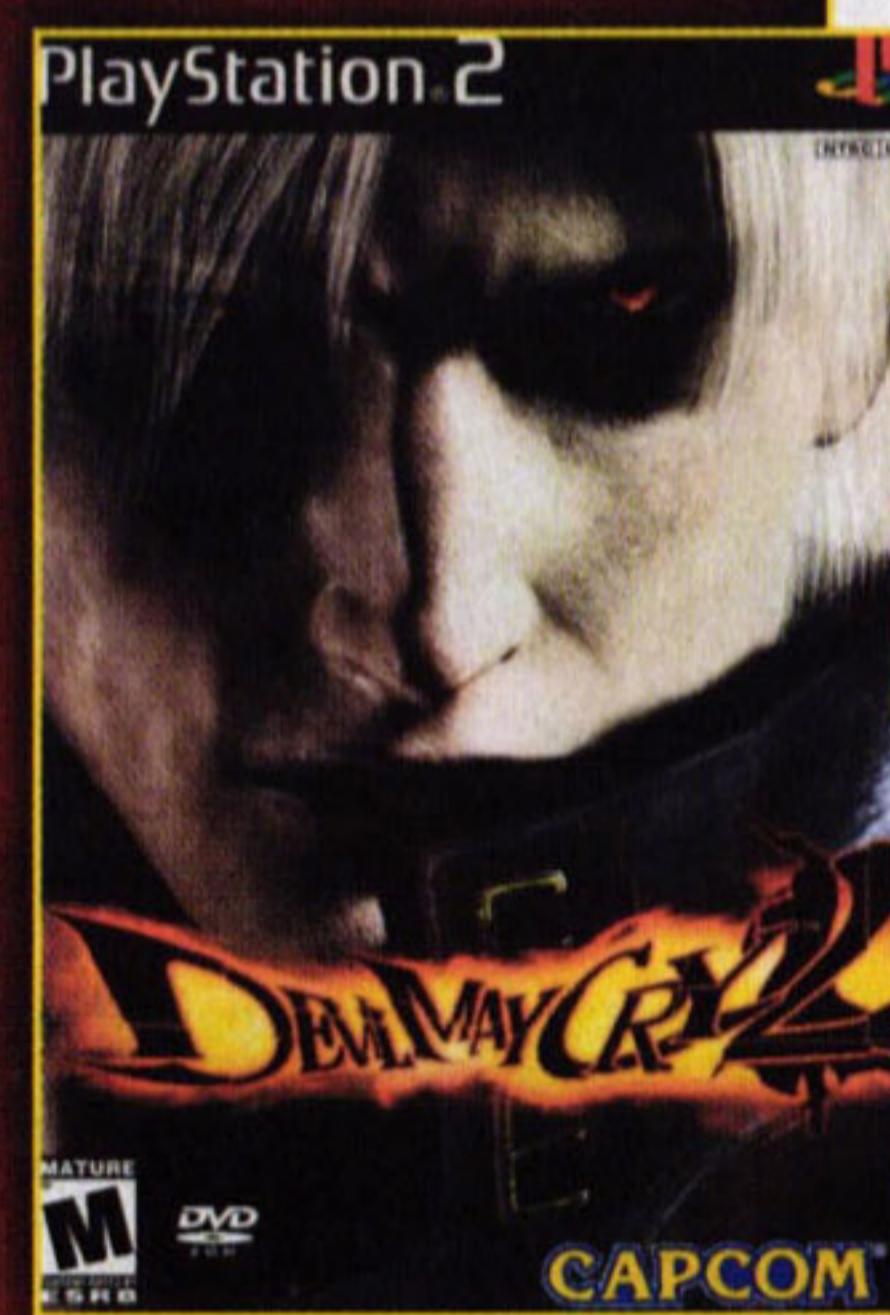
The timeline of the Devil May Cry series can be difficult to keep track of since the four games don't exactly occur one after another. To set the record straight, the chronological progression goes like this: DMC 3 is the earliest, followed by DMC 1, then 4, and finally 2. It should also be noted that despite rampant Internet rumors, the events of DMC 2 are not being entirely removed from the series' canon: "They occur very far after the events of 4," clarifies Kobayashi.



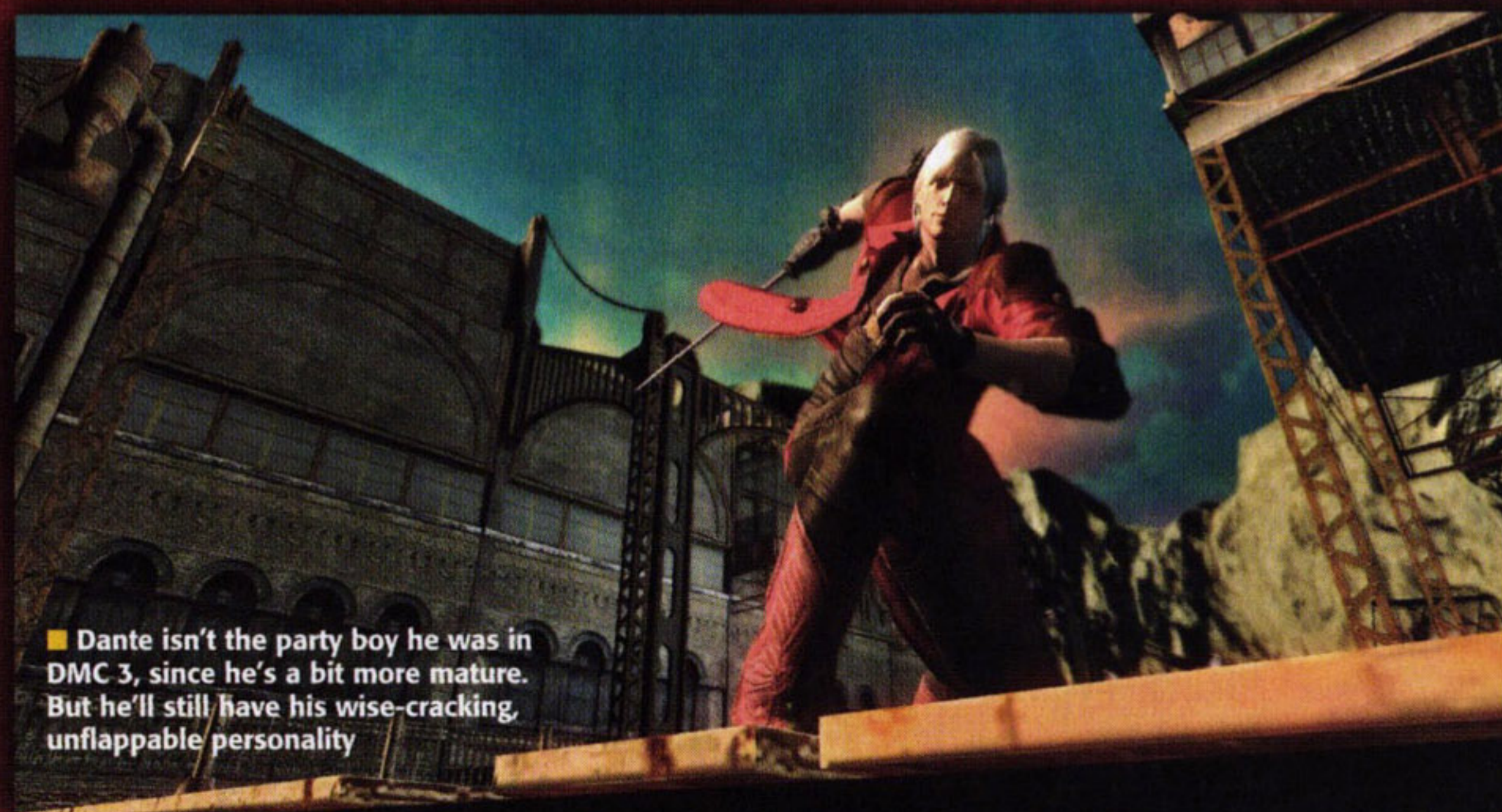
■ At first, Nero's goal is to stop Dante. After that, how the story unfolds (and who the real enemy is) is still a mystery



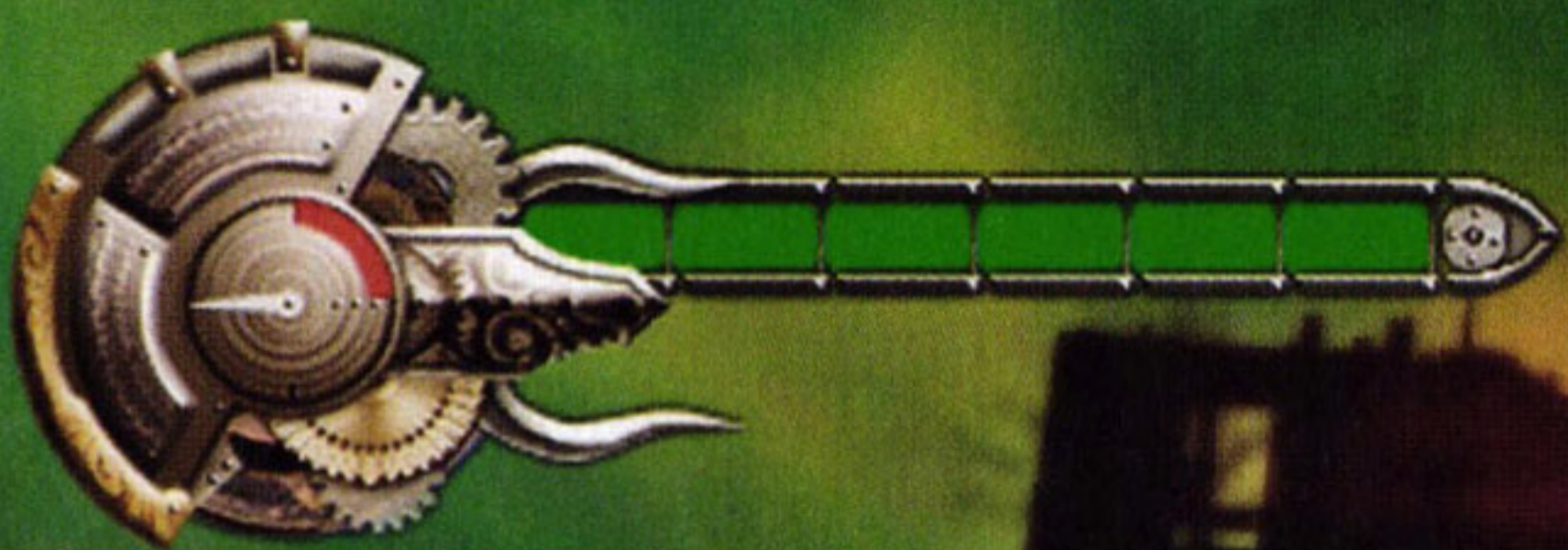
■ No information has been released about how the upgrade system works, but odds are that red orbs will still act as a kind of currency to buy new moves



■ It sure looks like there's enough space under that life bar for a devil trigger gauge, doesn't it?



■ Dante isn't the party boy he was in DMC 3, since he's a bit more mature. But he'll still have his wise-cracking, unflappable personality



■ This is Variel, a boss who sets fire to everything around him

continued from page 52

Like the previous games, this entry will have a variety of modes that will let you choose your desired level of challenge. In fact, the team is being particularly careful to tune each setting so that is appropriate for the type of gamer who wants to play on that level (though it's likely that Nero Must Die! mode will be as ridiculously hard as ever). This effort represents Capcom's hope that, with the move to new hardware, Devil May Cry 4 will serve as a new starting point for the series, allowing gamers to jump in without requiring them to play through previous entries.

"Even though the game says 4 on the cover, it's got a brand new character and a brand new way of playing, and we believe that will make it more accessible to gamers. I feel like I've said this before about a game called Resident Evil 4," laughs Kobayashi. To some gamers, the word "accessible" is a kiss of death, with connotations involving shallow and

oversimplified gameplay, but that should not be a concern with DMC 4. Apart from Kobayashi's track record with RE 4 (which pleased fans and newcomers alike), there is the fact that the team has no intention of forsaking the series' loyal followers. Just because extensive experience isn't necessary doesn't mean that players won't benefit from having played DMC in the past. "The fans are our most important thing," Kobayashi emphasizes. "We want to make a game where the more you know Devil May Cry 3, the more you will enjoy Devil May Cry 4, whether it is the action system or the characters. It is definitely made and aimed for the fans."

With so much thought going into how different gamers will experience DMC 4, one must wonder whether this desire to reach a wider audience extends further than even the PlayStation 3. Given the success of Capcom's Dead Rising on Xbox 360, there has been

speculation that the company will be lending more support to Microsoft's gaming machine. After all, console exclusives haven't gone incredibly well for the company in the past, like the ill-fated Capcom 5 for GameCube. When asked about the possibility of the Devil May Cry franchise moving to other systems, Kobayashi simply laughs and states: "Making DMC 4 for the PS3 is going to take all of our resources, so that's what we're going to focus on for now." So, as a PS3 exclusive, the real question is how exactly DMC 4 will be using Sony's next-gen console to the fullest.

The in-game visuals display the obvious graphical enhancements, including high definition and self-shadowing, plus the expected gorgeous water and particle effects. As far as the PS3 technology is concerned, the much-discussed motion sensor is being considered, though the team wants to make sure that it fits with the gameplay before promising anything.

 39895

Big up!



■ In the third game, many boss fights yielded new weapons. We have yet to see if this system will return in DMC 4

 8790

All chat!



■ Nero is a devil hunter like Dante, so he doesn't flinch at taking on even the most imposing foes

The most tantalizing possibility, however, is that DMC 4 may use the PS3's online capabilities. "Right now we're experimenting with network play and what we can do with it," Kobayashi reveals. "As far as DMC 4 as a game goes, it's so graphically intensive that to have everybody fighting on-screen while keeping up the quality of the visuals and the quality of the gameplay would be really difficult, if not impossible." Though skeptical, these comments refer specifically to having a large number of people playing at once, which at least leaves the door open for two-player online co-op. In fact, there was one fight in DMC 3 where, when an extra controller was plugged in, a second player could take control of Vergil alongside Dante and the two brothers could fight independently. Since one of the goals of DMC 4 is to build on the third

game, it isn't unthinkable that these kinds of cooperative efforts could find their way into the final version.

With more than a year left in its development, there are still features and details about Devil May Cry 4 that have yet to be revealed. From the time we spent playing the game in its current state, it feels like there is a healthy injection of new ideas without any attempt to drastically reinvent what we have come to expect from the franchise; the last thing anyone wants is a repeat of the DMC 2 debacle. Gamers can rest assured that Capcom and its

development team are taking the necessary time to ensure that all of the new elements exceed expectations, despite pressure from what many perceive as a shortage of must-buy titles for the early life of the PS3. "The Japanese branch of Sony has asked us to release it as close to launch as possible," divulges Kobayashi. "While I understand that users would like it as quickly as possible, and Sony would like it as quickly as possible, it says 'Devil May Cry 4.' Because it says that, we can't just make something and put it out. It has to live up to the Devil May Cry name." ■■■



UNLIMITED ENABLED

THE WORLD OF

wii

The time is fast approaching. Nintendo's long-awaited console is only months away. Whether its motion-sensing controller and intuitive approach to gaming is going to revolutionize the industry or leave players with nothing but a bad case of tennis elbow remains to be seen. In the meantime, we thought it was about time to gather together a round up of what some of Nintendo's third-party partners have in store for early adopters of the new system, as well as what Nintendo has planned from their internal studios. Enjoy!

Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam

While more recent Tony Hawk games have attempted to add new ideas and gameplay modes into the mix, skateboarding fans have largely been playing the same game conceptually since the very first iteration. Plans are afoot to change that approach with Downhill Jam, Tony's inaugural shot at bringing extreme sports onto the Wii. Focusing on a more action-packed, race-oriented style of gameplay, gamers will send their chosen skater hurtling down courses in areas like downtown San Francisco and the mountainous backdrop of Machu Picchu in South America. This month, we also got the scoop on all the other major locations for the game, which include scenic city locales like Edinburgh in Scotland, Rome, Hong Kong, and Rio de Janeiro. There's also a level set high in the Alps, and a cool-sounding indoor stage set in a huge mall in Chicago. With around 100 events in these different spots, it should be easy to keep busy with either the short challenges or the full-fledged races. Motion-sensing controls offer a perfect opportunity to tilt and turn like you're on a real skateboard, and those same controller capabilities will enable jumping, grinding, and boost-building tricks in midair. Up to four players will be able to race together at once, playing as either Tony Hawk, his friend Kevin Staab, one of eight other characters, or their own new boarders from the create-a-skater mode.



Trauma Center: Second Opinion

The cult DS hit has been confirmed as a launch game for the Wii! More than a straight port, the Wii version of the strange surgery game has totally redone visuals, new surgical tools and operations, a second playable character with unique missions, and of course a completely redesigned control scheme for the Wii-mote. You'd best start looking for malpractice insurance now – we've heard you've got shaky hands.



Call of Duty 3

We're happy to report that Activision is bringing this fan-favorite World War II series over to the Nintendo side of the world. Early screenshots seem to show a title with some visual compromises for the less powerful system, but the frantic and desperate action that the series is known for seems to be well intact. Keep checking back in the coming months, and we'll let you know after we've played this sucker how it really feels.



Elebits

If nothing else, Konami's strange little hide-and-seek game has us intrigued. The concept involves searching around normal household places and situations to find the hidden Elebits, creatures that are the real power behind making the world run. Using the remote, you'll lift up objects in the environment, push them around, or throw them about in a frenzy. If you do lots of softer actions, you can sneak up on the little creatures to capture them. Alternately, lots of loud raucous movements may cause them to panic and make a run for it. As you collect the strange, diminutive guys, they'll enable new abilities and movement options, allowing you to re-explore areas for more hidden Elebits. While we're definitely not ready to call this the next big thing, it sounds like there is potential for some quirky fun.



Marvel Ultimate Alliance

We've professed our love for the X-Men Legends games in recent years, and there's no reason to think our faith in continued kick-assery from Ultimate Alliance is misplaced. Lucky for Nintendo-philosophers, it looks as if the Wii will be getting the full treatment of superheroes along with the other major consoles. We spoke with Karthik Bala, CEO of Vicarious Visions, who is putting together the Wii version of the game. "For Marvel: Ultimate Alliance, our goal was to really streamline the control system and go with a complex gesture detection scheme that is mapped to the combat system," Bala explained. "There are five principle



gestures in the game. Each gesture maps intuitively to a specific maneuver or attack. Holding down the B button while performing the gestures is mapped to the five major super powers per character. By giving players access to all the powers at any time (without remapping powers to buttons or memorizing combos), the game becomes a lot more intuitive and enjoyable." Captain America, Spider-Man, Wolverine, and all the rest should be ready to throw down, if not by launch, then sometime awfully soon after.



Rampage

We're not going to pull your leg here. Rampage is pretty much the same game you've been playing since you walked into the arcade 20 years ago. You got a problem with that? Didn't think so. Everybody likes squashing those pitiful little human types. The Wii version is going to sport at least one brand new monster, which you can check out in the far right screenshot. Otherwise, expect to bash and destroy to your heart's content on the same day you take your Wii home for the first time.



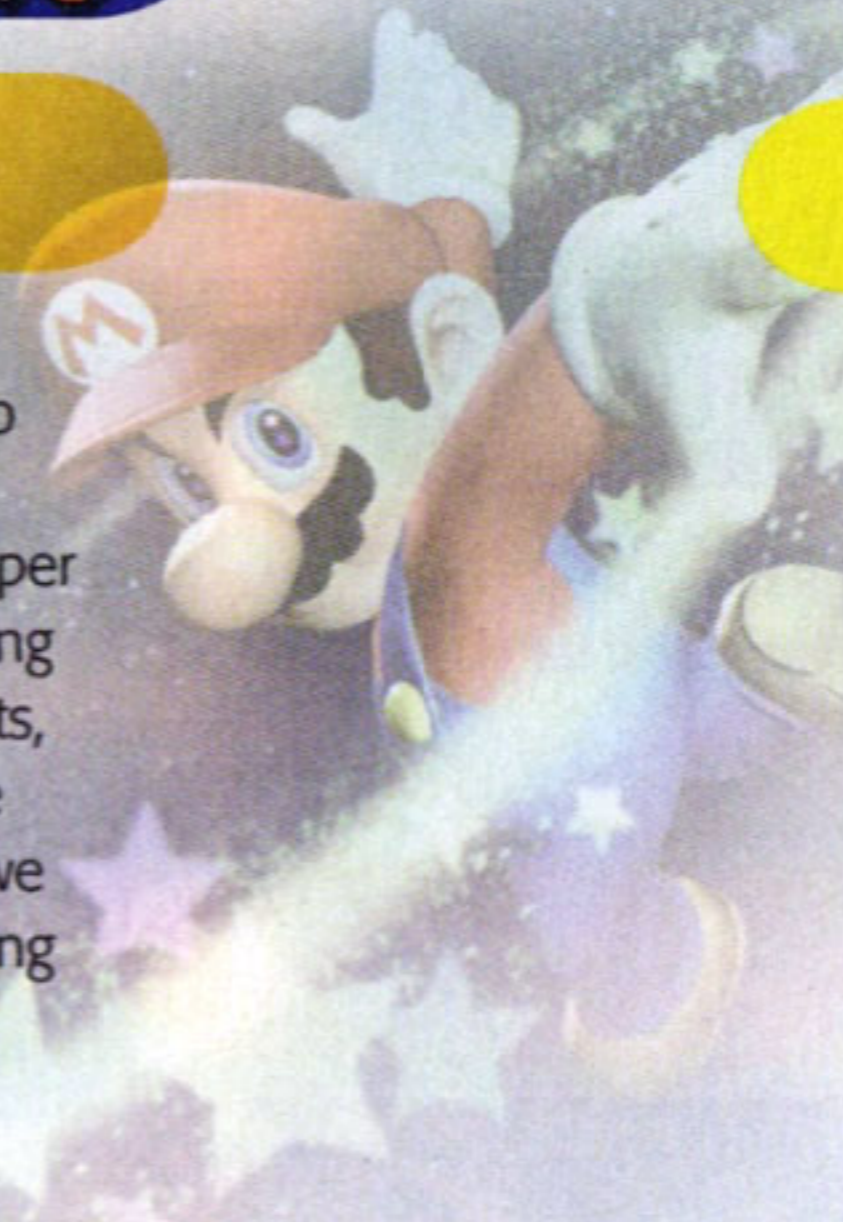
Disaster: Day of Crisis

There's not too much in the way of info regarding this strange and exciting title from developer Monolith Soft. The story details a rash of natural disasters that have pummeled the United States all at once. In the chaos that follows, a special-forces team with their own (presumably dastardly) intentions steals a nuclear weapon. Players adopt the role of an elite rescue task force member named Ray as he struggles through nature's catastrophes in order to stop the very unnatural danger presented by a possible bomb detonation. Early word includes scenarios like racing a car down a mountain pursued by a roaring magma flow, or getting out of the way of falling buildings during an earthquake. Hey, we'll try anything once.



Super Mario Galaxy

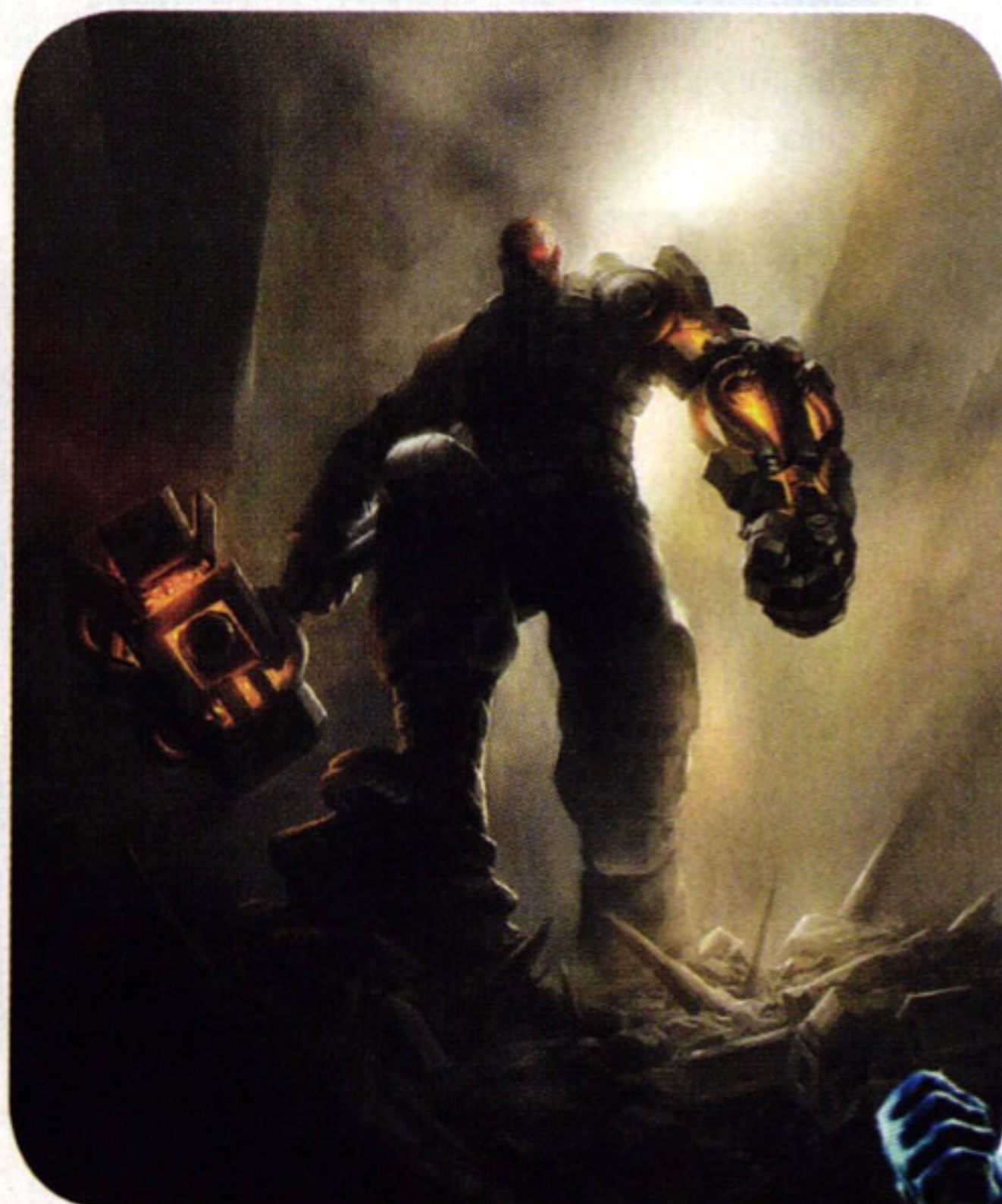
Pretend you never played the original Super Mario Bros., or any other game like it. Someone comes up to you and tries to tell you why it's so great. Do you believe them, or do you come out wondering what's so exciting about mushrooms and turtles? Of course, a few hours with Super Mario World or Mario 64 are enough to change your mind forever. Flying and spinning through space, running on the undersides of small planets, pulling stars out of the sky – Super Mario Galaxy is going to try to once again redefine The plumber for a new generation. The short minutes we spent in the game were amazing – now we just have to endure the long wait until a final version can tell us if the excitement is still so raw and intense after hours of flipping and jumping through the galaxy.



Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

How cool is it that there will be a full-fledged Metroid game at launch? Corruption's use of the Wii controller goes in some fascinating directions. Basics allow for movement with the nunchuck analog, while aiming and firing are simply based on where you point the remote onscreen. More than anything, this is going to make the task of shooting while moving way more user-friendly than previous Prime titles. Beyond that, the ability to actually push and pull onscreen mechanisms with real life motions has us excited in a way that moving stuff around should never really excite a person. The storyline seems to follow Samus' struggle to thwart Dark Samus and the Space Pirates as they use Phazon seeds to corrupt one planet after another. We're not sure how it all turns out, but we're pretty sure you're going to need to track down some energy tanks to get the job done.

Project H.A.M.M.E.R.



This may be the most complex and intriguing game story we've ever encountered. Killer robots are attacking the U.S. You are the country's last hope. You are a cyborg with a giant hammer. You must smash the robots with your hammer. Do we need to go on here?



A Hero Will Fly Again.

BATEN KAITOS ORIGINS

With the emperor assassinated and legendary monsters threatening every city, the world lies on the edge of ruin. Only a young spriter named Sagi and his two brave companions can stop a terrifying new evil from consuming everything they hold dear. Discover the beginnings of the Baten Kaitos universe in this prequel to Eternal Wings and the Lost Ocean. Only for Nintendo GameCube.



NINTENDO
GAMECUBE

DOLBY
PRO LOGIC II



TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Fantasy Violence
Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol

The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess

It's hard to find fault with a franchise that has so many times proven itself as such a phenomenal example of how much fun a game can be. Perhaps that's why *Twilight Princess* has gamers the world over so excited. In this version of the *Zelda* tale, Link is a young wrangler from a small village who is inadvertently drawn into a conflict threatening all of Hyrule. Beyond the dramatic change in artistic style this time around, the biggest shift will be Link's trips to the Twilight Realm, where he mysteriously becomes a wolf. In this lupine form, he'll meet a girl named Midna with strange magical powers. The Wii version of the game will have players flipping their controller forward as a fishing pole, aiming their bow with the pointer, and shaking the controller to drop into a wild spinning sword attack. And yes, we're as excited as you are to see how it all turns out.



WarioWare: Smooth Moves



Watching a grown man play the new *WarioWare* Wii game is an experience not to be missed, as he squats, lifts, and spins about like a puppy chasing his tail. Banking on the idea that it should be amusing to watch either the game or the people playing the game, the 200 split-second microgames in *Smooth Moves* all encourage not just hand motion, but full body interaction with the onscreen instructions in order to succeed. Expect this one to be a real hit with the nursing home crowd.

Wii Sports



The smart money's on a wider variety of sports showing up in the final product, but the current lineup of tennis, baseball, and golf each serve as a fantastic intro to the Wii as a whole, since the motions are simple and familiar to just about everyone. It also happens to be a great showpiece for the flexibility of the controller functionality. In the tennis section, the game can recognize the difference between volleys, slices, and lobs as well as the angle and power of the hit, not to mention whether you're hitting forehand or backhand. If this game isn't packed in with the system, don't be surprised to see Nintendo pushing it in some other way like a lower price or through a special offer. These simple motions are what Nintendo is building their company's future on, and they want everyone to know why.

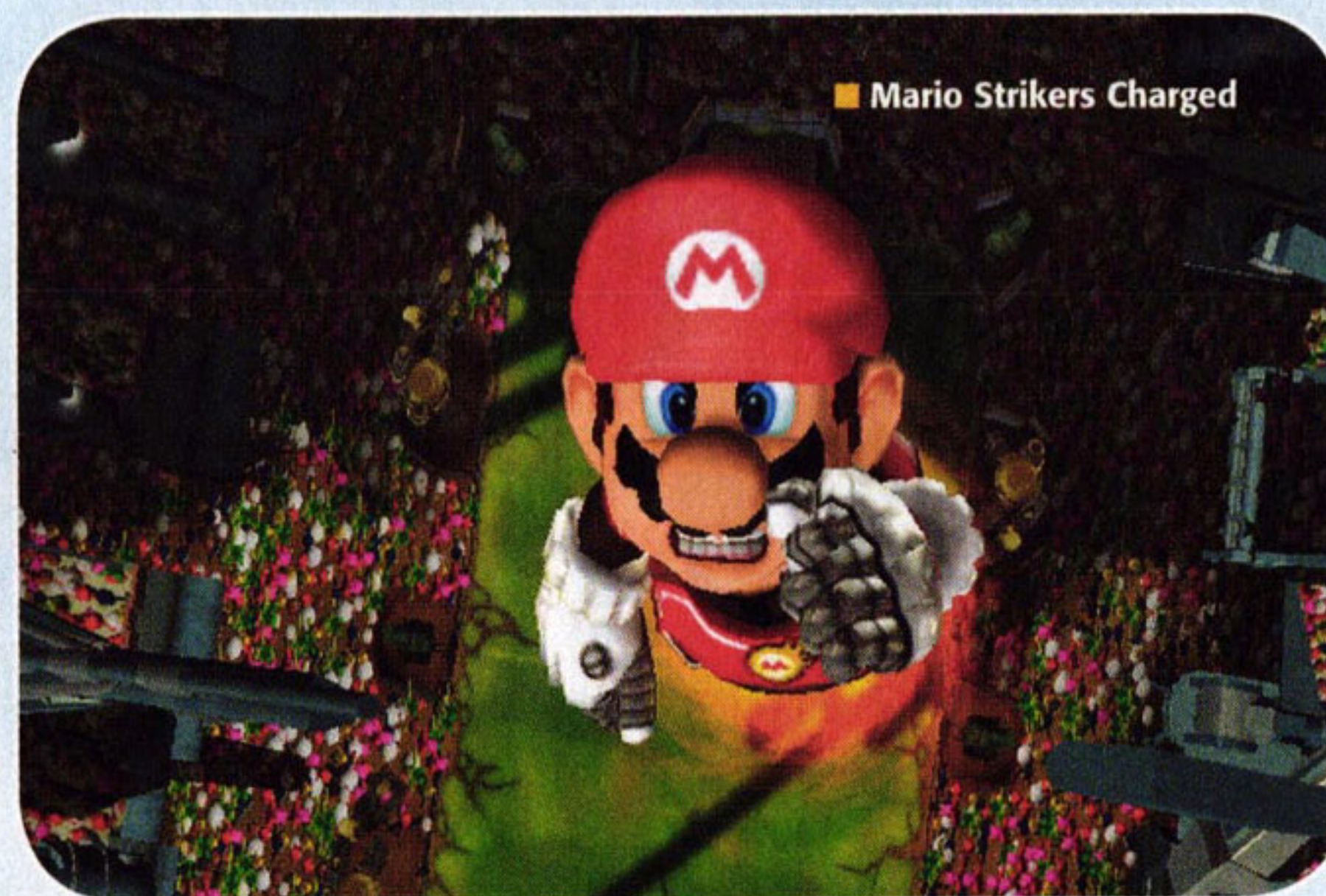
Excite Truck

For simple racing fun, *Excite Truck* will be your best bet in the early days of the Wii. Racing and jumping from huge drop-offs has way more potential than it normally might since you'll steer like you've actually got a steering wheel in your hands, turning side to side to stay on track. There are also pick-ups along the courses that will deform the land layout in front of you, transforming small bumps into massive jumps. You know what we want next? *Excite Bull Riding*.



Just Announced

Just before we sent this magazine off to the printers, we got word about **Mario Strikers Charged**, and **Battalion Wars 2**. We'll have details soon, but here's a first glimpse of both.

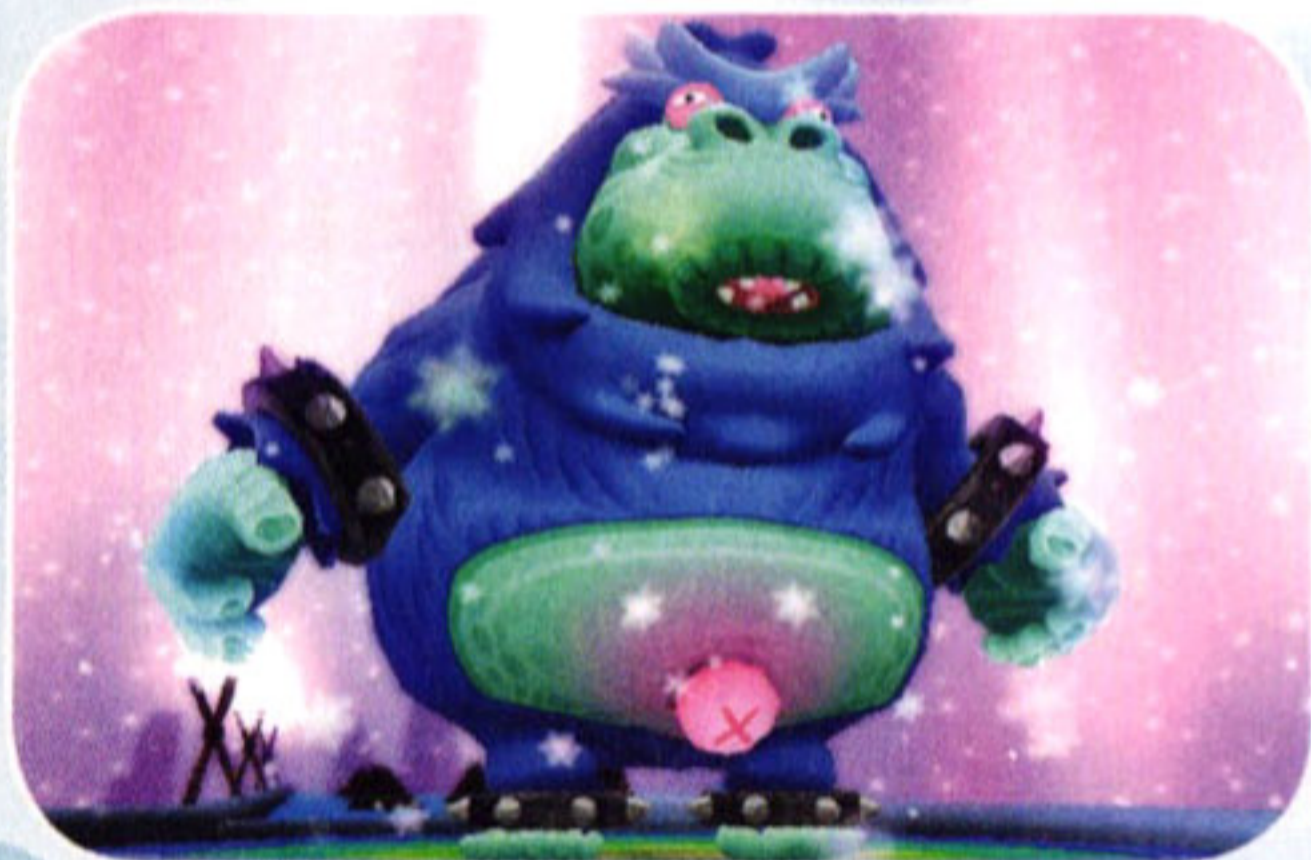




**ULTIMATE
AGILITY**

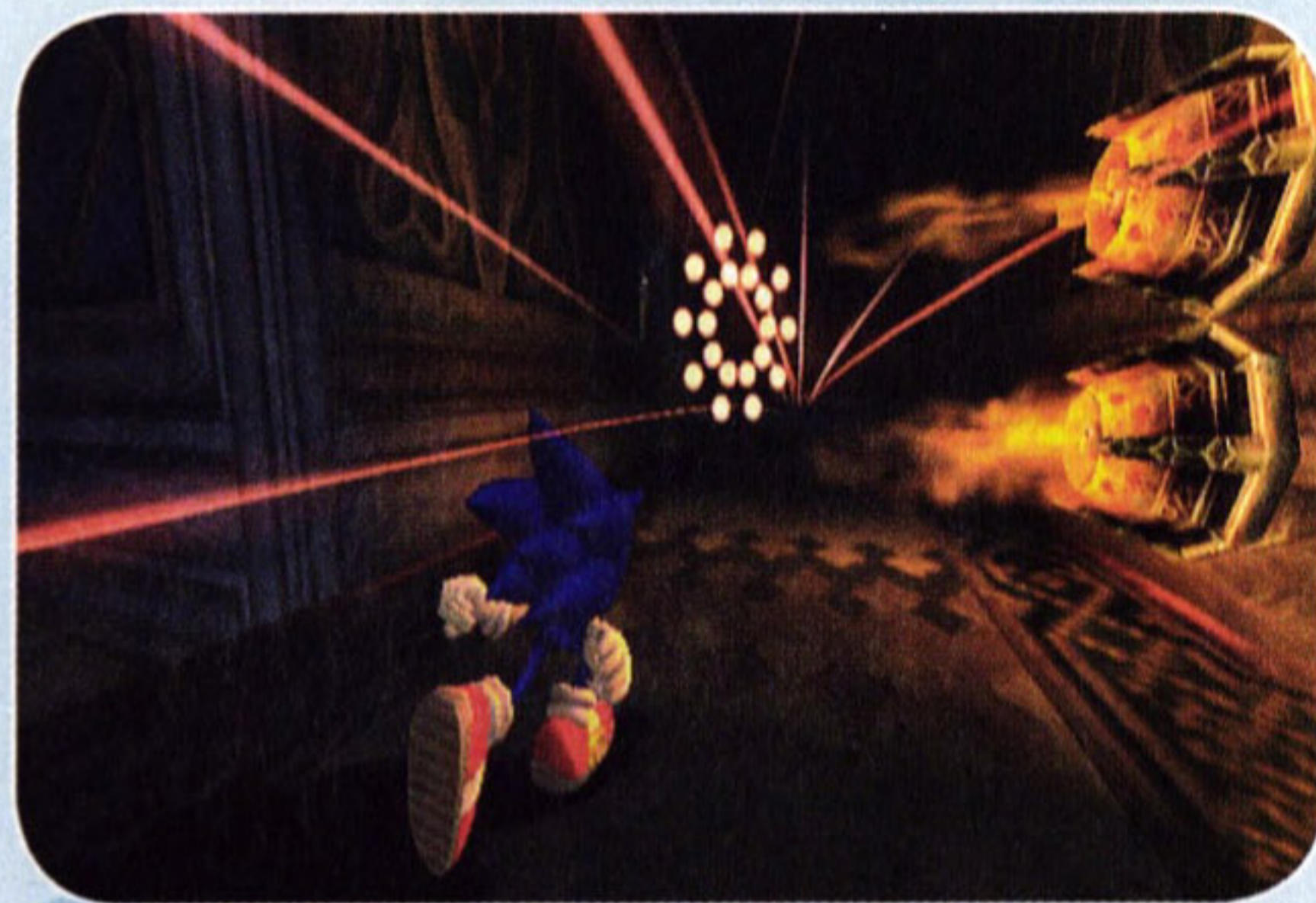
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz

You'd really have to wonder who was in charge over there at Sega if they hadn't come out of the gate with a Monkey Ball game for the Wii. It's a franchise that seems almost tailor-made for the strange tilt-sensing capabilities that Nintendo has promised. Thankfully, someone has their head screwed on right and AiAi and his friends are indeed on their way. Controls work pretty much the way you would expect. Tilting forward sends those crazy monkeys ahead, and tilting back slows them down – same idea with left and right. New to the series is the jump button, which, last we heard, was going to be useable either by tapping A or flicking the Wii-mote in a quick upward jab. Beyond the longer puzzle levels, the highlight of this party game will almost certainly be its numerous minigames, which are, quite frankly, a riot with multiple players. There's a whack-a-mole variation that has you moving the controller in 3D space to knock down those pesky rodents. There's a jump rope game that involves hopping your monkey up and down with careful timing and quick wrist motions. There's even a strange track-and-field hurdling game that has you using the two-handed controls as your feet, which you must lift and drop in sequence and then jump the barriers.



Sonic and the Secret Rings

Sega's hyperactive hedgehog is ready to throw his support behind the Wii with his recently retitled adventure. Playing the game has the same frantic speed that Sonic's 3D adventures have had for years. However, the new control scheme is surprisingly fun, an approach that involves tilting and turning the Wii remote to move left and right during your high speed runs to maneuver into the path of upcoming rings. The visuals look impressive, and we're sincerely hoping that the new approach to control gives the little blue guy a new lease on life after a recent string of lackluster games.



Metal Slug Anthology

Just the thought of using the remote to lob grenades has us losing sleep, but being able to do it within six different Metal Slug games has us banging down SNK's doors for a copy of the game. The six games are Metal Slug 1 through 5 and Metal Slug X. In addition to the motion-sensing gameplay, SNK plans to tap into the Wii's Wi-Fi capabilities for cooperative play. Oh yeah, and you can play it day one with the system if all goes well.



Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers



When Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles made its GameCube debut, it quickly became known as the Bucket Game for its insistence that one character must carry a bucket-shaped object in order for the party to venture further into a level. Although Square hasn't shown any gameplay of the Wii sequel, The Crystal Bearers, a brief CGI teaser trailer of the game did reveal something interesting: no bucket. It would appear that each character now carries a crystal, which means that they should have the freedom to venture on their

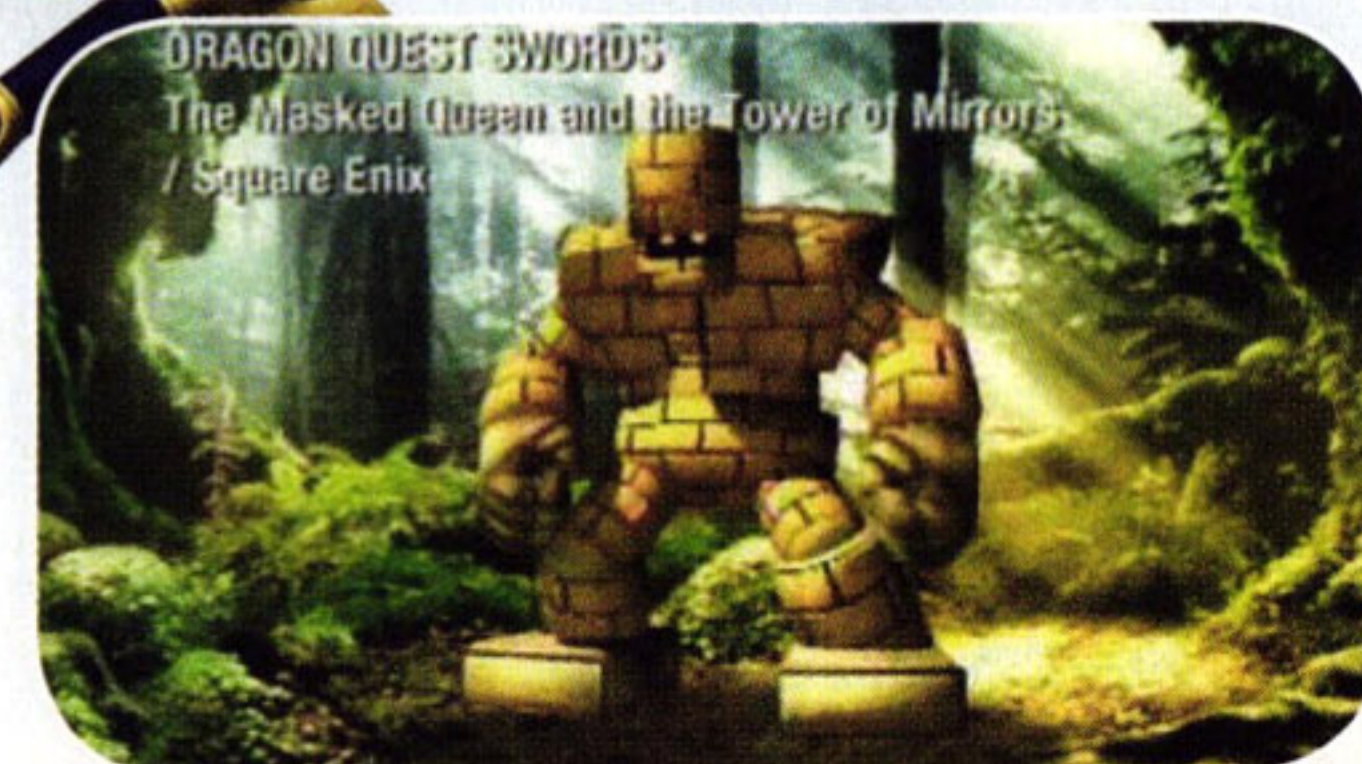
own through this dangerous land. The teaser also hints at the possibility of riding chocobos and what appears to be an airship battle. No control details have been given, but Game Informer has learned that the series will stick with real-time action. The Crystal Bearers is expected to release in 2007.

Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors

Nintendo is a hack. Yup, well before the company developed its motion-sensing technology, Square Enix was entertaining kids with its own motion-sensing game called Kenshin Dragon Quest: Yomigaerishi Densetsu no Ken. This game came packaged as a standalone console with a motion-sensing sword. It is believed that Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors shares a similar design. If this is the case, this release will be more of a simplistic hack n' slash than an RPG. Square hasn't shown much on this game just yet, but the company stands firm on its announcement of it being a launch title.



Dragon Quest Swords





**ULTIMATE
WEAPON**



Tecmo



Super Swing Golf Pangya

Golf games are a no-brainer for the new Wii remote, and Tecmo is jumping on the bandwagon right away with Super Swing Golf. As you hold the controller, how far you pull back the controller on your backswing will determine the power of your stroke, and your angle when you strike the ball dictates whether you hook or slice off into the trees. Ah, we can already hear the curses ringing through living rooms the world over! A multi-path story mode changes in response to who is winning and losing matches as you play through, and should be a little different for each character. There's also a free mode for when you just want to hit the links, and a challenge mode for more serious contenders. In addition to these single-player offerings, Tecmo also has competitive multiplayer modes that let you try out match play, stroke play, and even some variation on a party mode. Look for Super Swing to have Wii gamers teeing off sometime in early 2007.

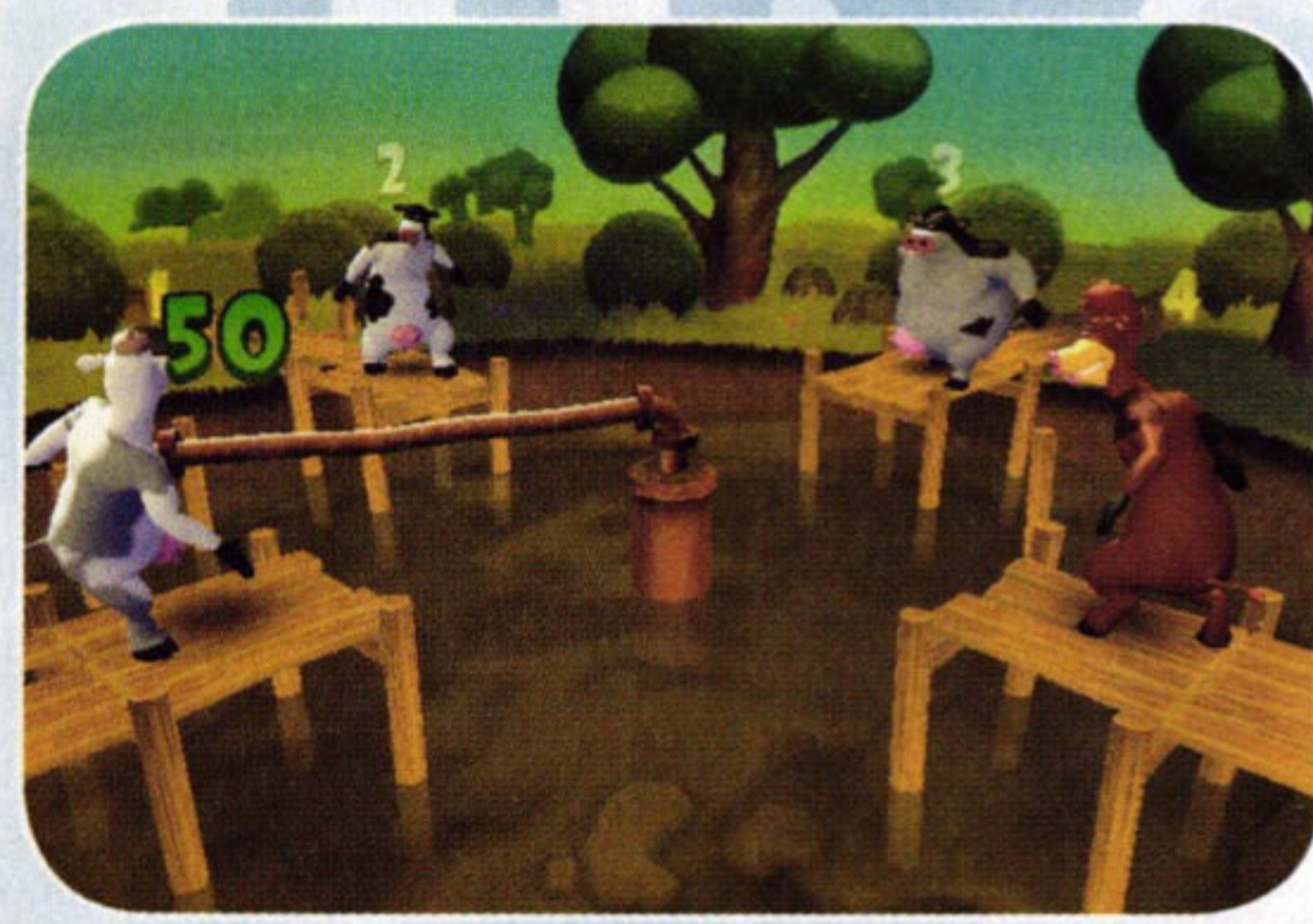


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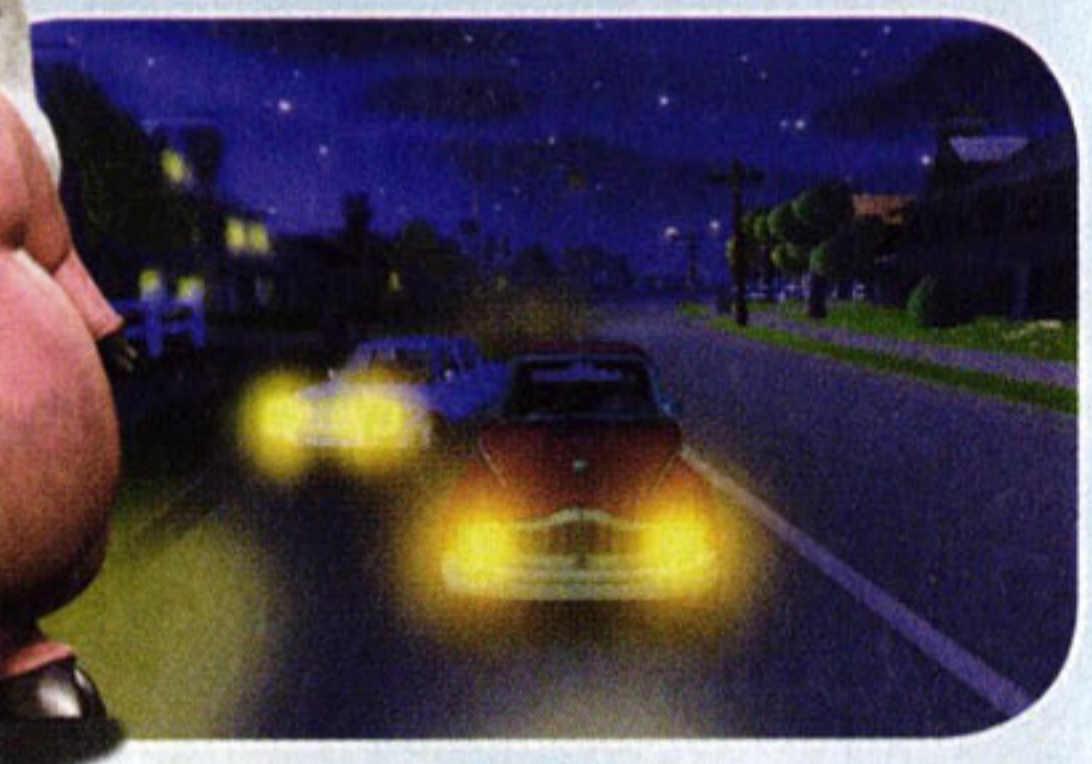
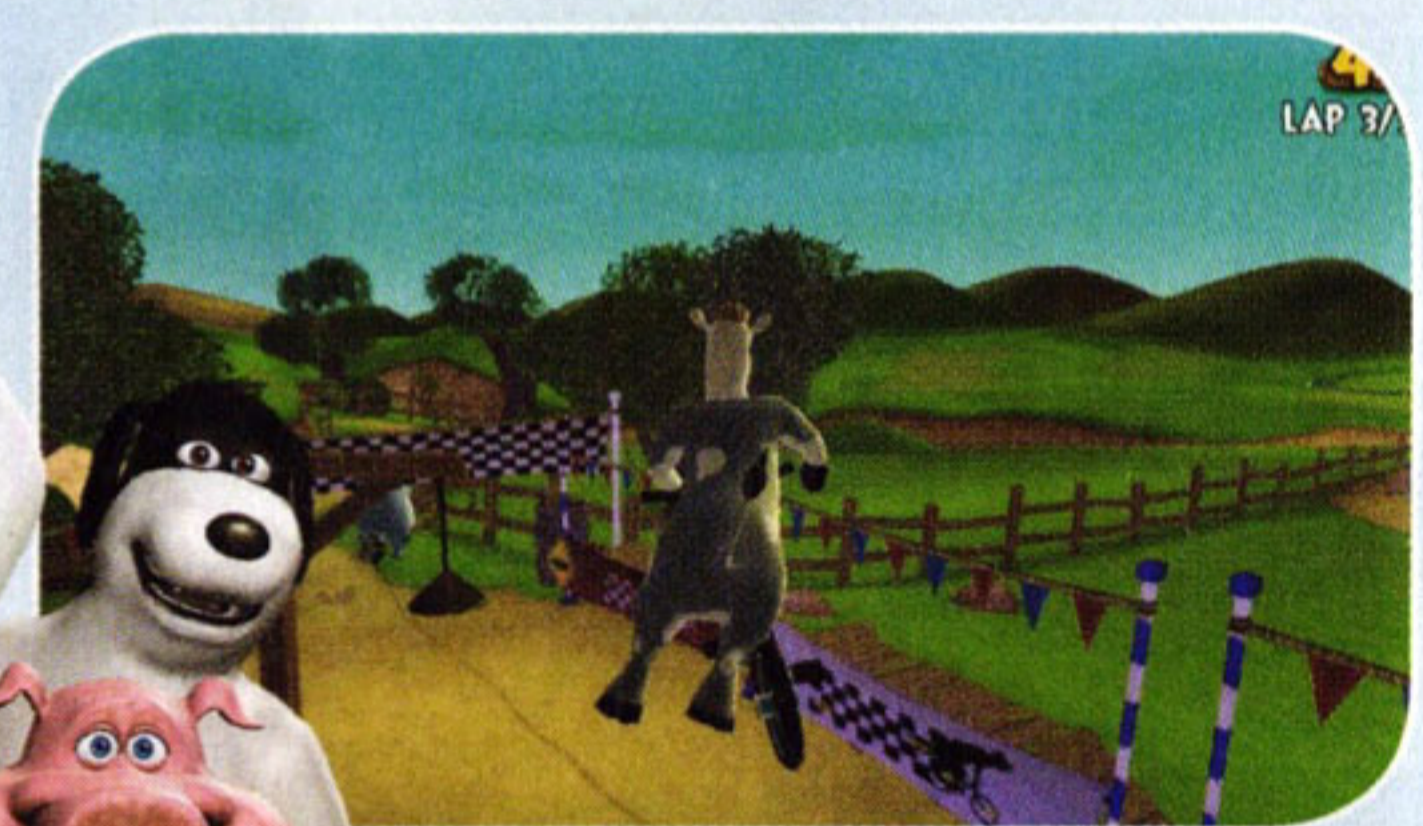


THQ

Barnyard

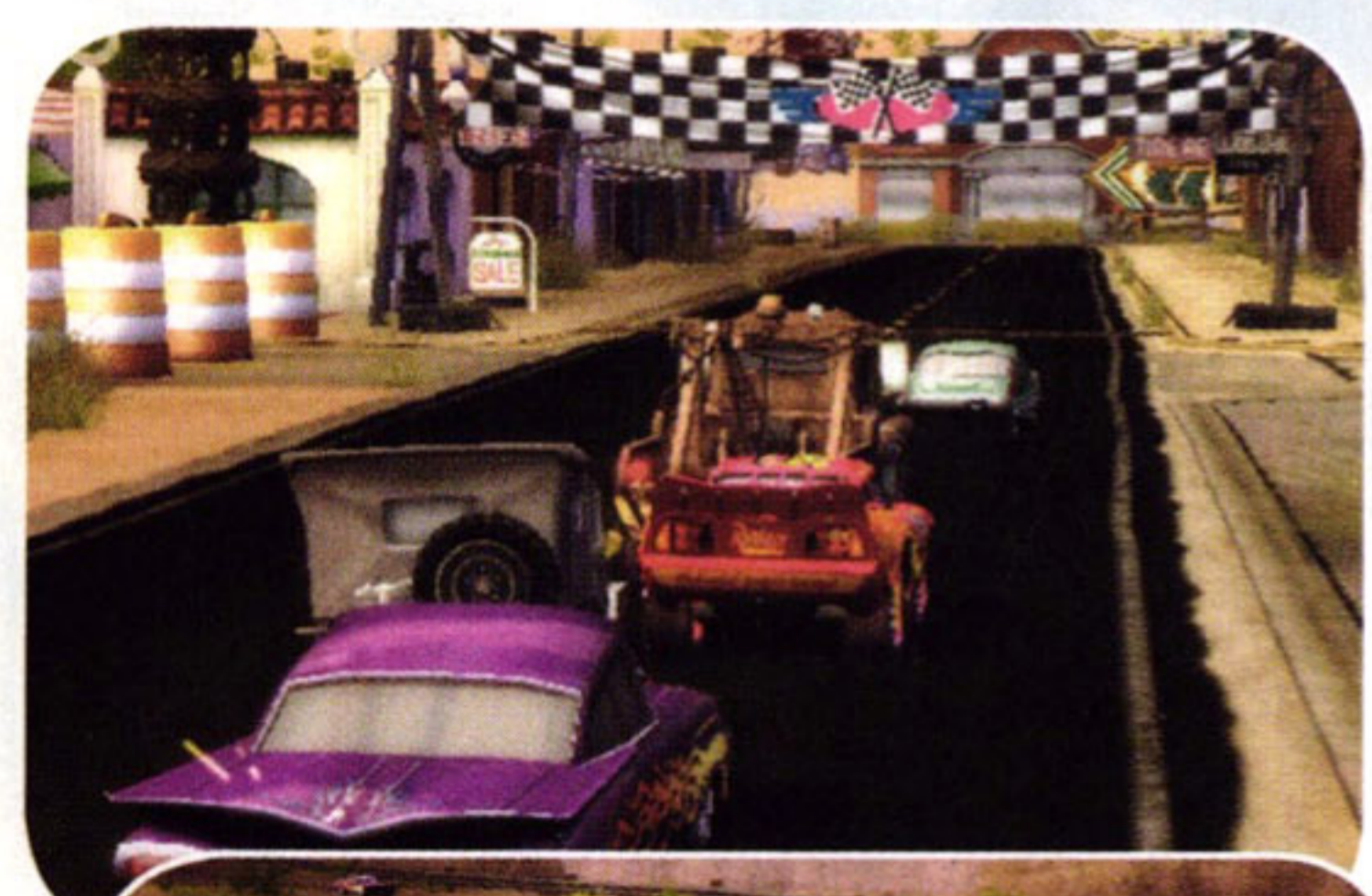


Nickelodeon Movies' farm adventure is headed to current-gen systems as we speak, but the Wii will have its own version right around launch time. Between sessions of warding off the coyote invaders you'll have a host of fun minigames to tackle as well. Promising a free form, open-ended world of gameplay, it might be just the ticket for those little 'uns that come home from the movie theater screaming about wanting to see more. Dam kids these days.



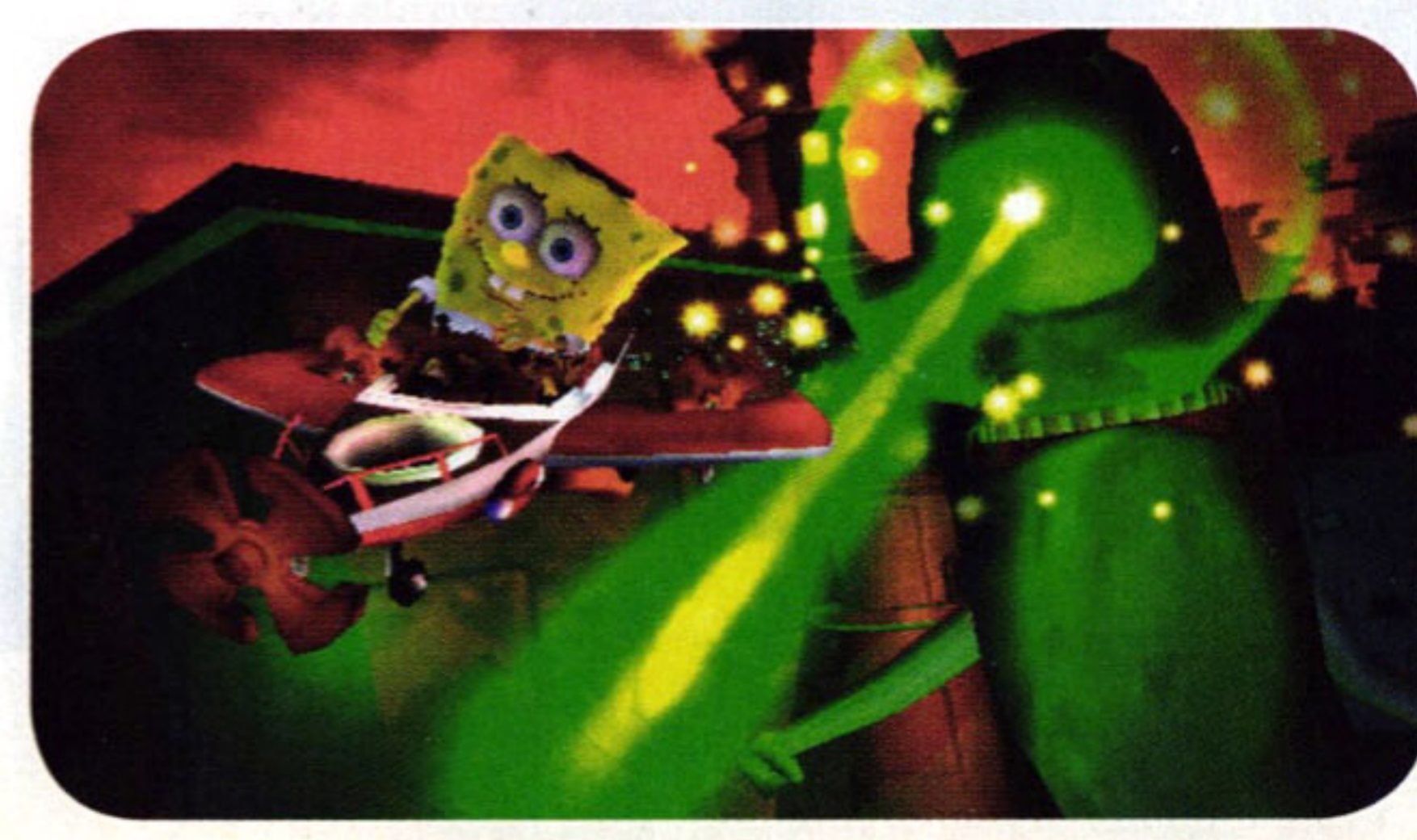
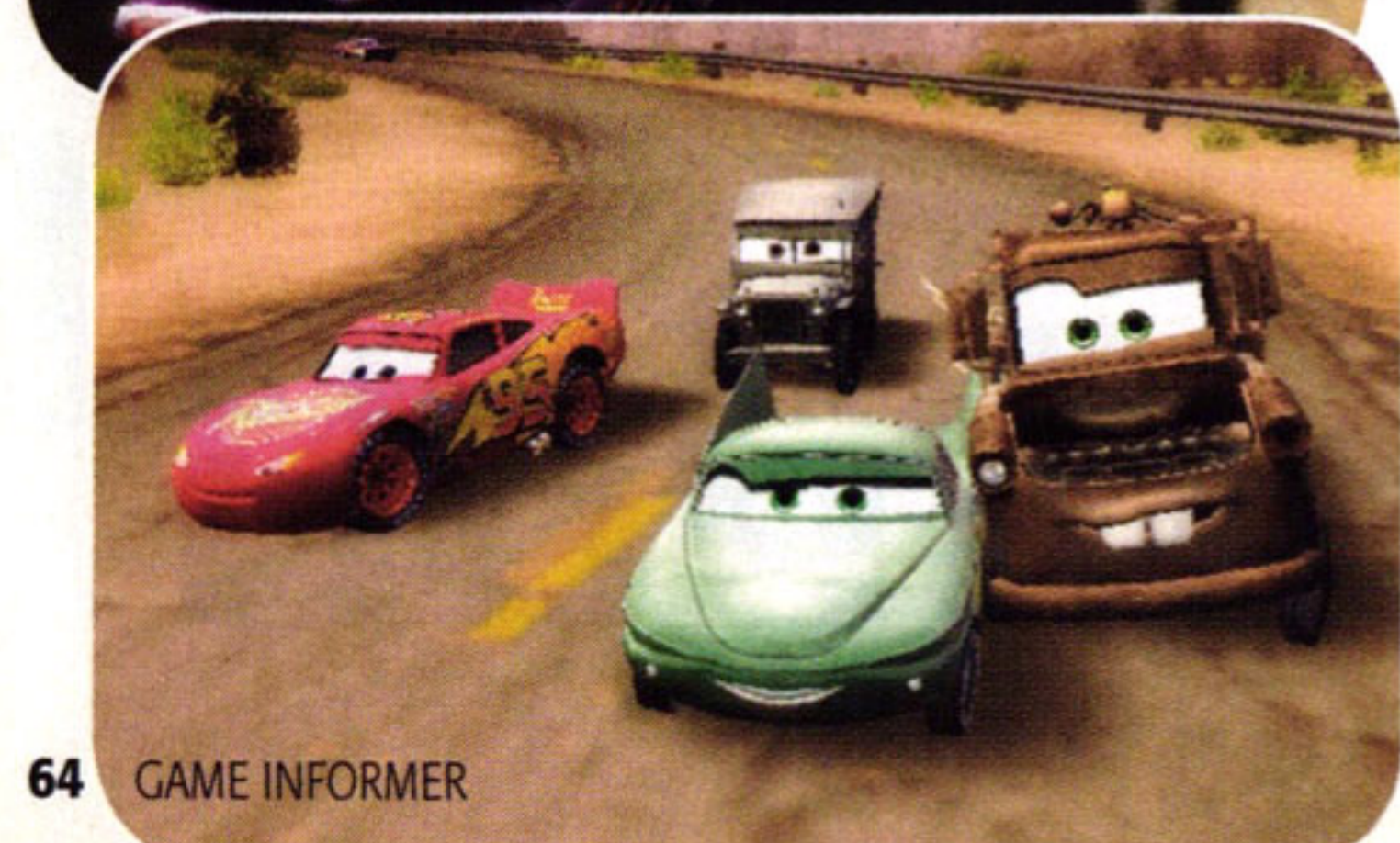
Cars

Unless there have been any dramatic changes since the current-gen version of the game released, expect Cars to offer some great simplistic racing action in an open world setting chock full of the humorous characters from the movie.



Spongebob Squarepants: Creature From the Krusty Krab

Man, there must be something about a place called Bikini Bottom that really appeals to little kids, because they can't get enough of this guy and his underwater habitat. This latest Spongebob adventure includes the option to rampage through town as a giant plankton, take Patrick into outer space through an asteroid field, and explore the metaphysical relationship between man and the sea as a metaphor for Spongebob's search for his own inner self. One of those might not be entirely accurate.



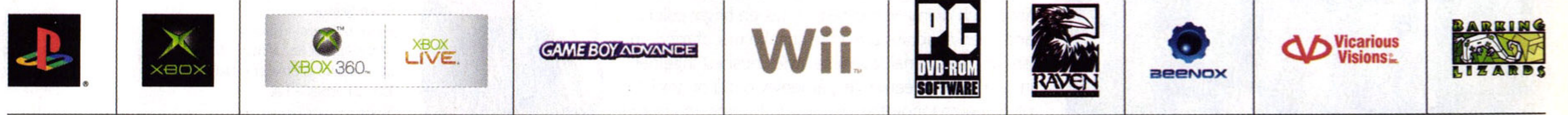


The world's largest army of Super Heroes™ is under your control.
 Create four-member strike teams. Choose from over 20 playable characters. Interact with more than 140 legends in all. Become your favorite heroes and change the fate of the universe in this epic action-RPG.



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PRODUCTS RANGE FROM EVERYONE 10+ TO TEEN
E-T
 10+
 CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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MARVEL

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Far Cry Vengeance

We spoke this month with Fabrice Cuny, one of the game designers hard at work bringing the Far Cry experience to the Wii. His team is taking the second adventure from the recent two-part 360 Far Cry game, and transferring that most recent story onto Nintendo's console. While the plot will be basically the same, the team has totally overhauled the controls and approach to gameplay to tailor the experience to the new system. "I think the Wii enhances and provides a different experience to the game genre," Cuny told us. "You can't make a direct port of an FPS to the Wii and hope that it will be fun. No, you have to adapt your game and think about the possibilities offered by the Wii." To do that, they've added options like the ability to perform a feral attack by making a wide slashing movement with the Wii remote. When sniping, moving the controller towards the screen automatically zooms in on your target. We've also heard about the inclusion of Chaos mode in the multiplayer arena, where you strive to be the last person standing in a frenetic firefight with your buddies. If it all comes together, Far Cry Vengeance might be even more immersive and involving than the original.



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Rayman Raving Rabbids

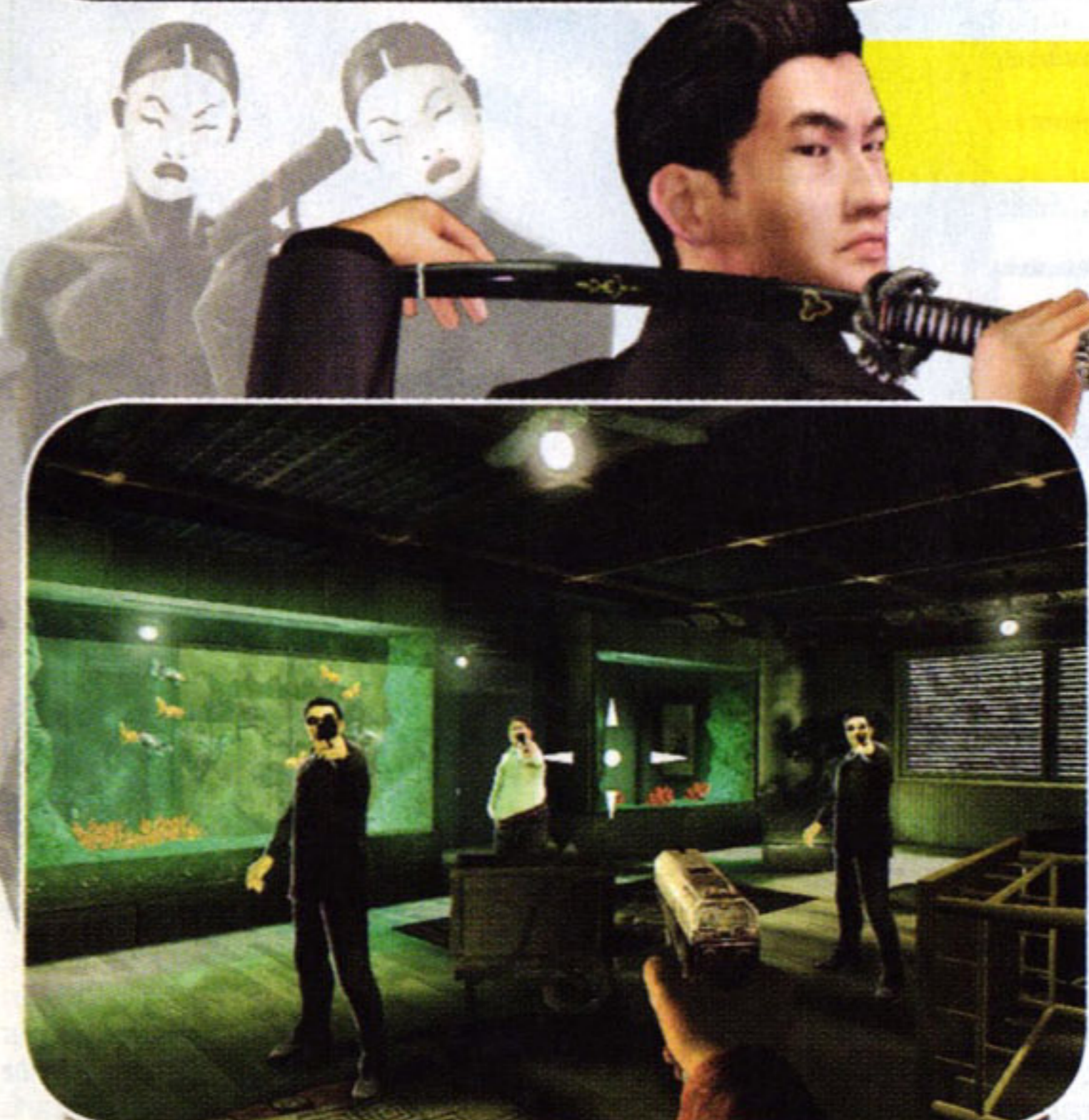
So, if we were to put in a vote today on which of the Wii games was going to be the craziest, it would be foolish to lay your money down on anything other than Rayman. We spoke with game manager Adrian Lacey regarding this latest project, and he was very forthcoming about the strange and exciting world his team is crafting. "As Rayman, your world has been invaded by hysterical out-of-control bunnies, who have enslaved you and all your little friends." Lacey told us. "In order to save your world you must use your skills to entertain the bunnies and increase your popularity." Okay, so that totally makes sense, but how will you do so? Apparently, entertaining and ultimately getting rid of the bunnies involves completing any number of strange tasks. We learned about one where you'll use your two-handed controllers to rhythmically pull the udders of an onscreen cow to milk it. In another task, you'll take those same cows and swing them around your head and throw them as far as you can. You know, like a cow toss. There are skydiving sections that have you tilting the Wii remote back and forth to guide your descent. Also, as these screens attest, there will be first person sections as you move about the map where you'll have to frantically shake the nunchuck to reload between firing. Finally, Lacey confirmed for us the inclusion of multiplayer options that should further boost the insanity quotient.



There are skydiving sections that have you tilting the Wii remote back and forth to guide your descent. Also, as these screens attest, there will be first person sections as you move about the map where you'll have to frantically shake the nunchuck to reload between firing. Finally, Lacey confirmed for us the inclusion of multiplayer options that should further boost the insanity quotient.

Red Steel

Red Steel continues to march towards the Wii launch, and this month we got to see a little bit more of how the team has been improving both the gameplay and graphical look of the game in the months since E3. Stephane Bachelet, artistic director on the project, filled us in on some of the details. He explained that the team is aiming as much as possible to convey the feeling of a foreigner who is visiting Japan for the first time, with dramatic contrasts between bright colors and deep shadows amid the strange mix of modernism and traditional Japanese styles pushed together in one place. Meanwhile, gameplay is still on track to combine an innovative mix of gun fighting and sword duels that, if nothing else, should be a change of pace from the conventions we've become so used to in first person gaming in recent years. If all goes well, we should be getting to see how it all turned out on launch day.



Monster 4x4

It looks as if Excite Truck has some competition from Nintendo's third-party partners. Ubisoft has plans to republish a version of their Xbox Monster Truck game from earlier this year. While details are scarce on the Wii version, the Xbox game boasted 40 tracks, personalized upgradeable trucks, and four-player split screen races and mini-games. While it doesn't sound like a system-seller for the Wii, we're eager to find out if the move to Nintendo's camp will do anything for this colorful and fun little title.

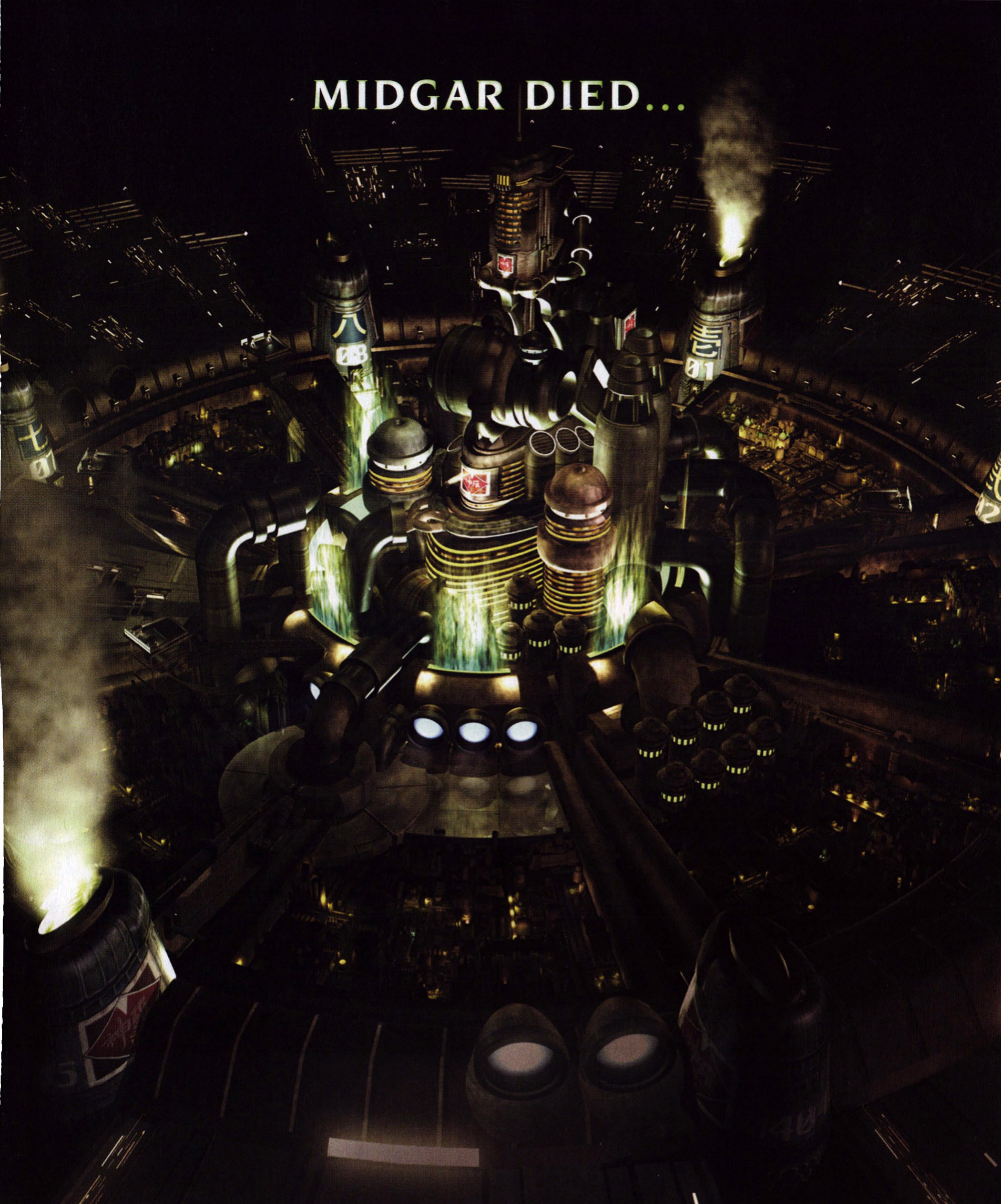


Also On The Way

Here's a complete list of other known games that are currently in development. Keep in mind that some of these titles likely won't be released in America. Who knows? Maybe the U.S. will have a sudden locomotive craze and demand an import of Let's Go By Train to grace our shores.

- Ant Bully, The – Midway
- Avatar: The Last Airbender – THQ
- Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII – Ubisoft
- Blitz: The League – Midway
- Bokujo Monogatari – Marvelous Interactive
- Bomberman Land – Hudson Soft
- Bust-A-Move Revolution – Majesco
- Chicken Little: Ace in Action – Beuna Vista Games
- Cooking Mama: Cooking With International Friends – Taito
- Digimon – Namco Bandai
- Dragon Ball Z Budokai: Tenkaichi 2 – Atari
- Dynasty Warriors – Koei
- Final Furlong – Namco Bandai
- Fire Emblem – Nintendo
- Happy Feet – Midway
- Harvest Moon – Natsume
- Heroes – Marvelous Interactive
- The Godfather – EA
- GT Pro Series – Ubisoft
- James Bond – Activision
- Jawa – Spike
- Kawa No Nushitsuri – Marvelous Interactive
- Let's Go By Train – Taito
- Lost – Ubisoft
- Madagascar 2 – Activision
- Madden NFL 07 – EA
- Medal of Honor: Airborne – EA
- Meet the Robinsons – Beuna Vista Games
- Mobile Suit Gundam – Namco Bandai
- Mortal Kombat: Armageddon – Midway
- Mr. D Goes to Town – Mastiff
- Necro-Nesia – Spike
- Need for Speed Carbon – EA
- One Piece Unlimited Adventure – Namco Bandai
- Open Season – Ubisoft
- Prince of Persia – Ubisoft
- SAN-X All-Star Revolution – MTO
- SD Gundam G Breaker – Namco Bandai
- The Simpsons – EA
- Shrek 3 – Activision
- Spider-Man 3 – Activision
- Splinter Cell – Ubisoft
- SSX – EA
- Tamagotchi – Namco Bandai
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07 – EA
- Turn It Around – Taito

MIDGAR DIED...





PlayStation 2

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Mild Language
Use of Tobacco
Violence

SOMETHING SURVIVED...

THE WORLD OF FINAL FANTASY® VII IS ABOUT TO EXPLODE.

A mysterious organization has emerged from the wreckage of the Meteor disaster. The enigmatic Vincent Valentine may be the only one who can save this shattered world.

Set after the events in FINAL FANTASY VII and FINAL FANTASY VII ADVENT CHILDREN, this entirely new game features familiar characters, dazzling gunplay and shocking truths never before revealed!

DIRGE of CERBERUS™ FINAL FANTASY VII



Take on new enemies and dangers in dazzling 3D environments



Stunning graphics and CG cinemas continuing the epic storyline



Meet familiar faces and unique allies in an all-new action adventure



PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Assassin's Creed

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** MARCH

DREAM MACHINE

The first year of a new console generation can be a bit of a letdown. Ports, graphical upgrades, and well-worn franchises rule the charts for months and it feels like nothing new is making any headway. But this set of consoles has had a rallying point to look forward to in the form of Assassin's Creed, although the enthusiasm has been limited to the PS3. That is, until now. Ubisoft has officially confirmed fan speculation by adding the Xbox 360 to the list of formats that Assassin's Creed will appear on.

Ubisoft's Montreal team has been busy creating a new definition of the action genre, combing changes in controller layout with real-world rulesets for the game's acrobatics. Features only possible with Sony and Microsoft's newer, faster hardware include crowd interactions, realistic manipulations of everything (and everyone), and a story spanning huge, full-featured cities.

Scriptwriter Corey May (whose credits include the last two Prince of Persia titles) says about the differences of storytelling

from last to next gen, "One significant difference stems from the more open nature of Assassin's Creed. The Prince of Persia games featured very linear narratives. Every cutscene and character interaction was the same for every play through. So we've worked out a system where there are narrative 'bottlenecks' in events you must experience, story points that must be delivered. But in between these points there is a lot of additional narrative information that's essentially optional." These side points, which will earn you gameplay advantages like citizens leading pursuers in the wrong direction or priests hiding you within their group, also fill you in about the world, telling players about the battle between the Crusaders and the Saracens, and what kind of moral fiber makes up the people you're assigned to assassinate.

These story element examples tell you about Altair's world and his place in it. But the tale of Assassin's Creed is also wrapped in some near-future sci-fi elements that will



surely surprise players. Says May, "The narrative framework also justifies a lot of our presentation decisions. I can't really talk about the details, but we tried really hard to ensure that any moments of reduced mobility are the result of narrative events and not arbitrary design decisions. Don't worry, Altair isn't going to be tied up and held hostage for the duration of a cut-scene every 10 minutes... In Assassin's Creed, you play the story. You don't just watch it." While we've been sworn to secrecy about the particulars of Assassin's storyline, there is that much-talked-about scene at the end of the game's E3 demo

where the player, in a first-person perspective, seems to be looking up into an operating room... a modern room.

While it seems assured that the gameplay will live up to our next-gen ambitions for the action genre, it's nice to see that the storytelling is getting the same attention and ambition. With a multi-platform release, the game is set to make a big impact and we're excited to see what the fallout is for gamers. We're all for vibrant action getting mixed with a healthy dose of sophisticated storytelling. ■ ■ ■



■ It seems that the quiver on your back would be a dead "I'm totally not a priest" giveaway, but sometimes a suspension of disbelief is just more fun



■ This isn't a point of view that you'll get often during gameplay, but it does do a good job of showing how players will move and how the city will continue to bustle about if you go unnoticed



RUMOR MONGERING

Consistently coy, Ubisoft never really did say which console *Assassin's Creed* wouldn't be on, only that the PS3 was definitely a release platform. Well, word's officially out. The Xbox 360 will also play host to the moody, atmospheric adventures that this game has in store on the same day and date as the Sony console. Is exclusivity really dead?



■ The team has been quiet on specifics, but we suspect that the countryside will probably be similar to *San Andreas*, but with less *Deliverance*



■ Rey watches in horror as his opponent suffers night terrors

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

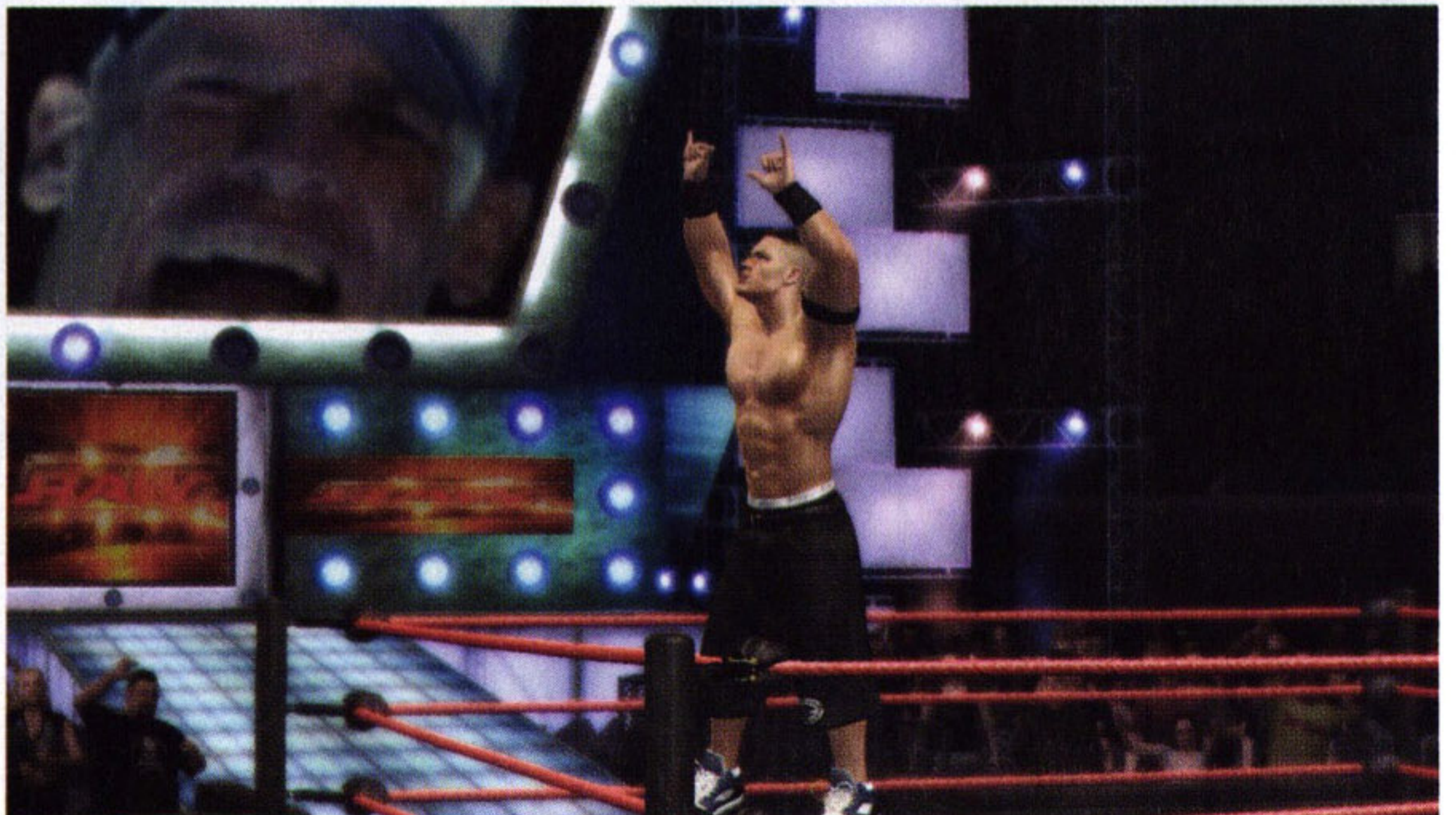
WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2007

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TBA) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER YUKE'S > RELEASE NOVEMBER

THE BUILDING OF A DYNASTY

Fans of the WWE wrestling series probably already know that the PlayStation 3 version of the game has been cancelled for undisclosed reasons. Therefore, the Xbox 360 will exclusively receive the first next-gen version of the game, leaving many Microsoft fans wondering how it's shaping up. To answer just that question, we spent some hands-on time with the 360 version and have a full report for all you sports entertainment enthusiasts.

Aside from the obvious upgrade in visuals, the biggest change in store for the 2007 WWE release is the inclusion of analog controls. Rather than clicking a button, grapples are now initiated by flicking the right stick, and each direction triggers a different grapple. Holding the right bumper while flicking the stick triggers a strong grapple, which can then transition into a variety of moves that give the player the most direct control over the action in the series



to date. Once you've tied up your opponent in a strong grapple, clicking the right stick opens up a few special attacks that are all triggered with analog movements. For example, pushing up on the stick may cause Triple H to lift up his opponent, and you can move around the ring to your ideal location before slamming him to the mat by flicking the stick down. Each superstar has their own unique analog moves, some of which require flicking up or down, while others are triggered with quarter-circle moves and the like.

While the transition to analog grapples takes a bit of time to get used to, once you pick it up, it adds a ton to the game. Grapples are no longer just long animated sequences, now players have control over where and when the move is executed. These new analog attacks can also be triggered in specific locations, like against the ropes, crowd barriers, and more. Other

actions, like grabbing the belt in a ladder match, are also now handled with the sticks. On the whole, these changes are a definite improvement, but last year's control scheme is available for players who can't get into it.

Although we were pleased with the way our playtest felt, Smackdown Vs. Raw 2007 still has some areas that need to be polished up. Some character movements are a little stiff and mechanical at this point, and hit detection is a bit spotty. A few character balance issues are also present — it's cool that heavyweights like John Cena "no sell" attacks from smaller characters like Rey Mysterio, but winning a match as the smaller wrestler is incredibly difficult to the point of frustration. Despite these quibbles, there is still time for the game to improve, and the series has been getting better year after year, so we're confident that fans will be happy with the final result. ■ ■ ■



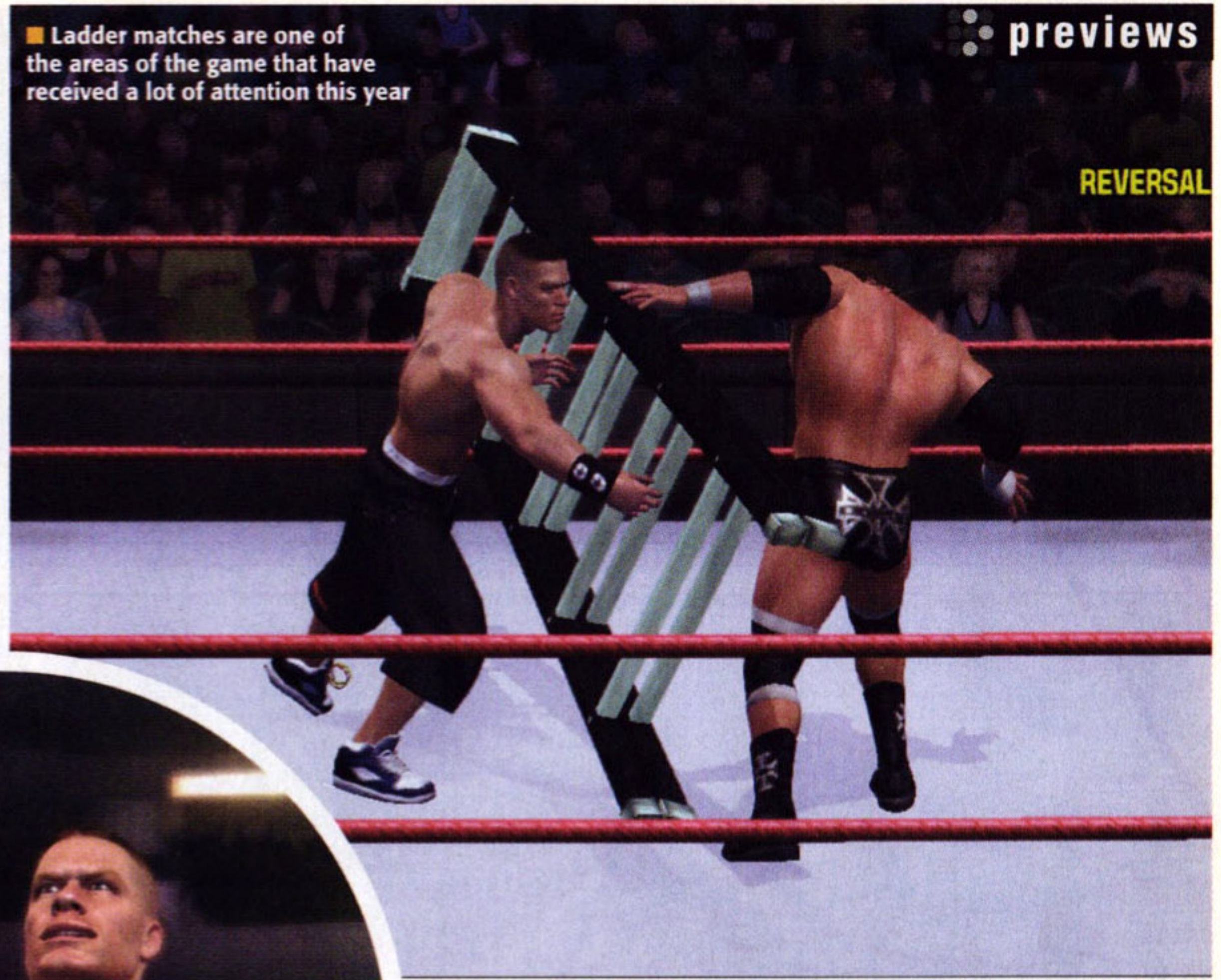
■ "Are you staring at my butt? Good!"

■ Triple H needs a nap

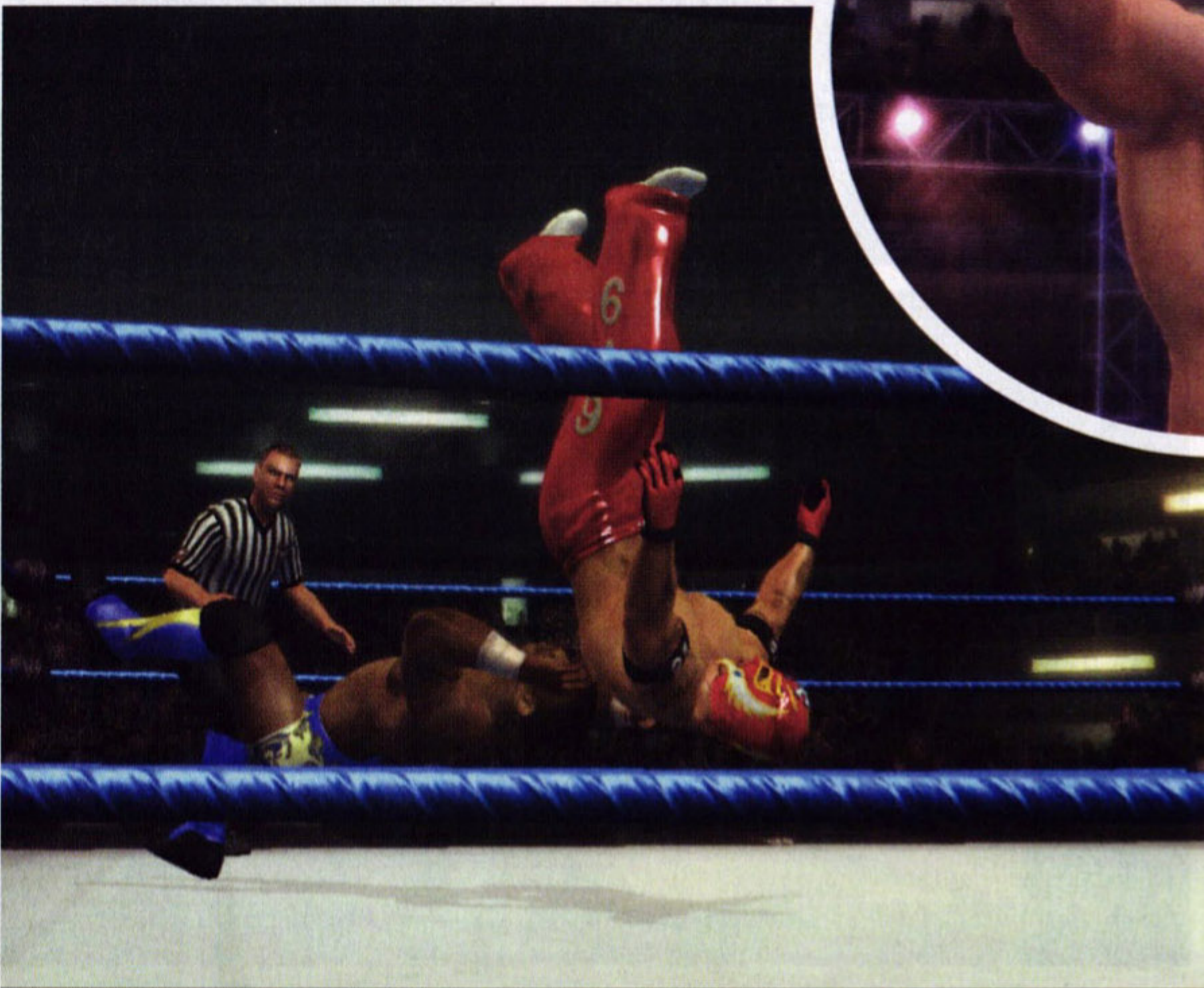


previews

■ Ladder matches are one of the areas of the game that have received a lot of attention this year



REVERSAL



■ "How many fingers am I holding up? Seriously, I can't count!"





■ All kinds of crazy special-forces maneuvers will make their way into multiplayer

Alice Pafine

Hunok

joel

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** WINTER

YOUR ODDS ARE BETTER HERE

It's no secret that the multiplayer is at least as big a draw for the Rainbow Six franchise as the single-player campaign. We got a chance to speak with Jean-Pascal Cambiotti, multiplayer game designer on the upcoming Rainbow Six: Vegas, about the steps that developer Ubisoft Montreal is taking to ensure that the game has next-gen concepts and design to go with its outstanding graphics. The new details that he shared with us on two such concepts – Attack & Defend mode and an expanded Persistent Elite Creation feature – have us buying into the hype.

Attack & Defend mode functions very similarly to Unreal Tournament's Assault mode, where one team will have a series of objectives to accomplish and the other squad will be trying to prevent that. The scenarios all make sense within the Rainbow Six mythology, though. "You can be the hired mercenaries holding a group of hostages against their will, or the heroes attempting to rescue them," explains Cambiotti. Also, you'll be able to choose loadouts like Assault and Sniper – but as with any mission-based mode, a balanced team that works well together will be the key to victory.

The PEC system, at its heart, is more or less a fairly complex structure that allows players to cosmetically customize their online avatars. Beyond that basic functionality (which is always amusing for clans creating team uniforms and the like), it does go a bit deeper. As you earn medals and points through playing online, you'll unlock new pieces of clothing, equipment, and weaponry as well as a rank that publicly broadcasts your prestige. According to Cambiotti, "PEC helps maintain an equal playing field regardless of what rank your opponent is and the content he's unlocked. Weapons you unlock are not only visually different, but they react differently too. Each weapon balances itself out in the long run; it all comes down to what you prefer to use for the given situation. There is no ultimate weapon to unlock in multiplayer; the tactics you employ as a team are what make the difference between victory and defeat."

Playing into both of these elements is the extensive stat tracking for both individuals and clans. "Every game mode has lots of statistics for you to compare your performance against another online player. We've put lots of efforts in stat tracking, including



■ We can only hope that the "facial hair" option for female avatars is in the retail game



■ Have no fear, campers. Sniping should be as powerful and abusible as ever

your favorite weapons and maps," says Cambiotti. "There are tons of achievements to unlock, from being the best in the game to having participated valiantly in a team. When you've accumulated enough points you're promoted to a new rank, which grants you access to new equipment."

We've been waiting for a long time for competitive console gaming to reach the levels of community support and intricacy that PC gamers have enjoyed for years, and with these systems in place Rainbow Six: Vegas looks ready to stand tall with the best of the best that any platform has

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS
MULTIPLAYER - TEAM SURVIVAL



TEAMSTATE
[ASSAULT]

5
FRAG GADGET

11 8
MP5N SMG

■ Using well-lit casinos as environments should make for some different tactical styles than we're used to

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS
MULTIPLAYER - TEAM SURVIVAL



TEAMSTATE
[ASSAULT]

5
FRAG GADGET

25 6
MP5N SMG

■ "Ooh! I got three gunshot wounds in a row! Jackpot!"



XBOX 360 | PC

Overlord

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** TRIUMPH STUDIOS
 > **RELEASE** SUMMER 2007

GREMLINS 3?

Okay, so this game doesn't really have anything to do with the vaunted '80s film series, but you wouldn't know it from looking at it. You'll play as a powerful warrior-sorcerer who just happens to gain the attention of some adorable-looking killer minions. Thinking you are their long-lost overlord, they'll treat you as such, and obey your every command as you seek to subjugate the twisted fantasy world around you. With the mischievous creatures in tow, the choices that lie before you have something of a limited scope — be mean, or be downright loathsome.

In actuality, the game will track your evil acts through a system that measures how corrupt you've become. While it's going to be pretty challenging to complete the game without "breaking a few eggs," the most tempting option for many players will be to go all out and indulge in the villainy. We learned about a situation early on in the game where you have to liberate a village from some overly violent halflings. When you free the peasants, they'll cheer you. If you start to mistreat them, they'll begin to bow and pay homage when you pass through town. Truly decimate their town, and they'll become so terrified of you they'll start to bind their virgin girls on sacrificial poles next to your summoning portals in the hope of appeasing you. Incidentally, we should mention a prediction we have. This game may not receive an E rating. Just a guess there.

From what we've seen, the gameplay pans out much like many action/RPGs, as you move

about the world swinging your sword and casting spells. The changeup occurs in your ability to send your scurrying little helpers to exert your will without much more than a raised finger from you. They'll happily slaughter foes and innocents alike, and then steal whatever implements they can use to make themselves look more fearsome/ridiculous, creating a ragtag army filled with mismatched armor, random pitchforks, and the occasional chef's hat for good measure. Unfortunately, your minions are incredibly easy to distract. Heading into one small town, we saw them spy a nearby fiddler, and they capered off to dance about him in giggling ecstasy. At times like these, you may actually have to get your own hands a little dirty and silence the distraction. The normal brown minions could also be exchanged for more focused red or green minions, with fire and poison powers, respectively. It's yet to be seen exactly how many different types of little guys you'll eventually be able to summon, but we have been promised that your squad of goons could number around 60 at one time.

Interestingly, there's also been some talk of multiplayer, including a player-versus-player option that pits your minion army against a buddy's. We've also heard rumors of a potential cooperative mode, but we'll have to wait and see if that pans out as we get closer to release. In the meantime, start honing your skills by rewatching *Gremlins* and its sequel on a weekly basis. You'll thank us later — probably. ■ ■ ■



■ Overlord often bemoans how infrequently he is allowed to bring his considerable conducting skills to bear



■ Bob the minion hates that he receives no 401K, even after several lifetimes of unflinching demonic service



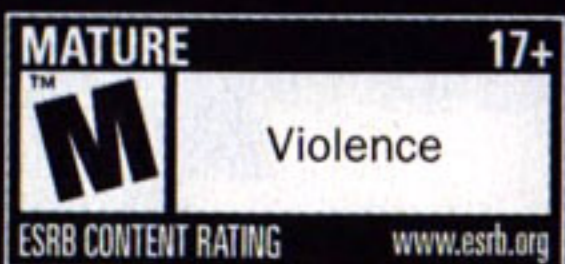
■ Strangely, dwarven ballet often involves large spikey metal balls

A SWEEPING SAGA
AN ANCIENT BETRAYAL
A BATTLE TO END ALL BATTLES



INTENSE ACTION

IMMERSIVE BATTLES



—PHANTAGRAM—



XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3

Army of Two

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS3 ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EA MONTREAL > RELEASE 2007

FOR LOVE OR MONEY... WELL, JUST MONEY

■ The visuals will not disappoint, that's for sure

Cooperative gameplay is becoming something of a buzzword in the next generation of gaming, and EA is building *Army of Two* around that very concept. As we mentioned when we named the game one of the 50 hottest titles of this year's E3, players will tackle the trickiest of jobs with a buddy controlled either by a flesh-and-blood friend or the game's AI.

Gameplay in *Army of Two* revolves around not only the basic third-person run-and-gun action, but also exploiting the combined talents of the two mercenary protagonists. Many maneuvers go above and beyond standard tactics. If you're playing with an AI partner, situation-specific commands for events like paratroops or having your buddy drive a forklift while you hang out on the machine's platform and gun down enemies abound (though human buddies can take advantage of

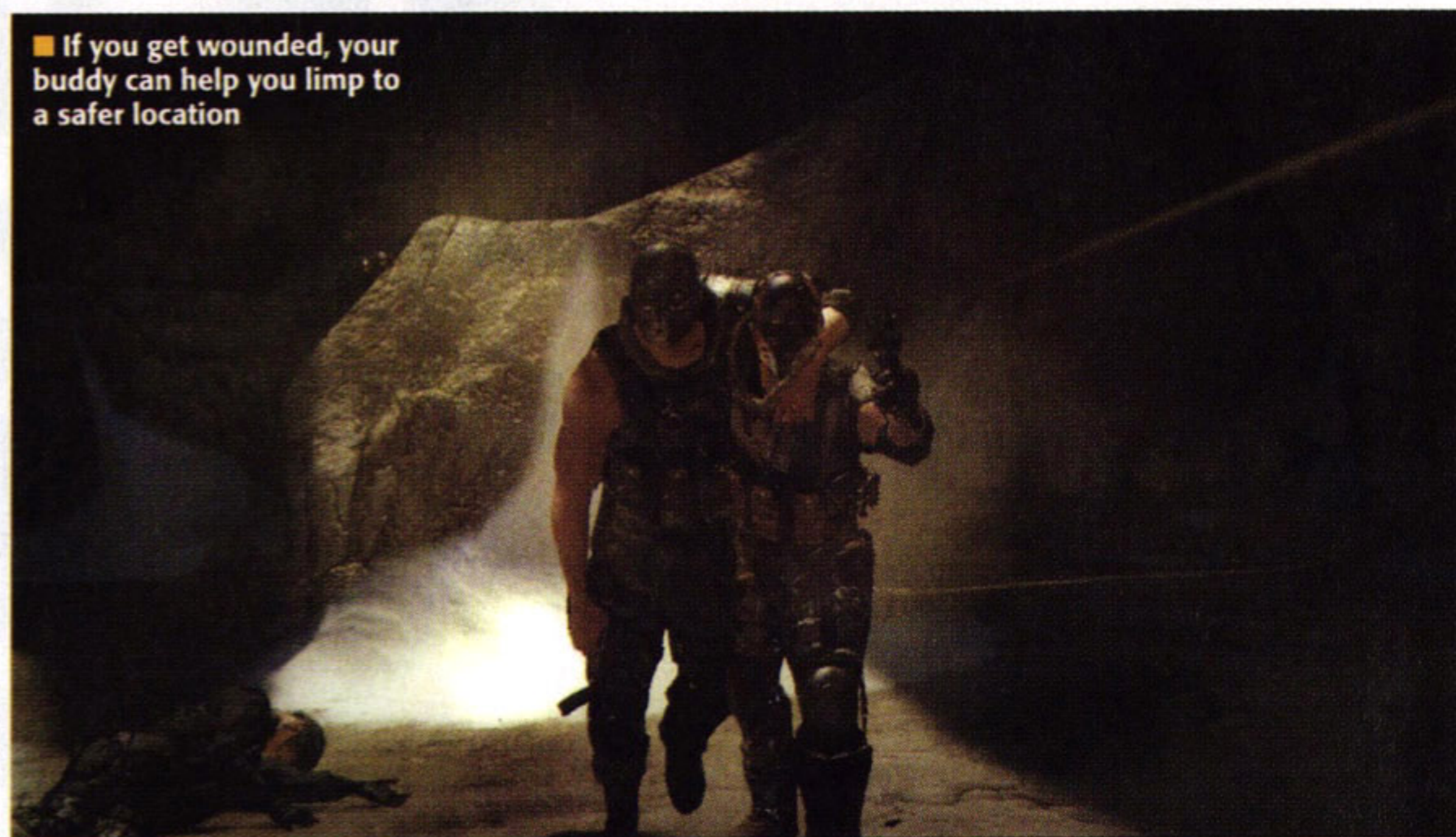
some specialized tactics for certain conditions as well). And, as we've seen in existing games like the latest releases of *Splinter Cell* and *Syphon Filter*, two people can get to places a single person cannot reach through moves like boost-ups.

One aspect of *Army of Two* that we really haven't seen in other titles before, however, is the depth of the weapon customization. With the bundles of cash you make by completing contracts, you'll be able to modify the game's basic arsenal in a huge number of ways that go way beyond simply adding a scope or a silencer. Grips, stocks, magazines, underslung secondary weapons, and more are all totally configurable to your specifications. Additionally, cosmetic additions like diamond grips and gold plating go the extra mile to make sure that your weaponry is as unique of a snowflake as you are.

If EA can truly integrate the game's co-op tricks into the flow of play and keep them from being one-shot gimmicks, *Army of*

Two could be a welcome evolution of the third-person action genre when it releases next year. ■ ■ ■

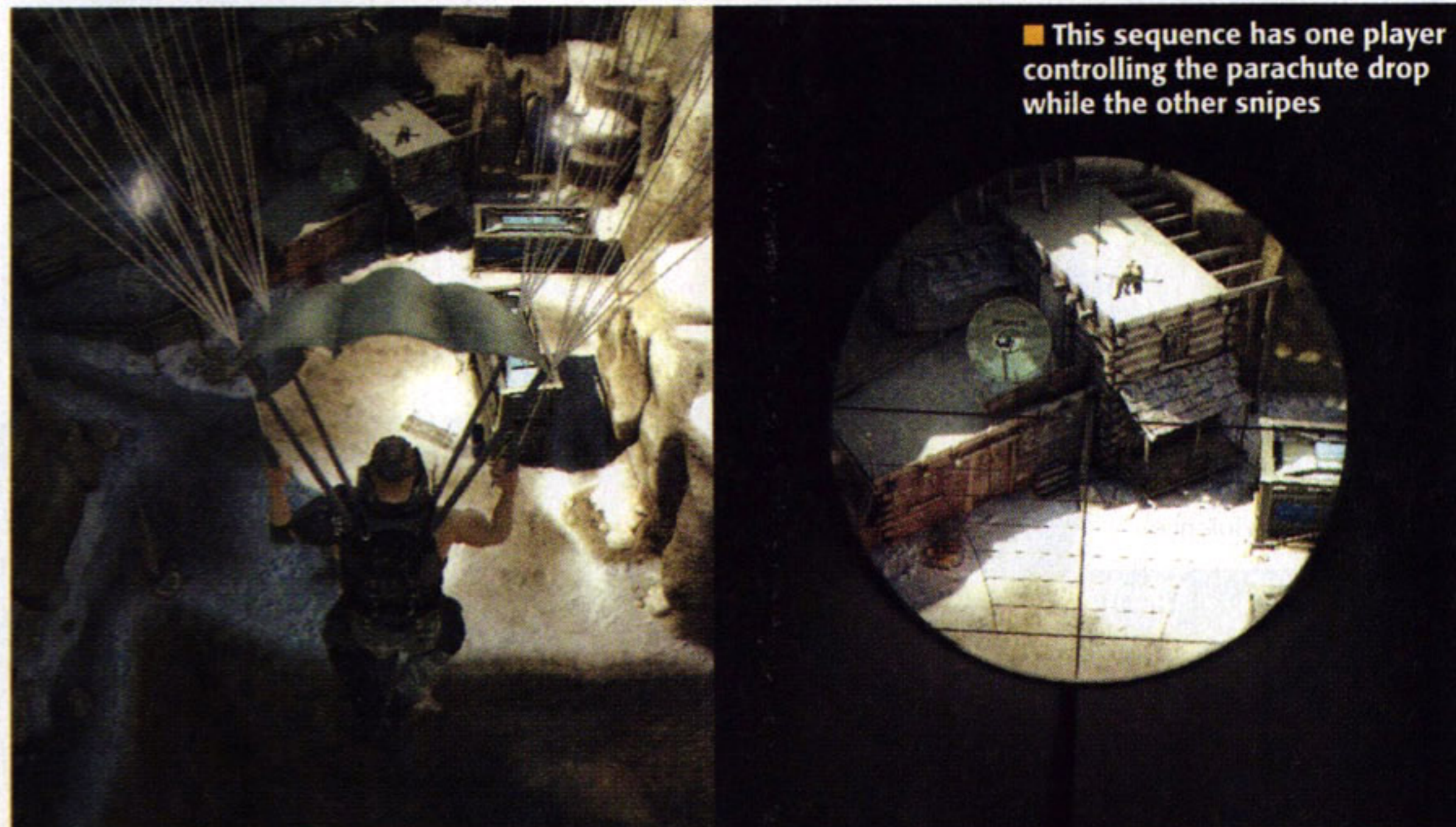
■ If you get wounded, your buddy can help you limp to a safer location



■ Should you lose all your health, you'll have to run away from the light while your partner gives you CPR



■ This sequence has one player controlling the parachute drop while the other snipes





XBOX 360

Forza Motorsport 2

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
 > **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

REDLINE OR FINISH LINE?

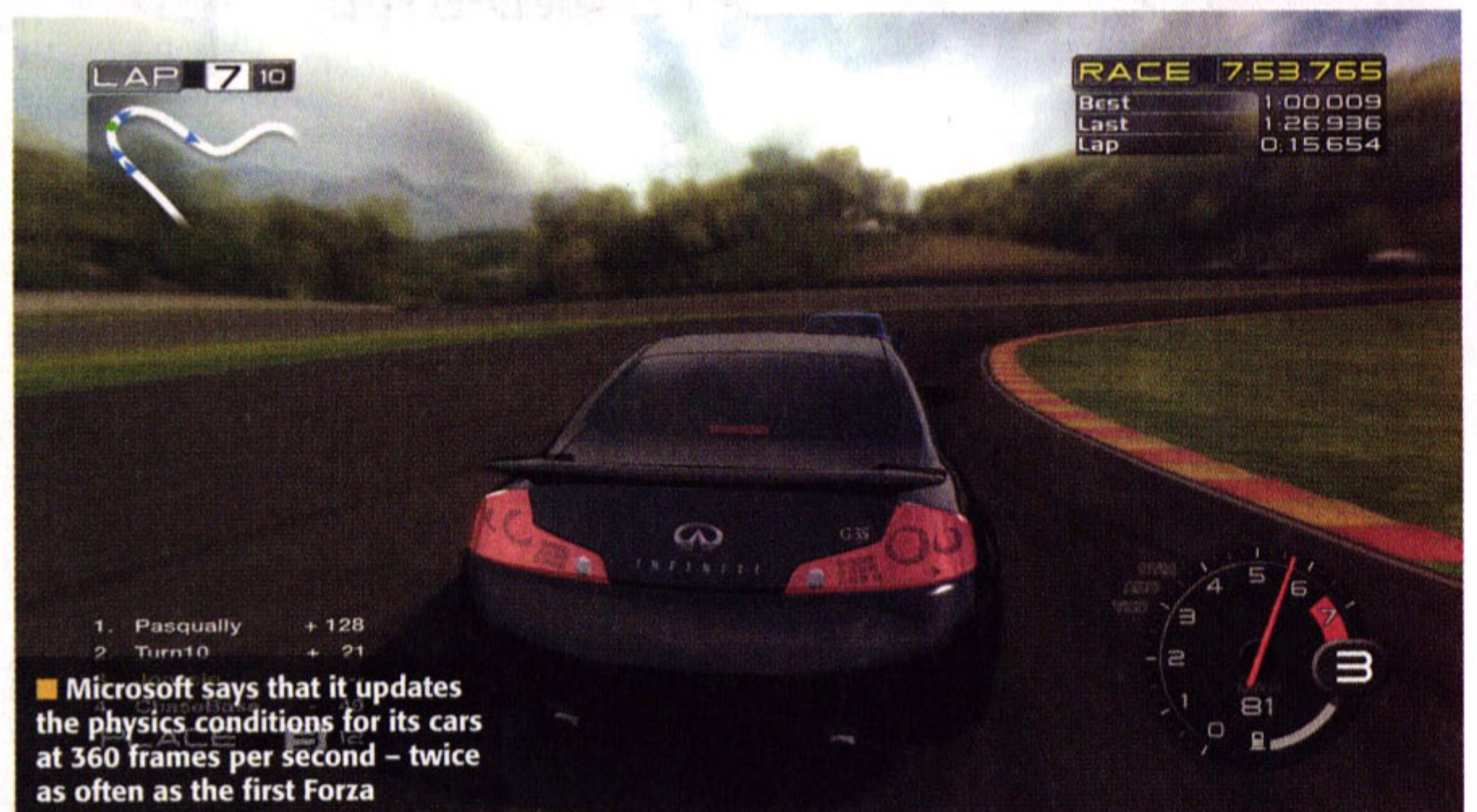
E3 was an interesting juxtaposition for two racing franchises. Sony brought an HD demo of Gran Turismo, while Microsoft showed some nondescript clips and wireframes from Forza Motorsport 2. Neither contained much substance, but the reaction from the crowds couldn't have been more different. Sony's GT presentation was not only confusing (since the demo wasn't representing an actual game) but it was underwhelming as well. Show goers, meanwhile, were excited about the second entry in Microsoft's simulation racer. But what do we actually know about the game?

This new Forza once again covers the spectrum of cars, from the pedestrian to

the jaw-dropping. The game spans 300 cars from over 50 manufacturers, and this year includes some newbies like a few Lamborghinis and an F1 McLaren road car. These will not only be customizable once again, but now the game will encourage you to spend more time, effort, and money on each one. As you progress in the career mode upgrades will be available, but your car itself will also level up as you have more success.

Like the first Forza, the online and single-player components will be integrated so that you can progress your career while playing online with friends. Now you not only race career mode races online, but you also

■ Microsoft wouldn't confirm a Forza 2/360 wheel bundle at the time of this writing, but the company did say that it is working with third-party manufacturers on the creation of their wheels



accrue money, cars, and parts by simply racing in the online portion itself. Microsoft isn't letting all the cats out of the bag just yet about this mode, but it did tell us that similar to Project Gotham Racing 3, this game will have Forza Motorsport TV, allowing you to watch the action going on all over Xbox Live. Microsoft

says it has some surprises in store for this mode, so we're anxious for them to spill the beans. For those of you who like this kind of passive experience or are, how shall we say...too chicken to race, you'll be glad that the Drivatar feature is returning for Forza 2. Microsoft says that your Drivatar will be smarter – which is always good. However, we remain skeptical that any AI could replicate people's tendency to drive hard into a corner and brake late – something that

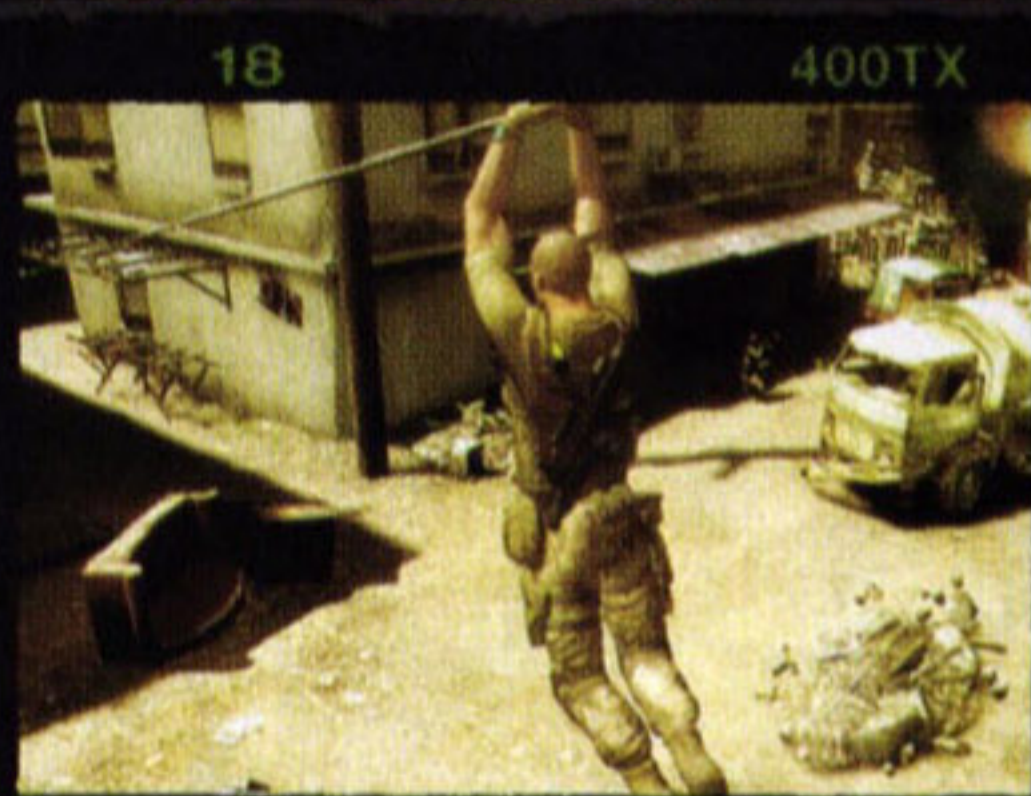


always gives human racers an advantage over the by-the-book AI.

Clearly there are still some secrets left to uncover about this game, but barring anything major, it looks like we're in store for another solid outing from the series. On the bright side, Microsoft keeps tightening the feature set and exploring new ways to find more speed from this established genre. ■ ■ ■



Tom Clancy's
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DOUBLE AGENT



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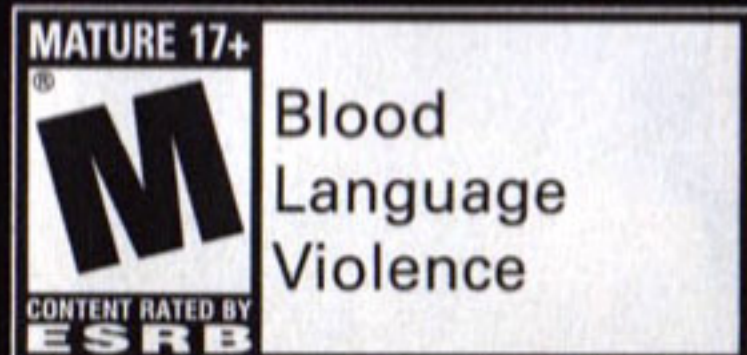
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PlayStation 2

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Vaan may look like a cross between Tidus and Zidane, but he's actually less of a doofus than either of them



COMBAT LOG

Mesmenir F readies Kick.

The "G" by the character names mean Gambits are turned on. In this fight, all party members are acting automatically

Attack	G Vaan	HP 686 951	MP 95
ACTION	G Basch	HP 712 969	MP 69
ACTION	G Penelo	HP 602 833	MP 107

PLAYSTATION 2

Final Fantasy XII

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX > RELEASE OCTOBER 31

SO CLOSE

The long wait is almost over. Gamers in the U.S. can now count the days until Final Fantasy XII is in their hands, ending the years of anticipation that began in 2003. However, for you RPG fanatics that can't take it anymore, we've got some impressions directly from the latest playable English version of the game.

Because it is such a radical shift for the series, the battle system in FF XII is what has been attracting the most attention. All actions occur in real-time as players move through large areas with freely roaming enemies – elements that often appear in the MMO genre. Now that we've delved into the game's Gambit system (which manages your allies' AI), we can say that the similarities to massively multiplayer games don't stop there.

Gambits do much more than simply tell your companions to auto-attack; they can be used to effectively program an ally into a particular role. Have one party member heal anyone whose HP drops below 30 percent while another focuses all attacks on enemies with over 50 percent HP. It isn't required that you use Gambits to perform these actions; if you'd like, you can manually enter each com-

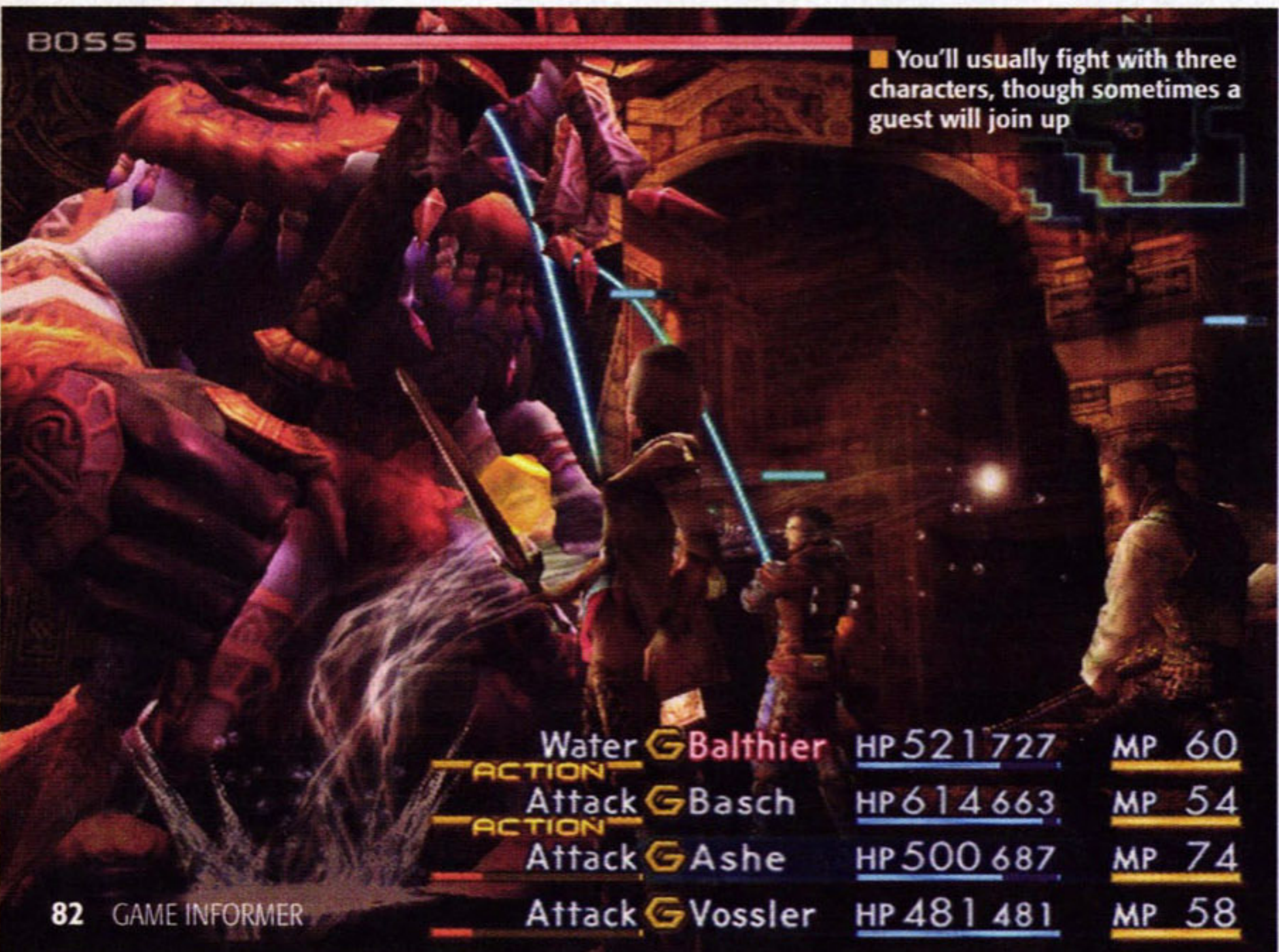
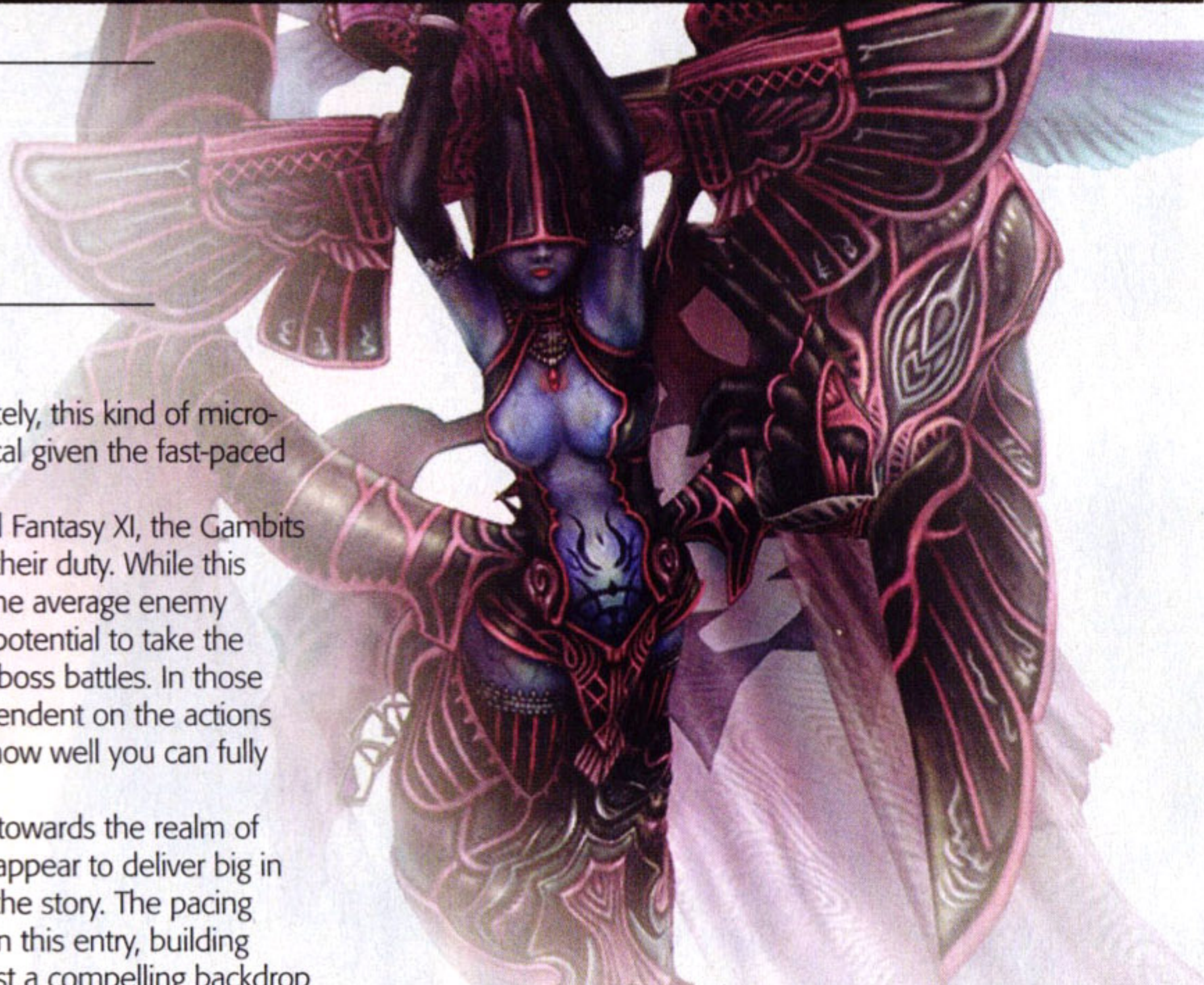
mand for any character. Unfortunately, this kind of micro-management is slow and impractical given the fast-paced nature of the fights.

Like a good leveling party in Final Fantasy XI, the Gambits ensure that no one deviates from their duty. While this efficiency-focused system makes the average enemy encounter go smoothly, it has the potential to take the sense of achievement from major boss battles. In those encounters, success feels less dependent on the actions you take personally and more on how well you can fully automate your party.

Despite its unnerving gravitation towards the realm of MMORPGs, Final Fantasy XII does appear to deliver big in one area those games never can: the story. The pacing feels much slower and deliberate in this entry, building characters and events slowly against a compelling backdrop of political unrest. Thankfully, every important character we've run into so far has been interesting, with no trace of any painful attempts at comic relief (Wakka, Zell, your legacy is dead!).

The Final Fantasy franchise is in for some changes.

Whether U.S. fans embrace or reject them has yet to be seen, but FF XII's attempts to bring certain MMO conventions into a single-player framework is certainly a daring endeavor. Be sure to check out our full review in next month's issue to see if it pays off. ■ ■ ■



You'll usually fight with three characters, though sometimes a guest will join up

Water	G Balthier	HP 521 727	MP 60
ACTION	G Basch	HP 614 663	MP 54
ACTION	G Ashe	HP 500 687	MP 74
ACTION	G Vossler	HP 481 481	MP 58



Basch
LP 00028

Unlike Final Fantasy X, everyone uses the same grid to acquire skills. Sending them in different directions will ensure you have a variety of abilities

LP 20	★ Heavy Armor 1
Leather Helm	Bronze Helm
Leather Armor	Bronze Armor

NYKO HAS YOUR XBOX 360 COVERED

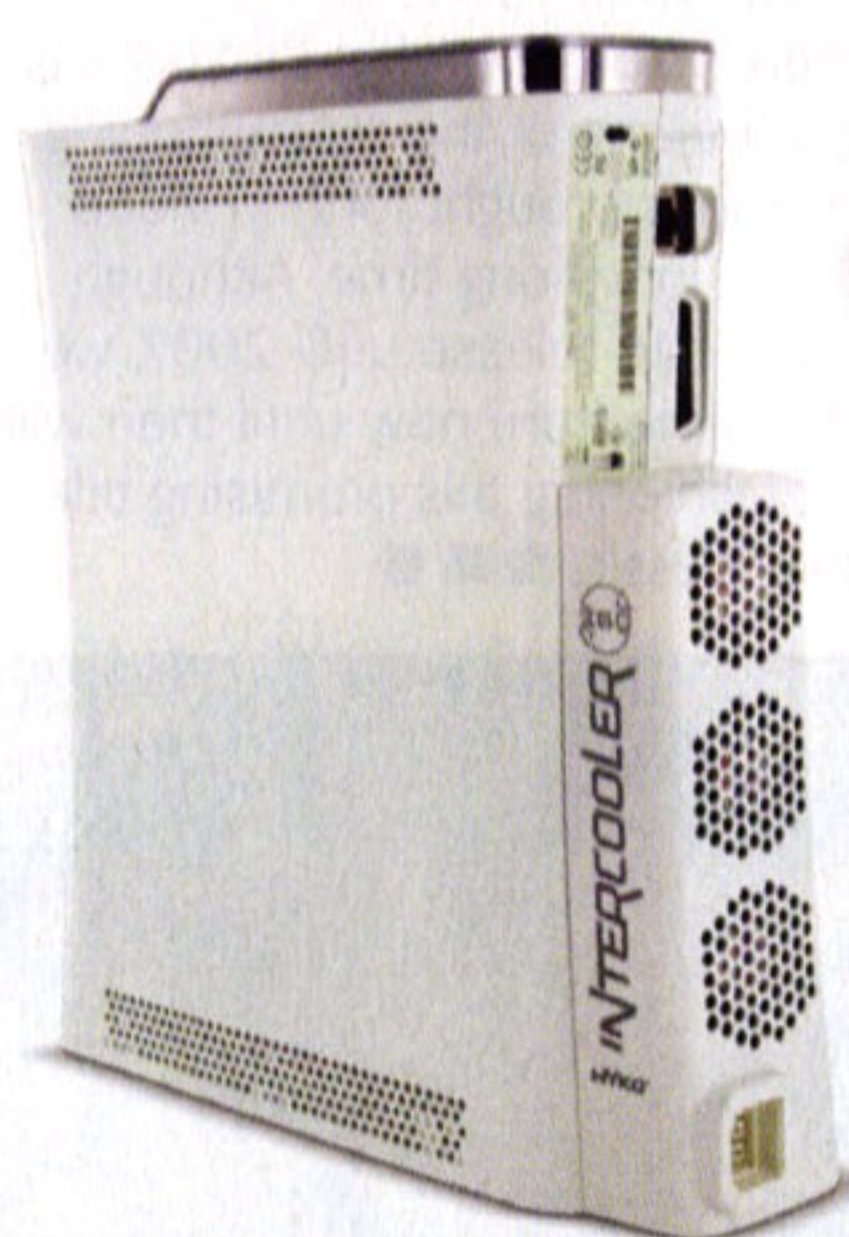


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charge cable

GAME 360 FACE
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NYKO

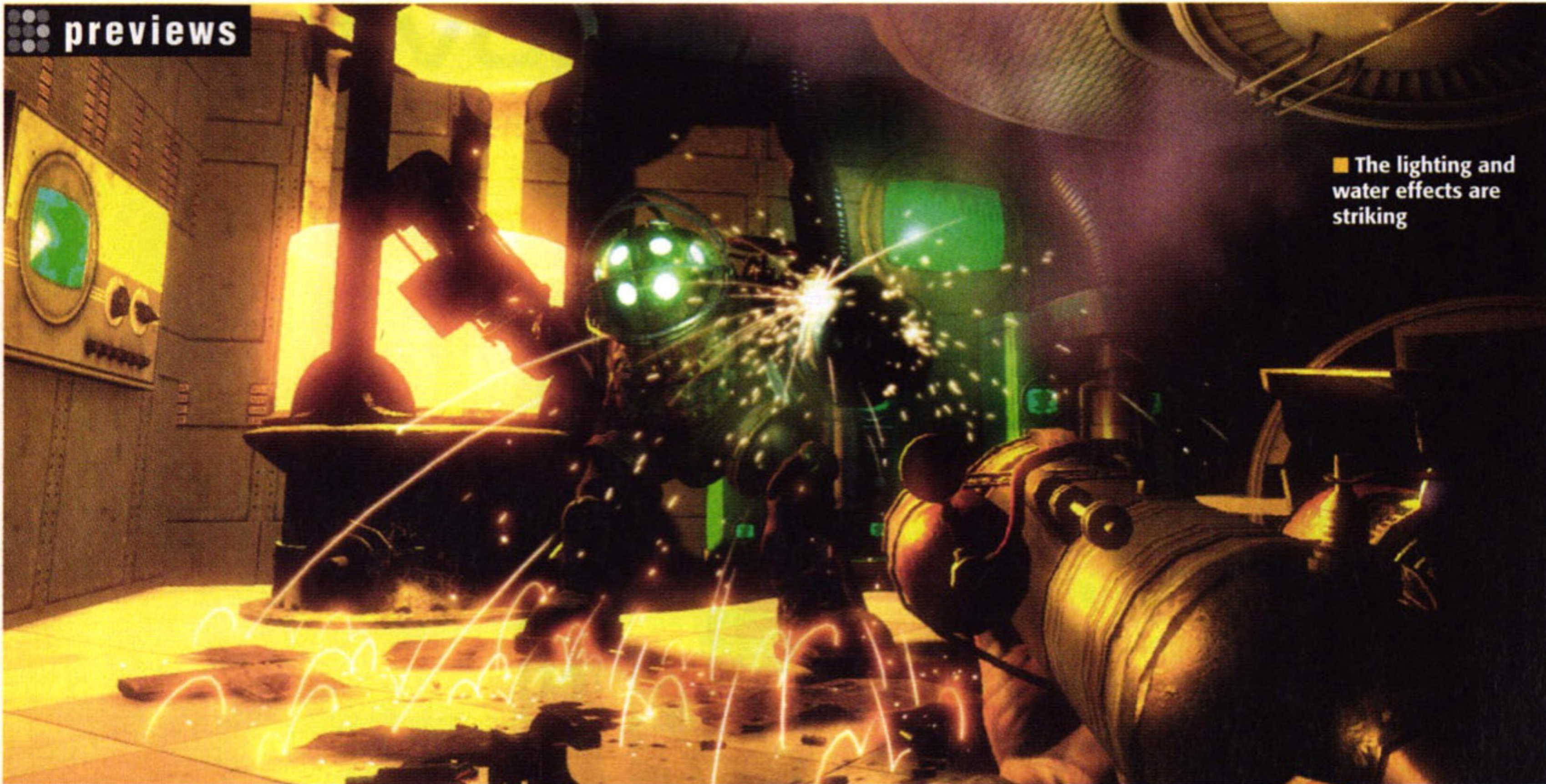
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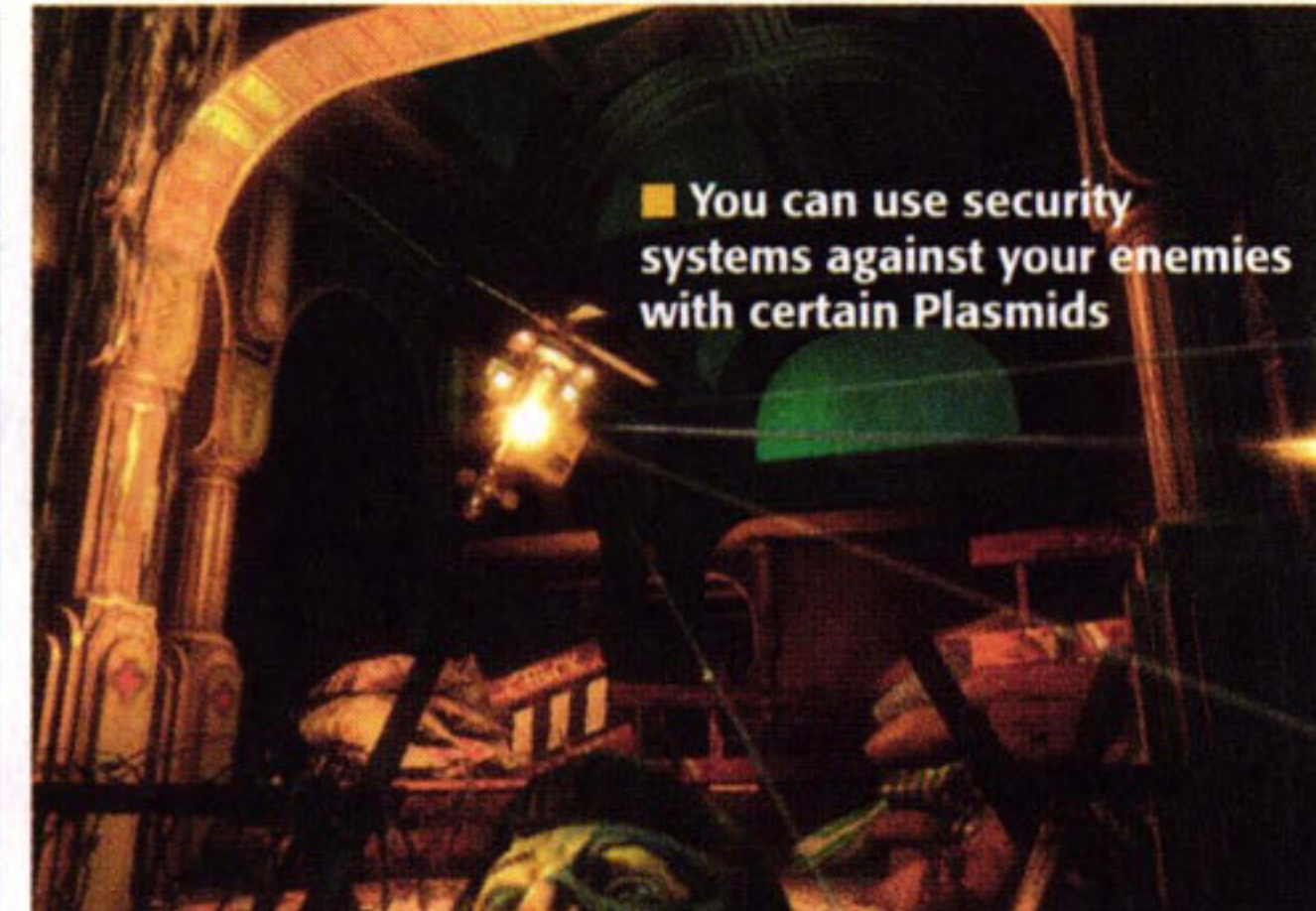


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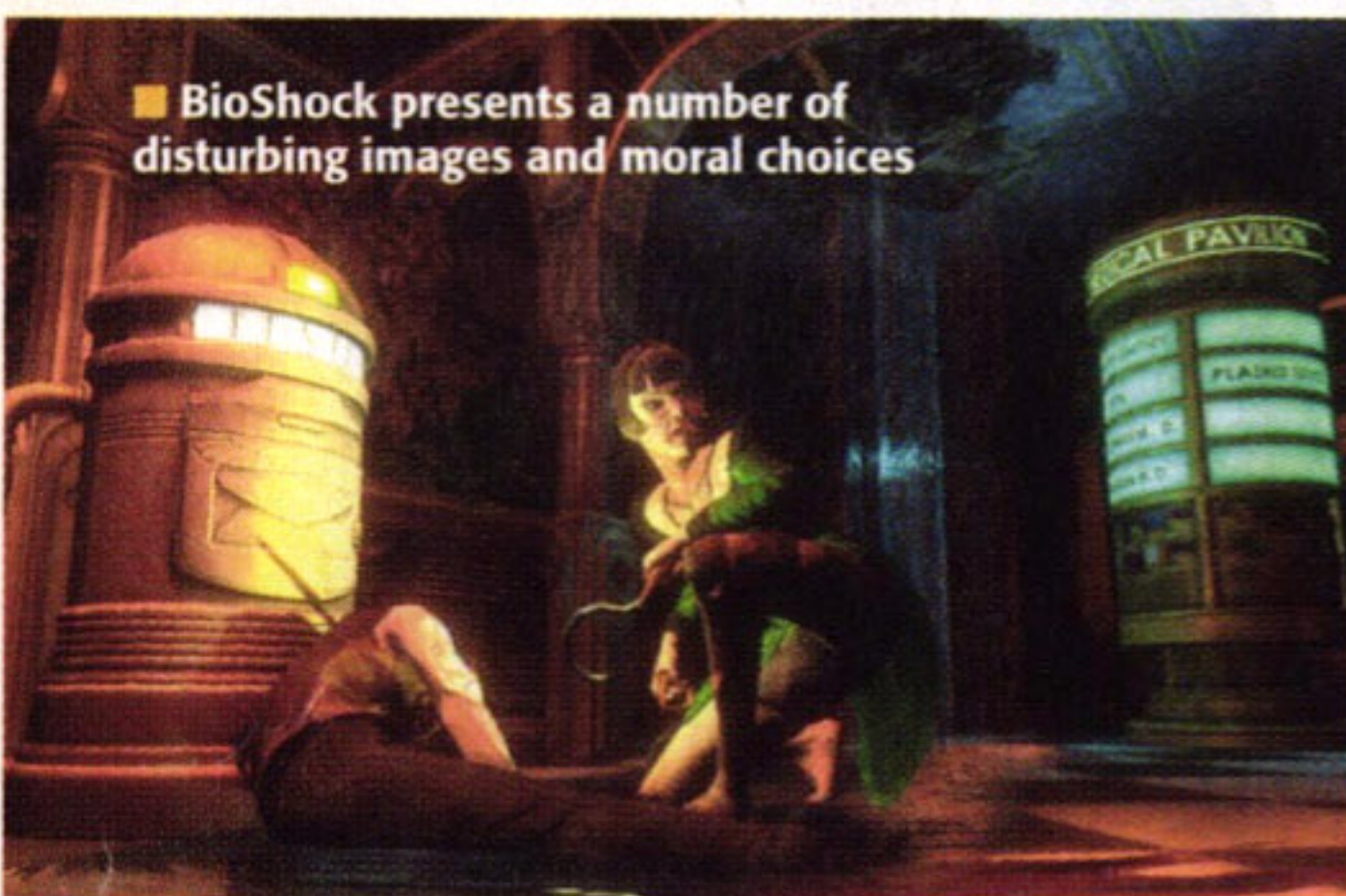
GameStop™



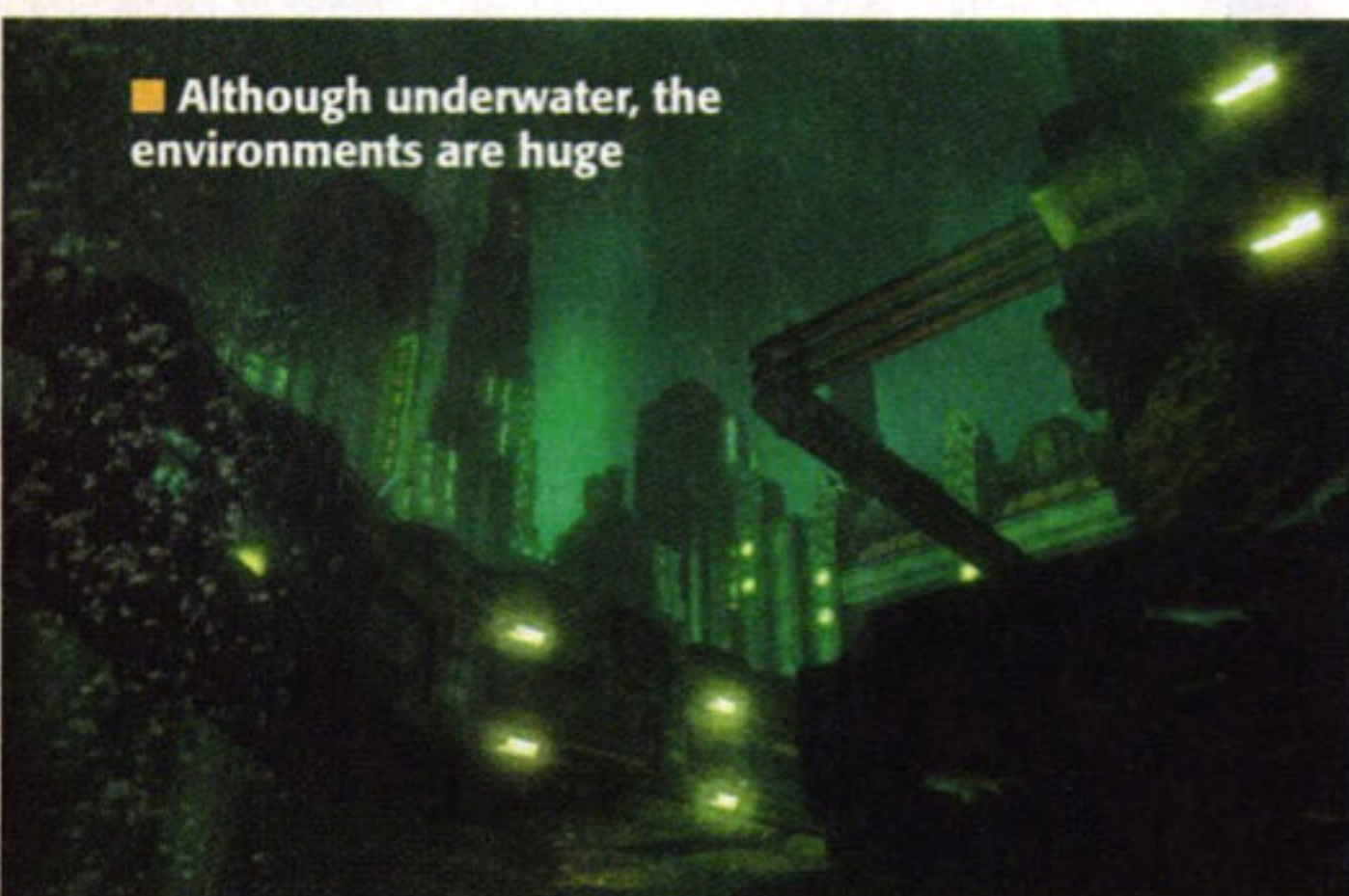
■ The lighting and water effects are striking



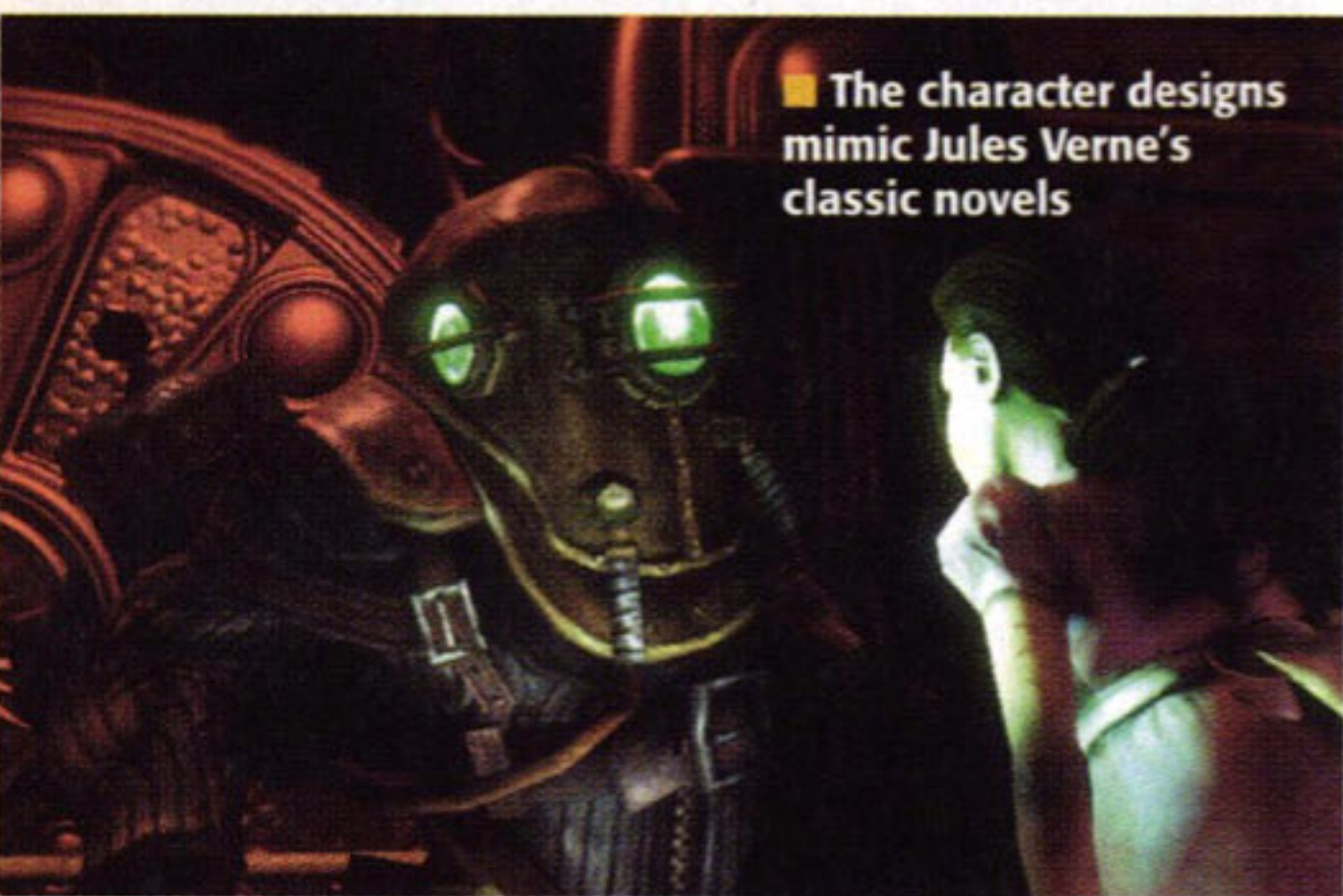
■ You can use security systems against your enemies with certain Plasmids



■ BioShock presents a number of disturbing images and moral choices



■ Although underwater, the environments are huge



■ The character designs mimic Jules Verne's classic novels

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PC

BioShock

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES > DEVELOPER IRRATIONAL GAMES > RELEASE 2007

THE SIN OF PRIDE

Since the game debuted on the cover of *Game Informer* back in March, *BioShock* has continued to impress both gamers and the media alike. Right now, we can't think of a game we're more excited to get our hands on. Developed by Irrational Games, the creative minds behind such classics as *System Shock 2* and *Freedom Force*, *BioShock* tells the disturbing tale of Rapture, the undersea utopia that went terribly, terribly wrong.

As you begin to explore the art deco ruins of Rapture, you'll see how the city's reliance on genetic modification and dependence on a mysterious substance called "Adam" turned it into a nightmare tableau populated by hideous monsters. Against this grim backdrop, you'll be forced to make some hard decisions about how

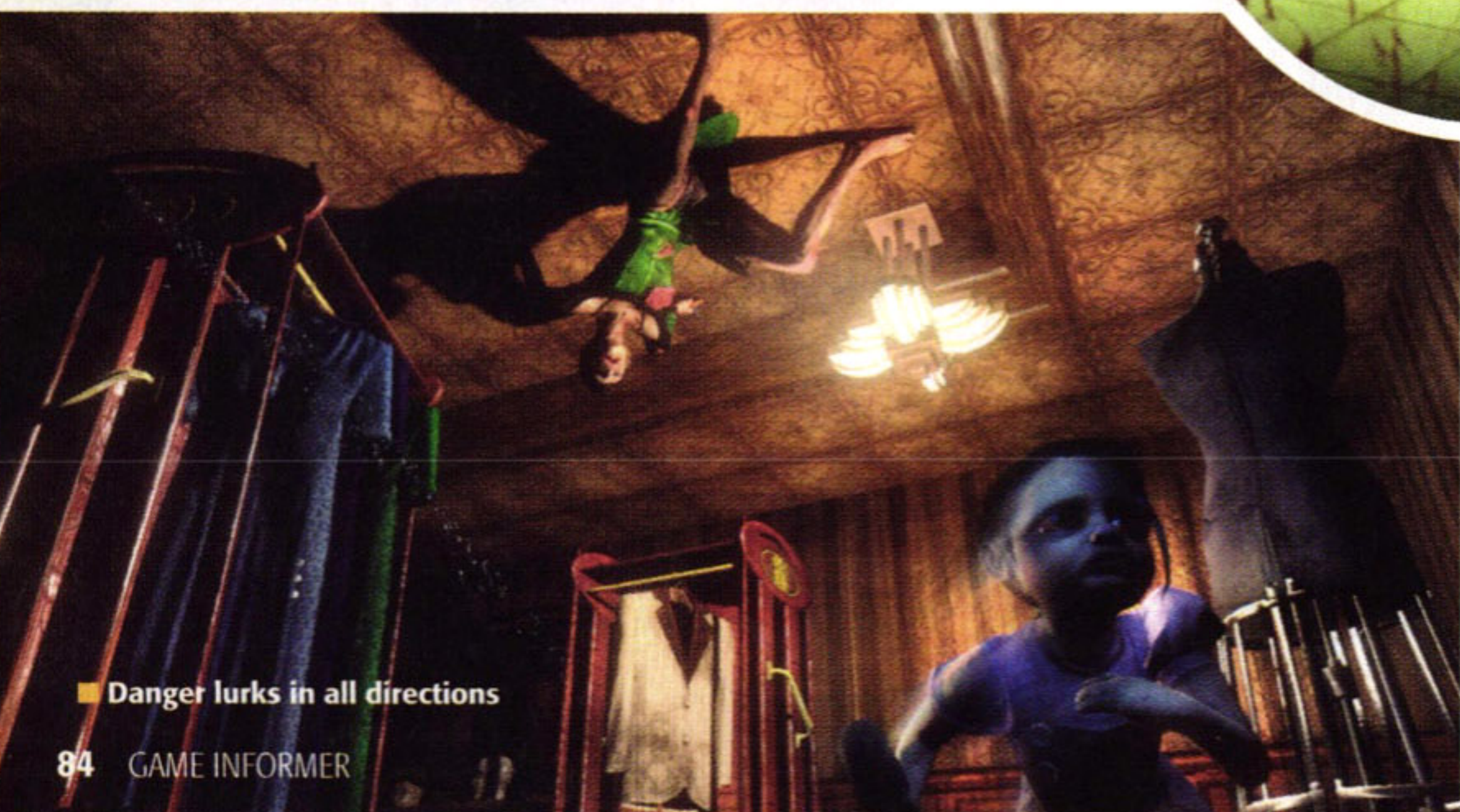
you're going to survive, and what kind of person you're going to be.

The most prominent decision you'll have to make is if and what kind of Plasmids (the game's term for a host of genetic modifications) to make use of. These Plasmids range from familiar gaming powers like Pyrokinesis (fire projectile), Telekinesis (the ability to lift and throw objects with your mind), and Cryokinetic Touch (freeze) to more interesting powers like Springboard Trap (a small vortex that launches enemies into the air when they step on it), Decoy (which confuses enemies into thinking one of their own is you), and Splicer Irritant (causes Splicers, one of the game's most dangerous enemies, to attack the next thing it sees).

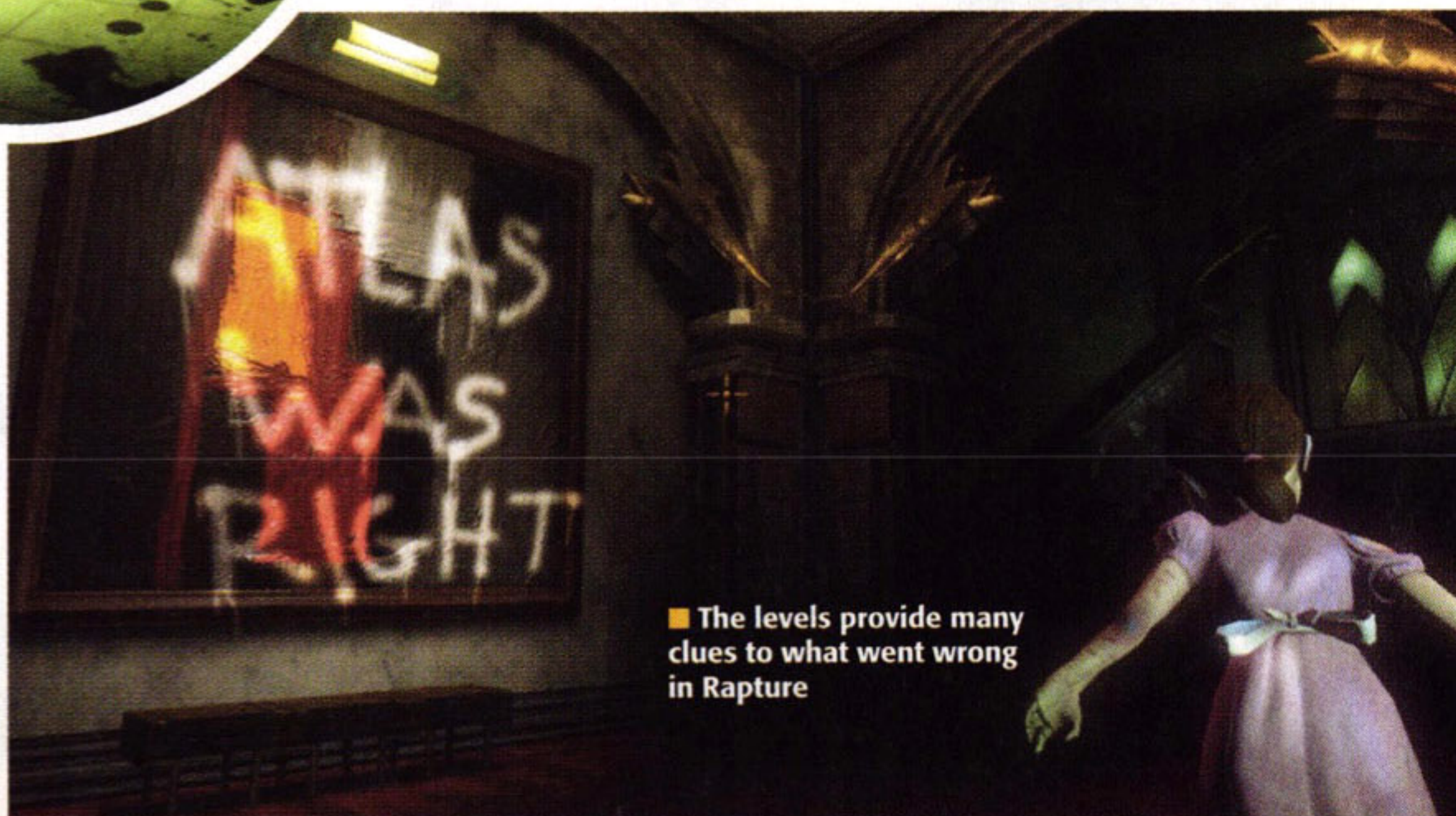
Given that the mutants that now stalk you in Rapture were horribly changed by their addiction to genetic modifications and Adam, it's likely

that you are running a terrible risk by using Plasmids, although Irrational won't reveal just what the cost to your humanity will be. They have, however, lifted the veil on some of the game's levels. Thus far, most of the footage shown has been in the ravaged art deco interiors of Rapture, but the enormous underground city holds many more surprises for the player. One interesting level is Arcadia, a giant biodome that provides the oxygen for the entire complex. Although you are still within the confines of Rapture, Arcadia plays out as a gigantic forest, demonstrating that Irrational's design has been limited only by its imagination.

Whether you proceed through the adventure in a moral fashion, or gradually become what you've come to hate most, there's no doubt that *BioShock* is looking to be one of the most gripping, creative visions brought forth in video games for a long, long time. Although it's not slated to release until 2007, we expect the time from now until then will be spent fashioning this promising title into a true classic. ■ ■ ■



■ Danger lurks in all directions

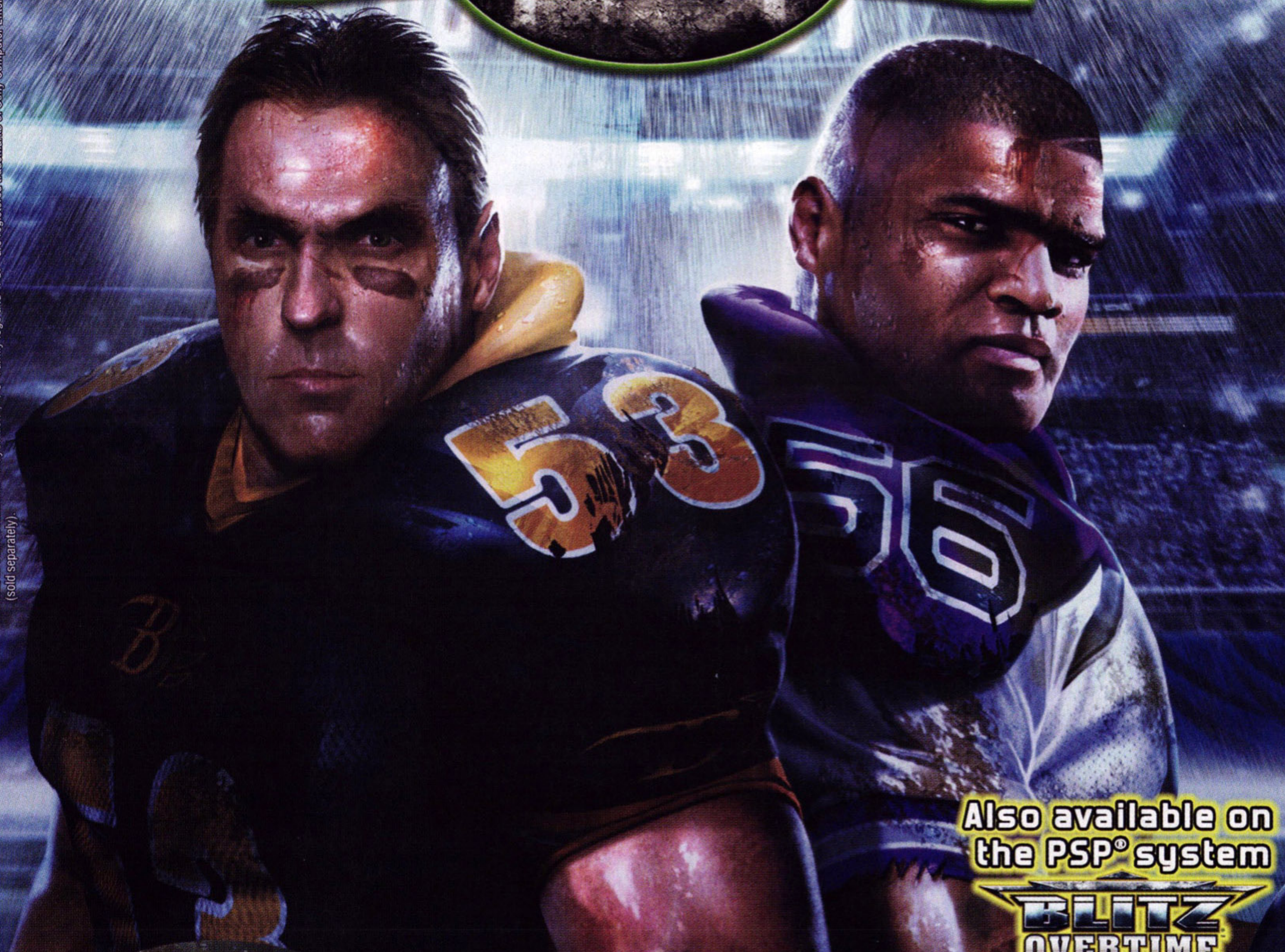


■ The levels provide many clues to what went wrong in Rapture

BLITZ

THE LEAGUE

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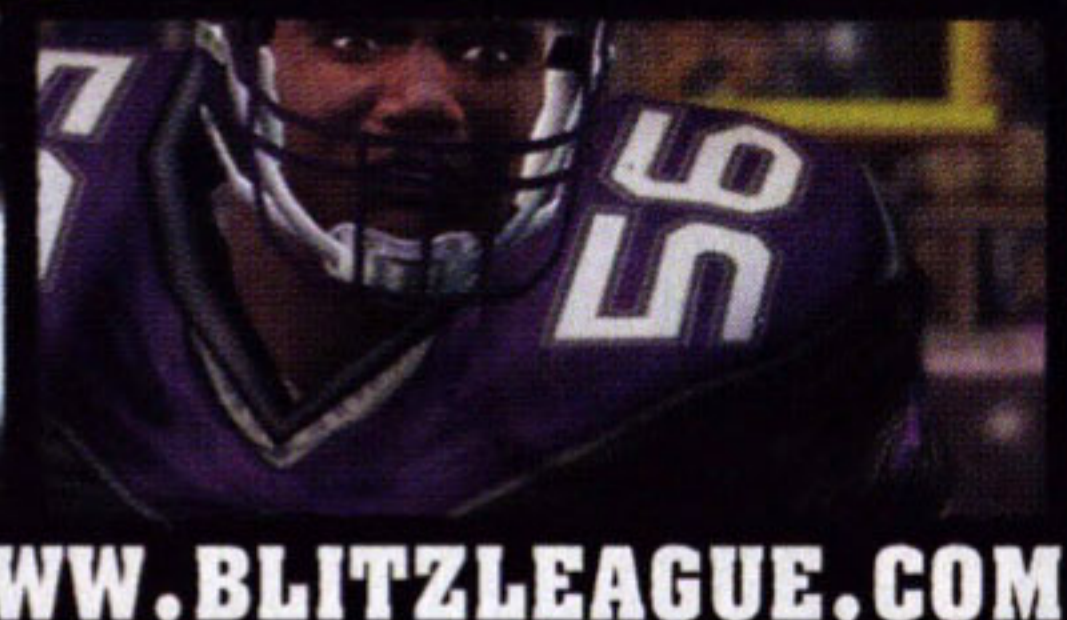


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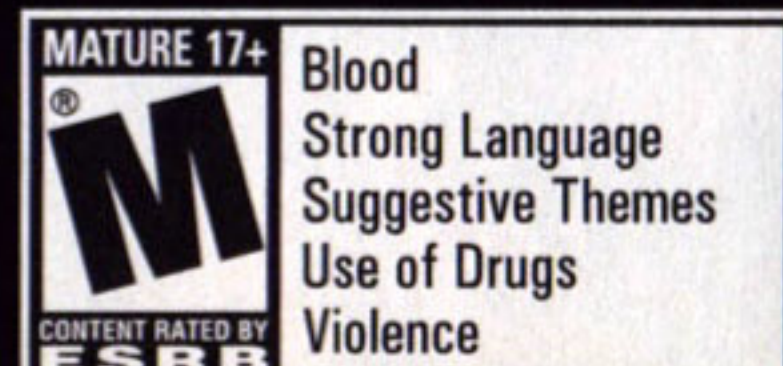


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■ Provided your machine has the horsepower, Age of Empires III is still one of the best-looking RTS games to date

PC

Age of Empires III: The Warchiefs

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** ENSEMBLE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 10

GOING NATIVE

Conquering the New World during the age of imperialism was all fine and good in Age of Empires III, but who doesn't want to step into the moccasins of a brave Native American and kick a little European rear? This expansion for AoE III allows players to do just that, and packs in some improvements to the basic gameplay to boot.

The biggest differences between native civilizations and their Old World counterparts are the titular Warchiefs and the Firepit structure. The Warchief unit serves as the native version of the Explorer (a hero unit that can't be permanently killed), but unlike the Explorer will grow in power as your tribe advances through the ages. Warchiefs also give aura-like buffs to nearby military units, so keeping him upright and in the fray is very desirable. Firepits allow you to order your worker units to perform specific dances

that give global advantages to your civilization. For instance, the fire dance will greatly increase the damage your troops do to buildings, which counteracts a major native weakness. Of course, dancing workers bring in no resources, so it's a balancing act like anything else.

A couple of new multiplayer features sound interesting as well. A "treaty mode" where nobody is allowed to attack for a set timeframe will allow for games devoid of early rush tactics. Plus, a "revolution" option for European civilizations (which takes the place of advancing to the Imperial Age) turns all your workers into militia and gives big military boosts at the expense of your Home City and resource-gathering. All in all, Age of Empires III: The Warchiefs should offer plenty to fans when it launches on October 10. ■ ■ ■



■ The Saloon is another new building in the expansion

PLAYSTATION 3

Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **RELEASE** WINTER 2006

ALL GROWN UP



If nothing else, the new Mobile Suit Gundam can boast of some impressive visuals. Early demos of the game show off the mammoth mech fighting machines with impressive weapon effects, swirling dust, and remarkably detailed vehicle bodies. From the surrounding landscape to the intricate appearance of man-made buildings, there's no part of the world that doesn't look great. For those more familiar with the anime look of the franchise, this realistic style is likely to be a major change of pace.

From what we've seen of the game in action, there's not as much to surprise players on the gameplay side of the equation. You'll control your bulky Gundam with appropriately bulky, slow responding controls. Moving and changing direction takes time and patience, unless you make use of the available jet pack on your suit for faster maneuvering. In the demonstration we saw, the Gundam utilized some massive long range weapons in addition to an energy blade used to slice apart machines. Individual pieces of enemy vehicles can be destroyed until your foe completely collapses in a quick cutaway cinematic. While

the action seems pretty standard behind-the-back fare, there's some evidence of open-ended missions that allow you to tackle objectives at your own pace and from your own angle of attack, as well as command your squad so you can plan out your own strategic approach. You'll also be able to upgrade your mechs using points you acquire through completing mission objectives. Honestly, it's like no other game we've ever encountered.

Sarcasm aside, given the early stage of development, it's not surprising that the gameplay was in need of some polish. On the bright side, to see the game looking so great this early on bodes quite well for the final visuals. Here's hoping the playability of the game catches up in the coming months. ■ ■ ■




■ We just wish the word Gundam appeared more frequently in the title. That would be awesome!





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PLAYSTATION 2

SOCOM U.S. Navy S.E.A.L.s: Combined Assault

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** ZIPPER INTERACTIVE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 7

ONE LAST DANCE ON PS2

The millions of rabid SOCOM fans out there will be gratified to learn that they won't have to break the bank on a PlayStation 3 to enjoy the next revision of the franchise. Combined Assault, while in some ways aptly described as "SOCOM 3.5," nonetheless throws a ton of new content as well as a number of tweaks to the gameplay that should justify the price tag for any fan of the franchise.

The biggest and best improvement is undoubtedly the online four-player co-op. Being able to tackle the entire single-player game with up to three buddies controlling the rest of your squad is something that many fans have dreamed of for a long time. Even

better, the online community support that is so integral to the SOCOM experience extends to leaderboards for co-op stats as well, so you can find out if your team really is the best virtual anti-terror squad out there.

Also in the realm of single-player additions is revamped AI that will have each enemy adopt different tactics based on what kind of weapon he's carrying. Snipers will try to maintain distance from your team, heavy machine gunners will lay down a base of suppressive fire from a stationary position, and close-range combatants with SMGs or shotguns will attempt to bound from cover to cover while closing to an effective range for their

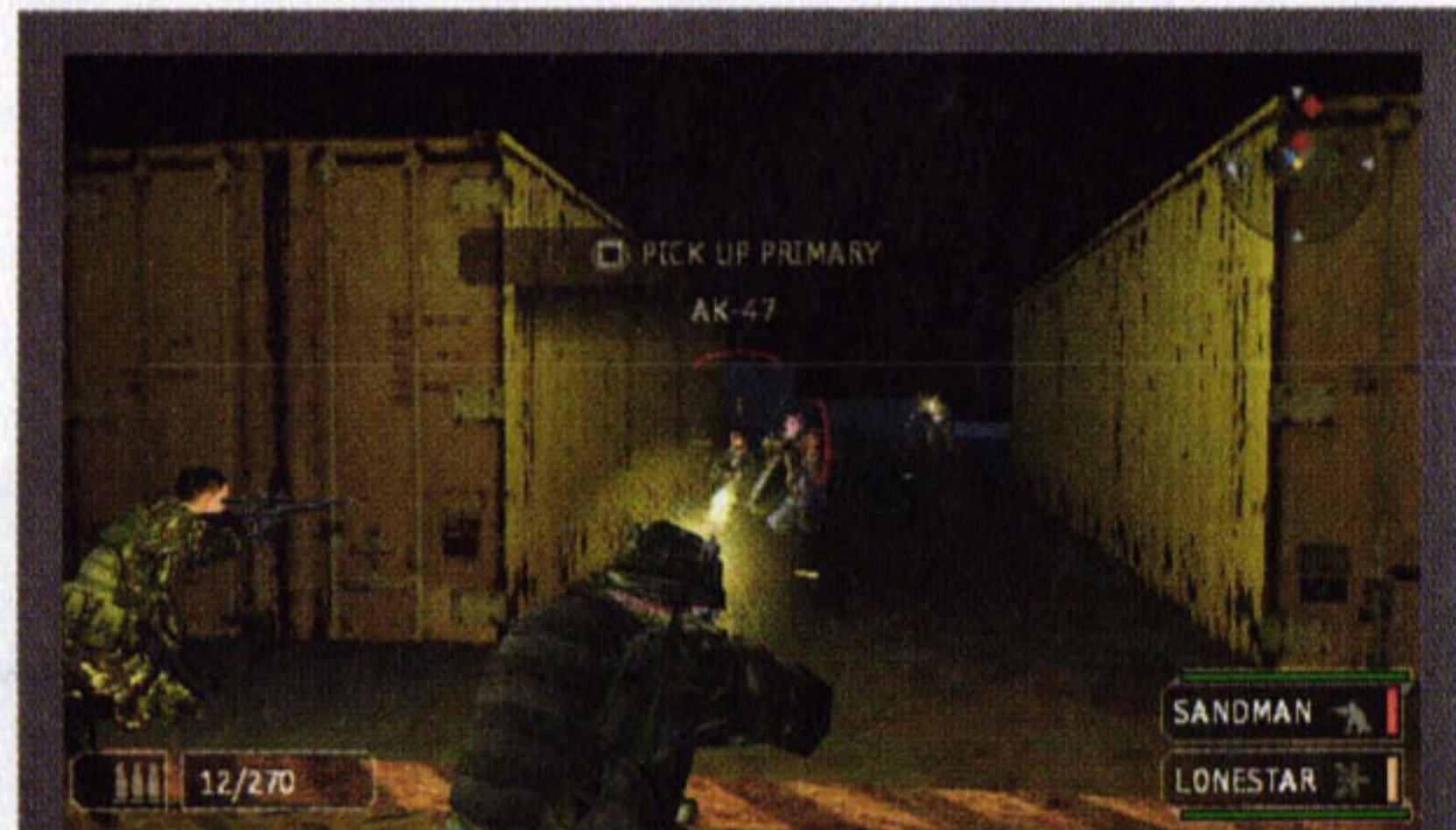
weapon. The developer expects players to see much more coordination and actual tactics from the AI-controlled enemies, which will make pulling off a successful strategy that much sweeter.

Multiplayer, of course, is far from neglected. A slew of new 32-player maps will join the entirety of SOCOM 3's multiplayer element in Combined Assault. This means that you'll be able to jump online and fight SOCOM 3 players without having to go back and load up the older game, though they obviously won't be able to play on any of the new maps. Also, in addition to the community support that SOCOM players expect (leaderboards, stat-tracking, etc.), Combined Assault players will have a wealth of cosmetic customizations at their fingertips. This aspect is planned to be extensive enough that it'll be rare to encounter someone online with the same look as anyone else, so you should be able to recognize that spawn-camping bastard on sight rather than have to squint at nametags before gunning him down.

Though it appears that any truly significant changes or re-workings of the SOCOM formula will have to wait for the PS3, Combined Assault has all the makings of a great pickup for current fans. And the best part is that the November 7 release date isn't that far off. ■■■

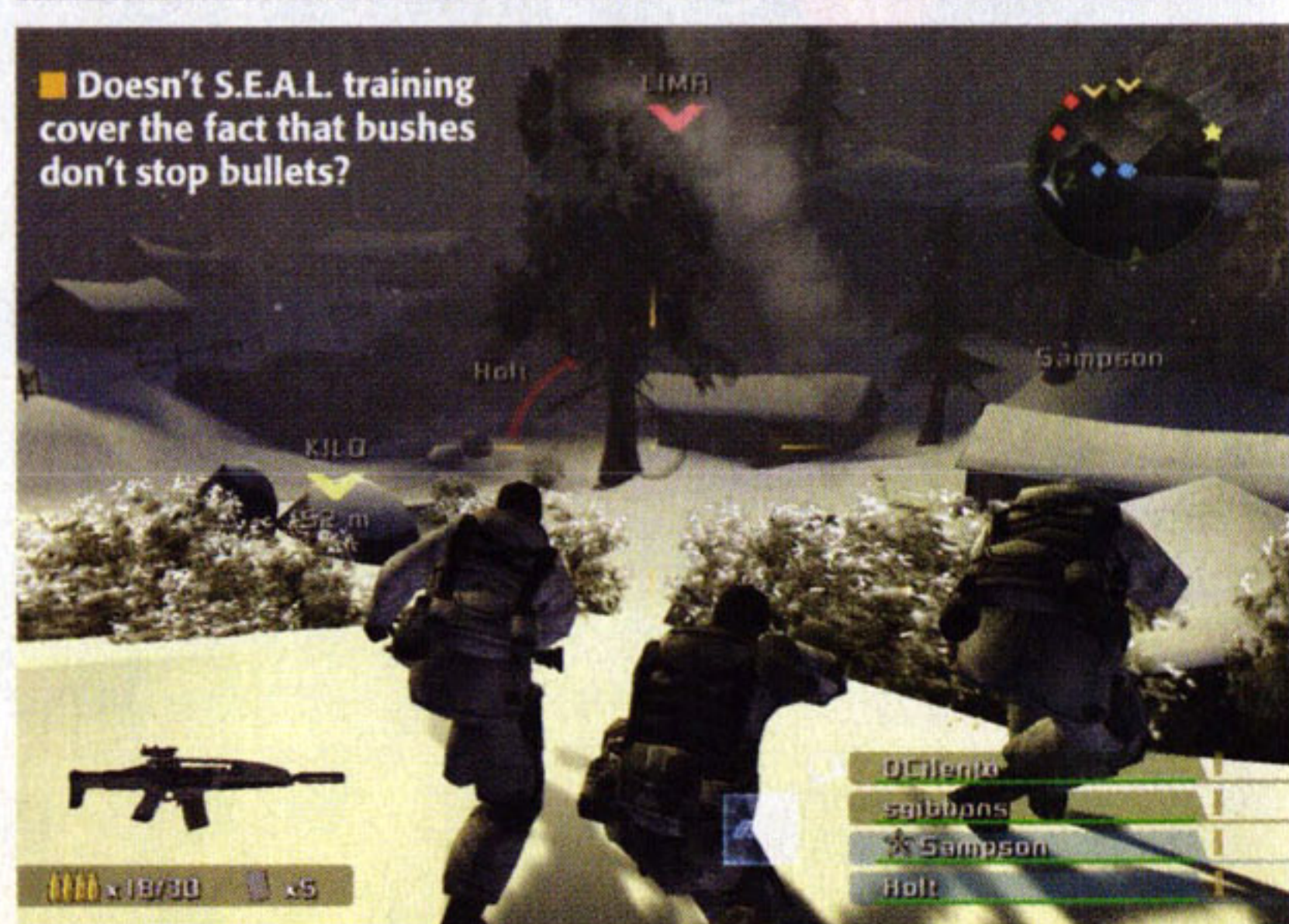


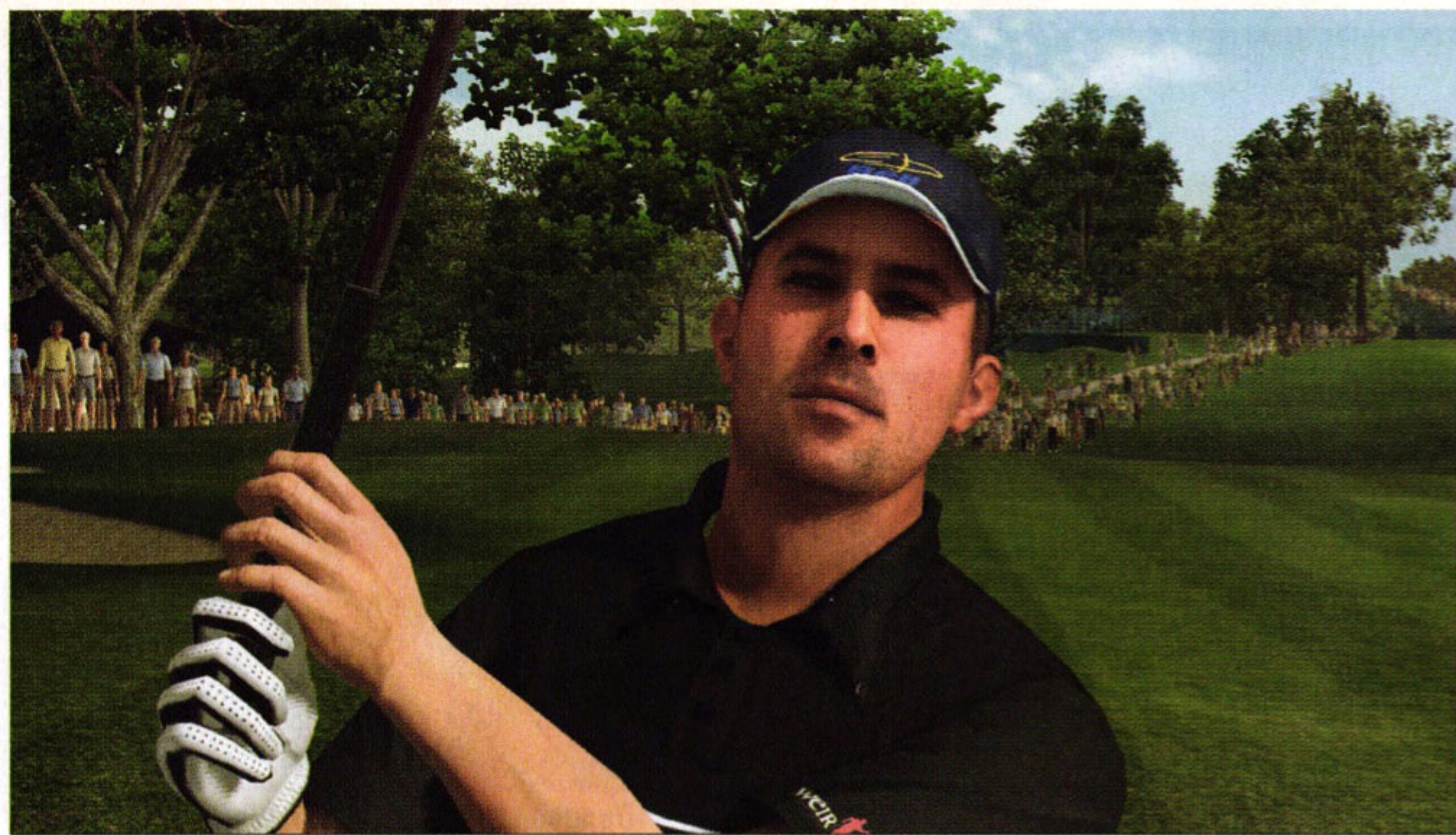
Whatever else you may say about this game, four-player online co-op is totally sweet



CROSSTALKIN'

Coinciding with the release of Combined Assault is the second PSP title, aptly named SOCOM U.S. Navy S.E.A.L.s Fireteam Bravo 2. Similarly to the PS2 game, this is very iterative from the first Fireteam Bravo, but the improvements all look good on paper. The lock-on targeting has been changed to have different weapons lock on at different speeds, and a focus has been placed on extending players' options for non-lethal takedowns. You'll even be able to go back and re-visit maps that you've already beaten to clear them of further (randomly generated) enemy activity to rack up points to spend on goodies like airstrikes. Of course, the Crosstalk feature is back and improved to have a more direct impact on the missions - since the PS2 and PSP S.E.A.L. teams are in the same areas of operation this time, you'll see the changes firsthand as well as receive voice transmissions from the other squad's leader. Multiplayer in Fireteam Bravo 2 has received the biggest boost, with the addition of three all-new gametypes that mirror popular playstyles from other games, including capture-the-flag, Battlefield-style conquest, and hold-the-briefcase variants. PSP owners can look forward to seeing this launch day and date with Combined Assault.





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2007

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) (PS3 ONLINE TBA) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 10 (NOVEMBER FOR PS3)

YEAR OF THE TIGER?

Another tournament, another Tiger win. After his recent major victory, the only other thing Tiger could do to cement his place as the greatest golfer of all time is to bring about world peace. Think Jack Nicklaus could talk down the Israelis and Hezbollah? Puh-leazzze. Send Tiger over there with a nine-iron, and not only would he get it done, he'd probably come back with Bin Laden too! He's like Jimmy Carter, only with a better chip shot and without the peanut smell. No, the real challenge is how to make the latest installment of his video game new and exciting.

Straight out of the gate, Tiger comes at you with something fresh by adopting the upcoming PGA Tour season format with The FedEx Cup, its points, and the PGA Tour's first ever playoff system. This is similar to NASCAR's Chase for the Cup format in which a champion is

crowned after a reset of points based on final regular season standings and the ensuing playoffs are played. Short of lining the fairways with anti-personnel mines, this new system is an exciting change for the sport.

Handling the pressure from a course lined with spectators isn't quite as unnerving as fighting man-eating lions in a hostile coliseum, but nevertheless, Tiger 07 wants to make you sweat. The galleries are bigger, and the crowds will follow you from hole to hole cheering and booing you as you go. Too bad you can't use Tiger's caddy to tell people to shut the hell up.

EA says that the dual analog swing system has been refined to make getting that perfect swing down "tougher." While we don't agree that the new mechanics actually make the game harder, they do give you some new options to get you out of those tough spots. Although

the usual options to choose a flop or chip shot are still there, with the right analog stick you can now change the pitch of the club face, thereby changing how you strike the ball. This can come in handy if you need to loft it over a tree or angle your club head down to punch the ball out of the rough.

Still, even if your game is a little off, in the career mode you can take on challenges and bone up on your strokes before heading off to a tournament to sink the tour studs. Practicing is now a more integral part of the game instead of just a stand-alone mode in the main menu to be ignored.

Okay, so maybe this new Tiger Woods isn't as exciting of a proposition as if it were Tiger Woods' Al-Qaeda Killer, but if you get a good handle on the new analog options, you could be absolutely deadly with a putter in your hands. ■ ■ ■



■ The new picture-in-picture feature enables you to see players curse "%\$##" when their ball hooks off into the woods

PSP

Cash Money Chaos

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE)
> **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** MARCH

TOTAL CARNAGE!



■ The train in this level must be destroyed as it snakes across the playfield

Sony Online Entertainment (one of the most innovative PSP publisher/developers around) has recently announced a Smash TV-styled romp exclusively for the handheld platform and we got the lowdown with some hands-on playtime. Cash Money Chaos features a bunch of modes designed to highlight the same thing: frenetic action. Players are abducted by an alien race that enlists their captives to battle through a messed up interpretation of a '70s game show.

SOE's take adds contemporary features to the Smash M.O. like eight-player deathmatches, two to four-player co-op survival, and a 50-level single-player onslaught. We recently got to play through a few stages of the circus level and were nothing short of delighted with the action. With controls along the lines of Geometry Wars and wave after wave of, shall we say, innovative enemies, CMC seems destined to be an adult send-up of one of gaming's classic ideas.

This is certainly no ride for the kiddie set, despite its youth-friendly inspirations. Bearded ladies, laser equipped nipples

(not on the same character, mind you), and hillbillies are merely the vessels for dialogue that we've heard is so over-the-top that the ESRB was brought in to preview the script. SOE's concern was that, while this is the studio's first Mature-rated game, they wanted to ensure that the title wasn't jumping into AO territory.

Whether or not the politically incorrect situations and characters will offend depends on the player, but it looks like the action will be hard for anyone to deny. The single-player was over the top chaos with swarms of enemies to control, power-ups to grab, and money to collect. Multiplayer includes this along with (in the versus modes) the goal to steal money from the other players. Cash Money Chaos will make you squeal – an involuntary response, we've found, from so much pure fun in such a small package. ■ ■ ■



■ Blood! More blood! This is not a game for the kids



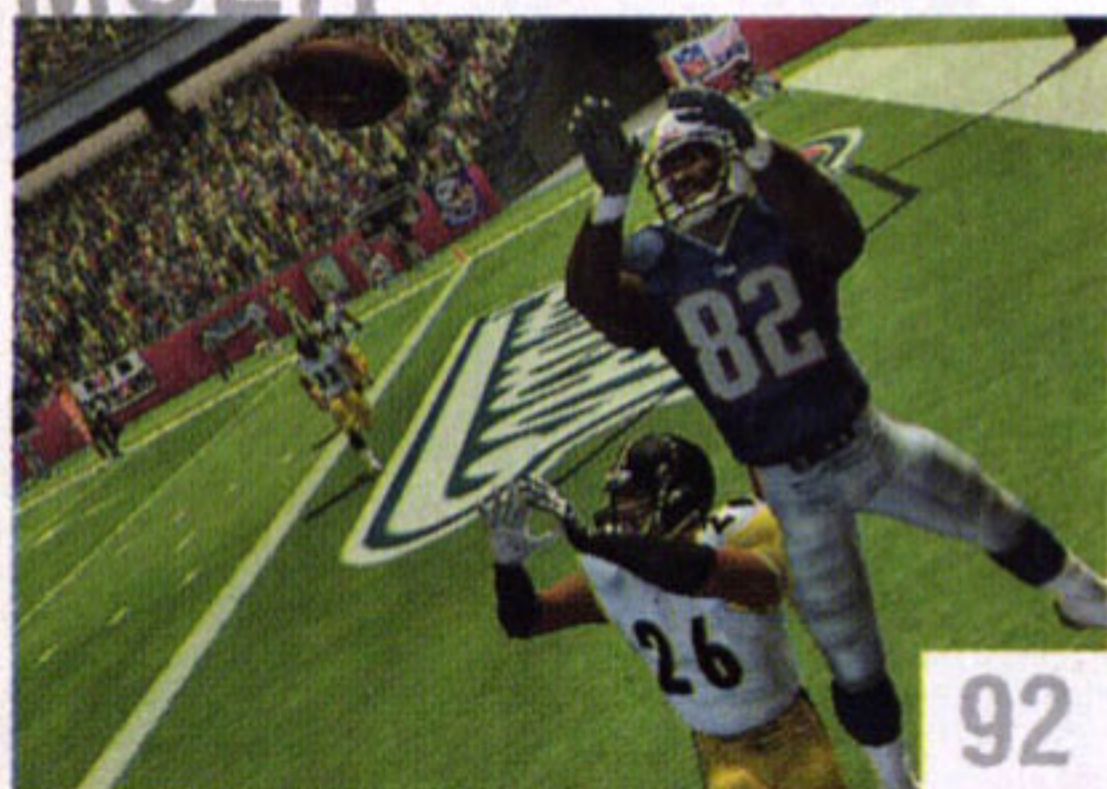
■ A clean interface highlights enemy and power-up locations



REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



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Dungeon Siege II: Broken World

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Okami

With the release of Okami, Clover Studio's Atsushi Inaba joins the ranks of the very few game designers with a genuine masterpiece under their belts. Drawing on the deep traditions of Japanese charcoal brush art, Okami delivers some of the most gorgeous visuals we've ever witnessed in a game. The gameplay, which utilizes a host of innovative brush-based powers, is every bit as inventive as the graphics. Even as the focus of gaming moves towards the next generation, you owe it to yourself to boot up the old PlayStation 2 for this grand adventure.



100

112



Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime

With an irresistible combination of classic Zelda-style action and genuine charm, Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime is a rare all-ages game that appeals to young and old alike. Surprisingly complex, yet easy to pick up and play, expect Rocket Slime to rule your DS for some time. Plus, that little blue blob is just so cute!

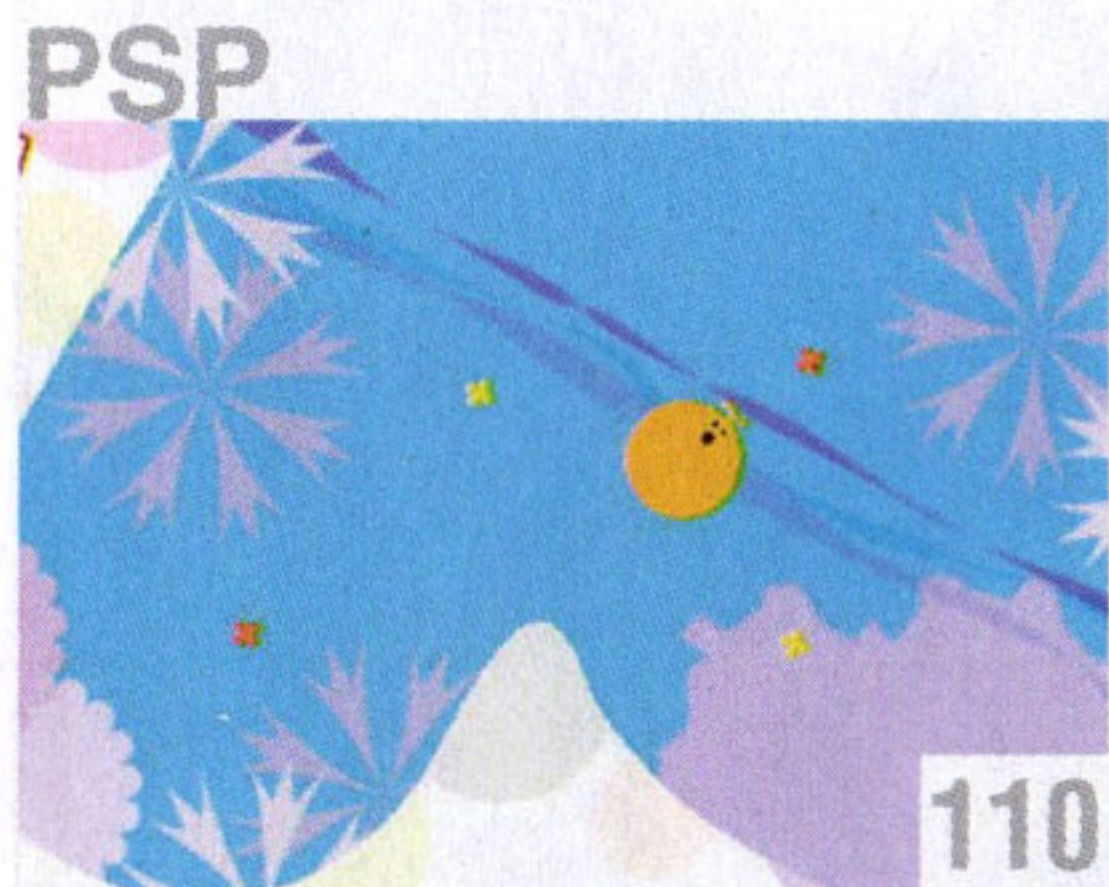
Our crack (or crackhead, we can never decide which) review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put together some definitions of what the numbers mean, what we look for in a game, and also a cheat sheet so the newbies can understand our advanced video game jargon. It is important to note that the Game of the Month is determined only by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

- 10** Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
- 9** Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
- 8** Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.
- 7** Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.
- 6** Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.
- 5** Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
- 4** Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
- 3** Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
- 2** Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
- 1** Pluto. Fails to meet the scientific definition of "game."

- > **Concept:** What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.
- > **Graphics:** How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.
- > **Sound:** Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?
- > **Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.
- > **Entertainment:** Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.
- > **Replay Value**

- High** - You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.
- Moderately High** - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
- Moderate** - Good for a few months or a few times through.
- Moderately Low** - After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
- Low** - You'll quit playing before you complete the game.



Loco Roco

110

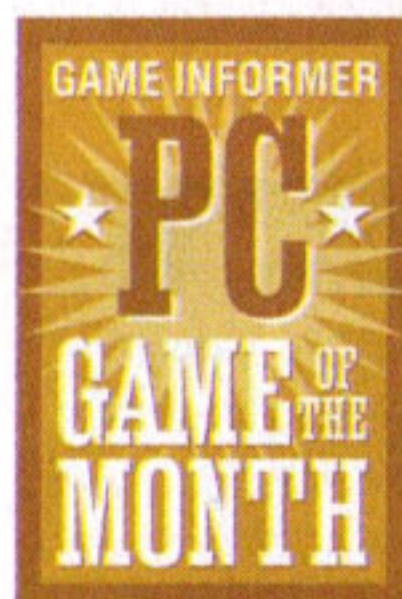


Mega Man ZX

112



108

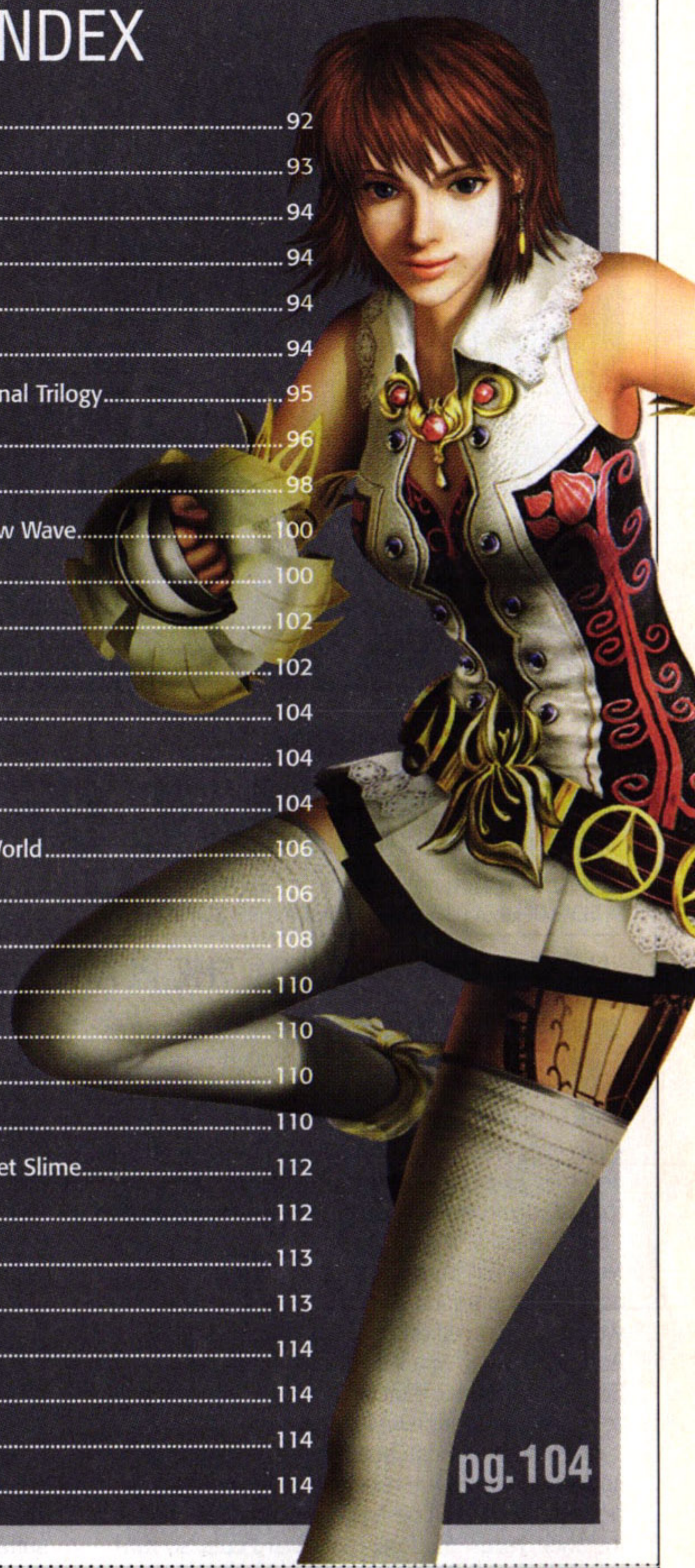


Company of Heroes

Heavyweight RTS developer Relic Entertainment has done it again. Company of Heroes melds a slew of advanced and innovative concepts into an amazing whole, and sets a new high water mark for the genre. The way you think about a battlefield may never be the same after seeing what happens to the environments here once the Axis and Allies have it out. Find out why World War II isn't quite played out yet as a video game setting on page 108.

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the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

This is where GI breaks down multi-platform games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.		Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.		Content suitable only for adults.
	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.		Product is awaiting final rating.
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		

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

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

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 Devil May Cry and Viewtiful Joe

ad hoc – A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity

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

bloom – An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces

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

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

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

fighting – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive

first-party – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system

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 Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

infrastructure – A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances

isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like StarCraft or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance

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

MMO – Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role-playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft

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

normal mapping – A graphical technique in which a hi-res skin containing 3D information, revealed by light reflecting off the surface, is wrapped around a low-res model

NPC – Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans

particle effects – Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time

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

pop-up – When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

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 Xenosaga

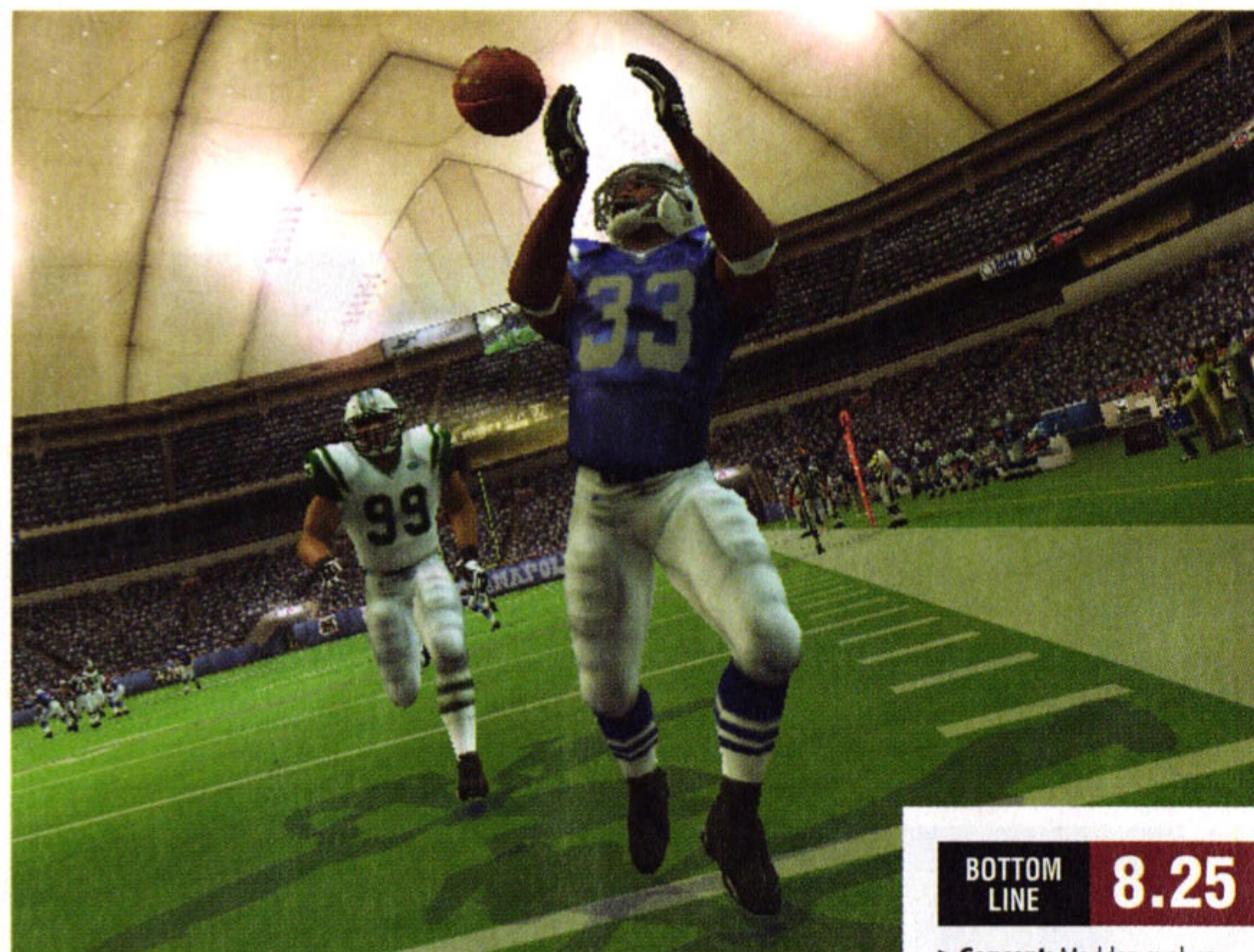
Secular Football Celebration – What public institutions need to call Maddenoliday. Not everyone believes in the power of John Madden, you know!

shooter – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL

strategy – A term we use for games like La Pucelle and Front Mission

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



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Madden NFL 07

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX, GC) (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** AUGUST 22 > **ESRB** E

HATE THE GAME, NOT THE PLAYA

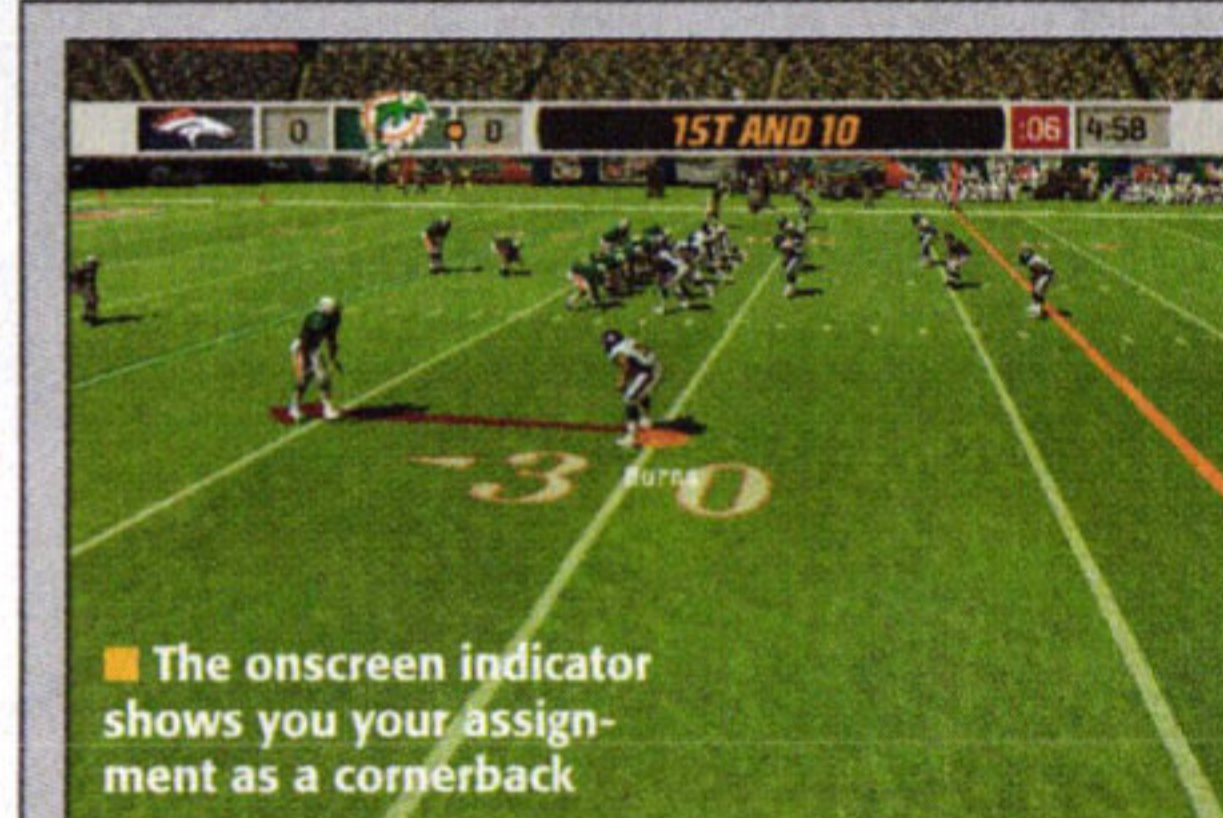
This game really scares me. After playing as a wide receiver in its improved Superstar mode, I started to act like Terrell Owens — and that's not cool. I was calling for the ball every play and became upset with the coaches and my QB when — on a crucial third down play, for instance — the ball wasn't thrown my way. Once I even yelled at the TV, "Hey —hole, I was wide freakin' open!!" Luckily, my ego shrunk to manageable proportions when I started playing more workmanlike positions such as offensive tackle. And that's why I'm a little fearful of this game — that Superstar mode is effective enough that it changes my mentality whenever I play it.

Make sure you use between-game practice sessions to learn the nuances of your position, because some will be easier than others. For instance, receivers don't make hard cuts, so running precise routes can be difficult. Add on the fact that neither of the camera views available to you makes it easy to judge incoming passes, and playing WR can be feast or famine. Despite this learning curve, Superstar mode is immediately fun, as even a routine block, catch, or pass deflection becomes a personal triumph deserving of a gratuitous celebration that would make the refs mad and Steve Smith envious.

What strikes you about this mode is just how crucial each position is to the football team as a whole. Miss a block, run a bad route, or ignore your defensive zone and terrible things could happen very quickly. You are just one cog in the machine, and ultimately, that's what makes Superstar mode both good and bad — but always realistic. As awesome as it is to play so well that you change the course of the game and accrue different player roles and influence points (which you can spend on yourself, your

teammates, and even against the enemy), it's also easy to get frustrated at those around you. The AI is pretty conservative in its playcalling, and oftentimes just doesn't call the right plays. Coach calls a play that sends the receivers short of the first down on third and 15? Too bad. Unless you're the QB, you can't audible out of it. You can run the perfect route, but then the AI QB might make an awful throw that gets picked off. It's moments like that when that selfish, Owens-like streak starts to rear its ugly head.

For those who are after more traditional Madden play, you may be disappointed when I tell you that I don't think one gameplay problem was fixed from last year. Dropped interceptions, sticky animations, bad Hit Stick response — they are all here. The Lead Blocker feature is very cool, but it too suffers from a problem from the past. Blocking on the backside is difficult and leads to many losses behind the line of scrimmage. All in all, though, I found myself taking control of a FB or guard just to blow guys up. This year's Franchise mode has added roles to some players, which creates a sort of team chemistry aspect to your locker room. A Franchise QB, for example, gives stat bumps to players around him, while a First-Round Pick will



■ The onscreen indicator shows you your assignment as a cornerback

WELCOME TO THE NFL

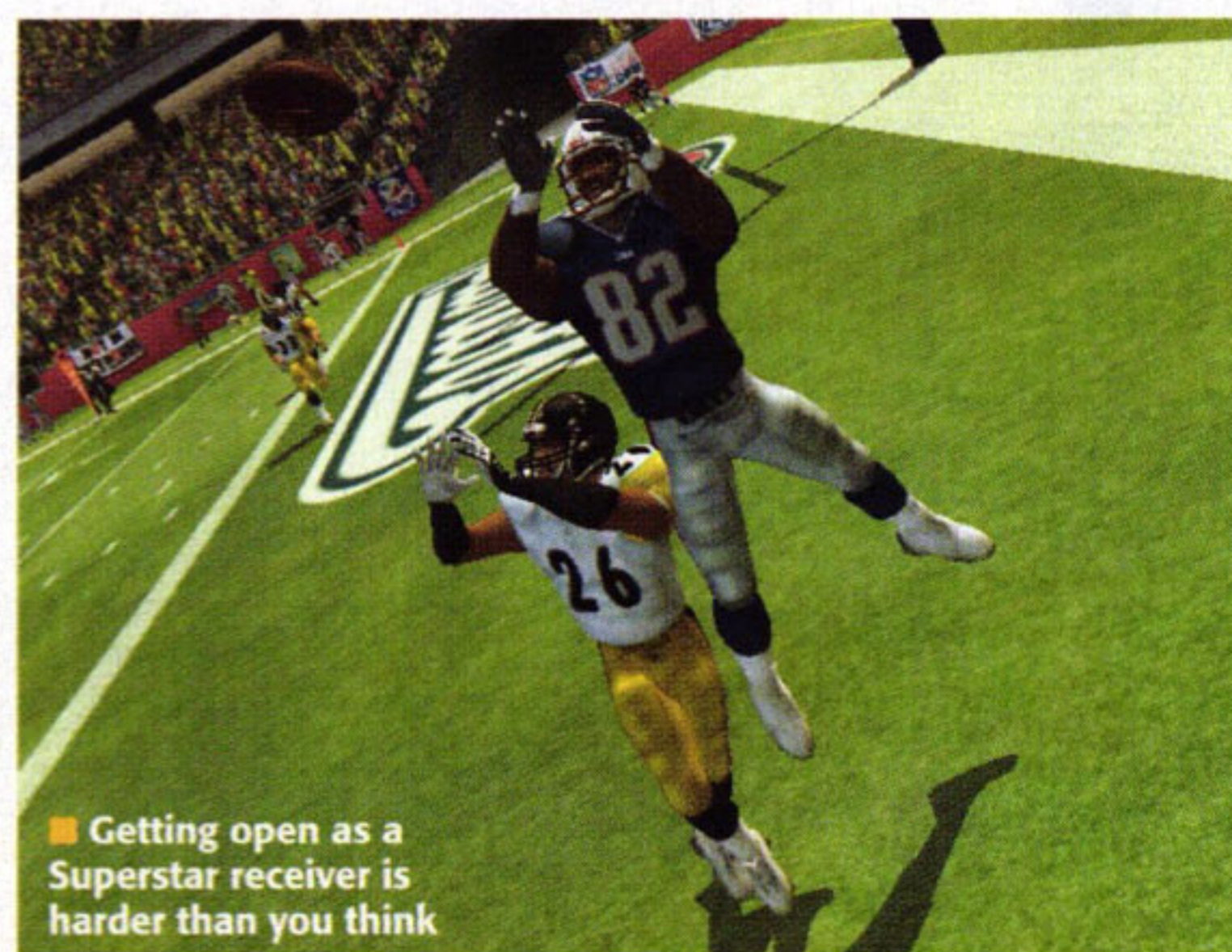
- **First Play As a Rookie:** Line up as a cornerback against Colts' Marvin Harrison in pre-season. I crap my pants a little
- **Halftime:** I have five influence points, in part because a good return I had on a kick-off
- **End of the Game:** I end up with nine influence points, one tackle, and three deflected balls. Marvin Harrison? He only caught two balls in just over a half of football, and was a non-factor. SHUT. DOWN. CORNER, baby!

demand a minimum amount of playing time. All role players' overall attributes and even their free agent value will also change depending on how they play within your team.

Despite the overall fun I had with Superstar mode, it's unfortunate other aspects of the game haven't been fixed. I guess it's like the real NFL, where a great individual performance by a player is good to see, but winning it all requires the combined effort of everybody working as a team. —**KATO**



■ Executing a perfect block as a receiver is a sweet feeling for a job well done



■ Getting open as a Superstar receiver is harder than you think

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Madden evolves Superstar mode in a way that will elevate your ego to planet size

> **Graphics:** I didn't notice any differences from last year

> **Sound:** There's only one thing to say: Why am I still hearing Tony Bruno's voice in this game?

> **Playability:** The new onscreen menu overlays make the myriad pre-snap options a lot easier to perform

> **Entertainment:** Ceding some of your play-to-play control in Superstar mode is a tradeoff for how fun this mode can be at times

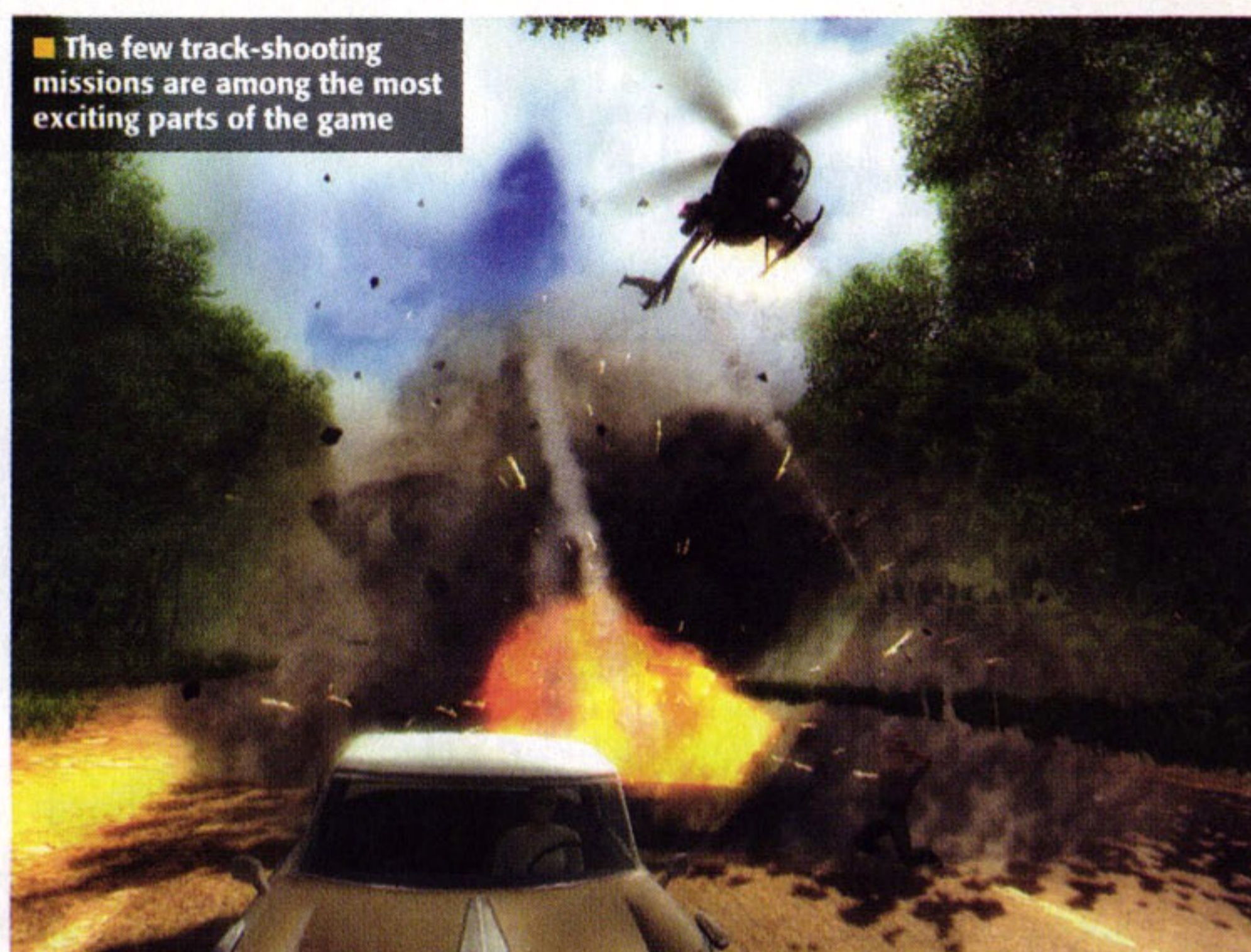
> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

The current-gen games are finally starting to show their age when stacked up against the Xbox 360 offering. And I'm not talking about the visual comparison. The current-gen versions are missing my favorite addition to this year's game: The Madden Gamer Level. Most of my time with this series is spent competing in multiplayer. The Madden Gamer Level caters to this crowd with its gambling and stat tracking functionality. Outside of this, the current-gen games continue to dominate on the gameplay front. The running backs are more receptive, receivers read the ball better, and the AI is far more aggressive on defense. Additionally, this is the only place where you'll find Owner mode. I also like how the presentation behind Hall of Fame mode pulls you into your career. This trusty quarterback still has some game left in its blood, but by no means is it in the same league as the up-and-coming Xbox 360 title. —**REINER**



■ Skydiving is a big part of how you travel around the island, and adds a nice extra dimension to the free-roaming formula



■ The few track-shooting missions are among the most exciting parts of the game

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Just Cause

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER EIDOS > DEVELOPER AVALANCHE STUDIOS > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 19 > ESRB M

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

As bullets whizzed by me on all sides, I planted the final explosive to blow the missile facility sky-high. The timer set for mere seconds, I jumped down from the scaffolding, machine gun blazing at the nearby guards. Mowing them down, I made a beeline for the nearest jeep, keenly aware of the seconds ticking past. Stealing the vehicle, I floored it towards the cliff, driving the jeep right over the edge. With the ocean thousands of feet below me, I climbed out of the car, jumped, and opened my parachute, floating down to safety as the missile facility exploded behind me.

There are a lot of exciting moments like this in *Just Cause*, the open-world title that puts you in the shoes of Rico Rodriguez, an American law enforcement agent tasked with the overthrow of the evil president of San Espirito. These exciting sequences are coupled with a tropical setting that's unique in the sandbox game genre, some original ideas like your ever-present parachute, and a very welcome lack of conventions lifted from *Grand Theft Auto*. However, on the other hand, a few issues detract from the overall experience, making *Just Cause* more of a promising start than a real revelation.

As in any sandbox game, *Just Cause* is divided into story missions and side quests, some of

which are more compelling than others, particularly the liberation missions. With the help of some AI rebels, you must free small towns from government rule by killing the occupying troops, destroying their barricades, and raising the rebel flag. Free enough towns, and the entire province will come under guerilla control. Performing liberations and other missions earns you promotions within the various factions on the island, resulting in better weapons and vehicles. Causing political instability certainly appeals to the agitator in me, and is one of the most successful aspects of the game. However, others don't work as well.

Most other side quests are essentially pizza delivery missions: go here, get this, bring it back. In other words, they're boring. Demolition missions seemed like they would be fun, but on several of these I discovered that my target couldn't actually be destroyed, due to a weird clipping bug. These were few and far between, but not the only glitches I encountered. On other occasions, I found myself stuck on the front of a car, unable to leave the water, and floating off the ground. The context-sensitive action button also gave me occasional problems; several times I tried to open my parachute after jumping out of a burning aircraft, only to discover that I triggered

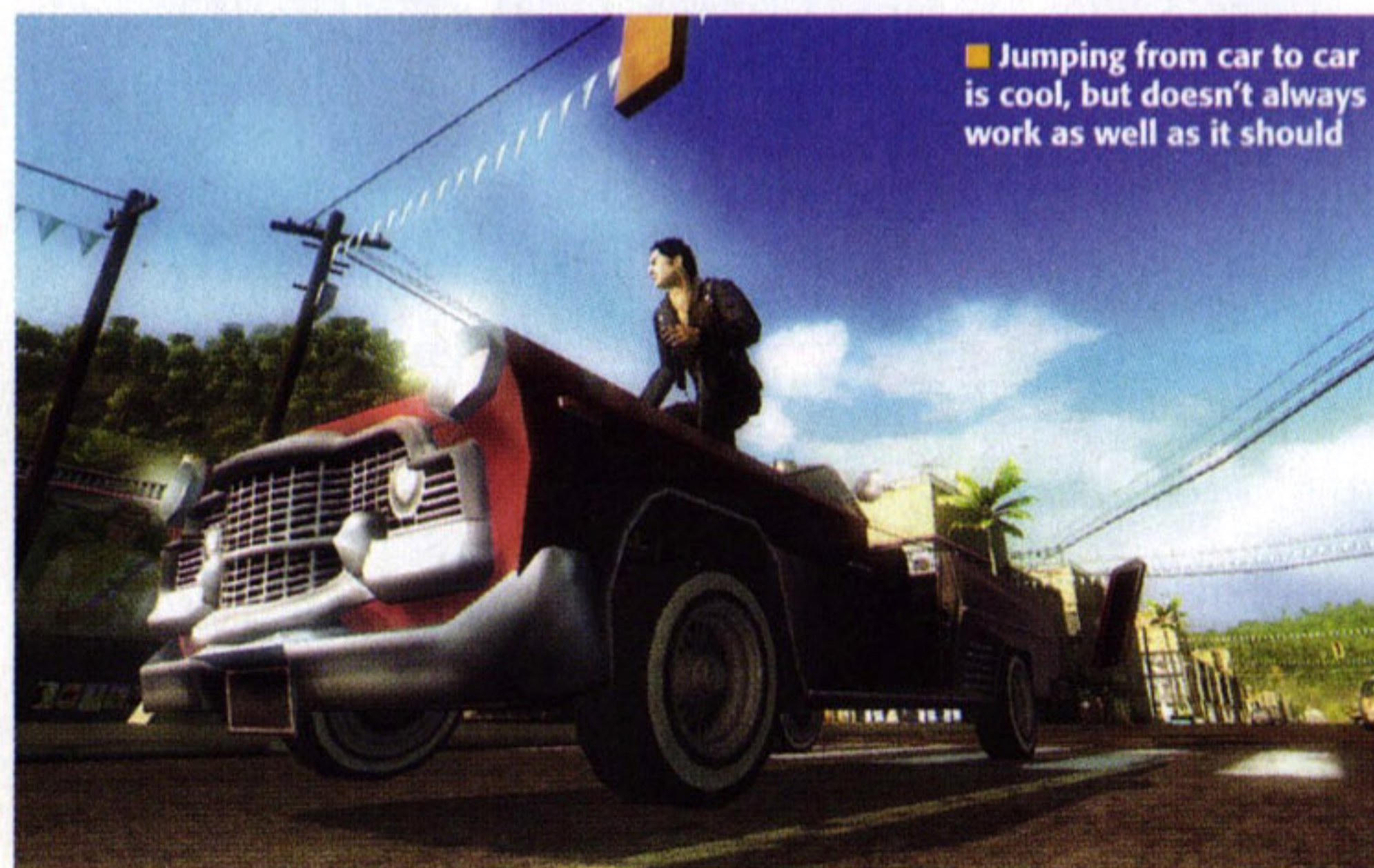


the "jump to vehicle" stunt instead. This naturally led to flaming death rather than escape.

Despite the flaws that keep *Just Cause* from earning a higher score, I encourage you to check it out if you like the genre or the subject. It is a fun game with some cool ideas, just one with its share of problems. If nothing else, it tries a few new things, which is more than you can say about many games.—JEREMY



■ "I'll probably be fine."



■ Jumping from car to car is cool, but doesn't always work as well as it should

BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

> **Concept:** Overthrow a corrupt South American government by causing chaos in a lush, open-world jungle setting

> **Graphics:** While some shortcuts were taken, the scale and scope of the tropical setting are impressive

> **Sound:** The voice work and music are decent, but both recycle the same clips too often

> **Playability:** Too many functions are mapped to the same key, especially since one face button isn't used at all

> **Entertainment:** It's nice to see a sandbox game that isn't aping *GTA* and has new ideas, but a little additional polish would have helped

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **7**

Just Cause is basically the biggest mixed bag of good and awful that I have seen in quite a while. Graphically, the world is pretty impressive — until you see it move or watch one of the cutscenes. The flamenco soundtrack is a great mood setter, but the voiceover work couldn't be worse. The gameplay also offers brilliance mixed with both major and minor annoyances. The parachute mechanic combined with the grappling gun makes for some spectacular moments as you latch onto and land on top of moving vehicles. Unfortunately, most of the other mechanics aren't as well done. The vehicles pretty much stink, and the missions are about as close to average as you can get. For all its faults and in-game bugs (and yes, this game has plenty of issues), there is still some fun to be found parachuting around the world and blowing stuff up, but this is dangerously close to being just plain bad. Why? *Just Cause*.—ANDY

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NASCAR 07

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 6 > **ESRB** E



NOT QUITE THE CAR OF TOMORROW

It's obvious that NASCAR fans will buy anything. For a fanbase that everyone thinks is a bunch of po' rednecks, they sure have a lot of money to blow on junk. The Official Doorstop of NASCAR? Put it in the cart. The Official Tampon of NASCAR? Sign me up! By the way, where can I get one with Carl Edwards' head on it? The only real question is whether fans will buy this year's game, seeing as how it has no major improvements or features from '06.

This game tries some new things, such as giving drivers skill grades depending on the type of track and letting you earn attribute bonuses during a race, but I honestly didn't see much difference on the track. However, it did seem like cars' handling was a little easier, and getting tapped in the rear quarter panel is less likely to put you into a spin. But these are small matters. You could make more changes to a chassis in a 13-second pit stop than were made to this title. Where's the next step in

Fight to the Top mode? There are no in-depth off-the-track features. No new teammate commands. This mode is fruitlessly going around in circles worse than Kyle Petty. I will say, however, that I'm thankful that the mode's long rise up the ladder to the Cup cars is easier thanks to the new Allstate Qualifiers, which is a series of test sessions at different tracks. Do well enough in them and you can jump straight into a Kenny Wallace-owned Busch car.

The one thing that makes this game worth it to NASCAR rubes like you and me is that the new speed blur makes side-by-side racing pretty damn cool. Of course, developer Tiburon missed a huge opportunity to make the racing really awesome when they decided not to include live cougars in the cars (or put Ricky Bobby on the cover), but maybe that's just the way I like to race. Still, it looks like we're all going to be on hold for a while until next-gen kicks in.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Make so few changes that the series is no longer on the lead lap

> **Graphics:** The motion blur is fantastic, and depending on the camera view, is fast

> **Sound:** Your spotter's accuracy hasn't improved at all

> **Playability:** Being able to change your car's sensitivity without pitting isn't realistic, but you may find it useful

> **Entertainment:** Racin' is always fun. And even more so if you spin out Tony Stewart along the way

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

Sure it is a tad disappointing that NASCAR didn't make a next-generation debut this season, but I can't be more pleased with EA's current-gen offerings. Both versions aren't that different from last year's, but the moment you start, you can tell that a lot of time has been spent making the cars drive better than ever. You could argue that the game is "easier," but I prefer the phrase "more forgiving." In the case of NASCAR 07 this is a blessing, since one wreck can spoil your season. I am still the worst Craftsman Truck series driver ever, but get me behind the wheel of the Nextel Cup cars and I'm a speed demon. Remember, it's about the bumper-to-bumper passing that makes NASCAR what it is, and this game delivers that experience and more.—**ANDY**



■ To paraphrase Ricky Bobby: "If you don't use Energizer, then \$#@% you!"

MULTI-SYSTEM QUICKIES

XBOX | PLAYSTATION 2

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

NHL 2K7

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** KUSH GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** E10+



I wouldn't necessarily say that Kush half-assed the current-gen versions of NHL 2K7, but it's safe to say that no more than three-quarters of an ass went into them. Crease Control, Cinemotion, and most other buzzwords that are included in the Xbox 360 version are

nowhere to be found on the PS2 or Xbox. Pressure Control, however, is a part of the picture. If you enjoy dishing out hits and disrupting offenses, you are going to love this new gameplay addition, which basically allows you to tell your players to hit and cover others. Outside of this, however, the enhancements to gameplay are minimal. The AI is still riddled with holes and your money plays from last year will still work. It's a respectable game, but you can clearly see that Kush's focus was on the next generation.—**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

NHL 07

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (1 TO 4-PLAYER ON XBOX) (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA MONTREAL > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** E10+



If you ever wondered what last year's game would have been like without the crazy deke-o-matic crap, well, you're looking at it. If "Old Time Hockey" is your motto, then this is your game. So much so, in fact, that there have been scarce improvements in this title from the pre-strike days of

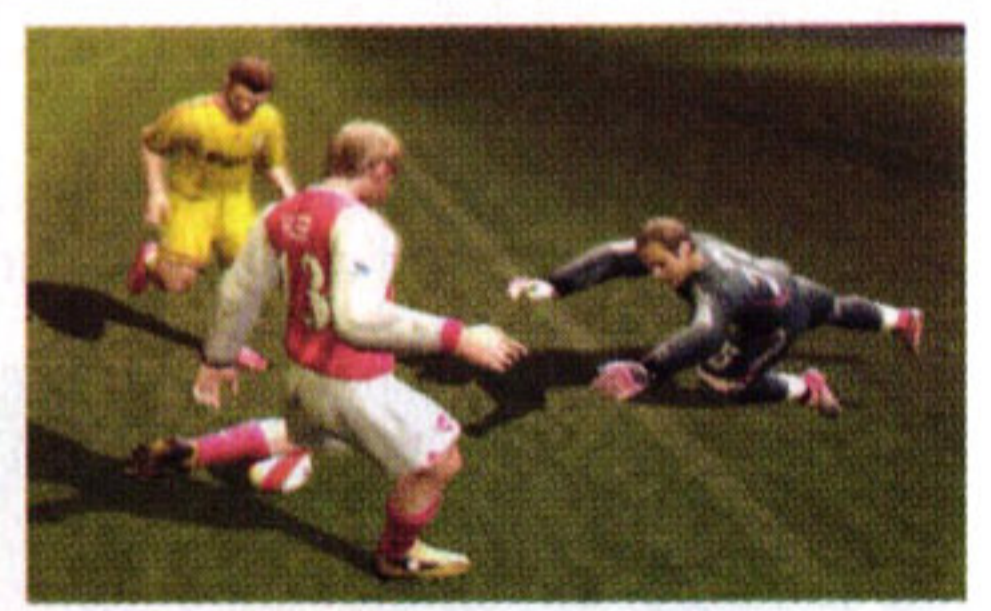
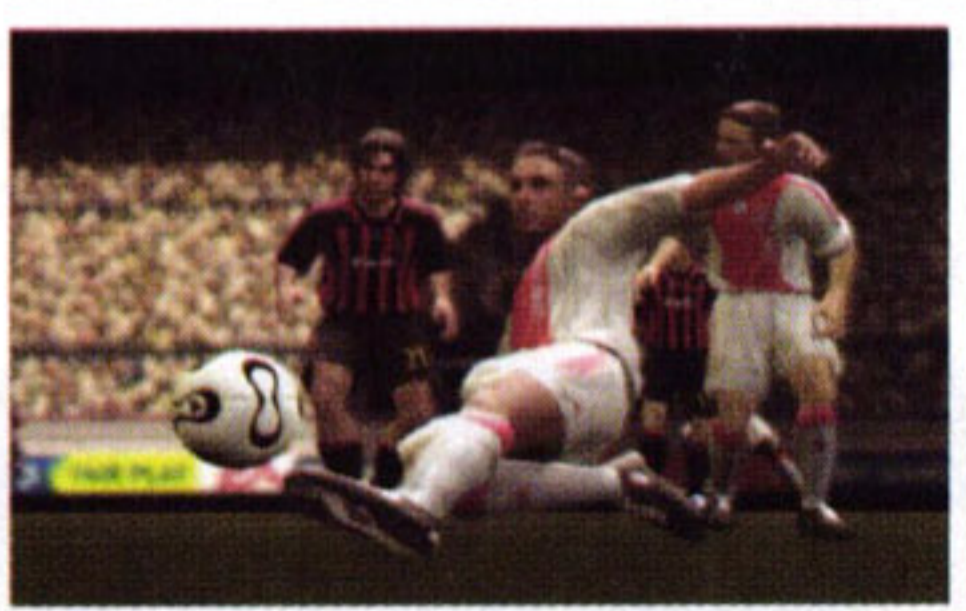
2004 – when Todd Bertuzzi didn't have a care in the world, and punching guys in the back of the head was just a glimmer in his eye. Regardless of the fact that you can pass now with the right analog, this game is for anyone who yearns for a simpler time when hockey was arcade-like and EA wasn't afraid to hit out on the ice – unlike the next-gen version.—**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

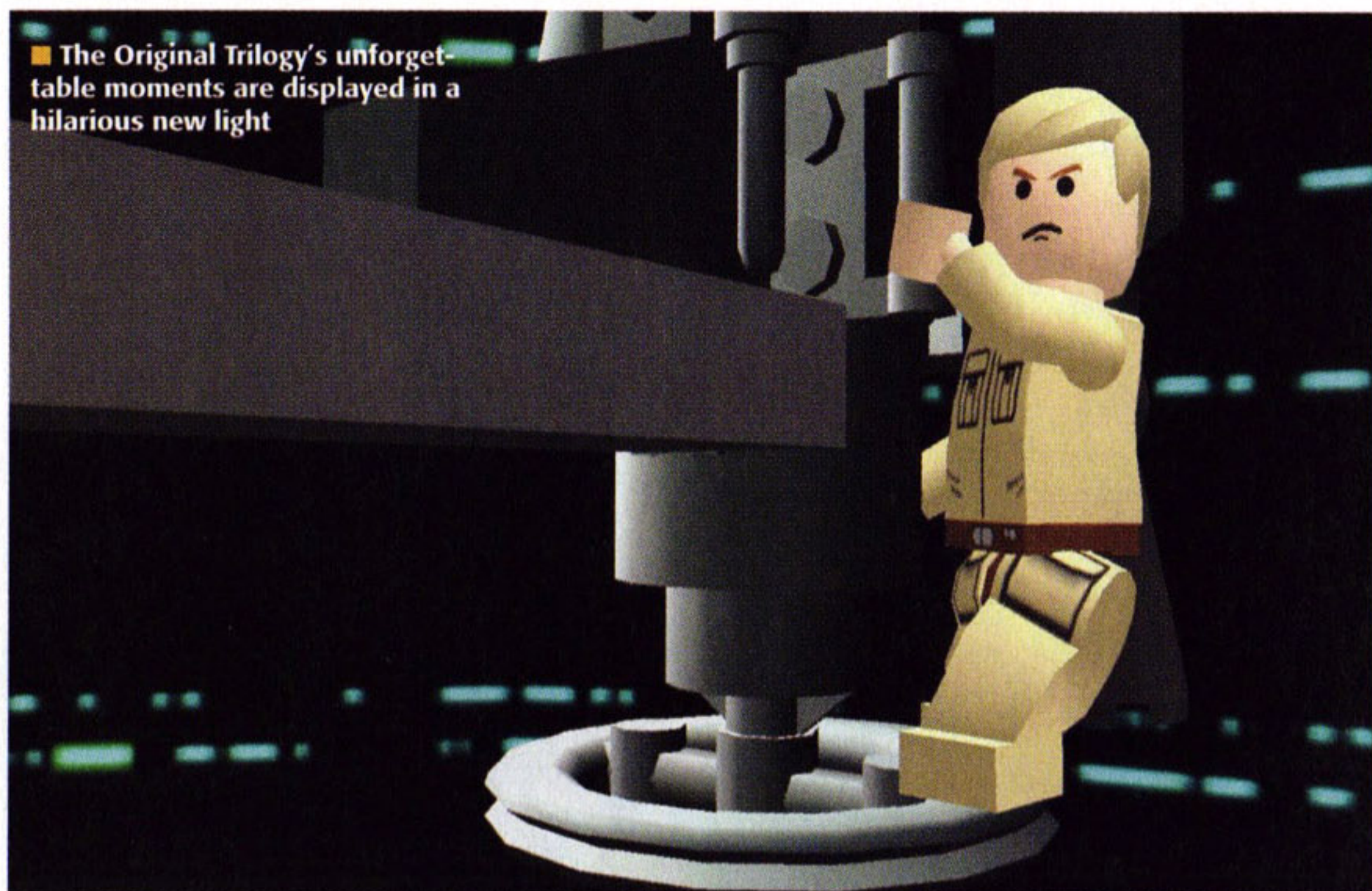
BOTTOM LINE 7.75

FIFA 07

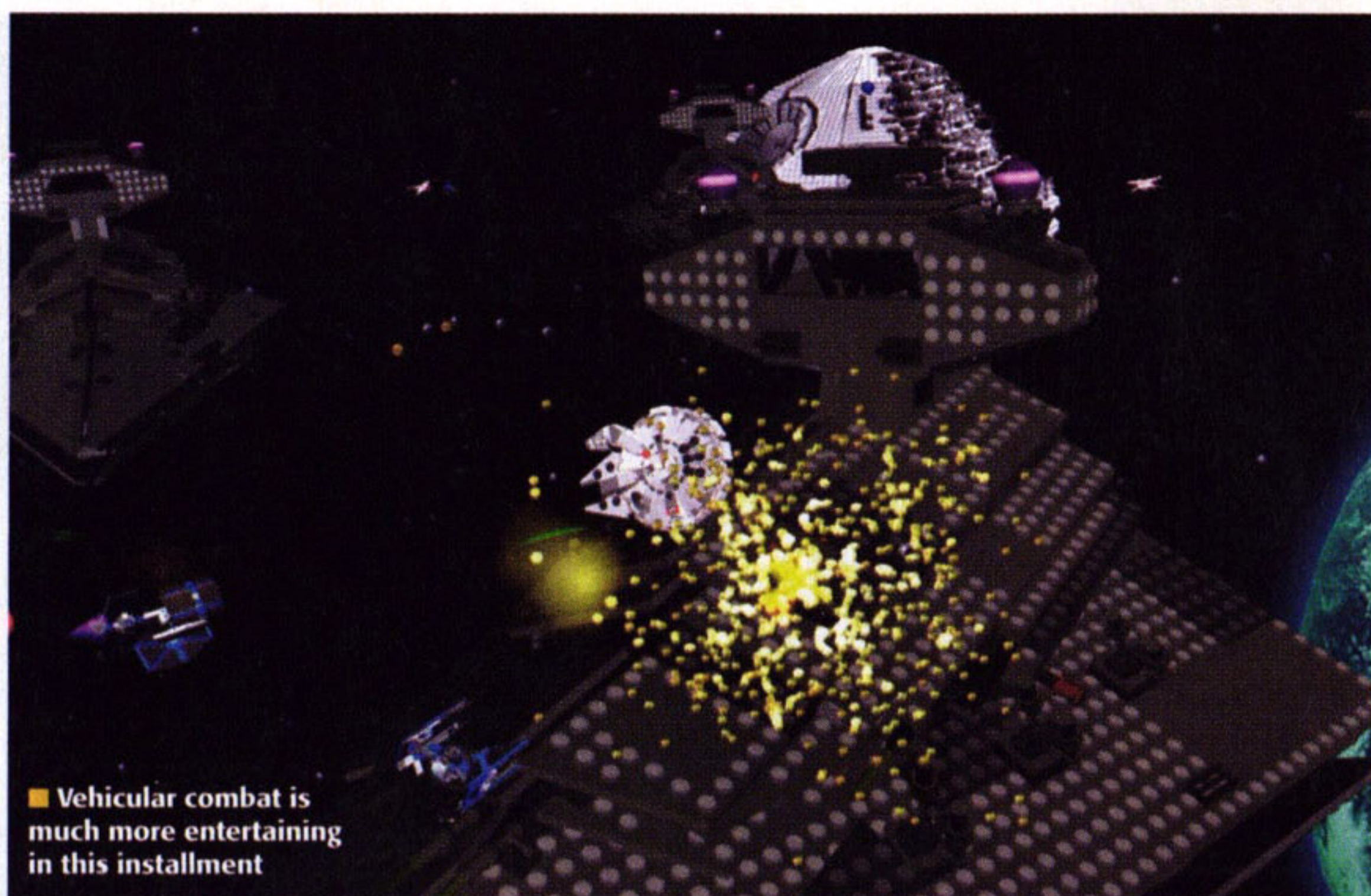
> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (XBOX, GAMECUBE), 1 TO 8-PLAYER (PS2) (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 3 > **ESRB** E



Another of FIFA's phenomenal soundtracks is the highlight of the great front-end production values that govern this year's effort. Gameplay, meanwhile, makes some minor adjustments this year – giving a few more control options including the ability to play with a scheme that is identical to Konami's Winning Eleven button layout. Unfortunately, the on-pitch visuals are starting to look a little iffy – let's hope the inevitable next-gen version in a few months can boast more than some minor upgrades. The manager mode continues the tradition of incredibly flexible options to build up your team and its profitability, now even allowing you to craft your own club from scratch. Not to be overlooked, the online interactive leagues should definitely please those of you looking to play more than just the friends on your sofa. Are there profound changes this year? Not really. Is this still the best soccer option that's not going to force you to spend a month learning controls? Yep.—**MILLER**



■ The Original Trilogy's unforgettable moments are displayed in a hilarious new light



■ Vehicular combat is much more entertaining in this installment

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS > DEVELOPER TRAVELLER'S TALES > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 12 > ESRB E10+

NOTHING QUITE LIKE THE ORIGINAL

My job is to review video games. The purpose of my existence, however, is to give George Lucas money. In the 30 years that I've lived on this rock, my credit cards can confirm that I've purchased enough Star Wars merchandise to put two of Lucas' children through college. I won't deny that I have an unhealthy obsession with this distant galaxy, but it all boils down to Lucas and his crew's ability to rekindle the magic and excitement of a story that has been in our lives for decades. LEGO Star Wars is a perfect example of this. It made me feel like a kid again... a kid who was watching the trilogy for the very first time.

On a strange note, the inaugural release in the LEGO Star Wars series, which followed the prequel films, didn't sweep me off of my feet quite like this one did. What's interesting about this statement is that both games are constructed nearly identically. You can clearly see that the brand of humor and quality of gameplay are fired from the same cannon. What sets these games apart is the source material. Don't get me wrong, I love the prequel trilogy, but comparing these films to the films in the original trilogy is similar to comparing Jar Jar

Binks to Han Solo. The prequels don't have the strong story, likeable characters, or truly memorable moments like the original films do. As it turns out, even when recreated in building blocks, a story can go a long way. There are a ton of scenes in the prequel game that don't resonate for the simple fact that they didn't stand out on the big screen to begin with. Almost every scene in the original trilogy is instantly recognizable and ripe for Traveller's Tales ability to turn serious moments into laugh-out-loud parody.

For LEGO Star Wars, the sights and sounds are everything. This is one of the few games out there that can get away with its gameplay playing second fiddle to the visuals. It would have been nice to see some improvements in this regard, but the game's simplistic approach is still fun and fits perfectly with the theme. Basically, if you have the motor skills to jam on a button, then you are more than capable of making it to the end of this game. Most of the challenges revolve around mindless lightsaber flailing, rapid laser blasting, and straightforward LEGO brick assembly puzzles. Platforming is still a part of the picture, and yes, the camera is a nuisance, but it's not as prominent as before and is more so shoved off to the side for secrets. The only gameplay elements that really show off significant changes are the vehicles, which

UNITING THE TRILOGIES

This game comes pre-packaged with over 50 playable characters that made appearances in the original trilogy. Those who are playing the game on the PS2, Xbox, and GameCube have the option to load up save files from the prequel game to upload every character that is unlocked. So, you could in fact see Darth Maul facing off against The Emperor in the final battle in Return of the Jedi. Although the Xbox game is compatible with Xbox 360, the save data is not. But this doesn't mean that you can't use prequel characters. For a low sum, LucasArts is selling all of the prequel characters in one bundle on the Marketplace.

oddly enough remind me of the old arcade game Zaxxon. Whether you are tripping up an AT-AT with a Snowspeeder tow-cable or making the Death Star trench run in an X-Wing, the game's obsession with jamming on buttons is ever present, and once again more than sufficient at delivering thrills. What you take away from the game are the little things, such as kicking stormtroopers with Lando, shooting off C-3PO's limbs so that he has to use his head to open doors, and Force pushing R2-D2 off of ledges.

In the end, I had a blast with this second go into the world of LEGO Star Wars. This entire game is held up by the comedy that it delivers, and as a result, I don't think I've laughed this hard in years. After finishing the game, the first thing that I wanted to do was run out and purchase every Star Wars LEGO set that I could find. It's good to be a kid again. —REINER



■ Miller has conceded that the only being in the galaxy that eats more than he does is the Rancor



■ The Xbox 360 version presents better lighting and a sharper resolution, plus a number of easily reachable Achievements

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** The second entry in the LEGO Star Wars series stays the course, but is elevated higher than its predecessor by the source material alone

> **Graphics:** LEGO pieces don't exactly have a ton of detail, yet Traveller's Tales has managed to create a beautiful game

> **Sound:** John Williams steals the show here, but the mumbling stormtroopers also deserve props

> **Playability:** Death is an impossibility and most of the game utilizes one button

> **Entertainment:** Although it can be completed in one sitting, this is a game that you will continue to go back to

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

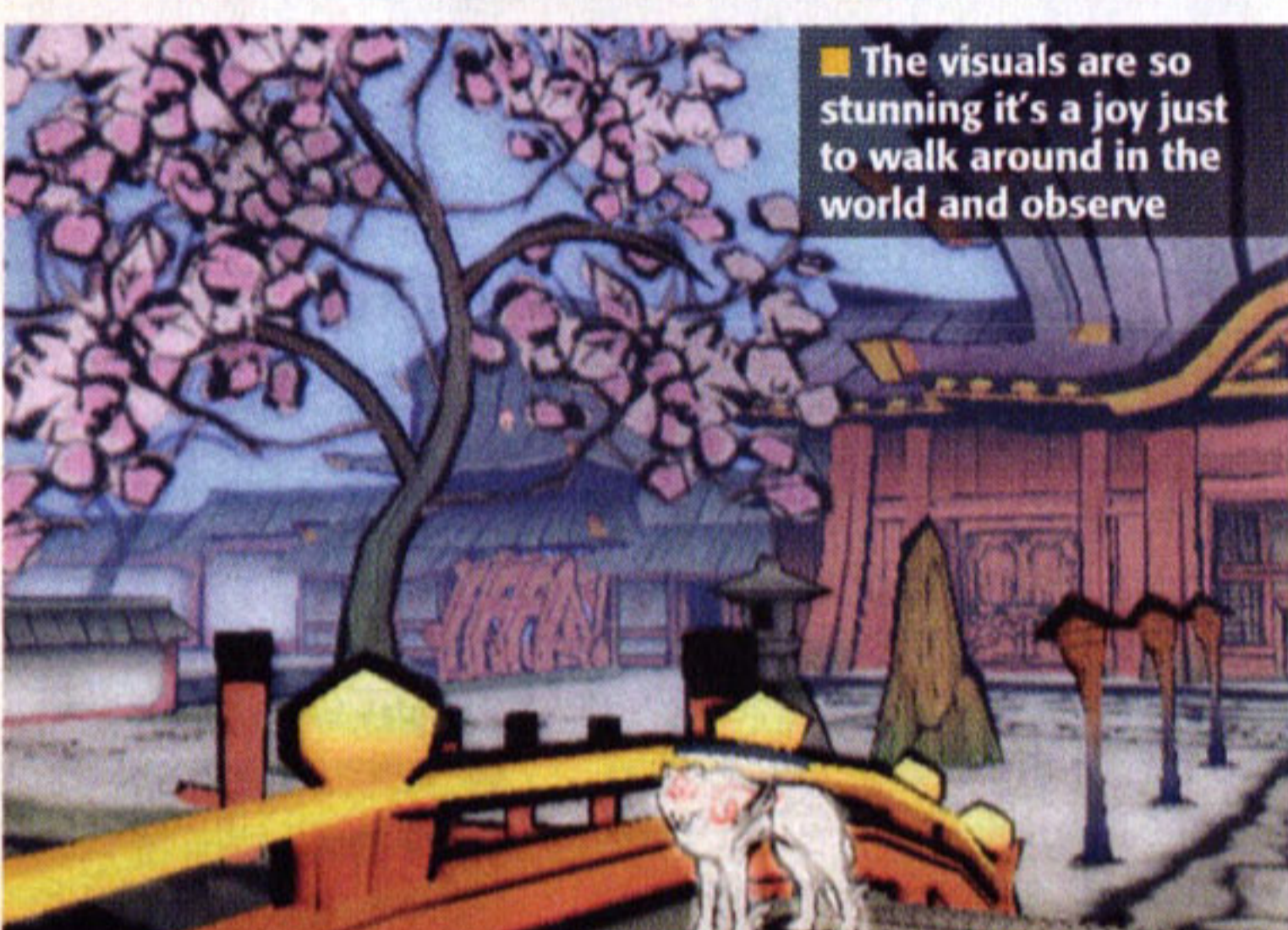
I've never had more fun with an average game than I had with LEGO Star Wars II. What it lacks in innovation and challenge it makes up for with accessibility and tons of laughs very much along the lines of its hilarious predecessor. The few new additions, like land vehicles and flight stages, are cool but don't add any dimension; you're still basically mashing a couple buttons endlessly. Despite the game's overall simplicity, Developer Traveller's Tales clearly paid attention to the little details (in-jokes, unlockables, create-a-character), and that's precisely what makes the whole experience so endearing and addictive. I assembled the worst non-Gungan Star Wars character ever — a Bith Jedi in a purple cape wearing Leia's metal bikini and no pants. You can even play as Garindan, but he's really only good for one thing: a victim of repeated force choking. Young or old, all gamers can enjoy giving that filthy long-nosed Imperial spy what he deserves! Remember Docking Bay 94! —JOE



■ Not to give to much away, but notice the size of Issun in this picture



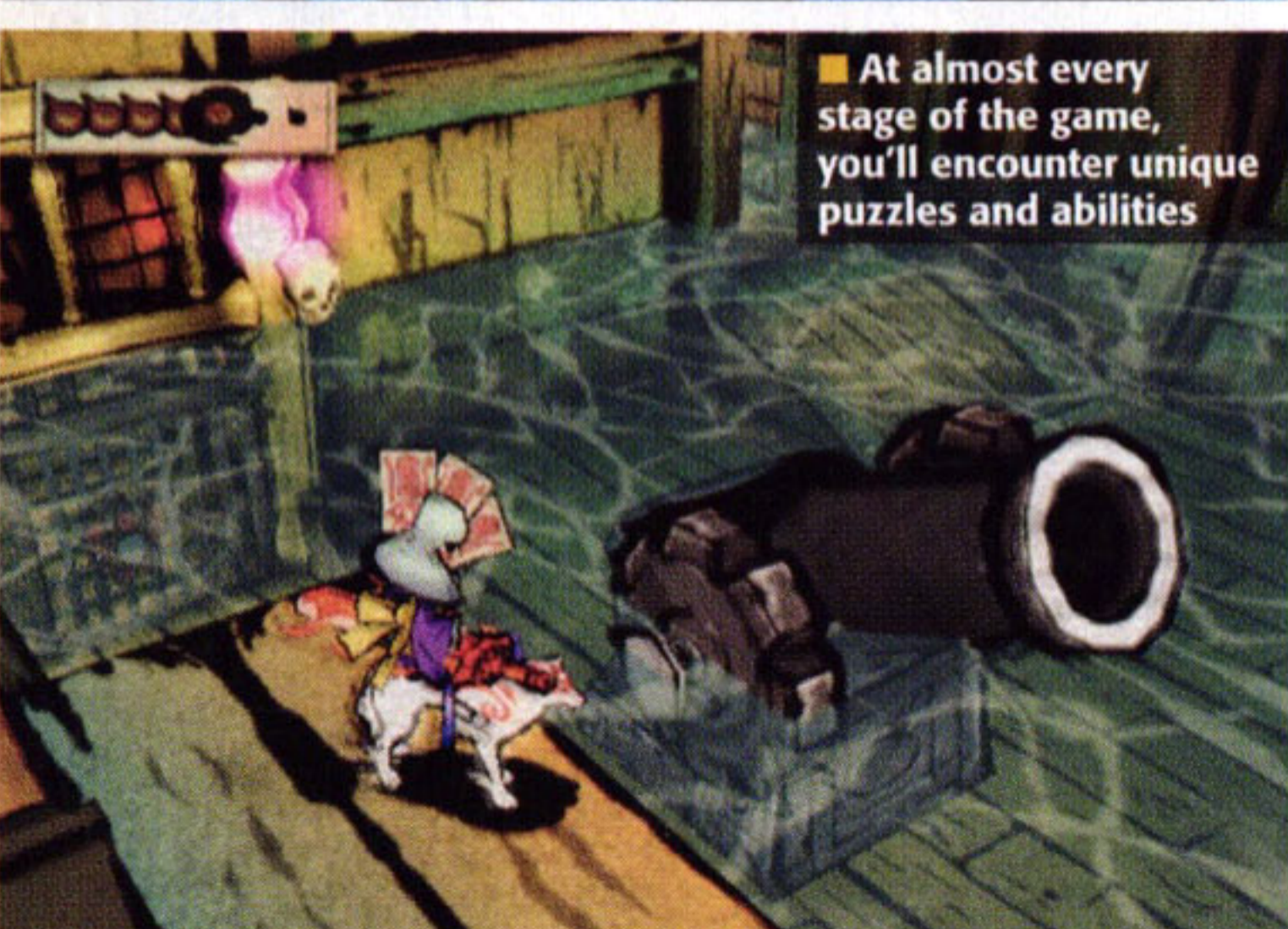
■ Okami features some amazingly creative character designs



■ The visuals are so stunning it's a joy just to walk around in the world and observe



■ The particle and fire effects are beautiful



■ At almost every stage of the game, you'll encounter unique puzzles and abilities



■ Boss battles range from epic to easy, but each features a special weakness you can exploit

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Okami



> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER CAPCOM
> DEVELOPER CLOVER STUDIO > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 5 > ESRB E

HIGH ART

I've been keenly anticipating Okami for quite some time. The game's gorgeous watercolor visuals, unique brush-based gameplay, and the fact that it was being made by Clover Studios' Atsushi Inaba (the creator of Viewtiful Joe) marked it as a game to watch. However, as I sat down to begin the game, I certainly wasn't prepared for what I was about to experience. I had expected a quirky, unique title with an engaging and fresh art style. What I got is probably one of the most engrossing gaming experiences I've had in recent memory — an enormous adventure that I think stands among the greatest PlayStation 2 games ever released.

As you begin the saga as Amaterasu, a white wolf god who holds the power of the Celestial Brush, you start off exploring what appears to be a very small world, experimenting with slight powers that allow you to make trees bloom or gates to be cut in two by circling or slashing with your brush. From this rather modest introduction, you'll gradually conquer all 13 of the Celestial Brush techniques, which will eventually allow you the power to bend even time and the elements to your will. Just as the gameplay becomes more ambitious and unique, so do the environments and missions, taking you to the bottom of the ocean, the tops of snow-capped mountains, and even the belly of a giant serpent.

The game's plot is also grand in scope and incredibly rich. In a time when games are becoming increasingly Westernized, aping successful Hollywood action films and clichés, Okami is resolutely Japanese, delivering a gentle message of spirituality and a love for nature. As you battle the dreaded eight-headed dragon Orochi and the agents of darkness that have engulfed Japan, you'll encounter a brilliant, time-

twisting tale that unravels Amaterasu's mysterious history and observe the landscape being restored from a ravaged wasteland into lush, verdant plains. While many of the themes of Okami are serious, it's also lighthearted, thanks mostly to your constant companion Issun, a pe-sized "wandering artist" who's there to provide comic relief when it's most needed. Whether he's threatening a giant dragon 1,000 times his size, or commenting on a priestess' large, ahem, "melons," Issun is definitely one of the year's best new characters, and provides an excellent foil to the dignified (and silent) Amaterasu.

While it's not perfect — some of the puzzles are too obvious and for the most of the game the boss battles aren't particularly challenging, especially if you keep a good supply of items — Okami remains compelling throughout the literally dozens and dozens of hours that it takes to complete the adventure. Throughout the course of the game, you're constantly encountering new gameplay, new abilities, and new environments, which helps keep this game fresh past the point where most similar titles start to go stale. The brush techniques add a level of gameplay that is stunning at times, as you feverishly switch back and forth between arduous platforming, brush techniques, and conventional attacks.

Most important though, is the level of artistry and detail that is shown throughout every minute of the game. The core mission of any game is to create a world that players want to get lost in, and Okami delivers on this in every way — with the gameplay, with the graphics, and with the story. I sincerely hope this game gets the audience it deserves. —MATT

Need a hand with your godly duties? Check out our tips from the developer on page 118

BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

> **Concept:** A gorgeous, epic adventure filled with artistry, heart, and great gameplay

> **Graphics:** Transcends mere "cel shading" with visuals that recall traditional Japanese charcoal brush and water-color painting

> **Sound:** The score is beautiful, yet understated, drawing on both orchestral film music and Japanese folk

> **Playability:** The groundbreaking brush techniques add a new layer of depth to an already expertly tuned action/adventure

> **Entertainment:** I spent countless hours completing this game, and honestly can't wait to play it again. Okami is a triumph of imagination

> **Replay Value:** High

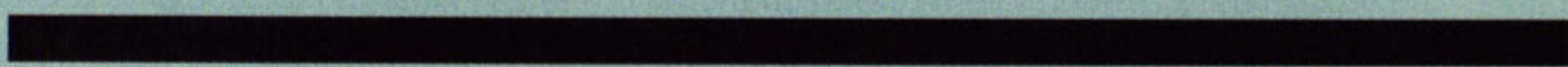
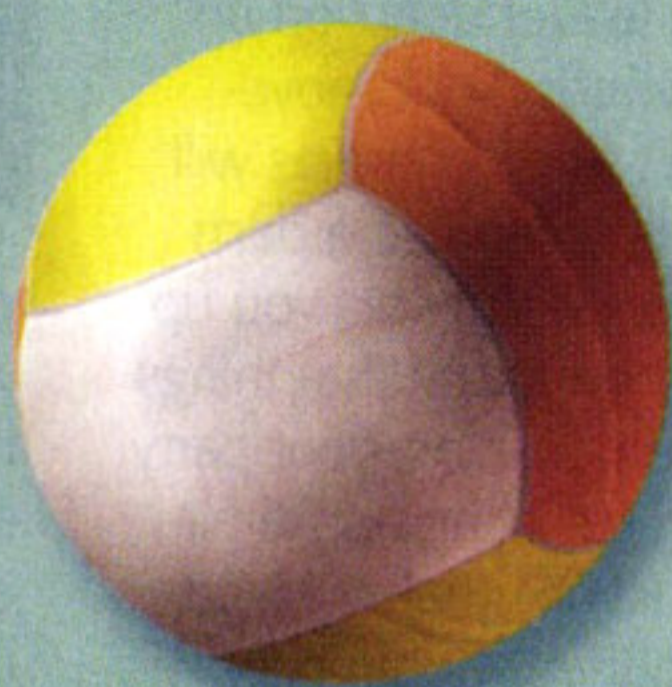
Second Opinion **9.5**

Okami is nothing short of a stylistic tour de force that everyone interested in an adult video game design should check out. I feel a need to clarify "adult" in that statement, though. There isn't anything scandalous or explicit with regard to content, but my point is more that the game tells stories with images, gameplay, and beautifully translated text that adults will get more meaning from than the kiddie set will. It's an adult game without being sarcastic or bloody, and a mature game without the simpleton hussies and brutal leading men. Part of this maturity is in storytelling, but a big part for me was the gameplay. The interesting painting mechanic is fast — it's more like a combo string entered in an unconventional way than anything else, and is totally successful. Okami is a great epic with a compelling look and feel all its own. —LISA





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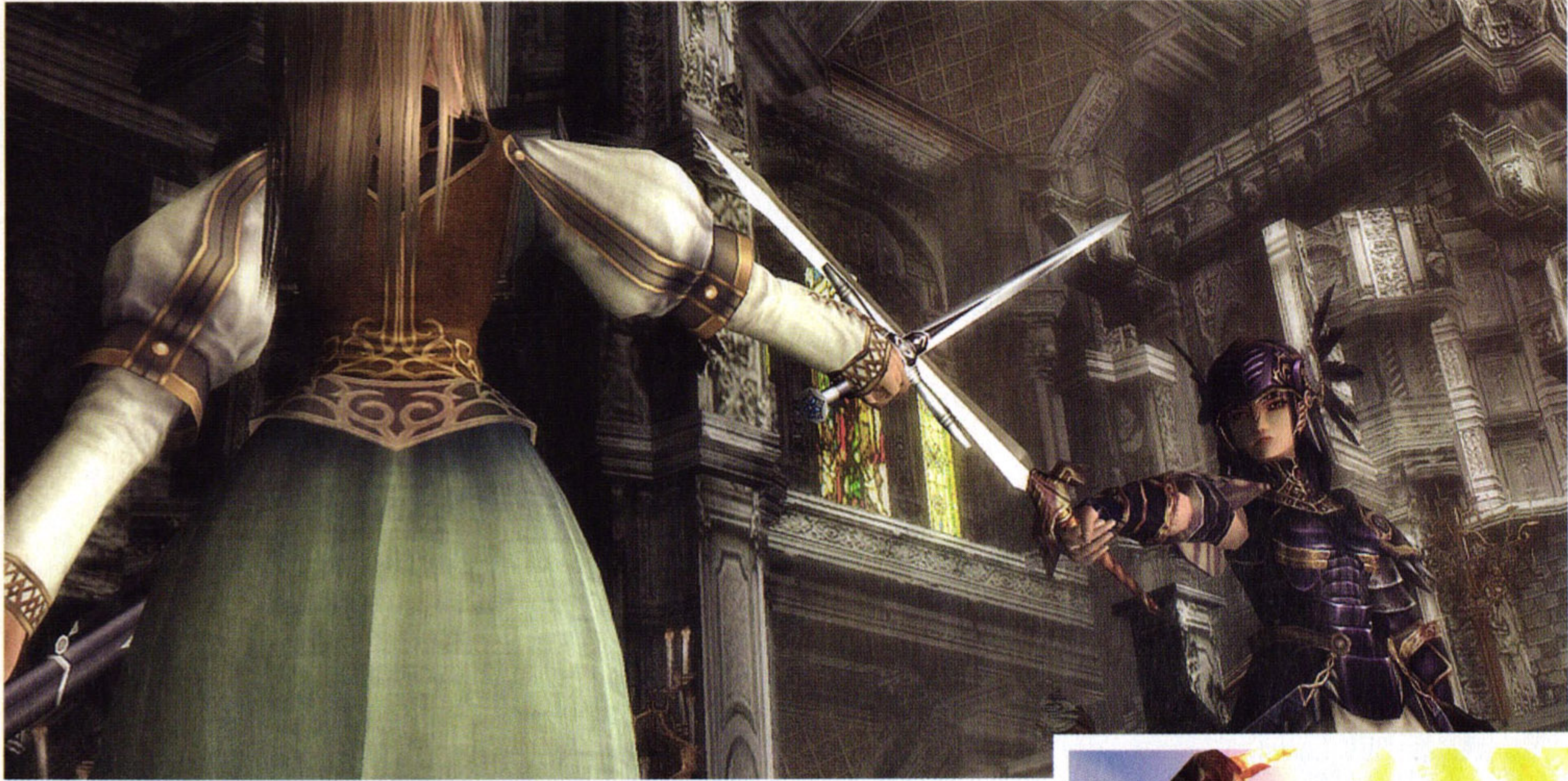


11.06

RATING PENDING
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TECMO 100% GAMES



BOTTOM LINE **8**

- > **Concept:** Create a much-deserved prequel that improves the series in some ways and falters in others
- > **Graphics:** Gorgeous graphics abound, and the artistic direction ties them together perfectly
- > **Sound:** A couple of cool and haunting tunes in the background, with decent voice work all around
- > **Playability:** Definitely takes some practice. Movement and timing in battle are important, but not very intuitive. It doesn't help that your party gets caught up on the environment, either
- > **Entertainment:** Falls a bit short in character department (when compared to the original), but the gameplay keeps you going
- > **Replay Value:** High

PLAYSTATION 2

Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 > **ESRB** T

A DIFFERENT KIND OF GOOD

When it first came out, the original Valkyrie Profile distinguished itself from its peers by weaving Norse mythology together with 2D visuals and old-school sensibilities. In a time when most games in this genre were about idealistic world-saving heroes, VP was the upstart young maverick RPG that refused to play by the rules. Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria does not follow in this tradition. It carries over a couple of traits from its predecessor, but the sense of the uniqueness that made this series distinct is diminished. Thankfully, there are a host of improvements that make VP 2 more playable than the first, even if it is more traditional.

Though these comparisons to the original game are inevitable, VP 2 does an admirable job of establishing its own identity. The addition of Seal Stones, which have various effects on all creatures in an area (including you), adds a compelling challenge to dungeons as you try to tip the bonuses in your favor. The intricate skill system – providing you read the in-game explanation – is an innovative way to gain abilities without just spending points on some menu screen. Refinements like these give surprising depth to seemingly simple mechanics, but the combat system is the best example of how the

game adds layers of complexity without becoming overwhelming.

Fights involve maneuvering on a 3D battlefield to position yourself for a quick strike against the enemy leader. You could just fight every monster you see, but taking down the leader nets you an automatic win and greater rewards. Your movements need to be methodical, since enemies will move whenever you do, but you can use a dash to bypass their attack field. Ideally, this sets you up for an attack from behind, but be aware that things might not go as planned; when dashing, your party members have a tendency to get hung up on pillars, corners, and other obstructions that will lead to them eating damage when they should have been free and clear. It isn't a constant problem, and most of the time I was focused mainly on using the timing-based combo system (based on the first game's) to trigger the sweet Soul Crush attacks like Niebelung Valesti.

Despite tweaks made to the mechanics, VP 2 is missing one element that the first game delivered in spades: backstory. The Einherjar (souls of dead warriors) that join Silmeria are basically devoid of personality. There aren't any cutscenes detailing their tragic deaths, and they aren't tied to the

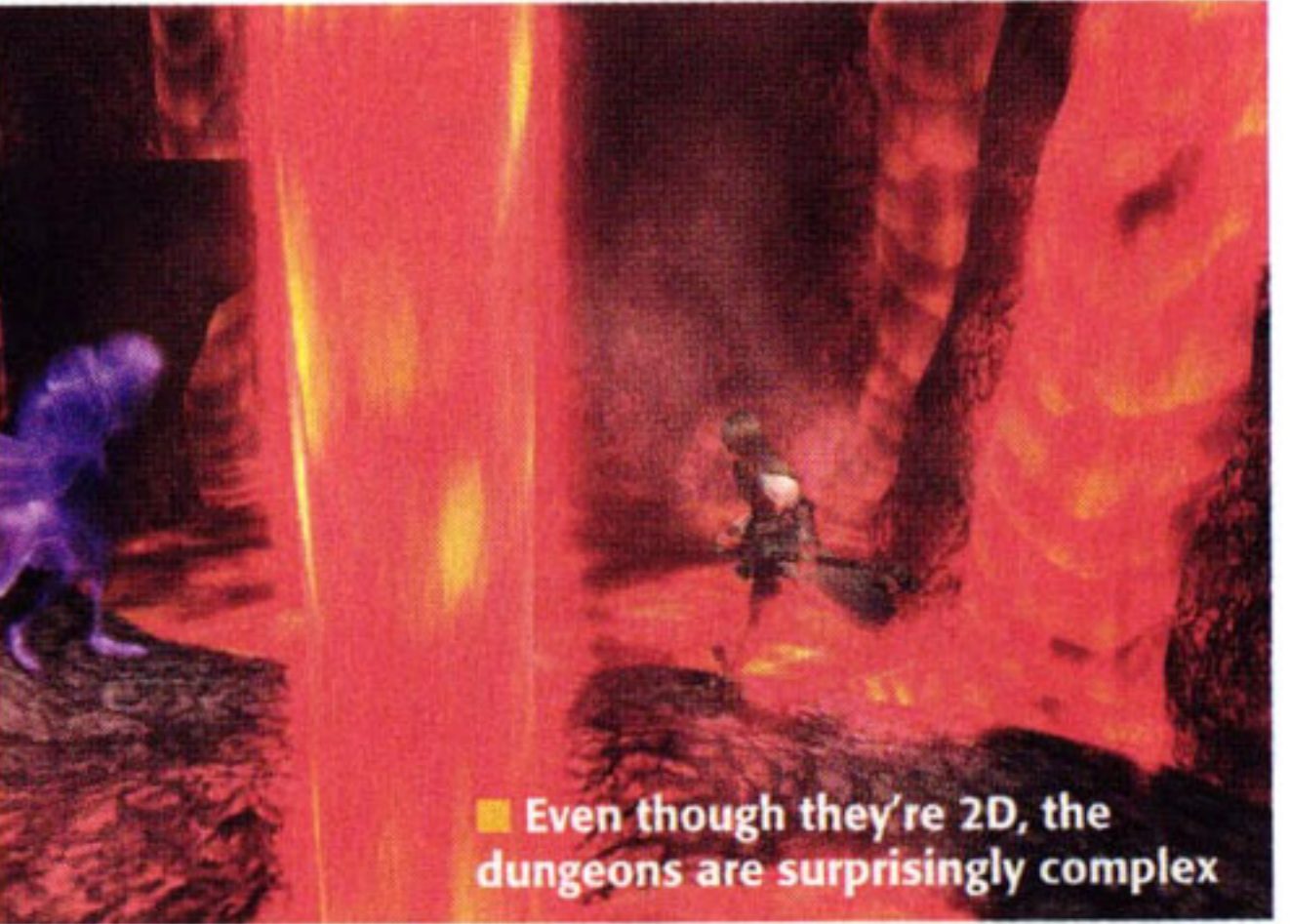
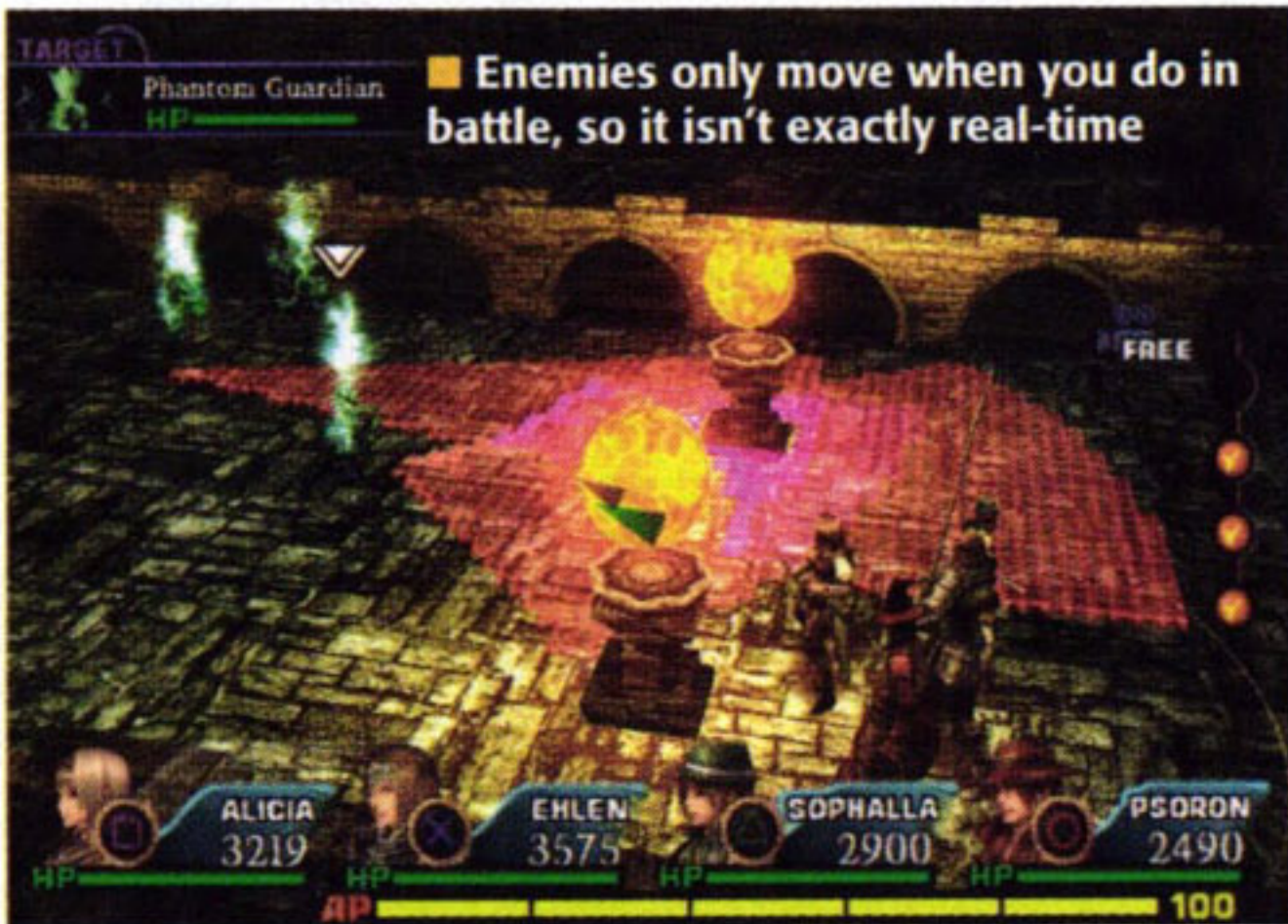


Second Opinion **8.25**

I've been pumped about this all-new Valkyrie Profile for what seems like ages now. Largely, I am really happy with how it turned out. The story gets up to speed right away and handles the idea (and dialogue challenges) of two prominent souls in one body with exceptional skill. In fact, the princess and her harbored valkyrie spirit are maybe my favorite part of the new game. What I miss, though, is the backstory origins of the other fighters that was such a cool part of the first VP game. I also wish that movement during fights had been tightened up substantially. There's a new dash move that players need to master early on to have any success in combat, but handling both distance and direction for your party are difficult and way too mushy for how important a skill it is. With the rest of the game being so uniformly excellent, I'm really upset about this one persistent issue, because it's the lynchpin of the entire combat system. Still, patience can get anyone over this fault, and the VP experience is worth a little pain to get through.—LISA

overarching story. You just come across a glowing weapon in a dungeon, the game asks if you want to materialize another Einherjar, and one is randomly selected from a few possibilities for that location. It doesn't really affect how you play the game, but it is disappointing to lose the bittersweet insight into your party members.

Fortunately, the main characters and the central plot are interesting enough to carry the action along, and the way it bridges the story to the original VP will leave fans very pleased. But "fans" is sort of a key word with VP 2. It definitely isn't friendly to RPG newcomers, but if you've played the original (or other tri-Ace games), you'll find that Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria is a competent and clever adventure.—JOE



Even though they're 2D, the dungeons are surprisingly complex

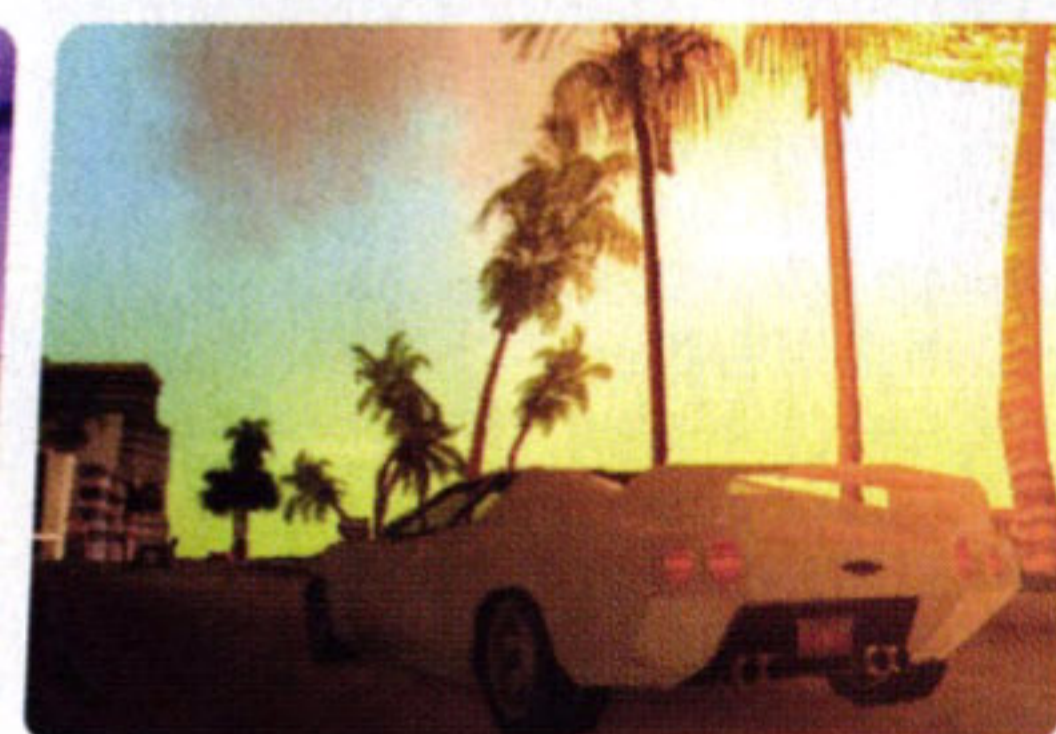
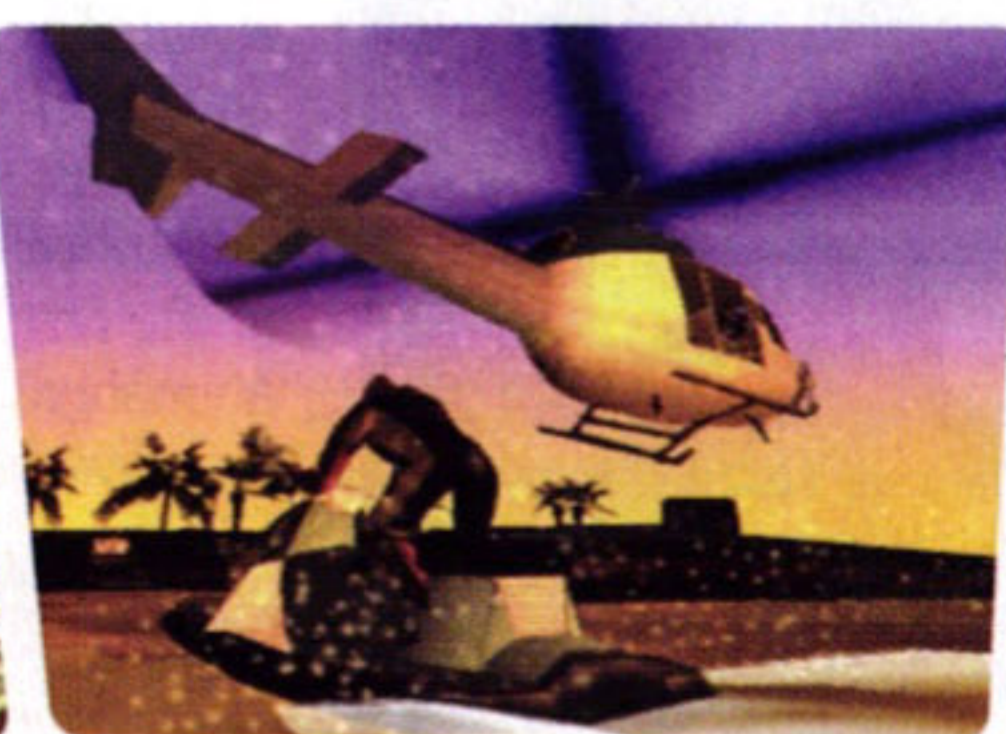
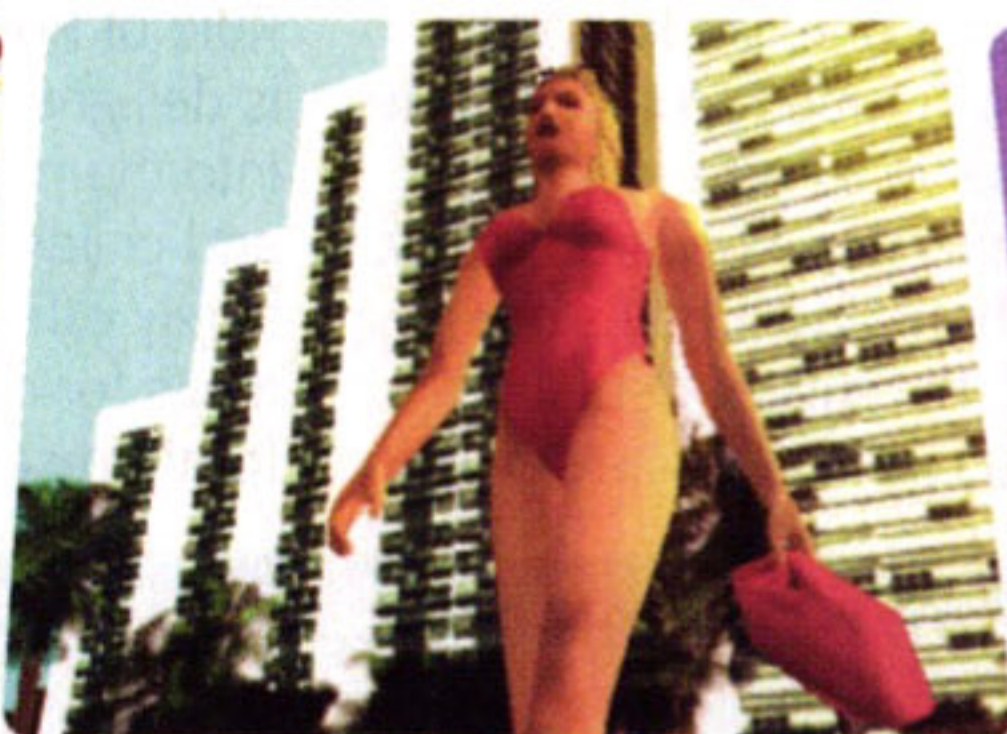
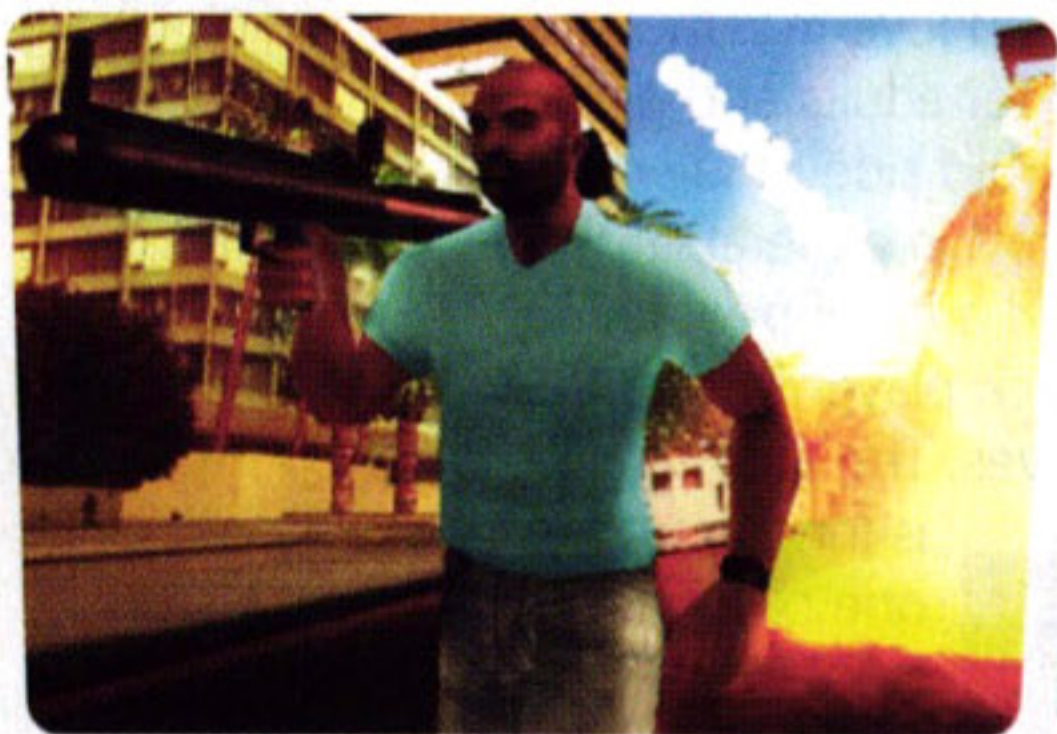
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PLAYSTATION 2

Eureka Seven Vol 1: The New Wave

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI > DEVELOPER BEM
> RELEASE OCTOBER 10 > ESRB T

SEVEN? NOT LIKELY!

Anime fans, rise up. I know you guys are just nutty about your favorite franchises, and will buy anything associated with your beloved characters, but that's exactly what prevents you from getting decent games. You see, when you automatically buy every piece of Naruto/InuYasha/One Piece merchandise out there, the developer has no incentive to actually put any effort into its games, because you'll buy it regardless. And then you get games like Eureka Seven Vol. 1: The New Wave.

Eureka Seven isn't as aggressively horrible as some anime games, but doesn't strive to be anything other than a forgettable piece of licensed crap, either. The core of the game is simplistic LFO (the series' term for mechs) combat (well, honestly, the core of the game is watching non-interactive cutscenes, which makes up the bulk of it), but throws in some equally uninspired lift racing (think hoverboards), and some awful on-foot segments. Each game type throws a few different mechanics at you, but all ultimately break down to simple one-button gameplay with no real strategy to any of it. Throw in some washed-out graphics with bad pop-up, environments that are endlessly repeated, and the standard crappy camera, and you've got a game that screams "for fans only!" as loudly as it possibly can.

Eureka Seven could have been decent if the LFOs didn't feel like they were sliding on ice, or the lifting delivered any sensation of speed or excitement. But that's the way it is, and it's up to you, the fans, to vote with your dollar. Demand quality games for your favorite franchises, and they shall come.—**JEREMY**



BOTTOM LINE 5.25

> **Concept:** Hey, here's an anime series that exists! Let's make a game out of it!

> **Graphics:** Fuzzy with bad draw-in and repetitive areas. So, basically, exactly what you would expect

> **Sound:** It has it, but you won't listen to it

> **Playability:** I didn't know that mechs wore ice skates. Well, live and learn, I guess

> **Entertainment:** There is absolutely no reason for non-fans to even acknowledge that this game exists.

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 4.75

It's rare to encounter a game that tries so many things and manages to fail at almost all of them. Whether muddling through the endlessly repetitive mech battles, marveling at how bad the on-foot missions are, or banging your head against the wall during the inane cutscenes, every one of Eureka 7's gameplay ideas is as flat as that soda you left out last night. The unifying feature of these different parts of the game are how badly they all control – if nothing else, you get a sense just how unwieldy a giant robot might feel if it were moving through molasses. If for no other reason than to save us from having to review another one of these in a year, save your money and snuff this already lifeless franchise out.—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2

Rule of Rose

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ATLUS > DEVELOPER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 12
> ESRB M



■ Even though this screen makes it look like there's a "stealthy" mechanic, there isn't at all

BOTTOM LINE 6.25

BAD TOUCH

It's almost like Rule of Rose is two separate games. The beginning is an amoral subversive horror adventure that manages to make you curious and repulsed at exactly the same moments. After combat gets introduced, though, you'll be more afraid of having to manhandle the clunky controls than what icky scene might be behind the next door. I like the first and I loathe the second.

Even though I feel so strongly, and negatively, about the game's combat, I think that there are a few things in Rule of Rose worth commending. I would even go so far as to recommend it to fans of survival horror and adventure titles, if they come with a little patience and appropriate reservations. The storytelling, for one, is top-notch adult horror. Frequent cutscenes are gorgeous, serve as nice rewards, and move the story forward quickly. In the first hour and a half alone, animal cruelty, hints of dental torture, live burials, and some sexual

innuendo were all perpetrated by a troop of messed-up school kids. And it only gets ickier as the game goes on. While I wouldn't call the subject matter specifically entertaining, the intense sense of unease is hard to deny, and even harder to actually pull off.

That success might be enough for some people to call it worthwhile. I, on the other hand, couldn't get past how broken the combat is. Fighting is so bad that the exploration featured prominently in the early game is discouraged later on just because you'll have to deal with more dudes. Difficult to control, slow, and (as the game goes on) more and more arbitrarily forced fights suck fun directly from the player.

So, in the end, I'm torn about Rule of Rose. I love that the story is designed for adults and plays into the morbid side of fairytales and childhood in general. It will surely offend a lot of people, but that's for each player to decide for themselves. The soundtrack is innovative and one of my favorites since Voodoo Vince (another example of an unusual score really helping the experience). But piss-poor fighting can break all of this unique vibe and, in the case of Rule of Rose, I think it did.—**LISA**



> **Concept:** Try to not freak out too much while a group of nefarious orphans mess with every moral code you hold dear

> **Graphics:** It's a lot prettier than the screenshots show and even the menus have a cool, creepy look

> **Sound:** Really interesting parlor music makes the score a highlight and the sound effects themselves are subtle, creepy, and smart

> **Playability:** The camera generally behaves itself (even though it's fixed), but combat is downright miserable

> **Entertainment:** I don't know if I would describe the content as "entertaining," but Rule of Rose certainly gets under your skin

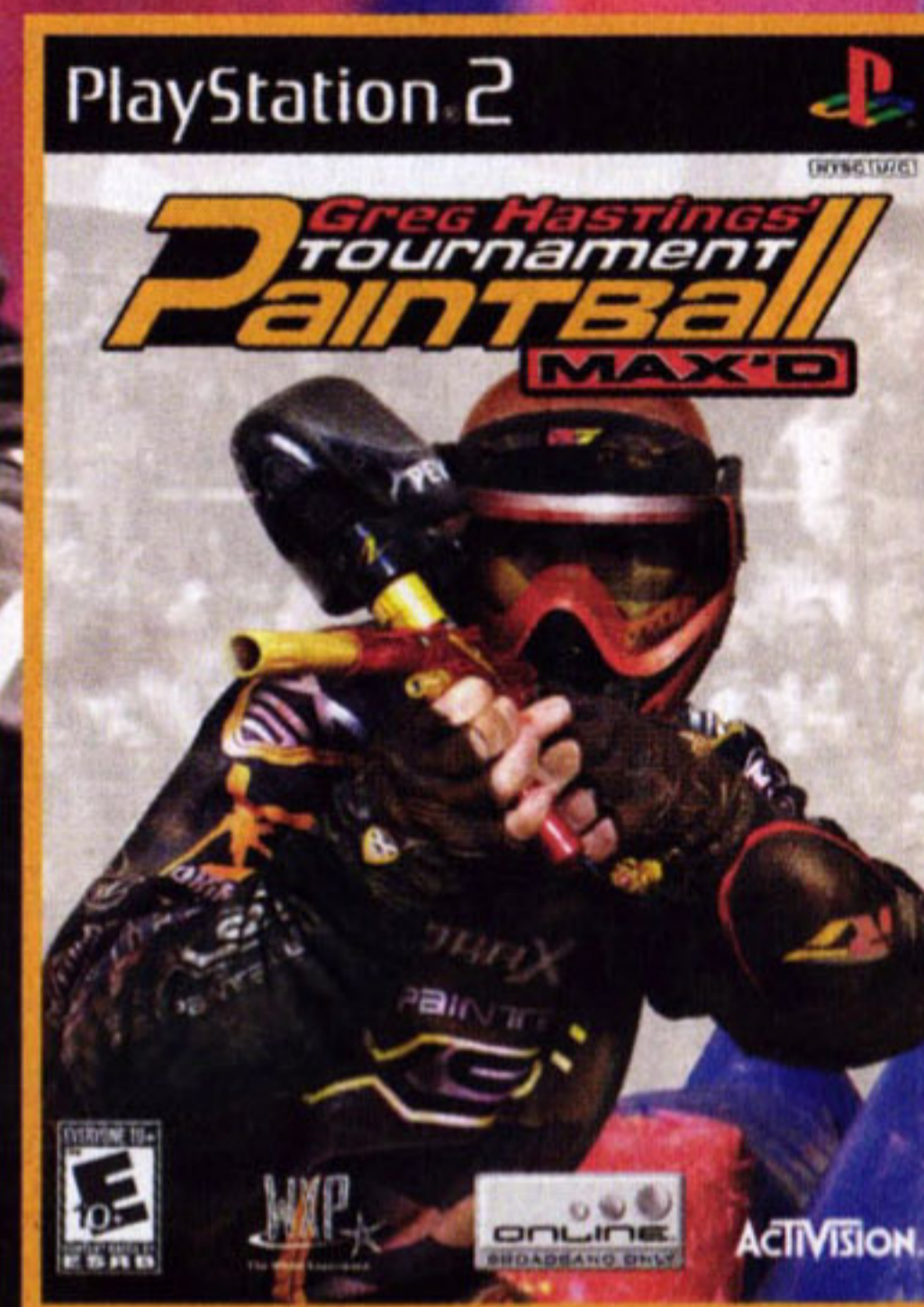
> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5.75

Well, I guarantee you've never played a game with a plot quite like Rule of Rose. Animal cruelty, bullying, child abuse, and even a hint of creepy preteen sexuality are all part and parcel of this very Japanese survival horror adventure. If Jack Thompson actually, you know, paid attention to games not made by Rockstar, he'd probably have a fit over this. Along with the disturbing content, Rule of Rose does create a very haunting atmosphere enhanced by a great score. However, the real horror lies in this title's glacial pace, obscure puzzles, and inept combat. At least now I can say I've stabbed a deformed imp-child to death with a fork. That's something.—**MATT**



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PlayStation 2



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■ You can do anything you like with the stick...well...except that

XBOX 360

NHL 07

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** E10+

SWEET MOVES & CHAOS

Taking a wrist shot has never felt so good. At the same time, playing a game of hockey has never felt so strange. In its first stab at next-generation hockey, Electronic Arts is approaching the sport in an entirely different way than we've seen before. For the most part, the face buttons on the controller are not used. All of the action is handled on the analog sticks and shoulder buttons. Moving in this direction has allowed EA to tie stick movement to the right analog – a move that I can't applaud enough. It really delivers the sensation that you have complete control over the puck.

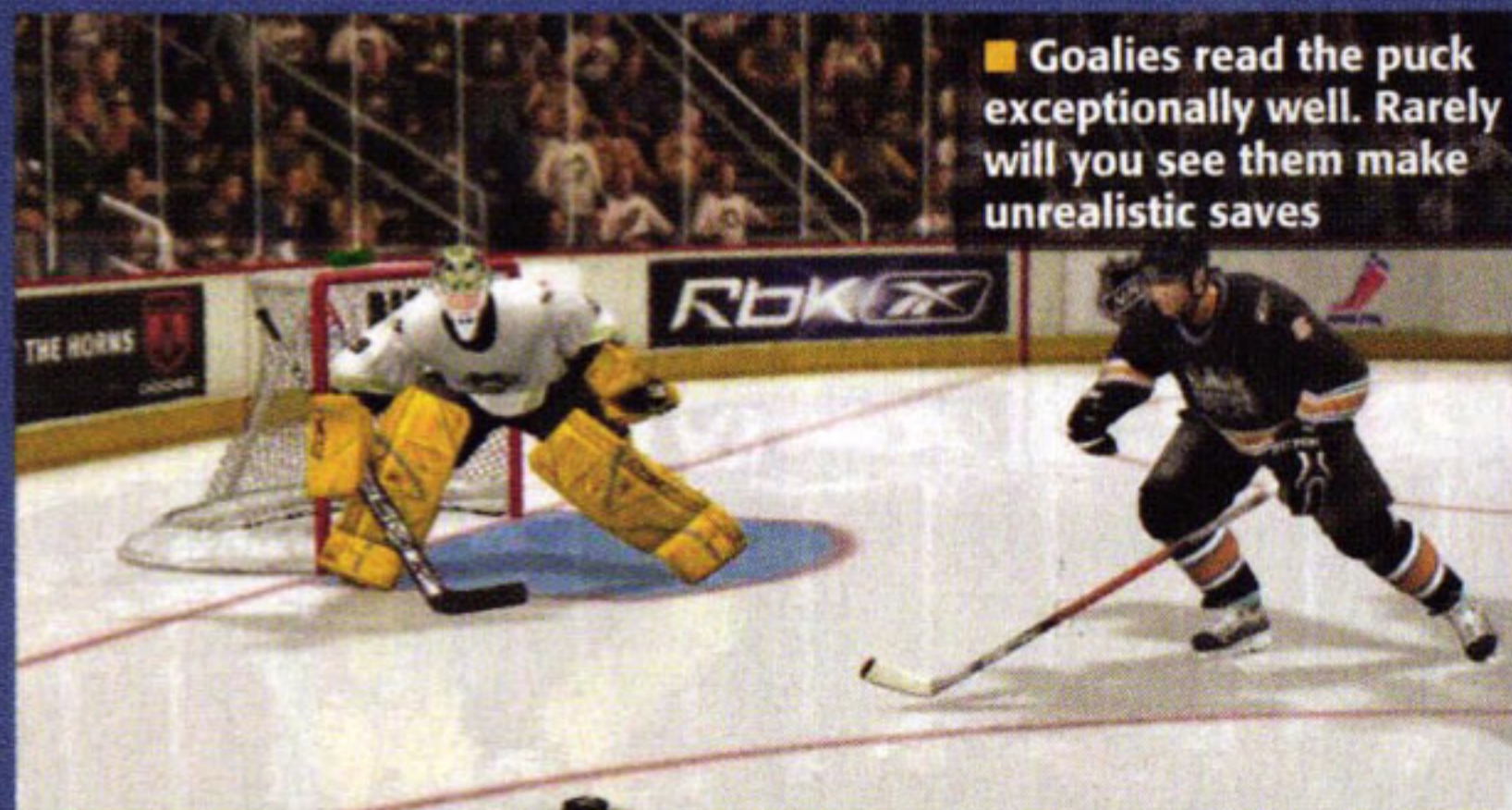
The realism of the sport is also expressed in the way that the goalies move. On breakaways they'll leave the confines of the net to challenge the shooter. On certain shots, they'll make sure that their pads are flat on the ice to prevent the puck sliding beneath them. Rather than just having the puck magically fly into the their mitt, the goalies have to track the puck and attempt their own catch. I witnessed several shots that grazed the goalie's mitt as

he tried to snatch it out of the air.

In a way, EA has created the ultimate shoot-out, but not a respectable hockey game. Stick handling and goaltending are better than I have seen, but the fundamentals of the sport are out of whack. The AI that is in place is not up to the standards that we've come to expect. Defenders are great at poke checking but are timid when it comes to checking. When a check is applied, it feels more like a love tap. There are no big hits in this game! Is this grade school floor hockey or what?!

Setting up an offense is another area of great concern. Not only do your teammates skate around erratically like ants that had their hill disrupted, getting a pass to them is more trouble than it is worth due to how precise it needs to be and how difficult it is to read who is highlighted.

The only area where the game fires shots on net is in the individual battle between a streaking skater and the goalie. The remainder of the game skates on thin ice. —**REINER**



■ Goalies read the puck exceptionally well. Rarely will you see them make unrealistic saves

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** EA started from scratch and has created a game that highlights stick handling and goalie movement. The rest of the game is a bloody mess

> **Graphics:** Goalie movements are amazingly realistic. If you view replays, you'll also see little details like the twig flexing on wrist shots

> **Sound:** The dynamic crowd really stands out against flat rink sounds and a commentary team that has the liveliness of a corpse

> **Playability:** EA finally got analog stick movement right, but this is the only aspect that isn't beaten bloody by problems

> **Entertainment:** A great sim and a miserable play

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.25

In trying to reinvent how we play hockey it's unfortunate that EA lost something of the sport along the way. Although there are always a few moments in each game where you will marvel at how cool it feels to deke and shoot with the right analog stick, the rest of the game just doesn't come together as well. The puck doesn't move as freely as advertised, you can skate around the AI, and the decision to put shooting and checking on the same stick was a bad one. It's not hard to recognize the cool elements in NHL 07, but it's only then that you realize how awesome it would actually be if the rest of the game followed suit. —**KATO**

XBOX 360

NHL 2K7

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** KUSH GAMES
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** E10+



■ You see...this is what happens when you play hockey in warm states!

SEND IN THE HANSONS

I've always been of the mind that any player that scores a goal against me needs to be delivered a message. The message usually consists of a blind-sided check, a face-first nudge into the boards, and maybe even a stick to a kidney if that player happens to be Mike Modano. Of course, stalking specific players puts a serious kink in my gameplay strategies. My bid to exact revenge usually leads to a defensive meltdown. This year, developer Kush Games is helping my unsound cause by placing the league's most celebrated players directly in the crosshairs.

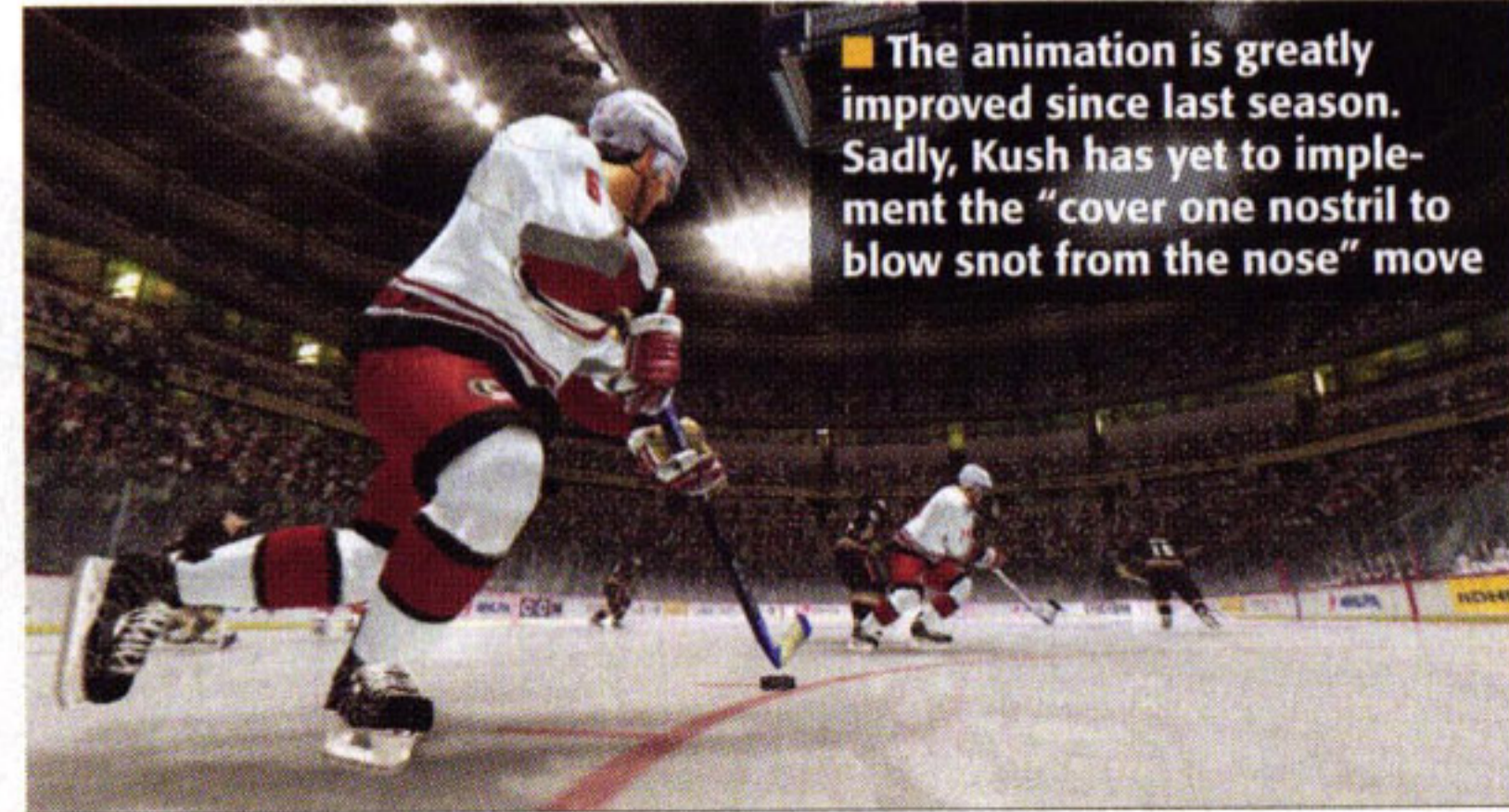
Through a new feature dubbed Pressure Control, you now have the ability to order your teammates to cover, double team, and apply a concussion-inducing hit to a specific player on the ice. I didn't think I would enjoy watching another player do my dirty work, but I actually found it to be quite an uplifting experience. No longer are you the hitman. You are now the Don who orders the hit. This new feature is not only a great addition for people who like to play dirty, it's an effective strategy to silencing explosive offenses

and rattling sharpshooters.

Last year, I felt that the AI had a glass jaw. The defense wouldn't challenge shooters, they left the blue line wide open, and I got the impression that most goalies were actually blind. Goaltenders are a hair smarter, yet remain overly robotic and susceptible to malfunctioning on point blank shots. The remainder of the team, however, attacks with newfound aggression. They step up on the blue line, poke check like it's going out of style, and will even rough up players who try to establish position in front of the net.

In addition to honing its craft on the ice, Kush has also implemented one of the strangest things I've ever seen in a sports game. It's called Cinemotion. This new mode replaces all of the commentary in a game with an original orchestrated score that dynamically changes with the action on the ice. It sounds lame, but it's actually a nice change of pace from listening to the announcers.

In the end, NHL 2K7 skates circles around the competition, but it still needs solid goaltending before it can make a run for the Stanley Cup. —**REINER**



■ The animation is greatly improved since last season. Sadly, Kush has yet to implement the "cover one nostril to blow snot from the nose" move

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Kush continues to find new ways to enhance its game. This year, the focus is on defensive strategies. It's not as flashy of an addition as sophisticated stick controls, but it makes for a better play

> **Graphics:** An animation powerhouse. Hits from varied angles produce different player reactions. The game also boasts some of the best-looking player models in sports

> **Sound:** Orchestrated music works for sci-fi and war, so why not hockey? It actually works quite well...which leads me to believe that violins and violence are the perfect pair

> **Playability:** Fluid, hard-hitting, and deeper than you could ever imagine. Sadly, goalies just don't match the high caliber puck play that is exhibited

> **Entertainment:** Offers a by-the-numbers career mode, extensive online features, and the best play on the ice this year

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8

As is typical for this series, it takes a large step forward and then proceeds to totally trip over its own feet. The new skating physics and camera work alone are revelations, but the game is still plagued with old problems. Crease Control is sadly the same, goalies' side-to-side movements are inept (especially on wraparounds), and the shot response is bad. The new pressure mechanic is cool, but I stopped using it because it took too long to activate on the right player. The foundation is set in stone for this game, now developer Kush just has to build off of it. —**KATO**

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Language
Mild Violence



XBOX LIVE



PC
CD-ROM
SOFTWARE



PlayStation 2

XBOX 360

MADDEN NFL 07

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** AUGUST 22 > **ESRB** E

LOST IN THE DEPTH CHART

This game lets you step into the shoes of an NFL superstar all right, but let me tell you – fame and fortune aren't all they are cracked up to be. Yeah my guy's a superstar, but he sure doesn't play like one. Developer Tiburon may have thrown in a good amount of fea-

tures this time around – including some 360-exclusive ones like the Madden Gamer Level and Live Opponents – but they can't cover up for this game's deficiencies on the field.
NFL Superstar is a cool mode that takes the sport a step forward, but in this next-gen case, it's held back



by the fact that when you actually control players, their movements feel like they are skating on ice. This means that changing direction is difficult. Therefore, positions like wide receivers – and the entire defense – are frustrating to control due to their inability to make hard cuts. Although some AI problems from last year have been cleaned up there's still a lot here that makes you wince, such as the game's collision problems. Players' moves for the ball are often unresponsive, whether that means receivers don't go up for jump balls or cornerbacks don't swat the ball when you tell them to. This feeling that catches are sometimes automatic is fur-

thered by the fact that you'll see receivers slide into place to make a catch.
I feel what we have here is a lot of spectacle that doesn't stand up to the scrutiny. How long did you keep playing last year's Madden before the excitement wore off? I think this edition will last longer, but will still fall short of what you expect from the franchise. You can see the developer's attempts to improve the game in all kinds of ways at every point in the game, but when it comes time to strap the pads on and hit people I feel like I'm back at the Xbox 360 launch. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

- > **Concept:** This game's one of those annoying punks that acts like a Superstar, but plays like a second-stringer
- > **Graphics:** The presentation aspect of the game has improved with some better shots between plays
- > **Sound:** Sad fact: The local homer commentator is worse than Madden's drivel
- > **Playability:** The controls aren't as responsive as you need them to be
- > **Entertainment:** More playable than last year's but not by too much
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

Last year, the Xbox 360 version resembled Joey Harrington. It generated tons of hype and showed great potential on the field, but ultimately couldn't play the game worth a damn. This season, the Xbox 360 version draws comparisons to Michael Vick. It's flashy, but more importantly, capable of playing one heck of a game. It no longer feels like Madden Lite, either. Superstar mode offers great depth, and this version actually offers a number of exciting features that you won't find in the current-gen games. What a difference a year can make. This is definitely the football game to get. —REINER



XBOX 360

The Godfather

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** E

MEET THE NEW BOSS

The version of The Godfather released for current-gen systems a few months ago was a major disappointment for me. Thankfully, Electronic Arts has taken this 360 version of the game as an opportunity to right the ship, making a host of improvements and adding new content to the game. There are new missions, a new "favor" systems that allows you to finesse your way through negotiations, the ability to hire a crew of thugs, a new gang compound, and more variety in the interior environments like stores and illegal rackets. EA also has (very slightly) enhanced the visuals, but I could really be damned to notice the difference except for the fire effects.
However, the fact remains that this is still the same flawed game that was released for the current-gen systems. You'll still spend way too much time needlessly driving between meetings (these gangsters are a chatty bunch) and dealing with the inconsistencies of the dual-analog fighting system, the still-spotty auto-targeting, and the often irritating mission goals. —MATT

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

- > **Concept:** A retooled Xbox 360 version of the recent current-gen console hit
- > **Graphics:** Some improvements, most notably with the fire effects, but not a huge step up from the Xbox version
- > **Sound:** The voiceovers are great, as is the iconic music. Brando's there; too bad they couldn't get Pacino
- > **Playability:** The targeting is better, if still flawed, but most of the mechanics are solid enough
- > **Entertainment:** I appreciate the effort that went into improving this game for 360, but there's just something very dull about The Godfather that can't be fixed
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

The Godfather stumbles onto the Xbox 360 riddled with bullet holes. Rather than fixing the problems that plagued the current-gen game, EA decided to slap Band-Aids over them. It's a better play, but it still limps along with many of the same annoyances. The repetition in indoor environments has been addressed, but most of the missions still deliver the dullness of staring a corpse in the eyes. —REINER



PLAYSTATION 2

Enchanted Arms

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** FROM SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1 > **ESRB** M

NEW SYSTEM, SAME FORMULA

The first Japanese Xbox 360 RPG isn't a totally unqualified failure, but it's a far cry from anything I'd call a success. After hours and hours in the world of Enchanted Arms, it's hard to imagine that the game ever had aspirations to be more than mediocre, and even that lofty goal slips out of reach. What remains is a sad attempt to appeal to as many gamers as possible by oversimplifying the most basic RPG formula. The results should come as no surprise. What the game does right are mostly surface-level things. Visuals, by and large, look great. There's also a robust creature collection system and a flexible character upgrade approach. Unfortunately, without exception the gameplay is insultingly simple and way too linear, with a promising strategic battle system that ultimately falls flat. While not broken in any fundamental ways, this soulless and clichéd title tries to be many things to many people, and in the end does none of them well. —MILLER

BOTTOM LINE 6

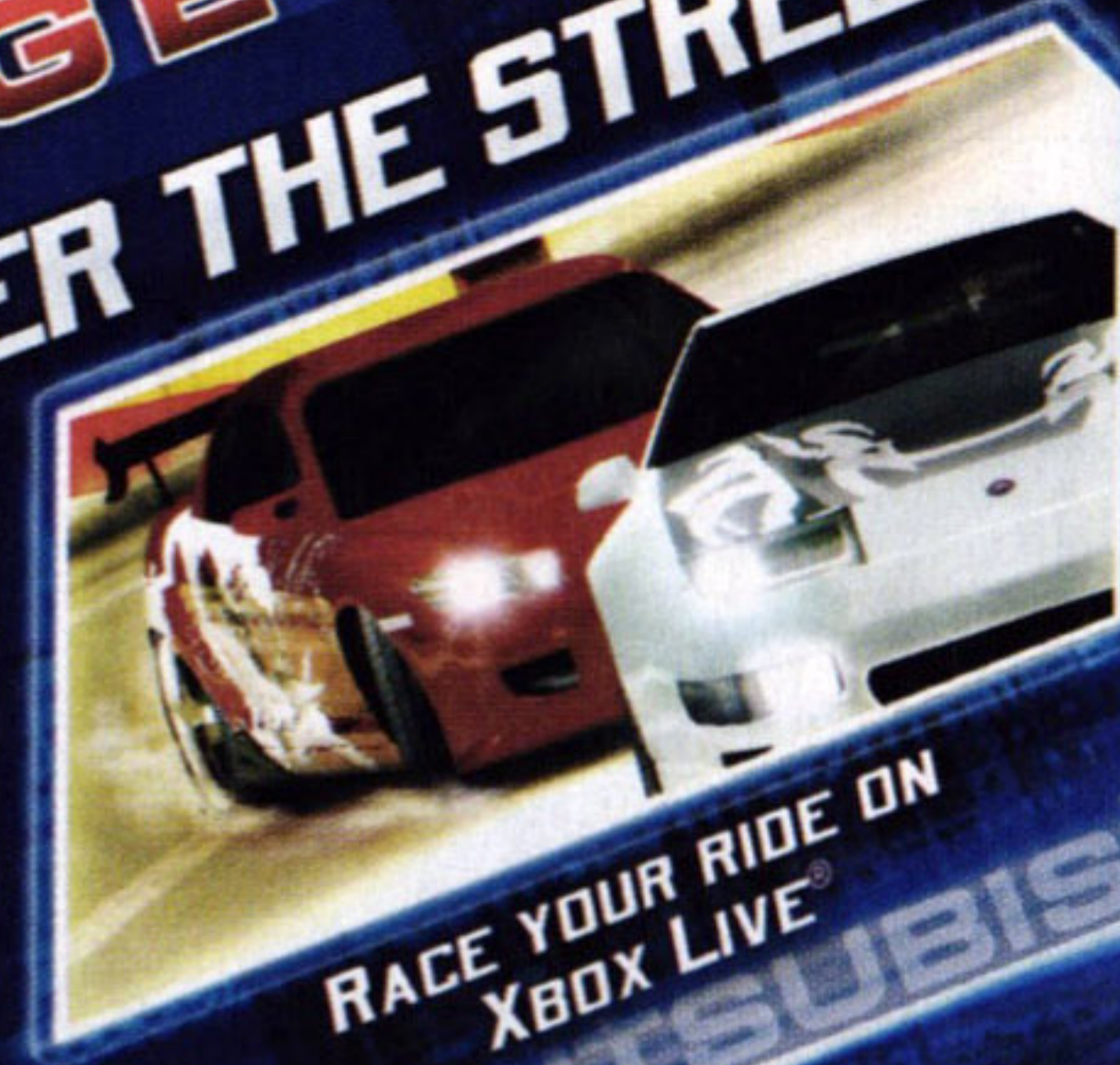
- > **Concept:** "Intro to RPGs 101" turns out to be one of the most boring classes you've ever had
- > **Graphics:** Pretty darn nice – a highlight, if one is to be found
- > **Sound:** Hours of voiceover, but that doesn't mean any of it is particularly good
- > **Playability:** If this is too hard, put down the controller, hang a stupid sign on your head, and go get a brain scan
- > **Entertainment:** Do you feel like you'll die if you don't play the same cliché you've been playing since the early '90s? This game's for you!
- > **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5

Are you a chimp that recently underwent a human brain transplant? Do you lack the wherewithal to manage your own bladder functions? If so, then Enchanted Arms might be worth your time. The dialogue is insipid, the characters are hollow, and combat is so shallow that the auto-attack option is just as effective as manually inputting commands (but faster!). The visuals are pretty much the only redeeming aspect, but if looks were all that mattered, I'd have married a *Return of the Jedi* Princess Leia standee years ago. —JOE

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UBISOFT

XBOX

Painkiller: Hell Wars

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER > **DEVELOPER** PEOPLE CAN FLY
> **RELEASE** JULY 25 > **ESRB** M

■ This shot actually isn't using any kind of forced perspective to make the boss look bigger than he is – he's really that huge



CIRCLE-STRAFING 101

As much as I hate to say it, this title is so 2005. It's a little unfair – there are certainly plenty of gamers who lack the gaming PC to play the original – but at the same time it's hard to get very excited about a port of a game that is exactly the same as one I played a year ago. Even lacking any new content (and on a system that has been left for dead by the rest of the industry), though, this is one of the better PC-to-console ports I've seen.

Don't let the thin veneer of story fool you. Painkiller is about shooting demons, grabbing some ammo every so often, and then shooting some more demons. Not since Serious Sam has an FPS been so single-mindedly dedicated to gratuitous violence. Fortunately, the combat is tight and fast, and the weapons and enemies are varied enough to keep things entertaining all throughout the lengthy single-player game. As with the original, some of the optional goals (which unlock new special

powers) are asinine, as is collecting money (which allows you to enable unlocked powers). But the bosses are huge, impressive, and clever, so it all works out in the end.

Only a few differences between the PC original and this port exist, and they're very minor. Mid-level loads come up occasionally, but they're no worse than most console games. A couple of the weapons, notably the chaingun and lightning gun, aren't nearly as useful without the precision of mouse-and-keyboard control, but those are hardly your only options. If you suffer (like so many of us do) from occasional cravings to gun down hordes of Satan's minions with no regard for silly modern concepts like the stealth or RPG elements that seem to creep their way into nearly every action game these days, Painkiller is an excellent way to blow off some steam. Just don't go in expecting some kind of deep emotional experience – enjoy this for what it is, and you won't be disappointed. —ADAM



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Take last year's PC-only fast-paced FPS and port it to the Xbox. No seriously, that's it

> **Graphics:** This definitely belongs in the top tier of current-gen games visually

> **Sound:** Cheesy Euro-metal and explosions – which is honestly a perfect fit for the gameplay

> **Playability:** Outside of a stupid oversight in weapon-switching, this plays smoothly and controls tightly

> **Entertainment:** Other than the fact that the Xbox ship has pretty much already sailed, this is a totally solid (if somewhat shallow) title

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

Painkiller: Hell Wars is one of those games that makes video game reviewers eat their words. I'm sick to death of predictable level design, arbitrary mission goals, and mindless shooting. So why did I have a surprisingly good time with this by-the-numbers gorefest? Painkiller's over-the-top gonzo sensibility, enormous bosses, and outrageous weapons somehow make this seem like more than just a hokey slasher FPS. I'm not really sure how this works, but it does – up to a point. It's definitely a fun time, but even the biggest addicts of twitch FPS will begin to grow tired of the meat grinder action over the long haul. Still, this is shameless in the best sense of the word. —MATT



PC

Dungeon Siege II: Broken World

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** GAS POWERED GAMES > **RELEASE** AUGUST 1 > **ESRB** M

FAT LOOTS AND BIG NUMBERS

Anyone who regularly reads the magazine knows my respect for any kind of moderately rewarding experience and loot treadmill. This expansion delivers on that front, and makes little pretense of being anything more than a vehicle to level your party up to insane heights of power. And while there's nothing wrong with that, some fixes to the irritations of Dungeon Siege II would've been nice.

Basic hack n' slash action, the staple of Dungeon Siege since the franchise's inception, is done with the same level of skill as ever. Sure, the AI bugs out once in a while and characters sometimes try to path through trees, but it's still a fairly smooth experience overall. One could wish for more cool spells and abilities – as in the base game, you'll likely find yourself using the same three or four for hours on end – but that's the price we pay for simplicity.

Broken World's focus on crafted über-items (which require you to hunt down a few uncommon reagents rather than hope for a single rare drop) is both blessing and curse. On the plus side, it's nice to be able to see your progress toward a super-powered sword. On the other hand, filling up your inventory space with a ton of feathers, stones, and suchlike in the hopes that you'll have the necessary ingredients on hand when the next recipe comes along is tedious and irritating.

This expansion is really nothing more than the quintessential extension of the base game. Nothing is really fixed or broken from the original, the new content is entertaining enough to play through, and some of the additional spells and hero classes are kind of fun. Extrapolate Dungeon Siege II for another dozen or so hours of playtime and you've got a pretty good idea of what's going on here. —ADAM



BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Take a party of high-level characters through a quest to save the world that they just helped destroy

> **Graphics:** Same as ever. Close-ups look mediocre, but the chaos of battle can be quite pretty

> **Sound:** Does iTunes count? Because this audio is entirely forgettable

> **Playability:** Occasional AI flakiness and some pathing issues are present, but not too frequent

> **Entertainment:** It's a hack n' slash dungeon crawler. No more, no less

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

Would you be shocked if I told you that if you liked the previous Dungeon Siege games you would be pleased with this expansion? Of course you wouldn't. The series has never really been about complicated never-before-seen gameplay, it's about a gamer's need to grind that next level, kill that next boss, and procure that next great item as you march your way to total game domination. In that regard, Broken World plays the familiar tune well enough, while offering fans more of the dungeon crawling madness that you either love or despise. My only complaint is that this series could really use an overhaul of the aging graphics engine. —ANDY

ACTION-RPG REDEFINED

Dark Messiah

MIGHT AND MAGIC

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MAGIC FRANCHISE GETS A MIND
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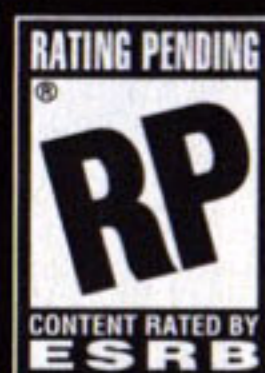
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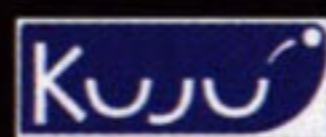


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UBISOFT



■ The ways that terrain and defensive emplacements affect the game are genius

PC

Company of Heroes

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** THQ
 > **DEVELOPER** RELIC ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 11 > **ESRB** M



ANOTHER TRIUMPH

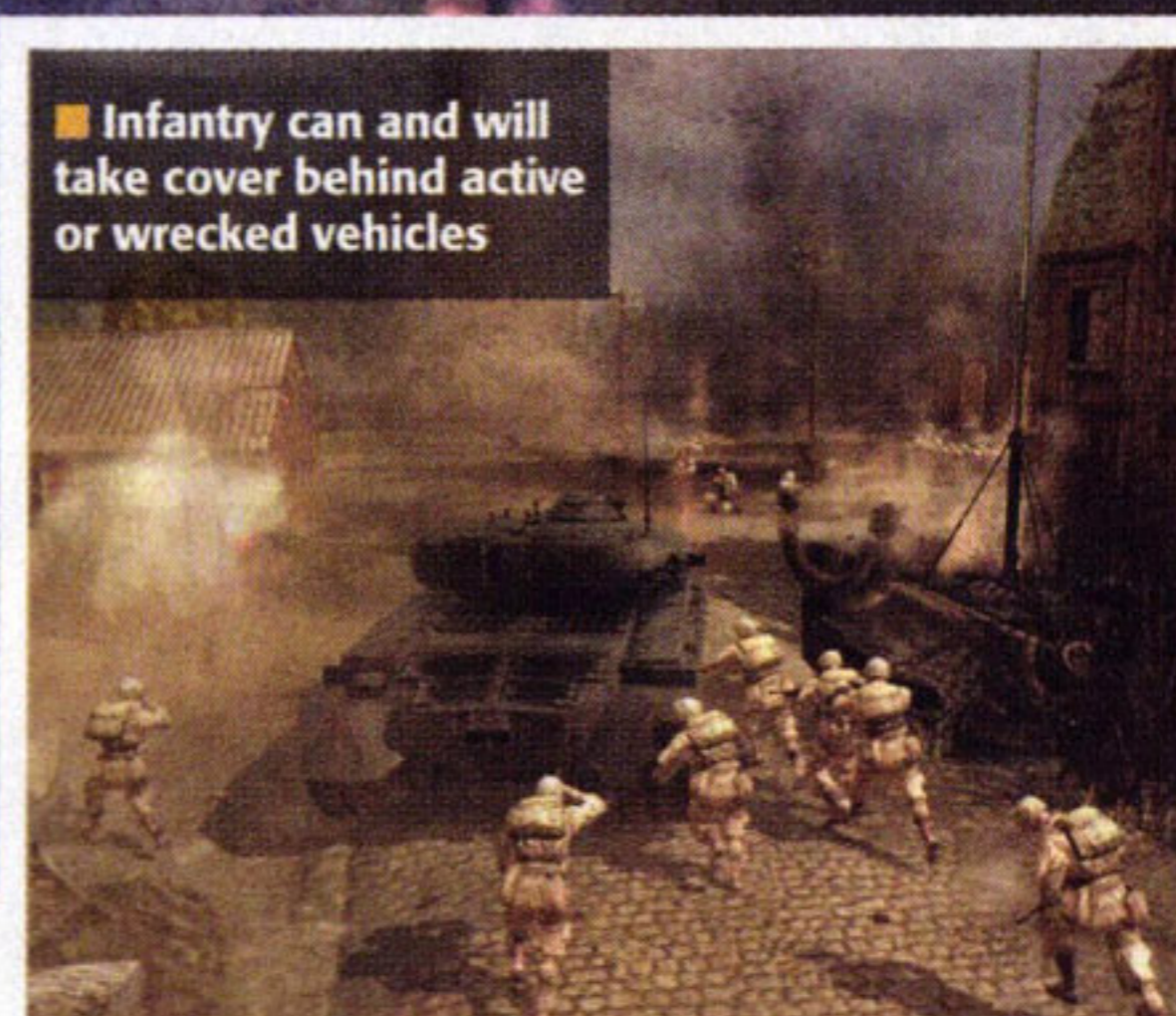
It isn't often that a supremely high level of design, execution, presentation, and plain old fun come together, yet developer Relic Entertainment is continuing its streak of truly outstanding titles with *Company of Heroes*. There was a time that playing yet another World War II RTS was only slightly above hosting a Pauly Shore movie marathon on my priority list, but now I can't tear myself away from another round of kicking Nazi ass.

Anyone who played Relic's last RTS effort, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*, will be instantly familiar with the basic mechanics here. Control points that give their holder a steady stream of resources dot the map, infantry are commanded on a squad level and are actually balanced well against vehicles, and cover and positioning are critical to any battle. As good as that title was, though, *Company of Heroes* takes everything a step farther. Nearly

everything on the field of battle is destructible and can be used for cover, many maps feature garrisonable buildings for additional infantry protection, and a balance between footsoldiers and heavier weaponry is utterly crucial to victory.

Simply dumping these concepts into any RTS title would virtually guarantee a decent game at the least. *Company of Heroes'* true genius is in how these elements all come together along with the available unit types and map design to form a cohesive, delicately interrelated whole. Because controlling territory is the means by which you acquire resources, any strategy is vulnerable to small raids by the enemy to disrupt your supply lines and mess up your economy – which makes mastering that tactic as well as defensive measures against it extremely important. On a smaller level, the addition of directional armor (tanks take more damage from

■ Infantry can and will take cover behind active or wrecked vehicles



behind, for instance) means that an adept tactician can take great advantage of flanking maneuvers. And that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to cooking up strategies in this game. The foundation of rules and concepts is so solid that a huge variety of advanced tactics and ploys can be built up once you've mastered the basics.

On the down side, several overly scripted single-player missions keep the campaign from being much more than average. Also, the aforementioned need to keep an eye on the entire map is sometimes a chore due to the standard-fare RTS control. Outside of this (and the done-to-death subject matter), there's very little not to love in *Company of Heroes*. Anyone who owns a gaming PC will be well served by this outstanding effort. —ADAM



■ Paying attention to vehicle facing and flanking maneuvers is critical



■ Very little in the way of terrain features is more than a speed bump to a tank



■ Not that you'd ever play from this view, but at least it looks cool

BOTTOM LINE

9

> **Concept:** Bridge the gap between overly complicated and too-simple World War II RTS in brilliant fashion

> **Graphics:** Even on an average machine this looks great. On a beefy rig, it's freaking amazing

> **Sound:** In a rare feat for the genre, the audio is absolutely outstanding

> **Playability:** Standard RTS controls are augmented by surprisingly good pathing, especially for infantry

> **Entertainment:** Unless the thought of playing another WWII game is totally abhorrent, you'll find few RTSs to match this

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.25

If this game doesn't totally blow you away, you must be missing your awesome gene. Building off of the best recent innovations in real-time strategy, *Company of Heroes* does for the WWII RTS what *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty* did in the FPS arena – make it real. The intensity of action delivered in every firefight, artillery strike, and tank battle is unmatched in any other similar game I've encountered. Enemies and allies alike naturally recognize cover and its strategic value, giving your role as a commander a degree of sophistication and complexity that's both refreshing and nerve-wracking. There's nothing quite like seeing your last squad of airborne commandos pinned down behind a rapidly disintegrating wooden wagon under heavy fire, and wondering how long before your reinforcements arrive. If I'm to muster up a complaint, it's that during the thick of a big battle, there weren't always enough visual cues to tell me what type of unit I had selected and weaponry they had equipped. But if that's my biggest concern – oh man, you've got to check this game out. —MILLER



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PSP

LocoRoco

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 5 > **ESRB** E

FIRST YOU HAVE TO TRY

PSP haters are going to have a field day with this one – it's the innovative, wacky, "Didn't Nintendo make that?" kind of title that Sony's port-heavy handheld lineup has needed. But, as illustrated by the early days of DS, innovation can take some time to find its groove. LocoRoco is a really promising and infinitely charming title that falls a little short, but it's weirdly a game that you'll really, really want to love.

My biggest problem is the unique control scheme for the game. Using the shoulder buttons almost exclusively, you'll tilt the world around the LocoRoco and maneuver them through puzzles and some platforming-like stages. But the issue is that jumping and getting any speed going are more of a chore than a joy. Unlike Katamari Damacy, another series with wacky controls and tons of charm, I never really got comfortable with maneuvering in LocoRoco.

But there are a lot of interesting ideas here and, hardcores be damned, it's cute-as-a-button attitude is a great asset. I found myself exploring and retrying more than the core gameplay would have warranted just because I liked looking around. Can style trump gameplay? Ultimately, no; but personality can, as they say, go a long way. —**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Bring about world peace by moving some blobs around

> **Graphics:** Incredibly adorable and uniquely stylized, the characters and the environments are always interesting to look at

> **Sound:** The cutesy music doesn't work as well a handful of hours into it, but I don't know that anything else would have fit

> **Playability:** A messy implementation of the shoulder buttons never really did feel comfortable to me

> **Entertainment:** A great experiment and just the kind of bizarre innovation that the PSP needs, but not quite up to its potential

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **8**

LocoRoco is probably the most infectious, charming game I've played since Katamari Damacy. Like that title, it features great music, a brightly colored, strange art style, and addictive gameplay. In this case, your task is to navigate a blob across a series of increasingly complex platforming levels. Like Katamari, it does get a bit repetitive after awhile, but for the most part this is an excellent and creative PSP title. —**MATT**



■ **Stylish, but vapid and repetitive – like [insert starlet's name here]**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

Miami Vice

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > **DEVELOPER** REBELLION > **RELEASE** JULY 18 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

I give Rebellion credit – it has clearly put some effort into making this game something more

than just a hastily slapped together shoot 'em up. Although it lacks any of the depth and drama of Michael Mann's summer film, little details like being able to cut shady deals with drug traffickers, having your clothes affect your reputation on the streets, and being able to cruise the waterways on a cigarette boat add an extra touch to what could have been a fairly standard shooter. Unfortunately, these "extras" are the best part of the experience, because the game's odd RE 4-style aiming mechanic (which forces you to be stationary while firing), oddly hyperactive enemies, and wonky character movement ultimately sink what could have been an over-achieving PSP licensed game. —**MATT**

DS

Monster House

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** A2M > **RELEASE** JULY 18 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE **6**

The fact that I played all the way through Monster House makes me seriously question

my chosen career path. It's not that this is a bad game, it's just that I can't imagine anyone else ever spending so much time with it. Monster House's gameplay is ripped off wholesale from Smash TV, even replicating most of the weapons in kid-friendly water gun form. But as it turns out, replacing Smash TV's overt violence and campy gameshow theme with animated enemy books and dishes makes for a fairly dull experience. So even though Monster House is better than your average kid's movie game, I just have to imagine most kids will put this down long before I did, and go do something more meaningful, like climb a tree or read a book. —**JEREMY**

PSP

Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 5 > **ESRB** E10+



ULTIMATE?

If this were another franchise, no one would defend its missteps as anything other than poor design and implementation. As it is, there are going to be some that stalwartly stand up for Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins by claiming that anybody who finds any problems with it must just not be capable of recognizing its genius. The truth is that this formulaic retread of a beloved concept still holds up remarkably well in many regards. But it's nowhere near perfect.

Like a shiny coat of paint, Ghosts 'n Goblins wears its beefed up visuals and audio well. The creepy melodies that accompany Arthur on his prosaic quest to save the princess are particularly good, and the special effects and overall art design are equally strong.

It's impossible to talk about a game with this name without bringing up the subject of difficulty. The classic games from which this takes its title are still renowned for their insane challenge. For better or worse, that element remains largely intact. Even on the lowest setting, the danger is constant and intense. You never feel safe from attack; every hop forward could mean potential death. Old-school fanatics would cry foul if the game wasn't this hard, and the dose of punishment this shells out shouldn't disappoint. Simultaneously, a newly generous continue policy means mere mortals might actually stand a chance.

What hurts the game is its insistence on maintaining the controls and conventions of its predecessors. The non-adjustable lateral jump means you'll regularly be landing someplace you don't intend (read: in a lava pit). Plus, the number and frequency of enemy respawns can be placed distinctly in the frustrating column rather than the legitimately challenging one. Finally, reaching the final level takes only a scant few hours, but a silly collection mechanic will force you into a whole second or third playthrough before you can even see the end. Weak. I'm fine with a game that has me tearing my hair out from the difficulty – but the gameplay sure better hold up during those frustrating hours. In this case, I'm not sure it always does. —**MILLER**



BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

> **Concept:** Return to the glory days of getting your ass handed to you by an endless swarm of baddies between you and your special lady friend

> **Graphics:** No disappointments here. Bright colorful worlds and rockin' monster designs definitely hold your attention

> **Sound:** A standout success in the musical department, with tunes that combine an 8-bit sensibility with a modern flair

> **Playability:** A major letdown. Awkward controls are a holdover from the past. A much-needed update is required to return to greatness

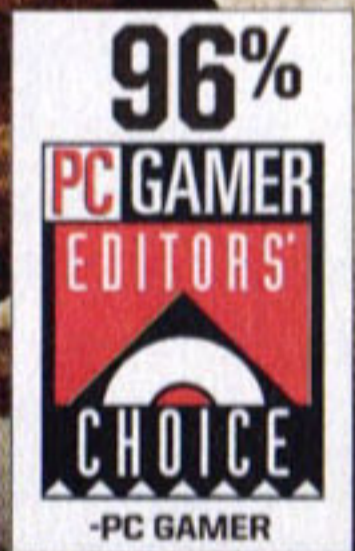
> **Entertainment:** Even if you like your gaming with a pinch of masochism, it's not all it could be

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **6.5**

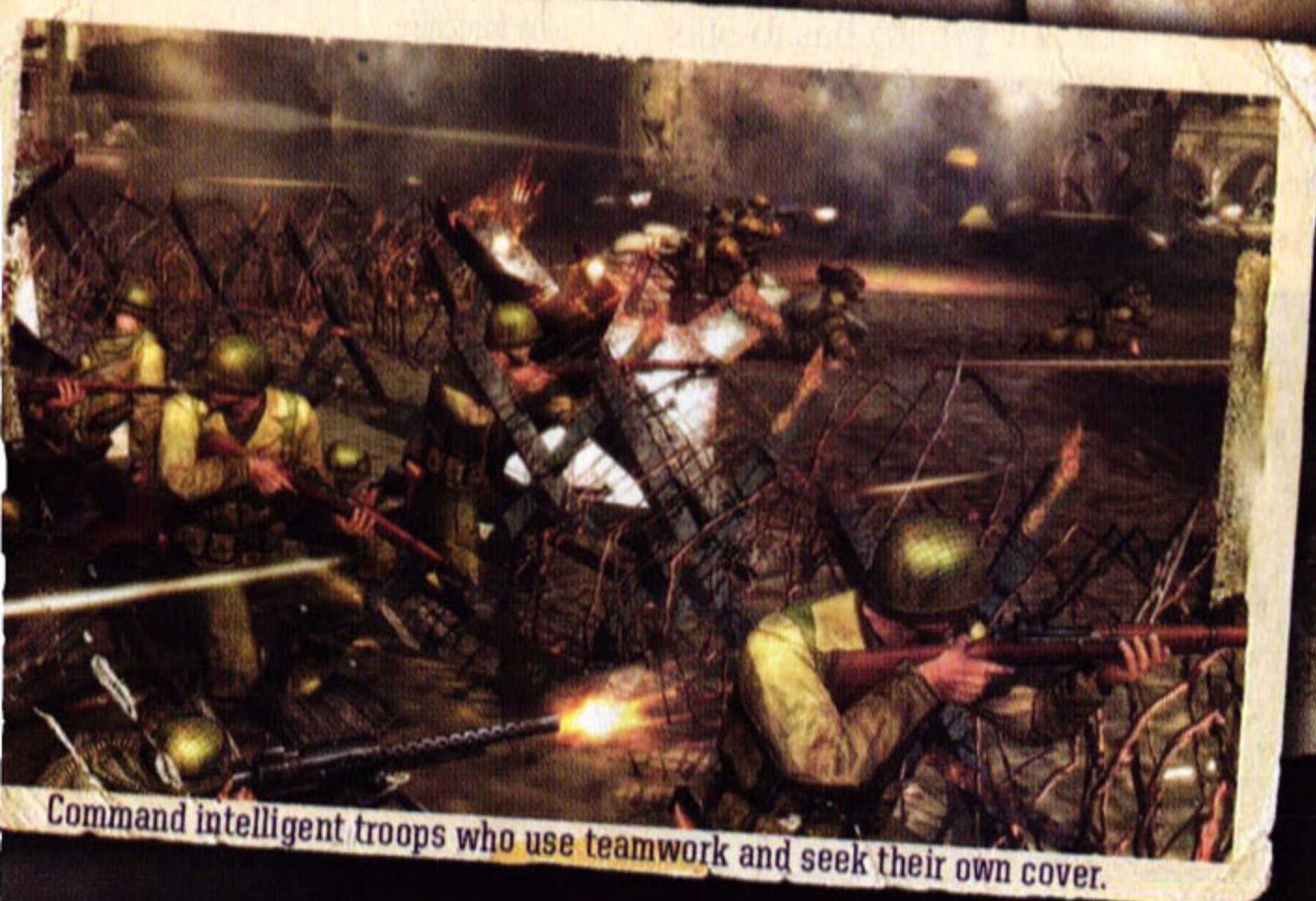
It's hard to really enjoy a game when you feel like it is constantly punching you in the face for trying to play it. It's not that I don't enjoy a challenge, it's that Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins feels more like a collection of punishments than a real game. This series is all about difficulty, but blind jumps, forced replays, and sticky controls just aren't much fun any more. Purists who love the series exactly how it is and don't want any evolution in the gameplay will love it, as it does have some great graphics, excellent sound, and good animation. The rest of us, however, have moved on, and realize that challenge no longer has to come at the expense of fun. —**JEREMY**

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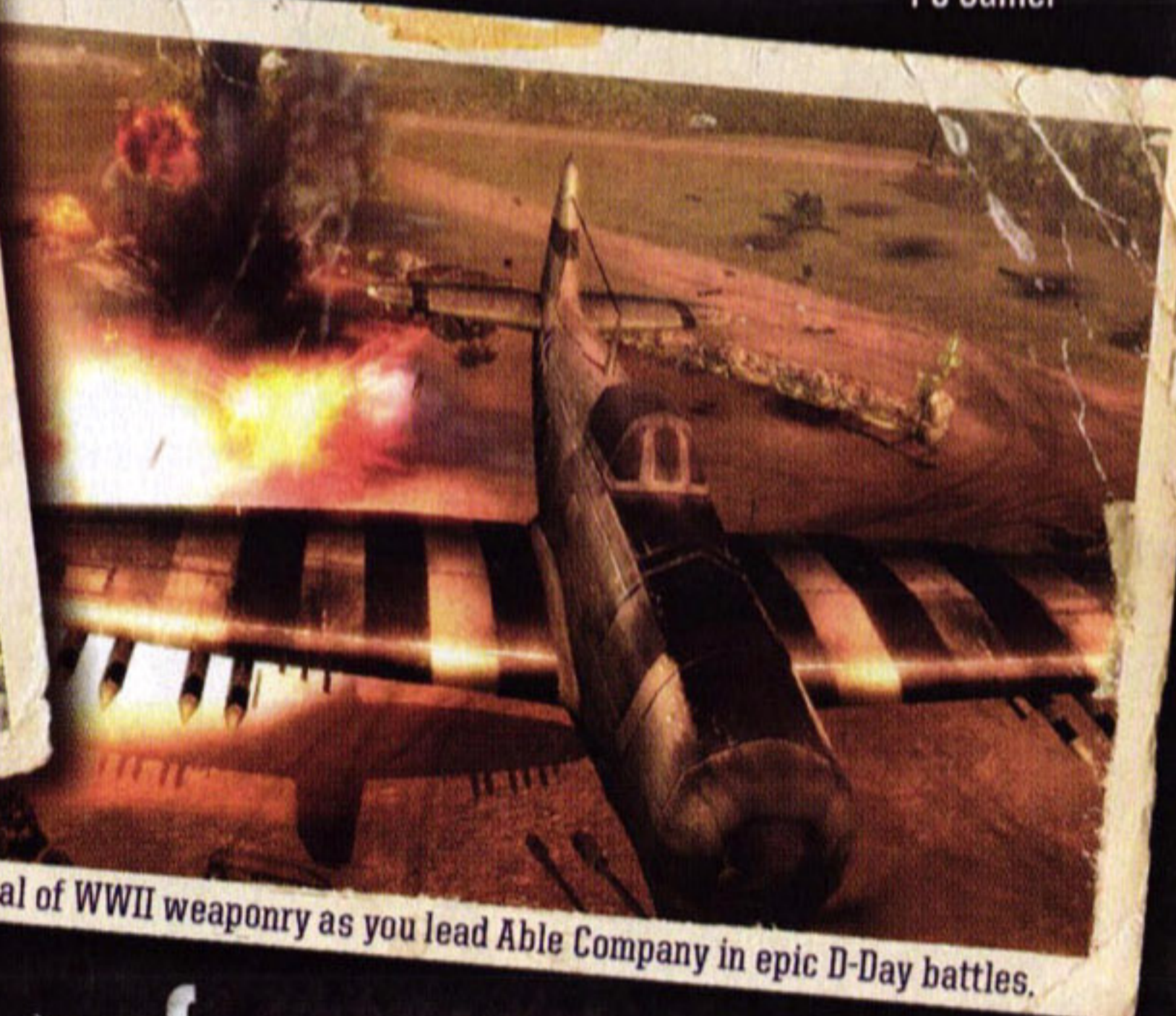


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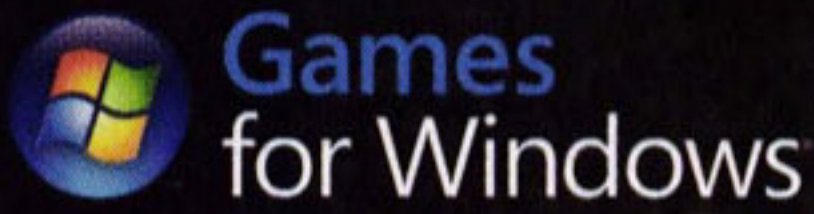
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DS

Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime

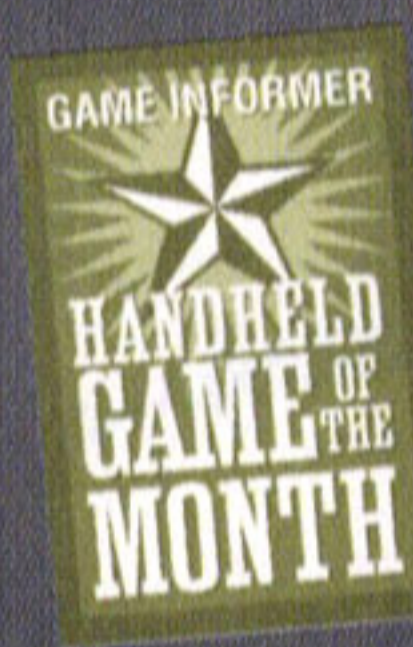
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA NINTENDO WI-FI) > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX/TOSE > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 19 > ESRB E

IT'S SLIME TIME

I feel pretty guilty. I've spent hours slaughtering slimes in Dragon Quest's RPG incarnations, only to find out now that the blue blobs with vacant grins are far more than easy XP; they're also adorable and hilarious. Rocket Slime harnesses these creatures' irresistible charm and pairs it with clever exploration and puzzle solving to form a fun adventure with a decidedly classic feel.

If you've played any of the top-down Zelda games, the core of Rocket Slime will be instantly familiar. You take control of a pure-hearted young slime who needs to rescue his captured friends by scouring every inch of the world. Basic progression through the game is pretty simple: You pick up enemies and items and throw them where they need to go. Throw bullets in cannons to blast obstacles. Throw your buddies onto rafts so they can get back to town. So why is this formula so much fun? Because tons of stuff you pick up doubles as ammunition for a giant magical tank that materializes out of thin air.

Even though you are ostensibly trying to save your fellow slimes, the real reason to explore the world is to gather a variety of ammunition for your massive Schleiman Tank. One-on-one tank battles comprise the game's key encounters, with an engaging mix of strategy and reflexes. These frenzied sequences



have you shooting down enemy projectiles and firing back with your own customized loadout of ammo that you collect on your journey.

Despite the fact that it's great fun to blow apart enemy tanks (with names like Chrono Twigger and Platypanzer), this emphasis on collection is the main thing that holds Rocket Slime back. It's fine in smaller quantities, but the sheer volume you need to amass in certain cases puts a temporary damper on the fun. Even so, that doesn't stop me from wholeheartedly recommending Rocket Slime to fans of Dragon Quest, Zelda, and good games in general.—JOE



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** The secret lives of slimes revealed!

> **Graphics:** Recognizable DQ creatures make a faithful transition to the smaller screen

> **Sound:** The best noise in the game is the surprised shout emitted by friendly slimes when you plow into them face-first

> **Playability:** Acquiring and assembling ammo gets more complex as the game progresses, but the mechanics remain accessible

> **Entertainment:** Visuals and dialogue are the humorous highlights, and the gameplay is no slouch

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

Many games can fairly be described as charming, but most of those don't pack a lot of depth behind their cutesy facade. Then there's Rocket Slime. Don't let the fact that it's undeniably adorable fool you—it's a deep, smart adventure game that achieves that rare Pixar trait of all-ages appeal. Even after I finished the main quest, I didn't want to put Rocket Slime down, and continued to play around with some of its extra features. And let me tell you, not many "kid's games" get their hooks so deeply into us jaded game journalists.—JEREMY

DS

Mega Man ZX

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 12 > ESRB E



■ Bosses don't always follow the traditional mold



■ Surprisingly, most boss fights are best tackled with your basic buster and Z-saber

NEW SYSTEM, SAME GAME

It is beginning to seriously irritate me that Capcom is apparently incapable of releasing a Mega Man game that doesn't have some kind of glaring flaws that keep it from achieving even nostalgic greatness. Mega Man ZX is a perfect example of this. The core gameplay (which is lifted almost entirely from the Mega Man Zero series on GBA) is nearly perfect, but nobody bothered to implement all of the other things that a game needs to be truly exceptional.

The fact that dropping bosses grants you new forms with specific mobility-related abilities as well as new attacks is a welcome change from the Zero series' performance-based upgrades. Likewise, the dropping of the overall difficulty down to a reasonable level is a blessing even for a hardcore Mega Man player like me. However, this is where the improvements unfortunately end.

Unlike in previous Mega Man titles, the world of ZX is a series of interconnected, continuous stages. Normally this would be a great

development, but when you're forced into blind wandering because the game never tells you where your next mission takes place—much less how to get there—exploration becomes a chore. Also, as is becoming customary for Mega Man games, a few absolutely horrendously designed levels (including one that is the most frustrating experience I've had since the Battletoads hover-bike sequence) make it all too easy to shut the game off and never come back.

Fans will certainly appreciate the opportunity to platform their way through another Mega Man adventure, and there are some clever bits that compare favorably to the best that 2D gaming has to offer. Inconsistent quality and unnecessary tedium are two foes whose powers I'd just as soon not absorb, though.—ADAM



■ Ah, underwater levels, you are never fun



■ Old-school Mega Man fans will recognize this homage to games past

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** You have powered armor that comes complete with a gun on your arm and a lightsaber. Just do what comes naturally

> **Graphics:** Decent enough, but disappointing in the fact that it doesn't look any better than the Zero series on GBA

> **Sound:** The sparkly techno-pop tunes actually fit the gameplay rather well

> **Playability:** As always, it's fairly simple to make Mega Man zoom and dart about the screen as only he can

> **Entertainment:** A couple of stupid design paradigms and a few obnoxious levels and bosses make this yet another average installment of the franchise

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

As the Mega Man series has evolved in different directions, each branch has become known for different things. That's why gamers shouldn't be fooled by the name Mega Man in this game's title; it's more akin to the immensely challenging GBA Zero games. Switching among your Biometal suits to aid in exploration adds a new layer to the "kill boss, get weapon" routine and is almost Metroid-like in execution, but sloppier. Tedium sets in quickly as you move through similar screens in a side-scrolling open world, hoping the transporters can get you within two or three zones of the next level. Mega Man ZX has fun gameplay, but this structure just isn't focused enough to get me excited about it.—JOE

DS

Star Fox Command

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS, UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA NINTENDO WI-FI) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** Q-GAMES > **RELEASE** AUGUST 28 > **ESRB** E10+



Most flying segments last for under a minute



Some stages feature unique minigames, such as this one where you must follow a path to destroy a mothership

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Fox takes to the skies again, but doesn't stay airborne for long enough. The action is great, but the levels are too short

> **Graphics:** Slightly better than the SNES's FX chip graphics. Draw distance can be a problem, which forces players to track vessels on their map

> **Sound:** An energetic soundtrack that is accompanied by annoying mumbled character speak

> **Playability:** Outside of the occasional misread, the touch screen controls are solid. The strategy elements are also quite interesting, but again, too short

> **Entertainment:** A return to the glory days in both single and multiplayer

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

WHAT GOES UP MUST NOT COME DOWN

It looks like someone at Nintendo finally took my advice and broke both of Fox McCloud's legs. I know this is a horrible thing to say, but disaster strikes whenever this fuzzy little critter frolics in the brush. His place is in the cockpit. That's where he's at his best. When he isn't soaring in his Arwing, the only thing that is airborne is a Nintendo machine thrown out of a window by a disconsolate fan boy. Nintendo tried to expand the Star Fox brand with the on foot focus in *Star Fox Adventures* and *Star Fox Assault*, but it just didn't take. Rather than making the same cataclysmic mistake of grounding the excitement, Nintendo and developer Q-Games are giving Fox another chance to earn his wings. *Star Fox Command* isn't the sequel to *Star Fox 64* that everyone has been looking to the skies for, but it does deliver the same nerve-rattling intensity that the series has been lacking in recent years.

The Nintendo DS' touch screen may not seem like a suitable navigational tool for a game of this ilk, but thanks to the ingenious design from Q-Games, it handles the Arwing's movements quite well. Sliding the stylus across the screen adjusts your vessel's pitch and yaw, and a quick circular motion performs the evasive spin. The ship's other functions, such as the flip, are also designated to the touch screen – not as stylus movements, but icons that you simply need to tap. I found that this new-fangled control system allows you to be more accurate in your targeting and more precise in your evasive maneuvers, but also more prone to mixing up your actions. A quick evasive swipe may be read as a spin, or you may accidentally hit the flip icon

as you veer to the side.

Unlike the *Star Foxes* of yesteryear, this one isn't a track shooter. It plays out more like a strategy game. Before you can down your first bogey, you must first coordinate the movements of your team by drawing their flight paths on a top-down map. When your tactics are set, the enemy will make its move. If your flight paths collide, the game switches to a real-time combat phase. These segments usually only consist of a handful of targets, but the enemy doesn't follow the old one-shot and run strategy that it used to. They'll stick to your tail and rip your Arwing to shreds if you don't lose them quickly. It still has that great *Star Fox* feel to the combat, but now it has elements of *Ace Combat* and *Advance Wars* thrown into the mix. A game that once just focused on your piloting skills now brings out the general in you.

The mind game that comes from reading your enemy's tactics is truly fascinating, but the game runs into the problem of the battles being far too short. A map usually only takes a few minutes to clear. Just as you start to get into the strategy element, you are pulled away and sent to another galaxy and another battle.

The game still offers a number of different paths, which is great for replay. Multiplayer is also present and proves to be as much fun as it was back when it was powered by the FX chip.

Star Fox Command isn't the second coming, but it is a great start to repairing a franchise that had crashed and burned. Let's hope that Nintendo continues with this formula and adds some length to the wars that unfold in future installments. —REINER



Second Opinion 8

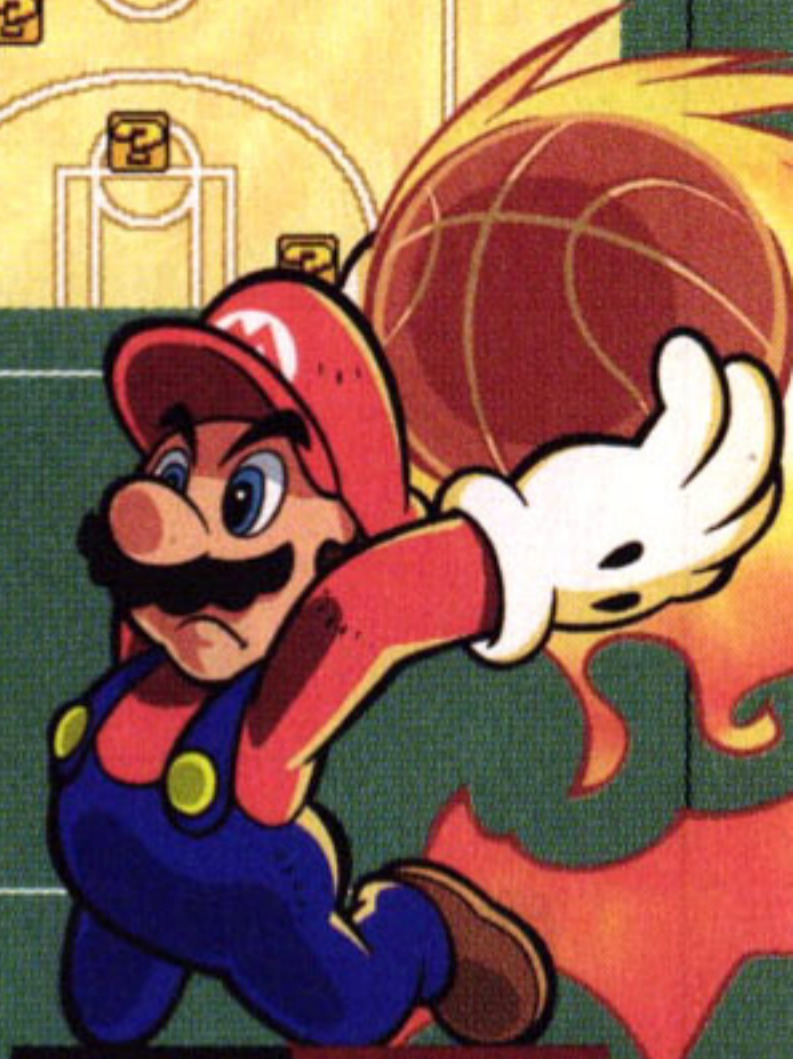
A totally new control scheme can be a tricky thing. You want it to be easy to pick up and learn, but still hold some fun after hours of playtime. Well, kudos to the *Star Fox* team, because this is one of the best touch screen control approaches I've yet seen, and it's actually fun to use! A new strategy-lite approach to getting into battles is pretty sweet – you'll maneuver into the flight paths of oncoming waves of enemies and missiles to protect your base ship, and then one by one fight out the battles you've run into in large arena-like dog-fights. Purists will bemoan the loss of the longer form flying forward levels, but for my taste a changeup of the formula in this way was just what a handheld version needed. Only the repetition of most of the battle types and scenarios really got me down. There's lots of straight up challenge if you're into that, and plenty of detail about the love affairs that frogs share if you're more into that, though you might want to keep that to yourself in most social circles. Good times. —MILLER



DS

Mario Hoops 3-on-3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA NINTENDO WI-FI)
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6.5

LACKS FUNDAMENTALS

There are two types of DS games. The first (and better) type manages to use the DS's touch screen to simplify and streamline familiar gameplay activities, while at the same time adding new, unique elements that could have never been possible without the system's technology. The second kind takes genres that we've all played for years, and then tacks on ill-fitting, gimmicky control schemes for the sake of saying that it has "groundbreaking" touch-screen elements.

It becomes apparent fairly quickly that *Mario Hoops 3-on-3* falls into the latter category. Completely eschewing the DS's face buttons, all your moves (with the exception of court movement, which is still mapped to the d-pad) are done with the stylus. To shoot you quickly swipe up; passing is done by quickly gesturing towards a teammate; blocking is down, etc. For the first 15 minutes, while you're still learning, it's sort of engaging. Then, as you progress through the tournament, you begin to realize that all this "innovation" only serves to make things that – in a normal basketball game – would be completely easy much sloppier than they ought to be. Given the amount of things you have to do with it – passing, shooting, blocking, dunking, even positioning your dribble – it starts to resemble complete chaos.

I don't doubt that the DS can be a good system for sports, but I really don't think this is the way to go about it. At this point, I'd advise Square Enix (which, surprisingly, developed this game) to stick to the RPG genre until they have a better grasp of the fundamentals of video game basketball. —MATT



> **Concept:** Take the familiar Mario sports formula to the DS with touch-screen control and wireless multiplayer

> **Graphics:** As always, Mario and the gang exhibit a colorful yet none-too-detailed graphical look

> **Sound:** Happy slappy music, plinging coins, wacky sound effects – nothing new here

> **Playability:** In general, the touch-screen control creates more problems than it solves

> **Entertainment:** Like too many DS games, this feels unnecessary and gimmicky

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6

Before putting in some time with *Hoops*, I was convinced that playing basketball with a stylus would be perhaps the most dreadful experience of my gaming life. Thankfully, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the controls are fun. Here is where the praise ends however, because while the control scheme is entertaining, it is also extremely one-dimensional. I found myself picking the single-player game apart with outrageous scores like 684 to zero. Thankfully, the single-player starts to offer up some challenge once you get to the Rainbow tournament, but by this point I had found that I was already bored with the game and its simplicity. It's a neat and original diversion, but as a full-fledged game *Mario Hoops* disappoints. —ANDY



DS

Cooking Mama

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** TAITO
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 29 > **ESRB** E

WONTON WAYS

I love (no, *love*) food as entertainment – in particular those wonderfully geeky shows on Food TV like *Good Eats* and *Ham on the Street*. Along these same lines, *Cooking Mama* could have been a wacky, gameplay-oriented way to have some fun with my food. Because of the dual-screen layout and minigame design, it just plain isn't. Points are seemingly docked at a flat rate – so failing to stir the rice enough could be just as bad as dropping all of the meat pies onto the floor. This scoring discrepancy is even more aggravating when some of the actions are way too easy and others are pretty hard under the game's harsh time limits. In short, the games themselves just aren't as much fun as other minigame collections and are really repetitive.

But fun learning could rule the day, right? Sadly, the home economics are just as dumbed down as the minigames. You can't be successful at the pan-frying minigame and also be paying attention to what's going on in the pan, for example. And, while you do do many steps of a dish, none are what a normal person would call a recipe, so the learning side is kinda bunk.

Without managing to scratch either itch of wacky bite-sized fun or interesting educational aid, *Cooking Mama* succeeds mostly at proving to me that the idea has potential to be really, really cool. But this game ain't the one to do it. Yet.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Finally make Mama happy with your mad sauté skillz

> **Graphics:** Cutesy Japanese style is applied to food, characters, and menus

> **Sound:** Repetitive sound clips for your success or failure and a super irritating main song are not what I would call the game's best feature

> **Playability:** More instruction on how some steps work would be nice, and I had occasional issues with the game recognizing what I was trying to do

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Cooking Mama is no deeper than a bowl of soup. It also loses its flavor in ten minutes. So why do I keep going back and playing it? We all run into moments where we only have a few minutes on our hands to sit down and play a game. This title fits that bill. It's intended for bite-sized gaming and proves to be a nice little distraction. The minigames are certainly creative, but end up favoring knowing how they function rather than skill. Once you learn the techniques, mastering them is a cinch. It's quirky and fun, but only if you go into it not expecting it to sate your hunger for a meaty experience.—**REINER**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

DS

Deep Labyrinth

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG
> **PUBLISHER** ATLUS
> **DEVELOPER** INTERACTIVE BRAINS
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 15 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 4

Deep Labyrinth lets you reverse its control scheme if you're left-handed, and that's the nicest thing I have to say about it. Unfortunately, lefty or righty, there's no other reason to spend any time with this mess. The gameplay mixes first-person action with a rune-drawing-like spellcasting mechanic similar to *Lost Magic*, but every aspect is unresponsive, sluggish, and repetitive. It feels like *Deep Labyrinth* dares you to flip the power switch on the DS with every new area and encounter, and even if you press on for a while, the game clumsily heaps on more suffering until you just can't refuse.—**JOE**

DS

Contact

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> **PUBLISHER** ATLUS
> **DEVELOPER** MARVELOUS INTERACTIVE
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 19 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 7

Playing with the idea that you as the game player actually make "contact" with the characters in the game, you help along a doddering professor from outer space and the young boy he enlists to help him track down some lost power cells. Lots of great collectables from weapons to decals to strange costumes are fun, but the sit-back-and-watch battle system kills some of that fun, especially since you'll need to be farming XP in order to reasonably challenge a lot of the bosses. This isn't going to change the world, but far be it for me to condemn it for being a run-of-the-mill RPG with a fun sense of humor.—**MILLER**

DS

MechAssault: Phantom War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA NINTENDO WI-FI) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO
> **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** T



MOUNT UP

I've got to tell you, I didn't have high expectations for this sucker. Take the explosive visual effects and large-scale conflicts of the Xbox action-fest and throw them on a handheld? Sounds a little questionable. That's why the end result came as such a surprise. *Phantom War* is a fully featured, honest-to-goodness *MechAssault* game in almost every regard. While technical limitations hold the game back from greatness, when you look past the downgraded visuals there's a lot to like.

Ignoring those graphical problems is no small task. While the short cinematics between some levels look pretty polished, the actual in-game environments are positively dreadful, filled with textureless masses of color and blocky corners. The mech designs fare slightly better, even if the animation is choppy. Given the system that Backbone is working with, I'm sure it was a technical miracle to get things looking even remotely this defined on the DS. Still, system limitations or not, "easy on the eyes" is definitely not going to be your first descriptor.

It's a lot harder to find things to complain about in the gameplay. Like its console cousins, the game gives plenty of exciting battles, as you navigate any number of different mechs and tanks through the most basic of objectives – usually to blow something up. You'll even have the battlearmor of *MechAssault 2*, and the ability to run around on foot for brief moments to change mechs or interface with a computer console. There's a lot of character voiceover, but the story is as threadbare as *MechAssault* has always been. Meanwhile, movement and fighting controls are remarkably well-mapped given the limited number of buttons. The face buttons control aiming, and a generous (and necessary) aim assist function helps correct for the inaccuracy of not having a right analog stick. Several basic functions like turning on shields and switching weapons are within easy reach on the touch screen. It adds up to conflicts that are every bit as fun and tense as the Xbox offerings.

I think it's a shame that the mammoth mech battles are marred by some pretty horrific hacking minigames that show up way too often. The final boss fight is also a major pain in the butt. With the exception of those trouble spots, *Phantom War* delivers with excellently balanced difficulty and constant action. We may not have heard about any new plans for the franchise on Microsoft's new console, but get rid of your low expectations on this handheld adventure – it's better than you or I thought it would be.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Become a mech-warrior and strike down your mechanized foes in a manner remarkably akin to how you'd do so on the Xbox

> **Graphics:** Just because I'm telling you this is fun doesn't mean it looks any good

> **Sound:** Weapon effects are great, and there's lots of voiceover for a DS game

> **Playability:** Excellent controls and smart touch screen use should have you slipping right into the action

> **Entertainment:** A deep, satisfying action shooter with giant walking robots – what's not to like?

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

Phantom War's philosophy may very well be that being fun overrides being ugly – like your mom. [Oh no you didn't! – Ed.] *Phantom War* has the basic gameplay and the soul of the *MechAssault* series down perfectly, despite sporting environments that make it one of the grubbier looking games on the DS. But, by mapping some features to the touch screen, Backbone has managed to include every aspect of the console titles' gameplay. The campaign is fun, the multiplayer is solid, and the story is entirely in line with the rest of the series. It may not be a beauty queen, but *Phantom War* can still offer you a good time.—**JEREMY**

THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

"A stroke of genius"

Daniel Owen, Golf Punk

"Once you have experienced ProStroke Golf,
other golf games will never feel the same"

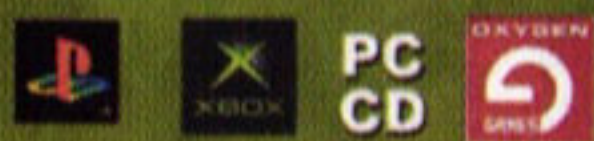
Matthew Scott, World Golf Teachers Federation Member



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CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For July 2006 Based On Units Sold

1 NCAA FOOTBALL 07 (PS2)



Wow, it looks like you folks really love your football! You guys must love it as much as we love lurking in the bushes outside Jimmy Kimmel's house. And that's a lot, seriously. We've got the restraining orders and taser burns to prove it.

2 NCAA FOOTBALL 07 (360)



We think that this version sold so well because its "next-generosity" makes it a glimpse at the future of football. Of course, everyone knows how the sport will evolve. The ball will be replaced with a dog skull, players will be called Juggers, and the most famous athlete of all is Rutger Hauer. 10,000 bonus points for anyone who gets this reference.

3 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. (DS)



Oh Mario, we're so happy to see you again. You're not a gangster or a space marine, you don't feature hidden sexual content, and we love that about you. You're an icon from the past. Did you bring any of that old-timey sasparilla with you? You didn't? Man, that's cold. Why you gotta be like that?

4 GRAND THEFT AUTO: LIBERTY CITY STORIES (PS2)



If you stacked up all the games that sold in the GTA series, it would probably reach, like the ceiling at least. What? You thought we were going to say the moon, or something? Games aren't that tall, man!

5 NCAA FOOTBALL 07 (XBOX)



If we could pick our perfect football team, The Rock would be QB, Aquaman would be the water tackle, and Godzilla would be the executive offensive monster. And, of course, Bumblebee the Autobot would be our wide receiver. But seriously, is there anyone who wouldn't pick good ol' Bumblebee? Miller certainly would.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	NCAA Football 07	N/A	PS2	8.25	07-06	\$48
2	NCAA Football 07	N/A	360	7.75	07-06	\$59
3	New Super Mario Bros.	1	DS	9.25	05-06	\$35
4	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	2	PS2	8.75	06-06	\$19
5	NCAA Football 07	N/A	XBOX	8.25	07-06	\$49
6	Cars	4	PS2	7	06-06	\$37
7	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day	3	DS	8.25	04-06	\$20
8	Big Brain Academy	8	DS	7.75	06-06	\$20
9	Cars	6	GBA	N/A	06-06	\$28
10	Chromehounds	N/A	360	7	07-06	\$59
11	The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II	N/A	360	8	07-06	\$60
12	2006 FIFA World Cup	7	PS2	8.5	04-06	\$30
13	Naruto: Ultimate Ninja	N/A	PS2	6.5	06-06	\$39
14	Prey	N/A	360	9.5	07-06	\$60
15	Star Wars: Battlefront II	N/A	PS2	8.5	11-05	\$19
16	Guitar Hero	12	PS2	9	11-05	\$70
17	God Of War	11	PS2	10	03-05	\$20
18	Cars	10	GC	7	06-06	\$37
19	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	18	PS2	10	10-04	\$20
20	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix	N/A	PS2	9.5	03-06	\$20

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	New Super Mario Bros.	DS
2	Tmagotchi No Puchi Puchi Omiseccchi Gohi-Kini	DS
3	Melty Blood: Act Cadenza	PS2
4	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain 2	DS
5	Shaberu! DS Cooking	DS
6	Animal Crossing: Wild World	DS
7	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain	DS
8	SD Gundam G Generation Portable	PSP
9	Jissen Pachi-Slot Hishouhou!	PS2
10	Kirarin Revolution: Kira Kira Idol Audition	DS



TOP 10 GI

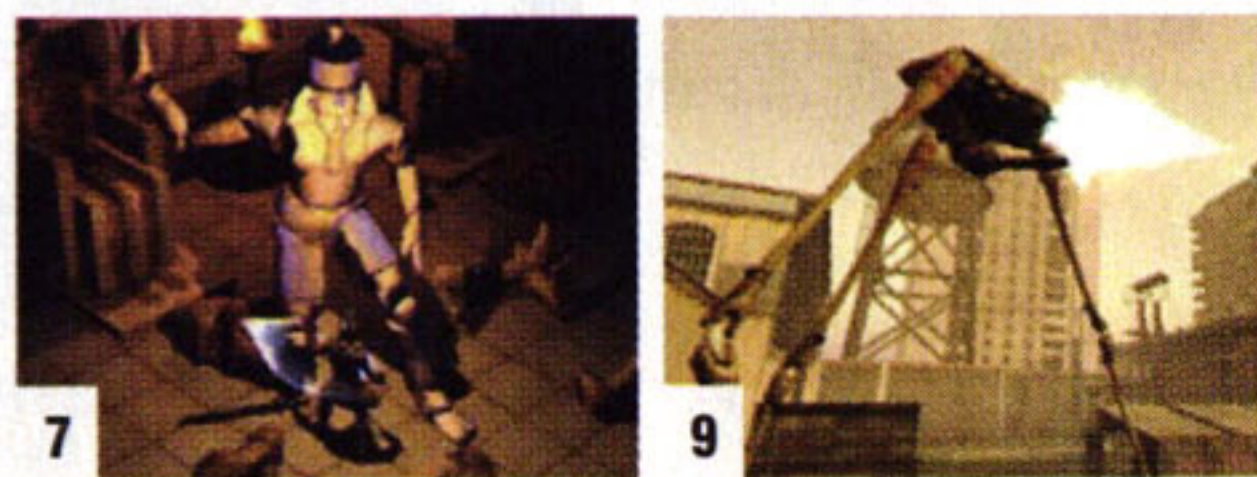
Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Okami	N/A	PS2
2	Dead Rising	1	360
3	Company of Heroes	N/A	PC
4	Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime	N/A	DS
5	Saints Row	2	360
6	LocoRoco	N/A	PSP
7	Star Fox Command	N/A	DS
8	Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra	3	PS2
9	Madden NFL 07	N/A	Multi
10	New Super Mario Bros.	5	DS



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World of Warcraft	1	\$36
2	Cars: Radiator Springs Adventures	4	\$18
3	The Sims 2: Family Fun Stuff	3	\$20
4	The Sims 2	6	\$40
5	The Sims 2: Open for Business	5	\$31
6	Guild Wars: Factions	8	\$48
7	Titan Quest	N/A	\$49
8	The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	7	\$49
9	Half-Life 2: Episode 1	2	\$18
10	Zoo Tycoon: The Complete Collection	N/A	\$20



Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

XBOX 360

2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.75	Jun-06
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	7.5	May-06
Bombberman: Act Zero	3	Sep-06
Burnout Revenge	9.5	Apr-06
Chromehounds	7	Aug-06
Dead or Alive 4	9	Mar-06
Dead Rising	9.25	Sep-06
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	6	May-06
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The	9.5	May-06
Far Cry Instincts: Predator	8.75	Jun-06
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06
Final Fantasy XI	7.25	Jun-06
Full Auto	7.5	Mar-06
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	9.5	Apr-06
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jul-06
Lord of the Rings: The Battle Middle-earth II, The	8	Aug-06
Major League Baseball 2K6	7	Jun-06
Moto GP '06	8.75	Jul-06
NCAA Football 07	7.75	Aug-06
Ninety-Nine Nights	7.5	Sep-06

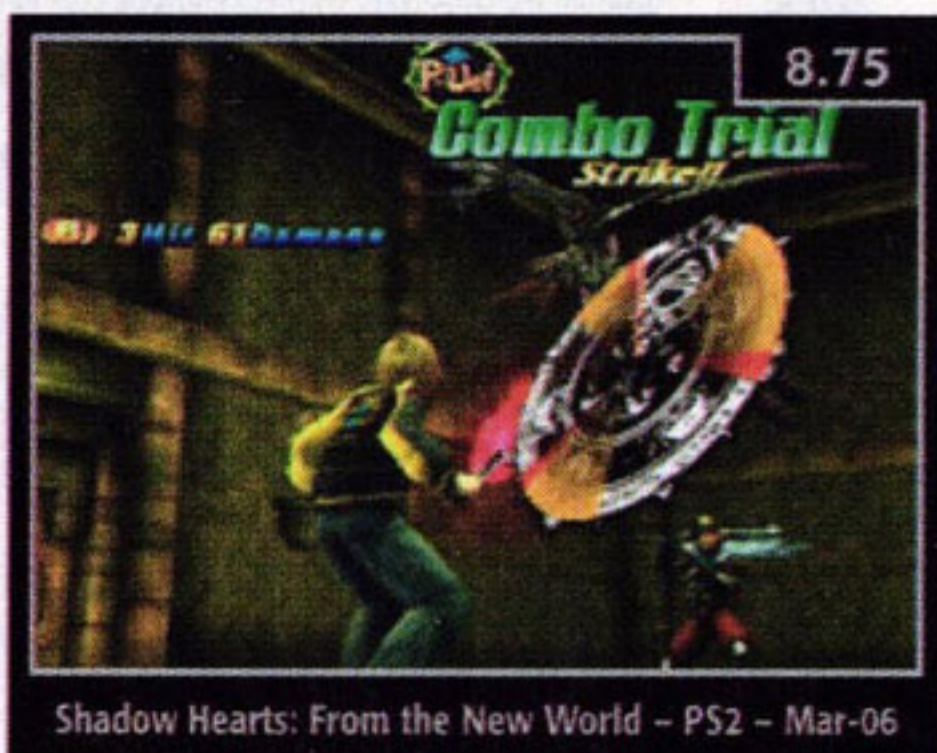


Ninety-Nine Nights - Xbox 360 - Sep-06

Outfit, The	7.75	Apr-06
Over G Fighters	5	Sep-06
Prey	9.5	Aug-06
Rumble Roses XX	5.75	May-06
Saints Row	8.75	Sep-06
Table Tennis	8	Jul-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Top Spin 2	8.5	May-06
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06

PLAYSTATION 2

24: The Game	7.5	Apr-06
25 to Life	5.75	Mar-06
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
50 Cent: Bulletproof	6	Feb-06
Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War	8.5	May-06
America's Army: Rise of a Soldier	6.5	Feb-06
Ape Escape 3	8.75	Feb-06
Arena Football	6.5	Apr-06
Atelier Iris 2: The Azoth of Destiny	7.5	Jun-06
Beatmania	8.5	Apr-06
Black	8.5	Apr-06
Cars	7	Aug-06
CMT Presents: Karaoke Revolution Country	8	Apr-06
Commandos: Strike Force	5.5	Jun-06
Dance Factory	8	Jun-06
Da Vinci Code, The	6	Jul-06
Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening Special Edition	9	Feb-06
Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII	6.75	Sep-06
Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories	8.75	Sep-06
Drakengard 2	7.25	Mar-06
Driver: Parallel Lines	6.75	May-06
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	6	May-06
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06
Final Fight: Streetwise	4	Mar-06
FlatOut 2	7.5	Sep-06
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	7.25	Apr-06
Gallop Racer 2006	6.75	Jul-06
Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	6.25	Feb-06
Godfather: The Game, The	7.5	May-06
Grandia III	8.75	Mar-06
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	8.75	Aug-06
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
Jaws	4.75	Aug-06
Kingdom Hearts II	9	Apr-06
Major League Baseball 2K6	8.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
Mega Man X Collection	8	Feb-06
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	9.5	Apr-06
Metal Saga	5.25	May-06
Micro Machines V4	7.5	Aug-06
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix	9.5	May-06
MLB 06: The Show	7.5	Apr-06
MLB SlugFest 2006	5	Aug-06
Monster Rancher EVO	8	Jun-06
MS Saga: A New Dawn	7.75	Mar-06
MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	7	Feb-06
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja	6.5	Jul-06
NBA Ballers Phenom	7.75	Apr-06
NCAA Football 07	8.25	Aug-06
NFL Head Coach	6.75	Aug-06
One Piece: Pirate's Carnival	4	Sep-06
Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams	9	Mar-06
Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
Pirates of the Caribbean: The Legend of Jack Sparrow	5.75	Aug-06
Rampage: Total Destruction	6.5	May-06
Real World Golf	7	Jun-06
Rogue Trooper	7.25	Jun-06
Samurai Champloo: Sidetracked	6.75	May-06
Shadow Hearts: From The New World	8.75	Mar-06
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
State of Emergency 2	6	Apr-06
Steambot Chronicles	5.5	May-06



Shadow Hearts: From the New World - PS2 - Mar-06

Street Fighter Alpha Anthology	7.5	Jul-06
Suikoden V	7.5	May-06
Super Dragon Ball Z	6	Sep-06
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	4.75	Sep-06
Tales of Legendia	7.25	Mar-06
TOCA Race Driver 3	8.25	Mar-06
Tokyo Extreme Racer Drift	6	Apr-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Torino 2006	4.25	Apr-06
Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Simulator	8.5	May-06
Urban Chaos: Riot Response	7.75	Jul-06
Warship Gunner 2	5	Apr-06
Wild Arms 4	7.5	Feb-06
Winback 2: Project Poseidon	4	Jun-06
Winning Eleven 9	8.5	Feb-06
Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra	8.5	Sep-06
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06
Yakuza	6	Sep-06

GAMECUBE

2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Cars	7	Aug-06
Chibi-Robo	5	Feb-06
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Mega Man X Collection	8	Feb-06
Odama	7	Mar-06
Rampage: Total Destruction	6.5	May-06
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	4.75	Sep-06
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06

XBOX

25 to Life	5.75	Mar-06
50 Cent: Bulletproof	6	Feb-06
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
America's Army: Rise of a Soldier	6.5	Feb-06
Arena Football	6.5	Apr-06
Black	8.5	Apr-06
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	7.5	May-06
Cars	7	Aug-06
Commandos: Strike Force	5.5	Jun-06
Da Vinci Code, The	6	Jul-06
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	8	Jun-06
Driver: Parallel Lines	6.75	May-06
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06
Final Fight: Streetwise	4	Mar-06
FlatOut 2	7.5	Sep-06
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	7.25	Apr-06
Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	6.25	Feb-06
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	7.5	May-06
Godfather: The Game, The	7.5	May-06
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
Jaws	4.75	Aug-06
Major League Baseball 2K6	8.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix	9.5	May-06
MLB SlugFest 2006	5	Aug-06
MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	7	Feb-06
NBA Ballers Phenom	7.75	Apr-06
NCAA Football 07	8.25	Aug-06
NFL Head Coach	6.75	Aug-06
Operation Flashpoint Elite	5	Feb-06
Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
Rogue Trooper	7.25	Jun-06
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Torino 2006	4.25	Apr-06
Urban Chaos: Riot Response	7.75	Jul-06
WarPath	7.25	May-06
Winback 2: Project Poseidon	4	Jun-06
Winning Eleven 9	8.5	Feb-06
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06

PC

AutoAssault	7	Jun-06
Battlefield 2: Special Forces	9	Feb-06
CivCity: Rome	8	Sep-06
Commandos: Strike Force	5.5	Jun-06
Darwinia	7.5	Jul-06
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	8	Jun-06
Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach	8	May-06
Earth 2160	7	Feb-06
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The	9.5	May-06
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	7.25	Apr-06
Galactic Civilizations II: Dread Lords	8	Apr-06
Half-Life 2: Episode One	8.75	Aug-06
Heroes of Might & Magic V	8.25	Jul-06
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II, The	8.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
Paradise	5.25	Jul-06
Prey	9.5	Aug-06

Rise & Fall: Civilizations at War	5	Aug-06
Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends	9.5	Jul-06
Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Warlords	8	Sep-06
Sims 2: Open for Business, The	7	Apr-06
SiN Episodes: Emergence	7.75	Jul-06
Star Wars: Empire at War	8.25	Mar-06
Sword of the Stars	7.5	Sep-06
Titan Quest	8.25	Aug-06
WarPath	7.25	May-06

NINTENDO DS

Age of Empires: The Age of Kings	8	Mar-06
Battles of Prince of Persia	8.5	Feb-06
Big Brain Academy	7.75	Aug-06
Brain Age	8.25	Jun-06
Break 'Em All	7.5	Sep-06
Electroplankton	7	Feb-06
Guilty Gear: Dust Strikers	6	May-06
Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi: The Genie and the Amp	5.75	Sep-06
Lost Magic	6	Jun-06
Magnetica	7.25	Aug-06
Metroid Prime: Hunters	8.5	May-06
New Super Mario Bros.	9.25	Jul-06
Point Blank DS	4.5	Aug-06
Pokémon Trozei	8.25	Mar-06
Resident Evil: Deadly Silence	7.75	Mar-06
Rub Rabbits!, The	7.5	Apr-06
Sims 2, The	6.75	Feb-06
Super Monkey Ball: Touch & Roll	8	Apr-06
Super Princess Peach	8.75	Mar-06
Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop	6.5	Apr-06
Tao's Adventure: Curse of the Demon Seal	2	Jun-06
Tetris DS	9.25	Apr-06
Tony Hawk's American Sk8Land	8.75	Feb-06
True Swing Golf	7	Feb-06
Worms: Open Warfare	7	May-06

PSP

Ape Escape Academy	7	Feb-06
Astonishia Story	4.25	Aug-06
Blade Dancer	5.5	Aug-06
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	8.5	May-06
Daxter	8.75	Apr-06
Def Jam Fight for NY: The Takeover	8	Aug-06
Exit	7.25	Mar-06
Field Commander	7.5	May-06
Fight Night Round 3	7.75	Apr-06
From Russia With Love	6.75	May-06
Generation of Chaos	5	May-06
Gradius Collection	8.5	Jun-06
Juiced Eliminator	7.75	Aug-06
Legend of Heroes II, The	6	Jul-06
Lemmings	7.25	Jul-06
Me and My Katamari	8	May-06
Mega Man: Maverick Hunter X	8	Mar-06
Mega Man: Powered Up	8.25	Apr-06
Mercury Meltdown	8	Sep-06
Metal Gear Acid 2	8	Apr-06
MLB '06 The Show	7	Apr-06
Monster Hunter Freedom	4	Jun-06
MX vs. ATV: On the Edge	8	May-06



Mega Man: Powered Up - PSP - Apr-06

NBA 06	6.5	Dec-05
NBA Ballers: Rebound	8	Apr-06
NCAA Football 07	8.5	Sep-06
Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest	3	Sep-06
PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient	7.75	Feb-06
Prince of Persia Revelations	7.75	Feb-06
Pursuit Force	6.25	Apr-06
Race Driver 2006	8.5	Aug-06
Samurai Warriors: State of War	7	May-06
Sims 2, The	5.5	Feb-06
Splinter Cell Essentials	8	May-06
Street Fight Alpha 3 Max	7.75	Mar-06
Street Supremacy	6.75	Apr-06
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	8	May-06
Tekken: Dark Resurrection	8.25	Sep-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.25	Jul-06
Ultimate Block Party	7.5	Jun-06
Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code	8.25	Apr-06
Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth	8	Aug-06
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	7	May-06
Winning Eleven 9	7.5	Mar-06
Worms: Open Warfare	7	May-06
WRC: FIA World Rally Championships	8.75	Apr-06
WWE SmackDown Vs. Raw 2006	8	Feb-06
Ys: The Ark of Napishtim	6.75	Apr-06

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Dogz	6.75	Feb-06
Drill Dozer	7.75	Feb-06
Mega Man Battle Network 6: Cybeast Gregar/Cybeast Falzar	6.5	Aug-06
Summon Night: Swordcraft Story	7	Aug-06
Super Robot Taisen: Original Generation	7.5	Aug-06
Tales of Phantasia	7.25	Mar-06
Tower SP, The	7	Jun-06

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Okami



The How-To Of Being A God

by game designer Masaaki Yamada

USE THE JUMP SLASH!

The sword jump attack is very powerful because the hit detection gives you multiple hits in a row for even more damage. It helps to stay close to the ground by jumping as low as possible. Combine this advanced technique with the Sword Dance technique for an unbeatable offense!



Using the Tsumugari weapon at max charge against the dressed-up kid in Kamui Village



When you do it in a jump, the damage from the first hit is a little less than when standing.



But when you land and do the flip, the second slash hits and you can take this much damage off.

BRUSH TECHNIQUE - VEIL OF MIST

Once you learn the Veil of Mist technique, take advantage of it in battle. The Veil of Mist has an amazing effect on all enemies, so find your opponent's weakness, use the Veil of Mist, and unleash a powerful attack on your foe. This technique combined with the jump slash can help you take down even the toughest of enemies with surprising speed.

THE WAILING MIRROR TECHNIQUE

You can use the Wailing Mirror technique when you have the mirror equipped to both the main and sub weapons. You can block attacks with the sub weapon, but using the Wailing Mirror block at just the right time will give you back some health too. It's the perfect alternative if you're in a tough fight, like the battle at Devil Gate Number 10, and you don't have any healing items.

USING CANCEL TO HOLD A CHARGE

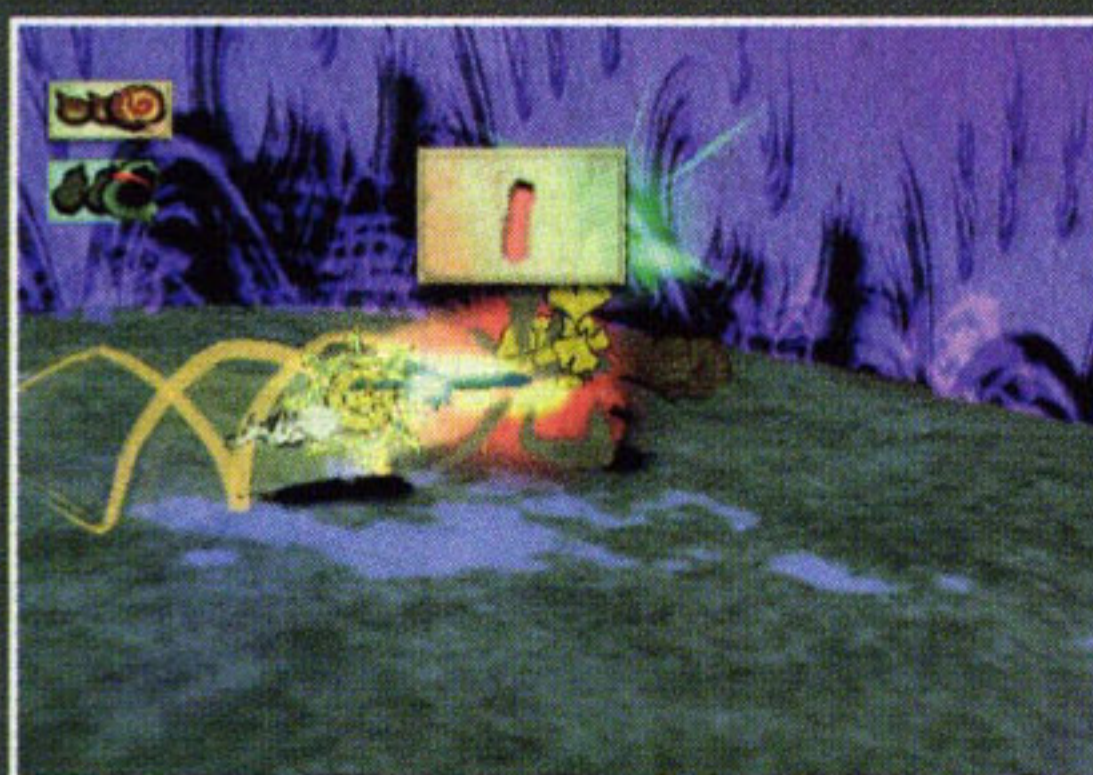
When you have the sword equipped as your sub weapon, you can't move around when you have the sword charged up. However, if you use the Fleetfoot technique to flip away, you can cancel your current action and evade an attack. However, when you use Fleetfoot you will keep your sword's charge. When you want to charge again press the attack button. With this advanced technique, it's easy to unleash a fully-charged sword attack at any time. You can also use the jump to cancel.



Charging sub-weapon sword



Use R2 to dodge. You can let go of the attack button and still keep your charge.



Press Δ again when you're in a better spot. The charge is carried over and you are performing a ramming attack.

THE THIEF'S GLOVE HOLY ARTIFACT

With this artifact equipped, you can use a technique that allows you to steal items from enemies by joining Issun and the enemy with the Celestial Brush. Actually Issun has his own attack level. It starts off at 100, and it goes up by two points every time you use the Thief's Glove technique. His level has a maximum of 130,100, which means his level goes up every time you use it for 65,000 times. When trying to defeat Blight in the Emperor's Garden, use this technique multiple times on the Blocking Spider near the Origin Mirror to give yourself a nice boost. Use the Origin Mirror to refill your stash of ink and repeat the process. The cool thing is, Issun's level carries over to the second time through the game, so definitely keep building up his level.



THE WATER TABLET HOLY ARTIFACT

After defeating Blight, you'll find that you can purchase the Water Tablet at the Emperor's Garden. This item is very handy for Amaterasu, making it easy to get through areas where you have to swim. The Water Tablet will also make it much easier to search for those hidden treasures and Stray Beads. There are also things that are nearly impossible to get without the Water Tablet.

HEALTH BOOST

When you use points to level up your max health (Solar Energy), it also fills up your health. So if you wait until you're in a boss fight and low on energy to boost your max HP, you can fill your health back-up without using a recovery item, killing two birds with one stone.



Mod World

THE SILVER LINING

<http://www.tsl-game.com>



Way back in Game Informer #132 (April 2004), we put the Classic GI spotlight on this fan-made title that harkens back to the glory days of adventure gaming. Two and a half years later (that's today, if you were wondering), there's finally something playable to download.



Originally conceived as King's Quest IX, Phoenix Online Studios (formerly Phoenix Freeware) renamed its project as part of an agreement it reached with King's Quest owner Vivendi Games. Rechristened The Silver Lining, the game has just seen its first demo released (and, as is customary, patched shortly thereafter - make sure to download both files). The game seeks to restore the point-and-click legacy of the King's Quest franchise. Fans of that style of gameplay - who have been almost totally ignored by mainstream publishers - will surely enjoy the old-school sensibilities here.

So get on over to the website and show some support for Phoenix Online, even if it's only in the form of increased traffic on the website. Of course, both the demo and the eventual game are free to download, so there's no harm in devoting 80 MB or so to seeing what this unofficial chapter in the storied saga has to offer.



Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM



NCAA Football 07

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Last month we showed you the codes for all the All Star teams. This month, check out the unlocks for all the Mascot teams. Go to the pennant select screen and press select in order to enter the code.

- Arkansas Mascot Team – Bear Down
- Georgia Tech Mascot Team – RamblinWreck
- Iowa State Mascot Team – Red And Gold
- Kansas Mascot Team – Rock Chalk
- Kentucky Mascot Team – On On UK
- Michigan State Mascot Team – Go Green
- Minnesota Mascot Team – Rah Rah Rah
- Missouri Mascot Team – Mizzou Rah
- North Carolina State Mascot Team – Go Pack
- Northwestern Mascot Team – Go Cats
- Ole Miss Mascot Team – Hotty Totty
- South Carolina Mascot Team – Go Carolina
- Wake Forest Mascot Team – Go Deacs Go
- Washington State Mascot Team – All Hail
- West Virginia Mascot Team – Hail WV



Over the Hedge

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

For all the following, pause the game while playing and hold down L1 and R1 while you enter the desired code.

- All Levels – △○△○○□
- All Moves – △○△□□□
- Always Power Golf – △○△○□○
- Earn More HP – △○△○□△
- Extra Damage – △○△○□

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – last seen passing out Aquafina water bottles to thirsty travellers at the airport)

Live Arcade Spotlight

Mutant Storm Empire

Last month we told you about Totemball, the first Live Arcade game to use the new Xbox Live Vision video camera. Our first this month is Live Arcade's premiere sequel. Mutant Storm Reloaded was one of the best titles that came out of Live Arcade's launch, and Pom Pom is hard at work to



bring us a follow-up in the coming months. While we weren't able to learn a whole lot about new gameplay plans for the arcade-style shooter, we did find out lots about the story and some of the cool levels we'll be wildly shooting in. Simply put, the Empire in the name comes from the fact that there is an evil emperor. Consequently, you're going to destroy him. Enough with the story. The stages include some fun sounding variations, from a farm level to an ocean stage and apparently even some strange space warped level where gravity and matter are constantly out of whack. Beyond that, expect to see lots more of shooting in every direction and spinning wildly through each stage to avoid your foes. Simple, but definitely quite sweet.



Code of the Month

Flatout 2



When scientists first began their painstaking work on Flatout 2, they set up a complex set of checks and balances to distill what is fun down into computer file that could be placed on a disc and shipped out into the world. After years of study, thousands of subjects, and numerous multi-million dollar grants from the government, they figured out that people liked stuff that blows up. And if you believe that, you may very well need these cheat codes more than we do. To

enter these codes, go to the Extras menu and enter your code.

- All Cars and One Million Creds – GIEVEPIX
- Flatmobile Car – WOTKINS
- Pimpster Car – RUTTO
- Rocket Car – KALJAKOPPA
- School Bus – GIEVCARPLZ

Billy Ray Hatfield
Nashville, TN



Painkiller: Hell Wars

During the game, press down the following

button combinations together to unlock the effect.

- All Weapons and Ammo – L+White+Y
- God Mode – L+White+B
- Demon Mode – L+White+X

For the following code, enter the button combination from the map screen

All Levels – Hold down White+Black, then press L



(pwned)



(pwner)

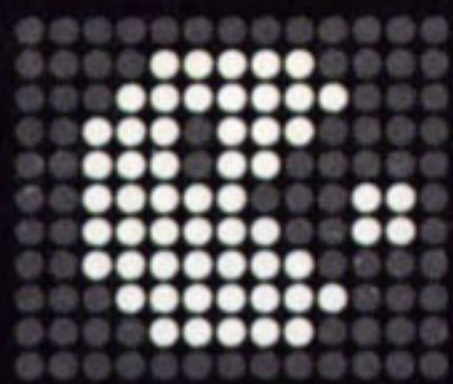


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AFTERSHOCK

A LOOK BACK AT THE
PC CLASSIC SYSTEM
SHOCK 2



There are certain games that leave their mark on everyone who plays them. Whether it's through storytelling, atmosphere, or intense combat, sometimes there's just no going back once you've experienced what these games have to offer, and System Shock 2 has undoubtedly earned a place among these standout titles. Developed cooperatively by Looking Glass Studios and Irrational Games (itself formed by former Looking Glass employees), System Shock 2 was an irresistible combination of mystery, action, and fear when it first released in 1999, and none of that has changed in the intervening years. On these two pages we reminisce with Irrational's Ken Levine about what went right, what went wrong, and why people are still playing this classic action/adventure masterpiece today.

A Great Foe Returns

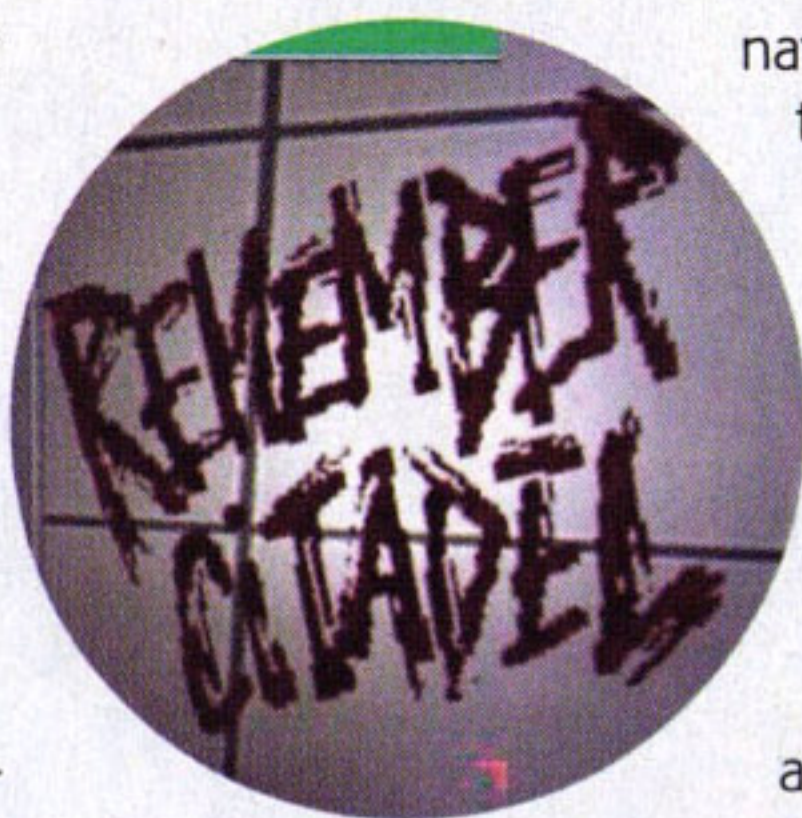
When your character first wakes up aboard the Von Braun, it appears that your main foe is a legion of mutants called The Many, who have also corrupted the ship's main computer, Xerxes. This may come as a disappointment at first, considering that the malevolent AI SHODAN from the original System Shock is regarded as one of the best villains in all of gaming. However, Levine points out that it was never really intended that The Many would rival SHODAN in terms of instilling the player with dread. "They measure up as intended," he reveals. "We never thought The Many would overcome SHODAN as a villain. We wanted to create a second foe who had a totally different point of view and agenda, and I think we pulled that off well."

Of course, when you have a character as awesome as SHODAN in your universe, you use her whenever possible. "Not putting SHODAN in Shock 2 is kind of like cutting Gollum out of *The Two Towers*. You don't do it," says Levine. Any disappointment the player may have felt at fighting The Many was eventually dissolved, since one of the game's biggest surprises is you discover that the survivor you thought was helping you, Dr. Janice Polito, is actually SHODAN manipulating you to serve her own purposes. In fact, Levine singles out this revelation as his favorite part of System Shock 2. "I had to fight with a lot of the team to get that in, and I think it had an impact on what you could do with a game story," he explains. "It sent the message that it's okay to mess with the gamer's head. We like doing that."



Fright Factor

It can't quite be classified as a survival horror game, but System Shock 2 is widely considered to be one of the scariest experiences out there. From the creepy sentient computers to the tortured cries of The Many (who will frequently beg you to put them out of their misery), the atmosphere of the game is definitely tense. This is interesting, considering that the element of fear in the game was sort of incidental. "I don't think we ever had a real goal of scaring people," admits Levine. "It just seemed to



naturally evolve in the type of game we were trying to make. I could break down all the technical stuff we did from a design and writing standpoint, but in reality it comes down to one thing: The player was alone. Very, very alone." That's the kind of fear that sticks with you. Monsters who jump out of closets are good for a quick jolt, but when players are constantly certain they are moments away from death, that's true terror.

Selling Shock

"There essentially was no marketing done by the publisher [Electronic Arts] on System Shock 2," Levine states. While the game gained momentum through word of mouth (in addition to rampant critical acclaim), this initial lack of official support probably kept the game from living up to its sales potential. Basically, the highest-profile marketing trick for the game was an online contest called "Get Killed By SHODAN," in which fans could enter to have their name and likeness appear as one of SHODAN's slaughtered victims. "I wish I could say it was a brilliant marketing team," says Levine of the contest. "The truth was I came up with it. I pitched it. I sold it. Almost every thing I've done during the development of Irrational Games is through a grand team effort. This is far less true with marketing. We've really been left in the lurch in the past." Thankfully, publisher 2K Games has been far more attentive in this department with Irrational's BioShock (Head to page 84 to see how BioShock is coming along).



PAY ATTENTION

Because System Shock 2 tells most of its story through in-game messages and logs, you won't get the whole picture just by barreling forward and hoping for a cutscene. Much of the game's mood is set by reading the desperate and confused final words of slain crew members found in various datapads. If you want to know exactly what happened, you've got a lot of reading to do.

Humble Beginnings

Since all of the story and gameplay elements of System Shock 2 weave together so well, gamers may be surprised to learn that the ideas that serve as the game's foundation were actually a part of an entirely different project. The team was designing a horror game that was simply being called Shock. "The plot was sort of a sci-fi *Apocalypse Now*, where you were sent to a distant space station to assassinate a military commander who had become politically unattractive to the government," Levine tells us. "However, the gameplay systems were very much System Shock 2. Only when EA got involved did the System Shock 2 license come into play. We basically adapted the gameplay ideas we had previously to a story and setting that involved SHODAN and the System Shock world." Now, if all games that shift design direction could turn out as well as System Shock 2, the gaming world would be a better place.



The Legacy

Despite the fact that it is several years old, another of System Shock 2's defining features is the way it has held up over time. Obviously the graphics aren't up to the current industry standard, but the gameplay and interface set a standard for FPS/adventure titles that is still used today. The quality of these aspects was not an accident; the way the player interacts with the world and manages items was something the team set out to improve during development. "As much as I love System Shock 1, it was a bit of bear in the interface department," Levine observes. "We wanted Shock 2 to play like a shooter, but allow the player to interact with the world around them. I think the Shock 2 interface was probably the most influential thing about the game." Influence on subsequent games aside, there is also the fact that people just love to play System Shock 2. Online discussion boards about the game are still active, and a community has risen to help users get it



NOT-SO-SECRET CODE

The code to System Shock 2's first keypad is "45100." While this is itself an homage to the original System Shock (which had a door with the code "451," from Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451), at one point 451 was also the code used on the lock to Looking Glass Studios' offices.

but when it all comes together, there's no more satisfying kind of game to play."

To read more of Ken Levine's thoughts on topics that don't relate to System Shock 2, be sure to check out the interview on page 38.

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By David Miller



ILLUSION OF GAIA

> **FORMAT** SUPER NINTENDO
> **PUBLISHER** ENIX

The typical RPG conventions of swords, sorcery, and moogles are a pleasure to play, but any real gamer knows that there is always room for an experience just a little outside of the box. Illusion of Gaia is an achievement in terms of standing apart from the fantasy formula, yet still maintaining a familiar tone that fans of other games of the genre can instantly appreciate. The story, the core of any memorable RPG, is always fascinating because it takes place in what appears to be the real world. The dungeons you travel to, from Nazca to the Pyramids, are all either real places or places from popular mythology. The relative locations of these places on the world map are extremely unrealistic, but storming the Tower of Babel still seems more authentic than stomping through a forest that's either called "forbidden" or something vaguely Elvish-sounding.



The locations are epic, but of course the story would still be weak if not for the believability (bad translation/cheesy dialogue aside) of the characters. The main character, Will, borrows something from the Legend of Zelda series in that he seldom speaks out loud to other characters, but through his narration you come to sympathize strongly with him.

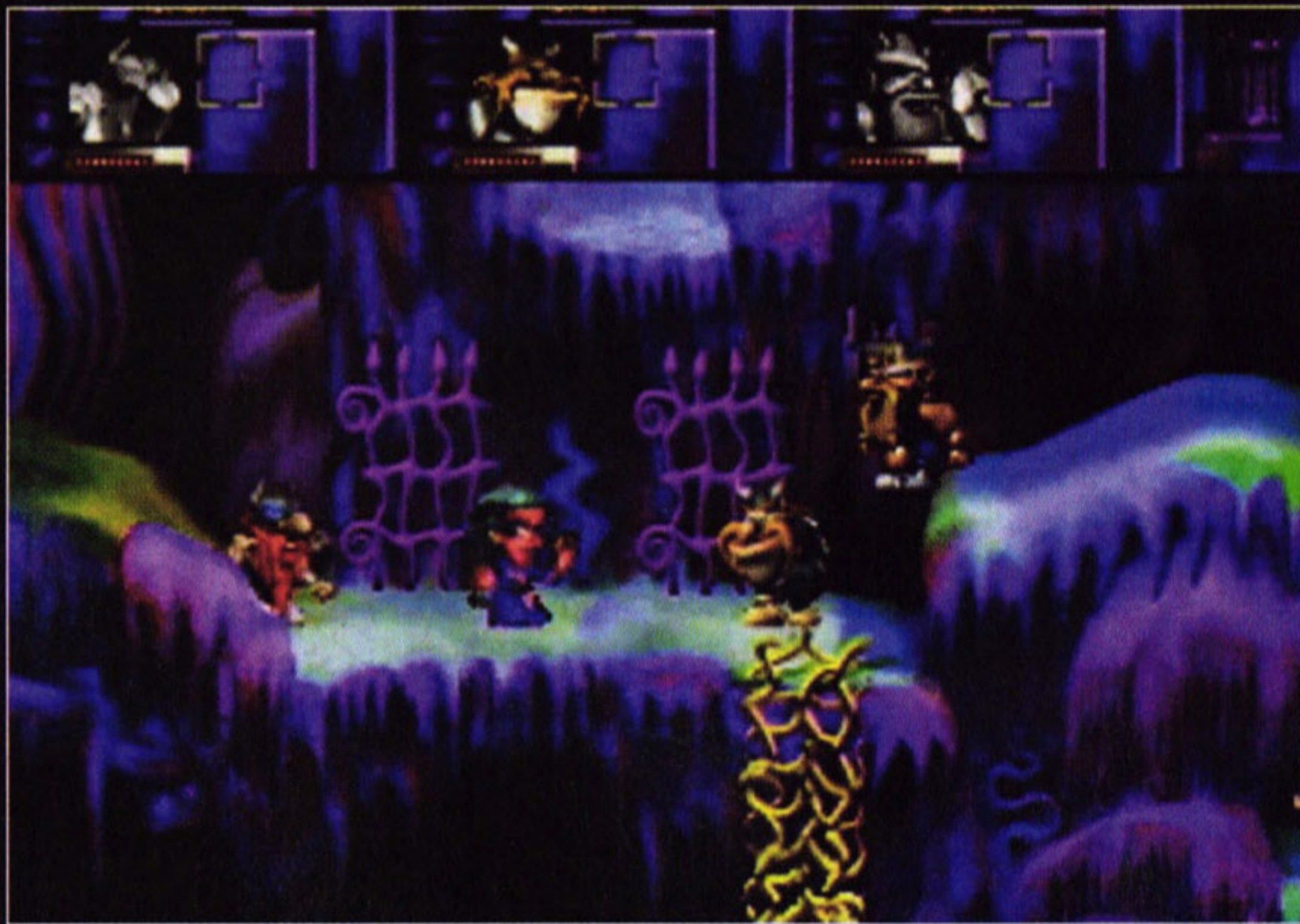
The gameplay, like the best of the era, is simple yet endlessly fun; the fighting is real-time and fast paced, and your powers are gradually expanded as the game goes on. The action most resembles A Link to the Past in its core mechanics, but rather than using myriad items and weapons to solve puzzles, Will can transform at various save points into a dark knight, or use special abilities to slide under walls or leap from ramps to distant platforms. This action-oriented style has the player pause the game to equip new items much less often than in Nintendo's classic series. The leveling system, the defining trait of the RPG genre, is also simple and requires nothing from the player except to kill every monster in every room. Do that and collect enough of the red jewels scattered around the world, and you will gain every single ability in the game. No grinding away at random encounters here!

What makes Illusion of Gaia really stand out in my mind, however, is its status as the first full-fledged RPG I ever played, and I think I will probably remember every moment of it forever. When the Virtual Console concept for the Nintendo Revolution was first announced, I instantly knew the first game that I was going to download: Illusion of Gaia.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

On October 7, 2003 the gaming world was given one of its most enduring punchlines. On that immortal date, Nokia's handheld disaster/phone/gaming system, the N-Gage, was unceremoniously dumped on the public. The precise reason for the device's lack of success is still unknown, but it might have been its taco-esque size and shape, or the fact that you practically had to disassemble the thing every time you wanted to switch games. These problems were later fixed with the redesigned N-Gage QD, but by that point the gaming world was just past the point of caring.



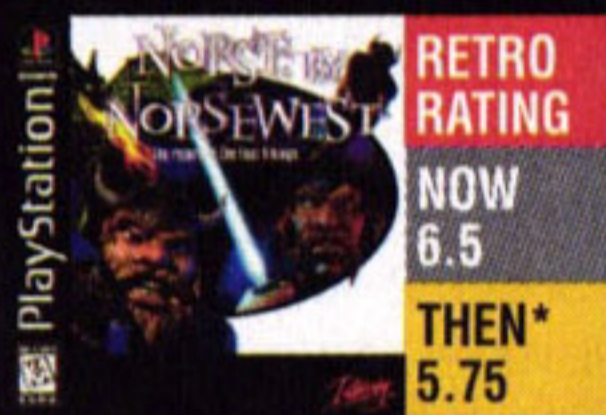


PSONE

NORSE BY NORSEWEST: THE RETURN OF THE LOST VIKINGS

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > PUBLISHER INTERPLAY > DEVELOPER BEAM SOFTWARE > RELEASE 1997

Many gamers have fond memories of the original Lost Vikings game, but some of the magic just got lost in this sequel. Even with the addition of two new characters (Fang the wolf and Scorch the dragon), this platformer/puzzler doesn't really do anything the first game didn't. You'll still find yourself maneuvering Baelog, Erik, Olaf, and company through a series of mind-bending levels. Since each character has different abilities, you'll have to trade one for another depending on the obstacle. Of course, since you need everyone's skills, if just one doofus kicks the bucket, you need to restart the whole level. And death comes frequently, resulting in a trial-and-error method of solving rather than actually thinking things through...when the game isn't walking you through, which it does for the first third of the levels. You may remember the Lost Vikings as being awesome, but if you really want to see them these days, you're better off just logging onto World of Warcraft and visiting them in Uldaman.

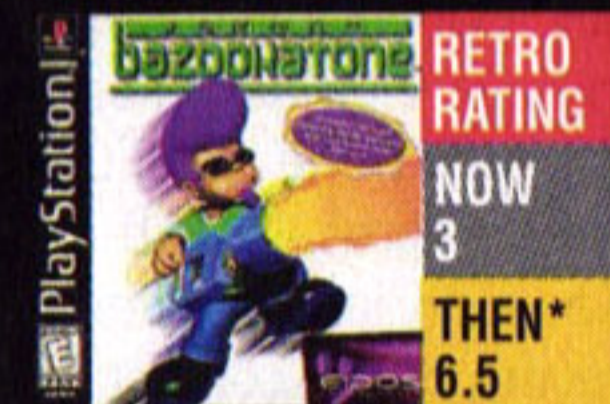


PSONE

JOHNNY BAZOOKATONE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER U.S. GOLD > DEVELOPER ARC DEVELOPMENTS > RELEASE 1996

Are you stuck in a nostalgic rut, pining for those good old days when the 2D platformer ruled the roost? We were feeling the same way after playing New Super Mario Bros. on DS, almost to the point where we felt more like digging out our old NES than digging on Prey for 360. So, in a way, it's good that we played Johnny Bazookatone.



Honestly, this game is like getting slapped across the face with a rancid salmon. At first, you're too stunned by the pain and the rotten stench to notice the slimy film that it's left all over your psyche. However difficult to experience, it's an important truth to learn; not only did a lot of old games suck, they sucked way worse than anything we could dream of now. Basically, this game is like every other 2D platformer in existence, except it stars some goofball in a purple pompadour who wields a guitar-gun and all the fun has been sucked out, beaten to death, and buried in a pauper's grave. Probably the most notable aspect of this title is the music which sounds like porn music (not that "wokka wokka" wah-wah guitar '70s stuff that everybody imagines porn music sounds like, but that authentic, weird '80s saxophone-and-Casio keyboard elevator music). So, where were we? Oh, yeah...Johnny Bazookatone. This game is not good.



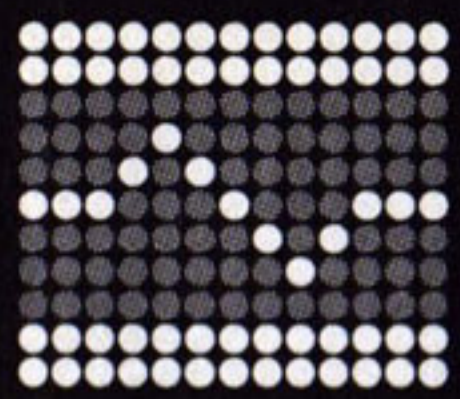
SUPER NINTENDO

KIRBY'S AVALANCHE

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE > PUBLISHER NINTENDO OF AMERICA > DEVELOPER HAL LABORATORY > RELEASE 1995

In the wake of the ultra-popular Tetris, the gaming world was virtually flooded with similarly-designed puzzle games like Kirby's Avalanche, a title that is the textbook definition of a slightly below-average puzzle game. Neither broken nor as addictive as more classic puzzlers, Kirby's Avalanche revolves around dropping pairs of blobs. When four or more blobs of the same color meet, they disappear, clearing boulders and dropping trash on your competitor's side of the screen. Whether against another player or an AI opponent, head-to-head competition is the only mode in Kirby's Avalanche, and while it is decent fun, grows tiresome quickly. Playing against a real human is advised, as the AI players are incredibly aggressive to the point of frustration, even on the lowest difficulty setting. The game does have a decent presentation, with some nice tunes and cute characters, but it is not enough to overcome the otherwise very standard puzzle gameplay.





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UNLIMITED LAUNCH: SEPT 20

DEVIL MAY CRY 4



No series does frantic demon-slaying action better than Devil May Cry. The third game in the series righted a ship left rocky by the second, and its first next-gen entry should be even hotter. If our 10-page cover story didn't sate your appetite for white-haired badassery, head on over to Unlimited for an interview with producer and famed game creator Hiroyuki Kobayashi.



The World of Wii

This month we brought you a huge roundup of Wii games, but you greedy little monkeys always want more, don't you? We give and we give, but it's never enough! Fine. Head on over to Unlimited to see more shots for games like Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam, Wii Sports, Trauma Center: Second Opinion and many more. A veritable cornucopia of additional screens and art pieces awaits you!

John Schappert

EA's Senior Vice President John Schappert spoke with us about his company's commitment to the Wii, and why the publishing giant is throwing its weight behind Nintendo's new console.



Head over to Unlimited to read the full text of the interview.

Laurent Detoc

Ubisoft has been one of the most visible third-party supporters of the Wii, and we spoke with the President of Ubisoft North America Laurent Detoc to find out why. Read everything he had to say, exclusively in Unlimited.



PLUS EXTRA ASSETS FOR:

Final Fantasy XII, Army of Two, WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2007, Okami, Forza Motorsport 2, Assassin's Creed, Just Cause, and more!



ALSO THIS MONTH ONLINE:

Game Informer Online heads to Japan to check out the Tokyo Game Show. Sony has promised a big showing for the PlayStation 3 at TGS this year, so there is certain to be a flood of crazy gaming news. Be sure to check out the coverage of this Japanese adventure, as well as a host of other special events promoting this holiday's hottest titles.



ONE OF THE TOP FIVE GAME-DEGREE PROGRAMS

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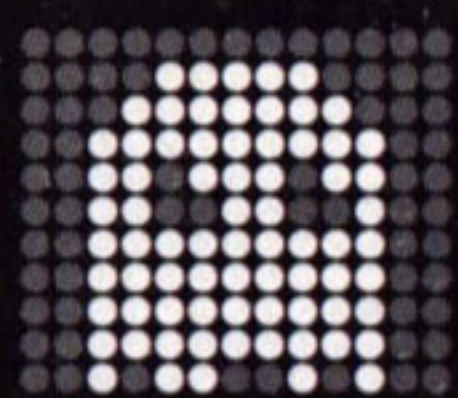
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GAMEOVER

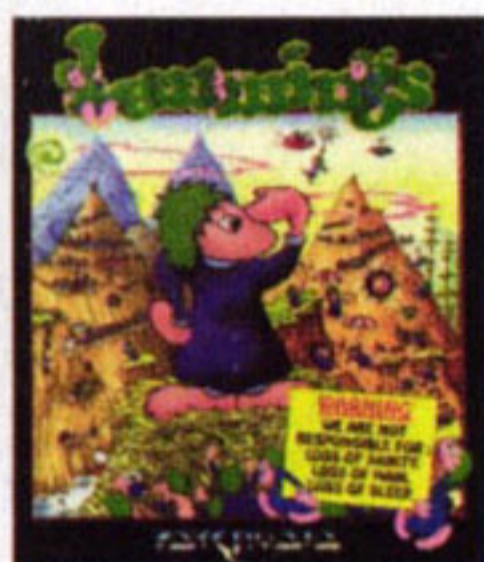
Fatality

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

As the release of Nintendo's new Wii console approaches, gamers are looking forward to high-profile launch titles like *Metroid 3: Corruption* and *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*. However, if Wii is anything like the DS, after launch there will be a period where we only get to play mediocre games as developers learn the hardware. Answer the following questions to discover which lackluster title you'll be playing while you wait for motion-sensor gaming to hit its stride.

1 As a gamer, one of your sacred duties is to help those who can't help themselves, including stupid, stupid rodents. In the first *Lemmings* for PC, which of the following jobs can you not assign to guide the creatures to safety?

- A. Builder
- B. Basher
- C. Miner
- D. Jumper



2 This (male!?) character named Calintz is the protagonist of what 2005 RPG made by Korean developer Softmax?

- A. Guild Wars
- B. Magna Carta: Tears of Blood
- C. Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana
- D. Romancing SaGa



3 Knuckles has been a regular in the *Sonic* series since his first appearance in *Sonic the Hedgehog 3*. What kind of animal is Knuckles, anyway?

- A. Hedgehog
- B. Porcupine
- C. Echidna
- D. Some kind of Xtreme mouse?

4 In the Midway-published title *Dr. Muto*, what is the name of the shattered planet the mad scientist is on a mission to reconstruct?

- A. Mluto
- B. Mutopolis
- C. Mutopiter
- D. Midway

5 True or False: In the Super Nintendo's *E.V.O.: The Search for Eden*, it is possible to eventually evolve your creature into a mermaid.

- A. True. Take that, Spore!
- B. False. But you could be a human. That's a change of pace, right?



6 Snipers were cool way before *Enemy at the Gates* and *Phone Booth*, as illustrated in the 8-bit *Golgo 13* games. Which long-forgotten developer brought us both *Golgo 13* and the sequel, *The Mafat Conspiracy*?

- A. Tradewest
- B. Vic Tokai
- C. Elite Systems
- D. Irem



7 A true fan of wrestling games remembers the days before games used "real" characters, instead resorting to fictitious wrestlers. In *Title Match Pro Wrestling for the Atari 2600*, which of the following fighters does not appear in the game?

- A. Big Chief
- B. Skin Head
- C. The Amazon
- D. Mr. Mean

8 Many gamers had issues with the key hunt near the end of *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* for GameCube. In total, how many temple keys are there for Samus to collect?

- A. 9
- B. 10
- C. 15
- D. 18

9 In the original *Tetris* for Game Boy, what does it mean if you have a heart icon next to the level indicator?

- A. Five-minute time limit
- B. Blocks fell slower
- C. Blocks fell faster
- D. Direction controls inverted

10 In the first of Ubisoft's recent *Prince of Persia* titles, what does the prince possess that allows him to manipulate time?

- A. The Dagger of Time
- B. The Sands of Time
- C. The Scimitar of Time
- D. Morris Day and the Time



BREAKDOWN

59,000 accounts in *World of Warcraft* were recently banned for using prohibited programs to automate actions. Take that, you rotten gold farmers!

.02% of DS Lite consoles are affected by a fault that causes cracks to appear in the hinges. Though only a cosmetic problem, Nintendo will fix it if you call their customer support line.

\$20,000: The supposed price developers are paying for PS3 dev kits

16% of the moles on Jeremy's body are alien parasites with malevolent plans. The remaining 84 percent, on the other hand, are just freakish dermatological anomalies.

81% of GI readers made the team! Congratulations! To you other losers, just empty your lockers and get out

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:
Floor Mopper



2-3:
Point & Laugh



4-5:
Use Soap!



6-7:
Fetch



8-9:
Channel Surfer



10:
Super Punch-Yourself-Out

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STEREOTYPED

THAT WHOLE "EVERYONE'S DOING IT" THING
WHEN IT COMES TO BEING A TEENAGER
AND GETTING HIGH?
JUST ANOTHER STUPID STEREOTYPE.



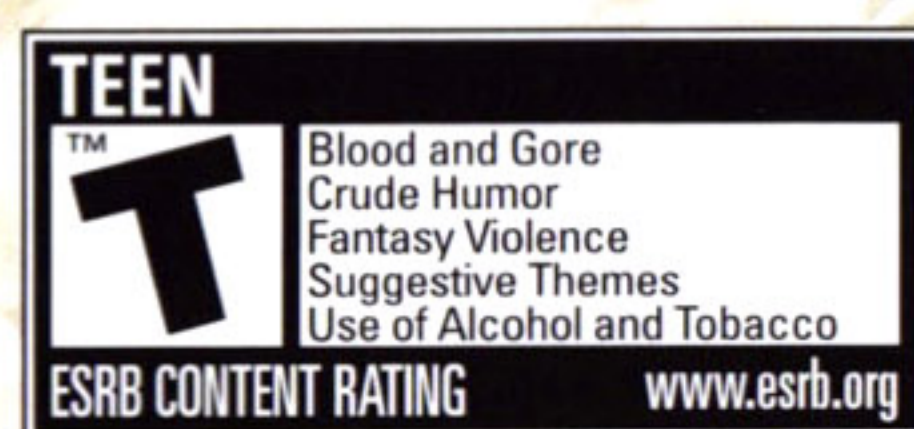
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