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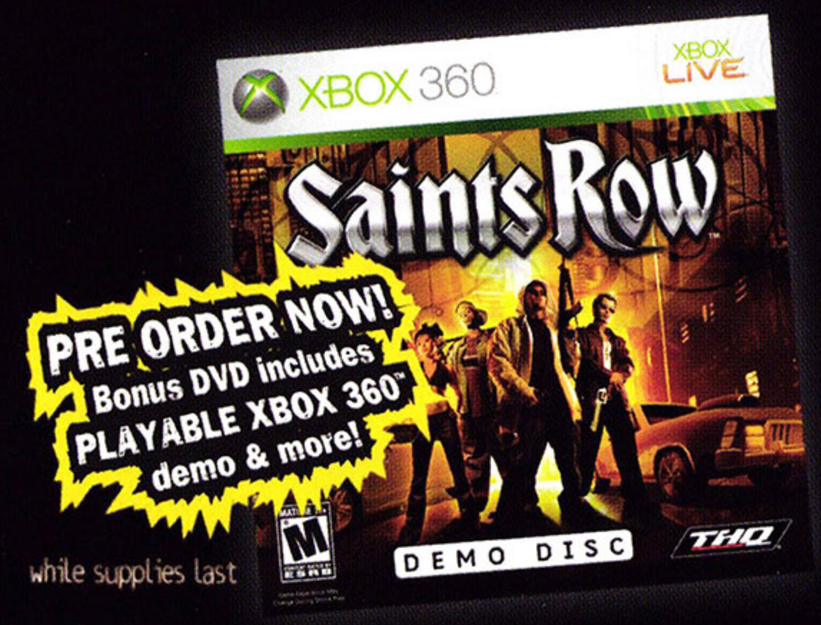

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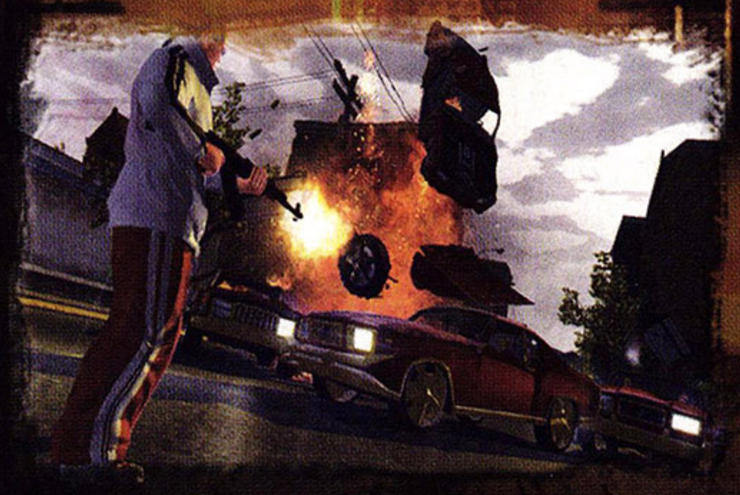

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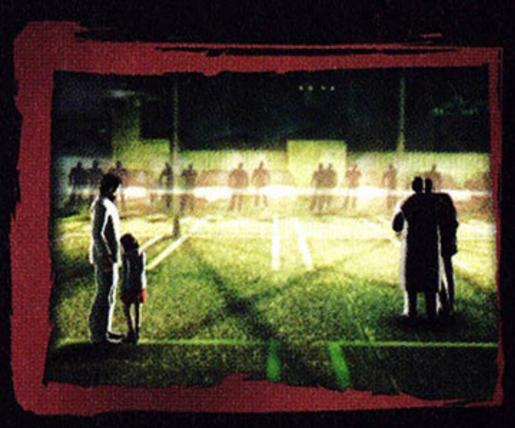

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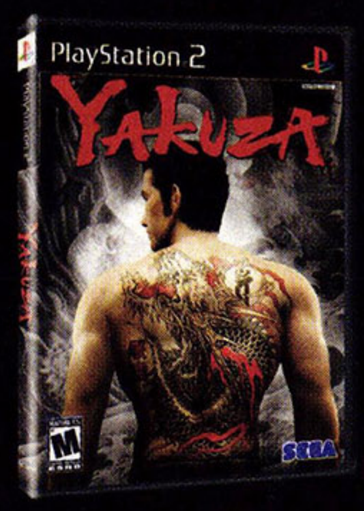

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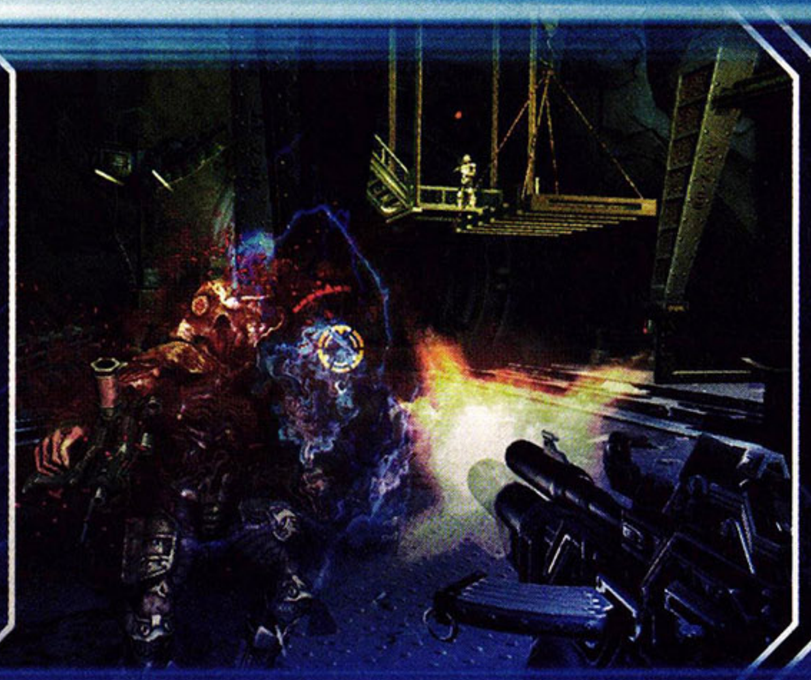

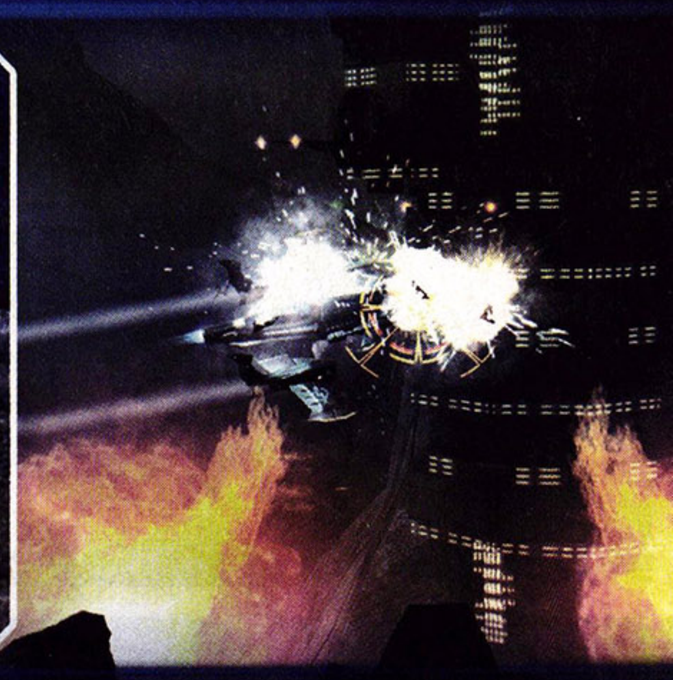

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CONTENTS

Give Us Your Lunch Money Issue

cover story

48 BULLY

Even when Rockstar Games does something that isn't named after a felony, it's still a big deal. We flew out to get the word on the company's latest project straight from the source, and invite you to join us for a world-exclusive in-depth look at Bully. We've got the real answers to whether or not it's as controversial as some would have you believe, and even more importantly, if it looks like fun.

features

BEHIND THE MIC
We bring you the story of how some of your favorite characters find their voices, complete with interviews with two of the most prolific voice actors in the industry.

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We round up this year's basketball games in our annual NBA feature. See who's looking good in the preseason and who needs to report to camp a little early for some extra workouts.

THIS STORY IS HAPPY END
You can finally find out why Final Fantasy hits six to nine months later in the U.S. with this in-depth look at how the localization process works.

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY
EA and DICE are aiming to make the single-player experience as engrossing as the series' traditionally outstanding online play. Join us for the world-exclusive first look inside!

departments

8 STAFF
Read the team's latest favorites

10 GI SPY
Silly pictures of our life and times

12 DEAR GI
Your chance to fire back at us!

16 CONNECT
Where news, talk, and technology collide

36 INTERVIEW
Bill Roper, CEO of Flagship Studios, explores the massive online space with us and shares his wisdom on the direction that the PC market is heading

40 GEAR
Geeky gadget stuff for the masses

44 OPINION
Gas Powered Games' Chris Taylor waxes poetic about the wonderful world of RTS and how the genre can improve in the coming years

46 CALENDAR
Get hip to this month's happenings

64 PREVIEWS
Hands-on time with Splinter Cell: Double Agent and God of War II kicks off this month's previews, and early looks at Call of Duty 3 and Scarface round out a look at what we'll be seeing this holiday season

86 REVIEWS
Game of the Month: Dead Rising for Xbox 360

102 CHARTS
Retail Sales Data and the GI editors' Top 10 Games

104 SECRET ACCESS
Codes, strategies, and passwords

106 CLASSIC GI
Reliving gaming's greatest moments

110 ONLINE
See what's happening at Game Informer Online

112 GAME OVER
The end...or is it?

game index

GAME	PAGE #
Archlord	84
Bomberman: Act Zero	97
Break 'Em All	100
Call of Duty 3	68
CivCity: Rome	98
Dead Rising	94
Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII	93
Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories	92
DK Bongo Blast	84
Eragon	75
F.E.A.R.	72
FlatOut 2	88
God of War II	66
Gunpey	85
Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi: The Genie and the Amp	100
Jeanne D'Arc	85
Justice League Heroes	82
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	78
Maelstrom	80
Magical Starsign	81
Mario Hoops 3-on-3	85
Mercury Meltdown	100
NASCAR 07	84
NCAA Football 07	100
NFL Street 3	85
Ninety-Nine Nights	96
One Piece: Pirate's Carnival	92
Over G Fighters	97
Phantasy Star Universe	74
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest	100
Saints Row	95
Scarface: The World Is Yours	70
Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Warlords	99
Splinter Cell: Double Agent	64
Star Trek Legacy	73
Super Dragon Ball Z	92
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	88
Superman Returns	82
Sword of the Stars	99
Tekken: Dark Resurrection	100
TimeShift	76
Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra	90
Yakuza	93

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

THE PLAYSTATION 3 PREDICAMENT

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It seems that everyone I talk to in the industry is down on the PlayStation 3. I've even heard from some of my friends that work there that seem less than confident in Sony's ability to even compete – much less win – in the next-generation war.

It makes it tough to keep a balanced and critical view of how this console generation is developing.

I remember being at the Tokyo Game Show in 2005 with a crew of industry illuminati as we sat around and nit-picked Microsoft's 360 launch in a posh Tokyo hotel bar. At the time, I told them some of the things I had learned about Microsoft's plan of attack and that while there were some problems (as there are with any console), its strategy was solid. At the time of course, most of the chorus was one of negativity towards Microsoft's second console attempt.

While I won't dig too deep into the discussion, we did spend the rest of the night analyzing the various pitfalls and innovations that next-generation gaming would bring.

Those in the Sony camp pointed towards its experience and leadership in the console space and how it would not be easy to unseat. In 2005, I couldn't have agreed more.

In 2006, it is much more difficult to put in perspective. I've seen many in the industry go from doom and gloom for the 360 to an unbreakable belief that it simply can't be beat. I've seen people say that Sony brand recognition alone is enough to take it back to the top regardless of price.

There are no easy answers here. We have to watch the battle unfold. Over the last year, the Xbox 360 has gone from demonized to canonized, and Sony has fallen from sure-fire winner to doubtful prospect. A year from now it could be all upside down again. I know I still see a strategy for success here with Sony, just as I did with Microsoft before it, but it sure does feel like the company is doing everything in its power to muck it up.

So much so, that I can't stop that sinking feeling in my gut that there is more to Sony's problem than mere rhetoric. We call them daily looking for answers to tough questions with none to be found. Developers speak of little to no knowledge of Sony's online plans and fear that incorporating these aspects into their games may be impossible. All these things do not sound like the seasoned market leader, a position that Sony has enjoyed for years. These are the signs of a company in disarray.

I'm trying to keep my objectivity. I wish all three hardware manufacturers success. And as I have said before, I think it's possible for any of the three to emerge victorious.

However, Sony needs to stop talking a big game, and actually start acting like it is playing for keeps this generation. Gamers want to know what their 600 dollars will buy them. Developers and publishers want to know why they need to invest tens of millions of dollars in creating games for the PlayStation 3 platform, but all Sony has cultivated over the last six months is negative commentaries and hearsay that continues to breed distrust.

Save your judgements until the entire case is heard, which in my opinion won't be until the dust settles after the 2007 holiday season. But if Sony doesn't start showing us why we loved their hardware over the last ten years, there will most certainly be hard days ahead.

Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Baseball On The Wii (It Is Frightening How Real It Feels), Helmet's *Monochrome*, The Talk Of A Grim Fandango Movie (Tim Burton!), Stumbling Upon Free Pets Outside **Dislikes:** The Talk Of Game Prices Possibly Going Up Again, Having To Hide My Great Strength From Society, My Fiancée Insisting That Bears Cannot Live Indoors **Current Favorite Games:** Dead Rising, Saints Row, Resistance: Fall Of Man, NCAA Football 07, Gears Of War, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess

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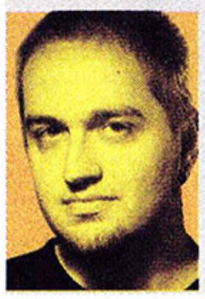

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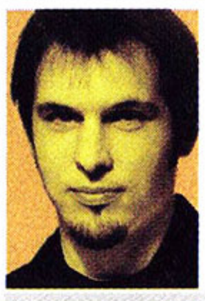

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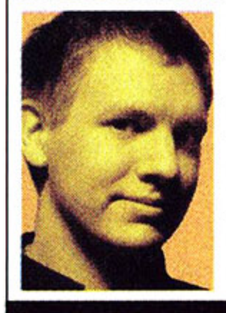

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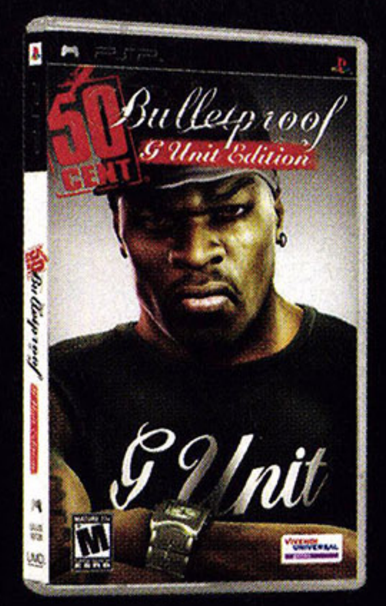

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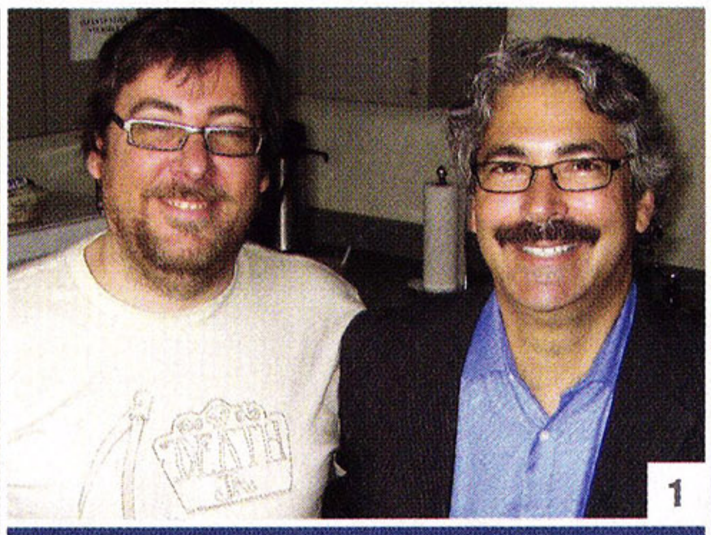

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1 Andy pow-wows with Joseph Olin, president of the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences **2** Castlevania mastermind Koji Igarashi couldn't be more thrilled to get his picture in GI Spy **3** As a tribute to the long-lost Digitial Deviant, we're publishing this picture of punk legend Henry Rollins, seen here pressing the flesh at Comic Con. Dude, play "Rise Above"!!! **4** Hellboy creator Mike Mignola reps for comic nerds everywhere **5** Sony Online Entertainment's Michael Shelling puts his mack game down at the company's first Block Party **6** Legendary director and professional motormouth Quentin Tarantino puts the moves on Rosario Dawson at Comic Con **7** Joe and Kane & Lynch director J.P. Kurup hang with the posse from IO Interactive and Eidos **8** Game Informer's Jeremy Zoss, performing his Comic Con reporting duties with his usual quiet dignity. He's our Morgan Freeman!

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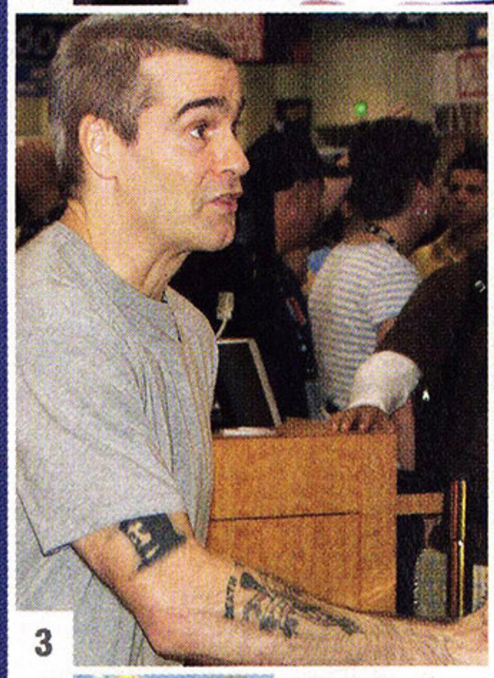

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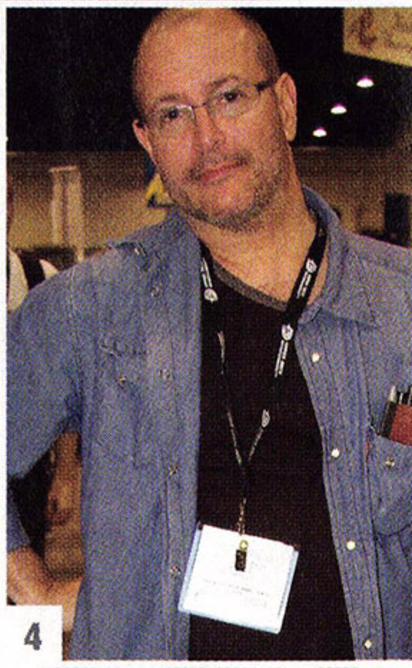

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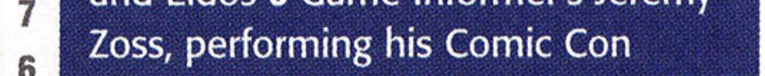

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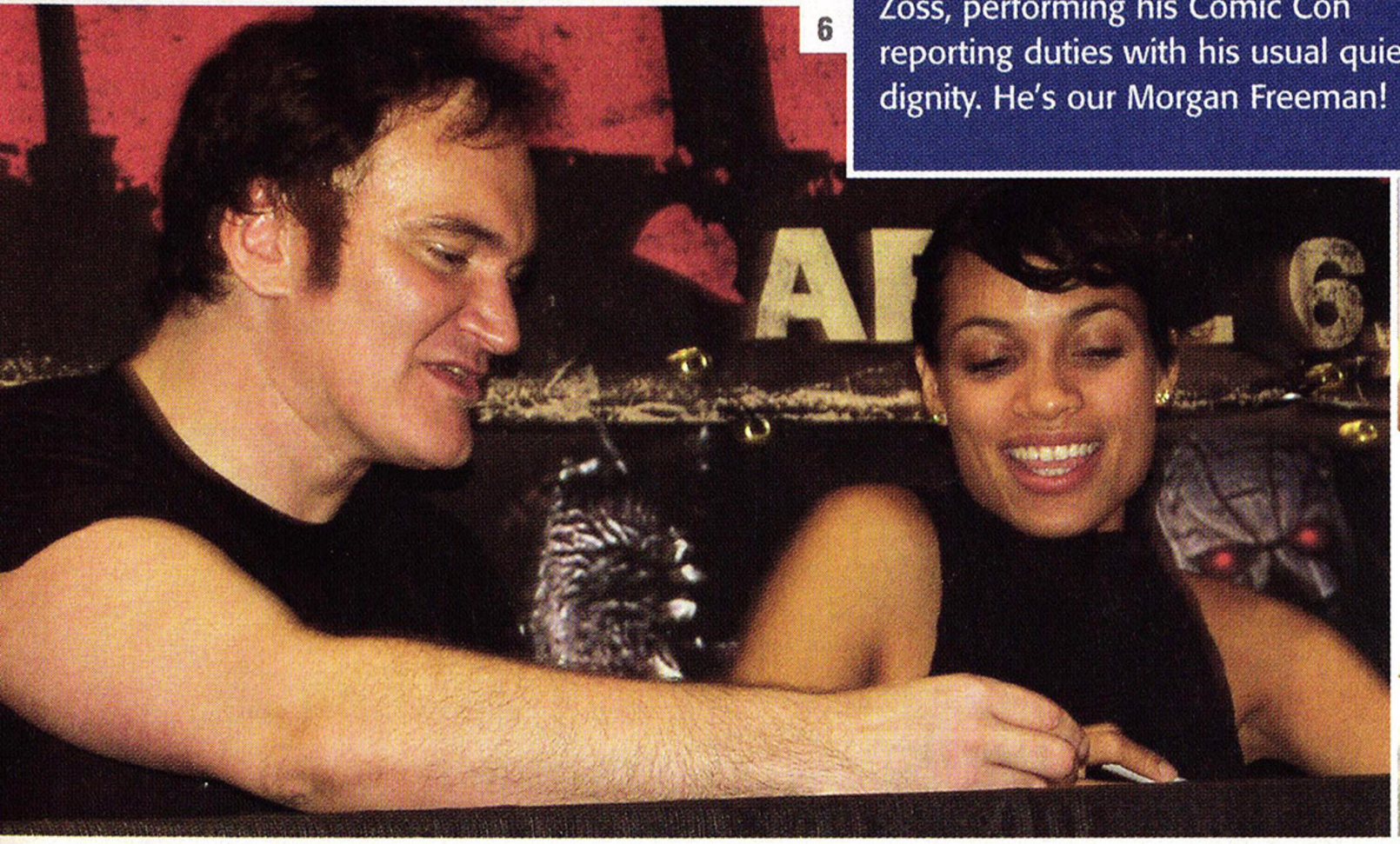

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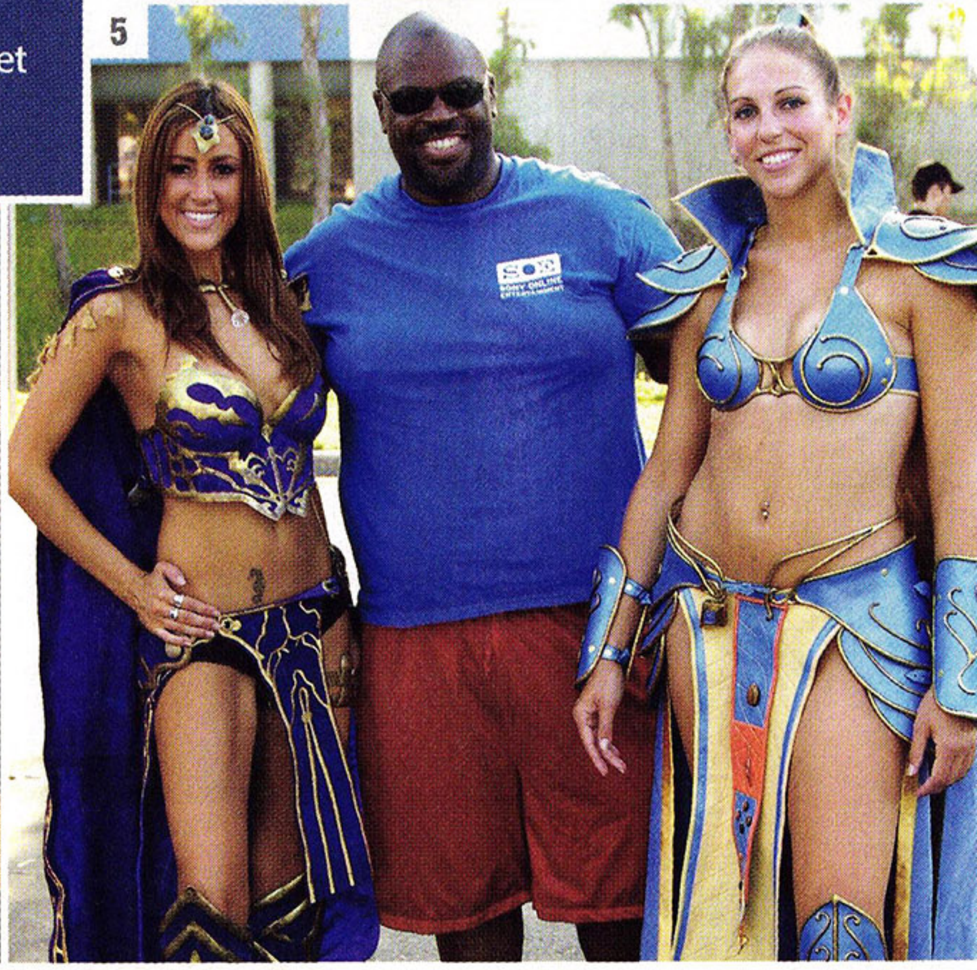

...continued from page 3

As the story continues to unfold down here on Earth about what may or may not be happening on the ship orbiting the planet, one thing's for sure, if those people are to get it will be thanks to their efforts

st place Tommy even on the re ation from people taken. He was lead life ge mechanic ar o com irlfriend, Jen, explore e wor . It's a good t for all of them up the that Jen reluctant to go.

Tommy has never been very int his ancestry, but if you ask his co they'll tell you that he holds those clo him very dear. He'll go to any length protect the people he cares for.

The only thing we know about the h ship that's circling us and stealing us random is that no one come there. We can only assume th being enslaved, killed or worse. is an option, and if you ask what worse than being killed, just think abou for a second or two.

To combat forces like this someone needs to be relentless, tough, fearless and quick. Tommy embodies all of these characteristics and more. He has always been athletic. Blessed with a physique that holds muscle and a mind that keeps him alert, the Cherokee mechanic is ready for anything. Rest assured, his skills are facing the ultimate test as we speak.

He's always been in search of the ultimate adventure. Those who worked at the roadhouse with Jen remember him coming in before quitting time. "He would sit at the end of the counter and look through books about big cities, small campgrounds, beaches and foreign countries. The whole time, you could see the sparkle in his eyes like he was imagining himself in those pictures," says a waitress named Dawn.

His grandfather once echoed those

ied th
can not control w wants. I chos
my life. He must ch s," he said.

Shortly before the abduction, Tommy began telling those close to him that his grandfather, now deceased, had been appearing to him. If this is true, it's likely that his grandfather is up there with him now acting as a spiritual guide and helping him to make all the right decisions.

It's safe to say that this is the adventure he was looking for, he's got more than he can handle right now. Telescope images of the space ship reveal a sinister exterior. If the outside looks that bad, it's safe to say there's no carnival going on inside. Except maybe for Tommy. This could be just what he's been dreaming of. It might just be what inspires Jen to tell him she's ready to see the rest of the world with him. If they can just make it home first.

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DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

GI COMMUNITY

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

THE QUESTION:
What game are you most looking forward to this holiday season?

Power Stone Collection for PSP. My DC versions died a long time ago. Best fighting game ever in my hands again. I tear up thinking of it.

Juganhut

Provided they don't make it a key-hunt like the second one, Metroid Prime 3. It looks beautiful (as usual) and it has shown some really cool ways to use the Wiimote. And for goodness sake, bring back the Chozo!

King Sshi

Super Metroid. When the Wii launches this fall, the first game I'm going to download off of the Virtual Console and play will be Super Metroid, guaranteed. Dead cartridge save batteries be damned.

God_of_Destruction

Crysis. I don't even wear pants anymore because I have to keep changing them.

cesarhaha

I have been jonesing for my Final Fantasy XII since I played the demo that came with Dragon Quest VIII. Sometimes I wish I spoke Japanese just so I could play it now.

Eel_O_Brian

Gears of War stirs something in me reminiscent of the awe I had for Halo at launch. It looks to be the game to define my life for the next four years.

illogical hawk

Zelda, what else? I've been looking forward to it for years now, before I was even aware of all the good reasons to look forward to it. It will be the first game I own for Wii, so playing it will represent the moment when my support for the console is vindicated.

PheonixDav

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

OVER THE HERO HILL

I had a question about the cover of issue 156. The top line boldly states "Justice League Heroes Over 40 Must-Read Reviews Inside." I personally don't know any JLA members over the age of 40, but would still like to stay up on any superhero business. I was wondering if you could be a little more specific as to what page or article is so vital to our middle-aged Heroes.

Tim Clapp
via email

■ The only way to get a good answer to this question is to go straight to the source. We wrote to our favorite middle-aged DC hero/subscriber, Alan Scott (a.k.a. Green Lantern), to find out what part of that issue was most compelling to him. He responded: "Greetings, Game Informers of Earth. As a former member of the Justice Society of America (a 1940s precursor to the JLA), I must say that I was disappointed in your review for Kingdom Hearts II. You apparently just lack the necessary skill it takes to appreciate the game to the fullest. Also, Solomon Grundy sucks!" So, there you have it. Apparently elderly superheroes were mainly interested in our Kingdom Hearts coverage. Oh, and with all due respect to Mr. Lantern, not everyone can use a magical glowing ring to cheat their way through games. Hax!

THE REAL THING

My friends think all of your letters are fake, and I have been harassed for defending you time and time again. Am I wrong? Do you write your own letters for Dear GI?

Brandon Morgan
Rancho Cucamonga, CA

■ The reader letters you see in Dear GI are absolutely genuine, no matter how ridiculous they may seem. Believe it or not, some people actually think Shadow the Hedgehog is a good game, and that the Alliance isn't full of hilarious noobs. Sometimes we can only print the "made for TV" versions (edited for content and length), but there is always a real letter or email at the core. In some cases, if we get a ton of similar letters on a topic, we may consolidate them all into one catch-all sentiment – usually from a "reader" with an improbable name (like Hans McSplosion), but even those are formed from authentic feedback.

YOU RUIN GAMES

I appreciated Joe's editorial in issue 159 about recycled stories, but he didn't mention the fact that fans are partly responsible for the lack of innovation, which is why I found it fascinating that you ran the article in the same issue as your interview with Hideo Kojima. When fans pressure designers to make games we think we want (as opposed to games they want to make), it takes their creative control away and makes them less likely to innovate. For example, I've been drooling over Metal Gear Solid 4, but it seems that Kojima's heart is elsewhere. If fans keep pushing him for more MGS, he'll probably break, but he'll have no desire to make them interesting anymore, and it will be our fault.

Sean Kirkland
New Orleans, LA

■ You have an interesting theory, Sean, but you're grossly underestimating the professionalism of game designers as a whole. Asking Hideo Kojima to make another MGS is not like asking a petulant child to do the dishes; he won't intentionally do a poor job just so he isn't asked to repeat the chore. The gaming industry is an exciting realm, and every developer probably has dream games they'd like to work on, but that doesn't mean that they will marginalize or compromise their current work. If a game isn't a wildly innovative venture on the cutting edge of technology, you can't automatically assume that the director (or anyone else on the team) isn't doing everything they can to make it good. Unless, of course, the game has "Army Men" somewhere in the title.

ABBR FTL

I recently read your July 2006 issue and saw the explanation of abbreviations used on the Internet. I have to let you know that "wtf" does NOT mean "wonderful tact, friend." When you're talking to someone and they type "wtf," it's actually insulting – they're saying "what the f---!"

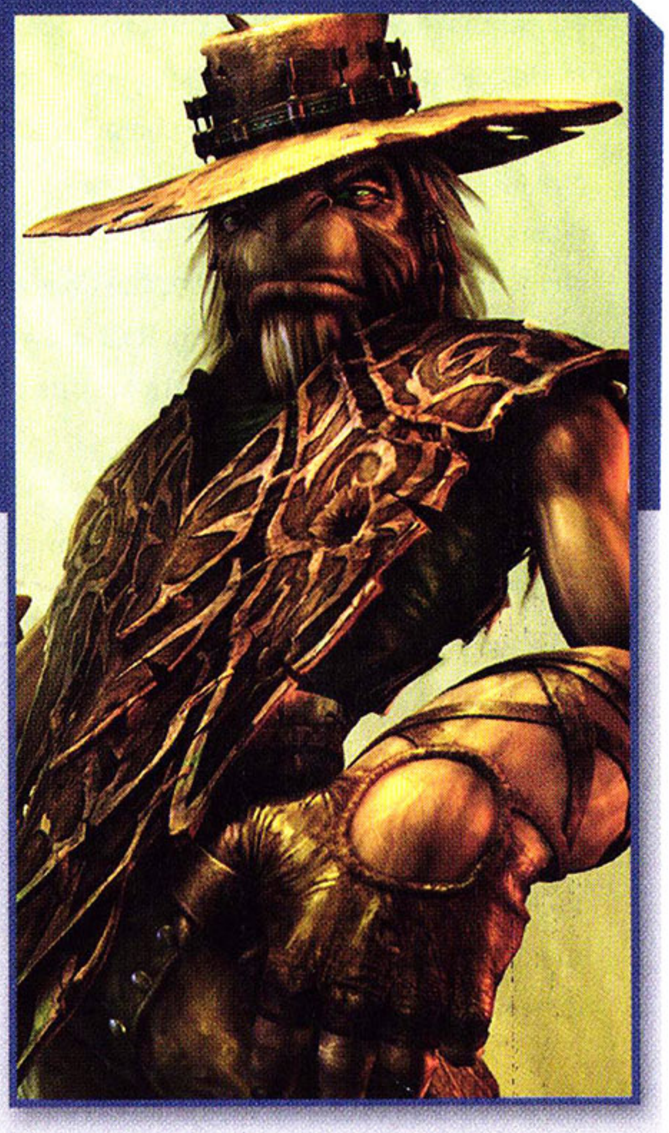
Erin Rish
via yahoo.com

■ Seriously?! Uh-oh. Apparently we don't have as many buddies on the Harry Potter forums as we thought. At least the ones who want us to "Show Them Fury Unleashed" are still our friends. Thanks for the support, guys!

TRUTH IS STRANGER

I am a big fan of your magazine, and buy all my games according to your comments and ratings. I was shocked, however, to find you said nothing about Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath in your reviews or any other part of your magazine whatsoever! This is a remarkable game that might have paved the way for future games everywhere if you had given it the recognition it deserves.

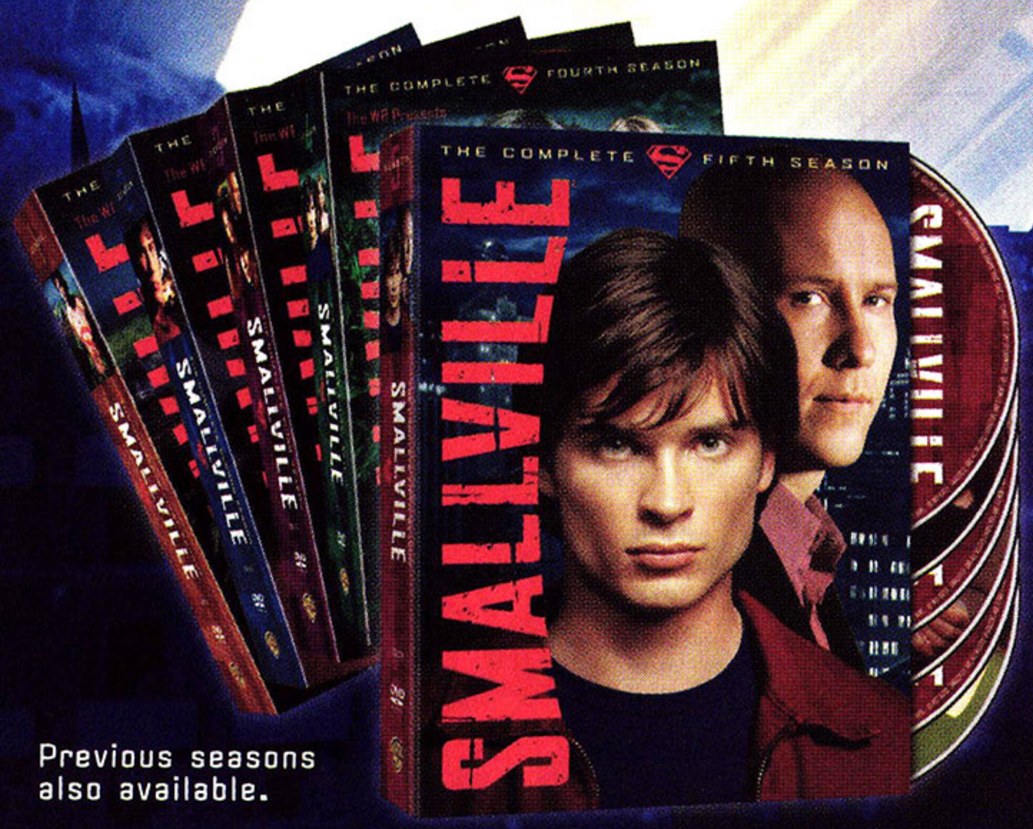
Manav Panwar
via yahoo.com



■ We love Oddworld, which is why it hurts when someone says we didn't show our support for Stranger's Wrath. It received an excellent score of 9 in issue 142, was selected as one of the top 50 games of 2005, and The Stranger was singled out as one of the top 10 heroes of 2005. Then again, we didn't crown it King of Space or anything, so maybe we didn't do everything we could have. Regardless, we also thought that this letter provided a perfect opportunity to remind people that this Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath is awesome, and that you should play it. Here's hoping that developer Oddworld Inhabitants isn't actually out of the gaming industry for good.

Send your comments to Game Informer. Snail Mail: Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 Email: deargi@gameinformer.com

HIS TIME HAS COME



Previous seasons also available.

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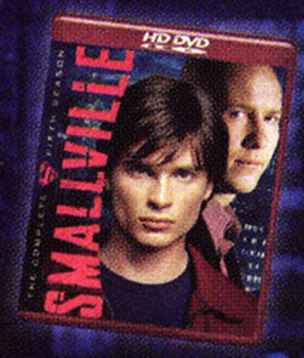
LOOK FOR IT ON HD DVD THIS FALL



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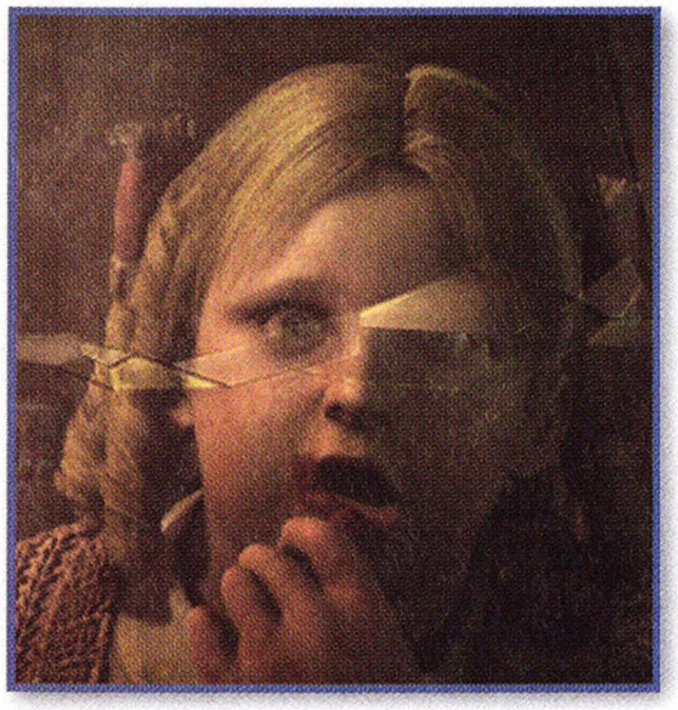
AREA OF EFFECT

In your preview for Rule of Rose, I noticed that the developer is Sony Japan but publisher is Atlus. Why would Sony, who normally publishes its own games, use a different publisher?

John Song
via yahoo.com



There is a long list of factors a company takes into account when deciding whether or not to publish a game in certain markets. In addition to politics, financials, and localization (see our feature on page 30 for more on that topic), a publisher needs to consider how its game portfolio contributes to its image in a particular territory. For instance, Rule of Rose may fit well within the profile of Sony in Japan, but there has been some controversy over the content in America. With video games in the U.S. under scrutiny for their violence and adult themes, it is understandable why a company would rather avoid dealing with these issues. On the other hand, some publishers (Atlus, in this case) may be more comfortable with edgy material and make deals to bring the game Stateside. Decisions like these don't necessarily mean that a title is of lower quality; the right game at the right time just varies from publisher to publisher. As gamers, the important thing is that we get our hands on it one way or another, right?

A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

We are working on a title called "Us" for the PC. It is about my friends and one of them is not my friend and we don`t like him, but yea, you get it. It will play like the first Metal Gear. Hey, you don`t think we can do it? Have a nice long look at Bungie. We won`t end up like 3DO. This game will have different areas.

Brandon Taylor
via verizon.net

BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: You and your buddies (plus that annoying tag-along) meet tactical espionage action somehow

> Graphics: Halo-quality graphics ensure the continuing non-bankruptcy of this fledgling developer

> Sound: Definitely doesn't sound like the whole score was recorded in some dude's basement

> Playability: Surprisingly, a control scheme based on a 1987 NES game makes a perfect transition to next-gen

> Entertainment: The innovative addition of different areas is what really sets this title apart from its peers

> Replay Value: Moderate

ENVELOPE ART

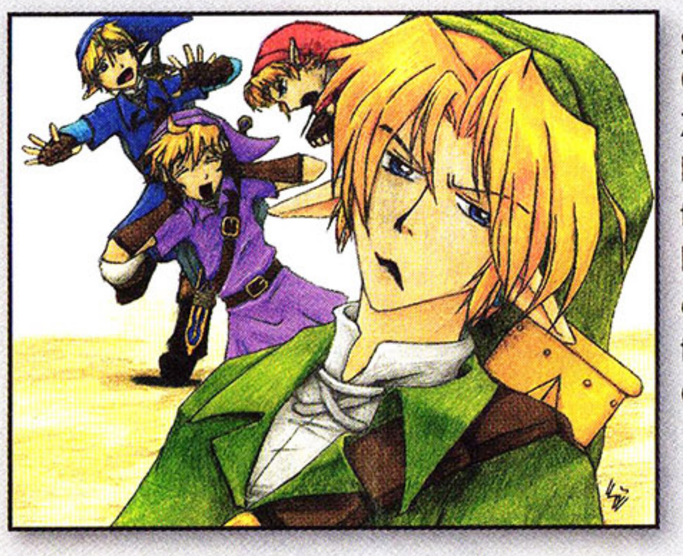
Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn envelope art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address on the back of the envelope. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your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

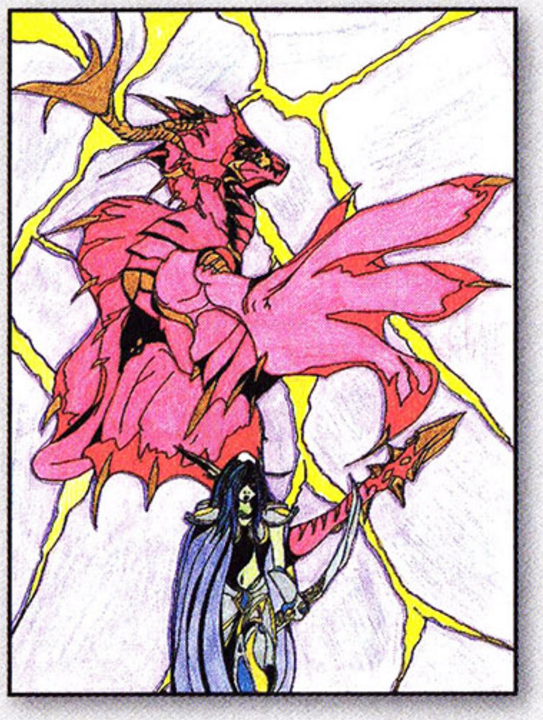
SEPTEMBER WINNER!

BARRY CHANDLER II
Looks like all of the important robot bases are covered in this one. Except Kilroy

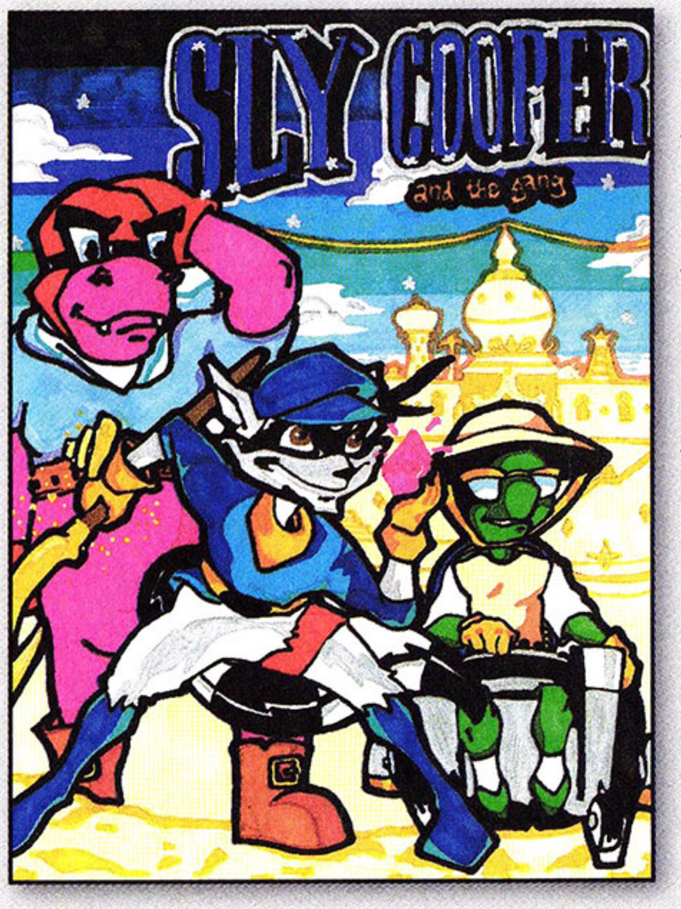
CHRISTOPHER BALL
Hey, weren't you on the cover of Final Fantasy: Mystic Quest? Shame on you



SHARECE OVERMYER
Zelda's got a busy night in front of her... because she's cooking dinner for four Links. Cooking dinner!



CHRISTINA BALLESTEROS
Fact: Game Informer readers are better at drawing elves and dragons than those Renaissance Festival hacks



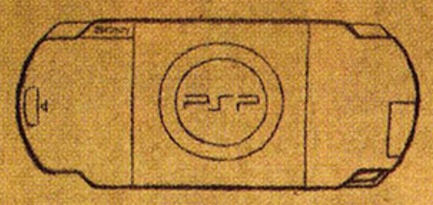
NICK LOW
Our sources tell us that Sly Stallone will play Sly Cooper in the upcoming movie. That guy at the taco hut is usually on top of these things

PSP THEATER

PRESENTS GREATEST HITS $19.99 MSRP

ROMEO, ROMEO, WHERE ART THOU ROMEO?

I'M BUSY PLAYING PSP GREATEST HITS FOR $19.99, SO CALL SOMEONE ELSE'S NAME-LIKE FRANK OR SOMETHING.



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news

XBOX LIVE IN PROGRESS

IS THE SERVICE ALL IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE?

Microsoft is here to stay as a console manufacturer, but the company's outlook for its Xbox-brand systems is clearly much larger than simply making gaming platforms. From the beginning, Microsoft made the online space a key differentiating factor between it and competitors Sony (which was late and unfocused to the online party) and Nintendo (which eschewed it altogether on the GameCube). Even though both Sony and Nintendo have significant online strategies planned for their PS3 and Wii systems respectively, it is the Xbox 360 that is perceived by the gaming public as the system to get if you deem online an important feature. Is this justified? Between Xbox Live Arcade, the downloads offered, and the online Halo 2 sessions that everyone loves, nobody is going to argue that Xbox Live is not a fun place to hang out. But is it all it could be or what Microsoft itself promised it would be?

Clearly the unbridled success of Xbox Live's features (apart from just online play) is Live Arcade. From Geometry Wars madness to puzzlers like Zuma or the excitement over the announcement that Alien Hominid (shown above) developer Behemoth is onboard, gamers have not been able to get enough of the service's titles. In fact, people wish there were more games available. Since the release of the Xbox 360 last November, and through this spring and summer, the number of Live Arcade titles Microsoft has promised has always been a moving target that the company could not hit. Recently, Microsoft

announced additional games to try and rectify the situation, including new Live Arcade titles every Wednesday and high-profile games such as Alien Hominid (see sidebar for more upcoming Live Arcade titles).

Game Informer talked to Steve Taylor, president of Ninja Bee/Wahoo Games, developer of Live Arcade's Cloning Clyde. Taylor gave us very specific reasons why the growth of Xbox Live Arcade isn't as simple as just throwing a bunch of games on the service. Apart from the fact that making games in general isn't easy or something a few people can toss off in no time at all, Smith informed us that Microsoft is very careful with what titles it accepts and which it doesn't – mindful of not only quality but variety. Taylor points out that simply making the game itself is only one part of the process, because Microsoft demands that each one contain a uniform feature set as well as minimum requirements for things like interface, Achievements, etc.

Whether or not Live Arcade delivers enough games for its waiting fanbase, the larger question remains: Is it the haven for independent game developers that Microsoft said it would be? At E3, the company bragged that it had 100 developers on its side. That support has yet to manifest itself in actual games. Given that Live Arcade's newest infusion of titles are classic, previously created titles such as Galaga or Pac-Man from well-established publishers such as Namco or Midway, Live has yet to prove itself as a hotbed for independent game development.

Taylor painted us a picture of what a developer can realistically expect when making a Live Arcade game, which put some perspective on the process. Although he declined to tell us what Cloning Clyde cost, Taylor did put a range on what a Live Arcade game might cost a developer to make, saying that you could easily spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in the process. Taylor was also quick to point out, though, that Microsoft was extremely helpful, providing everything from tools to testing and financial support. Only time will tell whether the company's help fosters and translates into more titles for the service.

Looking around at other aspects of Xbox Live, it is here where we start to see how Microsoft's vision remains frustratingly unfulfilled. The company's promise that the service would be an entertainment hub for your living room has yet to come to fruition. Playable demos for titles such as Fight Night Round 3 and Prey have excited fans, but haven't always been smooth affairs. Some have taken a long time to download, while others, like Prey's multiplayer demo, have been nearly unplayable. Microsoft's spring patch made using Live much more bearable, and the company tells us that a fall patch is also in the works.

Even with trailers for movies like *Superman Returns* and a deal with Paramount, Xbox Live's wallpapers and trailers for already released titles don't constitute entertainment. There are no direct download movies or TV, and although you can hook up your iPod, the music store that J Allard hinted to us has not surfaced. Microsoft and MTV struck a deal in 2005 for a Windows Media Player service named Urge, but it has yet to be unveiled on the console. Microsoft has also just announced a digital music player and software application dubbed Zune, but few details are available about it at the time of this writing. The potential is clearly there to merge these devices and services into Xbox Live, but integrating them won't be as seamless as flicking a switch, where one day you don't have them and the next they are just there. And what level Xbox Live membership will you have to have to use these services?

Interestingly, Xbox Live's vision of delivering entertainment content is already upon us – except it comes from publisher Electronic Arts. The company's partnership with cable sports network ESPN has created streaming content in upcoming 360 titles like NBA Live. Gamers whose consoles are connected to the Internet will not only download routinely updated ESPN radio streams throughout the day, but free clips of shows will also be available. Sitting down to play some games and catching highlights from today's *SportsCenter* is exactly the kind of entertainment capabilities that we expected Microsoft to offer. Instead, we get trailers for old movies.

Video chat with the Xbox Live Vision camera is on the horizon, but other promised features such as user-created content are nowhere to be found. Remember Velocity Girl, the one who was going to sell us all those Tony Hawk shirts she made? Microsoft spent an intolerable amount of time at the 2005 E3 press conference explaining how the Xbox 360 was going to cater to her whims, but it hasn't happened yet. Then again, if that means Marketplace doesn't get cluttered with crappy merch and we never have to hear about Velocity Girl again, perhaps that's not a bad thing.

Whether these promises come to pass or not, perhaps the biggest hurdle the 360 has to face in fulfilling its capabilities is represented by the console itself. With only a 20 GB hard drive, as it stands the system is ill-equipped to actually house all the music, game demos, Marketplace items, and other media available to you even today. Imagine how quickly your default hard drive (which actually only comes with 13 GB free out of the box) would fill up if all of Live's promised content were available. We asked Microsoft if larger-capacity hard drives where on the way, but representatives would not answer the question.

Furthermore, some of the 360's media capabilities, such as viewing pictures and video files, require that you have a Windows XP or Media Center PC. Microsoft says that these features will be enabled through its new Vista operating system (whenever that comes out). However, the fact still remains that it is your PC that is the real entertainment hub in the equation because it does all the heavy lifting and media storing, while your Xbox 360 is simply a remote node hooked up to your TV. Microsoft told us that this setup was "based on consumer feedback," but the cynical would say it's designed to force you to buy a PC.

Regardless of what Xbox Live has yet to accomplish, Microsoft says that it has no intention of relinquishing its image as the console manufacturer who cares most about the online space. A representative reassured us that "We're not even close to scratching the surface for what we intend to do with this product in the coming years." Here's hoping the wait isn't too long.

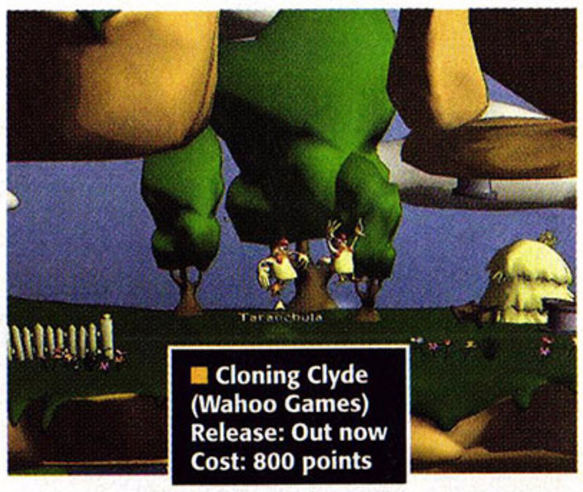
SONY AND NINTENDO'S OWN ARCADE

Not surprisingly, Sony isn't sitting back and letting rival Microsoft hog the online limelight. The company has started what it is called ED-i, or Electronic Distribution Initiative in order to compete with Xbox Live Arcade. Unlike Microsoft, Sony says that will be provide first-party titles to ED-i as well as helping third parties. According to Sony, some of the games already created for the program due to their design and hardware requirements wouldn't be possible on the Xbox 360. Sheer boasting? Maybe not. Wahoo Games/Ninja Bee president Steve Taylor told us that Microsoft puts a 50 MB cap on Live Arcade games with a recommended size of 25 MB. Larger titles require specific permission from Microsoft because the company wants titles to be able to fit on its 64 MB memory card.

Nintendo, meanwhile, is offering gamers the chance to dig into a slew of classic titles from consoles like the NES and SNES via its Virtual Console application in the Wii system.

WHAT'S NEXT?

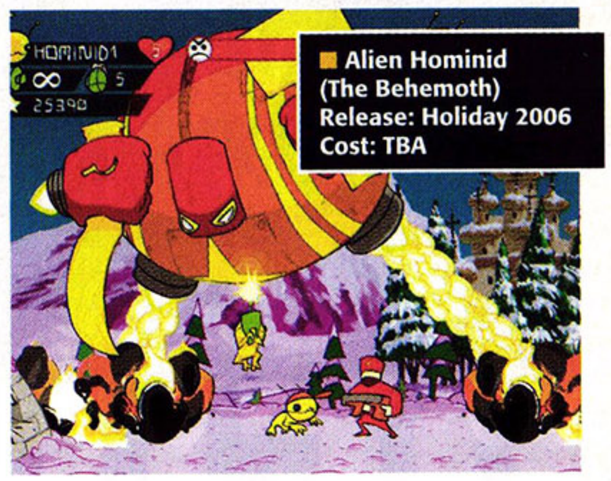
Microsoft has recently dropped a bunch of games on Xbox Live Arcade as part of its Arcade Wednesdays, where games will be launched each week during the summer. Also look out for future Live Arcade titles from developers such as The Behemoth.



■ **Cloning Clyde (Wahoo Games)**
Release: Out now
Cost: 800 points

■ **Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting (Capcom)**
Release: Out now
Cost: 800 points

■ **Pac-Man (Namco)**
Release: August 9
Cost: 400 points



■ **Alien Hominid (The Behemoth)**
Release: Holiday 2006
Cost: TBA

■ **Castle Crashers (The Behemoth)**
Release: Q1 2007
Cost: TBA

UNLIMITED ENABLED

THE ROLE OF VOICE ACTING IN GAMES

BEHIND THE MIC

Verbal storytelling is an art older than writing, and it is impossible to deny the power of the human voice to captivate and involve an audience. From campfire ghost stories to the serial radio dramas of the 1930s, there was a time when people heard the action instead of saw it. Video games, on the other hand, have traditionally been focused on the visual side of things. When the first computer games were being designed and released, the aural components served a rather minimal purpose; when gamers were just shooting space invaders, there wasn't much need for narration or nuanced character work. However, in recent years games have become less about keeping score and more about compelling characters and the stories that surround them. In order to deliver those kinds of experiences, developers need to ensure that their characters are convincing beyond the way they move, jump, and take cover. The characters need to speak believably and in ways that convey their unique personalities. Luckily for gamers, there are people who specialize in making that happen.

Gamers are obviously aware of the presence or absence of voiceovers in today's biggest titles, but what they may not recognize is the professional community that is at work to ensure that the biggest icons in gaming sound the way they should. The days are long gone when developers could just grab a friend or coworker to say a game's title or yell "fight!" into a microphone. "In high-end game productions, voiceover delivered by non-professionals is about as much of an option today as having your character art drawn by your accountants," says Lev Chapelsky, general manager of Blindlight – a production company specializing solely in voice acting talent for video games. "Professional voice actors hone their craft for years and years to do what they do better than anyone else can."

Given the vast number of video games that require voiceovers, it should be no surprise that there is considerable demand for this kind of talent. However, it is interesting to note that despite the fact that gamers only hear the voice rather than see the person, there are several individuals who have distinguished themselves as stars in the profession. They may not be the subject of gossip columns in celebrity tabloids, but there are a handful of voiceover artists who are frequently selected to portray the most pivotal characters in the games we know and love.

This level of budding recognition is essentially unprecedented in VO, and it's continuing to grow. One of the most distinctive male voices in the industry, Cam Clarke, marvels at the fact that these days voice actors can even get fan mail. "When people my age were kids, we never paid attention. The voices were just part of the cartoon,"

JENNIFER HALE

Notable game roles

- *Darkwatch – Cassidy Sharp*
- *Metal Gear Solid series – Naomi Hunter, Emma Emmerich*
- *Metroid Prime series – Samus Aran*
- *Mercenaries – Jennifer Mui*
- *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic – Bastila Shan*

Nerds want to know!

Though she doesn't typically do dubbing for anime, you can hear Hale as the voice of Electra Ovilo in *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie*.

"In high-end game productions, VO delivered by non-professionals is about as much of an option today as having your character art drawn by your accountants."

Clarke tells us. "We never, even for a second, cared to think that Daffy and Bugs had the same voice actor, or that Yosemite Sam was just Bugs talking funny. It was never even a concept. It was just a cartoon!"

Anyone who doubts that today VO is rising in prominence only needs to do a quick search online. In the last several years, the Internet Movie Database has started listing video games in addition to television and film due to the abundant crossover of voice actors between several forms of media. However, despite its ties to the Hollywood machine, the VO industry doesn't operate on the same cut-throat principles that people associate with being an on-camera actor. Voice actress Jennifer Hale, who you've probably heard if you've played any of this generation's triple-A titles, thinks it's just the opposite. "I've actually recommended friends for jobs that I just knew I wasn't right for. That's how it is. We help each other. I'll recommend other people all the time," she explains. "There are rare cases where I say 'Damn it! They should have hired me because I so got that! But, oh, *she* got it? She's amazing. That's gonna be so good.'"

Once a voice artist gets the part, they attend a studio recording session with a script in front of them. To a gamer, a story that details a regiment of space marines fighting an alien emperor in the far reaches of space is a perfectly plausible concept. Even so, one must wonder how these bizarre characters and settings are perceived by the artists recording the dialogue, who often don't play the game themselves. Totally ridiculous? According to Clarke, not at all. "Science fiction and fantasy, that's what actors are all about. Nothing is strange to me," he admits. "You go to an audition, and you ask 'What's the character,' and they say 'It's a Pterodactyl,' and you say 'Okay.' You don't even blink. You think of what you can do to bring life to it." To a voice casting director for a high-profile game, enlisting actors that aren't fazed by even the most far-fetched ideas (like a plumber saving a princess, for instance) is a must.

Even in light of the many benefits quality voice work can have, its impact on a game's success is still a subject of debate. In 2005, there were reports of a possible voice actor strike within the gaming industry. Though it never actually came to pass, the central issue was whether voice actors are entitled to a share of a game's profits. While this would have raised their pay, it also raised the question of the ultimate role they played in driving sales. "I was very happy with the resolution," Hale reveals. "I thought people were ultimately very sensible and really understood where we are in the game process and the evolution of games." While no one doubts the importance of what voice actors contribute to a product, at this point the consensus seems to be that it is still the gameplay rather than the cast that sells units. However, this won't necessarily always be the trend. To some degree, game publishers have already started using certain members of the voice cast to market a game, though these individuals are generally live-action stars reprising their silver screen roles in-game.

So, if big-name actors and actresses are doing more voice work, does that threaten the jobs of professionals who have made it into a career? "A small portion of the acting work will always be appropriate for celebrities, and the vast majority of the acting work will always be reserved for journeymen actors," Chapelsky observes. This is a fairly optimistic take on the situation, though some artists see it from a different angle. "There'll be a dent here and there. I don't really focus on it, because there's nothing I can do about that," points out Hale. And on the darker side of the spectrum, Clarke answers, "They get paid a zillion times more than we would. The stars are gobbling up work we would have done, but that's pretty much the nature of the entertainment beast." It would appear that just as gamers are uncertain of the role of licensed games in the industry, their role within the voice acting industry is also surrounded by varying degrees of acceptance.

In current popular culture, many forms of media have begun to cross over, and the divisions between movies, games, and TV are not as static as they once were. Where this trend will lead VO in the future is unknown, but for now it is exciting as gamers to see so much care and consideration being put into something that ultimately enriches the game when we finally get our hands on it. "My hope," confides Hale, "is that the work we do as voice actors can just make the game experience that much more intense, that much more fun, that much more of an escape and a great time." ■ ■ ■

SPEAKING OF...

One of the advantages of spoken dialogue becoming the standard in most games is that it sets a standard for the pronunciation of the many strange names and places in gaming. If only this had been the case when Street Fighter II hit the arcades, a lot of joystick jockeys would have been saved the embarrassment of trying to say "Guile."

■ **Power Tip: It's not "Gwilly"**

SPEAKING OF...

Not too long ago, professional voice actors basically had to hide the fact that they were involved in video game projects. "The game industry wanted access to this talent," explains Lev Chapelsky, "but it wasn't ready or willing to deal with the terms of employing the actors under union contract." As a result, many voice actors adopted pseudonyms to work on these projects. For instance, in Metal Gear Solid for the PSone, Clarke and Hale voiced characters under the names James Flinders and Carren Learning, respectively. Fortunately, this trend has changed recently, and you can see their real names in the credits of the remade Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes.

Full Interviews Online

Be sure to check out the Unlimited section at Game Informer Online to read the full interviews with Cam Clarke, Jennifer Hale, and Lev Chapelsky.

Photos: Ed Carreon

CAM CLARKE

Notable game roles

- *Metal Gear Solid series – Liquid Snake*
- *Killer7 – Andrei Ulmeyda*
- *Kingdom Hearts series – Simba*
- *Tales of Symphonia – Kratos Aurion*
- *Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist – Freddy Pharkas*

Nerds want to know!

Anyone who watched cartoons in the '80s will recognize Clarke as the voice of Leonardo, the leader of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles!

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

NEW NEVERWINTER INTO WINTER?

Atari is delaying the release of Neverwinter Nights 2 by a month, meaning the Obsidian-developed PC game will now come out in late October.

PS3 WRESTLING ON HOLD

THQ has put the sleeper hold on the PlayStation 3 version of WWE SmackDown! vs Raw 2007. The game was supposed to come out this year, but is instead being cancelled. The PS3 version of Raw will skip a year and debut with a 2008 edition. A year with no beefcake is a bad year.

TREYARCH IS BOND'S BARTENDER

Call of Duty 3 developer Treyarch is now hiring talent for Activision's first James Bond title. *Casino Royale* hits theaters this Christmas, but it is almost certain that Treyarch's game won't see the light of day until well after the film's release.

INTRIGUING PAIR FOR Wii

It's no secret that EA is going to be putting its titles out on Nintendo's Wii system, but at a recent studio showcase, the publisher quietly announced that both SSX and The Godfather will be coming to the system. The former series has yet to be mentioned in conjunction with the other consoles, and the latter's open world structure should be an interesting challenge for the Wii. Do you think Miyamoto imagined choking gangsters when he helped design the Wii controllers?

■ The Godfather for Xbox 360

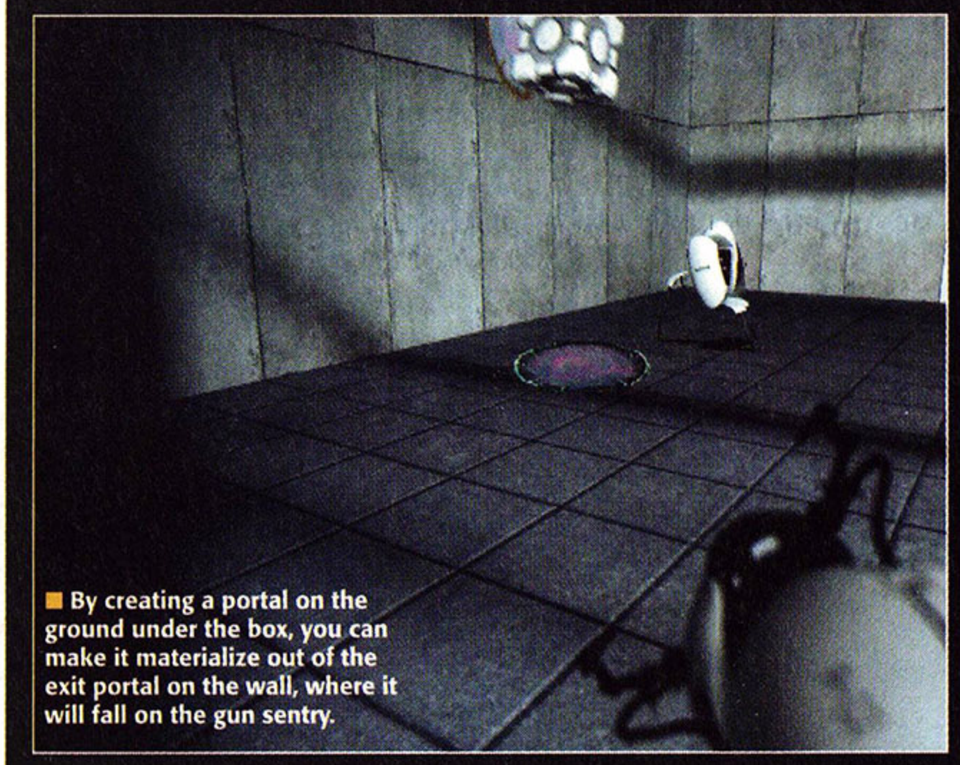
UBISOFT IN DRIVER'S SEAT

Atari has sold Tanner down the river to fellow Frenchmen Ubisoft. Not only will Ubisoft be taking over the franchise, but it'll also be getting "most of the assets and all of the personnel" of the series' famed developer Reflections Interactive.

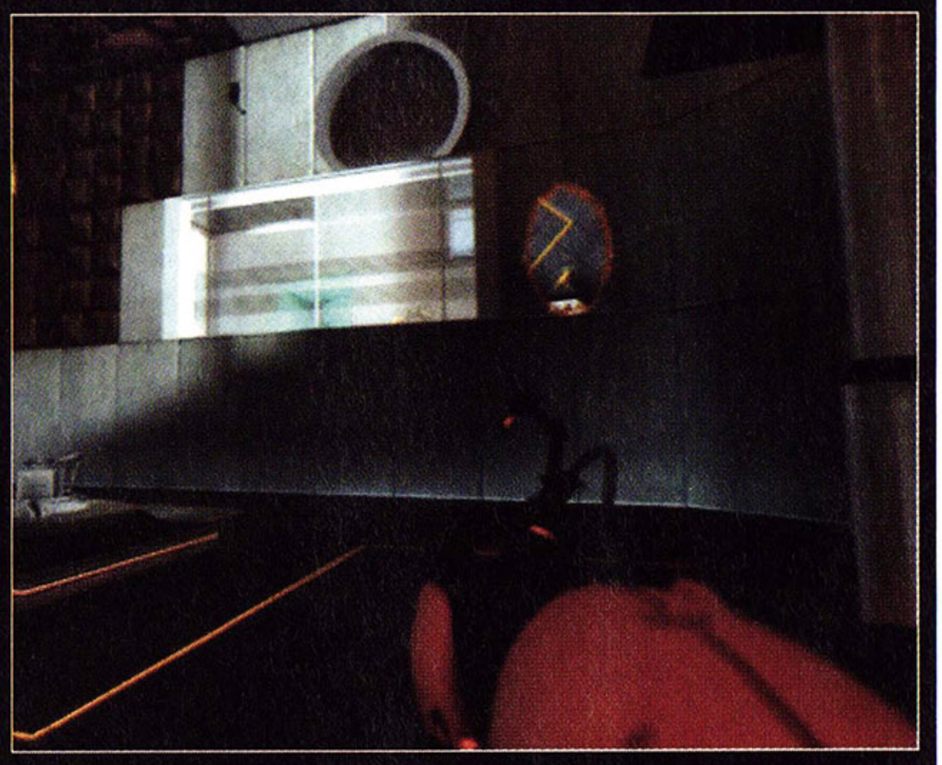
games

VALVE OPENS EPISODE TWO PORTAL

TEAM FORTRESS 2 BACK IN CHOCK-FULL RELEASE



■ By creating a portal on the ground under the box, you can make it materialize out of the exit portal on the wall, where it will fall on the gun sentry.



At the recent EA Studio Showcase, Valve's Gabe Newell took the stage to talk about Half-Life 2: Episode Two. Far from being your usual demo pitch or evangelization of episodic content, the audience was stunned by the time all was said and done.

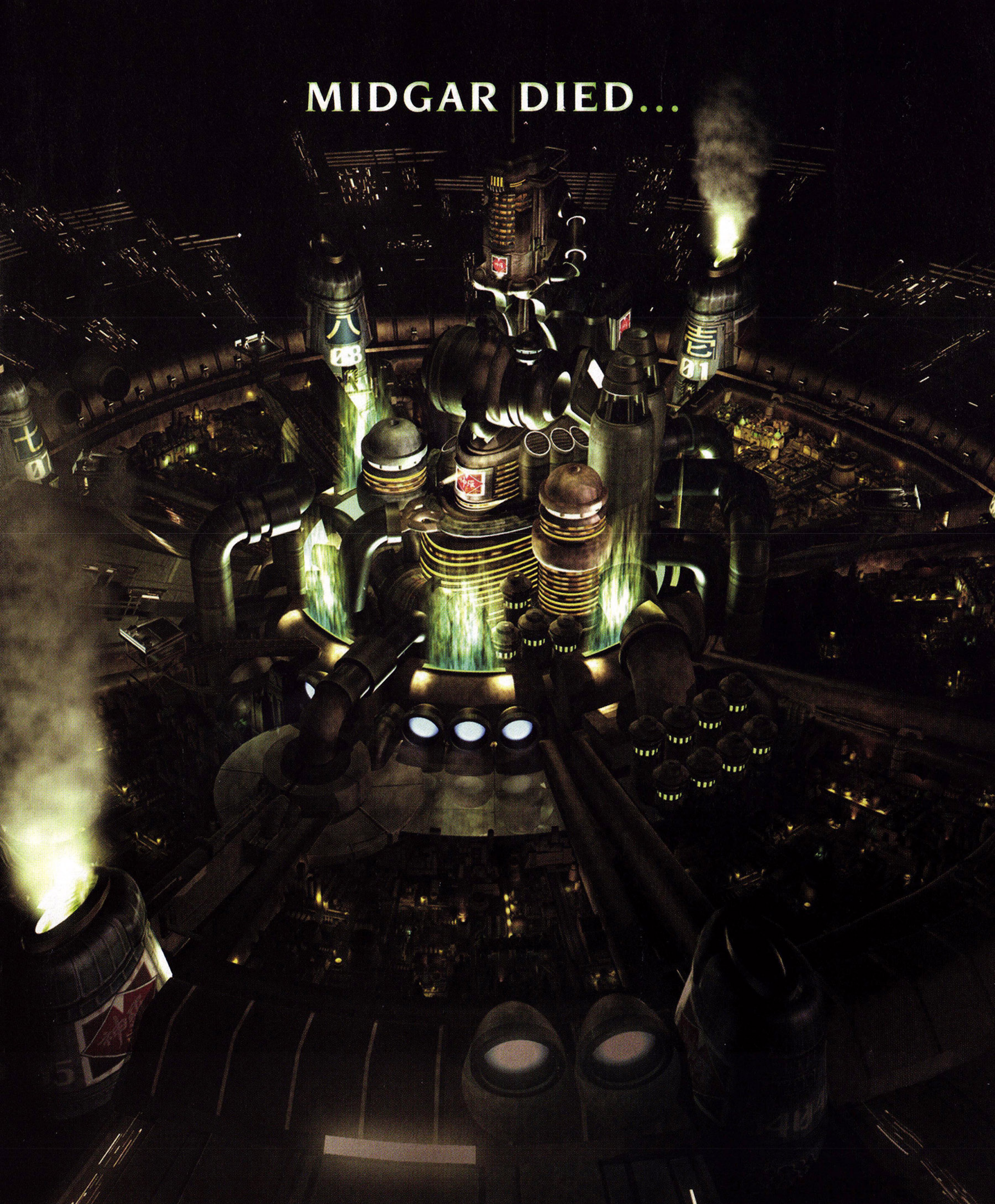
Newell and EA announced that Episode Two was coming to the PC, Xbox 360, and PlayStation 3, but the devil – as they say – is in the details. Surprising everyone in attendance, Valve unveiled Team Fortress 2 and a new single-player game entitled Portal. Both will be included in the retail and Steam (Valve's download service) versions of Episode Two for PC. Those who buy the Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 edition of Episode Two will get all of the games above, plus Half-Life 2 and Episode One in one package.

Many thought Team Fortress 2 had been cancelled long ago, but the multiplayer game made a big splash with its cartoon-like graphics and infectious art style. The game features different character classes such as spy, engineer, demolitions, medic, and more, all of whom must work together to complete various tactical objectives.

Perhaps the talk of the entire EA showcase, Valve's single-player title Portal inspired cheers and loud applause. Based on a game named Narbacular Drop (which Game Informer featured in Connect, page 22, Issue 156), which was created by some DigiPen students, the draw of Portal is a gun that creates portals that you can enter and exit from. So, if you had to cross a chasm, for example, you can shoot an exit portal on the other side of the divide and then create an entrance on the side you're on. You can then enter the portal on your side and exit from the one you've created across the chasm. Watching Valve's demo movie of the game, however, this is simply the beginning of what you can do. Creating infinite loops, manipulating objects, transporting yourself anywhere in an environment (irrespective of gravity – like Prey), and more will all be yours to figure out. To see how crazy Portal is, or to view the team Fortress 2 trailer, simply head over to GI Online and see for yourself.

Valve has yet to specify a release date for either the PC or console versions of Half-Life 2 Episode Two, Team Fortress 2, and Portal.

MIDGAR DIED...



PlayStation 2

SQUARE ENIX

www.square-enix.com

Published by Square Enix, Inc.

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TEEN

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Violence

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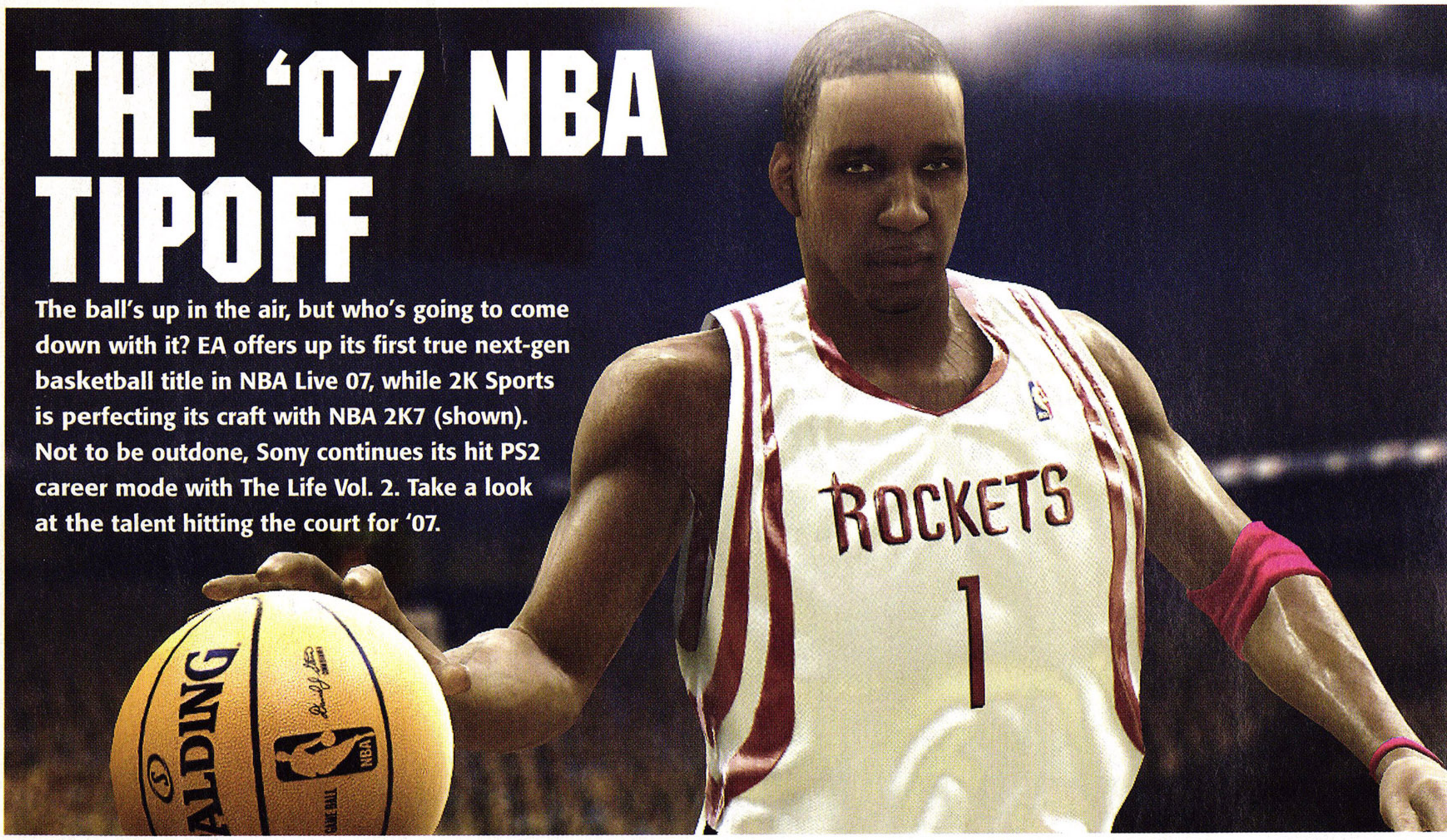
THE '07 NBA TIPOFF

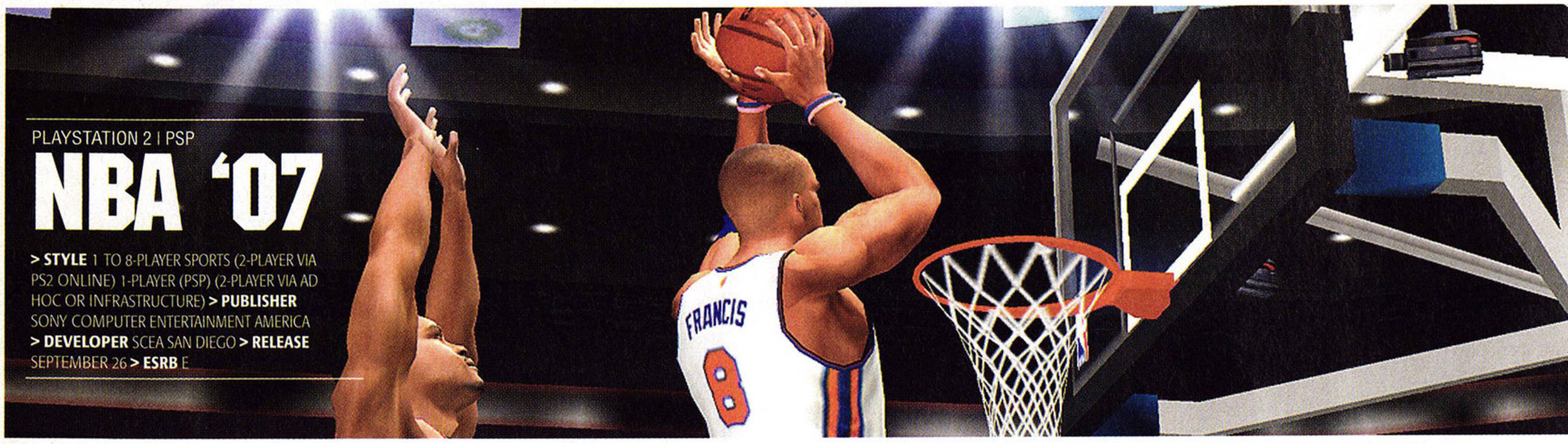
The ball's up in the air, but who's going to come down with it? EA offers up its first true next-gen basketball title in NBA Live 07, while 2K Sports is perfecting its craft with NBA 2K7 (shown). Not to be outdone, Sony continues its hit PS2 career mode with The Life Vol. 2. Take a look at the talent hitting the court for '07.



PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

NBA '07

> STYLE 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) 1-PLAYER (PSP) (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** SCEA SAN DIEGO **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 **> ESRB** E



It's without hyperbole that we say that NBA '06's The Life mode saved Sony's NBA franchise from irrelevance. It was a clear example of how a franchise could boldly reinvent itself, keeping it from the year-to-year grind. Of course, The Life is coming back this year, but the question for the game is not necessarily whether or not it will continue its heavy-handed drama (but that's why we like it!), but whether the gameplay can keep up.

Sony says that it has worked on the gameplay bugs and exploits that made last year's title far from superior in that department. In particular, hitting square for the jumpstop move won't leave the player paralyzed in the low post. In fact, Sony says that that area of the court will be better tuned to give you more options. Since dunks, lay-ups, and the jumpstop are all mapped to the same button, getting the right contextual balance and cleaning up the low post is going to be crucial to a good experience.

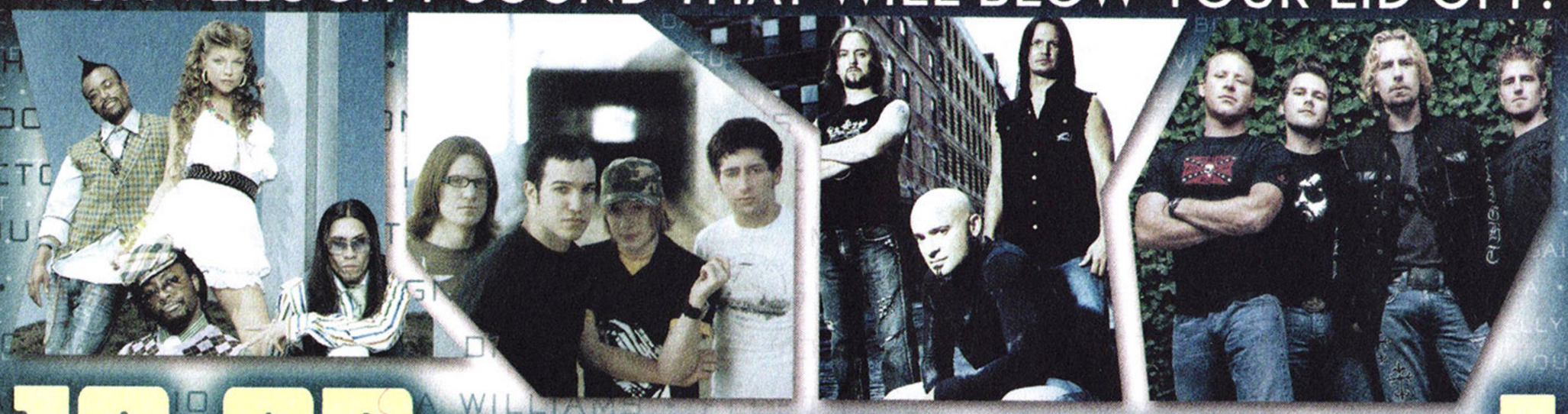
Speaking of the low post, NBA '07 is trying to make rebounding a bigger part of the game. Fixing the auto board problem from last year, boxing out, switching to the nearest guy, and figuring out where the ball is going to be is vital to getting that rebound. The game will even sometimes switch to a different camera or flash indicators on the court when the ball comes off the rim to help you out. In the early build we got of the game, it took getting used to, but we're glad Sony's trying to make this stat more relevant in video games.

Any gameplay fixes implemented will go a long way to making the already anticipated The Life Volume 2 even better. Especially since this year's mode has made its own changes for the better. Last year took us on a journey with The Kid. This time we also get to step into the shoes of his nemesis – the man they call Big W (that's "Big Dub" to you). You'll play through both players' storylines as the mode takes you back and forth between the two and their different

POCKET BALLER

The PSP version of NBA '07 is an entirely different beast than its console big brother. Naturally, there will be plenty of minigames (including a rhythm-based dunk contest and games like skee-ball and pinball) for pick-up-and-play action, but the title also includes Conquest mode. Here you'll defend territory and acquire players as you take your team to supremacy. The PSP edition also features a full season mode and wireless multiplayer play via both Ad Hoc and Infrastructure modes.

HIGH-VELOCITY SOUND THAT WILL BLOW YOUR LID OFF!



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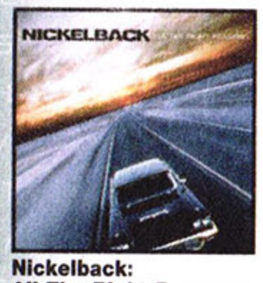
Staind: Chapter V (Atlantic) PA 62209	Shinedown: Us And Them (Atlantic) 62669	
Shooter Jennings: Electric Rodeo (Universal South) 64393	Daddy Yankee: Barrio Fino en Directo (1 CD/1 DVD) (Interscope) PA ★ 14174	
Keith Urban: Be Here (Capitol Nashville) 54443	Nelly: Sweatsuit (Universal) PA 63097	
INXS: Switch (Epic) 63141	Shinedown: Leave A Whisper (Reissue) (Atlantic) 53185	
Dierks Bentley: Modern Day Drifter (Capitol Nashville) 61530	Ja Rule: Exodus Best-of set. (Def Jam) PA 63152	
The Best Of Eric Clapton: The Millennium Collection (Polydor) 53035	The Best Of Fuel (Epic) 63129	

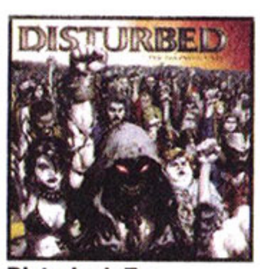


Nickelback: All The Right Reasons (Roadrunner) **62652**

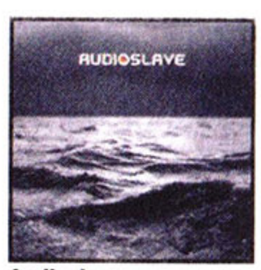
Korn: See You On The Other Side (Virgin) PA **63145**

James Blunt: Back To Bedlam (Atlantic) PA **62664**

The Black Eyed Peas: Monkey Business (Interscope) **62872**



Disturbed: Ten Thousand Fists (Reprise) **62459**



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Yellowcard: Lights And Sounds (Capitol) **63453**

Mudvayne: Lost And Found (Epic) PA 61264	The Best Of Snoop Dogg (Priority) PA 62723	Kanye West: Late Registration (Roc-A-Fella) PA 62352	Blink-182: Greatest Hits (Geffen) PA 62822	Destiny's Child: #1's (Columbia) 62857
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The Black Eyed Peas: Elephunk (w/Bonus Track) (A&M) PA 54073	Billy Currington: Doin' Somethin' Right (Mercury) 62734	Josh Turner: Your Man (MCA Nashville) 62909	Common: Be (Geffen) PA 62865	Bo Bice: The Real Thing (RCA) 63126
Nickelback: Silver Side Up (Roadrunner) 41322	Ciara: Goodies (LaFace (Zomba)) 54266	The Very Best Of The Beach Boys: Sounds Of Summer (Capitol) 48744	Aerosmith: Big Ones '80s-'90s hits. (Geffen) 06271	Bigg Snoop Dogg Presents Welcome To Tha Chuuch—Tha Album (Koch Records) PA 63200
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My Morning Jacket: Z (RCA) 62585	Elvis Presley: 30 #1 Hits (RCA) 45794			
Fiona Apple: Extraordinary Machine (Epic) 62589	Queensrÿche: Operation—Mindcrime II (Rhino) 64218			
Aqualung: Strange And Beautiful (Columbia) 61177	George Thorogood & The Destroyers: Greatest Hits—30 Years Of Rock (Capitol) 52885			
B.B. King: The Ultimate Collection (Geffen) 61196	The Derek Trucks Band: Songlines (Columbia) 64226			
Gretchen Wilson: All Jacked Up (Epic) 62620	Bon Jovi: Have A Nice Day (Island) 62813			
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Ill Niño: One Nation Underground (Roadrunner) PA 62648	Trace Adkins: Songs About Me (Capitol Nashville) 61410			
Hinder: Extreme Behavior (Universal) PA 62649	Green Day: International Superhits! (Reprise) 41830			
Liz Phair: Somebody's Miracle (Capitol) 62653	Ozzy Osbourne: Under Cover (Epic) 62844			
Soulfly: Dark Ages (Roadrunner) PA 62654				
O.A.R.: Stories Of A Stranger (Lava) 62665				
Iron Maiden: Death On The Road Live! (Sanctuary) ★ 06495				
Simple Plan: MTV Live From The Hard Rock (Lava) 62668				
Ghostface Killah: Fishscale (Def Jam) PA 64092				
Soundgarden: A-Sides (A&M) 24937				
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Matisyahu: Youth (Epic) 63393

Gwen Stefani: Love. Angel. Music. Baby. (Interscope) 60562

Il Divo: Ancora (Columbia) 63410

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Limp Bizkit: Greatest Hitz (Geffen) PA 63007

Saves The Day: Sound The Alarm (Vagrant) 64424

Young Jeezy: Let's Get It—Thug Motivation 101 (Def Jam) PA 62063

Jason Mraz: Mr. A-Z (Atlantic) 62068

Korn: Greatest Hits, Vol. 1 (Epic) PA 60176

Brad Paisley: Time Well Wasted (Arista Nashville) 62134

The Game: The Documentary (Aftermath) PA 60747

Slipknot: Vol. 3—The Subliminal Verses (Special Edition) (Roadrunner) PA ★ 61355

Michael Bublé: It's Time (Reprise) 60772

OK Go: Oh No (Capitol) 62355

3 Doors Down: Seventeen Days (Republic) 60773

Gorillaz: Demon Days (Virgin) 61780

Usher: Confessions (Special Edition) (LaFace (Zomba)) 60129

Ginuwine: Back II Da Basics (Epic) 62963

Switchfoot: Nothing Is Sound (Columbia) 62339

Coldplay: Parachutes (Nettwerk America) 36834

Dem Franchize Boyz: On Top Of Our Game (Virgin) PA 15174

Rihanna: Music Of The Sun (Def Jam) 62397

50 Cent: The Massacre (Shady/Interscope) PA 60985

Nine Black Alps: Everything Is (Interscope) PA 63831

Lynyrd Skynyrd: Family Hits! Skynyrd, 38 Special, others. (Geffen) 63833

Kelly Clarkson: Thankful (RCA) 48257

Puddle Of Mudd: Come Clean (Flawless/Geffen) PA 41188

Kelly Clarkson: Breakaway (RCA) 60388

Totally Country, Vol. 4 Gretchen Wilson, Toby Keith, etc. (RCA Nashville) 61026

Black Sabbath: Greatest Hits 1970-1978 (Rhino) 63861

Mercyme: Coming Up To Breathe (INO) 64463

Kirk Franklin: Hero (Gospo-Centric) 62449

Trapt: Someone In Control (Warner Bros.) 62460

DMX: Grand Champ (Def Jam) PA 51125

Ludacris: Chicken-N-Beer (Def Jam South) PA 51166

Coheed And Cambria: Good Apollo, I'm Burning Star IV... (Columbia) PA 62512

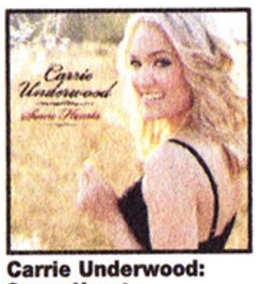
Dr. Dre: The Chronic (Death Row) PA 45517

Rage Against The Machine (Epic/Associated) PA 10094

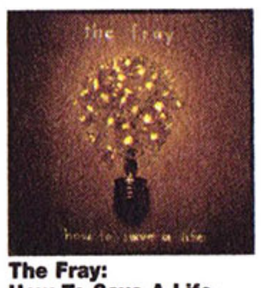
Godsmack: Faceless (Republic) PA 46944

The Very Best Of ZZ Top: Rancho Texicano (Rhino) ★ 53221

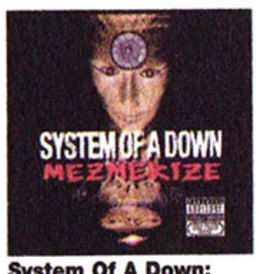
Fall Out Boy: From Under The Cork Tree (Island) **61553**



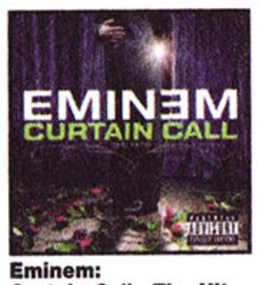
Carrie Underwood: Some Hearts (Arista) **63024**



The Fray: How To Save A Life (Epic) **62348**



System Of A Down: Mezmerize (Columbia) PA **61709**



Eminem: Curtain Call—The Hits (Aftermath) PA **63154**

Avenged Sevenfold: City Of Evil (Warner Bros.) PA **62878**

Pink: I'm Not Dead (LaFace (Zomba)) PA **64261**

Kenny Chesney: The Road And The Radio (BNA) 63263

Journey: Greatest Hits (Columbia) 05196

G-Unit: Beg For Mercy (Interscope) PA 51653

Power Ballads—Gold Styx, Kiss, many others. (Hip-0 Records) ★ 00139

DevilDriver: The Fury Of Our Maker's Hand (Roadrunner) PA 61894

T.I.: Urban Legend (Atlantic) PA 60486

Destiny's Child: Destiny Fulfilled (Columbia) 60487

We Are Scientists: With Love And Squalor (Virgin) 63323

Keyshia Cole: The Way It Is (A&M) PA 61852

Eminem: The Marshall Mathers LP (Aftermath) PA 35081

Akon: Trouble (Universal) PA 51666

Britney Spears: Greatest Hits—My Prerogative (Jive) 60597

Snoop Dogg: R&G (Rhythm & Gangsta)—The Masterpiece (Geffen) PA 60599

Kanye West: The College Dropout (Roc-A-Fella) PA 52098

50 Cent: Get Rich Or Die Tryin' (Shady/Interscope) PA 46446

Jamie Foxx: Unpredictable (J Records) PA 62960

The Darkness: One Way Ticket To Hell...And Back (Atlantic) PA 63006

Bruce Springsteen: Hammersmith Odeon, London '75 (Columbia) ★ 15094

Megadeth: Greatest Hits—Back To The Start (Capitol) 61823

30 Seconds To Mars: A Beautiful Lie (Virgin) 62214

10 Years: The Autumn Effect (Republic) 62248

T.I. Presents The P$C: 25 To Life (Atlantic) PA 62259

Linkin Park: Hybrid Theory (Warner Bros.) 38183

Maroon 5: Songs About Jane (J Records) 52387

Coldplay: A Rush Of Blood To The Head (Capitol) 45326

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- ☐ (40) MODERN ROCK Nickelback, Gorillaz
- ☐ (31) CLASSIC ROCK Bob Dylan, ZZ Top
- ☐ (38) METAL Disturbed, System Of A Down
- ☐ (50) ADULT ALTERNATIVE Wilco, Ryan Adams
- ☐ (34) COUNTRY Kenny Chesney, Martina McBride
- ☐ (39) R&B Chris Brown, Jamie Foxx
- ☐ (41) HIP-HOP Kanye West, Chamillionaire
- ☐ (33) LIGHT & EASY Rod Stewart, Michael Bublé
- ☐ (37) JAZZ Chris Botti, Jane Monheit
- ☐ (35) CLASSICAL Hilary Hahn, André Rieu
- ☐ (46) LATIN Christian Castro, Vicente Fernández
- ☐ (36) CHRISTIAN Casting Crowns, Michael W. Smith
- ☐ (44) GOSPEL Mary Mary, Kirk Franklin

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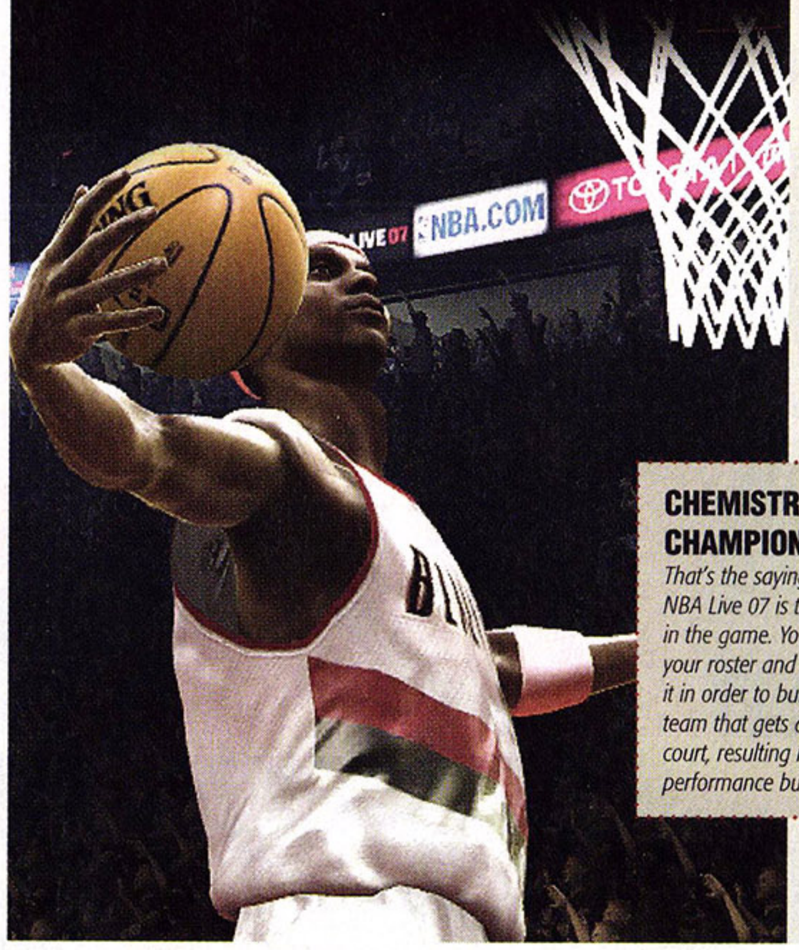
NBA LIVE 07

> STYLE 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 5-PLAYER (PC), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX/XBOX 360), (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PC INTERNET) **> PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS **> DEVELOPER** EA CANADA **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 25 **> ESRB** E



CHEMISTRY WINS CHAMPIONSHIPS

That's the saying in sports, and NBA Live 07 is trying to replicate it in the game. You'll have to manage your roster and the egos within it in order to build a title-winning team that gets along on and off the court, resulting in actual in-game performance bumps.

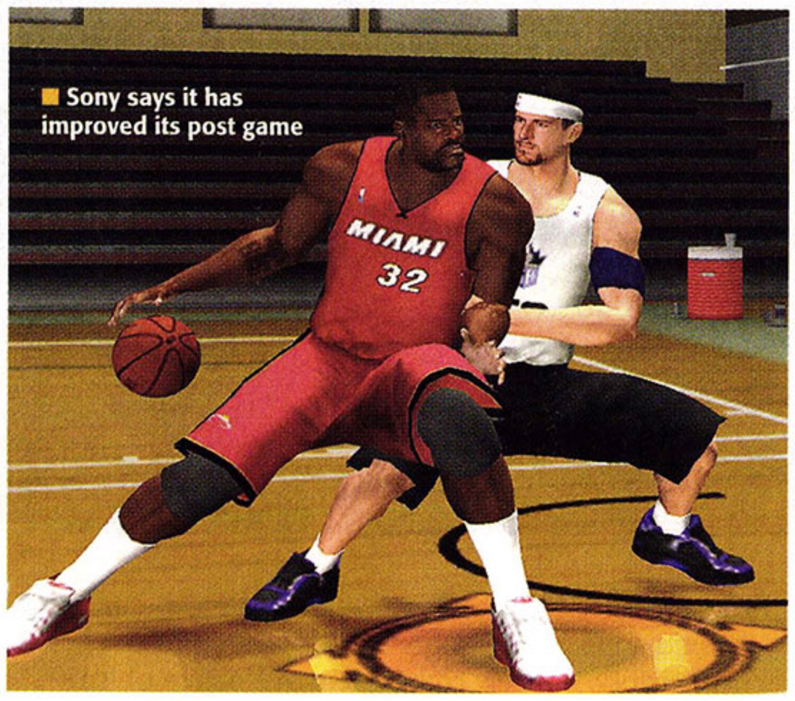
Notably absent from Live's debut on the 360 was the Superstar aspect that the series cultivated just the year before. Thankfully it is back and truly better than ever as the franchise tries to build its base up once again.

The Superstar feature of '06 has been blown out in every way for this year. Players will now be able to switch between the various Superstar styles on the fly (by pressing left bumper on the Xbox 360, for instance, and clicking the right analog stick on PS2). So instead of each guy being pigeonholed to one Superstar type like in past, now you can take a guy like Tracy McGrady and switch him from a High Flyer to a Scorer, to a Shooter, and then back to a High Flyer. This is all assuming the player's real-life counterpart has the skills, so you won't see Shaq becoming a Playmaker, for instance.

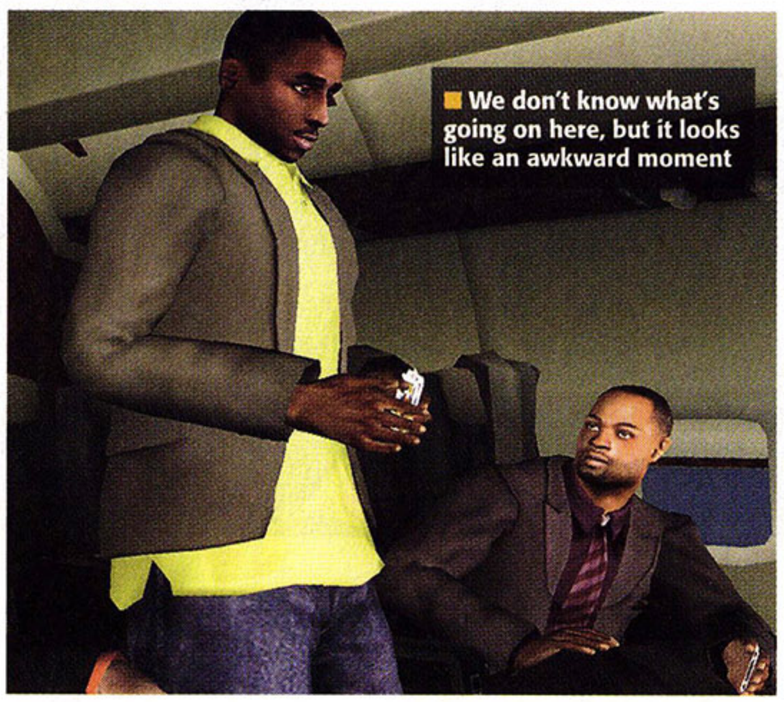
The Freestyle moves you unleash with these Superstars have been broken down into three levels, each of which contains four moves mapped to the right analog. Players are assigned a maximum level appropriate to how good they are. Level 1 moves are naturally the easiest to pull off, involving straight directional motions with the stick (up, down, left, right). Level 2 Freestyle moves incorporate quarter turns, while Level 3 involves half turns. Finally, if you get to Level 3 and your team has momentum, your player can perform special "In the Zone" moves such as a 360 dunk. So, a Level 1 move to the right might be a reverse dunk, while a quarter circle to the right for a Level 2 player is a windmill dunk.

Apart from EA's attempt to more accurately replicate the change of direction and a sense of momentum and weight in players, NBA Live 07 is also promising to work on the series' AI. EA says that it has rewritten the last year's code, including changing offensive and defensive strategies, as well as fundamentals like passing and shooting. The game also hopes to use players' ability ratings to a better degree.

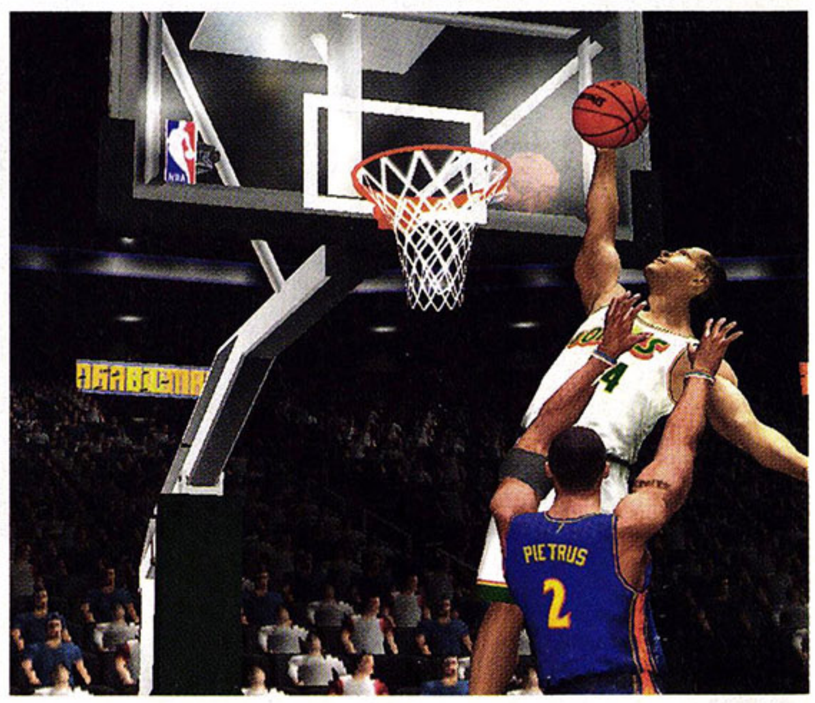
Rumors isn't just your momma's Fleetwood Mac record. They can be just as terrible when they hit a basketball team. This year's game features an assistant head coach, and one of his responsibilities in Dynasty mode is to keep track and alert you to any rumors flying around the league. This includes things like who might be traded, who wants out, and players' morale. If you investigate the rumors and they turn out to be true, you'll get an advantage such as getting the inside track on signing players before other teams.



■ Sony says it has improved its post game

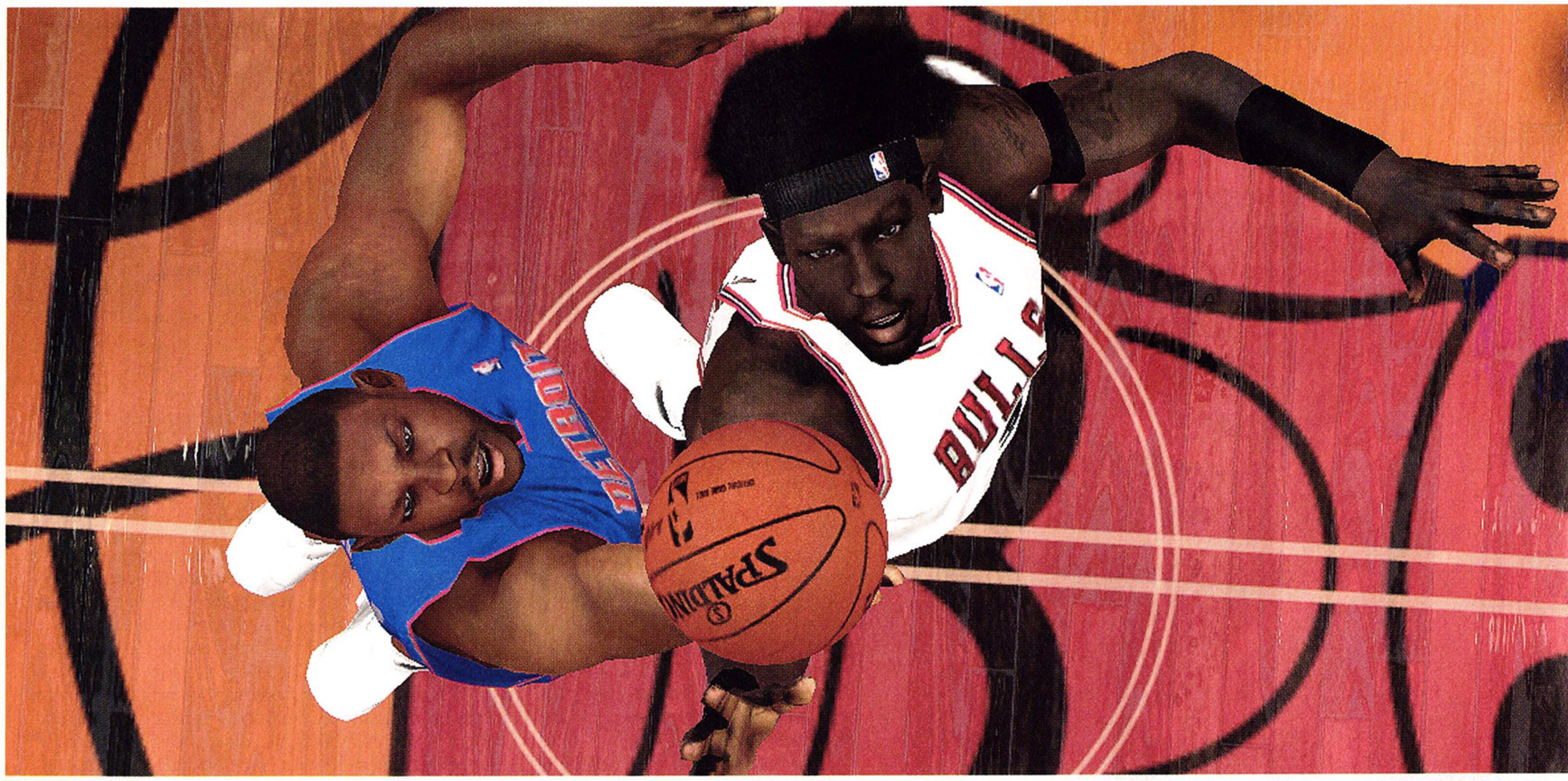


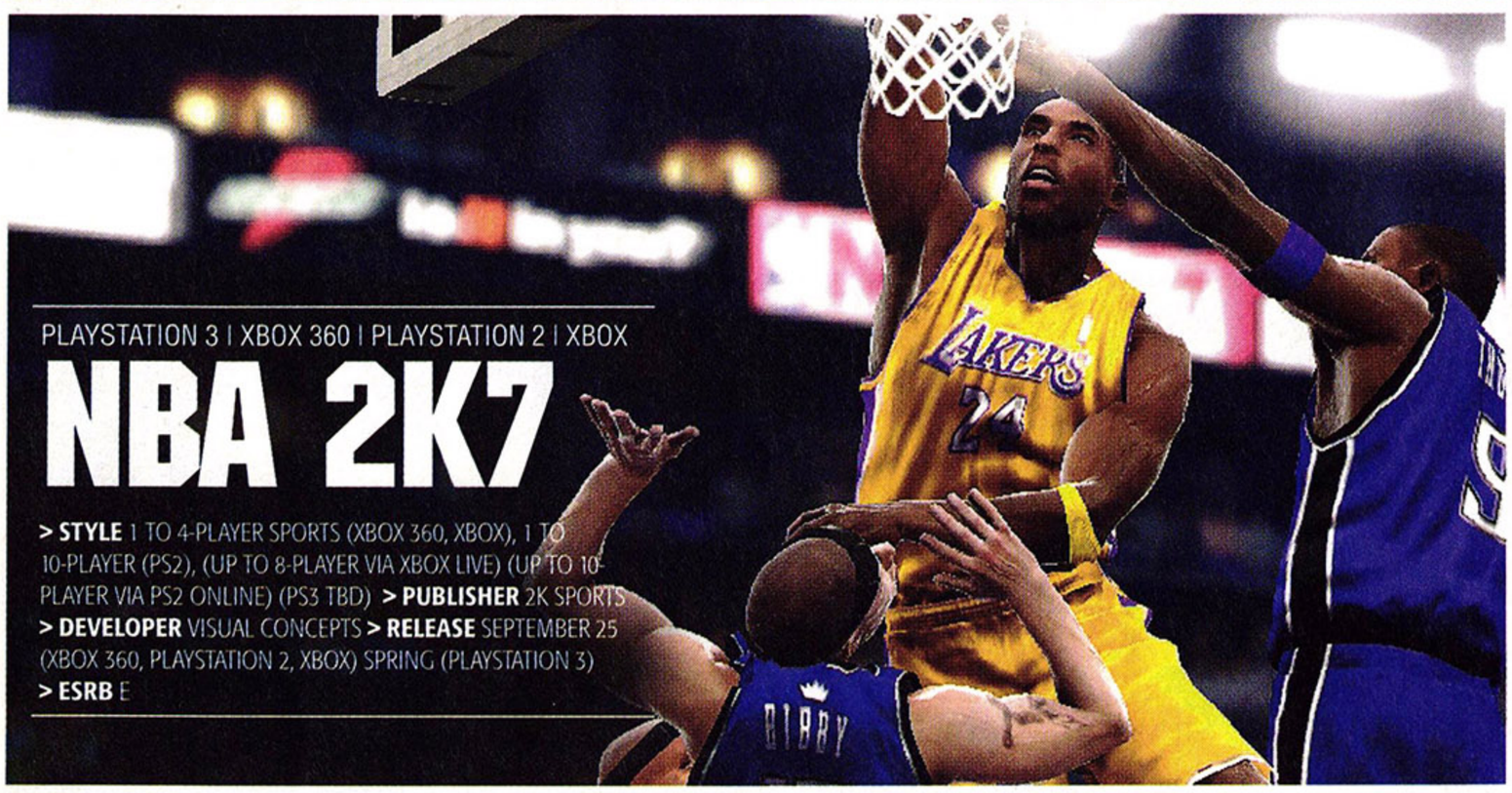
■ We don't know what's going on here, but it looks like an awkward moment



approaches to playing the game. Needless to say, there will be plenty of drama as the two face adversity during the season and even square off in an MVP race.

Although gamers enjoyed the new take that The Life posed to them, there were many justified complaints about the mode's difficulty. Sony has addressed this for Vol. 2 in several ways. The game's pacing is easier, not to mention the fact that the difficulty level will drop if you're having a hard time with things, alleviating the frustration of being stuck on one task. Vol. 2 will also dynamically adjust to your play by giving you goals in addition to your pre-game ones. For instance, if you're stealing well, it may ask you to get a certain amount of steals along with your normal objectives. The game will also mix the pacing of its minigames and offer more quick hits. Sony told us that you won't be playing full games or halves until you progress far into the mode.

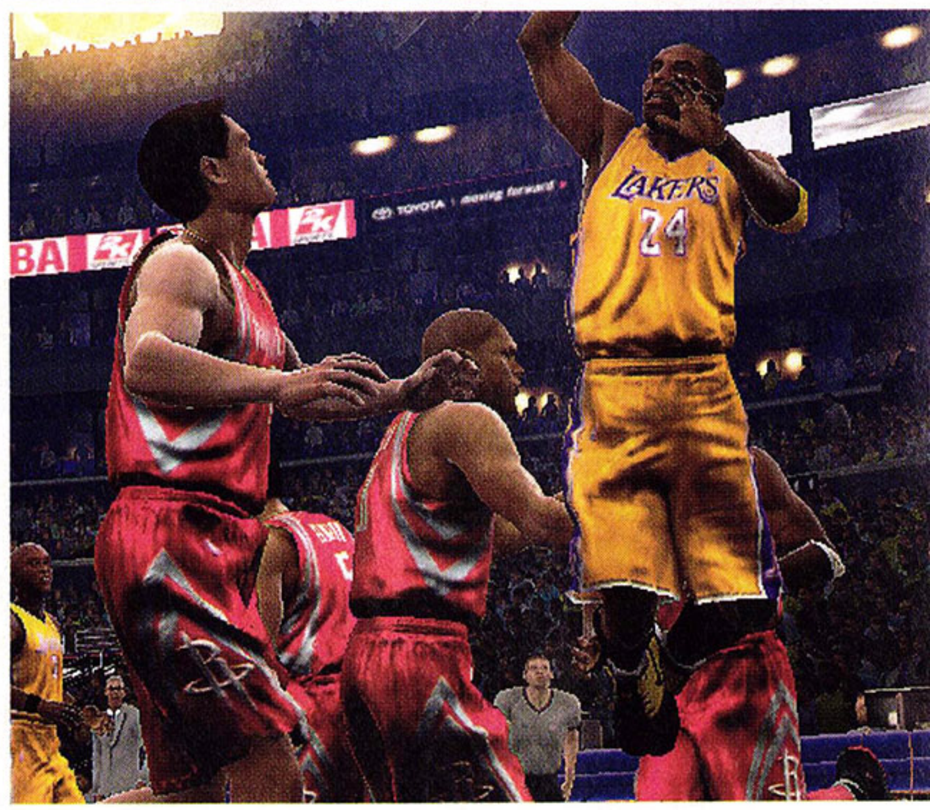




PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NBA 2K7

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (XBOX 360, XBOX), 1 TO 10-PLAYER (PS2), (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) (PS3 TBD) **> PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS **> DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 25 (XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX) SPRING (PLAYSTATION 3) **> ESRB** E



Eschewing rival EA's approach of starting from scratch for the next generation, NBA 2K6 fans were able to enjoy a full feature set from the get go. What's next for the franchise? Although it does not feature whole new modes or such radical overhauls, developer Visual Concepts has made some big changes to the series that has become the critics' favorite.

If there's a hallmark of this year's game, it's that the title is trying to make its players behave more like their real-life counterparts. This starts out with graphics. Despite last year's great-looking models, 2K7 makes a conscious attempt to mimic the moves and mannerisms of its players. Steve Nash is just as ugly in the game as he is in real life, and this time around he'll even perpetuate his gross habit of licking his fingers. Perhaps more importantly, however, you'll see many of the shots that you see on TV – whether that's a player's particularly ugly jump shot or the way a guy like Shaq powers his way to the basket.

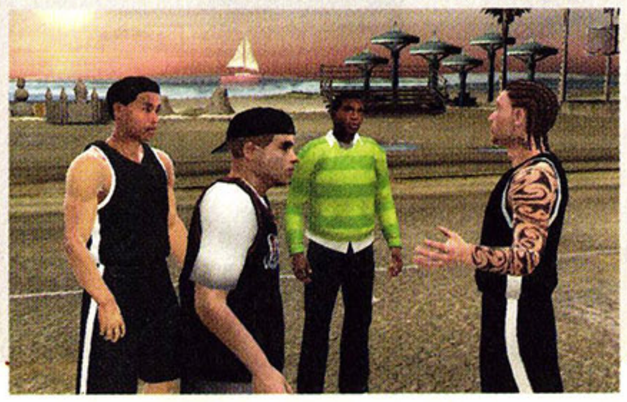
Right analog Iso-Motion controls have been further tweaked with this idea of increased realism in mind. The outcome of using Iso-Motion will be more varied and context sensitive. Three different players will likely act in three different ways when put in the same spot. What they do using Iso-Motion will be determined by what each particular guy is best at and/or what he naturally does in that situation. For instance, Gary Payton may consistently use a spin move, while Kobe is good enough to dip into a much fuller repertoire.

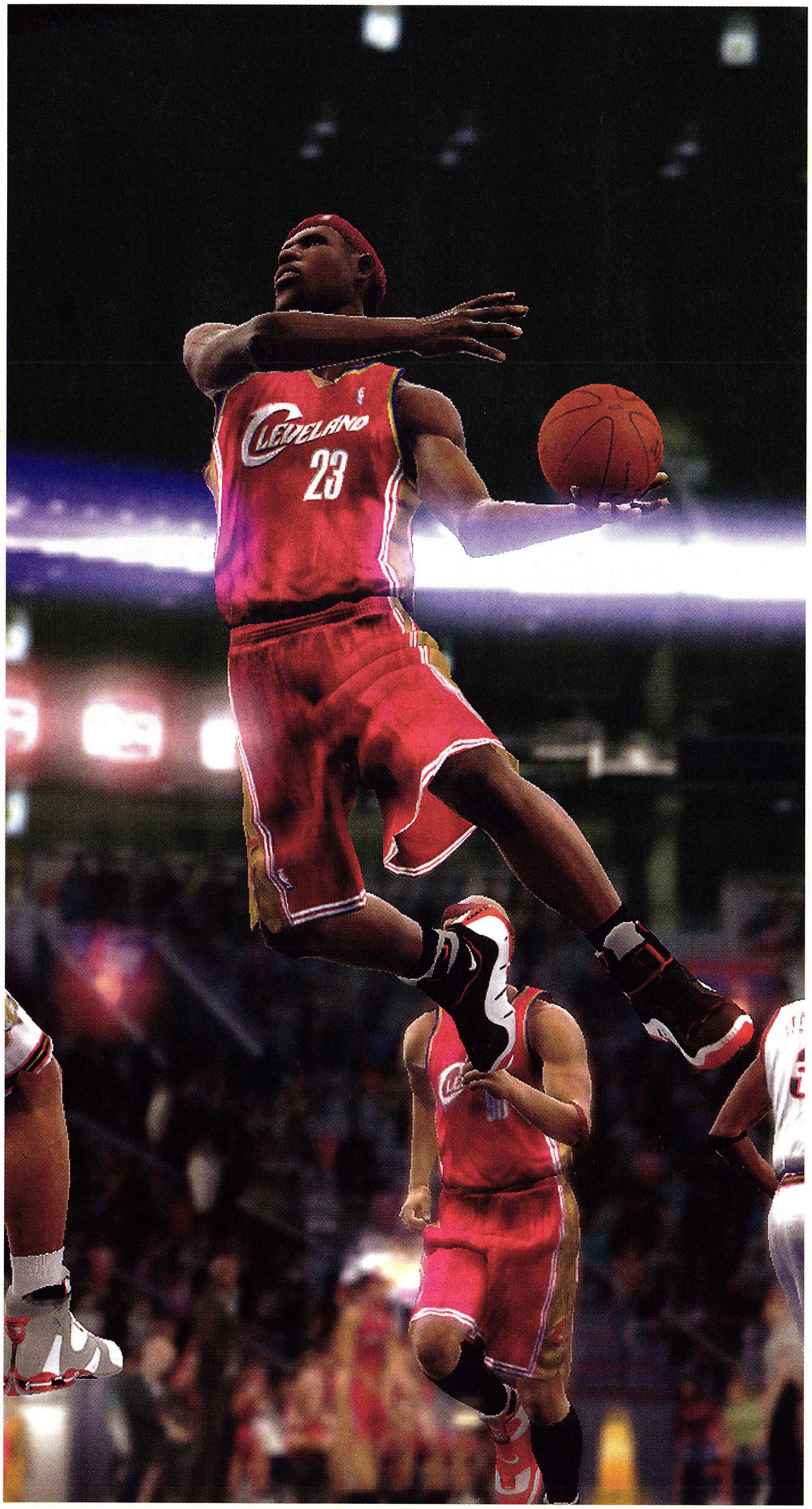
Thankfully, the new context-sensitive nature of Iso-Motion carries over to playing defense. Instead of simply mapping a steal move to the right analog, Iso-Motion on defense now gives you more ways to counter the dribbler's own moves. For example, you'll be more adept at foiling a crossover move. The team says that it wants to produce more "neutral outcomes." Whether or not the game can do this will be interesting to see.

Apart from the overhaul to 24/7 mode (see sidebar), NBA 2K7 has significantly bolstered its online league play, enabling real time drafts, more power for administrators, a friends leaderboard, season awards, and more. Also seeing tweaks is the Association modes, which features accumulated fatigue. You now have to manage players during games and practice to keep them fresh for that grueling road schedule.

LIKE NIGHT AND DAY – THE NEW 24/7

24/7 mode is more linear in structure, complete with story-imbued cutscenes that chronicle your rise to the big tournament. Similar to old times, you'll unlock and face NBA players as you go. Only now you'll have two friends who'll be with you the whole way – one of which bares an unfortunate resemblance to Entourage's *Turtle – as well as a nemesis also working his way up the ladder named Bernard. The mode will also feature exclusive minigames, some which play out in the first person.*





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LOOSE TALK

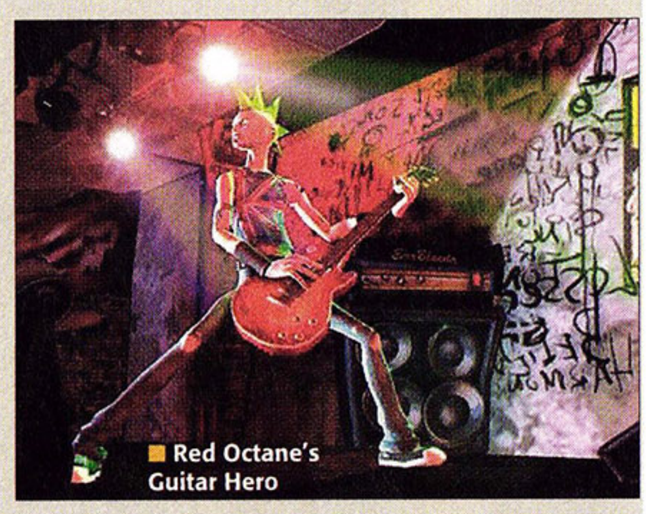
Hot Gaming Gossip

DEATH JR.'S CONSOLE OFFSPRING

In an interview with Game Informer Online, Backbone Entertainment's studio head Mike Mika dropped some hints about a console version of Death Jr. in the future. Which one(s)? Mika wouldn't let on, but he seemed to insinuate that Nintendo's Wii would be a good fit for your scythe moves, while also saying that the company plans to have downloadable content. This comment would seem to fit for the Wii, as well as the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

IT'S AN AXE WAR!

After having been blown off the stage by Red Octane's Guitar Hero game, Konami is looking to regroup and reclaim its title as the rhythm game master. The company has filed paperwork to trademark the name "Guitar Revolution." According to the trademark, the game would not only include a controller accessory, but also cover an arcade version. Konami is no stranger to the stage, however, as it released Guitar Freaks for the PSone and arcade back in 1999.



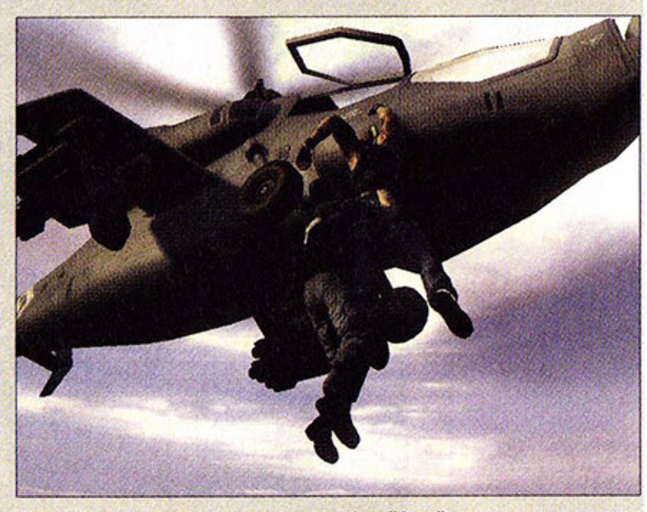
■ Red Octane's Guitar Hero

BATMAN DOESN'T GO TO THE MOVIES?

Tired of bad movie-licensed games like Batman Begins, for instance? Loose Talk has heard that the caped crusader's next adventure won't be based strictly on the next Batman movie. We don't know which direction the game will go in, but chances are it'll be better than most of the Batman games that have been released.

PANDEMIC'S MERCENARIES FOUND A HOME?

Powerhouse developer Pandemic showed off Mercenaries 2 for PS3 at E3, but the game was curiously without a publisher. The first Mercenaries was put out by LucasArts, and despite some rumors to the contrary, our sources are telling us that the house that Star Wars built will be publishing Mercenaries 2. The game is also coming out for the 360, but you knew that already.

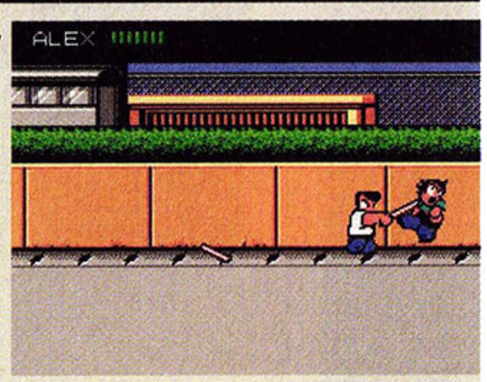


Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

For the few of you who actually had a girlfriend in high school, you were probably scared to death of a guy named Slick sweeping in and taking her away. One of the protagonists in this month's game – Ryan – had that very thing happen to him. But instead of letting it go, Ryan got his buddy Alex to roam the streets with him in this side-scrolling beat 'em up on the NES. You'll make your way through nine gangs, including The Zombies and The Plague before you can rescue Ryan's main squeeze. Coins dropped by thugs let you buy food from malls with which you can replenish your energy. Other stores help you build up your attributes.



(Answer on page 34)

news

BIG CHANGES FOR E3

VIDEO GAME'S BIGGEST EVENT GETS DOWNSIZED

Although the rumors that E3 had been "cancelled" proved to be false, the Electronic Software Association sent shockwaves through the Internet when it announced that the world's largest dedicated video game conference was being radically reinvented as a much smaller, industry-only affair.

In an interview with Game Informer, ESA president Doug Lowenstein confirmed the news. "In terms of [E3] being defined as an event with a big trade show floor, [that's] not going to be what we're doing any longer," commented Lowenstein. "We're evolving the event into something that's more narrowly focused on ensuring quality interactions with top-tier media and other audiences…. E3 has just become a little too much background noise during the event and increasingly difficult to conduct business there. So, how do we evolve that fundamentally important event into something that continues to serve and hold value for the industry going forward?"

These changes were sparked by concerns by the major game publishers regarding the cost and scale of the event. Despite rumors that this announcement was prompted because several publishers had pulled out of E3, Lowenstein denied those reports and stressed that the new E3 is being crafted in cooperation with the major manufacturers and publishers, which make up the association's board of directors. "Every year at E3 I go around and meet with all of my board of directors and talk about a number of issues…including their state of mind about E3," said Lowenstein. "So, out of those discussions emerged a need to evolve this event into something more targeted and focused. We began those discussions internally…and eventually brought some ideas to the board and they were approved."

Lowenstein then detailed how this new E3 would function. For one, it will no longer be held at the Los Angeles Convention Center (although it will still be held in Los Angeles). Effectively, there will be no "convention" in the way E3 has been defined in the 11 years of its existence – no booths, no show floor. Instead, the event will be centered around a few "headquarter" hotels where publishers will book suites and meeting rooms for the purpose of showing retailers and press game demonstrations on an invite-only basis. One E3 tradition that will continue is the manufacturer press conferences, which Lowenstein hinted would emulate Microsoft's presentation last year, in which the conference was immediately followed by a reception with game kiosks set up for journalists to get hands-on time with the company's products. Lowenstein also said that the intent was to shorten the conference back to its original three-day length; most industry people have had to devote an entire week to E3 in recent years.

The other major change is the timeframe. E3 has traditionally been held in mid-May, but it is being moved to July in order to help developers show more polished product and more playable games. The event's name is also being changed to the "E3 Media Festival" and will only house around 5,000 attendees, down from a reported 60,000 people in 2006.

In the end, Lowenstein and the ESA hope that this event will be more focused and cost-effective for the publishers. "Our goal is to make it effective and efficient," he elaborated. "I think that one thing that people can agree on at E3 is that as wonderful as the event has been, there is now probably a mismatch in the total amount vested in there, and the return. I've read on some of the sites that say, 'It's cost cutting, and the industry is tightening its belt.' And that's b------t. It's not about cost consciousness and tightening. It's about rational business. It's not that people don't want to spend the money. People spent the money for a long time at E3 and it made sense. It doesn't make sense to spend that dimension and scale of money at E3 anymore because of how things have evolved."

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Localization & Games

this story is happy end*

Gamers have been doing it for years – importing Japanese games and playing them while feverishly reading from translated scripts downloaded from the Internet. Many wondered if they were losing something in the experience, but the diehards did it anyway because it seemed like forever between Japanese and North American releases. Seriously, how long will it have been between the Japanese release of Final Fantasy III and its launch in the States? It must have been at least 15 years, or maybe that's just how it felt. While translating is certainly an art in and of itself, games require something more: localization. It's a bigger process than even long-time gamers may realize, so we got a few of the industry's best to let us know how their company does it, what's involved, and offer up some examples of things that were...well, lost in translation.

Tomm Hulett, assistant QA manager/editor for Atlus USA; Jyun Takagi, localization specialist at Square Enix; and Nintendo's Bill Trinen and Nate Bihldorff (both producers/localization managers) answered our questions graciously and thoroughly about how they make their living. The members of this group have made us laugh and cry by localizing games like Trauma Center: Under the Knife, Phantom Brave, River City Ransom, both Digital Devil Sagas, Kingdom Hearts II, Children of Mana, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, Mario Party, Smash Bros., The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask, Animal Crossing, Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, and the Paper Mario series. They know their stuff, so pay attention and be thankful that these guys are a big part of giving us quality games.

Could you outline how the localization process works? Are you involved during all stages of development, or do you come in more towards the end for translation and tweaking the cultural references?

TAKAGI [Square Enix]: For any given title, the localization specialists would usually be provided with some visuals or a preliminary Japanese build, and a length of time for familiarization along with all the text that needs to be translated. The text would include the event text dialogue, voiced dialogue (including movie dialogue), menu-related text (including tutorials), scripted battle calls, glossaries, and miscellaneous informational documents. After the familiarization phase comes the translation phase.

The voiced dialogue and battle calls need to be translated early to prepare for voice recordings, which take time to set up (auditions, contracts, etc.) and record. The glossary also needs to be worked on at an early stage.

TRINEN [Nintendo]: Our involvement in the process really varies quite a bit, depending on which team we're working with. When it comes to Twilight Princess, we have a fantastic relationship with Eiji Aonuma and his team, and we work very closely with them. Nate [Bihldorff] and I helped put together all of the trailers we've released so far, and we've been in close communication with them on a number of different levels since before the game was first unveiled at E3 two years ago. Of course we're also huge Smash Bros. fans, so we've gone out of our way to stay in close communication with Masahiro Sakurai.

BIHLDORFF [Nintendo]: From the writer side, once we get rough text from the translators, we hop to it. We use a number of text tools depending on the developer, but all of them gauge line lengths and window sizes to some degree. From that point on, it's a balancing act of establishing character voices but also keeping things simple enough to fit within the physical limits of the display windows. Dialogue is easier in general – you have decent sized text bubbles – but menu items and data screens tend to require a lot of work. You can fit a ton of information into a small space with kanji, so when we make the switch, we do a lot of abbreviating. While we're doing the actual text rewrite, we're also writing and recording any voices in the game, not to mention playing the early ROMs as much as possible to identify anything that needs to change graphically or thematically for our market. I remember slowly driving around every course in Mario Kart: Double Dash!!, looking at road signs and shop windows for the slightest bit of Japanese. You'd be surprised how many little things lurk in the nooks and crannies of these games.

Could you describe any examples of when this process went differently than normal?

HULETT [Atlus]: In certain projects, usually ones by our parent company Atlus Japan, we're asked for input on certain aspects of a game. Our upcoming title Trauma Center: Second Opinion is the most recent example. There have also been isolated cases of us writing the sparse English text that appears in a Japanese game, but those instances are few and far between.

> **...the original line in Japanese was 'Shinjirarenai!' If we took this phrase all by itself and merely replaced the words, it would come out as something like 'Believe cannot!'**
>
> – Jyun Takagi

TRINEN [Nintendo]: To be honest I don't know that we have anything that could really qualify as normal anymore. With Twilight Princess, the depth of story and its connection to past games means that not only does it have twice as much text as Wind Waker, but it includes a fair number of legacy terms that originate in past games, so consistency is a big focus there. We've also been given the opportunity to provide a lot of input on everything from play control to difficulty to character design, so over time our role has grown from simply localizing the Zelda games to almost being a branch of the development team itself.

BIHLDORFF [Nintendo]: One example I can think of was when Leslie [Swann, localization manager] and I went to Japan to do the first Paper Mario. We spent a week crammed into this tiny little room with Intelligent Systems, working on item names and various text files, and I had to play through the whole game in Japanese with the team that made the game looking over my shoulder and snickering whenever I got my butt kicked. That was brutal.

What are some names, situations, jokes, pop culture references that are commonly changed between North American and other territory's releases?

HULETT [Atlus]: Here at Atlus, we don't normally change things for sensitive content. After all, our flagship Shin Megami Tensei games push the envelope pretty far as it is... However, in certain cases, changes are necessary. We do have to change jokes and pop culture references. The reason for this is quite simple (though it might upset the hardcore purists). When the Japanese writer scripted the game, he wrote certain areas to be funny. His vision here was for the player to laugh (or chuckle, or smile, or whatever). If an American player read that same text translated literally it would not be funny. Therefore, a direct translation would be violating the vision the writer had for this part of the game. So, like it or not, we need to alter the text so that it is funny to an English-speaking audience. So, while our text is not word-for-word directly translated, we do strive for a 100-percent accurate experience.

TAKAGI [Square Enix]: Japan and North America have cultural differences in the degrees of permissible adult themes, violence, and coarse language, so adjustments are always in order. The original Japanese text would also often casually have "god" in various contexts, and that always needs to be handled with care, because we obviously don't want to offend anybody's religious sensibilities, but we also want to remain faithful to the original contexts.

We always try to be careful with ellipses, which tend to be seen as overused in Japanese dialogue text. Japanese dialogue is often about what is not being said that carries more weight than what is verbalized. A great deal of thought goes into expressing these passages in English so as to convey the intention without being too explicit or too cryptic.

> **So, while our text is not word-for-word directly translated, we do strive for a 100-percent accurate experience.**
>
> – Tomm Hulett

TRINEN [Nintendo]: There isn't anything that as a rule gets changed when coming to North America. We look at everything within the context of the game and the target audience. The ESRB has, in a sense, made those decisions easier, because we're able to look at content within the context of what we expect the game's rating to be. With Twilight Princess, we expect the game to get a T rating because of the more realistic graphics, so because of that you may see scenes and situations in that game that wouldn't have fit in a game like The Wind Waker.

Could you share an example of an unusual (but possibly hilarious) change that needed to be made?

HULETT [Atlus]: In Steambot Chronicles, you can date three of the game's lovely ladies. If you play your cards right, things may progress to an...intimate encounter. We were localizing the game right as the Hot Coffee scandal was blowing up, so it was a real concern. Connie [one of the potential love interests] specifically lets out a very alluring, "Stop it" in that special "no means yes" kind of way when the screen faded to black and the saxophone music started. So, what was a localization editor to do? Easy! The screen still fades out and the saxophone music still plays, but instead of trying for the reach-around, protagonist Vanilla is offering Connie a mug of hot cocoa.

TAKAGI [Square Enix]: In Japanese, a sentence can be considered complete without a subject or an object. Needless to say, if we were to simply replace the Japanese words in that kind of sentence with only the equivalent words in English, the sentence would come out sounding retarded at best.

Case in point: in *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, when Marlene responds to Vincent who lifts his cape to show that he doesn't have a phone, the original line in Japanese was "Shinjirarenai!" If we took this phrase all by itself and merely replaced the words, it would come out as something like "Believe cannot!" We felt the need to make it clear that Marlene wanted to borrow Vincent's phone. We couldn't change the [previous] "May I?" line because it was so short – we could see Marlene's face in the scene, and additional syllables in the line would not synch with the mouth movements. So we kept the line in question as "You don't have a phone?" which, conveniently, Marlene says with her back towards the audience.

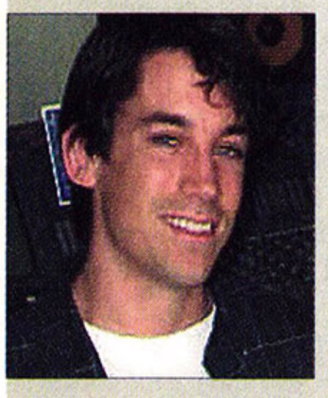
In Star Ocean, there was a location named Seahearts (which was phonetically close to what it was in the Japanese original) which was, one day, suddenly changed to Aquaria. The translation team (which I was not a part of) seemed to think that Seahearts was awful. I personally didn't have a problem with Seahearts. Aquaria, on the other hand, had the late '60s, hippie, flower-power connotation, which I thought was obvious, but never got to confirm if the translators were fully aware of. Sure enough, one of the voice actors had a field day with it, suddenly breaking into song – "We're here at Castle Aquaria! Castle Aquariaaa!!!" – when we were expecting a line to be read! None of these outbursts ended up in the game, of course, but we certainly kept them aside exclusively for our private amusement. ■■■

Check out Unlimited for the full cut of these interviews.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
TED PRICE
President, Insomniac Games



1 Super Metroid – SNES
2 Doom – PC
3 Half-Life 2 – PC
4 Conker's Bad Fur Day – N64
5 The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time – N64

READER
FRANK GOMEZ
Chicago, Ill.

1 Grand Theft Auto III – PS2
2 GoldenEye 007 – N64
3 Resident Evil 4 – GC
4 Super Mario 3 – SNES
5 The Warriors – Xbox

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(attach digital picture)

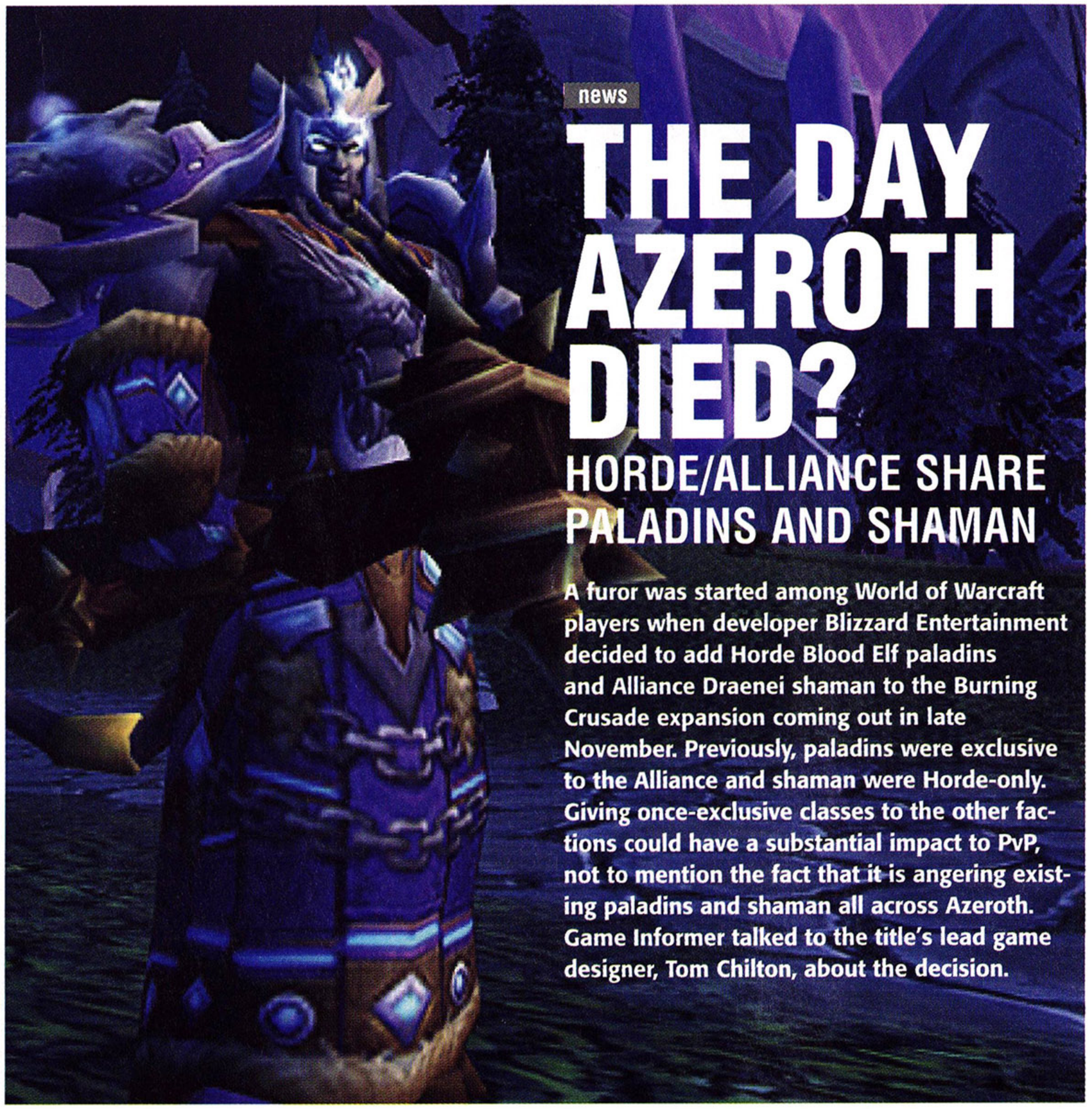
TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top Ten Games Concepts That Don't Need To Happen

10 Piñatas
9 Game Informer Office Life Simulator
8 *The DaVinci Code*...whoops, too late
7 *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*
6 A Dharma & Greg Sims expansion
5 Basically anything involving Joan Rivers
4 Encyclopedia Britannica
3 Cheech & Chong
2 [Insert Broadway Musical Here]
1 Perkins

Name That Game Answer: River City Ransom



news

THE DAY AZEROTH DIED?

HORDE/ALLIANCE SHARE PALADINS AND SHAMAN

A furor was started among World of Warcraft players when developer Blizzard Entertainment decided to add Horde Blood Elf paladins and Alliance Draenei shaman to the Burning Crusade expansion coming out in late November. Previously, paladins were exclusive to the Alliance and shaman were Horde-only. Giving once-exclusive classes to the other factions could have a substantial impact to PvP, not to mention the fact that it is angering existing paladins and shaman all across Azeroth. Game Informer talked to the title's lead game designer, Tom Chilton, about the decision.

When did this dialogue start?
We first tossed around the idea about nine months or so ago, so it's actually something we've been talking about for a long time.

When did you decide to go ahead with the change?
It was about two or three months ago that we finally came to the decision to do it.

What spurred you to do this?
We knew we had a symbiotic relationship between the paladins and the shaman, in that a lot of what we would do to one class we had to do to the other class. So over time, as we've been adding new content to the game that is more finely tuned, that symbiotic relationship is actually becoming tighter. So we were feeling more and more constrained in terms of what we could do with the shaman and the paladin as independent classes. I kind of saw this trend continuing over time, to eventually where it would feel more and more like we only had eight classes in the game and not nine. I felt like really the only way we could achieve what we had as a core design goals, which is to have really distinct character classes, was to have some way to develop the paladin and shaman in different directions. I felt that the only way we could do this without breaking the game balance-wise is to go ahead and share them across each [faction].

How are you going to protect each class's place in a raid or encourage people to take different classes? We know a lot of shaman are wondering, 'Why should I take shaman to a raid when I can take a paladin' and vice versa.
We're just going to have to make sure that every class brings something that contributes to the group as a whole...what we do try to do is ensure that each class has enough to offer so that you aren't implicitly turning down any class to show up for a raid.

Hybrid classes, in many cases, have to spec healing to get into a raid because that's all they do. Does the change help that and get hybrids back to their role of being hybrids?
It does help to a degree, and it helps in different ways in that we really kind of intend for the shaman to be a DPS/healing kind of hybrid and the paladin to be a tank/healing hybrid. So far we've been kind of hamstrung in terms of how far we could go in those kinds of directions because of the lack of crossover. So what I see in the expansion is that it gives the paladin more tools to be an effective tank, and give the shaman more tools to have effective sustained raid DPS...[currently] they kind of get left out of the mix when it comes to scenarios like the Twin Emperors in Ahn'Qiraj 40, where a lot of players have found that the best strategy is to use warlocks to tank.

Do you see the expansion having viable paladin raid tanks and viable shaman filling in a DPS role in raids?
That's definitely the intent. We do plan to give the paladin a snap-aggro ability. I expect them to be very competitive with warriors in terms of tanking ability, but hopefully they will be competitive in just slightly different ways and feel a little bit different than each other. And then the same goes for the shaman, who will have some better sustained raid DPS. You could always argue that as long as they have a heal, and healing is more efficient than damage, then in a lot of cases there's still going to be healing.

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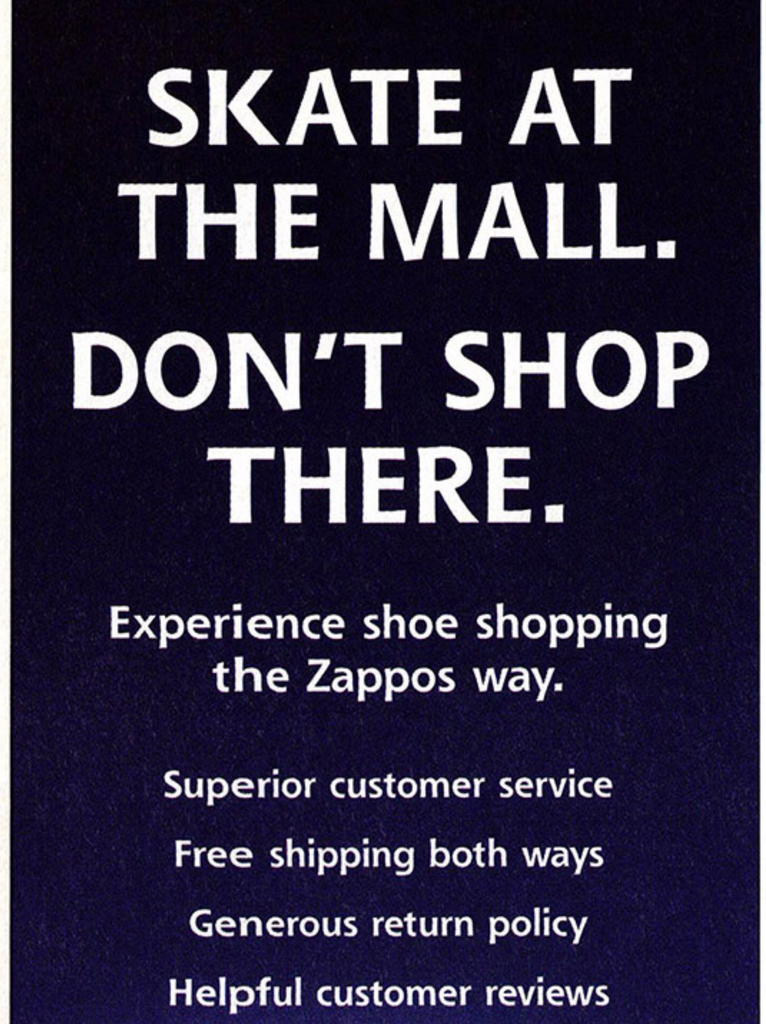

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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

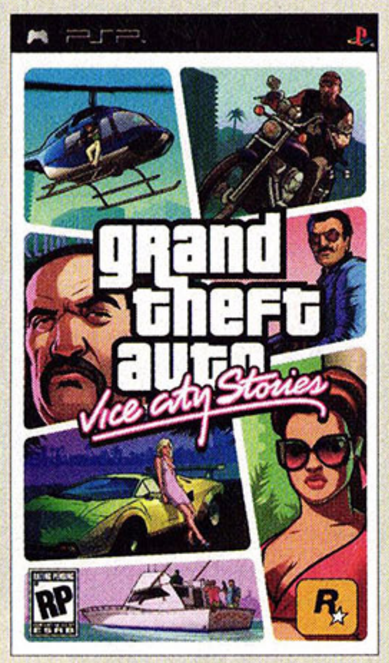
■ No, this isn't the next-gen Sonic game

GOOD?

Some will rejoice while others recoil at the news that Sega has confirmed that both its next-gen Sonic title and Full Auto 2: Battlelines are slated for the November launch of the PlayStation 3. Love or hate 'em, they are gonna be there.

GOOD

Codemasters and Colin McRae are branching off with the 2007 PS3/Xbox 360/PC title DIRT: Colin McRae Off-Road. Naturally the game tackles both off-road racing and rally championships. If only there was an Ol' Dirty Bastard game called ODB: DIRT McGirt.



GOOD

We all loved Rockstar's Liberty City Stories on the PSP, and here's hoping that GTA: Vice City Stories is just as good. The game has just been announced for October 17, and the cover art may reveal some returning characters from the console edition.

GOOD

Final Fantasy XII fans will face a decision when the game releases on October 31. A collector's edition is being sold exclusively through EBGames and Gamestop for $59.99, which will feature a bonus DVD filled with developer interviews, featurettes, promo trailers, and art.

BAD

Ironically, Webzen's Endless Saga MMO for PS3 and PC has indeed come to an end. The company has announced that the game is being cancelled for quality reasons.

UGLY

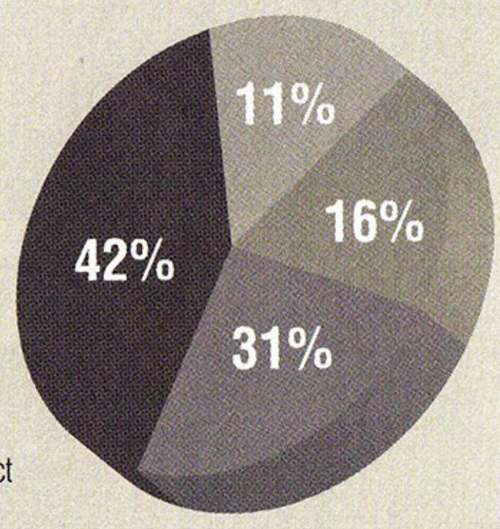
In this month's edition of "Somebody Tell The Suits At Sony To Stop Talking Because They Are Only Making Things Worse," Kaz Hirai once again steps up to the plate. In a recent interview, the Sony president left the door open for higher priced PS3 games, stating that "if it becomes a bit higher than $59, don't ding me." Luckily, Hirai prevented wide-scale rioting when he went on to reassure everyone that he didn't expect games to hit $100. Hey, if they're $99, don't ding him!

GOOD

Final Boss team members David Walsh, Thomas Ryan, Daniel Ryan, and Ryan Danford have earned a $1 million contract with Major League Gaming. The team won the MLG championship in 2004 and 2005, and under the terms of the contract can only play in MLG events.

BAD

If a recent poll we conducted through Game Informer Online is any indication, the PlayStation 3's lack of rumble could be a bad thing. Out of 2,280 votes, 53 percent of respondents classified having rumble as either important or so extremely important they wouldn't buy the system.



11% Extremely. I wouldn't buy a system without it

16% I don't care. It wouldn't affect my buying

31% It's okay. I can take it or leave it

42% Important. I really like rumble

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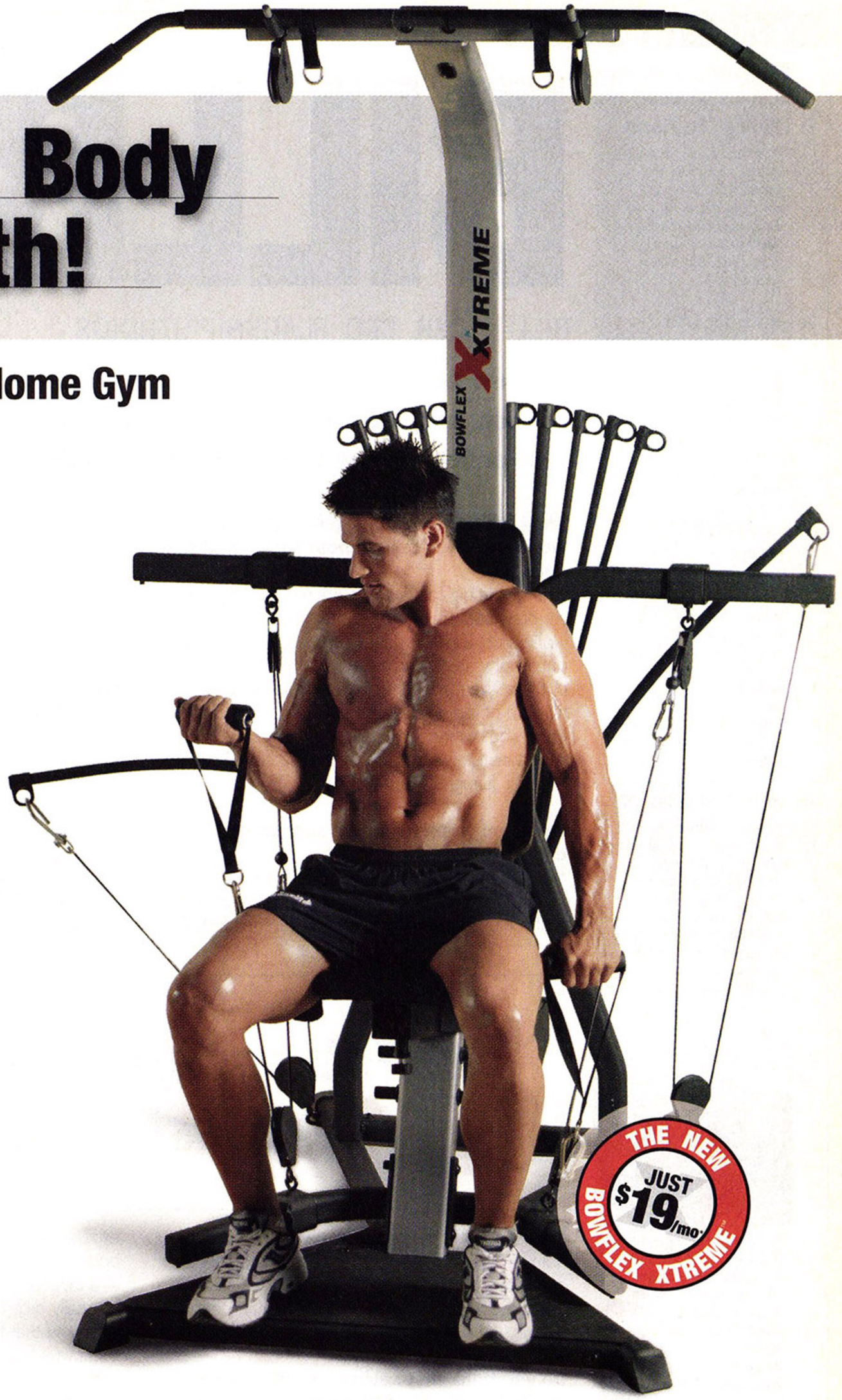

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BFMG0512 (0906)

BILL ROPER

BILL ROPER, CEO, FLAGSHIP STUDIOS

>> New developer Flagship Studios is pushing the online envelope with its upcoming game Hellgate: London, and CEO Bill Roper is the company's guiding star. We spoke with him about how much more there is to online gaming than World of Warcraft. <<

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1994 ▶ Riding The Storm

Roper breaks into the gaming industry with a little-known company called Blizzard Entertainment, working on a crazy little project called Warcraft: Orcs & Humans as both a producer and a voice actor.

1995 ▶ A Rising Tide

Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness launches and secures the franchise as a hallmark of PC gaming for years to come. Roper's work on the title includes everything from holding down the executive producer position to the narration.

1996 ▶ Deal With The Devil

As a producer and voice actor, Roper plays a big role in the creation of another one of PC gaming's biggest hits: Diablo. The game quickly becomes the most well-known, critically acclaimed, and successful action/RPG to date, due in no small part to its free online play on Blizzard's shiny new Battle.net.

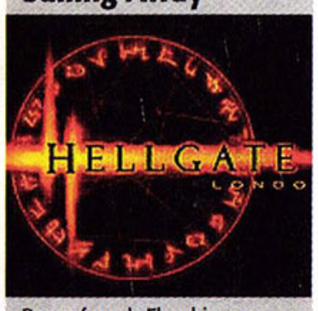
1998 ▶ The Final Frontier

Adding another worldwide smash hit to his resumé, Roper takes on his usual producer and voice acting duties for Starcraft. The game pushes Blizzard's revolutionary Battle.net service even further than Diablo did, and is held up even today as a paragon of brilliantly balanced design.

2000 ▶ Back Into Hell

Easily surpassing the original's high bar in every area, Diablo II comes out and proceeds to ignite the PC world. To this day, more people are playing Diablo II online than most subscription-based games, and the game has probably done more work to cement Battle.net as a fixture in online gaming than any other.

2003 ▶ Sailing Away



Roper founds Flagship Studios along with several other ex-Blizzard employees. Namco signs the company's first title, Hellgate: London, to a publishing deal and work continues apace.

What have the previous games you have worked on taught you about design and production?

One of the big things that's been good for us is that we draw something from every game that we've worked on. Whether that's methodology, process, or philosophy about game design or just little developer tricks, there's always something to be learned…. It's kind of like a relationship, when a relationship ends, you want to draw something positive out of it. Fortunately, we never had any bad breakups with Blizzard. [Laughs]

Were you surprised at the success that World of Warcraft had?

No. [Laughs] I wasn't surprised by the success. I think that the thing that's exciting about it in terms of the industry is that it is somewhat foolhardy to attempt to beat them at their own game at this point… So you're seeing things like Auto Assault come out; you're seeing a game like Hellgate: London come out. We're not directly competitive because our gameplay model is different.

Do you think that having one 800-pound gorilla like World of Warcraft is a natural state for the online market to be in?

I think that as with almost every genre, there tends to be one or two games that dominate that genre. The difference being that WoW does not represent everyone who wants to play online. It represents a large portion of people who want to be playing that style of MMORPG online. I think there's plenty of room for people who want to play different types of MMORPGs that have different focuses and different things, that want to play different styles of online games. Look at the massive, massive numbers of casual online game players that WoW doesn't even touch. I think that finally analysts are starting to come to the realization of what a lot of us in our industry have been touting for the past few years. The PC's not dying, it's actually getting stronger – you're just not looking in the right place. When you're looking just purely at box sales, yeah, there are fewer boxes being sold because people are more apt to buy a game and then continue to pay for that experience and new elements within that gameworld that they've become in love with…. You run gross numbers in World of Warcraft for example, it's grossing probably close to 700 or 800 million dollars a year. They're approaching the billion dollar a year gross mark. That's ridiculous! That's crazy talk! [Laughs]

What's your take on the growing importance of the European market?

The way we look at it is that much, much more of Europe is coming online. They've broken through some of the things that have kept their online penetration down – everything from high pricing on broadband connectivity to monopolies in the telecom marketplace. There are plenty of gamers, and I think you're now really starting to see it in Europe, who have predominantly been on consoles, but now that they can actually start getting online and experiencing what I still believe to be the biggest boon in the PC gaming side, which is the depth and level of sophistication of our online gameplay. It's really nice to see that growth in an area that we know that there's a lot of gamers there, and it's always been frustrating in the fact that there's nothing we could do to crack it. It had to be that the atmosphere of that market changed in terms of infrastructure and support.

Are the next generation of consoles any more attractive to you because of the increased technical and online capabilities?

Anything online-enabled certainly is attractive. One of the challenges is that they're also very closely and strictly regulated by the hardware manufacturers. So if you're running a game, you're going to be running it through Xbox Live, for example. There is a layer that's placed there because they are the ones who control the gateway. The most exciting thing about working on the PC is that we're constantly changing. We're on this ever-evolutionary platform. I remember Ed Fries saying – and this is a brilliant way of looking at it – that whenever a console comes out, it's a snapshot of the best that a PC can be in that point in time. But that's why you have to have a new console every three years, because the PC keeps evolving. And after a few years, it's like, "Well, the consoles aren't too sharp anymore." And you have to start working on the next one, because the PC's moved on.

As an independent developer working on a big-budget, triple-A title, how do you deal with rising development costs?

We wanted to try and maintain as small a studio as possible. So we've put a large focus on working with contractors and doing outsourcing. There are certain areas where we do everything internally still because we know that's our best chance for success, like we do almost all of our programming internally.

Do you think that this kind of specialization is the wave of the future in game development?

I think it is. It's something that, to draw a comparison to another industry, the film industry's done for a long time. If you look at Spielberg, for example, he has a core group of people that he works with on every film, but he doesn't maintain a company of 500 people that he takes from movie to movie. He maintains a company of 50 to 100 people that he takes from movie to movie. And then they go out and hire the hundreds of other people that are required to get a film done. That's the way, I think, that the gaming industry is moving towards, especially for indie developers…. You'll have large periods of time where you have big groups of developers not doing anything. When you're in the last six months of a game, your artists aren't doing a lot – especially if you've got 60 of them. Unless they've moved on to another project or are working on additional content for the game, you end up with very, very highly paid testers. You'll have some modeler that costs you 75 grand a year hunting bugs… That's great and all, but it's also incredibly expensive. For us, we know we can't do that. So it's much easier for us to find groups that we can work with and manage that we can use where they have a high level of expertise, and then when we get to that point, they're done contracting with us. That's what they want, that's what we want.

> ***"The PC's not dying, it's actually getting stronger – you're just not looking in the right place."***

Photo: Steve Skoll

SAILING THE ONLINE SEAS

■ Flagship Studios' Bill Roper is doing everything in his power to help the PC online market grow and expand

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avalanche STUDIOS

eidos

tech

MICROSOFT ZUNE

Manufacturer: Microsoft **Website:** www.microsoft.com
List Price: TBA

There are still a ton of questions that need some serious answering, but Microsoft has finally confirmed what the Internet has been buzzing about for weeks. The Zune is a real thing and many tech geeks' greatest dreams will be included. Zune is a family of hardware and software products designed for sharing media in as social and easy a way as possible. The first device (the prototype image shown here) is a hard drive-based media player with integrated Wi-Fi. Under the direction of J Allard and Robbie Bach, the plans for Wi-Fi options are really interesting. One idea has users in the same hotspot sharing samples of tracks or suggesting playlists to other people nearby. Another option is to have one central storage location for media that can be accessed and moved between the Zune, a Windows Media Center PC, the Xbox 360, and/or a phone running Windows Mobile. Yet another possibility is being able to buy and download music directly to the player over Wi-Fi, thereby ditching the requirement to have a PC handy. It sounds like the first stages of Live Anywhere could be closer than we thought – and the features could all fall under this new Zune umbrella.

RUMOR MONGERING

The Facts:

- Xbox head honcho J Allard and media master Robbie Bach have been cloistered away working on the Zune project
- More players are planned in the line including a video-centric version (confirmed) and a smaller Nano-styled device (rumored, but not disputed)
- Integration with Windows Media Player 11 and the upcoming Vista OS are assured

The Hopes:

- A social networking aspect will drive users toward the family of services to share and discover new bands, shows, and all varieties of media
- The large screen (around three to 3.5 inches diagonal) is rumored to support millions of colors and great video playback
- Intuitive integration of buying and sharing music directly from the device, without a PC hookup

The Dreams:

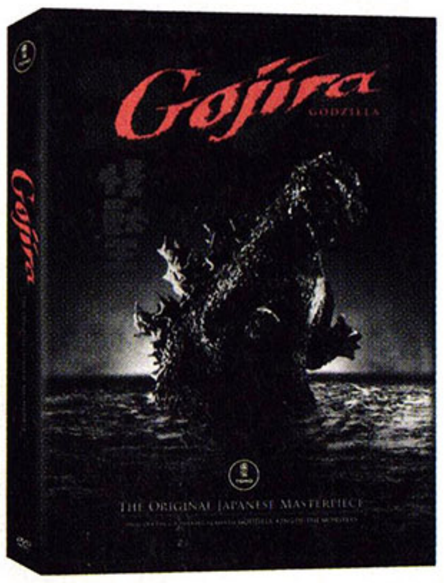
- Some are speculating that Microsoft might be forming partnerships with the satellite radio networks to offer streaming of their content and direct purchasing from the device
- A full-featured web browser isn't totally out of the question, but has not even been hinted at by Microsoft
- It's possible that the software giant will be willing to take a hit for each unit sold to extend their user base (much like they did with the Xbox) and would offer the player for less than an equivalently-sized iPod

There was some speculation that Zune was a portable Xbox. While the music player shown here is due by the end of the year and future Zune gadgets could include more gaming options, this first wave is no Game Boy slayer

dvd

GOJIRA/GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS DVD

Manufacturer: Classic Media
Website: www.godzillaondvd.com
List Price: $21.98



North America got a taste of Godzilla decades ago, but like Final Fantasy III, hadn't been in line for the original magic until this year. Classic Media is releasing a two-disc Gojira/Godzilla treatment on September 5th that will have both the previously unreleased in North America original Japanese cut along with the classic American treatment starring Raymond Burr.

peripherals

SANDISK 4 GB MEMORY STICK PRO DUO

Manufacturer: SanDisk
Website: www.sandisk.com
List Price: $219

This isn't necessarily life-changing technology, but four gigs of space for such a reasonable price shouldn't be ignored. The upgraded size was announced at E3 and is now available nationwide and online.

peripherals

MEMORY STICK ENTERTAINMENT PACK

Manufacturer: Sony
Website: www.sonystyle.com
List Price: $60 (1 GB), $100 (2 GB)

Maybe Sony is second-guessing that whole UMD movie thing. These Entertainment Packs include a memory stick and a CD that will unlock one of four Sony flicks formatted, optimized, and watchable exclusively on the PSP. Customers can choose between *Hitch, S.W.A.T., The Grudge,* or *XXX: State of the Union*.

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4) It's Goin' Down - Yung Joc	true1770	14) Doing Too Much - Paula De Anda	true1780
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9) Promiscuous (Girl) - Nelly Furtado	true1775	19) Money In The Bank - Lil Scrappy	true1785
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Side 2 Side - Three 6 Mafia	true1790	Get Up - Ciara	true1800
Sexy Back - Justin Timberlake	true1791	Everytime We Touch - Cascada	true1801
Savin' Me - Nickelback	true1792	Dani California - R.H.C.P.	true1802
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toy

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS FIGURE

Manufacturer: Kotobukiya **Website:** www.kotobukiya.co.jp
List Price: 10,290 Yen (about $90)

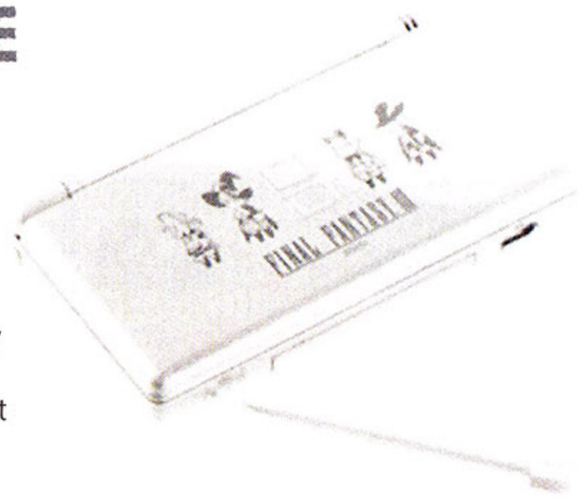
This amazing statue shows one of the Colossi (Colossuses?) standing over a teeny, tiny Wanderer – pretty succinctly illustrating the point that there weren't many enemies in that game, but they totally ruled.

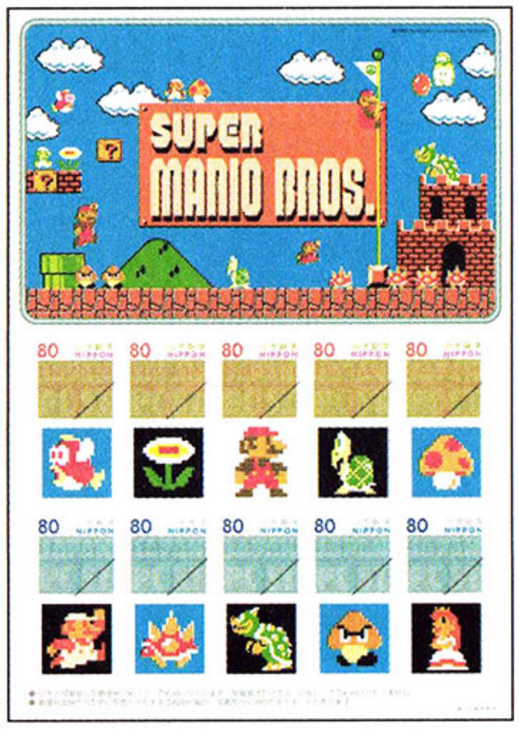
etc

FINAL FANTASY III DS LITE BUNDLE

Manufacturer: Nintendo/Square Enix
Website: www.nintendo.co.jp
List Price: 22,780 Yen (about $198)

Don't panic too much about the price – the bundle includes a Crystal White DS with custom artwork by Akihiko Yoshida and a copy of the interesting FF III remake. It's a sweet but limited edition deal that hits when the game launches in Japan (August 24th).





etc

SUPER MARIO BROS. COMMEMORATIVE STAMPS

Manufacturer: VisionsInc
Website: www.visionsinc.co.jp/consumer_mario.html
List Price: 3,150 Yen (about $26)

You can, if you're in Japan and you're crazy, use these to mail actual letters within the country. Then again, who sends paper through the mail anymore? Except us, that is, nevermind.

toy

LOST ACTION FIGURES

Manufacturer: McFarlane Toys **Website:** www.spawn.com
List Price: $14.99

Resident king of the realistic action figure, McFarlane Toys, is bringing out a sweet set of *Lost* figures based on the show's first season. Locke, Jack, Kate, Shannon, Hurley, and Charlie each get individual sculpts with a fun extra for each – a life-size prop from the show. Kate comes with her toy plane, Charlie with a Drive Shaft ring, and Jack with a copy of Kate's mug shot. There's also a group figure available with the crew looking into the hatch for the first time. The figures are all planned for release this November.

peripherals

PHANTOM LAPBOARD

Manufacturer: Phantom Entertainment **Website:** www.phantom.net **List Price:** TBA

Okay, there are only two reasons that infamous Phantom Entertainment is getting brought up again. One is that their Lapboard peripheral, announced along with their dead-before-arrival console, is actually a sweet piece of hardware. It rotates for easy left or right-handed operation, wirelessly connects to a PC, allows free mouse control, and even has headphone and mic jacks onboard. And it's really, really handy. The second reason to give this more than a passing nod is that there's a supposed release date: August 15th, according to the Phantom website. We're hoping, but we're not promising.

MATURE 17+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Intense Violence
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation 2

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INNOVATING IN REAL-TIME STRATEGY

BY CHRIS TAYLOR, CREATIVE DIRECTION, GAS POWERED GAMES

I love RTS games. They stole my heart back in 1992 when I first played Dune 2, which most folks credit as the game that launched the RTS genre. Before Dune 2, the closest you could come to an RTS was Herzog Zwei on the Sega Genesis, which was another favorite of mine.

Since then, and it's been over 10 years now, the genre has evolved and changed. Sometimes the changes have been in big, impressive ways, but recently the evolution has slowed. When I announced that I would be developing a new RTS, this spurred many people to say to me, "Chris, the genre's been around a long time now, is there anything more that can be done besides making small incremental improvements?"

My answer is a resounding YES! There is no doubt in my mind at all. There are so many things to do, I can hardly keep still in my chair (In fact, I never keep still, and my legs are constantly pumping with hyperactive energy. And no, I'm not kidding!).

I was faced with the question of exactly how I was going to take the RTS experience to the next level when I sat down to write the first draft of the Supreme Commander design document in the fall of 2003. I remember that day well, because I had all these ideas in my head and I had a publisher coming to visit on Monday (and I would need to present the design to them).

I don't usually get excited about creating documents, but I remember getting up at 6 a.m. (something I never do) and writing until about 4 p.m. that afternoon, each idea flowing out of my head and into my new design document. Every idea took something mundane and ordinary about the genre, and in some way lifted it up, enhanced it or made common UI interaction more informative and convenient for the player. I rinsed and repeated this on Sunday (okay, I didn't rinse). At the end of the second day I was looking at a hefty 65 page design doc, stuffed full of new ideas and improvements and tweaks.

But despite all the meat that was in the design doc, there was still something fundamental missing from the design.

Fast forward to January 2004, which is when work officially began on Supreme Commander. The design was still missing that essential ingredient. I had always talked about my next RTS game as the ultimate "strategy" game, but how would I truly bring this next level of strategy to the genre? I often considered RTS games to be heavy on tactics and light on strategy. I have a saying: Strategy happens before the battle, tactics happen during the battle.

That belief may not be technically correct in the eyes of all those hardcore strategy buffs out there, but it did start me down a particular line of thinking. What if the maps were bigger, and the player had more time to use distance in the gameplay? What if the units could be more realistic and have more than a couple of different weapon systems and capabilities? What if we could put super-huge units into the same game with the smaller units?

Meanwhile, in my normal flurry of game playing, I loaded up PopTop's Railroad Tycoon II. I realized after playing Phil's latest game (Phil Steinmeyer was the founder of PopTop), that being able to zoom in and out was the exact element that was missing from the traditional RTS game. I immediately started to think about how this would be integrated into the existing design. What would the effects be? Would it break something?

And so we implemented the zoom feature into Supreme Commander, and we were thrilled. It was like we found the missing link, and I knew right then and there that it was the piece I was looking for. And the kicker was that it was extremely intuitive for new players to pick up and use with a high degree of effectiveness. The player could zoom out to assess the whole map, zoom in close to issue a quick order, and then pop back out and issue a large sweeping order.

> **"One thing is clear though, there are a lot of new and innovative designs that we have yet to discover."**

All the pieces started to fall into place. This new zoom paradigm meant that we could have large units, which wouldn't even fit on the screen, mixed with small units in a way nobody had ever experienced.

To say I was happy that this major piece of the Supreme Commander design was now in place would be a huge understatement. This one fundamental change in the design radically changed the way the whole game was experienced and opened up new avenues of gameplay. But the even better news was that it didn't fundamentally change the way the player interacted with the game.

Today, we are rounding the last few corners and approaching the finish line. We still have a lot of work left to do before Supreme Commander is finished, but we are very happy with the way all the core elements came together. In many ways, the game came together much better than I could have ever expected.

One thing is clear though, there are a lot of new and innovative designs that we have yet to discover. Each of these new design inspirations will continue to elevate the RTS genre to new heights that many may never have predicted back when the genre first appeared. ■■■

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

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

ALL DRESSED UP AND NO ONE TO K.O.

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sun | mon | tue | wed | thur | fri | sat

september

1

2

Back when Kratos was soiling his diapers with the rage of a thousand gods, Medusa was turning noble men into stone with her deadly gaze. In a roundabout way, *Clash of the Titans* can be credited as the source for bringing Greek mythology to the nerd nation. Gentle Giant is tapping into this audience with a killer collection of nine-inch figures. Buy 'em today!

Okami (PS2) – 09/05/06

5-6

NEW RELEASES

- Call of Juarez – PC
- Faces of War – PC
- Guilty Gear: Judgment – PSP
- Little Einsteins – GBA
- LocoRoco – PSP
- *Lost: Season 2* – DVD
- My Little Pony: Crystal Princess – GBA
- NASCAR 07 – PS2, Xbox, PSP
- Okami – PS2
- One Piece: Pirate's Carnival – PS2
- Origin of the Species – PC
- Secret Files: Tunguska – PC
- Spyhunter: Nowhere to Run – PS2, Xbox
- Test Drive: Unlimited – 360
- Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins – PSP

07

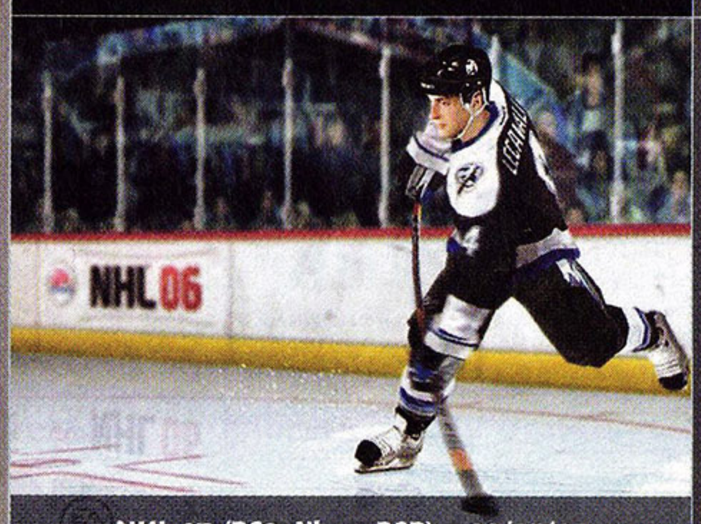
NATIONAL GRIMLOCK DAY

This holiday is in celebration of the greatest Dinobot of them all. To observe it correctly, every sentence out of your mouth has to start with "Me Grimlock…" Furthermore, whenever you eat food on this day, you must do it in dinosaur form…which means no hands and tons of roaring. Grimlock only eats at fancy places.

9

ACEC 2006 SWAP MEET

If you attend this awesome swap meet in Columbus, OH, Reiner says that he'll trade you his non-functional copy of E.T., which was recently used as a litter box scoop, for a new Xbox 360. Reiner is a generous man. He may also part with his broken sunglasses for a new DS Lite.



NHL 07 (PS2, Xbox, PSP) – 09/05/06

12-13

NEW RELEASES

- Bomberman: Act Zero – PSP
- Bounty Hounds – PSP
- Company of Heroes – PC
- Demon Chaos – PS2
- Eye Toy Play 3 – PS2
- The Godfather – 360, PSP
- LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy – 360, PS2, Xbox, GC, PSP, DS, GBA, PC
- Mario Hoops 3-on-3 – DS
- Mega Man ZX – DS
- NHL 07 – PS2, Xbox, PSP
- Rengoku 2: The Stairway to H.E.A.V.E.N. – PSP
- Rule of Rose – PS2
- Samurai Warriors 2 – 360, PS2
- *Smallville: Season 5* – DVD
- *Star Wars: The Original Trilogy* – DVD

14

CORY BARLOG BLOG

The Game Director of God of War II was destined to blog since the day he was born. Just remove the "ar" from his name and you'll see for yourself. His site talks games up and even reveals some info about his title that you won't find anywhere else!

http://corybarlog.blogspot.com

LocoRoco (PSP) – 09/05/06

Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team (DS) – 09/19/06

18

19-20

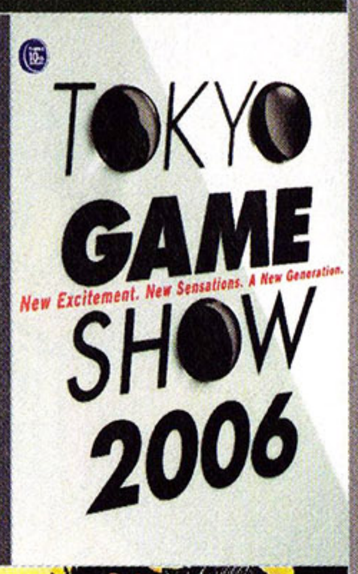
NEW RELEASES

- Ace Combat X: Skies of Deception – PSP
- *Battlestar Galactica: Season 2.5* –DVD
- Capcom Mini Mix – GBA
- Contact – DS
- Just Cause – 360, PS2, Xbox, PC
- The Guild II – PC
- Neverwinter Nights II – PC
- Open Season – 360, PS2, Xbox, GC, PSP, DS, GBA, PC
- Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team – DS
- Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Red Rescue Team – GBA
- Reservoir Dogs – PS2, Xbox, PC
- Star Shatterer II – PC
- *Stay Alive* – DVD
- Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria – PS2

22

TOKYO GAME SHOW 2006 (22-24)

The PlayStation 3 will be there in a big way, and our sources tell us that Microsoft will have Blue Dragon on the floor for people to play. As for the Wii? Nintendo is once again a no-show, but we do promise to send Matt dressed up as a Wii remote. He likes it when you punch the buttons.



Baten Kaitos Origins (GC) – 09/26/06

26-27

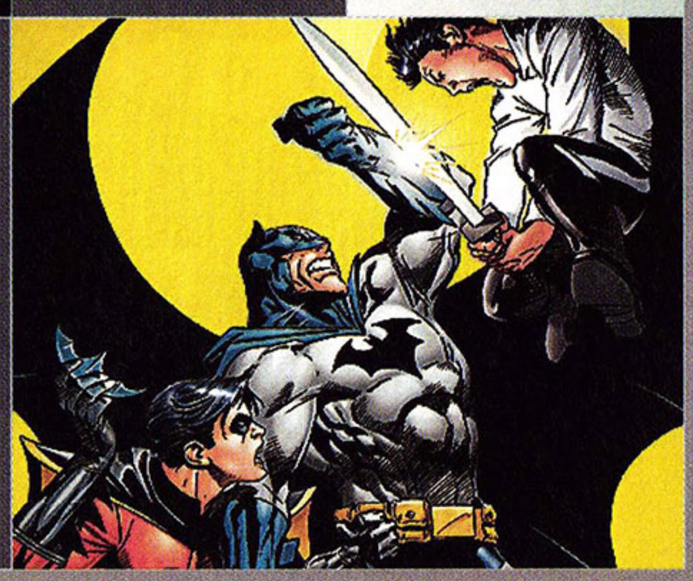
NEW RELEASES

- Alex Rider: Stormbreaker – DS, GBA
- ATV Off Road Fury 4 – PS2
- Baten Kaitos Origins – GC
- Gun: Showdown – PSP
- Maelstrom – PC
- Mario vs. Donkey Kong: March of the Minis – DS
- Dark Messiah of Might and Magic – PC
- Naruto II: Clash of the Ninja – GC
- NBA Live 07 – PS2, Xbox, PSP
- Scarface: The World is Yours – PS2, Xbox, PSP, PC
- Spectrobes – DS
- W.I.T.C.H. – GBA

28

SON OF THE BAT

When he's not fighting crime, Batman really needs to learn about birth control. In the latest issue of *Batman*, which ships today, the pointy-eared one learns of a son that he didn't know he had. As you can imagine, this kid is a bit psychotic.



All release dates subject to change. For future release dates, go to www.gameinformer.com

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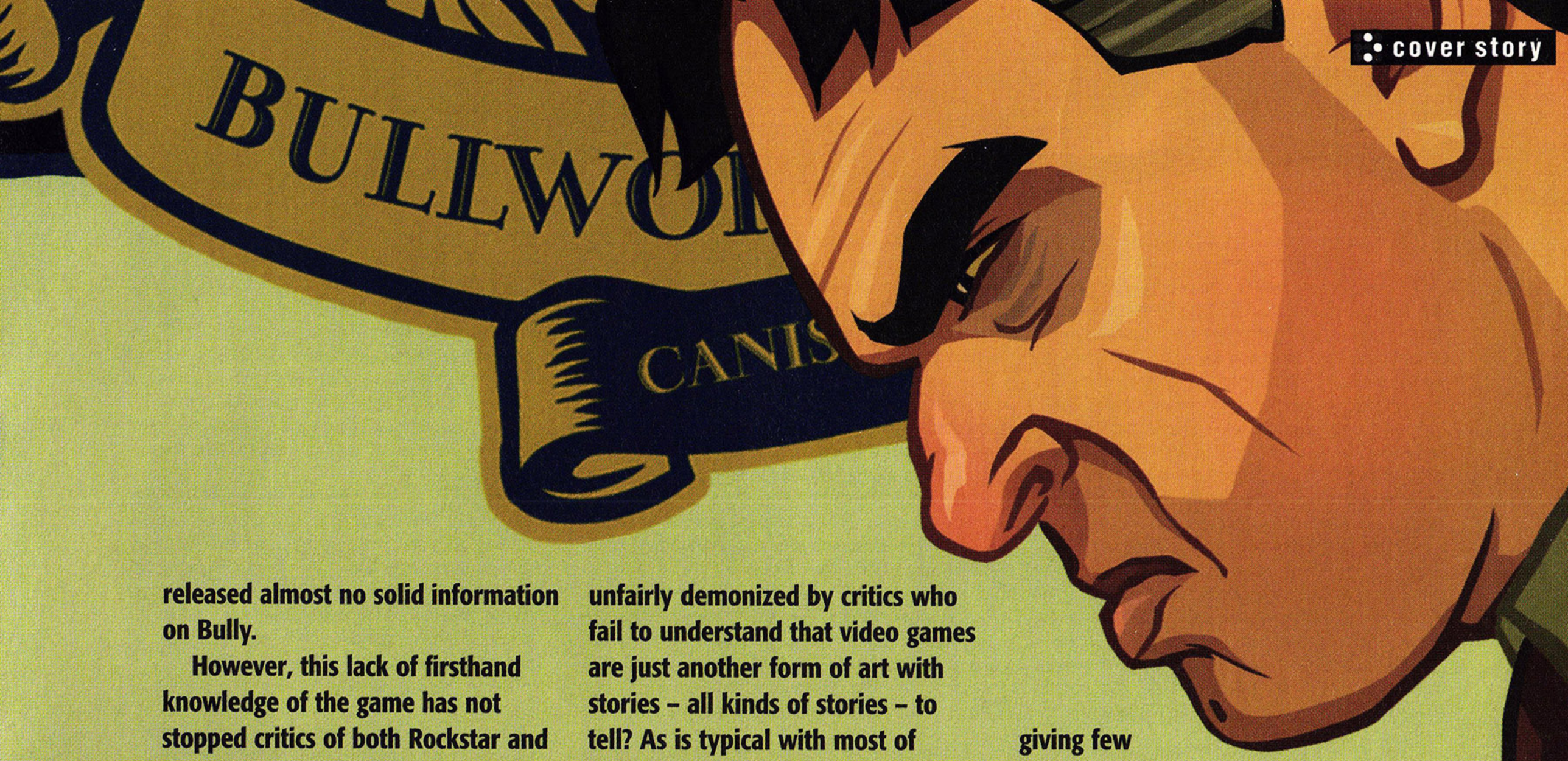
> **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR VANCOUVER
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER

"Columbine simulator." "A violent revenge fantasy." If you've read anything about Rockstar's newest title, Bully, you've no doubt seen phrases like this. Despite the fact that it isn't scheduled to release until October, Rockstar's Bully might already be the most controversial game of all time.

Ostensibly the tale of a young malcontent attempting to find his way at a new school, Bully has already been tagged as the title where the company's commitment to edgy content would finally push it over the edge into a dark world of teen violence. Even for Rockstar, a company that is no stranger to outcry over its often adult-oriented content, the public discussion over Bully has been exceptionally charged. The reaction has been surprising, all the more so for the fact that – until now – the company has



BULLY

THE REAL STORY ON THE WORLD'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL GAME

released almost no solid information on Bully.

However, this lack of firsthand knowledge of the game has not stopped critics of both Rockstar and the video game industry from calling for politicians and retailers to ban the game before it is even released. Recently, Game Informer was given the exclusive opportunity to be the first publication in the world to get a real look at Bully. Is this really the game that will take Rockstar beyond the pale? Or is Bully just another example of a game that's been unfairly demonized by critics who fail to understand that video games are just another form of art with stories – all kinds of stories – to tell? As is typical with most of Rockstar's games, the truth behind Bully is much more complicated and interesting than you might have expected.

Ironically, in light of all the uproar it would eventually cause, Bully was announced to little reaction in both the press and online. Rockstar announced the game via press release on May 10th, 2005, giving few details on the title save for the fact that it was the first title to be developed by the company's Vancouver studio and that it would "[take] the Rockstar tradition of groundbreaking, innovative, original gameplay and humorous tongue-in-cheek storytelling to an entirely new setting: the schoolyard."

Of course, Rockstar would soon find its every move under the microscope after the revelation in June that its ultra-popular PS2 and PC title Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas contained locked content (called Hot Coffee) that allowed players to simulate sex. This resulted in a chain of events that would eventually find Rockstar at the center of a FTC inquiry (see last month's issue for more details) and Bully on the hot seat. Suddenly, a game that Rockstar had envisioned as a light-hearted alternative to the grimmer fare of Grand Theft Auto and Manhunt was being tagged as a virtual tutorial for children looking to act out revenge on fellow students and teachers.

Needless to say, Florida lawyer and anti-game crusader Jack Thompson, who has been a constant thorn in the company's side, was soon in the press, leading the charge against a title he felt would "feature the murderous violence of Grand Theft Auto in a school setting." Despite the fact that there was no evidence to suggest that murder was to play any part in Bully, Thompson's charges were soon picked up in the mainstream media, which was eager to tie it into the unfolding Hot Coffee scandal. Soon enough, Thompson was appearing in many major newspapers and even CNN's *Lou Dobbs Moneyline* program calling for an outright ban of a game that would not even be finished for another year. The events hit their peak in August of 2005, when a youth group called the "Peaceaholics" picketed outside of Rockstar's New York headquarters, claiming that the game glamorized school violence.

Of course, this wild speculation on the game was aided by the fact that Rockstar, already one of gaming's least accessible publishers, had circled its wagons and was declining to comment on anything – Bully, Hot Coffee, or otherwise. Despite the fact that so many seemed to have an opinion, the reality was that only about 20 people in the world outside of Rockstar and their business partners – a group of journalists who had viewed a demo of the game at E3 2005 – had even seen Bully in action.

Speaking recently to Game Informer, Rockstar's Terry Donovan seems to take a fairly philosophical view on the controversy, claiming that the company's silence was the only good option it had in the face of all the criticism. "I think it was a case of that we knew the game was going to be special, but we didn't know how it was going to be special until the game had reached a point where it could defend itself on its own merits," comments Donovan. "Having a debate a year in advance of the game coming out didn't seem like a particularly healthy thing to do. The debate was horribly colored by misinformation. So it wasn't as if we went with a 'less is more' strategy, it just didn't seem like there was anything particularly intelligent to say…. We always knew that the debate would diffuse once the game became real, because the video game issue is more about misunderstanding. Most people that have issues with video games don't actually play them."

> "I THINK IT WAS A CASE OF THAT WE KNEW THE GAME WAS GOING TO BE SPECIAL, BUT WE DIDN'T KNOW HOW IT WAS GOING TO BE SPECIAL UNTIL THE GAME HAD REACHED A POINT WHERE IT COULD DEFEND ITSELF ON ITS OWN MERITS."
>
> TERRY DONOVAN

When we asked whether it bothered him that the game had been called a "Columbine simulator," Donovan seemed confident that the game itself would silence the critics. "Once you start wandering around and just being in the environment and it's funny, the whole issue goes away. To be afraid of this game seems almost absurd now, but if you don't know what it is and we can't talk about it…You're never upset; you're just disappointed because you don't know how to educate people. Then, you throw Hot Coffee in the mix, and it makes it very complicated."

Rockstar's Devin Winterbottom is even more clear in his defense of the game. "It's not Grand Theft Auto in a school, which is really the most baseline thing people seem to think about it. They say 'Oh, it's by the guys that made GTA, it seems to be an open-world type of game; clearly it's Grand Theft Auto in a school.' It's not…. [There's] not a gun, not a knife. Not a shred of blood."

At this point, instead of talking about what Bully isn't, perhaps it's time to examine just what Bully is. We were lucky enough to get a look at a very polished version of the game, and – despite its reputation – it comes off more as a wry, endearing look at the school experience, done with Rockstar's typically satirical and rude sense of humor.

For producer Jeronimo Barrera, it's the subject matter itself that he feels will be Bully's real contribution to gaming. "It's a new kind of game…. We feel that this is something that's going to change the way people look at content in a game. For us, it's very much unique; there's nothing else like it. Why hasn't it been done before? I think because people don't quite get the concept that school is an interesting place; your childhood is interesting. It's just as interesting as playing a gangster or a mage."

Although Bully certainly represents a risk for Rockstar in a gaming market glutted with spy sagas, battlefield simulations, and fantasy epics, on another level it makes perfect sense. Whether you grew up in Los Angeles, Tokyo, or London, the school experience is one that everyone can relate to. It also encompasses the full range of human emotion, from conflict to romance to the all-too-common feeling of being ostracized and unaccepted. In its own humorous manner, it's exactly these feelings that Barrera hopes Bully can express.

Barrera continues, "It needs to happen. When I was growing up, I loved *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Pretty in Pink* and this is the same sort of thing. I recently read *Catcher in the Rye*. Someone said, 'Oh you should read that if you're doing a game about boarding schools.' I knew that it was banned back in the day and found in the possession of the guy that killed John Lennon, but I read the stuff and it was parallel to what I want to do and the stories I want to tell. Teen angst – we all have been through it. It's not like, 'Oh I wish I were a dragon slayer and I went around and beefed up my swords' – which is cool – but this is a story of something that is human nature…. Something can really happen at a human level, can touch that emotion. I think we're doing that with this game, because everybody can relate to it. But, at the same time, it's funny, it's comedy, but we're laughing at ourselves."

The story of Bully is told through the eyes of Jimmy

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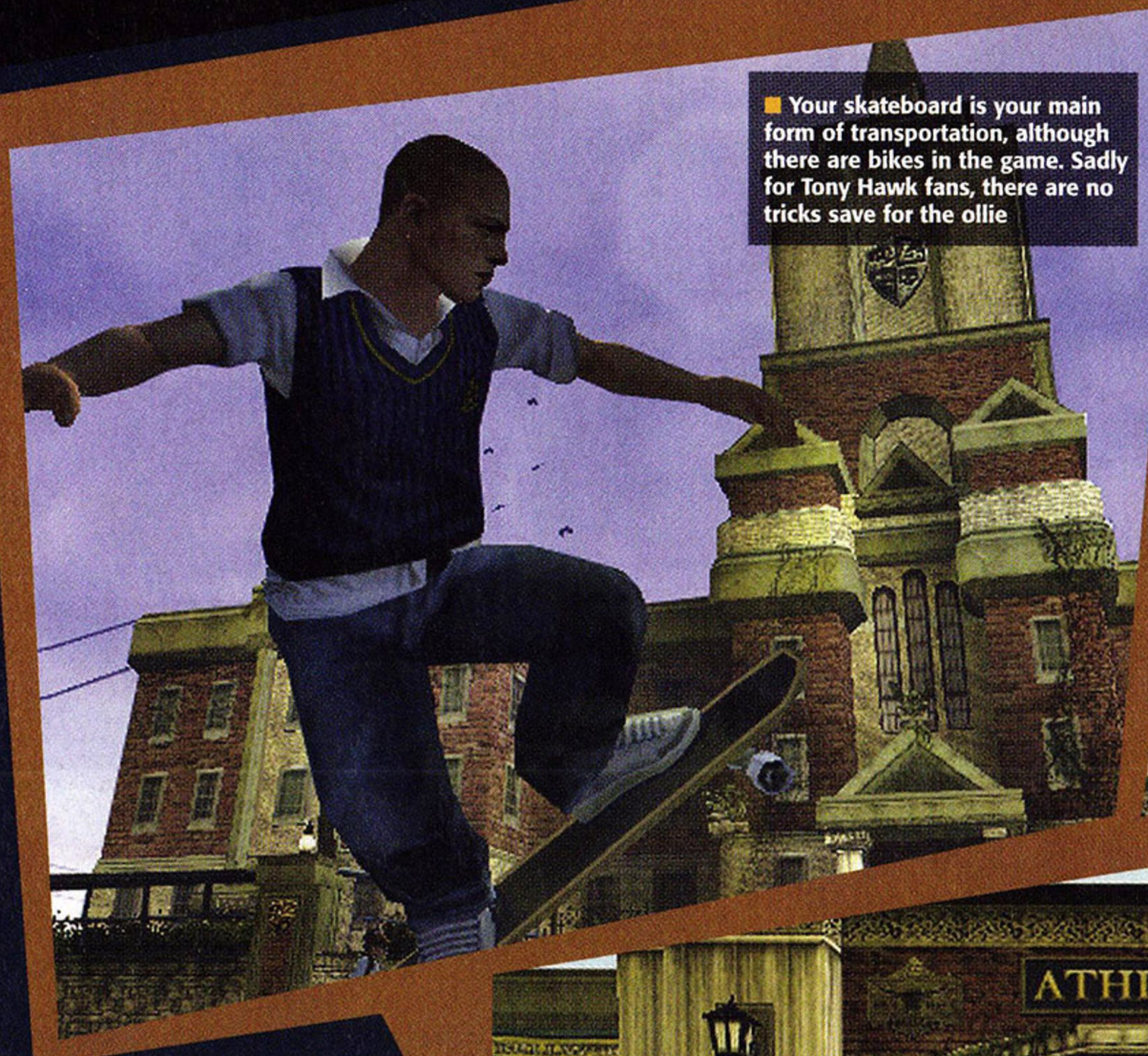
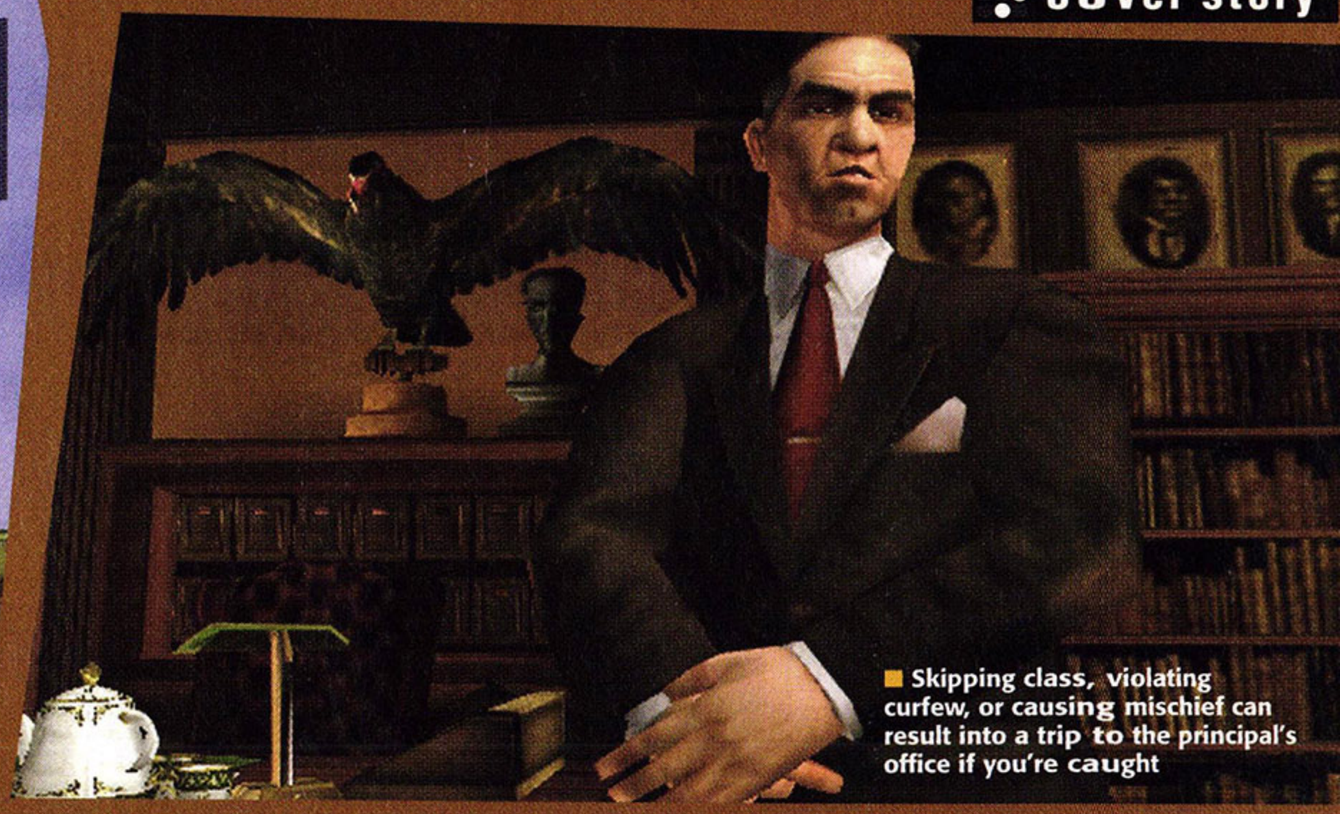
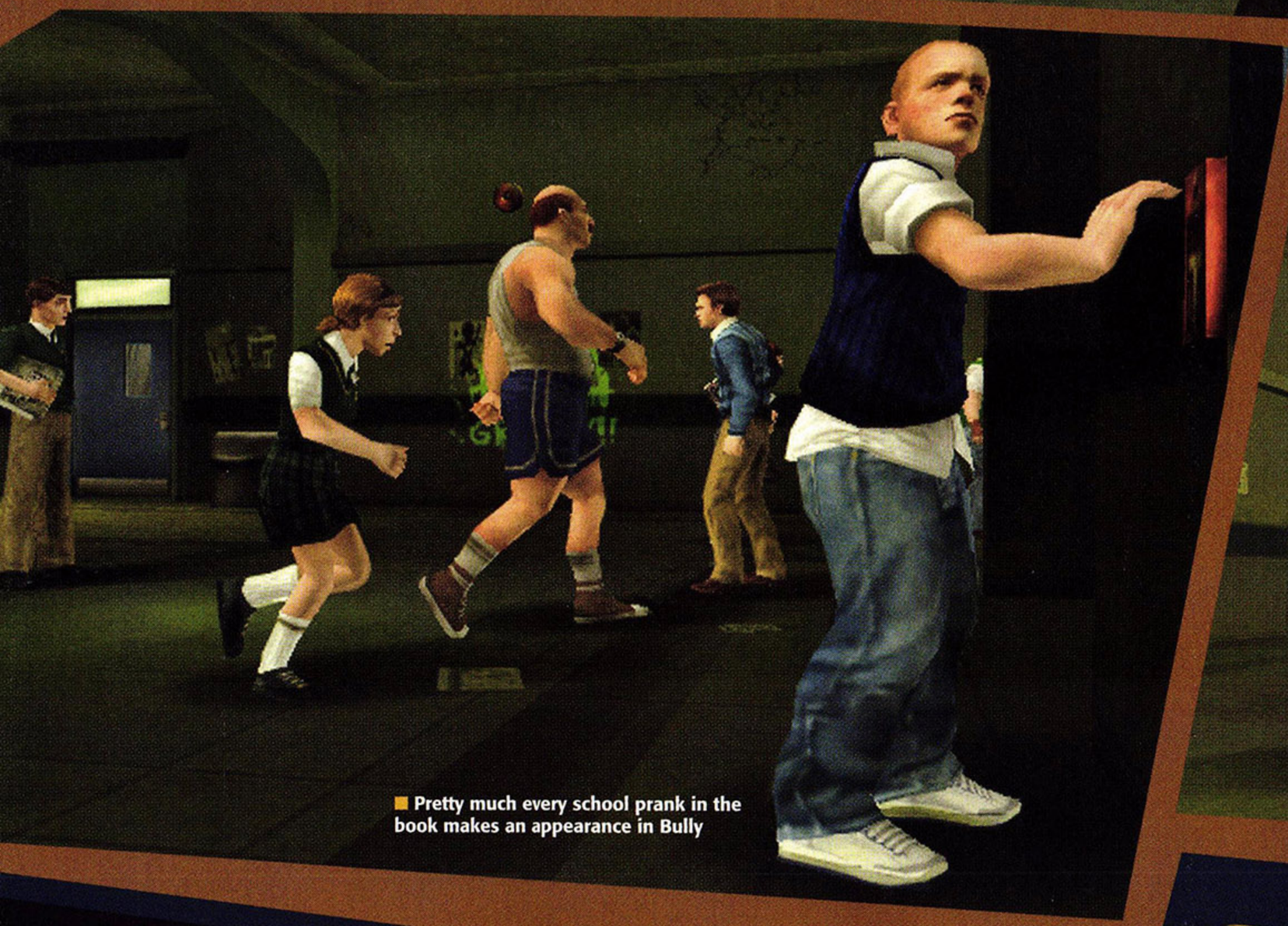


■ Your skateboard is your main form of transportation, although there are bikes in the game. Sadly for Tony Hawk fans, there are no tricks save for the ollie

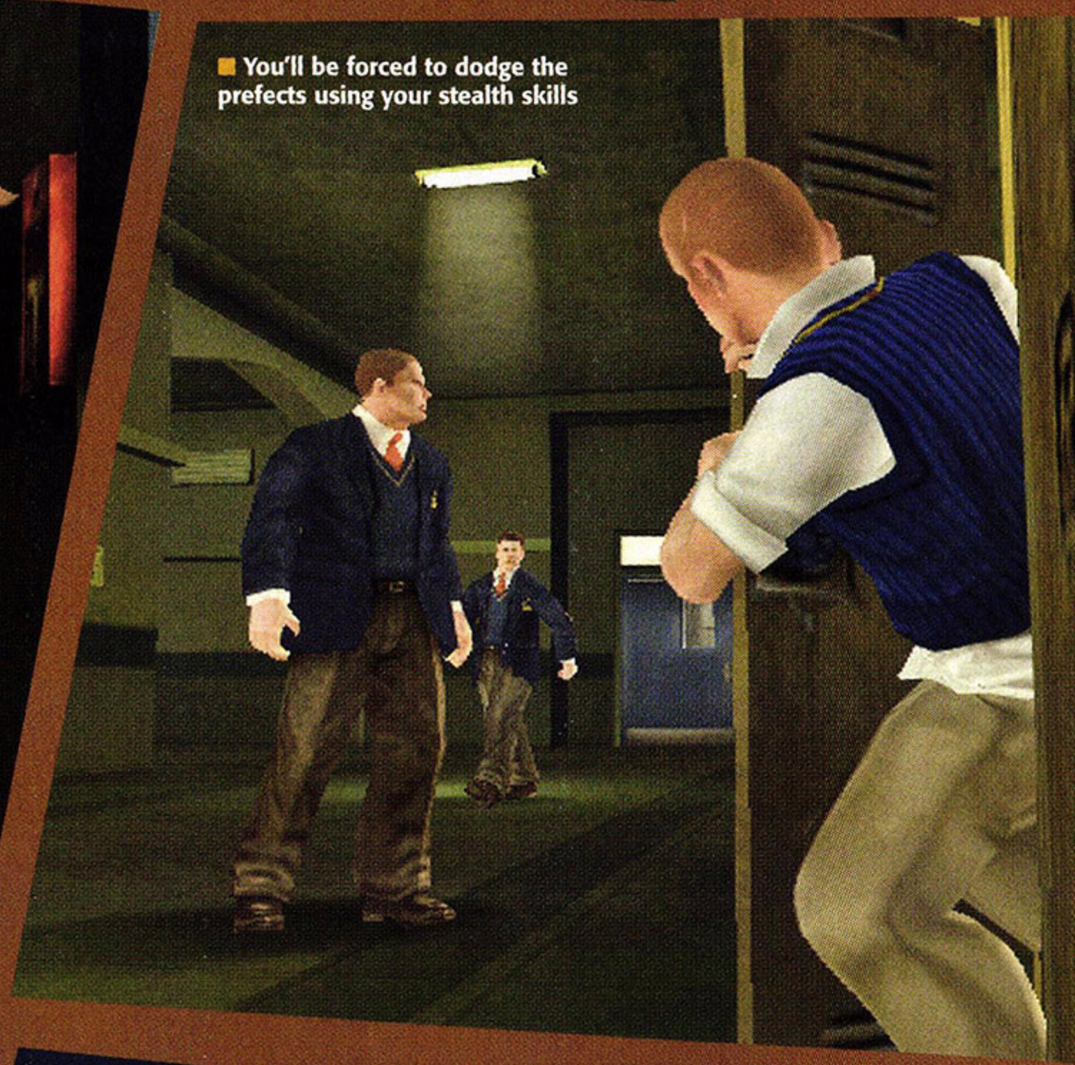


■ Skipping class, violating curfew, or causing mischief can result into a trip to the principal's office if you're caught

■ Rockstar hinted that many typical events of the school year like football games and dances will figure into Bully's plot



■ Pretty much every school prank in the book makes an appearance in Bully



■ You'll be forced to dodge the prefects using your stealth skills

LEARNING IS FUNDAMENTAL

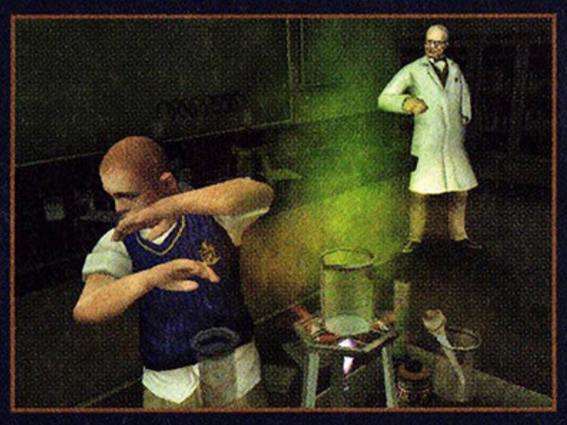
We all have at least some fond memories of our school days. However, classes are usually something we play games to avoid. In Bully, the developers want to make sure that classes aren't just something you are forced into doing, but rather a fun experience in and of themselves. While it is possible to play the game without attending classes, you'll quickly find that the prefects take a dim view of truancy. In addition, classwork is the primary way in which you build your character's skills and abilities. This is a quick breakdown of the six major class types, what they entail, and what benefits you'll receive from completing them.

ENGLISH

Language skills are as important in Bully as they are in real life. English classes are basically timed "word jumble" minigames, where you must form a specified number of words from a selection of randomly placed letters. By excelling in English, you'll learn new expressions that can make your day-to-day dealings with your fellow students and teachers easier. For example, learning a new apology might help you explain that you were in no way the student who put that cherry bomb in the toilet.

CHEMISTRY

Science is the backbone of any good education, and in Bully you'll quickly learn the rewards of receiving high marks in Chemistry. Basically, this minigame is an adaptation of the popular PaRappa the Rapper-style timed button pressing that so many games utilize. Experiments are conducted by mixing the chemicals assigned to a series of buttons icons that must be hit in correct order. Press the wrong one and your experiment will quite literally blow up in your face. After completing a few levels of chemistry, you'll be able to make a variety of fireworks in the chemistry set you have in your dorm room – a great way to stay armed for mischief.



AUTO SHOP

Rockstar was vague about how this class actually works, but would reveal that it will help you improve your "mechanical skills." These skills will help unlock some valuable new accessories for your bike and skateboard, among other things.

GYM

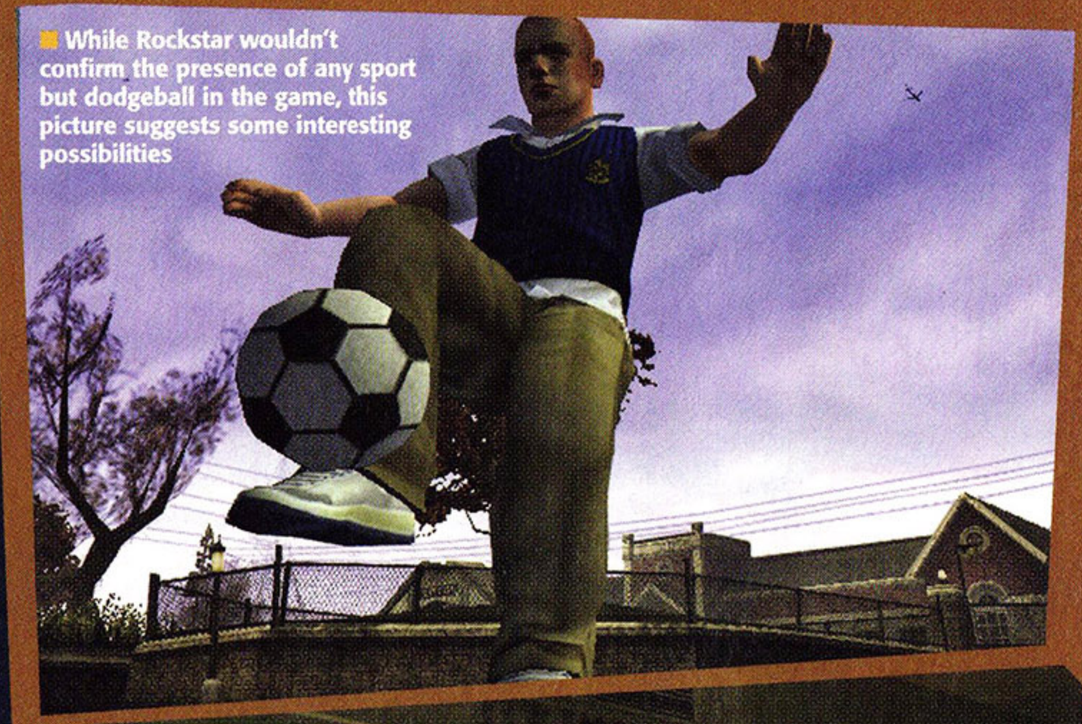
While we all suffered our share of emotional scars in gym class, Bully manages to make the experience a good deal more enjoyable than it was in real life. Some levels of gym involve wrestling, which is great for learning new combat and fighting moves. But we're much more excited by the dodgeball levels, which are a bit of a tribute to the NES cult classic Super Dodge Ball.

PHOTOGRAPHY

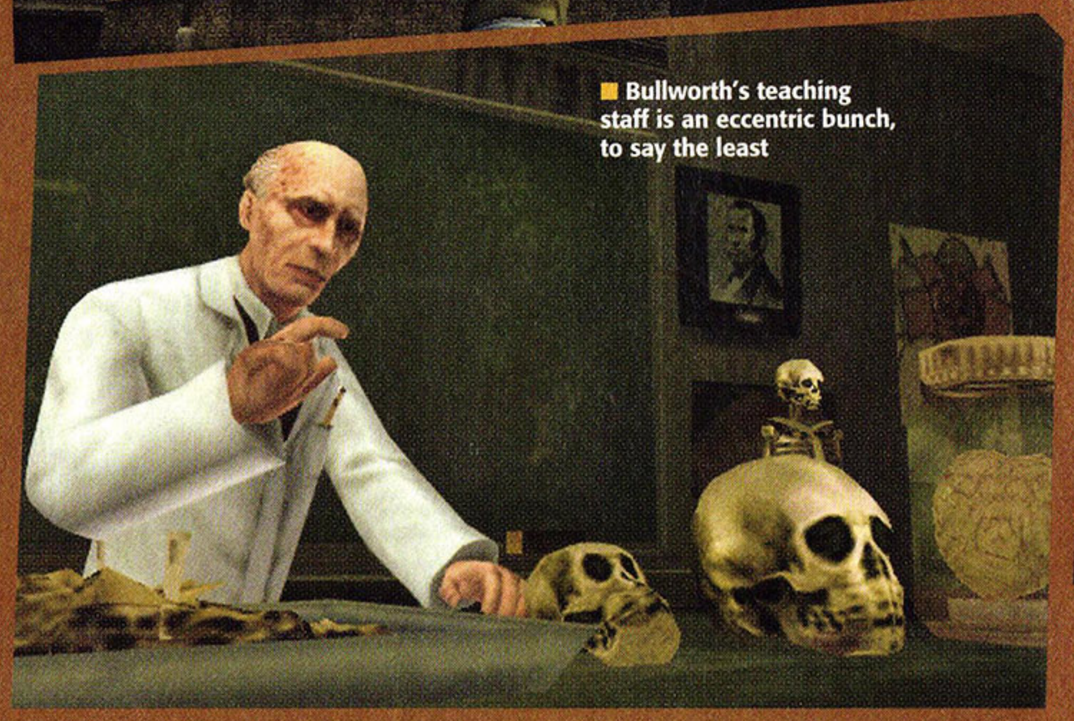
Another of the more mysterious classes, Photography is closely tied to the game's Yearbook and Photo Album features. While we don't know exactly how these will play out during the course of the game, Rockstar has revealed that taking certain pictures of events and people will unlock additional content in the game.

ART

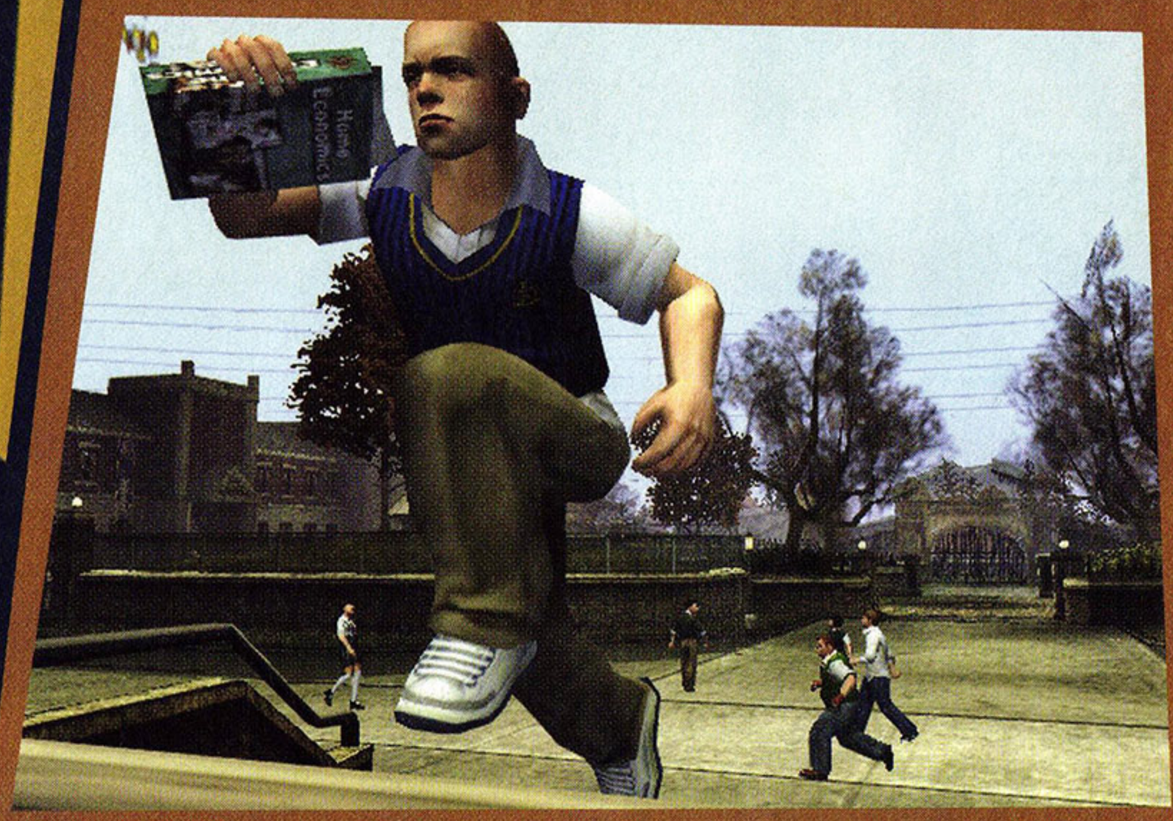
A good art education feeds both the soul and mind, and is key for your development in Bully. Art classes provide another tribute to video game's past, this time the puzzle game Qix, the abstract arcade classic in which you draw lines and shapes on a flat playfield. By excelling in Art, you will learn new "emotional" interaction, like how to woo girls and perhaps even steal a kiss or two.

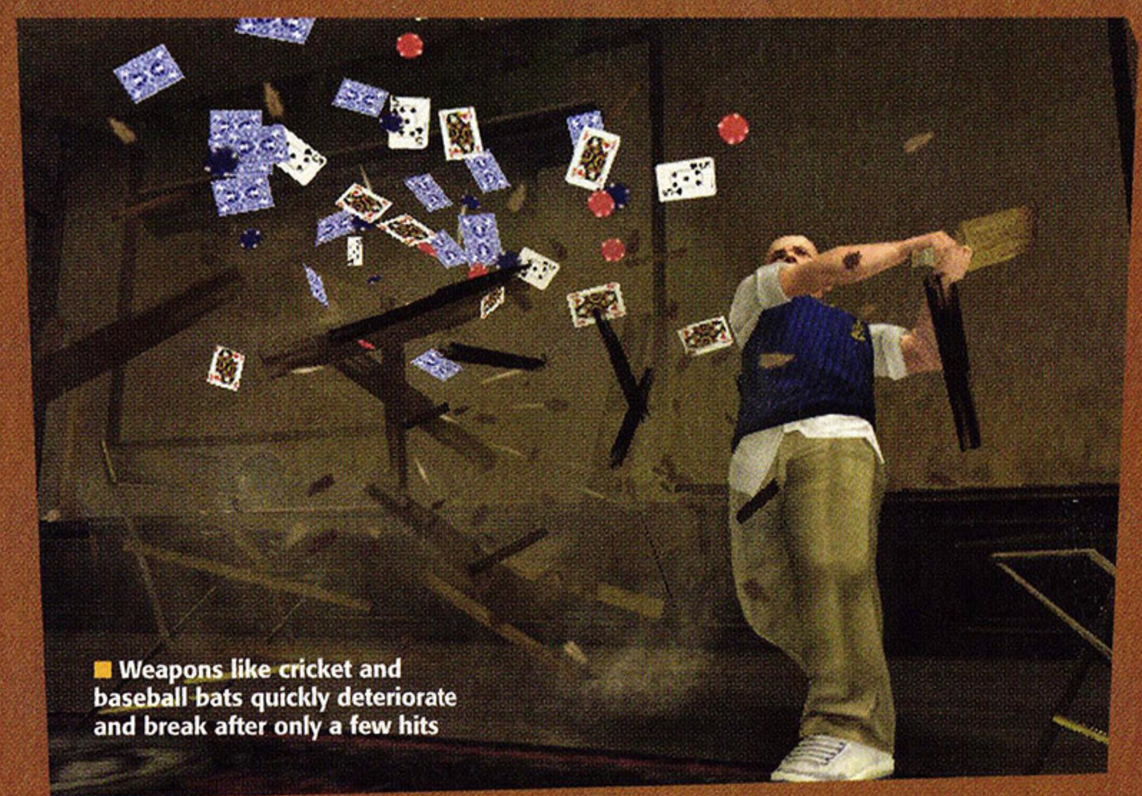


■ While Rockstar wouldn't confirm the presence of any sport but dodgeball in the game, this picture suggests some interesting possibilities

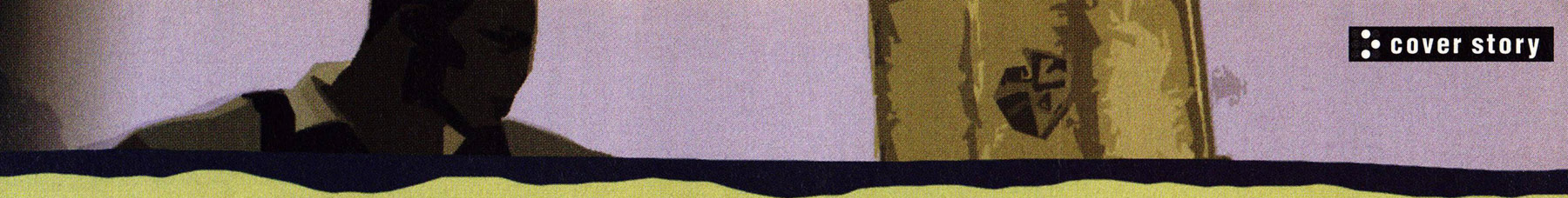


■ Bullworth's teaching staff is an eccentric bunch, to say the least





■ Weapons like cricket and baseball bats quickly deteriorate and break after only a few hits



continued from page 50

Hopkins, a troubled 15-year-old boy who's on his way to Bullworth Academy, which represents his last hope of making a go after being expelled from a series of boarding schools. As we see Jimmy riding in the back of his mother's car, the root of his behavioral problems quickly becomes apparent. After bickering with his mother, who appears all too eager to get Jimmy out of her life so she can go on a cruise with her latest husband, Jimmy is unceremoniously dropped off at the school gates. After a terse meeting with the principal, Jimmy heads to the dorm to change into his regulation Bullworth uniform, where he meets his first would-be ally, the unbalanced Gary, who will soon to prove to be a very unreliable "friend." Beginning here, Jimmy will embark on an adventure that will last through one full school year, and attempt to make it through a series of events that will change both him and Bullworth forever.

Although Rockstar is loath to draw comparisons between Bully and its most famous franchise, as you begin to explore Bullworth Academy it's clear that they are similar in one important way. Just as San Andreas or Vice City were imagined as real, living universes, so is Bullworth Academy and the surrounding area. Although the total area is much less than those games, in many ways, the simulation of a virtual society is much more detailed than in any of the GTA titles.

While we're used to open-world games having day to night and weather cycles, Bully uses time and the passage of seasons as an integral part of the world. In the top left of your screen is a clock, which is key to governing how you spend your day. Basically, each school day consists of two periods of class (if you choose to attend), a lunch hour, and free time from four in the afternoon to curfew (11 p.m.). Although you can skip class to do as you please, it's key to note that the school prefects and staff will notice that you're skipping, often resulting in your capture and a trip to the principal's office. In addition, because Jimmy is only 15, he will grow tired and pass out at 2 a.m., so you'd better keep a close eye on the clock during nighttime missions.

As the year progresses, you'll also notice changes in the school and town. Bully features full seasonal changes, which are reflected both in the environment and the attire of the characters. In autumn, you'll see Halloween decorations in town. By December, snow will cover the ground, and you and your fellow students will be decked out in winter wear like stocking caps and sweaters.

Using an improved version of the engine that powered San Andreas, Bullworth Academy has most of the common landmarks that we've come to associate with the school experience. From the gymnasium to the dormitory, you'll discover that the campus holds a great deal of areas to explore and secrets to find. Your dorm room and its adjoining common area will be a major hub, a place where you can save your game, change your outfit, grab a soda from the machine (which serves as the game's health power-up), or play one of five fully playable arcade video games. Later on, you'll be able to travel past the school walls to explore the town of Bullworth itself, usually on either your skateboard (which is always in your inventory) or a conveniently "borrowed" bicycle.

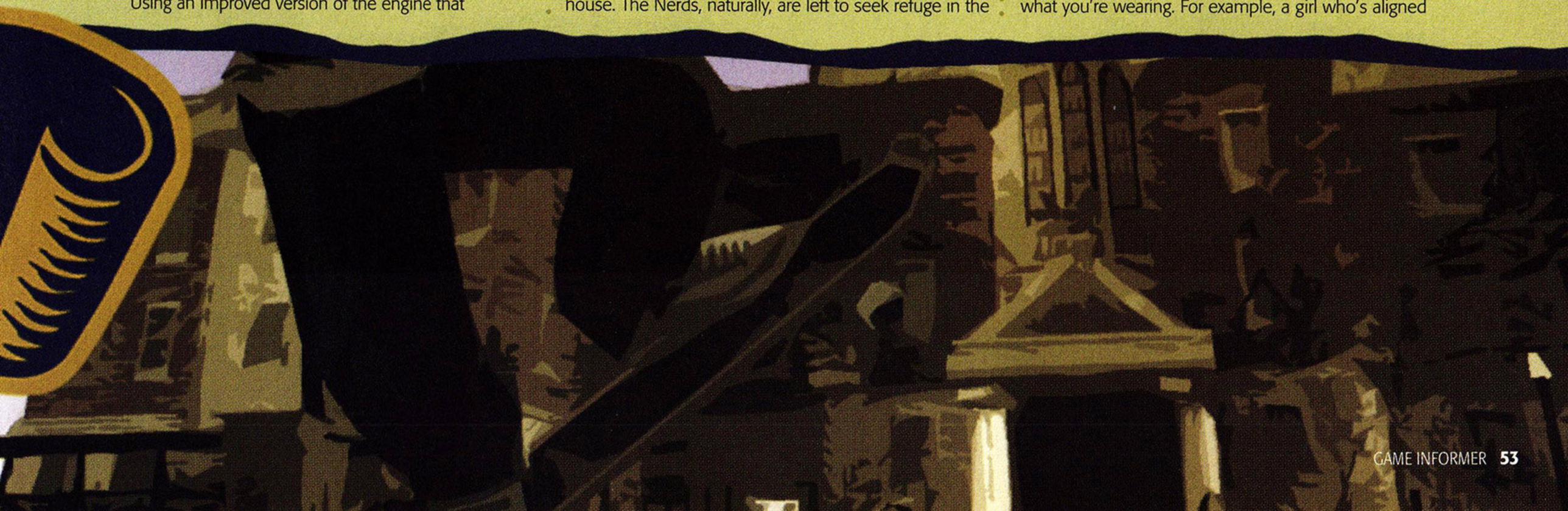
However, as we know all too well, the real experience of school does not revolve around the buildings, but rather the people in them. And it's in this way that Bully really distinguishes itself from the games that have come before it. First and foremost, Bully is a game about social relationships. Rockstar Vancouver has gone to great lengths to create a world that truly reacts and changes based on Jimmy's standing with his fellow students and teachers – a world where every action has a consequence.

> "...SOMETHING CAN REALLY HAPPEN AT A HUMAN LEVEL; CAN TOUCH THAT EMOTION. I THINK WE'RE DOING THAT WITH THIS GAME. BECAUSE EVERYBODY CAN RELATE TO IT. BUT, AT THE SAME TIME, IT'S FUNNY. IT'S COMEDY. BUT WE'RE LAUGHING AT OURSELVES."
>
> JERONIMO BARRERA

As in the real world, the social structure of Bullworth Academy revolves around cliques. The five main groups on campus span the common archetypes of childhood: Nerds, Jocks, Preps, Greasers, and Bullies. Each group has its own mode of dress and home base. The Jocks congregate around the gym and sports fields, favoring letterman jackets. The Greasers stalk the parking lot and auto shop, wearing the traditional leather jacket teen rebels have favored since the '50s. The Preps, rich and pampered students who look down on the other cliques, have their own posh dorm called Harrington house. The Nerds, naturally, are left to seek refuge in the library. The last and most dangerous group, the Bullies (easily identified by their white button-down shirts), have no home base at all, preferring to roam the school grounds looking for new ways to make life miserable for the other students. We should also point out that, contrary to the game's title, Jimmy is not really the bully at all, and more frequently finds himself defending other students from attacks and harassment.

Negotiating your way through the often treacherous social ladder of Bullworth is key to being successful. As you attempt to move your way up the food chain and ultimately unite the school against the Bullies, you'll have to manage your relationships with the various cliques. For example, in an early mission we saw, a Nerd nicknamed "Pee Stain" asked us to save his friend who had run afoul of some Bullies while looking for parts for his science project. After we had come to his rescue, we received a mission complete bulletin, which also showed that our Nerd respect had gone up, while our Bully respect had gone down. In the pause menu, you'll be able to see your current level of respect with each clique, which often has an effect on how difficult your mission is. If, for example, the Preps are mad at you, you know that a mission that takes you to Harrington house will be a difficult task.

There are also more complex, personal social interactions which govern life at Bullworth. As you begin to make acquaintances with your fellow students, you'll soon notice that there are no random pedestrians on the school ground. In fact, every single student has a name and distinct personality. From the craven toady who will steal chocolates from an unsuspecting classmate to the girls that are a bit "easy," you'll find an endless variety of both friends and enemies to encounter. Students also react to your reputation and what you're wearing. For example, a girl who's aligned



herself with the Jocks might mock you if you're seen wearing a Nerd sweater about campus. Thankfully, you do have the ability to either make new friends or enemies, depending on how you choose to deal with your fellow students.

The social mechanic is intuitive and simple, yet gives you a fair amount of flexibility in how you approach those around you. By locking on with the L1 button, you'll be able to access the interactive face button commands on the bottom left of the screen. Although there are a variety of different greetings and interaction, you basically select either an aggressive or friendly action by pressing the circle or X button, respectively. An aggressive action could either be a quick putdown to a bully or even pinching the derriere of a female student. Still, sometimes it's better to take a more subtle approach, so you'll also be able to rely on other forms of communication like friendly hellos, apologies, and flattery (even digital girls can't resist flowers). As you improve your emotional skills and vocabulary in classes (see sidebar page 52), you'll even be able to sweet talk your way out of trouble with the prefects and teachers.

> "WE'RE BEING VERY CAREFUL ABOUT [VIOLENCE]. THERE ISN'T ANYTHING THAT TURNS IT INTO A MASSACRE GAME....YOU CAN'T GO AROUND HITTING EVERYONE IN THE SCHOOL"
>
> JERONIMO BARRERA

Of course, sometimes words are just not enough, which is where pranks come into play. With the square button you'll be able to pull off such classic stunts as the wedgie, stuffing a classmate into a locker or garbage can, or even pasting a "Kick Me" sign on their back (an order you'll find your fellow students are only too happy to oblige).

Although there is a great deal of fun to be had by playing around with your interpersonal relationships, Bully is every bit an action game, one that seeks to emulate the wide variety of gameplay that has become a hallmark of many of Rockstar's games. No matter how honed your social skills are, as often as not you'll be forced to earn your respect with your fists. Combat, while not nearly as violent as in the company's other titles, does offer a fair amount of depth. The basic fighting mechanics seemed to be derived from the system used in The Warriors, although it has been simplified to a one-button attack control scheme that actually senses how long and hard you press the button to perform combos. "Instead of heavy and light attack buttons, we do taps and holds. So you can do charge moves. So 'tap, tap, hold' is different than 'tap, tap, tap,'" explains Barrera. "We've essentially collapsed two buttons into one. We feel that people that play a lot of Rockstar games aren't necessarily familiar with combat systems and things like that. So, if you button mash, you'll look good, but if you take some time to actually learn the timing of the moves, you can do reversals, you can chain combos, and you can juggle."

In addition to the core combo mechanics, you'll also be able to perform disarm moves, which entail mashing on the triangle button until you've freed the weapons from your opponent's grip (this mechanic also allows you to escape the grasp of prefects if you can pull it off). You'll also be able to bring matches to a quick end by performing "Humiliations" to embarrass your foe. These range from a simple slap across the face to the classic move commonly known as "Why don't you quit hitting yourself?" Some of these Humiliations are also context sensitive. For example, if you're brawling in the men's room you might be able to administer the most crushing of all schoolyard maneuvers: the swirlie. Aside from the usual playground scrapes, combat will sometimes be expanded into more involved sequences. Proper boxing matches will definitely play a part in the saga, and we did witness one sequence that resembled a traditional boss battle.

The game also expands combat in several humorous ways with its selection of weapons. This aspect of the game is sure to raise some eyebrows, lending some credence to the criticisms that Bully does portray youth violence. However, the developers are clearly treading carefully on this territory, and seem conscious of the need to keep the tone of the game more lighthearted and mischievous than the usual Rockstar fare. To that end, most of your arsenal is culled from schooldays past; your most common armament (which is always in your inventory) is a slingshot, the game's primary ranged weapon. You'll also be able to use more strategic items like marbles to trip you enemies, itching powder, stink bombs, snowballs, and banana peels. There are also some more exotic weapons like fireworks and the Nerds' special creation, the spud cannon.

The fighting, while light in tone, can get fairly violent, as you can use found items like garbage can lids and baseball bats. However, Rockstar Vancouver has implemented steps to mitigate the violence to some degree. More damaging weapons like the bats degrade quickly, after three to five hits, preventing you from walking around beating everyone in sight. Also, if the player decides to hit a girl or smaller child, the prefects will quickly swarm and take you down. In this way, Rockstar – usually known for pulling no punches – seems to be trying to create an organic system of consequences, a far cry in tone from the over-the-top world of GTA, a game that Bully has been (somewhat unfairly) lumped in with.

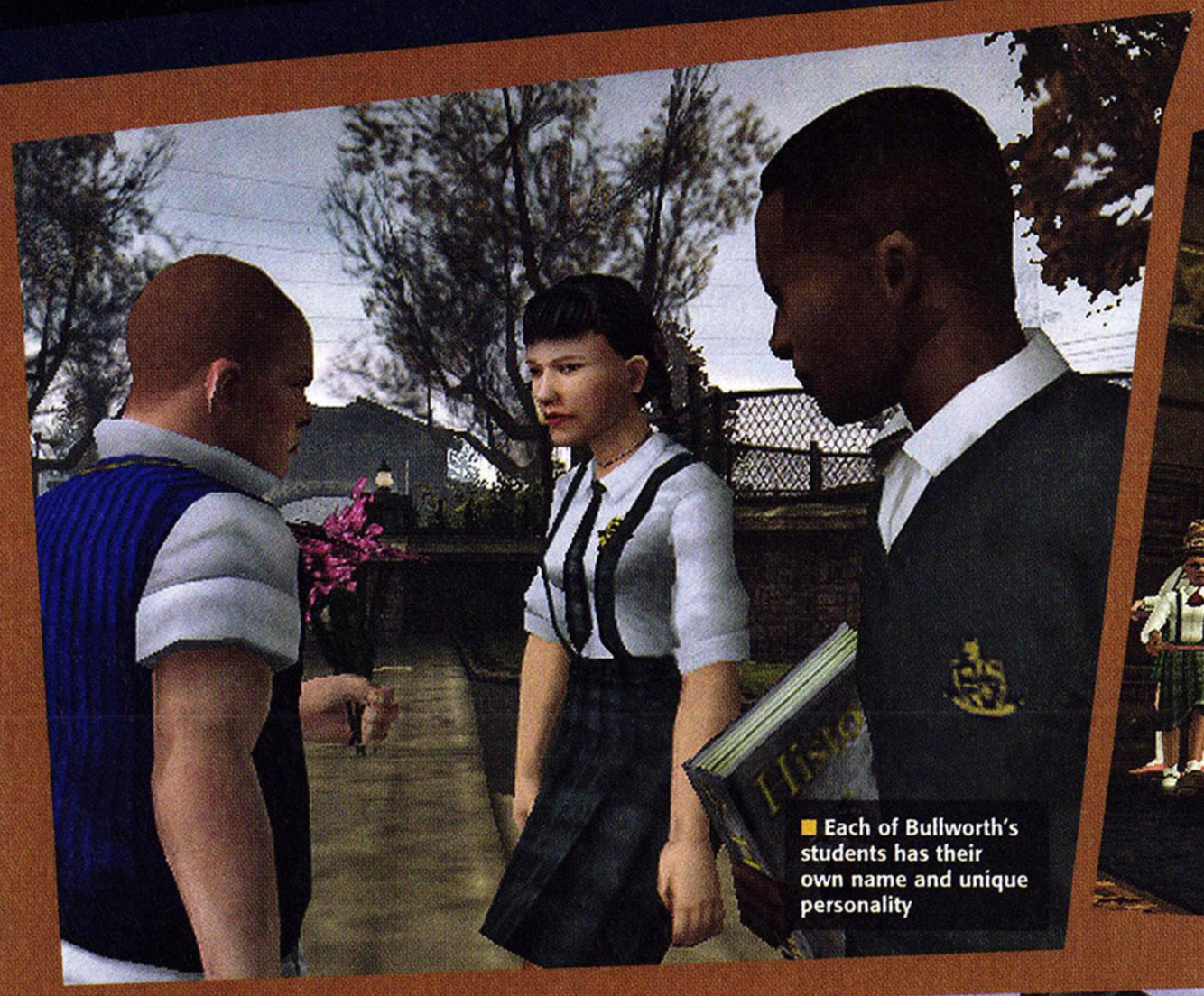
"We're being very careful about [violence], there isn't anything that turns it into a massacre game.... you can't go around hitting everyone in the school," stressed Barrera. "First of all, you'd get busted, and also the weapons break. We want it to be very black and white; you're either a good kid or a bad kid. If you do something bad, you know you're doing something bad and you'll get busted for it. It's our 'cops and robbers.' If you get busted, you'll get sent to the principal, you'll get your stuff taken away, whatever items in your inventory taken away. And, you might have to do a punishment minigame like mowing the lawn or, if it's wintertime, shoveling snow. But, these are things that the player will want to do because they're fun, and we allow the player to do to earn money."

It's equally important to note that that game is not simply about picking fights or stealing a kiss from a pretty girl. We've come to expect a great deal from Rockstar games in terms of variety and depth, and Bully's missions should deliver in that regard.

"Unique gameplay mechanics – definitely – we love to do that sort of stuff," says Barrera. "The more we can get into the game that's unique, the better, so we try to fill it up with that sort of stuff. It's not a beat 'em up game; you're doing unique things in every mission, that's how we approach it."

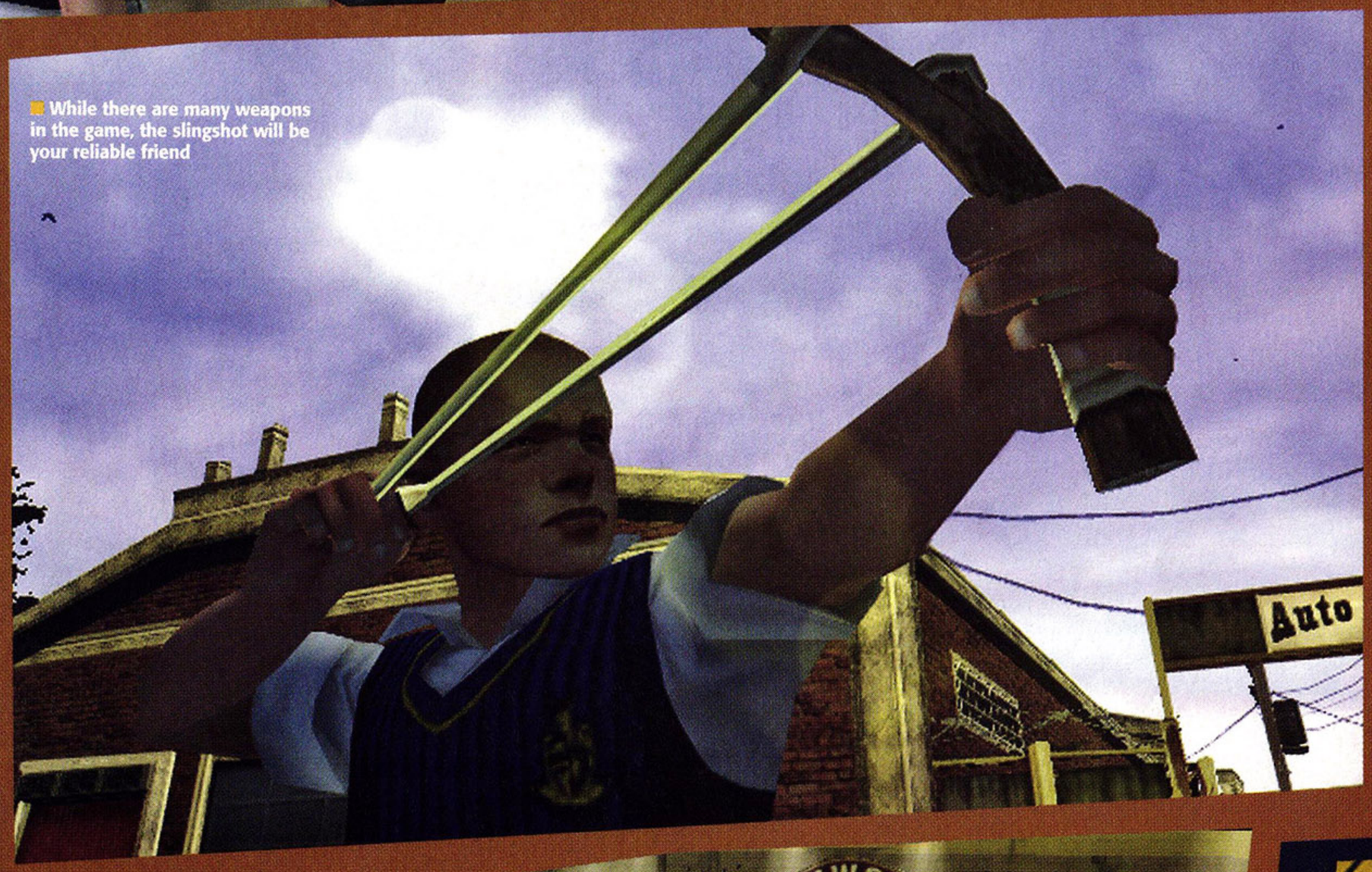
A couple of missions we saw demonstrated both the

continued on page 57



■ Each of Bullworth's students has their own name and unique personality

■ Even in video games, cafeteria food sucks



■ While there are many weapons in the game, the slingshot will be your reliable friend

■ Learning to romance the ladies is key to any boy's education

The game's dodgeball mode is a tribute to the classic NES game Super Dodge Ball

The town and school are littered with bikes you can "borrow"

Jimmy will have to put his fighting skills to the test in the boxing ring

The game runs on an improved version of the Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas engine

You'll find many hidden areas and alternate routes to explore at Bullworth

continued from page 55

variety that is packed into the game, and also Rockstar's sly sense of humor, something often overlooked by its critics. Early on, many of your tasks (which appear on the game's HUD map, which is similar to that found in most all of the company's games) will be simple errands, like retrieving some lost character sheets from the tabletop role-playing game "Grottos & Gremlins" for the Nerds. However, as you begin to wander farther outside of the bounds of Bullworth, the missions become more and more complex. A highlight of our demo included an objective called "Panty Raid" which began as Jimmy was riding around town on his bike. Catching his gym teacher (who claimed to be doing "research" on objectionable material) outside of an adult bookstore, Jimmy is quickly embroiled in a scheme to pick up some forgotten "laundry" for the teacher in the girls' dorm. Of course, the laundry is actually thong underwear, at which point the game switches to a stealth sequence. Here, Jimmy must scale the building's trellis, enter a second floor window and make off with the illicit garments while avoiding both the girls and the prefects (whose cone of vision is displayed on the HUD, as is customary in the stealth genre).

On another mission, this one to save an errant theater geek who was being menaced by some hooligans in a rough part of town, we saw how Rockstar Vancouver is hoping to incorporate some unique set pieces into the usual flow of objectives. After a brief scuffle, it became apparent that, on this occasion, Jimmy and his pals were outnumbered. As we hopped on the pegs of a friend's BMX bike, the perspective switched to that of a first-person track shooting game, as we struggled to slow down our pursuers with a steady hail of slingshot attacks.

In the final analysis, Bully is one of Rockstar's most intriguing moves to date. In both design and subject matter, it's a clear break from both the current marketplace and the company's own recent catalogue. Given just how foreign themes of childhood and school days are in modern video games, Bully's commercial prospects are almost impossible to gauge. That being said, it does display many of the core design principals that guide most of the company's products: a subversive sense of humor, freedom of exploration, and a focus on constant variety of gameplay. Even Barrera expresses concern that Bully might be too different for today's gamer.

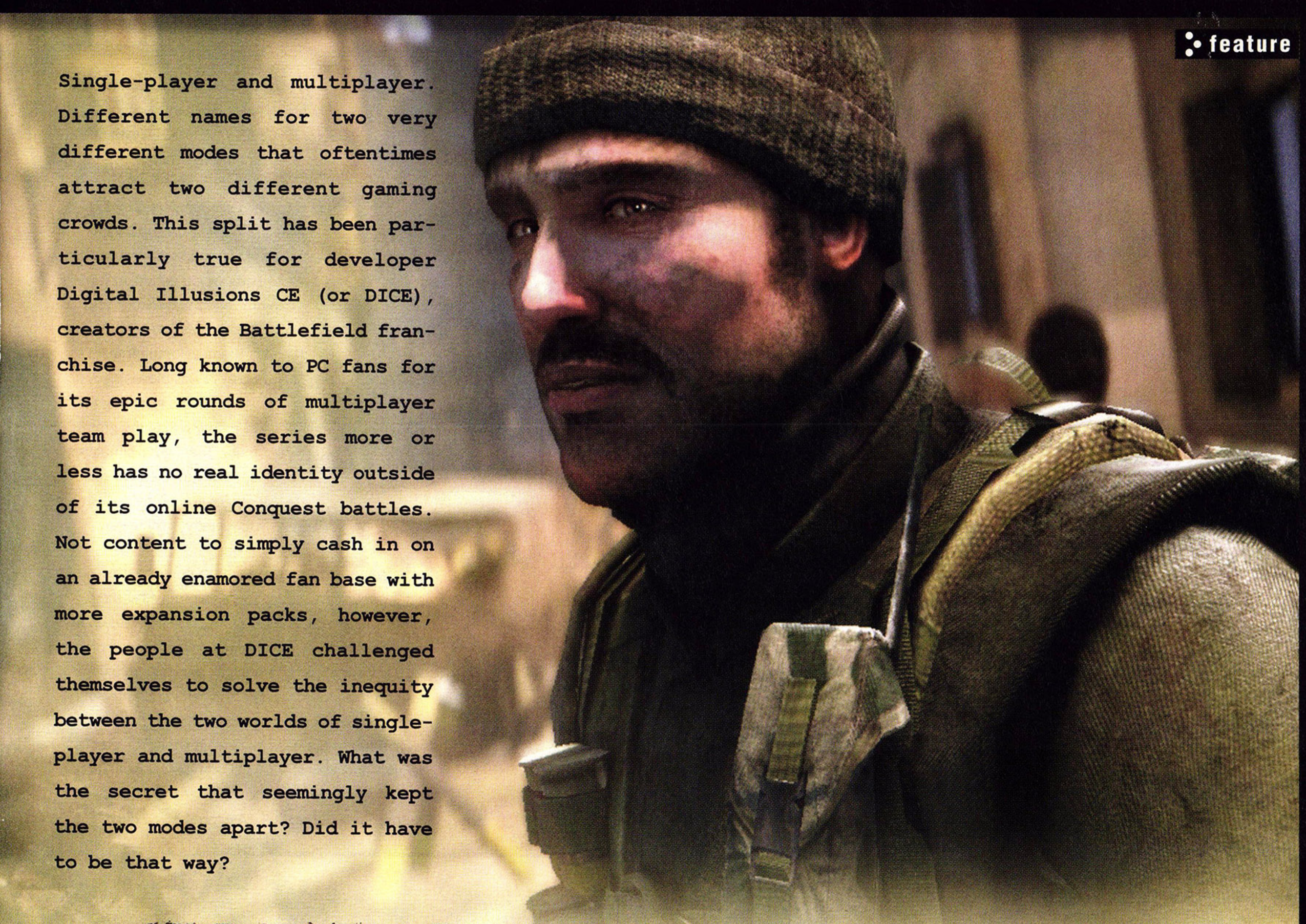
"That's the thing I'm worried about. Is the audience going to understand that?" he comments. "Have we progressed enough as an industry to let us do this stuff?"

The other question that will only be answered after Bully releases is just how it will be received by the crowd of social critics already sharpening their knives in anticipation of decrying the game as an irresponsible tutorial in violence aimed at children. Based on what we've seen, the game is far from the over-the-top, twisted fantasy that its been portrayed as, more similar in tone to the crude-but-sweet teen comedies of the 1980s than a brutal re-enactment of Columbine. And, as Rockstar has stated, Bully contains no death, blood, or bad language in any form. Still, it's likely that given the level of coverage it's already received, certain industry watchdogs will determine it to be over the line. Perhaps this is at least in part due to the fact that, largely, Bully shows children behaving exactly how children often behave in real life. The controversy over the game, and game content in general, often seems to be more about the fact that much of our society isn't comfortable with the artform depicting worlds and stories that closely resemble the one we live in everyday. It seems like no coincidence that ultra-violent, fantasy-based titles like God of War pass largely unnoticed by the mainstream media. In many ways, the struggles that Bully has gone through mirror the growing pains of a medium still trying to find acceptance as a viable venue for original storytelling.

"There are so many other forms of media that have explored the schoolyard as a place where fiction can exist. You name them," observes Donovan. "Go through the whole list of successful books, television, and films that have been set in and around school. It's totally viable subject matter for fiction for anybody – seemingly – apart from the video game business. That doesn't really make any sense to me, except for the fact that I understand that there's a vast proportion of the population that doesn't play video games and aren't comfortable with things that aren't familiar to them." ■■■

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 24-PLAYER VIA PS3 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
> **RELEASE** SPRING 2007



Single-player and multiplayer. Different names for two very different modes that oftentimes attract two different gaming crowds. This split has been particularly true for developer Digital Illusions CE (or DICE), creators of the Battlefield franchise. Long known to PC fans for its epic rounds of multiplayer team play, the series more or less has no real identity outside of its online Conquest battles. Not content to simply cash in on an already enamored fan base with more expansion packs, however, the people at DICE challenged themselves to solve the inequity between the two worlds of single-player and multiplayer. What was the secret that seemingly kept the two modes apart? Did it have to be that way?

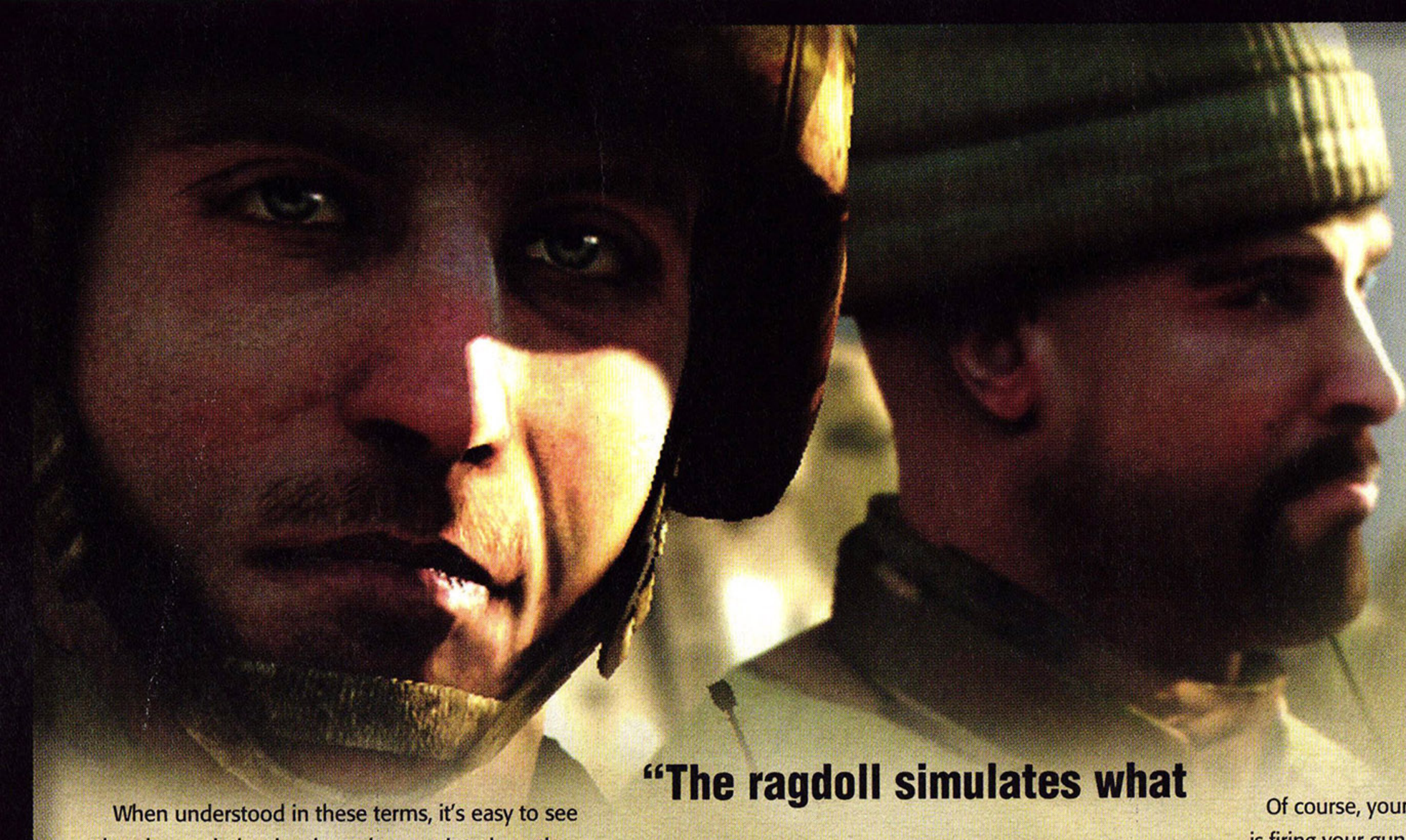
SYMPHONY OF DESTRUCTION

DICE's desire to create a single-player component of Battlefield that is every bit as deep and exciting as its multiplayer is part and parcel of the series' appearance on home consoles, which requires the compelling single-player experience that is so vital to non-PC players. Drawing on its experience with other console titles, as well as on those team members who have made the PC editions of Battlefield as highly regarded as they are, the developer sees an opportunity to create a dynamic console game with the coming of the next generation systems. But if you ask Battlefield: Bad Company's senior producer, Karl Magnus Troedsson, there's more at work here than just the team's ambitions and the appearance of new platforms. "You can't get lazy, because the fans will kill you off. We want to make sure that every time we put something out on the market, we innovate."

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat was the developer's first attempt at crafting an engaging single-player portion. Unfortunately, the game's solo play didn't match the prowess of its online component. The problem was that although it tried to give gamers a taste of its multiplayer fun via a hotswapping feature that let you jump into the body of any soldier on the map, this aping of online spawning totally negated the single-player experience. By being able to be anybody, players had little sense of themselves. In Battlefield: Bad Company, DICE is taking a more traditional route to capture the imagination of those who play the game solo.

Taking place in the near future, the aptly subtitled Bad Company follows the AWOL adventures of four squadmates. Inspired by the more modern and complex portrait of soldiers (with more than a dose of black humor) shown in movies such as *Three Kings*, the game's story disposes with the traditional hero concept. "We wanted to create a story about more ordinary guys who do crazy things," explains Troedsson. "If the war is a wrapper for the entire story, there is an adventure within the war. That is what these guys are experiencing. They are going out on the line and doing something they are not supposed to do. For different reasons in the story they go off on a tangent for their personal ambitions." Although Troedsson was loath to give away too much of the game's plot, it's not surprising that at least one of the motivations that would make trained soldiers disobey orders and embark on an adventure that will take them from Eastern Europe to points all over the globe is money. Well, that's not all there is to our AWOL heroes, but as Troedsson puts it, they are on a "one-way ticket to bad things."

The term "cinematic" has been bandied about for some time now, and is equated with either rich storytelling, lots of cutscenes, or crazy camera angles. But DICE has its own definition of the term and how this serves Bad Company and its audience. Although Troedsson also describes the word in terms of watching a movie, his idea of cinematic in Battlefield is more about how natural it is for you as a viewer to take in what you are seeing, rather than simply how grandiose it is. "You don't really have to think about it, you're just there. You experience it. You feel it."



When understood in these terms, it's easy to see that the work the developer has put into how the game looks greatly influences the impact of the single-player experience, which in this case depends on a certain amount of believability. This is especially important since DICE admits that the 360 version of Modern Combat wasn't nearly good enough for the hardware it was created on. Explaining the philosophy that drives Bad Company, Troedsson says, "The sum of the details makes the greater whole. A lot of games come out and they're like, 'Look at the vegetation renders!' And I'm like, 'Yeah, I see it, but the houses look like crap.' We always want to create the same level of quality over everything."

In footage we saw of the game which was running on the game engine and was not prerendered, minute details such as stitching on a soldier's uniform and the texture it was made out of were evident. This is not just a tech demo, however, as the graphics' applications in gameplay are quickly understood. Take a tank, for example – a pretty important piece of machinery given Battlefield's traditional marriage of vehicles and FPS combat. Your first impression is of fear. "In real life, if you encountered this tank, you'd run like hell," states Troedsson. That's exactly what DICE wants. That's the visual effect. The reason the tank looks as scary as it does is that it has twice the geometrical detail compared to the one from Battlefield 2. Therefore, the practical outcome of the developer's visual work is that any damage it suffers is much more communicable to the player. Since the vehicles are more fully modeled in places – and not just bump-mapped for looks – more stuff gets blown off and exposed as it takes a beating.

Other details are used to flesh out your character and bring him to life. Although it's a first-person shooter and naturally your body isn't visible, that doesn't mean that DICE can't use it to draw the player into the game. Using ragdoll and Havok physics, your character in FPS will have an actual body that is taken into account. So when an explosion blows up next to your guy, his body will be affected accordingly. This includes your head snapping back by the whiplash created on impact if you're blown to the ground, seeing your hands as you get up, or merely having the shockwaves rock your body off course as you keep on running. The development team's favorite activity was blowing guys out of buildings and watching their arms flail before hitting the ground with a thud. "The ragdoll simulates what happens, and then we stick the camera on top of that, which gives you a pretty exciting way to die."

"The ragdoll simulates what happens, and then we stick the camera on top of that, which gives you a pretty exciting way to die."

Of course, your main experience in the game is firing your guns, which has also received some subtle tweaks. If fellow EA game Black from Criterion attempted to bring guns alive through sound, then DICE is trying to do it through its own little details. A random movement variable has been added to your aiming axis to create more non-repetitive fire, and you'll notice more head sway from your character as he aims and strafes. DICE's FPS body representation also plays a part here. Since an animation system is imposed on your ragdoll even though you don't see

■ It won't be lost on players that there appears to be two additional slots on this vehicle for friends: One up top for a gunner and one in back for a passenger

it, actions like running and strafing won't just feel like you're skating on ice. Furthermore, your aim will be affected by how a gun's recoil acts on your shoulder. Following actual marksmen principles, your first shot in burst fire will be the most accurate. As you fire more bullets, the character will actually lean his body into the rifle butt to adjust to the recoil, and then move forward slightly when you stop firing and the recoil ends. So in gameplay terms, instead of your reticle moving constantly upward as you fire like in most games, your aim will go away from you but return as the player's body adapts to the recoil. Your aim will also be affected if you concentrate on it using a skill called Ironsight. Here the game's use of an out-of-focus filter for background objects will gradually shroud your peripheral vision as you concentrate on your target. It's the same effect you get in real life when you stare at an object long enough and everything around it slowly blurs.

It's hard not to see the work that DICE is putting into the graphical aspects of Bad Company as realistic but perhaps too subtle. We asked Troedsson about this and whether it was worth the effort. He understood our concerns but replied, "The sum of all the details makes up for the greater whole of the quality experience. We can't ship a next-gen game without having perfect execution on the things we want to have. Well, you can of course, but you're gonna get shot down for it. Even though there are small details that won't show up immediately, people will feel like it's a good experience, where it just feels like a great game. Then hopefully, hardcore gamers will pick up on the little things and use it to their advantage."

Investment in graphics and physics is something that equally benefits both multiplayer and single-player, but it doesn't necessarily elevate playing by yourself to the heights that the series is known for on the multiplayer front. In order to do this DICE had to literally break down a wall between the two modes, one that existed because the imagination and strategy inherently used in online wasn't replicated by single-player. So what the developer did was reaffirm what it thought made the multiplayer great and make sure the concepts were attainable in single-player. Troedsson puts the success of the franchise down to its sandbox nature, where people are thrown in a location, given a bunch of weapons and vehicles, and told to go at it. In order to help spur creativity in the single-player experience – as

DICE wants to make sure that each aspect of the character is accurately conveyed to the player, whether that's how they reload a gun to how their body moves – even though this is an FPS

well as create a host of new options within the multiplayer world – DICE added destructible environments to give players more freedom to feel like the game's world was there for the exploiting.

Troedsson showed us a mockup level that perfectly illustrated how destructible environments will help bring both modes together. After coming across a tank in a courtyard on a routine patrol, your squad scrambles and takes cover. At this moment you are appraised of your obvious mission objective – destroy the tank. This could be done in different ways. You could search around and find a vehicle to combat it with. You could get in real close and strap some C4 to its body. Or you could try and search around for an anti-tank rocket or something. "How you choose to take out that tank is up to you," Troedsson informs us. "That makes level designing a nightmare, but it's an interesting challenge." While you are figuring out what to do, the tank will track your movements, firing at you and destroying whatever it can to get to you.

Our first inclination of how to handle the above scenario was to get a rocket launcher, find some high cover in a building and take the tank down. But when it was alerted to our prime sniper position on the second floor, the tank simply blew out a huge hole in the side of the building, damaging us with shrapnel and debris. Sensing that we suddenly weren't as safe as we once thought we were, we proceeded to run from room to room as the tank chased us with more shells. Once down on the street, we weren't necessarily any safer. The corners of buildings can also be taken out, creating a situation where you will have to be highly mobile and willing to adapt your strategy to the constantly changing degrees of cover and whatever the game throws at you – just like a frantic multiplayer game.

Using the environment to your advantage naturally also comes into play when you go on the offensive. You could crash a roadside building or tree in order to create a roadblock or bring it down on a passing convoy. Similarly, some well-placed C4 can be detonated when an enemy passes too close. Other opportunities can be created, such as blowing out the sides of a building to fashion your own custom sniper's nest with the perfect vantage point. Above all, DICE does not want to restrict or funnel players into specific decisions or choke points, something that doesn't bind multiplayer. Knowing that freedom is exactly what makes that mode of Battlefield the most popular, Troedsson acknowledges that "their imagination is what creates [its] emergent gameplay moments. It's not a tunnel game. This is Battlefield. It's not a simulation, it's about making war more fun."

Despite its focus on single-player, naturally

■ Whether you're going after a sniper or creating a nest of your own, Battlefield's destructible environments can fit your strategy

■ Even with the high level of interaction of the environments, DICE says that the maps will remain roughly the same size as in previous Battlefields

the developer has not neglected its bread and butter. Apart from the obvious impact (pun intended) destructible environments will have on multiplayer, DICE isn't revealing much about this portion of the title. The game will support 24-player online play, and although they are more interactive than ever before, Bad Company's map sizes will be the same as previous titles. "Battlefield has always been about multiplayer," Troedsson assured us. "To be very blunt, we invented the vehicular first-person genre as it is. Other people are trying to get a piece of the pie, but we still feel we have a good grip on what we're doing. And we take that very, very seriously. Multiplayer is at the heart of what we do. We would never ship a game without a strong multiplayer component."

Bad Company features new as well as re-organized character classes. DICE says it is amalgamating some of the classes so they are "boiled down," as well as creating new loadouts of weapons and equipment. Always mindful of what its dedicated fan base is saying, balancing these changes (including the new weapons and vehicles that Bad Company will introduce) is at the forefront of the developer's minds right now as the mode is put together. Troedsson admitted that the company has made balancing mistakes in the past, pointing out that some loadouts in Battlefield Vietnam which were too powerful. DICE is also planning more gadgets with specific gameplay functions such as BF 2's defibrillator. Troedsson promises us that the developer will deliver "day-one" downloadable content (both for free and at cost), as well as a commitment to more. "Anybody who purchases Battlefield: Bad Company is going to feel like there's more things to come down the line continuously."

The fact that Battlefield is known as a franchise that succeeds because of its multiplayer is entirely the result of DICE's dedication to the series and its fan base, but no longer will that be confined to that mode alone. After all, the developer has discovered that there's no reason it has to be. When we first met Troedsson, he started out with the rhetorical question: "What is Battlefield actually?" The answer to that question is not exclusive to one particular mode over another, and it's something that neither DICE nor Battlefield: Bad Company loses sight of. ■■■

"How you choose to take out that tank is up to you..."

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

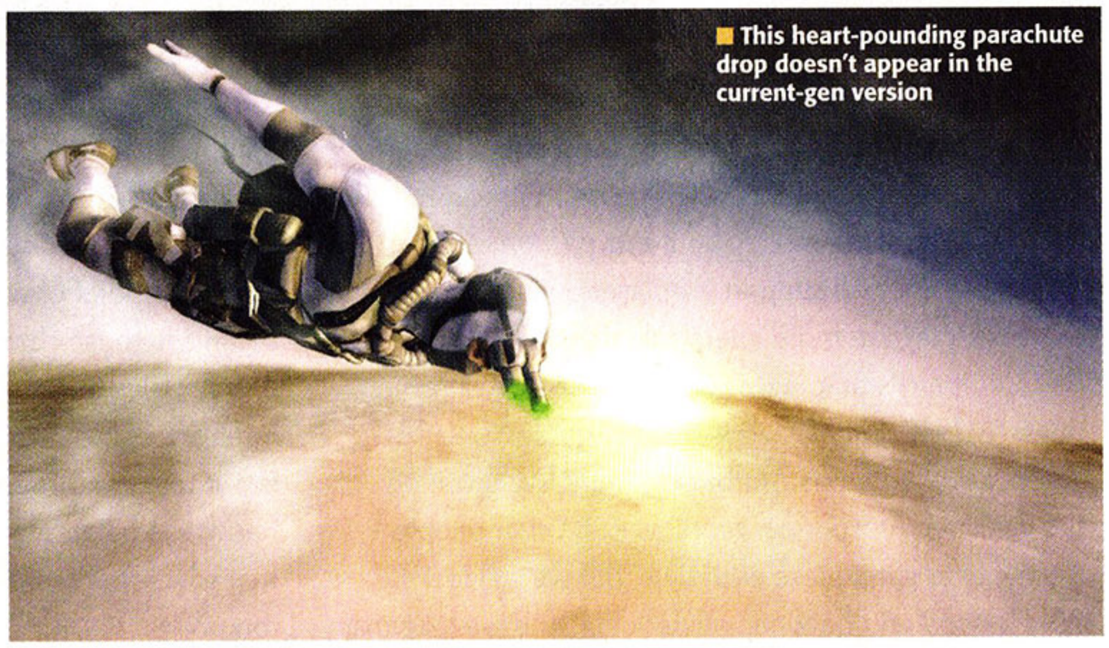
Splinter Cell: Double Agent

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, PS2 ONLINE, OR PC INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER UBISOFT SHANGHAI (XBOX 360), UBISOFT MONTREAL (PS2, XBOX, GC, PC) **> RELEASE** OCTOBER

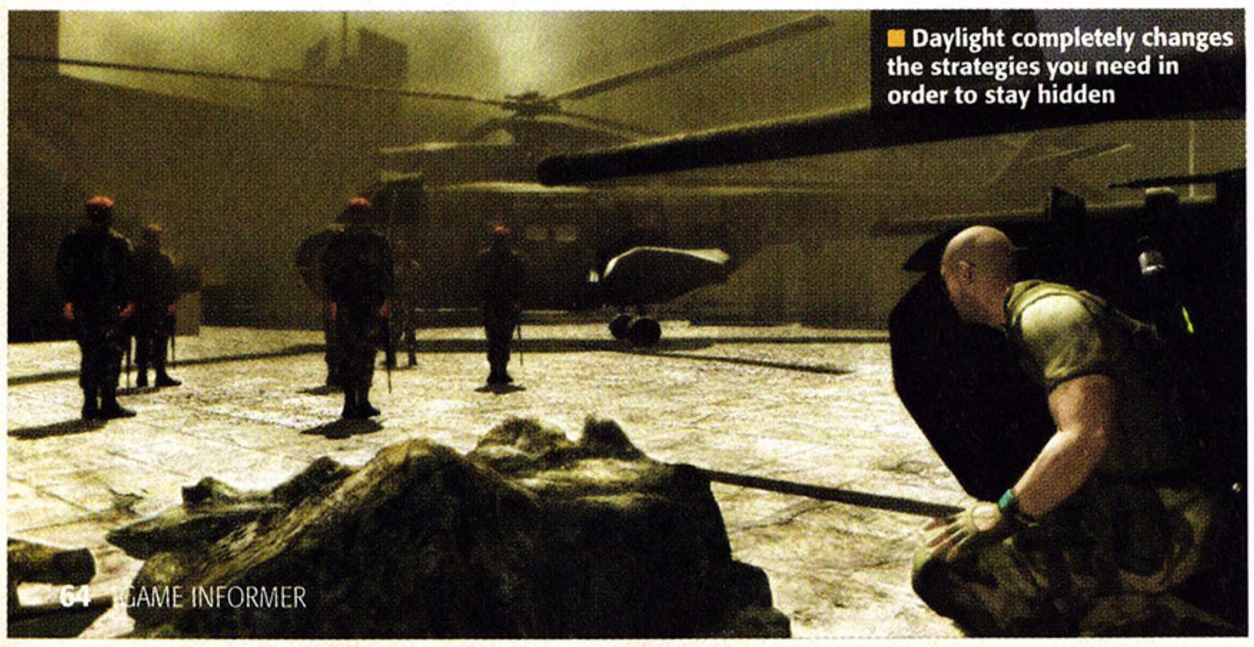
MISSION BRIEFING

Ever since it was unveiled on our cover in January, Splinter Cell fans have been waiting for more answers about what Sam Fisher's latest adventure has in store for the gruff secret agent. The world has known for some time now that Double Agent would be a departure for the series in many ways, as it has Sam go undercover in an enemy organization for the first time. We had a chance to check out some of these changes first hand, as we spent some serious time playing around with the current-gen version of the game. And, for good measure, we explored the Xbox 360 version as well.

The two versions of the game both have some surprises in store for fans. While they feature the same story line, areas, and characters, the level design is different, as are some gameplay elements. While the current-gen version features a tweaked and simplified HUD, the 360 version does away with almost all on-screen indicators. Instead of the familiar action box of the previous games, interactive items in the next-gen build display a small icon demonstrating the executable action when the player approaches. For example, in the level we played, a small arrow appeared when we approached the back of a truck, indicating that we could crawl underneath and hitch a ride.



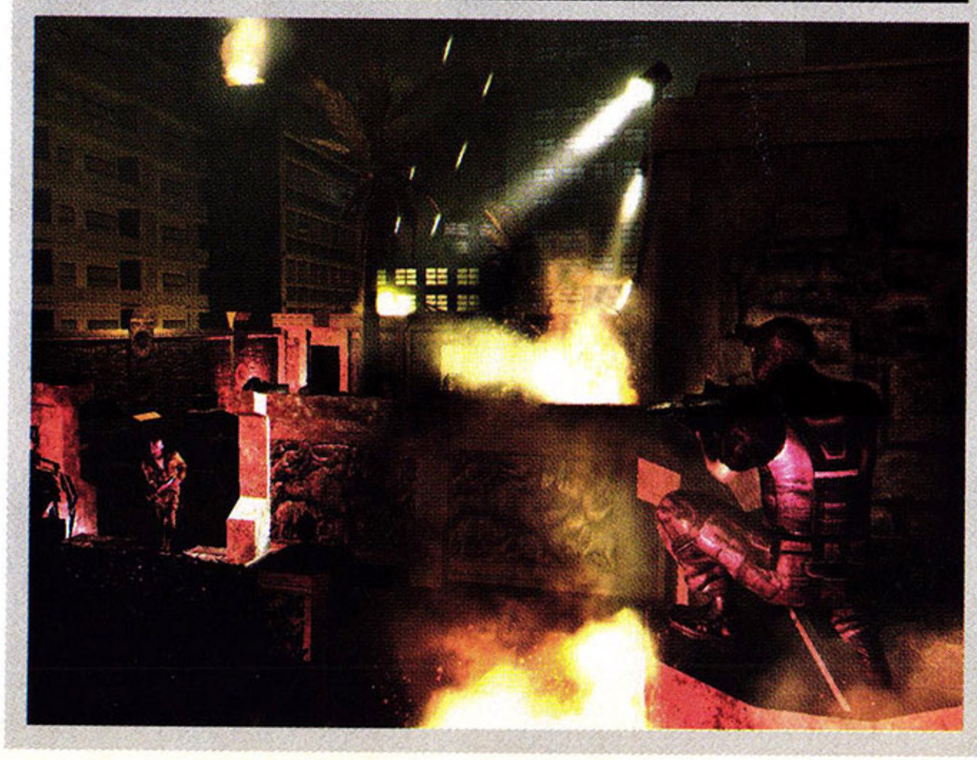
■ This heart-pounding parachute drop doesn't appear in the current-gen version

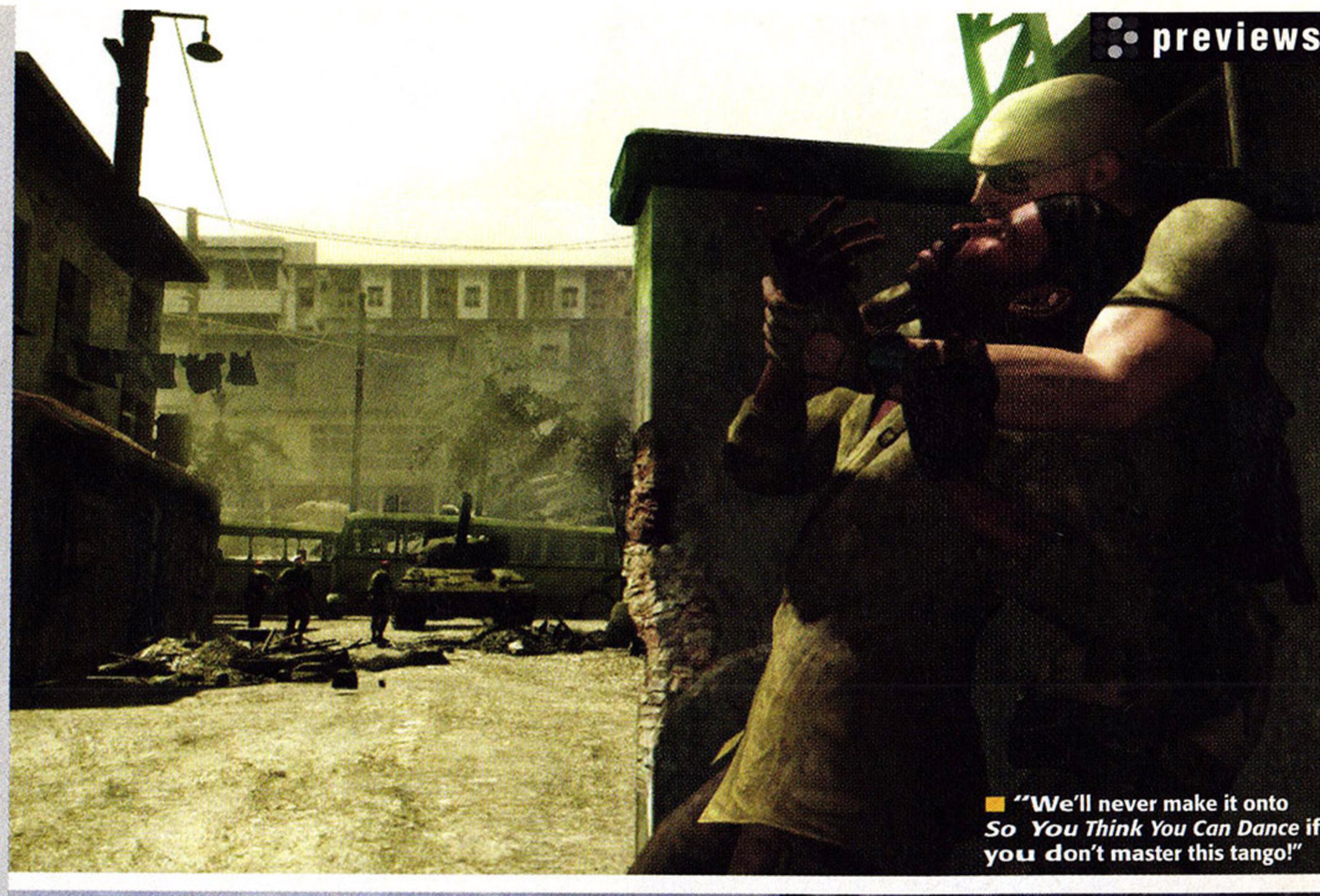


■ Daylight completely changes the strategies you need in order to stay hidden

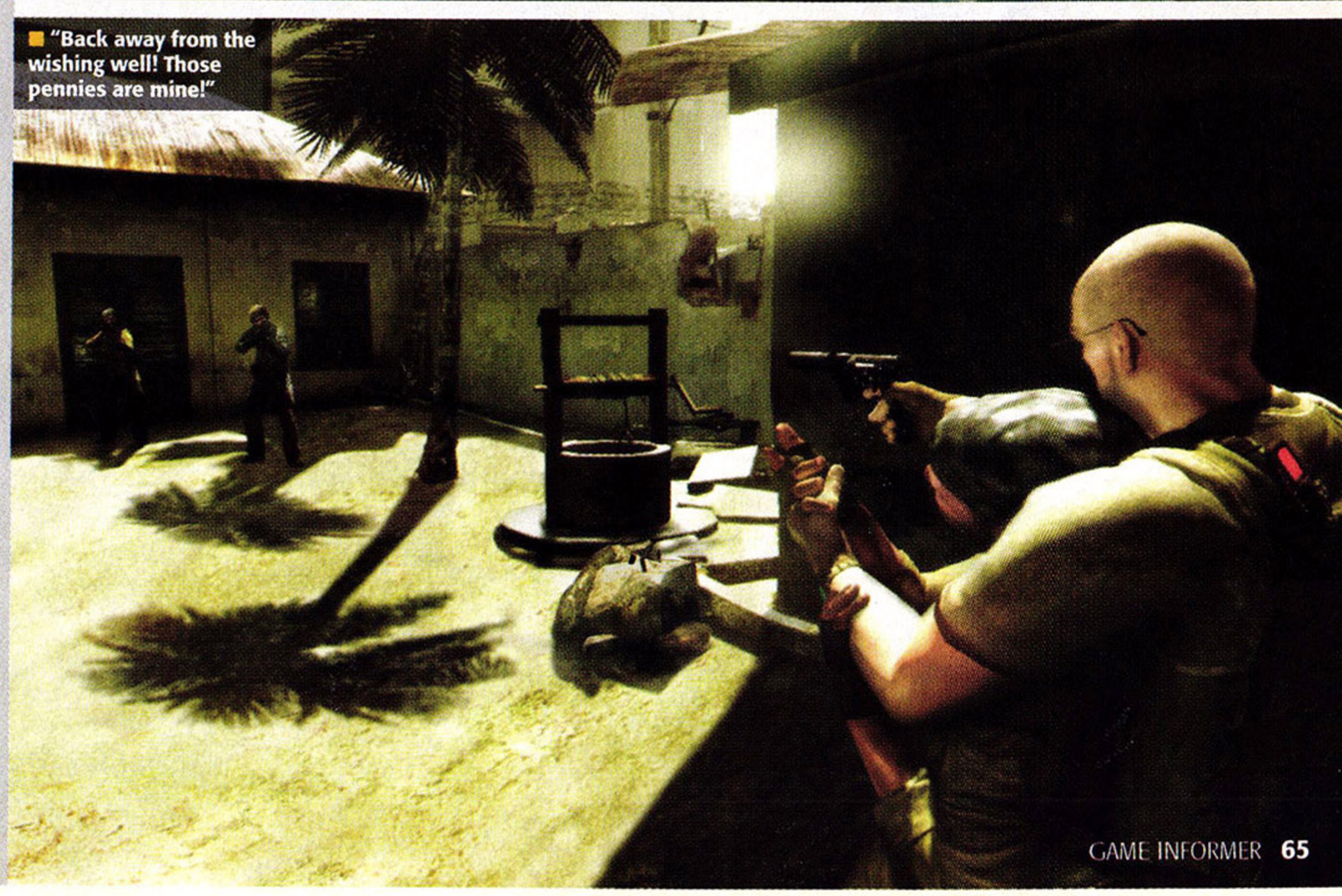
At this point, the current-gen version feels more familiar, as it sticks with traditional Splinter Cell presentation and even incorporates elements of Chaos Theory's co-op into the campaign (this feature will also appear in the 360 version, but wasn't present in our demo). Double Agent opens with a level in Iceland in which Sam is accompanied by another Splinter Cell, and the game offers optional training videos on how to work with your partner, as well as all its other game systems. Little additions like these training videos do a lot to make Double Agent more accessible to new players, as do small touches like Sam turning his head to look at walls where his trademark split jump is possible. These tweaks likely won't disturb fans – there are far bigger changes in store with Double Agent. Once Sam infiltrates the JBA (the terrorist organization at the heart of the story), he'll constantly have to make choices that affect a trust meter that slides back and forth between the JBA and NSA. Objectives in the missions can move the meter towards one side or the other, and you're in trouble if you don't strike a balance between the two. For example, in the prison break level, finding a hidden disc on your new JBA member friend Jamie earns you points with the NSA, and planting a fake record of your death in the prison computer gets you trust from the JBA. But what do you do when you encounter a man who Jamie wants dead and the NSA needs alive? Choices like this will follow you all through Double Agent, and you must choose wisely. All it takes is one mistake in the world of espionage to end up on the wrong side of a gun. ■ ■ ■

CURRENT-GEN





"We'll never make it onto *So You Think You Can Dance* if you don't master this tango!"



"Back away from the wishing well! Those pennies are mine!"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

God of War II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAIMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** SCEA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY

NEXT-GEN, SCHMEXT-GEN

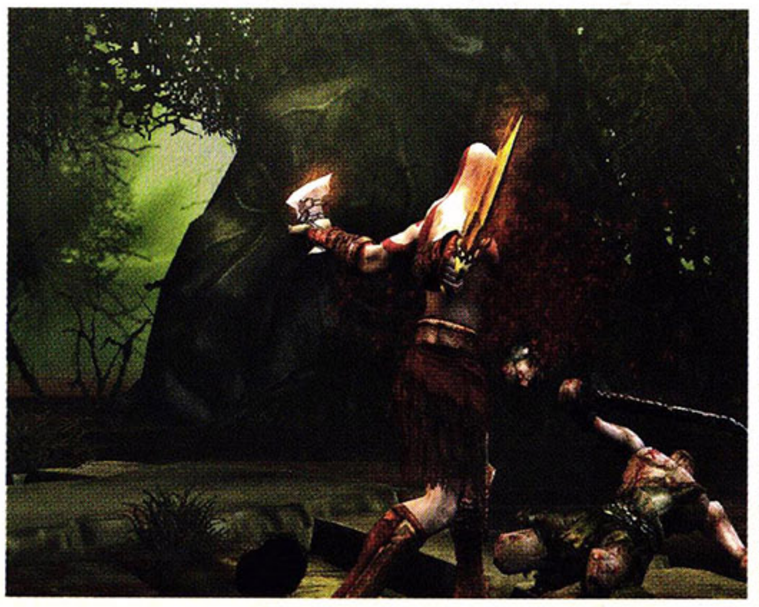
For gamers who aren't Swiss banks, it can be frustrating to hear about all the amazing upcoming next-gen consoles and games while this generation's hardware seems all but abandoned. But despair not, for the mighty Kratos is a loving god ("loving" means remorseless and savage, right?). He will bestow upon you one more PS2 adventure before the current-gen's end of times, and lo, it will not contain spinning blades of Hades.

Those rotating pillars of death may be the biggest complaint anyone can lodge against the first God of War, and the team at Sony's Santa Monica studio is taking them out and adding something that gamers actually want: boss fights. The screens on these pages depict Kratos fighting the Barbarian King, finally revealing one of the titanic boss battles in store for God of War II. Astute players will recognize that the Barbarian King is not an all-new character; he had a brief appearance in the first game in the cinematic where Kratos, in desperation, called out to Ares to lend him aid. Things did not end well for the Barbarian King in that battle, and now he has returned (on horseback!) to challenge the new god of war.

Of course, he wouldn't be much of a king without loyal followers. As Kratos uses his magical wind attack to keep the mounted monarch at bay, legions of the king's minions will spawn and attack Kratos from all angles. By mutilating and dispatching these warriors, Kratos sets their souls free only to be absorbed by their leader and make him grow to towering heights. On-foot, Kratos' blades meet the Barbarian King's hammer in an exchange of blows that culminates in an interactive button-pressing cinematic that kills the Barbarian King for the final time.

In addition to monumental conflicts like this, God of War II will also have monsters that function like mini-bosses. For instance, in the E3 build of the game we encountered a huge stone minotaur that blocked our path. Though big and powerful, he was also rooted in one place for the battle, which made him easy to defeat. However, later in the game you'll run into mobile versions of the hulking beast – and maybe even more than one at a time.

With so many great games coming up this holiday season, it may be difficult to look as far ahead as February. Still, in a month traditionally peppered with hearts and roses, God of War II could give gamers a brand new reason to see lots and lots of red. ■■■



■ "Stupid bug! You go squish now!"

■ After absorbing the souls of his minions, the Barbarian king grows to immense proportions

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Call of Duty 3

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (PS3, XBOX 360), 1-PLAYER ACTION (WII, PS2, XBOX) (UP TO 24-PLAYER VIA PS3 ONLINE OR XBOX 360 LIVE, OR UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA WII ONLINE, PS2 ONLINE, OR XBOX LIVE)
> PUBLISHER ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** TREYARCH **> RELEASE** FALL

■ Treyarch is aiming to make this the most intense Call of Duty ever

KICKING HITLER IN THE JIMMY

It may seem strange to some that Call of Duty creator Infinity Ward isn't making Call of Duty 3. Activision has handed custody of the project to internal development squad Treyarch, with Infinity Ward nowhere to be found. However, as we saw with Treyarch's last game, Call of Duty 2: Big Red One, the studio is a more than capable caretaker of the biggest war franchise of the day. And it has big plans for this sequel – even on the current-gen platforms.

■ No place, no matter how holy, was sacred in the last world war

Aside from the normal sequel progression of "bigger, better, more intense," CoD 3 will add some promising new features to the series' trademark cinematic action. First and foremost, making much of the gameworld destructible will change the way you approach objectives. Hiding behind a barrel isn't such a good idea when a single burst from a submachine gun will rip it to shreds, and the possibilities of grenades in such a setting are nearly limitless. As Activision executive producer Marcus Iremonger put it when we spoke to him about the game, "It changes the way you use your ammunition. Now, sometimes aiming at cover will be a good thing."

Going hand in hand with the environmental destruction is CoD 3's enhanced AI. Both friendly and enemy NPCs are aware of the state of the battlefield, particularly in terms of cover. They'll abandon damaged positions as well as attempt to compromise your own through tactics like suppression and flanking maneuvers or blowing apart your own ad hoc fortifications. Activision is promising that players will see, overall, much more unit cohesion and tactical thinking out of the AI in this title.

A ton of effort is going into the multiplayer side of the game as well. While the Call of Duty franchise has long offered solid and thrilling online play, it has always lagged behind its competitors in terms of innovations. CoD 3 is changing that with the addition of soldier classes (medic, sniper, etc) and extensive stat-tracking, not to mention a 24-player cap on the next-gen systems. Vehicles will play a large part in online play as well, but CoD 3's biggest advantage might be something a little more nebulous. "I think, very simply, it's Call of Duty 3," explains Iremonger. "We're really carrying the intensity from the single-player to the multiplayer." It may sound trite, but anyone with experience in the genre can tell you that there's a world of difference between shooting some Nazis and being in combat on a huge, chaotic battlefield.

Though several questions were raised in our minds by the change in development teams, it would seem that Treyarch truly is making the best Call of Duty 3 in its power. And after hearing firsthand the passion of the team behind it and the ideas they have for the gameplay, we're a lot less concerned with who is making it and more interested in when we'll be able to play it. ■ ■ ■

■ Even running at "only" 720p resolution, the PS3 can render some gorgeous images

As in real combat, using tanks as mobile cover is a good way to improve your chances

THE LITTLE GUY

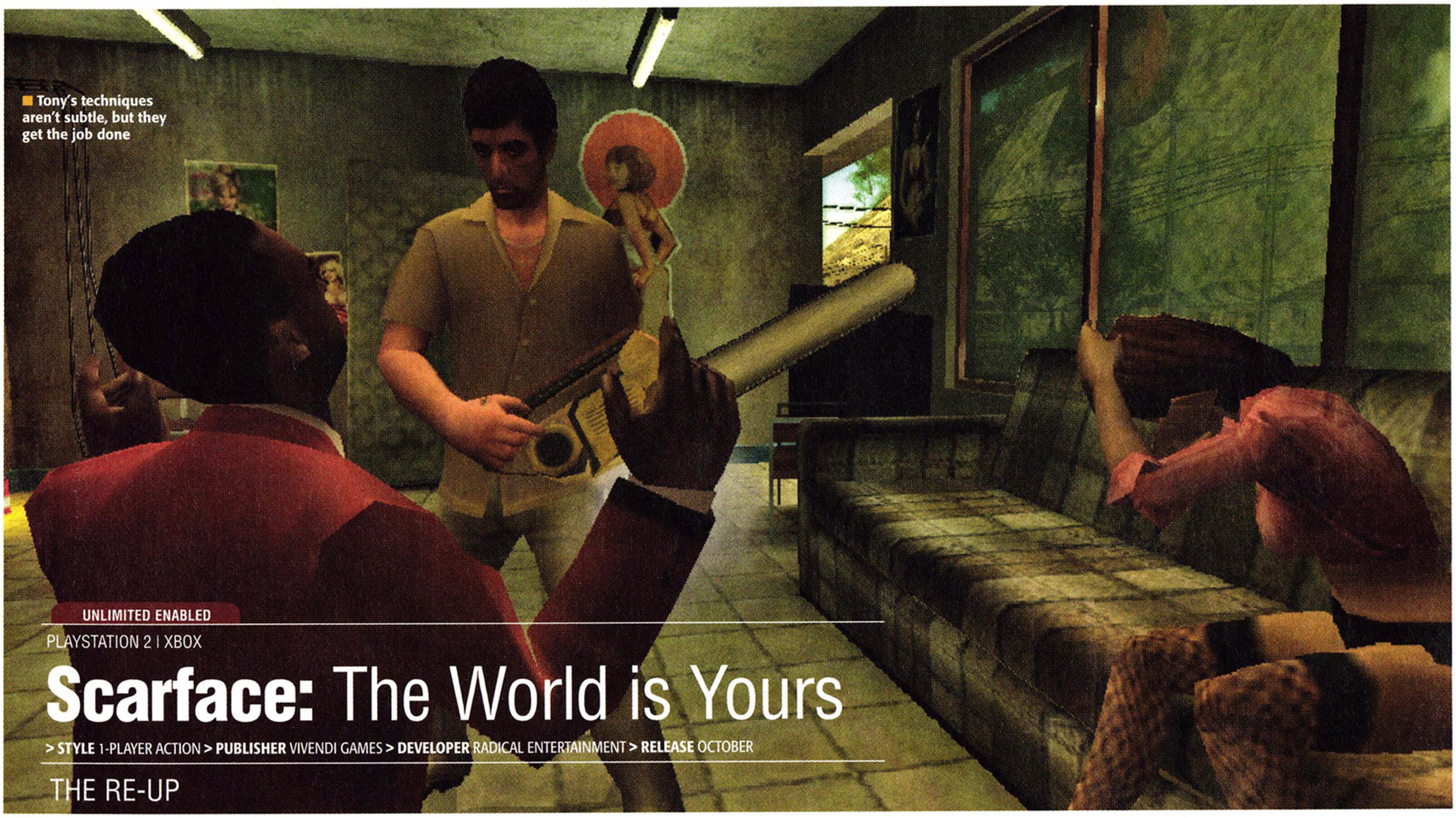
So with all this talk about how awesome more next-gen Call of Duty is going to be, what about the versions of the game coming out on PS2, Xbox, and the Wii? We asked, and Iremonger repeatedly insisted that, "They're the same game. You're not seeing any different games on current-gen compared with next-gen." Outside of the obvious differences in graphics,Treyarch is doing everything possible to fit all of the gameplay into the current-gen consoles and the Wii without making any compromises that cripple the developer's ideas. We can't help but be skeptical about the eventual outcome, especially in terms of fancy new features like enhanced AI and the destructible environments, but hopefully Treyarch knows what it's doing.

As for the Wii and its remote, it sounds as though CoD 3 will have a similar control scheme to what was shown for Red Steel at E3 – the player's arm will float around the screen somewhat, rather than being locked to the center of the screen. Also, the Wii-mote will be used in intuitive fashion for things like driving or melee combat. Since the system doesn't have nearly the horsepower of the 360 or PS3, you can expect much less eye candy, but that's inevitable.

The Wii version may not look as impressive, but hopefully the unique control will make it fun anyway

Can you spot the difference in quality between this 360 shot and the PS3 screens? We sure can't

As always, this sequel will push up the number of bodies on screen



■ Tony's techniques aren't subtle, but they get the job done

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Scarface: The World is Yours

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** VIVENDI GAMES **> DEVELOPER** RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** OCTOBER

THE RE-UP

After all the delays and problems that have plagued its development, Vivendi's much-anticipated Scarface game is finally on track to be released this October. Recently, the company paid a visit to the Game Informer offices and let us get some playtime with a highly polished version of the game.

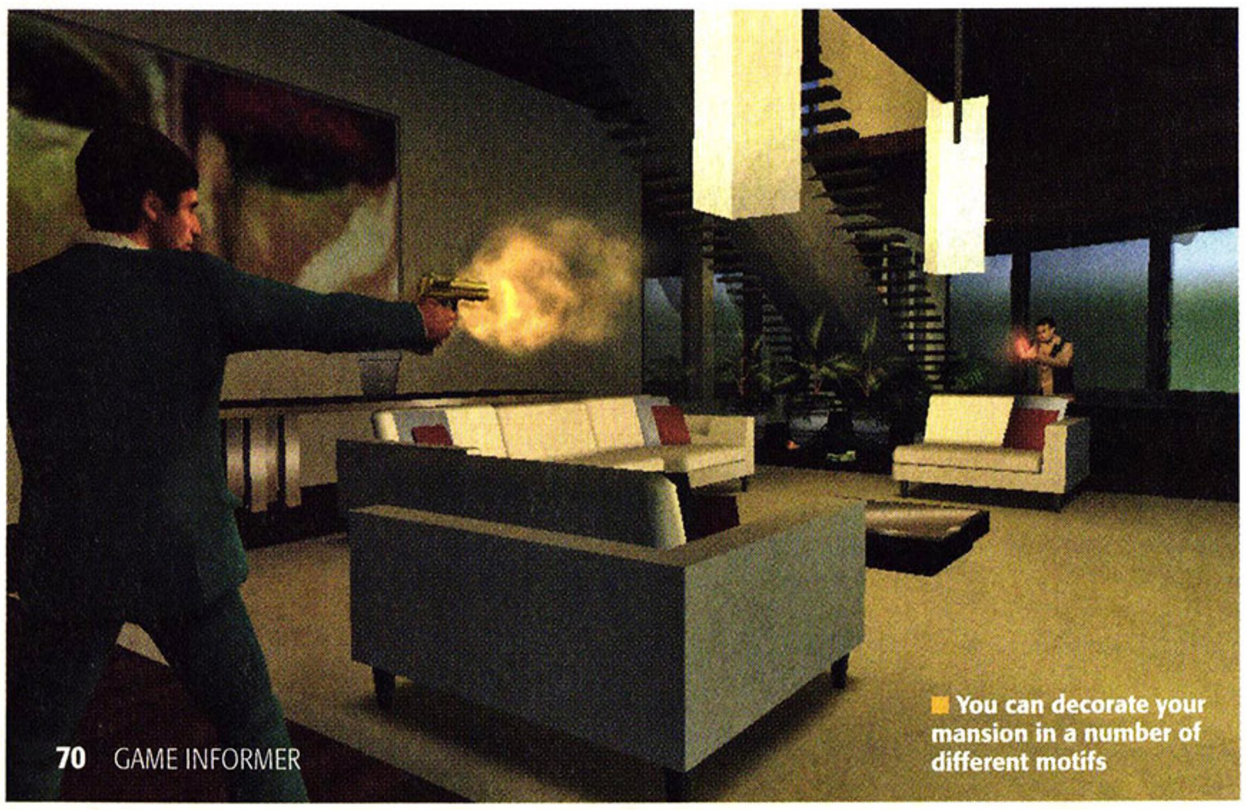
While questions regarding any open-world game of this scale won't be answered until we have a chance to dig in with a review build, based on what we saw, this game is on track to become one of the surprise hits of the year. At the very least, it looks to be an enjoyable Scarface saga that has made tremendous progress in the last year.

Producer Pete Wanat told us that the team had really focused on getting the core gameplay correct, and this care and attention appears to be paying off. The game's driving engine is rock solid, allowing for over-the-top chase scenes and even some fairly elaborate gunplay while behind the wheel. The basic shooting mechanics have been improved immensely as well, with a very quick turning rate and accurate targeting thanks to the FPS-style control scheme (which is also used to good effect in Saint's Row). Targeting can be performed either by a shoulder button lock-on or by regular aiming, which builds your Balls meter more quickly. In an interesting move, the game's "Blind Rage" mode (which is triggered by pressing the circle button when you have filled your Balls meter) actually switches the viewpoint to first-person, allowing you to quickly gun through all enemies in your path. Because you are invincible when in Blind Rage, it becomes a useful strategic tool, as using it judiciously can allow you to get through hard parts of the game unscathed.

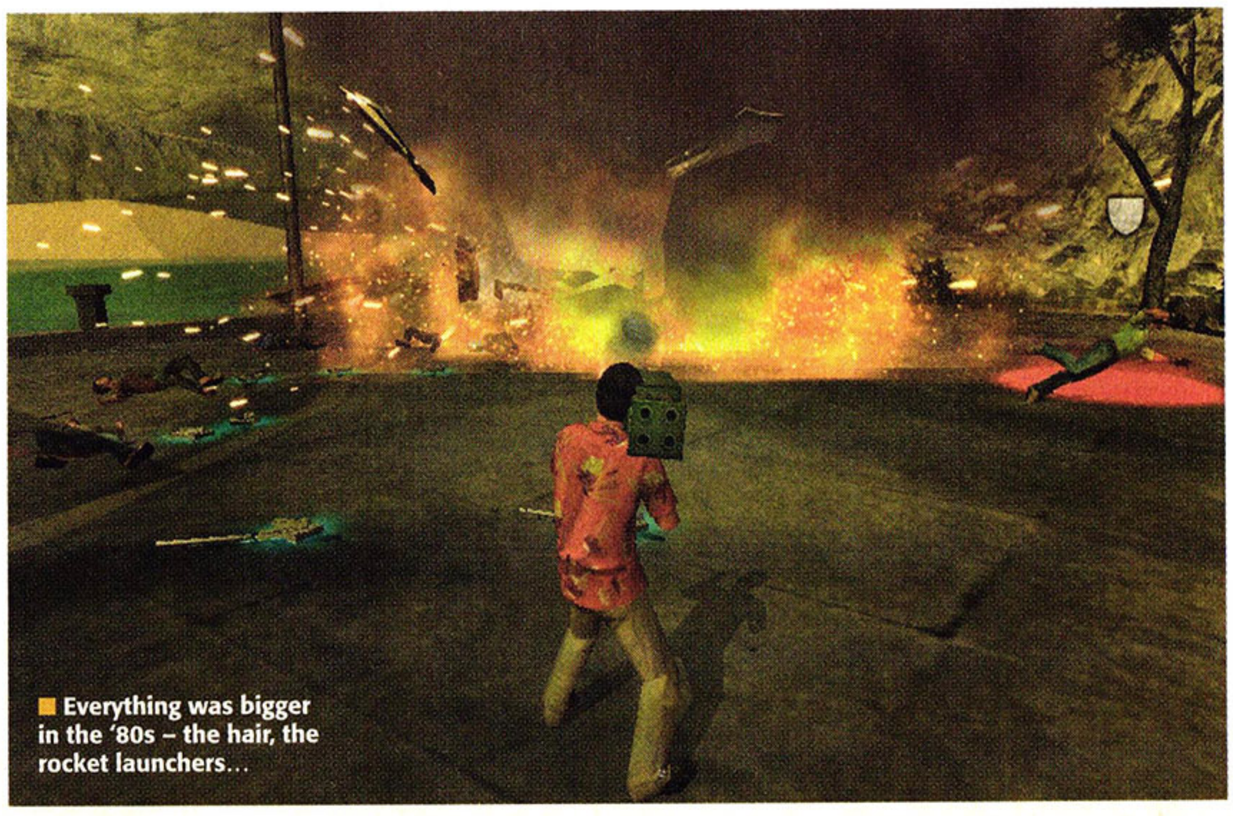
Another area in which Scarface is seeking to expand beyond the current conventions of the GTA genre is the way that it gives you the feeling of being a kingpin. As you rebuild Tony Montana's empire from the ground up, you'll be able to draw on a number of resources, henchmen, and abilities that make your experience much easier. For example, once you've hired a driver and arms dealer, you can call for a car anywhere via your (very old school) satellite phone and have one instantly appear, saving you the trouble of jacking a hoopty. Also, your trunk will have a full arsenal of weapons, allowing you to reload for war on the fly. In addition, as a kingpin, you can save valuable drive time by calling on a limo or water plane, which can instantly transport you around the world.

This idea of empire also plays out in the form of managing resources and locations. Once you buy or take over drug fronts, you'll have to assign security systems and henchmen to guard them from rival dealers. Since everything costs you money, you'll want to give the locations that get the best rates on product the most security dollars. Of course, dirty money leaves a trail, so you have to go to banks to launder your cash, performing a quick "golf-swing" type minigame to determine how much the bank takes as its cut. These minigames also pop up when you are given the chance to do small, street-level drug deals (mess up the minigame and the guns come out) or talk your way out of trouble with the police. As you grow your fortune, you'll see the results of your work in your mansion, which can be outfitted with furniture, collectibles, and design motifs.

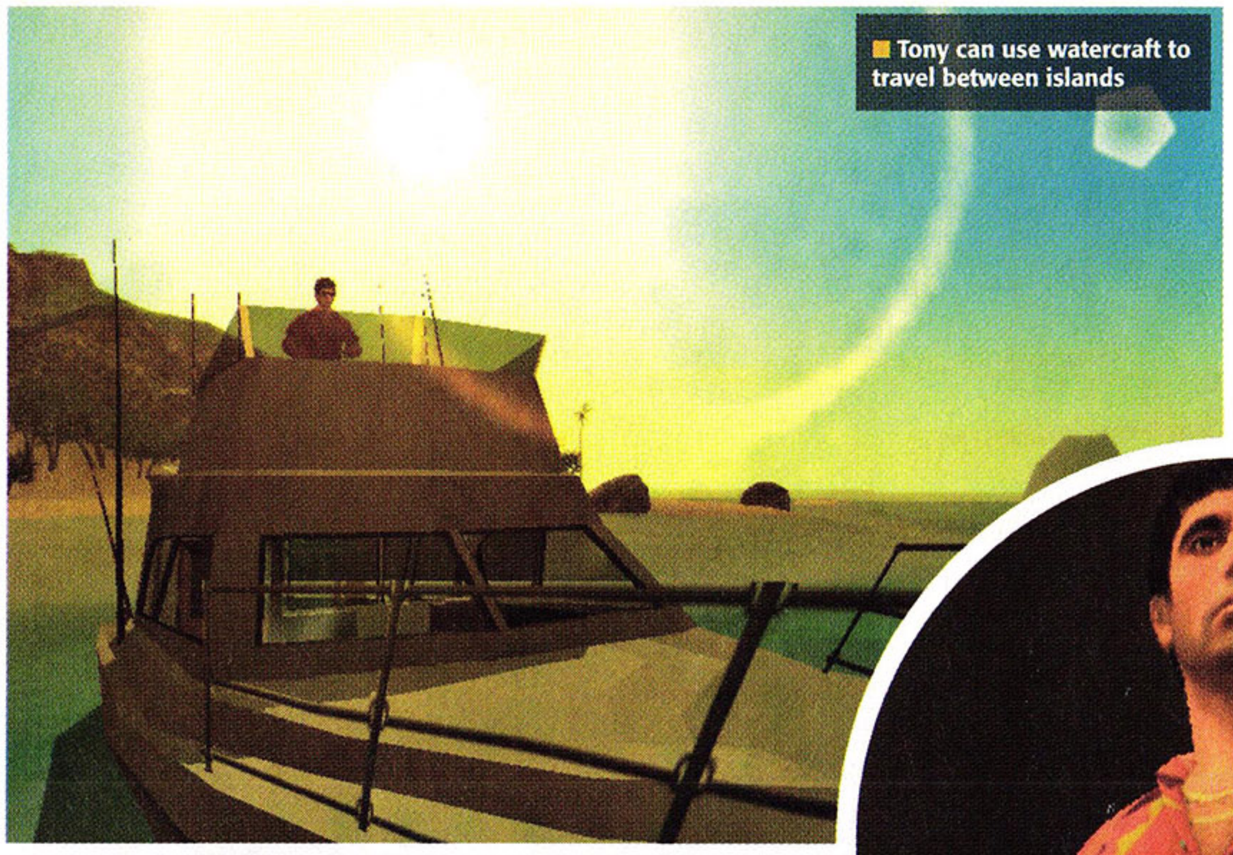
All these details, along with the tight gameplay, seem to be fleshing out Scarface into something more than just another GTA clone with a dirty mouth. If the final touches of polish can be added in time, this might be another bright spot for an increasingly moribund current-gen landscape. ■ ■ ■



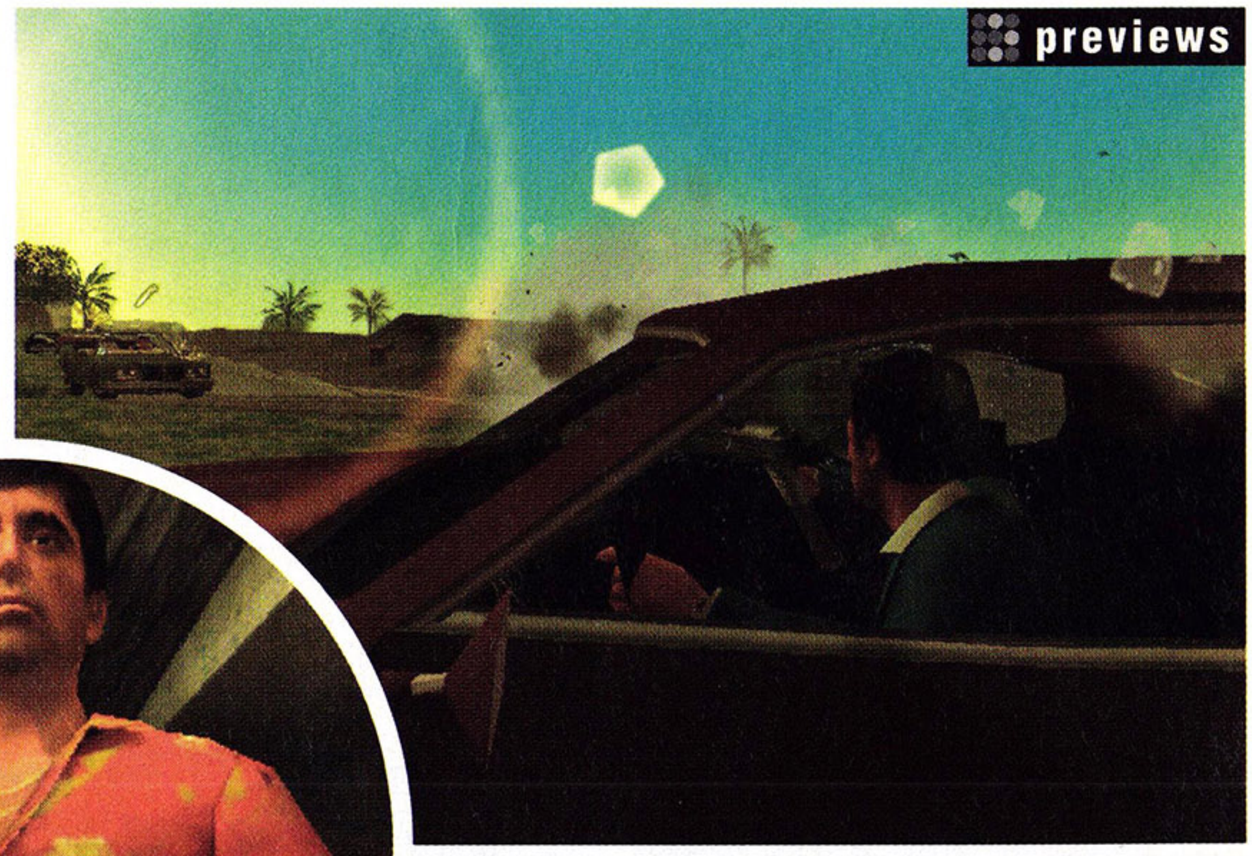
■ You can decorate your mansion in a number of different motifs

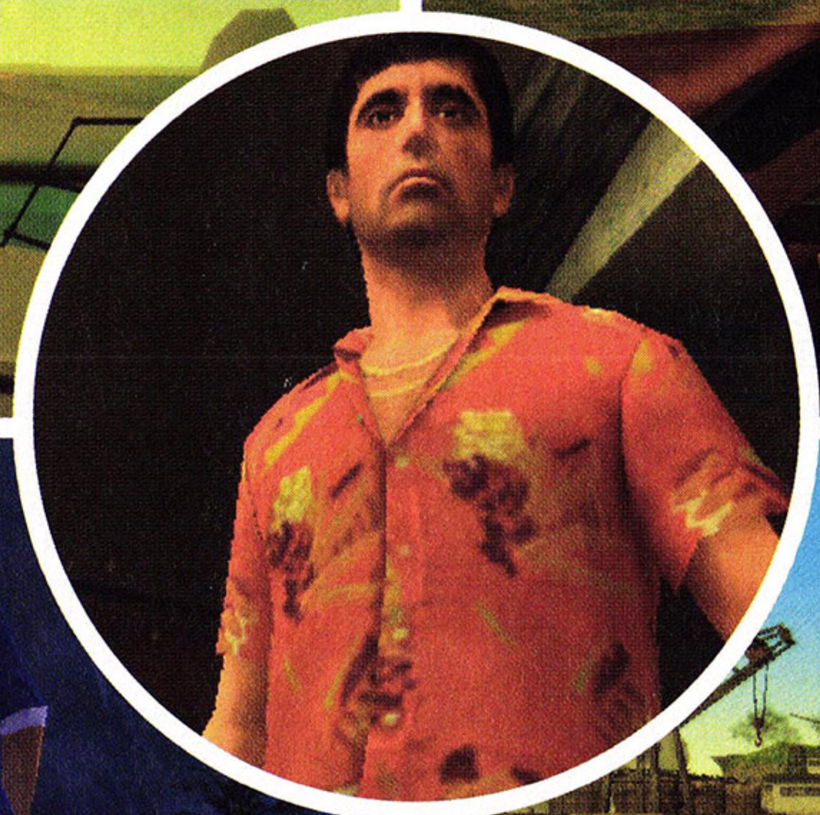


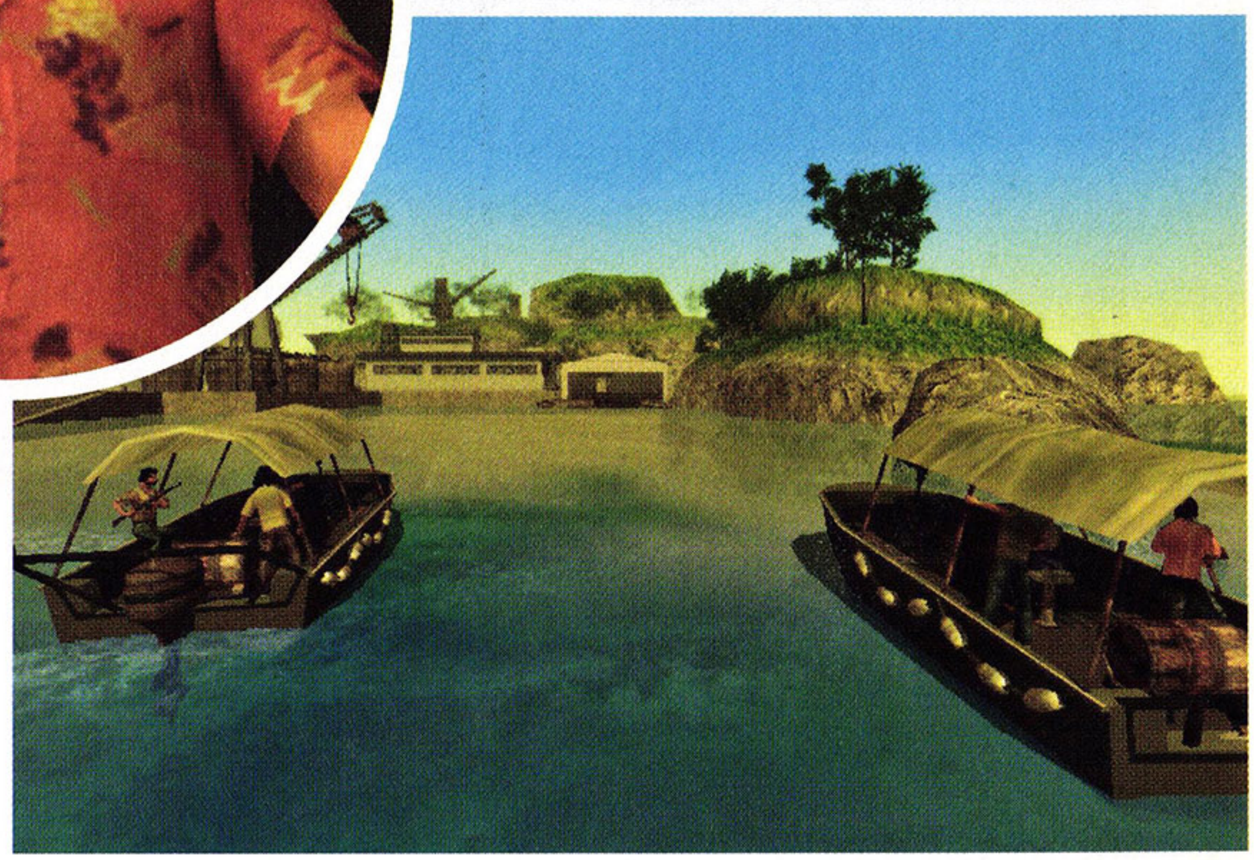
■ Everything was bigger in the '80s – the hair, the rocket launchers...



■ Tony can use watercraft to travel between islands







■ Some of your hired henchmen – the assassin (pictured), driver, and enforcer – become playable characters after you hire them. You can switch to them at anytime, and some missions can only be completed by a certain henchman

XBOX 360

F.E.A.R.

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER** VIVENDI GAMES
> DEVELOPER MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS/DAY 1 STUDIOS **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER

LATE TO THE PARTY

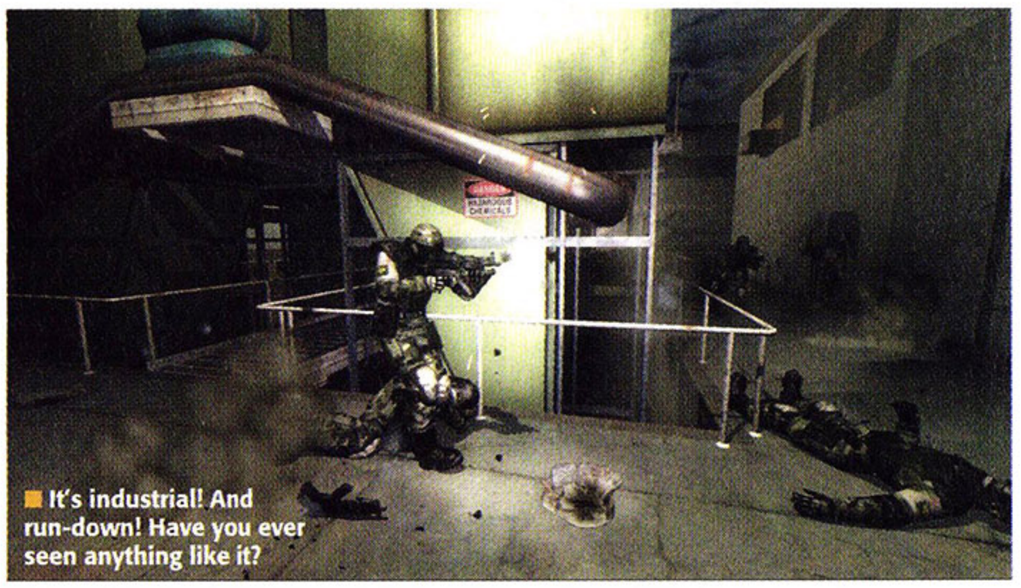
Last year's horror-themed first-person shooter for the PC did many things right – but most people wouldn't count releasing shortly before the Xbox 360 launched as one of them. Now, 12 months later, we're finally coming close to the release of the long-promised 360 port. After playing through a level of the latest build of the game, we're confident that 360 owners will get just as much out of this excellent FPS as PC users did.

There's no doubt that F.E.A.R. plays very well on the 360. According to Vivendi, the graphical detail is roughly equivalent to running the original with all the options maxed out – a feat that takes a good two grand worth of hardware to do in Windows. Most importantly, throughout the game's definitive gunfights, with massive amounts of particle effects and crazy physics and everything else going on, the framerate stayed stable during our playtests. After all, F.E.A.R. players already have a time-slowing power to play around with, and it's a hell of a lot more fun than graphical slowdown.

The severe dearth of new content in this port unfortunately makes it a largely pointless purchase for anyone who owns the PC version. Unless the single new level (which Vivendi steadfastly refused to tell us anything about) and the new Instant Action mode is enough value for your $60, that is. Still, this title should offer plenty of entertainment for 360 owners who didn't get the chance to experience the outstanding PC original. ■■■

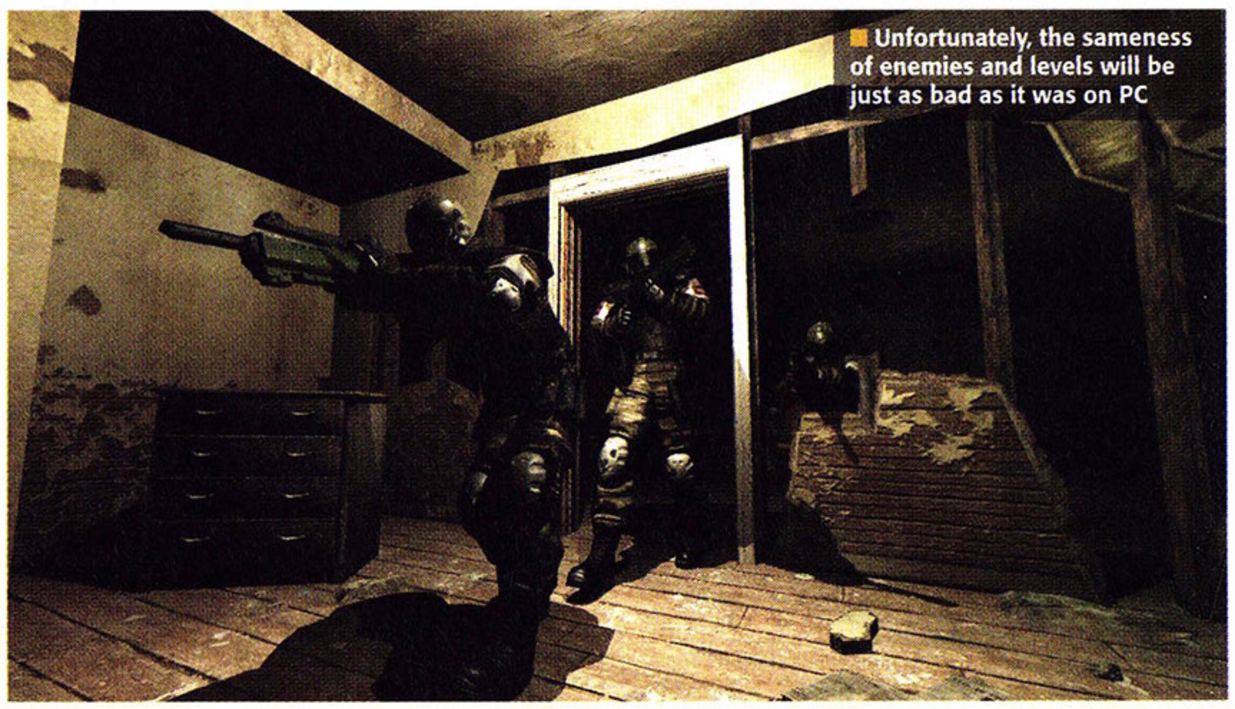
FEARING THE FUTURE?

Monolith Productions owner Warner Bros. Interactive is stepping up its video game business (see our interview with Jason Hall in our last issue), and unsurprisingly, the developer will be cutting off its relationship with rival Vivendi after F.E.A.R. launches. So where will the F.E.A.R. franchise go in the future? In most cases, the publisher would own everything pertaining to the game and simply put a different developer on the project for further titles. However, Monolith apparently retains the rights to all of the characters in F.E.A.R., while Vivendi has control of the name and the fictional universe itself. Since the original game did fairly well sales-wise according to the publisher, we will likely see more F.E.A.R. titles in the coming years, though the plots will necessarily be almost unrelated. We can't help but question whether another developer will be able to pull off the great mix of suspense and action that Monolith provided, and the story will lose its best facet without creepy antagonist Alma. Only time will tell, though.



■ It's industrial! And run-down! Have you ever seen anything like it?

■ The amount of hell that firearms unleash is astounding



■ Unfortunately, the sameness of enemies and levels will be just as bad as it was on PC

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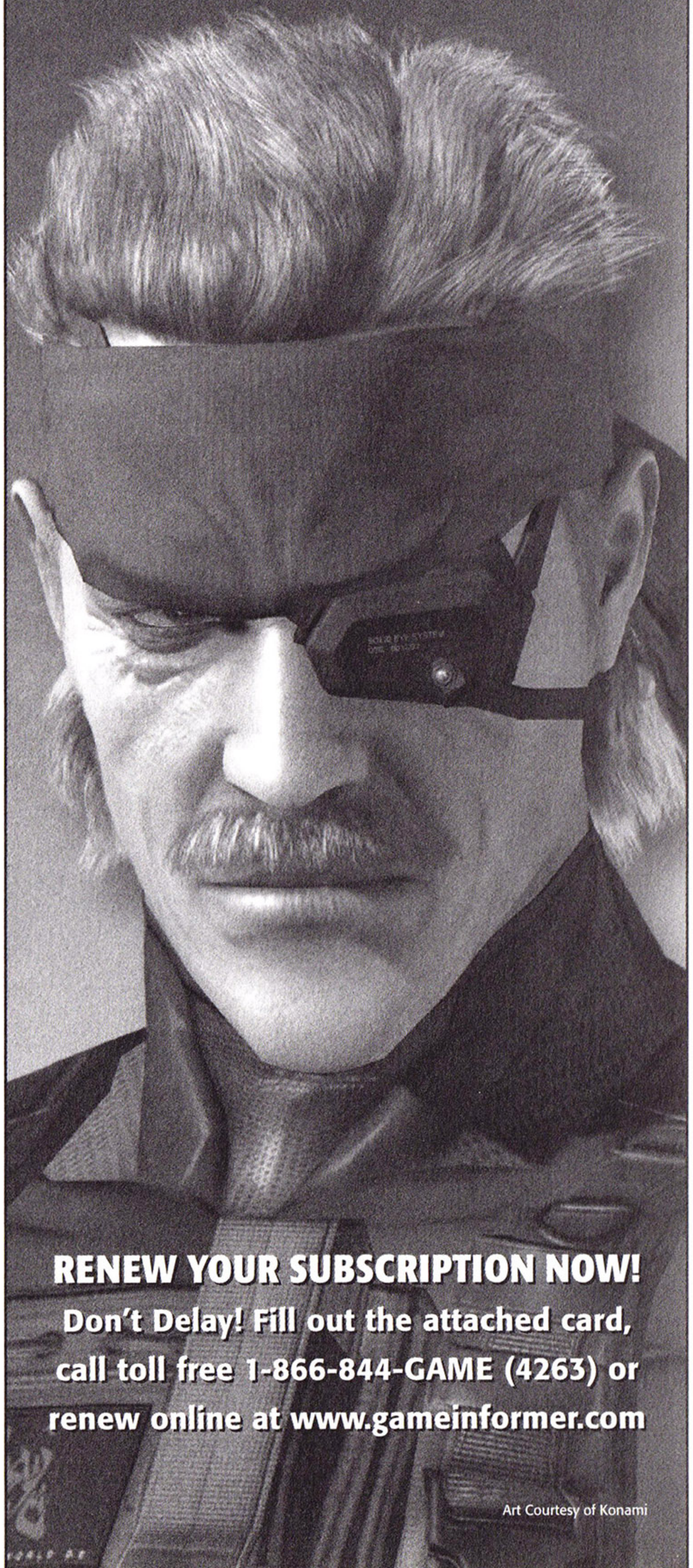

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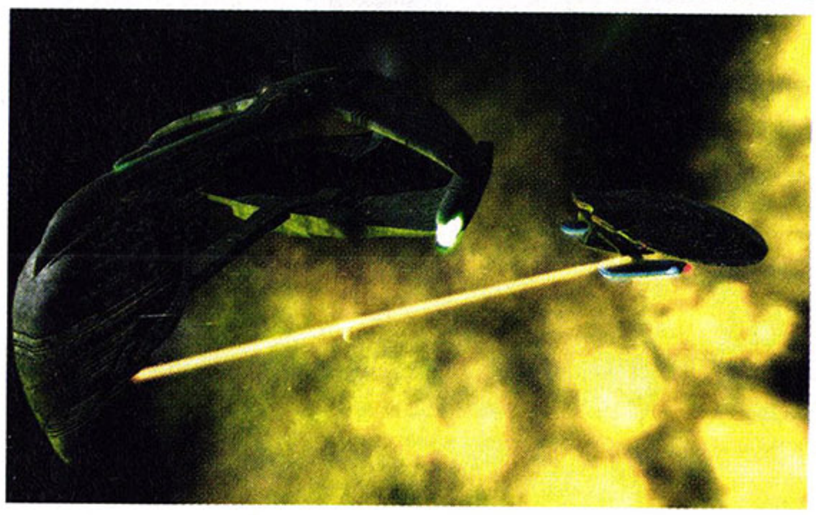
Art Courtesy of Konami



■ In battle, the d-pad allows instantaneous shifting between control of your four ships. Your other three will automatically deploy in response to your orders

XBOX 360 | PC

Star Trek Legacy

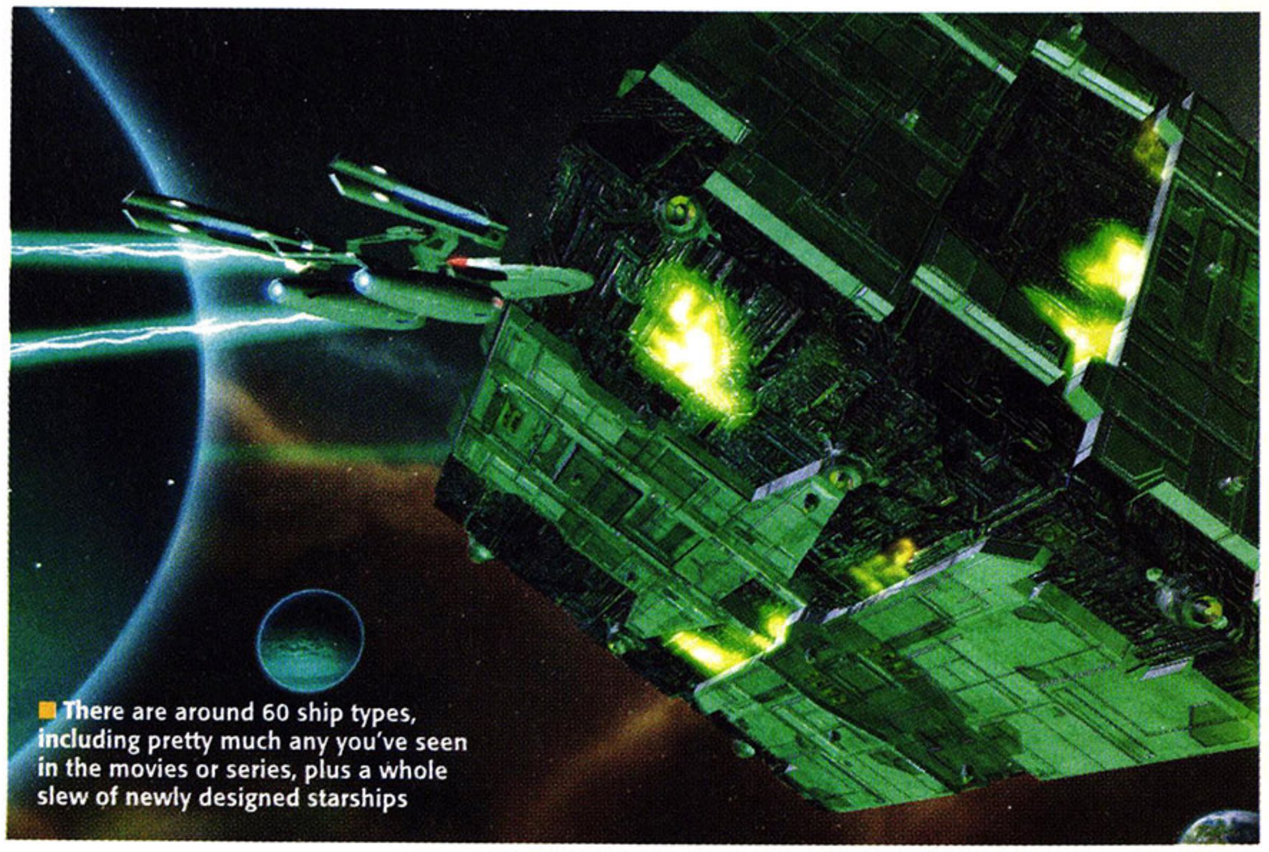
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PC ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS **> DEVELOPER** MAD DOC SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** OCTOBER

DREAMS DO COME TRUE

Star Trek Legacy is shaping up into a Trekker's (or Trekkie's, depending on your preferred nomenclature) dream game. It's filled with an explosive mix of fast-paced action with enough strategy and nods to the mythology to please both franchise fans and the more general crowd of people who like blowing up giant spaceships. This month we got a closer look at one of the single-player campaign levels in action, and then fired off some questions at game producer Charles Harribey about what we were seeing and how the game was shaping up in these final months.

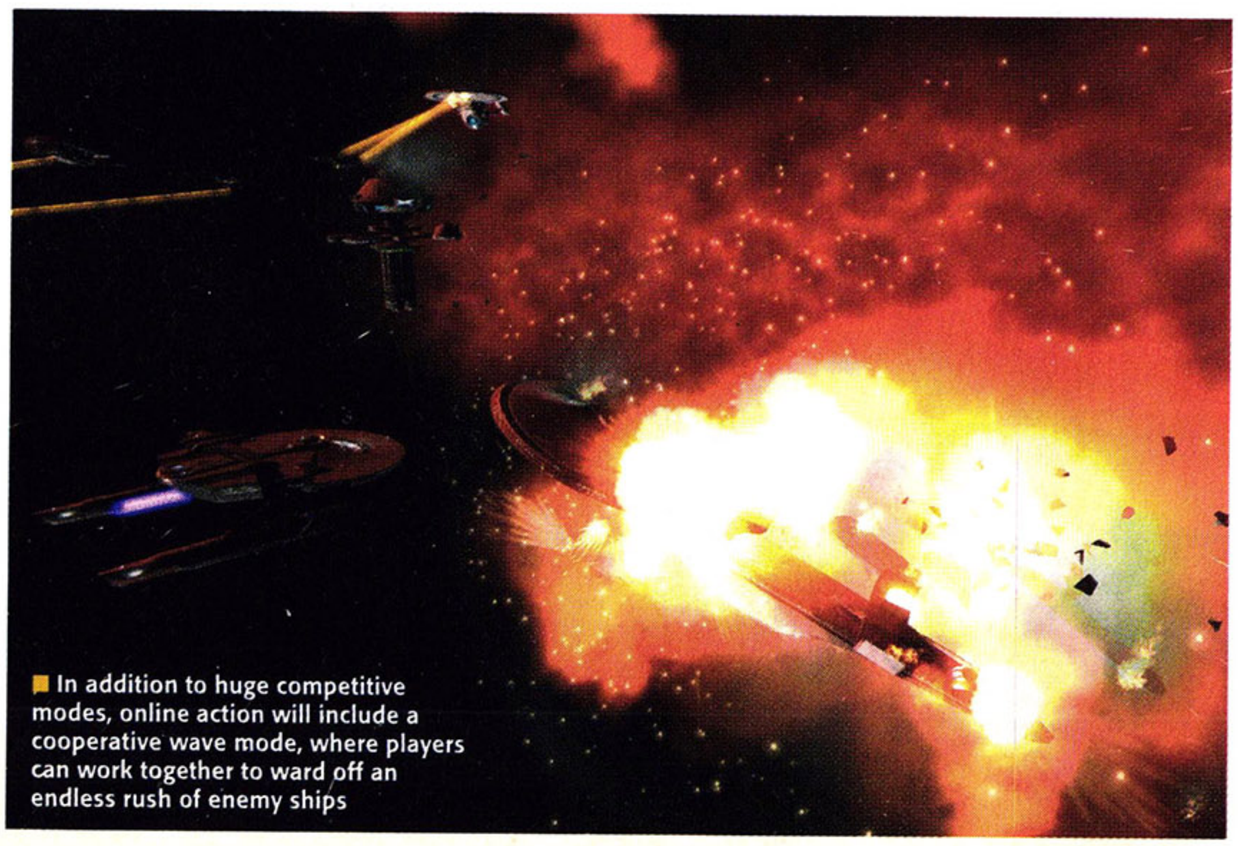
Three modes of play present themselves at the game opening. The campaign storyline is set during all three major eras of Star Trek history, opening in the *Enterprise* period of Captain Archer, progressing on to Kirk's adventurous years, and finishing out in the polished future of Picard's *Next Generation* era. The 15-mission storyline (five in each era) is played entirely from the Federation's perspective, but not so with skirmish mode. There, individual players can join battle in any time period and control ships from any of the four major factions: Federation, Klingon, Romulan, and Borg. If you want to bring some friends into the mix, hop into the online multiplayer. Here, up to eight players can fight gigantic space battles. Since each player can control up to four ships at once, that adds up to conflicts totaling as many as 32 starships at once!

Whether alone or with friends, the combat has been designed to move fast without betraying the integral naval combat feel that any fan expects out of the franchise. "You can split up your fleet however you want. Send one ship to do one thing and two others to go back and rearm," Harribey tells us. In the mission we saw, the objective was to take out a Klingon super weapon. Warp straight in and ignore your secondary objectives, and you'd have a hard fight on your hand. Alternately, you could send a few ships to reinforce a beleaguered Federation vessel, at which point they might join your cause. There's also a Klingon refueling station across the system that should make your task a little easier if you take it out first.



■ There are around 60 ship types, including pretty much any you've seen in the movies or series, plus a whole slew of newly designed starships

Once in combat, ships circle each other, jockeying for position and firing arcs while juggling power outputs and weapons fire. "The ship is the gun. You want to steer the ship to line up your full broad side onto your enemies weakest spots," Harribey relays. A phaser shot has to recharge over time, and does damage based on distance, so you'll have to choose the right moment to maximize destruction. You can fire photon torpedoes for massive damage, but they're limited in number and can easily miss a target. You can even pull up an energy triangle that lets you redistribute power across engines, weapons, and shields on the fly. "As a Bird of Prey, you might line yourself up with a target, and then drop everything into weapons, pull a strafing run and fire all your weapons for maximum damage," Harribey explains. "Then once you've passed the target you could switch everything back to engines so you could burn away before they hit you." Altogether, the flash-filled space battles that ensue are amazing, and may be exactly what many fans have waited years to participate in. ■ ■ ■



■ In addition to huge competitive modes, online action will include a cooperative wave mode, where players can work together to ward off an endless rush of enemy ships

DOWNLOADS ON THE WAY

Do you want the good news or the bad news first? The bad is that the tentatively planned historical battles mode doesn't look like it's going to make the retail game release. The good news? Bethesda is strongly considering offering that and other expanded content through download, whether on PC or 360. Think about downloading a scenario to play out the Dominion Wars, or reenacting the Borg/Federation conflict at Wolf 359, or even the drawn out wrath-filled battle between Kirk and Khan from Star Trek II. *Whether these, or new ships, or whole new mini-campaigns, Bethesda's track record with Oblivion says that we might have a lot to get excited about even after release.*

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

Phantasy Star Universe

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ RPG (MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAME) **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** SEGA **> RELEASE** FALL

COVER YOUR BASES

How many MMOs are out there with great universes, but no way for an offline gamer to check them out? On the flip side, what about the bummer when you're playing a really wonderful traditional RPG and you'd just like the other people in your party to be friends instead of A.I.? The Phantasy Star series has made a few attempts to appease all of these folks, but the upcoming Universe release looks closest to pleasing just about everyone.

We got our hands on the single-player saga and put the early stages to the test. The game essentially plays out in a series of episodes that Sega estimates will take around 35 to 40 hours to complete. Ethan Waber's fight against the SEED and evolution from bratty 17-year-old to (hopefully) wise savior of the free people certainly isn't breaking new ground from a storytelling perspective. On the other hand, the extensive voice acting even in the early build we played was nicely done and adds a lot to the characters and experience of the single-player story.

During Ethan's fight to overcome various catastrophes, certain sections (called Trials) are timed and award bonus points and a score when completed. It seems logical that faster times or more thorough completion will offer unique rewards – something that would make the game much more replayable.

PSU's single-player has such a strong focus on replay and story that the episodic presentation is really interesting and makes the experience feel somewhat more manageable. There are even recaps and hints of what's to come at the beginning and end of each section – an idea announced for a few other games that sounds kind of goofy at first, but really works well to keep you excited about trying the next section.

We didn't get to play the multiplayer version of PSU, but some details have been shared about how it will work. Players will create a new character from a variety of races, assemble teams from hundreds of players in specific cities, and then adventure together in instanced stages. The hack n' slash feel of combat could get really frenzied and team-work-based during large boss fights if the online component plays anything like the single-player game.

With a fall release date, Phantasy Star Universe doesn't have a lot of time to get some of its technology kinks worked out (our build was plagued with a hundred little problems), but the solid gameplay core is there to keep the project very promising. With content nearly done, the team has some time to polish, and gamers now have reason to hunger for a Phantasy Star game again. ■ ■ ■

■ Large scale boss encounters aren't particularly rare and, in classic RPG form, really offer a sense of accomplishment

■ Ethan and his posse run for a red light special at future T.J. Maxx – futuristic snowboarder gear can be hard to afford, y'all

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Eragon

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL **> DEVELOPER** STORMFRONT STUDIOS **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 14

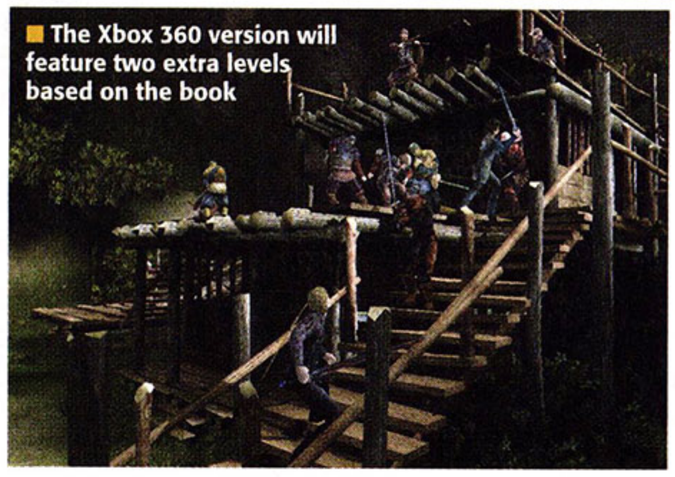
THE NEXT FANTASY BLOCKBUSTER TAKES FLIGHTS

As the release date for *Eragon*, 20th Century Fox's adaptation of young author Christopher Paolini's epic fantasy novel draws near, Vivendi Universal is beginning to lift the curtain on its game based on the film. The game is being handled by Stormfront Studios, which has tackled such major fantasy franchises as The Lord of the Rings and Dungeons & Dragons in recent years.

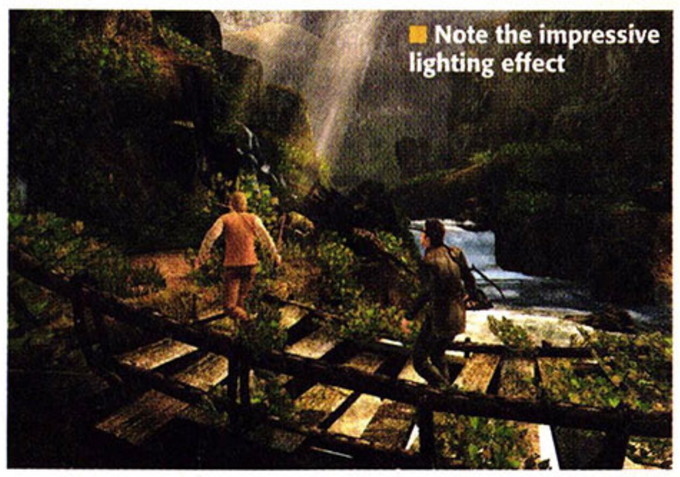
Sitting down with a playable version of Eragon, it's quickly apparent that Stormfront is doing what it does best: delivering solid hack n' slash gameplay. In single-player you'll have a variety of CPU-controlled cohorts, and also the option to have one friend drop in for co-op at any point in the game. As you might expect, the combat itself is fairly simple, with basic button presses allowing for a surprising number of moves. However, expert players will be rewarded by a number of special finishing moves, which play out in spectacular form thanks to a camera system that momentarily shifts to give you a cinematic view of the death. As is typical of Stormfront's games, the stages are very detailed and animated, letting you observe oncoming hordes in the background or even giant, destructive explosions happening in the lush environments.

Of course, along with swords comes sorcery, and as Eragon grows in power, he'll be able to call on a number of helpful spells. These include Repel, which will knock back foes; Pull, which allows you to move objects or enemies toward you; as well as the self-explanatory Fire and Magic Shield. Overall, it's just another way in which Eragon – despite the fact that it hews close to genre conventions – manages to establish its own identity in a crowded marketplace. And that's not even including the excellent dragon riding, which makes up a full quarter of the gameplay experience. Atop your dragon Saphira (who can also be called on to smite enemies while you're on foot), the game switches to an aerial combat game similar to Starfox, only with massively huge and gorgeous dragons torching everything in sight. ■■■

■ Co-op will be welcomed by hack n' slash fans



■ The Xbox 360 version will feature two extra levels based on the book



■ Note the impressive lighting effect

There's nothing like roasting marshmallows over a flaming corpse

On his way to confront the invader, Sgt. Fred was shot in the back by his squadmate for talking smack about *Veronica Mars*

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PC

TimeShift

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, SYSTEM LINK, OR PC INTERNET) **> PUBLISHER** VIVENDI GAMES **> DEVELOPER** SABER INTERACTIVE **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

When the world was first introduced to TimeShift and its time-hopping protagonist Michael Swift, the game was being handled by the folks at Atari. But when the struggling publisher sold off some of its properties, TimeShift was snapped up by Vivendi Games, which has wisely allowed developer Saber Interactive more time to polish the title, add new graphical flourishes, and more. We recently got a chance to get our hands on the multiplayer part of the game, and learned about some of the fun new elements that Saber has included to help TimeShift stand apart from the rest of the FPS pack. Below are some of the more interesting things we learned. ■■■

Multiplayer may be largely about using your time powers wisely, but having a good gun is equally important

In multiplayer, time effects only apply to those caught in the radius of a time grenade

TIME IS ON YOUR SIDE

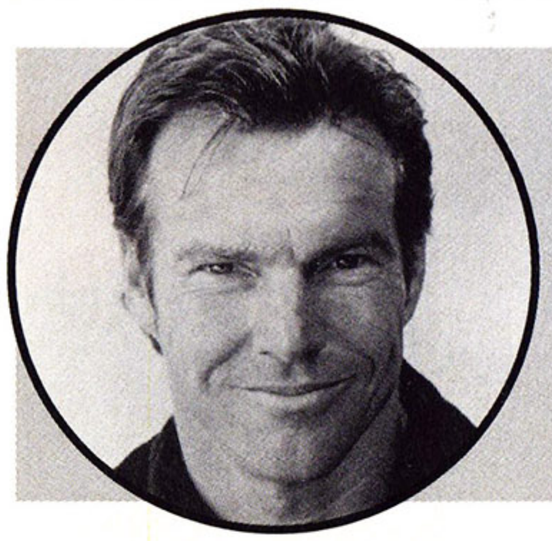
In the single-player game, Michael Swift will have control over all time in the game, but the same design simply won't work for multiplayer. Saber Interactive has therefore implemented time grenades in multiplayer, which have similar functions on a smaller scale. Players can throw both time-slowing and time-stopping grenades, both of which create a bubble that will affect anything within it. If you catch someone in a time stop bubble, you can circle around them, firing your weapon. All of the rounds will also stop when they hit the bubble, but when time resets, they'll suddenly start flying towards your target from every direction!

CONTROL THE WORLD

TimeShift will ship with 14 multiplayer maps and seven distinct play modes, like standard, low gravity, rocket arena, one-shot kills, and more. But if you don't like any of the available game types, you are free to make your own. There are roughly 50 modifiers you can play with, setting character health, gravity levels, amount of time power, weapon sets, and much more. These modifiers will be accessible on both the PC and Xbox 360 version of the game, and both support up to 16 players.

HAIL TO THE KING

Along with standard deathmatch and team deathmatch, TimeShift features a few unique games types, the most compelling of which is King of Time mode. The first person to capture a special power-up in this mode becomes the King of Time, who is unaffected by time powers, and has a time power gauge that fills up more quickly, so they can use their powers more freely. Anyone who kills the King becomes the King, but that is easier said than done, since the King can constantly toss grenades that slow down everyone except themselves.



QUAID!

Aside from checking out multiplayer, we also got a chance to chat with the man who will provide Michael Swift with his voice, actor Dennis Quaid. Quaid explained to us that he'd been interested in trying some voice acting for some time, and accepted the role in TimeShift because his son is a big video game fan who has tried on several occasions to get him into games. While Quaid admits that his son outshines him in gaming skills, he does own a Pac-Man/Galaga machine that he enjoys relaxing with. For him, the most interesting part of his involvement in TimeShift is crafting a character that is tough but sensitive. According to Quaid, Michael Swift is a military man who has somewhat given up on life, and learns that a sad fate will befall his daughter in the future. Hoping to save her, he volunteers to become a time traveler and goes through a series of events that are very much like an action movie.

OVER G FIGHTERS™

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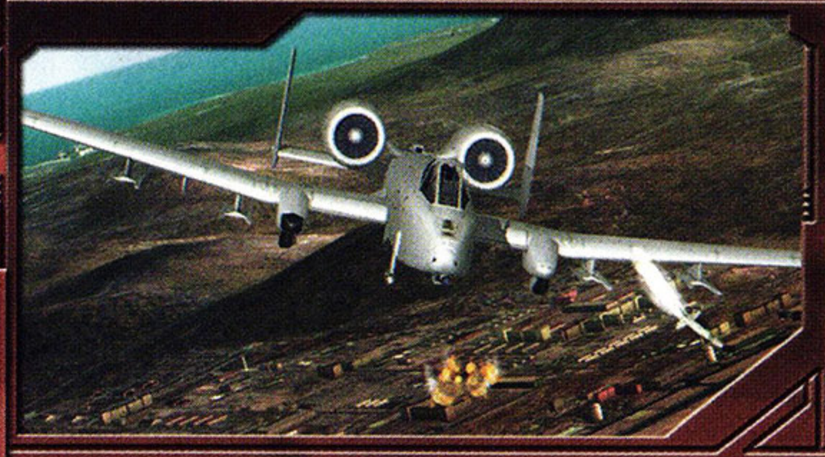

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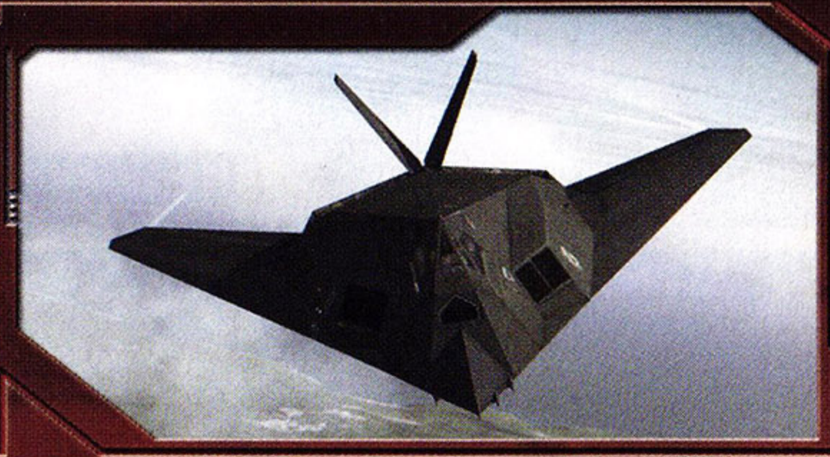

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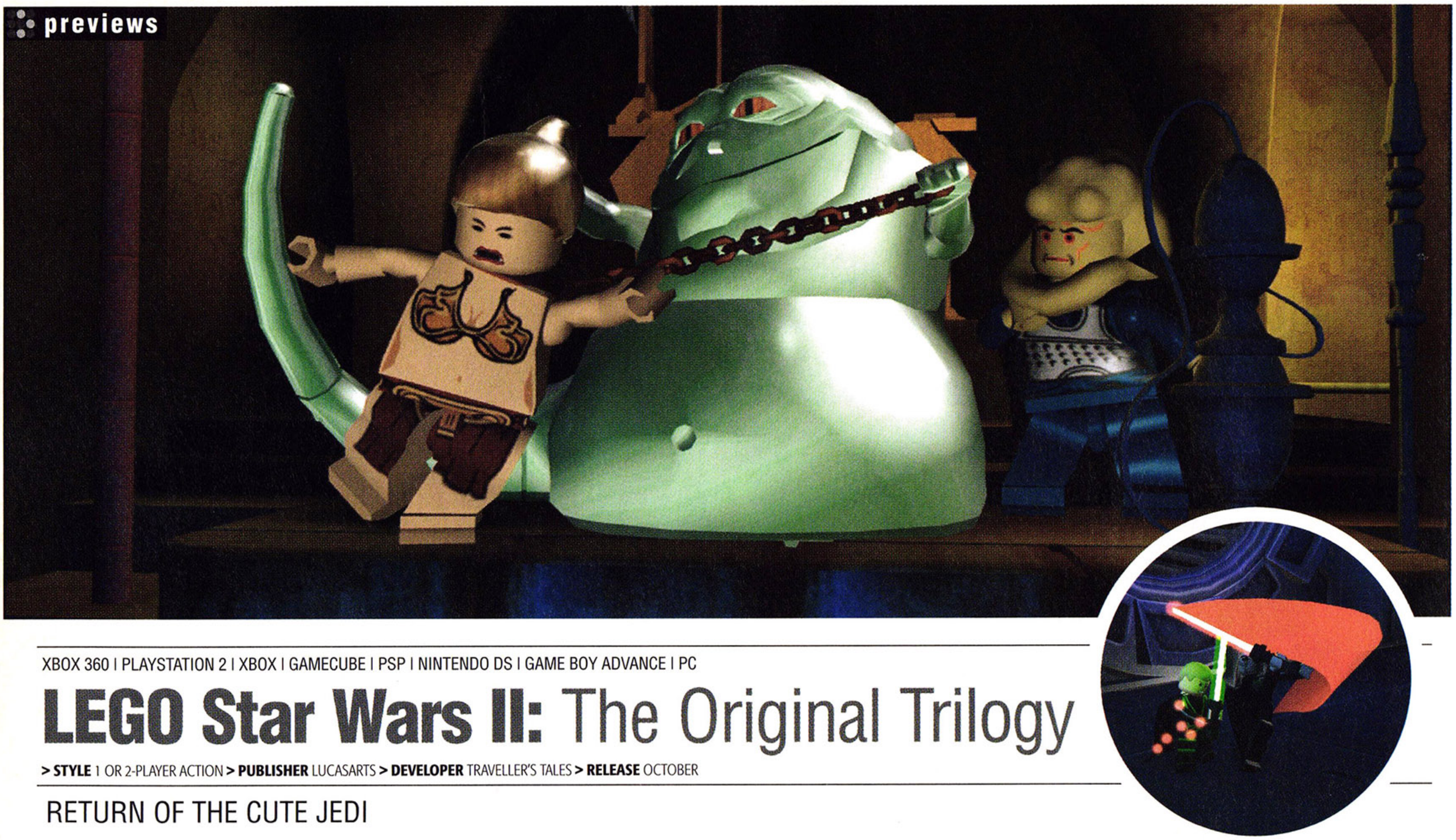


XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PSP | NINTENDO DS | GAME BOY ADVANCE | PC

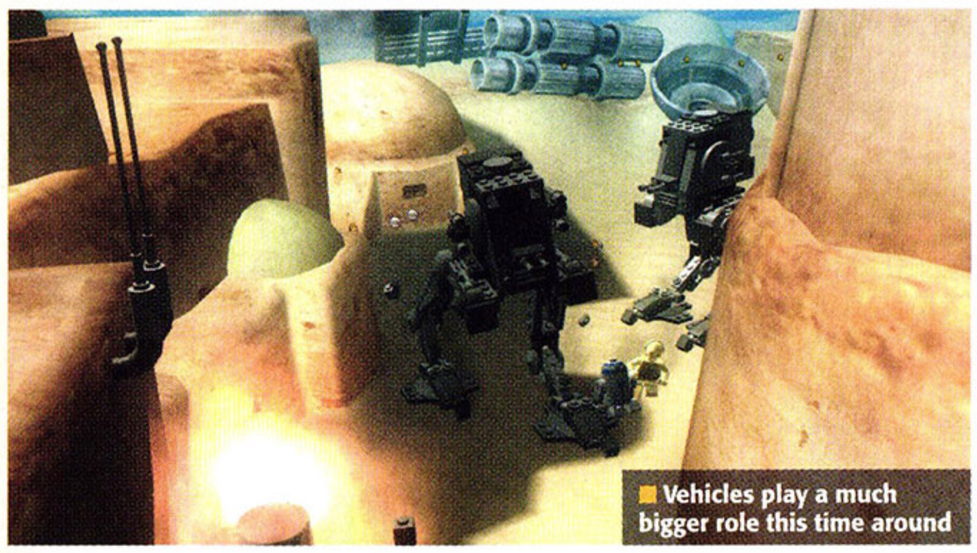
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS **> DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES **> RELEASE** OCTOBER

RETURN OF THE CUTE JEDI

In retrospect, it should have been no surprise how many people of all ages dove headlong into the last LEGO Star Wars game. After all, as near as we can tell, it combines two of the coolest things ever created by humankind. Given the success of the first entry, the second one seems a sure thing. Luckily, Traveller's Tales isn't willing to just toss out another installment without upping the ante, especially when it involves the near-sacred original three movies.

This month, while we eagerly awaited a final version of the game to review, we got to play through some levels from all three of the classic movies. Of course, one big shift that we've known about for awhile is the ability to use vehicles, and this element of gameplay didn't disappoint, as we careened about levels in some mammoth LEGOs like the AT-ST. That's not all. We also played levels where we flew around the Millenium Falcon, swept into battle with an X-Wing, and even sped through the forest on speeder-bikes.



■ Vehicles play a much bigger role this time around

We also noticed that some of the critiques of the first game seem to have been taken to heart by the developer. Levels now appear to be longer and more involved. And while it's always hard to gauge difficulty settings in a pre-final copy of the game, it certainly seems like the challenge has been ratcheted up a bit from the last installment. One big factor there might be the new adaptive difficulty of the game. Depending on how much you die, the game will automatically shift the level of difficulty to match your playing style. Of particular note, the levels we played seemed to have a much bigger focus on puzzle-solving, frequently using combinations of different character abilities to open a door or pass an obstacle. It's a design decision we're not totally sure works with the carefree humorous action of the game, but the combat and silliness quotient might still be getting tweaked, so we'll hold off on making any judgments. On the plus side, many of these puzzles are a lot of fun, especially since some paths require one of the "good" characters and others ask for a "bad" one. There are also identity gates based on helmets. For instance, in Jabba's Palace, Leia has limited mobility, but once she finds her bounty hunter helmet, all sorts of doors open for her.

Meanwhile, the game looks fantastic, managing perhaps even better than the first game to capture the essence of different characters while gently poking fun at the situations they find themselves in. A genuine attempt has been made to give each character unique bonuses that can help in moving through a level. Consequently, Luke's Force lift power is just as important as R2-D2's ability to open a door. The mix of fun characters, classic locations, and always funny visuals has this high on our list of current-gen offerings for the holiday, and it wouldn't surprise anyone if those cute little Force users garnered even more attention the second time around. ■ ■ ■

■ All of the images you see on the pages here are from the Xbox 360 version of the game – that's right, LEGO Achievements!

■ Luke compensates for being "a little short" for a Stormtrooper with his oversized blaster

95 out of 100 – Game Informer
"PC and Console Game of the Month"

9.0 out of 10 – IGN
"An excellent, deep first-person shooter experience... unrivaled on Xbox 360"

4.75 out of 5 – GamePro
"Surpasses all expectations to become one of the best games of the year"

9.0 out of 10 – Official Xbox Magazine
"Consistently impressive and rousingly fun in a way that you just shouldn't miss"

MATURE 17+ Blood and Gore Intense Violence Partial Nudity Strong Language

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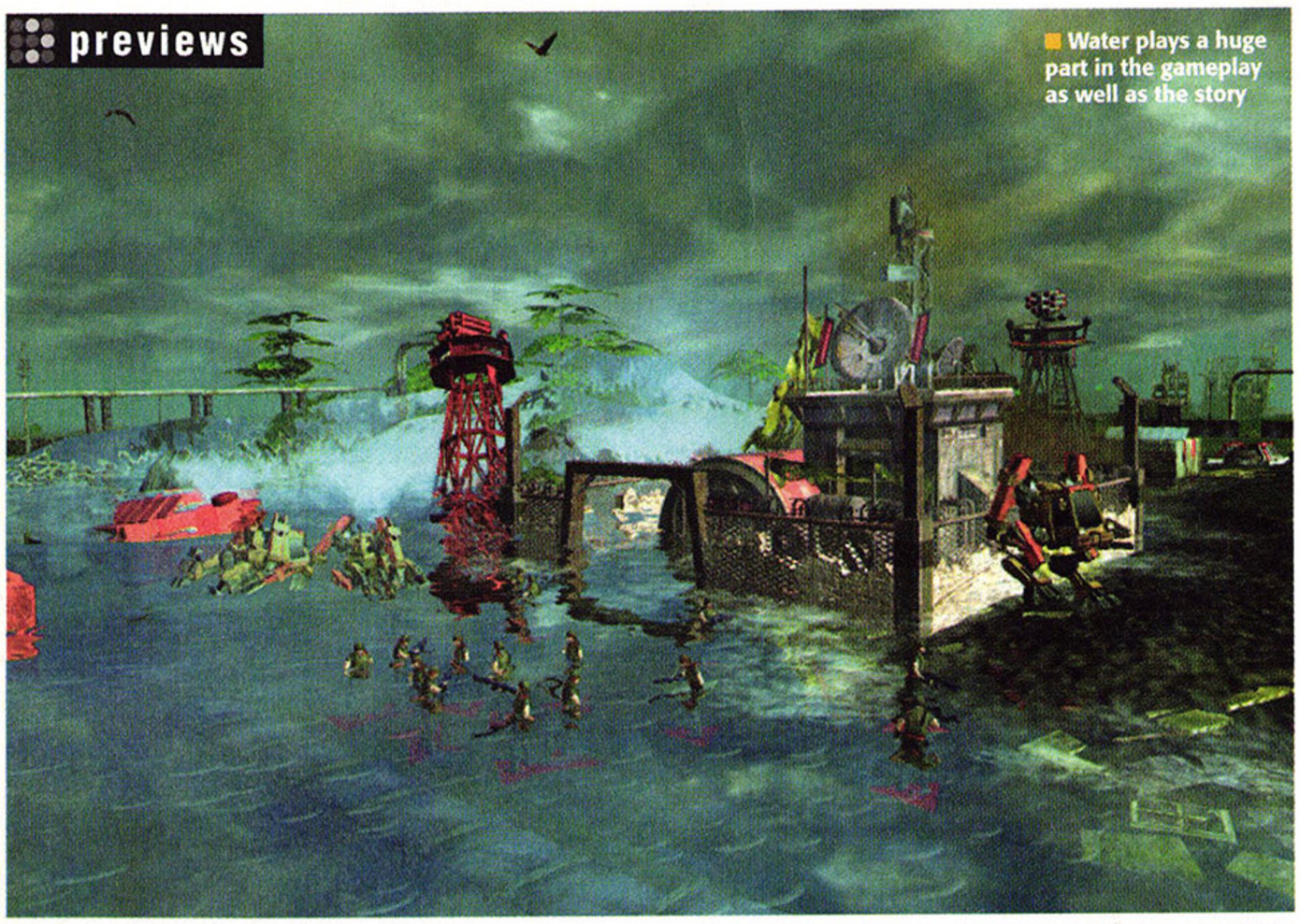


Water plays a huge part in the gameplay as well as the story

This faction's units are more than meets the eye – they can all transform into an alternate mode

PC

Maelstrom

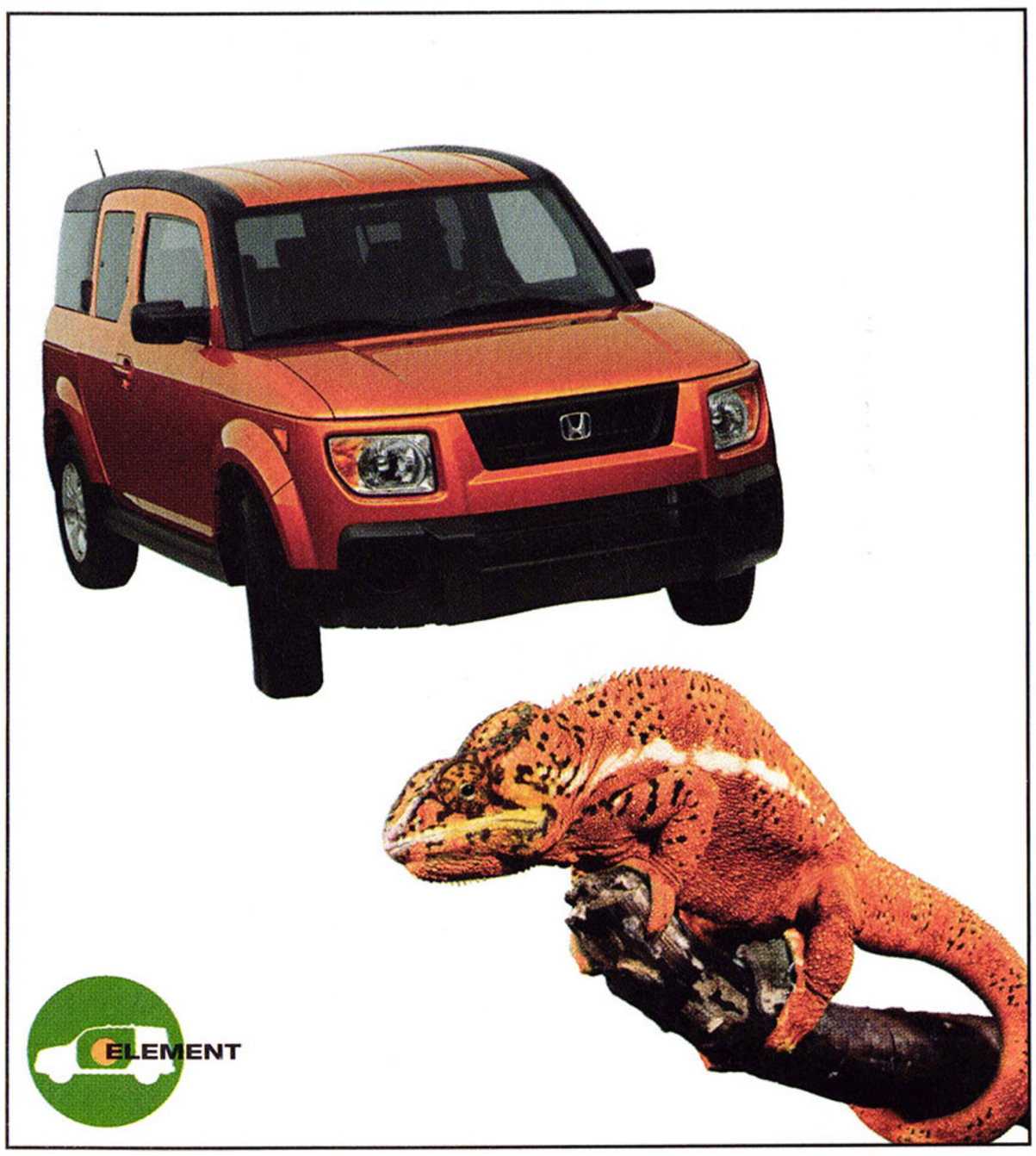
> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN)
> PUBLISHER CODEMASTERS **> DEVELOPER** KD VISION
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 26

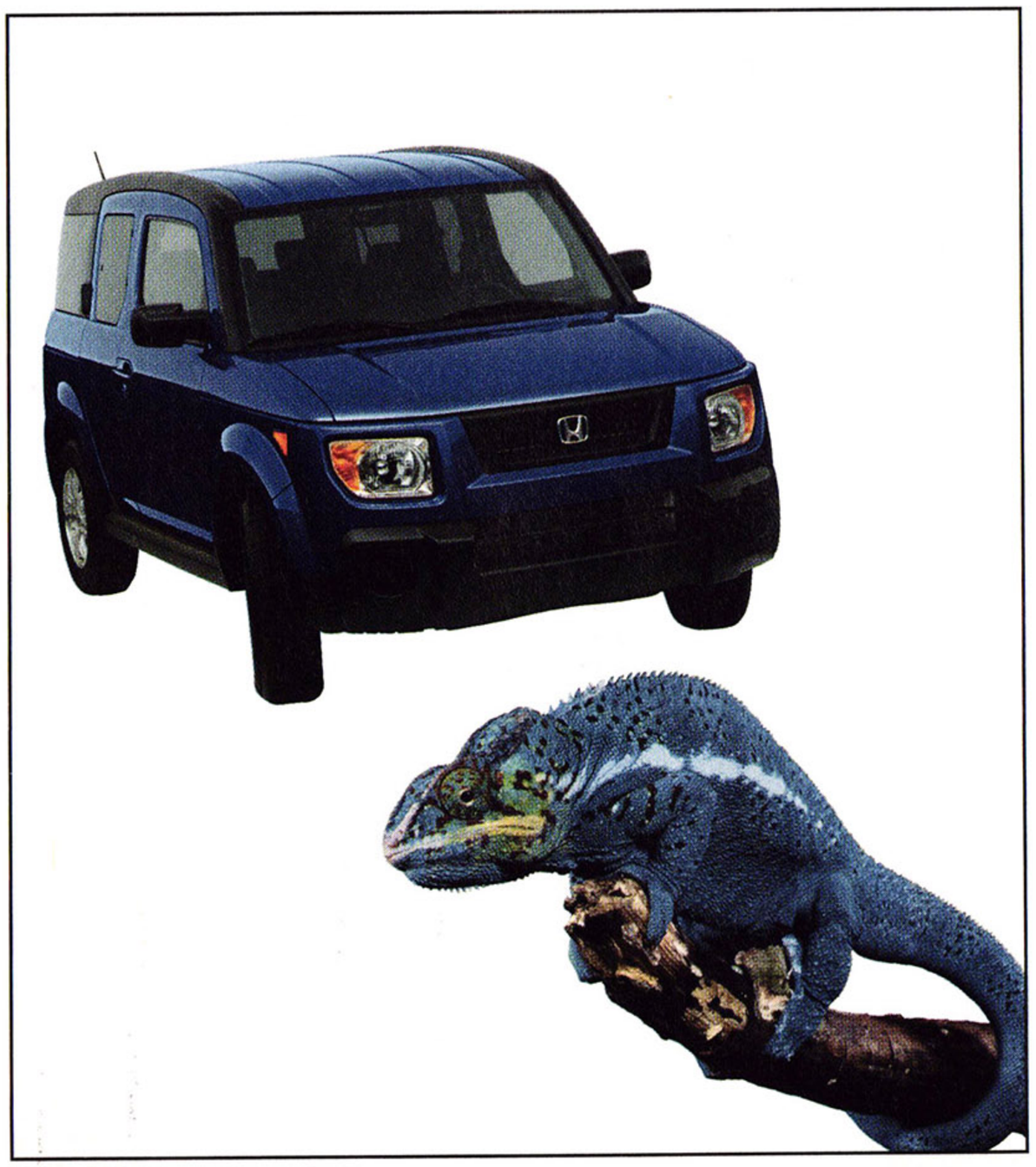
TWISTING CONCEPTS

Codemasters is bringing this Russian-developed real-time strategy title over to the U.S. despite the bad reputation that PC games from the other side of the Atlantic sometimes have to deal with, and after any amount of time with Maelstrom it's easy to see why. Maelstrom is much more than simply another sci-fi RTS with big armies and fancy explosions.

Maelstrom doesn't just have ragdoll bodies and chunks flying off of buildings. Not only does the terrain get deformed by explosions and such, but water will flow down realistically until it gets to a stable situation. Bodies of water can even be frozen or evaporated with the right weaponry. Wind is accurately modeled and affects many different things. Fires will ravage the landscape, spreading based on the wind and the type of land, and damaging buildings, units, and terrain as it goes. And, of course, the three factions have a ton of units and powers that are designed to take great advantage of all this cool technology.

From what we've seen, developer KD Vision has a much better chance of building a solid game around its fantastic engine than it did with its last game, Perimeter. If the gameplay is solid, we can expect a good online time as well – Codemasters is implementing a dedicated matchmaking and stat-tracking service for Maelstrom. We've also heard promises that the story will be somewhat more comprehensible this time, which would be a step in the right direction. At the very least, though, we're looking forward to literally flooding our enemies' bases when this project is done. ■■■





DS

Magical Starsign

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** BROWNIE BROWN **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 23

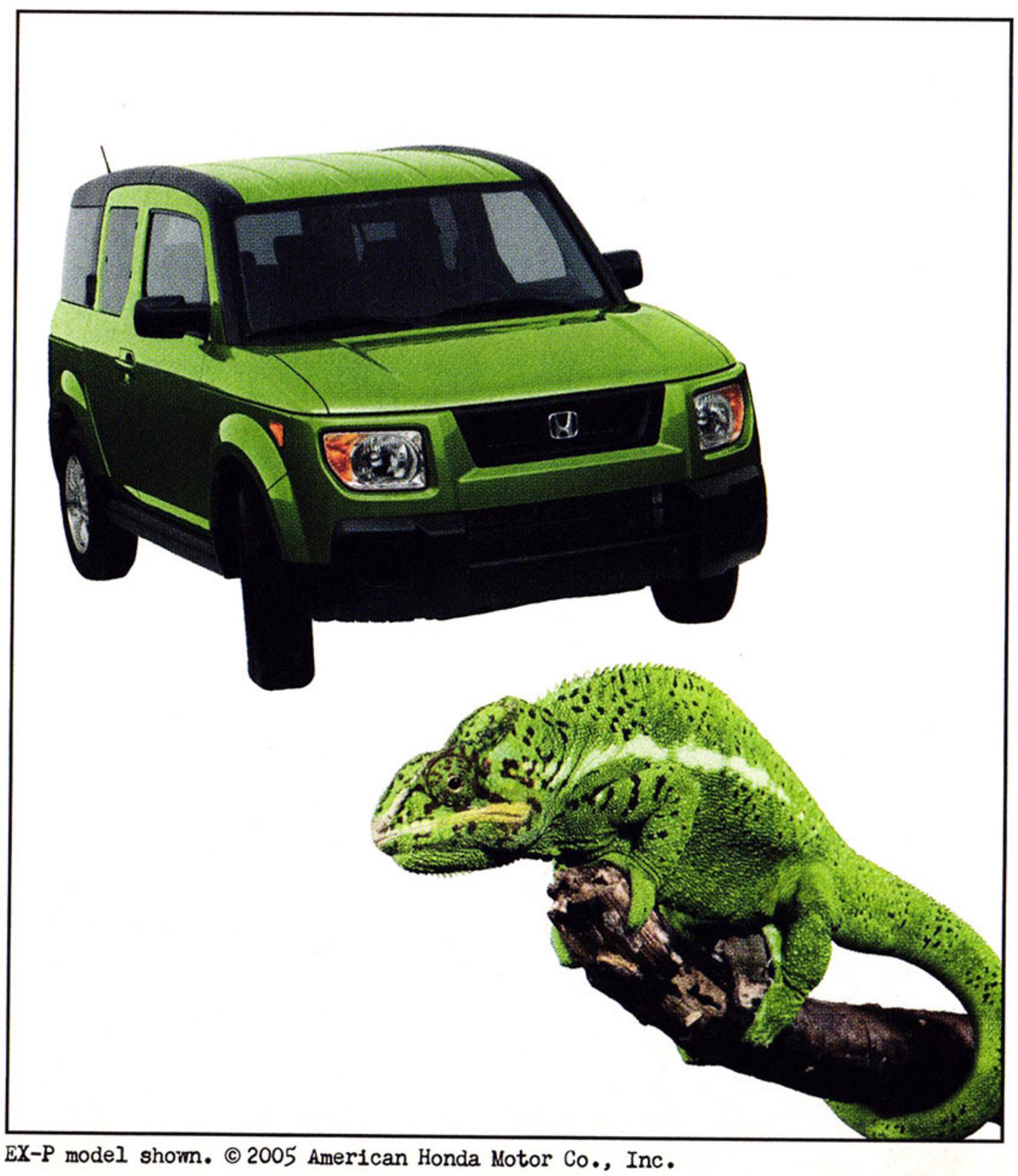
READ THE SIGNS

What if Harry Potter, instead of galavanting around England, actually hopped into a rocket ship to explore a bunch of planets in outer space? Well, then he'd sort of be like the characters in the upcoming RPG Magical Starsign, where a group of students at a magical academy explore the final frontier looking for their missing professor and trying to save the universe.

Developed by Brownie Brown (a studio founded by several former Square employees), Magical Starsign is a sequel to Magical Vacation, a Japan-only GBA game. Thankfully, it tells a brand new story that will be easily accessible without previous experience in the series. The plot follows a young protagonist (players choose between a female or a male hero) and a group of classmates that use their powerful magical abilities to stop an evil sorcerer from destroying reality. As with many RPGs, the only way to do that is through lots of fighting.

The combat at first will seem traditional, since it is based on a familiar turn-based system. However, some adjustments have been made to accommodate the DS interface, like allowing players to control the whole battle with the stylus. Using more magic spells than physical attacks, you will tap the action you want to take, and then tap the target to initiate it. The strength of your spells will even vary depending on which planets are most prominent in the solar system, which prevents you from just using the same strategy battle after battle.

It isn't the most high-profile game on the way for the DS, but its unique gameplay and the ability to link up to five friends for multiplayer dungeon exploration certainly make it a game for handheld RPG fans to keep an eye on. ■■■



EX-P model shown. © 2005 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Superman Returns

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 31

REPORTS OF SUPERMAN'S RETURN HAVE BEEN EXAGGERATED

EA's Superman hasn't been MIA for five years like his movie counterpart, but a lot of people have been wondering if this game got lost in space. After a highly publicized delay and a lackluster showing at E3, our Spidey Sen…uh, intuition flared up that all might not be well with this project. We recently saw the game at an EA event, and although it is indeed coming along, it's not out of the woods just yet.

We weren't allowed to actually touch the controller during the demo (red flag!). However, we witnessed that how Superman flies through the city and hovers just looks a little off. At least the different sections of Metropolis are now installed – which is a significant step from E3, especially seeing as how the large-scale aspect of the city is central to the game. Cruising around the city attending to the various emergencies and missions that are thrown your way will be an impressive task given the overall size of the map.

Of course, no Superman Returns preview would be complete without an appearance from…you guessed it: Metallo. The large-scale villain is looking better all the time, and Superman was able to handily call upon his array of powers via the d-pad to combat the brute. You can even control their range and intensity. Since Superman can't die, the game tempers you by demanding that you replenish your stamina by flying near the sun. Also, the city can only sustain so much damage before the game deems you a failure.

Progress has been made on Superman Returns, but the startling thing we came away with after the demo was that as much as developer Tiburon is putting the game's pieces in place, it is still missing that X-factor that makes the title spring to life and wow audiences. If this game doesn't come together, Superman's next disappearing act may be an exile. ■■■

■ Sick of saving Metropolis? The game will let you play as Bizarro Superman and rip up the city to your liking

■ Green Lantern is joined in battle by Zatanna, the sexy sorceress

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Justice League Heroes

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE/EIDOS
> **DEVELOPER** SNOWBLIND STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL

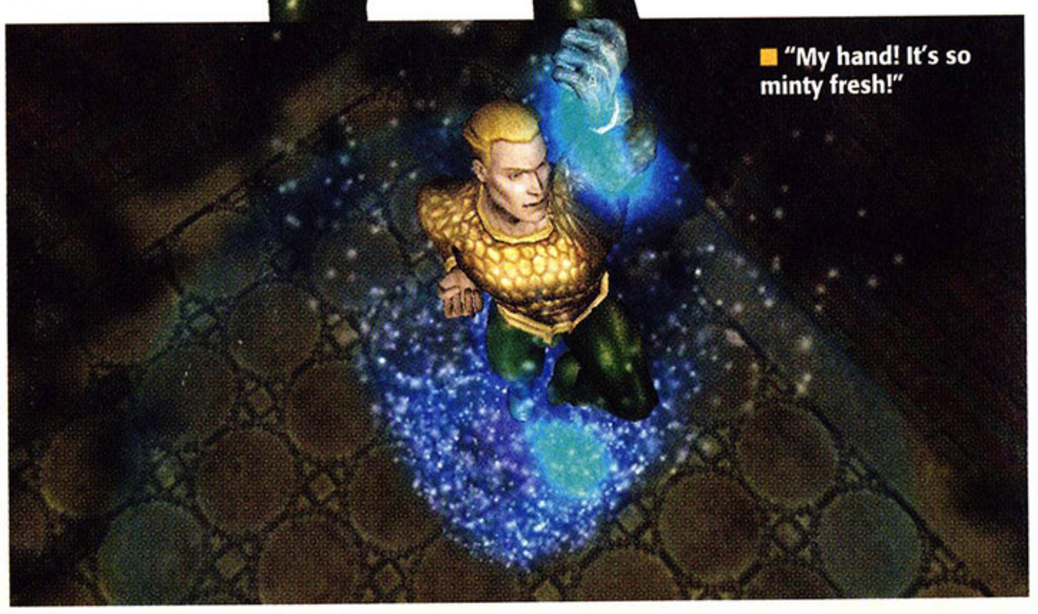
THE LEAGUE EXPANDS

When we unveiled Warner Bros. Interactive's new DC Comics action game Justice League Heroes a few months ago, fans had a lot to say. Most were excited that they would finally get to control Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, The Flash, Green Lantern, Martian Manhunter, and Zatanna in the same game. However, the DC universe is a big place, and the Justice League has had many members, so some fans declared that the game should feature even more playable superheroes. To those fans, we can now happily reveal that JLH will indeed feature a few more unlockable heroes. While we don't know exactly how many will be included or who will make the cut, we did get the lowdown on one: The king of the seas himself, Aquaman!

While he's been the butt of many jokes (ours included), Aquaman is actually a very powerful character who has seen an upswing in popularity as of late, thanks to some great work in his comic series, an appearance on *Smallville*, and a storyline about the character in HBO's *Entourage*. Toughened by the ocean's pressure and sporting a magical hand, JLH's version of Aquaman features water-based powers like a geyser-assisted uppercut and an enemy-seeking whirlpool. He also has the ability to turn his hand into a sword, shield, or bolts that can be fired at enemies.

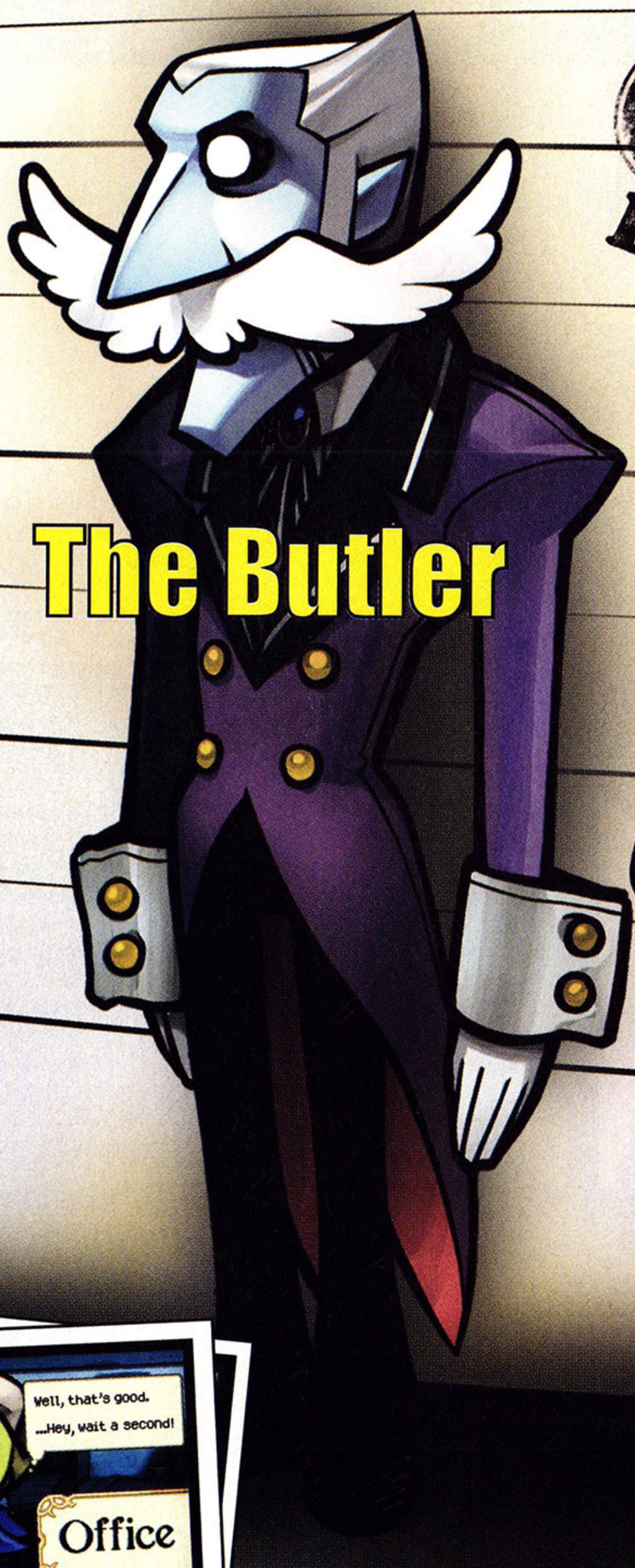
With a wide array of attacks at his disposal, Aquaman will certainly be another fine addition to Justice League Heroes' roster of playable characters.

Along with getting the scoop on Aquaman, we recently had a chance to talk with Dwayne McDuffie, the veteran comic book and cartoon writer who collaborated with Snowblind Studios on the story for the game. For his thoughts on the game, as well as other Justice League-related topics, head over to the Unlimited section of Game Informer Online to learn more. ■■■



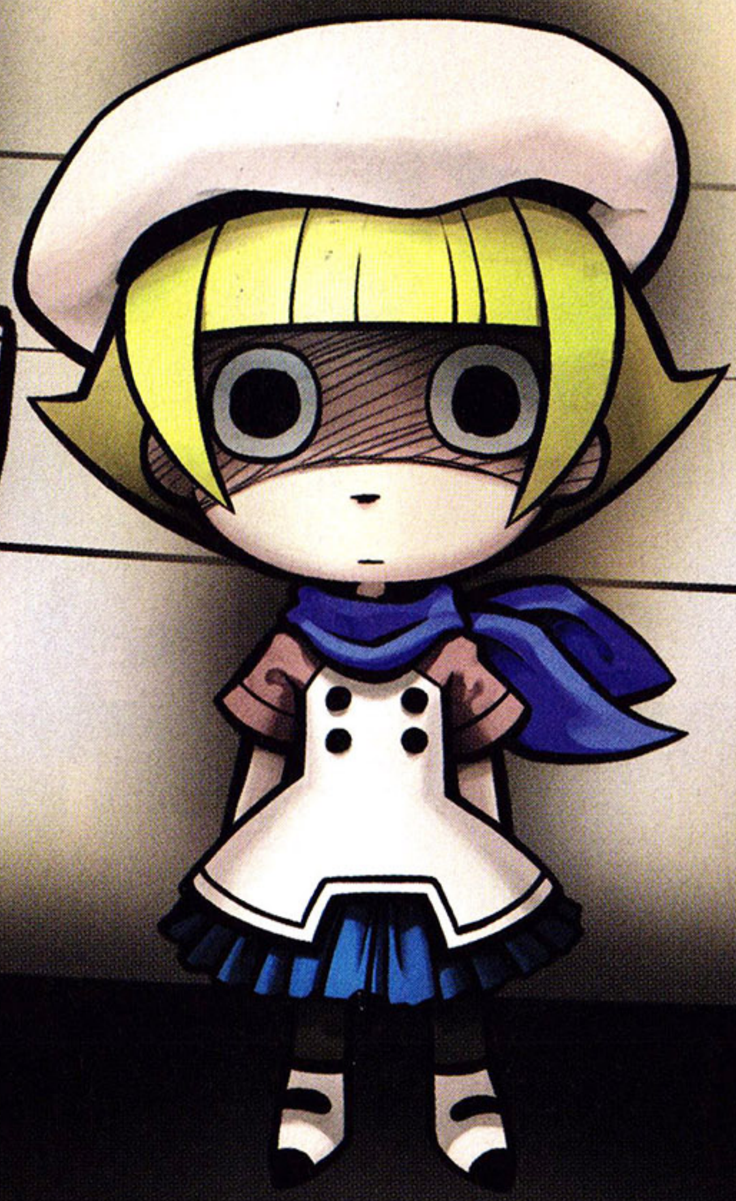
■ "My hand! It's so minty fresh!"

The usual suspects?

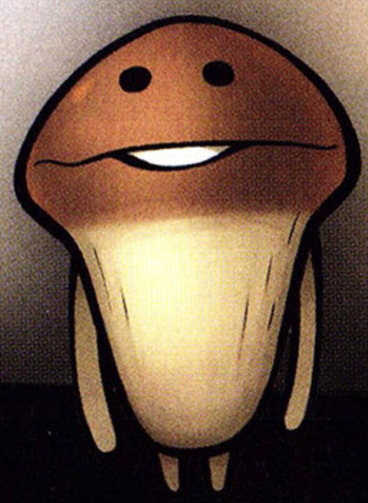


The Butler 6'6"

The Girl 5'6"



The Fungus 5'0"



4'6"

4'0"

3'6"

3'0"

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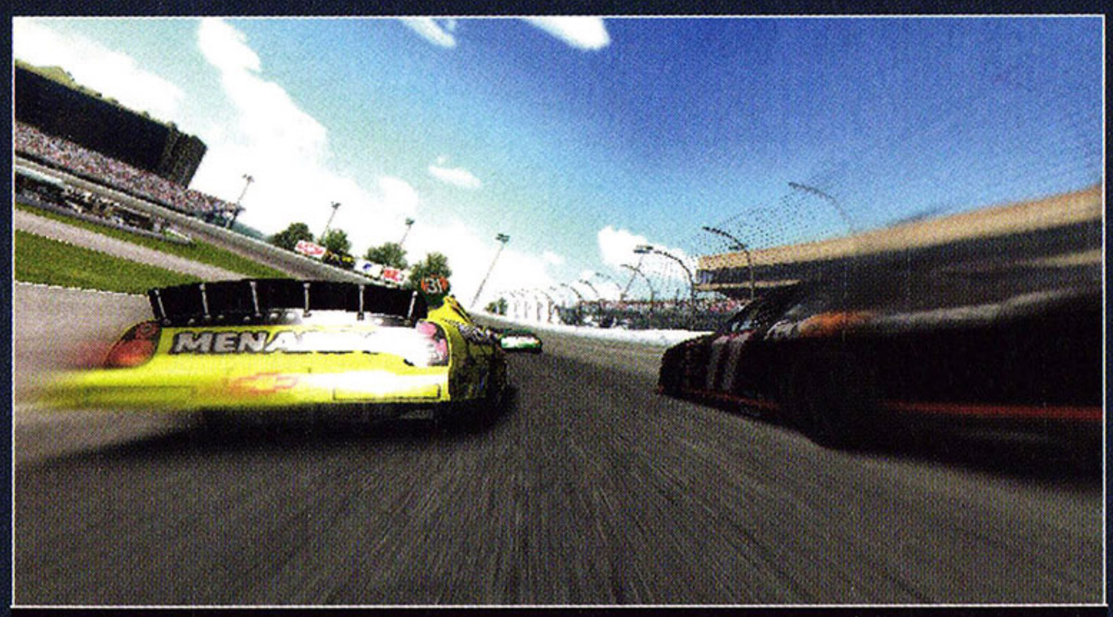
PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures

PC

Archlord

Courtesy of British publisher Codemasters and Korean developer NHN Games, the U.S. will see another MMORPG competing for your monthly gaming dollars this fall. Though Archlord may seem familiar at first glance to your standard level-grinding PvP-centric Asian online game, it has a unique hook that may be worth checking out. Through a huge combined effort by a group of players, one person can become the Archlord of an entire server. This comes with a whole host of benefits, from levying taxes on the populace to a unique set of armor and flying dragon mount. This title will also be attempting to change up the MMO business model a bit – subscription fees will be substantially lower than something like World of Warcraft or City of Heroes, but the publisher hopes to generate additional revenue by selling in-game items for real money online.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PSP

NASCAR 07

Let's just address this straight off: Ricky Bobby is not, repeat not, in NASCAR 07. It may seem weird, but he's not even a real driver! Don't worry though, 'cause if you're looking for ego, there's always Rowdy Busch. This year's game doesn't have a marquee feature on par with '06's team control, but developer Tiburon has tweaked the game in a few areas. A cool motion blur effect makes side-by-side racing sweet, and drivers' abilities will fluctuate depending on the track type. Your own stats will even change during a race. Draft well, make passes, and keep it off the wall and your confidence and attributes will increase for that race. Also new for '07 is bump drafting and the Kenny Wallace-led Allstate Qualifiers, which help you get a leg up in Fight to the Top mode. Both the console and PSP versions come out in early September, and the latter even features a rewind function for drivers who drive well enough to earn it.

GAMECUBE

DK Bongo Blast

You know those video game drums you bought last year? You know, the ones you banged on in time with the music for a month? Yeah, well, there's this new game that's going to have you endlessly whacking them (minus the rhythmic timing) to make your aerial jet-barrel powered carts zoom down a race course. That's right! Nintendo's new party/race game for the GameCube presumes its players want nothing more than to slap those bongos until their hands hurt. Is Nintendo right or wrong? Only time will tell, but we are impressed about plans to continue to support the peripheral, especially in such a strange setting as a cart racer. Look to have your forearms ready for a workout by the end of the year.

PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

NFL Street 3

EA Big's commissioned a new NFL Street title for November, and the good news is that they are actually gonna let you play the game this time! Yes, GameBreakers are no longer automatic sequences, and in fact the structure of this feature has been changed in general. GameBreakers will now be more frequent, but not as overwhelmingly powerful. There are also different kinds of GameBreakers, such as being able to blow guys off the ball carrier or allowing defensive backs to lock onto passes. Players can now jump off of stuff in the middle of the field, and they can even do double jumps in mid-air – although the development team admits that this feature still needs to be balanced. While playing you'll earn collectibles that will help you both inside and outside the game. For instance, you may be awarded 12 points for a TD instead of six.

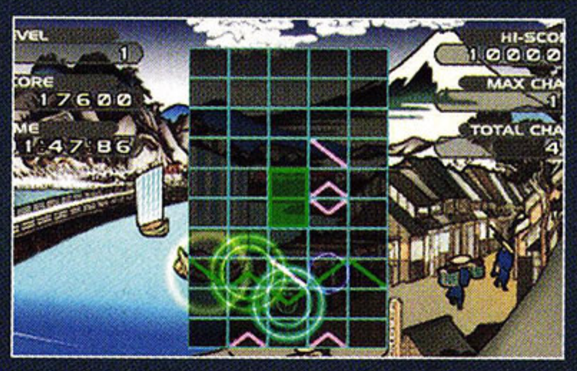
PSP

Jeanne D'Arc

French history may not top the list of things begging for a video game treatment, but it's on the way in the form of Level 5's new strategy/RPG Jeanne D'Arc. The developer (who also did Dragon Quest VIII and Rogue Galaxy) is mixing medieval France and fantasy in turn-based combat for the PSP, with an assortment of real and fictitious characters and scenarios. Adding magic and dragons to a history lesson may sound outlandish, but it's bound to be a better treatment of Joan of Arc than *The Messenger*. Did Dustin Hoffman even read that trash before he signed on? Anyway, Jeanne D'Arc will hit Japan in the winter, but there aren't any details yet regarding a U.S. release.

PSP | NINTENDO DS

Gunpey

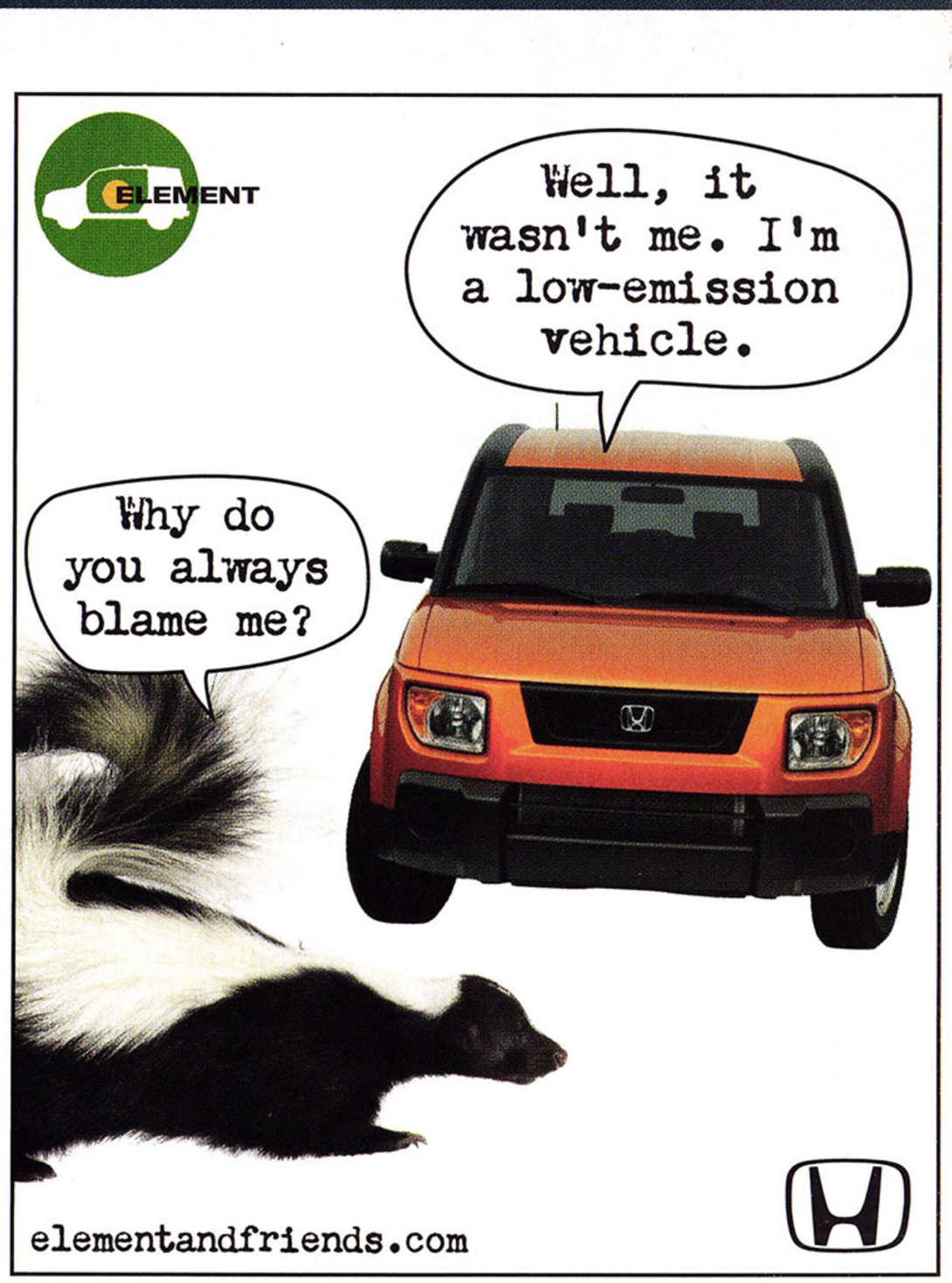


Pay attention, because this is important. You want to know about this game. Why, you ask? Well, for one, the game concept comes from the creator of the Game Boy, the late Gupei Yokoi, who died in a tragic auto accident in 1997. The basic idea has been remixed by the folks over at Q Entertainment, as in those guys who did Lumines. Bringing their own feel to the title means that the same aesthetic of their hit game will be present; songs and skins will unlock as you progress. The music also alters in reaction to your combos and line completions. Gameplay is simply a matter of linking a line from left to right across the screen by maneuvering segments into place, and then comboing by linking in other segments to your completed line. Easy, right? Keep telling yourself that. Forty songs and skins are out to prove you wrong, which are different for each version on PSP and DS. The PSP version looks an awful lot like Lumines, while the DS has a slightly more colorful, kid-friendly style. Namco Bandai should have the game out to you by this holiday for all your puzzling pleasure.

NINTENDO DS

Mario Hoops 3-on-3

It's good to see that sports game juggernaut, Square Enix, is finally giving those RPG side projects a rest. We all know that Cloud is modeled after Larry Bird, and that Black Mages were originally designed to dunk basketballs. There's no point in pinching yourself. You are not dreaming. The sky really is falling. Despite everything your inner fanboy tells you, Square Enix is making a basketball game for Nintendo DS...and it's looking pretty good! As it turns out, the stylus is a great tool for performing ankle-breaking dekes and thundering jams. While Mario gets the billing, players will also get the change to suit up as familiar faces from the Final Fantasy series. Who has better moves, Yoshi or Cactuar? We can't wait to find out. Publishing partner Nintendo hopes to have this offbeat, yet exciting release on store shelves on September 11.



EX-P model shown. © 2005 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI

88

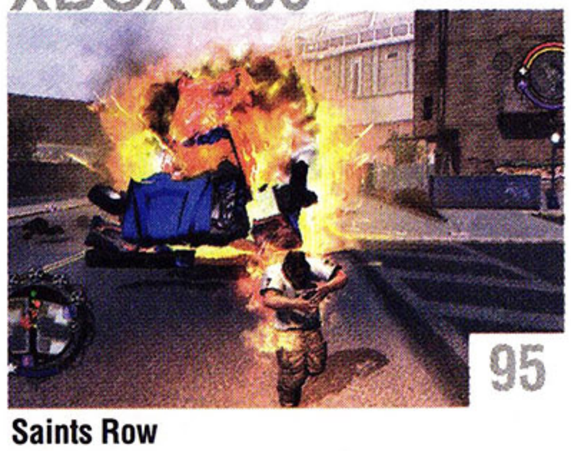
Super Monkey Ball Adventure

PS2

90

Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra

XBOX 360



95

Saints Row

PC

99

Civilization IV: Warlords

94

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

Dead Rising

Capcom has consistently provided some of the best moments that zombie horror can offer, but it has upped a different ante with Dead Rising. Chock full of hilarious side notes – clothing options, wacky weapons, hackneyed survivors, and over-the-top psychos – the game still manages to actually say something. It's no small task to mix this much hilarity with a social m essage, but Dead Rising unabashedly stakes its own claim in the zombie landscape and comes out, not just surviving the struggle, but triumphing. Head to our review of the events in a small town mall over on page 94.

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	Ignominous. Look it up.

> **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.

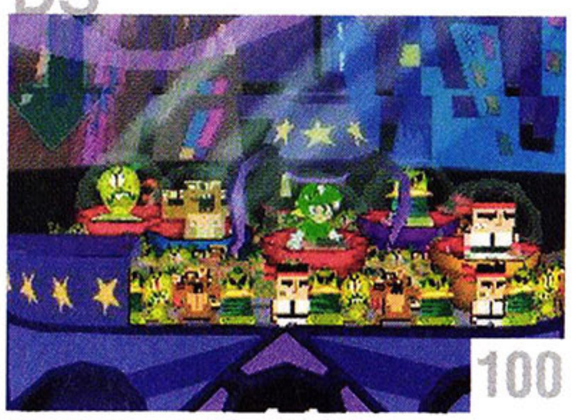
> **Replay Value**

- **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.

PSP

Tekken: Dark Resurrection

DS



Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi: The Genie and The Amp

GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

CivCity: Rome

City simulation has long been a staple of PC gaming, but it's been a while since we last saw a good title in the genre. CivCity: Rome does a great job of satisfying the intrinsic human desire to build something that works, and even does so without simply aping the decades-old SimCity concepts that started it all. Getting your people everything they need to build better homes (and therefore pay you more taxes) turns out to be an excellent gameplay hook, and makes the dry subject matter of ancient Roman society fun.

REVIEWS INDEX

FlatOut 2 88
Super Monkey Ball Adventure 88
Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra 90
Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories 92
One Piece: Pirate's Carnival 92
Super Dragon Ball Z 92
Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII 93
Yakuza 93
Dead Rising 94
Saints Row 95
Ninety-Nine Nights 96
Bomberman: Act Zero 97
Over G Fighters 97
CivCity: Rome 98
Civilization IV: Warlords 99
Sword of the Stars 99
Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi: The Genie and The Amp 100
Mercury Meltdown 100
NCAA Football 07 100
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest 100
Tekken: Dark Resurrection 100

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

EARLY CHILDHOOD eC	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.	MATURE M	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
EVERYONE E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.	ADULTS ONLY AO	Content suitable only for adults.
EVERYONE 10+ E10+	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.	RATING PENDING RP	Product is awaiting final rating.
TEEN T	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

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

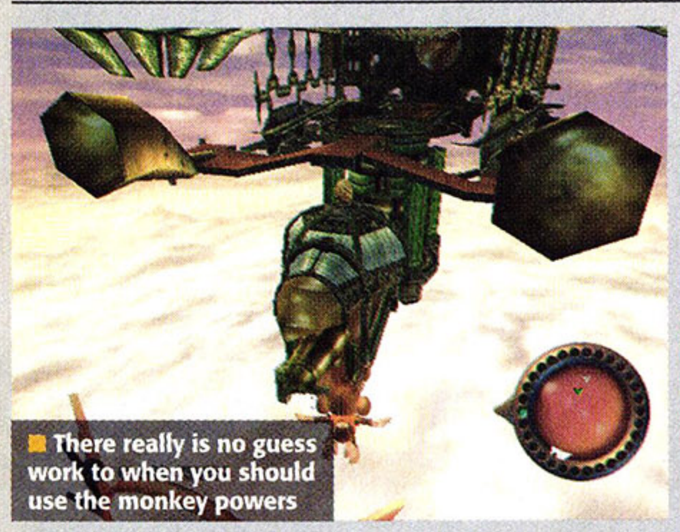
third-party – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer

Yeast – The ultimate power-up in Bread Rising

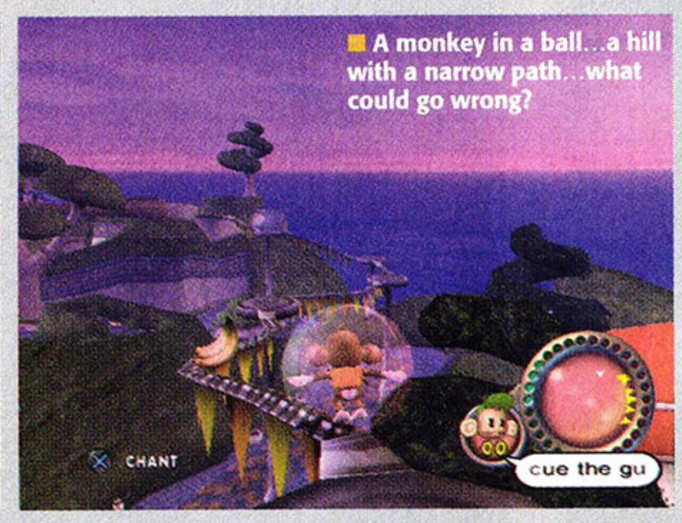
PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Super Monkey Ball Adventure

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES > **RELEASE** AUGUST 1 > **ESRB** E



There really is no guess work to when you should use the monkey powers



A monkey in a ball...a hill with a narrow path...what could go wrong?

THOSE DAMN, DIRTY MONKEYS

If these flea-infested poop throwers don't suffer the horrible death of asphyxiation inside of their wondrous rolling balls, I may be forced to push them off of a cliff onto what I hope are the sharpest rocks in the world. And don't even think of calling PETA on me. These fiesty hairballs are capable of inflicting a lifetime of suffering upon people within just 20 minutes of coming into contact with them.

Strangely enough, two days ago, I would have told you that I was a huge fan of the Monkey Ball series. Whenever I play these games, I always find myself in awe of how they make your nerves tense up as you try to apply a feather touch onto the ball. It's a wicked feeling, and it only becomes more intense as the difficulty level ramps up with each passing stage. Just the slightest touch to the left or right could lead to completing a level or having to restart it. Thankfully, this series is built on the idea of every stage being incredibly small. Levels last for only a few seconds, and you usually don't have to make too many drastic maneuvers. You just have to find a safe passage across the dangerous terrain.

With Super Monkey Ball Adventure, developer Traveller's Tales is plucking these primates from their dangerous bite-size habitats and is placing them into a peaceful world that sprawls as far as the eye can see. Unfortunately, the idiotic anthropoids are still incredibly difficult to control. The slightest misjudgment in movement won't necessarily lead to death, but rather to you sliding off of a ramp before you reach a house or sailing past a monkey that you need to converse with. In other words, it's like playing Jak & Daxter with characters that are drunk and uncooperative. Even without an enemy in sight, just exploring the surroundings can lead to curse words flying past your jowls at record speeds.

Menial activities like opening doors prove to be an even bigger ordeal. I have to rotate this lever 10 times? It's a pain in the ass to do it once. That's like having to find 10 security cards to open a door in any other game! And what does all of this hard work usually lead to? A transporter that will warp you to a normal Monkey Ball stage. Adding salt to the already gaping wound, most of these classic-styled stages are completed more through dumb luck than skill.

The only area where this game shows signs of its former glory is within the new party games. Bounce, a game that pushes players to turn over as many squares on a grid as possible by bouncing on them, is one of the series' best, and Tag, a game as simple as it sounds only on a spherical world, can suck away hours quickly.

Long story short, the adventure motif simply didn't catch. Even if the character controls had been more user friendly, the design that Traveller's Tales dreamed up fails to elicit any semblance of fun.—**REINER**

Bounce is one of the better Monkey Ball party games

BOTTOM LINE 4.75

> **Concept:** Moving the monkeys away from short puzzle levels and placing them in huge worlds is like taking a fish out of water. The results are very unpleasant

> **Graphics:** The most colorful and detailed Monkey Ball yet, but when stacked up against other franchises, it's still really ugly

> **Sound:** Cute little voices and melodies joined by your screams of agony

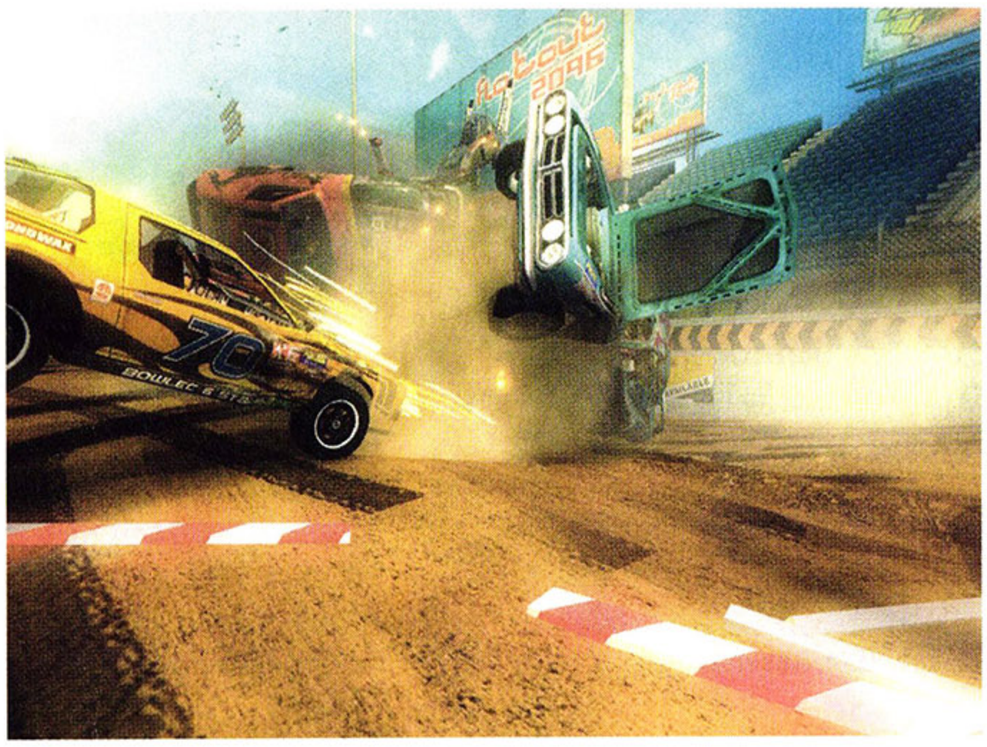
> **Playability:** An exact recreation of the Titanic hitting the iceberg. Control is nowhere to be found

> **Entertainment:** Two fun party games and a main quest that makes it feel like monkeys are throwing their droppings at you

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 5

If I asked you if you wanted some gummi bears, you'd probably answer yes. However, what if I told you that to get these gummi bears, you had to dig to the bottom of a White Castle dumpster? Oh, and one more thing, the gummi bears are actually five years old and stale. Still hungry? That's essentially the situation that presents itself to the person that plays Super Monkey Ball Adventure. The only real innovation the developers have managed to add to the aging formula is a platform-style overworld that succeeds solely in making you spend time on tedious fetch quests between actual Monkey Ball levels. What's worse, the new levels themselves are either too easy or difficult to the point of being totally random. Honestly, this series has been in decline since it debuted on GameCube so many years ago, and I think it might be time to give it a rest.—**MATT**



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

FlatOut 2

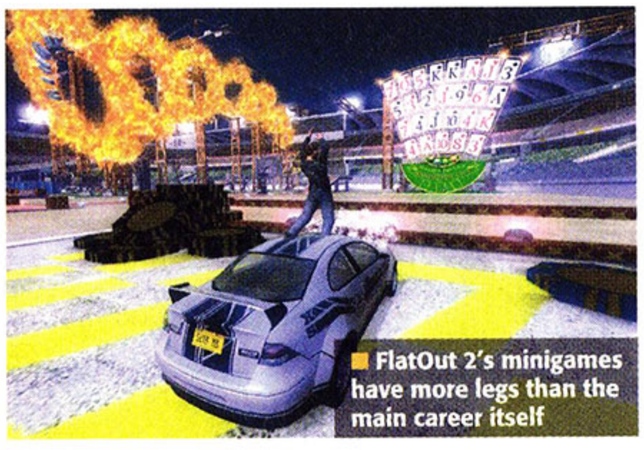
> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EMPIRE INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** BUGBEAR ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** AUGUST 1 > **ESRB** T

NO WINDSHIELD, NO PROBLEM

Gamers last year probably empathized with the drivers in FlatOut, who were regularly thrown through their windshields. The title punished players with floaty cars and racing that wasn't much fun, despite the collisions and debris that filled the screen. Although many of the same rules apply for this sequel, FlatOut 2 improves on the formula enough to elevate it above being a total car crash.

This game hasn't solved all of its pivot-based racing problems, so unfortunately that doesn't help matters, but at least it's better simply because the tracks are more interesting and the sense of speed is pretty good. The two go hand-in-hand, because not only do the tracks let you get a good head of steam going, but their layout is more diverse than in the first FlatOut. My favorite thing about this game – the unpredictability during a race – is both a blessing and a curse, however. I love all the crap flying around the screen and in front of your car, but I felt that what would or would not knock your car off course was inconsistent. And as much as I enjoy the fact that the AI cars constantly crash in front of you, I never felt that ramming into those in front of you was worth the turbo you earned from it.

If you're a fan of the driver projectile minigames from the first FlatOut, the new ones added here will definitely catch your eye. In particular I liked the field goal, royal flush, and stone-skipping games. Hell, I had fun with them all. The minigames alone will keep this game in your machine a little longer than it really deserves – but what's wrong with that? Nothing. Because if you can't have some fun with a dude flying through his windshield, then you are all dead inside.—**KATO**



FlatOut 2's minigames have more legs than the main career itself

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** The first FlatOut was as basic as the dirt it raced on. This one is a much more complete game

> **Graphics:** Both console versions are essentially the same, including the pop-up

> **Sound:** Perhaps the only video game to ever feature Supergrass

> **Playability:** The driving has tightened up a bit, but it's still a little floaty

> **Entertainment:** The slew of new minigames is perhaps the biggest plus, but overall the game is eminently better than its predecessor

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 6

FlatOut 2 shouts, "It's like Burnout, y'all!" but plays more like a sad hillbilly than a rowdy good ol' boy. Floaty cars and persnickety impact physics are the biggest offenders – they are each broken in a flavor that makes the whole fun-time-crashing idea a bust. But I want to like this sequel because the presentation is top notch, it has a vibe all its own, and there's obviously a lot of thought and care put into the whole experience. But, man, if it isn't fun to play...well, there's not much I can do. Granted, as you go on and buy better cars the driving gets a little bit better, but that still leaves us with two problems. Even at its best, the core driving isn't a very good time, and getting to that plateau of "okay" in the career mode is nothing short of laborious work.—**LISA**

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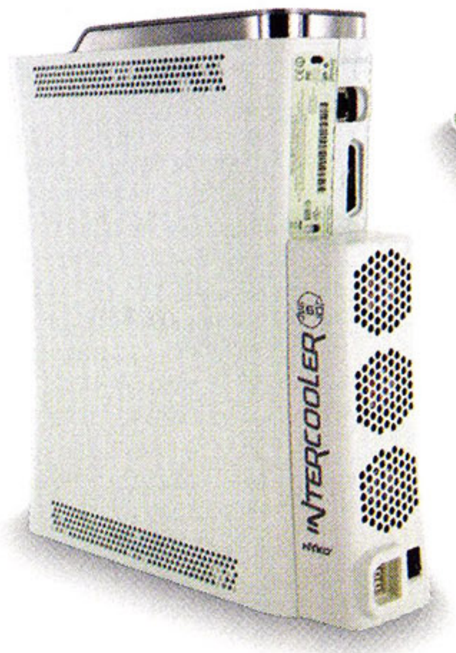

INTERCOOLER 360
Play longer at cooler temperatures

multiREADER 360
Compact multi-card
reader and USB hub

chargeSTATION 360
Dual port rapid battery charger
with two NiMH battery packs

Intelligent Remote 360
Full feature learning remote

powerKIT 360
NiMH battery pack
and USB play and
charge cable

GAME 360 FACE
Customizable faceplate
and skin kit

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PLAYSTATION 2

Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI **> DEVELOPER** MONOLITH SOFT **> RELEASE** AUGUST 29 **> ESRB** T

AND IT WAS GOOD

If there's one thing that can be said about last year's Xenosaga game, it's that it prepared fans of the series for the worst. If you were one of the many steeling yourself for disappointment in Episode III, go ahead and breathe a sigh of relief. Putting all of your fears to rest, the final chapter in this complicated tale ties up (most of) the loose ends, and does it with gameplay and storytelling that nearly recaptures the glory of the first Xenosaga.

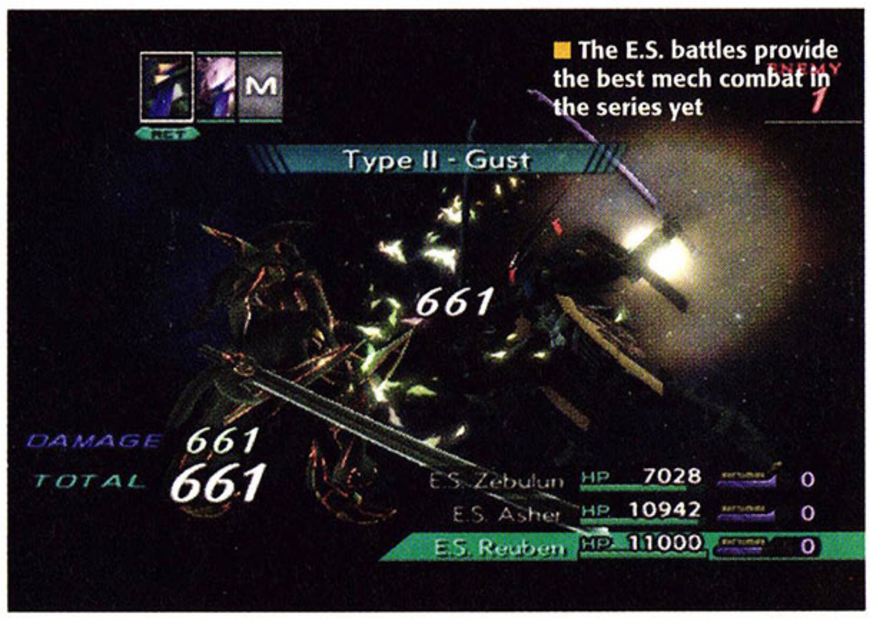
After the cool reception of Episode II, it seems that the team at Monolith Soft really listened to gamer feedback and made adjustments in order to craft this game into a suitable finale. The new battle system does away with the old break mechanic (substituting a much better one), and gives each character a chance to shine with unique techs, magic, and special finishing strikes. It even goes back to the first installment a bit by reinstating the importance of stat boosts and debuffs, which are necessary to score the big hits. These changes mainly affect character battles, but the E.S. combat has been overhauled too. In fact, I actually liked these sequences more than the on-foot ones this time – customizable weaponry, sweet animations, and cool mechanics make them a perfect change of pace. Fighting is actually fun again!

Of course, combat is only part of the Xenosaga equation, with the complex and twisting story making up most of the remainder. I can't say much without spoiling everything, but fans should be more than pleased with how the myriad pieces eventually align and make sense, and the pacing is spot-on. The only let-down in the storytelling is that more of the character interactions are covered in text boxes rather than cutscenes, which diminishes the impact of some clearly important events.

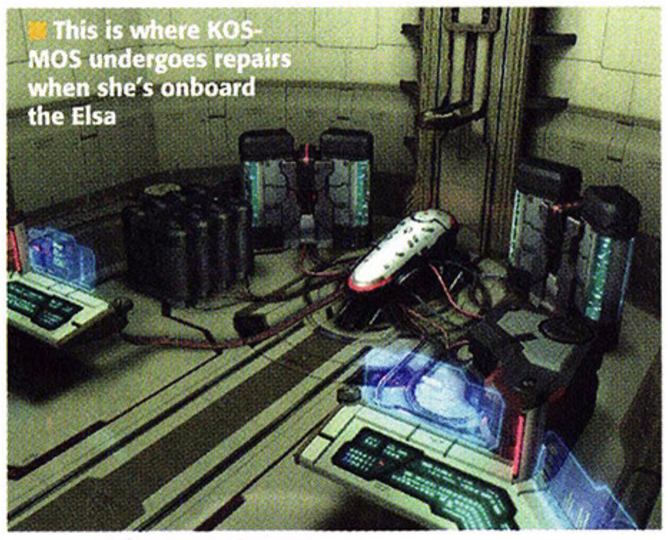
Despite the minor hit in terms of cinematic presentation, there's really only one thing that drags Episode III down as a game: a collection of the most dry and uninspired boss battles ever assembled in an RPG. Granted, they don't happen very often, but they are guaranteed to try your patience. The bosses never require any strategy; they've just got thousands upon thousands of hit points. These bouts basically come down to endurance, not challenge; if you have enough magic/items to last the 40 minutes it could take to the suckers down, you win. Congratulations, I guess?

"...nearly recaptures the glory of the first Xenosaga."

Xenosaga Episode III has many more successes than failures. All comparisons to previous entries aside (though you will need to beat both of them to enjoy this one), it's a fun and involving RPG with two or three immensely aggravating fights. But taken in context with the trilogy as a whole, Episode III is the worthy conclusion to an epic that I hadn't dared hope it could be.—**JOE**



The E.S. battles provide the best mech combat in the series yet


This is where KOS-MOS undergoes repairs when she's onboard the Elsa

Nice tattoo, loser. News flash: Venom is not the best band ever

SECRETS FINALLY REVEALED

Coming into the home stretch of Episode III, you've probably got a long list of puzzling characters and events that need clarification. While every little mystery isn't totally explained, here's a sampling of some key questions that you'll find very satisfying answers to throughout the course of the game.

- What's going on with blue-eyed KOS-MOS?
- Is Allen really that big of a wuss?
- What (and who) are the Testaments?
- What's the story with Ziggy's family?
- Does Nephilim ever say anything that's not totally confusing?
- Will Wilhelm ever do anything?
- Is Margulis always so awesome? (I'll spoil this one: Yes.)
- What really happened during the Miltian Conflict 15 years ago?
- Chaos isn't human, is he?
- How important could the Zohar really be?

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: After tripping and falling, just stand up, brush yourself off, and pretend nothing happened

> Graphics: No CG this time, but the in-game models and environments are still beautiful. The final dungeon in particular looks amazing

> Sound: The score is very hit and miss, but great voice work moves the story along

> Playability: Considerably easier than the previous two games, but the revamped battle systems are much better

> Entertainment: Great when you're exploring and fighting normal enemies. Frustrating during the boss encounters

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

Better than the second installment, but failing to meet the high bar set by the first, the third and final Xenosaga game is a better than passable game taken on its own merits. While desperately slow in getting going, it eventually ramps up to speed with a reasonably decent battle system and, from time to time, some cinematic sequences that should leave many sci-fi fans crying with joy. Unfortunately, text boxes have now replaced many of the scenes that could have been animated conversations, and the shift dramatically hurts the cinematic tone of the game. So, as a standalone product, my judgment comes down as a firm shrug of the shoulders. As a completion of one of the deepest and most complex RPG trilogies ever, this rich final act is a thematic triumph, weaving threads of religion and philosophy together to explore concepts of free will and individuality amid a backdrop of giant robots and mammoth space battles. You know, if you're into that sort of thing.—**MILLER**

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September 2006

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence

PlayStation 2

DOLBY DIGITAL PRO LOGIC II

XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE

DOLBY DIGITAL

PlayStation 2 screens shown

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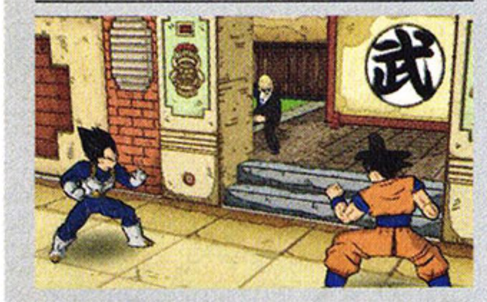
PS2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

Super Dragon Ball Z

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING
> **PUBLISHER** ATARI
> **DEVELOPER** CRAFTS & MEISTER
> **RELEASE** JULY 18 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 6

Dragon Ball Z games have long been concerned with pleasing fans first, and not being absolute trash second. It's encouraging to see Super Dragon Ball Z change these priorities a bit, focusing less on pandering and more on actual mechanics. Unfortunately, it still isn't very good. The fighting system is definitely more tactical (it's an arcade port), but remains pretty simplistic and feels like it was awkwardly transplanted from 2D into 3D space. I'll admit that this is technically the best DBZ game I have ever played. On the other hand, the Black Death is probably the best of the European plagues, and I'm not exactly rushing to get that.—**JOE**

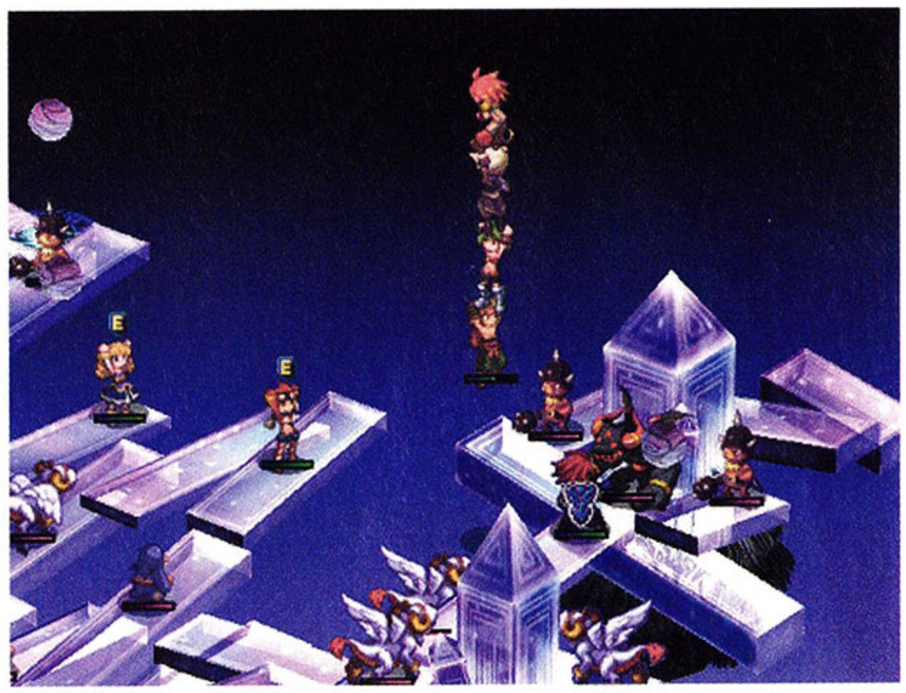
PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

One Piece: Pirate's Carnival

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER BOARD
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **DEVELOPER** HAND CO. LTD.
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 5 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 4

While I'm certainly not a fan of the zany anime franchise that this game is based on, I like to think that I'm capable of remaining objective and judging a title on its own merits, independent of the license it's tied to. I want to preface my statements that way, so that when I tell you how awful Pirate's Carnival is, maybe, just maybe, you'll believe me. Now I know you like those wacky characters and their crazy pirate antics. And yes, there sure are a lot of frantic, button-mashing, party-style minigames unceremoniously stuffed into this title. But you know what? Even if you have dozens of ugly, smelly sofas to pick between, buying any one of them means that at the end of the day you're still going to be staring at an unattractive couch that smells bad in your living room. And you don't want to do that to your dog. He has to sleep up there, man.—**MILLER**



PLAYSTATION 2

Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NIPPON ICHI > **DEVELOPER** NIPPON ICHI > **RELEASE** AUGUST 29 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Embed engaging characters and hilarious dialogue in a deeply customizable and interesting strategy/RPG

> **Graphics:** Spell effects and team attack animations are great, but the rest of the game looks a bit like a late-era PSone offering

> **Sound:** Maybe the Japanese voiceovers are only better because I don't understand the language, but they beat the mediocre English voices nonetheless

> **Playability:** It's all grids and menus, but they're well thought out and easy to use

> **Entertainment:** Even as a sequel to one of the best games in the genre to date, Disgaea 2 does not disappoint

> **Replay Value:** High

SECOND TIME'S STILL THE CHARM

Call it a sleeper hit, a cult classic, or whatever you like. Any way you slice it, Disgaea: Hour of Darkness was a low-profile game that delivered more entertainment than the vast majority of big-budget high-exposure titles. I was worried that Disgaea 2 wouldn't manage to capture the same magic that the original did, but I couldn't be happier that Cursed Memories proved me wrong.

Protagonists Adell and Rozalin don't quite pull off the amazing combination of hilarity and emotional attachment as well as the first game's tandem of Laharl and Etna, but in the realm of RPG characters they're well above average in terms of anchoring the story and involving the player in their lives and conflicts. A strong supporting cast of characters and a setting that pushes the boundary of absolute absurdism (the chapter interludes are brought to you by an inter-Netherworld news service that mimics and mocks the sensationalist coverage of modern TV news to great effect) also help to lift the story elements up almost to the level of the best that RPGs have to offer.

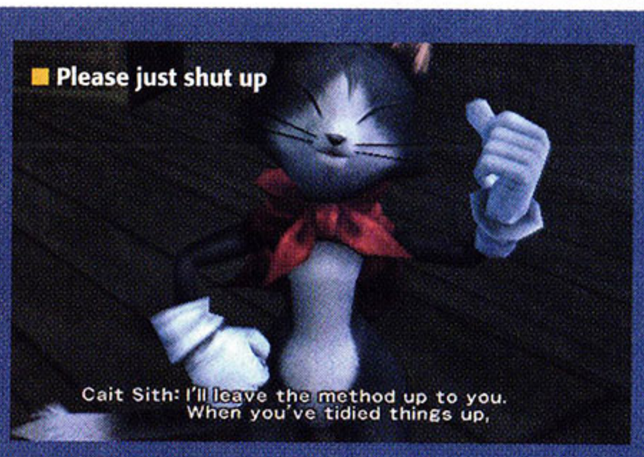
The amazing depth that permeated every one of Disgaea's game systems is back with additions and improvements sprinkled liberally throughout this time around. Secret rooms and marauding pirates, not to mention a ton of new Geo Symbol effects, make the Item Worlds (randomly generated dungeons that are great for leveling up) more interesting, and the Dark Assembly is thankfully less of a hassle to manipulate in this sequel. Story battles are crafted more like tactical puzzles than straight-up slugfests, which plays well to the strengths of the game's battle system. While a few rough spots like cumbersome inventory management remain, this sequel feels a lot like a polished up version of the original with a new setting – and given Disgaea's excellent pedigree, that's nothing to complain about.

Like its predecessor, Disgaea 2 isn't for everyone. If sinking 40-plus hours into a game just to see the basic ending and none of the secret or hidden content doesn't appeal to you, feel free to pass on by. But if dropping dozens of hours into leveling up for the sake of having obscenely powerful characters sounds good, or you're looking for some fun tactical battles and a clever story, I can't recommend this highly enough.—**ADAM**

Second Opinion 8.75

The Disgaea franchise has a pretty unique formula: deep turn-based strategy combined with a healthy dose of absurd humor – like Monty Python's translation of *The Art of War*. If that combination appeals to you, then you'll love Disgaea 2. Few games manage to be this complex and still work in zany characters like the Prism Rangers, Team Invincible, and exploding penguin demons. The cast is hilarious, and the huge number of character classes are nicely balanced. Some of the more advanced game systems could use a little better explanation, but that just means you have tons to discover by playing around with Disgaea 2's many features. Personally, I'm hooked on the Dark Assembly, which allows me to unleash my inner Jack Abramoff and bribe senators. It is the strange, unique features like these that make Disgaea 2 so much fun, and such a no-brainer for strategy fans like me.—**JEREMY**

If auto-aim is on, hitting your foes is never a problem



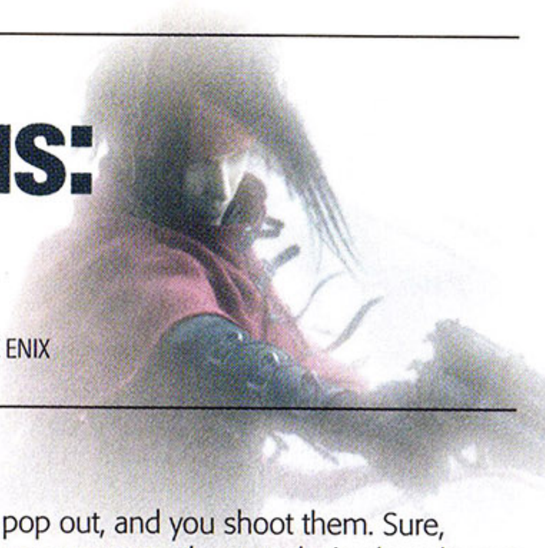
Please just shut up

Ugh, You Again?

Almost all of the original cast of FF VII has a cameo in Dirge of Cerberus, but unfortunately the two most prominent supporting characters are the last ones anyone would ever want – Yuffie and Cait Sith. Any FF VII fan who actually knows how to play the game can tell you that these are the losers you abandon on the airship as soon as possible. Instead, Vincent is saddled with their bungling while Cloud and Red XIII are probably off doing something awesome.

PLAYSTATION 2

Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII



> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
> RELEASE AUGUST 15 **> ESRB** T

REQUIEM FOR A DREAM

Look, I'm just going to get right to the point. After all, if you're interested in Dirge of Cerberus, odds are that you don't need an introduction to Final Fantasy VII and its key characters; you probably just want to know if, as a fan, you need to play through this game. The answer? Yes. I'm so sorry.

It isn't that Dirge of Cerberus is a terrible game – its visuals are decent, though it struggles in most other areas. It details the tragic events in Vincent's life (back when he was still a Turk) that will make you see his character in a new light. But this illuminating backstory comes at a price. Between the story scenes and revelations, Dirge of Cerberus is an unoriginal and uninspiring experience that feels more like a carnival shooting gallery than an action game.

No matter which generic neon techno-future level you're playing, the pattern is the same. Soldiers pop out, and you shoot them. Sure, sometimes you get to shoot explosive barrels next to the soldiers, but that's about as inventive as it gets. Don't expect any stylish Dante-caliber demon slaying; most battles are won by simply plugging away from a distance. Even though this style of gameplay doesn't exactly get the blood pumping, it makes it pretty easy to blow through the levels and get to the interesting bits, like Omega Weapon.

Vincent's Chaos and Galian Beast forms play important roles

There is a whole stable of titles that are basically made to satisfy loyal fans (see Super Dragon Ball Z on page 92), but very few of them expand and enrich the source universe like Dirge of Cerberus. On the other hand, despite all of the effort that clearly went into this game's visuals, story points, and even gun customization, making Dirge of Cerberus fun to play slipped to a disappointingly low priority somewhere along the way.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> Concept: Vincent Valentine is cool. Make a game about it

> Graphics: Character models are impressive, and the *Advent Children*-quality CG is amazing

> Sound: Excellent voicework and an atmospheric soundrack set the mood perfectly

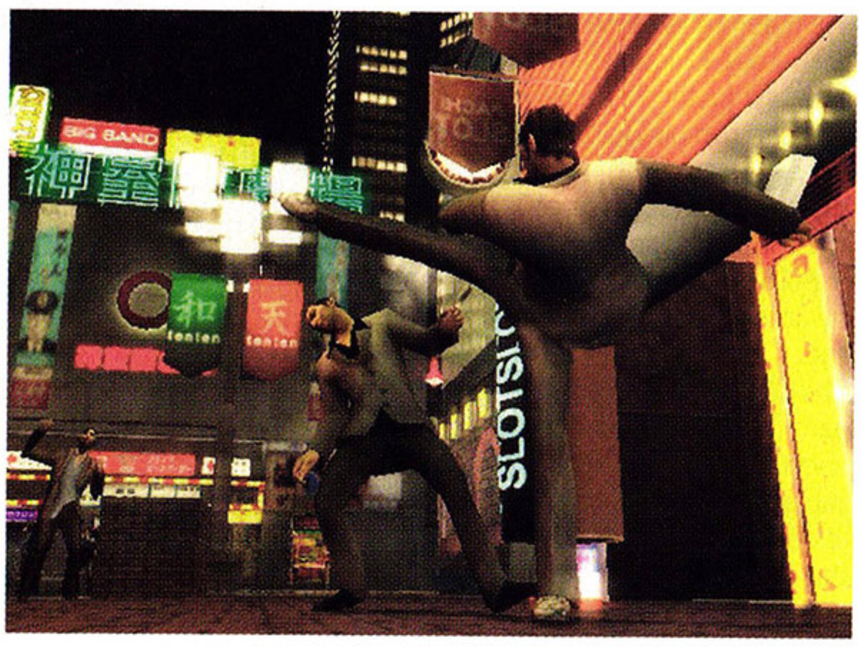
> Playability: The control scheme is surprisingly complicated and unwieldy for a game where you basically just point and shoot

> Entertainment: The story is compelling at points, but the game itself is just no fun

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 6

Vincent and *The Matrix*'s Neo have a lot in common. Not only do they both have an eye for flamboyant fashion, both of them have starred in sequels that make our inner-fan boys weep. Dirge's plot is just as confusing as anything the Wachowski's would dream up, but it actually looks quite good when stacked up against the gameplay, which is basically a shooting gallery that crushes souls with its yawn-inducing encounters and key card puzzles. Heart-wrenching horrors accompany almost every step that you make, but as always, Square's CG sequences are to die for, but not worth playing a crummy game to see.—**REINER**



PLAYSTATION 2

Yakuza

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** AMUSEMENT VISION **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1 **> ESRB** M

Oddly enough, for a game that has been perceived as the "Japanese GTA" (a description that's far off the mark), the experience of playing Yakuza reminds me most of a somewhat scary evening I spent drinking at Irv's Bar, one of Minneapolis' most notoriously tough dives. This might sound like a weird comparison, but in practice, it's pretty much the same. Most of the time, you're listening to rambling, incoherent conversations. Then, about every 15 minutes, some weird guy wanders up and tries to start a fight with you for no apparent reason. Basically, this is a poorly made RPG where the battles are determined by brief Streets of Rage-style brawling instead of turn-based battles, plagued by repetitive fighting, boring levels, and nearly zero variety. Please, someone put a hit out on this one before it commits more crimes against gaming.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> Concept: A deadly dull would-be crime epic that combines all the bad elements of the RPG and brawler genres

> Graphics: Pretty enough, but the loading times between screens gets very annoying

> Sound: Some of the worst voice acting you'll hear this year, notable only for a ridiculous amount of cussing

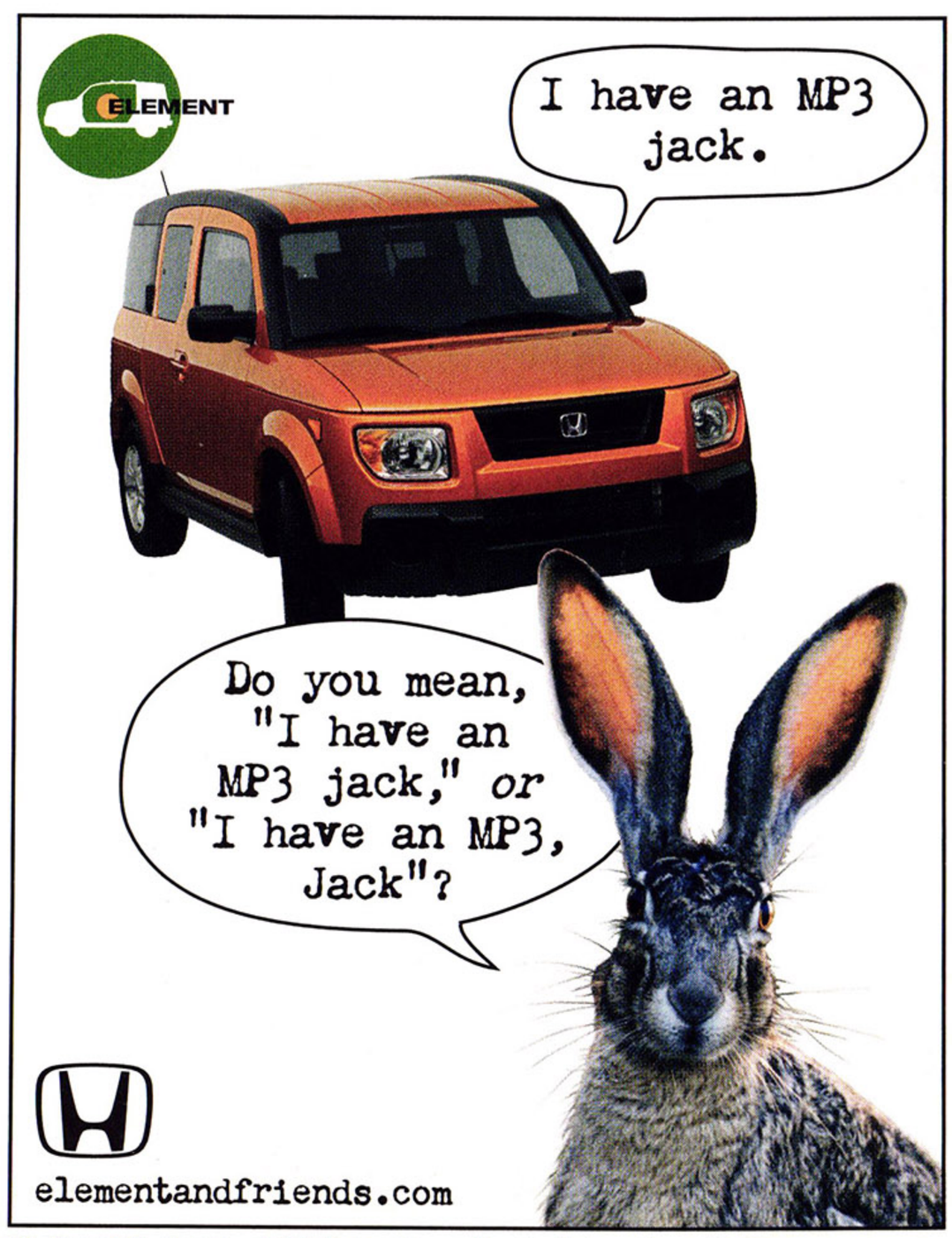
> Playability: The fighting is painfully shallow

> Entertainment: If you're expecting a Japanese GTA, run far, far away from Yakuza

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 6.25

If throwing around the F-bomb makes a game mature, this sucker belongs in a nursing home. The overblown machismo and cussing that is smeared throughout Yakuza will do much more to make you laugh than make you feel "street." Bolstered by some terrible music and worse dialogue, your mob enforcer with a heart of gold wanders through streets populated by more thugs than Sega has forgotten game franchises. The clumsy combat system and RPG feel might have been good, but end up as a mishmash of sophomoric attempts to be hard edged that end up as simply ridiculous.—**MILLER**



EX-P model shown. © 2005 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

XBOX 360

Dead Rising

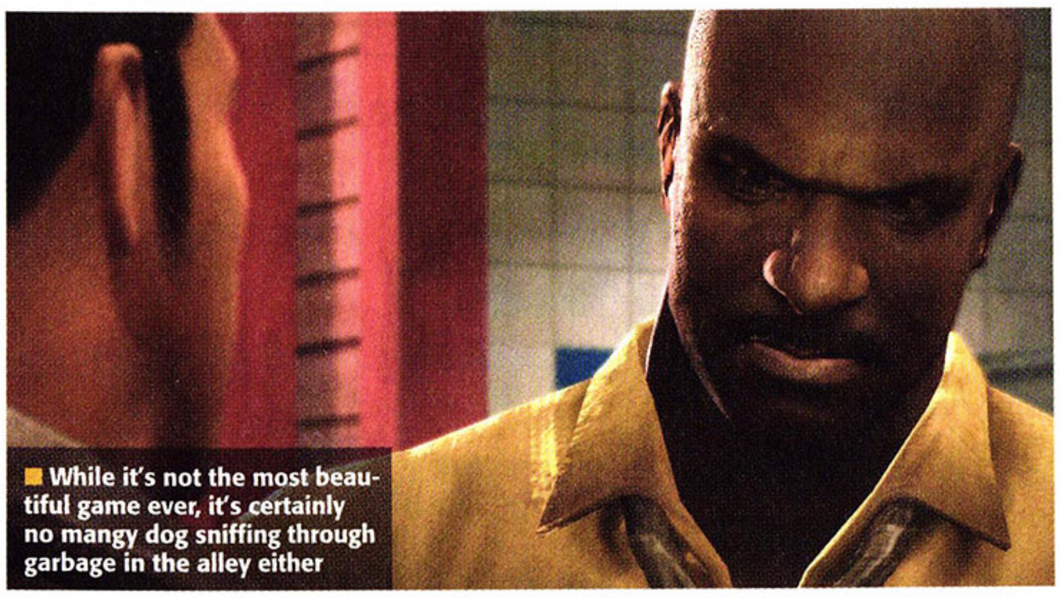
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM **> RELEASE** AUGUST 8 **> ESRB** M

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

SYSTEM SHOCK

Oh. My. God. With pundits flailing on the sidelines of video game design theory, trying *so hard* to cite gaming experiences that are "art," I'm afraid they're going to miss one of the most potentially compelling examples: the genre-smashing Dead Rising. Capcom's zombie festival of campy gore is so much more than it seems on the surface, but at its core succeeds in the one thing that sets video games apart from other forms of entertainment: It's unrelentingly fun and still has something to say.

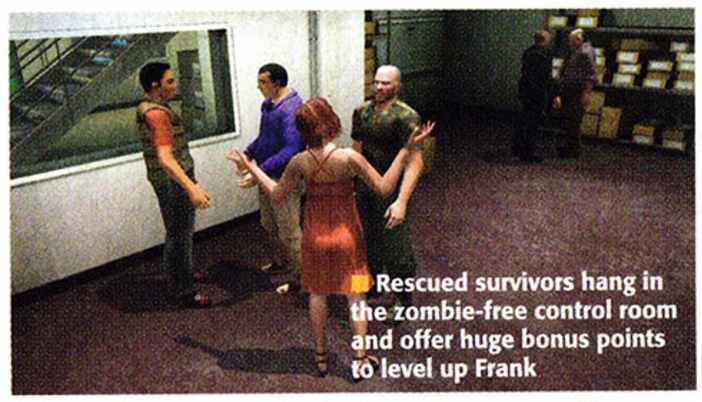
Looking for nothing more than a playground of undead destruction, I approached the game as many of you will. I was hoping that the action wouldn't get too repetitive. With any luck, I thought, the cheesy dialogue and setting would be an asset and not a source of droll cutscenes I would want to skip through. I started the game. I literally mowed over zombies. I cackled every five minutes when a newfound weapon sliced through the thick hordes in an over-the-top mockery of slasher flicks and secret dreams of the biggest *Dead Alive* fan. I outright horrified the other editors by walking Frank around in a cute little sundress for a full day.



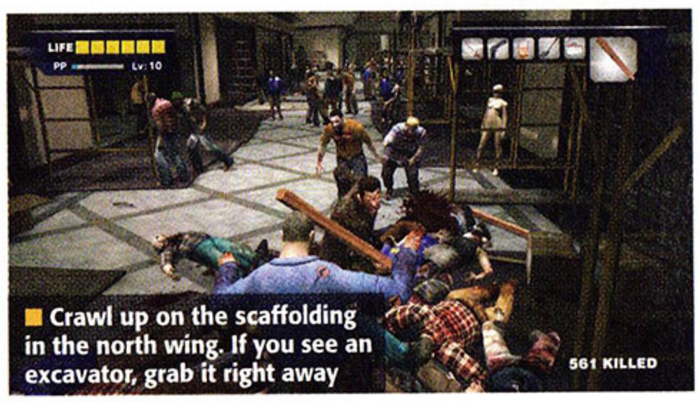
■ While it's not the most beautiful game ever, it's certainly no mangy dog sniffing through garbage in the alley either

■ As you level up (by killing, taking pictures, rescuing, etc.), you learn new moves, get extra inventory slots, and more health bars

■ Each of the stores in the mall offers different goods or services like food, weapons, clothes, and batteries. Handy



■ Rescued survivors hang in the zombie-free control room and offer huge bonus points to level up Frank



■ Crawl up on the scaffolding in the north wing. If you see an excavator, grab it right away

But the little surprises around every display rack couldn't shock or delight me as much as the underdog feature in this game: Dead Rising's story. It's political, steeped in condemnations of consumer culture, sympathy for those wronged by the government, and patriots disillusioned by the establishment they were once fighting for and are now battling against. It's about the freedom of press and imperialism. Most importantly, it manages to balance heady political commentary with the aforementioned silly action – I don't really know how, but it does, trust me.

There must be some sort of braniac magic going on with the team that developed Dead Rising, but they aren't perfect. Of the handful of boss fights, two are miserable, two are mediocre, and one is so awesome that even dying brought a weirdly pleasurable case of the adrenaline shakes so bad that I had to take a break after each attempt. Of the icky fights, the big problem is that they're just too much like what we've always seen – an overpowered enemy with superhuman predictive abilities, frustratingly powerful weapons, and who can only be injured by using the game's least innovative mechanics (Guns? I don't want to use guns – there's a bowling ball and sheets of plywood right over there!). In short, they're hard and they're boring.

But the rest of the game…well, figuring out where the thing actually ends is hard. I think that you could go through a dozen times and see at least two entirely new, large-scale events each time. The game is huge on replay in the main mode and offers even more after the tale is done. Without spoiling anything, let's leave it with the promise that you'll be popping this in for months to come. And do you want to know why? For more than the bounty of content, or interesting twist of social commentary, or even the collection of secret touches – you'll keep booting it up because it's an artsy brand of fun that you can't get anywhere else.—**LISA**

Zombie Trouble? Check out Secret Access (p. 104) for some undead-beating tips.

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> Concept: Survive the mall, destroy the zombies, expose the truth, and consider a vegetarian lifestyle

> Graphics: There are some cut corners, but the overall effect of so much stuff onscreen is exhilarating

> Sound: The occasional burst of music is well timed and effective, and the voice acting really sells the story's balance of camp and social message

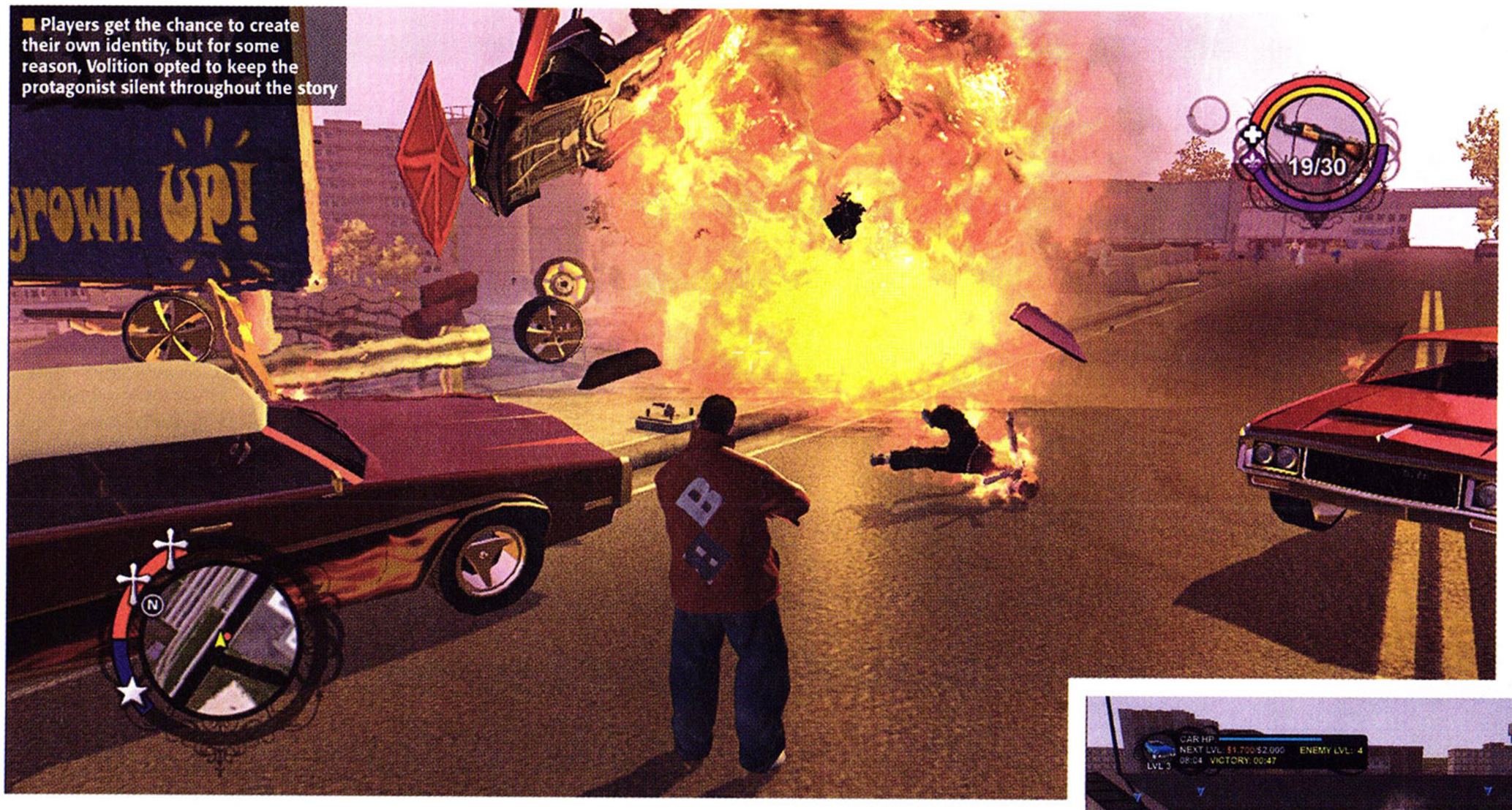
> Playability: First person controls are my only complaint in the whole game, but you don't need to use them too much

> Entertainment: Smarter than anyone would expect and even more fun than it looks – Dead Rising is a genius game

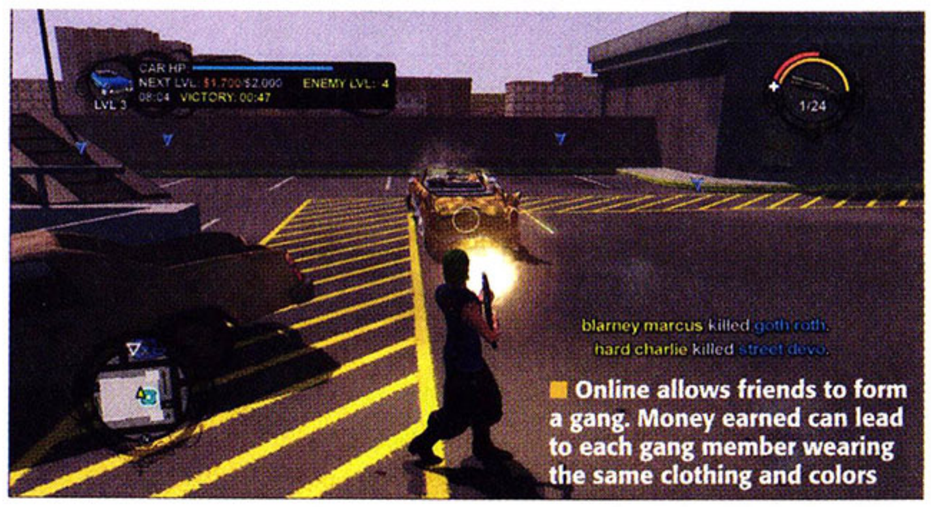
> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 9

I parted an undead sea with a chainsaw, kicked a zombie wearing a teddy-bear mask down a flight of stairs, and sacrificed the life of a frightened old man just so that I could snap a photo that might help me win the Pulitzer. If you could hear my horror-loving heart right now, it's pounding with maniacal glee. I guess I shouldn't be surprised that turning a pristine suburban mall into a sloppy mess would be anything less than a brilliant time. The list of weapons that you can use against the legions of feet shufflers is wonderfully diverse, and in some cases, downright wrong. For instance, I learned that throwing CDs at zombies only agitates them, but a cash register to the head makes instant brain soup. The riotous gameplay is joined by a story that has a number of great plot twists. You won't believe where this story goes. Political messages? Really? The only area where this game truly struggles is in its boss fights. Outside of this minor gripe, I hate to say it, but I really enjoyed spending 72 hours in a mall.—**REINER**



■ Players get the chance to create their own identity, but for some reason, Volition opted to keep the protagonist silent throughout the story



■ Online allows friends to form a gang. Money earned can lead to each gang member wearing the same clothing and colors

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> Concept: The closest any competitor has come to recreating the excitement from GTA, and online play helps it establish its own identity

> Graphics: Environment draw-in is present, but it's mostly only noticeable on the highways. Physics are done up in a big way, making each explosion a gawk-worthy spectacle

> Sound: From Beethoven to Winger, the selection of music is extensive and often surprising. You'll also hear comedic talk radio and civilians rambling on about random things

> Playability: Packs a wallop with silky smooth FPS-style controls, accurate vehicle physics, and a nice variety of mission types

> Entertainment: Familiar in all of the best ways. This is a sandbox game with limitless appeal

> Replay Value: High

XBOX 360

Saints Row

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** VOLITION **> RELEASE** AUGUST 29 **> ESRB** M

ANOTHER ROCKSTAR GROUPIE

In some parts of the world, the powers that be would decree that every person who worked on Saints Row deserves to have a hand chopped off for the crime of stealing from developer Rockstar North. Saints Row doesn't just pay homage to Grand Theft Auto, it pistol-whips it, takes its clothes, and masquerades as it. Thanks to this *Single White Female*-like release, the descriptor "Grand Theft Auto clone" has a whole new meaning. It should now be taken quite literally. Volition's actions are shameless and ignoble, but they have also led to an addiction and enchantment with a game that I haven't experienced since I departed San Andreas.

I wouldn't be surprised if I heard that this release made the bigwigs at Rockstar sweat a little bit. It's an incredibly well-made and highly polished game. At the same time, however, I wouldn't be shocked if Rockstar looked at this copycat and said "Nice try, chumps. You still have a long way to go." Saints Row hones in on the core of the GTA experience, but not the extracurricular activities that have pushed this genre forward through the years. This means that you won't find yourself base-jumping off of a skyscraper, launching a speedboat across waves in the ocean, or popping a wheelie down Main Street on a motorcycle. It's all about cars and guns.

In a way, this sandbox experience is a few years behind the competition, but it's what Volition does with the core mechanics that makes this title shine with the vibrancy of a finely polished rocket launcher. The application of FPS-style controls to character movement and targeting is the most impressive alteration, which allows players to run and gun with fluid pinpoint-precision, and never once have to worry about an auto-lock malfunction. The weapon/item wheel is another nice touch that will have you flipping between an AK-47 and a hamburger within a second. Every weapon is equipped with a melee move, and the player can throw punches from the left and right and kick on command.

■ The game also offers two short but highly enjoyable co-op levels. Both come with Achievements

The game is also very sensitive to the player's temperament. For instance, you won't need to reload a game or restock your inventory after failing a mission. Instead, you are quickly prompted to restart the mission with the weapon stash you originally brought into it. Being able to save anywhere and dial up your gang members for help also prove to be great aids and timesavers.

Even with the arrival of next-gen technologies, it would appear that this genre is still too much of a beast when it comes to draw distance. It's a shame that cars magically appear on highways, but I don't think you'll find yourself complaining too much over the visuals. The texturing and lighting are incredible spectacles to take in, and as it turns out, there's a lot of fun to be had with physics. Slamming into a tree will jettison a hostage through the windshield, which I can safely say is one of the funniest things I have ever seen. The ball of fire that accompanies explosions is quite the eye-opener, but it's the airborne debris (and bodies) that will likely make you blow up every car you come across. After hours of setup and experimentation, I managed to send a man flying over a 10-story building, which I will take to the grave as one of my finest moments in life.

You can easily spend over 100 hours in the single player experience, but don't be surprised if you spend more time elsewhere. The one area where Saints Row really goes outside of anything that GTA has to offer is through its amazingly diverse and highly enthralling online. Deathmatching is a finger-twitching blast, but it's the team-based modes like Protect the Pimp and Blinged Out Ride that really deliver something you haven't seen before. And once you get a taste of it, the rest of your 360 library will start collecting dust.

For once, derivative is good.—**REINER**

Second Opinion 8.5

First things first: Saints Row is probably the most derivative game I've ever played. The developers at Volition didn't just steal a page from the GTA handbook; they ran down to Kinko's and photocopied the whole damn thing! However, it's also among the most technically solid and well-made of the GTA wannabes I've played, which puts me in a bit of a quandary in scoring this game. Before playing Saints Row, you need to ask yourself how much you care about originality and innovation in your games. If you want a "next-gen" GTA experience, this isn't it. In many ways, this game isn't nearly as large and ambitious as San Andreas, a PS2 game, and certainly doesn't bring many new ideas to the table. However, it looks better and does offer some welcome improvements to the sandbox genre, most notably in the diverse Activities system, improved navigation, and by offering an FPS-style control scheme. If you want to crash some cars, cause some mayhem, and escalate the murder rate, this is an enjoyable way to do it. If you're looking for something unique, look elsewhere.—**MATT**

■ The enemy really should have heeded the warnings on the aptly named Trampoline of Death

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** A fantasy based hack n' slash that pits the player against armies of thousands and delivers big thrills through vast bloodshed

> **Graphics:** The amazing draw distance lets you see enemies approaching from a mile away. The stellar particle effects also make each sword slash jump from the screen

> **Sound:** A decent soundtrack, but the sounds from the battlefield are canned and muffled

> **Playability:** Combat is highly intuitive and surprisingly deep. All seven of the characters also showcase great differences in their fighting styles and weapon of choice

> **Entertainment:** It raises the genre up from being mindless and shallow, but still needs work in developing a flow to the exciting battles

> **Replay Value:** High

XBOX 360

Ninety-Nine Nights

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** Q ENTERTAINMENT/PHANTAGRAM
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 16 > **ESRB** M

THE NEW FACE OF WAR

Famed game maestro Tetsuya Mizuguchi has made a name for himself recently with the offbeat music games Rez and Lumines. Now, along with Phantagram's Sang Youn Lee, he is changing his tune to sing to fans that appreciate the epic wars in *The Lord of the Rings* films, the dazzling acrobatic combat in Devil May Cry, and the high body counts achieved in Dynasty Warriors. Mizuguchi's latest creation, Ninety-Nine Nights, successfully amalgamates these three elements into an experience that will make your heartbeat quicken, your muscles tense up, and your fingers ache with sword-swinging satisfaction.

The game empowers you with a god-like might that, even when measured by video game standards, is a tad ridiculous. With one effortless swing of a sword, you won't just have the opportunity to take out one orc soldier, you may cut down a dozen of them. The magic that courses through your veins is also quite potent. Summoning a meteor shower can turn a roaring battlefield that spreads as far as the eye can see into a silent graveyard littered with corpses. On a good day, you can decimate an entire army by yourself and tally over two thousand kills in the process.

Watching hundreds of troops spill over a hillside and storm your location is an exhilarating and sometimes overwhelming experience. It gets your blood pumping in the calm before the storm, then beats your reflexes bloody when the opposing steel clangs together. Sorry Dynasty Warriors fans, but jamming on one button won't unleash your most powerful attack, nor will it assure you victory.

Each of the seven playable characters that you can suit up as in Ninety-Nine Nights has an extensive list of moves tucked up their sleeves. Taking a tip from the fighting game genre, many of these moves are unleashed by performing a lengthy multi-button combo. The game also factors in precise timing, which means all bouts of laziness are met with a new cut or gouge. Rather than just performing a slash maneuver, most of the moves that you have at your fingertips are highly exaggerated, excessively brutal, and so over-the-top that you'd think that they were created by the team responsible for the summon spells in Final Fantasy VII. Needless to say, combat isn't just a skill-based affair, it's also quite fun to watch. Changes in the enemy ranks from level to level goes a long way in removing the repetitiveness that has plagued this genre in the past.

■ Leveling the characters up unveils their true might

It's when the action dies down that the game shows a number of nearly unbearable weaknesses. The level designs are far too large and invisible barriers often hold you back from exploration. Rather than hitting players with constant streams of enemies, the opposing force is usually divided into pockets spread across the level. Once you obliterate one squadron, a good minute of running is required to reach your next battle.

Although the AI featured in this game runs circles around the dunces from Dynasty Warriors, your foe still has problems adjusting to certain battle situations. Your enemy knows when to abandon the bow for a sword, but they absolutely have no idea how to read your movements. For bosses, the best strategy is to circle behind them and stab them in the back repeatedly. While it's fun to jab an idiotic foe in an unchivalrous way, the bosses usually have way too much health and take far too long to down. On the flip side, the enemy is smart enough to recognize that many of the environmental props don't have collision fields. They can sail arrows through trees and rocks all day long if you give them the opportunity to. Needless to say, there's nothing more frustrating than dying from a shot that should never have reached you. This can be quite aggravating given that the game doesn't have any checkpoints, and some levels can go on for nearly 45 minutes.

Ninety-Nine Nights may be the best that the genre has to offer, but it also shows us that this style of game still has a long way to go.— **REINER**

AN EASY WAY TO BOOST YOUR GAMERSCORE

None of the 10 Achievements are necessarily difficult to obtain. They simply demand that the player see all that the game has to offer. Seven of the Achievements are designated for completing the game with each of the seven playable characters. These vary between 50 and 100 points. Leveling each of the players up to level nine will land you another Achievement worth 200 points. In a typical playthrough, you'll get your character up to level six or seven. Another hour of play should get you to nine. Competing the special mission carries an Achievement worth 100 points. The final 200 points can be earned by getting an A-rank on all of the missions. This may sound taxing, but S is the difficult mark. You can usually land an A on your first playthrough.

Second Opinion 6.75

Even though we are approaching the one-year anniversary of the Xbox 360's release, this game plays and smells like the very definition of a "launch game." You know, where the only thing lower than the game's standards is gamers' even lower expectations. Ninety-Nine Nights had a great opportunity to prove that being labeled a Dynasty Warriors clone was an insult that could be overcome. Instead, it learns few lessons from that derided series, and even commits some of the same mistakes. Extremely repetitive gameplay, brain-dead enemy AI, and unhelpful allies are all here in abundance. I admit that the loot is much better than in DW, but since the game doesn't let you actually build your character, it's like pearls before swine. Phantagram hasn't learned its mistakes from Kingdom Under Fire, and unfortunately Mizuguchi's mere presence wasn't enough to save this title. —KATO

XBOX 360

Over G Fighters

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** TAITO > **RELEASE** JUNE 27 > **ESRB** T

THE FUTURE STILL HAS BAD GAMES

To say that Over G Fighters is a phenomenally terrible game isn't an exaggeration or a quippy joke. It's simply a natural fact, an idea that must be accepted, much like knowing the sun will rise in the morning. If you accept this fact, then read on to learn why this sorry excuse for a flight combat game not only attempts to set a new low bar for next generation gaming, but why it will make you angry at life on a much more fundamental level.

Did you ever have one of those teachers in high school that would tell you and your classmates to do some impossibly inane or challenging assignment, and then he/she would utterly fail to explain how to actually do it? To rub salt in the wound, they'd then berate you for your inadequacies. Welcome to the world of Over G Fighters, where nothing is ever clear and you're never really sure what the hell you're supposed to be doing. Presuming that you've played the games that this one is so clearly badly copied from (the excellent Ace Combat series), perhaps you'll be able to figure out enough to get by for several levels. Somewhere along the way, however, you'll be confronted by a dilemma. Why am I playing a game in which I seem to have almost no control over my own survival, where my plane controls like a boat in mud, and each mission feels like a worse version of the one I just completed?

The answer, of course, will be that you like flying and blowing stuff up. You like the variety of the planes, and you're driven to unlock all of them. You want to see if the totally disconnected nature of the missions and plots eventually cohere into a real story. They (as in the missions and plots), in point of fact, do not improve, and you, as a human being, will also not improve. That's right. If my experience with the game is any indication, you will emerge from your time of relaxation and playtime as a cranky beast, a sort of Mr. Hyde version of yourself, angry at the world and how it has failed to entertain you. Am I off topic here? Oh yeah, this game's no good.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Fly a variety of real world aircraft in a shameless and disgraceful copy of Ace Combat

> **Graphics:** If you didn't have a 360 controller in your hands, you seriously wouldn't know it was on a next-gen console

> **Sound:** Warning you when there's no danger and failing to offer audio clues when it would be helpful, the sound effects actually make the game worse

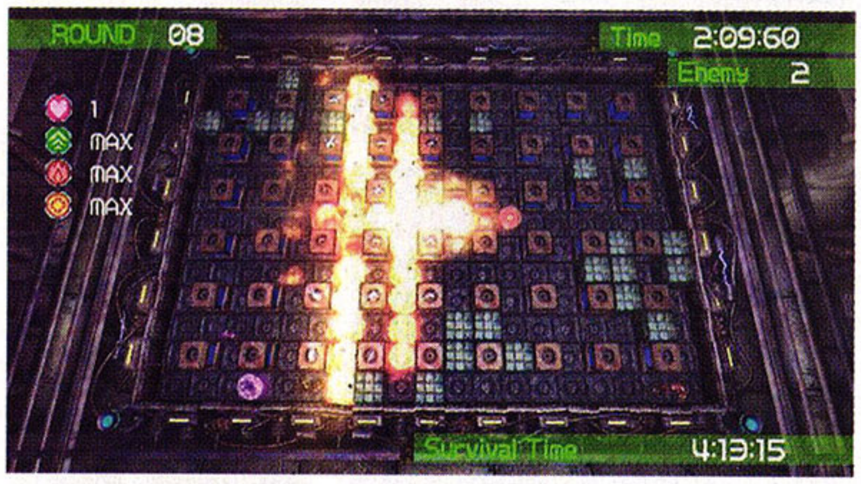
> **Playability:** Sluggish controls and unclear guidance from the game turn handling the controller into a chore

> **Entertainment:** The focus on realism should be the only reason to give it a try

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.5

Over G Fighters is the *Iron Eagle IV* of flight sim games – you've seen everything it has to offer before dozens of times, except executed far better. Dull and clunky with voicework that will make you want to shoot down your wingman and graphics that barely qualify as "next-gen," Over G doesn't know if it wants to be authentic or arcadey. The result is a twisted airshow disaster of a game that deserves to be forgotten as quickly as possible, just like Louis Gossett Jr.'s career.—**JEREMY**



XBOX 360

Bomberman: Act Zero

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK)
> **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** HUDSON SOFT > **RELEASE** AUGUST 30 > **ESRB** T

TOTAL BOMBA

The Xbox 360 has a lot of great games, several mediocre games, and now, thanks to Over G Fighters and Bomberman: Act Zero, two truly awful games. At its core, Act Zero isn't much different than the Bomberman games of old: You run around a maze dropping bombs to blow up your competitors. But the light-hearted, party game feeling of old is gone, replaced by an embarrassingly 1990s-feeling cyberpunk theme that gives the finger to fans and makes for arguably the worst-looking game on the system. The gameplay is even more offensive. Xbox Live and System Link are supported, but there are absolutely no multiplayer options for a single console. So basically, you'll never get to play Act Zero against another real person, because if someone is actually stupid enough to buy this, they'll be too embarrassed to actually show their face online. Bomberman: Act Zero may be the worst relaunch of an older series in history. It both sacrifices existing fans and fails to appeal to anyone new, and feels old and dated without being nostalgic. There's really only one way to sum it all up: This game just sucks.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 3

> **Concept:** Give the cutesy Bomberman franchise a dark "edgy" makeover, suck everything fun out if it, and crap it out on 360

> **Graphics:** Act Zero would look at home on the original Xbox, but even more comfortable at the bottom of a trash can

> **Sound:** Pathetic and forgettable, just like everything else about this game

> **Playability:** One-button gameplay, so you can use the rest of your fingers to gouge your eyes out for playing this abomination

> **Entertainment:** One of those rare games that has nothing to offer anyone

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 4

Deep in the underbelly of this video game catastrophe, you will find the classic Bomberman gameplay that we all know and love. Unfortunately, it is wrapped in perhaps some of the most cookie-cutter quasi-futuristic character designs my poor weary soul has ever laid eyes on. Throw in an awful "hard-rockin'" soundtrack and some "Mr. Roboto" voice-over work, and what we have here is an abomination, folks. Take it behind the woodshed and do what needs to be done.—**ANDY**

EX-P model shown. © 2005 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

Building Great Wonders makes your people ever so happy to live in your city

Good luck with the framerate once your city gets as developed as this

PC

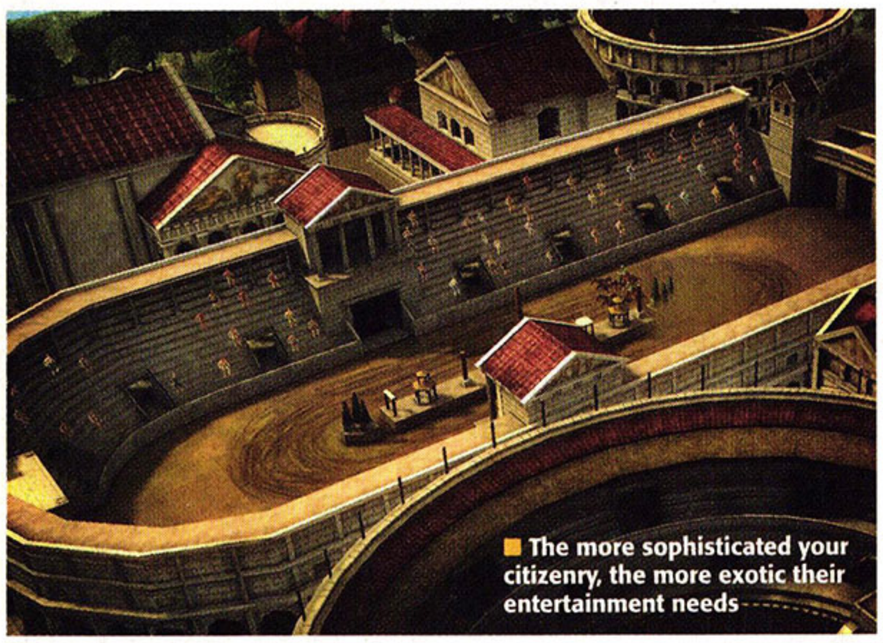
CivCity: Rome

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** FIREFLY STUDIOS/FIRAXIS GAMES > **RELEASE** JULY 24 > **ESRB** E 10+

GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

URBAN RENEWAL

Months ago, after initally hearing about CivCity: Rome, I was intensely interested in the game. From what publisher 2K Games had to say, it sounded like this would be everything I ever wanted out of a city simulation: Individual citizens that really matter, armies to keep the barbarians out, and a graphics engine that wouldn't make my eyes bleed. Strangely enough, it turns out that CivCity is one of my favorite titles in recent months – for none of those reasons.



The more sophisticated your citizenry, the more exotic their entertainment needs

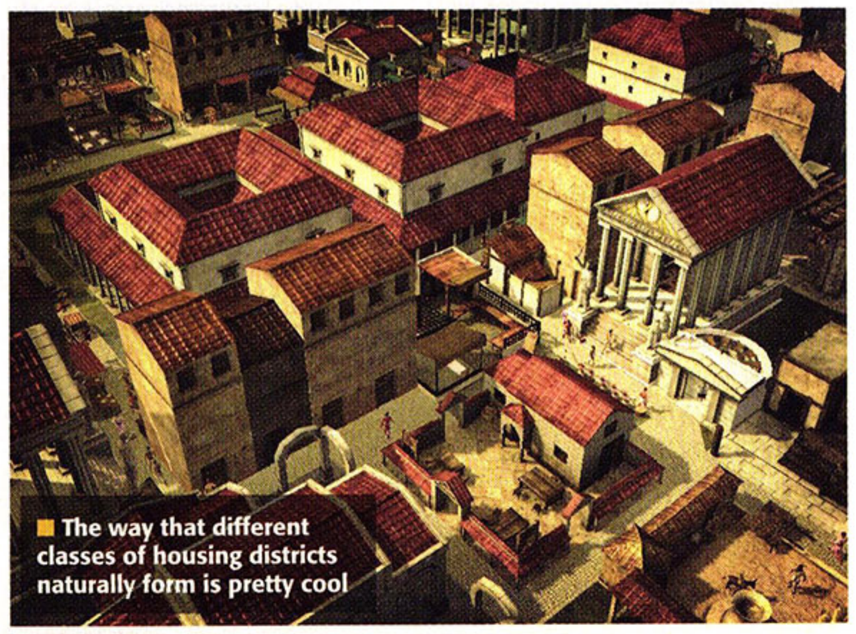
Building something that works is, I think, hard-coded into the human psyche as "a good thing." Good simulation games scratch that itch, and a well-planned and self-sustaining (dare I say, even profitable) city is its own reward. This core mechanic works very well in CivCity, and propels it beyond its own inadequacies into the land of entertaining diversions. As opposed to many other simulations, getting your little AI people to do things isn't the problem here. Give them work, and they'll gladly toil away for your benefit. Getting them access to everything they need – from drinking water to religion – is your goal, and building a city that provides that is almost endless fun.

While I'm profoundly glad that the basis of the game is solid and entertaining, a whole slew of irritations and just plain poor execution hold CivCity back from being special. The interface is needlessly frustrating, making players click through a layer or two of menus to get anything at all done. The framerate chugs badly in any well-developed city. And most of all, the military portion of the game is completely broken. Troops are nearly impossible to control, there's no strategy to combat, and your buildings go down under attack entirely too quickly. Thankfully, there are plenty of scenarios to choose from that don't have a military component – otherwise this game would score much, much lower.

In a genre where it seems like every successful game is deemed a classic and everything else a failure, CivCity: Rome falls somewhere in between. Although it is plagued by flaws in several areas, I still want to keep playing until I've conquered every challenge that the designers could fit in. And that says something about a game.—**ADAM**

It is possible, if not always practical, to design a gorgeous city

It's too bad the interface doesn't use any of the good modern design principles



The way that different classes of housing districts naturally form is pretty cool

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Further the cause of the Roman Empire by building up new settlements into thriving metropolises

> **Graphics:** Taking the time to craft a beautiful, well-planned city is worth it

> **Sound:** Why are there only a handful of musical background tracks? And why are they still going through my head?

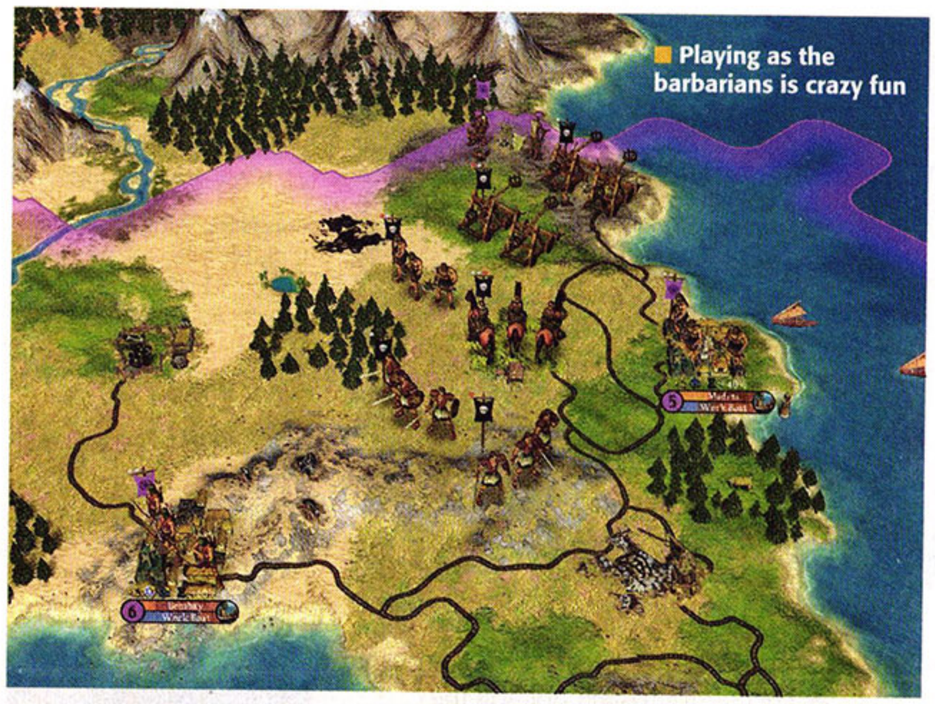
> **Playability:** Digging through menus to do anything is so 1997. At least it's functional, if only barely

> **Entertainment:** Building a city is fun, even if some peripheral facets of the game don't work so well

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

I've been governing virtual cities for years, and I always appreciate a game that makes me feel like I was born to have a large populace at my mercy. With a unique emphasis on the citizenry, CivCity does just that, along with providing several accessible options for managing the prosperity of your budding town. I enjoyed how housing upgrades give the early stages of a city focus, and how the later phases incorporate more cultural and military aspects – though I wouldn't bother with the army if I were you, since the whole affair is pretty frustrating. However, the biggest drag on the game is that there are a few factors that affect city happiness that felt beyond my control. If there aren't any jobs, then stop complaining and live somewhere else, idiots! Even with these problems, the other aspects of CivCity: Rome are polished and well-tuned, and the ability to zoom down to the level of an individual citizen adds a nice touch of human suffering when you raze their homes to make room for a gladiator school.—**JOE**


Playing as the barbarians is crazy fun

Building the Great Wall is a good, if temporary, way to deal with aggressors

PC

Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Warlords

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS GAMES > **RELEASE** JULY 24 > **ESRB** 10+

WHY FIGHT IT

No franchise has dominated my free time like Sid Meier's Civilization, and Warlords will continue the more than decade-long trend of dominating the world one turn at a time well into the night. Even though I've always been more of a dove than a hawk in my digital foreign policy, Warlords has the conquest-focused content in it to bring the most peaceful ruler's blood to a boil.

The eight packed-in scenarios are all good, with the exception of one that's great: Barbarians. Putting the player in charge of eradicating civilization with a massive barbarian horde is a brilliant idea, and it's as expertly executed as we've come to expect out of Firaxis. Once you've tapped out the mere hundreds of hours it takes to conquer the scenarios, however, there's still plenty more to do.

Warlords' enhancements to the standard Civilization IV game aren't huge, but they are somewhat significant. More of everything from civilization leaders to Wonders of the World expands the already wide-open strategy, and the addition of Great Generals makes it somewhat easier to prosecute a war. Civ IV is already so huge and deep, however, that putting yet more options at the player's fingertips isn't incredibly necessary – but it's certainly not a bad thing either.

For Civ players, Warlords will be a great addition. Outside of the fanbase, however, nobody will care much about this. And rightly so; even with all this war-centric content, Civilization is still slow, deliberate, and not particularly flashy. But if those things are deal-breakers for you, you're reading the wrong review in the first place.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Give the warlike player a bunch of cool new toys to play around with

> **Graphics:** Civ IV is still one of the best-looking strategy titles around

> **Sound:** Likewise, this boasts outstanding sound to help keep you enthralled for hours on end

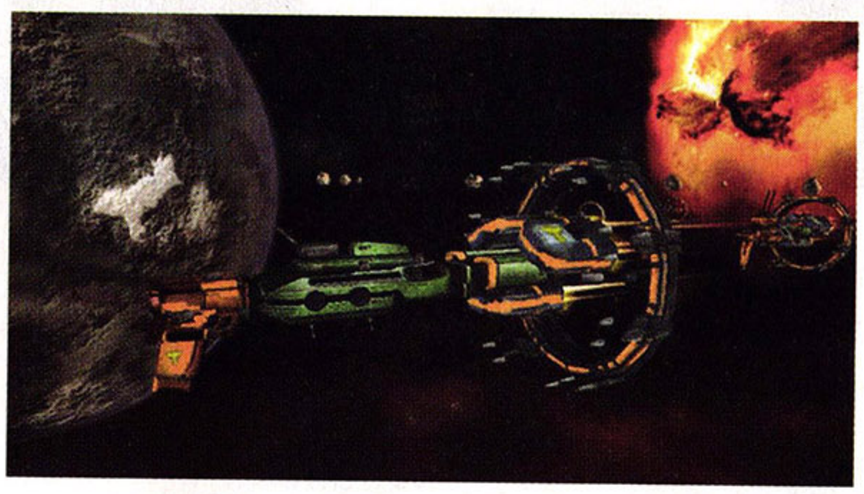
> **Playability:** If every game had an interface as brilliant as this, we wouldn't need this bullet point

> **Entertainment:** A good expansion to a great game is never a bad thing

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.5

Now, before you get all up in arms about this score, take a look back a few months at my scoring of the original game. I love Civ IV. And this expansion is just as fun as the original. But that's sort of the problem. Of the small additions to gameplay I detected in this expansion, very few brought anything profoundly exciting to the mix. Sure, there are some new unit types, and some of the scenarios are entertaining. I'm just not sure this add-on really changed enough about the overall game dynamic that I'd recommend it to you, even if you're as big of a fan of the base game as I am. —**MILLER**



PC

Sword of the Stars

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** LIGHTHOUSE INTERACTIVE/DESTINEER > **DEVELOPER** KERBEROS PRODUCTIONS
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 22 > **ESRB** E 10+

FORM BLAZING SWORD!

Building a terrestrial empire is difficult enough, but there are a slew of additional complications when you try to rule the cosmos. Some sci-fi "4X" (explore, expand, exploit, exterminate) games don't handle these nuances gracefully, but Sword of the Stars does an excellent job streamlining the many small details required to operate an empire effectively. I never got the feeling that I was being bogged down in unnecessary systems or adjustments; simple slider bars dictate how you allocate funds and nurture fledgling colonies, while ship designing/building is cool and intuitive. Most of the game is turn-based, though real-time battles sort of break the routine. The problem is that your fleet handles like an armada of flying, broken refrigerators – but you can just hit the "close and attack" button and they basically take care of themselves. Even with a well-balanced multiplayer experience, I can't say that Sword of the Stars is incredibly ambitious, but it's definitely an entertaining and accessible way to extend your galactic influence.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** A magical jaunt through a whimsical realm...naw! It's just a whole lot of conquering in space

> **Graphics:** Looks good when it needs to, but most of the time you're clicking little glowing dots

> **Sound:** The soundtrack is better classified as background music than a score

> **Playability:** Navigating certain screens can be a problem, but the core gameplay is solid

> **Entertainment:** If you can't have fun wiping out entire galactic civilizations, you have personal problems

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.75

Stripping down a sci-fi "4X" game to its core concepts is a perfectly groovy idea, and Sword of the Stars pulls it off pretty well. The real-time combat is fairly broken, but a handy "All ships attack!" button makes it something you don't have to deal with. The interface could be easier to deal with as well, but it's more of a slight irritation than a major stumbling block. Radically different races and a somewhat random tech tree, as well as a decent multiplayer implementation, give Sword of the Stars enough legs to make it a decent value for any strategy gamer's $40.—**ADAM**

PSP

Tekken: Dark Resurrection

> STYLE 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO **> RELEASE** JULY 25 **> ESRB** T

PURE GAMEPLAY

Whether or not Tekken is your fighting game of choice, this portable bruiser puts up features and performance that could convert some of you non-believers out there. For full disclosure, I have always liked Namco's fighting series, but also have to admit that the game has really offered little innovation in the last few editions.

While the PSP-exclusive Dark Resurrection isn't without faults and doesn't do anything at all to reinvent the Tekken code, it does offer a version that's compellingly full-featured and darn playable – and all in a bite-sized portable version. Not an easy feat for what you get out of the box. The game's good-looking characters and environments can be brutalized with a huge number of opponents (over 30, including two well-realized new contestants) and a handful of big gameplay options. There are also a bunch of lighthearted minigames designed as breathers between bouts. Arcade and story mode are exactly what any fan would expect and the expanded character customization is bigger than any Tekken before.

■ Hits have big particle effects attached, but some of the character customization options let you put similar effects onto characters full time

While content is big, the small-scale one-on-one fights are the game's true meat. Largely, it works well. Playing arcade-style with the PSP perched on a table or your leg is certainly an option, although I had nearly as successful results holding the unit as designed. Overall, I think this entry is harder – both an increase in difficulty and slightly squishier controls probably share equal blame for this. Working around frustration is easy, though, with a handful of difficulty settings and the previously mentioned bucket of characters to pick from.

■ The ladies hit as hard as the men, but with better shoes

To be honest, this game really annoyed me sometimes, but even when I had gotten to the point of wanting to chuck a PSP through plate glass onto the parking lot behind our office, I still picked the game back up 15 minutes later. Take that as you will, but for my money, that's probably a good sign for a predictable, but well made, fighter.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> Concept: Get Tekken's stable of fighters to kick some butt on the only handheld that can manage it

> Graphics: The levels are less detailed than their console counterparts, but still offer nice backdrops for the slick character models

> Sound: Totally forgettable, but also not annoying

> Playability: A sweet fighter with a few caveats

> Entertainment: This is Tekken – nothing terribly new or exciting, but still a good time

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.25

I've always found Tekken a tad mechanical in its character movement, lacking the flow and interconnection of moves that some other franchises have. However, even with that bias, I can recognize a good thing when I see it, and Tekken on PSP is most certainly that. Sporting insanely sharp gameplay graphics and some amazing (if sometimes silly) CG, this is easily one of the best looking games for the system. I'd love to see the series have some courage to try more new things, but as it is, it still serves as a high water mark for how good a 3D fighter can be on the go.—**MILLER**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

NCAA Football 07

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE)
> PUBLISHER EA SPORTS
> DEVELOPER EA CANADA
> RELEASE JULY 18 **> ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

From the full-on dynasty options to the fast-paced, de-cleating football action, this game totally captures the NCAA experience. It's such a deep football experience that the one thing I was missing was some quick minigames or challenges to make it more pick-up-and-play friendly. But given that I could get all my football needs staring at a handheld screen for hours is a trade-off I'll take. There is some sloppy tackling AI, but I was heartened by how smooth the analog stick feels when moving and passing, and liked that EA included the new kicking mechanic and gameplay cameras. NCAA at home or on the go? Now you truly can run the option.—**KATO**

PSP

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> PUBLISHER BUENA VISTA GAMES
> DEVELOPER AMAZE ENTERTAINMENT
> RELEASE JUNE 27 **> ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 3

D'yaar, thar she blows! Blows, blows, blows. Like a waterlogged corpse afloat in a handheld sea, Jack Sparrow's PSP adventure stinks. This game fails in so many areas that it becomes a portable laugh riot. The camera is totally broken, the combat system is absurd, and the ship-based multiplayer does little to redeem the package. The in-game Depp looks okay, though, so you can watch a mascara-wearing Hollywood prettyboy get the crap kicked out of him. Pow! That one's for *Benny & Joon*, ya stooge!—**JOE**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PSP

Mercury Meltdown

> STYLE 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> PUBLISHER IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT
> RELEASE AUGUST 22 **> ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 8

I was no big fan of Archer Maclean's Mercury, but its sequel Mercury Meltdown fixes all the problems I had with the original. Gone are the frustration-inducing time limits and cold, technical visuals, replaced with par times and a fun cel-shaded look. Meltdown is all about guiding a blob of ooze through 160-plus mind-bending maps, which sport some great level design, new tricks (like solid and extra-drippy states), and fun music. Level select alleviates the frustration of difficult maps, and the new party games offer their own simple charms. Definitely recommended for puzzle fans.—**JEREMY**

NINTENDO DS

Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi: The Genie and The Amp

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
> PUBLISHER D3 PUBLISHER OF AMERICA
> DEVELOPER SENSORY SWEEP
> RELEASE JUNE 27 **> ESRB** E10+

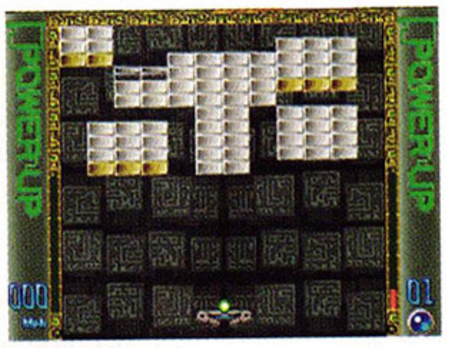
BOTTOM LINE 5.75

The by-the-numbers design of Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi's DS game is propped up by just one thing: style. The Genie and the Amp is a side-scrolling brawler with the girls traveling through time to get back some hit-making mojo. The dialogue and art direction are both really tight and very reminiscent of the Cartoon Network show, but I wish the combat had a similar degree of polish. Random button pressing will get you farther than most attempts at strategy, and getting locked into long combo animations is a "feature" that makes me just want to die.—**LISA**

NINTENDO DS

Break 'Em All

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)
> PUBLISHER D3 PUBLISHER OF AMERICA
> DEVELOPER WARASHI
> RELEASE JUNE 20 **> ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 7.5

You may be tempted to write this game off due to its extremely generic title, cheap-looking box art, and derivative concept (basically, it's a new version of Arkanoid). How superficial of you! Didn't your mother tell you not to judge a book by its cover? For shame. Now that you feel bad about yourself, I should tell you how Break 'Em All neatly updates the old block-busting formula with cool boss battles inspired by top-down, 2D shooters, a customizable power-up bar, touch screen control, and a number of multiplayer modes.—**MATT**

Lonely Prof. ISO DSP for aid/fun times...

Me: Rough around the edges, lab coat, bald spot, glasses, Doctorate of Space. Luxury top-screen apt.

You: Adventurous, DS curious, need to help pixelationally challenged castaway.

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RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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nintendo Wi-Fi connection

NINTENDO DS™

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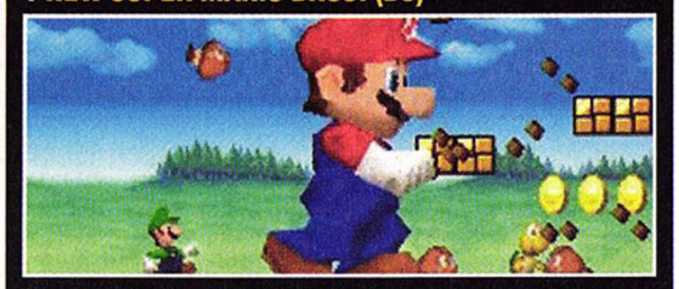
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

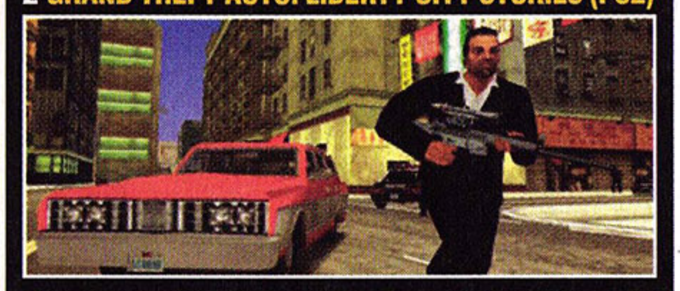
Listings Based Upon NPD Data For April 2006 Based On Units Sold

1 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. (DS)



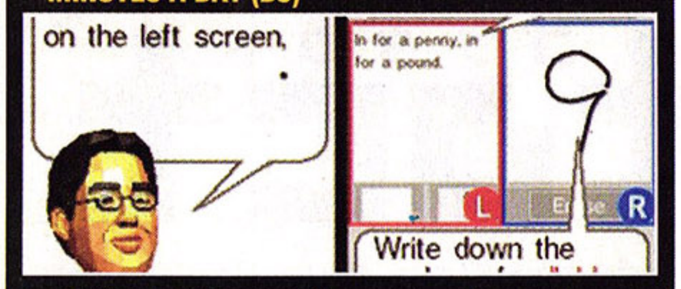
Even though it's a great game, the name of Mario's new adventure isn't exactly forward-thinking. Imagine how foolish you'll look in 10 years when you're trying to buy a classic copy of New Super Mario Bros. and instead you're given the latest installment of Mario Xtreme Squash for the Nintendo Wii-iii.

2 GRAND THEFT AUTO: LIBERTY CITY STORIES (PS2)



We're surprised this game is selling so well, since it is obviously a blatant rip-off of a recent PSP title. It even went so far as to steal the same name! In fact, there are lots of games on PSP that have the same name as PS2 games, and we haven't heard about a single lawsuit! There sure must be a lot of lawyers dropping the ball on this one.

3 BRAIN AGE: TRAIN YOUR BRAIN IN MINUTES A DAY (DS)

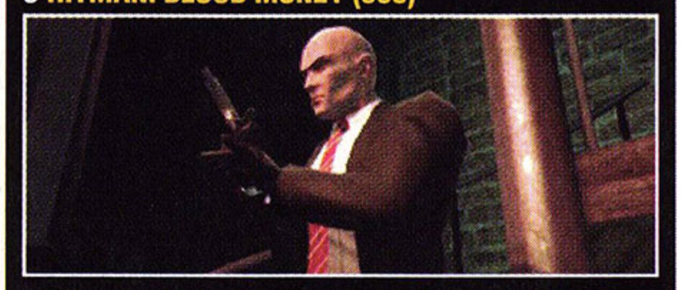


Sudoku? Colors? Counting? That smartypants crap is for sissies. Nintendo needs to make a brain training game with activities we're actually good at, like arguing with tractor tires. Who's the genius now, treadface?

4 CARS (PS2)

Here's a riddle for you: What has four doors, anti-lock brakes, keyless entry, and a fresh pine scent? A bunch of ducks looting an auto body shop! You thought it was gonna be a car, didn't you? Sucker!

5 HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY (360)



There's only one lesson to learn from Hitman. Bald people are all dangerous assassins, and will kill you if they can. If you see them, hide!

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	New Super Mario Bros.	N/A	DS	9.25	05-06	$35
2	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	1	PS2	8.75	06-06	$20
3	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes A Day	14	DS	8.25	04-06	$18
4	Cars	5	PS2	7	06-06	$39
5	Hitman: Blood Money	3	360	7.75	04-06	$60
6	Cars	2	GBA	N/A	06-06	$29
7	2006 FIFA World Cup	6	PS2	8.5	04-06	$30
8	Big Brain Academy	N/A	DS	7.75	06-06	$19
9	Hitman: Blood Money	15	PS2	7.75	05-06	$39
10	Cars	17	GC	7	06-06	$39
11	God of War	N/A	PS2	10	03-05	$20
12	Guitar Hero	N/A	PS2	9	11-05	$69
13	Kingdom Hearts II	19	PS2	9	03-06	$48
14	NFL Head Coach	N/A	PS2	6.75	06-06	$40
15	Over the Hedge	4	PS2	N/A	05-06	$37
16	The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	N/A	360	9.5	03-06	$60
17	MLB '06: The Show	10	PS2	6	03-06	$39
18	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	N/A	PS2	10	03-06	$20
19	X-Men: The Official Game	7	PS2	4	05-06	$37
20	Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	8	360	9.5	03-06	$60

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Jikkyou Powerful Pro Baseball 13	PS2
2	New Super Mario Bros.	DS
3	Persona 3	PS2
4	Ape Escape: Million Monkeys	PS2
5	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain 2	DS
6	Project Hacker: Kakusei DS	DS
7	LocoRoco	PSP
8	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain	DS
9	Naruto RPG 3	DS
10	Animal Crossing: Wild World	DS

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Dead Rising	N/A	360
2	Saints Row	N/A	360
3	Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra	N/A	PS2
4	Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories	N/A	PS2
5	New Super Mario Bros.	3	DS
6	Prey	1	Multi
7	CivCity: Rome	N/A	PC
8	Tekken: Dark Resurrection	N/A	PSP
9	Civilization IV: Warlords	N/A	PC
10	Half-Life 2: Episode 1	2	PC

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World of Warcraft	3	$36
2	Half-Life 2: Episode 1	N/A	$18
3	The Sims 2: Family Fun Stuff	2	$20
4	Cars: Radiator Springs Adventures	N/A	$18
5	The Sims 2: Open for Business	5	$31
6	The Sims 2	6	$40
7	The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	4	$49
8	Guild Wars: Factions	1	$48
9	Heroes of Might and Magic V	N/A	$50
10	Age of Empires III	2	$49

Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWSARCHIVE The Really Ugly Page Where You Can See Lots Of Old Review Scores

XBOX 360

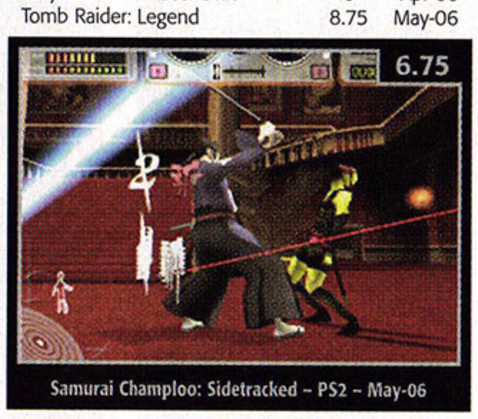
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Amped 3	8.5	Dec-05
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.75	Jun-06
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	7.5	May-06
Burnout Revenge	9.5	Apr-06
Call of Duty 2	9.75	Dec-05
Chromehounds	7	Aug-06
Condemned: Criminal Origins	8.75	Dec-05

Amped 3 – Xbox 360 – Dec-05

Dead or Alive 4	9	Mar-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
FIFA 06	8.25	Dec-05
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
Gun	8.75	Dec-05
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jul-06
Kameo: Elements of Power	7.5	Jan-06
Lord of the Rings: The Battle Middle-earth II, The	8	Aug-06
Madden NFL 06	7.75	Jan-06
Major League Baseball 2K6	7	Jun-06
Moto GP '06	8.75	Jul-06
NBA 2K6	8.5	Jan-06
NBA Live 06	6.75	Dec-05
NCAA Football 07	7.75	Aug-06
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	9	Jan-06
NHL 2K6	8.5	Jan-06
Outfit, The	7.75	Apr-06
Perfect Dark Zero	7	Jan-06
Peter Jackson's King Kong	8.5	Jan-06
Prey	9.5	Aug-06
Project Gotham Racing 3	8.5	Jan-06
Quake 4	7.75	Jan-06
Ridge Racer 6	7.5	Jan-06
Rumble Roses XX	5.75	May-06
Table Tennis	8	Jul-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.5	Jan-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05
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
Aeon Flux	7.25	Jan-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
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.5	Dec-05
Beatmania	8.5	Apr-06
Black	8.5	Apr-06
Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	7.25	Jan-06
Cars	7	Aug-06
Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, The	6.5	Dec-05
CMT Presents: Karaoke Revolution Country	8	Apr-06
College Hoops 2K6	8	Jan-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
Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King	8.75	Dec-05
Drakengard 2	7.25	Mar-06
Driver: Parallel Lines	6.75	May-06
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	6	May-06
Dynasty Warriors 5 Xtreme Legends	6.75	Dec-05
EyeToy: Operation Spy	6	Dec-05
Fatal Frame III: The Tormented	7.75	Dec-05
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06
Final Fight: Streetwise	4	Mar-06
From Russia With Love	7.75	Dec-05
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
Guitar Hero	9	Dec-05
Gun	8.75	Dec-05
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	6.5	Dec-05
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
Jaws	4.75	Aug-06
Karaoke Revolution Party	8.5	Dec-05
Kingdom Hearts II	9	Apr-06
L.A. Rush	6.25	Dec-05
Magna Carta: Tears of Blood	8.25	Dec-05
Major League Baseball 2K6	8.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
Matrix: Path of Neo, The	7.25	Dec-05
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 06	7.75	Jan-06
NBA Ballers Phenom	7.75	Apr-06
NCAA Football 07	8.25	Aug-06
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	8.5	Dec-05
NFL Head Coach	6.75	Aug-06
Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams	9	Mar-06
Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
Pac-Man World 3	6.25	Jan-06
Peter Jackson's King Kong	8.5	Jan-06
Pirates of the Caribbean: The Legend of Jack Sparrow	5.75	Aug-06
Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones	9	Jan-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
Shadow the Hedgehog	4	Jan-06
SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs	7.75	Dec-05
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
Soul Calibur III	9	Dec-05
Star Wars: Battlefront II	8.5	Dec-05
State Of Emergency 2	6	Apr-06
Steambot Chronicles	5.5	May-06
Street Fighter Alpha Anthology	7.5	Jul-06
Suikoden Tactics	6.75	Dec-05
Suikoden V	7.5	May-06
Taito Legends	8.5	Jan-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



Samurai Champloo: Sidetracked – PS2 – May-06

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05
Top Spin	8.75	Nov-05
Torino 2006	4.25	Apr-06
Total Overdose	6.25	Jan-06
Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Simulator	8.5	May-06
Trapt	6.75	Dec-05
True Crime: New York City	8.75	Jan-06
Ultimate Spider-Man	8	Nov05
Urban Chaos: Riot Response	7.75	Jul-06
Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit	7	Nov-05
Warriors, The	8.25	Nov-05
Warship Gunner 2	5	Apr-06
Wild Arms 4	7.5	Feb-06
Wild Arms: Alter Code F	6	Jan-06
Winback 2: Project Poseidon	4	Jun-06
Winning Eleven 9	8.5	Feb-06
Without Warning	6.5	Nov-05
WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2006	8.75	Dec-05
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Nov-05
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06

GAMECUBE

2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	7.25	Jan-06
Cars	7	Aug-06
Chibi-Robo	5	Feb-06
Chicken Little	7	Nov-05
Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, The	6.5	Dec-05
Dance Dance Revolution Mario Mix	5.25	Jan-06
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance	9	Nov-05
From Russia With Love	7.75	Dec-05
Gun	8.75	Dec-05
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	6.5	Dec-05
Karaoke Revolution Party	8.5	Dec-05
Mario Party 7	5	Dec-05
Mega Man X Collection	8	Feb-06
NBA Live 06	7.5	Nov-05
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	8.5	Dec-05
Odama	7	Mar-06
Pac-Man World 3	6.25	Jan-06
Peter Jackson's King Kong	8.5	Jan-06
Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness	5.75	Nov-05
Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones	9	Jan-06
Rainbow Six: Lockdown	7.5	Nov-05
Rampage: Total Destruction	6.5	May-06
Shadow the Hedgehog	4	Jan-06
Sims 2, The	7.75	Nov-05
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
Super Mario Strikers	6.75	Dec-05
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.25	Nov-05
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05
True Crime: New York City	8.75	Jan-06
Ultimate Spider-Man	8	Nov-05
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	7	Dec-05
Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit	7	Nov-05
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Nov-05
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06

XBOX

25 to Life	5.75	Mar-06
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Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.5	Dec-05
Black	8.5	Apr-06
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	7.5	May-06
Blitz: The League	7.75	Nov-05
Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood	8	Nov-05
Call of Cthulu: Dark Corners of the Earth	6	Jan-06
Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	7.25	Jan-06
Capcom Classic Collection	8.5	Nov-05
Cars	7	Aug-06
Castlevania: Curse of Darkness	7.5	Nov-05
Chicken Little	7	Nov-05
Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, The	6.5	Dec-05
Cold War	6	Dec-05
College Hoops 2K6	8	Jan-06
Commandos: Strike Force	5.5	Jun-06
Conflict: Global Terror	6.75	Nov-05
Da Vinci Code, The	6	Jul-06
Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	8.5	Jan-06
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	8	Jun-06
Driver: Parallel Lines	6.75	May-06
Fable: The Lost Chapters	8.75	Jan-06
Far Cry Instincts	8.75	Nov-05
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06
Final Fight: Streetwise	4	Mar-06
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Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	6.25	Feb-06
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Gun	8.75	Dec-05
Half-Life 2	7.25	Dec-05
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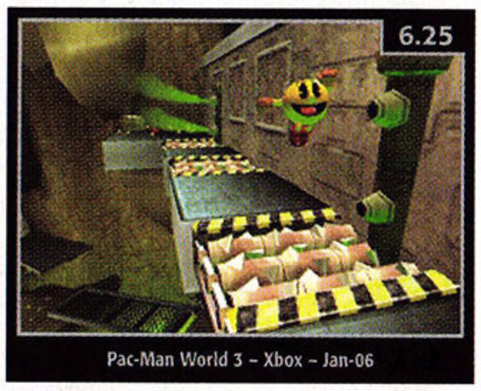
NCAA March Madness 2006	7	Nov-05
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	8.5	Dec-05
NFL Head Coach	6.75	Aug-06
Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge, The	5	Nov-05
Operation Flashpoint Elite	5	Feb-06
Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
Pac-Man World 3	6.25	Jan-06
Peter Jackson's King Kong	8.5	Jan-06
Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones	9	Jan-06



Pac-Man World 3 – Xbox – Jan-06

Rainbow Six: Lockdown	8.5	Nov-05
Rogue Trooper	7.25	Jun-06
Serious Sam II	7.75	Nov-05
Shadow the Hedgehog	4	Jan-06
Shattered Union	4	Jan-06
Sims 2, The	7.75	Nov-05
Sniper Elite	7.5	Nov-05
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
SSX On Tour	8	Nov-05
Star Wars: Battlefront II	8.5	Dec-05
Stubbs the Zombie in "Rebel Without A Pulse"	8	Dec-05
Taito Legends	8.5	Jan-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.25	Nov-05
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05
Torino 2006	4.25	Apr-06
Total Overdose	6.25	Jan-06
True Crime: New York City	8.75	Jan-06
Ultimate Spider-Man	8	Nov-05
Urban Chaos: Riot Response	7.75	Jul-06
Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit	7	Nov-05
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Nov-05
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06

PC

Age of Empires III	8.25	Dec-05
AutoAssault	7	Jun-06
Battlefield 2: Special Forces	9	Feb-06
Black & White 2	8.5	Nov-05
Call of Duty 2	9.75	Dec-05
City of Villains	8.75	Jan-06
Cold War	6	Dec-05
Commandos: Strike Force	5.5	Jun-06
Darwinia	7.5	Jul-06
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	8	Jun-06
Dungeons & Dragons: Dragonshard	8	Nov-05
Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach	8	May-06
Earth 2160	7	Feb-06
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The	9.5	May-06
F.E.A.R.	9	Nov-05
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

Titan Quest – PC – Aug-06

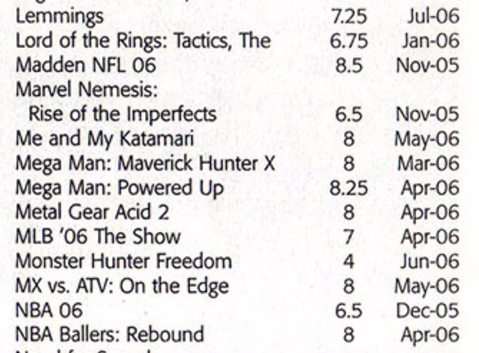
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II, The	8.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
Movies, The	8.75	Dec-05
Paradise	5.25	Jul-06
Prey	9.5	Aug-06
Quake IV	8.75	Nov-05
Rise & Fall: Civilizations at War	5	Aug-06
Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends	9.5	Jul-06
Serious Sam II	7.75	Nov-05
Shattered Union	4	Jan-06
Sid Meier's Civilization IV	9.5	Jan-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
Taito Legends	8.5	Jan-06
Titan Quest	8.25	Aug-06
WarPath	7.25	May-06

NINTENDO DS

Age of Empires: The Age of Kings	8	Mar-06
Animal Crossing: Wild World	8.75	Dec-05
Battles of Prince of Persia	8.5	Feb-06
Big Brain Academy	7.75	Aug-06
Brain Age	8.25	Jun-06
Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow	9.25	Nov-05
Dig Dug: Digging Strike	6.75	Dec-05
Electroplankton	7	Feb-06
Guilty Gear: Dust Strikers	6	May-06
Lost Magic	6	Jun-06
Lunar: Dragon Song	4.75	Nov-05
Madden NFL 06	5	Nov-05
Magnetica	7.25	Aug-06
Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time	8.25	Dec-05
Mario Kart DS	8.5	Dec-05
Mega Man Battle Network 5: Double Team	7.75	Nov-05
Metroid Prime: Hunters	8.5	May-06
Metroid Prime Pinball	8	Nov-05
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
Snowboard Kids DS	6	Jan-06
Sonic Rush	7	Jan-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
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3: Mutant Nightmare	4	Nov-05
Tetris DS	9.25	Apr-06
Tony Hawk's American Sk8Land	8.75	Feb-06
Trace Memory	7.5	Nov-05
True Swing Golf	7	Feb-06
Viewtiful Joe Double Trouble!	7.5	Dec-05
Worms: Open Warfare	7	May-06
Zoo Tycoon DS	6	Jan-06

PSP

Ape Escape Academy	7	Feb-06



Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth – PSP – Aug-06

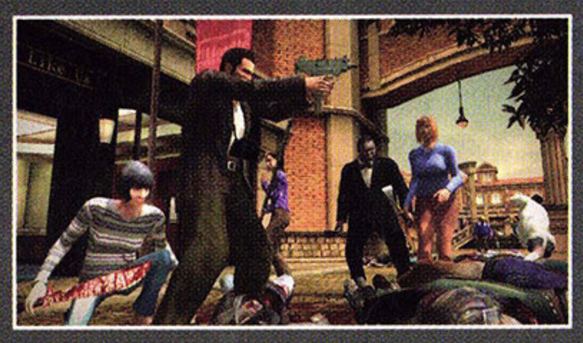
Armored Core: Formula Front Special Edition	3.75	Nov-05
Astonishia Story	4.25	Aug-06
Blade Dancer	5.5	Aug-06
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	8.5	May-06
Con, The	8	Nov-05
Daxter	8.75	Apr-06
Def Jam Fight for NY: The Takeover	8	Aug-06
Exit	7.25	Mar-06
Field Commander	7.5	May-06
FIFA 06	7.5	Nov-05
Fight Night Round 3	7.75	Apr-06
From Russia with Love	6.75	May-06
Generation of Chaos	5	May-06
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	5.5	Dec-05
Gradius Collection	8.5	Jun-06
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	9.25	Dec-05
Infected	8.25	Jan-06
Juiced Eliminator	7.75	Aug-06
Kingdom of Paradise	6.75	Jan-06
Legend of Heroes, The	6	Jan-06
Legend of Heroes II, The	6	Jul-06
Lemmings	7.25	Jul-06
Lord of the Rings: Tactics, The	6.75	Jan-06
Madden NFL 06	8.5	Nov-05
Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects	6.5	Nov-05
Me and My Katamari	8	May-06
Mega Man: Maverick Hunter X	8	Mar-06
Mega Man: Powered Up	8.25	Apr-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
NBA 06	6.5	Dec-05
NBA Ballers: Rebound	8	Apr-06
Need for Speed: Most Wanted 5-1-0	7.25	Jan-06
Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-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
SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs: Fireteam Bravo	7	Jan-06
Splinter Cell Essentials	8	May-06
SSX On Tour	7.75	Dec-05
Star Wars: Battlefront II	7	Jan-06
Street Fight Alpha 3 Max	7.75	Mar-06
Street Supremacy	6.75	Apr-06
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	8	May-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	7.5	Dec-05
Tokobot	8.25	Jan-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
Virtua Tennis: World Tour	8.5	Nov-05
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
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Dec-05
Ys: The Ark of Napishtim	6.75	Apr-06

GAME BOY ADVANCE

DK: King of Swing	7.75	Nov-05
Dogz	6.75	Feb-06
Donkey Kong Country 3	8.5	Nov-05
Drill Dozer	7.75	Feb-06
Dr. Mario Puzzle League	7.5	Jan-06
Final Fantasy IV Advance	8.75	Jan-06
Gunstar Super Heroes	8.75	Dec-05
Mario Tennis: Power Tour	7.75	Dec-05
Mega Man Battle Network 6: Cybeast Gregar/Cybeast Falzar	6.5	Aug-06
Mega Man Zero 4	8	Nov-05
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
Zooo	7	Nov-05

Dead Rising

Rising Above



By scenario co-writer David Crislip

DON'T EXPECT TO SEE EVERYTHING ON YOUR FIRST PLAYTHROUGH
Not only is this technically a near impossibility, but concentrating too hard on the small stuff can make you lose sight of the big picture. The game has been designed to encourage multiple playthroughs and to give you plenty of room to just go nuts and blow off some steam by coming up with creative ways to dispatch the undead. If a few survivors slip through the cracks the first time you play the game because you were too busy trying to bean zombies with golf balls or perfect your plate throwing skills, so be it. If you really want to be a perfectionist about it, keep a pen and paper handy and write down important notes like the location of hard-to-reach survivors or where you can find items you'll want to use again.

LISTEN TO OTIS
The guy's probably pretty lonely. Don't blame him if he seems talkative sometimes. Seriously though, the guy generally has some pretty helpful info for you, so it pays to listen to him. If he goes to the trouble to call you back to the Security Room, he probably has a good reason.

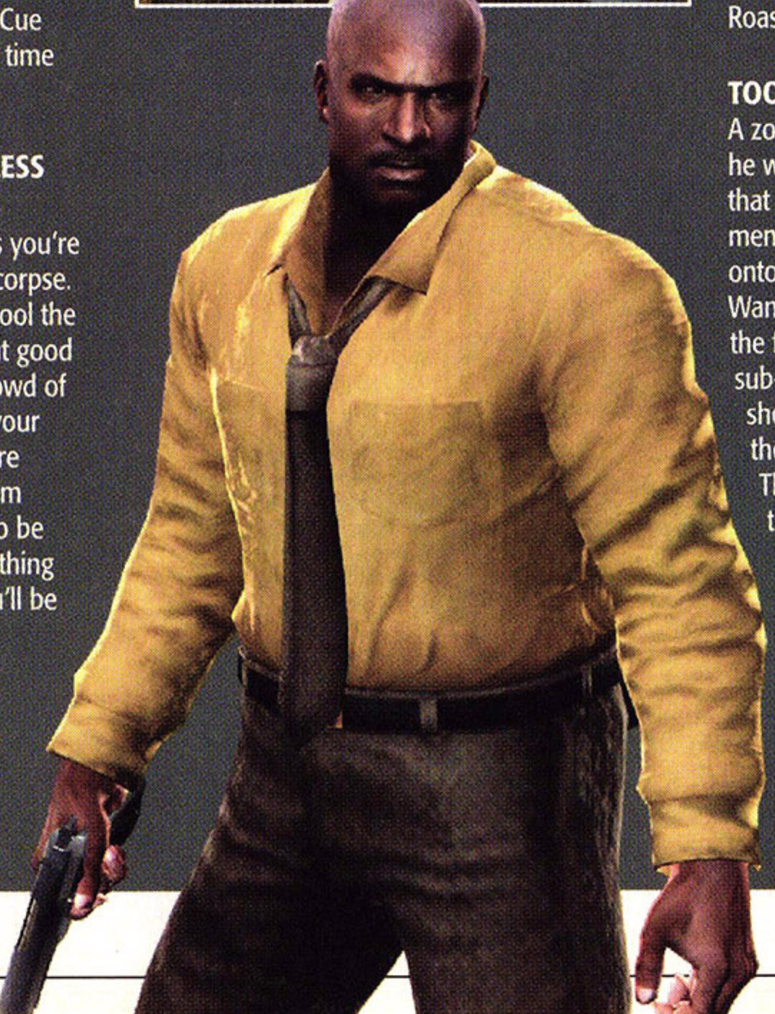
PLAN AHEAD
It's likely that you'll have multiple Scoops going at any given time. Try to tackle those that are in the same general location at once so you can minimize backtracking. Check the Scoop Cue as often as you need to keep tabs on the time limits and plan accordingly.

DON'T OVERLOOK SEEMINGLY USELESS WEAPONS
A sheet of plywood? Weak! That is unless you're swinging it at the midsection of a rotten corpse. Then it becomes a very effective cutting tool the size of your dinner table. A parasol? What good would that do? Try running through a crowd of zombies without one and you'll change your tune. Sure, some of the weapons are there for pure novelty, but others that may seem pretty useless on the surface can prove to be extremely helpful. Experiment with everything you can get your hands on and soon you'll be the savviest shopper around.

EXPERIMENT!
You may have already noticed this, but some of the game's Achievements are… not quite what you might be used to. Many of them can only be unlocked by doing experiments and trying things that may not seem obvious at first glance. It can be extremely satisfying to see the little Achievement message pop up without really expecting it.

TIPS FROM THE GI EDITORS
We had such a kick with Dead Rising this month, we thought we'd throw in our two cents and offer up some of our own things to check out in the game. Don't worry, we won't spoil any surprises.

MAKING YOUR WAY THE ONLY WAY YOU KNOW HOW
It's not going to take long before you realize that the never-ending flow of zombies in the game are going to impede your progress from time to time. There are some simple things to keep in mind that should make moving around a little easier. For one, you're a step ahead if you play any video game football games like Madden, as juking and quick turns are a must. Take advantage of the crowd-surfing ability as soon as you get it to avoid obstacles. Jump kicking is another excellent way to clear out crowds…and it always feels good to apply a boot to an undead face. Keep in mind that zombies aren't usually the smartest bunch around, so fake them out. Walk slowly to one side, and they'll shamble that direction. Then break the other way and run around the newly reformed crowd. You're a shepherd, except your sheep are all flesh-eating, undead mall-goers.



TRY, TRY AGAIN
As it turns out, Dead Rising can be a pretty tough game, especially if you play it in the linear path like you might another game. Don't

be afraid to save your character stats and start the game over. Repeatedly. There's enough stuff to do and paths to take that your next playthrough isn't going to be all that boring. Alternately, if you hit a trouble spot, take some time to go and rescue some survivors and do other scoop events. And while taking pictures isn't necessarily the most efficient way to level, it's certainly a fun and productive side event. If you get in sudden unexpected trouble, just think like you're in an MMO and zone – run to a nearby door and start slamming on B until you get out, and you'll save yourself. Alternately, you may be having trouble because you're making things too complicated. For instance, the game has a great auto-targeting system, so there's no reason that you shouldn't just run and gun when using firearms. Most of the time you can just forget about the time-consuming zoom function. Finally, if you're consistently hitting a wall in progression through the game, make sure you're keeping enough recovery items with you. Break open boxes to find weapons and health by jumping on them or throwing them at a wall. We'd suggest you aim for at least two good health boosts on hand at any one time, and more if you're headed to a boss. Our personal favorite spot to stock up is the second floor of the Paradise Plaza, in the Columbian Roastmasters store.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE
A zombie killer is only as good as the weapon he whacks things with. So while you're up at that Columbian Roastmasters store we just mentioned, hop over the back balcony rail onto the awning below to grab the katana. Want some of our other favorites? Check out the fountain in the Al Fresco plaza to reach the sub-machine gun. Both the sniper rifle and the shotgun can be found in the Huntin' Shack in the northeastern-most part of the North Plaza. There's a battle axe conveniently located in the antique store on the second floor of the Entrance Plaza. The excavator weapon can be found on the scaffolding in the North Plaza, and you definitely need to see it in action. Lastly, don't dismiss weapons that might initially seem silly. A great example is the soda can. They're easy to find, and awesome to use, since they can be thrown rapid fire and they stun your enemies. Good luck!

Mod World

THE SAGA OF RYZOM
RYZOM RING
http://www.ryzom-ring.com

Free expansion packs are always good. When they let you create your own content for an MMORPG, they're even better. Ryzom Ring does require an active subscription to The Saga of Ryzom, but it's so unique that it's worth mentioning, even if it's for a third-tier MMO.

The creation tools that Ryzom Ring puts in the hands of players are amazing. Nearly everything can be edited, and a seamless "test mode" lets you make sure things work as you add them in. Scripted events, NPC conversations, warring factions, and more are all entirely possible. The only downside is that you can't create your own terrain, and the maps that are provided are fairly small. On the plus side, you can have a scenario take place over multiple "acts," which are all on separate maps.

Detailing everything about Ryzom Ring would take most of the pages in this magazine, but the simple fact that an MMORPG is letting players create their own content (though it will be segregated away from the "official" world) is huge. Of course, since Ryzom is an online game, there are a huge number of resources on the Web for you to peruse if it sounds interesting. If nothing else, think of the machinema possibilities!

Live Arcade Spotlight

TotemBall

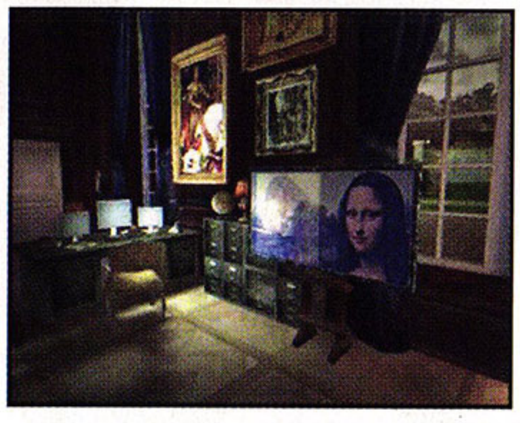
We have something of a first this month for Live Arcade Spotlight. It's a premiere of one of the first games for 360 that will fully utilize the Xbox Live Vision video camera. Strange Flavour and Freeverse are bringing TotemBall to XBLA sometime this September, if all goes as planned. The quirky game concept details an ancient musical tribe called the Ptolmec, whose creative nature sparked many new inventions. Alas, they apparently created gunpowder and the barbecue at the same time, and the resulting explosion scattered their musical totems across the jungle. As Pterry the Pturtle (sorry, we don't come up with this stuff), you have to roll around to retrieve the missing totems. As you pick up totems, each one adds a bit to your own in-game musical soundtrack. The platforming-style gameplay sounds almost like a mix of Katamari and Marble Blast, but apparently you'll control the action by waving your arms in front of the camera. There's also a cooperative juggling game, where one player uses the camera and another uses a controller to keep all your collected totem pieces aloft. Finally, adding to the fun, each player on the leaderboard will have an individual theme tune that you can listen to that's based on their own collection of totems. We are, how shall we say...intrigued.

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM



The Da Vinci Code

Go to the options menu to reach the Cheats sub-menu, then enter the desired code.

Unlock All Bonuses – Et In Arcadia Ego
Unlock All Visual Database Entries – Apocrypha
Double Health – Sacred Feminine
God Mode – Vitruvian Man
Level Select – Clos Luce 1519
One Hit Weapon Kill – Royal Holloway

PSP

NBA Ballers Rebound – PSP

Allen Iverson's Recording Studio – Go to the phrase-ology section, then enter the following code: THE ANSWER

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest

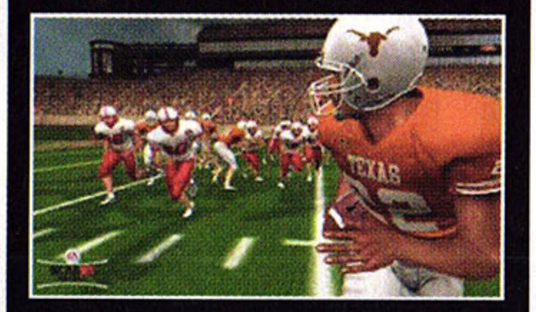
Enter the following code during gameplay without pausing.

Full Health – △, ○, △, ○, △, ○ (x2), ✕

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen eating your birthday cake before you blew the candles out)

Code of the Month

NCAA Football 07



It's college ball time again! Having trouble making that first down? Maybe you're playing the wrong team. Check out these codes to unlock teams for your favorite school. If you can't win with one of thems, we can't help you. Go back to class and give up your dream of a career in pro ball. To check out the cheats, go to the pennant select screen and press select in order to enter the code.

2004 All-Americans #273 – Fumble
All-Time Alabama Team – Roll Tide
All-Time Arkansas Team – Woopigsooie
All-Time Auburn Team – War Eagle
All-Time Clemson Team – Death Valley
All-Time Colorado Team – Glory
All-Time Florida Team – Great To Be
All-Time Florida State Team – Uprising
All-Time Georgia Team – Hunker Down
All-Time Iowa Team – On Iowa
All-Time Kansas State Team – Victory
All-Time LSU Team – Geaux Tigers
All-Time Miami Team – Raising Cane
All-Time Michigan Team – Go Blue
All-Time Mississippi State Team – Hail State
All-Time Nebraska Team – Go Big Red
All-Time North Carolina Team – Rah Rah
All-Time Notre Dame Team – Golden Domer
All-Time Ohio State Team – Killer Nuts
All-Time Oklahoma State Team – Go Pokes
All-Time Oklahoma Team – Boomer
All-Time Oregon Team – Quack Attack
All-Time Penn State Team – We Are
All-Time Pittsburgh Team – Lets Go Pitt
All-Time Purdue Team – Boiler Up
All-Time Syracuse Team – Orange Crush
All-Time Tennessee Team – Big Orange
All-Time Texas A&M Team – Gig Em
All-Time Texas Team – Hook Em
All-Time UCLA Team – Mighty
All-Time University of Washington Team – Bow Down
All-Time USC Team – Fight On
All-Time Virginia Team – Wahoos
All-Time Virginia Tech Team – Tech Triumph
All-Time Wisconsin Team – U Rah Rah
Baylor – Sic Em
Texas Tech – Fight
Illinois – Oskee Wow

Donnie Talaveto
New York, NY

{newbie}

{alpha geek}

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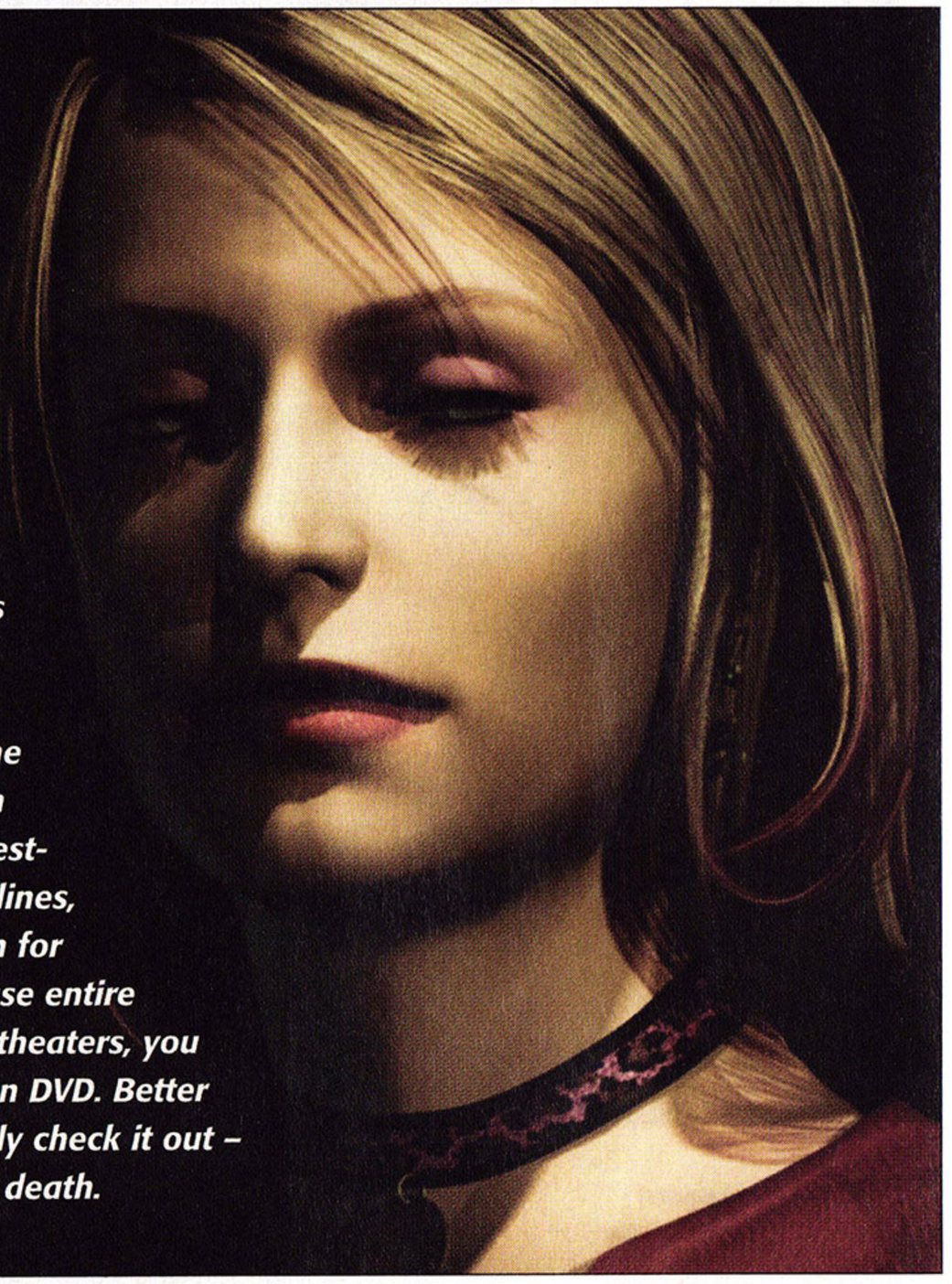
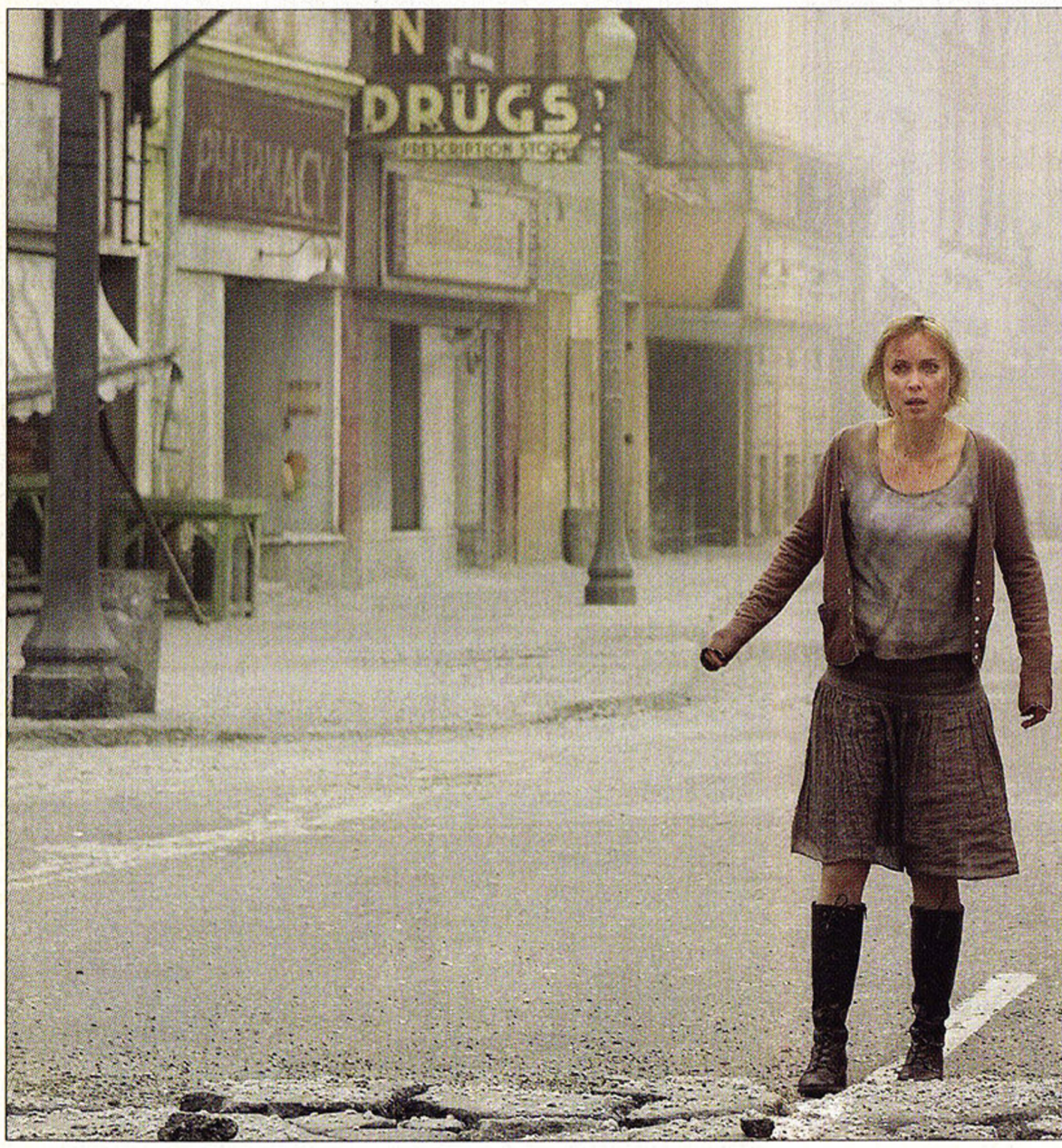
SILENT HILL COMPENDIUM

THE MOVIE, THE GAMES, AND THE ROADS THEY WALK

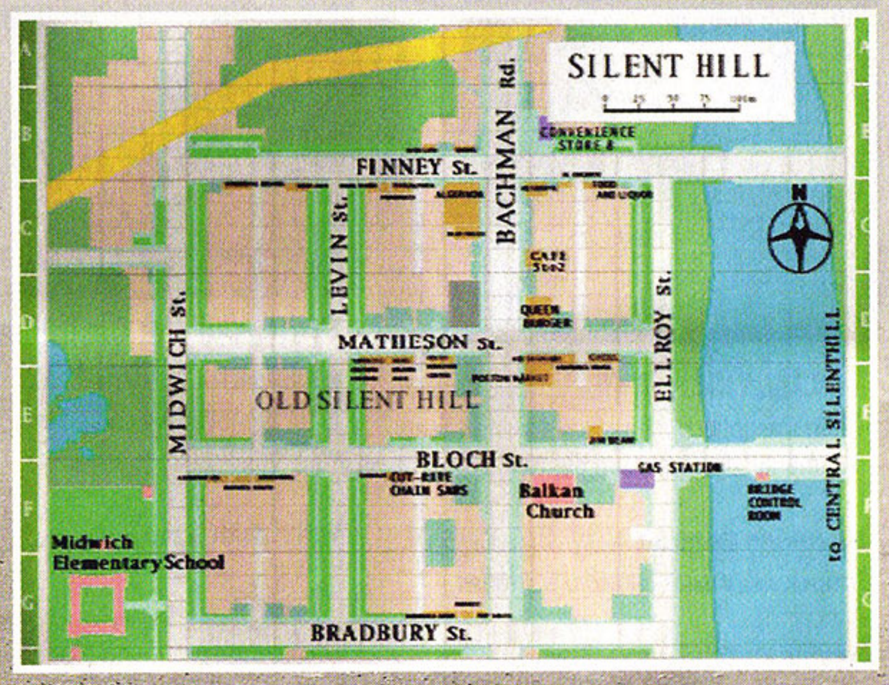


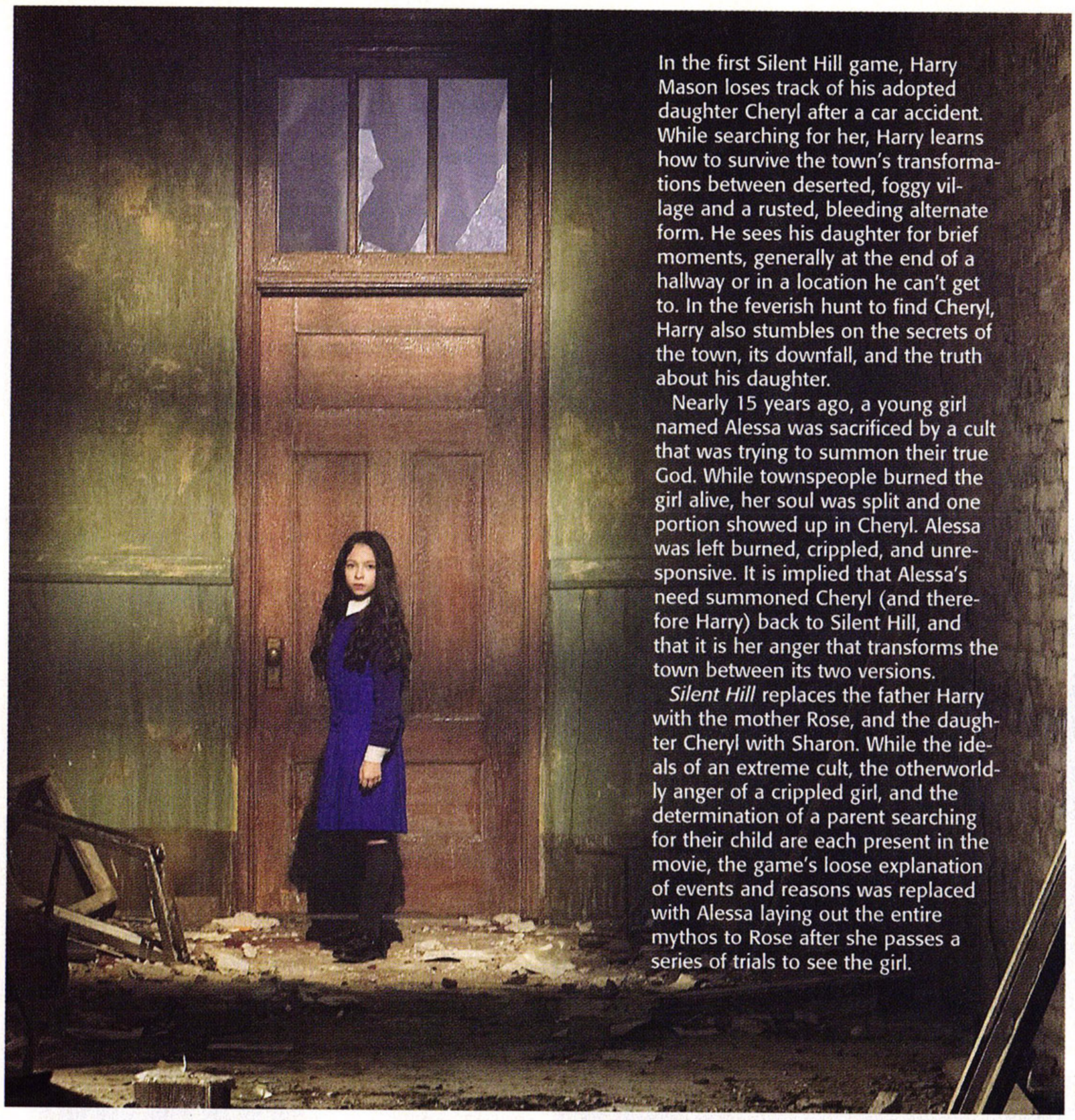
In the Silent Hill universe, the town itself is just as much a main character as any of the people wandering through it. Survival horror fans have seen the foggy village from a few different angles (and planes of existence, if some fan suppositions are to be believed), but moviegoers were only introduced to the series, its mythos, and the town at its center earlier this summer. Many left with a sadly bored impression of the franchise, but the film did do some really interesting things with the license. By picking and choosing elements, characters, storylines, and enemies from all of the games, many players left with a weird appreciation for this video game movie. In fact, Silent Hill was one of the first game movies to use entire sequences almost shot for shot from its source material. If you missed it in the theaters, you can make your own comparisons on August 22nd, when the movie comes out on DVD. Better yet, ambitious gamers who haven't jumped into the Silent Hill saga should really check it out – the games are good in different ways, and each will probably scare you half to death.



According to information in the games, Silent Hill was once a Native American holy land, a Civil War-era penal colony, the site of two separate epidemics, home to a once-thriving coal mine, and – after all of those facades fell away – a sleepy town that tried to market itself as a tourist destination. The town unfolds between layers of fog (in the games) or ash and smoke (in the movie), but no matter the source, the claustrophobia is the same. Silent Hill is a place of desperation, lies, and horrors, and seems to have a purgatory-like function later in the series as characters arrive and are forced to re-live or come to terms with their worst acts in the normal world.

So when exactly in the town's timeline did the shape-shifting, soul-sucking hellmouth that we see in the games really emerge? Some say that the Native Americans recognized the power of the land around Toluca Lake. Others say that it started with Alessa, a young girl whose legacy and reincarnations tie the four Silent Hill games together and from which the movie grabbed most of its plot.





In the first Silent Hill game, Harry Mason loses track of his adopted daughter Cheryl after a car accident. While searching for her, Harry learns how to survive the town's transformations between deserted, foggy village and a rusted, bleeding alternate form. He sees his daughter for brief moments, generally at the end of a hallway or in a location he can't get to. In the feverish hunt to find Cheryl, Harry also stumbles on the secrets of the town, its downfall, and the truth about his daughter.

Nearly 15 years ago, a young girl named Alessa was sacrificed by a cult that was trying to summon their true God. While townspeople burned the girl alive, her soul was split and one portion showed up in Cheryl. Alessa was left burned, crippled, and unresponsive. It is implied that Alessa's need summoned Cheryl (and therefore Harry) back to Silent Hill, and that it is her anger that transforms the town between its two versions.

Silent Hill replaces the father Harry with the mother Rose, and the daughter Cheryl with Sharon. While the ideals of an extreme cult, the otherworldly anger of a crippled girl, and the determination of a parent searching for their child are each present in the movie, the game's loose explanation of events and reasons was replaced with Alessa laying out the entire mythos to Rose after she passes a series of trials to see the girl.

This ultimate discovery of Alessa in the movie takes place in the bowels of the hospital. Although the structure fits into the geography of Silent Hill as presented in the first game, players don't go there until the second and third titles. Rose must battle through hordes of mutated nurses (in naughtier outfits than they likely wore while on their usual rounds) and takes small notice of the girl's main caretaker. While unnamed in the film, it's reasonable to assume that she is supposed to be Lisa Garland, a drug-addicted nurse charged with taking care of the vegetative Alessa. At various points in the first game, Harry encounters Lisa and she points him towards the town's manipulative cult leaders, the drug the group are feeding to the townspeople, and what they really did to Alessa when she was little. Lisa is most notable, however, as being the only "innocent" person Harry encounters in the alternate Silent Hill.

Rose's quest through Silent Hill ends not long after Alessa's tale is told, but the way that the movie ends eliminates any sequels from taking the path of the games' storylines. In Silent Hill 3, Cheryl (who goes by Heather since her father rescued her in the first game) is called back to the town and fights against the cult who believes that she will be the mother of God.

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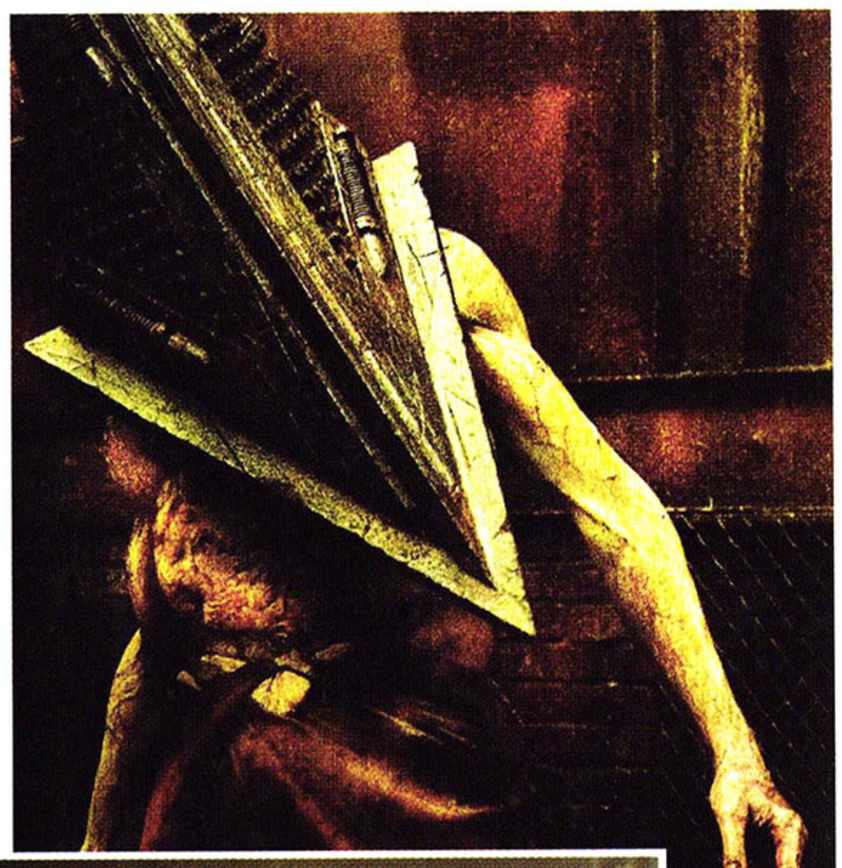
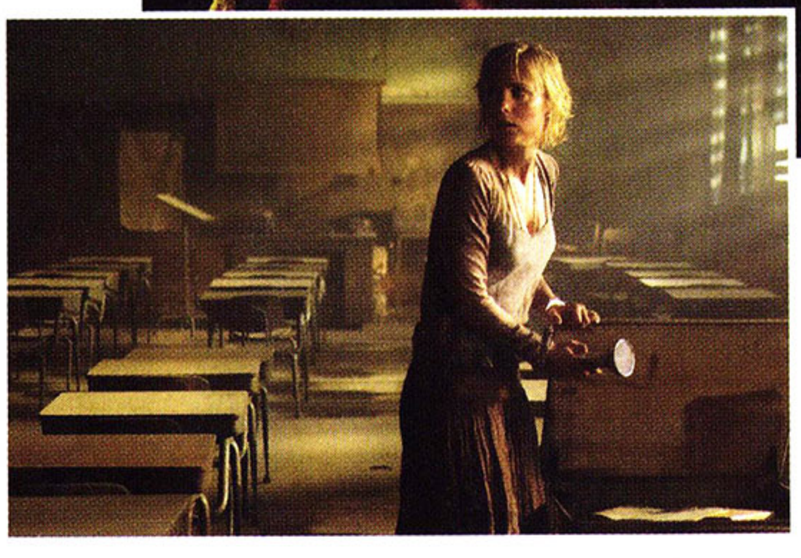
The extremist religious cult whose elaborate and destructive plans serve a central role in the mythos of the Silent Hill games is generally referred to as The Order. The majority of Silent Hill residents that players encounter are members of this somewhat secret society. While they offer services and religious education openly, their greater plans are kept under wraps. In the movie, the group's greatest sins are burning Alessa to "cleanse" her and convincing their members that an apocalypse was brought about because of their misdeeds. In the games, the group is responsible for distributing a drug called White Claudia to tourists and residents alike (in the first game). While this forced drug addiction is despicable, the group's biggest indiscretions are against children. They attempted to sacrifice Alessa to call forth their true archaic God (before the games begin), and summoned Heather back to the town for another attempt at bringing about the rhapsody (in Silent Hill 3). Silent Hill 4: The Room (which wasn't originally intended to be a Silent Hill game and had franchise ties inserted later in development) alludes to an orphanage run by some members of The Order where Walter Sullivan, the serial killer at the center of SH 4, painfully spent time.

With all of this emphasis on The Order, the second game (whose events have few stated ties to the cult) seems left out of the film. From a plot standpoint, this is true. But the movie and its marketing campaign took one very important icon from Silent Hill 2 – Pyramid Head. One of the few masculine enemies in the second title, his presence and actions in the movie are lifted almost directly from the game. Dragging a huge blade behind him and wearing a large metal headpiece that covers his entire face, the enemy's approach in both the movie and the game is terrifying. He kills humans and enemies alike. He is relentless. And he seems to be indestructible. Within the games it is implied that he is representative of executioners from earlier in the town's messy history, but he also resembles Walter Sullivan's first victim in Silent Hill 4: The Room.



The references between the movie and the games go on and on. Some are subtle, like Rose solving puzzles to follow her daughter through the town. Others aren't so much references as direct recreations of scenes from the game. For example, when Rose enters the town and starts walking down an alley only to be overcome by teams of mutated children, the sequence is a shot-for-shot recreation of Harry's introduction to the town. Regardless of how successful Silent Hill was or wasn't as a movie, it's interesting to watch as a player. Seeing what elements of such a long-running video game franchise are woven together is an experiment that no other series to film adaptation has offered and, at a bare minimum, the results are interesting. ■■■



GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME
by Boa Nguyen

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY

> **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2
> **PUBLISHER** KONAMI OF AMERICA

Quite possibly the quintessence of quality gaming, Metal Gear Solid 2 delivers on all fronts, soaring above the excellence that was its predecessor, which boasted an explosive and intelligent story line, tight gameplay, and bizarre boss fights.

Without revealing too much critical plot information, the story starts with Solid Snake, the hero of the original title, walking along the George Washington Bridge in New York. He vanishes into thin air and jumps off the bridge and lands on a tanker, which is home to his first mission in two years. After the events of Metal Gear Solid, Revolver Ocelot sold off the blueprints of Metal Gear REX, a bipedal nuclear behemoth. The tanker that Snake is infiltrating contains a new type of Metal Gear, one that is supposed to be more powerful than REX. But things go sour, the tanker sinks, and Snake allegedly drowns in the rough waters of the Hudson River.

Then, two years later, a rookie agent codenamed Raiden penetrates an offshore treatment plant to foil the plan of a terrorist organization that has seized the president and numerous hostages. This may seem simple, but in reality, the rabbit hole goes a lot deeper. Thus begins the long tale of Metal Gear Solid 2.

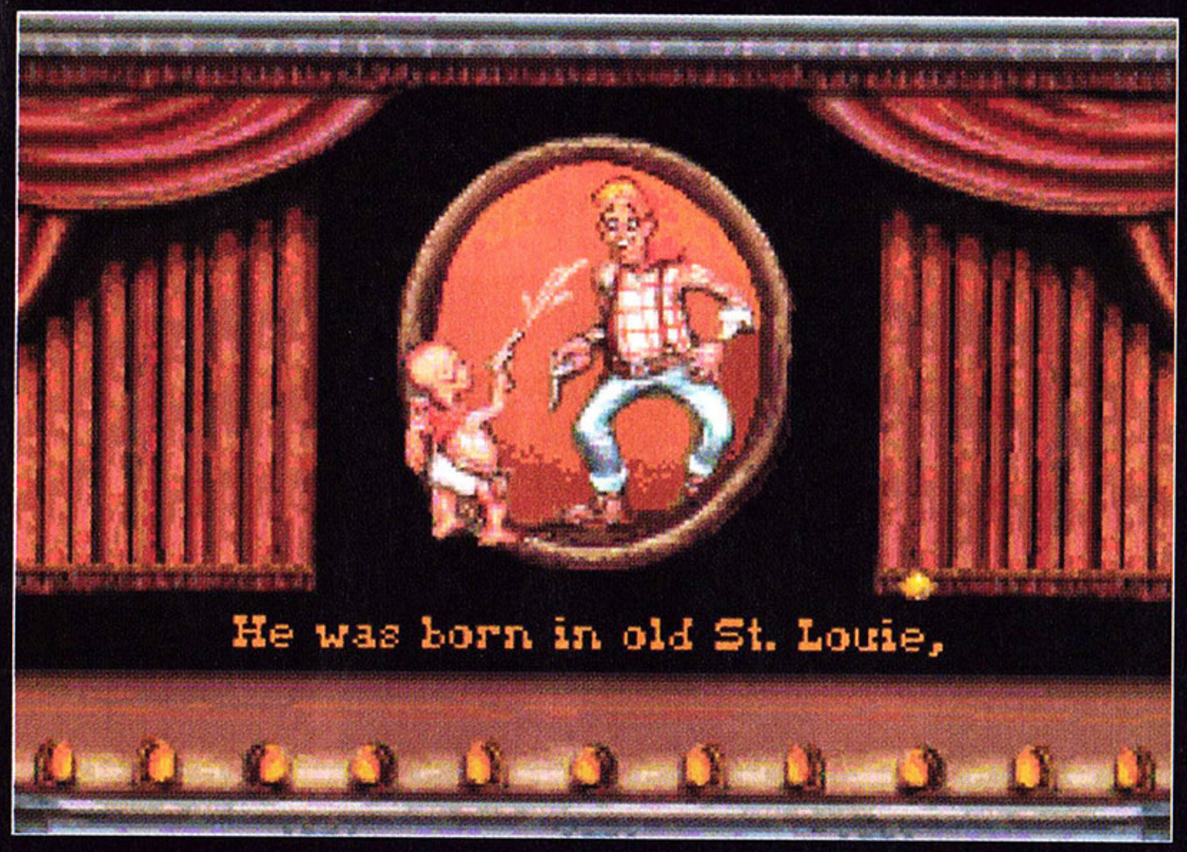
Throughout the two chapters, Snake's brief tanker adventure and Raiden's long plant mission, the player will guide two amazing characters down a harrowing and incredibly intricate storyline. You might even tear up on one occasion, but the plot can get a bit complicated for those who have yet to play the original. But of course, stories do not define the destiny of a game; it's the gameplay that counts. During the course of the missions, the player will climb over rails to avoid enemy sentries, defuse clusters of C4, use a high-frequency blade to beat a Doctor Octopus mimic, hold up a guard and use him for a retinal scan, and more.

The exciting moments of stealth action coupled with a diverse array of weapons makes gameplay all the more captivating. And the aforementioned moments are simply the tip of the iceberg; This game contains a hell of a lot more stuff.

The graphics are still top notch today. Surprisingly, this is an early PS2 title. A ton of detail was paid to refining the environments. Rain drips on the decks of the tanker. Bullets cause holes in the walls. These finer details, on top of its deep gameplay, the convoluted yet riveting story, and overall mirror polish makes Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty an instant classic. And that is why this is truly the Greatest Game of All Time.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

August of 1976 saw a revolution in video game technology and ideas that we're still using today. The Fairchild VES (later renamed the Fairchild Channel F) was the first console to use interchangeable cartridges for game content instead of internally-stored games. The idea and implementation were both revolutionary, but the Fairchild was overshadowed a year later by the Atari VCS, and both were eventually obliterated by the big crash a few years later. At least we still have the Game Boy and DS lines to carry on the ideal of swappable games with no loading.

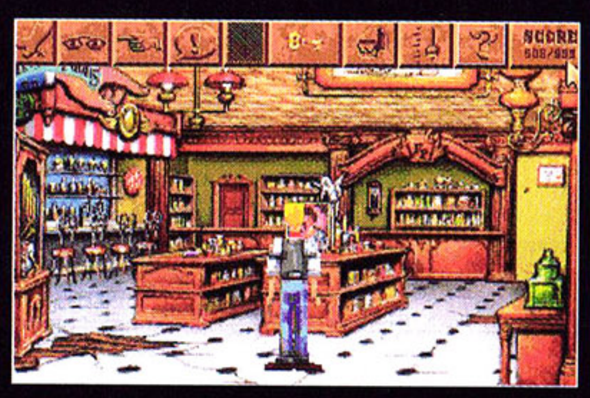


PC

FREDDY PHARKAS: FRONTIER PHARMACIST

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE **> PUBLISHER** SIERRA ON-LINE **> DEVELOPER** SIERRA ON-LINE **> RELEASE** 1993

Practically every game set in the Old West centers around cowboys and outlaws, but who's the real hero when Colton White contracts a nasty case of piles? The pharmacist, that's who. As one of the best titles to come out of Sierra's '90s heyday, Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist mixes bizarre problem solving and humor into one hilarious experience. From the ballad that tells the backstory to the realistic problems Freddy faces (like uncontrolled horse farting and emergency prescription-filling), FP:FP is one of the most entertaining adventure games ever made. Even if all you do is walk around trying to give the horse-plop to every townsperson in sight, it's totally worth it. The game may be off-kilter and mildly inappropriate (it is one of Leisure Suit Larry creator Al Lowe's projects, after all), but if nothing else, it's guaranteed to make you start saying "Score!" in a high, creaky voice. That's a skill you can take to the bank!



SEGA GENESIS

SHADOWRUN

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** BLUESKY SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** 1994

Some games are classics because they helped to start trends, introduce new approaches, or pioneer a genre. Unfortunately, this variety of game rarely fares as well in hindsight, as its once avant-garde concepts rapidly begin to feel old hat. Alas, such is the case with Shadowrun, one of the great Genesis RPGs. With its open world and freeform missions, Shadowrun gave players a freedom to explore the world at their own pace and in their own way. A tremendous variety of stats allows for intricate specialization of characters and upgrades. But the years have not been kind. The demanding hours of meaningless grinding for money and karma (experience) are intensely slow and boring, and threaten to halt the story before you even get started. Once the plot finally heats up, too much aimless wandering further slows the pace. Only the dark and well-realized atmosphere of character dialogue and the surrounding world still resonates with its original intensity. This is one of those once great titles that time has left behind to gather dust. Sometimes you just can't go home again.

SUPER NINTENDO

BREAKTHRU!

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE **> PUBLISHER** SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE **> DEVELOPER** ARTECH STUDIOS **> RELEASE** 1994

Alexy Pajitnov earned his place in gaming history by creating Tetris, the most popular puzzle game of all time, and lately he's been busy with titles such as Hexic for Xbox Live Arcade. However, one of his puzzle games is a little more obscure: Breakthru! The premise of Breakthru! is simple: There is a wall of colored blocks, and you need to clear them by clicking on any block that is next to another one of the same color to make them disappear. Gravity then fills in the gaps with falling bricks from above. The basic premise is complicated a bit by soda cans, which need to be cleared with sticks of dynamite, spiders that block falling bricks, and other special icons. Anyone can easily pick up Breakthru! and quickly get sucked in, as its elegant design allows both novices and experienced puzzlers to come up with strategies that work for them. Breakthru! isn't as instantly understandable as Tetris, but it's close. It's a bit of a shame that this decent little game has been living in the shadow of Pajitnov's classic title for so long.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Shadowrun (July/August 1994, Vol. 3 Issue 4)

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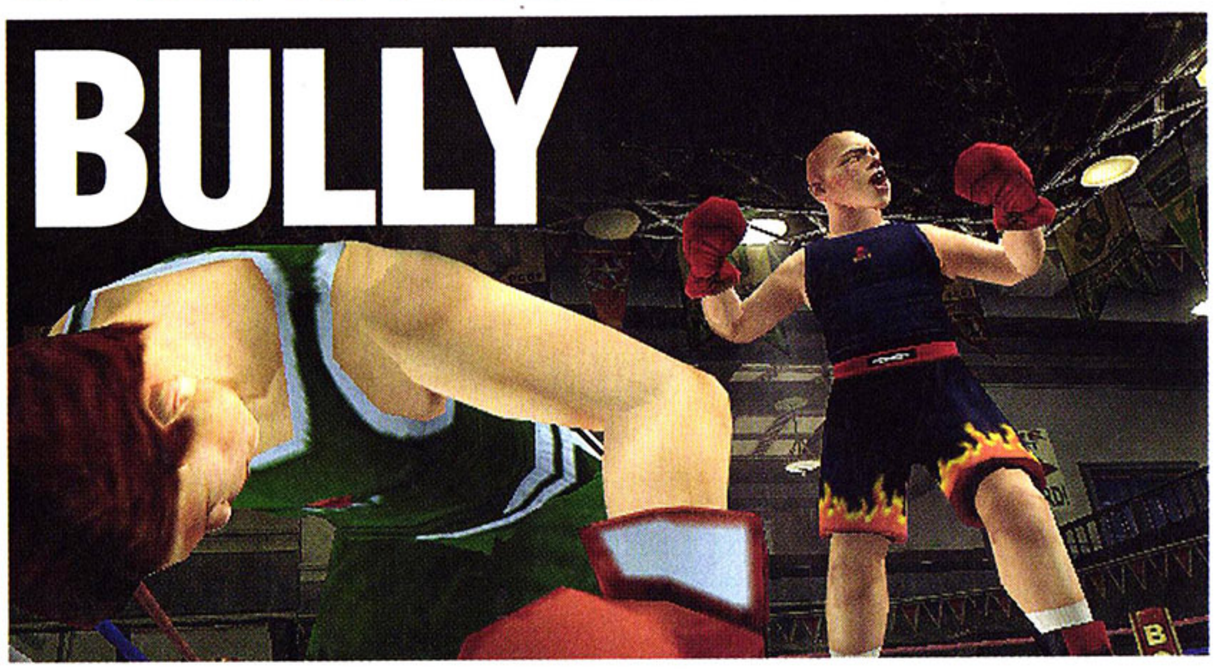
UNLIMITED LAUNCH: AUG 18



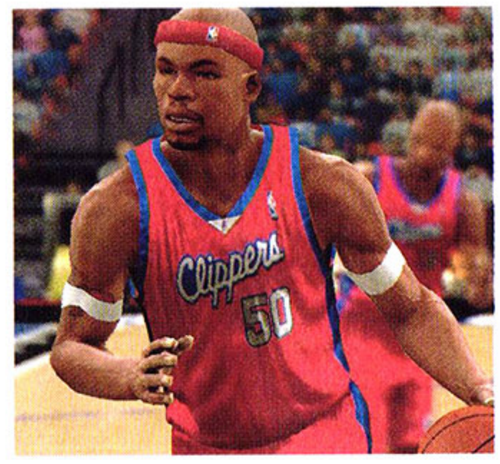
While the name Bully has been known to gamers for some time now, we took the chance this month to visit Rockstar to get the full scoop on the rapidly approaching schoolyard satire. If our 10 pages of info and images didn't sate your hunger, hop onto this month's Unlimited section and check out some extra screens and art that we've reserved just for you.

How They Did It

To most gamers, the process of how a game moves from one language and culture to another is something of a mystery. This month, we talked with several experts on the subject, including how they got their sweet gigs. Read the full interviews in Unlimited.

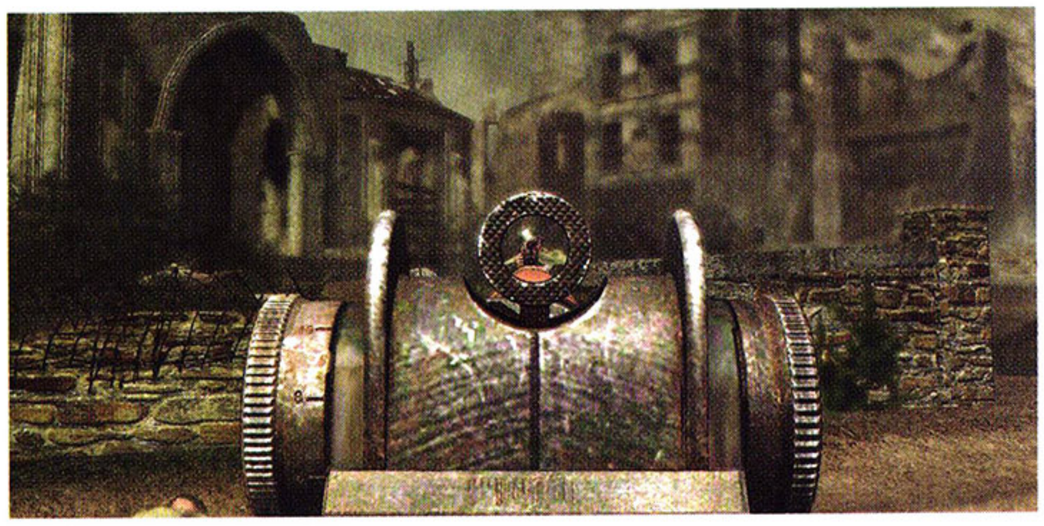
Extra Interviews

Voice actors sure do say some funny stuff. Like that one time, in that one game. Remember that? No? Well, you will if you go over to September's Unlimited and hear more from Cam Clarke and Jennifer Hale, two of the most well-respected and prolific voice actors in the industry, as well as Blindlight's Lev Chapelsky.



More Balls

Hopefully our roundup of this year's basketball offerings gave you something to think about. If you found yourself firmly wanting more sweaty balls, you might want to go online and check out our exclusive pictures, including some of the motion capture work they're adding into NBA Live 07.



Call of Duty 3

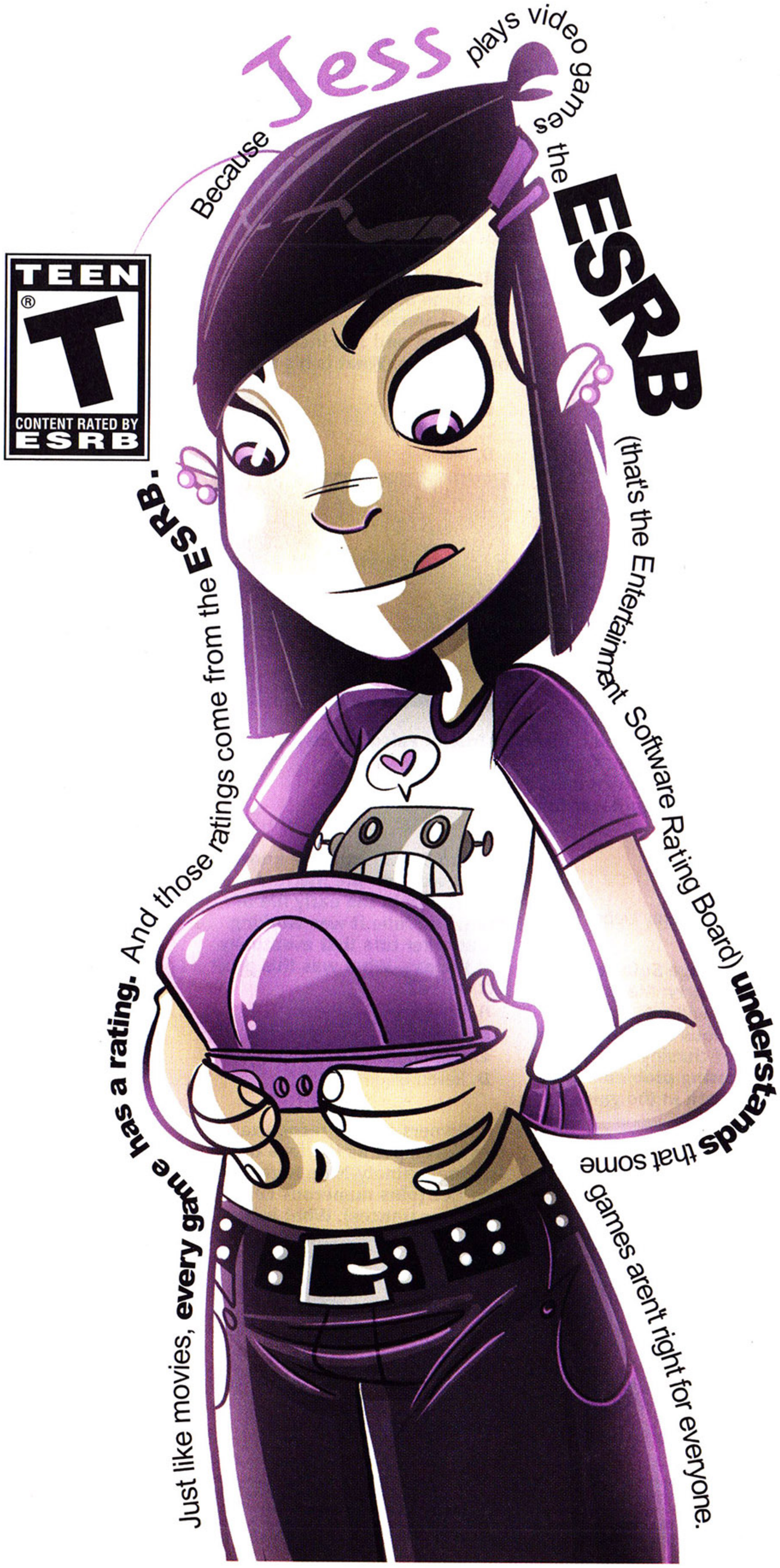
Call of Duty 2 was one of the biggest hits of last holiday season, and was a clear favorite for early adopters of the Xbox 360. Activision is eager to repeat its success with its latest take on the WWII era, Call of Duty 3. We spoke with the gamemakers, and you can read their full comments to us in September's Unlimited.

GI Online On The Road

Ever striving to bring you the absolute latest in video gaming news, the online crew is travelling over land and sea this month to bring you more coverage across all the internets! Atari will be showing off their latest products in an event in Las Vegas, while Konami's summer BBQ promises to reveal some exciting tidbits about their holiday lineup and beyond. We'll even have folks at the German Games Convention in Leipzig to give you the scoop on all the games from the biggest publishers.

PLUS EXTRA CONTENT FOR:

God of War II, TimeShift, Justice League Heroes, Star Trek Legacy, LEGO Star Wars II, and many other upcoming holiday titles you're waiting for!



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GAMEOVER

Now Try Hard Mode!

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

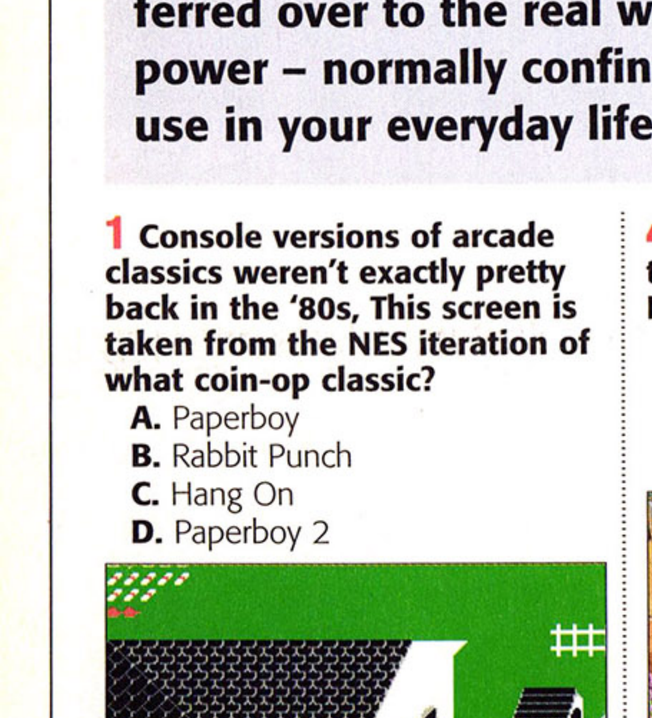
One of the reasons people love video games is because they provide opportunities to do things we can't normally do in real life. But wouldn't it be sweet if the world of video game abilities could be transferred over to the real world? Answer these questions to discover which power – normally confined to the world of gaming – you can unlock for use in your everyday life.

1 Console versions of arcade classics weren't exactly pretty back in the '80s, This screen is taken from the NES iteration of what coin-op classic?

A. Paperboy
B. Rabbit Punch
C. Hang On
D. Paperboy 2

2 Page boy cuts are awesome! This is a picture of the doofy-looking hero from which game in Konami's Suikoden series?

A. II
B. III
C. IV
D. V

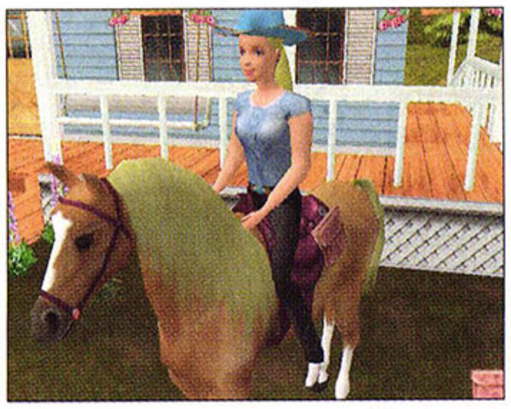


3 Ninjas are universally regarded as the perfect video game heroes. Which of the following was not a ninja weapon or skill available to the player in The Legend of Kage for NES?

A. Throwing Stars
B. Invisibility
C. Super Jump
D. Sword

4 How many horses were there to unlock in the PC version of Barbie Horse Adventures?

A. 4
B. 7
C. 12
D. I didn't play that garbage



5 Riiiidge racer! This franchise from Namco is often one of the first out of the gate when a new console hits the market. Of the following consoles, which one did NOT have a Ridge Racer title for launch?

A. PSP
B. GameCube
C. Xbox 360
D. Um, Giant enemy crabs?

6 In High Voltage Software's Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude, Larry will put up with some ridiculous situations all in the name of chasing tail. Which of the following problems is he NOT faced with in the game?

A. Dressing up as wood
B. Playing Dungeons & Dragons
C. Trying not to say "Buttress"
D. Babysitting a talking monkey

7 Double Fine's Psychonauts has some of the most memorable characters ever assembled in a game, and this little guy is one of them. What is his name?

A. Dogen
B. Sasha
C. Ford
D. Milkman

8 True or False: There is no cow level.

A. True
B. False

9 Retro Studios may be known for its work on the Metroid games, but in the early life of the GameCube it was working on another title that eventually got the axe. What was this project called?

A. Unity
B. Thornado
C. Dead Phoenix
D. Raven Blade

10 Gamers should recognize this developer as the face of Lumines, Ninety-Nine Nights, and Rez (plus numerous GI Spy appearances). What is his name?

A. Yoshinori Kitase
B. Tetsuya Mizuguchi
C. Suda 51
D. Denis Dyack

BREAKDOWN

33.3% of the revenue generated by the U.S. mobile game market is from puzzle and strategy titles.

15 The number of years that Sonic the Hedgehog has been a fixture in the industry. Unfortunately, he was only fun for about five of them.

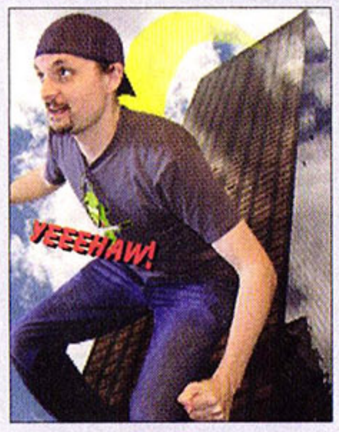
99% of human beings think the little boy in *Superman Returns* is adorable. The other 1 percent are dead on the inside.

37% of casual gamers are between the ages 35 and 49, according to a recent study.

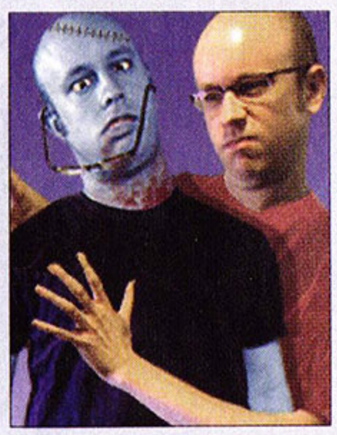
0.05% of Xenosaga fans will be disappointed by Shion's gratuitous shower scene in Episode III.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

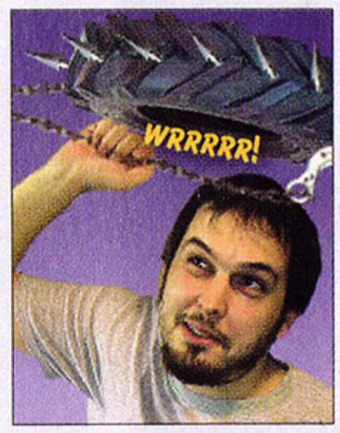
0-1:
Bottomless Inventory



2-3:
Double Jump



4-5:
Respawn



6-7:
Improbable Weapon

8-9:
Cheat Codes

10:
Limit Break

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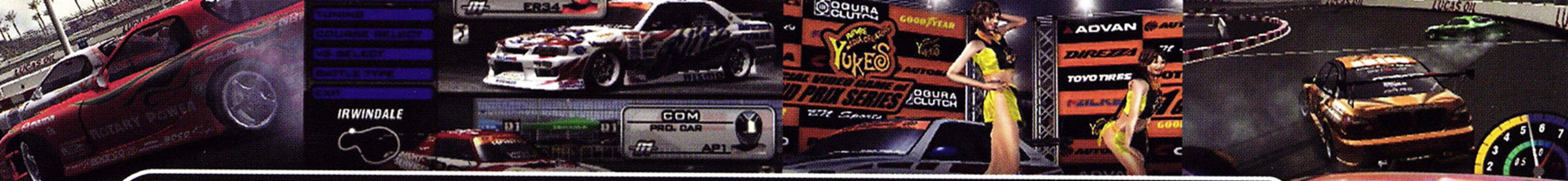
Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. A 2. C 3. B 4. D 5. B 6. C 7. A 8. B 9. D 10. B



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