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CHAINS OF OLYMPUS
REVIEW
PG. 104

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MARCH 2008

THE INVASION HAS BEGUN...

UNIVERSE AT WAR

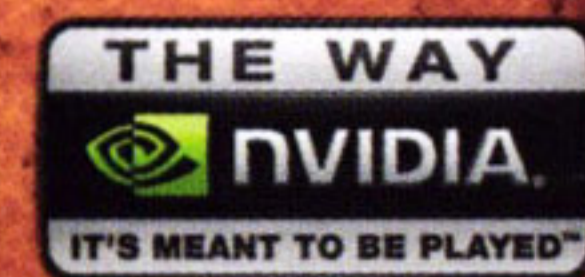
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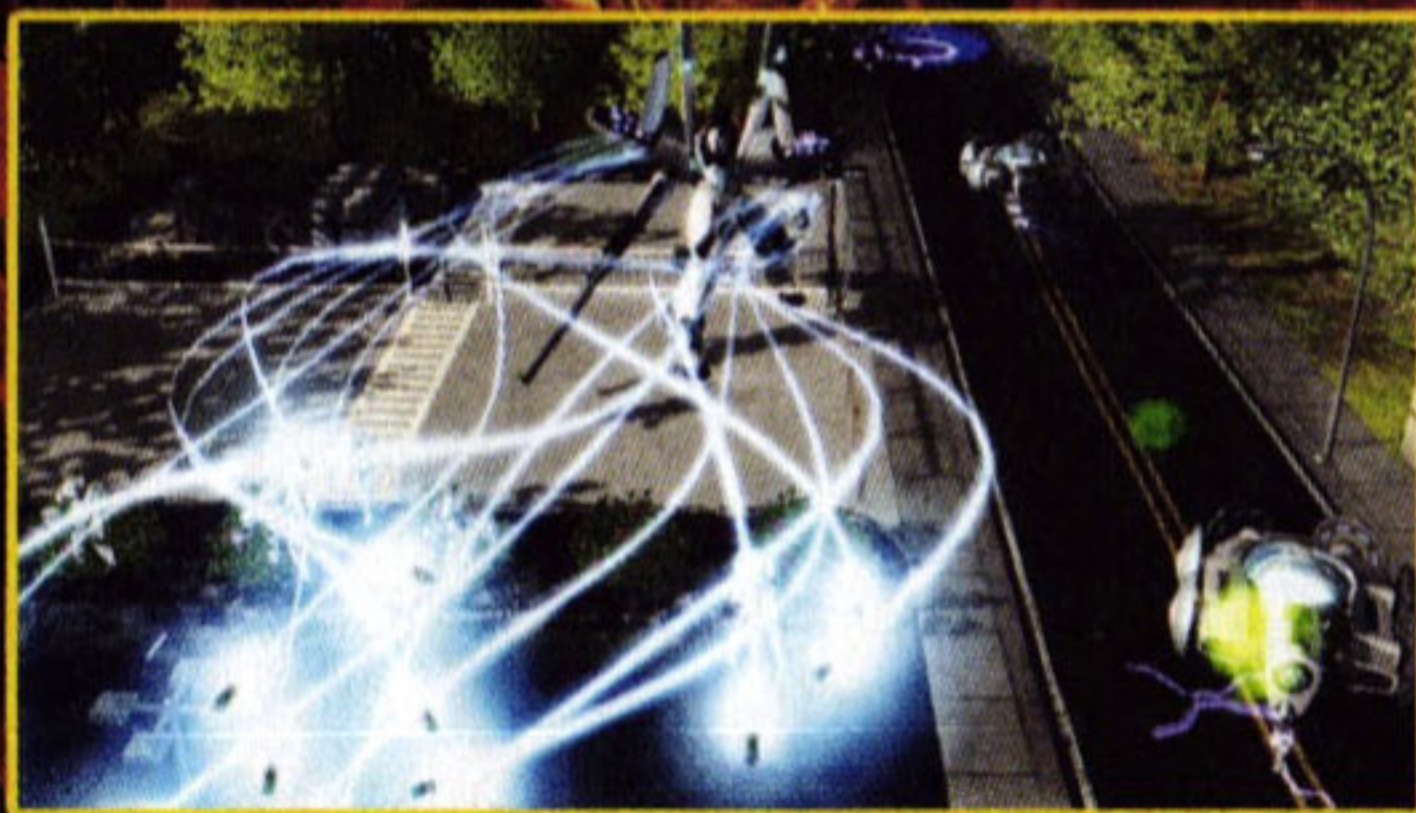
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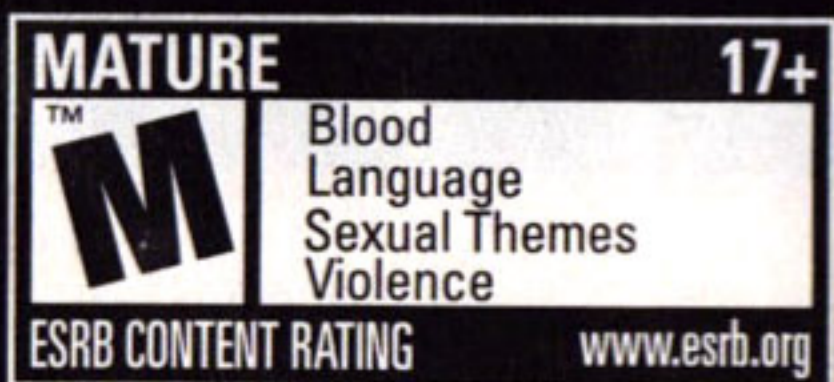
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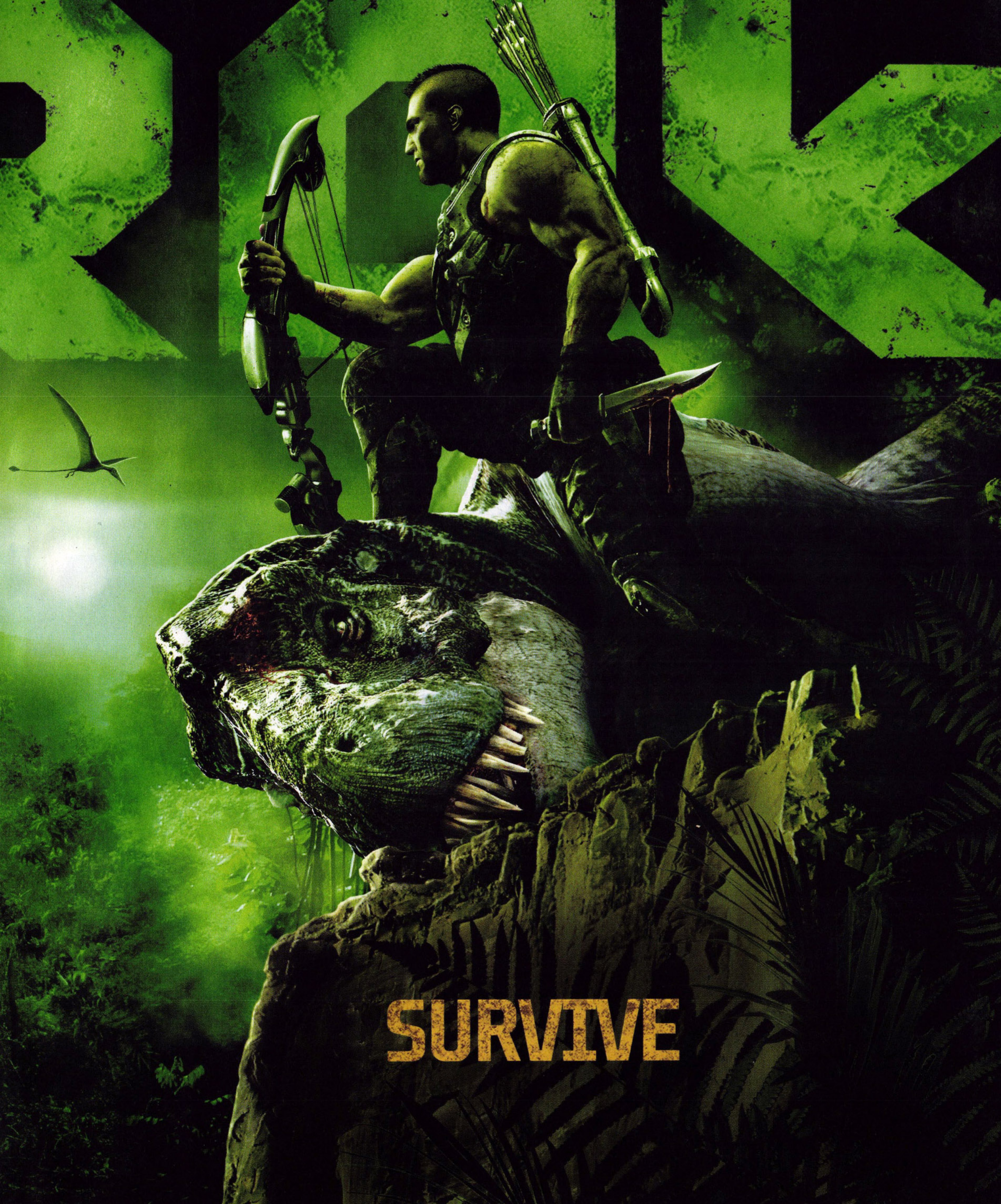
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Intense Violence
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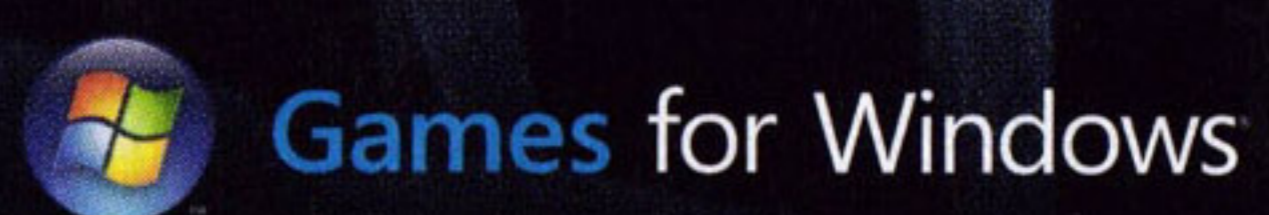
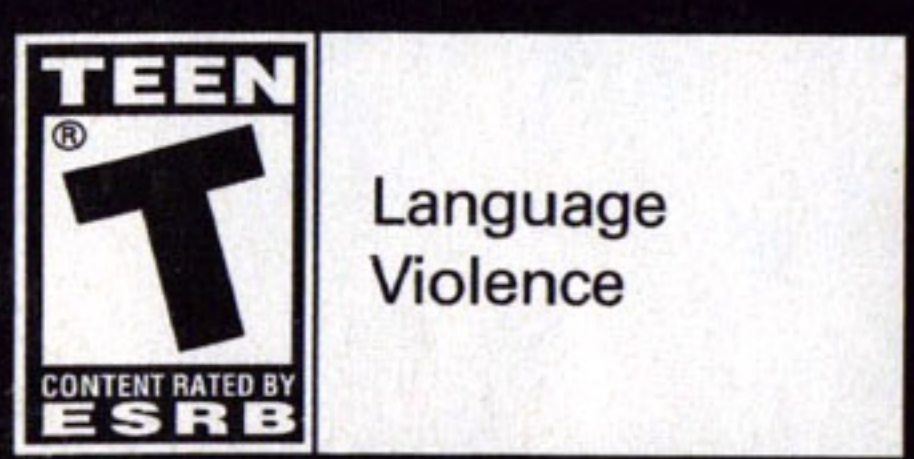


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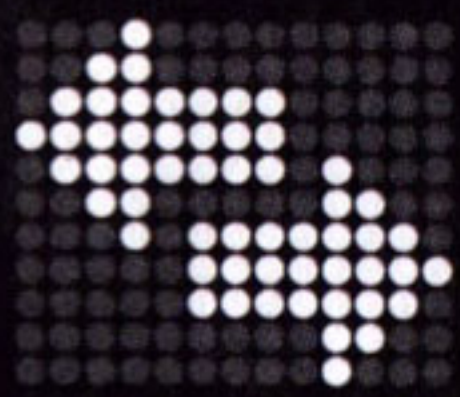
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46 ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

Fans have yearned for a truly awesome sequel to the Aliens saga for years, and Brothers in Arms developer Gearbox intends to deliver just that in this suspenseful first-person shooter. Players will experience the tense storyline (which takes place after *Alien 3*) from the perspective of a four-marine squad, and will need to utilize those colonial marines to their full potential via sound tactics to survive the horror. Alternatively, four-player co-op provides a different way to conquer the aliens. Enjoy our 10 pages of exclusive coverage inside.

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CHAMPIONS ONLINE

It was only a matter of time before the Xbox 360 got another triple-A MMORPG, and we've got the exclusive story. Cryptic Studios (*City of Heroes*) is blowing this superhero-oriented title way up, allowing players to customize their avatars to an unprecedented degree, create their own arch-nemesis, and adventure in locales as diverse as the moon and dinosaur-infested monster islands.



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The classic PS2 shooter returns on PS3 and Xbox 360 in an exciting, persistent open-world format. Every structure – and we mean every structure – is destructible brick-by-brick in this action-packed third-person adventure. Enjoy our world-exclusive first screens and details on page 62.

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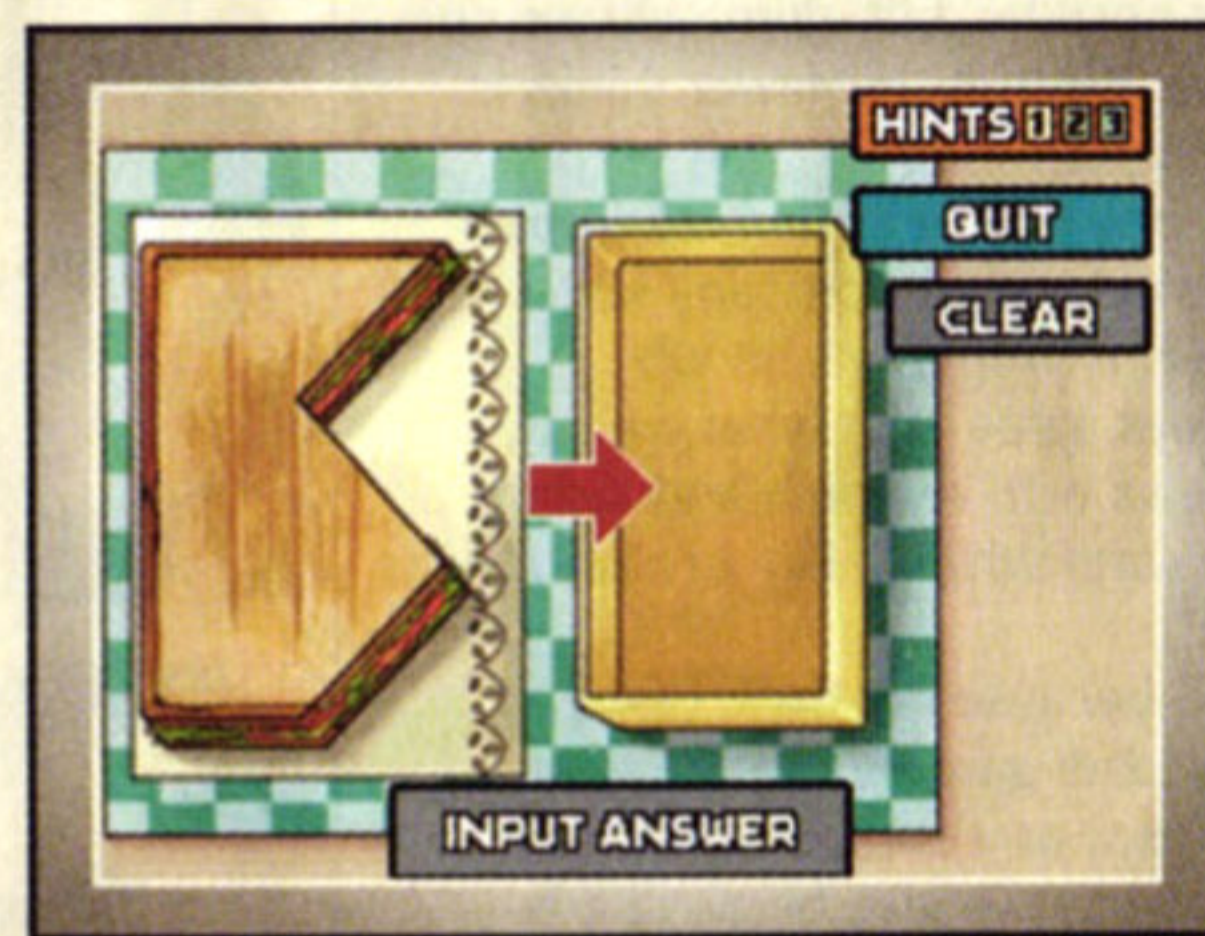
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Using scraps left over from your breakfast, you've managed to cobble together a rather oddly shaped sandwich.

How many times must you cut the sandwich in order to make it fit neatly in the container?

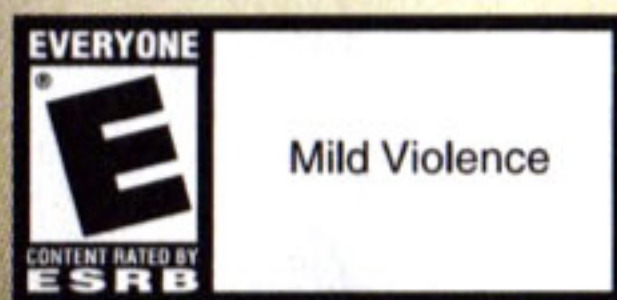


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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



OF REVIEW AND REVIEWS

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Every month it seems that one of our reviews sparks an onslaught of hate or love from gaming's collective conscience through a gaggle of posts on any of the thousands of forums you can find in the great Internet ether or from the emails overflowing in my inbox.

The thing that strikes me every time is that people always seem to assume that we are somehow being paid for our reviews or that we simply don't play the games. The idea that these things are even brought up at all blows my mind, but I figure I might as well cut through the confusion and set the record straight. No company gets favorable treatment for reviews due to an exchange of funds or any other goods or services.

And to think that we don't play the games is about the funniest thing I have ever heard. We work at a video game magazine. We go to work in the morning and have to fire up an Xbox 360. What do you think we do? Shocker: we sit and play games all day at work. But what you may not know is that when the day is over, we go home and play games all night as well. Some might call us crazy, but I call it heaven on Earth.

We love games, and will always love games. And don't think we don't argue over the reviews ourselves. Any review that the staff sees as too high or too low will always be challenged by the team. The writers are expected to defend their position, but ultimately we do not change game reviews. What the reviewer thinks is what we print. It's that simple.

And in my 17 years of being here at Game Informer we have never been banned from a company for a poor review, and there is a simple reason why. Companies may not always agree with what we say, but we back up our reviews with research and insight that explains our position and why we like or dislike a game.

We don't score a game because we think casual gamers will like it, or hardcore gamers will like it, or a company will like the review, or a company will hate the review. We give the scores we give because it is what we think of the game. Sometimes you agree with us and sometimes you don't, but don't ever accuse us of not being honest or passionate about video games, because at the end of the day that's our job. And we just happen to love our jobs. But each one of us would walk away from it in an instant if we weren't free to say what we think. So, while you may not agree with us all the time, the opinions you read each and every month are our own.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Freaks Who Can't Understand A Different Point Of View, Shopping For Computers, My Never-Ending Search For The World's Greatest Monitor (I Seem To Find A New Display I Love Every Week) **Dislikes:** Blizzard's Obvious Lack Of Interest In Fixing Enhancement Shaman Arena, People Who Suck **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Rock Band, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare



Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Realistic Physics In A GTA Game (Can You Say Car Launching Competitions?), *The Host & Dragon Wars* (Two Movies Gamers Have To See), GizmoDuck **Dislikes:** The Lack Of Hack 'N Slash Grinders (Kingdom Under Fire Will Have To Do, But Where's Diablo 3?), Microsoft Not Having Built-In Gamerscore Leaderboards Yet **Current Favorite Games:** Burnout Paradise, Culdcept Saga, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Lost Odyssey, Devil May Cry 4, Grand Theft Auto IV



Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** *TEVS Magazine*, Recording Again, *1408* (I Watch A Horror Movie Once Every Five Years), Buffalo Wings, Pwnd Packers **Dislikes:** Subzero Temps, Being A Shut-In, Election Coverage, The Writers' Strike, The Winter Video Game Release Doldrums **Current Favorite Games:** Patapon, Burnout Paradise, WordJong, Mass Effect



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Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Tower Defense, Baseball Getting Ever Closer, People Looking Stupid When Johan Pulls The String On That Filthy Change Of His, Suckers Chasing The F-Bomb's Hard Slider Way Out Of The Zone **Dislikes:** Slogging Through Dozens Of Poorly Made Flash Games To Find The Gems, Horrid Slowdown Due To Crappy Backwards Compatibility, Baseball Sims Defaulting To Putting Nick "Mendoza" Punto At The Top Of The Lineup **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Civilization IV, Advance Wars: Dual Strike, Advance Wars: Days Of Ruin



Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Lt. Columbo (Undisputed Master Of The Comeuppance), *Sweeney Todd*, Reading About D&D 4th Edition (Nerd!), Planning The Great Ban-Off '08 **Dislikes:** Waiting For *24* And *Battlestar Galactica* (Maybe This Strike Isn't So Hilarious), Fighting Back The WoW Bug, People Trying To Convince Me To Read Jane Austen (Do I Have "Huge Sucker" Stamped On My Forehead?) **Current Favorite Games:** Devil May Cry 4, Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney, Mass Effect, God Of War: Chains Of Olympus, Aliens: Colonial Marines



Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** The Way Every Star Trek Series Gets Better Around Season 3, My Masterpiece Megatron Figure (Totally Worth It), Seven Years Not Seeming Like A Long Time **Dislikes:** Polar Vortexes That Move Too Far South, The Way Marvel Throws Particular Characters Into Every Book Before A Big Movie Release (Since When Is Iron Man The Main Character In Everything?) **Current Favorite Games:** Champions Online, Rock Band, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Beautiful Katamari, Assassin's Creed, Mass Effect, N+



Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Handle: Lord Gaminington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** Oliver Stone Making A Movie About GWB, McNulty's Return As A Drunken Mess On *The Wire*, Brett Favre's Brilliant Overtime Interception (He's Still Got It!) **Dislikes:** The Battlefield Series Being Turned Into A Cartoon (Focus Groups Strike Again), Politicians Using The Word 'Change' Like Most People Use The Word 'Um,' Jon Stewart And Stephen Colbert Forced To Work Without Their Writers, *3:10 To Yuma* (A Sappy Lifetime Channel Western) **Current Favorite Games:** NHL 08, Contra 4, Rock Band, Bionic Commando Rearmed, Crisis



Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures In The Culinary Underbelly* By Anthony Bourdain, Watching Old '80s Dance Movies That Begin With F (It's Embarrassing That I Enjoyed Myself), *Pride & Prejudice* (The Best Book Joe Will Never Read) **Dislikes:** Adam's Problem With Lacy Thongs, Cold (Screw You, Winter) **Current Favorite Games:** Red Faction: Guerrilla, Mass Effect, Super Mario Galaxy, Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, Rock Band, The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass



Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** The Amazing Mr. Hat, *American Gangster*, *Dexter*, *Lars And The Real Girl*, *The Insider* (Yep, I'm The Last Man On Earth To See This One) **Dislikes:** Curious, The Possibility Of A Writer/Actor/Director Super Strike Coming This Summer, That Some Key PSP Exclusives Don't Transition To PS2/PSN While Games I Don't Care About Jump Ship Left And Right **Current Favorite Games:** Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney, Mass Effect, Patapon, Advance Wars: Days Of Ruin, Assassin's Creed, Super Mario Galaxy

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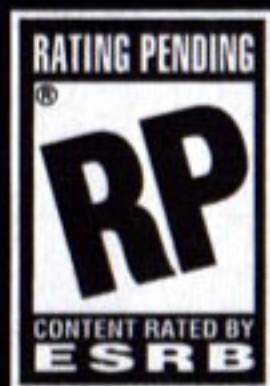


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IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS DARKNESS.

MARCH 2008



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GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



1 When it comes to game demos, Rockstar rolls deep! Here's the gang with Andy, Jeff, and Reiner: Alex Moulle-Berteaux, Jeronimo Barrera, Jennifer Kolbe, and Steve Hahnel

2 Game Informer contributing writer (and former Video Vigilante for you old school fans) David Vinyon meets greatness in the flesh: boxing legend Don King. Only in America!

3 Sony's Ron Eagle and Brandon Cox, missing and presumed having a good time at CES

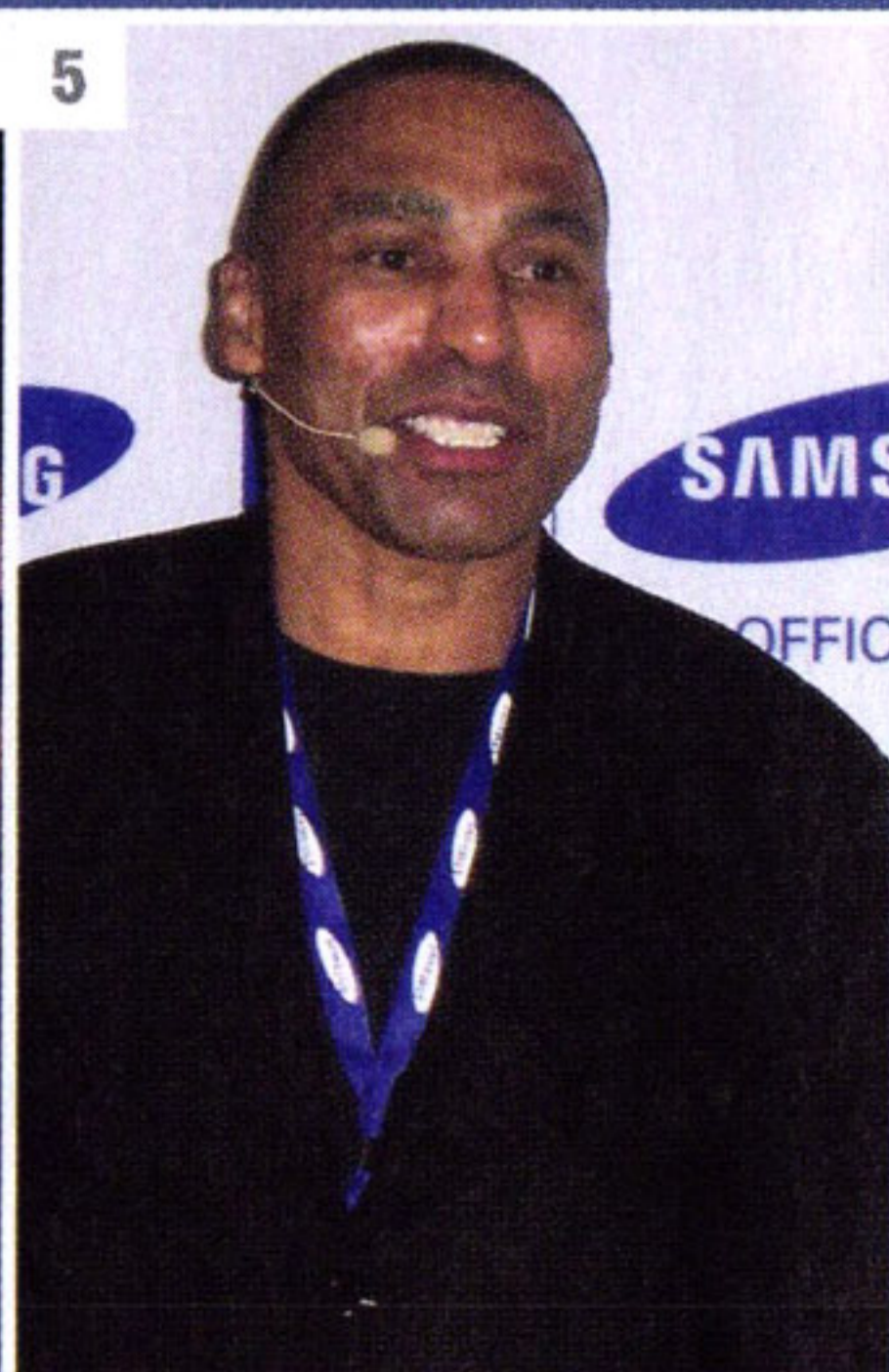
4 Darth Vader finds CNET's Dan Ackerman's lack of faith disturbing

5 NFL great Roger Craig stumps for Samsung at CES. Oh yeah, and NICE NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME, PACKER LOSERS!!!

6 Pete Smith, Kyle Shubel, and Leo Cubbin hang with Bertz, mere seconds after their live demo of LittleBigPlanet set the world ablaze at CES

7 Ben, D3's Tamara Sanderson, and Digital Extremes' Sheldon Carter show two of GI's favorite things: Dutch the Official Party Animal™ and incredible amounts of pizza

8 Dutch can't stop partying! Seriously, it's like living with the dog version of Britney! Here, we see him "hitting bottom" with Jason Teirstein, Ryan Jones, Reiner, and Adam



*"...a hectic, noisy symphony of destruction.
We wouldn't expect any less."*

- GameInformer.com

*"...has the intensity of a wartime
battlefield down perfectly..."*

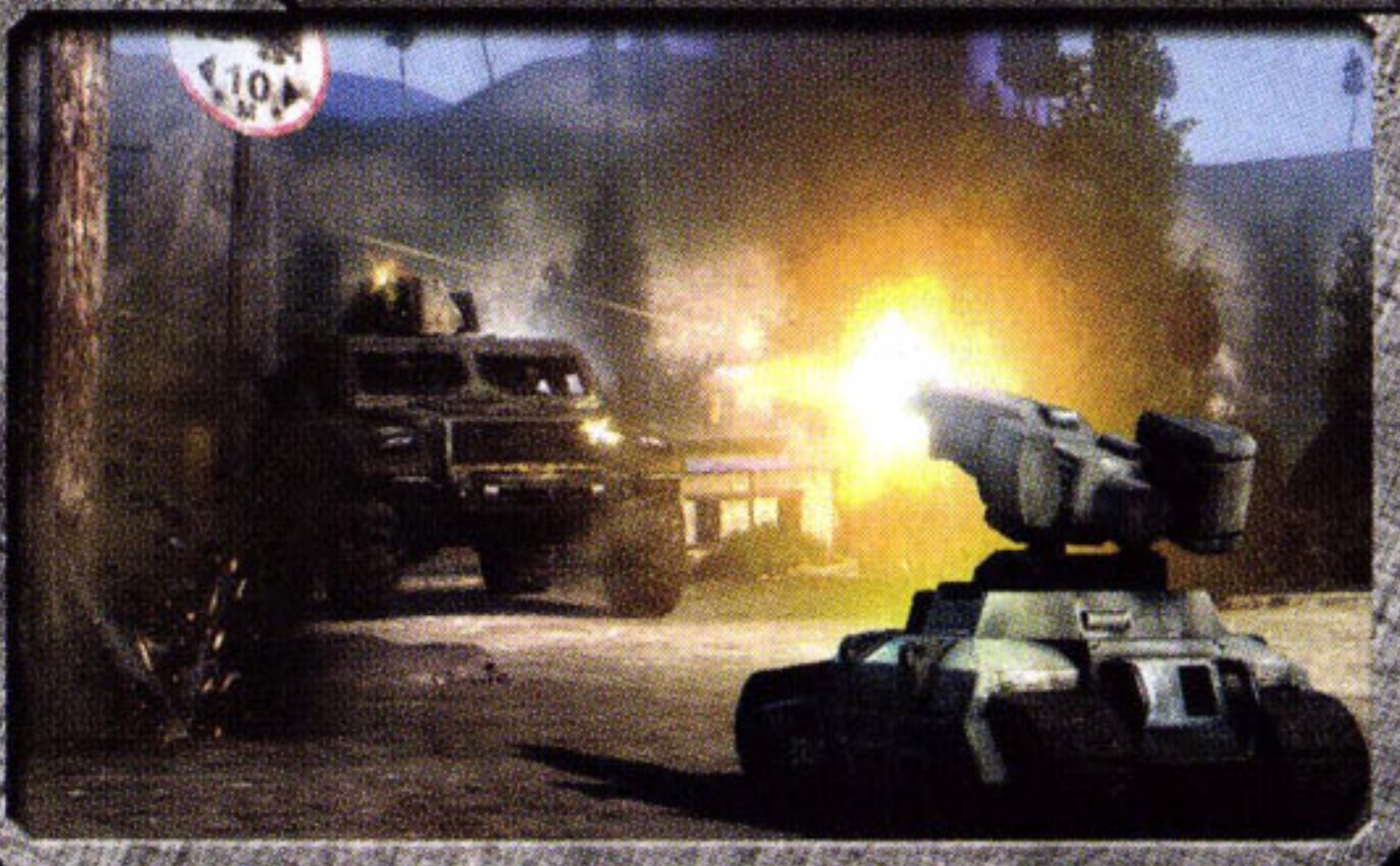
- IGN.com

*"I walked away impressed by the
refinement and intensity that Frontlines
brings to multiplayer matches."*

- PC Gamer



BATTLE ONLINE IN MASSIVE 32-PLAYER MAPS



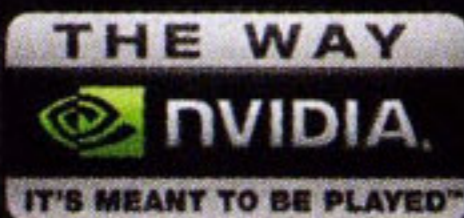
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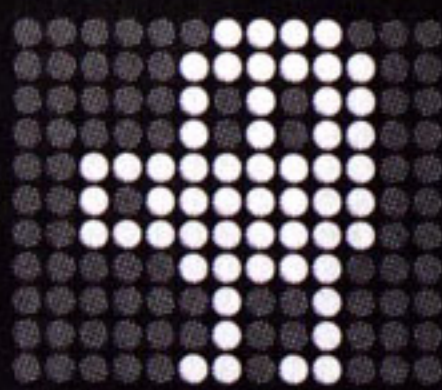
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GI COMMUNITY

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

THE QUESTION:
What game would you like to see a sequel to, and what are the odds of it happening?

Beyond Good & Evil is the first game that comes to mind. It was a simple, fun game that was powered by great storytelling. It even had an ending that screamed for a sequel.
Likelihood: 10%

God_of_Destruction



I want a true sequel to Frequency and Amplitude. Sure, Guitar Hero and Rock Band are similar, but they are just not the same. I want another game that infuses techno with awesome! Too bad it will never happen.
Likelihood: 0.5%

Sangheili

I would love to see an Aggressive Inline on the PS3 and Xbox 360. The first and only game was terrific, and the amount of things to do in the game were seemingly endless. Sadly, I doubt this will ever happen, but I suppose anything is possible.
Likelihood: 5%

bpx216

I would love to see a 2D sequel to Metroid Fusion. The Metroid series is at its best in 2D, so to not continue them would be a crime against gamers everywhere.
Likelihood: 90%

boogieman29

ESPN 2k5. Likelihood: 0%

DollMeat_TestSteak

I think the sequel we all want to see is another Sneak King game. C'mon, curbing hunger pangs with the power of the Whopper, that's pure gaming nirvana right there.
Likelihood: 100%

aubradley84



There should be, nay there must be, a sequel to Ico. The ending definitely left the door open for one, and with Shadow of the Colossus being a prequel and taking place in the same world, there is still hope.
Likelihood: 75%

MstrChf

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

A PLACE FOR QUARTERS

I have to comment on your "Top 10 Dying Video Game Trends" in issue 176 – specifically the one about the death of arcade ports. I am quite disappointed with the negative edge you put on arcades as a whole. Being an arcade operator myself, it is already difficult fighting false impressions surrounding arcades. It's true that they have lost the huge advantage they once had in terms of graphics, but then again, some arcade games run on the same hardware as console titles (like the upcoming Tekken 6). Plus, a lot of new arcade titles are focusing on providing new experiences instead of solely shinier graphics. In the past year there have nearly 30 games that came out in arcades (more if you count Japanese releases). I know that there are fewer arcade titles than there used to be, but stop passing off arcades as a bygone fad of the '80s and '90s. Some arcades are coming along just fine, and 2008 will be an excellent year.

Adam Pratt
via gmail.com

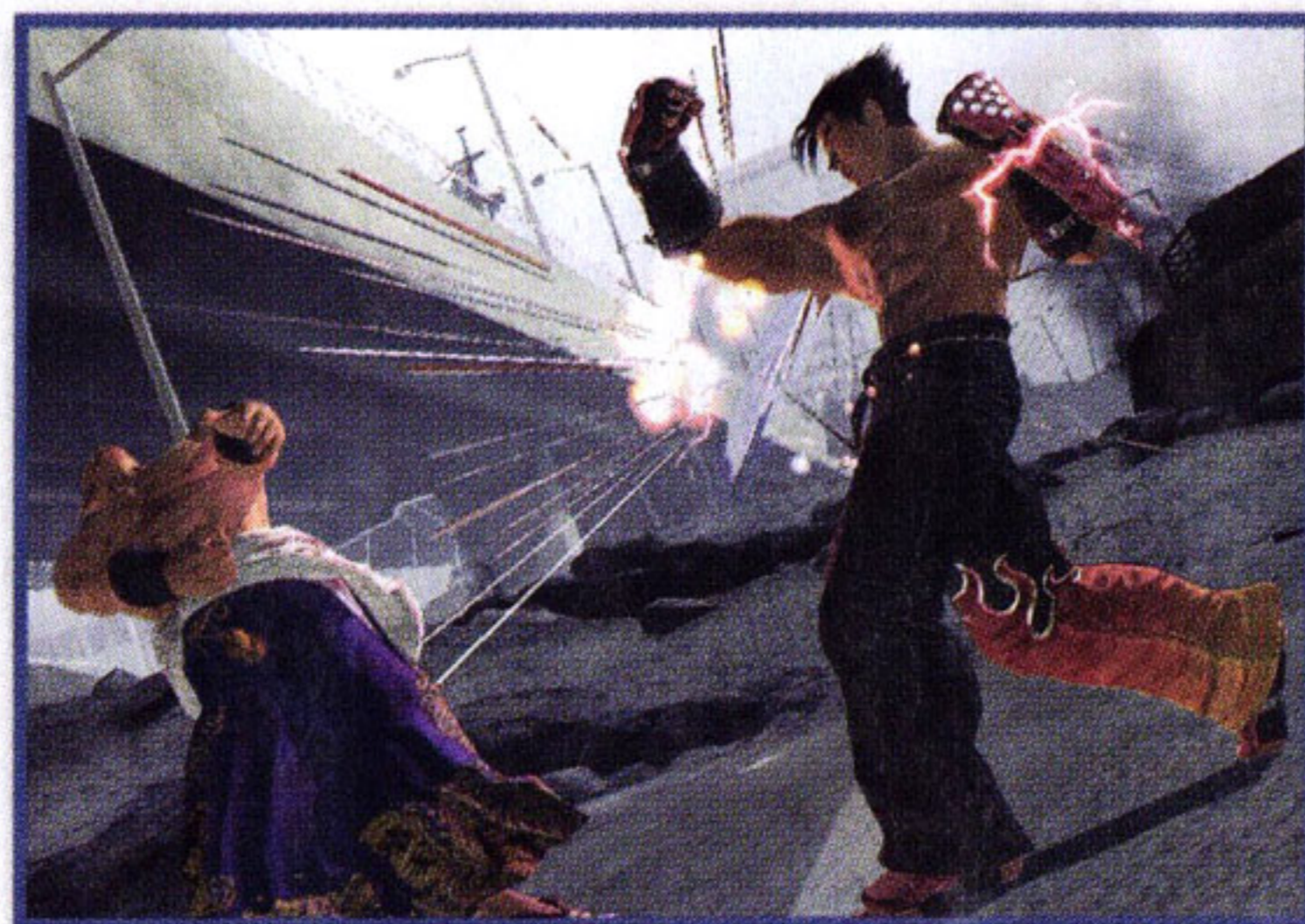
■ **Thanks for the insight, Adam. You're right to point out that arcades are not completely dead, but they have long lost their central relevance to gaming culture. We recognize this as a sad trend; many gamers have fond memories of the social and competitive opportunities an arcade provides. However, these concepts have since been adapted and expanded in the home console experience. Gamers can compete, share scores, and chat online. Even some of the gimmick-based cabinets (like rail shooters and boxing) are finding their way onto the Wii. The challenge is offering something at an arcade that you can't get at home...besides hot wings.**

ONE-TIMER

I need help. As soon as I beat a game's main campaign mode, I get bored with it. I see the ending, and I am done. I can't bring myself to play through anything twice. The only games that have any replay value for me are massively multiplayer RPGs. Can you help me out and recommend a few titles that go further than the campaign?

Nazar Kandyuk
via hotmail.com

■ **Most titles are designed as finite experiences. If you beat a game, you've probably seen the best it has to offer; you shouldn't always feel compelled to play more once the credits roll. On the other hand, it is understandable that you'd like to get more playtime for your money. There are a few**



■ Tekken 6

recent titles that go the extra mile in that department: **The multiplayer in Call of Duty 4 will keep you engaged long after you finish the single-player mode, The Orange Box is five games in one package, and Mass Effect's "new game plus"**

feature gives you incentives to go through a second time. You won't be able to play any of these games indefinitely, but they should hold even the most ravenous gamers at bay for a while.

TALENT SHOW

I'd like to give a resounding "Amen!" to Craig Allen's "Banking on Talent" article in issue 176. If more publisher/developer marketing strategies were based on the people behind the games, there would be a lot more money left over for actual development! In the automobile industry, everyone recognizes the name behind the vehicles. It's common to be excited about the next Cadillac SUV coming out or ask about the Volkswagen bus. Why aren't games marketed like that, except with a developer's name as the brand?

Steven Brooks
via email

■ **We'd totally buy the next Tim Schafer SUV or the Will Wright bus. In truth, we already have an industry heavily driven by brands. People care about the next Final Fantasy, Call of Duty, and Frogge...er...Metal Gear titles. Perhaps it is a result of the current marketing approach, but these are the names gamers connect with. It is difficult to**

MUTANT NFL

Madden – the "pinnacle of football," my ass. If it weren't for Mutant League Football, EA would not be making Madden. Mutant League Football is hands-down the greatest football game of all time. After playing Madden for two or three plays, you know what will work. At least in Mutant League Football you can kill the other team's players and the referee. Hell, you can even kill the band. Madden is the same every year, but a Mutant League Football remake is a chance for something different.

Gregg Trogon
via hotmail.com

■ **Somewhere out there, there is a land where the quality of a football game is judged solely by its humor factor and body count. Mechanics and gameplay are worth nothing if they don't help you dodge on-field fire pits, and the draft includes skeletons, robots, and aliens. In that faraway place, Mutant League Football is king. But not here.**

single out just one person of the hundreds that may work on a title during its development; there are only a few instances in which a specific developer's name appears on a game box (like American McGee or Sid Meier). We are in full support of developers getting their due recognition and accolades, but the games themselves are the true celebrities of our industry.

THE BIG LETDOWN

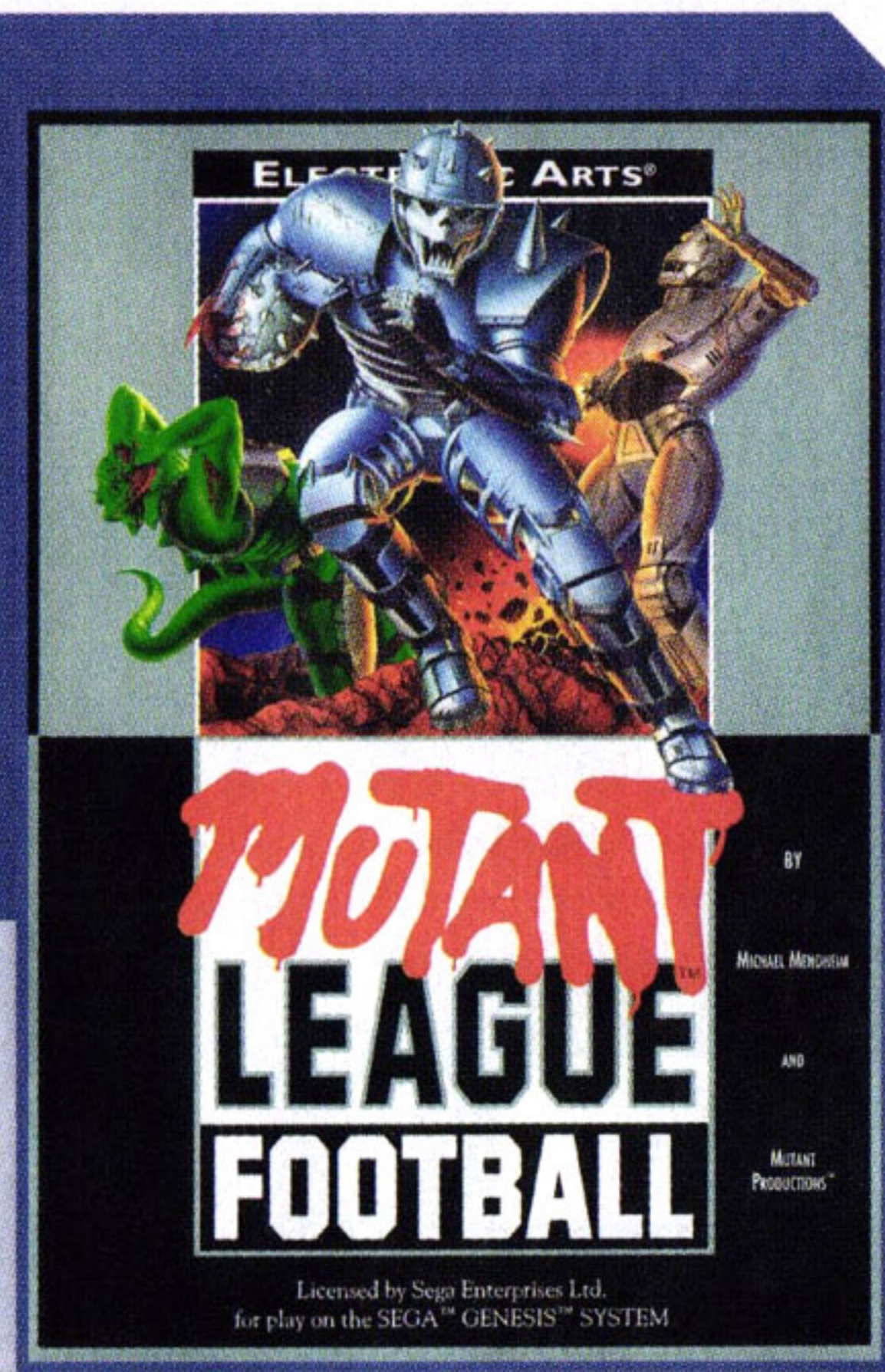
Every year, the issue that I look forward to most is the one with your Year in Review feature. However, I was disappointed that the top 10 disappointments of 2007 weren't included this time. I always liked reading that category in particular, because it showed what fell short of expectations. I could easily name 10 things that disappointed me; was 2007 really that perfect of a year in gaming?

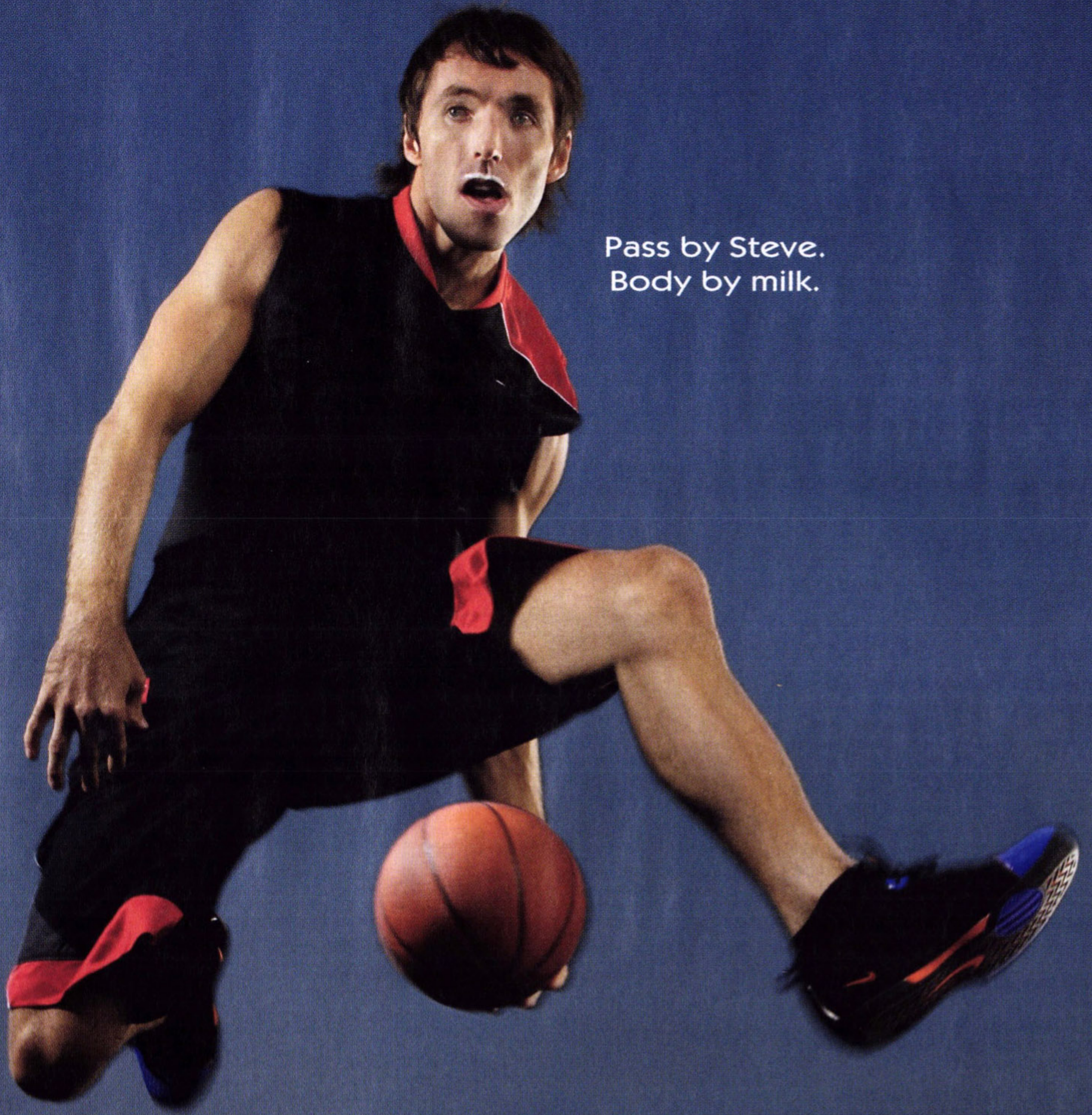
Ryan K.
via hotmail.com

■ **It's tough to deny: 2007 was a great year. It did have a handful of disappointments, like Sony's delay of Home, the Gravemind in Halo 3 (why couldn't we fight that space octopus?), and the continued problems with Nintendo's third-party support. There will always be things that let gamers down, but since there were far fewer of them in 2007, we just decided to focus more on the awesome stuff the year had to offer.**

LIMP AND FLOPPY

Before even sitting down to read your article in GI 177 regarding the Havok physics engine, I had already wanted to write and express my frustration with the ragdoll effect in certain games. It was quite refreshing to see that CEO, David O'Meara, also shares my disappointment with how developers have utilized it. It seems to me that they are getting more reckless with its usage. I enjoy flying bodies as much as the next guy, but the complex





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bone-to-jelly contortions some corpses experience go over the top – especially when a game is trying to go for a very realistic effect. Do they really expect me to take cartwheeling bodies seriously?

Eric Ceradsky
Kansas City, KS

■ **Ragdoll effects are a little outdated now, and that's why more and more games are experimenting with alternatives (while still keeping Havok's impressive object physics). Cartwheeling bodies may look somewhat ridiculous, but they are more satisfying than the static, pre-animated death animations ragdoll physics originally replaced. Yes, some developers were a bit overzealous in implementation (when Optimus Prime's robotic limbs helplessly flop in all directions, something has gone seriously wrong), but many are committed to adapting the technology to fit with the tone of their games. In fact, the Havok engine already provides more tools to help game creators keep these unrealistic situations in check.**

THEY START SO YOUNG

I am 12 years old and I think I'm becoming a Sonic the Hedgehog fan. Is that a bad thing?

Anji Alcock
South Waterboro, ME

■ **Not necessarily. The important thing is that we caught it early. With an effective treatment program, you can lead a normal life while still enjoying Sonic responsibly. The first step is knowing which Sonic games are safe. He definitely has some classics to his name, but dodging the (more numerous) stinkers can be more challenging than navigating a minefield. To ensure that you're the right kind of Sonic fan, just follow these three simple guidelines:**

- 1) If it's on Sega Genesis, it's good. Play away!
- 2) Avoid games featuring characters that send Sonic into a suck-spiral. These include Shadow, Amy, Cream, Blaze, Silver, and basically anyone who isn't Tails or Knuckles.
- 3) The main bad guy is Dr. Robotnik. Calling him "Eggman" sounds really, really stupid.



READER ART

Enter the Game Informer Reader Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address. 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. All entries become the property of Game Informer and can't be returned.

Send to:
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Reader Art Contest
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MARCH WINNER! CHRISTIAN JOEL LIGO FELICIANO

It's nice to see a picture of these two where they aren't just making out or getting hitched



JAMES RAFAEL
This arm is made for punchin', and that's just what it'll do...



KRISTINA M. WILLIAMS
Why is Link always the heroine of the Zelda series? Sure, she's cool, but isn't Zelda awesome, too?



ROBIN BEAUREGARD
Umbrella: They make a good parasol. And zombies



JOSE GADDIEL DIAZ
Stop brooding, Cloud? It's not like something terrible happened to you as a child, emotionally scarring you for life



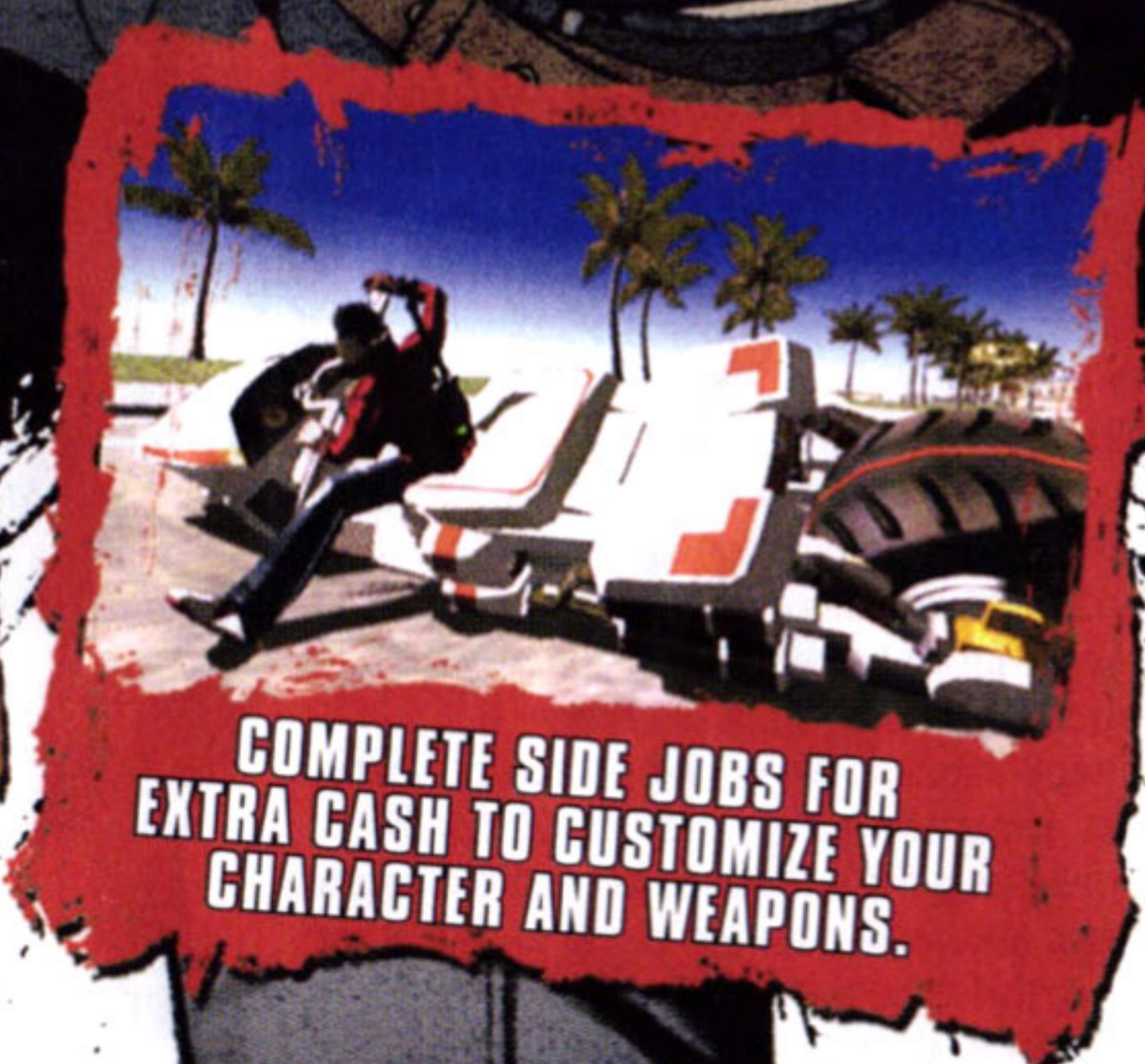
ELLEN RILEY-WINTERS
He might not look like much, but you don't stand a chance against Laharl

NO MORE HEROES™

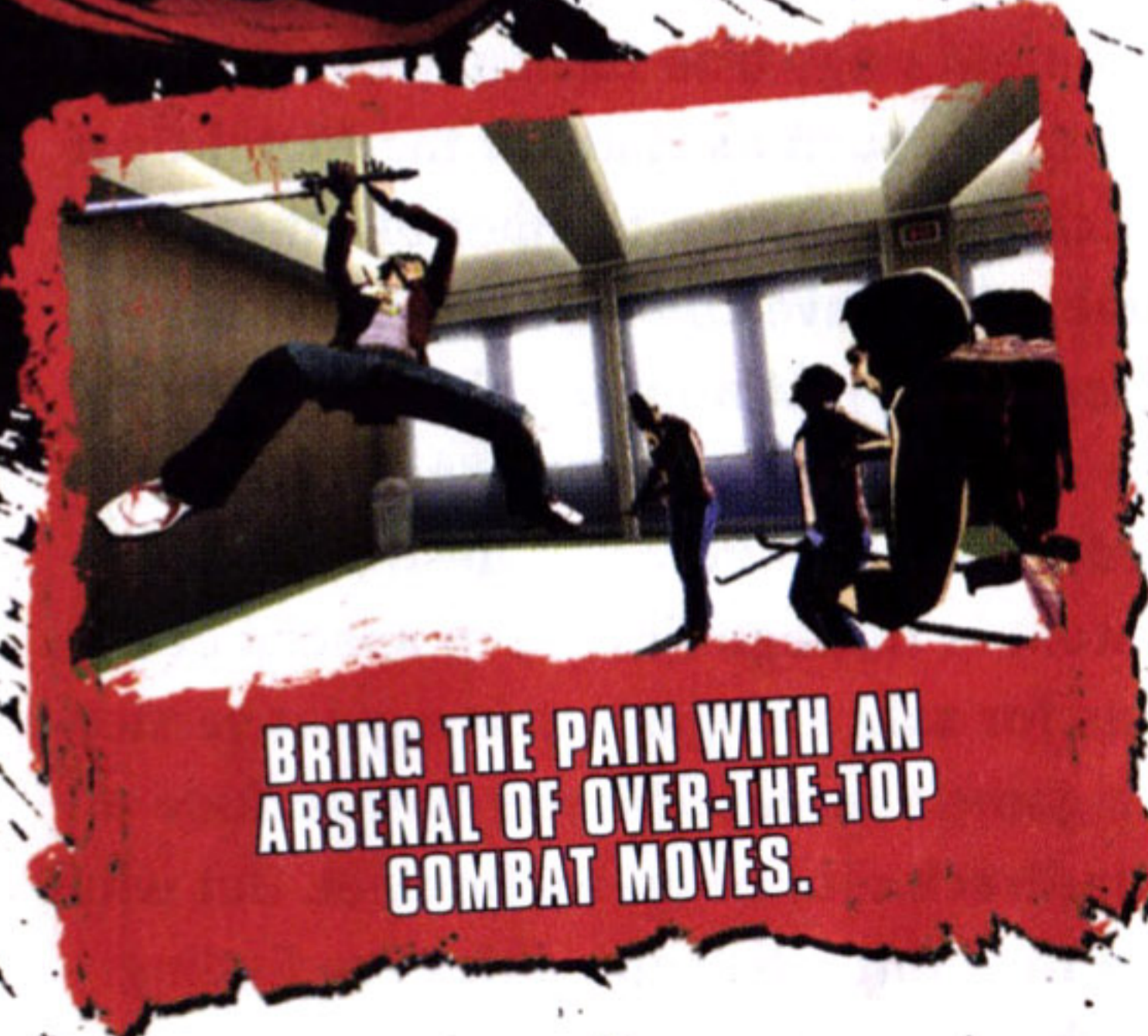
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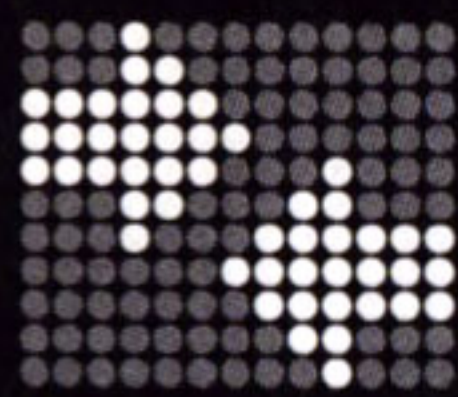
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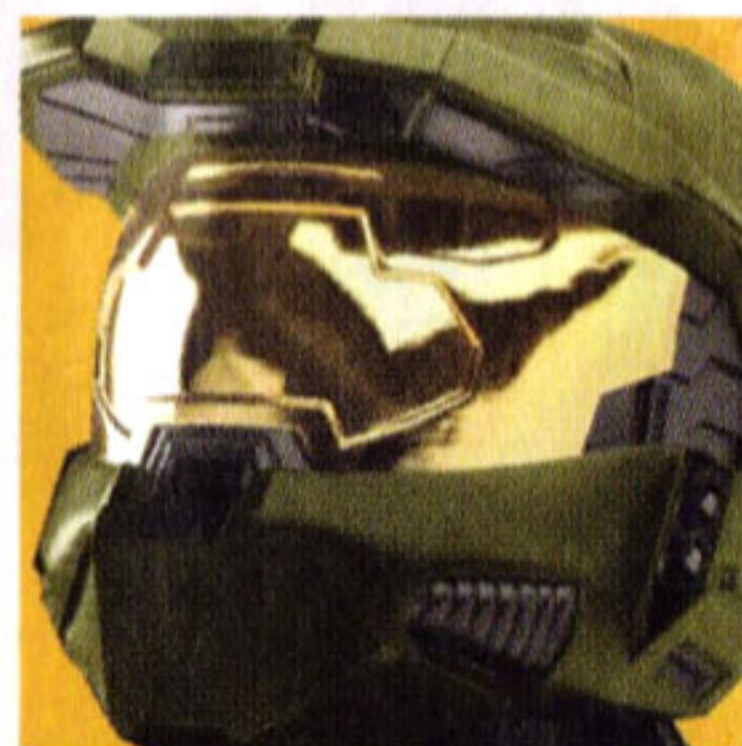
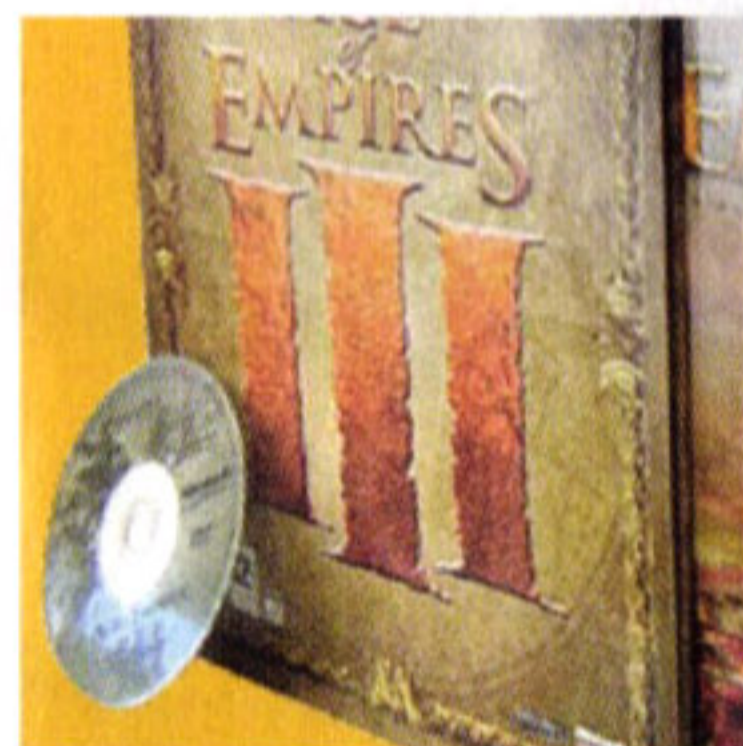
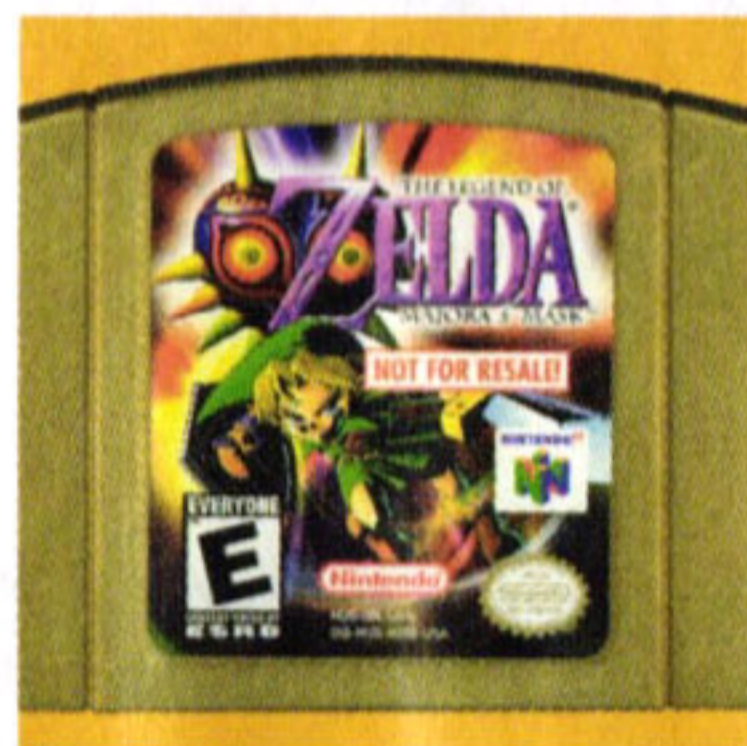
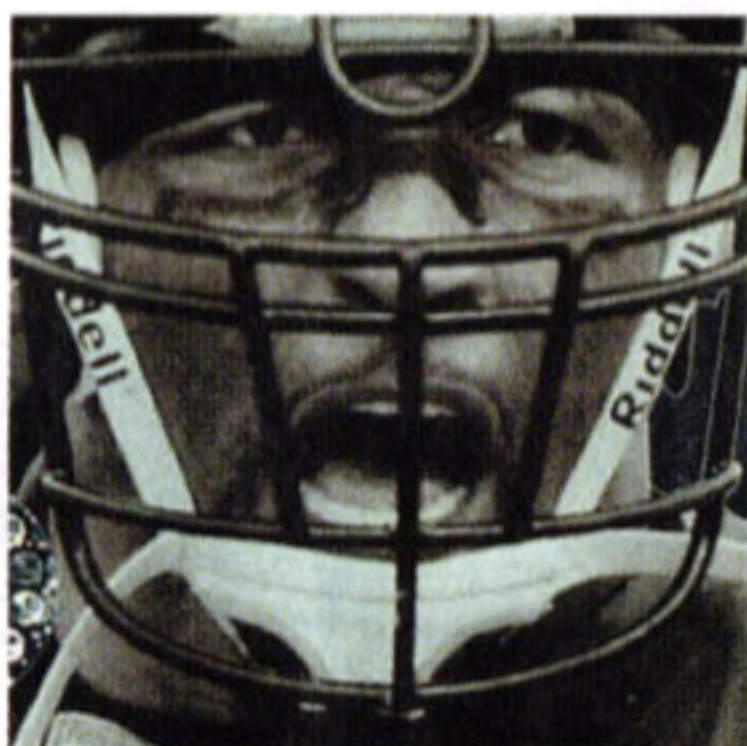
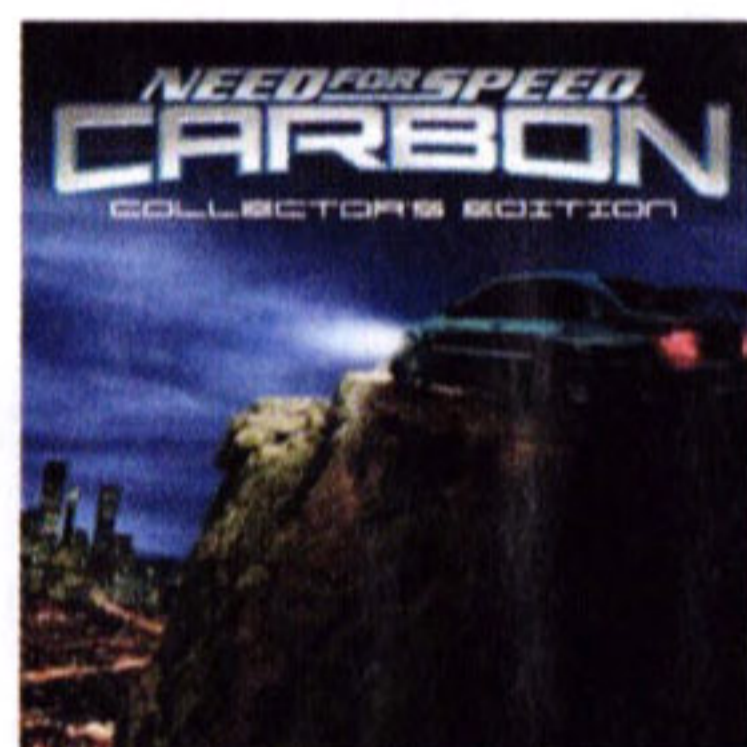
news

FOR THE FANS

GI LOOKS INTO LIMITED EDITIONS



■ Atlus has a devoted following of fans, and the company has rewarded them by making every copy of Persona 3 and Growlanser: Heritage of War a limited edition

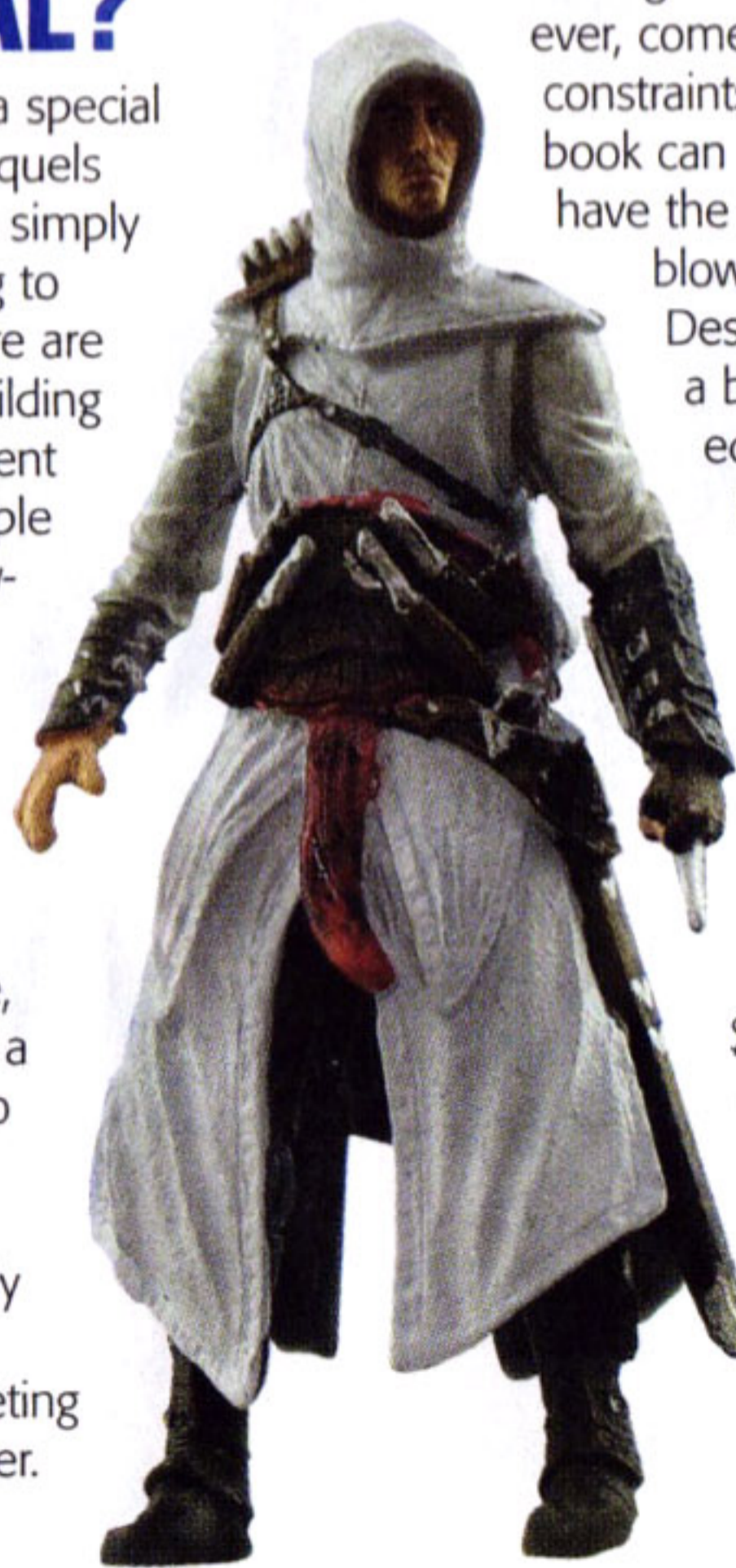


“What we’d really like to achieve,” explains Jerret West, global group product manager for Microsoft and a key figure behind the Halo 3 limited editions, “is to make this feel like the game is beyond just a video game. The game is part of your life.” Certainly that statement rings true for many of the fans of a series such as Halo, or the Metal Gear franchise, or quite a number of other video games that have come to represent more to fans than just another piece of software. One way that companies like Microsoft feed those fans and their desire for more content is through limited or special editions for sale alongside the regular version at a game’s launch. Maybe they include a soundtrack disc or an art booklet. But whatever the contents, companies are finding out that limited editions are a good way to feed the imagination and frenzy of fans. Game Informer talked to a few companies about how they put together their limited editions from start to finish.

WHAT’S SO SPECIAL?

When it comes down to which games get a special edition, the choice is somewhat limited. Sequels stand the best chance of making the grade simply because they have a built-in fanbase willing to spend the extra money. The exceptions here are triple-A franchises that might have been building up a head of steam through the development cycle. Certainly Mass Effect is a good example of this phenomenon. Microsoft’s West, however, believes that popularity alone ignores what he feels can be an important yet subtle ingredient to a successful limited edition: timing or “some sort of culmination in the story line.” West’s work on the Halo 3 special editions certainly coincides with an important juncture for the franchise, and the company responded with not only a regular special edition of the game, but also the monstrous Legendary Edition, which included a Master Chief helmet.

Preparations for a limited edition normally starts anywhere from a year to 18 months before the game’s release, when the marketing budget and retail plan are being put together. During this time a publisher will approach a developer in an effort to not only gauge what kinds of material they have to offer – whether that’s art, time for documentary footage, or even additional gameplay content – but to see if there’s anything that the developer specifically wants to get in.



Lil’ Assassin (actual size)

■ Fans were excited when they heard that Ubisoft was giving them a figure of Assassin’s Creed’s Altair. They were dismayed, however, to find it was actually quite puny. Here it is, actual size, in all of its shame.

Among all the big ideas for great pack-in items, however, comes the very real concern over the physical constraints of packaging. That giant coffee table art book can be an unfeasible option if retail stores don’t have the space for it, and besides, you don’t want to blow your budget on special packaging alone. Despite what some might think, working within a budget is important, as often these limited editions are truly that – one-off production runs that are intended to recuperate costs but which aren’t necessarily seen as a high profit driver.

David Riley, a director at industry sales tracker The NPD Group, says that limited editions are more than just a cynical exploitation of a fanbase. “I’ve seen in certain forums where people will blast the industry for trying to milk an additional \$10 to \$15 from a consumer for a special edition. I could not disagree with that more. As a gamer myself, I like to learn a little bit more about the industry. I just don’t like playing the game. I like to sort of experience it. I don’t know what goes into development. I like to learn about it. People were saying on the forums, ‘They’re packaging it this way because the game’s going to suck,’ and I thought, ‘Oh, you idiots...’”

WANTED: ONE BROKEN BIG DADDY

Despite the necessary marketing calculations, sometimes things don't go as planned – and in BioShock's case, that was a good thing. "When we looked at BioShock, we batted around the potential for a limited edition and killed it because it didn't make any sense," recalls 2K Games director of marketing, Tom Bass. "It was actually a pretty short discussion, to be honest with you! [laughs]"

Although it wasn't a direct sequel, BioShock had some early fans, which 2K made note of. "What changed our minds was there was a fan in Germany who started an online petition. When we saw it, it had like three signatures on it and it floated around the office. We were kind of looking at it and said, 'Well, do we even have time to do one?' We said, 'Yeah.' So we said, 'If it gets up to like 1,000 signatures we'll do one,' and someone said, 'You're crazy – put 10,000 signatures.' Finally, we settled on if it hit 5,000 signatures in a week, we'd do it. I remember that night I came home and we'd hit like 18,000 signatures."

In keeping with the fan-based nature of the genesis of BioShock's limited edition, 2K Games conducted a poll to gauge what fans would most want to see, and a Big Daddy figurine came out on top. Interestingly enough, to hear Bass and Microsoft's West



tell it, BioShock fans picked the hardest pack-in item of them all. "Figurines take a long time," says Bass. Since the work is done overseas in China, companies have to build in time to have the product made, shipped back to the U.S., and then integrated into the final packaging.

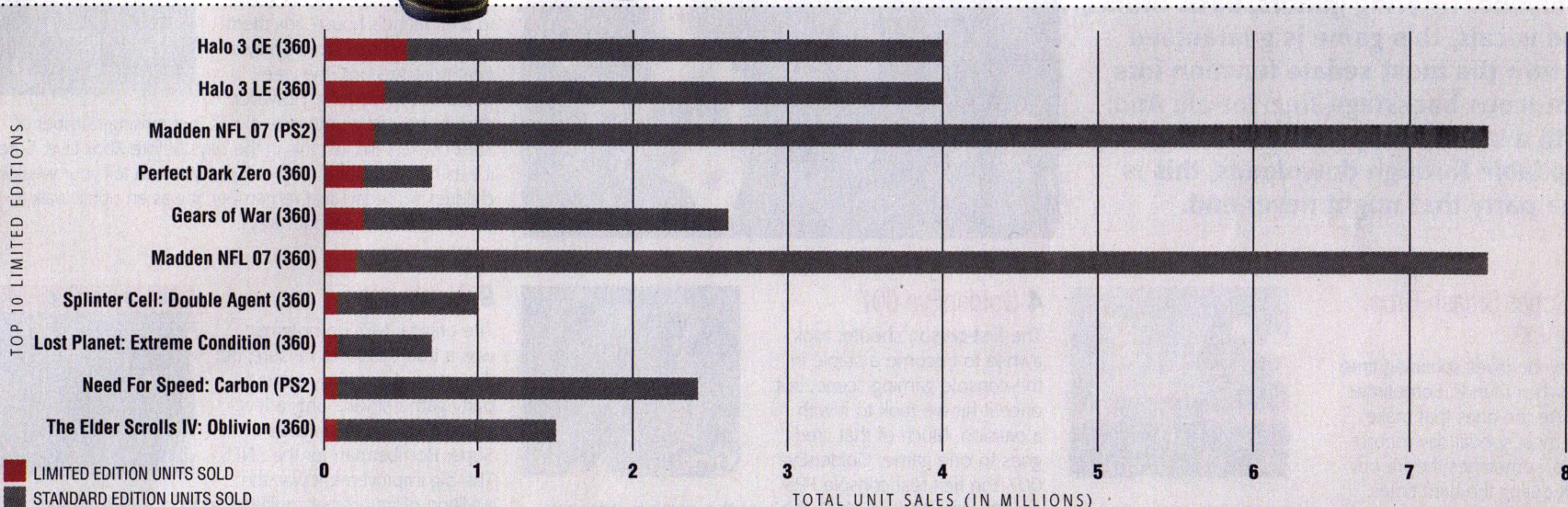
West, who dealt with Halo 3's Legendary Edition and its Master Chief helmet, said Microsoft had to start physically producing the helmets a year in advance. This was after already having spent the previous year in planning the game's two special editions – including considering offering a large-sized Master Chief figurine instead of the helmet. "The helmet itself had so many different parts. It was produced in China, and they were specifically manufactured and had to create an assembly line to build out the helmet. So we had to be super precise on the numbers we were producing months in advance." Special tooling had to be built at a separate production facility that was overseen by Microsoft's own quality control specifications. After they arrived by boat to America, the helmets had to be held at a distribution center until the game was ready to be packed in. West says that shipping the boxes themselves out to stores across the country took the equivalent of eight semi trucks. In the case of BioShock, shipping didn't go smoothly. The Big Daddy figure's drill bits had a tendency to chip off in transit.

Luckily, even this turned to 2K Game's advantage, as the broken figures soon became popular on eBay. Why? As part of its redemption program, 2K was offering a free art book – one of the other possible pack-in gifts in the original poll offered to fans – to those whose Big Daddy had been broken.

FREE INSIDE: THE HOLY GRAIL

As great as all the extras you can get for your \$10 are, some fans want more than early concept art with their game. "The holy grail of limited edition content is in-game content," admits West. While the special editions of some games do just that – like EA's Need for Speed: Carbon (featuring new cars) or BioWare's Jade Empire (offering a new character) – for most games adding in-game content is a difficult task. This is not only due to developer's time constraints, since during the production time for the limited edition the team is busy making the game itself, but also that the rest of the game must be balanced properly to accommodate giving fans an exclusive weapon, for example.

As downloadable content is now mandatory, West admits that there is a fine line between what you might be offering up for free in a limited edition and what a developer might choose to earmark and sell for downloadable content after the game's release. Still, West says that finding a way to fit in more gameplay related content is the future of limited editions. "I personally think we're reaching a saturation point where in-game content will be the only area that is going to drive people to purchase these collector's editions."



THE SPECIAL TEN

Here are the top 10 console limited/special editions as tracked by The NPD Group through November 2007.

Note: All total unit numbers from the NPD represent each game's total sales across all platforms as of November 2007

1 Halo 3 Collector's Edition (360) \$69.99

Game comes in a metal case that contains a hardcover bestiary book, a DVD with art, the Warthog Launch game, and behind-the-scenes footage.

■ Limited Edition units sold – 559,300
■ Total units sold – Four million

2 Halo 3 Legendary Edition (360) \$129.99

Comes with scaled-down Spartan helmet, the Halo 3 Collector's Edition bonus DVD, a disc of remastered cinematics from the first two Halos, and some Halo 3 storyboard art.

■ Limited Edition units sold – 400,300
■ Total units sold – Four million

3 Madden NFL 07: Hall of Fame (PS2) \$59.99

Features bonus DVD including a retrospective documentary of John Madden's career, a look at the making of the PS3 version, behind-the-scenes footage, and interviews with the game's music acts.

■ Limited Edition units sold – 340,300
■ Total units sold – 7.5 million

4 Perfect Dark Zero Limited Edition (360) \$59.99

Housed in an embossed metal case, the game also ships with an extras-filled DVD, one of nine holographic glyph cards, and a comic book.

■ Limited Edition units sold – 268,200
■ Total units sold – 622,800

5 Gears of War Limited Collector's Edition (360) \$69.99

Gears' hardcover art/history book Destroyed Beauty and bonus making-of DVD come in an embossed metal box.

■ Limited Edition units sold – 254,900
■ Total units sold – 2.6 million

6 Madden NFL 07: Hall of Fame (360) \$69.99

Features all of the goodies from the PS2's edition, but instead of the look at the PS3 game, it gives you the complete first season of ESPN's Madden Nation.

■ Limited Edition units sold – 216,500
■ Total units sold – 7.5 million

7 Splinter Cell: Double Agent Limited Edition (360) \$69.99

Comes with alternate cover art and the game's "Covert Ops" documentary includes a Michael Ironside interview, seven mini Web films, and much more.

■ Limited Edition units sold – 108,700
■ Total units sold – One million

8 Lost Planet: Extreme Condition Collector's Edition (360) \$69.99

This edition comes in a metal case with its own art and features an exclusive multiplayer map (before it was available on Xbox Live Marketplace), art book, and bonus CD which includes the soundtrack and other goodies.

■ Limited Edition units sold – 99,600
■ Total units sold – 678,800

9 Need for Speed: Carbon Collector's Edition (PS2) \$49.99

Unlike most other editions, Carbon gives you gameplay extras, including four exclusive cars, 10 pre-tuned cars, nine new races and events, and some special vinyl decals for your car – plus a bonus DVD.

■ Limited Edition units sold – 86,400
■ Total units sold – 2.44 million

10 The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion Game of the Year Edition (360) \$59.99

Although technically not a special edition in the same sense as the others, Oblivion's GOTY edition comes with the original game, expansion pack The Shivering Isles, and content pack The Knights of the Nine. The collector's edition itself, however, came with a replica septims coin and a 112-page booklet.

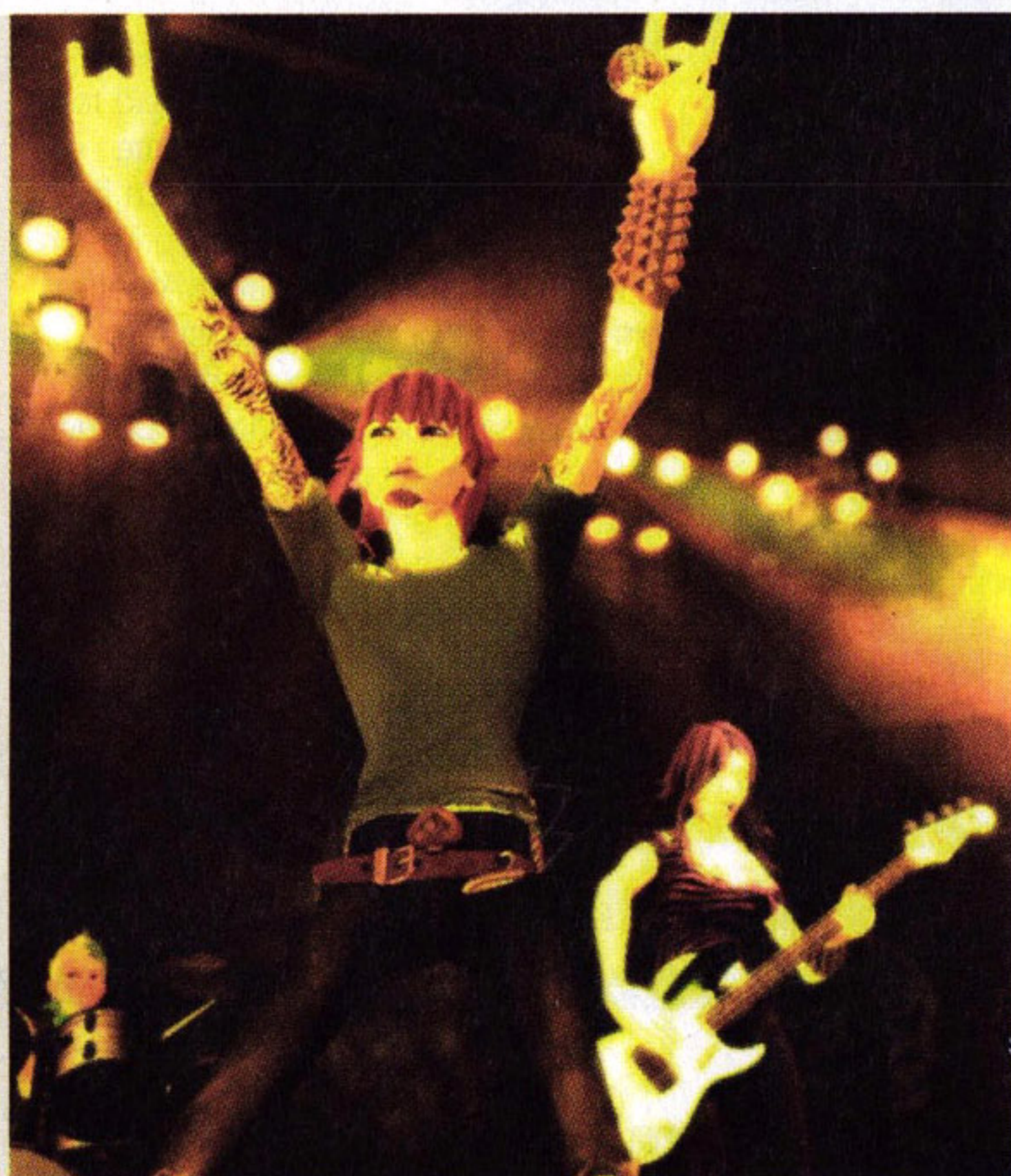
■ Limited Edition units sold – 86,400
■ Total units sold – 1.49 million

the top 10 party games of all time

Most people view games as a solitary hobby, the domain of pasty nerds who lock themselves away in a basement for days on end. NOT TRUE! Even before the days when you could romance that cute female blood elf in World of Warcraft (actually a 42-year-old appliance salesman named Randy...or Miller), video game fanatics have been gathering together for good times, a few cold ones, and great games. In celebration of this tradition, Game Informer has chosen what we feel are the 10 greatest party games of all time.

1 Rock Band

Although previous Harmonix franchises like *Guitar Hero* and *Karaoke Revolution* made music gaming part of the mainstream, it's already clear that the breakout hit *Rock Band* is a culmination of the developers' efforts to unite gamers together through music. It's quite simply got something for everyone. Offering guitars, bass, drums, and vocals, this game is guaranteed to turn the most sedate function into a raucous backstage free-for-all. And, with a steady supply of new songs available through downloads, this is one party that might never end.



2 Super Smash Bros. (series)

Everyone loves spending time with their friends. Sometimes they're the ones that make the most special day memorable, sometimes they're our rock during the hard times.

Sometimes they're the one you drop kick off the edge of the top platform. Hey – it's their fault for playing as Donkey Kong! Nothing can turn a living room into an all-out brawl quicker than *Super Smash Bros.*, and it's not for nothing that Nintendo fanboys of all ages love the series. It's a classic party game like no other.



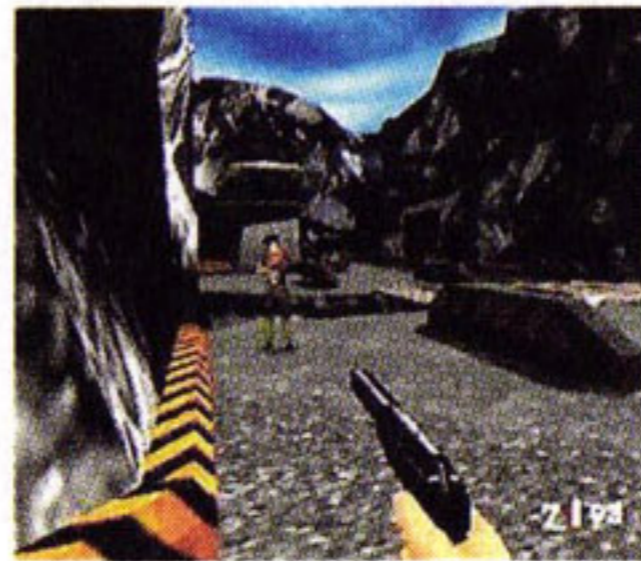
3 Madden NFL Football (series)

While it doesn't fit the traditional definition of "party game," the fact is that Madden round robins have become as much a part of the college dorm experience as keg beer and writing "Loser" on someone's forehead in permanent marker. Over the years, dudes all over the U.S.A. have owned and pwned each other on the digital gridiron. We don't know if we'll ever have more fun than hitting that go route and taking it to the house on our friends. Too bad we killed a Dual Shock by spiking it during the Icky Shuffle.



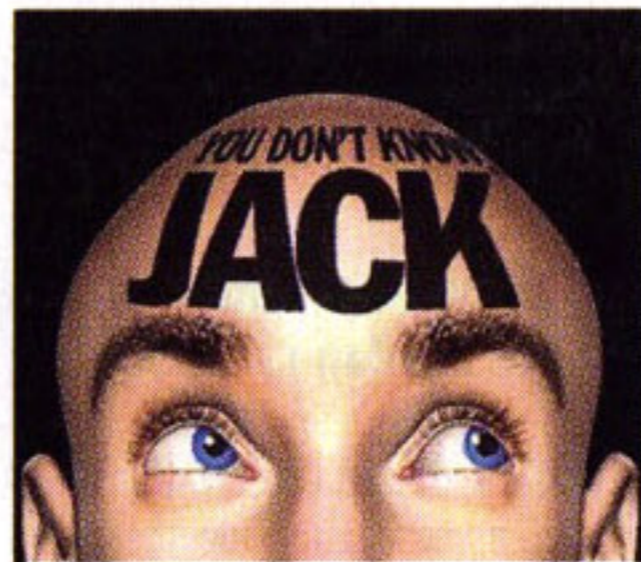
4 GoldenEye 007

The first-person shooter took awhile to become a staple in the console gaming scene, but once it hit we took to it with a passion. Much of that credit goes to one game: *GoldenEye 007*, the first real console FPS smash. Way back in 1997, this was the game that taught us that four-player fragging was one of gaming's finest experiences. Anyone with an N64 back then no doubt remembers countless gatherings that were given over to the game's split-screen clashes.



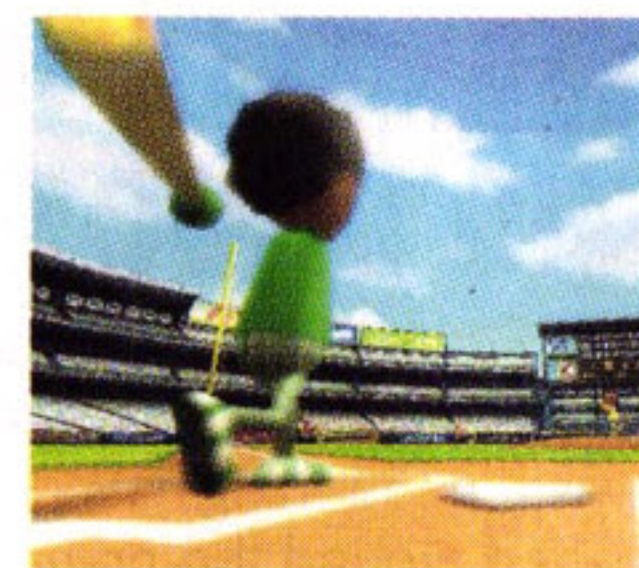
5 You Don't Know Jack (series)

Sure, everyone's "Buzz this" and "Scene It! that," but let us tell you hot-shot young whipper-snappers something – there was a trivia series for Windows and the good old PlayStation that was way better than both those newfangled whatzits combined! Jack combined a host of novel question types with a wickedly funny sense of humor and the ability to "screw" your friends without catching any nasty diseases. Trust us, the old PlayStation version is well worth tracking down, and we hope someone will have the good sense to bring this back for Xbox Live Arcade.



6 Wii Sports

Wii Sports just about defines the term "all ages" fun. The simple, motion-based controls guarantee entertainment for any party; watching people wildly flail around is always fun. Plus, the games were intuitive enough for anyone (literally) from a four-year-old to an 80-year-old to enjoy. In fact, *Wii Sports* was such a hit that it brought out the wild side in retirement homes across the country, where septuagenarians starting partying with the Wii into the late hours of the...afternoon at least.



7 Mario Kart (series)

Being addicted to speed is fun for parties, and we don't mean the kind they sell at truckstops in Arkansas. No, we mean the good clean enjoyment of *Mario Kart*, one of the world's best-loved and most enduring racing franchises. Leaving the serious business of simulating tire physics to killjoys like *Gran Turismo*, *Mario Kart's* four-player has always been a great way to spice up any party. Hey, for some of us, a turtle shell up the tailpipe is the best way to spend a Saturday night.



8 Halo

It takes a special game to rock a party. It takes an extraordinary game to get people to lug a gaggle of those huge original Xboxes to their friend's house, link them together, and conduct 16-player deathmatches until the wee hours of the morning. However, despite how labor intensive it was, a surprising number of Xbox owners did just this in the days before Xbox Live. Sure, it was hard, but think of the stories you can tell your weakling children someday! Just remember: it was an uphill walk to your friend's house, both ways.



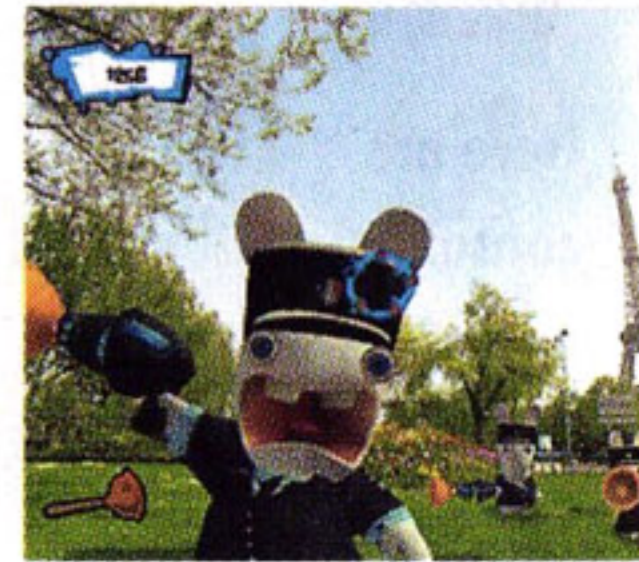
9 Bomberman

The original NES *Bomberman* was a true classic, to be sure, but the series didn't really achieve party game nirvana until a few years later with the release of *Super Bomberman* for the SNES. The big improvement was the addition of four-player multi-tap support, which allowed a quartet of pre-teen pyromaniacs to delight as they trapped each other in the game's fiendish mazes and blew each other to smithereens. Many an explosive time was had in the rec rooms of the early '90s, and, hey, it's safer than lighting off M-80s.



10 Rayman Raving Rabbids 2

The French aren't so good at some things, like rock music and fighting wars, but they excel at others, like cooking and having a surreal sense of humor. The latter is on excellent display in *Rayman* creator Michel Ancel's brilliant *Rayman Raving Rabbids* series. Composed of quick, manic minigames and crafted in a brilliantly strange art style, this is one party game that could bring a smile to the face of the most jaded gamer. The Rabbids themselves are some of the most loveably goofy game characters ever, but don't worry – you'll look just as silly soon enough.



"It's Bloody Good"

David Bianculli, New York Daily News



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- Kevin Thompson, *The Palm Beach Post*

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*Episode 12 ("Monsters") presented as originally aired

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NOT RATED

MARVEL

SPIKE
ONLY MOVIE ACTION

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

RED MILE ENTERS SIN CITY

Publisher Red Mile Entertainment has announced that it is licensing Epic's Unreal Engine 3 for use in an upcoming Sin City game. No other details pertaining to date, consoles, etc. for the title have been announced.

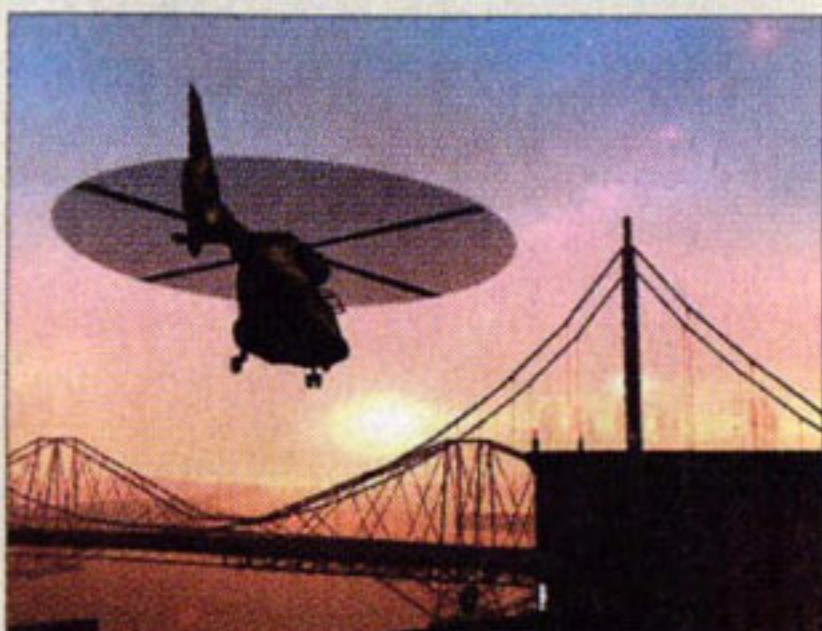
FAR CRY SEQUEL SPREADS TO CONSOLES

Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 owners will now be able to get in on the Far Cry 2 action, as publisher Ubisoft is expanding the reach of the once PC-only title. It is unknown if these console versions of the game will appear alongside their PC counterpart, whose release date is up in the air at the moment.



ROCKSTAR GAMES GO UP IN STEAM

Rockstar Games is jumping on the Steam bandwagon. The Grand Theft Auto makers are now offering PC games in the GTA franchise, as well as titles such as Midnight Club II, Manhunt, and both Max Payne games, over Valve's digital distribution service.



THQ'S BIG HUGE ACQUISITION

Rise of Nations developer Big Huge Games is becoming a wholly owned subsidiary of THQ. The Maryland-based development house is currently working on an RPG slated for 2009 on Xbox 360 and PS3.



ENDER'S GAME COMING

Chair Entertainment Group, which features some of the developers from Advent Rising, has secured the rights to Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* novel. Chair plans to start development this year, and is also looking to expand its use of the license in other directions.



news

THE WAR IS (ALMOST) OVER

BLU-RAY STEALS THE SHOW

The high-definition DVD format war between Sony's Blu-ray and Toshiba's HD DVD took a giant step in favor of Sony after studio Warner Bros. announced it was pulling its support of HD DVD in favor of working exclusively on Blu-ray. Warner Bros. is reported to be the biggest seller of DVDs, garnering an estimated 18 to 20 percent of DVD sales in America. Warner Bros. said that it would continue to release movies on the HD DVD format through May. The exclusivity announcement, made on the eve of the Consumer Electronics Show, shocked the industry enough that organizers of the HD DVD promotional group cancelled their scheduled CES press conference upon hearing the news.

The seeming effect of this deal – if a correlation can be drawn – was immediate and overwhelming. According to The NPD Group, Blu-ray accounted for almost 93 percent of high-def media player sales in the first week after the announcement. This is compared with almost a 50-50 split just the week prior to the Warner Bros. deal. The 93 percent figure may be skewed by some free Blu-ray player deals that occurred during the week surveyed. A comparison of movie sales between the two formats also widened, with Blu-ray taking an 85 percent share of all high-def discs sold during the period.

Previously, Blu-ray enjoyed the backing of 20th Century Fox, Walt Disney, and New Line, among other studios, as compared with HD DVD's Paramount, DreamWorks (excluding Steven Spielberg films), and Universal. Although there has been some speculation that Universal or Paramount would be getting out of their HD DVD support, both have said they are committed to the format. *Variety* has previously reported that Paramount has an escape clause in its contract that would allow it to switch to Blu-ray at any time.

Of course, the fortunes of Sony's PlayStation 3 (with its built-in Blu-ray player) and the success of the format are related. The PS2 enjoyed a considerable sales boost thanks to its inclusion of a DVD player. A decision in the format war also affects the PC market, as companies will be interested to see which format they should include in their towers in the future.

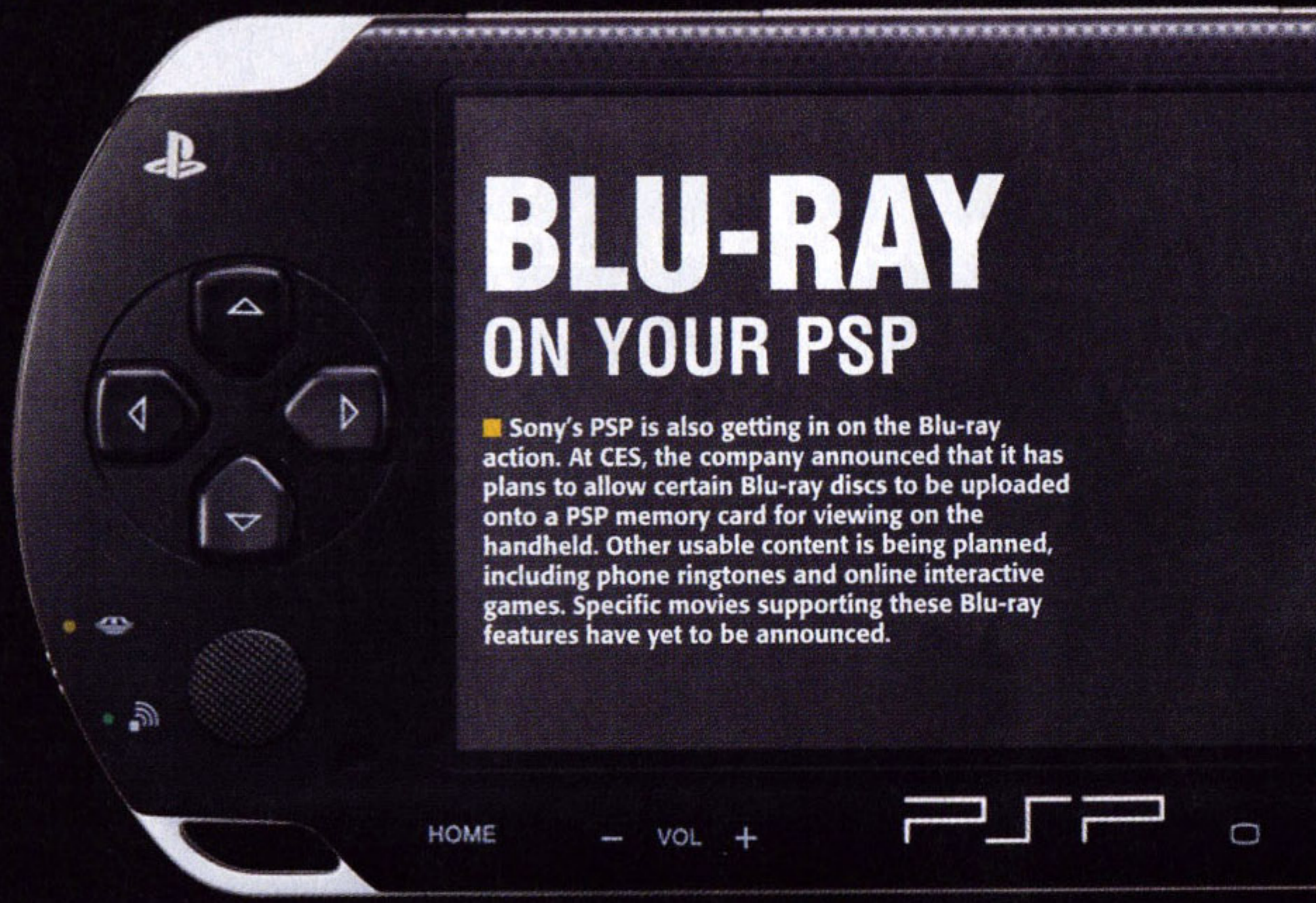
As a reaction to Warner's announcement, or perhaps to counter the fact that Blu-ray devices outsold HD DVD units by two-to-one in the first half of 2007 according to Home Media Research, Toshiba recently declared that it was cutting the price of its HD DVD players in half. Microsoft, which sells an HD DVD peripheral to the Xbox 360, sold only 296,000 units in America through November. In fact, Xbox group marketing manager Albert Penello said at CES that even though Microsoft is still standing behind HD DVD, "if [Blu-ray is] the way [consumers] vote, that's something we'll have to consider."

■ The PS3 may already be benefiting from Blu-ray taking over as the predominate high-def DVD format

GI OPINION



As an owner of both types of players, I could care less which side wins as long as a clear victor is decided soon. Confusion about which format will have what content has placed a ceiling on sales and, in turn, held back studios from digging fully into their catalogs. If Blu-ray's sudden market share spike continues, we may have a clear format winner much sooner than previously thought.—BRYAN



BLU-RAY ON YOUR PSP

■ Sony's PSP is also getting in on the Blu-ray action. At CES, the company announced that it has plans to allow certain Blu-ray discs to be uploaded onto a PSP memory card for viewing on the handheld. Other usable content is being planned, including phone ringtones and online interactive games. Specific movies supporting these Blu-ray features have yet to be announced.

HOME

VOL +

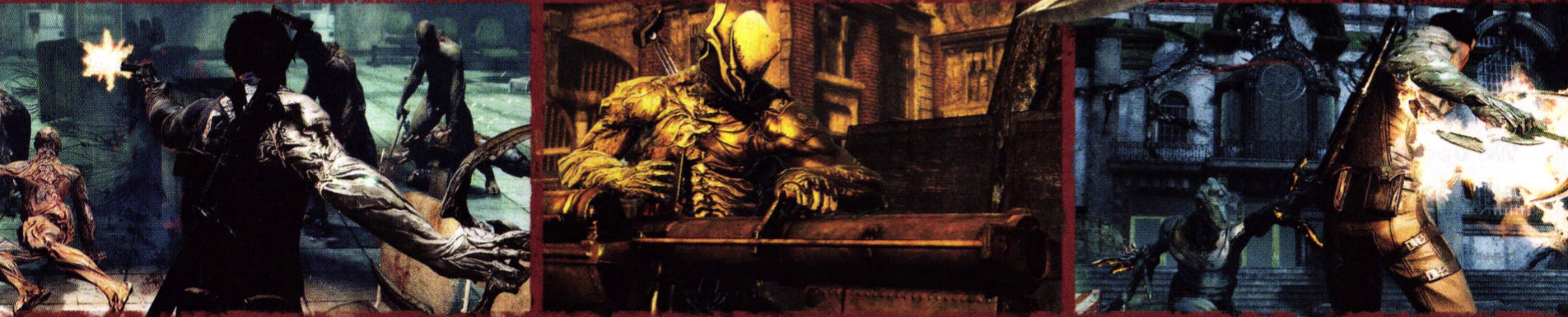
PSP

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weapon.

unleash the
power.

become the
hero.

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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

Afterwords

UNLIMITED ENABLED

MASS EFFECT

Casey Hudson
Project Director, BioWare

Within weeks of its release, BioWare's Mass Effect racked up a number of accolades, received nearly unanimously high reviews, and sold over a million units. The gaming press has had its chance to talk about the game, but what about the average gamer? We opened our forums to questions about the game, then turned around and got the answers from the game maker itself. This month, Casey Hudson from BioWare answers your questions about Mass Effect.

What other media were influences during the development of Mass Effect?

Well, a lot of what we were trying to do was capture the really memorable science fiction experiences that we had when we were younger; for us, that would be in the late seventies and early eighties. Maybe it was because we were younger and more impressionable, but those movies like *Aliens*, *Blade Runner*, *Star Wars* and some other movies from that period – *Wrath of Khan* – if you watch those they have a great cinematic quality, great cinematography, there's the film grain that made its way into Mass Effect. They are also very atmospheric. You feel like you are immersed inside those movies instead of watching them from the outside, and that is something that we thought pulls you into the experience a lot deeper than the science fiction that we've seen recently.

What drove the decision to have players select concise conversation options rather than the actual words Commander Shepard will say?

We always look at the feedback from fans, and that is a really important way for us to make our games better. One of the things about the way people played *Jade Empire* and *Knights of the Old Republic* was that they loved the story, but they found it was too wordy, and those two things seem to fight each other. But I think what that told us was that the delivery mechanism was too wordy – there was too much reading. We wanted it to be more fluid and more dynamic, so we figured that we wanted to give the player full voice and have it much more like an actual conversation. But then the question is if you are thinking about the choices you can make then you don't really want to read the line that you are going to say and then hear the line said again – it starts to feel redundant. The other thing is we wanted to come up with a way for the player to make a choice faster. The system that we ended up choosing was the one that we figured was the most fun and intuitive, and it tested really well.

The squad mechanics were a focus of early demos, but ended up being somewhat simplified in the final version. Can you briefly talk about how the approach to squad command evolved?

Some of the stuff that we showed early on, it looked really deep, but it was not as easy to control as we wanted. So in the end, we iterated on the controls and made it easier to control your characters in a way that matched the pacing of the combat that we wanted. It's really all about trying to fit everything onto a controller in a way where the pacing and the control scheme matches the way the combat works.

Were you forced to cut any beloved features that you really wanted to see make it into the final build? For example, we know that originally players were going to be able to interrupt certain bits of dialogue.

That's something people have asked about, and the game is so feature rich that obviously we are trying to find a balance where the whole package is what we wanted it to be. Personally, there was nothing about the original scope of the game that we had to change. There are design pillars that we start out with, and those pillars represent what we think is required to make the game great, and then as we go we talk about other features that we are trying to put in. People want information throughout development and we get asked a lot of questions, so we talk about what we are doing, but some of those features will come and go over the course of development. We always preserve those pillars: being a really cinematic game, being able to explore the universe, being able to customize your character to a great degree, and having a non-linear story that is really wrapped around your decisions with the character. All of those things and the things that support those were there from the beginning and got into the game in a way that we're really proud of. The other features that came to mind in the middle of development we're not too worried about,

but again that's why we are doing a trilogy so we can continually fatten the feature set.

Mass Effect's difficulty has a tendency to be uneven at times. What was your approach to balancing the game?

Pretty much everyone playing Mass Effect is going to have a different kind of experience. Typically, if you are making a game that is linear and is about a single character you can balance it once for that one character and then you're done. But Mass Effect literally has an astronomically large matrix of who you can be and what you can do at any given time – which is great for a player because it offers this incredible freedom. But then part of that is, as the player, you kind of end up taking more accountability for those choices and the things that happen. We try to balance it out, so that it kind of softens any of the extreme problems you might come across, but that is part of the freedom that Mass Effect offers – your choices do have an impact. If you're not developing your character in a certain way or if you choose a certain kind of squad, then that might not perform as well under certain circumstances as someone else's character.

Obviously, you guys already know about the texture loading issues, the long elevator rides, and sometimes-iffy teammate AI. Were these difficult things to optimize? How do you make that decision to delay a game or just release it with a few issues?

I think what a lot of the reviews have said is that while Mass Effect isn't perfect – and really no game is – it is a great game, and people are saying that it's the best game they have ever played and all of these really amazing quotes. It's kind of overwhelming. When you make a really ambitious game that tries to give players new and different experiences, you are going to face a lot of these challenges that you wouldn't otherwise have to deal with if you were making something that is simpler and more linear. But the team worked really hard and we were able to get the total experience to a point where – you know – the Metacritic score is in the 90s and it's ranked as one of the top 100 games. So being able to deliver that caliber of a game in time for players to be able to enjoy in time for the holiday season is a really ideal position to be in. So I'm really proud of the team to be able to get to that stage, even though this was probably one of the most ambitious projects ever attempted.

How are you guys planning on accounting for all the decisions a player could make throughout the game? The fate of individuals, societies, and even whole races can change depending on a players' actions. Won't it be a challenge to work a narrative around all those variables in the sequel?

There's not too much we can say about Mass Effect 2, but I can say that it is a big challenge. But that's going to be one of the huge payoffs for the player that has played Mass Effect 1 and who can take that same character into Mass Effect 2. This is literally an entire trilogy of a story about one character – your character – the one that you created, and all the decisions that you are making. So you will see a different version of the galaxy and all the choices that you've made than your friend who played Mass Effect 1 in a different way.

Are you guys planning on using a save file from the first game then? And what about people who skip the first game and start the story with the second game?

We are planning on looking at your save from Mass Effect 1, so keep your save if you finish the game. If you haven't played Mass Effect 1, then of course there will be a different kind of entry point that allows you to create a character and feel like you are picking up where Mass Effect 1 left off and knowing what went on before that.



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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

JADE EMPIRE'S NEW MANDATE

Dean Takahashi from *The Mercury News* says that BioWare is indeed working on a sequel to its action/RPG *Jade Empire*. The first title appeared on the original Xbox back in 2005 (and finally on PC last year), and while the game was seen running on an Xbox 360, it will be interesting to see if BioWare's new masters, EA, push the title to a multi-platform release that includes the PlayStation 3.



LOGITECH IN MICROSOFT'S SIGHTS?

Rumors of Microsoft taking over peripheral manufacturer Logitech have been making the rounds, with equal amounts of credibility and suspicion. While some dismiss the rumor as too much out of left field for the company, others point to the fact that a buyout would instantly make Microsoft the world's largest developer of mice and other computer peripherals as reason enough.



XBOX 360 GOES TILT

A rumor has sprung up on the Web from Xbox Family that Microsoft has contacted the company behind Nintendo's Wii-mote prototypes, Gyration, for motion-sensing Xbox 360 technology. This appears like it would be an add-on to your existing controller and not a wholly separate peripheral, of which there are already mods imbuing such functionality such as Xilt (shown).

360 CRYSIS IN CRISIS?

Crysis requires a pretty hefty PC for you to run it in all its glory, and the rumor is that this high spec requirement is why the game will only be ported to the PlayStation 3. Apparently a *Crysis 1.5* release is being planned for the system, but if EA is true to its usual pattern, we'd be surprised if this game didn't get a multi-console release. EA has denied the existence of any kind of console *Crysis*.



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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

People always talk about EA's *Mutant League Football* with relish for the way it re-invented the sport, but that wasn't the only pastime that was overhauled. This month's Name That Game was a reinvention of baseball featuring armored robots with jet packs, buyable upgrades, and mines placed on the field after certain innings by the umpires. Robot players can even blow up if they are worked too hard during a game.

(Answer on page 28)



news

THE LAST TIP OFF
2K FORFEITS; EA MOVES TOWARDS
NCAA HOOPS EXCLUSIVE

Sport by sport, the video game sports landscape is in upheaval. Where once there was widespread competition among several companies across different sports, now there is significantly less – and it's getting smaller every day. 2K Sports has announced that it is not releasing *College Hoops 2K9* due to an ongoing dispute with The Collegiate Licensing Company, the company responsible for the licensing rights to the NCAA and almost 200 universities, colleges, bowl games, etc.

Rival publisher EA Sports, which is behind the *March Madness* college basketball franchise and already has an exclusive deal with the CLC for college football, would not comment on the matter other than to say that it is in the middle of its contract with the CLC and that it plans to put out the next installment of *March Madness*.

Neither 2K Sports, the CLC, nor EA will comment, but *Game Informer* has learned some of the substance of the negotiations from an anonymous source with knowledge of the situation. Last fall, the CLC approached 2K Sports with an exclusive deal for college basketball, but neither side could come to an agreement. In the meantime, the CLC fielded a counter-offer from EA, which was willing to pay more for an exclusive deal. 2K Sports put up its own counter-offer, saying it would produce college hockey, lacrosse, and possibly another sport, which might have been rugby. The CLC was supposed to get back to 2K in December, but it never did. While the CLC stalled, 2K decided to move on.

This last turn of events seems to be confirmed by 2K Sports' official statement on the matter. "We are committed to providing fans with high-quality, critically-acclaimed sports games," reads the statement. "But given our disciplined approach to the business, we do not believe the current discussions would result in an acceptable outcome." Given that the franchise usually releases in late November, it's clear that 2K couldn't wait around forever to start development, nor start sinking money into a project that would never come out.

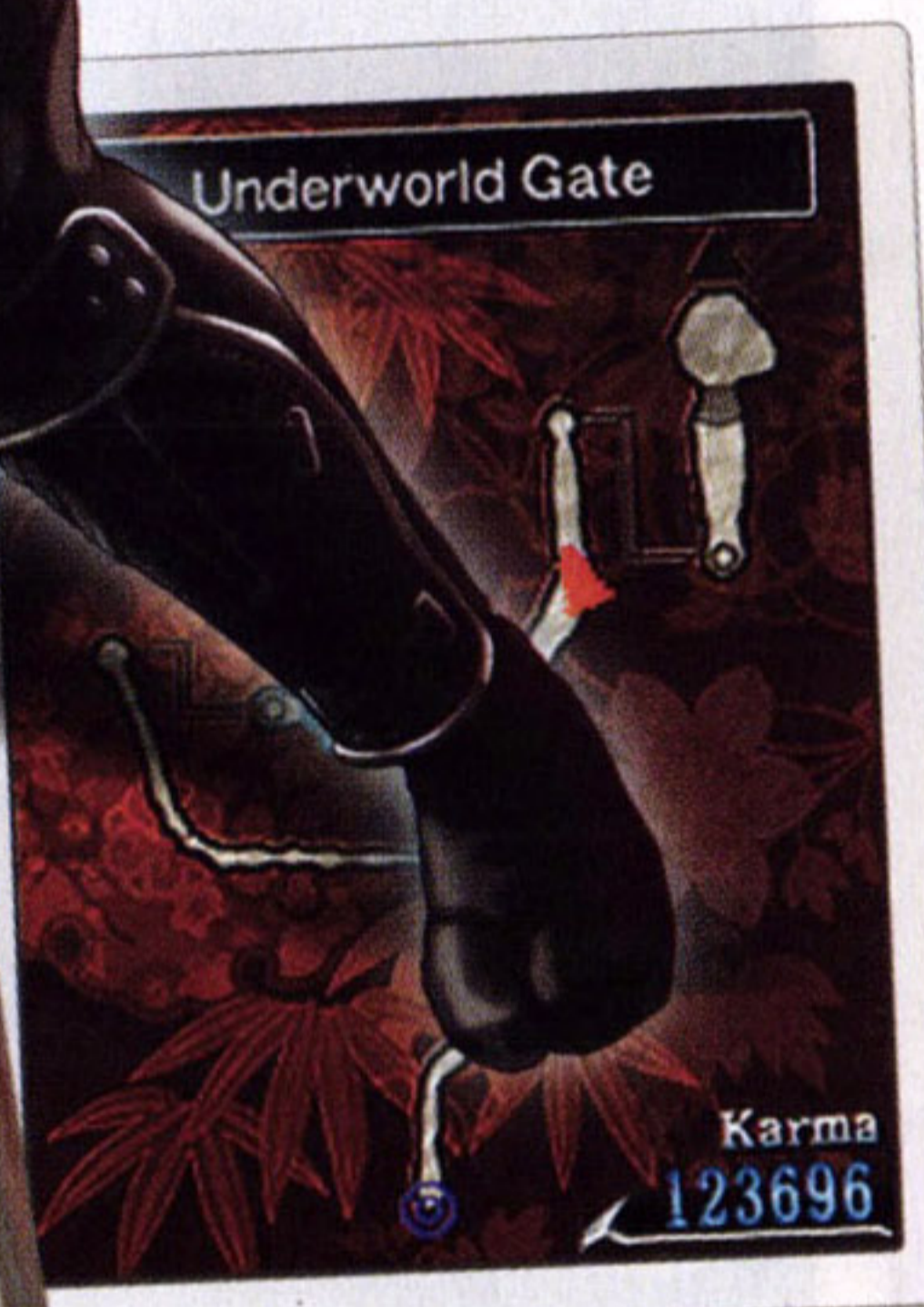
Was the CLC trying to play EA and 2K off of each other for the exclusive rights and 2K called its bluff? Was the CLC actually interested in exclusivity or was trying to extract as much money as possible out of the proceedings? What role did the other sports – college hockey, lacrosse, and perhaps rugby – play in all this? In a past conversation back in 2005, CLC president and CEO Pat Battle told *Game Informer* that the CLC was in negotiations for titles based on college hockey and lacrosse, and that he expected to be announcing "something fairly shortly" on that front. Two years later neither game has come to pass, but it appears that 2K didn't just offer up the two sports out of thin air, and that Battle and the CLC – at least at one time – thought that college hockey and lacrosse were something they could bring to market.

When compared to Battle's previous comments to us, it seems that freezing out one side of the negotiations is not that surprising either. Battle told us back in 2005 when talking about some publishers who wavered on an exclusive deal for college football (before it went to EA) that "once we heard that, we didn't engage them in conversations on an exclusive, because they had not been committed enough to warrant that discussion."

Whether or not the CLC overplayed its hand or if EA's money was simply too powerful, this latest casualty of the price of video game business is anything but a slam dunk. The fact that neither EA nor the CLC are willing to say anything about what's going on tells us that negotiations are ongoing between the two at the time of this writing – meaning true exclusivity for college basketball is likely just around the corner.



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NINTENDO DS™

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
BARRY CAUDILL
 Executive Producer
 (Civilization Revolution)
 Firaxis Games

- 1 Ratchet & Clank series – Multi
- 2 Roller Coaster Tycoon series – PC
- 3 NCAA Football series – Multi
- 4 Sid Meier's Pirates! – PC
- 5 The Seven Cities of Gold – Commodore 64



READER
RON HUGHES
 Schenectady, NY

- 1 Flashback: The Quest for Identity – SNES
- 2 Out of This World – SNES
- 3 Street Fighter II – Arcade
- 4 New Super Mario Bros. – DS
- 5 The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion – 360

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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 (attach digital picture)

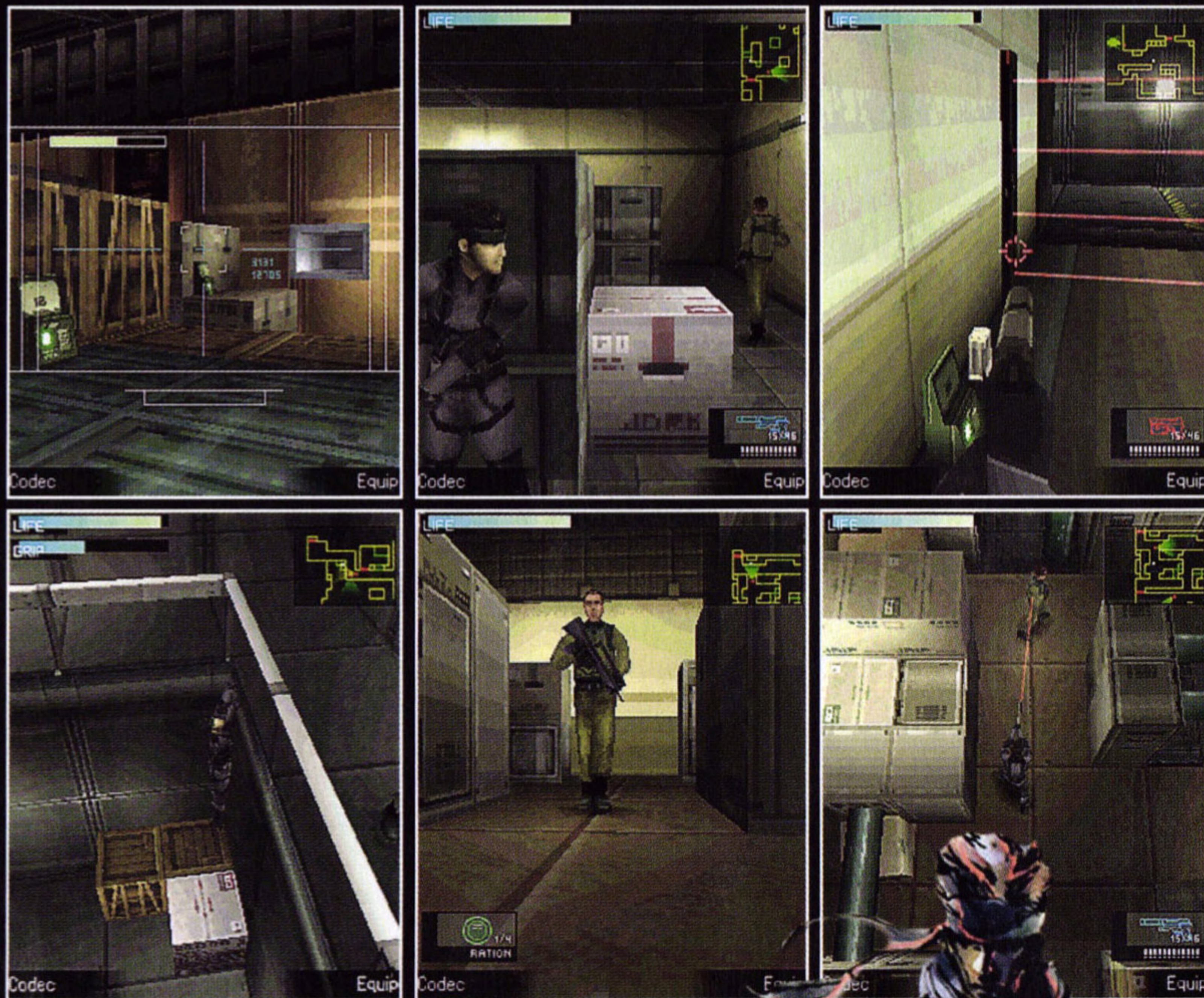
TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Things Bryan Shouted While Playing Nitrobike

- 10 Somehow, I drove vertically right up a column. Fantastic
- 9 I could not make a lamer character if I tried
- 8 Oh, God! No! Go... Restart
- 7 How about... I could see where I'm going? That would be great
- 6 Please, get back. Just get back on the track, please
- 5 I am turning, I promise you
- 4 Oh, that's a shortcut! I see what you're trying to do here
- 3 You suck...so...hard
- 2 How about some steering?! F--- you
- 1 I just flew off my bike and exploded for no reason

Name That Game Answer: Super Baseball 2020



games

MOBILE GEAR SOLID

KOJIMA BRINGS SNAKE BACK

Hideo Kojima isn't afraid to go off in some different directions – his light-sensitive foray into handheld gaming via Boktai is an indication of that. Although big-name exploits in the mobile space are less and less rare, Kojima is doing all he can to bring the full Metal Gear Solid experience to phones in Metal Gear Solid Mobile.

The game uses many of the conventions that Metal Gear Solid fans have come to love. It's presented in the familiar three-quarters, top-down view of the franchise, complete with radar showing guards' moving patterns and fields of vision. MGS Mobile takes place after the Shadow Moses Incident (placing the game after the original Metal Gear Solid), and Revolver Ocelot has spread Metal Gear technology onto the black market. Snake starts out by trying to track down a scientist leaking intel from within one of the renegade Metal Gear production facilities. Of course, what would Snake's covert ops be without a little codec help from Otacon?

In our limited time with the title, it's clear that although the game is on a cell phone, Kojima's vision for the title is not restricted. It features some of the same cinematic camera sweeps used in the console series, a full complement of weapons – including the Nikita rocket launcher – and even has a number of VR missions to help you with the pared-down controls. The game also uses phones' camera capability within its gameplay.

Metal Gear Solid Mobile will be a Verizon Wireless exclusive starting in February.



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Fry enemies with the Zap-o-Matic, raise an army with the Zombie gun or wreak havoc with a cosmic arsenal of weapons and mental abilities



Jump inside the prototype Big Willy mech and take to the streets, unleashing massive destruction and demolishing anything in sight



Destroy All Humans together through Co-operative play or compete Head-to-Head in a variety of action-packed missions

TEEN
T
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Tobacco Reference
Crude Humor
Mild Language
Sexual Themes
Violence

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www.DestroyAllHumansGame.com

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Wii

THQ
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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

...I wasn't expecting that Wii would be a console targeted only for non-gamers. I expected more games for hardcore gamers. The reality is different to what I expected.

- No More Heroes' creator Suda 51 on the Wii.



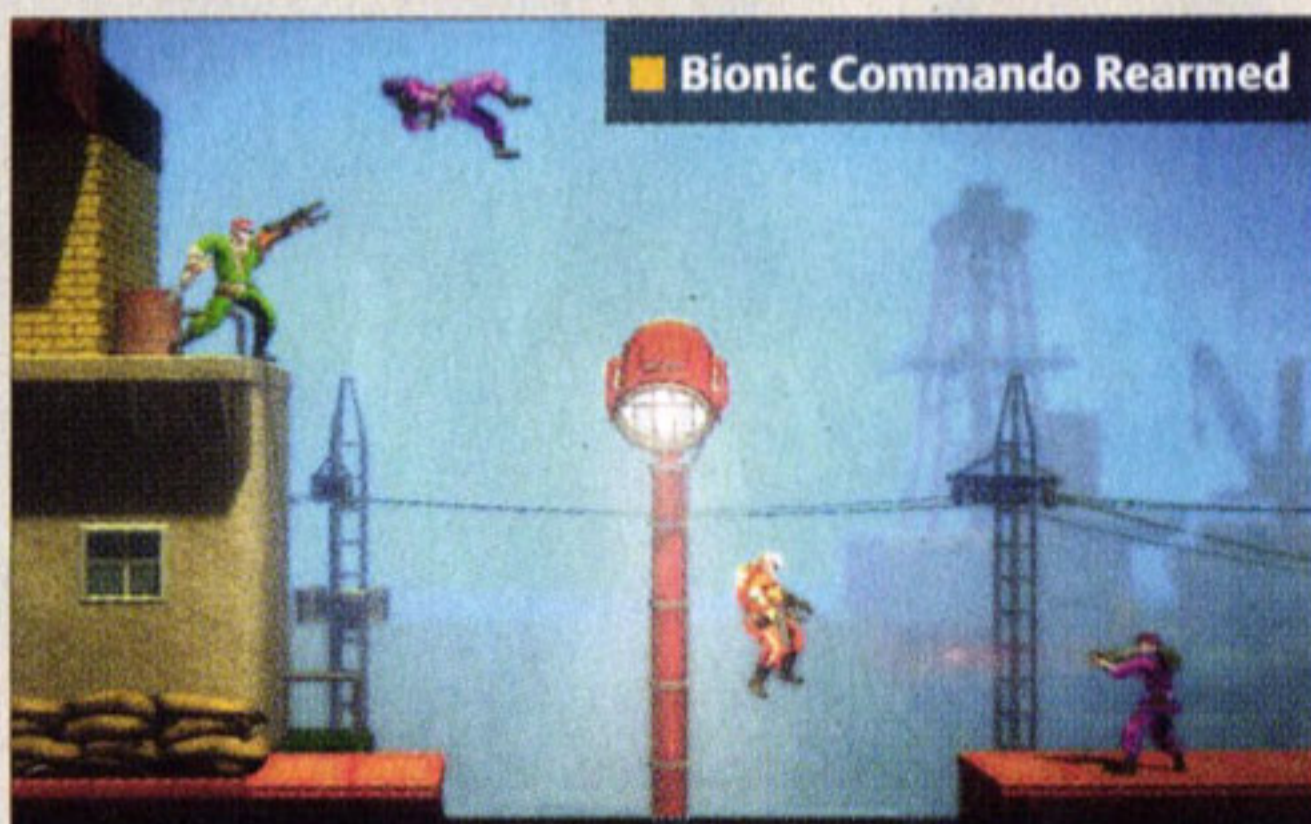
UGLY

Nintendo announces its new Wii release schedule, and not only has Super Smash Bros. Brawl been delayed until March 9, but the entire Wii lineup for 2008 is lacking in solid first-party titles. Apart from Super Smash Bros., Mario Kart Wii (spring) and Wii Fit (summer) are the only titles showing up on the docket.



BAD

THQ isn't hesitating on pulling the plug on some non-performers. The Juiced and Stuntman franchises - both series acquired from the outside (Acclaim and Atari, respectively) - have been axed from the publisher's portfolio. Also getting the back of THQ's hand are the PS3 version of Frontlines: Fuel of War and Destroy All Humans: Big Willy Unleashed for the PS2.



Bionic Commando Rearmed

GOOD

On the heels of its announcement last fall that it was making a next-gen sequel to Bionic Commando, Capcom is bringing back the original this spring as a downloadable title for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC. Bionic Commando Rearmed will feature updated graphics; new weapons, music, and a two-player coop mode; and online rankings. Those who beat Rearmed will also be able to unlock content in the new Bionic Commando, slated for release before the end of 2008.



ESA president Mike Gallagher flexes his muscles for the industry

GOOD

Entertainment Software Association president Mike Gallagher intends to make the video game industry's voice heard in Washington the only way you can - by waving around lots of money. Gallagher says he's starting a political action committee this March to round up cash from ESA members like Electronic Arts and Microsoft to contribute to national candidates' campaign coffers who are sympathetic to the industry. Gallagher wants you to get involved through the ESA's Video Game Voters Network (www.videogamevoters.org).



GOOD

EA is starting a free online play business model, and the first announced game is Battlefield Heroes from DICE. The game will be available for free download starting this summer, and DICE says that it will be aimed at both newbies and the Battlefield hardcore alike. Looks like we're not the only ones who have been playing a lot of Team Fortress?

UGLY

More clarity has surfaced regarding Activision and Harmonix's standoff over who's responsible for fixing the fact that you can't use your PS3 Guitar Hero controller with Rock Band. It turns out that despite all the finger pointing, it's Activision who seems to be holding things up by demanding more money. A Boston Globe article quotes Activision spokesperson Marryanne Lataif as saying, "We believe we should be compensated for the use of our technology."



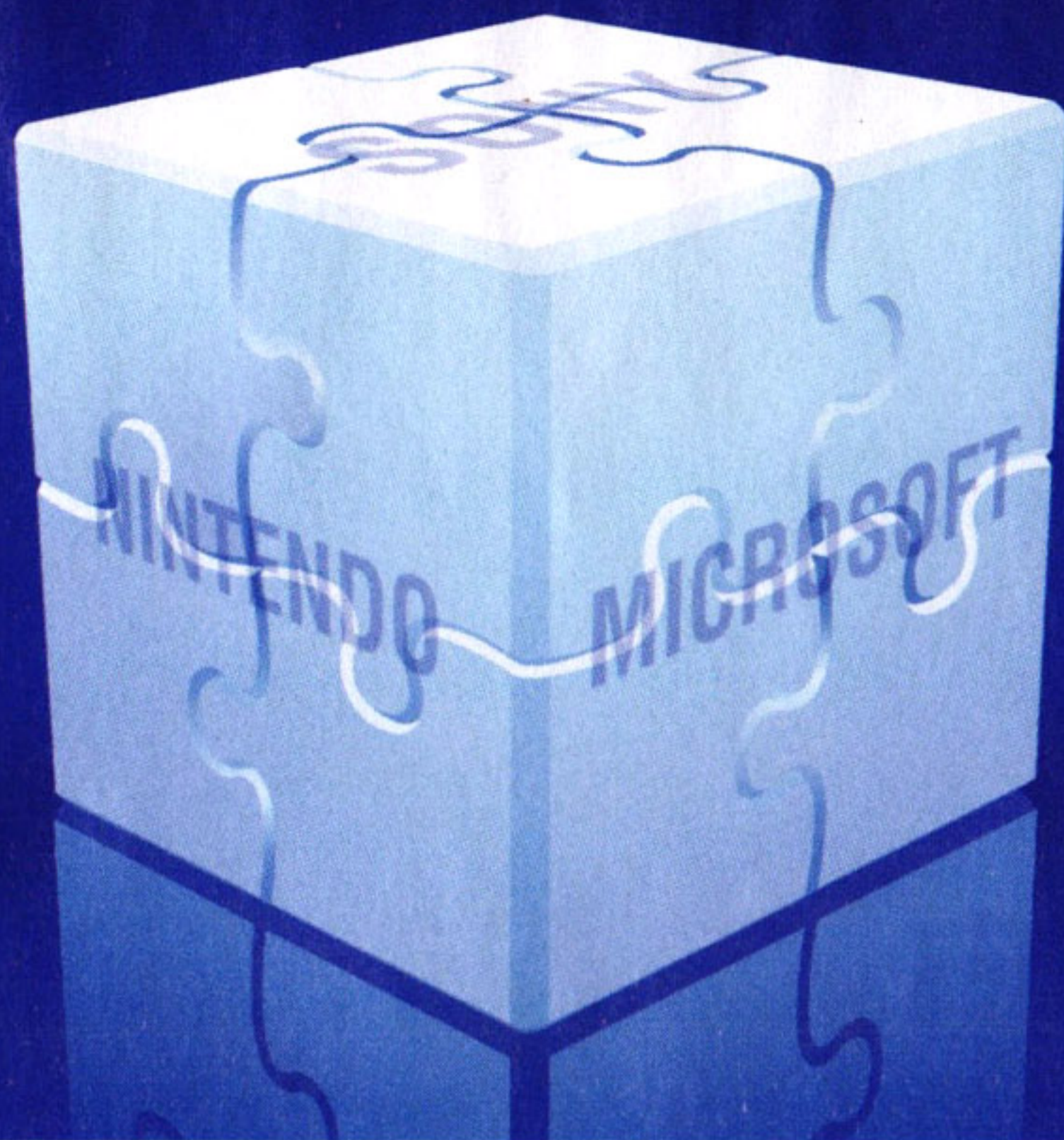
BAD

Wisconsin state senator Jon Erpenbach (D-Waunakee) has suggested adding a one percent surcharge to video games to offset rising juvenile justice systems costs. Not to be outdone, the environmental organization The Sierra Club has similarly proposed a tax on games and consoles to encourage kids to get off their asses and go outside.



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

A ONE-CONSOLE FUTURE?



The video game industry is faced with a number of difficult questions and many ways to look at them. In Game Informer's debate section, we attempt to analyze these scenarios from different angles. Like a typical debate club, our editors have been assigned to defend a position whether or not it agrees with their personal views. In this edition, we take a close look at the idea of a single dominant console and how it would help or harm the industry.



PRO

APART FROM FOREVER STAMPING OUT the "my console can beat up your console" flame wars that pollute every Internet gaming forum in existence, having one machine to rule them all would result in a net gain for our favorite hobby. What publisher or developer wouldn't salivate at the cost savings involved in working with a single hardware standard? What consumer would rue the days of spending \$400 or more multiple times to gain access to all the great games that come out in each generation?

The usual arguments against a one-console future could be easily rendered null with a little foresight and planning. A standardized set of tools for bringing basic concepts to life would alleviate the punishing entrance fee that makes developing fresh, innovative, low-cost games to a big-box console. Making one-off features like motion sensing available out of the box could bring the best parts of Wii development to a console with modern hardware. Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo have all made baby steps in these directions, but developers and gamers are both forced to choose between three imperfect options.

Ultimately, the strongest argument for a single box that plays every game in the world boils down to money. On the development side of things, spending less money on baseline engineering for multiple platforms would result in more dollars being available at the end of the day, which means more and better games. For rank-and-file gamers, imagine what you could do with all those hundreds of dollars you'd save by not buying that second or third console – not to mention that a single hardware investment would guarantee access to everything our boundlessly creative industry produces.

For further proof, just look at how thoroughly the console side of the business has eclipsed the PC. Testing a game's code against the countless thousands of common hardware configurations drives up development costs, while the need to replace hardware on a regular basis and at great cost keeps PC gaming from being a viable option for millions of potential gamers worldwide. Counterexamples like World of Warcraft exist, but the trend is clear: standardized hardware and low entry costs for consumers drive the market. Why not take those lessons and apply them to their next logical step?—**ADAM**

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CON

FOR YEARS, DEVELOPERS AND CONSUMERS have wished for one dominant console that could unite the gaming world in perfect harmony. In many ways, I don't blame them. One console would mean lower development costs and erase the hassles of porting to multiple systems. Consumers would never have to worry about missing out on an amazing gaming experience because of a console exclusive.

However appealing this idea is in theory, I think the results of a single company dominance of the console market would be disastrous. Is competition sometimes painful for consumers and developers? Absolutely. But it's also the fuel that has powered this industry's drive to heights we couldn't have imagined 20 years ago. Competing consoles don't just offer slight differences, like Blu-ray or HD DVD. Rather, they have often represented completely different philosophies and technologies – sets of ideas that have fundamentally shaped the way this art form has developed.

For example, in the early 1990s, Nintendo and Sony were working on a disc drive-based system for the SNES. After a falling out, Nintendo went back to the cartridge for its follow-up system, the N64. Sony brought out a little console known as the PlayStation, and in the process gave birth to the modern gaming industry. Without competition from a then-upstart game company like Sony, who knows how many years of progress would have been lost to the limitations of the cartridge format? A decade later, Sony itself reasoned that gamers weren't willing to pay for a cable-style, comprehensive online gaming service. Enter Microsoft's Xbox Live service. Anyone willing to go back to the days of unorganized, featureless console online, please raise your hand. More recently, Nintendo has turned the world on its head with the DS and Wii, two systems that offer developers entirely new and revolutionary control methods, allowing them to make games that aren't possible on other systems.

Game systems aren't simply media players. Consoles, and their underlying technology, actively shape the kinds of games that developers create. If the quest for innovations in hardware and online services dies, so follows the games themselves. I, for one, think the future of this art form is far too important to put in the hands of just one company.—**MATT**

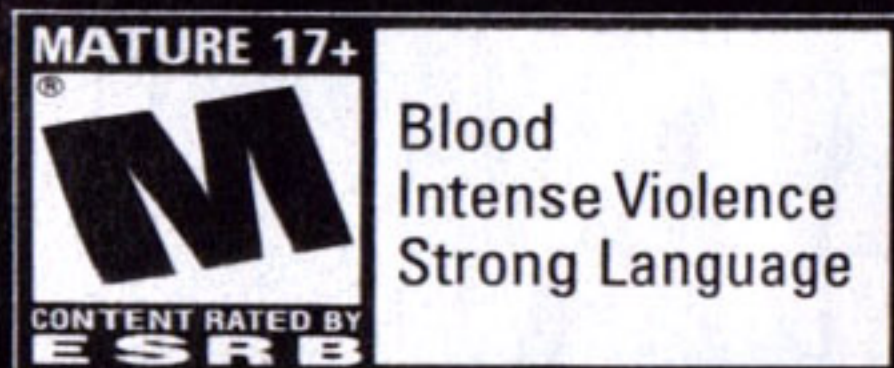
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UBISOFT

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1993

The Big Box



After working with Panasonic on Microsoft's MSX project, Gardner moves over to Panasonic's game division, working on the company's 3DO console

1997

Obsolete Technology

Despite praise in the media, Panasonic abandons the M2, the proposed successor to the 3DO, selling it to the Japanese firm Matsushita. Matsushita later cancels the console

1997

A New Chapter



Now devoted to the game industry, Gardner signs on to head the American division of Capcom, one of the industry's most respected publishers and developers

1998

Horrific Hit

Capcom releases the blockbuster Resident Evil 2, establishing the series as one of the best in gaming. Resident Evil replaces Street Fighter as Capcom's signature franchise for the next decade

2003

Changing Course

In a surprise turn, Gardner leaves his long-held position at Capcom

2003

Think Small

Gardner forms O3 Entertainment, a company focused on smaller-scale game publishing and development with former Capcom colleagues Chris Jelinek and Hanako Watanabe

2004

A Cult Classic



O3 launches the home version of the popular web game Alien Hominid to strong reviews

2005

Back In The Game



Gardner accepts a position at Eidos, where he seeks to revitalize the company's publishing and development portfolio

BILL GARDNER

CEO OF U.S. PUBLISHING/EIDOS INTERACTIVE

>> Bill Gardner, who took the reins of Eidos' American branch in 2005, brings a lifetime of video game knowledge to the venerable publisher. We spoke to Gardner about the future of the company, and some of the recent controversies surrounding Eidos and SCI. <<

What did you see as the opportunity at Eidos?

I competed against Eidos when I was at Capcom. The company was a fierce competitor. They had a great lineup of IP and titles. I was sort of perplexed about what had happened to them. When SCI went to take the company over, a very good friend of mine from Europe got in touch with me, someone I trusted a lot. He said that they needed some help in the U.S. and highly recommended that I come and take a look at it. So I did. This looked like an opportunity to come and turn some things around.

What's the status of Hitman as a gaming franchise? I/O has recently been working on Kane & Lynch, and the Hitman movie came out, but is Hitman coming back as a game?

I/O is committed to the Hitman franchise – that's their bread and butter. I'm sure they're working on something; I haven't been over there to talk to [them] to know exactly what they're doing. But they have a number of things they are working on, and

What was your take on the scandal that broke about Gamespot, Jeff Gertsman, and his Kane & Lynch review? The perception was that Eidos called for his head because of a negative review and the fact that you had bought a lot of banner ads and subsequently they let him go.

I think it got blown way out of proportion. There had been a change of management and direction at CNET [Gamespot's parent company] and that had nothing to do with us. In terms of the review, Jeff reviewed the game, he said what he wanted to say. There was advertising that was already planned for the site. I heard rumors that said we were going to pull the ad – you can't pull them overnight. It doesn't work that way. You know it; I know it; anyone in the business knows it. Did we complain? We asked the question about what was wrong with the game. But as far as going in and threatening anyone, I never talked to those guys – and that's the God's honest truth.... But we were caught with our

to get Eidos in that position, where the retailer buys the game because they know we're behind it and they know it's a quality game and the press is more open to asking us what happened instead of writing about it before they ask. But we need to build those relationships, and shame on us for letting us get the company to where it is and not bringing it back quicker.

Recently, your parent company, SCI, had its three highest officers resign after a shareholder uprising. What was your feeling about this? Did you have a good relationship with the leadership that resigned?

The bottom line is that the shareholders spoke, that's the best way to put it. In terms of a personal relationship with Jane [Cavanagh], Bill [Ennis], and Rob [Murphy], they were the ones that asked me to come to Eidos to come turn this operation around. On a personal level, I liked them quite a bit. They are very bright people, and you can't take that away

If you don't think you can deliver it, then you shouldn't be making that promise to your shareholders.

they just did come down from Kane & Lynch, so at the moment there's probably some people taking a well-deserved breather.

What about the Kane & Lynch movie? We've heard that Bruce Willis and Billy Bob Thornton were attached at one point.

Well, Mindscape got the rights to the movie, but we don't have a lot of say in who they're going to cast – God bless Angelina Jolie! [Laughs] Our franchises have been very lucky. Timothy Olyphant, I saw him in *Deadwood* and I wasn't quite prepared for what he'd look like with no hair. I think the company's been very fortunate in having some iconic actors, or people that could be iconic actors, cast in the roles of our movies.

A lot of people have affection for the Legacy of Kain series, which has been missing for some time. Is there a chance that might come back?

I would say absolutely. Some of the franchises that this company has that we haven't exploited need to be brought back out before we go look at new franchises. What about what we've got? I would say that Legacy of Kain and Soul Reaver are two that I would absolutely be pushing very hard for.

pants down because of the coincidence [in timing]. It's not our place to say something. We disagreed with his review. Did that cause his firing? I wasn't in the room. I don't know. I hope not, because I might disagree with what you're about to write about me.

Hey, we have mortgages. [Laughs]

Things happen. I might not like the way the photographer took my picture – I look fat. But that doesn't mean someone should be fired. I have disagreed in the past with reviews that have gone out for my games over the years. I thought they were a little one-sided.... But in terms of getting someone fired, no way. But you can't really come out and say anything. Once those [rumors] get out, they have a life of their own.

Looking forward, what are some of your goals for Eidos as a company?

I would see the company stabilized and starting to rebuild itself and its franchises to where it was quite some time ago, where the press and the consumers see Eidos as a company that puts out quality games and goes out and buys the game because it has the Eidos brand.... People bought Capcom because it said "Capcom" on it. We need

from them, but in terms of directing a multinational corporation, I think there was more experience necessary and the shareholders pointed that out. That's a decision that only the shareholders can make.

What does your gut tell you about the kind of changes you think the shareholders are going to want from Eidos?

I think they're going to want to see company growth. They're going to want a fiscally responsible plan that can be accomplished, not something that we come in at the last second and say, "Oh, by the way, this isn't coming." That has done no one any good. I had a little exercise the other weekend and looked at the history of Eidos. It's pretty interesting when you look at the press releases that go back to 1998.... I think we need to recognize that and deliver on our promises. If you don't think you can deliver it, then you shouldn't be making that promise to your shareholders. So what do I think is going to change? I think a lot is going to change. I don't want to speak out of turn or make any pronouncements that may or may not happen, but it has to change. It has to work.

■ Bill Gardner hopes to restore Eidos to the place it held in the industry during its Tomb Raider heyday

LOOKING AHEAD

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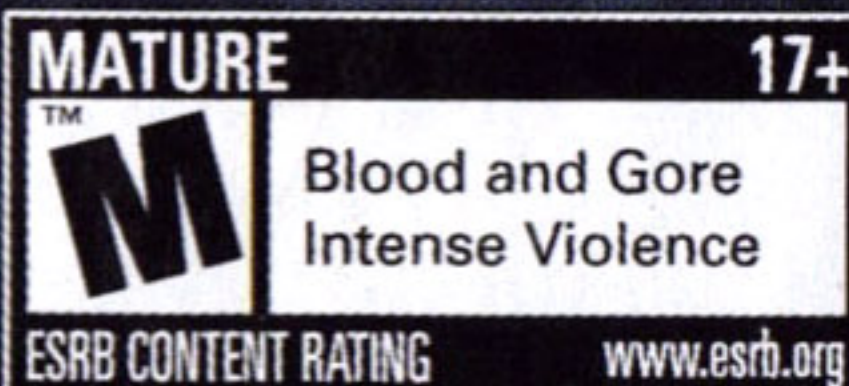
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XBOX 360

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At The LAN Party

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\$249.99 • www.astrogaming.com



accessories

CAMY HERO PACK

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\$24.99 • www.camyinternational.com

At The Desk

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Do you really have room for a full 5.1 audio system around your computer? After all, there is only so much space in your dorm room. Razer's Mako dishes out some great 2.1 audio, produces fantastic bass, and best of all, saves space while looking stylish. The only problem we found was its finicky touch controls, which are about as quick to respond as a 90-year-old being asked about their meds.

\$79.99 • www.razerzone.com



On The Go

ABLE PLANET NC1000CH CLEAR HARMONY HEADPHONES

OK ●●●●●●●●●●

These Able Planet headphones deliver a great range of crystal clear audio for both games and music, and the noise-canceling feature does a superb job of drowning out most ambient sounds. So what's the problem? There are two: the noise-canceling buzz will make you want to stab a pencil through your ears any time there's a lull in whatever you're listening to, and the price doesn't warrant these headphones not working perfectly. If money's not a factor, turn off the noise-canceling and enjoy these great cans.

\$349.99 • www.ableplanet.com



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tell him that
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then why can't he find
someone else to
do it with?



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media

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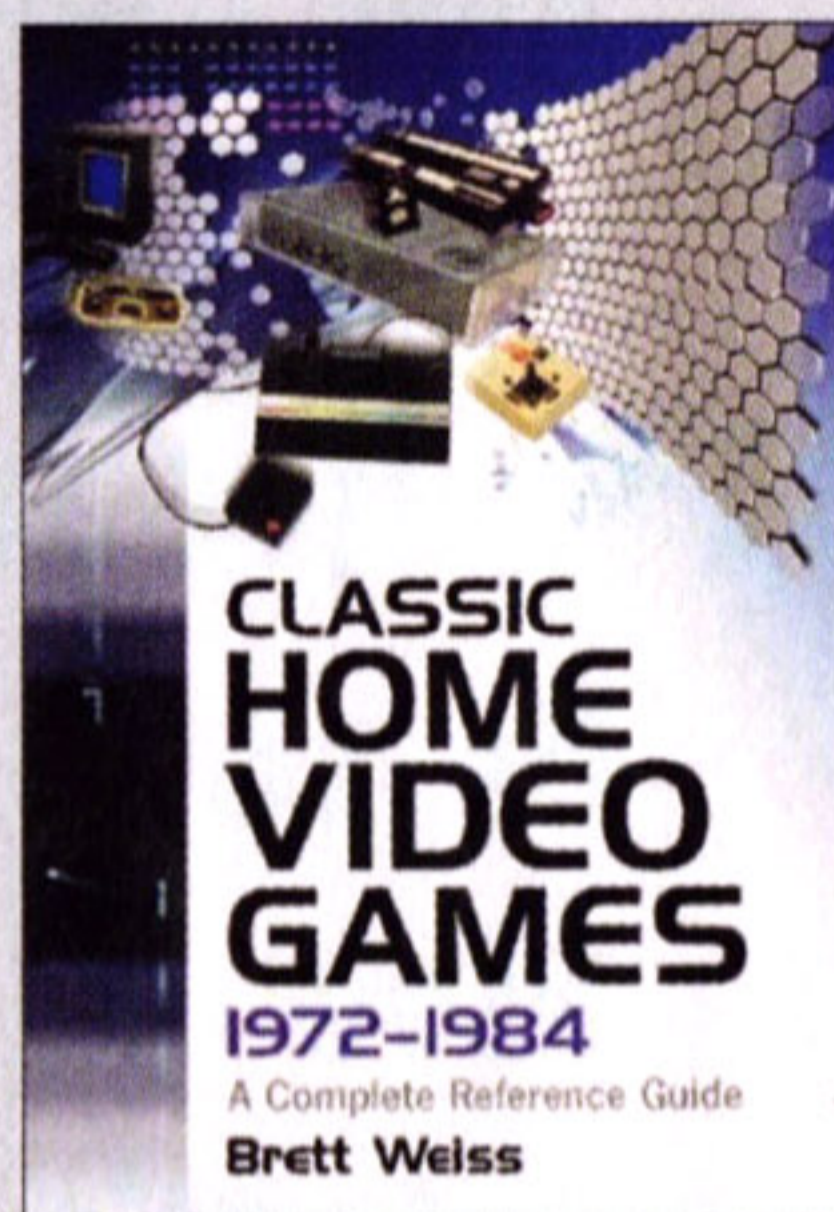
CLASSIC HOME VIDEO GAMES, 1972-1984:

A COMPLETE REFERENCE GUIDE

by Brett Weiss

Now this is our kind of history book. This thoroughly researched reference guide to home game consoles of the pre-NES era comprehensively lists every officially released U.S. game from Asteroids to Zaxxon. If this had been one of our textbooks in school, maybe we actually would have stayed awake in class instead of, well, ditching to go play video games.

\$55.00 • www.mcfarlandpub.com

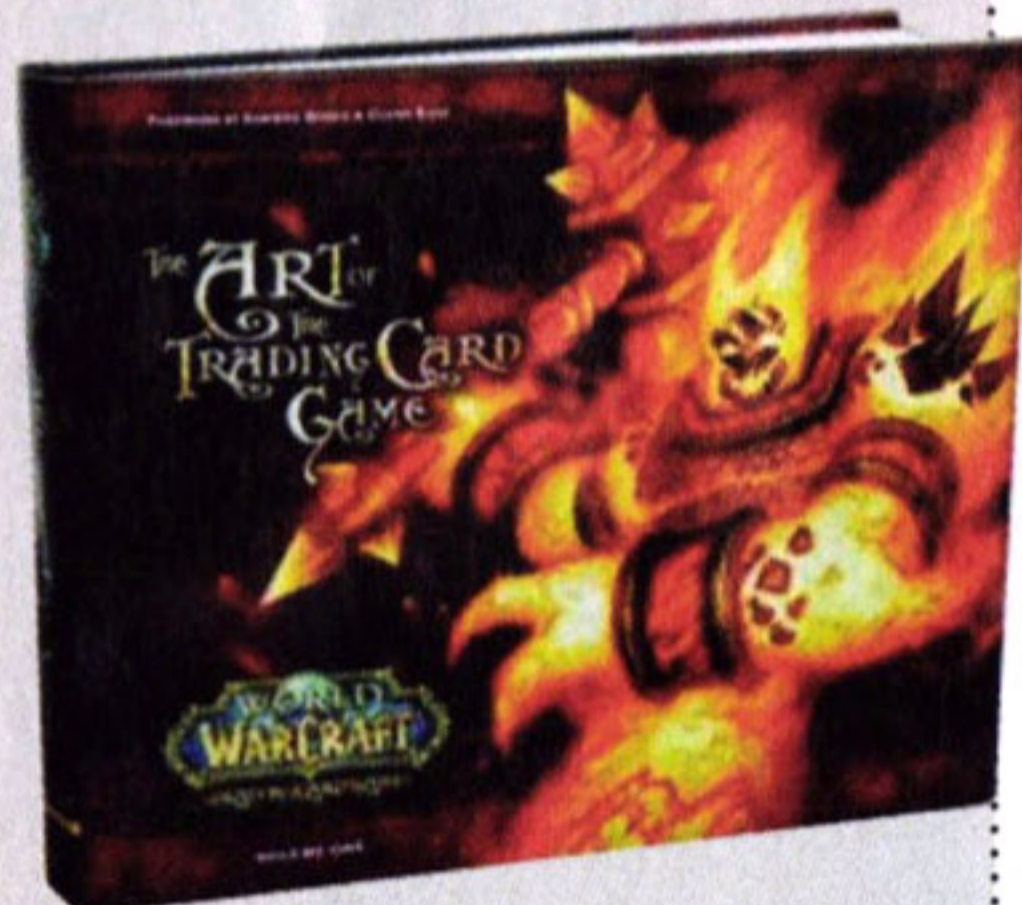


WORLD OF WARCRAFT:

THE ART OF THE TRADING CARD GAME

Whether you play the Upper Deck card game, are hooked on Blizzard's PC monstrosity, or are just a fan of cool fantasy art, you'll enjoy flipping through this book's glossy pages. Featuring more than 300 Warcraft-inspired images from acclaimed artists such as Todd McFarlane and Greg Staples, this is a great tome to add to any Warcraft fan's bookshelf.

\$50.00 • www.chroniclebooks.com

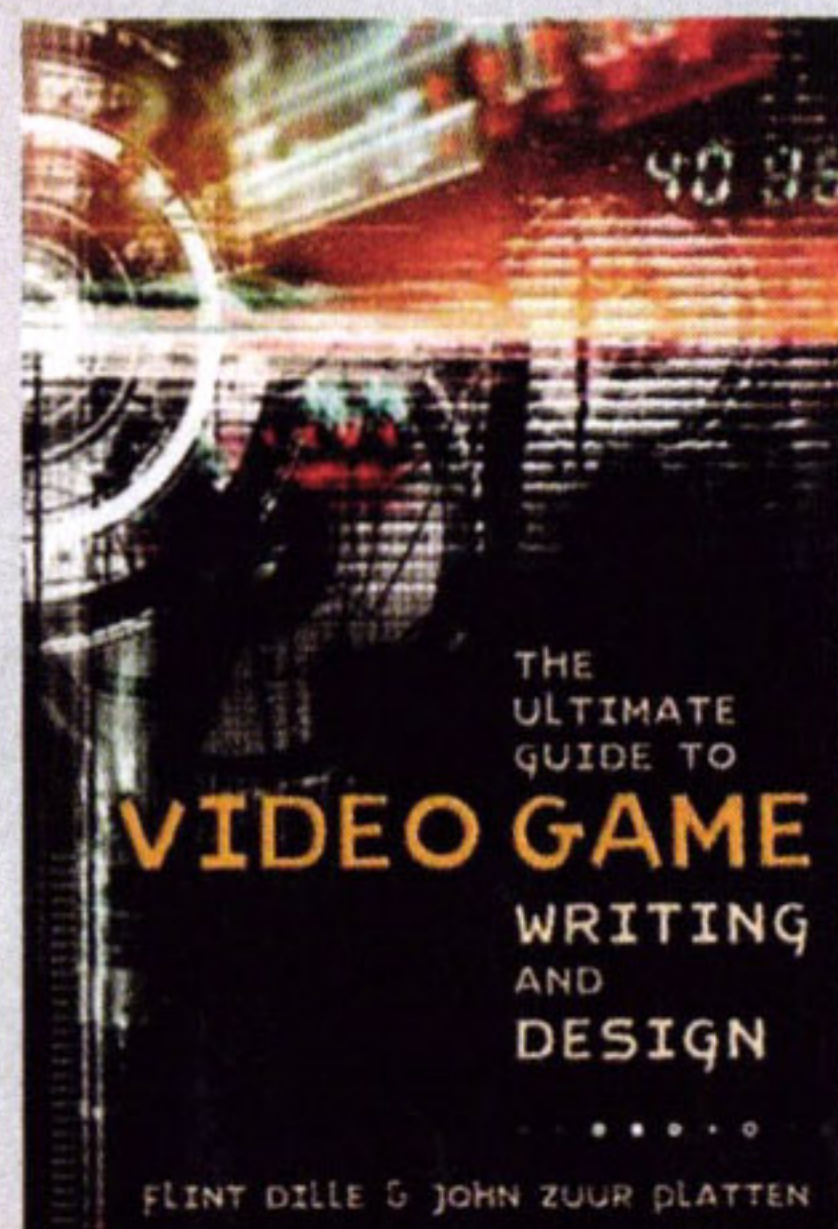


THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO VIDEO GAME WRITING AND DESIGN

by Flint Dille & John Zuur Platten

Have you always wanted to get into video game development but felt like you needed a little guidance? If only there were some ultimate guide to writing and designing video games. But wait, there is! Authored by the writers of The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, this book provides useful tips on writing dialogue, presenting your ideas to developers and publishers, and creating a design document.

\$19.95 • www.watsonguptill.com



peripherals

NYKO ZERO WIRELESS CONTROLLER FOR PS3



PASSABLE ●●●●●●●●●●

For every quality we like about the Zero, it has some fault that brings its score back down. The extra long USB cord and removable rechargeable batteries are nice, but we don't find its horseshoe design very comfortable. The 2.4 GHz wireless signal covers 30 feet and doesn't drop its signal, but the face buttons and d-pad aren't as responsive as we'd like. And even though this is the first PS3 controller to support rumble and tilt sensitivity, it doesn't provide rumble support for PS2 games. Sorry, PS3 owners, we might be waiting until the DualShock 3 releases before we get a great PS3 controller.

\$59.99 • www.nyko.com

peripherals

DREAMGEAR LAVA GLOW CONTROLLER FOR PS3

BAD ●●●●●●●●●●

These Lava Glow controllers have a cool looking '70's-vibe to them. Their best feature is probably the 2.4 GHz wireless signal that doesn't cut out in the middle of the action like Sony's first-party pads do. Our problems with this gamepad are that the buttons feel a little hard, it lacks tilt functionality (making it unusable for certain games that don't allow you to turn this feature off), and it doesn't have the rumble functionality Sony is rolling out soon. Buyer beware.

\$39.99 • www.dreamgear.net

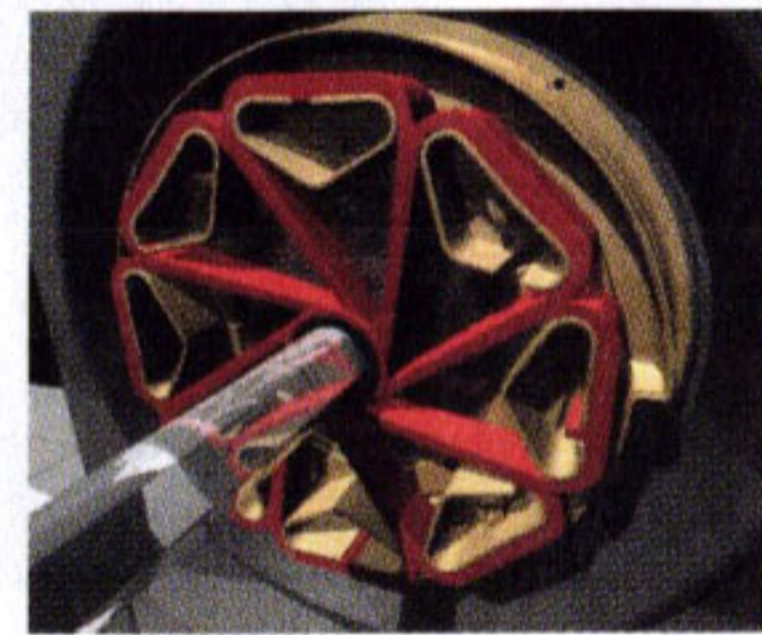


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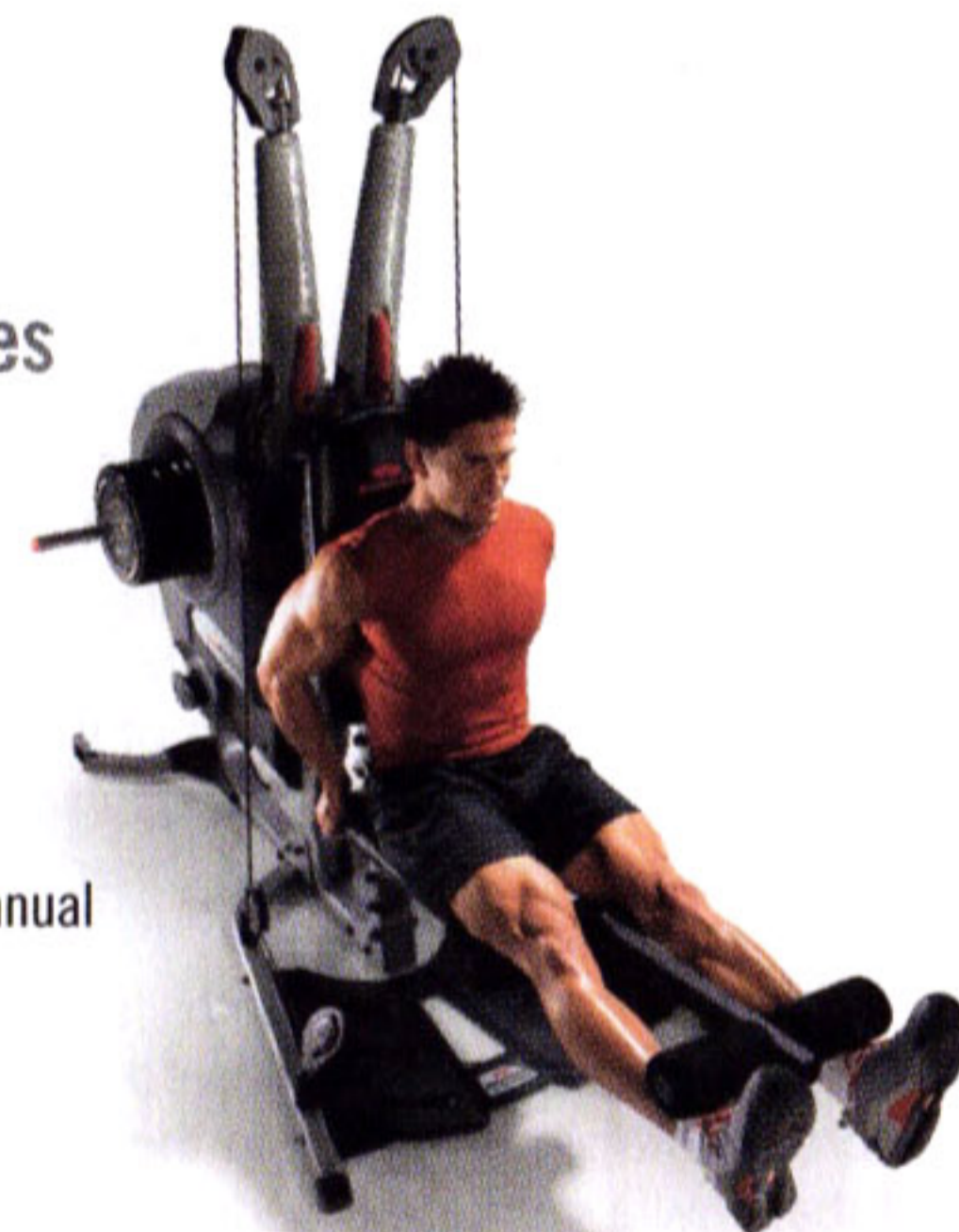
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THE CASUAL CRUSH

THE DANGEROUS GLUT IN THE MOBILE PHONE MARKET



BY THOR JENSEN,
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER,
GAMELAB



If you're reading this magazine, you more than likely don't play the games I make. My name is Thor Jensen, and I'm a project manager for a New York company called Gamelab. I work primarily in the "casual games" industry, those downloadable titles that you can usually play for an hour before you have to shell out any money. Those games that are played by moms, kids, and anybody who can move a mouse. Those games that aren't hardcore. Those games that everybody seems to want to make these days.

In 2003, we released a little game called Diner Dash through our publisher at the time, PlayFirst. In the years that followed, there have been quite literally dozens of clones and knock-offs of the game, to the point that most major casual game portals have now created a "time management" category to house them. We won't mention the names here, but almost all of them feature an alliterative title and a female protagonist that the player controls by clicking areas on-screen to accomplish tasks. The difference between all of these titles is quite minimal – most of them feature the exact same gameplay coated in a different graphical style. When we released Diner Dash, a hit game in the casual market would stay on a portal's Top 10 list for many months, sometimes up to a year. Now, a title's considered a hit if it lasts more than a single month in the Top 10. A market that saw a game released every few weeks is now seeing multiple titles debuting every single day, often with several of them being nothing but clones of previous hit games. The massive crush of new games is squeezing the air out of the market, little by little.

To compound the crush, more traditional developers and publishers have announced their intentions to enter the casual game space, both through downloadable titles as well as more tradi-

tional retail games. Electronic Arts acquired casual games portal Pogo.com and has created an entire division dedicated to developing original casual titles. Ubisoft is starting a sustained push into the casual market. And many other publishers are putting significant resources into exploring this new territory. The market success of the Nintendo Wii, which has eschewed the traditional gamer demographic with titles aimed at pre-teens, women, and other non-gamers, has inspired many companies to plumb what seems to be a rich demographic. But is this overwhelming focus on moving product into the casual market laying the groundwork for another industry-wide collapse?

The video game industry has endured crashes before – first, when the Atari 2600 drowned under a tidal wave of shoddily-produced games, and second when the Super Nintendo ended the 16-bit generation amid a similar deluge of licensed product. The connecting thread here is simple – too much product, released without sufficient attention to quality control. Software publishers were convinced that gamers would buy anything, and for a while, they were right. Unfortunately, you can only fool so many people for so long, and each time the market imploded on itself, dozens of studios closed and hundreds of developers were laid off. In the wake of the 1983 crash, several million copies of Atari's flop E.T. game were buried in a New Mexico landfill. These industry-wide crashes are deadly for gamers, developers, and publishers alike.

A similar trend is already developing in the existing casual market. Whenever a truly innovative title becomes a hit, it's only a matter of time before dozens of developers hop on the bandwagon, knocking out clones as fast as they can release them. Russell Carroll, director of marketing for Reflexive Arcade, recently posted an essay on website Gamasutra where he revealed some disheartening facts. After examining three years worth

Experienced
developers
and
publishers
entering the
casual game
space is by
no means a
bad thing.

of sales data, he determined that clones of the three major casual game genres (time management, Match 3, and hidden-object games) outsell games with original gameplay mechanics at a rate of 20:1. If traditional game publishers attempt to enter this market without adapting their development methodology to accommodate this sad reality, they'll quickly find themselves drowning in a sea of product that they helped create, with nothing distinguishing their titles but the overhead that comes with a larger corporate structure.

Am I advocating that developers and publishers "go with the flow," knock out clones, and enable this system to continue? Is that the only way to release a financially successful game in this market? Absolutely not. If developers do not prioritize innovation, there will be nothing for the rest of the market to clone, and the industry will eventually collapse inward on itself. That is one thing that larger companies could take the lead in, if they chose to. With the resources at their disposal, they could invest a greater amount of time into both development and testing than most casual development companies can. Whether that will actually be the case is anybody's guess.

Experienced developers and publishers entering the casual game space is by no means a bad thing. The production values and design experience they can bring to the table will no doubt help create exciting, compelling titles. If they're truly serious about working to open up the industry to a wider audience of gamers, more power to them. But if they're just trying to jump aboard the latest bandwagon and pumping product into an already straining market, well – those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Just keep me out of your landfill. ■■■

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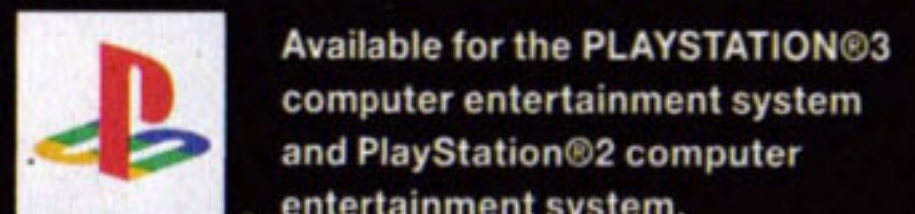
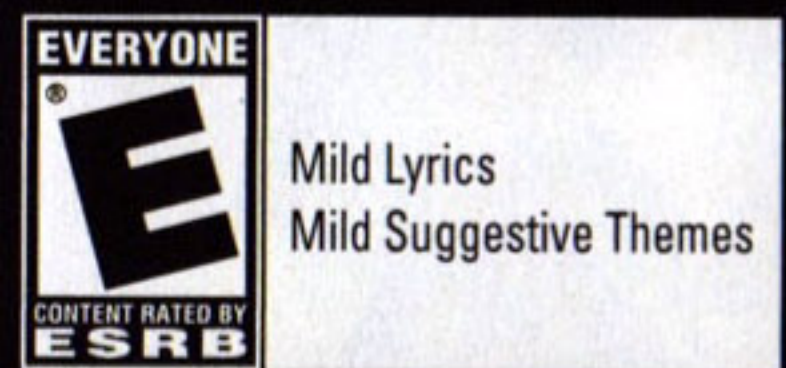
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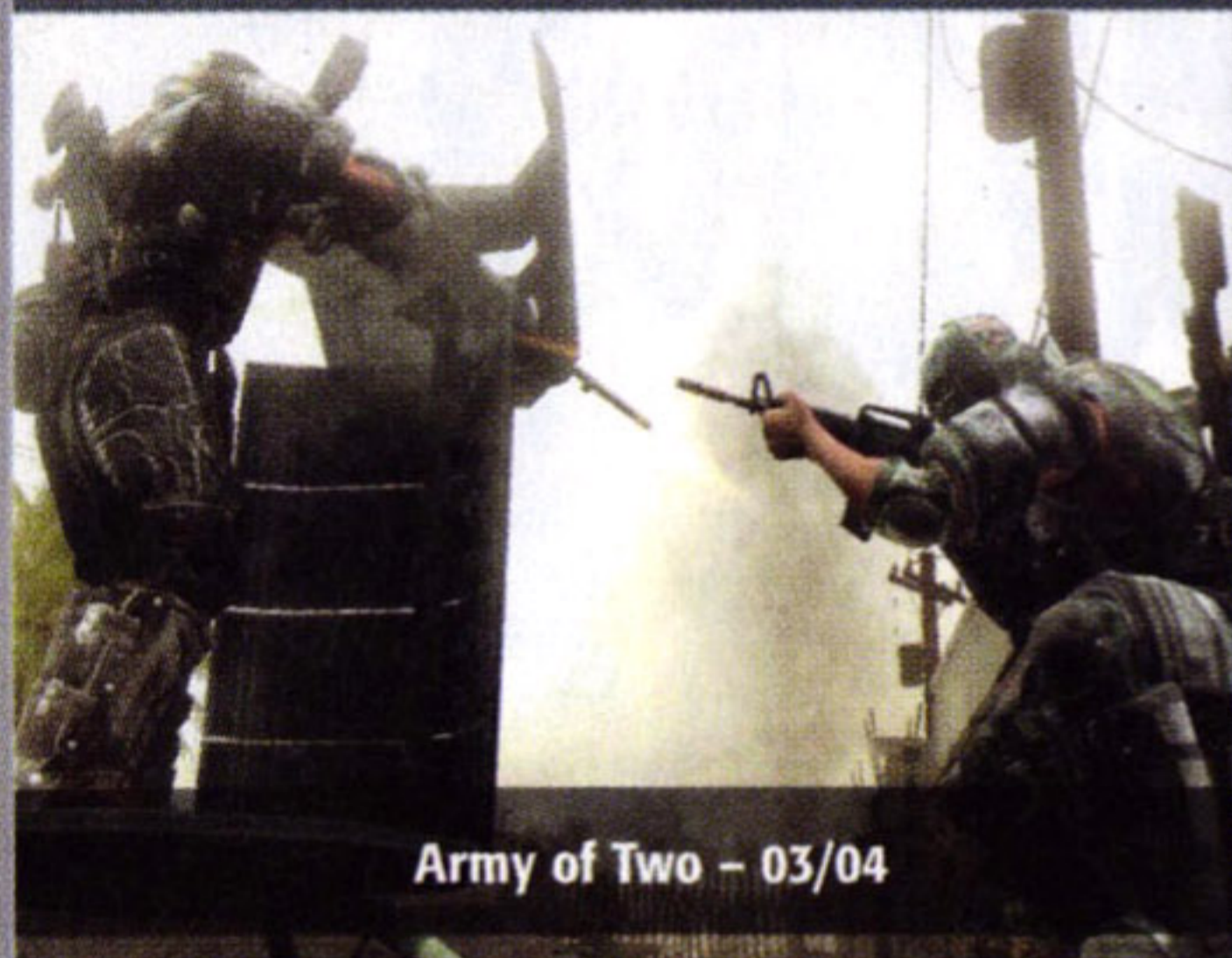
sat

march

Ninja Reflex - 03/04



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Army of Two - 03/04

04-05

NEW RELEASES

- Army of Two - PS3, 360
- Bully: Scholarship Edition - 360, Wii
- Dawn of War: Soulstorm - PC
- Destroy All Humans: Big Willy Unleashed - Wii, PSP
- Destroy All Humans 3: Path of Furon - PS3, 360
- The DOG Island - Wii, PS2
- Eco Creatures: Save the Forest - DS
- God of War: Chains of Olympus - PSP
- Go Pets: Vacation Island - DS
- Imagine: Figure Skater - DS
- Lost Planet: Extreme Condition - PS3
- Major League Baseball 2K8 - PS3, 360, PSP
- MLB 08: The Show - PS3, PSP
- Ninja Reflex - Wii
- Sega Superstar Tennis - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, DS
- Spiderwick: Chronicles, The - Wii
- Viking: Battle for Asgard - PS3, 360
- Wild Arms XF - PSP

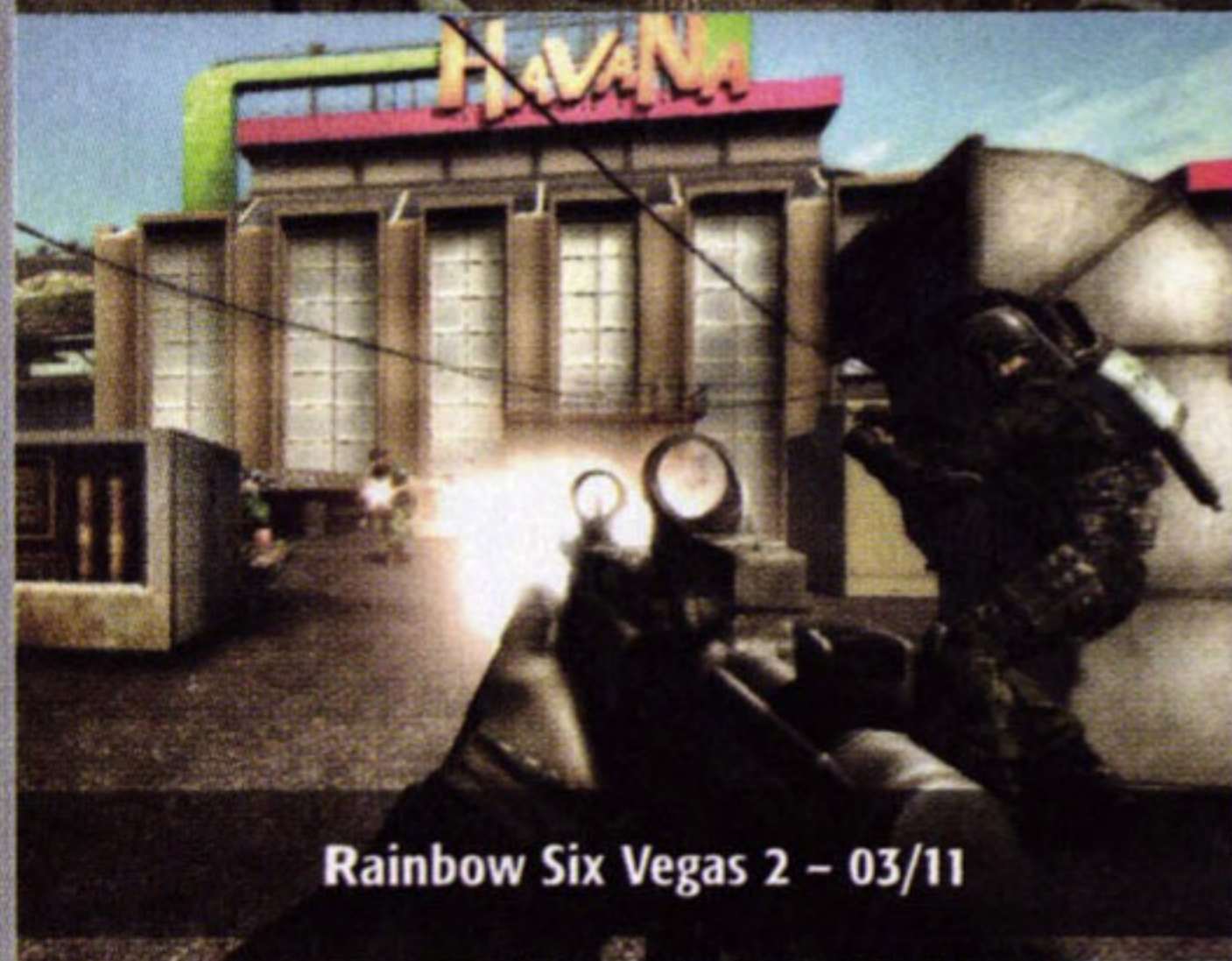
06

SECRET INVASION SAGA #1

Marvel Comics continues to pump out the universe-changing events. Now it's time for the alien species the Skrull to take a shot at earth. For years, they've lived among us, and even became us. Now it's time to find out what their true intentions of blending with humanity are.

07

Roland Emmerich's "historical" epic, *10,000 BC*, opens in theaters today. *Jurassic Park* had a T-Rex and raptors. This film has stupid hairy elephants. Our gut tells us this film is going to blow, since no caveman movie will ever be better than *Encino Man*.



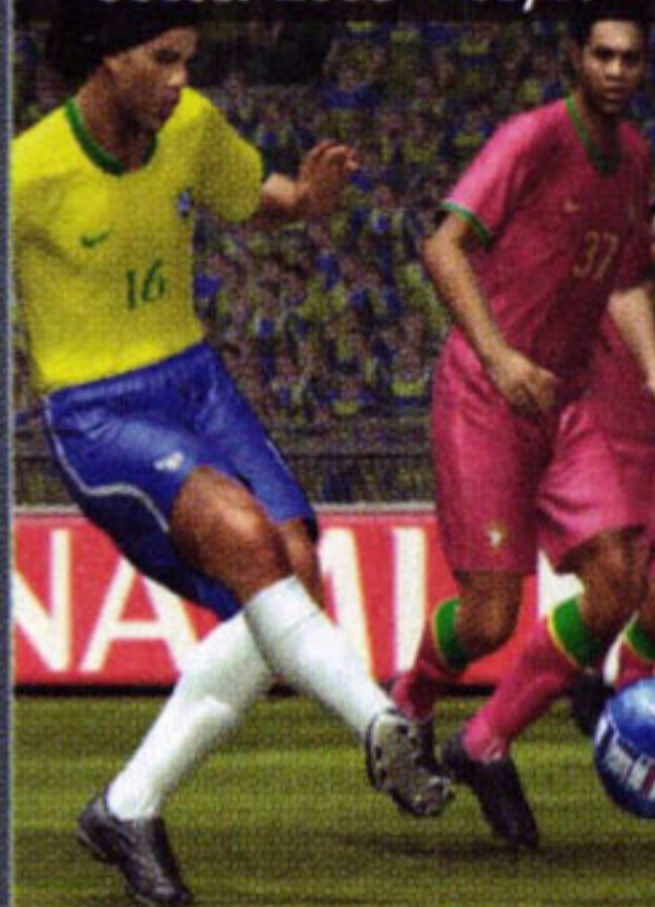
Rainbow Six Vegas 2 - 03/11

11-12

NEW RELEASES

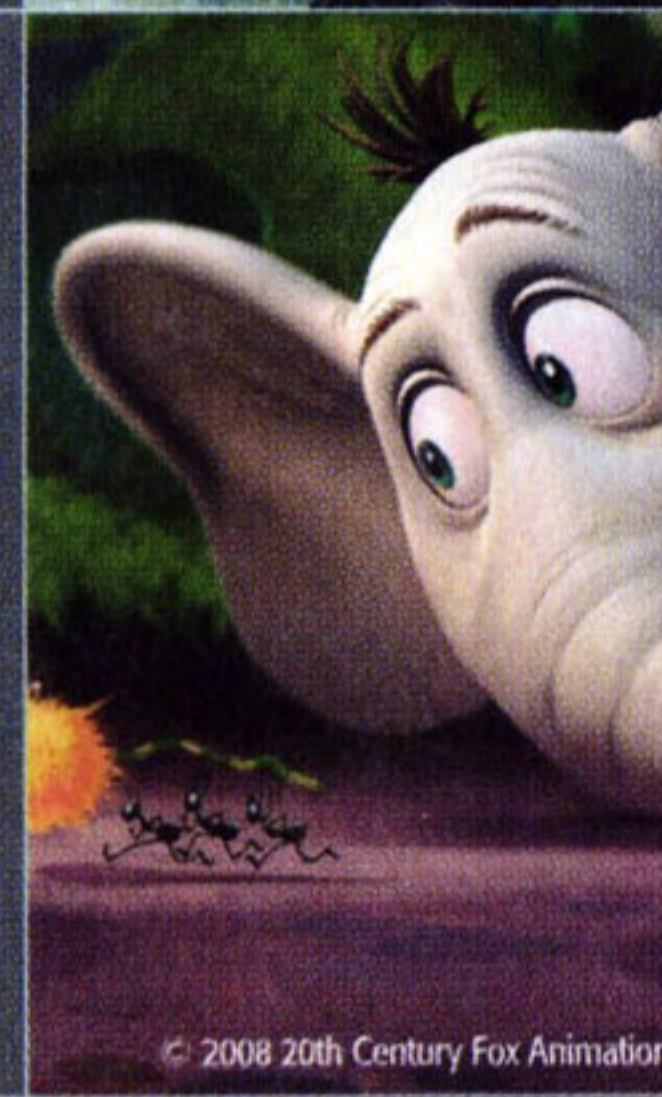
- Boom Blox - Wii
- Buzz! The Hollywood
- Buzz! Jr. Robo Jam - PS2
- Chessmaster - PSP
- Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates - DS
- Indoor Sports - Wii
- Lost in Blue 3 - DS
- Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer - DS
- Paws & Claws Pet Resort - DS
- Petz Bunz - DS
- Prey the Stars - DS
- Rainbow Six Vegas 2 - PS3, 360
- Warhammer: Battle Marchi - 360
- Winning Eleven: Pro Soccer 2008 - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP
- Worms: A Space Oddity - Wii

Winning Eleven: Pro Soccer 2008 - 03/11



14

Since being read to millions of children each year isn't good enough, *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who* is now a movie. Jim Carrey, Steve Carrell, Seth Rogan, and a bunch of other acting losers (Dane Cook) provide voicework. This brings us one step closer to a future of illiteracy (again, like Dane Cook).



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17

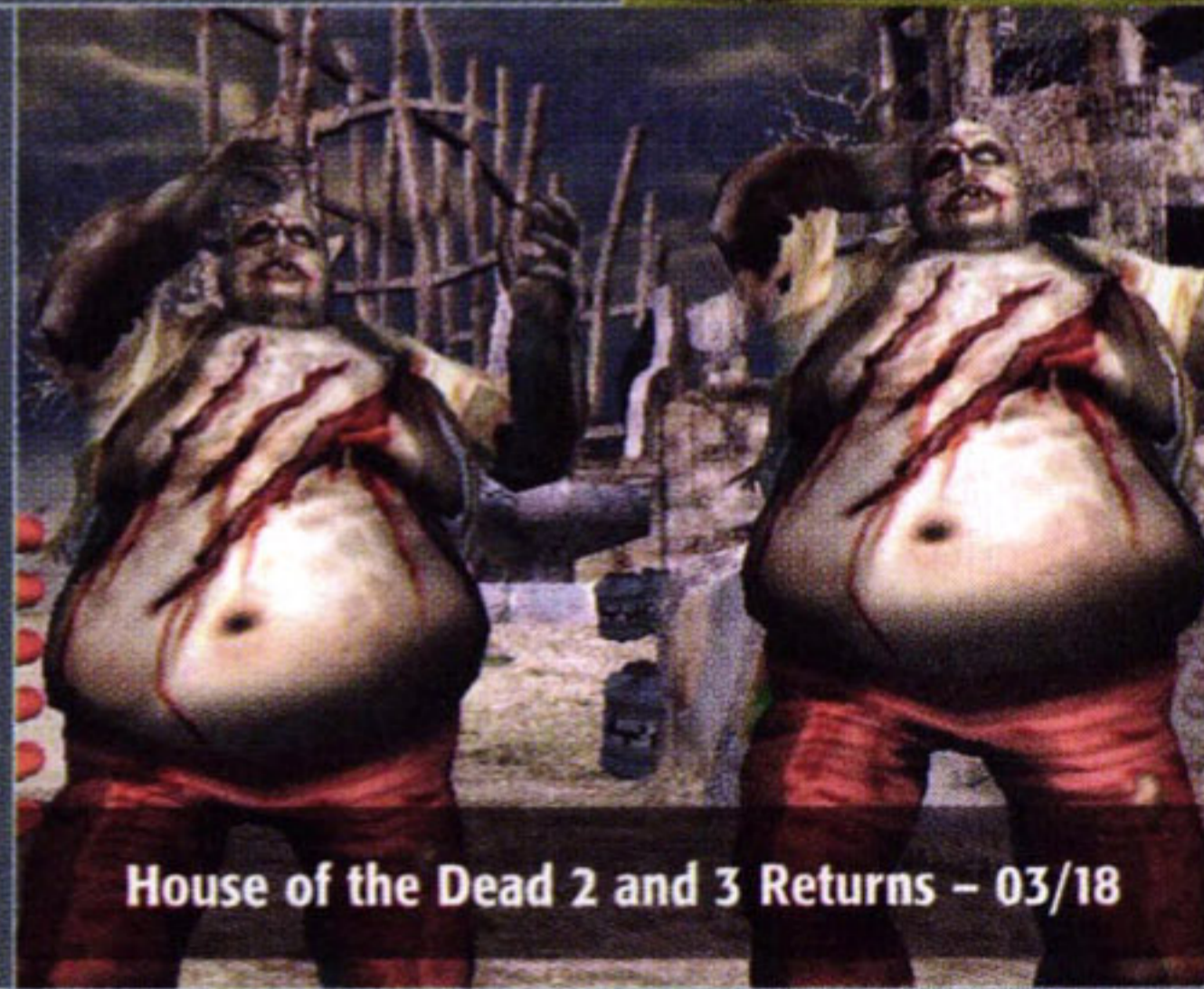
TORONTO INDEPENDENT GAMES FESTIVAL

It's not exactly Sundance, but this is a great place for the indie-minded to talk games, as this festival focuses mostly on independent third-party games. If you're lucky, you may run into Ben (if you do, please return him to the address on his tag).

18

NEW RELEASES

- Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures - PC
- Gran Turismo 5: Prologue - PS3
- House of the Dead 2 and 3 Returns - Wii
- N+ - PSP, DS
- Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword - DS
- Samurai Warriors 2: Xtreme Legends - 360, PS2
- Target Terror - Wii
- World in Conflict - 360



House of the Dead 2 and 3 Returns - 03/18

21

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA SEASON 4

The final season begins sometime this month (writer strike pending), but why waste your days watching it when we can ruin the show for you. After a bloody space battle, the Battlestar finally reaches Earth... a planet overrun by intelligent warrior cats!!!! DUM DUM DUM!!!!



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23-24

MOBILE GAMES FORUM 2008

Since there really is nothing to do or see in London, why not venture to the Mobile Games Forum, where industry insiders discuss the future of gaming on the go.

25

NEW RELEASES

- Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath - 360
- Dark Sector - PS3, 360
- Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core - PSP
- Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 3 - PS2
- Obscure Aftermath - Wii, PS2
- Spectral Force 3 - 360
- Warriors Orochi - PSP



Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core - 03/25

28

GREEN LANTERN #29

In the brightest day, in the blackest night, no evil shall escape my sight... This chant that the Green Lanterns spout out more than we'd like is actually a prophecy. This issue, dubbed Secret Origin, delves into Hal Jordan's past, Abin Sur's death, and the true meaning behind "the blackest night."



30

31

GAMES... GAMES... GAMES... GAMES

game3302: ARE YOU SMARTER THAN A 5TH GRADER

game3303: WHEELS OF FORTUNE

game3304: PUZZLE 8888

game3305: AGE OF EMPIRES

game3306: BLADE TRINITY

game3307: Pimp My Ride

game3308: MONOPOLY TYCOON

game3309: GAME OF LIFE

game3310: SPIDER-MAN

game3311: SLINGO BINGO

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wall5889: Skull with purple wings

wall5895: Skulls

wall5896: NOBODY IS PERFECT MY NAME IS NOBODY...

wall5897: Dice

wall5898: Underwear

wall5899: 7

wall5891: Blue figure

wall5899: Green face

wall5900: WHITE TRASH CHICKS ARE HOT

wall5901: BAD GIRL

wall5902: YOU ARE SO OFF MY BUDDY LIST

wall5892: Blue figure

GAMES... GAMES... GAMES... GAMES

*not available for T-Mobile, Verizon Wireless & Virgin Mobile customers

REALTONES

- Sensual Seduction - Snoop Dogg **true9668**
- Apologize - Timbaland **true9669**
- Kiss Kiss - Chris Brown Feat T-Pain **true9670**
- Crank That - Soulja Boy Tell Em **true9671**
- I'm So Hood - DJ Khaled Feat T Pain **true9672**
- Pop Bottles - Birdman **true9673**
- I'm Me - Lil Wayne **true9674**
- Duffle Bag Boy - Playaz Circle **true9675**
- Suffocate - J. Holiday **true9676**
- With You - Chris Brown **true9677**
- Shawty Is A 10 - The Dream **true9678**
- Girlfriend - Bow Wow & Omarion **true9679**
- Sweetest Girl (Dollar Bill) - Wyclef Feat Akon **true9680**
- Crank Dat Batman - Pop It Off Boyz **true9681**
- My Drink n' My 2 Step - Cassidy **true9682**
- Bed - J. Holiday **true9683**
- Good Life - Kanye West **true9684**
- Don't Stop The Music - Rihanna **true9685**
- White Girl - USDA **true9686**
- Who The F Is That? - Dolla Feat T-Pain **true9687**

THEMES

theme4617: Operator

theme4618: Fire

theme4619: Operator

theme4620: Operator

theme4621: Operator

theme4622: Operator

theme4623: Operator

theme4624: Operator

wall5893: Blonde woman

wall5903: CONGRATULATIONS YOU'RE AN IDIOT

wall5904: HELP WANTED SEXY GROUPIES FOR MY BAND

wall5905: COURAGE

wall5906: Money

wall5907: Frog

wall5908: BACK OFF

wall5894: Cards

wall5909: Green texture

wall5910: JESUS ROCKS!

wall5911: CLICK HERE TO SEE ME NAKED

SCREENSAVERS

move7712: Blue figure

move7713: Money

move7714: HELP US OUT!

move7715: CLICK HERE to see me NAKED

move7716: Blue figure

move7717: I ♥ U ...sometimes

HOW TO ORDER

1 Go to: Main Menu

2 Select: Message Center

3 Text Orderword: wall5889

4 Send to: 75555

HOW TO DOWNLOAD

5 Go To Inbox: Message Center

6 Select Link: Browser Msg Inbox

7 Start Download: Message 1

8 Save and Enjoy!

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> **PUBLISHER** SEGA

> **DEVELOPER** GEARBOX SOFTWARE

> **RELEASE** 2009



PEACE
THROUGH
SUPERIOR
FIREPOWER

ALIENS

COLONIAL MARINES

Ripley is dead. None of the soldiers dispatched from the military ship *Sulaco* survived the infestation of the colony Hadley's Hope. The details of their doomed struggle against a predatory alien species on the moon LV-426 are unknown. In the absence of firsthand accounts, only one clue remains to illuminate the unexplained disappearance of Hicks, Vasquez, Hudson, and the rest of the squad. That clue is the *Sulaco* itself, which has been found floating through space, the hypersleep pods ejected after an apparent fire in the chamber. The ship does not respond to any communications. Sent in to investigate the disappearance, a new squad of colonial marines is about to stumble upon the horror Lieutenant Ellen Ripley sacrificed herself to destroy: ruthlessly adaptable creatures bred as weapons and created for war. Hundreds of them.



“ A few years ago, we made a list of a lot of projects that we would really like to work on. At the top of my list was Aliens. ”

Brian Martel, creative director



The gaming industry has a love affair with space marines. As one of the most recognizable and popular archetypes in entertainment, these futuristic super-soldiers defend humanity with a mix of heavy weaponry and advanced technology, and they are always just a dropship away from the unknown. The space marine mythos is the centerpiece of some of gaming's greatest success stories – Doom, StarCraft, and Halo all use the concept to pit players against an alien menace. The elements these games share, from the standard-issue pulse rifle to the corridors of a derelict freighter, are not due to coincidence. They all draw from the same source material: *Aliens*, the movie that set the precedent for an entire genre.

Taking inspiration from Robert Heinlein's novel *Starship Troopers*, James Cameron's *Aliens* took the notion of soldiers-in-space and created the visual and thematic conventions that instantly became the standard for military science fiction – a standard that remains intact today. But if *Aliens* is the progenitor of this incredibly fertile brand of fiction, then why has it been eight years since a true Alien game was released on home consoles? Conceptually similar titles (like *Gears of War* and *Mass Effect*) enjoy praise while the Alien franchise lies dormant...but not for much longer. Thanks to a passionate team at Dallas-based Gearbox Software, gamers will have a chance to experience space marines in their native habitat: the *Aliens* fiction.

"A few years ago, we made of list of a lot projects that we would really like to work on,"

recalls creative director Brian Martel. "At the top of my list was *Aliens*." Art director Brian Cozzens adds, "We're finally at the point where the game can be made in a similar blockbuster style as the movie was – and be a legitimate treatment, not a watered-down version." The game is called *Aliens* for a reason; its look, feel, action, and characters are based on the film *Aliens*, not the franchise as a whole. With the numerous technological and graphical possibilities afforded by current consoles, Gearbox believes it is finally possible to translate all of the film's signature elements into authentic and exciting gameplay.

Put briefly, *Aliens* is about a small group of archetypal characters, a moderate arsenal of weapons, and a lot of aliens. Addressing the first point, *Aliens: Colonial Marines* will be a first-person shooter with mechanics that stress working together as a unit. The story begins with four Colonial Marines (currently named Winter, Bella, O'Neal, and Monday) sent in to investigate the *Sulaco*, the ship Ripley escaped in at the end of *Aliens*. Unlike many FPS titles, there is not one central hero character – the role is shared among the whole squad. The game reinforces that notion by assigning the player to control a set marine for a particular mission; in the single-player campaign, you will have the chance to experience everyone's perspective.

All of the Colonial Marines have considerable combat potential, but their abilities vary depending on specialization and equipment. Marines can carry four weapons – a primary gun, a secondary one, grenades, and a sidearm. The primary weapons, like smart guns and

pulse rifles, are essentially how the team at Gearbox is representing a character's class. A squad member who carries the massive smart gun is the one you count on for firepower, while the riflemen will probably be more versatile. Since certain weapons are tied to a character's role (and personality), you'll stick with them for the duration of your time controlling a particular marine. "We wish to remain authentic to true soldiers, so characters generally do not drop or pick up weapons," explains lead designer Keith Schuler. "That is one of the reasons we switch between characters during the game – to keep our soldiers realistic, but still give the player access to different weaponry throughout the game."

The secondary weapons will vary and be customized according to the character, like Hicks' shotgun in *Aliens*. Grenades are pretty self-explanatory, and the sidearms are small one-handed weapons that characters can use for defense while using another item, like the motion tracker. To further differentiate the characters, each one will also carry a special item that can interact with allies or the environment. For instance, the hacking tool will allow you to open sealed doors, the torch can weld things shut, and allies using a medical kit can revive you as well as neutralize the inevitable acid burns.

Regardless of which squad member you're controlling, you will have access to the abilities of your entire team. You may be placed in the shoes of just one marine, but the game allows

CONTINUED ON PAGE 51 >>

■ In the pipe, five by five. Aliens: Colonial Marines uses the original dropship, not a re-imagined knock-off like those featured in other space shooters



■ Even though Ripley's sleeping chamber was jettisoned, there are others aboard the *Sulaco* that your team will explore



■ There will be some driving segments, but the gameplay is focused primarily on squad shooting



CONCEPT TO REALITY

In the history of licensed video games, there have been many attempts to expand the universe of a particular franchise by introducing new settings. In *Aliens*, players will definitely see things that weren't in the films, but Gearbox's approach lends an unusual credibility to these departures. For instance, the team is cooperating with the original conceptual designer for the *Sulaco*, Syd Mead, to ensure that everything is perfectly in line. For instance, the Colonial Marines' exploration of the *Sulaco* will take them into unseen parts of the ship, so Mead created art to represent how those areas would have looked had they been in the film. This level of consistency and detail is just part of the team's commitment to authenticity. As you can see in these comparison shots, the areas that overlap between the film and the game will be recreated with impressive accuracy. The team even contacted Kodak about the movie's film stock to get the details on each color channel to work into the shader.



■ In-Game



■ Movie



■ Since your view is uncluttered by any sort of HUD, you will be able to fully appreciate terrifying moments like this

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 48

you to issue commands to your individual squad-mates. In addition to handling basic move and attack orders, you can give context-sensitive commands by targeting specific parts of your surroundings, such as hacking doors, sealing air vents, and setting up gun turrets.

You won't be dictating your squad's actions with the level of specificity of *Rainbow Six Vegas*, but the tactical element still plays a large role in combat. After all, we all know what happens to the marine who just runs into a hive with guns blazing. Aliens are nearly perfect hunters, and that requires a more measured approach, which also serves to highlight the horror and suspense elements prevalent in the film. Your foes will rarely just come barreling at you, and they never stay back and fire from behind cover. "There's a problem with aliens — they don't have a lot of distance weapons," observes Martel. Aliens hide in air ducts, above pipes in the ceiling, and under the grating on the floor, just waiting for the moment to strike. In the game, they will use the environment to their full advantage.

As a result, players may have to reevaluate the standard squad shooter approach. Position, firepower, and cooperation take precedence over finding cover in *Aliens*. One member will probably be holding the classic motion tracker (which emits the signature tapping sound pulled straight from the Fox archives), because even if you can't see the aliens it doesn't mean they aren't there. Another marine might be up front with a flamethrower, ready to stem a tide of xenomorphs, while the other two could guard the flanks with iconic pulse rifles. Holding this position, you could make it through a darkened corridor unscathed...or you might hear a rapid tapping noise

as a swarm of blue dots appears on the tracker. At that point, you'd better stay alert and dig in for a rough fight on all fronts.

This atmosphere of tension and isolation is an important part of *Aliens*, and thankfully, you don't need to take on the threat alone. Gearbox is committed to making players feel like an integral part of a functioning unit, and part of that is offering support for four-player co-op in the campaign. You can delve into world with up to three friends at your side, uncovering the mystery and horror together. Even better, it will allow for a combination of split-screen and online play; two players can share one screen in offline co-op, or you can go online to fill the vacancies. Players can easily drop into and out of a game at will, and the AI will handle all marines that aren't player-controlled.

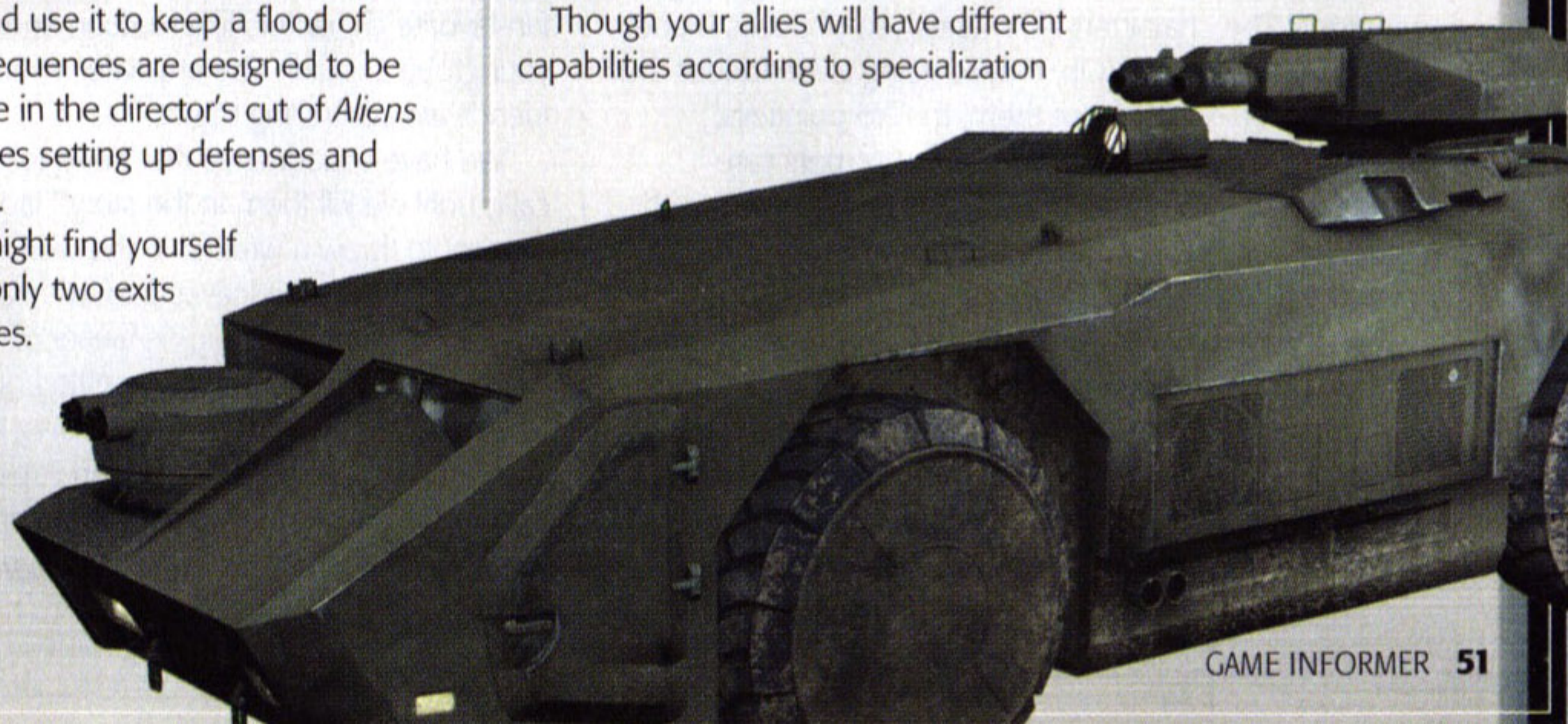
Being able to coordinate your assaults with other humans will help keep you alive, but you won't always be in a position to use conventional tactics. There will be plenty of corridor firefights, but at certain points you will need to make a stand — find a somewhat defensible position and use it to keep a flood of aliens at bay. These sequences are designed to be reminiscent of a scene in the director's cut of *Aliens* that depicts the marines setting up defenses and securing their location.

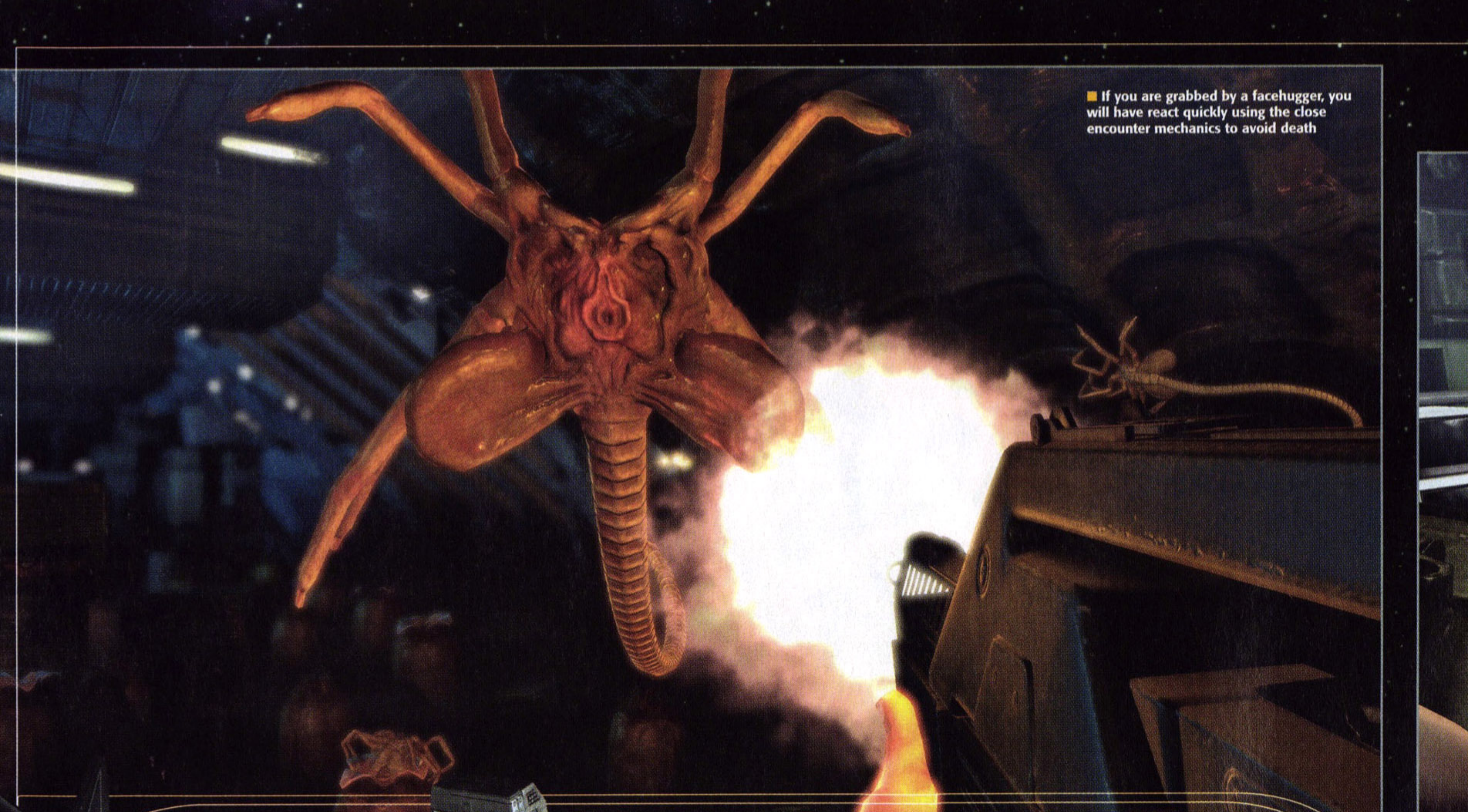
For example, you might find yourself in a hangar bay with only two exits and hostiles on all sides. Before you are completely overwhelmed, you will have a few precious seconds to increase your odds of survival.

You may send one team member to reactivate a gun turret in the corner, order another to close the metal shielding over the windows, and personally seal one of the doors yourself. Then the onslaught begins, and you and your team will have to fight back a stream of aliens while securing the remaining entry points in the room, like ventilation shafts and maintenance hatches. Once all breaches are contained, the aliens eventually relent, and you are free to continue your mission.

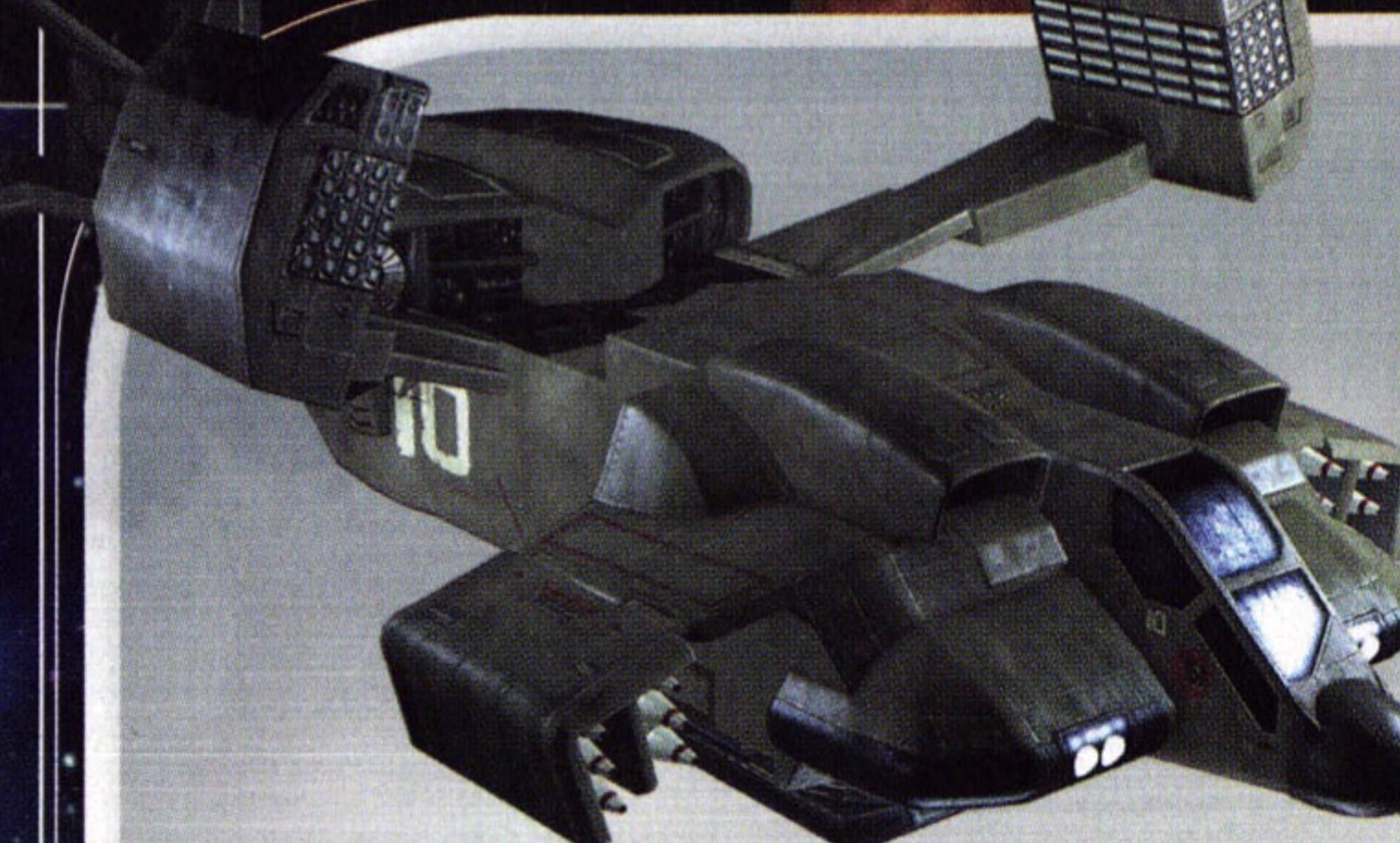
Though these tense situations will undoubtedly be gratifying in single-player, just imagine the heightened thrill of coordinating your survival in four-player co-op. Instead of ordering the AI around, you can work together to identify the problem areas. The development team is currently even toying with the idea of making it possible (though difficult) for a well-organized team to neutralize all liabilities in an environment before a single alien manages to break through. That feat would require an observant and fast-acting team familiar with their abilities both as individuals and as a unit.

Though your allies will have different capabilities according to specialization





■ If you are grabbed by a facehugger, you will have react quickly using the close encounter mechanics to avoid death



(and who is controlling them), they are more than just sets of abilities and weapons. The characters' personalities will provide a more immediate and entertaining way to get to know them. In *Aliens*, some of the most memorable moments come from Hudson's panicked screams or Apone's cigar-chomping attitude, and Gearbox is working hard to ensure that the characters in the game are just as likeable and easy to connect with. "That's something people forget: The characters *do* matter," emphasizes Martel. "Everybody thinks 'Oh, they're going to be fodder,' but if you don't care about them, they're pointless."

One major step toward making gamers care about these marines is Gearbox's collaboration with *Battlestar Galactica* writers Bradley Thompson and David Weddle, an experienced sci-fi writing duo that has infused the popular show with complex characters, political intrigue, and cool dialogue.

Not only does Thompson and Weddle's involvement mean that we'll be treated to plenty of clever mission banter, but it also indicates that the story of *Aliens* will go far beyond the adrift *Sulaco*. A force of

opposing human enemies (your team is comprised of United States Colonial Marines) are also interested in harnessing the aliens as biological weapons, and you'll have to deal with them. Fans of the original *Alien* will also be pleased to know that players may finally learn more about the enigmatic species referred to as "the Space Jockey," an extraterrestrial creature who sat dead in a chair aboard the crashed

Derelict, the ship where the current alien threat seems to have originated. We know that your team will be sent on a

mission back to LV-426 to investigate the Derelict, but how all the events will tie together – and where they will lead – is still a mystery.

As much fun as it will be to watch the characters develop and guide them through the campaign, the co-op feature poses a unique problem to the development of the game's story. A static group of four members runs counter to the goal of staying true to the *Aliens* film. That storyline saw the deaths of fan-favorite characters like Hudson and Vasquez, and your group shouldn't be any safer, even if your best friends are controlling them.

"We have squadmates that need to survive, basically, until we kill them in the story," laughs Schuler. This could throw a wrench in the workings of your group, especially if it leaves a fourth player without a marine to control. Gearbox is aware of the difficulties this presents, but hasn't quite settled on the best way to resolve the situation. "We are going to make the absolute best co-op game we can make to the extent that it doesn't interfere with the best single-player game we can make," states lead programmer Kyle

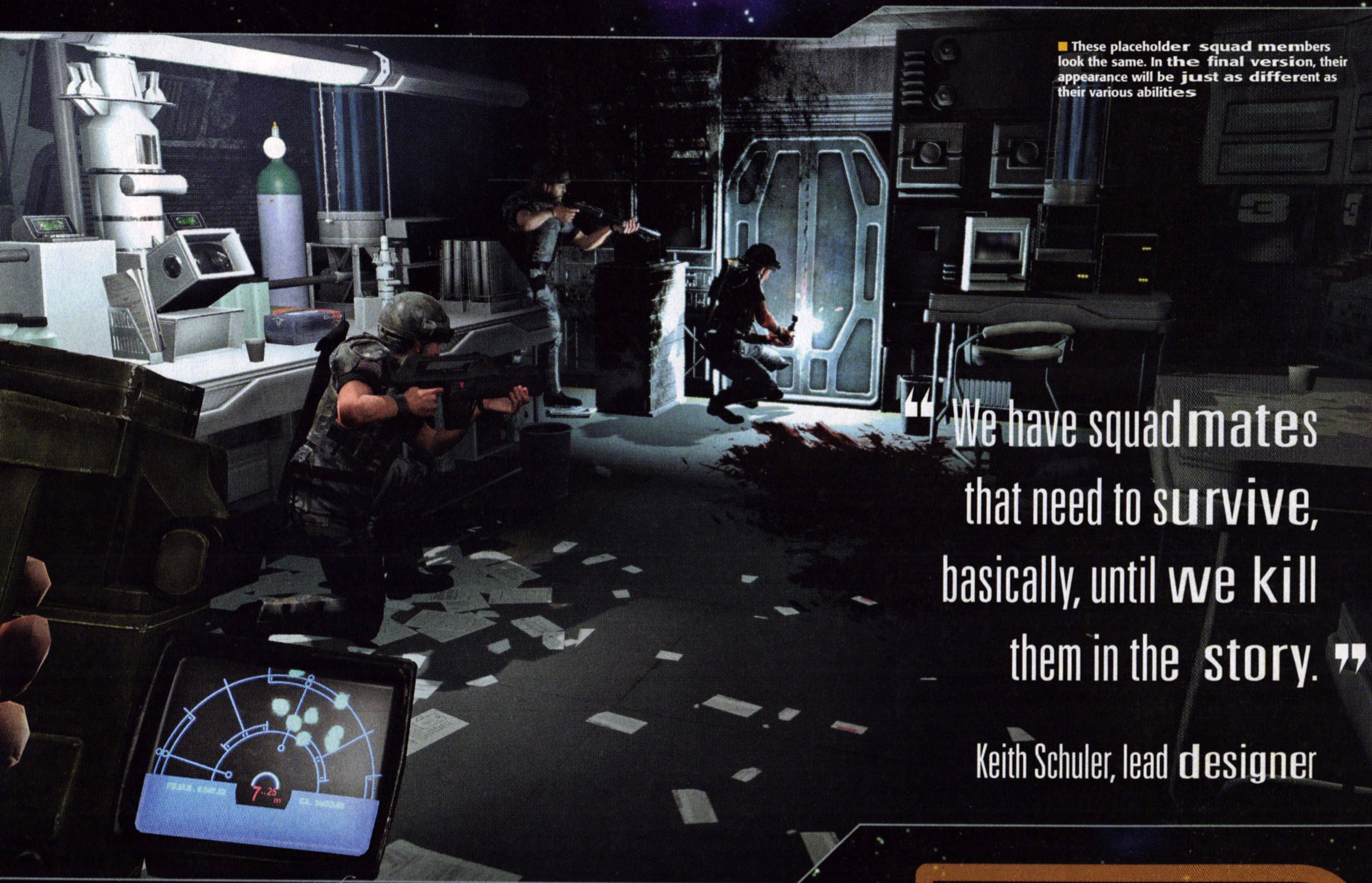
Davis diplomatically. "Obviously, there are some things we can't do if there are always four people alive, but there are ways around that situation. We are going to find them, because it's our job to."

Though one of the hallmarks of the *Alien* franchise, character death is not something that will occur constantly. The development team hopes that the writing and gameplay will help players bond with each of the squad members, so when (and if) someone's time comes, it contributes to the tension and plot of the game. Ideally, players will develop an emotional attachment to all of the main characters. If not, there may be a different kind of mourning. "Even if the player doesn't grieve for the character, they'll at least feel some kind of loss," says Schuler. "Like, 'Aw, man! That was the guy with the awesome smart gun!'" At least some good will come of it all; the scenes where you lose your comrades are sure to be gruesomely entertaining because, as Schuler wryly puts it, "Aliens are kind of deadly."

Previously, technological limitations kept *Alien* titles from truly capturing the terrifying nature of H.R. Giger's creations. After all, when a xenomorph is simply standing in front of your character and repeatedly playing the claw-swipe animation, it doesn't convey the creature's lethal agility or the dread intensity of being hunted. "If you're laying down fire and the aliens are just there in your face, it just isn't much fun," observes Martel. Those days are over.

It makes sense to shoot at aliens when they are at a distance, but considering their acid blood, spiked tails, and second mouths, confronting them in melee range is a deadly proposition. In order to communicate the sheer power and ferocity of the xenomorphs, the team is implementing a mechanic it is calling "close encounters." These are scripted

CONTINUED ON PAGE 54 »



■ These placeholder squad members look the same. In the final version, their appearance will be just as different as their various abilities

“We have squad mates that need to survive, basically, until we kill them in the story.”

Keith Schuler, lead designer



■ Using a turret to mow down xenomorphs is a good way to avoid being splashed by acid blood

ONLINE BUG HUNT

Aliens will have multiplayer capabilities in addition to the four-player cooperative mode. Beyond that, no specifics have been confirmed. However, we couldn't help but overhear several team members discussing their fondness for *Quake II*'s Gloom mod. That particular mod has an *Aliens* flavor, with humans fighting spiders in upgrade-driven combat, and we would definitely be excited if something similar were to find its way into *Aliens*' online multiplayer.



■ The *Quake II* Gloom mod

■ The LED on the pulse rifle will display your allies' ammo, so even in the middle of a fight, you can see how they're doing



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 52

sequences that allow players to witness an alien that the regular gameplay wouldn't otherwise accommodate.

Similar in concept to the button-press minigames popularized by *God of War*, close encounters will differ in execution. For example, one close encounter we witnessed from a first-person perspective was the player character getting grabbed by an alien from above, and then dragged through a vertical ventilation shaft. After firing a few rounds from his pulse rifle, the marine briefly scared off the creature, then he began to kick out a nearby grate to escape. After getting halfway out, there was a tug at his leg, and he was pulled back inside the vent, frantically shooting and pleading for rescue.

"Close encounters are almost unlimited in their ability to let us do what we want to do," elaborates Schuler.

"Aliens can interact with the world – it isn't just a bunch of button presses until it's over. The alien could leap back onto a cabinet, or another one of your squadmates. He could leap back and through a duct and out of sight."

Since these sequences are intended to be a cinematic way to showcase the aliens and their tactics, it doesn't do much good if a big button prompt pops up in the middle of the screen. The marine's actions described in the ventilation shaft example are initiated by the player by responding to less intrusive instructions. A subtle flash of green on the right side of the screen tells you to move the analog stick in that direction, whereas one in the upper-left corner could be a prompt to pull the left trigger. By briefly abandoning the game's usual control scheme, close encounters make it possible for the

team to create those one-of-a-kind combat situations that capture the flavor of the most iconic moments in *Aliens*. "If we were to recreate the power-loader battle against the queen, that would be a close encounter," Schuler concludes.

The xenomorphs are among the most recognizable monsters in cinema, and it should be exciting to see them using the same tactics that they do in the films. Unfortunately, no matter how bloodthirsty and fearsome they are, it's hard to deny that the aliens don't have much variety among their ranks. This is a problem that has plagued *Alien* games since the beginning: what can players fight besides face-huggers, xenomorphs, and (at the end) a queen?

Since the aliens' form adapts to the DNA of its host,



NOT *THOSE* COLONIAL MARINES

Fans of the Alien franchise and its video game adaptations may remember a cancelled EA title that also went by the name *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. While the subject matter and setting of both games are similar, EA's canned game is in no way related to the new Gearbox and Sega project

there are many other possibilities for enemy types. Even so, fans needn't worry about fighting a menagerie of improbable beasts or incarnations that don't fit with the tone of the franchise. "There won't be porcupine aliens shooting spines at you," Martel assures us. "It can't be goofy or stupid." It could be cool to see a new alien silhouette creeping out from the shadows, but behavior and attack patterns will ultimately do much more to differentiate the enemies than appearance.

"You have the original alien from *Alien*, and we sort of think of him as the smart one, as a scout. He'll hide and ambush people," explains Martel. "Then there's the warrior

alien, which we see in *Aliens*, which is going to be the one that rushes you and comes out in volume." In addition, the team is experimenting with new designs that add variety to the universe without being inconsistent, like a drone alien with a carapace especially suited for transporting eggs. The exact role they play in combat, as well as other potential xenomorph forms, are still a topic of discussion.

Some aspects of the vision for *Aliens* are still falling into place. Since gamers shouldn't expect to see the game until the first half of 2009, there is still plenty of time for the dedicated team to experiment with things like enemy design and how to handle the challenge of face-huggers.

There is one thing that has been set in stone since day one, though: a commitment to faithfully capturing the look and feel of the best and most popular film in the Alien series. If things go according to plan, Gearbox's foray into this classic franchise will finally see it elevated to the level of other high-profile titles in the genre it created. "It's the granddaddy of all military sci-fi," Martel states. "With next-gen technology, we can finally do it justice. We can really make the aliens look scary, we can make the setting freaky, and we can create characters the player cares about." With all of those areas under control, what more could fans want? That's it. Game over, man. ■■■

**CRYPTIC
COMICS**



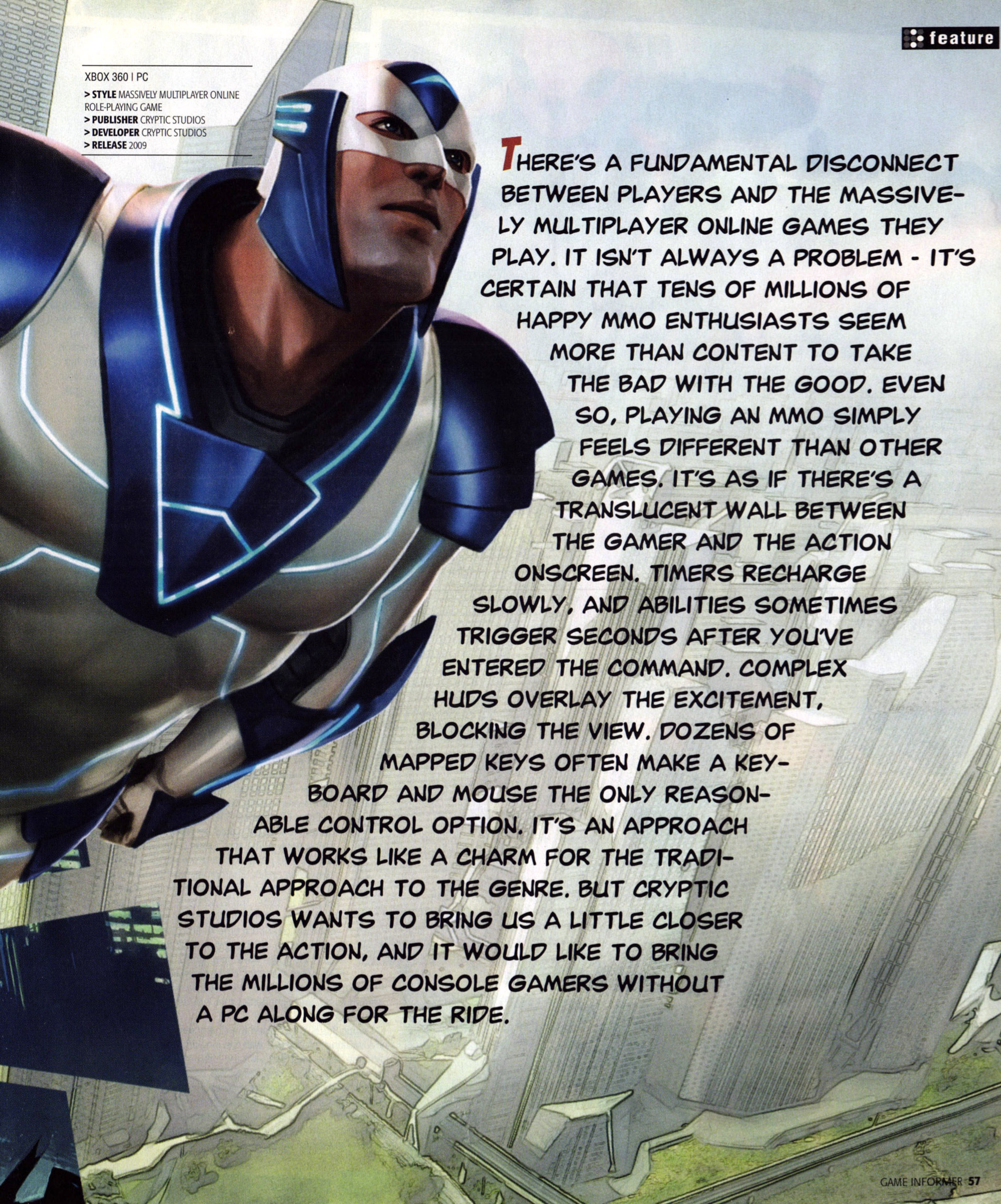
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CHANGING THE GAME





XBOX 360 | PC

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE
ROLE-PLAYING GAME

> **PUBLISHER** CRYPTIC STUDIOS

> **DEVELOPER** CRYPTIC STUDIOS

> **RELEASE** 2009

THERE'S A FUNDAMENTAL DISCONNECT BETWEEN PLAYERS AND THE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAMES THEY PLAY. IT ISN'T ALWAYS A PROBLEM - IT'S CERTAIN THAT TENS OF MILLIONS OF HAPPY MMO ENTHUSIASTS SEEM MORE THAN CONTENT TO TAKE THE BAD WITH THE GOOD. EVEN SO, PLAYING AN MMO SIMPLY FEELS DIFFERENT THAN OTHER GAMES. IT'S AS IF THERE'S A TRANSLUCENT WALL BETWEEN THE GAMER AND THE ACTION ONSCREEN. TIMERS RECHARGE SLOWLY, AND ABILITIES SOMETIMES TRIGGER SECONDS AFTER YOU'VE ENTERED THE COMMAND. COMPLEX HUDS OVERLAY THE EXCITEMENT, BLOCKING THE VIEW. DOZENS OF MAPPED KEYS OFTEN MAKE A KEYBOARD AND MOUSE THE ONLY REASONABLE CONTROL OPTION. IT'S AN APPROACH THAT WORKS LIKE A CHARM FOR THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO THE GENRE. BUT CRYPTIC STUDIOS WANTS TO BRING US A LITTLE CLOSER TO THE ACTION, AND IT WOULD LIKE TO BRING THE MILLIONS OF CONSOLE GAMERS WITHOUT A PC ALONG FOR THE RIDE.



■ While the game appears at first to be cel-shaded, it's actually a unique look that the team calls comic shading. The outlines deliver a cel-shaded feel, but interior surfaces actually have textures and bump maps on them, creating more detail



■ Players will all adopt heroic archetypes as they fight against supervillainy. However, the team has already begun to hint at future installments that explore the Dark Champions

MISSING MARVEL?

We contacted all the parties involved with the Marvel MMO regarding the project's cancellation. Cryptic told us: "Cryptic and Microsoft amicably terminated the development agreement, which was necessitated for reasons beyond our control. We still have a good relationship with Microsoft and continue to support the Xbox 360." Meanwhile, Microsoft gave us this comment: "Microsoft and Marvel have jointly decided to discontinue development of their massively multiplayer online game featuring Marvel characters, which Microsoft had been developing under the name Marvel Universe Online. The decision was reached amicably by Marvel and Microsoft. The two companies remain partners on many ventures and hope to pursue additional collaborative efforts in the future." As of press time, Marvel had no direct comment for us. Independent of bleached-clean official statements, an anonymous source tells us that licensing disagreements between Microsoft and Marvel are the reason why the exciting game concept hit a brick wall. In addition, it's clear that MUO represented a major investment from Microsoft, so it's hard to take comments on an amicable split seriously. Time will tell if the relationship between the two massive media companies is as sunny as they would have the public believe.



CHANGING PLANS

Console MMOs aren't unheard of. Even the previous generation of platforms saw games like *Phantasy Star Online* and *Final Fantasy XI* garner moderate success. The team at Cryptic Studios has a slightly grander plan — an overhaul of the traditional MMO structure that offers unparalleled customization and action-packed gameplay, while keeping things fun for console and PC players alike. If the name of the studio sounds familiar, it's probably for one of two reasons. Cryptic developed the superhero MMO *City of Heroes* in 2004, followed by the appropriately titled *City of Villains* expansion a year later. A quick glance at the surrounding images reveals that pedigree in an instant, even if this newest endeavor is a dramatic leap forward from the last effort in more ways than one. The *City of Heroes* franchise was extremely successful for both Cryptic and its Korean publisher NCsoft, a company that used the game to help launch its push into the American market. Recently, Cryptic sold its interest in *City of Heroes* to NCsoft, which left Cryptic with some hefty capital to pour into new projects.

The second way you may have heard about Cryptic was the announcement last year that it would be the studio creating the *Marvel Comics* MMO. It seemed a strange pairing, after an earlier disagreement between the two companies led to a lawsuit related to character customization options in *City of Heroes*. However, Microsoft bartered the new deal with Cryptic, and the project was moving forward rapidly until only a few months ago when it fell through. It came as a shock to the enthusiastic team at Cryptic.

"It was pretty tough. It was kind of devastating for a very short period of time. We'd done all of this work in this one direction. And we can't use that work, because that is all Microsoft's now," explains Cryptic CEO Michael Lewis. "But we've got this momentum going. What are we going to do with it?"

Enter *Champions*. "We made a very short list of things we thought would be great, and *Champions* was actually at the top," Lewis continues. Extremely popular and praised in hardcore pencil-and-paper roleplaying circles, *Champions* has been around for over 25 years. To many it's the definitive superhero roleplaying game. The franchise is unique because of its expansive internal fiction. Rather than wiping the continuity clear from time to time, *Champions* has a game world that has grown over time. Characters have died. Cities have been razed. New heroes have risen. More than that, it has a remarkable ruleset that allows players to create the exact hero they've always wanted to be, and fight battles that include innumerable options for play.

Cryptic Studios purchased the *Champions* game and is now working side-by-side with the long-time owners of the franchise. More than that, with the influx of capital from the sale of *City of Heroes*, Cryptic has been able to realize a plan it has aimed at since the company started in 1999. "Publishing was one of the first decisions we made as a company back in 2000," Lewis reveals. Consequently, *Champions Online* and all of Cryptic's games going forward will be developed and published in-house.

■ Every character has access to every power – your class determines how much it will cost for each ability

■ Superpowers are all mapped to the controller's face buttons

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

With Marvel out of the picture, that meant Spider-Man, Wolverine, and the Hulk were out as well. Fortunately, the game engine that has been evolving since the completion of *City of Heroes* belongs entirely to Cryptic. The project could move forward in a brand new direction. More than that, the ownership of *Champions* means there are no concerns about licensing – the team has access to everything that world has to offer. “Here’s a game system where you can do anything that you want. That’s the kind of flexibility that we started to explore with *City of Heroes*, and we want to take it to the next step with this game,” Lewis explains.

Cryptic has taken the inherent strengths of *Champions* and pulled them together into a re-imagining of the traditional MMO framework. The task starts with character creation, where Cryptic is delivering more flexibility than any other release has ever attempted. “Our costume creation system was such a hit in *City of Heroes*, and we’re going to take that to the next level,” says chief creative officer Jack Emmert. Costumes have more unique pieces than ever, but now you can alter and select the color and style of each individual power as well. You also won’t be limited to just one standard movement animation. A werewolf man can be set to leap forward like a beast on all fours. Your hulking robot war machine can step into battle with suitably mechanical motions. That all-knowing master of the mind can float inches above the ground with his arms crossed in concentration. In addition, players will create and customize their secret identity. As the game progresses, you’ll choose whether that identity will remain secret or if you’ll make it public – a decision that will dramatically affect the missions your character will encounter. As your character grows, you’ll choose his unique weaknesses and disadvantages – maybe he is invulnerable unless someone pulls out an ice ray. Coolest of all, you’ll create your arch-nemesis. Just like your main character, you’ll build him a costume, select his powers, and give him a name. Throughout your hero’s career, his arch-nemesis will attempt to foil his plans, again and again; the game becomes your own personal comic book adventure. “Players don’t just customize their look; they customize their gameplay,” Emmert tells us.

Champions is also known for its intense action sequences, and Cryptic is translating that into a combat system that feels more like *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* than *World of Warcraft*. “Someone was going to move games from over here to over there,” Lewis suggests. “And we thought: Why don’t we do that?” The shift is particularly noticeable when you pick up the Xbox 360 controller and wade into the action, as we did. The left and right analogs deliver the expected movement and camera controls. While the A button jumps, every other

face button has a power attached to it. One of them is your standard attack – a punch, kick, or simple ranged blast. In any case, tapping the button results in an immediate attack – no waiting required. The right bumper blocks incoming assaults. Do damage or successfully block, and your character’s blue power bar will grow, letting you tap into any of your many other more-devastating super powers. Hold down the left trigger as a shift key, and the face buttons become another four abilities. Any of these actions can be used at any time, without waiting for a recharge, so long as you’ve built up enough energy through more basic assaults. The focus is always on delivering exciting and visceral battles while maintaining the complexity of strategy and ability management that makes MMOs fun.

A great combat system is all for nothing if the world isn’t fun to play in. *City of Heroes* is limited to a single city and its environs. *Champions Online* takes place across an entire world. While sprawling urban city settings remain, players will also explore vast underground ruins and underwater lairs. They’ll travel to a dinosaur-infested monster island. Perhaps a trek into that secret desert military base is in order. Even launch into outer space and land on the moon.

Wherever you travel, you’ll be in constant control of an ever-evolving superhero. Unlike in *City of Heroes*, you’ll pick up and don real loot and gear. Each piece you discover fits into one of several body slots. If you don’t like the way the new equipment looks in conjunction with your carefully crafted costume, then turn it off; the visuals for every item can be toggled away.

You can also join one or more factions around the game world. Each opens up access to new stores, costume items, insignias, and crafting stations. At those stations, you can build new equipment and character upgrades.

Out in the field, the game is as accessible to that lonely renegade crusader as it is for the burgeoning super group; most of the game can be played either solo or with a group of up to five friends. “I think we’re kind of passed the point of forced teaming,” Emmert opines. Missions show up in persistent zones where everyone can access them, but much of the content is instanced, ranging from small three-room houses to hour-long dungeons. Wherever you are adventuring, expect a wealth of cutscenes with voiced dialogue, changing camera angles, and genuine story components. Just as the action feels more like a traditional console game, so too does the storytelling.

When you’ve had enough of fighting back the forces of evil with your buddies, then it may be time to enter the underground arena circuit of the *Champions* world. PvP will be available, and will offer XP rewards, loot, and other benefits just like the rest of the game. Once you cap out at level 50, extensive end-game content will be available for solo players, group players, and PvP combatants.

■ Characters from throughout the *Champions* universe will show up in the game. “The traditional roles are not so clear in *Champions Online*. For instance, anybody can tank – they just tank differently,” Jack Emmert explains. “All powers are open to all character classes – it’s just that some powers are cheaper for a given class”



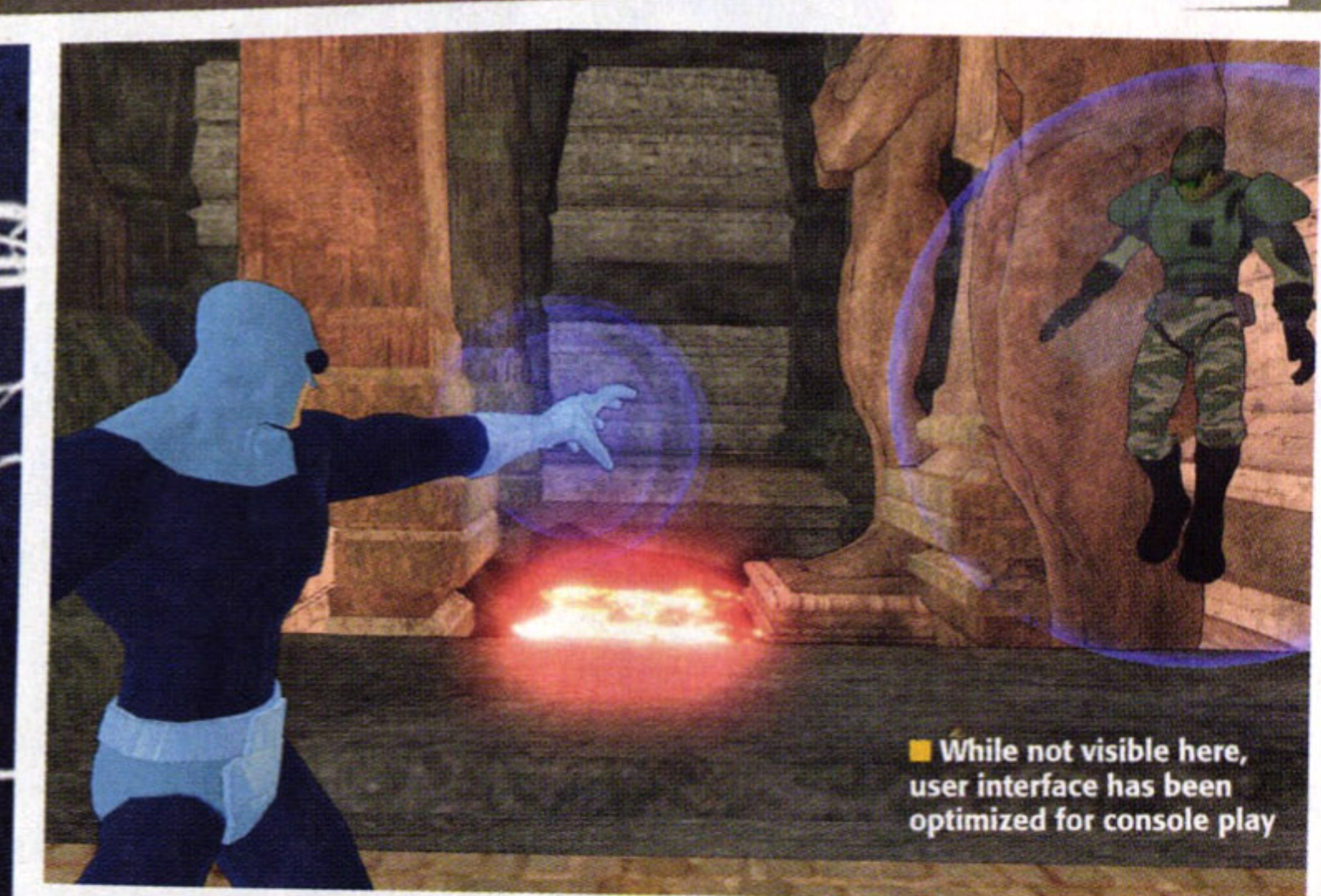
■ There's little penalty when you die – characters respawn at a nearby checkpoint



■ The game is playable on both Xbox 360 and PC – cross-platform play will be available on day one



■ Every character has access to a basic attack – do damage to build up a power bar to unleash more potent assaults



■ While not visible here, user interface has been optimized for console play

■ Soundly defeat your arch-nemesis, and you might be given the option to get rid of him for good, perhaps by sending him to permanent lock-up. If you decide to do so, you'll create another villain from scratch



CHANGING THE PLAYING FIELD

We sit down in a demo room with several of the game's developers. A crazy link-up of Xbox 360s and PCs fills the small space, and we each take a station – pre-made characters waiting as we sit down. We proceed to explore the underground sanctuary of the reptilian Lemurians.

To our left, one of our companions is throwing out a mean barrage of forcefield powers, flinging enemies into nearby pits of lava and then deploying a huge bubble shield that encases our entire group as we finish off the villains within. On our opposite side, a clawed melee combatant is leaping into battle at full speed, jumping from target to target as bad guys collapse beneath his assaults. Across the way, another player has adopted a shadowy hero who projects tendrils of dark energy to engulf our attackers. In the midst of it, we find ourselves playing an armored battle fortress of a hero. Our favorite attack is a mini-gun that pops out of our left shoulder to pepper foes with bullet fire. Combat has a frantic, fast-paced immediacy to it. The level is filled with traps and surprises – at one point we're flung off a ledge as a fire pit bursts to life beneath us. As we near the final room of the dungeon, a cutscene triggers where the enemy boss declares his plans to rule the world. We rush forward into a massive fight.

With Champions already up and running using the newest version of their Game Tech engine, the team's work during the coming year is focused on building content and iterating on the basic design. The GT engine allows the team to tweak elements in-game as they play, dropping in new objects or level designs as they run their characters through the existing framework. Many major gameplay details are still being worked out. Decisions must be made about which classes to include, and how to balance each power set against the others. Nonetheless, it's clear that the team at Cryptic is more than capable of dealing with the curve balls that have come at it in recent months. They have a franchise that is now truly their own to play with, and the resources to publish the type of game they want to put out. They'd be the first to tell us – not all change is a bad thing. ■ ■ ■



CHANGING DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Cryptic Studios' leap into the dangerous waters of publishing has been a long-term plan for the company, and that same strategy extends several years into its future, with the plan to publish a new game every year going forward. Most are planned as both PC and console releases.

While we visited, studio CEO Michael Lewis gave us a sneak preview of a couple of those upcoming projects. One (top), has visuals that seem to suggest an exploration vibe. Ancient ruins hide in forgotten jungles and hold powerful relics and dangerous secrets. We saw one screenshot of a man looking out on a sprawling valley filled with Aztec-style pyramids and heavy tree cover.

The next game (bottom) is a fantasy-themed MMO set in a world that is still young and primal. Think about Tolkien's Middle-earth, but then rewind that world to its earliest days. Dinosaurs still roam the planet. Magic is untamed. You play a dangerous tribal warrior with a huge primitive weapon. And you ride the gigantic beasts of the world into combat.

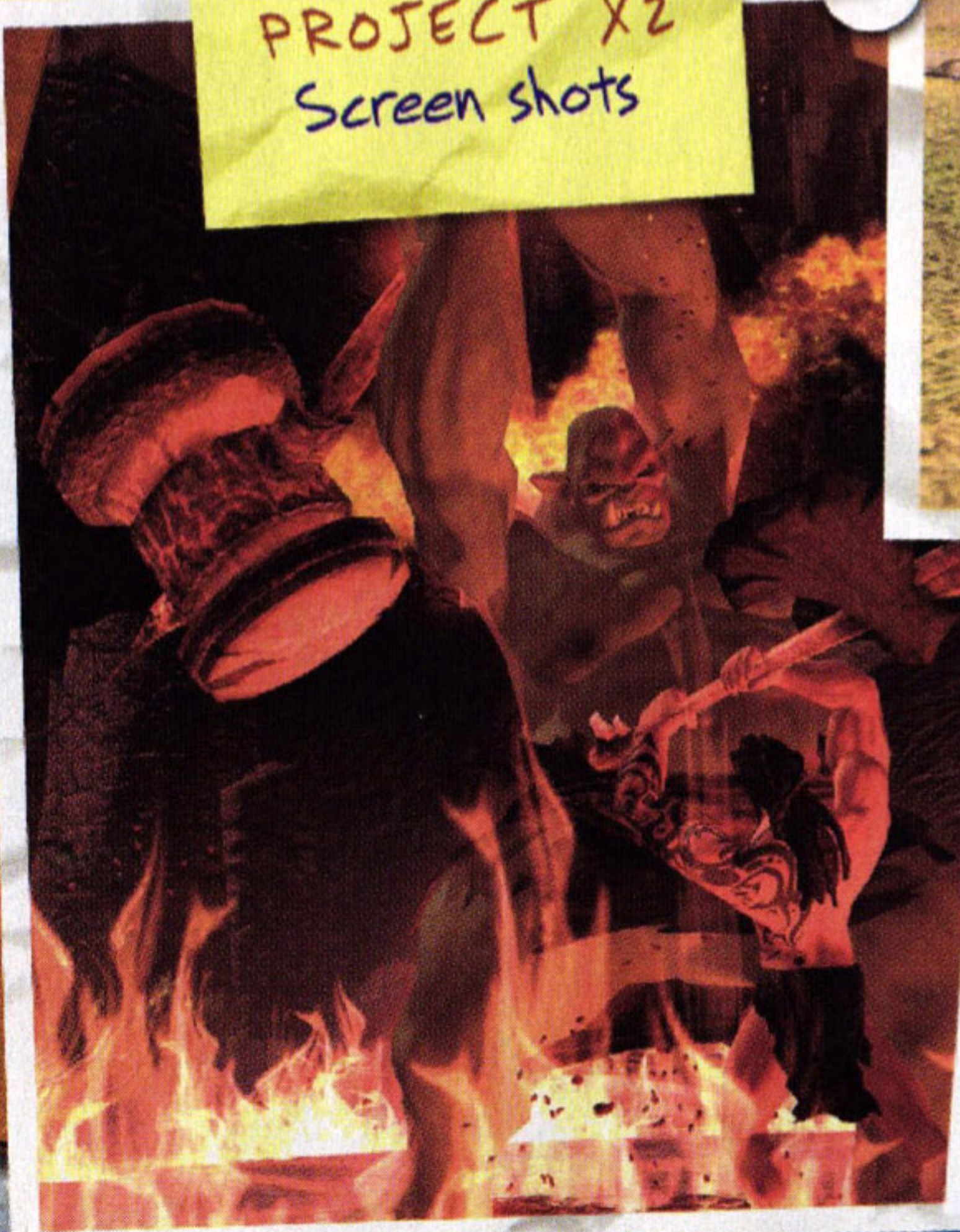


feature

PROJECT X1
Concept Art



PROJECT X2
Screen shots



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE OR PC INTERNET) > **PUBLISHER** THQ
> **DEVELOPER** VOLITION > **RELEASE** 2008



RED FACTION

GUERRILLA



Disorganized and leaderless, your attack against an EDF training facility has gone horribly wrong. Your troops have already started to scatter. They don't belong in a war. They're miners and farmers, not soldiers. Zigzagging your way over fallen allies and past smoking vehicle husks you take shelter inside a nearby structure. Inside, you hear the local chatter of soldiers on the floor above you. Using

through a nearby wall. The radio on your belt squawks with news from a resistance bandwidth. There's talk of rebel captives being held hostage somewhere within the complex, and you realize that some of the bodies slumped in front of you didn't belong to the opposing team.

Gunfire doesn't let you reflect on your fatal mistakes for long. Looking up, you see another marine aiming

BUILT TO BREAK

your trusty sledgehammer, you snap one of the interior support pillars in two. The ceiling creaks ominously for a second, then starts to sag. Finally, split open like a gutted fish, it spits the contents of the second story at your feet.

There are people in the mess in front of you; people who didn't survive the surprise drop. A lone marine staggers to his feet. Reacting on instinct, you swing your hammer at his head, putting both objects

down at you from the second floor.

You fire your homebrewed rocket launcher from the hip. The rocket misses its target, but the explosion gives the building a new skylight and rains enough debris down on your opponent to shatter his skull. Your enemies are dead, but you are far from safe. That last blast was more than the building could take, and like a poorly built house of cards, the structure is starting to collapse, falling on your head brick by tiny brick.



Heritage of Rebellion

"We're going back to the roots of the franchise. We're going back to the setting and the feel of Red Faction one," says Volition's senior designer and writer Mike Breault. Those roots provide Red Faction: Guerrilla with a strong fiction base to continue growing forward. Set in the 22nd century, the original Red Faction let players take control of a miner named Parker who travels to Mars expecting to find riches and instead finds oppression. Parker helps lead an uprising, eventually calling in the Earth Defense Force to help lead Mars to victory and freedom.

For Guerrilla, the setting and themes may be similar, but players will quickly discover that the fruits of Parker's labor have withered and bruised. Fast-forward 50 years and we find that the EDF is still present. "They've stayed on Mars with the intention of helping the Martian colonies flourish," says Breault. But noble intentions don't always equate to noble actions. "In the intervening 50 years," clarifies Breault, "the EDF has evolved into this oppressive military force that controls everything on Mars. Mars has changed. There is a new oppressor there."

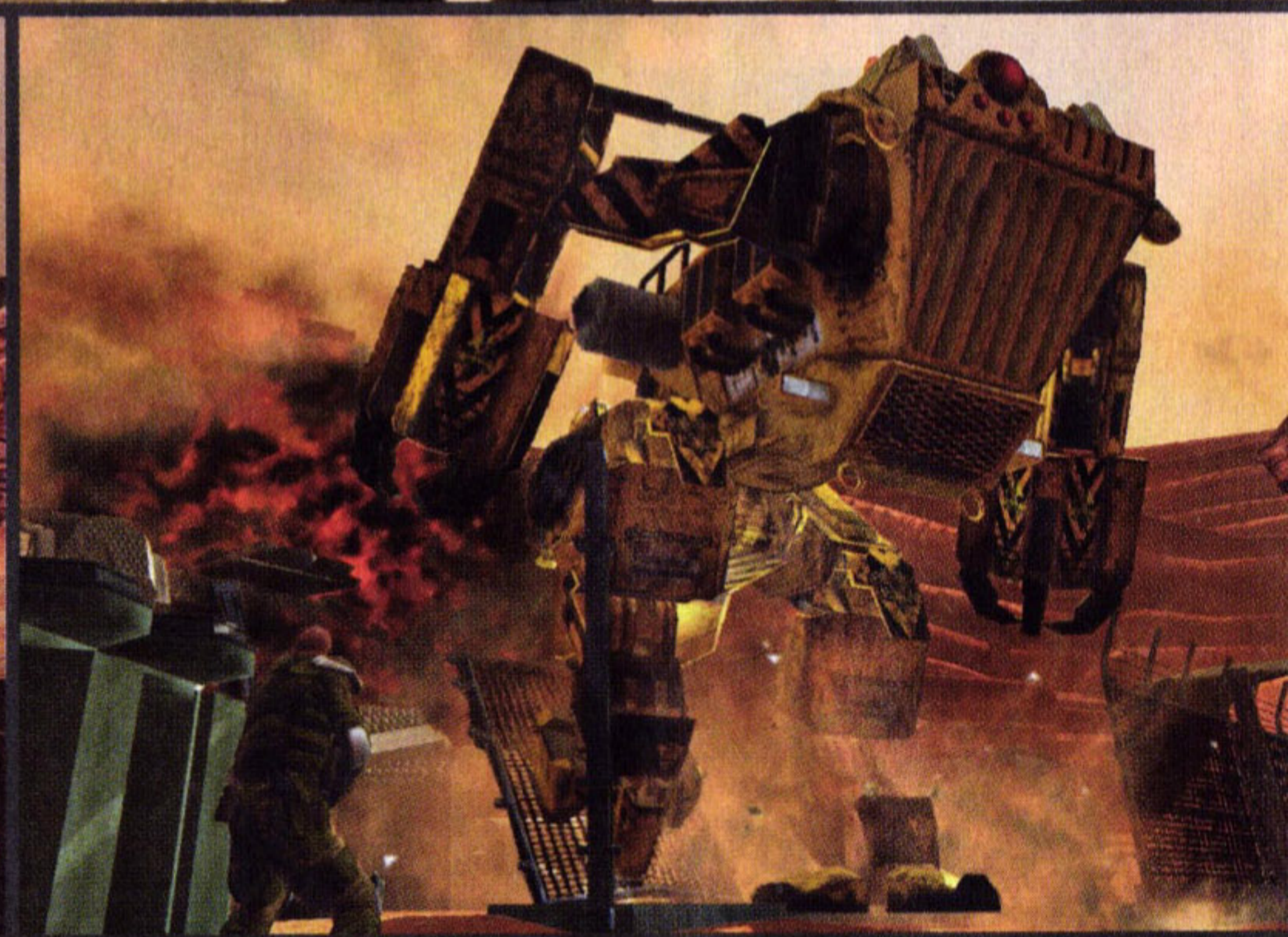
Mars' landscape has changed dramatically, too. The planet has been partially terraformed, allowing pockets of frontier-like civilization to freckle out across the red planet. "The early areas are very primitive, sort of Wild West areas," says Breault. "Then as you progress through the game you get to more and more advanced areas, and you see a lot more interesting architecture and a lot more refined architecture." All told, Volition hopes to offer players the freedom to explore a diverse and expansive

Tied to the Past

"There are a lot of physical and thematic ties to Red Faction one. The heroes you remember like Parker, Eos, and Hendrix have cities named after them now, and they have statues erected in those cities. There are even some people who were alive during Red Faction one – now in their seventies – who you'll meet and they will regale you with stories about the old rebellion," says Volition's Mike Breault.



■ Volition's artist had to learn a little bit about real architectural structure, "building models like a building should be built," says Cermak. "You can't put 10 tons of concrete on the second floor. Our buildings actually have to be built architecturally sound"



world nearly four times the size of Saints Row; an area gigantic in scope. But one feat is even more impressive than the world's megalithic size: Everything within it will be completely destructible.

Symphony of Destruction

"We spent about four years in technical development, really looking at what we had to do in an open world in terms of destruction, and how we could take destruction to a next-generation level," explains producer Rick White. What the team came up with is something they call "true physics-based destruction." Everything a player interacts with breaks apart. Little pieces have momen-

tum and mass, and cause damage if they explode out of a burning building. "Everything here is real," adds Volition vice president Dan Cermak.

To better understand how Guerrilla's destruction system works, it's useful to first understand how it doesn't. Most games use a destruction system sometimes called corpse modeling or corpse swapping. When an object in the game is destroyed, the original model is replaced with a destroyed version. Usually some clever special effects are sprinkled over the event to help hide the swap, but after that building has been destroyed there isn't much else the player can do with the object.

Gamers have been watching crates explode into wood chips for years, but now Volition hopes to add

some deeper elements. Guerrilla's structures can be reduced to their basic building blocks and turned to dust. "You look at most games and they're only destruction-based damage because that's the trigger that allows you to replace their models," says Cermak, "but this is collision damage, this is explosions, this is everything all together in a real world destruction system that acts like it should, and it's crazy looking."

Given this crazy level of destruction, Volition has chosen to pull back on the series' perspective, giving Guerrilla a third-person viewpoint. A wise choice, since this more expansive view provides a better showcase for the game's enhanced destruction level. A player can walk up to any building in the game and bring the whole thing down. They could bring it down with

■ After the dust clears, players will be able to pick up pieces of salvage that can be used to upgrade their weapons and vehicles



■ "We don't think that anyone has caught up to Geo-Mod yet, but we decided to really blow that out," says Volition's Dan Cermak

s or remote charges. They could bring it down by going into it and blowing up the vehicle. They could take it down with just a sledgehammer, taking chunks of it piece at a time. In *Guerrilla*, destructive experimentation is encouraged. Want to knock out a building's support beams and see what happens? Try weakening the structure and then jump a car onto the roof to see if the weight of the car makes that part of the building collapse. It doesn't matter what the building is made out of—any structure in the game can be reduced to piles of rubble. This level of destruction leads to some interesting gameplay events. "Even after having worked on this for years, I still have fun going in and just messing around blowing stuff up," says design director Paul Hague. "Sometimes stuff happens and you're

like, 'I can't believe I actually saw that!' You know the radar dish will tip up and shear through the side of a building making this huge U-shaped hole and a bunch of guys all come out and kill you. It's always very different, and it's always very satisfying to blow yourself up by accident."

Stress Out

To complete the destruction system and give it that extra air of realism, Volition felt it had to implement a dynamic stress system. *Guerrilla*'s buildings are all constructed out of a library of real materials that have real densities and weight. Every crossbeam and support

pillar has actual structural properties. "If you model a wall in another game you wouldn't really care what's behind it or on the insides," says Hague. "We have to have the girders running through, or if there are pipes in the walls or rebar, we have to have that."

The reason for this intricate level of detail is because just as a building will blow apart like it does in real life, it will also have to stand up like it would in real life. "Very early on in the project it was routine for an architect to say, 'I made this building and then I put it in the game and it fell apart,'" says Hague. "They all started complaining because of the weight. We just weren't building them correctly. Our artist had to learn a little bit about architectural structure, building models like a real building should be built."

Having such a detailed stress system immediately elevates the game's suspense. There may be times when players are forced to go into weakened structures; the creaks of a building under stress can be heard all around. When small pieces of the ceiling start falling off, it's not a question of if the building will collapse, but when. This system creates extra dilemmas for players to work through. Do you use the high-end explosives that are guaranteed to blow through a door? Do you cautiously make your way through the overstressed structure? Or do you box the enemy inside the place and try to send the whole building collapsing on his head?

One of the best examples of how the stress system can work to a player's advantage is if they place some remote charges on a bridge and blow out enough of the supports so that it's no longer safe to travel on. Bent girders and metal may be jutting out at odd angles, but if for whatever reason the bridge is still standing, it's a trap. "It's not until the enemy tries to drive a tank across the bridge that the whole thing comes tumbling down," says Hague. "That stuff's not scripted. We didn't plan that. That will just happen."

Viva La Resistance

There is more to Guerrilla than just explosions and crumbling buildings. As the name implies, players will be taking part in righteous, though somewhat underhanded, combat tactics. The goal is to ultimately liberate districts by causing enough damage to the EDF so they are forced to pull out of that area. "We're trying to give that feel of real warfare," says Cermak. "Hit 'em when they're not there and hit the right things that cause the most damage. Make it too expensive for the EDF to occupy the area."

The map will indicate how important each building is. You have smaller things that are more of a harassment target, so I might just annoy the EDF by blowing up their port-a-potties and radar dishes," jokes Hague. Other targets may do more damage, but come at a greater risk. "If you hit a high-priority target you'll know that you might get air support after you, so you have to be really careful," says Hague.



■ Guerrilla warfare is all about using whatever is at hand. As such, the resistance's weapons and vehicles are all repurposed mining equipment. "The mining walker is a giant walking vehicle for mining, but here it is being repurposed for war. Remote charges are mining charges build to blow rock apart, and here they are being used for death," says Cermak



■ Players will be very free to make their own choices about what to do in the game. "The guerrilla war is very decentralized and disorganized," Hague explains. "There isn't a specific leader that is giving the player information, leading him by the nose, telling him what to do"



■ We witnessed one mission where the resistance stole back a confiscated mining walker, tearing through an enemy encampment with it on the way out. The walkers may not start out equipped with any weapons, but that doesn't mean they aren't deadly. "I watched one of the testers pick up a guy with the walker and throw him with such force that the guy's impact actually broke off part of a building," explains Cermak



■ As the guerilla movement builds throughout the game, players will watch it grow stronger. The resistance will set up new areas and safe houses that players can always use to upgrade and restock on weapons. "Players are helping build this movement. It's not just them getting stuff for themselves, it's about contributing to the advancement of a whole," says Breault



Online Breakdown

Volition isn't ready for full disclosure on Guerrilla's multiplayer just yet, but after some brief hands-on time we have a few details to dish out. In addition to more traditional games, Guerrilla will have a few other modes that revolve around causing – what else? – lots of destruction. A few modes might even play around with two opposing forces, one side causing destruction and the other repairing it. In multiplayer, players will be able to outfit themselves with a variety of backpacks. These backpacks provide extra abilities such as super speed or high jumps or the ability to crash through walls like Kool-Aid Man. Even the standard Deathmatch and CTF matches have a unique slant to them. "As you keep playing the game the environment is changing," White explains. "You may have had the cool sniper point early on, but maybe it's not there anymore, so now what am I going to do? Players are going to have to change their tactics the longer they play to accommodate an ever-changing environment."



■ Additional events are constantly coming in over Red Faction's radio chatter, such as EDF convoys passing through the area or hostage situations that need to be defused. The player will have the option to follow up on these leads or just ignore them

Even though this is an open-world game, players won't be walking up to any shining, spinning icons to start their missions. Story missions crop up fairly naturally through conversations and an underground network of resistance radio chatter. Players will also always have the option of taking the initiative. If a player sees an EDF headquarters in the distance or on the map, they can choose to plan an attack on it and try to get other people to join the fight. "I think that one of the big advances that we've really tried to go for is having core gameplay that you can get involved in that is not something you trigger," states Hague.

"The EDF is just doing what it's doing," says White. "So when you see that the EDF sends its patrol through this area at nine o'clock everyday, well guess what? I'm going to be setting up some remote charges for them."

The EDF will respond in equal measure to an aggressive player. For example, if they've been really successful in taking control of a certain district, then the EDF might decide to

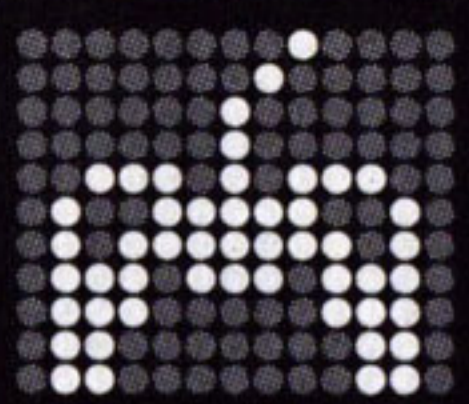
raid one of the resistance's safe houses. "It's not this inexorable tide of you marching steadily to victory," says Breault. "If the EDF strikes back, they can take an area from you, and they are going to take these areas back if you don't deal with it."

However, this is a two-way war. White explains, "The resistance might say, 'Hey we're going to go over here. Because you took out that supply convoy, the EDF is not getting enough ammo and supplies over here, so this is a perfect opportunity to hit this base.'" Players will have the freedom to go join in on that hit, or they can go off and do something else, but events like this are taking place even if the player is not participating.

It's this constant battle over land that helps lend Guerrilla a little strategic flavor. A player can easily destroy a strategic point, go off to do something else for a while, then come back and find that the EDF has rebuilt the place and it's stronger than it was before because it's a pivotal control point for the area.

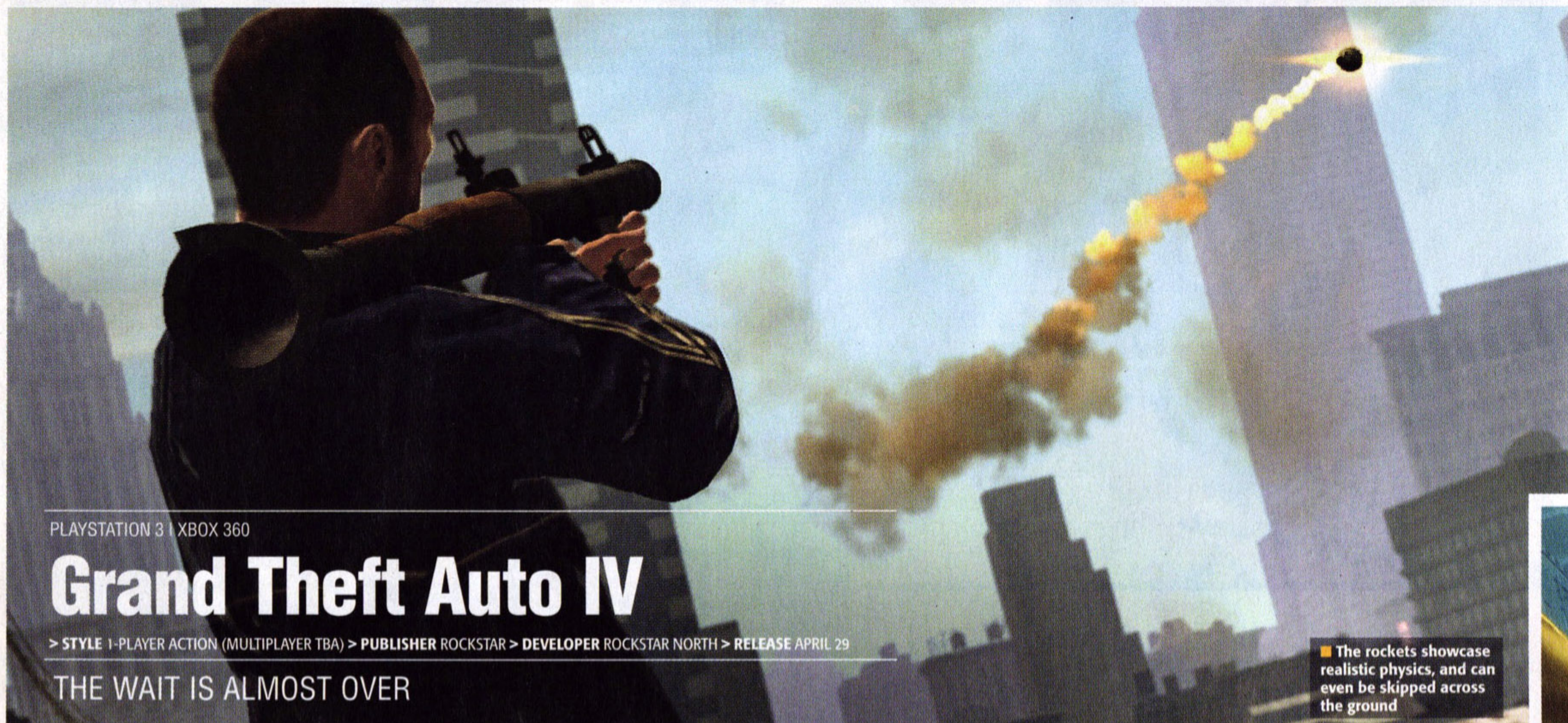
Volition is working really hard to combine these open world elements with the most highly detailed destruction system to date. "The guerrilla warfare is a key thing. It's kind of our glue. It ties together the new generation of destruction with the open world," confirms Cermak. From the look of things so far that's a fine combination, and Volition looks to be crafting one of the largest sandbox sandcastles that gamers will ever get to kick over. ■ ■ ■





PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Grand Theft Auto IV

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR > DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR NORTH > RELEASE APRIL 29

THE WAIT IS ALMOST OVER

■ The rockets showcase realistic physics, and can even be skipped across the ground

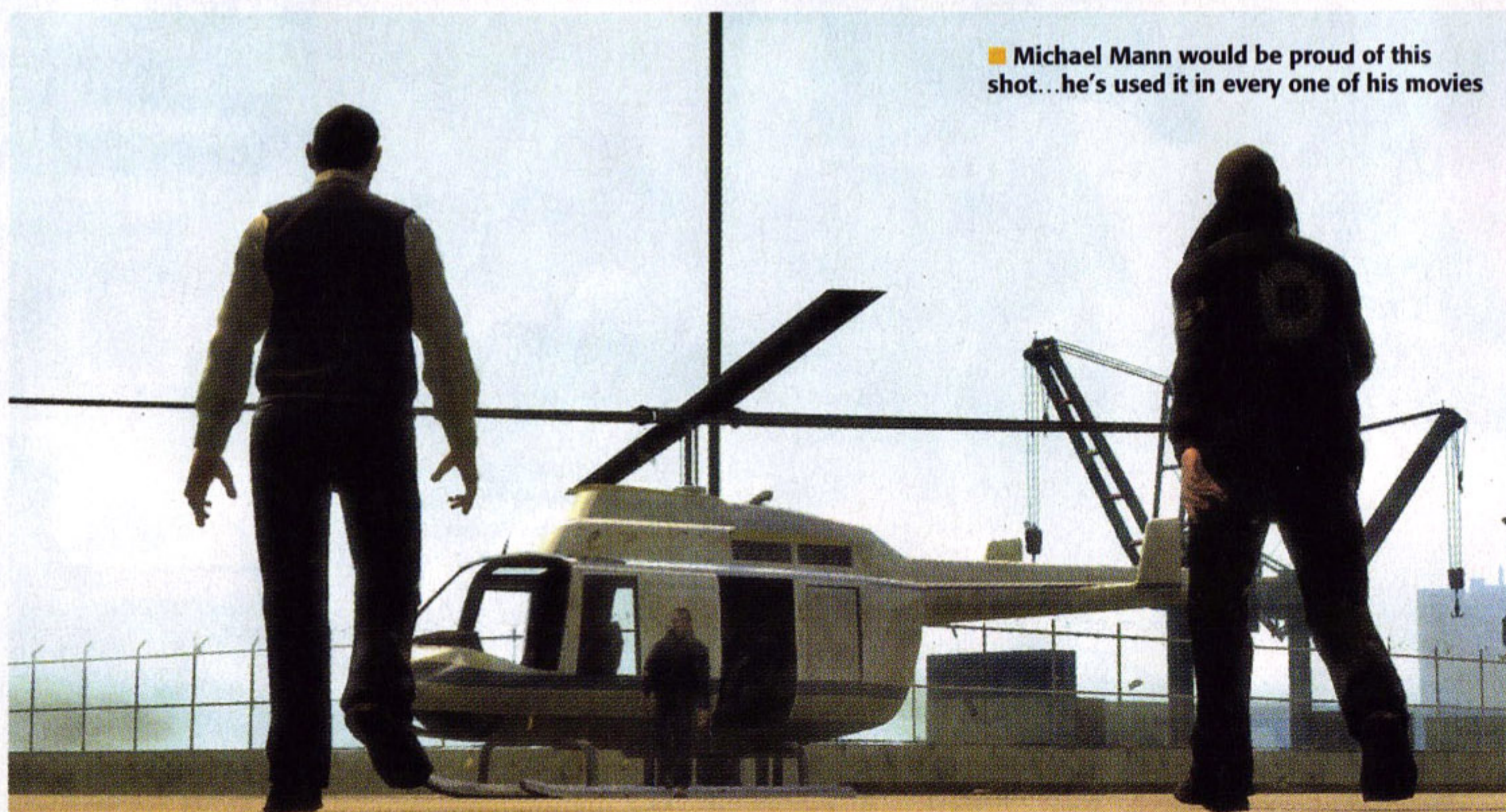
We're hoping that you didn't set up a chair in front of your local game retailer back when Grand Theft Auto IV was supposed to release last October; but if you did, your wait is about to come to an end. On January 16, the Rockstar posse rolled into the Game Informer offices with a confident swagger, and more importantly, a new Xbox 360 build of the game. Rockstar wouldn't comment on the release of the game, but from our perspective, it would appear the development process is in its final stages of polish.

As smoothly as the game was running, Rockstar still wouldn't let us get our hands on the game, but for a change, they were more than willing to answer all of our questions about how it plays. The answer everyone has been dying to hear has finally been announced. Grand Theft Auto IV does in fact feature a new targeting system – one that seems to be designed to please everyone. By holding the left trigger, the view switches to over Niko's shoulder. If you apply a click of the right analog stick, you'll zoom down the scope for precision targeting. At this point, if you flick the right analog you'll be able to target specific appendages such as the head, torso, and legs. If you press to the left or right, you'll highlight different targets. If you don't want to have the game aim for you, you can depress the left trigger halfway for free over-the-shoulder aiming. This targeting option will allow you to do things you never thought possible, like carefully placing a rocket launcher shot so that the rocket skips off of the ground. You can also target items in the environment for more entertaining kills, such as a physics-enabled plank on which an enemy may be standing.

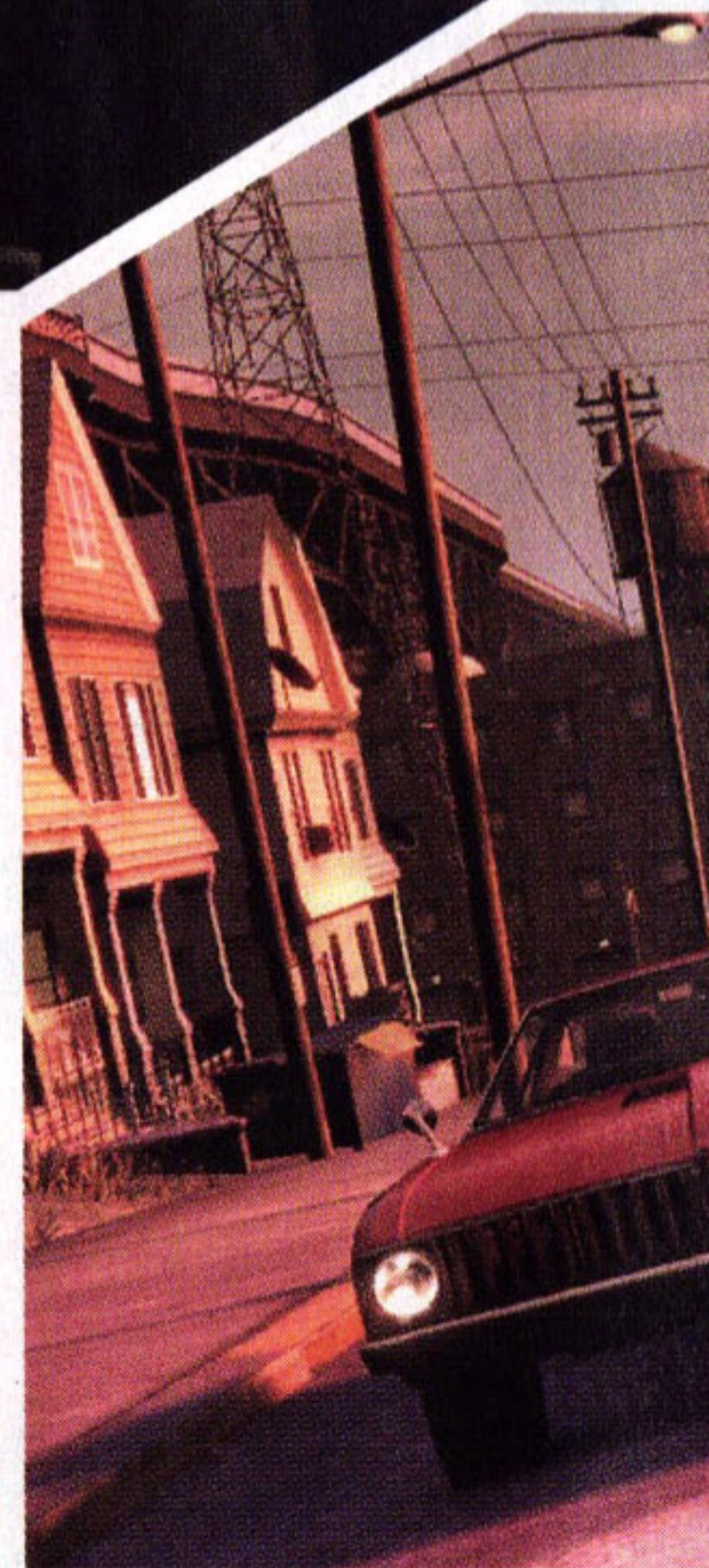
The game also features a robust cover system. Much like Gears of War,



■ "Looks like you've got quite the 'concealed weapon' there, bud"

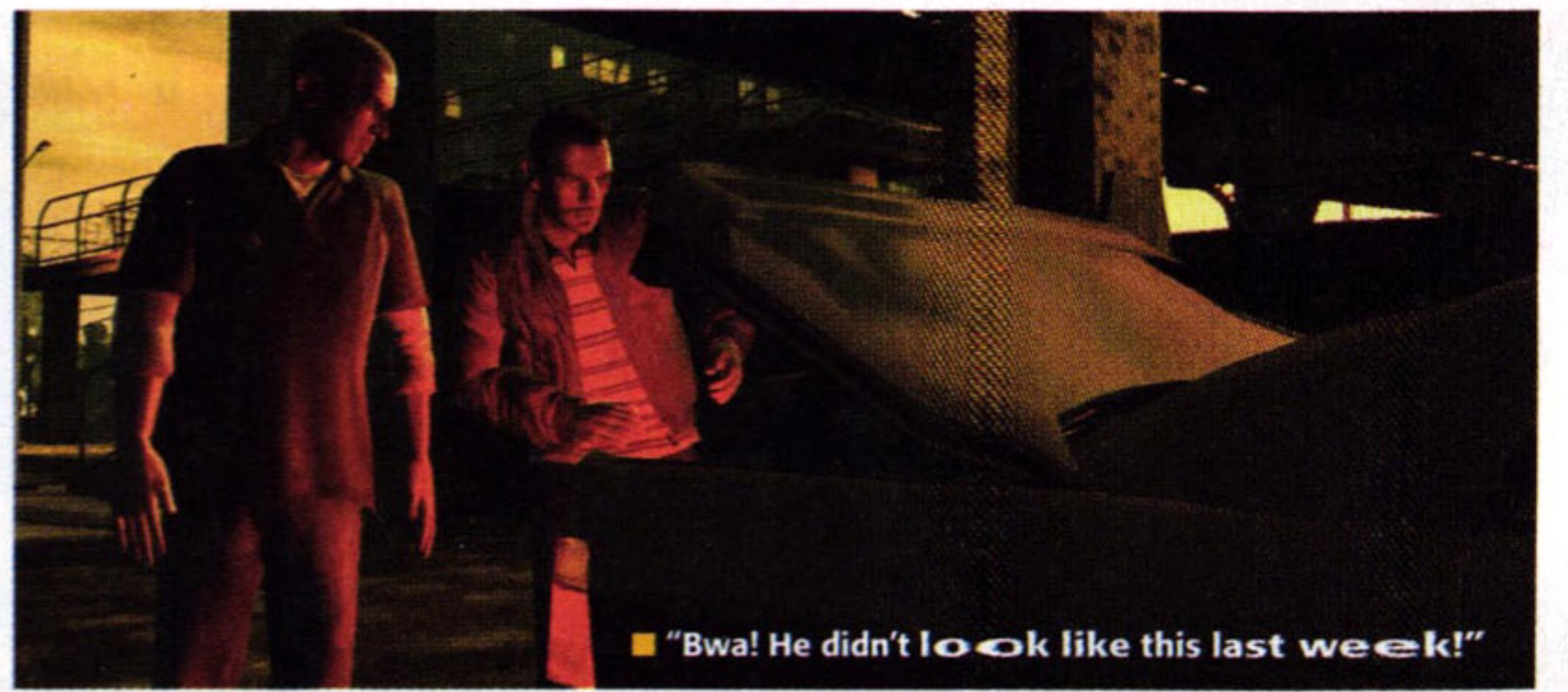


■ Michael Mann would be proud of this shot...he's used it in every one of his movies

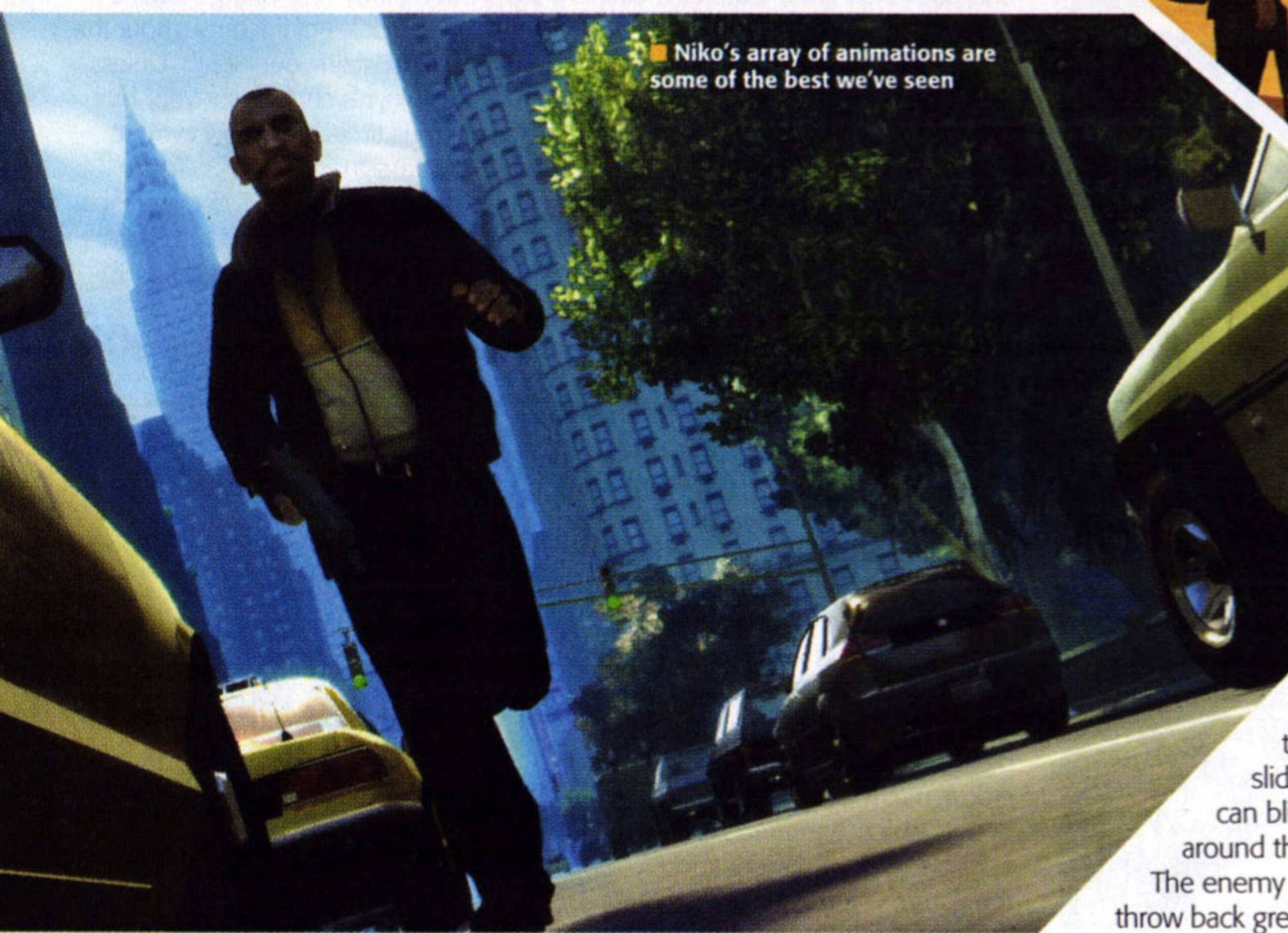




■ Police chases are now radius based



■ "Bwa! He didn't look like this last week!"



■ Niko's array of animations are some of the best we've seen



■ The rocket in the fuel tank joke got old quickly



if Niko is in full sprint, clicking the cover button will make him slide into cover. From here, Niko can blind fire, or pop over the top or around the corner to survey the terrain.

The enemy AI doesn't have the ability to throw back grenades (which Niko can "cook" by holding for a longer time), but they can play dead if they only have a sliver of life left. When you least expect it, they may pop up and open fire again. In one mission that begins with Niko taking a window washing device to the top of a skyscraper, we were able to see how physics are being applied to enemy deaths. With a hunting rifle in hand, Niko picked thugs off of construction cranes. When an enemy is struck with the shot, the game switches to a cinematic view, showing them tumble off of cranes and down to the pavement, which welcomes them with an unsettling "squish."

The game contains a shocking amount of variety. If you fail a mission, Rockstar is making sure that your next playthrough will be different. This is accomplished by different dialogue tracks for the characters involved. Our Rockstar representative told us that you can expect to hear three or four different tracks for each mission. We already knew that Niko could surf the Internet, but that isn't the extent of his computer prowess. If you jack a police car, you can play around with the criminal database and search the records. Input a name, and a series

of pictures will flash onscreen until your target appears. The click of a button will then reveal his or her location in the city, complete with a GPS path there.

As it turns out, Niko likes his whisky, which has led to the creation of a drinking-based game. You won't be doing belly shots or anything like that, but rather, you'll be playing the ugly aftermath, with Niko stumbling down the street drunk. The goal is to simply get home, but given how much the camera shakes as you drive, and how much Niko stumbles around while walking, this could be the hardest feat to accomplish in the game.

Another interesting activity has to do with jacking a truck. You can either open the driver door and snatch it there, or perform a stealthier move of hopping on the back. If you do this, you can ride on the bumper and look over the side or tap the A button to scurry up to the roof, where you'll have to be careful. If the truck turns, you may roll off. You can, of course, cling on for dear life, and roll to the center if you happen to get near the side. You can also crawl toward the front, leap over the side, and smash through the passenger's side window. From here, all it takes is a gunshot or two to take control of the moving vehicle.

As we said, the game is looking like it's nearly done. Be sure to take at least two weeks of vacation time, as that's supposedly how long it's going to take to see everything in this massive title. ■■■



■ As Niko says, "Safety first"



The red and yellow highlights on buildings to the left provide a hint as to how they should be painted



In addition to a multitude of different colors, the blob can also utilize various patterns to give structures a more signature look

Wii

De Blob

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER BLUE TONGUE > RELEASE SUMMER

PAINTING THE TOWN RED...AND BLUE, AND PURPLE

Trying to break the overall third-party streak of shovelware on the Wii, THQ has enlisted Australian developer Blue Tongue to craft a unique mix of Katamari Damacy's environmental interaction, Mercury Meltdown's color blending puzzles, and even a little bit of Grand Theft Auto's open worlds.

The game begins as the oppressive INKT Corporation has taken control of Chroma City and completely whitewashed it (told through cute/mischievous cutscenes in the vein of Rayman Raving Rabbids). As an anthropomorphic blob of goo, players will roll around with the nunchuk analog stick gathering various colors of paint and spreading it over trees, benches, and buildings. Jumping is handled by a flick of the remote, which feels like it would fit better on the A button, but perhaps the final game will allow players to mess with button mapping.

As the world becomes more colorful, background music fills in with more pep, and each blob color features a different signature melody (e.g. orange adds a trumpet solo while red layers in vocal harmonies). Puddles of ink throughout the environment will turn you black and instantly begin to drain your health. Unless you can find a fountain or pool of water to rinse off in, it's curtains for your blob.

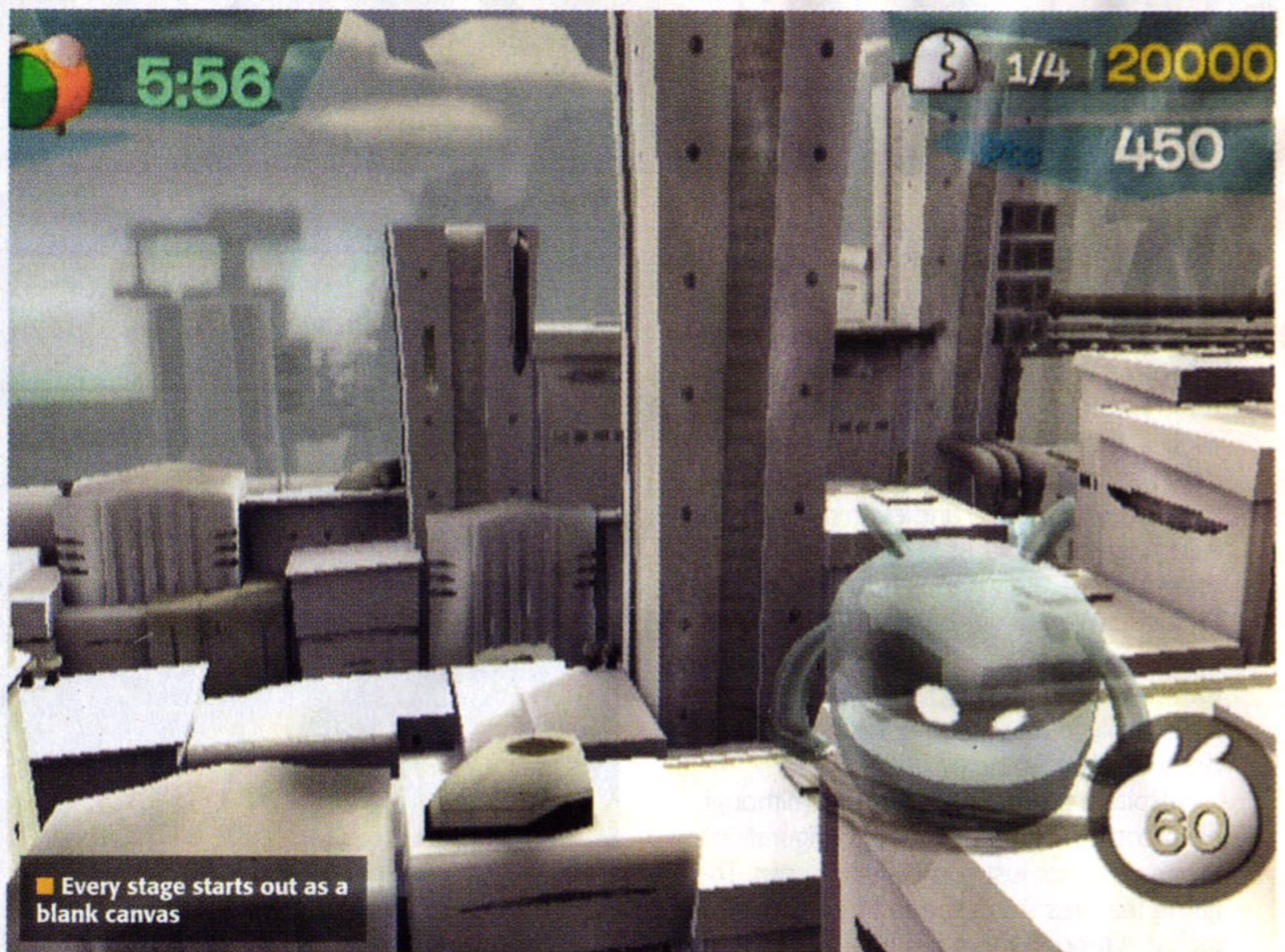
The 10 open stages are set to a relatively generous timer that allows you to freely paint, search for pickups, or focus on various assigned missions. These tasks involve painting buildings specific colors, racing, battling INKT troops, rescuing multicolored citizens from prison, sabotaging enemy landmarks, and more. Taking down these landmarks is the key to ultimate victory in a given stage. To pull it off, players must make sure they have the proper color and amount of paint required. Next they'll target the weak point with Z, flick towards it with the remote, and shake until the structure and surrounding area explodes with color. Later levels feature tricky platforming over lakes of deadly ink and Ninja Gaiden-style wall jumps to access higher areas.

While De Blob is showing plenty of quirky promise, it's crucial that mission and level design variety and precision controls hold up deeper into the game. We're definitely looking forward to seeing how it all pans out. ■■■■





Your blob will leave messy paint trails wherever it goes



Every stage starts out as a blank canvas



Look out for these squiggly green arrows to receive new missions



PLAYSTATION 3

Gran Turismo 5 Prologue

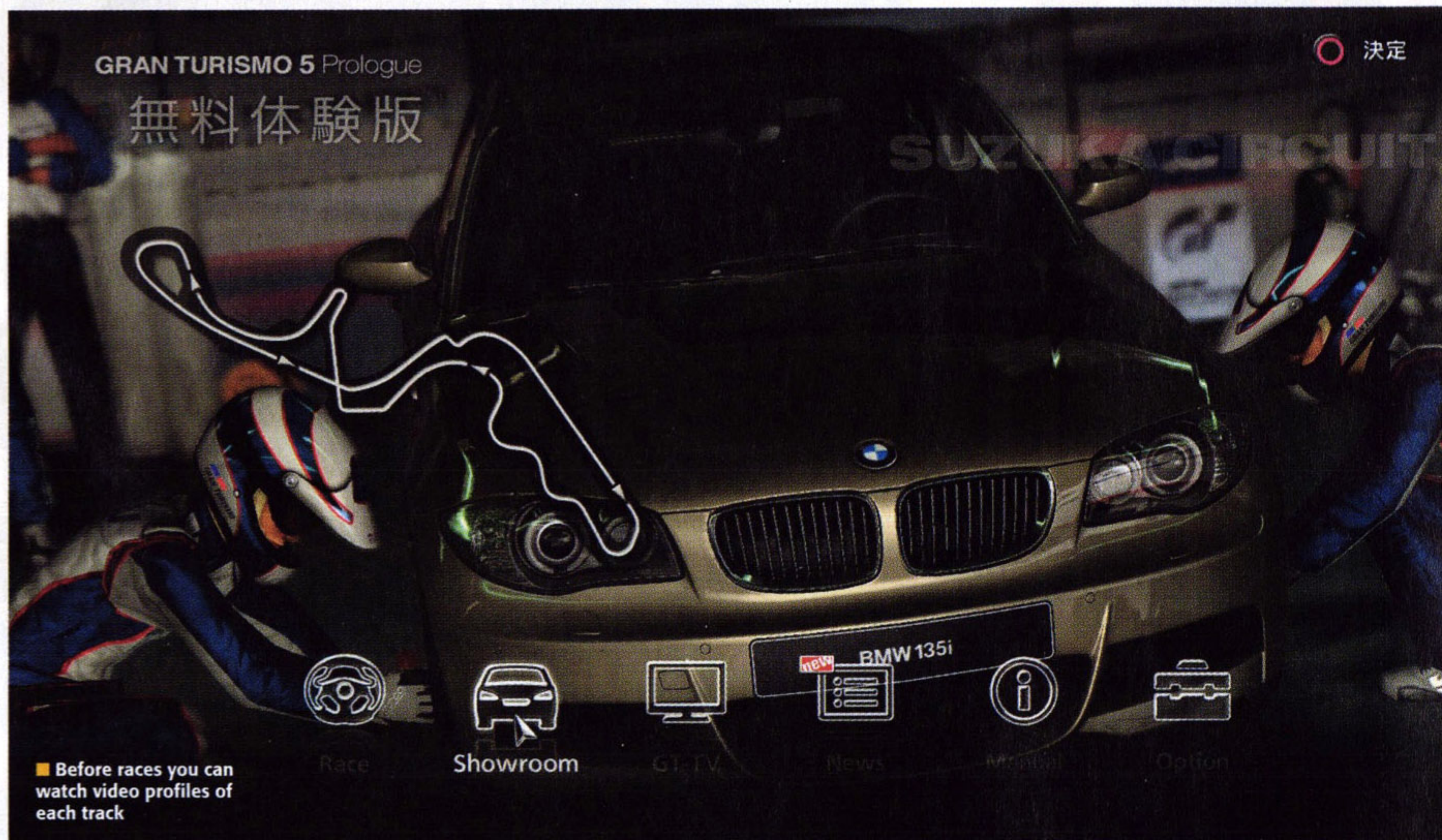
> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER POLYPHONY DIGITAL > RELEASE MARCH 18

BLURRED LINES

What you see here might not be what you get. While Gran Turismo 5 Prologue certainly provides a foundation for Gran Turismo 5 – whenever it comes out – franchise mastermind Kazunori Yamauchi has said that GT 5 itself is a moving target. He anticipates using downloads to continually tweak aspects of the game such as AI, and even possibly add a damage component to the series – something it desperately needs but is still missing in Prologue. We got our hands on the Japanese version of the title, and it's clear that the racing foundation that developer Polyphony is known for is firmly in place. The question is: Where does GT go from here?

Despite offering just five tracks (although each comes with a different configuration), Prologue is not just some slight demo. The game features 40 cars and three tiers of racing. Although there are no licenses to earn, you do have to finish all eight of the races in C class before you can move up to B, for example. Some of these are standard races, but also sprinkled in the 26 races over Prologue's "career" are events asking you to score under a certain time for the bronze, silver, or gold, or those tasking you with overtaking a specific number of opponents. At times the game gives you more than enough money to buy the cars you need, and other times you're re-racing events to earn enough scratch. The hefty, 16,670,000-credit Audi R8 needed for the last B-class race comes to mind here.

Prologue offers 16-player online play, but in the early days of the Japanese version this covers a scant four race events and four single-player time trials with online leaderboards. Interestingly, even this may change. We talked to Sony here in the U.S., and it told us that for the American version events will expire, but a full schedule hasn't been determined yet. Sony and Polyphony plan to frequently change and update Prologue's online landscape as time goes on. This fluid usage of online for the game is evident in other features as well. The game's dashboard showing weather and a calendar is only available if you have your



PS3 hooked up online, and GT TV shows different videos depending on if you're connected. As of the time of this writing there are only a few videos through GT TV, including one showing how the Polyphony team put Nissan's GT-R into the game. Those who buy the retail version (as opposed to the download from the PlayStation Network) will even get an exclusive behind-the-scenes feature entitled "Beyond the Apex."

Whereas Prologue and GT 5 plan to change via online downloads as time goes on, one thing that Prologue has nailed down is its 1080p racing. The inclusion of a cockpit view is more than just graphical eye candy highlighting shadows moving across your dashboard and the work the developer has done on each of the car's interiors. Paying attention to what your car is doing in this or any of

Prologue's camera views is important. You can almost feel your wheels locking up into a turn or the g-forces push the car forward as you decelerate into a turn, your tires chirping loudly all the while. In other words, Prologue's graphical attention to detail helps bridge the divide of allowing you to feel your car – something that video games are for the most part incapable of doing.

Prologue's \$40 price point (whether you buy the retail version or get it as a download) puts it in a difficult position. It may turn off some, but Gran Turismo fans will no doubt be excited to get their hands on Prologue regardless. However, with its quality of racing clearly established and its intriguing expansive feature set thanks to downloads, this game might be worth a look by anyone with motor oil in their blood. ■ ■ ■

■ In cockpit view you can even see your hands move to shift through the gears



■ Gran Turismo HD Concept's Eiger Nordwand makes its return



■ No crooked, baked bean and tea-stained teeth here. London looks fabulous



■ "As a Royal, it's my duty to lose...embarrassingly"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

MLB 2K8

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
 > **DEVELOPER** 2K SPORTS LOS ANGELES > **RELEASE** MARCH 3

BRINGING OUT THE BEST FROM PLAYERS AND FANS

Since there isn't much controversy surrounding baseball these days outside of Topps no longer packaging gum with its cards, we figured we would focus our attention on something truly newsworthy: MLB 2K8. Last year was a winning season for 2K Sports' long-running series, as it showed off an unprecedented level of player detail (Derek Jeter = polygonal heartthrob), but there were aspects of the game that either didn't work as well as they should, or were clearly dragged over from the previous generation. This year's effort addresses all aspects of the game, and in many cases, completely reinvents them. While still embodying a similar batting experience, the majority of the game feels like a whole new ballgame. To put it in a way that will likely make all 360 owners panic, there is so much content included in this game that parts of it won't even fit on the Xbox 360 disc.

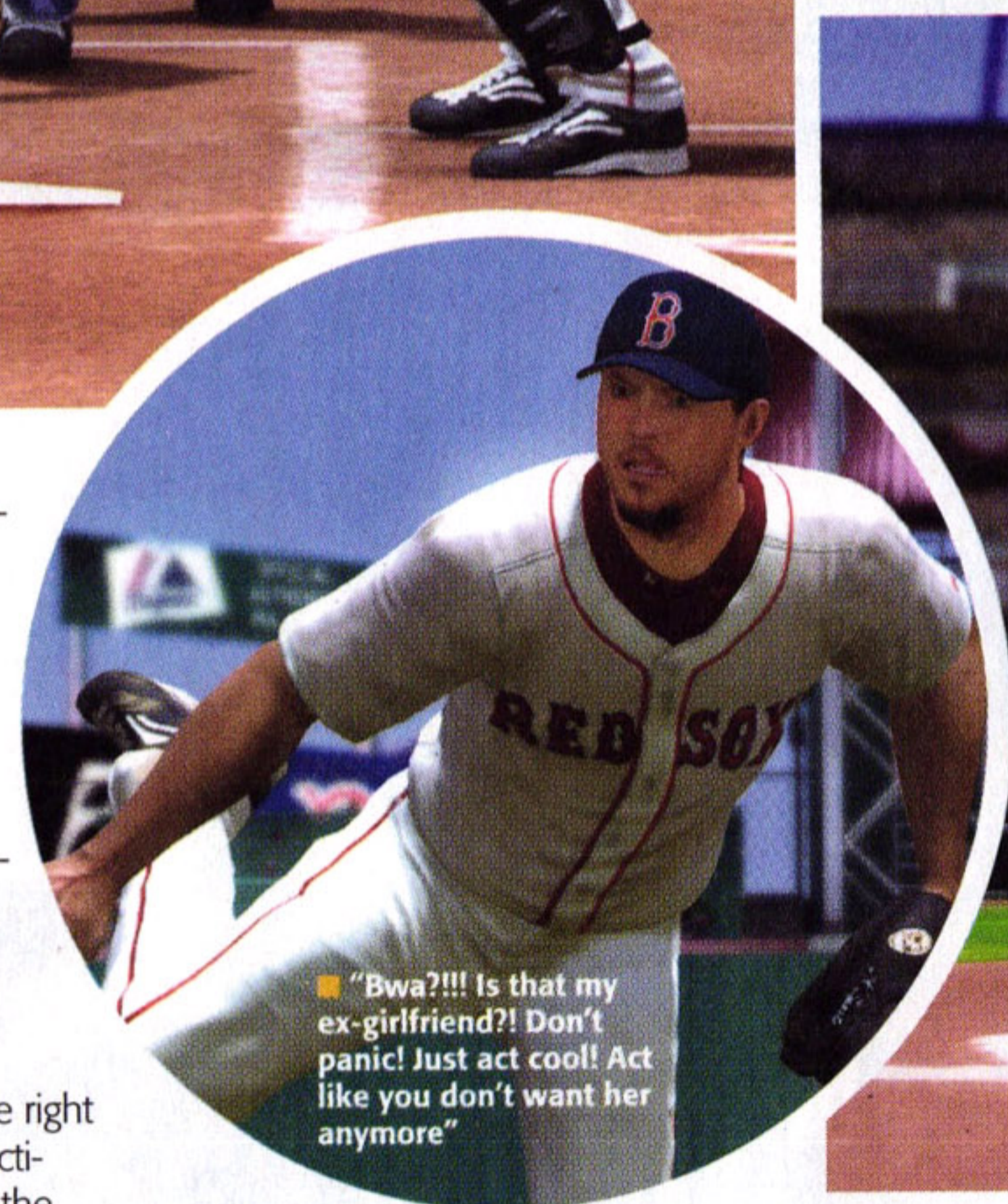
For the future of video game baseball, 2K Sports no longer sees button-pressing as part of the equation. Last year's analog swing set the table for what is now an all-analog

game. Pitching now takes a steady hand and a skill in spinning the ball. Each pitch, be it a fastball, curve, or slider, requires a unique motion. By pulling back on the right analog stick, the pitcher will begin his windup, which activates a circular power meter. Once the meter reaches the desired level, the player must then complete the motion for the desired pitch. Since pitchers excel at different deliveries, the motions vary, but a fastball is generally a simple down-to-up motion. Curveballs, as you would imagine, require a rotation of the analog. Failing to replicate the motion will result in an easily crushable meatball, while a slightly imperfect gesture will send your pitch off-course. Also, if you felt that pitchers fatigued too quickly last year, 2K has retuned the mechanic to be more realistic. Aces will be able to throw complete games without fear of dying.

Batting has also received attention, although you might not notice it. Last year, players could only make contact on three different frames, whereas this year, the window of hitting has expanded to 12 to 16 frames. This has the effect of

making at bats much more natural, and allows players to protect the strike zone by fouling off pitches they previously would have whiffed on.

There's no denying that last year's game of fielding was also flawed. Most plays, even casual fly balls, seemed to require a highlight reel-worthy catch. As fun as it was to watch your player make an ass of himself, the animations in this year's game are spot on. On grounders, you can really see the new ball physics in play. Another interesting addition is the ball locator meter disappearing as your player sprints – a decision 2K feels represents the player taking his eyes off of the ball. This can make for some exciting plays in the outfield.



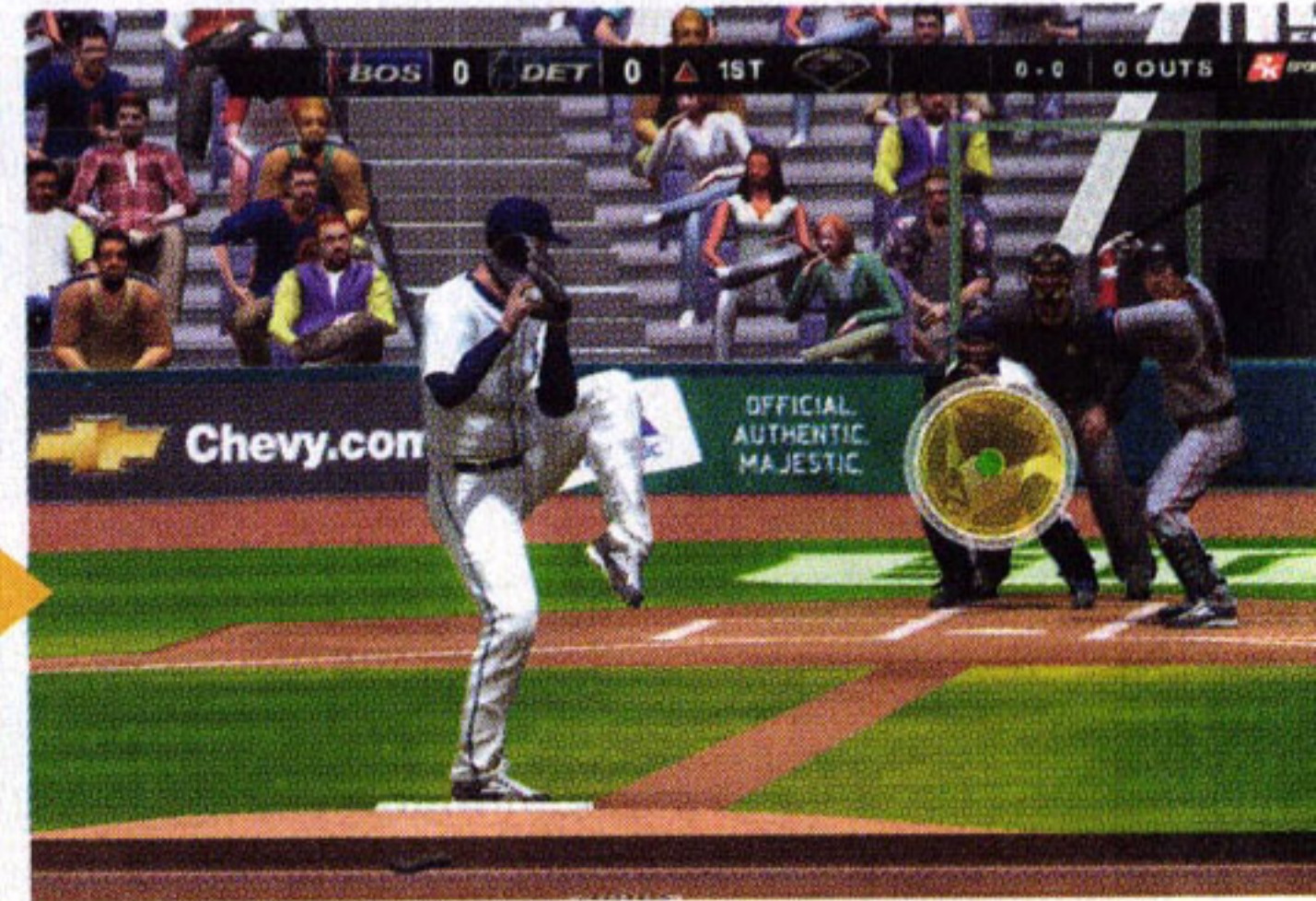
■ "Bwa?!?! Is that my ex-girlfriend?! Don't panic! Just act cool! Act like you don't want her anymore"



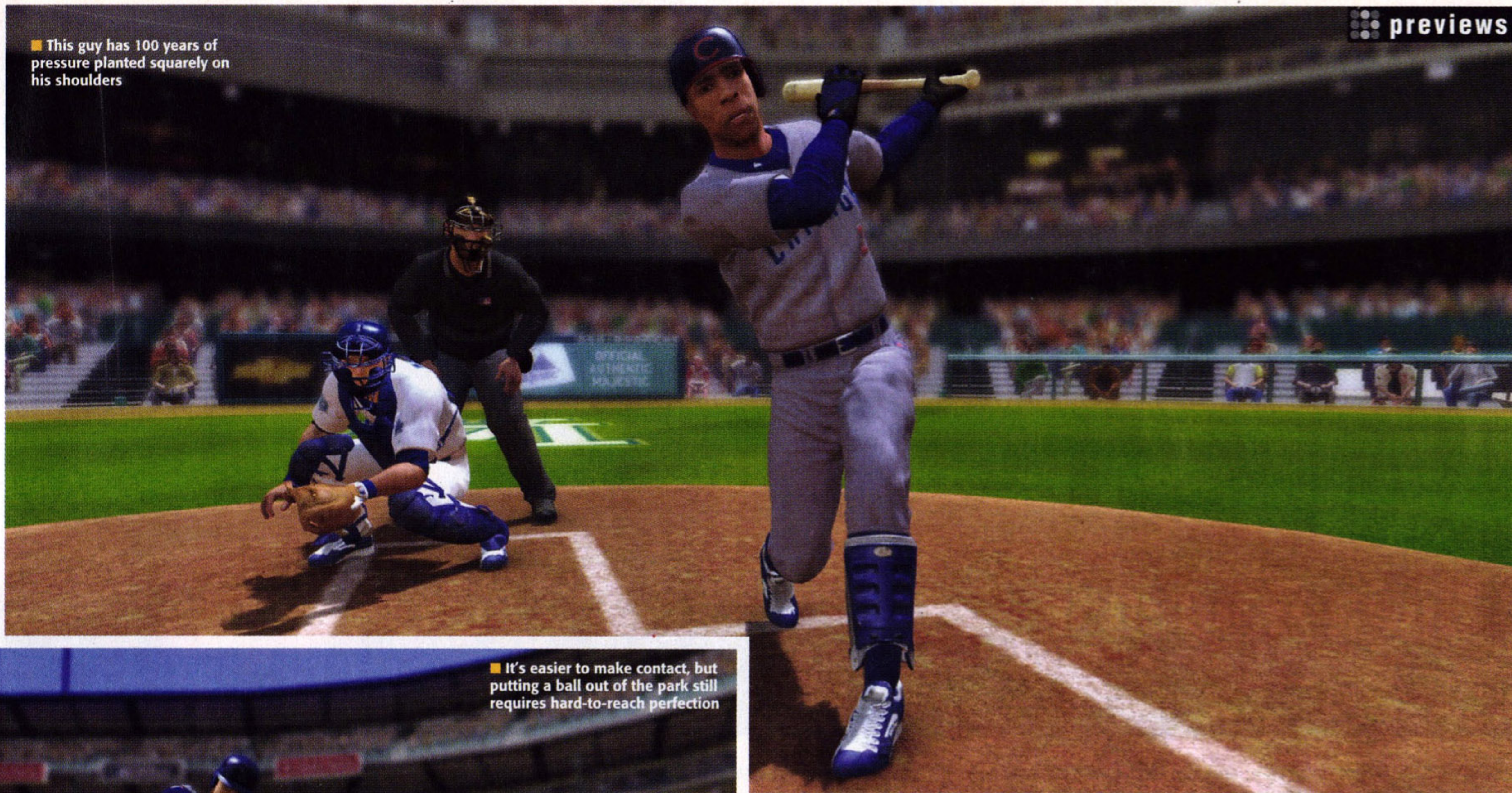
74 GAME INFORMER



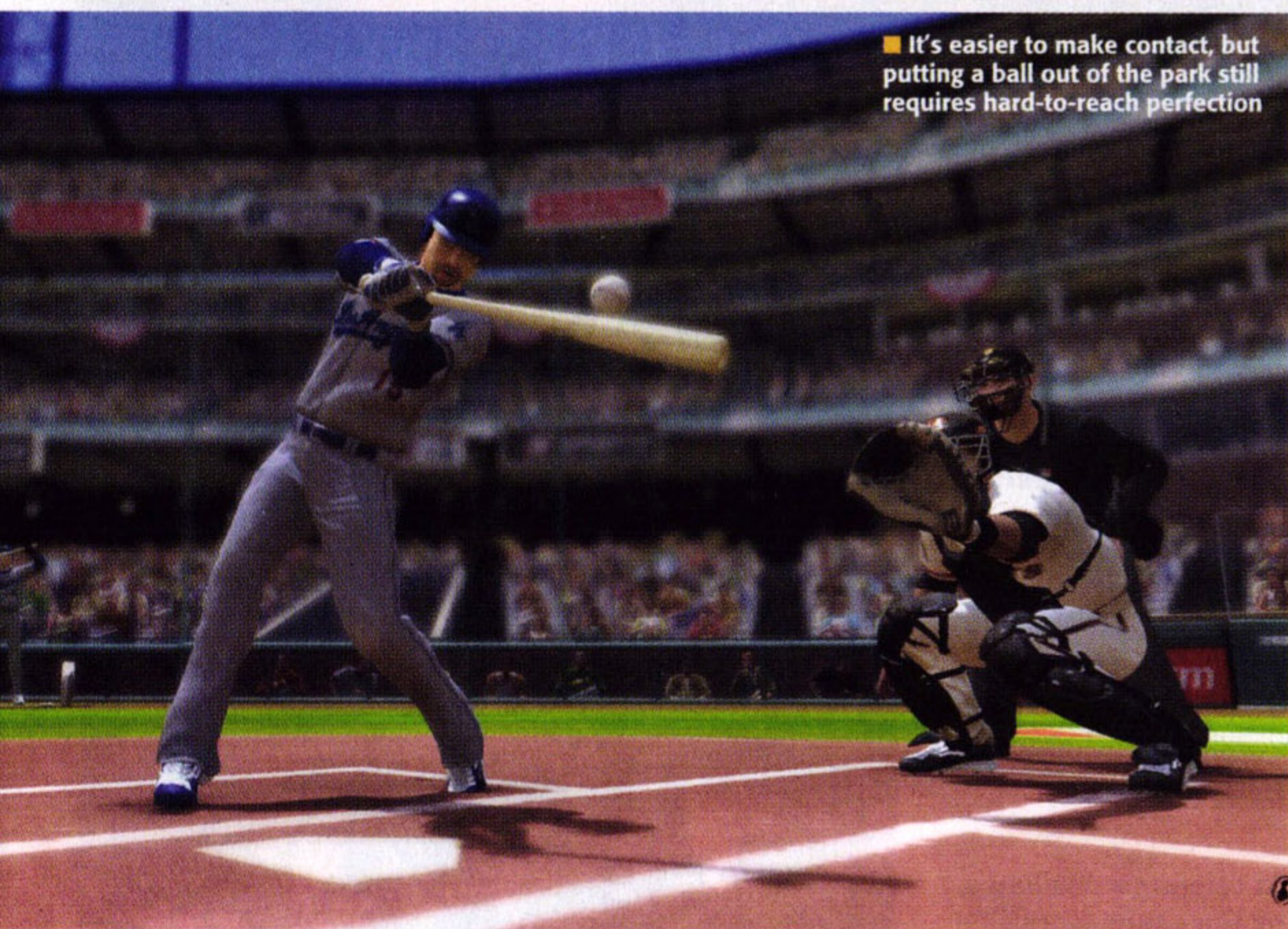
(NHL) A'S HAY TRICK LEADS THRASHERS PAST RED WINGS 5-1



■ This guy has 100 years of pressure planted squarely on his shoulders



■ It's easier to make contact, but putting a ball out of the park still requires hard-to-reach perfection



CARD ALBUM CREDITS: 0

New Cards (9)

COREY PATTERSON

OBTAINED 1/10/2008
 VALUE 20 CREDITS
 POSITION OF \$3,500,000
 COST QUANTITY 1 TOTAL

■ The thrill of collecting is a large part of this year's game. "Ah crap! Another Corey Patterson card! What button performs the 'shred and trash' function?"

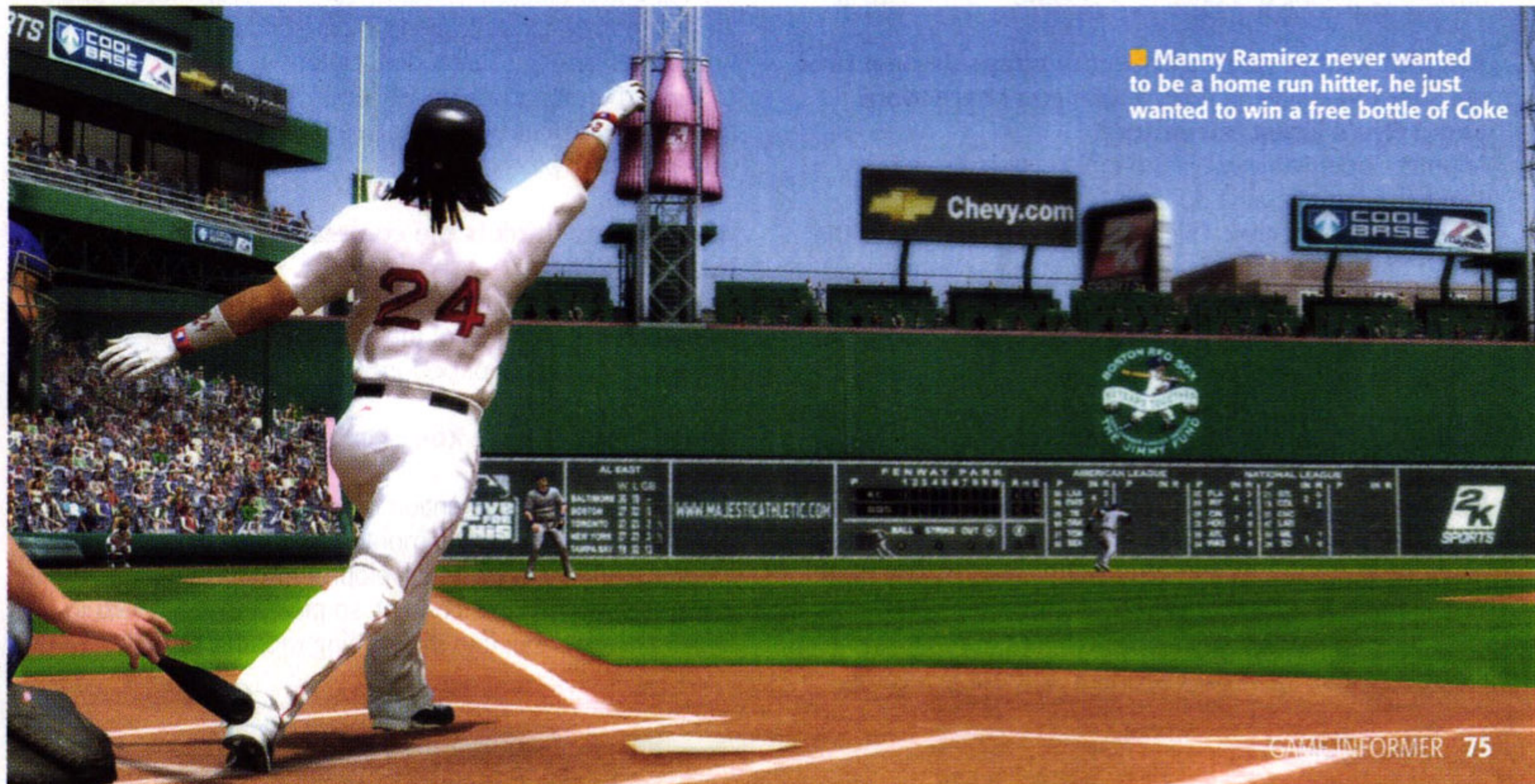
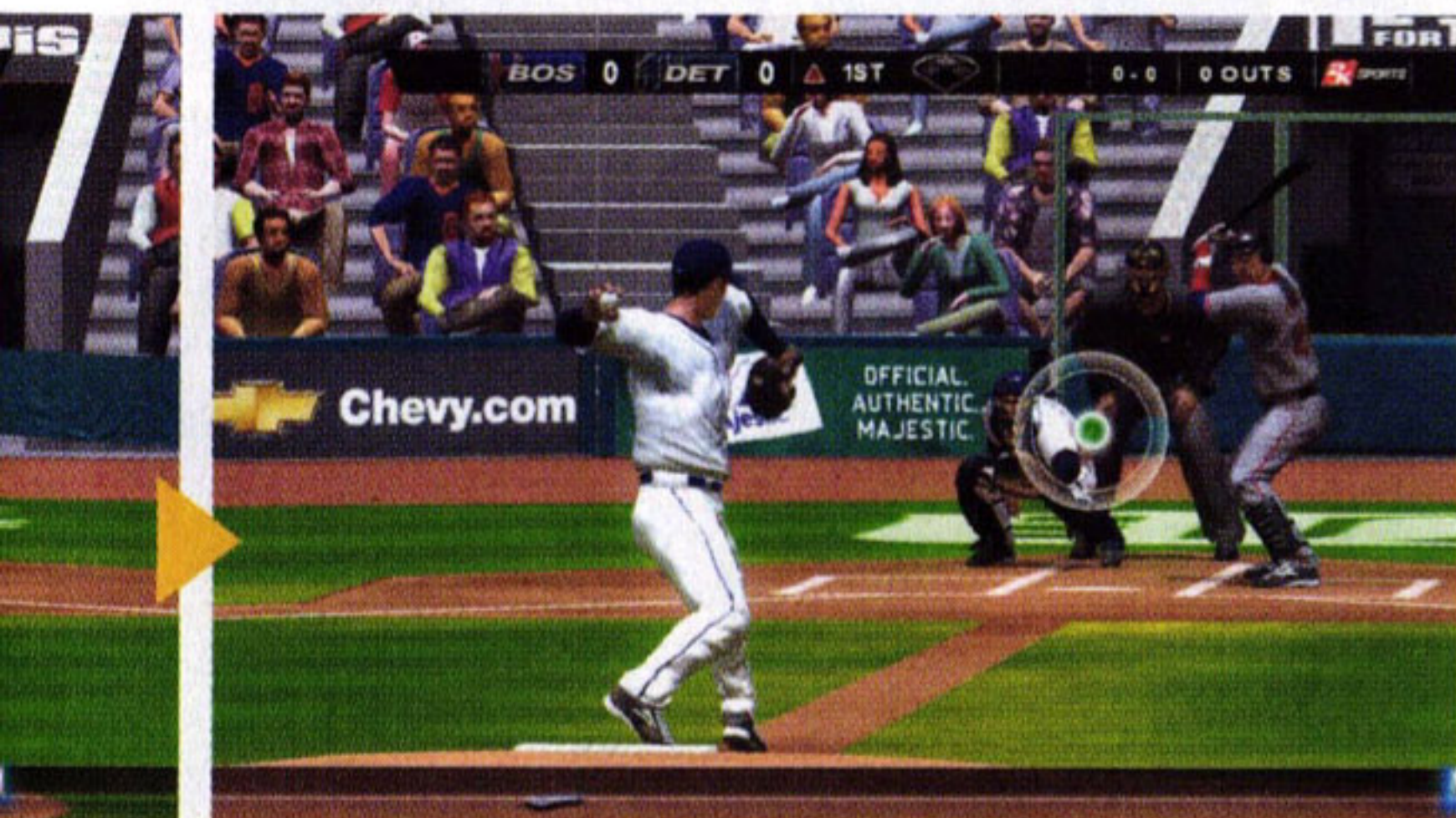
NFL PACKERS HOSTING NFC CHA

The best part of the game in our opinion, however, derives from our childhood of collecting baseball cards. MLB 2K8 is now entering the world of collecting with an in game 459-card set. You can either buy packs or earn one card at a time. For instance, to unlock the Josh Beckett card, you must throw seven shutout innings with said pitcher. Cards can be traded online, and they can also be used to create a unique team for use in multiplayer games. Salary caps will prevent you from assembling an all All-Star squad, unless you earn platinum versions (which greatly reduces the salary of the player). There are three types of cards: platinum, gold, and the lowly black. As the year rolls on, 2K is planning to release two additional series of cards (including a set much like Topps Traded).

If you are a 360 owner wondering what is missing from this version of the game, never fear, 2K is planning to have all of the missing content available day one via download. This content consists of unlockable stadiums and Cool Base alternate jerseys.

MLB 2K8 will be available just in time for spring training for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. A Wii version is also releasing on this day, and yes, it uses motion-based swinging, but interestingly, is more reminiscent of MLB 2K7. (And this concludes the first steroid-free baseball story since 2002.) ■ ■ ■

■ Manny Ramirez never wanted to be a home run hitter, he just wanted to win a free bottle of Coke



Ryu sheds blood at such an alarming rate that we're surprised there isn't a pack of feeding vampires in his wake

XBOX 360

Ninja Gaiden II

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER TEAM NINJA > RELEASE 2008

ITAGAKI SPEAKS OUT

Microsoft is still keeping many of the details surrounding *Ninja Gaiden II* to itself, but it did afford us an opportunity to speak with Tomonobu Itagaki, the enigmatic and controversial head of Team Ninja, regarding Ryu Hayabusa's latest blood-fueled adventure.

There seems to be a renaissance in third-person action games with stellar titles like *Heavenly Sword* and *God of War* following the brilliance of *Ninja Gaiden* and *Devil May Cry*. What ideas are you bringing to the table with *Ninja Gaiden II* to keep the franchise at the head of the pack against such tough competition?

It took me 10 years to reach the pinnacle of the fighting game genre with *Dead or Alive*, but I believe I have pretty good insight and perspective into how to best go up against competitors' titles. To be blunt with you, the competitive process within the fighting game genre is very exclusionary, which forces us into a down-and-dirty fight in which all features are competing with each other on a similar level. The competition within the action game genre, however, is not nearly as severe. Why, you ask? Simple: because the action game genre has a very broad base. Although I can't quite say the same about *Heavenly Sword*, both *God of War* and *Devil May Cry* are fantastic games, and their respective feature sets don't force them into direct exclusionary competition with *Ninja Gaiden*. In that sense, I'm not too concerned with these titles. In fact, I'm actually looking forward to getting a chance to play *DMC 4* and *GOW III*.

The plot for the game was under wraps the last time we saw the game in Tokyo. Can you share more about Ryu's latest adventure?

Another Super Ninja will stand in Ryu Hayabusa's way this time around. I don't mean the Ryu look-alike "doppelganger," either. This is a proud man that leads the militant faction of the Black Spider Clan, and his name is Genshin. The fight with Genshin will make you remember once again what it is that a man must protect, even at the cost of his own life.

With recent games like *BioShock*, *Mass Effect*, and *Half-Life 2*, video games have grown leaps and bounds as a storytelling medium. Given this new trend toward compelling plotlines, do you feel the need to enhance Ryu's story with more depth than Team Ninja has in the past?

I make video games. Story is important, but I've never thought of it as the most important element in a game.

If it were the most essential thing to me, I'd write a novel instead.

With the impressive skill set of moves and counters that *Ninja Gaiden* offers, it seems ripe for translation into player-versus-player online multiplayer. Have you ever considered growing the *Ninja Gaiden* experience to include versus competition or co-op gameplay?

I once made a four-player competitive online version, purely for fun. It conflicts with the concept of this game, however, so I won't put it in this time around, but I do want to give you guys an opportunity to experience this kind of gameplay at some point.

Is walking the fine line between offering a challenge to hardcore gamers and keeping the game accessible enough to allow less-talented gamers to enjoy your game something the team struggles with?

Satisfying both the casual gaming crowd and the hardcore gamers out there is one of the goals that the *Ninja Gaiden II* team is putting the most effort into. That's why we're including four different levels of difficulty, and in each one the game is designed to behave differently depending on the type of gamer it's aimed at. I intend to release a demo of the game prior to its launch, and I think that if you play that demo you'll all be able to see that I have fulfilled this very important promise.

What do you think is the coolest new element in *Ninja Gaiden II*?

The Ninpo magic attacks, the Obliteration Technique finishing moves, and all of the other new actions that Hayabusa is capable of performing.

Do you plan to have Xbox Live marketplace items for *Ninja Gaiden II*?

Of course. I have no intention of letting people get bored with *Ninja Gaiden II* just a month or so after launch. We're already pretty far along in development with many different kinds of downloadable content, so please look forward to hearing more about it in the coming months. ■ ■ ■



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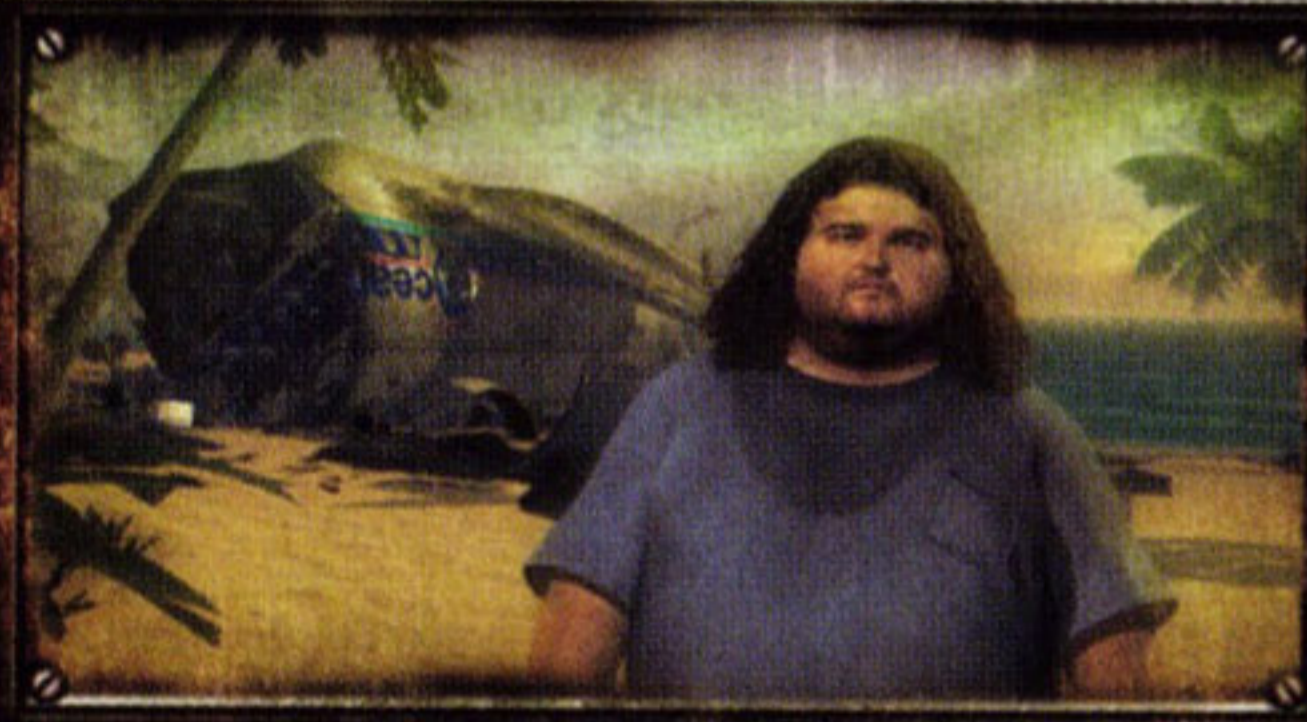


FIND YOUR REDEMPTION. FIND YOUR WAY HOME.

You awake to the blazing sun, the screaming of other passengers, the wreckage of Oceanic flight 815. And no memory of what has happened. Now you must fight for your survival by exploring the island, uncovering its dark secrets, and piecing together the fragments of your own furtive past. If you're lucky, you may just find a way home ...



Experience the never-before-told story of a previously unseen flight 815 survivor.



Uncover the island's secrets, exploring familiar and new locations and interacting with other key survivors.

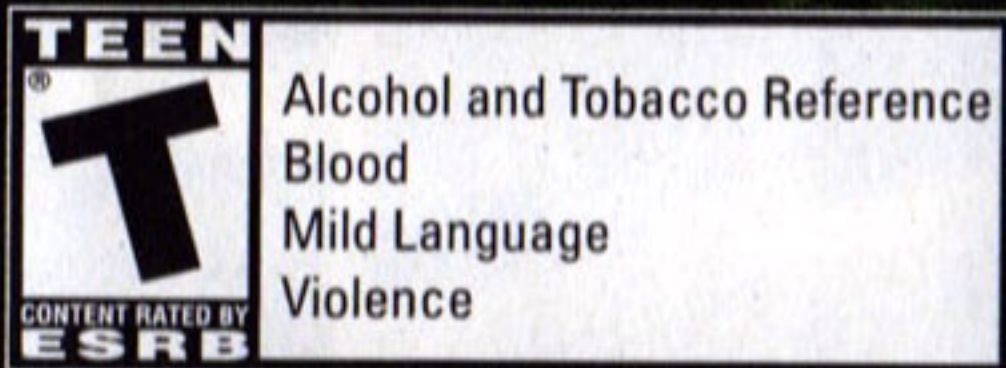


Confront the island's dark forces to solve the mystery of your own illicit past and discover a way home.

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XBOX 360®

AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 2008



PLAYSTATION 3



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■ Characters' faces are more clearly defined on the 360

XBOX 360 | Wii

Bully: Scholarship Edition

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES > DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR VANCOUVER > RELEASE MARCH 4

BACK IN SESSION

If you played *Bully* on PS2, you may have been surprised to find that it was a good-hearted, schooldays simulation, and not a subversive tool to incite playground violence. Once you strip away the controversy surrounding Rockstar Vancouver's title, what's left is a charming and entertaining tale filled with humor and likeable characters. If you missed this gem in the 2006 next-gen holiday rush, Rockstar is giving you a chance to make the grade with *Bully: Scholarship Edition*.

Wii and Xbox 360 owners can look forward to more than just a simple port of Jimmy Hopkins' year at Bullworth

Academy. There will be eight new missions, many of which will be holiday-themed tasks set in the sparse winter term. For instance, we played one mission called "Miracle on Bullworth St." where Jimmy talked to a mangy, whiskey-swilling Santa (think Billy Bob Thornton from *Bad Santa*). Old Saint Nick wanted Jimmy to take care of a Santa imposter in the town square, so we got to break oversized decorations and beat up elves to scare the old coot off. Our reward was an elf costume for Jimmy – just one of many new pieces of clothing added to the game.

Gamers will also be able to attend four new classes.

Geography, music, biology, and math will join the six old classes for 10 total. These activities add considerable variety to the school day; music is a percussion rhythm game, math is a "choose the best answer" exercise, geography has you placing a flag on the proper region, and biology is a Trauma Center-like dissection game. Surprisingly, most of the classes (including the new ones) will now be available as competitive activities in *Scholarship Edition's* head-to-head multiplayer mode. Several of the games from the carnival can also be selected to round out your bouts.

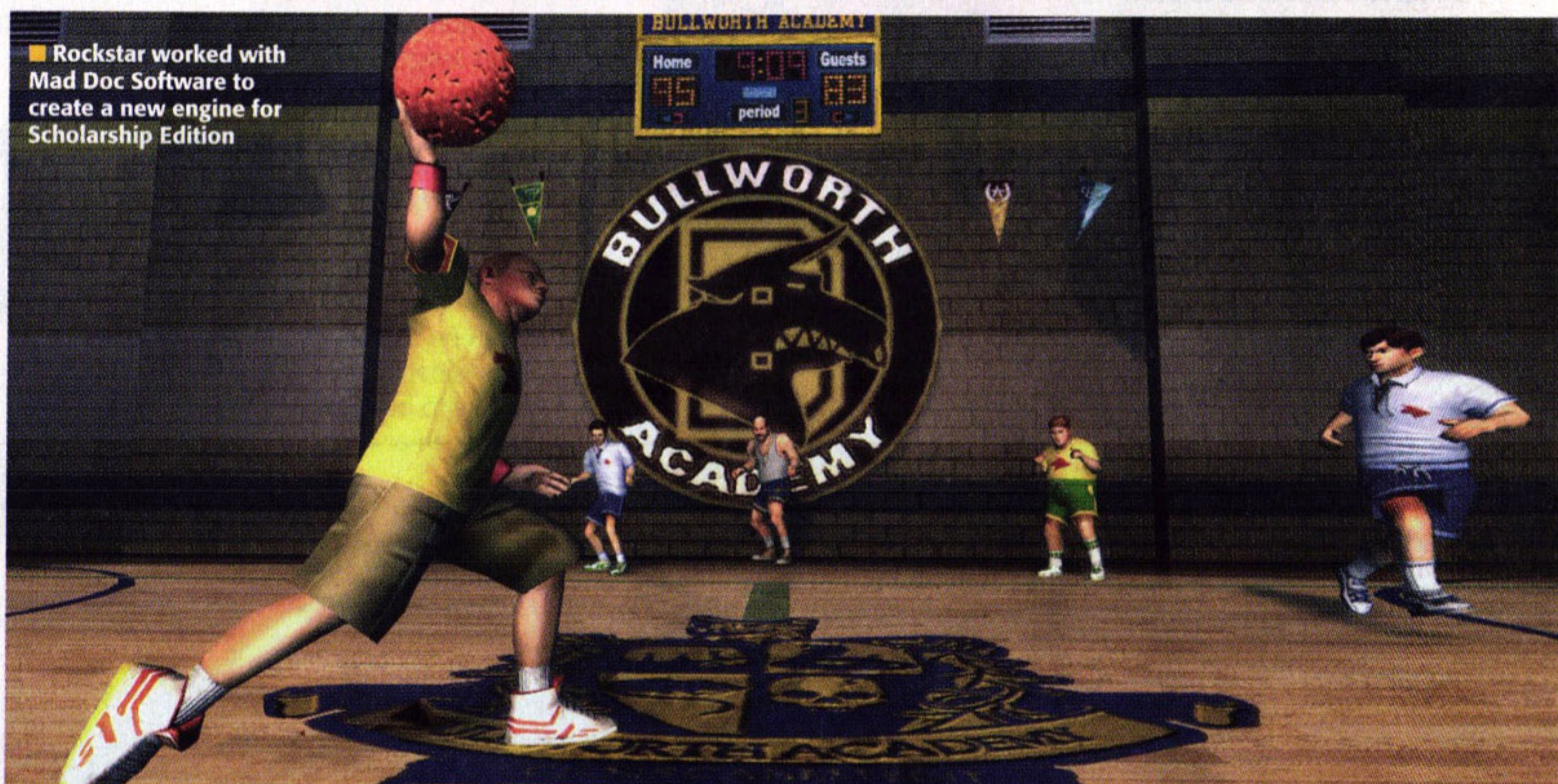
Additional content isn't the only improvement you'll

■ Jimmy's about to help this Fonz wannabe learn how to keep your cool in the face debilitating groin pain

■ One of your missions for Santa is to take pictures of disobedient kids on his lap



■ Rockstar worked with Mad Doc Software to create a new engine for Scholarship Edition



notice. The team has clearly put a lot of effort into updating the graphics for both systems. The 360 version is a particularly remarkable step up, since it retains the cartoonish style while making the environment and characters much more detailed. It may have the refinement of modern 360 games, but it is certainly impressive. Even on the Wii, the game looks better than the original.

Don't make the mistake of assuming *Bully: Scholarship Edition* is just a port for people who haven't played the original. The new content, along with the game's magnetic appeal, ensure that even if you graduated from Bullworth with honors, there are tempting incentives to return to campus for continuing education. ■ ■ ■

■ Because there are more classes, you won't have to worry about running out of courses so early in the year



HUMILIATION AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

The 360 edition may come out ahead in terms of visuals, but the Wii's control scheme has some hilarious potential you won't find elsewhere. The combat mechanics involve swinging the remote and nunchuk to throw punches, but the real joy comes from Jimmy's humiliation moves. If you want to give a nerd a wedgie, you lift the controllers up the air. To deliver snakebites, you twist the remote. In addition to being entertaining, these actions are inventive in the way they bring you even closer to Jimmy's endearing sophomoric hijinks.

NINTENDO DS

Final Fantasy Tactics A2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX > RELEASE TBA

IVALICE, AGAIN

It's a good time to be a fan of Final Fantasy Tactics. On the tail of last year's War of the Lions (the excellent remake of the original on PSP) comes the next new game in the series, Final Fantasy Tactics A2. This sequel to the GBA entry (A2 = Advance 2) has already been released in Japan, and we got our hands on a copy to see how it stacks up to previous titles in the series.

Players once again find themselves in control of a modern character, Luso, who is magically transported to the land of Ivalice. This world is the same one used in previous Tactics



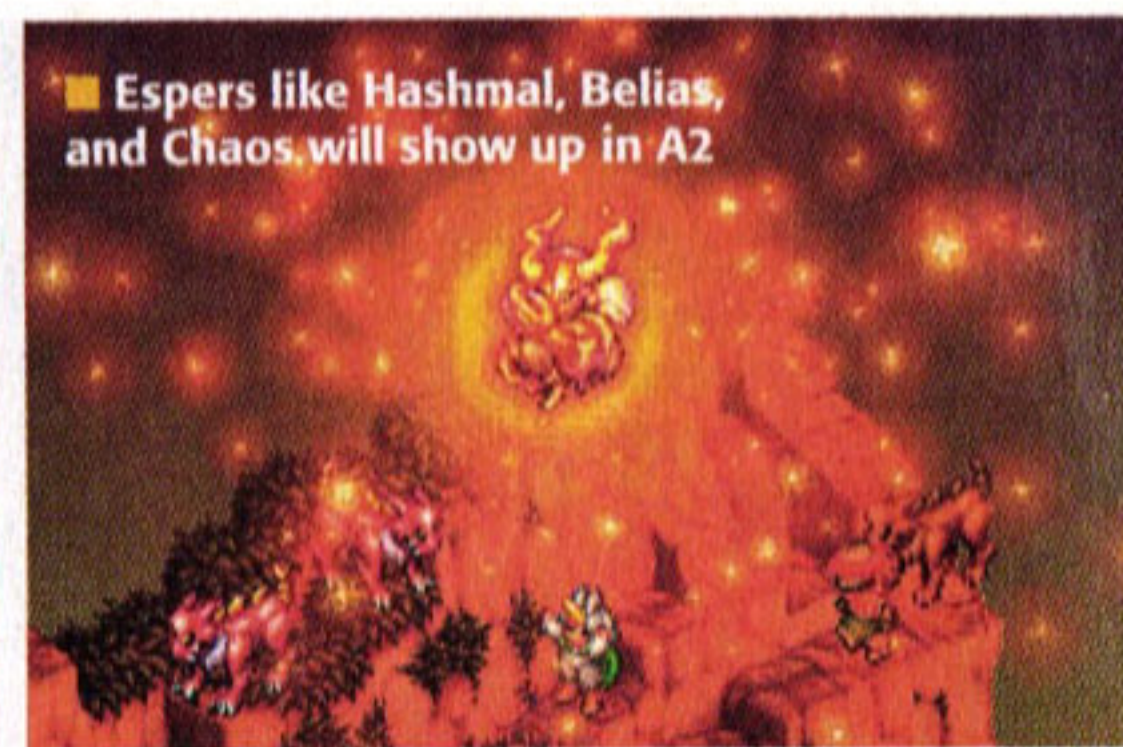
games, as well as Final Fantasy XII and its spin-off, Revenant Wings. The setting isn't the only familiar element; the gameplay relies on the traditional turn-based grid combat that strategy fans have come to know so well.

In our time with the game, the core mechanics seem largely unchanged, with a handful of new features to add more depth. You now can assign special clan abilities for your party that can have numerous effects, such as locating traps on the map or protecting against status ailments. Choosing these clan abilities wisely can be the key to victory, considering the game appears to be quite challenging, even at early levels.

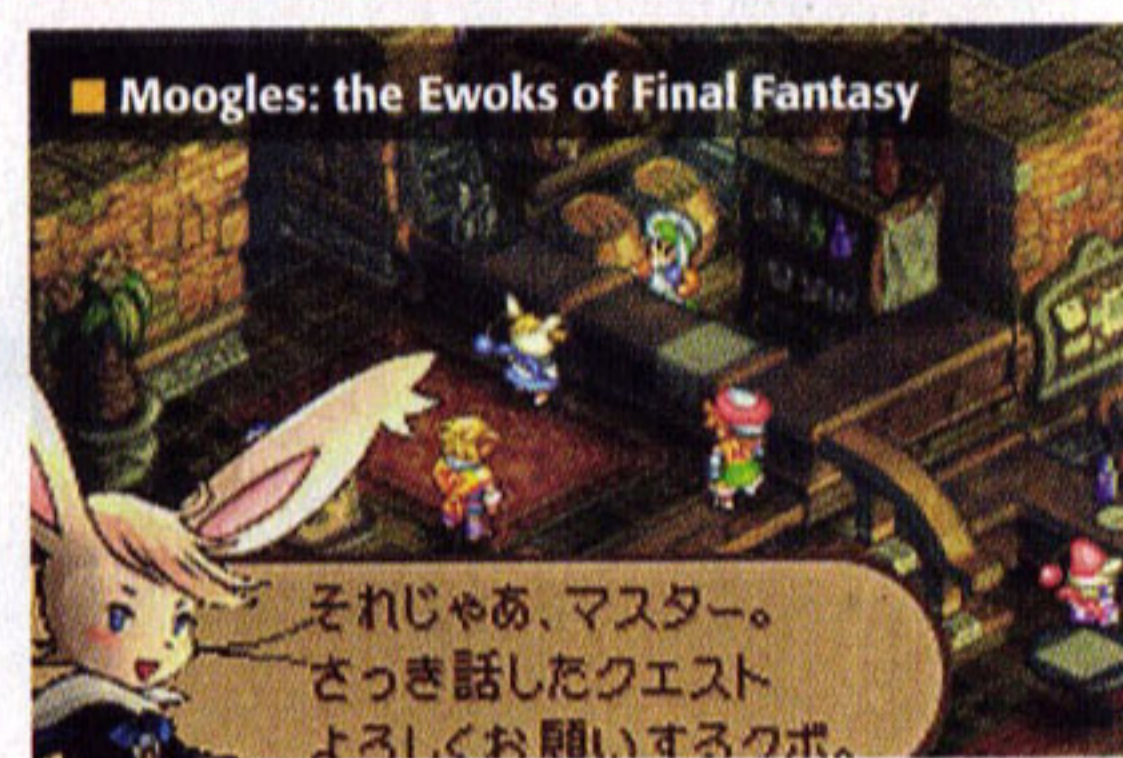
As you progress, you'll



■ The art style is similar to Final Fantasy Tactics Advance



■ Espers like Hashmal, Belias, and Chaos will show up in A2



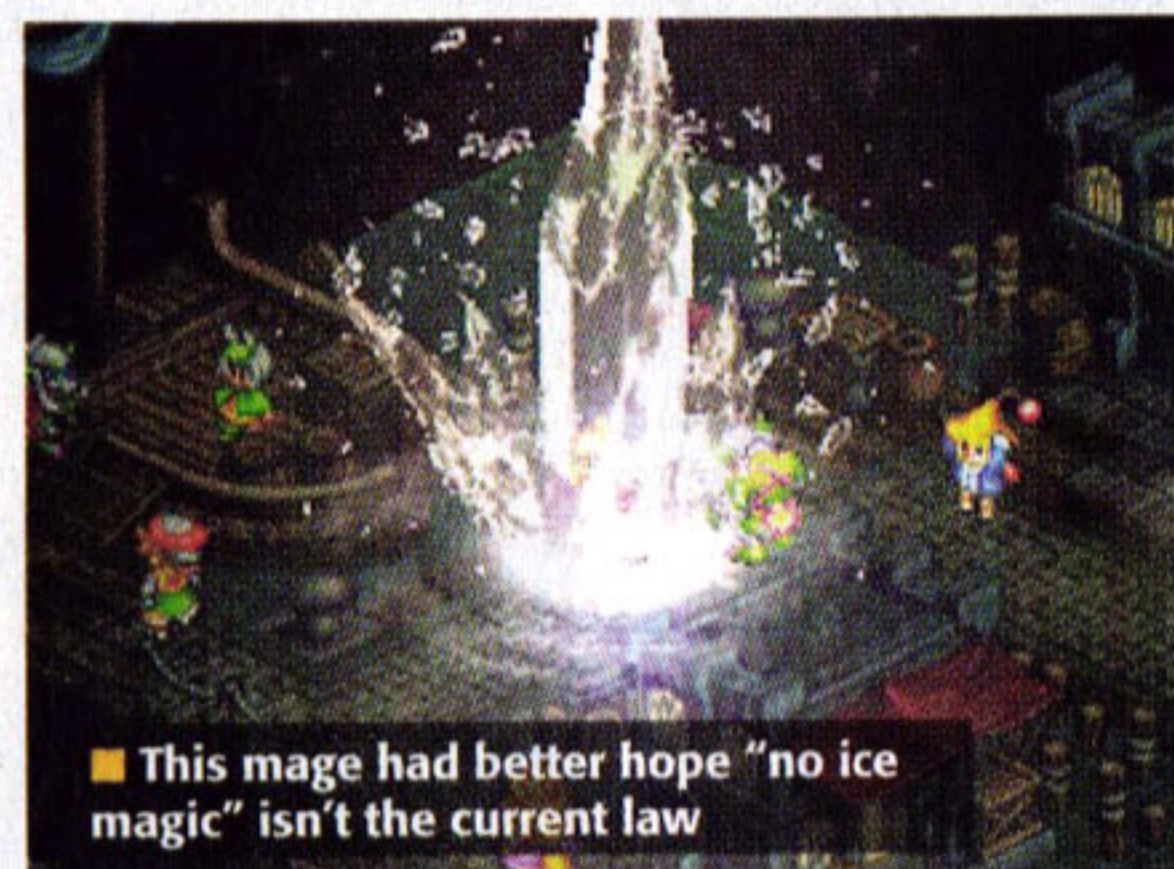
■ Moogles: the Ewoks of Final Fantasy

get to see more of the improvements it has to offer. Old classes have seen some tweaks, and new ones (like Bodyguard and Chocobo Rider) have been added. While those will be fun to see, one sight in the game might not be so welcome: Judges. These arbiters of combat will return, ready to hand out punishments if you don't abide by the conditions they set for a battle.

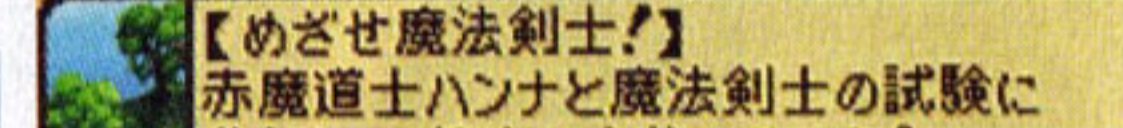
So far, this trip back to Ivalice looks promising. It's got some new ideas that complement, but don't drastically change, the already solid strategic foundations of the series. Square Enix hasn't announced a specific release date for North America, but we'd be surprised if it wasn't on shelves by the time fall rolls around. ■ ■ ■



レイラードの森



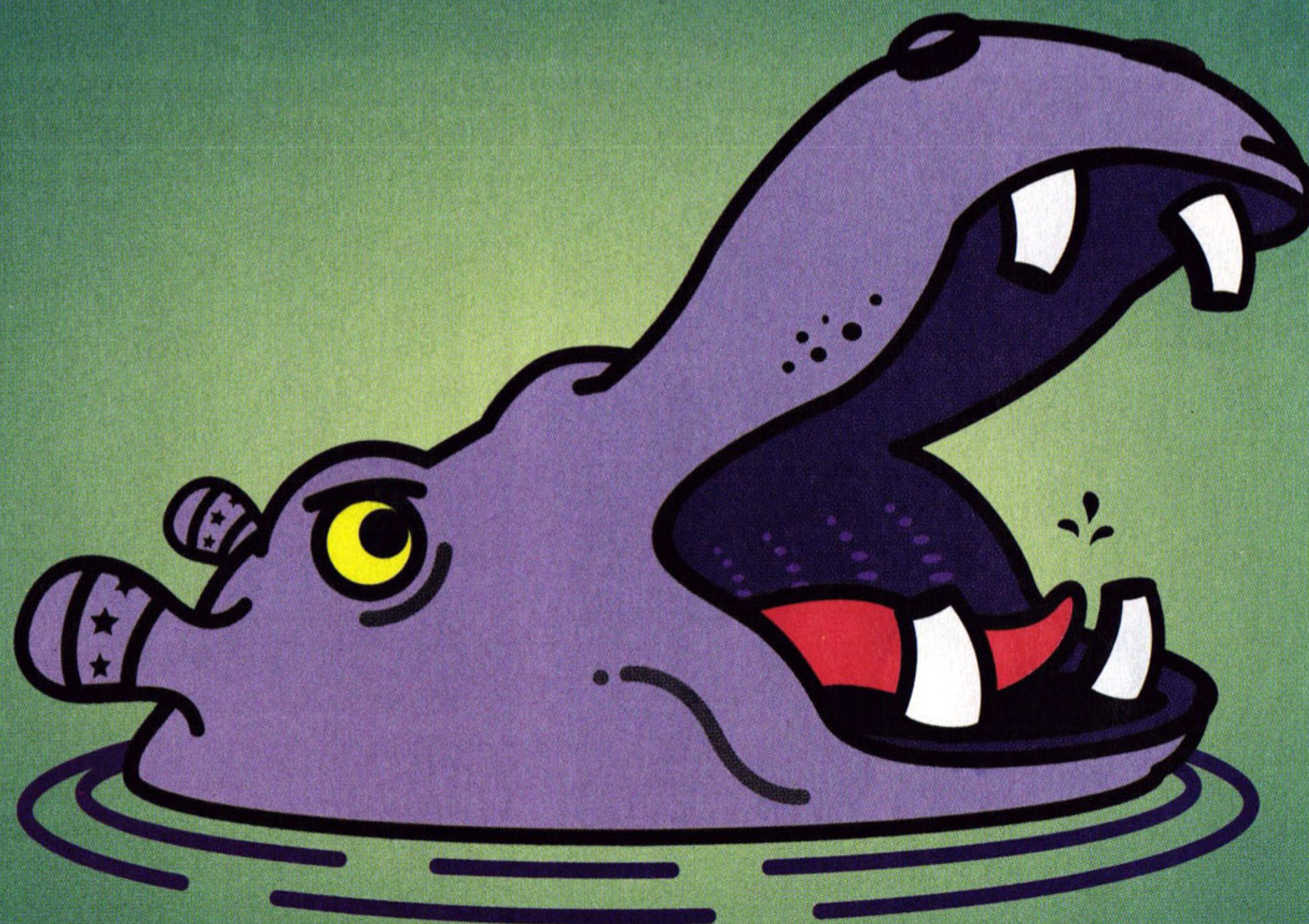
■ This mage had better hope "no ice magic" isn't the current law



【めざせ魔法剣士!】
赤魔道士ハンナと魔法剣士の試験に



二ヶ月もこのオッサンの
めんどろみろってか!?
カンベンしてくれよ...



Hungry Beast!



■ "I'm a subtle, nuanced, empowering character!"



■ The characters' interactions promise to illustrate a deep and meaningful insight on the human condition

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SIERRA > DEVELOPER TEAM 17 > RELEASE FALL

LAFF TRACK

Proudly trumpeting its low-brow, sophomoric style of humor, the elderly Leisure Suit Larry franchise is returning once again. This installment puts Larry in Tinseltown, on the set of Laffer Studios' many productions. Some things never change, though – Larry's still looking for love in all the wrong places, and the game is filled with enough floozies to keep Wilt Chamberlain busy for at least a week.

Gameplay revolves around completing minigames to win the affections of the ladies, though players will have the opportunity to explore the Laffer Studios campus sandbox-style. Activities range from racing to platforming, puzzle-solving to fish-in-a-barrel shooting, and more. Having Worms developer Team 17 on the project gives us some hope that these will be



brought off with more aplomb than the previous title's mediocre showing.

Much of the franchise's entertainment value lies in the writing and delivery of the humor. To that end, this latest effort includes Happy Madison Productions (Adam Sandler's company – *Ed.*) screenwriter Allen Covert parodying popular movies, backed up by celebrity voiceovers courtesy of Dave

Attell, Shannon Elizabeth, and several more well-known actors.

The final piece of the Leisure Suit Larry puzzle is something known as the Director's Game, which allows players to direct their own Larry Feature. What exactly this entails is unknown at this point, but we can only hope that it involves the ability to drop Larry into crushingly embarrassing scenarios and send them to your buddies in the vein of Halo 3's video sharing capabilities. ■ ■ ■

Fit

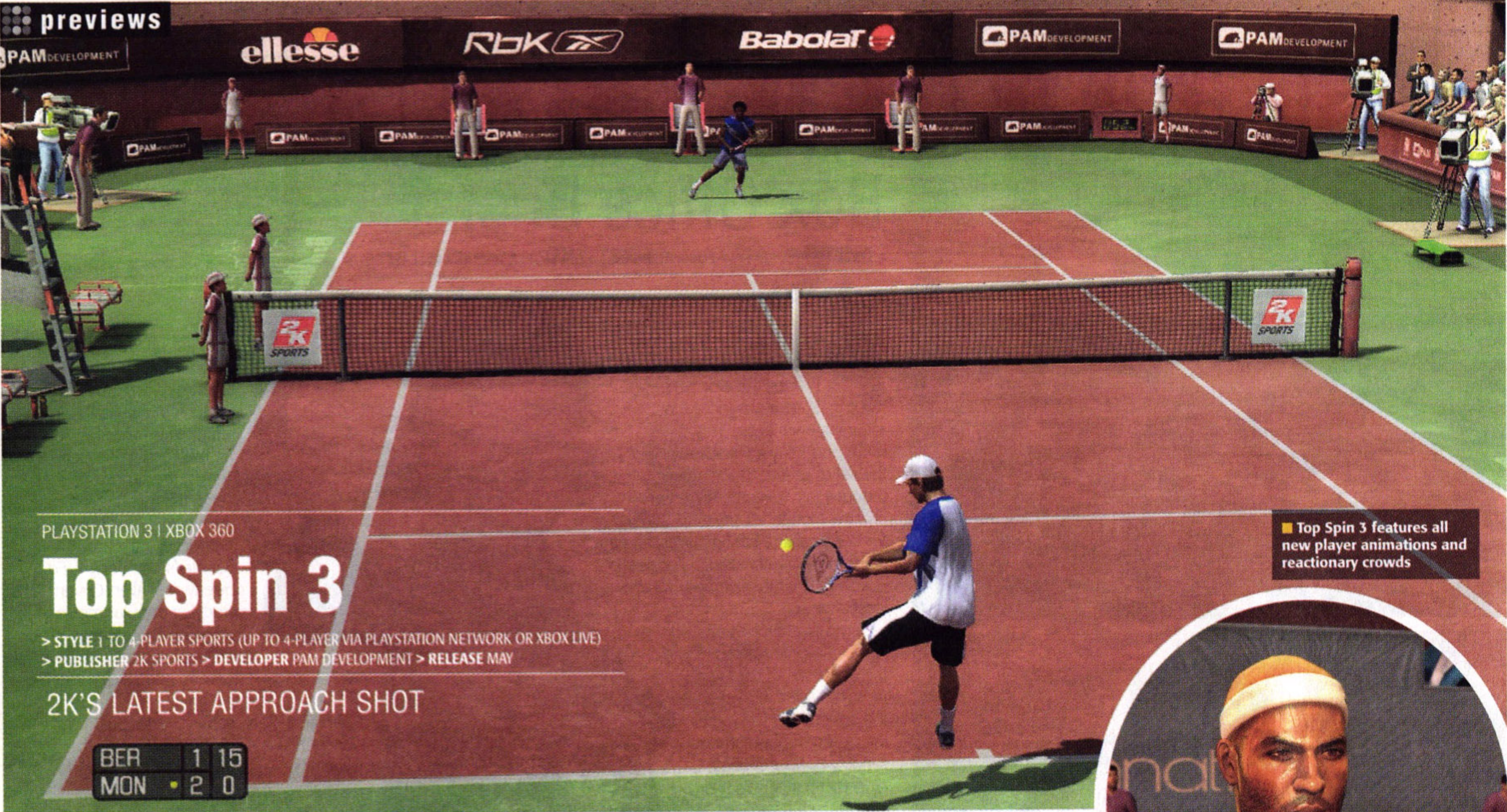


The Fit is Go!

Release the hatchback! Feeding time! Load your cargo and five human passengers into the ravenous, cavernous Fit! Gulp!

fit.honda.com





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

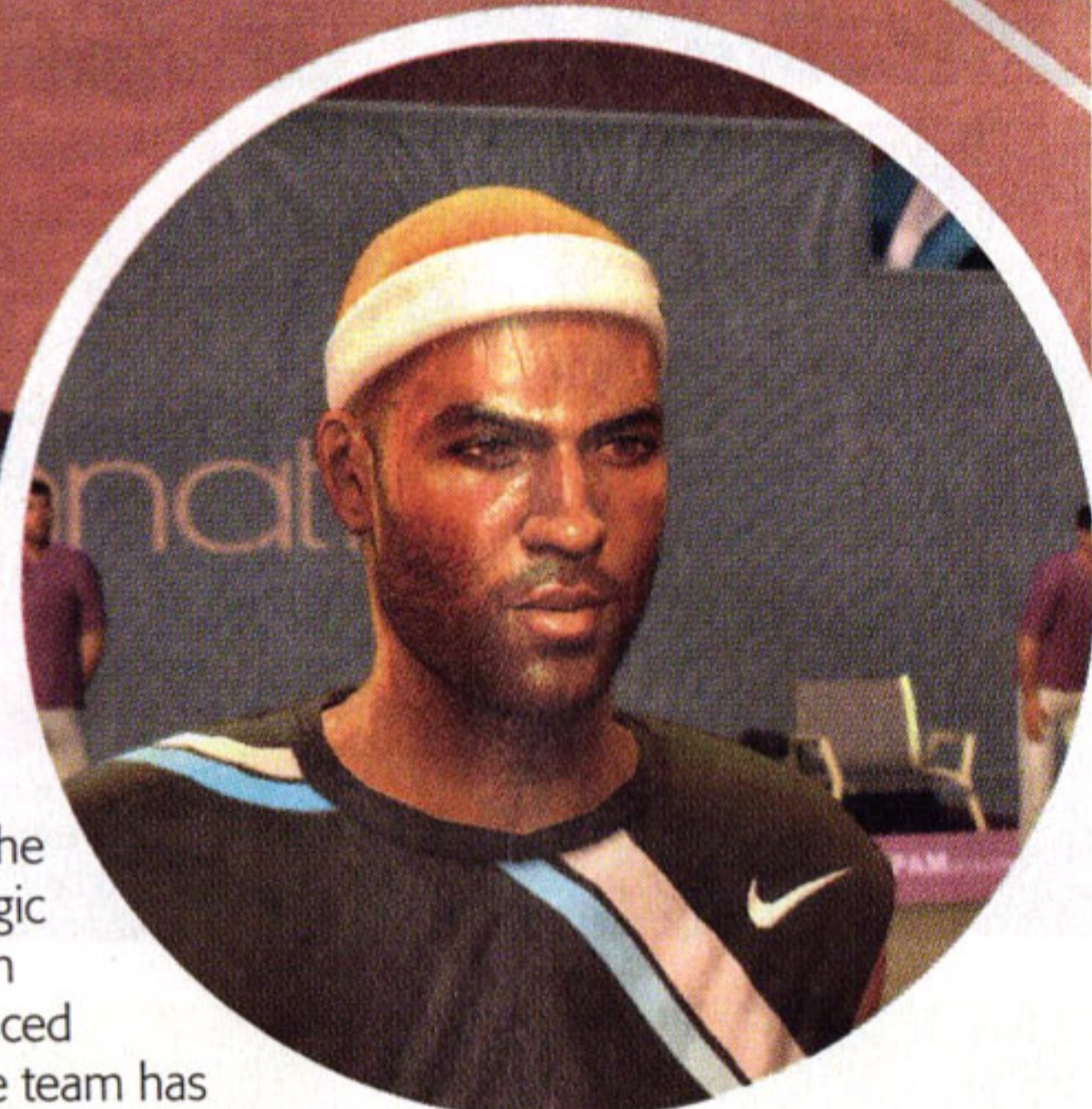
Top Spin 3

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE)
 > PUBLISHER 2K SPORTS > DEVELOPER PAM DEVELOPMENT > RELEASE MAY

2K'S LATEST APPROACH SHOT

BER 1 15
 MON 2 0

■ Top Spin 3 features all new player animations and reactionary crowds



The Top Spin series has been the Roger Federer to Virtua Tennis' Pete Sampras. Sure, VT dominated for a long stretch in the 1990s and early 2000s, but right now no one has a better all-around game than Federer. Some are saying the Swiss star will go down as the best of all time. Top Spin 3 hopes a similar fate lies in its future.

The first noticeable trait of Top Spin 3 is the revamped graphics. Everything about the game — from the player movement to the court surfaces — has received a drastic upgrade. The developer, PAM, has beefed up the polygon count for player models, and the result is some of the most realistic faces in video games this side of Tiger Woods. The animation system has also been overhauled to feature more

varied swings, foot planting, and player movements. The new level of immersion doesn't stop at the graphics — PAM also promises livelier crowds that react more readily to tension on the court.

Many of the major stars from Top Spin 2 — including Roger Federer, Anna Sharapova, and Andy Roddick — will return, but there will also be some comings and goings as the faces of the ATP and WTA change. New additions include Spanish phenom Raphael Nadal and the world's number one women's player, Justine Henin. Also new to the series is the introduction of legendary tennis figures. You won't find fan favorites Pete Sampras or Andre Agassi, but the game does feature German wunderkind Boris Becker, Bjorn Borg, and the queen of the grunt, Monica Seles. A

majority of the licensed players in the game will have their own signature animations and mannerisms, including serves and groundstrokes. Unfortunately, technical limitations prevented the team from adopting the new 2K Share application, which allows players to create their own pro tennis players and share them, but 2K hopes to implement it in future releases.

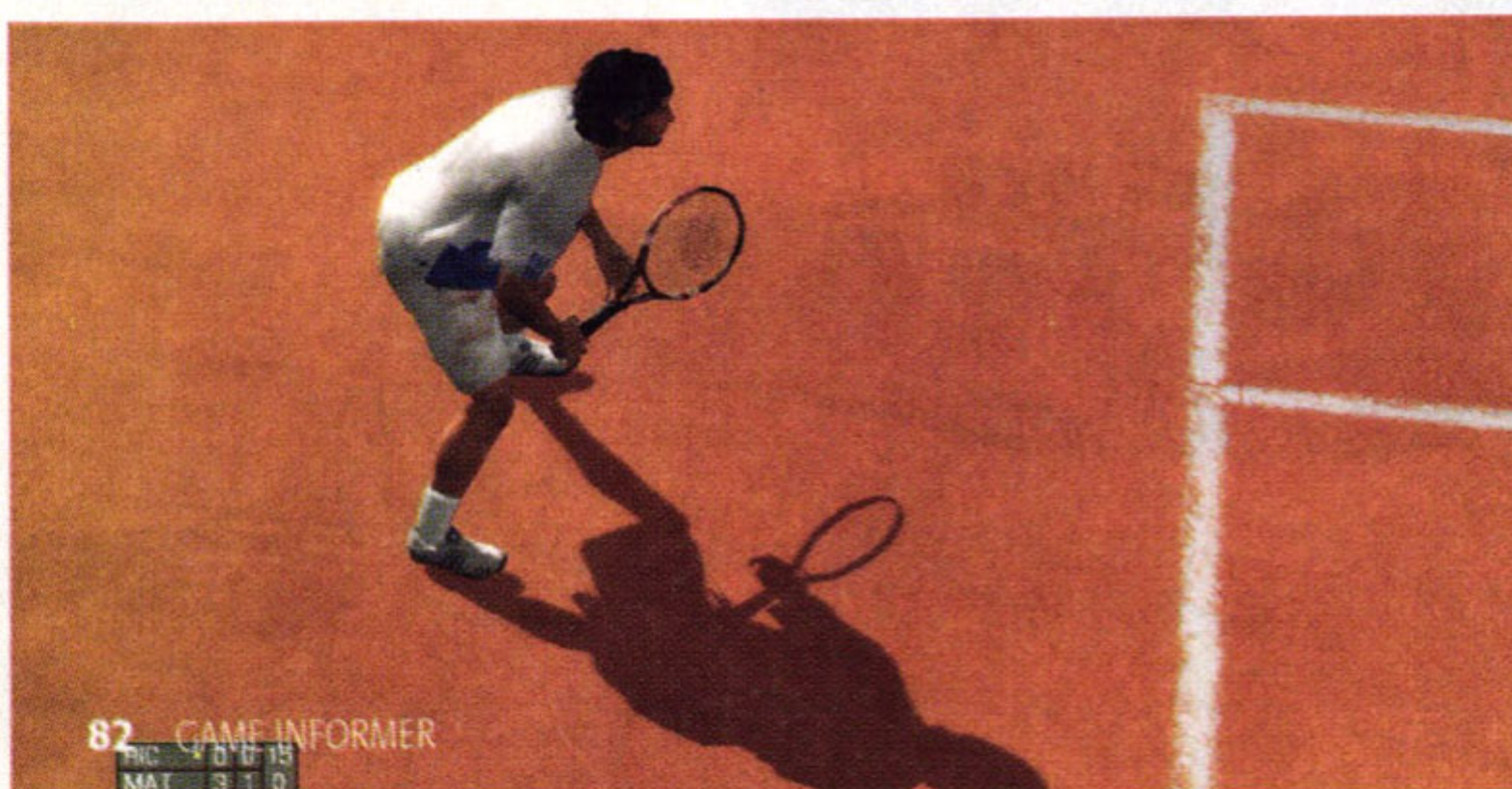
On the court, PAM aims to preserve Top Spin's great balance of pick-up-and-

play accessibility for newcomers along with the more strategic tennis action for experienced gamers. The team has maintained the deep career mode from Top Spin 2 and added more depth to the already impressive player creation and RPG-style progression systems. PAM also listened to common complaints from fans to implement some basic gameplay changes, including adding more risk shots. In addition, they've created a new control scheme that allows you to pull off some shots using the right analog stick, most notably during serves.

One of the major criticisms of Top Spin 2 was its lack of depth in online play. As a corrective measure, PAM is introducing the new Top Spin World Tour, which lets players participate in online tournaments and single-player matches. The tour is organized in short seasons, with new champions being crowned every month, which should continually open up the competition to include newer players. We look forward to getting some court time with this one in the near future. ■ ■ ■



BER 0 0
 MON 0 0



82 GAME INFORMER
 BER 0 0
 MON 3 0



BLA 0 0
 NAL 0 0

■ James Blake loves Top Spin. It's the only place he can win a major tournament

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THE ANGLES

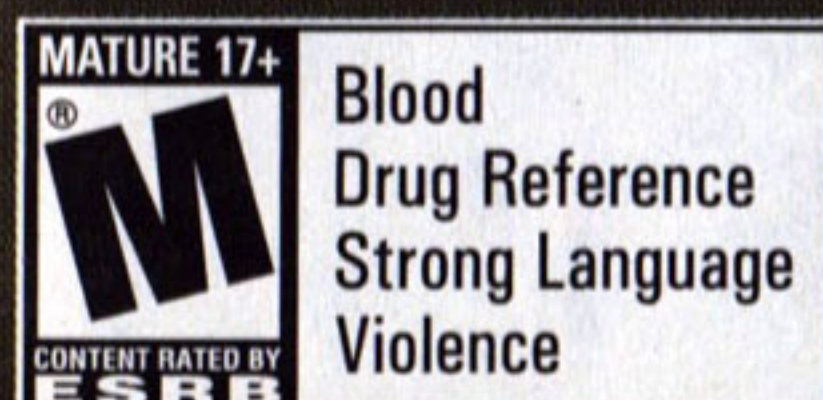
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HIS BACK



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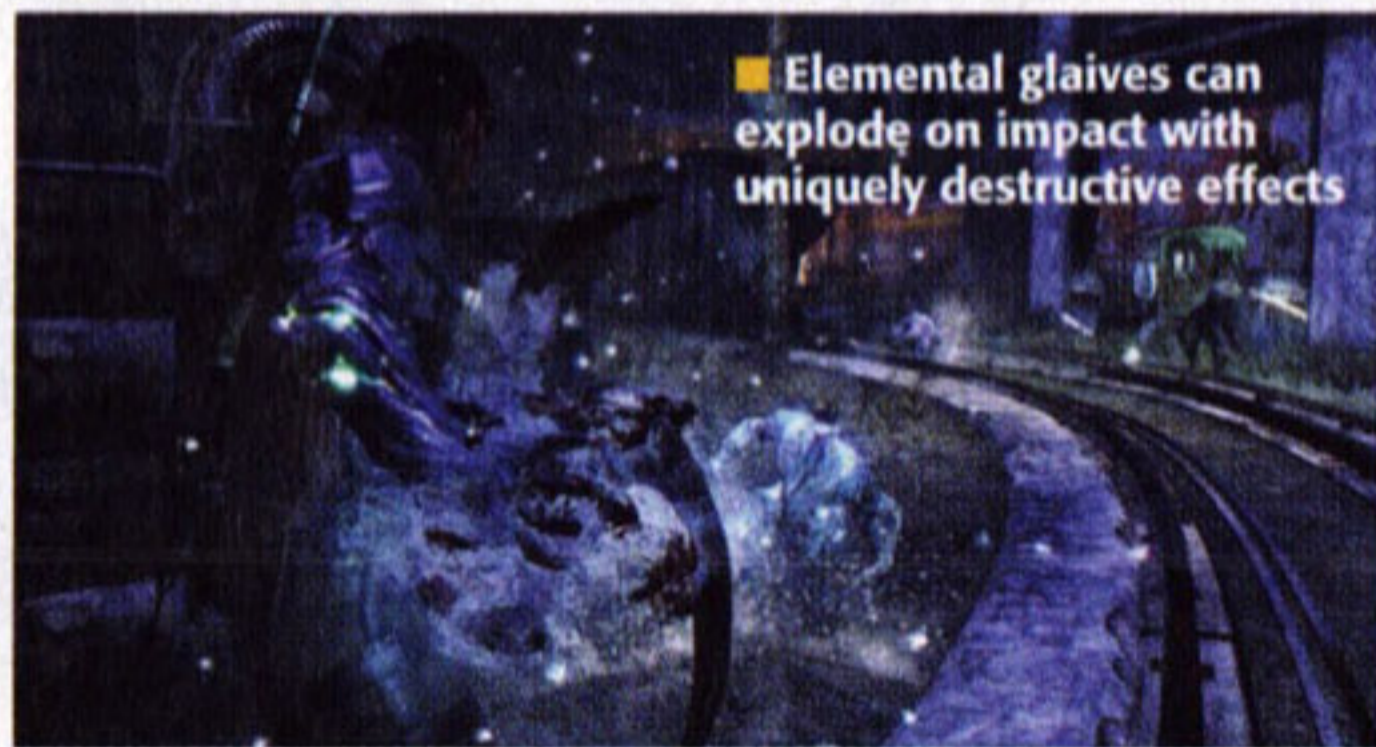
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Dark Sector

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER D3 PUBLISHER > DEVELOPER DIGITAL EXTREME
> RELEASE MARCH 25

PROVING BLADE

■ Despite being thorough, Hayden gives a terrible chest exam



■ Elemental glaives can explode on impact with uniquely destructive effects



■ Bosses usually require some combination of puzzle solving and brute force

If Dark Sector sounds like one of those games you've been hearing about longer than any other, it's probably because you have. Many may remember that Dark Sector was the very first next generation title to be announced. However, Dark Sector doesn't feel like an early system launch title at all. Rather than release its game along with all the other early PS3 and Xbox 360 titles, developer Digital Extremes has taken its time to ensure that the game gets polished. After spending almost four hours with a near-final build, we can safely say that Dark Sector measures up to today's console offerings.

The game starts out with a stylized black and white intro in a fictional Soviet bloc country called Lasria. During a mission gone wrong, black-op Hayden Tenno becomes infected with a terrible mutation. Similar to Gears of War, players will be able to take cover and fire from the third-person perspective, but the game really gets interesting when Hayden brings the action in close, taking advantage of some mysterious powers

gained through his infection.

Hayden's mutation gives him access to a rather unique circular glaive. This three-pronged pinwheel of murder is used as both a distance and close-quarters weapon, playing creatively into Hayden's arsenal of several dozen finishing moves. Not only can Hayden throw the glaive through bullet-torn battlefields to stun enemies and then take them out with one pistol shot, but he can also charge up the throw. If the move is well-timed, the blade will decapitate or cut enemies in half.

Many of the game's power-ups serve to further augment the glaive's destructive utility. The first upgrade we received was the glaive pickup. Hayden can target weapons and other treasures with the thrown blade and it will boomerang these items back to him.

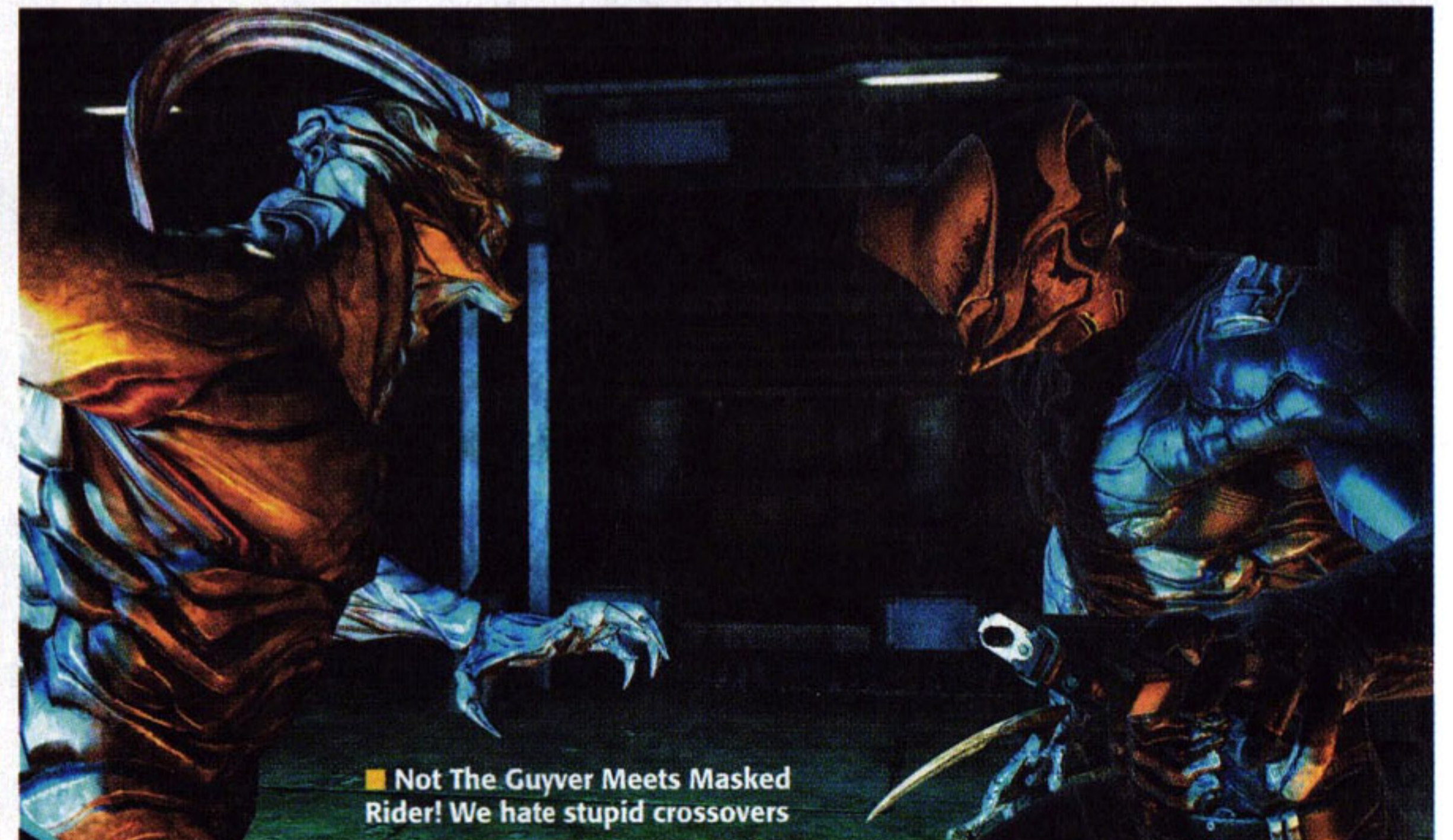
The glaive can also be temporarily imbued with elemental powers such as fire, electricity, and ice. These elements can be used in conjunction to help Hayden solve puzzles. For

example, a short-circuiting electrical box will light up the glaive with flashes of lightning that can be used to ignite a leaking gas pipe, which in turn gives the glaive flame properties allowing it to burn down some blockage covering a door leading to his next objective. These elements are also useful during combat, as a charged-up ice glaive will explode when thrown at a target, flash-freezing all enemies within its blast radius.

Our playtime left us with more information than we can talk about. We haven't even mentioned Hayden's stored energy charges, his temporary shield, the weapon upgrade system, or the strategic boss battles. Fortunately, gamers won't have to wait too long to experience these things for themselves since Dark Sector looks on track to hit its March release. ■ ■ ■



■ As the game progresses, Hayden continues to evolve, becoming stronger and able to lift heavier weapons



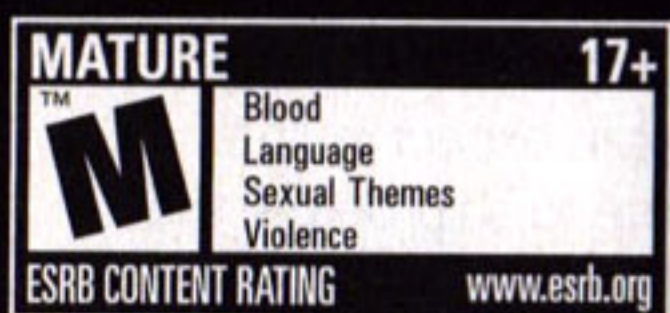
■ Not The Guyver Meets Masked Rider! We hate stupid crossovers

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JAMES P WIND

SOPHIA

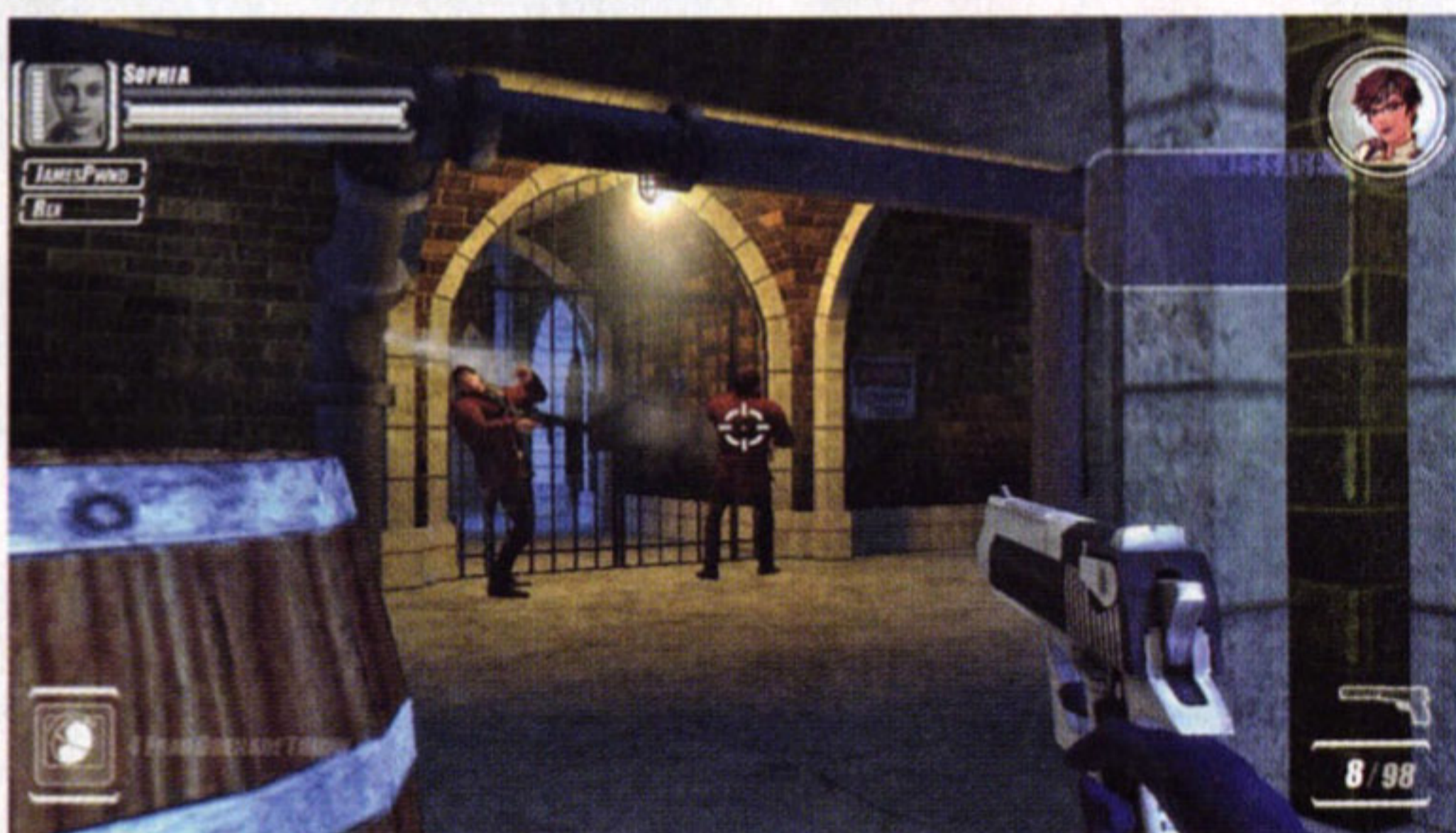
You can go lone wolf in *The Agency*, but if you want to advance through the ranks quickly you'll need to work as a team

PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

The Agency

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ACTION > PUBLISHER SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER SOE SEATTLE > RELEASE 2008

BRUSH CONTACT



Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to check out Sony Online Entertainment's bold new attempt to bring action gameplay to the massively multiplayer space. A lot has happened since our last look, so let's skip the pleasantries and dive straight into the action.

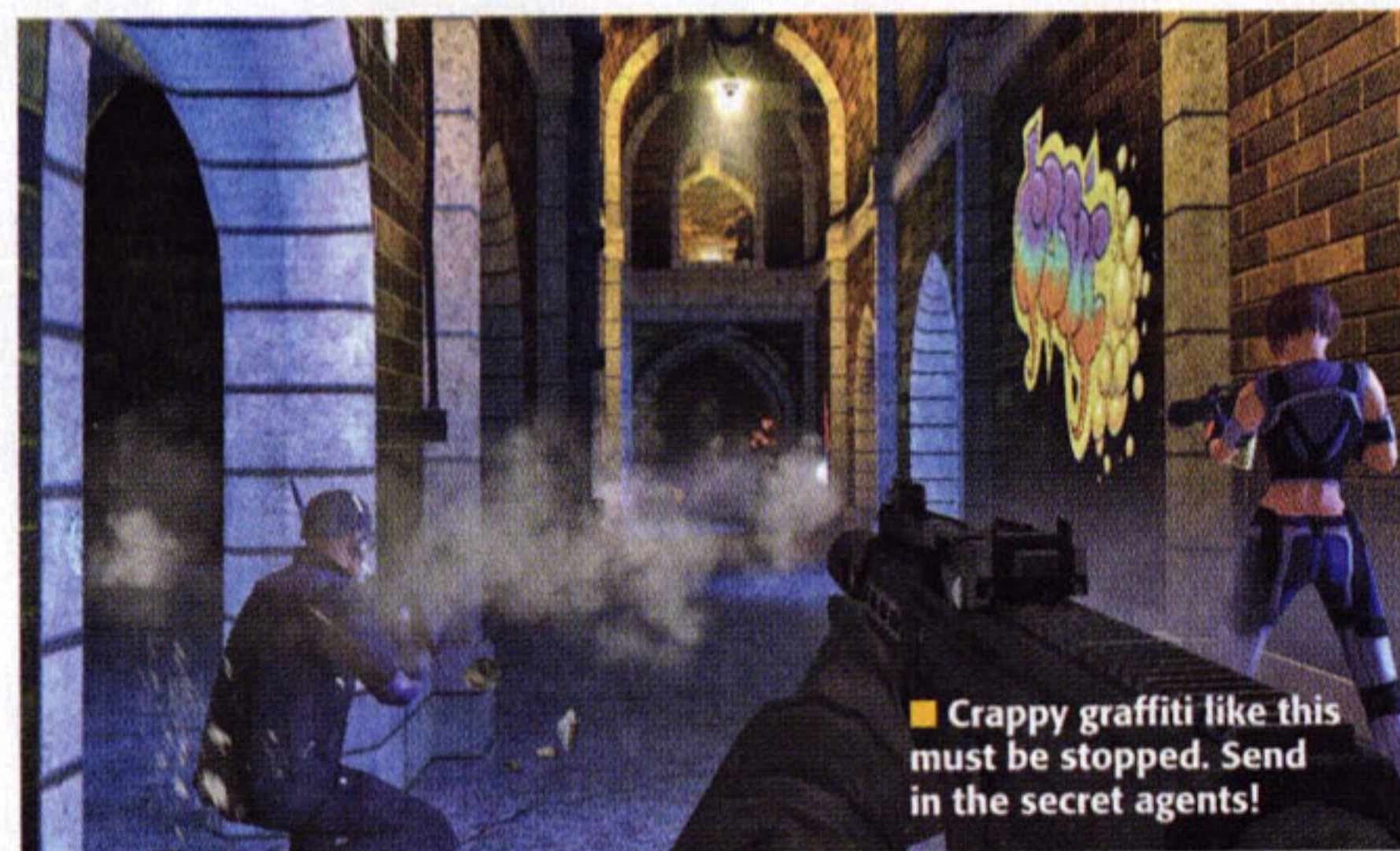
The Agency differs from traditional MMOs right off the bat with its character customization. Players can choose between becoming a muscle-bound mercenary working for covert organization ParaGON or a well-dressed spy employed by UNITE (United Nations Intelligence and Tactical Experts). It's easy to distinguish between the two judging by body types alone — the sleek and slim UNITE agents follow in the footsteps of Bond, while the ripped ParaGON forces look like they inject human growth hormone into their Captain Crunch and aren't shy about using demolitions to get their job done. As for character classes, The Agency uses a "you are what you wear" system that allows players the flexibility of specializing in combat, stealth, or support roles on any given mission depending on what gear you bring to the fight.

After creating his UNITE character, the SOE rep giving the demo jumped into Prague, one of The Agency's operative hubs in the game world. The Agency shuns the black ops feel of most espionage movies in favor of a more lighthearted, spy vs. spy world where agents can be seen openly making handoffs, conducting surveillance, and gathering in groups. Our agent enters a nearby floral shop that serves as the front for the UNITE field office. Once we move through the secret passageway, a large base opens up complete with everything a secret agent needs, including a martini bar. This is the central meeting place where players can seek medical treatment, test out new gadgets and weaponry, and take on new assignments.

After accepting a mission, our agent heads out to the other side of the city to try and prevent the sinister group Das Committee from continuing their recent assault on European embassies. Lone wolf players will be happy to hear that you can take on

each mission by yourself, but each level awards you with a rating based on your performance, and if you want to shoot for gold or silver instead of bronze you will likely need assistance from other agents. Higher scores net you more experience, better awards for your NPC operatives, and cooler gadgets.

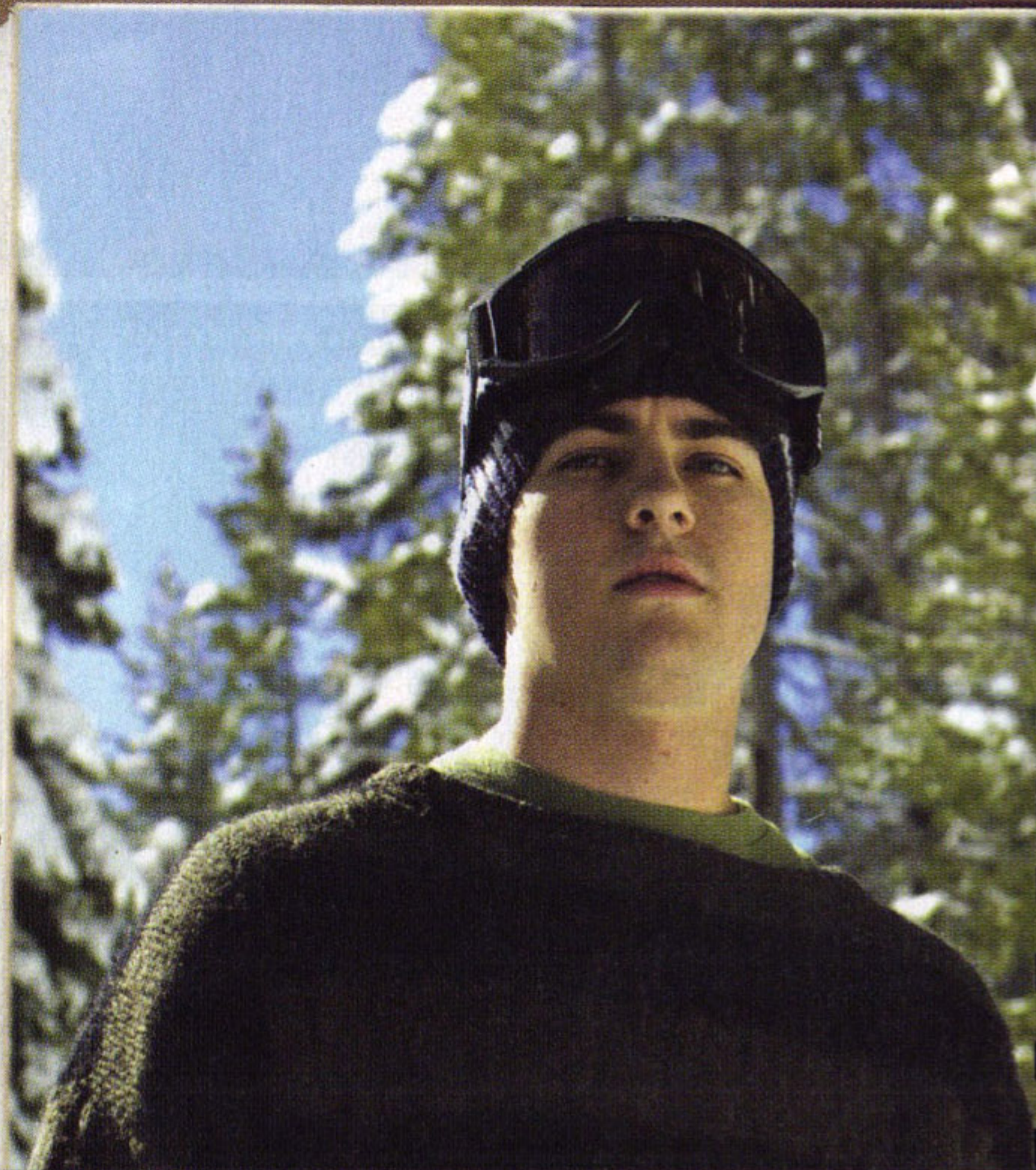
The mission breakdown is what you would expect from an espionage game: First off, the agent must track the enemy to find out what embassy they are targeting. During this section, your health bar is replaced with an alias meter that drains whenever the target sees or hears you. Once our agent finishes his trailing mission, he moves in to neutralize the threat in the catacombs with his newly acquired



Crappy graffiti like this must be stopped. Send in the secret agents!

squad, which includes a medic and a spec-ops player capable of disarming the bombs. The game uses a simple run-and-gun shooting mechanic, with no zoom targeting on basic weapons and no cover system. Once in a while environmental icons appear that indicate that our agent can use an operative to aid him, like creating a diversion by overheating a nearby pipe. Each time you use an operative he or she gains experience and becomes a more valuable asset to your team. The team splits up to cover the target area and proceeds to take out the steady stream of villains attempting to blow up the pillars. Mission accomplished

This mission is just one example of the Bond-Bourne-Bauer gameplay you can expect in The Agency. Sony expects the game to ship before the end of the year. ■ ■ ■

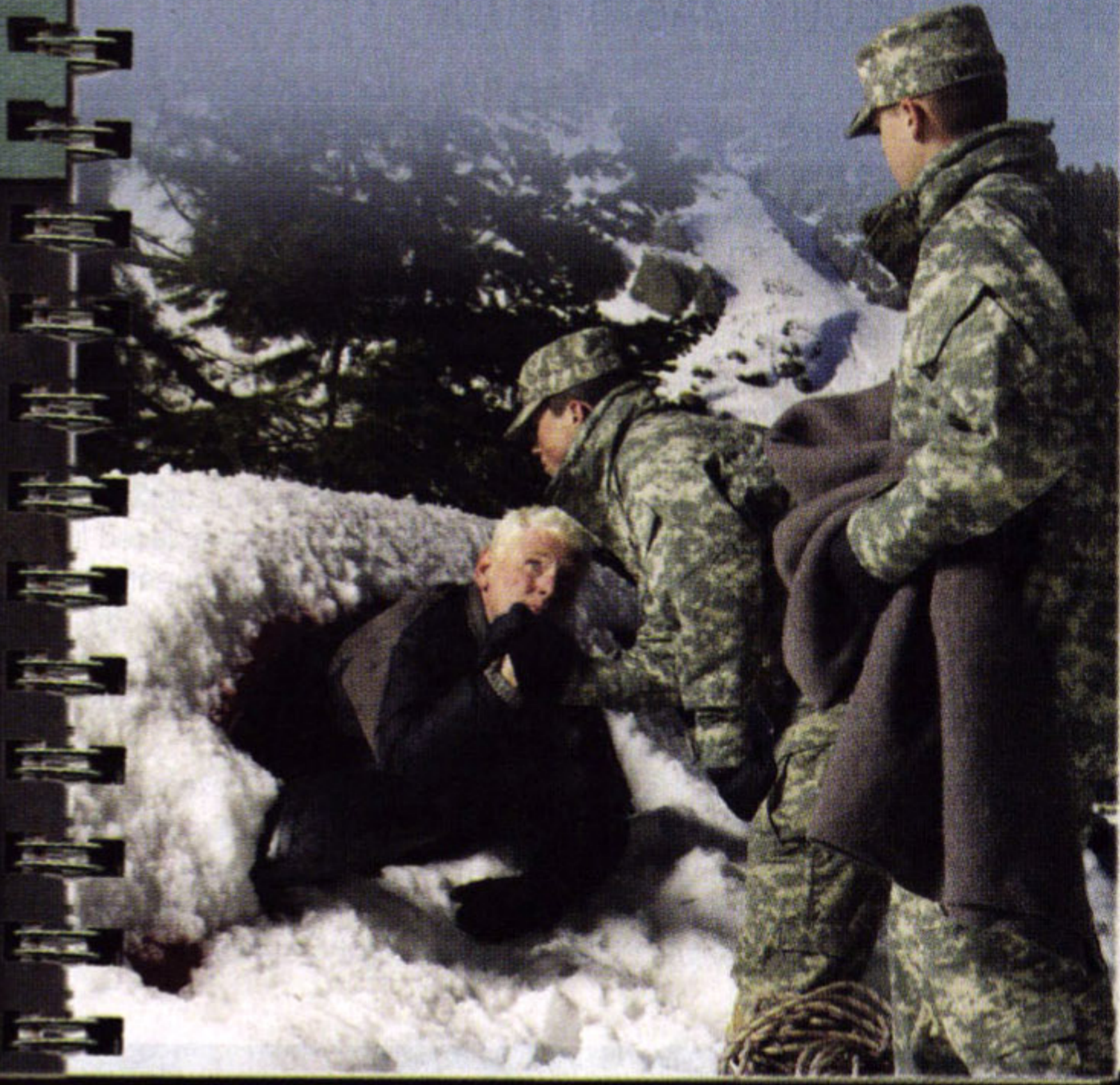
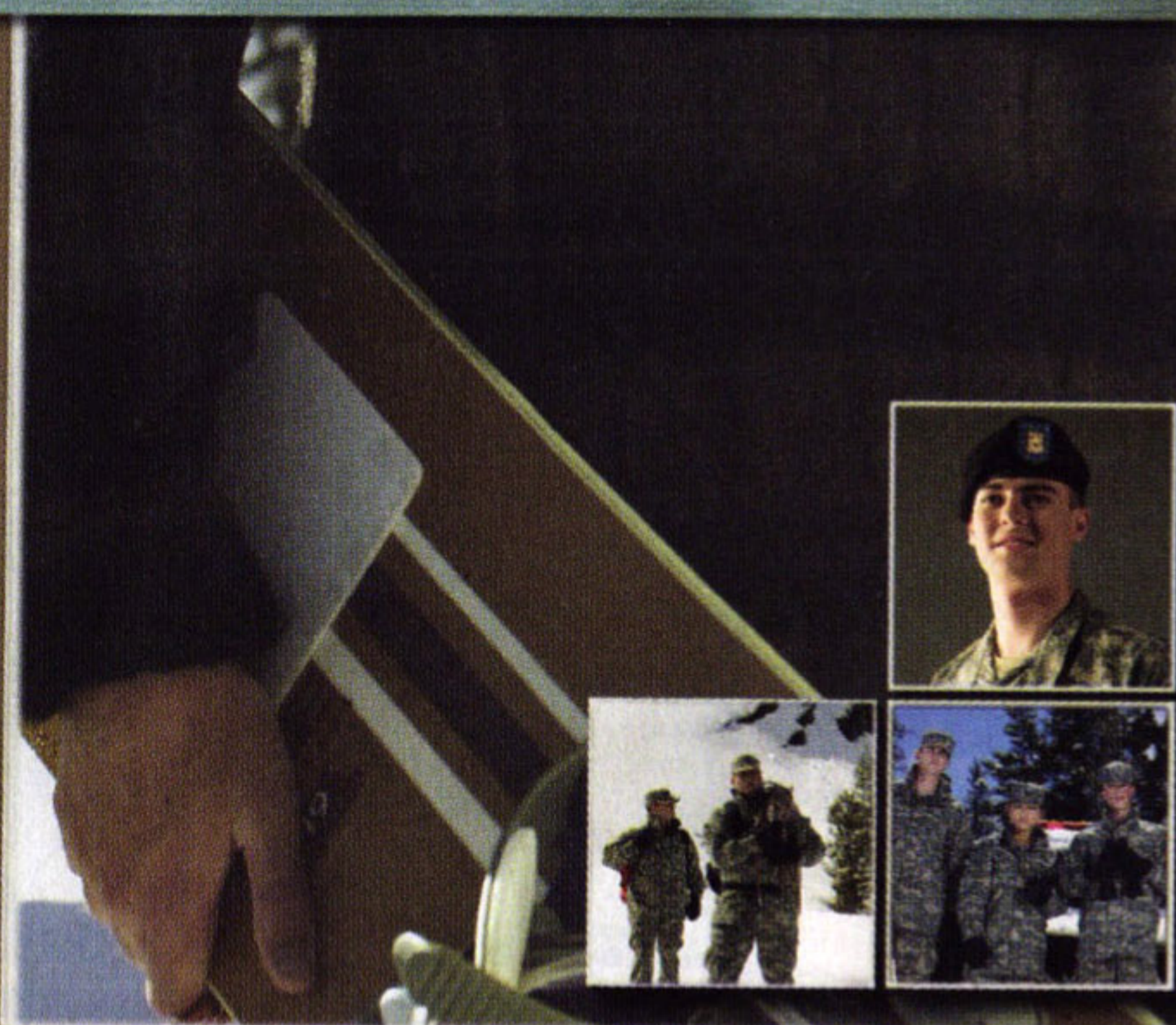


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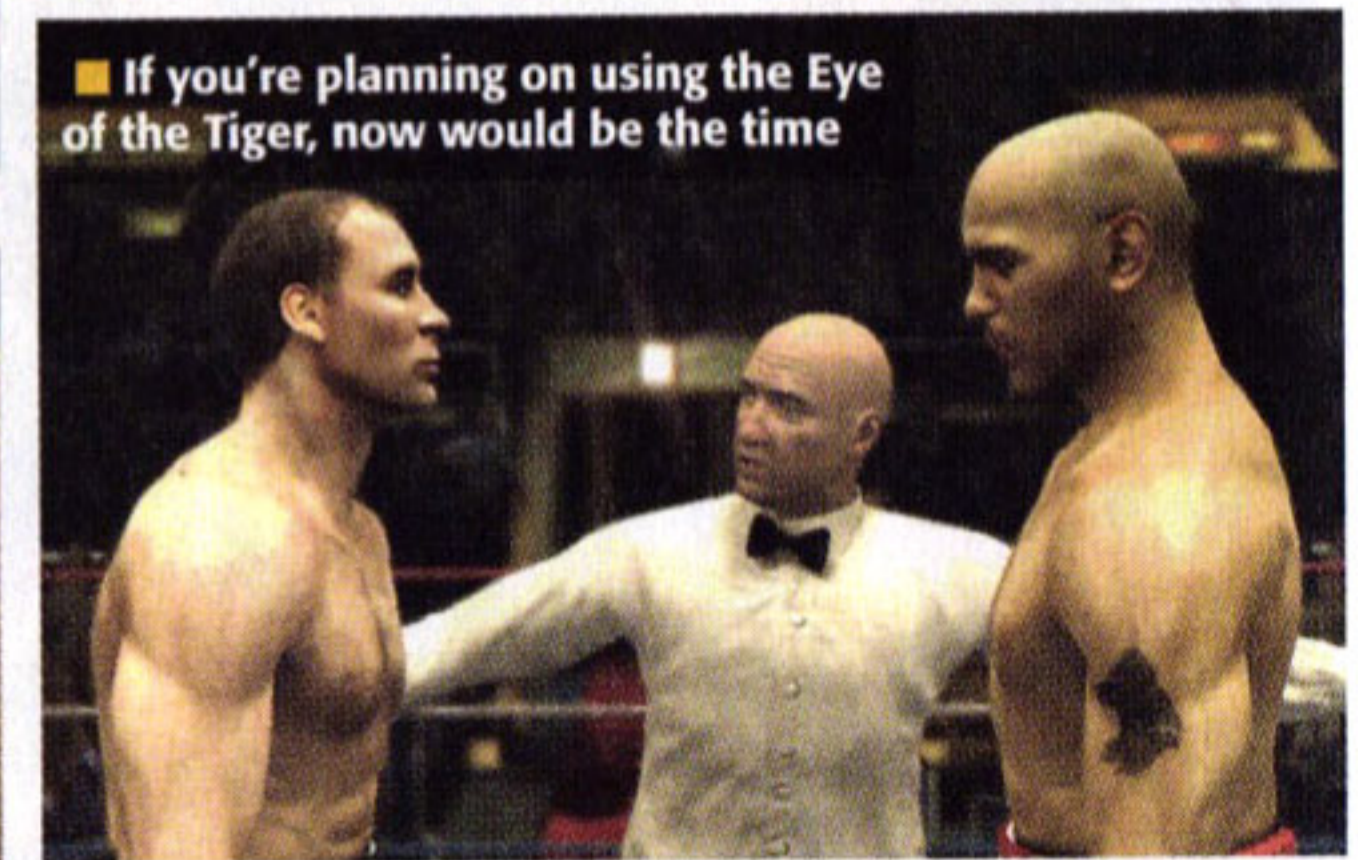
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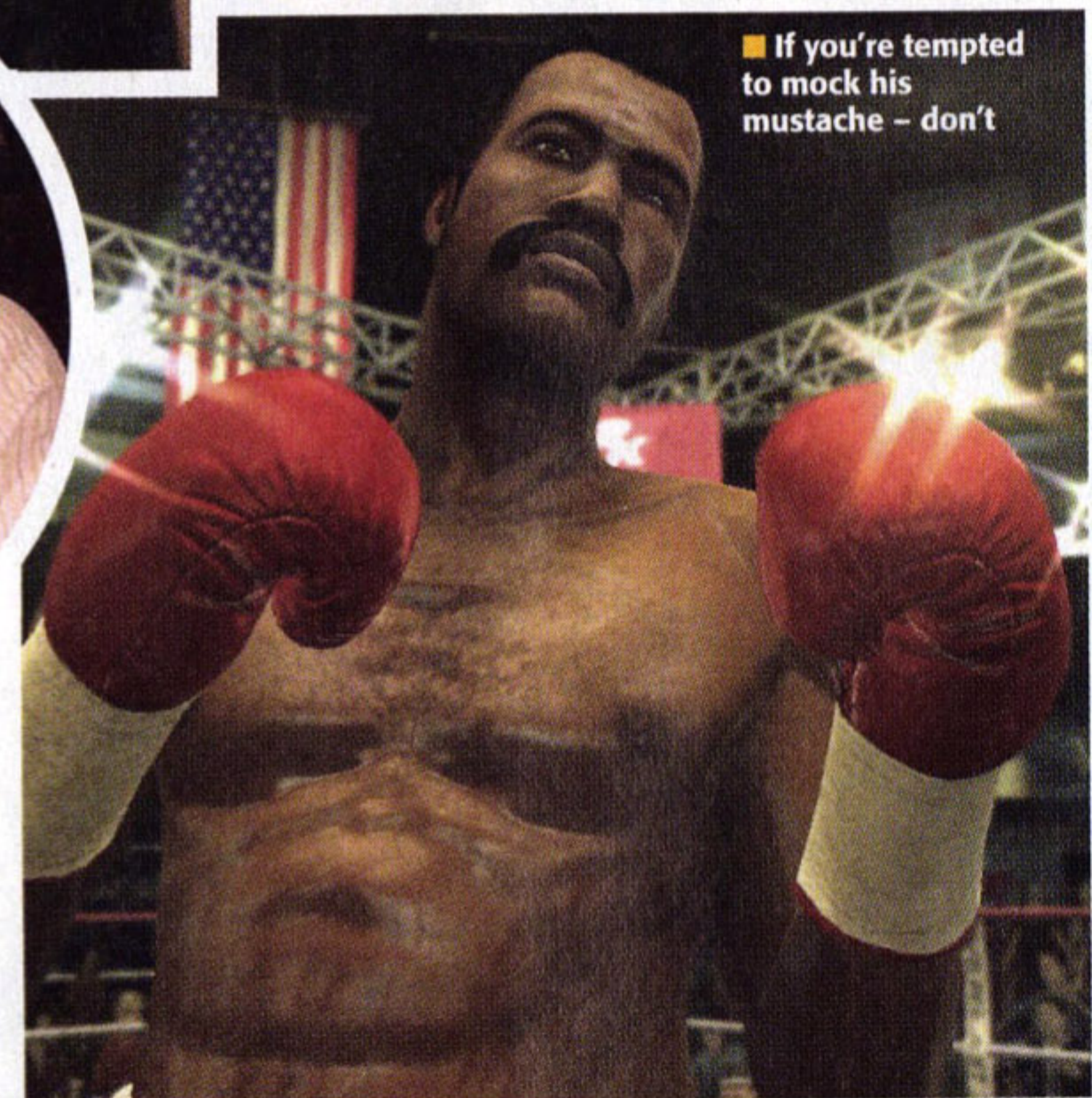
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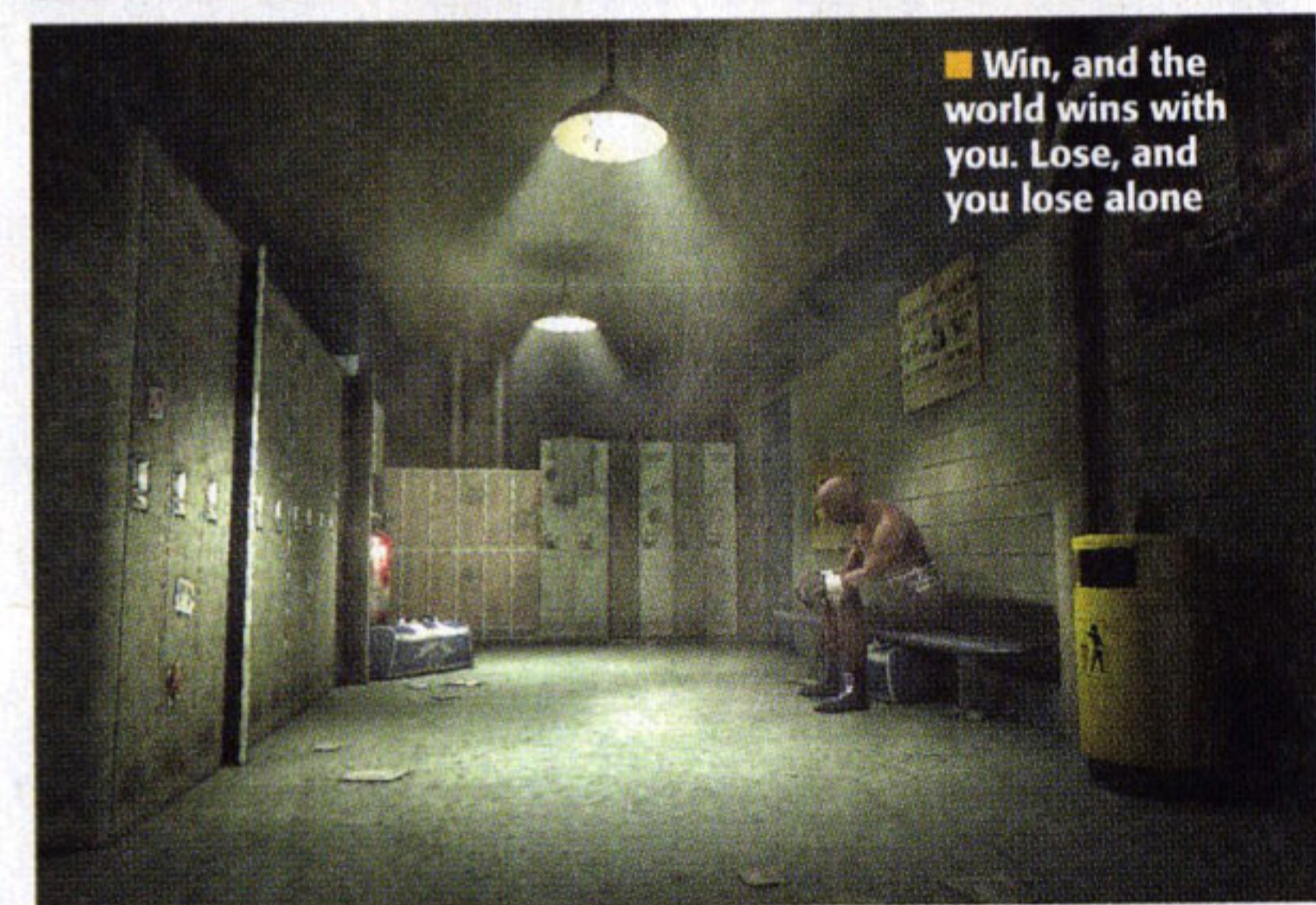
■ Ex-girlfriends may trash you in the press



■ If you're planning on using the Eye of the Tiger, now would be the time



■ If you're tempted to mock his mustache – don't



■ Win, and the world wins with you. Lose, and you lose alone



XBOX 360 | NINTENDO WII | NINTENDO DS

Don King Presents: Prizefighter

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR WIICONNECT24)
 > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** VENOM GAMES/2K NEWCASTLE > **RELEASE** SPRING 2008

A GAME OF SPECTACULOUS MAGNIFITUDE

Boxing – the purest of sports. In modern society it's the closest one can get to "two men enter, one man leaves." Two gladiators face off, each trying not to take down his opponent, but to put him down. It is truly the sweet science.

No single figure has been as simultaneously influential and controversial in the realm of boxing than wordsmith Don King, and now he is lending his prominent name to a brand-new boxing franchise in the form of Don King Presents: Prizefighter. Prizefighter is being developed by Venom Games, which brought us Rocky and Rocky Legends.

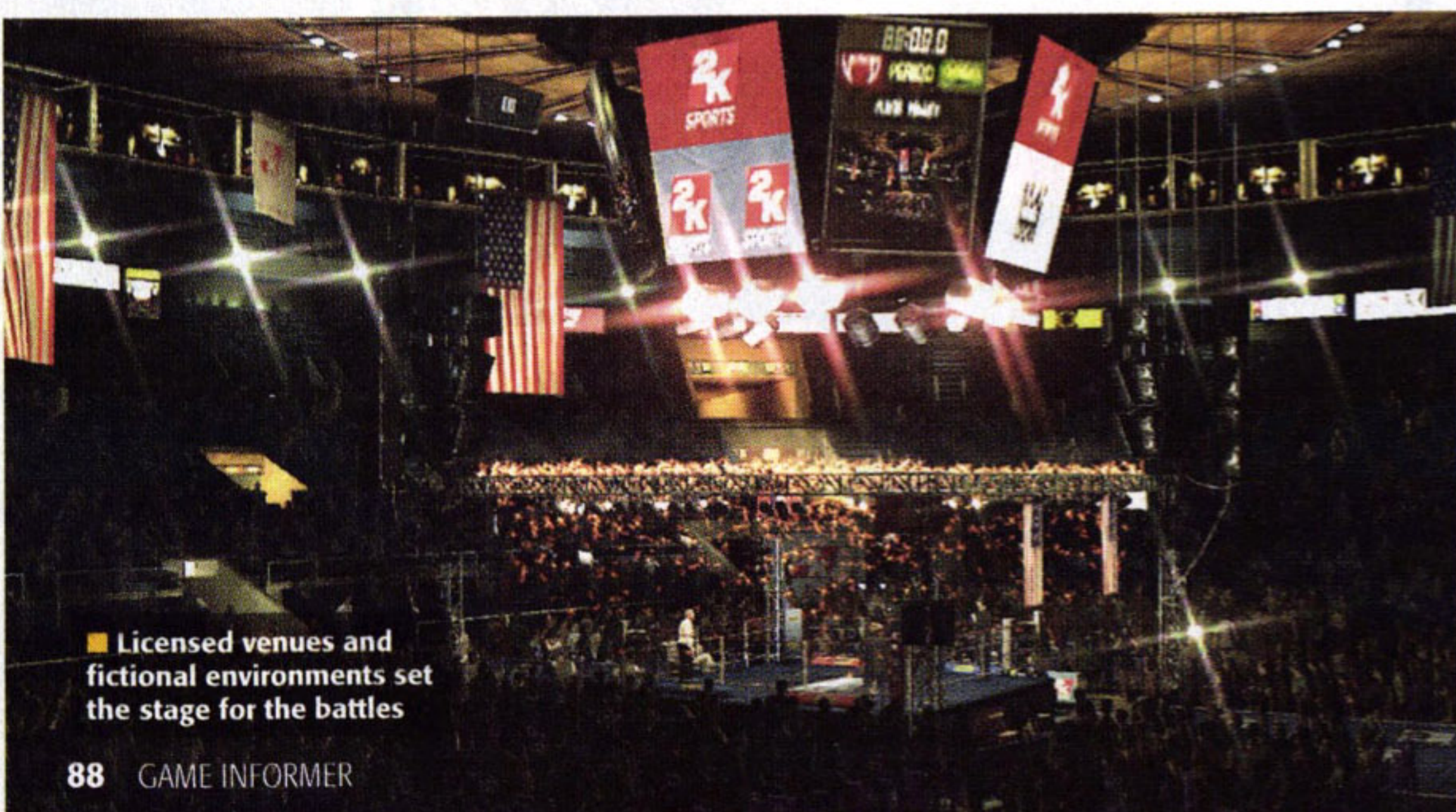
Hoping to take the experience of boxing beyond a single night of fighting, Prizefighter will offer an immersive career mode that presents the classic story of an unknown scrapper rising to the pinnacle of the boxing world in the form of a sports biography. As your career progresses, you'll hear all manner of promoters, boxers, and even ex-girlfriends comment on your achievements. Between fights you'll have to choose between focusing on training to increase your skills and pandering to the press. The latter option will increase your notoriety with the public, giving you advantages in the ring as the crowd cheers you on.

Training consists of a series of boxing gym minigames, ranging from doing the shuttle run to hitting the heavy bag. Scores attained in these events will be posted to leaderboards on Xbox Live, giving you the opportunity to prove that you are the world's best rope jumper.

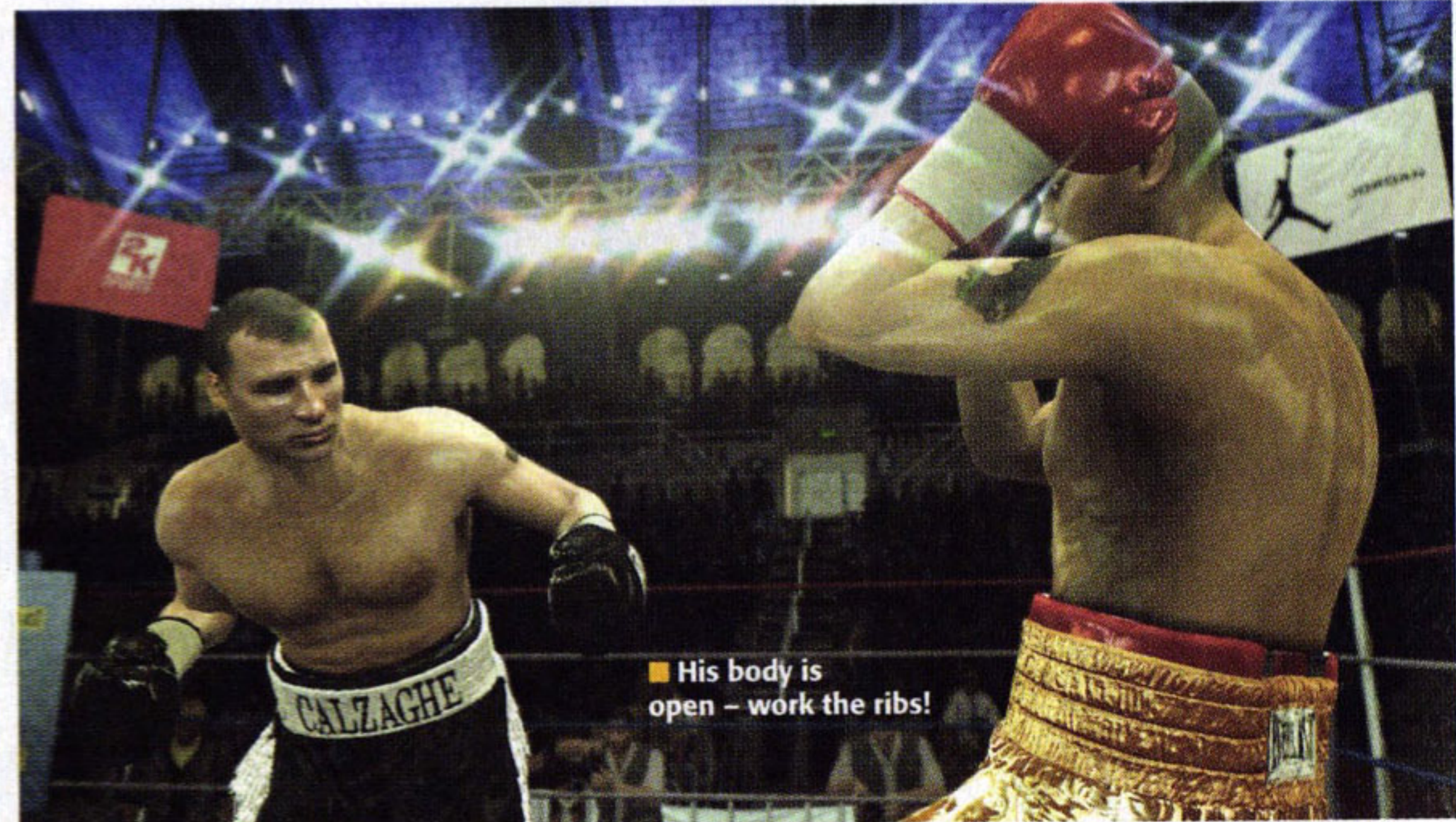
Most of the action will take place in the ring, and the developers present an experience that leans more towards sim than arcade. The 3D aspect of boxing has been emphasized, meaning that footwork and positioning will be crucial in putting away your opponent. Between-rounds button mashing has been replaced by trainer assistance, perhaps pointing out an opponent's bruised ribs and offering advice to work that part of his body.

For online bouts, you can create a stable of boxers in a variety of weight classes, any of whom can be used against other players.

With 30 active boxers licensed along with 10 historic bruisers including Cinderella Man James Braddock, Prizefighter is shaping up to be formidable contender in the realm of console boxing. Look for it to hit the shelves swinging this spring. ■ ■ ■

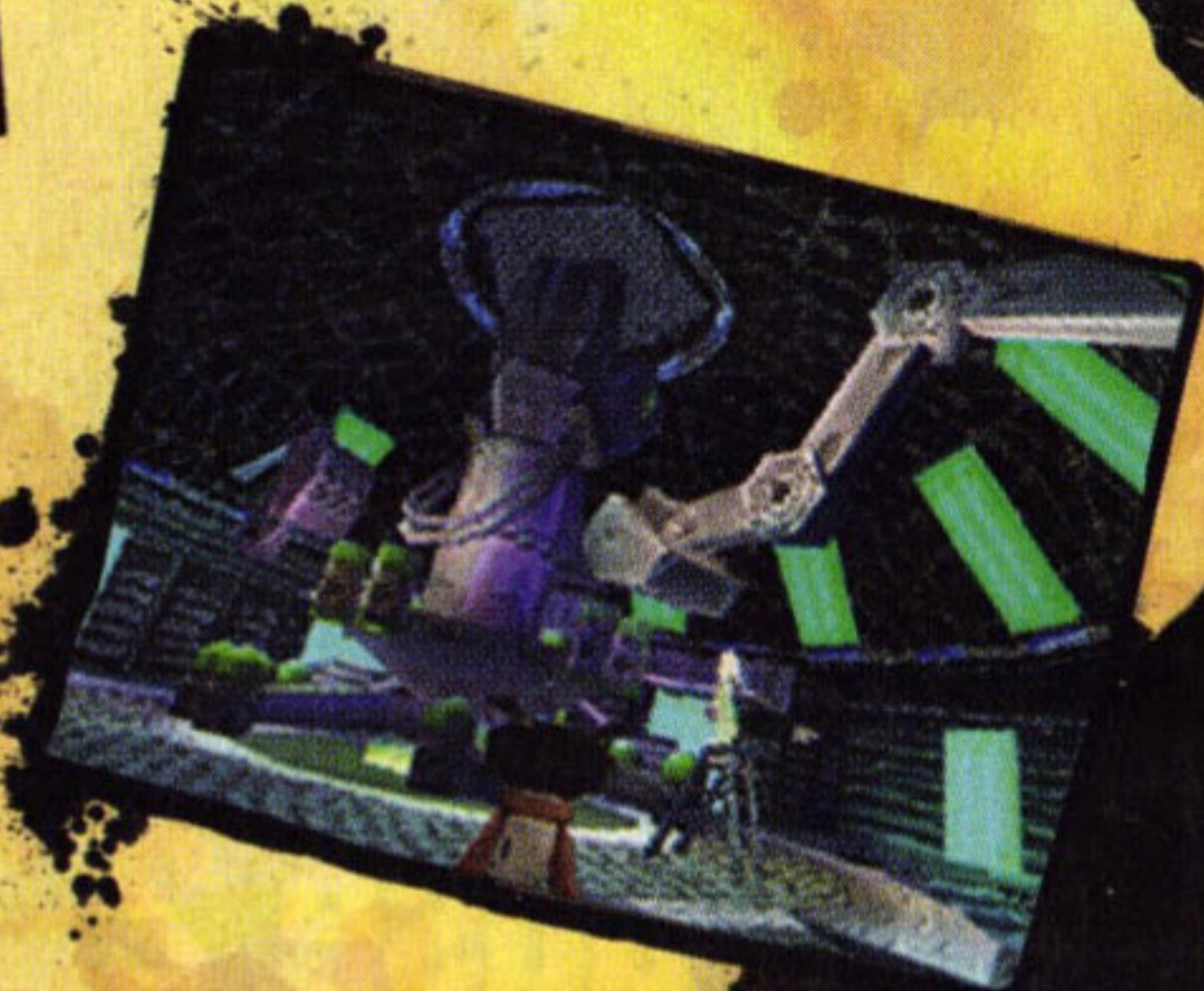


■ Licensed venues and fictional environments set the stage for the battles



■ His body is open – work the ribs!

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A STICKY WEB OF CRIME



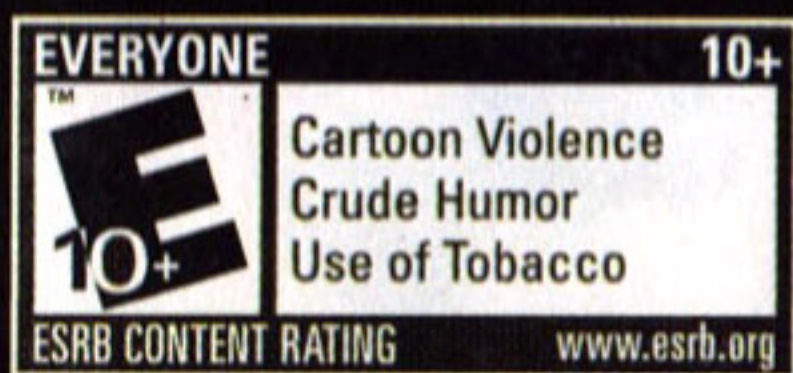
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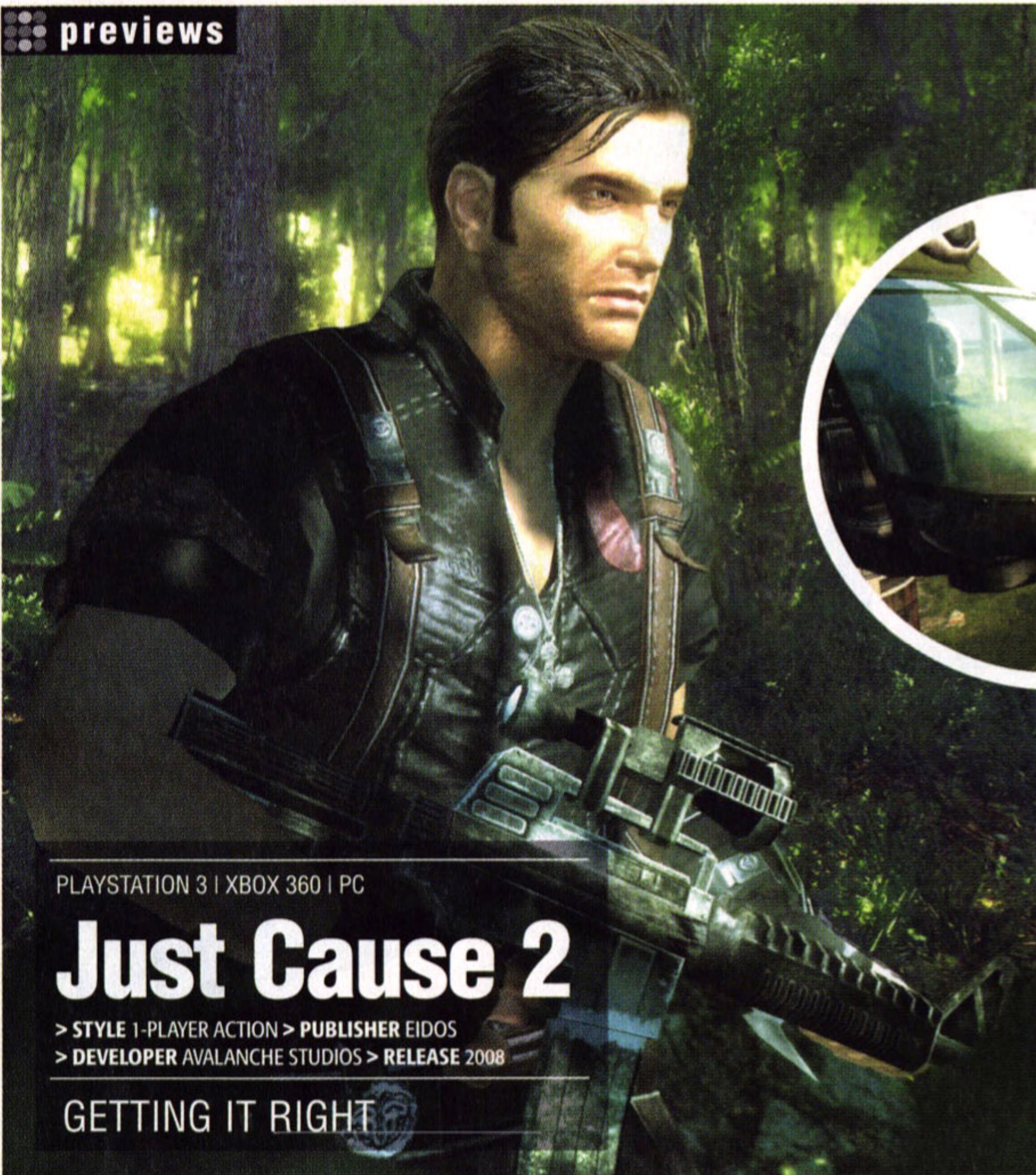


PUBLISHED BY



Screens from Nintendo DS™ version

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Just Cause 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER EIDOS
> DEVELOPER AVALANCHE STUDIOS > RELEASE 2008

GETTING IT RIGHT

The original *Just Cause* debuted to mixed reviews praising its open-world gameplay and over-the-top stunts while docking points for repetitive missions and lack of incentive to explore much outside of the critical path. "Basically, [we took] all of the criticism we got from *Just Cause 1* and made a big list, which we prioritized, and we've been trying very hard to address all of the issues from the first game and create a true sequel," says Avalanche founder and creative director Christofer Sundberg. "For [the sequel] we really could address everything from the start and make sure that the cool features became better features and the features that we didn't like we've thrown away."

Just Cause 2 begins a few years after the events of the first game. Rico Rodriguez is no longer a CIA agent, but he gets pulled back in to black ops duties to take down a

vile dictator in the fictional Southeast Asian island of Panau. The new environment is approximately the same size as the original San Esperito, but this time a variety of settings including deserts, urban cityscapes, and snow-capped mountains complement the traditional jungles.

"Making this huge detailed world is not difficult for us, but the challenge is making it feel filled with meaningful things to do, meaningful content," says lead designer Peter Johansson. "Everything you do has meaning or causes chaos, [bringing] you closer to the ultimate goal, so we actually don't have any side missions. Instead, we have around a thousand different activities you can do to cause this chaos." Many of these activities are bite-sized and can be completed in tandem with larger critical path missions. Blowing up bases, tearing down dictator statues, and assassinating



■ Full day and night cycles in addition to a variety of weather effects should bring an added sense of realism to the game

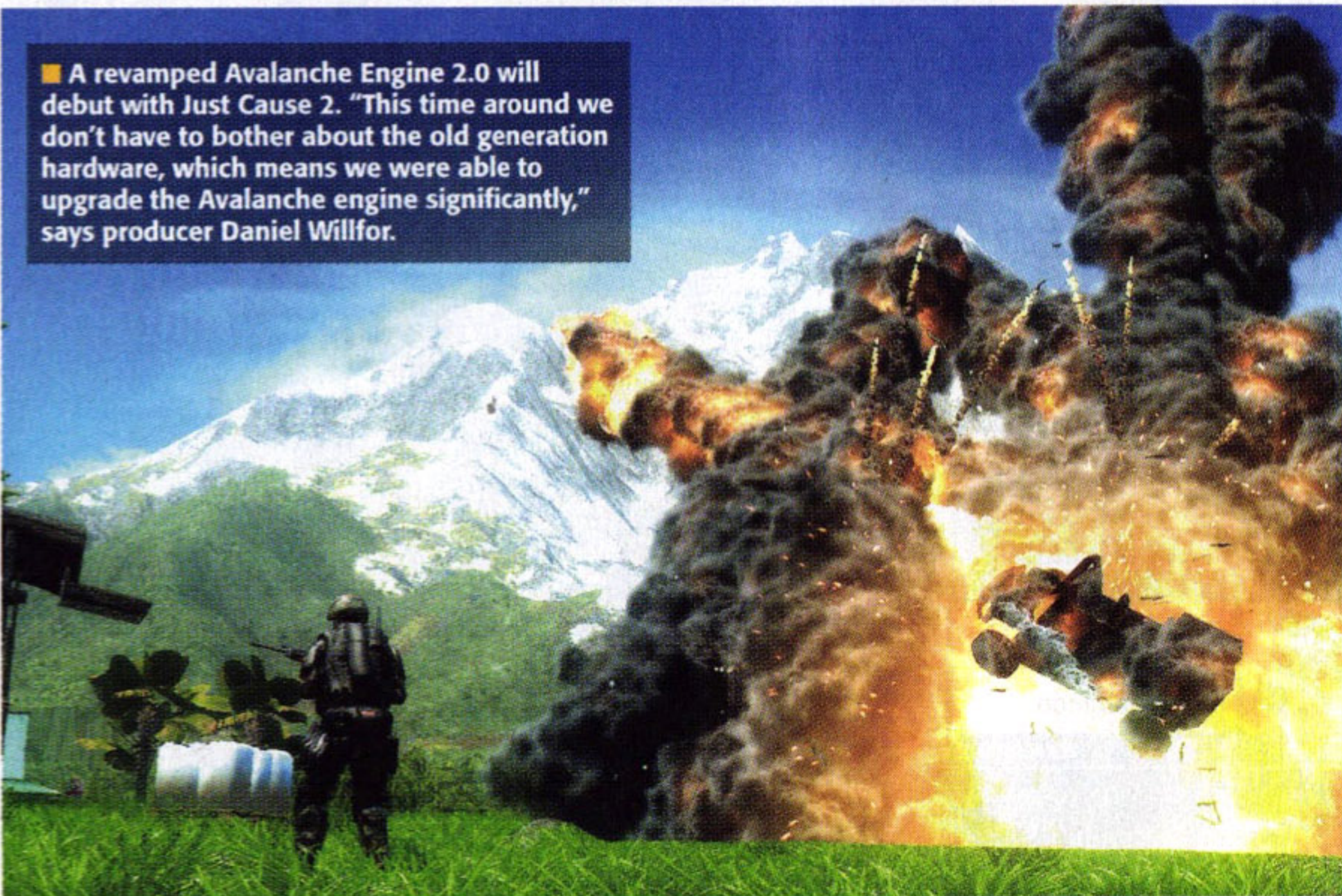
generals will expand this "chaos," reveal new strongholds to take over and additional key missions, and increase items available on the black market.

A wide array of weapons, vehicles, and armor will unlock during gameplay, in addition to approximately 2,000 upgrade parts. Once new rides and equipment are purchased, Rico can call in a chopper drop from wherever he is and tailor it to his situation. Avalanche is focusing on making every vehicle feel completely different, so while a sports car might be great for missions on asphalt, a jeep will be best for off-road tasks.

Stunts promise to be even more intense this time around, mostly due to the expanded role of the grappling hook. Instead of just being able to latch onto vehicles, the hook will be fully integrated into all aspects of the game. Use it to reach higher areas, pull enemies in for melee attacks (or off of

ledges), or combine it with the parachute to slingshot yourself into the air. You can even attach one end of the hook to your vehicle to drag enemies or yank down barricades and structures.

Enemy AI has been completely revamped to beef up team communication and response to dynamic combat situations. Lock-on gunplay has been replaced with a hybrid system somewhat similar to *Call of Duty*, allowing both free aiming and quick-click targeting. While *Crackdown*-style multiplayer would have been a cool addition, *Just Cause 2* will remain strictly single-player. "We felt it was more important to get a better core game experience because if we couldn't get that then multiplayer wouldn't be that good anyway," says Johansson. "Even though we have a large game world, it may not be big enough for two Ricos." ■ ■ ■



■ A revamped Avalanche Engine 2.0 will debut with *Just Cause 2*. "This time around we don't have to bother about the old generation hardware, which means we were able to upgrade the Avalanche engine significantly," says producer Daniel Willfor.

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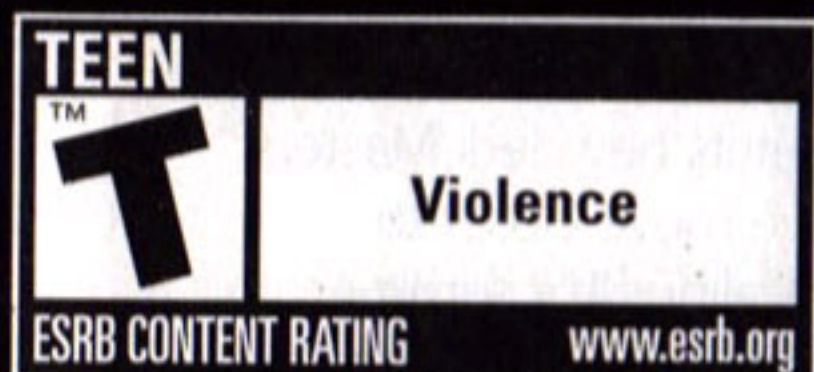


New character designs, new weapons and new lands to conquer.

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PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360 LIVE





■ The look on Yoda's face says it all – this fight won't even make this old Jedi Master break a sweat



■ All Vader has to do is lean to make his opponents fall backward



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Soulcalibur IV

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE)
 > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** PROJECT SOUL > **RELEASE** SUMMER

FORCE FED

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...Darth Vader and Yoda squared off against a bunch of buxom fighters armed with...nothing more than steel and magic weapons? Sure it may sound ludicrous, but Namco is betting gamers will flock to Soulcalibur IV to clash lightsabers in the way we falsely assumed Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi would.

But therein lies the rub. The game will not ship with both saber-wielding combatants. Much like it did with Spawn and Link in SC II, Namco will include Vader in the PlayStation 3 version and Yoda in the Xbox 360 one. After listening to our 10-minute rant about how disappointed we were about losing the chance to see Vader and Yoda go toe to toe, Namco was nice enough to concede that the second characters may be available for download on the respective consoles at a later date. That's more like it!

Including these two high-profile Star Wars icons creates more questions than Namco had answers for. Does

this tangent fit into the Star Wars timeline, or is it a rent-a-character one-off? The latter seems more likely. Like Spawn and Link before them, Vader and Yoda will have their own in-game storylines, but the details remain under wraps. How the hell will any of these characters stand up to the unrelenting strength of lightsabers and the Force? We just can't see a lamer like Voldo, or even a real fighter like Nightmare for that matter, lasting more than two seconds in the ring with a Jedi Master. Fear not, says Namco, there will be a logical explanation

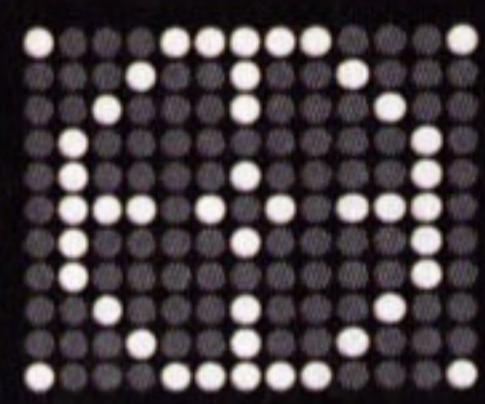
for why common swords and spears won't crumble upon impact with the glowing lightsaber blade. Details on how the Force powers will work also remain cloaked. But Namco did make one thing clear – these two Force-wielding juggernauts will fight in a style in total congruence with the Star Wars films.

In addition to showing off its two newest cast additions, Namco also let us get some hands-on time with SC IV. The game build was hardly representative of the final product – the finishing moves, stage interactivity, and new attacks had yet to be implemented – but the impressive graphical sheen and responsive combat did more than enough to impress. Each of the three playable characters –Mitsurugi, Cassandra, and Taki – moved deftly and dealt swift blows

through the gorgeous lush jungle and pillared Grecian locales that served as backdrops.

We expect Namco to reveal more information about its new Jedi Masters as we move closer to Soulcalibur IV's summer release date. Stay tuned for more information. ■ ■ ■





REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



The Club

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PLAYSTATION 3



Lost Planet: Extreme Condition

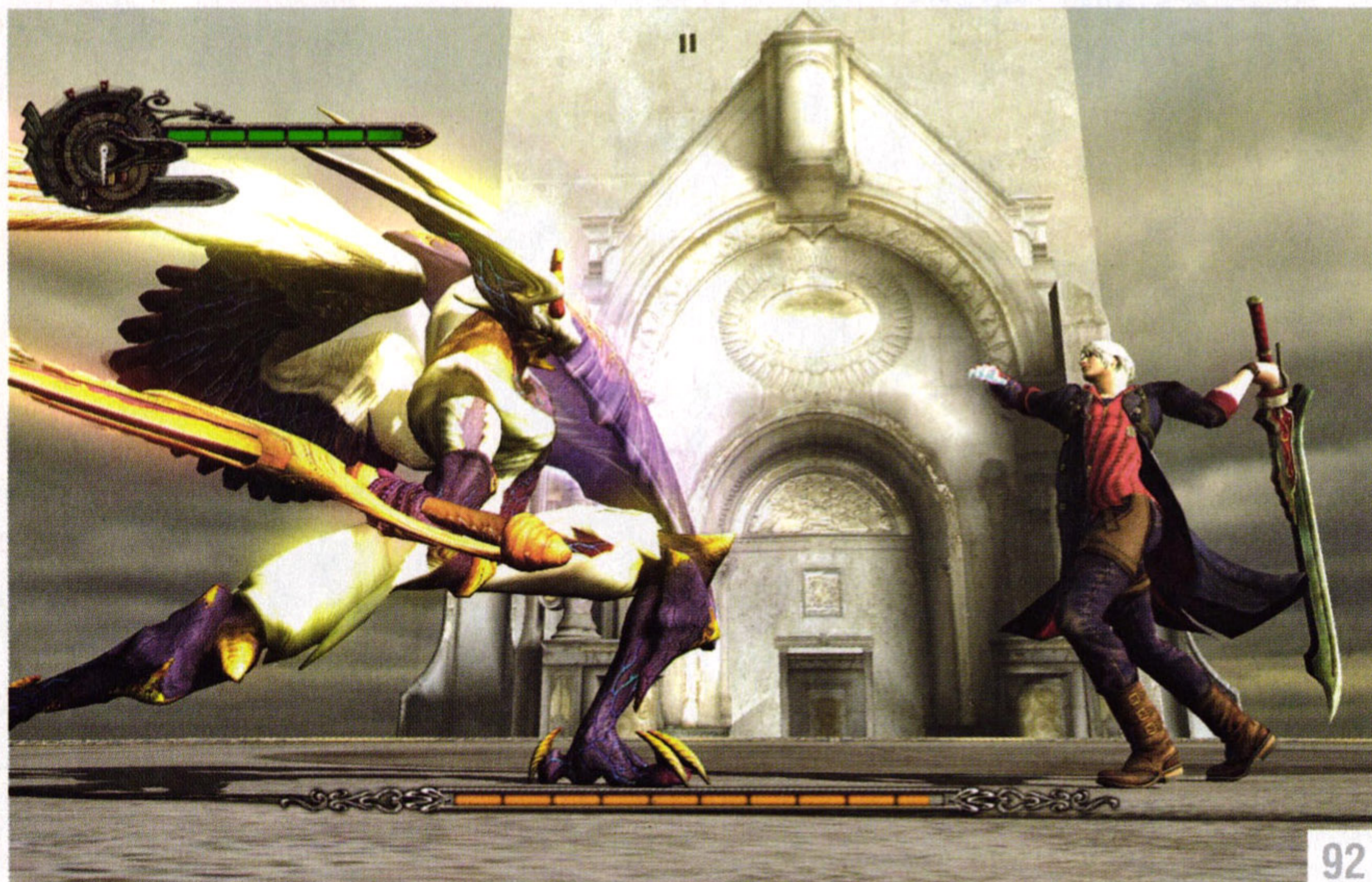
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Wii



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

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Devil May Cry 4

It's risky to replace a series' lead character, especially when he happens to be as awesome as Dante. The gamble pays off for Capcom in Devil May Cry 4, where new protagonist Nero and his demonic arm up the ante with tighter controls and more fluid combat than any of the previous titles. Beautiful visuals, terrifying demons, and relentless action keep this stylish franchise going strong.

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

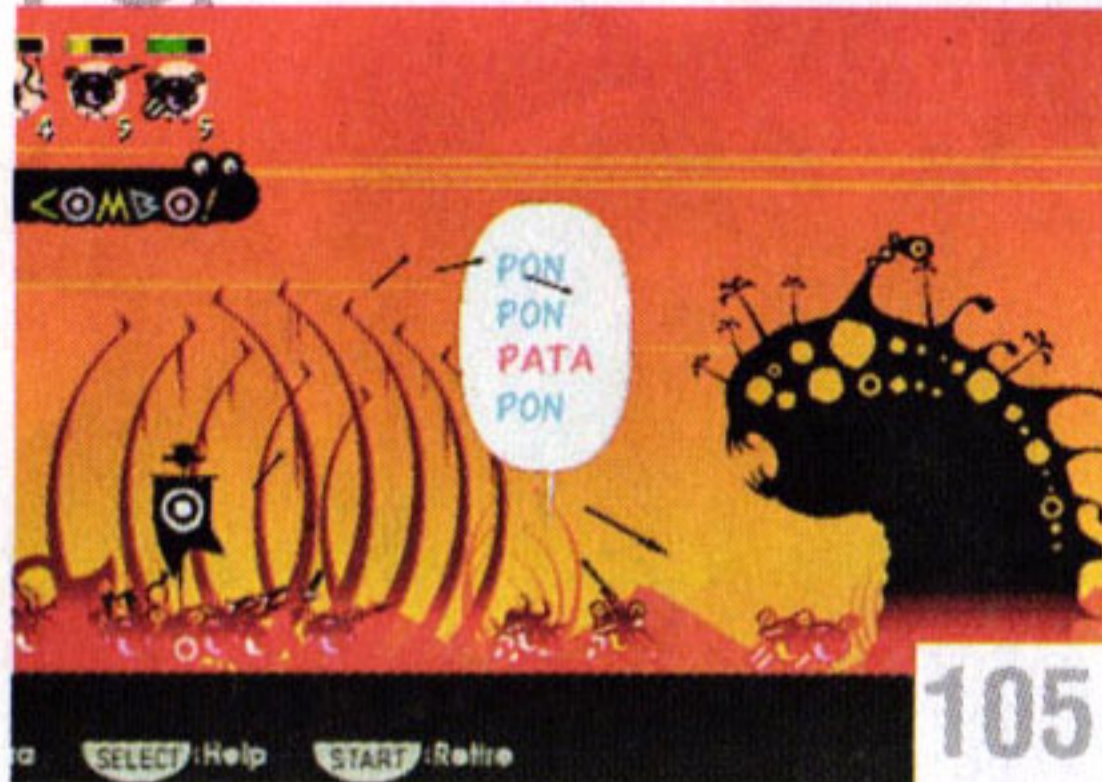
- 10** Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
- 9** Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
- 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** Fox News. A game so terrible you don't even need to play it (or video games in general) to justify disparaging it.

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

> Replay Value

- 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



105

Patapon

DS

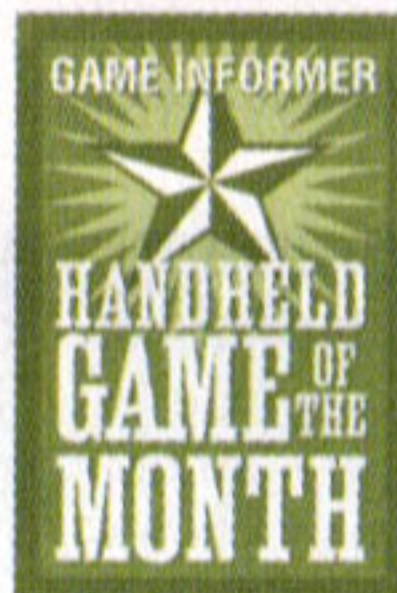


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Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney



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God of War: Chains of Olympus

Don't let the size fool you. Ready at Dawn's prequel in Sony's mythological franchise is unmistakably a God of War game, earning its place in the series' canon. Kratos is again at odds with the gods, and he carves his way through their minions with visceral ease. The kills are brutal, the puzzles are clever, and the combat is as ferociously entertaining as ever. If you don't think a handheld game can be epic, Chains of Olympus will change your mind.

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theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

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

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

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

1080p – Currently the best resolution for gaming on an HDTV. In widescreen, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format

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 God of War and Devil May Cry

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

AI – Artificial Intelligence. Usually refers to how well the computer reacts to human opponents or works with human allies

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

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

board – A term we use for games like Scene It? and Mario Party

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

CG – Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics

E3 – Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry

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

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

FPS – First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase “frames per second,” or how many animation frames happen in one second.

framerate – The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement

frontend – A game's menus and options

HDTV – High Definition Television

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

IP – Intellectual Property. A single game or franchise encompassing the ideas and characters contained within

isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like Warcraft 3 or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance

jaggies – Graphical lines that look 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

music – A term we use for games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band

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

“On the Salarian team” – A euphemistic phrase used to describe party members who are stupid,

whiny, and/or useless. Carth, Wakka, and Kaidan are all on the Salarian team

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

platform – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Ratchet & Clank

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

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

PS3 – Sony's PlayStation 3 console

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Picross

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

RPG – Role-Playing Game. A term we use to describe games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls

RTS – Real-Time Strategy. A subgenre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer

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

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin

strategy – A term we use for games like Disgaea and Fire Emblem



■ Grab moves do serious damage to bosses, and even more when Nero's Devil Trigger is engaged



■ Dante hates Cirque du Soleil and all its performers

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Devil May Cry 4

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 5 > **ESRB** M



THE DEVIL'S HAND

It just get this out of the way: Nero is awesome. Any reservations fans may have about the young upstart replacing Dante as the main hero will evaporate in the first hour of Devil May Cry 4. Nero delivers all of the combo-driven action you would expect from this series, but he also opens the door for new mechanics that will make it difficult to go back to previous installments. Dante established the stylish combat at the core of the DMC, but Nero is taking it forward.

At the center of this evolution is the Devil Bringer. Nero's demonic arm may appear to be a gimmick at first, but it opens doors to the most thrilling and intricate combos you can imagine. By bringing enemies to you, the arm minimizes travel time between foes and increases your opportunities to unleash barrages of sword slices and bullets. Whether you're in mid-air or on the ground, it's remarkably easy to ensure you always have something in front of you to kill. When you face larger and/or tougher foes,

the Devil Bringer's grab maneuvers become an integral part of your strategy, either as set-ups or as the killing blow. Every encounter becomes a personal challenge to take ass-kicking to the next level.

Once you've gotten a handle on Nero, DMC 4 throws you a curve ball; control switches over to Dante for the second half of the game. It's great to see him back in action, but without the Devil Bringer, his gameplay feels a bit outdated when compared to the tricks up Nero's sleeve. To compensate, he acquires a crazy arsenal that is devilishly entertaining (especially the multi-purpose Pandora), and all of his weapons and styles are selected on the fly with triggers and the d-pad. You only have Dante for seven of the 20 missions, so it may take a few times through to fully appreciate his options.

Nero and Dante both make strides forward, but not everything about Devil May Cry 4 is an improvement. The pure combat mechanics have evolved, but there is one big design problem that pulls down the whole second act of the game: backtracking. As Nero, you spend the first 11 missions fighting through areas like a city, a castle, and a forest. Once Dante is playable, you just go backwards through those same areas, which are barely transformed by minor modifications. You even fight the same bosses in reverse order (which makes three times total, counting Capcom's signature boss redux towards the end). This lame recycling stands out as an incongruous oversight, and the only part of the game I would call a true disappointment.

ORBS AND SOULS

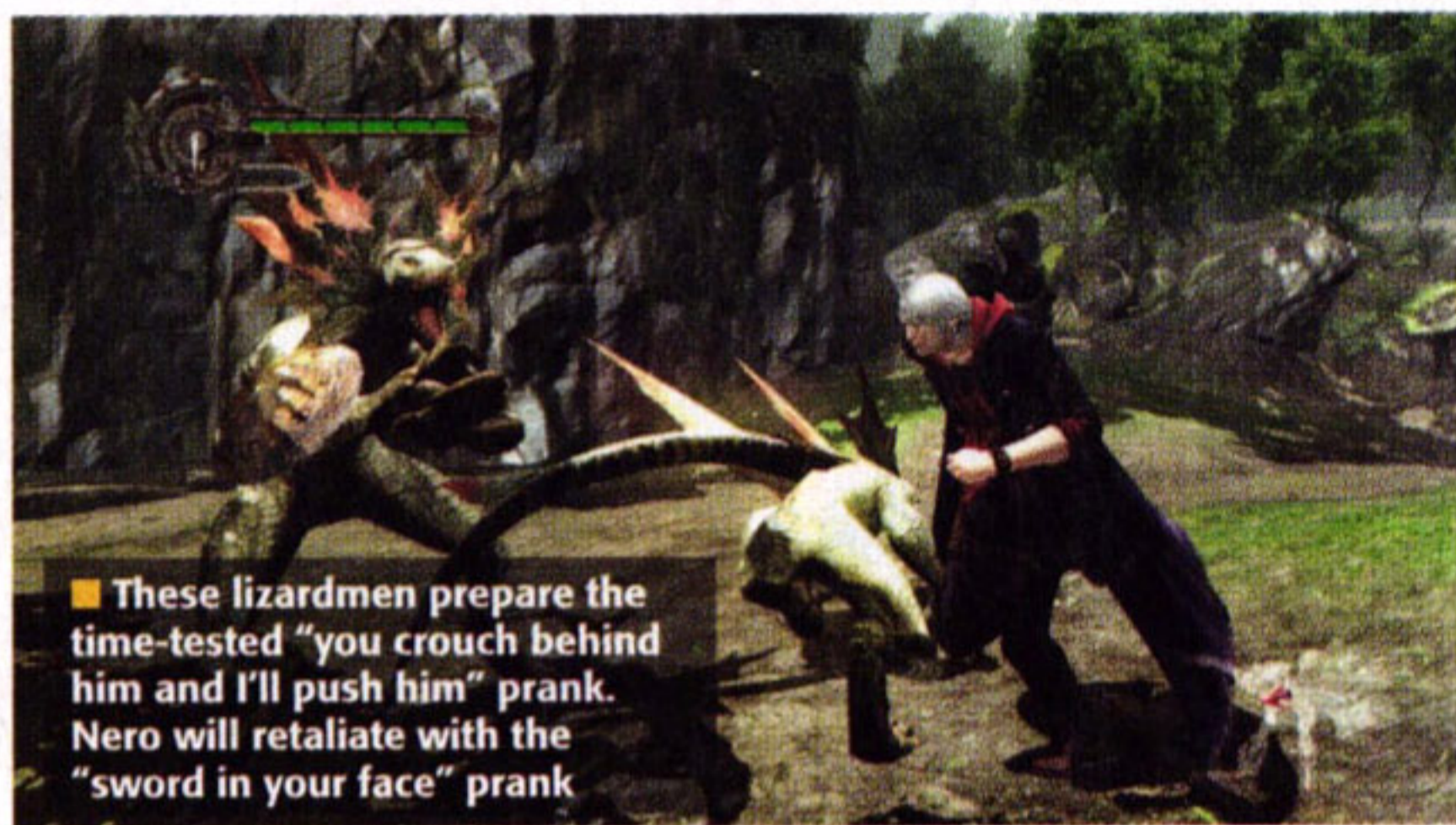
In previous DMC titles, you purchased both items and skills with red orbs, often forcing you to choose between the two. Now red orbs are only used to purchase items, and a separate currency called Proud Souls will buy new abilities. These are awarded during major battles and as a reward for completing missions with a high ranking, and the best part is that they are refundable. If you don't like an ability you bought, you just trade it in and get a new one, allowing you to find the right balance for your preferred method of play.



■ Guns on a boss fight? Learn to play, Nero



■ The Devil Bringer won't pull these flying knights to you, but it will bring you to them for some aerial combos



■ These lizardmen prepare the time-tested "you crouch behind him and I'll push him" prank. Nero will retaliate with the "sword in your face" prank

I also wanted to know more about the characters and the plot, but it is ultimately a good thing that the game's focus on combat never wavers. The expertly tuned balancing is better here than any other entry in the series; it isn't as punishing as the third game, and the difficulty gradually increases to ease you into new challenges. A seasoned DMC veteran will have no problem with the early missions, but a couple of the boss fights rank right up there with those in DMC 3.

I've been a fan of this series since the beginning, and this entry surprised me by giving me new features and options I didn't even know I wanted. They form a tight, precise combat system that action aficionados will adore, but newcomers can still utilize. Devil May Cry 4 delivers polished, fiendish thrills that eclipse other games in the series, and almost all contemporaries in the genre.—**JOE**

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

DMC 4 has the exact same content on both consoles, but there are a few things to consider if you're trying to decide between the two. The PS3 version requires about 4 GB of hard drive space to install (a mandatory process that takes 30 minutes), but the result is slightly shorter load times than the 360. Other than that, just pick up the version with the controller you prefer, keeping in mind that you need to use the d-pad to switch styles as Dante.

BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** Build on the Devil May Cry formula, but retain what makes it great

> **Graphics:** The effects are gorgeous, the framerate is silky smooth, and the cutscenes are full of amazing and improbable feats

> **Sound:** Generally excellent voice work, and the score is a great mix of ominous classical and ridiculous rock music

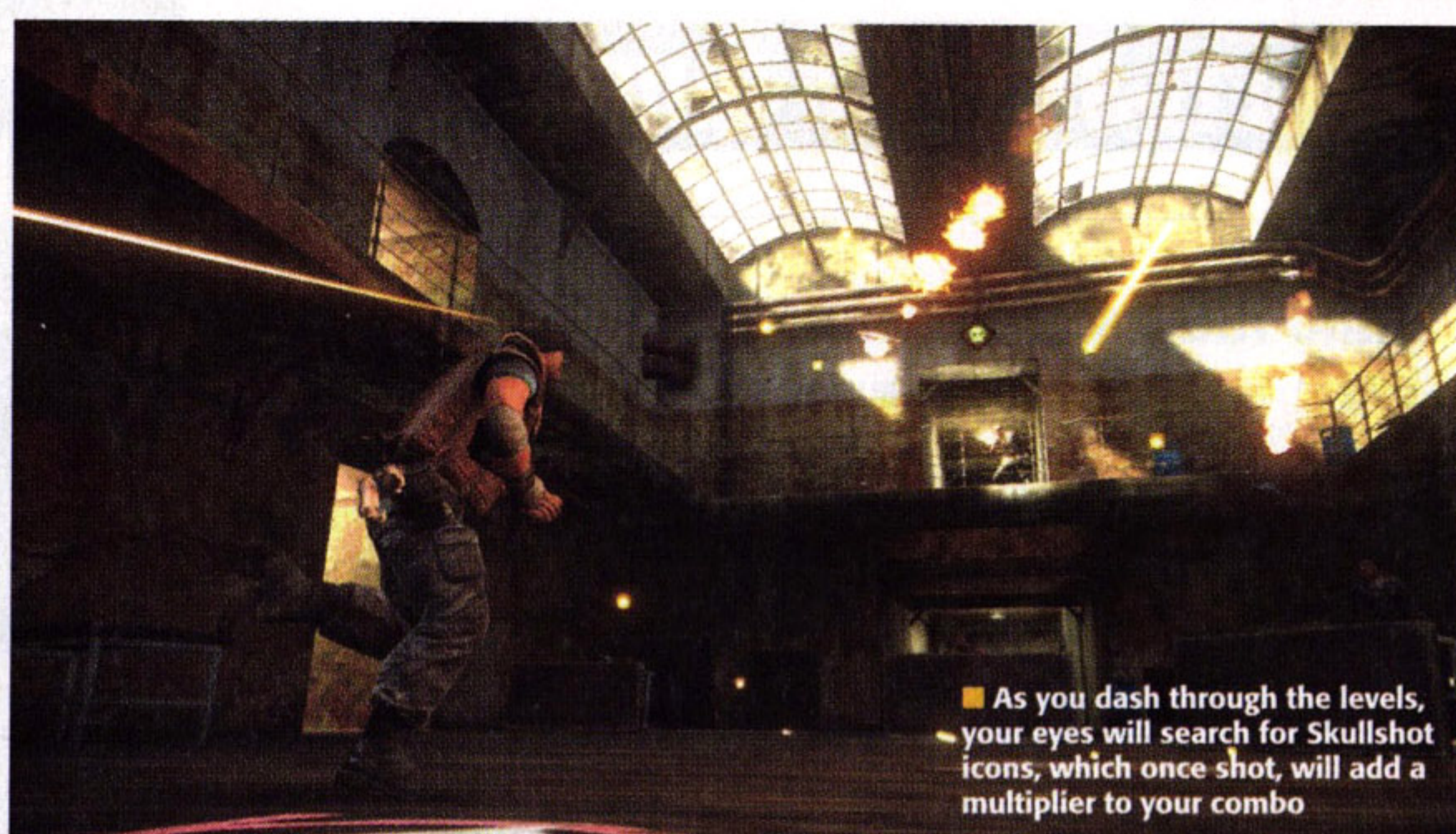
> **Playability:** The action is fast and responsive. The sometimes-controllable camera presents a few problems, but rarely at critical moments

> **Entertainment:** The adrenaline-charged encounters are always a blast, but the backtracking in the second half is a bummer

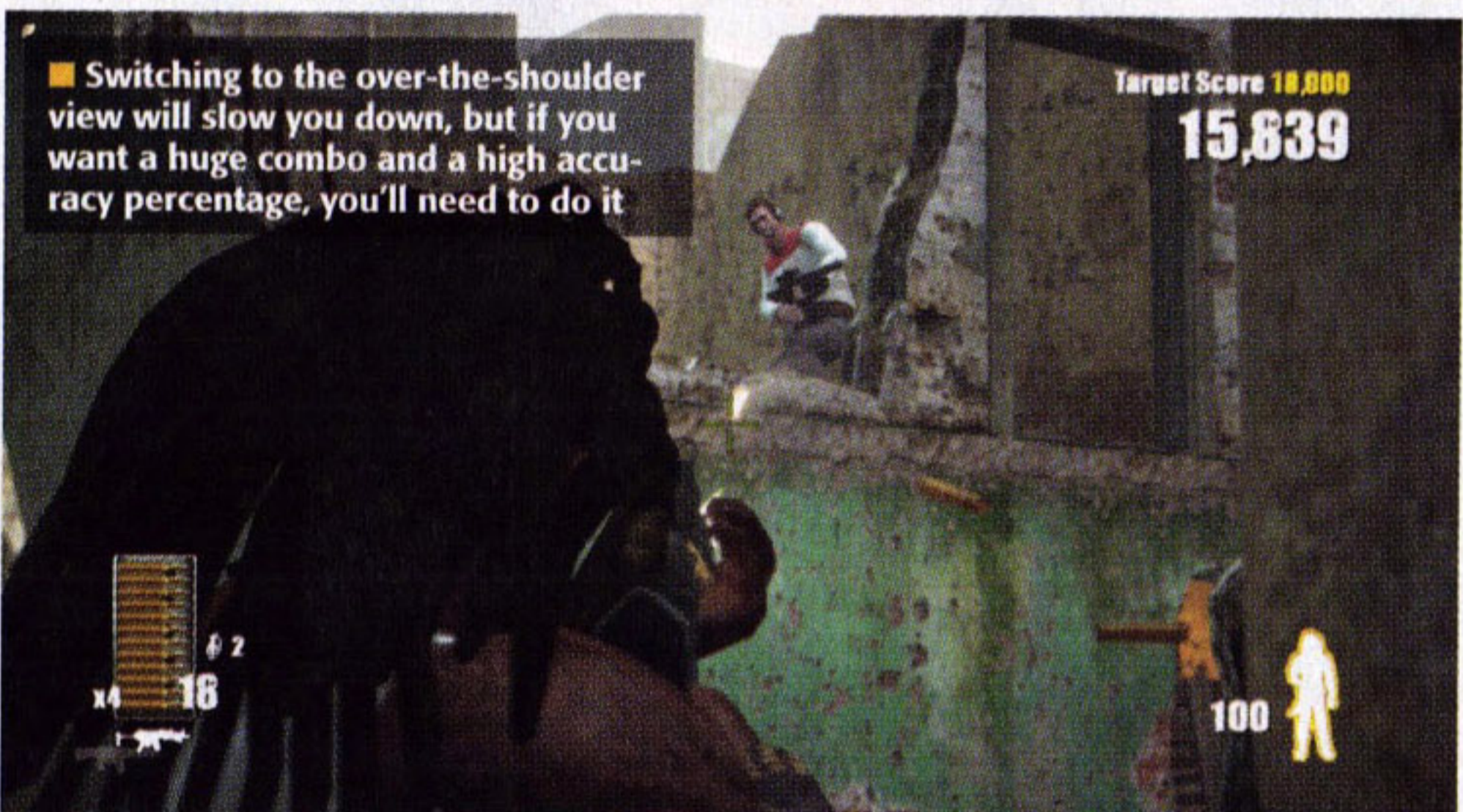
> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **9**

Although Devil May Cry 4 introduces a new protagonist, there's little chance of him being booted off of the TV screen like Metal Gear Solid's Raiden. Nero is a bona fide killer and, dare I say it, just as likeable hero as Dante. His Devil Bringer factors brilliantly into combat, and adds an over-the-top edge to his amazing combos. Nero could certainly carry this game on his own, but the shocking events in the introductory cutscene make you count the seconds until you get to suit up as Dante again, which you eventually do. And yes, he lives up to his legacy. For both characters, the series' combat is as exciting as ever, and the bosses they confront are simply some of the best in gaming. The levels, however, suffer from lulls in the action, and far too much repetition in the "fight these enemies to open this door" goals, but their beautiful artistry cannot be denied. Even with some faults, this is the very definition of what I expect from an action game. It's intense, stylish, and all about the cut of the blade.—**REINER**



■ As you dash through the levels, your eyes will search for Skullshot icons, which once shot, will add a multiplier to your combo



■ Switching to the over-the-shoulder view will slow you down, but if you want a huge combo and a high accuracy percentage, you'll need to do it



■ It's a game of speed over staying safe

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

The Club

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** BIZARRE CREATIONS > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 19 > **ESRB** M

TICK... TICK... TICK... BOOM!!!

The Club, created by the racing savvy Bizarre Creations, is the most hyperactive, audacious, adrenaline-charged shooter I've come across. It's also one of the most unique. The speed-first mentality of the racing genre is cleverly infused into the framework of a run-and-gun shooter. With microscopic explosives implanted under your skin, bullets are the least of your worries. The thing you end up fearing the most is the second hand on the clock. If you don't reach a specific location before time expires, you're going to experience what it's like to be a human popcorn machine.

This time-is-of-the-essence approach leads to gameplay that doesn't give you a second to think or breathe. You are constantly on the run, barreling through highly contested war zones, and ending human lives faster than a McDonald's meat factory can churn out beef patties. This action is intense, heart pounding, and often a blur, but it always proves to be entertaining.

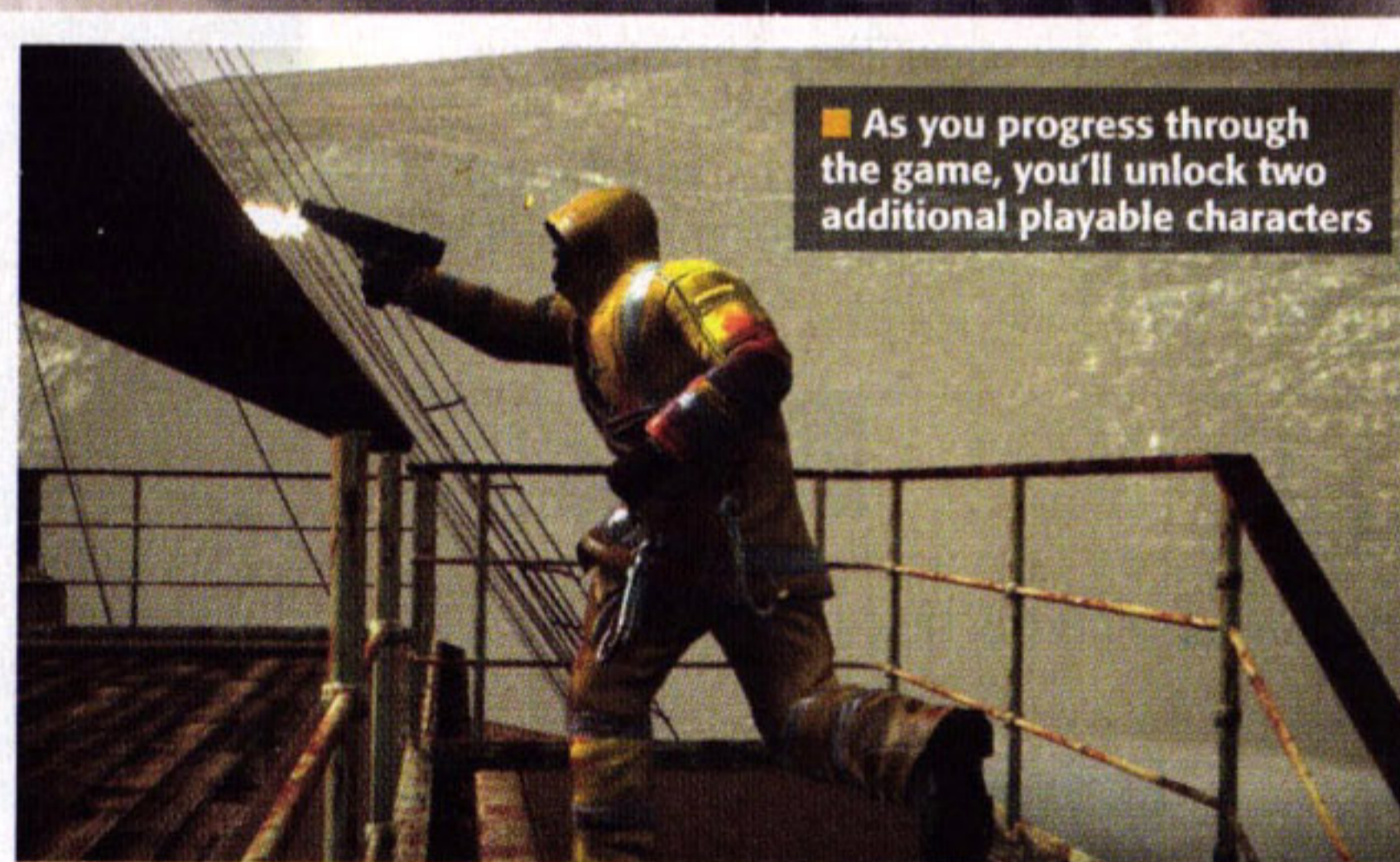
Most of the challenges have players running through serpentine battlefields from point A to point B, but there are also levels where you are confined to a small area — relying more on your speed of spinning than sprinting to dispatch enemies before time expires. And to truly capture the racing atmosphere, some of the levels have players running laps in specific environments. In these, you really have to keep an eye on your health and conserve health packs for the last lap. Since most levels can be completed in a blink of an eye, the sense of variety doesn't last long, but unlike games like Burnout, you really don't find yourself favoring one style over the other. They are

all enjoyable, and balanced to the point where you end up finishing a level with a fraction of a second or a sliver of health. It's very much a heart attack on a disc.

The thrill of running into a hail-storm of lead is only part of the picture, however. The game also puts your targeting skills to the test with a combo system that works much like that in Stuntman. If you can string together kills (bonuses are thrown out for headshots and last bullet takedowns), you'll tally a higher score, which at the end of the level will be held up against seven other CPU opponents. Not only will you be pushed to move the targeting reticle faster than you ever had to, you'll also have to time your reloads so you don't lose your combo. This is where the game will become more of a thrill for some people, and more of a chore for others. It's built for people who enjoy replaying levels to better their scores. There isn't much of a narrative, and there are no larger-than-life water cooler moments.

The targeting and character movements are a bit stiff, but once I got the hang of them, I couldn't get enough of this game. It brings out that Zen "Tony Hawk" feel, where the world melts away and you are completely in the zone, delivering one swift headshot after another. It may sound odd, but the racing shooter formula works amazingly well.

Like all shooters, The Club also offers an online experience centered on deathmatching and team



■ As you progress through the game, you'll unlock two additional playable characters

play. For those of you out there without online, it also offers four-player split-screen. The versus content has a nice variety of match types, and the maps work well for each, but little has been done to avoid spawn camping. I respawned exactly when a rocket hit my character's face. It was the shortest life of my video game career. With that said, the matches can be fun, but for people who know where players spawn, it can also be unfair.

A nice change of pace, and hopefully the beginning of a new genre, The Club can best be summarized as a hardcore gamer's type of game. Taking the time to perfect runs is a blast, and unlike most shooters, it can also be used for short gaming sessions. If you enjoy a good challenge and arcade-like games that empower you with bragging rights, you're going to love this game's nerve-shattering pressure. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** A successful experiment in what would happen if a racing game mated with a shooting game

> **Graphics:** The environments are lined with details, and the character animations (especially their death throes) look great. On a different note: This game has some of the best virtual hair out there

> **Sound:** The pounding soundtrack effectively gets your blood racing faster

> **Playability:** The controls are very tight, and they make sense for this style of fast-paced action. The selection of weapons is also nice

> **Entertainment:** It's short and void of a story, but the excellent multiplayer and entertaining single-player content gives it legs

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.75

This game should carry a warning for pregnant women, those prone to heart attacks, and people with severe anxiety issues. Any and all of the above can expect a dangerous rise in heart rate and excitability. For everybody else, The Club delivers some of the highest-octane thrills in a long time. By applying racing game methodology to the shooter mechanic, Bizarre Creations has crafted a totally new style of action gameplay. Speed, accuracy, and strategy combine into a formula that rewards risk-taking and frantic action above all else. This comes at the expense of story, which is largely absent in any meaningful way. Likewise, controls and movement speed feel more than a little sluggish at times. It's about the worst I can say about what is otherwise a great variation on the over-saturated shooter genre, and some wildly fun multiplayer modes only enhance the experience. Non-twitch shooters need not apply, but the rest of us will have a blast. —MILLER

MULTI-SYSTEM QUICKIES

NINTENDO Wii

BOTTOM LINE **6**

Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 8 > **ESRB** E



I'll admit it: At this point about the only thing Sega could do with Sonic to make me happy is to turn him into a nice, blue fur coat. Seriously, this guy is about as relevant a mascot as Blind Melon's "bee girl" (remember her? Didn't think so). Zero Gravity is the sequel to a forgettable last-gen racing game, one that squanders its few decent ideas (the slingshot cornering ability is cool) and solid track designs on an imprecise Wii motion control scheme that does little but make this game needlessly frustrating. However, if you have a GameCube controller handy, Zero Gravity is very nearly mediocre. —**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

BOTTOM LINE **7**

FIFA Street 3

> **STYLE** 1 TO 7-PLAYER SPORTS (PS3), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX 360) (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA BIG > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 19 > **ESRB** E



It's easy to appreciate FIFA Street 3's fluid play. The right analog enables some quick-fire drag moves, and you can also flip the ball up and juggle it. These aren't new aspects for the series, they're just better done and your characters

move in and out of these animations more smoothly. These improvements stand in contrast to the continued weak goalie AI, unhelpful camera work, and iffy passing. I also think you could add give-and-gos, set pieces, and through passes to give more gameplay dimension to a title that is too limiting. —**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

Dynasty Warriors 6

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KOEI > **DEVELOPER** OMEGA FORCE
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 19 > **ESRB** T

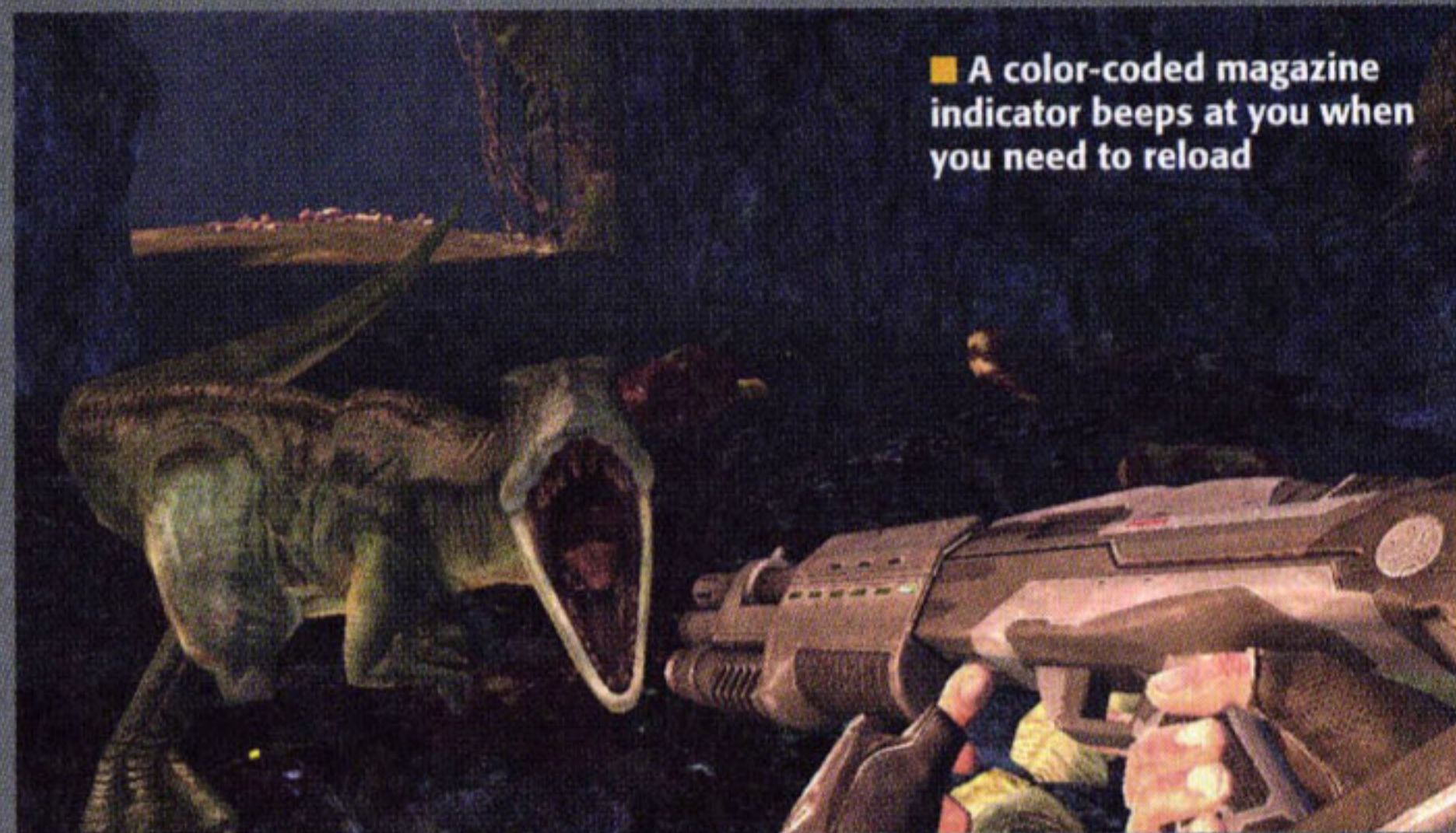


This is the first Dynasty Warriors title created specifically for next-gen consoles, but with a large portion of its design remaining similar to the previous generation's games, it ends up feeling more like an update than a fully featured sequel. Some of the new content falls into the silly and fun category, such as having named horses, but key additions, like the branching skill system, add much-needed depth to the monotonous "wail away on the same button" combat. The Renbu/Chain system also adds a nice reward to combo-heavy killing, allowing players to strategically link together groups of enemies throughout the majority of a level. Do these subtle additions make it the best Dynasty Warriors? Yes. But could it also be classified as more of the same? Most definitely. This is a small step forward, but for a series that hasn't moved an inch over five installments, it's a mind-boggling breakthrough. —**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Turok

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** TOUCHSTONE
> **DEVELOPER** PROPAGANDA GAMES > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 5 > **ESRB** M



■ A color-coded magazine indicator beeps at you when you need to reload

BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **Concept:** Turok's been given a much needed makeover, but it's not enough to elevate this FPS above the pack

> **Graphics:** Some great jungle environments and a lot of good animation work give this game a good face

> **Sound:** A solid list of voice actors helps the game's story limp along

> **Playability:** The game has a few nice touches like a magazine indicator that beeps when you need to reload

> **Entertainment:** A lot of little issues like poor checkpoints mar this otherwise decent shooter

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

FRAIL REVIVAL

Turok, by its very nature, seems to be all about change. Originating as a comic book in the 1950's, Turok passed through more hands than bad stock tips, and finally achieved its most popular incarnation as a console FPS during the late '90s. Since then Turok still hasn't stayed put, having fallen once again into the hands of a new creative force.

Propaganda Games has decided (probably wisely) to forgo many of the fantastical story elements — time-traveling dino-riders and world-eating super beings — found in the earlier games, and has instead focused on a more traditional science fiction narrative. But just as Joseph Turok crash lands on an alien world looking wearied and beaten from the experience, the game itself collides with the newest generation of first-person shooters and walks away humbly.

The game's not all bad. It's filled with a few tense moments, mostly due to the wild dinosaurs that roam the alien planet you're stranded on. You'll see a T-rex shove over a few trees and your stomach will drop as he comes at you, dry swallowing any small creatures that get in his way like they were meat candy. Then there are the lurkers. These fearsome reptiles are part jungle cat, part dinosaur, and part Satan. They usually hunt in packs, and you'll see them circling around you, climbing tree trunks waiting patiently for their lunch (i.e. you) to walk by. The grass effects aren't bad either. It's fun to watch the ripple of a grenade blast flow across an open field.

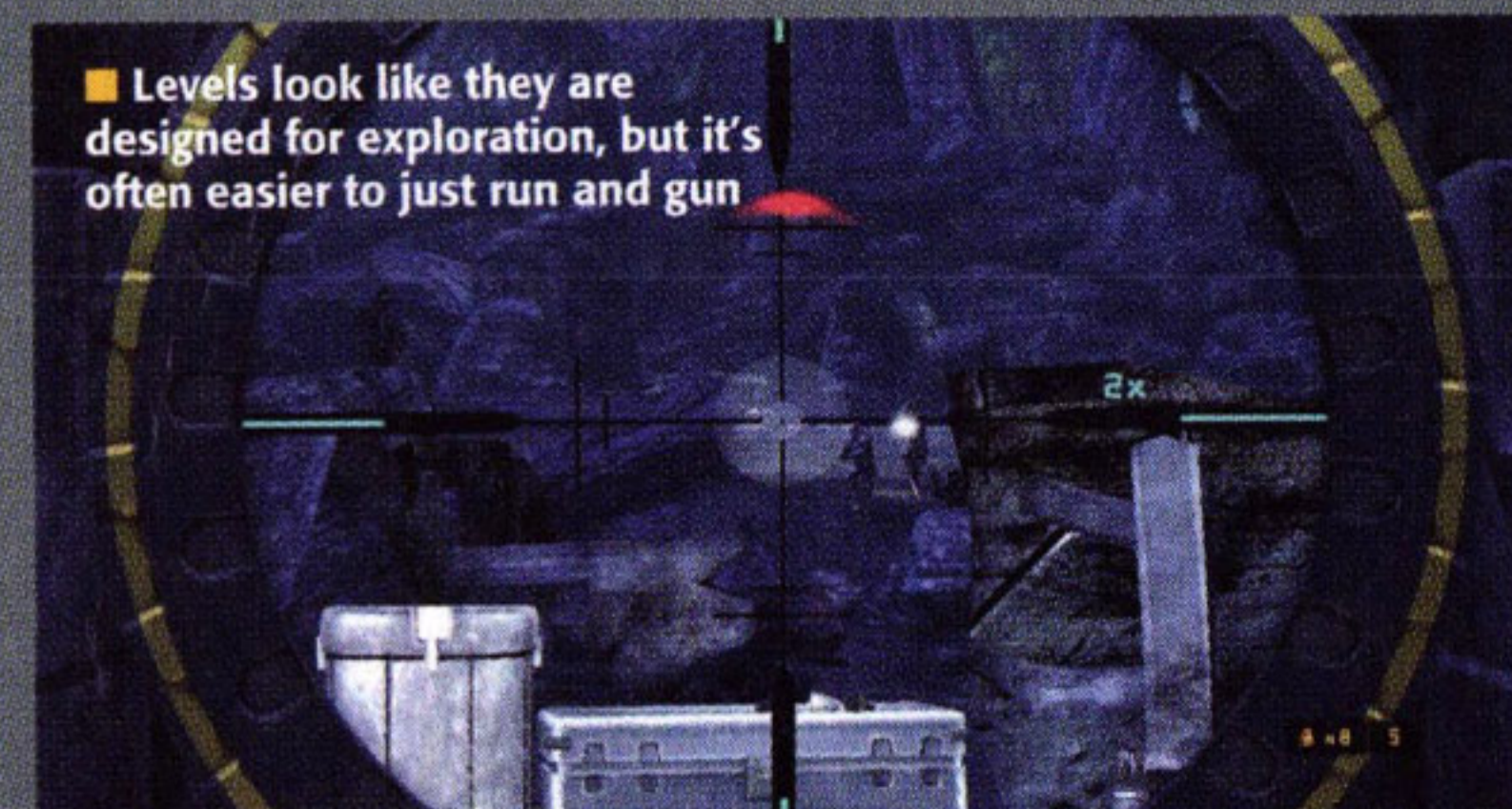
Turok's showcase feature, its living, exploitable ecosystem, sadly doesn't live up to its promise. Sure, you can make omelets out of every egg in a raptor's nursery to lure out the mother, then send her, blindly fueled by rage, to attack a group of human enemies — and don't

get me wrong, that's cool — but there aren't many opportunities like this throughout the game. The ecosystem as a whole doesn't feel very alive.

The toilet paper-thin story is something that the characters from Gears of War could really get behind. Let's just say that the dinos provide all the smart, witty dialogue. I will give Propaganda props for getting some decent voice actors, however, like Powers Boothe and Timothy Olyphant.

Poorly spaced checkpoints, dank too-similar environments, and magical teleporting allies are a few other annoying and strange traits that cause this game to fall down a few notches. Most notable is the fact that you are constantly being spun around, feet skyward, during heated firefights. This is kind of a cool effect during scripted sequences, but it's frustrating every time a grenade goes off nearby or a dinosaur attacks. It's too easy to get disoriented, lose your cover, and feel cheaply killed.

Turok's multiplayer offerings are all pretty bland, too. Dinosaurs exist in the online games as well, but they're AI-controlled bots only meant to add some extra randomness to each match. Instead, they offer little more than an extra target to practice on while passing through an area. Multiplayer, like so many other elements of this game, feels well-intentioned but fails to impress. —**BEN**



■ Levels look like they are designed for exploration, but it's often easier to just run and gun

Second Opinion 7

With Gears of War-esque visuals and a stellar voice-acting cast (including the one and only Powers Boothe), Turok has been given a memorable Hollywood makeover. The game's lush jungle environments and Jurassic Park-quality dinosaur animations keep to the celluloid theme, and some of the battles against the quick and deadly dinosaurs are truly memorable (especially when Turok's wielding his bowie knife). The game also does a nice job of making the linear levels feel open-ended, but some of the gameplay basics don't fare as well. It takes a while to adjust to the unwieldy thumbsticks, and the poorly placed checkpoints had me longing for quicksaves. The set piece gunplay and the unimaginative multiplayer, which fail to impress in the face of Turok's contemporaries, ultimately keep this serviceable sequel from reaching too far past its Paleolithic roots. —**BERTZ**



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prototype shown with optional equip't. ©2007 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

PLAYSTATION 3

Lost Planet: Extreme Condition

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
 > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 26 > **ESRB** T



LATE TO THE PARTY

This is a great addition to the PlayStation 3 library, but it certainly isn't anything more than what the 360 version offered early last year. That's not a bad thing. Lost Planet is a positive explosion of action and epic-scale conflicts. A year later, the visuals look phenomenal, and the unique premise is still unlike anything else out there. Admittedly, the moment-to-moment gameplay of Lost Planet can be a little slow and unexciting, but the big encounters make it all worthwhile.

The game casts you as Wayne, a fittingly bad hero name for an equally bad game title. Who thought "Extreme Condition" made this game sound better? Anyway, Wayne wanders through a sub-arctic wasteland of ice and snow most of the time, killing off some amazing monsters along with some slightly less-amazing snow pirates and their ilk. Beyond some fun and well-balanced guns, Wayne also has a handy grapple to reach high ledges. The show stealers, however, are the Vital Suits — mechs of various types scat-

tered liberally throughout the game world. These powerful attack vehicles are your only good shot at taking down the enormous boss monsters the game throws at you. While finding their weak spots doesn't exactly stretch the brain (hint: look for orange), the fights are still plenty challenging and tense, since each monster wields a titanic level of destructive power. Sadly, the story doesn't keep pace with the frenetic action and cool premise; I never felt drawn in to the drama.

The extensive multiplayer options let you play in the snow along with up to 15 other friends, and this version includes not only the original complement of multiplayer stages, but all the ones you can download off of Xbox Live as well. There are also some new unlockable characters. Beyond that, my eye doesn't notice any profound advancements since the original 360 release. If you're into insane boss fights and haven't already hit this up on another system, Lost Planet deserves to be found. —**MILLER**

**BOTTOM
LINE**
8

> **Concept:** Blow up monstrously huge bosses in a gorgeous arctic wasteland

> **Graphics:** High-quality animation and intense effects make what otherwise might have been a boring color palette pop with excitement

> **Sound:** The sound effect work is great, but it obscures the enjoyable musical score a little bit

> **Playability:** Very straightforward controls drop you into the action right away, so the focus stays on the over-the-top action

> **Entertainment:** Some stunning boss encounters are scattered amid a tedious story and basic gameplay arc

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **8.25**

Like a savory recipe being served on a new dish, Lost Planet lands on the PS3 with few changes from the 360 version. The game has the same great graphics, gorgeous monster designs, and laughable story as it did a year ago. However, the game's difficulty does seem to have been rebalanced, making the game slightly easier. This may be a good thing, as I found myself enjoying the game's new, more casual, pacing. If you haven't played this well-rounded shooter before, there is no reason to not check out the PS3 offering. —**BEN**



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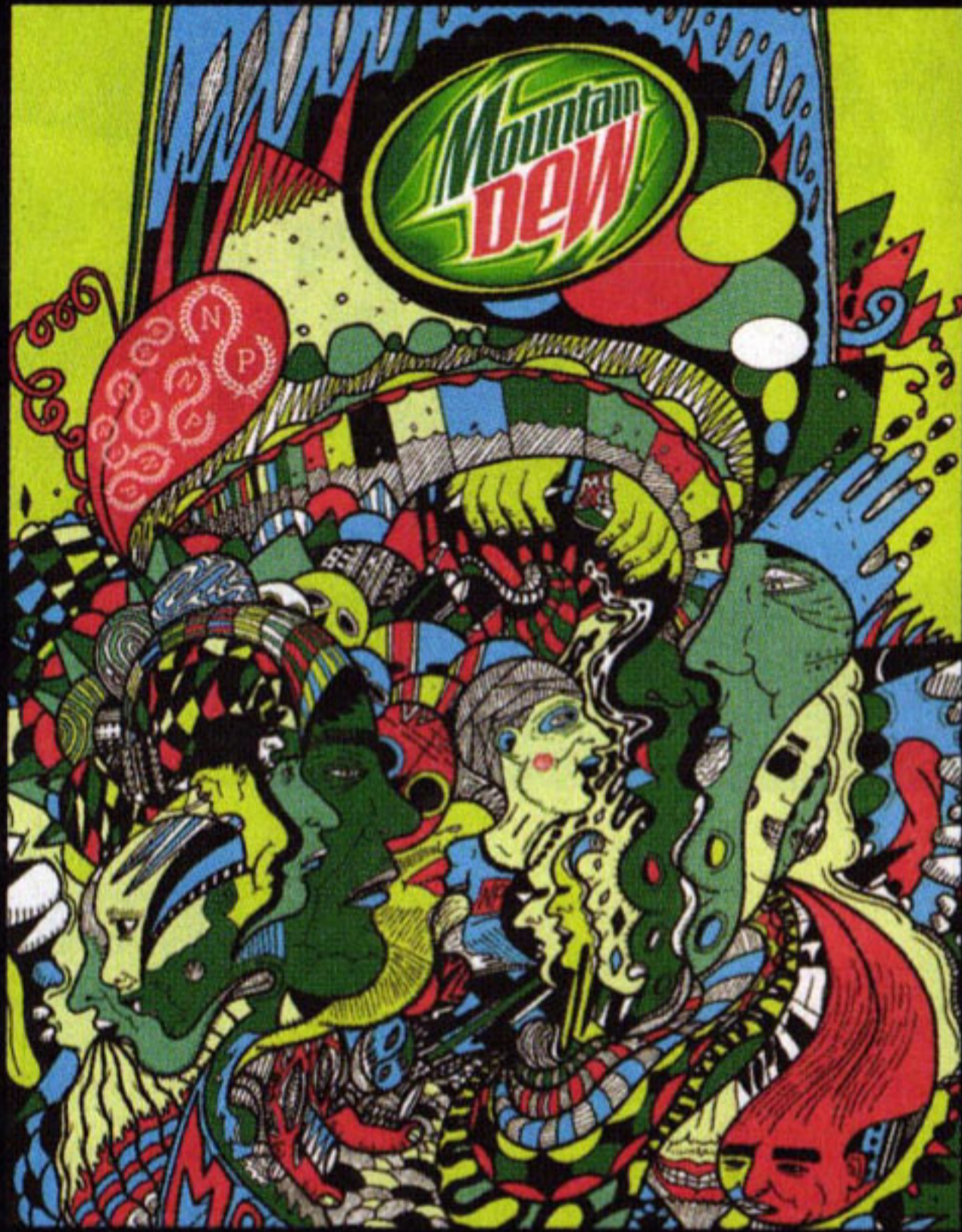
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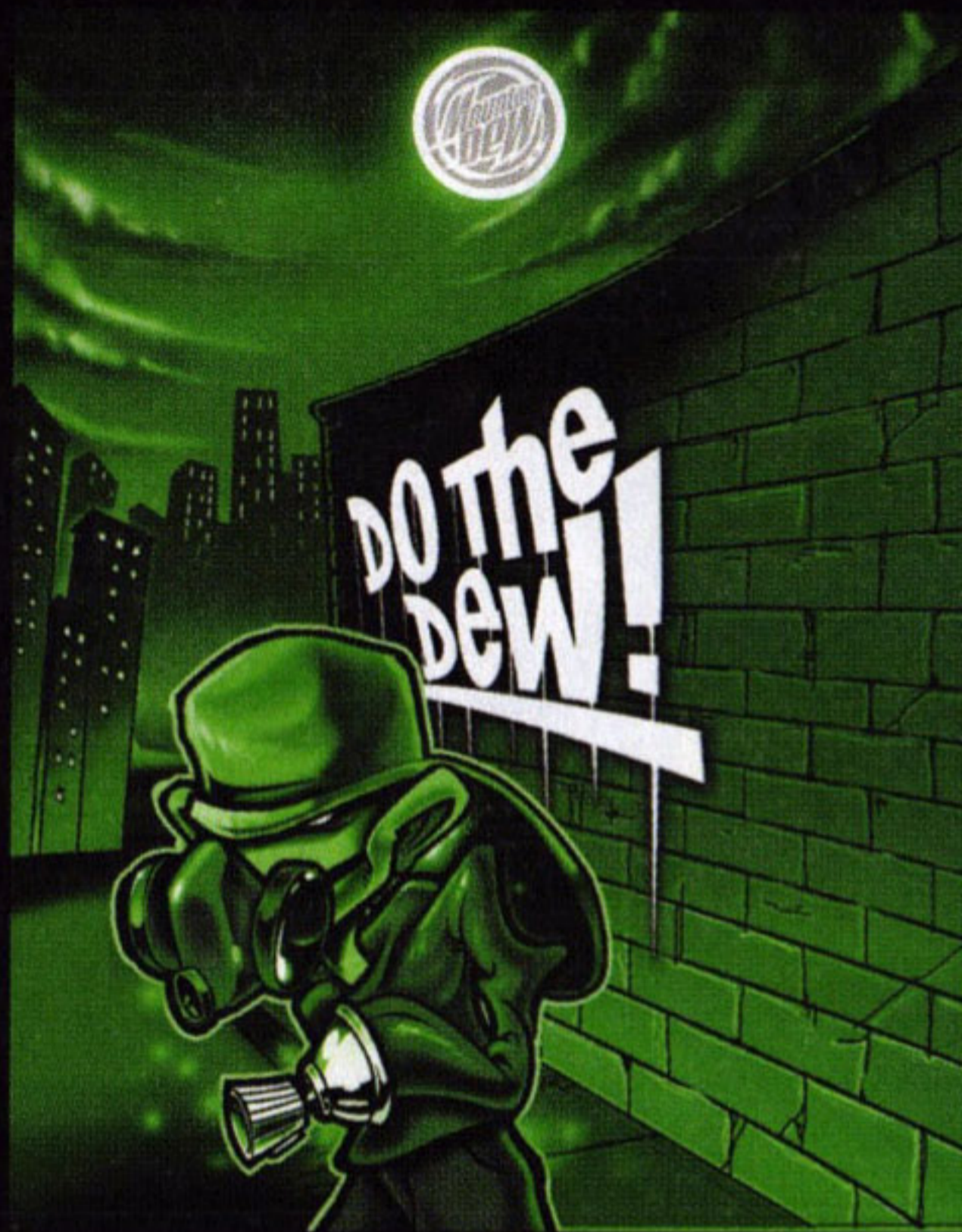
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LIMITED EDITION ARTIST SERIES



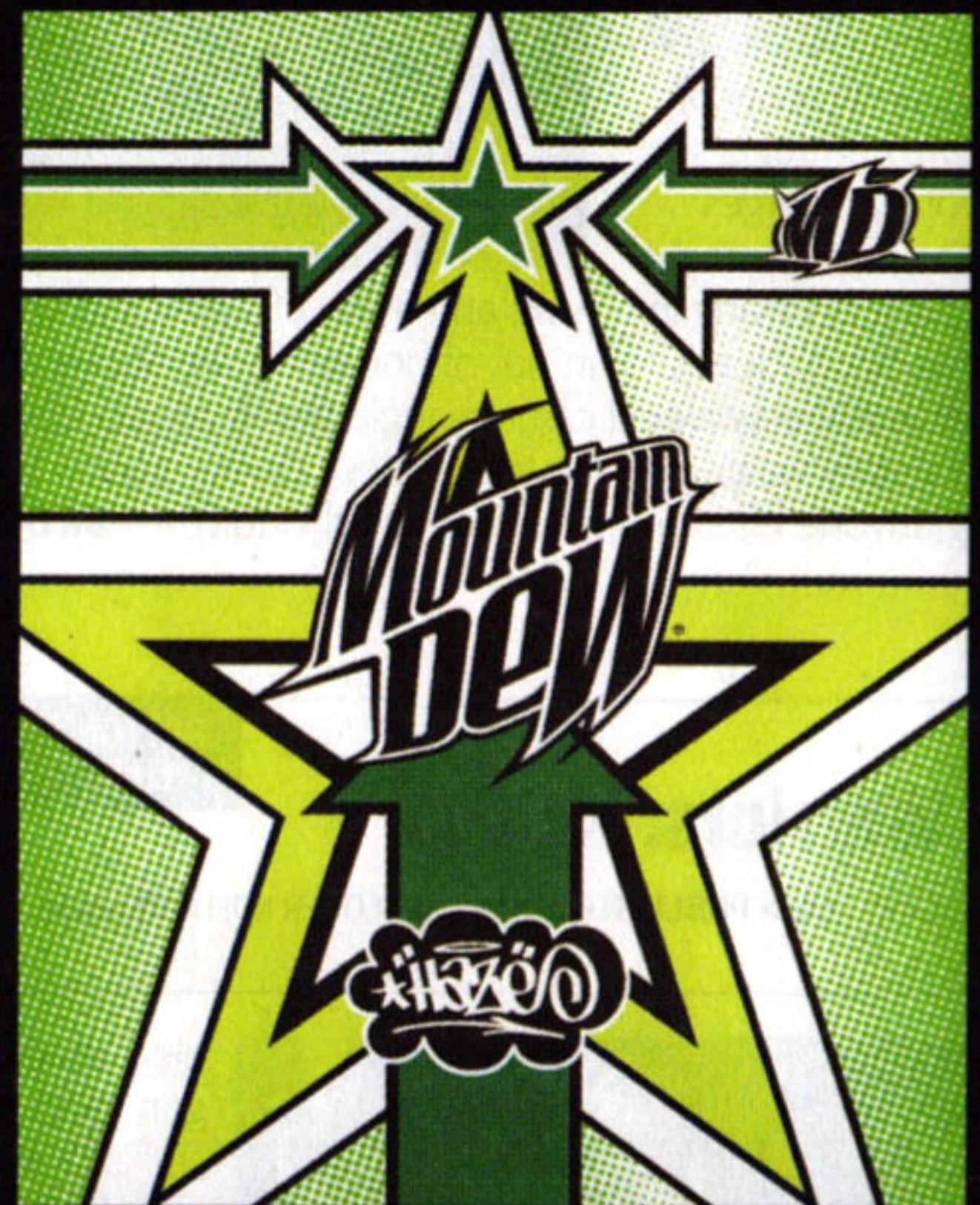
CHUCK ANDERSON

"Highs and lows everyone goes through..."



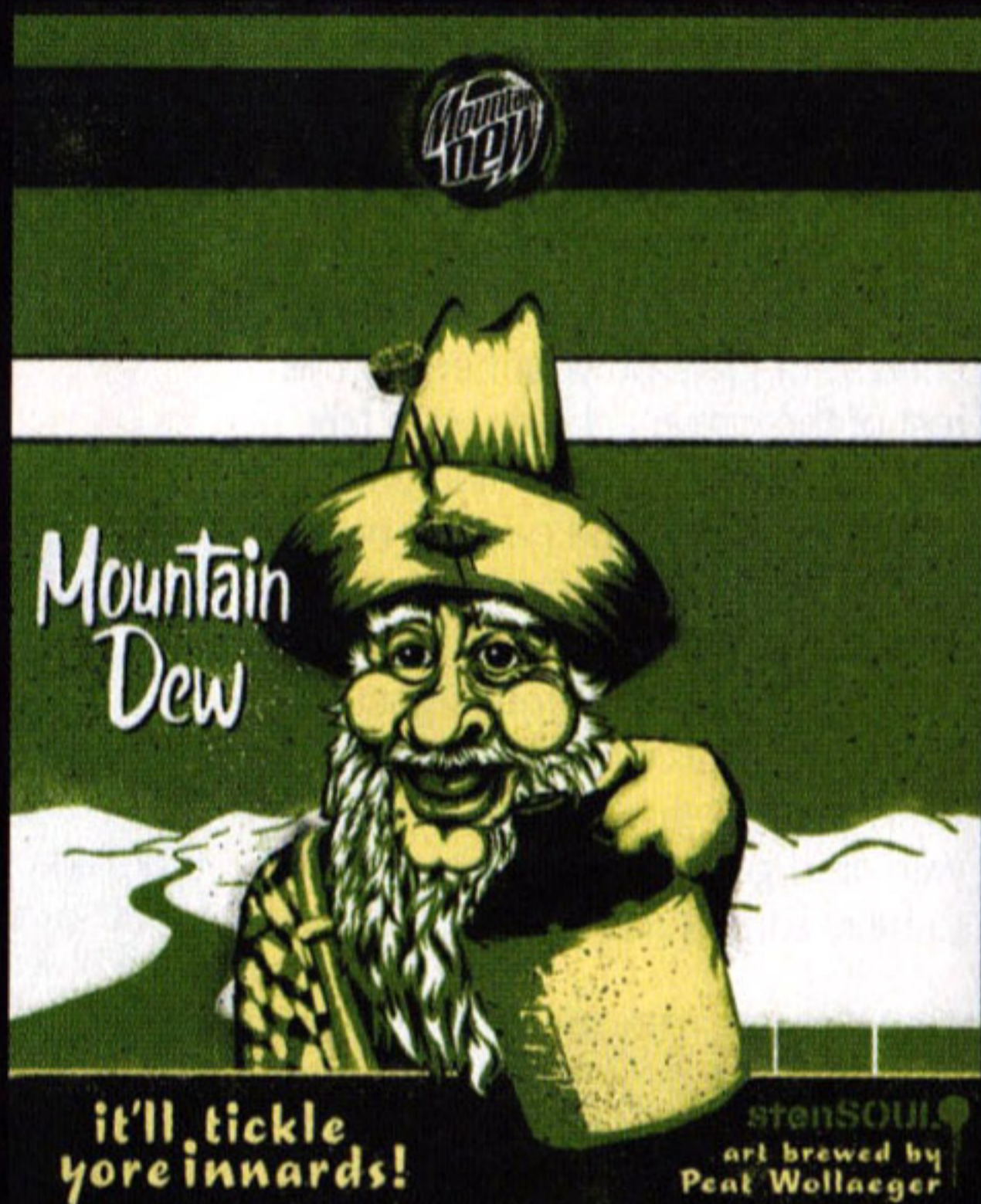
DEZ

"DEW is about excitement and adventure."



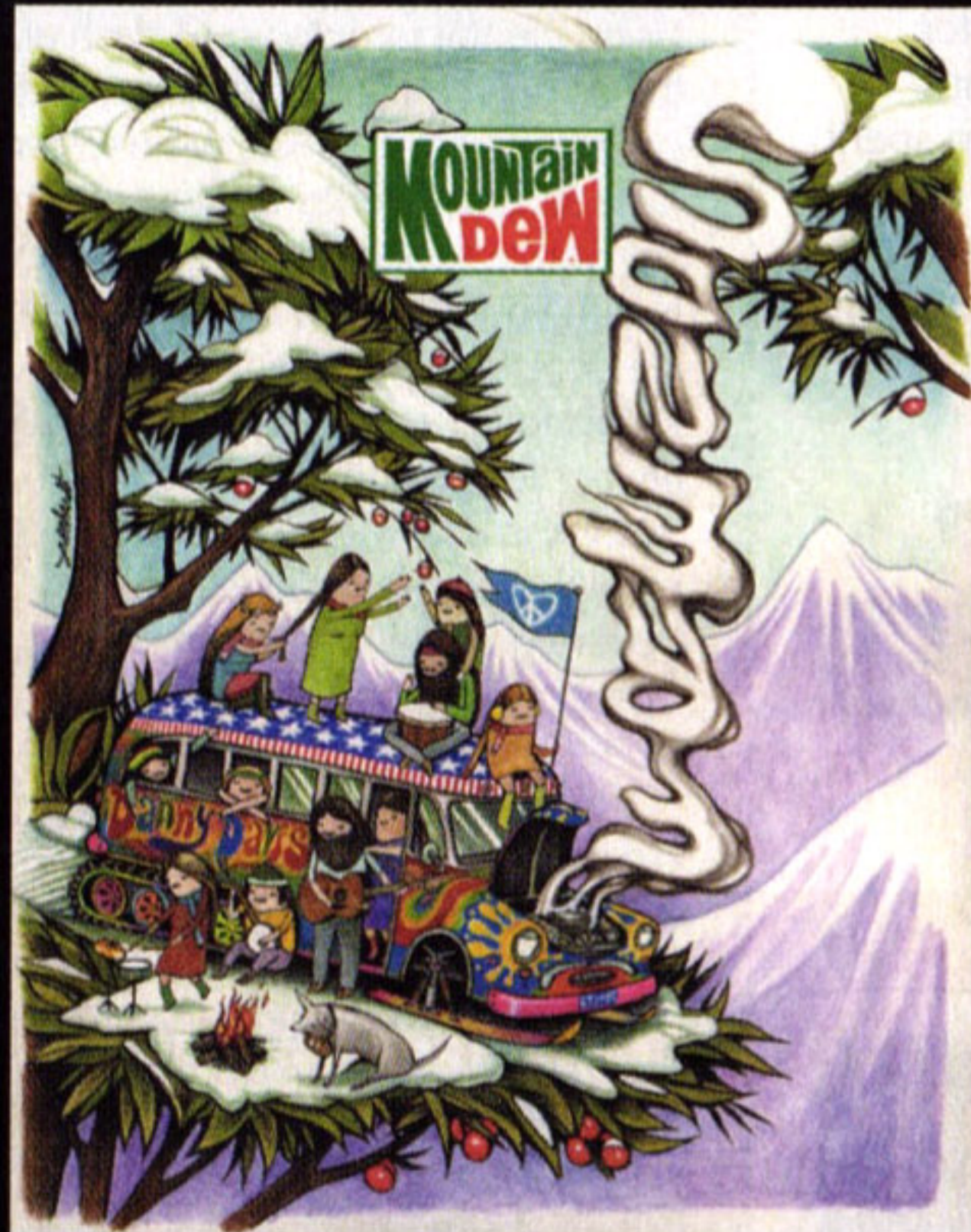
HAZE

"Super vibrant, pop art kind of vibe."



PEAT WOLLAEGER

"Vintage bottle of MOUNTAIN DEW."



SCOTT LENHARDT & DANNY DAVIS

"Like hanging out with a friend I hadn't seen in a while, ..."



TROY DENNING

"A magic elixir from a samurai's pouch."

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Wii QUICKIES

Wii
Nitrobike

BOTTOM LINE 4.25

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6 PLAYERS VIA WIICONNECT24) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** LEFT FIELD PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** JANUARY 15 > **ESRB** E10+

Developer Left Field made Excitebike 64 and is clearly attempting to ape the more recent Excite Truck. Unfortunately, Nitrobike lacks any of the fun of these two titles. Sure it's got remote tilt steering, liberal boosts, and plenty of jumps, but the core control is so fundamentally sloppy it verges on unplayable. The unclear track design will have players driving into walls and flying off cliffs, and shooting for possible shortcuts only leads to an out-of-bounds reset. Stunts are simple enough to pull off, but the swiveled camera angle prevents you from seeing and avoiding any debris waiting on the track below. Online play is available, but good luck finding anyone else who actually owns this turd. —**BRYAN**



Wii
Samurai Warriors: Katana

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KOEI > **DEVELOPER** KOEI > **RELEASE** JANUARY 15 > **ESRB** T



Melee attacks in light gun games always suck. It's too hard to judge the effective distance of your weapon, and much of the fun of melee combat as a concept is tied to the use of space and the tactics involved in controlling the flow of the fight. Unfortunately for Samurai Warriors: Katana, it's

basically a light gun game with melee weapons. Much of players' time is spent jamming on A to attack the endless waves of enemies that swarm you (surprise), and that core gameplay is too shallow and repetitive to be truly engaging. The encounters with enemy captains are more memorable, but there's far too little gravy in this bland meal to make it any better or more delicious than a stereotypical Midwestern casserole. —**ADAM**

Wii
Winter Sports: The Ultimate Challenge

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** CONSPIRACY ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** 49 GAMES > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E

It's customary to play these types of games with button-mashing or some other flurry of activity, so it's fitting that this official unofficial collection of winter Olympic games has you waving the Wii controllers around. It's an evolution, for sure, but not an entirely exciting one. Some sports (like skiing) are better than others (speed skating), but what ultimately dooms this game is the sheer repetition. The skiing and bobsled/luge/etc. events are all the same, and although the controls aren't disastrous, they simply don't translate into much fun. Clearly, the future of Olympic games is on the Wii, but this is an inauspicious start. —**KATO**



Wii

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

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** EIGHTING CO. > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 25 > **ESRB** T



MOVING FORWARD?

Dragon Quest Swords is a strange combination of new technology and dated gameplay. I wish I could say these two opposing forces mix to create a stellar game, but the truth is like a scoliotic mule. This half-breed may be unique, but it lacks a certain kind of grace.

Easily the best part of Swords is its unique motion sensitive combat. Using the Wii remote you'll slash at the screen and your horizontal, vertical, and diagonal strikes will transfer fairly accurately onto whatever monster you're fighting. You'll also have to aim your shield to block incoming attacks and use well-timed sword strikes to lob ranged projectiles back at your foes. All told, combat in Swords is a fairly enjoyable experience that rewards players with better equipment for going back through dungeons and achieving higher scores.

The game suffers, however, whenever you are not in combat. The dungeons are extremely linear, and

I mean this in the most literal sense because they are on rails. All you can do is walk forward or backwards while picking left or right at the occasional fork in the road.

However, this is preferable to movement in town, which has you using the d-pad to look around from a first-person perspective and the B button to walk forward. I understand that the developers might have wanted to keep things simple by keeping the controls all on one hand, but why not at least include the option to use the nunchuk?

The game's "ello governor" re-fest dialogue will either make you chuckle or grate on your nerves. The rest of the game — the need to talk to every townsman to find out where to go next, the paint by numbers story, and the archaic weapon's and item's menus — all feels like it's been pulled out of some forgotten NES game. This won't appeal to everyone, but those willing to put up with tired genre formulas are bound to have some fun. —**BEN**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Old school meets new school in this unique take on action/RPGs

> **Graphics:** Character designs, and the art style in general, look good, but the detail is far from impressive

> **Sound:** Prince Anlace says some awesome things like, "And now we must away"

> **Playability:** The one-handed controls are annoying even after you get used to them

> **Entertainment:** Fans of older RPGs might dig this, but impatient gamers might feel a little bogged down

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

Dragon Quest Swords latches onto the Wii's motion-based gameplay, but it also retains many of its RPG elements, which results in an interesting hybrid that role-playing fanatics and action junkies alike can enjoy. Hordes of slimes can be dispatched by a wild waggle of the remote, but most enemies, as in most RPGs, require specific tactics to take down. The combat functionality is very enjoyable, and the variety in the encounters keeps it fresh. The characters are certainly interesting, and the conflict surrounding the Queen raises some intrigue, but the story mostly falls flat. Regardless though, the well-crafted combat deserves a look. —**REINER**



■ The small collection of in-town minigames allows up to four people to play together

Wii

No More Heroes

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE > **RELEASE** JANUARY 22 > **ESRB** M

EMPTY PROMISES

Over many years of gaming I've lost patience with design philosophy that dictates punishing a player for turning on a game. You know what I'm talking about. Giving players boring, meaningless tasks to unlock miniscule rewards. Making boss fights needlessly long to try the player's patience. Obscuring the story behind a confusing script. No More Heroes embraces these ideas to their fullest extent, going out of its way to push away all but the most fervent players.

The combat system in No More Heroes has a lot of promise. The combination of button pressing and motion controls is visceral, bloody, and fun at first. Unfortunately, beyond the boss fights, the complexity of the lightsaber-esque fighting never elevates past button mashing. The stylized graphics of the game

certainly evoke memories of 8-bit goodness, but they also suffer from frequent pop-up and lack any real texture work. The flow of gameplay is also crippled by some odd decisions – why is there no retry option after a failed side mis-

sion? Why does the boring gas pumping minigame net more money than some of the more exciting assassination quests?

Then there's the issue of the subject matter. Protagonist Travis Touchdown is a sociopath, killing largely for pleasure's sake, but we never really get to explore why he is the way he is. There's also a sick fascination with linking love and sex

with extreme violence – Travis at one point waits to confess his love to a woman only after she's blown her own head off with a grenade. In short, there are some things here designed from the ground up to shock and offend.

No More Heroes certainly gets a nod for being wildly different. It's a unique take on open world play, and its almost nihilistic fixation on violence for the sake of violence has a satirical and darkly comedic edge. Unfortunately, the repetition and lack of substance behind the flash left me cold. —**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE

6

> **Concept:** A bloody mash-up of minigames, barren open world wandering, and frustrating boss fights

> **Graphics:** You could defend the lack of texture work as part of the style, or you could just call the visuals poor

> **Sound:** Some strong voice work can't save the convoluted script

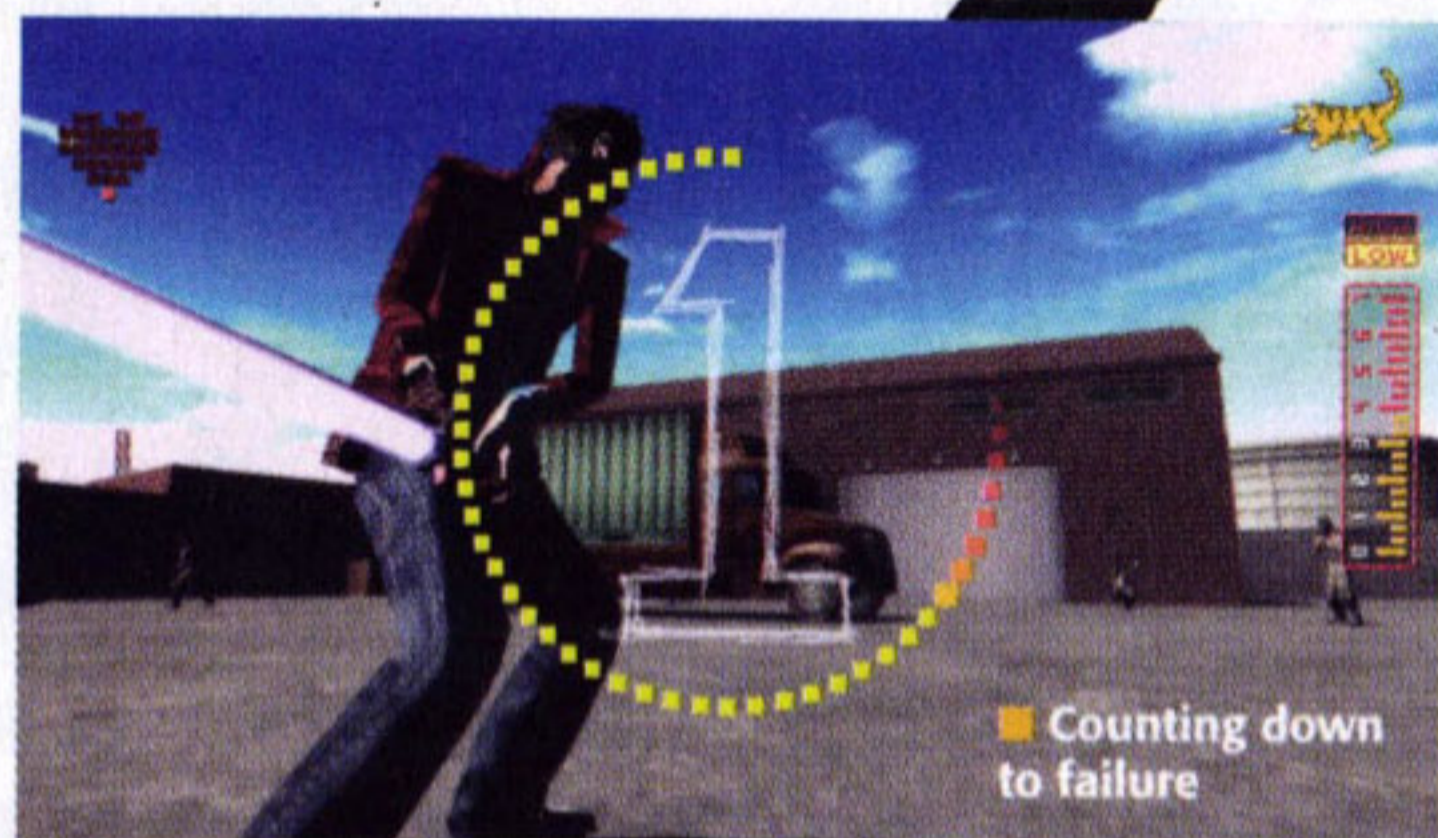
> **Playability:** Relatively intuitive motion controls, but a steep difficulty curve should warn away casual players

> **Entertainment:** It may offend some with its gameplay and others with its subject matter

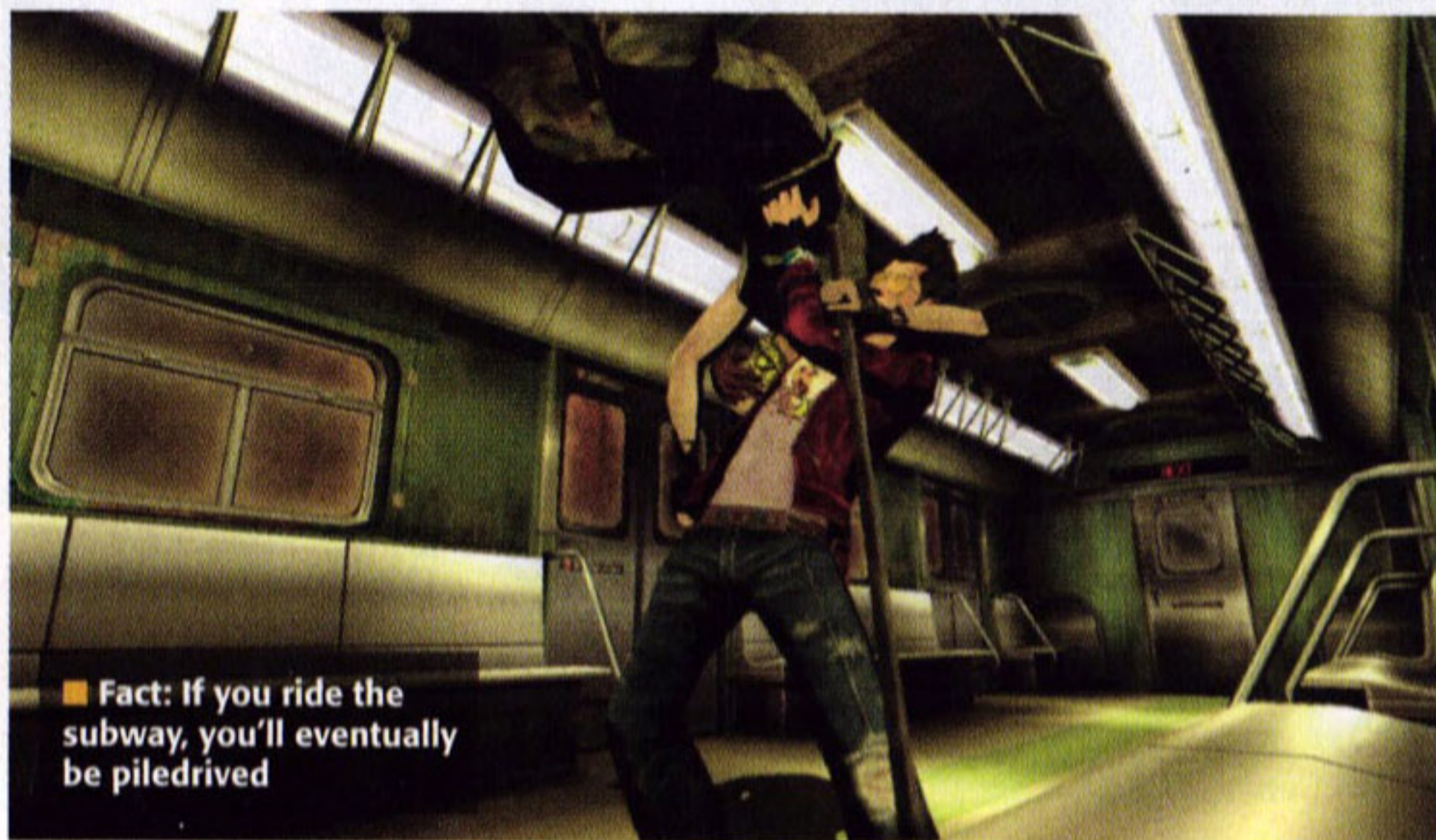
> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6

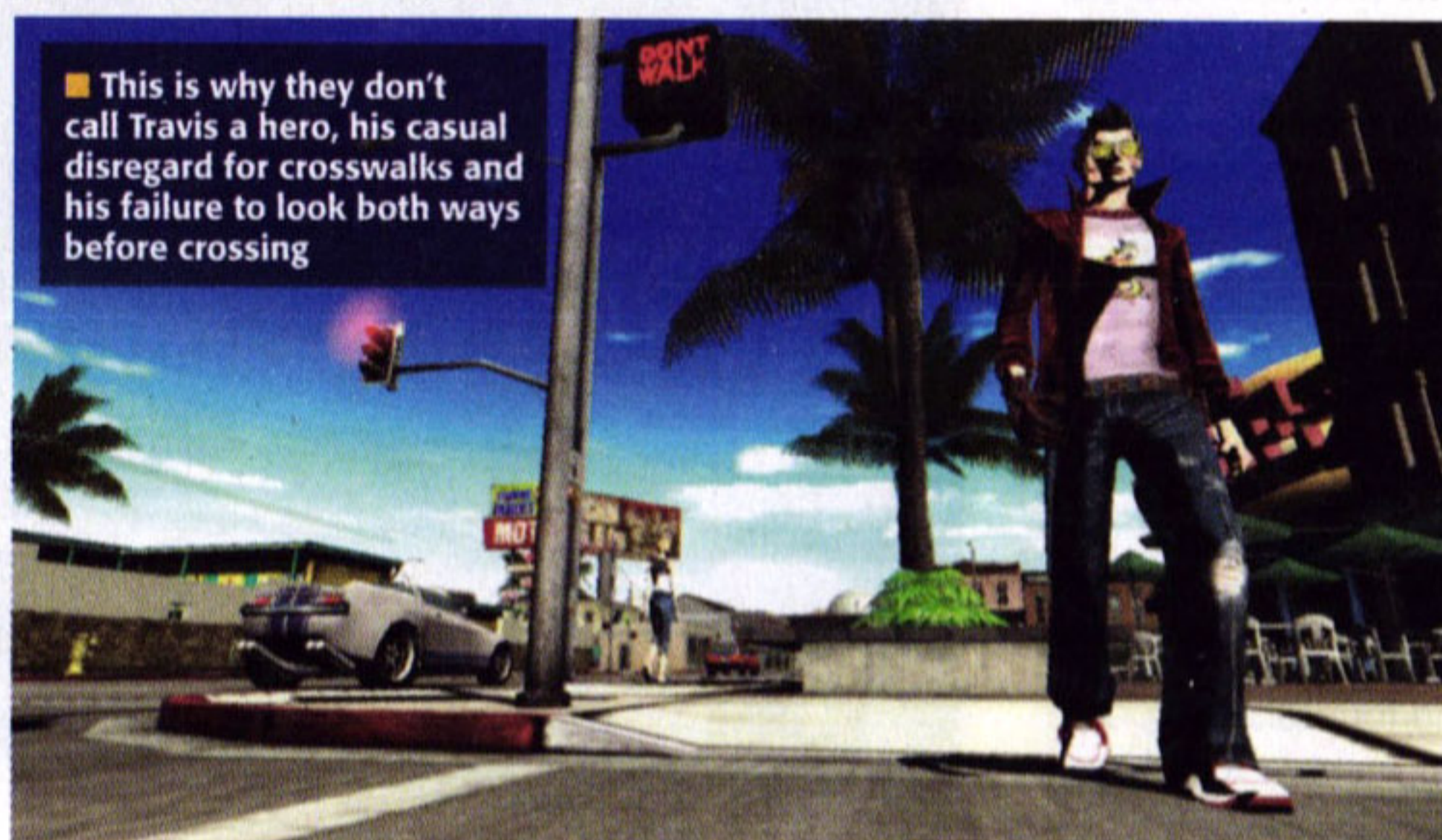
No More Heroes has significant faults in the gameplay design that would instantly doom any other title to immediate failure...but I still wanted to keep playing. The primary draw is a fascinating, stylized presentation (including the dialogue, humor, visuals, and soundtrack) that conveys the surreal and absurd world of hero Travis Touchdown. However, if you lift the artistic tarp draped over No More Heroes, it's kind of a mess. The controls, combat mechanics, and mission structure are all frustrating in their sub-average execution – and those aren't exactly trivial aspects of a video game. I found the stylistic elements compelling enough to grit my teeth through the problems, but it's a high price to pay for unique visuals and quirky (if sometimes disturbing) writing. —**JOE**



Counting down to failure

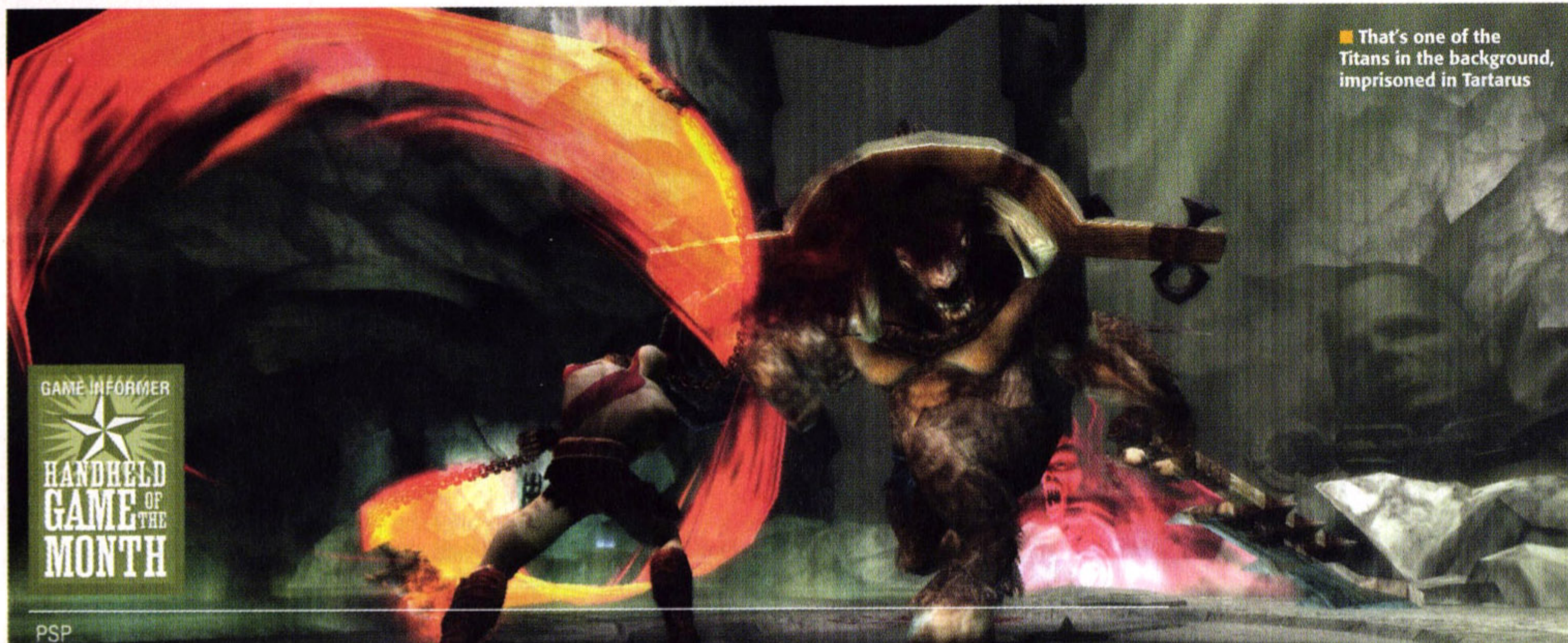


Fact: If you ride the subway, you'll eventually be piledrived



This is why they don't call Travis a hero, his casual disregard for crosswalks and his failure to look both ways before crossing

It's only a game.



■ That's one of the Titans in the background, imprisoned in Tartarus

GAME INFORMER
★
HANDHELD
GAME OF THE
MONTH

PSP

God of War: Chains of Olympus

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER READY AT DAWN STUDIOS
> RELEASE MARCH 4 > ESRB M

WHERE ARE YOUR GODS NOW?

Before racking up a few counts of deicide, Kratos was a divine errand boy, fighting wars and killing beasts in the name of the gods. This is where players find the Ghost of Sparta at the beginning of Chains of Olympus, hoping to lift the burden of his past through servitude. Even though the game is set years before his ascent to godhood, players will discover that experience of controlling the ruthless Kratos has not been diminished.

Developer Ready at Dawn has crafted a superb adventure that feels exactly like a God of War game should. Chains of Olympus has vicious combat, mythological figures, and awesome moments that will be burned into your mind for years – especially the choice Kratos has to make in the Elysium Fields. Using a combat system almost identical to the two PS2 God of War titles, you pack a brutal punch as you eviscerate and flay your way through ancient Greece with ease. Boss fights against the likes of Charon the Ferryman and a basilisk meet (and sometimes exceed) the series' epic standards, and the bloody finishing moves are satisfying every time.

The combat is just as visceral as ever, but the context surrounding it isn't quite as solid. The story in Chains of Olympus is by no means bad, but it feels unfocused. When he isn't out for revenge, Kratos seems stripped of purpose, which makes



THROW DOWN THE GAUNTLET

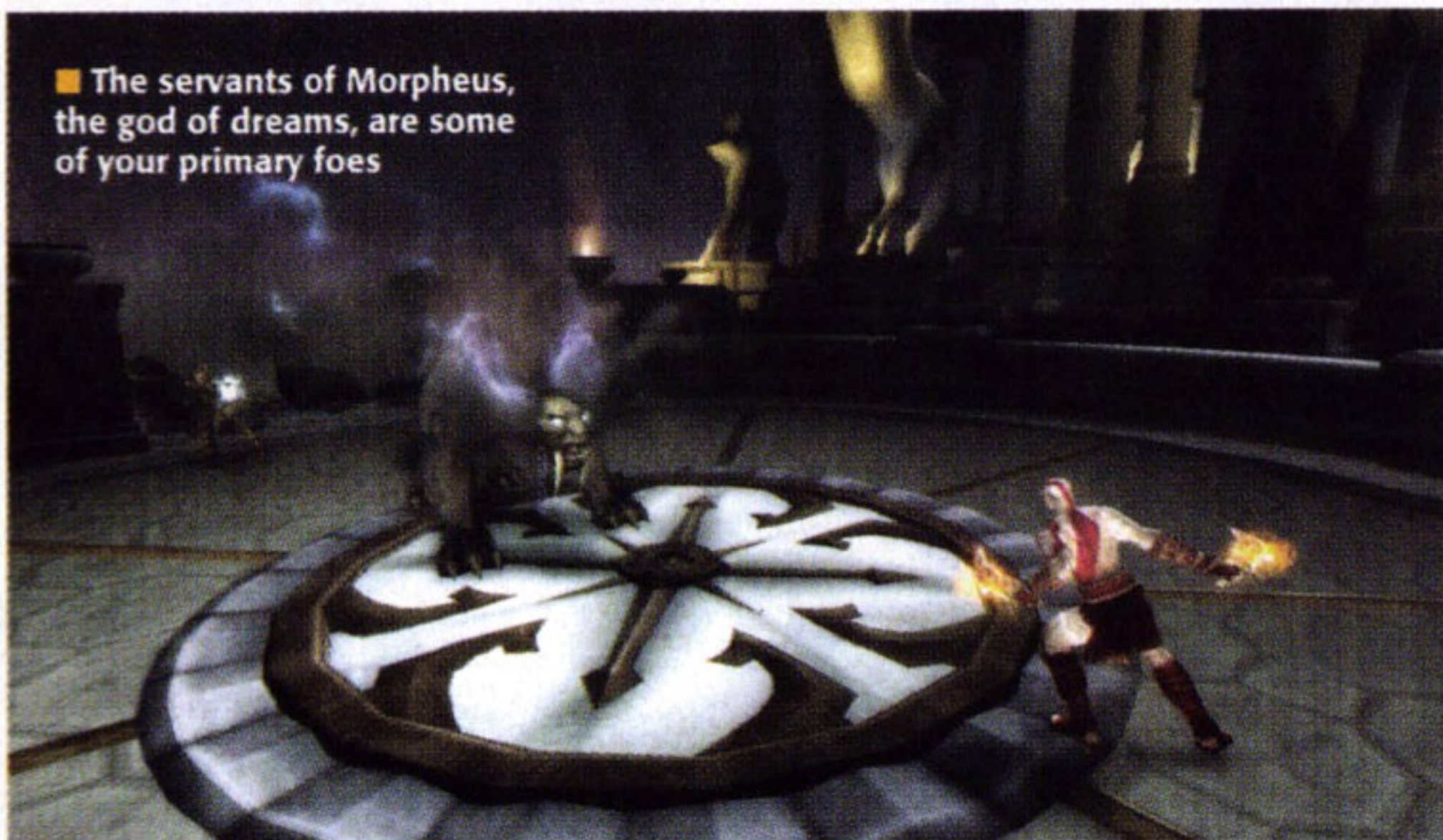
In the later portions of his adventure, Kratos acquires a new weapon called the Gauntlet of Zeus. This marks the first time in the series that players have a viable alternative to the Blades of Chaos. The spear and the hammer were cool, but the gauntlet is actually useful; it's fast, powerful, and provides a different feel to the combat. For once you don't need to feel like a sucker for investing orbs in something other than the blades.

a few key plot points fall flat. Sometimes you're not even sure why he's fighting. Is he supposed to rescue Helios? Kill Morpheus? Stop Atlas? You only know for sure when the final boss appears.

While the gameplay and controls are generally extremely polished (I love the new magic system), there is one exception: The lack of a second analog stick has caused some problems with the evade mechanic, which now requires you to press L and R while holding a direction on the analog. However, L and R also serve individual functions, so it requires some complicated maneuvering to make Kratos do

exactly what you want him to. I got used to it eventually, but the game was nearly over by then.

A curse of being a handheld God of War title is the inevitable comparisons that will be drawn to the PS2 titles. However, it is only in that context that the controls or story in this game fall remotely short. When viewed outside of the shadow of its console brethren, the gameplay, action, and cinematic quality in Chains of Olympus still reach legendary heights. This is one of the few must-play titles for the PSP, and it will have you expecting much more of your handheld titles in the future.—**JOE**



■ The servants of Morpheus, the god of dreams, are some of your primary foes



■ Kratos: The Orthodontist of War

BOTTOM
LINE

9

> **Concept:** God of War, but smaller

> **Graphics:** Among the best-looking PSP titles out there, with grand environments, outstanding character models, and flashy combos

> **Sound:** The major voice actors return and do their jobs well, and the soundtrack puts you right into assault mode

> **Playability:** Basic actions, like combos and magic, are a breeze to pull off. The more advanced moves, like evade attacks, get lost in the control scheme

> **Entertainment:** Non-stop, rage-fueled combat is relentlessly satisfying, but the story doesn't completely measure up

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High



Second Opinion 8.75

Ready at Dawn has pulled off a remarkable technological feat, squeezing more juice out of the PSP than any other game I've played on the system. Even some occasional slowdown and frame stutters aren't enough to dull that achievement. Chains of Olympus offers a full-fledged adventure for the dour and fearsome Ghost of Sparta, but the narrative carries a little less weight than his other outings have. While we get to visit some awe-inspiring locales, the story itself seems a little patchwork – it's hard to get into Kratos' grim purpose when we never really grasp what that is. Zero in from that broad view into the moment-to-moment action, and complaints are hard to muster. Battles are challenging, intense, and brutal – the backdrop a twisted looking glass into Greek mythology. Like its console cousins, this iteration of the franchise deserves praise for its meticulous and perfectly paced level design, which offers just the right mix of combat, exploration, secrets, and wonder. While I sure wouldn't mind a second analog stick, Chains of Olympus works with what it's given, and emerges as a great addition to an already stellar series.—**MILLER**

PSP

Patapon

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** PYRAMID/SONY JAPAN STUDIO > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 26 > **ESRB** E

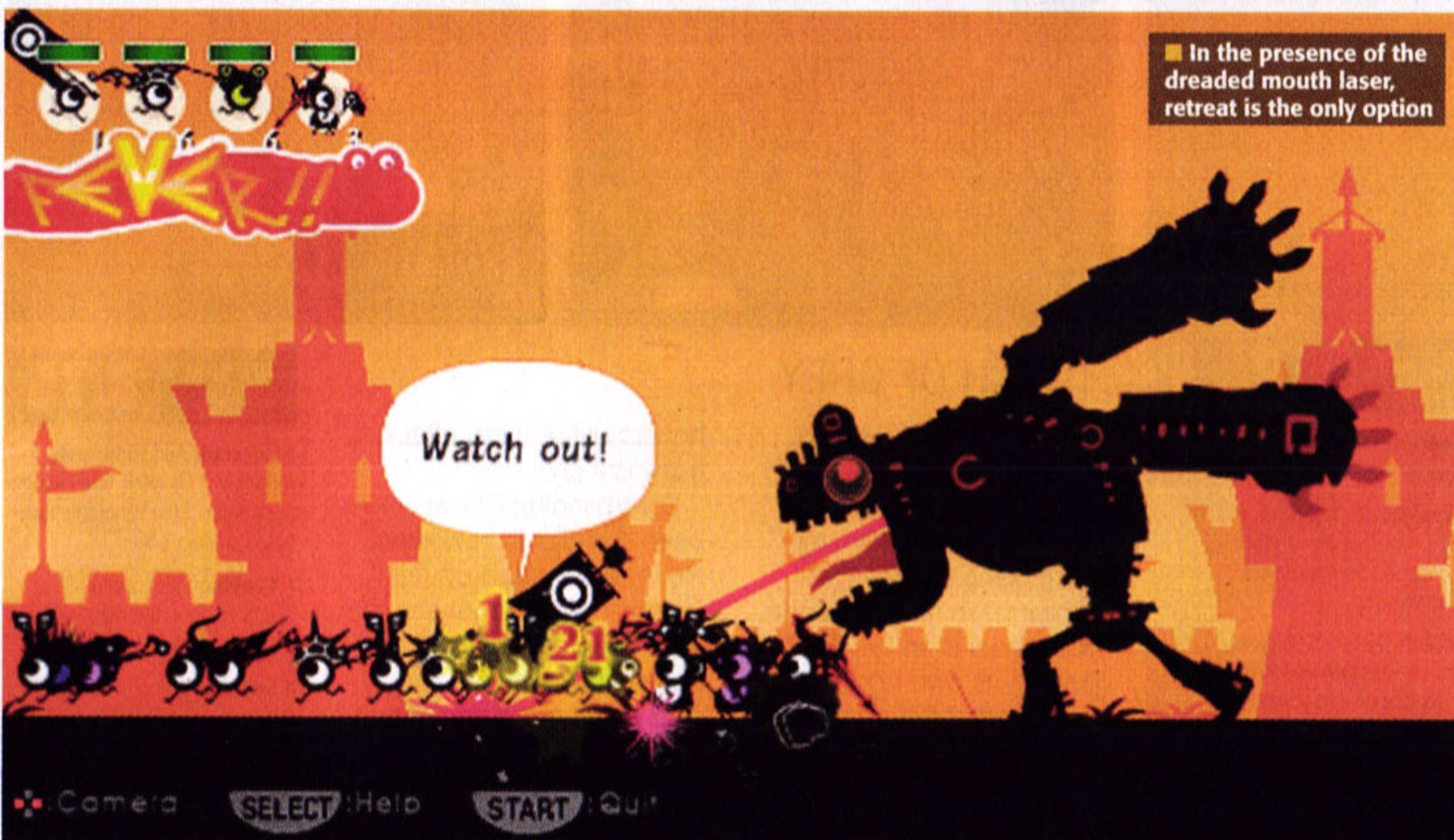
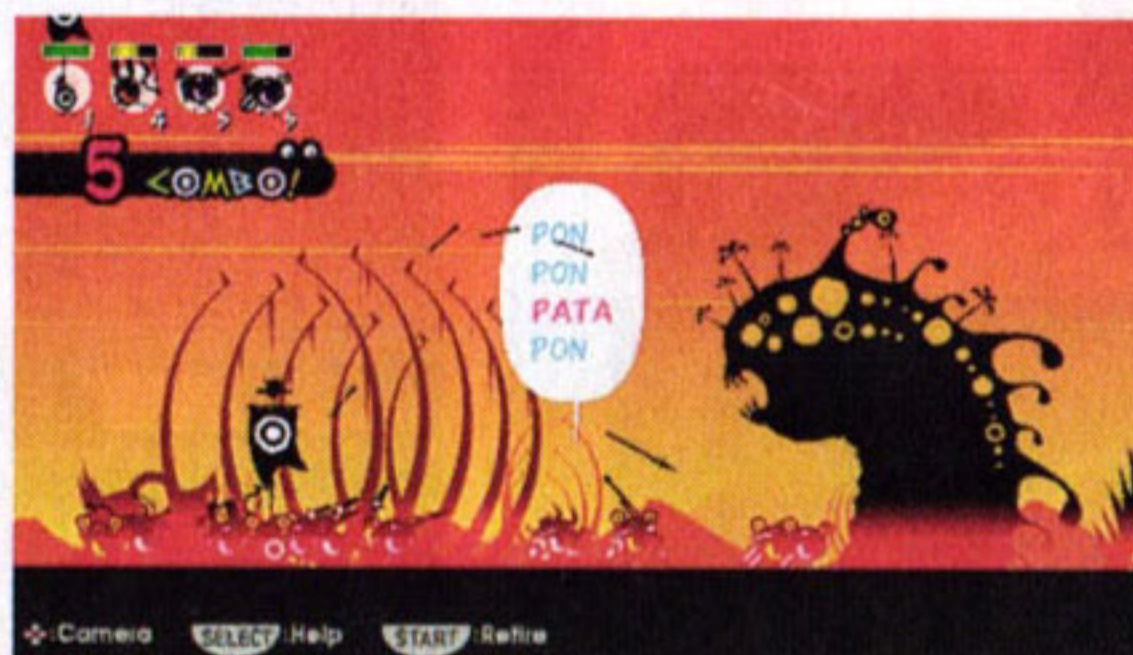
STICKS AND STONES WILL MAKE YOUR BONES

Patapon is tough to describe, yet easy to love once you get your hands on it. The foundation is built on long-held tenets of the real-time strategy and rhythm genres, but somewhere in the blending process they both come out fresh. Players select a mix of unit types, equip them with armor and weapons, and spend the next five to ten minutes locked in a heated battle against the rival Zigoton army or a towering monster.

Instead of pointing and clicking a mouse, however, players enter a

simple four-button command along with the beat. Over the next four beats the army will carry out the action while you plan the next move. The goal is to continue this chain of call and response for as long as possible to get up to Fever mode and all of the attack bonuses it provides (including tripling the amount of arrows your archers shoot).

This system makes for an extremely absorbing gameplay experience as you try to constantly think one step ahead of



the enemy. Maintaining a consistent combo and finding the right mix of attack, charge, and defend while bosses are flinging your soldiers across the screen takes a Zen-level of concentration comparable to an arcade shooter. And what could easily become a repetitive endeavor is spiced up with (actually fun) escort missions, prison breakouts, music minigames, hunting ground puzzles, and castle sieges (complete with a catapult).

Patapons falters only in a couple of small, but important areas. The limited tutorials will have you paging through the instruction book or going online for clarification. Weapons can only be obtained through scarce random drops, leaving some of your army with crappy starting weapons even later in the game. And rather than using experience to progress soldiers, you have to rely on the luck of the drop for some high-level wood, stone, and meat items to create top-tier troops. Let's just say you're going to spend a lot of time hunting and re-fighting old bosses. As a whole, however, Patapon is an experience not to be missed, and at \$20 there's little excuse to let it pass you by. —BRYAN

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Mix real-time strategy with rhythm gameplay in surprising ways

> **Graphics:** Beautiful designs and charming animations really set this apart

> **Sound:** Music plays a huge part in every aspect of this game. Fortunately, it's as catchy as the Katamari series was back in its glory days

> **Playability:** The call and response drum lines take some getting used to, but once it clicks you can really dig into the strategy

> **Entertainment:** Beneath the kiddy veneer lies a deep and challenging experience like no other

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

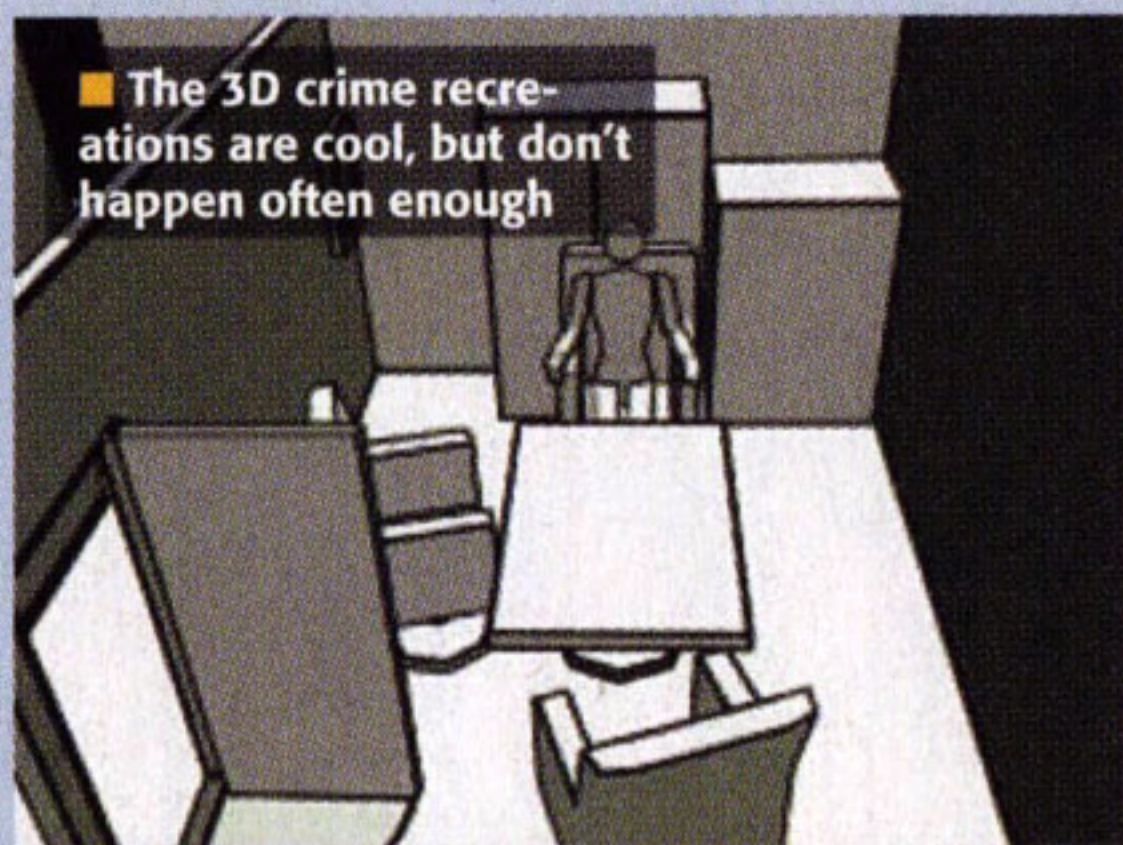
Second Opinion 8.5

I've played a lot of games over the years, but I've never played one quite like Patapon. I don't even know what genre this fits into. Combining elements of action, music, RPGs, and real-time strategy, Patapon is one of the most unique video game experiences you'll have this year. The game's ingratiating soundtrack, cool visual aesthetics, and odd sense of humor will get you through the somewhat repetitive early stages. Thankfully, the game soon opens up to reveal a surprising amount of depth. Although it's easy enough for anyone to get going, later battles require some genuine thought in how you craft new units and deploy your troops. With any luck, this might be this year's Katamari Damacy-style sleeper hit. I hope so, since Patapon is clearly the superior title of the two. —MATT

It's only a game.



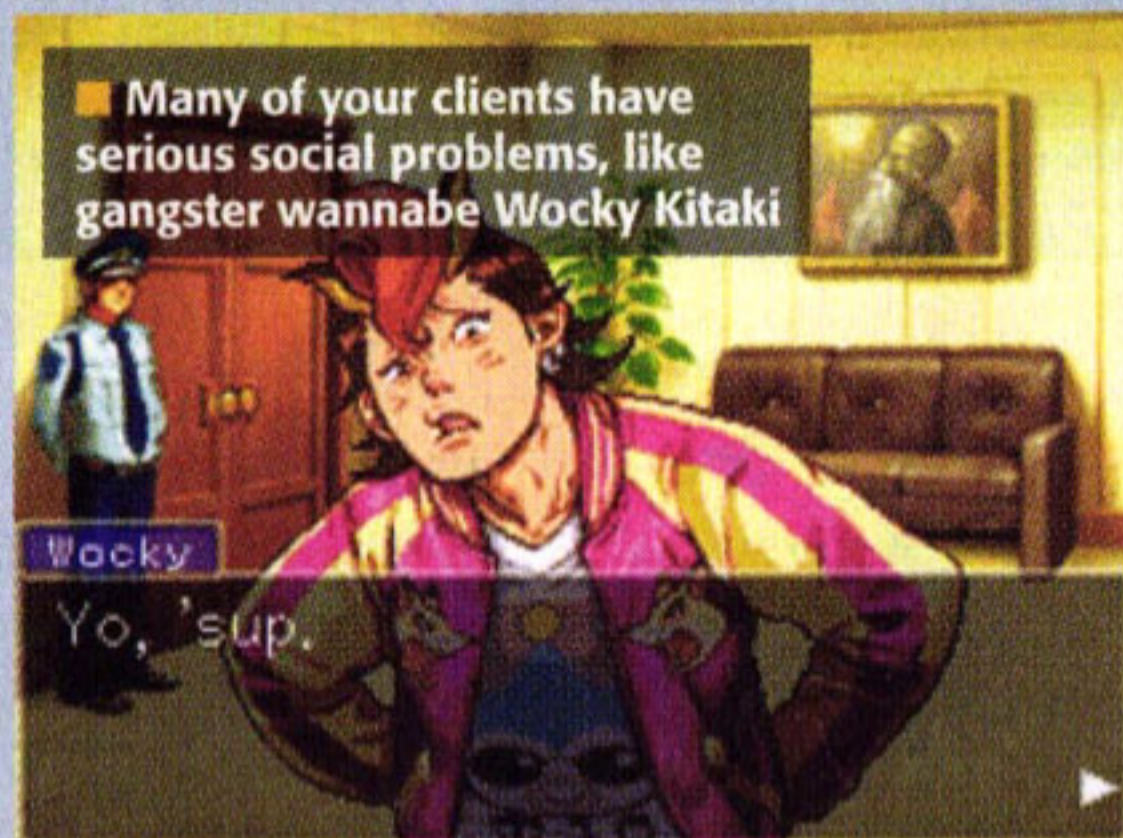
■ Trucy is Apollo's new assistant/talent agent



■ The 3D crime recreations are cool, but don't happen often enough



■ All of the art has been upgraded, with more detailed backgrounds and animations



■ Many of your clients have serious social problems, like gangster wannabe Wocky Kitaki

NINTENDO DS

Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE FEBRUARY 19 > ESRB T

ANOTHER FIRST TRIAL

With his bright red vest and spiky hair, Apollo Justice looks like a pindexter. He's also an inexperienced lawyer, forgetting key information and occasionally even turning to the prosecution for help. Despite all that, I can't be too hard on the new kid. It wasn't long ago that Phoenix Wright was in the exact same position – a young defense attorney with something to prove. Apollo may not be quite as good as Phoenix in his prime, but the latest entry in this series shows that Capcom has passed the title of Ace Attorney into capable hands.

Apollo tackles problems in almost the same way as his predecessor. The gameplay consists of investigation seg-

ments where you gather evidence and talk to bizarre characters, followed by a trial where you present what you've learned. The top-notch writing and localization remain intact, so every conversation and cross-examination provides plenty of laughs – the fickle judge continues to steal the show with some classic misunderstandings.

A few new innovations take advantage of the DS hardware, adding a much-needed dose of variety to the gameplay. Apollo has the ability to perceive nervous twitches during testimony, so players get a close-up view to study the witness. There are also a handful of forensic tools, like fingerprinting and blood detection. These interludes definitely improve the overall experience, but I wish they were a more integral part of investigation. They aren't reliable tools you can use to uncover clues as much as brief minigames you complete when prompted.

Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney upholds the series' distinction as being one of the most clever adventures on the DS. It's funny, unique, and breaks up the text scrolling with more varied activities. Even so, Apollo still has room to grow, and I'm looking forward to seeing what case he takes next. —JOE

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Dish out justice as Phoenix Wright's protégé

> **Graphics:** Backgrounds and characters are cleaner and more detailed, but still in the same distinctive style

> **Sound:** The use of simple sound effects at unexpected moments is still one of the series' most entertaining aspects

> **Playability:** Touch screen activities and 3D scenes spice things up, but could have been more smoothly integrated

> **Entertainment:** The characters aren't quite as endearing as the crew we left behind in part three, but they still deliver clever humor

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

With a reboot of the Ace Attorney series, I was hoping for some serious streamlining. Less convoluted investigation movement and more flexible evidence presentation (just accept both "knife" and "picture of knife!") would have been great, but the revamped animations, amusing (but simple) minigames, and excellent story help make up for it. The developers somehow crafted a tale that opens the door for newcomers and at the same time rewards longtime fans. Apollo and his "focus" powers certainly fill Phoenix Wright's shoes while the former protagonist takes on a badass new role as a behind-the-scenes player. —BRYAN

ROOKIES WELCOME

Apollo Justice is the most newcomer-friendly entry since the original. Most of the characters are brand new, and not bogged down with several cases worth of backstory. There are cameos from familiar faces of the previous titles, but not as many as you would think. Fans may be disappointed by the wealth of questions that remain unanswered about the seven years that have passed since the last game, but if this is your first time in the courtroom, it's a fresh start.

NINTENDO DS

Advance Wars: Days of Ruin

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS OR 2-PLAYER VIA NINTENDO WI-FI CONNECTION) > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS > RELEASE JANUARY 21 > ESRB E10+



TOUCH OF GREY

Advance Wars has long been one of my favorite franchises in gaming, and judging by the series' following I'm far from alone. This sequel is an excellent game in its own right, but I can't say that I'm on board with Nintendo's decision to take Advance Wars away from its charming, cartoony roots in favor of Days of Ruin's dreary post-apocalyptic setting. At the same time, it's not a bad trade to make for this title's new unit types, improved balance, and fresh campaign to conquer.

Boring storyline and interminable dialogue aside, the meat of the gameplay is classic Advance Wars, with all of the strategic excellence that implies. Managing your units from turn to turn, vying for control over revenue-generating bases, and making the most efficient use of those funds to complement your chosen strategy with new units is as good as it's ever been.

Though I didn't care for the maps as much as those in 2005's Advance Wars: Dual Strike, the rest of the changes in this sequel are welcome. Each added unit fills a useful role on the battlefield, and puzzling out

how to utilize them effectively is a joy.

Commanding Officers have been completely reworked. No longer abstract off-field leaders, COs now inhabit units, granting bonuses and charging power gauges only within a certain radius. Passive bonuses have been substantially increased, while activated abilities are toned down from previous titles. Ultimately, this results in more traditional strategic battles and fewer game-breaking CO powers being used – a net gain in my opinion.

Also gone is the CO experience system that made grinding through the dozens of one-off maps so engrossing in the last game. While probably better for balance (+2 vision on a fog of war map? GG), it's sad to see that addictive mechanic depart.

The addition of online multiplayer via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection will be a great boon for some, but the core single-player experience feels like a small step back from the brilliance of Dual Strike. Still, this is a standout in the DS lineup and a sequel that shouldn't disappoint the series' many fans. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Add some units, redo how COs work, and change the setting of the venerable turn-based strategy series

> **Graphics:** It's easy to tell what's what on the map, and that's all you really need

> **Sound:** Mediocre and unnecessary in every regard

> **Playability:** Stylus control still sucks, but the normal inputs work just fine

> **Entertainment:** Next to its predecessor, this is the best portable strategy around

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.75

This may be the minority opinion, but I actually like Advance Wars' turn to the dark side. Rather than previous entries' attitude of "Hey, we just killed an army of dudes! Let's go grab a soda," Days of Ruin provides a slightly more serious take on the subject of war. Fortunately, the addictive core mechanics remain mostly unchanged outside of some handy new units. The scaling back of COs ends up being more balanced, but I miss the leveling and being able to unleash carnage in one fell swoop. And over 150 total maps and online battles and map trading will keep hardcore fans busy for months on end. —BRYAN



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For December 2007 Based On Units Sold

1 CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE (360)



Special Someone – One burly man's man who likes to hunt, has an amazing gun collection, and wears women's underwear seeks a girl with similar interests. If you like the soft whimper of a fawn as it lies dying in your arms and the gentle embrace of silken garments please call me at 1-800-IAM-STR8.

2 SUPER MARIO GALAXY (Wii)



Missed Connection – You: The giant, spiky-shelled dinosaur who stole my girlfriend. Me: A slightly chubby, pasta-eating plumber with one badass moustache. Could there be more between us than your indomitable thirst for power and my righteous desire for justice? Are you willing to find out?

3 GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK (PS2)



Unique Opportunity – I just broke up with one of my girlfriends while on tour and so I've got an open slot for one lucky lady. Must be willing to put up with long late evenings of wailing and be good at cleaning mystery stains off leather pants. Also should not easily get jealous or be blood shy.

4 Wii PLAY (Wii)



For Sale – Hey everyone, I'm Wii Play, and I'm for sale! In Japan, it's legally required – upon threat of death – that everyone own a copy of me. The bill hasn't made its through Congress here in the States, but that doesn't mean you can't still buy me. Seriously, buy me or face financial and spiritual ruin!

5 ASSASSIN'S CREED (360)

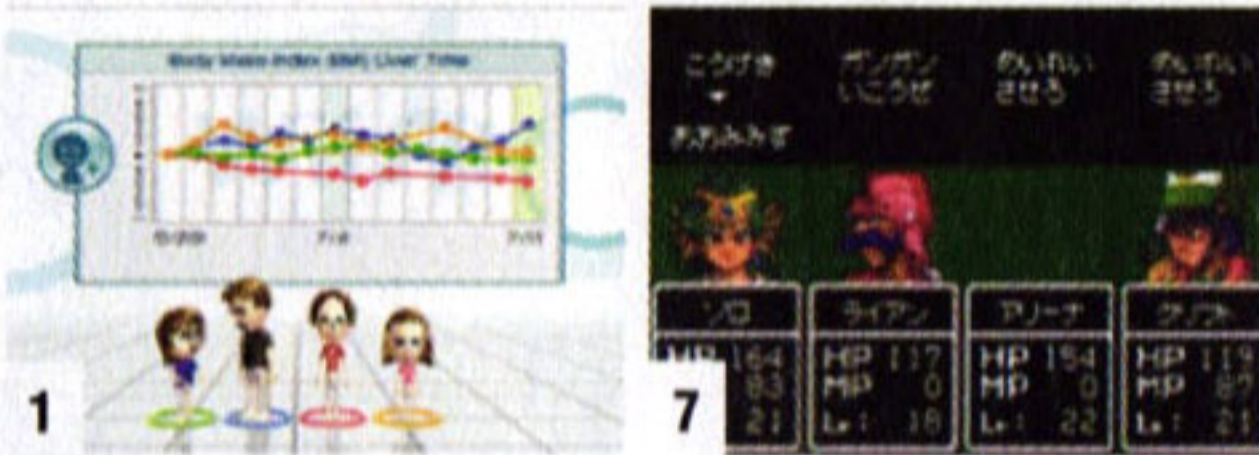


Help – I've climbed to the top of a nearby steeple and now I'm scared to climb down. Would someone please push a cart of hay over to the church next to the hidden assassin's guild? It's just three blocks down from the donkey market, right next to the man selling stale fish. Hurry please, it's getting cold and I'm hungry.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	1	360	10	11-07
2	Super Mario Galaxy	2	Wii	9.75	11-07
3	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	4	PS2	8.75	10-07
4	Wii Play	5	Wii	7	02-07
5	Assassin's Creed	3	360	9.5	11-07
6	Halo 3	9	360	9.75	09-07
7	Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day	17	DS	8.25	08-07
8	Madden NFL 08	15	PS2	8	08-07
9	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	11	360	8.75	10-07
10	Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games	12	Wii	4	11-07
11	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	7	PS3	10	11-07
12	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	8	Wii	8.75	10-07
13	Rock Band	13	360	9.25	11-07
14	New Super Mario Bros.	N/A	DS	9.25	05-06
15	Mario Party 8	N/A	Wii	7.25	05-07
16	Assassin's Creed	10	PS3	9.5	11-07
17	Mass Effect	6	360	9.75	11-07
18	The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	18	DS	9.75	09-07
19	Madden NFL 08	N/A	360	8	08-07
20	Mario Party DS	16	DS	7	11-07

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Wii Fit	Wii
2	Mario Party DS	DS
3	Wii Sports	Wii
4	Final Fantasy IV	DS
5	Monter Hunter Portable 2nd	PSP
6	Professor Layton and the Demonic Box	DS
7	Dragon Quest IV: Michibikareshi Monotachi	DS
8	Wii Play	Wii
9	Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games	Wii
10	Mario Kart DS	DS



TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Devil May Cry 4	N/A	multi
2	God of War: Chains of Olympus	N/A	PSP
3	The Club	N/A	multi
4	Super Mario Galaxy	1	Wii
5	Rock Band	2	multi
6	Patapon	N/A	PSP
7	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	3	360
8	Burnout Paradise	4	multi
9	Assassin's Creed	5	multi
10	Mass Effect	9	360



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	1	\$46
2	World Of Warcraft	5	\$20
3	The Sims 2 Bon Voyage	7	\$29
4	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	N/A	\$39
5	World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	9	\$31
6	The Sims 2 Teen Style Stuff	4	\$19
7	Crysis	2	\$47
8	The Orange Box	3	\$47
9	The Sims 2 Deluxe	N/A	\$34
10	The Sims 2 Seasons	N/A	\$29



Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Assassin's Creed	9.5	Dec-07
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
BlackSite: Area 51	7.5	Dec-07
Burnout Paradise	8.5	Feb-08
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	10	Dec-07
Clive Barker's Jericho	6	Dec-07
College Hoops 2K8	7.75	Feb-08
Conan	7	Nov-07
Dirt	8	Nov-07
Eye of Judgement	8	Dec-07
Folklore	7.25	Dec-07
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	8.5	Oct-07
Golden Compass, The	3.25	Feb-08
Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	8.75	Oct-07
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	8.25	Nov-07
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	7	Jan-08
LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	7.5	Dec-07
MX vs. ATV Untamed	8	Jan-08
NBA 08	7	Nov-07
NBA 2K8	8.25	Nov-07
NBA Live 08	7.5	Nov-07
NCAA March Madness 08	7.25	Feb-08
Need for Speed ProStreet	7.5	Dec-07
NFL Tour	5	Feb-08
NHL 08	8.5	Oct-07
NHL 2K8	7.75	Oct-07
Orange Box, The	9.25	Feb-08
Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction	9.25	Dec-07
Rock Band	9.25	Jan-08
Sega Rally Revo	6.5	Dec-07
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Skate	8.75	Oct-07
Stuntman Ignition	8.5	Oct-07
Time Crisis 4	4.25	Jan-08
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	7.75	Dec-07
Uncharted: Drake's Fortune	8.75	Dec-07
Unreal Tournament 3	8.5	Feb-08
Warhawk	8.25	Oct-07
WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw 2008	8	Dec-07

XBOX 360

Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation	8.75	Nov-07
Assassin's Creed	9.5	Dec-07
Beautiful Katamari	7.25	Dec-07
Bee Movie Game	6.5	Jan-08
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
BlackSite: Area 51	7.5	Dec-07
Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions of WWII	7.5	Nov-07
Burnout Paradise	8.5	Feb-08
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	10	Dec-07
Clive Barker's Jericho	6	Dec-07
College Hoops 2K8	7.75	Feb-08
Conan	7	Nov-07
Crash of the Titans	7.25	Nov-07
CSI: Hard Evidence	4	Dec-07
Culdcept Saga	7	Feb-08
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam	5	Oct-07
Fatal Inertia	7.5	Oct-07
F.E.A.R. Files	6.5	Jan-08
FIFA 08	7.75	Oct-07
FlatOut Ultimate Carnage	7.5	Nov-07
Golden Compass, The	3.25	Feb-08
Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	8.75	Oct-07
Halo 3	9.75	Nov-07
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	8.25	Nov-07
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	7	Jan-08
Kengo: Legend of the 9 Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom	5.25	Feb-08
LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	7.5	Dec-07
Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal	1.75	Dec-07
Mass Effect	9.75	Nov-07
Medal of Honor Airborne	7.25	Oct-07
MX vs. ATV Untamed	8	Jan-08
Naruto: Rise of the Ninja	8	Dec-07
NBA 2K8	8.25	Nov-07
NBA Live 08	7.5	Nov-07
NCAA March Madness 08	7.25	Feb-08
Need for Speed ProStreet	7.5	Dec-07
NFL Tour	5	Feb-08
NHL 08	8.5	Oct-07
NHL 2K8	7.75	Oct-07
Orange Box, The	9.75	Nov-07
Project Gotham Racing 4	8.75	Nov-07
Rock Band	9.25	Jan-08
Scene It? Lights, Camera, Action	8.5	Jan-08



Burnout Paradise - Xbox 360 - Feb-08

Sega Rally Revo	6.5	Dec-07
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Skate	8.75	Oct-07
Soldier of Fortune: Payback	4.25	Feb-08
Spider-Man: Friend or Foe	4.5	Nov-07
Stranglehold	7.25	Oct-07
Stuntman Ignition	8.5	Oct-07
Thrillville: Off the Rails	7	Dec-07
TimeShift	7.75	Dec-07
Tomb Raider Anniversary	8.25	Dec-07
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	7.75	Dec-07
Two Worlds	4	Nov-07
Virtua Fighter 5	9	Dec-07
Viva Piñata: Party Animals	5.5	Jan-08
Warriors Orochi	5.75	Oct-07
WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw 2008	8	Dec-07

Wii

Alien Syndrome	6.25	Oct-07
Battalion Wars 2	7.25	Jan-08
Boogie	7.75	Oct-07
Carnival Games	5.5	Nov-07
Cranium Kabookii	6.75	Feb-08
Crash of the Titans	7.25	Nov-07
Dancing With the Stars	5.25	Jan-08
Dewy's Adventure	7	Oct-07
Donkey Kong Barrel Blast	5	Dec-07
EA Playground	7	Dec-07
Endless Ocean	6	Jan-08
Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn	7	Dec-07
Geometry Wars Galaxies	9	Dec-07
Ghost Squad	7	Jan-08
Godzilla: Unleashed	4	Dec-07
Golden Compass, The	3.25	Feb-08
Guilty Gear XX Accent Core	7.75	Oct-07
Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	8.75	Oct-07
Harvey Birdman: Attorney At Law	6	Feb-08
Jenga	2	Jan-08
Legend of Spyro: The Eternal Night, The	6.25	Nov-07
LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	7.5	Dec-07
Link's Crossbow Training	6.75	Feb-08
Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal	1.75	Dec-07
Madden NFL 08	7.5	Oct-07
Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games	4	Dec-07



Geometry Wars Galaxies - Wii - Dec-07

Manhunt 2	7.75	Dec-07
Medal of Honor Heroes 2	6.75	Jan-08
Metroid Prime 3: Corruption	9.5	Oct-07
My Sims	8	Oct-07
Need for Speed ProStreet	7	Dec-07
Nights: Journey of Dreams	6.5	Feb-08
Rayman Raving Rabbids 2	7.75	Jan-08
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles	8.25	Jan-08
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Sims 2: Castaway, The	7.25	Nov-07
Smarty Pants	7.5	Jan-08
Soulcalibur Legends	4	Jan-08
Spider-Man: Friend or Foe	4.5	Nov-07
Star Trek Conquest	5	Feb-08
Super Mario Galaxy	9.75	Jan-08
Super Swing Golf Season 2	8.5	Feb-08
Table Tennis	6	Dec-07
Thrillville: Off the Rails	7	Dec-07
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008	7	Oct-07
Trama Center: New Blood	7.5	Jan-08
Victorious Boxers: Revolution	6.75	Nov-07
Zack & Wiki: Quest For Barbaros' Treasure	8.25	Nov-07

PLAYSTATION 2

Crash of the Titans	7.25	Nov-07
Guilty Gear XX Accent Core	7.75	Oct-07
Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	8.75	Oct-07
Legend of Spyro: The Eternal Night, The	6.25	Nov-07
Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal	1.75	Dec-07
Manhunt 2	7.75	Dec-07
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Soul Nomad & The World Eaters	7.75	Oct-07
Spider-Man: Friend or Foe	4.5	Nov-07
Star Trek Conquest	5	Feb-08
Stuntman Ignition	8.5	Oct-07
Thrillville: Off the Rails	7	Dec-07
Warriors Orochi	5.75	Oct-07
Wild Arms 5	6.5	Oct-07

PC



Unreal Tournament 3 - PC - Dec-07

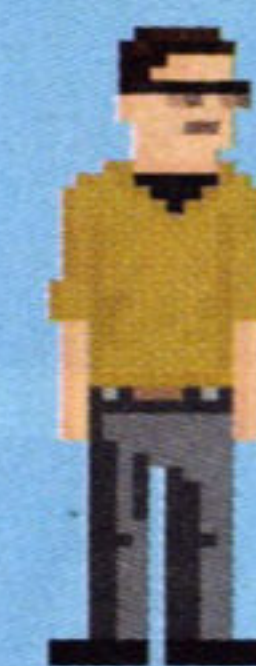
Ages of Empires III: The Asian Dynasties	8	Dec-07
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
BlackSite: Area 51	7.5	Dec-07
Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions of WWII	7.5	Nov-07
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	10	Dec-07
Clive Barker's Jericho	6	Dec-07
Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts	8.25	Nov-07
Crysis	9	Jan-08
Empire Earth III	6.5	Jan-08
Enemy Territories: Quake Wars	8.5	Nov-07
Fury	5	Jan-08
Gears of War	8	Jan-08
Hellgate: London	8.5	Jan-08
Medieval II: Total War Kingdoms	9	Nov-07
Neverwinter Nights 2: Mask of the Betrayer	9	Nov-07
Orange Box, The	9.75	Nov-07
Painkiller: Overdose	6.75	Dec-07
Settlers: Rise of an Empire, The	7	Dec-07
SimCity Societies	8	Jan-08
Supreme Commander: Forged Alliance	8.5	Dec-07
Tabula Rasa	8	Jan-08
TimeShift	7.75	Dec-07
Two Worlds	4	Nov-07
Universe at War: Earth Assault	8.25	Jan-08
Unreal Tournament 3	9	Dec-07
Witcher, The	8	Dec-07

NINTENDO DS

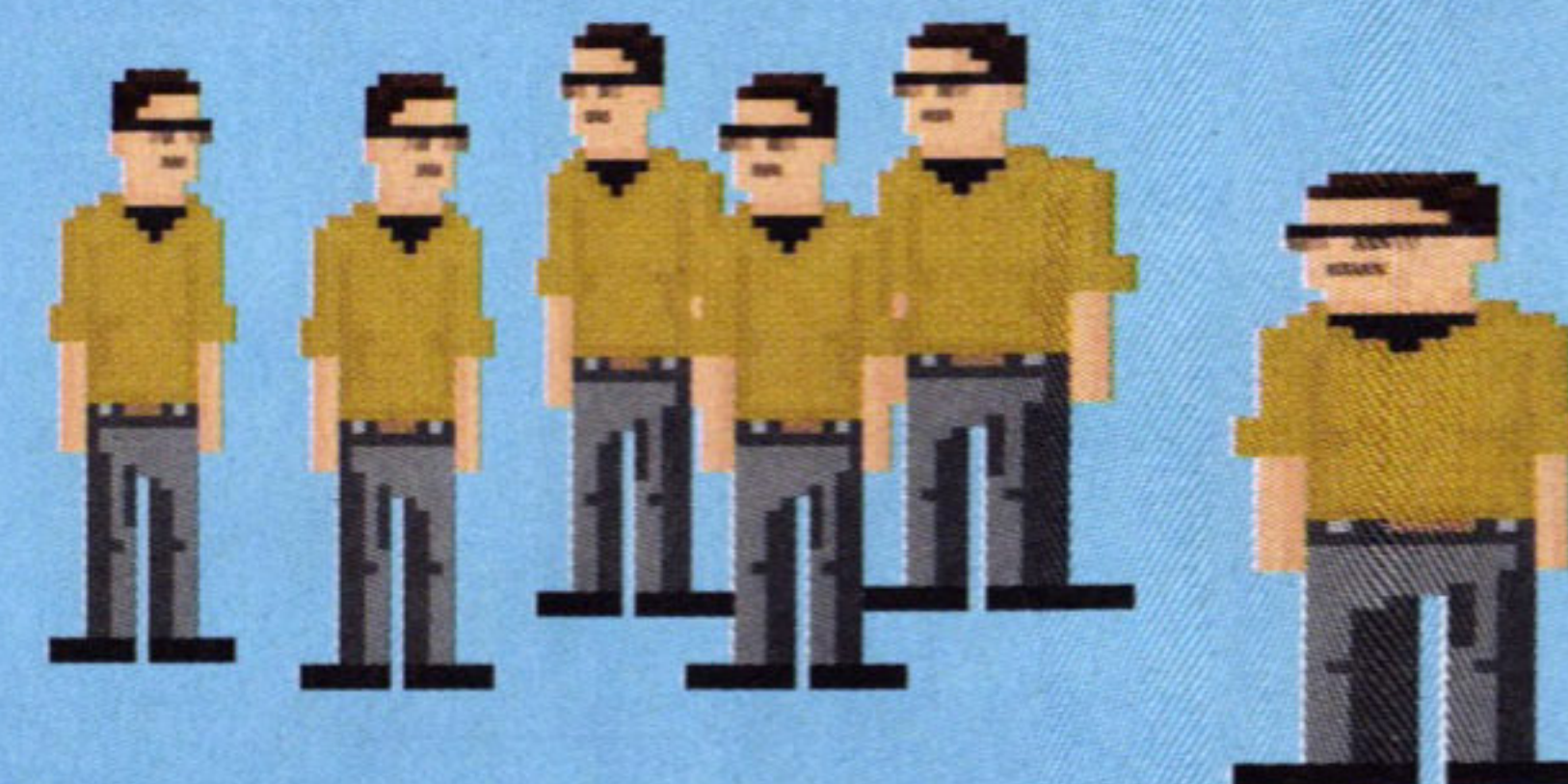
Contra 4	9.25	Jan-08
Cooking Mama 2: Dinner With Friends	7	Dec-07
Dementium: The Ward	5.75	Dec-07
DK: Jungle Climer	5.75	Nov-07
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker	8	Dec-07
Draglade	6.75	Feb-08
Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings	7.5	Dec-07
Front Mission 1st	7	Nov-07
Jam Sessions	6	Dec-07
Left Brain, Right Brain	5	Feb-08
Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, The	9.5	Oct-07
LifeSigns: Surgical Unit	6	Jan-08
Mario Party DS	7	Feb-08
Master of Illusion	8	Jan-08
Mega Man ZX Advent	8	Nov-07
My Word Coach	8	Feb-08
Nanostray 2	7.25	Jan-08
Orc & Elves	6.75	Jan-08
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trials & Tribulations	8.25	Nov-07
Prism: Light the Way	7.5	Dec-07
Rune Factory: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	5.75	Oct-07
Sonic Rush Adventure	7.25	Nov-07
Turn It Around	4	Dec-07
World Jong	8	Dec-07
Worms Open Warfare 2	7.5	Oct-07

PSP

Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles	7	Oct-07
Crazy Taxi: Fare Wars	5.75	Nov-07
Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness	9	Nov-07
Dragoneer's Aria	5.75	Oct-07
Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions	9.5	Nov-07
Hot PXL	6	Oct-07
Jackass: The Game	6.25	Dec-07
Manhunt 2	7.75	Dec-07
Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops Plus	7.75	Dec-07
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Heroes	6.75	Oct-07
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	7.25	Feb-08
Silent Hill Origins	7.75	Dec-07
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Tactical Strike	8	Dec-07
Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron	7	Nov-07
SWAT: Target Liberty	5	Dec-07
Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow	8.75	Nov-07
Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command	8	Jan-08



(geek)



(clustergeeking)

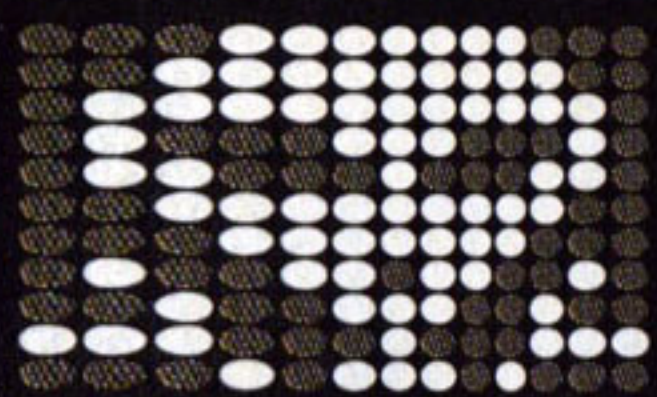


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UNLIMITED ENABLED

The Club

Tips From the Shooting Gallery



By Omar Woodley, Producer

QUICK TIPS

Choose your character wisely. Be sure to try all the gladiators of The Club and pick one that fits your speed and style of play.

Timing is everything. Although The Club is a heart-pounding run and gun shooter, in order to score big points you will need to know when and how to shoot your enemies. So don't always rush in.

Reloading is for the weak. Reloading your gun is a cautious and safe thing to do after downing a target, but in The Club it is frowned upon. You can get big points for keeping the last bullet in the chamber and pulling off a one-shot kill.

It's all about the combo. Killing with style and killing frequently will keep your combo counter going and increase the amount of points you get. But try pulling off multiple kill shots with one kill to see your points skyrocket. Snapshot + Deathroll + Headshot + Penetrator = \$\$\$

Running low on ammo or don't have enough guns? Don't forget you can pick up the weapons of your downed foes.

LEVEL HINTS



Steel Mill

A View to a Mill – In this level, it would probably be best to use Seager. Although he's more vulnerable to bullets, his speed is unmatched, and will definitely help you out when clearing areas and getting to the next area fast. Most of this area is outdoors, so watch out for enemies leaping over balconies and shooting you through windows.

The Bonus Enemy can be found right when you're going down the first set of stairs from the circular catwalk around the towers. Head straight to the railing at the base of the steps and target the ground in the distance. He'll be on the ground beyond the angled cart track. If you miss him when you first see him, he will round the corner to the left.

Wheels of Steel – This level is completely different than the View to a Mill round, as it



restricts your movement to catwalks overlooking the factory floor. The goal is to try and survive the barrage of enemies for 2:20. There is minimal cover, so we suggest using Dragov. Although he lacks speed, he's probably the toughest of The Club's members in terms of enduring bullet wounds. Keep an eye on the catwalks on the opposite end of this level; enemies will pick you off from a far – there is a rocket launcher close by, use it!

When the timer reaches 1:30, the Bonus Enemy will appear in the foreground right below the walkway. He'll run from left to right. A headshot can get you up to roughly a million points.

Venice

Italian Stallions – Try using Kuro or Renwick, both have good speed. Kuro is the fastest, but Renwick can take more hits and there are a lot of enemies in this map.

Your difficulty setting will dictate when the bonus enemy will be released. On Real Setting it's 1:04, but just keep an eye for the Bonus Enemy Release message on screen. When you see that flashing, head to the left side of the room and look down just left of the phone booth. The bonus enemy will come out of the corridor and will run into the building located on the left.

Pasta La Vista – This area in the game is a Survivor event, which restricts the members of The Club to the central plaza who have to defend themselves against an onslaught of armed enemies. A good tip for this level is that there are health packs that respawn occasionally – keep close to them. Enemies mostly attack from the ground, but do keep an eye out on the second floor windows and balconies, enemies will attack from there, too. Try using Dragov or Adjo for this level.

When the clock hits 3:03 in Real Mode, a Bonus Enemy will pop out of the tunnel near the phone booth with

the health packs. He'll run past the stores and up the stairs to the balcony.

Prison Cells

Jailbait – This area is pretty straightforward, head through the guards' area, down in the yard, and pass through the mess hall. There aren't many enemies, but there are a ton of skull shots – keep an eye out! We suggest Killen for this level.

Once you enter the first corner in the guard walkway area, step out of the corner tower to continue the patrol along the wall. The Bonus Enemy will run in the open and should be easy to spot/kill.

Doin' Time – The Doin' Time portion of the Prison level is a three-lap race. The enemies come in waves, are fairly tough, and will probably need a couple shots to bring them down. We would recommend using Kuro, as he is the fastest character in The Club, and when it comes to Time Attacks he is the best.

The Bonus Enemy pops out right as you reach the steps leading outside on the third lap. Go up the steps to the catwalk. There will be an enemy at the top, so it's best to be running and gunning. Watch out for the enemies to the right while dashing to the corner of the catwalk. Once you get there, aim at the distant walkway along the wall, right above the archway leading to the prison dock. He'll run from the left, and there is a point where he'll be in between the two guard towers – that will be your best shot. If he gets to the second tower, you've lost him.



Mod World

TOWER DEFENSE

Tower defense as a gametype has evolved from a curiosity within more fully-featured real-time strategy titles into a valid subgenre of its own. The idea is to stop waves of "creeps" from making it through the maze alive by building towers to shoot them down. Killing creeps and surviving waves gives more money, which is used to build more towers. Depending on the variation, some combination of creeps with special abilities, area-of-effect towers, debuffing or buffing towers, and more keeps the gameplay fresh. TD has been around for years, but never has there been such a bounty of freely available scenarios. Here are a few of our favorite Web-based TD games (though many RTS games have loads of downloadable player-made TD maps):

Desktop Tower Defense 1.5

www.handdrawngames.com/DesktopTD/



This Flash game is notable for having some of the best "mazing" around. Most TD variants have a set path that creeps run in and which let you build towers around that path. Desktop TD, on the other hand, lets players define their own path through the board by blocking off routes with towers. A handful of "Fun" and "Challenge" modes enhance replayability even further.

Flash Element TD 2

www.casualcollective.com/games/Flash_Element_TD_2/



Another Flash game, this features the common "interest" mechanic (where after each wave you earn interest and bonus points on unspent money), and rather than having creeps simply run through a maze, they pick up and carry element stones back through once they reach the end – dropping them where they fall for another creep to pick up.

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 prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM



WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2008

> XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 3, Wii, PLAYSTATION 2

Go to the Cheats tab found under the Options menu to enter these codes.

Unlock HBK and HHH's DX Attire –

DXCostume69K2

Unlock Kelly Kelly's Alternate Attire –

KellyKG12R

Wii



Manhunt 2

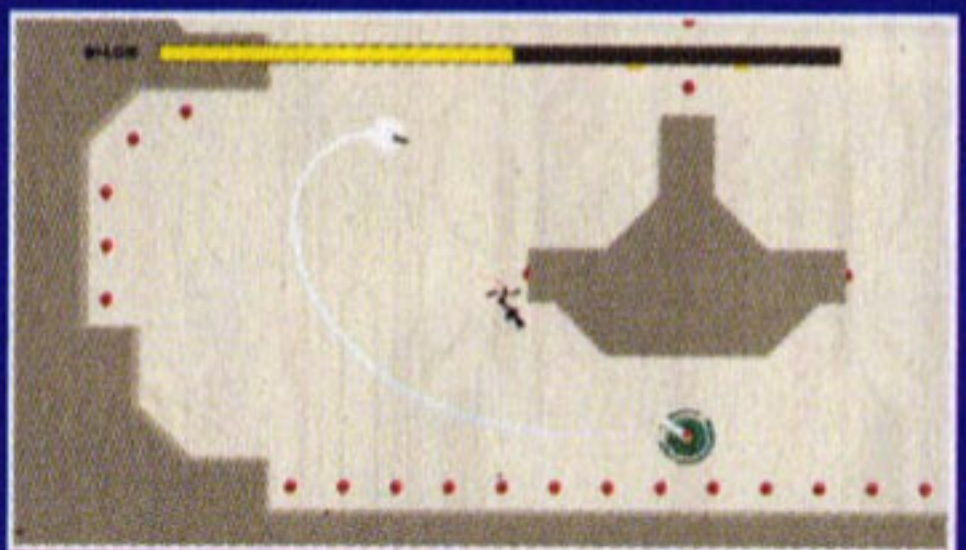
You can enter these codes either at the main menu or while playing the game.

Infinite Ammo – Up, Down, Left, Right, Up,

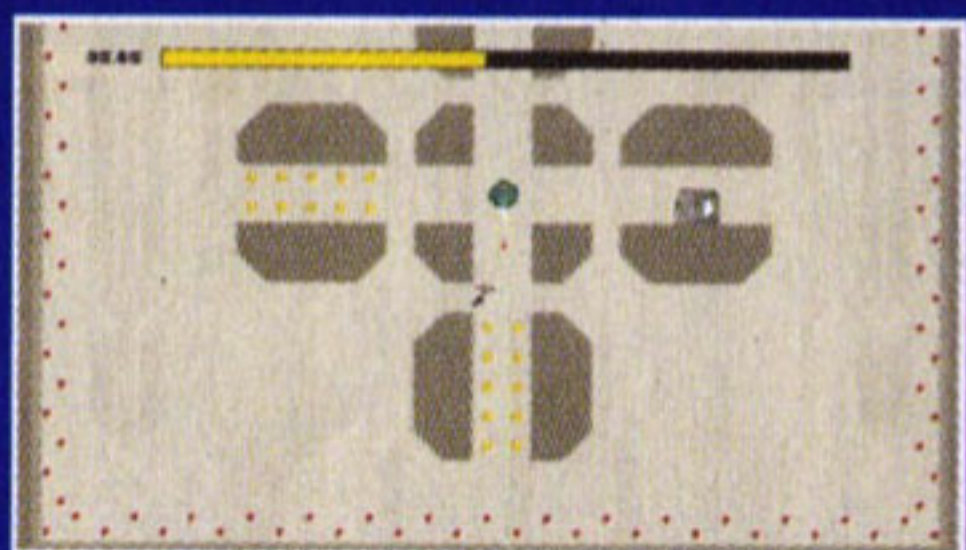
Down, Left, Right

Xbox Live Arcade Spotlight

N+



Well, we're not entirely sure what the title means either, but the game sure is sweet. This gem of a download is one of the most fully featured and fun titles we've seen for a while on Live Arcade. The puzzle/platformer gameplay is based around a tiny ninja who traverses ever more complicated stages, gathering gold as he goes. Unlike many puzzle games, the addition of physics and speed make this as much about well-timed



button presses as figuring out the ideal route to the end. Players can keep busy with 300 such levels, but the availability of local or Live-enabled cooperative and competitive play are what shoot this into the stratosphere. Tack on a level editor, and this could steal more of your life away than any Arcade release should. Oh, and never underestimate the hilarity of exaggerated ragdoll death animations.

Level Select – Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen selling Xbox 360 HD DVD add-ons from the back of a truck)

PSP



Silent Hill: Origins

From the main menu enter this code to unlock a hidden costume.

Codebreaker Costume – Up, Up, Down, Down,

Left, Right, Left, Right, X, O

PC



Painkiller: Overdose

During gameplay hit the tilde (~) key then type the following codes and push enter to receive the desired effects. Cheats will also only work in Daydream and Insomnia difficulties.

All Enemies Go Down To 1 HP –

pkweakenemies

Bodies Don't Dissappear – pkkeepbodies

Faster Movement – pkhaste

Gain 999 Ammo For All Weapons –

pkammo

Godmode – pkgod

Unlock All Weapons – pkweapons

Code of the Month

The Simpsons Game



Eager to experience more Simpson's content, but you don't want to have to suffer through all that horrible pushing of buttons and moving of joysticks to get it? Tapping in these codes should save your hands some labor.

XBOX 360

Enter these codes at the main menu. Code effects will not save.

Unlock Bart's Costumes and

Trophies – Right, Left, X, X, Y, R3

Unlock Homer's Costumes and

Trophies – Left, Right, Y, Y, X, L3

Unlock Lisa's Costumes and

Trophies – X,Y,X,X,Y, L3

Unlock Marge's Costumes and

Trophies – Y, X, Y, Y, X, R3

PLAYSTATION 3

Enter these codes at the main menu. Code effects will not save.

Unlimited Power – O, Left, Right, O,

□, L1

Unlock Bart's Costumes and

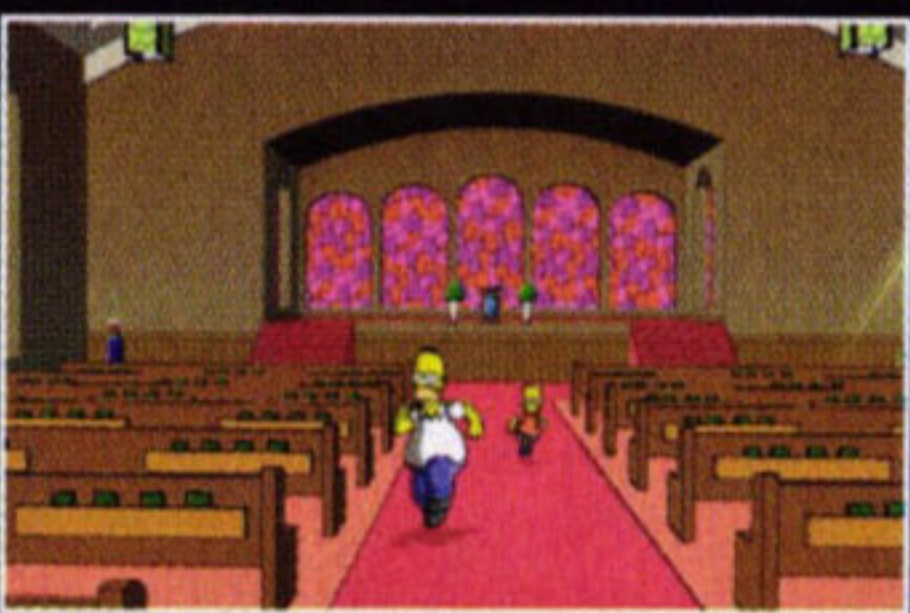
Trophies – Right, Left, □, □, △, R3

Unlock Lisa's Costumes and

Trophies – □, △, □, □, □, L3

Unlock Marge's Costumes and

Trophies – △, □, △, △, □, R3



Wii

From the Main Menu enter the Extras Menu, then enter these codes. When successful you will hear a chime.

Unlimited Power – +, Left, Right, +, -, Z

Unlock All Clichés – Left, -, Right, +, Right, Z

Unlock All Movies – -, Left, -, Right, +, C

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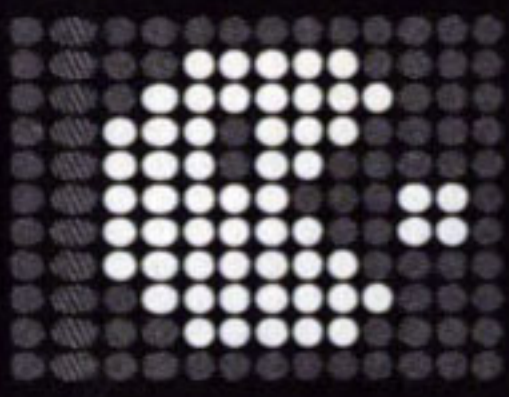
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Demon's Legacy

A CRASH COURSE IN DEVIL MAY CRY

As popular gaming franchises grow and receive additional installments, the number of key characters and events increases. Even fans of a series can find it challenging to keep all of the mythology straight after a few entries. With the release of Devil May Cry 4, you may find yourself a little hazy on who and what is important (and why) in the DMC universe, so we've broken down the major figures and artifacts by game. We don't cover all of the finer plot points, but you'll find all the info you need to start up Devil May Cry 4 in the know.

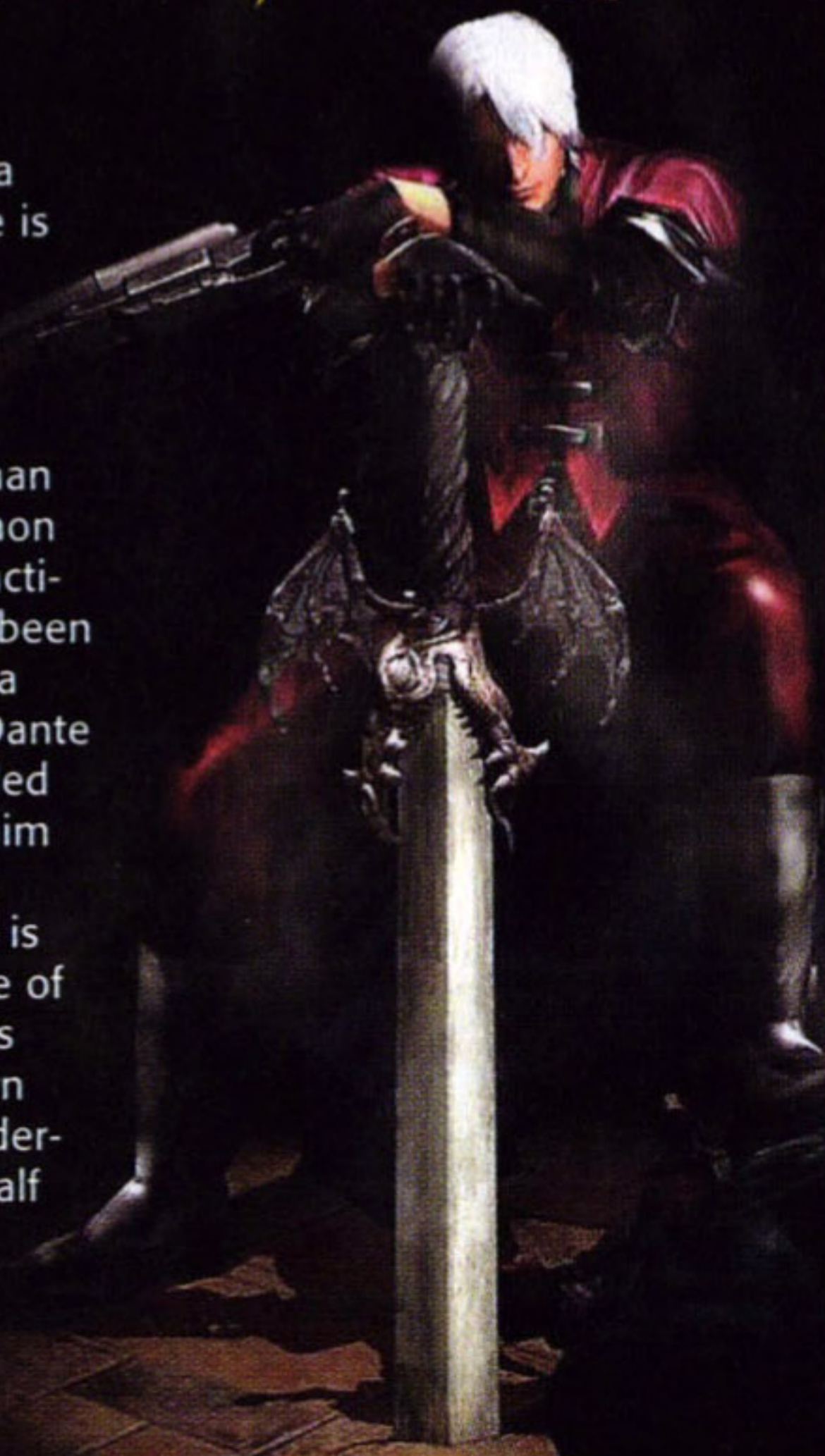


DEVIL MAY CRY



Dante

Dante is introduced as a devil hunter for hire. He is one of the two sons of Sparda, the demon who betrayed his own kind to defend the human world. Dante's half-demon ancestry makes him practically unkillable; he has been completely impaled by a sword multiple times. Dante possesses an ability called Devil Trigger, allowing him temporary access to his full demonic power. He is unconcerned in the face of danger, and often cracks jokes while staring down horrid beasts of the underworld. He carries one half of an ancient amulet that was given to him as a boy. His brother Vergil was given the second half.



Trish

Though she initially appears to be his ally, Trish's primary job is simply to lure Dante to Mallet Island so Mundus and his minions can kill the son of Sparda. Trish is a demon created by Mundus, who gave her a form resembling Dante's deceased mother, Eva, so Dante would be more likely to trust her. Despite her origins, she decides to betray Mundus, helping Dante seal the demon away again. Afterwards, she joins up in Dante's devil-hunting business as a partner.



Force Edge/Sparda

Even though Force Edge is a formidable sword in its own right, its true form is only unlocked through the two halves of the amulet Sparda gave to his two sons. It then becomes the sword Sparda, and harnesses the full power of its namesake hero. Like his father before him, Dante uses this weapon to defeat Mundus, and retains possession of it thereafter.

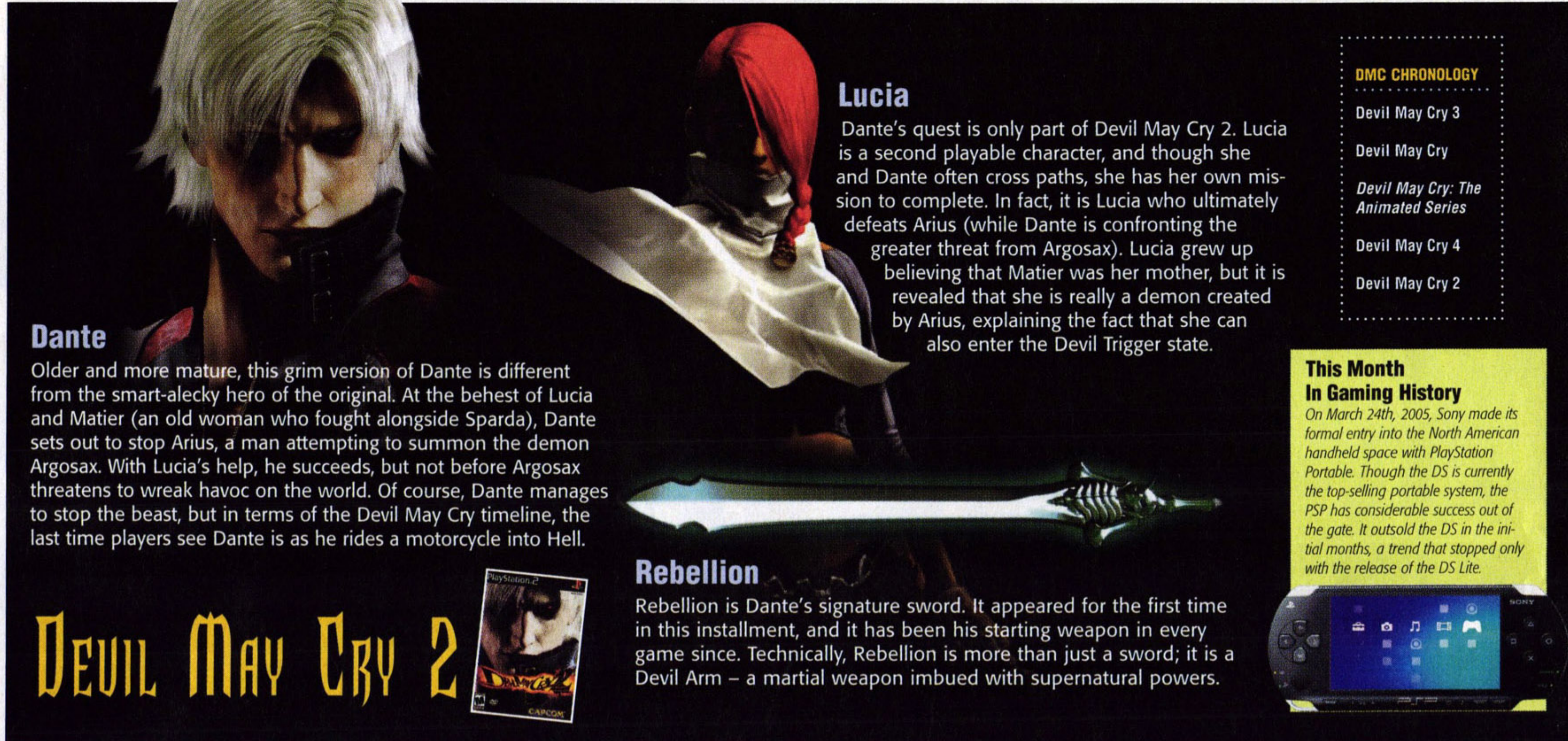
Mundus

Sealed away by Sparda 2,000 years ago, the king of the demon world is on the brink of reemerging into the human world on Mallet Island. He seeks to conquer both realms, but he also wants revenge on Dante, the son of the warrior who defeated him millennia ago.



Nelo Angelo

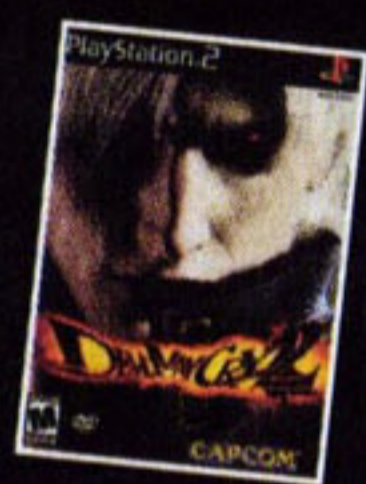
The identity of this honorable fighter escapes Dante for a while, but Nelo Angelo is his brother Vergil, corrupted by his years spent in the demon world. Though little personality remains intact, Nelo Angelo reacts whenever he sees Dante's amulet. Upon defeat, he relinquishes his half of the artifact, allowing Dante to access the full power of the Force Edge.



Dante

Older and more mature, this grim version of Dante is different from the smart-alecky hero of the original. At the behest of Lucia and Matier (an old woman who fought alongside Sparda), Dante sets out to stop Arius, a man attempting to summon the demon Argosax. With Lucia's help, he succeeds, but not before Argosax threatens to wreak havoc on the world. Of course, Dante manages to stop the beast, but in terms of the Devil May Cry timeline, the last time players see Dante is as he rides a motorcycle into Hell.

DEVIL MAY CRY 2



Lucia

Dante's quest is only part of Devil May Cry 2. Lucia is a second playable character, and though she and Dante often cross paths, she has her own mission to complete. In fact, it is Lucia who ultimately defeats Arius (while Dante is confronting the greater threat from Argosax). Lucia grew up believing that Matier was her mother, but it is revealed that she is really a demon created by Arius, explaining the fact that she can also enter the Devil Trigger state.

Rebellion

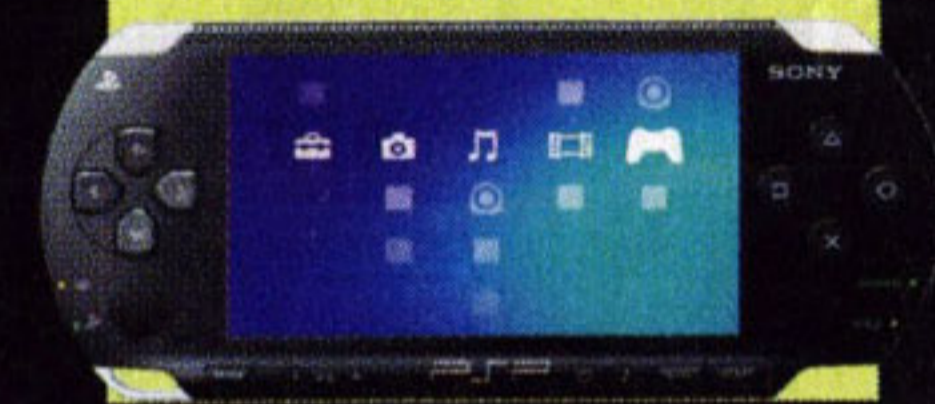
Rebellion is Dante's signature sword. It appeared for the first time in this installment, and it has been his starting weapon in every game since. Technically, Rebellion is more than just a sword; it is a Devil Arm – a martial weapon imbued with supernatural powers.

DMC CHRONOLOGY

- Devil May Cry 3
- Devil May Cry
- Devil May Cry: The Animated Series
- Devil May Cry 4
- Devil May Cry 2

This Month In Gaming History

On March 24th, 2005, Sony made its formal entry into the North American handheld space with PlayStation Portable. Though the DS is currently the top-selling portable system, the PSP has considerable success out of the gate. It outsold the DS in the initial months, a trend that stopped only with the release of the DS Lite.



DEVIL MAY CRY 3



Dante

The young and impetuous Dante of DMC 3 is still learning the ropes, since the game actually occurs several years before the original. He is trying to stop his brother Vergil from attaining absolute power, despite the fact that the relationship between the two is more competitive than antagonistic. Dante is defeated, but awakens in a surge of supernatural strength – his first experience with his latent Devil Trigger ability. He is later forced to fight his brother again, but even after winning, Dante unsuccessfully attempts to save Vergil from his fate in demon realm.

Vergil

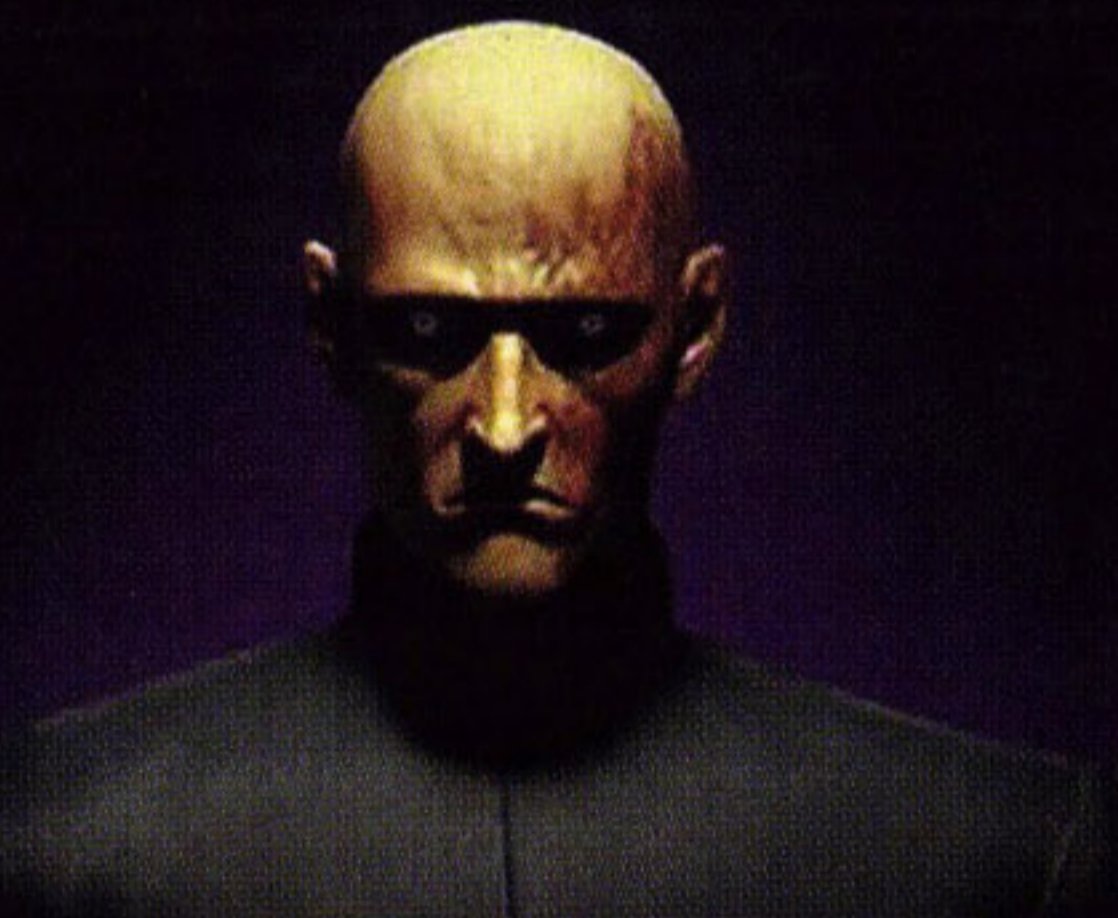
The other son of Sparda, and Dante's twin brother. While Dante recognizes and appreciates his own humanity, Vergil fully embraces his demonic heritage. He seeks to recover Dante's half of Sparda's amulet in order to activate a demonic tower and unlock his father's power. Though Vergil and Dante briefly team up to defeat Arkham, the brothers cross swords again over the gate to the demon world. Vergil falls into the gate after his defeat, not to be seen again for many years.

Lady

Her real name is Mary, but Dante just refers to her as "Lady." Like Dante, she is a devil hunter, though her job is complicated by the fact that she doesn't have demonic blood in her veins. Like her father Arkham, her eyes are different colors – one green and one reddish brown. As revenge for the murder of her mother, Lady kills Arkham when she comes across his broken body after his defeat by Dante and Vergil. In the following years, she maintains a professional relationship with Dante.

Arkham

A scholar who helps Vergil awaken the lost power of Sparda. He sacrificed his wife (Lady's mother) in a ritual to obtain demonic power, an act for which his daughter has never forgiven him. His true goal is not to assist Vergil, but rather to seize Sparda's power for himself.



Yamato

Like Dante's Rebellion, the katana Yamato is a Devil Arm, and Vergil's weapon of choice in Devil May Cry 3. Through events that aren't yet known, the sword leaves his possession sometime after his imprisonment in the demon world.



Mundus

The villain from the original title has a brief cameo appearance after Vergil jumps into the Demon Realm. Mundus appears as three glowing orbs, and though Vergil challenges him, he fails and Mundus gradually bends him to his will over the span of several years. ■ ■ ■





SNES

STAR FOX

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER ARGONAUT > RELEASE 1993

Back in the early '90s when Nintendo first announced that its Super FX chip was a math co-processor utilizing reduced instruction set computer technology, most of the gaming population had no idea what the hell they were talking about. Then Nintendo told us it meant SNES games would be powerful enough to produce 3D graphics, and we all got silly little grins on our faces as our eyes widened and we started to see the future. Star Fox was the first game to utilize this technology and it didn't disappoint, forcing the SNES to pop out 3D effects the system had no business producing. This decade-and-a-half-old rail shooter actually holds up better than Star Fox's more modern offerings. As mercenary fighter pilot Fox McCloud, players could dogfight their way through one of three different paths around the Lylat system. The controls obviously aren't analog, but they still feel better than you might expect. All this just begs the question: if Star Fox started out leading the pack in terms of technology and graphics, why is he lagging so far behind now?



RETRO RATING
NOW 8.25
THEN* 9.25



NES

THE GUARDIAN LEGEND

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/SHOOTER > PUBLISHER BRÖDERBUND > DEVELOPER COMPILE/IREM > RELEASE 1989

The Guardian Legend was the ultimate genre bender – mixing the top-down adventuring of The Legend of Zelda, the sci-fi female protagonist vs. aliens concept of Metroid, and the vertically scrolling shooting action of 1942. The game begins in space as your ship races through a meteor field towards Naju, an alien-infested planet hurtling towards Earth. As you go in for a landing, this ship transforms into a female “Guardian” who can navigate the surface. In the on-foot scenarios players search for transporter keys, new special weapons, and stat boosts. Once you've solved a certain corridor puzzle you'll change back into a ship and frantically blast through one of over 20 exciting and challenging shooter stages. For all of the freshness this game brought to the scene, its overly confusing world map and outrageous password system (32 characters long!) tainted the overall experience. At least you can enter “TGL” on the password screen to play all of the shooter stages back to back if you like.



RETRO RATING
NOW 7.75
THEN N/A



PLAYSTATION

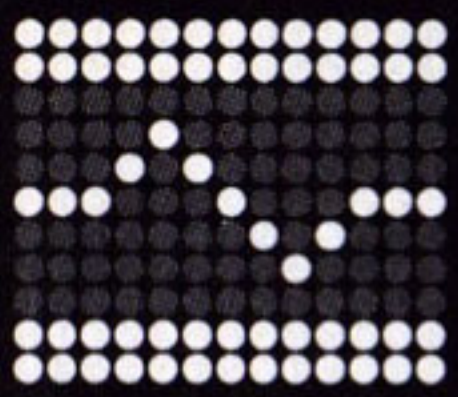
ALIEN RESURRECTION

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER FOX INTERACTIVE > DEVELOPER ARGONAUT > RELEASE 2000

What's worse than a bad game based on a movie no one liked? Try releasing the game three years after its source film has already left theaters. That way people have just enough time to forget, ensuring maximum pain when you reopen the wound. Alien Resurrection is a first-person shooter (after starting development as a third-person title), but few of the mechanics are up to any FPS standards, past or present. Ripley is doomed to slowly saunter through corridors and fight off xenomorphs and face-huggers with terrible, unresponsive controls. When she dies (this happens often), you start back at your last save point, which was probably at least a half hour ago. Alien Resurrection makes up some ground in the tense, frightening atmosphere it creates, but it all melts away when you need to actually participate in the sluggish action and face-punchingly awful level design. If you're looking for a decent PSone Aliens game, stick to Alien Trilogy. Like so many fans of the franchise have said before, “Just pretend Alien Resurrection never happened.”



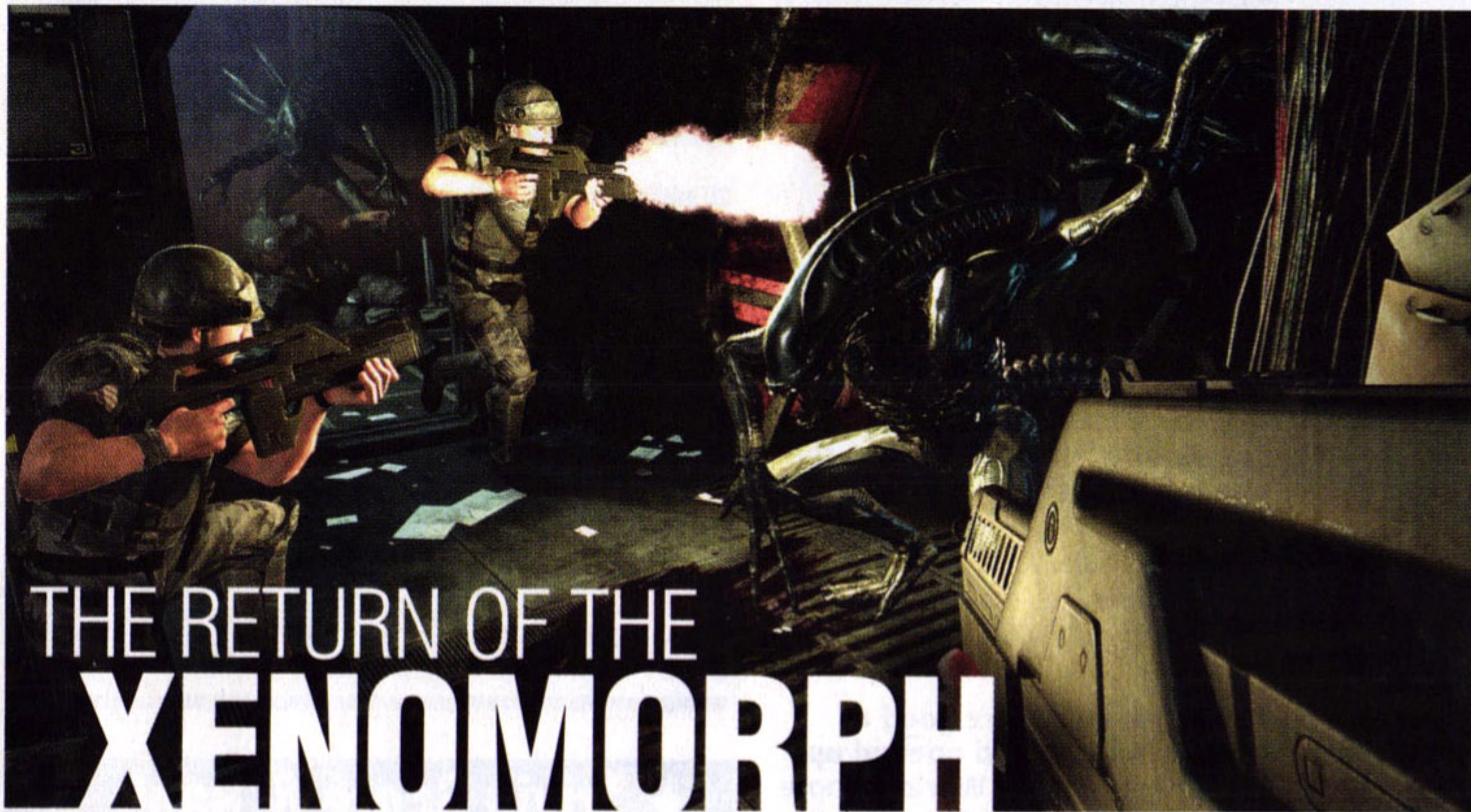
RETRO RATING
NOW 5
THEN* 6



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THE RETURN OF THE XENOMORPH

If you're still jonesing for an Aliens fix after reading the cover story, check out our exclusive online interviews with Brian Martel, the executive VP of Gearbox and director of Aliens, about working with the storied franchise.



Alien Concept

We've got exclusive Aliens concept art for your perusal online.



Batter Up

Take time away from the steroid hearings to eyeball some performance-enhanced screenshots from MLB 2K8.



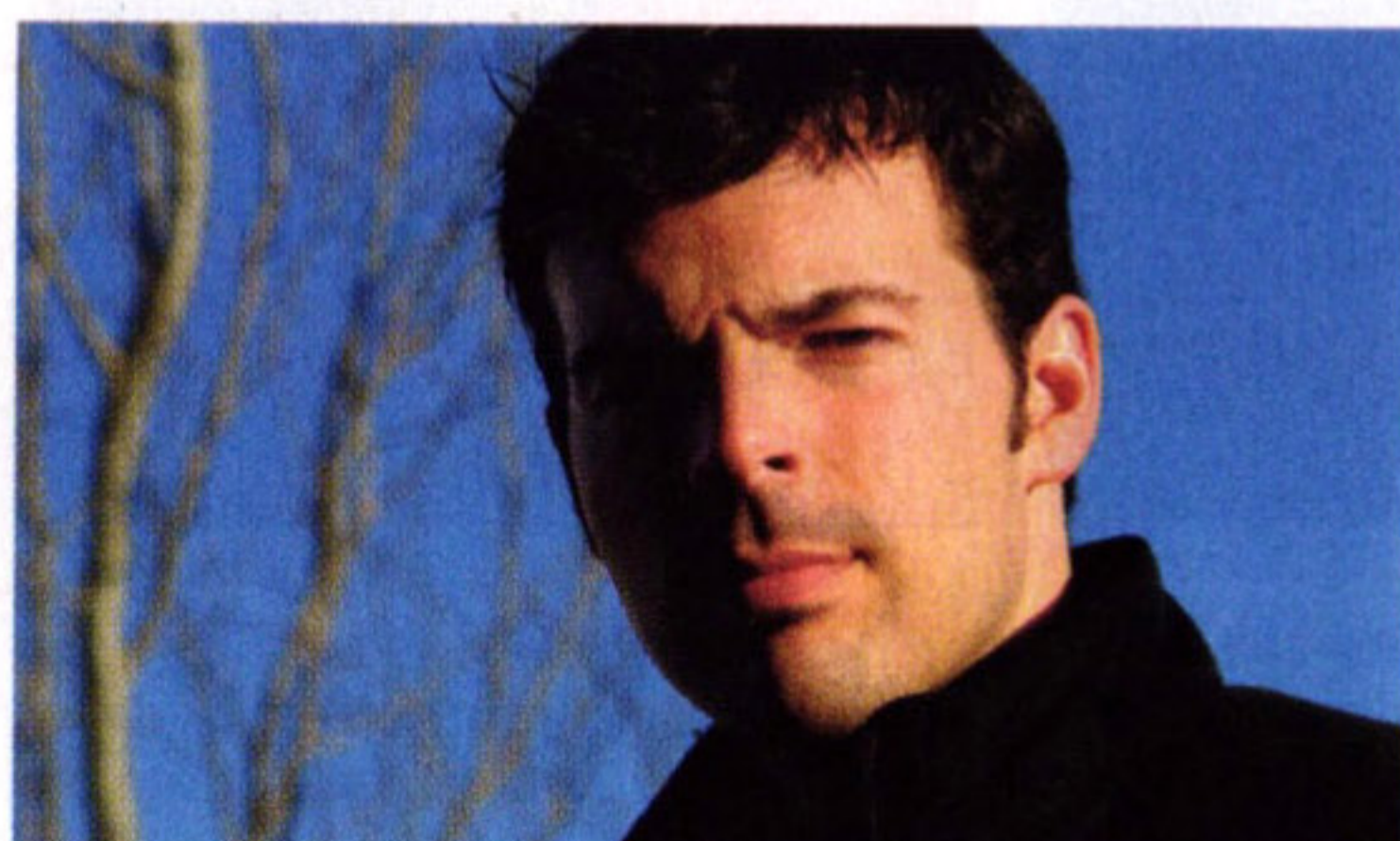
Geardaddy

We sit down with Randy Pitchford to discuss Gearbox's past, present, and future.



Red Faction Guerilla

Read our extended interview with Volition about its fresh new take on the Red Faction franchise.



Massive After Effect

Casey Hudson, the project director at BioWare, takes time out of his busy schedule planning downloadable content for Mass Effect to discuss the game's highs and lows.

ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

Game Informer Online heads to the 2008 Game Developers Conference in San Francisco to rub shoulders with the hottest industry talent.



UP TO THE MOMENT NEWS

IN-DEPTH FEATURES

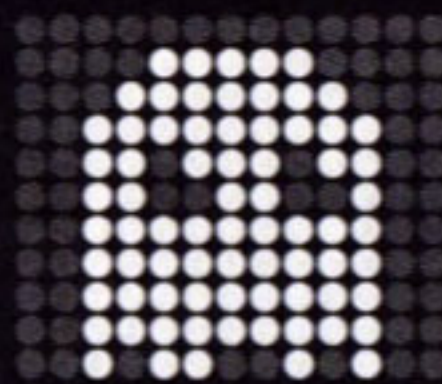
PREVIEWS OF THE HOTTEST GAMES

LEGENDARY INTERVIEWS

HI-RES MOVIES & DOWNLOADS

INTERACT IN THE FORUMS





VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Everybody knows just how hard it is to come up with just the right look. In fact, Game Informer's Bryan Vore has been trying to nail down just the right way to wear his beard for months. Help a buddy out. Complete the following quiz to vote for which totally awesome facial hair style will have the ladies banging down Bryan's door.

1 Wow, there sure have been a lot of Dynasty Warriors games. What historical Chinese novel is that series loosely based on?

- A. Water Margin
- B. Romance of the Three Kingdoms
- C. Journey to the East
- D. Star Wars



2 Herc's Adventures released on both the PlayStation and the Saturn in 1997. Besides being pretty darn funny, it also let you play as three different mythical heroes. Which hero didn't make the grade?

- A. Herc
- B. Jason
- C. Atlanta
- D. Odysseus



3 The Super NES brought the world all sorts of role-playing goodness, and one of the finest treasures in the bunch was entitled Secret of Evermore. In it, you played as a young boy and his _____.

- A. Sister
- B. Dog
- C. Dad
- D. Toothbrush

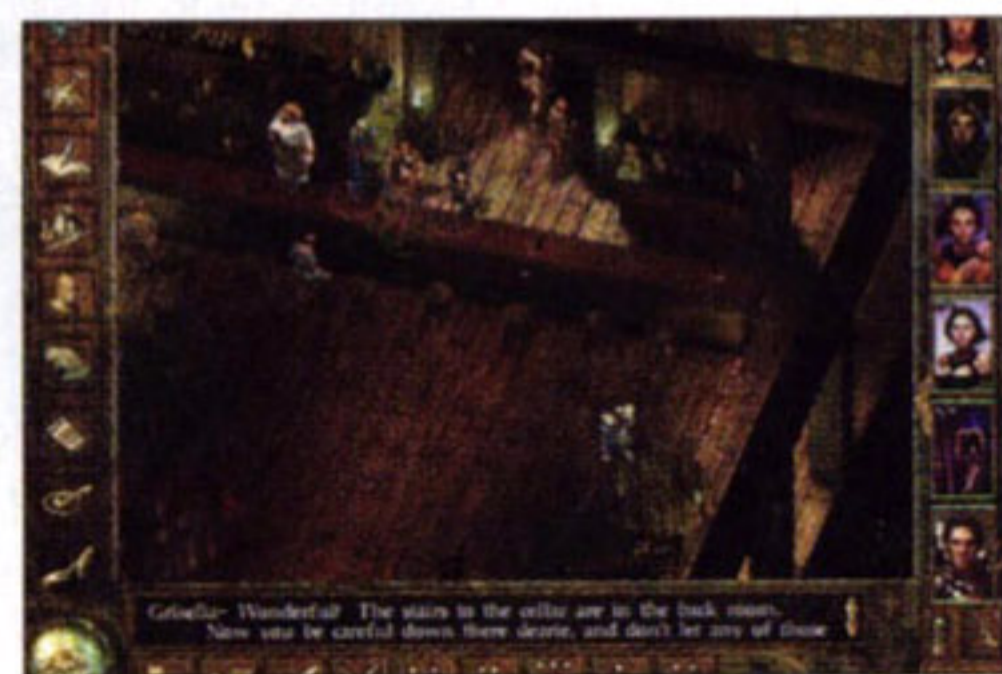


4 If there is anything the last 10 years have taught us, it's that the Jetsons was the most predictive piece of science fiction ever. Don't argue. Which of these was not a subtitle for a Jetsons game?

- A. Robot Panic
- B. Cogswell's Caper
- C. Astro's Cosmic Bone
- D. Invasion of the Planet Pirates

5 Icewind Dale was one of the many excellent D&D-based PC games. Which version of the D&D ruleset did that game utilize?

- A. 1st Edition
- B. 2nd Edition
- C. 3rd Edition
- D. They travelled into the future to use 4th Edition



6 You are on a casting call for SPUMCO. They need someone to play the lead in a skateboarding film. With a cel-shaded character, you must impress them with your crazy stunts. Name the game.

- A. Go! Go! Hypergrind
- B. Fly! Fly! Exteeme Skate
- C. Skate! Skate! Movie Star
- D. Ow! Ow! My Poor Head

7 Nippon Ichi has become a celebrated producer of turn-based role-playing strategy games. What was their first game officially published in the United States?

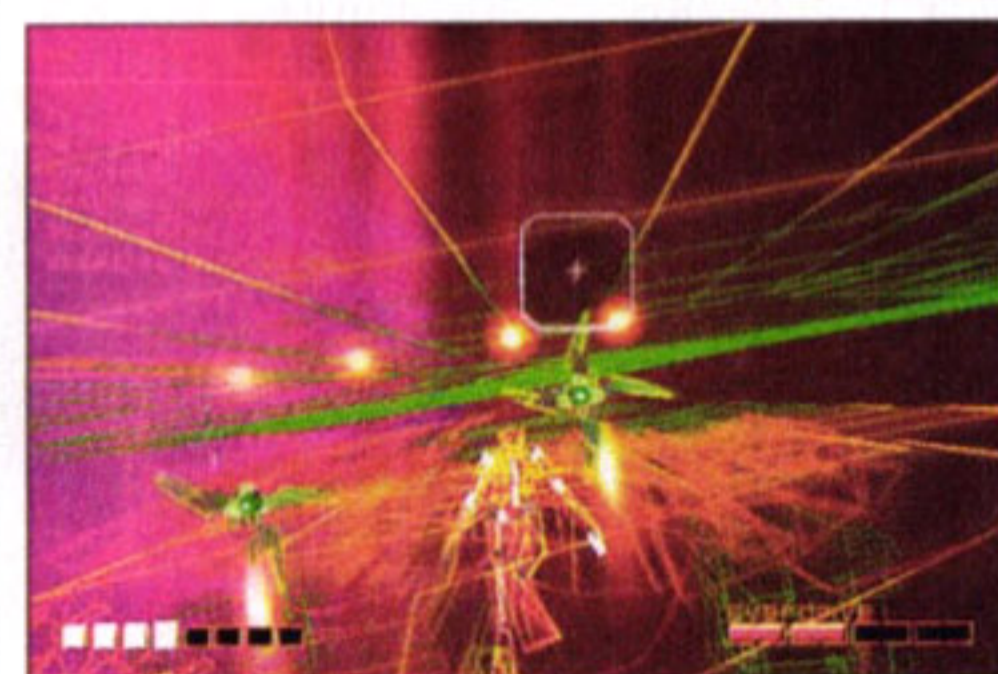
- A. Disgaea: Hour of Darkness
- B. La Pucelle: Tactics
- C. Jigsaw Madness
- D. Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure

8 People who were good at Super Mario World opened up and beat the Star World. People who were great at Super Mario World opened up and beat the Special World. Which of these was not the name of a Super Mario World level?

- A. Funky
- B. Mondo
- C. Gnarly
- D. Radical

9 In the cult hit Rez, much of the story surrounded the awakening of a seemingly conscious AI system. What was its name?

- A. Eden
- B. Apollo
- C. Skynet
- D. HAL



10 Hypothetically, what do you think of hypothetical questions posed for no discernible reason?

- A. It depends
- B. Um...
- C. I answer with a rhetorical question
- D. I hate you guys

BREAKDOWN

40 plus shows are planned and booked in the 2008 season of Video Games Live, the orchestral video game music concert series originally created by Tommy Tallarico and Jack Wall

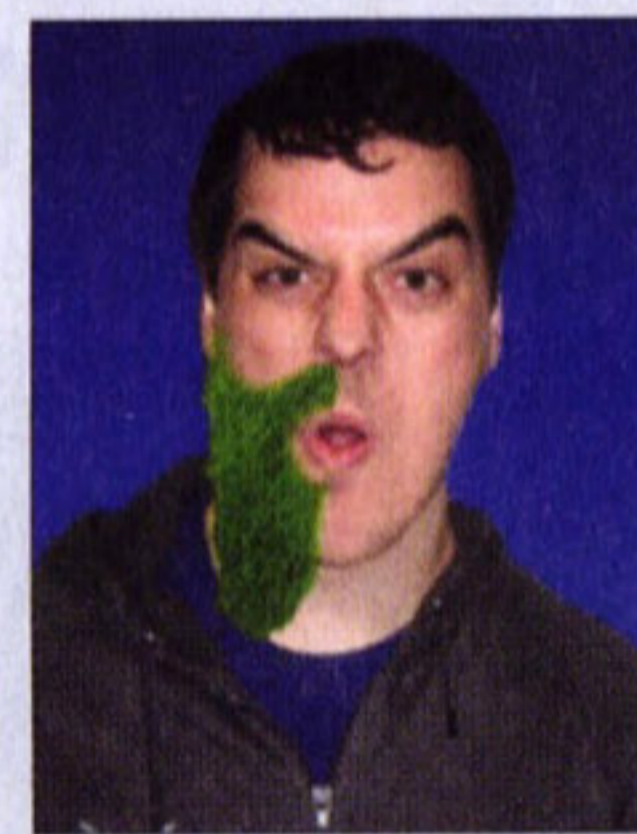
20 million dollars have been set aside by Electronic Arts to open a new online-centric Korean studio

50,000 dollars has been pledged by Gearbox Software to The Guildhall at Southern Methodist University, a graduate school for game development in Plano, Texas

10 franchises were included in the sale of Bioware/Pandemic to EA - that's more than we know about, in case you were wondering

1 request was all we had to make to get Bryan to pose for the photos on this page. He's a good sport.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



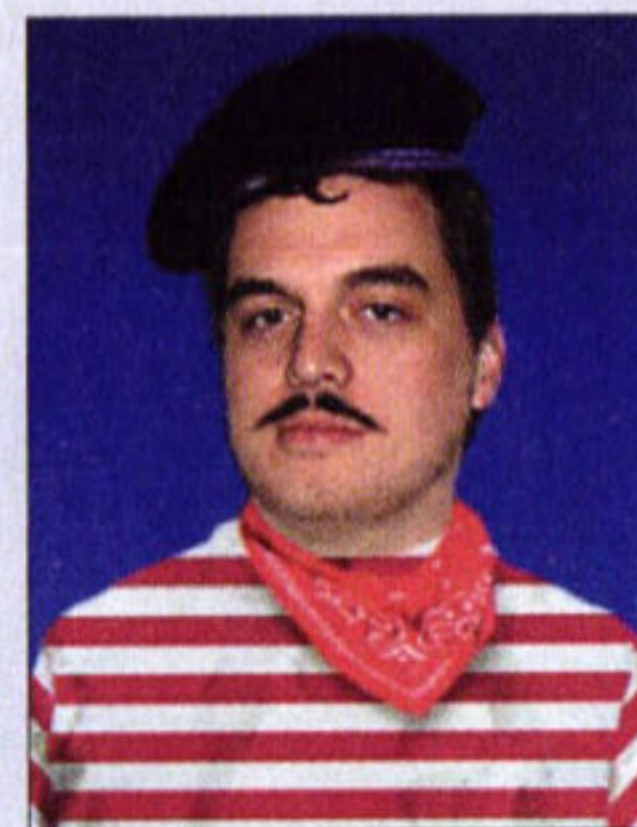
0-1:

The What Were You Thinking



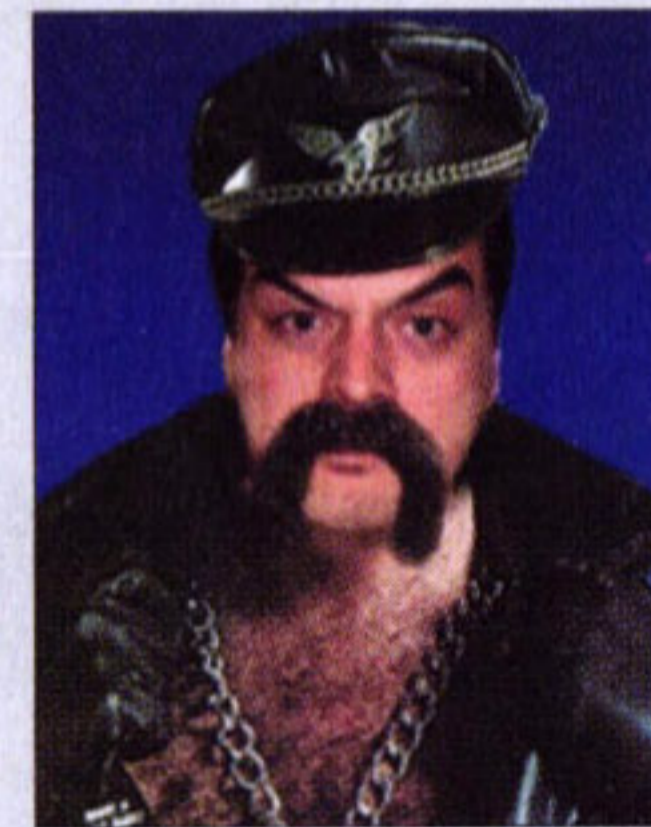
2-3:

The Chin Strap



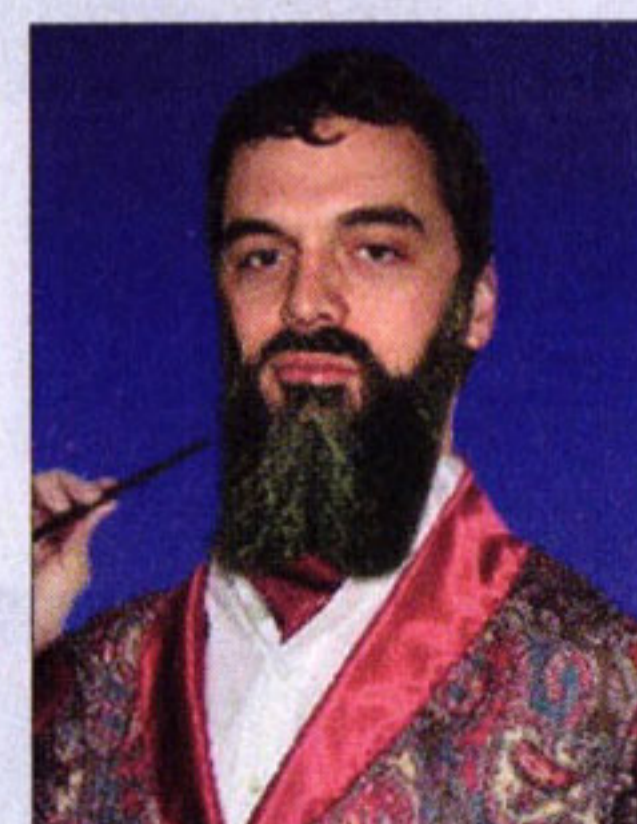
4-5:

The Frenchman



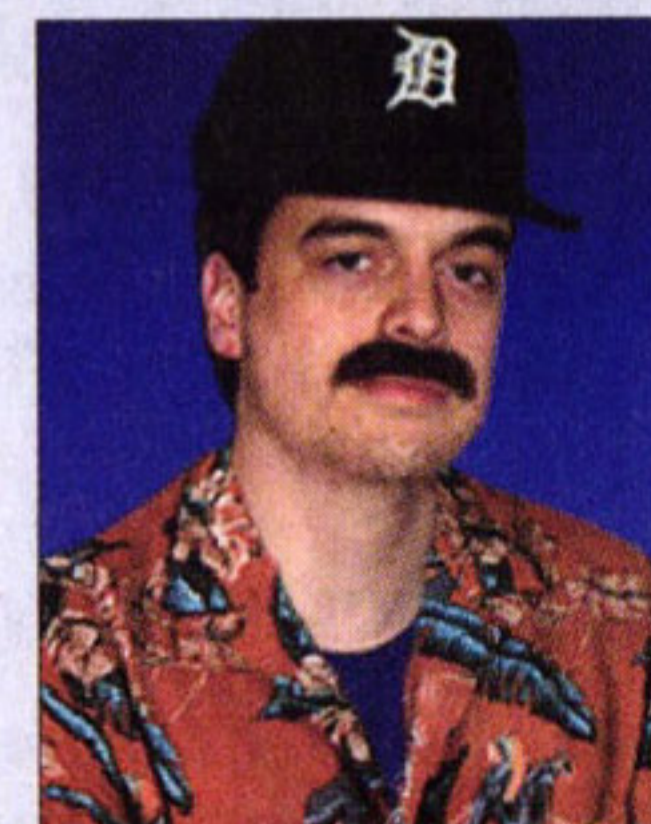
6-7:

The Sam Elliott



8-9:

The Man About Town



10:

The Magnum P.I.

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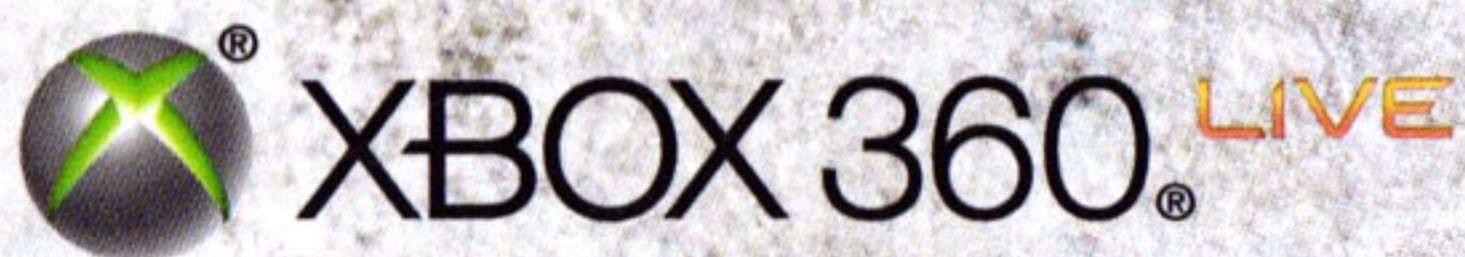


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PLAYSTATION 3