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JADE EMPIRE
A WORLD EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT BIOWARE'S NEW XBOX RPG
FROM THE CREATORS OF STAR WARS KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
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ISSUE 126
OCTOBER 2003

UNITED AT BIRTH...

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence

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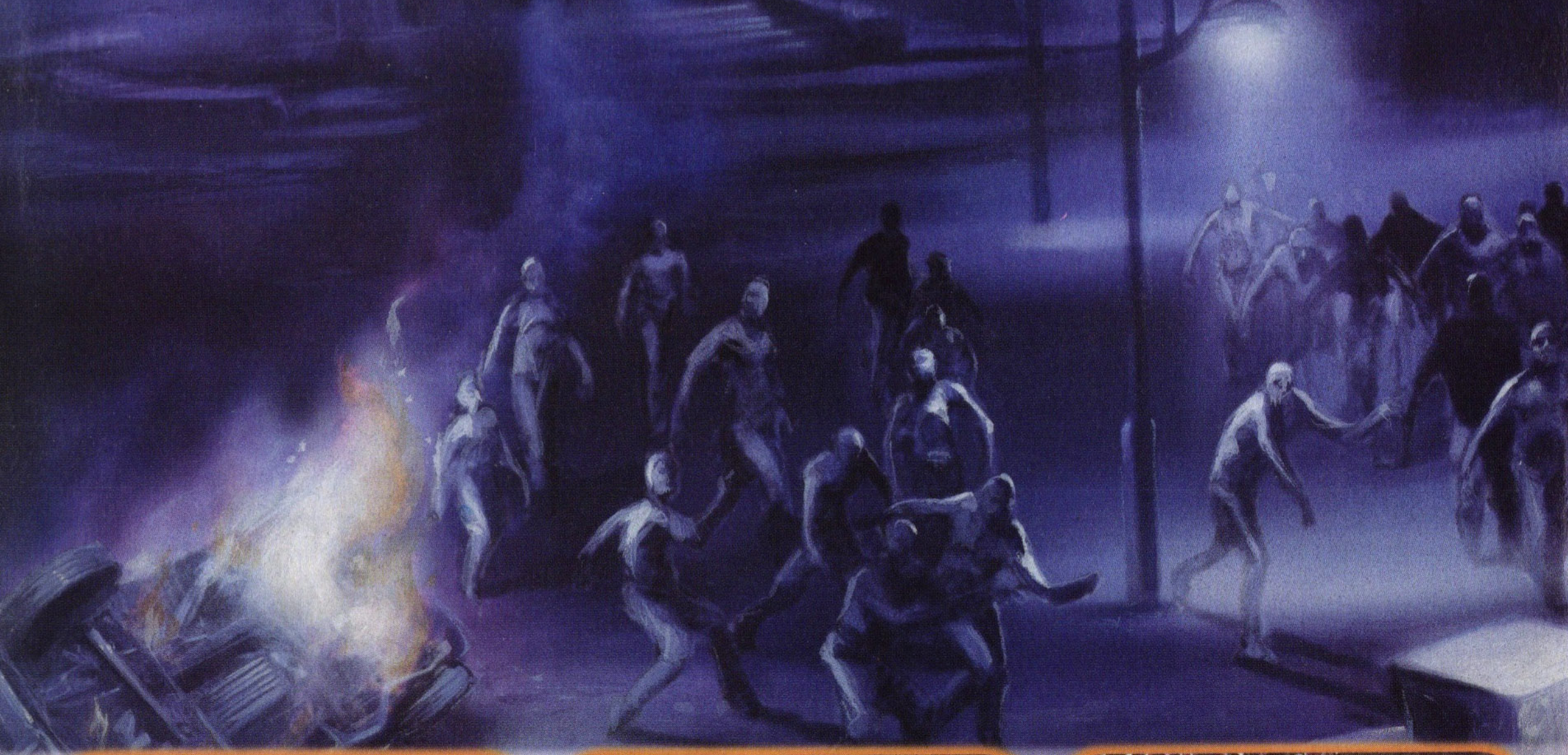

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MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Strong Lyrics
Violence

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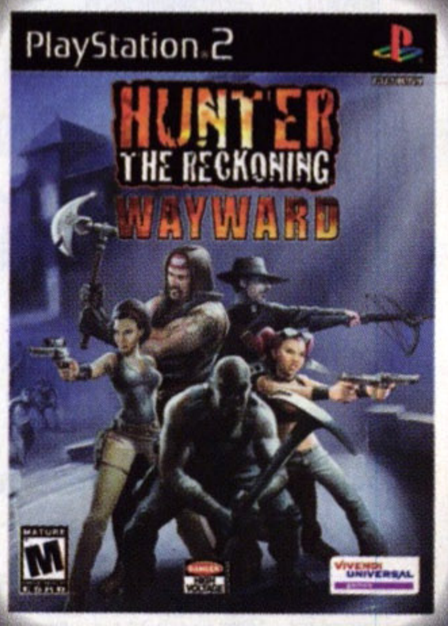
Intense multi-player action means at least you won't die alone.

HUNTER THE RECKONING WAYWARD



www.hunterthereckoning.com/wayward

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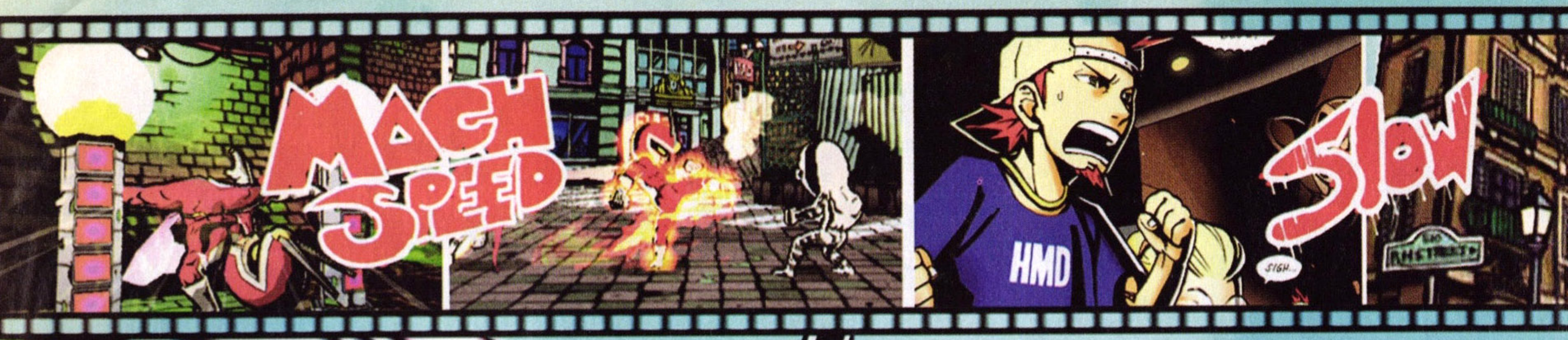

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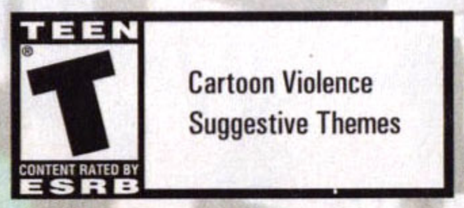

Cartoon Violence
Suggestive Themes

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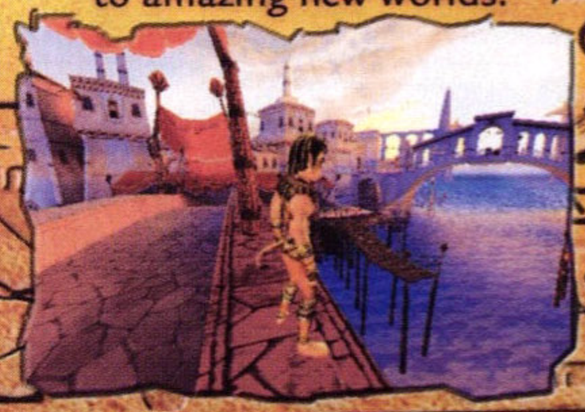
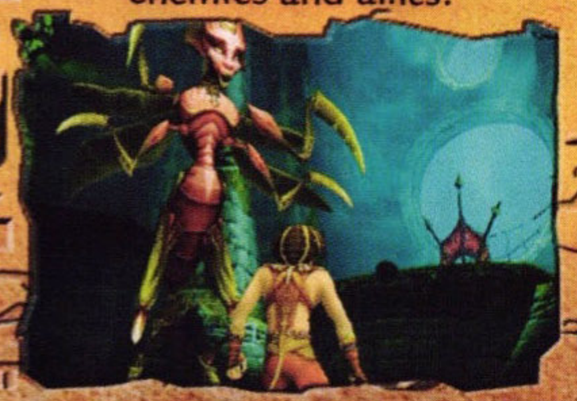
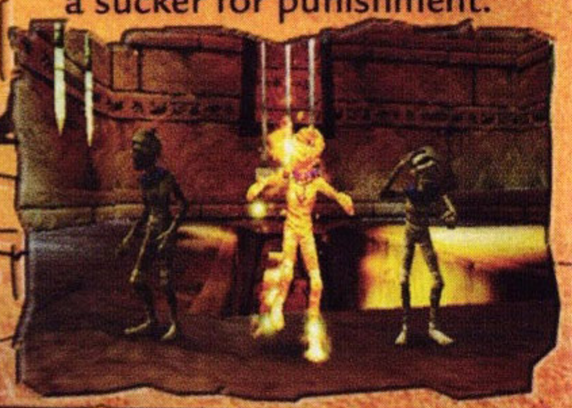


Interact with hundreds of enemies and allies.



Play as the Mummy, he's a sucker for punishment.



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SPHINX
AND THE CURSED MUMMY™

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Fantasy Violence

PlayStation 2

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GATHERING

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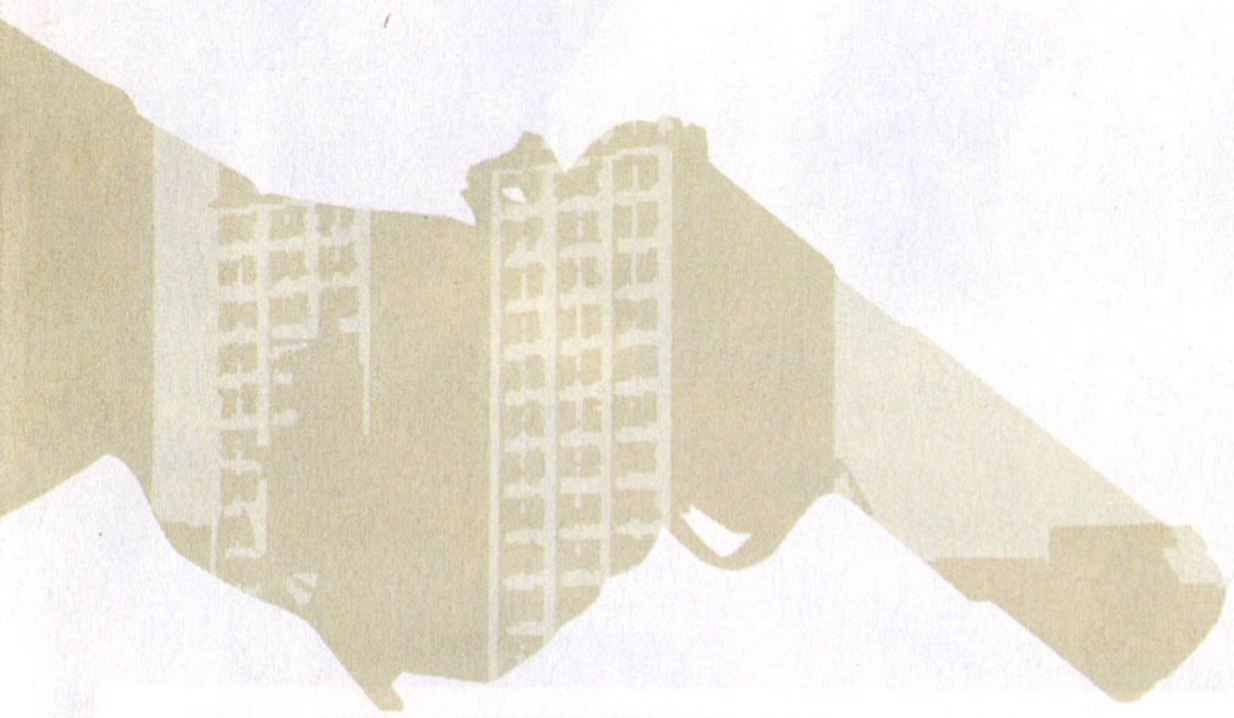
A hail of bullets from a Tommy gun or a shotgun stuck in your face over linguine at lunch. You choose a life with the Salieri family, the cops and feds will be the least of your problems.

The city of Lost Heaven is at war as the Salieri and Morello mobs fight to control the lucrative protection rackets, smuggling and women of Lost Heaven.

Join the Mob – you've got no choice, unless you think choosing death is a smart move! Mafia grabs you by the lapels and plunges you into the middle of a vicious and deadly turf war. The cops, the feds, the Morello family – each of them are out to get you and none of them care how they take you down.

Mafia has received universal acclaim across the world with its blend of action and plot driven narrative. With Mafia living out your wise guy ambitions could not be easier.



Arriving on both PlayStation®2 and Xbox™, Mafia has been enhanced to deliver an awesome console experience that will make the Cosa Nostra look like a bunch of choirboys.

PlayStation®2

XBOX

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence

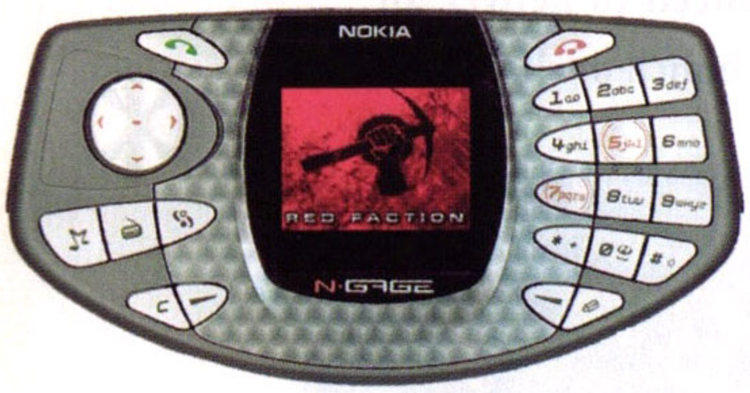
GAMEINFORMER

COVER STORY

38 JADE EMPIRE: INSIDE THE DYNASTY THAT BIOWARE BUILT

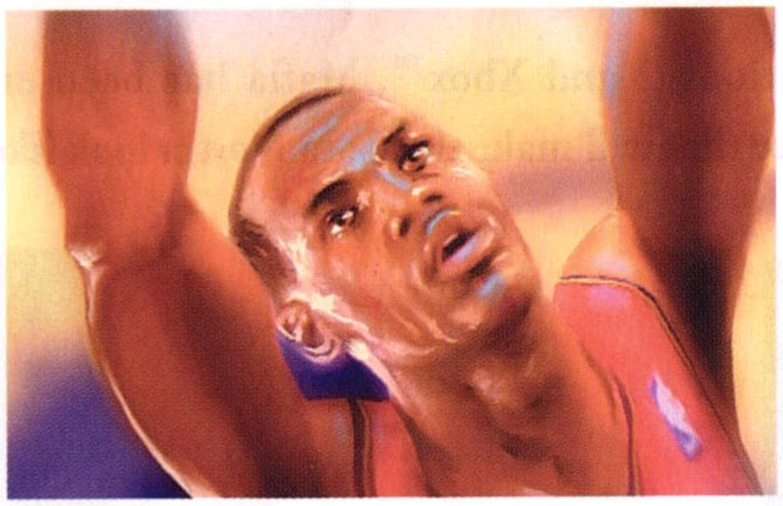
Following up the fastest-selling Xbox title (Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic) with all-new material is no small feat. Luckily, if anyone can deal with the pressure cooker of success, it's probably famed Canadian developer BioWare. See what they have planned for discerning gamers.

FEATURES



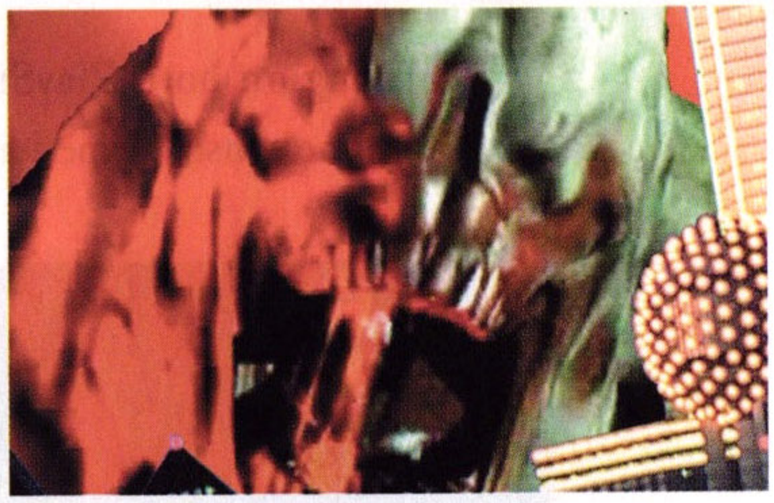
50 GAMING ON THE GO!

Portable gaming is finally getting a facelift, courtesy of two companies with two very different executions of the idea. One is a phone; one is a Palm; both are tailored to gamers. See the plans, the titles, and the devices.



58 HEROES OF THE HARDWOOD

Although none of us are nearly as rich or talented or in trouble with the law as some basketball players are, we still want to rule the court on our consoles. Enter GI's yearly roundup of roundball titles, and see what has changed and what has stayed the same (for better or worse).



66 DOOM DESCENDS ON DALLAS

Although the event is called QuakeCon, this year was all about Doom. The fan convention turned into a large-scale debut of Doom 3's multiplayer mode, and we were there to check out all of the action.

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- *NEW FRANCHISE MODE*
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Available September 2003

"Blitz has something for everyone.. old school Blitz fans and the sim crowd. Online or off, the graphics overall are great. This is a sweet looking game competing with or surpassing a lot of the titles on the market." - IGN

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16 EDITOR'S FORUM
No one left, and no new people came in. See what we think about the industry now that we've successfully initiated Jeremy.

18 GI SPY
The Game Informer paparazzi stalk the video game industry, bringing you candid photos of all the action.

20 DEAR GI
There's an eligible chick who thinks that gaming guys are crazy hot! No, honestly, we printed the whole letter, because everyone was so darned shocked. There's other good stuff there too, for those not on the make.

24 NEWS
While maintaining a level of sarcasm and journalistic integrity somewhere between *The Onion* and *The Chicago Tribune*, we'll keep you up to date on the big industry announcements.

74 PREVIEWS
The trees are starting to change colors, the nights are getting a little colder, and it's time to start lusting for the upcoming releases. Soon enough, it will be winter, which always gives you a fabulously convenient excuse to hang inside and master the gaming arena.

110 REVIEWS
It's a hard knock life for a few much-hyped titles. See what we're recommending and what we're less than satisfied with. Surprises inside!

146 CHARTS
What's hot? What's not? What's up? What's down? It's not NASDAQ, it's the Retail Sales Data and the GI editors' Top 10 Games.

151 SECRET ACCCESS
Ever wonder how we beat all those games each month? We don't get to cheat, but we will give you some pointers for titles that the general public can get their mitts on.

156 CLASSIC GI
Classic Gaming Expo is always a wonderland of hardware and software nearly forgotten. We've got a rundown of the museum, the auction, and (of course) our classic reviews to trip the light fantastic.

160 ETC
"I want everyone in the world to have a video game accessory like this, so they can feel the joy that I am feeling right now," is what Miss America should say instead of all that puppy business.

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EDITORS' FORUM

GAME INFORMER UPDATE

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

Last month I got a chance to fill you in on the relaunch of Game Informer Online. This month I get to tell you about some of the cool stuff it does for Game Informer magazine readers.

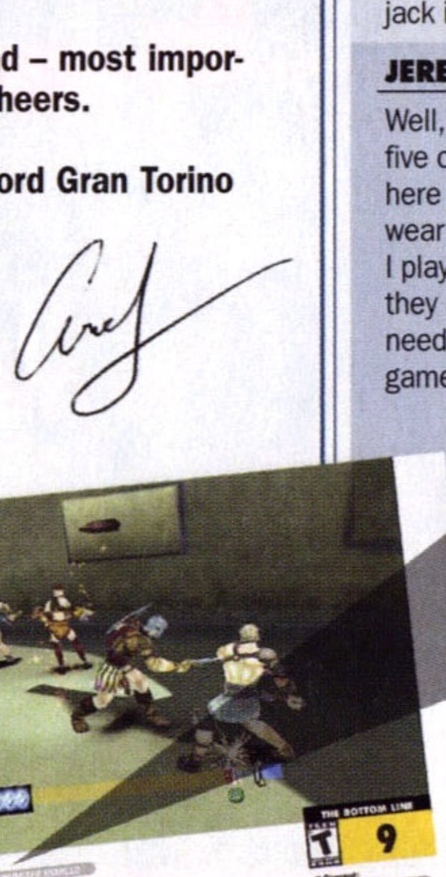
First, it gives you free daily news, movies, PC demos, codes, forums, and also an extensive review and code archive from the magazine. That stuff is pretty straightforward, but there is yet another bonus – Game Informer Unlimited. If you are lucky enough to be a Game Informer subscriber (and I know you are!), you can venture into this exclusive area of our website.

Simply put, Game Informer Unlimited is a demo disc online. Read about a game in the magazine that you want to know more about; then head to Unlimited to get bonus screenshots, movies, interviews, and much more all just for subscribing to this wonderful (if I do say so myself) magazine. A number of our bigger stories in this issue (and all issues from now on) will feature Game Informer Unlimited logos alerting you to head online to get more about those titles.

In other news, the search for our new PC editor continues, but I have started getting people writing in begging for the position. All the letters are great, so hopefully we will have a new reviewer next month to mock and overwork. Until then, enjoy the amazing Jade Empire cover feature and make sure to watch out for next month's issue, where we blow the doors open on a never-before-seen Namco title that I'm pretty sure will surprise you.

Enjoy the online site, and – most importantly – enjoy the issue. Cheers.

PS: Whoever wins the Ford Gran Torino contest on page 32 owes me a ride (and yes, you can actually win a car in this issue), because that is one sweet set of wheels.



REINER | reiner@gameinformer.com

I would really like to see what would happen if a developer took the setting and open-ended gameplay of Grand Theft Auto and applied the choice of being good or evil from Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic. Every mission would feature two goals. For instance, rather than robbing a bank, you could join the ranks of the police and stop the heist. Simple things like obeying the speed limit and stopping at red lights would affect your affiliation as well. If you don't feel like joining either side, you could avoid conflict altogether and take on the simple life of being a cab driver or a pizza delivery person. Naturally, the game would conclude in three completely different ways.

MATT | matt@gameinformer.com

Video games always have their share of meaningless buzzwords. For a while, "immersive" was all the rage, but now a couple of new contenders are on the rise. The first is "robust," which was previously used only in reference to oak trees and fat guys, now describes everything from control schemes to save menus. I think it means "good." Also notable is "bleeding edge," a more violent update of "cutting edge." However, if the edge is bleeding, it must have already been cut, which would make "cutting edge" more cutting edge than "bleeding edge" – but what do I know? As a bonus, I'll give you two of tomorrow's PR catchphrases today: "morphological" and "etherealistic." We'll figure out what they mean later.

JUSTIN | justin@gameinformer.com

Look, everyone – it's an issue of Game Informer without any editors leaving or new editors joining up! That's a bit of a rarity as of late, huh? So anyway, I quit. Just kidding. This month's review crop brought about two traditions I love seeing: revived classics with added content (Double Dragon Advance), and games packed with insane amounts of depth and replay (Tiger Woods 2004). I also think RoadKill set the record for the most F-bombs in a game, but it's only a matter of time before another title comes along and breaks it. How 'bout that new GI web site?

KATO | kato@gameinformer.com

I'm really loving a recent trend in games – unlockables with depth. In the sports genre in particular, we've been treated with some great stuff in this department from Tiger Woods, ESPN NFL Football, and NHL 2004. While once I used to love unlocking cards in Madden (yawn!), now I fuss over getting the right wall hanging in my GM's office (NHL) and Crib (ESPN). Tiger's even gone a step further and had its plethora of unlockables worth something. I knew I was addicted to this feature when I caved in and got my guy a hat (which I never wear in real life) because he got sponsorship bucks whenever he golfed with it!

LISA | lisa@gameinformer.com

I've been all mobile-gaming happy as of late. I don't know if it's because I'm traveling more and really missing the couch/console setup at home, but I really want more from my handheld baby. I've tried phones. I've attempted PDAs. But I really think that what is going to tweak my melon is a nice, updated, hybrid unit. I'm not naming names here, but we all know which handheld hasn't really done much by way of advancements in the last few years (a backlight but no headphone jack is not doing it for me). I'm an early adopter, and I want my crazysexycool stuff!

JEREMY | jeremy@gameinformer.com

Well, I've survived my first full issue of Game Informer, and I've only been handed five or six savage beatings! It's been tons of fun, but in the short time I've been here I've noticed an unfortunate trend. No, I'm not taking about Justin's refusal to wear pants. I'm taking about games with weak camera systems. Several games I played this month (which shall remain nameless in this forum – they know who they are) would have scored much higher if the awful camera had been fixed. You need solid camera work to make a good movie, and you need it to make a good game as well. And popcorn. You need that, too.

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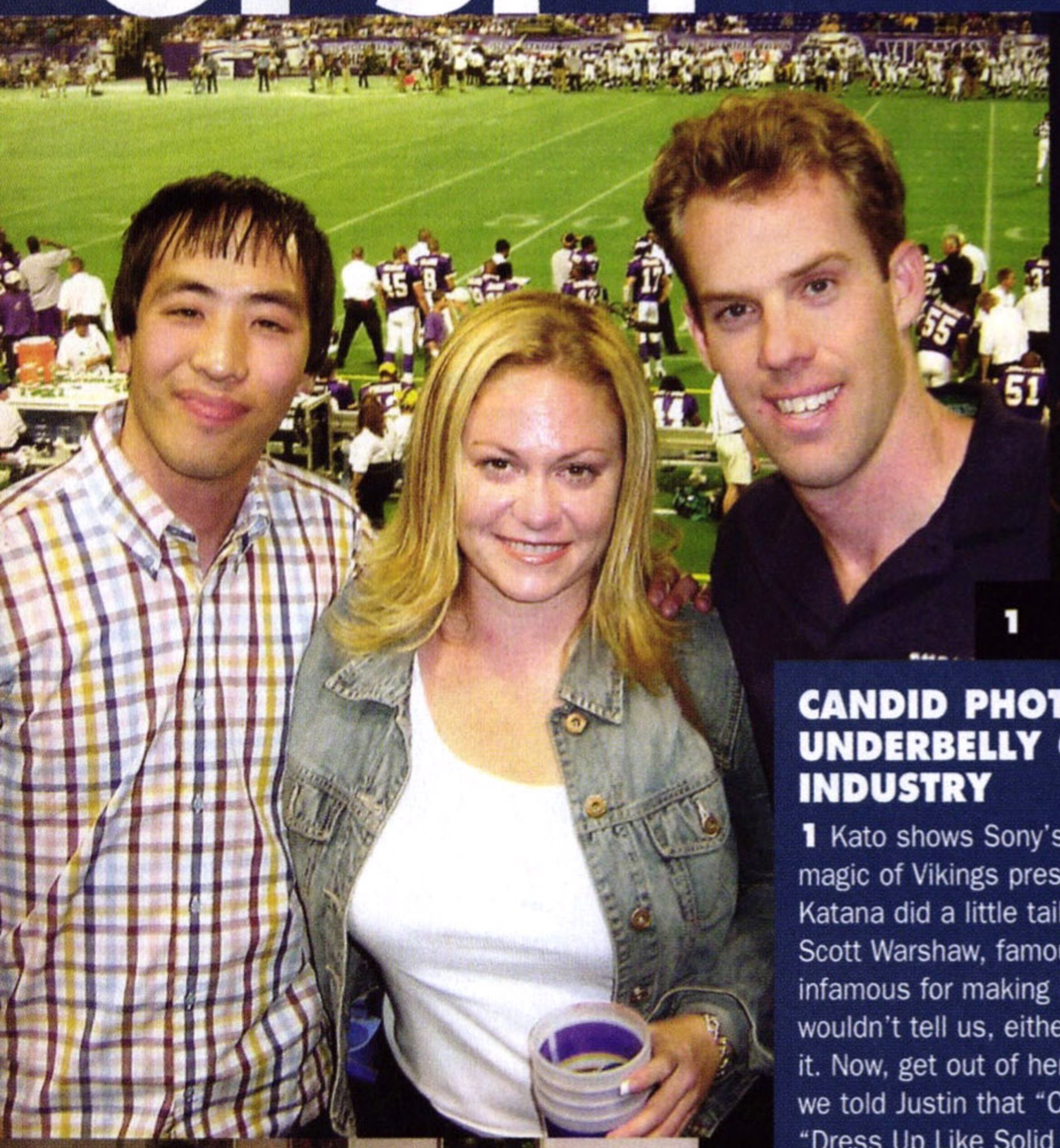
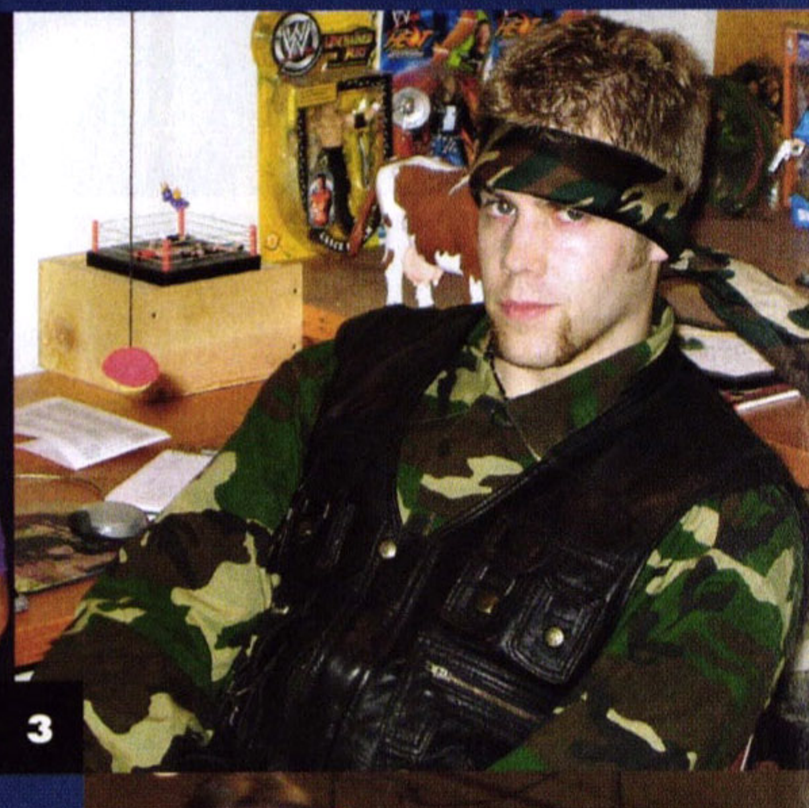
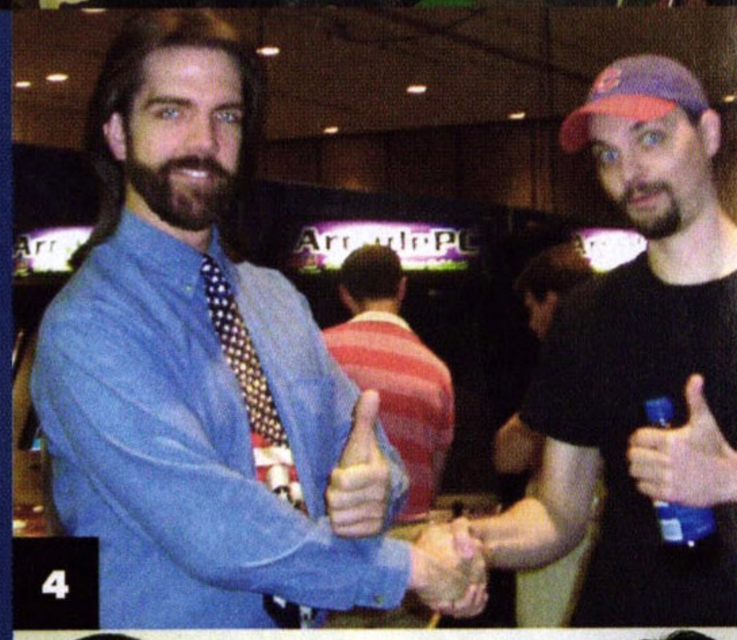
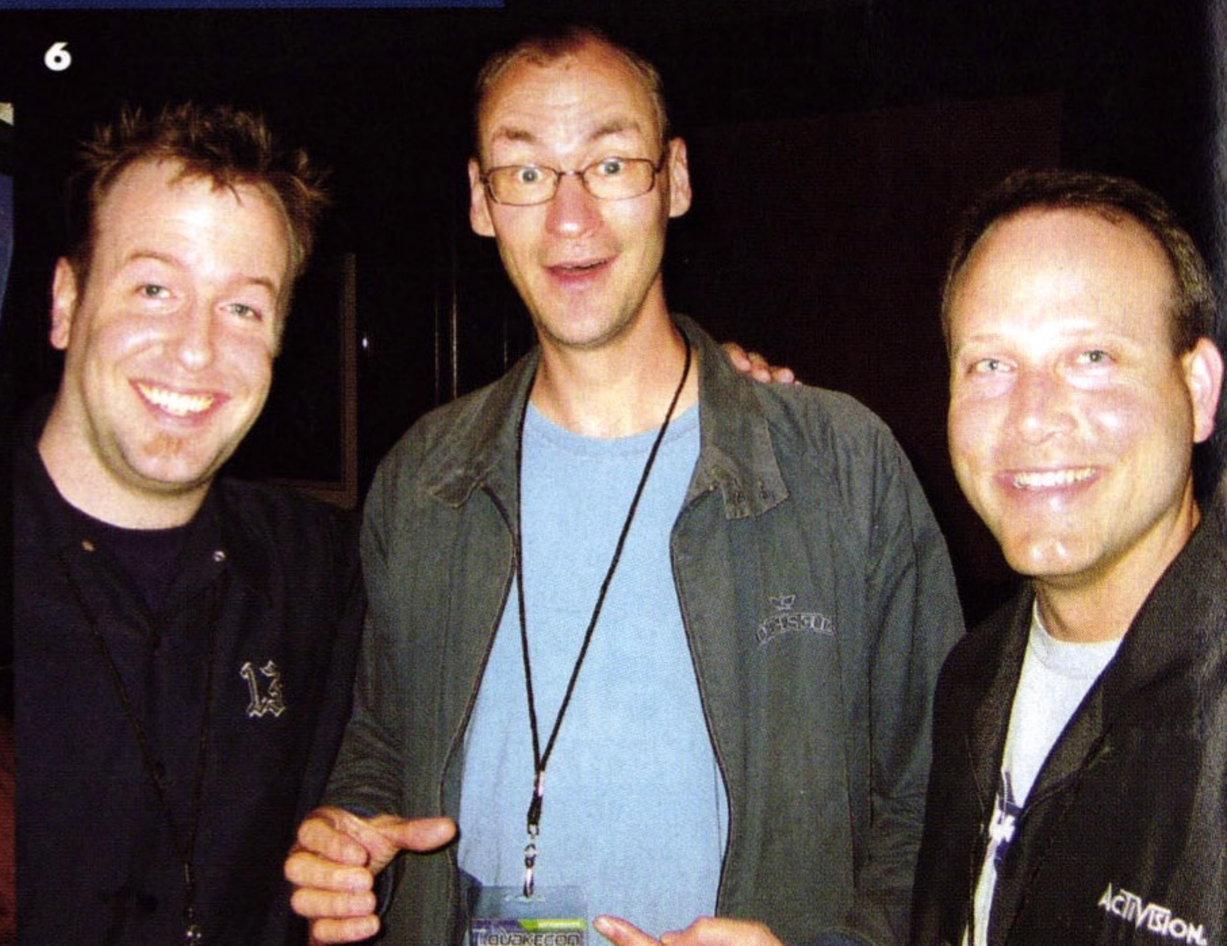




CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE SEAMY UNDERBELLY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

1 Kato shows Sony's Carrie Altuvilla and Ryan Bowling the magic of Vikings preseason football. Looks like the Game Katana did a little tailgating before the game **2** Howard Scott Warshaw, famous for making Yar's Revenge and infamous for making E.T., knows something you don't. He wouldn't tell us, either, so don't bother emailing us about it. Now, get out of here, you smelly nerds! **3** As a joke, we told Justin that "Casual Fridays" had been changed to "Dress Up Like Solid Snake Fridays." **4** Pac-Man world record holder Billy Mitchell compares thumbs with Reiner. Later, back at the hotel, they compared a few other things **5** New guy Jeremy poses with Amy Hennig from Crystal Dynamics and Denny Chiu from Eidos **6** Infinity Ward's Grant Collier, and Activision's Tim Ponting and Mike Mantarro were nice enough to pretend they were having a good time for the GI Spy camera **7** AARRRRGH! Petey the Shark say Aquaman best game ever!!! Buy or I bite you!! Why shark talk like caveman? Me not know! **8** Atlus' Akibo Shieh and Gail Salamanca show the closest thing to a ninja at Game Informer the patented Double Dragon elbow. BAAAM!





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TEEN T — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Violence

DEAR GI

COLLECTABLES >>>

I was just wondering if old Game Informer magazines are going to be worth a lot of money in the future?

Joseph Suarez
Via hotmail.com

■ Since some of the crew just came back from the Classic Gaming Expo in Las Vegas (check our coverage of the event in the Classic Feature on page 156), we can say with shock and befuddlement that one booth did have old copies of gaming magazines, including ours. Although the Vectrex dust cover commanded alarmingly more money than our first issue, the amusement factor was still pretty high. But, don't be that guy that says, "I don't need to save up for college/retirement/trust fund for my family members to use in case of my untimely demise, I have old Game Informer issues lying around."

GONZO FOR GORDON >>>

Why do you think that everyone hates Jeff Gordon? As a race fan for over 20 years, when I saw Gordon come on to the scene I saw nothing but a driver who had a LOT of talent. Is that why "everyone" hates him? Because he wins a lot, drives better than most out there, and takes no crap from ANY driver? Please try to give me an intelligent reason to hate the guy.

Chris
Via comcast.net

As a very loyal fan of GI, I am thinking of canceling my subscription due to the magazine's bias in the August 2003 issue. Bias against who or what, you ask? JEFF GORDON is who. You not only insulted him by calling him an "SOB," but also your headline says "EAT IT, GORDON." That was very degrading to a man of his abilities and achievements. Are you all Dale Jr., Rusty Wallace, and Mark Martin fans? Mr. Gordon is the youngest-ever Winston Cup Champion. He is third to only Dale Sr. and king Richard Petty. So, my request of you is that you back off of Gordon!

Big Will
Via yahoo.com

We all hate Jeff Gordon? Out of the millions of NASCAR fans, I'm sure there are probably five or six of us that are fans of four-time Winston cup champion Jeff Gordon. You know, we "24" fans are used to this kind of discrimination; but normally it comes from a testosterone-challenged, red-neck, beer-swilling, has-to-sneak-up-on-a-mirror-to-get-a-look-at-himself, fifth grade educated good ol' boy. So now I suppose we can add the keyboard-clicking, toggle-switch-fiddling, computer geek that wouldn't know a sprint car from a stock car to the ranks of the prejudiced. I see how it is. Well, I have two things to say: One, if you see the number 24 car getting smaller, it's because he's already at the finish line; and two, bite my ass (and I use the "my" for the collective five or six Jeff Gordon fans around the world).

Laura A. Ridge
Via email

■ Gordon fans have truly united over this cause – and most did it through graphic depictions too vile and profane to print in even this mag. Sadly, the point of our missive was that the rivalries (as Big Will so eloquently demonstrated) are going to be present in the upcoming release. All you NASCAR diehards go out and buy the game – then you defend his honor as much as you like in the digital realm. Besides, Kato just writes negative stuff about Jeff Gordon because Andy is a fan. [and I think he is just tired of losing to ol' 24 all the time – ed.]

FESTIVE

■ We appreciate the creative and festive use of label makers – a woefully under-appreciated office supply. In addition, although a little shocked, the male members of the staff are... flattered by your admitted attraction. Strange that people are starting to get some action for an activity that most of us suffered taunts and ridicule and mockery and thrown food and swirlies and wedgies and there was that one really bad time that... We're sorry, it's just too painful to talk about. But we're really glad that guys who can tell the difference between an Intellivision and a GameCube rock your boat.

KOTOR CONUNDRUM >>>

The review of Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic was way too kind. As a role-playing game, KOTOR is mediocre, and in no way did it deserve a 9.5. The menus and equipment screens are ridiculously inconvenient, and I found the battle mode to be a confusing and complicated endurance exercise. As a Star Wars game, it really sucks. The plot and characters are so sickeningly unoriginal and cheesy I think I could have written it better. You're a guy who runs around with a wookiee (who has a life debt to you), an astromech droid, a protocol droid (who comes from Tatooine by the way) and a bunch of other boring carbon copy characters we've already seen countless times before. They even have a Yoda creature on the Jedi council! What's up with that? I thought George Lucas already wrote this story. You should review these titles from more of a "gamer" standpoint.

Jon Klippstein
Ft Wayne Indiana

I just want to tell you how much I appreciate you guys. I take all of your reviews to heart when deciding what to buy. For the first time since Grand Theft Auto, I have found a game to spend not hours or a few days on, but literally weeks, and it's all thanks to you. Honestly, I'm not a *Star Wars* fan at all and would have never even dreamed of picking up one of those (in most cases) extremely lame games, but your review of Knights of the Old Republic caught my eye. I went out and bought it that day, and haven't stopped playing it since. My copy of GTA is collecting dust because of this game. Wonderful story, great battle system, and you can do almost anything you want. I've beaten it twice and yet I'm still playing it! So thank you so much. If it weren't for that review, I'd still be killing NPC's endlessly with uzis and rocket launchers instead of lightsabers and Force powers.

Robi3rd
Via email

■ While Jon was the lone dissenter with regard to KOTOR, we were very nearly not able to put out issue 125 because most of the office suddenly had "family emergencies" after the game came out. It was really weird, because all the catastrophes involved a great aunt named Bastila and a cousin that insisted on referring to elders as "meatbags." Small world, isn't it?

SUMMER ACTIVITIES >>>

Adam is gone to marching band camp for the next two weeks. Please do not email until after the 25th. I am taking care of the email for him while he is gone.

Thanks,
His Mom

■ Did everyone in the free world get this message? None of us have cool stories that start with, "One time, at band camp..." but our new favorite reader, Adam, will surely have a yarn or two to spin after the 25th. Go Adam!

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

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"OLDER" GAMERS HAVE LIVES >>>

At a robust 24 years of age, I consider myself way beyond my video game-playing prime. While my spending for video games is way up (I have a career now), long gone are the days of locking myself in a room with some friends and some coffee to try and beat Final Fantasy 1 in a weekend or Mario Brothers 3 in a day. I would keep games for years (I was still playing Double Dribble as my primary basketball title until 1992). At one time, I knew every move and combo in Street Fighter II for every character, now I can barely master Mitsurugi. These days, my gaming sessions are much shorter, 1 1/2 hours at the most – and my attention span is not there. Rarely do I see games through to the end and I sometimes sell games on eBay after I am stumped for 15 minutes. I guess I miss the days when flying Wing Commander or X-Wing Missions morning to night was fun for me.

I wish I could attribute it to my being more mature person with more important things to do, but I'd be lying. In college my gaming took a dramatic upturn, with Rogue Spear and StarCraft, and Quake tourneys on the LAN. But since graduation, I don't even have the patience to get all my licenses for GT3. I cannot explain it.

When I do buy games today, they have to be simple or short games. Most purchases of mine are sports and racing titles that can be put down in a couple minutes. I only buy action or hack n' slash types if I can get the strategy guide to accompany them. I no longer have time for games with puzzle solving – I have a checkbook for that.

I was just wondering if you experts had any opinions about age, attention span, and gaming.

Brian M.
Nostalgic Gamer

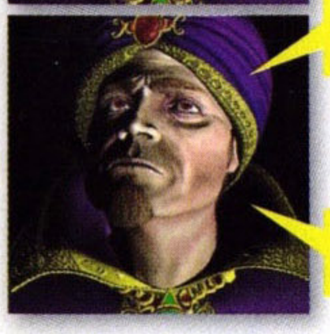
▪ Not being comfortable calling ourselves "experts" on any subject, we decided to contact someone who had actually pursued a post-secondary education in the question at hand. No reputable sources would return our calls, so we harvested all the quarters that could be separated from the fuzzy Skittles under our car seats and had a long talk with Zoltan, the Fortune Telling arcade machine. Here are is the short form of our interview:

US: Can adults still play video games?

ZOLTAN: With Mars in retrograde? Surely you jest.

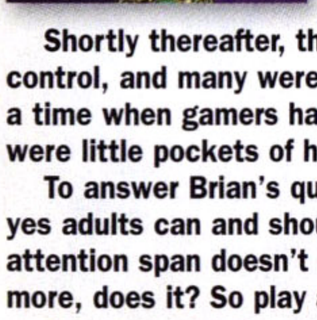
US: Okay, let's reword the question. Are older humans capable of playing games for long periods of time?

ZOLTAN: Some day your prince/princess will come, but not now.



US: Can you answer us seriously one of these times? We're running out of change.

ZOLTAN: The odds gods favor it about 70-30.



US: Well, for crap's sake. What do you think about age, attention span, and gaming?

ZOLTAN: We Higher Beings find little reason to expect this.

Shortly thereafter, the conversation spiraled out of control, and many were left with tearful remembrances of a time when gamers had no spare quarters and arcades were little pockets of heaven livening up the suburbs.

To answer Brian's question (since Zoltan was no help), yes adults can and should play games. Your shortened attention span doesn't mean that games aren't fun anymore, does it? So play and be happy.

ENVELOPE ART

LeVar Williams
"Hulk not on steroids!" "Yeah right, bub."

Carlos A. Salinas
Worst case of flaming hemorrhoids ever!!!

OCTOBER WINNER!

Jas Carpenter
She comes when you call her. What a woman!

Bolivar Pincay
The sign behind the turtles doesn't say Game Informer. It's actually Green Hummer. What the hell does that mean?

Chijuyo
"I told you...Enough with the projectile armpit juice! Put down your arm or your friend gets it!"

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

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GI NEWS

MICROSOFT GETS HIGH HEAT IN 3DO FIRE SALE

In an auction of its game assets, bankrupt publisher **3DO** sold off a number of its intellectual properties, leaving giant **Microsoft** with the rights to the valuable ***High Heat*** baseball franchise. Meanwhile, **Crave** picked up the ***Army Men*** series, and **Ubi Soft** got hold of the ***Might and Magic*** and ***Heroes of Might and Magic*** brands. 3DO CEO and ex-**Electronic Arts** founder **Trip Hawkins** was able to retain a few games (such as ***Jonny Moseley Mad Trix***) and 3DO's Internet patent. However, the fate of the company's most-promising unreleased asset, ***The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse***, is unknown.

According to Reuters, 3DO picked up only $4.6 million in the auction, and Microsoft may be paying more in the future. The **Xbox** creator's rights only extend to the *High Heat* engine, and do not encompass any MLB league or player association rights. Apparently, even if Microsoft adopted the *High Heat* moniker or applied its engine to the company's already-existing ***Inside Pitch*** franchise, new licenses would be needed.

NEW PUBLISHERS FOR EX-3DO PROPERTIES

- **Microsoft** – *High Heat Baseball* ($450,000)
- **Crave** – *Army Men* ($750,000)
- **Ubi Soft** – *Heroes of Might and Magic, Might and Magic* ($1.3 million)
- **Namco** – *Street Racing Syndicate* ($1.5 million)
- **JoWood** – *Jacked* ($90,000)

Street Racing Syndicate

High Heat Baseball 2004

Jacked

ATI TO DO XBOX 2

In a coup against rival chipmaker **Nvidia**, **ATI** scored the contract to manufacture the graphics processor for the next iteration of **Microsoft's Xbox**. The agreement will be based on a royalty system, with ATI receiving both funds for development and additional payments when shipments begin.

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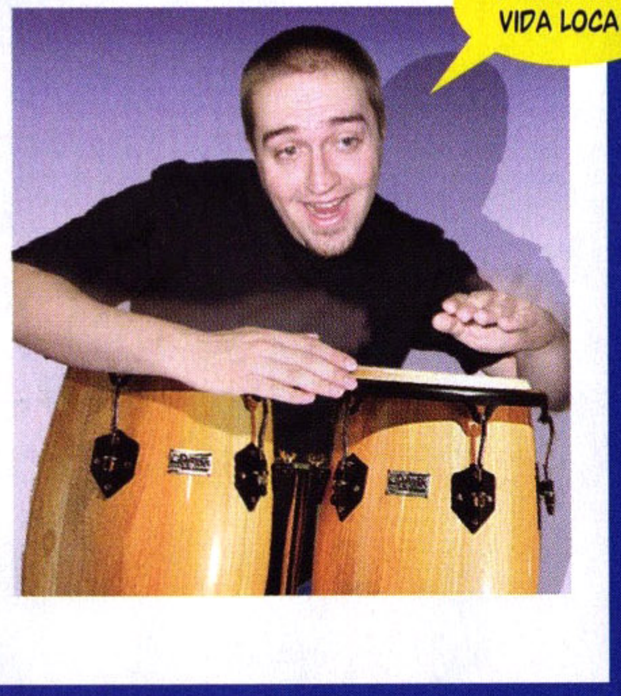
In recent years, ATI has become a major force in chip manufacturing. It makes the processor for **Nintendo's GameCube**, and is currently under contract with the company to produce future components for the hardware maker. Whether this means a new GameCube or other products is not known. According to ATI, its partnership with Nintendo will not be affected by the deal with Microsoft.

Nvidia made the chips for the first Xbox, but the relationship between the two companies turned rocky after an arbitration dispute over the cost of the components. Until ATI's announcement, it appeared that the pair would work together again on Xbox 2 after the matter was settled.

NINTENDO TO RELEASE...SOMETHING

True to its nature of keeping gamers in the dark, but intrigued, **Nintendo** president **Satoru Iwata** declared that the company was developing a "new product" which it promised to unveil in the spring of next year.

"We are preparing a new product which will be surprising and unique," he said at a news conference. It appears that this mysterious new item from Nintendo would be hardware-related and not a game. When asked about whether this move was in response to **Sony's** 2004 **PlayStation Portable**, Iwata replied, "Basically, Sony's multi-function handheld device will not have a big impact on our business, but we are – whether Sony releases a new product or not – preparing for our future and we'll be able to tell you specifics next spring."

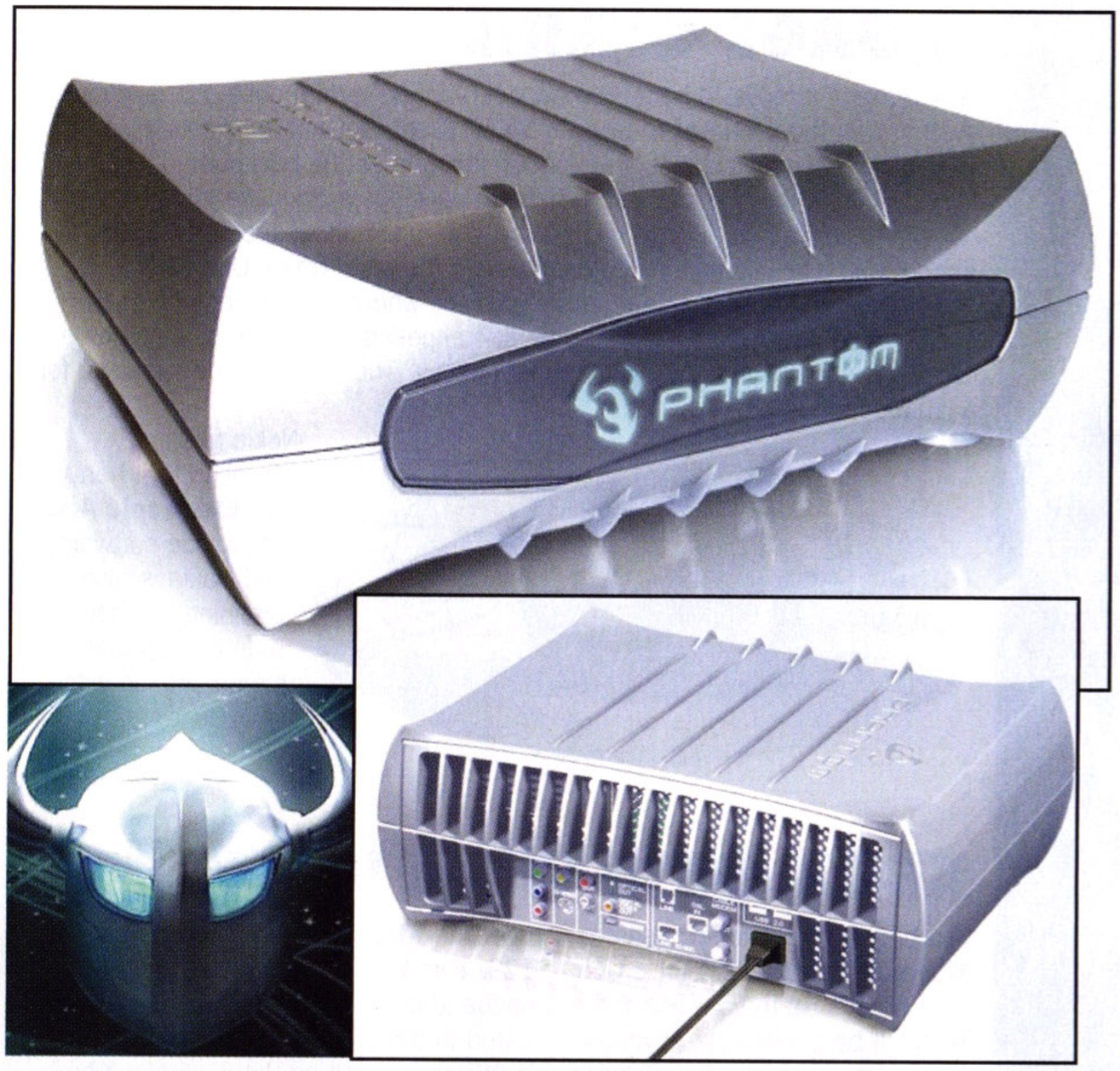


Crazy editor's rendition of Donkey Konga

One thing that the company is disclosing information on is the new ***Donkey Kong*** game to be developed with **Namco**. Called ***Donkey Konga***, the spring 2004 (in Japan) **GameCube** title will be a music rhythm game that utilizes a special conga drum controller, similar to Namco's ***Taiko Master*** in Japan. Details on pricing and packaging for the unit have not been announced.

Starting October 13, Nintendo is offering a bundle for those who buy either the Indigo or Glacier colored **Game Boy Advance** units. For a limited time, customers that pick up the new GBA colors will receive an **e-Reader** with the ***Donkey Kong Jr. e-game*** and a sample pack of cards.

Finally, in other Nintendo news, the company will start an awards program similar to airlines' frequent flier mileage plans. Dubbed **Club Nintendo**, gamers will earn points for every Nintendo title bought, which will be redeemable for limited edition prizes.



PHANTOM DELIVERS SPECS

Infinium Labs has finally supplied some technical specs for its **Phantom** system. The broadband console doesn't utilize software, but instead plans to deliver its content via downloads of cross-console games, including **PC** titles. As of the time of this writing, no major publishers have been announced to support the Phantom. The system's delivery method also supports game demo downloads and rentals.

The Phantom is only available online. You can pre-order the console starting in October at phantom.net.

STANDARD COMPONENTS

- Custom OS on Windows XPe kernel
- Up to a 3.0GHz processor with 256 MB DDR RAM
- Nvidia video card
- Intel motherboard
- Dolby Digital 7.1 surround sound
- 100GB+ internal storage
- Onboard RF wireless modules
- S-video, RCA, component video, and PAL support
- 10/100 BaseT Ethernet
- Wireless controller
- Wireless keyboard and mouse
- 2 USB ports
- 4 controller ports

OPTIONAL COMPONENTS

- Controllers, wireless and corded
- Keyboard and mouse with charging base station
- Hard drive expansion for additional game storage
- DSL modem
- Cable modem
- Wireless Wi-Fi card
- Memory upgrades
- Speaker sets
- Flat-screen displays

THE RETURN OF THE GOLDEN BOOT

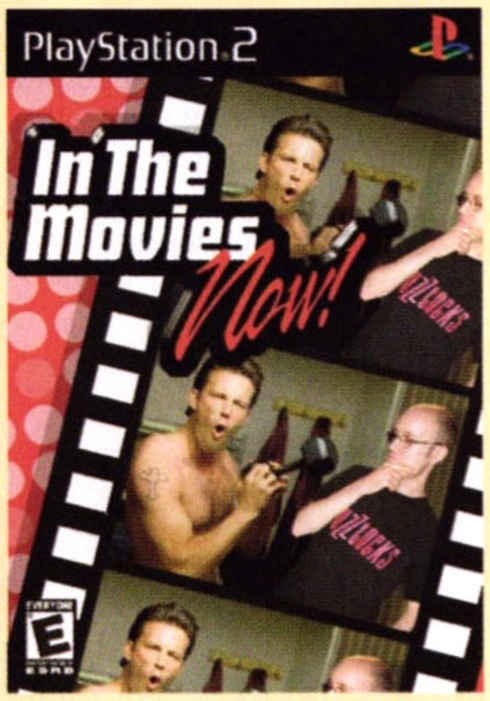
Konami returns with the best-selling soccer franchise ***Winning Eleven 7*** in March 2004 for the **PlayStation 2**, and we're happy to present these exclusive screens from the game. Last year was the first time the series came to America after capturing the footie-mad imagination of the rest of the world, and it promptly kicked **EA Sports' *FIFA*** into the stands. Not to rest on its laurels, Konami is back with the best boot on the virtual pitch.

Winning Eleven 7 features an all-new engine, which will allow for more detailed and true-to-life graphics and faces. The Master League has been blown out with more features and options, and new to this year is a shop where you can earn and trade teams, stadiums, crowd effects, players, and more.

R&D

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

IN THE MOVIES NOW!



Ever dream about being a well-respected movie star? The brilliant people at Game Informer have concocted an idea that allows everyone to become a Hollywood legend. In the Movies Now makes use of a digital camera much like Sony's new EyeToy. By standing in front of the camera and playing a DVD at the same time, your image will be superimposed over the film. Pictured below, we've used this technology to insert Matt into his favorite scene from his favorite film, *Gigli*. Of course, you'll be able to save clips onto a hard drive peripheral, which is capable of storing up to 10 full-length movies. You can even record new dialogue. If you spend enough time with this device and line up the shots perfectly, you'll be seamlessly integrated into your film of choice. Imagine the possibilities! You could completely replace Jar Jar Binks from *Episode I* and, if you're truly talented, make it look like you're getting down and dirty with everyone from *Charlie's Angels*...including Bill Murray!

NAME THAT GAME

In 1982, Harvard-educated Trip Hawkins left Apple to form his own company. Attracting programmers with a designers-first attitude that was in contrast to Atari's shabby treatment of its developers at the time, Electronic Arts was born. In 1983 – it's first year – the company found immediate success with its releases on the Apple II and Atari 800. This month's title was liked because of its easy-to-learn-but-hard-to-master approach set on a construction site.

(Answer on page 32)

TOP 10 UNBOUGHT AUCTION ITEMS FROM THE CLASSIC GAMING EXPO

10 The Bosom Buddies: Drag-ster Atari 2600 cart featuring cross-dressing drag racing

9 A foam middle finger to promote Bill Laimbeer's Combat Basketball on the SNES

8 Make My Video: The Jets Sega CD FMV "game"

7 A pair of Nolan Bushnell underoos

6 A copy of Aquanaut's Holiday going for a penny

5 The complete Luke Ski discography (and a barf bag thrown in for free)

4 Atari vaporware. Wonder why nobody bought it?

3 The original pizza from which Toru Iwatani got the idea for Pac-Man. After 20 years, it's still edible!

2 One deed to a certain plot of land in the Nevada desert (the auctioneer let slip that it contained the buried E.T. carts). Maybe next year

1 The first issue of Game Informer!

DEVELOPER TOP 5

CLAYTON KAUZLARIC
Creative Director, Voodoo Vince

1 Animal Crossing – GC

2 The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time – N64

3 Final Fantasy VII – PSone

4 Conker's Bad Fur Day – N64

5 Battlefield 1942 – PC

READER TOP 5

NICK
Nowheresville, USA

1 The Legend of Zelda – NES

2 Super Mario All-Stars – SNES

3 Harvest Moon 64 – N64

4 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project – NES

5 Mega Man 5 – NES

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

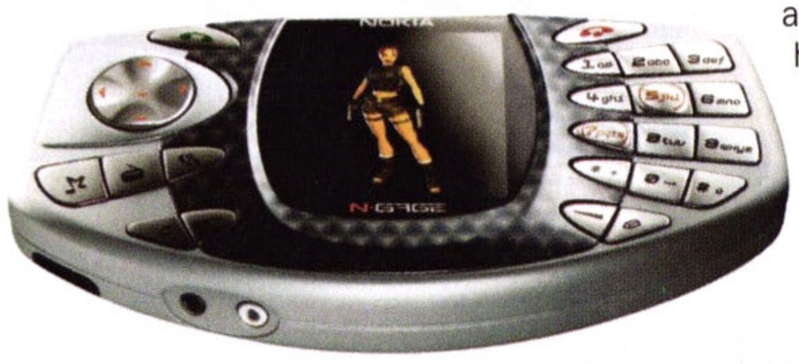
Game Informer Magazine
Attn: Top Five
724 North First St., 4th Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

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

N-GAGE ONLINE

Nokia made a move to boost the appeal of its **N-Gage** mobile phone/gaming system with the licensing of **Sega's SNAP** (Sega Network Application Package), a server technology which will function as the backbone of the Nokia's game network and lend a hand to developers of online titles for the handheld. Nokia has dubbed the system's virtual gaming space the **N-Gage Arena**, and it will launch in conjunction with the platform on October 7.

The N-Gage Arena will be a gathering place where players can use such community functions as meeting others, competing worldwide, posting game clips, cheat downloads, and high score posting. The Arena will be available for a limited-time free trial period.



Nokia has just announced that heavy hitter **Electronic Arts** will provide software, and Nokia is also planning to offer a month of pre-paid phone service with the N-Gage.

XBOX GETS WI-FI WACKY

Starting in mid-October, gamers can get the **Xbox Wireless Adapter** from **Microsoft** at retailers for around $129. This Wi-Fi device allows you to hook the console up to your **PC** and a broadband connection without any cords. This will be perfect for anyone interested in transferring data from their PC for applications like the **Xbox Music Mixer**, as well as those whose **Xbox** is stranded far from their broadband connection.

"For the people that have an Xbox now," explains Microsoft broadband networking product manager Todd Greenberg, "and are thinking of **Xbox Live** and are worried that the Xbox is in a different room than their broadband is, this is a really easy solution for them. They don't have to have that 100-foot ethernet cable through their house. That was one of the top problems we saw in our focus groups."

Moreover, the device has an advantage over third-party Wi-Fi solutions in the areas of both set-up and security. The adapter comes with a disc that helps you create a dashboard on your Xbox and your PC. Best of all, installing the unit on the Xbox takes only two steps. "People were afraid to set up their network," says Greenberg. "That's why we entered this category in the first place, so it was easy for people." Furthermore, linking your Xbox and PC won't compromise the security of the network.

The Xbox Wireless Adapter also uses 802.11G wireless network standard which has a through-put of up to 54 megabytes per second. This is backwards-compatible with the 802.11A units, and it should avoid most interference from other wireless sources in your house such as cordless phones. Microsoft will offer a rebate of $40 for those that buy both the adapter and the **Xbox Live Starter Kit.**

In other Xbox Live news, as part of an additional content rollout for the online service, Microsoft is not only inaugurating the **XSN Sports Network** with the release of ***NFL Fever 2004*** (see our July issue #123 for more), but it is packing in new Live features such as **Live Aware** (let's you send challenges to other friends playing online) and **Live Now**. The latter feature is a new user-friendly interface that tells you the Live news of the day, lets you see where your friends are, and helps you manage your settings.

Xbox Live Now

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T TEEN
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Language
Violence

XBOX

Available Now

DOLBY DIGITAL

PlayStation®2

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UNREAL II BLOWS HOLE IN XBOX

This holiday, first-person shooter **Xbox** fans will find something a lot scarier than a lump of coal in their stockings – although you may find your pants filled with an unknown substance once you drop into ***Unreal II: The Awakening's*** frag-fest. **Tantalus** and **Legend Entertainment**, in conjunction with **Epic Games**, are developing the **Atari**-published title. More than just a port, this trio is making sure that the controls are fully optimized for the Xbox gamer – something that isn't always done when bringing a **PC** title to a console. Other crucial differences exist. **Xbox Live**-specific multiplayer team-based mode utilizing the different classes and skills of your group is being unveiled, as is a co-op mode allowing you and a friend to stomp through the game's single-player portion. Xbox Live downloads for Unreal II are undetermined at this time.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

GOOD – **Vicarious Visions** (responsible for the console ports of ***Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast***) is handling the **Xbox** version of ***Doom 3***. In fact, **John Carmack** himself has designed the game's engine with the system in mind.

There is also good news for **PC** *Doom 3* players. You can stop worrying about getting a new machine just to play the game. id tells us that the system requirements aren't that bad. Early estimates suggest that using a GeForce II or III with 1GHz of processing power should do you just fine. Check out our *Doom 3* feature on page 66 for more.

UGLY – It's in the game. Wait a minute, no it's not. Initial copies of ***Madden NFL 2004*** for **Xbox** contained a bug that wouldn't allow you to import your draft class from ***NCAA Football 2004***. Contact publisher **Electronic Arts** if you are one of the unlucky.

UGLY – **Capcom** has pulled the plug on a trio of games. ***Red Dead Revolver*** (**PS2**), ***Capcom All-Stars*** (**arcade**), and ***Dead Phoenix*** (**GC**) have all been cancelled. Rumors say that *Red Dead* may be picked up by **Rockstar**.

GOOD – Instead of sticking us with a game that nobody wants to play, **Microsoft** is delaying RPG ***Sudeki*** in order to optimize it for maximum funness. Is that a word?

BAD – The creator of **Kirby** and director of ***Super Smash Bros. Melee***, **Masahiro Sakurai**, has left **Nintendo** developer **HAL Laboratory**. Creative differences are said to be at the heart of the split. Mr. Sakurai is currently contemplating freelance work. For more on his work with Kirby, check out our *Classic GI* feature in the September issue (#125).

GOOD – **Sony Europe** is making a music rhythm game entitled ***EyeToy: Groove***. Using the **PS2** camera (see our review of the peripheral's first game on page 123), players can bob along to songs from the likes of **Madonna** and the **Jackson 5**.

LOOSE TALK

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

What's that sound? Whatever it is, it isn't **Trent Reznor** doing the ***Doom 3*** soundtrack. *Loose Talk* has heard that the **Nine Inch Nails** singer is no longer composing music for the project. Interestingly, ex-Nine Inch Nails member (and ***American McGee's Alice*** composer) **Chris Vrenna** will now be handling the project.

To celebrate the 15-year anniversary of **Mega Man**, **Capcom** is planning to release two anthology sets. The first will feature the first eight titles in the series, while the second encompasses the ***Mega Man X*** lineup. Both sets will include extras such as ***Mega Man Chess*** (never before released in the States) and ***Mega Man Soccer***.

In a talk to shareholders, **Electronic Arts** CEO Larry Probst, said that the company is not ruling out acquiring another video game publisher. On the topic, Probst said that with $1.6 billion in the bank, EA was "not averse to that."

Sony is contemplating putting online functionality in the **PlayStation Portable**. The unit should release by the end of next year.

Square is creating a remake of the Japanese SNES classic ***Front Mission*** (which was never released in the States) for the **PSone**. Dubbed ***Front Mission 1st***, the game will also give you an additional mission if you play as the USN. This isn't all that Square has in store for us, however. *Loose Talk* has heard that this is just the start for the publisher's retro assault. ***Secret of Mana 2*** (which also never came out in the U.S.) is being discussed as another blast from the past for the PSone. The possibility also exists for an all-new *Front Mission* to appear on the **PlayStation 2**.

For those not rich enough the first time around, **Capcom** is planning a smaller, cheaper version of the ***Steel Battalion*** joystick for the **Xbox**. This mammoth controller is a must-have now that there's no excuses not to get it.

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September 2003

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Violence

Brave souls,come forth!

Romance of The Three Kingdoms VIII

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence

Bitter Enemies, allied schemes, and War Council directives intertwine in a rich tapestry of intrigue!

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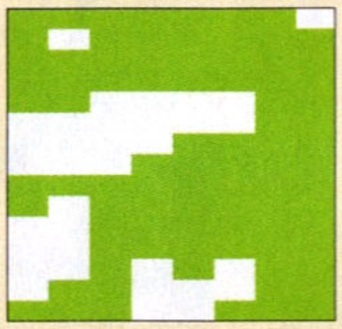
www.koei.co.jp/html/joboffer をご覧ください。

VIDEO GAME **TRIVIA**

Video game crossovers are becoming exceedingly popular. Capcom integrated Mega Man and S.T.A.R.S members into its fighting games. Battletoads and the Double Dragon guys joined forces on the NES. The Nintendo crew seems to get together to golf, race, or play tennis on an annual basis. Now, it's your turn to make two great tastes go great together. Which refreshing video game combination will you create? Take this month's trivia to find out!

Question 1: Who is this blocky character. Here's a hint: He appeared in a well-known Atari 2600 game.

A. The Burgertime Pickle
B. The boss in the early FPS, Crypts of Chaos
C. E.T.
D. The miner from Miner 2049er



Question 2: Last month, we reviewed a great strategy/RPG game for PS2 called Disgaea. Its developer, Nippon Ichi Software, developed another Atlus-published game. Which one was it?

A. Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure
B. Hoshigami: Ruining Blue Earth
C. Peak Performance
D. Dual Hearts

Question 3: Software Toolworks released a game for the NES designed to teach people how to play piano. It was a pricey package that included a full-size MIDI keyboard. What was it called?

A. Play Piano With Mario
B. 88 Keys With Ease
C. How To Play Keyboards
D. The Miracle Piano Teaching System

Question 4: Which handheld video game system had a model with the option to flip the screen upside down to better accommodate left-handed players?

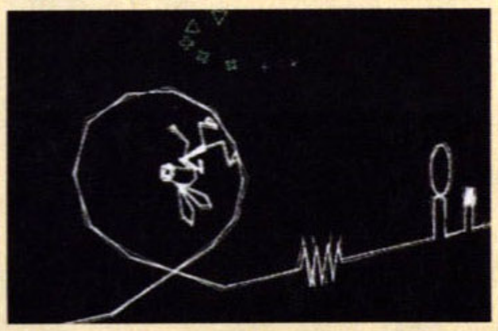
A. Turbo Express
B. Atari Lynx
C. Game.Com
D. GP32 Game System

Question 5: True or False: There are multiple areas in Super Mario 64 where Mario can lose his hat.

A. True
B. False

Question 6: Monster Rancher, which got its start on the PSone, took data from CDs and turned them into monsters you could raise. Around the same time, a game made levels based on the audio tracks of CDs, which were then traversed by a bunny/rat-like creature. What is this Japan-only game's name?

A. Rabbit Ear Antenna
B. Music Wire Beat Machine
C. Boogie Oogie
D. Vib Ribbon

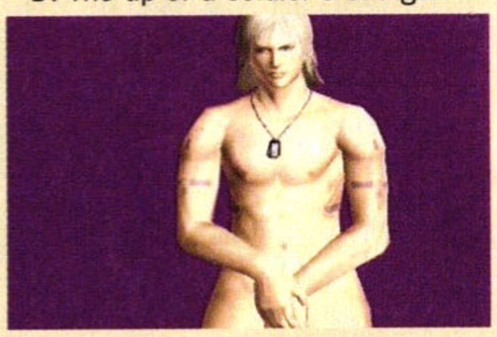


Question 7: Street Fighter II's sumo star, Edmund Honda, is one husky lad. What is this ton o' fun's listed weight in the SNES version?

A. 304 pounds
B. 403 pounds
C. 501 pounds
D. 6,400 fluid ounces

Question 8: In Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty, young Raiden gets captured and put into a torture device not unlike what Snake endured in the first MGS. It also results in him being naked. During his escape, he can get back on the device. When he does, what is the only thing keeping his unmentionables out of view?

A. A joystick from the instrument panel
B. A straw sticking out of a can of soda
C. A well-placed walkie talkie
D. The tip of a soldier's shotgun



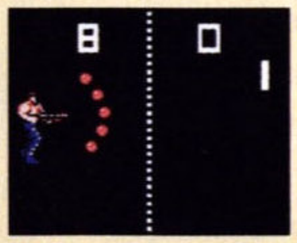
Question 9: Terry Pratchett's international best-selling sci-fi series, *Discworld*, was made into a game for PSone. Psygnosis published the graphic adventure, which used a point-and-click interface to maneuver bumbling wizard Rincewind around Ankh Morpork – Discworld's biggest city. Who provided Rincewind's voice?

A. Christopher Lambert
B. Eric Idle
C. John Leguizamo
D. Mark Hamill

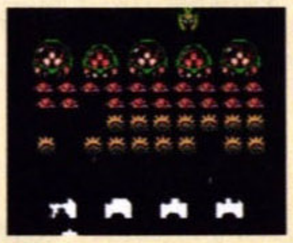
Question 10: The PSone fighting game, Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi, is pretty lame – even for the most ardent Star Wars supporters. At least it featured a few hidden characters. Which of the following was NOT one of them?

A. Wickett the Ewok
B. Darth Vader
C. Sexy slave outfit Leia
D. Imperial Stormtrooper

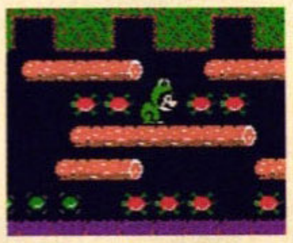
Score & Rank



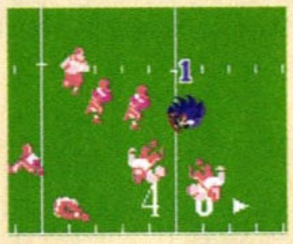
0-2 Pongtra



3-5 Metroid Invaders



6-7 Froggio Bros.



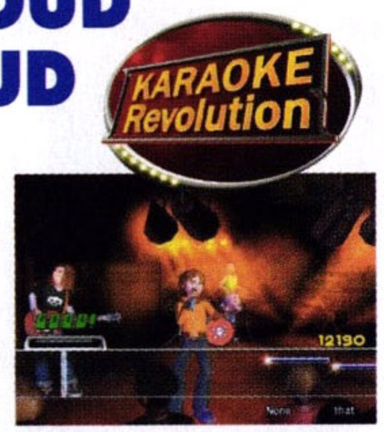
8-9 Tecmo Sonic Bowl

10 Hyrule Wrestling

Video Game Trivia Answers:

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

SING IT LOUD AND PROUD



Afraid of making an ass of yourself in public by prancing and singing karaoke to "Like a Virgin"? Now you can do so in the comfort of your own home courtesy of **Konami's** newest musical number, ***Karaoke Revolution*** for the **PlayStation 2**.

The game has just released its song list, and with over 35 hits (some listed below) in one hand and a Sony USB voice recognition headset in the other, you can hit the high notes until your ears bleed. For those of you who didn't join the Vienna Boys Choir, an on-the-fly octave regulator lets you sing any song in the range of your choice. By the way, Reiner wanted us to tell you that he'll be at Jimmy's Steak & Ale every Tuesday for anyone who wants to witness his strip-tease version of Cher's "Believe."

Konami representatives have told us that the company plans to see a version of the game without the mic for around $40, while a bundle pack will also be available for about $60. Prices, however, are not final.

PARTIAL SONG LIST FOR KARAOKE REVOLUTION

Michelle Branch
"All You Wanted"
Cher
"Believe"
Hoobastank
"Crawling in the Dark"
Michael Jackson
"Billie Jean"
Norah Jones
"Don't Know Why"
Kool and the Gang
"Celebration"
Avril Lavigne
"Complicated"
Cyndi Lauper
"Girls Just Want to Have Fun"
Huey Lewis and the News
"Power of Love"
Jennifer Lopez
"Waiting for Tonight"
Madonna
"Like a Virgin"
Mr. Mister
"Broken Wings"
Nickleback
"How You Remind Me"
R.E.M.
"It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)"
Sugar Ray
"Every Morning"
UB40
"Red Red Wine"
Van Halen
"You Really Got Me"

BREAK**DOWN**

4% of sports gamers make purchasing decisions based a game's cover athlete, according to a study

100% of the editors reaffirmed their love for Arthur, our mascot dog, at a recent company outing

18.3% The amount by which the Japanese video game market shrunk from last year, according to estimates

0% of the time editor Jeremy Zoss responds to being called "The Zossauge"

100% of the world is digging the new look of Game Informer online

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Mild Violence

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

Sick Puppies

EMPIRE

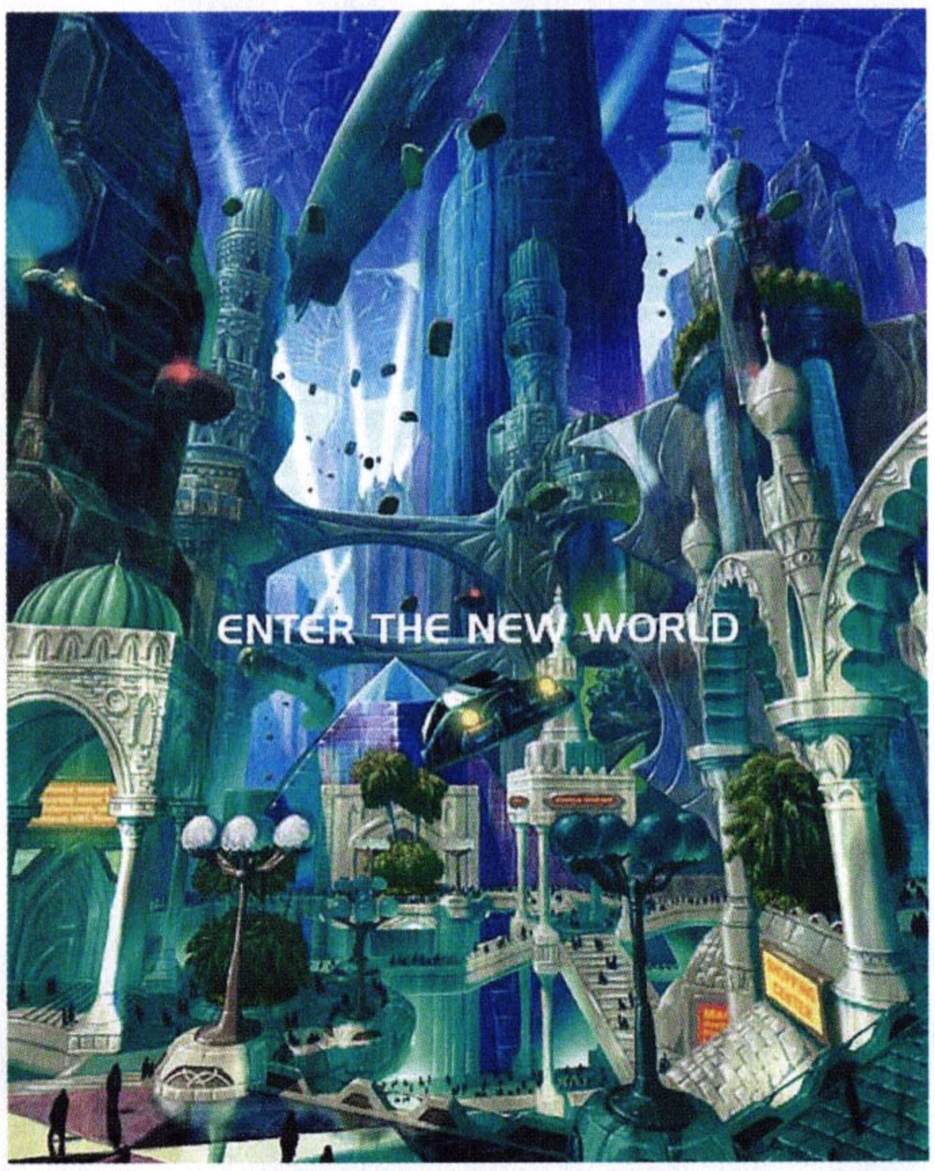
Ghost Master®

Exercise Your Demons

GI NEWS

LEVEL 5'S RPG MYSTERY

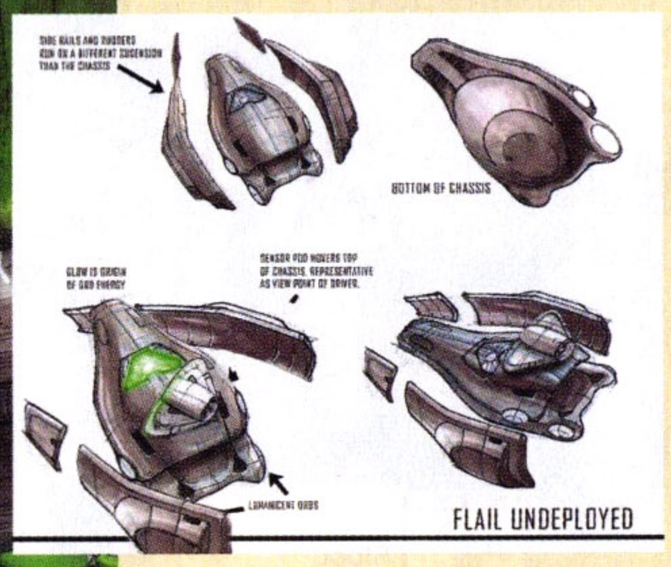
Japanese developer **Level 5** is burning the midnight oil and then some. The company is currently working on **Square Enix's *Dragon Quest VIII*** for the **PlayStation 2** (for more on this title, turn to page 86 for our preview), ***True Fantasy Live Online*** for the **Xbox**, and a new unnamed RPG project which has just popped up on the company's website. Level 5 is mum regarding details at the moment, but we do know that the game sports a very impressive futuristic look and a large scale that screams "epic." The game is already registered under publisher **Sony**, which puts out the developer's ***Dark Cloud*** series. Is this the next iteration in the franchise or something completely different?



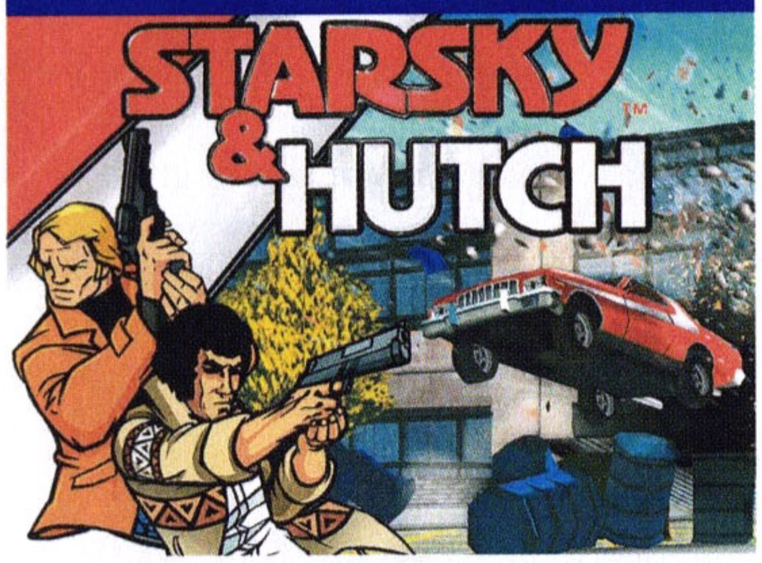
PLANETSIDE EXPANSION HITS

Sony Online is already augmenting the first massively multiplayer online first-person shooter with an expansion pack that will be available for purchase in stores or download. ***PlanetSide: Core Combat*** will be available for the **PC** starting in October.

Core Combat will feature six new cavern war zones, all sorts of additional vehicles and weapons, and ancient technology that can be used by all the empires to upgrade level facilities. Even if you don't sign on for *Core Combat* duty, many patches have been planned to implement improvements in the existing game. These include overhauls for the physics system, the capacity for 30-man platoons, and much more.



CONTEST



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Have you ever dreamt of sliding your polyester-clad buttocks behind the wheel of a 1976 Ford Gran Torino just like Starsky & Hutch used to in the TV show? Here is your one and only chance to make that dream come true. Gotham games is giving away a custom-built replica of a Gran Torino to celebrate its Starsky & Hutch PlayStation 2 and Xbox games. Yes, it runs and everything. Better than that you'll even find that it has a few surprises in store for the winner. Enter, win, and find out.

Grand Prize (1)

A custom coach built, mint condition replica of the 1976 Ford Gran Torino driven by Starsky & Hutch. The car comes equipped with a custom-built CD stereo system, and one front seat 7-inch and two 10-inch back seat TV screens ready and waiting for gaming systems. Retail value of the car is $22,500.

There is One Way To Enter:

To enter and see complete contest rules, go to **www.gothamgames.com/contests/starsky/**

You must be 18, have a valid driver's license, and live in the continental U.S. to enter

Drawing will be conducted on October 31, 2003

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CONTEST RULES

1. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. To enter and see the complete contest rules, go to www.gothamgames.com/contests/starsky/. Entries must be received by October 31, 2003. One entry per person. Duplicated entries will be disqualified. Gotham Games (the "Sponsor") is not responsible for lost, late, mutilated, illegible, incomplete or misdirected entries. Gotham Games is solely responsibility for prize fulfillment. 2. PRIZES: 1 (one) grand prize winner will receive a custom-built, replica 1976 Ford Gran Torino with a custom build CD stereo system, and one front seat 7-inch and two 10-inch back seat TV screens. (approximate retail value $22,500). Sponsor reserves the right to substitute prize of equal or greater value if prize is unavailable. Prizes are non-transferable and no substitutions allowed. 3. WINNER(S): Winners will be determined by random drawings of all valid entries received by the Sponsor, whose decisions are final. Drawing will be held on or about October 31, 2003. Winners shall be notified by email and/or telephone. Please allow six to eight weeks for delivery of prizes. 4. ODDS OF WINNING: The odds of winning depend on number of valid entries received. 5. ELIGIBILITY: Promotion open to residents of United States only. Return of any prize/prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Winner may be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within 14 days of receipt or forfeit prize. If the winner is a minor, then prize may be awarded to winner's parent or legal guardian. By acceptance of prize, winners agree to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Employees of the Sponsor, Game Informer Magazine, and their parent and affiliated companies and their families are not eligible. Neither the Sponsor nor its affiliates, subsidiaries, division or related companies are responsible for any damages, taxes, or expenses that winners might incur as a result of this sweepstakes or receipt of prize. 6. RESTRICTIONS: Void where prohibited or restricted by law.

DATA FILE

➤ **Microsoft** has announced a second wave of **Xbox Platinum Hits** $20 titles. These include ***Blinx: The Time Sweeper***, ***Dead or Alive 3***, ***Dead to Rights***, ***Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4***, ***Unreal Championship***, ***Hitman 2***, ***Medal of Honor: Frontline***, and ***The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind***.

➤ **Vivendi Universal** has cancelled both the **GameCube** and **PC** version of ***Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter***. We blame **Henry Rollins**. Really, we do.

➤ Development on the fourth ***Wild Arms*** has begun, according to publisher/developer **Sony Computer Entertainment**. ***Wild Arms Alter Code: F*** for the **PlayStation 2** has yet to get a release date.

➤ **Sony Online** is working on a proprietary matchmaking service for ***Lords of EverQuest*** and ***Champions of Norrath***. The company has also commissioned two future titles from **SolWorks** and **Lodestone Games**.

➤ Also taking the low road to nowhere is ***Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels*** from **LucasArts**. The game was a follow-up to the **PC** adventure game by **Tim Schafer** in 1996.

➤ Calling all coffins! **Red Entertainment** and **Sega** are bringing ***Gungrave O.D.*** to the **PlayStation 2** this winter in Japan. The game's Spawn-inspired destruction and Beat combos will be more prevalent than ever.

➤ **Midway** is bringing the **Justice League** to next-generation consoles next year. In on the superhero fun are **Superman**, **The Flash**, **Wonder Woman**, **Green Lantern**, **Batman**, and other **DC Comics** stalwarts.

➤ The **PlayStation 2** is coming with pack-in software. If you purchase the Combo Pack with the **Network Adaptor** for $199, you'll receive a free copy of ***ATV Offroad Fury 2***.

➤ Former **Nintendo** developer **Rare** and **THQ** are hooking up to keep the love flowing to the **Game Boy Advance**. THQ will publisher ***Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge***, ***SabreWulf***, ***Banjo-Pilot***, and ***It's Mr. Pants***.

Name That Game Answer:

Hard Hat Mack

YO, J.R.

YOUR SKILLS NEED WORK.

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

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 12TH.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

XBOX LIVE

PlayStation 2

2K4 SEGA

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HEY SAPP

YOU'RE SOFT

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E

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

XBOX

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PLAYERS INC

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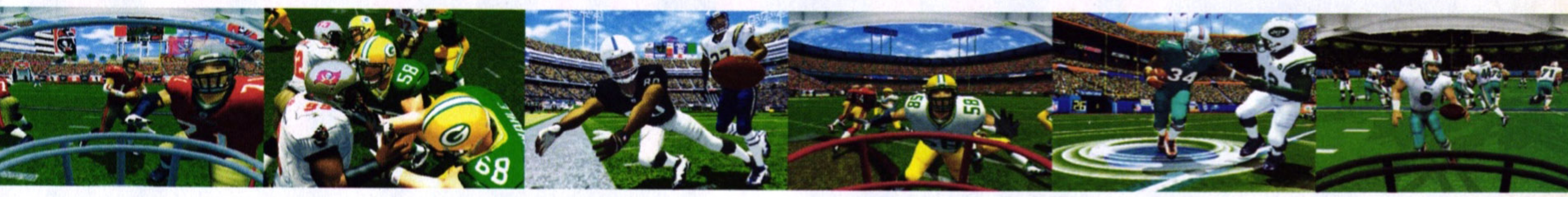

In the First Person Football™ mode, I'm on the field, staring you down. I can see you coming. You got nothing. No matter what the play, I own you. C'mon, Warren, line up. It's you and me. Let's do this.

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 4TH.

ONLINE™ BROADBAND AND DIAL-UP

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Seriously, I can take you. With the IsoMotion feature, I can clear the court and take you one-on-one. My crossover will leave you flat. My defense will leave you helpless. You can't stop me. I'm ballin' 24/7, crushing legends better than you. Let's go, Answer, step up.

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 16TH.

ONLINE
BROADBAND AND DIAL-UP

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"We'd heard this story that George Lucas goes around stamping concepts with 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable.' So, my friend got me a Chinese stamp [with those characters on it] and I started stamping stuff. I ran out of red ink." Looking at the sketches that would become Jade Empire, art director Matthew Goldman's red insignia of failure is all over the place. The team behind the game can laugh about it now, knowing that such starts and stops are par for the course towards perfection at BioWare.

There is no better example of the lengths the company will go to hone its craft than the new Xbox RPG it is working on, called Jade Empire, to be published by Microsoft. "New" isn't really an appropriate word for the project. The game originally started production way back in 1998, when the original Baldur's Gate was still in development. Dubbed Five Fingers of Death, the prototype was running on the isometric Infinity engine being used in Baldur's. "It was considerably campy," says Jim Bishop, project director and producer for Jade Empire. That wasn't an encouraging comment, and it was taken to heart. Instead of plowing ahead with the project regardless, the game was thankfully shelved so that it could be fully realized another day.

However, this wasn't just a flippant proposal scrawled onto some wet bar napkin and forgotten in the wastebasket of time. This was a plan. Eventually, the ideas behind Jade Empire would consume the energy of the entire company. While the final results won't be coming until the end of next year, the team will likely go through however many revisions it takes to get Jade exactly the way it wants it to be – even if that means enduring endless script rewrites, interface overhauls, and release delays. Regardless of the toil that will be involved; Goldman, Bishop, and everyone else in the developer's two-story office in Edmonton, Canada surely wouldn't have it any other way.

■ **FORMAT** XBOX ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** BIOWARE
■ **RELEASE** LATE 2004

INSIDE THE DYNASTY THAT BIOWARE BUILT

JADE EMPIRE

"This is a game that we've wanted to make for years and years and years."

TALES FROM LONG AGO

Ask any PC gamer, and they will be more than familiar with BioWare's Baldur's Gate or Neverwinter Nights series. Xbox fans are fast becoming acquainted with Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (KOTOR), and the console is benefiting from the fact that it has its first system seller since Halo. Given this history (which even includes MDK 2 for the Dreamcast), most companies would relish the chance to be able to rest on the laurels of such franchises. As proud of its past works as the developer is, they are parts in a larger plan. Ever conscious of pushing forward, BioWare believes that, because Jade is its second shot at developing for the Xbox, the experience and resources that it has marshalled through KOTOR and its other releases should be formidable enough to eclipse the past. Not only that, but it should push the boundaries of the RPG market itself into new areas that gamers will crave. Nobody is more sure of this than doctors Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka, two men who not only share the titles of CEO and executive producer at BioWare, but the singular commitment towards nothing but the best.

"We hate to compromise. It's like driving a knife into our heart and twisting it." As dramatic as that sounds, Zeschuk describes one of BioWare's beliefs very matter of factly. This is appropriate, as these steadfast principals have served the company well. Despite rolling around in idea form for years, Jade Empire was always a distant plan by design. Even with its success with such licensed properties as Dungeons & Dragons, the developer wanted to wait until it felt it was ready to use its own original ideas. Zeschuk explains, "Part of [being ready for Jade] is development, but part of it is also just being ready as a company. A lot of people will try to tackle a new IP [intellectual property] before they are ready, and they'll make something that's okay, but really, there's no value in just doing an okay job."

"It's gotta be a blockbuster," interjects Muzyka.

"We've been doing this almost 10 years now," Zeschuk continues, "and it took us that long until we felt that we had a very, very strong chance of making this a home run."

We were absolutely shocked to hear that the people who did Neverwinter Nights (complete with d20, third edition D&D rules) and KOTOR felt like they'd only just gotten their feet under them enough to pursue Jade Empire. With accumulated experience in one hand and exciting new ideas in the other, BioWare is starting to piece together the RPG that it has always wanted to make.

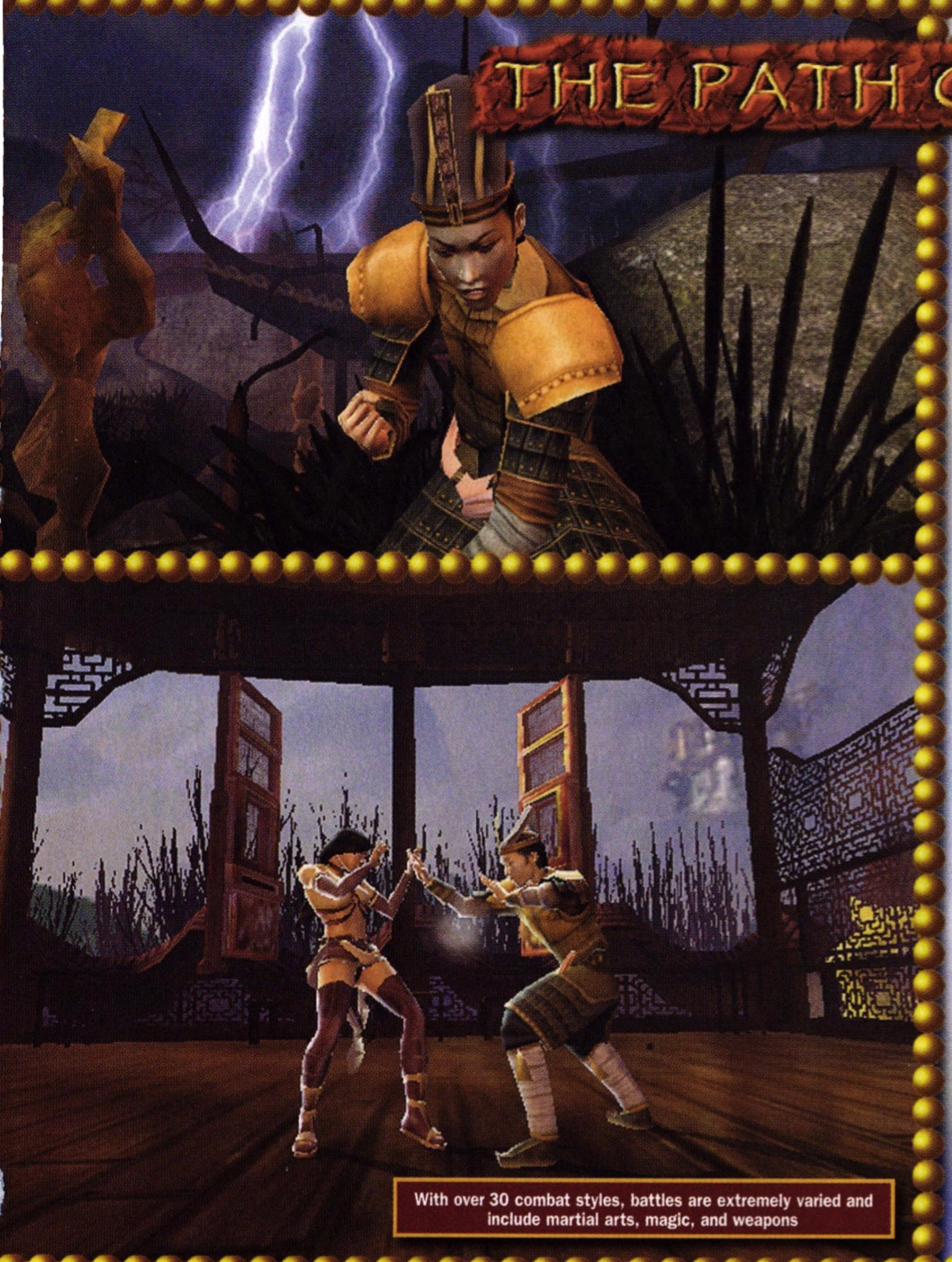
For Jade Empire, BioWare drew inspiration from everything from traditional Chinese literature to countless martial arts flicks

These spirit forms in your Stronghold allow you to transform into a ghoul, fox, or terra-cotta warrior

Furious Ming is just one of the characters you can choose at the outset. Regardless, shaping their skills is entirely up to you

"Our goal is to advance the RPG genre and really take it to a new level – a place it's never really been before."

THE PATH OF MANY STONES



With over 30 combat styles, battles are extremely varied and include martial arts, magic, and weapons

What kind of game could possibly take a company as talented as BioWare virtually 10 years to create? An RPG that blends the best in martial arts fighting, player freedom, and story-telling. Before you can master the game's 30-plus martial arts styles, you have to spend time crafting your character. Unlike the usual party-based titles that the developer has created, Jade is a single-player game. At the start, you choose from several pre-made characters that are already named. Each of these not only represents a sort of iconic figure, but will start out with some predetermined combination of the Primary Attributes: Body, Mind, and Spirit. These determine defaults for Health, Focus, and Chi, respectively. For example, Tiger Shen is a prototypical strong-armed goon, while Furious Ming is more molded after Bruce Lee. However, don't think that just because you choose Tiger, you can't become an expert in magical or defensive combat styles. Far from it. Lead designer Kevin Martens is quick to point out the freedom inherent in the system: "You can play the game the way you want to play it. You don't have to pick Tiger Shen and have to be the strong guy."

Jim Bishop adds, "He could be wandering around doing really calm tai chi [a magical style] as this enormous, muscular barbarian."

At the start of Jade Empire, the character you have chosen has just graduated from Master Li's martial arts school. What happens next is a closely guarded secret. After repeated attempts to pry details out of BioWare's clenched fist, even executive producer Greg Zeschuk starts to feel empathy for the lack of love being given. He tries to help us out. "What's the initial setup? In a very brief, like, two lines?" He asks of the lead designer. Put on the spot, Martens tenses up. "Let's not release the story." As if a couple of measly sentences would really blow the game open! He relents, only to laugh, "Things happen. Needless to say, happy times don't last long."

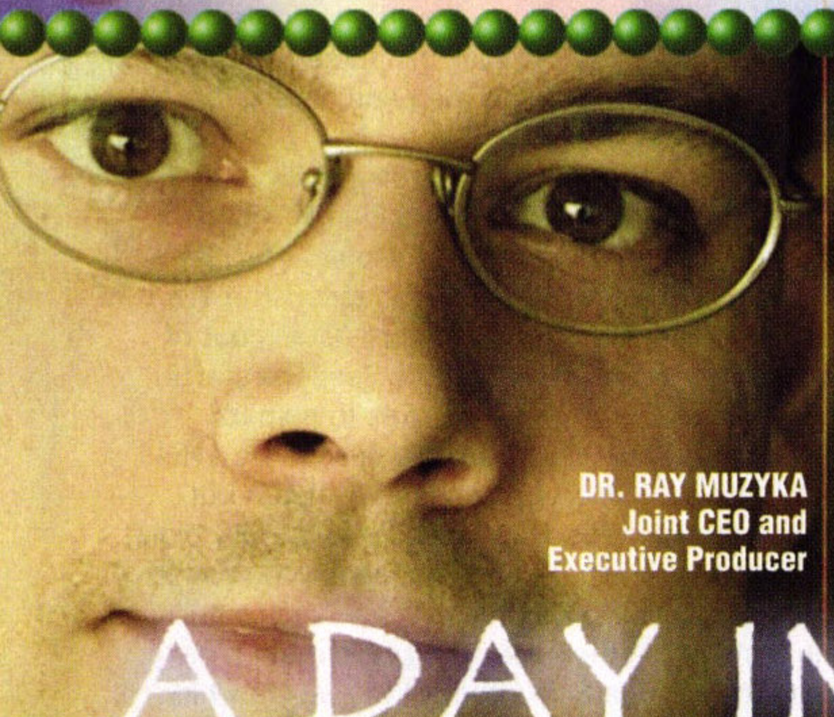
Eventually, we get some facts out in the open. The plot's main antagonists come from the Spirit World – a dark counterpart to real life which you will jump into with more frequency as the game progresses. "This parallel world is sort of a dark analog of the world you're in," explains Muzyka. "It's an evil place with ghosts and apparitions, and you have to transition into it to find out what's going on." While not every area in Empire will have such a counterpart, the Spirit World is key to the game. "These animal spirits, ghosts, and so on appearing are a part of a larger problem, and kind of tie into the larger story as you reveal it."

Your Stronghold holds numerous surprises. Here we see some bells you can ring, and behind them is a statue of a boss you once defeated

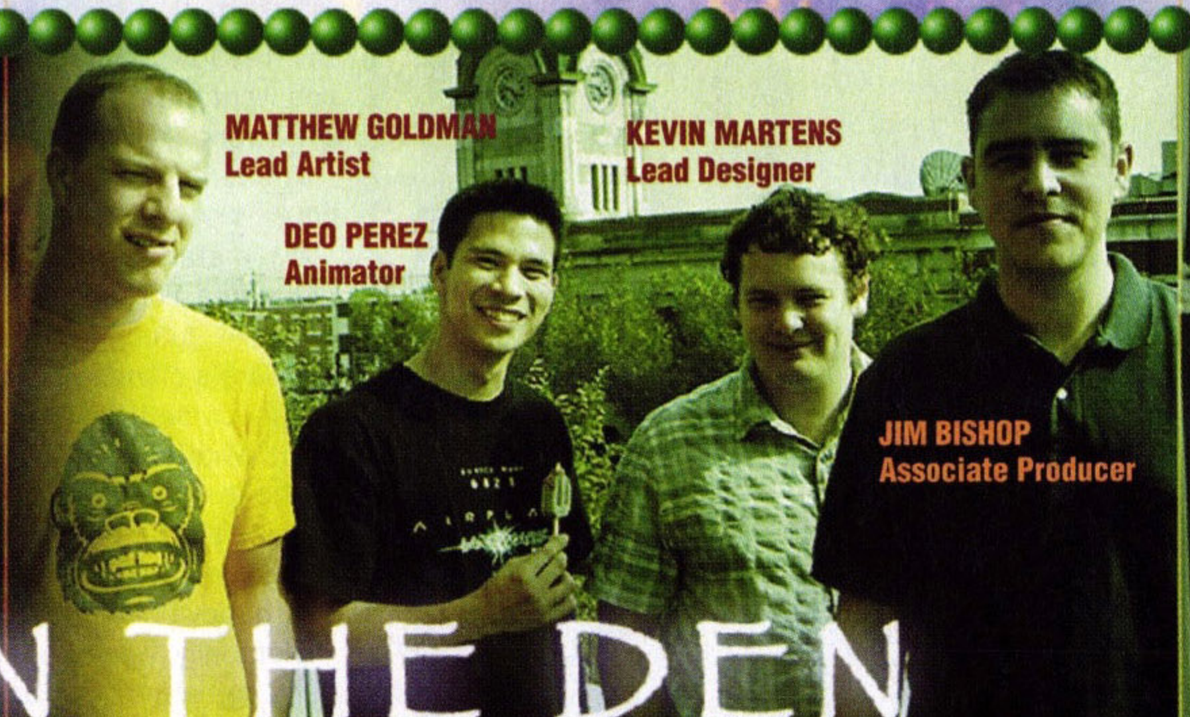
In typical BioWare fashion, as you unravel the plot, a plethora of choices will reveal themselves to let you mold the story. If you reveled in the dark or light side choices in Knights of the Old Republic, you'll get just as many options in Jade. Having a high replay value is something that is very important to the company. Zeschuk and Muzyka outlined a very specific model of just how to give the player the richest experience possible. Whereas before the content was largely driven by the desire to offer as lengthy a quest as possible – even if it didn't branch out much – now BioWare wants to scale back the overall length (relative to the usually gargantuan quests on PC, that is. Trust us, the game will still be huge) in order to give players more side quests, alternate story paths, and ultimately, to fuel your desire to want to beat the title again and again.

The core component behind Jade Empire is a real-time combat system that surpasses the previous work that the company has done in terms of fluidity, accessibility, and flat-out fun. It lets the player switch between and seamlessly link together different fighting styles, including everything from real martial arts disciplines to magical transformations and summons. These are basically grouped into three types: martial arts, magic, and weapon-based. Each of these houses moves that can be further broken down into descriptors such as strong (like the Eight-Ring Sword strong weapon style), fast, and defensive. Outside of the three major groups are the Focus and Chi powers, which open up other maneuvers (including stun moves that enable you to steal an opponent's own Chi). Furthermore, your Dragon Amulet can be outfitted with the gems that you find. The effects of these range from permanent attribute bumps to enhancing the fighting styles that you use. True to other BioWare titles, the key to your success will be in how strategically you put your attacks together. The flexibility inherent in the design has even its makers intrigued. "We're actually quite excited to see the tactical choices develop," Muzyka confesses, "because we anticipate there will be a variety of ways you can fight different enemies. The players will probably discover new combos that we never anticipated."

We witnessed a prime example of Jade's combat in a skirmish between the main character and a powerful enemy, who starts out by summoning fire demons from afar. After dispatching



DR. RAY MUZYKA
Joint CEO and
Executive Producer



MATTHEW GOLDMAN
Lead Artist

DEO PEREZ
Animator

KEVIN MARTENS
Lead Designer

JIM BISHOP
Associate Producer

A DAY IN THE DEN

"We love role-playing games, that's why Greg and I quit – well, we didn't quit. We finished medical school," says joint CEO and executive producer Dr. Ray Muzyka.

"We didn't get drummed out!" insists fellow CEO and executive producer Dr. Greg Zeschuk.

"No, we actually graduated as doctors, we practiced for a while, and basically the hobby became the career, and the career basically became a hobby." You don't have to get your Ph.D. to work at BioWare – just be similarly dedicated to the making and playing of video games.

Such a give and take is very typical if you sit down and spend any time with these two men. Interjecting and finishing each other's sentences, they share a strong wavelength that has shaped the direction and drive of all those around them. BioWare is singularly committed to making games. Great games.

A rabbit's warren of corridors lined with awards, framed magazine covers and ads; darkened rooms lit only by the glow of computer screens; and makeshift nests of cardboard air conditioning venting (with nary a city inspector in sight!), the company's office can be a confusing place to be. Although BioWare is seriously contemplating moving to better accommodations, the tight-knit aspect that it has developed will never change the way it makes games. We discovered that the development of Jade Empire is not the product of one team of the company, but rather the responsibility of everyone at BioWare.

"We have matrix structures, so people move back and forth, and generally almost everyone who's senior works on every single project we have," explains Muzyka. "So, a lot of the designers have extensive experience with all of our past games. There's exhaustive critiques going on right now, viewing all of the chapters in [Jade Empire's] story to make [it] the best we've ever made as a company."

With the lighthearted chuckle that could only come from one who's been there, producer Jim Bishop explains what it's like at the ground level. "They call them audits, but they are much more painful than even that sounds. You bring in someone who's completely cold. They can be another producer, they can be a department director, and they review everything relating to their expertise on a project."

Telling of his experiences, lead designer Kevin Martens says, "It avoids the 'It seemed like a good idea at the time.' We just finished the design audit, so I got the director of design, the lead writer on the Neverwinter expansion packs, and the lead writer on Star Wars [Knights of the Old Republic]. We mapped out the areas, and we discovered that they were too concentrated in certain parts. So, we basically took the plot and spread them out more."

"The team here really is 160," says Muzyka, "and that's the size of the company. When we are finishing one of our games, everyone in the company focuses on it; everyone in the company is playing it. In Knights of the Old Republic, we were basically making sure there were serial Xbox allotments, so we had a lot of Xboxes, making sure that everyone was operating them 24 hours a day."

Instrumental to this whole process was a unique contributing factor. When Neverwinter Nights shipped last year on PC, it featured the game's tool set. This allowed players to make their own modules – something that has increased the title's replayability greatly. Of course, being the developer, BioWare was just as able to utilize Neverwinter for its own ends. Martens constructed portions of Jade Empire using the Neverwinter world so that everyone could test out Jade's elements, such as the rate of encounters, walk distances, sight lines, and general flow.

Muzyka goes on to tell us that some areas have had as many as three compete redoes – with more always a possibility. No doubt the doctors themselves will get plenty of time in with Jade before it ships. Muzyka says that he played KOTOR so much he discovered 1,284 bugs, all of which were fixed. Ultimately, whether it's something in the water or the free popsicles constantly stocking the office freezer, the same commitment leads everyone to get their hands dirty in the name of the final product. Calling for 160 sets of dedicated eyes to poke and prod a game to excellence is just the sort of thing that Muzyka and Zeschuk insist of everyone and themselves. "Ray and I run the company," says Zeschuk. "We're not really business guys, we're not really development guys. What we think our biggest role is to pretend that we're the new consumers."

them with your smooth Willow defensive magic, your attacker comes in towards you, closing the distance between you rapidly via Centipede style. Catching you off guard, he also throws some sand in your face, temporary blinding you by using a dirty fighting technique. He follows with a fireball magic attack that throws you back, causing you to break a table in the area. The result of this is that you can now use the broken table legs as makeshift weapons (damageable areas are a big component of the combat). As you charge towards each other, you slow down your movements with a Focus attack, letting you get in some extra strikes. Sequences like this are just the tip of the iceberg, as you learn to manage your various abilities and put together strategies to take advantage of all of them.

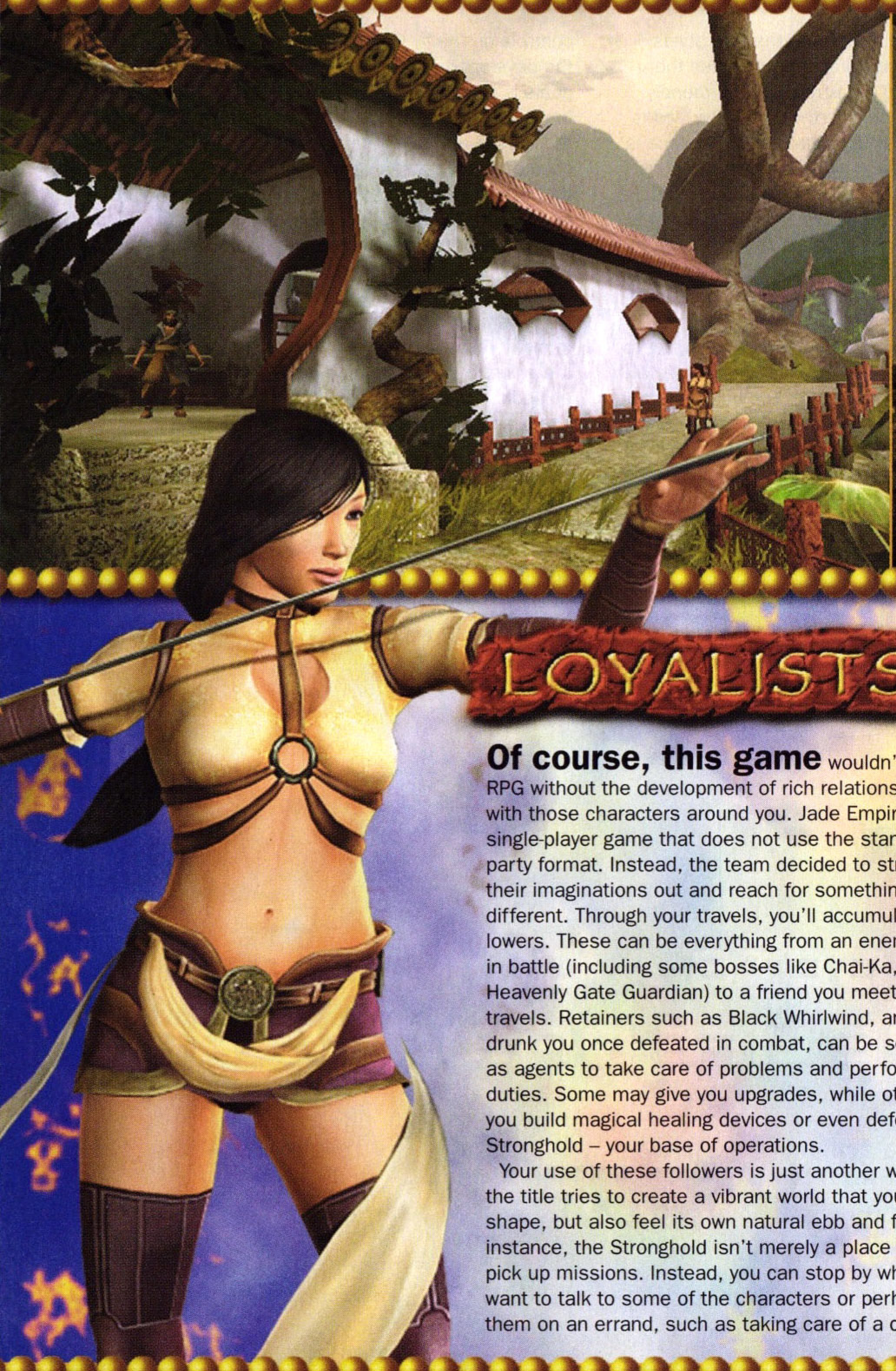
As you can imagine, with more than 30 styles available to you, the interface that handles them all is going to have to be extremely user friendly. Muzyka takes it one step further. The interface is going to have to be virtually flawless. "Interface is what prevents you from joining the game. A good interface, the reason you know it's really well done, is one no talks about it. We've learned a lot about how to choose tactical options really effectively. We actually redid the interface for Star Wars two or three times near the end. So, the same thing's going to apply here."

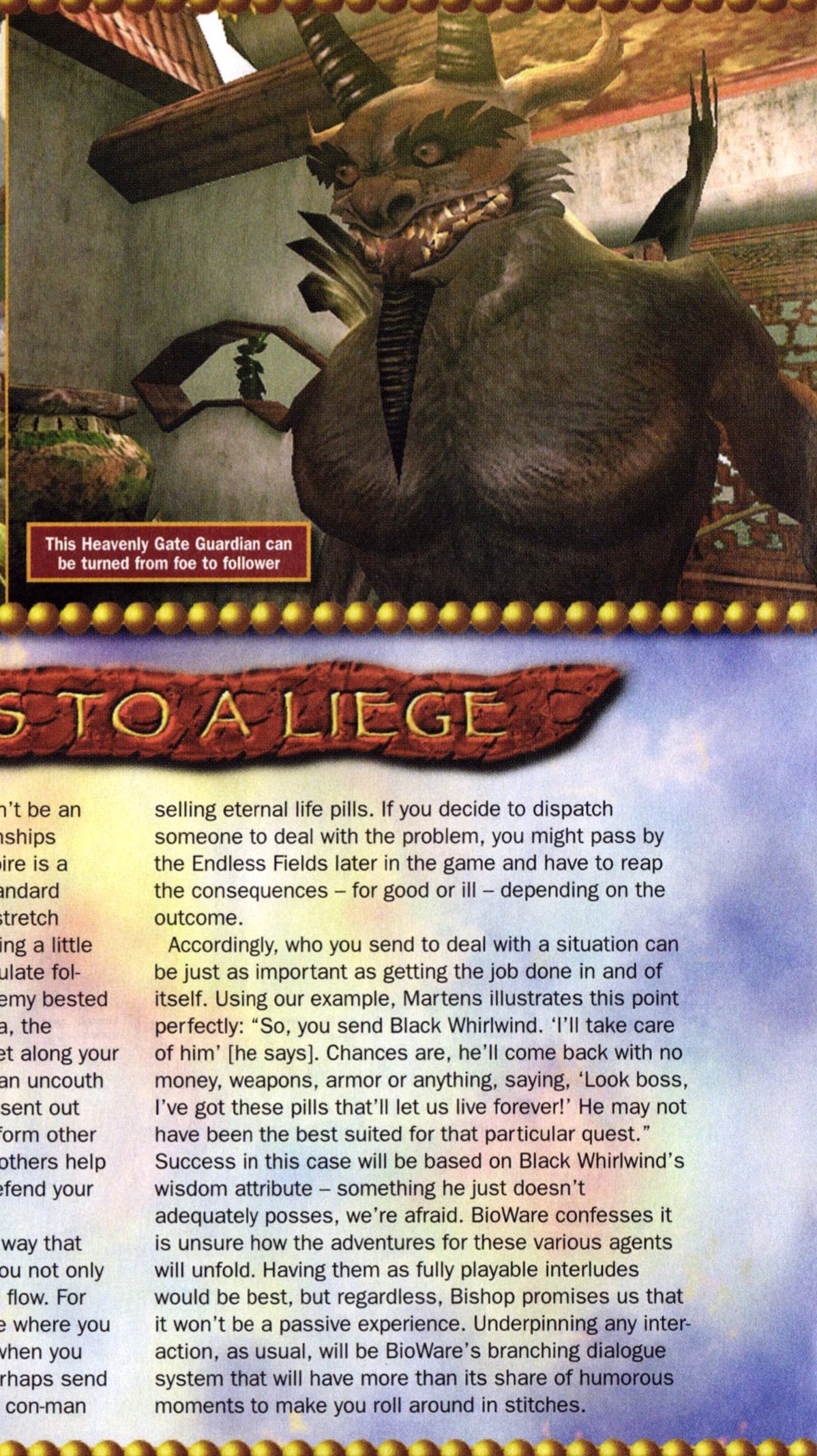
At this point in time, BioWare is just beginning to sketch out exactly how you're going to manage all of your combat possibilities. We hope that it will be similar to KOTOR in regards to the simplicity of the onscreen grouping of attacks and options. However, everything from button mapping your favorite actions onto the controller face to being able to change controls on the fly is being looked at. One thing that the developer did tell us, is that one of the ultimate goals is to make it so that the player never has to leave the game and go into a menu when you need to kick ass and take names. Like KOTOR, Jade will have optional pauses so that you can think through the more difficult encounters. But, because this title is not party-based, there are naturally fewer interruptions, as you are only dealing with a single character. We inquired if the company had any concerns that the utilization of a pause function would inherently put a damper on the kind of flowing fights that it had in mind. Bishop, however, disagreed: "I don't think it's going to slow it down, but I do think it'll feel episodic.

"It's about the strategic choices," Martens adds. "You don't just hit the button and watch a sequence." This is the kind of divergent RPG evolution that the company is aiming to deliver.

BioWare's office is jammed full of awards and accolades chronicling its accomplishments

"We're trying to create a more unified world space than in our other games"





This Heavenly Gate Guardian can be turned from foe to follower

LOYALISTS TO A LIEGE

Of course, this game wouldn't be an RPG without the development of rich relationships with those characters around you. Jade Empire is a single-player game that does not use the standard party format. Instead, the team decided to stretch their imaginations out and reach for something a little different. Through your travels, you'll accumulate followers. These can be everything from an enemy bested in battle (including some bosses like Chai-Ka, the Heavenly Gate Guardian) to a friend you meet along your travels. Retainers such as Black Whirlwind, an uncouth drunk you once defeated in combat, can be sent out as agents to take care of problems and perform other duties. Some may give you upgrades, while others help you build magical healing devices or even defend your Stronghold – your base of operations.

Your use of these followers is just another way that the title tries to create a vibrant world that you not only shape, but also feel its own natural ebb and flow. For instance, the Stronghold isn't merely a place where you pick up missions. Instead, you can stop by when you want to talk to some of the characters or perhaps send them on an errand, such as taking care of a con-man selling eternal life pills. If you decide to dispatch someone to deal with the problem, you might pass by the Endless Fields later in the game and have to reap the consequences – for good or ill – depending on the outcome.

Accordingly, who you send to deal with a situation can be just as important as getting the job done in and of itself. Using our example, Martens illustrates this point perfectly: "So, you send Black Whirlwind. 'I'll take care of him' [he says]. Chances are, he'll come back with no money, weapons, armor or anything, saying, 'Look boss, I've got these pills that'll let us live forever!' He may not have been the best suited for that particular quest." Success in this case will be based on Black Whirlwind's wisdom attribute – something he just doesn't adequately posses, we're afraid. BioWare confesses it is unsure how the adventures for these various agents will unfold. Having them as fully playable interludes would be best, but regardless, Bishop promises us that it won't be a passive experience. Underpinning any interaction, as usual, will be BioWare's branching dialogue system that will have more than its share of humorous moments to make you roll around in stitches.

Jade Empire loses none of the humorous dialogue BioWare is known for

Ah, you again. When is the action going to start? I can only stand here drinking for so long. Wait, did I say that?

The Bunmaster coordinates who should be sent to complete one of the side tasks

This is a matter best handled by one of your followers. Just tell me who should be sent and I will ready supplies.

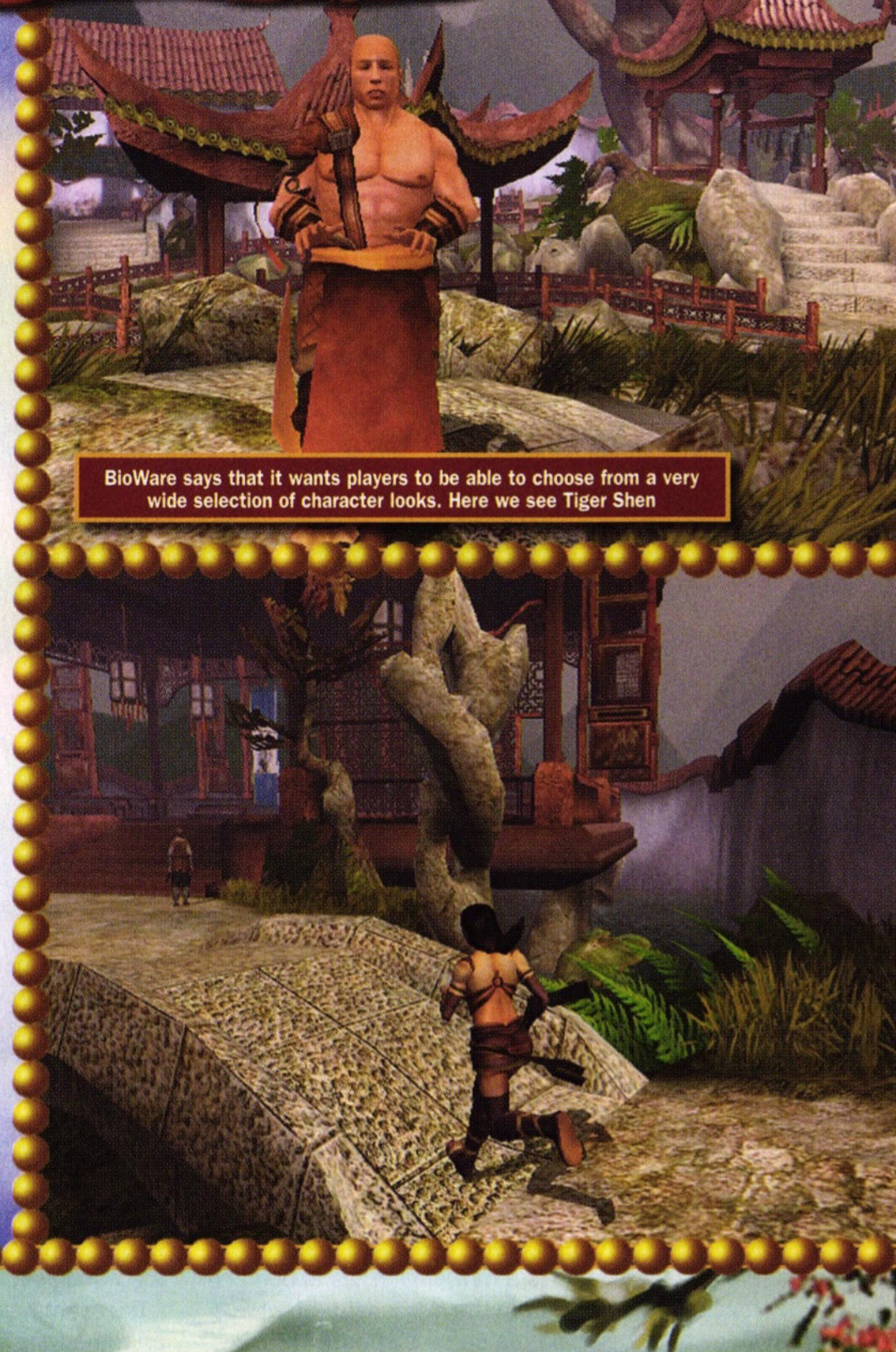
THE GYM TEACHER STRUCTURE

As the team pieces together the world, they find that its vision and focus keeps getting tighter. This brings us back to art director Matthew Goldman and his disapproving Chinese stamp of death. Sketching out, erasing, and reiterating the level designs (and all the red ink involved) have become necessary tasks as the game's world takes shape. Bishop explained one instance where changes had to be made was in Stronghold's layout: "Originally, the followers were scattered all over the map – which was cool, but in Neverwinter, we found that you spent a lot of time running around, talking to followers, and what you really wanted was to go to one place and do all your follower business. So we set up a sort of corner of the town where it's set up like a tenement house."

Visually, BioWare wants to reduce transit time and make a more concentrated experience. Goldman was instrumental in this phase. "Running across vast distances isn't a whole lot of fun," he insists. "Smaller areas that are densely packed with plots, characters, gameplay, views, collectible items – that is more interesting." Goldman's sketches show a density and sense of scale that is being replicated both visually and in the gameplay. The team is currently working on an AI system that will enable them to pack the city areas with people, and still maintain some amount of interaction with the player. Another way in which Jade Empire builds an all-encompassing, living, breathing experience is by not only linking the game's environments through aspects of geography and visualization, but through time. You will revisit locations you've been to before at various points, and you can see that they've changed due to your actions. They will be further shaped as your abilities evolve. "What we'd identified as really fun is going back to high school with flaming fists of fury and being able to punch out your gym teacher," Goldman says of this concept. Bishop jokes that this has officially been labeled the Gym Teacher Structure. "The best way to tell how badass you are is to go back to earlier areas as your new badass self."

One of the ways of travelling around Jade's landscape is through the air, where eventually the player (with the help of your followers) will be able to construct a dragonfly airship, complete with a landing field in your Stronghold. The dragonfly's look has been fairly consistent throughout the process, and it highlights an important aspect of the visual side of the game. Goldman and the entire team have immersed themselves in all aspects of Chinese literature, art, and of course, martial arts. "The first thing we had to do was really address our ignorance on the subject," confesses Goldman. "I find a lot of games investigating these sort of Asian themes tend to stick a yin-yang on it, some conical hats, and call it Asian."

"Or worse," Bishop winces, "mix Japanese and Chinese up together as some nasty blend." However, as the dragonfly ship points out, this game is by no means a historical one. It merely draws upon what's real in order to apply a mythical layer on top.



BioWare says that it wants players to be able to choose from a very wide selection of character looks. Here we see Tiger Shen

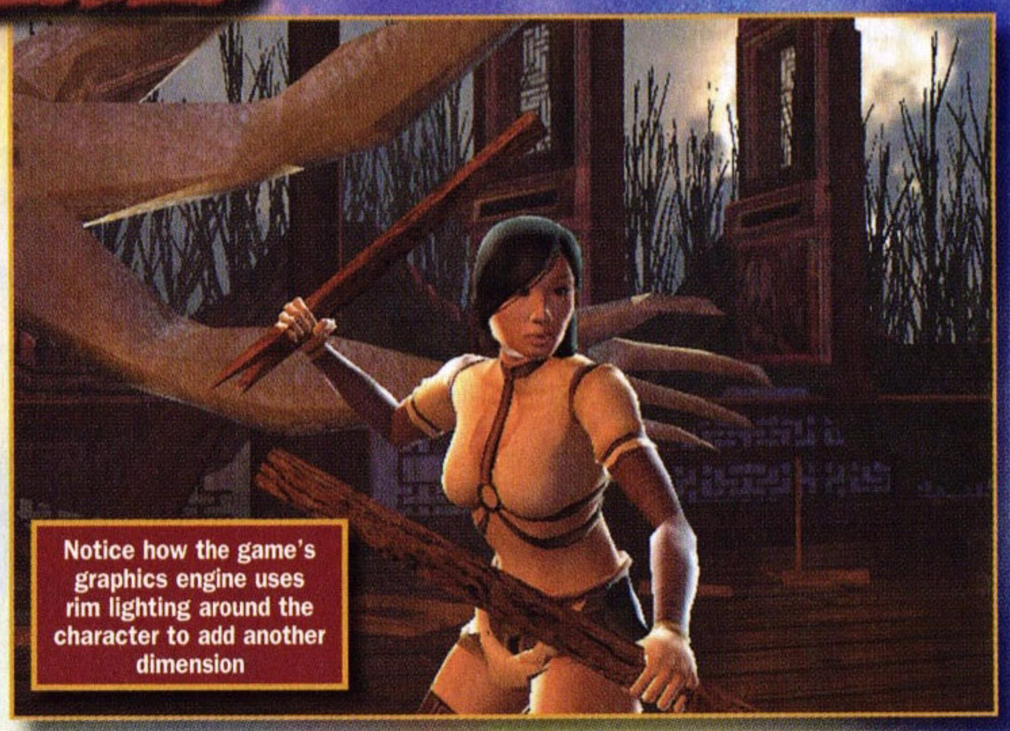
THE HEART OF THE BEAST

Proud of its lineage of innovating in the PC space with game engines that became legendary, BioWare took no steps backwards when it released Knights of the Old Republic on the Xbox. The game effortlessly blended the d20 combat mechanics of paper-based D&D with an experience that console RPGers, and everyone else, could truly enjoy. Appropriately, the company sees no reason to stop going forward with Jade Empire – especially since it uses a rules system made by BioWare itself. The game sports a new engine, as is befitting of its change in style from the successful Star Wars RPG, despite being on the same platform. "It's not based on KOTOR," stresses Bishop. "We're a single-player, action-based RPG [with Jade]. In KOTOR, the animations are pretty much based on the rolls, and that gives it a cinematic feel, but you aren't actually doing the parry. Here, we are doing it." As such, Bishop explains that there are computations being made behind the scenes, of course, but those are mainly to determine damage and the effects to the victim.

Jade Empire's graphics are noticeably better than KOTOR with its new engine in tow. We witnessed a quick stroll around the main character's Stronghold that proved that the company isn't just blowing smoke. Greatly increased ambient life, eye-popping textures, and a jump in the quality of the player models were easily noticeable. These improvements are due to the new cloth system, the multiple render passes, rim lighting (the shadowing around your characters), and much more – all thanks to the new engine. While we certainly weren't disbelieving what we were seeing, Muzyka gave us a quantifying figure to hit the point home: Jade Empire's main characters have three times the polygons of those in Knights. Still, as great as all this sounds, the graphics and the game as a whole could always stand to be better in Bishop and BioWare's eyes. "Eight months ago, KOTOR wasn't any fun to play, and then we developed it into something that was more fun. With a new engine and game, you get it at some point, and you go, 'Wow, this is lame. Let's fix it!'" For some video game series, the engine retooling involved of this order alone would be worthy of a few generations for the franchise, but not here.

The team has already begun working on remedying one of the more prominent problems with KOTOR in Jade Empire: load time. You could grow old in between some of the game's load screens, but Bishop is confident they have learned enough about the system to be able to speed up the process – even with the increase in the graphic's detail. "If and where there are load times, they will be very rapid. The second-generation engine allows us to do a lot of stuff, a lot faster than before. We've got two programmers for nine months, whose only job is to make it go faster." One way the problem has already been fixed is by structuring the city levels so things like stores are out in the open, thus negating the need to walk into separate areas to access them.

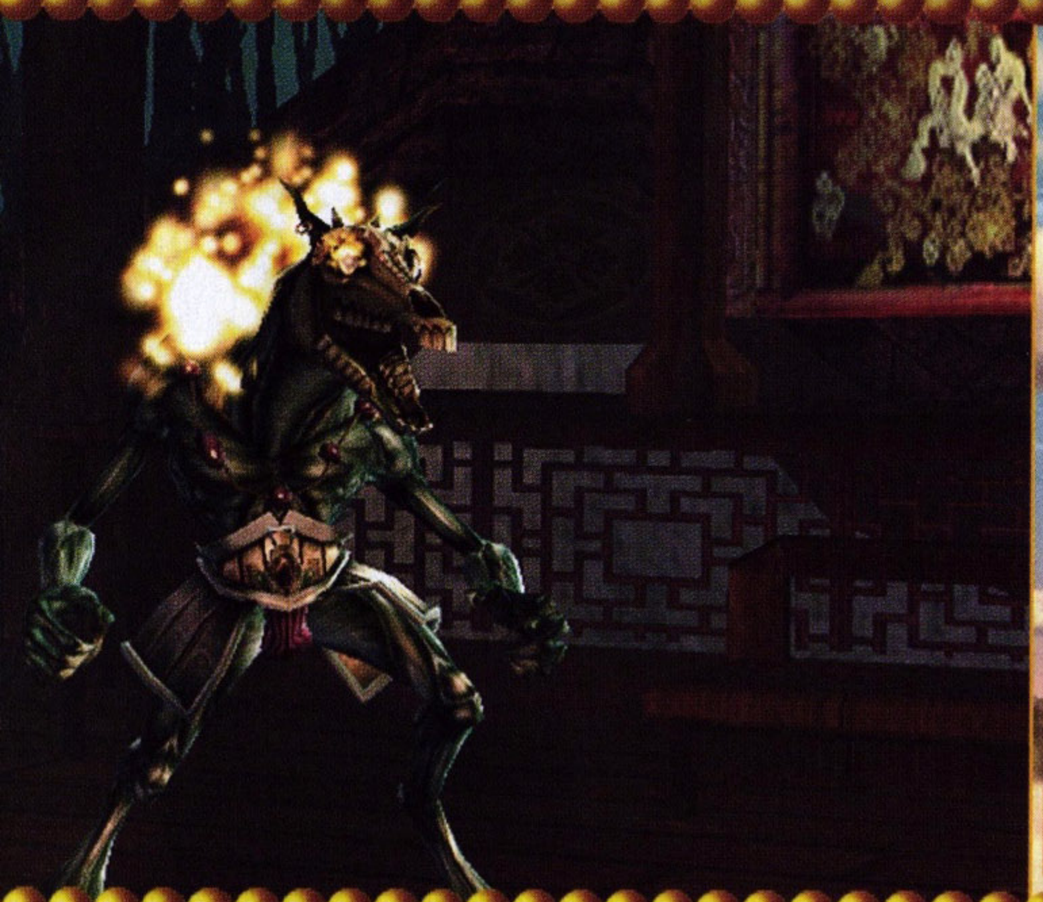
With Jade Empire waiting in the wings for many years before it ever surfaced and a soft release date of late 2004 (with the company's commitment to getting things done right, it could be longer than that!), we can already see doctors Muzyka and Zeschuk and everyone else at BioWare getting excited about the company's future. Some of which is being prepared for as we speak – just like Jade Empire was once just a nascent idea whose time finally came.



Notice how the game's graphics engine uses rim lighting around the character to add another dimension

A PC project is being worked on, and another console game is being discussed. We asked if perhaps a resurrection of the fan-favorite Infinity engine used in Baldur's Gate would ever resurface to take a curtain call, but Muzyka wasn't telling. Thinking out loud, he said, "Without revealing anything about future plans, I guess you could say we're very fond of that design, the Baldur's Gate style. And some elements of the Neverwinter style as well. Certainly, there's an interest in the company – a very serious interest in making sure that we have some kind of future projects that fulfill that. We see RPGs as being a very broad category, and you can have an action-RPG like Jade is." Continuing to look forward, and exemplifying the kind of thinking that has brought BioWare to where it is today and where it will lead it to tomorrow, Zeschuk states, "I think the one thing as a company is that we feel we can never go back."

"Each game we make has to be better than the one before. This one actually has a high bar to exceed."



You and your followers will construct a dragonfly which will help you travel around Jade's world

REFLECTIONS ON STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Knights of the Old Republic was just the kind of title that Microsoft needed for its system. In its first two weeks on store shelves, the game set an Xbox record by selling more than 270,000 copies. During our visit with BioWare, we got to sit down with joint CEOs and co-executive producers Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk and talk about the game and what may come next.

Talk about working with a licensed product like Star Wars

Greg Zeschuk: The type of games we make are really detailed, so everything has to hold together really logically. So, when you are using an existing license that's almost been playtested, whether it be movies or games, it's sort of been tested and tested until it all sort of fits together well. In our games, you really need to do that well. You need to competently create the whole framework. We had the Star Wars framework, but we were able to make new worlds, new species.

Ray Muzyka: We had complete freedom with the story, too. We had the option from LucasArts to do an RPG set in the movie universe or one that was set 4,000 years before. So we jumped on that one, because it was much more free for writers, designers, and artists because it would become part of the canon of the Star Wars universe.

Do you think that the game's load times were a problem?

GZ: There were some comments on load time, but you really can't have your cake and eat it, too. KOTOR is trying to shove this much stuff [splits out hands] through this little pipe, and it does it. But [on Jade] we're trying to have a nice even flow of data. We think that making an RPG is so much harder than other games. Once you have the character in the level, and running around and jumping, in most games you're done. For us, now we have to lay the entire story and characterization on top of that basic level.

What about the repetitiveness of the characters' heads?

RM: I don't think we were aware of it, otherwise we would have dealt with it. We've certainly seen the feedback since its release. In fact, we just had a meeting about things that we are going to take lessons from for Jade. One of the things we could have done better was, because the areas are made independently of each other, there wasn't this sort of overview.

GZ: What we tend to do is parallel development because we do so much content. You had multiple discreet teams, and they all go, 'Hey, I like that head!'

RM: And there are a lot of people who thought that independently, simultaneously. Then you get to a certain point, unless you are assessing that stuff regularly, there's nothing you can do about it then. It's easy to remedy.

From the feedback from fans, what's something that's impressed you?

GZ: Perhaps one of the most amazing things we've heard about KOTOR is that some people just aren't able to make themselves play the dark side. Some of the stuff you do is so terrible.

RM: Yeah, but what I found was that was that once you start.... I started with the wraid plate the widow wanted me to sell on Tatooine – and I was in kind of a bad mood – and she said, 'So what happened?' And I said, 'Yeah, I sold it.' She said, 'Well, are you going to pay me?' And I said, 'No.' And then I was all evil. Every single thing I did from that point on was evil. Once you start, you can't stop. There's no looking back.

GZ: If you can make a video game where you make people feel uncomfortable because they've done [something]. That's powerful. We set out to do that.

Similar to your other engines, will KOTOR's be licensed?

RM: Potentially. We've done that in the past. We're always looking for ways to do that. We haven't announced anything publicly or informally yet.

GZ: It's kind of a shame to put in that much effort and not use it somehow.

What about KOTOR II?

RM: Yeah, it's a very interesting project. We can't say anything about it as a courtesy to our publisher LucasArts. They are delighted with the success of KOTOR I, and so are we.

If there was a second KOTOR, would you start work on it right away or would it have to wait for the completion of all the other projects?

RM: We've got sort of a master schedule, and we definitely take on the projects we want to take on. It's a lot easier to replicate [KOTOR's rules] and content iterate in a sequel as well, so it's definitely achievable.

GZ: Yeah, we've got lots of folks. Lots of projects, but lots of people, too.

RM: We are exploring ways to work with external groups on new projects as well. We have a lot of opportunities that we want to try and find the time and fulfill all of them, but it's not possible to do all of them ourselves.

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Intense Violence

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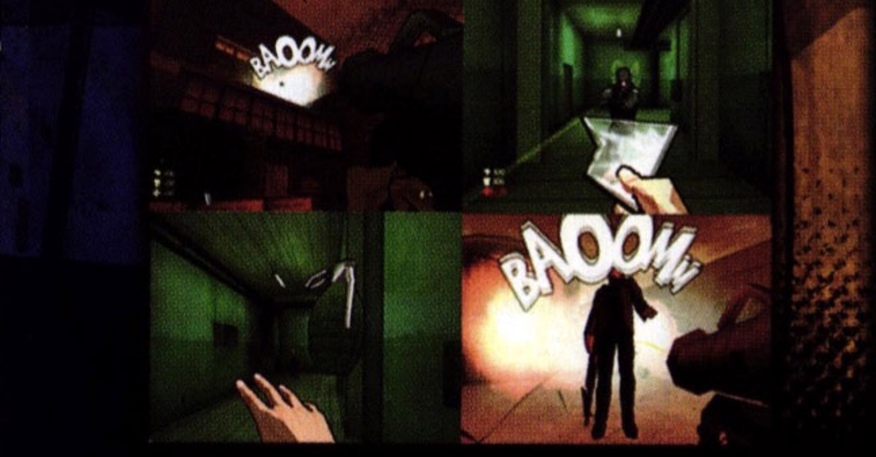

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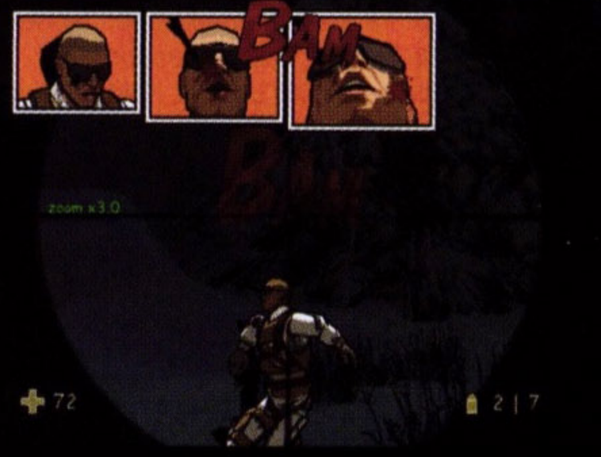

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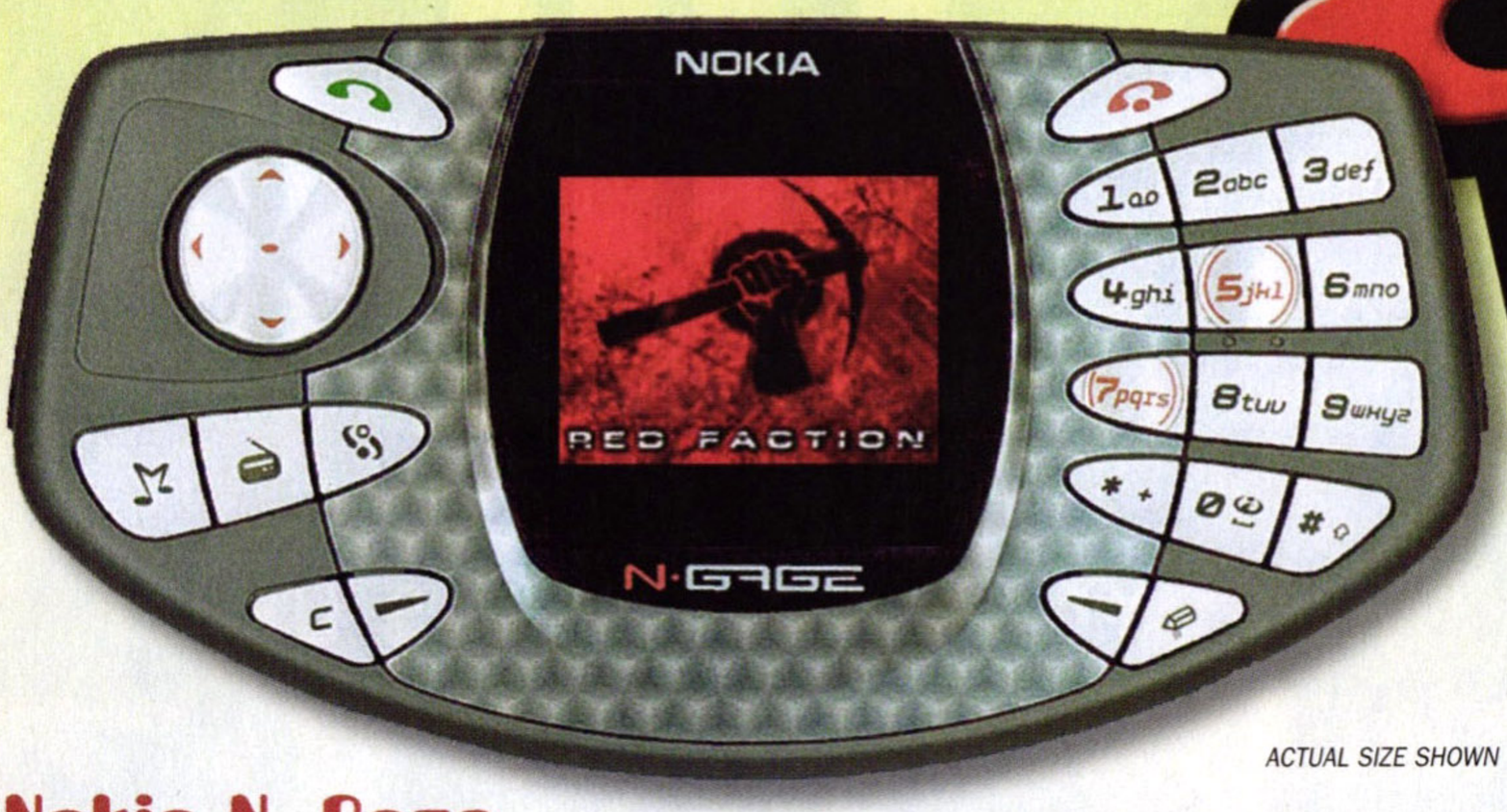
In the very near future (by the end of October, to be specific), the gaming community is going to have something we haven't had in more than a decade – viable handheld gaming devices not produced by Nintendo. Nokia's much-hyped N-Gage has landed in our office, and Tapwave's Zodiac is soon to follow. What are their differences? Should you get excited about the gaming possibilities they open up? Most importantly, are the games any good?



ACTUAL SIZE SHOWN

Nokia N-Gage

A crew of Nokia elite stopped by the GI offices to deliver our very first "game deck." It's also a phone, but the company's general manager of entertainment and media business, Nada Usina, explained the consequences of calling it a phone in her presence during the early N-Gage days – employees laying down cold, hard cash. We suppose it's better than washing their mouths out with soap, but she claims that not much cash was made off the deal because everyone was too busy playing games to harbor any cell phone preconceptions.

Nokia has insisted since day one, even to skeptical journalists such as ourselves, that it's serious about gaming on the N-Gage. To prove the point, it signed up big names to develop titles for the system: Tony Hawk's Pro Skater is coming from Activision, THQ is offering up Red Faction, and Sega Rally is courtesy of, well, Sega. Sadly, Red Faction and Sega Rally aren't launch games, but the company promises to have hundreds of titles by next May, and many of them in time for this holiday season.

However, it is still obvious to us that Nokia has some industrial design issues to work through. Players have to shut down the system and take out the battery to change games. Talking on the phone requires holding the unit perpendicular to your head, producing an unfortunate "I'm talking on a taco" effect. Also, there aren't any shoulder buttons. Still, this is certainly not the first time that a gaming device has been less than perfect in its first iteration – remember scraping labels off of NES cartridges to get them in there "just right?"

SYSTEM SPECIFICATIONS

Size (Weight): 4.83 ounces (with standard battery)

Dimensions: 5.26 x 2.74 x .80 inches

Display Resolution: 176 x 208 pixels

Screen Area: 1.38 x 1.63 inches illuminated

Colors: 12-bit (4,096 colors)

Operating System: Series 60 UI

Sound: Stereo speakers and headphone jack (proprietary dual-plug earbud headphones included, Bluetooth headset available separately)

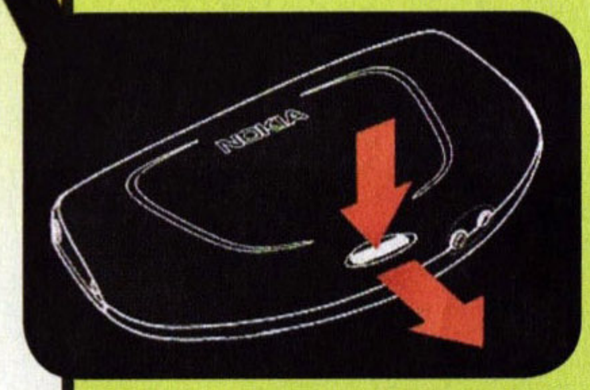
Battery: 3.7 V rechargeable Lithium-ion battery

Data Transfer: Bluetooth, Tri-band GSM, WAP over GPRS, USB connection to PC

FEATURES:

- Stereo FM radio tuner
- Digital music player and recorder
- USB connection for MP3 downloads from a PC
- N-Gage Arena services offering tournaments, screenshot upload, and score tracking
- SD memory card slot
- J2ME and Symbian enabled

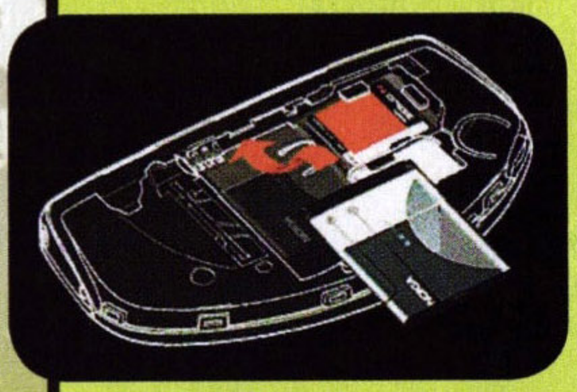
How to boot-up your N-gauge



STEP 1: *Remove the back cover. Press the release latch and slide the cover off.*

STEP 2A: *Insert the SIM card. Make sure the gold contacts are facing down and the beveled edge lines up correctly with the SIM card holder.*

STEP 2B: *Insert the game card. Make sure the gold contacts are facing down and the beveled edge lines up correctly with the game card holder*



STEP 3: *Insert the battery. Then replace the cover.*

PANDEMONIUM!

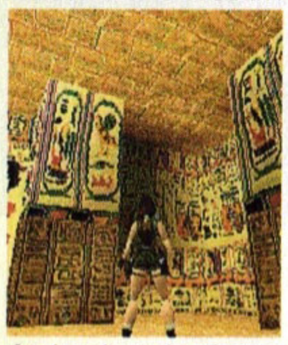
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

N-Gage's rendition of the late '90s PSone platformer is best described as adequate. Its two-player Bluetooth options make for a fun race, if you've got a friend with the equipment. The game has some serious framerate issues (especially in two-player mode), but does a nice job of making you forget that it really is a simple, side-scrolling "run and jump" game. – **LISA**

E 6

TOMB RAIDER

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7



If someone were to make me play Tomb Raider again on a big screen TV, I would seriously have my apprehensions. Expecting someone to play it on a tiny phone screen is just asking too much. I will admit the game looks amazingly close to the PSone original; but some things have been edited down, and waiting for levels to load on a cartridge game is just silly. I'm impressed Nokia is trying to get some classic games for its system, but I simply cannot give this game the thumbs up. It's not fun. Should you buy it? In the words of Lara Croft, "No!" – **ANDY**

T 4

SONIC N

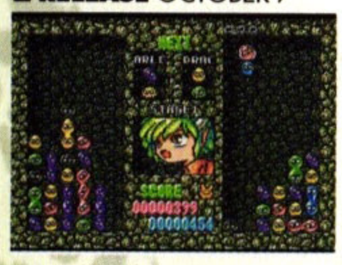
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

The levels are vibrantly detailed, each of the four playable characters brings something different to the table, and being able to adjust the aspect ratio to widescreen is a nice touch. The framerate isn't as smooth as I had hoped it would be, and it can be completed in no time flat (an hour or two), but it is successful in recreating the gameplay from Sonic's legendary side-scrolling exploits. – **REINER**

E 6.25

PUYO POP

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE
■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

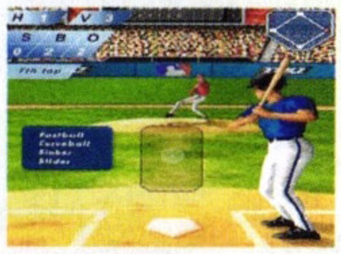


For those who haven't played this title's other incarnations, it's a fast-paced puzzle ditty something like Dr. Mario. The graphics are clean, the single-player has a nice ramp-up of difficulty, and the two-player action is great. I would have really appreciated the blue and purple guys being easier to tell from one another, but it's still a solid little puzzler. – **LISA**

E 7.75

MLB SLAM!

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** THQ
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

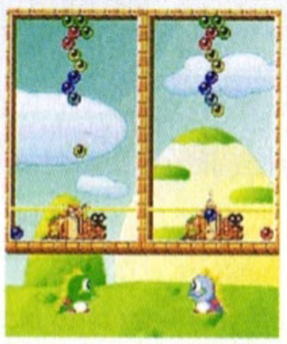


Slam as in the sound made when a baseball bat is swung and cracked in two across your face. While it does boast a complete season, all of the MLB teams, and a majority of the players; Slam's gameplay is painfully slow and the baseball is roughly the size of a beach ball. The fielding works pretty well, but I haven't see a batting/pitching interface this atrocious since the Intellivision. – **REINER**

E 4

PUZZLE BOBBLE VS

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE
■ **PUBLISHER** TAITO
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7



This is an update of Taito's 1994 arcade "classic" that adds an important new feature – two-player action. The question I must ask is why would you want to subject someone you like to this game? It's a plodding puzzle title with little variation in gameplay, and graphics created on a Lite Brite look more interesting and detailed than what this stinker offers. – **LISA**

E 3

VIRTUA TENNIS

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

When I first popped Virtua Tennis in and saw that it had the World Tour mode, I was giddy with anticipation. All those wonderful minigames in my pocket – awesome! Sadly, World Tour just means you play a less than mediocre tennis game on courts from around the world that all look oddly similar. The graphics aren't bad, but I have most definitely played better games on Game Boy. I could say that it's not awful for a phone, but N-Gage is a gaming platform and is going to need better efforts than this if it wants to succeed. – **ANDY**

E 5

SUPER MONKEY BALL

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE
■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

Super Monkey Ball is like the Tetris of the 21st century – the game is freaking everywhere! As you could say about the 3,000 original Tetris variations, "There's nothing to see here, move along now," if you like Super Monkey Ball and have an N-Gage, this will be a must-buy. If you don't, the framerate chugs and bland textures will bother you. – **LISA**

E 7

Fun with Acronyms

N-Gages will be available on October 7 for $299 – the launch price for most home consoles in recent memory, but still quite a lot for a handheld gaming platform. While your money will cover the unit, battery supply, and a month of free service from T-Mobile, you'll still have to pony up for some games. Because it's also a phone, there are a few advantages that may tip the scales in Nokia's favor. Here's a phone primer course for those of you still lugging around those bricks from '92. All of the features listed below are supported by the N-Gage.

Bluetooth: A relatively new way to transmit information over a short distance (around 30 feet at most); Bluetooth doesn't have the range of an 802.11 wireless network, but is much more stable and long-distance than infrared. Phone manufacturers are using the technology for wireless headsets, multiplayer gaming, and data transfer between devices.

GPRS: Global Packet Radio Switching basically means that you get stable web connectivity (similar to the differences between dial-up and broadband connections) and faster data transfer speeds.

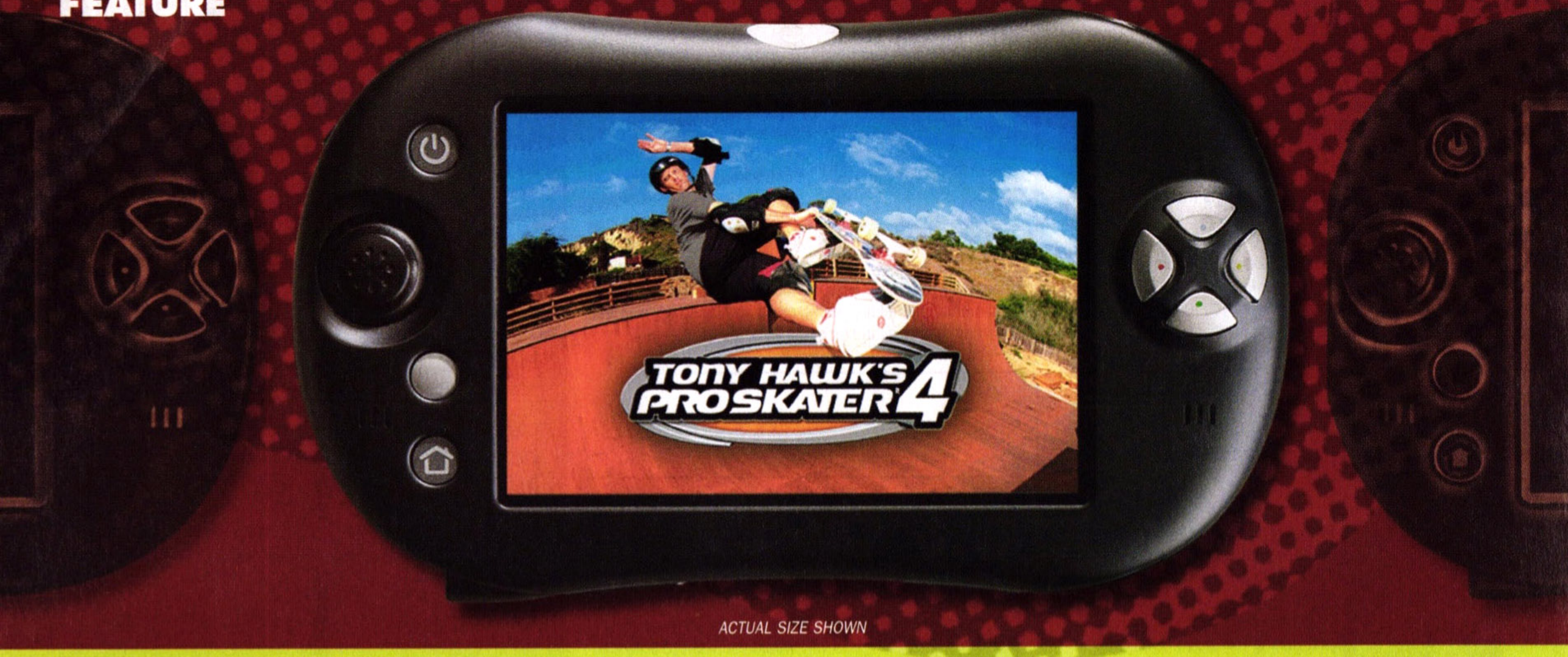
GSM: An acronym (there are a lot of those in cell phones, aren't there?) for Global System for Mobile Communications, GSM phones support SIM cards – everyone's new best friend [see the SIM card entry below] and web access. GSM transmits data at about 9.6 kbps, roughly one-third the speed of GPRS.

J2ME: Java Version 2, Mobile Edition or J2ME is a pocket-sized Java programming language. J2ME applications can be downloaded, installed, and run directly on appropriately enabled phones, and there are over 1,000 games available for such devices. Recent releases of J2ME games include The Prince of Persia, Splinter Cell, and Rayman Golf – all by developer Gameloft.

MMS: As text messaging continues to degrade the public's English language skills, MMS or Multimedia Messaging Service allows people to attach sounds, pictures, or animations stored on their phones to more pedestrian text messages. This service is still a little limited in the States because the recipient's network has to support the data transfer and their phone needs an operating system and screen to handle the information.

Polyphonic: Refers to a phone's ability to make sounds that creep out your fellow cubicle dwellers. Polyphonic ring tones can play up to 16 notes at a time, allowing "I'm A Slave 4 U" to finally be a really great ring tone.

SIM card: A wee card whose acronym stands for Subscriber Identity Module, a SIM card can store user information, phone numbers, or received messages. This means that when you buy a new GSM phone, you can pop your SIM card into the new phone and all of your old information is right there. It's better than sliced bread. Seriously, we'll slice bread before we'd manually transfer phone numbers to a new device.



ACTUAL SIZE SHOWN

Tapwave Zodiac

Tapwave, a start-up company that opened its doors in 2001 and hasn't even launched its first product yet, is getting a lot of attention by offering a device that is Nokia's closest competition – at least when it comes to launch date (October), price ($299), and target audience (somewhat grown-up gamers). Tim Twerdahl, senior product line manager, is in charge of the look and feel for the company's new gaming/PDA hybrid, called Zodiac. "We did a lot of focus groups and met with around one or two hundred of our potential customers – gamers."

Tapwave feels that its core audience is 18- to 32-year old entertainment-focused gamers. For two years before the company even opened doors, the team talked to players and developers to find out what people wanted.

"There's a video from the focus groups and there's one where this guy is just going through his Game Boy Advance and talking about what he loves and hates about it. We realized that shoulder buttons were critical; getting a really good, well-lit screen was critical; and having rumble effects were really important," Twerdahl explains.

As a result, Tapwave's Zodiac has what sounds like a dream set of features. It has the first analog controller ever in a handheld device. It rumbles. The screen technology uses a fully backlit TFT touch screen (most devices are lit from the sides, which washes out the colors and is harder to see in direct sunlight). There are shoulder buttons. The two SD memory card slots are hot swappable, meaning that you can move them in and out without turning the system off. Twerdahl also takes a jab at the N-Gage when he says, "You don't have to take off your battery to play them." Ouch, that hurts.

Besides gaming, Zodiac can play movies, the memory can be upgraded to over 2 gigabytes through SD memory cards (you can actually have as many cards as you like, but the device can only access two at a time), and it handles MP3s with a Yamaha sound chip. The thing even has a freakin' graphing calculator! Oh yeah, and it's a Palm device, so all of the tasks that businessy folk have been gloating about for years can be done on the Zodiac.

Twerdahl also talked about the company's plans for community building around this device. "Tapwave.com will have a store and a community section. What we want to see is a lot of our customers coming up to the community site, which will [have] message boards where they can share tips and talk about the latest games that are coming out. One of the other really cool things that we're doing on our site is enabling tournament play."

Players will upload scores when they hook the Zodiac into a computer. However, it's currently unknown if scores or times can be updated through a Bluetooth Internet connection. "It's up to them [game developers] to implement the mode, but we've built the structure to support it."

Tapwave has merged what many are calling the best Palm device on the market with a truly high-end gaming setup in what could be the next big thing. The company is taking pre-orders on their website in September, shipping devices in October, and will offer hardware and software through retail channels in the spring of 2004.

SYSTEM SPECIFICATIONS

Size (Weight): 6.3 ounces

Dimensions: 5.6 x 3.1 x .55 inches

Display Resolution: 480 x 320 pixels

Screen Area: 3.8" Backlit Transflective-TFT

Colors: 16-bit (65,536 colors)

Sound: Yamaha audio components, stereo speakers, and standard headphone jack

Battery: Dual Lithium rechargeables

Data Transfer: Bluetooth, SD memory cards, SD I/O peripherals (digital cameras, FM radio cards, WiFi, etc.), USB connection to PC

Operating System: PalmOS 5.2T (Tapwave optimized, but fully compatible with all 5.2 apps)

FEATURES:

- Motorola i.MX1 ARM9 processor
- ATI Imageon graphics accelerator
- FatHammer X-Forge 3D graphics engine
- Rumble capabilities
- Analog joystick, triggers, and action buttons
- Dual hot-swappable SD memory card slots
- Touch-sensitive display for menu navigation

tapwave™

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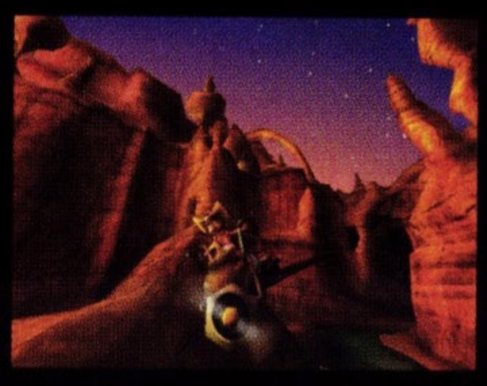

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XBOX

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PlayStation 2

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comic Mischief
Mild Violence
Suggestive Themes

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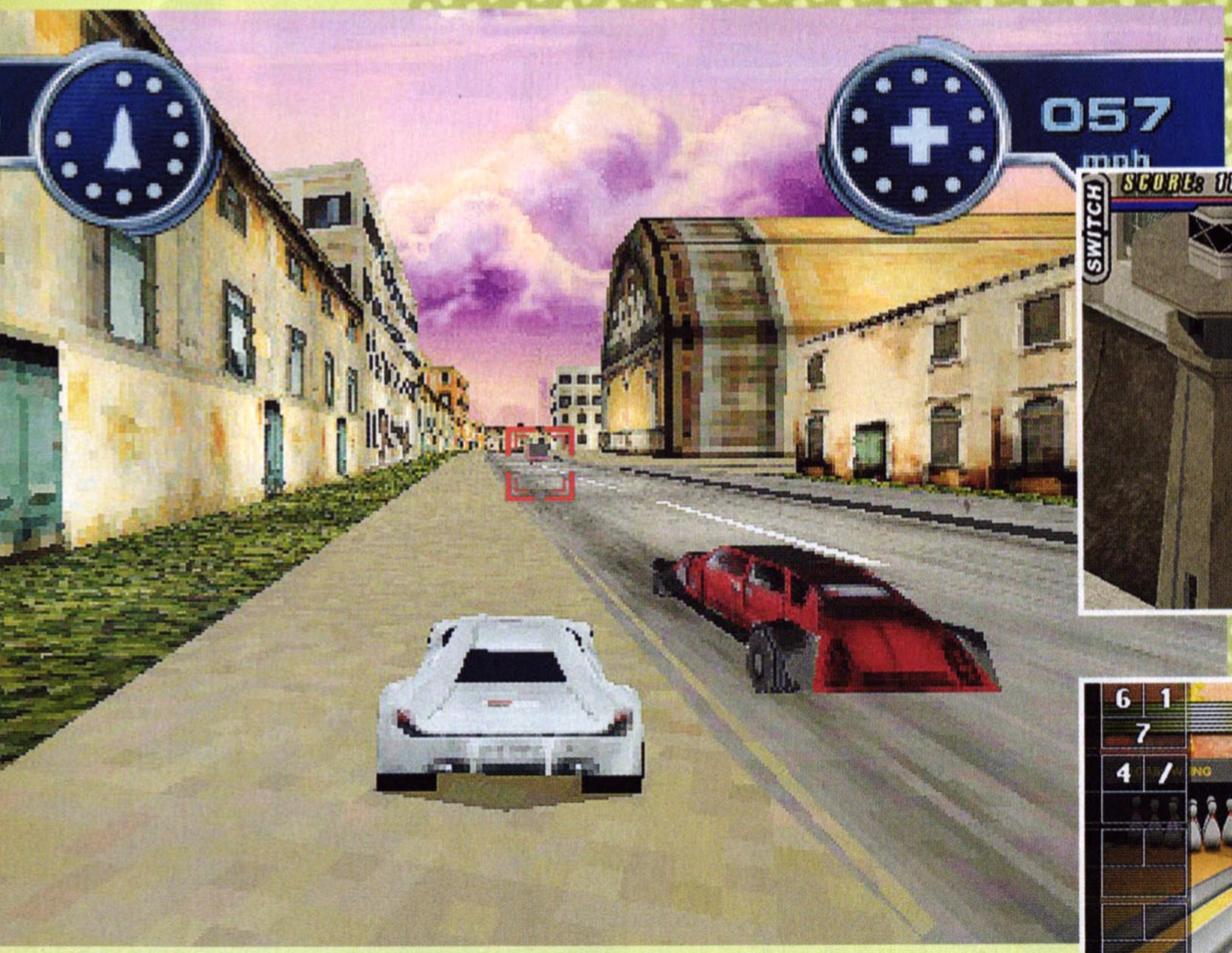
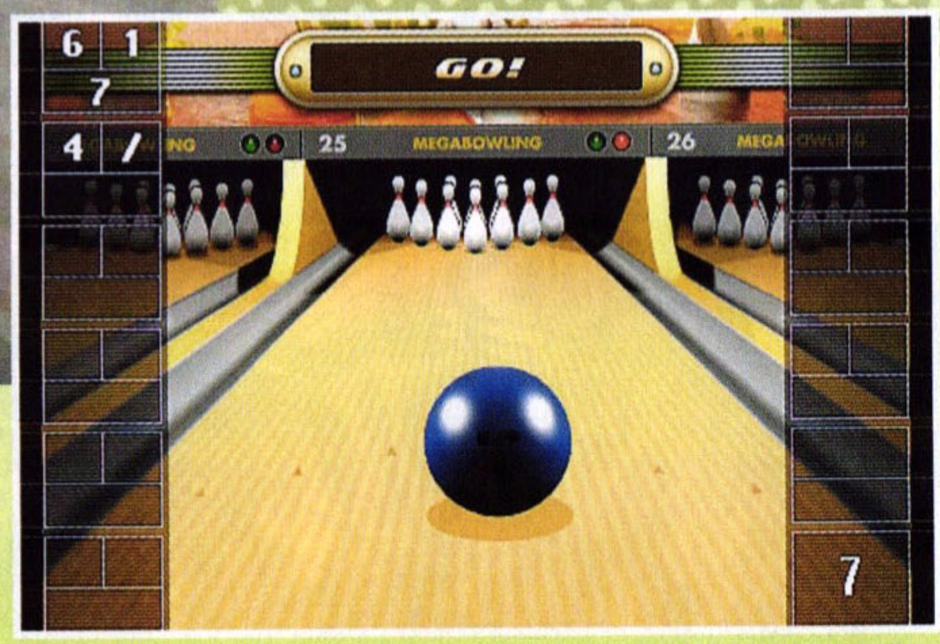


Spy Hunter

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4



MegaBowling

Announced Titles

Besides these three games, Tapwave is expecting to have 25 titles at the system's launch. A handful will be high-end titles from well-known PC and console developers, and the rest will be enhanced versions of existing Palm OS-compatible titles.

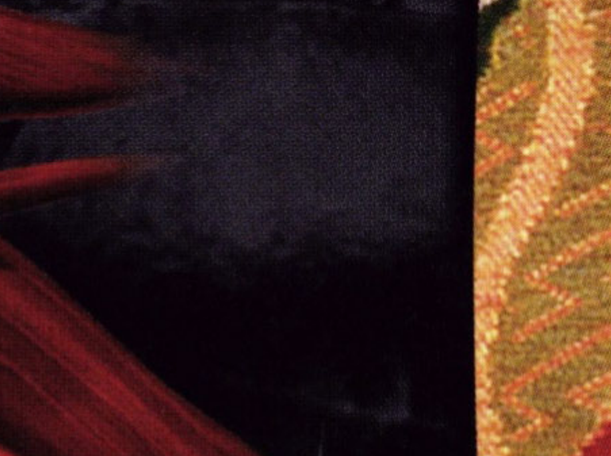
Why It's Cool That Zodiac is a Palm Device

Tapwave's Zodiac features a slightly tweaked version of Palm's 5.2 operating system (called Palm OS 5.2T for Tapwave). This allows them to give programmers extra control over the analog joystick and shoulder buttons – input options not available on most Palm devices. The Palm OS always comes with a calendar, address book, alarm clock, memo pad, calculator, and email; and it's extremely easy to develop for, spawning literally thousands of applications (many are free or shareware) available on the web and in software stores. Currently, games available to the average consumer number over 1,400 and general Palm OS applications are around 20,000. The range of applications swings from database management all the way over to a program that rolls a 20-sided die for the pen and paper set.

The touch screen allows you to drag and drop applications to these shortcut "spokes" ▶

If you're looking for a few more reasons to justify the Tapwave as a business write-off next tax season, here are some applications that will come pre-loaded on the Zodiac:

- Palm's Media Suite which includes address book, calendar, to-do list, and memo pad programs
- Productivity tools to handle most Microsoft Office files (Word, Excel, etc.)
- Graphing calculator
- Chat application that works over Bluetooth or other wireless internet connection
- Stunt Car Extreme – a 3D racing title
- Acid Solitaire – a juice-up version of traditional Solitaire



Out Of Myth

Comes May

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

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Fantasy Violence

XBOX

ONLY ON XBOX

Otogi 御伽

Myth of Demons

SEGA

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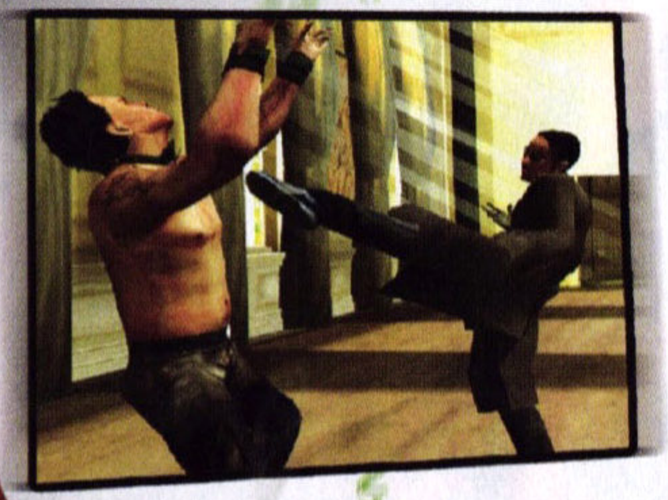
"you won't be able to put this down until you've seen all of the new footage."
_Game Informer



"...it jacked me, the casual fan, into *The Matrix* universe."
_Official PlayStation Magazine

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(s03)

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO...
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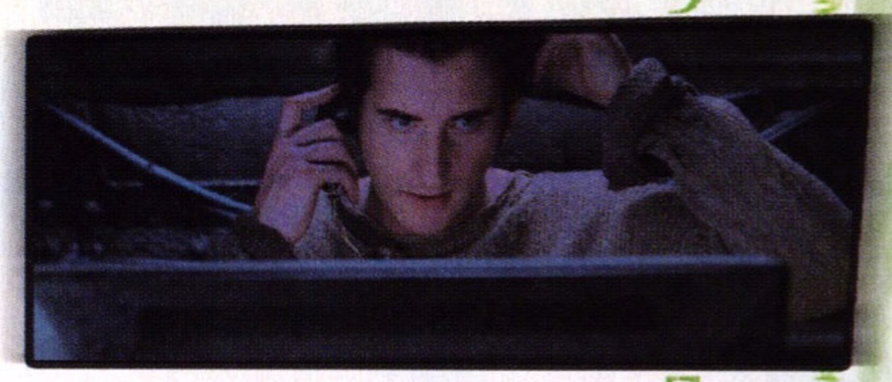
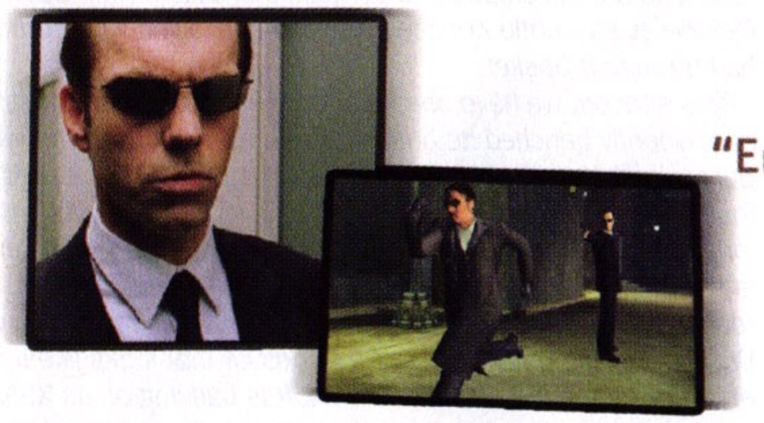
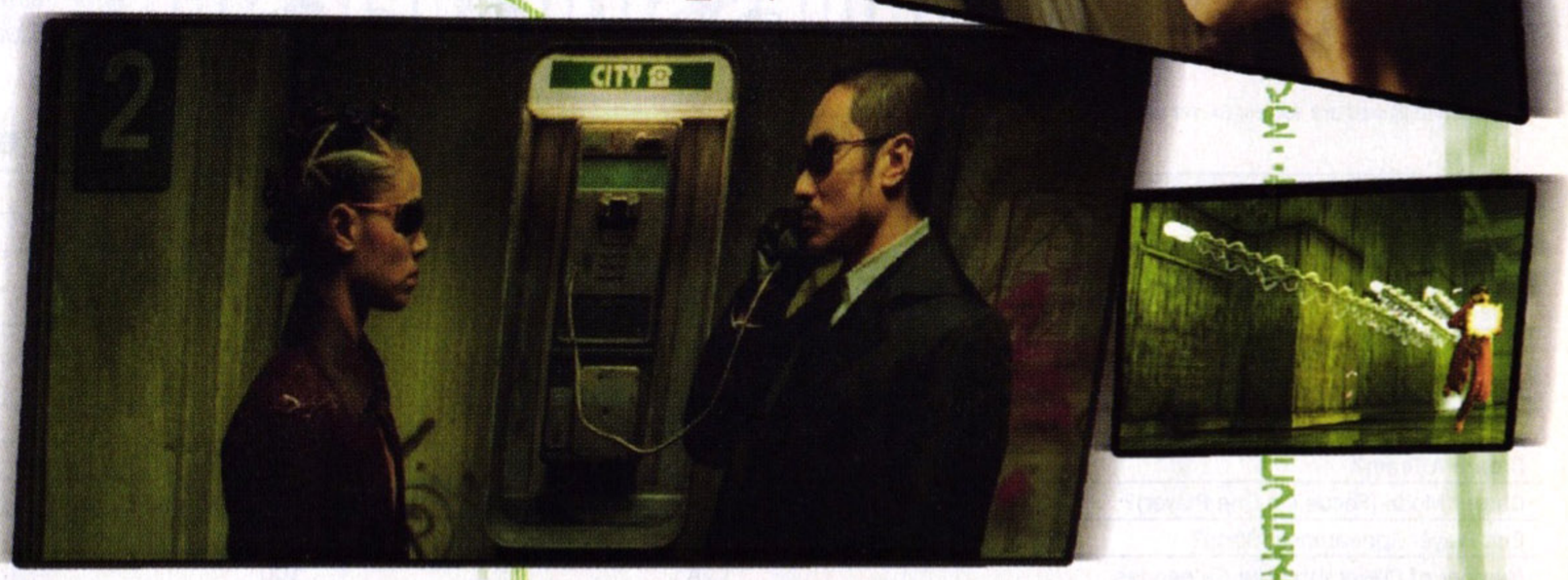




"Enter the **must-have** Matrix."
_Dennis McCauley, Philadelphia Inquirer

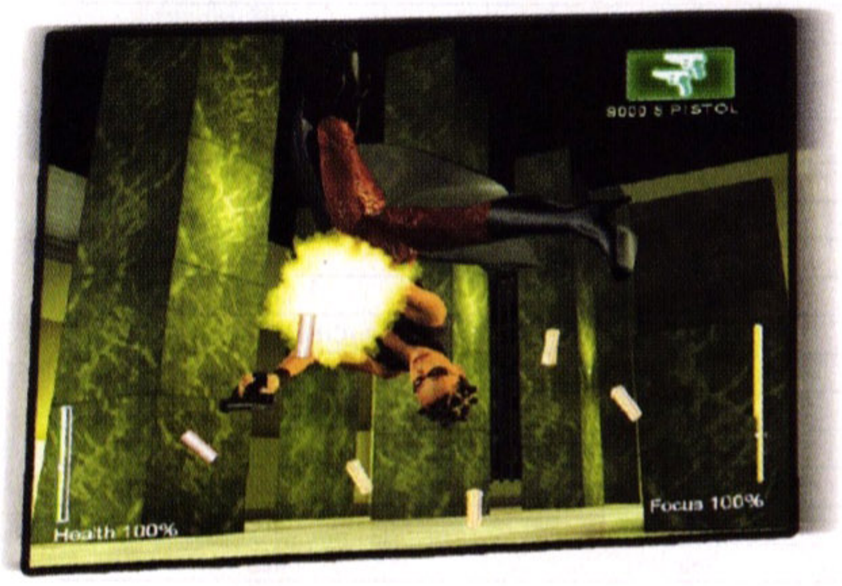
"...looks, smells, and feels like...The Matrix." _Play



"...if you are a diehard fan of the films, it doesn't get much better than this.
_Game Informer

"...if you are a hardcore Matrix fan, owning Enter the Matrix is an absolute necessity."
_PlayStation Magazine

"Mark this down: this is the day the entertainment industry changed forever. **A-plus.**"
_Tribune Media Services



"If you're a die-hard fan of the flicks, Enter the Matrix provides exactly what creators Andy and Larry Wachowski had promised." _Electronic Gaming Monthly

"**Explosive and stunning** – Atari's Enter the Matrix revolutionizes 3-D adventure gaming with blockbuster bravado."
_Nintendo Power

"...dodging bullets and pulling off mad kung fu in Enter the Matrix is exactly what I hoped it would be **...awesome.**"
_Official Xbox Magazine

"Setting a new standard for game and movie studios working together."
_Detroit News

PlayStation.2 ® XBOX NINTENDO GAMECUBE PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE Shiny ENTERTAINMENT WB INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT™ VILLAGE ROADSHOW PICTURES

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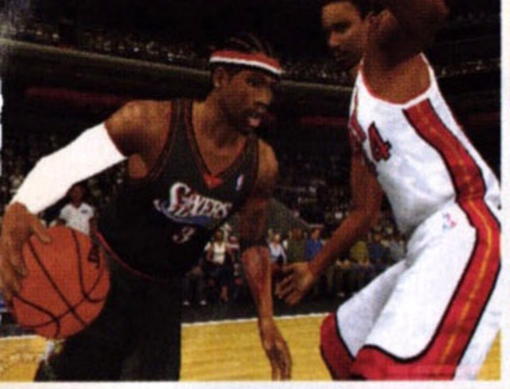
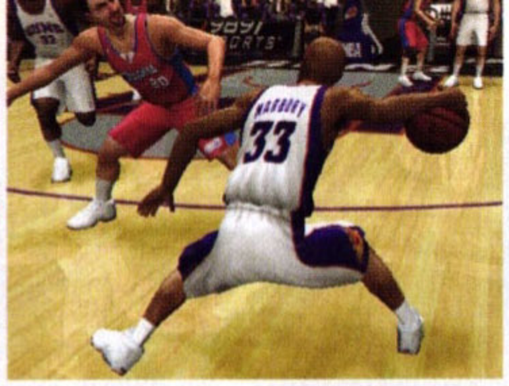




Heroes of the Hardwood:

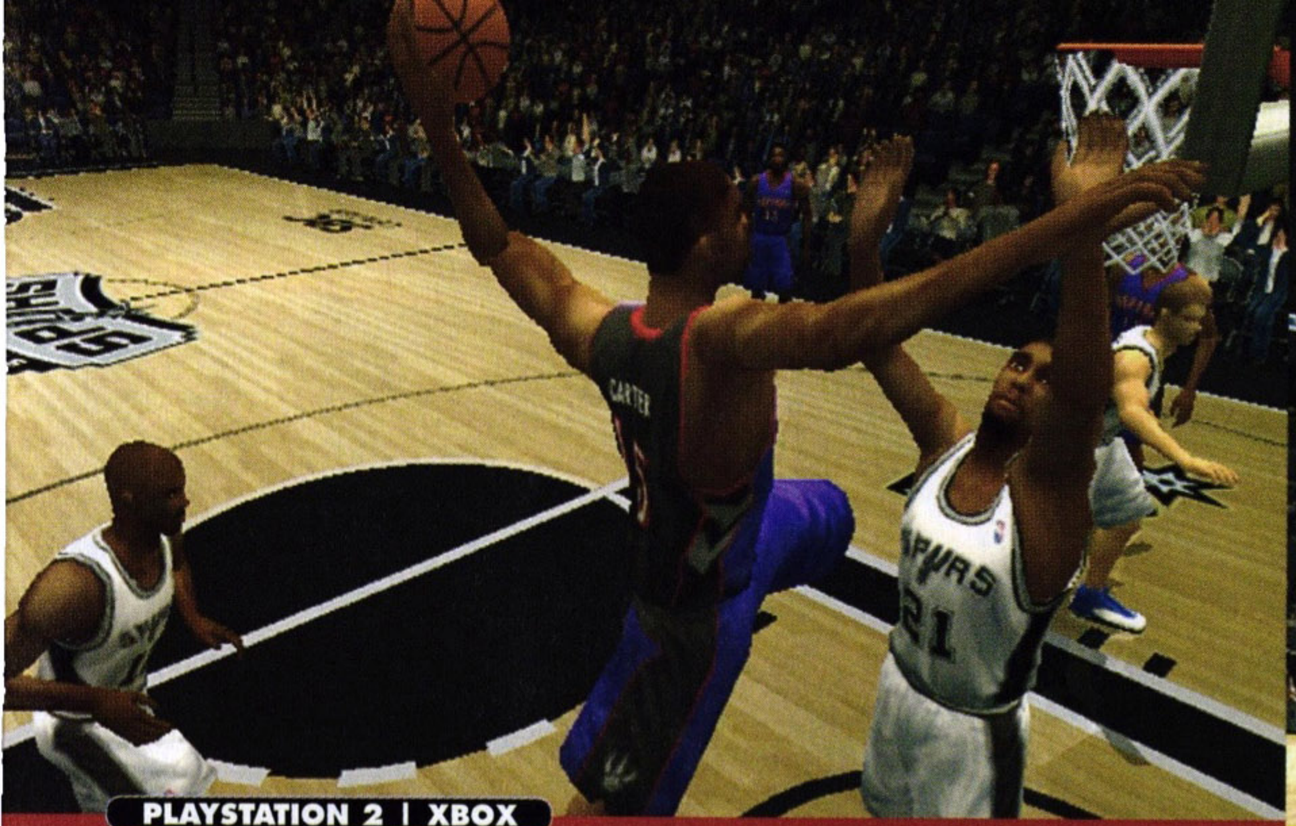
This Year's NBA Games Strut Their Stuff

NBA players are larger than life – sometimes literally. As technology has advanced, games have drawn closer to faithfully representing these giants in all their glory. Some try to show the finesse of the game of basketball. Others work towards emulating the speed and intensity of real-life hoops. After those missions are accomplished, companies make a mad dash to include every subtle nuance imaginable involved with putting a ball through a basket.

This season, we have one less team in contention. Konami has permanently benched its basketball series, NBA Starting Five. Surprisingly, nothing has popped up in its place. That leaves just four games jockeying for position for 2004. Sega Sports – the longtime leader in the field – has adopted the ESPN moniker, and is showing off a new mode. EA Sports' Live series is honing its realism while branching out on uncharted visual fronts. Sony's 989 Sports is putting together a ShootOut that looks like its best effort since the '98 version. Microsoft is banking on its XSN online network to draw people with a thirst for playing over the (nothing but) 'net. We'll also talk about two upcoming alternatives to the simulation style: Acclaim's NBA Jam and Midway's NBA Ballers. Clear out of the way, because we're about to drive the lane.

All facts and figures are subject to change by the developer

	NBA Live 2004	NBA ShootOut 2004	ESPN NBA Basketball	NBA Inside Drive 2004
THE BASICS				
Release Date	October 7	September 30	October 21	October 28
Commentary Team	Marv Albert, Mike Fratello	Bill Walton, Ian Eagle	Tom Tolbert, Kevin Frazier	Kevin Colabro, Marques Johnson
Musical Licenses	Chingy, Outkast, Jermaine Dupri	Afrika Bambaataa	ESPN themes, Mantronix	DJ Clue, Method Man, Jurassic 5
Game's Finalized Roster Date	N/A	9/1/03	8/30/03	9/15/03
FRONTEND OPTIONS				
Gameplay Sliders?/#?	Yes/50	Yes/N/A	Yes/86	Yes/N/A
Create A Team?	No	No	Yes	No
Career Mode (Focus On One Player)?	No	Yes	Yes (24/7 Mode)	No (Can Build Up Created Player)
Edit Player Appearance/Stats?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Number of Player Attribute Categories	N/A	100	92	114
GAMEPLAY				
Number of Dunks	200+	50+	70+	111
Number of Dribble Moves	100+	29	70+	20
Number of Post Moves	30+	5	10+	10
Number of Plays Offense/Defense	100/20+	7/7 (30 Voice Recognition plays)	145/10	30/12
Touch-Sensitive Passing?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
On-The-Fly Shot Alterations?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
User-Activated Alley-Oops?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Loose-Ball Dives?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Between-Play Cutscenes?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
FRANCHISE OPTIONS				
# Years in Franchise Mode?	25	30 (in Career Mode)	40	25
Multiple Users in One Franchise?	No	No	Yes	Yes
Different Schedule Each Franchise Year?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fantasy Draft?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Changing Player Stats in Franchise?	Yes	Yes (Created player only)	Yes	Yes (Created player only)
Fictional Rookies in Franchise?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Off-Season Rookie Draft?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Number of Player Stats Tracked	N/A	20	47	67
Number of League Leader Stats Tracked	N/A	24	30	33
CPU-Offered Trades?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Salary Cap Restrictions?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Trading Deadline?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
All-Star Game?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
End of Season Awards?/#	Yes/14	Yes/11	Yes / 25	Yes
EXTRAS				
Retro/Alternate Jerseys?	Yes	No/Yes	Yes	No/Yes
Classic Players?/Teams?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
One-on-One Mode?	Yes	No	Yes	No
Unlockables?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ONLINE OPTIONS				
Online Play?/Platforms	Yes/PS2	Yes/PS2	Yes/PS2, Xbox	Yes/Xbox
Broadband/Narrowband Support?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Broadband
Chat: Text/Voice?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online Tournaments/User-Created Tourneys?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online Leader Board?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online Roster Updates?	Yes	Yes (Weekly)	Yes (Monthly)	Yes (Weekly)
Non-Default Rosters Online?	Yes	Yes	No	No
Online Subscription Price	Free	Free	PS2-Free, Xbox-Monthly Xbox Live	Monthly Xbox Live



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NBA LIVE 2004

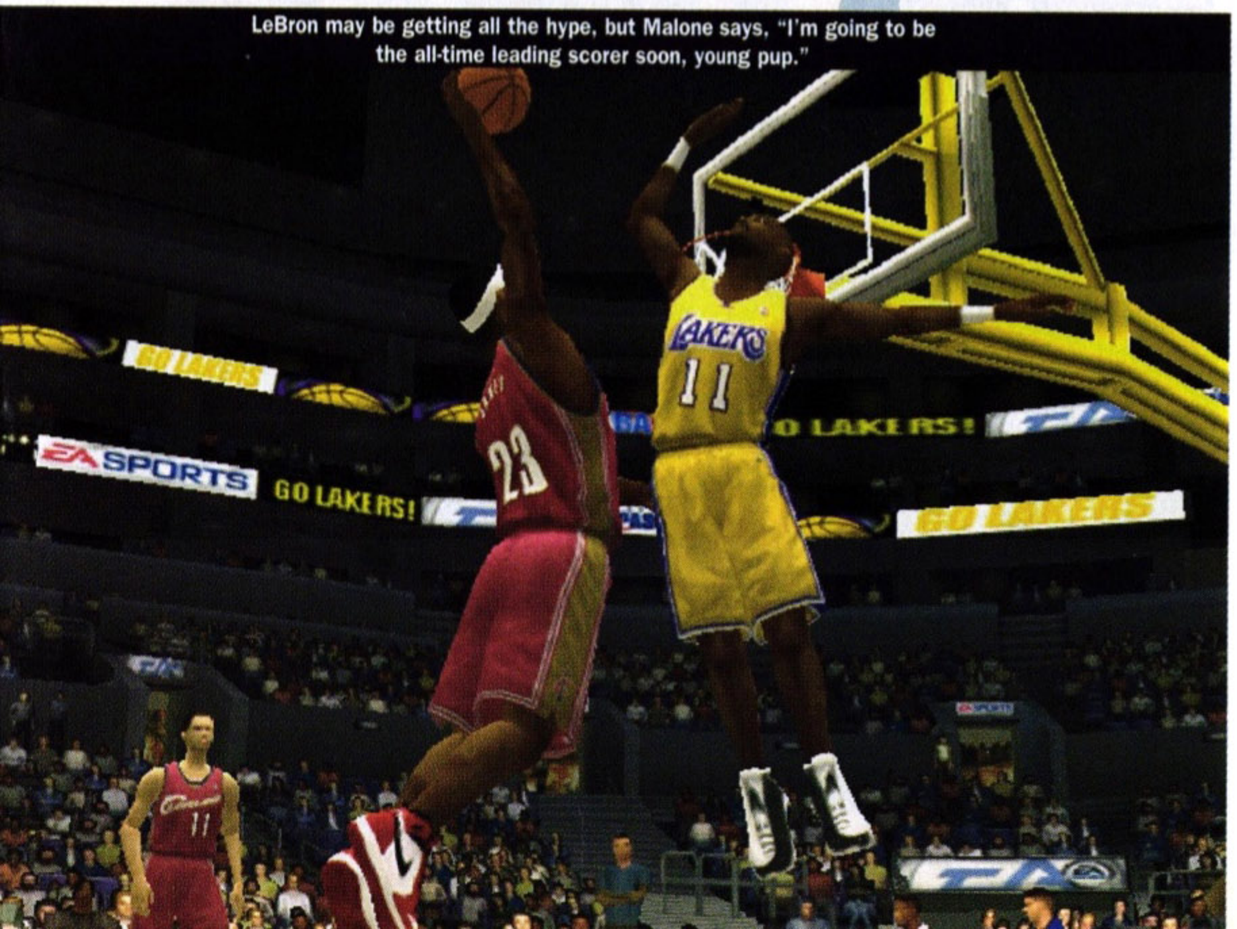
■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA VANCOUVER ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

The Live series is the longest-standing hoops franchise out there. As a crafty veteran, it has always put forth a good effort. Last season, Live 2003 showed that you can teach an old dog new tricks; the Freestyle mode, coupled with a Franchise mode overhaul, had it going almost neck-and-neck with perennial champion, Sega's NBA 2K series. This year, EA thinks it has filled in the last pieces of the puzzle, and expects to be taking the title home.

Live 2003 got you up to speed with the new form of offense. Freestyle mode brought with it a wealth of user-controlled moves activated by a directional press on the right analog. This resulted in a game that quickly became a dunk contest. The 2004 installment is aiming at realism by balancing all other on-court facets. The collision detection of players during the course of the game – something you usually wouldn't give much thought to – is very impressive. Big men bump off each other in the paint, duplicating the overall physicality of NBA play. You won't be able to turbo down the lane and throw it down, because you'll have to deal with all the other jerseys – both teammates and opponents – in your path. This realism necessitates a new control scheme: There is one button for shooting and another for dunks/layups. Other changes aimed at increasing difficulty and user strategy are an increase in passes picked off and one-button alley-oops.

Franchise mode has a new coat of polish as well as a new name – Dynasty mode. Every transaction brings about a cutscene. For example, if you draft a player, it will show him at a press conference with his new jersey. This brings more visual flair, without having to break up the action of the game on the court. A training camp allows you to sharpen the skills of your players, and you can now trade draft picks.

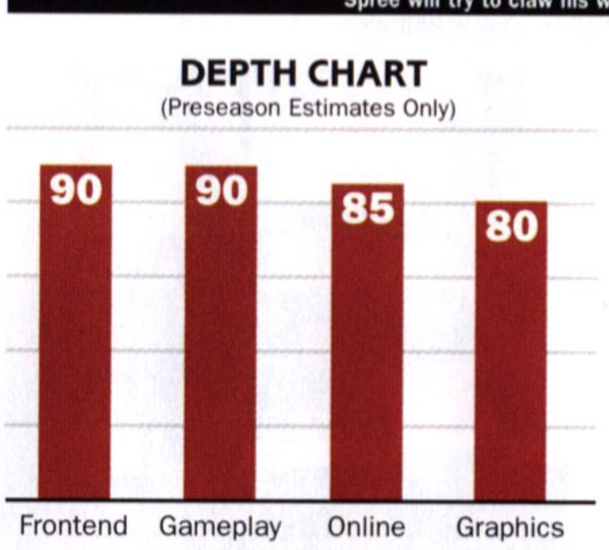
Like Madden, Live is going to reward your good deeds. When you accomplish feats on a task list (hit five three-pointers, get a triple-double, etc.), you earn points that can be spent in the NBA Store. These unlock new shoes, apparel, and other goodies. In Dynasty mode, things are a bit different; you unlock Dynasty points. These are spent on rewards similar to Madden cards, such as boosting your rebounding for one game or giving you enhanced steals for a series.

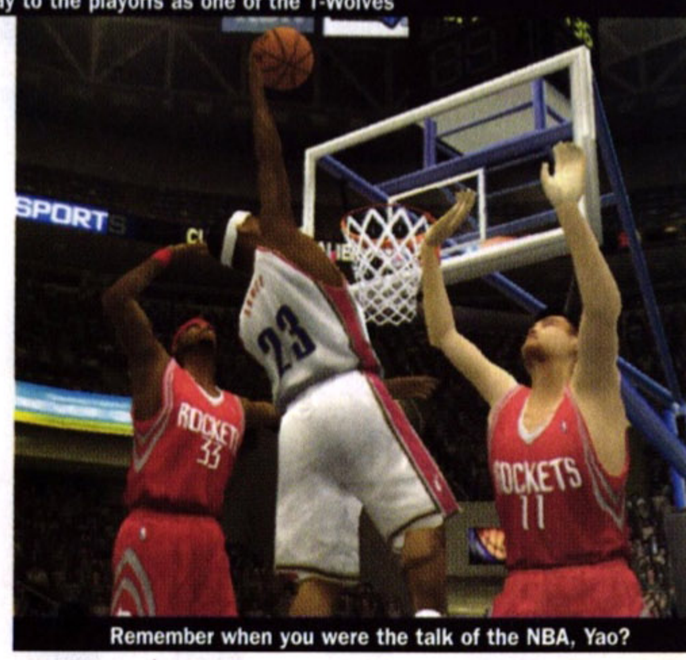


LeBron may be getting all the hype, but Malone says, "I'm going to be the all-time leading scorer soon, young pup."

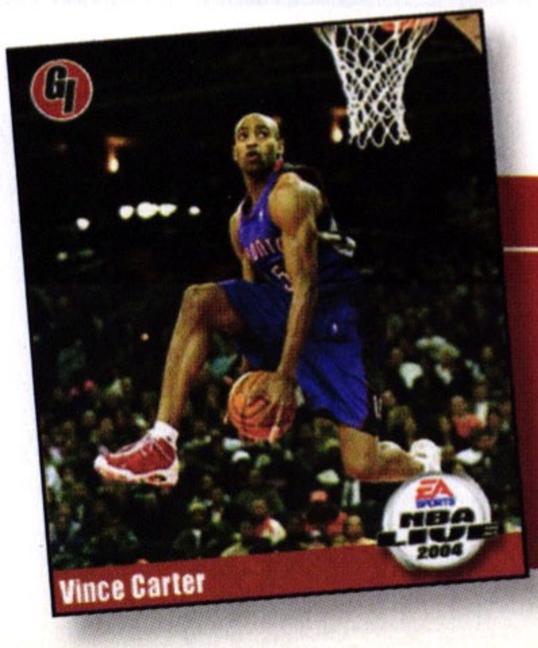
Shaq shows off the new collision against new Net and fellow 1992 draft pick, 'Zo Mourning

Spree will try to claw his way to the playoffs as one of the T-Wolves





Remember when you were the talk of the NBA, Yao?



Scouting Report

EA Sports is focused this year. Live is making great strides toward achieving gameplay realism, while adding depth to its Franchise mode. Gamers will have to bring their clutch skills to compete in Live, as the cakewalk is over. Sega's reign may be over, as well. It's going to be a tight race.

Al's pace is too fast for Indiana

PLAYSTATION 2

NBA SHOOTOUT 2004

■ **PUBLISHER** 989 SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** 989 SPORTS ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30

When you think of the great hoops titles of the current console generation, ShootOut probably doesn't make the list. Publisher 989 Sports wants to change that, and it's making a solid bid to do so this year. The gameplay is getting up to speed, Career mode is still in the house, and its online features are near the head of the pack.

Last year, we saw ShootOut eschewing Franchise in favor of Career mode. It tracks the progress of your created baller from his struggles to make a squad to his final game. It seemed like an idea everyone else would copy; but ShootOut still has the market cornered. That's a good thing, since little has changed in this respect. You still play in the summer league, sign for a 10-day contract with an NBA or NBA Development League team, and go from there. One of the few additions is having goals to achieve each game. Also, Franchise mode is again nowhere to be found.

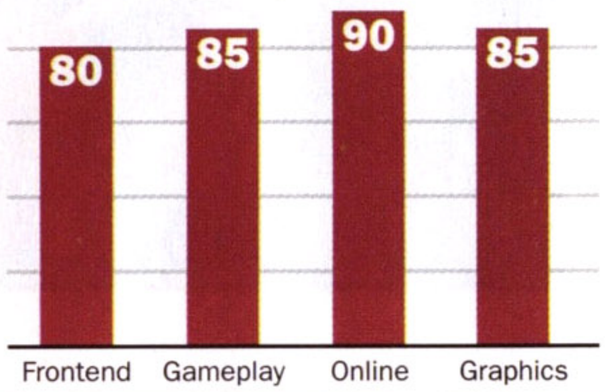
Nearly every other aspect of this game is showing signs of improvement. It has what it takes to compete graphically, with nice player models and attractive stadiums. An innovative part of the presentation is Poster Cam – which slows down and zooms in when you go in for a big dunk so you can soak in all the glory.

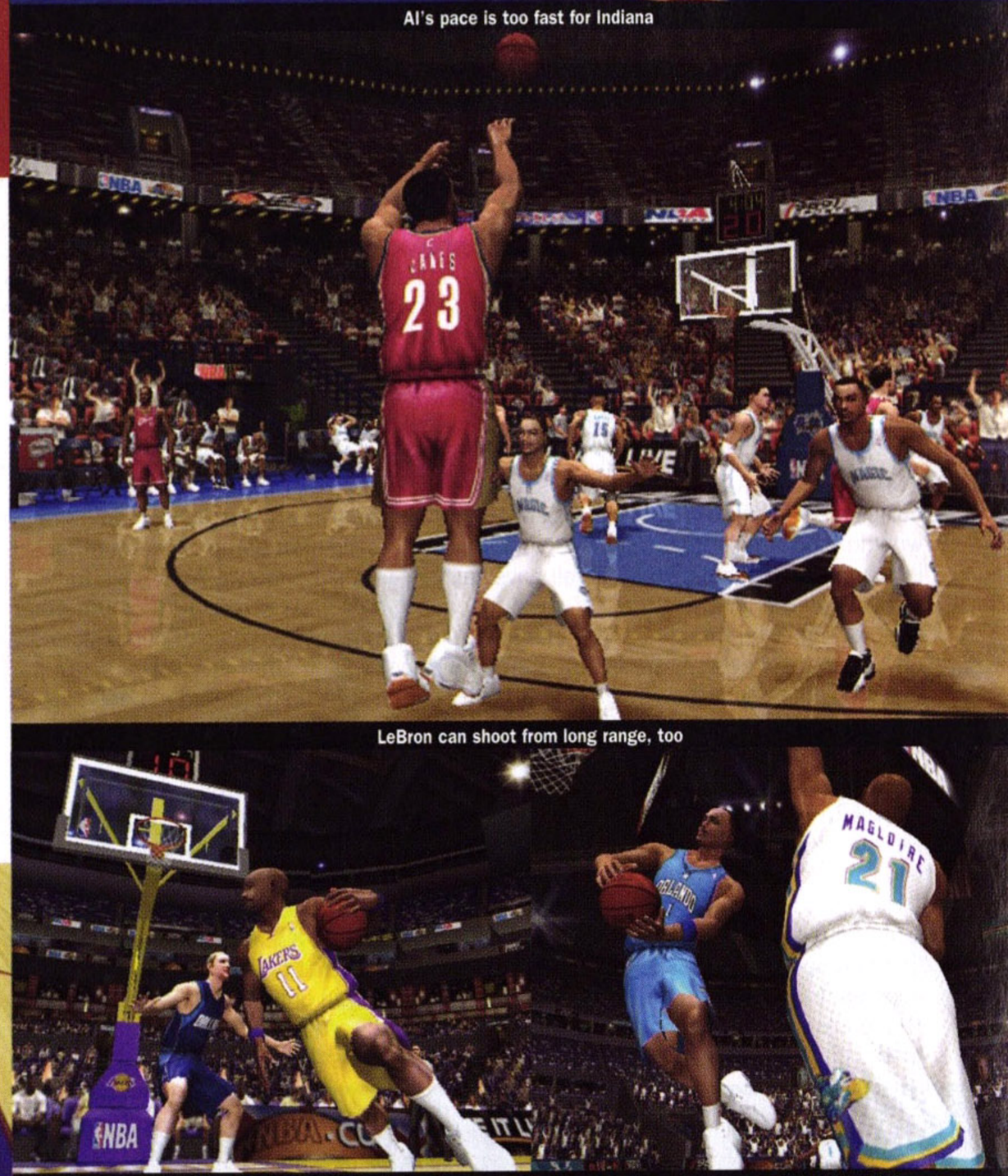
As far as fundamentals, ShootOut has been training hard between seasons. It's gotten a lot faster, rebounding is accurate, and the right analog pulls off some dazzling special moves (similar to Live's Freestyle). The d-pad calls quick plays with ease, but you can also use voice recognition commands to order your players around. This same feature can be used to talk smack online. Speaking of the Internet, 989 is readying gems like 64-man tournaments, broadband and dial-up support, a real sports ticker, and rankings.

ShootOut may not have the makings of an MVP just yet, but it's looking more and more worthy of a spot on the All-NBA First Team, as well as a nomination for Most Improved Player.

DEPTH CHART

(Preseason Estimates Only)

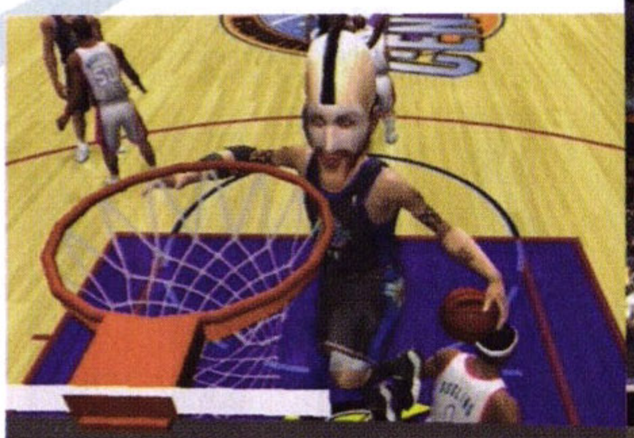




LeBron can shoot from long range, too

The Mailman hopes the Lakers deliver him a ring

You can call T-Mac "Daddy"

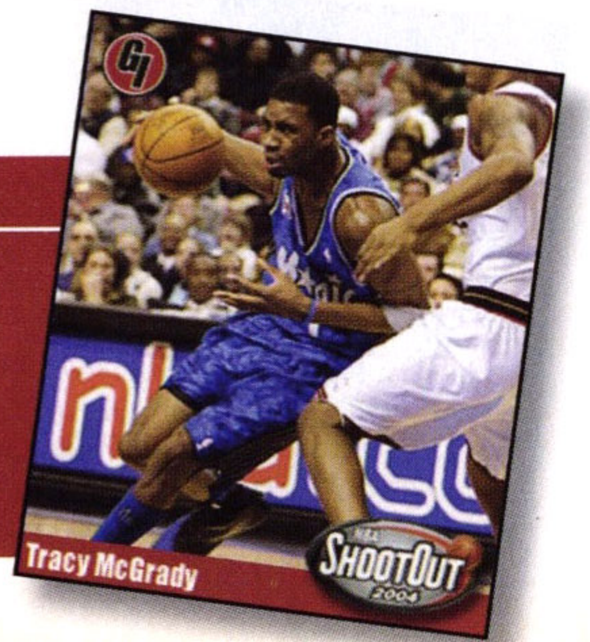


Taking a created player through the summer league is what ShootOut is all about

Walker demonstrates the mid-air shot adjustment feature

Scouting Report

The unique Career mode is joined by gameplay that's starting to catch up to the big boys – EA and Sega. Like SOCOM, you can use your headset for both single-player and online. We still see plenty of room for improvement, but we may have to give ShootOut 2004 an A for effort.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

ESPN NBA BASKETBALL

■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21

The leader of video game hoops kept its title last year, but took seven games to beat rival NBA Live. Sega and Visual Concepts seem to be using the competition as a motivator, and have the most ambitious basketball title this year. Gameplay and presentation enhancements are impressive, but a groundbreaking new career mode is what will really turn heads.

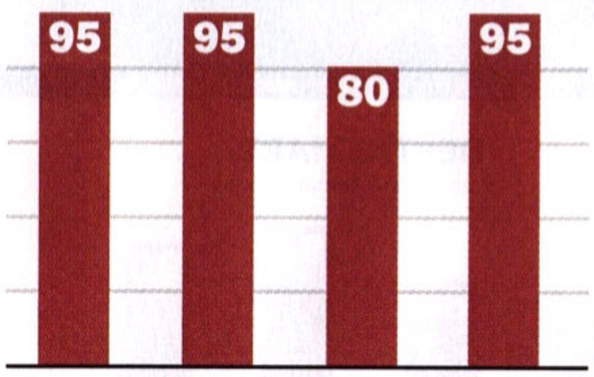
This mode, called 24/7, is like a world tour for your created player. Craft your guy from scratch, then do training drills to enhance his skills. From there, travel around the globe and compete in various challenges – 1-on-1, 2-on-2, dunk only, come-from-behind, etc. Winning boosts your attributes, but that's not all. You also win items from a massive list that includes full head coverings, new balls, and a bunch of jerseys. The trick is, it uses your console's internal clock to decide what type of game to play and what prize to win. For example, Larry Bird may be available at Rucker Park, but only at 5pm. Or, to win the night vision goggles, you could be forced to stay up until 1am for a specific game. Your character, along with his unique costume, can be used in online games or imported via memory cards.

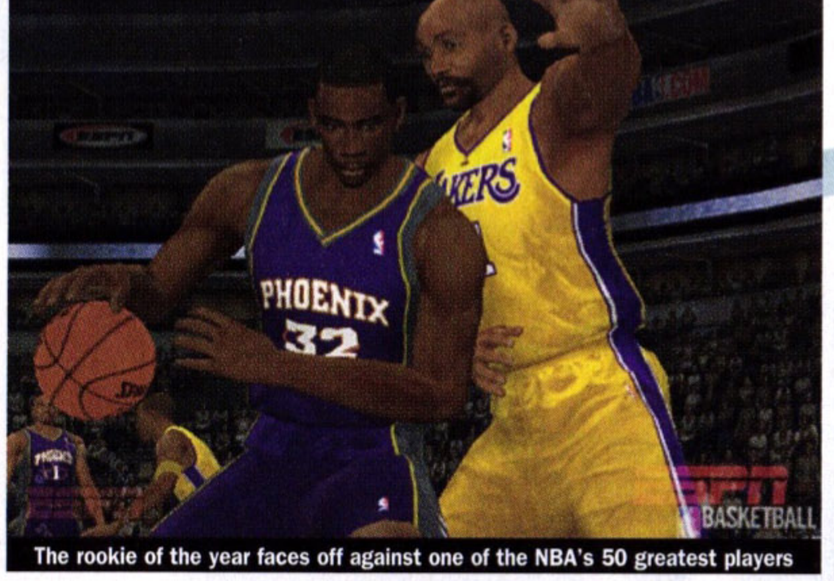
Students of the game should not fear; the simulation aspects haven't suffered for this new mode. This title is faster than 2K3, but that doesn't mean gameplay has been dumbed down. Iso-motion control is Visual Concepts' answer to EA's Freestyle control, and each offensive move has its own defensive counter. It's almost like a fighting game between opponents. Double-tapping on passes sends CPU-controlled teammates to the lane, or you can do a sweet give-and-go by holding the pass button then releasing it to get a dish back. Passing as a whole is much easier. For Franchise play, the big addition is the ability to hire trainers, assistant coaches, and scouts.

NBA 2K3 was the best-looking game last season, but every head has been remodeled for ESPN. You'll see both shorts and jerseys sway in animated response to movement – even on PS2. The crowds have been given depth, so they don't have that "picket fence" look to them. This series is now full of between-play cutscenes, as well.

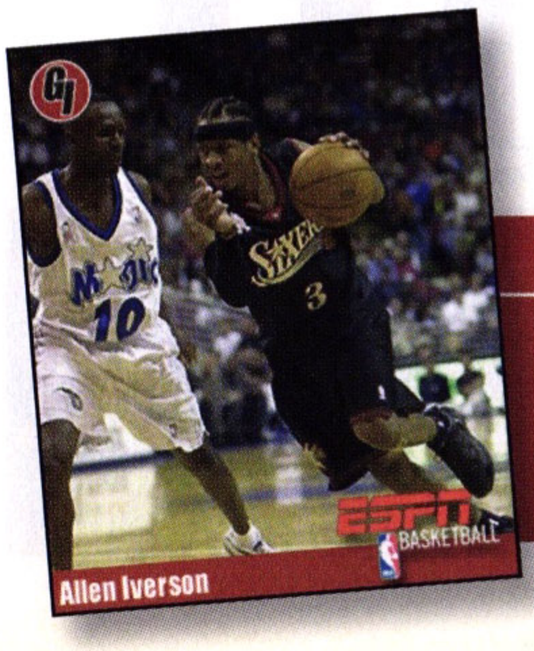
DEPTH CHART

(Preseason Estimates Only)





The rookie of the year faces off against one of the NBA's 50 greatest players



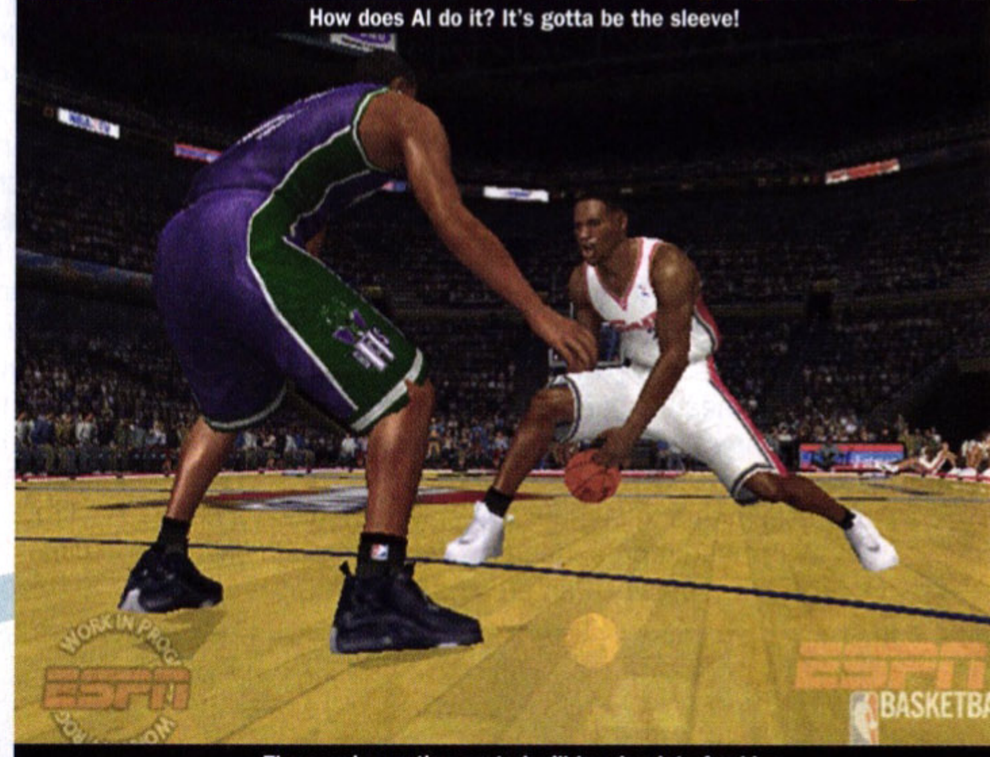
Allen Iverson

Scouting Report

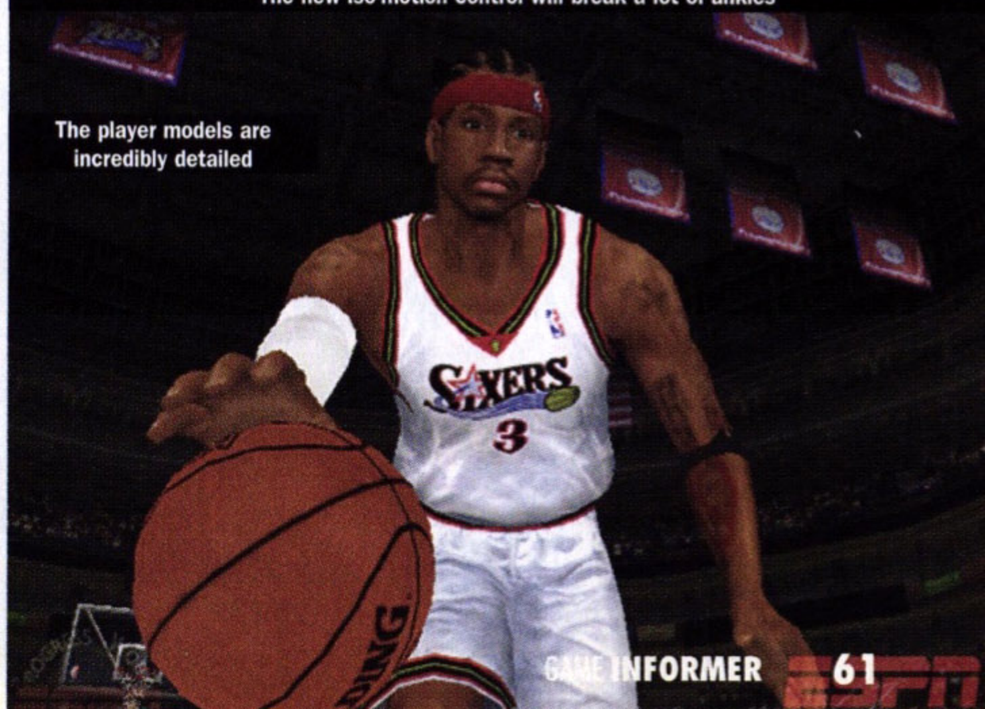
Sega definitely wants to stay the hoops leader. The 24/7 mode is sure to draw in basketball fans of all types, and the attention to graphical detail is unmatched. Iso-motion is a good rival to Live's Freestyle. Quickening the pace looks like a good decision – one which doesn't hinder the stellar, strategic gameplay.

This wolf flies like an eagle

How does AI do it? It's gotta be the sleeve!



The new iso-motion control will break a lot of ankles



The player models are incredibly detailed

Here's a great shot of the majestic United Center

Inside Drive's new facial hair details make Vlade look like the smelly, scruffy bum he really is

Rick Fox won't have much to do this season

XBOX

NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2004

■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** HIGH VOLTAGE ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

Microsoft's own hoops series started with a solid foundation, but has only made baby steps ever since. This season, the company is banking on the fact that gamers will go gaga over XSN – Microsoft's über-cool online service. Also, the can't-miss cover boy, Shaquille O'Neal, is bound to generate some interest.

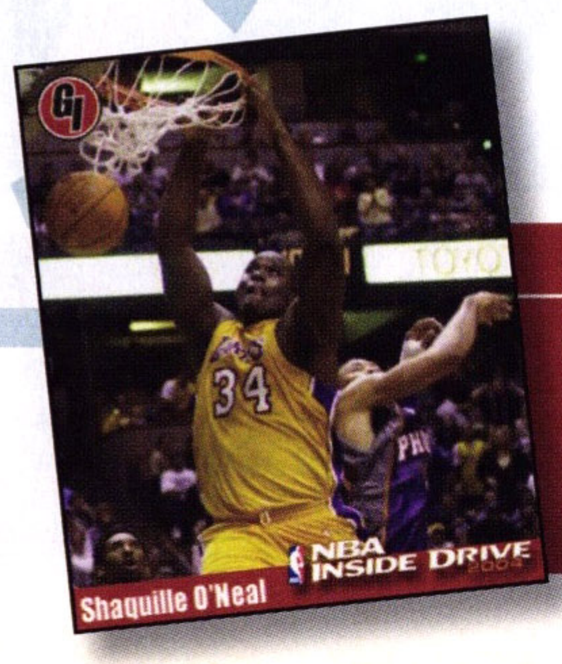
For those unfamiliar with XSN (Xbox Sports Network), it's the first truly virtual sports league. It uses your PC to track stats, works with your cell phone, broadcasts up-to-date scores and info, and features downloadable roster updates and player rating changes. It's far beyond the head-to-head exhibition contests that have been the norm with most Internet-capable sports games.

Advancements in actual gameplay are looking a bit thin. With Shaq representing the title, there's a big focus on post moves – an area that Inside Drive has always devoted a lot of attention to. Alley-oops feel very natural and are just a matter of lobbing a pass to an open player in the paint. Loose-ball dives have been added. Steals occur less frequently than in most games, which is a good thing. However, the defense has received an overall boost in IQ points.

Franchise mode caught up with the crowd last year – with 25 seasons, rookie draft, etc. – and it's staying the course for 2004. You can now make trades for uneven numbers of players – something sorely missing in 2003. User preferences handle things like substitution types and rebounding tenacity. Hopefully, the salary cap restrictions will be made a little more lenient before it ships, as most teams in the build we saw were too far over the limit to make any transactions.

From a presentation standpoint, Inside Drive is still respectable. The graphics have lost some of their odd look to become more realistic. The best commentary in video game hoops (Kevin Colabro, Marques Johnson, and Kenny Smith) is back to call the action. Still, it's going to be hard for Inside Drive to make an impact with so few innovations.

Ray Allen punishes his former team. How did they ever let him go?



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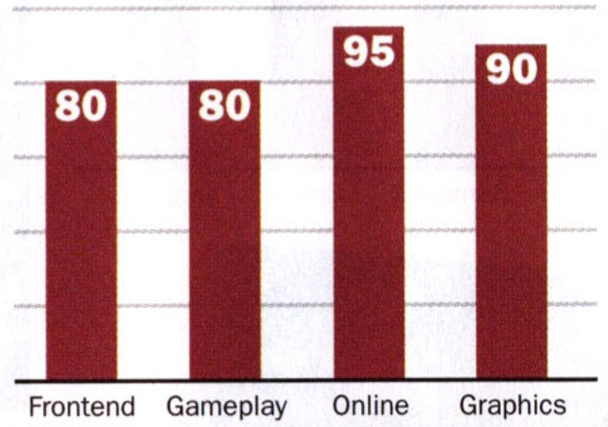
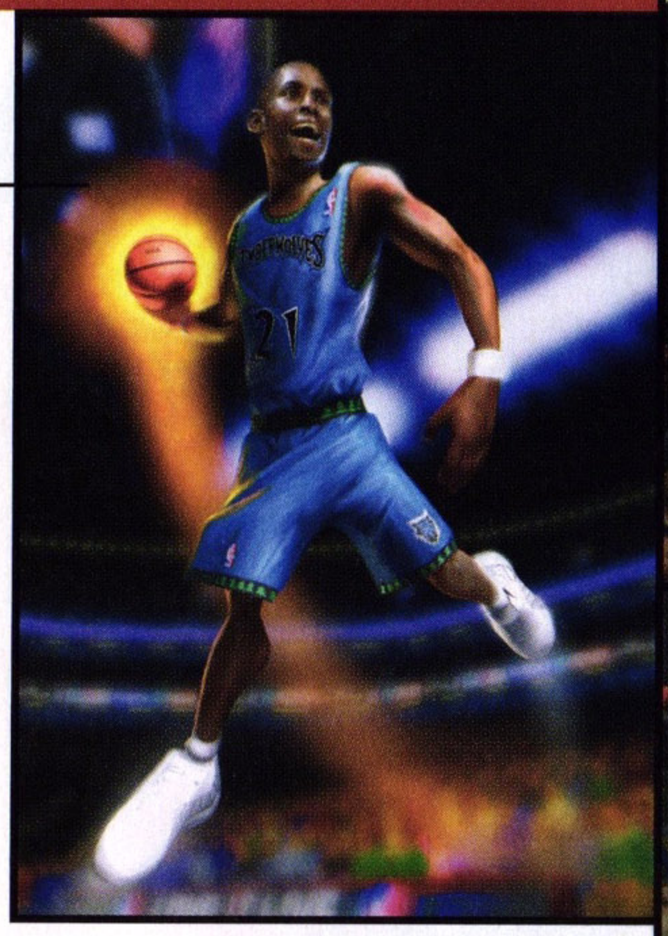


Scouting Report

Inside Drive is looking like one of those players who get out of shape in the off-season, opting to cruise around in his Escalade looking for honeys rather than honing his skills. Online addicts will absolutely love XSN, but people looking for other new features are searching for needles in a haystack.

THE ARCADE ALTERNATIVE

Not everyone gets a kick out of scouting rookies or managing rosters. For those just wanting some good, intense hoops, Acclaim and Midway are putting out NBA games with a different take on the sport. Have a look.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NBA JAM

The father of arcade sports is back, thanks to Acclaim. While capturing the essence of the quarter-munching dunk-fest of old, it also has many of the features required for a next-generation sports title.

The game is three-on-three, and you have a handful of players on each team to choose from. Ballhandling moves and alley-oops broaden gameplay a bit, while instant replays let you revel in your dunks – including the Play of the Game, shown at the end of a contest. Each score or defensive stop earns you Jam Points, which can either upgrade created players or buy new modes, apparel, or options.

Codes, trivia, and classic players are just some of the bonuses included in this throwback release. Multiplayer will be where the most fun lies, but solo players will get their kicks, too. It may not be an NBA Street killer, but Jam has a lot of potential for fun.

■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM ■ **DEVELOPER** ACCLAIM STUDIOS AUSTIN
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

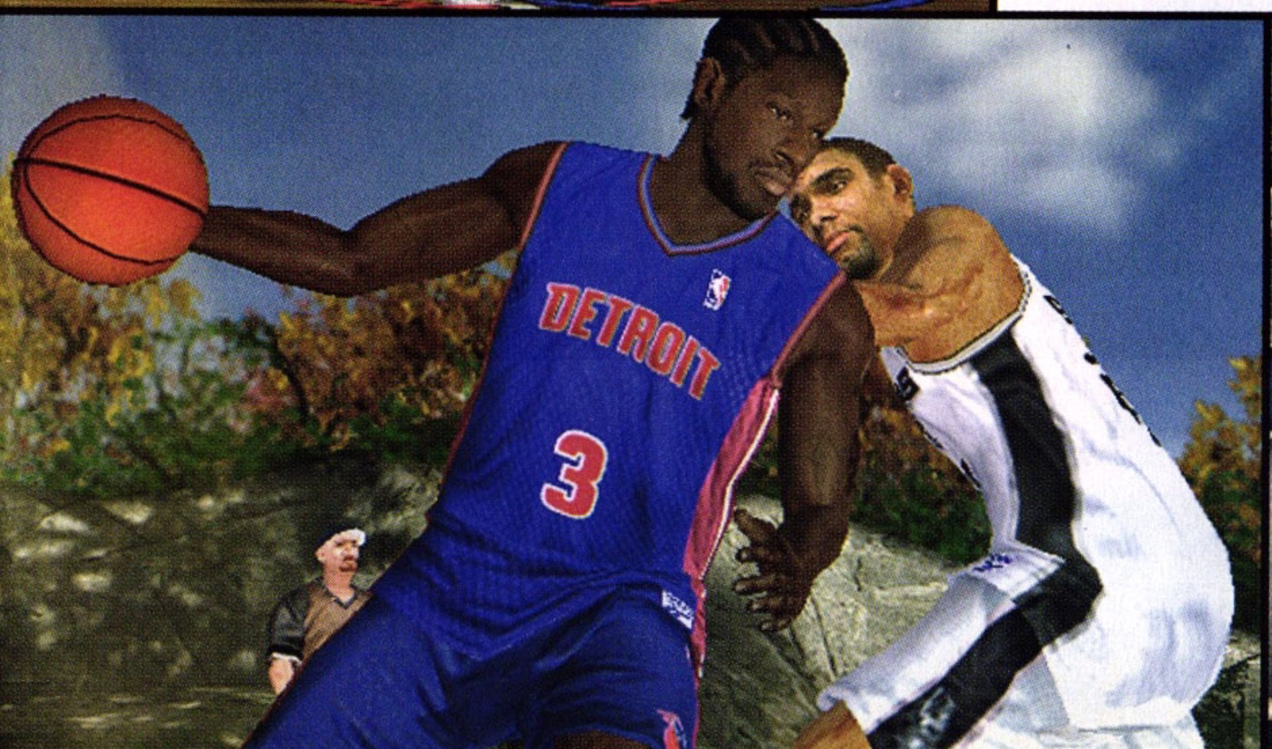
NBA BALLERS

The celebrity of an NBA superstar doesn't end when they step off the court. According to NBA Ballers, it's just beginning. These guys are so bling-bling, they're blung-blong. Head out to a player's location of choice to have a game of one-on-one. With only two models on the court, Midway can make them the most detailed in any title; this includes stunning reactions, sizes, and animation.

Ballers features over 80 players – both current and past hoopsters. You can also craft your own wannabe and go from rags to riches, building up your own mansion. You'll hit Jalen Rose's yacht and Tim Duncan's palace in the Virgin Islands. Online play is set for both PS2 and Xbox.

Midway has been doing arcade b-ball longer than anyone – it was Midway, not Acclaim, that made the first NBA Jam. Ballers is a totally original take on hoops, and will pique a lot of gamers' interests.

■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY ■ **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 2004



TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Lyrics
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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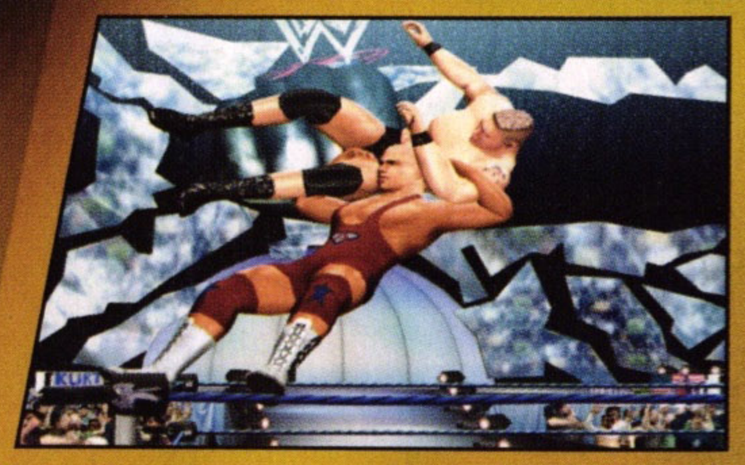
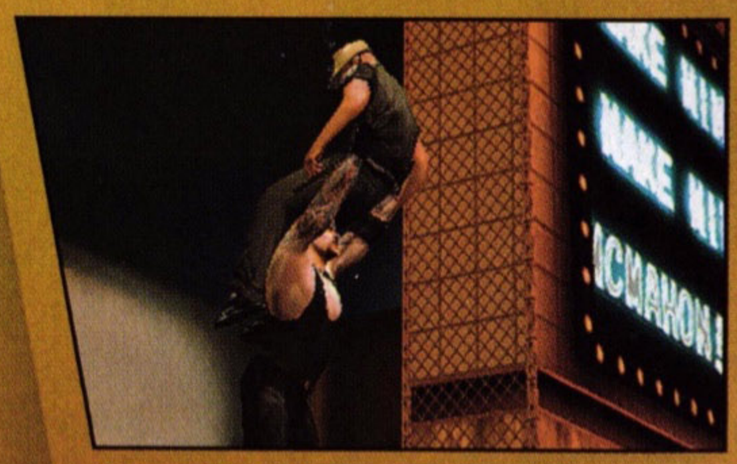


Look hard enough
and you'll see
MEMORIES
of legends past
CHALLENGING
you to become a
legend of the future.



WRESTLEMANIA XIX

Where SUPERSTARS Become LEGENDS.

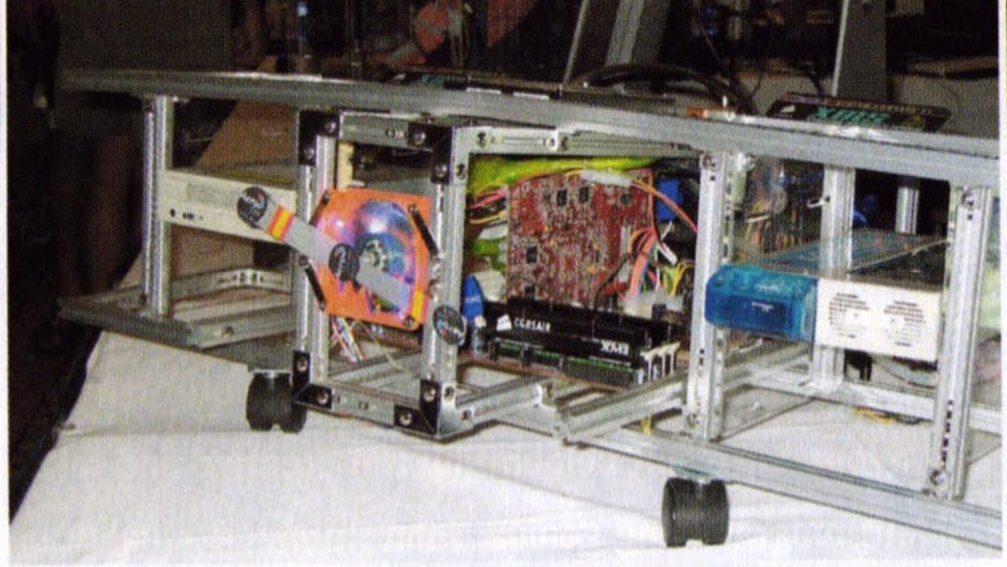
ONLY FOR NINTENDO GAMECUBE.

DOOM

XBOX | PC *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

Each year, thousands of the world's most rabid first-person shooter fanatics gather in Texas for QuakeCon, a one-of-a-kind four-day event celebrating the creative and technical achievements of id Software and its resident programming genius, John Carmack. QuakeCon is always a unique experience, but 2003's convention was even more noteworthy for the fact that id had decided to use the event as its first public showing of Doom 3 multiplayer, which was to be fully playable at the Activision booth. Game Informer couldn't pass up the chance to get our hands on one of the most anticipated PC titles ever. Working with Activision, we were also able to secure an exclusive behind-the-scenes showing of Doom 3 single player. Besides having our minds blown by id's graphical masterpiece, we also got a firsthand look at the QuakeCon experience, as well as some hints at what id might have in store for the future. If you're a hardcore FPS junkie, look no further: We've got what you need.

DESCENDS ON DALLAS



At QuakeCon, you'll see some of the most outrageous computers in the world

Like so much of the video game industry, QuakeCon started as a small, grass-roots movement, spearheaded by a handful of gamers devoted to id's seminal online shooter, Quake. "QuakeCon started in '96," recalls Marty Stratton, id's director of business development, "but id wasn't nearly as involved as it is now. Basically, QuakeCon was a gathering of a small number of fans. About 150 fans of id's games, people that had been playing Quake on the Internet together said, 'Hey, let's go have a LAN party and get together. Let's meet each other face to face.'"

Id, which caters to its core audience like few other developers, quickly became involved in both planning and funding the convention, moving it from nearby Garland, Texas to its hometown of Mesquite. As the event continued to grow in both importance and attendance, Stratton (who guides the planning and organization effort for id) decided on a new location for QuakeCon 2003 – the Adam's Mark Hotel in downtown Dallas.

With more rooms now available to conventioneers, this year's event was bigger and better than years past. Around 4,000 people registered to attend, with nearly 2,000 competing in the tournaments or the B.Y.O.C. ("Bring Your Own Computer") area. The prize money being awarded for top finishers was larger as well – with the biggest awards in the Quake III Arena one-on-one tournaments totaling over $60,000 to be divided among the top finishers.

The moment we stepped out of our taxi at the Adam's Mark, it was obvious that QuakeCon is an experience like no other. At the entrance of the hotel, dozens of gamers were already moving piles of PC towers, monitors, and keyboards through the front door. Once inside, we ascended to the second level and were floored at the sight of hundreds of FPS junkies waiting patiently in line (PCs in tow) just for the chance to grab one of the last remaining seats available in the enormous B.Y.O.C. room.

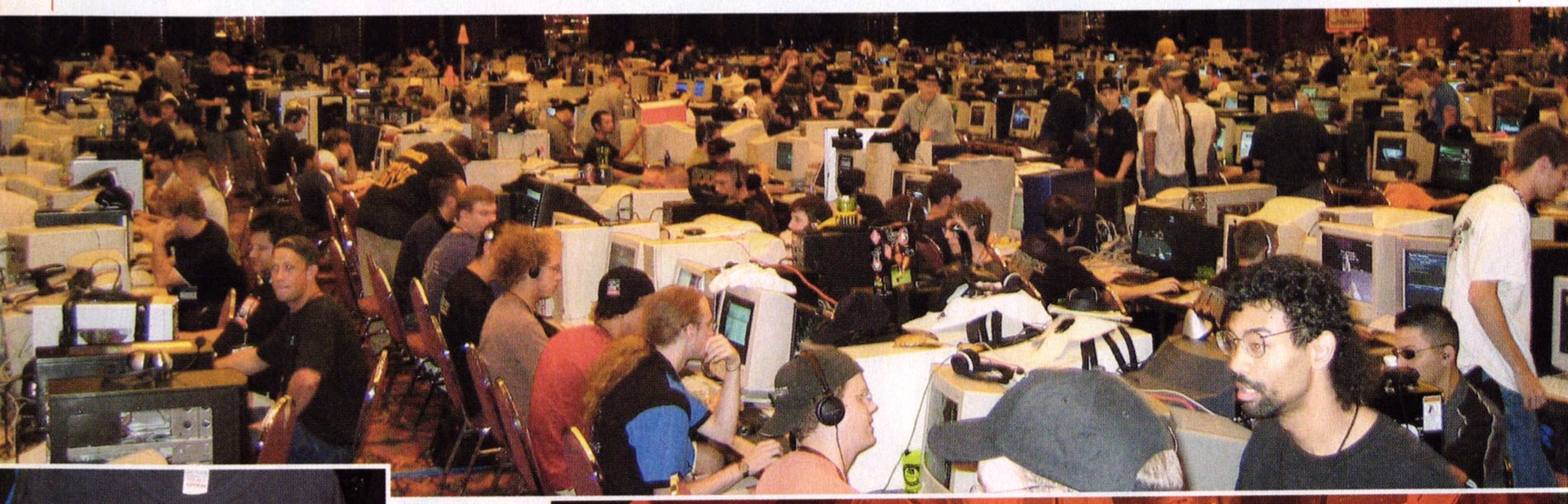
Moving into the B.Y.O.C., we were simply astounded. It's a beehive of activity; a maze of tables, computers, and tangled cables populated by gamers steeling themselves for a marathon of intense virtual combat.

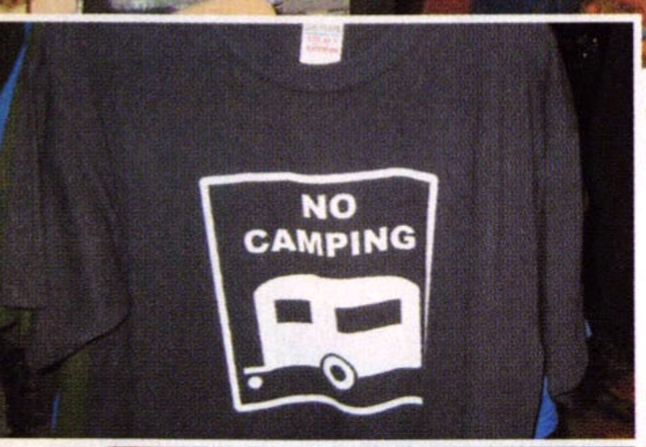
The attendees we spoke to were there for a variety of reasons. Most simply came to play – and did for nearly four days straight with as little sleep (and as much complimentary Bawls energy drink) as they could manage. Others made the pilgrimage expressly to be among the first lucky souls outside of id Software to play Doom 3 multiplayer.

Another growing faction of the QuakeCon crowd is the mod community, the individuals and start-up development firms that have already uncovered a kaleidoscope of gameplay possibilities in the Quake III engine. Lee Montgomery, the director of Wirehead Studios, was there for a couple of reasons: to help stage a tournament for Wirehead's popular mod Generations Arena, and to get the inside scoop on id's newest engine.

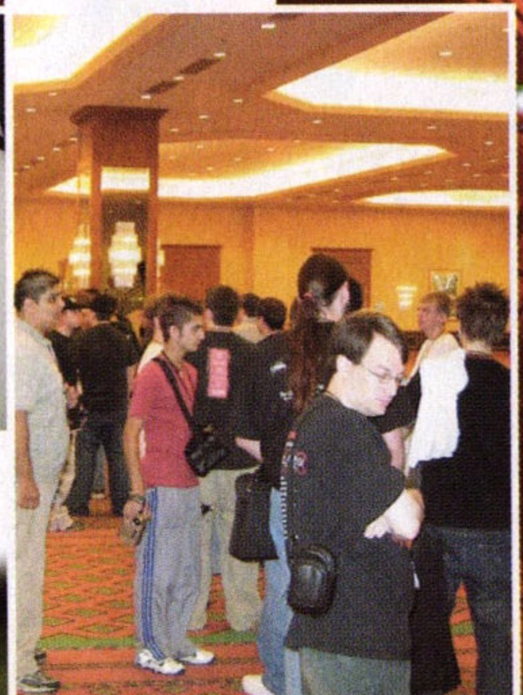
After playing a round of Doom 3 multiplayer, Montgomery appeared enthusiastic. "They're doing a terrific job with it," he said. "[The lighting system] adds an unbelievable element of depth and starts affecting the gameplay as well."

As for the whether his next mod would be running on Doom 3, or its most clear competitor, Half-Life 2, Montgomery remained unsure. "There's definitely a lot of potential behind [Doom 3]. Especially with the lighting engine, you have a lot of possibilities within a hunt-and-seek game or a dark game. Immediately, a lot of people are going to want to turn off all the lights and do flashlight wars. As for my personal team, we're a little torn right now. We have something a little larger in scope in mind than what we've seen Doom 3 do, but we're not confirmed that it can't do it. Obviously, if it can, we'd love to do it, so we're taking a wait-and-see approach until the keynote address."





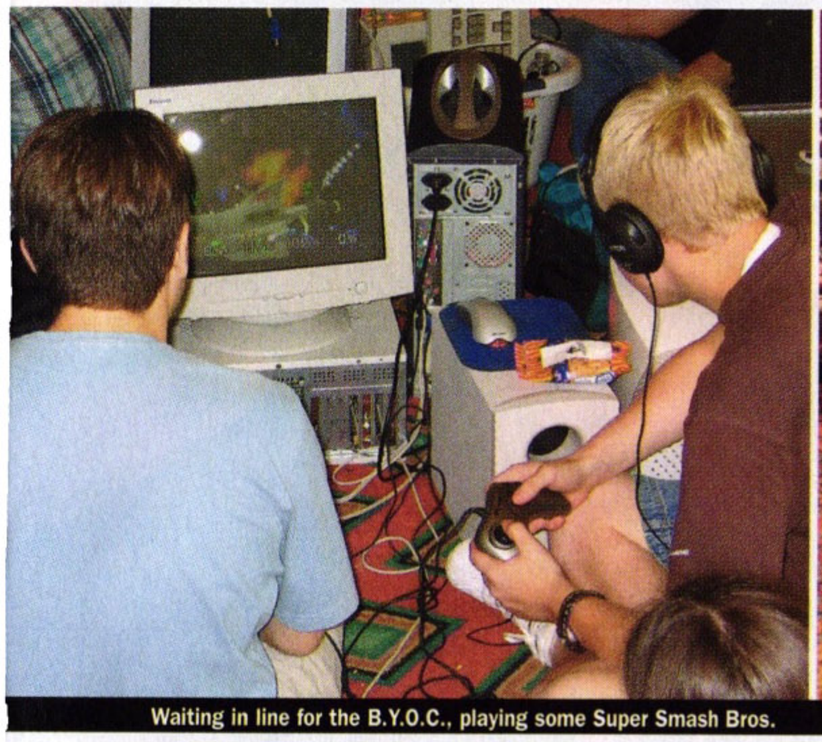
▲ *The heart of QuakeCon: the B.Y.O.C. room*



▼ *The line waiting to get into the id Software round-table discussion.*

▲ *There was some humorous gear for sale, aimed at the hardcore LAN party crowd*

Doom 3 features only traditional deathmatching, but the graphic presentation makes it a whole new game



Waiting in line for the B.Y.O.C., playing some Super Smash Bros.

Dozens of volunteers help run the tournaments and serve as tech support

Many of the contestants played for hours on end

Despite its rapid expansion (QC 2003 is 50 percent larger than last year), it's still an extremely casual and low-key event. It remains, at heart, the same giant LAN party it always was. It's surely one of the only places on Earth you can see multiple "Trogdor: The Burninator" (if you have to ask, you wouldn't understand) shirts in a matter of minutes. It's also one of the most predominantly white male gatherings this side of a Trent Lott campaign fundraiser or a They Might Be Giants concert.

However, as video games continue to reach out to new fans, the "boy's club" atmosphere of QuakeCon is slowly changing. This year marked the first Ms. QuakeCon competition – an all-female tournament aimed at increasing the profile of girl gamers in the FPS scene. After last year's show featured a Ms. QuakeCon beauty pageant, a group of women decided to organize the tournament as a response ("We decided that we weren't going to let that happen this year," said Fixx, one of the organizers). Although this year saw only 32 participants, Beta, another of the planners, envisions much larger female attendance in the future. "This was our first year of Ms. QuakeCon, but next year I want it to be really, really big. I would really like to see hundreds of girls show up to an event like this so we could have an entire section. That would be so cool."

While the action was clearly centered around the B.Y.O.C. room, Doom 3 was definitely the most-discussed topic at QuakeCon, especially for those who got a chance to test its waters in the special booths Activision had set up for multiplayer.

For id, this was a true proving ground for the game, and the company was watching the reception it received closely. "We want to give people at QuakeCon, our hardest-core fans, a taste of the game first," comments Stratton, "because they're going to be the ones to get everyone else excited about it....We always take into account what people are saying, their feedback, watch to see if they're coming out with smiles on their faces, or terrified or whatever it is. We like to hear when things are working and when they're not."

Underneath this portal lies the dreaded Berserker power-up

The levels are filled with plenty of fodder

After our intense 10-minute session, we were convinced that Doom 3 is working quite well. For starters, it's very possibly the best looking game ever made. Examining it up close, we were blown away by the sheer clarity of the textures, the accurate physics, and the unprecedented use of light and shadow.

The physics and lighting systems are clearly id's focus, and these elements of the game are birthing new gameplay tactics that would not be possible in most first-person titles. One dastardly technique that some were already starting to use was ambushing. Many rooms feature light switches, and every object in the environment moves realistically; so savvy players had already figured out how to enter an area, shoot a barrel over to block the exit, turn out the lights, and then wait for their hapless quarry to come running in. About halfway through our match, we found ourselves trapped in one such situation, blindly turning for the exit while being attacked by two competitors who were visible only by their muzzle flash.

Some areas of the base in Doom 3 are being taken over by hell, lending them a morbid, cavernous look

DOOM 3™

We also witnessed the awesome new incarnation of the classic Berserker power in action. This pick-up sends players into an animal rage, allowing them super-speed and the strength to deliver one-hit melee kills. If this wasn't frightening enough, characters equipped with Berserker speed through the level wearing a crazed expression and uttering bloodcurdling, otherworldly screams.

Some of the crowd, a group that clearly prefers Quake to Doom, expressed disappointment with the basic deathmatch design, but we couldn't have been more blown away by the simple, yet tremendously exhilarating combat.

Later that day, we delved deeper into the horrifying world of Doom 3, at a demonstration of a new single-player level. What we saw was a game that has much more to offer than the traditional Doom run-and-shoot fragfests of the past – although undead cannon fodder was in no short supply.

The first thing that strikes you is how id has moved beyond creating simple maps and levels, and is now crafting a fully-formed world where the properties of every object react exactly as they would in real life. Enemies charge at doors, bending the metal until it finally gives way. We saw a character run into a hallway, shoot the glass out of an exterior window, and heard the oxygen escaping. Shoot a swinging light, and shadows will realistically play off every surface in the area.

Taking it all in was almost overwhelming. We stared in horror as monsters crawled from the ceilings; or appeared in a flash out of pentagrams on the floor, grabbing and tearing at the screen with preternatural agility. Many Doom creatures from the past reappear in new forms, like the Revenants – who now shoot missiles off of shoulder-mounted rocket launchers. Every little detail impressed, from the tiny luminescent sizzle that errant plasma rifle rounds leave on the walls to the sickly, bloody sheen reflected in the guts of an eviscerated demon.

As in multiplayer, lighting and physics are also guiding the design process, as evidenced in a couple of unique sequences we witnessed. The first, and most impressive, was a mission in which you are faced with the task of crossing a large area where the power has failed. Instead of the usual "find the backup generator switch" routine, you actually must find a surviving scientist who has a lantern and escort him through the darkness. Proceeding at a snail's pace through the massive room, staying close to the bulb's small halo of light, you can hear the demons gathering around you. Suddenly, they begin to attack from every direction, as you desperately attempt to keep the scientist (and his precious illumination) alive. It's gripping stuff, and something that could only be done with a lighting system as advanced as Doom 3's.

Another sequence displayed the physics system's prowess, in a laboratory where you have to drop barrels of toxic gas into an incinerator in order to pass through it. From the other side of the glass wall, you must use a mechanical arm to pick up the containers, all of which have completely accurate weight and feel. In essence, it's like a high-tech recreation of the old quarter-munching carnie machine where you unsuccessfully try to extract cheap teddy bears out of a plastic box with a metal claw.

One thing is certain: Doom 3 is going to scare all types of bodily secretions out of PC players. The shocking-scare tactics, morbid art direction, and grotesque beasts that have been the hallmark of the series are now being brought forth in a more suspenseful, more graphic, and infinitely more horrifying way.

After the single-player demo (and quick check of our trousers), we trudged off the hotel's Dallas Ballroom for what is many fans' highlight of QuakeCon: the annual keynote address. Although John Carmack (who usually makes one of his increasingly rare public appearances at the show) was ill and not able to take part, four members of the id team stepped in to fill his shoes: CEO Todd Hollenshead, animator Fred Nilsson, programmer Robert Duffy, and longtime lead designer Tim Willits. The panel discussion was moderated by noted game journalist Steven Kent, and covered a range of topics, from the highly technical to the slightly ridiculous (one question from the audience read "Will Doom 3 be M-rated?" to which Hollenshead responded, "Is that a rhetorical question?").

Doom 3's character models and skin textures are unparalleled

Journalist Steven Kent, id CEO Todd Hollenshead, animator Fred Nilsson listen as Tim Willits breaks down the finer points of Doom 3 level designs and gameplay

Hollenshead went on to explain just how John Carmack's rendering technology creates Doom 3's elaborate visuals, using a design that presents a new paradigm for the way that game engines are designed.

"At a very fundamental level, the approach that John took with the core of the rendering technology for Doom 3 is a completely different conception of how an engine is programmed," observed Hollenshead. "[It's] a clear break from the progression of Quake to Quake II to Quake III, [which used] more polygons, more colors. Whereas in Doom 3, a given scene may be comparable to the same number of polygons as Quake III, but we don't get our detail out of geometry anymore, we build it out of the bump maps."

Programmer Robert Duffy facetiously added, "Well, on the engine side, we've progressed quite a bit from the original Doom."

More seriously, Tim Willits boasted that id's new physics system could do things that "bring other physics engines to their knees."

They also brought to light the tools that id is putting in the hands of the mod community. In essence, nearly everything that the team used to craft the game will be fully included in the retail boxed copies of Doom 3. The crowd seemed very excited when Duffy revealed that map files from every level, along with id's map editor, will be available, giving modders what Duffy termed "the blueprint for the entire game." Needless to say, we can expect some amazing mods to surface shortly after the game hits store shelves, many of which should expand the game past its four-player deathmatching to incorporate eight-player contests and beyond.

Speaking of multiplayer, the crowd did express its disappointment with Doom 3's relatively simple modes (one-on-one, two-on-two, and last man standing). Scattered groans were heard when Willits stated that there are currently no plans to include co-op or capture the flag, to which he mockingly responded (in a high, whiny voice), "We want you guys to do everything, and we want you to have it done now!"

Still, the tight-lipped quartet did announce a few surprises, including confirmation that a deal has been signed to create a Doom movie in partnership with Warner Brothers – one that gives id both creative input and veto power over certain elements of the film. Vowing that the production would not disappoint fans, Hollenshead promised, "We know our limitations, but I also think that we know what the heart and soul of Doom is about – and it's definitely not about a movie that sucks!"

More importantly, they also dropped a few hints about the future of the game that shares its name with QuakeCon. While discussing the power of the Doom 3 engine, Willits divulged that plans for Quake 4 include the use of vehicles – a revelation that sent shivers of excitement through the audience. Then, as if to whet our appetite, Hollenshead openly discussed the possibility of showing the next installment of Quake at next year's convention.

"Although it's probably too early to say for sure whether we'll have Quake 4 here next year," teased Hollenshead, "there is a certain amount of symmetry with QuakeCon 2K4 and Quake 4."

Of course, id's "when it's done, it's done" philosophy always holds the possibility of delays, but let's just say that we're already booking our flight to Dallas for the summer of 2004. If you live and breathe first-person shooters, and want to witness the magic of QuakeCon, we recommend that you do the same.

Trites, gruesome spider creatures, attack in swarms during single-player missions

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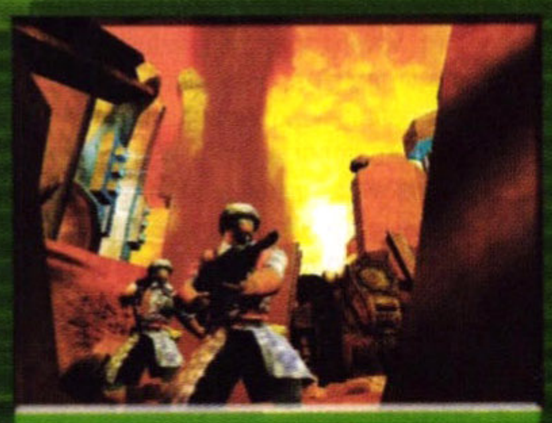

15 DEVASTATING WEAPONS

ENCOUNTER TREACHERY, BETRAYAL AND HORROR

INTENSE FIRST PERSON ACTION ACROSS 21 LEVELS

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

Blood and Gore

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NAME: IRWIN FINKLE

SCREEN NAME: THE EXTIRWINATOR

PROFESSION: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

SPECS: HUSBAND, FATHER OF FOUR

WEAPON OF CHOICE:

PLASMA GUN

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

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

FAVORITE PREY: CHAOS RAPTOR

MANTRA: ONLY IN DEATH DOES DUTY END.

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PlayStation 2

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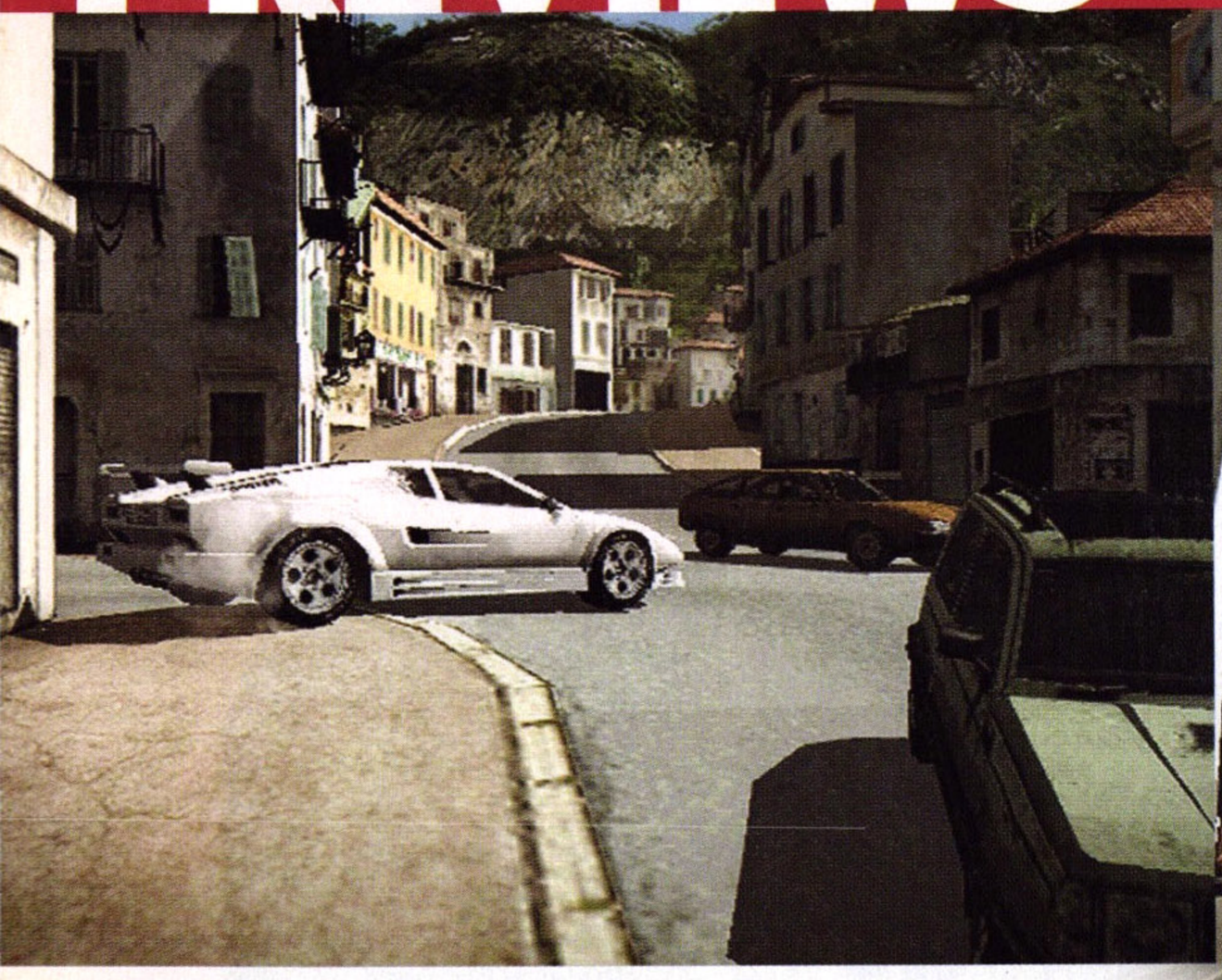
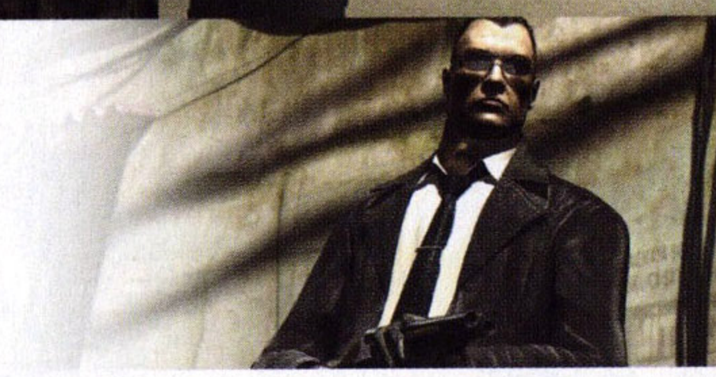
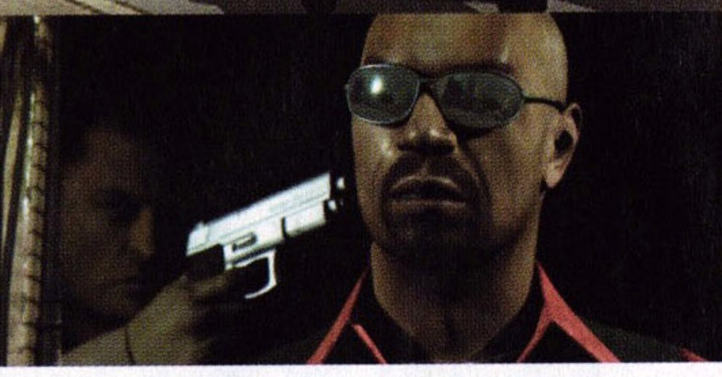
PREVIEWS







PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

DRIVER 3

STICKING TO ITS GUNS

Driver 3 has been in the works for quite some time now, so hopefully you know the basic facts regarding this highly anticipated sequel. But for those who don't, here is a quick refresher. The game takes place across three gigantic, true-to-life cities (Miami, Nice, and Istanbul) with over 150 miles of highways and streets surrounded by over 30,000 buildings.

Contrary to the rumors, Driver 3 is not built on the Stuntman engine, but does indeed utilize that game's impressive physics system. The accurate modeling of the weight of each individual object in the environment means that the cars will exhibit ultra-realistic damage, from smashed quarter panels that eventually hang and then fall off to tires that go flat.

In an exclusive demo of the game, we got a chance to witness a mission firsthand and see what Driver 3 has to offer. The story has the lead character Tanner and his partner Tobias trying to infiltrate a global car theft ring. The goal of this stage is to retrieve a valuable car from an unknown location and get it back to your hideout unscathed.

To discover its location, you must head out after the truck that's leaving to pick up the vehicle from the thieves. Along the way, you get cut off (see the picture below) by a group of gangsters who wish to give you an early retirement and nice comfy bed, six feet under. Without missing a beat, Tanner hops out of the car and starts dealing out some street justice.

It's at this point that we learn that the entire game can, if you wish, be played in first-person. From shooting to driving, it all can be seen from this perspective. Tanner then tags the bad guys and grabs the driver, throwing him to the ground. After moving the vehicle from his path, Tanner climbs back into his car and takes off to catch up with the truck.

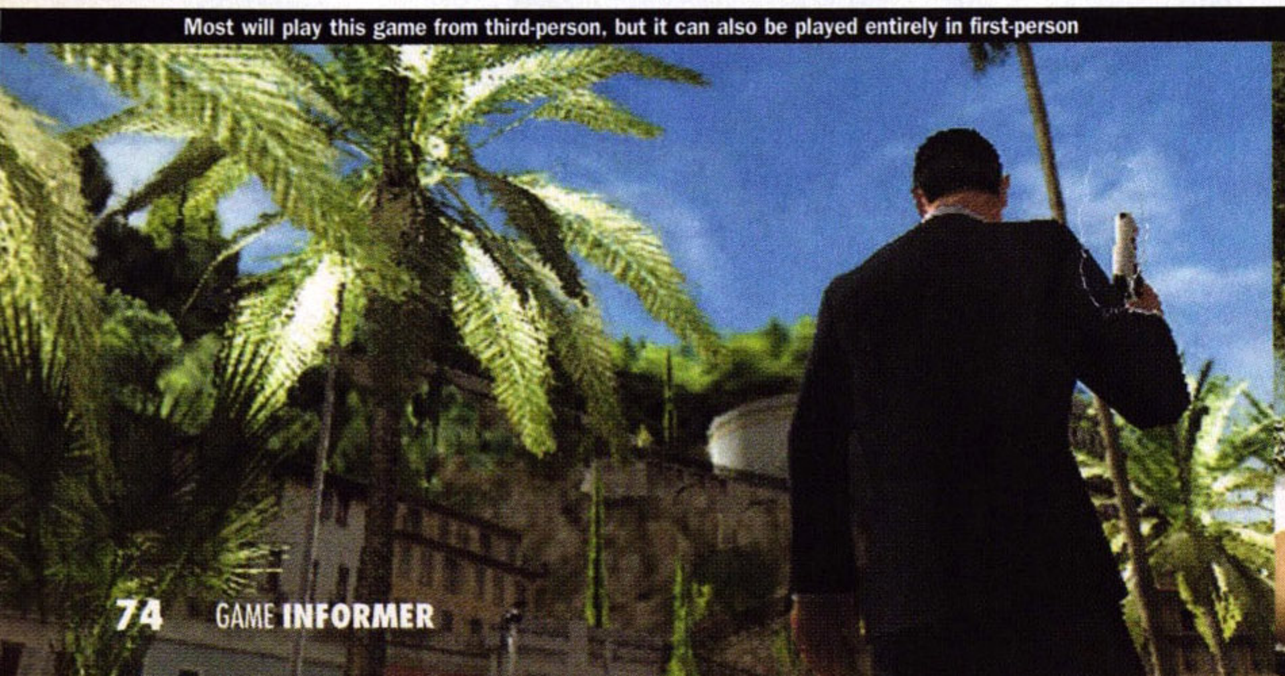
As expected, a big chase ensues, with Tanner flying through traffic and dodging pedestrians. Once he arrives at the hideout, a gunfight takes place where you kill all the gang members and are left with a couple of options. One, drive the car back and avoid getting into any accidents; or two, load the car up onto the truck. Since we had never seen something like that before, we chose option two. With a quick press of the button, the back of the truck opens and a ramp descends. Drive the car in, hop out, and close the door – simple enough.

Of course, this whole scenario could have played out in a completely different way. For example, rather than fighting the first group of bad guys, you could have just spun around, found a motorcycle, raced through the streets to set up a road block ahead of the truck, killed the driver, assumed his identity, and gone and picked up the car without a second thought.

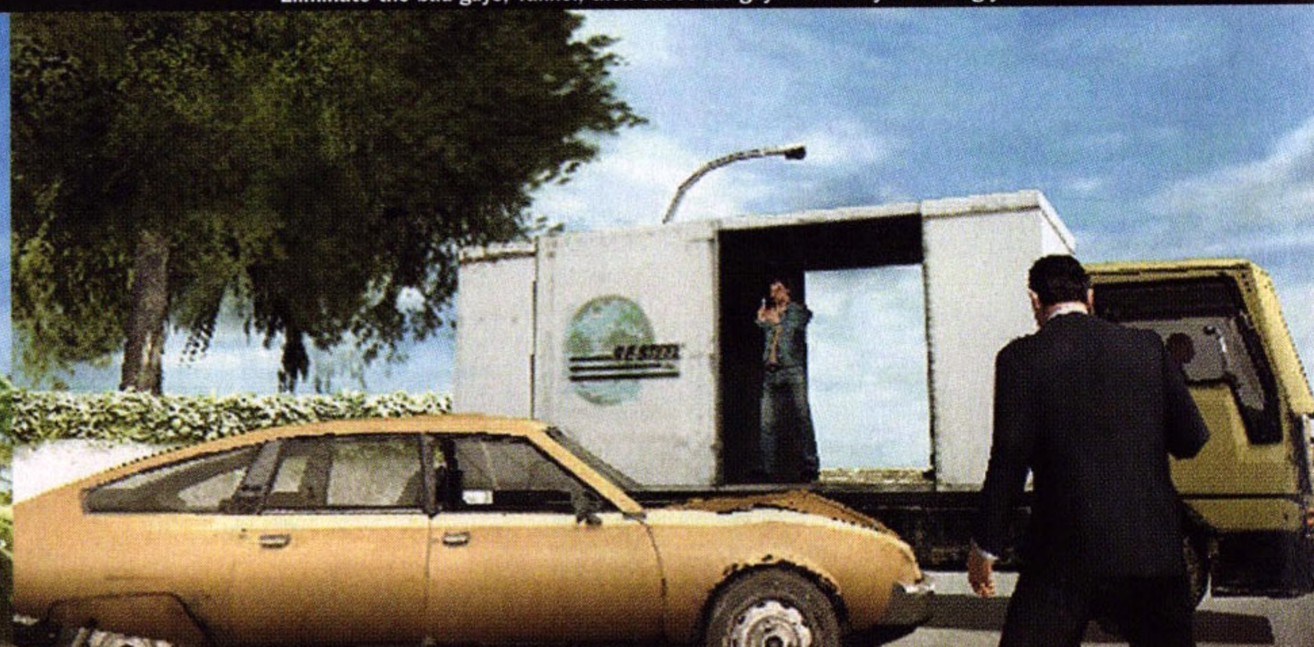
Driver 3 still has plenty of time to work out all the details, but what we have seen is most certainly intriguing. From driving 18-wheelers to literally blowing a car to pieces with a machine gun, the game has a lot to offer and high expectations to live up to. We will all see how good it can be when it hits the streets next spring.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** REFLECTIONS ■ **RELEASE** SPRING 2004

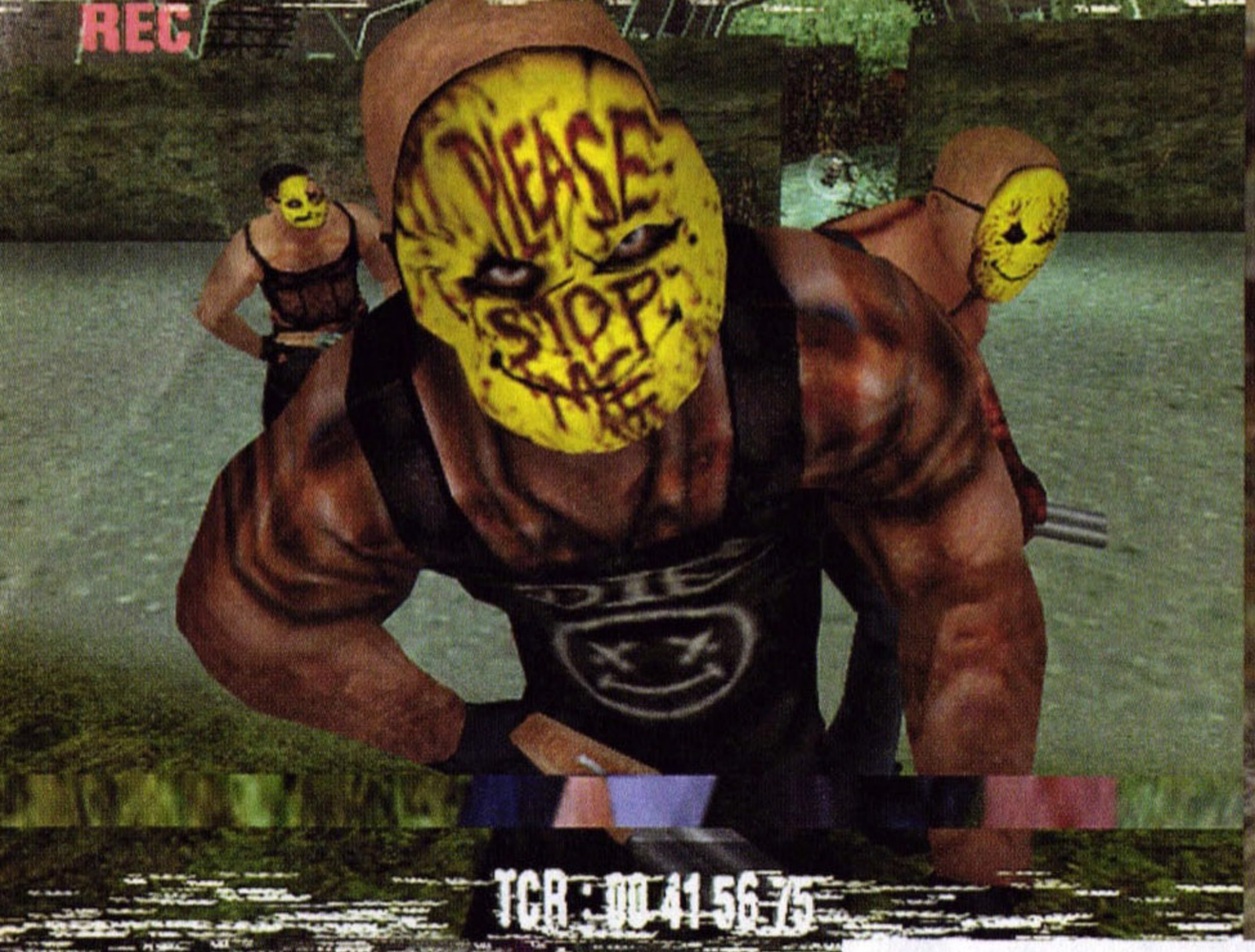
Most will play this game from third-person, but it can also be played entirely in first-person

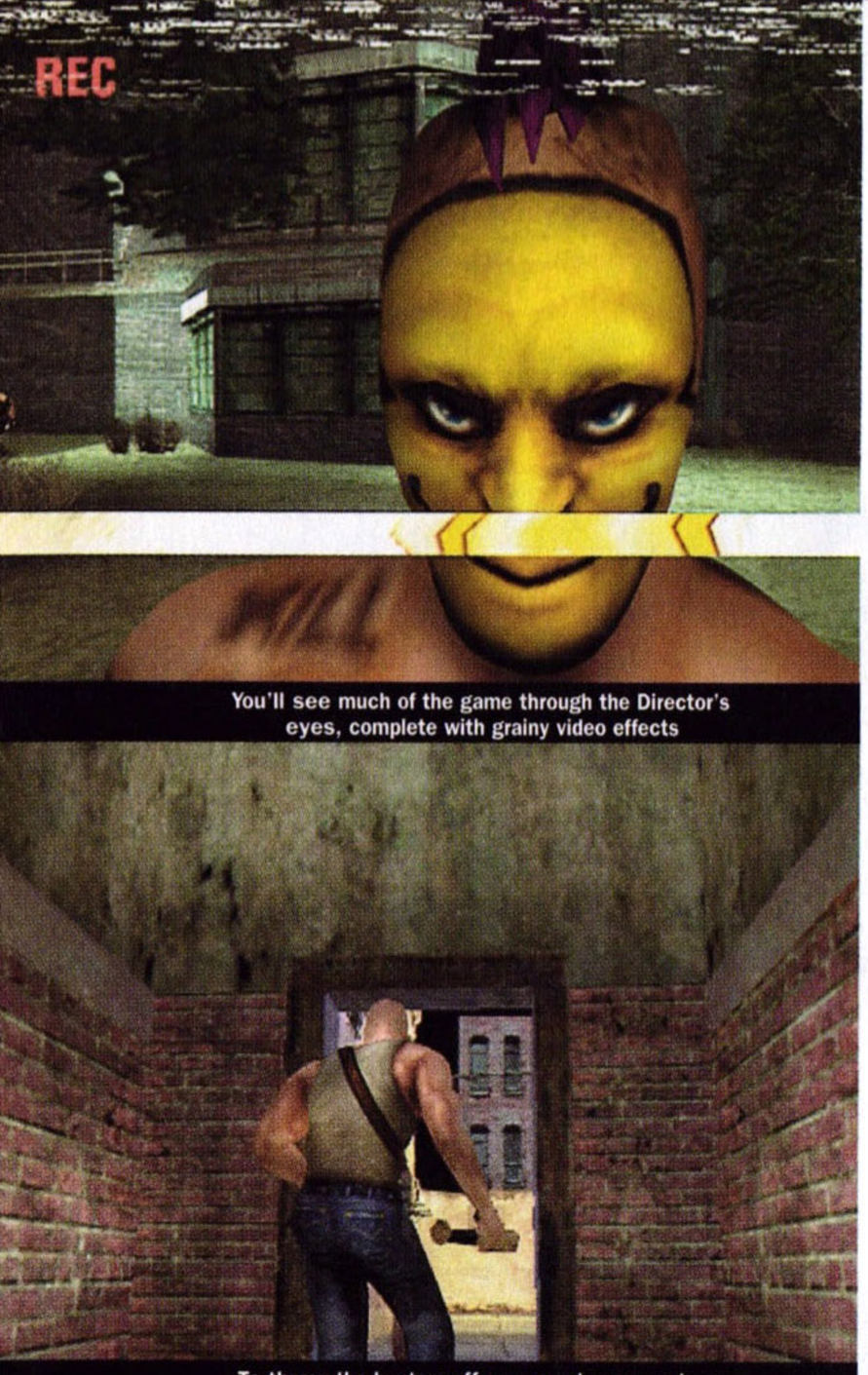


Eliminate the bad guys, Tanner, then shoot the guy who sold you that ugly car



All three of the images on this page are from the hour of CGI video that will deliver the story





You'll see much of the game through the Director's eyes, complete with grainy video effects

To throw the hunters off your scent, you can toss small items to cause a distraction

PLAYSTATION 2

MANHUNT

A DARK CORNER OF HELL

Instead of pursuing another GTA sequel, Rockstar North is creating an entirely new property; one that – believe it or not – is actually darker, more mature, and bloodier than we could have imagined. That property is Manhunt, a game inspired by the Nicolas Cage vehicle, *8MM* – a film that explored the twisted phenomenon of snuff movies that purport to feature real footage of actual onscreen deaths. Simply put, human behavior doesn't get more disgusting than this. As you would expect, Manhunt will certainly scandalize, and promises to be a ride that might be too sick for many to stomach.

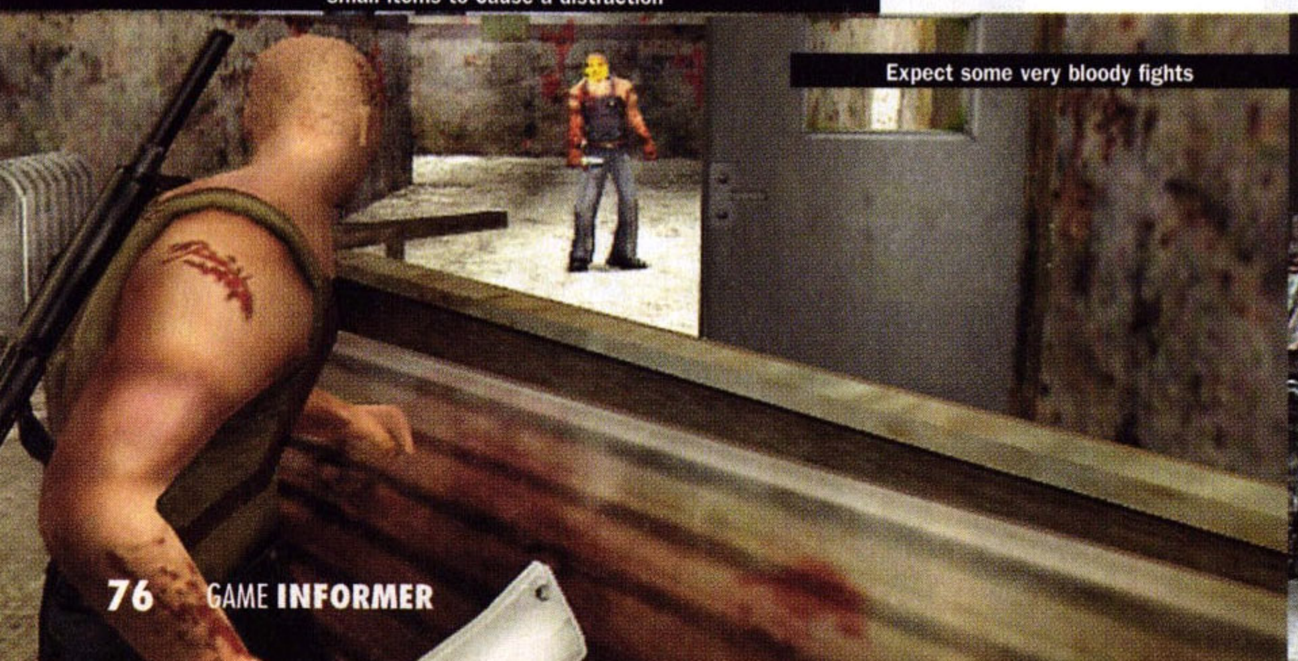
Manhunt's main character is James Earl Cash, a career criminal and death row inmate that is given a second chance at life by a depraved character known as "the Director." The Director has Cash's execution faked in order to use him as human prey in a bizarre hunting ritual. Using abandoned areas of Carcer City, the Director offers a bounty on Cash's head, and allows him to be stalked by street gangs, all while filming the horrid events for posterity on scores of hidden surveillance cameras. During the hunt, Cash must listen to the Director through an ear piece, as he offers (often suspect) guidance and encourages you to off your foes in the most gruesome manner possible. This relationship will be key to the game's plot, explains Rockstar's Chris Carro. "He keeps taunting you and messing with your mind," comments Carro. "But you really don't have any other choice [but to follow his commands]."

Unlike GTA's free-roaming mayhem, Manhunt's environments are very claustrophobic and confined, allowing for a stealth-oriented gameplay formula ("If you're expecting some kind of branch out of GTA, it's totally not that direction," opines Carro. "It's 180 degrees the other way."). Much like Metal Gear Solid, the cautious route is the best one, as you must pay close attention to both your position relative to the hunters and the sound you are making (both of which are displayed via an onscreen radar). You'll also kill silently, in "execution" sequences, which are prompted when you sneak up behind a character. These fatalities are displayed from the perspective of the Director, shown on his grainy monitors.

While your most potent armament might be the bottles and small objects you can throw to distract the guards, you will have your share of fighting in Manhunt, including some as-yet-unrevealed boss battles. These melees are of the bloodiest sort, incorporating everything from blunt objects like bricks and crowbars to the more effective shotgun. So far, we know of four gangs of hunters you'll encounter: the Hoods (mask-wearing street hooligans), the Smiley (psychos who sport grim clown face paint), the Innocents (a Latin gang that thrives on speed and stealth), and the Skins (presumably skinheads, but Rockstar wouldn't confirm).

Manhunt will surely be one of the most controversial games ever released, especially since its realistic bent doesn't give the audience much distance from the violence at hand. We're not sure how we feel about Manhunt's content, but Rockstar North believes that it has the mettle to tackle the always-problematic stealth/action genre. Given its past success, we'll certainly be following the development of this game closely.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR ■ **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH ■ **RELEASE** FALL



Expect some very bloody fights

Could these be the el usive Innocents?

Although the game emphasizes stealth, sometimes battle can't be avoided

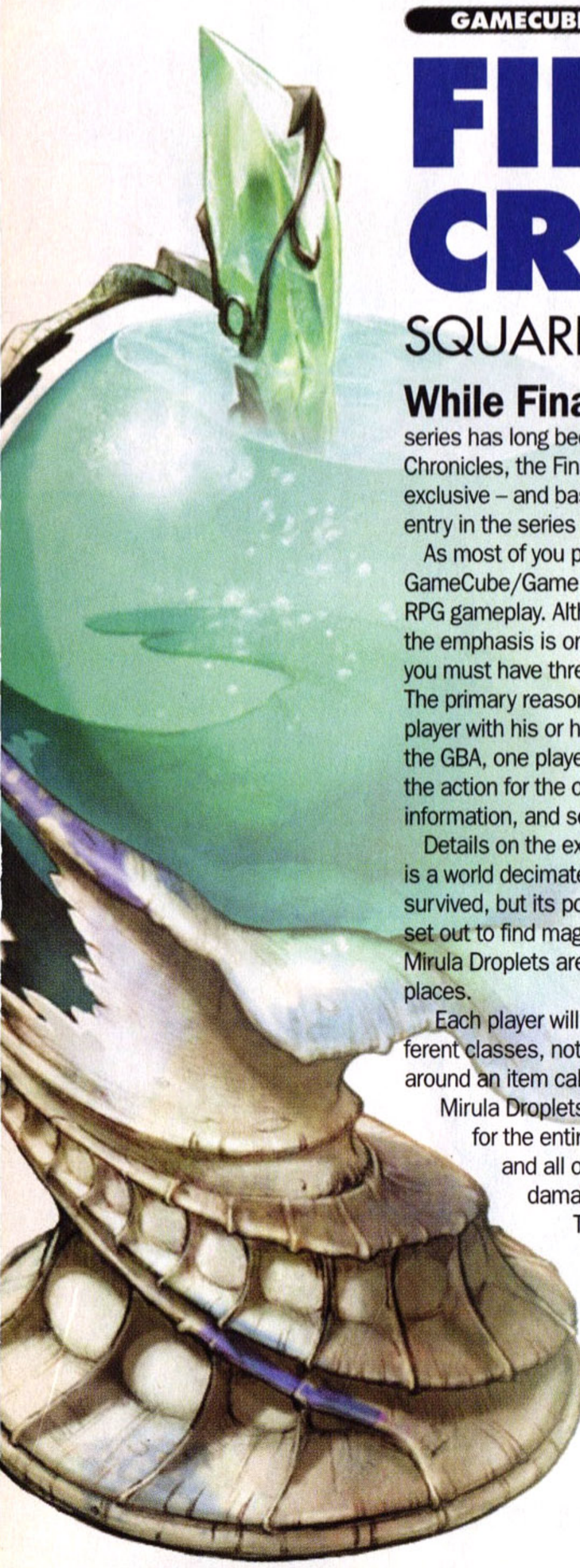
The Hoods are violent, mask-wearing street thugs

The Smileys wear creepy clown face paint

All the items and weapons you have are displayed on Cash's body

When all else fails, the shotgun should help you survive Carcer City

Stealth kills will be key to your success



GAMECUBE

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

SQUARE, MEET CUBE

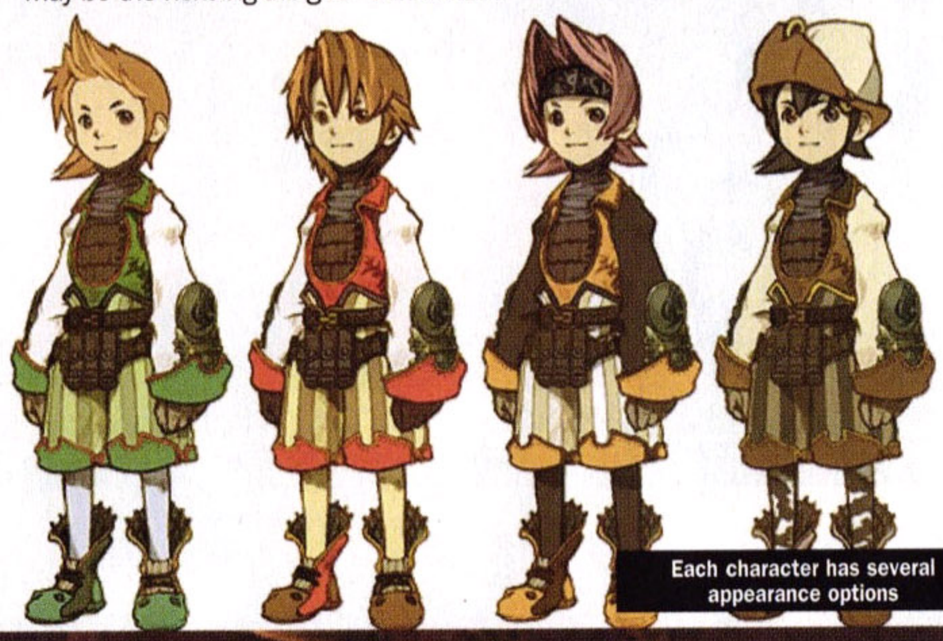
While Final Fantasy originated on the NES, the series has long been associated with Sony. Now, with the release of Crystal Chronicles, the Final Fantasy series is returning to Nintendo in a GameCube exclusive – and based on what we've seen so far – it may be the most unique entry in the series to date.

As most of you probably know by now, Crystal Chronicles uses the GameCube/Game Boy Advance connectivity to bring a new twist to traditional RPG gameplay. Although solo play is possible with just a GameCube controller, the emphasis is on the multiplayer experience. For maximum RPG goodness, you must have three friends, each with a Game Boy Advance and a link cable. The primary reason for using the handheld as the controller is to provide each player with his or her own menu screen. By confining the selection process to the GBA, one player can manage their character's abilities without slowing down the action for the other three. The screen will also display maps, character information, and send messages to individual players.

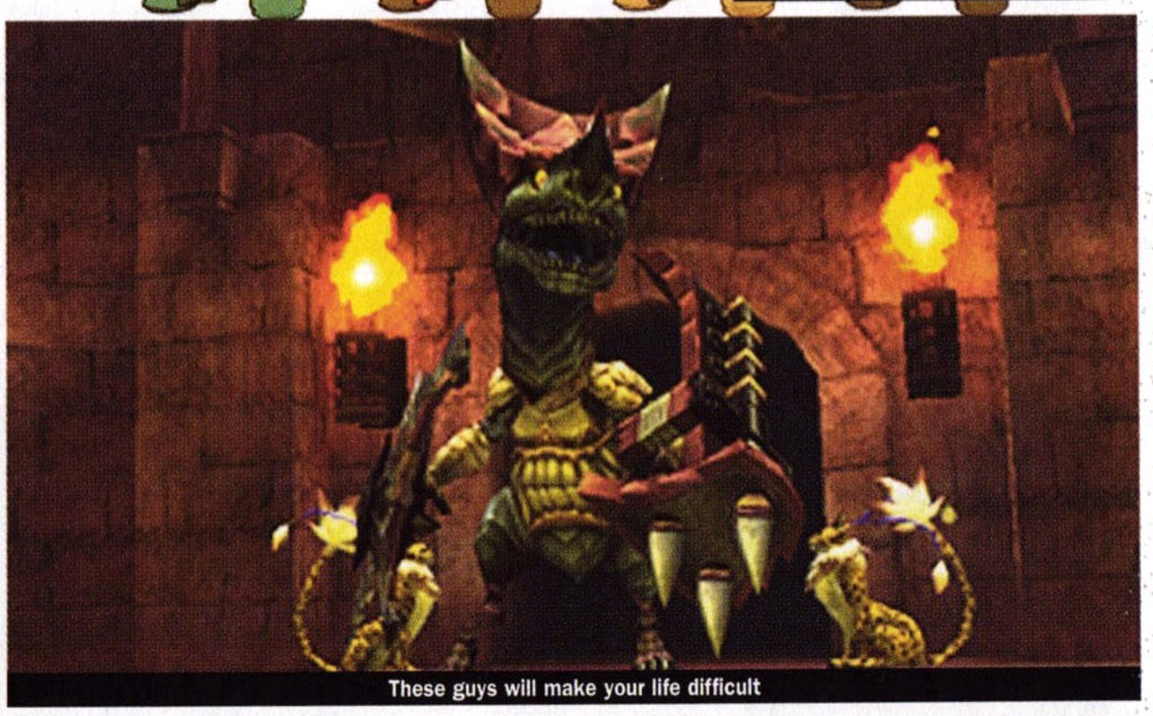
Details on the exact storyline are still scarce, but we know that the setting is a world decimated by a massive plague. A magic crystal protects those who survived, but its power is fading. To extend the life of the crystal, parties of four set out to find magical Mirula Droplets, which help restore the crystal's power. Mirula Droplets are only found in dark caverns and other spooky places.

Each player will create their own character from one of four different classes, not all of which are human. The gameplay revolves around an item called the "mana bucket," a pitcher used to collect Mirula Droplets. The bucket also serves as the source of magic for the entire party. One character carries the mana bucket, and all others must stay within its aura, or they will take damage from the poisonous plague gasses in the air. This mechanic not only forces players to cooperate, but also adds an extra layer for strategy: As the character holding the bucket regenerates health and magic the fastest, trading possession of it is key to survival.

The new emphasis on teamwork is certainly a departure for the series. Not only does Crystal Chronicles play entirely in real time, recognizable Final Fantasy elements such as the Summon spells been done away with. This bold new direction may put a few Final Fantasy fans on edge, but Crystal Chronicles is shaping up to be one of the more interesting new RPG titles out there. With its gorgeous graphics and unique gameplay, it may be the next big thing for Gamecube.



Each character has several appearance options



These guys will make your life difficult

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 9

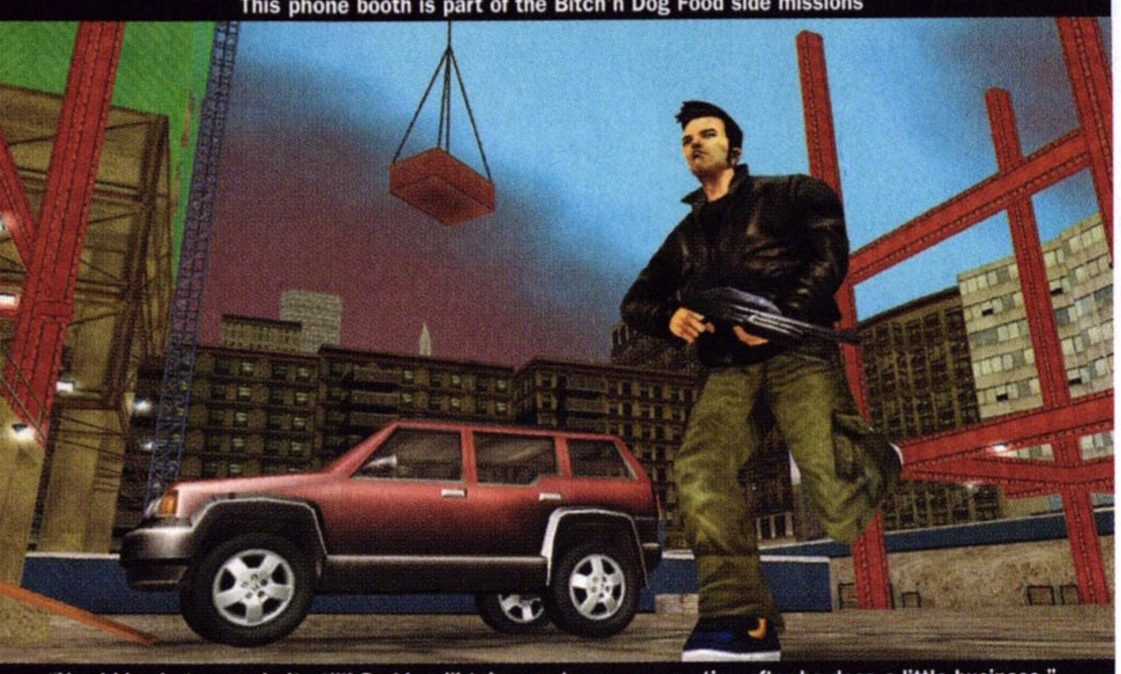
The overhead map is still in the game

This appears to be some kind of shrine

Is he fighting a carrot?

This reticule is used for super attacks

This phone booth is part of the Bitch'n Dog Food side missions



"You kids shut up and sit still! Daddy will take you to soccer practice after he does a little business."

A man with a sniper rifle and an attitude can do some very bad things

XBOX UNLIMITED ENABLED

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

HELL FREEZES OVER

If you don't know about Grand Theft Auto III, you must've stolen this magazine out of someone else's mailbox or thought it was an issue of Modern Maturity. The game became a cultural phenomenon like no piece of software before it. Celebrities talked about it; parents were outraged by it; and gamers flocked to it. As we speak, it is still topping sales charts.

This game can no longer be confined to the PlayStation 2. Rockstar is bringing GTA III to Microsoft's console to appease the millions of Xbox owners worldwide screaming for free-roaming gameplay and ingenious missions. Is this in response to the strong sales of the Xbox version of Midnight Club II? Is it because games like True Crime and RoadKill are trying to capitalize on the series' success on a system where GTA has never appeared? Who cares? All that matters to us is that it's going to be on Xbox, baby!

The big question: What new things does this version bring to the table? A Rockstar representative tells us the company is maintaining the essence of the game. You won't find new characters or extra missions here; they're unnecessary. What you will find is a more polished product that takes advantage of the power of Xbox.

If GTA III had an Achilles' Heel, it was the graphics. For tech geeks, you'll be pleased as punch to hear the Xbox version supports high-definition, 16x9, and 720p. To go along with this, Rockstar North has upped the resolution on nearly every texture. Advanced specular lighting brilliantly illuminates Liberty City in real time.

The city itself isn't the only thing that will look better. All of the vehicles and major characters have new skins and more polygons. Reflections on the vehicles are much more noticeable, and will cast differently depending on the type of vehicle you're driving.

The audio of Grand Theft Auto III was something that set a benchmark for the industry. It won Game Informer's Best Video Game Soundtrack award for 2001. In all, there's about three hours of quality listening here. You've got Lazlow doing hilarious talk radio, some kickin' reggae jams, and great fictitious commercials spots. Add customizable soundtracks to the list, thanks to the Xbox's hard drive. These, as well as all of the game's audio, can now be enjoyed in Dolby 5.1.

There are rumors that Rockstar isn't stopping the Xbox love with GTA III, and may even be looking at packaging Vice City along with it. That's a conversation for another issue, however. Besides, this is huge news as is, and is sure to lift the spirit of every Xbox owner in existence.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR ■ **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH
■ **RELEASE** FALL

"Flame on! I'm gone! This van'll be crispier than a crouton."

We have a feeling this will shortly become a bridge over rubbled waters

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

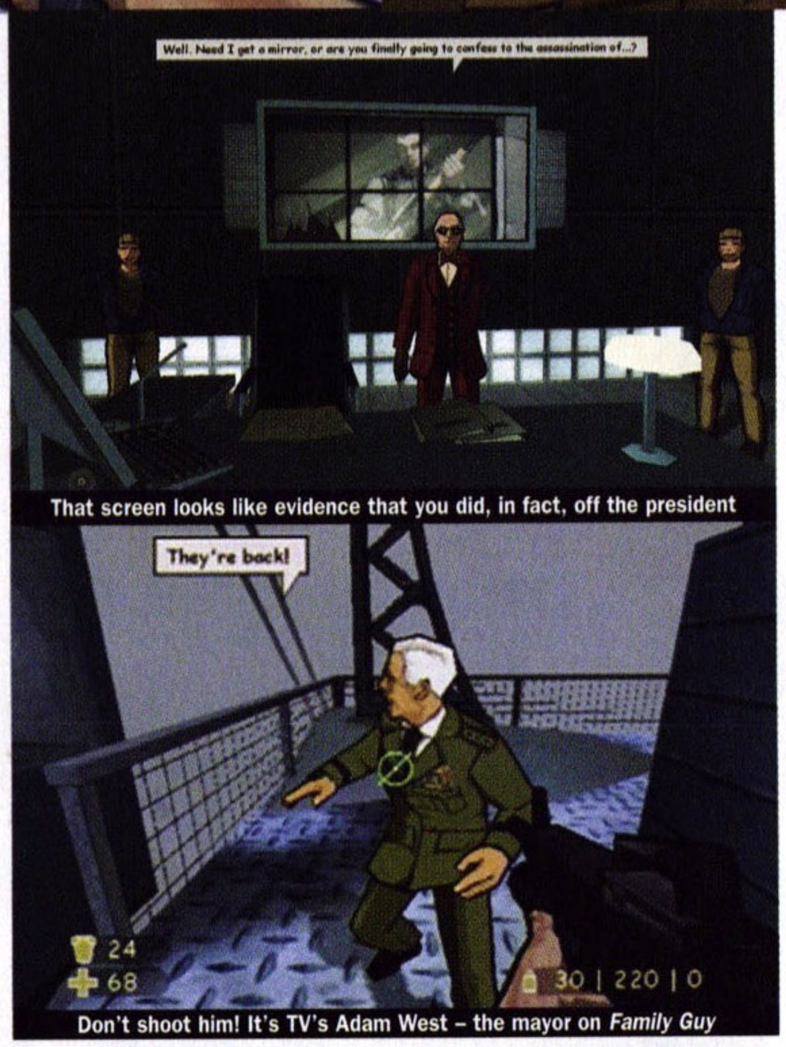
XIII

ASSASSINATION AMNESIA

THE STORY SO FAR...

You killed the president. Or you didn't. As a man with amnesia and a big XIII tattooed on your chest, you really have no clue what happened. All you know is your life is in danger, but somewhere along the line – in that blurry blob you call a past – you learned how to take care of yourself to a very violent extreme.

You have few allies, especially when compared to your enemies. Everyone seems to know more about you than you do. But whom do you trust? The lovely Jones (voiced by hip-hop singer Eve) is one person who seems to be on your side, and she'll definitely be an asset to your goal of survival. One thing's for sure: If those bastards want you dead, you aren't going down alone.



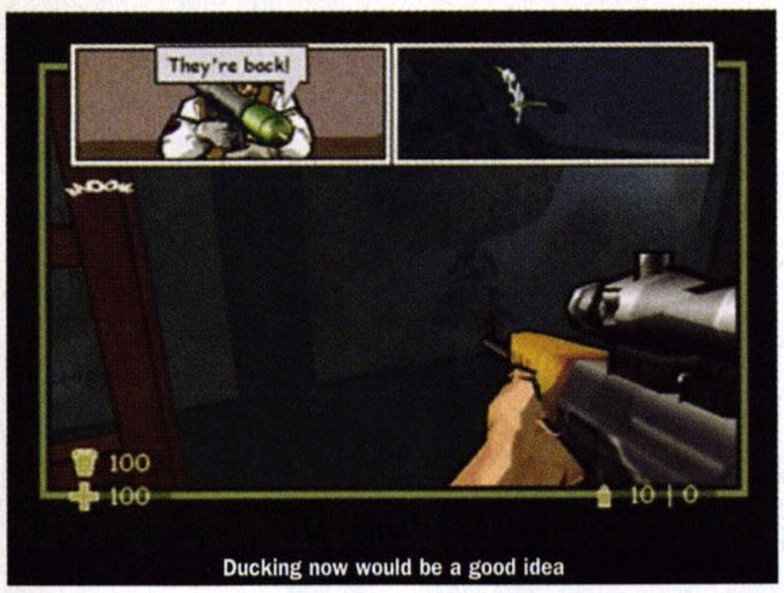
That screen looks like evidence that you did, in fact, off the president

Don't shoot him! It's TV's Adam West – the mayor on *Family Guy*

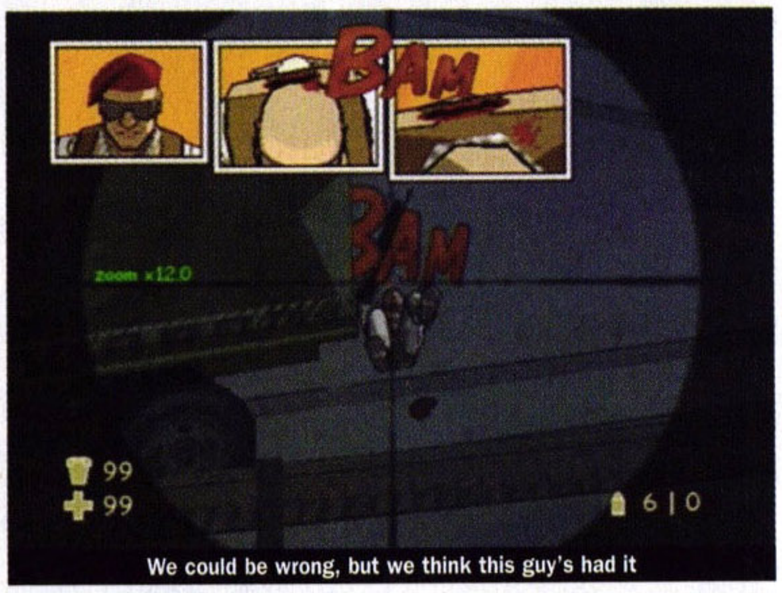
"Don't shoot! I have a pass. And a hostage."

HE'S GOT HIS HANDS FULL

Aside from the various firearms and other obvious implements of bodily harm XIII will brandish, there are many other things that he will pick up. Several everyday items can be used as weapons – including chairs, bottles, and bricks. They're generally only good for one use, then they shatter and are discarded. Bodies – alive or dead – can be hefted and moved around. Even things like security cards and keys are held before you use them for their intended purpose. Things you can interact with prompt icons when the cursor goes over them, and there are a lot of them.



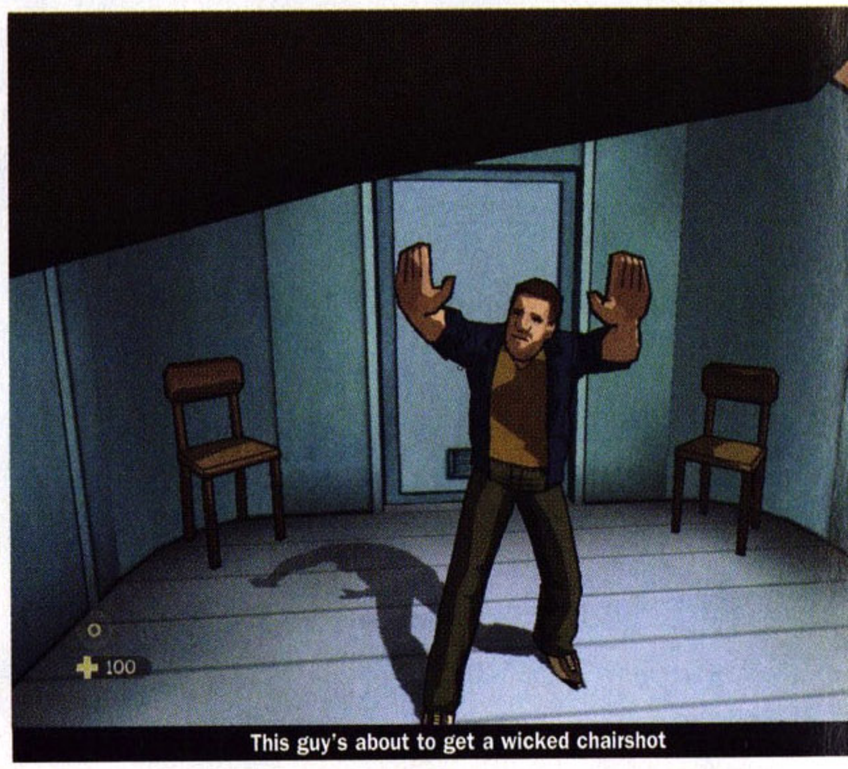
Ducking now would be a good idea



We could be wrong, but we think this guy's had it

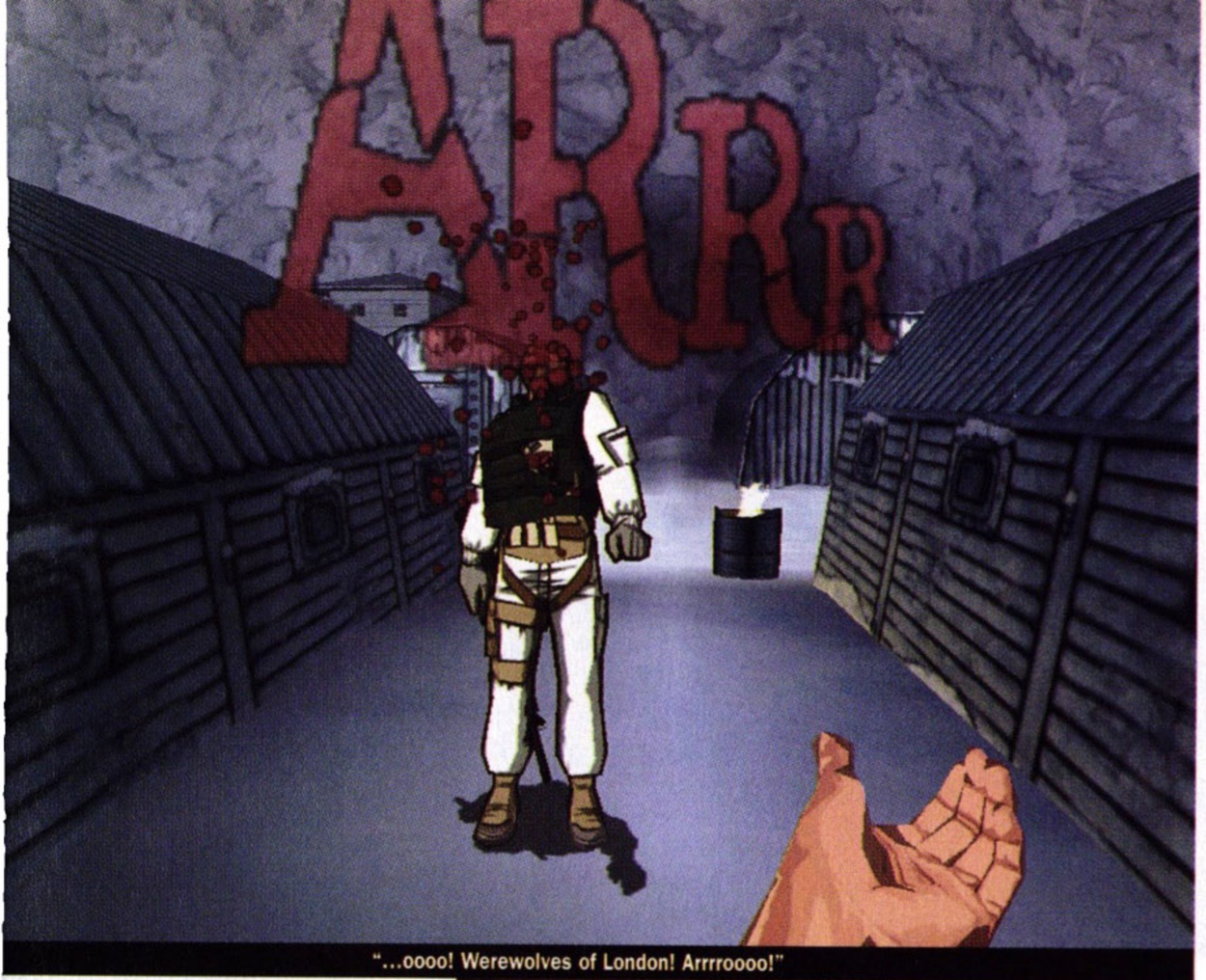
XIII'S VIth SENSE

Every hero needs an edge, and XIII's comes in the form of a super sense. Windows pop up during gameplay to alert you to things going on outside of your regular field of vision. Perhaps a soldier is aiming a rocket launcher at your temple or a means of escape has opened up. These windows will also pop up for less vital – but equally cool – things like when you cap a guy between the eyes. The fact that these occur in real time keep the action going, without the break caused by traditional cutscenes.



This guy's about to get a wicked chairshot

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (PS2: UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE, XBOX: UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, PC: UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** UBI SOFT ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 9



"...oooo! Werewolves of London! Arrrroooo!"

THE SIGHTS OF SOUNDS

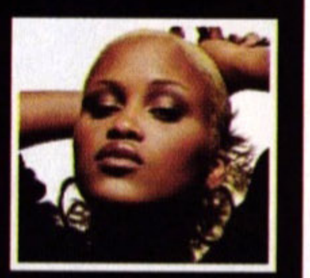
To further strengthen that comic book feel, this game not only lets you hear the audio but also lets you see it. Kill an enemy, and his death knell will fill the screen. Blow something up, and the onomatopoeia is just as eye-popping as the visual effects of the explosion.

We think "Pshowwww!" would've been better, but we're not game designers

VOICEOVER TALENT

Adam West as Gen. Carrington

David Duchovny as XIII



Eve as Jones

PC

CITY OF HEROES

ADVENTURES IN UNDERPANTS

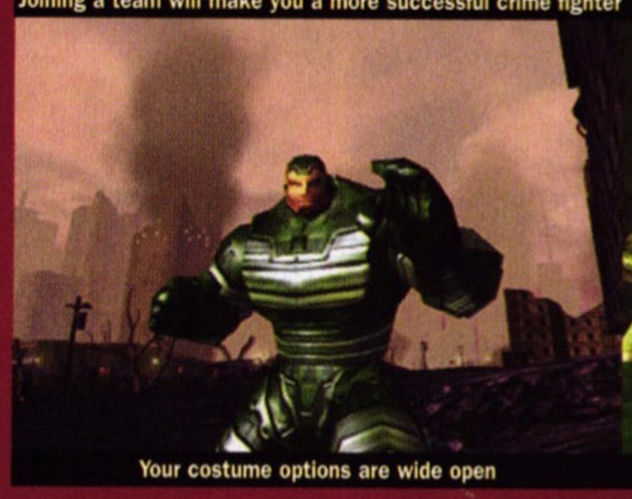
These days, new MMORPGs are popping up left and right. Despite the growing number of titles, the core concepts are growing a bit tired. It seems as if every game is geared towards either Renaissance Festival dorks or sci-fi nerds. Fortunately, City of Heroes will offer something different by targeting a new group of fanboys: comic book nerds.

In City of Heroes, each player is able to create a unique superhero by starting with an archetype (such as Scrapper, Tanker, or Controller), choosing from a mammoth list of powers, and designing a costume. Developer Cryptic Studios promises so many options for both powers and costumes that no two characters will ever be the same.

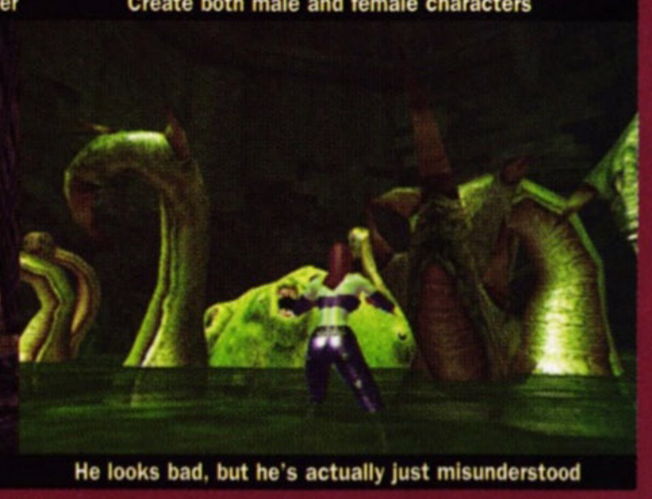
After creating a hero, players will join others in the world of Paragon City, where they can create a super team or combat evil solo. Many different types of villains inhabit the city, and up to 20 storylines will take place at once, so there will be plenty of super-buttkicking to go around. Enemies include Rikti aliens, the Freakshow gang, and the evil Crey Corporation. Villains will not be playable in the first release, although this may change in a later version. Either way, those who have longed to be a comic book hero finally have a MMORPG of their very own.

Joining a team will make you a more successful crime fighter

Create both male and female characters



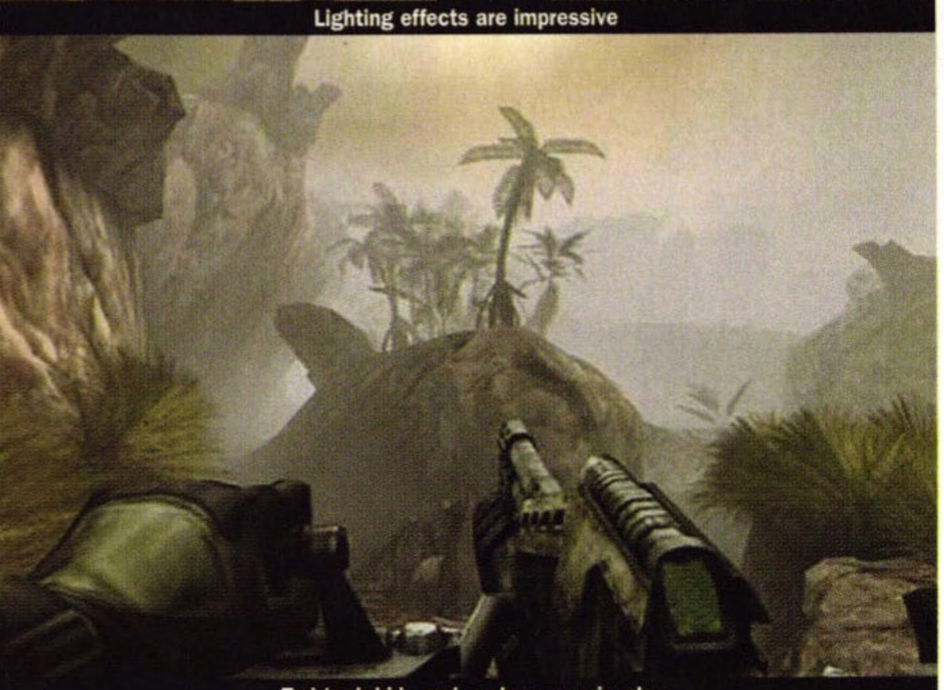
Your costume options are wide open



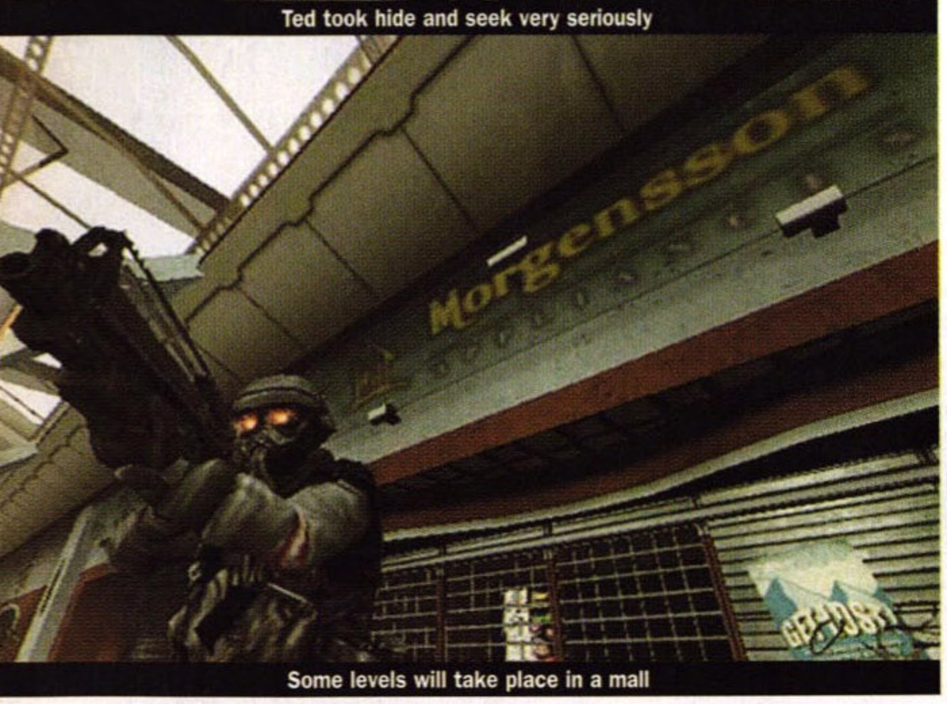
He looks bad, but he's actually just misunderstood

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** NCSOFT
■ **DEVELOPER** CRYPTIC STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 15, 2004

Lighting effects are impressive



Ted took hide and seek very seriously



Some levels will take place in a mall

PLAYSTATION 2

KILLZONE

STEP INTO THE KILLZONE

Halo has long been considered the pinnacle of console first-person shooters, but if the PS2-exclusive Killzone lives up to its hype, there may be a new champion. As the title is tentatively scheduled for late 2004, many aspects of the game are still foggy, but if what we've seen so far is any indication, Killzone could be a real contender for the FPS crown.

Set in the near future in which mankind has begun to expand its influence into space, a war erupts between an Earth-loyal group and a bunch of militant rebels called the Helghast. After a deadly bombing by the Helghast calls them into battle, four ISA soldiers find themselves in a "kill zone," surrounded by Helghast soldiers behind enemy lines. Over the course of 26 levels (each with at least one "memorable moment," which are similar to Halo's scripted events), you will battle through environments patterned after real 20th Century military conflicts. It has been confirmed that levels will be inspired by the guerilla warfare of Vietnam, the trench combat of Somme, and the street fighting of Stalingrad.

With its realistic combat and scripted events, Killzone is designed to deliver both a frantic combat experience as well as a compelling storyline. As your characters are confronted with seemingly impossible odds, you'll witness your fellow troops fight and die, and structures get destroyed in some of the most incredibly detailed graphics ever to appear on the PlayStation 2. While the PS2 may not have the processing power of the Xbox, the somber look of the game feels darker, grittier, and more realistic than anything in Halo.

At the beginning of gameplay, you will be able to choose from one of four playable characters, each with different skills. One character is said to have stealth abilities, another is a master of heavy weapons. Details on the final two characters have not yet been revealed, but presumably they will create a balanced four-person squad. These characters will accompany you on missions and can be controlled with a simple command menu, much like SOCOM. Playing through with each of the four characters will create a slightly different game experience.

Killzone developer Guerilla Games promises the title will feature 21 handheld weapons, as well as five "fixed position" weapons, such as machine gun turrets. Online play and multiplayer have yet to be confirmed, although it is expected that the title will feature both. Even with many details still unknown, it is shaping to be one impressive title. Surpassing Halo is quite the lofty goal, but Killzone looks like it may do just that.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA ■ **DEVELOPER** GUERILLA GAMES
■ **RELEASE** 2004

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EVERYONE
E
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PlayStation®2

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PLAYSTATION 2

DRAGON QUEST VIII

WHAT'S FINAL FANTASY AGAIN?

The tough guy in the back is making you carry barrels? Meanie!

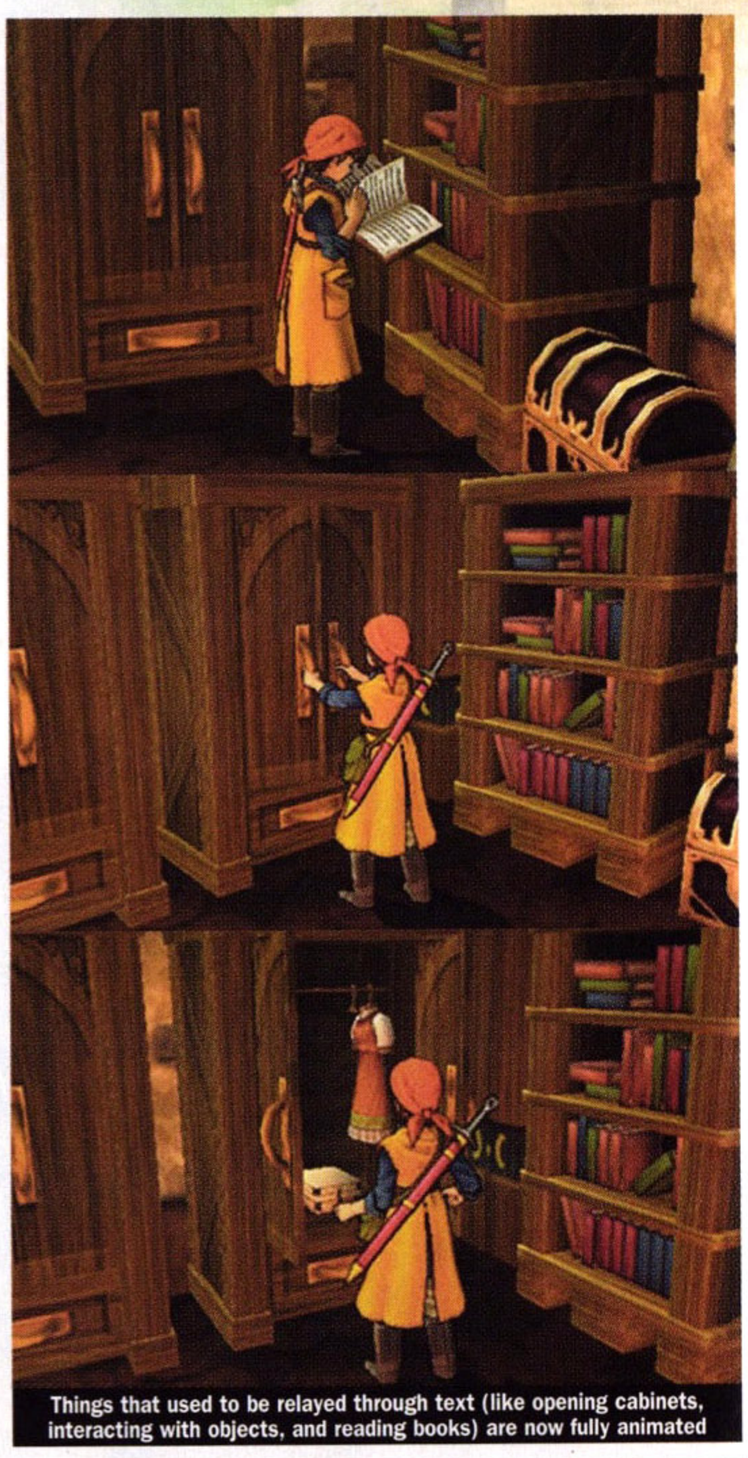
"With God as my witness, I will never go hungry again."

It looks like you'll be able to build a party

Dragon Quest VIII still harbors many major secrets, but there are a few things we know for sure. The original crew (artist Akira Toriyama, writer Yuji Horii, and composer Koichi Sugiyama) is still at the creative helm, while Level 5 is taking care of the more technical aspects of the title. Some may know Level 5 from its previous outings with Dark Cloud, that game's sequel, and the upcoming Xbox title True Fantasy Live Online. From what we've seen, Dragon Quest VIII will mimic the look of the developer's earlier releases by featuring thickly outlined, cel-shaded characters in more realistic 3D backgrounds.

Although previous chapters in the series didn't necessarily tie together, this entry is a direct sequel to its precursor (DQ VII). That title sold extremely well, but many commented that the graphics looked outdated and the game didn't have the full effect that its team was hoping for. That's where the big changes come into play for DQ VIII – battles, characters, and enemies will all be in 3D, but hold onto Toriyama's distinctive art style. In addition, actions that used to be entirely text-based (opening a cabinet to look for loot, for instance) are now shown through character animation. It might not sound like a big deal to more casual DQ players, but the fan base for this 20-year franchise knows all of the ins, outs, modifications, and upgrades that each iteration of the title has gone through.

It cannot be overstated what a big deal Dragon Quest (called Dragon Warrior in the U.S.) titles are in Japan, and Square Enix is promising to bring this edition of the series to the forefront of American gamers' minds. Look forward to a truly epic experience next year.



Things that used to be relayed through text (like opening cabinets, interacting with objects, and reading books) are now fully animated

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** LEVEL 5 ■ **RELEASE** 2004

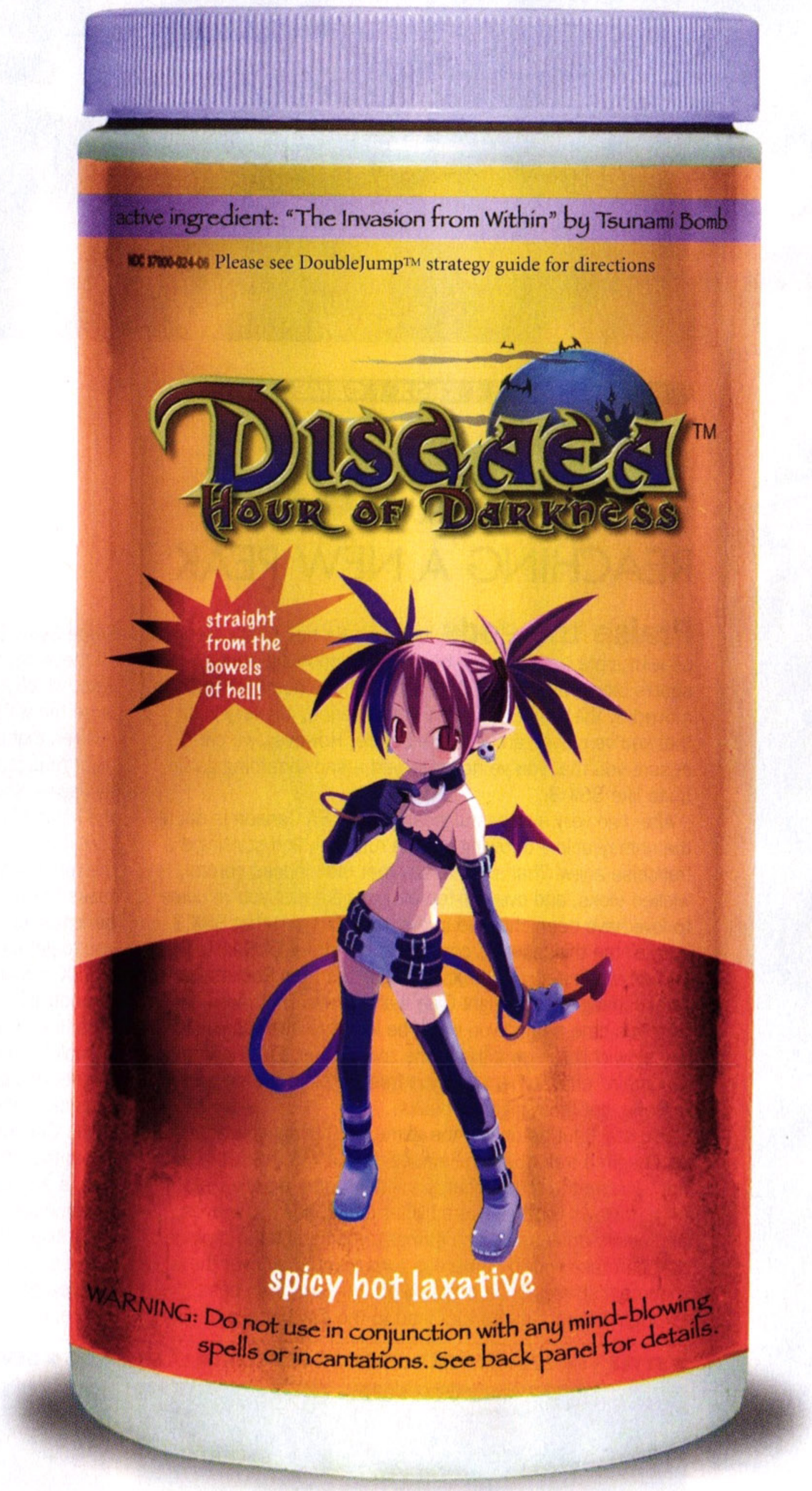
Because even the strongest heroes need help sometimes

"...strategy fans should be tenting their fingers in anticipation..."
-- GMR

Over 40 Hours of gameplay with multiple endings!

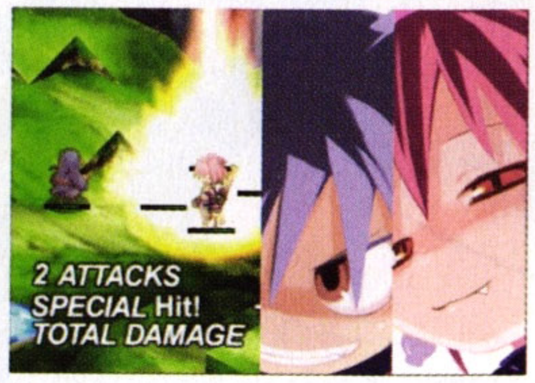
Unleash over 100 mind-blowing spells and special skills to lay waste to your enemies!

Dynamic Battle System: Switch your characters in and out of battle to match the strengths of your toughest opponents!



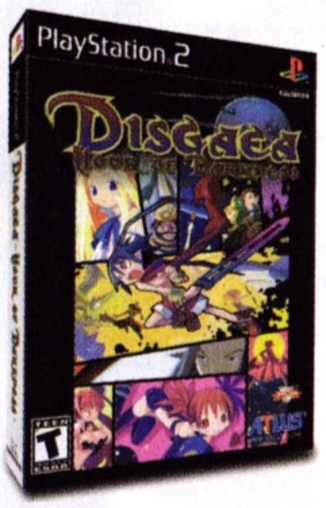
"Don't expect a standard strategy-RPG, though the whimsical plot, bizarre graphics, and crazy minigames combine to make Disgaea a truly offbeat experience."
--Electronic Gaming Monthly

Customize your army with over 150 character classes and monsters!



New Formation Attack System allows up to 4 of your characters to do quadruple the damage on one enemy!

Never before seen gameplay elements add a new dimension of strategy!



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

PlayStation.2

RPG/SIM

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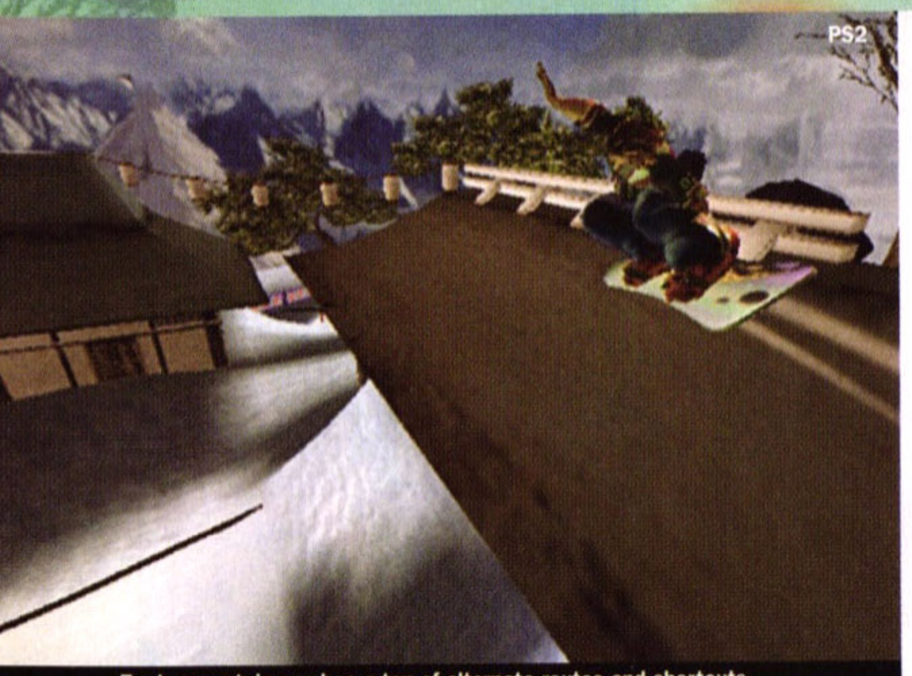
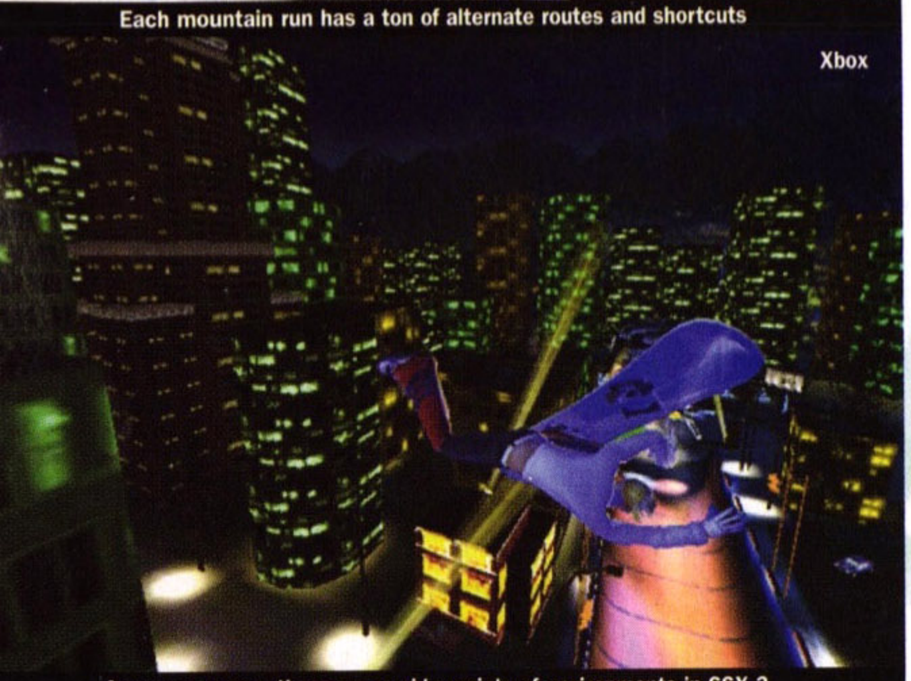
GameCube

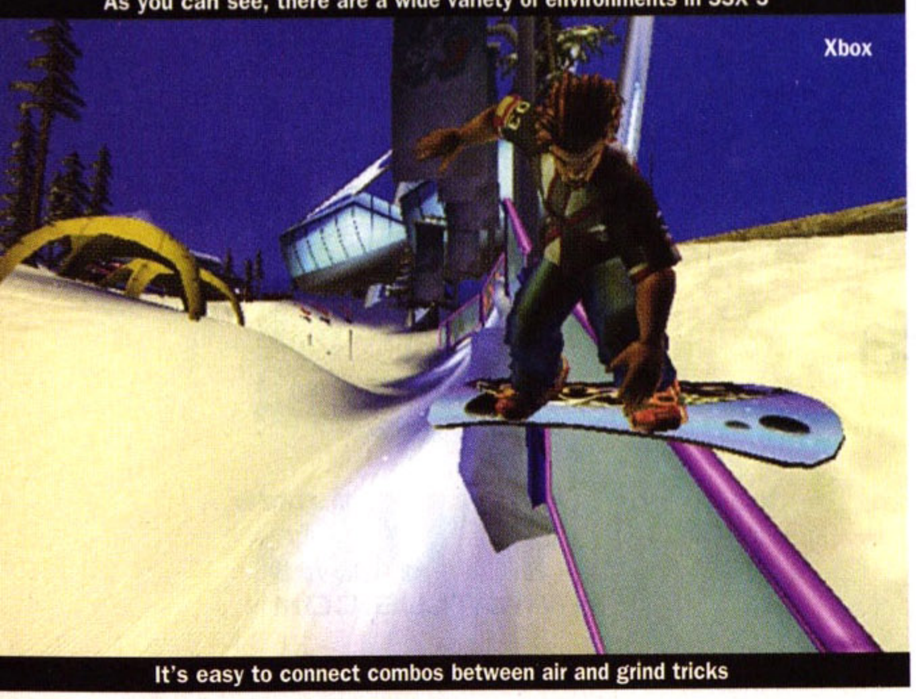
GameCube


PS2

Each mountain run has a ton of alternate routes and shortcuts


Xbox

As you can see, there are a wide variety of environments in SSX 3


Xbox

It's easy to connect combos between air and grind tricks

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

SSX 3

REACHING A NEW PEAK

Praise the gods, because EA has finally blessed us with a playable preview build of its upcoming action/sports blockbuster, SSX 3. Given the huge numbers of units moved by the first two entries in the series, it's very likely that you've played an SSX title before. However, we can assure you that you've never played a snowboarding game quite like SSX 3.

After two very successful incarnations, EA Canada is doing the unthinkable – throwing out the rulebook and starting the franchise anew. That's not to say that the pinpoint control, wicked tricks, and over-the-top atmosphere that you've come to love have been chucked in the trash. It's just that SSX 3 puts all the things we've come to expect from EA Sports Big into an exciting new context. Taking a cue from Rockstar's free-roaming hits Midnight Club II and Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, this time around you won't be led from event to event like slow children on a trip to the zoo. Rather, EA's new "open mountain" environment lets you freely explore the slopes of not one, but three gigantic peaks.

You start out as one of the game's 10 initial characters, and begin a trek down the slopes. When you reach the end, now acclimated to the changes in the game's trick system (which allows for three-tiered Uber tricks, new rail moves, and nearly endless combo strings), you can hop in a plane that can take you to numerous runs located all over the mountain's face. Once dropped off, you can then pass through different gates that lead to the start of events like Slope Style, Big Air, and Super Pipe competitions. Of course, all these courses can also be tackled through a Freeride gate, which gives you a nice opportunity to see just how large the world that EA Canada has created really is.

Given that there are three peaks, each with more than eight runs featuring multiple competitions, the replayability of this game seems nearly limitless. That's not even counting the myriad Challenges, which are Tony Hawk-style goals that you start by running into EA Sports Big icons strewn over the mountainside. Examples of these range from simple tasks like popping a giant cat parade balloon or grinding two benches, to the more demanding Air Spasms, which require you to get a certain number of points in 30 seconds.

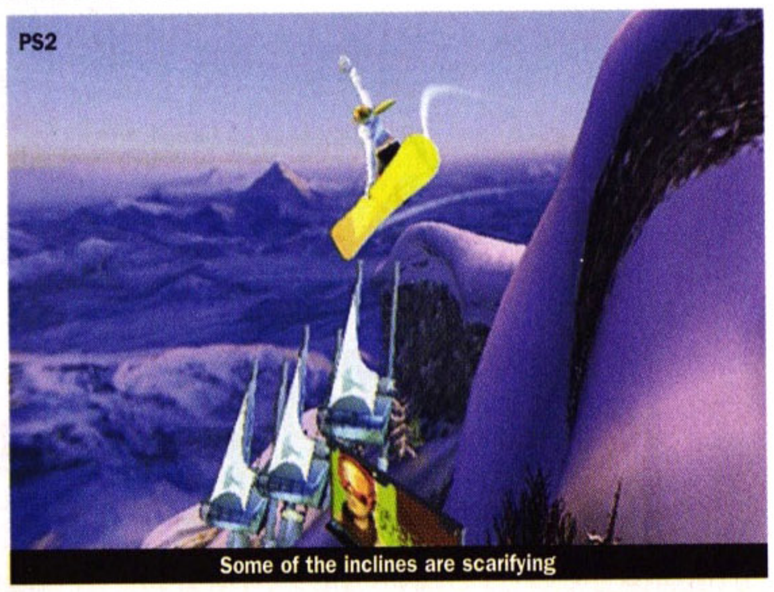
SSX 3 is also heading in new directions with the soundtrack, which was previously done by Mixmaster Mike. This time around, the audio is styled like a radio station, complete with a DJ that lets you know about upcoming events and burgeoning rivalries between boarders. The musical selections are diverse, ranging from stoner rock icons Queens of the Stone Age to Mexican electronica eccentrics Kinky. However, many of the hip hop and rock songs are here in remix form, which means that the very eclectic selections all maintain a unified feel.

Although 1080° and Cool Boarders did much to promote video snowboarding, SSX has perfected it. In this third edition, its creators show no signs of slowing down. For the near future, EA Sports Big should remain the king of the mountain.

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS BIG ■ **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

PS2

Check this disco-inspired move


PS2

Some of the inclines are scarifying

"...the best game of its type this year." -- PS2.IGN

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* Based on total franchise sales through 2002 TRST.

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PlayStation 2

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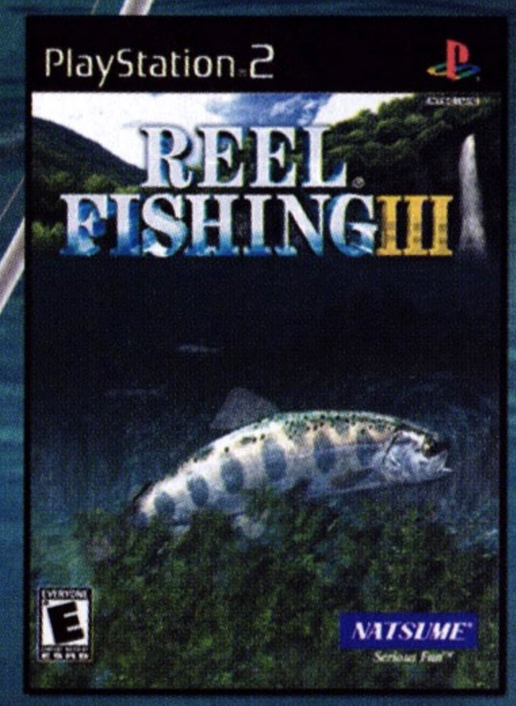
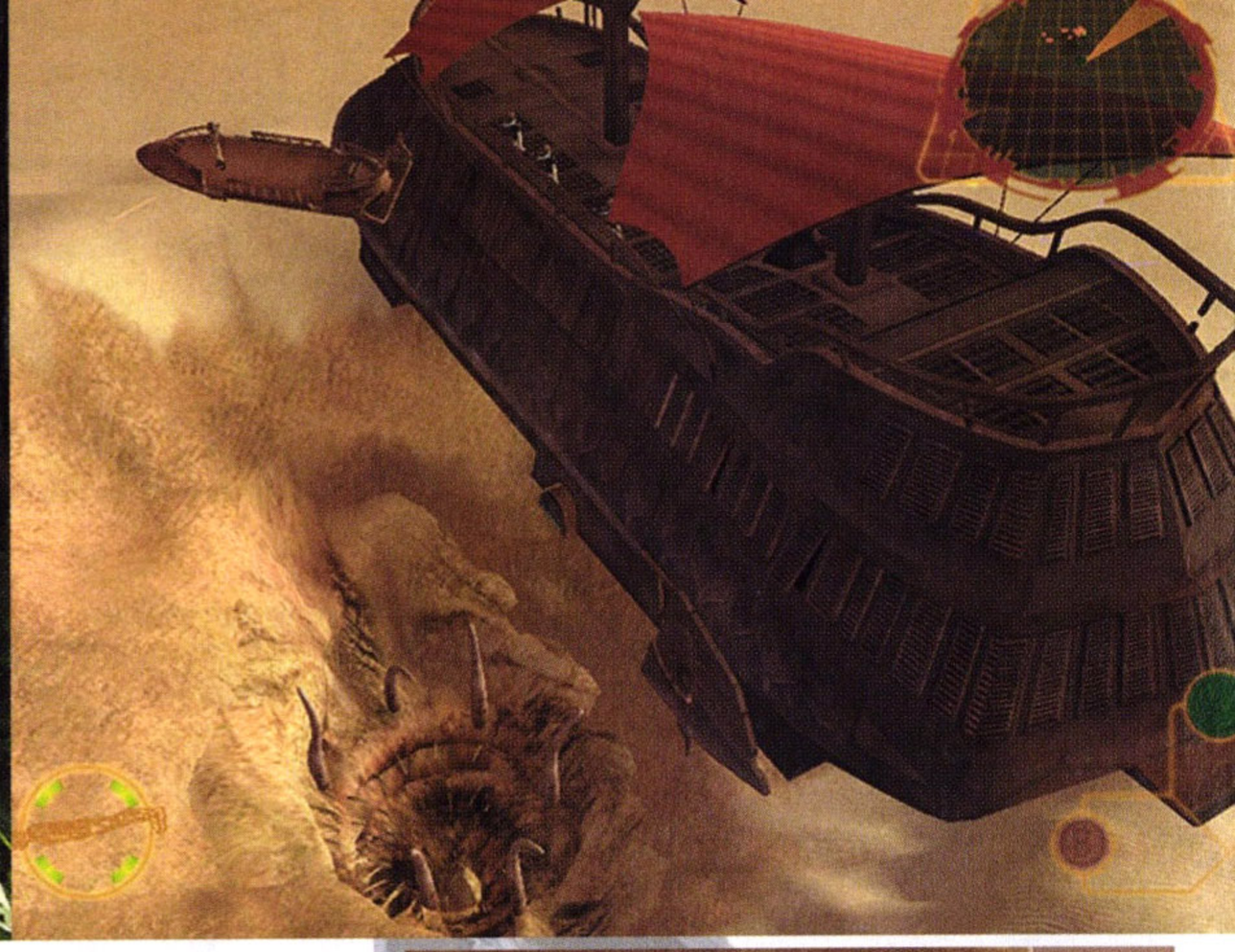




GAMECUBE

STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

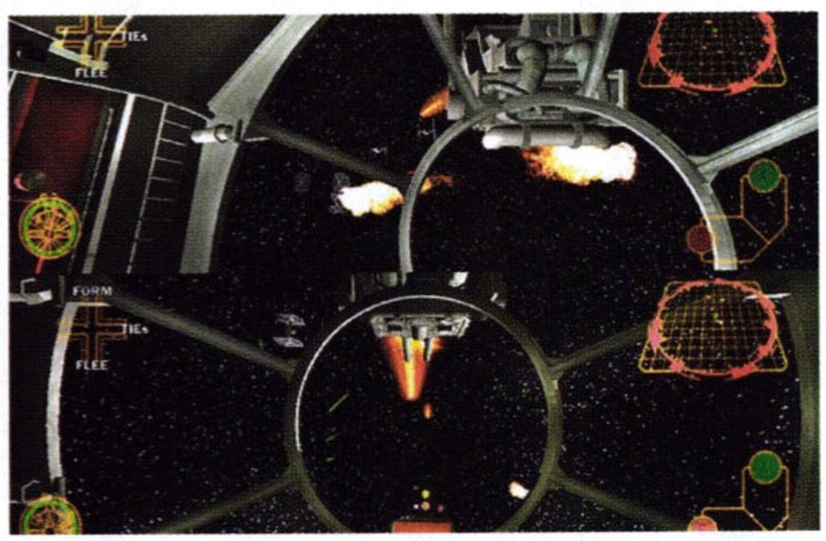
THE ENTIRE TRILOGY ON ONE DISC

As we speak, George Lucas is wrapping up the filming of Episode III (let's hope that he didn't forget Jar Jar's horribly grotesque death scene), and Factor 5 is putting the finishing touches on the third installment in the wildly popular Rogue Squadron series. This time, the adventure spans across the entire classic trilogy and allows the player to control the action within the most memorable sequences. You'll be able to grapple up to the underbelly of an AT-AT, rescue your friends from Jabba's sadistic Sarlaac execution, and join forces with the Ewoks in the battle for Endor. The only thing that you won't be able to do is make out with your sister. Bummer. Rebel Strike is currently slated for an October 14 release exclusively for GameCube.

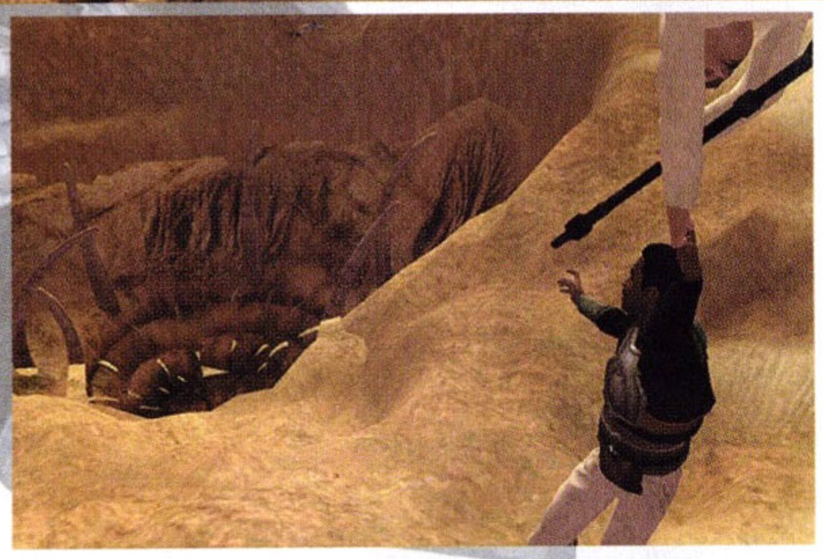
- **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
- **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** FACTOR 5
- **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

For a limited time only, if you preorder Rebel Strike from a participating video game retailer, you'll receive a bonus disc free of charge. Included on this disc are a playable demo of the Hoth stage from Rebel Strike, a trailer, game art, various behind-the-scenes and "making of" content, but best of all, a complete version of the original 1982 arcade game. How cool is that!

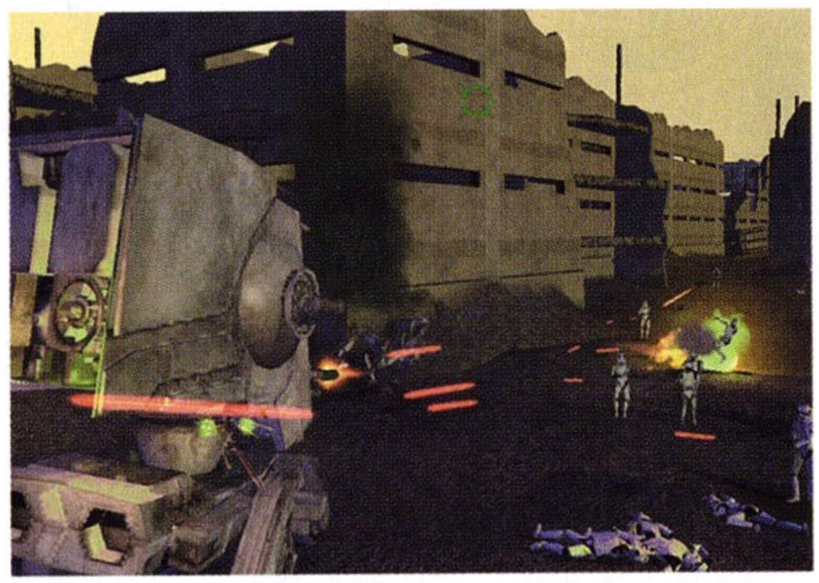
As the story unfolds, players will encounter and assume control of a wide variety of different characters ranging from Luke Skywalker, Wedge Antilles, Han Solo, Chewbacca, Lando (complete with skintight white pants), and Princess Leia. Each of these characters is tied to specific scenes and levels.



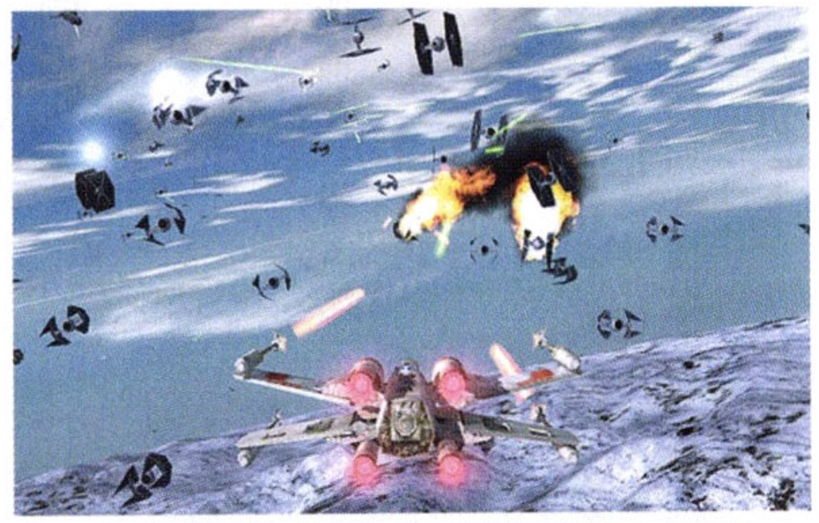
Two-player split-screen is a major focus in Rebel Strike. Along with a handful head-to-head modes like Capture-the-Base and Endurance, the entire first GameCube game can be played cooperatively with a friend. Since connectivity is currently "hot," Factor 5 is doing its part to support the unification of GameCube and Game Boy Advance. For multiplayer only, the GBA can be used to issue wingman commands. Now, if that doesn't sound like $70 well spent, call us stupid and slap us on the ass!



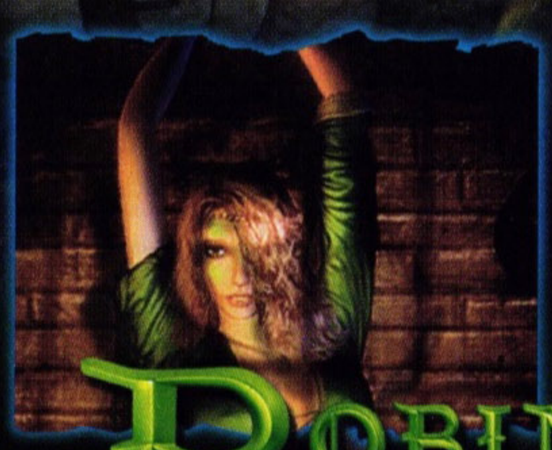
In an attempt to seamlessly bind gameplay and cinematics, Factor 5 has undertaken the painstaking process of replicating sequences from the film within the graphics of the game. When goals are completed or destinations are reached, the game switches on the fly between story breaks and gameplay. It's an impressive feat that lends authenticity to the experience.

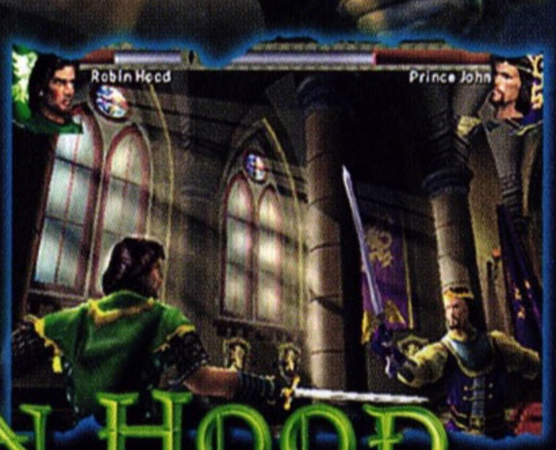


Rebel Strike also veers off of the beaten path to show elements or particular battles that were not represented within the trilogy.



Gameplay breaks down to 60 percent of the action dedicated to space combat and 40 percent for ground battles.





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Suggestive Themes
Violence

PlayStation 2

PC CD ROM

XBOX

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PC

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

SEE HOW THE OTHER HALF FOUGHT

Without a doubt, no other video game series has captured the great war of the 20th century like Medal of Honor. Allied Assault was the first PC appearance for the franchise, and it won Electronic Arts numerous accolades. A lot has changed since then, and Pacific Assault is a deeper, larger, and more technically advanced game than its predecessor.

All WW II games have focused on the battles in Europe. Maybe that's because building dilapidated, static cities isn't that hard. Places like the untamed jungle provide a few more difficulties for developers. While Stalingrad and Omaha Beach showed drama in Europe, areas like Guadalcanal and Tarawa haven't been represented until now.

The faces of these locations are very different from what you've seen in previous MOH games. As Private Tom Conlin, you will witness horrors like the attack on Pearl Harbor firsthand. The game's seven missions take place in 25 areas, like Australia and Japan. You'll be shooting down kamikaze pilots and freeing prisoners of war with new weapons at your side, and piloting new vehicles, including the M4 flame-thrower tank.

The squad you fight alongside is much more vital than in Allied Assault. After all, you can't win a war flying solo. Fellow troops will gain experience – making them more effective associates. When some greenhorns step in for fallen comrades, they're going to be a liability until they get up to speed. It's variables like this that make games great, because it creates a wildcard scenario. Will you lose your ace sharpshooter and get a crappy rookie as a replacement? It can mean the difference between success and failure.

Allied Assault's multiplayer functionality was rather underwhelming, but EA is making it a much larger focus for Pacific Assault. Up to 32 players can go to town on at least nine maps, with options like Team Objective Mode and Free for All.

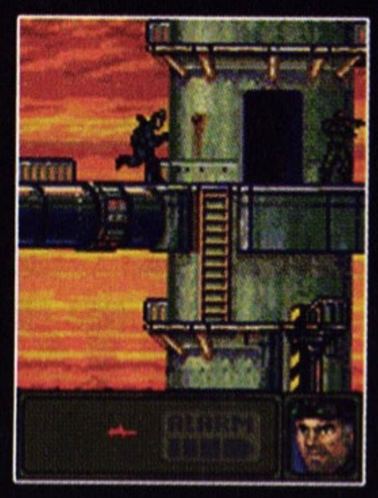
Excellent graphics and sound are a given for a Medal of Honor game, and this one isn't breaking that tradition. EA has hinted at some new 3D technology, but isn't saying anything more than that. The same sound team is back to produce what will no doubt be more award-winning sonic effects. Pacific Assault will be another monster Medal of Honor installment, sure to win the battle for your free time.

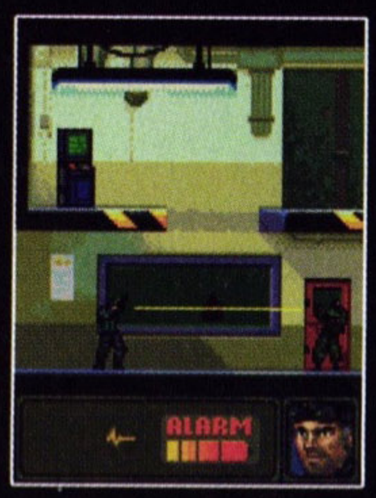
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 2004

It's going to take a lot more than a lick of spit and a napkin to clean up this guy

This looks like a scene out of *Predator*. "I ain't got time to bleed."

Get your fix on the go!





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HITS

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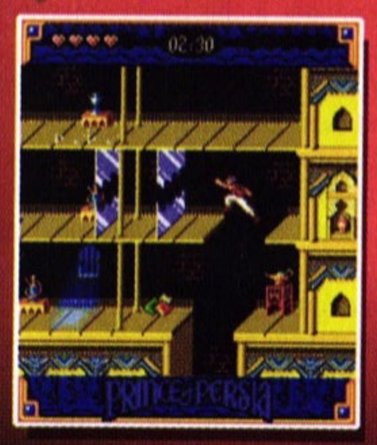

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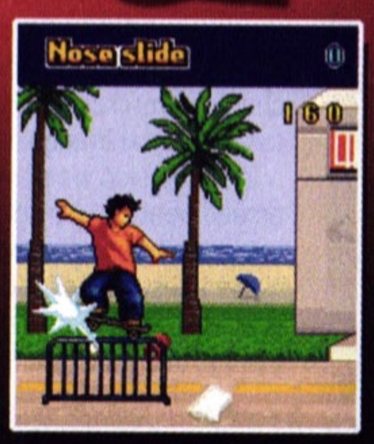

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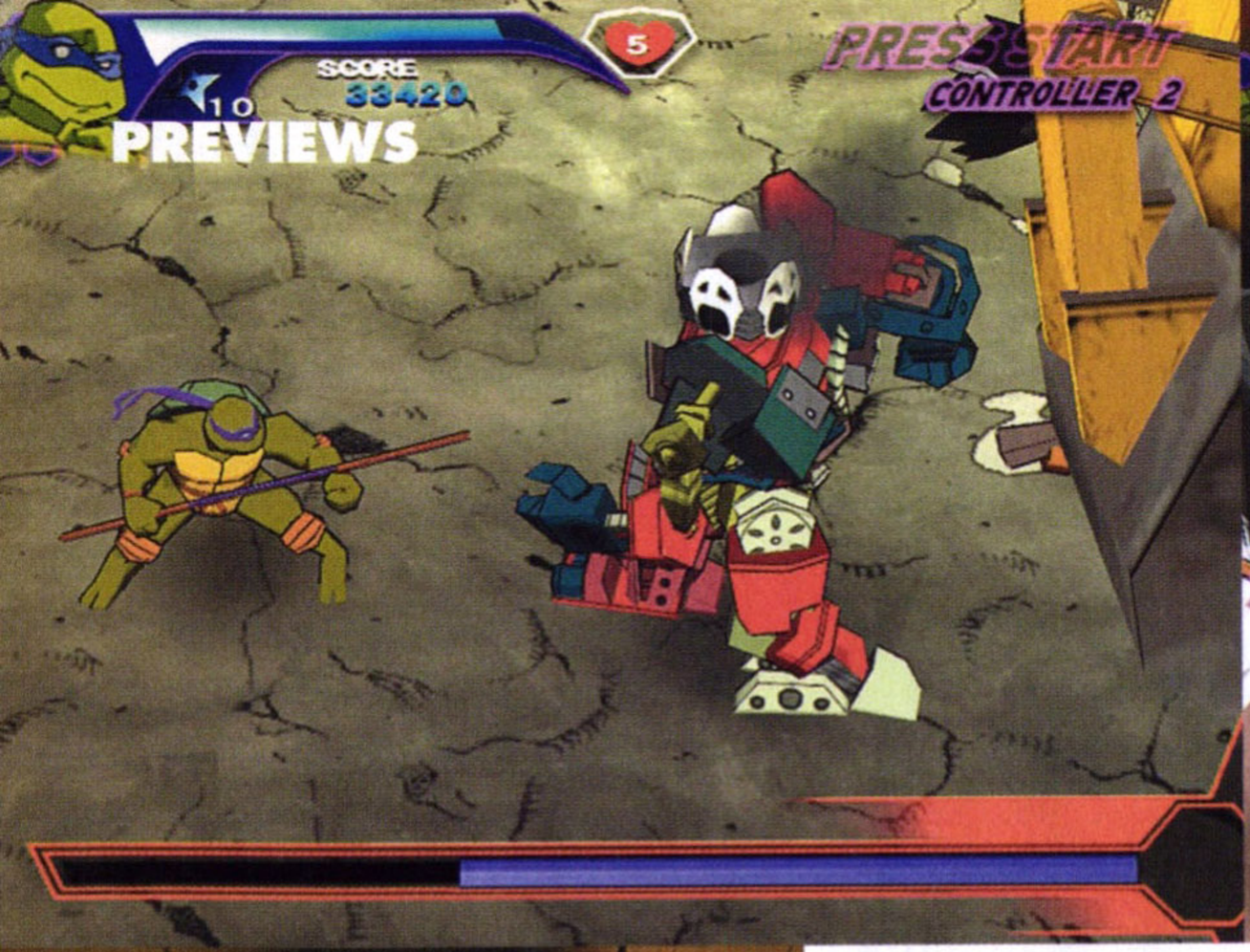


These cutscenes advance the plot and look amazing

Where is that sword going to go next?

Two-player action is a blast

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | GAME BOY ADVANCE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

TURTLE POWER!

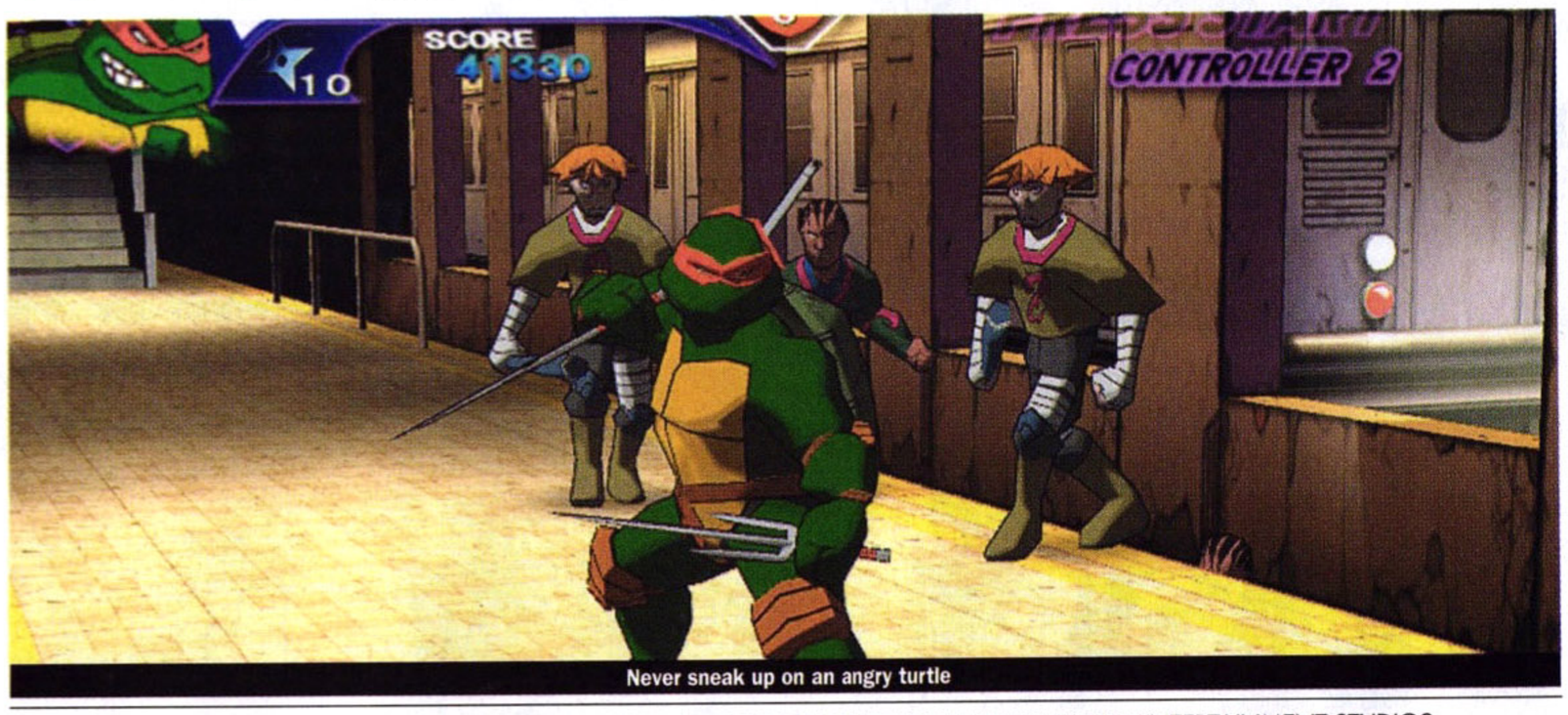
The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and the Final Fight-style brawler have much in common. Both were once omnipresent in the '80s and early-'90s. Sadly, the popularity of each faded as the 20th century drew to a close, killed off by Power Rangers and the switch to 3D gaming. But together, the two are making a comeback on next-generation consoles, and this time, they've crossed over into the third dimension.

Now more closely aligned with the original comic book and sporting an updated cel-shaded look (similar to Jet Set Radio or The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker), the Turtles are back. Sure, the cel shading technique has been accused of being a gaming fad, but it fits this title perfectly. With its clean character models and fluid animation, the game looks like a cartoon, as any good Turtles title should. In fact, we think that the in-game character models look even better than their counterparts in the traditionally animated cutscenes.

In the version we played, gameplay felt just like a classic arcade beat-em-up. Not surprising, considering that some members of the development team worked on the earliest Turtle titles. Game producer Kengo Nakamura promised a comprehensive combat system, and so far, the game delivers on his pledge. In both single and co-op play, combat was fast-paced and involved, yet incredibly easy to pick up. A second player can join in at any time, and at one point during our testing, someone who had not yet touched the game jumped in and was playing like an expert in seconds. The intuitive control scheme means that combat is lightning-fast – creating a high-energy, enjoyable gaming experience.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles has all the makings of a great party game, and the addition of a Power Stone-esque Versus mode only adds to its group-play appeal. In this mode, you can go up against a human or CPU opponent and duke in out in some of the highly detailed environments. The arenas include a junkyard, a subway station, and even the top of a moving truck! To start, this mode features only the Turtles as playable characters, but additional combatants from the TMNT universe can be unlocked by playing through the Story mode with each of the four pizza-munchers.

With so much to offer in terms of gameplay, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles has all the makings of a hit. And, considering that they have new toys and a new TV show, it looks like a full-fledged TMNT renaissance is on the way. Does this mean that Vanilla Ice and his "Ninja Rap" will come back too?



Never sneak up on an angry turtle

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT STUDIOS
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21

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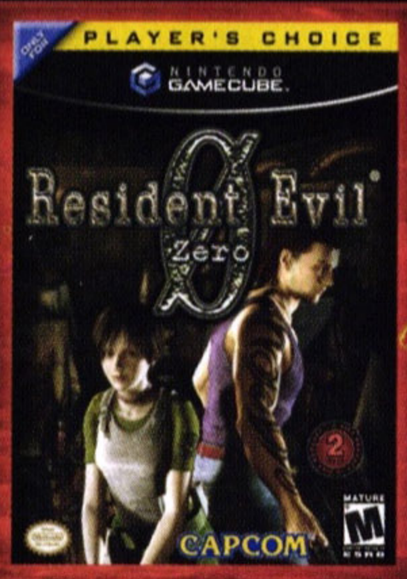

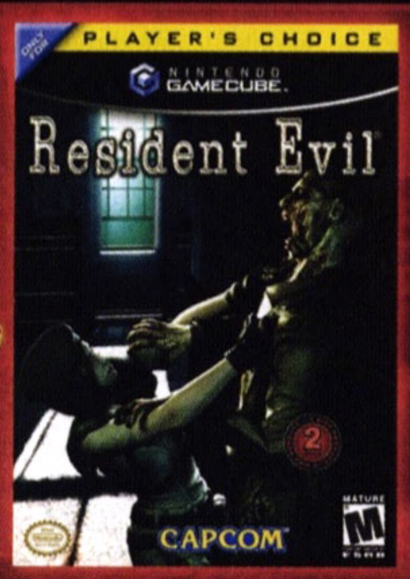

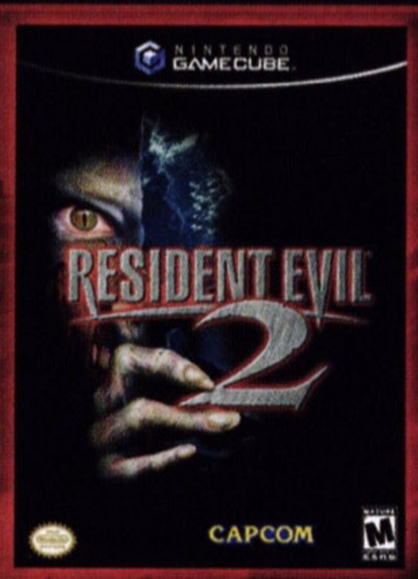

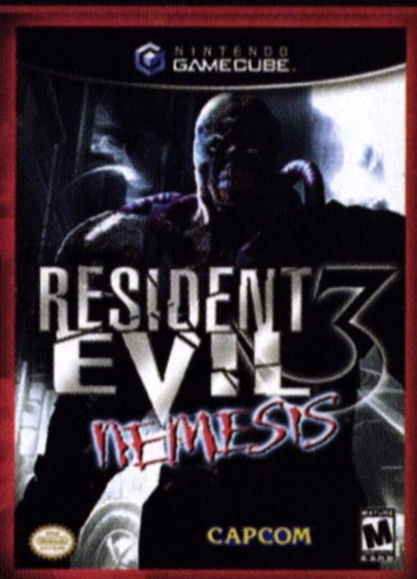

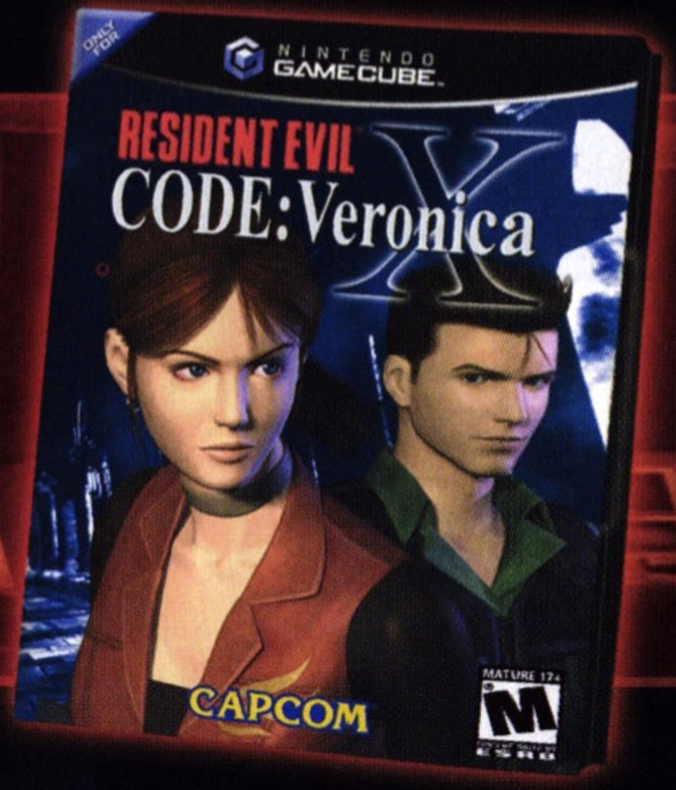

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

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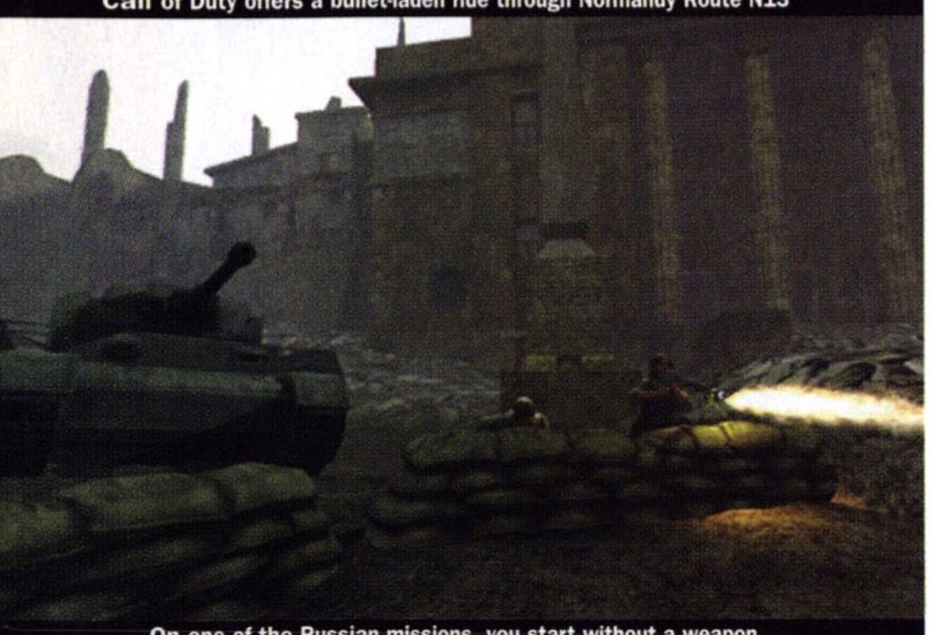
Call of Duty offers a bullet-laden ride through Normandy Route N13



On one of the Russian missions, you start without a weapon and are instructed to follow an armed soldier so you can pick it up when he dies – that's pleasant

PC

CALL OF DUTY

FROM THE "REAL" CREATORS OF MEDAL OF HONOR

After Medal of Honor: Allied Assault took off on the PC, there were a slew of new developers popping up that claimed to be the brains behind Medal of Honor. When Game Informer asked Infinity Ward's chief creative officer, Vince Zampella, what his thoughts were on the subject, he grinned as he debated what he wanted to say. He then grimaced and gave us the answer he knew would get him in the least amount of trouble: "Take a look at the manual for both games and make your own opinions."

If you do compare the credits for the two titles you will find over 20 members of Infinity Ward gracing the manual for both Call of Duty and Medal of Honor: Allied Assault. Plus, Infinity Ward was also quick to rehire music and sound master Michael Giacchino, who also worked on Allied Assault. When you add it all up, you can't help but think Call of Duty is the true successor.

Once again focused on intense WW II gameplay, Call of Duty takes the player across 24 missions ranging from historic battlefields, towns, bridges, forests, a POW camp, and even a battleship. All of the game's settings are lovingly recreated from extensive archival research.

We got a chance to see and play a number of scenarios, and to say that this game is just as gripping as Medal of Honor: Allied Assault would be an understatement. The title is split up into three campaigns: one each for the American, British, and Russian soldiers – all with seven to nine missions. Featuring some amazing fire and smoke effects, the game draws you in as the sounds and shrapnel of war explode around you.

In a couple of the missions we played, we noticed that not only are these levels longer than most war-based games, they are frantic to no end. Giving the player the ability to hit the dirt (the player can crouch, stand, or go completely prone at the touch of a button) teaches you a quick lesson on keeping your head down. Stick your neck out on any of these stages, and you will get it blown off.

From a car chase through the streets being trailed by a panzer tank to insane firefights, Call of Duty has all the sights and sounds of war that any gamer could be looking for in a one-player game. But that's not the end of it; there will also be co-op play and events that unfold in the multiplayer missions to make sure that Call of Duty has legs even after you have defeated the Nazis one more time.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** INFINITY WARD
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4

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Thanks to R&C's weapon upgrade system...

...killing alien baddies...

...will never grow old

PLAYSTATION 2

RATCHET & CLANK: GOING COMMANDO

MORE OF WHAT YOU WANT

Ratchet & Clank was one of the highlights of last year's platforming crop, so we were pleased when it was announced that Insomniac was going to forgo the expected two-year development cycle and deliver a sequel this fall. However, the shortened time frame doesn't mean that the company is skimping on improvements and rushing out a sub-par follow-up. From what we saw in a recent presentation, almost every aspect of the game is being overhauled.

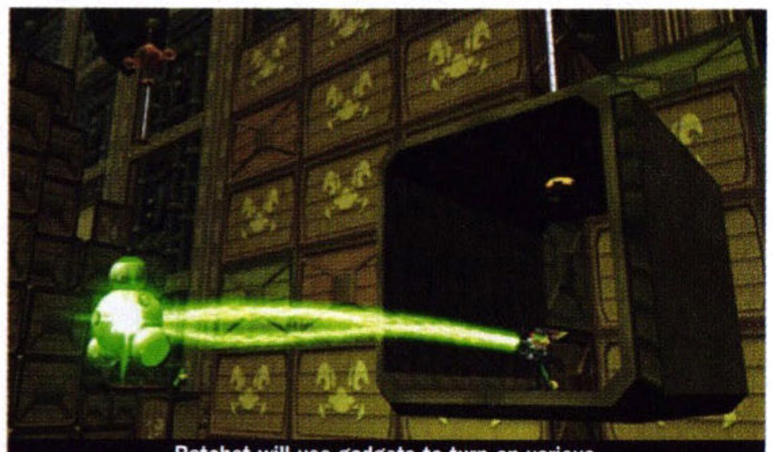
Based on their post-mortem critiques on the first Ratchet & Clank, Ted Price, CEO of Insomniac, claims that the team "came up with brand new approaches for major areas of the game."

Many of these changes take inspiration from the world of RPGs, meaning that Ratchet and his arsenal of weapons evolve over the course of the game, changing the basic gameplay mechanics and combat techniques. Ratchet gets experience points (for collecting bolts) that allow him to gain more hit points and new sets of armor (which he'll need, since some of the larger enemies have up to 120 hit points). Likewise, the weapons gain experience every time you use them, morphing into dangerous new forms. For example, the humble gravity bomb will become the decimating mini-nuke – complete with mushroom cloud effects.

There are 20 new weapons in the game, 18 of which can be upgraded into a new form. Of course, if you long for some of the weapons from the original missing from this edition, you'll be able to pick them up free of charge at a store if you have a Ratchet & Clank save file on your memory card. In addition, you can purchase "mods," which do post-attack damage to enemies, much like a poison spell in an RPG.

That's a lot of firepower, but you'll need it to get past the game's new tenacious enemy AI. Insomniac's motto this time around was "no sleeping on the job," which means that guards will never be standing around, just waiting for something to happen. They'll be walking, scanning for your presence, and won't just go back to a "sleep" state if you run out of their zone. Rather, they'll pursue you, taking cover when necessary, and even work in team formations.

Obviously, being the first platformer to incorporate weapons is a point of pride for Insomniac, but it has also included what they term "maxigames" to add some variety between the blistering gunplay. These include arena challenges (gladiatorial battles that are played for experience points, new weapons, and gadgets), hoverbike racing that gives most cart racers a run for their money, and space shooter stages that bring back fond Star Fox memories. Really, we don't know what more you could want from an action/platform game. We fully expect Ratchet & Clank to be another shining moment for a company that's done much to advance the genre.



Ratchet will use gadgets to turn on various machines and switches in the environment

Finally, we get a good look at Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando's flying levels

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
■ **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAC GAMES ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

SPAWN

ONE HELL OF A GAME

Spawn is the J. Lo of comics. Think about it: J. Lo makes movies, music, clothes, and tabloid headlines. Spawn appears in comics, movies, TV shows, and video games; and he'd make short work of the future Mrs. Affleck in a fight.

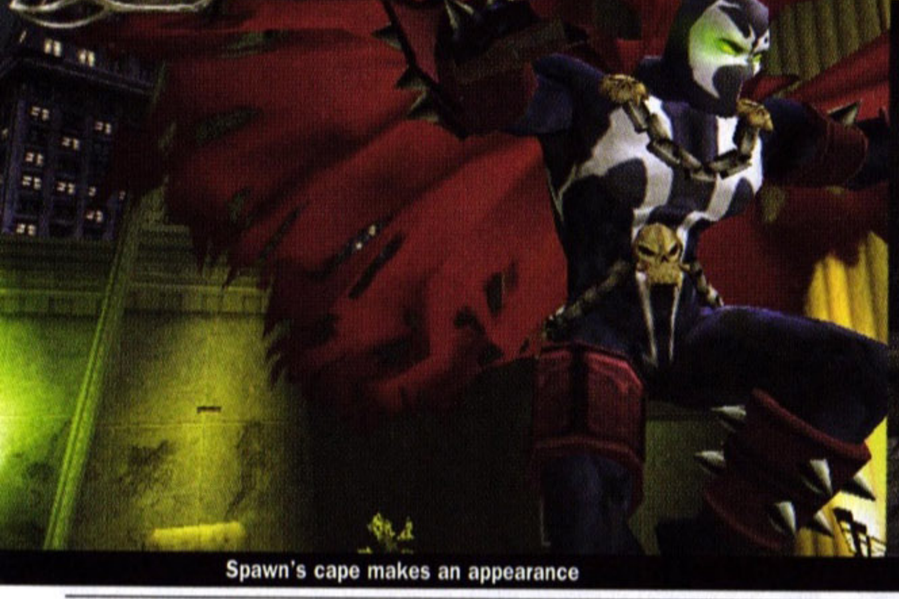
Yet Spawn will be facing much tougher foes in his new 3D adventure. Much like the comics, the plot concerns a war between Heaven and Hell, with Spawn caught right in the middle. He'll be forced to battle familiar enemies such as demons, angels, evil millionaire Jason Wynn and, naturally, the Violator.

Of course, Spawn will have a huge arsenal at his disposal. Aside from a large selection of guns, Spawn will tote Agony (the axe he carries in the Xbox version of Soul Calibur II), his chains, and a variety of Hell powers. In the version we played, Spawn was able to throw balls of necroplasm, gain bursts of supernatural speed, and even slow down his enemies in a twisted version of bullet time.

With so many combat options available, don't expect Spawn to be yet another stale brawler. The Soul Calibur II development team consulted on the hand-to-hand combat, and your weapons add a lot of variety to the combat. Spawn can choose to slice enemies with his axe, blow their heads apart with a shotgun, and even rip creatures in two with his chains. Special combat techniques will earn the player points which can be used to purchase unlockables, including bonus levels. Get ready – Spawn materializes on a console near you this fall.

This guy is about to burst like a ripe melon

"I am gonna give him such a wedgie!"



Spawn's cape makes an appearance

"Whoever took my last beer better fess up now!"

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** NAMCO ■ **DEVELOPER** POINT OF VIEW ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11

PlayStation 2

The Seductress

Xtreme Legends

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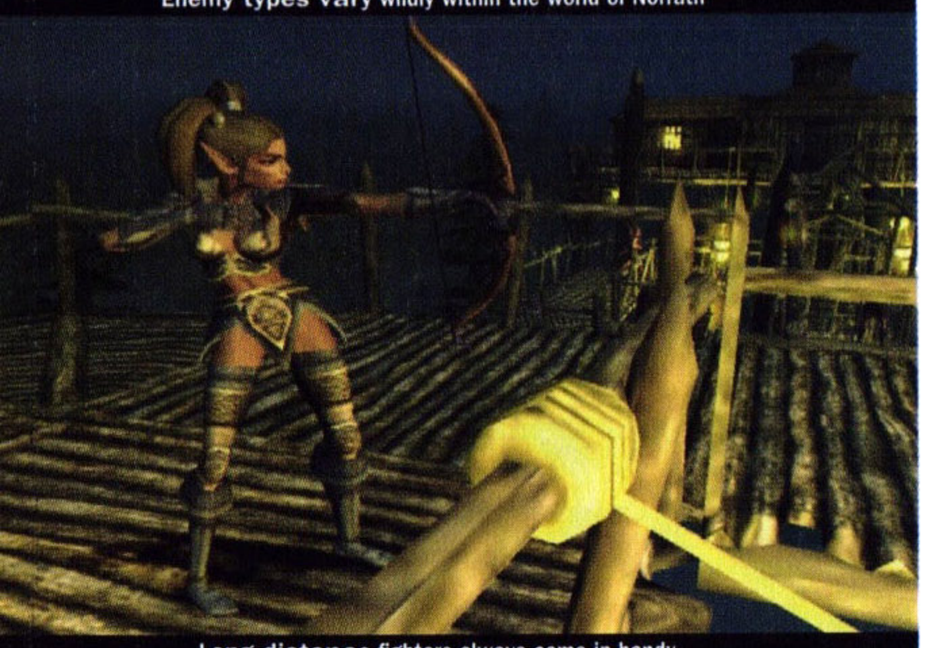
thanks! 25th KOEI's 25th Anniversary

Enemy types vary wildly within the world of Norrath



Long distance fighters always come in handy

Weapons and items appear on your character within the menu screens and the game

PLAYSTATION 2

CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EVERQUEST

FANTASY ACTION

Snowblind Studios' upcoming

Champions of Norrath might be the action/adventure title that fans everywhere have been hunting for. We supplied a first look at the game in our July 2003 cover story, and since then the development team has been maintaining a madcap pace to meet a November launch date.

What have they been up to? Building and perfecting the game's impressive feature list, for starters. Norrath offers players five classes to choose from at the beginning of the game (male and female versions of the barbarian warrior, dark elf shadowknight, high elf cleric, erudite wizard, and wood elf ranger); and customization of hairstyle, skin tone, tattoos, facial hair, armor, weapons, and jewelry. Snowblind also estimates that there are 100 hours of gameplay per character – for those of you not too quick with the mental math, that's 500 hours if you play through with each class. In addition, every single area outside the hub villages is randomly generated, so it's never the same game twice.

This all sounds fine and dandy, but there is one major hurdle that Norrath still needs to leap: getting this game into the hands of those players who are sick to death of hearing about EverQuest every 3.5 seconds. After spending some time with an early build that Sony was gracious enough to send our way, it looks like Champions may be the one to convert the newbies. You don't really need to know anything about the EQ world to understand and enjoy CON, as frequent NPC encounters will explain goals and rules to you. We are also happy to report that the worlds, characters, and enemies are really interesting and engaging.

While the multiplayer functionality wasn't yet ironed out on the version we played, Snowblind has a very exciting plan for you and your peeps. Norrath will be a one to four-player game via online (with no monthly service charge, although you must obviously provide an Internet connection and network adapter for the PS2) or multitap. Online play has you log onto a new matchmaking service that will be hosted by Sony, pick a party, and get your fantasy-based action on with three new friends.

Snowblind is certainly on the right path, and the developer has obviously pulled through in the past with Balder's Gate: Dark Alliance. Expect all of the good things about Dark Alliance, with the epic fantasy of EverQuest and a truly intriguing online component. How could it go wrong?

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
■ **DEVELOPER** SNOWBLIND STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 24

Depending on weapon selection, multiple enemies can be attacked at once

This is still an EverQuest game, so there's a decent amount of text

XBOX

TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

THE PROLIFIC PAJAMA PATROL

Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven on PlayStation 2 set the new standard for ninja games. Its stealth elements were amazing, the combat was fierce, and it even featured multiplayer co-op. And of course, gore's always good. Come March of 2004, one year after Wrath's release, Return From Darkness will sneak up on Microsoft's bulky black box.

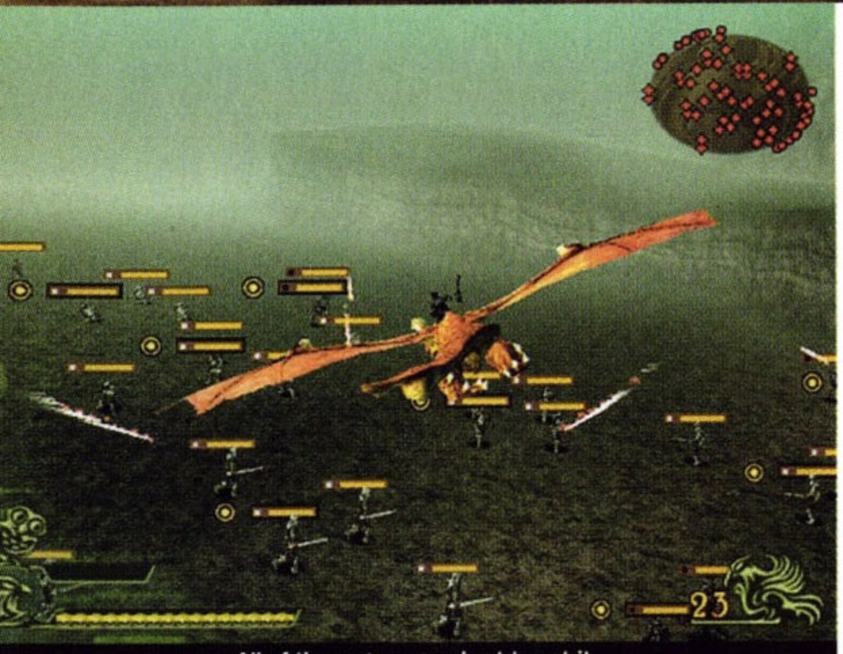
Return From Darkness fits into that "not quite a sequel, not quite a port" category which is good at attracting new gamers, while still getting a lot of existing fans to bite. Much of the content is the same as Wrath, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. However, plenty of additions are promised, which will make you unsheathe your sword in excitement. Two new single-player missions are included, as well as new enemy layouts for the pre-existing ones. Also, some never-before-seen foes will have to be killed on sight, there are added weapons in your arsenal, and a training mode will get ninja neophytes up to speed in a hurry. Remember, Lord Gohda expects much of you.

Most ninjas can be categorized as lone swordsman, but we'll gladly put that tradition to rest in favor of Xbox Live support. Activision tells us that all six cooperative levels can be played online. If that wasn't enough, the game also supports voice chat. Now you can spout witty one-liners while you exact your efficient revenge. We recommend either: "My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die," or "That pretty good. But brick not hit back."

The Tenchu series represents some of the best ninja games in the last five years. Xbox owners should feel enlightened by the prospect of this upcoming release. Remember: Ninjas do it with the lights off.

This boss is some creepy scientist guy in a mascot-like contraption full of surprises

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** K2/PROSOFT
■ **RELEASE** MARCH 2004



All of those guys are about to eat it

Ground battles are massive

You won't be alone in the air

PLAYSTATION 2

DRAKENGARD

TOASTY!

Man, did *Reign of Fire* suck! It had nowhere near enough dragon vs. human action to satisfy us. Thankfully, Drakengard is coming to ease the pain. Like a combination of Panzer Dragoon Orta and the Dynasty Warriors series, Drakengard should provide enough action to make anyone forget about Matthew McConaughey and his stupid fake tattoos.

Drakengard is the story of Kyme, a young prince whose parents were killed by dragons. To make matters worse, the evil Empire has destroyed his kingdom and kidnapped his sister. In the process of rescuing her, Kyme is mortally wounded and forced to make a pact with an injured dragon in order to save both of their lives. The pair exchange hearts and regain their health. Unfortunately, Kyme also loses the ability to speak. Now bound to the dragon until death, Kyme and his new ally rescue his sister and set out to bring the Empire to its knees.

Gameplay is divided into both ground and aerial combat. Ground combat will feature hack n' slash action against swarms of enemies, similar to Koei's Dynasty Warriors games. Air combat will include both dogfighting in a 360-degree environment and air-to-ground strafing. Imagine flying over a massive army of ground troops and raining the destructive hellfire of dragon's breath down upon them. How sweet is that?

While the game will feature an impressive amount of action, RPG elements have been included for added depth. Both Kyme and the dragon will change as experience is earned. Kyme will learn new battle techniques and combos, and even gain magical abilities; the dragon will actually change in size and appearance as it grows more powerful. The creature's fire breath will even become more potent as the game advances. Kind of like ours after a big plate of delicious liver and onions.

Graphically, Drakengard is looking pretty slick. Both the dragon and the title's other creatures are appropriately creepy, and the human character models look just as good. The environments are detailed and gloomy, and ground battles are epic; you'll often face off with a dozen or more enemies at once. Of course, the dragon's breath looks awesome – it just might make you want to whip out some marshmallows and make s'mores.

Drakengard may not be the most original game to come down the pike lately, but it's looking quite promising. Square Enix's record with fantasy games and RPGs is unmatched, and anything with dragons in it gets us excited. You could even say it gets us hot and bothered. Get it? 'Cause dragon fire is hot.... Man, we're funny.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** CAVIA ■ **RELEASE** SPRING 2004

This looks like a rescue attempt

Kyme is one tough mutha

XBOX

ARX FATALIS

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Like most of our readers, the main character in Arx Fatalis never sees the light of day. In this port of the PC game, you play as a man with no memory that is exploring a series of dungeons, caves, underground passages, and other dark, musty places. It's a good thing you don't have allergies.

The story of Arx Fatalis concerns a world where the sun has died and monsters run rampant. You must explore the subterranean world of Arx in order to rediscover your identity and fulfill a destiny unknown to you.

Although the game plays out in the first-person view, this is no trigger-happy shooter. Much like Morrowind, Arx Fatalis is an RPG in first-person clothing. It certainly delivers all the menus, stats, and spells that RPG fans crave. Over the course of the game, levels are gained, weapons are bought and upgraded, and, of course, monsters are battled.

Because of the underground setting, don't expect to see any pretty outdoor environments. However, the various dungeons are detailed and varied enough to keep the game from growing stale. And though the game may not be as gorgeous as titles like Splinter Cell, the look is appropriately moody and takes good advantage of the Xbox's capabilities. This dark little title releases just in time for Halloween.

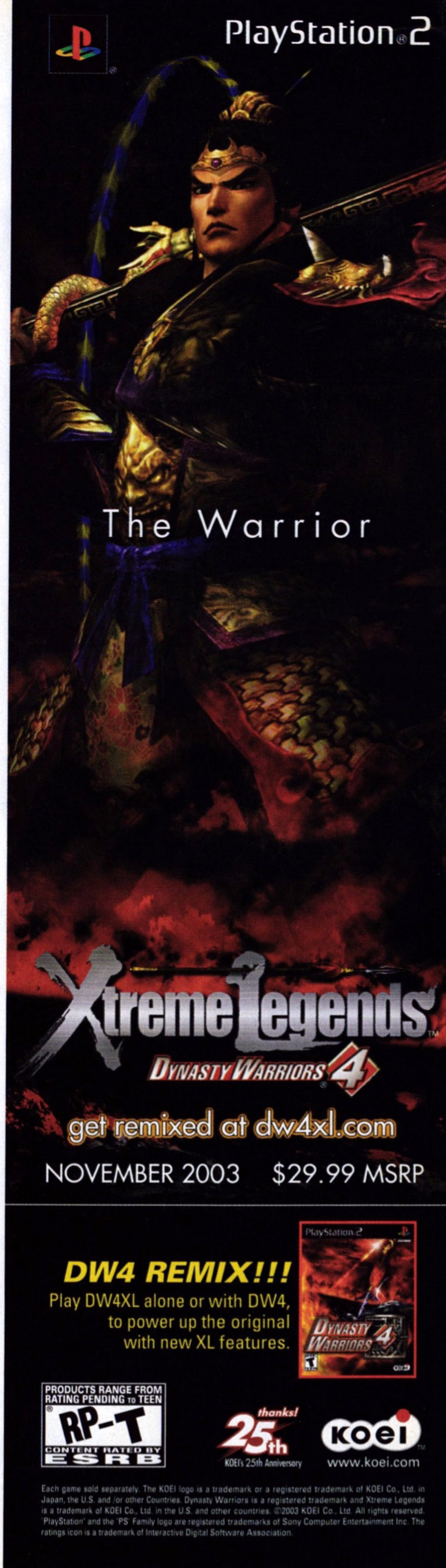
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER ■ **DEVELOPER** ARKANE STUDIOS
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 27

All kinds of creepy things live underground...

...like Calista Flockhart

You have a host of magical abilities at your fingertips

The game features some pretty snazzy lighting effects



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

I-NINJA

I-NINJA, U-NINJA... WE ALL-NINJA!

Argonaut spent a lot of time working on the recently-canceled Malice. Fortunately, the company has moved on to bigger and better things. The developer is now crafting I-Ninja, a quirky action title Namco will be unleashing upon the console gaming world this holiday season.

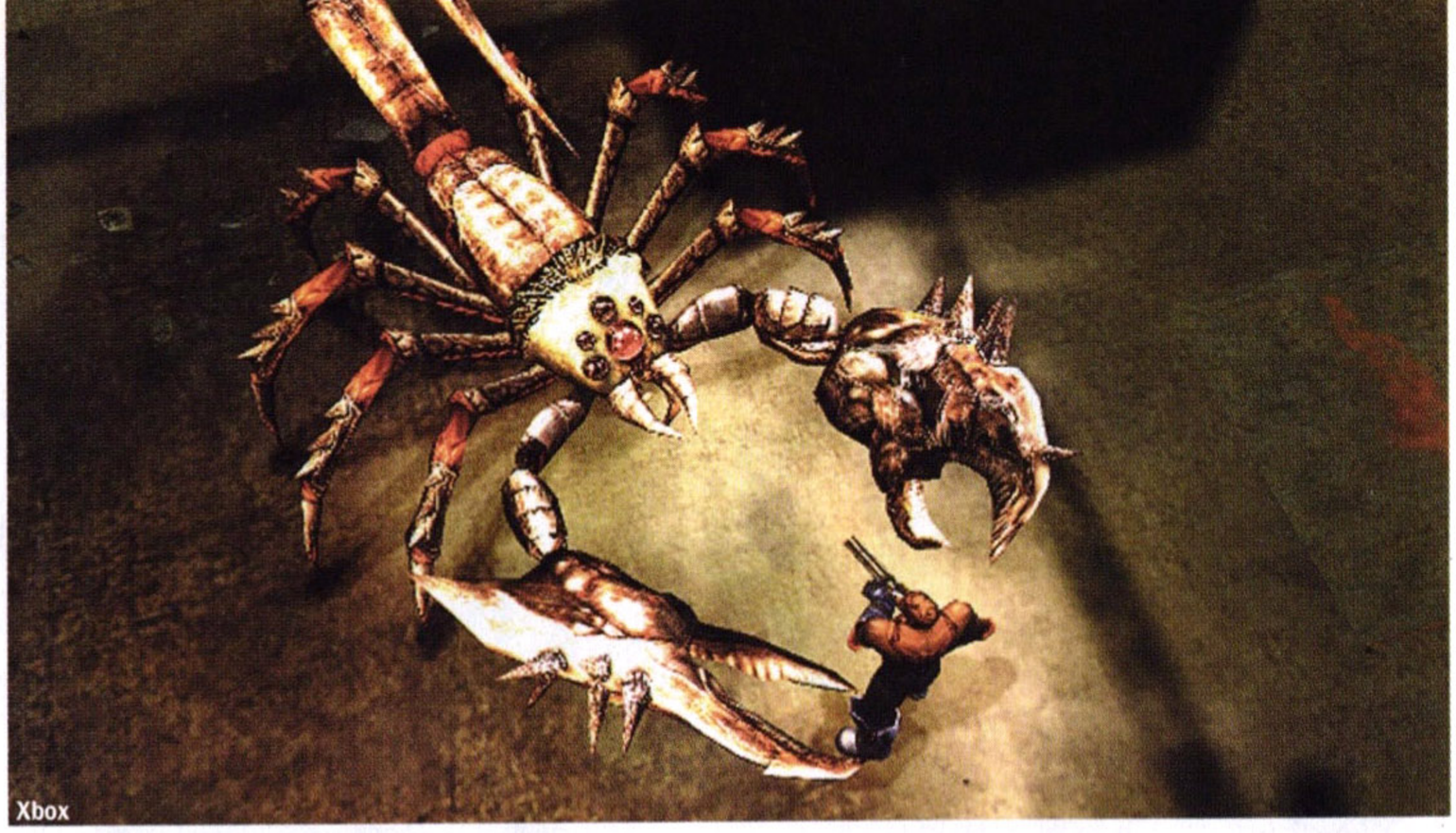
The game's title character has a laughable look about him, but don't you dare underestimate his mystical skills. This kid's got more moves than a chessboard. Not only can he wield swords, throwing stars, and blowguns; he can also scale sheer walls and grind on railings. So what if the only parts of his face visible behind his mask are a pair of beady eyes and an exaggerated brow?

At its heart, I-Ninja is a platform game. Your cloth-covered friend is battling an evil dictator and his robot army on a planet called "The World." I-Ninja not only fights to recover the lost Rage Stones and free some innocent prisoners, but also to collect new belts.

Ninjas are officially the coolest video game characters ever – beating Jedi and top-heavy females in a close race. I-Ninja will need that cool factor to avoid becoming just another mediocre, poor-selling platformer like Dr. Muto, Blinx, Ty the Tazmanian Tiger, Haven, Vexx...the list goes on and on.

Go ninja! Go ninja, go!

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** NAMCO
■ **DEVELOPER** ARGONAUT ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 4



Xbox

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

FALLOUT: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL

THERE'S A PALADIN, TOO

The Fallout universe – a collection of bad '50s in-jokes, witty banter, mutated demon spawn, and post-nuclear apocalyptic fun has been going strong among PC gamers since 1997 (or even earlier, if you count Wasteland, the series' ancestor title that was released by EA in 1988). The forthcoming Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel for Xbox and PS2 takes a different route than its brothers, though. Instead of an extremely deep role-playing game, this console edition of Brotherhood is offering a more action-orientated experience.

Players start as one of three customizable characters: Nadia, a gun specialist; the ubiquitous bruiser, in this case named Cyrus; or Cain, an exposed-brain monstrosity. As Easter eggs or rewards for certain behaviors, three extra characters can be unlocked during play and upgraded in the same ways as the original set. Fallout's plot is that the remnants of humanity have been camping out in bunkers for the last 80 years or so, and now their equipment is failing. You want to join the Brotherhood of Steel and save the day by blowing up lots of stuff.

Taking advantage of an upgraded version of the Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance engine, Brotherhood will sport over 50 weapons (ranged, melee, and explosive types), around 45 levels, and an estimated 23 hours of gameplay. In addition, two players can join forces for cooperative completion of objectives and some bonus areas that are only accessible if both members of your party are alive and kicking.

Previous Fallout titles are epic RPGs that featured in-depth character creation, thousands of armor and weapon combinations, strategy elements aplenty, and turn-based combat; but Brotherhood is requiring more hand-eye coordination for successful completion than its predecessors. Most of the game is seen through an isometric third-person camera that shows off the real-time combat.

What remains to be seen is how the hardcore Fallout fan base will react to their precious digital universe being "sullied" by a more action-based title. The developers have stated that they followed the Fallout Bible for this game, but want it to be a different experience for a different group of gamers.

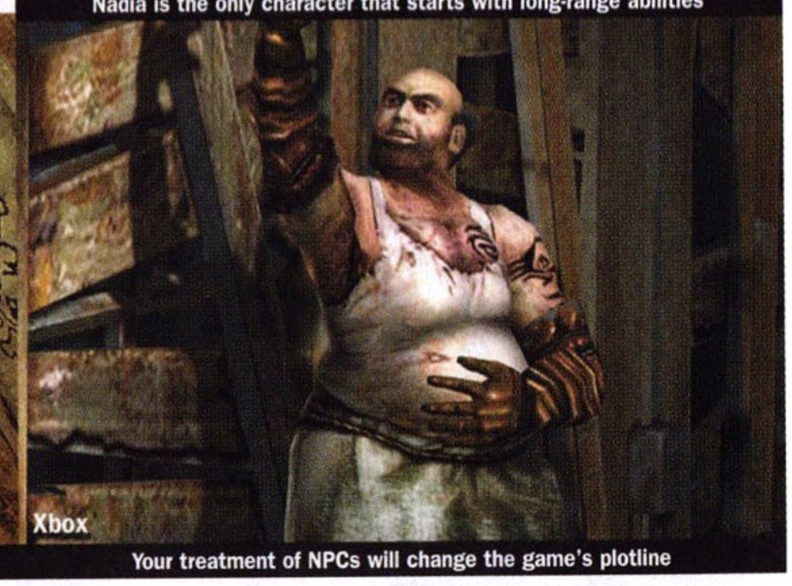
The first three characters available to players are Cain, Cyrus, and Nadia

PS2

Nadia is the only character that starts with long-range abilities

Xbox

Yes, sirie. It looks like a post-apocalyptic wasteland to me



Xbox

Your treatment of NPCs will change the game's plotline

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** INTERPLAY
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

XBOX UNLIMITED ENABLED

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS HEROES

CHARISMA +20

Drawing from a bucket of great source material, Atari is hoping to take advantage of the Dungeons & Dragons phenomena with its upcoming D&D Heroes. Liberally referencing the existing D&D universe and rule set, the company stopped by recently to show us the latest build of this Xbox-exclusive title.

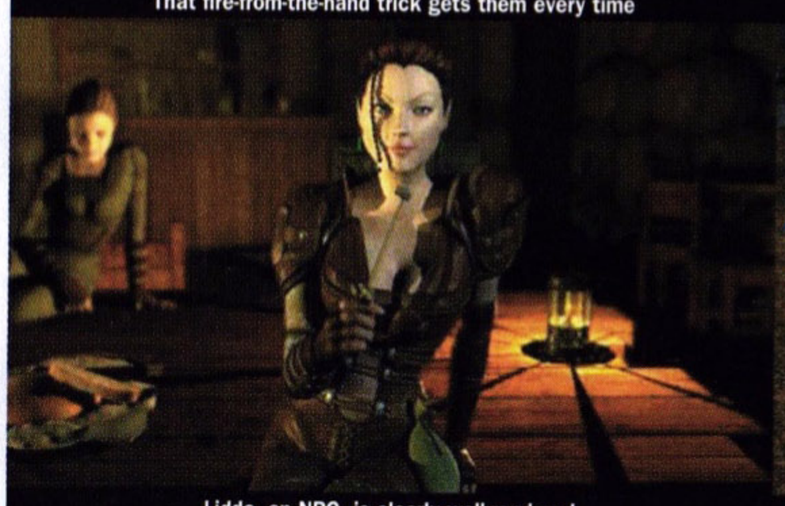
Heroes offers players the choice of four epic characters (the wizard Cyndryn, warrior Aradin, the stocky cleric Barltok, and a rogue named Akio), each offering different moves, skills, attributes, and weaponry. Ideally, players will attempt the mission with each character, as the experience varies wildly with each.

The heroes of Heroes are each awoken 100 years after their deaths to combat an evil wizard who has set up camp in a floating castle above Baele. Traveling through mystical portals (there's no easy front door access in D&D, as we all know), players will discover seven distinct worlds featuring familiar monsters like Iron Golems, fire-breathing Golden Dragons, and Beholders.

Besides the upgradeable weapons, spells, attacks, and armor; the feature that should really send gamers through the roof is Heroes' four-player cooperative mode. We had a chance to play through a few levels as a "team-building exercise" and were pleased with the effect. While experience points are shared within the party and not based on who executed the killing blow or how much work one player did, the gold and items are for whoever gets to them first. For distance gaming, you can import your character from a memory card and any player can join the fray whenever they please, but the title is noticeably lacking an online component. Then again, brawling with your buddies on the couch certainly is a good time.

That fire-from-the-hand trick gets them every time

Battles, especially if players spread out, are epic



Lidda, an NPC, is clearly well-rendered

Environments are extremely varied

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** ATARI HUNT VALLEY
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14

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Artwork by Full Sail Student-
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PHOTOPHILE

PLAYSTATION 2

GUNDAM: ENCOUNTERS IN SPACE

We know that you'll never believe this, but Bandai's new space-combat game is totally based on real events. Yup, that's right. As we speak, over 50 kinds of huge mobile suits are zooming around in Earth's atmosphere shooting it out with enemy forces. They're flying around, targeting ships' gunner turrets, using their secondary melee weapons, and much more in an effort to keep evil at bay. If that's not enough for you, there will also be exclusive suits in the game. Boy, do they look good! Well, we guess you'll have to wait until December before you believe that what we are saying is true. We know you're hoping Elvis is in the game, but that's just crazy talk – he's dead!

GAMECUBE

AUTO MODELLISTA

The title that everyone thought was a GameCube vid because of the cel-shaded graphics is finally coming to the system. So let's just pretend that the PlayStation 2 version never existed, and you're getting the game's power-sliding and insanely customizable garage for the very first time. Okay, maybe the cars' handling takes some getting used to, but there is a surprising amount of depth to tweaking your ride to make it feel just right. No, there's no online portion. What is that anyway? According to Nintendo, "the Internet" doesn't even exist! Regardless, publisher Capcom knows that people are hungering for a racer with some depth, so it's coming your way at the end of September.

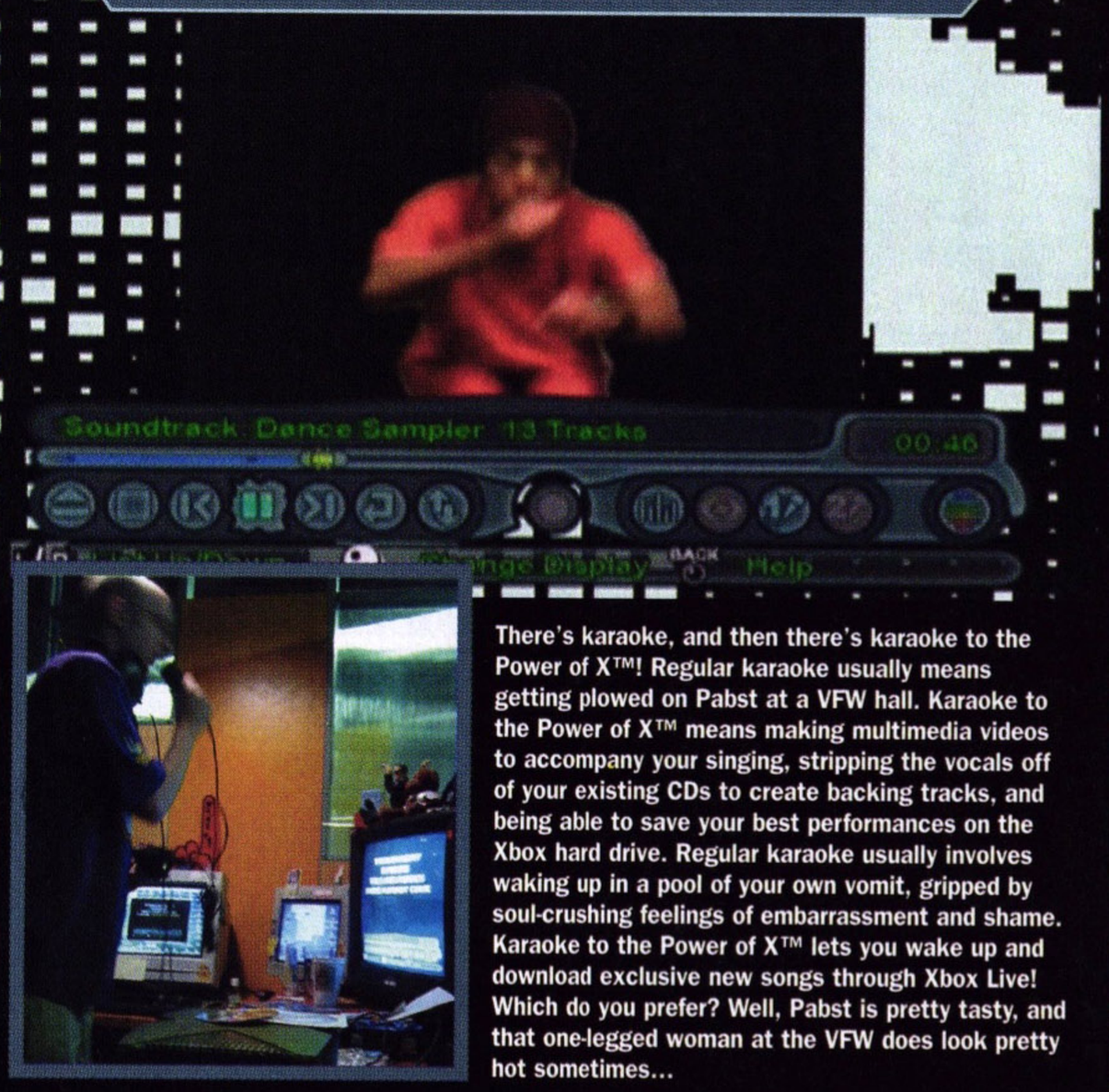
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

STAR TREK: SHATTERED UNIVERSE

Activision and Paramount aren't really on the best terms right now, due to a recent lawsuit. Leave it to TDK to pick up the slack with Shattered Universe, a very promising shooter. Taking place in the era of the original series, you're under the command of Captain Sulu – but in a reality very unlike the one you're used to. Protect your main ship, the USS Excelsior, as you try to unravel the mysteries behind this new dimension. Star Trek fans will prosper in November, when this game comes out.

XBOX

XBOX MUSIC MIXER



There's karaoke, and then there's karaoke to the Power of X™! Regular karaoke usually means getting plowed on Pabst at a VFW hall. Karaoke to the Power of X™ means making multimedia videos to accompany your singing, stripping the vocals off of your existing CDs to create backing tracks, and being able to save your best performances on the Xbox hard drive. Regular karaoke usually involves waking up in a pool of your own vomit, gripped by soul-crushing feelings of embarrassment and shame. Karaoke to the Power of X™ lets you wake up and download exclusive new songs through Xbox Live! Which do you prefer? Well, Pabst is pretty tasty, and that one-legged woman at the VFW does look pretty hot sometimes...

PC

CIVILIZATION III: CONQUESTS

If we ever run into Sid Meier, we're going to run over and kiss him on the cheek (and maybe nibble on his ear a little, too!). Civilization has been, and probably always will be, one of the most addictive and thought-provoking strategy games on PC. Conquests expands upon the experience with seven new civilizations, Trial Council and Imperialism governments, and tons of additional victory conditions, leaders, special units, disasters, and wonders. This highly anticipated follow up will street on October 28 for a measly $29.99.

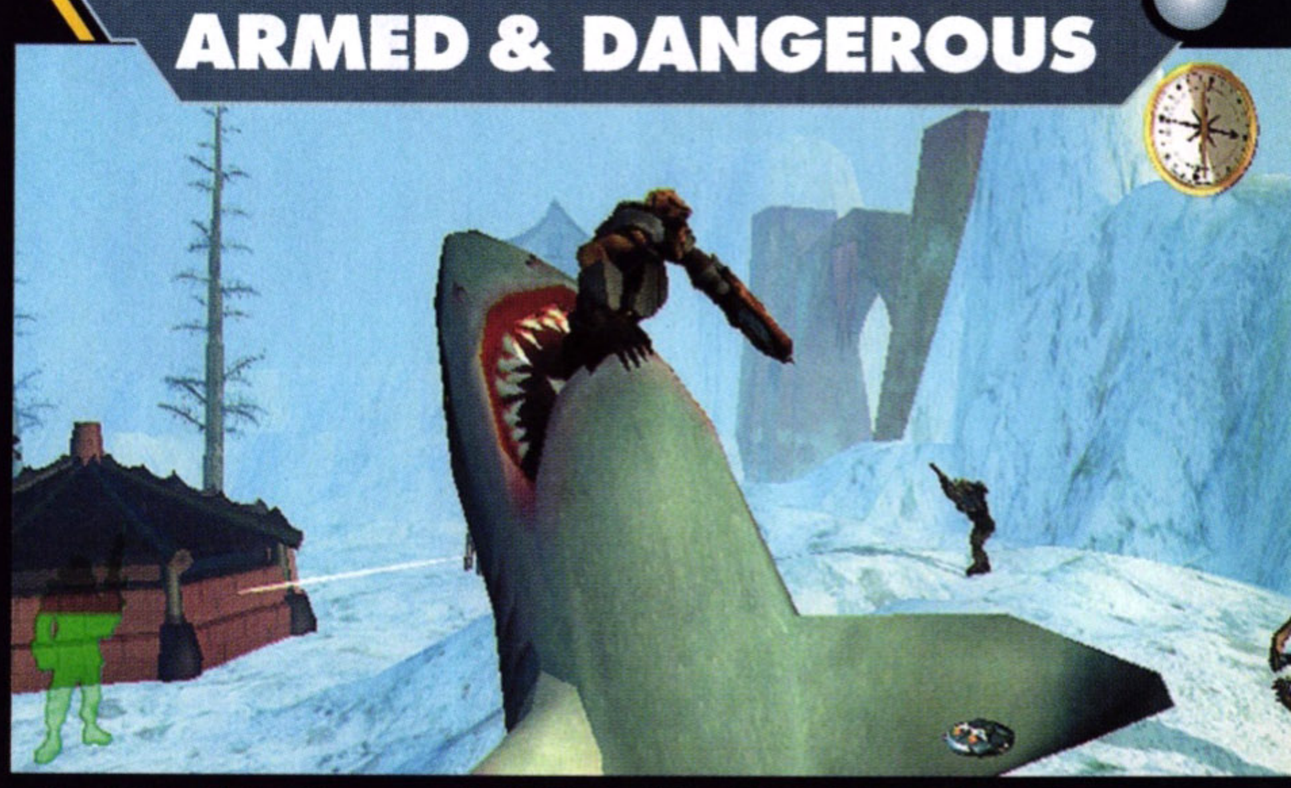
PLAYSTATION 2 *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

MONSTER RANCHER 4

In an unexpected twist, the loveable simians from Ape Escape 2 are included as trainable critters in Monster Rancher 4. Tecmo has also announced that multiple creatures can breed simultaneously. Ah yeah! Turn on the Barry White and get down with your dirty monster selves! There's a party in the barn and you'll get your chance to roll around in the hay with your monkey of choice when Monster Rancher 4 ships on October 4.

XBOX | PC

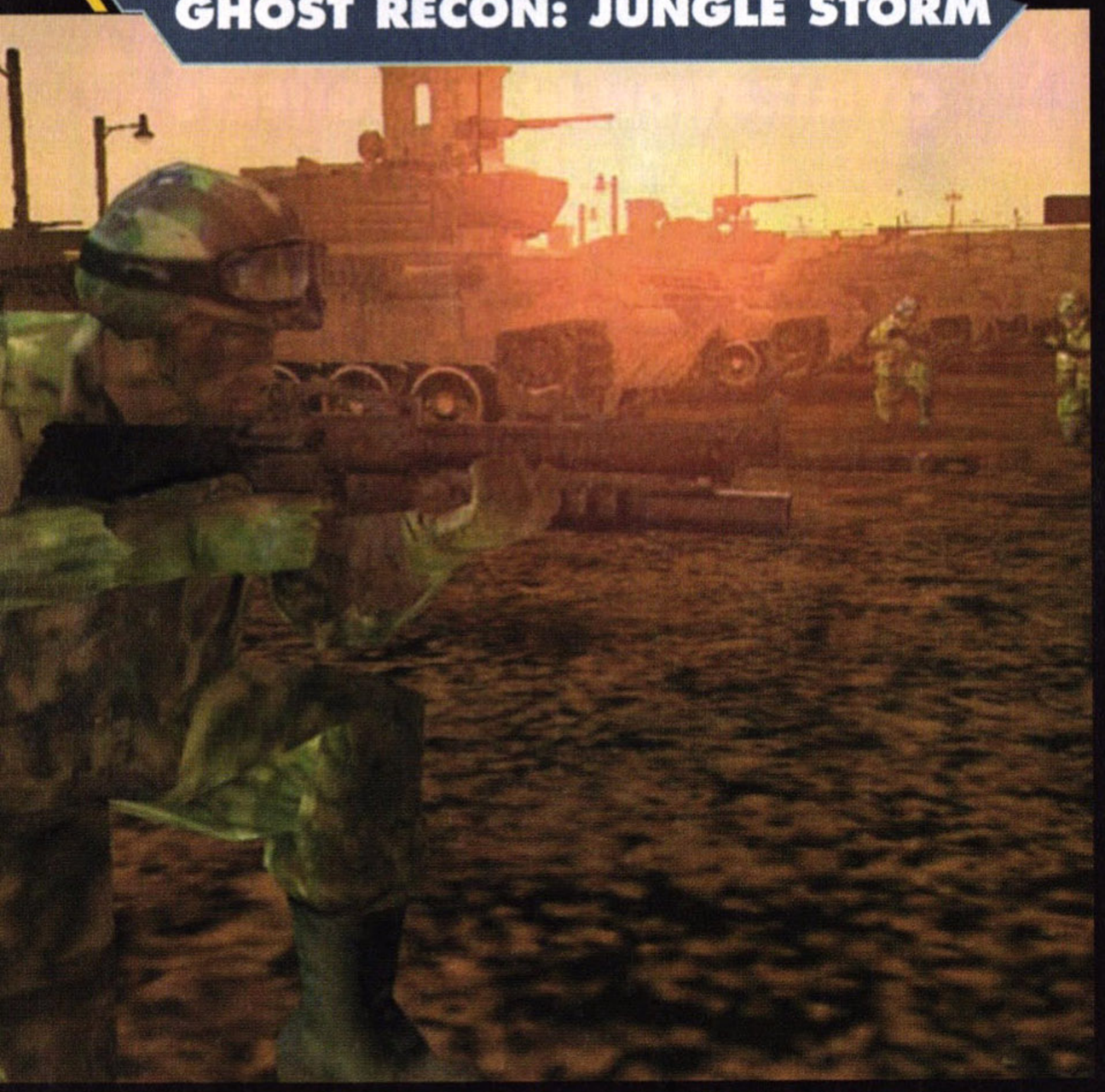
ARMED & DANGEROUS



Planet Moon Studios, the company behind Giants: Citizen Kabuto, is known for providing a fresh presentation for action games. Its newest title, Armed & Dangerous, should help cement that reputation. Through the game's 21 missions, you'll give out commands to your comrades Jonesy and Q, while performing dangerous feats like storming bases and gunning down enemy hordes. The real hook of Armed & Dangerous is the unique weapons, which include the Land Shark, an implement that launches a shark into the ground, which then circles towards enemies (visible only by its dorsal fin) and jumps out and captures them in its iron-like jaws. Chomp!

PLAYSTATION 2

GHOST RECON: JUNGLE STORM



All you PS2-ownin' Ghost Recon fans who were jealous of the Xbox/PC exclusive Island Thunder now have reason to cheer. Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm will feature all the Island Thunder single-player campaigns, plus eight new missions set in Columbia. As an added bonus, Jungle Storm will feature online play, a first for the PS2 Ghost Recon games. Multiplayer will feature 31 levels and 10 different play modes. If you stay in a jungle storm too long, will you catch jungle fever? You will know before the end of the year.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

SHINING SOUL II

The original version may just have been shipped to stores, but already Atlus and Sega are showing their hand regarding a sequel. This pocket-sized Diablo doubles the playable character count to a respectable eight. Multiplayer is still its main selling point, as dungeon-crawling is always more fun with a friend. So is bathing. How else do you expect to wash that spot between your shoulder blades?

GAME BOY ADVANCE

DRAGON BALL Z: TAIKETSU

Way before it was inspiring action/RPGs like Legacy of Goku, the Dragon Ball Z series was all about fighting games. Published by Atari, this 2D brawler looks even better than its PSone relative, Ultimate Battle 22. Its cast includes many of your favorites, displayed in some very impressive graphics. Play Story mode by yourself or engage in multiplayer battles via link. Earning Z-points along the way lets you unlock new content. This highly anticipated fighter will be out mid-October.

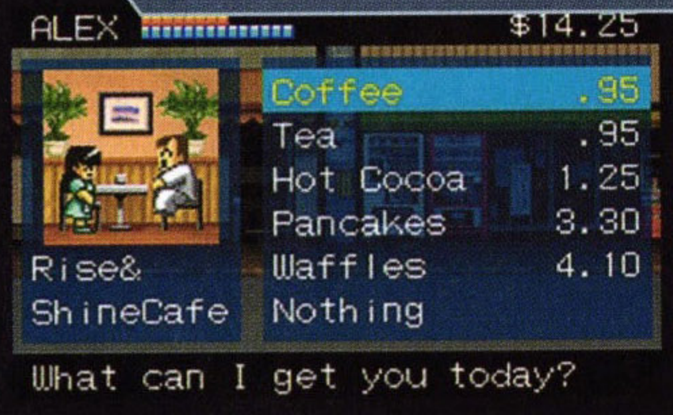
GAME BOY ADVANCE

METAL SLUG ADVANCE

Arcade and handheld darling SNK is back! Its first revival comes in the form of a Metal Slug for the GBA. This series was a big hit on Neo Geo Pocket Color – if you can consider anything that appeared on a console with an installed base of 22 a "hit." Think of Contra with oddly-proportioned characters, and you're getting close to what the game is all about. It's high-intensity shooting with great level design and excellent graphics. Come November, more people than ever before will be able to give this game a shot.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

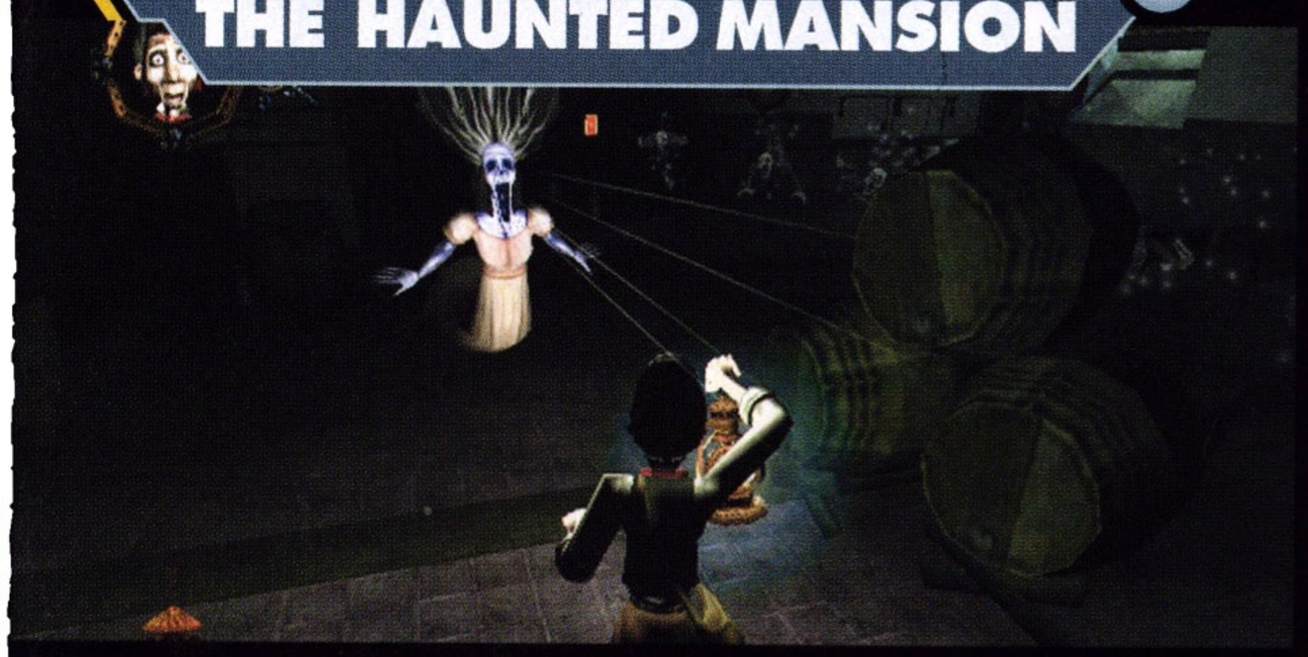
RIVER CITY RANSOM



Fans of classic brawlers, you have Atlus to thank for the resurgence of some of your favorite games. We reviewed the company's GBA update of Double Dragon in this issue, and River City Ransom is on the way, too. A favorite on the NES, this beat 'em up had some RPG elements thrown in, such as being able to buy new items and food. Also, it's hilarious to read enemies' reactions to getting beaten about the neck and face. Everyone remembers reading "BARF!" and giggling like a schoolgirl. That adulation returns in January.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

THE HAUNTED MANSION



You've ridden the ride. You've seen the movie. Now, play the game! TDK is doing what it does best: taking a quirky license and crafting a game around it. Main character Jim Evers doesn't resemble Eddie Murphy much, but he *is* trapped in the most haunted of mansions. Banshees, giant spiders, and Death himself are just a few of the guests who will welcome you to the property. Don't let your lantern burn out or you may turn into a specter yourself [insert scary sound effect here]. The game will release mid-October.

PC

SYBERIA II

For adventure game geeks, Benoît Sokal's 2002 epic Syberia was a thankful return to the glory days of the genre. Kate Walker (the first entry's heroine) continues her trek across Europe, following the eccentric Hans Voralberg – the idiot/genius who created the incredible animatronic "toys" featured in the first game. Syberia II promises more immersive environments, a bevy of new characters, and an improved graphics engine. Look for it in October.

XBOX

ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION

Let those PC suckers fork over cash for their beloved expansion packs. Us Xbox fans, meanwhile, can clean up in one fell swoop with this handy compilation from the folks at Bethesda coming this October. This version of Morrowind contains both the Tribunal and Bloodmoon expansions, and lets you play where your last Elder Scrolls save left off. Speaking of which, last year's Morrowind was notable for the bugs some users found. We talked to a representative from publisher/developer Bethesda, who told us: "We've done some optimization to the code, which in theory should fix some things." They went on to tell us that they've done exhaustive playtesting, with none of the problems from the past cropping up. Well done on many fronts, we say.

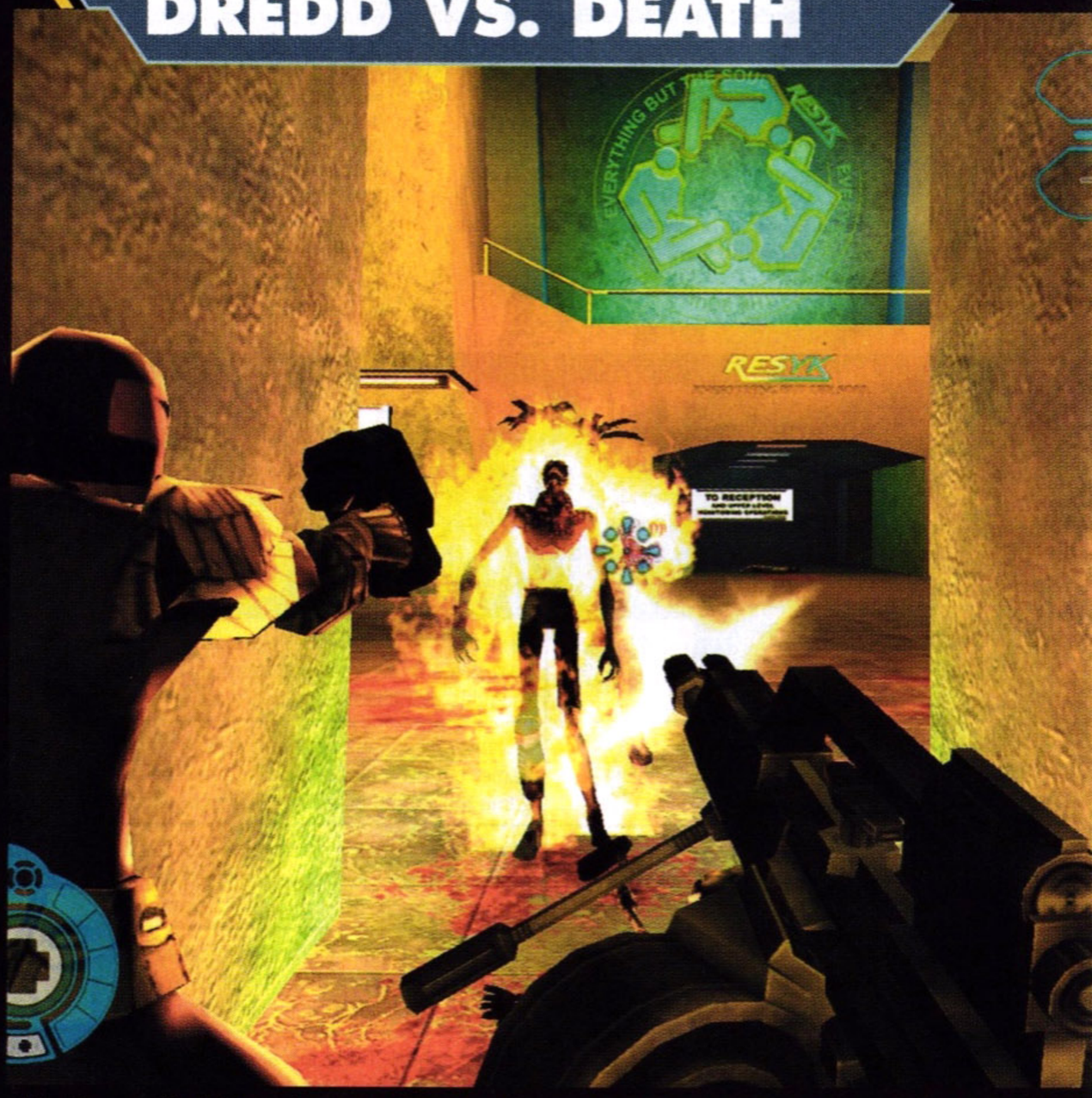
PLAYSTATION 2 *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

R-TYPE: FINAL

If you're like us (and we don't mean hideous and lonely), you're probably excited about the return of old school, side-scrolling shooters. Fresh Games has given us another reason to squeal like schoolgirls with the release of R-Type: Final. Featuring 99 unlockable spaceships and a bevy of power-ups, R-Type: Final will certainly eat away at any semblance of a social life you might have when it releases on January 4.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

DREDD VS. DEATH



Whether you liked the movie or not (Rob Schneider is soooo funny!), the upcoming Judge Dredd game by Aliens Vs. Predator developers Rebellion should appeal to all you first-person shooter fans out there. Set in Mega City 1, a little town of 400 million, Judge Dredd and his pals are the only ones who maintain any sort of order. In a city swarming with criminals, none are worse than the undead Judge Death. As Dredd, you will take on Death and a host of other baddies. Got what it takes to be a Judge? Find out this winter.

REVIEWS

PS2

Soul Calibur II
pg.104

GC

Soul Calibur II
pg.126

ANDY

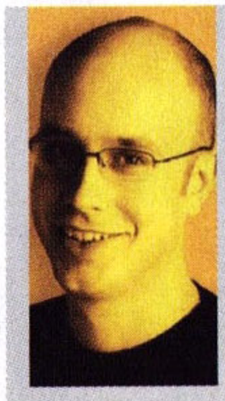
Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** My New Vectrex 3D Imager, Classic Gaming Expo '03, Watching PlanetSide Fall Apart As Each Patch Makes The Game Worse And Worse **Dislikes:** N-Gage (It's Better Than I Thought, But Still Needs Work – But Its Version Of Tony Hawk Does Rule), Stale Chips, Confusing Parking Garages **Current Favorite Games:** Viewtiful Joe, Tron 2.0, Gladius, Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic

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

REINER

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** Collecting Classic Games, *1602*, The Proposed Sequel *Freddy Vs. Jason Vs. Ash*, Having Howard Scott Warshaw Sign My Copy Of E.T. For The Atari 2600 **Dislikes:** Gobots (Imposters!), Reviewing All The Bad Games This Issue **Current Favorite Games:** Viewtiful Joe, Star Wars: Jedi Academy, Tron 2.0, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, Monster Rancher 4, Gladius

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



MATT

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Puzzle, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Finding A Singer For The Band, The A-Frames, Realizing How Much I Like *Premiere Magazine*'s Fall Preview Issues, Charles Portis' *The Dog of the South* **Dislikes:** My Lawn's Sad Fate, Being Short A Staff Member (Send Those Applications!), Pretty Much Anything That Doesn't Involve Sleeping And/Or Watching TV **Current Favorite Games:** Pokémon Pinball Ruby & Sapphire, Freedom Fighters, Doom 3, Mojo!, Tennis Masters Series 2003

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

JUSTIN

Handle: The Digital Deviant **Expertise:** Action/Sports, Action/Adventure, Fighting, RPGs **Interests:** Ready-To-Drink Protein Shakes, The Neo Pro Wrestling Show On September 27 (Be There! neoprowrestling.com), *Bowling For Columbine*, Rush **Dislikes:** My Luck With Audio Equipment, Working Too Much, TV News, Playaz (Cheaper Homies Rip-Offs) **Current Favorite Games:** Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004, Double Dragon Advance, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Scrabble (The Real Game)

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

LISA

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Puzzle, RPGs, Action/Platform, Horror **Interests:** Wireless Gaming, Kill Rock Stars Sampler CDs, A Perfect Circle's New CD, Tin Wind-Up Toys, Ancient Egypt **Dislikes:** Car Repair, Merging Dreadlocks, Expiring Driver's Licenses **Current Favorite Games:** Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Fatal Frame 2, Outlaw Volleyball, Arc The Lad: Twilight Of The Spirits

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

KATO

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Super Furry Animals, *Queer Eye For The Straight Guy*, Jersey's Fatcats, Herb Brooks, The Madden Cover Star Curse **Dislikes:** Weather Anchors, Grocery Stores, *Spin* Magazine, Stationary Stores, VH-1, Pre-Season Football **Current Favorite Games:** Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004, Freedom Fighters, NHL 2004, NASCAR Thunder 2004, Jade Empire, Gladius

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

JEREMY

Handle: The Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Adventure, Fighting, RPGs **Interests:** Movies With "VS." In The Title, Filling My Closet With Free Shirts, Tacocat, My New Comfy Couch **Dislikes:** Buying New Cell Phones, Tearing Up Carpet, The Hennepin County Government Center, Waiting For My New Comfy Couch To Be Delivered **Current Favorite Games:** Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, R-Type:Final, Tron 2.0, Double Dragon Advance, Ninja Gaiden, Gladius

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

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

THE SCORING SYSTEM

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

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

CONCEPT
What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

GRAPHICS
How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

SOUND
Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

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

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

REPLAY VALUE
The longevity of the title.

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

EARLY CHILDHOOD – CONTENT RATED BY ESRB	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.
EVERYONE – CONTENT RATED BY ESRB	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.
TEEN – CONTENT RATED BY ESRB	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.
MATURE – CONTENT RATED BY ESRB	Content suitable for persons ages 17 and older.
ADULTS ONLY – CONTENT RATED BY ESRB	Content suitable only for adults.
RATING PENDING – CONTENT RATED BY ESRB	Product is awaiting final rating.

XBOX

Soul Calibur II
pg.132

PC

Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader
pg.141

HANDHELD

Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand
pg.142

NEWBIE CHEAT SHEET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

blung-blong – Even better than bling-bling

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

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

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

CG – Computer-Generated graphics

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

fighting – A term we use for games like Street Fighter and Dead or Alive

FMV – Full Motion Video. Usually refers to an animated CG cutscene

FPS – Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First-Person Shooters like Doom, GoldenEye, and Unreal Tournament

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GBC – Game Boy Color

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like StarCraft or Diablo

ISP – Internet Service Provider. The company that provides you with access to the Internet

jaggies – Graphical lines that are jagged when they should be straight

LAN – Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay

minigame – A small, simple game within a larger one

motion-capture – Using human models and infrared cameras to record movement for game animation. Also mo-cap

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

N64 – Nintendo 64

NES – Nintendo Entertainment System

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

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

PKer – Player Killer. This is a person who thrives on killing newbie or vulnerable characters in MMORPGs or shooting their teammates in games like Counter-Strike

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

pop-up – When onscreen objects, usually distant, suddenly appear

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

PSone – Sony PlayStation

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Puyo Pop

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

RPG – Role-Playing Game. A game that involves character improvement through collecting and spending points. A term we use for games like Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior

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

SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL

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

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

GAME OF THE MONTH
VIEWTIFUL JOE

This oddly named Capcom title pays homage to the classic action games that shaped our lives and makes a strong case that there's still plenty of life and fresh ideas left in 2D design. Once you experience Viewtiful Joe's incredible gameplay and breathe in its remarkable cel-shaded graphics, we have a feeling that you'll never look at games the same way again. pg.124

PC GAME OF THE MONTH
TRON 2.0

Who would have thought that a cheesy '80s movie would be the inspiration for such a good game? Tron 2.0 manages to stay true to the days of new wave and bring some much-needed innovations to the FPS genre at the same time. Oh, and the light cycles are back, too. Get sucked into your computer on pg. 140.

"[Soul Calibur II] has all of the elements I look for in the genre: It's long-lasting, it's great in multiplayer, and it looks dead sexy."

PLAYSTATION 2

SOUL CALIBUR II

WHO STOLE THE SOUL?

I don't think anybody had higher expectations for this title than I did. Soul Blade kicked Tekken's butt in my opinion, and the Dreamcast version of Soul Calibur is easily one of that system's best efforts. While Soul Calibur II outshines the previous entries in the series, I can't call it the PS2's best fighter – much less a must-have for anyone who has ever held a controller.

Visually, SC II is silkier than that chocolate pie made with eight sticks of butter. The characters push the limits of the PlayStation 2, and without the stiff movement of Final Fantasy X's models. I'm amazed at how unique and distinct each costume is. Also, as someone who has fooled around with nunchuks for 13 years, SC II's animation is so good that Maxi taught me a few new moves.

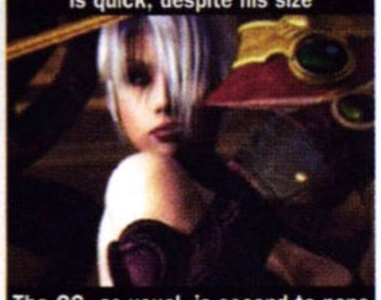
The mission-based modes have always been what kept gamers coming back to the Soul titles, and Weapon Master mode is indeed vast. Through 10 chapters, you'll fight enemies with odd parameters and certain tasks. You can switch your character at any time. Winning grants both experience and cash to buy new weapons.

Sure, this mode sounds great; but for some reason, it doesn't do as much for me as it used to. Maybe it's because I want something for leveling up other than just a title. Maybe I miss the nifty stat graph for your weapons. Perhaps I'm put off by the abundance of mundane text or the lackluster ending when you finally get through everything. Even the missions themselves get boring after a while. How many times can one person be poisoned, forced to fight five enemies in a row, and only have 15 seconds per bout? I feel like a tool for ripping on something obviously meant to increase replay value – and the game is definitely better for having it – but it just doesn't satisfy me. I hate to compare it to Madden's Owner mode or NBA Street Vol. 2's Be A Legend mode, but those are examples of the new-school replay that's taking games by storm.

Many new characters are introduced here. I love their fighting styles, as weapons like tonfas are represented. You can never have enough people to choose from. Their design leaves a bit to be desired, however. Many are just rip-offs of old Soul Blade cast members, or they simply lack personality. "Hi, I'm the fencer guy. Let's fight!" I also think Tekken's Heihachi is a lame choice for an exclusive character. I'd rather have Mr. Driller than that old fart.

I'm being overly critical (hey, I'm a critic), but I still view Soul Calibur II as a good fighter. It has all of the elements I look for in the genre: It's long-lasting, it's great in multiplayer, and it looks dead sexy. SC II just doesn't elevate the series the way I had hoped, and even takes a few steps back in some single-player respects. But, if you've got love for fighting games, pick it up. – **JUSTIN**

Necrid – a McFarlane creation – is quick, despite his size



The CG, as usual, is second to none

Just about everything is unlocked through Weapon Master mode

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** NAMCO ■ **DEVELOPER** NAMCO ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26

"No, I don't think it's a hernia. You'll be okay."

Heihachi plays nearly identically to how he is in Tekken

THE BOTTOM LINE

ESRB T TEEN

8.5

- **Concept:** Namco's power play to corner the fighting game market
- **Graphics:** The best and most fluid character models I've ever seen on this console, period
- **Sound:** Good background music. I can take or leave the English dialogue
- **Playability:** Some would call it a flail-fest, but I prefer its slightly "random" attacks to having to remember every complex combo
- **Entertainment:** Many fighters and modes to put through their paces, along with a very robust Weapon Master mode. Obviously brilliant in multiplayer
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

No matter what system you play it on, Soul Calibur II is simply gorgeous. While this version lacks the HDTV support of Xbox and the character-of-choice in Link, it does deliver all the intense fighting action you would expect from this series. My one major disappointment in this title is the single-player experience. Weapon Master mode is a complete waste in my book, and doesn't even begin to hold a candle to the ingenious Quest mode of Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution. I really expected a lot of this game, but in the end found its only charm to be multiplayer (and if forced to choose, I think that VF4: Evo is better even in this respect). If you love Soul Calibur, and have a buddy who will constantly play it with you, then I can't recommend this game enough. But if you are planning on going solo, you might want to look elsewhere.

ANDY – 8.5

"Its gripping gameplay and the great Cold War-inspired storyline will have you hooked until the last Russkie is dead."

PLAYSTATION 2

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

FROM RUSSIA, WITH LOVE

Squad-based action on the consoles has always been a risky proposition for developers; but as of late, a few games appear to be taking some significant strides in the progression of the genre. SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs, although best known for its awesome online play, actually features an engrossing single-player mode that lets you issue commands via an onscreen menu system or the PS2 headset microphone. Now, EA is taking another crack at squad combat, in partnership with I/O Interactive – the creators of Hitman 2. On the whole, Freedom Fighters is a smashing success, presenting a gameplay design that manages to be both simple and versatile.

The story takes place in an alternate modern-day reality, where the Soviet Union still exists and has invaded the U.S. You are Chris Stone, a plumber who gets thrown into a leadership position in the burgeoning U.S. underground resistance through an unlikely series of events. It's up to you destroy various installations and overtake Soviet strongholds with a team of fellow dissidents.

You command your men through an easy-to-use control scheme. The square button tells the troop to regroup at your position; the triangle orders them to attack; and the circle makes them defend a certain post. What's cool, though, is the fact that, through your sniper view, you can tell soldiers to rush specific waypoints, which allows for a good deal of on-the-fly strategy. As your reputation continues to grow, so does your squad, which can swell up to 12 people. Overall, it's one of the least frustrating and most workable solutions to real-time squad-based tactics I've seen on a console.

The missions themselves are fairly repetitive – revolving mostly around storming buildings, shooting your way to the top, and then replacing the hammer and sickle with the stars n' stripes. However, there are a few twists thrown in, like a solo mission where you have to climb a sniper tower to off the evil General Tatarin. Emphasis is placed on careful planning, as you can take your pick of a number of different areas and objectives, which you access via the city's sewer system. Often, the order in which you tackle stages is important, as it might be nearly impossible to take out a power plant until you've disabled Soviet air support by blowing up a helipad in another zone.

Aside from a few minor frustrations, like the inconsistent aiming and the fact that I did manage to lose my troops a few times, Freedom Fighters is one of the better military action games on the market, and represents another step forward for squad-based third-person shooters. Its gripping gameplay and the great Cold War-inspired storyline will have you hooked until the last Russkie is dead. – **MATT**

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

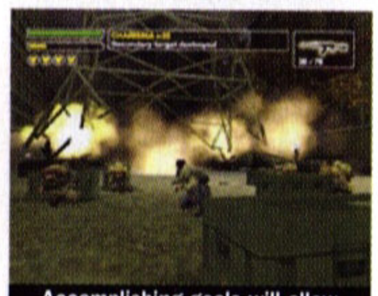
8

- **Concept:** A Cold War redux that features innovative squad-based controls
- **Graphics:** Solid across the board, but not mind-blowing in any one area
- **Sound:** I like the Russian-inspired score and the voice-acting is better than most
- **Playability:** This puts us one step closer to a workable template for squad-based shooters
- **Entertainment:** A fairly short, sometimes repetitive, but always gripping adventure
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

For a squad-based game with only above-average AI, this title is pretty damn fun. The combat is basic, and I have issues with the controls. What gripped me most about this title was its world. That includes everything from your interaction with it to the story and its design. Stages are not only packed with alternate paths, but the order you play through them (via the sewer system) is refreshing. Your impact on people through the Charisma system is cool, and you are rewarded handsomely for exploring – not something you are usually inclined to do in action games. All of these factors lead to the stages feeling much larger and interesting than the missions make them sound. If you're looking for an engrossing action game that raises the bar, than this one definitely flies the flag.

KATO – 8



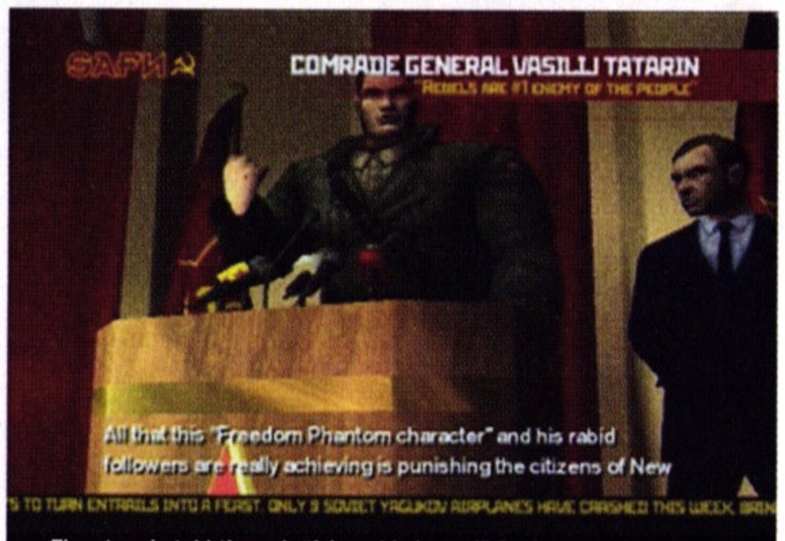
Accomplishing goals will allow your squad to grow from...

...a few followers...

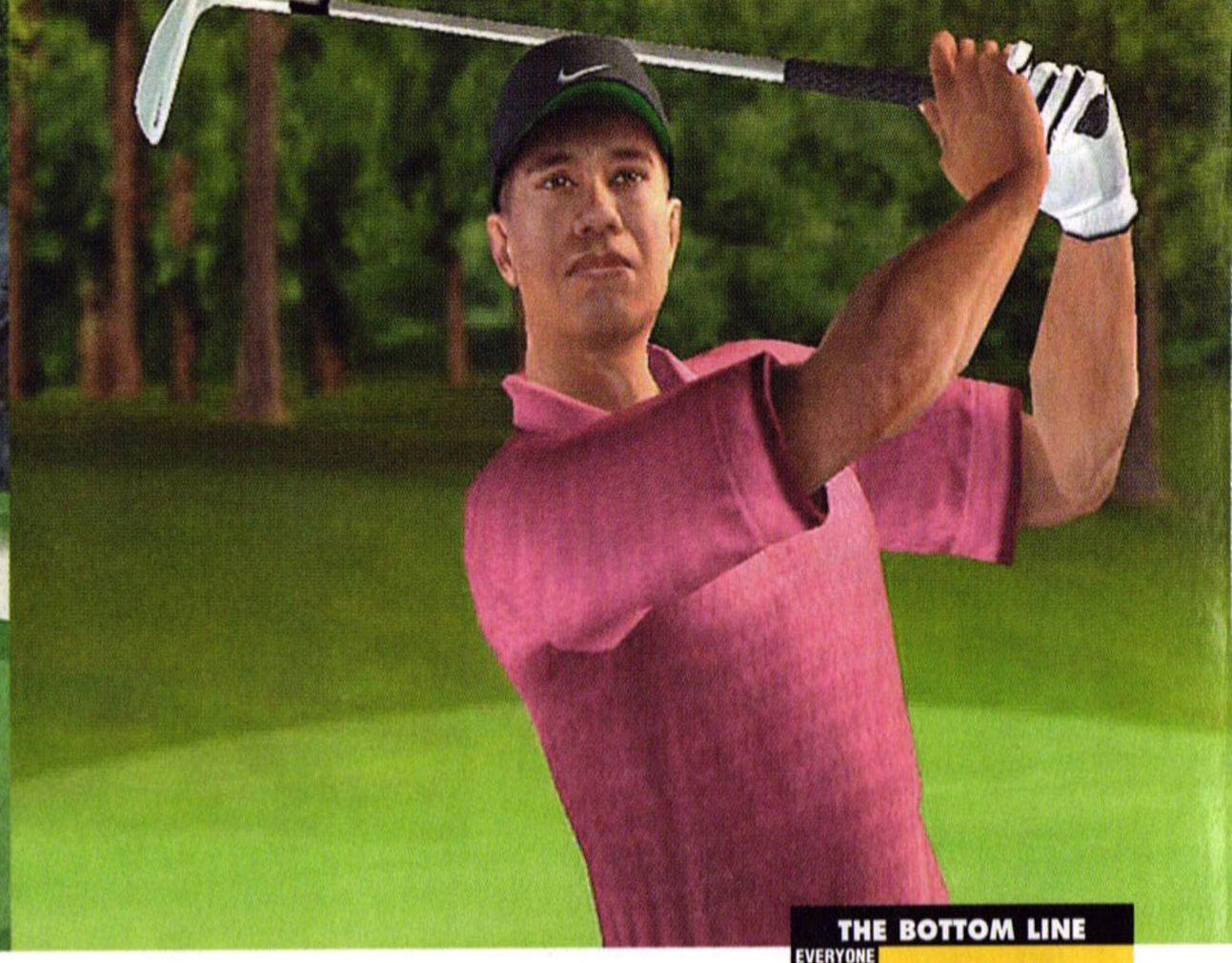
...to a 12-person team

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** I/O INTERACTIVE ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

You can send you troops to scout an area, defend, or attack specific waypoints



The story is told through "fair and balanced" Soviet news broadcasts



PLAYSTATION 2

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

ACE IN THE HOLE

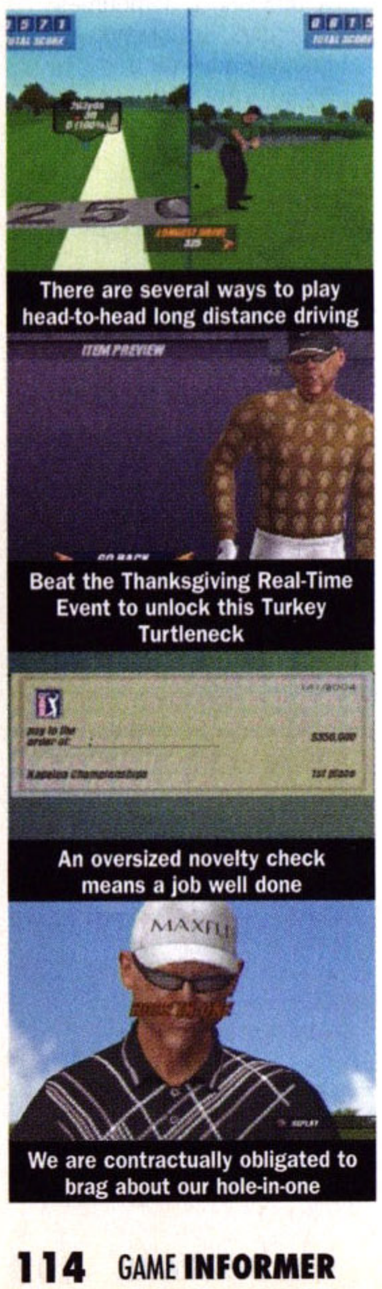
"Tiger Woods has now evolved into golf's version of Madden."

Picture the perfect digital representation of golf. Think of everything you'd want to include. I'm serious; don't just stare at this page like a goon. Okay, got it? You're not even close to envisioning what EA Sports has done with this game. Tiger Woods has now evolved into golf's version of Madden. Hot Shots, eat your heart out.

I've never seen so much replay and attention to detail in a game. It's as if EA gathered up its legions of employees, had a big powwow discussing anything that may possibly be cool related to golf, and then implemented it all in the short time period between last year's game and now. Creating a character, boosting his/her attributes, choosing all manners of apparel, and unlocking new golfers (celebrities included) isn't even scratching the surface. How about challenges that relate to specific dates (holidays, new moon phases, Tiger's birthday); gaining corporate sponsorships that pay you a bonus when you use their gear; more minigames (that reward you for playing them) than you can shake a 3 Wood at; and a Season-esque tour calendar? There is much, much more than that; but I'm a reviewer, not a list-maker. Suffice to say, this game will spend more time in your PS2 than that wool sweater your grandma got you spends on the closet floor.

I am now officially hooked on analog swinging. Once a mere novelty, Tiger 2004 has made it real. Sure, it's tougher to hit the ball at half-strength, but that's how it is in real life, too. The selection of shots is quite lengthy. I had never heard of a flop shot before playing this. My only complaint is the revamped chipping, which is just too confusing to read and results in far too many bogeys. Power boosts are activated by slamming on R1 during your upswing. While the ball is in the air, pound R2 and hold a direction for some spin. Both of these can make a huge difference. Nothing feels better than a good shot and, with a little practice, you'll be hitting plenty of them.

While gamers have been waiting for Hot Shots Online, Tiger Woods has quietly made that another birdie on his scorecard. Compete in online tournaments or go one-on-one. I don't mean to dis Hot Shots, because it's a phenomenal game, and was my favorite golf sim until now. Tiger just owns it in every category: graphics, unlockables, golfers, courses, modes, and everything else. This is hands-down the best golf game ever, and easily one of the best sports games in general. The line to wait for its release starts behind me. – **JUSTIN**



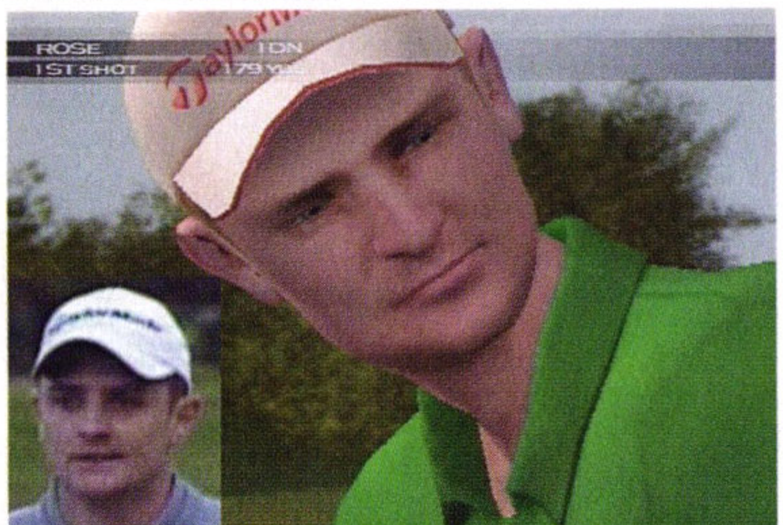
There are several ways to play head-to-head long distance driving

Beat the Thanksgiving Real-Time Event to unlock this Turkey Turtleneck

An oversized novelty check means a job well done

We are contractually obligated to brag about our hole-in-one

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22



Check out the similarities between the real golfer and the character model

Just a sampling of all that you can buy for your created swinger

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

9.5

- **Concept:** EA Sports is the king of most sports. It's now making a serious bid for golf supremacy
- **Graphics:** The player models blow me away. The courses themselves are full of ambience and lighting
- **Sound:** Funny Canadians on commentary. Whoever picks the "rock" tunes needs a paddlin'
- **Playability:** Aside from chipping, every shot type and stroke will quickly become second nature
- **Entertainment:** You'll be a kid in a candy store with all the modes, courses, and unlockables in this unbelievable game
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

What can I say? EA really nailed a hole in one with this release. Tiger Woods 2004 is far and away the greatest golf game I have ever played. There really is nothing that even comes close to touching it. Even the wildly entertaining Hot Shots series looks archaic by comparison. With online play, over 20 courses, a comprehensive character creator, tons of unlockables, and the smoothest gameplay system around; it really doesn't get much better than this. Additionally, you can earn sponsorships, compete in special events that only occur on specific days, and purchase a wealth of gear for your character. The only area where this game comes up a little short is in commentary. It's a minor gripe, but if I never hear "He hit it on the dance floor" again it'll be too soon. Regardless, Tiger Woods 2004 is a surprise hit and an absolute necessity. Buy it immediately!

REINER – 9.5

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PLAYSTATION 2 *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

GLADIUS

A GLORIOUS DAY FOR BLOODSHED

"...a compelling and ingenious romp in the strategy genre."

When I first heard about Gladius, I thought it was a hoax. Could LucasArts (a developer whose name is synonymous with Star Wars) really be working on a gladiator-inspired game that blends the strategies of Final Fantasy Tactics with the timed button sequences of your everyday rhythm game? As hard as this genre-blending amalgamation is to fathom, Gladius is indeed a reality, and even more shocking yet, it just happens to be a compelling and ingenious romp in the strategy genre.

From the outset, you assume the identity of either Valens, son of the greatest warrior in Imperia; or Ursula, the daughter of the Nordagh barbarian king. Rather than recycling content, both characters feature different story arcs and challenges throughout the majority of their quests. Valens seeks fame and fortune within the gladiator circuit, whereas Ursula fights for the respect of her father. Both characters bring something different to the table and give players good reason to play through the adventure twice.

Seeing that the critical path for each character is roughly 50 hours (add another 40 if you wish to tackle the side quests), Gladius had best deliver a riveting gameplay package. While the turn-based combat can be deemed slow, the strategies that emerge from each skirmish will have the wheels in your head spinning constantly. Much like Final Fantasy Tactics, the lay of the multi-level land, position of your characters, and range abilities all must be factored into each move that you make. LucasArts did a phenomenal job of changing things up. It really feels like no two battles are the same. Within each contest, I was constantly challenged to concoct new strategies that best fit the situation at hand. Most tactics titles suffer from repetition, but Gladius emerges with incredible diversity.

Another common hang-up in games of this ilk is that players usually sit and watch more than they interact with the action. Surprisingly, Gladius excels in this area. Each move that you orchestrate is tied to a timed function that forces players to be skillful to prevail. I often found myself with a bead of sweat on my brow as I feverishly tried to hammer out five-hit combo sequences. Rather than viewing the fray, you actually have a hand in it. It's a fantastic solution, but be warned: if you are horrible at timed button pressing, progressing in this game will be extremely difficult.

Gladius also boasts tons of customizable features. Recruiting new party members, purchasing gear, and upgrading skills are here with mind-boggling complexity. If you are so inclined, you can even alter the color of a character's garments to your liking.

It's not the prettiest game in the world, but it's certainly one of the most captivating. From the entertaining action to the depth of play, it has all of the makings of a bona fide classic.
– **REINER**

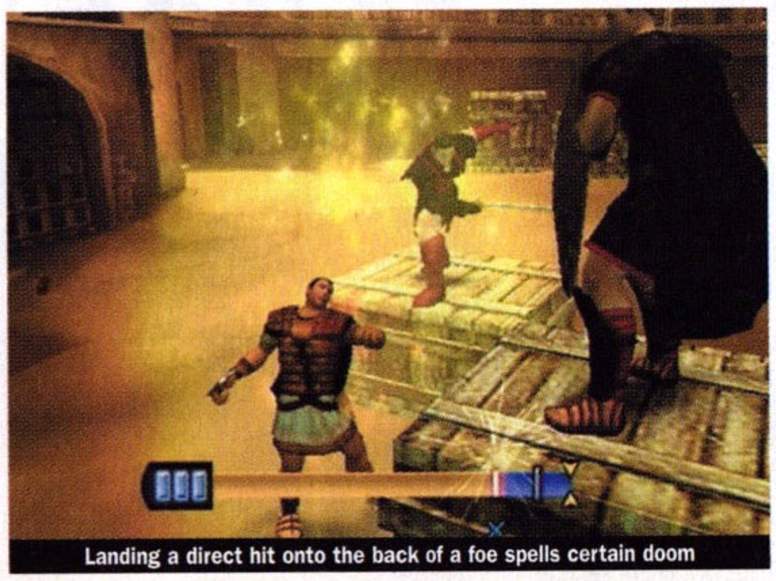
The gladiator bouts are separated into leagues and tournaments

You can customize the color of your characters' garments and can basically create your own team uniforms

Although a battlefield grid isn't shown, the characters are limited in movement and action

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

The combo meter can stretch to 5 hits


Landing a direct hit onto the back of a foe spells certain doom

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

9

- **Concept:** Successfully express the brutality of gladiator tournaments within the complexity of turn-based strategy
- **Graphics:** Finely detailed environments and gorgeous animations. Conversely, the effects aren't the best and the extensive loading is annoying
- **Sound:** An amazing orchestrated score, but the voice actors are a little over the top
- **Playability:** Thought provoking strategy, high user interaction in combat, and a perfect difficulty curve
- **Entertainment:** It's a slow play through, but a challenging and addictive one
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Seldom have I had such a hard time tearing myself away from a game. Few titles offer both the ease of play and incredible depth found in Gladius. The innovative combat mechanics take it above and beyond most strategy games; battles are actually decided by skill, not statistics. The golf-style swing meter is a little bizarre at first, but once you get used to it, it's hard to imagine that a strategy game could be any good without one. I was also impressed by some of the specialty battles – the King of the Hill and Rival Nations games were especially fun. The fact that there are two separate stories to play through also rocks, as playing for a mere 40 hours just wouldn't be enough, dammit! I have to recommend the Xbox version over this one as the graphics are a bit sharper; but on any system, this game is a must-have.

JEREMY – 9

PLAYSTATION 2

"...worse than a '70s kung fu movie dubbed off broadcast television."

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON

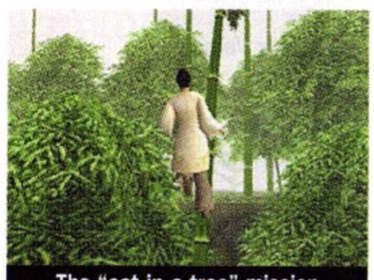
LIKE A KARATE CHOP TO THE NECK

Most licensed games suck because they are rushed out the door so it can get to store shelves while the movie is still in the theater. So, when a game is released years after the film and it's still no good, who's to blame? That's uncertain, but one thing is for sure: The new Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon game is certainly less than the excellent movie deserves.

The concept is solid: playing as the central characters Jen Yu, Lu Mu Bai, Shu Lien, and "Dark Cloud" Lo; you replay the movie from several different perspectives. All the key scenes are included: the courtyard fight, the desert, and the famous treetop chase. While the developer's faithfulness to the story is admirable, the title falls short in a number of key areas. Gameplay feels disjointed and odd due to an unusual default control scheme which makes combat initially clunky. Once you get used to it, however, battles become quick and intuitive. Crouching Tiger also deserves praise for its innovative blocking system: By hitting the block button as the defense icon flashes, your character will avoid enemies by ducking, twisting, and flipping out of the way. Moves like these require fancy multiple-button combos in most games, but here it's done with just one press. This defensive system is easily the most enjoyable part of the game, which is simultaneously cool and sad. It's definitely a neat mechanic, but the best part of an action title absolutely should not be avoiding combat.

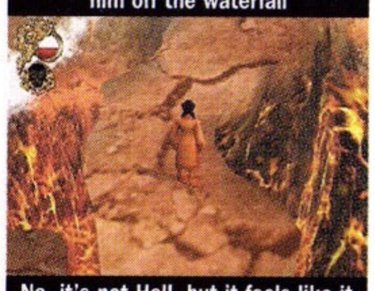
Even though the blocking mechanism grows stale quickly, it's still the high point of the game. Unlike the movie, which was lush and vibrant from beginning to end, this looks worse than a '70s kung fu movie dubbed off broadcast television. Background textures are flat, character models are chunky, and lighting is non-existent. City levels are a uniformly gray, and the desert stages are so garishly orange that you'll feel like you're fighting enemies atop a giant loaf of cheese bread. The camera system is similarly hideous, and the level designs range from bland to ridiculously awful.

Despite all of its flaws, Crouching Tiger isn't completely worthless. Combat is fun (for a while), and the experience system which improves your armed and unarmed combat separately is kind of cool. Playing through a level with a good ranking will reward you with clips from the movie, but if you already own the DVD, you can watch your favorite scenes without subjecting yourself to needless suffering. – **JEREMY**

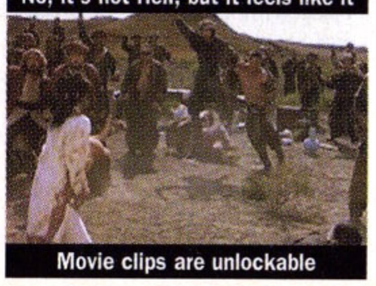


The "cat in a tree" mission

You can win this fight by pushing him off the waterfall

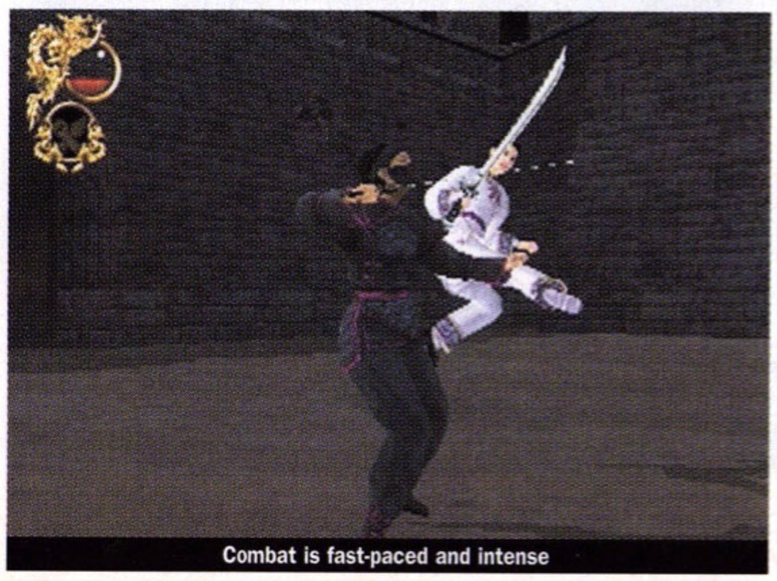


No, it's not Hell, but it feels like it

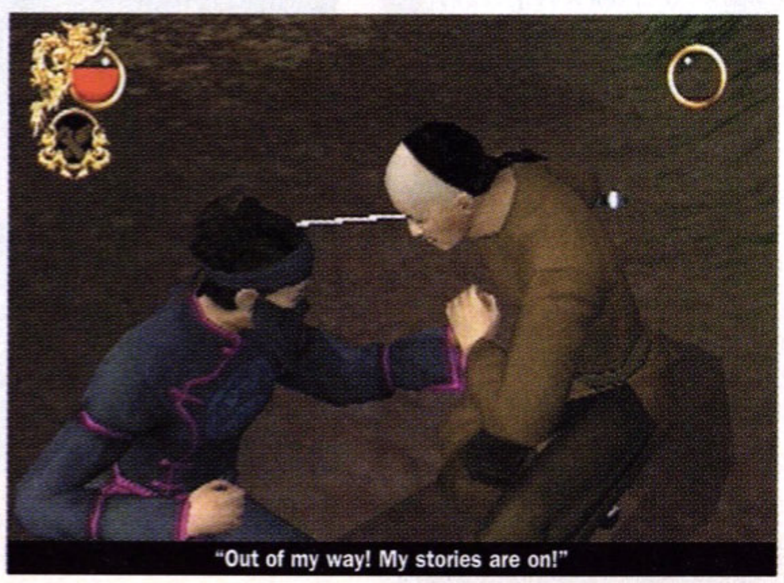


Movie clips are unlockable

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** GENKI ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23



Combat is fast-paced and intense



"Out of my way! My stories are on!"

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

6

- **Concept:** Play through the movie as each of the four main characters: Lu Mu Bai, Shu Lien, Jen Yu, and Lo
- **Graphics:** Blocky characters and bland environments don't come close to the beauty of the film
- **Sound:** With its faithful adaptation of the movie score, the sound is one of the best facets of the game
- **Playability:** The unique combat system is fun at first, but grows quickly tiring
- **Entertainment:** Your time is far better spent watching the movie
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

In the game world, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon translates to Throwing TV, Broken Controller. This movie originally hit theaters three years ago, and judging by how problematic this game is, I'd have to say that the gameplay technology did as well! The camera system is the most suspect. If I wasn't looking directly at the ground, my view was blanketed by a closeup of an enemy's butt. Nothing says quality like a big ol' polygonal booty. Tack on levels that feature a good deal of platforming, and you can clearly see where the frustrations in this game lie. The combat isn't the best, either, but it does have a number of eye-opening features. I especially like the acrobatic defensive maneuvers and high-flying special moves. Unfortunately, the sensation that you've become a part of the movie is not expressed. It's more like Chow Yun-Fat snuck into your house and stabbed you in the heart while you slept.

REINER – 5.5

PLAYSTATION 2

WALLACE & GROMIT IN PROJECT ZOO

A GRAND DAY OUT

Sometimes licensed video game titles are decent, often they are terrible, but it almost never happens that they capture the best things from their namesake. Luckily, Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo manages to be a respectably solid title that makes fans remember why they like the characters in the first place.

Wallace is akin to Belle's dad in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (a bumbling but lovable inventor of truly strange items). Gromit, Wallace's dog, has a similar role to Brain in the Inspector Gadget cartoons – he's the one with some semblance of common sense that rolls his eyes and saves Wallace's butt.

Project Zoo is an all-new storyline for the duo, and has them foiling the plot of Feathers, the evil penguin that wants to get diamonds from the mine below our heroes' favorite zoo. What's great about this title is that it puts the best things about Wallace & Gromit into a video game – which is no small feat, as those of us who have suffered through less-thoughtful licensed titles can attest to.

The game itself is good, but not stellar. It looks most like a late-era PSone game, but has a fairly solid camera, great dialogue, imaginative level design, and a definite emphasis on platforming rather than fighting action. – **LISA**

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE – CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.5

- **Concept:** Bring the classic British comedy duo to the gaming world
- **Graphics:** Concentrate on animations, in-jokes, and items from the show
- **Sound:** Full of funny one-liners and witty dialogue. Ambient noises and the soundtrack are average
- **Playability:** Sometimes buggy when jumping, but everything else is pretty okay (including the camera)
- **Entertainment:** Freaking hysterical for fans of the franchise, newbies will still find plenty to chuckle at
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Like the recent Futurama, Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo typifies the problem with most licensed games based on "cult" properties – they take obsessively crafted, idiosyncratic, and creative source material; then turn it into the most banal, by-the-numbers action/platform game possible. It's the equivalent of Avril Lavigne writing a song about a Philip K. Dick novel or a Jim Belushi sitcom based on *Being John Malkovich*.

MATT – 4

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** BAM ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** BAM ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23

PLAYSTATION 2

ROADKILL

HIGHWAY TO HELL

Think about all the low-budget knockoffs of successful movies that are on video store shelves. Are they ever any good? No, and video game knockoffs aren't much better. For a perfect example, look at RoadKill, a shameless rip on the Grand Theft Auto series.

After a plague wipes out most of humanity, the world is turned into a violent cesspool of gang warfare. As the ridiculously named Mason Strong, you join a gang and work you way up the ranks by performing missions. Between errands, you are free to explore the cities to search for weapons or work on your reputation by killing members of the rival gangs. In other words, it's a lot like Grand Theft Auto III, but without some of the key elements that made that game great.

Unlike GTA III, RoadKill only presents you with one mission at a time. You can choose to do other things before accepting it, but eventually you have to do each mission in order to advance the plot. Instead of focusing on the freeform play of the GTA games, RoadKill focuses on the adult content. All the spoken dialogue is loaded with swearing, prostitutes are everywhere, and the talk radio stations may contain the most sexually explicit content in any video game to date. The result is an immature and offensive clone of a far superior game. – **JEREMY**

Sexual content is everywhere

Kill up to three friends in Deathmatch

Wreck stuff...

...then wreck more stuff

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY ■ **DEVELOPER** TERMINAL REALITY ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE – CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

6

- **Concept:** Imagine a Grand Theft Auto III/Twisted Metal hybrid, and make it much, much filthier
- **Graphics:** Post-apocalyptic settings are supposed to look crappy, but not this crappy
- **Sound:** Combat tends to sound like a loud static crackle, and the radio stations range from forgettable to annoying
- **Playability:** The simple controls will have you up and killing in no time
- **Entertainment:** Strictly for those amused by doodie jokes
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

I admire the amount of effort that went into RoadKill – attempting to bring car combat to a free-roaming city environment couldn't have been an easy job. Unfortunately, the game doesn't really manage to capture the magic of its influences (GTA III and Twisted Metal). I have a feeling that the team attempted to do so much that they couldn't manage to give this title the adequate amount of polish; as the car handling, gun targeting, and graphics are fairly sloppy. Also, when you're bound to your vehicle, it's hard to really enjoy exploring the vast environments they worked so hard to create. Even worse, the game's plot and audio do a terrible job of trying to ape GTA's satirical style. Until I played RoadKill, I didn't know it was possible to be offended and bored at the same time. Overall, it's a game that may find an audience, but I doubt many of the people that buy it will be satisfied with their decision.

MATT – 6.5

Certain death at your
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12 o'clock

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

fasa studio

Microsoft game studios

Buckle up because Crimson Skies® is a deadly ride. Play single player as an air pirate at the helm of a tricked-out 1930s warplane. Because you're fueled by revenge, anyone foolish enough to enter your airspace is an enemy. Play on Xbox *Live*™ to pick a dogfight with up to 15 friends and strangers. Just remember, as you enjoy sending opponents into a fiery death spiral, someone probably has you in their crosshairs. Good luck, you are cleared to rule the skies.

XBOX LIVE

CRIMSON SKIES
HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE

XBOX

it's good to play together

xbox.com/crimsonskies

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PLAYSTATION 2

DYNASTY TACTICS 2

MORE LIKE DYNASTY TACTICS 1.5

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB **7.5**

- **Concept:** Take the original strategy game, iron out a few kinks, add one additional character, and pretend it's a real sequel
- **Graphics:** The battle animations are sharp and feel appropriately epic
- **Sound:** The voice acting is solid, which is odd, 'cause it's totally unnecessary
- **Playability:** Learning the basics is easy, but the overall pace is as slow as molasses
- **Entertainment:** History buffs, chess players, and military nuts will eat this up
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

The definition of "sequel" must be getting pretty loose. I was under the impression that a sequel should build significantly on the original, but I guess I was wrong. With only a few minor play control tweaks and touch ups, Dynasty Tactics 2 feels much more like an upgrade than a new chapter.

In the first Dynasty Tactics, you commanded historical Chinese warriors into battle on a chess board-like grid, and that hasn't changed at all. The system of battle tactics has been expanded so you can serve your opponents pain in greater portions, but that's about all that's different. Okay, so you can talk to people in towns now, and there's one more character to choose from. Whee. But if you can get past the fact that it's the same game as the first, Dynasty Tactics 2 is pretty decent. While the battles are a bit slow, they are quite fun and easy to get into. The combat animations are exciting and well rendered (as they were in the first game), and commanding butt whoopin' warriors is always a good time. If you've never played a strategy game before, Dynasty Tactics 2 is a good choice, but if you've played the original, there's no reason to go back for seconds. – **JEREMY**

SECOND OPINION

This series sounds dry, but I found it more interesting than many of the other titles from the publisher, simply because of the tactical combo system. If only Koei can take this aspect and merge it with Kessen's remarkable real-time engine, then they'd be speaking everyone's language.

KATO – 7.5

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** KOEI
■ **DEVELOPER** KOEI ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23

PLAYSTATION 2

NASCAR THUNDER 2004

DROPPING THE HAMMER

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB **8.75**

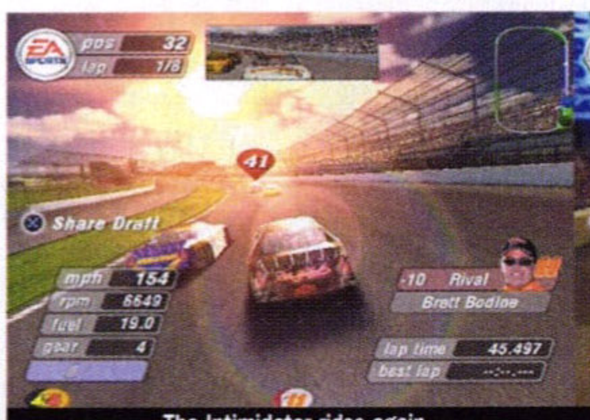
- **Concept:** Pop the hood of NASCAR and find the passion and rivalry within
- **Graphics:** They've gotten worse at the same time they've improved. That's disappointing
- **Sound:** MRN's involvement broadens to give great isolated commentary during races. Plus, there's a crew chief in your ear now
- **Playability:** The new career structure is both fun and more evenly balanced
- **Entertainment:** The depth of strategy on the track is unparalleled and opens up an awesome experience
- **Replay Value:** High

Beating and banging, trading places the last few laps; Ricky Craven and Kurt Busch's finish at the spring Darlington race was historic. Craven's win was so close, it was basically decided by the duct tape on his front grill. What does it feel like to race your guts out and get the best from your competitors? Play NASCAR Thunder 2004 to find out.

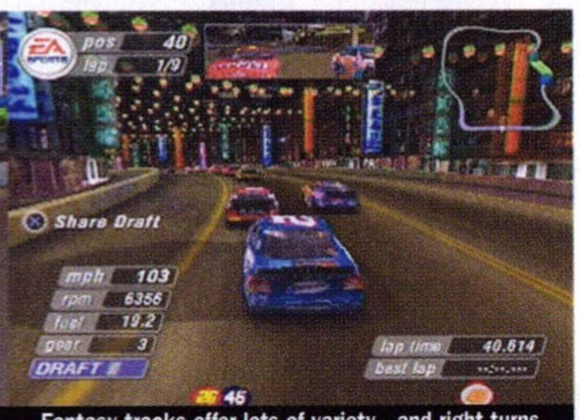
The improved career mode, new SpeedZone, online play, and more crashes are nice, but this title's draw is the AI. Finally, a racing title breathes life into the cars around you. Respect is huge to real-life drivers, and it's an awesome feeling when you earn it on the track by driving with a cool head. On the other hand – for the first time in a racing game – I felt fear, as a driver that I'd pissed off earlier crept up from behind and spun me. This must have been what it was like to see the late Dale Earnhardt (the Intimidator) in your rear-view mirror.

Legend has it that Earnhardt was so good because he could "see" the draft. That's far-fetched, but Thunder lets you hear it, which is just one of the new tweaks. You earn respect from drivers if you draft with them by pushing the X button. While you can still draft without it, this new mechanic of "latching on" is cool because it lets you choose who you want to help, and it makes you more aware of the different lines around the track.

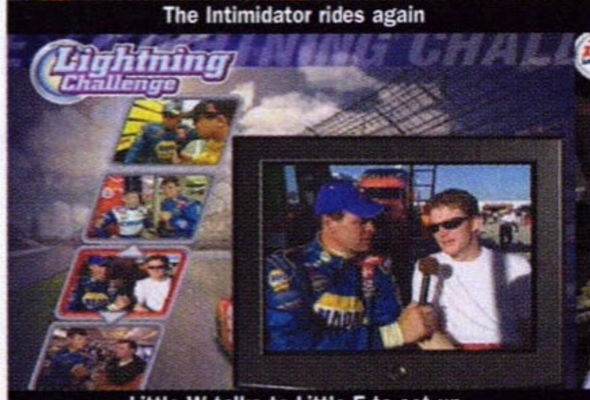
Even with better road textures and effects, the graphics look awful in places, and are the one thing that hold this game back. However, make no mistake about it – NASCAR Thunder has pushed the envelope of what it means to kick the tires and light the fires. – **KATO**



The Intimidator rides again



Fantasy tracks offer lots of variety...and right turns



Little W talks to Little E to set up another Lightning Challenge

SpeedZone has racing lessons wrapped in scenario challenges

SECOND OPINION

I absolutely love the new rival/ally aspect to Thunder as it really makes the racing intense. When I see Mark Martin cruising down the track, I just can't resist smashing right into his Viagra-mobile and letting him know that if you can't get it up perhaps you should stay off the track. I'm also a fan of the carnage going on during the races, from walls of smoke to debris on the track, you just never know what to expect. Graphically, Thunder 2004 is a nice package overall, but you will see some frames drop from time to time, especially when there is a slew of stuff onscreen. Besides all the other new aspects, online is a welcome addition even though my be-the-evil-guy-and-run-into-everyone-strategy doesn't work as well. Okay, I lied. I can indeed be evil online. But that's part of the fun.

ANDY – 8.5

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA BROADBAND OR LAN)
■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

PLAYSTATION 2

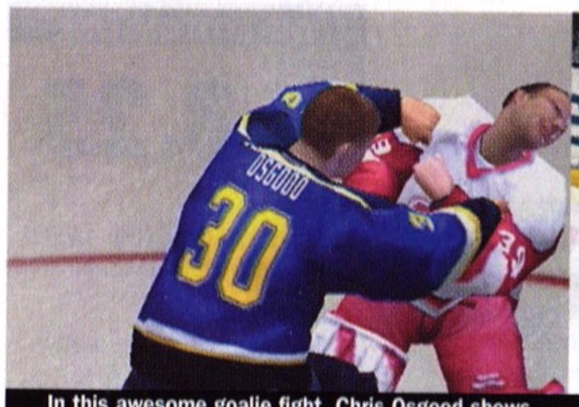
NHL 2004

NO MORE MISTER NICE EA

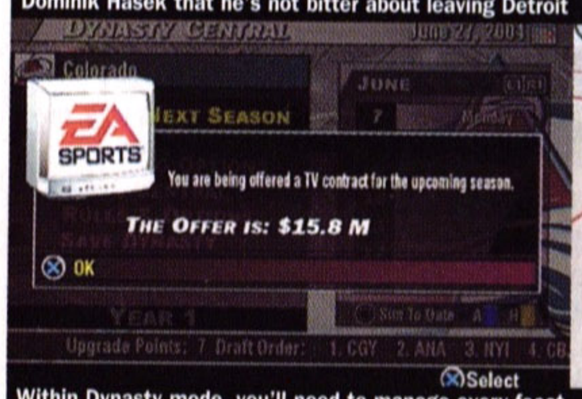
After last year's disappointing release, EA has come out swinging and has honed in on the brutality of the sport of hockey. Along with bone-jarring manual checks and a rebuilt fighting system (even the goalies can throw down), the play has opened up significantly and is much tighter as a whole. I really like the new two-button passing system that not only allows you to select between saucer and regular dishes, but you can determine how hard each pass is. Additionally, the defensive AI scripting has improved dramatically, and goalies are no longer stiff and mechanical – they really know how to handle different situations. I witnessed many saves where the goalie transitioned seamlessly from one animation to another – like reaching up to block the top shelf, then kicking out a leg to stop a rebound.

EA has also spiced up the fantasy aspect. In such, Dynasty mode now boasts many of the ownership options from this year's Madden. You'll have the ability to alter ticket prices and spend your team's income on a plethora of things like training equipment (which will raise your players' attributes) and TV contracts (which should bring in more cash). You'll even have the ability to furnish your own office with different hockey-related knickknacks and furniture.

Saying that EA has turned it on this year is the understatement of the century. NHL 2004 is jam-packed with longevity. Its simulation options are deeper than ever, the gameplay is lightning fast and incredibly smooth, and this version just happens to be the only one that features online play. When it comes to your hard-earned dollar, the puck stops at NHL 2004. It's easily the best hockey title of the year. – **REINER**


In this awesome goalie fight, Chris Osgood shows Dominik Hasek that he's not bitter about leaving Detroit

The bruise control checking system features over 100 different hit animations



Within Dynasty mode, you'll need to manage every facet of a team – including its finances and business decisions

The camera no longer blinds players. It's reverted back to former glory

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **DEVELOPER** EA SPORTS CANADA ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

9.25

- **Concept:** Rebuilt and better than ever
- **Graphics:** The attention to detail is incredible. You'll even see helmets flying off and rendered fans walking up the stairs
- **Sound:** The commentary is not very dynamic, but the rink sounds (especially the crowd) are realistic
- **Playability:** The new actions are implemented nicely, the camera is no longer troublesome, and the defensive AI is all the more impressive
- **Entertainment:** The most polished and rewarding hockey release of the year. It has it all
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

This series has been changing between good and bad for years, but this is the turning point. This game will be remembered as the iteration of the series in which things finally hit their stride and there was no looking back. The talk is all about the blown-out GM functions, but let's no forget about what happens on the ice. Hockey is graceful game, but this title captures the clutching and grabbing, the scrums, and the fact that ice is...slippery. Although players at times had a tendency to act like magnets – repel and attract each other – I've never seen a game replicate the movements of players quite like this. As such, it'll take a little time to get used to; but when you're crisscrossing across the blue line, manually dekeing with ease, you know you've hit your stride – and it feels awesome. This series has finally earned the right to live under the hype of the EA Sports banner.

KATO – 9.25

PLAYSTATION 2

ESPN NHL HOCKEY

SKATING ON THIN ICE

If there's one thing that can kill the momentum of a year-to-year sports franchise, it's the introduction of a new developer. Not only does the new creative team have to get up to speed and fully understand every inch of the product's coding, it has to expand upon each aspect of the game. The graphics have to be better; the gameplay needs to be smoother; and the fantasy options need to be deeper. Developer Kush Games, who replaces Treyarch, was faced with such a feat.

Within the span of a year, Kush was able to piece together a respectable follow-up that is, in fact, bigger and better in every conceivable way. Such aspects as goalies being too difficult to score on and injuries occurring too often were addressed as well. If anything, Kush was too ambitious in its efforts. Adding fluff along the lines of skill contests, minigames, the Skybox, and an assortment of collectibles is highly appreciated, but perfecting gameplay should have been priority number one. Being able to stop on a dime and spray ice is cool, yet the remainder of new deke moves are a little out of control. Moreover, holes in the AI show that the CPU isn't the brightest or most skilled of opponents.

It's impressive what Kush has done, but EA's game outperforms it with ease. Maybe next year. – **REINER**

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

8.5

- **Concept:** Even with a new developer, the series continues to grow and improve...but it's still not the best
- **Graphics:** The collision between players, detail in the models, and fluidity of animations encompass the true essence of the sport
- **Sound:** The commentators babble constantly...which is an impressive feat since their speech is rarely repeated
- **Playability:** Mostly the same, but the goalie AI has been toned down and the implementation of deke moves generates more excitement
- **Entertainment:** A solid follow-up, but not nearly as mouthwatering as EA's game
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

ESPN is more of a flowing game than EA's title, but it doesn't have as much realism. Still, ESPN is a changed beast from last year, the most significant of which is in the visual department. Fans will find a good mix of old and new, and it is the former that holds this series back slightly.

KATO – 8.5

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE)
■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** KUSH GAMES/ VISUAL CONCEPTS ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9

PLAYSTATION 2

ROBIN HOOD: DEFENDER OF THE CROWN

WATCH SHERWOOD FOREST BURN

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

5.25

With heritage spanning back to the golden age of gaming, the revival of the Defender of the Crown series oozes with nostalgia. While it does bring back a flood of fond memories, this new incarnation remains firmly planted in the past and doesn't have nearly enough substance to whet gamers' appetites.

While I can appreciate the fact that it is true to the 1987 precursor, I'm flabbergasted that Cinemaware didn't make any attempts to expand upon the experience. The strategic elements are painfully shallow and are accompanied by archaic visuals. Sadly, a crayon drawing from a five-year-old shows more detail and realism than the military units in this game.

As was the case with the original title, players will have a chance to earn gold competing in a handful of action-packed sequences. Within these minigame-like scenes, you'll engage in jousting tournaments and use a bow to snipe enemies. Due to the sheer simplicity of these elements, the thrills are fleeting; and once you've played through a sequence, you never want to see it again.

The idea is certainly sound, and I do think people would embrace a next-gen Defender of the Crown. There just needs to be more to it. – **REINER**

- **Concept:** A painfully faithful remake of the classic Commodore 64 and Atari ST title
- **Graphics:** The game would probably be more enjoyable without the crude graphics and poor texturing
- **Sound:** The voice acting is decent, but the soundtrack is completely forgettable
- **Playability:** Every element usually allows the player to only do one or two things. There's nothing to it whatsoever
- **Entertainment:** It's one of those games that seems fairly interesting at first, but quickly falls apart
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

There is actually more to this game than meets the eye; but visually and mechanically, combat is more like a backwoods renaissance fair rather than high adventure. Tactically, the battlefields require quick thinking, but don't dwell on this title too long. If strategy is more your bread than butter, then this is for you.

KATO – 6.75

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
■ **DEVELOPER** CINEMAWARE ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30

PLAYSTATION 2

DDR MAX 2

RETRACING ITS STEPS

Dance Dance Revolution is one of those series that doesn't change much from installment to installment. It keeps its niche following and doesn't go out of its way to appeal to new players. Hardcore fans will keep buying, and everyone else will most likely continue to ignore it.

Max represents the PS2 era of the series. With the bump from PSone comes obvious technological upgrades. There are now videos that play in the background. The familiar polygonal alter egos are soon unlocked, however. Indeed, Max 2 unlocks things at a steady pace. The music is also slightly more mainstream this time around, with hits from Kylie Minogue and the Crystal Method. In my opinion, there are fewer tracks that really inspire you to shuffle your feet than other DDR installments.

Where are the new modes? Where are the innovations? Not here, folks. This is just another DDR update for those who want more songs. How vexing that Konami keeps releasing the same thing time and time again. It's still an entertaining way to get some cardio, but that's about the best thing I can say about this aging brand. – **JUSTIN**

SECOND OPINION

Me judging a dancing game makes about as much sense as Michael Jackson running a day care center. But those who actually have rhythm will dig DDR Max 2. The game hasn't changed much, although the music selection has improved (slightly). For DDR fans, that should be enough.

JEREMY – 7

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7

- **Concept:** More DDR! More, says Konami!
- **Graphics:** The video quality isn't the best – probably because there are so many songs
- **Sound:** A few tracks that I've heard before, as well as plenty of originals and overseas hits
- **Playability:** Anything but a revolution. When an arrow hits the top of the screen, step on the corresponding direction on the pad
- **Entertainment:** Nothing new here to warrant a purchase by anyone but total newbies or DDR fanatics
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23

PLAYSTATION 2

NHL HITZ PRO

TOUGH LIKE A HANSON

Full of homicidal checks that send players crashing through the glass, NHL Hitz is still the hardest-hitting title of the year; but now we're seeing a much softer side of the game. In an attempt to bridge the gap between authenticity and arcade, Midway has moved from 3-on-3 play to 5-on-5, and has also implemented an array of sliders that allows players to experience a realistic NHL simulation.

True enough, the gameplay is much deeper and forces gamers to concoct more complex offensive strategies. In a way, though, the game has lost part of its charm. It's not as frantic or fast. On this same note, it now competes directly with ESPN and NHL, whereas it was in a league of its own before. Without an engrossing Franchise mode, it really doesn't stand a chance against the competition. Seeing if you can bring an upstart team to the NHL is a decent idea, but there's nothing to it. You just win games and move on.

Hitz is a fun game, but much like RuPaul, it doesn't know what it wants to be. – **REINER**

SECOND OPINION

From franchise's Hero Equipment to the gameplay sliders and totally revamped goalie animations, this is Hitz hockey the way it's meant to be. From Saskatoon to San Jose, this game has the ability to turn just about any town into Hockey Falls.

KATO – 8.25

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.25

- **Concept:** Apply authentic NHL rules to the hard-edged Hitz gameplay
- **Graphics:** The animations are pretty slick. You can really feel every check. The crowds are also the best in the biz
- **Sound:** The original NBA Jam commentator has legs, but nothing new to say
- **Playability:** It's much slower, but the lowering scoring affairs produce a higher intensity
- **Entertainment:** A great multiplayer game, but the single-player experience is still too shallow
- **Replay Value:** High

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
■ **DEVELOPER** NEXT LEVEL GAMES ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22

PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

DISNEY EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE

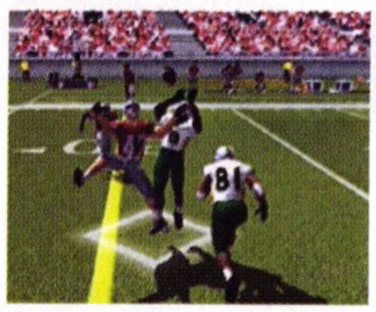
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2

The words "Disney" and "Extreme" usually sound about as good together as a peanut butter and pickle relish sandwich; but this time, it's actually a pretty appealing combo. Based on the Tony Hawk 4 engine, Extreme Skate Adventure is basically a streamlined version of that game with Disney characters. Not only is it fun for Disney lovers, it's a good time for skateboarding fans looking for creative environments or a more forgiving learning curve. – **JEREMY**

E **7.75**

NCAA GAMEBREAKER 2004

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE)
■ **PUBLISHER** SONY/989
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26

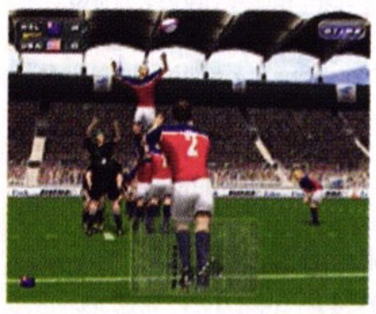


Sony's slow ascent can best be described in this encapsulation from the game. There are great touches, such as when my guys get tackled and slide out of bounds or they perform a nice sideline tiptoe. Then there were the instances when I'd wince because of the money plays, number of tip balls, and general sloppiness. The Career route is cool as you build your resume, but a more traditional route would have been a nice option, too. – **KATO**

E **7**

RUGBY 2004

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9

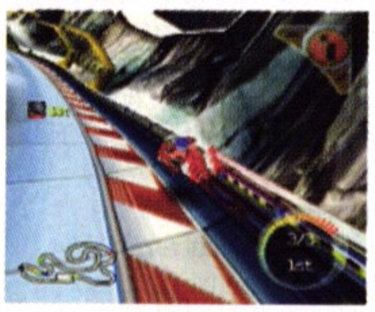


The last time we reviewed Rugby, I thought a scrum was a part of the male anatomy that wasn't printable in this mag. Now that I'm a little wiser, I'm not pleased with what EA's done. There are more career features this time around, but the new gameplay is about as rancid as a Frenchman on a hot day. Finally, these graphics look like they missed the PS2 boat entirely. What this game lacks in fun it doesn't even make up for in novelty. – **KATO**

E **6**

BUTT-UGLY MARTIANS: ZOOM OR DOOM!

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** CRAVE ENTERTAINMENT
■ **RELEASE** JULY 29



Zoom or Doom is a great example of why lots of people hate futuristic racing games. The music is awful, generic techno. The tracks are recycled pieces of each other with mediocre obstacles randomly thrown in your way. The sense of speed is somewhat equivalent to the electric carts available to the recently injured at grocery stores, and it doesn't have the multiplayer fun of Mario Kart or the pure speed of F-Zero. – **LISA**

E **5**

STARSKY & HUTCH

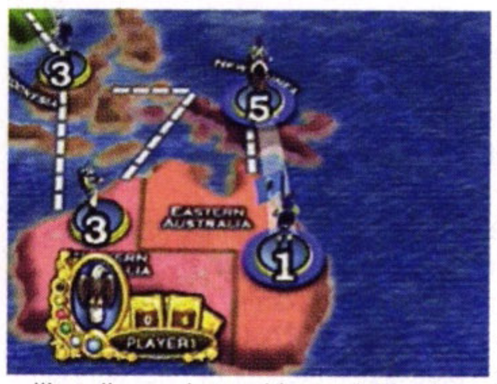
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** EMPIRE/GOTHAM GAMES
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9

Starsky & Hutch is broken up into three seasons of "episodes." In reality, this game doesn't deserve to be on the air as long as *Cop Rock* was. My favorite level was when I chased a car around for 10 minutes, trying to destroy it. Wait, that was my *least* favorite level. Wait, that's *EVERY* level! At least the scripted scenes were mildly amusing. People with light guns and steering wheels may have a toenail's width more fun than those just using a controller, but that's still not saying much. Gotham and Empire were going for a retro revival, but what they ended up with was something that's just old. And stinky. – **JUSTIN**

T **5.75**

RISK: GLOBAL DOMINATION

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER BOARD
■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9

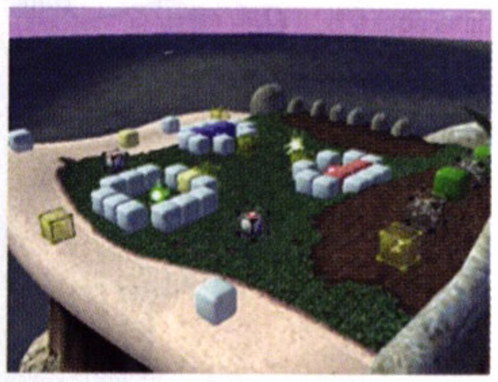


This is a nice translation of the classic board game Risk, which, like Festivus, is the strategy game for the rest of us. The simple play dynamic of placing armies, rolling die, and attacking neighboring territories remains intact, but with a few nice extras like Mission Risk, Capital Risk, and a load of customizable game options. Is it fun? You bet; but I still think the preferred Risk experience is sitting around the kitchen table with some friends and a lot of Mountain Dew and Doritos. However, if you're like me and have no friends, this is your ticket – especially when you consider the title's online play functions. – **MATT**

E **7**

MOJO!

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE
■ **PUBLISHER** CRAVE
■ **RELEASE** JULY 30



Mojo is a strange little game, one that combines the gameplay of Marble Madness and Super Monkey Ball with color-coded puzzle elements. Basically, you control a sphere on the board, which can eliminate blocks of the same color. As you negotiate the levels, you can get "infusions" of color that change your ball, allowing it to break differently hued cubes. Sounds simple, until the game starts to throw stages with multicolored blocks, locks, precarious ramps, and unbreakable boxes at you. It's definitely a puzzle game like no other, and even offers a nice level create function and four-player support, all for a 10-dollar price point! – **MATT**

E **7.75**

PLAYSTATION 2 *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

EYETOY: PLAY

WORTH EVERY CENT

THE BOTTOM LINE
EVERYONE
E
9

It's funny to watch people play with this wee camera and its accompanying games for the first time. They want to be cool. They try to look all jaded and tough. But, given a mere fifteen minutes, everyone is turned into a giggling baffoon. I can't explain it, I only report.

The EyeToy: Play package gets you the camera (which plugs into the USB port on the front of the PS2, and thusly requires no batteries) and the play disc. Presumably, Sony is planning on a decent integration for this device, because it's offering the whole shebang for a mere $50. The possibilities are really immense, but right now you get 12 minigames and the ability to record messages to your PS2 memory card.

Like all party game collections, some activities work better than others. I really, really liked Rocket Rumble (it's a FantaVision concept where you pick rockets and then detonate them to make more spectacular displays). If you must know why I fancy this one so much, it's because you're a giant on the screen and it looks like you have sole control over the cosmos. I dig it.

Besides the minigames being a party paradise, the Playroom section is a haven for those who are "high on life." Rainbow tracers or jerky delays that make you look like you're in a Tool video are all available. Party on! – **LISA**

■ **Concept:** Make some games to go along with this camera thingy that Bond's buddy Q came up with

■ **Graphics:** The focus isn't that stellar from the camera, and since that's most of the screen, the general look is a little grainy

■ **Sound:** Generic minigame techno. The characters have European accents, which make them strangely appealing

■ **Playability:** Like the demo shows, even grandmas can do it, and do it well

■ **Entertainment:** Embarrassingly high

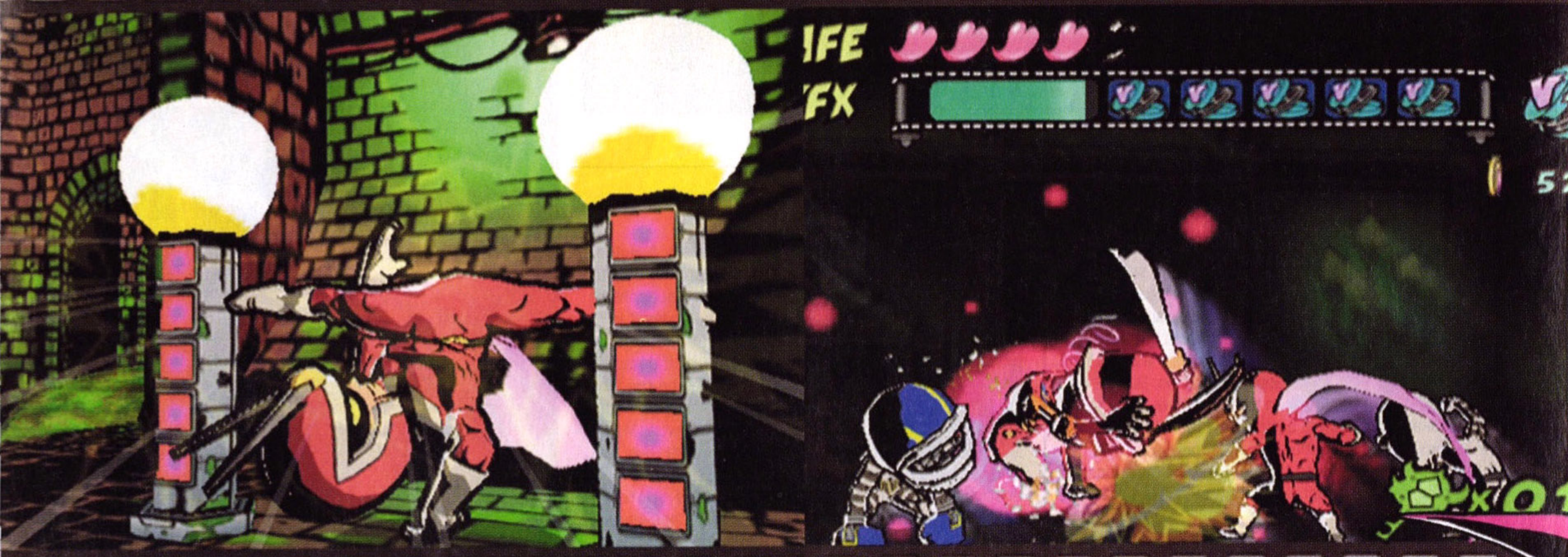
■ **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

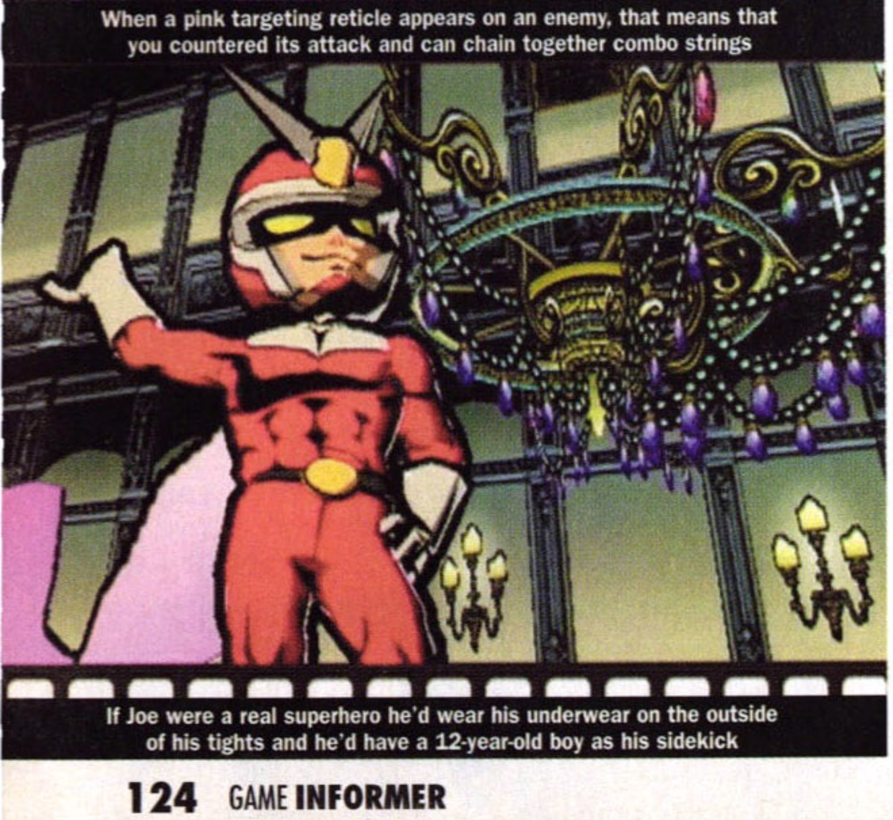
Yes, the games of EyeToy are completely silly and make you feel like a complete fool while you are playing them, but there is no denying that they are – for lack of a better term – wacky fun. My personal favorite is boxing, but the others are equally entertaining. I'll be surprised if the camera is ever used for much else, but these 12 games are worth the price of admission.

ANDY – 8

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA ■ **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4



By slowing the flow of time, Joe can track missiles and even knock them back toward the assailant that launched them



When a pink targeting reticle appears on an enemy, that means that you countered its attack and can chain together combo strings

If Joe were a real superhero he'd wear his underwear on the outside of his tights and he'd have a 12-year-old boy as his sidekick

GAMECUBE

VIEWTIFUL JOE

STUPID NAME...GREAT GAME

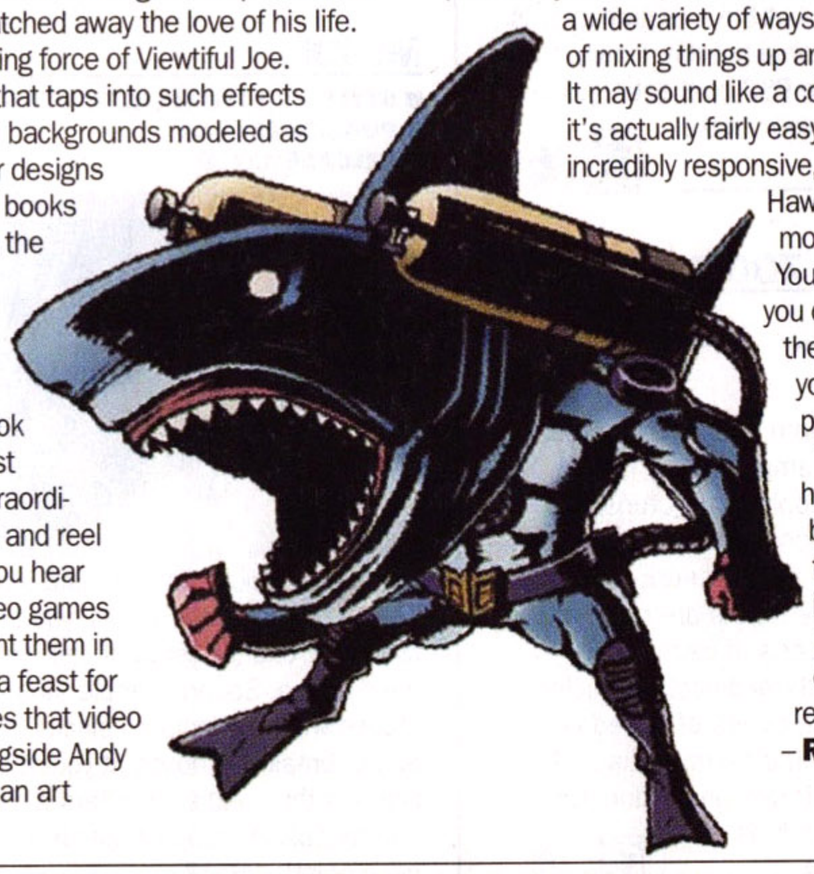
A rare gem that seamlessly blends new-age technologies with gameplay of yesteryear, Viewtiful Joe is a stylish brawler that innovates in every field and emerges as one of the most captivating and addictive GameCube titles to date.

The premise is simple, yet original: Doing what every male does best (and every female fears), Joe takes his girlfriend Sylvia to the debut of a new action film starring his childhood hero, Captain Blue. Amid the high-flying stunts unfolding on the silver screen, Captain Blue is defeated for the first time at the hands of a mysterious new foe. As if this wasn't shocking enough, the villain turns to the audience and peers right into Joe's very soul. Then, through an action that transcends reality, extends his arm out of the screen, wraps his hand around Sylvia and pulls her into the frame of the film. Miffed, but more so confused, Joe follows and jumps into the picture...only to find that he's too late. There are no signs of Sylvia or her abductor. In a desperate plea for help, Joe turns to the bruised and beaten Captain Blue and asks for his guidance and training needed to become a hero powerful enough to stop this formidable adversary who has snatched away the love of his life. Herein lies the origin and driving force of Viewtiful Joe.

With a decidedly retro feel that taps into such effects as dirty lens cinematography, backgrounds modeled as flat cardboard sets, character designs inspired by golden age comic books and classic Japanese anime; the graphical detailing is nothing short of awe-inspiring, and is the perfect marriage of Western and Eastern styles. It really looks like a comic book came to life and someone just happened to capture this extraordinary event on an archaic film and reel camera. From here on in, if you hear people talking about how video games are not a viable art form, point them in the direction of this title. It's a feast for the eyes that clearly illustrates that video games could, in fact, sit alongside Andy Warhol and Claude Monet in an art gallery.

The same level of creativity and expert craftsmanship runs rampant throughout every inch of gameplay. While it does fall under the classification of a brawler, I can guarantee that you've never seen anything quite like this before. Along with a fairly complex combat system that allows players to construct lengthy combo strings, Joe can tap into three superpowers. He can slow the fabric of time, which allows him to easily read what an enemy's next action will be. More impressively, it can be used to stop the blades on a helicopter, dodge bullets, or super-charge the engines on a missile. Conversely, Joe can speed things up to the point that only the Flash could fully comprehend. Along with bolting beneath falling debris, if Joe throws a flurry of punches, he'll move so fast that he'll catch fire. Joe's final power is the ability to zoom in on his immediate surroundings. This technique leaves him somewhat blinded to the action at hand, but his combat prowess is enhanced and can lead to some impressive moves – like a flying tornado assault or a spinning roundhouse kick.

With each passing stage, new obstacles are thrown into your path and you'll be pushed to use your powers repeatedly and in a wide variety of ways. Capcom really did a great job of mixing things up and keeping it fresh for players. It may sound like a complex gameplay system, but it's actually fairly easy to get into. The controls are incredibly responsive, and much like in the Tony Hawk titles, your progression is more or less based solely on skill. You may end up dying more than you care to admit; but by the end of the game, there's a chance that you could be racking up 9,999-point combos.

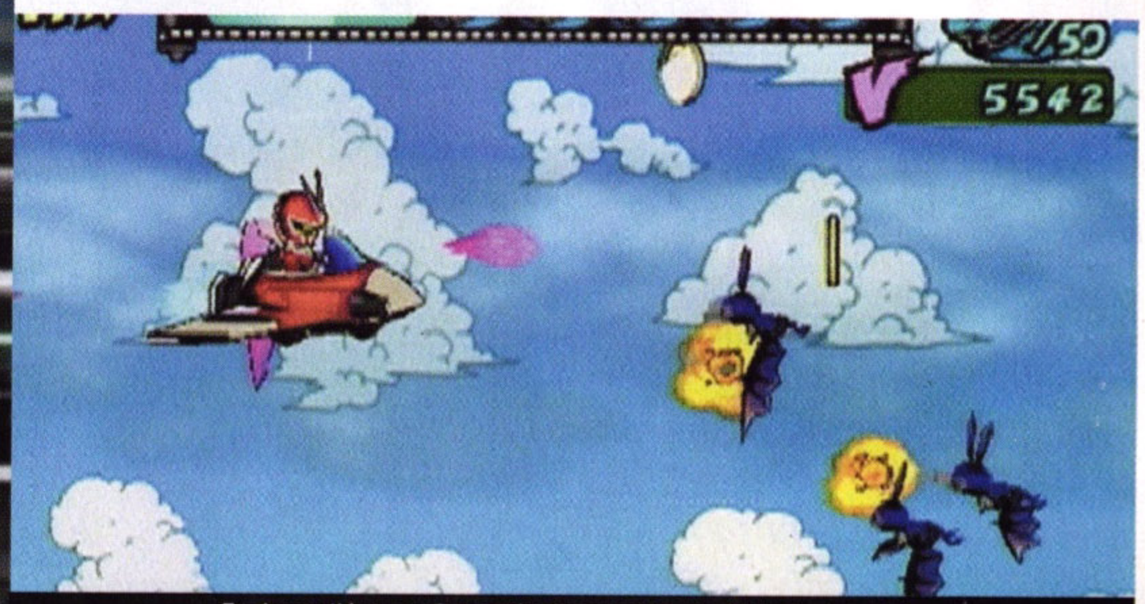


There are very few titles that have gameplay as tight and balanced as Viewtiful Joe's. On that same note, there really is nothing else like it. It's a completely original and highly entertaining work of art. You really have to see it to believe it.

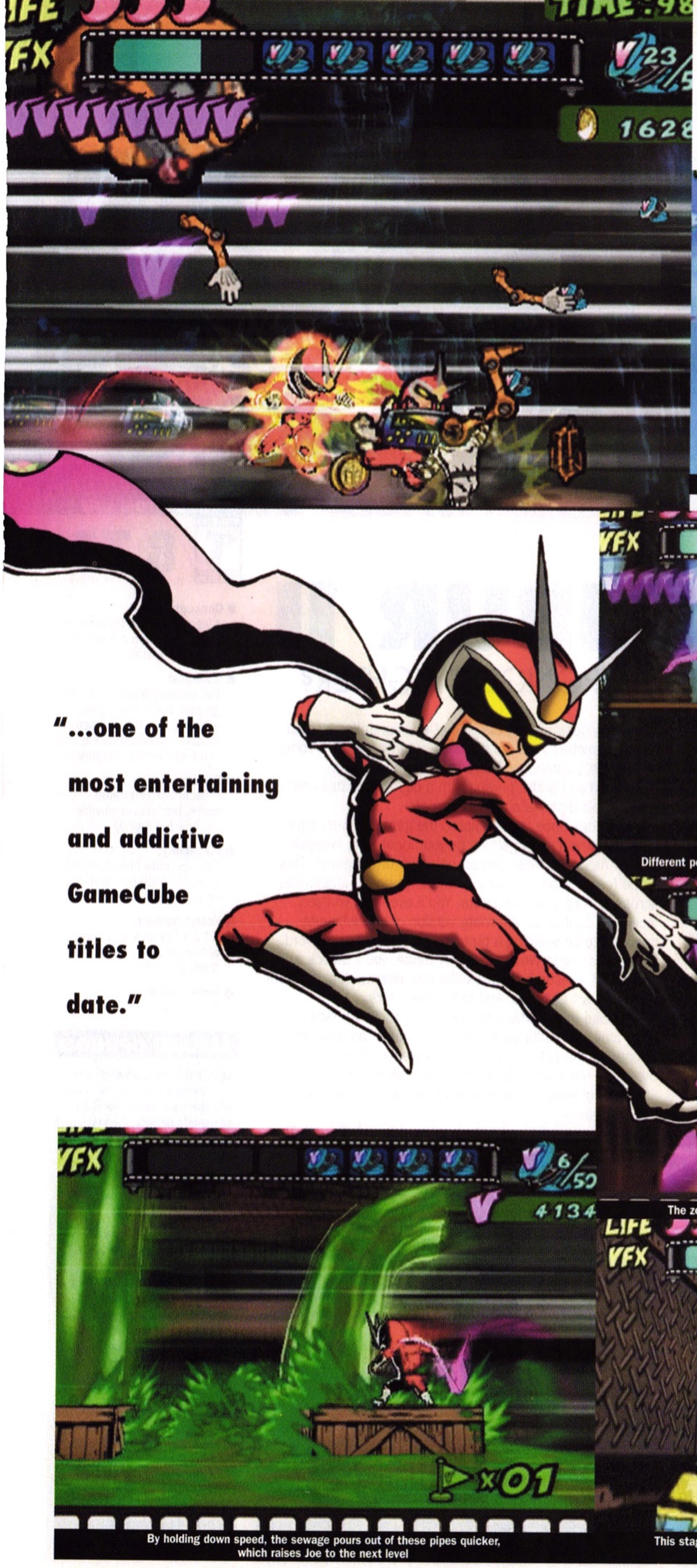
– **REINER**

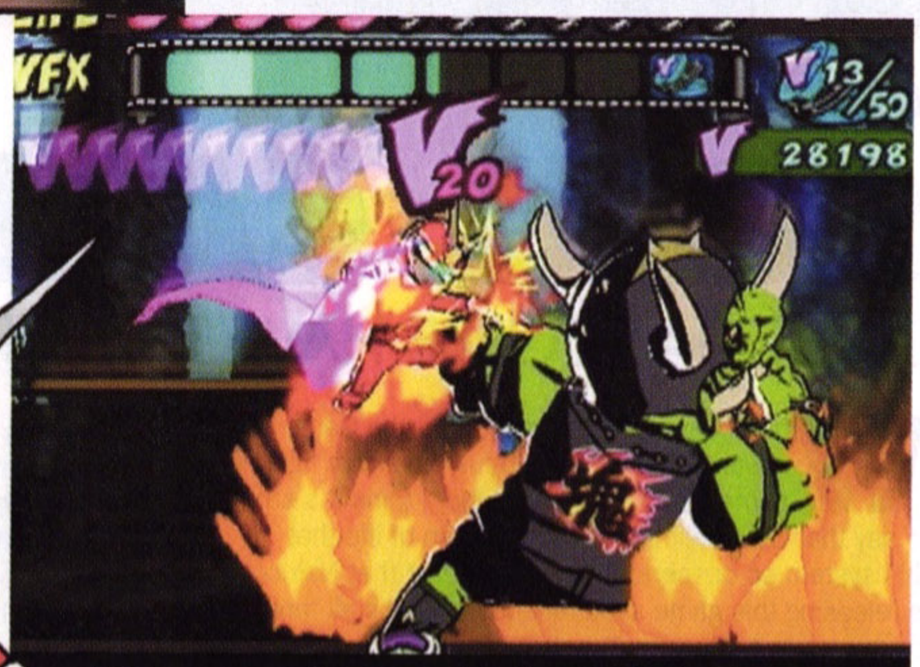
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 4
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

VIEWTIFUL JOE

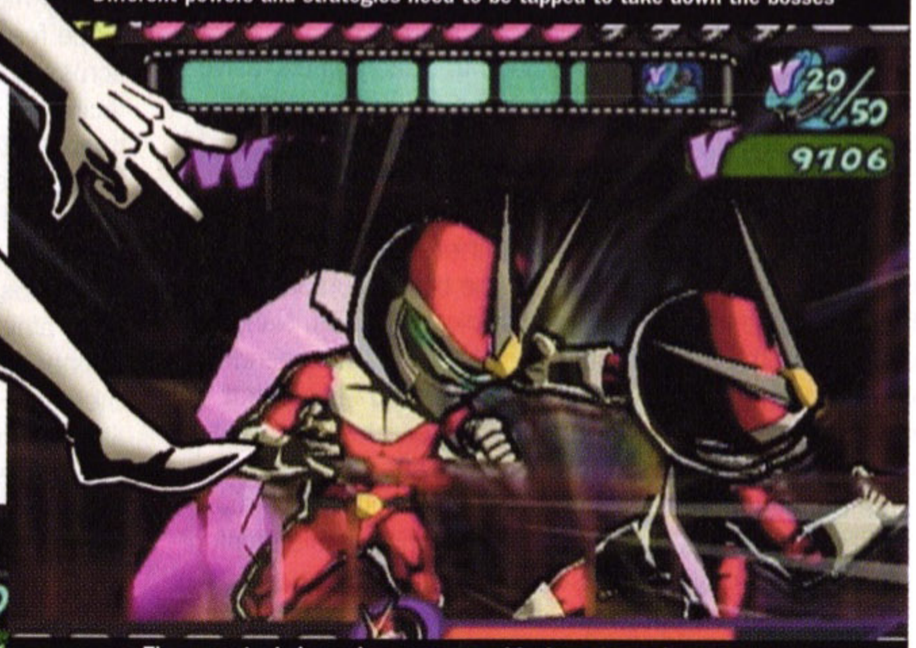


To change things up, Capcom implemented in a fun little shooter stage



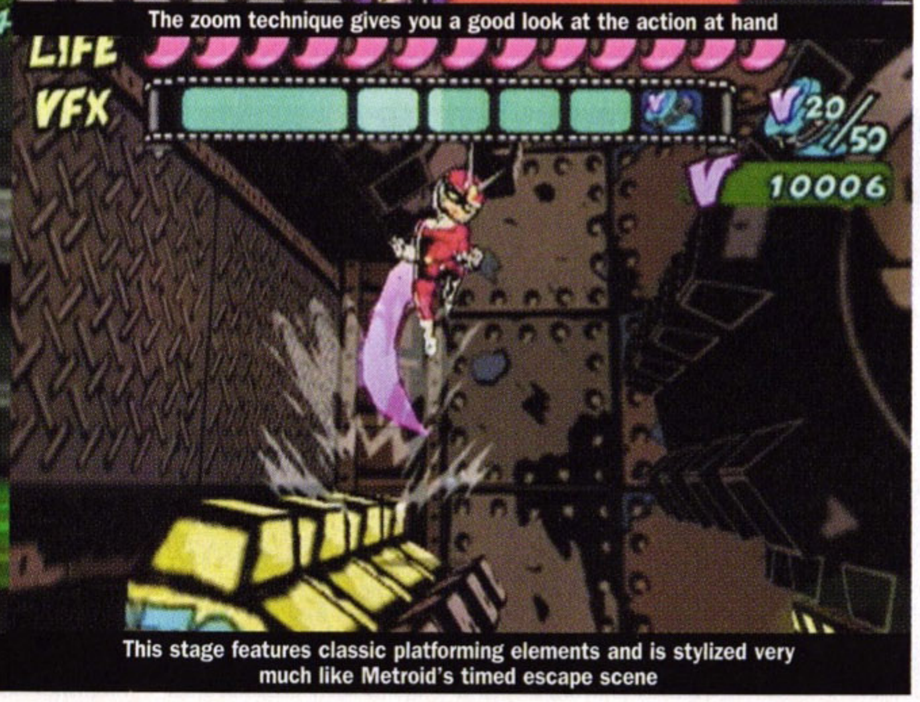


Different powers and strategies need to be tapped to take down the bosses



The zoom technique gives you a good look at the action at hand

By holding down speed, the sewage pours out of these pipes quicker, which raises Joe to the next level



This stage features classic platforming elements and is stylized very much like Metroid's timed escape scene

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

9.5

- **Concept:** A beat 'em up that proves that unique ideas can still be applied to 2D gaming
- **Graphics:** The cardboard cutout scenery, comic book-style cel shading, and speed effects are implemented perfectly. It looks fantastic
- **Sound:** Hysterical voiceovers and a fitting score
- **Playability:** Where the game truly excels. The controls fit like a glove and the gameplay is filled with variety and skill-based challenges
- **Entertainment:** It's gorgeous. It's fun. It's an absolute must-have
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Not only is Viewtiful Joe a game that you absolutely, positively must play, it is one that will make all non-GameCube console owners green with envy. In many ways, Joe goes back to Capcom's roots, delivering pulse-pounding, hand-cramping, and over-the-top gameplay. It's 2D, but it's 3D. It's difficult, but it's doable. It's a fighter, and it's a brain-teasing platformer. And it is, without a doubt, the most ingenious action game I have seen in a long, long time. There will be people that find it too hard, as even on Kids mode Viewtiful Joe likes to hand you your butt on a platter. But in the end (no pun intended), you will delight in dining on this scrumptious gaming delight. It's absolutely Viewtiful!

ANDY – 9.25

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.75

GAMECUBE

SOUL CALIBUR II

DOES GAMECUBE HAVE THE STRONGEST FIGHTER?

"The gameplay is endless in scope and its visuals will leave you with a wide-eyed gaze."

When I can make the claim that the Game Boy Advance has a more robust library of fighting games than the GameCube, I think it's safe to say that Soul Calibur II is the injection of life that this system so desperately needs. Seeing that Namco is releasing this game simultaneously across all three systems won't necessarily help Nintendo's case, but I have a sneaking suspicion that the GameCube incarnation will be the one that people flock to and crave the most.

The crafty folks at Namco decided to attach an exclusive character to each version of the game. In such, Heihachi (a Tekken veteran) can only be found on the PlayStation 2. Additionally, the legendary comic book hero and failed movie star, Spawn, has made his home on Xbox. Both of these characters bring something different to the arena, but they simply pale in comparison to the bonus combatant in the GameCube incarnation. By a stroke of genius, Namco has plucked the adult version of Link out of The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time and has integrated his combat prowess into the framework of this fighter. I had my doubts as to how he would fit into the fold; but after putting this game through its paces, Link is now – far and away – my favorite character on the SC II roster. In my humble opinion, he's reason enough to invest in the GameCube version.

If you're worried about the controller not being able to handle this fighter's fevered gameplay pitch, rest easy – this game was designed for the GameCube controller. Namco definitely factored the controller layout into the development of this title's gameplay. There is one trouble zone, however. If you prefer playing with a digital pad, this unit's microscopic d-pad is a definite turnoff.

Namco has once again tailored the game to every type of player. If you enjoy gaming by your lonesome, Weapon Master mode will keep you occupied for days on end. This mode features an array of circumstance-based stages set across 10 expansive chapters. You'll even find yourself facing off against an alternate version of Link who just happens to be wielding a butterfly net instead of a sword. By progressing in Weapon Master mode, you'll unlock a handful of awesome features like new play modes, different weapons, art galleries, and extra characters.

For those of you who thrive off of the thrill of head-to-head play, the multiplayer experience is just as rewarding. Mastering character combos and perfecting the timing of the guard block (which replaces reversals) will lead to a Zen-like fighting prowess and some of the most intense battles in all of gaming.

Little can be said about the quality of Soul Calibur II. The gameplay is endless in scope and its visuals will leave you with a wide-eyed gaze. It's a remarkable fighter that just happens to feel the most at home on GameCube. – **REINER**

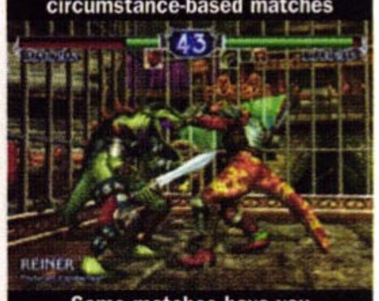
- **Concept:** A weapon-based fighter with great depth and a touch of Nintendo nostalgia
- **Graphics:** The environments are a tad generic, but there's good reason why – the character models are breathtaking and some of the best in gaming
- **Sound:** A decent orchestrated score, but the voiceovers are way too campy
- **Playability:** The new guard block rocks and the strategies that can be concocted are limitless
- **Entertainment:** A ton of modes and some of the greatest multiplayer dueling around
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Link is the fighter gamers are screaming for, so this version of Namco's blockbuster is an automatic favorite. I agree he's damn good to do battle with – almost to the point of being unbalanced. For people familiar with this series' former console offerings, you'll need to give yourself time to adjust to the button layout, as it's subtly different. The advantage is that you can hit all three attack buttons with ease for a power-up. Weapon Master mode can get frustrating, especially on the second time through, but it's definitely something to do while your buds are working or hanging with their girlfriends (losers!). Still, multiplayer is where Soul Calibur II's best experiences lie. The guard break moves really bring defense up to the forefront of strategy. I just wish the new characters were a little more compelling. This is easily the best GameCube fighter so far this year.

JUSTIN – 8.5

In Weapon Master mode, you'll work your way through a series of circumstance-based matches



Some matches have you playing as Lizardman

By completing these bouts, you'll earn cash that can be used to purchase new weapons, outfits, and art galleries

STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** NAMCO ■ **DEVELOPER** NAMCO ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26

SWM seeks companion to frolic in the woods and catch butterflies with. Will only accept entries from princesses

"The Black Knight always triumphs! Have at you! Come on then. 'Tis just a scratch. It's just a flesh wound. Come on, you pansy!"

P.N.03™
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P.N.03

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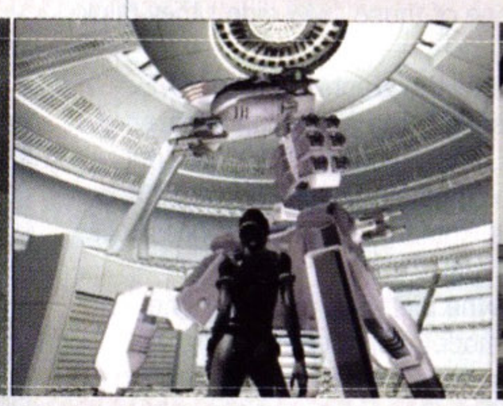
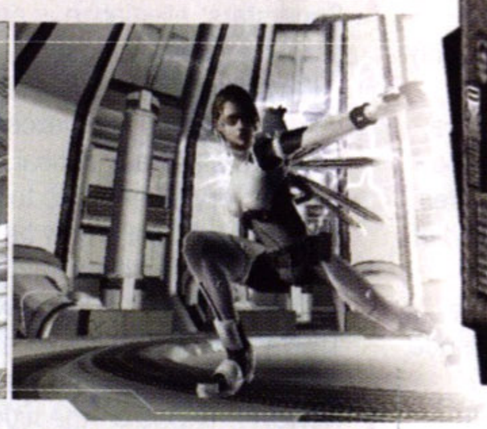
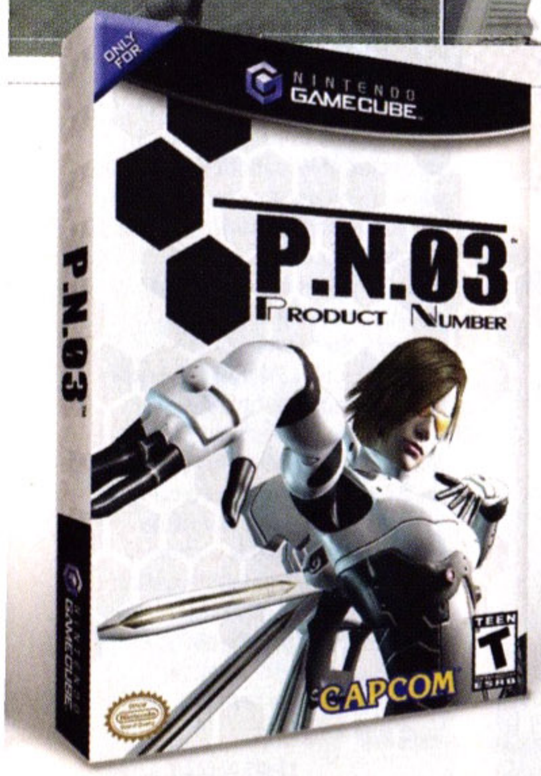
demolish robots, machines, mega weapons and transforming enemies with your bare hands





master stylish moves and powerful attacks for enhanced choreographed gameplay



NINTENDO GAMECUBE™

CAPCOM
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BRADYGAMES Strategy Guide AVAILABLE

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

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GAMECUBE

WRESTLEMANIA XIX

THE 'MANIA SERIES TURNS FACE

"WrestleMania XIX has all the pieces in place but one."

The first GameCube WWE game, WrestleMania X8, was as memorable as a fart in your sleep. It played like SmackDown, it looked okay, but there were no replay-inducing modes. THQ has obviously put in more time and effort into WrestleMania XIX, which shares little with its precursor.

This engine is slammin'. If anyone remembers No Mercy as the best wrestling game released in the U.S., gimme a "hell yeah!" WM 19 resembles, but plays even better. We're talking strong and weak grapples, and a wealth of moves for a wealth of situations. Get on the apron and sunset flip into the ring. Do a suicide dive to an opponent on the outside. Counters and blocking are cleverly implemented, as are special moves. Take that, SmackDown!

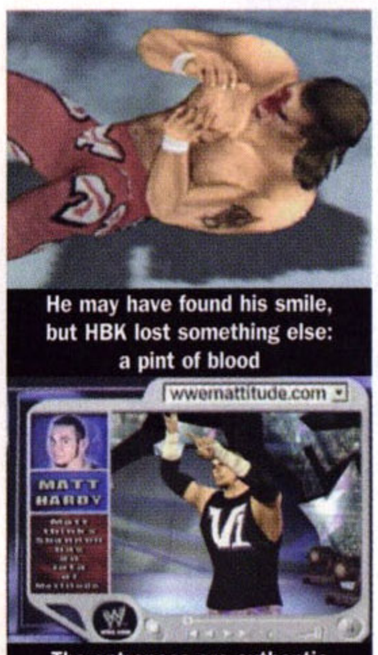
The thing I think I like the most about 'Mania's gameplay is being able to strong grapple someone, knock them around with a few strikes, then transition into a big move. Also, the animations for injuries are pretty cool. Work the arm, and they'll eventually hold it. Unfortunately, it's often the wrong appendage that they're favoring (right instead of left), but it's a step in the right direction.

I wish I could say the modes are just as stellar as the gameplay, but that would be an outright lie. Revenge mode tries something new with wrestling games, which I can respect, but the end result isn't something people will like to play. Most of its missions consist of beating up a multitude of generic assailants. Also, switching targets is painstakingly difficult, and some goals are just too frustrating and imprecise to endure. For example, I had to knock out five security guards. Sounds easy, right? No way. It took a dozen times, with Brock freakin' Lesnar, to do it – using the same method that was unsuccessful the other times. Go figure.

With Revenge a bust, there isn't much for loners to do aside from winning some tournaments and having a few gimmick matches. Blood makes hardcore matches worth fighting. The Create-A-Wrestler mode is really comprehensive – both in appearance and moves – and you'll be working on your custom creations for hours on end. The logo editor is brilliant. Also, being able to change every Superstars' allegiance is one of those "why didn't they think of this sooner?" ideas.

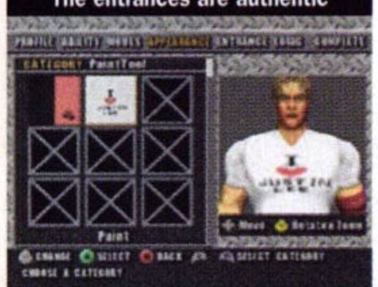
I'm constantly impressed by the graphics in the WWE games, and this is no exception. The animation is amazing. I'm generally pretty critical of how bumps (falls) look, but there's very little for me to complain about. The crowd and environments set a new benchmark and the entrances rock. Even better, loading is minimal.

WrestleMania XIX has all the pieces in place but one. The lack of a good career mode keeps it from being the first must-have wrestling game of this console generation. However, THQ is on the right track, and I eagerly await the next installment. – **JUSTIN**



He may have found his smile, but HBK lost something else: a pint of blood

The entrances are authentic

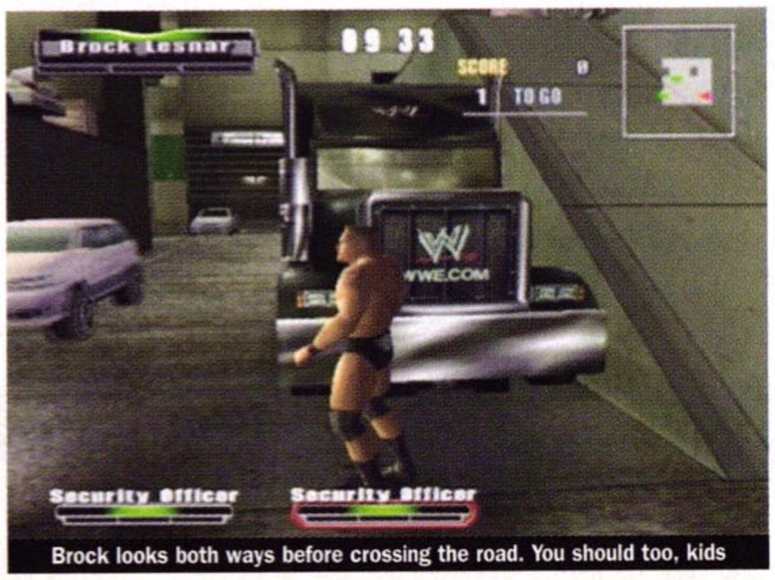


You can design your own logos for t-shirts and other apparel

Cena checks on his friend "little Eddie"

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ ■ **DEVELOPER** YUKE'S ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9

Size differences are well represented



Brock looks both ways before crossing the road. You should too, kids

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7.75

- **Concept:** Make a WWE game that GameCube owners will actually want to play
- **Graphics:** Impressive character models, animation, and crowds. What more could you ask for?
- **Sound:** All the authentic entrance songs. Even a few voices by select Superstars
- **Playability:** Yuke's has finally made an engine that overcomes AKI's N64 efforts
- **Entertainment:** WrestleMania's Achilles' Heel is the fact that its single-player mode blows
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

This game upset me to such a degree that I could hear blood vessels bursting within my brain like a bag of Orville Redenbacher's. THQ has once again let the wrestling community down with a horribly designed game that doesn't tap into the true potential of the WWE. In Revenge mode, which just happens to be the main attraction of WrestleMania XIX, you'll spend most of your time combating mall security guards, construction workers, and the occasional biker in chaps. Sweaty men in their undies... enemies that resemble the Village People...Shawn Michaels is in the game, but maybe it should have been George Michael, if you catch my drift. As if I need to say it, Revenge is nothing short of a complete waste of time. This is a shame, too, since the Create-A-Wrestler rocks and the gameplay is respectable (think No Mercy). It's great for multiplayer, but there's little else here that will hold your interest.

REINER – 6

"Somehow the whole thing feels a little half-baked (or is that soft-boiled? Over easy? You get my point)."

GAMECUBE

BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG

SCRAMBLING EGGS

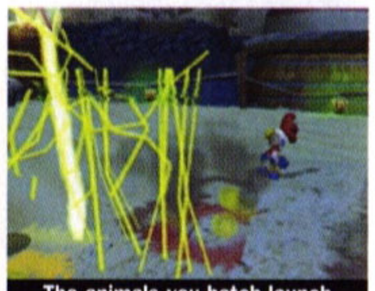
Back in the day, Yugi Naka was one of gaming's golden boys; his brilliant work on Sonic the Hedgehog and Nights had him poised to be the Japanese gaming scene's successor to Shigeru Miyamoto. Recently, though, Naka hasn't been able to adjust to the requirements of today's technologically advanced systems. After a few disappointing Sonic Adventure titles, Naka and his Sonic Team are now bringing forth a brand new franchise: Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg.

As you might expect, eggs feature prominently in Billy Hatcher's design. These little misshapen orbs are your constant companions throughout your travels. The core of this game revolves around maneuvering your egg over enemies, across jumps, and down long luge-like runs. It's definitely unique, although having to constantly tend to your egg can be annoying at times.

There are some interesting elements at play here. By "feeding" your egg (plowing over fruit on the ground); your little buddy will grow and eventually hatch extra lives, power-ups, and even animals that accompany you through the level. These companions have attacks you can launch with the X button, ranging from water splashes to fireballs to electrical storms. It's a shame that this aspect of the game wasn't expanded to emphasize a Pokémon-esque animal collection element. Even better, it would be cool if you could keep them throughout, swapping creatures in and out. As it stands, they're more like temporary weapons, and don't play a crucial role in completing the quest.

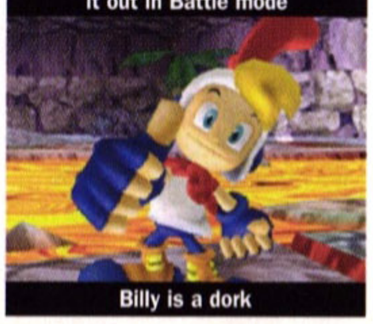
Somehow the whole thing feels a little half-baked (or is that soft-boiled? Over easy? You get my point). For example, in one section I met up with a large snake that could only be killed by placing a bomb in his mouth. I kept failing at my attempts to place the explosive in his mug, then discovered that I could just grab my egg and roll right on by him. Pointless, no? This same tedious design also applies to the uninspired boss battles – which mostly just consist of running around, dodging attacks, and hitting whatever giant monster with an egg when he comes to a standstill.

Also, there are some basic issues, especially the camerawork, that Sega still isn't getting right. You have to constantly babysit the camera, but it's even more frustrating because the rotation is so slow that it's hard to keep your sights on an enemy that's chasing you in circles (which figures heavily into the pro forma boss battles). This lack of attention to detail, coupled with a character and storyline that is so cliched I won't even waste your time by describing in this review; makes Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg an intriguing, unique, but somewhat forgettable GameCube title. – **MATT**



The animals you hatch launch some cool attacks

Up to four players can duel it out in Battle mode



Billy is a dork

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA ■ **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23

Riding eggs is fun, but difficult to control

The boss battles are very standard issue

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

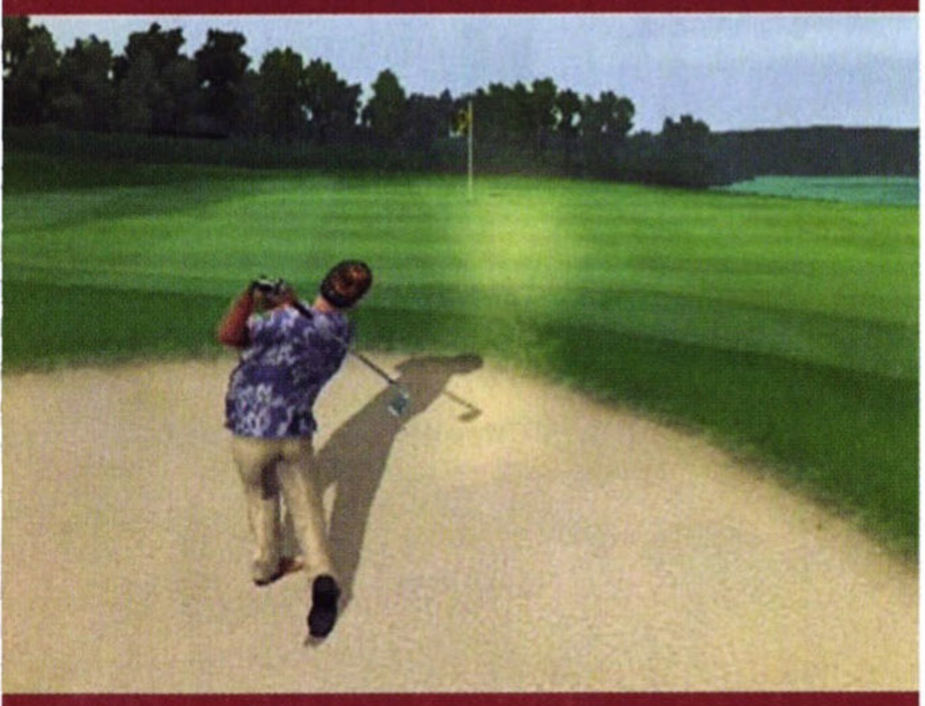
7

- **Concept:** An eggstraordinary platformer [bad pun alert!]
- **Graphics:** Colorful, crisp, and detailed; especially nice lava and water effects
- **Sound:** Imagine your ears being run over by an ice cream truck
- **Playability:** Hope you like rolling eggs!
- **Entertainment:** Enjoyable, but there's a much better game in here somewhere
- **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

SECOND OPINION

My gut told me that pushing an egg around for hours would start to be a pain. I don't like to depend on my gut when it comes to games, because you just can't have much of an idea before playing a final version – but my gut was so right. Disregarding how much Billy as a character gets on my nerves (it's hard to think that someone is capable of saving the world when they do a little pirouette after getting each item), I just can't fathom having to push those darn eggs around for one more second. I'm disappointed that this fairly original dynamic (the egg) isn't used more creatively. The moves at Billy's disposal have been seen a hundred times before, and none of them make up for the fact that you're babysitting an egg. The different varieties of eggs and what hatches from them is interesting – except that the little animals don't hang around for that long. I guess Billy just left me wanting more on every level.

LISA – 7



GAMECUBE

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

SHAG YOUR BALLS!

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE

9

You know that guy in your office – the one who's always ducking out for "lunch" and coming back three hours later with a tan and a sore arm? You'll be tempted to do the same with Tiger Woods, bacause it's a bona fide time-sucker.

I'll bet you think, "When I'm rich, I'm gonna spend all day golfing and blowing money!" Your dream has now come true. Spending cash in the Pro Shop is an awesome way to combine unlockables with character customization and upgrades. Throw in the sponsorships, and you'll be going up and down the greens all day like a strumpet in a golf cart. I love how you can earn money to buy stuff for your character in just about every area of the game. Don't call the Pro Shop a mode – it's in the entire title. Add to this the way EA keeps track of all your stats and trophies, and you've got an incredibly inviting experience.

Listen up, Nintendo. Toadstool Tour is solid, but it's a case of nothing ventured, nothing gained. EA Sports has gone out and given us more game than we ever dreamed of. Barring the fact that I'd love to have a real course creator (and it's two discs), Tiger's franchise and its analog swing is blazing a new path for video game links and putting it on a collision course with old favorite Hot Shots Golf. Who wins? Well, you know Tiger; when he gets on a roll, he can be unstoppable. – **KATO**

- **Concept:** This thing's so blown out, it's like adding a whole new game on top of last year
- **Graphics:** The facial features and swaying tree animations are pretty sweet
- **Sound:** Some of the commentary is old and repetitious. The jibes are cool, though
- **Playability:** Power shots are annoying – otherwise, analog is clearly becoming the way to go
- **Entertainment:** Tiger may be slumping in real life, but he's stronger than ever here
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Tiger Woods 2004 is to Mario Golf what a Dodge Viper is to a Civic. Don't get me wrong – I love Hondas. But if the price was the same and you didn't have to worry about speeding tickets, which would you pick? The only gameplay flaw here is assigning power shots to the sticky Z button. Tiger is the high chief mack daddy of video game golf. Ya better recognize!

JUSTIN – 9.25

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22

GAMECUBE *UNLIMITED ENABLED*

GLADIUS

RUSSELL CROWE IS A WIMP!

THE BOTTOM LINE

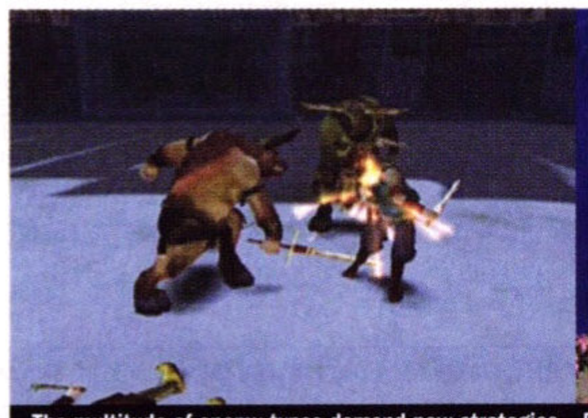
TEEN

9

Gone are the days when a strategy game is as boring as an insurance seminar. No longer should you get scared when someone asks you, "Do you like games about gladiators?" LucasArts has finally developed a top-notch game by itself. I'm not sure which of those statements will surprise you the most – because they're all whoppers. I've seen Gladius coming for some time now, and I thought this title wasn't going to be the type that was going to challenge my notions of the strategy genre, deliver amazing replayability, and charm the socks off of me with its combat. Thankfully, I stand corrected, and here's why.

The depth within the battles simply keeps you coming back for more. I love the real-time hit system. Its exacting timing and damage balance system are truly rewarding. It also grows as your characters do, and is customized for each attack and combatant. However, there is equal challenge in what happens before any sword falls. How your prepare for battles is just as crucial. Unit placement, movement on the map (including dealing with terrain), and knowing your enemies' (and your own) classes and Affinities keep you happily busy.

Finally, LucasArts had the foresight to surround the game's finely tuned combat with engaging story interludes, sidequests, and more content than you can imagine. Gladius is the convergence of a lot of successful elements working in tandem. Don't miss the opportunity to experience it. – **KATO**



The multitude of enemy types demand new strategies

Positioning your people right can confer a huge advantage

Movement is a huge part of the game

Executing multiple combo shots is a thrilling maneuver

- **Concept:** Deliver an inspired strategy title that makes you pump your fist as much as it does think
- **Graphics:** Despite the eye-catching gore, I thought the magic animations were pedestrian
- **Sound:** While the music is inviting, the speech in battles is gratingly repetitive
- **Playability:** Enough depth to keep players of any skill level entranced. Real-time combos rock
- **Entertainment:** I couldn't turn this thing off – and I'm not a huge strategy guy
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

LucasArts has crafted an immensely satisfying quest that fully taps into a unique concept, exploits every facet of turn-based strategy, and hammers home the importance of difficulty balancing. Most games of this caliber have a tendency to be dry and repetitive, but LucasArts has gone out of its way to keep gamers plugged into the action and wondering what could possibly come next. Allowing players to physically take part in combat is where this game excels the most. You can't just be tactically savvy; you also have to be skillful in executing timed button sequences. Relying on just one strategy won't work either, as each fight brings something different to the table. If you desire a game that tests you on every level, Gladius will prove to be an irresistible play through. It's the invigorating new spin that the strategy genre has so desperately needed.

REINER – 9

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

GAMECUBE

DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE

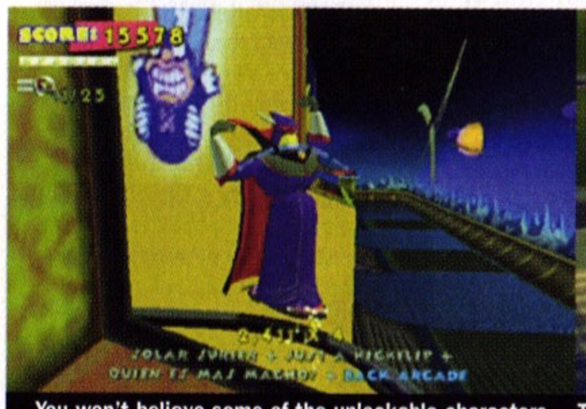
PIGS FLY

I'll admit it: *Finding Nemo* was probably my favorite movie of the summer, and now comes along Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure. Yes, it's just Tony Hawk with cuddly creatures; but don't let the Disney theme scare you off. This is actually one of the better games of this ilk I've played in quite some time.

Using Neversoft's engine, developer Toys For Bob has constructed a phenomenal kids game. Now, I don't mean "kids game" in the usual way we reviewers usually misuse the term (i.e. simplistic and boring). This, my friends is the way it should be done.

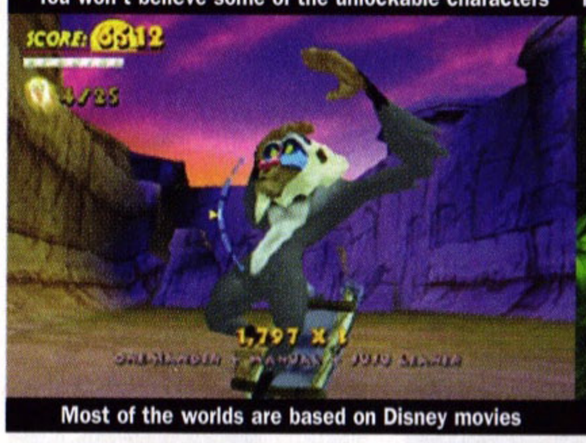
Everything you love about Tony Hawk is here: an extensive character create mode, huge levels filled with awesome grinding lines and hidden areas, creative gameplay, and challenging objectives. Extreme Skate essentially mimic's Tony's control scheme as well, although a few things have been simplified a bit (especially ground tricks) to accommodate the younger audience. However, this is partly due to the fact that the game places more emphasis on the exploration than forcing players to hit ambitious scoring goals.

The graphics, from the levels based on movies like *Toy Story* and *The Lion King* to the beautifully animated, over-the-top unique move sets for each character, make this a gorgeous game to watch. It's also cool that there are certain goals that can only be accomplished by certain characters. If, like Whitney says, the children are the future, we need to start making more kids titles like Disney's Skate Adventure or face the wrath of a bitter younger generation. – **MATT**

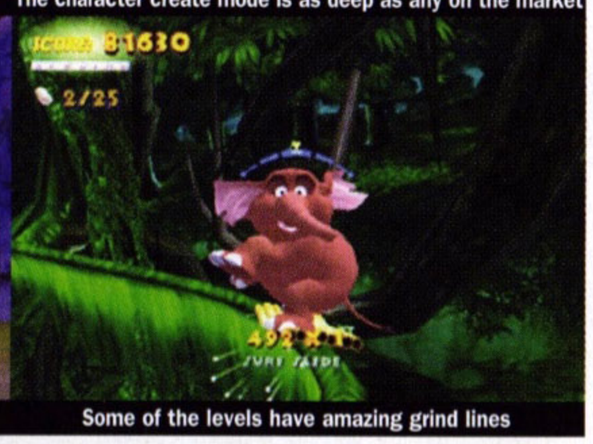


You won't believe some of the unlockable characters

The character create mode is as deep as any on the market



Most of the worlds are based on Disney movies



Some of the levels have amazing grind lines

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION/DISNEY INTERACTIVE
■ **DEVELOPER** TOYS FOR BOB/NEVERSOFT ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8

- **Concept:** A cartoon skating game featuring some major Disney stars and the vaunted Tony Hawk 4 engine
- **Graphics:** Very impressive, with nice animations
- **Sound:** A selection of kiddified Radio Disney fair
- **Playability:** A slightly simplified, but very accurate translation of its big brother's gameplay
- **Entertainment:** Let your friend point and laugh; this is a good little game
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

The oddly named development house, Toys For Bob, has done a phenomenal job of toning down the skill-intensive gameplay of Tony Hawk for a younger audience. In such, the challenges are not nearly as taxing and the controls are easier to manipulate. Ingeniously, if a player sticks with the game long enough, they can graduate to the original control schematic and tear it up just like the pros do in the Tony Hawk titles. I just wish Activision would have done more with the Disney license. Unlike Kingdom Hearts, which features cameos from almost every Disney character imaginable, all of the content in Extreme Skate Adventure is based on a measly three films (*Tarzan*, *Toy Story*, and *The Lion King*). For some reason, having a licensed soundtrack just doesn't seem to fit the content, either. All gripes aside, this really is one of the best kids games available and is a great way to jumpstart the next generation of gamers.

REINER – 7

REVIEWS

GAMECUBE

AQUAMAN: BATTLE FOR ATLANTIS

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** TDK MEDIACTIVE
■ **RELEASE** JULY 31

First of all, I'd like to give Aquaman props for not being the worst game of all time – so it is better than expected. As you can probably imagine, the concept of an underwater fighting game didn't exactly work out as planned. Call me crazy, but punching an enemy while doing the doggy paddle doesn't exactly generate a whole lot of excitement. Admittedly, though, it's next to impossible to do this comic book justice. Talking to fish and playing "hide the sardine" with Lagoon Boy and Aqualad probably wouldn't go over too well with gamers. When it comes to the digital world, Aquaman isn't the king of the sea. He's a turd in a pool. – **REINER**

TEEN — **2**

GAMECUBE

NHL HITZ PRO

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22

Of all of Midway's arcade sports titles, Hitz needed the least amount of help. Its franchise mode has been steadily improving, and the fast-paced gameplay is a perfect fit for hockey. That's why it's such a shame that Midway fixed things that weren't broken and made the game less enjoyable for me. The new moves are great; fighting is tolerable; and being able to knock down the goalie is a blast. However, the speed is greatly decreased (despite sliders) due to a rink that's too big and players that are too small. It's still a great game, but I'm a little bummed at the unnecessary changes. – **JUSTIN**

TEEN — **8**

GAMECUBE

NHL 2004

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22

Dense with managerial options and overflowing with new gameplay features, NHL 2004 is a complete turnaround from last season's disastrous release and is this year's must-have hockey title. Scrums now break out along the boards; goalies can be coaxed into fighting; and players have complete control over throwing checks. In the front office, you'll have to keep an eye on everything, right down to upgrading training gear and setting ticket prices. It really seems as though this game has everything that you could ever want. It'll be interesting to see where EA goes with it next year. – **REINER**

EVERYONE — **9**

XBOX

SOUL CALIBUR II

STUNNING, BUT NOT SHOWSTOPPING

"I think I may have expected too much from this game, as it really isn't the Second Coming that I was waiting for."

I have been anxiously awaiting the U.S. release of this title. So much so that I purposely avoided the import and preview versions just so that I would be completely untarnished the day the review copies came in. Unfortunately, I think I may have expected too much from this game, as it really isn't the Second Coming that I was waiting for.

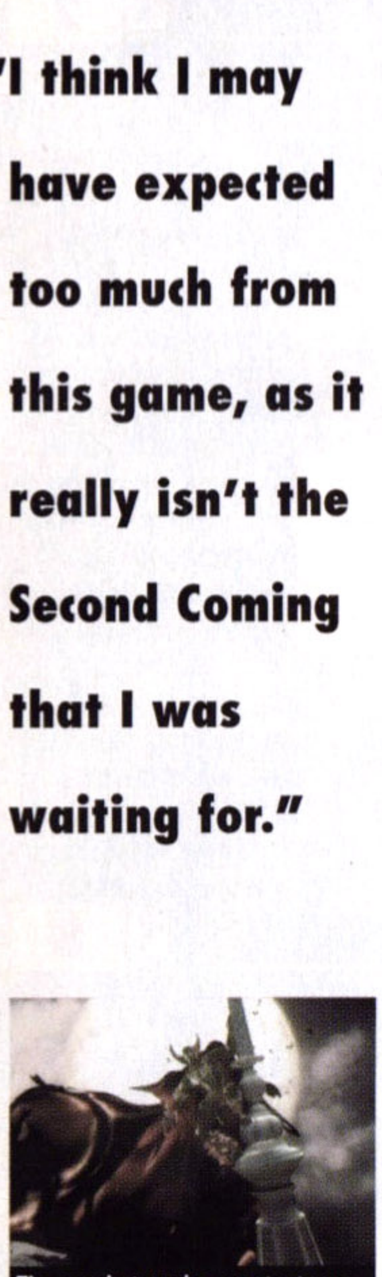
Now don't get me wrong, Soul Calibur II is an outstanding fighter with plenty of depth and some absolutely breath-taking graphics. This is especially true for you lucky Xbox owners who play on a HDTV, as the game in 720p is simply drool-inducing. But there are a number of areas in this title that annoy.

So many in fact, I really don't know where to begin. For example, the game starts off with this amazing opening movie, but when you beat Arcade mode, you get three still images and some stupid (yet endearing) text. Or how about the fact that while there are a ton of new faces in the line-up, many of them have move sets from previous players.

Next, Weapons Master mode, in my opinion, is just plain stupid. Now before you Soul Calibur fans throw the magazine in disgust, listen to my reasoning. This mode encourages cheese. And I don't mean a slice of cheddar. I'm talking a flood of Muenster.

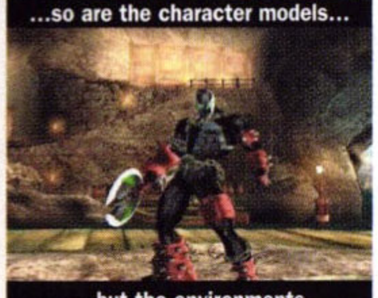
To get past most of the challenges, repeating the same deadly move or simple button press over and over isn't just sufficient, it is encouraged. There simply isn't enough time or health to pass the requirements in any other way. Where is the challenge in that? I want the single player or quest modes in a fighting game to make me a better warrior, not one that requires me to pull off cheese move after cheese move. Plus, the variety in this mode is severely lacking. In one of the dungeon sequences, I fought 17 versions of the same guy in succession. Yippee.

Now I realize that most of this review has been rather negative, but I think all the criticism is deserved. That said, Soul Calibur II is still an immensely entertaining fighting game...in multiplayer. So if you buy this title and plan to spend lots of time beating the tar out of your buddies, you will get your money's worth. If not, you might want to rent this game for a night and see if there is enough to keep you interested, as you can blow through most of the single-player content in a good long day of play. – **ANDY**



The opening movies are gorgeous...

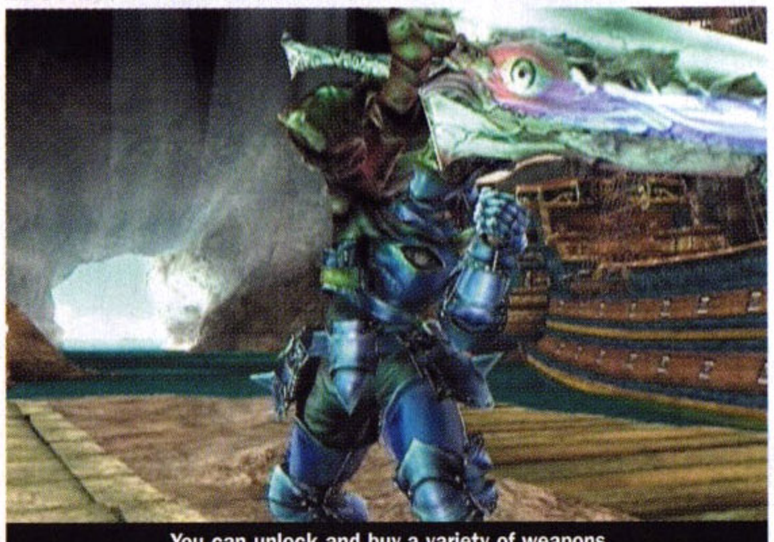
...so are the character models...



...but the environments could use some work

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** NAMCO ■ **DEVELOPER** NAMCO ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26

All the animation and particle effects in the game are impressive



You can unlock and buy a variety of weapons for each character in Weapons Master mode

THE BOTTOM LINE

ESRB: TEEN

8.5

- **Concept:** Update the game enough to get by, but don't reinvent the wheel
- **Graphics:** It looks fantastic on a standard TV and even better in 720p on an HDTV
- **Sound:** Great production all around, but the tunes themselves aren't exactly my style
- **Playability:** Solid control and plenty of depth gives combatants lots to explore
- **Entertainment:** The one-player game is nothing special, but multiplayer is a blast
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

You'll definitely get your bling-bling with the Xbox version of Soul Calibur II. Stacked up against the PlayStation 2 and GameCube counterparts, this incarnation features quicker loading times, superior resolution capabilities (720p), and controls perfectly on both the analog and d-pad. The inclusion of Spawn as an exclusive playable character for this version is definitely cool, and he does seem to fit into the roster fairly well. But let's face some facts here, people: It's insulting to say his name in the same breath as The Legend of Zelda's Link – who just happens to be the new character in the GC version. In this regard, the Xbox game comes up a little short. If you're a graphics snob, you'll drool buckets over how gorgeous this game looks on the 'box. When it comes to all around enjoyment, however, the GC version is the better buy.

REINER – 8.5

XBOX

OTOGI: MYTH OF DEMONS

ALL MADE UP WITH NOWHERE TO GO

"...this is another lack-luster title that attempts to coast on the company's storied arcade history."

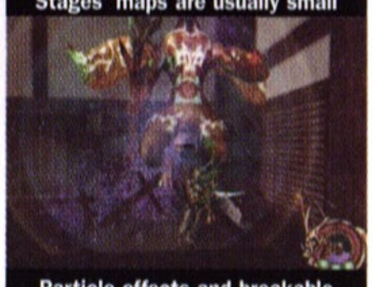
Otogi's developer is From Software. For those of you not familiar with this Japanese company, it's the one behind titles like Armored Core and Evergrace. From's imprint is all over Otogi as well, but with less than stellar results. Like the aforementioned titles, this game sticks close to the developer's slow, steady, "no surprises" approach. Armored Core – mission after mission of mech fighting and upgrades. Evergrace? No-frills real-time combat with a smattering of RPG customizations for your character. Otogi proceeds along an equally predictable route, only this time in the action genre.

This game has other sources of inspiration: it's very straightforward mantra is reminiscent of Sega's Shinobi. As much as I respect the publisher, this is another lackluster title that attempts to coast on the company's storied arcade history. While having 30 stages sounds like a bonanza of lowering the boom, Otogi's simplistic combos wear you out rather quickly. That's not to say that you can sail through the game, as you will encounter some tough cookies. Furthermore, there is some variance in the objectives of the missions. However, by not offering the player an engaging combat system as a foundation, the game tastes a little like spaghetti without the sauce. Magic and weapon upgrades are available, but require an almost mandatory visit to previous stages in order to rustle up enough cash to get them – but you may choose to fall on your sword before going through such an ordeal again.

Although some may think that Onimusha is an inspiration here, I regret that From Software didn't draw more influence from that classic. Japanese folklore is the backdrop, yes, but I miss Capcom's deft way of engaging the player in the story – even if it is a little corny. Capcom may be predictable, but it does have a knack for overcoming the confines of genre and expectation, which this Sega title does not do.

One thing that you absolutely cannot criticize Otogi for is its graphics. Xbox owners expect the world out of their console in this department, and they are going to get that and more. Shining, gilded palaces of gold; spooky water-drenched levels lit only by an eerie moon; and enemies complete with amazing levels of detail await. These examples are made even more breathtaking due to breakable objects in the environments and the sheer speed of combat. You'll be in the middle of a flurry of combos, and will have to keep yourself from pausing to admire the flashy effects. It's just unfortunate that Otogi has come this far with its visuals only to be undermined by that subtle but oh-so-important aspect of vids known as gameplay. – **KATO**

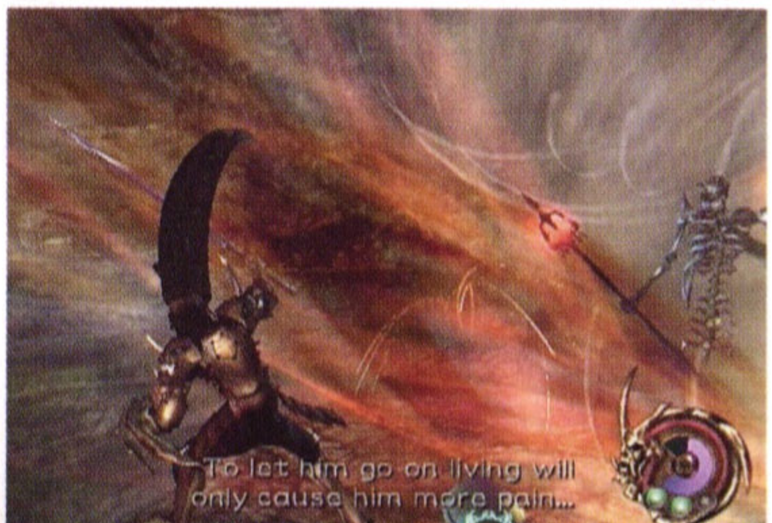
Stages' maps are usually small



Particle effects and breakable objects abound

You can't process the action fast enough

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA ■ **DEVELOPER** FROM SOFTWARE ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26



Hairspray versus tornado-like wind, which will win?

Watching this game is more fun than playing it

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

6.75

- **Concept:** It's like a segment of Conan O'Brien's "If They Mated" featuring Shinobi and Onimusha
- **Graphics:** Simply superb. The game's speed sacrifices none of the glitz
- **Sound:** Otogi's sounds are an intriguing blend of traditional Japanese instruments and electronic sounds
- **Playability:** Even with new weapons and trickier foes, the learning curve for the combat peaks in the first five minutes
- **Entertainment:** This is an experience that gets tapped out pretty quickly. Multiplayer would have helped a little
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Otogi: Myth of Demons has some interesting pros and cons to it. Graphics, obviously, go into the plus column and will be the major draw for most gamers. Particle effects, destructible terrain, detailed enemies, and beautiful animations are all well-executed features in this From Software release. While the company bills its title as an action/role-playing game, I think that both areas need to be fleshed out a lot. Otogi's move set doesn't increase dramatically as you progress through the impressive number of levels, and it's quite a stretch to call it an RPG of any sort. Character evolution revolves entirely around buying new weapons, spells, and accessories; and an extremely nebulous leveling-up system. While the combat animations are smooth and enormously entertaining to look at, the fighting system is fairly one-dimensional, but intriguing enough to keep most going from level to level.

LISA 7.5

XBOX

SIMPSONS HIT & RUN

GRAND THEFT OTTO?

"It's nice to see Springfield get the respect it deserves."

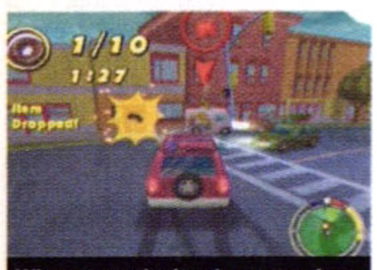
Simpsons Road Rage, which released around Christmas 2001 on all platforms, was a great way to show off Springfield in all its glory. It was essentially a Crazy Taxi clone in the Simpsons universe. This time, the powers that be picked a better game to mimic, in the form of Grand Theft Auto. The results are nothing short of astonishing. It's nice to see Springfield get the respect it deserves.

Like its ultra-violent mentor, Hit & Run has large environments in which to explore using a free-form style. Springfield is broken up into several levels, each with its own main character. They usually introduce new areas, though some are recycled with different themes – Homer traverses the suburbs during the day, while Marge does it in the evening. Much of the gameplay revolves around vehicles. You will amass a collection that can be called upon at any time, such as Mr. Plow, Malibu Stacey's convertible, and Otto's school bus. However, you can also "get a lift" from any of the other rides you come across. Vehicles have their own attributes, which come into play depending on your tasks. You obviously don't want to race in the donut truck or be forced to use the Honor Roller when you have to destroy a runaway limo. The vehicular missions don't deviate much from these examples, but they're only a piece of the pie. Mmmm...pie.

Springfield is just as easily explored on foot. Like GTA, searching for hidden goodies is highly encouraged. Each level has a set number of security wasps to destroy, trivia-laden collector cards to grab, and clever gags to activate (Moe's Love Tester, Jasper in the Kwik-E-Mart freezer, Kamp Krusty's flagpole, etc.). Not everything you see can be trod upon, but the ability to go inside buildings makes up for this. Platforming is sporadic, and is slightly hindered by a touchy camera.

For Simpsons fans like myself, there are bountiful references to the show – not only in the form of locales, but also tons of audio snippets and unlockable costumes. However, unlike Simpsons Road Rage, a deep appreciation for Springfield's brand of Americana isn't vital to the enjoyment of this game. The mechanics themselves are enough to keep just about anyone enthralled, regardless of whether or not they can spout Ralph Wiggum lines till the three-eyed fish swims home.

I do notice a minor lack of refinement, as some bugs are evident and lip-synching wasn't even attempted. More creativity in missions would've been appreciated, though the game's lack of violence limits the possibilities. Regardless, publishers and developers should take note: THIS is how you do a licensed game. Hit & Run is likely the best game released with Vivendi Universal, Radical Entertainment, or The Simpsons plastered on its cover. It's not perfect, but neither is Homer, and that's why we love him. – **JUSTIN**



Wiggum needs donuts, so you have to bump the donut van to make them fall off

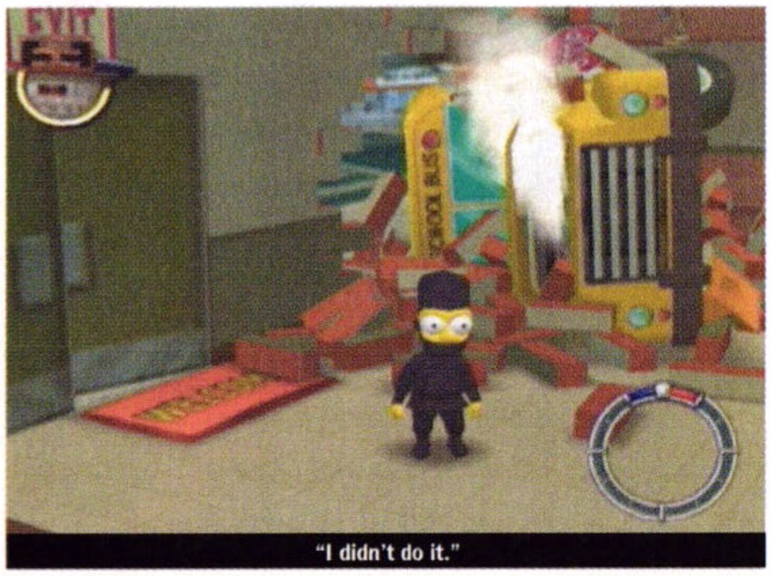
You can go just about anywhere

"Truckasaurus!!!"

Each level has a few points where you can buy new costumes – some are necessary to missions

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL/FOX INTERACTIVE ■ **DEVELOPER** RADICAL
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

Marge upgrades to the Lard Lad



"I didn't do it."

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

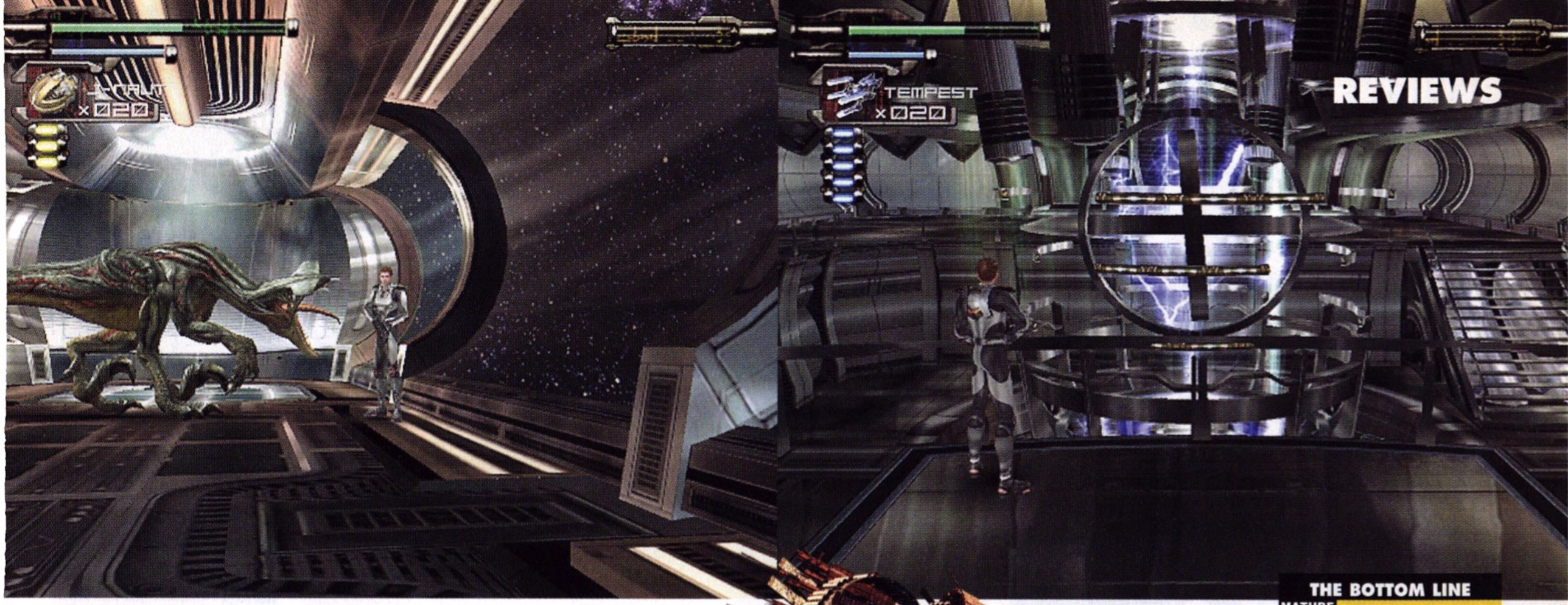
8.5

- **Concept:** Mission-based driving, streaming environments, and Homer in a muumuu
- **Graphics:** Some things look odd in 3D (Lisa's hair), but everything else is faithfully recreated from the show
- **Sound:** An insane amount of speech, both new and recycled. Some of the music is annoying
- **Playability:** The driving engine is darn good. On foot, things are slightly more problematic
- **Entertainment:** Fans of the show will adore it, but there's more than enough to appease any gamer
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

For the geek in me, Hit & Run delivers everything I could want and more. This is by far the most ambitious recreation of the Simpsons universe ever attempted. Much like Vice City, this digital Springfield is fully rendered and waiting to be explored. The unlockables are also plentiful, ranging from costumes like Homer's muumuu and Lisa's "Floreda" outfit to vehicles like the Honor Roller and Mr. Plow. It's really amazing to behold; the gang was even drinking Flaming Moes when I stopped by the bar. Sadly, the gameplay and mission structure are not nearly as deep as the presentation, incorporating a mix of point-to-point races, tailing and destruction missions, and some brief and simplistic out-of-the-car sequences. Is it a solid game? Yes, but the repetitive nature of the design grows old after a few hours. Did I enjoy myself? Hell, yes; but that's more due to the wealth of Simpsons minutia than the gameplay.

MATT – 7.75



XBOX

DINO CRISIS 3

BAD DINO, BAD

"...this game plays like a blind, drunken monkey has been given full control of the camera."

I want to like this game. I want to look back on my time with it fondly, a sepia-toned memory of good times blasting mutated carnivores into zero-G oblivion. I can't do this, and it makes me very, very sad. For crap's sake, I can't even run down a corridor in Dino Crisis 3 with any semblance of accuracy.

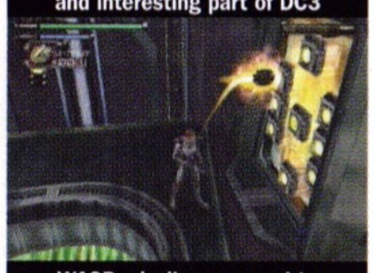
Followers of this Capcom series will want a few questions answered right away: no, Regina isn't in this one; yes, an ubiquitous t-rex or two will show up; indeed, the dinosaurs splash blood around with abandon; and yes, the story is still wafer-thin. Uninitiated Dino Crisis newbies will want to know something else: Is it fun and worth my $50? Sadly, I must answer in the negative to that question.

Although the list of problems I have with this game is longer than the "begets" at the beginning of the Bible, the most grievous issue is the camera. Like earlier DC games and their Resident Evil cousins, this title features a stationary camera. As a die-hard fan of Resident Evil, this doesn't usually bother me; but this game plays like a blind, drunken monkey has been given full control of the camera. On a scarily consistent basis, the angles will switch mid-jump. I'm not talking about walking through a room and randomly firing up the jetpack for the heck of it, I'm referring to places where you have to leap from one platform to another, for example. They know that you're going to jump right there, and still insist on changing the camera at the least opportune time. I would consider both Jeremy and I fairly adept gamers; but on more than a few occasions, a handful of attempts would be required to successfully walk straight across a room.

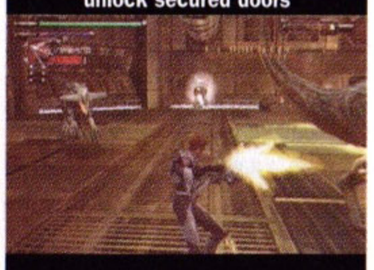
Other things started to grate my nerves like a "Mariah Carey Sings Lawrence Welk Classics In The Park" benefit concert. The map system explains absolutely nothing and is slower than a 1970s Winnebago going uphill. The number of enemy types can safely be described as meager, and you'll only catch a glimpse of them if the camera gods are smiling in your favor. Honestly, you can get through most of the game just cruising on your jetpack and letting the auto-aim do its work.

Thankfully, DC 3 does have two very strong points going for it. The characters, enemies (when you see them), and environments look better than anything in recent memory. Every surface is reflective and there isn't a jaggie to be found. In addition, the cutscenes are excellent and follow Capcom's latest trend of utilizing more Hollywood cinema tricks. However, these attributes, although well executed, can't save the beast from itself. – **LISA**

Oz (the ship) is the most beautiful and interesting part of DC3

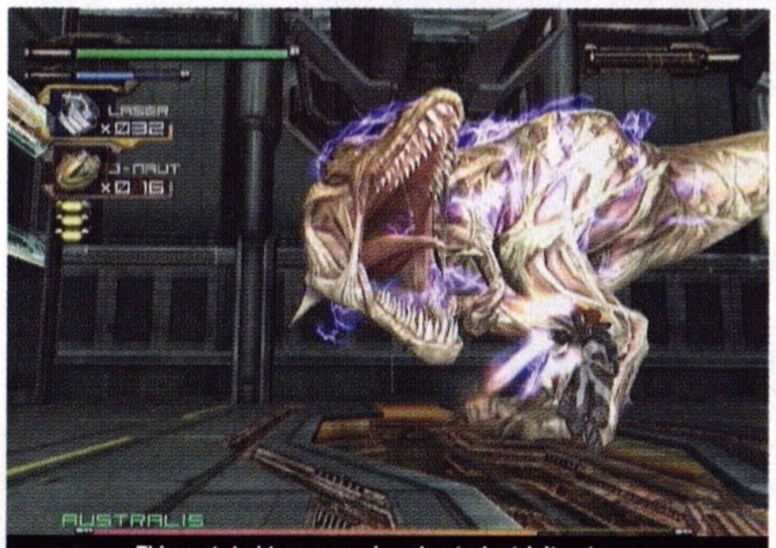


WASP missiles are used to unlock secured doors



There are woefully few enemy types

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **■ PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **■ DEVELOPER** CAPCOM **■ RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16



This mutated t-rex can also shoot electricity at you

Camera angles are almost always a problem in battle

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

6.25

- **Concept:** Revive the stagnating Dino Crisis franchise by bringing in space marines and a super-smart ship
- **Graphics:** Beautiful rooms with a ridiculous number of reflective surfaces
- **Sound:** The ship's noises aren't successful at heightening the tension and the soundtrack starts to get annoying
- **Playability:** It hurts when things are this awful. It really hurts me
- **Entertainment:** Devoid of suspense, variety, or any other redeeming entertainment value
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

Considering how biased I am towards anything with dinosaurs in it, I should have enjoyed Dino Crisis 3 far more than I did. I absolutely love the idea of fighting mutant dinosaurs in space (are you listening, Steven Spielberg?): but the cool core idea is not enough to overcome its shortcomings, and there are a lot. There are only a handful of different creatures to fight, combat is repetitive, and your biggest enemy is the atrocious camera. Coping with the awful camera angles is actually the most challenging aspect of the title, which causes me to wonder if they were designed to increase the difficulty of an otherwise easy game. To its credit, the graphics are great; backgrounds are highly detailed and character animations are incredibly fluid. Despite the great visuals, Dino Crisis 3 is still more *Carnosaur* than *Jurassic Park*.

JEREMY – 6.25

XBOX

STARSKY & HUTCH

NOT SO GROOVY

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB **5.75**

I admit, I've never seen the Starsky & Hutch TV show, and based on this mediocre game, I probably never will. I doubt it had the retro-looking cel-shaded cutscenes, which were just about the only decent thing in this game. Okay, the concept is kind of cool: In each episode, you chase villains to earn or lose viewer ratings. The crazier the action, the more people tune in. It's a nice twist on a driving game, but no one in their right mind would watch this show. Two dorks driving around in an incredibly ugly and generic city chasing bad guys with laughable AI doesn't qualify as good entertainment. Both cars and pedestrians are blocky and lacking detail, and the same voiceovers repeat so often you'll feel like there's an echo.

If you get tired of playing the episodes, you can check out the free roam mode in which you search areas of the city for police badges before time runs out. Here's the best part: What do you do when you've collected all the badges? Wait out the clock. What fun. You can play either mode with a second player as well, using a steering wheel and a light gun; but if you value your friendships, keep this game far away from everyone you know. – **JEREMY**

- **Concept:** Imagine Crazy Taxi, only starring a TV cop duo you're probably not old enough to remember
- **Graphics:** These might just be the least detailed cars to ever appear on the Xbox
- **Sound:** The guy who starred as Huggy Bear did his own voice! He probably needs the work
- **Playability:** You have your choice of two cramp-inducing control schemes
- **Entertainment:** If you must make games based on 70's TV shows, I'd take a "Three's Company" game over this
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

It's a quirky little game, especially if you're one of the five people on Earth who owns both an Xbox gun controller and a driving wheel. Whether you play with that wacky set-up or not, Starsky & Hutch isn't really interesting enough or suitably polished to keep your interest for long.

MATT – 6.25

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** GOTHAM GAMES ■ **DEVELOPER** MIND'S EYE PRODUCTIONS ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 3

XBOX

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

LIKE THE FRIES, BUT AGAINST COMMUNISM NOT THE FRENCH

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB **8**

On one level, Freedom Fighters is pure genius. This is one of the few games that can make the player feel part of an engagement. There is a bigger picture. You go from rag-tag citizen to a major force in the liberation of an America that has been conquered by Communism. And the battles represent that.

You, and in time, up to 12 other Freedom Fighters, clear Soviet strongholds, blow bridges, and cause general disarray in their new world order. Shouting out commands to the soldiers under your rule is easy, and adds to the overall suspension of disbelief. This is actually heightened once you start unloading lead, since the environments come alive with exploding vehicles and the chaos that comes from large-scale soldier-to-soldier confrontations.

But for all the great things Freedom Fighters does to create an immersive experience, it constantly comes crashing down because the player and camera controls are poor. It really burns my flag when I realize all the good is wasted by the use of the third-person perspective. It simply hinders the experience. And for what? To look at the average models the developer has created for this title? Or perhaps it's to make sure I don't miss the overuse of the same boxes and textures throughout the entire level, or keep my mind off the constant polygonal tearing you can see throughout the levels?

Either way, Freedom Fighters is a perfect example of why third-person games shouldn't be made-over first-person titles. If this game was an FPS, I would absolutely adore it. As it stands, it's just a fun gun marred by bad controls. – **ANDY**

At the end of each level, you must hoist the flag of freedom

Sometimes it's better to run and fight another day

You're not just a sniper...you're a freedom sniper

Don't know what it is, but exploding vehicles is always a good time

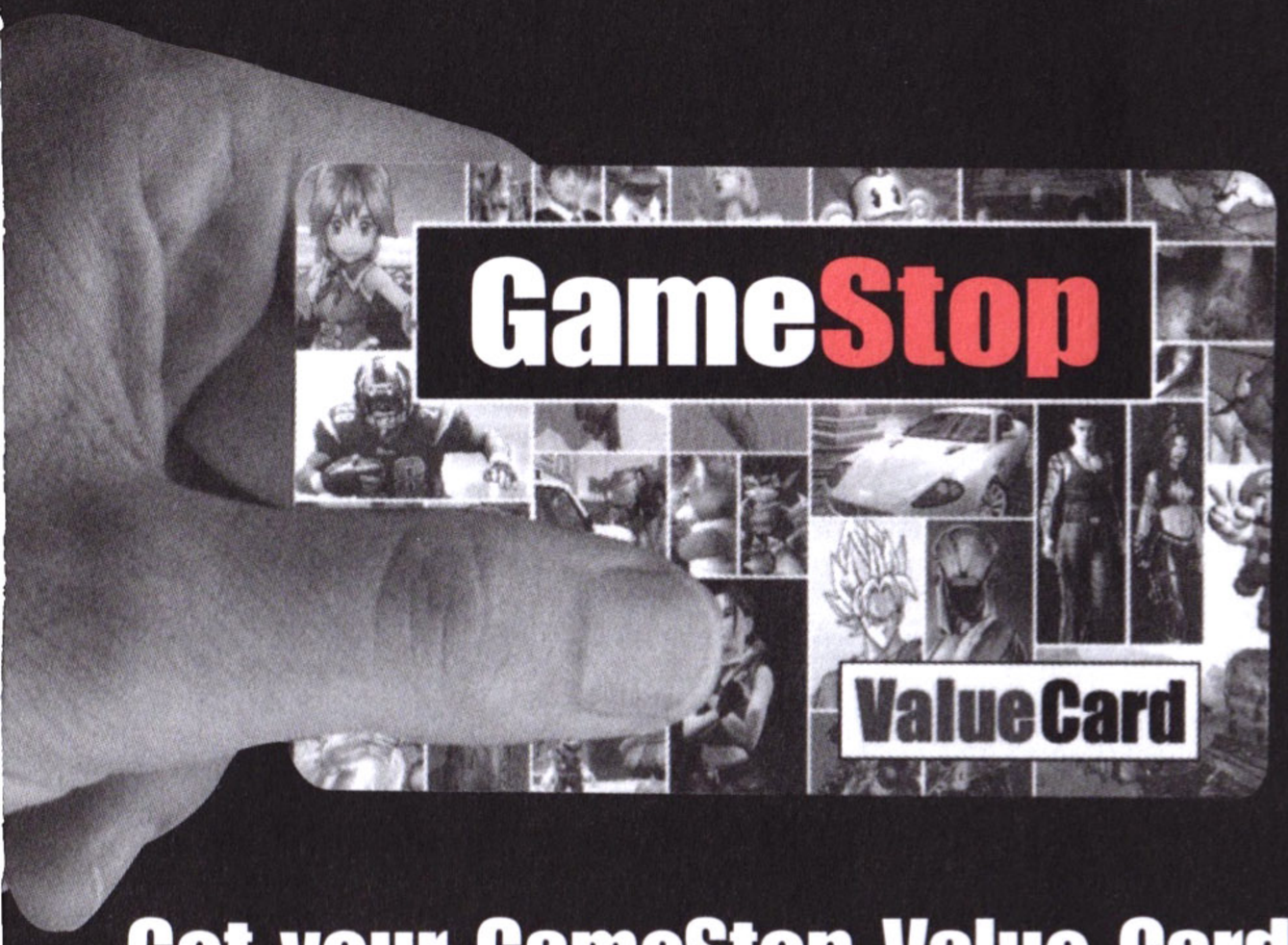
- **Concept:** America good, communism bad
- **Graphics:** Pretty average, but you can tell this game was designed for multiple platforms, as it doesn't take advantage of the Xbox's power
- **Sound:** Good voice acting and tunes
- **Playability:** Typical third-person control problems that frustrate, but are acceptable
- **Entertainment:** The game is engaging, but the cumbersome controls detract from the overall experience
- **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

SECOND OPINION

Everything about this title screams epic. Everything except the gameplay. The scale of the battles and graphical realism attributed to every inch of the environments is very impressive. From crowded city streets with crumbling buildings to dozens of enemies onscreen at once, the game successfully delivers the sensation that you're but a pawn in a war that you have no control over. You really don't stand a chance if you run and gun solo. You'll have the ability to give commands to up to 12 teammates at any given time. This aspect works pretty well. The NPC AI is decent, and sending out your troops can be done with but a click of a button. Controlling your character isn't as easy. With an appalling targeting system, combat becomes a terribly frustrating affair and running and gunning is next to impossible. Once again, here's a game that focuses on graphics over gameplay and ends up being mediocre.

REINER – 7.5

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** I/O INTERACTIVE ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16



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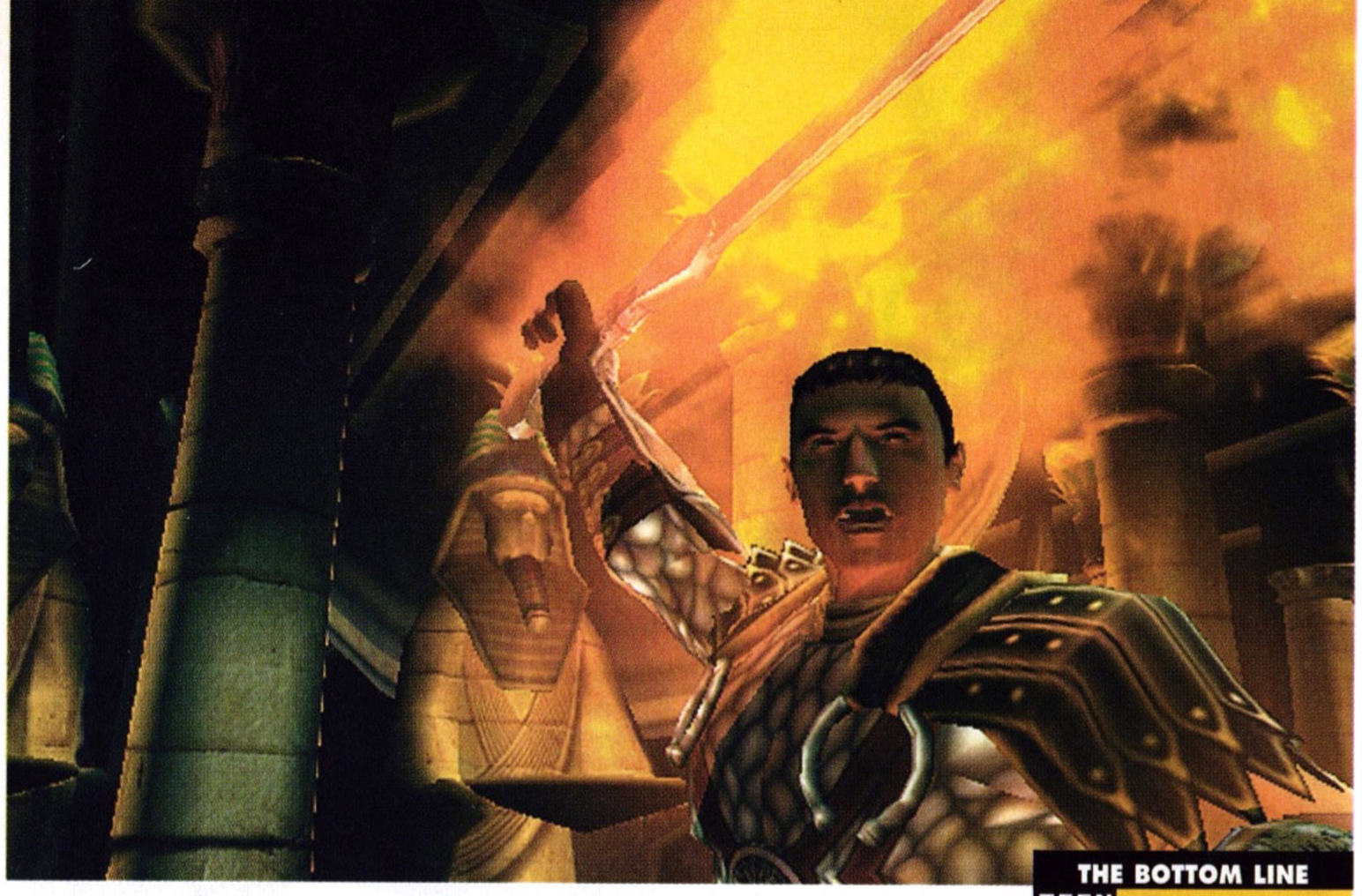


XBOX UNLIMITED ENABLED

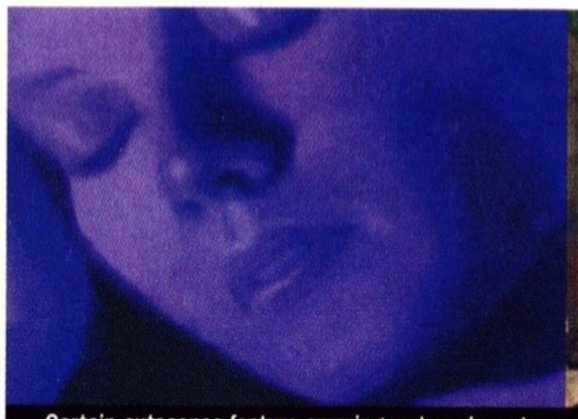
GLADIUS

LIVE BY THE SWORD

Tactical strategy games often only appeal to a limited audience, but Gladius just might bring the genre a slew of new fans. With more depth than all of Minnesota's lakes combined, Gladius offers a level of immersion that no other strategy game can offer.

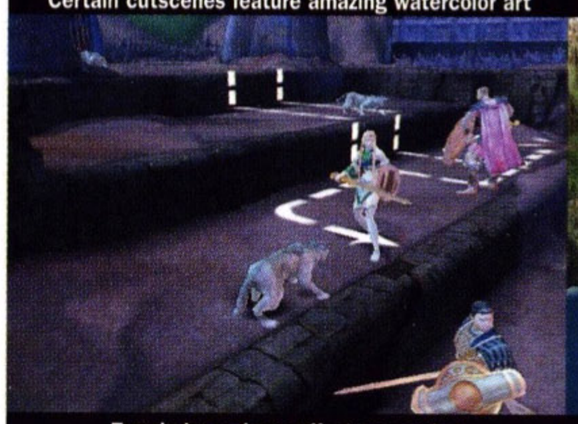
Complex as the game is, the basic premise is deceptively simple. As one of two playable characters, you train to compete in the arena games of the land, on a mission to bring fame to your school of combat. As you travel the countryside, you participate in tournaments to win notoriety, earn money, and gain entrance to more prestigious contests. You will also hire more warriors, learn more skills, and unravel a complex storyline that varies depending on which character you've chosen.

The breadth of options in Gladius cannot be praised enough, but even more impressive are the unique combat mechanics. Every move utilizes a swing meter like those often found in golf games. The goal is to let the meter climb and hit the button as it reaches the sweet spot. Hit the button too early and you won't do much damage; hit it too late and you'll overextend your swing. It might sound complicated, but it actually works extremely smoothly. You can turn the meter off in the options menu and let the computer decided combat for you, but to do so would be to remove much of what makes this game truly great. – **JEREMY**

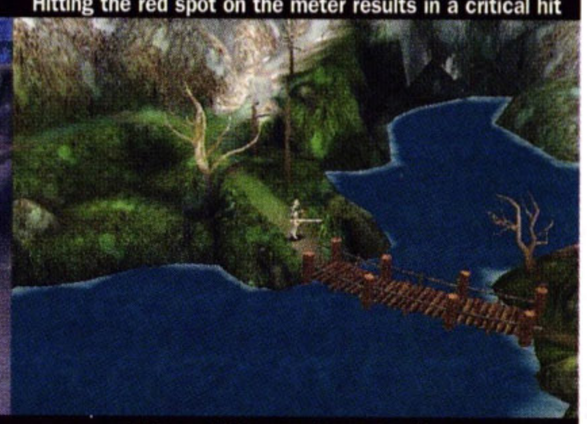


Certain cutscenes feature amazing watercolor art

Hitting the red spot on the meter results in a critical hit



Terrain has a huge effect on combat



The world is open to exploration

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

9.25

- **Concept:** A tactical sim based on gladiator combat and oh so much more
- **Graphics:** While not the best looking game on the black box, it is the sharpest of the three versions
- **Sound:** The swords crashing against each other are so real, you'll swear you're under attack
- **Playability:** With so much depth, you'd think it would be difficult to learn. Instead, it's simple and addictive
- **Entertainment:** The gameplay can last for over 100 hours, and you'll be left wanting more
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Gladius offers the turn-based strategy fan a lot to like. Not only does this game do all the basics you have come to expect from the genre, it expands on them with some rather ingenious additions. Most notably is the ability to aim, get critical hits, and execute combos with a golf game-like swing meter. It really makes the battles much more interesting and intense. Also, movement and target selection are executed with the left analog stick. There are, however, a couple drawbacks to the game. The graphics, for one, could have been a lot better (especially on the Xbox). Plus, your fighters have some really annoying sayings like, "For the glory of our school!" Who the heck says that? I know every time it happened I wanted to punch the guy. Annoyances aside, Gladius is a fantastic game and definitely one of the best console turn-based strategy games available.

ANDY – 8.75

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15

XBOX

NASCAR THUNDER 2004

JEFF GORDON RULES!!!

After all the negative comments Kato got in Dear GI in reference to his Jeff Gordon bash, I'm going to dedicate this entire review to Jeff Gordon – because he rules. Like Gordon's 1998 Winston Cup winning season where he won 13 races and finished in the top five 26 times, NASCAR Thunder 2004 is definitely driving in the zone.

While I'm a fan of all the fancy new modes, the biggest improvements are actually found on the track. Spinouts and wrecks leave a wall of smoke and debris on the tarmac that you must weave through blindly, and cars flip through the air spewing sparks and fire. Plus, the new driver ally/rival dynamic makes for some interesting new twists.

For example, say you want to...oh, I don't know...knock Tony Stewart out of the race. You can do it, but just like the real Stewart, you can expect him to exact some retribution. Next chance he gets, he won't let you pass, or even better, he will just flat-out slam into you for revenge.

If you are into NASCAR, you really don't have a choice, as Thunder is the only game available. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, until you realize that EA refuses to go online with Xbox, so Thunder can only be played online on PS2. That's so lame...err, "non-Jeff Gordon." – **ANDY**

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.5

- **Concept:** Completely corner the market on NASCAR games, so fans literally have no choice but to buy your game
- **Graphics:** On the Xbox, this game should look much better in my opinion, but it is more than adequate
- **Sound:** The engine samples and screeching tires are well represented, and the EA Trax tunes manage to not annoy
- **Playability:** Not the greatest driving game ever, but it does do a good job of capturing the NASCAR experience
- **Entertainment:** Between Career, Season, Lightning Challenge, and Speed Zone modes you have more NASCAR than even the most hardcore fans know what to do with
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

If you're looking for the best representation of the competition of NASCAR and what it feels like to drive on that knife's edge, then you can't miss this. If you think that the Xbox is going to make this game look really good, then you're so wrong. Despite peripheral additions, skipped frames just aren't acceptable two years in a row.

KATO – 8.75

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1

XBOX

NHL 2004

CROSSING LINES

THE BOTTOM LINE
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
9

Considering last year's debacle I've got to ask: Do you believe in miracles? The game's journey toward respectability from the disaster that was NHL 2003 was long enough, but this new edition is making up both time and history.

That's a bold statement, but your players' actions are more realistic than ever. Some may see this as a downfall, as there's more grabbing and dancing than a booze-filled high school prom (especially in front of the net). The game still flows, but you just have to concentrate on your skating and setting up your offense effectively like never before – which includes passes off the boards. The AI helps the pace of things by jumping on any rebounds in front of the goal. Be sure and clear that traffic out in front by checking via the right analog stick or your goalie will get screened and scored upon.

Dynasty mode isn't just a Madden copy. While still giving you the depth of watching over the budget of your team, the upgrades to your club are cool and the customization of the GM's office is addictive. I'm glad that EA decided to give each of their sports a little different treatment in their career modes, and I expect that Madden will steal this office idea for next year. Given how far this franchise has come, however, I've no doubt that the team behind NHL will keep this series out in front of the curve from now on. – **KATO**

- **Concept:** EA's hockey franchise catches up to the high bar set by the rest of its other sports
- **Graphics:** Really nice animations are all over the place
- **Sound:** There's nothing that makes you play with urgency like your home crowd booing you in the third period
- **Playability:** Not as flowing as your typical arcade-esque video game hockey
- **Entertainment:** From frontend to back, this is a can't-miss title
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Comparatively, NHL 2004 simply smokes the competition both on the ice and in the front office. The bruise control allows players to level the opposition with newfound force. Irritating goalies to the point where they will drop their gloves and fight is a brilliant addition as well. It doesn't have online play on Xbox, which is a bummer, but it's still the best hockey title on the system.

REINER – 9

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **DEVELOPER** EA VANCOUVER ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22

XBOX

NHL HITZ PRO

CANADIANS SPELL HOCKEY WITH A "Z"

Maybe you're a person who keeps their Genesis around just to play hockey. Maybe you don't want to shave pennies off the cost of your franchise's hot dogs. Is this business school, or are we going to play some hockey?! Midway is here to remind you that there will always be at least one game on the market where you can put somebody through the glass.

Five guys on a side just means that there are two more people to hit out on the ice. Also on the "realism" side of things, the game's goalie animations are sweet. In a departure, however, I wish that there were more ways to catch on fire. Yes, the fighting is cool, but what about a reward for a hat trick or whatnot? It would go with the perks system that Hitz Pro already has going. The best part of the Hero Equipment is that it's useable by anyone from game to game. The way that Midway has its Franchise structured is refreshing, considering how realistic this mode is becoming in the other hockey games.

I'd say that if you can't have a good time with this title, than you need to pull that puck out of your butt and allow yourself to sit down and relax a little. – **KATO**

SECOND OPINION

I really like where Midway is taking this series. The move toward realism spices up the play nicely. It's not quite as dynamic as EA's release, but being able to toggle between the fast-paced Hitz style and authentic simulation gives it a unique angle that is perfect for multiplayer. Franchise still needs plenty of work, but it's getting there.

REINER – 8

THE BOTTOM LINE
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
8

- **Concept:** A pretty rare example of how to have your cake and eat it, too
- **Graphics:** The fact that all the fans are 3D is cool
- **Sound:** Not enough "Canadian" on the announcers for my liking, but it's still funny
- **Playability:** A difficulty setting between Pro and All-Star is needed
- **Entertainment:** More fun than the time I spent in the back of a truck riding through Saskatchewan. Yeah, it's cool
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY ■ **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY SPORTS
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22

XBOX

ESPN NHL HOCKEY

NEW TRICKS FOR THE OLD DOG

It's good to see that last year's best hockey game has gone through everything short of an overhaul. Sounds unnecessary, but like a shark (not the kind hanging around San Jose, they stink) you can't go backwards in a sports game. I know for a fact that the team at Kush Games didn't have that much time to put this thing out, but the results are pretty solid nonetheless.

In some areas the game actually smokes. The models are 10 times as good, and the animation system has improved even more from last year. If you liked the goalies in 2003, you're going to freak when you see what's going on now. In fact, there are all sorts of changes to the player's movements, although they still seem to swivel on their skates a little too much. Despite the new look of Franchise mode, the skill games, and the Skybox collectible area, the title's AI (including the too-strong CPU on the penalty kill) still leaves you in a lurch too often. Finally, I'm not a huge fan of the dekes.

It's almost scary to think what would have happened if Kush got a full year to work on this one, which leaves ESPN in a better position than last year, but you can still feel the potential brewing under the surface. – **KATO**

SECOND OPINION

ESPN hasn't made significant strides forward. The gameplay is certainly smooth; but the controls, general movement, and CPU AI all prove to be a little shaky. I love the assortment of hockey challenge minigames, but the gameplay should have been the primary focus, not the distractions to it.

REINER – 8.5

THE BOTTOM LINE
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
8.5

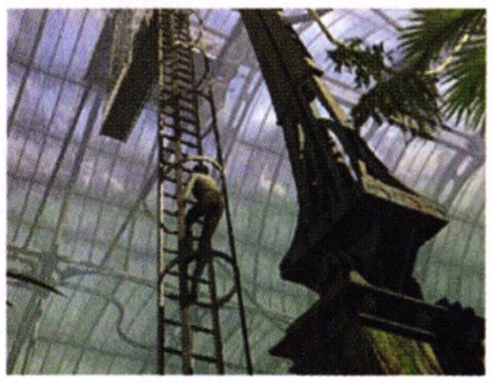
- **Concept:** Try to stay ahead of the curve with changes for an already good series
- **Graphics:** The new models are great and the faces are simply amazing
- **Sound:** The commentary is improved and non-stop
- **Playability:** The turning physics are improved, but the dekes aren't super fluid
- **Entertainment:** Gameplay has been tweaked, while the franchise mode can't compete with EA
- **Replay Value:** High

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA SPORTS
■ **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS/KUSH GAMES ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9

XBOX **QUICKIES**

SYBERIA

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE
■ **PUBLISHER** JACK OF ALL GAMES
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 1



Adventure fans can't go wrong for $20, as Syberia is a graphically stunning game with a great story. But, while the controls on this PC port are okay, they are clearly not refined for a console experience (awkward required zooming to read documents and a completely illegible notebook are the most migraine-inducing), and the puzzles are almost exclusively of the go-find-this-widget-and-bring-it-over-here variety. The franchise does hold future promise, though. – **LISA**

T 7

DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2

As an adult gamer, there are a few things I really appreciate about Disney Extreme Skate Adventure. For one, the simplified version of the Tony Hawk engine allows both kids and adults like myself to feel like we're good at a skating game. I also love that the Create-A-Skater mode lets me create really hideous mutant children. What could be more fun than a kid with an enormously swollen head, a mohawk, and red clown shoes busting 80,000 point combos? – **JEREMY**

E **7.75**

DYNASTY WARRIORS 4

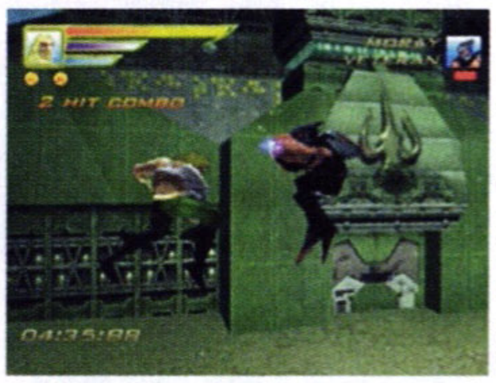
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** KOEI
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 3

Although the gameplay hasn't changed too terribly much since the last installment, being able to slay over 1,000 soldiers within an hour proves to be an addictive allure that I cannot escape. It's like a Siren that sings out to me with the beautiful melody of "Kill them. Kill them all, Reiner." Now, if that isn't music to my ears, I don't know what is. While it can easily be labeled as an expansion pack to Dynasty Warriors 3, there are a couple of standout features. Along with a larger quest and the ability to create your own character, you'll encounter new one-on-one officer battles as well as siege weapons like battering rams and catapults. Unfortunately, the joy that comes with slaughtering entire civilizations is still plagued by plenty of slowdown and environment pop up. Don't get me wrong, it's a fun game that will keep you glued to your tube, but it's just too much of the same. Killing good...updates bad! – **REINER**

T 7

AQUAMAN: BATTLE FOR ATLANTIS

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** TDK MEDIACTIVE
■ **RELEASE** JULY 31

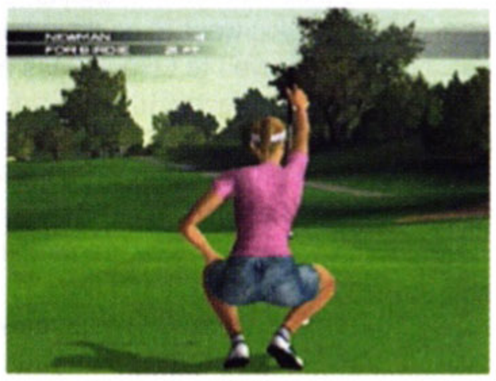


God help me, but here's a sentence I never dreamed I'd write: The best part of this game is the main character's hair. Seriously, Fish Boy's locks really do flow in the water. It's pretty neat. Too bad everything else sucks so much. Basically, you swim around until you find a group of bad guys and engage in some extremely weak combat. Repeat ad naseum. Oh, and you also do some poor space-shooter action in a submarine (although I don't know why an aquatic hero would need a submarine, but then again, I don't really care). I'd say it was as horrible as the N64 Superman atrocity, but since Aquaman has always been a lame character, having a crappy game is at least conceptually sound, given the subject matter. Somehow, the universe would cease to make sense in some profound way if an Aquaman title were actually any good. In any case, you're probably not even reading this, and I can't say that I blame you. – **MATT**

T 2

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22



Tiger's been coasting on his name, but this version blows out the franchise like nothing you've seen before. While the addition of a true chip approach shot is new, the gameplay is largely the same. What is astounding is the replay value and depth added to the off the course shenanigans. Who says that the golf genre is stagnant? Just like in real life, the coming of Tiger has changed the sport forever. – **KATO**

E **9.25**

TENNIS MASTERS SERIES 2003

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** HIP GAMES
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 10

It's no Anna Kournikova in the looks department, but thankfully it plays a lot better than the racket-wielding supermodel. Tennis Masters Series is well off the mark set by Sega's Virtua Tennis franchise, but it does do an admirable job of capturing the basics of the pro tour. The gameplay is more than adequate, although sometimes the players are a bit jumpy on the court. Overall, this game performs like a solid pro baseliner – playing it safe, but hitting a majority of its shots in-bounds. – **MATT**

E **8**

REVIEWS

XBOX

ROADKILL

SWEARING IS, LIKE, SO COOL

THE BOTTOM LINE
MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB **6.5**

We always try to avoid using lazy, reductive comparison like "This title is [insert popular game here] meets [insert popular game here]." But, in the case of RoadKill, it's simply not possible to describe it any other way than "Twisted Metal meets Grand Theft Auto III." Basically, Midway has taken GTA's open environments, potty mouth theatrics, and radio-station audio conceit, and hitched them to a car combat game. On paper, that's a solid idea – two great tastes that taste great together, right? Wrong.

By combining two genres, Midway has had to compromise most of the things that made each cool individually. Twisted Metal has always been about gorgeous graphics, pinpoint control, and learning the ins and outs of brilliantly designed battle arenas. Grand Theft Auto is a big, sprawling – yet ultimately engrossing – mess of a game, one that succeeds by creating a world full of humor, secrets, and varied gameplay. Plunking down cars in an open environment detracts from the thrill of battling it out, while not offering any of the depth or variety of a GTA III. Also, I rarely feel that my intelligence is being insulted by a game, but RoadKill managed to do the trick. The self-consciously "bad-ass" plot is devoid of humor or interesting characters ("Shut up, f^&#bag" is about as witty as it gets), and sounds like the work of two twelve-year-olds who have fallen under the spell of their uncle's old Andrew Dice Clay cassette. – **MATT**

■ **Concept:** A "hardcore" action/racing game – and you better believe it's as M-rated as a mofo, you wimp!!

■ **Graphics:** Has about the same graphical quality as GTA III, which isn't saying much. It does have a few good explosive effects, however

■ **Sound:** Fake talk radio, fake and real '80s metal, and the best guitar riff ever written: Blue Oyster Cult's "Don't Fear The Reaper"

■ **Playability:** Decent enough, but not as tight or varied as car combat should be

■ **Entertainment:** It's similar to games that I love, so why don't I like this more?

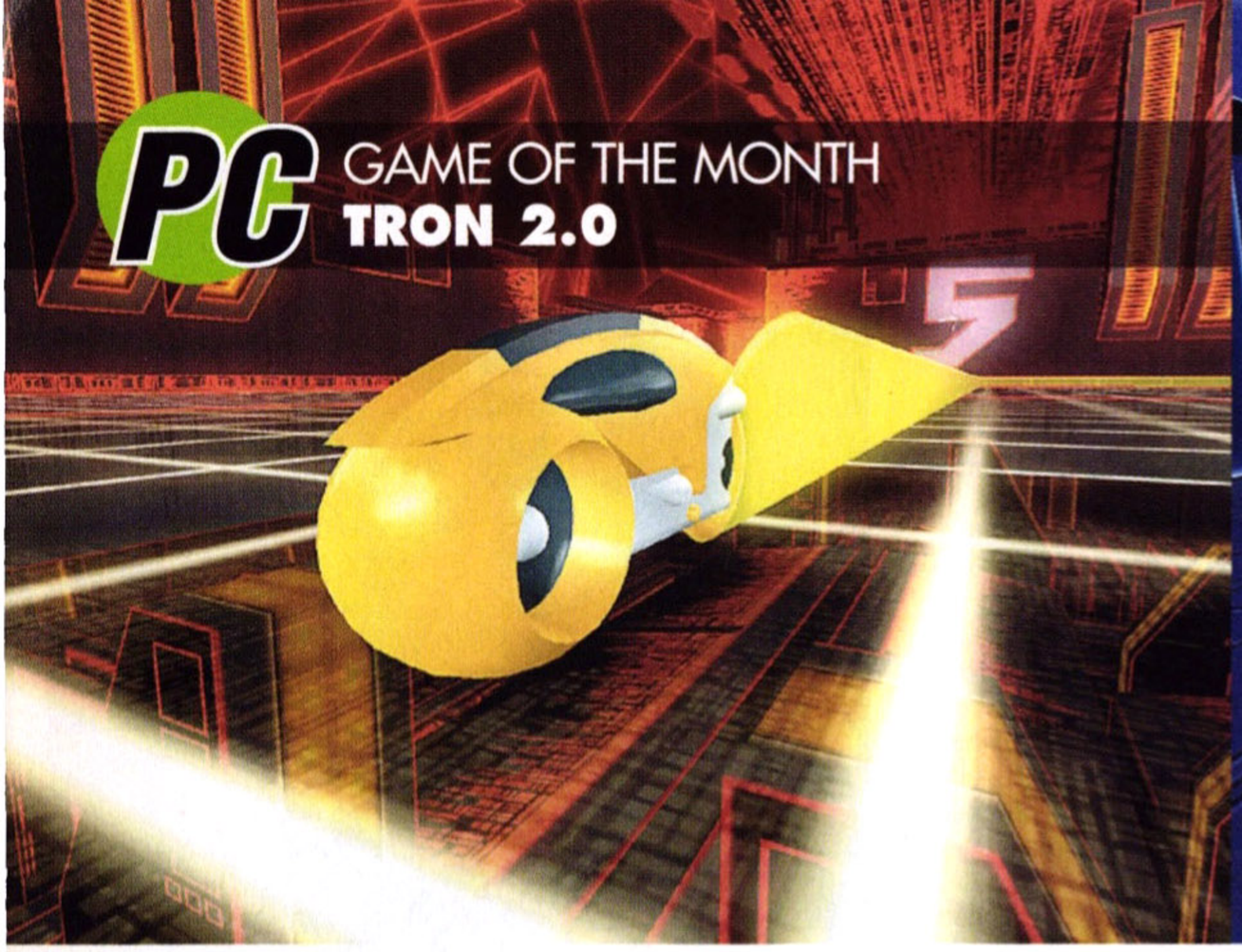
■ **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

I like lewd conduct as much as the next macho man, but even I think Midway tried too hard to be shocking in RoadKill. It exhibits sloppy gameplay and design on many fronts. Not leaving the car is weak and the missions are aggravating, but I still felt compelled to play a good portion of it. If you thought Vice City was too tame, this may be up your alley.

JUSTIN – 6.5

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY ■ **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 3



PC GAME OF THE MONTH
TRON 2.0

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.75

PC

TRON 2.0

ENTER THE MATRIX

"...excels in using the little touches to immerse the player in the computer world."

With the wave of '80s nostalgia sweeping the video game industry (He-Man, Transformers, etc.), an update of Tron seems like a no-brainer (can an RPG based on the Fred Savage opus *The Wizard* be far behind?). Designed as a sequel to the movie, you play as Jet Bradley, son of Alan Bradley (a.k.a. Tron) from the film. After Alan disappears, you are sucked into the computer and must solve the mystery of his abduction from the inside.

Tron 2.0 instantly grabs you with its ultra-crisp graphics, which perfectly recall the mood of the film. The radiant environments easily define the computer world, and because of the clever and varied level design, looking at geometric shapes never gets old. However, there is much more to the title than great graphics; Tron 2.0 excels in using the little touches to immerse the player in the computer world. My favorite moment of the game is when I transferred into a 20-year old computer system and had to over-clock the processor to increase the speed at which I could move.

Upgrading your character adds further depth to the title. As you progress through the plot, you pick up a variety of upgrades and patches that increase strength, add weapons, and provide helpful abilities. Yet, you only have so much memory available, so you are forced to decide which you want to equip in each situation. These items can be improved to take up less memory and can sometimes become infected, requiring defragmentation. This system creates a nice RPG-like quality and adds to the effect.

Your primary weapon is the infamous Tron throwing disc, which can also be used as a shield. Of course, when you throw the disc, you are momentarily disarmed, so unlike most shooters, rapid firing is out of the question. And no Tron title would be complete without the notorious light cycle – at several points you climb aboard it to engage in the deadly race. Presented in an isometric view, the light cycle portions are fast-paced and tricky, and are also available as a separate multiplayer game.

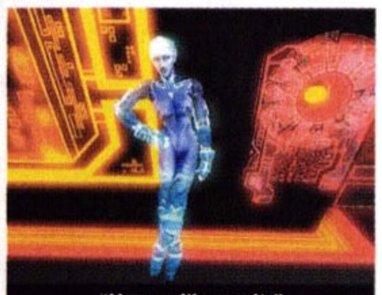
As much fun as the cycles are, they are actually one of my few minor complaints with Tron 2.0. These portions of the game are exponentially more difficult than the first-person sections, which can make for a frustrating change of pace. Enemy AI is occasionally spotty as well, but not enough to detract from an overall enjoyable experience. For first-person shooter fans looking for something a little different, Tron 2.0 is the way to go. – **JEREMY**

- **Concept:** Battle through various computer systems in this sequel to the 1982 movie
- **Graphics:** Super-slick visuals will make you feel like you're actually in the computer
- **Sound:** Nifty sound effects and solid voice acting balance out the forgettable score
- **Playability:** Throwing the little glowing disc thingy is every bit as fun as you'd expect
- **Entertainment:** Having seen the movie is not at all necessary to enjoy the game. And yes, you get to drive the light cycles
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

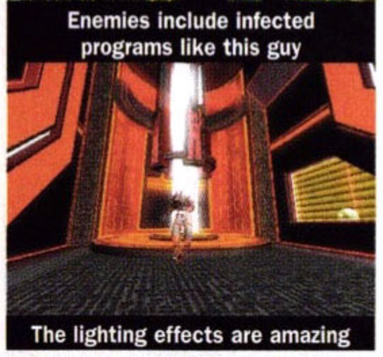
For a Tron fan like myself, it really doesn't get much better than 2.0. Not only does it capture the look and feel of the universe, the clever script is easily better than the movie that started it all – and the graphics absolutely blow it away. Even the caliber of talent in the game eclipses the movie, with Bruce Boxleitner returning and Rebecca Romijn-Stamos adding some femme fatale to the mix. When you put it all together, you feel like you are playing the movie sequel we have all waited for. Now, it is important to note that Tron 2.0 isn't the most frantic FPS I've seen. In fact, it might be the slowest. But the action is compelling enough to keep you playing, and the story and world are things that Tron fans just won't want to miss. Even if you think the movie sucks, this game is worth checking out.

ANDY – 8.75



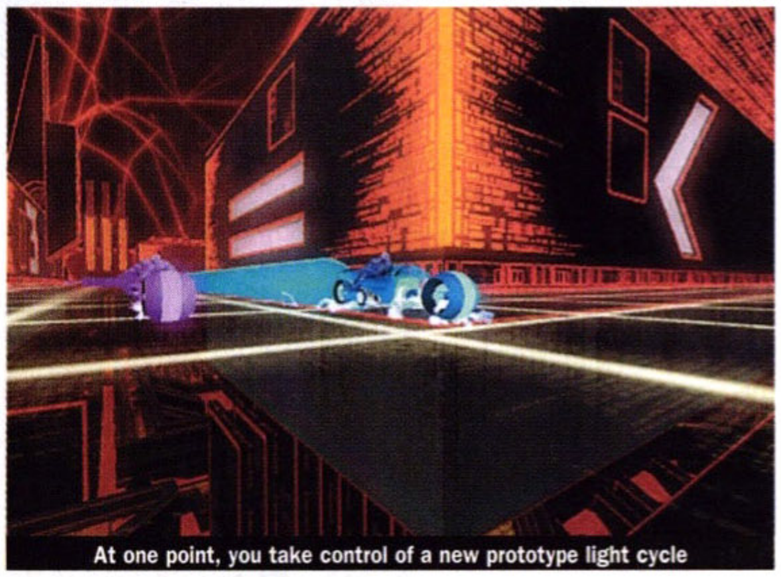
"Hey, sailing unit."

Enemies include infected programs like this guy

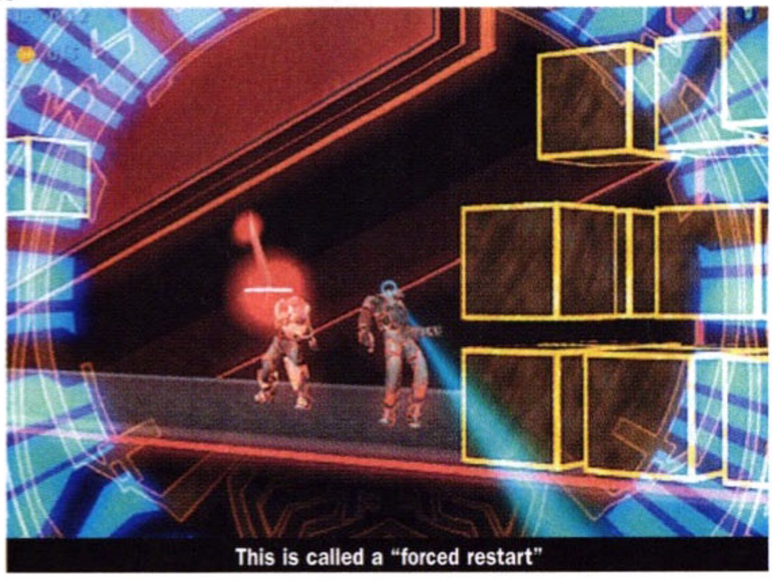


The lighting effects are amazing

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA ONLINE AND LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** BUENA VISTA GAMES
■ **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26



At one point, you take control of a new prototype light cycle



This is called a "forced restart"

"Playing Lionheart could easily be a completely different experience every time."

PC

LIONHEART: LEGACY OF THE CRUSADER

IT'S MAGIC TIME

If you are an RPG fan, you are familiar with Black Isle Studios' work. Do the names Baldur's Gate, Fallout, or Icewind Dale sound familiar? Well, it's time to add another name to this publisher's list of hit RPGs – Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader.

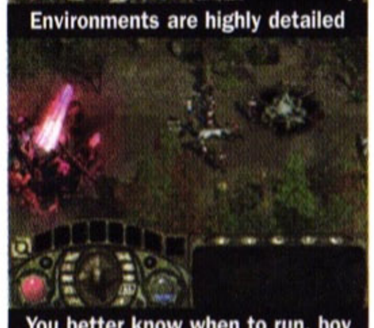
Lionheart, set hundreds of years after the Third Crusade, centers around a strange series of event set into motion by King Richard the Lionheart. Tricked by his trusted advisor, Richard accidentally opened a rift called "The Disjunction," which released magic and demons into the world. Generations later, Europe is populated with pureblood humans, as well as three magically inclined races: the Demokin, the Feralkin, and the Sylvants. These races are all endowed with magical gifts, but are persecuted for their impure blood by normal citizens and the Spanish Inquisition. As the descendant of King Richard, your character is pursued by unknown forces who are after the magical spirit in your blood.

Like the other Black Isle games, Lionheart is an isometric-view dungeon crawler that utilizes a rule set modified from the Fallout games. Players can choose from preexisting characters or create their own by selecting a race, traits, skills, and a guardian spirit. The three impure races can also choose racial traits, which have both positive and negative affects. These options allow players a nearly ridiculous amount of customization. Gaining levels leads to even more options, as perks are earned and skills and spells are improved.

Once into the game, you are faced with nearly as many choices. Dozens of sub-quests are presented to you, which can be completed in several different ways. These range from simple delivery missions to combat-intensive rescue jobs. The paths of good and evil are both available to you, and you can even join any number of guilds or gangs. Playing Lionheart could easily be a completely different experience every time.

Graphically, Lionheart may not be the prettiest game out there, but it's nothing to complain about either. The environments are crisp and detailed, especially the cities and homes. My only minor gripe is that the characters are a bit small and blurry, but this in no way detracts from the play experience. The music and sounds effects are also excellent, and the point-and-click interface works perfectly. The menu and icon system is intricate, but easy to master. Overall, Lionheart is solid, and is a deserving addition to any RPG player's library. – **JEREMY**

Environments are highly detailed

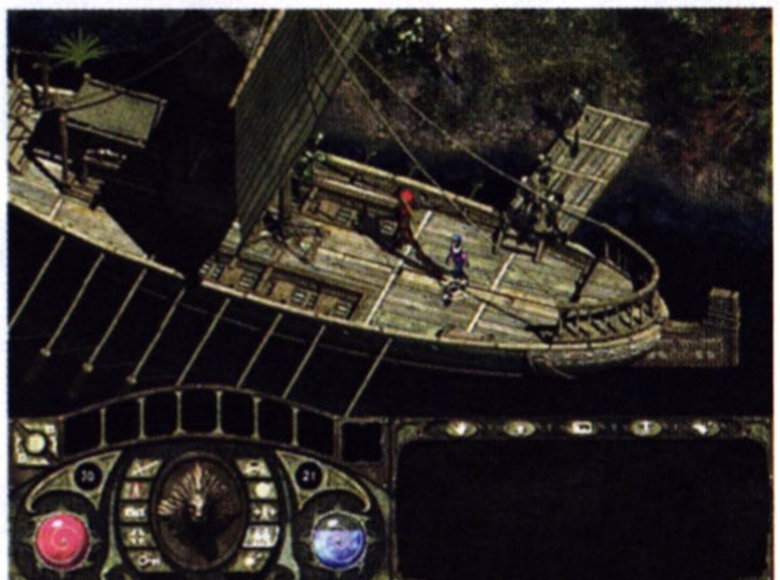


You better know when to run, boy

There are many different companions in the game

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** BLACK ISLE STUDIOS ■ **DEVELOPER** REFLEXIVE ENTERTAINMENT
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 12

The menu screens are easy to navigate



A wide variety of creatures stalk you

THE BOTTOM LINE

8.5

- **Concept:** An open-ended RPG set in an alternate Europe where magic is everywhere
- **Graphics:** The environments are highly detailed, although slightly larger characters would have been nice
- **Sound:** The score really enhances the various moods of the game
- **Playability:** The simple point-and-click interface is incredibly easy to learn and offers a lot of depth
- **Entertainment:** With so many different quests and ways to complete them, Lionheart is thoroughly engrossing
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Lionheart is an interesting mixed bag. For every thing it does right, it seems to do something else equally poorly. The artwork in the game is simply fantastic, while the animation of your character is like watching Atari 2600-era track and field stars run. The story is well written and brings a new twist to a tired and predictable genre, but the lack of focus brings boredom in time, and many of the missions are either too deep or too shallow. The combat is straightforward and easy to follow, but most fights are won or lost by luck, not skill. However, for all my complaints about the game, I did manage to sit in front of the PC captivated by its magic for two days straight. Lionheart is definitely an above-average RPG, but it scores more points for its odd story than its antiquated gameplay.

ANDY – 7.75

GAME BOY ADVANCE

BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND

I BOUGHT A HEADACHE

From a purely intellectual perspective, Boktai is a wonder of design. The cartridge has a special sensor that detects sunlight, which in turn powers your character's ("Solar Boy") weapon – one which he uses to defeat various occult baddies and vampires in the game's numerous dungeons.

Unfortunately, this innovative concept proves to be very frustrating in real life. Here's my experience with Boktai:

I quickly realized that our office's florescents weren't going to do the trick, so I tried sitting by a window. There was a (very) light cloud cover outside, and I couldn't seem to get my solar meter to move (the manual warns that windows decrease the power of the sun). So, I headed outside and sat on a bench. So, now I'm getting some good rays. Unfortunately, it's also hot out, so I begin to sweat. This makes me mad. Then, the glare off the GBA screen starts to give me a splitting headache. I also realize that you can't power up in most dungeons (there's no sun underground). I'd wasted all my Solar Boy energy right before I got to a big battle, which meant I had to trek back onto the overworld to recharge. Of course, when I got out, a cloud went over the sun and my meter wouldn't work! There I sit: pissed, rapidly pitting out my t-shirt, and nursing the mother of all migraines. That is not fun – and I don't give a damn how "deep" or "inventive" this game is. – **MATT**

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

5

- **Concept:** A solar-powered dungeon crawler(!?)
- **Graphics:** Although it's isometric, the environments are very detailed and there are some nice lighting effects
- **Sound:** Konami never skimps on handheld music, and Boktai's is great
- **Playability:** There is a lot of depth here, but relying on Mother Nature for it is tough
- **Entertainment:** Sun-worshippers will love it, but all I got from Boktai was irritated. If it's cloudy out – forget it
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

This is a good game. In fact, if it's nice outside, it's damn near a great game. The problem is that your ability to play is based on a force none of us has control over – the weather. So, if you live somewhere that's always 82 degrees, sunny, and offers a gentle breeze, you'll love this game. If not, you're screwed and in pain.

LISA – 6.75

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG
■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

GAME BOY ADVANCE

DOUBLE DRAGON ADVANCE

DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE

Double Dragon is one of my all-time favorite arcade games (see Classic GI, issue 123). The lack of an arcade-faithful console version has boggled my mind. Atlus took things one step further and basically doubled what the coin-op had to offer in this GBA cart.

When I say double, I mean (at least) twice the enemy types, 100 percent more weapons, an increase in moves, and a game with eight stages rather than four. The lunging headbutt replaces the back elbow as my attack of choice. I also dig mounting fallen enemies and bashing their heads in. Nunchuks and escrima sticks are lethal, and I mowed through a lot of Abobo with my chain mace. Defense is even an option – go figure.

You'll need all of these extra skills, as the game is twice as long as before. Some stages – like Chinatown – are brand new. Other times, you'll have added sections to classic levels. The developers are obviously *Matrix* fans, as Agent-like enemies straighten their ties between beatings, and you'll fight atop a speeding semi.

A mode that lets you alternate between control of two heroes by yourself is really intriguing. It requires a lot of strategy, as one character is helpless when he isn't under your influence. It really grew on me. Sure, cheap enemy tactics will cost you some lives, but it's not like you have to plunk quarters into your GBA. Double Dragon is an epic brawler well worth a purchase. – **JUSTIN**

Between levels, the guys you whupped will feed you info

The famous broken bridge is back

You'll get knocked off this speeding truck. A lot

"Take that! And THAT! And even a lil' of THIS!"

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ATLUS ■ **DEVELOPER** ATLUS/TECHNOS
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

9

- **Concept:** Give this arcade classic the upgrade it deserves
- **Graphics:** Character models are around SNES quality and have great animations. The backgrounds are hit or miss
- **Sound:** All the tunes and grunts you remember
- **Playability:** A bunch of new moves make for more buttons to remember, but it's well worth it
- **Entertainment:** It's still no 30-hour marathon, but Atlus has added a whole lot to an already-excellent beat 'em up
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Updating classic games can be a tricky thing. Change it too much and it's not the same game; update it too little and fans feel cheated. Fortunately, Double Dragon Advance gets it just right. Aside from the addition of a few new villains, the game is basically unchanged. One of the only problems I ever had with Double Dragon is that the outlandish enemy designs aged badly. But the addition of some more modern characters does a lot to correct that. As a result, Double Dragon Advance looks better than the original; the graphics are detailed and colorful, and the new cutscenes look great. The control scheme feels just like the arcade, and even retains some of the original's flaws: It's far too easy to accidentally fall in a pit, just as it always was. Minor quibbles aside, Double Dragon Advance is the best version of the game to date.

JEREMY – 8.5

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New Game Boy Advance SP
Now in flame

GAME BOY ADVANCE

ALADDIN

ALADDIN AINTSOBADDIN!

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E

8

This new version of Aladdin is nothing more than a port of the classic Super NES/Sega Genesis game. But as they say: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. As Aladdin, you basically run and jump through the whole game in a loose retelling of the movie. Your only weapons are your acrobatic moves, and apples which can be thrown to stun opponents. This may sound repetitive, but creative level designs with lots of hidden items keep this simple game from getting stale. Trying to find all the hidden gems and other pickups in each level adds a nice degree of replay value.

The playcontrol is spot-on and still feels like a descendant of the original Prince of Persia. The fluid character animation is some of the best around, and Aladdin's acrobatic moves are incredibly simple to pull off, yet a great deal of fun to watch. Graphically, it's bright and sharp, and looks absolutely wonderful on the GBA. The character's appearance is remarkably similar to the cartoon – which is quite a feat considering how old the original game is. The only real flaws in this title are the fact that it's a bit on the short side, and little could be worse than Disney music heard through Game Boy speakers. Still, with the volume turned down, Aladdin is quite a fun ride. – **JEREMY**

- **Concept:** Based on the hit movie, this port of the 16-bit game requires copious amounts of running and jumping
- **Graphics:** Smooth animations, clean environments, and sharp characters look great on the GBA
- **Sound:** The music is slightly less painful than a drill bit in the ear
- **Playability:** Simple controls make this easy for gamers of any level to pick up and enjoy
- **Entertainment:** Addictively simple, this is easily one of the best movie licensed games of all time
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Besides an extremely annoying, long-winded, quote-laden opening cinema, this little Disney ditty is a solid platformer with good animations and some interesting level designs. Fans of the movie will be really excited by the in-jokes and film references. Newbies will see a predictable, but serviceable portable game.

LISA – 7

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 2

GAME BOY ADVANCE

ONIMUSHA TACTICS

A DAY LATE, AND A DOLLAR SHORT

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T

7

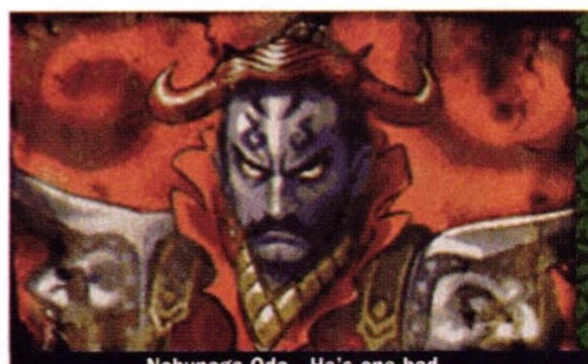
It's a shame really. Capcom couldn't have picked a worse time to launch this title, as two of the greatest portable turn-based strategy games ever made were recently released in Advance Wars 2 and Final Fantasy Tactics Advance. That said, Onimusha Tactics isn't bad, but it certainly isn't revolutionary, either.

One of the game's highpoints is the fact that you can move or attack with any character at any time during your turn. For example, you can strike with one guy, then wait to see where you want to move him later as the rest of your characters move about the board. However, this does remove a lot of the advance thinking and strategy that is common with these games, so the approach is both a blessing and a curse.

From this point, everything else goes downhill. For example, the only way to get items or weapons is to create them by collecting and combining Genma stones that drop from fallen opponents. A different twist, but it really leaves little to do outside of battle.

Also, the story is rather weird. From your sensei who looks and speaks like Sean Connery (he calls you "lad" and at one point says "willy-nilly") to party members who excitingly exclaim "cool" as you journey to Hell, the dialogue makes absolutely no sense.

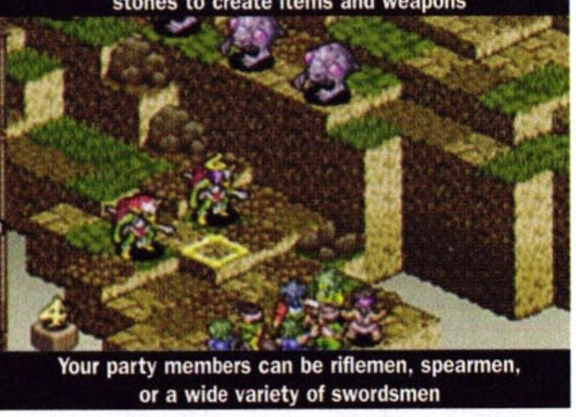
Onimusha Tactics isn't a horrible game in the end, but you shouldn't even think about playing it until you have beaten Advance Wars 2 and Final Fantasy Tactics Advance, and even then you might want to distance yourself from those titles some before you pick this one up. It's not bad, but it really does pale in comparison. – **ANDY**



Nobunaga Oda...He's one bad, mother...shut your mouth

Once you have a recipe you can combine Genma stones to create items and weapons

You must equip and select your party members before each battle



Your party members can be riflemen, spearmen, or a wide variety of swordsmen

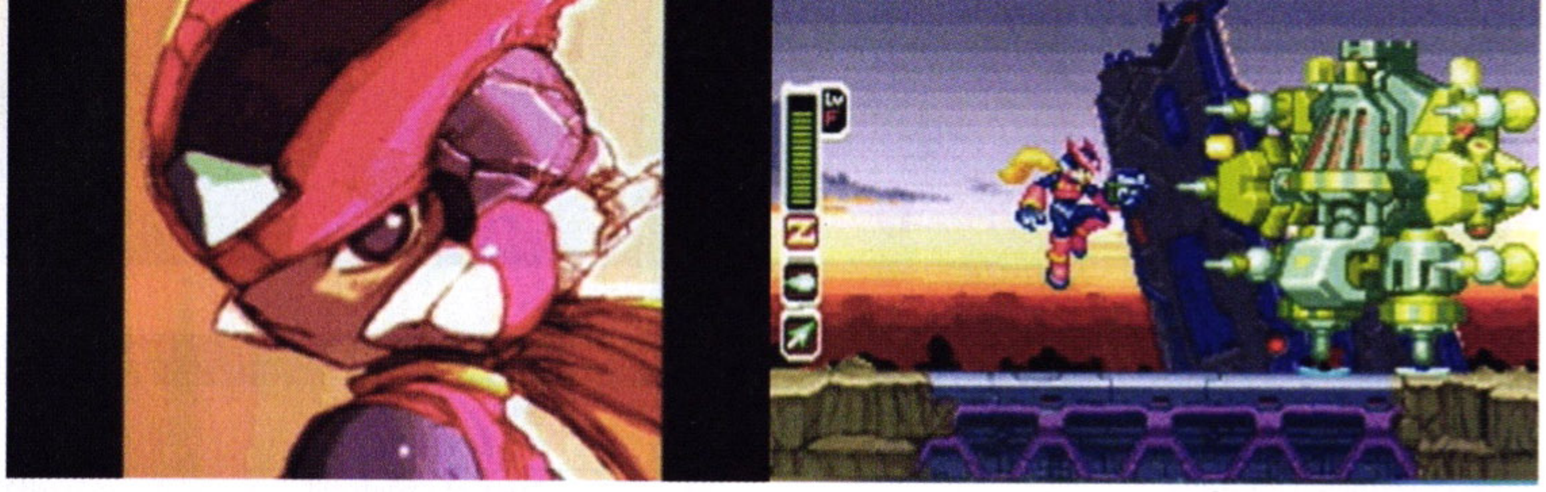
- **Concept:** Expand the Onimusha universe by creating a turn-based strategy game on the GBA
- **Graphics:** Unexciting, but solid characters and environments
- **Sound:** The music works, but it doesn't really fit the theme of the game
- **Playability:** Very basic in design and scope, but it does manage to get the job done
- **Entertainment:** The story and gameplay are mediocre at best
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

I applaud Capcom's decision to branch out and try different things with the Onimusha franchise. As luck would have it, turn-based strategy is the perfect fit for this series. It's not nearly as deep as Square Soft's Final Fantasy Tactics title, but it does give players a slightly different look at the tactics style of play. For instance, I really liked having the ability to move a character after attacking. This action adds another layer to the strategies that you can concoct. Unfortunately, character customization is not nearly as profound as it should be, and forcing players to build items from Genma that is accumulated during combat is just plain evil. Altogether, this game just happens to be too much like Final Fantasy for its own good. Why settle for Onimusha when there's something else out there that's far superior? It's worthy of play, but only after you've licked up every drop of FF.

REINER – 7

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28



GAME BOY ADVANCE

MEGA MAN ZERO 2

MEGA TOUGH

As with most titles in the series, Mega Man Zero 2 involves a lot of jumping and shooting. Sure, there are new bells and whistles in each volume, but the core gameplay remains largely unchanged. And while the formula works fairly well, Mega Man Zero 2 doesn't have what it takes to stand as one of the series' better entries.

The new stuff in this volume is pretty cool. Zero's ability to change forms based on how the player performs is a neat twist, and two-player action is something this series could have used long ago. But these additions are balanced out with a severely uneven difficulty level and stages are rife with cheap hits. The level design forces players to constantly jump into unseen territory, which usually houses some robotic villain, or worse, spikes of instant death. The only way to combat these obstacles is to play each board to the point of memorization. Bosses are similarly tricky, and as a result, only true Mega Man fans will feel compelled to keep playing. – **JEREMY**

SECOND OPINION

Every bit as good as the precursor, but it really feels rushed. The difficulty has increased substantially and the level designs can best be summed up as either unfair or impossible. The action is good and the graphics are phenomenal, but you'll most likely walk away from it frustrated.

REINER – 7.5

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

7

■ **Concept:** Shoot evil robots, jump over pointy things, and save the world

■ **Graphics:** The environments are bright and complex, and the characters are large and detailed

■ **Sound:** Both the music and sound effects are old-school, but it works

■ **Playability:** Thanks to the flexible control scheme, it's easy to get comfortable

■ **Entertainment:** The gameplay quickly alternates between fun and infuriating

■ **Replay Value:** Moderate

GAME BOY ADVANCE

POKÉMON PINBALL RUBY & SAPPHIRE

POKÉMON PERFECTION

Pokémon has always kept its audience on the line through an endless game of carrot and stick; forcing you to collect monsters only to bring out new titles that then require you acquire a new batch of brightly colored creatures. Unfortunately, there's never been a whole lot of compelling gameplay to go along with the endless game of "find the critter."

Thank God for Pokémon Pinball. This series has always delivered top-quality flipper action and the new Ruby & Sapphire edition is no exception. As ball physics and control go, it's dead-on; and this time around there are more reasons to keep playing – from the host of Pokémon to catch and evolve to the bonus stages, which are like platforming boss battles. The board designs are excellent, managing both a sublime simplicity that echoes the best real-world pinball machines, alongside a host of cool real-time events and special features that make sure the experience never grows dull. Being a kids game, it's a little slower than Sonic Pinball, but it's a very good title. – **MATT**

SECOND OPINION

I believe that this game was sent by Satan himself to punish all who play it. The music will drive you insane and the abysmal gameplay will make you think you are in a padded room, with flippers, that bounce you around and around and around and...

ANDY – 2

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** THE POKÉMON COMPANY/NINTENDO ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 25

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

8.5

■ **Concept:** The best Pokémon franchise ever becomes bigger and badder

■ **Graphics:** All the crisp and clean graphics you expect, plus a few cool effects you don't

■ **Sound:** In a world gone crazy over licensed tracks, I'm digging the old-school MIDI vibe

■ **Playability:** It's not the most challenging pinball title, but the flipper control and ball physics are solid

■ **Entertainment:** You won't find a better bus/plane/waiting room companion

■ **Replay Value:** High

GAME BOY ADVANCE

DISNEY'S MAGICAL QUEST 2 STARRING MICKEY AND MINNIE

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
■ **PUBLISHER** BUENA VISTA
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11

Mickey and Minnie are both playable characters in this second Magical Quest game (the original came out on SNES in '92). Each of the three outfits that the characters wear offer different abilities, the graphics are certainly respectable, and the Disney universe is humorously represented. The main reason I am less than enamored with this title is that it features some of the worst jumping controls in memory. Frustrating and painful. Bad Mickey. Bad. – **LISA**

EVERYONE E **6.75**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** THQ
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 7

Monster trucks control like rally cars; at least that's what this game has taught me. It has also taught me that 3D graphics and lots of tracks don't prevent me from wanting to put this game in a shallow grave after my first lap. The most – and perhaps only – fun I had was hitting the shoulder buttons to either make my driver scream "Yee-haw!" or honk my horn. Who will Monster Truck Madness appeal to? The vehicles don't act how they would in real life and it's so short on thrills that it needs to sit atop a stack of phone books to see over the dashboard. – **JUSTIN**

EVERYONE E **4.5**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE

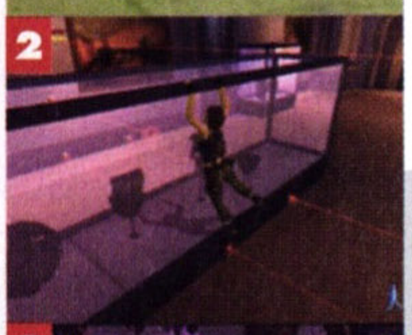
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2

Game Boy extreme sports games always pale in comparison to their console counterparts, but Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure suffers more than most. It's largely due to the fact that much of the appeal of the game was its cool, intricate Disney environments and detailed characters. Although I like the fact that it has three Story modes each based on a movie (*Toy Story*, *Tarzan*, and *The Lion King*), the simplified game design and controls don't offer enough depth to overcome the downgrade in graphics. Also, I'm beginning to tire of the isometric view on these kinds of games. I say, bring on the PlayStation Portable and fully polygonal handheld skating! – **MATT**

EVERYONE E **6**

CHARTS

In association with the NPD TRSTS Video Games Service, Charts presents an in-depth listing of the best-selling software on a month-to-month basis. Are the games you spend your hard-earned dollars on top sellers? Take a look below to find out. We've also compiled a listing of the top-selling Japanese software, and, of course, we included a Top 10 list of the games the GI staff is currently enjoying.



NPD TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For June 2003 Based On Units Sold

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
1	1	**Enter The Matrix**	PS2	8.5	May-03	$49

We've been trying to say funny things about this game for months now; we're officially tapped. Seriously, there's nothing to see here. Move on to Tomb Raider – plenty to poke fun at there. Why must you torment us by continuing to read our pathetic passages? We are not monkeys with shock collars, forced to dance in pink tutus, lest we feel 2,000 volts sear through our cerebellums at your discriminating hand. Dogstar rules!

2	N/A	**Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness**	PS2	5.5	Jun-03	$50

People love to see train wrecks, which is the only explanation why this debacle sold so well in its first month. Ms. Croft is looking as used-up as a flat tube of Colgate. But unlike toothpaste, the only thing that this game will make sparkle is the disc – if you use a hammer to smash it into tiny shards.

3	N/A	**Donkey Kong Country**	GBA	9	Jun-03	$29

Nintendo has proven it can release any SNES game on GBA and make bank, not just ones with Mario. Donkey Kong's banana horde has been pillaged, and he has to get them back. How does a person – much less a gorilla – keep tens of thousands of bananas ripe? Their ability to float in thin air makes them sound a bit sketchy, kind of like Mario's "mushroom" fixation.

4	N/A	**Hulk**	PS2	5.5	May-03	$48

Mr. Green got mean and ripped the top off a tank. It's too damn bad that his game just stank. He talks like Cookie Monster and he really loves to smash; but if you spent money on this, you really miss your cash. You pout, cry, and wonder why as you sit and muse: "Before I shop for games, I'd better read GI's reviews."

5	3	**NBA Street Vol. 2**	PS2	9	Apr-03	$48

With Kobe's future in doubt, Street fans are creating their own teams to have Shaq Daddy, The Glove, and The Mailman together. Would *you* want to play against this team? Okay, let's rephrase that: Would you want to play against this team if losing meant you'd have to do 50 pushups and eat one hardboiled egg on the way down every time? Shells removed, of course.

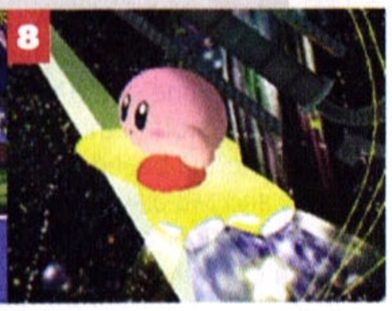
RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
6	6	**Pokémon Ruby**	GBA	7.25	Mar-03	$33
7	7	**Pokémon Sapphire**	GBA	7.25	Mar-03	$33
8	N/A	**Finding Nemo**	GBA	N/A	May-03	$30
9	N/A	**Dragon Ball Z: Legacy of Goku II**	GBA	7.5	Jun-03	$29
10	9	**Yu-Gi-Oh Worldwide Edition: Stairway to Destined Duel**	GBA	7.5	Apr-03	$35
11	5	**Brute Force**	Xbox	8.25	May-03	$49
12	10	**Midnight Club II**	PS2	9	Apr-03	$47
13	12	**Grand Theft Auto III**	PS2	9.5	Oct-01	$20
14	N/A	**Finding Nemo**	PS2	6.5	May-03	$39
15	13	**The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker**	GC	10	Mar-03	$38
16	2	**Enter The Matrix**	Xbox	8.5	May-03	$50
17	N/A	**Spider-Man**	PS2	7.75	Apr-02	$19
18	N/A	**Midnight Club II**	Xbox	9	Jun-03	$50
19	N/A	**Preview Disc**	GC	N/A	May-03	$7
20	N/A	**The Incredible Hulk**	GBA	4	May-03	$29

Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Service • Kristin Barnett-Von-Korff (516) 625-2481

JAPAN TOP 10

Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	**Gundam Seed**	PS2
2	N/A	**Tales of Phantasia**	GBA
3	N/A	**Pokémon Pinball: Ruby and Sapphire**	GBA
4	N/A	**PowerPro Baseball 10**	PS2
5	N/A	**Guilty Gear XX #Reload**	PS2
6	N/A	**Tokyo Highway Battle 01**	PS2
7	N/A	**Super Mario Advance 4**	GBA
8	N/A	**Kirby Air Ride**	GC
9	N/A	**K-1 World Grand Prix: The Beast Attack**	PS2
10	N/A	**Sakura: Winter Flower**	PS2



GAME INFORMER TOP 10

The Staff's Favorite Picks

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	**Viewtiful Joe**	GC
2	N/A	**Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004**	PS2
3	N/A	**Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic**	Xbox
4	4	**ESPN NFL Football**	Xbox
5	2	**Final Fantasy Tactics Advance**	GBA
6	N/A	**Gladius**	Xbox
7	N/A	**Soul Calibur 2**	GC
8	3	**Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild**	PS2
9	N/A	**EyeToy: Play**	PS2
10	N/A	**Tron 2.0**	PC

PC TOP 10

Based On Monthly Units Sold. Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Sevice Kristin Barnett-Von-Korff (516) 625-2481

POS.	L. MO	GAME	MONTH	PRICE
1	N/A	**MS Flight Simulator 2000: Century of Flight**	Jul-03	$53
2	2	**The Sims: Superstar**	May-03	$27
3	1	**Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne**	Jun-03	$36
4	5	**The Sims Deluxe**	Sep-02	$42
5	N/A	**The Sims: Unleashed**	Sep-02	$28
6	8	**Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided**	Jun-03	$50
7	N/A	**Diablo II**	Jun-00	$20
8	10	**Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos**	Jun-03	$39
9	N/A	**Zoo Tycoon**	Oct-01	$27
10	N/A	**Roller Coaster Tycoon 2**	Oct-02	$29

REVIEWS ARCHIVE OCTOBER 2003

THE SIMS

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SIMULATION
■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **REVIEWED** FEB-03

I had my doubts as to how the controls would fit, but to my astonishment, the gameplay works just as well on the Dual Shock analogs as it does a mouse. This version also boasts a number of new items for your house, and for the first time ever, simultaneous multiplayer. I went into this review with the impression that this version wouldn't live up to its PC counterpart, but I actually enjoyed this take on The Sims more than the original. – **REINER**

E 9

PLAYSTATION 2

Aero Elite: Combat Academy	6.75	May-03
Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	6.75	Aug-03
All-Star Baseball 2004	8	Apr-03
Alter Echo	8	Sep-03
Amplitude	8.75	May-03
Ape Escape 2	7.5	Jul-03
Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits	8.75	Jul-03
ATV Offroad Fury 2	9	Jan-03
Auto Modellista	8	Jun-03
Battle Engine Aquila	7	Feb-03
Big Mutha Truckers	7.5	May-03
Black & Bruised	7.5	Mar-03
BMX XXX	7.75	Jan-03
Bombastic	8	Sep-03
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	8	Mar-0
Cabela's Big Game Hunter	7	Mar-03
Chaos Legion	8.5	Jun-03
Choplifter: Crisis Shield	6.5	May-03
Clock Tower 3	8.5	May-03
Colin McRae Rally 3	8.75	May-03
Dark Cloud 2	9.25	Mar-03
Dead to Rights	9.25	Jan-03
Def Jam Vendetta	8.5	Apr-03
Devil May Cry 2	7	Mar-03
Disaster Report	8	Mar-0
Dot Hack Vol. 1: Infection	8.25	Mar-03
Dot Hack Vol. 2: Mutation	7.75	Jun-03
Dot Hack Vol. 3: Outbreak	7.5	Sep-03
Downhill Domination	8.25	Aug-03
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	7.25	Jan-03
Drome Racers	7	Jan-03
Dynasty Warriors 3: Xtreme Legends	6.75	Jan-03
Dynasty Warriors 4	7	Apr-03
Ejay Clubworld	7	Aug-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jun-03
Everblue 2	8.75	Mar-03
EverQuest: Online Adventures	9	Feb-03
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	7.75	Jun-03
F1 Career Championship	7	Aug-03
Fighter Maker 2	6.5	Feb-03
Finding Nemo	6.5	Jul-03
Fisherman's Challenge	7.5	Mar-03
Freaky Flyers	6	Aug-03
Freestyle MetalX	7	Aug-03
Futurama	5.25	Sep-03
G1 Jockey 3	8	Jun-03
Gallop Racer 2003: A New Breed	8.5	May-03
Getaway, The	9	Feb-03
Grand Prix Challenge	7.5	May-03
Great Escape, The	6.5	Sep-03
Guilty Gear X2	8.75	Mar-03
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	6	Jan-03
Haven: Call of the King	8.25	Jan-03
High Heat 2004	7	Apr-03
Hot Wheels: Velocity X	6	Feb-03
Hulk, The	5.5	Jul-03
Hunter The Reckoning - Wayward	6.25	Sep-03
Hypersonic Extreme	7.25	Mar-03
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	8.25	Aug-03
IndyCar Series	7	Jun-03
Island Extreme Stunts	6	Feb-03
Italian Job, The	5	Aug-03
James Bond 007: NightFire	7.75	Jan-03
James Cameron's Dark Angel	5.25	Jan-03
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	8.75	Apr-03
K-1 World Grand Prix	6.5	Jul-03
King of Route 66, The	7	Apr-03
Legends of Wrestling II	7	Feb-03
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	7.25	Aug-03
Madden NFL 2004	9.25	Sep-03
Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color	8	Sep-03
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	8.5	Apr-03
Midnight Club II	9	May-03
Minority Report: Everybody Runs	6.75	Feb-03
MLB 2004	6.5	Apr-03
MLB Slugfest 2004	6	Apr-03
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	9.5	Jan-03
MotoGP 3	7	Apr-03
Music Maker	8	Jul-03
MVP Baseball 2003	9.25	Apr-03
Naval Ops: Warship Gunner	7.5	Jul-03
NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA College Basketball 2K3	5.75	Jan-03
NCAA Final Four	1.25	Jan-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.75	Jul-03
NCAA March Madness 2003	8	Jan-03
NFL Blitz Pro	7.25	Sep-03
NFL GameDay 2004	7	Sep-03
Ninja Assault	6.25	Feb-03
Pride FC	8	Feb-03
Primal	6.75	May-03
P.T.O. IV	7.75	Mar-03
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	8.5	Mar-03
Reel Fishing III	3	Jul-03
Resident Evil Dead Aim	6	Jun-03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Operation Resurrection	7.5	Jul-03
Romance of Three Kingdoms VIII	7	Sep-03
RTX Red Rock	6.5	Jul-03
Silent Hill 3	8.25	Aug-03
Silent Line: Armored Core	7.5	Jul-03
Sims, The	9	Feb-03
Smash Cars	4	Aug-03
Speed Kings	6.5	Jul-03
Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild	9.25	Sep-03
Splinter Cell	8.5	Apr-03
Star Wars: Bounty Hunter	5.75	Jan-03
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	7.75	Feb-03
Sub Rebellion	7.5	Jan-03
Summer Heat Beach Volleyball	6.75	Aug-03
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	9	Apr-03
Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	5.5	Aug-03
Treasure Planet	7.75	Jan-03
Unlimited SaGa	6.5	Jun-03
Vexx	6.75	Apr-03
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	9	Aug-03
V-Rally 3	8.75	Jan-03
Wakeboarding Unleashed Featuring Shaun Murray	8.25	Jul-03
War of the Monsters	6	Feb-03
Winning Eleven 6	9	Apr-03
World Series Baseball 2K3	6.75	Apr-03
World Tour Soccer 2003	8.5	Feb-03
WWE Crush Hour	5.25	May-03
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.5	Jun-03
X-Men Next Dimension	7.75	Dec-02
Xenosaga Episode 1: Der Wille Zur Macht	9.75	Mar-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Duelists of the Roses	8	Apr-03
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	8.5	May-03

GAMECUBE

Army Men: Sarge's War	6	May-03
ATV: Quad Power Racing 2	8	Mar-03
Batman: Dark Tomorrow	0.75	May-03
Black & Bruised	7.5	Mar-03
Blood Omen 2	7.5	Jan-03
BloodRayne	7	Dec-02
BMX XXX	7.75	Feb-03
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	8.5	May-03
Charlie's Angels	2	Sep-03
Conflict: Desert Storm	6	May-03
Darkened Skye	6.75	Dec-02
Dead to Rights	8.75	Jan-03
Def Jam Vendetta	8.75	Apr-03
Die Hard: Vendetta	6	Jan-03
Disney Sports Football	6.75	Mar-03
Disney Sports Soccer	8	Feb-03
Disney's PK: Out of the Shadows	4.75	Mar-03
Dr. Muto	7	Feb-03
Dragon's Lair 3D	7.75	Feb-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jun-03
Evolution Worlds	7	Dec-02
FIFA 2003	8	Jan-03
Finding Nemo	6.75	Aug-03
F-Zero GX	8.25	Sep-03
Ghost Recon	7.75	May-03
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	8	Jul-03
Hulk, The	5.75	Jul-03
Ikaruga	9	May-03
Italian Job, The	5	Aug-03
James Bond 007: NightFire	8	Jan-03
Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, The	10	Apr-03
Legends of Wrestling II	6.75	Feb-03
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, The	9.25	Jan-03
Lost Kingdoms II	8.5	Jun-03
Madden NFL 2004	8.75	Sep-03
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	8	Sep-03
Mario Pary 4	3	Dec-02
Medal of Honor: Frontline	8.75	Dec-02
Mega Man: Network Transmission	6.25	Jun-03
Metroid Prime	9.5	Jan-03
Minority Report: Everybody Runs	6.75	Feb-03
MLB Slugfest 2004	6.75	Apr-03
Monsters, Inc. Scream Arena	5	Dec-02
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	9	Jan-03
NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.5	Jul-03
Outlaw Golf	7.75	Dec-02
Phantasy Star Online Version I & II	8	Jan-03
P.N. 03	5.75	Sep-03
Red Faction II	8.75	Apr-03
Resident Evil 0	9.25	Dec-02
Resident Evil 2	8	Apr-03
Resident Evil 3: Nemesis	7.75	Apr-03
Robotech: Battlecry	8.5	Dec-02
Shrek: Extra Large	3	Jan-03
Sims, The	8.75	May-03
Skies of Arcadia Legends	9	Feb-03
Sonic Adventure DX	5	May-03
Sonic Mega Collection	8.75	Dec-02
Speed Kings	7	Jul-03
Splinter Cell	8.5	May-03
Spyro: Enter the Dragonfly	4.75	Jan-03
Star Wars: Bounty Hunter	5	Feb-03
Star Wars: Jedi Outcast	8.75	Jan-03
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	8.25	Dec-02
Sum of All Fears, The	5.5	Apr-03
Summoner: A Goddess Reborn	9	Apr-03
Super Bubble Pop	8	Feb-03
Superman: Shadow of Apokolips	6.5	May-03
Swingerz Golf	7.75	Jan-03
SX Superstar	6	Aug-03
TimeSplitters 2	8.5	Dec-02
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	9	Dec-02
Transworld Surf: Next Wave	5.5	May-03
Tube Slider	6.5	Jun-03
Ultimate Muscle	7.5	Jul-03
Vexx	8.25	Mar-03
Wario World	8.5	Jul-03
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions	7.75	Jan-03
WWE Crush Hour	4	May-03
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.75	Jun-03
X-Men: Next Dimension	7.75	Jan-03
Zapper: One Wicked Cricket	8.75	Dec-02

XBOX

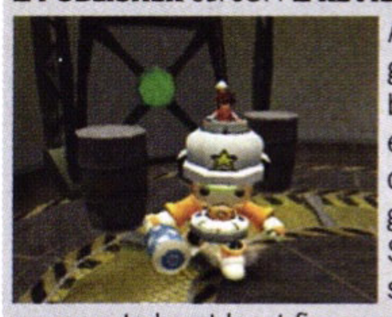
Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	6.75	Aug-03
All-Star Baseball 2004	8	Apr-03
Alter Echo	8	Sep-03
Antz Extreme Racing	5.5	Dec-02
Apex	7.75	May-03
ATV: Quad Power Racing 2	7.5	Apr-03
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	8.5	Dec-02
Battle Engine Aquila	7	Feb-03
Big Mutha Truckers	7.25	Sep-03
Black Stone: Magic & Steel	3	Feb-03
BloodRayne	7.75	Dec-02
Bloody Roar Extreme	6.5	Jul-03
BMX XXX	7.75	Jan-03
Brute Force	8.25	Jul-03
Buffy: Chaos Bleeds	8	Sep-03
Burnout 2: Point of Impact Developer's Cut	8.5	Jun-03
Capcom Vs. SNK 2 EO	8.5	Jan-03
Colin McRae Rally 3	8.75	Dec-02
Crimson Sea	7.75	Feb-03
Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	7.5	Mar-03
Deathrow	5	Jan-03
Defender	8.25	Feb-03
Dr. Muto	8	Dec-02
Dragon's Lair 3D	7.75	Jan-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jul-03
ESPN NFL Football	9.25	Sep-03
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	8	Jun-03
Fatal Frame	9	Jan-03
Freaky Flyers	5.75	Aug-03
Freestyle MetalX	7	Aug-03
Furious Karting	6	Jun-03
Ghost Recon	8.5	Dec-02
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	8.25	Aug-03
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	7.5	Jun-03
Great Escape, The	7	Sep-03
Grooverider	2	Sep-03
Group S Challenge	6.75	Sep-03
High Heat 2004	7.25	Apr-03
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	8.5	Dec-02
Hulk, The	5.75	Jul-03
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	8.5	Mar-03
Indycar Series	7.5	Aug-03
Italian Job, The	5	Aug-03
James Bond 007: NightFire	7.75	Jan-03
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	8.25	Apr-03
Kakuto Chojin	6.25	Jan-03
Kung Fu Chaos	6.5	Mar-03
Legends of Wrestling II	6.75	Feb-03
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, The	9.25	Feb-03
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	8	Jul-03
Madden NFL 2004	9	Sep-03
Marvel Vs. Capcom 2	8.5	May-03
MechAssault	8.75	Dec-02
Medal of Honor: Frontline	8.75	Dec-02
Metal Dungeon	6	Feb-03
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	9.25	Jan-03
Micro Machines	6	May-03
Midnight Club II	9	Jul-03
Midtown Madness 3	5.25	Jul-03
Minority Report: Everybody Runs	6.75	Feb-03
MLB Inside Pitch 2003	5.5	Jun-03
MLB Slugfest 2004	6.75	Apr-03
Monopoly Party	4	Dec-02
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	9.5	Jan-03
MotoGP 2	8	Jun-03
Murakumo	5.75	Mar-03
MVP Baseball 2003	9.25	Apr-03
NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.5	Jul-03
NFL Fever 2004	7.5	Sep-03
NHL 2K3	9.25	Dec-02
Nightcaster II: Equinox	5.75	Feb-03
Outlaw Volleyball	8.25	Sep-03
Panzer Dragoon Orta	8.25	Jan-03
Phantom Crash	7.5	Jan-03
Pirates of the Caribbean	7.75	Aug-03
Pro Cast Fishing	5.5	Sep-03
Pro Race Driver	9	Apr-03
Pulse Racer	3	Feb-03
Rally Fusion: Race of Champions	8	Jan-03
Red Faction II	8.25	Apr-03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	9.25	Jun-03
Robocop	3.5	May-03
Rocky	7	Dec-02
Roller Coaster Tycoon	2	Jun-03
Run Like Hell	8	May-03
Seablade	4	Jan-03
Serious Sam	9	Dec-02
Shenmue II	8	Jan-03
Shrek: Super Party	3.25	Jan-03
Sims, The	8.75	Apr-03
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	8	Jul-03
Speed Kings	7	Jul-03
Splinter Cell	8.75	Jan-03
Star Wars: Jedi Outcast	9	Dec-02
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	9.5	Aug-03
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	8.5	Jun-03
State of Emergency	7	May-03
Steel Battalion	9.5	Dec-02
Superman: The Man of Steel	4.75	Jan-03
SX Superstar	6.5	Aug-03
Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus	7.25	Apr-03
TimeSplitters 2	8.5	Dec-02
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	9	Dec-02
Total Immersion Racing	6.5	Jan-03
Toxic Grind	6.25	Feb-03
Transworld Snowboarding	6.5	Jan-03
UFC: Tapout 2	6.25	May-03
Unreal Championship	8.75	Jan-03
Vexx	8	Mar-03
Wakeboarding Unleashed Featuring Shaun Murray	8.5	Jul-03
Whacked	2	Dec-02
Whiteout	6.25	Dec-02
World Racing	5	Jun-03
World Series Baseball 2K3	7	Apr-03
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.5	Jun-03

PC

1503 A.D.: The New World	7.5	Apr-03
Age of Mythology	9.5	Jan-03
Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings	8.5	Feb-03
Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WW II	8.75	Sep-03
Contra Advance: The Alien Wars EX	6.75	Dec-02
Crash Bandicoot 2: N-Tranced	7.5	Jan-03
Crazy Taxi: Catch a Ride	4	May-03
Daredevil	5	Mar-03
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 3	8.25	Mar-03
Defender	2	Feb-03
Demikids Light & Dark	8.25	Sep-03
Donkey Kong Country	9	Jun-03
Doom II	8.5	Dec-02
Dragon Ball Z: Legacy of Goku II	7.5	Jul-03
Dungeons & Dragons: Eye of the Beholder	5.5	Mar-03
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	9.5	Sep-03
Fire Pro Wrestling 2	9	Mar-03
Freekstyle	7.5	Aug-03
Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension	7.75	Dec-02
Game & Watch: Gallery 4	3	Feb-03
Godzilla Domination!	4.5	May-03
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	8	Apr-03
GT Advance 3: Pro Concept Racing	7.25	Mar-03
Incredible Hulk, The	4	Jul-03
Iridion II	8	May-03
Jet Grind Radio	7	Sep-03
Justice League: Injustice for All	4.25	Feb-03

APE ESCAPE 2

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT ■ **REVIEWED** JUL-03



Ape Escape was never a graphically ambitious game, but its modest look appears even more dated today in comparison to such gorgeous games as Jak and Daxter and Sly Cooper. Also, the camera system is highly suspect and appears to be at least five years behind the curve of what I expect from a 3D platformer. All told, Ape Escape is a lot like the monkeys that it features so prominently. It's cute as hell, fun as can be, but a few steps back on the evolutionary ladder. – **MATT**

E 7.5

Day of Defeat	8.5	Aug-03
Command & Conquer Generals	9.25	Apr-03
Divine Divinity	7.75	Dec-02
Earth & Beyond	9.25	Dec-02
Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind – Bloodmoon, The	9	Aug-03
Europa 1400: The Guild	8.5	Feb-03
Eve: The Second Genesis	6.75	Aug-03
EverQuest: The Planes of Power	9.5	Jan-03
Freelancer	9.5	May-03
Harbinger	6	May-03
Highland Warriors	6.5	Apr-03
IGI 2: Covert Strike	7.25	Apr-03
Impossible Creatures	7.5	Mar-03
Master of Orion III	8	Apr-03
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries	9.5	Jan-03
Medal of Honor: Spearhead	8.25	Jan-03
Medieval: Total War - Viking Invasion	8.75	Jun-03
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	8.25	Aug-03
No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy In H.A.R.M.'s Way	9	Dec-02
Pirates of the Caribbean	7.75	Sep-03
PlanetSide	9.25	Jul-03
Postal 2	7.5	Jun-03
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	7.25	May-03
Restaurant Empire	6.75	Jul-03
Rise of Nations	9	Jul-03
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2	8.5	Dec-02
Shadowbane	6.75	Jun-03
SimCity 4	9.75	Feb-03
Sims Online, The	9	Mar-03
Sims: Superstar, The	8	Jul-03
Star Trek: Elite Force II	8.5	Aug-03
Star Trek: Starfleet Command II	9.25	Jan-03
Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided	9.5	Jun-03
Stronghold: Crusader	8.75	Dec-02
Tropico 2: Pirate Cove	8	Jun-03
Unreal II: The Awakening	9.5	Mar-03
Unreal Tournament 2003	9.5	Dec-02
Warcraft 3: Frozen Throne	9	Sep-03
Will Rock	7.75	Aug-03

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	9.25	Jul-03
Aggressive Inline	7.75	Dec-02
Airforce Delta Storm	6.75	Dec-02
All-Star Baseball 2004	6.5	Apr-03
Altered Beast: Guardian of the Realms	7.5	Feb-03
ATV: Quad Power Racing	6	Dec-02
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Wrath of Darkhul King	4	Sep-03
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	9.25	Jun-03
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	8.75	Jan-03
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past, The	9.25	Jan-03
Legends of Wrestling II	0.75	Mar-03
Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, The	5	Dec-02
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, The	6.75	Feb-03
Lost Vikings, The	7	Jun-03
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	7.75	Apr-03
Lunar Legend	7.5	Feb-03
Masters of the Universe: He-Man – Power of Grayskull	3.75	Jan-03
Mega Man & Bass	8	Mar-03
Mega Man Battle Network 3: Blue and White	8	Jun-03
Metroid Fusion	10	Jan-03
Monster Rancher Advance 2	8.5	Jan-03
Mortal Kombat: Tournament Edition	8.25	Aug-03
Muppets: On With the Show	5.5	Jun-03
Ninja Five-O	8.25	Jul-03
Phantasy Star Collection	8	Feb-03
Pirates of the Caribbean	5.5	Sep-03
Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire	7.25	Apr-03
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	8	Mar-03
Revenge of Shinobi, The	6	Feb-03
Ripping Friends: The World's Most Manly Men, The	4.75	Dec-02
Road Rash: Jailbreak	4.5	Aug-03
Robotech: The Macross Saga	8.5	Jan-03
Rock 'n Roll Racing	8.75	Sep-03
Rocky	7.5	Jan-03
Samurai Jack: The Amulet of Time	8	Feb-03
Sega Rally Championship	5	Mar-03
Sega Smash Pack	7	Dec-02
Shining Soul	6.5	Sep-03
Simpsons Road Rage	2.25	Aug-03
Sonic Advance 2	7.5	May-03
Sonic Pinball Party	6	Jul-03
Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack	7	Sep-03
Splinter Cell	8.5	Jun-03
Spyro 2: Season of Flame	7.5	Dec-02
SSX Tricky	4	Dec-02
Star Wars: The New Droid Army	6	Feb-03
Stuntman	8.75	Sep-03
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	8	Feb-03
Super Puzzle Fighter II	9	Apr-03
Tomb Raider: The Prophecy	6.5	Jan-03
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	8	Jan-03
Virtua Tennis	7.75	Jan-03
Wacky Stackers	6.5	Jan-03
Wario Ware, Inc.: Mega Microgames	7.5	Jun-03
Wing Commander Prophecy	7	Aug-03
WWE Road to Wrestlemania X8	7	Mar-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! Dungeon Dice Monsters	8	Apr-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition: Stairway to the Destined Duel	7.5	Jun-03

SONIC ADVENTURE DX

■ **FORMAT** GAMECUBE ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA ■ **REVIEWED** MAY-03

Sega's re-release of the mascot's 1999 Dreamcast launch title with enhanced graphics, sound, and a boatload of extra features doesn't make up for the fact that Sonic Adventure was certainly not the most shining moment in his otherwise noble career. My problem is that the pumped-up graphics look pretty mediocre at best; the soundtrack still includes those hair-metal rock/ballad interludes; the plot is stinky like doggie poo; and the game mechanics are bland and simplistic – like the worst of the Genesis era. Don't call me a hater, I just really want to see the blue hero evolve. – **LISA**

E 5

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Release Date	Title	Publisher/ Distributor
PLAYSTATION 2		
10/21/03	Backyard Basketball	Atari
10/7/03	Backyard Wrestling	Eidos
10/14/03	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance 2	Vivendi Universal
10/14/03	Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	Ubi Soft
10/7/03	Bionicle: The Game	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Blowout	Majesco

KING OF FIGHTERS 2000 & 2001

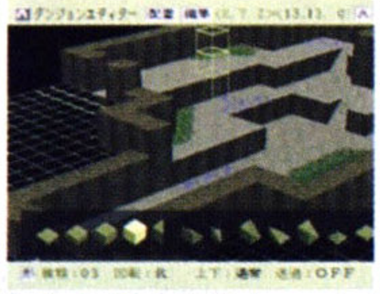
■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING
■ **PUBLISHER** SNK/PLAYMORE ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

SNK lives again, under the aegis of Playmore, a company that is bringing two editions of the legendary King of Fighters series to the PlayStation 2 this fall. The 2000 and 2001 version of the vaunted franchise should be a boon to hardcore fighting fans in the U.S., as they were only released as home ports for the Japanese Dreamcast. It's certainly exciting, as we all know that King of Fighters is one of the most underrated properties in all of gaming.

10/28/03	Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami
10/14/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
10/15/03	Choplifter: Crisis Shield	Xicat
10/7/03	Conflict Desert Storm II: Return to Baghdad	Take 2
9/23/03	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft
9/23/03	Dance Dance Revolution: Max 2	Konami
10/14/03	Deer Hunter	Atari
9/23/03	Dynasty Tactics 2	Koei
10/1/03	ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega
10/28/03	Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	Vivendi Universal
10/28/03	FIFA 2004	Electronic Arts
9/16/03	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts
10/7/03	Galidor: Defenders Outer Dimension	Electronic Arts
10/14/03	Gladiator Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim
10/28/03	Gladius	LucasArts
10/28/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
10/14/03	Haunted Mansion	TDK Mediactive
10/8/03	Hot Wheels World Race	THQ
10/14/03	Jak II	Sony
10/21/03	Jeopardy	Atari
10/28/03	Kill Switch	Namco
10/28/03	King of Fighters 2000 & 2001	SNK
10/28/03	Lowrider	Jaleco
10/14/03	Mega Man X7	Capcom
10/28/03	Monster Rancher 4	Tecmo
9/16/03	NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts
9/30/03	NBA Jam	Acclaim
10/7/03	NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts
9/30/03	NBA ShootOut 2004	Sony
9/29/03	NFL Blitz Pro	Midway
9/22/03	NHL 2004	Electronic Arts
9/22/03	NHL Hitz Pro	Midway
10/13/03	RoadKill	Midway
9/30/03	Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	Capcom
10/21/03	RPG Maker 2	Tommo
9/16/03	Simpsons: Hit and Run	Vivendi Universal
9/22/03	Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	THQ
10/14/03	SSX 3	Electronic Arts
10/21/03	SWAT: Global Strike Team	Vivendi Universal
10/16/03	Tak and the Power of Juju	THQ
10/21/03	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami
9/22/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
10/21/03	Time Crisis III	Namco
10/28/03	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision
9/23/03	Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	Bam Entertainment
9/16/03	Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	THQ
10/21/03	Wheel of Fortune	Atari
10/21/03	Whiplash	Eidos
10/27/03	WWE SmackDown: Here Comes the Pain	THQ
10/9/03	XIII	Ubi Soft
GAMECUBE		
9/30/03	Auto Modellista	Capcom
10/14/03	Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	Ubi Soft
10/14/03	Beyblade: Super Battle Tournament	Atari
9/23/03	Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	Sega
10/7/03	Bionicle: The Game	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Bomberman Jeeters	Majesco
10/14/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
9/16/03	Disney Party	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	Atari
9/16/03	Drome Racers	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	FIFA 2004	Electronic Arts
9/23/03	Freestyle Street Soccer	Acclaim
10/7/03	Galidor: Defenders Outer Dimension	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Gladius	LucasArts
10/28/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
10/1/03	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Natsume
10/14/03	Haunted Mansion	TDK Mediactive
9/23/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
10/8/03	Hot Wheels World Race	THQ
9/16/03	Jimmy Neutron Jet Fusion	THQ
10/13/03	Kirby Air Ride	Nintendo
10/1/03	Medabots: Infinity	Natsume
10/7/03	NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts
9/29/03	NFL Blitz Pro	Midway
9/22/03	NHL 2004	Electronic Arts
9/22/03	NHL Hitz Pro	Midway
10/27/03	Pikmin 2	Nintendo
10/21/03	Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	Capcom
10/13/03	RoadKill	Midway
9/16/03	Simpsons: Hit and Run	Vivendi Universal
10/13/03	Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	THQ
10/14/03	SSX 3	Electronic Arts
10/21/03	Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike	LucasArts
10/16/03	Tak and the Power of Juju	THQ
10/21/03	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami
9/22/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision
10/7/03	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom
9/23/03	Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	Bam Entertainment
9/16/03	XGRA	Acclaim
10/9/03	XIII	Ubi Soft
XBOX		
10/28/03	Amped 2	Microsoft
10/27/03	Arx Fatalis	Dreamcatcher
10/7/03	Backyard Wrestling	Eidos
10/14/03	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance 2	Vivendi Universal
10/14/03	Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	Ubi Soft
10/7/03	Bionicle: The Game	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Black 9	Majesco
10/28/03	Blowout	Majesco
10/14/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
10/7/03	Conflict Desert Storm II: Return to Baghdad	Take 2
10/14/03	Crimson Skies High Road Revenge	Microsoft
10/15/03	Curse: The Eye of Isis	Dreamcatcher
9/16/03	Dino Crisis 3	Capcom
10/28/03	Drake	Majesco
9/23/03	Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes	Atari
10/14/03	Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind - Game of the Year Edition	Bethesda Softworks
10/1/03	ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega
10/28/03	Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	Vivendi Universal
10/28/03	FIFA 2004	Electronic Arts
9/16/03	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts
9/23/03	Freestyle Street Soccer	Acclaim
10/2/03	Fuzion Frenzy 2	Microsoft
10/14/03	Gladiator Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim
10/28/03	Grabbed by the Ghoulies	Microsoft
9/23/03	Group S Challenge	Capcom
10/28/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
10/14/03	Haunted Mansion	TDK Mediactive
10/21/03	Hunter: The Reckoning Redeemer	Vivendi Universal
10/28/03	Kill Switch	Namco
10/28/03	Links 2004	Microsoft
9/16/03	NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts
9/30/03	NBA Jam	Acclaim
10/7/03	NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts
9/29/03	NFL Blitz Pro	Midway
9/22/03	NHL 2004	Electronic Arts
9/22/03	NHL Hitz Pro	Midway
10/1/03	NHL Rivals 2004	Microsoft
10/14/03	Operation Flashpoint	Atari
10/1/03	Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft
10/13/03	RoadKill	Midway
9/30/03	Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	Capcom
10/28/03	Rogue Ops	Kemco
9/16/03	Simpsons: Hit and Run	Vivendi Universal
10/14/03	SSX 3	Electronic Arts
10/21/03	SWAT: Global Strike Team	Vivendi Universal
10/21/03	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami
9/22/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision
10/28/03	Top Spin	Microsoft
10/1/03	Unseen, The	Microsoft
9/23/03	Voodoo Vince	Microsoft

RPG MAKER 2

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RPG/SIMULATION
■ **PUBLISHER** AGETEC ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21

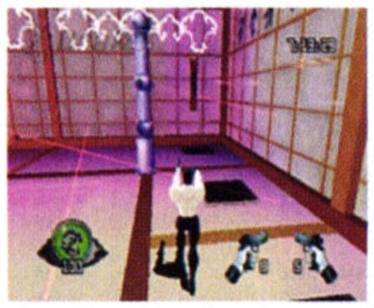


Think you can teach those chumps at Square Enix a thing or two about game development? Well, with RPG Maker 2, the follow-up to the PSone cult classic, you'll have all the tools you need to make a top-flight role-playing game – including the ability to create 3D environments, nearly limitless item and magic options, a sample game created by the Dragon Warrior team, and the ability to download digital pictures into your game. The possibilities are endless.

9/23/03	Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	Bam Entertainment
10/21/03	Whiplash	Eidos
10/21/03	Xbox Music Mixer	Microsoft
10/9/03	XIII	Ubi Soft
PC		
9/30/03	Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft
10/1/03	Airport Tycoon III	Global Star Software
9/30/03	American Conquest Fight Back	Hip Interactive
9/23/03	Apocalyptica	Konami
10/21/03	Battlecruiser Generations	Dreamcatcher
10/21/03	Battlefield 1942: Deluxe Edition	Electronic Arts
10/1/03	Berlin: Battle for Normandy	ValuSoft
10/7/03	Bionicle: The Game	Electronic Arts
10/10/03	Black Mirror, The	Dreamcatcher
10/14/03	Blowout	Majesco
10/14/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
9/23/03	Chrome	Strategy First
10/28/03	Civilization III: Conquests	Atari
10/28/03	Civilization III: Gold	Atari
9/22/03	Command & Conquer Generals: Zero Hour	Electronic Arts
9/23/03	Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	Eidos
10/7/03	Conflict Desert Storm II: Back to Baghdad	Take 2
10/23/03	Crime Fighter 3 Mission Pack	Digital Leisure
10/15/03	Curse: The Eye of Isis	Dreamcatcher
10/28/03	Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis	Vivendi Universal
10/7/03	Deer Hunter 2004	Atari
10/8/03	Dragon's Lair 20th Aniversary Edition	Digital Leisure
10/14/03	Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind - Game of the Year Edition	Bethesda Softworks
10/1/03	Emergency Services Sim	Global Star Software
10/21/03	Empires: Dawn of Modern World	Activision
10/7/03	Enter The Matrix Special Edition	Atari
10/28/03	FIFA 2004	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Final Fantasy XI Online	Enix
9/16/03	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts
9/16/03	Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Gothic II	Atari
10/1/03	Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus	Vivendi Universal
9/30/03	Halo	Microsoft
10/28/03	Harpoon IV	Ubi Soft
10/28/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
10/21/03	Hidden & Dangerous II	Talonsoft
9/16/03	Homeworld 2	Vivendi Universal
10/1/03	Jetfighter V	Global Star Software
10/1/03	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs. Death	Vivendi Universal
10/10/03	Korea: Forgotten Conflict	Tri-Synergy
9/30/03	Law & Order II: Double or Nothing	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Links Championship Edition	Microsoft
9/23/03	Lock On Modern Air Combat	Ubi Soft
10/1/03	Mall Tycoon II	Global Star Software
9/22/03	Medal of Honor: Allied Assault – Breakthrough	Electronic Arts

DRAKE

■ **FORMAT** XBOX ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28



Drake is a comic book-inspired action game being created by Idol FX for Majesco. It's basically a light-hearted Enter the Matrix, allowing the main character to run on and flip off walls, use a variety of short- and long-ranged weapons, and even freeze or slow time. The visuals are as bright and vibrant as they should be, and this looks like a nice Xbox sleeper for fall.

10/1/03	Men of Valor: Vietnam	Vivendi Universal
10/7/03	Nancy Drew: Danger on Deception Island	Atari
9/16/03	NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts
10/7/03	NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts
9/16/03	NHL 2004	Electronic Arts
10/21/03	Railroad Tycoon III	Take 2
9/23/03	Rainbow Six 3: Althena Sword	Ubi Soft
10/21/03	Rollercoaster Tycoon 2: Time Twist EX	Atari
9/22/03	Sim City 4 Deluxe	Electronic Arts
9/22/03	Sim City 4: Rush Hour	Electronic Arts
9/22/03	Sims: Double Deluxe, The	Electronic Arts
10/28/03	Sims: Makin' Magic, The	Electronic Arts
10/14/03	Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas	Atari
10/14/03	Space Colony	Take 2
10/1/03	Space Haste II	Encore Software Inc.
9/16/03	Star Wars: Jedi Academy	LucasArts
10/21/03	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami
9/16/03	Temple of Elemental Evil: Greyhawk	Atari
9/22/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
10/1/03	Train Simulator 2.0	Microsoft
9/19/03	Warcraft III: Battlechest	Vivendi Universal
9/25/03	Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	THQ
10/21/03	Warlords IV: Heroes of Etheria	Ubi Soft
10/9/03	XIII	Ubi Soft
GAME BOY ADVANCE		
10/7/03	Backyard Hockey	Atari
10/14/03	Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	Ubi Soft
9/16/03	Blackthorne	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	Konami
9/23/03	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft
10/7/03	DemiKids: Darkness Version	Atlus
10/7/03	DemiKids: White Version	Atlus
9/23/03	Digimon Battle Spirit 2	Bandai
9/16/03	Disney Party	Electronic Arts
10/21/03	Dr. Seuss: Green Eggs and Ham	Take 2
10/14/03	Dragon Ball Z: Taiketsu	Atari
10/1/03	Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	Natsume
10/14/03	Haunted Mansion	TDK Mediactive
9/23/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
10/13/03	Jimmy Neutron Jet Fusion	THQ
10/27/03	Justice League: Chronicles	Midway
10/7/03	Lion King	Disney Interactive
9/30/03	Little League Baseball 2003	Take 2
10/14/03	Lizzie McGuire	Disney Interactive
10/14/03	Mega Man Zero 2	Capcom
10/20/03	Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed	Destination Software
9/23/03	Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee	THQ
9/16/03	Polly Pocket	Vivendi Universal
9/30/03	Quad Desert Fury	Majesco
10/20/03	R-Type III	Destination Software
9/16/03	Shining Soul	Atlus
10/10/03	Sim City	Destination Software
10/13/03	Spirits & Spells	Dreamcatcher
10/21/03	Super Mario Advance 4	Nintendo
10/16/03	Tak and the Power of Juju	THQ
10/21/03	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami
10/21/03	Woody Woodpecker: Crazy Castle 5	Kemco

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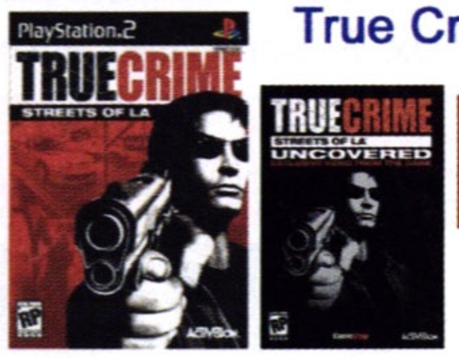

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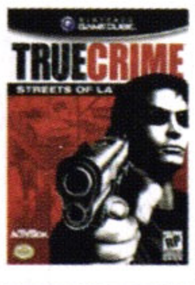

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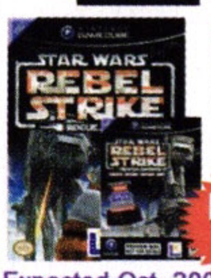

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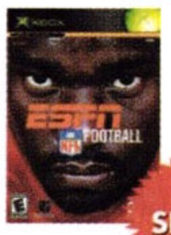

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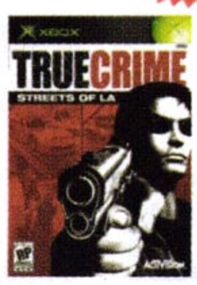

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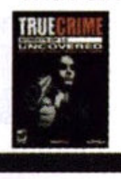

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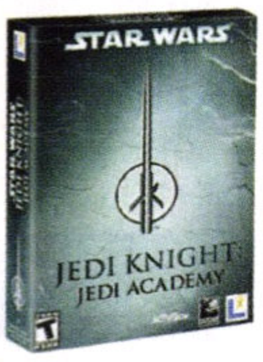

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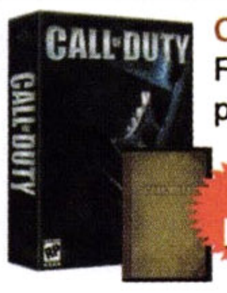

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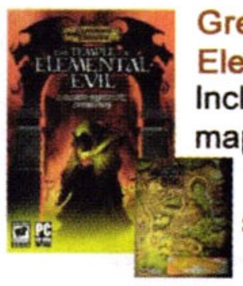

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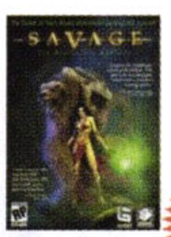

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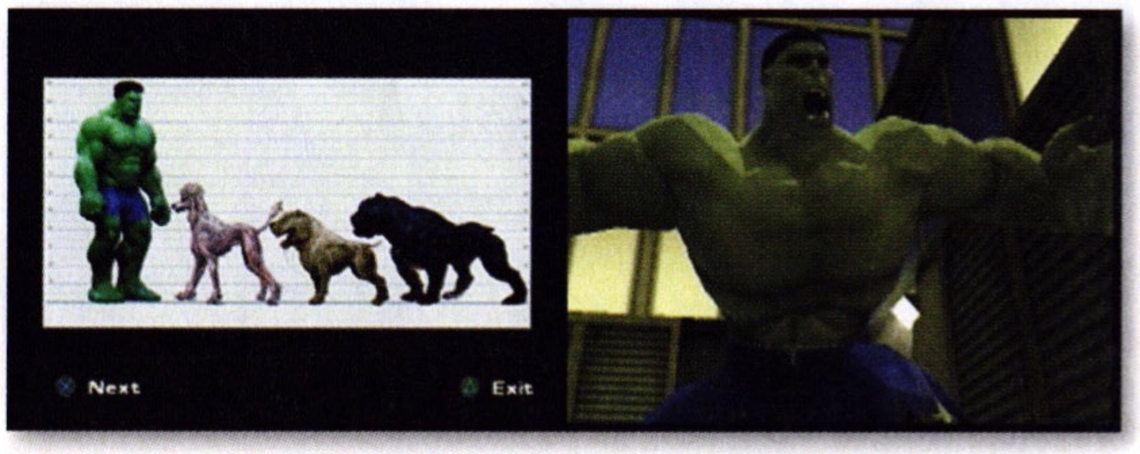
SECRET ACCESS

THE HULK



Enter all of these cheats at the Code Input screen located within the Options menu. To activate these codes, head into the Special Features menu and access the Cheats menu.

Double Enemy Health – BRNGITN
Double Hulk Health – HLTHDSE
Half Enemy Health – MMMYHLP
High Score Reset – NMBTHIH
Infinite Continues – GRNCHTR
Infinite Rage – ANGMNGT
Invincibility – GMMSKIN
Level Select – TRUBLVR
Puzzles Solved – BRCESTN
Regenerator – FLSHWND
Super Punches – FSTOFRY

Enter all of these cheats at the Universal Code Terminals within stages.

Desert Battle Art – FIFTEEN
Gray Hulk – JANITOR
Hulk Movie FMV – NANOMED
Hulk Transformation Art – SANFRAN
Mutant Dog Art – PITBULL

Gregory Hines
Green Bay, WI

FREAKY FLYERS

Here's a listing of the means needed to unlock all of the hidden characters. A message will appear onscreen when the action is executed correctly.

Andre La Toilette – In Bigfoot Mountain, near the start of the race, locate a cabin on a hill and shoot the snowman in front of it.
Atomic Andre – In Bigfoot Mountain, achieve a perfect score.
Baron Von Slaughter – In Grave Danger, fly into the graveyard and destroy the Baron's tombstone.
Bigfoot – In X, achieve a perfect score.
Cactus Rose – In Coyote Canyon, locate the hangman's gallows and shoot Cactus Rose.
Chicken hut Sheik – In Cave of Boulders, achieve a perfect score.
Human Baron – In Grave Danger, achieve a perfect score.
Island Jack – In Danger Island, fly to the monkey temple and blast the python in the river bank.
La Chiquita Diabla – In Coyote Canyon, achieve a perfect score.
Lt. Island Jack D.I.A.F – In Danger Island, achieve a perfect score.
Marcel Clowns – In Bombsburg, achieve a perfect score.
Margaret Basher – In Thugsville, head to the harbor and shoot the Union Jack flag on the ship under the bridge.
Monkey Pie – In Intestinal Track, achieve a perfect score.
Pilot X – In X, simply finish the stage.
Professor Gtentaag – In Torpedo Run, sink the yellow sub.
Sambot 5000 – In Monster Isle, achieve a perfect score.
Sammy Wasabi – In Monster Isle, locate the castle and shoot the ninja on the balcony.
Sanitation Paulie – In Thugsville, achieve a perfect score.
Sheik Abdul – In Cave of Blunders, shoot the executioner in front of the palace.
Stewardess Traci – In Bandito Attack, achieve a perfect score.
Sven with Monkey – In Torpedo Run, achieve a perfect score.
Zenbu – Unlock everything in the game to get this character.

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen running for Governor of California

SOUL CALIBUR II

We've spent many moons with Soul Calibur II and have unearthed a truckload of bonuses. Here's how to get 'em!

ARENAS

Hwangseo Palace/Phoenix Court – In Chapter 7 (Rigel), complete Rigel, Spiritual City.
Labyrinth – In Chapter 6 (Aldebaran), defeat the boss in Underground Juno.
Lakeside Coliseum – In Chapter 1 (Regulus), complete Warrior's Trial Grounds to unlock this snazzy new arena.
Money Pit/Top Tier – In Chapter 4 (Mizar), complete Al Gieba Ruins and this arena will become available.

CHARACTERS

Berserker – In Subchapter 1 (Schedar) on your second time through Weapon Master mode, defeat the boss in Stone Temple.
Cervantes – In Chapter 3 (Benetnasch), complete Benetnasch Harbor to unlock Cervantes.
Character Profiles – Complete Arcade mode to unlock a Profile of the character you were playing as.
Charade – In Chapter 3 (Benetnasch), complete Carnival to add Charade to your character list.
Seung Mina – In Chapter 6 (Aldebaran), complete Seginus Temple.
Sophitia – In Chapter 4 (Mizar), defeat the boss in Charon's Pass.
Yoshimitsu – In Chapter 2 (Thuban), beat the boss in Minkar Mine to add this familiar Tekken face to your roster.

COSTUMES

New Nightmare – In Chapter 8 (Merak), complete Grand Shrine of Merak to unlock this awesome costume!

MODES

Extra Arcade Mode – Simply complete Arcade mode.
Extra Practice Mode – In Chapter 1 (Regulus), complete Proving Grounds to unlock this handy feature.
Extra Survival (Standard) Mode – In Chapter 6 (Aldebaran), complete Siam Ruins.
Extra Team Battle Mode – In Subchapter 1 (Schedar), defeat the boss of Stone Temple.
Extra Time Attack (Standard) Mode – In Chapter 5 (Altair), complete Nereid Gorge.
Weapon Master Opening – In Chapter 10 (Antares), complete Tartaros.

WEAPONS

Acheron (Cervantes) – In Chapter 4 (Maxim), defeat a specific enemy in Charon's Pass.
Halberd (Seung Mina) – In Chapter 6 (Aldebaran), defeat a specific enemy in Underground Juno.
Schweizer (Raphael) – In Chapter 4 (Mizar), complete Deserted Village.
Soul Calibur Evil (Xianghua) – In Chapter 5 (Altair), defeat your doppelganger in Paradise of Altair.
Soul Edge Growth (Nightmare) – In Chapter 7 (Rigel), complete Forbidden Grounds.
Synval (Sophitia) – In Chapter 10 (Antares), defeat a specific foe in Court of the Dead.

"The GI Staff"
Minneapolis, MN

ENTER TO WIN

Send in your codes and passwords, and if we choose your entry as Code of the Month you'll win a wonderful prize from the Game Informer Vault! All other entries printed within these hallowed pages will receive a Secret Access t-shirt.

Send To:
Secret Access
Game Informer Magazine
724 North First Street, 4th Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401
secretaccess@gameinformer.com

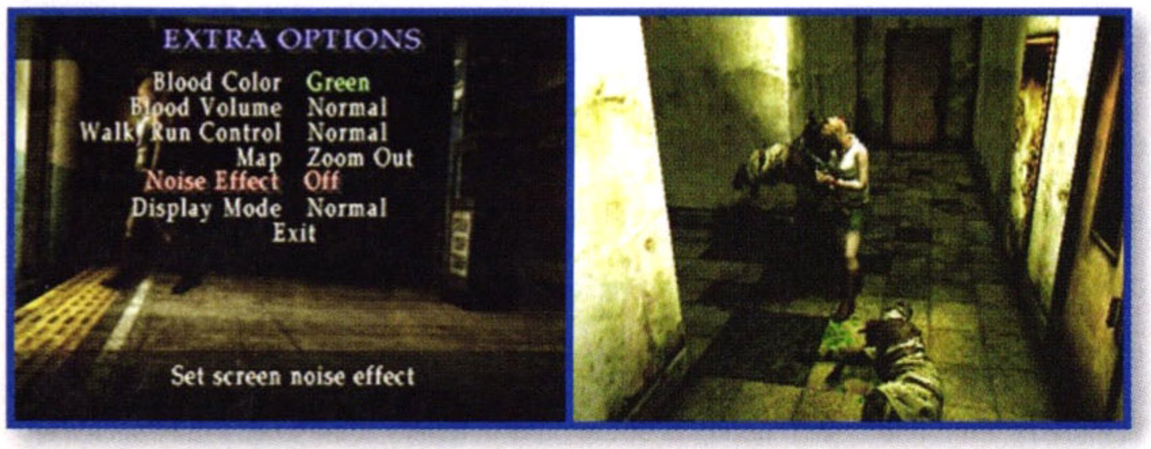
ALIENS VS. PREDATOR: EXTINCTION

Enter this code at any point during gameplay.

Cheat Mode – Pause the game, then press R1 (x2), L1, R1, L1 (x2), R1, L1, R1 (x2), L1, R1, L1 (x2), R1, L1. If the sequence is entered correctly, the Cheats option will appear within the Options menu. Here, you'll be able to access Player Invulnerable, Enable All Levels, Cheat Win, and Gimme $10,000 toggles.

"Dynamite" Derek Peterson
Atlanta, GA

SILENT HILL 3



Enter this sequence in the Options menu.

Bonus Options – Simultaneously press L1, L2, R1, and R2 to make the new options appear.

"Daddy Fat Sacks"
Memphis, TN

RTX RED ROCK

Enter all of these cheats from the Code screen within the in-game pause screen.

Additional Items – Right (x5), Left (x3), Up (x2)
Bonus Special Features – Left, Down, Up, Left, Right, Up, Down, Left, Right, Down
Difficult Mode – Down, Up (x8), Down
Easy Mode – Up, Down (x8), Up
Level Select – Down, Left (x2), Down, Left, Down, Right, Down, Left, Down
Normal Mode – Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down
Super Weapons – Right, Up, Down (x2), Up, Right (x2), Up, Down (x2)

Henry Tyson
West Brook, ID

FUTURAMA

Input these codes at any point during gameplay. The screen will flash blue, white, or green when entered correctly.

All Extras – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, ○, Select.
Bogad's Swamp Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Left, Up, Select.
Canyon Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, Up, Select.
Immortality – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, △, Select.
Inner Temple Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down, △, Select.
Junkyard Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, Left, Select.
Junkyard Stage 2 – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, △, Select.
Junkyard Stage 3 – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, ○, Select.
Left Wing Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down, Right, Select.
Market Square Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down, Up, Select.
Mine Facility Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, Down, Select.
Mine Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right (x2), Select.
Mom's HQ Bender's Breakout Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △ (x2), Up, Select.
Mom's HQ Fry Fights Back Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △ (x2), Down, Select.
Mom's HQ Leela's Last Laugh Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △ (x2), Right, Select.
New New York Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, ×, Select.
Old New York Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, Left, Select.
Planet Xpress Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up (x2), Select.
Red Light District Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, △, Select.
Right Wing Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down (x2), Select.
Sewers Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, Right, Select.
Subway Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, Down, Select.
Temple Courtyard Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down, Left, Select.
Unlimited Ammo – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, Right, Select.
Unlimited Charge – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, Left, Select.
Unlimited Health – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, Up, Select.
Unlimited Lives – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, Down, Select.
Uptown Stage – Hold L1 and L2, and press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, ○, Select.

Robin Williams
Deer Town, IA

A fantasy for wherever reality takes you.

Welcome to the fantasy world of Ivalice. Use swords, magic, spells or whatever tactics you can to return to reality. It'll take strategy and time. Good thing you can take it with you.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Mild Violence

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CODE OF THE MONTH

DOWNHILL DOMINATION

To enter these cheats, begin any race, then input Up, △, Down, ✕, Left, ○, Right, □ to bring up the message Codes Unlocked. From here, input any sequence below to activate the corresponding cheat function. When a code is entered correctly, a message will appear on screen.

Adrenaline Boost – Down, Left (x2), Right
Always Stoked – Down, □ (x2), Left, ○
Anti-Gravity – Down, △, □ (x2), Up
Combat Upgrade – Up, Down, Left (x2), Right
Energy Restore – Down, Right (x2), Left (x2)
Infinite Water Bottles – Up, ✕, Left (x2), ○ (x2)
Mega Flip – Right, Up (x2), Right (x2), □
More Cash – Right, Up (x2), ○ (x2), □
Speed Freak – Down, △, Right (x2), □
Stoke Trick Meter – Down, Left (x2), Right (x2)
Super Bounce – Left, □, ✕, Up, △
Super Bunny Hop – Up, ✕, Left, □, Up
Upgrade Bottle – Up, Down, Left (x2), Right (x2)

Steven Rogers
Spartanburg, SC

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION

Here's a brief rundown of some of the secrets in this massive game.

Alternate Dural Music – In Arcade mode, reach Dural in less than nine minutes to hear a different music track.
Classic Sega Chant – When the game begins, hold ○ before the Sega logo appears to hear a familiar medley of voices.
Fight Against Alternate Dural – In Arcade mode, reach Dural with a total number of wins with a "9" as the last digit. If you look closely, you'll see that Dural has red eyes.
Fight Against Transparent Dural – In Arcade mode, reach Dural within six minutes under default settings.
Original Arenas – In Quest mode, make it to the Sega Area Uptown stage. From here on in, if you hold Start at the Versus mode Stage Selection screen, you'll unlock an original VF arena.
Play as Dural – In Quest mode, progress to the Sega Area Uptown stage. Purchase the ability to fight Dural. From here on in, this powerful character will be available for play in Versus mode.
Training Stage 1 – In Quest mode, reach Club Sega Bay Area stage. From here on in, if you press Left or Right at the Versus mode Stage Selection screen, you can play on Training Stage 1.
Training Stage 2 – In Quest mode, reach Sega World South stage. From here on in, if you press Left or Right at the Versus mode Stage Selection screen, you can play on Training Stage 2.
Training Stage 3 – In Quest mode, reach Club Sega Plant Area stage. From here on in, if you press Left or Right at the Versus mode Stage Selection screen, you can play on Training Stage 3.
Training Stage 4 – In Quest mode, reach Sega Area Midtown stage. From here on in, if you press Left or Right at the Versus mode Stage Selection screen, you can play on Training Stage 4.

"The Vidman"
Uptown, MN

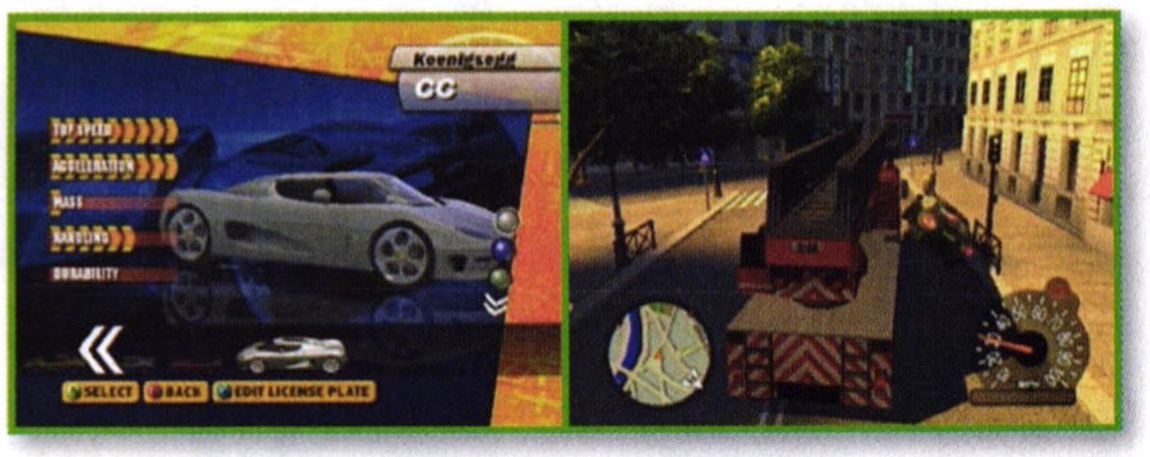
SUMMER HEAT BEACH VOLLEYBALL

Enter these codes at the Cheats screen within the Options/Game Settings menu. When a code is entered correctly, you'll hear a girl say, "You got it."

All Accessories – WERIT
All Beach House Bonuses – MYPAD
All Characters – PEEPS
All Difficulty Settings – CHAMP
All Locations – 80DAY
All Minigames – MAJOR
All Movies – MUSAK
All Swimsuits & Shorts – GREED
All Trailers – GAMON
Coconut Ball – MILKY
High Gravity – Zippy
High Pitched Voices – MOUSE
Low Gravity – SPACE
Low Pitched Voices – HORSE
Nails Mode – NAILS
Nerd Ball – GOLEM
No Arrows – WHINE
Spinning Heads – EXOSZ
Sun Ball – Hot 1

Isaac Hayes
Rockford, IL

MIDTOWN MADNESS 3



Enter this helpful cheat at the Car Selection menu. This sequence must be entered quickly.

All Cars – Click in the Left analog stick and hold it while entering L Button, R Button, L Button (x3), R Button (x3), L Button (x2), R Button (x2).

Jason Lees
Rochester, NH

ROLLER COASTER TYCOON

To activate these cheats, you simply need to change the name of a guest. If you want to activate multiples of the same cheat, simply change the capitalization in the name. For instance, if you've already used John Mace, try JoHn MaCe.

Guest Draws Pictures – Simon Foster
Guest Increases Park Happiness – Melanie
Guest Pays Double Entrance Fee – John Mace
Guest Slow in Go-Karts – Mr Bean
Guest Speeds in Go-Karts – Damon Hill
Guest Takes Photos – Chris Sawyer
Guest Thinks "Wow!" – John Wardley
Guest Waves to Everyone – Katie Brayshaw

Johnson Longfellow
Bigone Villa, RI

Aliens vs. Predator: Extinction

Enter this code at any point during gameplay.

Cartoon Mode – Create an Xbox soundtrack with the name «<GIGGLES>». When the game begins, Cartoon mode will be activated. All of the units and objects will now have cel-shaded outlines. Simply change the soundtrack name to remove this effect.

Cheat Mode – Pause the game, then press R Button (x2), L Button, R Button, L Button (x2), R Button, L Button, R Button (x2), L Button, R Button, L Button (x2), R Button, L Button. If the sequence is entered correctly, the Cheats option will appear within the Options menu. Here, you'll be able to access Player Invulnerable, Enable All Levels, Cheat Win, and Gimme $10,000 toggles.

"Dynamite" Derek Peterson
Atlanta, GA

Ghost Recon: Island Thunder

To enter these cheats, you'll first need to complete all objectives in the Single Mission dossier. Once you accomplish this feat, you can input any of the codes at any point during gameplay. When a cheat is entered correctly, a message will flash on the screen.

Big Bodies – Press Back, then hit B (x2), Y, X (x2), A.
Big Heads – Press Back, then hit A, X, B, Y, A.
Chicken Explosives – Press Back, then hit X (x2), Y, A, B.
Fast Mode – Press Back, then hit A (x2), X, B, Y.
High Pitched Voices – Press Back, then hit X, A, Y, B, X.
Paper Mode – Press Back, then hit B, A, X, Y, A.
Slow Motion – Press Back, then hit Y (x2), B, X, A.

Ben Andersen
Farmington, GA

Viewtiful Joe

Play as Alastor – Complete the game on V-Rated difficulty.
Play as Captain Blue – Complete the game on Ultra V-Rated difficulty.
Play as Sylvia – Complete the game on Adults difficulty.
Ultra V-Rated Mode – Complete the game on V-Rated difficulty.
Viewtiful World Music Video – Complete the game on Kids difficulty.
V-Rated Mode – Complete the game on Adults difficulty.

Cookie Galore
Webville, COM

Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour

Blooper Open Tournament – In Sands Classic, finish in first.
Bowser Badlands Tournament – In Peach's Invitational, finish in first.
Cheep Cheep Tournament – In Lakitu Cup, finish in first.
Peach's Invitational Tournament – In Blooper Open, finish in first.
Play as Boo – In Tournament mode, obtain 50 different Birdie Badges.
Play as Bowser Jr. – Get a birdie or better on all holes of the 18 Hole Birdie Challenge.
Play as Petey Pirahna – Complete all of the side games on all of the difficulty levels.
Play as Shadow Mario – Complete all of Ring mode.
Sands Classic Tournament – In Cheep Cheep Tournament, finish in first.
Star Tournament – In Bowser Badlands, finish in first.

Louie Berghammer
Minneapolis, MN

Simpsons: Road Rage

Enter this code at the Password screen.

Unlock Everything – Maggie, Willy, Bart, Chief Wiggum, Apu, Moe, Krusty, Barney

Marcus "Damn Yankees Rule!!!" Wheaton
San Rafael, CA

The Incredible Hulk

Enter this code from the in-game pause screen.

Level Skip – Down, Right, Down, Right, Left (x2), Up

Antonio Banderas
Suckyactor City, HI

Muppets: On With the Show

Enter all of these case-sensitive cheats at the Continue screen.

All Minigames – J09J4
Hard Difficulty Setting – H08L2
Medium Difficulty Setting – G07N0

Larry David
New York, NY

CLASSIC GAMING EXPO 2003

Each year that we visit the Classic Gaming Expo in Las Vegas, it gets better and better. While the shopping portion of the trip certainly stirred a desire within us to pick up some rare favorites, the museum and auction held a special place in our hearts. Here are some of the more quirky highlights from the museum – and don't forget to flip the page for a rundown of the auction results.

Entex Select A Game

Entex, a Los Angeles-based handheld video game giant, produced this unit that uses a Vacuum Fluorescent Display and color overlays to make different games. Different might be too broad a term, though, as only six titles were released through normal retail channels. The system came bundled with Space Invaders 2 with the two-player mode having one gamer controlling the aliens and the other trying to blast them into oblivion. Other titles (Baseball 4, Basketball 3, Battleship, Football 4, Pac-Man 2, and Pinball) featured less innovative, but solid gameplay.

Vectrex Mr. Boston Game and Bottle

A nasty rumor in video game lore says that sometime in 1982, a liquor company sought to cash in on that "video game phenomenon" it saw all over the place. Their solution was to commission a custom version of Clean Sweep that featured a title screen with the Mr. Boston logo and a brief ad listing the types of spirits available at their emporium. Although only a small handful of the cartridges are known to exist, the few that have been found don't look to be the work of a built-at-home programmer, as they all have actual factory ROMs. Made by the factory? You decide.

Atari Mirai

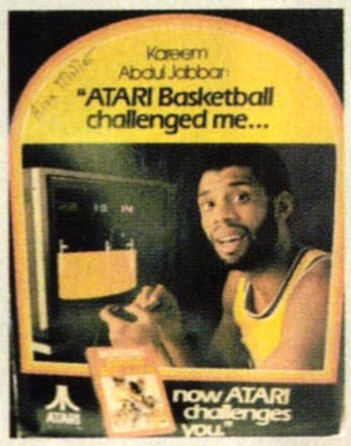
This wee gem of the late 1980s, *Miami Vice*, skinny ties, and pastel suits-like design is only known as the Atari Mirai. It's a non-functional prototype that has spawned more urban myths than that party down the block that your friend's brother's cousin went to a few years ago. Some Atari junkies think that it was a prototype system to be based on the ST line of 16- and 32-bit Atari computers. Others think that Atari and SNK had unannounced dealings on the down-low (the cartridge slot is mammoth, like on the Neo-Geo), while another faction believes that this is an unreleased Panther machine. It's doubtful that we'll ever really know what it is, but we can revel in its rad design.

Amiga Joyboard for Atari 2600

Basically a hands-free controller (one joystick could be plugged in to offer the player a "fire" button), the Joyboard required users to shift their body weight to move within a game. Designed in 1983 for use with the Mogul Maniac skiing game, Amiga programmers became so enamored with the device that it became a religious experience. Some may remember that older versions of the AmigaOS featured a cryptic "Guru Meditation" error. This inside joke started when stressed-out programmers relaxed at work by playing a Zen meditation game that required them to sit as still as possible on the Joyboard and not hit any of the directional switches.

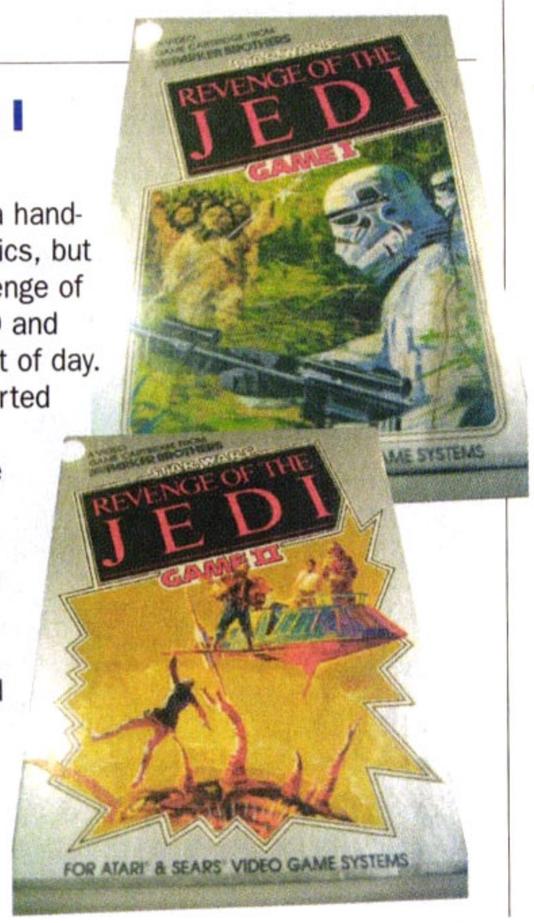
Kareem Abdul Jabbar ATARI Standup

Atari's aptly titled Basketball for the 2600 featured no celebrity look-alikes – in all honesty, the players only vaguely looked like actual humans. Released in the late '70s, Basketball was one of the first titles to take advantage of celebrity endorsement – just look at how excited Mr. Jabbar is! This particular standee is especially nifty, as Alan Miller (the game's programmer) scrawled his name across the top.



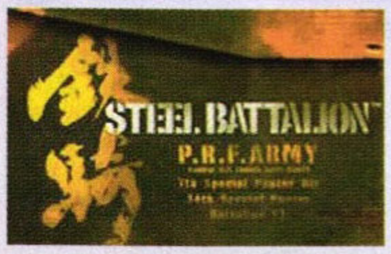
Revenge of the Jedi I and II Boxes

Atari played gracious host to a handful of *Star Wars*-inspired classics, but Parker Brothers' planned Revenge of the Jedi I and II for Atari 2600 and Intellivision never saw the light of day. In theory, the games were started while *Return of the Jedi* was still in production, as Revenge of the Jedi was the flick's original title. Apparently, the companies were giddy enough about the idea to mock up some box art and hype up the titles in magazine ads and articles, but there is no proof that the games were ever actually produced.



GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME | BY THOMAS COUGHLIN

Every month one of Game Informer's readers picks his or her personal choice for Greatest Game Of All Time.



STEEL BATTALION

■ **FORMAT** XBOX
■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM

The controller has two flight sticks: one for turning and looking around, the other is used for aiming lock-on crosshairs, as well as firing primary and sub weapons. The controller also has a tuning dial used to communicate orders or supply requests, and a gearshift. All of the buttons light up or flash in either red or green, depending on what they do. The foot pedals are for acceleration, braking, and evasion of enemy fire if you are fast enough.

While moving in first-person view, you play mission-based combat modes like Protection, Acquisition (obtaining things), Capture (claiming territory), Annihilate, and Chase. Your Sight Change Stick rotates the view to look for a target and then locks on with the weapons crosshairs. Both move 180 degrees.

Inside the cockpit there are dials for your map, ammo, fuel, slide boost power, and incoming attack location and type. Other ones are included for speed, mission time, override, and forecast shooting system. I should mention that

His and Hers Lynx

The Lynx was released by Atari in 1989 as the first color handheld gaming system featuring multiplayer competition, built-in 3D, distortion graphics, and reversible controls. The two units pictured here in traditional "boy" and "girl" shades of powder blue and pastel pink were never commercially released. If Atari was planning this as the ultimate present for couples, someone must have pointed out the obvious, "Dude. It's like 1989. Although there are girls that play video games, how many of them want a pink one...to match their boyfriend's?"

Famicom

We "older" gamers will remember drooling over a similar-looking box used in electronic stores to demonstrate Nintendo games stateside. That unit, called the M82, is not the same as this Famicom Box, which was designed for use in Japanese hotels. Although the cartridges held inside resemble those used in the NES, they contain no NES chips. In addition, the "Nintendo" labeled controllers and zapper are hardwired into the unit, while the box itself weighs a ton. Presumably, Nintendo was worried about these walking out of hotels with the bathrobes and towels.

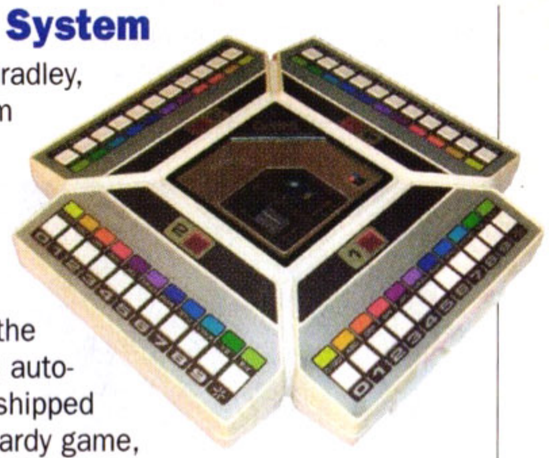
Revenge of the Beefsteak Tomatoes Promotional Beach Ball

Apparently, 1982 was an interesting year for video game public relations. Members of the press and retail communities were subjected to frequent packages educating them on a forthcoming Atari 2600 game...and a tomato product. Tomato paste, ketchup, and stewed versions of the fruit preceded this truly bizarre item – a beach ball in the likeness of the main character who was a beefsteak tomato with horns. The game was never released, but an emulation of the title is now widely available.

Bally Astrocade

Bally Manufacturing Company, well known for its leadership in the pinball industry, fancied itself as a video game console manufacturer in 1977 with the high-profile announcement of the Bally Astrocade. Shipping in January of 1978, the machine utilized the Zilog Z-80 processor, had four built-in programs, and came with two controllers and an alphanumeric keypad. Why bother with the keypad? Because in October of the same year, Bally released a cartridge containing Tiny BASIC, and the Astrocade became an extremely easy to use and programmable console.

Omni Entertainment System



Conceived in 1980 by Milton Bradley, the Omni Entertainment system is an 8-track trivia machine. Cartridges were 8-track tapes with a host that asks one to four players trivia questions. Each "gamer" has their own keypad to enter answers, and the machine keeps track of scores automatically. At least some units shipped with Re-Action Quiz and a Jeopardy game, but few other titles are proven to exist. Hasbro (who now owns Milton Bradley) still has the instruction book on their website, and it's funny enough to deserve a read-though now and again.

Nintendo Homework First lock

There's not much history to share with this little device that locks onto the NES and blocks the cartridge slot, but most gamers can safely say that this conversation has taken place in their lives:

LOVED ONE: "Did you finish your homework/chores/senior thesis yet?"

GAMER: "Nope. I'm going to go play games first."

LOVED ONE: "You can't play games until you've finished your homework/chores/senior thesis!"

GAMER: "Oh. Well, then they're done. Yeah, done."

Coleco Combat

While Combat is generally remembered as a game that came with the Atari 2600 console, Coleco put out the title first. This dedicated console (meaning that it only played Combat and didn't accept other cartridges) allowed two players to partake in some head-to-head tank warfare. Atari's update featured color graphics, multiple enemy types, and different weapons to have at your disposal. The Coleco version was not in color, offered less variety, and required the use of this console, which many have generously described as "fragile."

VTs (vertical tanks) consists of first, second, and third generation types, and the cockpit looks different for each one. Observant players will notice that all of the creators' names are written on the bottom of the center block.

The cockpit view is slightly fuzzy, the paint scratches off the controller's metal plates easily, and you cannot switch your sex from male to female. These three problems aside, this game is complex, challenging, and long (29 missions).

Your VT stands ten stories tall (the height changes based on its generation), and is equipped with the latest weaponry available in 2080. A 355mm rifle, 67mm chain guns, mortars, missiles, cluster rockets, railguns, plasma torches, and cutters (melee weapons) are all available. You even have napalm to burn trees, create smoke, or scorch your enemies by lighting them on fire. The VT is the ultimate war machine.

The music is very diverse: classical changes to hip-hop mid-song; a Japanese woman sings beautifully during the game's two ending sequences; and, while I can't be sure, I think the soundtrack also includes some Japanese rap.

The game's physics change as the difficulty level rises. Missile and shell rounds speed up, damage becomes critical more quickly, and enemies demonstrate more skill. Higher difficulty means less supply points (used to buy more tanks) and more combat points (used to pilot more advanced VTs that you have faced in combat).

I have always liked mech games, and this is the best one. I am a collector and Steel Battalion is the best piece I have.

Auction Fun

There are few things that can make a room of geeks go, "Ohhhhhh. Wow! Will you take a check?" like an auction of obsolete, but extremely collectible gaming paraphernalia. Here are some highlights of what was on the block and how much it went for.

Protable Magnavox VCS Handmade $410

This handheld wonder is actually an Atari 2600 VCS. The unit was designed and built by Benjamin J. Heckendorn and features hand-tooled wood casing.

Intellicart $90 and $130

Two of these strange cards were available. They allow you to upload Intellivision game ROM files from your PC to an Intellivision console.

Vectrex 3D Imager $290

This accessory launched at the same time as the Vectrex Light Pen and was the first item up for bid. The winner giggled like a schoolgirl.

- Mythacon floor display $75
- A-Team prototype (dated 3/30/84) for Atari 2600 $170
- Complete Microvision with seven games $100
- NES hands-free controller from the Starlight foundation $90 – Nintendo's Starlight foundation developed tools for handicapped gamers to enjoy the latest releases. This controller worked through breath control.
- Steven Segal prototype for Super Nintendo $120 – No one knew whether or not to congratulate the "winner" of this item. Someone behind us imitated The Simpsons' Nelson and said, "Ha ha. You bought a Steven Segal game."
- Magnavox Odyssey One with six games $310 (reserve not met)
- Might and Magic design document and concept art (around 80 pages for the Apple II version) $150
- Qb (numbered 20 of 100) for Atari 2600 $80
- NTF2 Nintendo test card $110
- Vextrex dust cover $120 – You did read that correctly, it's a dust cover. And it went for $120 to a very excited classic gamer.
- N64 lighted display sign $90
- Dragon's Lair collectors cards $45
- Turbo Duo with three games $160 (reserve not met)
- Dragonball Z GT Final Bout for PSone $110
- Q*Bert marquee for an arcade standup, signed $90
- Metal Slug 2 for Neo-Geo $160
- Swordquest Waterworld for Atari 2600, shrink-wrapped $320 – This was the third in a series of four games. Players had to mail order it from Atari and this one was still wrapped! The two preceding titles weren't very much fun, so few gamers put forth the effort to get their hands on this one.
- Intellivision One blank cassettes $60 (reserve not met)
- Phantasy Star I-IV $110
- Radiant Silvergun for Sega Saturn $150
- Nintendo TV/NES combo by Sharp $200
- SNES Speed Racer Mountain Bike Rally $310
- Track and Field prototype for Atari 5200 $150
- Atari Sales binder from CES $180 (reserve not met)
- Atari trackball hat, signed by inventor $35
- Frogger 2 prototype for Atari 2600 $80
- Rescue Terra One for Atari 2600 $80
- War of the Robots for Vectrex $110
- Nintendo Game Counselor's Handbook $330 – The collective awe when this item was unveiled would have rivaled the crappy Care Bear's Care Power. Not only had everyone wanted to be a Nintendo Counselor, how did someone get this binder out of the building?
- Lynx Baseball prototype $100
- Boing for Atari 2600 $70
- Vectrex Light Pen and two games, each in their box $150
- Merlin's Walls for Atari 2600 $80
- Super Smash TV for Sega Master System $50
- Spy Hunter for Coleco Vision $65
- Top-loading NES $95 – Rare Nintendo hardware is always a good seller. The battle for this item was no exception.
- Surf Saves the Day for Atari 2600 with tapes $75 (reserve not met)
- Vectrex with Pole Position, Polar Rescue, and Star Castle $150
- Biorhythm RCA Studio $25 (reserve not met)
- Condor Attack for Atari 2600 $180
- Sonic Adventure, Hollywood Video version for Sega Dreamcast $70
- Football prototype for Atari 2600 $60 (reserve not met)

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

To gamers, Nolan Bushnell is best known as one of the co-founders of Atari. Along with Ted Dabney, Bushnell ponied up $250 to start the company in 1972 – hoping to develop and publish arcade games. Their hit ping-pong title Pong was actually based on Table Tennis, which was created by Ralph Baer for the Magnavox Odyssey.

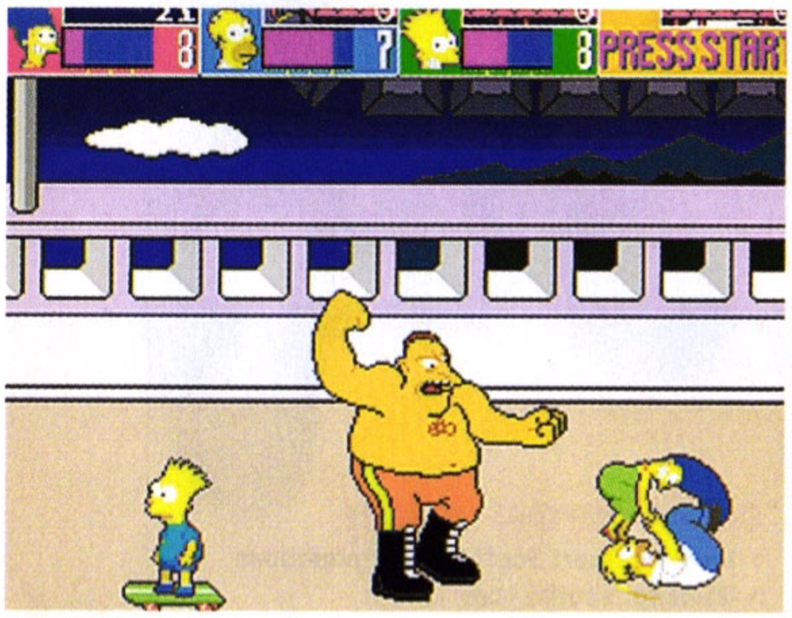
Atari went on to be the "Six Degrees of Separation" for the video game industry, as nearly everyone is tied to it in some way. Steve Jobs was the company's fortieth employee (he worked as a technician for $5/hour), and current bigwig development house Activision was founded in 1980 by four disgruntled Atari programmers.

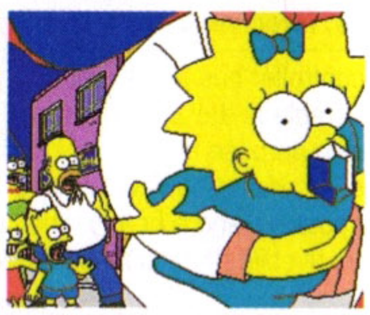
Bushnell sold Atari to Warner Communications for $28 million in this month in 1976, and went on to make more mad cash shilling pizzas and creepy mascots to children through his Chuck E. Cheese party-restaurant empire.

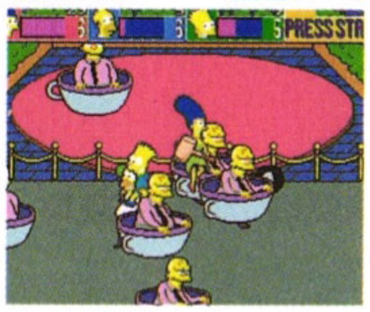
ARCADE

THE SIMPSONS

RETRO RATING **8.75**







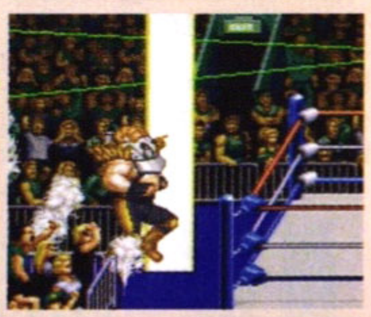
Having taken TV by storm, Springfield's #1 family hit arcades in 1991. In the spirit of other Konami brawlers at the time – Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and X-Men to name a few – The Simpsons lets you take over Lisa, Bart, Marge, or Homer in a wild attempt to save poor Maggie. While there's really only one attack button to speak of, family members can team up for super attacks. For example, Homer can pick up Bart and throw him, or he and Marge can form a human tumbleweed – rolling over anything in their path. The show references are infinite, as just about every Springfield citizen makes a cameo. Martin will run from thugs, Otto serves you life-replenishing food, and Milhouse offers up a hammer power-up. Popular locations like Noiseland Arcade and Springfield Elementary pop up, too. Everything looks astounding enough that a 16-bit console port was never realized. Now that console technology has caught up, when will we see an enhanced home version?

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1991

SNES

SATURDAY NIGHT SLAM MASTERS

RETRO RATING **7**



Every gamer knew Capcom in 1993. Its flagship Street Fighter II series was king. Slam Masters is an attempt to blend SF II's arcade fighting mechanics with pro wrestling. Ten stars make up the CWA (Capcom Wrestling Association). While they're fictional characters, similarities to real-life wrestlers – most notably Big Van Vader, Tiger Mask, and Buck Zumhofe – cannot be denied. After a flashy entrance, they hit the ring. Buttons consist of attack, jump, and run – a far cry from the six attack buttons of Street Fighter. That doesn't mean the moves don't have style; there are plenty of submissions and suplexes. Also, you can jump into and out of the ring and use a variety of weapons. Sadly, Street Fighter quality, this is not. The framerate is awful on most moves, and executing grapples doesn't work very well. That leaves you mostly striking; but with only one button, strategy is limited. Its four-player battle royal is good fun, but Capcom really didn't hit the mark with this crossover try.

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1993

GENESIS

CASTLEVANIA: BLOODLINES

RETRO RATING **8.5**

Each previous Castlevania had been on a Nintendo platform, but it was only natural for Genesis – the "cool" console – to get in on the vampire slaying. Bloodlines is a great addition to the series, and takes full advantage of the console's strong points. It is packed with nonstop action, as there's always a mid-boss or slew of drones in every room. Belmont descendent John Morris (don't let the last name fool you) fills the role of the whip-wielding hero. He's joined by Eric Lecarde, who chooses to swing a spear. They have to stop the Countess from resurrecting Dracula. Does it really take two dudes to beat one woman? Ouch, Lisa, stop pummeling us! Bloodlines, as the name suggests, is one of the bloodier installments to the series, and its reflective pools and massive bosses look gorgeous. While it's void of the RPG elements that made Castlevania titles in the Igarashi era so amazing (Symphony of the Night, Circle of the Moon, etc.), this is still a great part of the legacy.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1994

PSONE

TOMB RAIDER

RETRO RATING **8.25**

Lara's Tomb Raider series revolutionized video games – more specifically 3D gaming. Before it turned into the farce it is now, this entry dazzled gamers far and wide. We'll assume you know all about Ms. Croft, and we'll just talk about the series' first installment. She is introduced in dramatic fashion, dispatching a pack of wolves and slipping into a secret, ancient doorway before it closes. Armed with twin pistols that never run out of ammo, Lara does some fantastic platforming and exploring. The control is meticulous, but actually makes more sense than the gameplay in Angel of Darkness. Graphically, it's a little rough on the eyes – and not just because Lara's chest could easily poke out one of them with its sharp points. The sound, however, is a masterpiece of "less is more" philosophy. Music only comes in when the drama is heightened. It's a great effect. The puzzles have some repetition (pull switch/open door), but these were done well before Core's idea well ran dry.

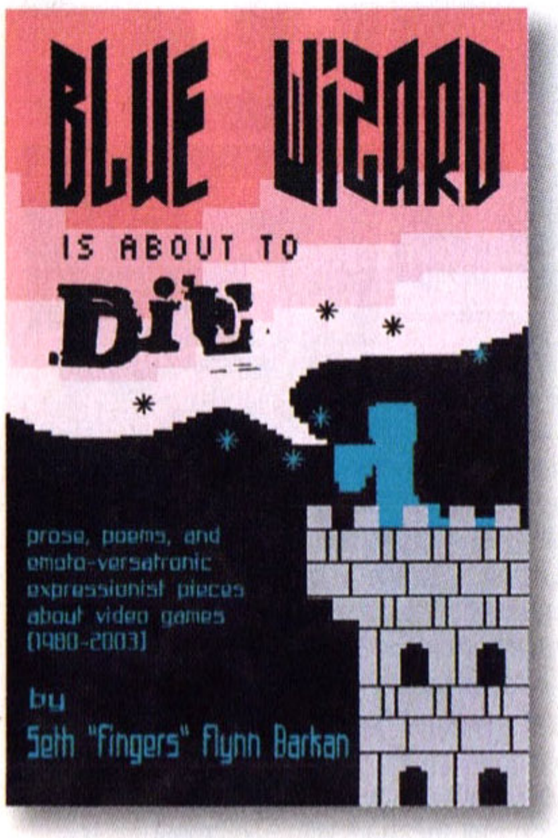
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS INTERACTIVE
■ **DEVELOPER** CORE ■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1996

ETC

BLUE WIZARD IS ABOUT TO DIE

> **Manufacturer: Rusty Immelman Press**
> **Website: twhi.org/immelman.htm**
> **List Price: $15.00**

There is only one item that all GI staff in attendance of the Classic Gaming Expo gladly plopped down $15.00 for – *Blue Wizard Is About To Die*, a collection of poems and essays about video games. If you've spent any amount of time with the titles covered, there are few things funnier in this universe. We present as an example the poem entitled Paperboy below.

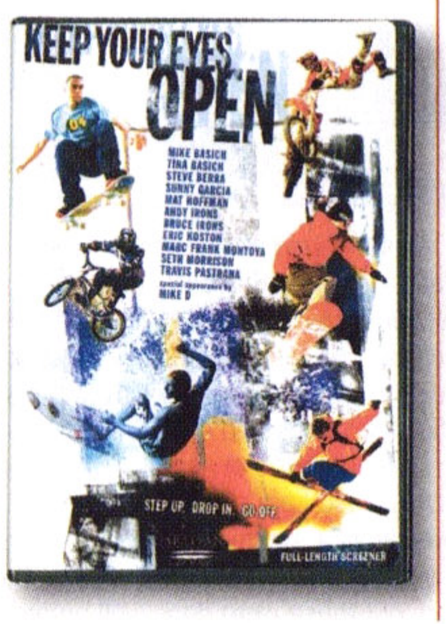


If only I could save you
from the blondes in the black
Duesenberg; hold you back,
Grab your f°/₀#&ing handle-bars,*
shaking my head, preventing
your insane ride into traffic
saying "it's not worth it, kid;
whatever they're paying you,
it's not worth it."

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

> **Manufacturer: Artisan Entertainment**
> **Website: artisanent.com**
> **List Price: $19.98**

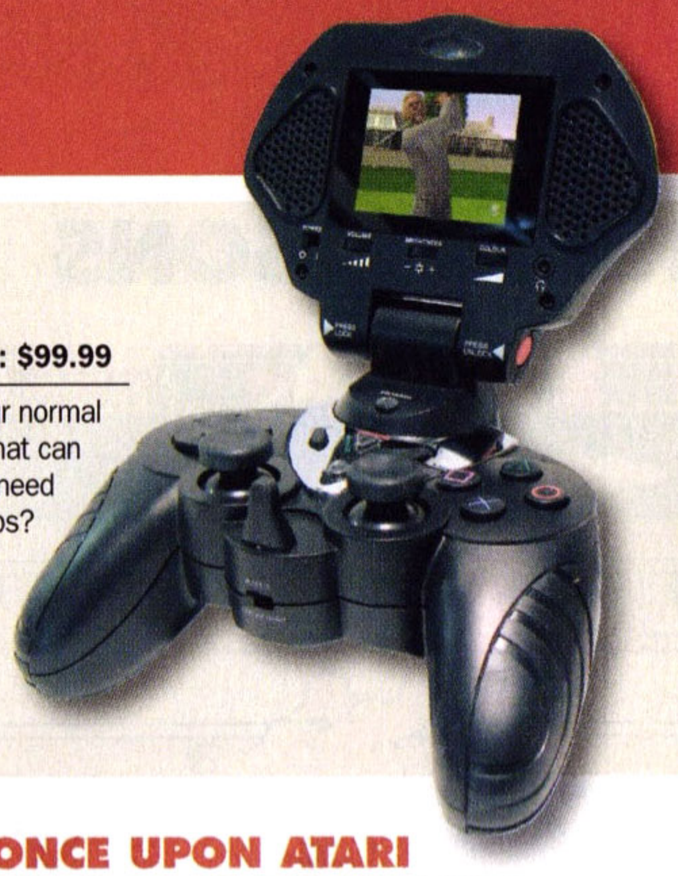
The director of *Half Baked* and that Britney Spears vehicle called *Crossroads* has turned her attention to extreme sports. *Keep Your Eyes Open* follows an eclectic league of athletes as they attempt to ski, surf, skate, and bike their way to personal fulfillment. The Latch Brothers supply the soundtrack.



CONTROLLER & GAME SCREEN

> **Manufacturer: Intec** > **Website: inteclink.com** > **List Price: $99.99**

This programmable PlayStation 2 controller has a few features your normal hunk of plastic can't boast. Most notable is the 2.5" TFT screen that can be used for gaming or DVDs. Its main purpose is to eliminate the need for a separate television – perhaps for shared bedrooms or car trips? In addition, the unit offers stereo speakers and a headphone jack. Although it weighs as much as a small child, this could be one of those so-geeky-it's-cool items.



NINJA GAIDEN THROWING STAR

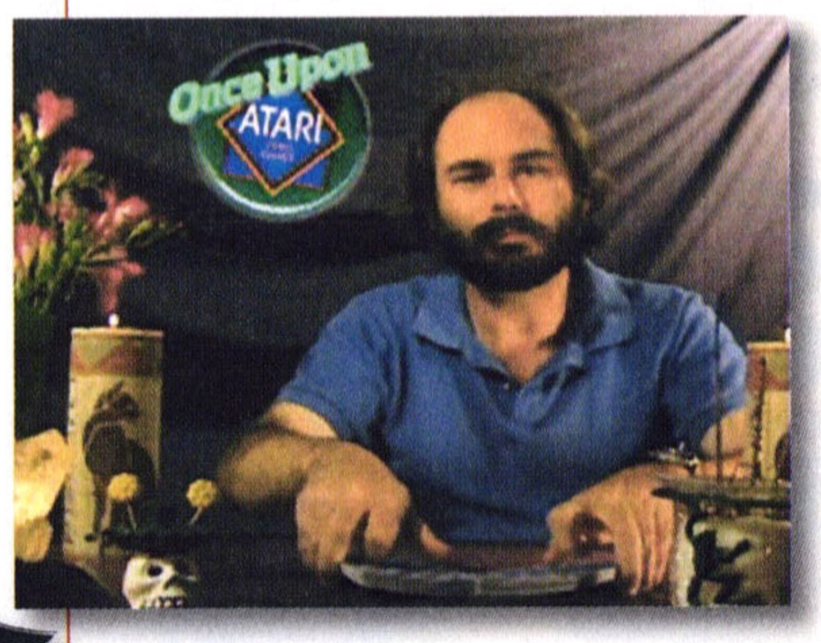
> **Manufacturer: Master Cutlery**
> **Website: mastercutlery.com**
> **List Price: Call for price**

What makes this item a true Ninja Gaiden accessory is the nifty box a few key members of our staff received them in. A very thoughtful warning runs below the Ninja Gaiden logo: "Use the virtue of caution when opening." We also suggest you use the virtues of not trying to pack it into carry-on luggage or a school-bound backpack. In fact, we feel compelled to state that this accessory is definitely for adults only.

ONCE UPON ATARI

> **Manufacturer: Scott West Productions**
> **Website: scottw.com**
> **List Price: $49.95**

Howard Scott Warsaw has actually done some really excellent work (produced Yar's Revenge and Raiders of the Lost Ark, for instance), but he is sadly known by most gamers for one "achievement" – making E.T. for Atari 2600. Fortunately, this notorious release did place Mr. Warsaw in an unusually advantageous position to make a documentary on the big times at Atari. This DVD's steep price tag is well worth it for those interested in how the company handled itself during the industry's heyday.



NAMCO TV GAMES

> **Manufacturer: JAKKS Pacific**
> **Website: jakkstvgames.com**
> **List Price: $24.99**

Fits of nostalgic whimsy dictate that classic gaming consoles get shrunk down to controller size – with a ridiculously wonderful amount of games packed inside. The Namco TV Games unit features five classics: Bosconian, Dig Dug, Galaxian, and Rally-X. Intellivision 25 has 25 titles (hence the name) that were ported to the new hardware by everyone's favorite Blue Sky Rangers. Favorites include Shark! Shark!, Space Battle, Vectron, and Sub Hunt. Good times, and you don't need anything to play besides the controllers, a TV, and four AA batteries (not included).

INTELLIVISION 25

> **Manufacturer: Techno Source**
> **Website: intellivisionlives.com**
> **List Price: $24.99**

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