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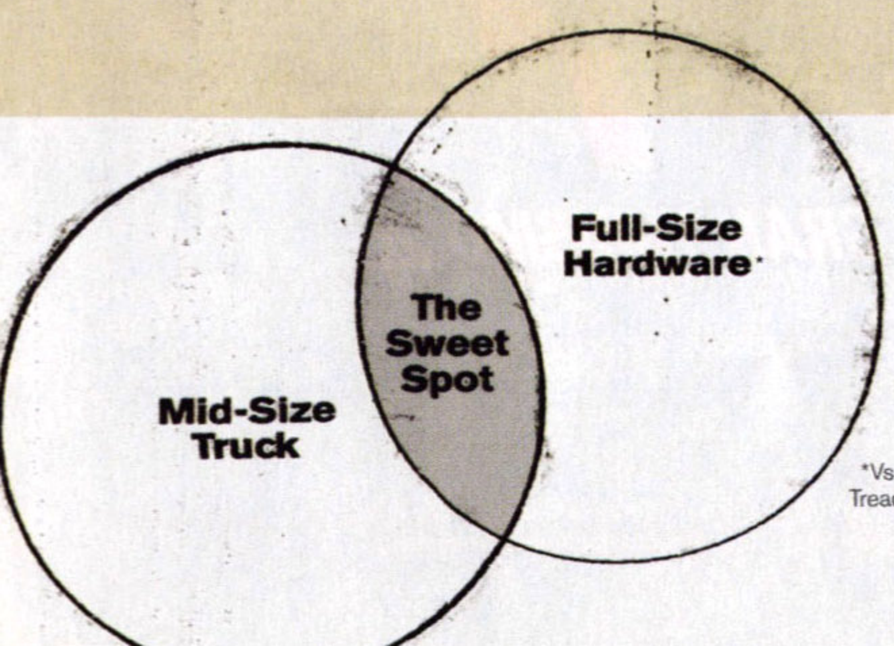

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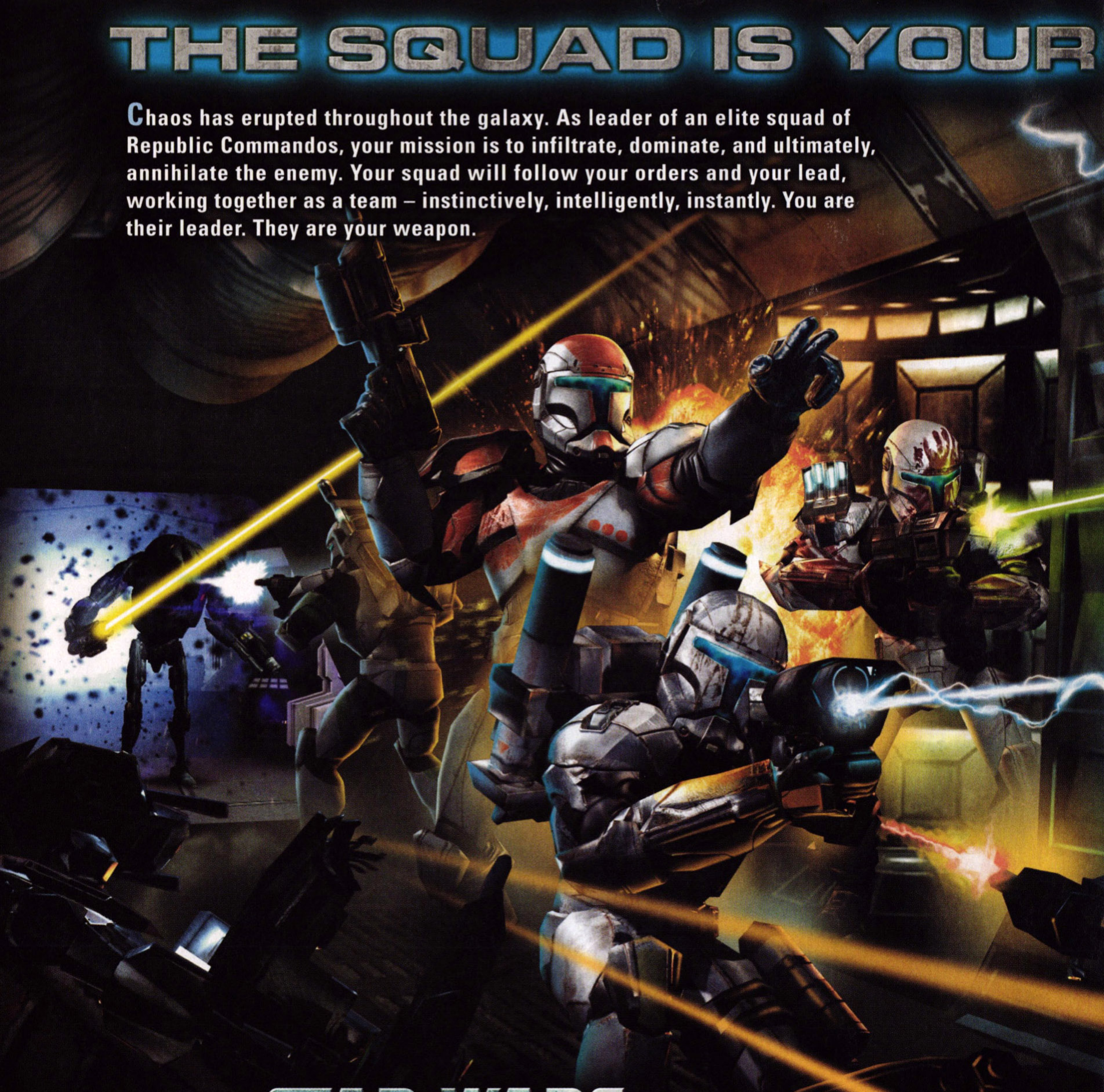

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Frightening games have always had the ability to disturb people far more deeply than movies, and those scares will only be more profound on the next generation of game consoles. Condemned, the new next-gen scarefest from Sega and respected developer Monolith, is changing the rules for the genre with more realistic visuals than ever before. But better graphics aren't the only surprises this game has in store. Check out the next generation of horror on page 56.

features

PSP SPECIAL REPORT

Vegas isn't all about desperate gambling addicts and depressingly aged cocktail waitresses – sometimes some video game news develops there, too! The recent Consumer Electronics Show in the neon city featured tons of new info on Sony's handheld, and GI was there to check it out. When we could pull ourselves away from the craps table, that is.

WANDA AND THE COLOSSUS

It may have not been a huge seller, but ICO is easily one of the most respected titles in the PS2 library. Now, the ICO team is returning with a game that promises to be bigger and better in every way. Check out the gorgeous screens and information to discover why gamers around the world are salivating over Wanda and the Colossus.

GAUNTLET: SEVEN SORROWS

Gauntlet defined multiplayer fun back in the day, and Midway is intent on recreating that magic with its newest incarnation. Fun hack n' slashers like this one get us all weepy, which some might mistake for sorrow – which of course it's not. We're too macho to cry, especially over a game that offers so much bloody fun.

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People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

SHOW ME THE MONEY

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It was only going to be a matter of time until the major sports leagues of the world figured out a way to make more money out of the video game market, and it seems they have finally struck gold with the selling of exclusive rights.

When it was announced that Electronic Arts had acquired the exclusive rights to the NFL, game enthusiasts were quick to blame the industry giant for monopolizing the sport and ruining the hobby. This, of course, is not the case. It's the sports entities that are bringing these deals to the table, and EA just happened to be the highest bidder. But of course, this is only the beginning.

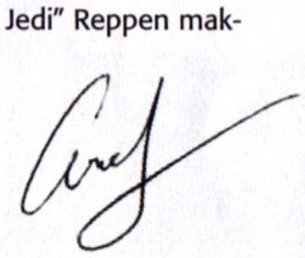
Just as the television networks fight over sports broadcasting rights, video game companies must now battle over the exclusive rights to all the various sports. Take 2 has already made a move for the Major League Baseball Players Association. Thankfully, it also secured the exclusive MLB rights, avoiding the scenario where one game features the players and another the official teams.

And now that the cat is out of the bag and the sports world knows we'll pay top dollar for these rights, you can expect this type of silliness to go on with every major sport (there are many companies already courting the National Basketball Association).

Of course, these dealings aren't necessarily bad for the video game player, but in all likelihood they probably are. It is my hope that these companies will realize that the acquisition of the exclusive rights isn't a license to do as they please, but an opportunity to expand video games and make them better. If done the right way, we can all still win; but if at the end of the day these high-budget exclusive deals take money away from development, players may find themselves paying top dollar for updated rosters.

I have faith in the video game industry, as it hasn't steered me wrong yet, but it will be interesting to see how the companies handle these licensing deals and increased costs.

Enjoy the issue, and please take an extra moment to check out this month's Greatest Game Of All Time in Classic GI which features a blast from Game Informer's past, with Erik "The PC Jedi" Reppen making a fantastic appearance.



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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry

1 Buena Vista's Rob Alvarez, Bender/Helper's Jaime Jensen, and Buena Vista's Mike Jacobs hang with Lisa on the Legendary Game Informer Couch™ **2** Sega's Bret Blount puts on a smile with Monolith's Frank Rooke and Dave Hasle **3** Andy, Adam, and the Novalogic massive parlay at Grandma's Bar and Grill in Minneapolis **4** Kato and Billy hang with the Bioware gang in chilly Edmonton, Canada **5** Old-school West Coast legend Tone Loc shows video game dorks how to do the wild thing with the celebrity supergroup Camp Freddy at Sony's CES PSP party **6** Surge Magazine's Matt Bertz unleashes the fury while freelance herbalizer Jon Gibson tries to eat Lisa's brains, zombie-style! **7** Koei's Jarik Sikat loves GI Spy and GI Spy loves him! As for Joe and Chris, well, we think it's best if we remain "just friends" **8** Ready for takeoff! To avoid an international incident, Activision's Ryh-Ming Poon and Aaron Grant are forced to cram the Seven Studios posse into a cargo jet at the Santa Monica Airport

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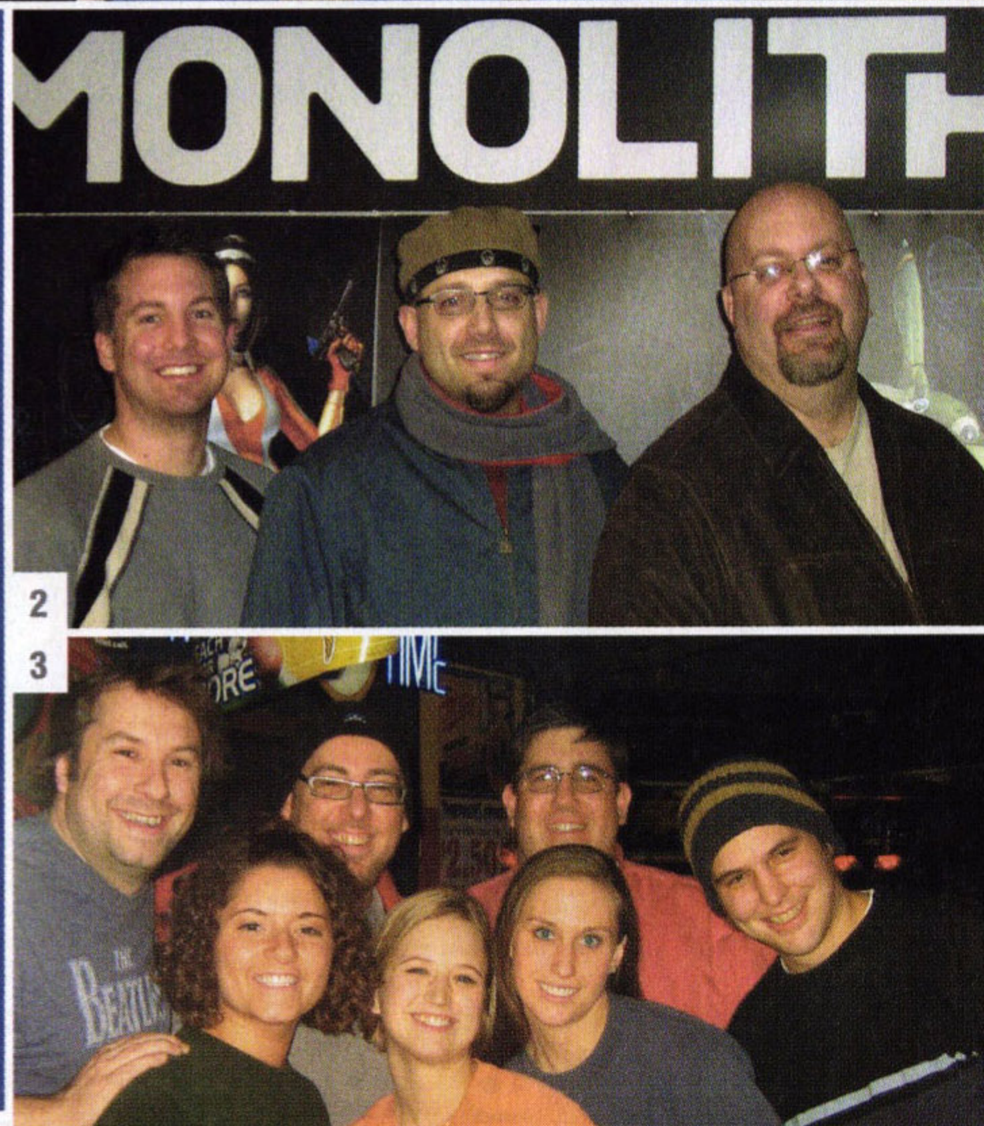

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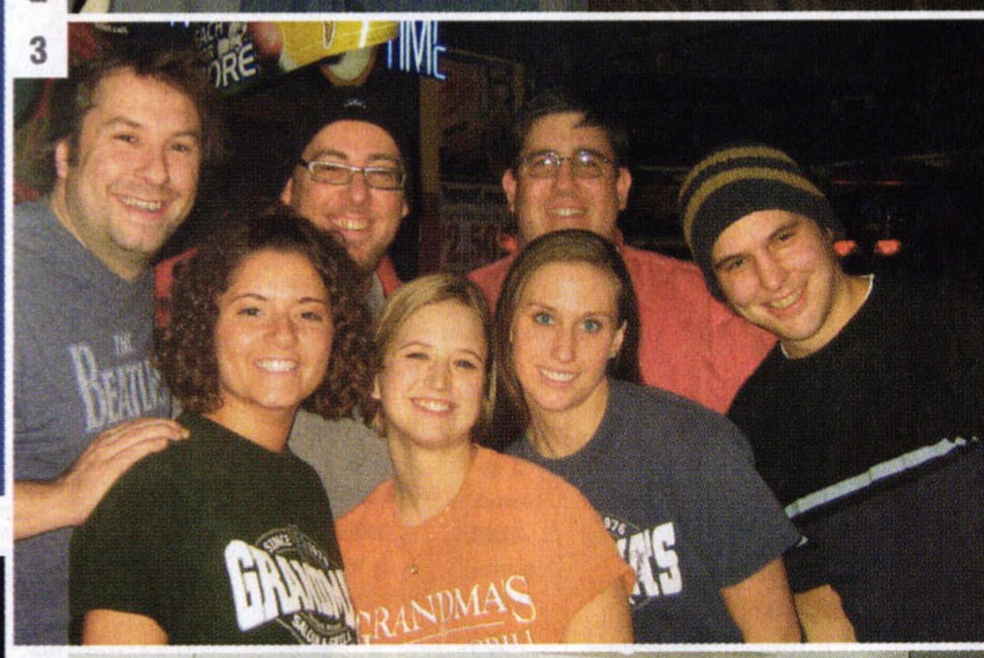

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DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

THEM'S FIGHTIN' WORDS

After reading John Levine's letter [issue 141] I can only hope that once he enters the real world, he'll learn a few important lessons. First, the number of people who learn a foreign language is not as small or as exclusive as he thinks. Second, a large vocabulary does not immediately indicate intelligence. Third, the gaming community is one of the most diverse populations one is likely to find. Many ages, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and intelligence levels are represented in our ranks. Attempting to lump them all together in some ignorant stereotype is just asinine. I'm already sick of getting my gaming knowledge questioned simply because I'm female; I don't need to put up with false assumptions about my intellect.

Rebecca
Via comcast.net

Though I normally enjoy the letters in Dear GI, I took no pleasure in reading the comments written by Mr. Levine. His implication that his fellow readers are too uneducated to possess a vocabulary encompassing words like "verisimilitude" (which is part of standard English, regardless of its etymology) is an insult to gamers everywhere. Maybe I'm just a part of that "small percentage of your readership" predicted by John to have understood the word, but I think it is far more likely that his vocabulary is not as "robust" as he is pleased to believe.

Lambert
Via email

■ **As it turns out, people don't like being called stupid. Maybe that's why we keep getting punched when we go to Bed Bath & Beyond. Anyway, our readers came out of the woodwork wielding esoteric weapons of cosmic magnitude to disprove John Levine's assertion. From long-forgotten, obscure words to an Einstein-Fuller lovechild reference, you pulled out all the stops in displaying the staggering might of your collective lexicon. We'd like to take this moment to say that not only are we very proud of you, we're also a little bit scared. "Atrabilious"? "Hortatory"? Do you fanatically memorize Word-A-Day emails, or are you just relics from an ancient and superior civilization? We're cool with it either way – plus, both situations could make pretty sweet Val Kilmer movies.**

HAVE FUN STORMING THE CASTLE

As is the case for many gamers, ESPN NFL 2K5 stole my allegiance from Madden this year, but I have still remained a loyal buyer of other Electronic Arts products – until now. In my 14 years of playing video games I have never been so outraged and disgusted as I am at EA's acquisition of the NFL license. Through their recent deal, EA and the NFL have irrevocably slowed the evolution of console gaming. Sports video games would not be the dominant market they are today without multiple developers like Tecmo and Midway contributing titles and keeping competition alive. Those days are now over, at least for the next five years. I guess Sega flew a little too close to the sun.

Nathan Burba
Via email

I am completely appalled by EA's move to single-handedly dominate the NFL gaming experience. I've always purchased and enjoyed both the Madden and NFL 2K series, and I don't like being limited to a single choice. Plus, didn't an EA representative say that Sega couldn't sell ESPN NFL 2K5 with a free ham sandwich taped to it? Big words from a publisher who now seems desperate to buy its way out of trouble. This exclusive deal wouldn't be necessary for a company secure in their market dominance. It is unfair to gamers, and it is a scary precedent to set on the road to a gaming industry monopoly. Personally, I will never buy an EA title again.

Joe
Via msn.com

What's the deal with these EA fat cats crappin' all over the little guy like some crapfest road show just pulled into town?

Anonymous
Via email

■ **Okay, we know you're upset, but just put down the pitchforks and torches for one darn minute. EA's recent purchase of the exclusive rights to the NFL license has rightly angered many gamers, and though it's always fun to take pot shots at the big guy, EA isn't solely to blame. When the time came for license renewal last spring, the NFL approached both Sega and EA with several choices, exclusivity among them. The option was in front of both publishers (though the NFL likely knew which one would be most likely to step up). It was the NFL, not EA, who made the acquisition possible. Of course, this isn't to say that EA is just an innocent victim; given its other aggressive moves in the industry lately, we wouldn't be surprised if it were suddenly revealed to be a subsidiary of LexCorp. At any rate, protest the football deal if you want, but EA buying something up for sale doesn't sound like a great reason to deprive yourself of its other games. You loved Burnout 3, remember? Don't give in to hate – that leads to the Dark Side.**

NO LAWNMOWER MEN, PLEASE

I think it's unfair that your rules for envelope art are limited to physical media only. Many artists do post-production work on the computer, resulting in a much better work of art. Plus, I don't think I even have envelopes in my house! This is the information age, and I think emailed pieces should be eligible for the contest.

Will Ruzicka
Via email

■ **Information age, eh? If technology is so advanced, then why is there still only one Rebecca Romijn? In all seriousness, electronic artwork actually is eligible as long as it meets two conditions: 1) it's all your own, not just a doctored up version of someone else's hard work, and 2) it isn't produced by a malevolent sentient program bent on digital domination. If it's 100 percent original and absolutely free of evil, send it on in to deargi@gameinformer.com. Also, for those of you who haven't forgotten the sweet smells of graphite and gum eraser, remember that despite the name, envelope art is accepted on all types and sizes of paper – except stationary that still says "Where's the Beef?" It's right there! Get with it!**

FLAVOR COUNTRY

I normally have a great deal of trust in your magazine, but that changed when I read your Breakdown section in issue 140. Although I was skeptical as to whether 75 percent of the pages were really spearmint flavored, I tasted every one. I was shocked to find that not even one page was the flavor promised. At first, I thought it was because my issue was defective, but after tasting every corner of a friend's magazine, I realized the truth – none of the magazines had spearmint flavored pages. What happened?

Jonathan Ma
Via Yahoo.com

■ **You are no doubt referencing the surprisingly unrefreshing zest that graced those pages instead. Due to a misunderstanding at the printer, there was indeed a mix-up in terms of flavor. Instead of spearmint, "pants taste" was incorrectly applied to a certain percentage of that issue. If you are experiencing either Denim Burn or Corduroy Leakage as a result of this oversight, please know that we have imbued every page of this issue with the Pantidote. You are just one lick away from relief. We apologize for any inconvenience.**

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

LEARN TO SPEAK GETAWAY

Piss off or I'll sort you out!

I didn't know she was a bloody grass.

Straight off the back of a lorry. Fancy a butcher's?

You wanna get nicked? Bloke in the corner looks like Old Bill.

...and tell 'em this time I don't want claret all over the boot of my motor!

I want those geezers tooled up. Shooters, knuckledusters, the lot.

Just give me the reddies, you tosser.

Better not be telling porkies, luv, or you'll be wearin' a Chelsea smile.

THE LOVE DOCTOR IS IN

I have had this problem for a while, and I finally decided to seek your expert advice. I am currently in sixth grade, and there is a cute seventh grade girl I have a crush on. We are both major gamers, but I'm just not sure how I should go about asking her out. Can you help me?

Ryan Mottl
Via yahoo.com

■ A ready-made mash note, from your friends at Game Informer. Works for either gender!

Dear Potential Mating Partner,
I can no longer keep my feelings for you inside; like Dante in Devil Trigger mode, I feel unstoppable in your presence. The possibility of being your [lad/lass] is more exciting than a potential sequel to Earthbound. I know you feel the same about me, unless my senses are producing an unsubstantiated illusion of StarCraft Ghost-like proportions. To spend time searching for a better possible match would be a grievous disc read error. A truer mate than me you will never find; I will never cheat or exploit your glitches, nor will I try to mod you. Unlike Mode 7, the joy of our love cannot deteriorate over time, so just tell me I'm your console exclusive. Don't let my [prince/princess] be in another castle.

If slipping that note in your intended's locker doesn't work, try reading it aloud face-to-face, being careful to stand very close and speak in a comically loud and exaggerated voice. And dress like a hoagie. Don't blame us if it wasn't meant to be, though; we're journalists, not reckless, untamed Casanovas (except Matt, who pulls off both with surprising grace).

EXCLUSIVE SCHMEXCLUSIVE

I am irritated by the news that Capcom has decided to make Resident Evil 4 for the PS2 in addition to the GameCube version. It is nice that Capcom is accommodating RE fans with PS2s, but at the same time, I can't help but think that the whole point of a console exclusive game is lost when companies turn around like this. If you are a huge Resident Evil fan and you see that Capcom is becoming bedfellows with GameCube, you would probably lean in that console's direction. Gamers commit to certain systems because of these games, even though other consoles might have more tantalizing features. It is frustrating when you make this choice, then find out only months later that you could have had your game as well as the extra amenities.

Craig Williams
Via Hotmail.com

■ Unfortunately, these days "exclusive" usually only refers to a certain time period, after which a company like Capcom can release the game elsewhere. Though these moves are frustrating on an individual level (especially when you are devoted to one particular console), gamers as a whole ultimately benefit from these decisions. Take Resident Evil 4, for instance. While it certainly doesn't help GameCube owners (or Nintendo, for that matter) to lose hold of the most anticipated of the mythical Capcom 5, the game is so good (see our review on page 134 for more), the world gets a little bit better with every person who plays it. Each shotgun shell is filled with buckshot of joy, each chainsaw to the face requires euphoric reconstructive surgery, and with every headshot, in some far away secluded grove, a delicate flower begins to grow. A veiny, tumored, pulsating, delicate flower. And we think to ourselves, "What a wonderful world."

ENVELOPE ART

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

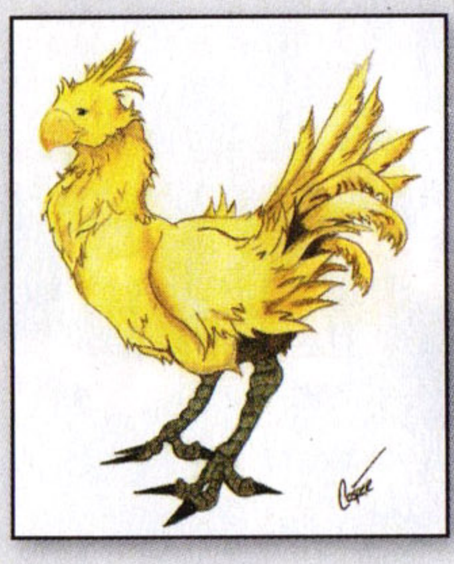
Send to:
Game Informer
Envelope Art Contest
724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401

MARCH WINNER!

RUOLIN LI
Hizzyrule holla back!

BETH ABAIR
If you're prone to slicey outbursts, it's probably best for everyone if you don't wear a claw

RALPH NIXON JR.
"I'm a sailboat!"



STACEY COSPER
Yeah, chocobos look cute, but they smell worse than a tauntaun at a Farscape convention

SAMUEL ROESLER
Due to the zombies' well-known weakness to posted warnings, the "Keep Out" door saves the day

CHARLES M. ATKINS
"Darn sinus infection – I can't even enjoy the robust flavor of human flesh."

Ruthless cops. Vicious criminals. Petty thieves. On the brutal streets of London, they all speak the same language. Learn it. With three playable characters, 25 miles of authentic locations, enhanced graphics and realistic A.I., your life depends on it.

speakgetaway.com

MATURE 17+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Nudity
Sexual Themes
Strong Language

PlayStation.2

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ONLY ON PLAYSTATION.

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connect feature

PSP NORTH AMERICAN NEWS

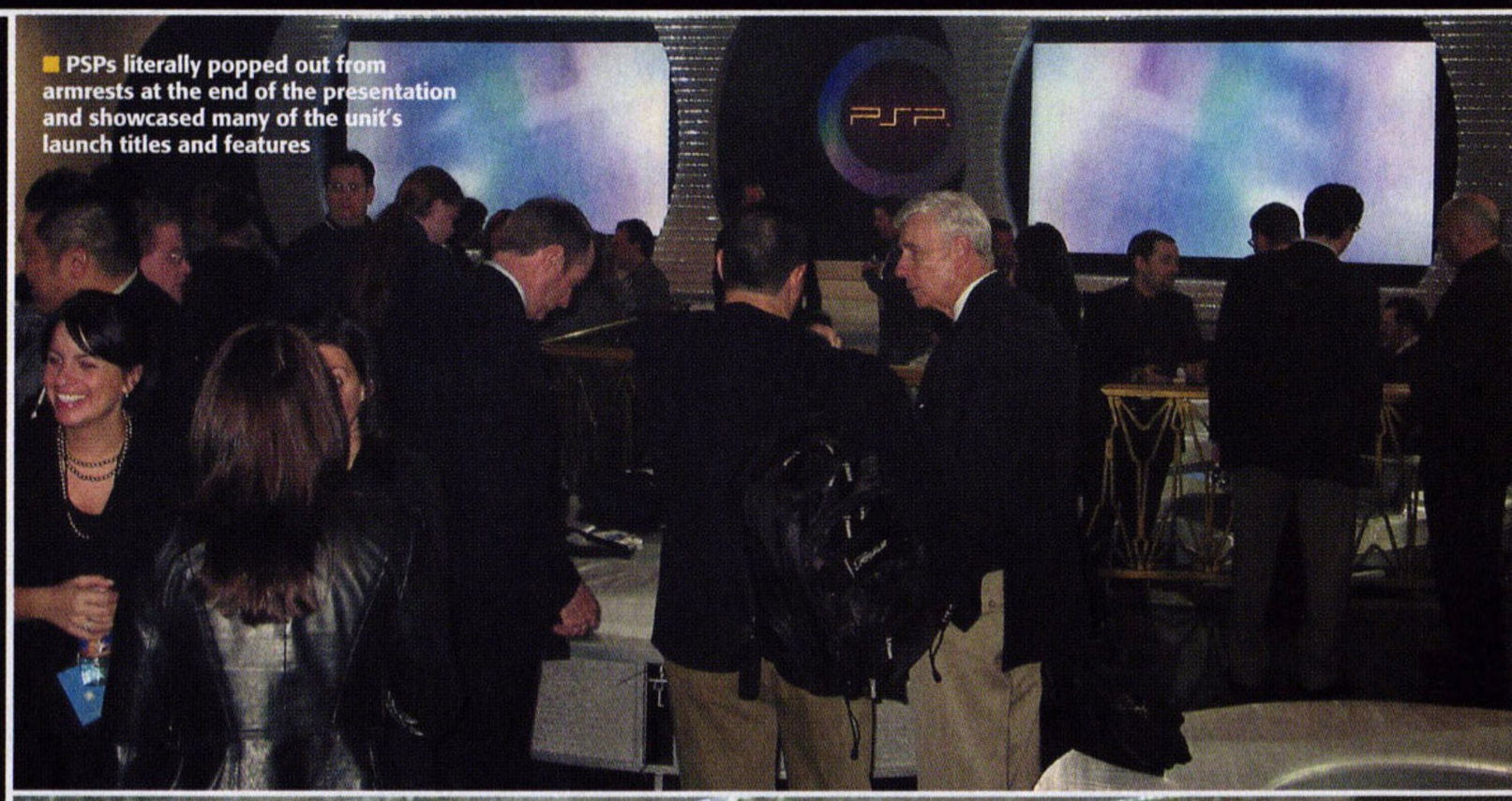
The multimedia functionality of the PSP was highlighted during Hirai's presentation

Before the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas even started, Sony was courting the North American public with its first foray into the handheld gaming market. While we covered the Japanese launch of PSP [Connect, issue 142], some of the finer details of the North American retail version hadn't been discussed. At the PSP Debut event, we did get information about how the launch titles are shaping up and what the games will be like in the next year. But, perhaps most importantly, we didn't get our biggest questions answered at the event – when and how much (although we're confident that it will be in line with the Japanese price – just under $200)?

Sony kept mum on anything more specific than "late March" for a release date, which happens to be the end of the company's fiscal year and had long rumored to be the latest that the units would hit American retailers. Still, the Consumer Electronics Show did give us plenty of time to mess around with nearly every feature of the PSP.

Media management was a stronger focus of Sony Computer Entertainment America president and CEO Kaz Hirai's speech than other demonstrations of the unit, and to those of us who had already imported one, the information was a welcome change of pace. Covering the widely-known features of transferring music, movies, and digital pictures with either a USB connection or by swapping Memory Sticks (depending on the other device's capabilities), the company also announced a name for the menu system used on the PSP. The XMB (cross-media bar) will become standard on all Sony media devices and is simple to use and understand.

Other sources from Sony talked about downloading media from their Connect online store and also of integrating Location Free TV features into the device. For those who haven't been keeping tabs on the electronics giant's endgame of linking our digital life anywhere around the world, Location Free TV is a service that allows programming like TV shows to be accessed from practically any device that can get to the Internet. PSP's Wi-Fi capability means that one could watch



■ PSPs literally popped out from armrests at the end of the presentation and showcased many of the unit's launch titles and features

■ Rapper and *Pimp My Ride* host Xzibit helped Hirai transfer music files

the local news, for example, by accessing a home recording unit from any wireless hotspot throughout the world. The information is credited to a small executive gathering held in Tokyo just before the Las Vegas presentation which also says that the features would be available in the first half of 2005. Game Informer contacted Sony, but representatives could not make a comment on the upcoming feature's future in the North American market.

No matter how long it takes to get streaming television up and running on PSP (if it even becomes available here), the unit is clearly capable of displaying beautiful video on the large screen. Some of the systems were set up around the event just to show how nice video looks on its display – in one word, it's amazing.

The presentation also focused on the future possibilities of the hardware, although many of these hypothetical scenarios remained just that, as there aren't any announced games that fully use the features. Ad-hoc sessions of up to 16 players are possible, if they're in the same room as each other, and Hirai also alluded to interesting forms of connectivity between the PS2 and the PSP. One idea is taking characters on the go and then importing them back into the console game through the units' USB connections to let players adjust their characters' stats or items.

With all of the possible twists and turns that PSP development could take, the future looks interesting to say the least. But, what trends do the launch titles seem to be following? Almost universally, it is clear that publishers and developers are banking on recognizable franchises and ports of already popular games. Spider-Man 2, Hot Shots Golf, and EA's collection of sports games certainly follow this formula. The innovation promised in PSP isn't really being tested with this first round of software, but the good news is that almost everything we played could universally be described as "solid." With no launch disappointments looming, PSP is coasting a bit to the North American starting line, but the promise of the hardware and the enthusiasm of players, press, and developers alike make the handheld's future exceptionally bright.

IT IS TIME TO RETURN TO THE GLORY OF BATTLE.

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RETURN TO ARMS™

IMPORT YOUR CHAMPION OR CUSTOMIZE A NEW ONE
Choose from 7 races & 7 classes, with updated weapons, armor, spells, skills and levels.

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Explore and conquer over 50 areas, including thrill-filled, non-linear side quests.

COOPERATE OR DECIMATE
Help your friends—or challenge them in the Arena. Up to 4-player action online or off with Multitap.

AS OF NOW – NORTH AMERICA'S EARLY PSP LINEUP

At the Japanese launch of PSP, 18 games were offered. Many of those will be available Stateside (Hot Shots Golf, Metal Gear Acid, and Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower are good examples), but there are a bounty of other games that we've gotten our hands onto recently. What follows are announced titles that will arrive at launch or shortly thereafter. Besides these games, Rockstar has announced a Grand Theft Auto title that will take place in Liberty City, scheduled to be a launch title for the PSP. Also, Sony Online is offering Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade [check out issue 142 for our exclusive first look].

Archer Maclean's Mercury

Publisher: Ignition Entertainment
Developer: Awesome Studios
This game is the most unique title we got our hands on during Sony's Debut event. Think Marble Madness and Monkey Ball, but with a generous blob of mercury as your charge. Tilt the stages and get your toxic liqui-metal to complete different objectives in different game modes for success – simple and highly addictive, but also the kind of game that every good handheld needs.

Dynasty Warriors

Publisher: Koei **Developer:** Koei
Without a doubt, this is a classic Dynasty Warriors game – full of hack n' slash action and pseudo-historical combat. Koei is thinking about how to switch up the action for those on the go with the different locales that players can experience in this title. Stages are segmented into "Battle Zones," each less than a few minutes in length and selected on a strategy-laden map between fights. While we love the bite-size level design, the action sequences don't use the entire screen (an information bar uses up about a quarter of the right side).

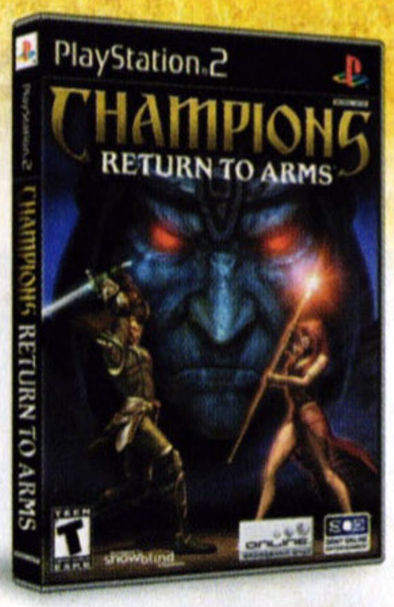
ATV Offroad Fury

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America
Developer: Climax
The demo version of ATV didn't offer us as much content to play around with as other titles on the floor at Sony's event, but we did get to try out the two gameplay modes offered – supercross and freestyle. In normal ATV fashion, the racing portions require not only good times, but good trick scores. The level we played had a nice varied track design and great physics. Although there were only a few different riders and four-wheelers in this build, the final version will feature a bounty (at least in part so players can stand out, style-wise, in the wireless multiplayer modes).

FIFA Soccer

Publisher: Electronic Arts **Developer:** EA Canada
Soccer's usual representation in video games is particularly well-suited for the PSP – a nice, wide screen means you can show a nice, wide field. EA is taking advantage of this fact in full force, and the results are compelling. Challenges in the vein of historic matches and blowouts are unlockable features, and (since this isn't the normal time for a soccer title to come out) the game includes a mid-season mode with current stats on all players and teams as of December 30, 2004.

ARM YOURSELF FOR THE FIGHT OF YOUR LIFE.



Pick your side, choose your deadliest arms, then slay your way to victory in Champions: Return to Arms — the powerful sequel to the must-have action-RPG of 2004, Champions of Norrath™. Rediscover all the action-packed, hack 'n' slash fun with up to 100 hours of gameplay per character, unlimited battles, deadly missions, horrific creatures and stunning environments.

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www.championsrta.com

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ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
Game experience may change during online play.

PlayStation.2

online BROADBAND ONLY

developed by snowblind studios

SOE SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

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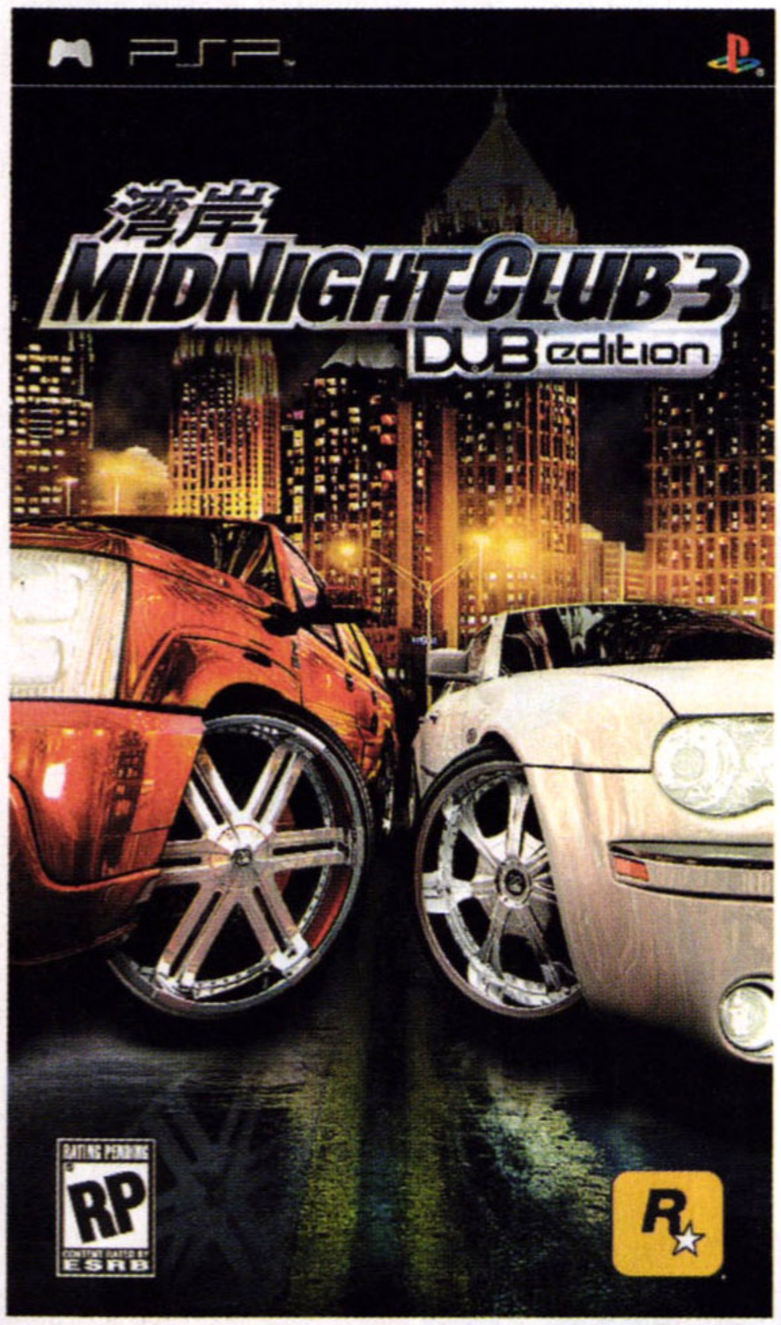
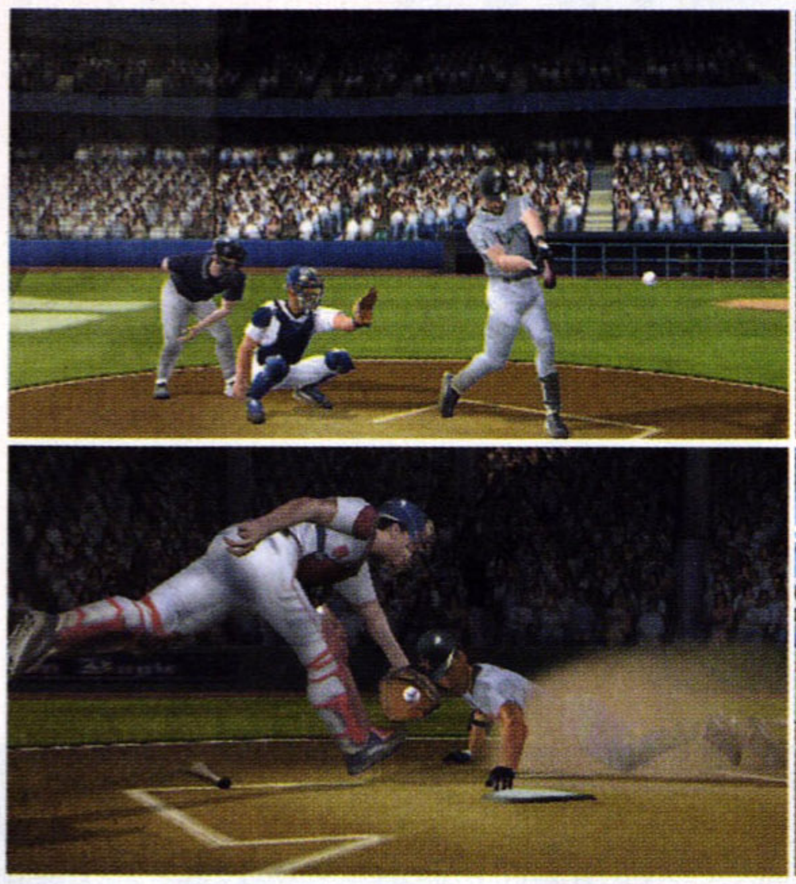
Midnight Club DUB Edition

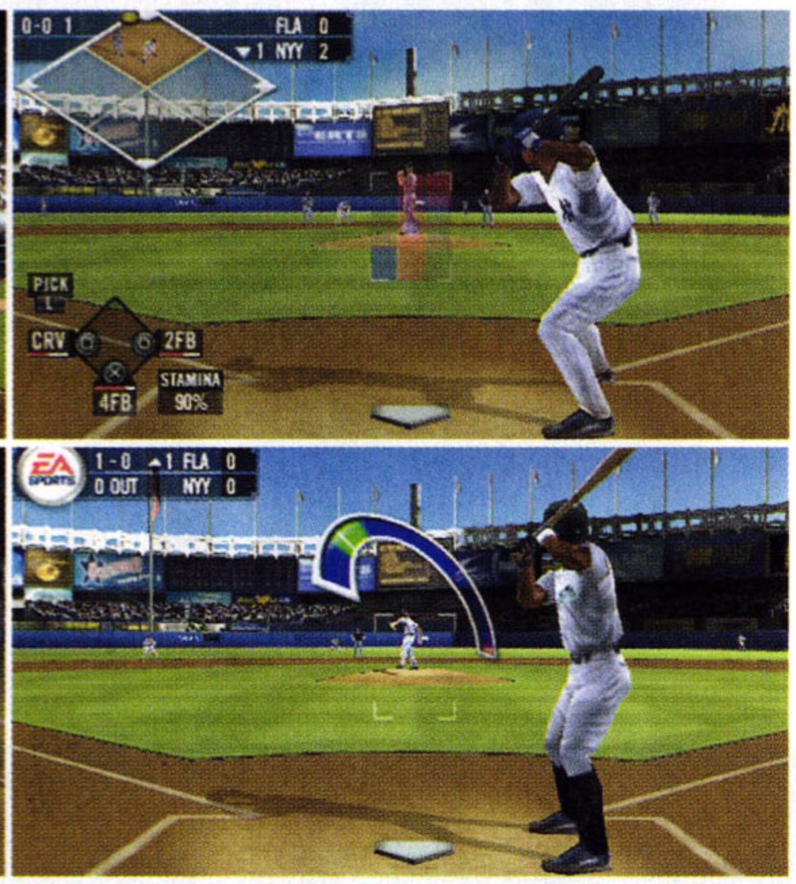
Publisher: Rockstar Games **Developer:** Rockstar Leeds
Unlike the other games in this roundup, the only information that we have on this title is the box art. Rockstar has announced this along with a GTA game for PSP launch.



NBA 2005

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America
Developer: 989 Sports
Showing off how closely a PSP game can stick to its PS2 version's roots, 989's basketball title has impressive details and a nice feature list. From a visual standpoint, the player animations, facial models, and stadiums all look nice. The gameplay modes, which include a full season option and a handful of minigames, ably provide a more realistic basketball simulation than a handheld has ever attempted before.



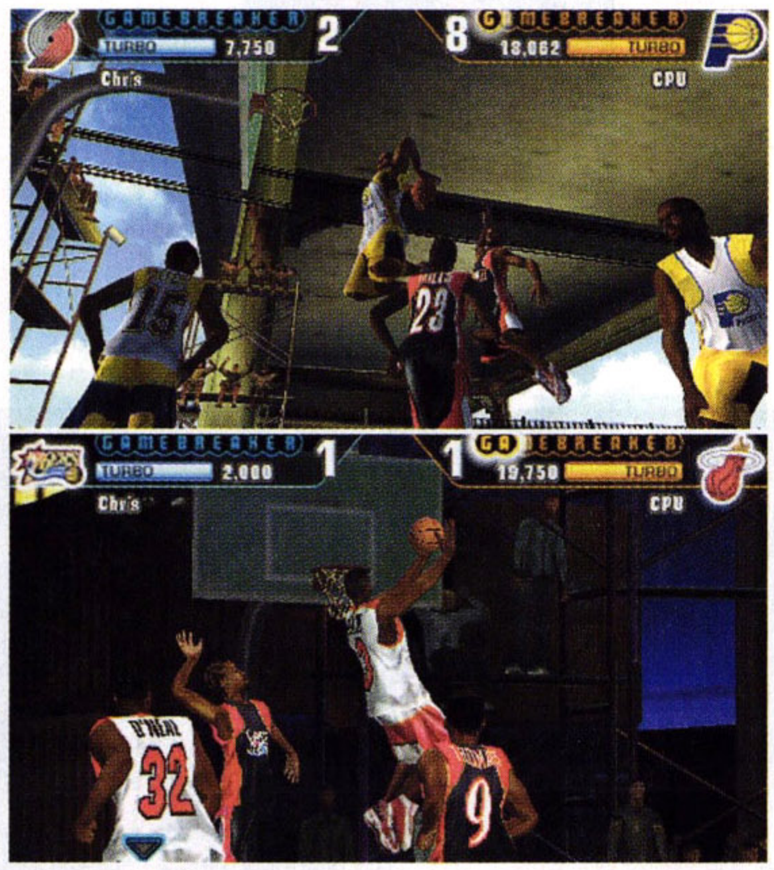


MVP Baseball

Publisher: Electronic Arts **Developer:** EA Canada
Pleasing both stat junkies and action-orientated players alike, MVP on PSP will offer a full range of EA's platform-wide portable features. Game types are available for both head-to-head through the unit's Wi-Fi link or by using EA's Party Play play-and-pass system. Minigames like a home run derby, full seasons, and statistic-determined simulated matches should all be available at launch.

NBA Street: Showdown

Publisher: Electronic Arts **Developer:** EA Canada
The Street series' mentality of quickly making players comfortable and offering a more tongue-in-cheek look at pro ballers is in full force with the PSP's version. Offering so many options that a rewarding play experience can be had in any interval between 30 seconds and a handful of hours (minigames and a full career mode are both easily accessible) combine with great graphics, huge variety in the courts and unlockables, and nice controls.



INFECTED

Publisher: Majesco
Developer: Planet Moon Studios

Leave it to Planet Moon to come up with a game like Infected. The quirky developer, best known for titles like Armed and Dangerous and Giants: Citizen Kabuto announced last year that it would be developing exclusively for the PSP for the time being, and now details on its first handheld title are coming to light. A fast-paced action game with a few interesting twists, Infected pits the player against hordes of savages who have been driven crazy by a strange disease. As fate would have it, you're also infected, but are somehow immune to the disease's crazyfying properties. So you do what any good New Yorker would do: Make bullets out of your own blood and take on the hordes of violent plague carriers!

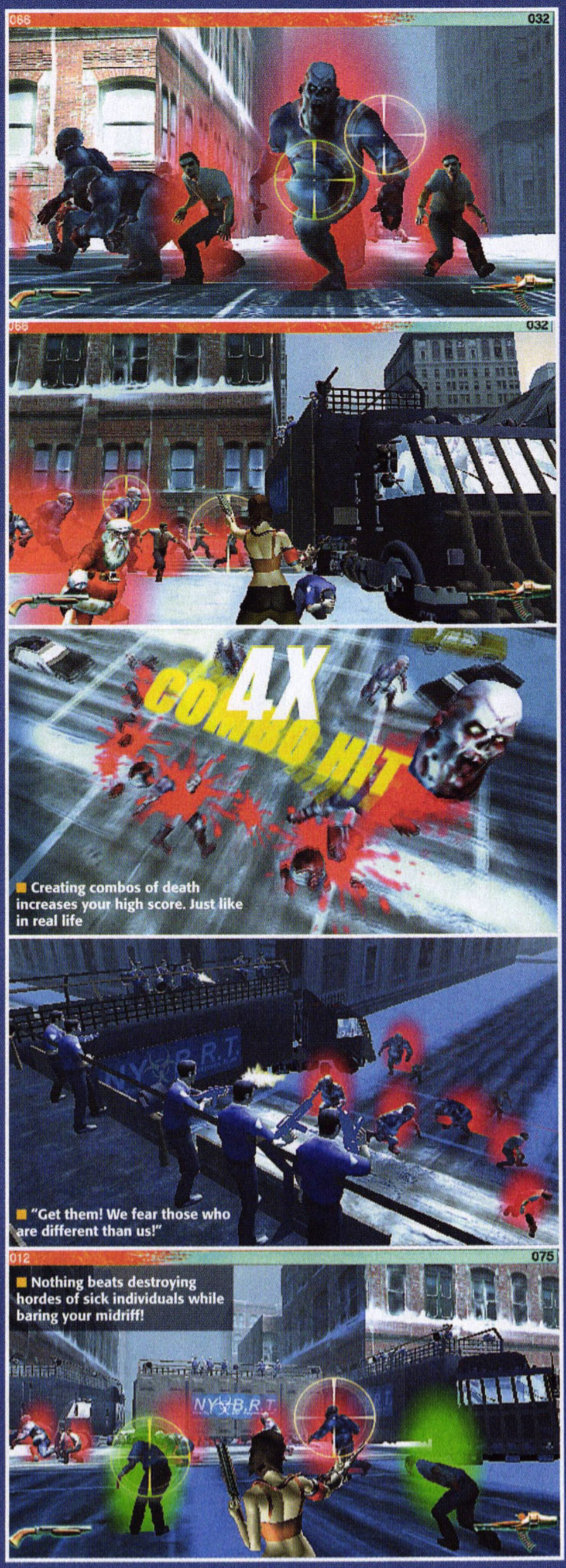
If this premise sounds bizarre, that's because it is. We spoke with Planet Moon's Aaron Loeb, and he filled us in on some more of the game's odd features, including an almost puzzle game-like chain reaction effect. First, the Infected must be weakened with conventional weapons, then they can be finished off with a viral bullet to start a chain reaction. "When you hit a Green Infected with the viral gun, he goes splat, and any other Green Infected within the radius of his explosion also go splat," says Loeb. "Any Green Infected within their radius goes splat too, and so on. The goal is to use your shotgun to set up the biggest possible combinations of exploding Infected, creating really spectacular scenes of carnage in the palm of your hand."

"...this title is quickly shaping up to be one of the most exciting games of the PSP's launch."

This chain reaction system sounds like it will certainly add a lot of depth (and carnage) to the traditional action formula, and Infected has a few more surprises in store. Of particular interest is the multiplayer aspect. "Every player has a unique virus. When they play others over Wi-Fi, the winners actually infect the losers with their virus," says Loeb. Then players have the choice of replaying missions to clear the virus, or challenging another player. If the challenged player loses, the virus will be then passed to them. This leads to an interesting, chain letter-inspired scoring system.

If a player infects you with a virus, he scores a point. If you pass the infection along, you receive a point, as does the player who infected you. "Every person in the chain gets points when a 'link' of infection is added," explains Loeb. "This continues until there are 10 people in the chain, and then everyone gets a big point bonus. Everyone involved has an incentive to keep the infection chain letter going until the end so that they will all get the points."

With this unique multiplayer mode, the splatteriffic combos of exploding Infected, and Planet Moon's trademark sense of humor, this title is quickly shaping up to be one of the most exciting games of the PSP's launch. Also, the fact that it takes place on Christmas and that you get to kill rampaging Santas doesn't hurt. We hate that guy. He never brought us the Rainbow Brite doll we asked for as kids.

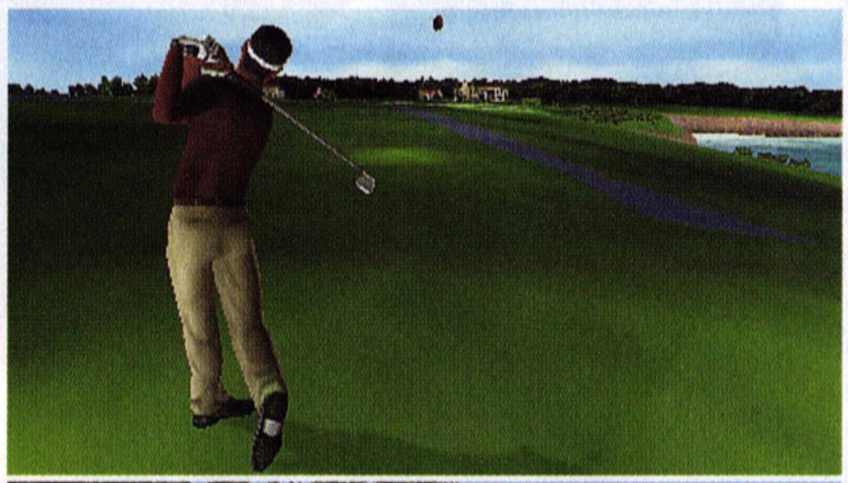


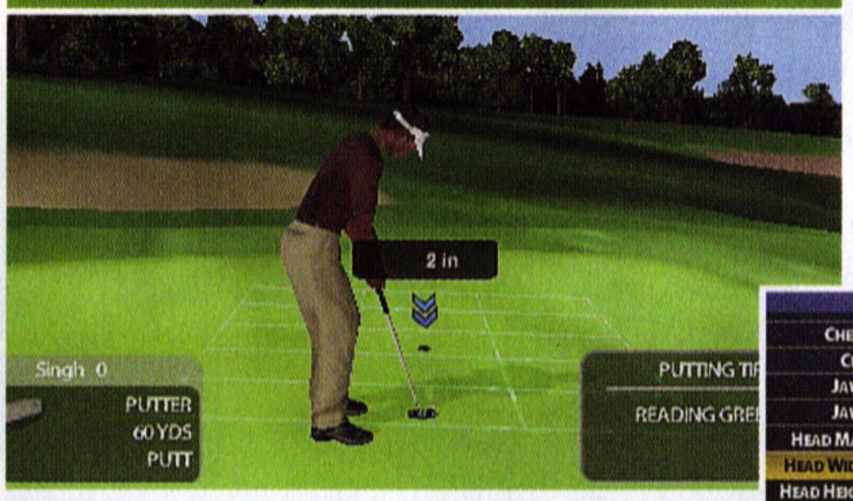
■ Creating combos of death increases your high score. Just like in real life

■ "Get them! We fear those who are different than us!"

012 075

■ Nothing beats destroying hordes of sick individuals while baring your midriff!

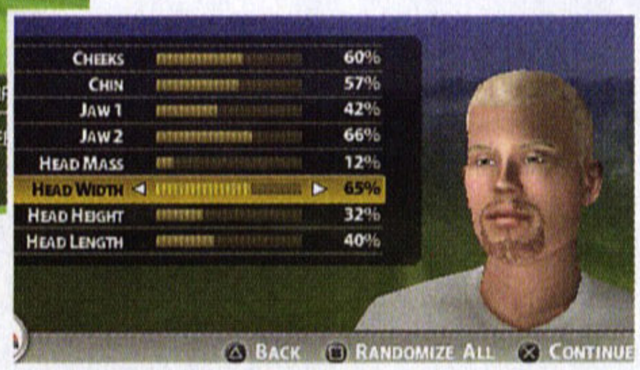




Tiger Woods PGA

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA Canada

Integrating a nearly full version of the console franchise's Game Face mode with a complete Legends tour and a bounty of new minigames to accommodate both multiplayer sessions and shorter playtimes, Tiger's handheld foray really shines. The analog swing is here in full force, as is a nice roundup of courses. Two big updates (Bingo Bango Bongo mode where players race to a series of goals like being the first to the green and the option to save between any swing) are welcome customizations for a portable platform.



ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY

PlayStation®2

FREE RADICAL

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

XBOX

XBOX LIVE

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

*Online play not available on all platforms. INTERNET CONNECTION required for online play. PlayStation®2 online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). Check platform box for online play.

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Need For Speed Underground Rivals

Publisher: Electronic Arts **Developer:** EA Canada

Rivals looks to be one of the flagship games in EA's PSP launch lineup. Offering just a hair short of all of the customization options available in the console versions, two new race modes (drift attack and nitrous run), a bucket of cars, and arguably the most compelling integration of EA's Champ/Owned system [see sidebar] is just the start. With the Las Vegas build we played, the physics are shaping up and graphical effects really shine.

ELECTRONIC ARTS' CONSISTENT FEATURES:

Industry powerhouse Electronic Arts is throwing a lot of muscle behind Sony's handheld (a 175-person team is devoted to the platform), and putting a lot of effort into accommodating the unit's abilities as well. Here's a rundown of the features that are integrated into almost all of the company's launch titles.

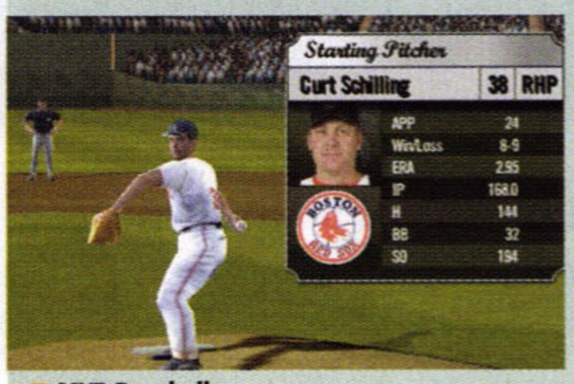
➤ Quick Saves (with replay on FIFA)
Messing with some of the rules for valued core frachises means adding a quick save feature on most titles. The Tiger Woods PSP entry, for instance, lets players save after any stroke, unlike the more stringent rules in the console versions. Portable FIFA goes one step further by introducing loaded saves with a five-second replay, so gamers can remember exactly where their 'ballers are between play sessions.

➤ Party Play
Hedging bets that there won't be quite enough units to saturate the market at launch, all of the EA titles we saw offered some variant of Party Play options. Certain titles featured minigames (like NBA Street), while others like Need for Speed have players pass the unit after each race to beat times.

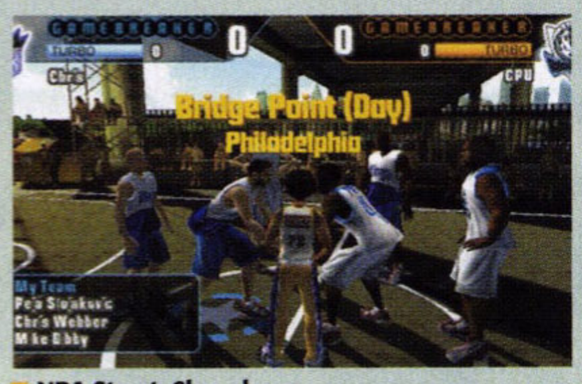
➤ EA Pocket Trax
With all of the emphasis that EA's games usually put on soundtracks still firmly in place for the portable versions, the company is letting owners listen to the soundtrack without playing the game. Pocket Trax will play the band's video if available, or do title-themed visualizations if an MTV-ready clip isn't accessible.

➤ Owned/Champ mode
Fostering competition seems like something that really wouldn't be absolutely necessary, given the history of this industry and the level of fame certain players already receive with excellent performances, but EA's PSP team doesn't see it that way. Accepting and then winning challenges earns players a "Champ" title and the loser is officially "Owned." The only way to get rid of a pesky and embarrassing Owned moniker is to challenge and beat the ones who have bested you in the past.

➤ Minigames and new content
As is exceptionally clear, most of the PSP launch titles (especially EA's lineup) are extremely reminiscent of their console counterparts. Ensuring that these aren't direct ports, the development teams for each game are adding courses, features, minigames, and loot to every entry. Completists will love the bonuses and those who already have the home version will appreciate the differences that make each of these a worthy purchase.



MVP Baseball



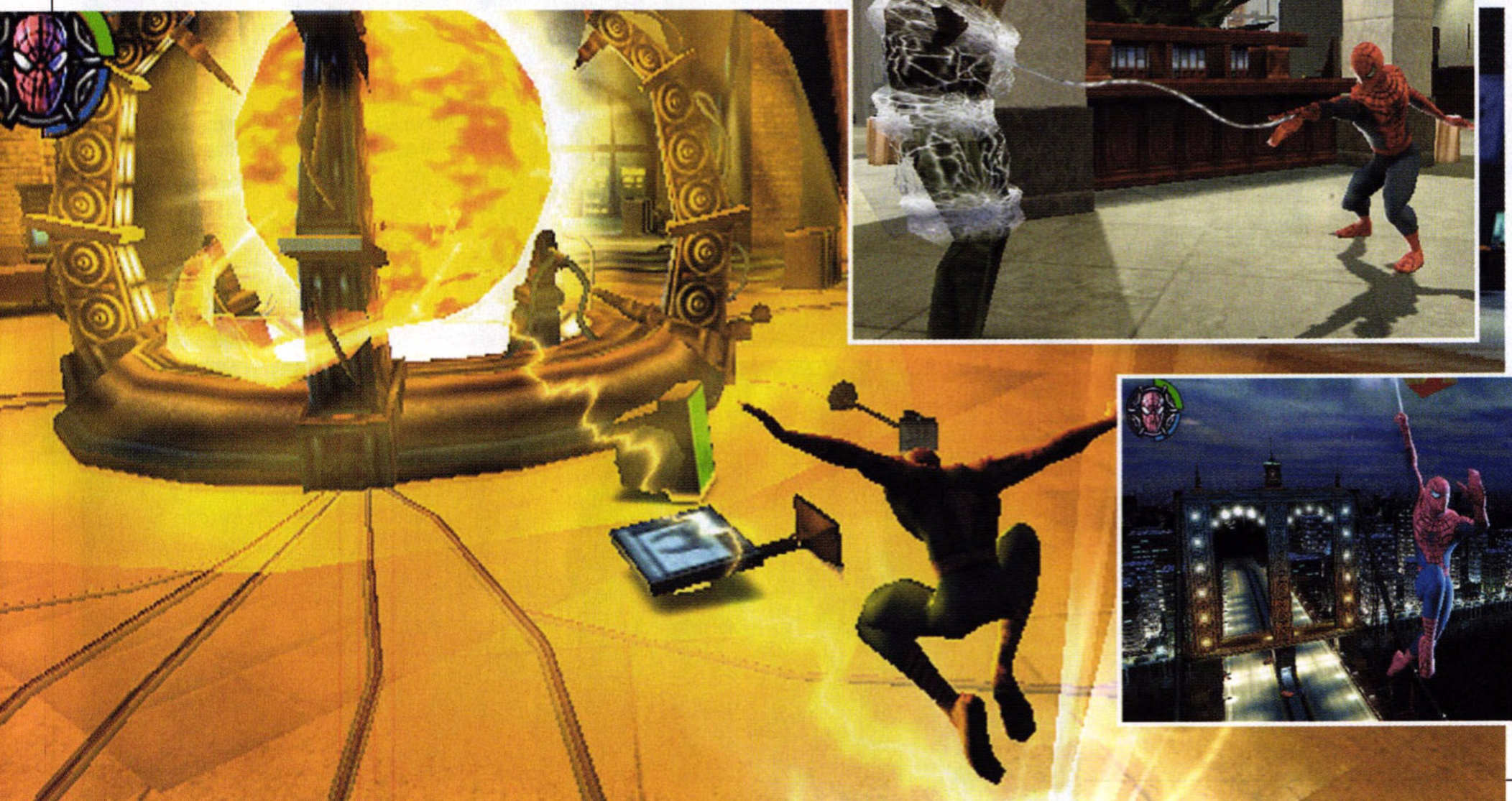
NBA Street: Showdown

Need For Speed Underground Rivals

Spider-Man 2

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Vicarious Visions

Veteran handheld development team Vicarious Visions (who also did a Spidey DS launch title) is showing off the physics and action/adventure possibilities of the PSP with a Spider-Man 2 launch title. The three-level demo available at the Las Vegas Debut event featured hostage rescues, a boss fight against Rhino, tons of web-slinging, and admirable voice-over work by the movie's cast. New moves are being added for the hero like web nets and the ability to cocoon foes, along with the console releases' extensive move set.



DEATH JR.

Publisher TBA
Developer Backbone Entertainment

The name Death Jr. is probably familiar to anyone counting down the days to the release of the PSP. The unique title was the first game announced for the system, although it has been a while since any news leaked out about this quirky-looking game. But now we've heard a few details about the story and the gameplay, and it certainly sounds like Death Jr. will be a funny, endearing title perfect for fans of Tim Burton or *Invader Zim*.

Death Jr. is, obviously, the son of the Grim Reaper, but he's also a student and a bit of a social misfit. Still, he does have a few close friends including Smith and Weston, a pair of twins joined at the head; Sigmartha, who starts bleeding from her limbs when nervous; Pandora, who suffers from a compulsion to open everything she touches; and a talking limbless fetus named Seep. On a trip to the Museum of Supernatural History, the gang discovers an interesting box, which is, of course, opened by Pandora. Unfortunately, contained in the box are an ancient demon and his minions, and they start wreaking havoc on everything they see. Death Jr. takes it upon himself to defeat the evil beings so that he doesn't get in trouble with his dad.

"We've even heard some rumors about him tossing explosive hamsters"

The story will unfold over 10 levels, with Death Jr. tackling both action and platforming elements. Along with his scythe, DJ (as his friends call him) will wield weapons like twin pistols, a chain gun, lightning gun, and more. We've even heard some rumors about him tossing explosive hamsters. It seems obvious that Death Jr. will feature a unique setting and a bizarre sense of humor – which is probably why a comic book is in the works, and there are even talks about an animated movie. These spin-offs sound great, but for now we hope that the game itself lives up to its potential. Based on what we've heard, it sounds like one of the most intriguing titles yet announced for Sony's fledgling handheld.

NFL Street 2: Unleashed

Publisher: Electronic Arts **Developer:** EA Canada
With what some may call "all of the fun that the NFL won't let you have," this is one of the more ambitious titles (technologically speaking) in EA's launch lineup. The problems of having 14 players onscreen is coupled with the series over-the-top effects. While the version we played had some slowdown, its achievements are clear – this is the pick-up-and-play football that players love.

Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix

Publisher: Activision **Developer:** Shaba Games
Portable Tony Hawks have always been impressive feats of coding wizardry, but what Activision has up its sleeve for this release is more along the lines of a full-fledged console version in a convenient carrying case. Four new levels (Las Vegas, Atlanta, Kyoto, and Santa Cruz) join forces with classic and story modes from THUG 2. Even the face-mapping features are back – players can import a pic via Memory Stick and map it to a created character.

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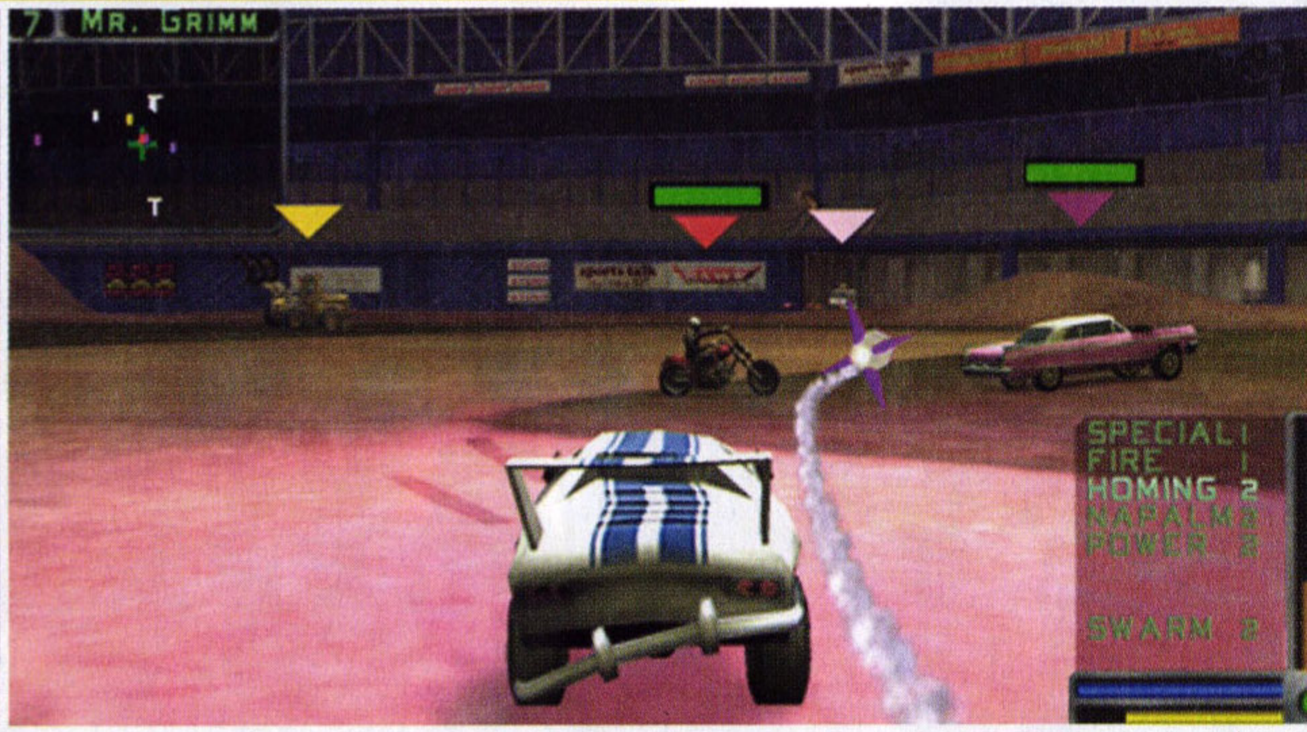
Twisted Metal: Head-On

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America
Developer: Incog

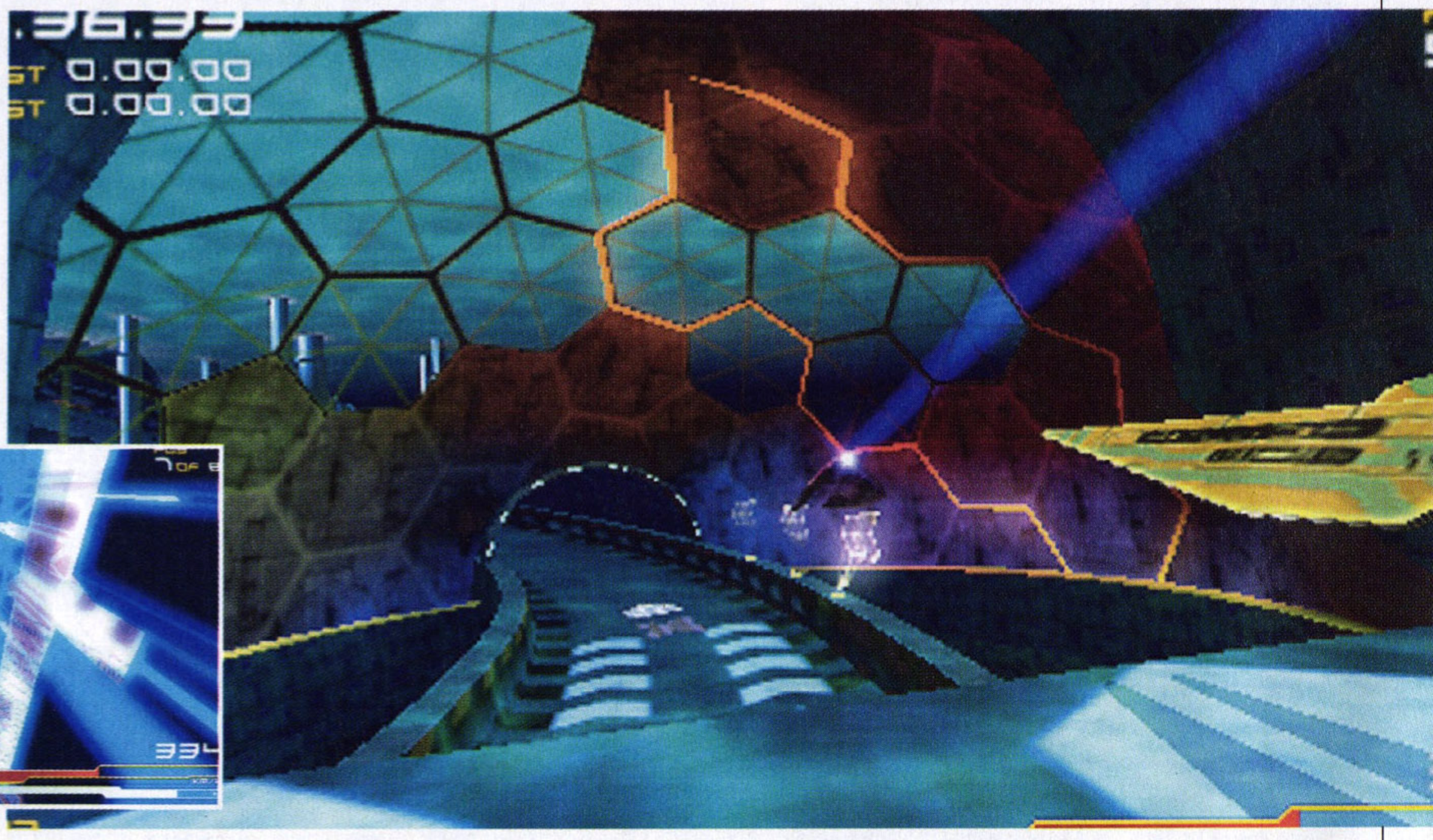
It seems that Sony officially has a favorite series to fall back on when they want to tout new multiplayer gameplay – Twisted Metal. The franchise's Black Online entry highlighted PS2's online adapter and the PSP version lets more people jump in wirelessly than any launch title we've seen, with a healthy eight-player option. We tried out the Wi-Fi link with a few others and left impressed at the trademark car combat's speed, agility, and pure insanity.

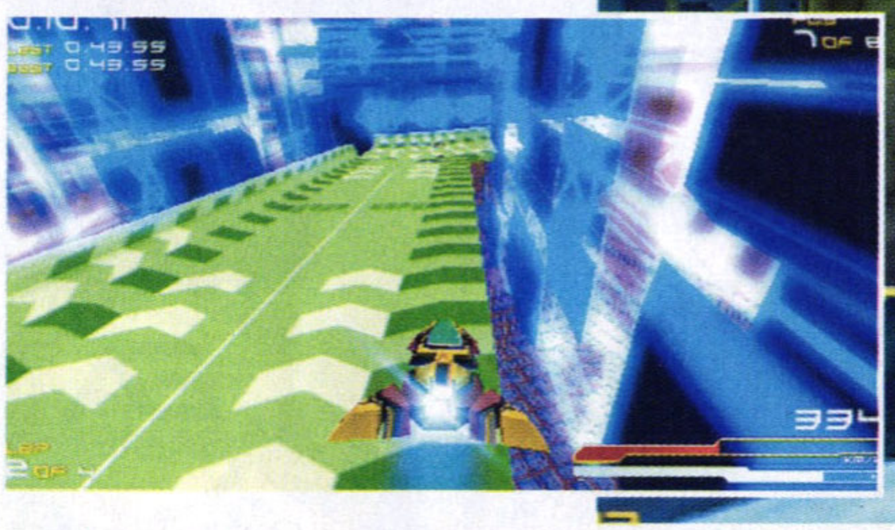


Wipeout Pure

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America
Developer: Sony Computer Entertainment

Matching Twisted Metal's impressive and addictive eight-player options, this traditionally styled futuristic racer ups the feature set ante by promising downloadable content in the future. Tracks, vehicles, and tunes are all possible, although the exact transfer mechanism still has yet to be announced. As for the gameplay, even this early build of Pure has an admirable sense of speed and great course designs.





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news

CHRISTMAS CLASH

WHO IS THE REAL HOLIDAY WINNER?

In the industry, the holiday sales numbers are usually discussed in terms of which game sold more. Who's on top? Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas or Halo 2? While that certainly was on people's minds after Christmas, a larger story has emerged: Who sold more consoles and what will that mean for the future? Although Sony's PlayStation 2 has enjoyed a much larger installed base since its U.S. debut in 2000, this past holiday season gave Microsoft's Xbox reasons to be merry.

Overall, the industry saw a minimal revenue decline from last year (not including PC software sales) according to market researcher the NPD Group. Part of the reason was the loss in revenue for sales of home consoles due to price cuts. Also important was a December shortage of both the Xbox and PlayStation 2 systems. Whatever the cause, a dramatic reversal of fortunes occurred, with PlayStation 2 selling 28 percent (1.1 million units) fewer systems than in 2003. The Xbox, meanwhile, outdid its figures from last year, selling 4 million units in the U.S. – an increase of 27 percent. In November alone, Xbox sold 708,000 systems as compared to Sony's 694,000 and Nintendo's 350,000 units for its GameCube. Overall, console sales were down by 16 percent in 2004.

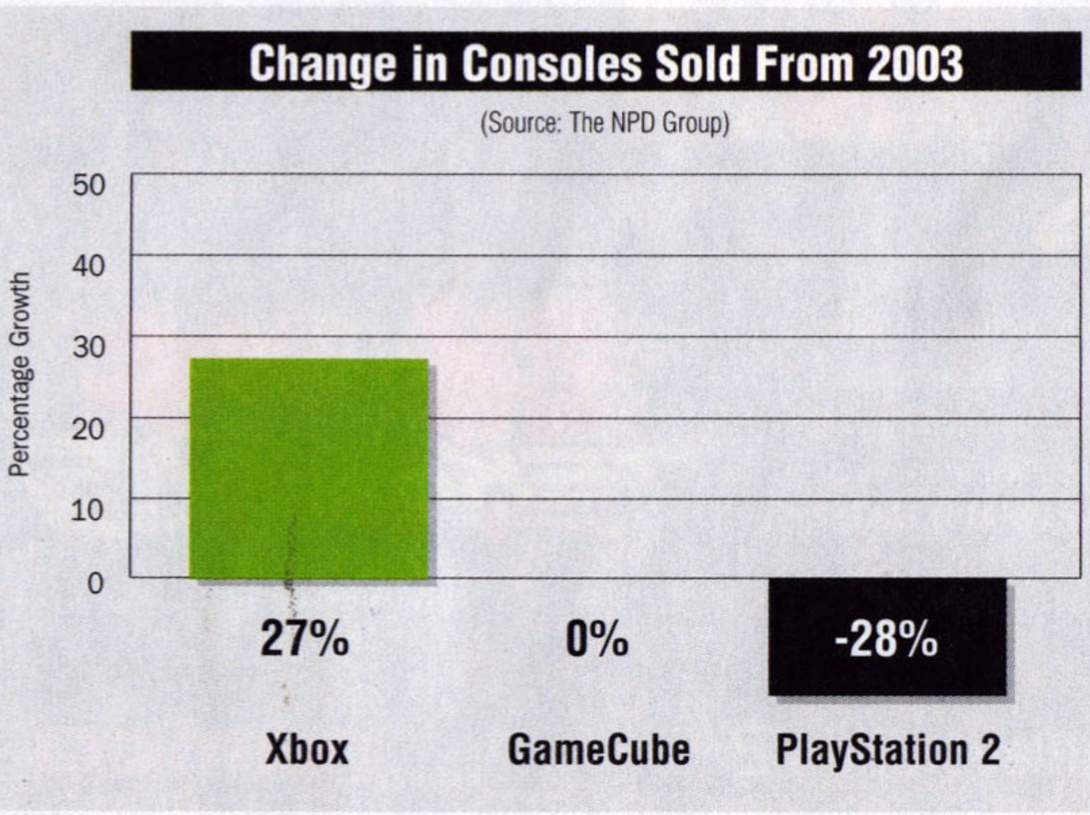
Sony's number is competitive with Microsoft's, but the PlayStation 2 maker missed an opportunity to advance its larger installed base due to a double shortage of the console. Not only did production of the new slimmed-down model of the PS2 not meet demand; there weren't even enough of the old models in stores. In preparation for the November 1 launch of the new-style PS2, Sony purposely starved retailers of the original unit in an attempt to generate demand and get rid of the old stock.

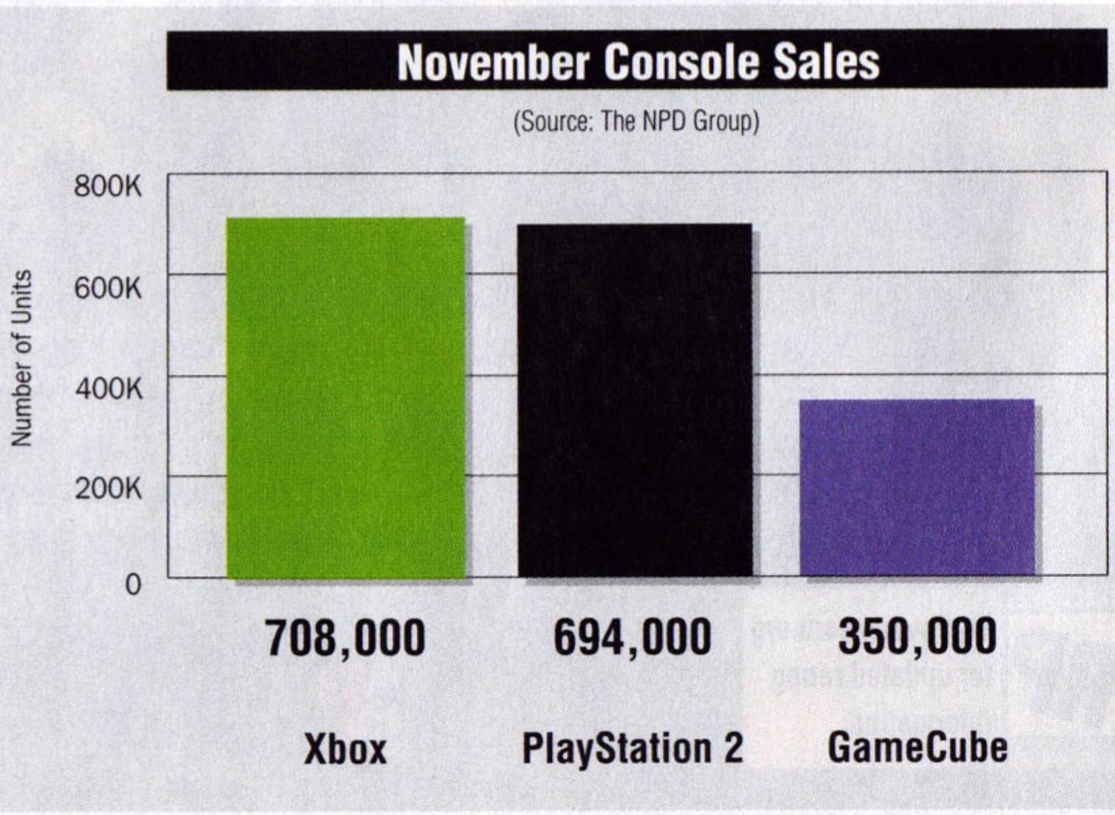
Although Microsoft's good holiday season and the increase in its installed base has the company clicking its heels, some believe that it is no portent to the future. Research analyst Michael Pachter told Game Informer that Sony, despite its stumbles, is still on top. Due to the company's decision to redesign the PlayStation 2 in order to lessen production costs, Pachter says that Sony actually made more money by selling fewer consoles in November and December of this year as compared to those months in 2003 because it made more money on each slim-line PS2 than the older model. "I think [Sony] lost some sales permanently, but this supply issue was intentional, because everybody knows that Microsoft loses money on every Xbox sold. Sony is positioning itself to cut the price of the PS2 further and kick Microsoft's butt. So here's Microsoft, 'Oh my God, we outsold them by 14,000 whopping units in November and 47,000 in December – aren't we awesome?!' You know what? If Sony had produced an extra 100,000 each month, Microsoft would not have outsold them – period. So who cares? It's not a trend; it's not a precursor for the next [hardware] cycle. It's Sony making a conscious decision that the guy who makes the most money per unit is going to win the war."

Pachter also told us that another factor in the shortage of both consoles this season was the fact that the dollar and the Japanese yen were doing poorly against the Euro. Thus, both companies made more money by selling an Xbox or PS2 in Europe than they would have in Japan or the U.S.

As for the future, Pachter doesn't see Microsoft parlaying this upswing into permanent gains against Sony. "It's really not that big of a deal, and I wouldn't get all hung up on Microsoft passing Sony temporarily. How many PS2 owners are going to throw away their PS2 to buy a non-backwards compatible Xbox Next that has no software? I think none. How many Xbox owners? Probably three-quarters of them, but not 100 percent."

Despite Microsoft's encouraging holiday, it looks as though the more important indicator of future success is what titles and features the next Xbox debuts with – something which isn't known yet. Regardless, it's a battle that we gamers can clearly benefit from.





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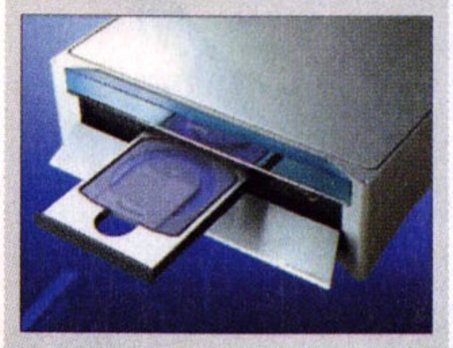
DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

EA AND VU BACK BLU-RAY

Both Electronic Arts and Vivendi Universal have come out in support of the Blu-Ray high-definition DVD standard backed by Sony, which is to be included in the PlayStation 3. The support of such video game companies is crucial, as the PS3 is being seen as an important device to propel mass consumer acceptance of the format. Microsoft is expected to utilize Blu-Ray rival HD-DVD with its next Xbox.

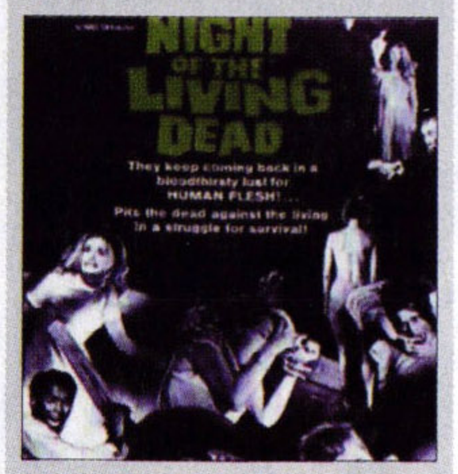


NAMCO GOING PLACES

The company's upcoming June title, Sigma Star Saga, combines the two unlikely genres of RPG and space shooter into one GBA package. Players will explore six planets facing a Krill onslaught, participating in both RPG conventions and side-scrolling shooter portions. Sigma Star Saga also features customizable weapons with more than 50 different items.

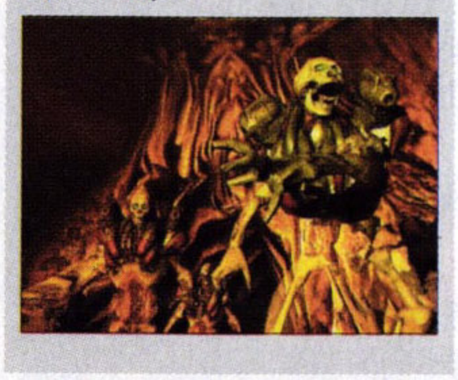
ZOMBIE LEGEND GETS DEVELOPER

Hip Games has signed on with legendary horror director George Romero to make video games of his zombie movies, and the company has assigned English developer Kuju Entertainment to handle the initial project. The first game is expected sometime before the spring of next year. Romero is also working with American McGee on an all-new property called City of the Dead.



VICARIOUS VISIONS BOUGHT

Activision and Vicarious Visions are now joined at the hip. The publisher acquired the Doom 3 Xbox developer, which has delivered over five million in sales in its past five games. Rumor has it that Activision acquired Vicarious Visions as a portfolio move as it actively shops itself around to potential buyers.



news

ALL OUT WAR!

TAKE 2 STEALS MLB, EA GRABS ESPN & SEGA IS OUT

A month after rival Electronic Arts stole the NFL rug out from under its feet, publisher Take 2 Interactive has struck back by signing an exclusive third-party agreement with Major League Baseball and its players' association in a seven-year deal, starting next year. According to the terms of the agreement, Take 2 is the only third-party publisher that will be able to use real-life baseball teams, players, and stadiums in its game.

The deal states that first-parties, such as Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo, are not bound by any such restrictions – effectively making this arrangement a direct shot at Electronic Arts. Game Informer talked to an EA representative, who was skeptical of the merits of Take 2's deal. "We did compete for the license, but it's not an agreement we would have signed. It really looks like they paid exclusive money, and it's a non-exclusive license. So instead of getting an exclusive license, it's really just a deal that excludes EA."

Currently, Sony (the MLB series) and Nintendo (Nintendo Pennant Chase Baseball) are the only two first-party publishers with baseball titles. Microsoft has shut down its traditional sports studio and laid off its employees in the department, although it does own the rights to the High Heat franchise. Take 2 has approached other pro sports leagues, such as the NBA, in an effort to secure long-term deals to prevent from losing any more ground to EA. However, sources tell Game Informer that it is unlikely basketball will suffer the same exclusive fate which has befallen the NFL and MLB, due to its current lucrative contracts with multiple companies.

This move by Take 2 is just the latest in a series of events that have shaken the sports video game world. Weeks prior, EA pulled a major coup by signing ESPN out from under the nose of Take 2 (who, along with Sega, had published under the name for two years), giving the Madden-maker the sole rights to the brand name for the next 15 years.

This monumental deal not only means that EA has the right to use the ESPN name from now on, it also covers usage of programs and personalities on the sports network. EA told us that "ESPN" will not be used in the title of the Madden NFL series, although the moniker will be present somewhere on the front of the game box. This new branding won't start until the 2007 lineup of titles (in calendar year 2006), and it remains to be seen what, if any, consumer confusion there is between EA's new lineup and the old Take 2 games. As for rumors of EA dropping popular commentator John Madden, the EA spokesperson would only say that the company has no plans to, and that he is still under contract.

Game Informer spoke to a source at ESPN NFL 2K5 developer Visual Concepts who told us that the company (and its publishers Sega and Take 2) knew about this deal approximately two weeks before it was announced. However, ESPN didn't have to break its contract with Take 2 to enter into this new deal with EA. After ESPN NFL 2K5 was released, the network was able to exercise a clause in its contract that enabled it to terminate its relationship with Take 2. Seeing as how the network would have to continue its video game brand name without a football title had it continued to work with Take 2, it's likely the only practical course of action for ESPN was to follow the NFL license into the arms of EA. There have also been rumors that both the NFL and ESPN were mad at the $20 pricing of last year's Take 2 titles, but this cannot be confirmed. The first effect of this ESPN/EA deal is that Take 2 has dropped the network's moniker from the upcoming Major League Baseball 2K5 (see our review on page 118.)

As if this wasn't enough change in the video game sports world, Take 2 has bought developers Visual Concepts and Kush Games (the studio that collaborated with VC on MLB 2K5) from former parent company Sega for $24 million – a deal that has been in the works for a few months now. Under the terms of the publishing contract between Take 2 and Sega, the former company had the option to buy VC before March 31, 2006. Industry watchers say that the price is lower than what the developers would have garnered had EA not bought the NFL out from under them. While Take 2 will no longer have the NFL nor ESPN to rely on, taking over these studios is a chance for it to diversify its games portfolio with an already proven and profitable sector of the industry: sports. The company has already inaugurated a new publishing label for VC-developed titles called 2K Games. This division will also put out non-sports products for console, PC, and handhelds, including those developed both internally and externally and selected titles from Take 2's Global Star label. This isn't the end of the relationship between Take 2 and Sega, however. The Grand Theft Auto publisher will help bring VC-developed titles to Japanese arcades, and a number of Take 2 games to Japan and the rest of Asia.

Meanwhile, EA has continued its bold dealings by signing the four-year rights to make games based on the Arena Football League. This newest addition to EA Sports' football roster has already begun, but no release date has been announced. Apart from taking away a possible non-NFL avenue from its competitors, this move benefits EA because the deal allows the video game publisher/developer to reap the financial benefits of any future AFL expansion team sales.

What's the next domino to fall? Who's angling for the NBA? Stay tuned and see, as it looks like anything and everything is up for grabs in the high stakes game of video game sports. For more on our take on these recent wheelings and dealings, check out the Letter From the Editor on page 12.

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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

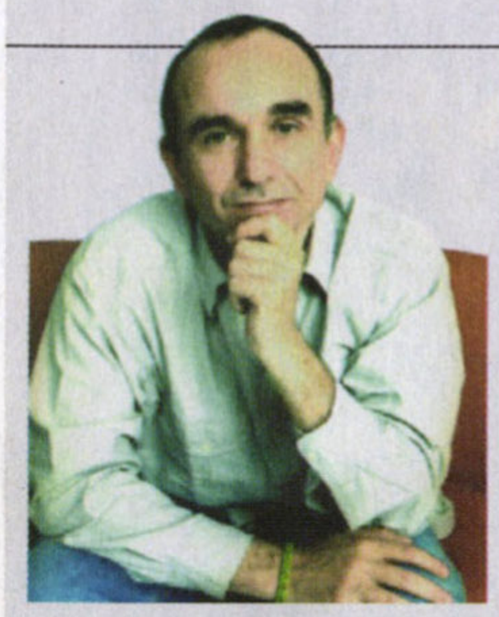
BAD

PSP owners who excitedly downloaded an unofficial software update file from Sony's servers may find that their handheld doesn't work anymore because of the file. However, they can be heartened by the fact that the download (which Sony admits came from within the company, although it wasn't officially sanctioned yet) may point to future applications for the PSP including web browsing, email, a calculator, voice chat, a schedule calendar, a text-to-speech program, and even word processor and spreadsheet applications.

GOOD

In response to the recent criticism of developer working conditions in the video game industry (see issue 141, page 18 for more), The International Game Developers Association is planning its first-ever Quality of Life Summit in March. It will address the problems of employee burnout and how to alleviate crunch times in the development cycle.

igda international game developers association



GOOD

For his services to the English video game industry, Fable creator Peter Molyneux received the Order of the British Empire (OBE) from the Queen – a first for anyone in the industry. Congratulations.

■ Sly 2: Band of Thieves

GOOD

To make it up to PlayStation Underground members who found their memory cards erased after playing Viewtiful Joe 2 on Sony's Winter demo disc, the company is offering free copies of games like ATV Offroad Fury 3, Sly 2: Band of Thieves, Hot Shots Golf Fore!, and more. Afflicted gamers can call SCEA's customer support line for more info.

GOOD

Bungie and Microsoft put the hammer to cheaters and rude numbskulls by suspending and banning some less-than-savory Halo 2 online players. Thousands found themselves at least temporarily locked out, if not banned, from playing the game for offenses that range from repeated network-exploiting to racism. Got a problem with that? Well, Bungie hopes that all you cheaters and half-wits get your "fingers slammed in a car door on a cold day." How's that for sympathy?

UGLY

For love or for Lineage? A Japanese woman was arrested for erasing her former boyfriend's Lineage save out of revenge for breaking up with her. What's worse, the fact that he lost his Lineage save or that he broke up with a girl? Either way he won't get another sniff of action for a long time.

BAD

BioWare's action/RPG Jade Empire for the Xbox has been delayed until late April. However, gamers can bide their time by dreaming about the special edition of the title, which will come in different packaging and even feature an exclusive character and fighting style.

news

FRANCE FIGHTS EA

HELP COMES FROM ALL SIDES

Electronic Arts' recent purchase of 19.9 percent of French video game publisher/developer Ubisoft may appear to be a first step in acquiring the company, but the Splinter Cell makers aren't going to go down without a fight. The French government and even other French companies are coming forth to help fight EA.

The stock purchase is considered hostile by Ubisoft because it was unsolicited and was not discussed between the two companies. Despite EA's moves, the Guillemot family still owns Ubisoft and has a controlling interest in it. However, to prevent further erosion, the French government is watching the situation and may intervene to help. Such a move wouldn't be unusual for the government, which is routinely involved in corporate subsidies. Currently, Ubisoft is a part of the backbone of the French video game industry due to the deals it has with up to 20 other companies in the country.

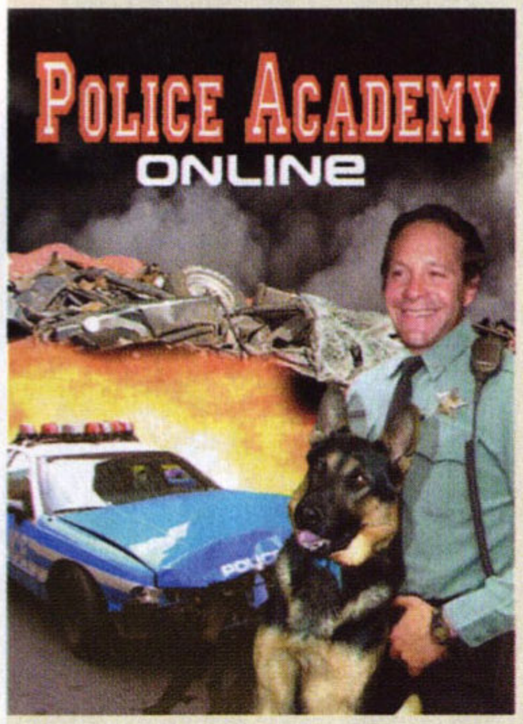
Of course, Ubisoft itself is being proactive towards its fate. During a recent conference call discussing the company's financials, Guillemot offered that perhaps a buyout of Eidos (which has been up for sale for many months now) could be a line of defense. "Short-term we are [more focused on] analyzing how to organize in the face of recent events rather than on buying Eidos. That said, this is a defense option we have not yet ruled out."

EA's moves have even stirred sympathy with Ubisoft's rivals. Infogrames, the French company that owns the Atari brand name, has expressed a willingness to help – although no specific details have emerged. Its chairman, Bruno Bonnell, told news agency Reuters, "When Ubisoft has defined the limits within which it is prepared to work, they know we are ready to listen." Bonnell continued by rejecting EA's assertion that the stock purchase was merely for financial investment. "Electronic Arts certainly did not enter Ubisoft's capital to just stay at that level. I hope Ubisoft will find ways to defend itself so that Infogrames does not become the last bastion in the European video games community. It would be a pity to see great European creations end up in a relatively hegemonic U.S. conglomerate."

Help may also come in a different form. Rumors have circulated that fellow French company Vivendi Universal has talked with Ubisoft about a merger – something that Vivendi denies.

R & D

Game Informer brings the world's worst game ideas to life



Police Academy Online

With Warcraft's successful move to the MMORPG world, it's time for all of the me-too franchises to try to elbow their way into the crowded market – and who better to occupy the coveted "Reviled '80s Movie MMO" slot than Police Academy? Players will be able to create characters like Sound Effects Dude, Gruff Sergeant, and That Sexy Girl. Each class will feature embarrassingly unfunny special skills like "Shout Something Contrived and Unhilarious into a Bullhorn," or "Be Steve Guttenberg." The gameplay will feature a persistent, formulaic world in which players endure forced comedic routines and insipid dialogue in a quest to delete their own characters (which can only be done once level 40 is attained), thus erasing all evidence that they were ever affiliated with this abominable experience.

Of course, regardless of profession or skills, all characters will be essentially useless in combat situations, relying on blind luck and deus ex machina to win battles and gain experience. Unfortunately, players will have to be wary of making characters that look too much like Hightower or Tackleberry to avoid being sued. However, given his inability to afford breakfast, much less an attorney, players making Steve Guttenberg-esque characters need fear no legal recourse.

THREE SWORDS OF POWER.
ONE HERO TO MASTER THEM.

Ys

THE ARK OF NAPISHTIM

Fight enemies and huge bosses in real-time with special sword attacks and combinations!

Unleash the powers of Wind, Fire and Thunder with 3 elemental swords!

Meet allies and foes on your quest to uncover the secrets of the Vortex of Canaan!

TEEN
T
Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation®2

Falcom®

KONAMI

www.konami.com/gs

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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

NOTES ON KOTOR III

Obsidian did pretty well taking over for BioWare in KOTOR II: The Sith Lords, and it's got more up its sleeve for the third installment. A source tells us that the game is going to reveal more about the HK series of droids, including where they are from and who makes them. Also planned is an exploration of the Outer Rim territories following in Revan's footsteps.

Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords

NCAA TO EA?

In a follow up to the flurry of punches EA has leveled to its sports video game rivals, Loose Talk has heard that the company is currently pursuing a contract with the NCAA to obtain the exclusive rights to the collegiate sports association. It is unknown which sports this deal would encompass, such as football, basketball, hockey, and more. Currently the only franchise challenging EA's college titles is Take 2's ESPN College Hoops 2K series.

TRUE FANTASY NOT DEAD?

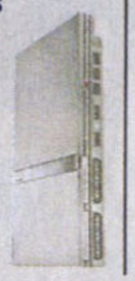
Xbox lost out on a potentially good game when Japanese developer Level-5 announced that it was canning MMORPG title True Fantasy Live Online. However, the company hasn't given up hope on the title. President Akihiro Hino recently said that he thinks that there is a chance that the game could release on Xbox Next.

$60 GAMES?

In a presentation to Barney Citigroup Entertainment, Activision CEO Bobby Kotick said that he sees triple-A titles increasing in price by $10 once the next-generation consoles hit.

SLIM NEW COLOURS

Although not yet confirmed for America, it looks like Europe is already advertising Sony's new slim-line PS2 in different colors – including silver (pictured). We hope the company steps up and delivers this multi-colored fun here in the States sometime soon.



GAMES GET A GRAMMY

The Recording Academy is considering creating a Grammy Award category for video game soundtracks in the future. Considering how much time, effort, talent, and money is poured into even your average video game score (not to mention full symphonic concerts!), it's about time. Finally the Grammy Awards will be about talent.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Despite the 3D flop of Castlevania 64, Konami forged ahead with plans for this three-dimensional title on Sega's Dreamcast. The American-developed game featured Sonia Belmont in a Dracula-chasing time adventure. Despite this rock-solid premise (insert chuckle), this Castlevania never made it to store shelves, even though it showed at E3 and was several years in development. In fact, gamers were so sick of waiting through its numerous delays, the title was even dubbed Cancelvania.

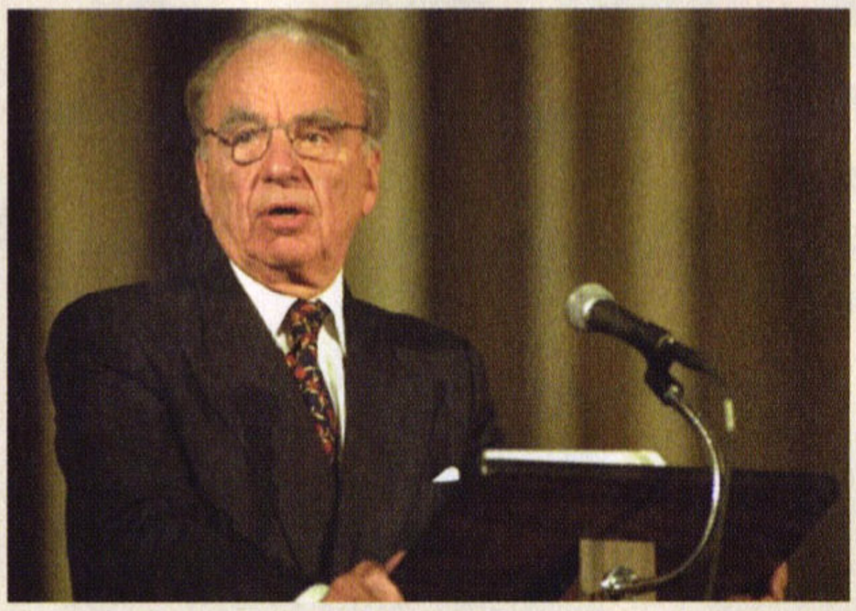
(Answer on page 42)

news

FAIR AND BALANCED GAMES?

FOX OWNER MURDOCH TO BUY INTO VIDEO GAMES

Media mogul Rupert Murdoch is looking into acquiring a video game company. Murdoch currently owns News Corporation, which controls the Fox and Sky television networks, along with British newspapers *The Sun* and *The Times* and book publisher Harper Collins.



News Corp. COO Peter Chernin recently admitted in a quote to *The Financial Times* that the company was "kicking the tires of pretty much all video game companies," but wasn't sure which one was the right fit. "We see [video games] as a big business, and we'd like to get into it. We are struggling with the gap between companies like Electronic Arts, which come with a high price tag, and the next tier of companies. These may be too focused on one or two product lines." Chernin did, however, mention Activision by name as a potential target. Activision's reported market capitalization is around $3 million, while EA's is $19 million. News Corporation has estimated cash holdings of $5.5 billion.

Chernin also mentioned that other media companies are interested in moving into video games. One we know about for sure is Viacom's CEO Sumner Redstone, who acquired a majority of Midway's stock last year and appointed his daughter vice chairman to the company's board of directors.

With the success of the video game industry, it shouldn't come as a surprise that people like Murdoch would want a taste of the action. Unfortunately the results could be a glut of safer, license-based games stuffed with every cross-promotional marketing trick you could think of. Who knows, maybe Purina will burst back onto the scene and make a Chase the Chuckwagon 2.

news

WHO SAYS YOU ARE A GAMER?

NEW STUDY QUESTIONS GAMER STEREOTYPES

The friends you've just met on Halo 2 might not be who you think they are. According to a new study by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), the typical American gamer is not the dumpy, socially-retarded person we assume makes up the gaming population (except for Adam – he still breaks out in hives around girls).

In a random survey of 802 adults conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc, computer and video game players spend more than three times the amount of time doing activities such as community volunteering or engaging in religious or cultural activities than they do playing games. For instance, 79 percent of all game players say they exercise or play sports for an average of 20 hours per month – a statistic that contradicts some people's belief that video games are a part of the cause in the rise in obesity rates among Americans.

esa entertainment software association

"Gamers are everywhere and they're everyone. They are your friends, neighbors, co-workers, relatives, and kids, they lead responsible and caring lives, balancing their enjoyment of interactive entertainment with many other activities important to a well-rounded lifestyle," said Douglas Lowenstein, president of the ESA. "Indeed, those who continue to portray the game population as single-minded loafers are living in their own fantasy world."

Tekken's Nina Williams is even deadlier undercover.

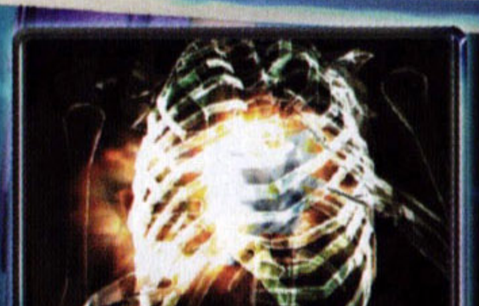
As a covert operative of the CIA, Nina Williams enters an underground fighting tournament to track Kometa, a shadowy underworld organization. Functioning as the "sweeper" of her cell, Nina finds herself tracking a stolen high-tech weapon through a variety of locations to reveal a conspiracy on a global scale. Nina must now face a multitude of deadly enemies, as well as her own past, in order to save the world.

TEKKEN'S NINA WILLIAMS IN:

DEATH BY DEGREES™

> Control Nina with an intuitive 360-degree combat system

> Wield a variety of weapons



> Burst organs, shatter bones

> Deliver Nina's signature moves outside the ring

www.deathbydegrees.com

PlayStation 2

namco®
www.namco.com

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Intense Violence
Language
Suggestive Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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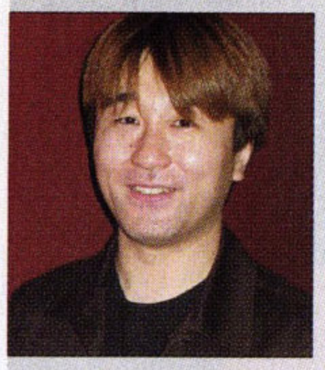
TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
YOSHINORI ONO
Producer, Shadow of Rome



1 Castlevania – NES
2 Dragon Quest 5 – SNES
3 Resident Evil 2 – PSone
4 Super Mario Bros. – NES
5 Pikmin – GC

READER
MADY SALE
Amherst, VA

1 Dog's Life – PS2
2 Shrek 2 – Xbox
3 SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom – Xbox
4 Grabbed by the Ghoulies – Xbox
5 EyeToy: Play – PS2

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Franchises Appearing On Next-Gen Consoles Whether You Like It Or Not

10 BMX XXX: Nothing is sexier than normal-mapped boobies!
9 Crash Bandicoot: Even if developers stop making his games, he'll still show up on his own.
8 Drake of the 99 Dragons: "Take one down, pass it around, 98 more iterations to endure!"
7 Catwoman: Because game manufacturers hate you.
6 Army Men: The rights are currently on the auction block at Christie's. Highest bid is a cool buck fifty.
5 Robocop: The sadly underrepresented "robots who shoot things" genre needs a new champion.
4 Celebrity Death Match: Because Carrot Top will do anything for a dollar. Anything.
3 McFarlane's Evil Prophecy: The prophecy reads: "And, Lo! Once slain, it will return with renewed vigor to defile the facial cavities of all who decried it."
2 Aquaman: Rumor has it the next entry will be called Aquaman: Seahorse Rodeo
1 Fugitive Hunter: If we don't Kung Fu fight Osama Bin Laden, the terrorists have already won.

Name That Game Answer: Castlevania: Resurrection

games

A NEW SET OF STAR WARS

FIRST LOOK AT LUCASARTS' RTS

With the last Star Wars movie set to release in May, LucasArts is going back to the beginning for its newest creation based on the franchise. Star Wars: Empire at War is a real-time 3D RTS developed by Petroglyph – a new company comprised of a number of people who used to work at Command & Conquer creator Westwood. Empire at War is scheduled to appear this fall on PC and other undisclosed platforms.

The game is set before Episode IV: A New Hope, letting players advance the cause of either the Rebel Alliance or the Darth Vader-led Empire. Taking place in space as well as on land, the game takes in familiar locations such as Tatooine, Dagobah, Hoth, and new environments (some from the Star Wars expanded universe) and directions. Your adventures may even put you into contact with your favorite Star Wars heroes. Empire at War also supports a two-player Empire vs. Rebellion mode and up to eight players online.

This is the Tip of America's Military Spear. You're on Point.

You are the First to Fight – a US Marine on the front lines of urban combat in Beirut. Lead a 4-man fire team that executes authentic Marine tactics. Move aggressively, knowing your team gives you 360-degree security, and devastate your enemies with precise air and mortar attacks. Experience a first-person shooter so realistic, the Marines use it as a training tool.

Play single-player, 4-man co-op, or go head-to-head in the Fire Team Arena.

CLOSE COMBAT

FIRST TO FIGHT™

THE REAL-LIFE COMBAT EXPERIENCES OF THE PROUD FEW.

BASED ON A TRAINING TOOL DEVELOPED FOR THE UNITED STATES MARINES

COMING SOON Visit www.FirstToFight.com

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Blood, Violence

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE · Mac · XBOX · XBOX LIVE · POWERED BY gamespy · ATOMIC GAMES · DESTINEER · GS GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE

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JIM WARD

PRESIDENT, LUCASARTS/VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION, LUCASFILM LTD.

>> As president of LucasArts and vice president of marketing and distribution of Lucasfilm Ltd., Jim Ward is the man in charge of bringing to life George Lucas' vision for both the video game and movie wings of the company. After recently spearheading a massive reorganization of LucasArts, Ward feels that the company is poised to take a leading role in the game industry. <<

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1981 ▶ International Politics
As a senior at Hanover College, Ward interns at the United Nations and is voted Hanover's "Man of the Year."

1989 ▶ Taking A Bite
As an account executive for BBDO/Los Angeles, Ward works for Apple Computers, helping launch the Power Macintosh, among other products.

1993 ▶ Going Mobile
Working with Apple, Ward oversees the launch of the company's groundbreaking PowerBook laptop, causing a huge stir in the computing world.

1995 ▶ Start Me Up
Ward, after joining Wieden & Kennedy, takes on his biggest project to date: the launch of Microsoft's long-awaited Windows 95 operation system. Microsoft rolls out a huge ad campaign, using the Rolling Stones' "Start Me Up" as a theme song.

1996 ▶ The Sporting Life
Ward coordinates two huge sports events for Nike, the 1996 Summer Olympics and the company's signing of up-and-coming golf superstar Tiger Woods to a $40 million endorsement deal.

1997 ▶ The Empire
Ward joins Lucasfilm Ltd. as the head of its new marketing division.

1999 ▶ The Return

Ward helps orchestrate one of the largest media/marketing campaigns in the history of film: the highly anticipated return of Star Wars to the silver screen with *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*. Jar Jar wasn't his fault.

2002 ▶ Another Blockbuster
Ward oversees the release of the second of the new trilogy, *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, which is another huge hit and better received by the Star Wars faithful.

2004 ▶ It's About Synergy

Ward masterminds a brilliant bit of marketing: the simultaneous release of the original *Star Wars* trilogy on DVD and the multiplatform action game Star Wars: Battlefront. Sales for both are exceptionally strong.

You've worked in a lot of different industries, from the food industry to film to technology. What are some of the thing video games could learn from other industries?
There's a lot we can learn from entertainment marketing in terms of tie-in promotional partners and retail events. This is something that, frankly, we pioneered in September with the simultaneous launch of the original [Star Wars] trilogy on DVD along with Star Wars: Battlefront. That had never been done before in the retail environment, where you had a DVD and a video game tie-in that came out at the same time.

In addition, [we need to] open up the window of when events can happen. Certainly, the movie business has learned that the fourth-quarter crunch, while holding great opportunity, can also be the death [knell]. What we need is to use other seasons to launch our games. There's no reason why the summer timeframe should not be ripe for this industry. It's when kids have the disposable income; it's when they have time to play these kinds of games.

How involved is George Lucas with the game side of your business?
His involvement has ebbed and flowed over the years depending on his focus. I can tell you that, as we're coming up to the end of his Star Wars moviemaking activity, he has become more and more involved in the games business. Most of the changes we've experienced in the last year at LucasArts are a direct result of his focus on this business. He believes, as we all do, that the interactive segment of the entertainment business is the leading edge of growth for the industry and Lucasfilm.

What were the changes he pushed for? Was it a reorganization or just a change of priorities?
All of the above. We clearly had gotten to a point at LucasArts where, very honestly, the quality of our product was not at the level that it should have been. We were making too many Star Wars games, making too many mediocre Star Wars games. We weren't having as much luck with new IP [intellectual properties] and we certainly weren't doing anything new with the Indiana Jones IP. I think George came to the conclusion that it was time for change. For better or worse, that's why I was asked to come in here and we began to radically restructure the company. We [changed] management, changed our focus to raising the quality of the games, and to limit the number of Star Wars games that we do, but make them big blockbuster games.

LucasArts used to be known for making really unique original properties like Day of the Tentacle, then fell back primarily on Star Wars products exclusively. Are original games going to be a bigger focus for the company?
We have three main goals. One is to restimulate the Star Wars IP with high quality games. Secondly, we're going to reinvigorate the Indiana Jones IP, which has basically been stagnant for years. There's no reason that Indiana Jones can't be a James Bond and have a year-in, year-out great representation of that brand. And take advantage of the fact that, in the next couple of years, there will be a new Indiana Jones movie. The third leg of this is definitely new IP. There's a heritage built into the DNA of LucasArts, and that's creativity and innovation. We need to move beyond the IP that we have. We certainly lost that. We lost that as the console marketplace came into being; it was very strong on the PC platform. Once the company missed the adaptation of the console platforms, we've been in catch-up mode ever since. But that's going to change.

Industrial Light & Magic [Lucasfilm's special effects division] has always been on the cutting edge of movie effects technology. Do you have any plans in making them involved with your graphics engine technology for games?
Absolutely. In fact, they already are. I'm glad you brought that up. It's another aspect of restructuring our company. One of the goals for that was to be able to share assets much more efficiently. It's absolutely a competitive edge for us. We are years ahead of everyone else. Every other media or games studio out there is trying to do basically what George has in place. We have the ability to leverage assets from ILM to make our games better and vice versa, and working together with them from a technology standpoint to really push the envelope way farther than we currently have.

The Episode III game is scheduled to come out before the film. How do you maintain a balance of having content from the film, while at the same time not including too many spoilers?
Well, I think it's a lot easier now since I also have the responsibility for the film in terms of marketing and distribution. But remember, this game has been developed in lockstep with the movie from the very beginning. While the game follows the basic construct of the film, it's clearly not the film, and is focusing more on the ultimate Jedi action experience. The game is focusing more on the ultimate Jedi experience, while the film dimensionalizes the story in many different ways.

Do you think that the Star Wars saga could continue in the video game realm? Any chance of us seeing games that continue the story of the Episodes IV-VI?
It's a wait-and-see type of thing. I think that holds a lot of promise and could be very exciting. But I'd also like to remind everyone that while this is the last Star Wars movie, it's certainly not the last of Star Wars. We are taking the Star Wars brand into the television realm, both in animation and live action. The opportunity is ripe with different ways in which we can extend this in the video game side, tying into [the] TV shows.

Is Star Wars Galaxies going to continue as a long-term partnership with Sony Online?
Absolutely. The MMO business is a unique and interesting market segment. I think the MMO business has actually gotten to a point where we're bumping at the [ceiling] of the way it's defined currently. There are about a million MMO players currently. The barriers to entry in the [genre] are pretty severe. You've got to have broadband; you've got to be able to play 40 hours a week; you've got to be committed to it or you're penalized. I think for the million or so players out there that's been fun and enjoyable. The challenge we really have is to go beyond that. I think that requires a different mindset and a different way of looking at this type of gameplay.

Where would you like to see LucasArts as a game publisher five years from now?
Five years from now, I want to have been able to put the "Lucas" back in LucasArts. To have that same "pixie dust" feeling when people see that logo that they maybe did in the '90s. For them to think, "If I pick up this game, I know it's going to be kick ass; I know it's going to be of the highest quality and the most creative thing out there."

> ***"There's a heritage built into the DNA of LucasArts, and that's creativity and innovation."***

Photo: Brett Klenk

LUCASARTS' JEDI MASTER SPEAKS

■ Jim Ward oversees the marketing and coordinates the operations of Lucasfilm's video game and movie projects

"A shooter unlike any you've seen before!" — Electronic Gaming Monthly
"One of our most anticipated titles of 2005." — Official XBOX Magazine

You've got no past.

This here's a diff'rent kinda shooter.
Switch back 'n forth 'tween first
n' third person dependin' on
if yer gunnin' or brawlin'.

Shoot livin' ammo like Fuzzles,
Boombats and Sting Bees at yer enemies,
each with a pow'rful world of hurt.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence

ONLY ON XBOX

XBOX

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And, from the looks of things, not much future.

ODDWORLD STRANGER'S WRATH™

Welcome, friend. Heard yer that bounty hunter with the mysterious past. Ya hit town ta collect bounties, make moolah and free the land from tyranny. Better keep that double-barrel'd creature crossbow loaded 'cuz ya gotta blast yer way through a pack of outlaws 'n filthy minions if yer gonna clean up around here. Hitch up yer boots, Stranger, it's time ta make a name fer yer'self.

At general stores everywhere. Yer hunt begins at eagames.com

EA GAMES™

Challenge Everything™

tech

iPOD SHUFFLE

Manufacturer: Apple
Website: www.apple.com
List Price: $99 (512 MB), $149 (1 GB)

Here's a big dose of honesty for you – the iPod Shuffle technology came out ages ago. Thumb-sized flash drives are so ubiquitous that even the most mainstream of mainstream computer manufacturers have been shipping them out instead of floppy drives for a few years. Still, Apple's panache for kick-ass industrial design makes this the one that we're giddy for. IPod controls and a wickedly cool plug-in for iTunes top off the whole package. Nyko's iTop Button Relocator is one of the handiest accessories for the hard drive iPods – moving the controls up top means that we can stop fishing it out of our pockets every time we need to skip a track.

tech

iTOP BUTTON RELOCATOR

Manufacturer: Nyko
Website: www.nyko.com
List Price: $29

(shown with iPod, iPod not included)

etc.

MINI-MART À LA CARTE

Manufacturer:
Chronicle Books
Website:
www.chroniclebooks.com
List Price:
$14.95

Rarely in our time covering the video game universe are we presented with cookbooks that actually seem pertinent to our readership, but the tongue-in-cheek *Mini-Mart à la Carte* perfectly fits the bill. Featuring drinks, appetizers, and suggestions on how to feed a crowd, it also offers up handy trivia tidbits about the history of convenience stores, a food pyramid that would make the Surgeon General weep in despair, and a quiz to determine if your corner market is actually a bastion of power, glory, and processed cheese spread. Here's a sample recipe to whet your whistle.

Pigs in a Poncho

This little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed home. And this little piggy hopped into his souped-up low rider and headed to Tijuana. We've nestled our little piggies under a blanket of cheese sauce and wrapped them snugly in a tortilla comforter. And for a pillow, how about some hot sauce? This little piggy went wee, wee, wee all the way to your belly.

You will need:

- One 16-ounce package hot dogs
- 8 taco-sized soft flour tortillas
- One 8-ounce can Cheddar-flavor Kraft Easy Cheese
- 1 packet taco sauce from the condiment bar

1) Place the hot dogs on a microwave-safe plate and heat in the microwave oven on high for about 4 minutes, or until the dogs are heated throughout.

2) Place each hot dog on a tortilla and spray liberally with Easy Cheese.

3) Wrap the tortillas snugly around the hot dogs.

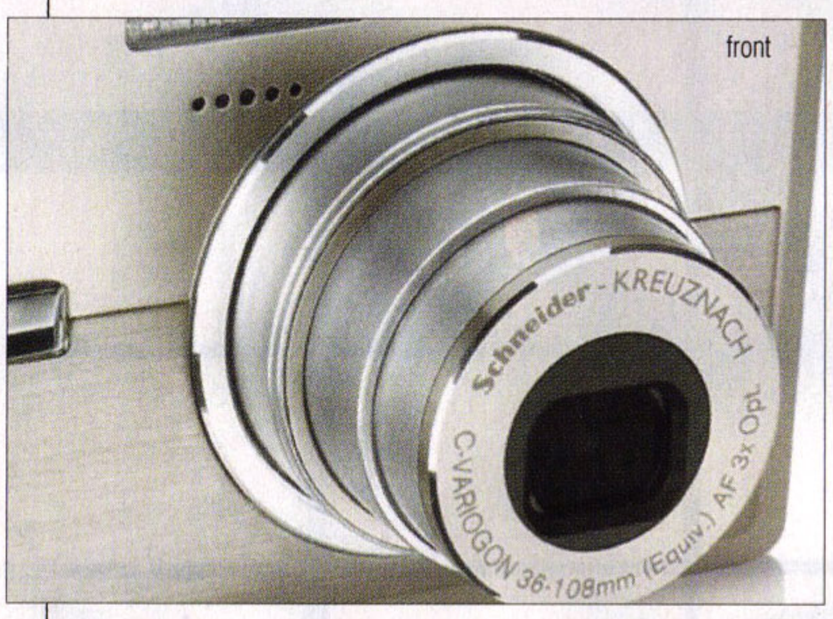
4) Squirt the taco sauce in a thick line on a large serving platter, arrange the piggies in a row along the line of sauce, and serve.

home entertainment

XBOX 5.1 SURROUND SOUND SYSTEM

Manufacturer: Spherex
Website: www.spherexinc.com
List Price: $499.99

For those of you still thinking that stereo sound is mad pimpin', we have to have some words. First off, getting a solid, respectable 5.1 system will change your gaming, music, and movie lives and, no, we're not overstating. A good choice would be this set we spied at CES in Vegas – 600 Watts and five audio inputs (three digital, one analog, and one mighty handy USB 1.1 port) make sweet surround magic with nice-sounding speakers on all sides.



tech

EASYSHARE-ONE

Manufacturer: Kodak
Website: www.kodak.com
List Price: $599 (Camera), $99.95 (Wi-Fi Card)

Best of CES

tech

TALBY

Manufacturer: Sanyo
Website: www.au.kddi.com
List Price: $140

Recently, we pounded the floors of Las Vegas' convention center to dig through the masses of geek porn at the annual Consumer Electronics Show. Here are the two things we lusted for the most.

Kodak's camera easily makes our short list of technology that will change the way we do things when it becomes available in the near future (June). The 4.0 megapixel unit is small in stature, but large in features with gigantic touch-screen interface and the option to add Wi-Fi image transfer. So the next time you're in an Internet café in Amsterdam and want to upload vacation shots to a website, there's no computer required, and the action even frees up space on your memory card.

The appeal of Sanyo's Talby cell phone cannot be understated – it's slim, powerful, quirky, and classic all at the same time. With a 1.3 MP camera, a version of the Opera web browser, and a macro for converting pictures of barcodes into useful product information (how very Japanese), it's enough to make us buy one, even though it will only work in the Land of the Rising Sun.

peripherals

PHOENIX REVOLUTION

Manufacturer: Radica
Website: www.radicauk.com
List Price: $45.00

With all of the crazy gaming gear we see every week, Radica's Gamester line is stepping up to the plate with a controller designed like nothing we've seen before in the console world. Swappable pod-like units let players change the positions of the analog sticks and action buttons, and there are even built-in tension control knobs that tweak the resistance of the sticks. Lefties, swap the left analog and rejoice!

peripherals

NEO GEO STICK 2

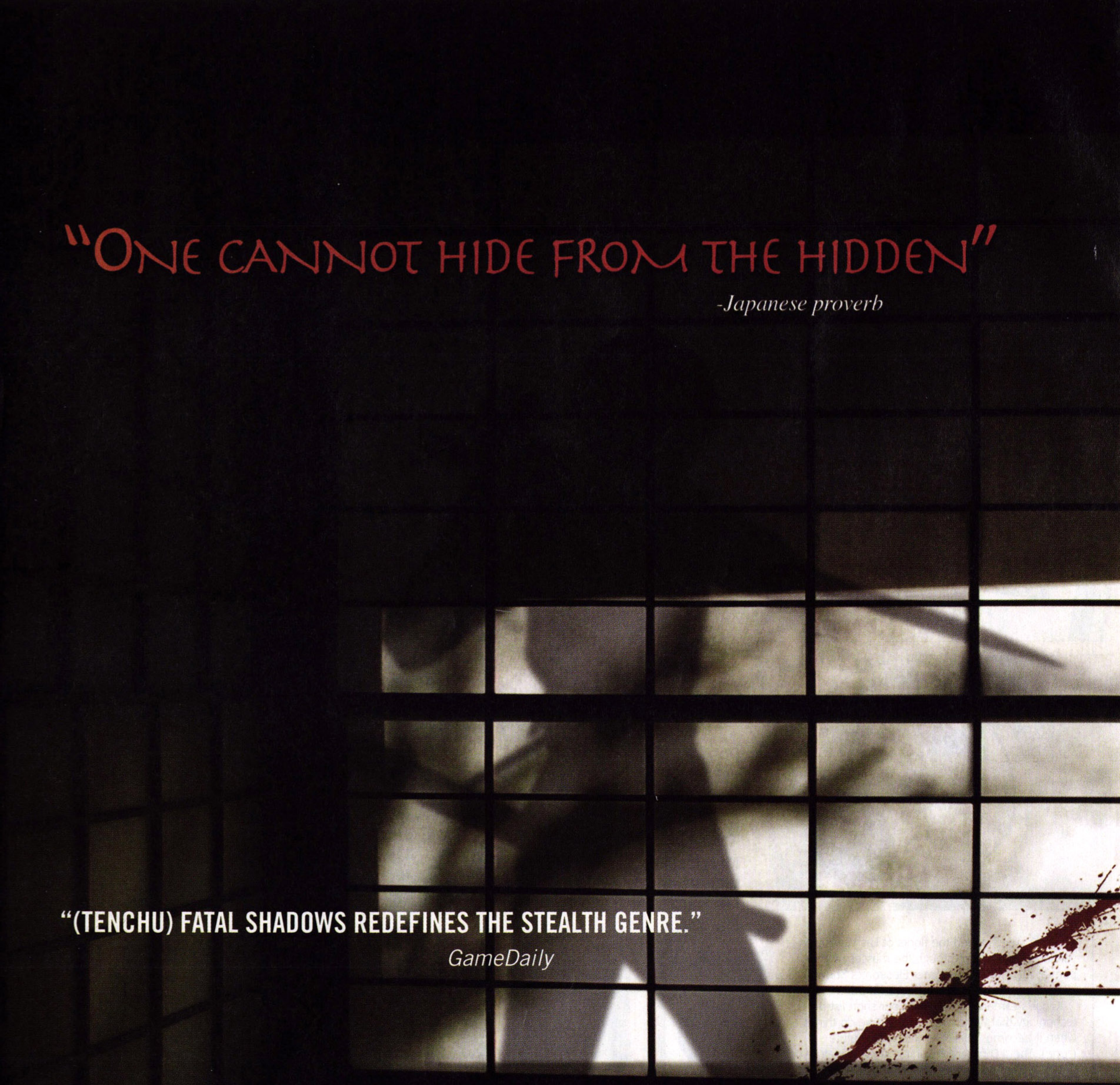
Manufacturer: Sega Logistics Services
Website: www.sls-net.com
List Price: $59.99

Commemorating the 10th anniversary of one very special 2D fighting series, The King of Fighters, Sega Logistics along with SNK Playmore is issuing a PS2-compatable version of the Neo Geo Stick. The only real change between the original and this version is the addition of four PlayStation buttons. Still large, still in charge, and (right now) only available by importing one from Japan.

CORRECTIONS
Pelican's HD System Selector featured in issue #142 has a suggested retail price of $19.99.

"ONE CANNOT HIDE FROM THE HIDDEN"

-Japanese proverb



"(TENCHU) FATAL SHADOWS REDEFINES THE STEALTH GENRE."

GameDaily

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation.2

SEGA

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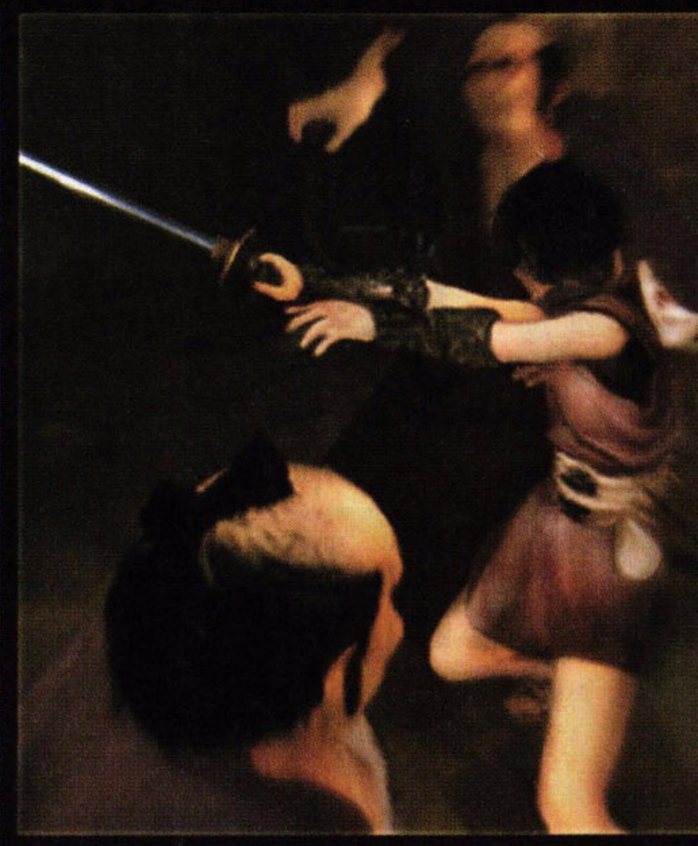

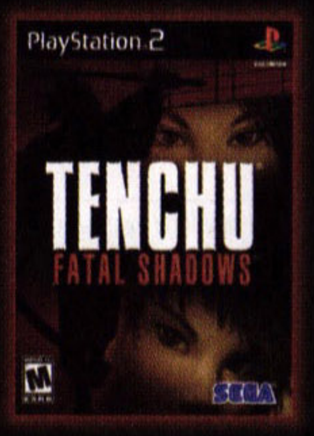

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TAKING GAMES SERIOUSLY

BY MATT HELGESON, SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR, GAME INFORMER MAGAZINE

I couldn't believe my eyes. I guess I should be immune to ill-advised marketing schemes, but watching characters from BioWare's Jade Empire lamely mime along to Christina Milian's pop hit "Dip it Low" on MTV 2's *Video Mods* seems to be a perfect illustration of a major issue that the game industry needs to deal with: taking games seriously. While you often hear complaints from people in development about how video games are not considered to be a legitimate art form by the mainstream media, the truth is that much of the problem stems from within the industry itself.

I'm not trying to single out BioWare for criticism. Jade Empire wasn't the only game joining in the digital minstrel routine. Leisure Suit Larry characters jumped around to the Black Eyed Peas, the Tribes: Vengeance gang air-guitared to that Von Bondies song from the Chevy commercial, and The Sims 2 posse extolled the virtues of MILFs with Fountains of Wayne's hit "Stacy's Mom." While, on the surface, this might seem like good fun and good marketing, I think it's indicative of how the game industry is often too eager to play along with any form of mainstream media that deigns to give it coverage.

The fact is that games today are about more than just providing gameplay; they are about creating digital worlds and characters that can transport players far away from our often-dreary day-to-day lives. However, this drama can only be created with an audience that's ready to willfully suspend its disbelief – to believe in and care about the character or characters that it's playing. And marketing tactics like *Video Mods* – which uses game characters as little more than comic props – can only make it harder for gamers to accept these digital creations as real.

Perhaps an even more extreme example of this took place in 2004, in an issue of *Playboy*, where characters from BloodRayne and other games actually "posed" nude in the famous men's magazine. I guess you could consider it progress that video games have gotten to the point where our female leads can be exploited for their sex appeal to the same degree that Hollywood actresses are, but I hardly think it's a cause for celebration.

Another aspect of this "mainstreaming" of video games that has potentially harmful implications for our art form is in-game advertising. In-game advertising revenue reached $79 million in 2003, the Nielsen ratings board has just formed a branch to study its effectiveness, and nearly every major advertiser in the world is looking towards this market as a source of potential growth.

I understand that this is a business, and that publishers are looking to any avenue to recoup their rising development costs. In some cases, a NASCAR racing game for instance, advertising can actually help to make the experience seem closer to real life. However, I hope our industry uses caution in its approach to in-game advertising. One only needs to look at EA's Need for Speed Underground 2, with its city that had more Burger Kings and Best Buys per capita than any metro area in the world, for an example of in-game advertising gone awry. Every time you looked at your Cingular™ phone to check the map, it drove home the message that this was simply a commercial product aimed at making as much money as possible for the company that made it, not a work of art.

On the one hand, I understand the motivations behind this desire for mainstream press coverage. Video games were ignored for far too long, and I think that the industry suffers from a bit of an inferiority complex as a result. At times, I think games are so desperate for any kind of attention that the industry bends over backwards to gain any media exposure, even if it compromises the integrity of its games and characters.

I'm all for more mainstream coverage of games, but I think we need to approach pop culture on our own terms. The fact is that video games are the emerging dominant form of entertainment. We've already eclipsed movies and music, and games are quickly taking a bite out of the world's television watching time. With as much money and enthusiasm that is generated by the products that developers make, traditional media needs us more than we need them.

> **"...I think we need to approach pop culture on our own terms."**

There is a right way to do it. The launches of Halo 2 and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas were huge events because these games generated a genuine enthusiasm in the gaming public, not because of some shoddy marketing stunt. Rockstar in particular has done a great job of becoming part of popular culture, and they've done it by making their brand and logo into an icon through street level marketing, excellent graphic design, and games that really address what's going on in the world today. And they didn't have to have Carl Johnson singing a Chingy song to do it.

Games like The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay and Midway's upcoming Fear & Respect show the way towards a more equitable partnership. In both cases, the Hollywood talent involved (Vin Diesel and John Singleton) have a love for the art of gaming, and are intent on making sure that the games are just as high quality as one of their film projects. By looking at the examples I've just mentioned, hopefully the video game industry can find ways to play a larger role in pop culture without compromising the things that make gaming the world's most unique and compelling form of entertainment. If we continue to capitalize on every gimmicky and short-sighted marketing stunt offered to us, we run the risk of alienating the very audience of hardcore gamers that has helped build this business into what it is today. If we don't respect ourselves, we can't expect anyone else to. ■■■

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

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

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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language

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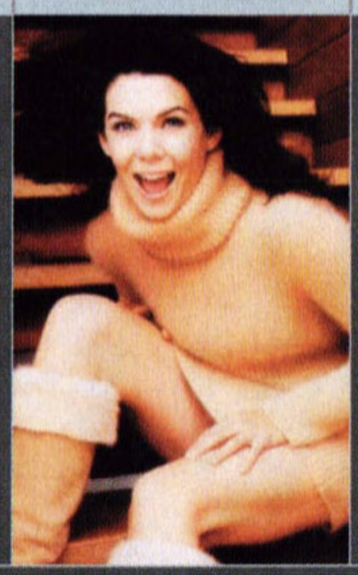
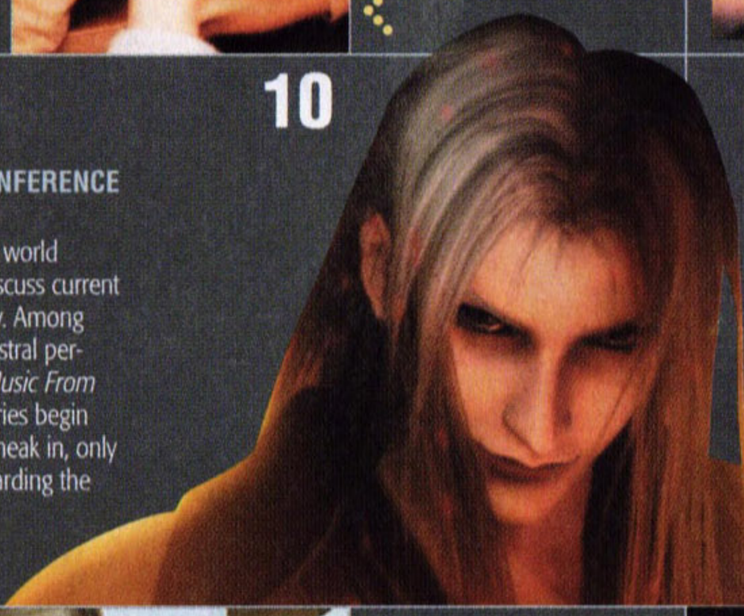
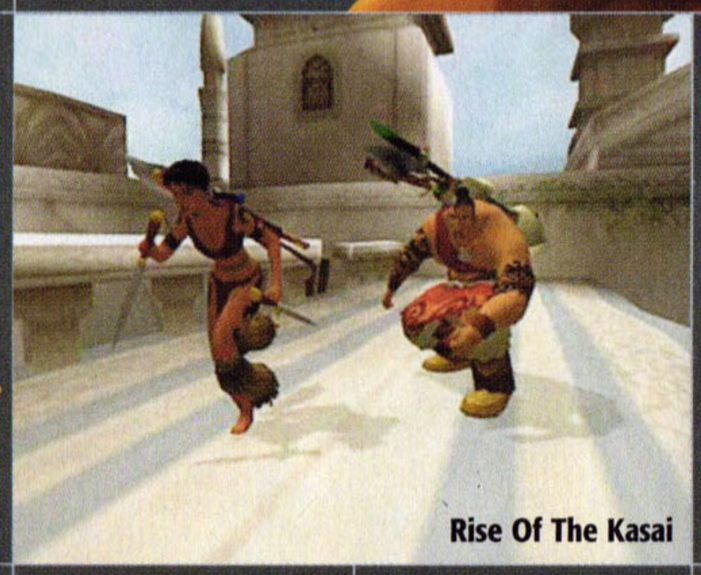
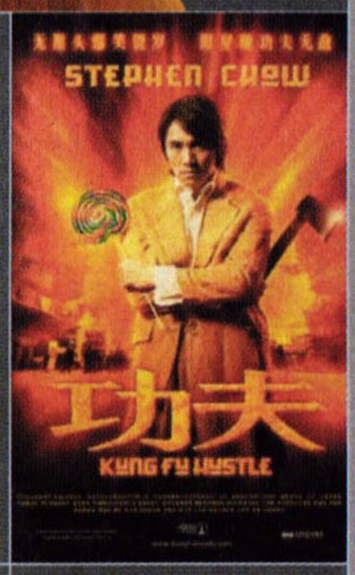
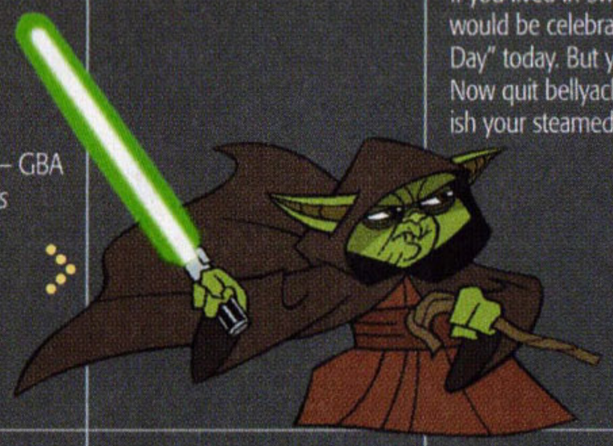
march

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
Doom 3		**01** NEW RELEASES • Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening – PS2 • Star Wars: Republic Commando – Xbox • Doom 3 – Xbox • MVP Baseball 2005 – PS2/Xbox/GC • Fight Night Round 2 – PS2/Xbox/GC • *D.C. Cab* – DVD	**02**		**04** Vin Diesel plays a babysitting Navy S.E.A.L. in *The Pacifier*, opening today. It also features our favorite Bad Santaphile, Lauren Graham. Naughty, please!	**05** Known for his wooden, vacant performance, the mannequin Skywalker Jake Lloyd turns 16 today. Super bombad! Time for a real driver's license, kid.
06 WWE Wrestlemania 21	**07**	**08** NEW RELEASES • TimeSplitters Future Perfect – PS2/Xbox/GC • WWE Wrestlemania 21 – Xbox • Super Monkey Ball Deluxe – PS2	**09** GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE MARCH 9-11 Developers from around the world gather in San Francisco to discuss current issues in the gaming industry. Among the highlights: another orchestral performance of *Dear Friends: Music From Final Fantasy*. Fans of the series begin hatching elaborate plots to sneak in, only to be foiled by Sephiroth guarding the front door.	**10** 		**12**
13	**14** NEW RELEASES • Gran Turismo 4 – PS2 • Donkey Kong Jungle Beat – GC • Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict – Xbox • Yoshi's Touch & Go – DS • Pokémon Dash – DS	**15** NEW RELEASES •Resident Evil Outbreak File #2 – PS2 • Rise of the Kasai – PS2 • ESPN Major League Baseball 2K5 – PS2/Xbox/GC • *Being Ron Jeremy* – DVD	 Rise Of The Kasai	**18** *Kung Fu Hustle* hits theaters today, starring *Shaolin Soccer's* Stephen Chow. We're not sure, but there's probably going to be some kicking in this film.		
20	**21** The only man in Hollywood to play more mentally unbalanced characters than Dennis Hopper, perennial freaky guy Gary Oldman turns 47.	**22**	**23** NEW RELEASES • God of War – PS2 • NARC – PS2/Xbox • Ghost Recon 2 – GC • Battlefield 2 – PC • Wario Ware: Twisted! – GBA • *Star Wars: Clone Wars Volume 1* – DVD	**24** 	**25** If you lived in Sweden, you would be celebrating "Waffle Day" today. But you don't. Now quit bellyaching and finish your steamed peat!	**26**
28	**29** NEW RELEASES • Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory – Xbox/PS2 • Red Ninja: End of Honor – PS2/Xbox • Dynasty Warriors 5 – PS2 • Mario Party Advance – GBA		**30**	**31** The walking self-caricature Christopher Walken turns 62 today. He celebrates by stealing your bike. What? Are you gonna stop him?		

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

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XBOX 2 | PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH
> **RELEASE** XBOX 2 LAUNCH (PLAYSTATION 3 AND PC TBD)

CONDEMNED

The Future Of Fear

Hanging from the crumbling ceiling, the light above you flickers and dies. In the dark, your other senses perk up, trying to help you navigate the dilapidated area around you. A drop of water falls nearby. The roof is leaking. The hair on your arm stands up as a cool breeze flickers over your skin. A crack in the failing walls leads outside. A foul smell fills your nostrils. The smell of death. He was here – he used this space to work on his victims. You reach into your bag, pull out a small device and switch it on. It throws out a sickly green beam, which quickly reveals a previously unseen handprint on the cold brick wall. You scan the stone surface and see several more handprints along its length. He went this way, steadying himself on the wall as he carried his victim into the night. You start down the same path, following in the footsteps of a killer. Ahead of you, the shadows shift, and a soft cackle cuts through the silence. You are not alone.

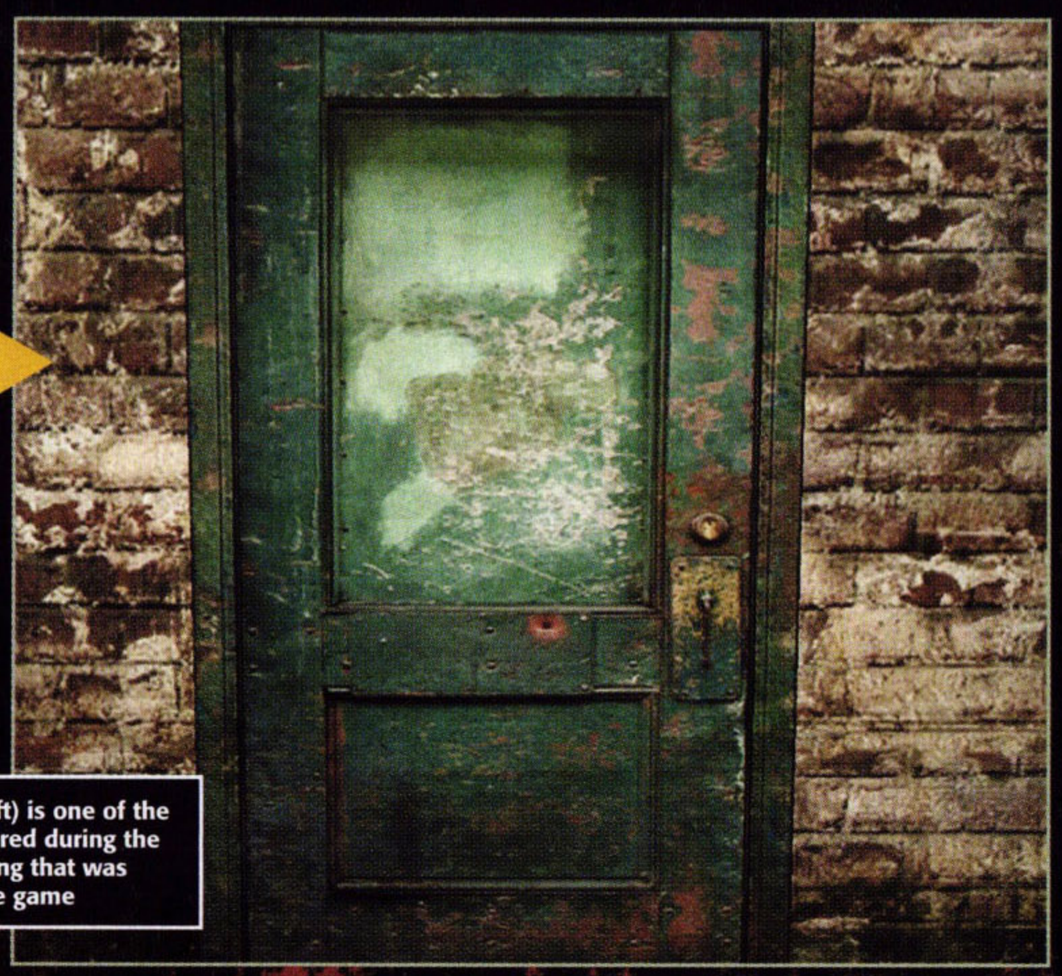
This scene might feel like it is straight out of a Hollywood thriller, and that's exactly what Sega and developer Monolith want you to think. But this is no movie – it is Monolith's dark new title Condemned. The esteemed developer wants to immerse you in the gloomy world of a psychological thriller and create an entirely unique and frightening game. This is not a first-person shooter, nor is it a survival horror game. It is a different type of scary experience, one that draws more inspiration from films like *Seven* and *The Silence of the Lambs* than the Resident Evil series or Doom 3. It is a game that will scare players with atmosphere, pacing, and a tangible sense of dread. It is a game that will stun with its realism and unsettle viewers with its shocking moments and visceral feel. It is a game that is only possible because of the raw power of Xbox 2.

As most gamers know, the Xbox 2 (or Xenon as it is also called) is likely to be the first next-generation machine to come on the market, with its release probable before the end of the year. Despite the relatively short timeframe before its debut, few details on the launch lineup for Microsoft's new machine have been revealed. According to Sega, barring any exclusivity deal, Condemned is being developed for multiple next-gen consoles and PC. However, our investigation has confirmed that Condemned will be coming to Xbox 2, and will likely ship around the launch of the console. Although neither Microsoft nor Sega will confirm Xbox 2's existence, we have proof, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that everything you see here is for Xbox 2, and we will address it as such.

While Washington-based Monolith is well known as a PC developer, the company has been yearning to break into the console market. The start of a new generation was the perfect time for it to jump into the fray, considering its first console project is a new type of game, one that has a better chance of finding an audience at the start of a new hardware cycle. Consider the games that have debuted with consoles in the past – many have carved out new styles of play or redefined an existing genre. Condemned is such a game. While first-person perspectives and scary games are nothing new, the way Condemned combines the two is. Monolith's goal is to create a truly tense and unnerving thriller that is rooted in reality, something that has never been done before in video games. In the past, several horror games have managed to elicit genuine scares, but none have done so by convincing the player that the action takes place in the real world. Condemned will not pit you against zombies or ghosts, instead populating its world with human monsters. As Ethan Thomas, member of the FBI's Serial Crime Unit, you will be tasked with tracking down several vicious serial killers, and will face many other deranged individuals along the way. You will learn what drives these vicious killers and stare into the face of madness itself. While the plot will take many twists and turns to add intricate layers onto this premise, believability is incredibly important to Monolith, and the game will stay rooted in reality. Thanks to the abilities of Xbox 2, Monolith has managed to create a world that feels just like our own – which is exactly what makes it so terrifying.

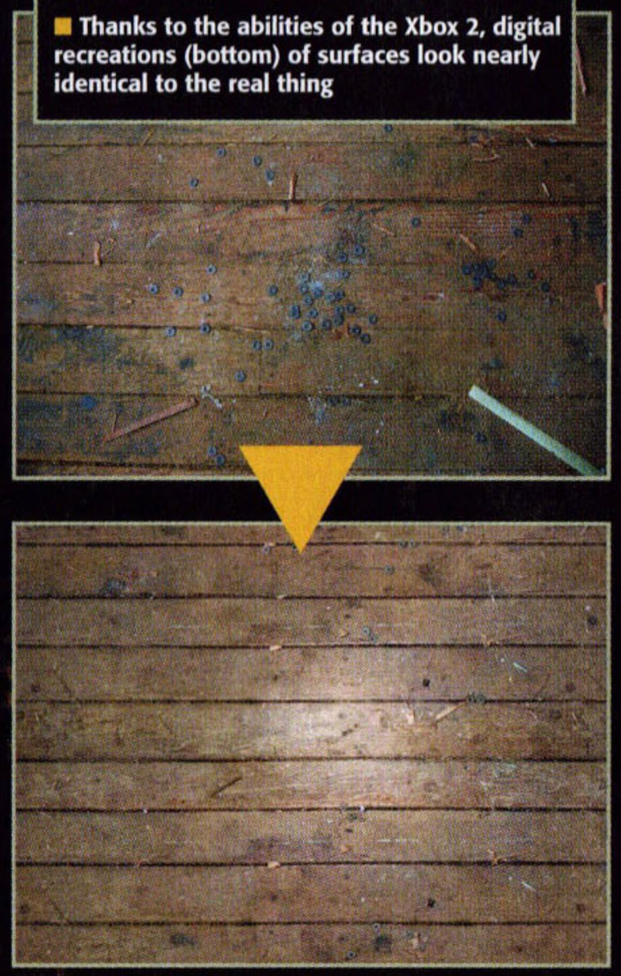
There has been much speculation about what the next generation of video game consoles will be capable of, and Condemned reveals many answers to those questions. Improved graphics logically accompany each iteration of consoles, and Condemned obviously excels in this arena. Throughout the game, you will find yourself in a variety of locations, each more decayed and filthy than the last. As you chase down a pack of serial killers, you will explore subway stations, ruined factories, abandoned department stores, failed youth centers, and more. Every environment is filled with clutter that is both real and unsettling. Stained mattresses lay on scuffed wood floors, ancient console televisions feature spiderwebs of cracks across their screens, and broken plastic chairs suggest the lost innocence of structures once populated by smiling children. Each area features such rich textures, atmospheric lighting, and creepy ambiance that you'd swear that they were real – and, in a way, they are. The Xbox 2 is capable of displaying such realistic environments that Monolith hired a location scout to find some of the most run-down, disgusting, and downright frightening locations around the Seattle area and capture them in photographs. The best (or possibly worst) elements of these locations were recreated in the game with such attention to detail that it is difficult to tell the real place apart from its digital recreation.

The games appearing on the Xbox in the last year have begun to use powerful



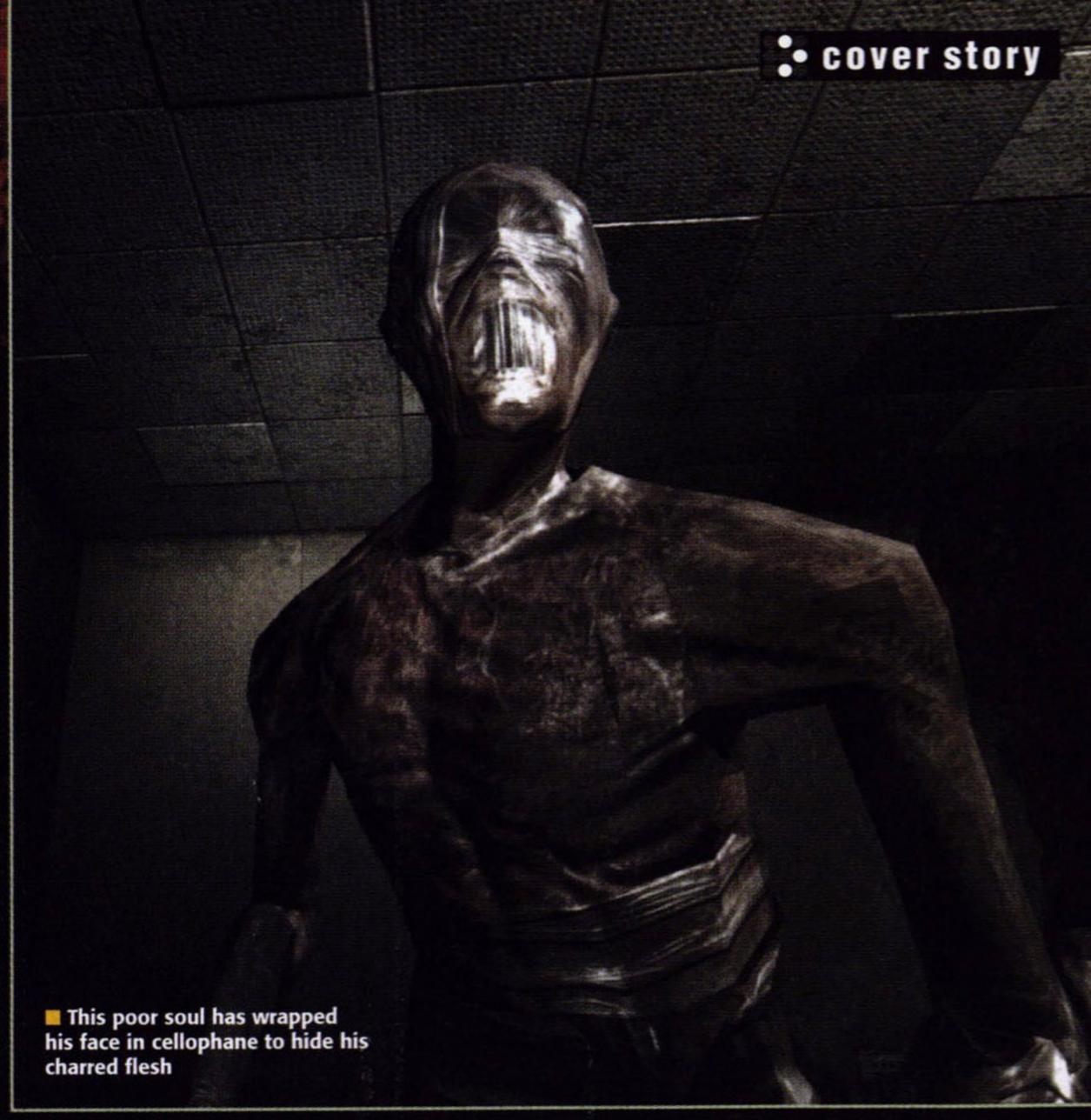
■ This door (left) is one of the objects discovered during the location shooting that was recreated in the game

■ Thanks to the abilities of the Xbox 2, digital recreations (bottom) of surfaces look nearly identical to the real thing



graphical tools such as normal mapping, a technique that allows digital artists to create the illusion of depth through detailed "wrapping papers" on low-resolution objects that have lighting information encoded within. Normal mapping, an elaborate technique for the current generation, looks poised to become the standard on the next. While it is a tool that the current Xbox can utilize, it will be taken to the next level in Condemned by using it in conjunction with several other mapping techniques, each of which adds further detail to a digital creation. The combination of these techniques creates visuals far more realistic than anything the current generation can produce. Every surface and object in Condemned is made by using multiple maps, such as the normal map, color map, specular map (for further lighting information), and more. To create skin that looks real, each character in the game is covered in seven different maps, and is built from up to eight million polygons. The level of detail on these characters is amazing, and simply is not possible on today's lineup of game machines. The realism of both the characters and locations is further augmented by volumetric lighting, a real-time light and shadow system that behaves exactly the way light does in reality. In each area you explore, you will notice how the meager light spilling in from a window diffuses into the darkness, how your flashlight beam fades into the distant crepuscule, and how shadows play realistically off of surfaces as a deranged lunatic comes between you and the only small bare bulb lighting a room.

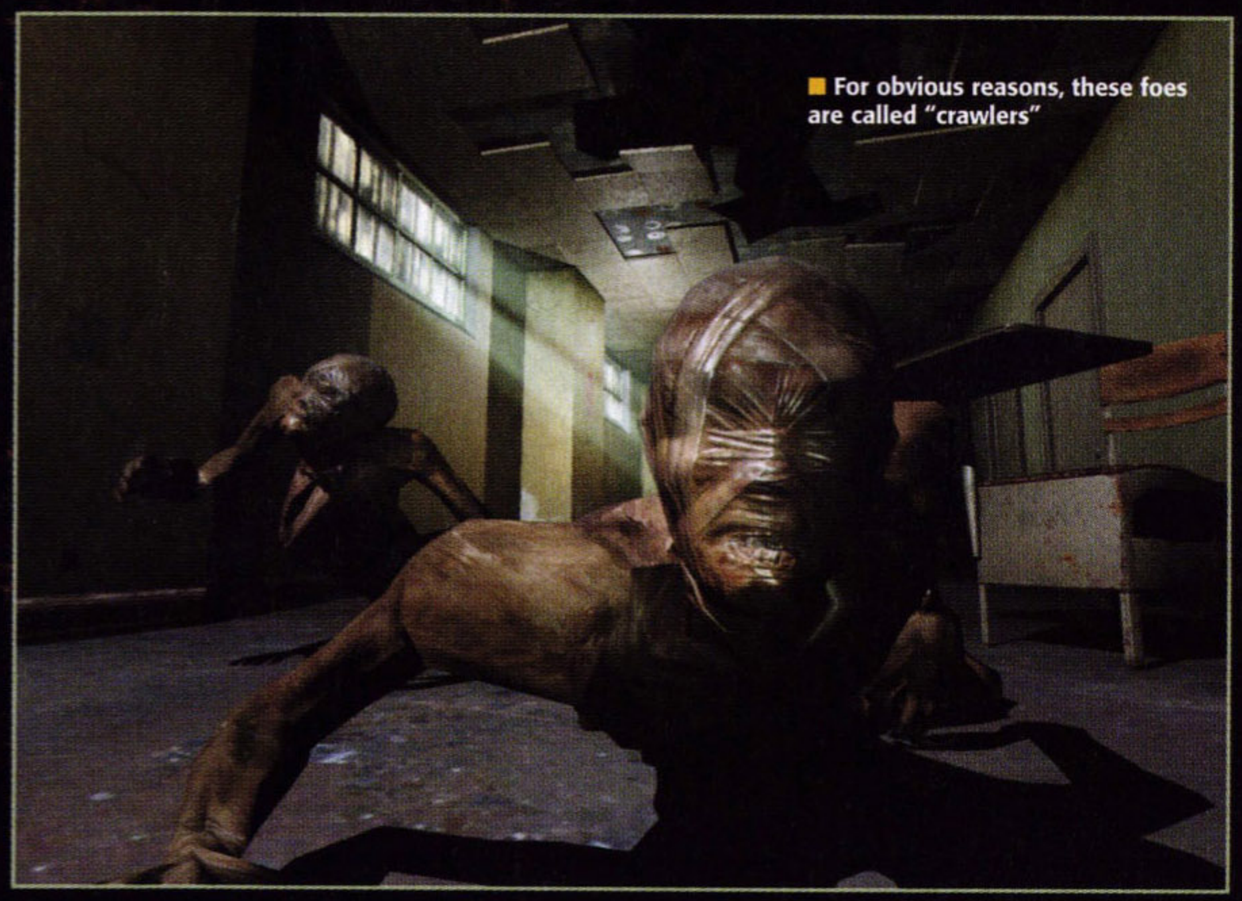
In many ways, the stunning graphics of Condemned are what allow for the pacing, which is much slower than what gamers are used to in first-person titles. Since at its core Condemned is



■ This poor soul has wrapped his face in cellophane to hide his charred flesh

■ They may look undead, but all the people on these pages are actually humans whos insanity and living conditions have lent them a horrible visage

"Each area features such rich textures, atmospheric lighting, and creepy ambiance that you'd swear that they were real."



■ For obvious reasons, these foes are called "crawlers"

■ Not only will the condemned hunt you down, but sometimes they will battle with each other

about unraveling a mystery, players are encouraged to carefully explore each area to help them find clues. "In previous generations, you wouldn't want someone to walk up to a wall and look at it, because you'd notice that it didn't look real," says Matt Allen, Condemned's art lead. "We want you to look around." Not only are players encouraged to examine areas for clues, Allen is simply proud of what his team has accomplished. "The slower pace of the game forces us to create more detailed environments, and we want to show off what our engineers can do. There are all these little things that we've added to make crossing a room cool. We let you experience things more."

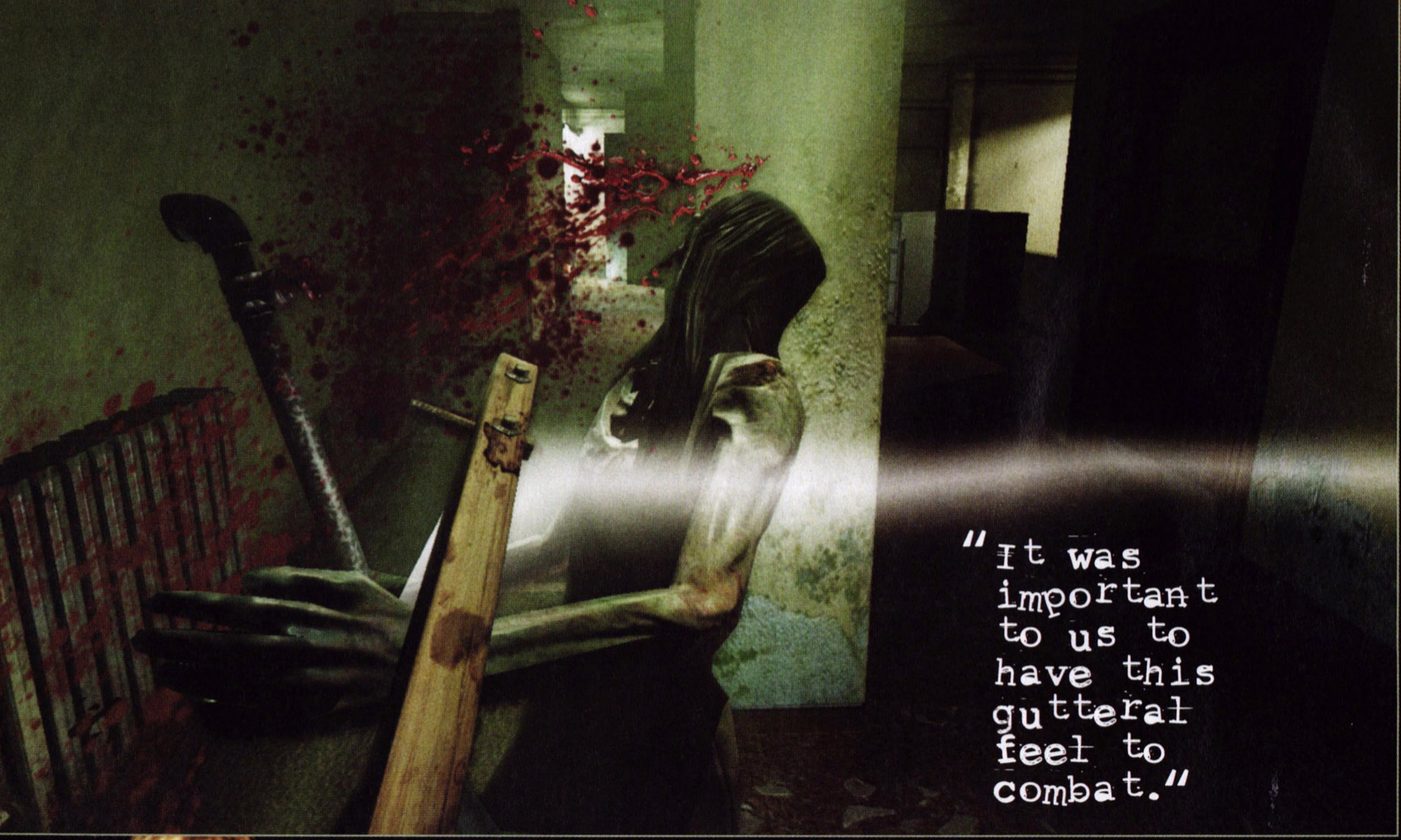
As you explore these highly detailed environments, you will notice the little things Monolith has done to fill Condemned with an incredibly palpable sense of dread. Even when the player is the only thing moving onscreen, it feels like things are happening all around. All objects in the game feature full Havok 3.0 physics, and the sounds of each item have been captured from real life. Trash from an overturned garbage can will spill out in every direction, and maniacal laugher echoes disturbingly through quiet rooms. Every footstep you take is audible, and you can even tell what type of surface you're walking on by sound alone. Your character's movement is noticeably different while walking up stairs than when on flat ground. A flashlight is clipped onto Thomas' jacket, which casts just enough light to pick up sinister movements in the distant shadows. The foes you'll face will scamper quickly across a room, trying to lead you into a trap. Sometimes it will be obvious that you're about to enter a fight, and sometimes it will come as a complete surprise. Even though it lacks the frantic pace of a typical shooter, Condemned features a very important focus on combat. But like everything else in the game, it is approached from a slightly different angle.

"The anticipation of battle is just as important as the battle itself," says producer Dave Hasle. "This game is about tension." As you hunt psychotic killers through dank, unfriendly locations, you will encounter those that lead game designer Frank Rooke describes as "condemned people." These are the people who have been marginalized by society, mentally unstable unfortunates who have found their homes in the areas that normal citizens fear to enter. Living in the slums and forgotten corners of the city, they are the derelicts that have lost touch with reality and civilization. They are the people that populate the areas that you will find yourself in, and more often that not, they won't be happy to see you. As you follow your quarry into forbidden areas, the condemned will greet you as an intruder and deal with you as such. But crazy as they may be, these foes are not stupid. In fact, their intelligent AI is another aspect of what makes the game so realistic, and demonstrates the further abilities of Xbox 2.

(continued on page 62)

■ Your enemies will try to catch you in traps, and all objects in the game move realistically, thanks to the Havok 3.0 system

■ Enemies will search for the best weapon available if they realize they're outmatched

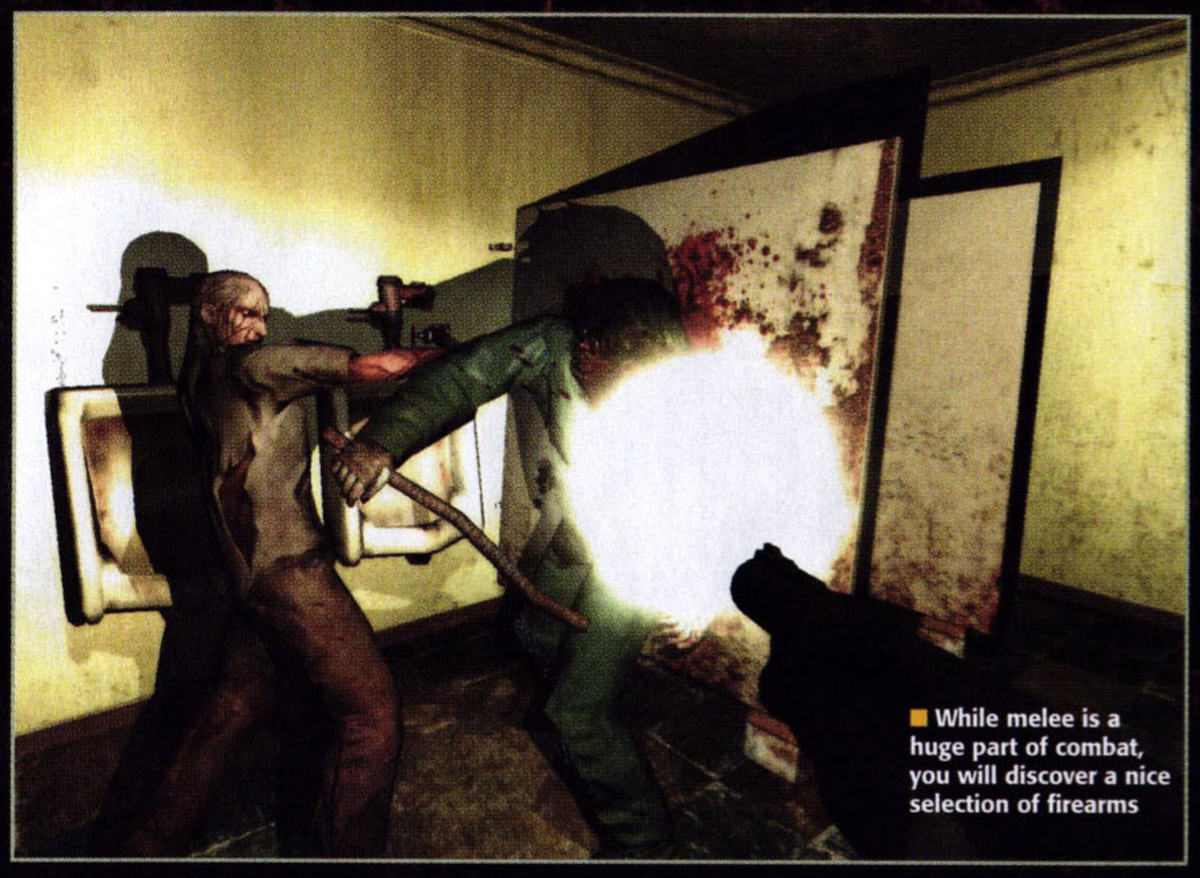


Sometimes, one of these lost souls may charge you, swinging randomly with a piece of lumber or rebar. But more frequently, they will try to sneak around you, toss garbage cans at you, or otherwise put you at a disadvantage. They will try to crush you by toppling shelves, and even try to grab you and throw you down stairwells. If you approach an enemy while wielding an axe, gun, or other powerful weapon, he will run from you and try to find a weapon of his own. Enemies will pull pipes and boards from walls to attack you with, actively use group tactics to give themselves an advantage, and even attempt to lead you into ambushes. They also know when they are outmatched, fleeing if they realize you are too tough for them to search for a better weapon. They will look for any opportunity to create a tactical advantage, but sometimes their mania will simply take hold of them. They will push their comrades out of the way to attack, and may even leap at you like a wild beast, kicking and scratching with all four limbs.

Building on the intelligent AI systems found in their previous games, Monolith has created antagonists that behave more intelligently and realistically than any game to date. The Xbox 2 allows the condemned (and the other types of enemies you'll face) to act more naturally than traditional video game enemies, and its power gives Monolith the freedom to use them in more complex situations. Gameplay scenarios were presented to us that rival blockbuster action movies in complexity. One scenario described had the player trying to escape from a gas-filled building while fending off two separate, unique groups of enemies inside, with a more powerful third assortment of foes waiting outside. Including the player and the deadly gas, this scenario asks the game console to deal with five distinct elements simultaneously – something far beyond the abilities of current consoles.

The team at Monolith is able to create such complex scenarios thanks to the tools built into the development kits. Engineering lead Joe Waters was quite forthcoming about making a game for the new consoles, and how it varied from working on other platforms (although Monolith's previous titles have all been released for PC, most of the Condemned team has worked on console games for other companies). The first Xbox, PlayStation 2, and GameCube all required developers to create tools to make a game before the actual game design even began, but the Xbox 2 does not. The development kits are loaded with programs to help the team build the game and meet Microsoft's certifications. As a result, the programmers are able to spend more time making the game great, rather than making sure it works with the hardware as it should. In other words, as Waters puts it, the Xbox 2 allows you to "design your house, rather than design it after you figure out how the plumbing will work."

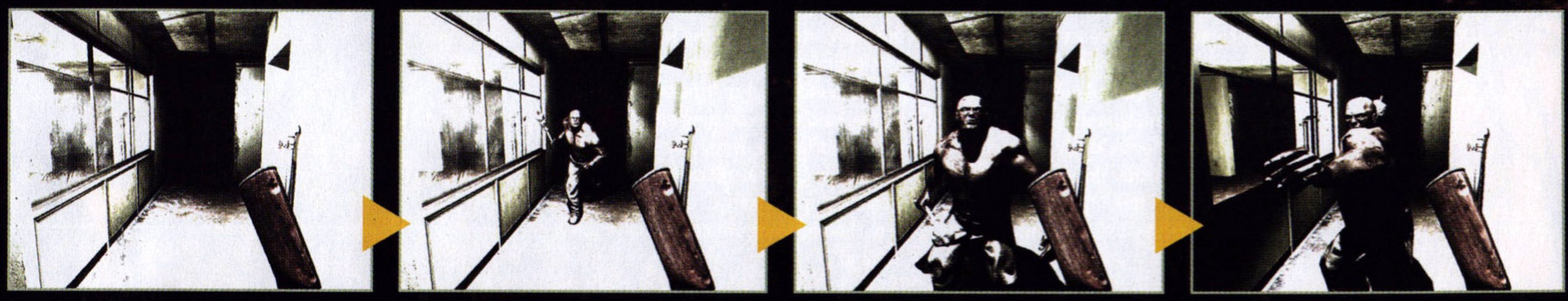
According to Waters, the Xbox 2 is easier to develop for than PS2 or GameCube, and only slightly harder to work with than the original Xbox. Programming for the new console is more complex, he says, only because it gives the developer more options to work with. He also claims that it is more a true console than Microsoft's first (rather than a PC in a box), and that it will be more powerful than the best PCs on the market when it launches. But all of this impressive technology amounts to nothing if the story and gameplay aren't there.



■ While melee is a huge part of combat, you will discover a nice selection of firearms

■ This psychotic individual has had his flesh cut up by shattered glass

■ Boss battles and other key fights trigger an eerie photo-negative effect



Fortunately, the rest of Condemned is just as impressive as the technology that was used to create it.

The story of a Serial Crime Unit agent tracking down multiple serial killers might not at first seem like a natural fit for the world of video games, but there is much more to Condemned's plot than meets the eye. "Being scared is a huge element," says Frank Rooke. "But at the same time, the sensation of unraveling a mystery is what it's really about. Being scary is almost a byproduct." As Ethan Thomas hunts down each of the deadly sociopaths, he'll delve into the mystery of how these people crossed over the line into madness. In the world of Condemned, there is a shadowy element at play that corrupts those prone to mental illness and causes them to descend into complete insanity. Both the serial killers and the condemned people you encounter have fallen victim to this force, making them a danger to anyone around. The idea of a mysterious presence that drives people crazy may sound fantastic, but Monolith assures us that nothing in this game will take place outside of the realm of possibility. There may be some elements in the game that aren't found in the real world, but there is nothing that couldn't theoretically exist.

The unrevealed sinister presence is only one of the deeper elements found in the plot of this game. There is far more to the story than just some diabolical killers – Condemned will explore themes of intuition, madness, self-destruction, identity, and more; all while wrapped in a twisting plot more complex than those featured in the mystery section of your local video store. Rooke openly shared many major plot twists with us to illustrate the team's goals with Condemned, but we would never spoil its secrets by revealing them. One thing you can expect to see is the plot delving into the motivations of the vicious killers. "What makes a serial killer so interesting is not catching him or killing him," says Rooke. "It's figuring out why he does the things he does."

Players will learn the title's secrets when they start exploring its dark world come the launch of the new system. Thanks largely to the realistic feel of the game, the story will unfold mainly in-game, and won't rely heavily on cutscenes. Those that are included will be largely interactive, allowing the player to move the camera and otherwise remain involved in the action. One of the title's most compelling features, the forensic detective element, functions both as a storytelling device and a gameplay mechanic. Since Condemned takes place in a realistic universe, levels aren't laid out in simple, linear paths. Players must find their way through the dreary environments by using detective tools. There are six different tools, including a laser light, which can detect clues like footprints, a UV light for uncovering organic evidence such as blood and other fluids, and a gas spectrometer for detecting odors and gasses in the air. A 3D scanner collects the data for transmission back to the forensics lab. In one demo area we were shown, Thomas followed a trail of chemicals through a train station by searching for the dripping trail with the laser light. The chemicals glowed green under its beam, leading him through the level.

Whenever the player enters an area where evidence awaits, Thomas' intuition tells him to investigate, and an on-screen prompt appears to alert the player. With a click of a button, Thomas removes his scanning tool from his bag so the player can search the area. If something interesting is uncovered, Thomas can transmit his findings to the lab, where his partner can analyze it and report her findings. In the level we witnessed, Thomas followed the chemical trail to a trashcan, in which several photographs were discovered. Through a video response which played on his cell phone, Thomas learned that the chemicals were used in photo development, and that the pictures were shots of his own apartment taken from inside the train station. In this sequence, not only did the forensics element drive the player through the level, but it also conveyed the story without the use of a cinematic.

Throughout the course of a level, the player will be treated to a few brief cutscenes that show the killer you are chasing taking some sinister action. These aren't psychic flashes or glimpses of the future – they are the clues coming together in Thomas's mind. Referred to by Rooke as "mind's eye moments," these brief videos are triggered when a key piece of evidence is discovered. For example, when indentations that revealed a heavy object had been dragged across the floor were found, we witnessed a quick sequence showing the killer pushing a cabinet in front of a door. Unfolding

■ There is a wide variety of melee weapons in the game, many of which can be used to break into locked areas

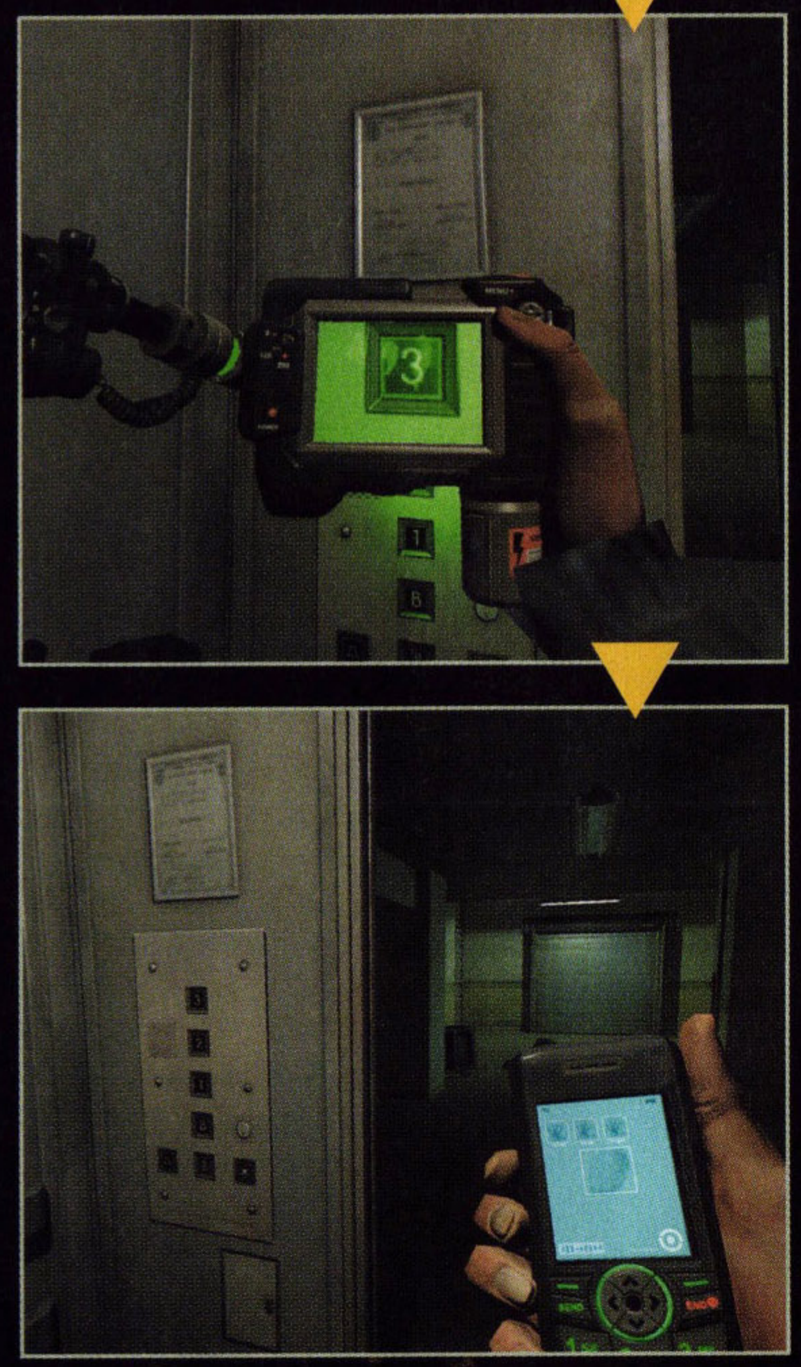
in creepy photo-negative style, this vignette revealed Thomas putting the clues together in his brain and told us that we needed to uncover this door to continue.

As Thomas works his way through the city's seedy underbelly in search of the brutal killers, he will find many of the intelligent, deranged lost souls standing in his way. These condemned people move with frightening realism (the vast majority of character movements in the game were motion captured), and react to Thomas in a variety of ways. Sometimes they'll scamper through the darkness away from him, and other times he may stumble across them as they viciously dispatch a helpless civilian. Other times they'll turn a blind eye towards the intruder in their territory, but on most occasions, they'll force Thomas to fight.

It may come as a shock to some, but the bulk of Condemned's fighting involves melee combat. Thomas is not a cold-blooded killer, and thus doesn't gun down the mentally unstable lurkers that lunge at him in the darkness. But he must defend himself, and will use the objects around him to fight off his attackers. Like his foes, he can pull weapons like pipes off of walls, rip apart a shelf for a punishing piece of wood, or use handy tools like hammers, axes, and shovels for defense. Just as a prompt appears when Thomas' finely honed senses indicate that evidence is nearby, an onscreen indicator appears when an item can be used for a weapon. Beating someone with a piece of lumber feels every bit as vicious and brutal as it should. A few cracks across the face will drop any attacker, and the sound it makes as it connects is sickening. Blood sprays from wounds, and specific body parts can be targeted to devastating effect. "It was very important to us to have this guttural feel to combat." says Dave Hasle. "It's not clean, it's not military or organized. It's very chaotic, using whatever you've got at hand."

Although you can certainly dish out the punishment with your melee weapons, Thomas is no superhero and can be taken out just as fast as anyone else. A shot across the face with a pipe will cause your vision to flash red, and it only takes a few swings to bring you down permanently. Of course you can block, but remembering

■ Melee combat is raw, brutal, and features blood that flies, splatters, and runs realistically



■ This sequence illustrates how the forensic tools can be used to pick up a killer's trail. The UV scanner uncovers a trail of chemicals leading to the elevator, and a fingerprint reveals which button was pressed. The evidence is tranmitted to the lab for analysis, and a video on the cell phone displays the results

■ The subway station is only one of the many environments players will explore over the course of the story

that you are simply human is the main key to staying alive. Melee combat in the first-person perspective has a spotty history, but the fighting in Condemned is brutally engaging enough to convert any nonbeliever.

There are firearms found throughout the game as well, but don't expect to blast your way through your foes once you find one. As no one in the real world leaves convenient stashes of ammo lying around, your rounds are limited to those loaded in the weapon. You will be able to use the gun as a blunt-force weapon once your rounds are depleted, but doing so will eventually break it. Fortunately, there are roughly 20 melee weapons in the game, including brutal options like shovels, locker doors, bar stools, and more. There are plenty of offensive tools to choose from once your rounds are gone, and you will also carry a taser that can stun foes at a distance in case there are no weapons to be found.

Of course, Condemned will feature several different types of enemies to battle as well. There will be three distinct "levels" of insanity in the foes you'll encounter, which dictates how dangerous they are. Those in the first stage of their madness are the most common, and are basically violent street people. Those in the second stage have fully given in to their rage and madness, making them the most violent and unpredictable. The adrenaline and anger flowing in their systems makes them aggressive, resilient, and incredibly deadly. On the other hand, the stage three foes are the weakest – they have lived with their madness for so long it has consumed them, leaving their bodies weak and their minds cloudy. They are still dangerous, but in many situations they won't attack unless provoked.

In each of the game's eight stages, the foes you encounter will take on different traits and appearances. One stage takes place in a burned library, which is populated by unfortunate souls who were trapped inside. These scarred transients cover their burns in whatever is available, making them look like diseased urban mummies. In another stage, Thomas explores an abandoned department store, and will discover people who glue mannequin parts to their skin and pretend to be statues until someone walks by. As Thomas battles these maniacs, their plastic armor cracks off, revealing their true faces. By populating each stage with a unique set of creepy, insane denizens, Monolith hopes to keep players on edge throughout the entire game.

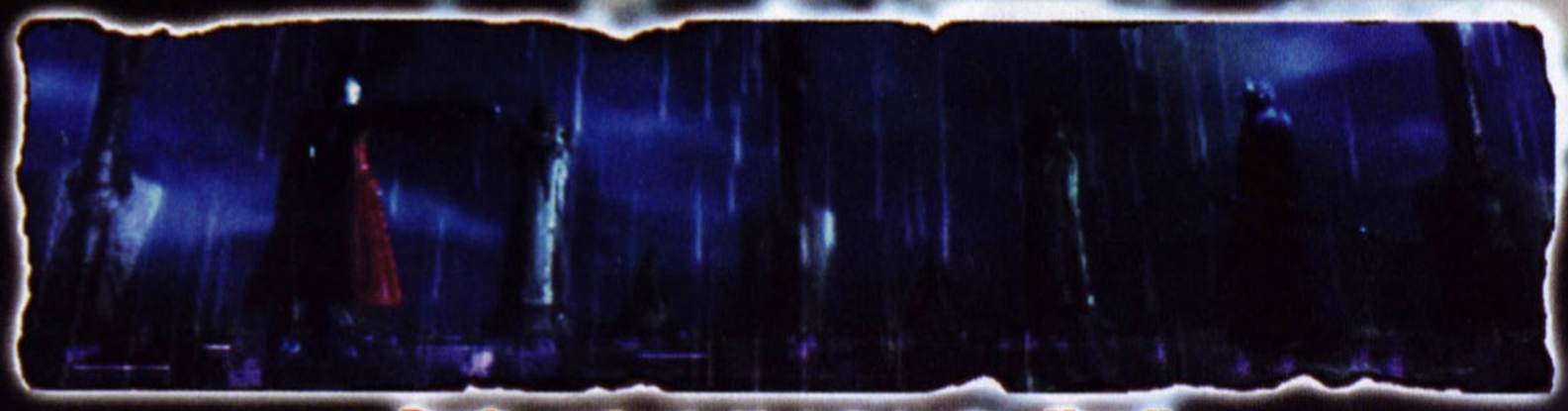
Over the course of the twisting adventure, Thomas will take on hordes of deranged foes as well as several different serial killers, each with their own methods and madness. In each mission, Thomas will head out after one of the psychopaths, who sport colorful names like The Torturer, The Bonecutter, and The Blade. While each of these monsters carries out their grisly business independently, they are all tied together in a greater storyline.

As players unravel the mysteries of the plot, they will learn what drives these killers to undertake their bloody work. They will also uncover a sinister force that pushes people over the precipice into madness, and observe the effects of what happens to a good man who spends too much time surrounded by darkness. It is an ambitious tale for a video game, but one that has the potential to redefine what can and cannot be done in a scary game. Condemned is a title that demonstrates the freedoms made possible by the video game technology of tomorrow, one that has the potential to affect its audience far more deeply than the best Hollywood mystery. Its photorealistic environments, unnerving enemies, forensic elements, and visceral combat put players in the shoes of the protagonist far more effectively than the best movie, and the twisting, interactive plot is more complex than what can be done on film. Thanks to the talented crew at Monolith and the incredible abilities of the next generation of game machines, Condemned just may take the art of fear to a whole new level. ■■■

■ Enemies will sport unique fighting styles and vary in level of aggression

Prequel to the Original Devil May Cry®

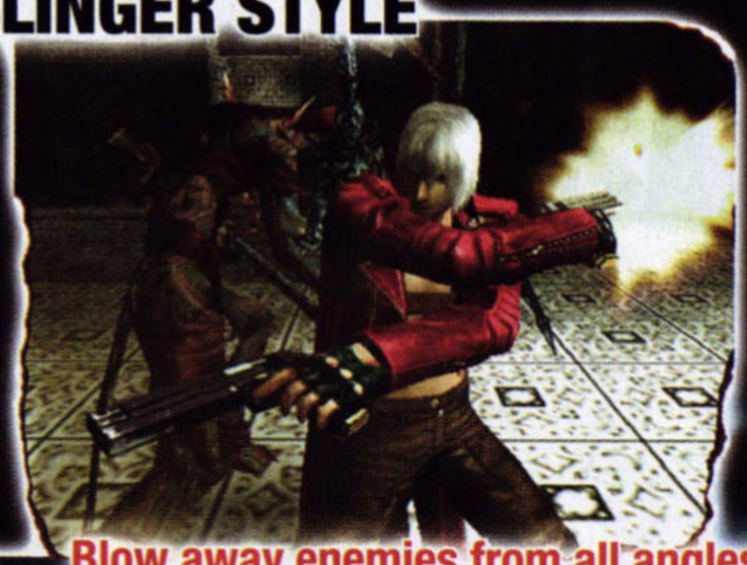
Dante's History Revealed



Dante confronts his twin brother **Vergil**

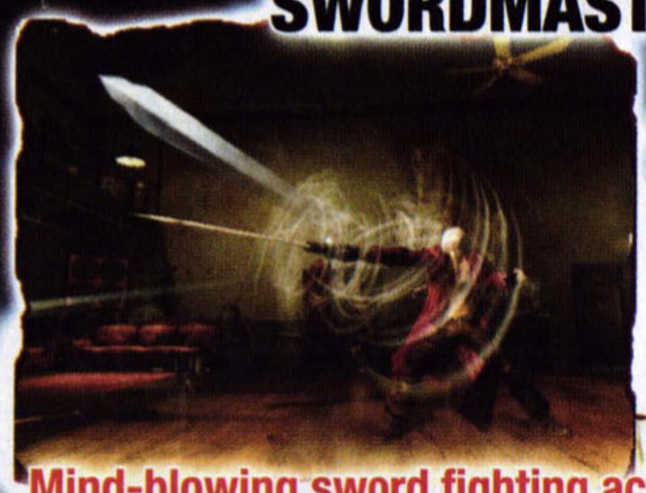
Multiple Fighting Styles to Choose From

GUNSLINGER STYLE

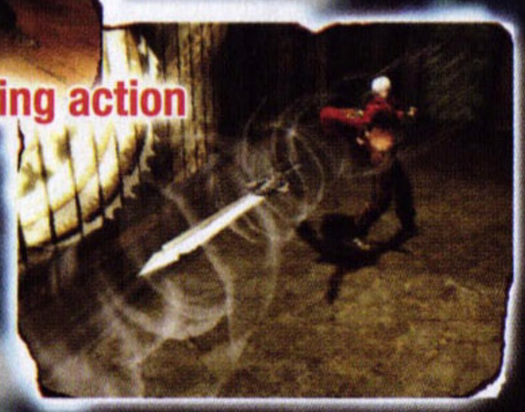


Blow away enemies from all angles

SWORDMASTER STYLE



Mind-blowing sword fighting action



TRICKSTER STYLE

Killer evasive, agile moves

MATURE 17+

M

Blood
Suggestive Themes
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation®2

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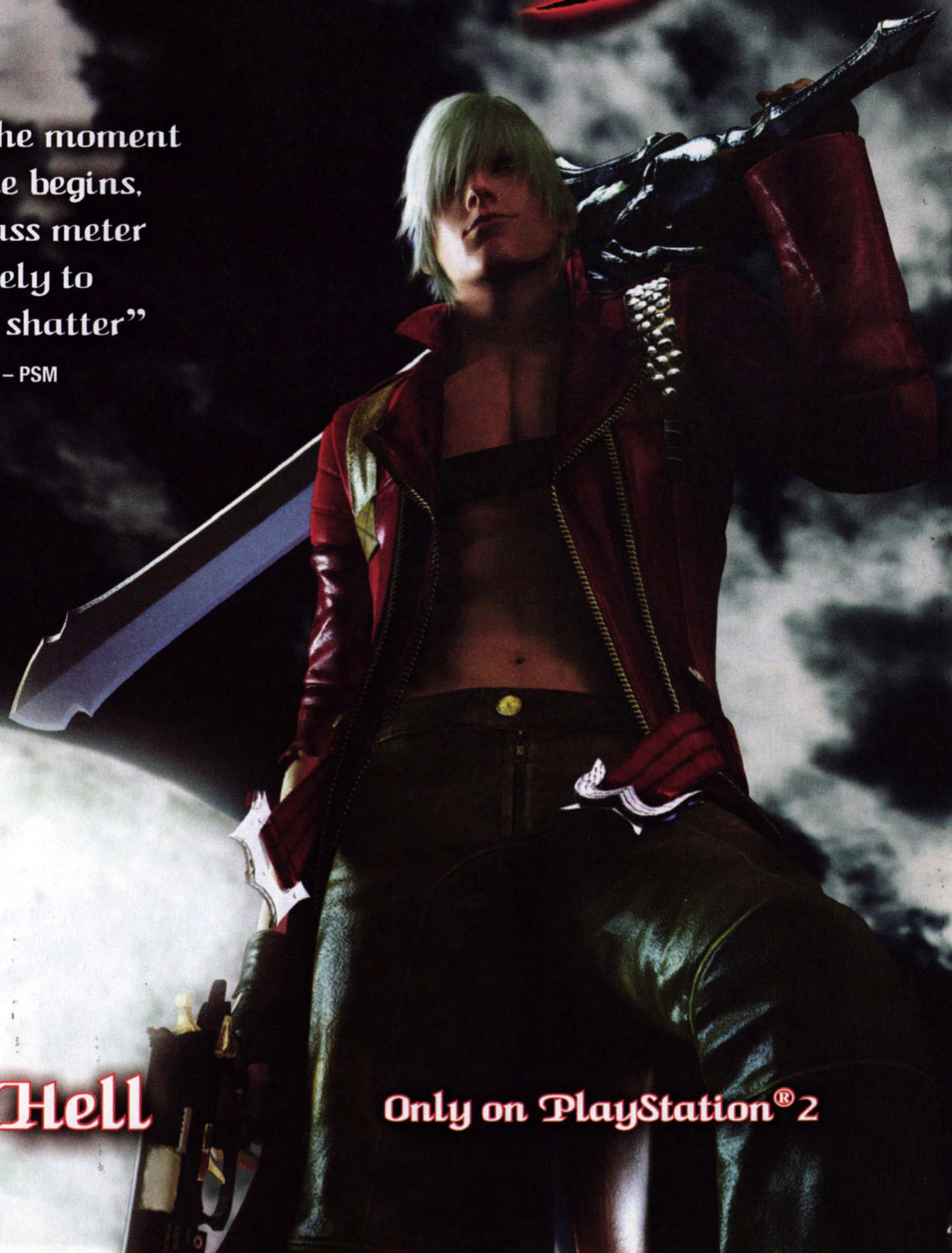
Devil May Cry® 3

DANTE'S AWAKENING

"...from the moment
the game begins,
the badass meter
is likely to
flat-out shatter"

– PSM



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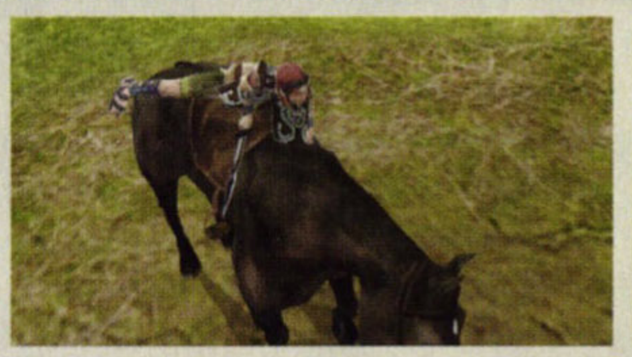
PLAYSTATION 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN
> **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN
> **RELEASE** TBA



Wanda and the Colossus
ワンダと巨像

As video games grow closer and closer to the other entertainment industries, there is an increasing emphasis on providing experiences that are fast-paced, action-packed thrill rides. This shift of focus isn't necessarily a bad thing; in the past few years, we have seen some truly exceptional games emerge from this philosophy. However, occasionally a game will come along that transcends pure entertainment and stands out as a true work of art. If there is one title this generation that exemplifies this rare accomplishment, it is Sony's storybook adventure ICO.

The title garnered high praise from critics, but with little marketing muscle behind it, ICO was doomed to become a buried treasure of video game history. Plagued by unimpressive sales from its release, the title has since had several years to gain momentum and renown, and today it is revered as one of the most underrated games of this console generation. Featuring a distinctive art style and an unmatched emotional hook, many gamers have been eagerly awaiting news of a follow-up to ICO that would continue the story of the young boy and his barren, ethereal world. At the 2004 Tokyo Game Show, their wish was finally granted – sort of.

The announcement of a new game from Fumito Ueda and Kenji Kaido, the same duo responsible for ICO, was greeted with unrestrained euphoria. However, many were surprised by that fact that the tentatively titled Wanda and the Colossus will not be a true sequel to the pair's initial masterpiece. Featuring entirely new characters, themes, and gameplay dynamics, Wanda and the Colossus is an original and ambitious project that promises to take the concept of artistic game development to the next level.

In Wanda and the Colossus, we will see many of ICO's central elements implemented in slightly different forms. A lone hero wanders an apparently uninhabited world, he has a single constant companion, and astounding lighting effects breathe life into his picturesque surroundings. While it is encouraging to know these time-tested features will return, it is the ways Wanda and the Colossus expands on ICO's themes that are most compelling.

First and foremost, the simple "rescue the princess" concept has been replaced with a more complex and mature premise. The vast countryside is overrun by terrifying and enormous creatures (the titular Colossuses), and it falls to the hero to hunt them. Whether these intimidating monsters are a living race or simply animate relics of a lost age is unknown, and the hero's motivation for confronting them is equally mysterious. Though felling the hulking foes is the game's primary focus, it hasn't entirely abandoned the childish innocence of ICO. From the video shown at TGS, there appears to be a new "damsel in distress" character adding a dimension of protection, but her true role has yet to be revealed.

Instead of relying on the bond between the endangered and the protector, the game will instead hinge on the cooperation of the hero and his trustworthy companion – his horse. While roaming the countryside, the horse serves as reliable transportation, but

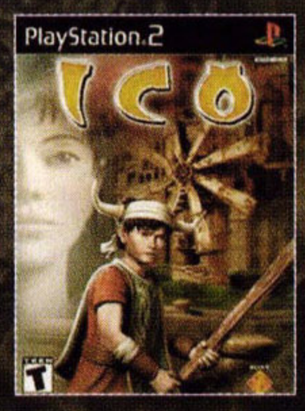
combat gives the noble animal another chance to lend aid. During many Colossus battles, the hero will rely on his steed to avoid environmental hazards and to maneuver to advantageous locations, setting up the final assault on the intimidating brutes.

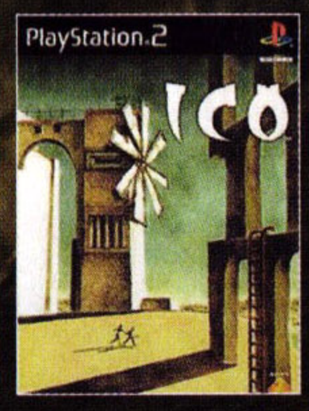
The overwhelming presence of the massive opponents defies explanation. To call a Colossus' size "epic" is an understatement. Fighting one is like going head-to-head against a skyscraper. Many of them carry titanic weapons that could take out a city block. Though apparently built out of stone, some of the towering beasts bear a vague resemblance to organic wildlife. They are like ancient monuments come to life, a cross between animals and cathedrals. The exact threat they pose is still unknown, but it is

(continued on page 72)

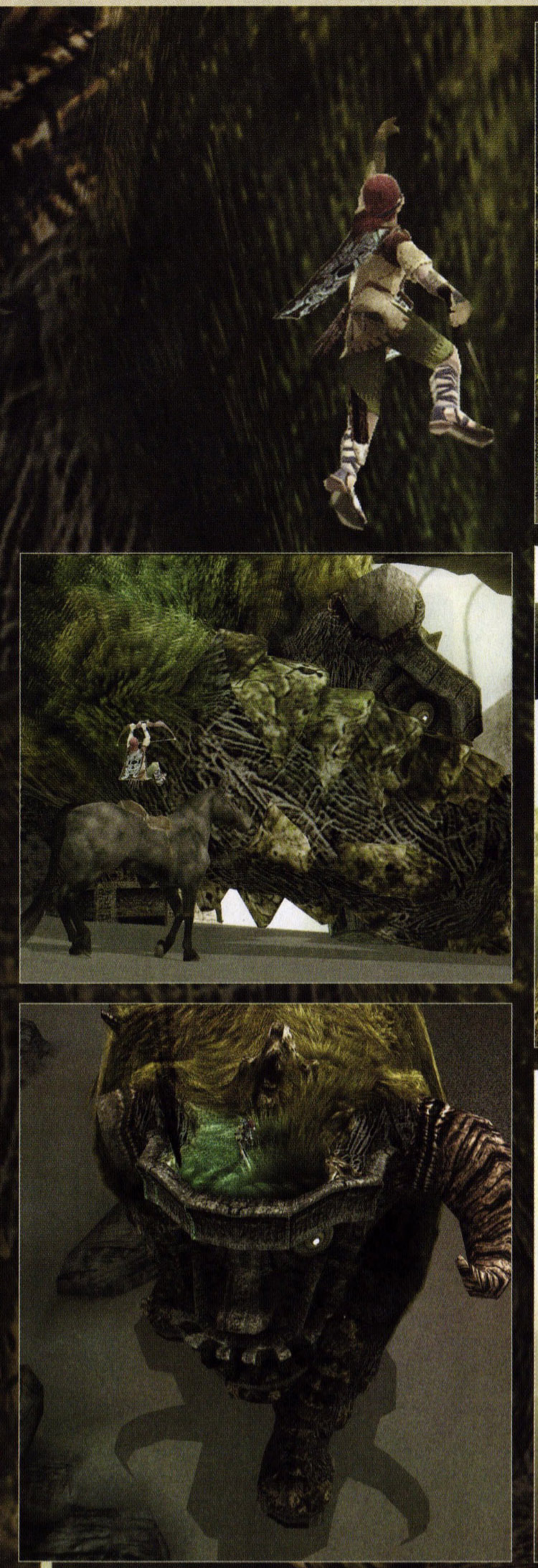
Stateside Release TBA

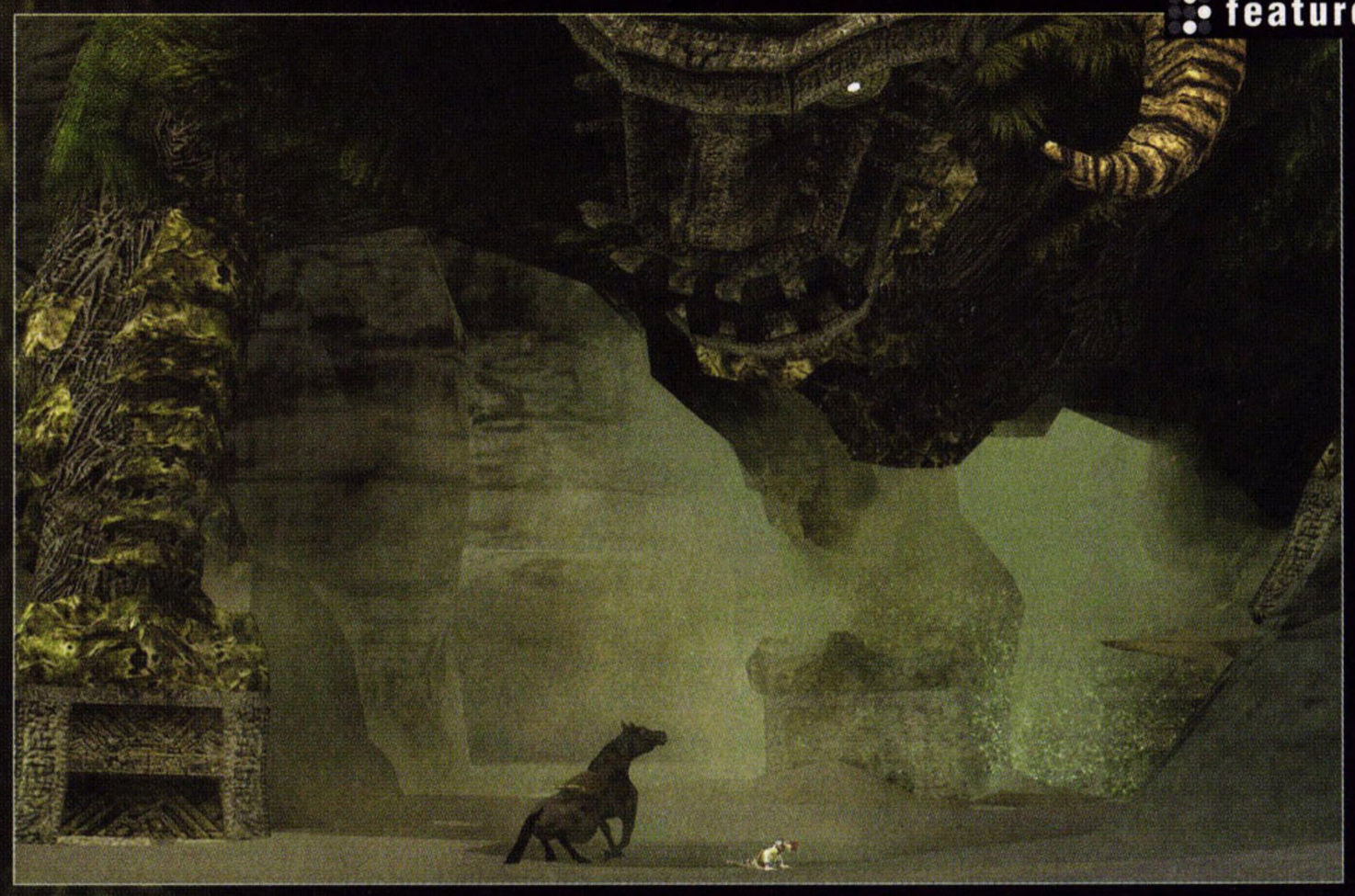
As of right now, Wanda and the Colossus is only slated for a Japanese release. Given ICO's lack of commercial success, it is understandable that Sony might need to think twice about sending such a unique game into an uncertain market. However, the cult following surrounding ICO has swelled to an immense size, and the hardest of the hardcore gamers are clamoring for more from Ueda and Kaido. In the end, it could be this enthusiasm that tips the scale in our favor.





■ **Generic U.S. boxart probably contributed to ICO's poor sales. Compare it to the understated simplicity of the Japanese cover, and it isn't hard to see why.**



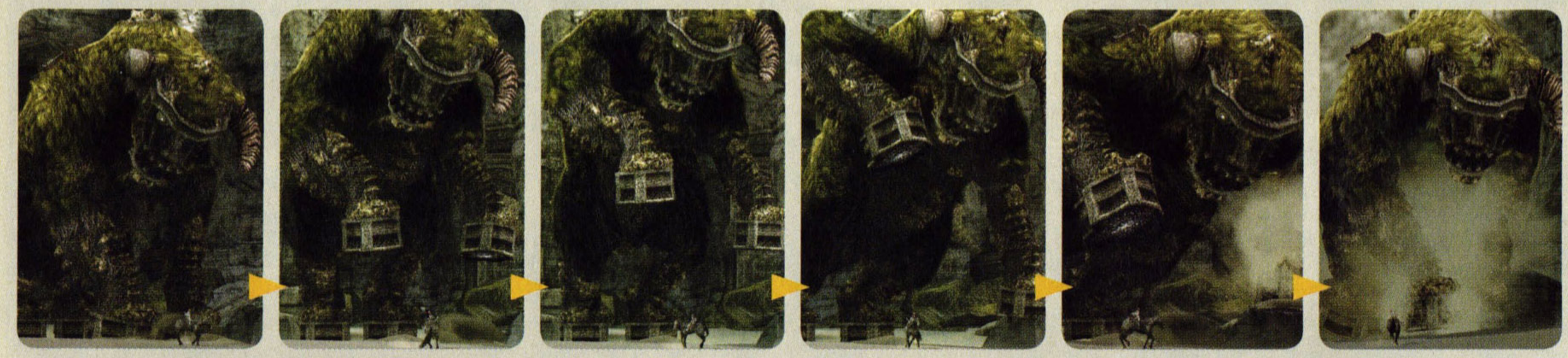


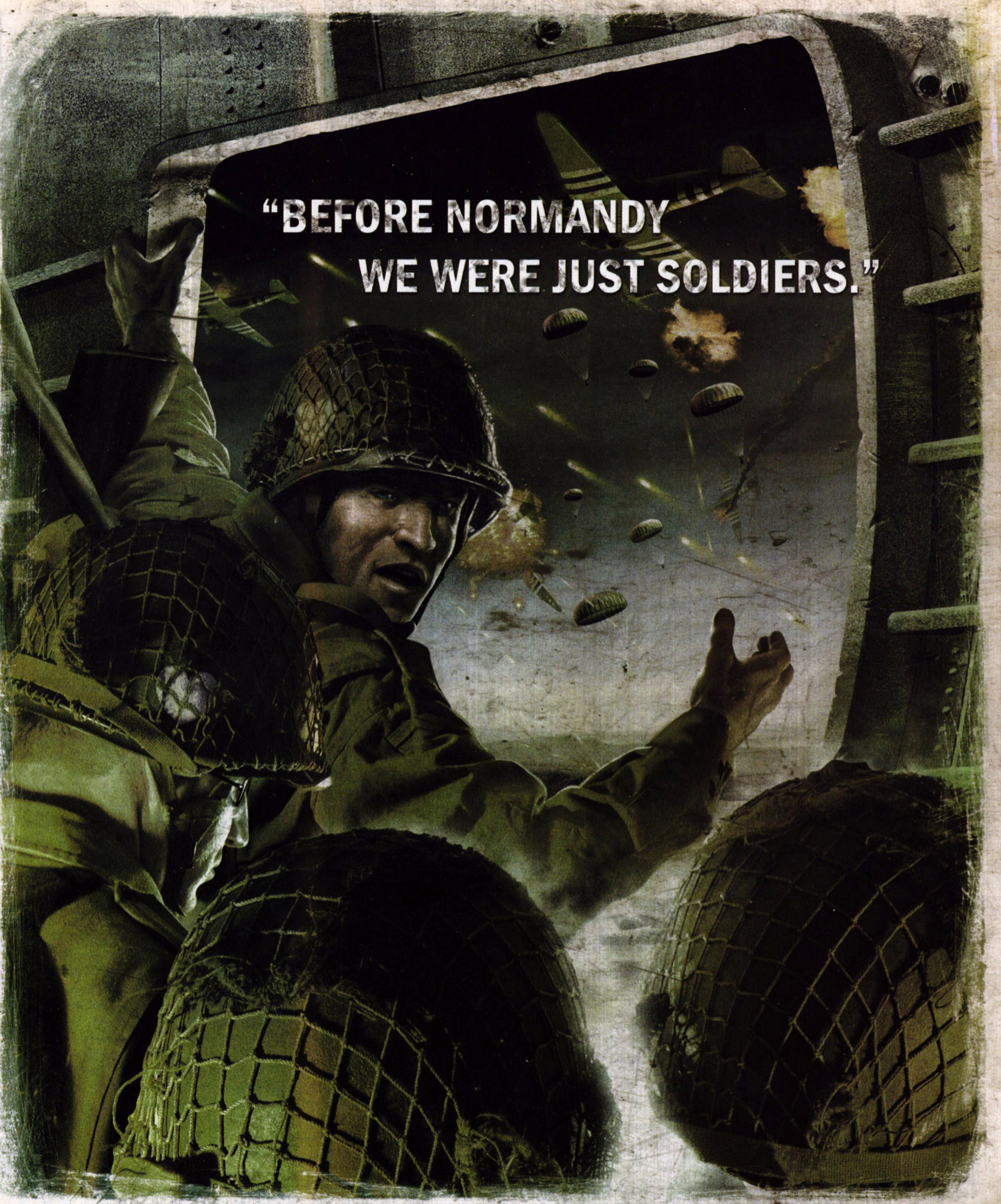
perfectly clear that these are fights that cannot be won through conventional means.

While puzzle solving will still be an integral element of the adventure, obstacles are now overcome with a more action-oriented approach. For instance, because each Colossus has a weak point, how the player confronts the beasts to attack that spot varies, and may involve drastically different methods. The video presented at TGS showed the hero scaling the maze-like skin of the lumbering beast to reach the center. Other fights will require players to constantly adapt to the perils of shifting surfaces and angles as they climb the behemoth adversaries. With what appears to be over a dozen of the creatures, the strategies for taking each one down will certainly be unique and challenging, and will most likely result in an awe-inspiring death for the unfortunate Colossus.

Of course, even with the puzzles and staggering foes, the most intriguing aspect of Wanda and the Colossus is the captivating setting it weaves. From expansive, ghostly-lit plains to mysterious abandoned ruins, the hero's surroundings look simultaneously barren and vibrant. In fact, though the game isn't a traditional sequel, it is possible that it still takes place in ICO's universe, which would explain the stylistic similarity. From bluffs to forgotten castles, each area fills in another gap in this astonishing and expansive world.

More information will undoubtedly become available as the game nears completion, but in the meantime, simply savor the breathtaking screenshots on these pages showcasing a singular style and beauty that proves that, at its best, video game development is still an art.




"BEFORE NORMANDY
WE WERE JUST SOLDIERS."

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

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

PlayStation 2

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XBOX LIVE

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> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE, PC ONLINE TBD) **> PUBLISHER** MIDWAY **> DEVELOPER** MIDWAY HOME ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** OCTOBER (PS2/XBOX), TBD (PC)

GAUNTLET
SEVEN SORROWS

At a regular rate, features that were once new and innovative in game design become expected, notable only by their absence. The double jump in a platform title, a player-controlled camera, and matchmaking for online battles are all examples. Another such feature originated with the hack n' slash classic Gauntlet.

Midway's famous title was released to arcades in 1985, a pivotal time in the history of video games for both hardware and software innovation. By the end of the year, a dark horse home console from Japan (the Nintendo Entertainment System) would start its domination of American living rooms, and arcade owners were feverishly searching for something to bring players and their loose change back to stand-up machines.

Gauntlet fit the bill for proprietors of smoke-filled gaming dens across the land by offering one of those features that we all now take for granted – Gauntlet was the first four-player co-op title available to the masses. The warrior, the archer, the valkyrie, and the wizard were each maneuvered through the game's almost innumerable dungeons, managing items and food, and requesting quarters at a breakneck pace.

The idea of teaming up with friends, finding loot, and hacking foes to bits is almost primal in appeal. There isn't a gamer out there who doesn't appreciate an elegantly simple experience like the one that the arcade Gauntlet titles provided. In fact, the idea was so phenomenal that the co-op feature has become a given in gaming, and the joy of team dungeon crawling has been a crutch for more titles than anyone could count. In hindsight, what did that mean for Gauntlet's follow-ups? They felt passé and a little generic. The series is, to this day, so often referenced that the descriptor "Gauntlet-like" has connotations for both shamelessly amusing button mashing and painfully dull game design. Will that be the sad fate of the franchise's latest reinvention? From what we've seen, that certainly won't be the case – what the team plans for Seven Sorrows is both complex and elegantly simple, instantly playable and laden with strategy, fast-paced, but with a rich tale. In short, this could be exactly how everyone filled in the blanks while they pumped quarters into the arcade cabinets. And isn't that how any update 20 years in the making should be?

■ Cooperative gameplay, the hallmark of Gauntlet, is being readied in both on- and offline flavors

To really take an honest look at what the Gauntlet franchise can offer in the future, one must look at the experiences it provided in the past. Fantasy stereotypes of buxom ladies and hardened warriors teaming up with powerful wizards and precise archers, unending waves of enemies focused only on your destruction, and the more subtle elements like player reactions to simple attack options and judicious resource management were all present. Everyone knows what Gauntlet was, and the question that we sought to answer by visiting the Midway studios in San Diego was what will it become.

Self-described "crazy idea man" of the Gauntlet project, one-time id Software co-founder John Romero tells us, "This one is M-rated. There are no jesters." Followers of the series will understand his reference – the 3D updates of Gauntlet (Legends and Dark Legacy) took a more family-friendly tone and included wacky class types and a more carnival-infused vibe. As he continues, lead designer Josh Sawyer jumps in to tell us the new ideas for Gauntlet, and this grown-up skew on the fantasy saga becomes increasingly apparent.

Over the next few hours of discussion, topics will jump back and forth between the ways that players can apply vengeance and magic in liberal amounts, and (in something very different from the franchise's roots) the story-based reasons for them to do so. What we couldn't shake, while being impressed with the appeal of the team's new ideas, was the slight trepidation that the updated focus will lose what Gauntlet really stands for. By the time we left, the doubts had been swept aside to make room for the boggling possibilities of what Seven Sorrows will bring to the franchise.

Expectedly, multiplayer – Gauntlet's most important contribution to the world of video games – will remain a focus. The three modes (story, advance, and online) are each designed around the cooperative experience. Story mode's rich tale can be explored solo or with another player who can join or exit the quest at any time. With nearly identical functions, advance and online modes provide the most classic Gauntlet experience by stripping out all of the narrative featured in the two-player story mode and letting four gamers take on missions at a lightning pace.

Online is easily the most interesting of the three because of how it updates the classic arcade experience for today's gamers and their preferences: We want to play with other people but not give up the comforts of home. The team has merged what we expect in an online title with what we want from a Gauntlet game. Two players can be on each console, and there is no artificial construct to keep everyone together outside of the strategy built

■ In this shot, the elf character is walking through a section of the Flesh Eaters' homeland affectionately called "Plague Town" by the development team. As one could guess by the name, the village has been decimated by disease and corpses litter the entire area

■ The Flesh Eaters (the wizard's race) are a superstitious people who suspect an angry god is responsible for the virulent plague that has destroyed many of their families – instead, it is an engineered sickness planted by one of the game's villains

SEVEN SORROWS UNIVERSAL NAME REPLACER

The Gauntlet team has created a rich and diverse world for players to explore – but creating a naming convention based on languages like Welsh means that even the development team has a hard time spelling things sometimes. We use the "easy" versions in our article because that's what they used, but here are the actual names for the kingdoms and characters.

KINGDOMS

Drowned Kingdom – Sanzhu

Empire – Urcointi

Flesh Eaters – Gwaedmae

Noble Continent – Indlopha (name used by the lower classes/foreigners) or Ajanaku Orile (name used by upper classes)

North Islands – Heima

Underworld – Ailura

CHARACTERS

Elf – Idain

Valkyrie – Ragnheiður

Wizard – Madoc

Warrior – Aðalbrandr

Lancer – Adeycmi

Tragedian – Thandi

■ This screen shows the valkyrie's Flock skill. In multiplayer, characters can use their advanced skills at any time, making for a psychotic symphony of particle effects and destruction

into the combat engine. Full voice chat is supported for those with a headset, and those without can use a handful of canned responses or requests to communicate with teammates.

What we saw during our time with Seven Sorrow's online mode was cinematic camera angles to replace the isometric view used by earlier titles, which highlighted the game's many particle-heavy special combat moves.

In keeping with the hack n' slash code of conduct, this combat engine is instantly accessible to players who have at least a little action game experience. But, balancing button-mashing combat is a tricky act – one must keep the combos fluid and frequent while also making sure that players don't get bored by becoming too reliant on a small segment of their moveset. What we want, ideally, is an easy-to-use, visually engaging dance of bloodletting that requires exactly the right amount of strategy and skill.

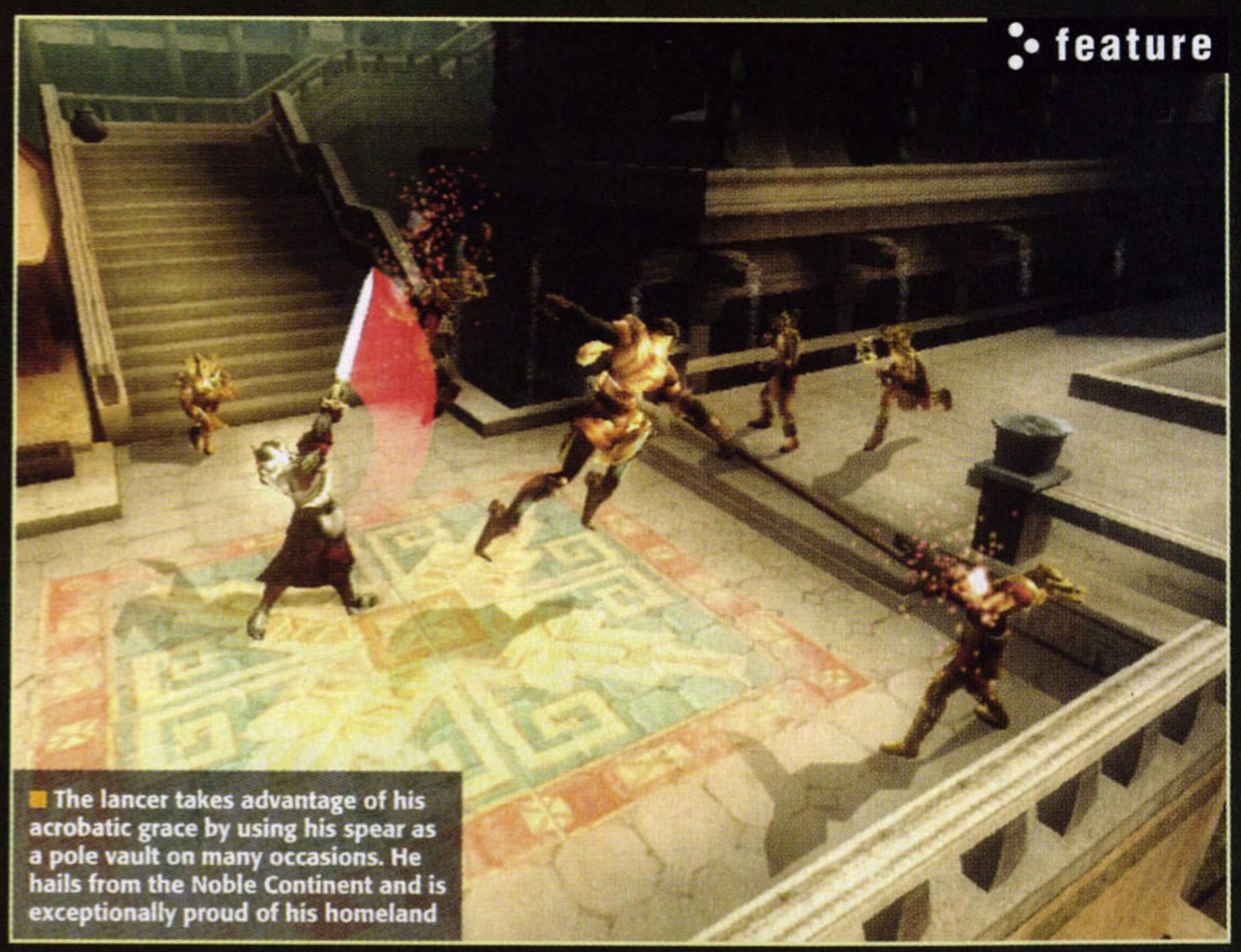
To reach these goals for the variety of players that will invest time in Gauntlet, even if only for the nostalgia factor, the team has set up a handful of different weapons,

skills, abilities, and customization options. The warrior, for example, learns a finishing skill called Bloodbath. When initiated, players will cleave their foes in two and the resulting geyser of blood blinds any enemies standing behind the victim – making them easy prey for the warrior or his nearby friends.

Another option in combat is using any of the three class skills available to each character. These are all offered from the start,

■ One of the large-scale junction skills, Hail Storm, lets players grab a few seals to make shapes over a large area (if they coordinate their actions correctly, that is). The size of the storm matches the outline made by the grabbed seals

Players upgrade the weapon skills that their character has access to after each level. The interface is laid out as the tree that our heroes are crucified on at the start of the game



The lancer takes advantage of his acrobatic grace by using his spear as a pole vault on many occasions. He hails from the Noble Continent and is exceptionally proud of his homeland

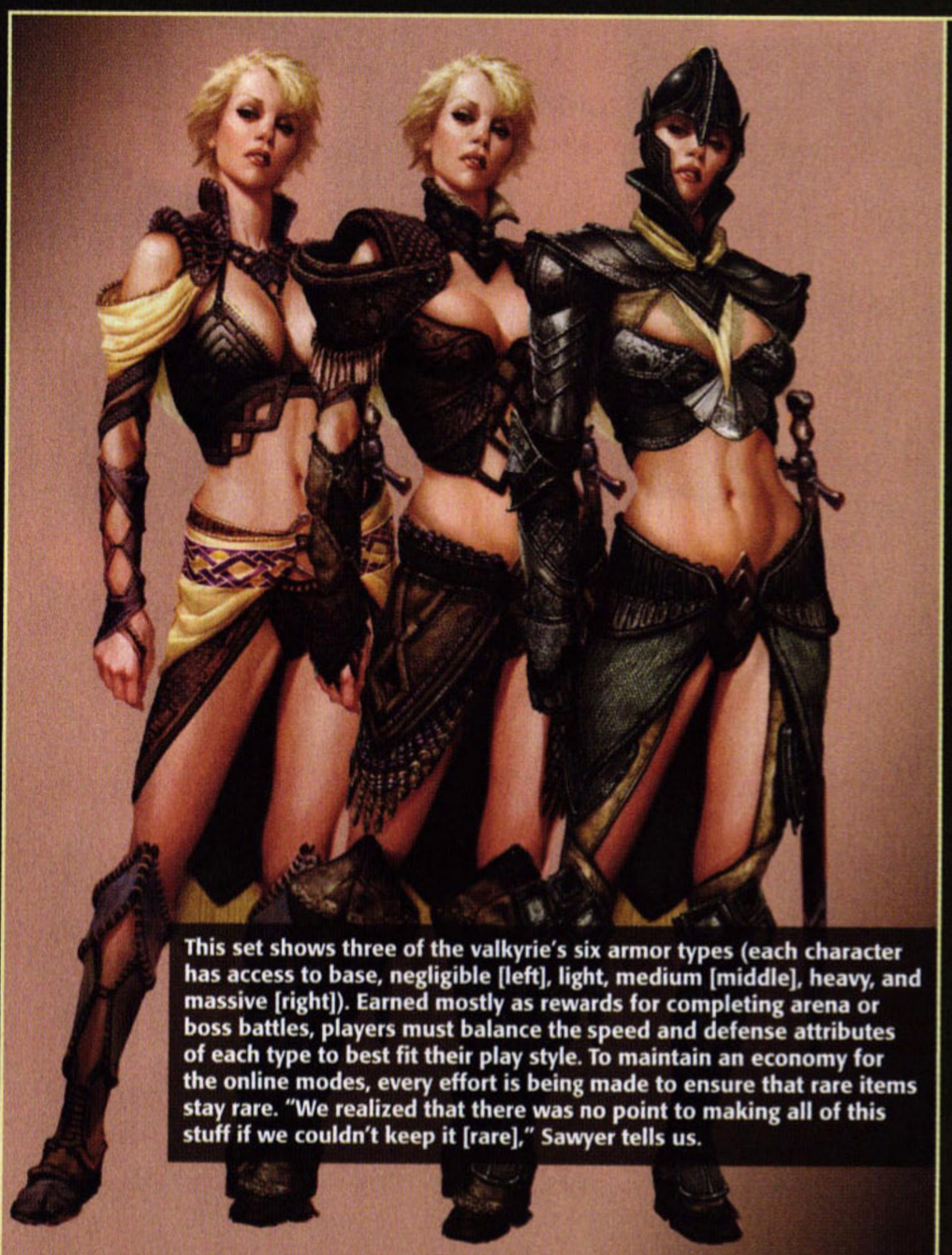
but can be leveled up to increase their amount of effective time or degree of damage caused. No matter the level, the ultimate carnage they can inflict is determined by a variety of minigame styled activities. These little tests of might ably merge the requirements of action and strategy in a way that is uniquely effective.

We saw a few of the different class skills and were impressed both by how cool they look ("I keep telling the particle artists to make it bigger – make it bitchin'," Sawyer tells us) and how appropriate the minigames seem in context. One class skill option the wizard has is to steer crystal-generating fissures towards enemies and pop them into the air by calling forth spires at just the right time. The fissure will race erratically forward while being steered by the players with the left analog stick; shards will burst through the ground when L3 is pressed (on the PS2, that is). And, if the gamer is something of a masochist, they have the option to double the challenge by dividing the fissure in two, now controlling one with the left analog and one with the right. The valkyrie has a similar multi-enemy attack called Flock. Once started, a face button will appear over each of your opponents; for every time that the corresponding button is pressed, one raven will come down and recall Hitchcock's *The Birds* in both savagery and terror. Not necessarily subtle, but certainly effective.

Junction skills are the only actions that (essentially) require some aid. Inspired by the co-op attacks in Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles, but with a dynamic that is easier to coordinate, Gauntlet's junction moves have players working together to call forth large-scale hailstorms, walls of fire, or draglines of health-sucking doom. The duration, intensity, and size of these skills are determined directly by how many, how big, and how far apart the seals "grabbed" by players are.

When a junction skill is started, a smattering of differently sized seals will start to circle the battlefield at varying speeds. Grabbing a seal (by running over it) uses half of a character's mana, therefore a single player can grab two – any more than that and a second character is required. Large shapes can be made (think triangles, for example), trapping enemies within walls of death.

Now picture what all of these skills strung together and initiated in tandem with other players would look like on-screen. Enemies are pelted by hail, cleaved in two, or lit ablaze with a wizard's magic. Imagine too, that all of these things can happen at once.



This set shows three of the valkyrie's six armor types (each character has access to base, negligible [left], light, medium [middle], heavy, and massive [right]). Earned mostly as rewards for completing arena or boss battles, players must balance the speed and defense attributes of each type to best fit their play style. To maintain an economy for the online modes, every effort is being made to ensure that rare items stay rare. "We realized that there was no point to making all of this stuff if we couldn't keep it [rare]," Sawyer tells us.

This is concept art for the emperor, the figurehead leader/icon of Gauntlet's universe. Over the past few centuries, the sorcerors of the castle have been performing rites that are slowly changing him to pure energy. This is why the playable characters can't kill him outright and instead must work to end his life by righting his Seven Sorrows

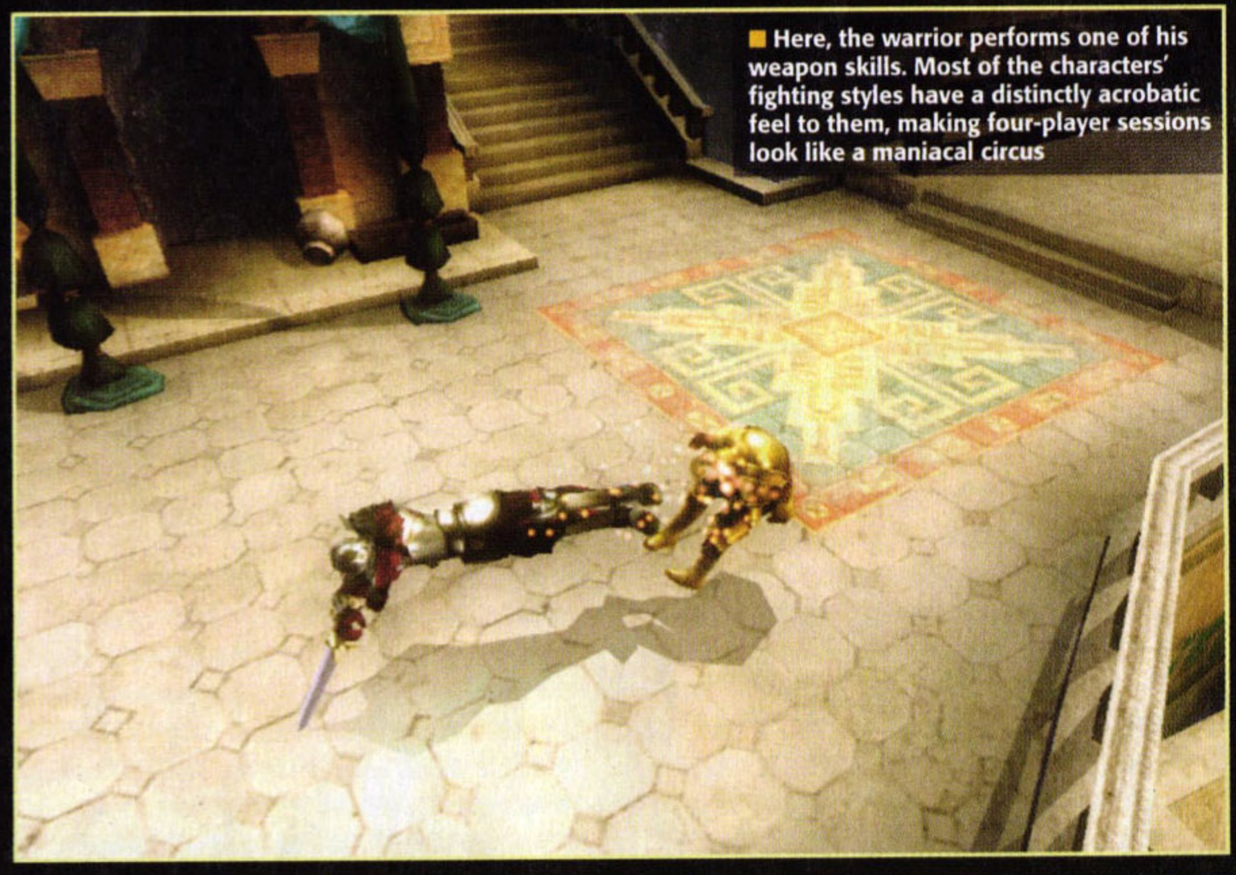
Although four players can team up, there are actually six characters that they can select from. The warrior, wizard, elf, and valkyrie are from the original games and, besides a darker tone, hold their familiar strengths and methods of attack. The two new characters – the lancer and the tragedian – are making their debut in Seven Sorrows.

Featuring a fluid acrobatic style, the lancer focuses on longer spear-like weapons. His animations weren't complete when we visited with the team, but even the bare bones that were already in place had the character flinging enemies into the air, setting up juggling attacks and combo chains. The tragedian (which means, loosely, "an actor who specializes in tragic stories") is a very new archetype for the fantasy genre, and offers some interesting twists in gameplay and plot.

Those going through story mode will be introduced to this fighter a few levels into the journey when a group of "working girls" explain the tragedian's tale to the other adventurers. An actor who turned into a grassroots activist when the government outlawed theater, she was roped into an incident of civil disobedience that went too far. Labeled a terrorist and taken to the capital, she was tortured, mutilated, and violated within an inch of her life. Players will never see the tragedian's face, but one of her special attacks is to remove her ever-present mask, stunning anyone who sees her mangled (and only vaguely human) form.

Each of the characters has a similarly involved background, and the team hopes to add storytelling to the list of features Gauntlet is known for. The opening of the game sets up the four classic archtypes, now seemingly nothing more than mercenaries out to assassinate the emperor. They are captured, unsuccessful, and crucified on a tree growing from the bottom of the world. There, the warrior, the wizard, and the archer elf will hang for two

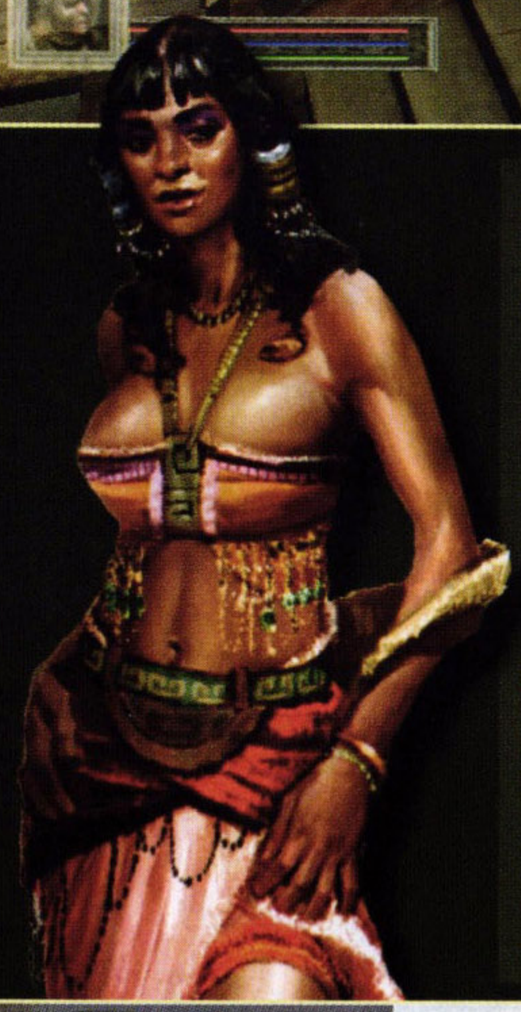
■ This scene takes place in the capital of the empire. The design asthetic is loosely modeled after a mix of Greek and Aztec influences



■ Here, the warrior performs one of his weapon skills. Most of the characters' fighting styles have a distinctly acrobatic feel to them, making four-player sessions look like a maniacal circus

■ This shot is from the Drowned Kingdom, a once-beautiful peninsula that was sunken by the emperor. Now, the tips of buildings pop from the surface of the water and the entire area is a series of islands punctuated with ships and floating villages

■ Although the player's path is pretty well set through each area, the team has put a lot of effort into making sure that cinematic camera angles and distance shots showcase large environments. Abandoning the isometric view of earlier Gauntlet titles was an easy decision made at the start of development



centuries. The fourth, the valkyrie, tied by conflicting oaths to both protect the warrior and not free the assassins, will wait by the warrior's side.

Of course, as this is the very beginning of the tale, these fighters must be brought back into Gauntlet's world. By whom, for what end, and through which means are questions that remain at least partially unanswered until the end of the game. What we do know is exactly what the Seven Sorrows are.

The group heads off to the capital of the empire intent on finally destroying the emperor, who in the time since their first attempt has become a figurehead and hasn't issued a law or decree in well over a century. But, when they arrive, the group discovers that it cannot happen in the way they're most accustomed. Instead, they are charged with enabling the ruler's natural demise by righting the seven decisions he regrets – they must travel through all of the empire and reverse the Seven Sorrows so the emperor can finally pass away as he desires.

Choose to take the story mode or skip the narrative with advance or online mode, but what we've seen overall is a nice balance of offering information, yet not necessarily requiring people to memorize it. The thrill in Seven Sorrows is hack n' slash gameplay at its best with buxom ladies, hardened warriors, powerful wizards and unrelentingly satisfying combat. "The goal is for every part of this to be fun," says Sawyer, and it looks like Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows can deliver classic goodness for a new generation when it debuts this fall. ■■■

■ The elf and the wizard are often teamed together in story mode because of their differing backgrounds and the opportunities that their personality conflicts offer with regard to storytelling

■ Funny story – Plague Town was once mislabeled by a designer as "Plaque Town." Just one more reminder to take care of your teeth, kids

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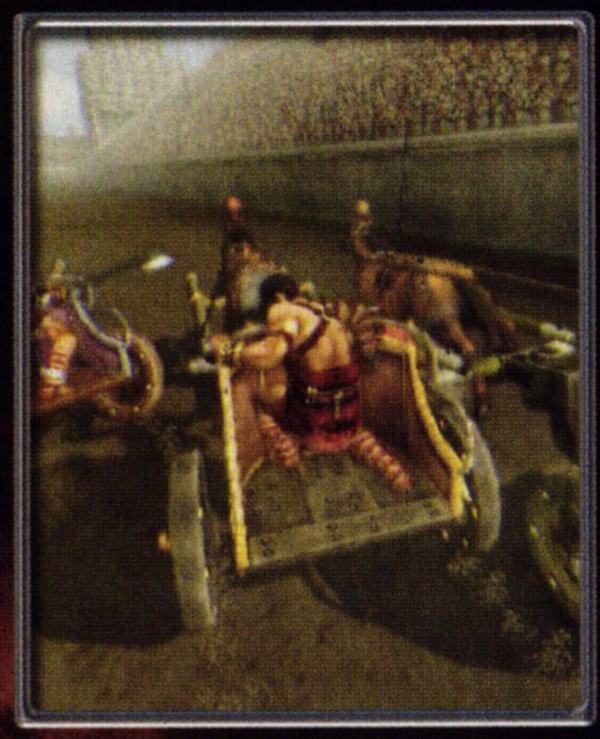

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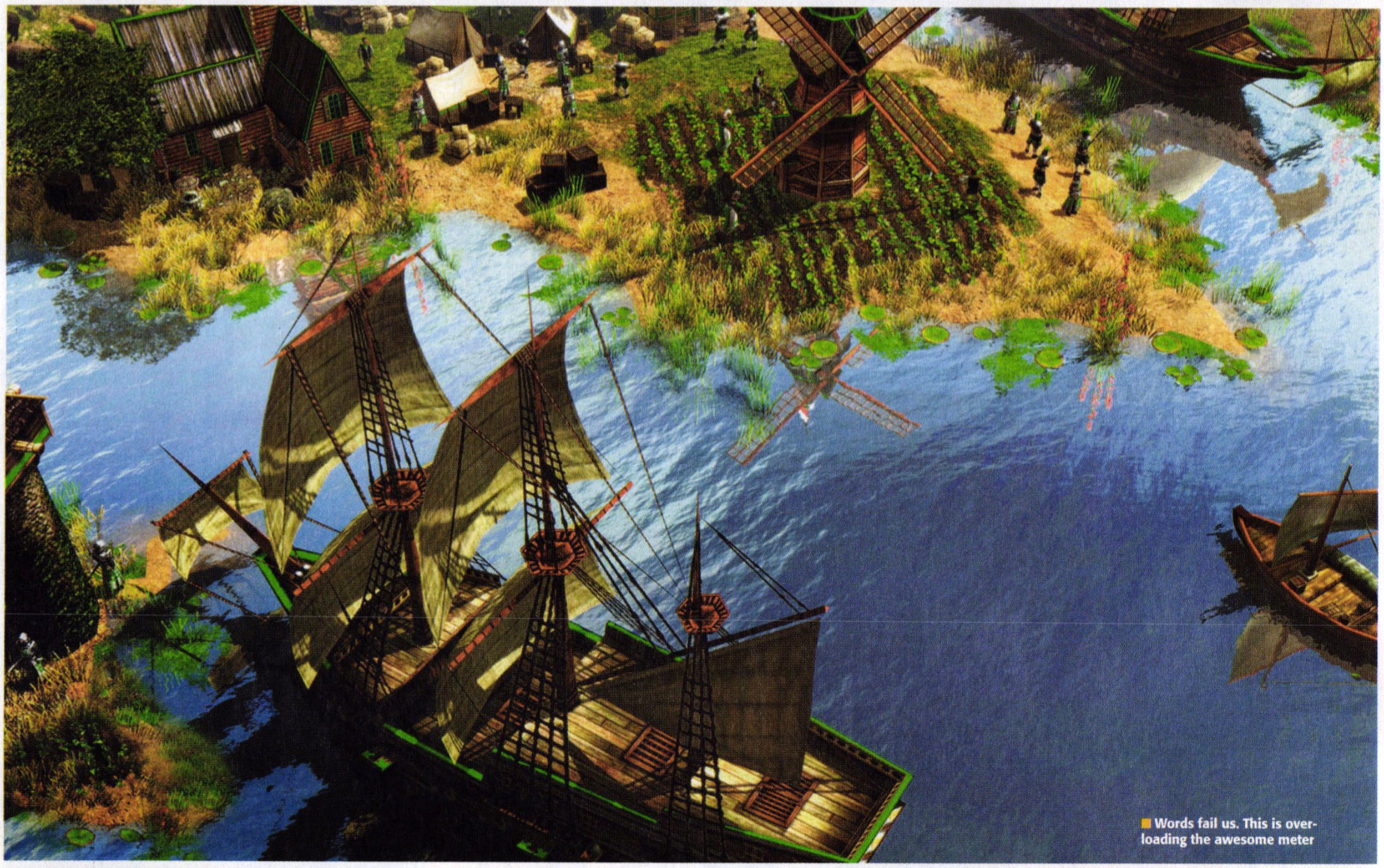


Words fail us. This is overloading the awesome meter

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Age of Empires III

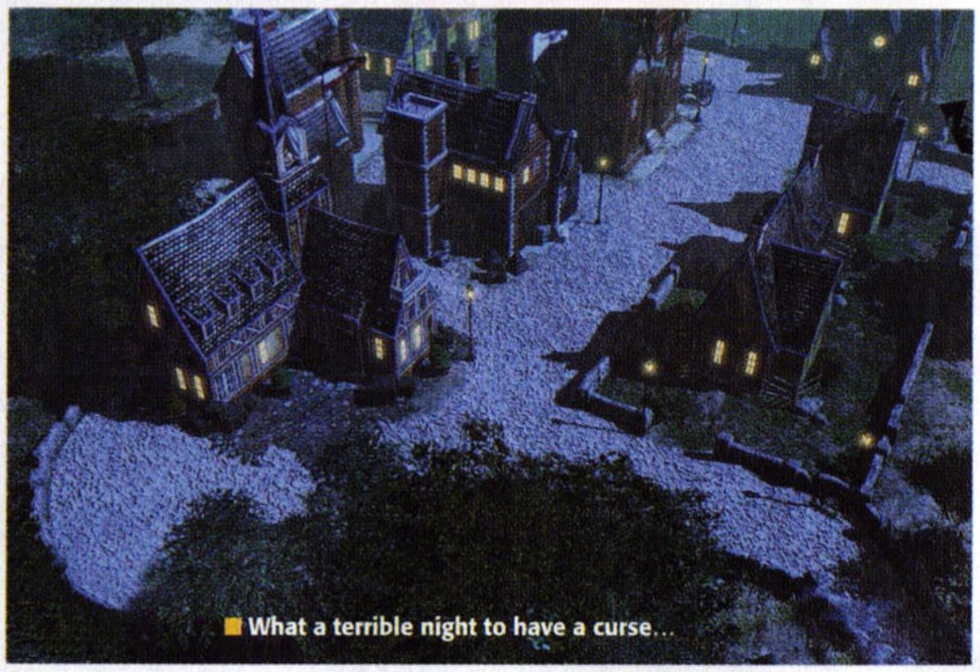
> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS **> DEVELOPER** ENSEMBLE STUDIOS
> RELEASE FALL

THE NEW WORLD

Ensemble Studios' acclaimed Age series has provided gamers with a unique take on the RTS genre since the original Age of Empires came out in 1997. This year will see a new chapter in mankind's saga played out in digital form with the release of Age of Empires III. While the screenshots speak volumes about the graphical prowess of this title, Ensemble's own lead designer Greg Street and lead programmer Dave Pottinger took the time to answer some of our questions about AoE III, and the gameplay sounds just as delicious as the visuals.

Though AoE III's setting of the New World during the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries is a much smaller chunk of time than is covered in Ensemble's previous titles, the ever-faster march of technology provides as much room for development of your civilization as before. Likewise, the fact that the game only takes place in the Americas seems limiting at first, but Street states that this was a very deliberate decision. "We stopped the game before you see lots of colonial revolutions so that players have a clear focus: build up a new colony, defend it from your enemies, and eventually conquer the map."

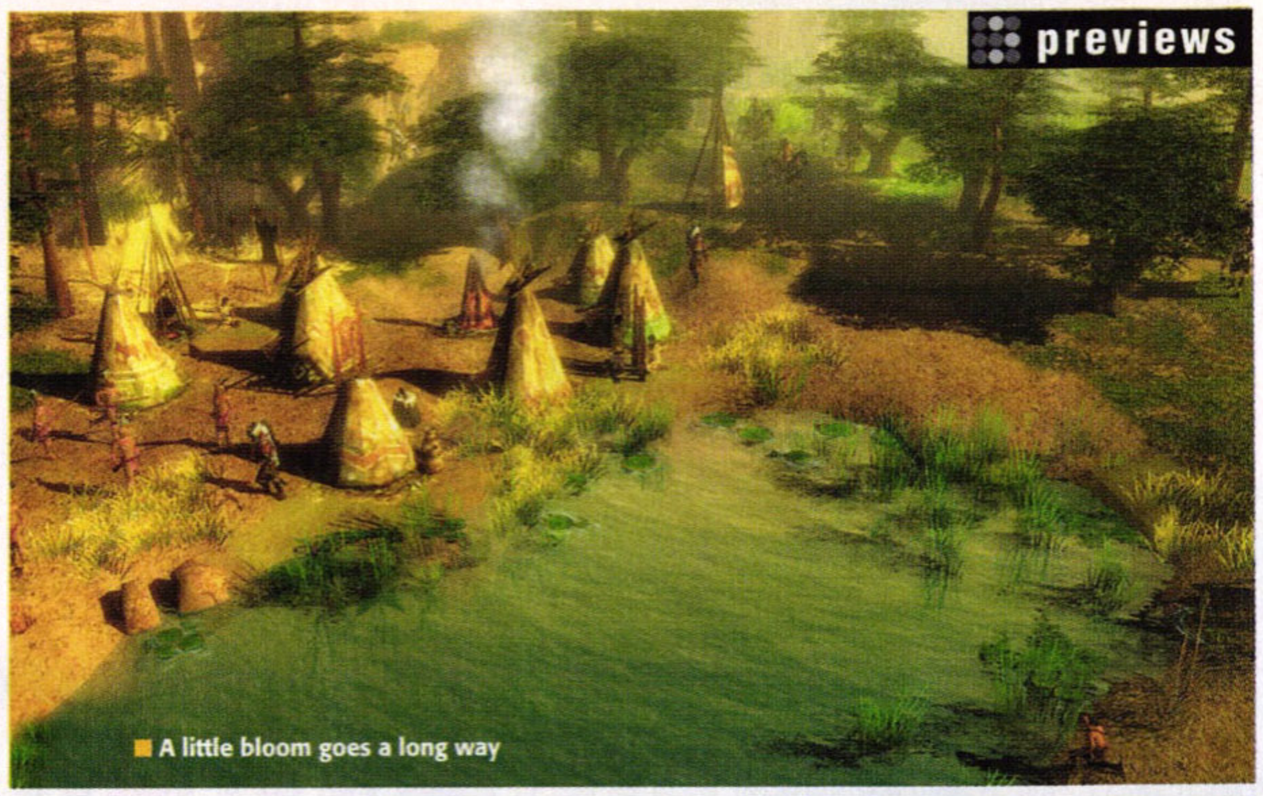
As for the nuts-and-bolts gameplay of AoE III, well, the previous Age games featured stellar RTS action that was anything but broken, so it isn't getting fixed. It is, however, getting expanded in a few key areas. Take the economy, for instance – there are several different ways to gather a single resource, all with their own benefits and drawbacks. A simple tweak, but with far-reaching consequences. "It's cool to see two different players funding their colonies through completely different strategies," says Pottinger. In a similar vein, the vastly improved and streamlined Age of Mythology engine does more than make your eyes dance with joy. Since it's more efficient, there's more room for extra animations and units onscreen, which Pottinger notes as being surprisingly helpful in gameplay terms. "[This] may not seem like a huge deal for gameplay, but simple things like being able to blend in damage animations on top of existing animations add a lot to RTS gameplay because you can more easily tell when units are taking damage."



What a terrible night to have a curse...

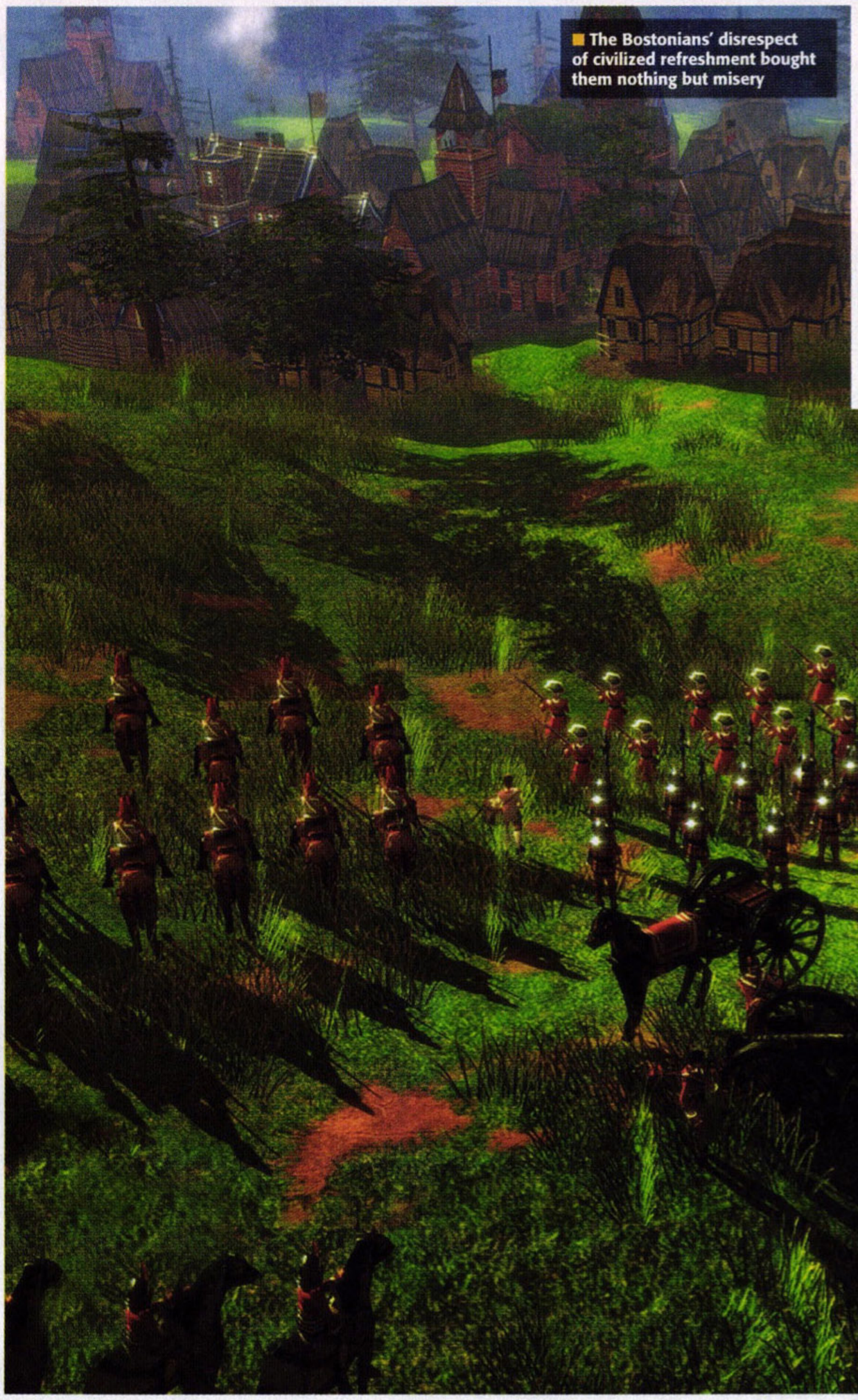
A new Age title with tweaked, expanded gameplay and amazing graphics is certainly nothing to complain about, but Ensemble has more than that in store. Multiplayer in AoE III has a mode like nothing seen in RTS before: Players will be able to take their carefully-crafted persistent Home City (the Old World power you're aligned with, which confers defining traits onto your empire, though it's never seen) online and use it in multiplayer battles. Though reluctant to spill details, Street gushed, "It should have all the drama of high-level MMO characters duking it out, but in an RTS game." And if that tidbit isn't enough to excite you for AoE III, there's not much else we can do. ■■■

■ Even the deer have real-time soft shadows! Ridiculous



■ A little bloom goes a long way

■ We'll take this Oregon trail over the old one any day



■ The Bostonians' disrespect of civilized refreshment bought them nothing but misery

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A Kou Shibusawa Production | An Action Strategy Game

■ Anakin tears through a squadron of battle droids in this *Revenge of the Sith* level

■ Here's a good look at the first TIE Fighter

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

LEGO Star Wars

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** GIANT (DISTRIBUTION BY EIDOS INTERACTIVE) **> DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES
> RELEASE APRIL

BUILD IT AND FAN BOYS WILL COME

If just the thought of a LEGO AT-AT makes you shake with excitement and emit noises you never thought you could produce, developer Traveller's Tales and publisher Giant have a game in the works that will likely make you lose control of all of your bodily functions. The toys that line your bookshelves and sit on your desk at work are now coming to the digital realm. Spanning all three prequel films, LEGO Star Wars retells Anakin's fall to the dark side in a style quite unlike anything you've seen before. "In a LEGO game, you never really know what to expect next," says Giant's chief development director Jonathan Smith. "When characters are defeated they fall apart. There are opportunities to build stuff. You'll find a unique LEGO feel throughout the gameplay." The game will unfold through 18 different scenes from the motion pictures, and players will be able to bounce between the movies as they like.

While he couldn't divulge any information on what we can expect from sequences tied to *Revenge of the Sith*, Smith did break down a sequence that Star Wars fans are very familiar with. "We start Episode I in the boardroom on the Trade Federation Battle Cruiser, with Jedi Knights Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi under attack from battle droids and droidekas. In LEGO Star Wars, you can control either of the two main characters, or play co-op with a second player. And right from the start, you'll be swinging your lightsabers to slice droids left, right, and center. If you can time it right, you'll be able to deflect blaster bolts back at enemies, and you can use the Force Push move to send Battle Droids smashing into walls. Master your combat moves as you move deeper into the ship, experiment with your Force powers, and you'll discover more and more secret areas and bonuses around you."

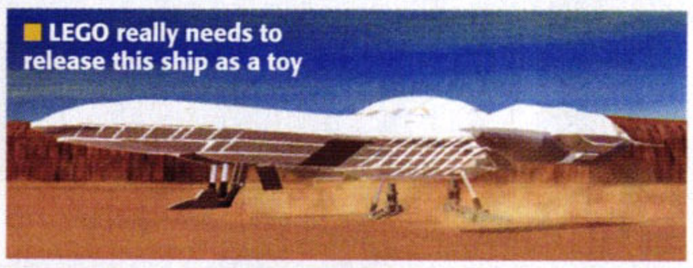
For Episode II, players will have a chance to battle the ever-formidable Jango Fett as Slave I rains down death from above on Kamino. Lightsabers will also be ablaze within the arena battle on Geonosis. "For the arena battle, we've had an immense amount of fun creating loads of new LEGO Jedi characters," Smith adds. "We had Mace Windu already from the plastic, but we made LEGO versions of guys like Kit Fisto and Ki-Adi Mundi from scratch. I'm a pretty big Star Wars fan, so I really enjoyed that."

Outside of the action, the story will unfold through cutscenes with the LEGO cast. John Williams' score will accompany the events, but a decision was made to not use any voices. Rather, the toy characters will interact with each other through animations and some noises. Just the thought of Darth Maul squeaking has us rolling with laughter.

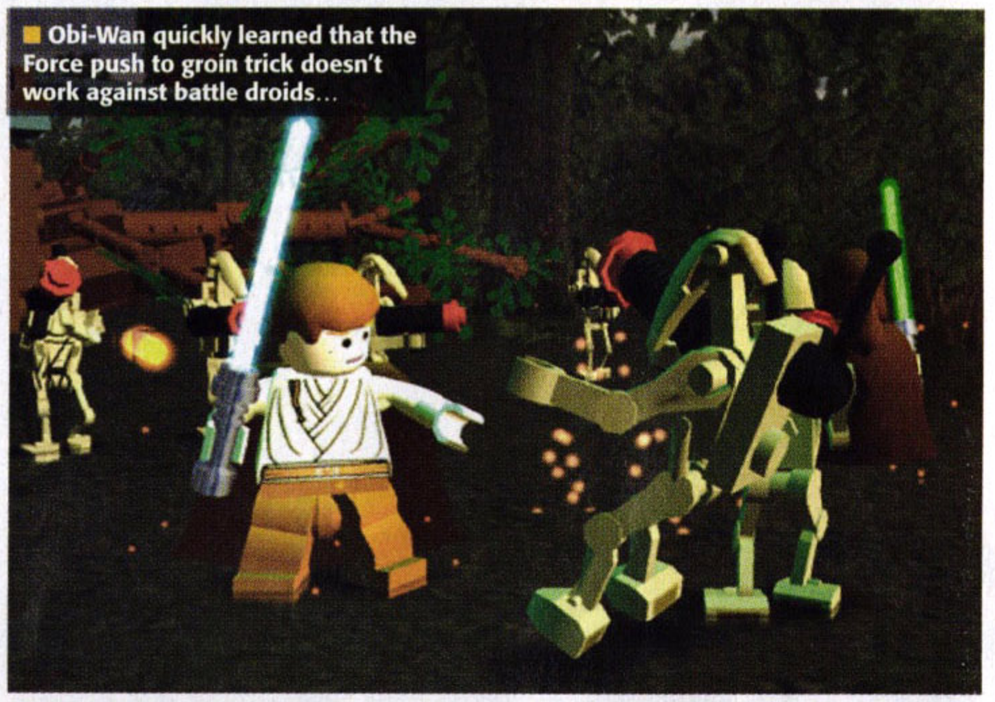
As of now, the game boasts over 30 playable characters. Along with Anakin, Obi-Wan, and Padme, you'll be able to suit up as Yoda, R2-D2, and a handful of characters you wouldn't expect like Luminara Unduli, Captain Panaka, and even a GNK power droid (also known as "The Gonk"). "There are big differences between the major types of characters," Smith injects. "Only Jedi can wield lightsabers and use The Force; protocol droids can open certain doors; astromech droids can hover across gaps and hack computers; Security Guards, Clones, and Amidala have blasters and can use their Ascension Guns to grapple up a level." The action isn't just limited to running around on foot, either. You'll take on Sebulba in the pod race and launch up to the skies in a variety of craft such as the Naboo Starfighter.

Rather than overwhelming players with complex button sequences, Traveller's Tales is keeping the gameplay simple, but is ensuring that the lightsaber action will live up to the expectations of fans. Whether you are working your way through the game or playing co-op with a friend, you'll have to keep your eyes peeled for secrets. Smith elaborates, "The game's absolutely full of secrets and unlockables: new characters, cheats, LEGO models, a special secret level, and more."

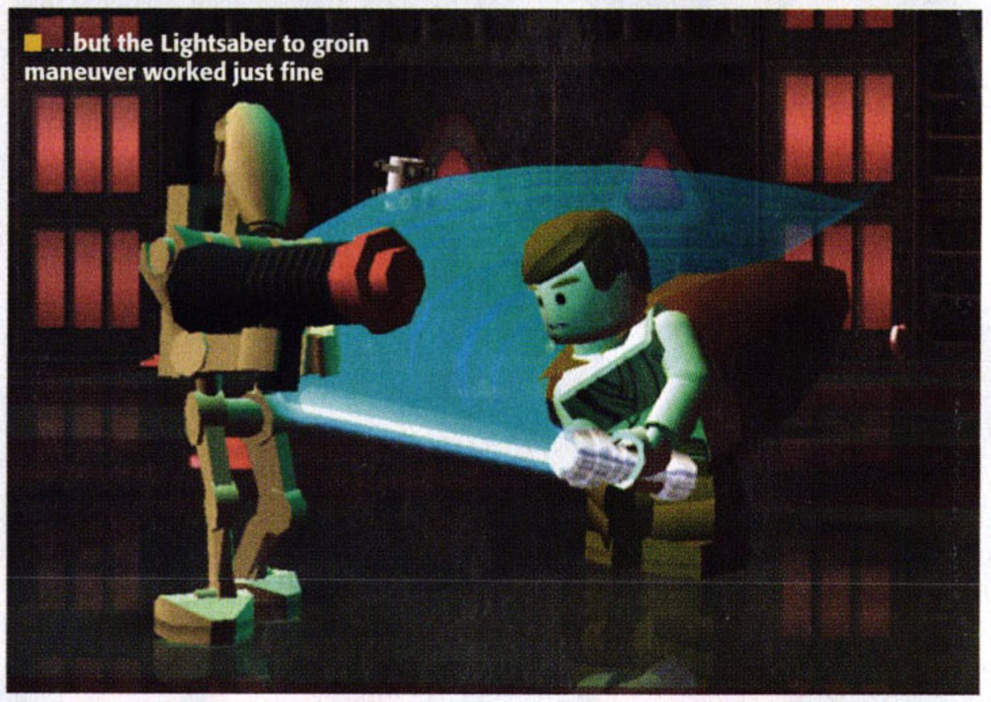
Cross your fingers, Star Wars fans. If Traveller's Tales and Giant can pull this game off, it could be the coolest thing to ever happen to mankind. ■■■



■ LEGO really needs to release this ship as a toy



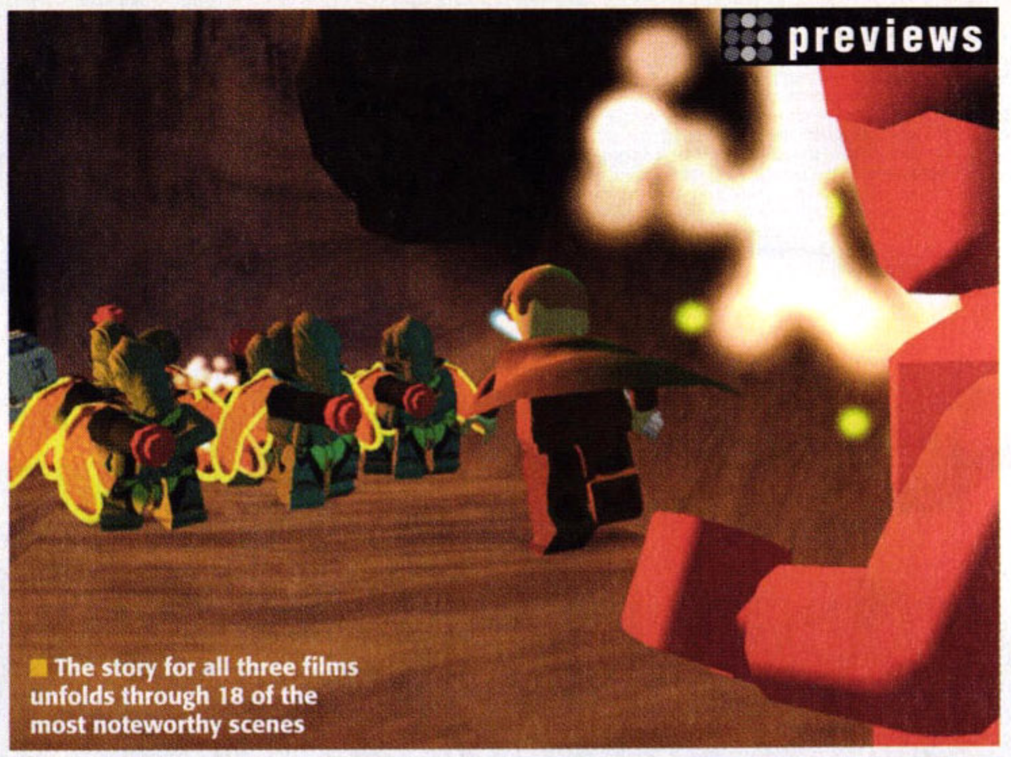
■ Obi-Wan quickly learned that the Force push to groin trick doesn't work against battle droids...



■ ...but the Lightsaber to groin maneuver worked just fine

■ "Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering. Suffering leads to getting jiggy with it."

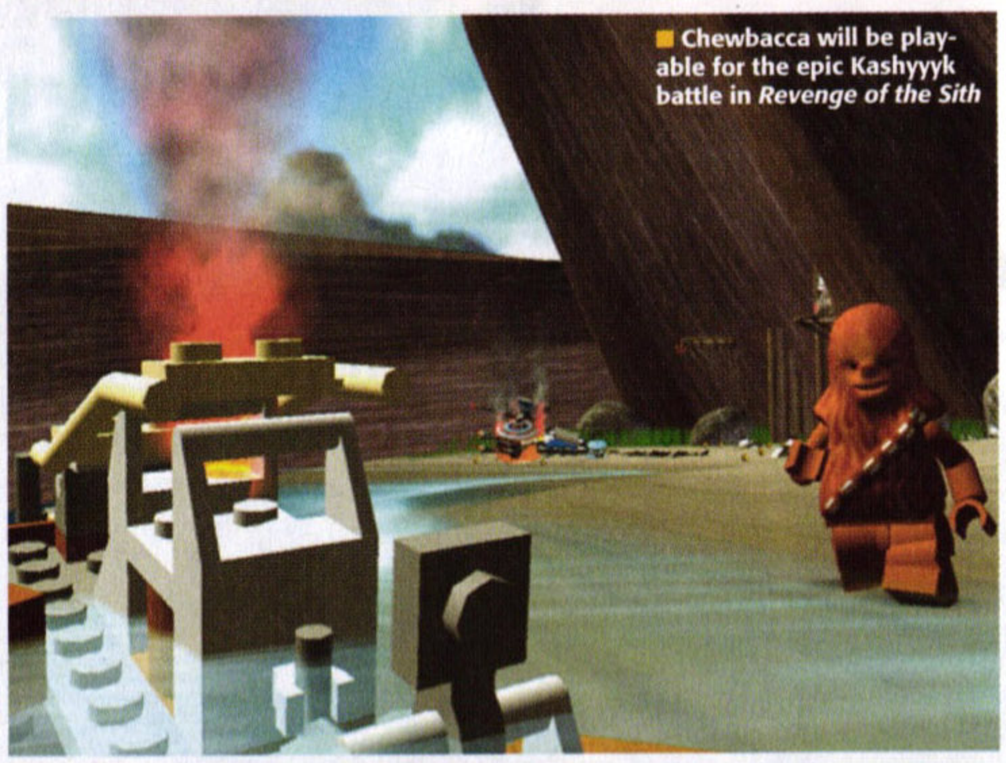
"We wouldn't be so damn cute if we were built with Technic."



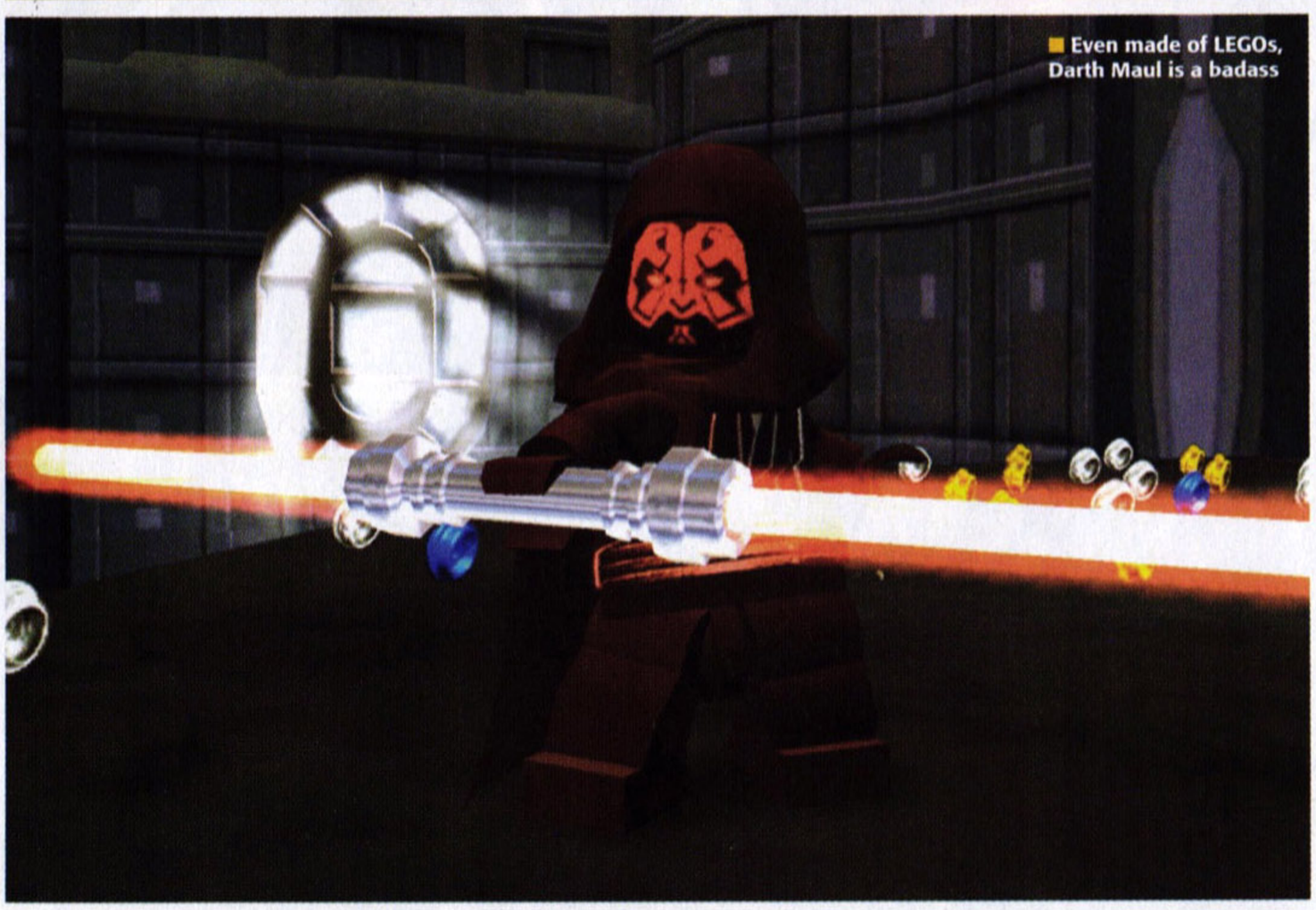
The story for all three films unfolds through 18 of the most noteworthy scenes

The pod racer is just one of many playable craft

"That stupid ghost ruins all of my dinner parties."



Chewbacca will be playable for the epic Kashyyyk battle in *Revenge of the Sith*



Even made of LEGOs, Darth Maul is a badass

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MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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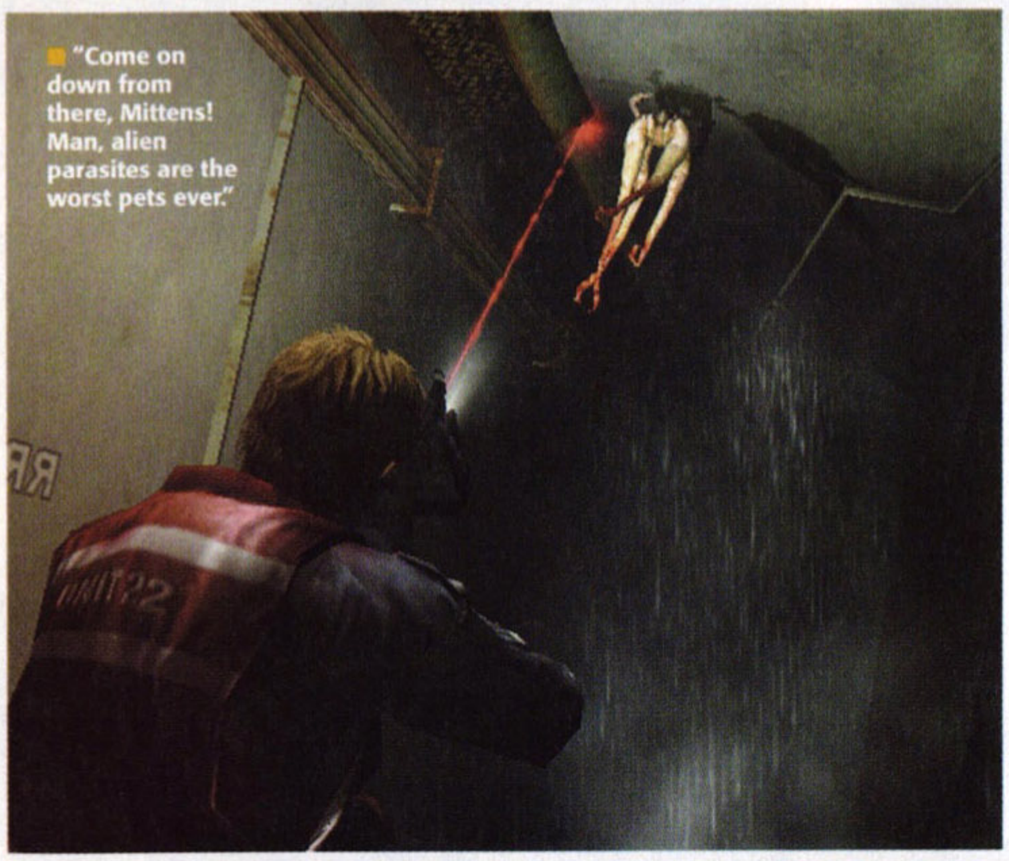
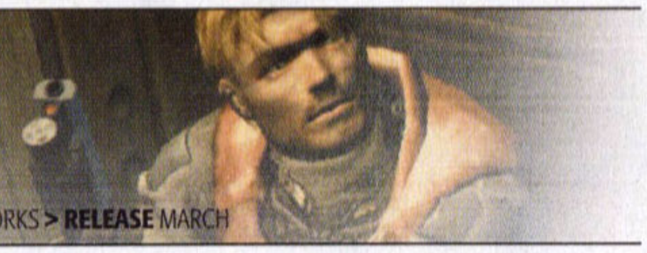


"Come on down from there, Mittens! Man, alien parasites are the worst pets ever."

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Cold Fear



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

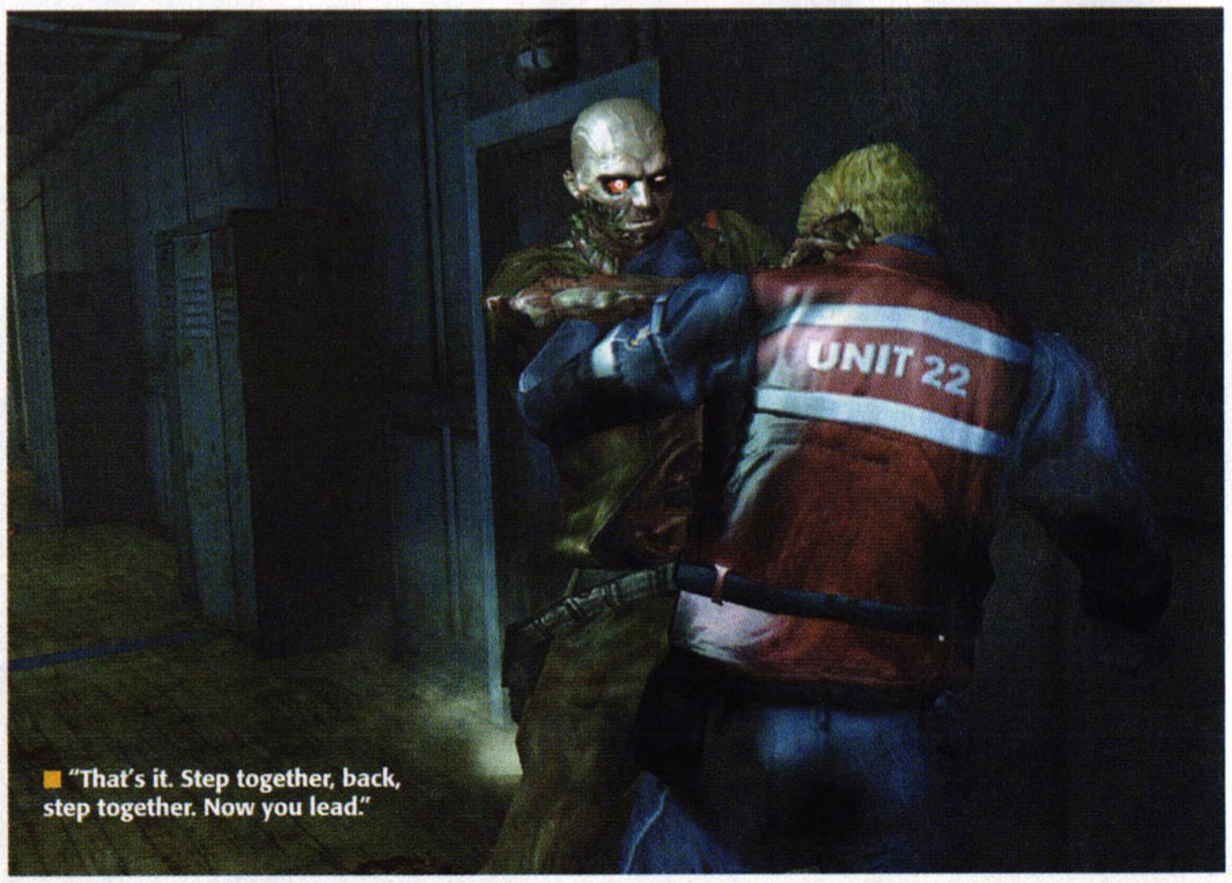
THE LIFE AQUATIC

The sea is angry, and it rocks the huge ship back and forth like a rubber raft. Rain pours down around you, making it difficult to find your way across the slippery deck. Nearly losing your balance, you look down to see a dark pool under your feet. It isn't water, and you aren't alone on the boat – something black sprints through the darkness towards you, and you notice too late that it isn't human.

Cold Fear, the new survival horror title from Ubisoft, puts the player in just such a situation. As Coast Guard member Tom Hansen, you must investigate a mystery unfolding upon a Russian whaling ship and face down both a massive storm and things far more sinister. We explored this creepy new title first hand, and were pleased with the dark thrills it had to offer.

Long on atmosphere, Cold Fear draws on traditional survival horror elements, combines them with the lighting style of the Splinter Cell games, and wraps it all in a waterlogged package. Featuring an over-the-shoulder gun view much like Resident Evil 4, a stamina gauge similar to Metal Gear Solid 3, and a balancing mechanic that's entirely new, Cold Fear certainly strives to carve its own place in the horror genre. The steadying mechanic is perhaps its most interesting innovation. By hitting a button, players can grab onto a nearby object to steady themselves against the boat's

Although the drums of gasoline were right in front of him, Sgt. Fred was still convinced a flame-thrower was the best way to deal with his hornet problem



"That's it. Step together, back, step together. Now you lead."

■ Tranquilizer darts were the only way to keep Star Jones in line during her wedding planning

■ Little did Bob know that his Manic Panic hair dye reacted poorly to acid rain

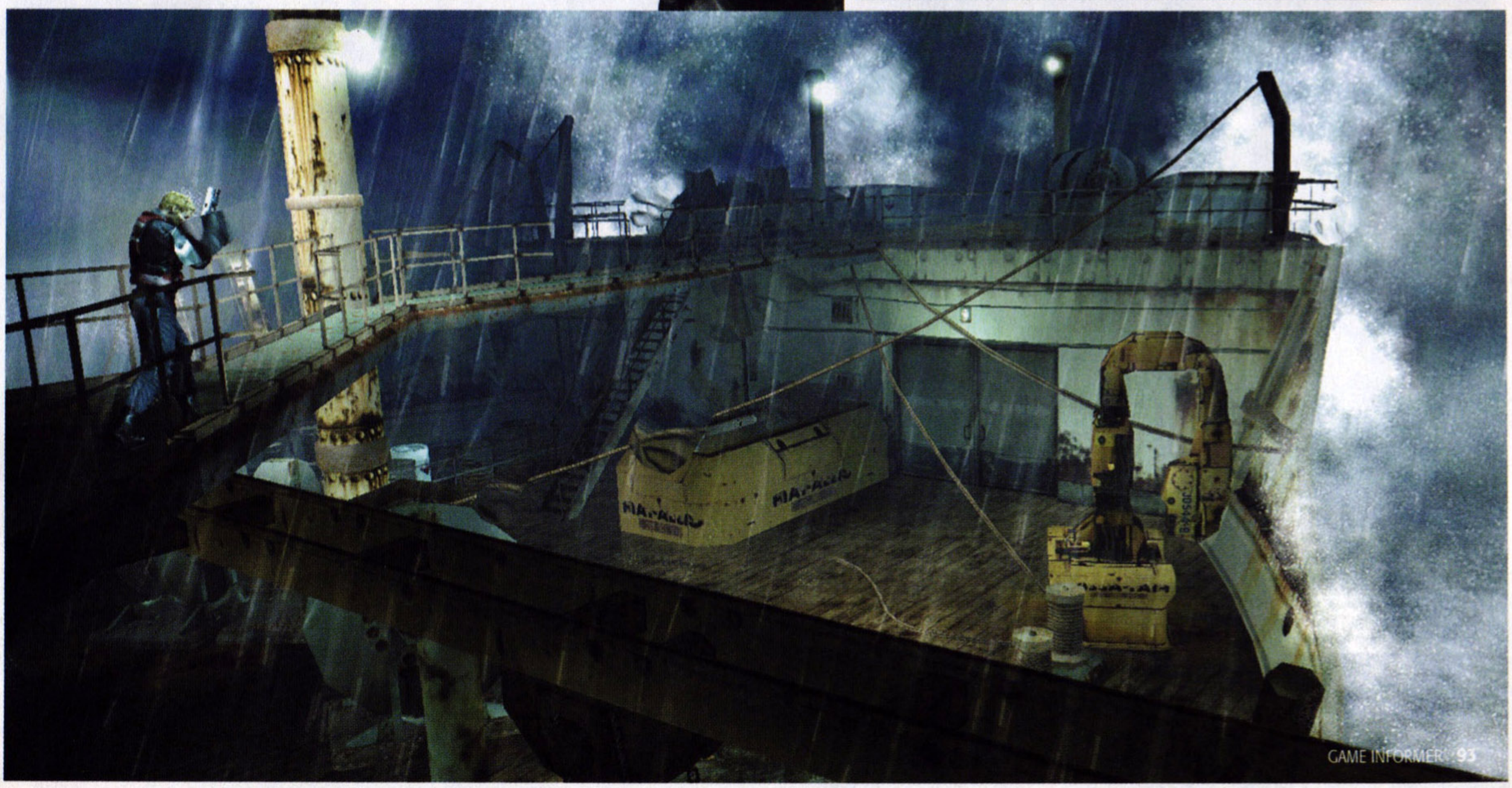
constant movement. You can still aim while holding onto something, but cannot move, meaning that you'll have to often choose between mobility and a clean shot.

The nautical setting is perfect for the survival horror genre. The rocking motion of the boat affects your aim and ammo is scarce, making judicious usage of your weapons extremely critical. Fortunately, you can use the boat itself and its contents against your enemies; barrels and fire extinguishers can be shot to cause explosions, and swinging objects can knock your foes off the side into the raging sea. But these traps can be just as easily turned on you. Enormous waves can slam you into the cabin, and the tilt of the deck may even send you sliding off into the icy water.

Of course, the ocean isn't the only challenge you'll face. Sinister creatures lurk in every corner of the ship (and later, on an oil platform). It seems that the crew of the ship has been transformed into homicidal mutants, and it's up to Hansen to figure out why. Not all is at it seems on this whaling vessel, and a Russian scientist's experiments are certainly involved. We expect to see many more twists and turns in the story as we delve deeper into this game.

Cold Fear is shaping up to be a worthy entry in the survival horror genre, and we hope it continues to improve before its March release. While the gunplay aspect could feel a bit more intense, the atmosphere is incredible and the visuals are impressive. But most of all, our hands-on time with Cold Fear has us curious to see what else this title will throw our way. ■■■

■ "The ones filled with raspberry taste the best."



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MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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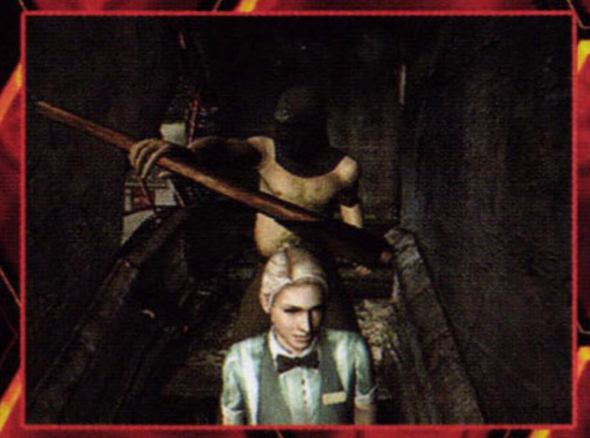

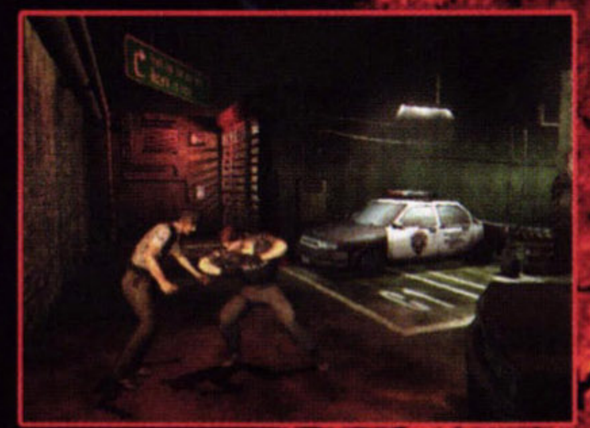

TRY AND GET OUT ALIVE

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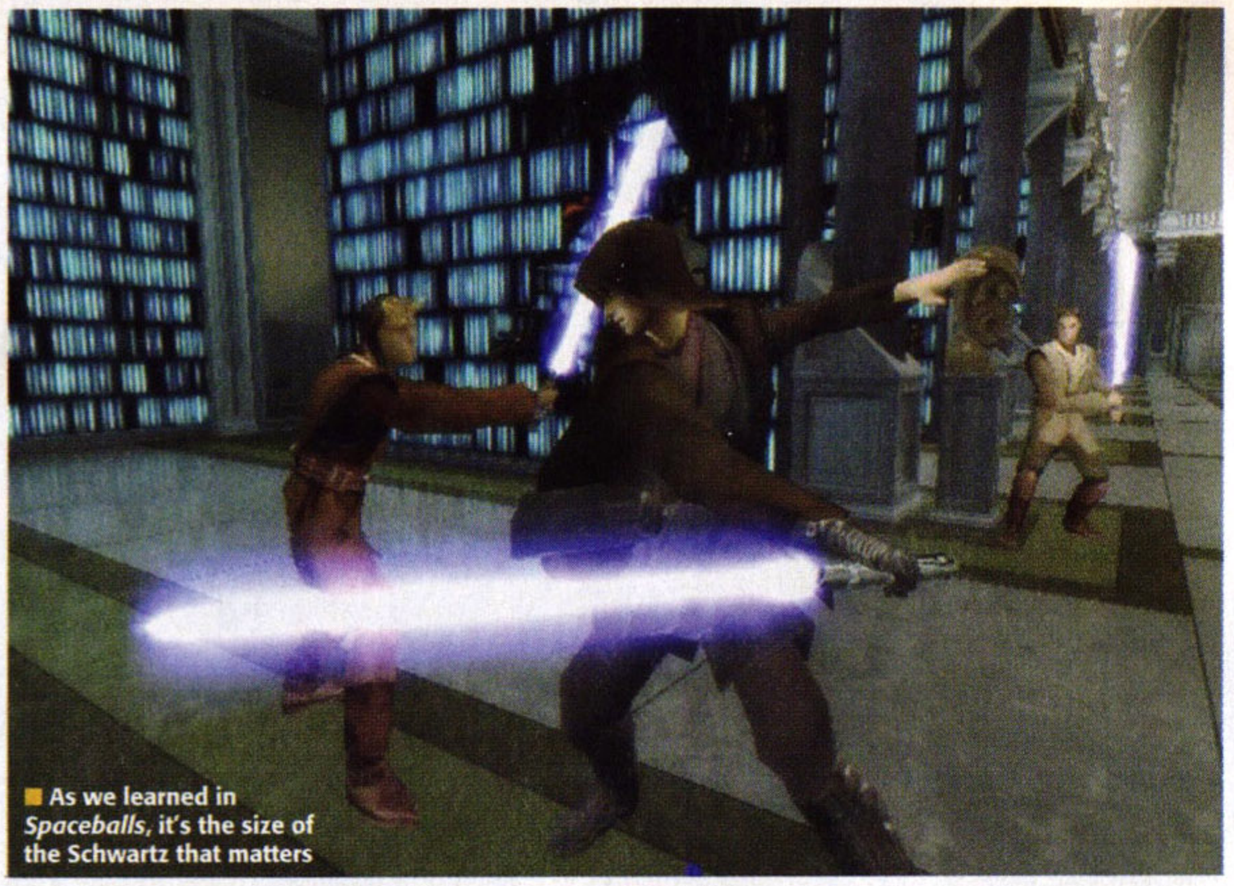
2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately).

Here's a shot of General Grievous – the new face of evil in *Revenge of the Sith*



As we learned in *Spaceballs*, it's the size of the Schwartz that matters

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS **> DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS **> RELEASE** MAY

COMPLETING THE JOURNEY TO THE DARK SIDE

May 19, 2005 is judgement day for Star Wars fans. Will laughable acting and characters accidentally stepping in ronto droppings taint Anakin Skywalker's descent to the Dark Side? Or will George Lucas finally set things right and have this troubled soul lop off heads, Force choke loved ones, and make the galaxy shudder in fear at his very presence? Only time will tell, but if the video game adaptation of *Revenge of the Sith* is any indication, Star Wars fans have much reason to rejoice. In fact, the new information that we've received points toward this game becoming the ultimate Jedi simulator. Outside of occupying a bathroom stall next to Mark Hamill, this should be the closest gamers ever get to the Force. To make the gaming experience as authentic and robust as possible, LucasArts has implemented choreography straight from the feature film, and has even enlisted the talents of stunt coordinator Nick Gillad to create exclusive content for the game.

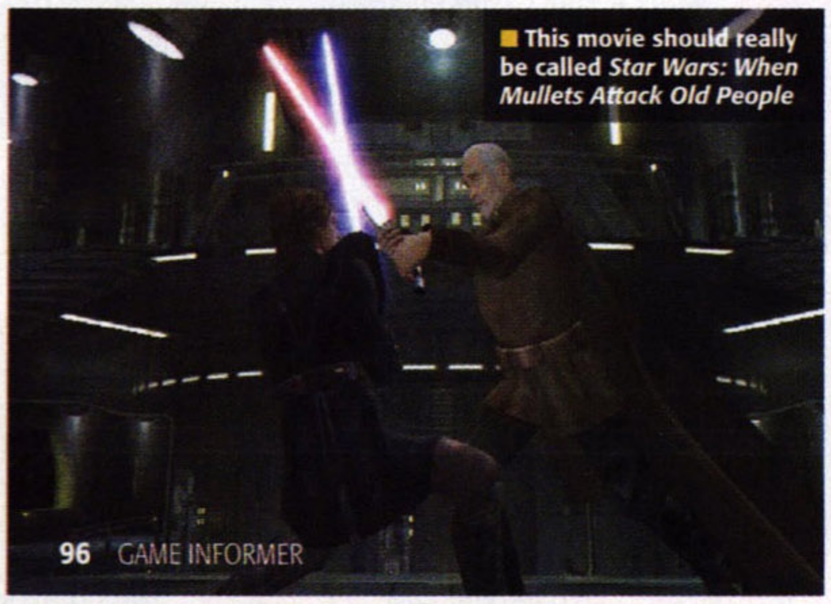
Players will have the chance to assume the identity of either the deeply troubled Anakin or his master Obi-Wan Kenobi. Of course, both of these Jedi can tap into an extensive arsenal of acrobatic moves and combo sequences. As your lightsaber hums and tears opponents to pieces, you can also use the Force to lift, push, pull, and our favorite, throw. There's nothing quite like the sight of a battle droid magically lifting into the air, colliding with a wall, and exploding into hundreds of pieces. As illustrated in *The Phantom Menace* by Qui-Gon Jinn, players can also use the lightsaber to cut through doors. We always wanted to do that!

As of now, LucasArts has revealed that the game will take place on Kashyyyk, Coruscant, and two additional worlds. In total, players will work their way through 16 stages and will have the chance to square off against formidable opponents like Mace Windu, Count Dooku, and General Grievous. As Anakin succumbs to the Dark Side, his arsenal of Force attacks will expand to include darker abilities. Interestingly, combos are also upgradeable.

The jury may still be out on the film, but LucasArts is doing everything in its power to ensure that the video game adaptation is as explosive as it can possibly be. There's nothing that we'd like to see more than a great new Star Wars film that has a game that is worthy to play. EA found a solution for The Lord of the Rings. Let's hope that LucasArts has an answer as well. ■■■

They'll Rip Your Arms Off!

As cool as Chewbacca was, we never got the chance to see what he was truly capable of. Threatening Lando and chess-playing droids just doesn't cut the mustard. It took a few decades, but Lucas is finally giving us the opportunity to see what the Wookiee race can do. In one of *Revenge of the Sith*'s largest battles, we'll see the Wookiees defending their homeworld, Kashyyyk. Not only will we get a good look at their civilization (pictured in the artwork), we'll see their warrior blood boil and their unique weapons and vehicles in use.



This movie should really be called *Star Wars: When Mullets Attack Old People*

Noxema: Keeping troubled teenager skin dark and foreboding

"You see, Anakin. Purple nurples won't work on droids. Remember this, my padawan."

DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

To those parties attempting to recreate the stunts contained in the new MX vs. ATV Unleashed, we offer this message: DON'T. While that seems fairly obvious to most, you'd be surprised how many people will contemplate emulating its dangerous intensity, vis-á-vis the realistic head-to-head racing experience. Ergo, THQ and Rainbow Studios put forth the following caveats to all parties: Do not attempt to make a golf cart do 70 mph, nor launch a sand rail over a moving plane. Moreover, do not undertake the recreation of any and all stunts from MX vs. ATV Unleashed in order to replicate its realistic rag-doll physics. The insane stunts and fierce racing is intended for the sole intent and purpose of an intense gaming experience, not for the discovery of clever ways to inflict bodily harm. Case in point, THQ and Rainbow Studios offer this photo as reference of the projected outcome of ignoring this warning. Honestly, what was this guy thinking? Said driver wasn't anywhere close to successfully completing the jump, nor is the other side of the canyon he was attempting to reach even in the aforementioned photo. In summation, MX vs. ATV Unleashed is not real, don't attempt to make it real.

rainbow STUDIOS PRESENTS

MX vs. ATV UNLEASHED

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Lyrics

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PC

Quake IV

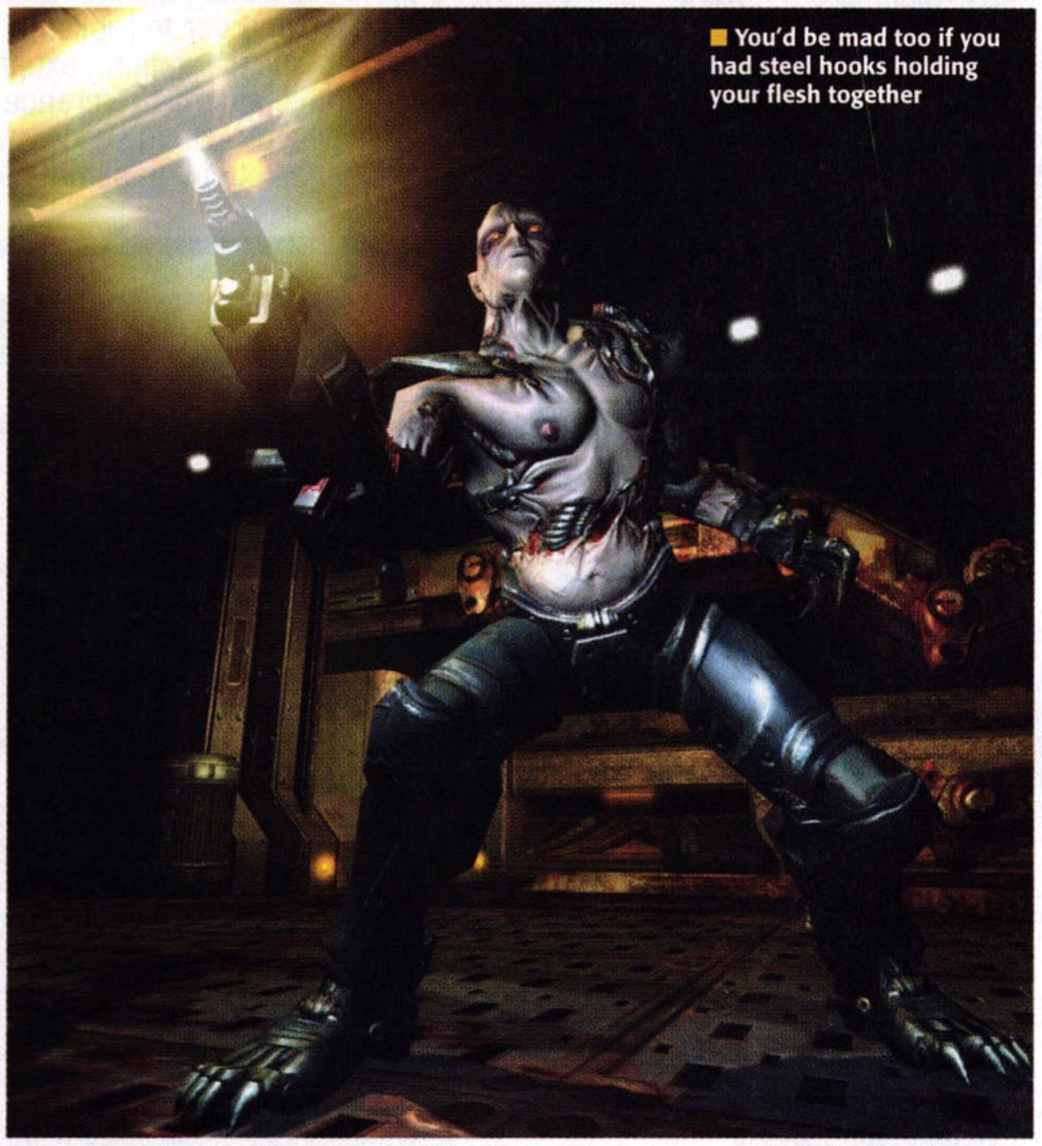
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** 2005

BEYOND THE ARENA

Veteran PC studio Raven Software and ever-secretive Doom creator id Software are in cahoots once again, this time on one of the most anticipated PC titles of 2005, Quake IV. While Raven (of Soldier of Fortune, Heretic, and X-Men Legends fame) is handling the bulk of the development burden, id is working closely with the company to make sure Quake IV takes maximum advantage of the powerful Doom 3 engine it is running on. And by all accounts, this is well on track to living up to the lofty expectations of the rabid Quake fanbase.

Much like anything connected with id, details about Quake IV are few and far between. We do know that the single-player campaign will tell a full-fledged story which begins scant hours after the finale of Quake II. The Strogg menace has not in fact been ended, and Earth's forces decide to have another go at making the galaxy safe from the ravages of that horrific cybernetic race. A huge army, including the player, lands on the enemy homeworld to finish the job – and Raven intends to make your comrades-in-arms as much a part of Quake IV's gameplay experience as possible. Along with your squad, you'll have to go deep under the surface of the planet, fighting through the dreadful factories where the Strogg process the body parts of their slain enemies into new warriors. Needless to say, Quake IV doesn't look to be dropping the gore level much at all from Doom 3.

One other exciting addition to the Quake IV menu are the vehicles. We don't know anything about them yet, but the prospect of piloting giant engines of destruction through the kind of environments we know this engine is capable of is enough to get our trigger fingers very itchy indeed. And now you know just as much about Quake IV as we do – and we'll be sure to keep it that way as more info becomes available. You'll have to soothe your cravings with these gorgeous screenshots until that day. ■■■



■ You'd be mad too if you had steel hooks holding your flesh together

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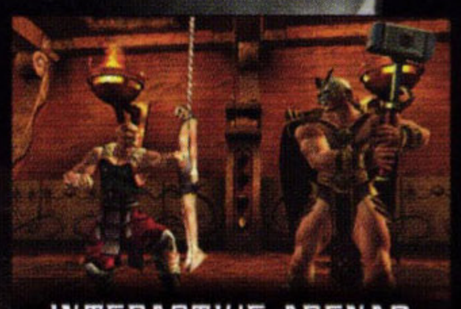
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Intense Violence

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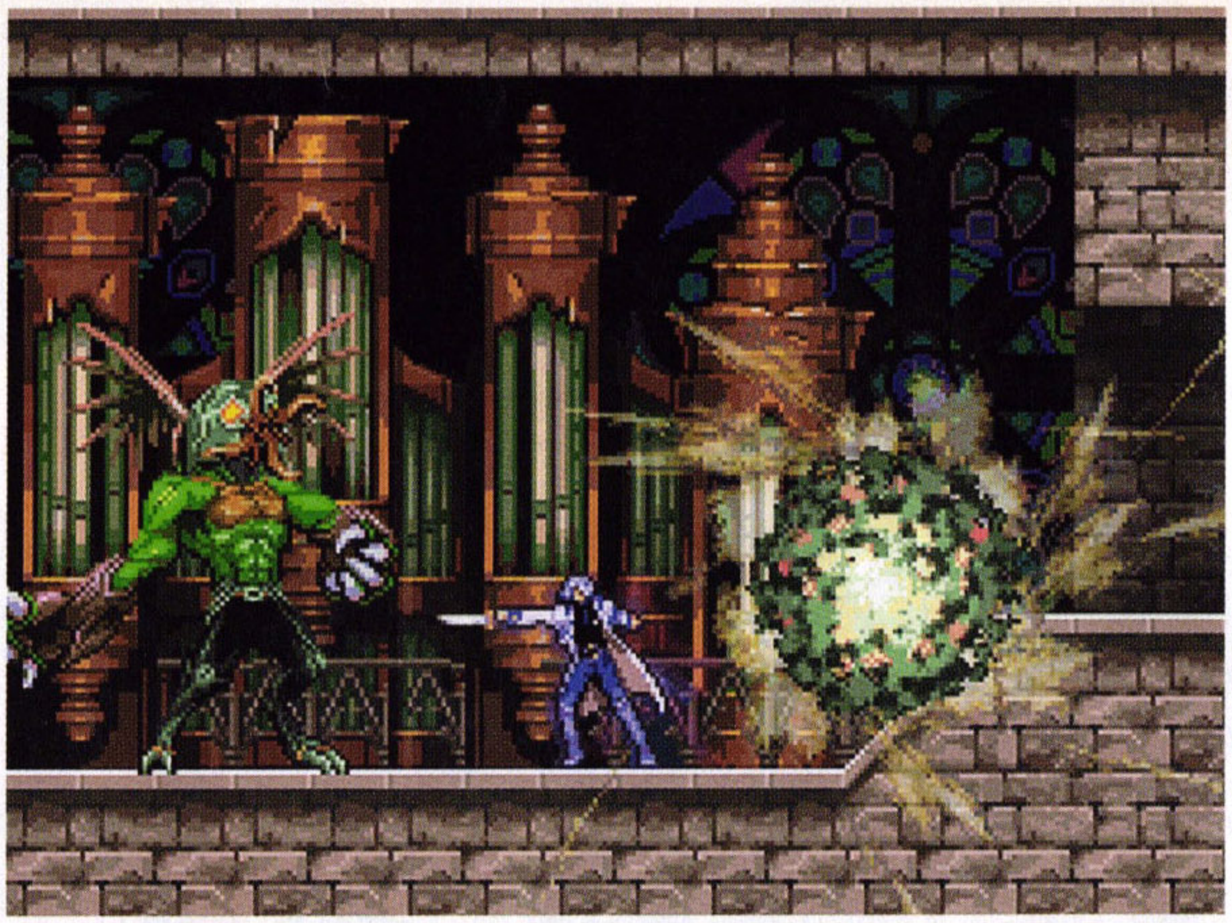


NINTENDO DS

Castlevania DS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI **> RELEASE** FALL

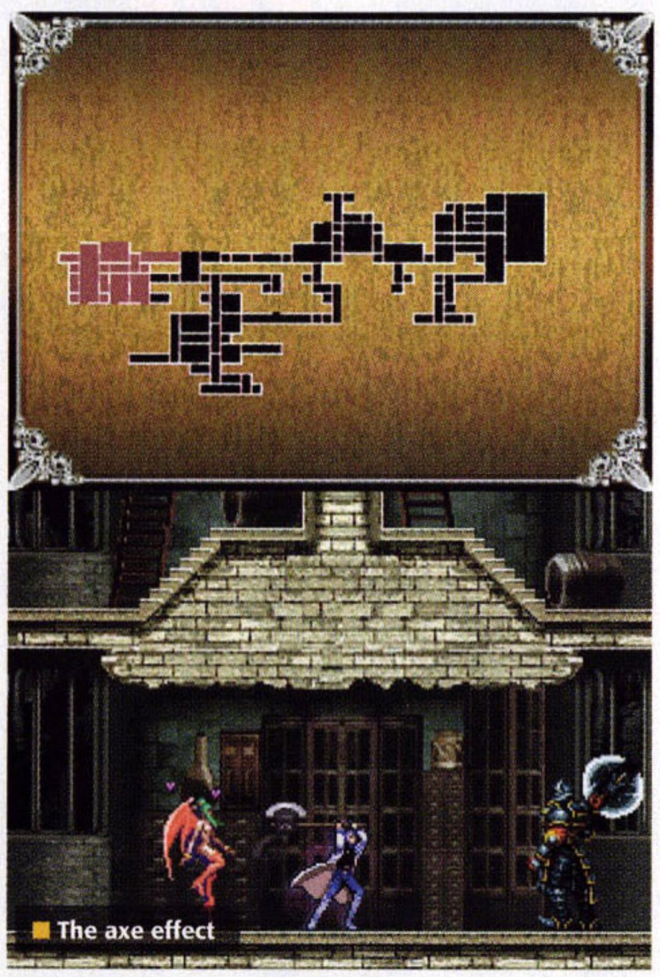
TOUCH DRACULA

The Castlevania series has been quite successful on handheld systems. The Game Boy Advance titles Circle of the Moon, Harmony of Dissonance, and Aria of Sorrow are some of the best action games the platform has to offer. Considering the success the franchise has experienced on Nintendo's portable juggernaut, it's no surprise the series is jumping to the big N's other handheld, the DS.

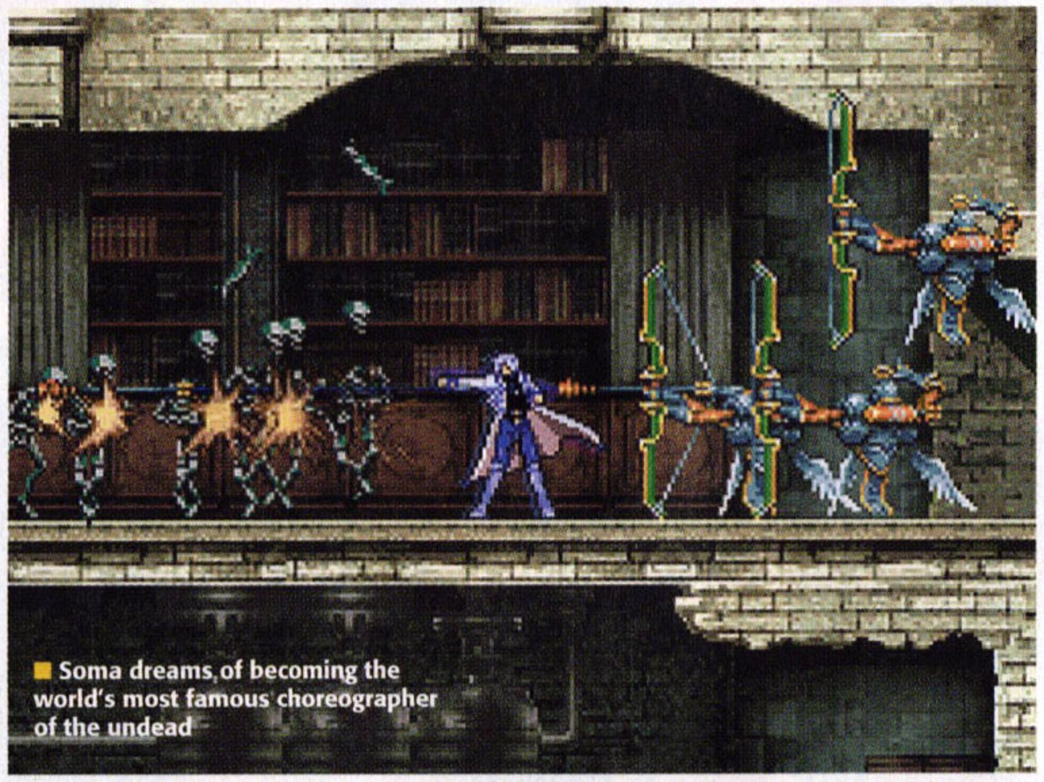
Castlevania DS (which is a working title only – the game will certainly receive its own cryptic, quasi-goth subhead before release) will actually be a direct sequel to Aria of Sorrow. Players assume the role of Soma Cruz in the year 2036, one year after he prevented the return of Dracula. All of the characters that survived the events of Aria will return, as will the major gameplay mechanics. Players will once again be able to equip Soma with weapons such as axes and hammers, and the Enemy Soul system will also make a return. For those who missed out on Soma's excellent first game, the Enemy Soul system allows him to earn new attacks and skills by collecting souls dropped by defeated monsters. As in Aria of Sorrow, there will be dozens of souls to collect, although completing the game is no guarantee that you'll find them all. But Castlevania DS will take advantage of the system's unique wireless properties, allowing players to swap rare souls.

Of course, this is only one example of how Castlevania DS varies from its GBA predecessors. The top screen will constantly display the map – which is incredibly helpful for anyone who has ever gotten lost in Aria's labyrinthine castle. While the main action will unfold on the bottom screen and be controlled with the traditional d-pad and button scheme, its touch screen capabilities will be used during boss battles. After defeating a boss, a specific symbol must be drawn on the touch screen to "seal" the enemy permanently. If the player draws the wrong symbol, or even draws the lines in the wrong order, the creature will regain hit points and continue fighting.

The handheld Castlevania games have been consistently excellent, and its new DS entry appears to use the platform's abilities in a unique and logical way. If it all comes together, Castlevania DS promises to be both a great entry in the series, and one of the most exciting titles in the DS' growing library. ■■■



■ The axe effect



■ Soma dreams of becoming the world's most famous choreographer of the undead

■ There's no easier way to anger a living tree than to try to extract syrup from it.

SEQUEL SHOCK

Although Castlevania is a long-running series, it has more reinventions of the franchise than true sequels. Castlevania DS is the first game to feature a returning cast of characters since the saga hit the GBA, although all the games share deeper links. One character in Castlevania DS and Aria of Sorrow (though we won't spoil who) is actually Alucard, star of the excellent PSone title Symphony of the Night – the game that all of the handheld outings have been patterned after. If you haven't played Symphony or any of the GBA titles, you're missing some of the finest side-scrolling action games in history.

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Fantasy Violence

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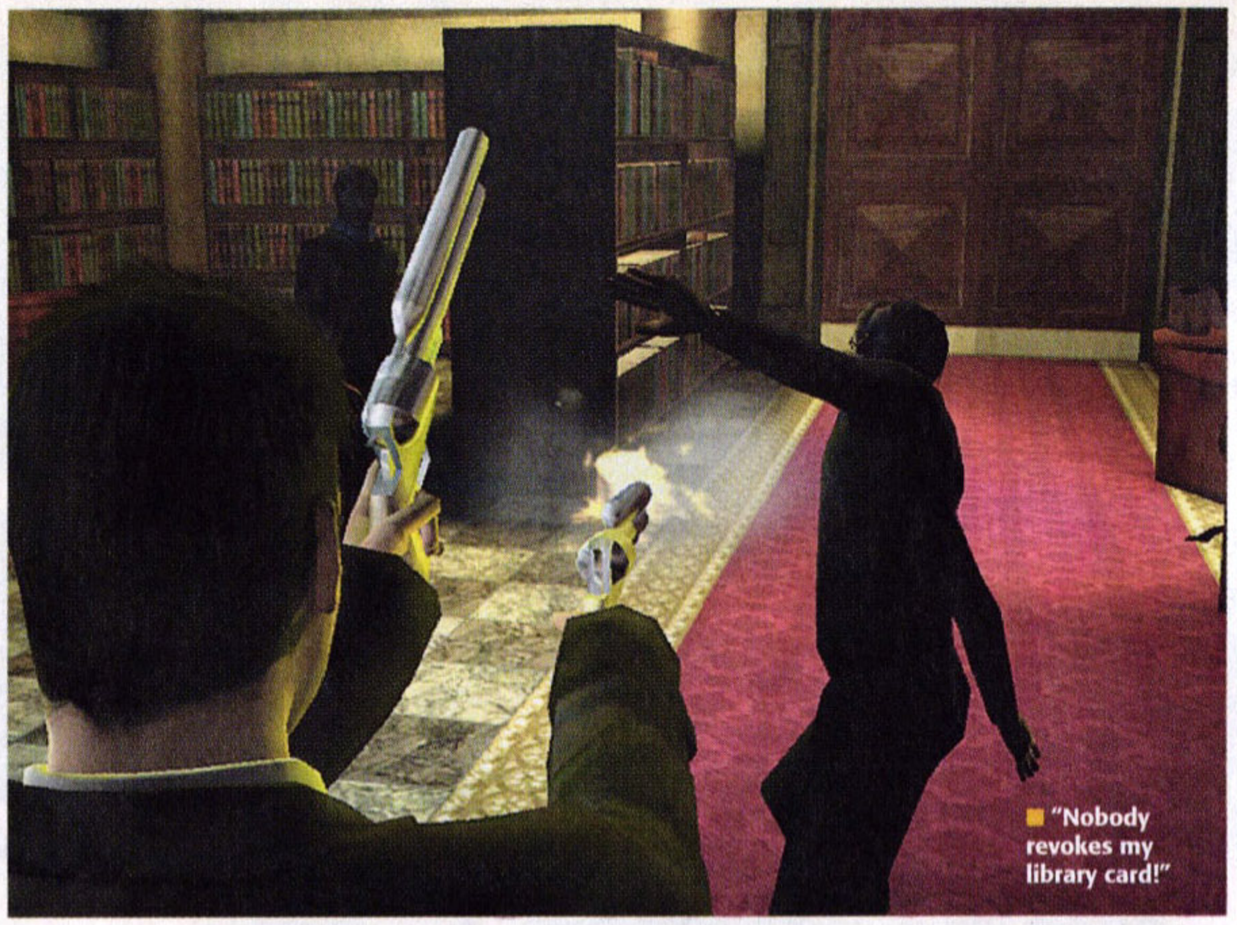
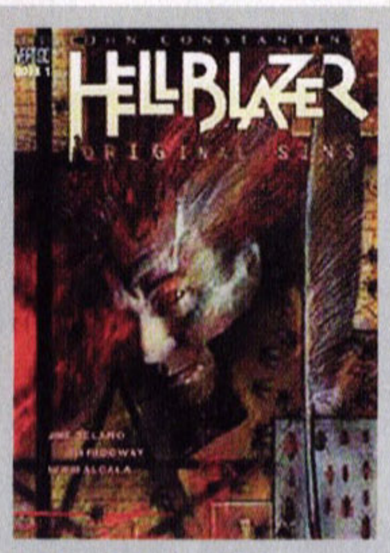
"I'll get you for this, Agent Smith!"



"Nobody revokes my library card!"



John Constantine, Hellblazer

While the video game is based on the film, *Constantine* deviates noticeably from the comic on which it is based, DC/Vertigo's *Hellblazer*. The John Constantine of the comic world is British and blond – his appearance is loosely based on the musician Sting. Created by Alan Moore in the pages of *Swamp Thing*, some of comics' most respected names have written stories about the character, including Neil Gaiman, Garth Ennis, Warren Ellis, Brian Azzarello, and current series scribe Mike Carey. Several comic book tie-ins are planned to commemorate the character's translation to film after 15 years of comic book fame.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Constantine

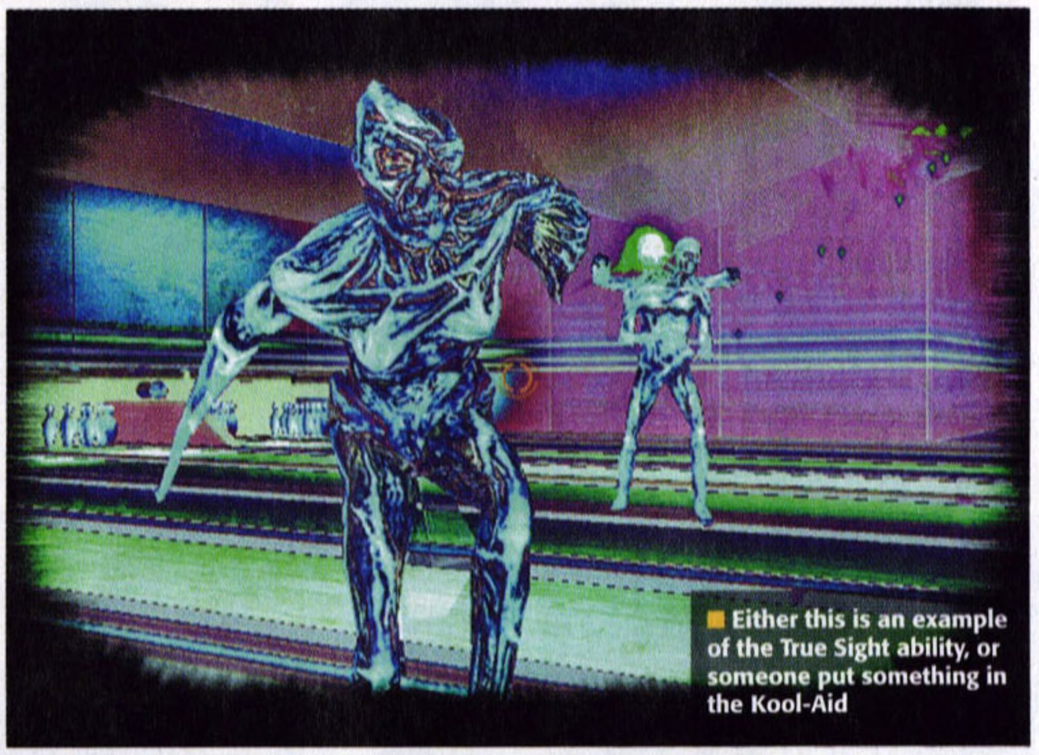
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** BITS STUDIOS
> RELEASE FEBRUARY

NEO VS. EVIL

Whoa! Keanu Reeves is a wizard? We thought he was a time traveler. Or possibly our savior in the war against machines. He's so multifaceted! In the movie *Constantine*, Keanu plays a regular guy (who just happens to command dark occult powers) that gets mixed up in a mystical plot involving demons, angels, and literally travelling to Hell and back.

Launching around the same time as the film, the video game adaptation allows players to step into the role of Keanu's character John Constantine, a magic user trying to solve the mysterious death of a policewoman's twin sister. The game will follow the plot of the film while also featuring original story material and enemies. In the game, Constantine will travel between two different planes of reality: the real world and the Matrix…no, that's not it. He'll travel between the real world and the underworld, where he will discover a twisted, hellish version of Los Angeles. As the two planes mirror each other, the player's actions in one plane will actually affect the other, and twisted monstrosities will hunt you down in both. Expect to see creatures from the film, as well as completely original horrors.

Of course, since Constantine is versed in the mystical arts, he has quite an arsenal of magical weapons at his disposal. A traditional third-person action title, the game will allow players to lay waste to their foes with weapons such as the Crucifier, the Holy Shotgun, and the Shroud of Moses. We've always wanted to have a weapon called "the Holy Shotgun!" Joy! Constantine will also be able to tap into an ability called True Sight, which will reveal secrets invisible to the human eye, such as those tainted by the supernatural.



Either this is an example of the True Sight ability, or someone put something in the Kool-Aid

At a glance, Constantine has all the makings of a pretty enjoyable game. You get to fight demons with blessed firearms, travel between Hell and L.A. (no, they're not the same place), and assume the role of the bass player in the band Dogstar. What's not to like? For everyone who has ever hoped to hop into the shoes of Mr. Ted Theodore Logan himself, now's your chance! But all jokes about Mr. Reeves' filmography aside, any game that lets us blast through the unholy hordes of the underworld is all right with us. Excellent! Sorry, we had to put one last shot in there. ■■■

"Come on Mom, give us the tops of our heads back. We promise we'll be good!"

At Spooky High, hall monitors are expected to make sure demons aren't cutting class to go smoke souls

UNLIMITED ENABLED

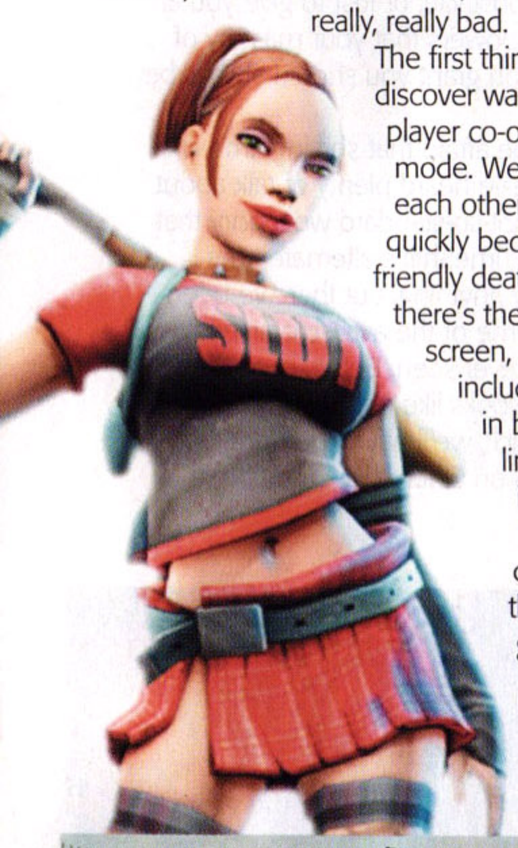
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

TimeSplitters Future Perfect

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** FREE RADICAL **> RELEASE** MARCH

BACK TO THE FUTURE

A few months ago, we sent one of our top secret GI operatives into the future to play the new TimeSplitters. The thing is, we forgot to send enough people on our ChronoTravel FutureBus 4000 to try out the bevy of multiplayer options that time, a mistake we've now remedied with another romp into the future, where Future Perfect blew us away with its dozens of game modes, characters, and weapons. Then we came back to the present to tell you about it – because, let's face it, the future smells really, really bad.



The first thing we were overjoyed to discover was the inclusion of two-player co-op for the entire Story mode. We can only be friendly with each other for so long though, so it quickly became time for some not-so friendly deathmatch variations. While there's the requisite four-player split screen, it's notable that offline play included the option of adding in bots to fill out the battle lineup. Going online, we increased our player count to 16, and proceeded to demolish each other in the 13 distinct multiplayer game types, several of which were truly unique. Vampire mode forces you to kill others to extend your own life span.

Shrink mode bases your opponent's body size on their current ranking in the game. And, our personal favorite, Monkey Assistant mode, rewards the player in last place with a slew of little simian helpers. Genius!

Another additional feature showed up in the form of Challenges. These short vignettes allow you to compete for the best time and score either off or online. Each challenge has a unique theme and can be divided into the categories of either hilarious or downright weird. The first challenge in the "Behead the Undead" category gives you a shotgun and asks you to eliminate some pesky zombie-like monkeys. Another area of challenges is entitled simply "Cat Racing." They're cats, but they're on caster wheels! And don't forget Monkey Shuffleboard. The brilliance of these ideas seems to only be overshadowed by their relative insanity. All of the challenges are pretty simplistic, but are an incredibly amusing addition to the numerous options already available in the game.

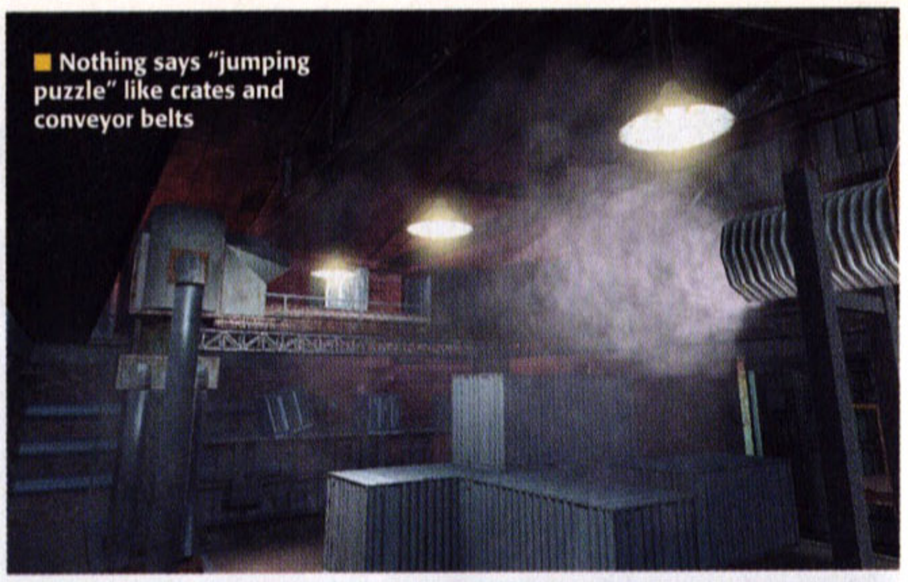
Even if for some reason you were to grow tired of the lengthy campaign, numerous multiplayer stages and game types, or the quirky challenges, you'd still have a fully functional mapmaker to explore – allowing you to create, play, and share your own level creations with friends and online competitors.

With so much content to try out, even the malodorous and fetid smell of the future almost wasn't enough to bring us back to the present. Thankfully, we realized it was only a matter of weeks before the final version of Future Perfect would be in our hands, as the game looks well on track for its March release schedule. ■■■

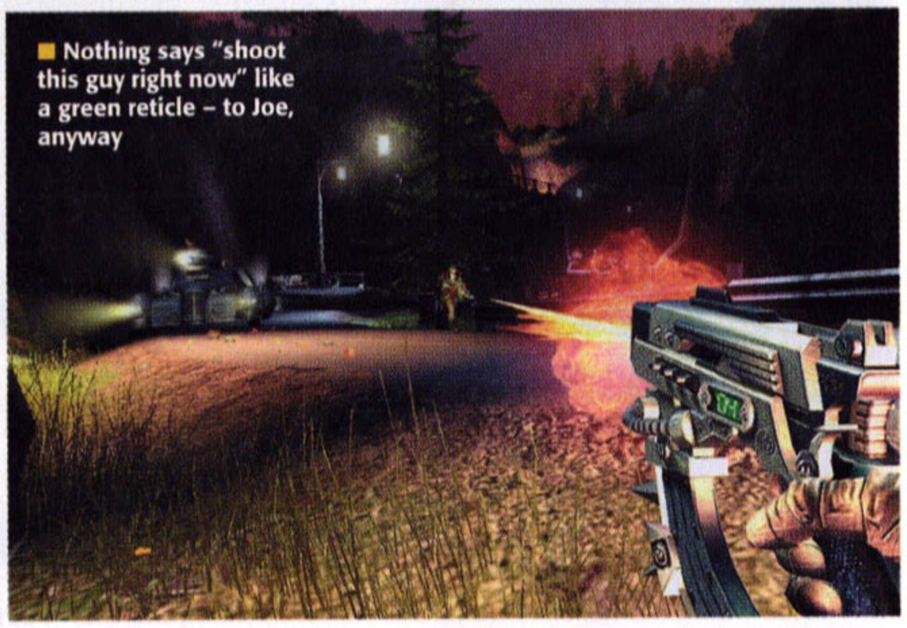
■ Time periods stretch from 1924 to the far distant 2401

■ Explosion Diving is the most popular Olympic sport in the future

■ Nothing says "slow time" like some nice full-screen blur



■ Nothing says "jumping puzzle" like crates and conveyor belts



■ Nothing says "shoot this guy right now" like a green reticle – to Joe, anyway

The whole point of TimeShift is to allow players to use their time-control abilities to overcome any challenge they may face. These are some examples of the kind of things that are possible. While these vignettes aren't actual gameplay scenarios, Atari confirmed that all of the gameplay elements are the same as those that will actually be in the game.

REWIND

One of your abilities is the power to rewind time. Here's one situation where it can save your butt:

So you messed up your infiltration, and a goon squad is chasing you through the secret lab complex. Careening through a door, you find yourself in a room with no exits. From behind, the guards open fire on you and shatter a two-way mirror, opening up an escape route. Through the breach you go, but afterwards you warp the fabric of time to flow backwards. The mirror un-shatters back to its pristine state and the goons run back out of the room, while you're still on the other side of the mirror. When time resumes its normal course, your pursuers enter the room only to find that you've apparently disappeared. They leave, let the dispatcher know you've vanished, and you can wait for the alarm to die down in peace.

PAUSE

Another way you can affect time is by stopping it. This is an example of just how useful that can be:

The entrance to the hidden missile silo is on the other side of a lava flow, which is studded with chunks of floating debris. If you jump on them, they'll sink and you'll die an agonizing fiery death. However, stopping time freezes all physical objects (besides your bad self) in place, allowing you to hop across in relative safety.

MIX AND SERVE!

When faced with complex situations, a combination of powers might be necessary – or a clever player can figure out how to use a particular one to complete the challenge. For instance:

Your brother's cover has been blown, and he's being held by the nefarious bad guys in a fortified secret base, his execution imminent. Snipers man the outer wall, searchlights criss-cross the surrounding space, and other enemies sit in machine gun turrets. The gate is open, but well-defended. Here you have some options: slow time and dodge the spotlights (rewinding if you screw up), stop time and haul your butt through, or blast through with heavy firepower. Plus, you can play some great cat and mouse with the baddies if you decide to go the combat route. Once they figure out where you are and start targeting you in force, just stop time, find a new firing spot, and open up again – you'll have precious seconds to unload before they reacquire you as a target.

PC

TimeShift

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** SABER INTERACTIVE **> RELEASE** FALL

FOUR DIMENSIONS OF SHOOTING

We've been playing 3D first-person shooters for quite some time now. With TimeShift, Atari and previously low-profile developer Saber Interactive are looking to expand the FPS formula into the fourth dimension itself: time. To accomplish this, Saber's Saber3D engine, which incorporates all kinds of buzzwords (normal mapping, parallax lighting, realistic physics, etc.) is the basis on which TimeShift is built. Further details about this title are scarce given its far-off release date, but one tidbit has our little hearts a-twitter – the integration of time-based powers into intricate puzzles.

The abilities players will have access to in TimeShift are diverse. We know that it will be possible to slow down, stop, and rewind time, and whether this is the extent of the powers or not, this twist on FPS norms will undoubtedly make for some good gaming. Whether you're simply using them to get away from the enemy, make it past an environmental obstacle, or just to give you an edge in battle, the powers that your mastery of the fourth dimension grant you should always be useful.

However, don't be afraid that shifting time is all you'll be doing. We've heard plenty of talk about the standard and not-so-standard weaponry that arms the forces of TimeShift's alternate timeline. Atari won't say anything, but there've been mumblings that some of the available arsenal is like nothing we've ever seen. Between all these elements, this title looks like it's worth keeping an eye on; with any luck, we'll have another great way to get our FPS on when this ships later this year. ■■■

■ Nothing says "dystopia" like a blood-red sky

These screens are from the Xbox version – and the similarities to the PC original are easy to spot

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Delta Force – Black Hawk Down

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 SYSTEM LINK, UP TO 50-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, OR UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER** NOVALOGIC **> DEVELOPER** REBELLION (PS2), CLIMAX (XBOX) **> RELEASE** JUNE (PS2), APRIL (XBOX)

ONLINE INSANITY

Publisher NovaLogic (which also developed the original PC version of Black Hawk Down) is making the jump into the console space this spring with adaptations of its first-person recreation of the 1993 Somalian crisis. And while the Xbox version is largely a streamlined port of the PC original, the PS2 release is built entirely on brand-new technology – though both share the commitment to authenticity and attention to detail that NovaLogic is known for.

The single-player campaigns will no doubt offer their share of thrills, with some seriously tense moments sprinkled throughout the tight FPS gameplay. There is a strong squad element as well, including voice command on both platforms, so BHD won't be straight-up run-and-gun all the time. The PS2 game, built from the ground up specifically for the hardware, features a much-expanded single-player mode. Starting off as an Army grunt, you'll progress into the Rangers and finally Delta Force as the story continues. Likewise, your squadmates will have more sophisticated AI the deeper you are into the game, since you'll obviously be fighting alongside better-trained allies.

However, as with many FPSs, multiplayer is where it's at. For one thing, the online modes of both formats are simply bigger than any other game on their respective platforms. Don't pretend that you don't want to play 50-player Team King of the Hill on Xbox Live with hefty XBL 3.0 support. Or that 32-player matches (likely over GameSpy) on the PS2 don't get your competitive juices flowing. The multiplayer is clearly the big draw of BHD, and it's precisely there that it looks to have a ton of potential. We're talking the whole package here, from tracked stats and rankings to official NovaLogic servers to play on, not to mention voicechat on both systems. If NovaLogic's last title, Joint Operations, is any indication, the company knows how to succeed in the online arena, so our expectations are high. With any luck, you'll have a good alternative next time SOCOM glitchers tick you off or Halo 2 refuses to load Midship again. ■■■

Does this square look like a total deathtrap? It is

■ Jack Slate's favorite way to say hello

■ "Nobody plays fetch with my dog except me!"

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Dead to Rights 2: Hell to Pay

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO **> RELEASE** APRIL 4

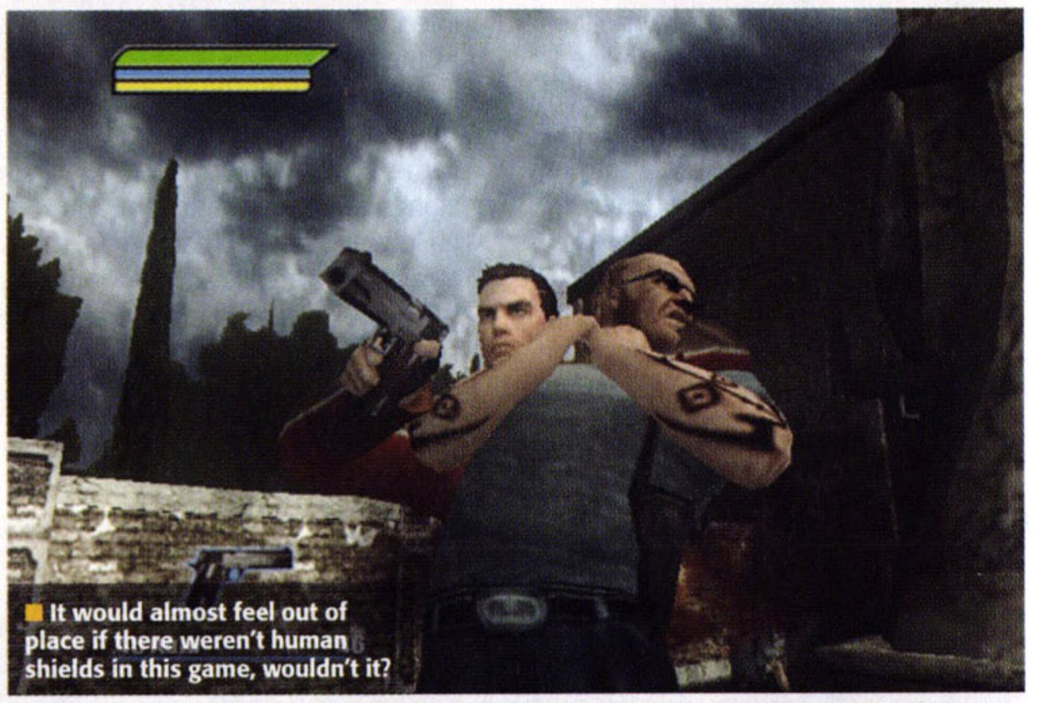
RUN AND GUN FUN ANYONE?

If there were an advertising campaign for over-the-top brutality, Jack Slate would be its poster child. The first game in the Dead to Rights series offered a constant stream of bone jarring shooting and hand-to-hand combat that kept you far too busy piling up bad guy corpses to pay attention to the body count you were leaving behind. For better or worse, the sequel steps in with the same frantic conflict in another tale of the vigilante and his mission to bring about a harsh and indiscriminate justice.

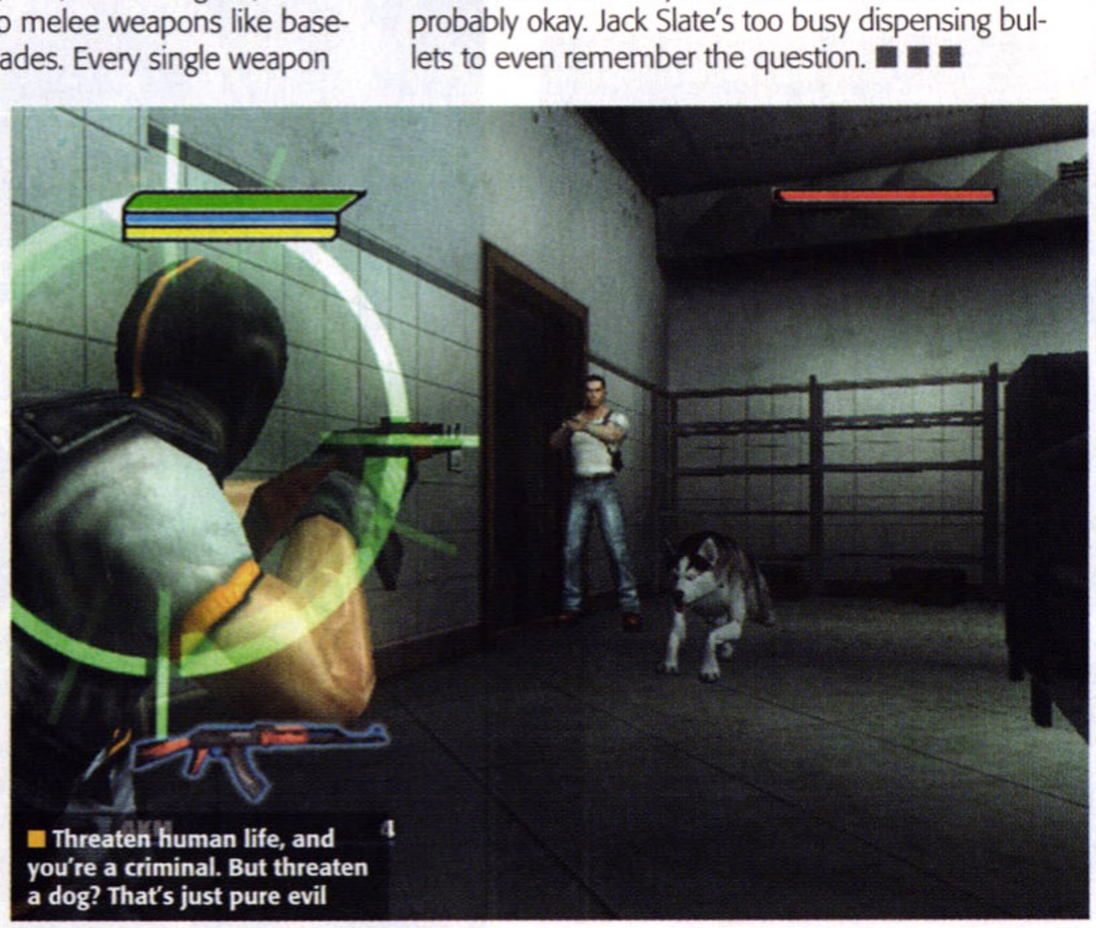
We recently got a chance to play several levels of Slate's newest adventure, which revealed itself to be remarkably similar in execution to its predecessor. You'll wander through the dark and shadier sides of city life as you gun down an endless stream of crime's most judgment-worthy ruffians. A simple button press sends you into a lengthy slow motion dive. Here, a new 360-degree targeting system allows you to take down foes all around you as you spin and fire in the air. During your travels, you'll pick up a steady flow of new weapon types, including pistols, uzis, machine guns, and shotguns, in addition to melee weapons like baseball bats and katana blades. Every single weapon has a special up close and personal disarm technique, whereby you violently wrest the weapon from an opponent before using it to viciously cut them down. Another significant improvement involves environmental interaction, which is now much more streamlined and fluid. If a box lies between you and an enemy, Jack will readily roll over it to move forward, rather than taking those extra crucial seconds to run around it. The effect makes the stages more open and flexible, giving you additional options for how to tackle a room full of murderous criminals. Fans should be happy to see the return of Shadow, your faithful and equally violent dog. Your canine companion is constantly available to tackle nearby foes at the press of a command button, leaving you to pummel the other thugs who have been foolish enough to cross your path.

Several areas find you sans weaponry, forcing you to punch, kick, and grapple one-on-one with your foes. These sections bring in the feel of an old-school brawler with simple repeated melee moves and swarming enemy forces. Even with the switch up between gun and melee attacks, we're a little concerned about the repetitious nature of the combat, which even the shocking violence can't hide from being a little over-simplistic. But for those looking for a steady flow of unadulterated action and brutal vigilante justice, Dead to Rights 2 is set to deliver with the same aplomb that its predecessor did. Violence may not be the answer, but that's probably okay. Jack Slate's too busy dispensing bullets to even remember the question. ■■■

■ Slow motion dives are the clear highlight of the game



■ It would almost feel out of place if there weren't human shields in this game, wouldn't it?



■ Threaten human life, and you're a criminal. But threaten a dog? That's just pure evil

■ Savage disarming techniques - check

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ESRB: TEEN — Blood and Gore, Violence

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GAMECUBE

Geist

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** N-SPACE **> RELEASE** SUMMER

BODY SNATCHER

Have you ever wanted to jump out of your body and into someone else's? We have (especially Jude Law's – he's dreamy!), and thanks to Nintendo's Geist, we'll get that chance. Geist stars John Raimi, a man whose spirit has been ripped from his body by the sinister Volks Corporation. Now a free-roaming ghost, Raimi must venture through the Volks Corporation compound in search of his body, and he'll get all up in a bunch of folks along the way.

Although Geist is an FPS at its core, the ghostly nature endows it with some truly unique features. Raimi can possess all kinds of people, animals, and even inanimate objects; but in order to take over a person, Raimi must embrace his ghostly nature. By taking over objects like lights, fire extinguishers, and security cameras, Raimi can scare people and, once frightened, they can be controlled. There are over a dozen types of people for Raimi to enter, and their abilities are available once possessed. Some people carry weapons, while others can use computers or make it into secure areas of the compound. But humans aren't the only ones that Raimi wants a piece of: Animals offer their own unique benefits. For example, possessing a mouse allows Raimi to fit into the tiniest passages and he can take over a dog if he wants a walk or a belly rub. Awww!

While taking over dogs will have serious benefits, possessing people is the true name of the game. When in control of a human, commands will be displayed onscreen that instruct the player how to take advantage of their arsenal and skills. This portion of the game is played like a typical FPS, and will make up a huge chunk of the quest. Raimi can relinquish his control of a possessed individual if he sees someone else he'd rather get into or if he simply wants to take advantage of the unique properties his immaterial form offers. Playing as a ghost in a shooter is certainly an interesting twist, and any game that allows us to fully control the body of anybody we see is definitely okay with us. ■■■

■ Whether alive or dead, everyone hates ceiling crabs

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG **> PUBLISHER** NIPPON ICHI **> DEVELOPER** GUST **> RELEASE** MAY

ALCHEMY IS THE NEW PINK

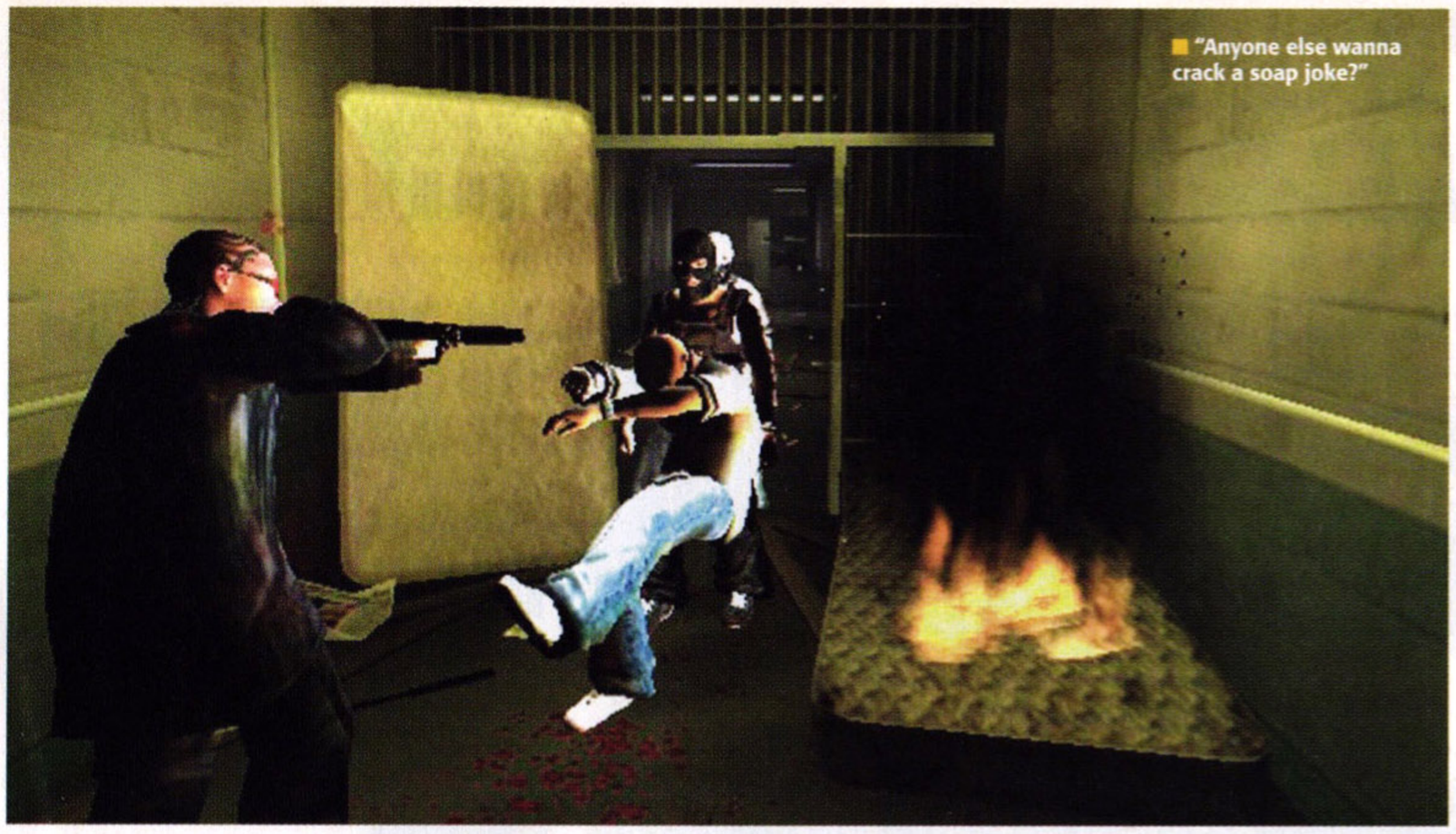
The Atelier series has been going on in Japan for years without crossing the pond, but publisher Nippon Ichi, still riding high on the success of Disgaea, is bringing it Stateside this May. Though Atelier Iris is developed by Gust, it shares many of the qualities we love Nippon Ichi's titles so much for.

Everything we've come to expect out of a strategy/RPG looks to be present in full force in Atelier Iris. We've got the epic storyline with a pair of unlikely teenage heroes trying to save the world. The intricate turn-based battle system lets you switch out characters mid-fight. Your heroes earn skill points at level up to upgrade special attacks…you get the idea. What's interesting above and beyond all of this stuff we've seen a hundred times before, though, is the item customization system.

One of the main characters, Klein, is an alchemist, so the breaking down and reforming of equipment is a major factor in this title. You'll be able to reduce pretty much anything into Elements, which are used by Mana (little demigod mascots) to upgrade an item or create something entirely new. Mana have a level associated with them as well, so you'll have to get them experience in order to gain access to the best recipes. The entire framework is being proudly touted as the most extensive item customization system seen in an RPG, and if Nippon Ichi tells it true, we have no doubt that this is the case.

The hand-drawn sprites and explosive special effects give Atelier Iris a clean, crisp look (or an annoyingly outdated one, depending on your perspective), and the depth of its strategic gameplay looks to be immense. From how this title is shaping up, it should be one of the better ways to satisfy your inner Japanophile when it hits shelves in May. ■■■

■ The game does feature some action elements



"Anyone else wanna crack a soap joke?"

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

25 to Life

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** EIDOS **> DEVELOPER** AVALANCHE SOFTWARE/HIGHWAY 1 PRODUCTIONS **> RELEASE** MARCH

COPS AND ROBBERS

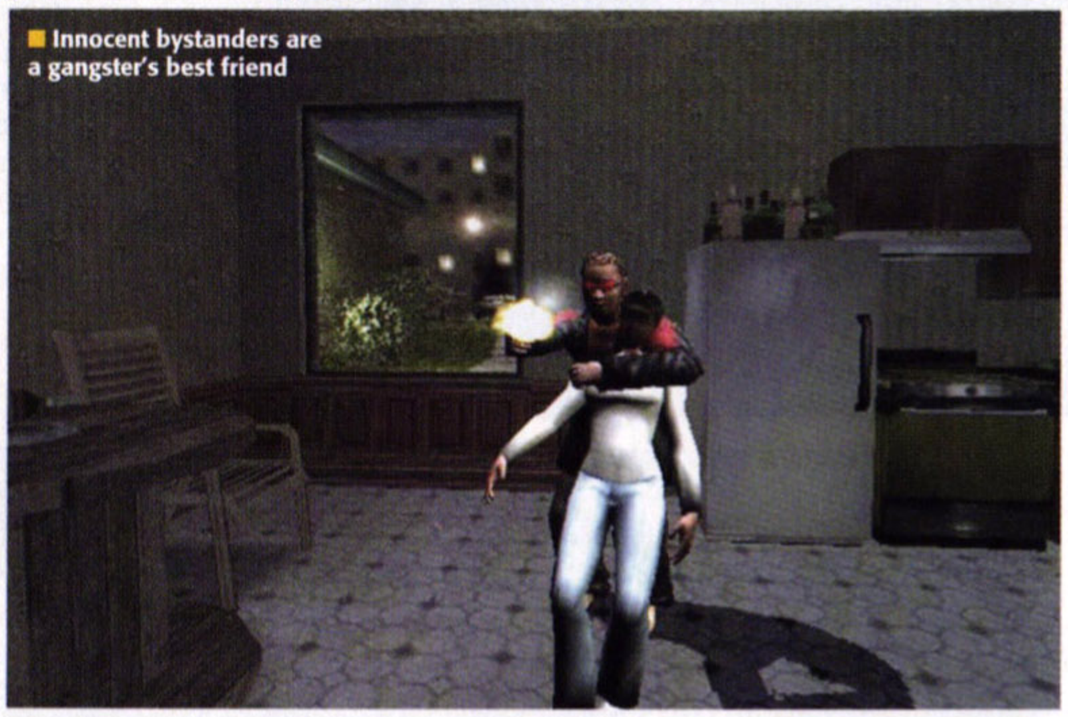
In the wake of video games' and pop culture's convergence, this forthcoming third-person shooter from Eidos aims to bring yet another facet of real life into the digital realm. 25 to Life takes a much grittier tone than is usually seen in the gaming world, and even does it online for up to 16 players at a time.

Single-player in 25 to Life seems to be much more action-focused than other urban-inspired games. Not that shooting people is all that you do; the missions you take on as a gangster trying to survive the harsh city (bank robberies, etc.) all have goals that need fulfilling. Respected hip-hop authority and former *Source* executive editor P. Frank Williams has been brought in by Eidos to ensure authenticity, so this shouldn't be the kind of cliché "urban" nonsense that gluts American pop culture.

Cops and thugs have several differences in 25 to Life. For example, criminals have the option to take human shields and don't have to worry about stray gunfire dropping innocents, while police are more accurate with their firearms because of on-the-job weapons training. In addition, the cops don't have access to the kind of illegal heavy weaponry that gangsters have no compunctions about turning on them. However, they do have non-lethal ways to take down bad guys and body armor to balance things out.

What's more, these distinctions between the two sides carry over to multiplayer, even if you're playing straight-up War (25 to Life's name for deathmatch). They really come into play in the Raid and Robbery modes, which have the cops and gangsters in offensive and defensive roles. Perform well online, and you'll be able to buy custom clothes for your character to make yourself stand out. See somebody in a match wearing the latest threads and expensive kicks, and you know that he's not to be messed with.

With voice chat support and the aforementioned avatar customization, along with the robust mode selection, this could definitely turn out to be a great multiplayer experience. Hopefully the polishing cycle will iron out any issues, and we'll have ourselves another solid online shooter to play this March. ■■■



Innocent bystanders are a gangster's best friend

"No shirt, no service my $@#, suckas"

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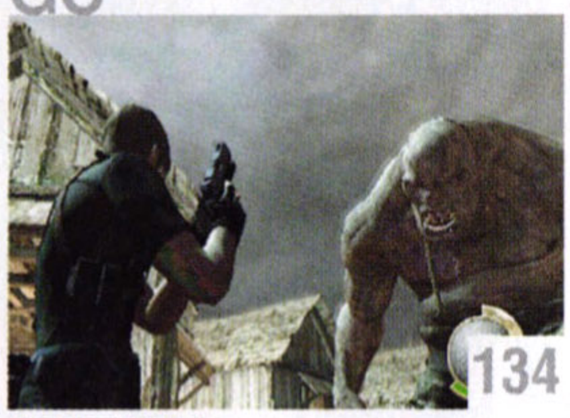

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GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

Resident Evil 4

Action-packed, cinematic, and scary as hell, Resident Evil 4 not only takes the series to new heights, it does away with all the conventions of survival horror and completely reinvents the genre. Capcom took a huge chance by stripping away many of the familiar elements, and their risky maneuver paid off in a huge way. With a completely new approach to fear, gorgeous graphics, interactive cutscenes, and some of the most amazing action sequences ever, Resident Evil 4 has instantly claimed the title of a true must-play game.

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

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.
5	Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
4	Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
1	Dr. No. Like some digital super villain, this game maniacally taunts you with its awfulness before leaving you to die in a tank of cybernetic sharks.

> Concept: What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

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

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

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

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

> Replay Value

High – You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.

Moderately High – Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.

Moderate – Good for a few months or a few times through.

Moderately Low – After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.

Low – You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

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HANDHELD

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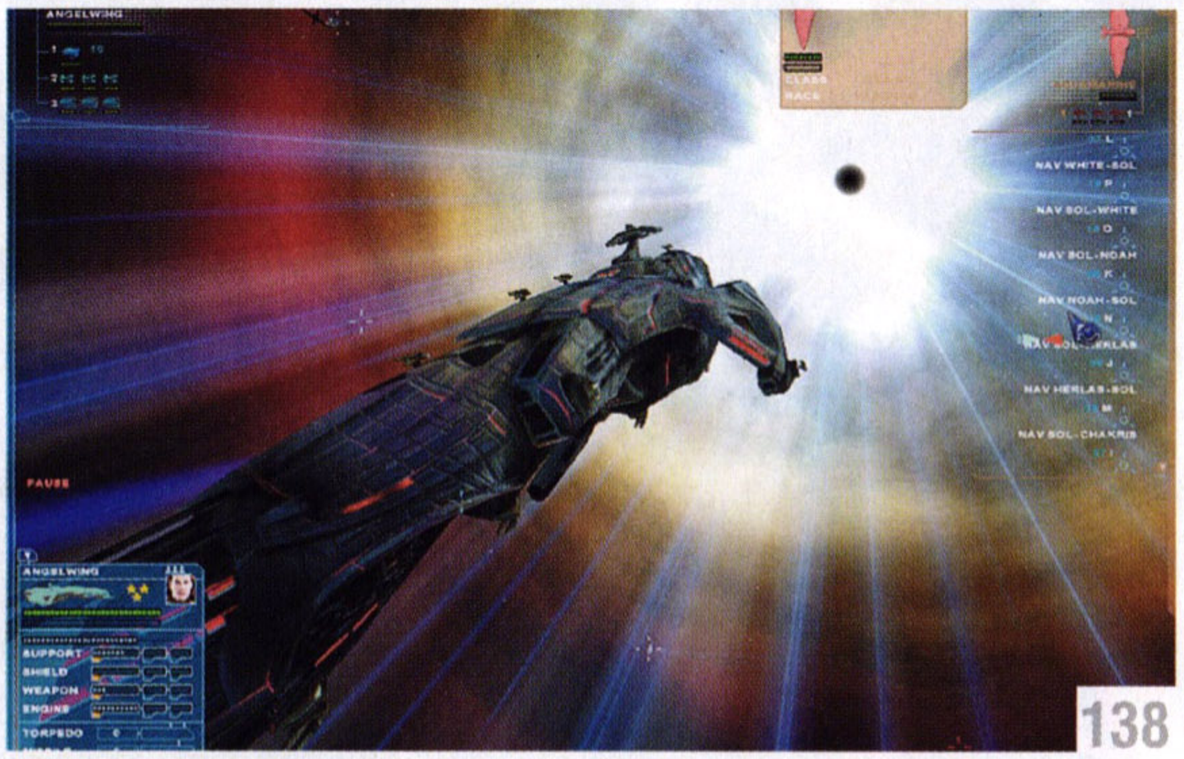
Klonoa 2: Dream Champ Tournament



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GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

Nexus: The Jupiter Incident

True, it's a slow month for PC reviews, but that doesn't mean that Nexus isn't deserving of honors. Bringing tactical space combat to life like never before, telling an interesting story, and making our jaws drop with awe more than once at the beauty displayed on our monitors is no mean feat. If you ever wanted to know what happens to battles when you throw in a true third dimension, Nexus is worth a look – and page 138 is a good place to start.

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pg.128

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

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

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

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

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

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

action – A term we use for games like Devil May Cry and Viewtiful Joe

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

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

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

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

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

CG – Computer-Generated graphics

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

fighting – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat 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 Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GBC – Game Boy Color

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

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

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

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

jerkfacium– The element found in the water supply that makes people act like tools on Xbox Live

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 Xenosaga

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

SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System

sports – A term we use for games like MaddenNFL

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

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

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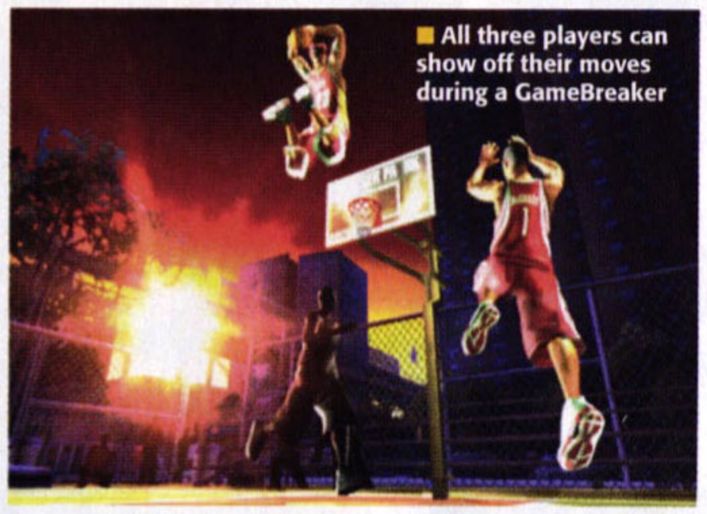
All three players can show off their moves during a GameBreaker

As you build your character into a NBA-caliber star, you'll have the chance to sign the league's finest to your team

Earn cash to build your very own court

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NBA Street V3

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

ACHIEVING SERIOUS HANG TIME

Some franchises just run out of steam. NBA Jam is one of them. It started off strong – redefining video game basketball as we know it – had a phenomenal sophomore year, then plummeted from grace with such momentum that even those who praised the series wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. NBA Street is walking directly in the footsteps of this highly influential game, but it has no intention of hanging its shoes up anytime soon. While sticking to the high-flying, rim-rockin' antics that launched the series to the top of the charts, developer EA Canada has implemented enough exciting new content to make the experience fresh and addictive yet again.

In many ways, EA has gone back to the drawing board to present the game in an entirely new light. Moving away from the mile-high afros, graffiti-riddled courts, and playful caricaturizing of the previous two releases, this series' ankle-breaking jukes and orbital slams are now visualized with the utmost realism. Courts are teeming with animated fans, leaves falling off of trees, and breathtaking lighting effects that produce blinding rays and photorealistic shading. The player models are also impressively detailed with swaying jerseys, the authentication of signature apparel, and facial texturing that is perfected to the very pimple.

For those of you who feel that looks mean about as much as a new hair color for Dennis Rodman, the most significant changes to this year's addition stem from gameplay. Focusing on the most exciting aspect of the game, dunks reign supreme in this iteration. Above and beyond the the assortment of jams that you'll be able to perform throughout the course of the game, players can now customize their slams when activating a GameBreaker. When your character takes flight, tapping the right analog stick in different directions will make your player perform different moves such as windmills, double pumps, and an array of remarkable feats. More impressive yet, you can also toss the ball to an airborne teammate before you land to create a two- or three-man combo that will simply decimate your opponent.

To ensure that players are flying through the air at any given time, EA has also created an insanely deep Dunk Contest mode. Bounce the rock behind your back, leap to grab it, then spin and double pump as you bring the backboard crashing to the ground. Or if you really want to get crazy, drag props such as vending machines and port-a-potties onto the court and soar over them. Unlike the latest entry of NBA Live, this mode is easy to use, has more slams in its arsenal than Spud Webb (who is in the game), and couldn't be much more entertaining.

Regarding the battle for position on the court, EA has removed the trick buttons in favor of mapping deke moves to the right analog stick. Each 45-degree angle performs a different move. Apply the modifier buttons to the equation and you have an expansive arsenal at your fingertips. This new format is much easier to tap into and be successful with. Much like dunking, a combo meter tracks how many dekes you can chain together and creates a higher multiplier for the forthcoming shot or dunk.

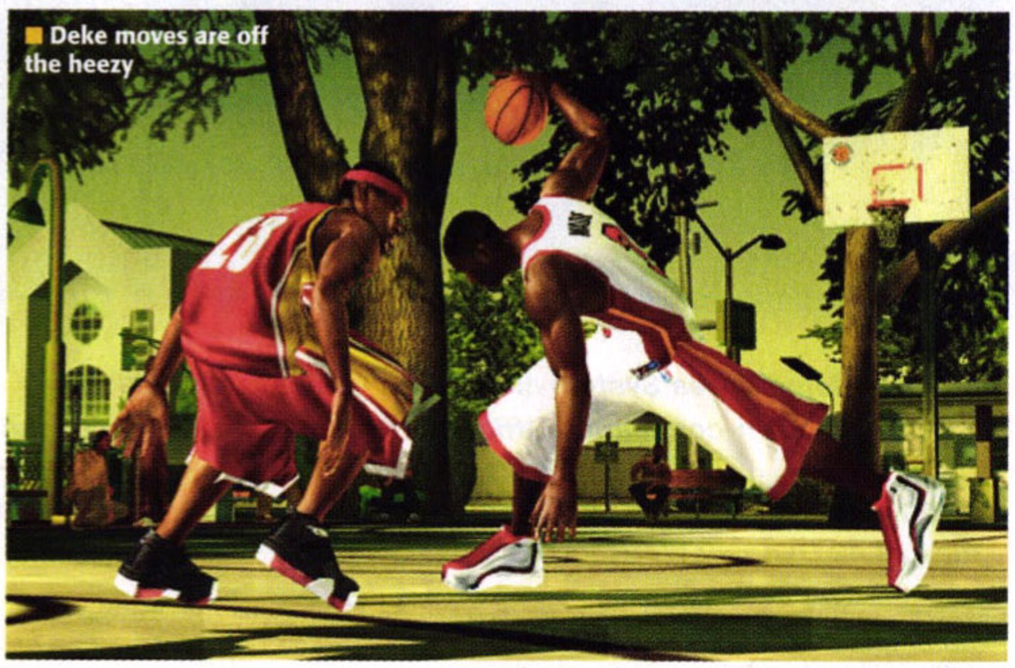
Be a Legend mode has been replaced by the similarly designed and equally amusing Street Challenge. Build a baller from the ground up, create your own shoes, and compete in challenges that range from dunk-only contests to the first to perform a GameBreaker. As you gain reputation, you'll be asked to join an NBA team for league play. You'll also get the chance to build your own court. As nice as it is to have turf to call your own, there's little in the way of customization options.

On occasion, your CPU opponents will make some silly mistakes along the lines of using a GameBreaker to shoot a three-pointer during a dunk-only contest, but the AI is still mighty impressive. Rather than going the way of the dodo like other arcade basketball franchises, Street continues to gain momentum and is more desirable now than it has ever been.—**REINER**

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The GameCube version has an exciting, yet slightly odd perk. Mario, his bumbling brother Luigi, and the easily captured Peach have mad ups and are playable. The Xbox version looks the best, but the PS2 and GC are not far behind.


Deke moves are off the heezy

BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: Slamfest 2005. Killer dunk contests, amazing slams, and more windmills than Holland

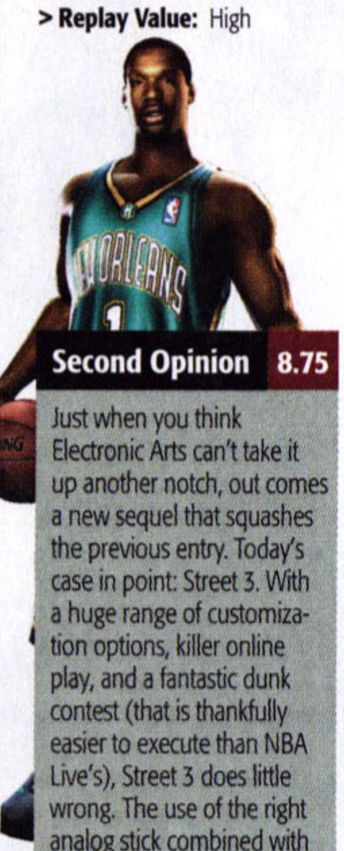
> Graphics: A towering level of realism can be found in the player models, courts, and lighting effects

> Sound: The announcer is quite funny, but he'll drive you nuts after awhile. The soundtrack is a bit slim, but it has a number of catchy tunes on it

> Playability: The controls are like butta. Juking and taking flight almost becomes second nature

> Entertainment: Coming back for thirds is rarely this satisfying

> Replay Value: High



Second Opinion 8.75

Just when you think Electronic Arts can't take it up another notch, out comes a new sequel that squashes the previous entry. Today's case in point: Street 3. With a huge range of customization options, killer online play, and a fantastic dunk contest (that is thankfully easier to execute than NBA Live's), Street 3 does little wrong. The use of the right analog stick combined with the shoulder buttons to execute tricks, jukes, and dunks gives the player more control over what actions take place on the court, which in turn makes the game feel smoother. Even the AI is improved (though still not quite perfect). Between the various editions, I'd personally go with the Xbox's stellar graphics package, but they shine on all three. Heck, you may even have to buy the game twice, since the GC has Mario. I know, shocker…Street Mario…is that one of the signs of the apocalypse?—**ANDY**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Winning Eleven 8

> STYLE 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI
> RELEASE FEBRUARY 1 **> ESRB** E

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE BEST?

This series has collected accolades as the best soccer game out there, and I don't dispute that. As an almost haughty acknowledgement of the near-perfect action on the field, there isn't much that's different for this year's installment. Instead, Konami has turned its attention to solidifying some of the sim aspects of its franchise. It's not a quantum leap, but it's the kind of adjustments that will only endear the faithful to this already beloved series even more.

Gameplay wise, it's very hard to see much that's different from last year. That sounds like laziness on Konami's part, but it already runs as smooth as the bald head of "Kojak" Collina. Positioning is very important in this iteration, as players jostle and interact better when it comes to dribbling and steals. I also like how teams play with different strategies, making you adjust your offense and defense accordingly.

Although Winning Eleven's coup of getting to feature the Italian, Spanish, and Dutch leagues is cool in the face of EA's ownership of the FIFA license, the real allure of this new game is the revamping done to the Master League. Players will now age and retire. Their myriad attribute stats will decline as they get older. Moreover, everyone's skills will fluctuate from match to match, and each player is built based upon one of three attribute curves. Some will find their talents blossom early, while others might be able to be at their peak for most of their career. This close attention paid to the players means you have to be more aware of substitutions, spreading the ball around so everyone gets a touch (thereby keeping their skills up), and taking care of transfers and the Negotiations phase of the Master League. There is also a mid-week training option. However it's pretty boring, though I'd enjoy it if it were more like Madden's training camp.

I doubt that the new additions to this Winning Eleven are going to convince anyone who hasn't already taken the plunge to buy this game (nor is the conspicuous lack of online), but its small steps forward are more than baby steps to the many fans it has around the world.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> Concept: The franchise bolsters itself behind the scenes to its continued betterment

> Graphics: It looks crisp as always, and all your favorite players are recognizable

> Sound: If the commentary has changed any, I certainly haven't noticed

> Playability: As always, the franchise gives you the freedom to attack the goal in many ways

> Entertainment: Master League improvements make the game stronger, but on the field it's basically the same

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.75

One word comes to mind with the new Winning Eleven – definitive. This is the quintessential adaptation of the world's biggest game. Boasting an exhaustive set of controls that gives you unprecedented control over the actions of your players, it's hard to fault anything but the learning curve in the gameplay department. There could still be a few improvements in the graphics, selection of announcer sound bites, and variety of music, even if those elements on the whole are quite excellent. If you like to watch soccer, by all means go play the gorgeous fields of FIFA's popular franchise. But to play a real game of football, the better choice by far is Winning Eleven.—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Fight Night: Round 2

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS **> PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS **> DEVELOPER** EA CHICAGO **> RELEASE** MARCH 1 **> ESRB** T

THE CHAMP IS HERE

As much as certain events have made gamers a little bitter at EA's business tactics, Fight Night: Round 2 does illustrate what the company is very good at: taking a good thing and making it even better.

It's obvious that the developers, while continuing to fine-tune the all-analog gameplay, have placed a focus on creating a more compelling career mode. Largely, they've been very successful. The new create-a-boxer is very comprehensive, allowing you to morph almost every aspect of your pugilist's appearance on the fly. A new type of match mode, available as a standalone option called Hard Hit Mode, makes an appearance on your schedule as special events. In these events, a round doesn't end until someone is knocked down, lending a more brutal, over-the-top feel to the contest. Thankfully, these are optional and, while they can unlock new items in the store, they don't usually count against your ranking. For hardcore fans, you'll be pleased to note that you can now change weight classes mid-career as you age and that each pro's career is made so you're fighting era-appropriate foes.

On the gameplay side, the most important new aspect is the Haymakers – powerful blows that allow you to pre-load a punch for extra impact. Of course, using them is risky, but their power makes them an important tool in winning the belt. Although the initial matches are a bit easier than in last year's, the difficulty stiffened once my rank climbed to the mid-30s. The AI seems a bit sawier, and opponents will grapple when you've got them nearly knocked out to buy for time. I find it a little strange that rival boxers have an almost Jason Vorhees-like ability to rise from the mat, sometimes recovering from as many as four knockdowns in two rounds, but that's a minor quibble.

Another nice addition is the "woozy" camera angles that appear when you or an opponent is nearly knocked down. It's a small touch, but a very dramatic one, just one more of the many little things that EA did right in making Fight Night: Round 2. The sum of these is a game that might just be the best boxing video game to date.—**MATT**

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

There isn't a clear edge to be handed out for Fight Night: Round 2, if only because you have some radically different choices to make. Obviously, Xbox has a (slight) edge in the graphics department. Once again, the PlayStation 2 and Xbox versions both offer up nice online modes that run smoothly. The "wild card" is the Nintendo version, which has no online, but rather a port of the revered Super Punch-Out, which is a true classic of old-school arcade and console boxing. It all comes down to what you want – but kudos to Nintendo for including a genuinely exciting extra to make up for the lack of Internet play.

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> Concept: After revolutionizing the genre, EA makes an effort to give boxing fans a more well-rounded experience

> Graphics: Improves on last year's already great visuals – the facial injuries and sweat are eerily real

> Sound: Great selection of rough n' ready rap, including the reunited Geto Boys (Yay!)

> Playability: If anything, the all-analog control is even more fluid this time around

> Entertainment: A better career mode and more depth make for a better overall game

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 9

With my right and left hands (one is "Sorrow," the other "Pity") I have brutalized flesh and shortened the lives of men. This is my career. This is Fight Night Round 2. Footwork, punches, and your defense are now all seamlessly integrated into an irresistibly fluid dance of timely parries and devastating counter-blows. It looks so real you can feel your brain slapping against the inside of your skull. Also more lifelike is the career mode, in which your fighter will actually age, necessitating training and the best equipment. But, nothing makes you feel quite as alive as being in the ring, where sweat and bloody spray are the champagne of victory. Absolutely glorious.—**KATO**

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BRAVE DANGEROUS WATERS:
ROCKED BY HUGE BREAKERS, YOU MUST STEADY YOUR NERVES – AND AIM – TO EVADE A WATERY GRAVE.

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

PlayStation 2

XBOX

DARKWORKS

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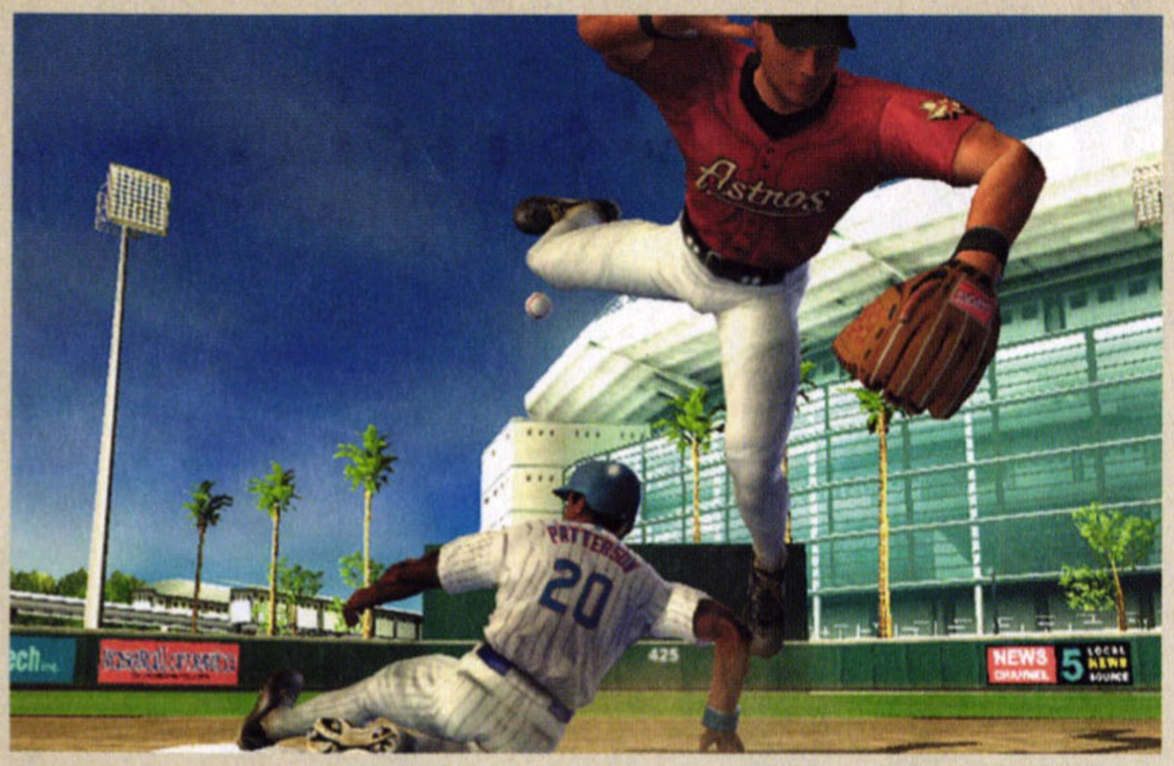

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MVP Baseball 2005

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> DEVELOPER EA CANADA **> RELEASE** MARCH 1 **> ESRB** E

HITTING A COMFORTABLE STRIDE

After working your way through all of the new content in this year's Major League Baseball, you can't help but eye MVP like you would an old pair of cleats. The new material that EA has implemented is minimal at best, and most of the additions don't generate a lot of excitement. With that said, this is still the best-playing baseball game on the market. It may feel old hat, but it handles the fundamentals and nuances of the game much better than Major League. You really get the distinct feeling that the team spent a lot of time polishing the game to attain the highest level of authenticity possible.

Fielding is tighter than last year, allowing players to really get a good feel for each position on the diamond. The implementation of a perfect marker on the pitching meter makes it more difficult to paint the corners, so you shouldn't throw as many no-hitters as you did last year. Batters can also read pitchers thanks to the new Hitter's Eye feature, which briefly color-coats the ball as it is thrown to tell you what you are swinging at. This looks a bit goofy in my opinion, but since you can't read the spin on the laces like players do, it's a nice solution.

Most of the changes are found in the frontend. As in the Madden games, players can now run the finances of their team and build their own stadium. I really got a kick out of this new feature. Enticing people to come to games by selecting free gifts for fan appreciation days is a lot of fun, and actually having to build a winning team that brings in enough funds to upgrade the stadium facilities makes sense. It's very gratifying to watch your stadium grow from a rinky dink park to a colossal sporting venue. The only drawback is that unlike football's quick 16-game season, you'll need to play or sim through hundreds, maybe thousands of games to get your team where you want it. Going even further with the minor leagues, players can now play and manage rosters for their club's A-ball team. Franchise options don't get much deeper than this.

EA has also included addictive minigames for both batting and pitching. Like Tetris, you can't seem to put the controller down once you start playing. Thankfully, you'll receive points for performing well in these games that can be used to purchase legendary players (new Hall of Famers like Carlton Fisk are included), classic stadiums (Bloomington, anyone?), and tons of throwback jerseys.

This game is put together incredibly well, but fans who vested hundreds of hours in last year's iteration will likely be let down by the familiarity on the field. Conversely, if you are just looking for a solid gameplay package, MVP is still the game to beat.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: A highly polished, yet only slightly changed follow-up to last year's release

> Graphics: Virtually identical to last year. The detail of the created stadiums is exceptional, however

> Sound: The commentary team doesn't even come close to delivering on the same level of Major League's dynamic duo. The soundtrack is better than last year, however

> Playability: Pitching is a bit more difficult this time around (as it should be), fielding is easier to get a grasp on, and batters can now read pitches

> Entertainment: Owner mode offers an unprecedented level of depth, and the gameplay is still in a league of its own

> Replay Value: Moderate

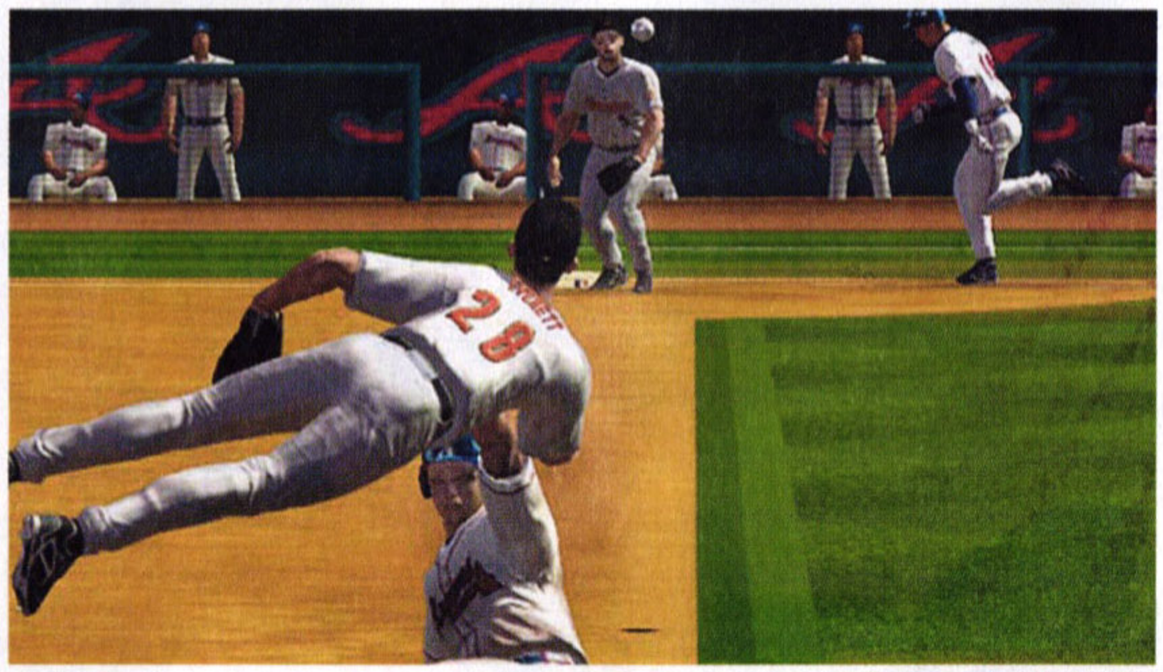
Second Opinion 8.5

With a methodical, Yankees-like approach, MVP continues to build its dynasty brick by brick. However, 2005's gameplay remains largely unchanged. It seems that additions like Hitter's Eye were only introduced to make things easier for people – so I suggest you turn this unexciting feature off. Owner's mode gives you some stadium options to play with, but the Spring Training minigames were what I was most excited about. It's just too bad that there isn't more to scouting in the off-season. If you're still slogging through a 162-game season from last year, I could see you not getting this title and being fine with that. It's still the best, but it hasn't gotten much better in the meantime.—**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Major League Baseball 2K5

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE (VISUAL CONCEPTS) **> DEVELOPER** KUSH GAMES **> RELEASE** MARCH 1 **> ESRB** E



EVERYTHING BUT THE GOLDEN GLOVE

After another heart-breaking season, Visual Concepts gave struggling developer Blue Shift the Steinbrenner surprise (a swift kick of the boot and phone numbers to a handful of scouts in Japan). Rather than playing the free agent game, Visual Concepts turned to its own bankroll to fill this starting role. Making like Bo Jackson, Kush Games, which has proven to be skilled in both professional hockey and college basketball, is stepping onto the diamond and adding a third sport to its impressive resumé.

Fitting right in like it had been releasing baseball games for years, Kush knew exactly what players would want. The company's approach to pitching is reminiscent of a Charlie Hough knuckleball. It's wildly inventive and loaded with twists and turns that you wouldn't expect. Through brilliantly conceived timing-based and pressure-sensitive meters, player skills are put to the test with each and every pitch. In other words, it's the perfect solution to the mechanics in MVP.

Interestingly, there's more to batting than just taking a cut. Honing in on the mind game that occurs between the pitcher and batter, you can guess where the hurler may throw the ball. I absolutely adore this element. Guess correctly and you'll get the chance to jack it out of the park. To much surprise, Major League Baseball captures the war between the batter and pitcher even better than MVP's excellent approach.

Kush has also made base running an integral part of the game. No longer limited to a tiny picture-in-picture display, players can now transition from the batter's box to the runner on base. As you take your lead, you can tell the batter to swing away, bunt, or be conservative. Another nice touch is how you have to jam on the button to make your player run faster.

Fielding is the area where this game isn't playing at an all-star level. From clunky R-stick moves to strange transition animations, it feels like you have Jose Canseco playing every position for you. This area definitely needs some work.

In the front office, GM Career does a good job of tracking the day to day business. Fictional minor league teams are now included for AA and AAA levels, but you won't have any control over them as the CPU plays the games and manages the rosters for you.

Without question, Kush did a phenomenal job in its first year on the mound. Questionable fielding holds it back from capturing the Golden Glove. MVP still holds this honor, but Major League's innovative techniques make it this year's most exciting baseball game.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: A complete turnaround for the series that showcases a handful of innovative features

> Graphics: Little details like shadows creeping across the field as the game progresses are in great abundance

> Sound: John Miller and Joe Morgan should get an Emmy for their remarkable commentary

> Playability: Ripe with innovative techniques, but the fielding needs serious help

> Entertainment: Online leagues, tons of unlockables, and the most realistic pitching/batting battle to date

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 7.75

Even though this game incorporates some of the key components from last year's hit EA series, MVP, it hasn't entirely caught up to the rival franchise. The new pitching is hot, and I really liked having control over all aspects of base running. However the game's defense still lags behind with its less than smooth execution of R-stick moves, AI, and animations. I'm also not impressed by the Slam Zone hitting, and batter's seeming inability to make contact with balls outside of the strike zone. Improved but not outstanding. —**KATO**

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The PS2 version doesn't have the impressive lighting found in the Xbox version. Loading is also a bit longer. The Xbox version also allows players to replay any moment from the game at any point. You can also do this on the PS2, but you'll need the hard drive. All told, the Xbox version is a hair better.

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■ For HDTV buffs, GT4 does what some thought was impossible on PS2 – it runs flawlessly in 1080i

PLAYSTATION 2

Gran Turismo 4

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA LAN) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> DEVELOPER POLYPHONY DIGITAL **> RELEASE** MARCH 14 **> ESRB** E

PUT THE RUBBER TO THE ROAD

Here's the simplest, most accurate statement ever made: In Gran Turismo 4, you race cars. That's it – find cars, buy cars, try out cars, and drive them around predetermined tracks. In the real world, people gladly hemorrhage money to buy a new car or race on a famous course. Why would we, stranger still, even want to do the same things in a virtual, digital world? The answer to both is the same: People love their cars.

Polyphony's opus, Gran Turismo 4, is nothing more than a beautifully composed love letter to the automobile. Take that as you will, because for car dorks like myself, it means that GT 4 is one of the most addictive and rewarding time sucks in recent memory. The car list, to understate radically, is immense. Sure, there are a handful of rides that any one of us could name that aren't included, but to be nitpicky is to miss the greater point of this collection. That is, there is more variety in every possible descriptor of the word "automobile" here than one person can reasonably hope to experience in months of rabid playtime. For that, I'm immensely thankful.

"...a fabulously executed game that remains a consistent joy to play for many, many moons."

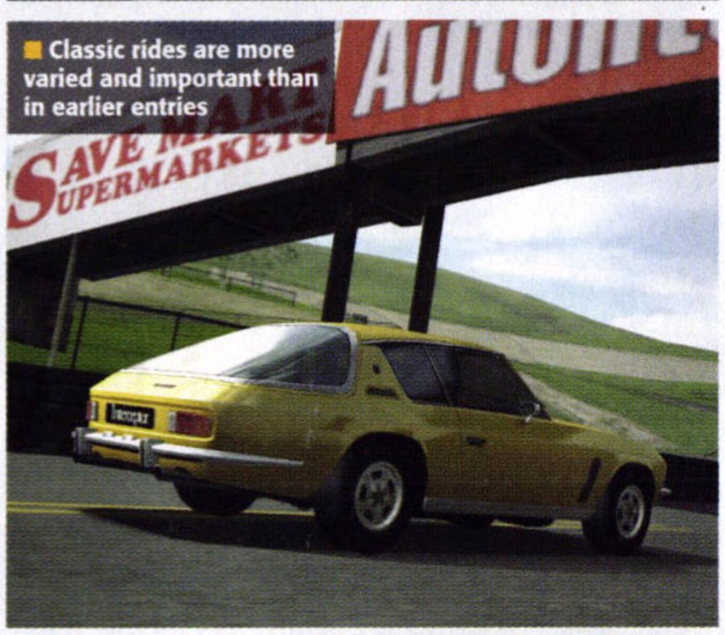
And yet, when considering my score, I didn't come up with a perfect 10. What could sully the simulation goodness that this long-awaited title dishes out liberally? I don't mean this with any negative connotation – GT 4 is a highly polished and nicely expanded version of GT 3. Building off of such legendary source material is certainly a good idea, and a lucky opportunity, for any game. Still, it means that GT 4 doesn't get any bonus points for innovation.

The new B-Spec and Photo modes are interesting ideas. Although in practice, these are such minor additions from a reward and gameplay-time point of view that, in the face of literally hundreds of hours of play, most will only venture to these features in times of idle curiosity. And then they'll leave them. B-Spec has players essentially coaching their on-track driver through a race, dictating things like level of aggression and when to make pit stops. Photo Mode sure is pretty, but the shots can only be printed on a Picturemate Epson printer, and even without this limitation, the idea is just sort of gimmicky and not really part of "the game."

In the standard circuit, the improvements (besides the car list) are universally welcome and ably done. Opponent AI is tweaked to both be more realistic and match the relative skill level of the player. The intermediate section of the game is balanced much better than the previous title – you'll have plenty of cash and some nice, new, and fast options for earning a quick buck for upgrades.

The moral of the story here, kids, is that Gran Turismo 4 is a fabulously executed game that remains a consistent joy to play for many, many moons. But it lacks innovation and, in the time since GT 3 came out four years ago, there are certain things that we expect from racing games that aren't here. Gran Turismo needs to innovate, but not compromise its core ideals, to make racing perfection.—**LISA**

■ The variety of races is nice, but the real switch-ups happen when you take vastly different cars onto the same track



■ Classic rides are more varied and important than in earlier entries

■ Rally races are just plain fun

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> Concept: Primp and polish the nearly-perfect GT 3 with few major alterations

> Graphics: Enough to make God weep at the beauty of humanity's creative ability – these cars look shiny and sexy to a degree that we've never seen

> Sound: Visual cues are augmented greatly by sound design that highlights the differences in rides, as well as critical information in races

> Playability: An easier progression in the early levels is really nice and makes the game more accessible with less backtracking

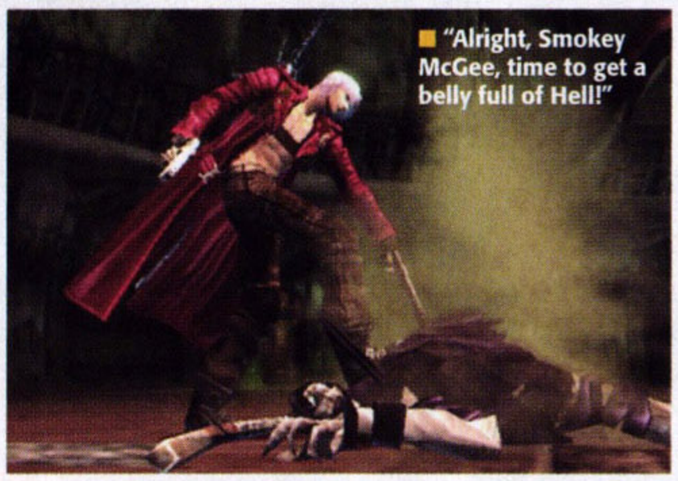
> Entertainment: Unquestionably the most accurate racing game ever, car dorks should swoon on sight

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.5

GT 4 is the best sim-racer out there, but it's afraid to expand its horizons. It looks better and there are more cars, but I wanted it to do more than meet my minimum expectations. The progression curve is easier, but I found B-Spec mode and the photo taker useless. The new bad-driving penalties are contrived and only apply to rally races. The perfect symbol for the impotence of the new features is the A- and B-Spec points. They don't buy anything! What's fun about GT 4? It makes you fall in love with cars because you start to become more and more interested in what all those numbers on the spec sheet mean as you race them. GT 4's got its core racing down. Now Polyphony Digital needs to start innovating, not simply re-making the same game every four years.—**KATO**

The gauntlets make a smashing return


"Alright, Smokey McGee, time to get a belly full of Hell!"

PLAYSTATION 2

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 1 **> RELEASE** MARCH 1 **> ESRB** M

THIS PARTY'S GETTING CRAZY!

The good news is that we no longer have to worry about the Devil May Cry franchise falling into generic action game obscurity; Devil May Cry 3 rises from the ashes of the series' sophomore slump with a vengeance that cannot be ignored. The bad news is that it seems pretty angry. Offering improvements that add a brand new dimension to the combo-driven demon meat carving, this title takes the concept of a hardcore action experience and contorts it into a humiliating position before administering a handgun enema.

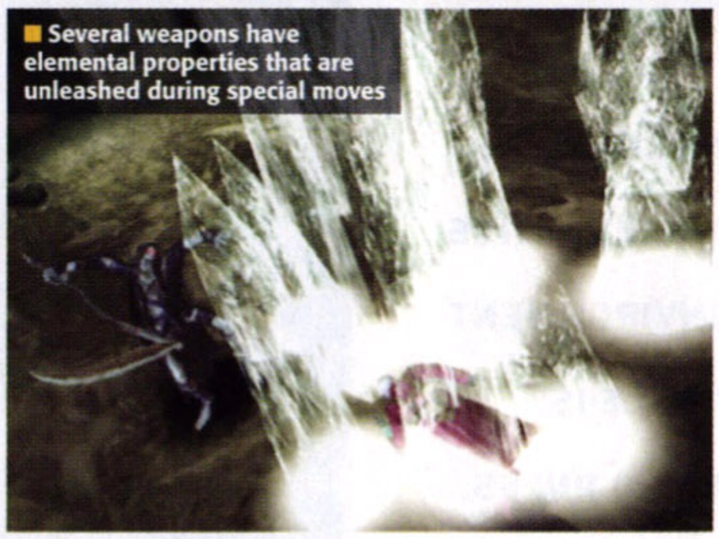
Devil May Cry 3 is, without a doubt, the most difficult game I have played this generation. Yes, it's even harder than Ninja Gaiden (pre Hurricane pack). However, it lacks the same strategic finesse of Tecmo's infamous title, often requiring you to earn your victories through pure blood and sweat rather than art and precision – it's the working man's ruthlessly challenging game. Some victories are just made sweeter by working hard to earn them, and the game allows you to replay previous missions to collect orbs and style points to make sure those triumphs are within reach. The sense of accomplishment you get when you master your skills and beat one of the insane bosses into submission makes all the toil worthwhile. That is, if you consider performing outstanding feats of supernatural combat "toil."

Of all the new tools at Dante's disposal, the ability to switch armaments at the press of a button does the most to add new depth to the battles. Given the versatility of each weapon, I was frequently impressed by my own overwhelming awesomeness as I effortlessly switched swords mid-air and seamlessly kept the combo going with a barrage of new attacks. The game masterfully blends form and function to create situations that look incredibly stylish and complex while keeping players intently focused on the frantic action at hand.

In an utterly unexpected turn of events, even the story commands the player's attention. With cutscenes before and after each mission, Dante's purpose and intentions are much clearer and the sequences provide the perfect venue for him to showcase his unique talents. The only gripe I have in this department is Dante's recent attitude adjustment; his one-liners and party dude demeanor were so clearly brewed in the early '90s that I expected Bebop and Rocksteady to show up for a boss fight.

The game has its fair share of problems: the difficulty is an obvious hurdle, your demon form isn't available until you've completed the seventh of 20 missions, and the camera remains a consistent problem (though it is thankfully better than in DMC 2). Even though Devil May Cry 3 hasn't entirely renewed that indefinable spark of the first game, it is still relentlessly entertaining, and has certainly established DMC as an enduring and dynamic franchise as opposed to a one-trick demon-pony.—**JOE**

Hot, sweaty, shirtless pole-dancing of destruction


Several weapons have elemental properties that are unleashed during special moves

Doing It With Style!

As you first start the game, it may appear that your choice among four initial fighting styles only impacts the special "style move" at your disposal. However, as you proceed to gain new weapons and abilities, the secrets of each technique slowly reveal themselves. Depending on your equipment, entirely new combo possibilities open up, giving you more ways to indulge in your preferred mode of combat. For instance, each melee weapon has a unique array of abilities only available in the Swordmaster style, and the firearms only reach their full potential using the Gunslinger style. The additional two styles unlocked later, Doppelganger (which creates a duplicate Dante) and Quicksilver (similar to the Bangle of Time effect from DMC 1) both draw on your Devil Trigger gauge, but further expand your capacity to unleash hellish combos.

BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: Dante is back, and he wants to kick your ass for badmouthing his last game

> Graphics: The looming gothic environments return, setting the stage perfectly for the outstanding, over-the-top cutscenes

> Sound: An ideal combination of rockin' metal and eerie choral compositions

> Playability: Even the coolest looking combo can be pulled off with ease, but the game has a prohibitive learning curve

> Entertainment: Always stylish and satisfying, though it is sometimes an unbalanced mix of frustration and fun

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 9

Gluttons for punishment, rejoice! The ass-kicking of a lifetime has just arrived! Devil May Cry 3 beat me senseless, poured salt on my wounds, and told me to go home and cry to my mommy. As my blistered fingers and frazzled hair are testament to, there hasn't been a game quite as arduous as this in a long, long time. Some people may view the unrelenting difficulty as a major turn off, but I tip my hat to the developer for not bowing down to the masses. You have to master the arts and prove that your skills are truly worthy to reap its benefits. The implementation of different fighting styles, ability to switch weapons on the fly, and multitude of new weapons really opens up the options that players have at their fingertips. It's combo heaven. Level designs are very reminiscent of the first chapter in the series, boss fights are larger than life, and the story breaks are just flat out cool. This is the sequel that you have been waiting for, but only the greatest of gamers will truly embrace it.—**REINER**

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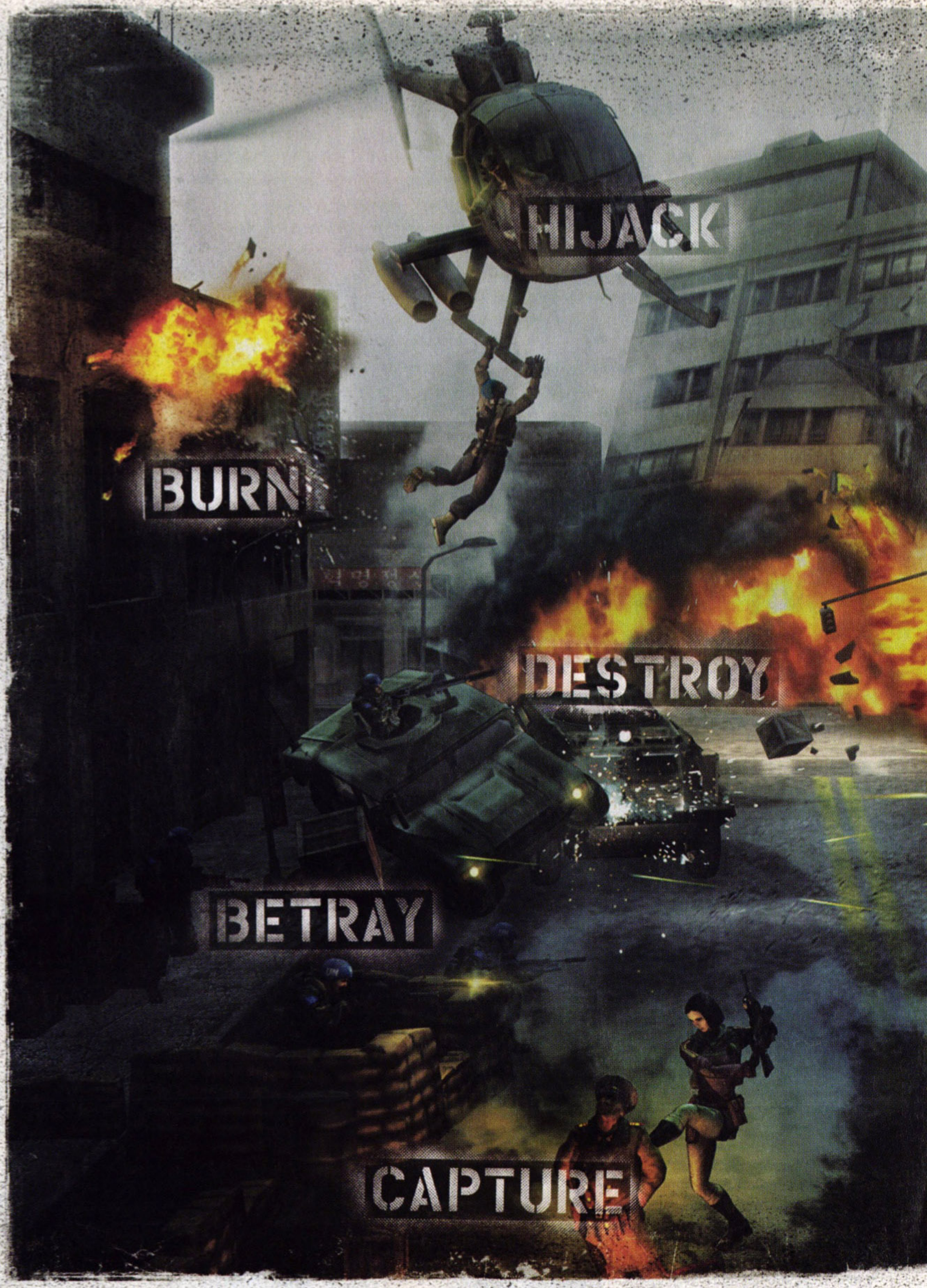

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XBOX

PANDEMIC

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■ The Giant Growth spell is appropriately hilarious

■ They're not robots! They're golems, duh

PLAYSTATION 2

Champions: Return to Arms

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT **> DEVELOPER** SNOWBLIND STUDIOS **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 7 **> ESRB** T

RETUNED BUT NOT RETOOLED

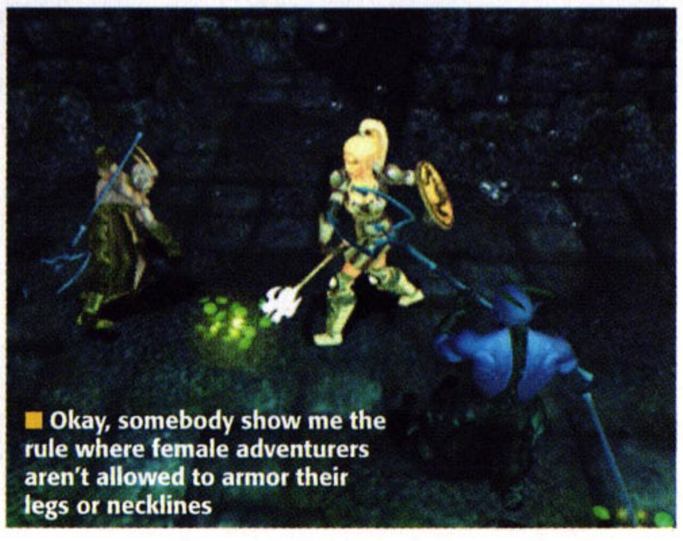
If you're not familiar with Snowblind Studios' delightful game engine (first seen in Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance), you are missing out. It has received much critical acclaim, and for good reason – this core technology has made some of the best action/RPGs of the last several years. While other developers have licensed this engine for use in their own games, Snowblind has taken them all to school on how to squeeze the most juice out of it. Return to Arms is a visually stunning game in every way, and a lot of my issues with the first Champions of Norrath have been addressed. It's a pity that there isn't really anything in RtA that moves the genre forward or breaks from convention in any way.

■ "Back off, fanboy, I am *not* a furry!"

All of the standard action/RPG elements are present and accounted for, and for the most part are done with a level of polish and flair rarely seen. Leveling up each character can be done in a nigh-infinite number of ways, since each one has a multitude of skills to develop or ignore at your choice. Bosses drop fatty loot to collect and power up your avatar with, and completing challenges (which become unlocked after finishing a stage) unlocks new online maps as well as hooking you up with bonus stat and skill points. These challenge rounds are easily the most interesting new element of RtA, with nonstandard objectives or restrictions that make you use your gaming skills or solve puzzles to emerge triumphant.

Every single change from the original Champions of Norrath is a positive one, as far as I can tell. The removal of random maps sounds like a bummer, but the result is that each level is designed much more tightly and flows better than before. Skills have been rebalanced and seem to be a bit more even, and the two new classes offer unique and fun styles of play. And, as has been mentioned, the latest revision of the Snowblind engine is amazing. Textures give a startling illusion of depth to surfaces, lighting changes give each area a different feel, and the excellent particle effects really bring the flashy spell animations to life. Plus, even though I've been seeing it for the last few years, I still have to stop and marvel at the water this engine can render out.

■ Animations and effects are top-notch



■ Okay, somebody show me the rule where female adventurers aren't allowed to armor their legs or necklines

The icing on this cake of fantasy hack n' slash goodness is the amount of content available. Between the four difficulty modes (which are designed like Diablo II's, where you can start the next mode with your powered-up hero after clearing the one before), co-op and competitive online multiplayer, and the seven playable classes, there is an awful lot of game here to adventure through. Whether or not you'll be sick of cleaving orc heads before you finish it is another matter entirely, but rest assured that this is no weaksauce 10-hour quest with little replay value.

All of this high-heaped praise begs the question of why isn't RtA the must-have fantasy epic of 2005. The answer to that is simple: Though everything is very well-done, it's difficult to shake the feeling that I've been playing this same game since Diablo came out on PC in 1997. The core concept of bashing skulls and gaining levels and loot is still strong as can be, and I had a lot of fun with RtA, but the foreshadowings of a Dynasty Warriors-like rut are clearly visible. It's rare to see a sequel that does this little to shake up the gameplay formula of the original, but with that being said, anyone who enjoyed the first Champions title or either of the Dark Alliance games will find a lot to love here.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: Tighten up, refine, and expand everything that you know about console dungeon crawlers

> Graphics: Nobody can rock the Snowblind engine like Snowblind – gorgeous visuals abound

> Sound: Easily the low point. The only thing worth noting is the delightful thumping noise maces make as they bash heads

> Playability: The new evade move makes all the difference in nasty boss fights

> Entertainment: What's not to like about crushing waves of enemies and leveling up to god-like status?

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

I can't help it. I just love experience grinders. Throw in co-op play, some solid graphics, online play for extra value, and, quite frankly, I'm sold. I loved every moment I put into this game. That's not to say it doesn't have its share of problems. First of all, the story is pretty much non-existent. Be good or be evil, fight through some planes of power…blah, blah, blah… get me to my next cool weapon or skill. That's about all I care about. And to this end, Return to Arms delivers. The boss battles are epic, the game is longer than most, and it's certainly worth multiple play-throughs just to try out the other classes. It's not gnome rocket science, but it sure is fun.—**ANDY**

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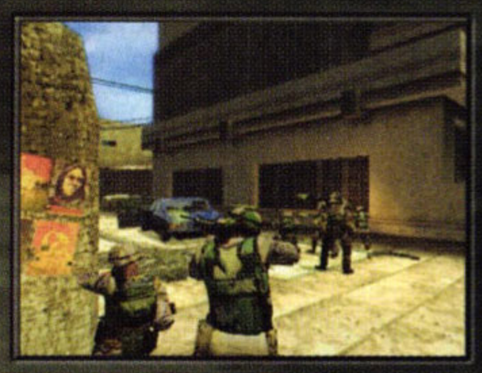

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PLAYSTATION 2

Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** MONOLITH SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 15
> ESRB T

XENOSADNESS

Imagine if Peter Jackson, instead of continuing his *The Lord of the Rings* epic in movie form, had decided to tell the story of *The Two Towers* through limited edition Bazooka Joe comics. The characters would all be there and the concepts behind the story would still be intriguing, but the delivery and execution would be devoid of grace or subtlety. If you're having trouble picturing that, just pick up a copy of Xenosaga Episode II and you will understand all too well. Despite my undying adoration of the first entry, I am sorry to report that this game is a dropped ball of Devil May Cry 2 proportions.

Let's get one thing straight: This is not a bad RPG. It is, however, utterly disappointing in its mediocrity. Even ignoring the radiance of its predecessor, this game features some baffling design choices that seem specifically intended to make it frustrating. It contains a meager 25-hour critical path (one of the dungeons is even repeated!), jarring load times before each fight, and an absence of money or shops that leaves you with a constant shortage of necessary recovery items. I'm not against titles breaking from conventions, but these are some of the worst decisions outside of Charles Grodin's resume.

Unfortunately, the area where Episode II has received the greatest attention is also where it falters the most. It sports a redesigned battle system that focuses much more on combined efforts rather than individual abilities. By stocking extra attacks and using the shared Boost gauge, the party can cooperatively unleash devastating combos. First you attack a sequence of zones on an enemy (which breaks its defense), then boost other characters into the action queue so they can take advantage of the weakened foe. Unfortunately, this method quickly becomes the only viable way to inflict damage on any enemy; whether it's a simple encounter or key boss fight, every battle is a pathetic routine of eating attacks as you build up your various gauges in preparation for the big assault.

My favorite thing about the first Xenosaga was the way it systematically gave the finger to anyone who didn't devote themselves, body and soul, to taking in the whole experience. "Oh, you don't want to watch the plot or figure out the skill system?" the game seemed to say, "Well toughen up, buttercup. It's a long ride." On the other hand, Episode II appears to be aimed squarely at the milquetoasts who couldn't handle the previous iteration, coddling and cooing "Do you want a lolly, sweetheart?" Where the series' balance (or imbalance) between story and action was once the subject of criticism, the frequency of amazing cutscenes is now all that redeems Episode II.—**JOE**

"This game is a dropped ball of Devil May Cry 2 proportions."

Identity Crisis

Though the new battle system is more dynamic than the last one, it has a major drawback in terms of getting a feel for the characters. In Episode I, the fights provided a chance for the characters to showcase their personalities through unique skills and actions in battle. In Episode II, all sense of individuality is washed away. In fact, players no longer have the ability to upgrade and adjust a character's techs, meaning that attacks you have at the beginning of the game are the ones you'll be using right up until the end. Customization instead comes in the form of a huge communal pool of skills, where you can spend points to teach characters healing spells and ether attacks. Any character can learn any skill, however, which means that apart from some latent ability scores and attack properties (like fire, piercing, and slash), everyone is virtually interchangeable on the battlefield. Prepare to forget why KOS-MOS kicks ass.

■ The E.S. units (replacing A.G.W.S.) are now required for certain areas

■ There are many powerful double techs, but most must be obtained by completing NPC fetch quests

■ Albedo's true purpose is finally made clear, and it is totally awesome

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: Give loyal fans more philosophical puzzle pieces, but make them suffer along the way

> Graphics: Despite some jaggies and Shion's new "bus station skank" style, it is a sleek and beautiful game

> Sound: The voice actor switch-ups are unfortunate (especially KOS-MOS), and the soundtrack frequently jumps between awe-inspiring and comically inappropriate

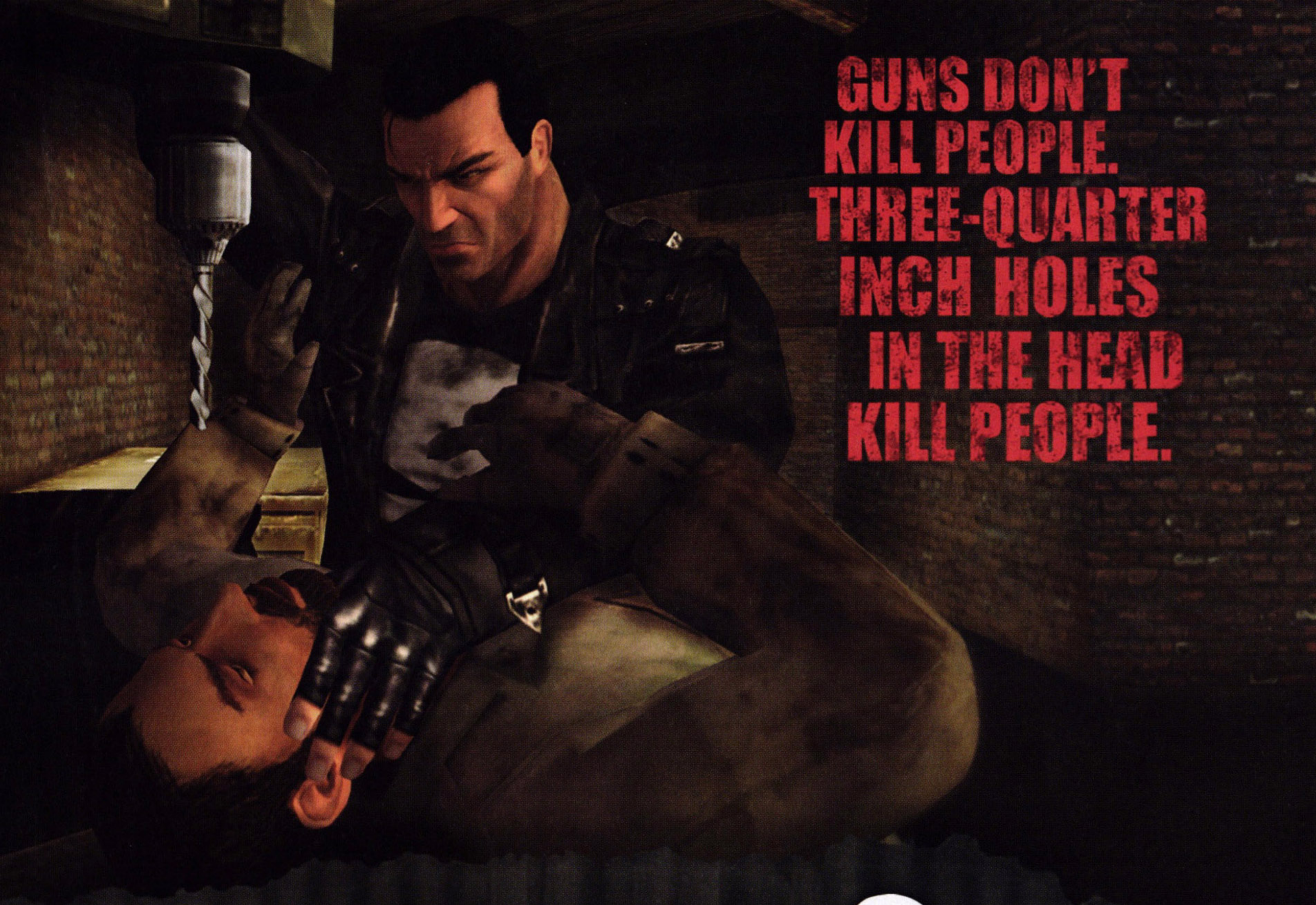
> Playability: Increased accessibility comes at the expense of engaging customization

> Entertainment: The ratio of "pay attention time" to "play time" is still uneven, but the action cutscenes rank among the very best in gaming

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

I wish I had better news to share. But facts are facts, and the follow up to one of my favorite RPGs is a disappointment on many levels. Graphics, story, and jaw-dropping cinematics are thankfully not on the list of casualties – those remain truly top notch as they combine to exhibit expressive characters wrestling with interweaving themes of family, betrayal, and the nature of evil. It's too bad gameplay fails to be even remotely as complex. Combat is desperately shallow, especially in the lengthy mech sequences that show up in the second half of the time. The game-spanning series of side quests are contrived and drab, but you're forced to endure them to get some of the better power-ups. And when I started encountering frequent inane box puzzles, I nearly threw up my hands in existential, angst-ridden despair. The whole affair seems amateurish in comparison to the intricate original. So do I think Episode II has a lot of problems? Yes. Will it disappoint you as it did me? Probably. But if you're a fan of the original, do I still think you should play this one? As much as it's going to hurt – definitely.—**MILLER**



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PlayStation.2

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PLAYSTATION 2

Ys: The Ark of Napishtim

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 8 **> ESRB** E

GLORY DAYS

Popping the new adventures of Adol Christin into your PS2 is like going to a bar and ordering up a sidecar – what you're really doing is calling back a bygone era, for good or ill. The problems with searching through the past (for drinks or games) are many – maybe the bartender won't know how to whip up such a classic libation correctly and, maybe even worse, you won't like it as much as you remember.

Clearly, a team who knows the roots of this genre has made Ys: The Ark of Napishtim – the classic elements are expertly and accurately done. There's a lone boyish hero thrust into an unfamiliar place. The world is infused with long-standing feuds and societies based on both magic and industry. Even the classic town drunks are present along with the gruff tribal leader who begrudgingly accepts the lead character, despite his foreign upbringing. The weaponry is imbued with elemental powers and the enemies are over-the-top and downright wacky.

Yet playing the game begs the question, "Is all of this a good thing?" Do we want to go this far back, and is the experience rewarding? Overall, I'd say yes. There's something undeniably simple and comforting about such a pure experience. It's true that games (and gamers) have become much more sophisticated, but that doesn't utterly deny the allure of classic gaming.

In Ark of Napishtim, some things are updated judiciously – the art direction and general visual style is very modern and takes advantage of the hardware. Enemies swarm onscreen while featuring detailed and varied designs. Yet, within this obvious nod to advanced hardware, some trademarks of old-school ideals rear their heads, and I really wish they wouldn't. Adol is silent and awkward text messages let players know that he has "explained the situation to <villager>." It's cumbersome and distracting – the other voice work in the game is nice, and the hero should have received similar treatment.

All in all, it's not that the latest Ys adventure is bad – the game suffers only by clinging a bit too tightly to its roots. Old-school appeal is there, but with the caveat that certain methods of character advancement, storytelling, and exploration have evolved for a reason, and Ys hasn't taken the train to Current Town with the rest of the hack n' slash crew.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> Concept: Like a golden swig of nostalgia

> Graphics: Update a SNES-styled adventure with a richer color palette and finer details

> Sound: Weird, although I can't say that they're bad, hair-metal ballads

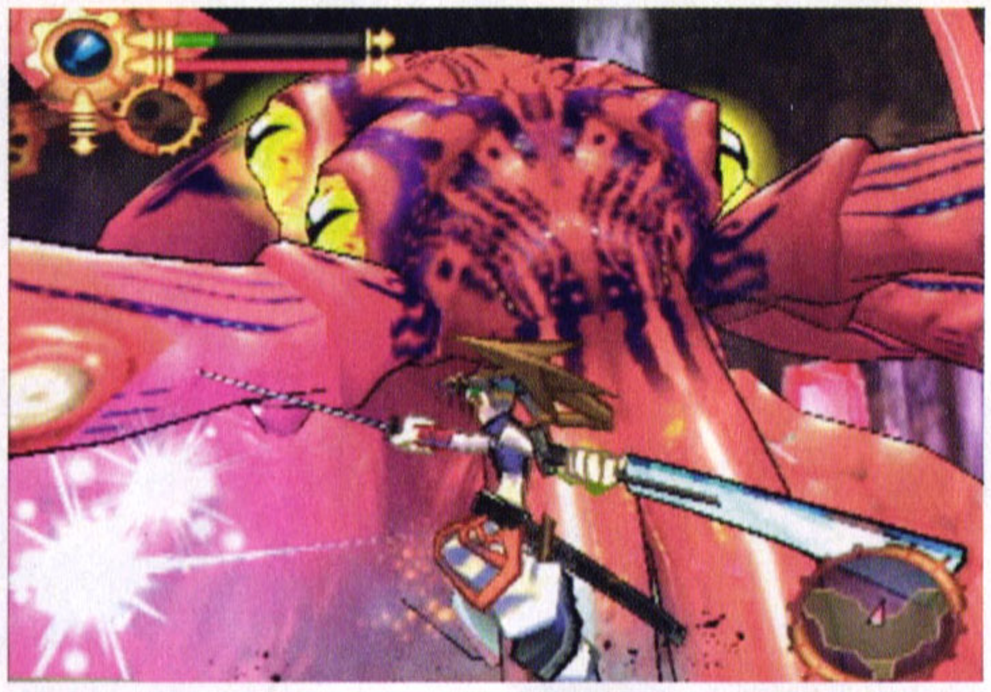
> Playability: Hack n' slash through and through, there's not a lot by way of combat complexity

> Entertainment: Despite the overriding "been there, done that" feeling that players will have, Ys is comforting and mindlessly amusing

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

Joe opens his second opinion with a clever comment which transitions nicely into his explanation of what bothers him about the whole "silent hero" routine found in this Ys title – the crux of which is the awkward way in which even the simplest concepts must be relayed through cumbersome narration. He then takes issue with the game's heavily scripted progression before admitting that, despite the formulaic action, Ys is pretty fun in a comforting and familiar way. As he wraps up, Joe makes a barb-laden quip that cuts Dave Coulier to the quick, who quietly weeps in his lonely dressing room.—**JOE**



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PLAYSTATION 2

Musashi: Samurai Legend

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX **> RELEASE** MARCH 1 **> ESRB** E

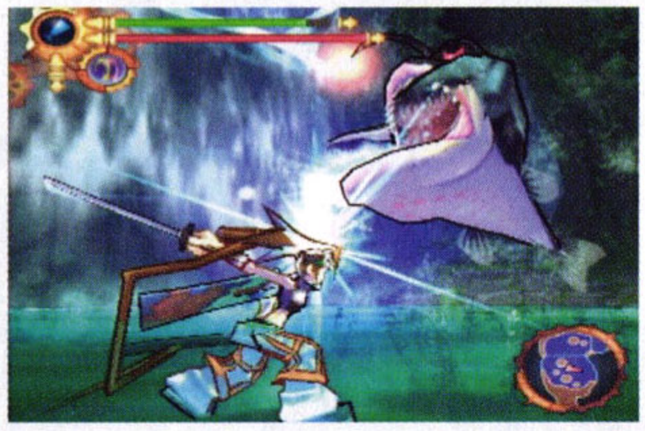
A WELCOME RETURN

Hardcore Square fans rejoiced when it was announced that the Brave Fencer Musashi series was coming back. I'm happy to report that these stalwarts will not be disappointed. In other reviews in this issue, I've taken games to task for sticking to staid design and plot clichés. Well, here's the review where I look like a hypocrite because, while it definitely features some well-worn concepts and plotlines, there's something oddly appealing about this game that keeps things feeling fresh throughout your adventure.

It's mostly down to superb execution. Square has implemented a character advancement and item system that rivals most full-blown RPGs. As expected, you can acquire new items and weapons, and improve your attributes in a number of areas. But what's really cool is how they've given you the ability to learn attacks from your enemies (á la Final Fantasy). By locking on to an enemy, you can instantly gain new abilities with a few well-timed button presses. It's ingenious, and adds a ton of depth to the proceedings. The deep and exacting combat is really at the core of what makes this a great game – especially in the gorgeous boss battles.

Aside from the combat, I found the story element – while not too original – very compelling. It's mostly due to the humorous dialogue, which hits that perfect note of classic Japanese whimsy and silliness. Little touches like being referred to by my instructor as "unripe melon" or having an enemy taunt me by exclaiming "I'm wicked popular!" brought more than a few chuckles.

While it does have its weaknesses (the levels are a bit generic and there was a bit too much backtracking for my taste), Musashi succeeds with great visual style, excellent humor, and rock-solid gameplay.—**MATT**



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> Concept: A gorgeous and well-done sequel to a PSone cult classic

> Graphics: Cel shading is currently out of favor, but this shows how impressive it can be when done right

> Sound: Great score and funny voiceovers – too bad there's not more of them

> Playability: Platforming can be a little frustrating, but the combat system is primo hack n' slash

> Entertainment: Musashi overcomes its weaknesses with charm, style, and great gameplay

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

I was surprised at how charming I found Musashi to be as an action game, since it breaks many of the rules that I usually can't forgive – namely horrendous voice-overs and fairly repetitious gameplay. Even with these flaws the game manages to deliver a quality experience, which I would attribute to its fantastic art direction and entertaining boss encounters. It reminds of those mindless ninja games I used to play on NES for hours on end that really weren't that great or innovative, but delivered a nice serving of mindless hack n' slash with a heaping helping of the absurd. Musashi isn't for everyone. So I highly recommend a test drive before a purchase, but those that can look past its quirky story will be rewarded with a title that is a nice blend of Square Enix production values and good old-fashioned fun.—**ANDY**

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PLAYSTATION 2

Shining Tears

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** SEGA **> RELEASE** MARCH 1 **> ESRB** T

KICKIN' IT OLD SCHOOL

Shining Tears is a throwback to a bygone era in gaming. A spin-off of Sega's classic Shining titles, its real-time action is reminiscent of the SNES game Secret of Mana, which is definitely a compliment. In many ways, Shining Tears is a retro-RPG gamer's dream, and will make you feel like you've gone back in time to the early '90s – which, as we all know, is both a good and a bad thing.

The plot of Shining Tears is, as Mr. T would say, simply a bunch of jibba jabba, filled with more clichés and stilted dialogue than an episode of *Full House*. But the plot is not really the draw – the two-character combat is the heart of this game. In single-player you control the primary character while AI handles your partner. But you can also steer the second player with the right analog stick and execute linked attacks between the two with a few clicks of the R1 button. It's a nifty little system that works well, but I found it inferior to playing with a real person (even if it was Joe). Coordinating linked attacks with a second player requires more cooperation and allows you more strategic thinking in battle. This is a definite plus because later fights throw so many hordes of enemies at you you'll feel like you're trying to fight your way out of a crowd at a Color Me Badd concert.

After a while, the combat can get as stale as MC Hammer's career, thanks to stages that are repeated over and over, and the necessity of replaying missions with different characters in order to level up your entire crew. The hand-drawn environments are gorgeous, as are the visuals as a whole, but that doesn't mean I want to see the same areas again and again. With repetitive combat and a plot thinner than Tracey Gold, Shining Tears shouldn't be quite as good as it is. But the retro vibe, beautiful graphics and unique control dynamic add a lot of value. It's not the best action/RPG out there, but offers some fun co-op and recalls days past in a far better way than any of the lame jokes I've made in this review.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: Sega's Shining series returns with an action-oriented spin-off featuring lush visuals, a unique control scheme, and a buttload of RPG clichés

> Graphics: The hand-drawn art style is simply amazing, and the characters are surprisingly well animated

> Sound: It would be nice to have more voice work than just a tiny handful of battle cries

> Playability: Controlling two characters with the dual analog sticks is a bit tricky, but co-op is a blast

> Entertainment: At first it's as fun and fresh as Gallagher, but it quickly gets as dull as Bob Sagat

> Replay Value: Moderate

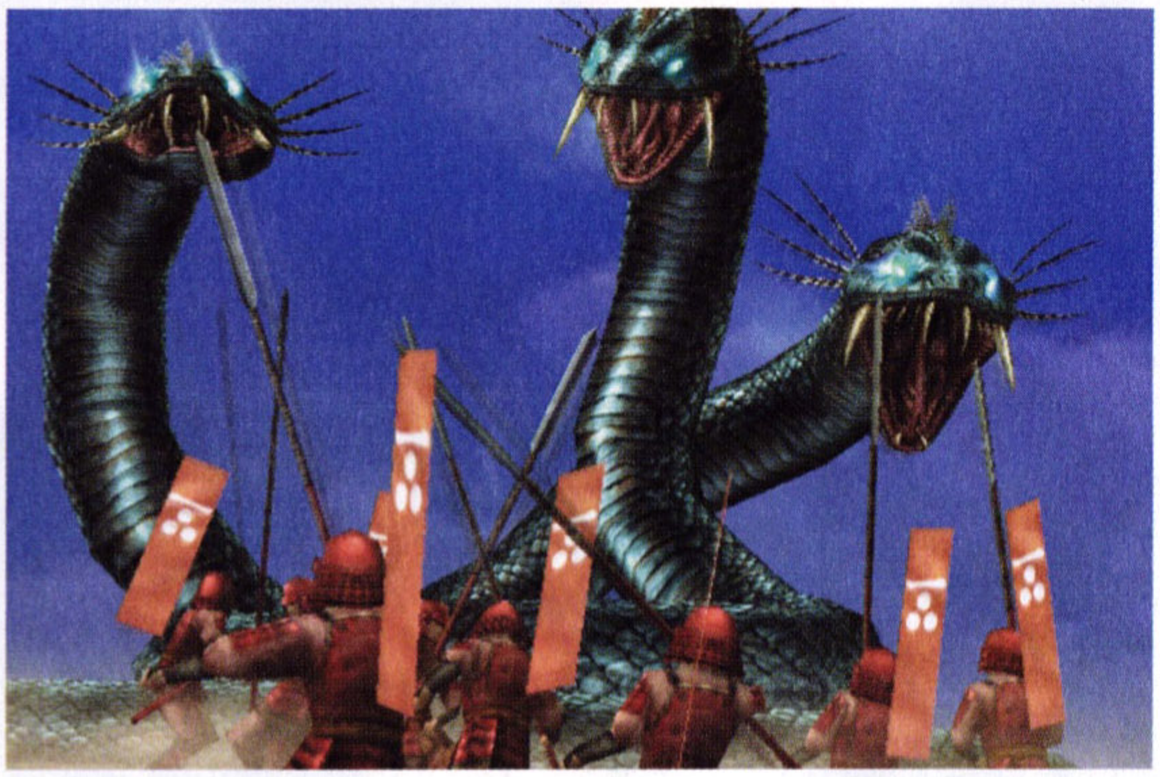
Second Opinion 7.25

As its name suggests, Shining Tears is full of both radiance and grief. It pulls off its unique two-character combat with brilliant artistic style, and provides surprising depth despite its simple appearance. Sadly, the game's lack of variation on the combat front and a tendency to make me revisit the same maps wore thin on my patience. The story isn't much help, either; it's bubbling over with every fantasy stereotype imaginable (emphasis on the "fantasy" – there isn't a single bustline smaller than 36D). Without a truly tactical edge, Shining Tears gets repetitive quickly, though the actions you find yourself repeating are immensely entertaining.—**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2

Kessen III

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY **> PUBLISHER** KOEI **> DEVELOPER** KOEI **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 22 **> ESRB** T



JAPAN USED TO BE FILLED WITH GIANT WORMS

Out of all of Koei's myriad franchises, this is the one I have the most hope for. If you want Dynasty Warriors hacking with some extra gameplay thrown in, then this series has it. It also has a degree of strategy thrown in, but you don't have to be Napoleon to enjoy Kessen III. However, the game's attempt to pat its head while rubbing its belly isn't without hiccups.

The last Kessen let you control individual officers, but this one takes it a giant step further, permitting you to switch to and play as multiple generals on the fly. Each one commands a unit of soldiers, and the armaments, armor, steeds, etc. of your general and unit can be changed throughout the game, letting you tinker with all kinds of different soldiers, spells, and attacks. Some of your commanders may unleash giant worms on the enemy, while others may charge a foe's front with horses of fire. You'll have a lot of fun experimenting with all the different options available to you.

On the battlefield the game controls like Dynasty Warriors (with the same mindless combos), but with more destruction. Unfortunately, Kessen III can be frustrating when it comes to coordinating all your soldiers. Although I like how you have to form up your ranks to perform effective attacks, I really wanted to be able to create control groups like in a PC RTS. Kessen does well to avoid the personality-devoid regiments of most strategy games, but because of the sometimes-sloppy unit controls, the strategy portion of the title suffers.

For all you Dynasty Warriors fans out there, I suggest you spread your wings and give this game a try – there's so much more to chew on here. This series is close to breaking through, it only needs to tighten up and refine its core elements (as well as expand its linear structure) to stand out.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: Like the last Kessen, this installment continues to add touches of Dynasty Warriors

> Graphics: Koei has cleared up most of the fogging and pop-up for the Dynasty Warriors-like portions

> Sound: A few new takes on your typical symphonic score are sprinkled in

> Playability: Commanding and keeping your units together is a mixed bag

> Entertainment: In its genre blending attempts, Kessen III pushes neither action nor strategy to the extreme

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

In nature, organisms that share identical genetic code are particularly susceptible to disease. Koei's lineup has staved off this fate for a while by diversifying franchises in key areas, but the changes in Kessen III are a sign that they are all slowly converging into the same species. Kessen III provides action along the lines of a group-oriented Dynasty Warriors, while still retaining the strategic elements that set the previous entries apart (plus some cool additions, like support troops). However, even with its blending of styles, it's still the video game equivalent of the History Channel – it grabs your attention and may even teach you something, but it just can't blow your socks off.—**JOE**

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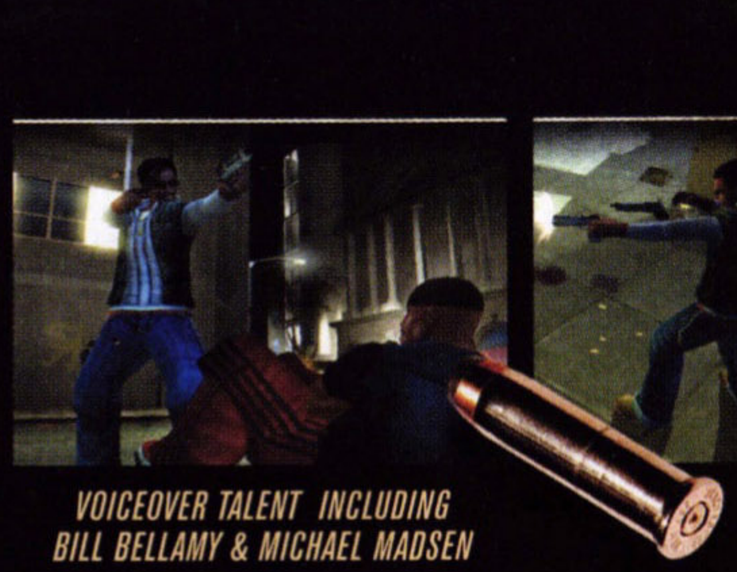

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PLAYSTATION 2

Nano Breaker

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT TOKYO **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 15 **> ESRB** M

OH NO...

I rolled my eyes so much throughout the course of this miserable release that I should probably be fitted for contact lenses. Video games should never deliver the feeling that someone has run over your puppy with a truck. Thanks to Nano Breaker, I now know what that feels like. Castlevania: Lament of Innocence creator Koji Igarashi can be applauded for the conceptual idea of allowing players to customize their combos and build longer, more complex strings as the game progresses. At the same time, however, you have to wonder how a game that is riddled with so many flaws actually made it off of the development floor.

Even the thickest fogging that video games can provide can't hide the fact that the level designs are atrocious, the texturing resembles the smear on a baby's dirty diaper, and the Liquid (blood) effects that gush like geysers from enemies are just too ridiculous to be taken seriously. As painful as it is to look at, playing this game is like running naked through a thorn-infested briar. Not only will you find yourself combating the same foes for hours on end, the boss battles demand exhaustively repetitive techniques, the platforming exercises are incredibly sloppy, checkpoints are too infrequent, and you'll even have to endure some of the most asinine box puzzles to date.

Descending to the bottom of the video game barrel, then busting through it and plummeting at great speeds toward Hell, Nano Breaker also falters in epic ways in the storytelling department. So let me get this straight, the government is working on top secret nanotechnology on Nanotechnology Island. This is really the setting of the game? You gotta be kidding me!

The combo system is definitely cool, and the controls are fashioned nicely, but the remainder of the game is just downright appalling.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 5

> Concept: Customize your own combos in this mindless and poorly designed hack n' slash

> Graphics: Vast amounts of fog blanket the ugly texturing and bland level designs…but not enough. This game needs more fog!

> Sound: Decent, but quickly drowned out by your angst-filled agony

> Playability: Stringing together combos is enjoyable, but every other action leads to frustration

> Entertainment: Even the Stink Monster would think this game reeks. Misery on a disc

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 5

Nano Breaker does two things right: the main character has a pretty neat selection of hack n' slash moves, and some of the FMV cutscenes look very good. Everything else sucks as hard as Star Jones inhaling a plate of hot dogs. Horrid level designs, boss battles that are as tedious as they are frustrating, and an inexcusable degree of fogging combine to form yet another generic, boring action title. Don't even get me started about the terrible platforming.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2

Tenchu: Fatal Shadows

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** FROM SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 15 **> ESRB** M

OLD NINJA NEEDS NEW TRICKS

Millions of years ago, the age of the ninja came to a close when a meteor hit the Earth, altering the planet's climate. Unable to adapt to these changes, the ninjas gradually became extinct. No, wait…that was the dinosaurs. In any case, my point is that everything must evolve or eventually die off. Sadly, I'm afraid that the Tenchu franchise, which once helped define the stealth genre on the original PlayStation, has fallen desperately behind the times.

Although Tenchu is once again in the hands of a new publisher (Sega) and new developer (From Software), the end product adheres strictly to the well-worn formula developed by the series. Body-dragging is back from Tenchu 2, and after pulling out our old copy of that game I'd say you'd be hard-pressed to find any major differences between the basic moveset of Tenchu 2 and Fatal Shadows.

That's not to say that there isn't some fun to be had here. Being a ninja is just plain cool, and the thrill of grappling from rooftop to rooftop, using a host of ninja items, and pulling off nicely animated stealth kills (of which there are a ton to unlock) will always be there. However, I'm a little disappointed that Tenchu isn't pushing the genre forward like Splinter Cell and Metal Gear Solid have.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Another entry in the long-running ninja stealth series

> Graphics: Better character models than the last iteration, but nothing spectacular

> Sound: Nice, tasteful ambient score with a Japanese folk music flavor

> Playability: The combat is simplistic, but effective – if you can overlook the terrible camera

> Entertainment: Being a shadow warrior still has its charms, but Tenchu badly needs an overhaul

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 6.75

Ever since the original Tenchu, I have been waiting patiently for this series to move forward, and unfortunately Fatal Shadows does little new and can be summed simply as just more of the same. Not that it's a bad thing. It's just the series could be so much more than navigating a simple environment, waiting for an opportune moment, and dealing out a stealth kill. Splinter Cell (among others) has moved the stealth genre forward, but Tenchu is still living in the past in both the gameplay and graphics departments. The environments are drab, and the AI is extremely poor at times. For example, in one level I would jump into the water when I was spotted, and the ninjas tracking me down would react by following me into the drink only to discover they couldn't swim and instantly drowned. Who knew? Ninjas can't swim. Fatal Shadows does manage to tread water, but that's about it.—**ANDY**

PLAYSTATION 2

Death by Degrees

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 8 **> ESRB** M

APT TITLE

Death by Degrees has been designed as an odd hybrid of Resident Evil style game structure (think fixed camera angles, plus lots of hallways and item/key puzzles) interspersed with all-analog fighting à la Rise to Honor. I think this basic foundation is where the developers went wrong. The survival horror genre was conceived to build tension. All the running around you do in Resident Evil titles is actually helps to create a mood of foreboding. Here, there's none of that. For this reason, all the wandering seems like filler. This tedium is not helped by the inexcusably long loading times. In addition, the fixed camera scheme isn't well-suited to all-out brawling either, as sometimes you'll be pushed into an area of a room where you can't see your opponent.

I actually had fun using the analog control to effortlessly string together combos. Even cooler are Nina's finishing moves, where the screen goes to an x-ray view of your prey that allows you to select just which part of his torso you're going to crush. However, I didn't like the mechanics for blocking or evades (which require a quick flick of the analog stick). During heated battles, both were way too erratic, even with the sensitivity adjusted to high.

All told, this game will please neither action fans nor followers of the Tekken franchise, and comes off as a marketing scheme gone horribly awry.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> Concept: A mix of Resident Evil and third-person beat 'em ups, starring Nina from Tekken

> Graphics: A very nice-looking PS2 title, Death by Degrees excels graphically

> Sound: Generic to the extreme (is that possible?), a ho-hum mix of rock guitars and cheesy techno

> Playability: I'm not sold on the 360-degree combat, and the exploration is tedious

> Entertainment: Hardcore Tekken fans will be disappointed, as will everyone else

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 5.25

There are two things that I like about this game, and the rest (and I mean rest) of the package reeks of utter despair. In a plus column, I have the opening cinematic and the x-ray finishing-move dynamic. Cool stuff, please do it again. Other than that, there's nothing here but a handful of standard features notable only for the variety of ways that they suck fun from the experience, nestled between long bouts of loading.—**LISA**

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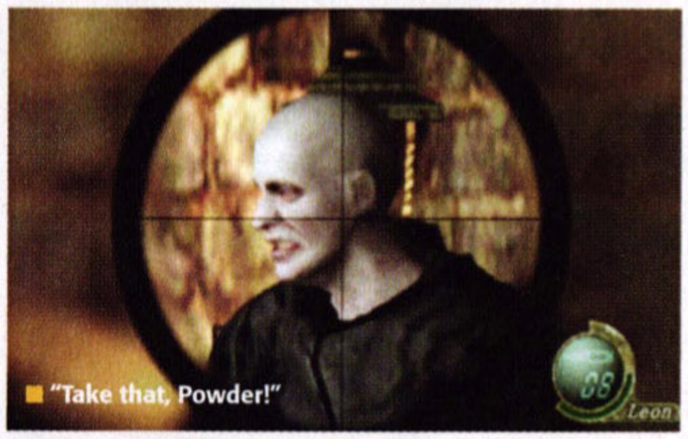
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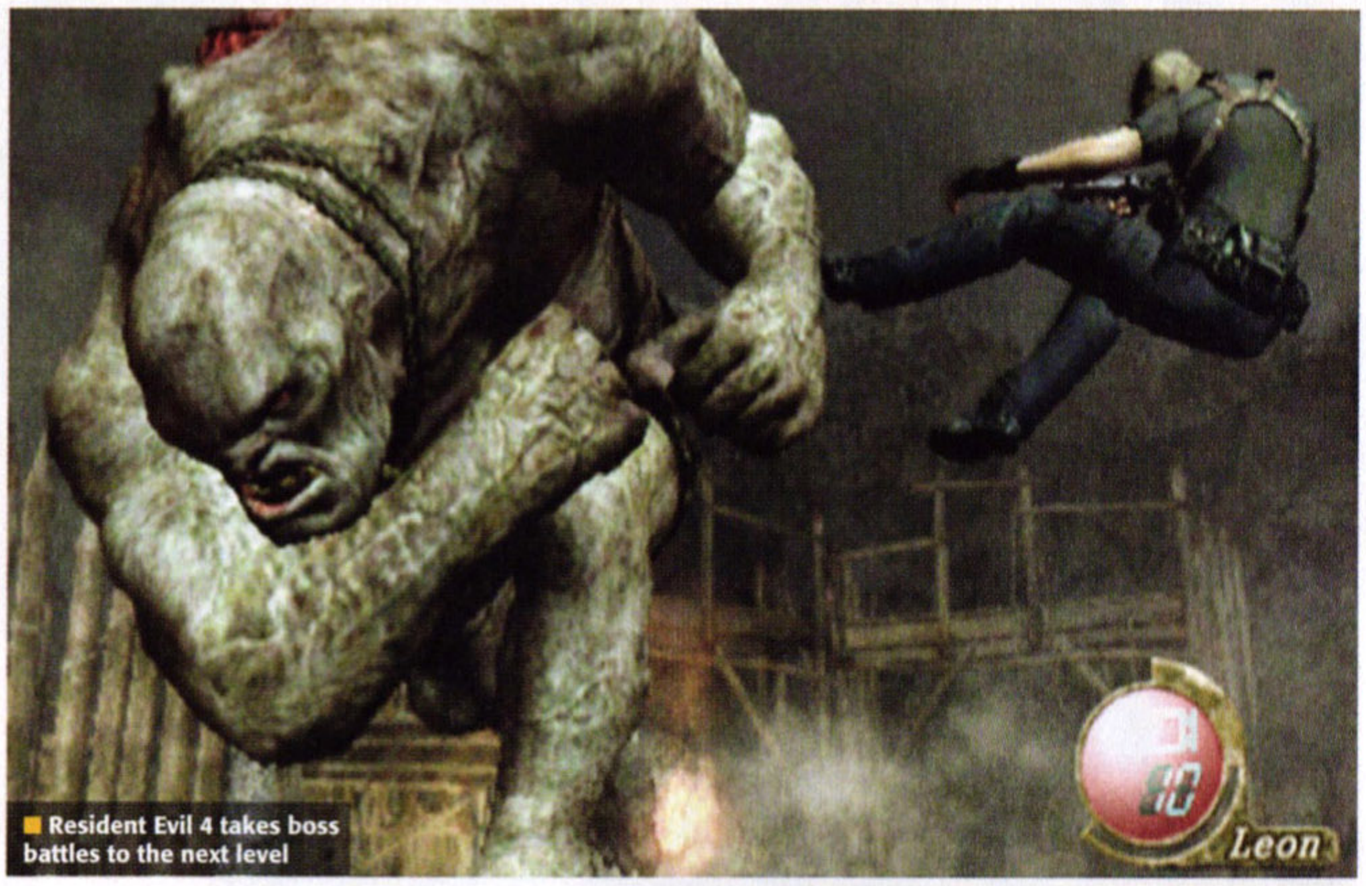

Resident Evil 4 takes boss battles to the next level

BOTTOM LINE **10**

> Concept: A brilliant new direction for survival horror that focuses on gunplay and truly cinematic moments

> Graphics: A sickening level of detail accompanies every little object, animation, and effect. It looks too good to be true

> Sound: Great voice acting, stress-inducing music, and disturbing sound effects combine to create the perfect atmosphere

> Playability: The controls are fashioned beautifully, boss fights are ingenious, and the popping of heads is immensely rewarding

> Entertainment: Hard to put down even after you've beaten it twice

> Replay Value: Moderately High

GAMECUBE

Resident Evil 4

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 4
> DEVELOPER CAPCOM **> RELEASE** JANUARY 11 **> ESRB** M

LIFE AFTER DEATH

The walking dead have incoherently moaned, clumsily shuffled their feet, and affectionately given us crater-sized hickeys in every Resident Evil game to date. The animated corpses that put this series on the map and redefined video game horror as a whole are now buried six feet under the soil at Capcom's Production Studio 4. It may be difficult to envision a Resident Evil game without flesh-eating zombies, but Capcom is showing us that there are far more terrifying things that go bump in the night. Nothing can truly prepare you for the unspeakable horrors that will hunt you until your last breath is given. It's been a long time coming, but Resident Evil is back, and it is better and bloodier than ever before.

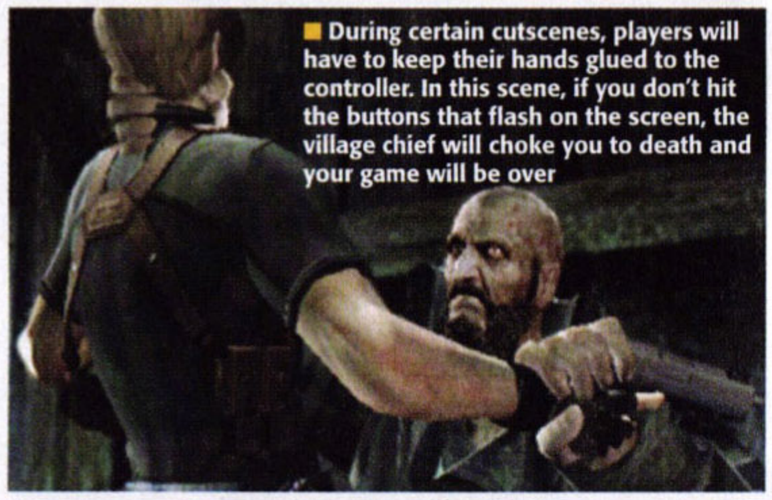
This game is such a departure from the series' heritage that the only familiarity gamers will have with it is through protagonist Leon S. Kennedy, who was first introduced as a greenhorn police officer that spent his first day on the job handling the outbreak in Resident Evil 2. Attracted to madness like teenage girls are to Camp Crystal Lake, Kennedy once again finds himself knee-deep in unspeakable horror. Rather than having maggot-infested zombies gnawing at his neck, crazed villagers are the order of the day. Unlike the slow-witted, slow-moving dead, these adversaries are very intelligent, extremely agile, and not afraid to use weapons. They also like to attack in packs. Picture if you will a group of six murderous souls with beady red eyes glowing under the moonlight running at you with lit dynamite, ducking out of the way of your shots, and calling out for others nearby to lend a hand in your death. This is a new kind of scare that far surpasses the suspense and jump-out-of-your-seat shock moments that fueled the previous chapters in the series. As you'll soon learn, there are few things scarier than a middle-aged housewife that sprints at you with a blood-soaked axe raised into the air, belting out a bloodcurdling scream.

To counteract the intelligence and sheer brutality of these new foes, Capcom has completely reworked the combat system. In the past, we blindly fired into areas we couldn't see and ran past enemies to preserve ammo. This time around, everything that so much as raises a finger at you must die – preferably by a nicely placed headshot. A remarkable new targeting system allows this feat to be handled with the utmost precision. On this note, I've never seen so many heads explode in my life. The new over-the-shoulder perspective coupled with a beautifully crafted laser sight makes for a lethal and satisfying combat experience. Additionally, players can now interact with their surroundings in a handful of clever ways, such as knocking down ladders and pushing dressers in front of doors. The Resident Evil games were always criticized for being too clumsy in gameplay. With Resident Evil 4, however, I can't envision it playing any better.

I also like how the game pushes players to scour every inch of the environments. Rare treasures that are unearthed can be traded in to a vendor for cash. With enough funds you can buy new weapons and items, as well as upgrade all of your armaments. Inventory space is still limited, but it's finally done in a way that makes sense. You now manage a physical space. If a new gun doesn't fit in your case, try moving things around to make room for it.

Recently, developers have been talking about the need to blend story cinematics with gameplay. Capcom has accomplished just this, and it's captured in way that will make you wish that every game that you play utilized this innovative system. For instance, if a character in a sequence comes at you with a knife, you have to press the L and R buttons at the precise moment to dodge the attack, otherwise the scene will end with blood gushing from your neck. The interaction that you have at your hands is unprecedented, and you'll be doing things you didn't even think were possible in games.

There are no flaws in Resident Evil 4. It is the greatest horror game to date. I never thought that a game, or movie for that matter, could deliver pulse-pounding action in such an awe-inspiring way.—**REINER**


During certain cutscenes, players will have to keep their hands glued to the controller. In this scene, if you don't hit the buttons that flash on the screen, the village chief will choke you to death and your game will be over

Some enemies have specific weaknesses. Wait until you see what this guy's is

Who's That Girl?

Throughout a good portion of the game, you'll find yourself escorting a girl named Ashley. Amazingly, she ducks when you aim in her direction, calls out for help when an enemy approaches, will jump from great heights if you are willing to catch her, and will even lend a hand in puzzle solving.

Second Opinion 10

Some games are simply destined to become milestones in gaming history, and Resident Evil 4 is one of them. Even those who have never picked up one of the previous titles and swear that they hate the slow-paced crawl of survival horror games simply must play it. Capcom has managed to create a game that is a complete reinvention of the series – even the entire genre – without losing anything that Resident Evil fans expect. Perfectly balancing elements of horror, subtlety, and wit with explosive action and over-the-top thrills, playing RE 4 feels like living one of the most epic films you've ever seen. Gorgeous to look at, a dream to control, and filled with some of the most exciting moments you've experienced in a game, Resident Evil 4 is stellar on every level. It goes without saying that it's the best in the series, the best survival horror game yet, and simply one of the best games ever made.—**JEREMY**

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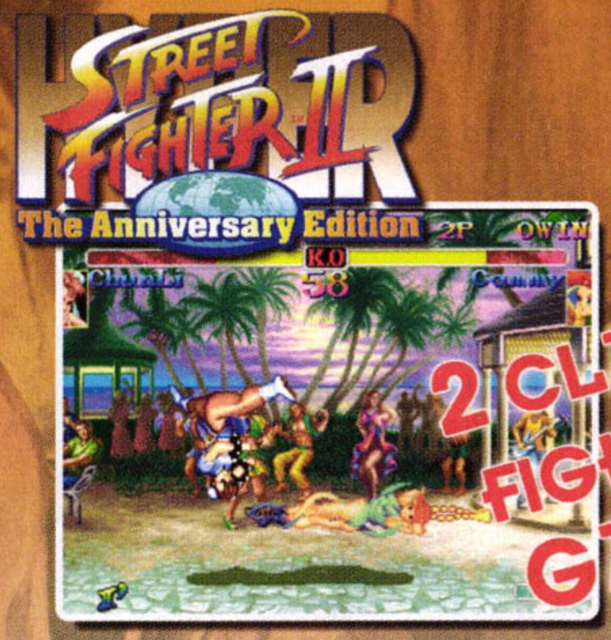

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■ Grievous' robotic body guards will make quick work of you at close range

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Star Wars: Republic Commando

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS **> DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS **> RELEASE** MARCH 1 **> ESRB** T

JEDI NOT INCLUDED

Over the years, we have sliced through Imperial forces with twirling lightsabers, given in to the tantalizing power of the Dark Side, and destroyed the Death Star more times than George Lucas has worn his favorite flannel. With a setting that Tom Clancy wouldn't mind endorsing, Republic Commando emerges as a great departure for Star Wars gaming, and a breath of fresh air that fans have been dreaming of since they first watched a squadron of storm troopers obliterate a hapless crew aboard the Tantive IV blockade runner.

There are no backdoor drafts in the Republic. Born of the genetic stock of the galaxy's most feared bounty hunter, you were created with the specific intent of serving your people through bloodshed and war. Your appearance is identical to that of your brethren, who number in the millions, but your physical prowess has been heightened far beyond theirs. You are the best of the best. You are one of the Clone Trooper elite. Assigned as the leader of an upper echelon Republic Commando division, you must lead your squad to victory in the face of unyielding adversity.

As you unload countless rounds into a Separatist onslaught, you can send your sharpshooter to a sniper point, tell your hacker to open a door, and order your weapons expert to light up the droid forces with a well a placed Thermal Detonator. The on-the-fly squad control may sound fairly complex, but the system that LucasArts has developed couldn't be easier to use. With this said, you won't have complete control over the actions of your cohorts. Outside of simple commands like "form up" and "attack this target," you can only send them to areas that are assigned to specific tasks such as sniping or hacking – all with the click of a button. If you take on too much damage and go down, you can even signal to a teammate to revive you with a quick resuscitation. Thanks to impressive AI, you never really have to worry about your troops doing something stupid. The only flak you can send their way is for being too cowardly when an enemy is clearly not paying attention to them, and for not being able to recognize the greatest threat on the battlefield unless you point it out to them.

Although the controls fit as comfortably as Master Chief's glove, the targeting system is too demanding of precision, especially when you are required to unload dozens of rounds into certain enemy types. If you don't have armor-breaking rounds, a Super Battle Droid can be just as annoying as the new dance number in *Return of the Jedi.* Airborne foes are also quite difficult to tag at a successful rate.

While not a sure-fire marksman, Republic Commando still has enough kick in its firepower to knock you off of your feet. From explosive scripted events on the battlefield to harrowing battles that are almost too intense to comprehend, each mission is filled with relentless excitement and moments that you'll cherish for a lifetime. Whether you watch a Wookiee physically dismantle a Super Battle Droid or hold your breath as you rely on your troops to provide over a minute of cover fire as you hack a security terminal, Republic Commando seamlessly blends breathtaking spectacles with uniquely styled and highly contagious gameplay. The sound (sans the metal during the end credits) is remarkable as well.

At the same time, however, you can't help but criticize the game for its limited number of enemy types (I seriously felt like I destroyed at least 10,000 Battle Droids), noticeably absent story breaks, and lackluster multiplayer deathmatching. Furthermore, why didn't LucasArts do online co-op? It's a perfect fit.

It does tie into the upcoming *Revenge of the Sith* movie, but the Episode III content is more of a lightsaber tease than anything. General Grievous is literally in the game for two seconds, and just as you are about to join the pivotal battle of Kashyyyk, the game comes to an end, basically saying, "This looks awesome, doesn't it? Buy a ticket to the movie and you'll see how it unfolds."

No lightsabers? No problem. A Star Wars game without Jedi may seem like a Jar Jar-sized disaster, but I don't think even Master Yoda could dodge a nicely placed sniper shot by this incredible Republic Commando unit.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> Concept: Suit up as an elite commando and pulverize Battle Droids as you bark out orders to your Power Ranger-colored squad

> Graphics: There are few visuals more satisfying than the vibrant green splattering of Geonosian blood on your visor

> Sound: Why do clones have different voices? And what's with the cheesy hair metal at the end? If John Williams hears this, batons will be shoved in uncomfortable places

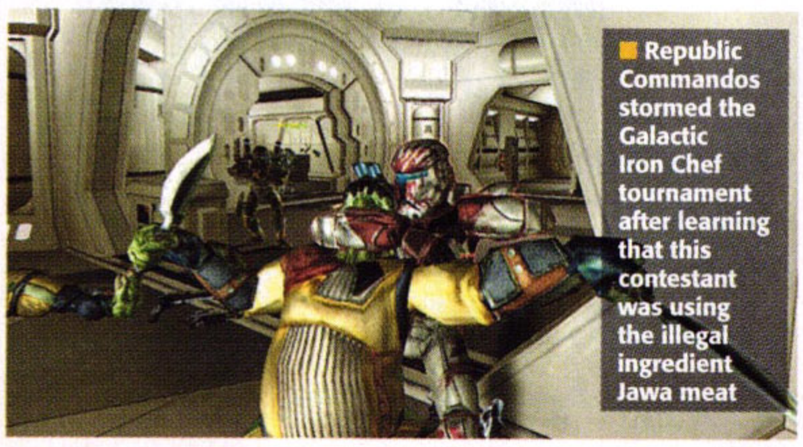
> Playability: Targeting with the DC-17m is a bit suspect, but the squad commands work well, and the weapon selection is balanced nicely

> Entertainment: Has the uncanny ability to rock your world and make you cry like a baby at the same time

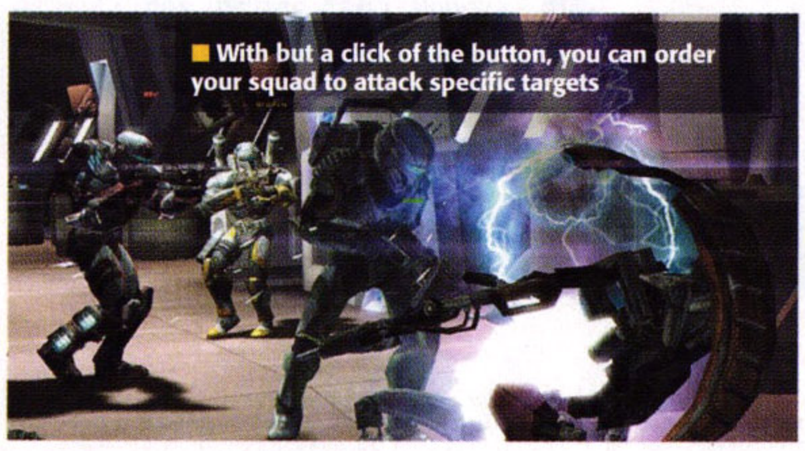
> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 8.75

While there are some recognizable technical issues that mar the glossy sheen of Republic Commando, they are only noticeable because everything else has been done with such finesse. Painting Star Wars in a dark and gritty light results in visuals that are both believable and deeply involving. The action sprung to life around me, and the squad mechanic was one of the most enjoyable and flexible I have yet encountered, even if the ally AI was occasionally frustrating. With only a few different enemy types, there really should have been more variety in their tactics, which brings the otherwise gripping combat down a notch in my mind. The voicework and visceral Foley sound effects are uniformly fantastic, and the Episode III score had me chomping at the bit for the big May release. The ending induced in me near physical pain, as it brought me right to the brink of something I'm not going to see until after the opening text scroll of the movie. Regardless, this is a unique take on that most beloved of fictional universes, and true fans would be remiss not to play it in its entirety. Oh, and in case you were wondering, Wookiees in battle are indeed ridiculously sweet. —**MILLER**



■ Republic Commandos stormed the Galactic Iron Chef tournament after learning that this contestant was using the illegal ingredient Jawa meat



■ With but a click of the button, you can order your squad to attack specific targets

■ Provide covering fire as one of your teammates hacks into a security terminal to open a door

XBOX QUICKIES

XBOX

Tork: Prehistoric Punk

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** TIWAK
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 10 > **ESRB** E

Here's my theory about Tork: Space aliens, hoping to assimilate themselves into human culture, posed as video game developers. Of course, not wanting to seem strange, they studied games and attempted to emulate what they saw. The result is Tork, which is a virtual compendium of platforming conventions, almost to a bizarre (otherworldly perhaps?) degree. Whacking things on the head, transforming into other creatures to solve puzzles, double-jumping, and collecting trinkets is the order of the day. The first four levels are a grand slam of cliché: a desert world, an ice world, a jungle world, and a lava world! Honestly, Tork wouldn't know a new idea if it abducted him and gave him an anal probe. It also looks pretty nice, but those aliens have always had good technology.—**MATT**

XBOX

Dai Senryaku VII: Modern Military Tactics

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** KEMCO > **DEVELOPER** SYSTEM SOFT ALPHA
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 15 > **ESRB** E

Looking more like an old Avalon Hill game than an Xbox exclusive, strategy buffs cannot go wrong with this thrifty title (it retails for under $20) that won't short-change anyone in the mood for a little hex counting. This title puts a premium on knowing the ins-and-outs of every unit on the board in order to attain victory – and each of the game's 400 unit types has a story to tell. It's daunting at first, but it'll make you an instant West Point graduate once it all clicks (there's even a map editor for the ambitious). Apart from the bare-bones presentation and graphics, I struggled at times with building exactly the right units for the situation, but this title's definitely worth taking a chance on.—**KATO**

XBOX

Chicago Enforcer

BOTTOM LINE 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** KEMCO
> **DEVELOPER** TOUCHDOWN ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 15 > **ESRB** M

The horrific, steaming turd that is Chicago Enforcer, in a strange way proves the theory of universal balance. For every great positive force, there is an equally powerful negative force. In other words, if Halo 2 is, as many believe, the best console FPS to date, then Chicago Enforcer is easily the worst. This game is supposed to take players back to the mob-controlled 1920's, and I did indeed feel like I had gone back in time. Except I felt as if I was back in the early 1990's, playing a bad PC mod of the original Doom. With terrible level design, non-existent enemy AI, horrible graphics and tons of technical hiccups, Chicago Enforcer actually manages to do absolutely nothing interesting. Sure, it has Xbox Live, but good luck finding anyone playing this digital abomination online. It sucks in a vomitous, spirit-crushing kind of way.—**JEREMY**

XBOX

Phantom Dust

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS JAPAN > **RELEASE** MARCH > **ESRB** T

MIND GAMES

Developed by Microsoft's Japanese division and published in the U.S. by Majesco, Phantom Dust was fated to be an odd duck. Corporate nonsense aside, this game is one that shows a huge amount of potential and delivers only superficially. It seems to shoot itself in the foot whenever it's poised to really take off and achieve something, but there's still some enjoyment to be had here.

Single-player suffers from this syndrome far more than the online modes. Crippled by a marginal localization and dreadful structure, the original and interesting story never has a chance to take hold, while laughable AI makes the battles one-dimensional. It's admittedly fun for a while to laugh at the character designs that look like Queen starring in a remake of *Blade Runner*, but in the end, the offline offering serves merely as a training session for the hectic online matches.

Phantom Dust takes place in bite-sized servings of explosive combat for up to four players (or AI opponents), with the object being to obliterate your foes with psychic powers acquired on the battlefield. There are plenty of nuances to pick up on, like which defensive skills work against which offensive powers, and this multifaceted gameplay introduced in single-player mode seems amazing at first, but ultimately fails to provide enough strategy meat to really sink your teeth into. Unparalleled environmental destruction will make your jaw drop, only to frustrate and annoy when you figure out that there's no reliable way to turn it to your advantage in a fight. Customizing your skill set would seem to add a level of needed depth to the combat, but the randomness in which you gain access to them recalls blackjack more than Diablo. And with no mini map, cycling through targets (which you don't need a line of sight to lock on to) is your only resort to keeping tabs on the situation. The final nail in the coffin is that there is absolutely no way to possibly defend yourself if more than one player decides to gun for you – expect to die in a matter of seconds, without exception.

Unleashing beautiful hell on your opponents is certainly fun for a while, as this is one of the more visually pleasing games in recent memory. The combat provides some thrills that you won't find in other games, given the unique nature of Phantom Dust's premise. And if the soundtrack were available commercially, I'd buy it without a second thought. However, I can't believe that anyone is going to stick with this rather than go back to Halo 2 or Rainbow Six 3 for their online needs once the new game glow wears off.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Trade civilization and your memories for psionic powers and post-apocalyptic ruin! Valid at participating stores only

> **Graphics:** Any way you slice it, this is a treat for the eyes

> **Sound:** One of the coolest soundtracks ever. Orchestral instrumentation with a twist

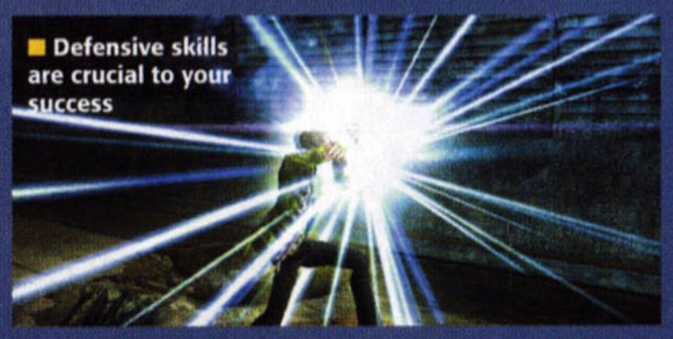
> **Playability:** The lack of a minimap severely hampers battle awareness

> **Entertainment:** The thrills end up being short-lived, as combat proves too shallow to hold interest for long

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

I'm happy to see this game finally get a U.S. release, because it really does bring something different to the world of Xbox Live. I do quite enjoy the core psychic combat at the heart of this game, but it does grow a little stale after all strategic options have been explored. The story mode is pretty unimpressive (most worthless map system ever!), but multiplayer should offer some thrills for those looking for a different way to get an online fix.—**JEREMY**



■ Defensive skills are crucial to your success

■ A sneak preview of our Dorks of 2005 list, perhaps?

PC

Will of Steel

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY **> PUBLISHER** TRI SYNERGY **> DEVELOPER** GAMEYUS
> RELEASE FEBRUARY 1 **> ESRB** T

RUN TO THE HILLS

I am utterly astonished that this game was made, much less released for public consumption. Before I even started playing, I had a queasy feeling in my gut when the graphics options defaulted to a 640x480 resolution. What is this, Warcraft: Orcs & Humans? Once I started playing, I honestly wished it was.

Will of Steel lacks even basic real-time strategy functionality. The minimap has no terrain on it, just a grid with some green and red dots. The engine is so amazingly inefficient that WoS actually caused GI's beastly gaming rig to slow down despite being uglier than sin. Half of my mouse clicks didn't have any effect on what was happening onscreen, as if some nefarious entity was inhabiting my USB controller. The list goes on and on, but what makes this title truly unplayable is the AI.

Units occasionally wandering off to their doom and infrequent pathing issues are merely minor annoyances in better RTS games. Will of Steel had me laughing out loud at the obscene things my troops were doing: walking blindly past enemies who were shooting them, taking off in random directions with no input from me, and so on. I don't care how good of a tactical mind you have – the sadistic demons that reside in Will of Steel's code will lay your best plans low and laugh as you swear futilely at your useless troops. Me, I got my revenge by airstriking my own forces, which was far and away the most fun I had in my time with this fetid crap-storm.

I honestly can't think of one positive thing to say about Will of Steel. Even the setting is offensive, with its callous treatment of present-day American conflicts where real people are fighting and dying. I'd avoid picking up the box for fear of contracting something infectious, to say nothing of actually paying for this abomination.——**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 2.5

> Concept: Utterly ignore basic tenets of the RTS genre, and use the most inefficient engine in the history of gaming

> Graphics: I thought the game had crashed the first time the lightning effect happened, it looks so terrible

> Sound: There are a few laughs to be had at the hilariously bad opening music, but that's the best thing that can be said

> Playability: I like it when my mouse clicks don't register, really

> Entertainment: There are games that come free with Windows that are more fun

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 1.5

This unmitigated disaster is not only entirely unplayable on most levels, but also has the poor taste to be about real life military conflicts that are still occurring around the world. I was literally struck speechless by the total lack of basic functionality in this execrable piece of software. I always try to find the positives to point out in a game, but in this case I'm simply at a loss. It's totally broken. What were they thinking?
—**MILLER**

PC

Nexus: The Jupiter Incident

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** HD INTERACTIVE/VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
> DEVELOPER MITHIS **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 22 **> ESRB** T

■ The battle for Earth is absolutely insane

HOT FLEET-ON-FLEET ACTION

As much as everyone wanted to be Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, or Princess Leia when they grew up (or Darth Vader, if you're sadistic like Joe), there's something to be said about a game that puts you in Admiral Ackbar's command seat. Nexus does just that, and succeeds pretty well. Typically, the kind of moderately hardcore strategy found in Nexus is accompanied by a frustratingly obtuse interface and novel-sized manual. This could not be further from the case here – though the control isn't quite as intuitive as that of a Blizzard game, it does an admirable job of allowing you to jump right in and have some fun without requiring a degree in warfare.

Nexus forgoes any sort of base construction and puts you in real-time command of a group of units (though you can upgrade them between missions) and tasks you with various objectives, usually involving stomping an opposing force. This gameplay is fun rather than annoyingly complex due to the commands being very general in nature and leaving the individual tasks of firing weapons and turning to the AI. Movement is similarly abstracted; given that the whole game takes place in gigantic, open 3D space, traditional RTS maneuverings would be impossible. Instead, you issue orders to move towards or away from objects (though you do have the option to manually set up new points), which on the whole makes the third dimension much easier to deal with.

GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

As for the combat itself, it's a far cry from the fast-paced shootouts of most RTS games. Lumbering capital ships circle each other, vying for position, while fighters enact their own deadly dance at breakneck speed. Much of the time, there's an additional twist to the scenario, be it a black hole, subspace rift, or hulking battle station projecting a thousand-kilometer wide force shield. Even so, engagements can drag on at times as shields wear down and energy slowly depletes – but after about the half-way point of the campaign, the scale of battles is large enough to require your constant attention. However, some of the more unconventional missions miss the mark a bit. In particular, the stealth ones are about as exciting as commuting with a broken car stereo.

This epic spectacle (and by epic I mean that some scenarios dwarf the most massive space conflicts seen on film) is brought to life by some of the best graphics I've had the pleasure to see. Blinding explosions rip across the screen and superheated plasma bolts spatter off of shimmering energy shields against the majestic backdrop of stars and colorful nebulae – watching Nexus is literally almost as engaging as the strategy itself. Plus, the story is intriguing in that sweeping fate-of-the-galaxy sci-fi kind of a way, without being completely overblown and melodramatic. All in all, despite its occasional frustrations, Nexus has a lot to offer anyone with an interest in strategy.——**ADAM**

■ Even smaller ships can take quite a beating

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> Concept: Become humanity's savior through your tactical wizardry…in space!

> Graphics: Wonderful on every level. You really have to see it to believe it

> Sound: Competent voiceovers and a nicely moody atmospheric score do a good job of setting the tone

> Playability: The abstraction of control is great, but an option for some more in-depth orders would have really helped

> Entertainment: Unique and well crafted, this is a title strategy fans should get serious mileage out of

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

Who knew space could look this breathtaking? Knowing close to nil about this title prior to my playthrough, I was blown away by the fantastic visuals that fill the dark reaches of the galaxy. As the first hours of the game passed, I wasn't sure if I could proclaim the same praises for the gameplay, which seemed overly simplistic during early missions. When you play this (because you should), push past that barrier to the deeply strategic and incredibly challenging mission structure that lies beyond that early hump. The ships, characters, and plot will remind you of every sci-fi epic you've ever come across – in a good way. Once you get used to the interface and the special demands of three-dimensional combat, you'll marvel at the futuristic naval conflicts, especially as the campaign mounts to its climactic finale – a battle scene that makes all the earlier challenges worthwhile.
—**MILLER**

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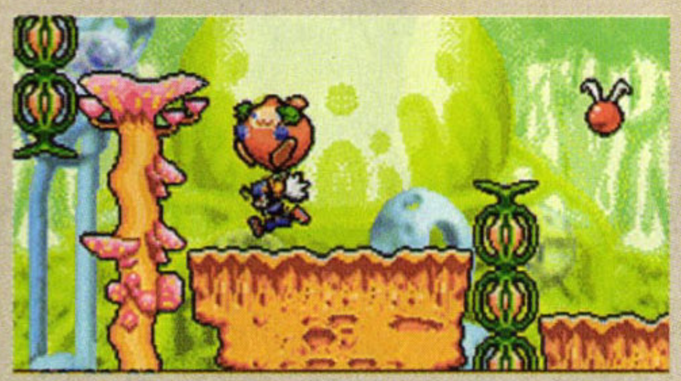
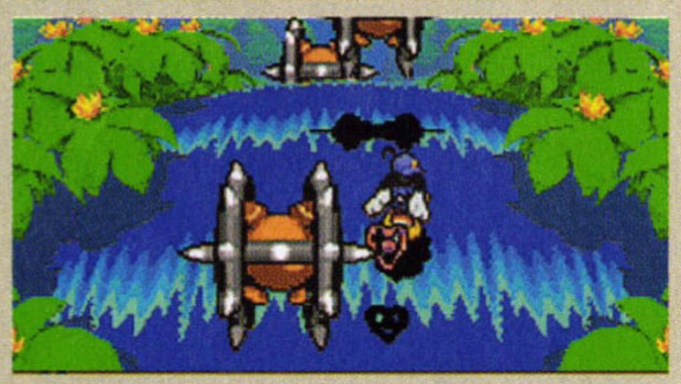
GAME BOY ADVANCE

Klonoa 2: Dream Champ Tournament

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 22 **> ESRB** E





THE GOOD KIND OF PAIN

Though there was another game entitled Klonoa 2 (on PS2, 2001), this latest GBA offering from Namco is the same only in spirit – though this is a completely different game, tight 2D platforming with delicious puzzle elements are still the order of the day in Dream Champ Tournament. And if some of the later stages are painfully tough, who ever said video games had to be easy?

Most of Klonoa 2's levels are more reminiscent of Lode Runner than Mario. You'll have to figure out which enemies to pick up and where to throw them, push around boxes, find keys, and otherwise solve some of the better puzzles around. Farther into the quest, your reactions will be tested along with your brain as you'll be dodging obstacles or working under tight time constraints while desperately trying to get all of the pieces into place to advance to the next room. You have the option to scroll your view around the room you're in, which is immensely helpful, considering the complexity of Klonoa 2's many multi-part puzzles. It's a wonderfully unique variation on 2D action, and an absolute blast to play through.

For the most part, new elements are introduced at a good pace and utilized well to continually diversify the style of puzzles the player faces. About halfway through the game, though, the difficulty suddenly goes through the roof, as the puzzles get much larger and harder. In and of itself this is a minor annoyance; however, taken along with the abrupt need to execute intricate and precise platforming wizardry in the process of enacting the solution, it makes for a mighty strong temptation to launch your GBA through the nearest window. Of course, when you actually beat these occasional monstrosities, it's a great feeling.

Some variety is thrown into this basic formula in the form of levels where you have to race against a boss, auto-scrolling stages, and some basic Mode 7 F-Zero-like levels. For the most part, the 2D ones are a fun break from the standard gameplay while the pseudo-3D Mode 7 parts are dumb – fortunately, you always have the option of skipping the 3D ones and doing a regular level instead. Unless you're going for the insane task of collecting every single item in the game, of course (which nets you some bonus stages). Remember the trouble you had with those brutal levels? It's infinitely harder to pick up all the goodies on top of beating them in the first place.

As much of an irritation as the trouble spots can be, perseverance pays off with Klonoa 2. There's a lot of great platforming to be had here, and the infrequent annoyances of those nasty levels and the questionable localization are a small price to pay for the opportunity to revisit the 2D nirvana that so few modern games give us a chance to experience.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

> Concept: Bring another helping of Klonoa's unique puzzling platforming to the GBA

> Graphics: Sharp and colorful, the visuals do a good job of drawing you into this cartoony adventure

> Sound: Boring and forgettable, just like most titles on the GBA

> Playability: It's a rare title that creates such a tight link between player and character

> Entertainment: Despite some punishingly difficult levels, this is head and shoulders above the vast majority of GBA offerings

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

Ignore the kiddie characters and the ludicrous story – this game is straight up platform puzzling goodness. The colorful stages are varied and enjoyable, even if the music and sound effects that accompany them aren't. The mild variations on the traditional platforming pattern make for a slightly slower paced, but no less enjoyable jaunt as you steadily cross the 2D landscape. Several of the puzzles are downright mean in later levels, a distinction that may not win it a lot of fans with the demographic most attracted to these cutesy visuals. For myself, I would have enjoyed a little more action to keep the pace up, but overall this cat emerges from the proverbial bag as a quality offering for the GBA.—**MILLER**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Racing Gears Advance

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) **> PUBLISHER** ORBITAL MEDIA **> DEVELOPER** ORBITAL MEDIA **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 8 **> ESRB** E

FINGERLESS GLOVE HEAVEN

With all the hubbub over the DS, Nintendo's other child – the GBA – isn't getting quite the love that it once did. Thanks to Orbital Media, however, Racing Gears Advance bucks its anonymous name and gives the system a solid, fun experience that isn't quite as throwaway as it seems.

With a multitude of twisty tracks and an isometric view, the game instantly reminds you of the old RC Pro Am racers. Racing Gears, however, adds some depth with its weapons and car upgrades. Armor keeps you from damaging out of races (and saves you on the repair bills), while offensive armaments like rockets are there to sink the seven other cars. Mix these in with the precision needed to perfectly drift around the corners, and this game will grab your attention for a few hours. I'd go so far as to say that the title's difficulty will have you re-racing some of the tracks just to get that perfect line down. Memorizing the courses is almost a must as obstacles and chicanes are thrown in your direction at a pretty fast pace. Things can also get hairy when the eight-car field gets bunched up and you can't even tell which one is yours.

Difficulty aside, I dug this game because of a lot of the little touches: the shadows that fall on the track, the shortcuts, the elevation changes, and the way that every race and lap has some surprises in store (Yes, you can fly off into the ocean!). Just wait till someone unleashes a smoke bomb in your face. The oil slicks that you put down behind you even persist for a few laps, patiently waiting for anyone to foolishly skid over them again. The fact that Orbital has combined this kind of fun with a requisite of moderate racing skill makes for a good combo. Apart from being inherently limiting, Racing Gears does just about all you could ask of it.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> Concept: It's like the old isometric RC Pro Am titles, but with a few wrinkles

> Graphics: The game looks pretty sharp, and I was impressed with the persistent oil slicks

> Sound: There is music for the races, but it's pretty forgettable

> Playability: With the tracks being as complicated as they are, the isometric view can throw you off – but that's the point

> Entertainment: If you don't want brain surgery on the GBA, than this will fit the bill

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

I can't recall too many arcade-style racers with this level of approachability, simplicity, and downright fun – handheld or otherwise. Taking the overhead view style first pioneered in early games like Super Sprint to its zenith, Racing Gears Advance offers a surprisingly deep experience through its numerous lengthy tracks, unique individual cars and drivers, and a simple but involving upgrade system for improving your ride. Not only are the courses varied and plentiful, but also excellently designed with jumps, shortcuts and obstacles hidden all over. While certainly not as deep as many console offerings, I'd be hard pressed to name a better racer to take with you on the road.—**MILLER**

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RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

Spring 2005

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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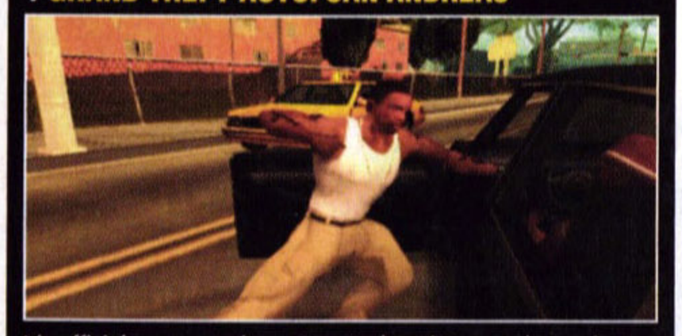
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

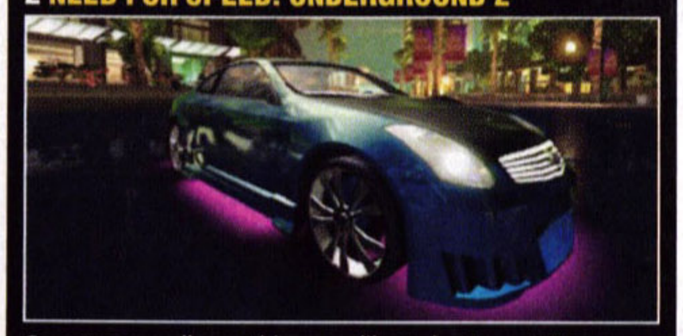
Listings Based Upon NPD Data For December 2004 Based On Units Sold

1 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS



It's official, everyone loves San Andreas! It scored a perfect 10, and judging by the huge sales, the public is eating this sucker up. It looks like it is destined to be one of the greatest selling games of all time. It's a true work of art. In other words, it's the *Night Court* of video games.

2 NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 2

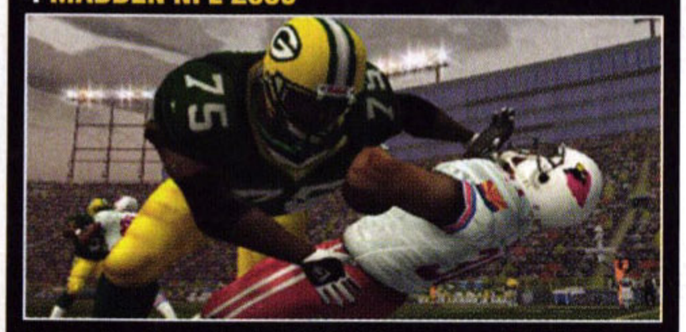


Gamers were all over this game like Judge Harry T. Stone wanted to be all over Mel Tormé. The gaming public has swung its gavel and judged this pimped out racer as totally awesome. Just don't drive like this in real life, or you may find yourself at the mercy of incompetent Public Defender Christine Sullivan, ably played by Markie Post.

3 HALO 2

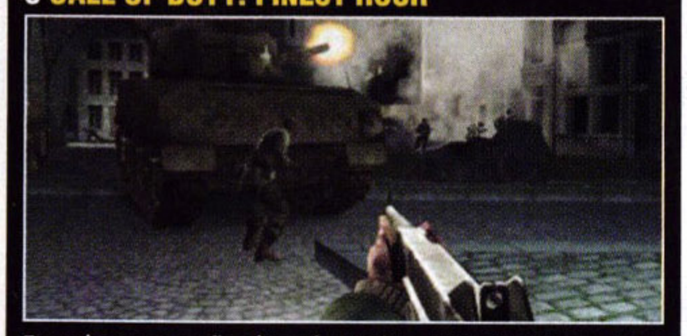
This game is huge. Bull Shannon huge.

4 MADDEN NFL 2005



Remember the episode of *Night Court* where John Astin played the mentally ill guy who turned out to be Harry's dad? What does that have to do with Madden NFL 2005? Nothing in particular. We just thought that it was a really funny episode.

5 CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR



Every hour was a fine hour for Assistant District Attorney Dan Fielding. His job was putting ne'er-do-wells behind bars and scoring with all the pretty ladies. The brave boys who fought in World War II were American heroes, just like good, ol' Dan Fielding. John Larroquette, we salute you.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	2	PS2	10	10-04	$49
2	Need for Speed: Underground 2	4	PS2	8	11-04	$48
3	Halo 2	1	XBOX	10	11-04	$49
4	Madden NFL 2005	6	PS2	8.75	09-04	$27
5	Call of Duty: Finest Hour	N/A	PS2	8.5	11-04	$49
6	Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories	N/A	GBA	7.75	12-04	$32
7	Need for Speed: Underground 2	9	XBOX	8	11-04	$48
8	NBA Live 2005	13	PS2	8.25	09-04	$28
9	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	7	PS2	9.5	11-04	$49
10	Mario Party 6	N/A	GC	6.25	12-04	$49
11	Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	N/A	XBOX	9.25	12-04	$50
12	Dragonball Z: Budokai 3	14	PS2	5	11-04	$47
13	Super Mario 64 DS	10	DS	8.5	11-04	$30
14	The Incredibles	8	GBA	N/A	11-04	$29
15	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	16	PS2	9.75	10-04	$43
16	Jak 3	15	PS2	9.25	11-04	$39
17	Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	20	GBA	6	10-04	$28
18	Ghost Recon 2	N/A	XBOX	8	11-04	$48
19	Donkey Kong Country 2	N/A	GBA	8.5	11-04	$29
20	Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	11	PS2	10	11-04	$39

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

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Gran Turismo 4	N/A	PS2
2	Wario Ware Touched!	N/A	DS
3	Super Mario 64 DS	N/A	DS
4	Dragon Quest VII	1	PS2
5	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	N/A	PS2
6	To Heart 2	N/A	PS2
7	Itadaki Street Special	N/A	PS2
8	Mega Man Battle Network 5	N/A	GBA
9	Mario Party 6	4	GC
10	Tales of Rebirth	N/A	PS2

Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Resident Evil 4	N/A	GC
2	Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening	N/A	PS2
3	World of Warcraft	1	PC
4	Gran Turismo 4	N/A	PS2
5	NBA Street V3	N/A	Multi
6	The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap	2	GBA
7	Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	3	Xbox
8	Halo 2	5	Xbox
9	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	8	PS2
10	Star Wars: Republic Commando	N/A	Xbox

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

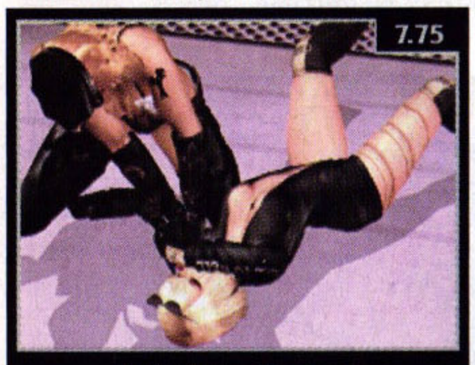
Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	The Sims 2	3	$43
2	Half-Life 2	2	$51
3	Roller Coaster Tycoon 3	5	$37
4	Zoo Tycoon 2	4	$35
5	The Lord of the Rings: Battle For Middle-Earth	N/A	$49
6	The Sims 2: Special Edition	6	$43
7	World Of Warcraft	N/A	$49
8	The Sims Deluxe	N/A	$17
9	Zoo Tycoon: Complete Collection	9	$30
10	Rome: Total War	7	$35

Based On Monthly Units Sold

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

PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	9	Dec-04
Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed	5.5	Jan-05
Armored Core: Nexus	7.25	Sep-04
Asterix & Obelix XXL	6	Sep-04
Astro Boy	5.5	Sep-04
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Athens 2004	6	Aug-04
ATV Offroad Fury 3	7	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes TheNeighborhood	5.75	Jan-05



Rumble Roses – PS2 – Jan-05

Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Battle Assault 3 Featuring Gundam Seed	4	Jan-05
Blood Will Tell	5	Nov-04
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	7.25	Jul-04
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Capcom Fighting Evolution	6	Dec-04
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
ChoroQ	6.25	Oct-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Crash 'n' Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Crimson Tears	5	Aug-04
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme	8.25	Oct-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Dog's Life	7	Sep-04
Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3	5	Jan-05
Driv3r	6	Aug-04
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	7	Sep-04
Echo Night: Beyond	6	Aug-04
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
EyeToy: AntiGrav	7	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	7.75	Dec-04
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	8.75	Oct-04
Fullmetal Alchemist and the Broken Angel	4.75	Feb-05
Funkmaster Flex Digital Hitz Factory	6.75	Oct-04
Galactic Wrestling Featuring Ultimate Muscle	4.25	Jul-04
Gallop Racer 2004	8.25	Oct-04
Getaway: Black Monday, The	7	Feb-05
Get On Da Mic	5	Dec-04
Ghosthunter	6.5	Sep-04
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	7.25	Dec-04
Ghost Recon 2	6.5	Feb-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Gradius V	8.25	Oct-04
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	10	Dec-04
Gretzky NHL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Growlanser: Generations	7.5	Jan-05
Guilty Gear Isuka	6.75	Dec-04
Gungrave: Overdose	4.25	Nov-04
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Headhunter: Redemption	6.75	Oct-04
Hot Shots Golf Fore!	9	Sep-04
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Inuyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask	4.25	Jan-05
Jak 3	9.25	Nov-04
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	8.25	Aug-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	8.25	Nov-04
Katamari Damacy	8	Oct-04
Killzone	7.5	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	6.5	Nov-04
Kuon	6	Nov-04
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	4	Aug-04
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Mega Man X8	8.25	Jan-05
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MLB Slugfest Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
Monster Hunter	5	Nov-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
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NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
Neo Contra	7.75	Nov-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Nightmare of Druaga: Fushigino Dungeon, The	4	Nov-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
Phantom Brave	8	Sep-04
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection	6.75	Feb-05
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
Puyo Pop Fever	7.25	Aug-04
Rachet and Clank: Up Your Arsenal	10	Nov-04
Rapala Pro Fishing	8.25	Oct-04
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Rumble Roses	7.75	Jan-05
Samurai Warriors Xtreme Legends	6.75	Jan-05
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Sega Superstars	8	Dec-04
Shadow Hearts: Covenant	8	Oct-04
Shadow of Rome	8.5	Feb-05
Shaman King: Power of Spirit	6.5	Jan-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Shellshock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	7.5	Nov-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Sly 2: Band of Thieves	8.75	Oct-04
Smash Court Pro Tournament 2	5	Jul-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spy Fiction	7.5	Oct-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	8.25	Aug-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	8	Sep-04
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Suikoden IV	8.5	Feb-05
Taiko Drum Master	7.75	Dec-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Technic Beat	7.5	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	6.75	Nov-04
TOCA Race Driver: Ultimate Racing Simulator	7.5	Nov-04
Tony Hawk's Undeground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	5	Aug-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
UFC Sudden Impact	6.5	Jul-04
Under the Skin	5	Oct-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe	9.5	Sep-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
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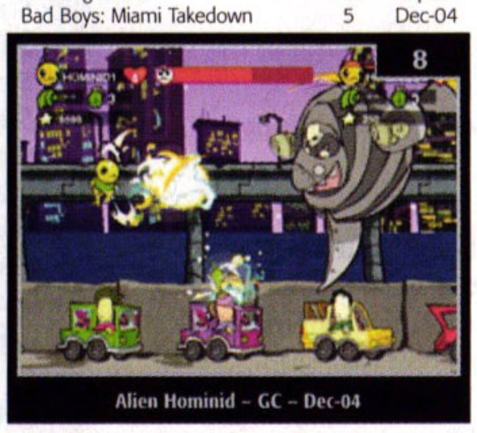
WWE Smackdown! Vs. RAW	8.5	Dec-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	3.25	Dec-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	6	Jan-05

GAMECUBE

Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Amazing Island	7.25	Sep-04
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04



Alien Hominid – GC – Dec-04

Baten Kaitos: Wings of Eternity and the Lost Ocean	8.75	Dec-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Donkey Konga	7	Nov-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
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Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Mario Party 6	6.25	Feb-05
Mario Power Tennis	8.5	Jan-05
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	9.5	Jan-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
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NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Paper Mario 2: The Thousand-Year Door	6.75	Nov-04
Pikmin 2	8.75	Aug-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Rainbow Six 3	5.75	Sep-04
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
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Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
WWE Day of Reckoning	8.25	Oct-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04

XBOX

Army Men: Sarge's War	5	Oct-04
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04

Scaler – Xbox – Feb-05

Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space	7	Jan-05
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay, The	9.5	Jul-04
Colin McRae Rally 2005	8.25	Oct-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Crash 'n' Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 2	7.75	Dec-04
Dead or Alive Ultimate	9	Dec-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Driv3r	6	Aug-04
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
Fable	9.5	Oct-04
Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut	9.25	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Full Spectrum Warrior	8.25	Jul-04
Galleon	4.25	Oct-04
Ghost Recon 2	8	Jan-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Guilty Gear X2 #Reload	8.25	Sep-04
Gungriffon: Allied Strike	6	Feb-05
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Halo 2	10	Dec-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
IndyCar Series 2005	6.5	Aug-04
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Karaoke Revolution	7.75	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders	7.75	Nov-04
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Malice	5.5	Aug-04
Mechassault 2: Lone Wolf	9.25	Feb-05
Men of Valor	7.75	Nov-04
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Slug 3	8	Jul-04
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
MLB Slugfest Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
MTV Music Generator 3	8	Aug-04
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath	9	Feb-05
Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors	7	Oct-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
OutRun 2	6.5	Dec-04
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection	6.75	Feb-05
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Pro Fishing Challenge	4.25	Sep-04
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
Pure Pinball	5.75	Oct-04
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Samurai Warriors	7.75	Sep-04
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	5.75	Aug-04
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
ShellShock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Sims 2, The	8.75	Nov-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	9.25	Feb-05
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Sudeki	7.75	Sep-04
SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom	6.5	Nov-04
Syberia II	6.25	Nov-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Thief: Deadly Shadows	7.25	Jul-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Tony Hawk's Undeground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	5	Aug-04
Tron 2.0 Killer App	7	Jan-05
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
Ultra Bust-A-Move	7	Dec-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Wings of War	6.5	Nov-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Yager	7	Oct-04

PC

Armies of Exigo	8	Dec-04
Aura: Fate of the Ages	7.25	Sep-04
Axis & Allies	7.75	Jan-05
Besieger	6	Aug-04
Call of Duty: United Offensive	8.75	Nov-04
City of Heroes	9	Jul-04
Chris Sawyer's Locomotion	7	Nov-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay Developer's Cut, The	9.25	Jan-05
Codename: Panzers	7.75	Dec-04
Doom 3	9	Oct-04
Everquest II	8.5	Feb-05
Evil Genius	8.5	Nov-04
Ground Control II: Operation Exodus	8.5	Aug-04
Half-Life 2	9.5	Dec-04
Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile	8	Jan-05

Sid Meier's Pirates – PC – Jan-05

Joint Operations: Escalation	8	Jan-05
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	8.5	Aug-04
Kohan II: Kings of War	8	Oct-04
Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle	7.25	Jul-04
Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth, The	8.5	Jan-05
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	8.5	Jan-05
Missing: Since January	6.5	Sep-04
Myst IV: Revelation	8	Nov-04
Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell	8	Jan-05
Perimeter	7.75	Jul-04
Political Machine, The	7	Nov-04
Rise of Nations: Thrones and Patriots	9	Jul-04
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	8.75	Dec-04
Rome: Total War	7.75	Nov-04
Sacred	7.75	Jun-04
Scrapland	6	Dec-04
Sid Meier's Pirates!	8.5	Jan-05
Singles: Flirt Up Your Life	7	Aug-04
Soldiers: Heroes of World War II	5	Aug-04
Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed	8	Jan-05
Thief: Deadly Shadows	7.25	Jul-04
Tribes: Vengeance	8.5	Dec-04
Uru: The Path of the Shell	8.25	Sep-04
Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines	7.5	Jan-05
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	9.25	Nov-04
Warlords Battlecry III	7.75	Aug-04
World of Warcraft	9.5	Feb-05

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Advance Guardian Heroes	7	Dec-04
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	8.5	Aug-04
Banjo Pilot	7	Jan-05
Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	6.25	Dec-04
Catwoman	6.5	Sep-04
Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Rage	5.75	Jun-04
Donkey Kong	8	Jun-04
Donkey Kong Country 2	8.5	Jan-05
Dragon Ball Z: Buu's Fury	4.5	Oct-04
Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors	5.5	Sep-04
Duel Masters: Sempai Legends	7.5	Aug-04
Fear Factor: Unleashed	3	Feb-05
Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls	9	Jan-05
F-Zero: GP Legend	6.5	Nov-04
Grand Theft Auto Advance	7.5	Jan-05
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	8	Jul-04
It's Mr. Pants	8	Jan-05
Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories	7.75	Jan-05

Astro Boy – GBA – Aug-04

Kirby and the Amazing Mirror	7.75	Oct-04
Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap, The	9.5	Feb-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8	Feb-05
Madden NFL 2005	7	Sep-04
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	8	Jun-04
Mario Pinball Land	7.5	Oct-04
Mario vs. Donkey Kong	7.5	Jun-04
Mega Man Battle Network 4: Red Sun/Blue Moon	7	Jun-04
Mega Man Zero 3	6.75	Oct-04
Metal Slug Advance	7	Dec-04
Mighty Beanz Pocket Puzzles	6	Sep-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	3.5	Feb-05
Pokémon Fire Red/Leaf Green	8	Oct-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	3.5	Dec-04
River City Ransom EX	8	Jun-04
Sabrewulf	6.5	Aug-04
Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon	7.5	Jun-04
Sonic Advance 3	6.75	Jul-04
Spider-Man 2	7	Aug-04
Spyro Orange: The Cortex Conspiracy	5.75	Jun-04
Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice of the Force	6	Oct-04
Super Mario Bros.	9	Jun-04
Thunderbirds	5.75	Oct-04
Tron 2.0: Killer App	6.5	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6	Dec-04
Ultimate Card Games	7	Sep-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.5	Nov-04
WWE Survivor Series	7.5	Jan-05
Yu-Gi-Oh!: Reshef of Destruction	4.5	Sep-04

NINTENDO DS

Feel the Magic XY/XX	8.5	Jan-05
Madden NFL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits	7	Jan-05
Ridge Racer DS	7	Jan-05
Spider-Man 2	6	Jan-05
Sprung	6	Jan-05
Super Mario 64 DS	8.5	Jan-05
Tiger Woods PGA Tour	4	Feb-05
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	8	Feb-05

SECRETACCESS

Codes, Strategies, Hints, Droids, And Tips

Resident Evil 4

Quick Tips From Capcom

After the event with the village mayor, if you go back to the room there's an event that will occur in which Ada helps you out. (Chapter 1-3)

If you shoot out the lanterns in the underground passageway, the place will go completely dark and you will be able to see jewels on the ceiling. (Chapter 1-3)

From the hole in the ceiling you can go to where the Weapons Merchant is. (Chapter 2-1)

If you hit Luis five times there is an event that will occur in which the two of you have a falling out or a quarrel. (Chapter 2-2)

If you use the flash grenade on the "abnormal living beings" (all types), then you can defeat them in one hit. (From Chapter 2-1 on)

If you defeat the two lookouts in front, then the sling-wielding force will not appear. (Chapter 4-1)

You can destroy the creepy crawly's nest (a ton of items will fall down). (Chapter 4-1)

In front of the skeleton in the room with the Key Items it is possible to acquire a total of 3,000 pesetas. (Chapter 4-3)

If you examine Saddler's chair you will be able to pick up an emerald. If you check it again after that, Leon will sit down! (Chapter 5-3)

At the first jet ski jump, if you push the L + R buttons and jump just before you do this, you will rotate or spin around once. Even in jumps after that, if you push the L + R buttons and jump, then you'll rotate off to the side. (Final Area)

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM

Alien Hominid

> **PLAYSTATION 2, GAMECUBE**

Entering each of these as your player name will unlock new hats.

Abe	Goodman
April	Grrl
Behemoth	Princess
Cletus	Superfly
Dandy	Tomfulp

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – last seen mooning Packers fans and rubbing his metal tush on the goalposts of Lambeau Field)

Mercenaries

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX**

Enter these on the Factions screen of the PDA. A soft click will confirm correct entry.

Invulnerability – Up, Down, Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right

Unlock All Shop Items – Down (x4), Up, Left, Right (x2)

NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

Enter these as your driver's name in Fight to the Top mode. The first word should be his first name, and the second word his last. Also, be aware that these are case-sensitive.

$10 Million – Walmart NASCAR

10 Million Fans – MakeMe Famous

2,000,000 Prestige Points – You TheMan

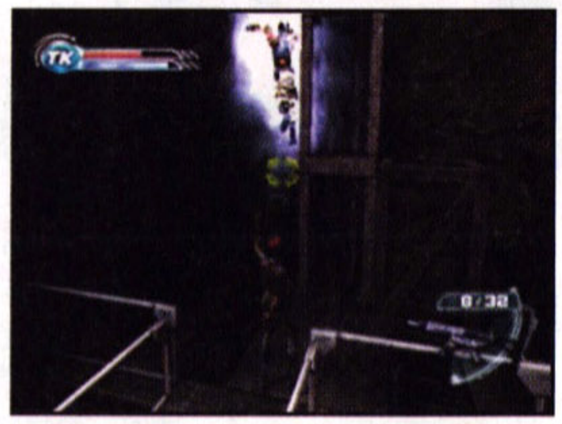
Event Thunder Plates – Dodge Stadium

Unlock All Thunder Plates – Open Sesame

Unlock Dale Earnhardt, Sr. – The Intimidator

Unlock Lakeshore Drive (Fantasy Track) – Walmart Exclusive

Unlock Mr. Clean Pit Crew – Clean Crew



Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX**

At the main menu, highlight Extra Content and press the R button (Xbox) or R1 (PS2). Enter these codes on the keypad that pops up.

All Powers	537893
Arcade Mode	05051979
Bullet Resistant	548975
Cooperative Play Mode	07041979
Dark Mode	465486
No Head	987978
Super Psi	456456
Unlimited Ammo	978945

SKINS

Crispy Soldier	454566
Dockworker	364654
Edgar Barret	497878
Edgar Barret (Training 1)	196001
Edgar Barret (Training 2)	196002
Edgar Barret (Training 3)	196003
Edgar Barret (Training 4)	196004
Edgar Barret (Training 5)	196005
Edgar Barret (Training 6)	196006
Jack	698798
Jov Leonov	468987
Kimiko Jones	978798
Labcoat	998789
Marlena Kessler	489788
Marlena Kessler (Bikini)	135454
Marlena Kessler (Leather)	136876
Marlena Kessler (Saranae)	65496873
MP1	321646
MP2	698799
MP3	654659
Nick Scryer (Stealth)	456498
Nick Scryer (Training)	564689
Nick Scryer (Urban)	484646
Nick Scryer (Wasteland)	975466
Sara Blake	135488
Sara Blake (Psi)	468799
Sara Blake (Suicide)	231644
Scorpion	546546
The General (Default)	459797
The General (Clown)	431644
Tonya	678999
UN Soldier	365498
Wei Lu	231324
Wei Lu (Dragon)	978789
Wei Lu (Tranquility)	654654

EXTRA MISSIONS

Aura Pool	659785

Code of the Month

NFL Street 2

From the main menu, go to Options and then Cheats and Codes. Enter these there; keep in mind that they are case-sensitive. You also have to enable them afterwards (from that same menu), or they won't work.

No Chains Mode – NoChains
No Fumble Mode – GlueHands
Unlock EA Field – EAField
Unlock AFC East All-Stars – EAASFSCT
Unlock AFC North All-Stars – NAOFRCTH
Unlock AFC South All-Stars – SAOFUCTH
Unlock AFC West All-Stars – WAEFSCT
Unlock NFC East All-Stars – NNOFRCTH
Unlock NFC North All-Stars – NNAS66784
Unlock NFC South All-Stars – SNOFUCTH
Unlock NFC West All-Stars – ENASFSCT
Unlock Team Reebok – Reebok
Unlock Team Xzibit – TeamXzibit

Randy Blake
Philadelphia, PA

Bottomless Pit	154897
Bouncy, Bouncy	568789
Floor of Death	05120926
Gasoline	9442662
Gearshift	154684
Gnomotron	456878
Panic Room	76635766
Psi Pool	565485
Stoplights	945678
Survival	7734206
Tip the Idol	428584
TK Alley	090702
Up and Over	020615

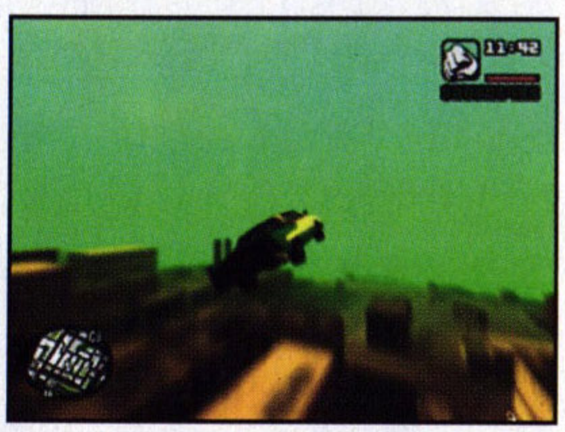
Unlock All Rider Gear FITS
Unlock Everything But Fury Bike !SLACKER!

Scaler

> XBOX, GAMECUBE

Pause the game, select Options, then Audio. Enter the codes there. A message will confirm correct entry.

200,000 Klokkies – L (x2), R (x2), Y, X, Y
Full Health – R, L, R, L, Y (x2), X (x2), R, X
Infinite Electric Bombs – R (x2), L (x2), Y (x2), X



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Some new codes have come to light. As always, enter these during non-paused gameplay. A message will display confirming correct entry.

Flying Cars – □, Down, L2, Up, L1, ○, Up, ×, Left
Increased Gang Violence – L2, Up, R1 (x2), L, R1 (x2), Right, Down
Only Gangs On Streets – Left, Right (x3), Left, ×, Down, Up, □, Right, Down
Vastly Less Traffic – ×, Down, Up, R2, Down, △, L1, △, Left
Super Punch – Up, Left, ×, △, R1, ○ (x3), L2

PLAYSTATION 2

ATV Offroad Fury 3

In the Player Profile menu, select Enter Cheat. Then, believe it or not, enter the cheats.

1,500 Credits	+foodstamps+

Mega Man X8

Enter these at the title screen (where it says Press Start). A voiceover will confirm entry. Then, you have to start a new game on Normal or Hard difficulty. The new items will be available for development at the R&D Lab, but be warned – they're really expensive.

Alia (playable) – Down, R1, Up, L1, □, ×, △, ○
Layer (playable) – □ (x2), Right, ×, R1
Sigma Blade – L3 (x2), R3, L3 (x2), R3, L3 (x2), R3, L3 (x2), R3

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Grand Theft Auto

Enter these codes during gameplay. You have to activate cheat mode first.

Activate Cheat Mode – Press A, B, and Start at the same time
Cash Money – Left, Right, Up, Down, L (x2)
Full Armor – Left, Right, Up, Down, A (x2)
Full Health – Left, Right, Up, Down, A, L
Less Wanted Level – Left, Right, Up, Down, A, R
More Wanted Level – Left, Right, Up, Down, R, A
Wanted Level Full/None Toggle – Left, Right, Up, Down, R (x2)

PC

Axis & Allies

Press Enter to open the chat pane, then enter the code and press Enter again.

$100	swissbank
100 XP	fieldpromotion
Instant Lose	isurrender
Instant Win	veday
No Build Time	rosieriveter
No Fog Of War	enigma

Mod World

GUNBOUND

www.gunbound.net

Imagine, for a second, that Worms was free, online, and tracked stats. Then replace all the documentation with hilarious Korean Engrish. Voila, you've got Gunbound! True, the download clocks in at a whopping 105 MB, but that's what leaving your computer running overnight is for. And why are you reading this column if you don't have decent broadband anyway, neanderthals?

For those unfamiliar with Worms (shame on you!), the premise is this: Players are seperated into teams, thrown onto a destructible 2D map, and proceed to blow the crap out of each other with a variety of explosive weaponry. The great part about the whole thing, though, is that you get money for kills, and can use it between games to upgrade your avatar. The selection of new items available for purchase is astounding, and you'd be surprised how cool you can make an anime-style sprite look.

Though it can be fairly tough to learn the ropes when you're getting pounded by online death machines, once you get into the swing of things, Gunbound can be an absolute blast. Besides the ever-entertaining gameplay itself, the upgrade system is rather addictive. Of course, if you don't want to earn your goods through winning in-game, you have the option to purchase game cash with real money – but it's far from necessary. Supporting the people who provide you with free entertainment is always commendable, though.

MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf

Day One Studios Shares World-Conquering Tips

Designers Jeff Gregg and Matt Udvari, Day One Studios

KNOW AND LOVE THE VTOL

Perhaps the single biggest contribution to your team is the VTOL pilot. While it is true the VTOL won't be the king of kills, it is invaluable for keeping your team healthy and at maximum power. Before the game starts decide who is going to be the VTOL pilot. In most game types the first thing you, as the VTOL pilot, will want to do is get airborne and start gathering salvage from the VTOL pad. Don't worry about finesse; just throw out packs of four of each ammo type until your teammates are at full power.

Once they are powered up, gather a load of armor salvage and be ready to heal people up as they engage the enemy. Prioritize healing friends over providing them ammo. The right salvage at the right time can mean the difference between victory and defeat.

If you are not your team's VTOL pilot, remember to keep your lifeline informed of your condition. Ask for salvage before you are in desperate need of it (when you are at around 50% health and still under fire), and make sure to tell the pilot what vehicle or Mech you are in so he can easily recognize you in the field. Make sure to give an indication of your position as well. If you see the enemy VTOL, be sure to bring it down as quickly as possible.

FOCUS YOUR FIREPOWER

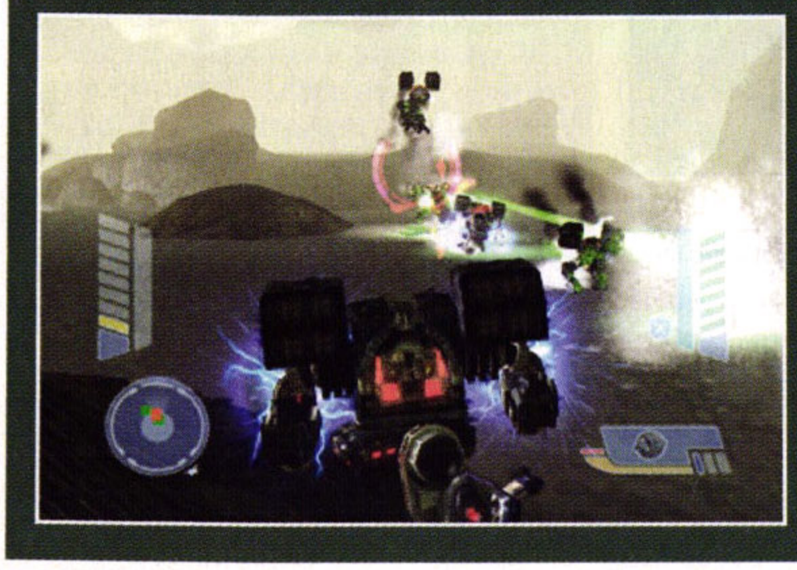
The vehicles and Mechs in MechAssault 2 are capable of dealing and taking enormous punishment. The best way to bring a foe down is for all of your team members to concentrate fire on as few targets as possible. Call out your target and focus on those your teammates attack. Try to bring down enemies that are not using defensive systems (such as reflective or reactive armor) first.

Try to concentrate on one enemy Mech that is near his friends. The Mech's violent reactor explosion has a very good chance of taking out other foes.

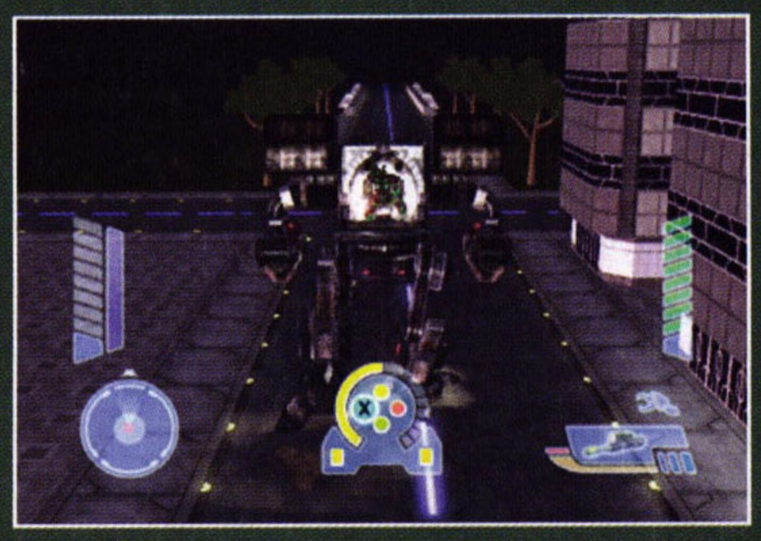
Remember to come out in organized waves. Constantly engaging the enemy without support is a great way to be killed. At the start of the game wait for your teammates to enter their vehicles and Mechs, then go out as one force. When you die, regroup and counter-attack with friends. Remember to move at the pace of your slower Mechs. Don't overextend your team by sending the faster scout Mechs to the front lines!

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE BATTLE ARMOR

The battle armor is the most versatile unit on the field. It can jump and attach to buildings, allowing it to access areas few others can get to. It does not appear on radar when motionless which is perfect for lurking in wait for a passing Mech. It can neurohack enemy Mechs, robbing foes of a deployable unit which you can use! It can also hitch a ride on the VTOL craft to reach anywhere on the battlefield in a speedy fashion.



When in a battle armor, remember to use your size to your advantage. Chances are you won't win a fight with a Mech when engaging head-to-head. Instead, try to remain motionless and unnoticed, grabbing hold of them with your claw when they pass. When you attach, quickly begin the neurohacking process. This is especially effective in Capture the Flag or Snatch-It! game types since attaching to a Mech that is carrying one of these objects forces it to drop its prize.



Battle armor units that are attached and hanging from a VTOL gain powerful level four laser weaponry. A VTOL with two battle armor units riding is a force to be reckoned with. Use this tactic to quickly fly to areas where you are needed most. This is a great way to quickly capture the enemy flag or to steal a data core.

If the VTOL pilot is busy, you can attach to friendly Mechs and ride out to battle that way as well. As a bonus, Mechs that have friendly battle armor attached cannot be neurohacked!

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Don't fill the airwaves with needless chatter if the heat is on. Remember to stay in constant communication with relevant details being relayed to your team. Teams that listen to their friends and adjust their tactics accordingly are sure to crush a disorganized team very quickly.

If you are heading for salvage that someone says they need, don't take it! Trust that they really need it.

Don't ask for a VTOL drop of armor unless you really need it! One of your friends may perish while the VTOL wastes his time with you.

Keep focused on the objective or objectives! Report where your flag is and who has it if it has been captured. Inform defenders of attack waves you see and what enemies are bringing to the battle. Give the shout out if you see an enemy Alpha Strike being charged.

Above all, if someone is relaying important information, listen and don't interrupt unless you have something more important to say!

CONTROL THE BATTLEFIELD'S RESOURCES

Check-It games contain only one VTOL pad which is controlled by the center checkpoint. Your team cannot use the VTOL pad to gain precious cargo unless you have control of that checkpoint. Make sure to get control of this point and hold it as quickly as possible! If the enemy has control of this precious prize, make sure to get it back as soon as you can. Shoot down the enemy VTOL at all times to prevent it from undoing the damage you do to enemy units.

MAP TIPS: NEW RIVER CITY (CTF MODE)

The blue team's side of the river contains the bulk of the city. This is both a blessing and a curse, as it means more cover for both invaders and defenders. Blue defenders should plant pilot bombs on the flag pad and attempt to catch flag runners before they cross the river. Red attackers should try to use the buildings to come up behind the blue flag and scoop it up.

The red team's side of the river is much more open. Red defenders should use their buildings around the flag pad as cover. Try to destroy blue attackers as they cross the river. Don't let blue flag runners get into the city proper on the blue side or you will likely lose them. Blue attackers should try to approach from the far side (near the red base itself) if possible. Expect the most direct route to the red flag to be heavily guarded.

Both teams should use their Hackman as the flag runner. Its cloaking ability makes sneaking up to the flag a snap. Remember to shoot the flag pad before approaching it to clear out any enemy pilot bombs!

MAP TIPS: MISSION (TANK RUSH)

You start Tank Rush without a vehicle. As luck would have it, the mission starts you right in front of a tank crew taking a break. Sneak around behind the tank and enter it using the open hatch on the tank's left side. Simply run over the tank crew to remove them from the picture.

After the APC joins you, follow the highway and be careful not to shoot or run over any enemy troops. Remember, they think you are one of them! Eventually you will be caught though, and brute force will become the only option. Use your tank's long range firing ability

to take out enemies from great distances. Remember to protect the APC from damage.

Eventually you will cross a large chasm that has its bridge destroyed by enemy jets. On the other side of this chasm there is a hidden path to the left you can take. Proceed down this path to find an abandoned Owens Mech. Use this Mech to complete the mission easily and proceed to the next mission.

MISSION TIPS: GO TIME ON THESTRIA

The Mad Dog is one mean piece of machinery if you can get it fully powered up. Use your missiles to attack the small fast units, like the tank and the helicopter.

Kuritan warriors will join you at the huge battlefield. What follows is a huge, chaotic Mech fight. Though you can hear missiles whizzing past your cockpit in every direction, stay focused. The best way to get your Mech to full power is to destroy one bad guy at a time. Then, get his salvage and move to the next one. Keep in mind that, since you are going 100% with your weapons, the Mad Dog is sure to overheat. So try to find the low ground, where there is some pooled swamp water. Standing in this will cool you down.

Notice that, throughout the fight, Nat will fly around in her VTOL occasionally dropping some salvage and attacking enemies. Keeping her and the Kuritans from destruction may be the difference between your victory and defeat. Try to defend them when you aren't preoccupied with saving your own skin.

If there are any moments of calm, be sure to run around and gather the loose salvage. When possible, turn on your target jamming to avoid taking too many missile shots. Look for salvage in the field, keep moving, and most importantly, don't get caught in a nasty crossfire between the hordes of enemies!

MAP TIPS: MISSION (SWAMP ROCK)

Swamp Rock begins with you being deployed in a suit of battle armor. You need to locate and destroy Anti-Aircraft missile sites so that the Icarus can set down. There are two different approaches to this situation.

The easier way to handle this mission is to jack and occupy the first Mech you come into contact with (a Thor class Mech). This mighty ride should see you through the engagements until the missiles are destroyed and the Icarus can land. Once they do, they will provide you with a fully powered Mad Dog Mech that you should take for the rest of the mission.

A much more challenging way is to try to complete Swamp Rock without abandoning the battle armor. This will be harder but it can be done and is worth the effort. Feel free to neurohack enemy Mechs for quick takedowns, but just leave them there and move on. If you manage to complete Swamp Rock with the battle armor you will still occupy it at the start of the next

mission. The giant Spider Mech wasn't built for fighting such a small unit, and you will find that the battle armor can make quick work of the behemoth and easily dodges most of its weaponry!

MAP TIPS: CHECKMATE (FINAL BOSS)

The final boss demands that you bring your best battle armor game to the table. Right when the battle begins fall back and to your left, keeping the boss in sight. Only direct hits to his head will hurt him, so keep pouring on the mortars. Lasers will hurt him as well, but sticking to just lasers takes a long time and gives the boss more opportunities to destroy you.

The boss uses three attack types in his first stage:
- When his right claw charges up, he is about to fire a plasma PPC burst at you. Wait until the burst is close and then quickly jump/strafe to the left or right to get out of the way.
- When the boss rears up he will shoot his mortars at you. Quickly jump and strafe backwards to avoid the impacts. Be careful not to jump into the outer wall or you will become pinned.
- If you get too close, the boss will use his left arm to smash the ground. Jump before his left claw connects with the ground or you will take damage and be knocked off your feet!

Keep circling around the arena in a clockwise fashion and always face the boss. Try to keep him chasing you in a circular motion as well; don't get so far away that he cuts across the middle or things will get rougher on you. Natalia will fly by in her VTOL and drop salvage for you as you fight. Learn to time her drops and collect the salvage as she passes to maximize your energy. Eventually you will crack his head open and his second phase will begin.

The boss uses all of his previous attacks plus the following additional attacks during phase two:
- If you get close to the front of the boss, he will belch fire onto you. The boss loves to knock you down with his ground pound and then fry you – watch out!
- The boss will also shoot deadly energy beams from his eyes. Dodge these attacks before they push you too far away to neurohack him!

During the second phase you will see a blue shield surrounding his cracked head. While this shield is up you cannot damage the boss. Wait for him to charge up his plasma PPCs or mortars and then jump behind him to attach to him with your claw. Neurohack him to drop his shield! With his shield down you have free reign to assault his exposed head. Pour as much punishment into his skull as you can before his shield recharges. Once it does, neurohack him to drop the shield again. Remember to use Natalia's salvage drops when you need them. Keep this up and the boss will be destroyed in no time.

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—Stephanie Heer
B.A. in Multimedia
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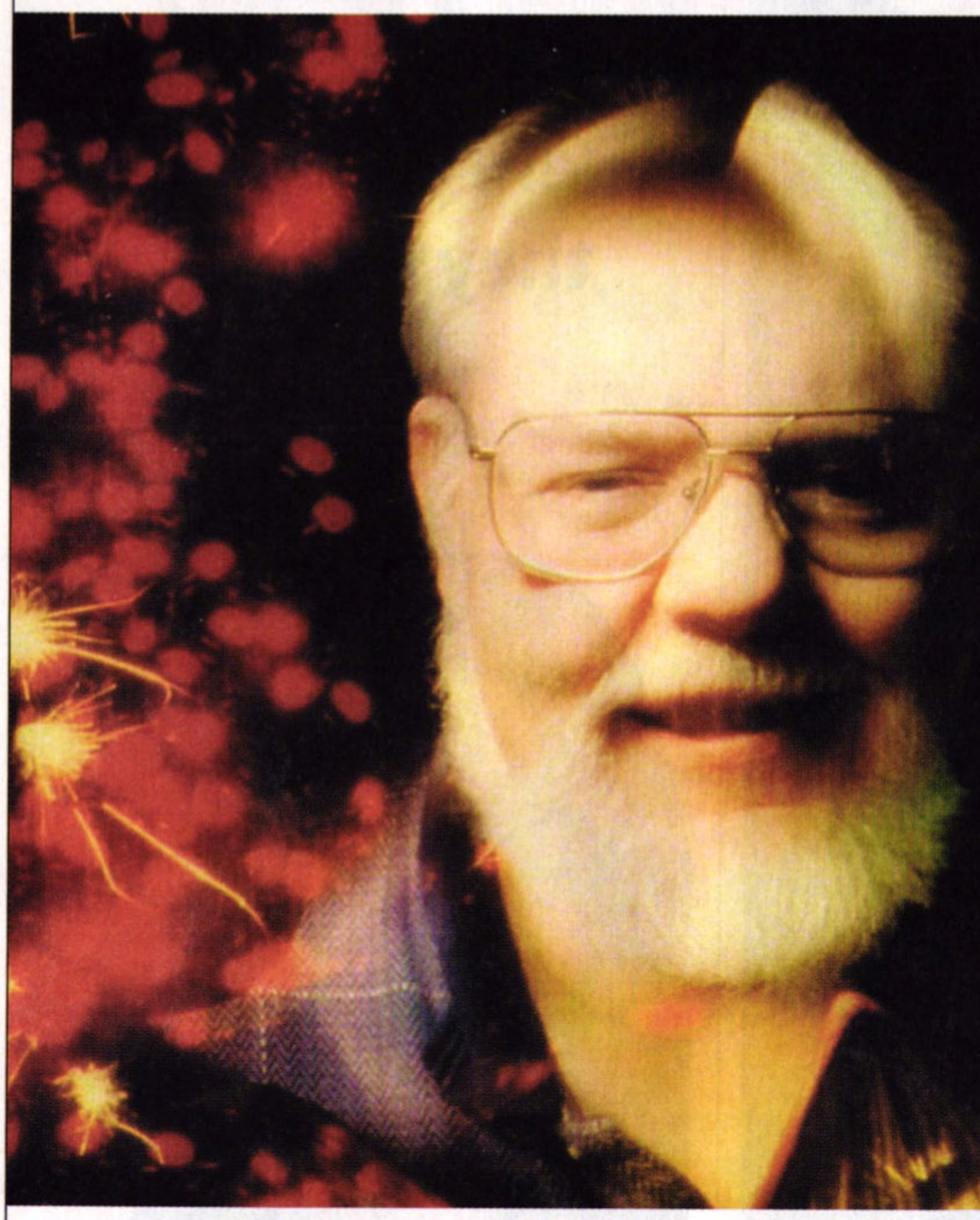


THE DUNGEON MASTER SPEAKS:

CLASSIC GI INTERVIEWS DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CO-CREATOR DAVE ARNESON

In issue 138, Game Informer named Dungeons & Dragons one of the 25 most influential games of all time – the only non-video game to make the list. From its tabletop roots, the impact of D&D has reached into nearly every facet of modern video games, from level building to storytelling, and is now inextricable from the titles we know and love. As one of the game's creators, Dave Arneson was there for D&D's inception, and like his legendary RPG, he has also shifted considerable focus to the world of computer entertainment. Not content to simply watch the ripples of his contribution spread, Arneson continues to take an active role in shaping the direction of gaming. As an instructor at Full Sail media arts college, he has long kept in touch with the video game community he helped foster, teaching computer game design and documentation to a new generation of industry hopefuls. We recently had a chance to speak with Arneson about the many faces of gaming, the people who play them, and what lies ahead.

Where did the name "Dungeons & Dragons" come from?

We sat down in [co-creator] Gary Gygax's basement and made a list of all the possible titles, and I think it was actually his daughter Alicia that came up with "Dungeons & Dragons." Up until then I had called my fantasy game Blackmoor because that was the name of the campaign. He called his Greyhawk, and neither one of those were good mass-market titles. We brainstormed up a list – and made sure we got the kids involved, because they don't have so much chaff in their minds – and that was the best one.

There was a time when playing D&D was harshly stigmatized. What was your reaction to the controversy?

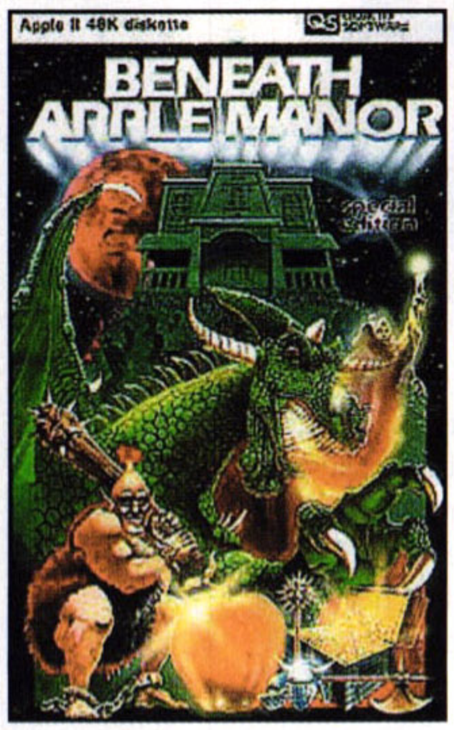
It all started with J. Dallas Egbert, who went missing in some tunnels during what people were led to believe was a live-action variant of D&D. Of course, when it was revealed that D&D had nothing to do with it, well, that part of the story never came out. It made me realize that with one million people playing D&D at the time, I couldn't be held responsible for the choices all those people made. As the years pass, there are always new "evils" to be discovered, like Magic: The Gathering, Yu-Gi-Oh (or was it Pokémon?), and now I think Harry Potter is the evil of the moment. It's always something that everyone is aware of, but nobody really knows anything about. That makes it easier to heap aspersions on it without actually doing any research. When the controversy surrounded D&D, it would have been interesting if the kids who played the game would have had their parents sit in on a session. They probably would have been immediately bored out of their minds, and thought "This is the cult that is sucking my child's life away?"

Do you think that there is a similar taboo attached to video games today?

You see the same kind of misunderstanding. Parents see their kids playing EverQuest for hours every day, and the kids can't explain everything about it. Especially when they're doing live chat, and the parents hear stuff like "chop the head off" and "loot the body!" It sounds pretty lurid and horrible without context. It sounds like your child is becoming an axe murderer!

What are some of the positive things to be gained from gaming?

In terms of tabletop, it provides an avenue to learn social interaction and to put together cooperative efforts. Then there are the mundane things like scorekeeping and math skills. There's also writing, since many referees will write up their adventures. So it nurtures social interaction, and it is even used in schools – especially in special education courses – to help develop those skills. You can get the same thing, to some extent, with video games. The problem with those games is that everything is written in cement the minute it is programmed. If you run into a problem or a roadblock, you can't just reprogram it on the fly. In a live game, the referee can find a way to work around it, so it is more flexible. In the classes I teach, we play a lot of games, but there's learning that happens along the way.



What do you see as the connection between MMORPGs and D&D?

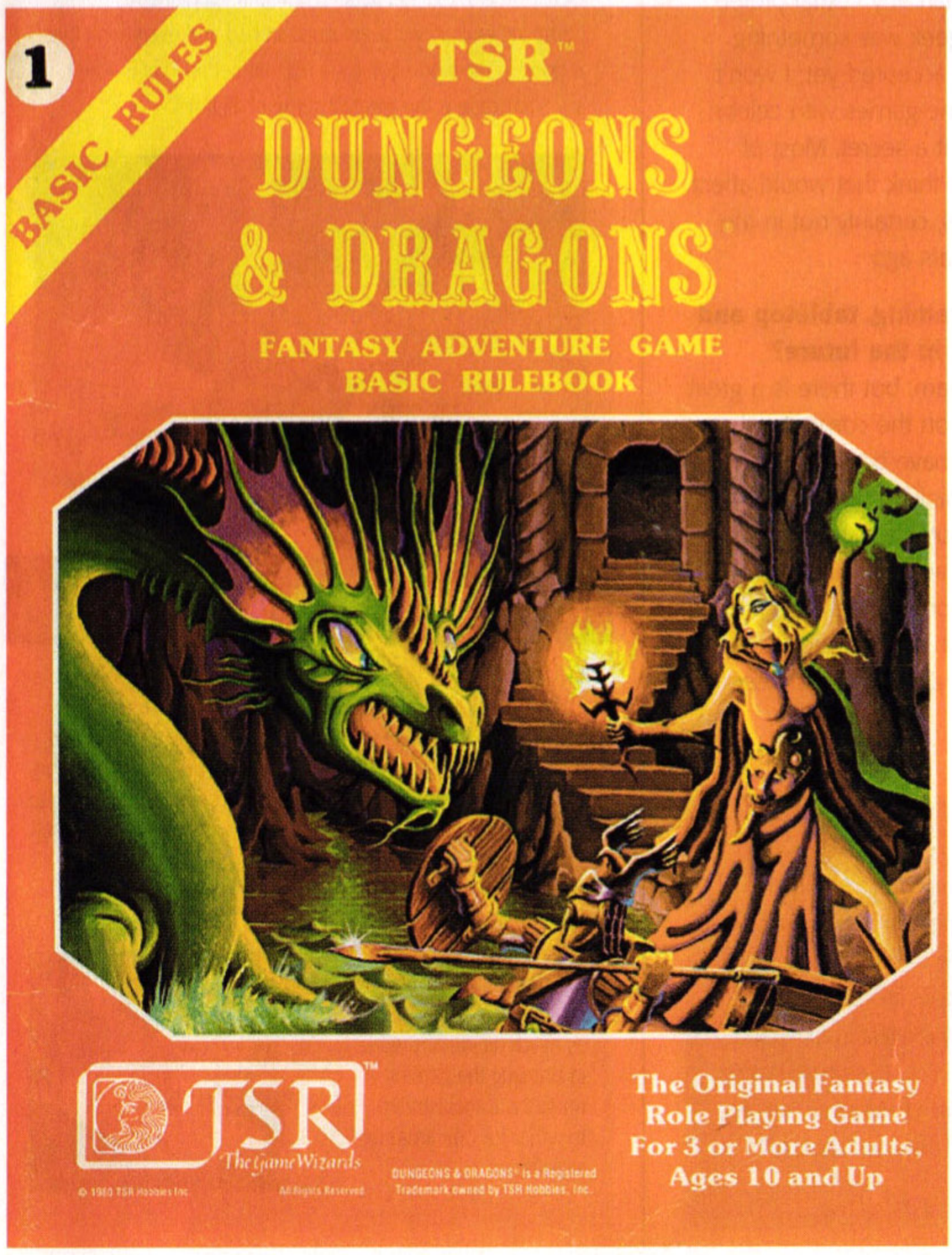
I'll be blunt: I think they're trying to copy D&D on the computer.

We have yet to see a true digital port of the tabletop game. Do you think it's even possible?

I won't say it will never happen. But I find, as a player and a referee, that the face-to-face experience is more valuable. You can see the people, not just the screen names. You can tailor your adventure to suit the people, something that computers won't let you do. I don't think the tabletop can ever be truly replaced, no matter how many versions of EverQuest or Dark Age of Camelot come out. One of the things everyone was so excited about with Neverwinter Nights was the construction set, and it turned out that you couldn't quite do *everything* on the construction set, but you could do a lot. Even though you're always restricted, it's enough to get you involved. It's when players don't feel engaged or involved that you've got problems.

Where do you think video games and tabletop games first crossed paths?

D&D has been a bigger influence in the video game community than many people realize or admit. That's because when this all got started, being a geek meant that you were kind of on the fringes. There were the geeks that played role-playing games, and there were the geeks who did computers, and surprisingly enough, they were the same geeks! One of the biggest influences in the early days came from the Internet in the form of MUDs (Multi User Dungeons). I've heard estimates that said that as many as 10,000 MUDs were going on at one time. That's a lot of dedicated people.



What early games do you see as drawing from the D&D framework?

Beneath Apple Manor. It was the first game I remember providing a fantasy role-playing experience. You went in, cleared out the monsters, took the booty, and "Whoo!" it said you went up three levels. For the time it was advanced, but these days I have students who do more complicated projects in a month. But again, that's just the nature of the industry. That's how things progress. In early games, people were just amazed when you could have a picture of a monster – it didn't need to move or twitch or anything. That wouldn't fly these days.

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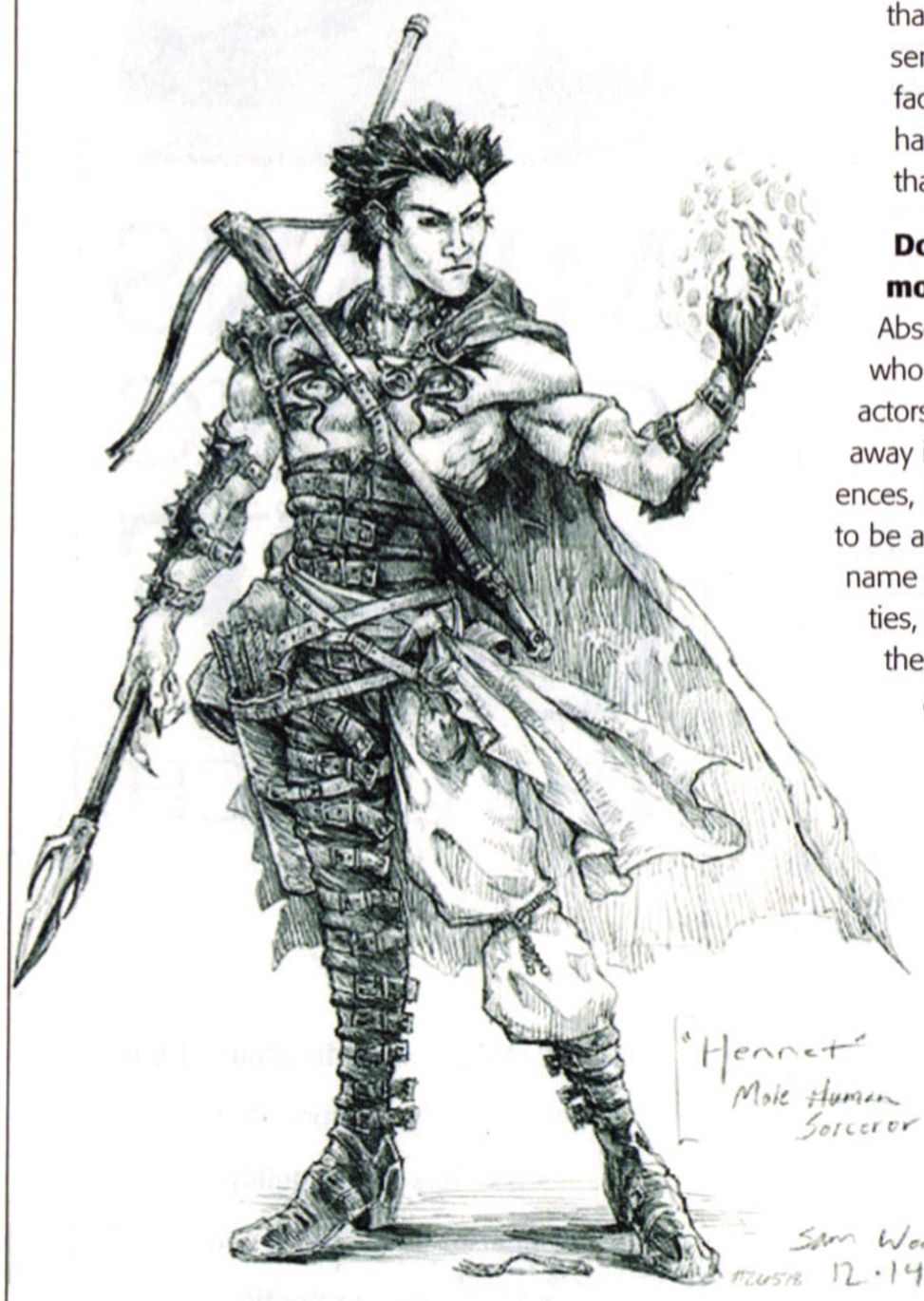
Has D&D borrowed anything from video games?
So many game designers and programmers are D&D players that I think there will always be an open line between the two. There will always be borrowing. New ideas are easier to try out in a paper and pencil game, but the computer may be more ideal for the final implementation.

In your experience, how accurate do you find the common stereotype of "The Gamer?" Are we all Mountain Dew-drinking, Cheetos-eating, basement-dwelling nerds?
Gamer or not, everyone smells after a few days. However, I will say that two years ago, Full Sail was number three in central Florida for Mountain Dew consumption – including the theme parks. [Laughs] For the times that the stereotype holds true, it usually just indicates that they are into the games more than anything else. On the plus side, I've only had one student out of 400 who has had a drug problem. If you're into games, you typically

don't want mind-altering substances because it will screw up your gameplay. That's the good part of the culture that you don't see, because it's more intriguing and sensational to show overweight people stuffing their faces with junk food. All groups have their quirks and habits; I don't think gamers are any worse or better than any others.

Do you think that gaming is now viewed as a more acceptable past time?
Absolutely. There are all kinds of influential people who play D&D and video games, including Hollywood actors. Before, this would have been secretly locked away in a closet, even deeper than any sexual preferences, because being a gaming geek was something to be ashamed of. It isn't entirely accepted yet; I won't name any names, but I have done games with celebrities, and many ask that I keep it a secret. Most of them you'd know. But, I don't think that would affect anyone's career these days, certainly not in the way it would have 20 years ago.

Where do you see gaming, tabletop and otherwise, heading in the future?
It's not yet mainstream, but there is a great role-playing game on the computer that 20 million people have bought – The Sims. Talk about thinking outside the box; Will Wright thinks outside the dimension! That's a good start, and because gaming has the ability to morph and adapt, it will always stay fresh. It will keep appealing to more people, and it will just keep growing.



GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME
By Erik Reppen

SLAMSCAPE
> FORMAT PSONE
> PUBLISHER VIACOM

I've often heard it said that with every use of certain recreational drugs, the world will seem a bit grayer and bleaker after the euphoric effects have worn off. This is the case with many video games. They are so much fun, so gorgeous, and so absolutely engrossing that such simple day-to-day tasks like showing up for work or class, eating, changing your underwear, or feeding the cat that is gnawing on your leg for sustenance seem too monotonous to cope with.

Slamscape is not such a game.

This is the game that literally made me feel ill and touched by evil for two full days after I did a preview for it. Every odious, stinking moment of video game putrescence had me wanting to gnaw my hand off at the controller because for some reason I couldn't stop playing. I had to discover something – anything – that gave some merit to it, because I couldn't believe that anything in the world could be this horrible. Just one moment where I was at least bored rather than visually assaulted and made to feel nauseous by the sickening lurching motion of the vehicle or the so-ugly-they-must-have-been-spawned-in-Hell character models would have sufficed. But no such moment came.

When I finally recovered from the experience two days later, I found that I was experiencing a complete reversal of the post-euphoric phenomenon mentioned above. Everything in the world seemed not a little, but a lot less bleak. No lousy game, parking ticket, or spontaneous nut trampling would ever seem quite so bad and everything that is good in the world got just a little bit better. That is why I say Slamscape is the greatest game of all time.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

In March of 2002, Will Wright and Maxis' now legendary game The Sims became the best-selling computer game in history. Selling over 6.3 million units, the addictive simulation gained the momentum required to overthrow the previous champion, Broderbound's 1993 adventure masterpiece Myst. Appealing to hardcore and casual gamers alike, The Sims sparked a cultural phenomenon when it released in February 2000, and has since spawned seven PC expansion packs, as well as several console and handheld adaptations. Plus, its sequel released this year to overwhelming critical acclaim. No single franchise has done as much diplomatic work in bringing the gaming fringes and mainstream together for one amazing experience.

VIN'S INNER GEEK

There are few celebrities as enthusiastic as Vin Diesel when it comes to gaming in all its forms. In addition to founding Tigon Games (responsible for last year's stellar The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay), he has also been a D&D player since childhood. He addresses the phenomenal appeal of the game in the following excerpt from his foreword to the book *Thirty Years of Adventure: A Celebration of Dungeons and Dragons:*

"We were all drawn to the game because it allowed us to become these characters, vastly different in appearance and in actions, but what kept us hooked, was the search for the character that represented our higher self. Playing D&D was a training ground for our imaginations and an opportunity to explore our own identities. I started acting when I was seven, and this game was a constant exercise in developing voices and characters. I believe now, but I probably did not realize then, that I was attracted to the artistic outlet the game provided. My D&D journey paralleled my search for identity in those growing years."

PSONE

RESIDENT EVIL: SURVIVOR

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM **> RELEASE** 2000

RETRO RATING
NOW 5
THEN* 4

First-person survival horror games are becoming increasingly popular, and Resident Evil: Survivor was one of the first. An action-oriented spinoff of the series, Survivor features many elements of the Resident Evil series such as enemies, items, and mentions of the previous games. Unfortunately, it has none of the franchise's scares, atmosphere, or fun. Originally conceived as a light gun game, the blocky graphics are terrible and more reminiscent of old FPS titles like Doom than the eerie Resident Evil games. Many familiar foes make appearances, such as zombies, lickers, and giant alligators, but the hideous visuals rob these formerly intimidating foes of all their sinister nature. The graphics would be forgivable if the gameplay weren't so plodding and linear – which it is. Other than some decent voice work, Survivor does nothing right, making this one game in the franchise which is a true horror.

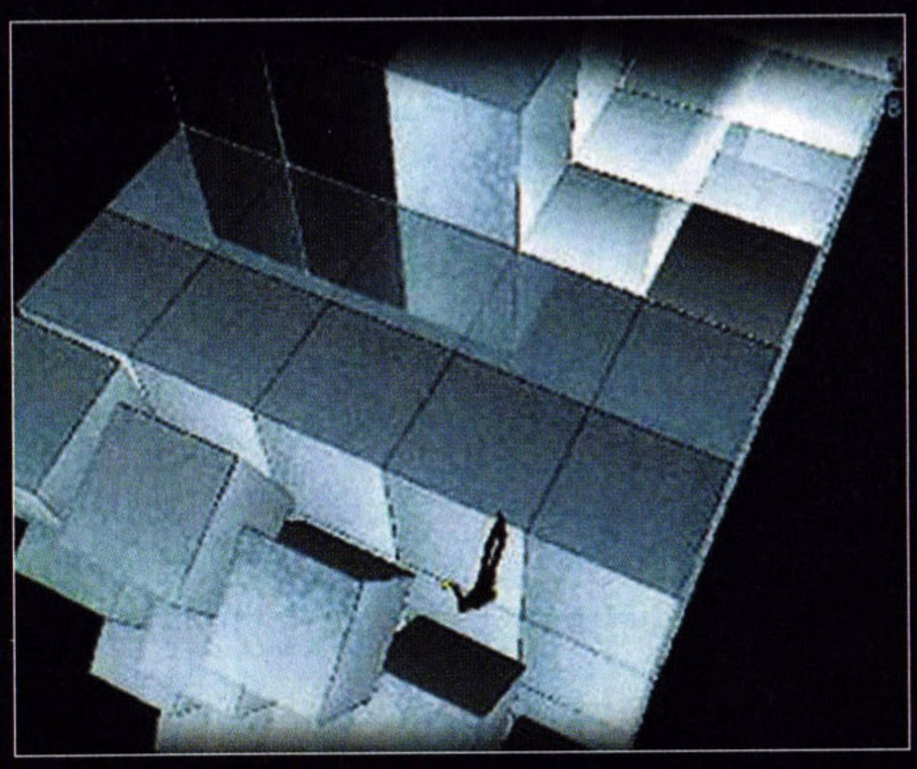
DREAMCAST

STUPID INVADERS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** XILAM ANIMATION **> RELEASE** 2001

RETRO RATING
NOW 5
THEN N/A

At first, Stupid Invaders seems to be a product of an age when *Ren & Stimpy* was brilliant television, the word "poopstain" was comedic gold, and point and click adventures were all the rage. Unfortunately, even when the game first released, the time when people cared about any of these things had long since passed. The result is a game steeped in obsolete traditions the world has been trying to forget. The entire process consists of wandering around, picking up items, and using them to solve obtuse and counterintuitive puzzles – providing you don't die along the way. How is it that your character can get chewed up by a ravenous, carnivorous plant and be just fine, but walking in front of simple cupboards or opening innocuous doors invariably leads to random and unpredictable death? One could possibly forgive these flaws if the game had an enjoyable quirk factor, but it delivers nothing of the sort – unless you're developmentally impaired and still think the mere process of going to the bathroom is absolutely hilarious. For those of you who don't bust out laughing every time you whiz, spend your gaming energy elsewhere.



PSONE

INTELLIGENT QUBE

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** 1997

RETRO RATING
NOW 8.25
THEN* 7.5

Now here's a game for those truly free-thinking Mensa candidates out there. What it lacks in its drab black backgrounds and poorly textured cubes it more than makes up for with one of the most addictive approaches to puzzle games that has ever graced the scene. You desperately struggle against the oncoming rush of rolling blocks as they attempt to smash or force you off the edge of the board into the empty black abyss. To halt your demise, you're forced to methodically destroy the oncoming cubes and break through to the next stage. Sounds simple, eh? Think again. Some block types may be blown up and others must be avoided, and as the stages advance, your mind is forced to warp around a strategy of multi-tasking and spatial reasoning quite unlike other brainteasers you may have encountered. The addition of a remarkably complex modern orchestral score deepens the experience into a sort of trance-like meditation – in the fun, addictive way. Other flashier games may have overshadowed its original release in that early generation of PSone games, but IQ is the one that is still worth playing today.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Resident Evil: Survivor (GI #91 11/00), Intelligent Qube (GI #53 9/97)

GAMEOVER

Time For The Shocking Twist Ending...

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

When a game does really well with critics and sales, spin-offs are inevitable. We were so impressed with Resident Evil 4 that we hope some spin-offs are on the way soon to fill our time until RE 5's inevitable announcement. What RE side stories can we hope to see? Take our quiz to find out. The higher you score, the cooler the new Resident Evil game will be.

1 Which now-famous developer created the Mortal Kombat knockoff Way of the Warrior for 3DO in its early days?

- **A.** Insomniac
- **B.** Ubisoft
- **C.** Naughty Dog
- **D.** Rockstar North

2 Who is the last member of the COBRA Unit that Naked Snake confronts in Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater?

- **A.** The Sorrow
- **B.** The Fear
- **C.** The Fury
- **D.** The End

3 Which of these largely forgotten titles is not exclusive to the Xbox?

- **A.** Nightcaster: Defeat the Darkness
- **B.** Circus Maximus: Chariot Wars
- **C.** Blackstone: Magic and Steel
- **D.** Superman: The Man of Steel

4 On what day in 2001 was the world's most fashionable video game system, the GameCube, released in the U.S. in all its purple, purse-like glory?

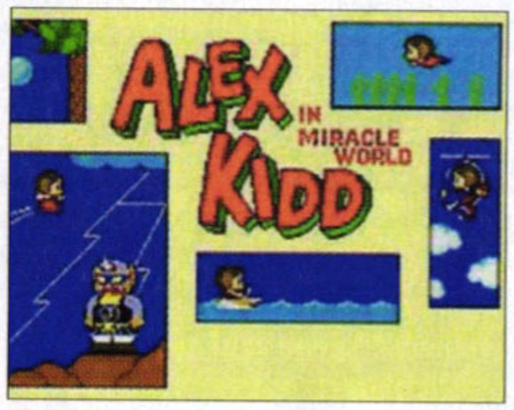
- **A.** November 18
- **B.** October 17
- **C.** December 1
- **D.** September 21

5 Which of these survival horror titles features a demented killer named Scissorman?

- **A.** Illbleed
- **B.** Nocturne
- **C.** Clock Tower
- **D.** Alone in the Dark 3

6 Before Sonic the Hedgehog was created, Alex Kidd served as Sega's first mascot. What was the last game he appeared in before disappearing into the void?

- **A.** Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars
- **B.** Alex Kidd in Shinobi World
- **C.** Alex Kidd: High Tech World
- **D.** Alex Kidd in the Enchanted Castle



7 The Xbox recently saw the release of one of the most popular games of all time. We're talking, of course, about Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders. This title is a sequel to a game on what system?

- **A.** Xbox
- **B.** PSone
- **C.** PC
- **D.** It's not a sequel, you sneaky devils!

8 We all love ninjas, even Atari. Which of these Ninja Gaiden titles was NOT released for the short-lived Lynx handheld?

- **A.** Ninja Gaiden
- **B.** Ninja Gaiden II
- **C.** Ninja Gaiden III
- **D.** All three were released for the Lynx. Take that, Xbox!

9 The popular police shooter Lethal Enforcers spawned a single sequel. What was unusual about the second game's story?

- **A.** It had you fight aliens rather than criminals
- **B.** It had exactly the same story as the first game
- **C.** It featured a complex plot narrated by Danny Glover
- **D.** It took place over 100 years before the first game

10 Which of these second-string characters from the comics makes an appearance in X-Men Legends?

- **A.** Psylocke
- **B.** Maggot
- **C.** Omega Red
- **D.** Douglock

BREAKDOWN

47% of the Game Informer office staff are Oompa-Loompas purchased at Willy Wonka's Magic Chocolate Factory Chapter 11 Liquidation Sale.

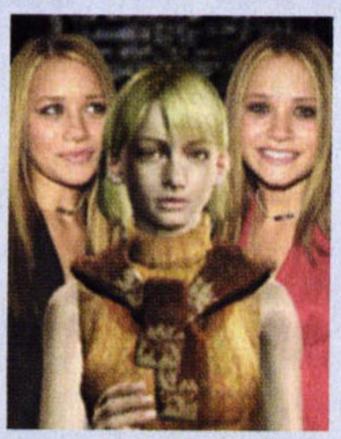
37.9% The percentage that Xbox sales increased in the UK during 2004. However, PS2 remained the best-selling console in the UK and featured the highest-selling game with Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.

87% of the staff were so impressed by Resident Evil 4 that they could only utter primitive grunts like "ooh" and "whoa" while watching it. Joe was so floored that he actually devolved into a caveman, and now only answers to "Ook the Firebringer."

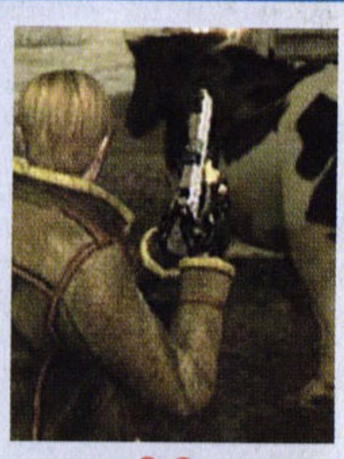
30% of the top ten video game companies are based in France (Ubisoft, Atari, and Vivendi Universal).

65% of the staff are superheroes. We'd tell you which ones, but we have secret identities to protect.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



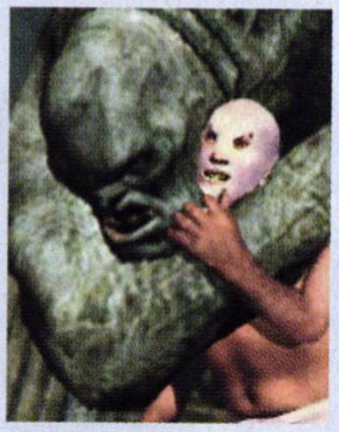
0-1:
The New Adventures of Mary-Kate & Ashley & Ashley



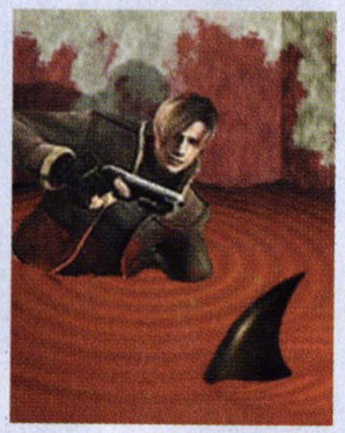
2-3:
Leon's Haunted Farm

4-5:
Rapala Mutant Fishing

6-7:
DDRE: Dance Dance Resident Evil



8-9:
El Gigante Pro Wrestling



10:
Resident Evil 4: The Extra-Juicy Director's Cut

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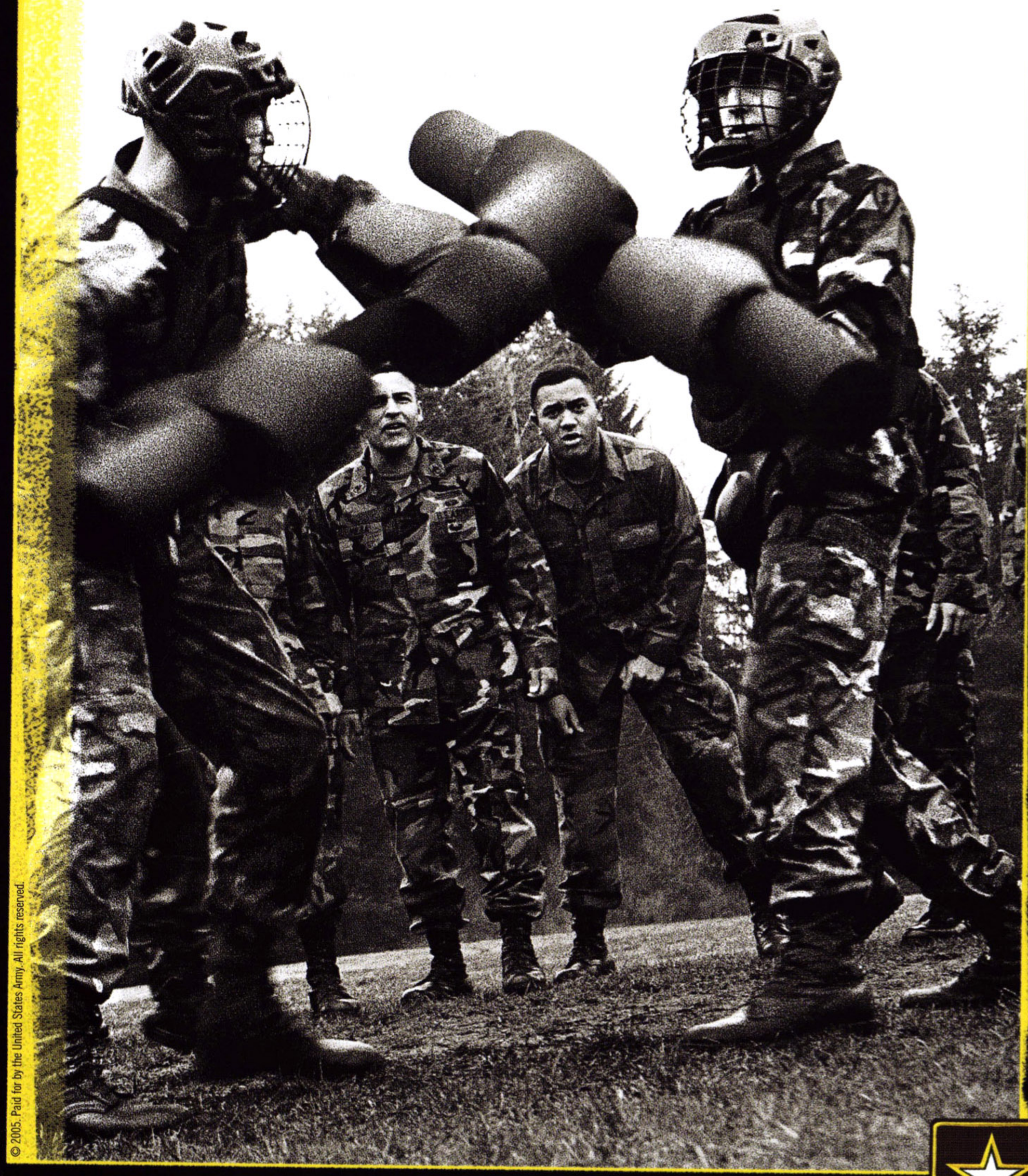
Video Game Trivia Answers: 1.C 2.A 3.B 4.A 5.C 6.D 7.C 8.B 9.D 10.A

Sergeant **Derek Brame.** 11B Infantry.

IT'S NOT ABOUT MAKING THE TEAM. IT'S ABOUT MAKING THE TEAM STRONGER.



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