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Official Xbox Magazine

XBOX 360

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Dec 05 / Issue #51



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



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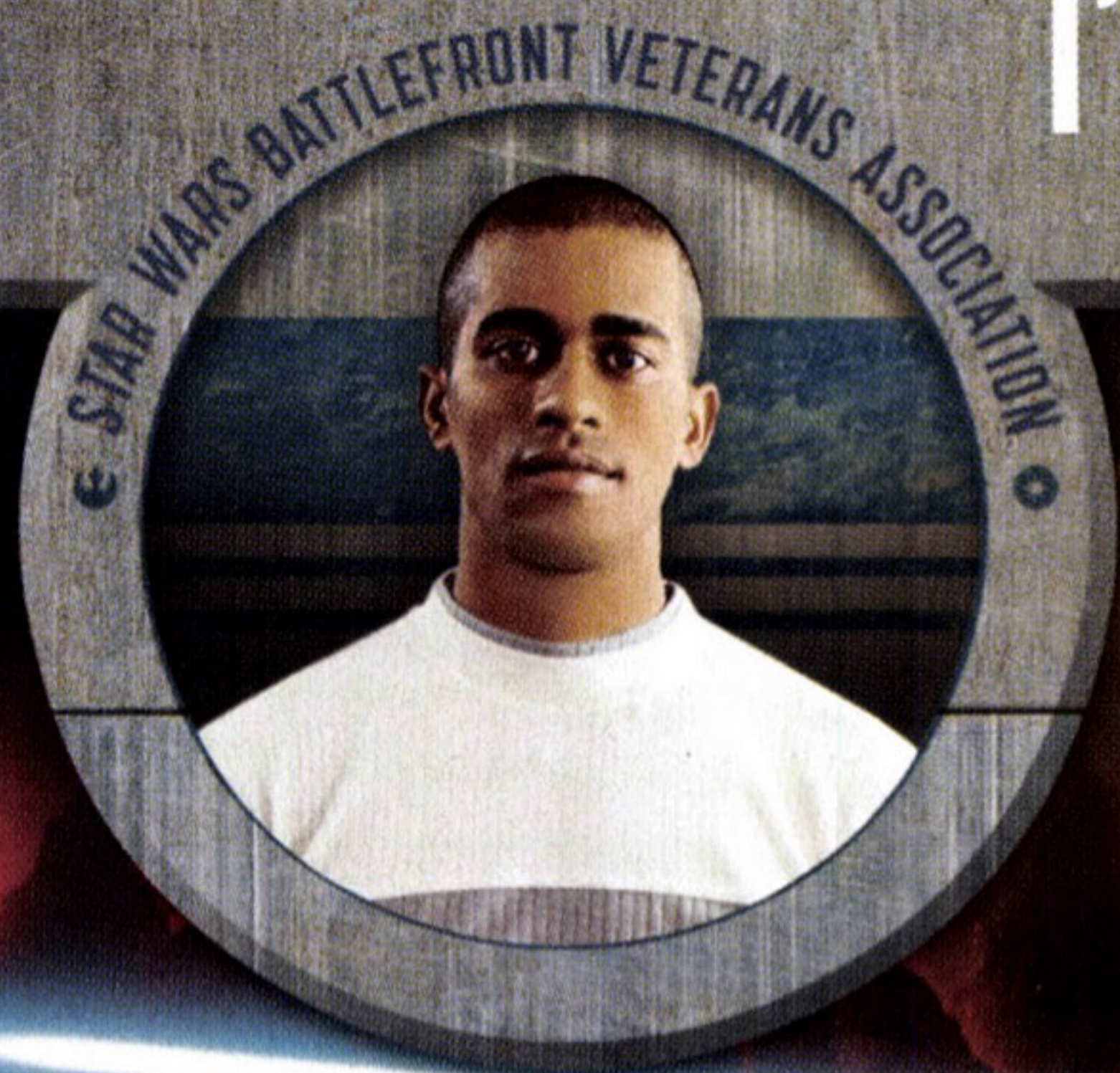
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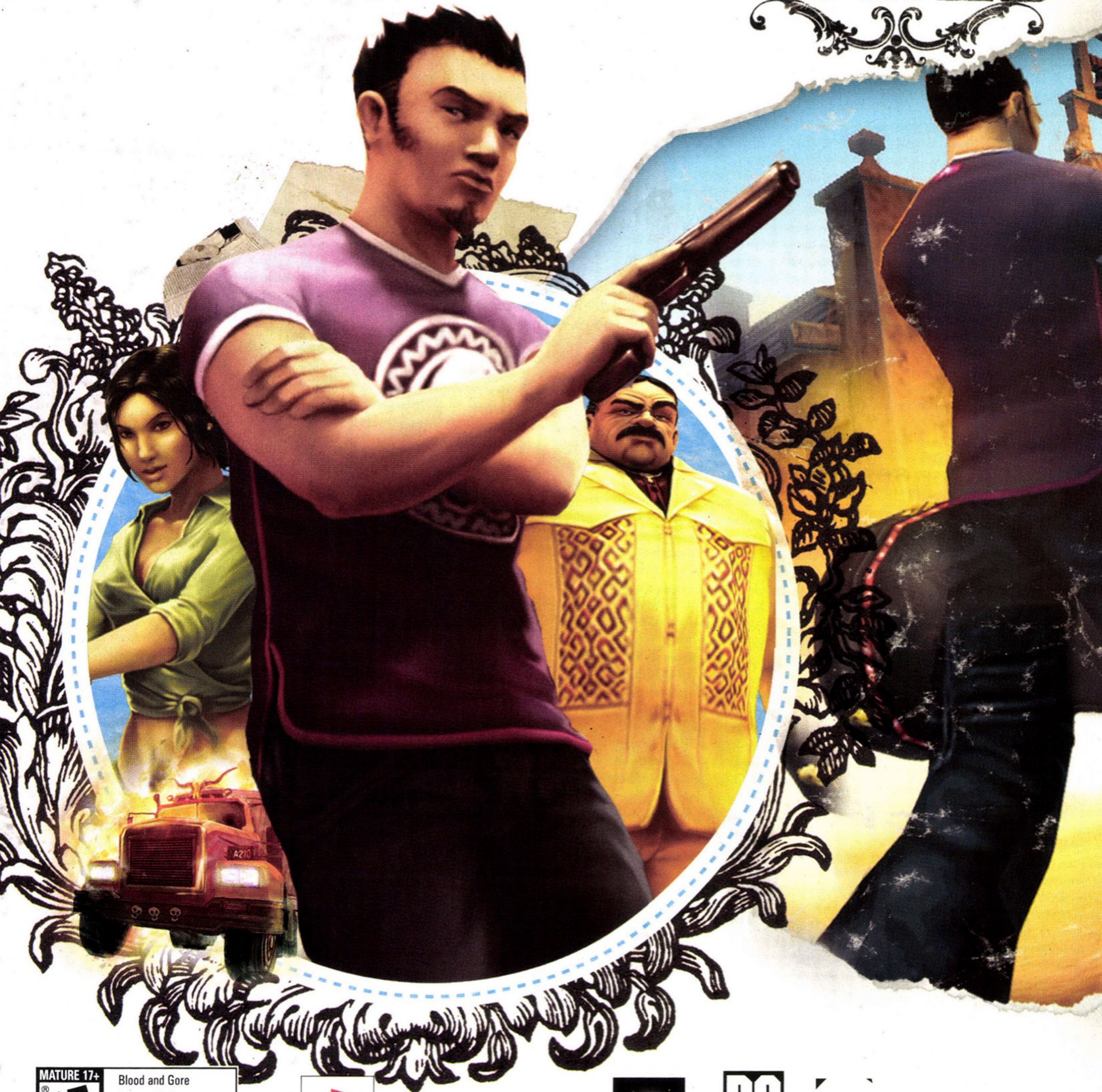
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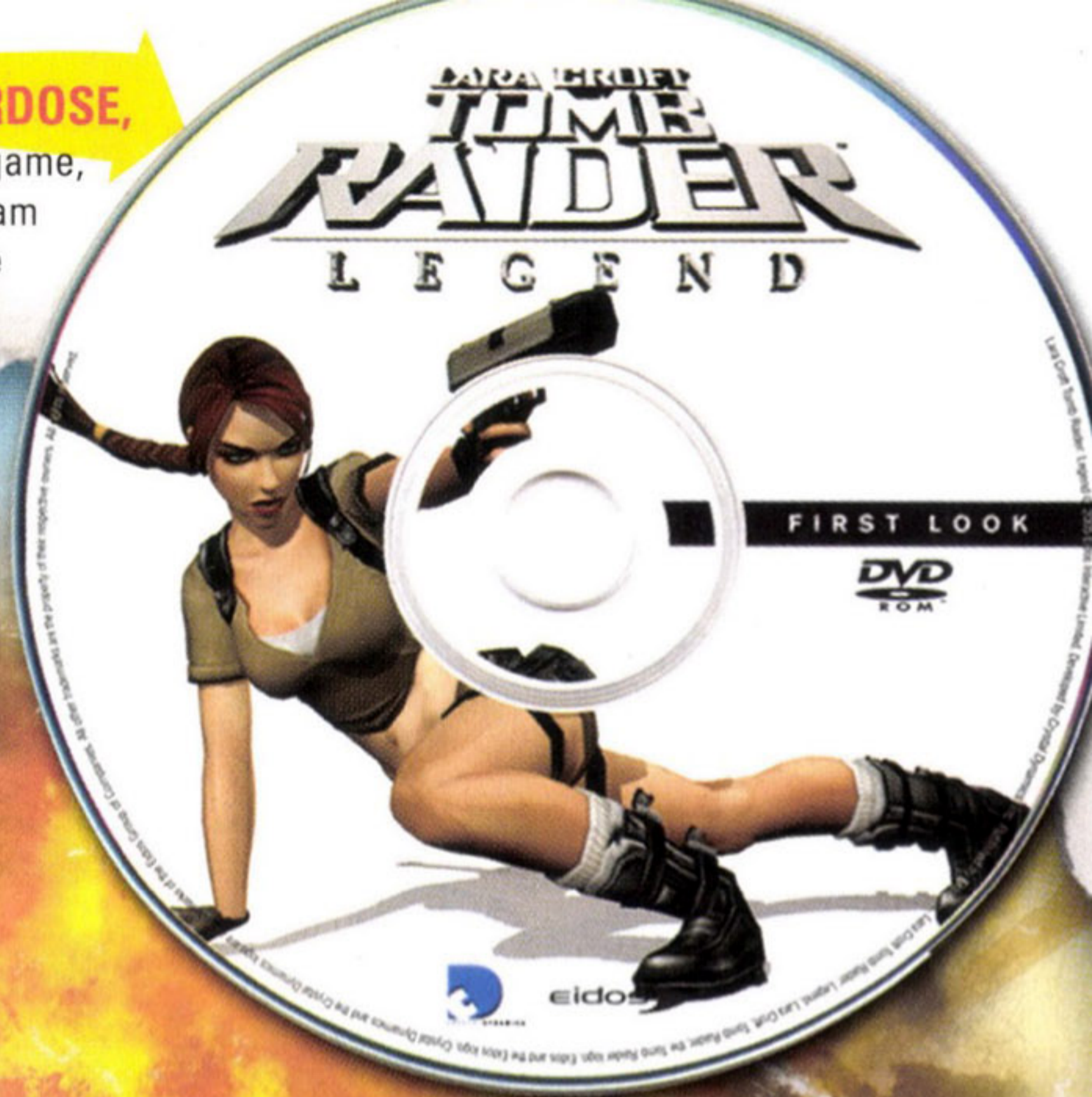


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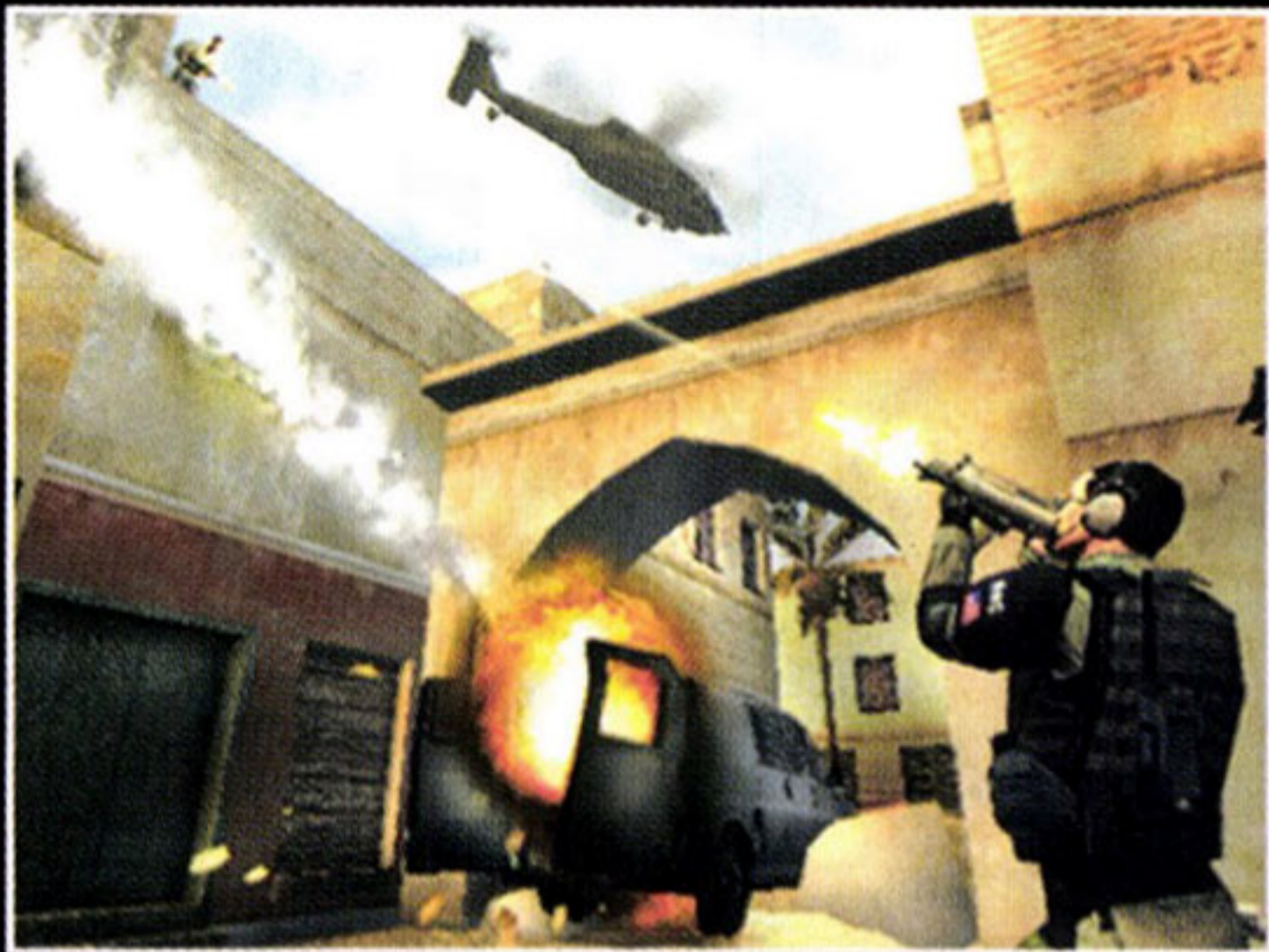
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Blood
Language
Violence

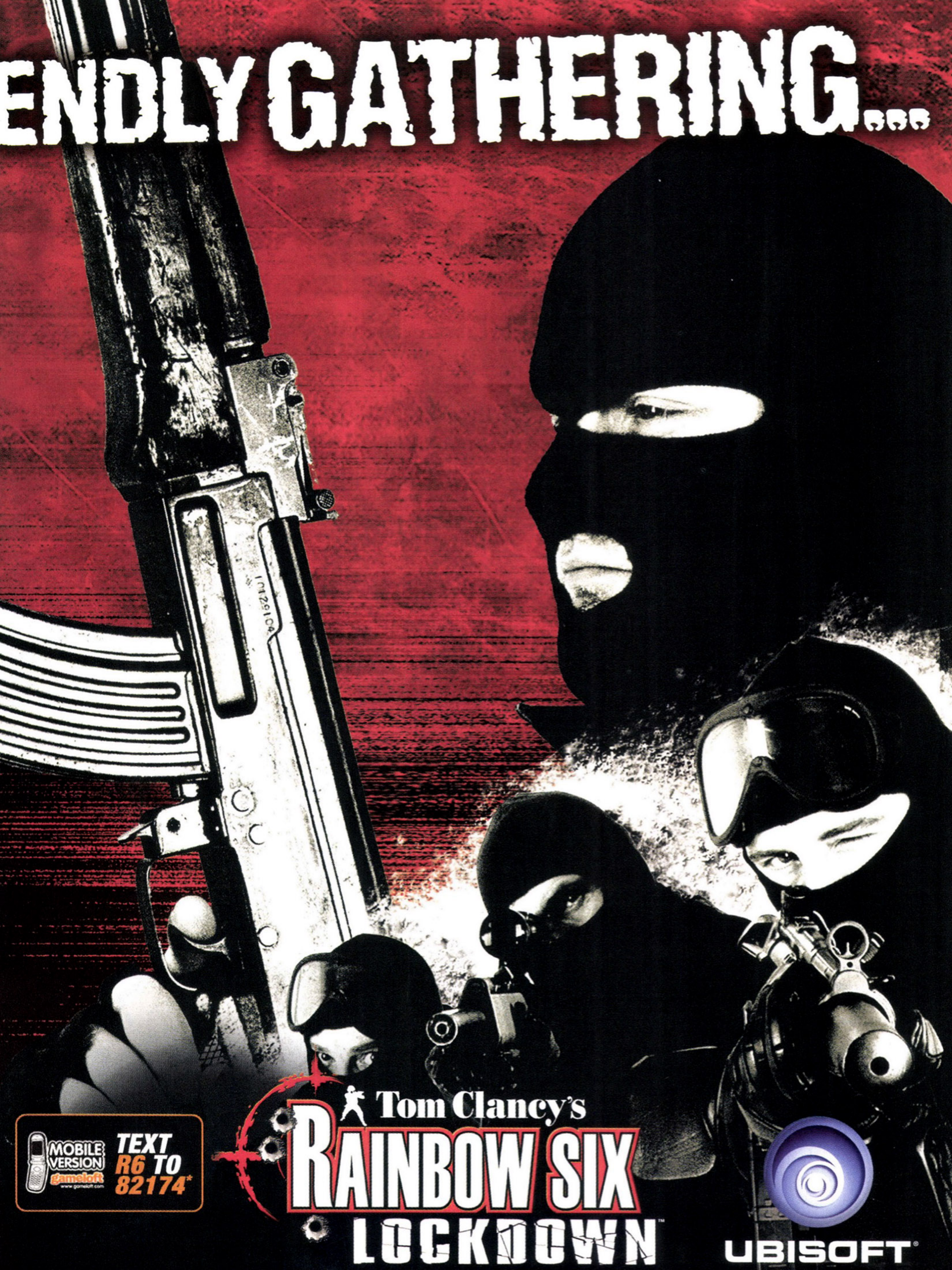


PlayStation 2



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Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX
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MASS EFFECT pg. 48

The next great Xbox 360 roleplaying epic from the KOTOR maestros at BioWare is powered by the Unreal Engine 3, and it looks hot! Exclusive first details and images inside!

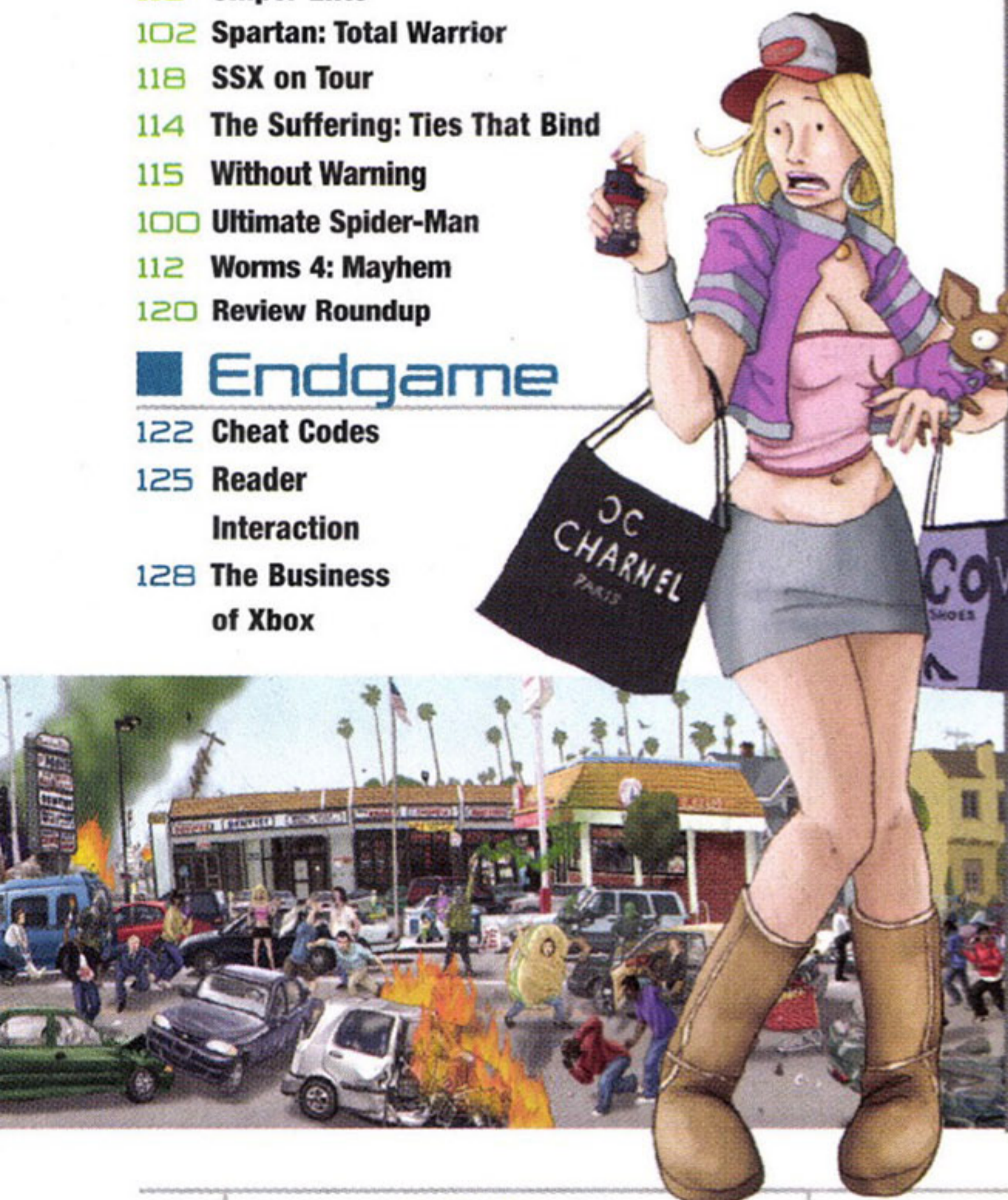
An Englishman in Tokyo



TOKYO GAME SHOW 2005 REPORT pg. 72

Rob went to the Tokyo Game Show and brought back a love for karaoke, vending-machine beer and the latest Xbox 360 info from the Land of the Rising Sun!

Reviews You Can Hang Your Hat On!



ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN Pg. 100



BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD Pg. 113

Kameo

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XBOX 360



The Countdown Commences...

From the U.S. to Japan to Europe, the Tour de Xbox 360 continues...

As we go to press, Tokyo Game Show is over and Microsoft's Xbox 360 story for Japan is set. Attention now turns to Europe. Just over a week from now, I'll be in Amsterdam to get hands-on time with the games expected to be on shelves on November 22nd. Even at this stage, the exact list isn't clear. As crunch time hits at dev studios around the world, a couple of the games we thought were shoo-ins for Day One may now slip into the "launch window" (the month after system launch).

Don't stress if the game you're jonesing to play isn't available immediately. Part of Microsoft's strategy is to ensure that software shelves are refreshed with new games in the weeks after the hullabaloo of launch has quieted. We also expect January to be a busy month for releases as publishers provide plenty of opportunities to spend the holiday money you were lucky enough to receive.

Out of the gate, I expect some of the launch titles to remain system standouts for months to come. A big question mark hangs over the possibility that *Perfect Dark Zero* aims to be Xbox 360's *Halo*. We'll have more news next issue with our hands-on report.

Now don't laugh, but Rare's other launch title, *Kameo: Elements of Power*, elevated itself high onto our want-to-play list. Initially, playing as a cutesy, magic-wielding pixie held

little appeal...until we saw said pixie manifesting herself in myriad inventive ways. I didn't steer you wrong on *Psychonauts*, so trust me on this one!

We have plenty to look forward to. Our cover subject this month, BioWare's new RPG *Mass Effect*, is the first in what we hope to be many announcements of original intellectual properties heading to Xbox 360. Read our full insight on p. 48.

And a last note – you'll be getting an all-new, all-singing OXM next issue. That's right. To time with the launch of the new system, we're revamping and reenergizing OXM for your next-gen pleasure. Rest assured that we'll bring all the info on the games for the current system, and we've a treat headed your way on the disc in a few months. It's news that will make everyone happy!

Rob Smith

editor-in-chief

Top 5 Tokyo memories:

- 1) Karaoke: What a spectacle. When the booth door closes, the music starts and formerly stoic game designers let loose!
- 2) Trains: London Underground? A breeze. New York subway? Piece of cake. Tokyo's train system? Baffling.
- 3) Humidity: Not the worst, and even pleasant on occasion, but the stifling humidity made me feel like Arthur Dent, carrying a small towel everywhere I went.
- 4) Akihabra: Electric Town is a cacophony of announcements, vendors selling phone plans, and hardcore rap – complete with expletives.
- 5) Videogame culture: Games are everywhere in Tokyo.

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Rob



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Meet the Team

Take a closer look at what the staff of OXM is thinking and feeling – but don't get too close. That might be dangerous.



Paul Curthoys
managing editor

Top 5 most challenging children's-book lines for (immature) fathers (like me) to read aloud to their 16-month-old daughters:

- 1) "They look down holes, they look up poles."
- 2) "Mr. Brown makes a sound like thunder."
- 3) "There were five in the bed and the little one said, 'roll over.'" (Hmmm...)
- 4) The entirety of *The Owl & The Pussy*. (Look no further than the title.)
- 5) "Goodnight bowl of mush." (Huh?)

paul@officialxboxmagazine.com



Francesca Reyes
executive editor

Top 5 favorite haircare products (yes, I'm that superficial, folks):

- 1) Molton Brown's Ziao Jao shampoo and Indian Cross conditioner: A bit perfumey, but they smell absolutely heavenly!
- 2) Molto Bene B:Oce: A Japanese hair-care line for those who've abused theirs too often (me).
- 3) Modern Organic Products: Earth-friendly Pear Shampoo – that's two bonuses in one!
- 4) Laminates hair spray: A favorite for five years.
- 5) Lush anything: Specifically, I Love Juicy and Veganese conditioner! Yumzorz.

francesca@officialxboxmagazine.com



Dave Rees
DVD editor

Top 5 reasons why I'm too busy to do a Top 5:

- 1) I'm in the middle of creating and refining a top-secret new disc for the mag.
- 2) Trying to convince Itagaki to make a *DOA4* demo for our disc.
- 3) Trying to get the inside scoop on *Halo 3* – the minute I find out, you will too!
- 4) Trying to clone Thomas (our intern) so that we can work him doubly hard for only one paycheck. Cloning can't happen fast enough.
- 5) Oh, and eating...I forget to do that sometimes.

dave@officialxboxmagazine.com



Tom Price
senior editor

Top 5 things I want to be when I grow up:

- 1) Chicken Farmer: I love chicken – fried, BBQ'd, rotisserie. I might have to eat them in egg-form though; don't know if I can slaughter them.
- 2) Long Haul Truck Driver: Ever since I saw the movie *Convoy*, I've been itching to start one.
- 3) Professional Poker Player: No sunglasses, though – they're for wussies.
- 4) Fashion Photographer: Hello, ladies!
- 5) Undisputed Ruler of the Universe: It would just make everything so much easier.

tom@officialxboxmagazine.com



Ryan McCaffrey
assistant editor

Top 5 most wanted non-Xbox games:

- 1) *Zelda: Twilight Princess* (GC): TP looks much deeper than *Wind Waker*.
- 2) *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* (PSP): Revisiting Liberty City on the go sounds brilliant!
- 3) *Sam and Max II* (PC): I can't wait, but if Telltale Games mucks it up, they'll never live it down.
- 4) *F.E.A.R.* (PC): The demo rocked, and you guys know I love first-person shooters.
- 5) *Half-Life 2: Aftermath* (PC): Will this sequel have the closure I've been searching for?

ryan@officialxboxmagazine.com



Juliann Brown
art director

Top 5 favorite "reality" TV shows:

- 1) *Fear Factor*: This has to be my ultimate favorite bed time TV show. Mmmmm... Buffalo intestines.
- 2) *The Real World*: The serious O.G. of reality television, yo.
- 3) *The Girls Next Door*: I can't tell the girls apart, but I still like to see what Heff's dealing with on a day-to-day basis. He's oooooold.
- 4) *Intervention*: Watch out! It'll make you cry.
- 5) *The Villa*: UK computer couples matching show. Snogging slags and drunk blokes. Wheel!

juliann@officialxboxmagazine.com



Gary Cribb
associate art director

Top 5 driving albums of the month:

- 1) *2001* (Dr. Dre): Looking for the proper hotbox material? Look no further.
- 2) *Famous Monsters* (Misfits): Without Danzig some fans will say "Yeah, right," but for you fiends out there – give it a try.
- 3) *Introducing* (DJ Shadow): Fine downtempo.
- 4) *Pretty Hate Machine* (Nine Inch Nails): Probably the most influential album in my collection.
- 5) *Team Sleep* (Team Sleep): If you hear the Deftones' *White Pony* album, you'll love their frontman's new band.

gary@officialxboxmagazine.com



Dane Frederiksen
multimedia editor

Top 5 words that are the most fun to say out loud:

- 1) "Opakapaka": For being a delicate, yummy pink snapper from Hawaii, it sure has a funny name.
- 2) "Fungus": A classic standard for goofiness.
- 3) "Sumimasen": "Excuse me" or "Sorry" – the most used word in Tokyo, it served me well.
- 4) "Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis": A.K.A. Mad Cow disease...and technically it's three words – so, I kinda cheated for this one.
- 5) "Pickle": Saying "pickle" out loud never gets old, no matter how many times you say it.

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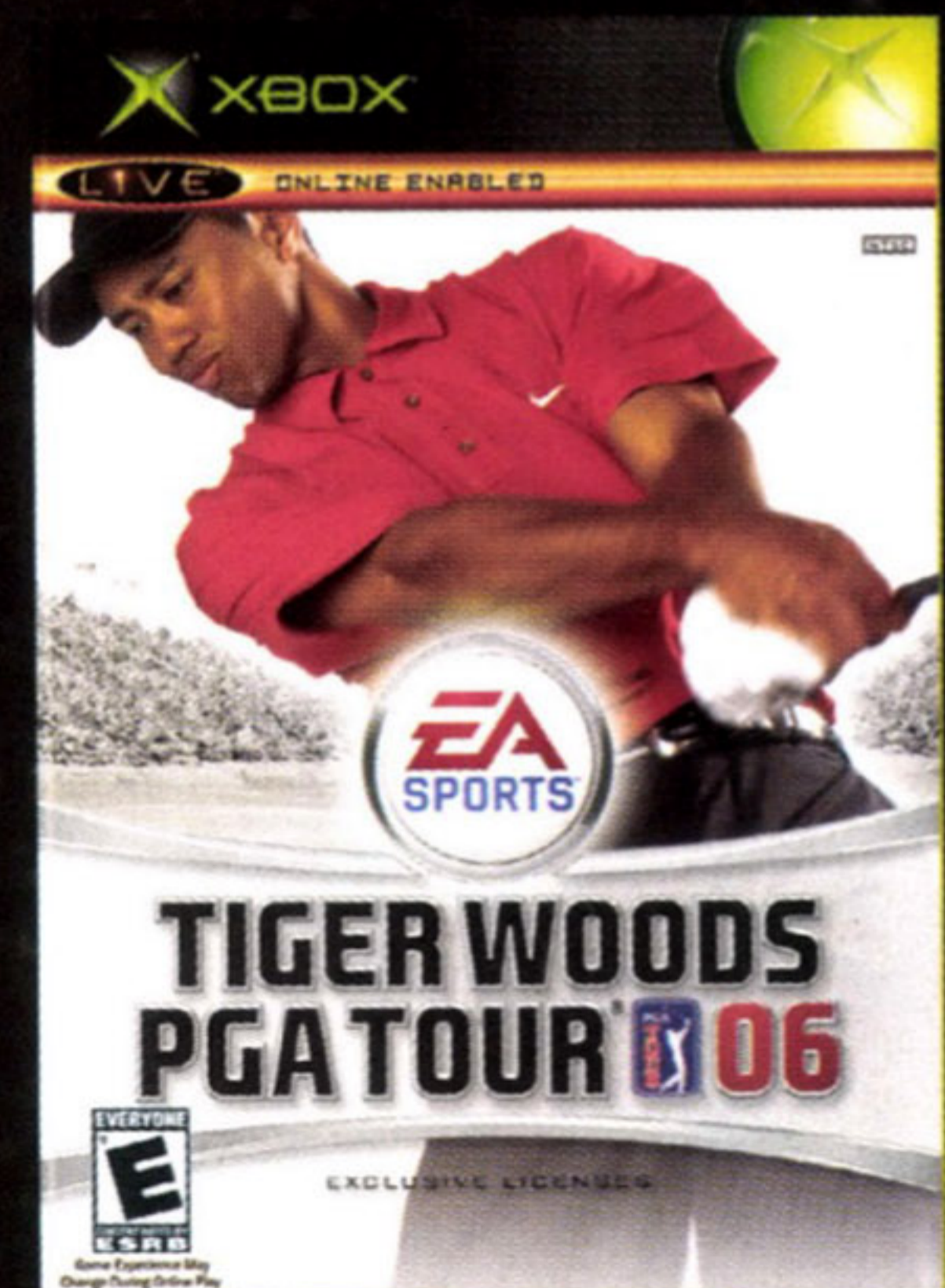
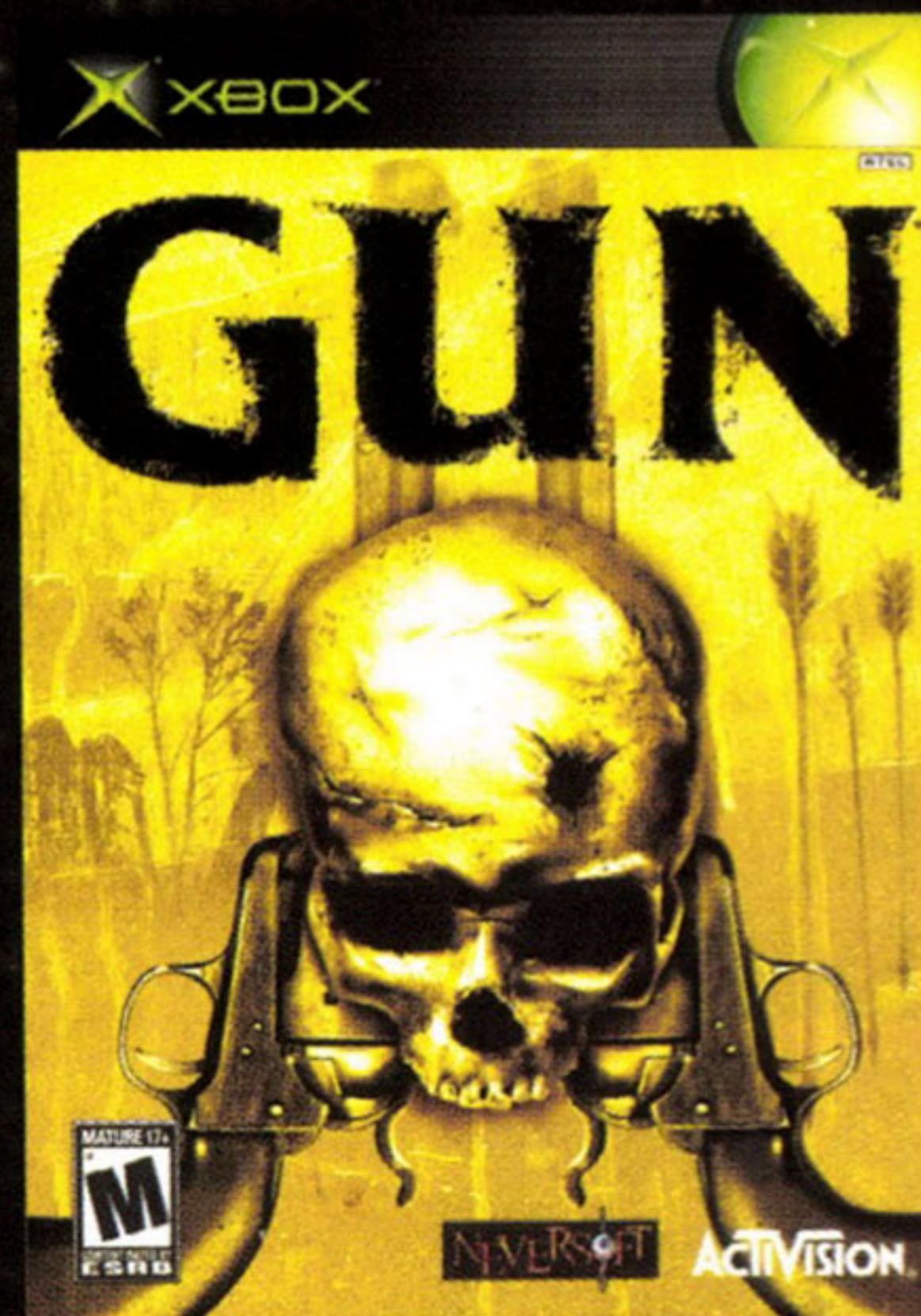
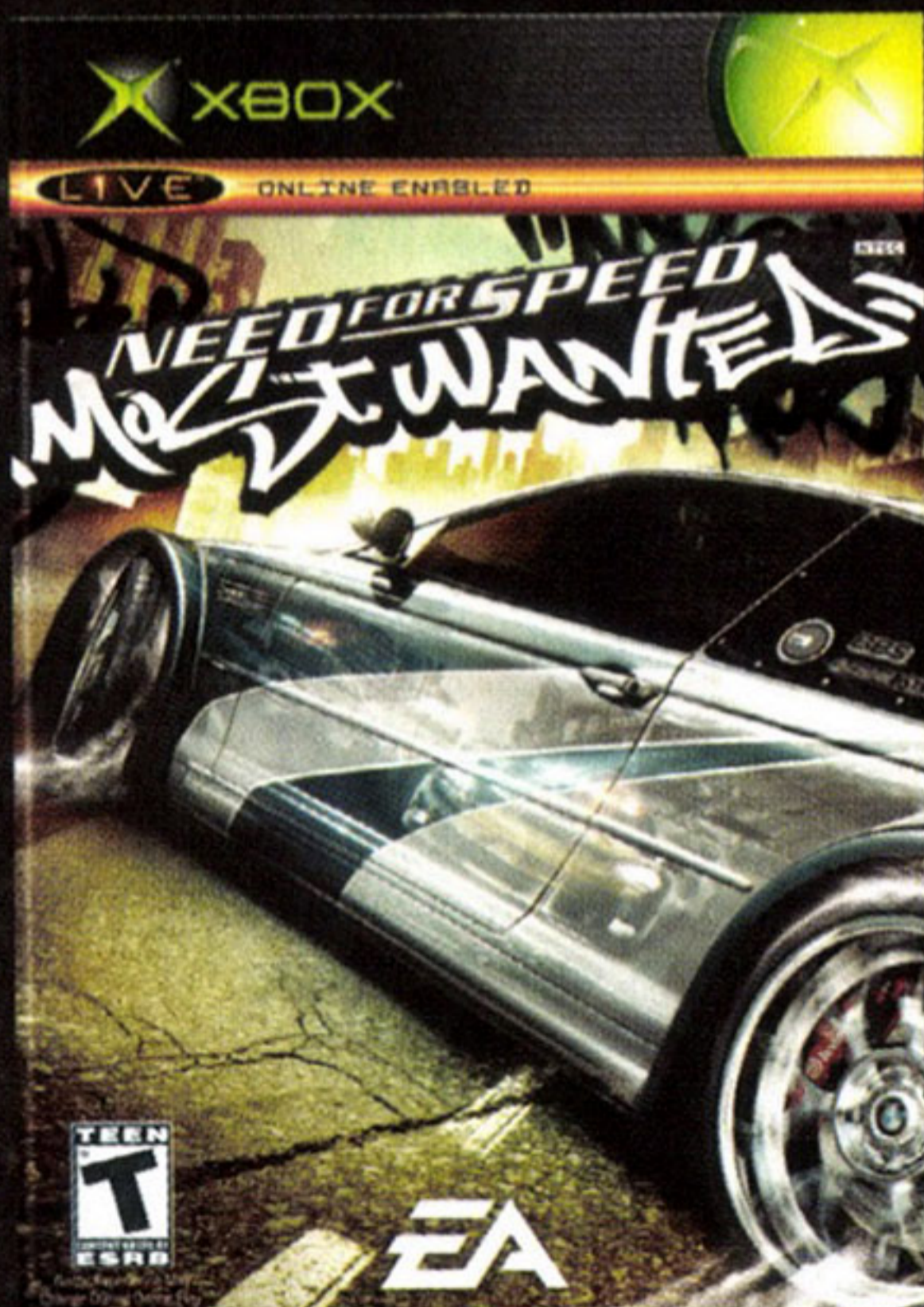
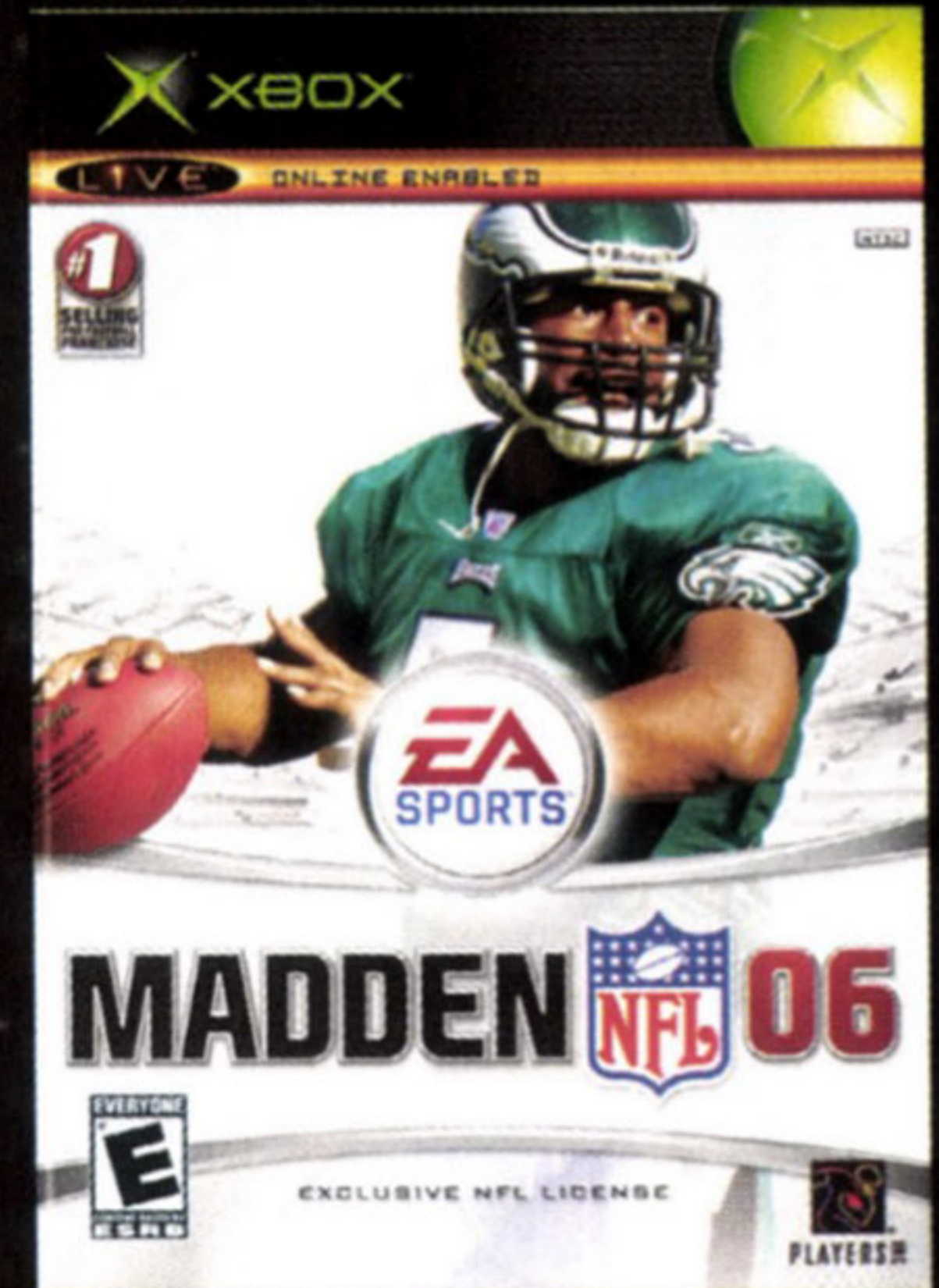
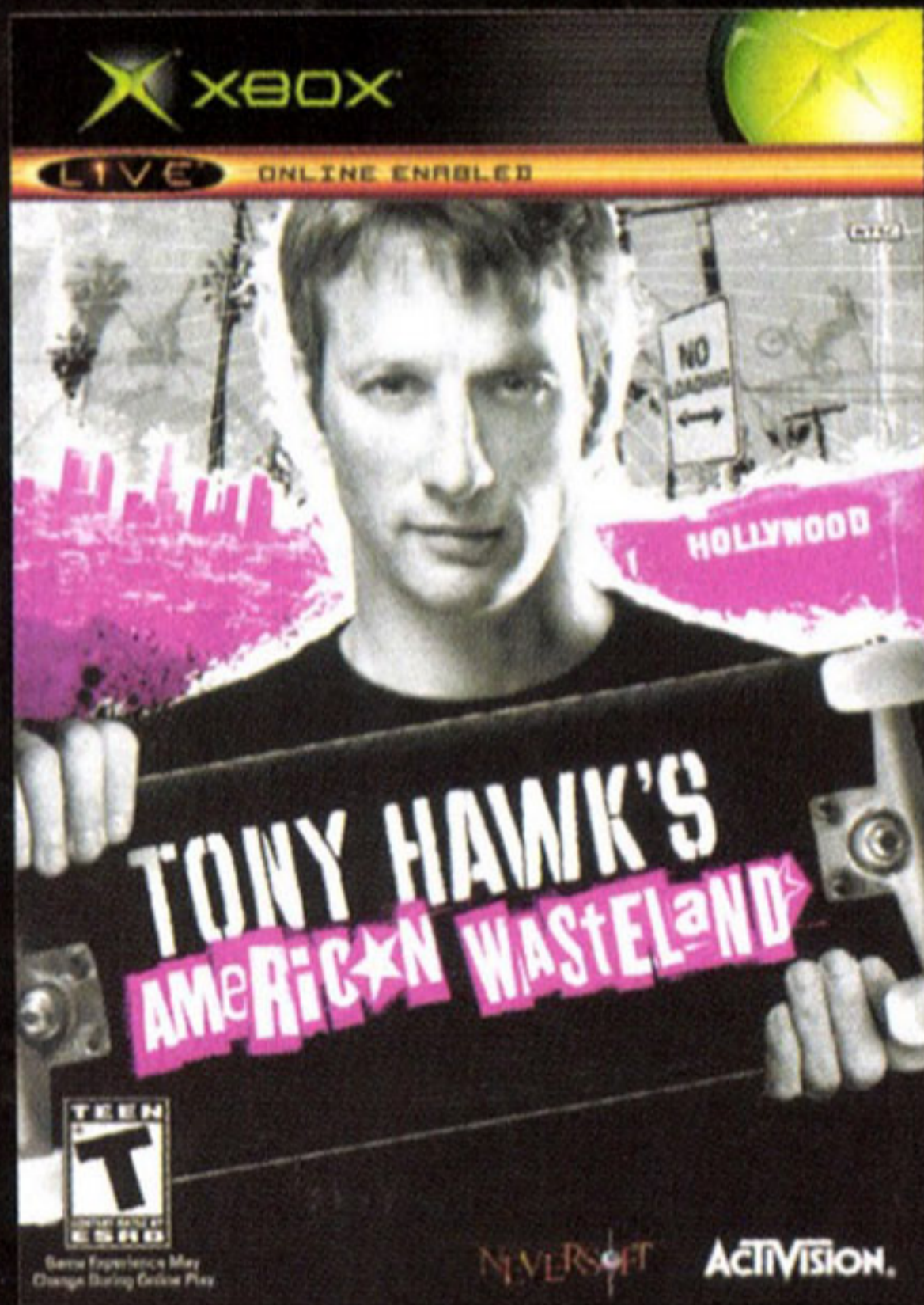
Thomas Baxter
editorial intern

Top 5 Star Wars movies, ranked in specific order:

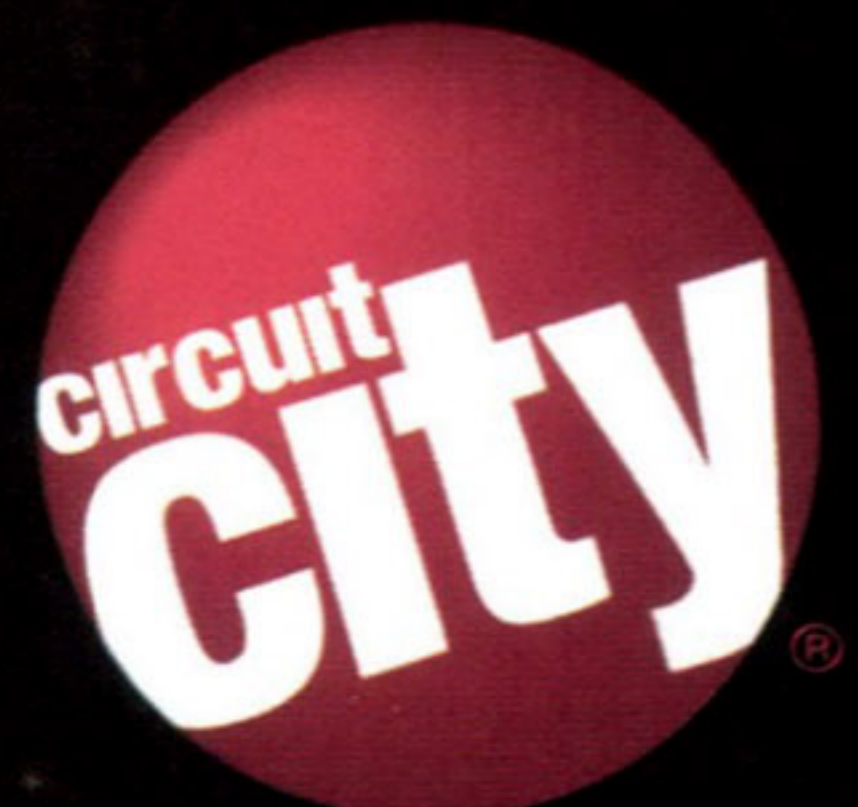
1. *Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*: I liked the Ewoks. Sue me.
2. *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*: What a finale!
3. *Star Wars Episode II: The Empire Strikes Back*: You may have thought it was the best, but it's only #3 to me.
4. *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*: The start of it all. I wasn't even born when it was in theaters.
5. And the other two *Episodes* are dead to me and therefore do not exist.

theintern@officialxboxmagazine.com

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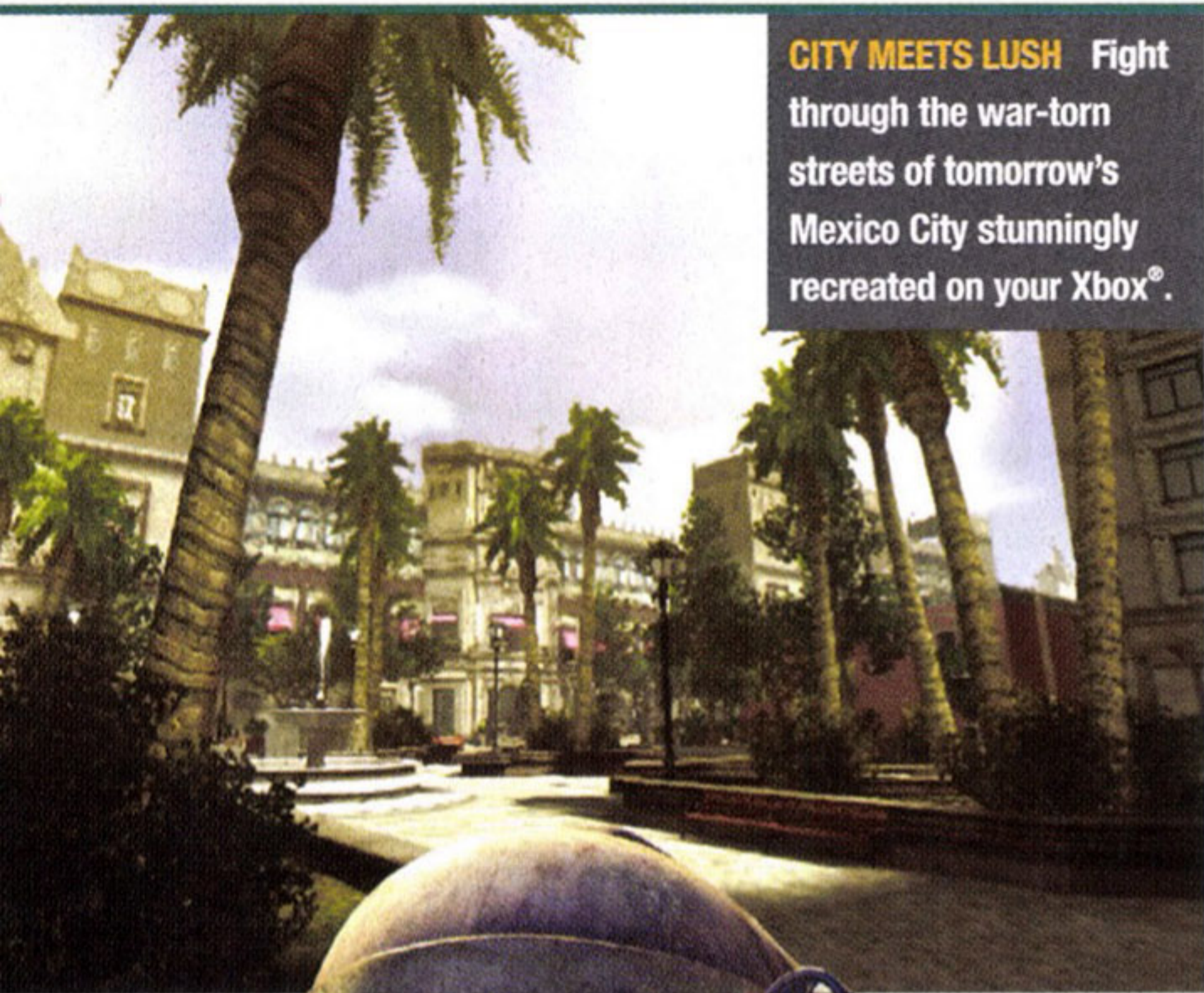


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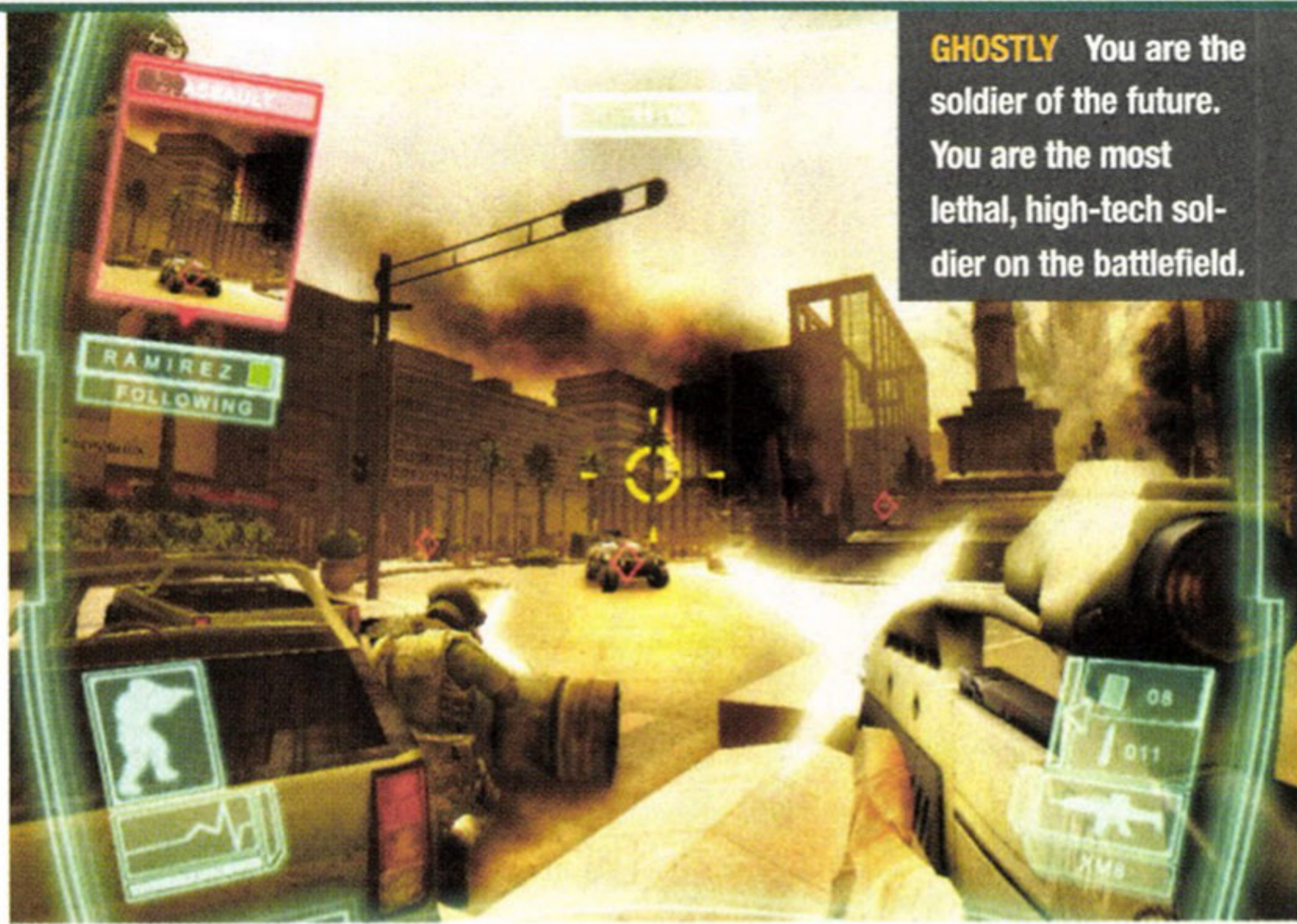


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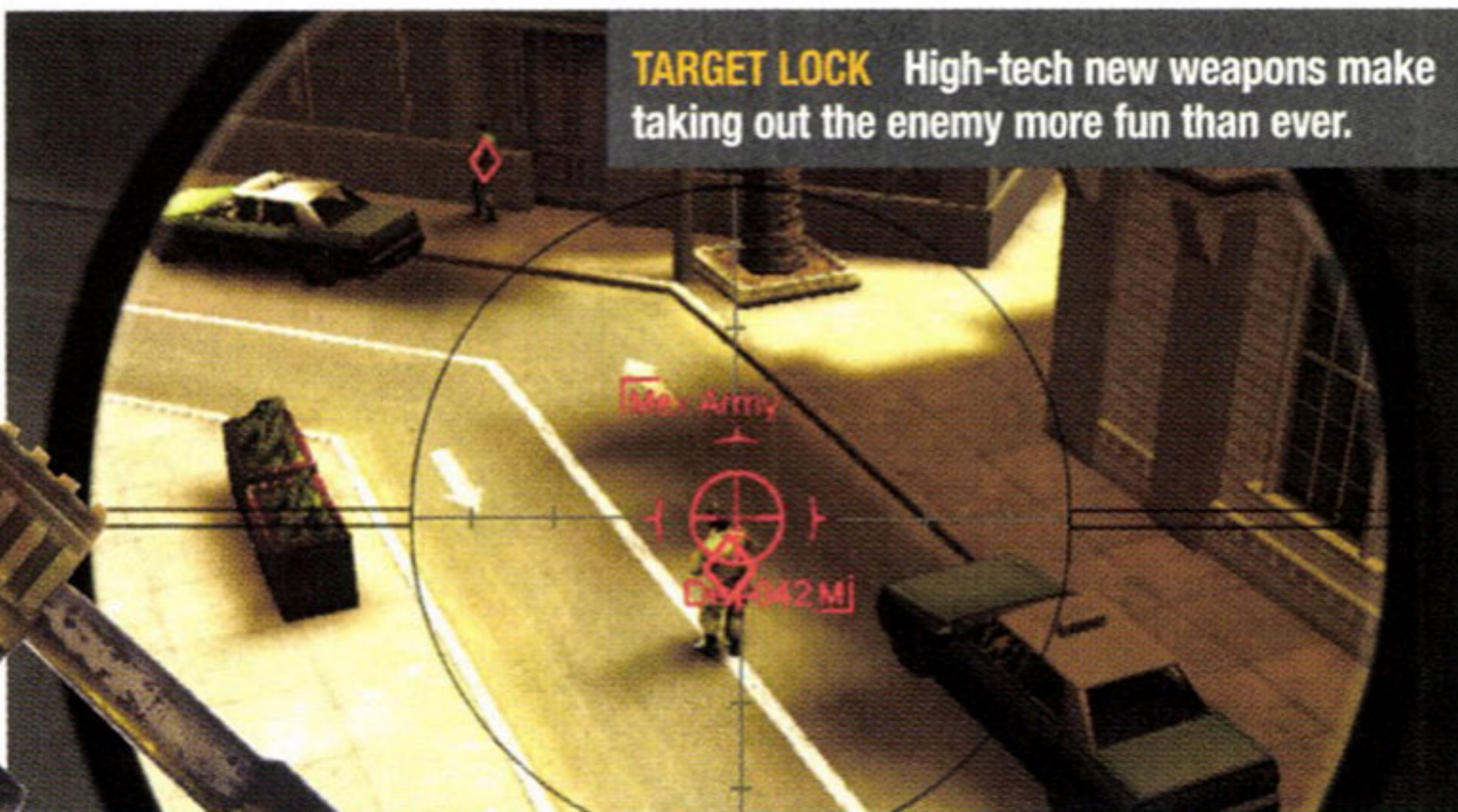
FUTURE PERFECT

Ubisoft set new standards for future-realistic shooters with Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon series.



The fan-favorite franchise focuses on the near-future exploits of the Ghosts – an elite American infantry unit using the most advanced technology the USA has to offer. The Ghosts are the Army's first-response strike team, equipped with weaponry and equipment that may seem like Sci-Fi today, but will be operational and battle-standard in the years to come. And the latest in the franchise, Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter™, is going to hit fans like a gut-punch from the future. 2013 to be exact. And it's all coming to Xbox®!

As the game begins, it's the year 2013 and a splinter faction in the Mexican army has launched an insurrection. The strike is



TARGET LOCK High-tech new weapons make taking out the enemy more fun than ever.

timed to coincide with an international celebration, and the rebel Mexican forces are able to do the unthinkable, killing the leader of Canada, taking the President of the United States hostage, and capturing codes to the US nuclear arsenal. The stakes couldn't be any higher as the Ghosts arrive...

Fitting for a franchise all about the real technologies of the future, Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter boasts innovation in both gameplay and amazing new weaponry. The game gets its very name from the Integrated Warfighter System (IWS) program, based on actual US military research combining advanced weapons systems, satellite communications, and survivability systems including MULTICAM adaptive camouflage to actually evolve what we think of the Modern Soldier.

The CROSS-COM system, obvious in the game's one-of-a-kind HUD, makes for an amazing single-player experience as you freely navigate the wide open levels.

But Xbox Live® fanatics will be glad to know that CROSS-COM is just as effective there, actually allowing team members to update situational awareness live, online. Add to that all-new multiplayer modes like Dog Tags, a gritty new take on Deathmatch; and Domination,



where nothing less than total victory will do. And with the return of favorites like Solo, Team Adversarial, Last Man Standing, and Co-op Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter promises to be a must-have for any Xbox Live® gamer.

Any way you slice it, Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter has the intensity and high-tech realism to maintain the series' hold on the Modern Combat Battlefield. And with its new emphasis on the Integrated Warfighter System and rededication to multiplayer innovation, it just may be the best Ghost Recon ever.

EXPLOSIVE You've got 48 hours to save the president, and some really big guns to help the cause.



CROSS-COM

In the future war will look more like videogames, complete with a HUD... which experts say will look something like this...

SATELLITE CAMERA

Live video feed from your squadmate's helmet gives you unprecedented situational awareness

UPDATED MAP

Spot an enemy and he's tracked by satellites and placed in your map

TOTAL CONTROL

Effortlessly command your squad and other allied forces. Even call in air-strikes

HEALTH/STANCE

A quick look and you can determine your position, and your health

FUTURE WEAPONS

Master deadly prototype high-tech weapons that are inspired by actual army research programs, like the lightweight XM8 assault rifle

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www.ghostrecon.com

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org
for updated rating
information.

WHAT'S ON THE DISC!



PLAYABLE DEMOS

DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** PUBLISHER: **KONAMI** ESRB: **PENDING**

Castlevania: Curse of Darkness



The legendary *Castlevania* series finally debuts on Xbox, and in this installment, you'll have friendly NPCs to support you in addition to your trusty blade. Use your beastly Innocent Devil buddies to your full advantage, whether it's tanking an enemy or helping you fly across barriers you otherwise can't jump across on your own. Whip it good, you might like it!

DEVELOPER: **CREATIVE ASSEMBLY** PUBLISHER: **SEGA** ESRB: **MATURE**

Spartan: Total Warrior



With this demo, you get not one but two levels of gladiator goodness, and thankfully, there's no Russell Crowe in sight. Defend Sparta in the first level, then fight Roman legions in the Coliseum in the second. When (not if) things get hairy, try holding down the R Trigger and press B to unleash a ring of lightning that will instantly kill any enemies in the area. The huge battles rock!

DEVELOPER: **IR GURUS** PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT** ESRB: **PENDING**

Heroes of the Pacific



It's not a true flight sim, but it's ridiculously fun and as close as we're likely to ever get on Xbox. Beginning at the infamous Pearl Harbor battle, this demo spans three complete playable missions. With four planes to fly around in, it's up to you to show off your ace aerial-fighting skills to become a high-flyin' hero all on your own.

XBOX GAME DISC



DECEMBER 2005 DISC VOLUME #

51

MORE PLAYABLE DEMOS

Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes

DEVELOPER: **PHANTAGRAM/BLUESIDE** PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS** ESRB: **MATURE**

Pac-Man World 3

DEVELOPER: **NAMCO** PUBLISHER: **NAMCO** ESRB: **EVERYONE**

DDR: Ultramix 3

DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** PUBLISHER: **KONAMI** ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Karaoke Revolution Party

DEVELOPER: **HARMONIX** PUBLISHER: **KONAMI** ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Without Warning

DEVELOPER: **CIRCLE STUDIOS** PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM** ESRB: **MATURE**

VIDEO FEATURES

- **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** 2K GAMES
- **50 Cent: Bulletproof - 50 Cent Interview** VU GAMES
- **Rumble Roses XX** KONAMI
- **IGPX** CARTOON NETWORK USA

VIDEO SHOWCASE

- **Gun** ACTIVISION
- **True Crime: New York City** ACTIVISION
- **Stacked with Daniel Negreanu** MYELIN MEDIA
- **Star Wars Episode III** FOX HOME VIDEO
- **Roland SP-404** ROLAND
- **Progressive Auto Insurance** PROGRESSIVE

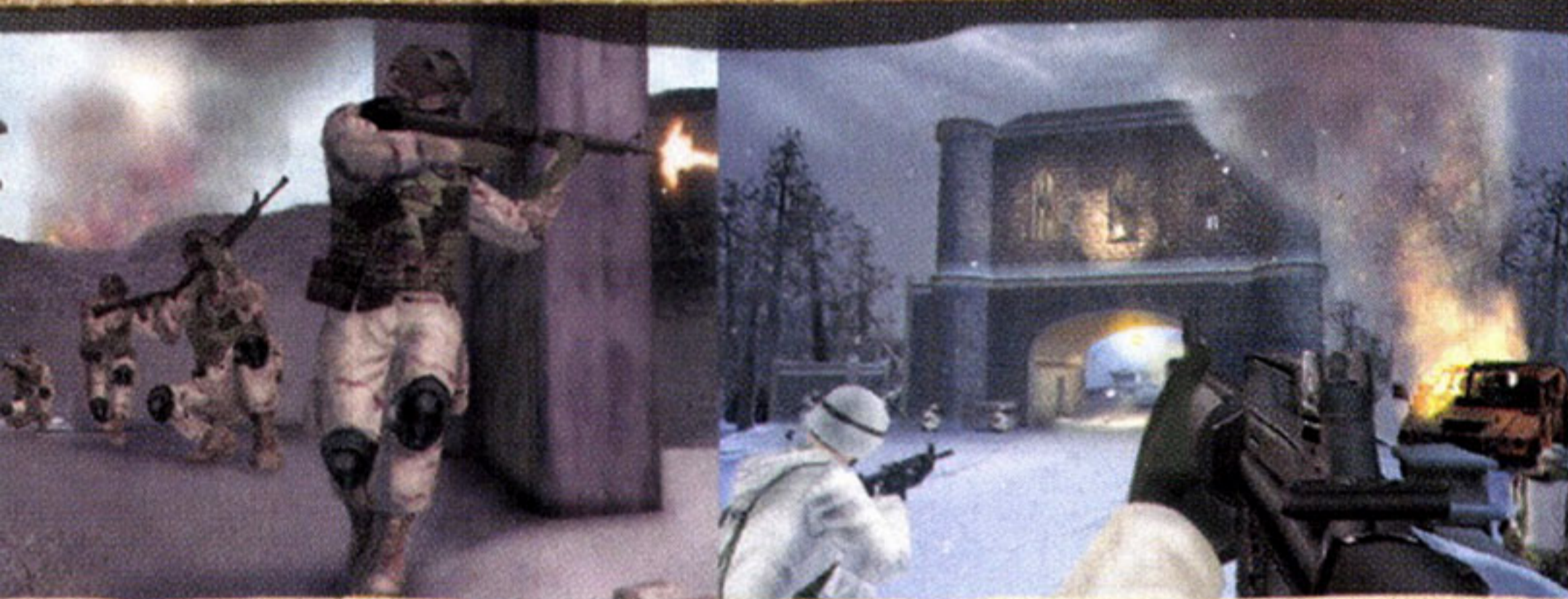
NEED TO GET A DISC?

If you don't receive the disc, then you need to upgrade! Each disc contains playable demos, video previews, downloads, and more. To get 12 issues that include the game disc with your subscription (prorated if necessary) for just \$1 per issue, please call (515) 248-7682 (listen past the entire outgoing message), and an operator will take care of everything. (Please note that subscriptions purchased through third-party subscription agents do not include the monthly game disc.)

For Challenges, send an email with a digital picture attached, including your first and last name and challenge completed, to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject line "I'm a Legend." You can also take pictures the old-fashioned way and mail them to us (don't forget your full name and challenge completed) at: **I'M A LEGEND, c/o Official Xbox Magazine, 150 North Hill Dr., Suite 40, Brisbane, CA 94005.** P.S. Use the header "I'm a Legend," or your entry won't qualify.



OUR GAME DEVELOPERS DON'T RELY ON IMAGINATION.



Advance from recruit to Special Forces in Career mode.

Master a number of roles including grenadier and sniper.



RISE OF A SOLDIER™



Build an online character and test your skills against others.

THE OFFICIAL U.S. ARMY GAME.®



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***WHO DO YOU FIGHT
WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE FIGHTING FOR?***



PlayStation 2





THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

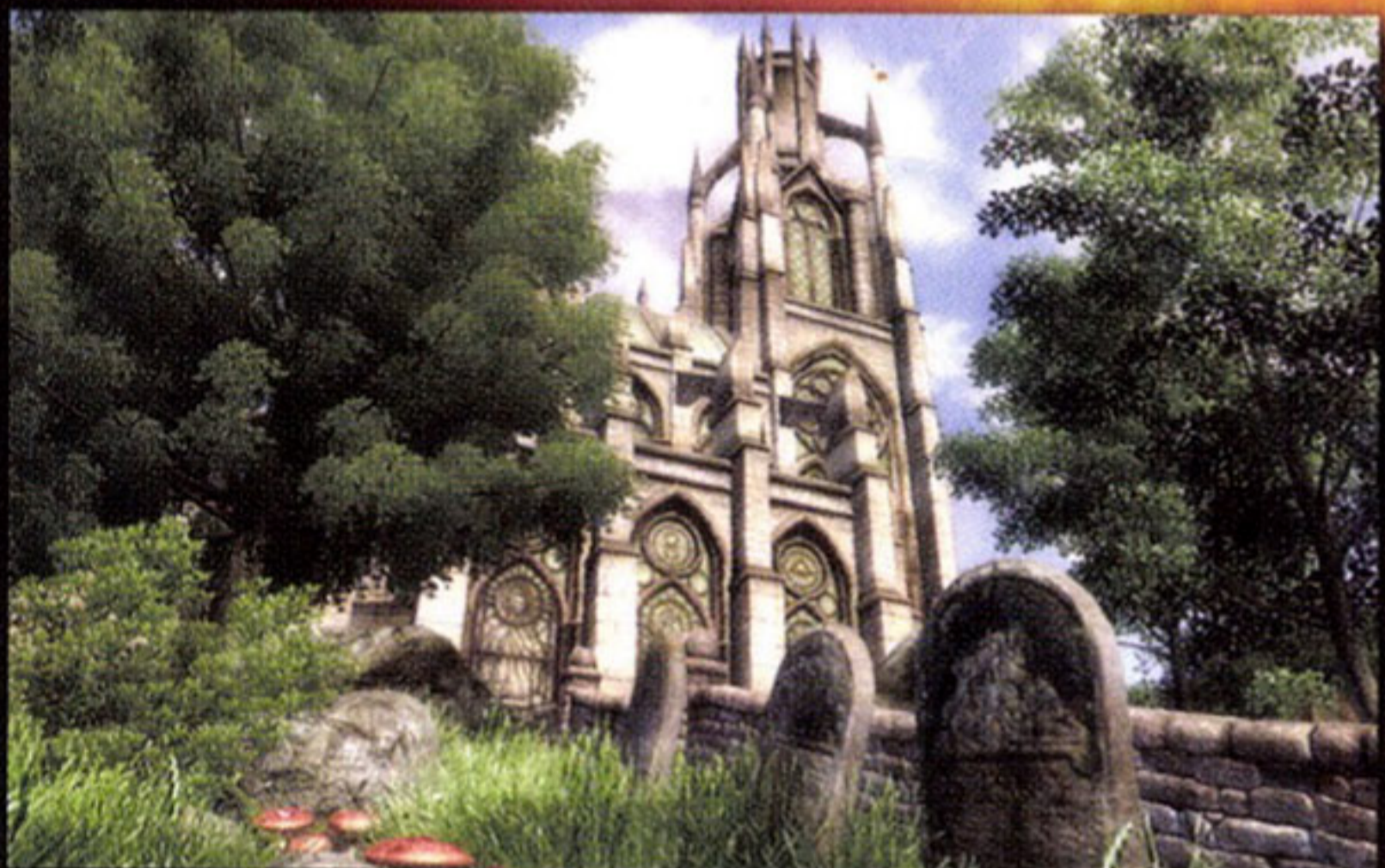
Meet Shadow, a hedgehog with a mysterious past. Your choices throughout the game will enable him to discover who his enemies really are. With a little help from some high-speed vehicles and high-powered weapons, of course. Shadow's either going to destroy the world, or save us all. But either way, you'll have a blast.

SHADOW™ THE HEDGEHOG



Winner, Best RPG of E3

- Game Critics Award, GameSpot, IGN, GameSpy,
Xbox Evolved, Console Gold, Daily Game, Games Domain



"Oblivion is, at this time, the best-looking
game I have ever seen in my life."

- Xbox.com



"The biggest title for the Xbox 360™,
and the one I'm most looking forward to."

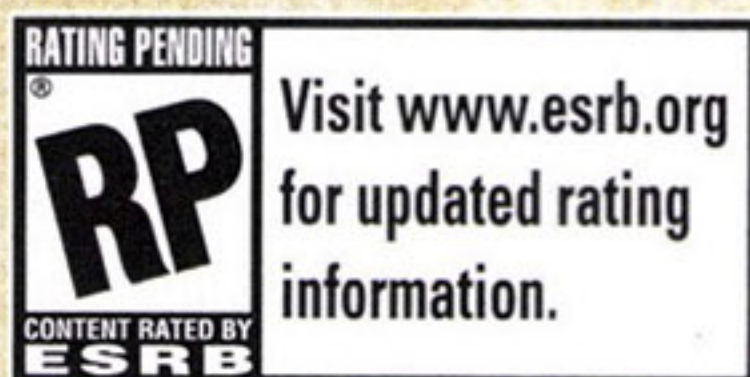
- GamePro Magazine

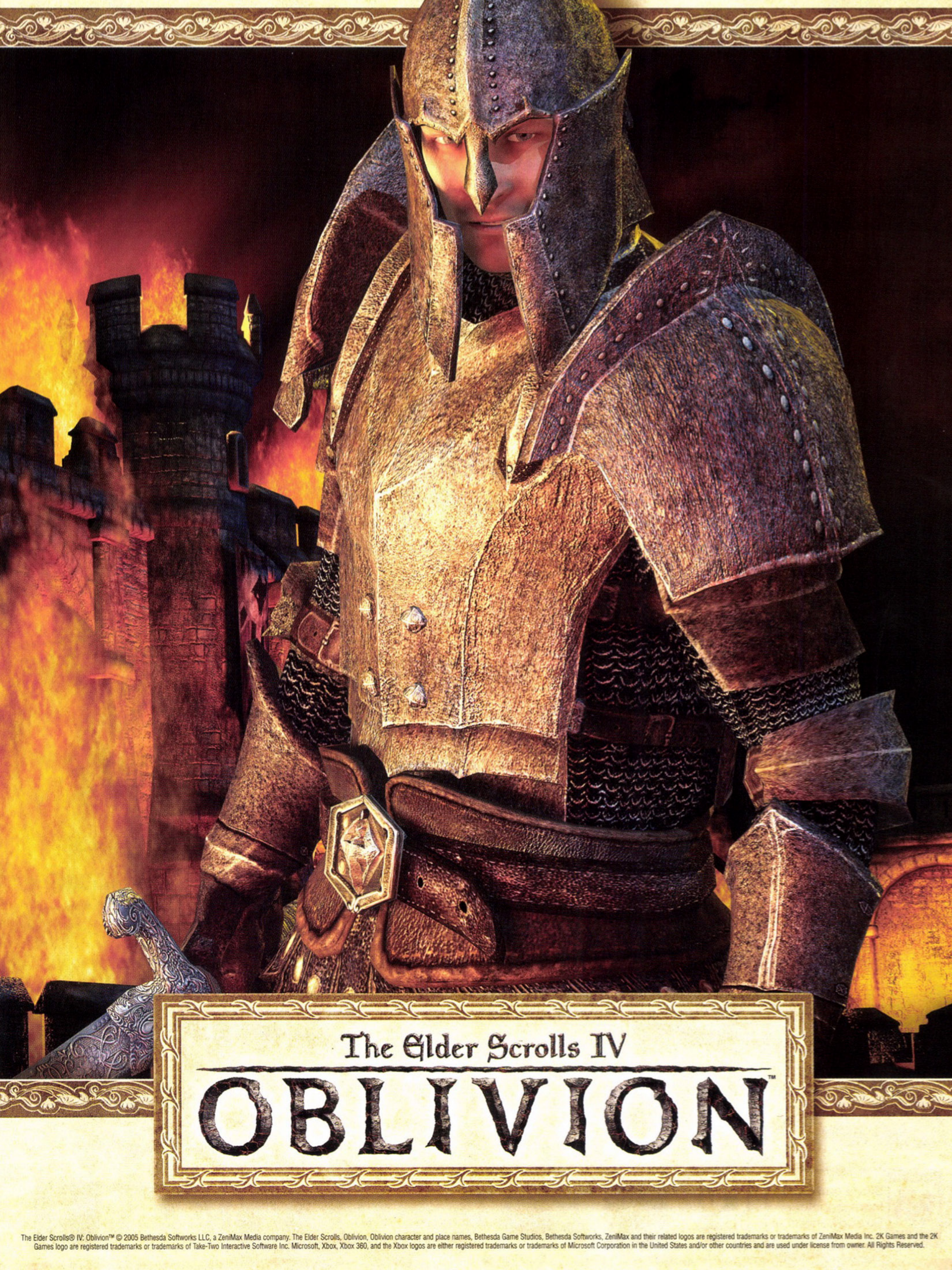


"One look at Oblivion will shatter your
conceptions about what is possible in a
video game."

- GameInformer

The RPG for the Next Generation





The Elder Scrolls IV

OBLIVION™

BROTHERS ★ IN ARMS ★ ★ IN ARMS ★ EARNED IN BLOOD

1944 St. Sauveur, D-Day +10

I've been out of Baker's shadow for no more than three days now and already I'm feeling the weight of my fear. The fear that around every corner somebody's lying in wait. The fear that any wrong choice could end up killing what I'm trying to save. Well, somebody's got to lead this fight. And if I call this right, my men - the men who have fought next to me - will get out of this hell alive.

Red
6116



INTENSE URBAN COMBAT: SECURE WAR-TORN CITIES USING AUTHENTIC PARATROOPER TACTICS.



IMPROVED DYNAMIC AI: OUTSMART INTELLIGENT GERMAN FORCES THAT FLANK, COVER, AND ANTICIPATE EVERY MOVE.

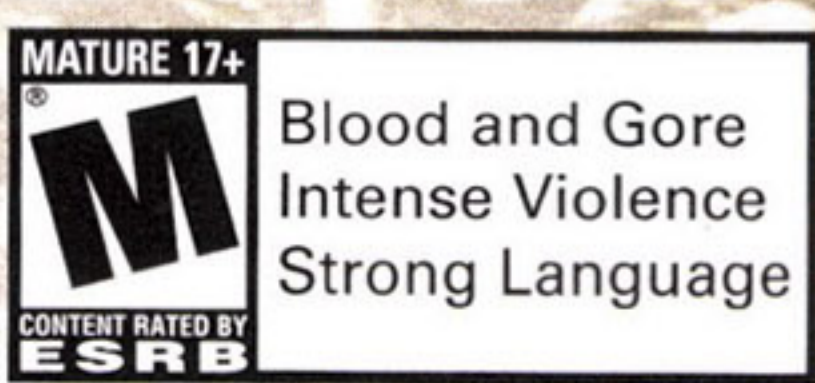


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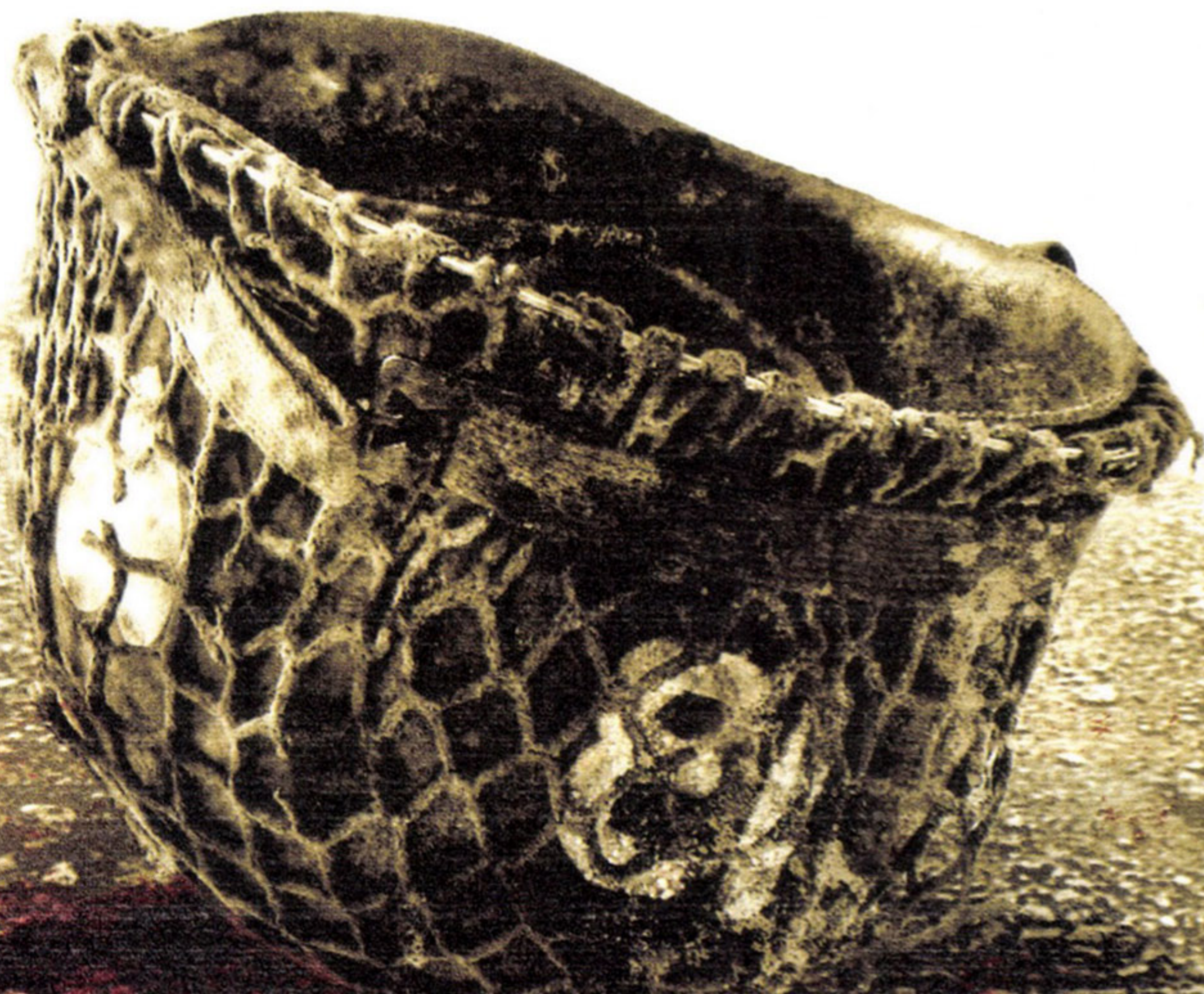


PlayStation 2



TAKING COMMAND ISN'T EASY.

TAKING THE CONSEQUENCES IS EVEN HARDER.



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gearbox
software



UBISOFT®

Amateur Cartography



■ Dark and spooky...just the way a map shouldn't be, we would learn later.

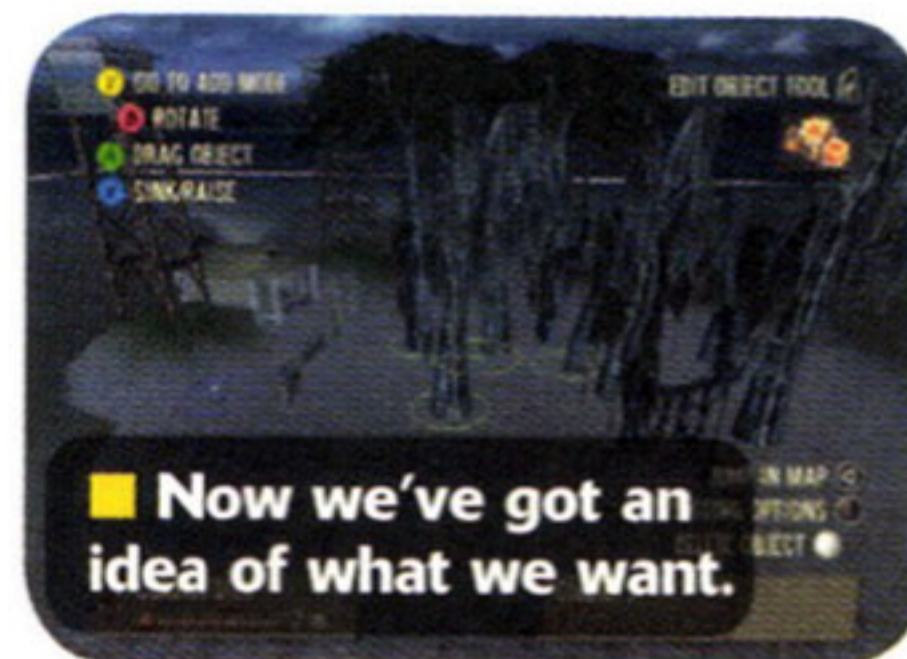
Become an expert Far Cry mapmaker with these tips from the developer

Given *Far Cry Instincts'* quality (OXM score: 8.7) and unique tropical setting, we expect its multiplayer to be popular on Xbox Live – thanks in no small part to its robust level-creation feature. But since level editing is relatively new to the Xbox scene, we decided to build a level ourselves. We called it “OXM

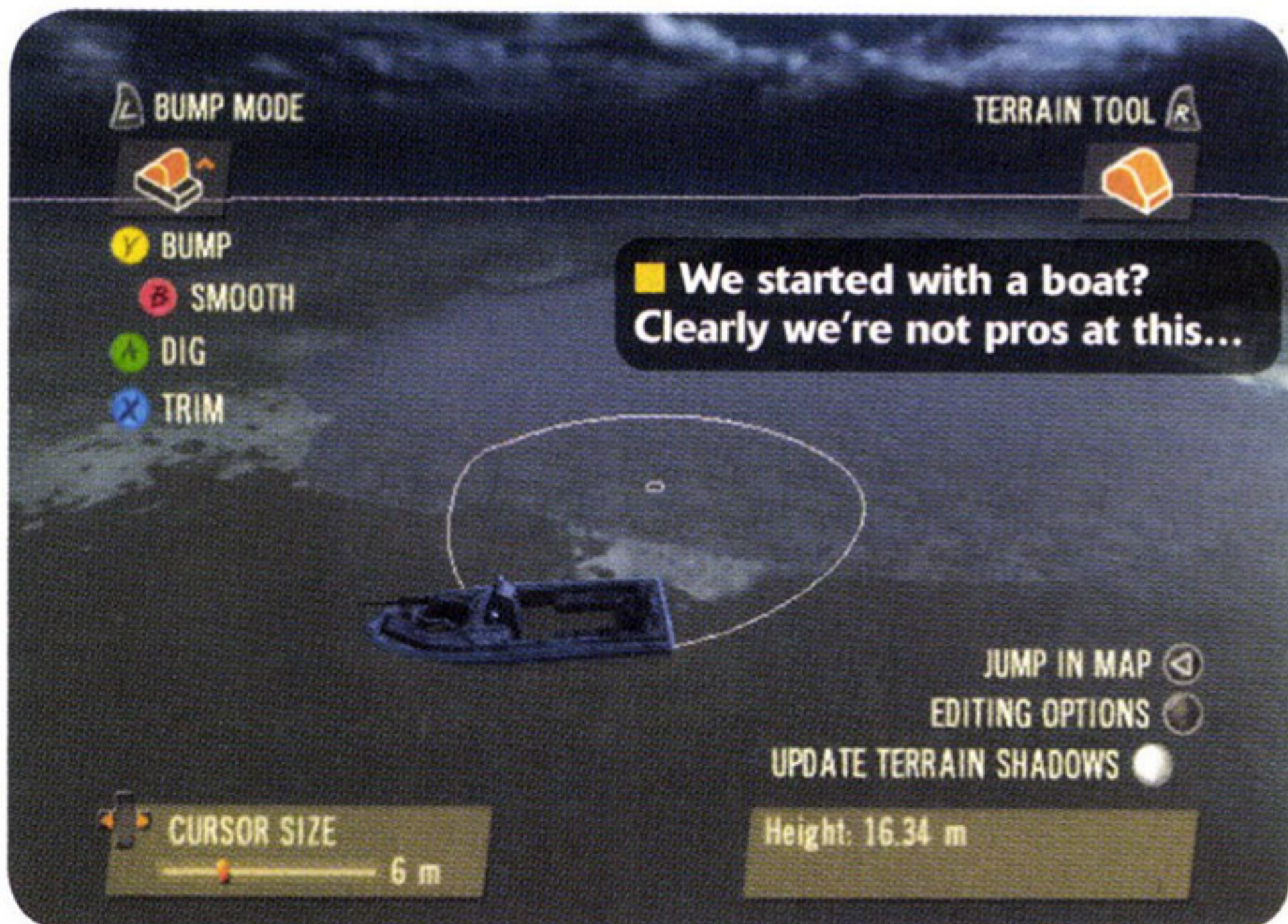
Playground” (try not to laugh), then showed it to *Far Cry* Multiplayer Game Designer Alexandre Mandryka. Check out his thoughts on our work (talk about turning the tables!), and then take his constructive criticisms of our efforts into account as you dive into your own level-editing endeavors.

Developer Tip #1: Start with a theme in mind

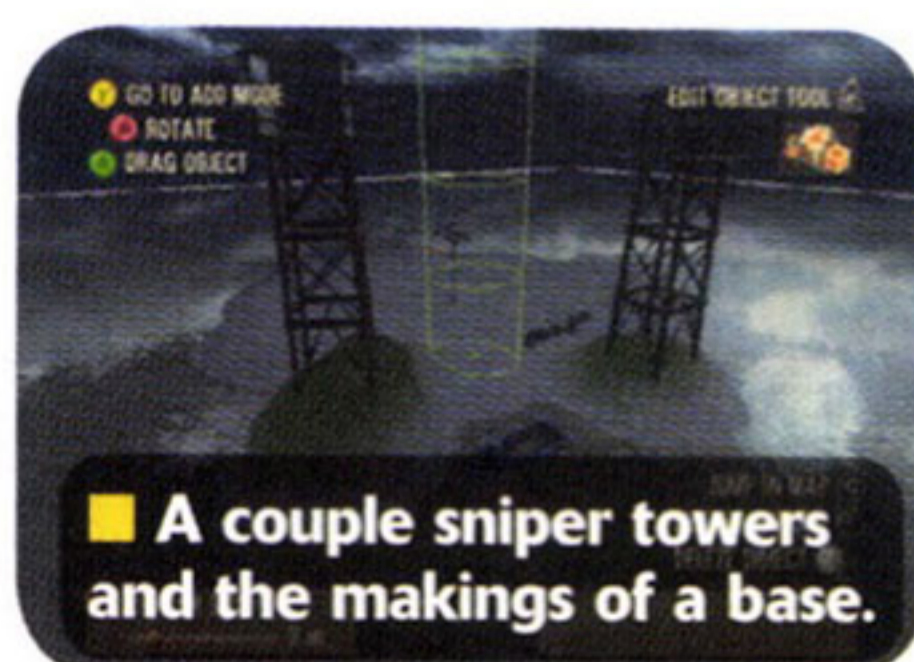
Do you want a small, circular arena or a big, multi-base complex? Do you want a straight chaos (a.k.a. deathmatch) map, or something designed for steal the sample (a.k.a. capture the flag)? Consider this before loading up the editor.



■ Now we've got an idea of what we want.



■ We started with a boat? Clearly we're not pros at this...



■ A couple sniper towers and the makings of a base.

Developer Tip #2: Plan ahead

After you've thought about your map, Alex kindly suggests that you draw it out on a piece of paper. You don't have to be an architect who can draw 3D spaces (even a simple overhead sketch will do) but visualizing it on paper helps flesh it out. Alex is a pro so we believe him.

Developer Tip #3: Visibility is a good thing

“This is certainly the darkest map I've ever seen,” Alex said of our fogged-out midnight mess. He added that it's important to be able to see what's going on and where you're going. So our mid-level forest was a cool idea, but Alex suggested we have at least one clear path through it to guide players from one base to the other.

Developer Tip #4: It's all about the flow

Alex was passionate about putting the good weapons – which we'd randomly scattered around – in a central, open, visible area of the level, ▶

XBOX LIVE

Get more for your money



The Xbox 360 revolves around choice, and Xbox Live is no exception. Now that pricing has been announced, it's just a matter of picking the best value package for you.

The **Xbox Live Premium Gold Pack** comes in two varieties. The **Three Month** pack (\$39.99) includes an Xbox 360 Headset, the Xbox Live Arcade version of the coin-op classic Joust, a \$10 rebate for the Xbox 360 game of your choice (remember, they're all Xbox Live enabled), and 100 Microsoft Points to spend as you see fit in the new Xbox Live Marketplace. The **12 Month** pack (\$69.99) offers double the rebate (\$20) and Microsoft Points (200), plus the headset and a copy of Bankshot Billiards for Xbox Live Arcade. When you're ready to play, **subscription cards** are available in One Month (\$7.99), Three Month (\$19.99) and 12 Month (\$49.99) blocks—and they can be stacked and combined at any time. No credit card required! Simply stop by your favorite retailer and pick 'em up!

Bottom line: It's the same price you pay for Xbox Live access now—only with many more features. Stay connected and you'll see!



Look for the new Xbox Live Premium Gold Pack at your local retailer, or visit <http://www.xbox.com>.



Connecting: Easy as 1, 2, 3

1. Get an Xbox 360

For \$399, the Xbox 360 includes a Headset and an Ethernet cable—all you need to get up and running.

2. Plug into high-speed Internet

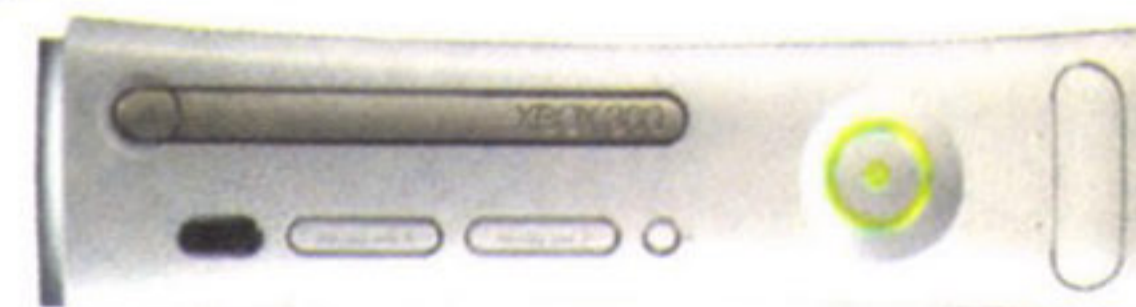
Simply connect your cable or DSL modem to your Xbox 360, direct or through a router—configuration happens automatically.

3. Start playing

Create a new Gamertag or transfer the one you currently use—either way, your identity is secured and your legend only grows from here.



Coming Soon to Xbox Live



Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon:
Advanced Warfighter

And 1 Streetball

Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows

Dance Dance Revolution
Ultramix 3

America's Army:
Rise of a Soldier

Perfect Dark Zero

Project Gotham
Racing 3

Dead or Alive 4

Madden NFL 06

NHL 2K6

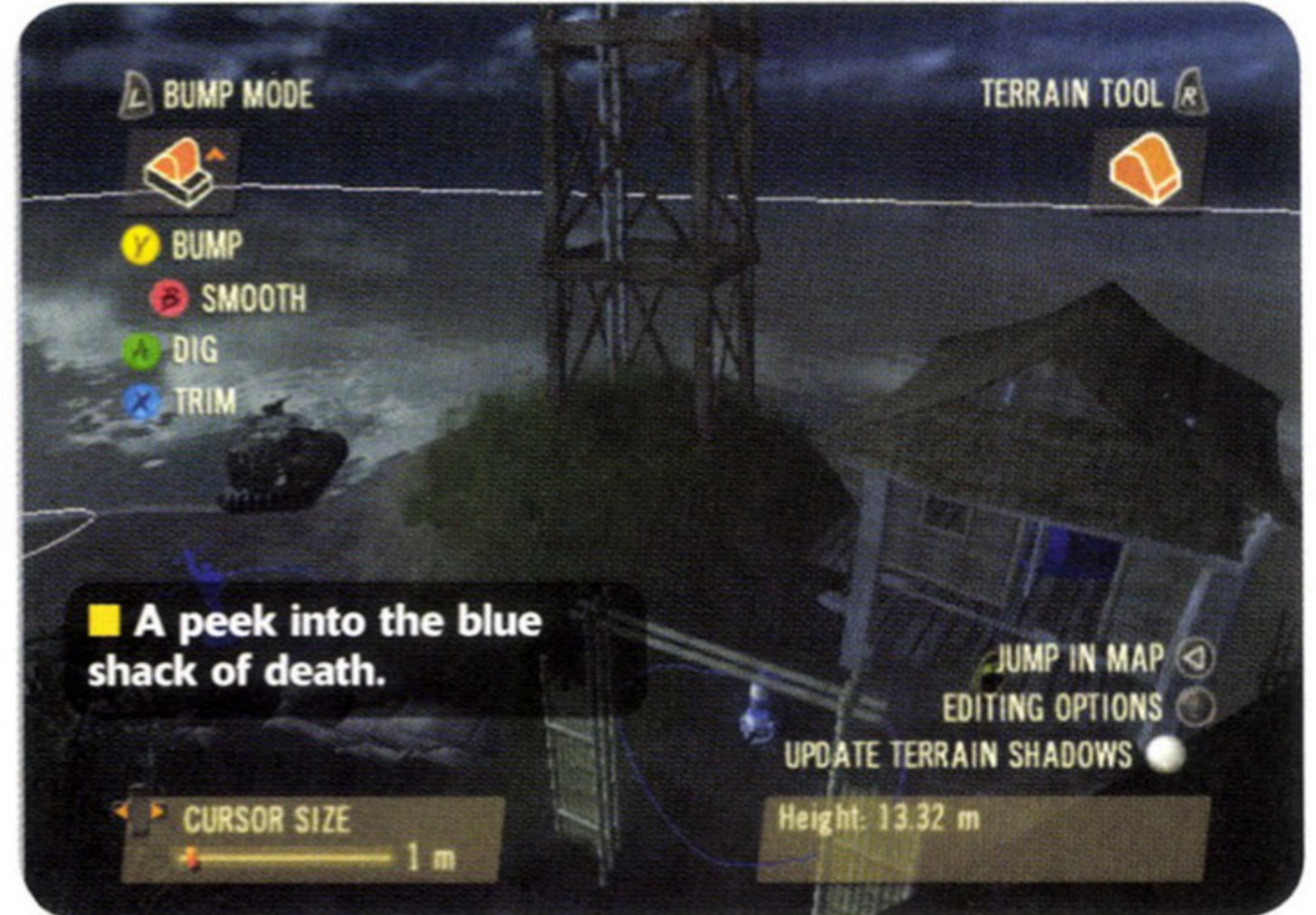
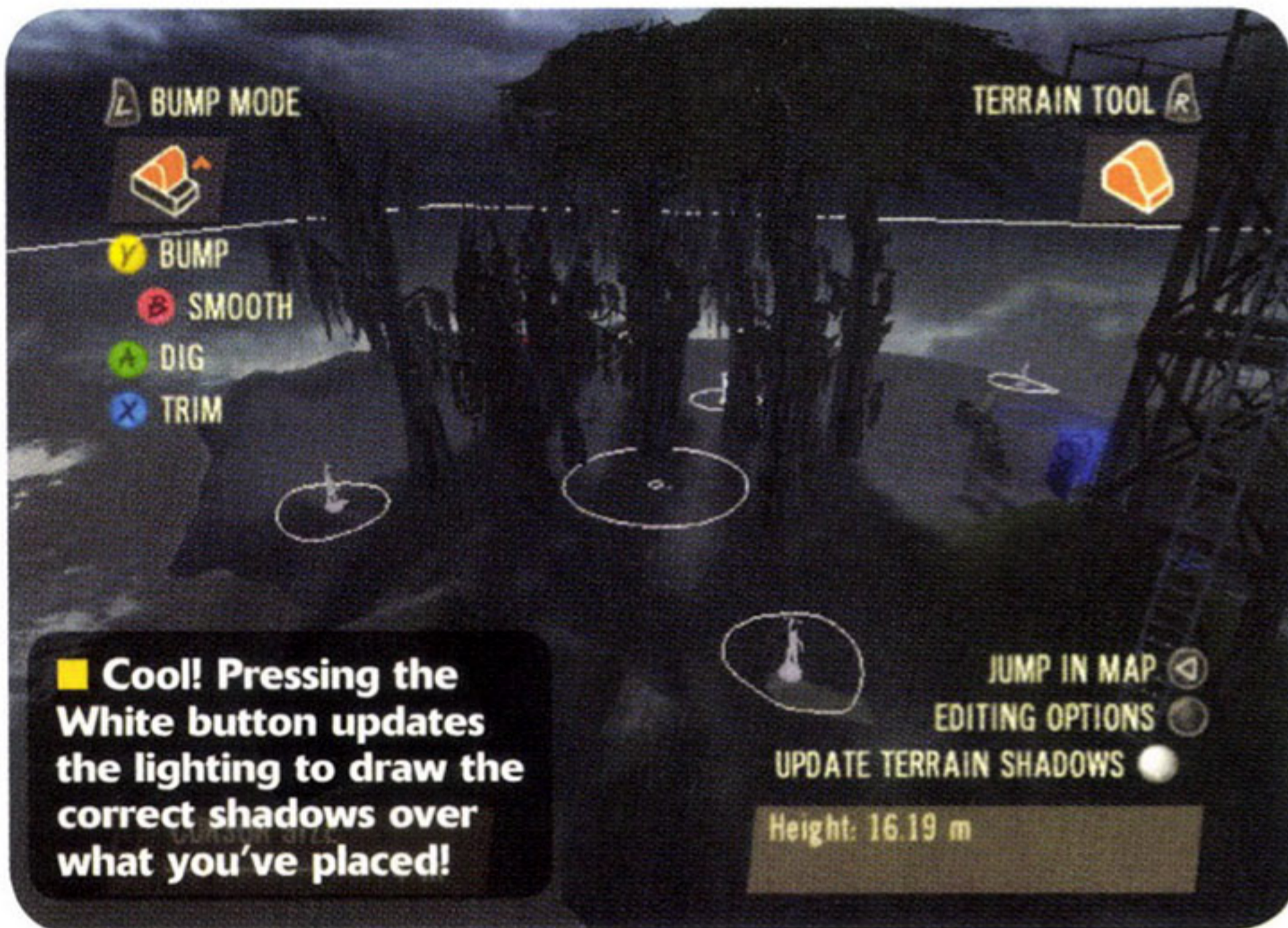
Tiger Woods
PGA Tour 2006

Game releases subject to change.

Sports Sunday	R&R Night	Old School Night	Race To The Weekend	New Release Night	Free-For-All Friday	Shooter Saturday
30 NHL 06 6pm PT/9pm ET NHL 2K6 8pm PT/11pm ET	31  Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil 6pm PT/9pm ET Darkwatch 8pm PT/11pm ET	1 RalliSport Challenge 2 6pm PT/9pm ET Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge 8pm PT/11pm ET	2 NASCAR 06: Total Team Control 6pm PT/9pm ET LA Rush 8pm PT/11pm ET	3 Guest Gamer— Producer Joel Taubelli! plays... Delta Force: Black Hawk Down 4pm PT/7pm ET See Xbox.com for more	4  Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects 6pm PT/9pm ET	5 Battlefield 2: Modern Combat 6pm PT/9pm ET 25 to Life 8pm PT/11pm ET
6 Madden NFL 06 6pm PT/9pm ET 	7 Think Tanks— Xbox Live Arcade 6pm PT/9pm ET Bankshot Billiards— Xbox Live Arcade 8pm PT/11pm ET	8 MechAssault 6pm PT/9pm ET Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow 8pm PT/11pm ET	9 OutRun 2 6pm PT/9pm ET Burnout Revenge 8pm PT/11pm ET	10  Beat the Mystery Gamer (Gamertag: XboxLive) and win! Tony Hawk's American Wasteland 3pm PT/6pm ET	11 Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike 6pm PT/9pm ET 	12 Star Wars Battlefront II 6pm PT/9pm ET Conker: Live and Reloaded 8pm PT/11pm ET
13 College Hoops 2K6 6pm PT/9pm ET NBA Live 06 8pm PT/11pm ET	14 World Poker Tour 6pm PT/9pm ET Stacked featuring Daniel Negreanu 8pm PT/11pm ET	15 Top Spin 8pm PT/11pm ET Links 2004 3pm PT/6pm ET	16 Midnight Club 3 DUB Edition 6pm PT/9pm ET Forza Motorsport 8pm PT/11pm ET	17 World Series of Poker 6pm PT/9pm ET	18 Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike 6pm PT/9pm ET 	19 Painkiller 6pm PT/9pm ET Far Cry Instincts 8pm PT/11pm ET
20 Blitz: The League 6pm PT/9pm ET Madden NFL 06 8pm PT/11pm ET	21  X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse 6pm PT/9pm ET	22 Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3 6pm PT/9pm ET Counter-Strike 8pm PT/11pm ET	23 Burnout Revenge 6pm PT/9pm ET MotoGP 3 8pm PT/11pm ET	24 Need for Speed: Most Wanted 6pm PT/9pm ET	25 Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Lockdown 6pm PT/9pm ET Battlefield 2: Modern Combat 8pm PT/11pm ET	26 Delta Force: Black Hawk Down 6pm PT/9pm ET America's Army: Rise of a Soldier 8pm PT/11pm ET

XBOX LIVE BY THE NUMBERS

- 85** Percentage of Xbox Live users who are male.
- 62** Percentage of Live users between age 18 and 30.
- 35** Percentage of Live users whose income is at least \$60k/year.
- 23.3** Average number of games owned by Xbox Live subscribers.
- 20** Average number of people on each Live user's Friends List.
- 15.4** Average number of games owned by offline Xbox owners.
- 5** Tom Clancy titles in Top 10 most-played Live games worldwide.
- 1.4** Billion hours accrued by all Xbox Live users online.



in order to draw the action to those spots. "You want to concentrate the action around clear points like the rocket launcher and health packs." He also added that you must resist the temptation to plant *Far Cry's* lush vegetation everywhere and at random. Instead, use pockets of it as visual barriers that you can still run through, and use the paint tool in the terrain menu in order to physically create paths to those central areas you want your players to go. "You can't just place trees and bushes and hope players have fun," he said.



Developer Tip #6: Mind your spawn points

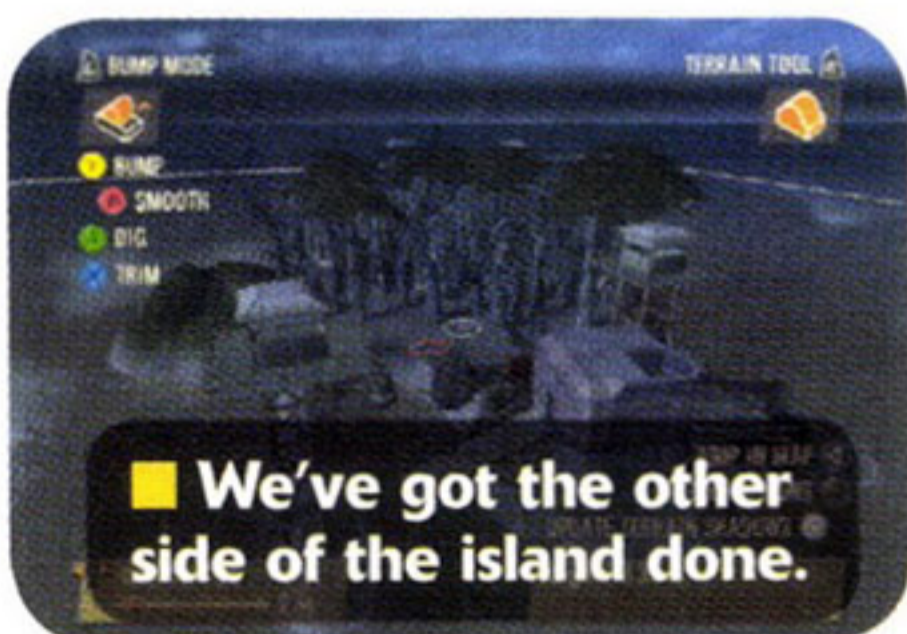
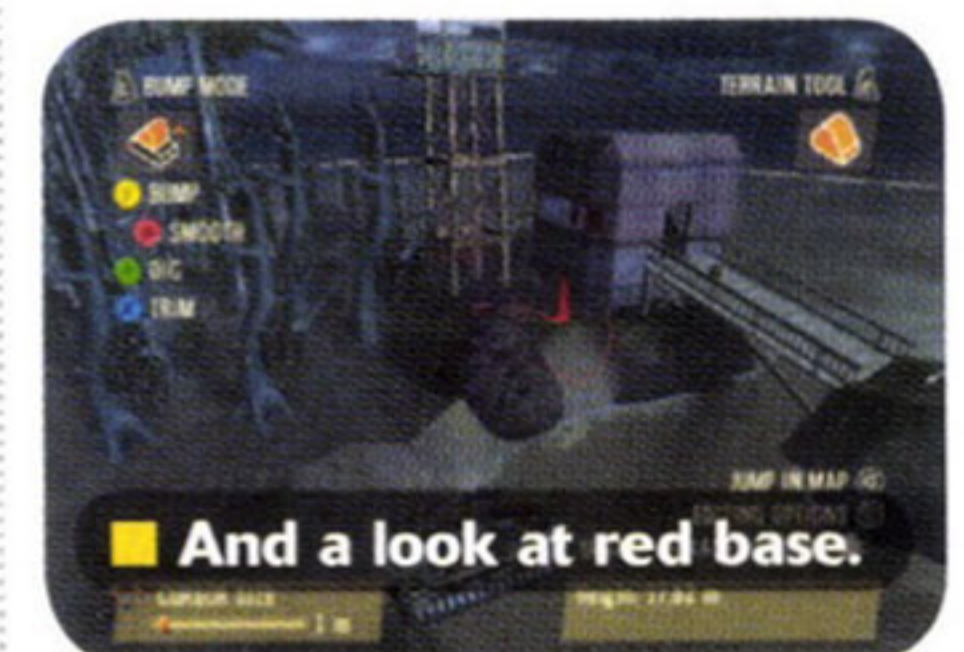
Here's one we at least got somewhat right. It's downright dumb to point your respawn spots toward the outer

edges of the level. Make sure you direct your respawns toward the central, action-packed areas.

Developer Tip #7: The word of the day is "verticality"

"Try to create multiple layers," Alex told us. He liked that we had sniper towers and that you could jump up on top of the roof of the blue base, thereby creating three separate levels that action could take place on, but said we didn't maximize the potential. Build your map with this in

mind. For instance, you could have a trench network, a ground level, and a surrounding plateau for some good three-layer verticality. Now, go forth, map-making expert.



Developer Tip #5: Landmarks are key

You need a central point of attraction that will naturally lure the casual players because it looks cool, and also bring the hardcore players who know that the heavy-duty firepower will likely reside there. And what better way to do it than with landmarks. Landmarks are also good for navigation purposes so that players don't get lost in the level.

XBOX LIVE 360 PRICING INFO

Wondering what your online-gaming addiction will cost in the world of 360? The news is all good – no price hikes!

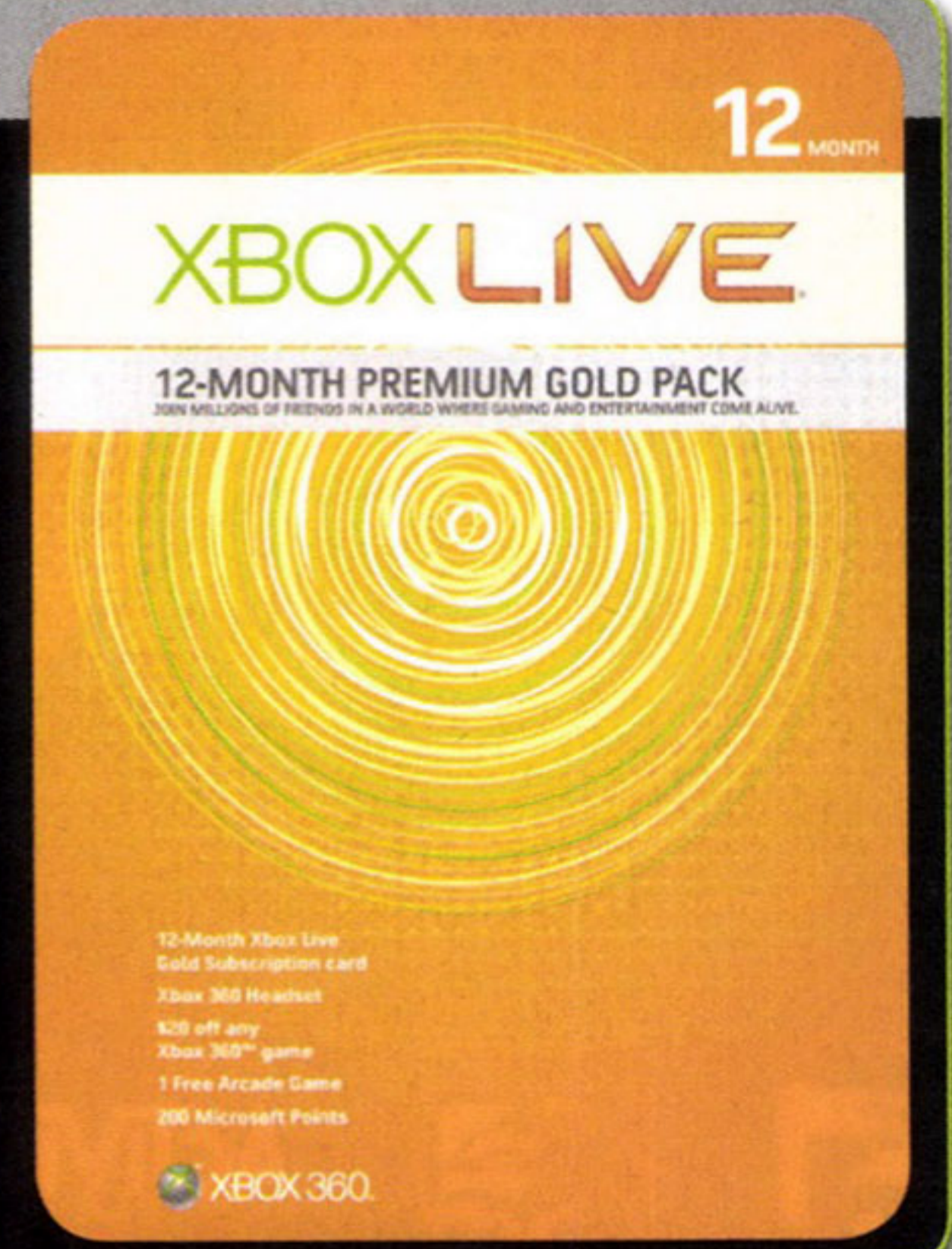
Standard one-year Gold subscription (via retail card or Live Dashboard): \$49.99

3-Month Xbox Live Premium Gold Pack (at retail locations): \$39.99

- *Joust* for Xbox Live Arcade
- Xbox 360 headset
- \$10 mail-in rebate good on any 360 game
- 100 Microsoft Points for use in the Xbox Live Marketplace

12-Month Xbox Live Premium Gold Pack (at retail locations): \$69.99

- *Bankshot Billiards* for Xbox Live Arcade
- Xbox 360 headset
- \$20 mail-in rebate good on any 360 game
- 200 Microsoft Points for use in the Xbox Live Marketplace





A Game By



idSoftware.com

Developed By



Published By



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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

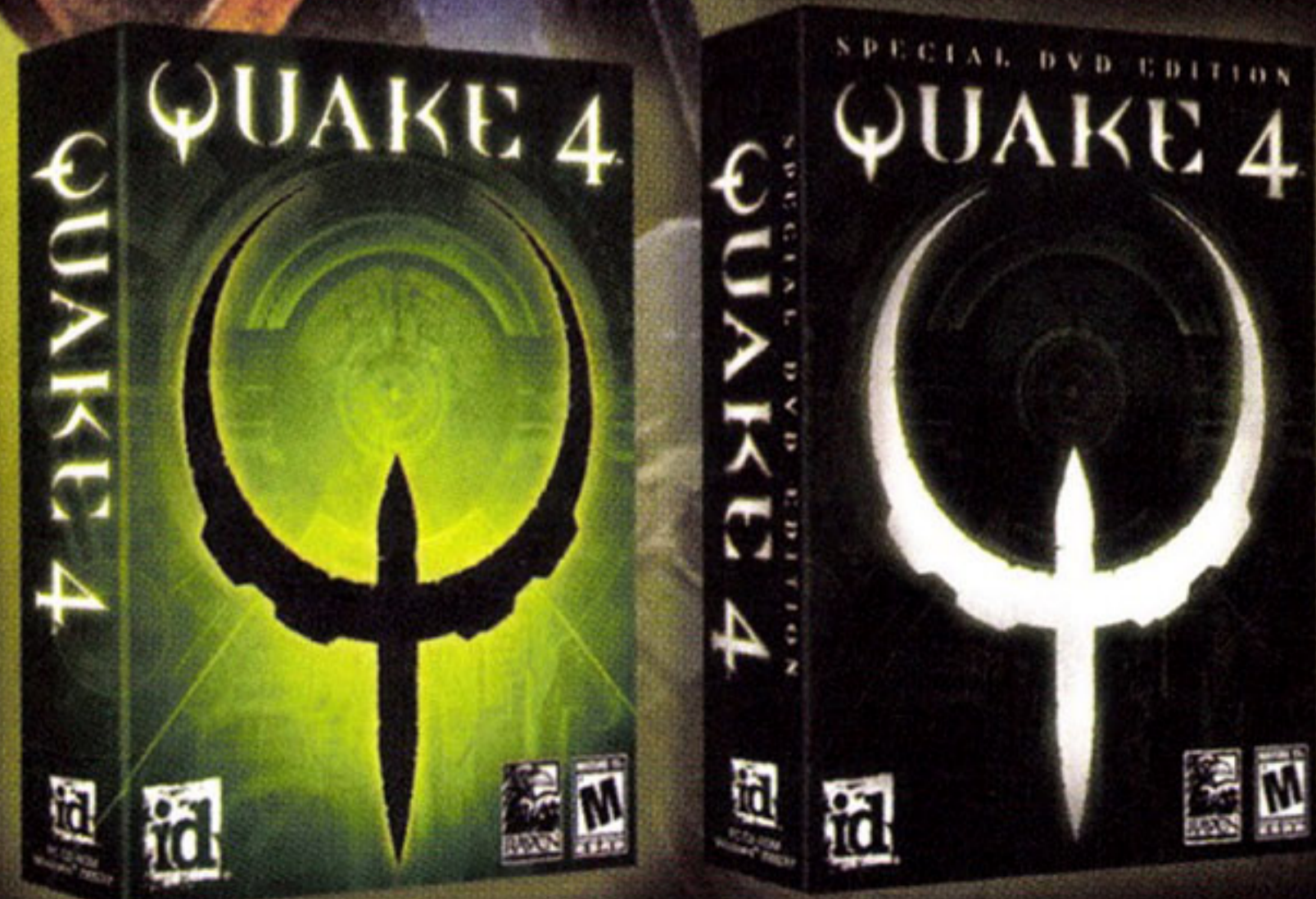


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ULTIMATE WAR...**

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- ☉ Battle outdoors using tanks and walkers
- ☉ Fight with the support of an elite squad
- ☉ Annihilate the alien enemy with an arsenal of hi-tech weaponry
- ☉ Compete online in fast action, arena-style multiplayer



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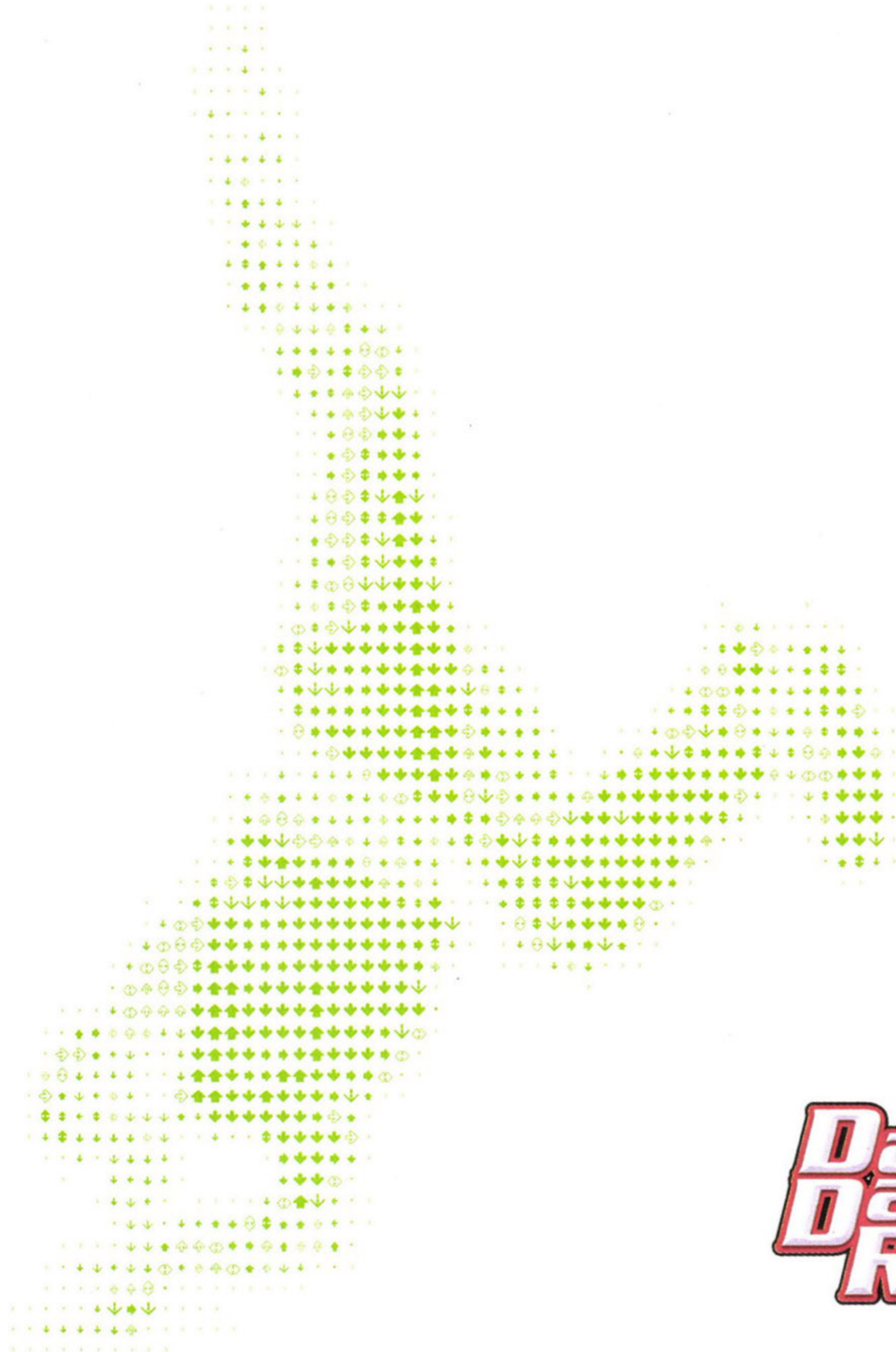
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DDR Ultramix 3. Killer artists. Smash hits. New Freestyle mode. Calorie-tracking Workout mode. And Xbox Live support for chat, new music downloads and head-to-head online competition.

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KONAMI



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



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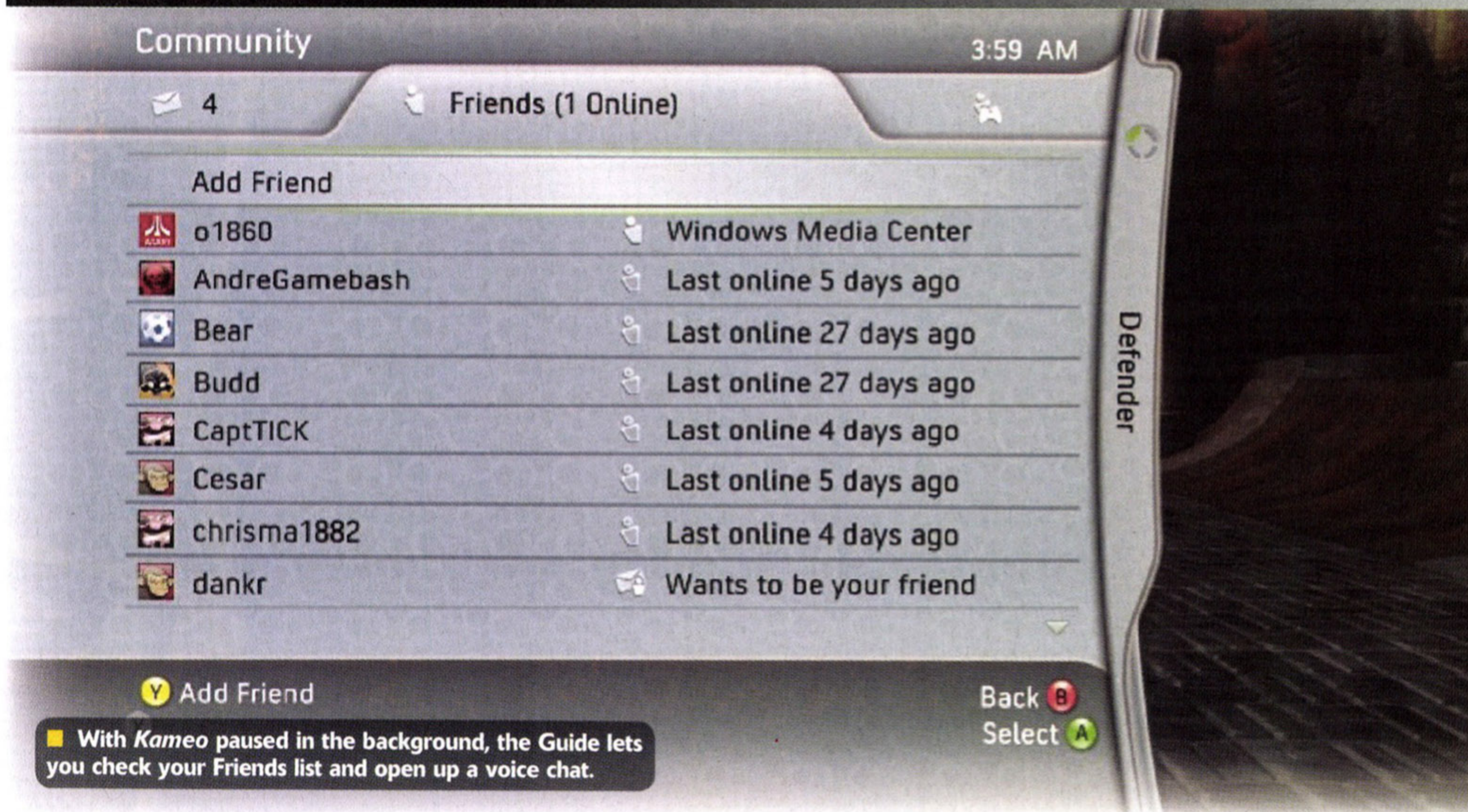
You are FBI Agent Ethan Thomas. To hunt the world's most dangerous serial killer you'll need to keep your eyes open. Starting now. FOLLOW THE EVIDENCE TO CONDEMNEDGAME.COM

CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS™

All Access

Slick tricks

SIX MUST-TRY FEATURES OF XBOX 360



Some of the more impressive “next-gen” aspects of Xbox 360 gaming will come not from high-def graphics or triple-core processing, but from the interface itself.

By now, you know that tapping the new Guide button on your Xbox 360 controller pauses the action and brings up a standard set of menus no matter what game you're playing or which movie you're watching. And getting excited about menus... well, unless they have an option like “refrigerate adult beverage,” only menu designers do that, right? Not this time. Remember when you first heard about *PGR3*'s Gotham TV feature and how that seemed

so much more “next-gen” than the most glittering, photorealistic Ferrari? That same kind of evolution is lurking inside the 360 interface, and we've got the lowdown for you on the shiny toys that intrigue us most.

Four Channels of Voice Chat

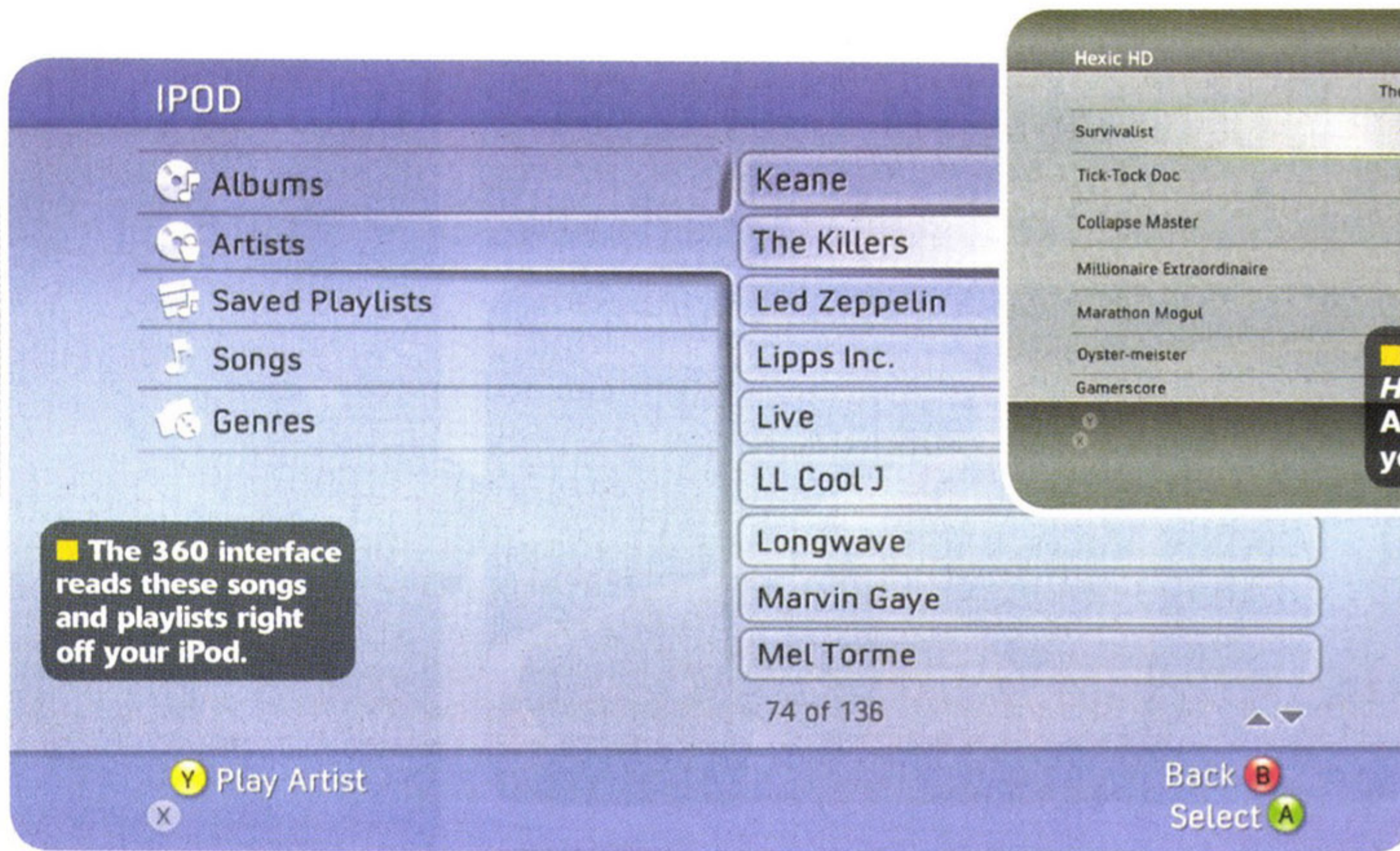
Right out of the box, you're instantly wired up with more lines of communication than you probably have in your home. Picture this:

You're fragging merrily away in *PDZ*, talkin' up a storm, when some buddies on your Friends list start up a *Call of Duty 2* match. You click over and catch up with them, then notice some guy who schooled you at *Top Spin 2* come online. So you open up a line to challenge him to a game later on – all without leaving your *PDZ* match. (You don't talk to everyone at once; it's like having four phone lines.) And that would still leave one line open for you to catch up with...geez, someone else. We don't have that many friends, so it's hard to imagine. Setting up these gabfests is simple – hit the Guide button, flip to your Friends list, and select a chat buddy. Best of all, you can change which game you're playing without dropping any of your voice chats. The potential for social interaction is just huge.

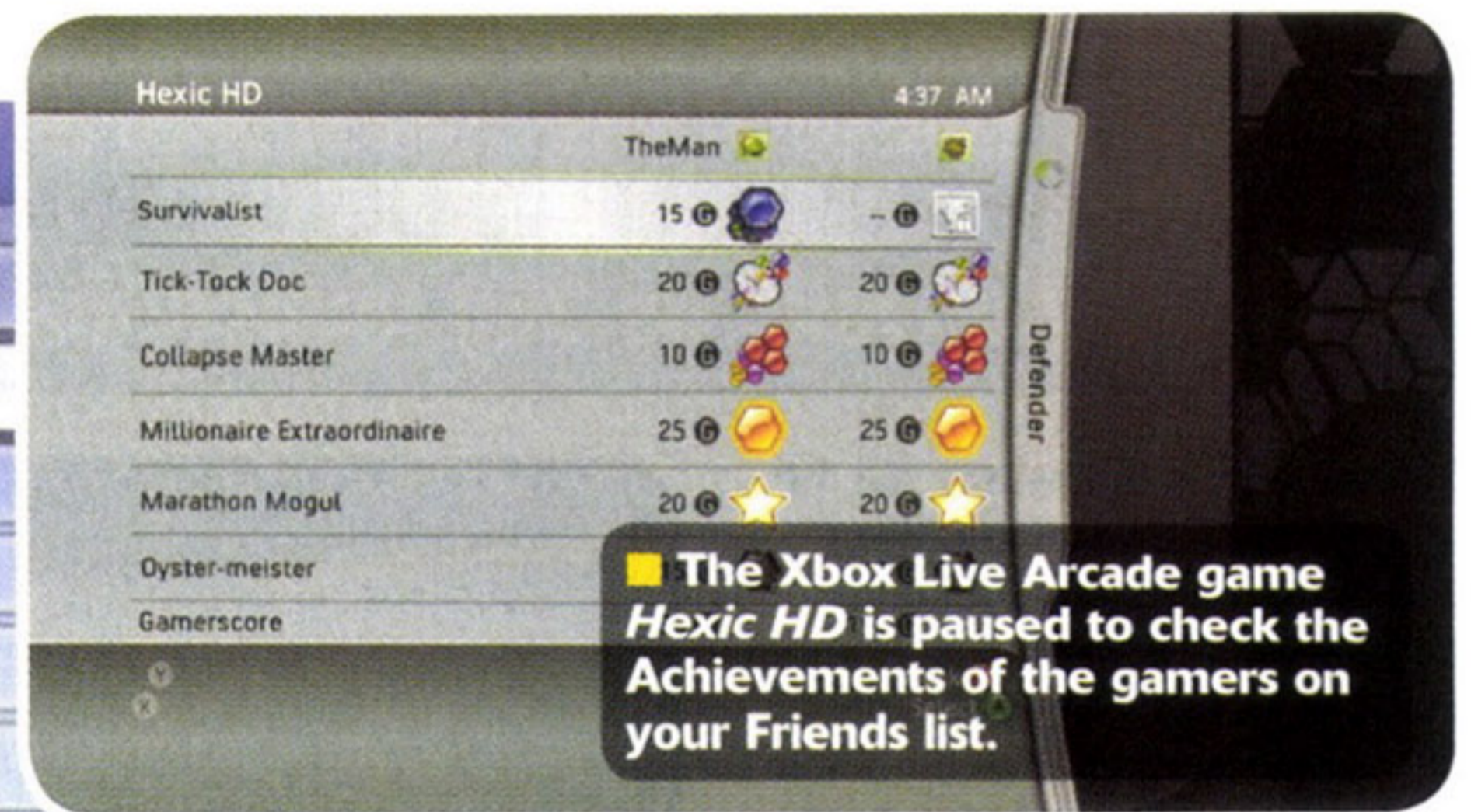
Gentlemen, Start Your iPods

Sure, you already know you can connect an iPod to one of your 360's USB ports, but how does it all work? Like a charm. The 360 recognizes your connected iPod in a few seconds, and its library of playlists and tunes is instantly accessible – just set your iPod down and do the driving from the 360. Tap that Guide button again during a game, flick over to the Media menu, and start up your tunes by album, playlist, artist, shuffle, whatever.

“Game soundtracks are coded separately [from the rest of the game audio],” explains Jerry Johnson, group program manager for Xbox Live, “so you can [override the soundtrack and] play your music in-game without stomping on the sound effects.” You can also browse and use pictures and music



■ The 360 interface reads these songs and playlists right off your iPod.



■ The Xbox Live Arcade game *Hexic HD* is paused to check the Achievements of the gamers on your Friends list.

off a USB-connected PSP or any networked PC (not video, though).

Sounds too good to be true, huh? It is, and here's the catch: You can't play any music that uses Fairplay digital-rights management... which means anything you bought on iTunes won't work unless you burn it to a CD and re-rip it. Fortunately, the 360 is compatible with Apple's AAC format, but if Fairplay songs are on your iPod or PC, they just don't show up on the 360. Hackers will surely find a way around this, but in the meantime, it's a sorta tolerable hassle in an otherwise awesome feature.

Feedback Affects Matchmaking

If, like us, you've spent too much time suffering at the hands of knuckle-dragging morons on Live, this one is just huge. Behind the scenes (meaning, you'll never see it), Live maintains an Affiliates list for each 360 gamer, and along

with your Rep, Gamer Zone, and geographical region, it significantly impacts matchmaking. Your Friends list and any players you rate with positive feedback after a match are part of your Affiliates – and you're much more likely to be matched with both groups. When you give negative feedback to some chumps, that thumbs-down also appears on your Affiliates list – and you're far less likely to be matched with them in future games.

The power to suffer fools less is a great gift to the vast numbers of decent gamers on Live, but Microsoft wisely tempered it by installing checks and balances. Feedback is given by accessing your Recent Players list, and it affects a player's five-star Rep rating in their profile. "But you can't gang up on a guy," explains Johnson. "If you leave duplicate feedback, it just overwrites [the previous feedback]." That also means you can change your mind – unlikely, but you can.

The categories of negative feedback are extensive – trash-talking, disruptive voice, overly aggressive, cheating, quit early, too good, too unfamiliar with the game, and more – but the more serious complaints like racism, stalking, and so on are filed in a separate system that's monitored by Live. "We really encourage people to use feedback, and we really want the community to police itself," Johnson adds, citing the eBay model. "If they want to run in a circle with people who like that, then they should do that. But if they do it in the family zone, that's cause for feedback."

Customize Your Controls – Once

Here's one of those nifty little details that you'll get used to so quickly, you'll forget it ever wasn't this way. In the System menu, you can set default control options that apply to all games. At launch, you can indicate preferences for three groups: General (difficulty level, controller sensitivity, and color scheme), Action (invert aim, movement on L or R thumbstick, auto

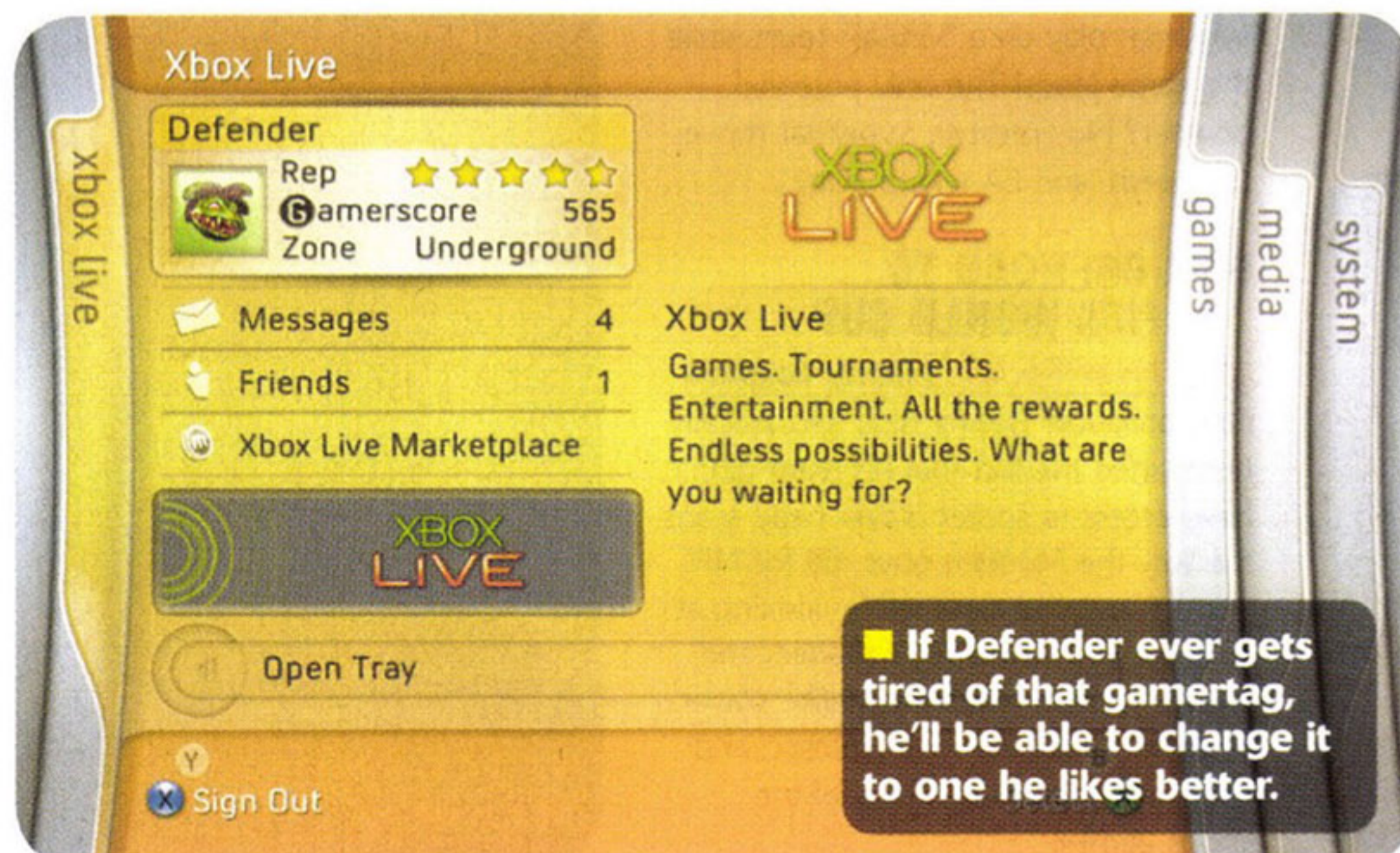
aim, auto center), and Racing (transmissions type, camera angle, and gas/brake on triggers or buttons). Microsoft can expand these groups and add new ones over time through autoupdates, and it's just cool that developers and gamers can worry more about gameplay and less about housekeeping.

Achievements = Tech Support

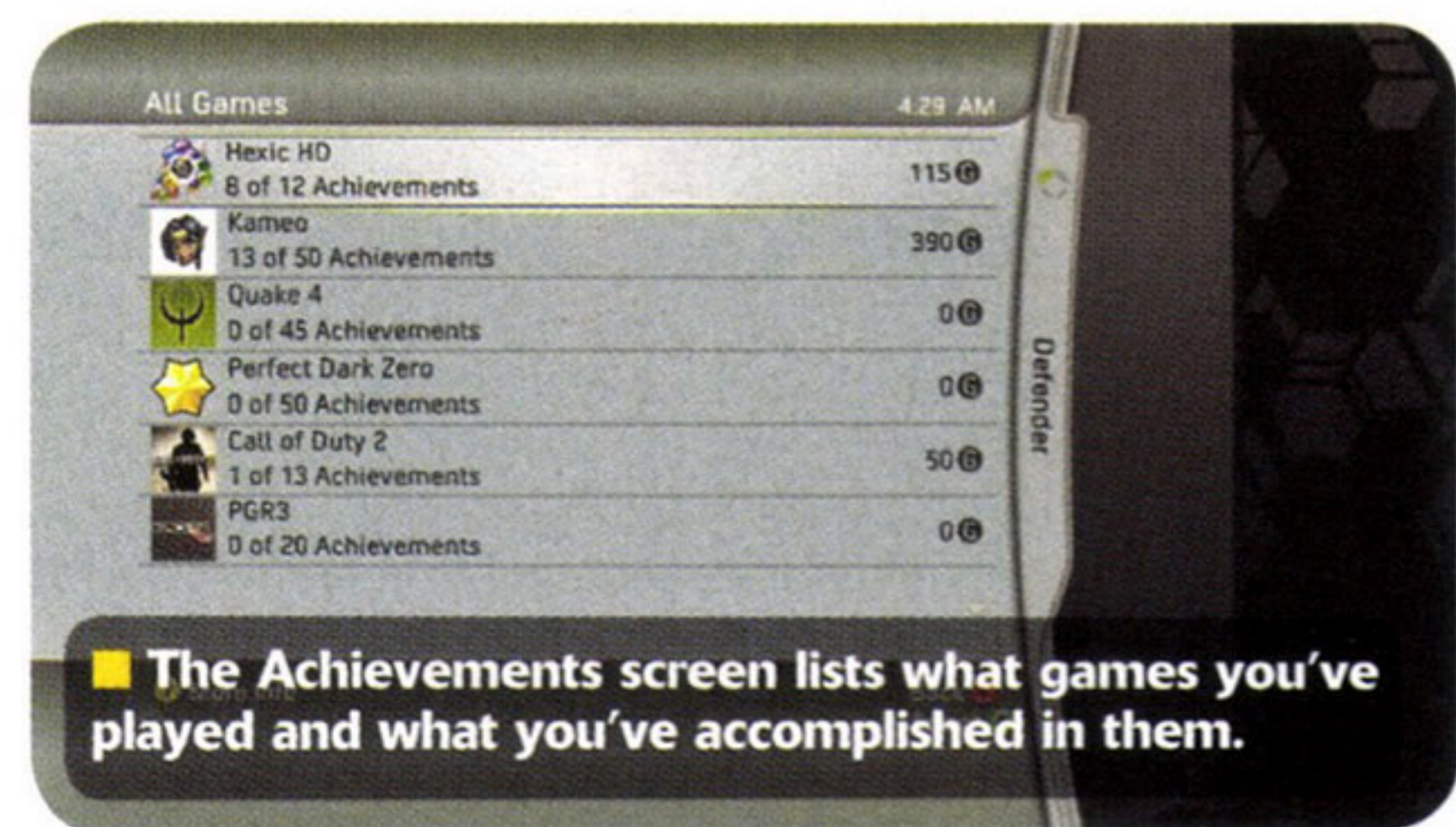
You've probably heard that Achievements will be tracked for each game, which means that when you beat a boss in *Kameo*, that feat shows up in your profile. But what you haven't considered is how that can turn into a help line. Say you're stuck on beating the next boss – hit your Friends list, see who's done it and who's online, and open up a voice chat to ask them for advice.

Gamertags Aren't Forever

One of the most common complaints of Live gamers is getting saddled with a lame, chosen-in-haste gamertag, and help is on the way. "On the original Xbox, it was the only thing you knew about that person," Johnson explains, "but now you know their Rep and Gamer Zone, and [changing tags] won't hide who you are." It may cost a small number of Microsoft Points to make the switch (the decision's not final), but if it does, Johnson assures us that it's not to make a profit; it would merely "put a speed bump in there and make sure everybody isn't [changing tags] every day."



■ If Defender ever gets tired of that gamertag, he'll be able to change it to one he likes better.



■ The Achievements screen lists what games you've played and what you've accomplished in them.

The Madden Behind the Curtain

EA finally unveils its 360 launch lineup in playable form

"Seeing is *not* believing," EA VP of Corporate Communications Jeff Brown told us prior to the long-awaited unveiling of the company's unrivaled five-title Day One launch lineup for Xbox 360. "The magic of 360 is in the gameplay...it's the animation, it's the experience. [Static] screenshots don't do it justice." This, he said, is the reason EA's next-gen games have all been kept under such tight wraps. Now that they're finally ready to be shown, we were anxious to see if the near-final titles were hot or not. The results may surprise you.

MADDEN NFL 06

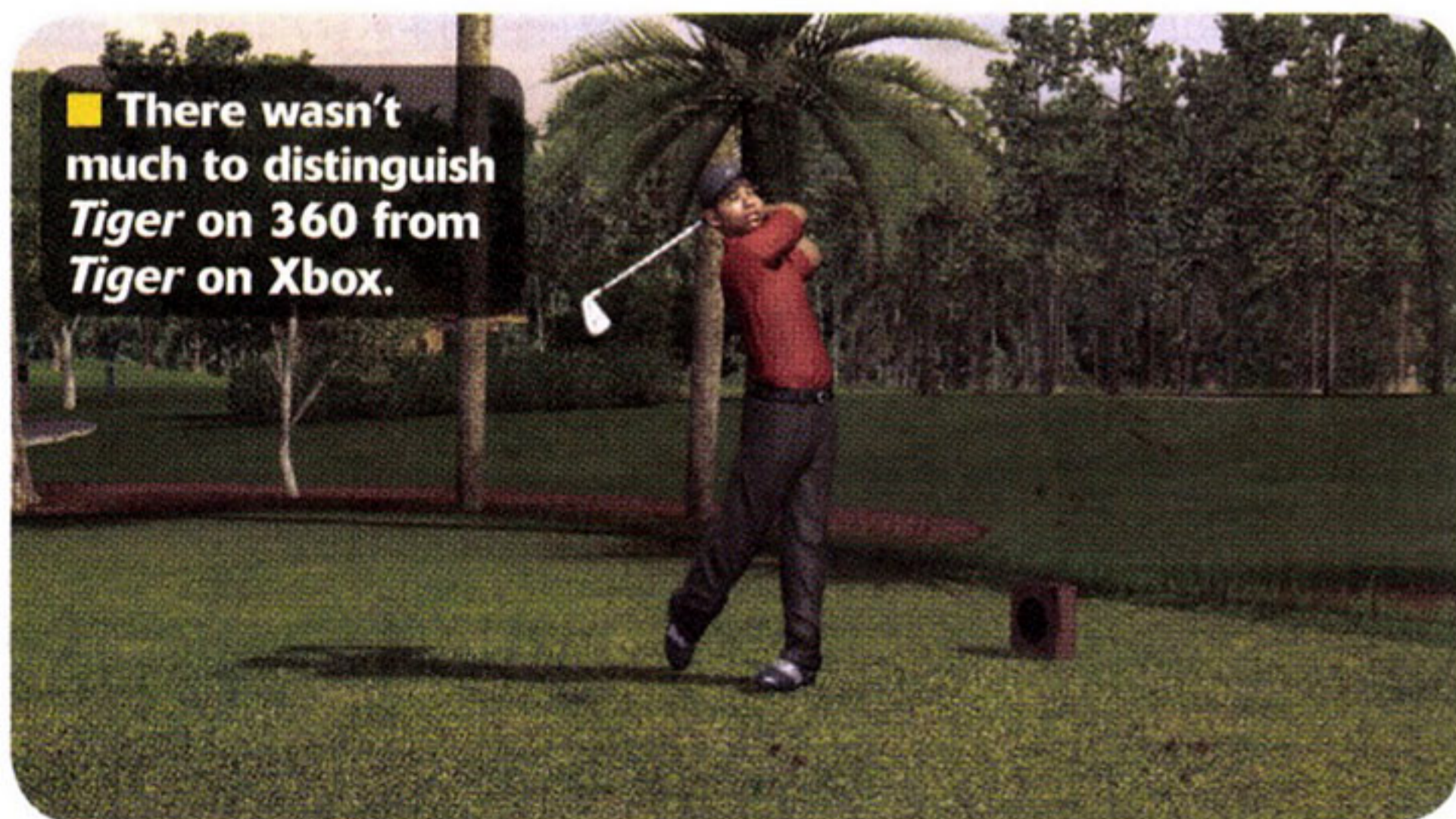
Heat Factor: Sizzling

The 800-pound gridiron gorilla is what you really want to hear about, right? Good news: It's awesome. A field-level focus means lots of close looks at frighteningly lifelike players, on-field player chatter straight from NFL Films (it's recorded from real games, so you'll hear Favre, for example, yelling "Hike!"), radio commentary only (no Madden and Michaels from the booth), slick animation, and stunning stadiums. This is remarkably different from the *Madden 06* you bought two months ago, and it's worth another purchase.

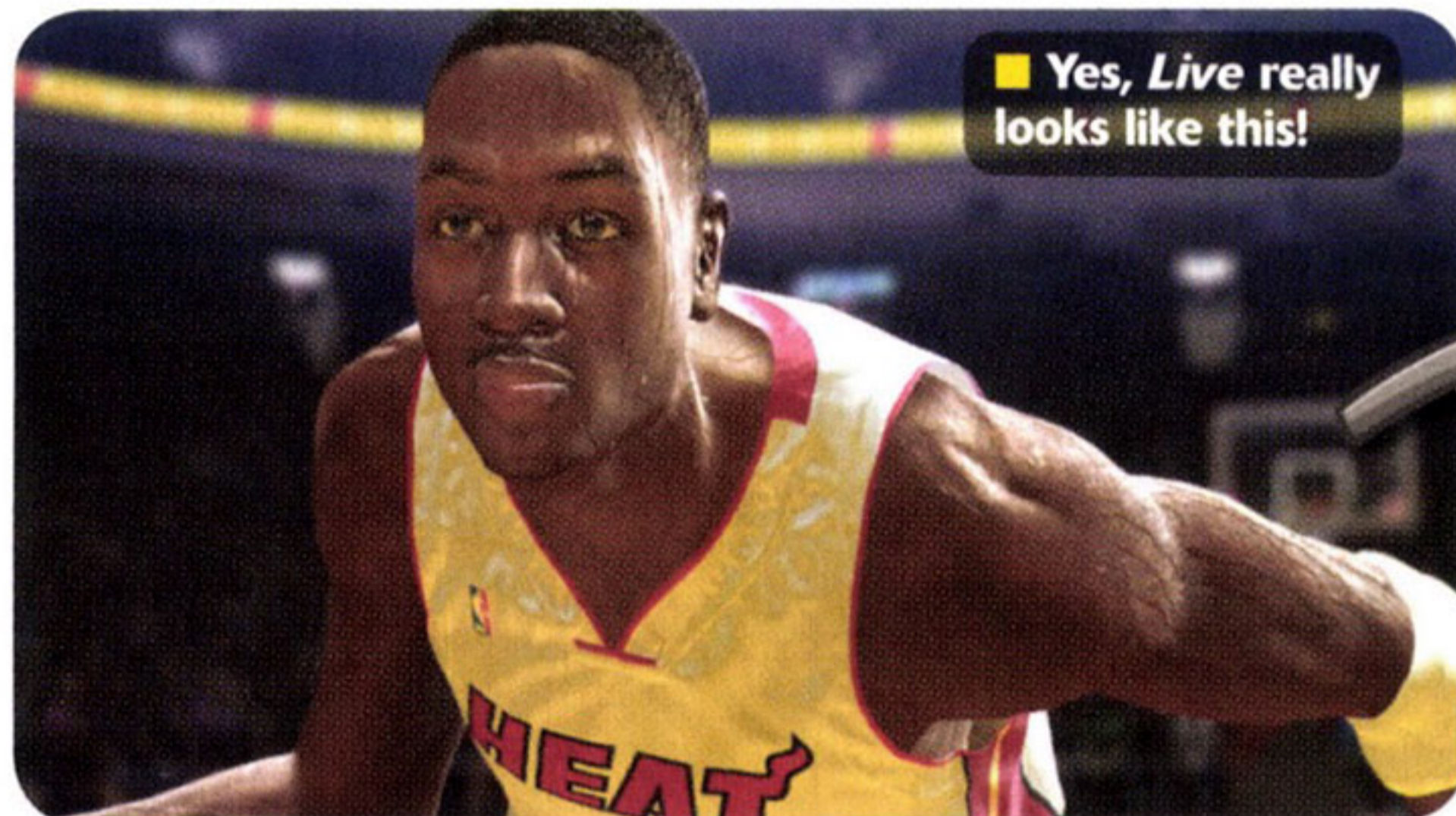
TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06

Heat Factor: Has anyone seen my winter coat?

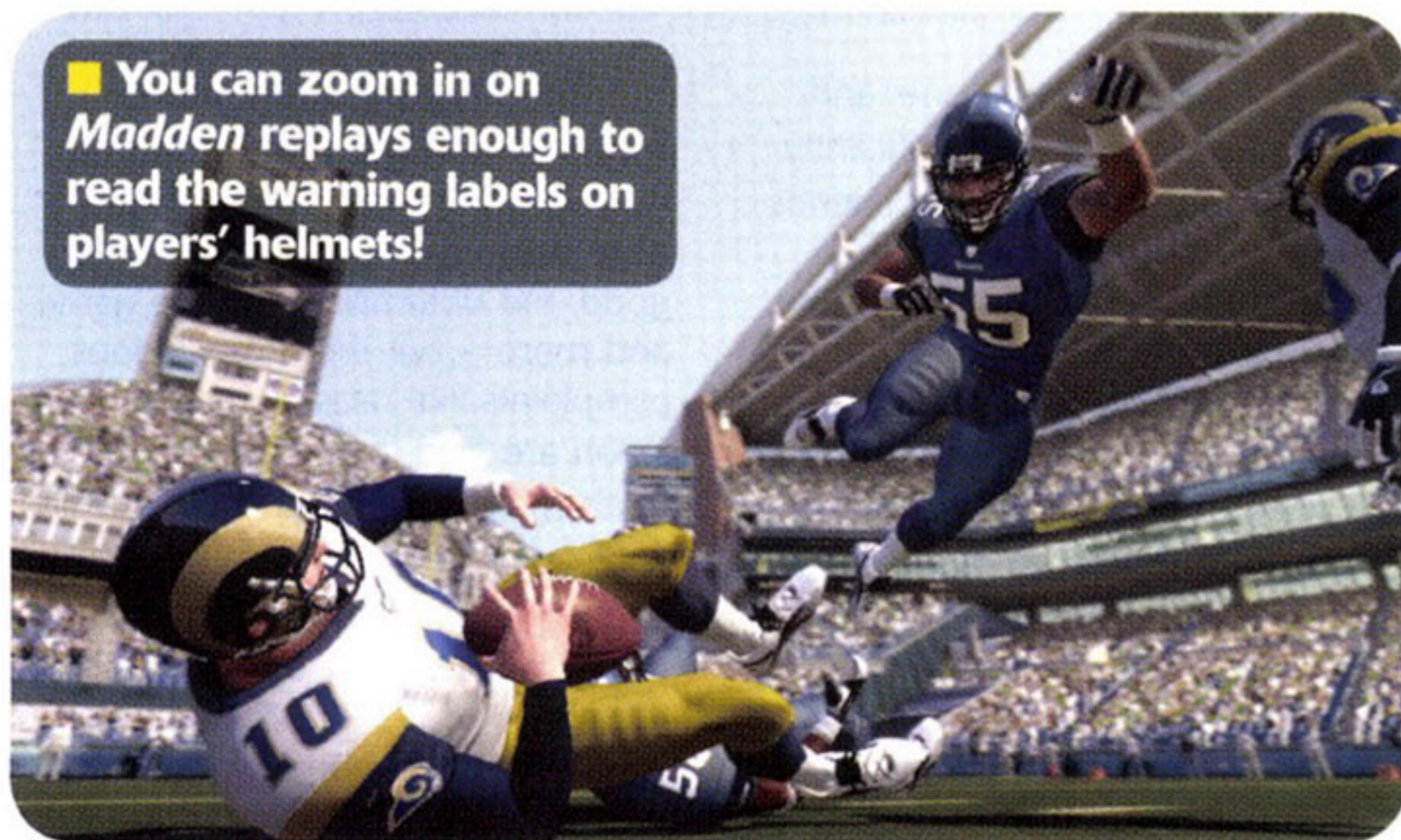
There's still a bit of time remaining to patch it up, but *Tiger* paled in comparison to the other four games coming from EA. An awful framerate, mid-level PC-quality graphics, and almost no 360-specific visual tricks left quite a lot to be desired.



■ There wasn't much to distinguish *Tiger* on 360 from *Tiger* on Xbox.



■ Yes, *Live* really looks like this!



■ You can zoom in on *Madden* replays enough to read the warning labels on players' helmets!

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

Heat Factor: Lukewarm

What's there to say about *Most Wanted*? It's definitely a solid game, running at 30 frames per second with 4x anti-aliasing and lots of cool effects. Other than some impressive lighting on the tracks and cars, though, it's looking nearly identical to its Xbox counterpart. But it does offer additional gameplay specific to the next-gen system, so we're still intrigued.

NBA LIVE 06

Heat Factor: Positively face-melting!

Now this is what we're talking about! As good as the screenshot looks (above), the real deal in motion is better. The detail of the players is mind-altering, complete with tattoos, uniform materials, cloth physics, sweat, and facial detail and animation. The arenas are *Madden*-ly perfect, and you can even play on a "virtual" court while the game loads! The only potential downer? No Freestyle Superstar moves. EA giveth, and EA taketh away...

FIFA 06: ROAD TO FIFA WORLD CUP

Heat Factor: Nicely toasted

FIFA producer Danny Isaac sarcastically bemoaned the fact that his team didn't have access to soccer player head scans the way the *Madden* guys did for NFL players, but you can't tell by looking at *FIFA* on 360. The use of shaders and quality lighting make the lifelike player faces and uniforms look fantastic, and the grass is the best of any of the sports games.

Rumor Mole



A hot one on backwards compatibility – reportedly, an impressively large number of Xbox 1 games will be supported with the necessary BC patches on 360 Day One, including both older and newer franchises... A Microsoft exec in Europe claims that the company plans to cut production costs on the console every calendar year, so it's not a stretch to surmise that the actual price of the system could see annual drops as well... Originally, the Xbox 360 package being released in Japan was scheduled to have the beta-test version of *Final Fantasy XI* pre-installed on the hard drive in lieu of a remote and a component video cable (even the beta test would be a huge draw there). At the last minute, that plan was scrapped due to the game not being ready; the cable/remote are back, and *FFXI* will be available separately... We hear that *Oblivion* and *Ghost Recon 3* may not be ready on 11/22 – Day One of the 360 launch – but the developers of both games are confident they'll arrive by the end of the year... Word of another possible delay – Microsoft is reportedly paying a lot more attention to *Need for Speed: Most Wanted* because *PGR3* might slip to early 2006, and it wants to be sure that a quality racing game will be on shelves at launch. But is that just sneaky EA propaganda?... Speaking of which, EA's previously denied that a 360 version of *Burnout* is in the works, but online retailers are starting to take pre-orders for a March release...

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\$299 or \$399?

That is *the* Xbox 360 question, and for answers about why Microsoft chose what has been a confusing approach for many of you, we spoke with Dave Reid, director of platform marketing, about the two options for buying a 360.



Q: Why make two different 360 packages available at launch?

A: The fundamental reason really is about choice. When we set down this path back when Xbox 360 was called Xenon, we spent a lot of time talking to consumers. It became clear that there are people who line up for midnight madness, but there are also tens of millions of gamers who aren't as committed. [The first group] wants the highest-fidelity experience with the hard drive and wireless controller, and [the second group] wants to play games but doesn't need the hard drive, doesn't care about wireless or downloadable content, but wants to be able to upgrade when it's time. We're

making sure these two groups can get what they want. The people who ask, "why is there a Core System [for \$299]?" – it's really not for them.

Q: Since memory units cost \$40 and you need one if you don't have a hard drive, that really puts the Core at \$340, only \$59 less than the loaded \$399 option. Why would a gamer go the Core route?

A: The Core System is fundamentally still a next-gen experience with full Xbox Live support, and it's a different view of "when do I need those other bells and whistles?" The premium edition is the ultimate experience; you get a package at \$399 that's a spectacular

value – the [included] accessories alone are worth \$200. Some people see that value and want it today, and some don't – we don't want to force them to buy one. It's a fundamentally different proposition for those folks – that's one more game they can buy.

Q: Any downside for players who don't buy a hard drive?

A: Developers won't count on a hard drive in every console, but there will be a lot out there, and they can be used in interesting ways like downloadable content, backwards compatibility, custom playlists, and caching [game data to improve load times]. We did not compromise on performance –

we found ways to keep it very high without a hard drive. A 12x DVD drive and 512MB of memory – those are more general-purpose things that will improve on gameplay in a more dramatic fashion than a hard drive would. You're not going to suffer without a hard drive, but it will get much more exciting.

Q: At any point, will an Xbox 360 game require the hard drive?

A: Possibly – MMOs, for example, might. Or other genres could come up, like a game with episodic content [where developers release a new level every couple months]. All of the titles at launch won't require a hard drive.

The Xbox 360 Essentials

360 Snapshot

Release Date: November 22, 2005 (North America); December 2, 2005 (Europe); December 10, 2005 (Japan).
Price: \$399 nicely equipped; \$299 for Xbox 360 Core System.
Hard Drive: Removable 20GB drive for storage of saved games and downloadable content (comes with Xbox 360 Premium Edition, but not with Core

System). An optional 40GB hard drive is expected next year.

Connectivity: Memory unit slots x2, USB slots x3, Ethernet port.

Wireless: Supports 802.11a, b, and g networks with a simple adapter. Rechargeable controllers are wireless on 2.4Ghz, and four are supported simultaneously.

Xbox Live: System comes with Xbox Live Silver subscription. Plug in your

broadband Internet connection, and you're online! Existing Live accounts work fine on 360, too.

Voice Chat: Voice over IP via Xbox Live. Headset microphone plugs directly into controller.

Video Chat: With optional Xbox Live digital camera (due 2006).

Backwards Compatibility: Yes, for a TBA number of Xbox titles. Since it's achieved via software emulation, this

feature requires the optional hard drive.

Video: Maximum resolution of 1920x1080; all games will support 720p and 1080i via component cables.

Audio: 5.1 Dolby Surround support built-in.

DVD: Built-in progressive-scan DVD playback.

CPU: Custom IBM PowerPC processor: Triple-core 3.2Ghz with two hardware threads per core (6 threads total).

Essential: Launch!

Q: So when is it coming out?

A: Depends on where you live. The North American market gets it Tuesday, November 22. Europe's a week and a half later on Friday, December 2. The Japanese rollout takes place eight days after that on Saturday, December 10.

Q: Why three dates? Why not just pick one global date?

A: These launches are a little tricky to orchestrate, and nobody else has come anywhere near doing what Microsoft is going to pull off with Xbox 360. Usually there are months, not days, between territorial launches – PSP just hit the U.K. this past fall even though the U.S. launch was in March and Japan had it in late 2004! It takes

time to get the units manufactured and shipped to each territory, so the fact that all three markets will have it in time for this holiday season is pretty impressive.

Q: What games will be out at launch?

A: Since Microsoft defines "launch" as "the day of release through December 31," this list is pretty flexible. Expect to see some of these titles suffer slight delays and maybe even push to 2006; you will want to call your store the week before the launch day to confirm whether or not your favorite game will be available on the 22nd. Here's what we expect to be available before the end of the year:



Exclusive to Xbox 360

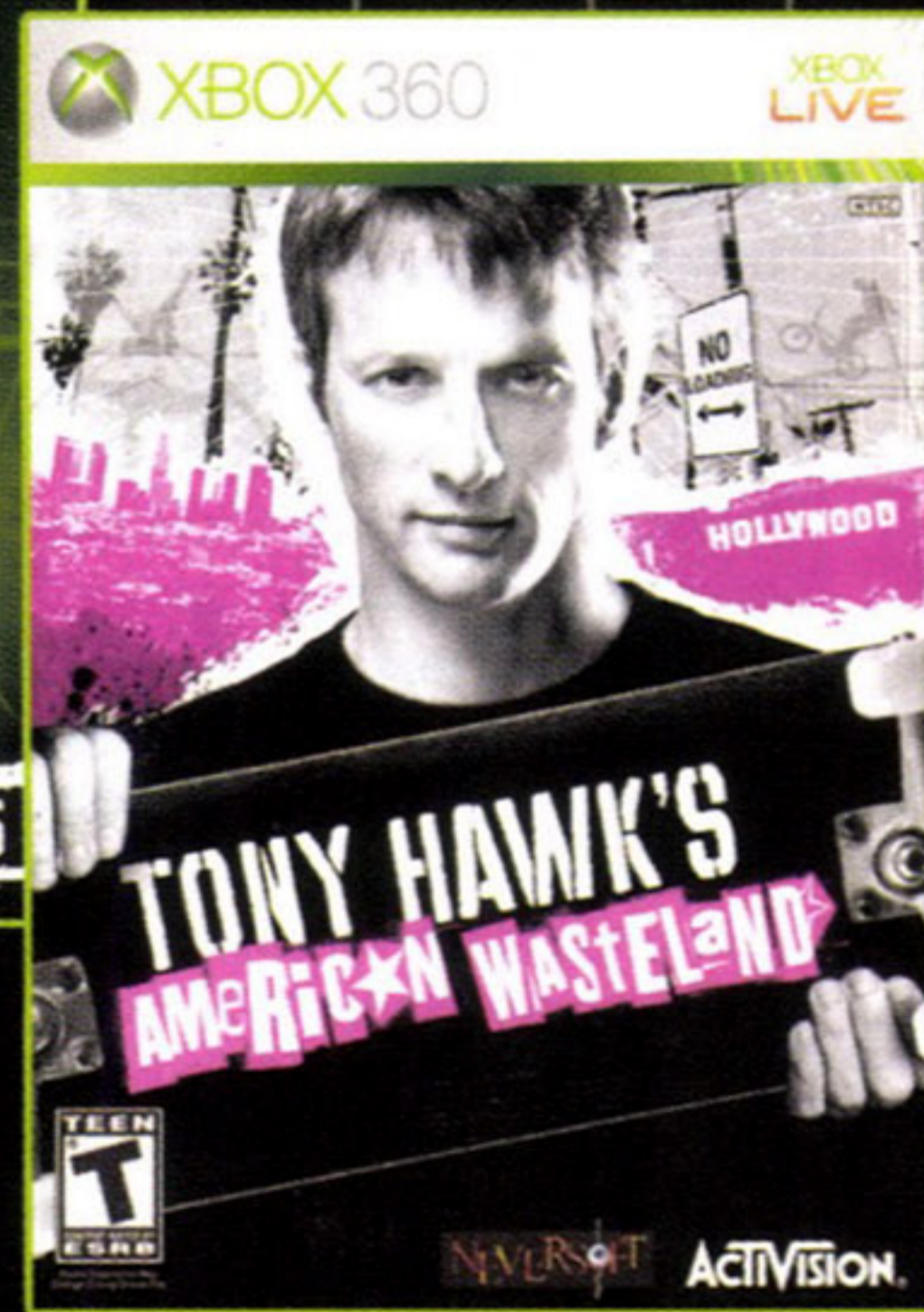
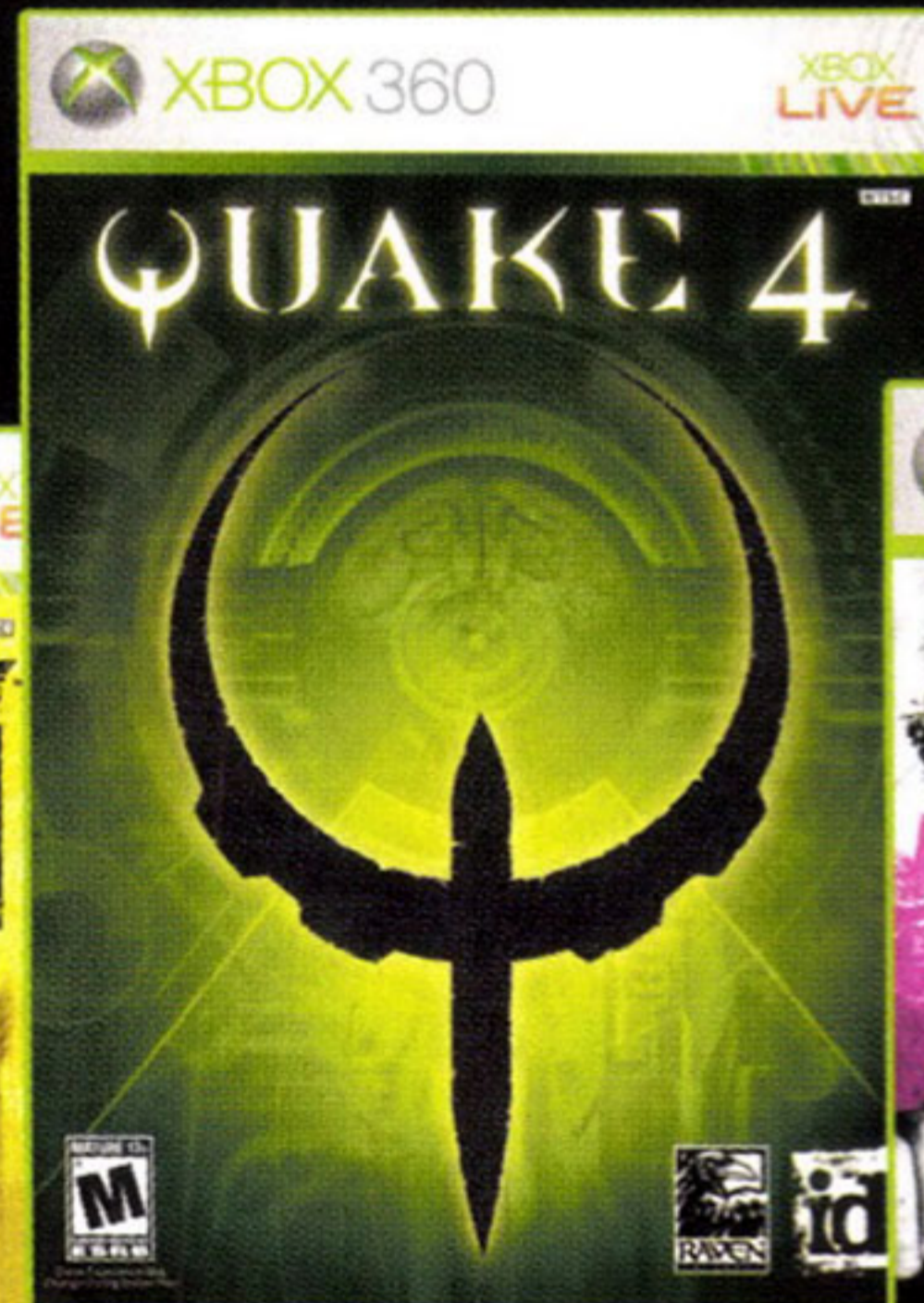
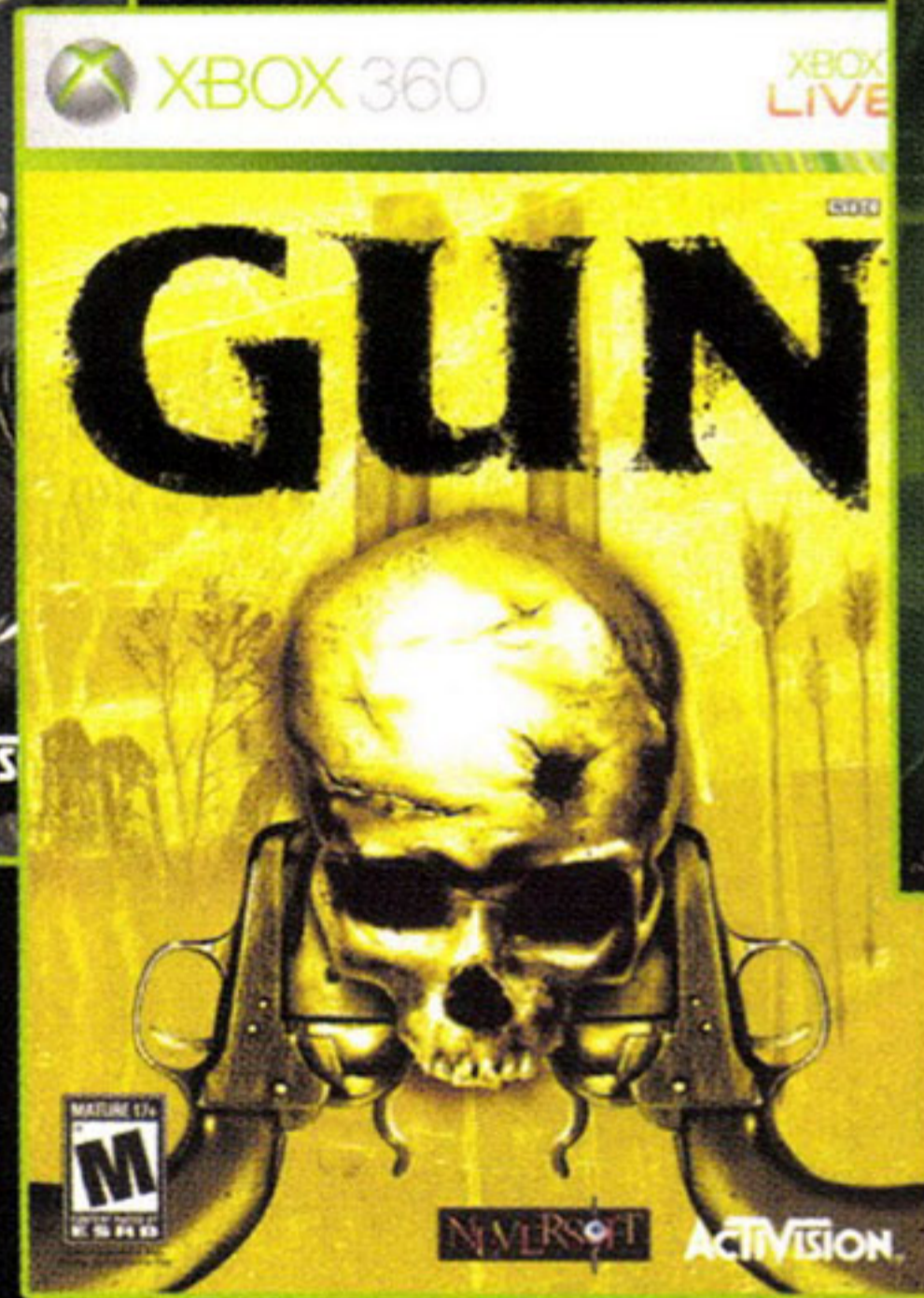
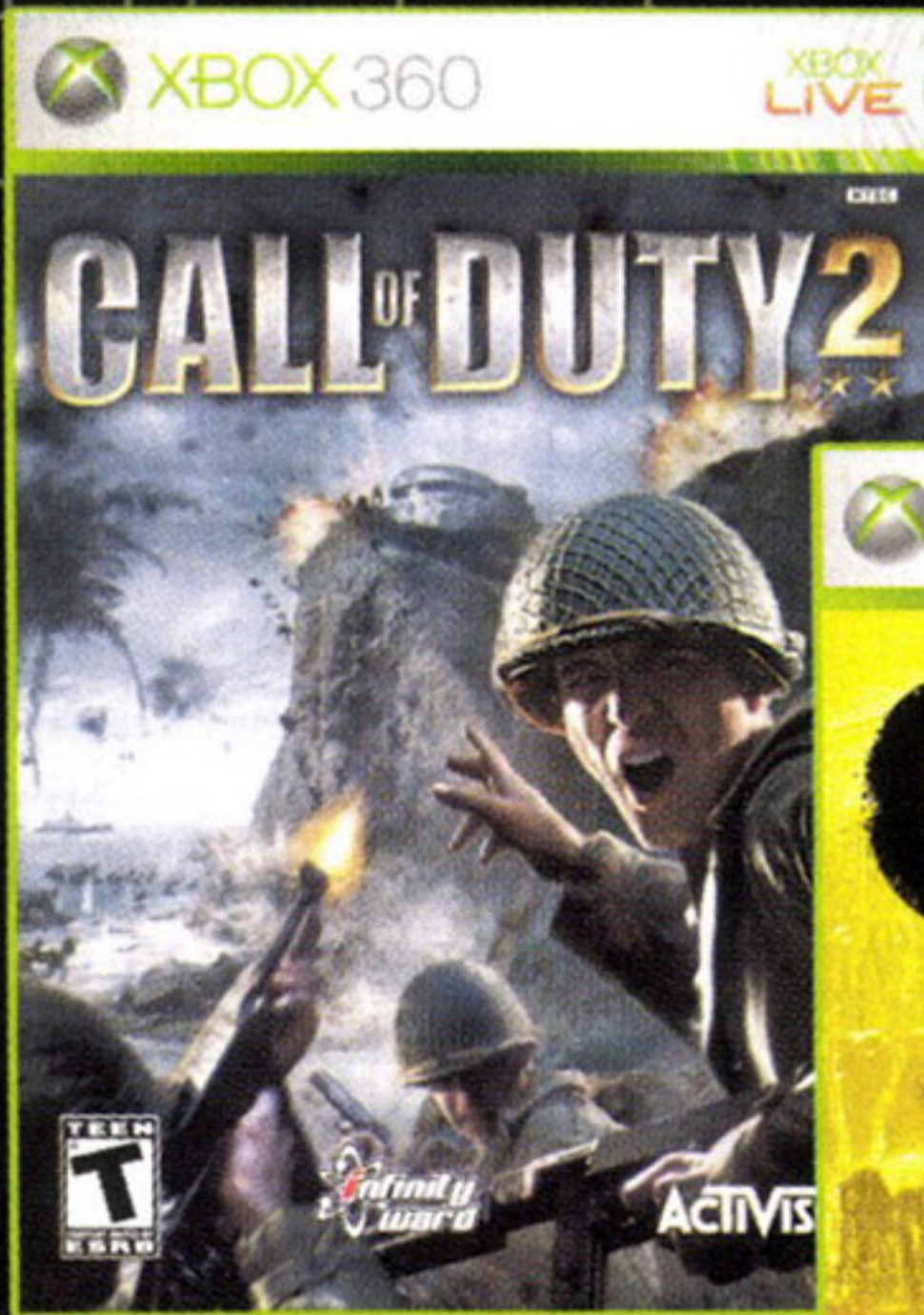
- Amped 3 (2K Sports)
- Call of Duty 2 (Activision)
- Condemned: Criminal Origins (Sega)
- Dead or Alive 4 (Tecmo)
- The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion (Bethesda)
- Frame City Killer (Namco)
- Gun (Activision)
- Kameo: Elements of Power (Microsoft)
- The Outfit (THQ)
- Perfect Dark Zero (Microsoft)
- Project Gotham Racing 3 (Microsoft)
- Ridge Racer 6 (Namco)
- Quake 4 (Activision)
- Top Spin 2 (2K Sports)

Also on Xbox 360

- FIFA Soccer 06 (EA Sports)
- King Kong (Ubisoft)
- Lara Croft Tomb
- Raider: Legend (Eidos)
- Madden NFL 06 (EA Sports)
- NBA 2K6 (2K Sports)
- NBA Live 06 (EA Sports)
- Need for Speed: Most Wanted (EA)
- NHL 2K6 (2K Sports)
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06 (EA Sports)
- Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter (Ubisoft)
- Tony Hawk's American Wasteland (Activision)

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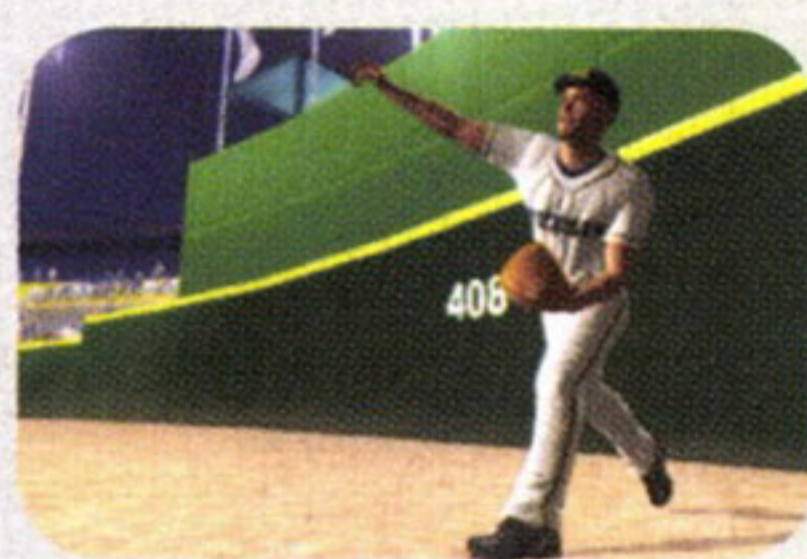
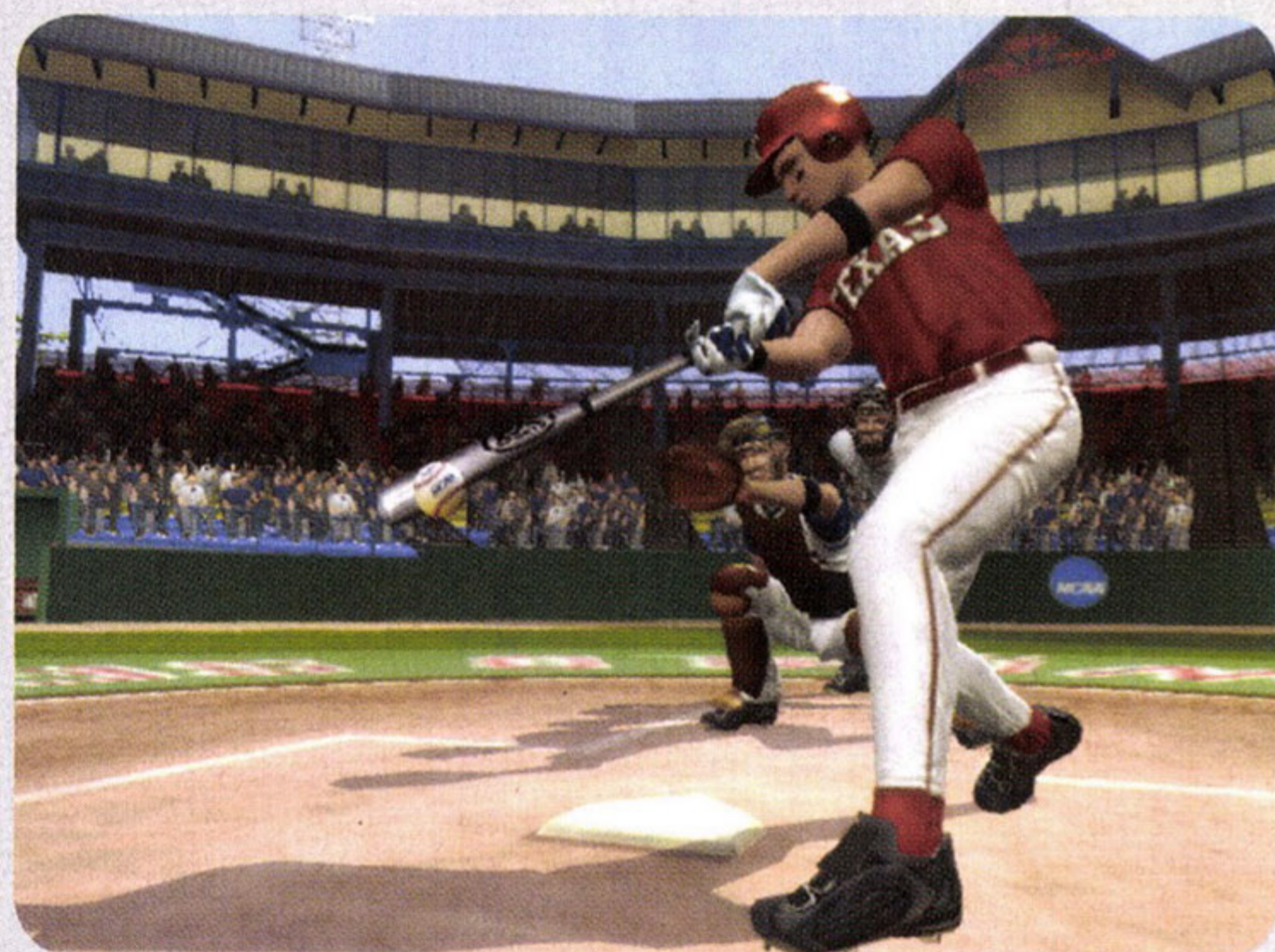
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Without the MLB license, *MVP* goes back to school



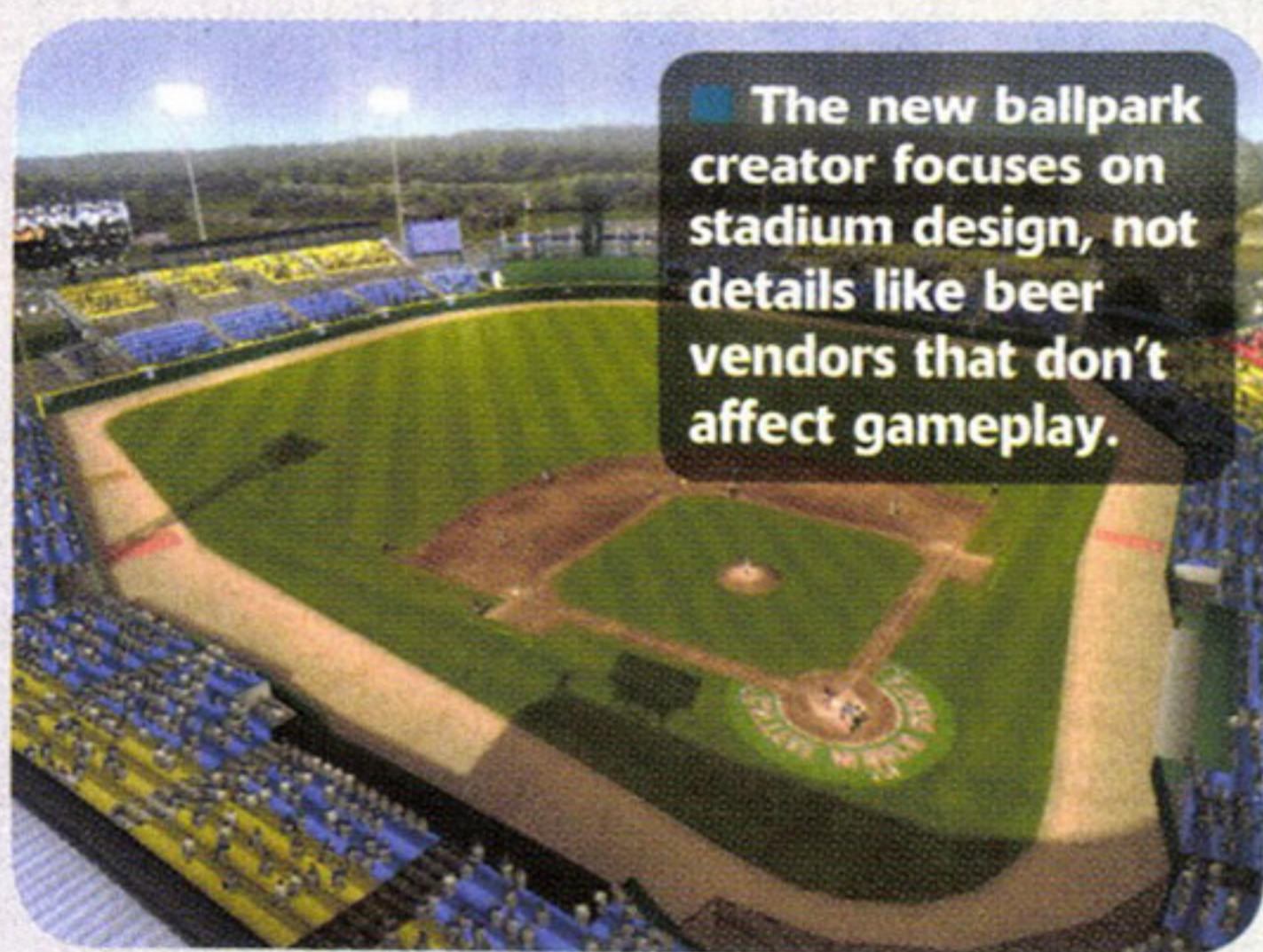
■ In *MVP*'s new batting system, you pull the right thumbstick back and jam it forward, much like the *Tiger Woods* golf swing. But when fielding, you flick the thumbstick to one of the four corners to throw the ball to that bag; the longer you hold the stick in that direction, the harder the throw.

For two years running, *MVP Baseball* has been the Xbox's superior baseball game in both quality and sales. After 2K Sports grabbed the exclusive third-party Major League Baseball license earlier this year, however, EA Sports was left with a good product it can no longer sell.

So now it's aiming to become the biggest back-to-school success story since Billy Madison. *MVP 06 NCAA Baseball* takes the existing *MVP* engine to college and adds an improved right-thumbstick throwing system, a nifty right-stick swing system, a powerful ballpark creator that allows anything up to and including Escher-esque outfield walls, full ESPN integration featuring Mike Patrick and Kyle Peterson calling the action, an always-online sports ticker that gives you real-life sports scores, a Dynasty Mode that boasts *NCAA Football*-style year-round recruiting, and of course, aluminum bats. Heck, they've even added day progression and dynamic weather effects.

The game ships in March, and EA told us they're committed to the experiment but honestly have no

idea if the public will latch on to college baseball since it certainly isn't in the same league of popularity as its collegiate pigskin cousin. They did hint at a price point far less than \$50, and between that and the game's creative features, the "clang" of balls hitting bats can't come soon enough.



■ The new ballpark creator focuses on stadium design, not details like beer vendors that don't affect gameplay.

Uppers and Downers

How this month's news affects the world of videogames.



Xbox Live Pricing

It's staying the same price as it is now (even though you get more options online), and the starter kit includes a game rebate instead of a pack-in you might already own. Plus, you no longer need a credit card to join. WOOT.



Sam & Max

The Freelance Police are back on the beat thanks to Telltale Games, a gang of developers made mostly of ex-LucasArts *S&M* teammates. The new game, built from scratch, already has an 85 percent chance of being hilarious.



Easter Eggs... Revealed!

So as not to get burned by another serving of "hot coffee," the ESRB now needs to approve all hidden content before finalizing a game's rating. It's unclear if it will also require every ending to be revealed on the back of the box.



origenxbox360.com

Microsoft's latest cryptic promotional website spurred rumors of *Halo 3*'s release or improvements to the 360 hardware (as if it's lacking?). When your customers jump to the wrong conclusions, it's time to simply advertise what's actually for sale.



Think Different. Sorta.

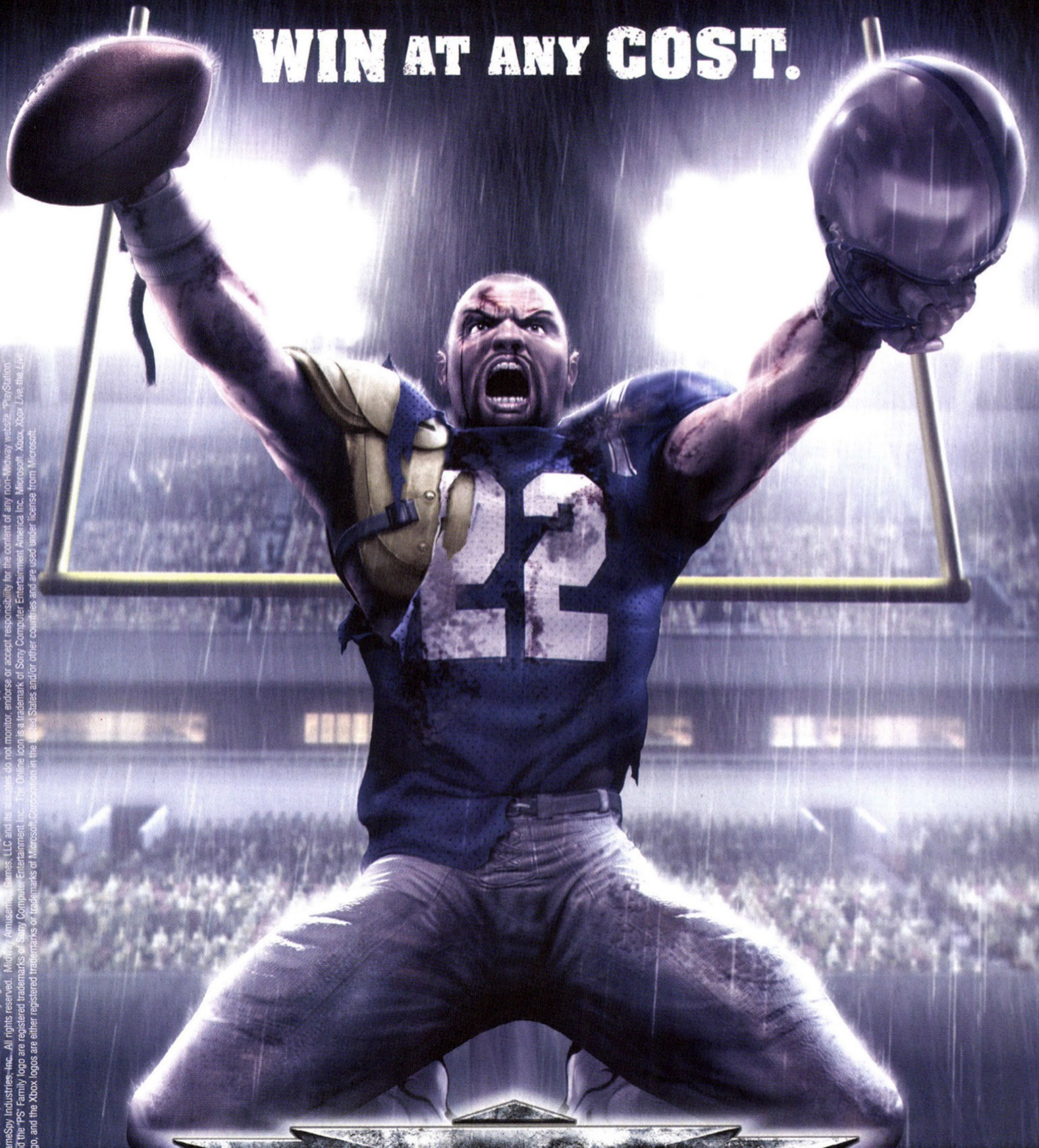
You can play music from your iPod during 360 games, but you can't stream music bought via iTunes. G3nt13m3n, start your hacking.



WIN AN XBOX 360 By Watching Comedy Central!

Starting on Thanksgiving and running through Sunday, November 27, Comedy Central will be giving away 48 Xbox 360s (along with two 360 games and a year's subscription to *OXM*) – one every hour to viewers who tune in to catch codes aired in promotional spots between 11am and 11pm EST. Enter those codes at comedycentral.com, and 48 randomly chosen lucky winners will score the loot. A 49th extra-lucky viewer will also be chosen to win the grand prize: a Scion xB loaded with a 360 and wireless controllers, three LCD screens, a sweet music/navigation system; \$5,000; an Ultimate Gaming Chair; a spare 360 for home; two 360 games; and a year of *OXM*. Full contest rules and details can be found at comedycentral.com. Somehow, we get the feeling that they won't let *OXM* editors enter. Sigh.

WIN AT ANY COST.



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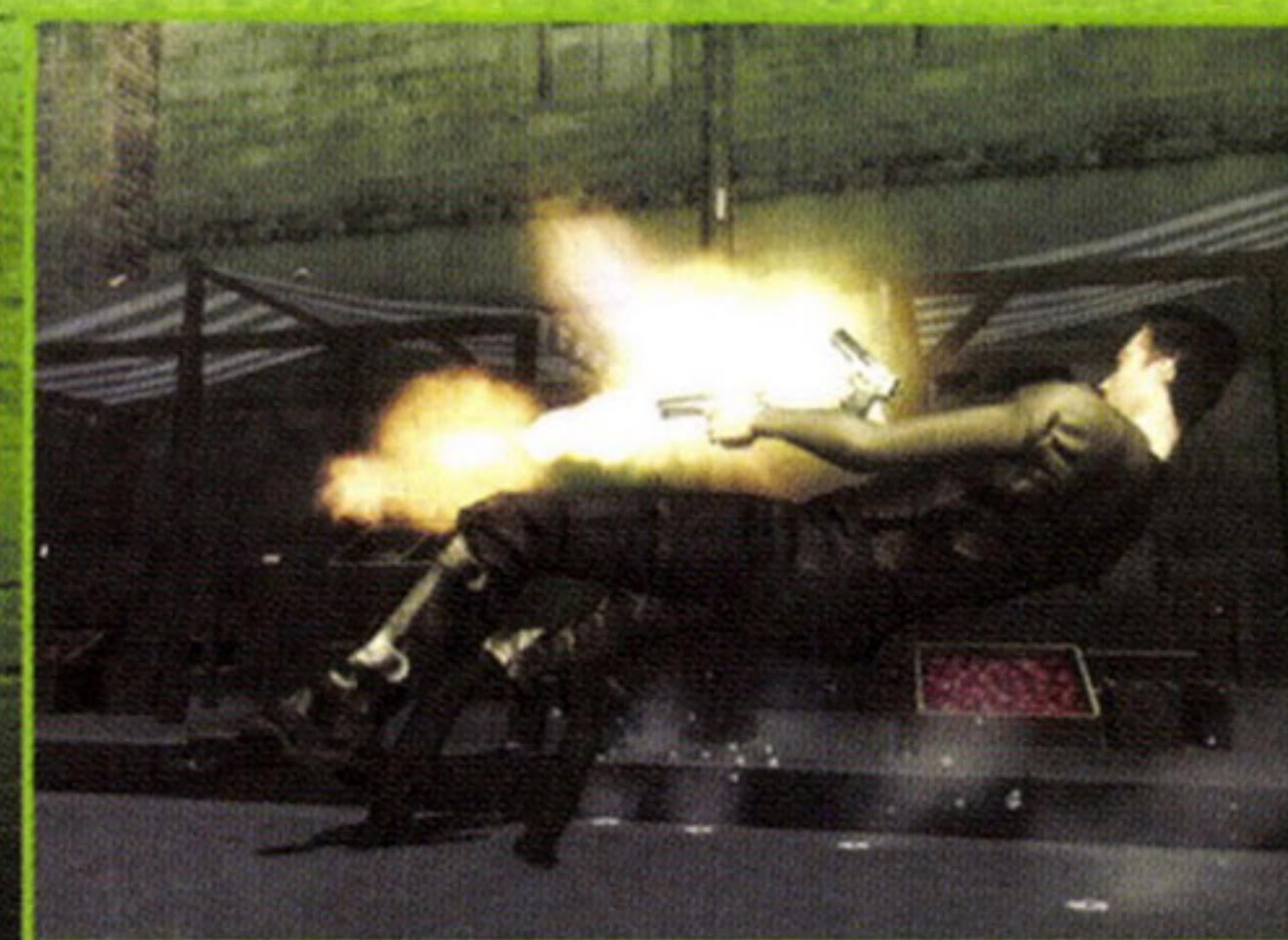


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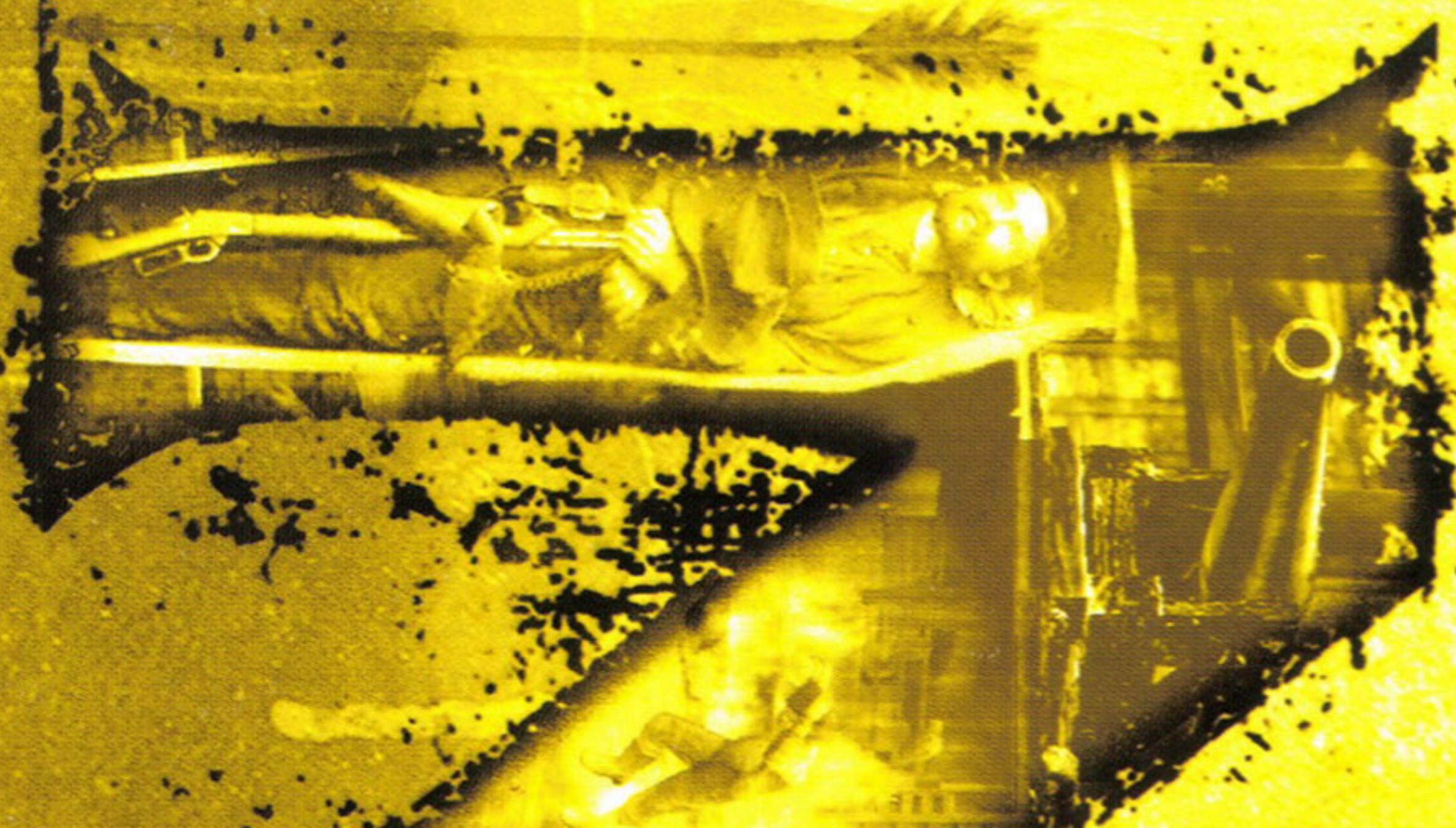
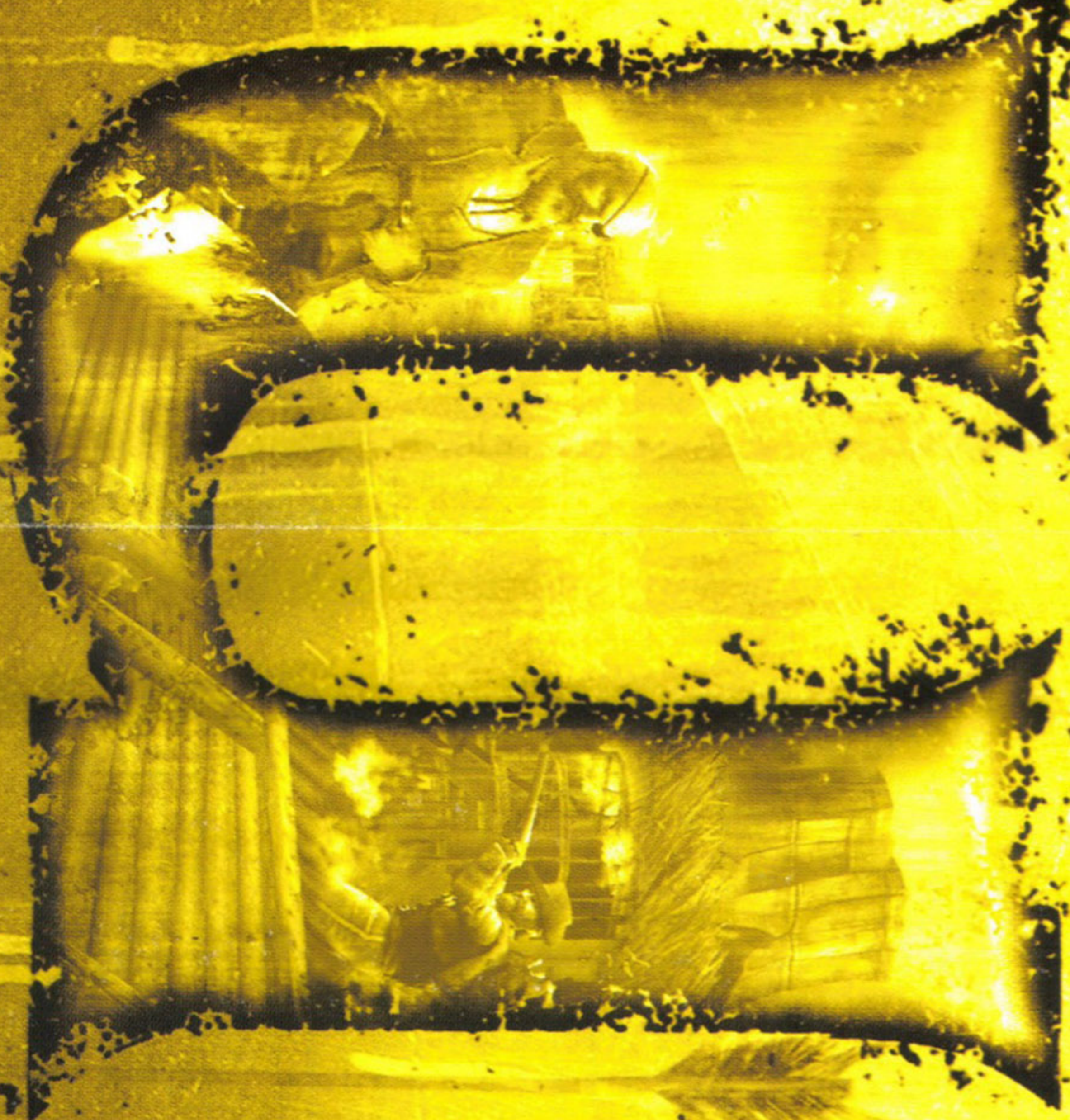
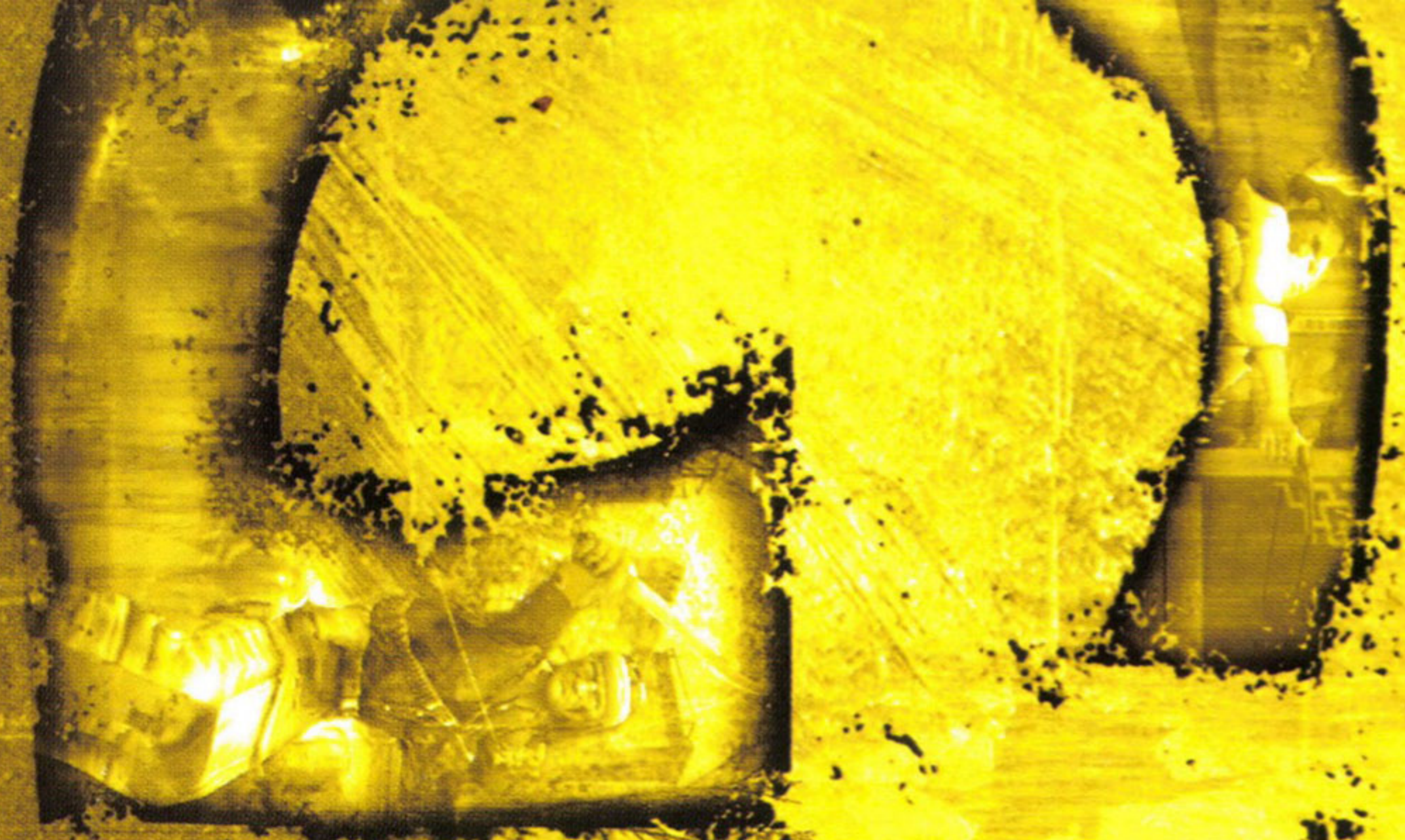
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NEW



BANG

BioWare levels up for a new space odyssey with **Mass Effect**, its next big RPG

Words: Francesca Reyes

"I think the idea for **Mass Effect** came up over lunch," says Casey Hudson, the game's project director and producer. "We knew the type of sci-fi experience we wanted to create; it came from an idea that Greg [Zeschuk] had about 'uncharted worlds.' From that point on, it was pure collaboration. We want **Mass Effect** to be the ultimate sci-fi fantasy fulfillment."

A few years ago, I got a call from a developer out of the blue. He had a question about a game that he was stuck in and needed to commiserate with someone else who was playing it. The game was Capcom's PS2 RPG *Breath of Fire*

V: Dragon Quarter. The guy on the other end of the line was Greg Zeschuk, co-founder and joint-CEO of Edmonton-based BioWare. I don't remember most of the conversation, but I do remember thinking to myself, "Man, this guy really loves games and he really loves RPGs...how cool."

Not surprisingly, games are beyond a way of life at BioWare. Without skipping a beat in the conversation, you can find yourself talking about everything from the team's latest project to their last epic, *Jade Empire*, to how Zeschuk's BioWare partner in crime and joint-CEO, Ray Muzyka, spent five hours straight playing the puzzle game *Lumines* on his

PSP while stuck at an airport. It's all part and parcel of heading up a company whose name is synonymous with the RPG genre – and specifically with spinning one hell of a good interactive yarn.

Just take a look at BioWare's history – *Baldur's Gate*, *Neverwinter Nights*, and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. Good yarns are what BioWare does best – and with the hulking juggernaut that is Xbox 360 soon setting foot into gamers' living rooms, the developer is aiming to interweave good storytelling, a love of games, and amazing technology to bring to life its latest: a sci-fi roleplaying opus called **Mass Effect**.





● The Volus aren't your enemy – they like humans. Not that you would ever think this plump little guy could hurt a fly or anything.

→ SPACE CADETS

CASEY HUDSON

Food: Salmon sashimi

CD: Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Works Vol. 2*

Game: *Starflight* – for its time, it was an incredibly deep space adventure.

BioWare game: *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (but maybe I'm a bit biased since I worked on it...)



THE LAST FRONTIER

"The real success in a game is creating multiple moments of real emotional impact," asserts Muzyka. *"We don't want players to ever stop playing the game once they've started."*

If *Mass Effect* is correct, in 200 years the human race will have done more than take baby steps into space. We'll have established ourselves in the galactic community. But space is indeed a very crowded place, and even if humanity has made strides toward joining the universal collective with numerous other alien races, we'd still just be a fledgling species among thousands of others. And this is where you'll take your first giant leap into *Mass Effect's* future perfect vision.

As a human soldier (called a Specter) in an elite tactical force, your mission is simple: Follow

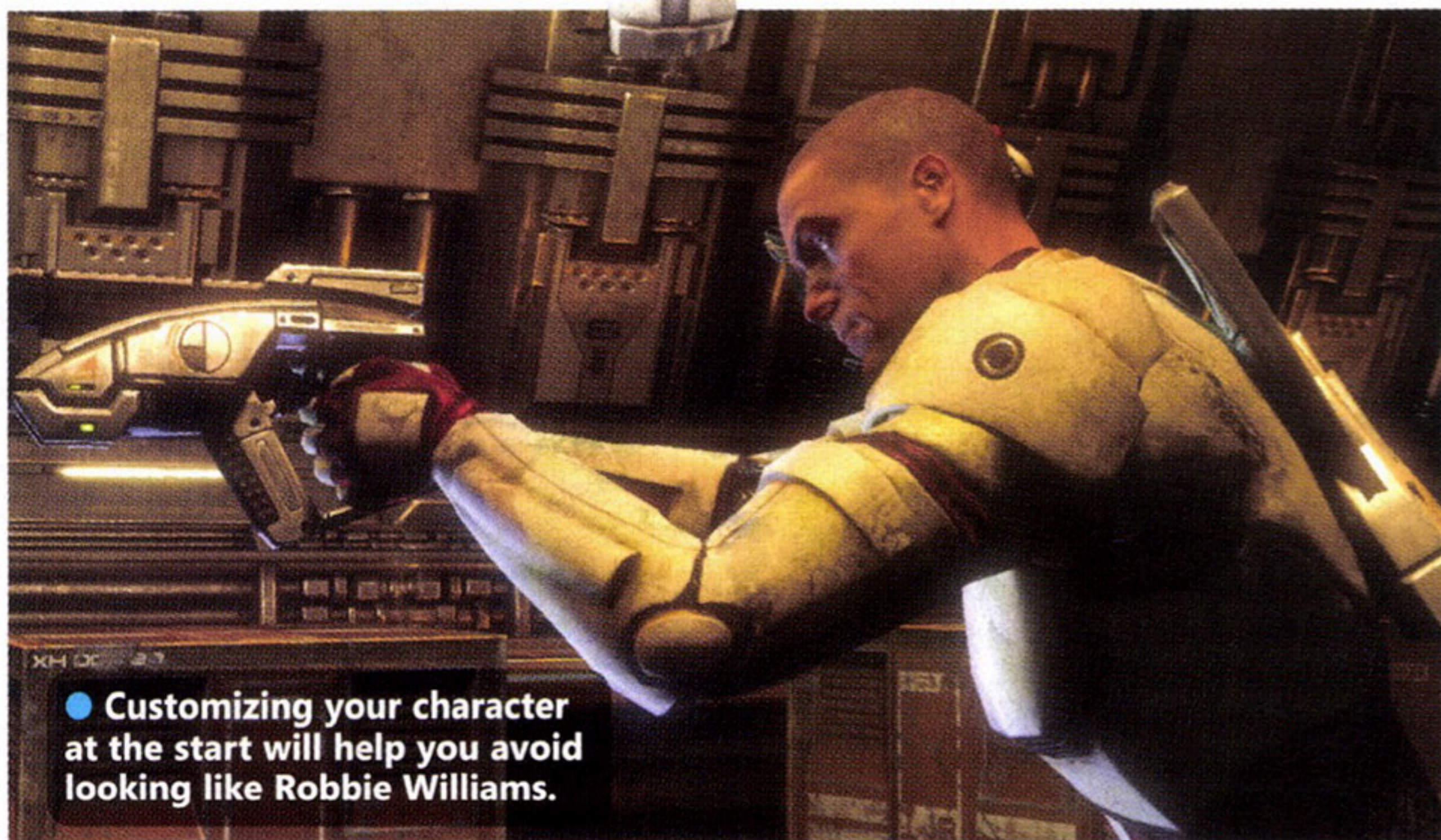
orders and root out a corrupted military general wreaking havoc in the solar system. Easy, right? You're the good guy and this crazy general is the bad guy. At first, it's cut and dry. But "epic" would be a better word to accurately describe the storyline in *Mass Effect* – things get complicated, and at some point, you'll come to realize that your first simple is just a beginning. Soon, it becomes apparent that the fate of the entire universe hangs in the balance, and the outcome is in your hands. No pressure or anything.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

"Structurally, there will be a handful of 'main' endings [in Mass Effect]," says Hudson, *"But within each class of endings lie more."*

BioWare definitely hit a gaming nerve when it decided to let you, the player, decide your own path in *Knights of the Old Republic*. Sure, the light/dark path might've been done to a certain degree in earlier games, but *KOTOR* fleshed it out in a way that made your actions as important as your conversational choices. Since then, it seems that nearly every game in *KOTOR's* wake has incorporated some form of the good/bad binary path. Fellow RPGs like *Fable* and even the upcoming *Shadow the Hedgehog* (*Shadow the freakin' Hedgehog, people!*) give you moral choices to determine your gaming path.

So for *Mass Effect*, BioWare plans to push past the simple binary endings of *KOTOR* (and to a lesser degree, *Jade Empire*). Expect shades of gray. As the main character, you'll contend with several different agendas. Your choices are important, so will you further the cause of the human race, helping them eke out better status? Or are you the type to fight for everyone involved in the conflict, regardless of species, race, or



● Customizing your character at the start will help you avoid looking like Robbie Williams.

phaselation, a.

1. transmission in which the carrier wave is modulated by changing its phase to transmit the amplitude and pitch of a signal to create the equivalent of flying around in the center of a tornado.



→ SPACE CADETS

GREG ZESCHUK

Food: Sushi
CD: Catch Twenty-Two's *Keasbey Nights*, Rise Against's *Siren Song of the Counter Culture*, and of course, William Shatner's *Has Been*

Game: *Wasteland*, *Wizardry I*, *Chrono Cross*, *Resident Evil 4*, *World of Warcraft*

BioWare game: If I had to pick two: *Baldur's Gate II: Shadow of Amn* and *MDK2*



● The Maw gleams, glistens, and strikes pretty hard. Seeing it in motion is a thing of beauty.

creed? Or will you do what's best for yourself and your rank in the global order?

Every decision counts – and not just for a simple game ending. After all, this is just the first step in what BioWare is creating as a trilogy of games. You read that right. According to Hudson, "The story was too big and its arc too massive, so we decided to tell it across three games instead of cramming it all into one. It's an exciting idea to play as a character you can take all the way through an entire [three-game] story arc."

But that's the end goal for *Mass Effect*. The richness and depth of the game lies on the road through the whole trilogy. On the way, you'll be charged with commanding your own starship, navigating a massive civilization contained in a humongous space metropolis called the Oculon,

discovering unknown, uncharted areas of the galaxy, and directing an eager crew that can reach up to ten strong throughout the game.

CITY LIVING

"All of the features in the game point to immersion," explains Zeschuk. "We want this to be a living, breathing world that's exciting; one where we can really push the boundaries."

Your hub in *Mass Effect* is your spaceship, but you'll have to land somewhere, and that somewhere is the gigantic floating urban sprawl called the Oculon. BioWare's keen on laying out just how massive the Oculon is – imagine five giant plates, each larger than real-world Manhattan, conjoined by a lush, vibrant ring world at one end where the elite frolic and meet.

Then imagine those five thriving "plates" (BioWare refer to them as "fingers") having multiple layers to each – the surface world, the middle level, and the sub-area beneath all of it. All packed with life, characters, and most importantly, quests.

The team is quick to point out that the ring world, the Presidium, where politicians and intellectuals hang out, is actually Oculon's most fascinating area. A rotating, illusory blue sky (complete with drifting clouds) lies atop a sophisticated network of hobnobbing elite, green gardens, and waterways. This is where most of your starting quests will be assigned as your status as a member of the Specter force gives you access to places that commoners can't go.

But while the Oculon and the Presidium present the universe at its most civilized – the universe is exactly that, a huge, hulking expanse of unknown...stuff. And this hints at *Mass Effect's* most tempting feature – its uncharted worlds.

THE WORLD AWAITS

"We really want to place an emphasis on non-linearity," muses Muzyka. "We want to create really great water-cooler conversation where you can compare game notes with your friends."

Somewhere deep down inside each gamer, you'll most likely find a "map filler." Some people may call them "completionists," but in the end,



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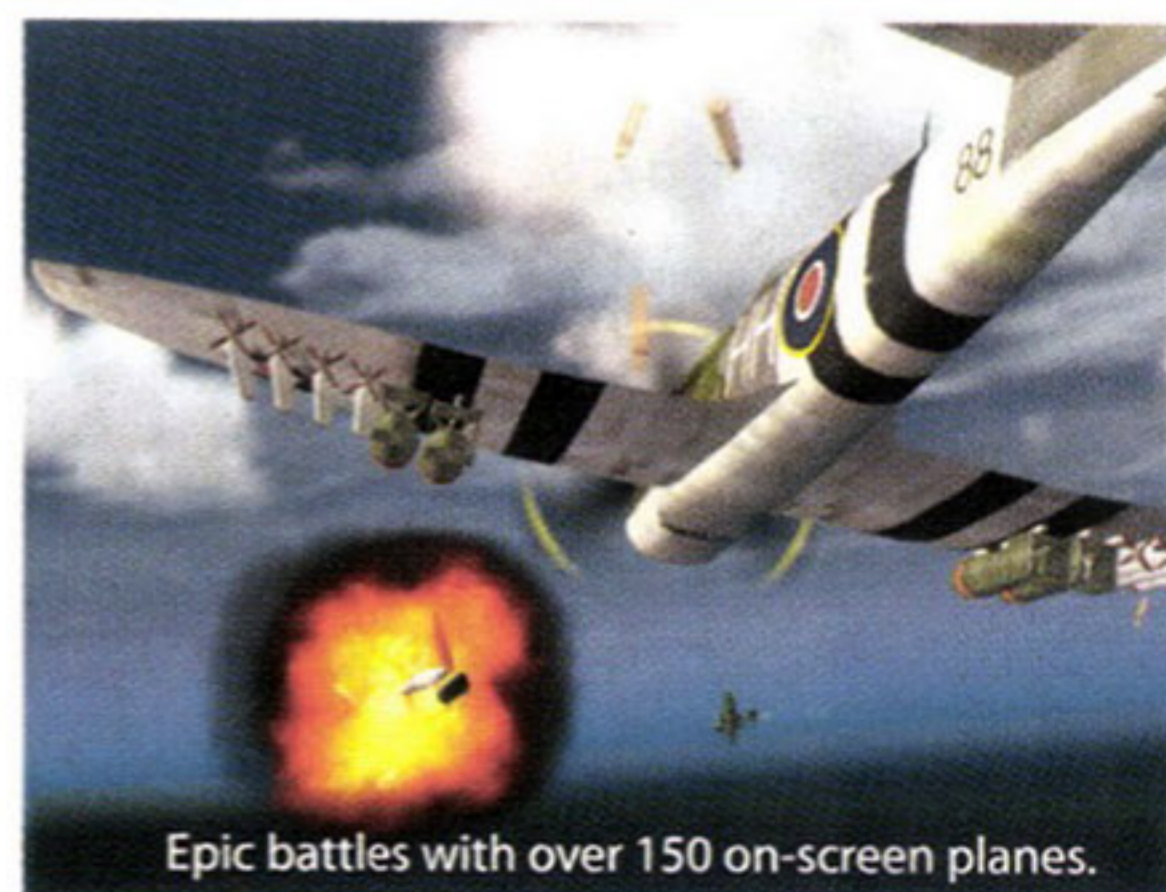
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DIRTY BOY



Though you might not be finding yourself hurtling through space anytime soon in real life, realism is one of the biggest characters in *Mass Effect*. Details like the eventual wear and tear on your armor over time play a big role in how you customize your appearance in the game. When your suit gets dirty, you can choose to clean it or let the grit cake on. But more importantly, wear and tear on your actual visage from battle (cuts, bruises, lacerations) is even more of a factor – it will figure directly into gameplay and possibly even determine your route through the game's moral space.

it's about covering every square inch of a game and getting the most out of it. This is particularly crucial in RPGs – every little bit may reveal a new kernel of story or inch you closer to finding that elusive last item or weapon to beat a boss.

The concept of uncharted worlds in *Mass Effect* embraces this exploratory urge in gamers by giving us a wide-open universe to spelunk. Cruising in your starship, you'll often stumble across planets, stars, or other areas not marked on your map – hence the whole "uncharted" thing. Some locations are integral to the single-player story, according to Hudson. Others won't be, and these are the ones that you'll have to find through unabashed exploration (think *Skies of Arcadia* on Dreamcast) or by overhearing their location when chatting it up with locals and other NPCs. The

uncharted areas can yield surprises for intrepid explorers, and in some cases, the world you stumble on can be large enough for you to land your ship on – and that means good times in an alien landscape where the natives may be friendly...or not.

But this aspect of *Mass Effect* drives home the game's push to be a blank canvas, representing how it might feel to be a new species in a completely foreign universe. And some of the enemies or allies you come across build out your experience from there.

GALACTIC TACTICS

"Combat is going to be really, really tactical," states Muzyka.

Exploration and *Mass Effect's* storyline are the stars of BioWare's new roleplaying show, but another aspect also commands the spotlight: Not everyone who inhabits these worlds is

a friend, and where there's a foe, there's a fight. Fans of *KOTOR* may have some déjà vu over some of the similarities in combat between that game's *D&D*-ruled fights and *Mass Effect's* tactical battles, but there's much more here than meets the eye.

Know this: You'll travel in a squad of three members (you included) throughout the game. Each character will have a choice of specialty-class skills: Biotics, Tech, or Soldier. Biotics work a lot like magic would in, say, a *Final Fantasy* game – but with a sci-fi twist. Casting spells can result in offensive attacks like putting up a force field that pushes enemies away from you. Hudson likens it to being able to control "the fifth physical force" – wielding unseen powers to your advantage.

The Tech skill class is much more grounded in tangible, tactile effects – get your levels up enough, and you'll be able to sway the tide of battle by sabotaging enemy weaponry. And the Soldier attack class remains *Mass Effect's* most traditional – you'll build up your attacks with firearms and other projectile weaponry in order to tank your way through battle. Each skill set is balanced by the other, but you'll have to think tactically in order to survive.

And for those of you out there who wince at the idea of picking an unsuitable class right



→ SPACE CADETS

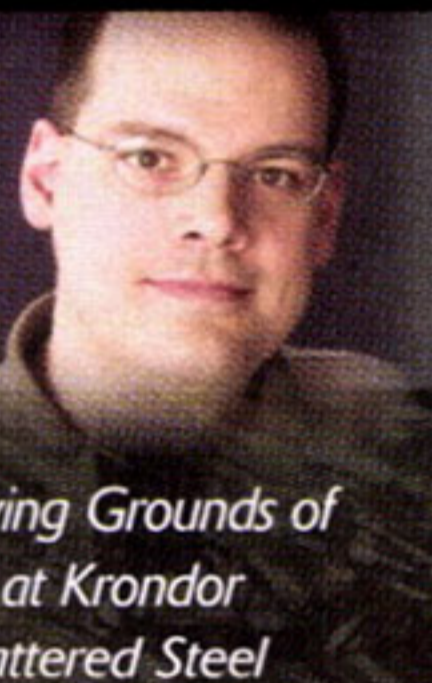
RAY MUZYKA

Food: Sushi – or maybe Indian.

CD: Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew*, New Order's *Power*, *Corruption and Lies*, U2's *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* and *Joshua Tree*

Game: *System Shock I*, *Ultima Underworld I*, *Deus Ex*, *Wizardry I: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord*, *Wasteland*, *Betrayal at Krondor*

BioWare game: *Baldur's Gate I* or *Shattered Steel*



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after you've customized your character at the start screen. BioWare's cooking up a rather interesting way to deal with this dilemma. Instead of choosing your character's attack class right out of the gate, you'll begin by playing through a prologue that will give you a good handle on how the game will play and what beginning obstacles you might be facing. Only after this point will you be able to make an educated decision on the class you'd like to commit to for the rest of the game. Think of it as a smart approach to an in-game tutorial.

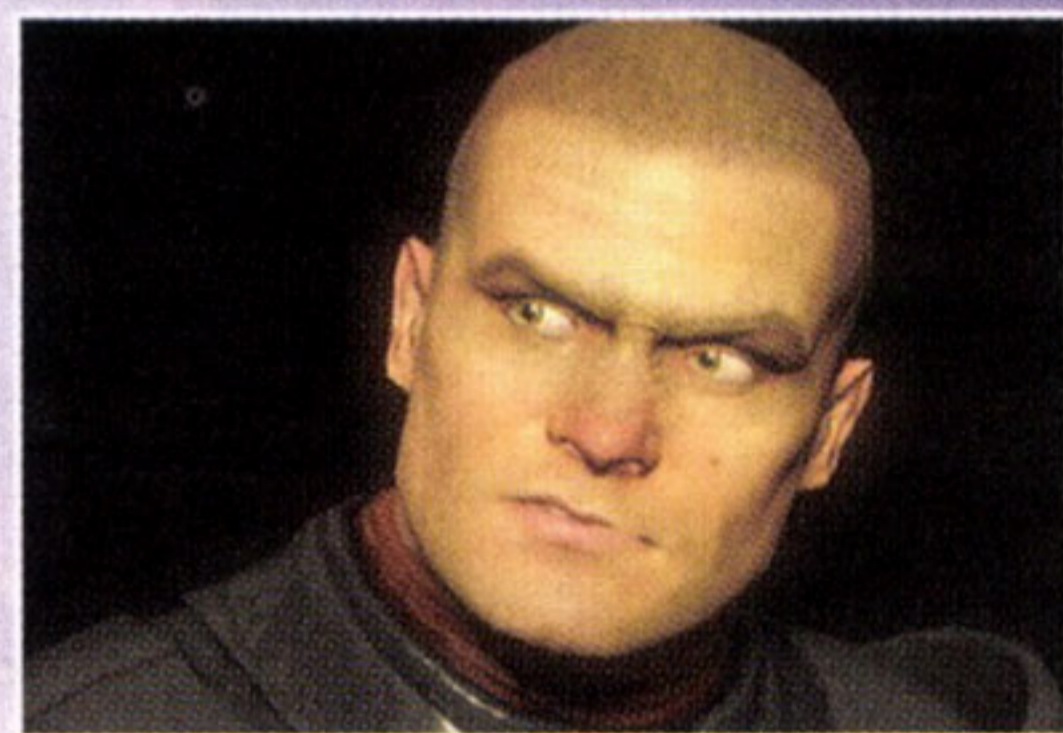
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

"Game direction on previous-generation systems is so different, but now you can think like a movie director," Hudson enthuses. Zeschuk puts it more colorfully: "With all the technical power of next-gen, we don't have to hit players over the head with a sledgehammer to portray certain things anymore."

Innovations in technology are one thing, but using that power to tell a compelling story through action and characters is another. To illustrate this point, you won't just generate responses from other characters that are merely spoken or conveyed through stilted text – you'll also decipher their body language and facial expressions. Just think: Instead of eliciting a "yes," "no," or "I dunno" from an NPC, you'll read it on their face without hearing so much as a whisper. A well-animated shrug, the fleeting shadow of doubt crossing over a character's face, or a slightly raised eyebrow will be enough to give you pause in this game.

You'll also be able to progress relations between your own squadmates. Having only two other characters in your party provides several incredibly cool opportunities. For instance, say you have two squadmates from polar-opposite backgrounds or species – their banter and their relationship during missions will dynamically

INSIDE THE DIGITAL ACTOR'S STUDIO



The entire team at BioWare is incredibly quick to point out that Xbox 360 enables *Mass Effect* to utilize something they refer to as "digital actors." No longer constrained by technical limitations, you can expect realism to rocket up a few levels and kick tired old gaming clichés to the curb. Weary of entering a teeming town only to see it populated with mannequin-style NPCs? Fear not. *Mass Effect* takes that convention and turns it on its head by employing realistic characters exhibiting realistic animations and movements – just about everything, really. NPCs will yawn, lounge, cross their legs, the whole shebang. Main characters will express the whole range of emotions through facial expressions, body language, and a massive amount of professionally performed dialogue.



● Little details like seeing your breath in cold climates is important – even in concept art.

change over time the more they work together with you. Therefore, if you keep swapping out party members throughout *Mass Effect*, they might not get to the point where they'll cement

any sort of relationship. But if you decide to stick with the same two squadmates, things will develop. Romantically? Maybe. Antagonistically? Perhaps. It's all up in the air, giving *Mass Effect* a multi-layered feel. And when Muzyka says, "We want you to believe that these are real people," we actually kinda believe him.

WARP SPEED

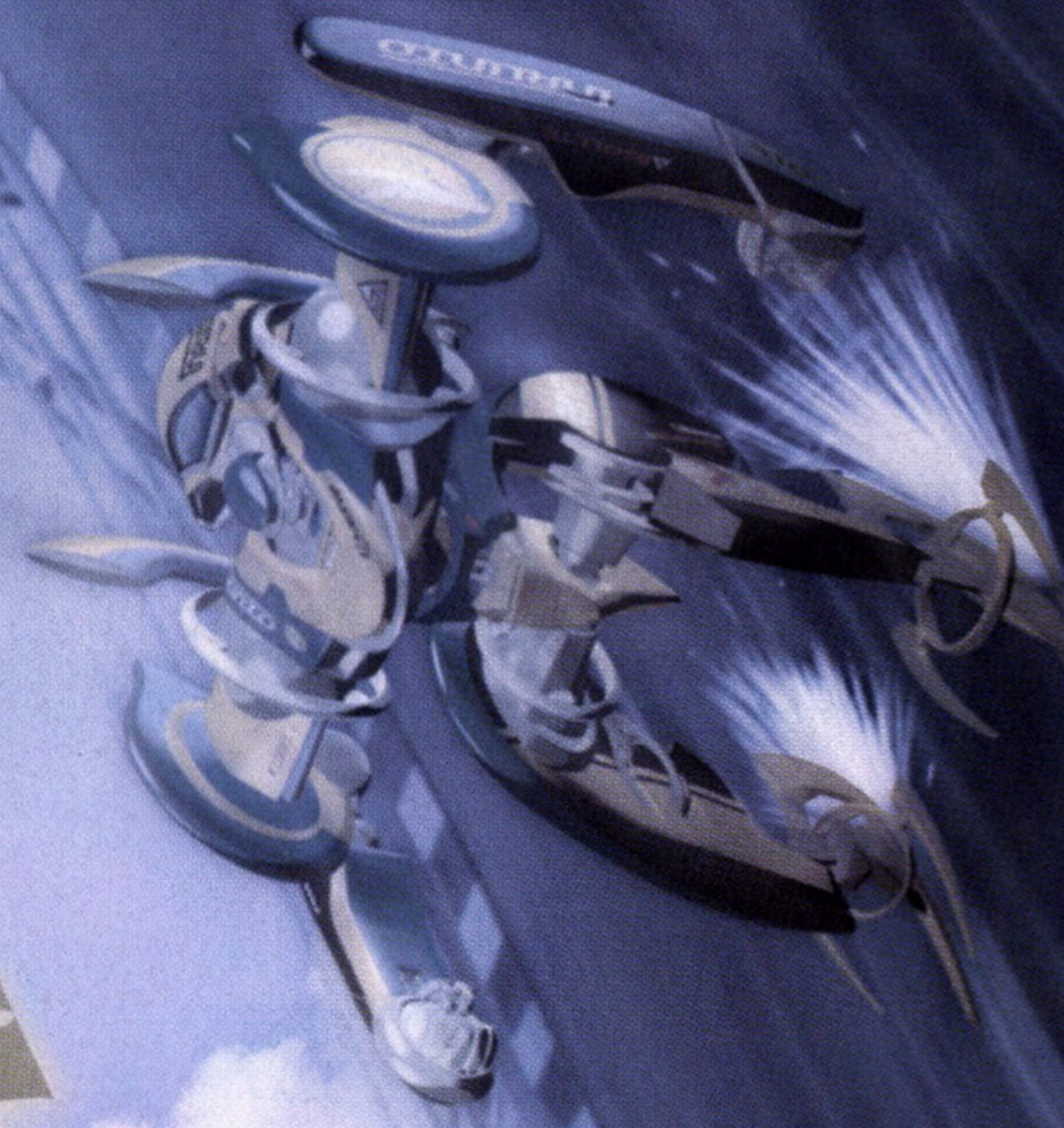
We won't go into nitty-gritty details about the visuals because we don't really have to. You can see for yourself where *Mass Effect's* graphics are headed on Xbox 360 – into a truly gorgeous space all its own. Those screens you're looking at? Picture them in motion, and you have a good idea of what we saw during our visit to BioWare's studio in Edmonton. Fluid, shiny, textured, all the tech mumbo jumbo – it's all there. But with an indeterminate release date loosely targeted at late 2006 or early 2007 (as Muzyka says, "It'll be done when it's done. We want this to be amazing, and we don't want to rush it."), we have little doubt that BioWare's amazing pitch at sci-fi fantasy fulfillment will evolve into a character-driven, visually arresting force to be reckoned with when it touches down on Xbox 360.

XBOX



● You and your squad will depend on each other to survive – and you can ensure this by swapping manual controls between all of them if you want.

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WHEELS
WHEELS



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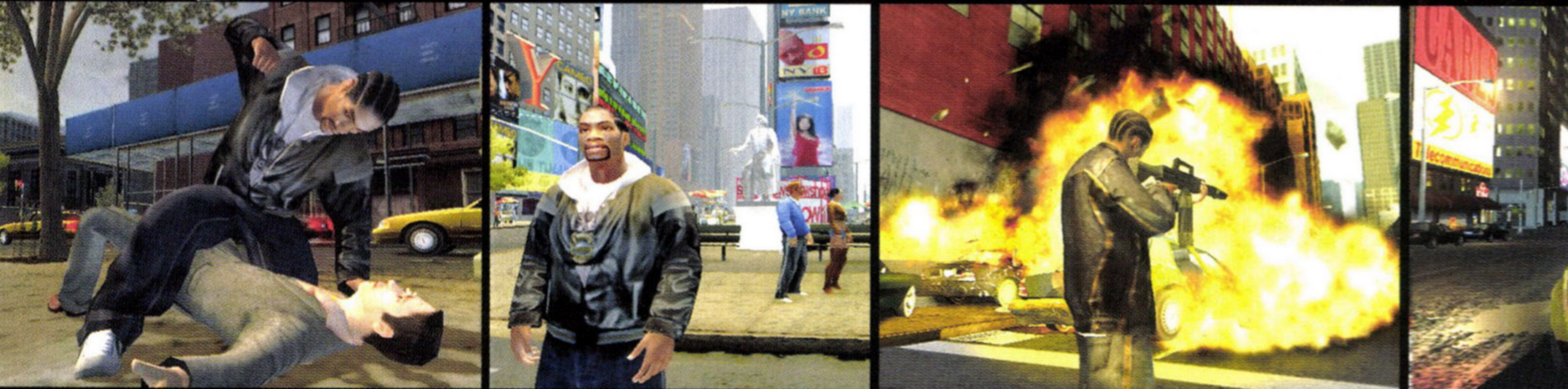
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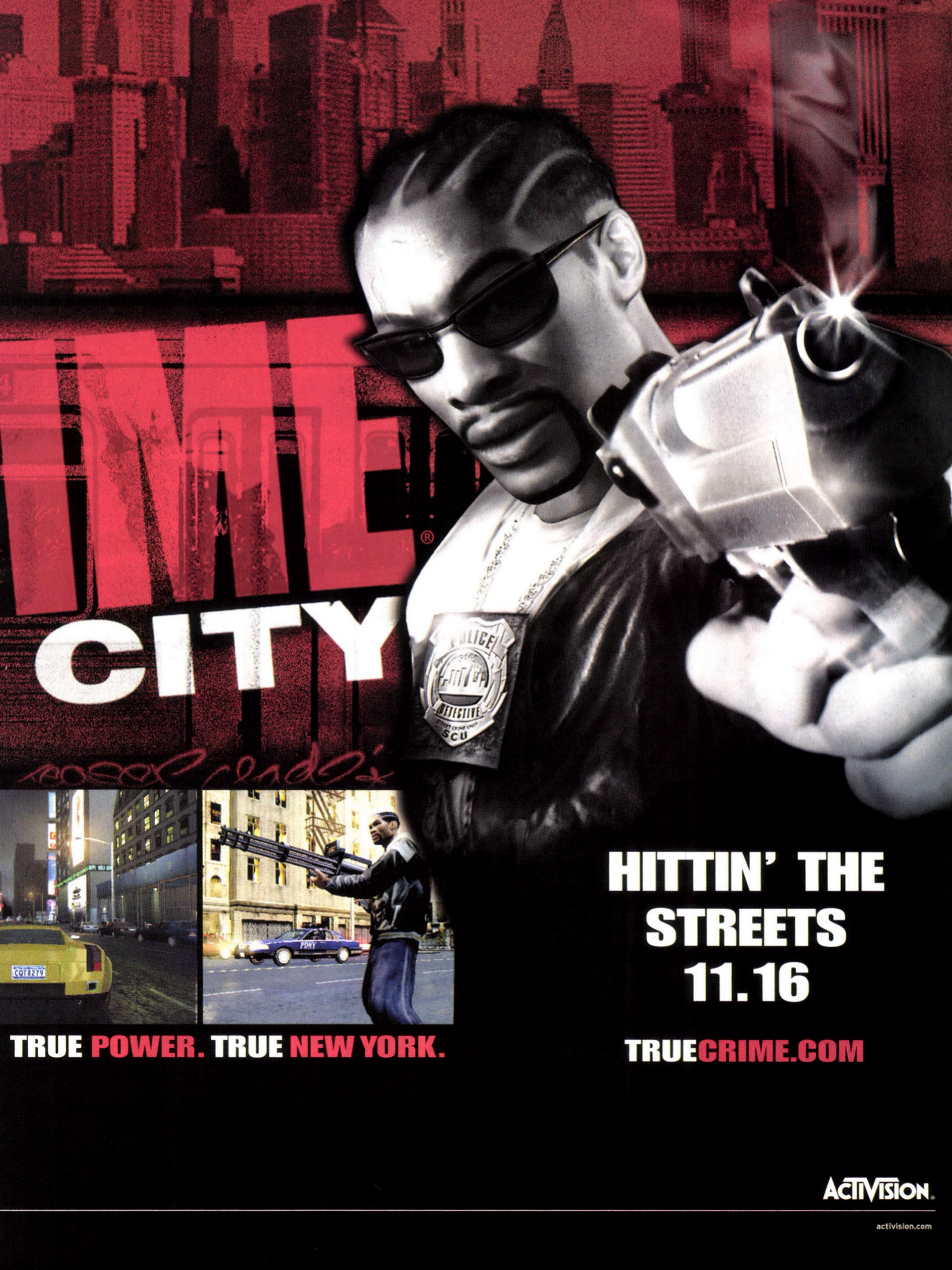
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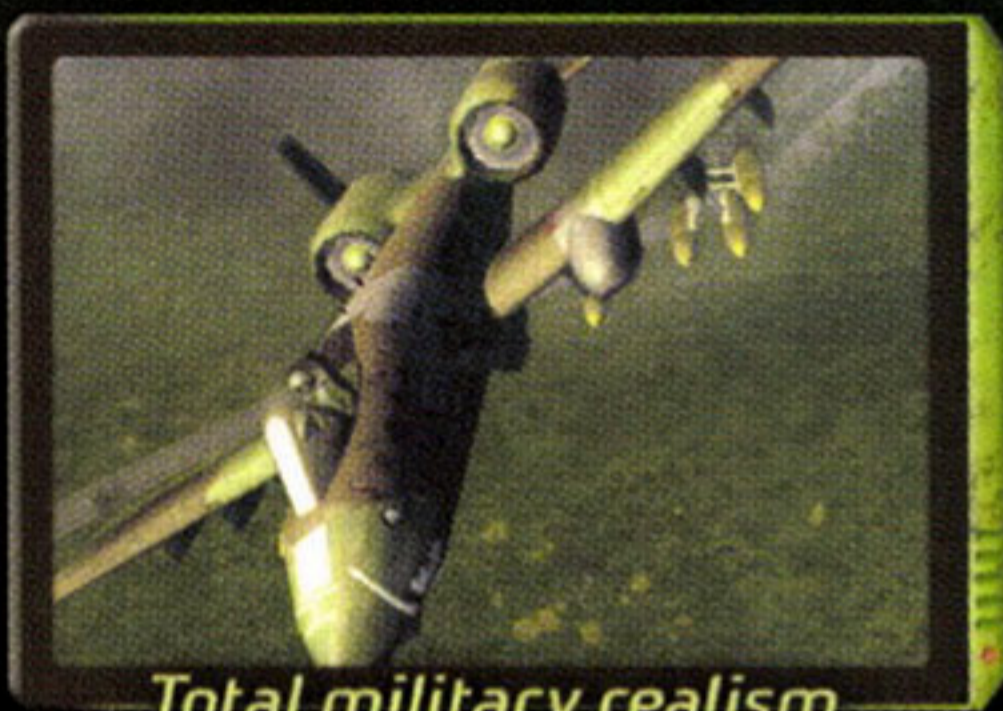
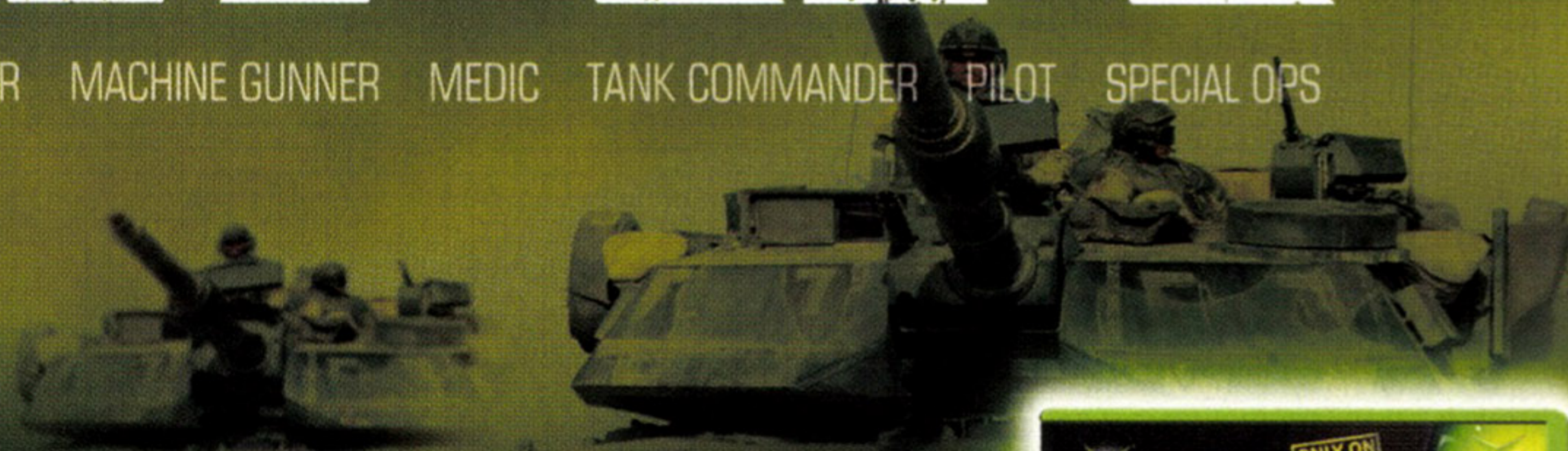
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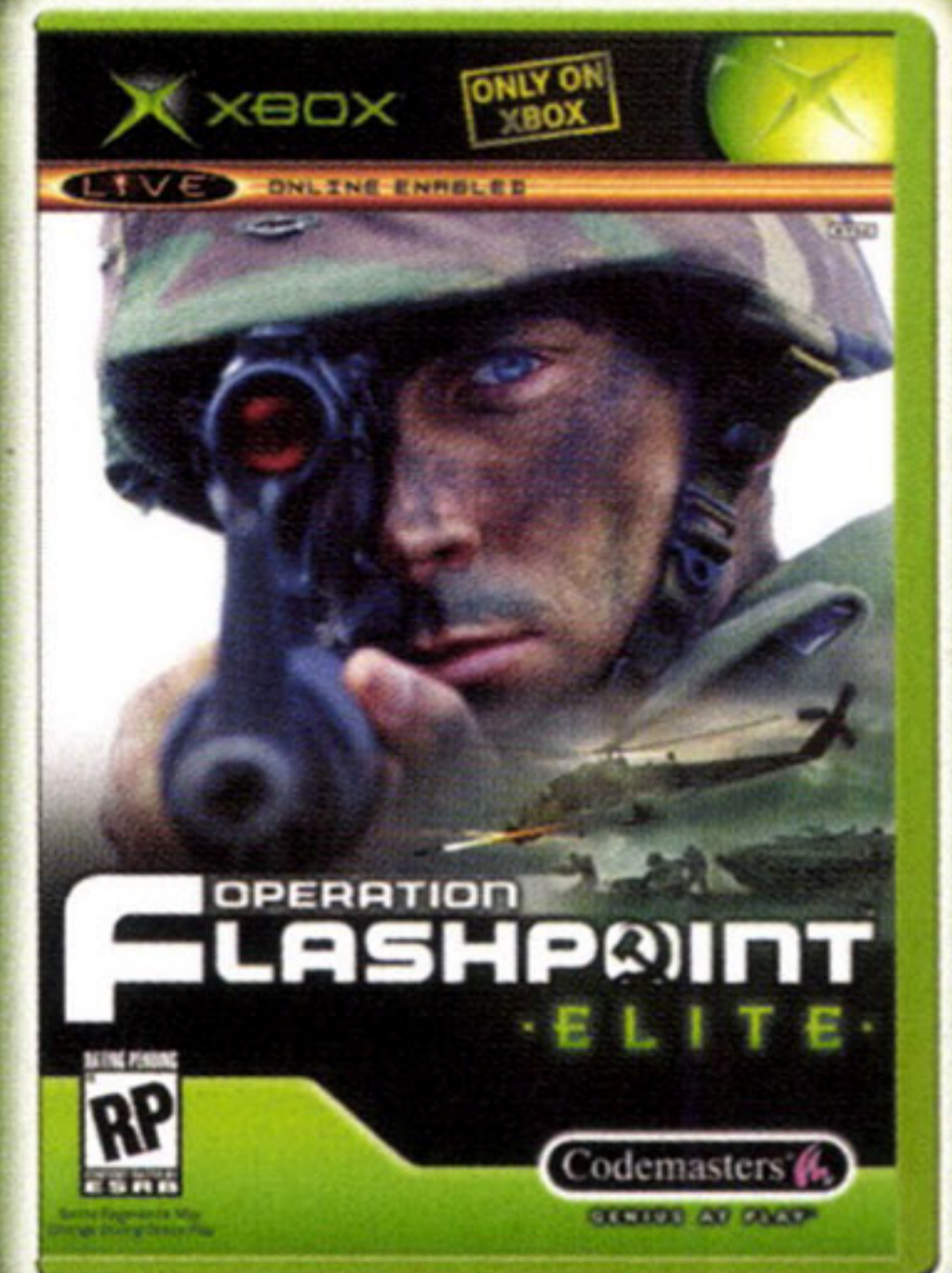
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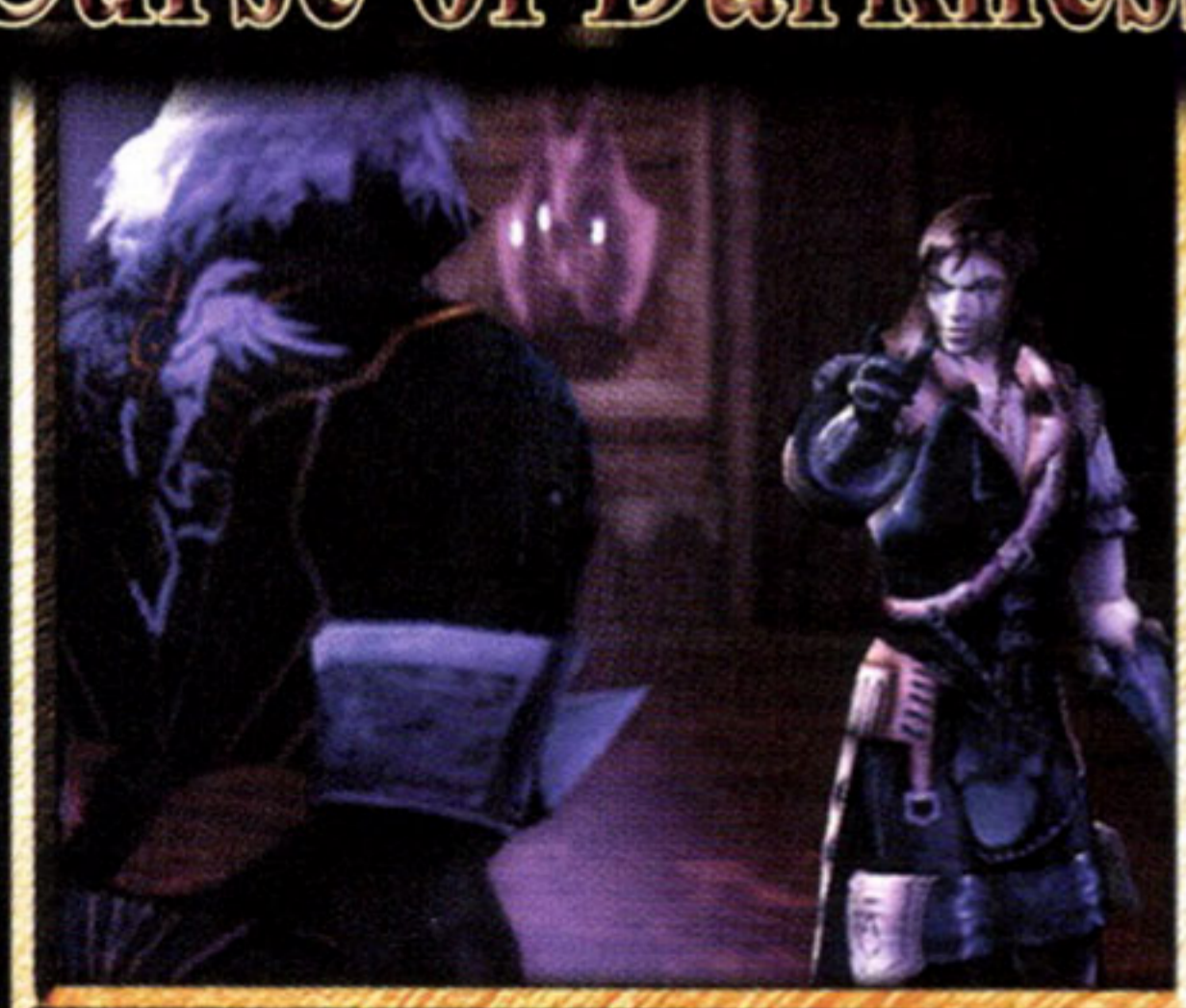
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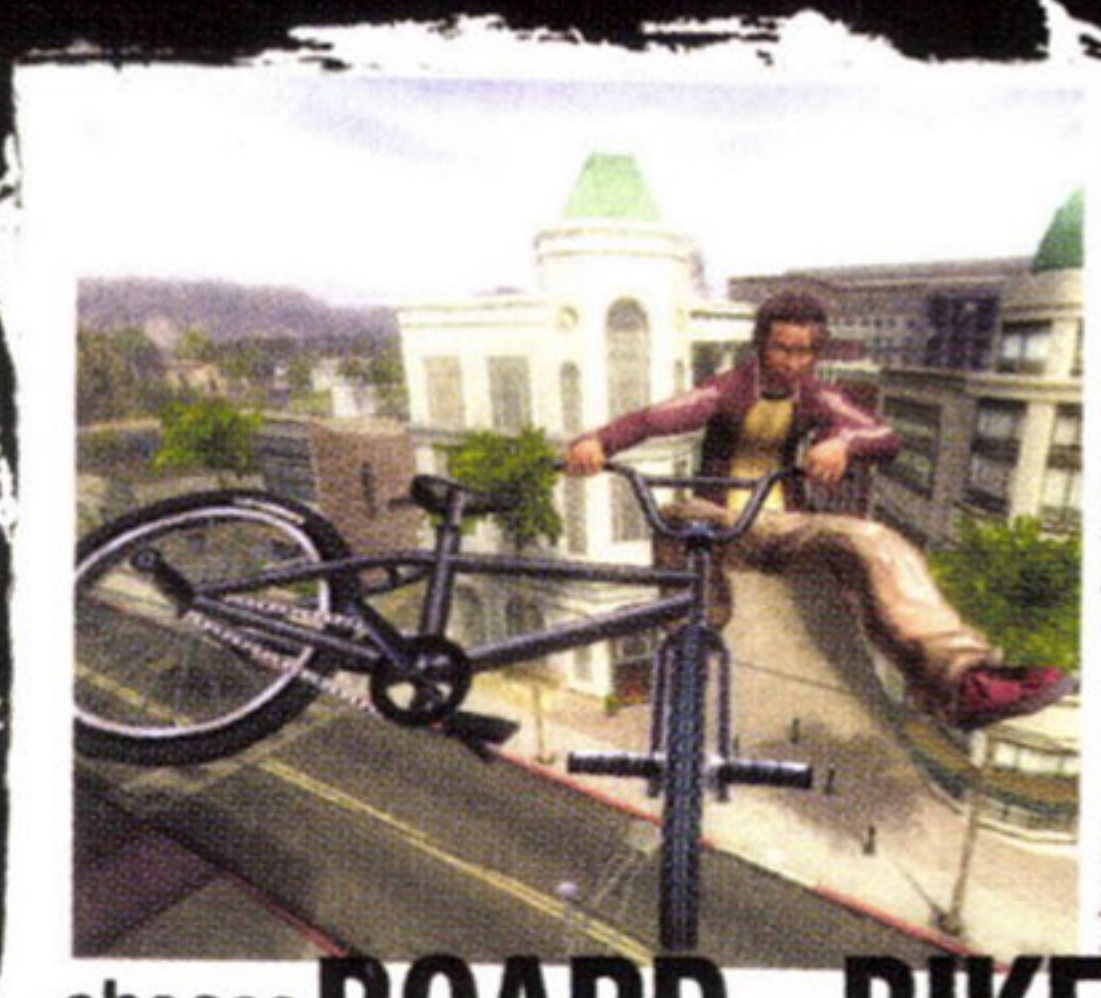
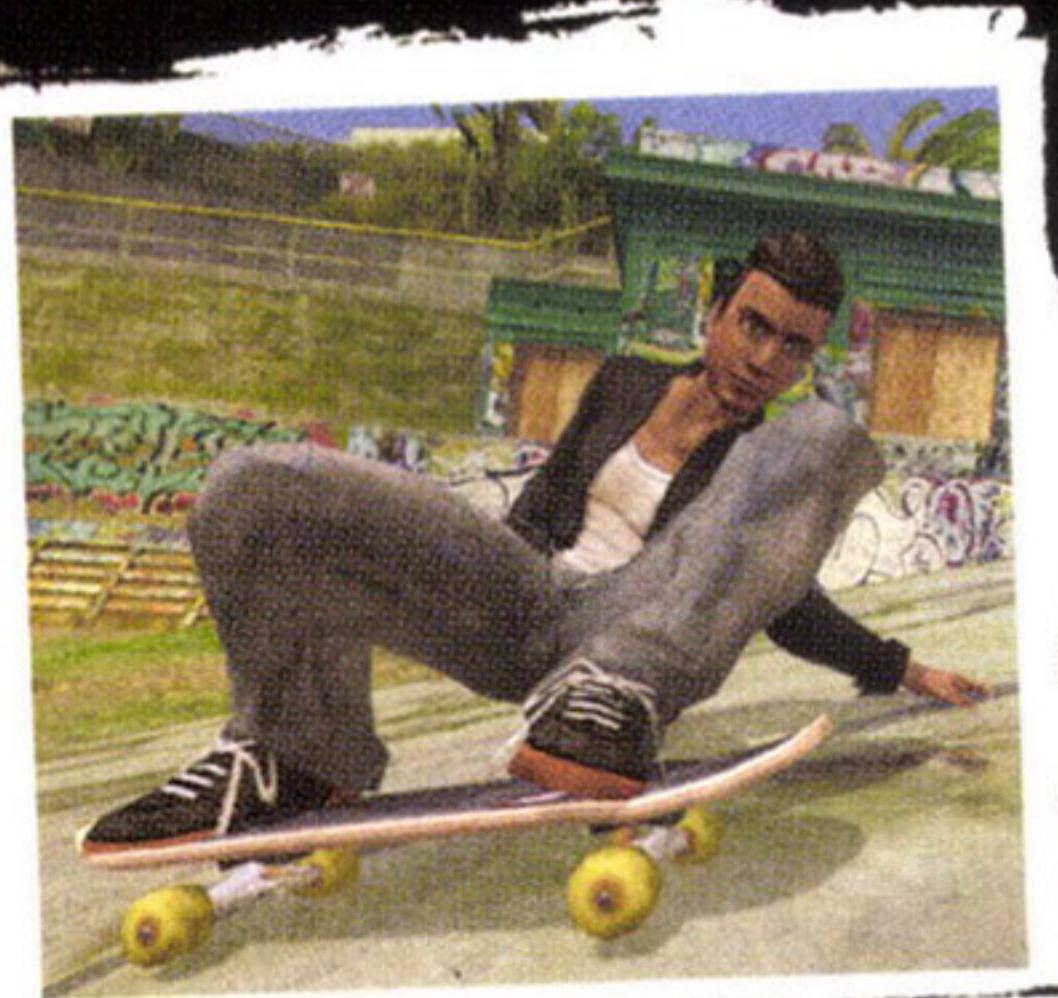


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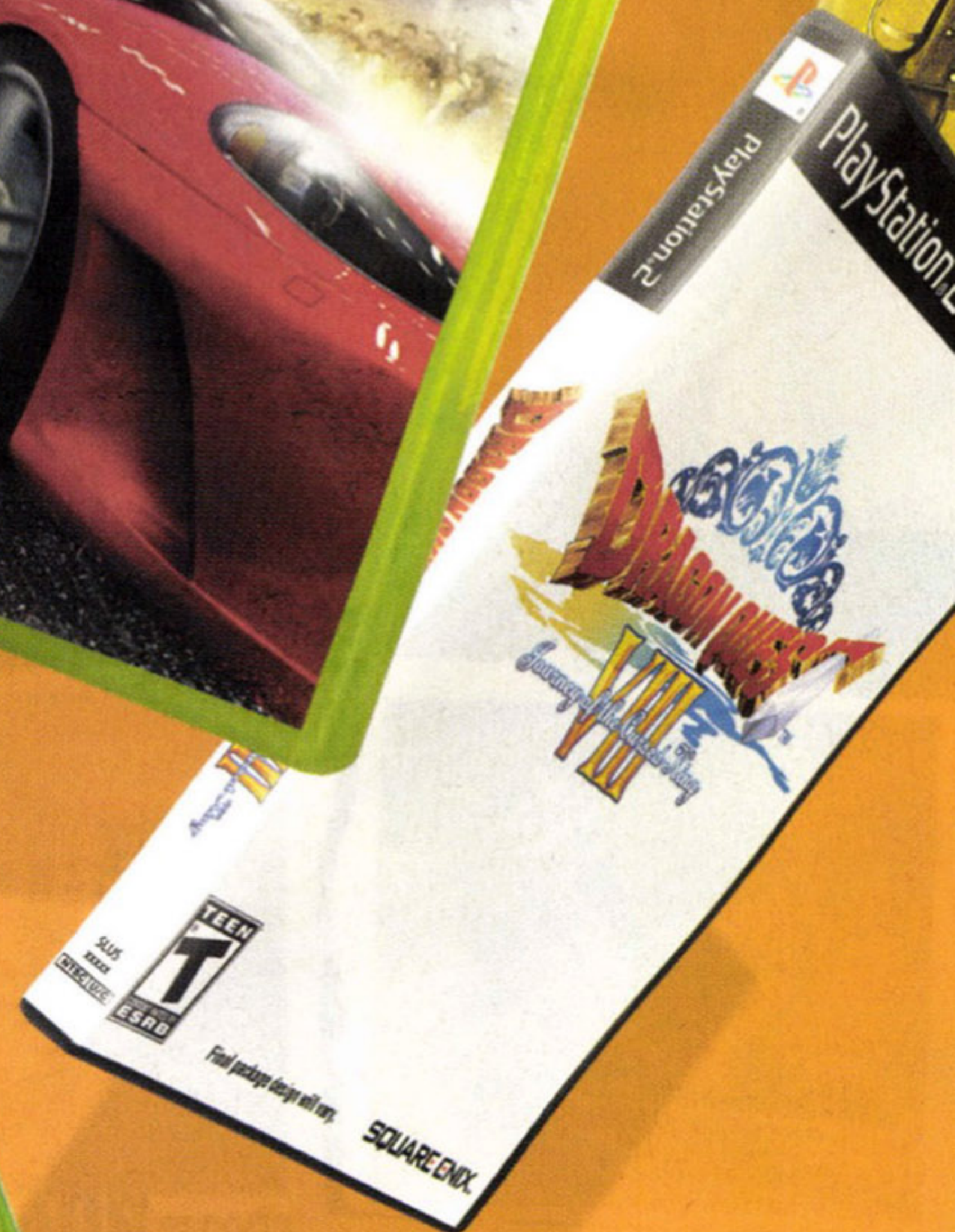
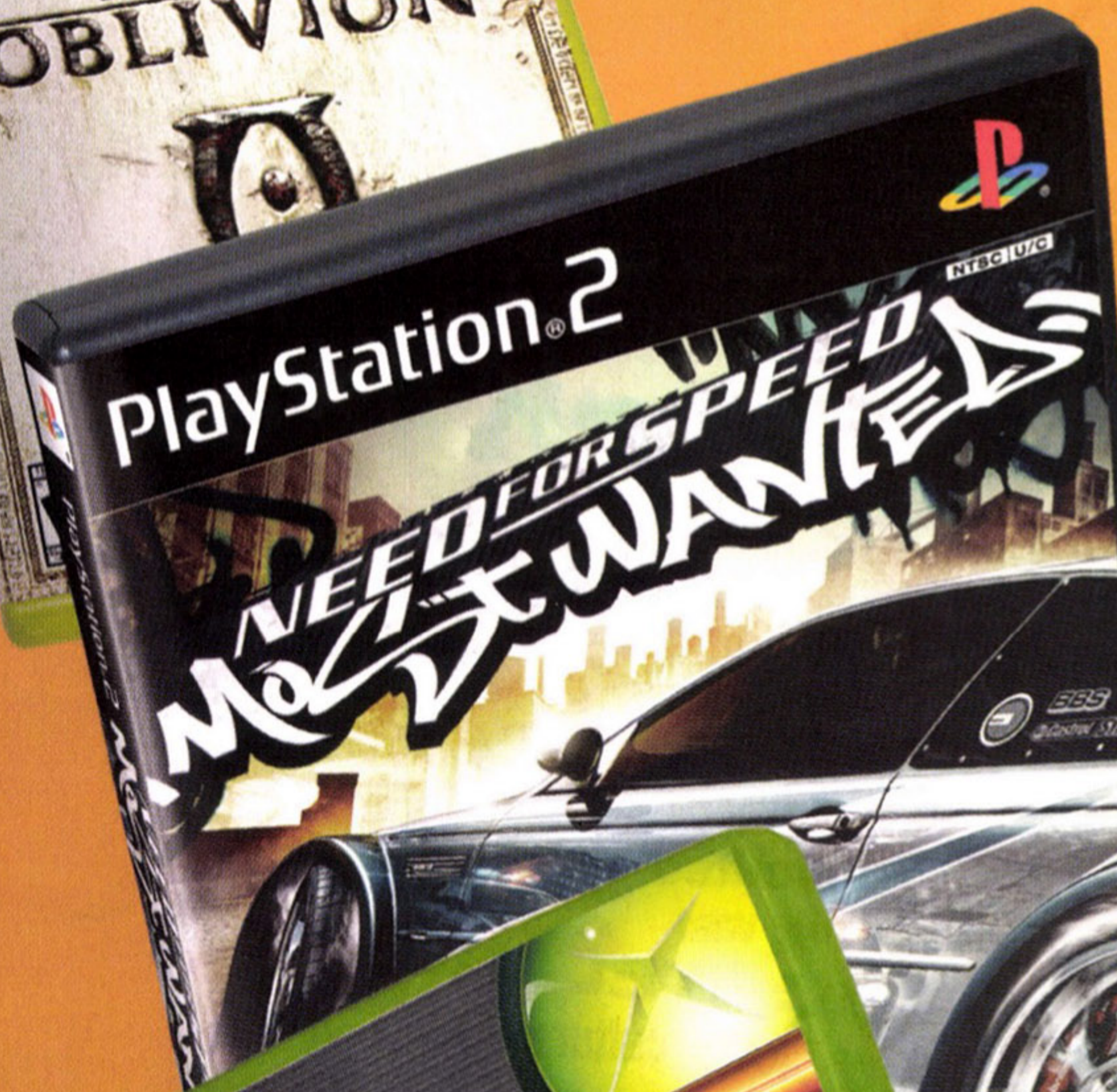


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XBOX 360

PS2

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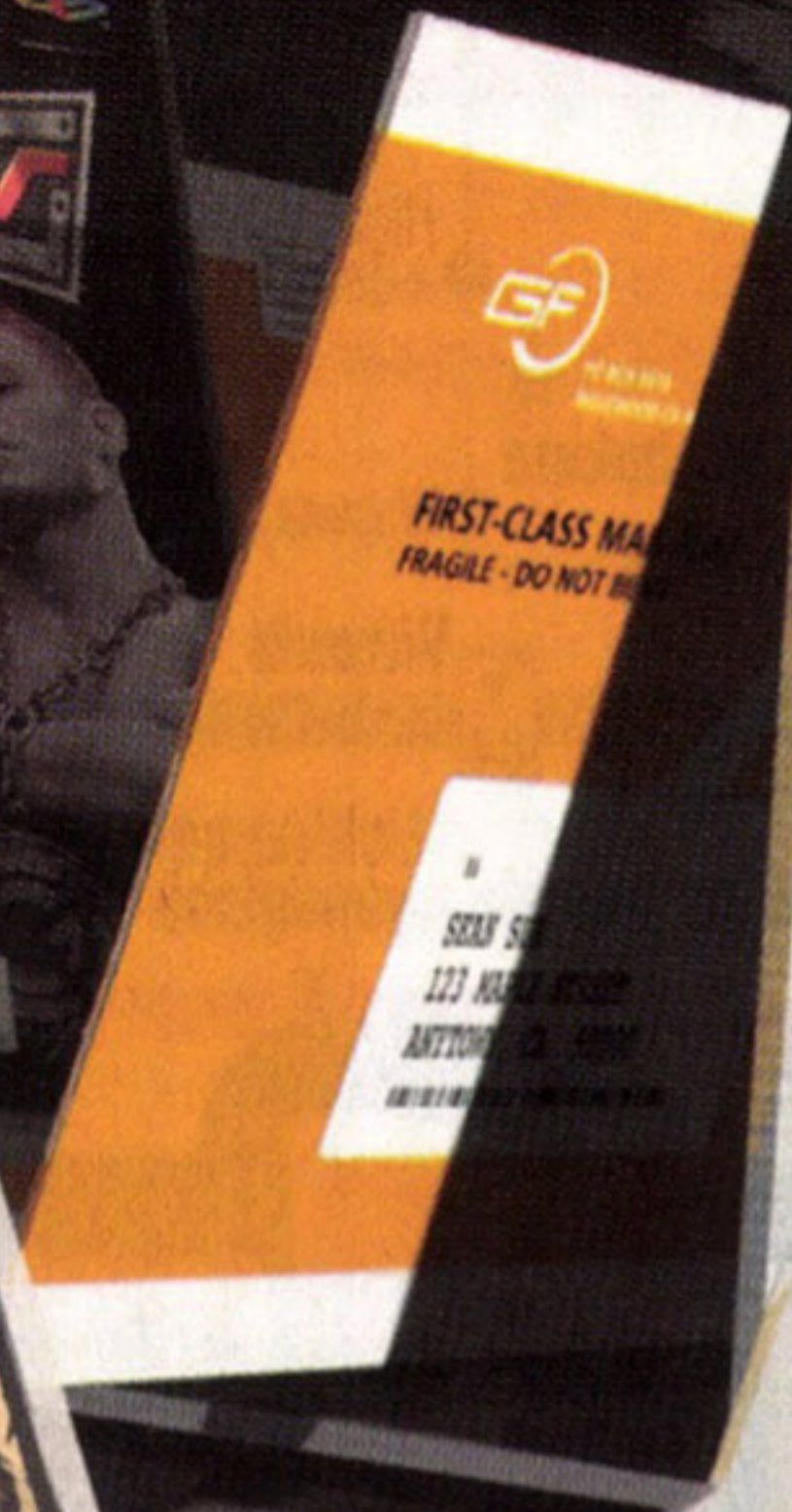
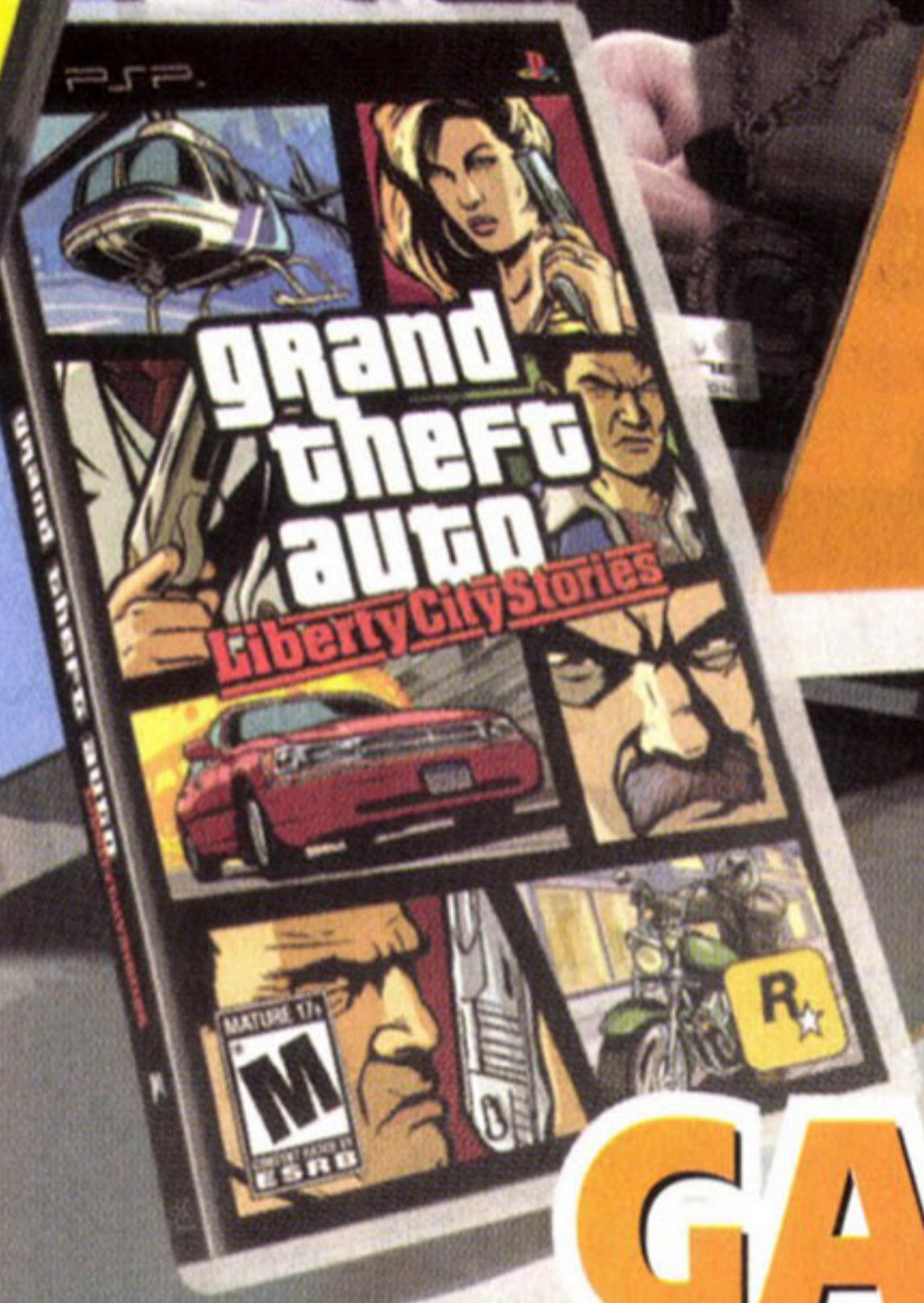
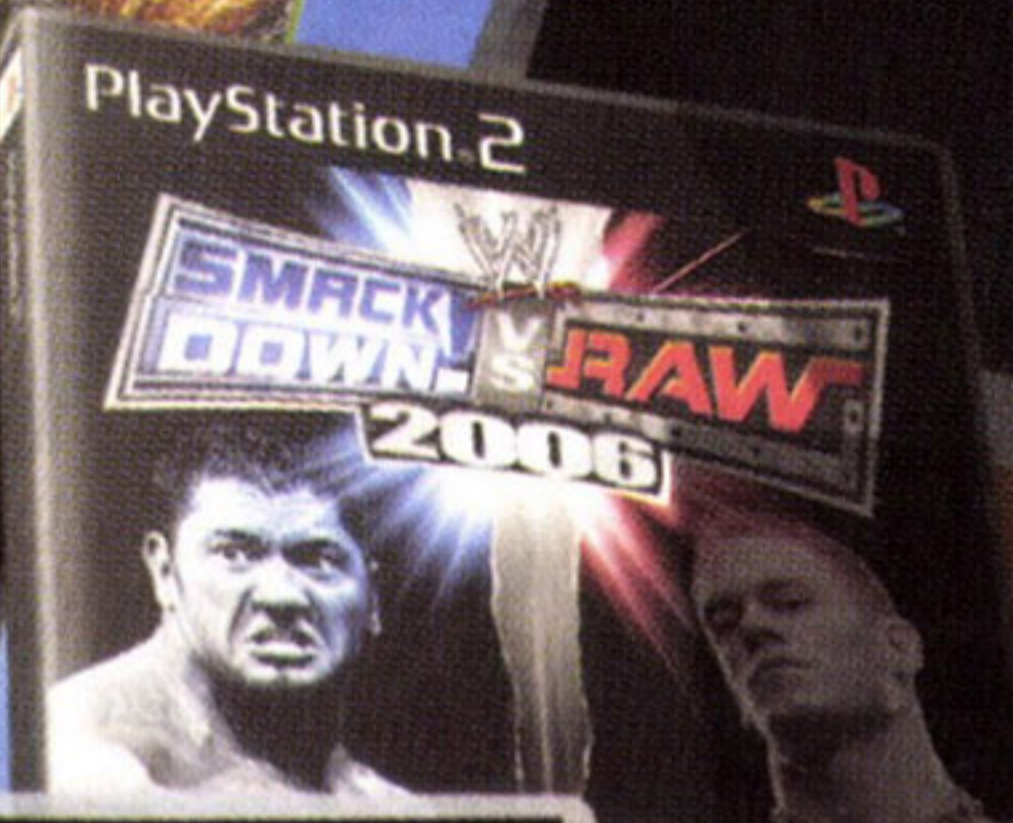
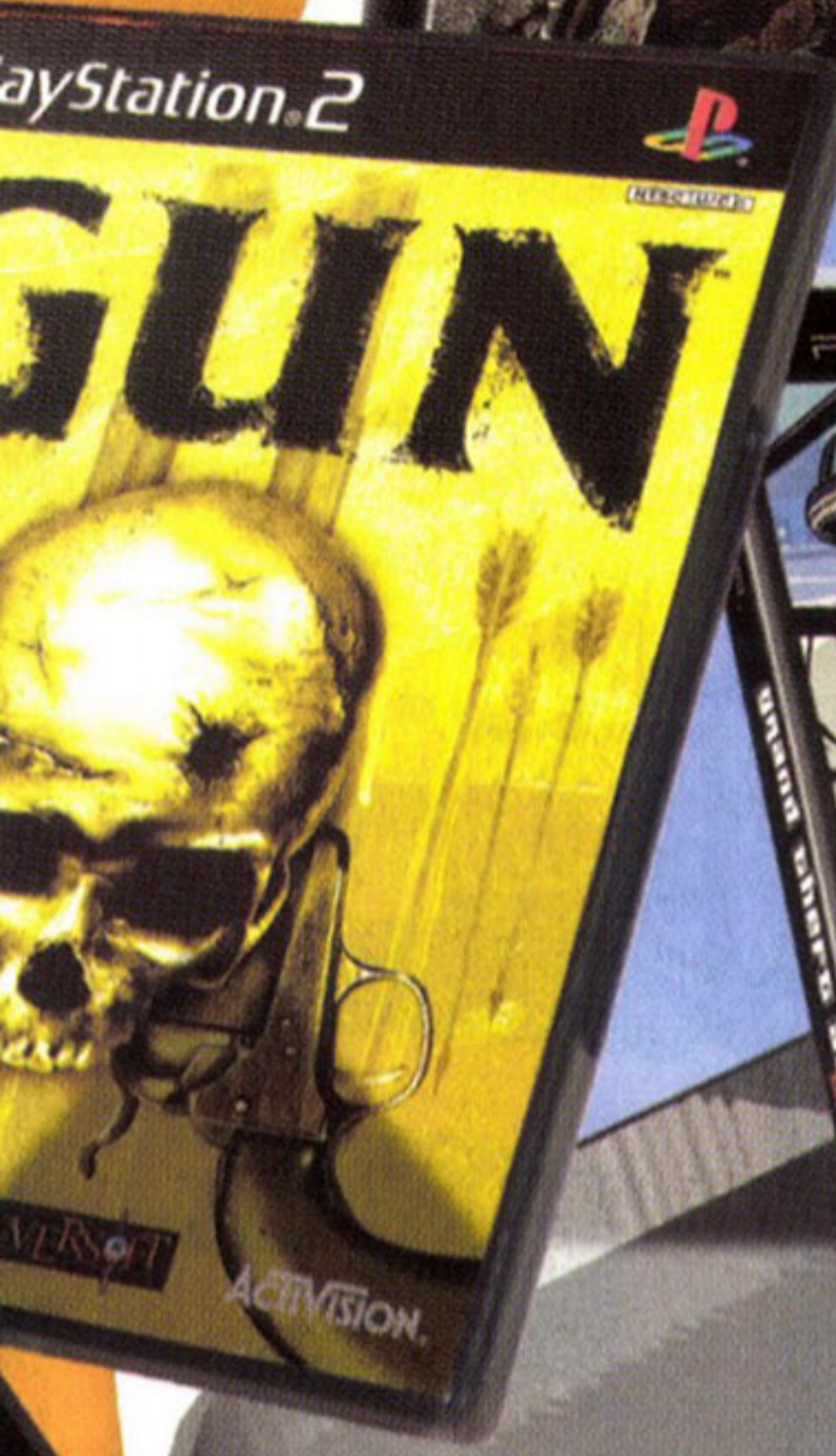


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Does Japan's Tokyo Game Show still matter to Xbox and Xbox 360? OXM's Rob Smith packs his bags to find out...

Eighty-four degrees outside. Feels like 92. Seventy percent humidity. Weather.com may be informative, but it makes you want to stay indoors. For a Brit ex-pat who now resides in the dry heat of the left coast, those numbers spell sweaty discomfort.

Those are the conditions facing me, a first-time visitor to Japan, headed east to the Tokyo Game Show. As Asia's biggest videogame showcase (which unlike E3, offers two days when consumers can try the latest games), the show is always a big deal in the late, sweltering summer months. On the cusp of the global launch, TGS lies at the heart of Microsoft's approach to making a positive impact in the Japanese market. The original Xbox performance in Japan

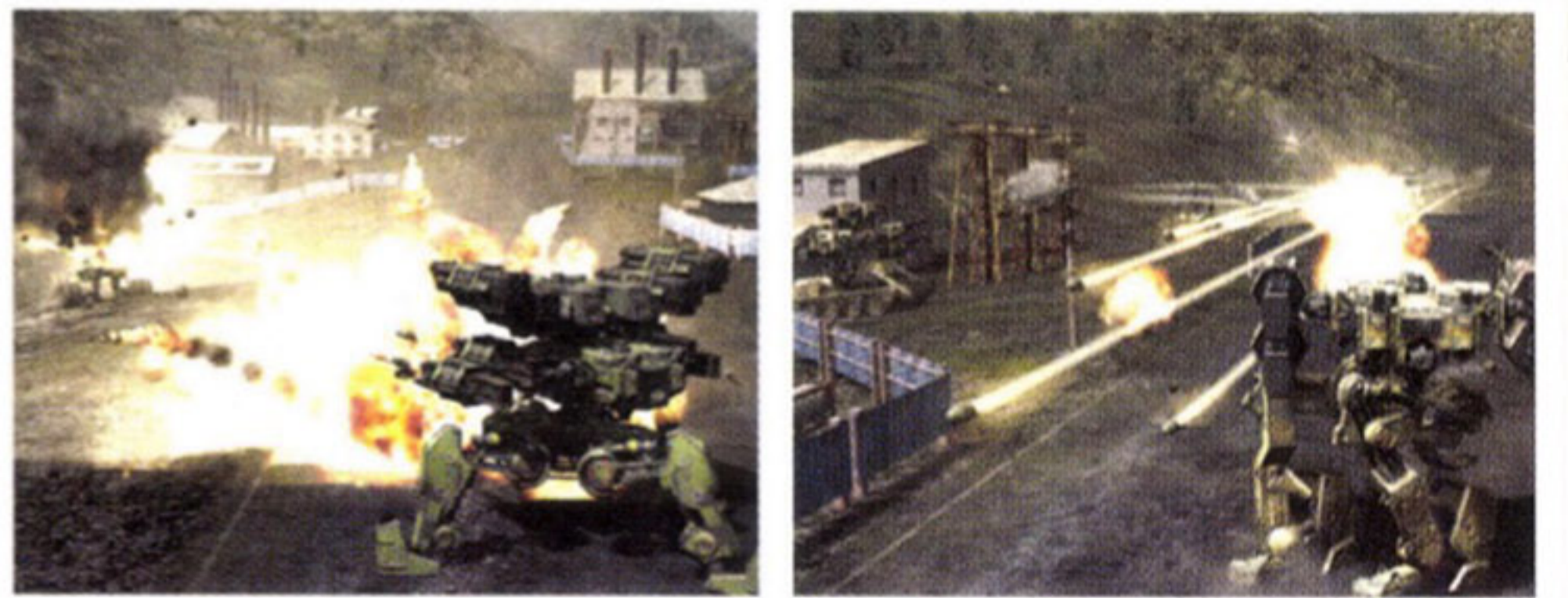
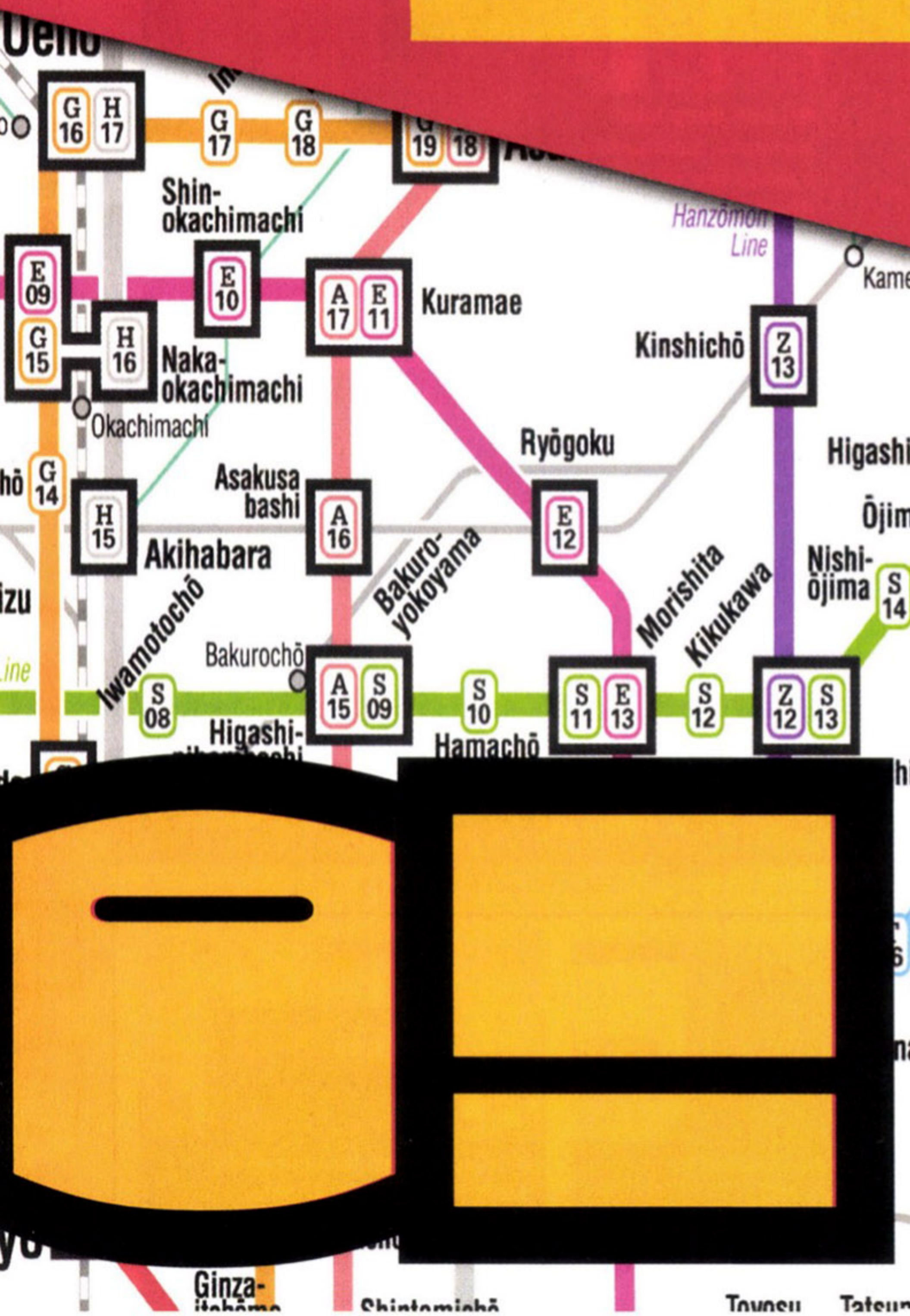
is best described as disastrous. Software sales are terrible. Unless the name of your game starts with *Dead or Alive* or *Ninja Gaiden*, it's not likely to capture the local consumers' attention.

Time for a change of mindset.

The big guns are out. Chief Xbox Officer Robbie Bach is here to deliver a keynote speech. Xbox global marketing supreme Peter Moore is in Japan (again) to wheel, deal, and spiel. The big-name pool of developers already announced are raring to go with new games primed with the PR line.

The game is on. Not quite Tokyo or bust, but the Japanese market represents a huge commitment of finances and credibility for Xbox 360 that simply cannot fail. We were there to witness the launching pad to Xbox 360's December 10th launch in Japan.

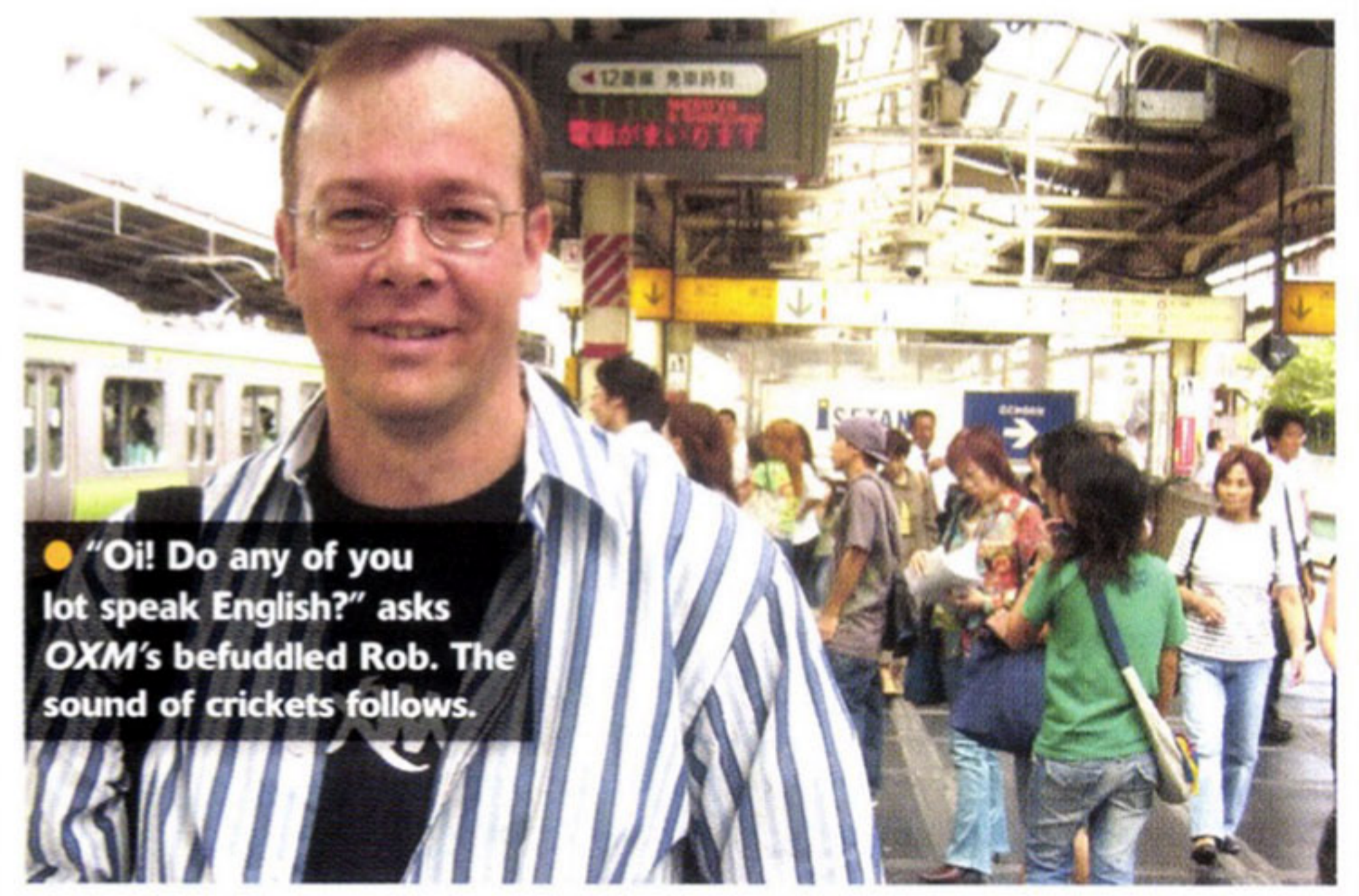




Tuesday September 13th, 2005

I'm not a pretty sight. I'm not a pretty sight on my best day, but at this particular moment I'm such a sweaty mess even my loved ones would recoil in disgust. Out of the train station, I'm heading to From Software in the midday swelter. Fran's warnings reverberate around my head: "Don't be late," she warned, referring to the Japanese (and general business) expectation of punctuality.

An hour early, I duck into what looks on the outside like a café. Watered and fed, I venture out a half-block to the ground floor of From Software to get the lowdown on big-mech action game, *Chromehounds*.



● "Oi! Do any of you lot speak English?" asks OXM's befuddled Rob. The sound of crickets follows.

Chromehounds

Developer: From Software Publisher: Sega Release: Spring 2006

Chromehounds' single-player mech-action gameplay is broken into six different short stories, two for each of the three battling nations in *Chromehounds'* militaristic future world. Through this, you'll pilot each of the six types of Hound – the sniper, heavy gunner, scout, assault, defender, and commander (the official names are still to be set) – and learn their varying controls, loadout options, and play styles. Over 100 maps are planned for launch, and the six-on-six teams will fight in urban sprawls, icy plains, and farmed fields.

Taking advantage of Xbox Live and making the game appealing to the U.S. markets are key parts of From's strategy. In the game lobby, you'll be able to see the world map and where the battle needs to be fought. Then you'll kit out your Hound with points accumulated by winning matches and buying more powerful engines, armor, and weapons. You'll even be able to kick down your old gear to weaker teammates.



● The future shall be decided by men in mechs. How depressing is that?



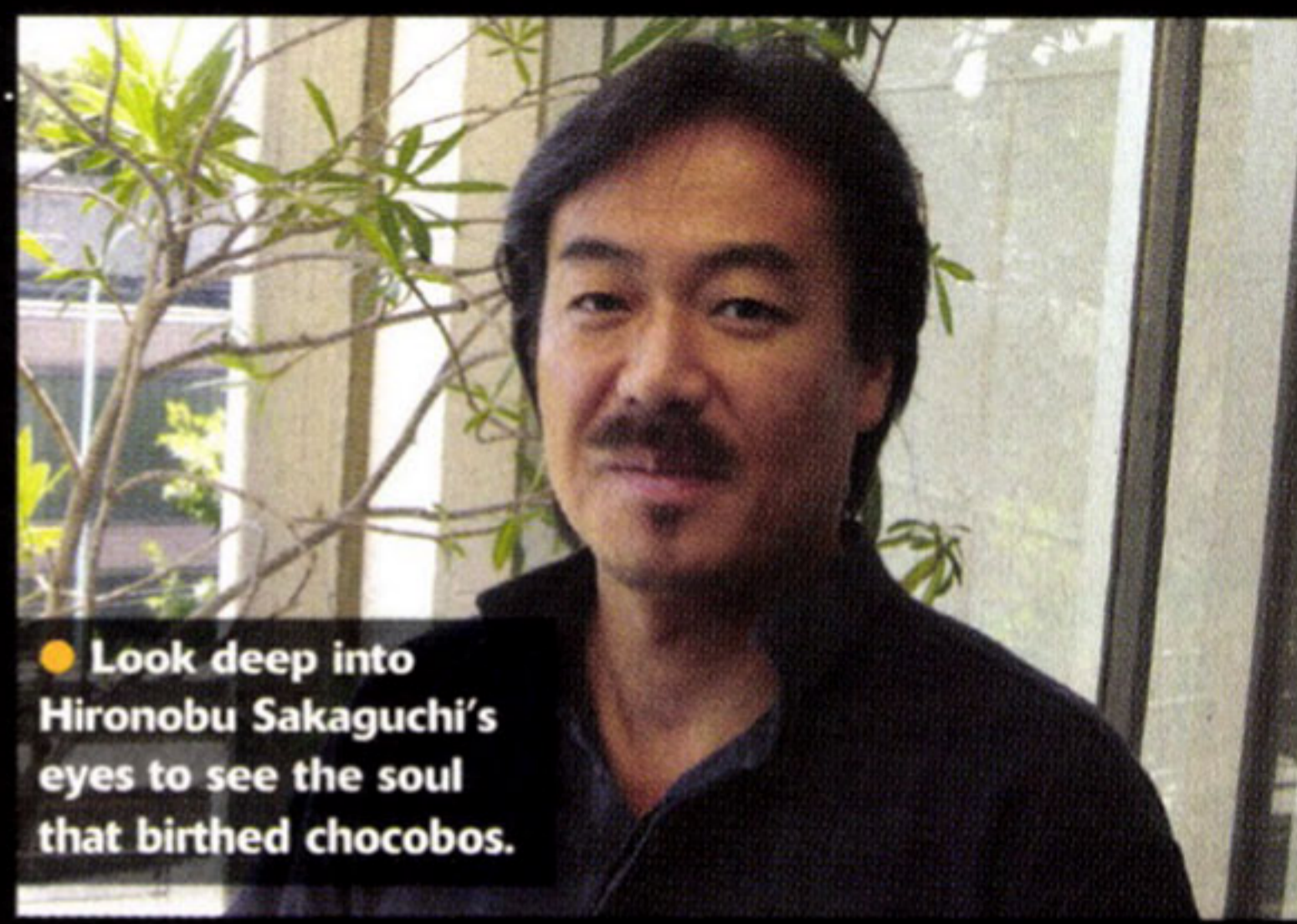
Blue Dragon Developer: Mistwalker/Artoon Publisher: Microsoft Release: Late 2006

No disrespect to the other esteemed studios and developers working on Xbox 360 games, but *Final Fantasy* legend Hironobu Sakaguchi's new Mistwalker studio is the brightest jewel in the crown of talent signed up to make a splash in Japan. The tale of Shu, a boy whose shadow takes the form of a powerful creature who can help you during battle, follows his journey to uncover the origins of his abilities.

"Shu is energetic, so I want the player to never give up too," Sakaguchi told us. "He's vigorous but not sensitive," he added,

"so when a girl has feelings for him and is being obvious, he doesn't recognize the advance [and that causes conflict]."

Then Sakaguchi rolled the game's tech demo. I've been in hundreds of game demos where water effects are trotted out as the evidence of incredible technology. Before I had time to groan, the water effects in *Blue Dragon* stunned me. Real depth, real shimmer, real lighting; no viscous quality to the water weight, no weird shadows from bridges, no odd ripples – it was really that good!



● Look deep into Hironobu Sakaguchi's eyes to see the soul that birthed chocobos.

● Personal space, especially in train stations, is not really an option in Tokyo.



● The *Blade Runner*-esque skyline is stunning for first-time visitors to Tokyo.



Wednesday September 14th, 2005

Trains! Gotta love 'em. The short trip from Shinjuku to Shibuya to see the legendary Squaresoft alum, Hironobu Sakaguchi was a breeze. Picking the correct exit in the right direction...that's tough. After 15 minutes of wandering, a police officer scoffs at my ignorance and points the right way.

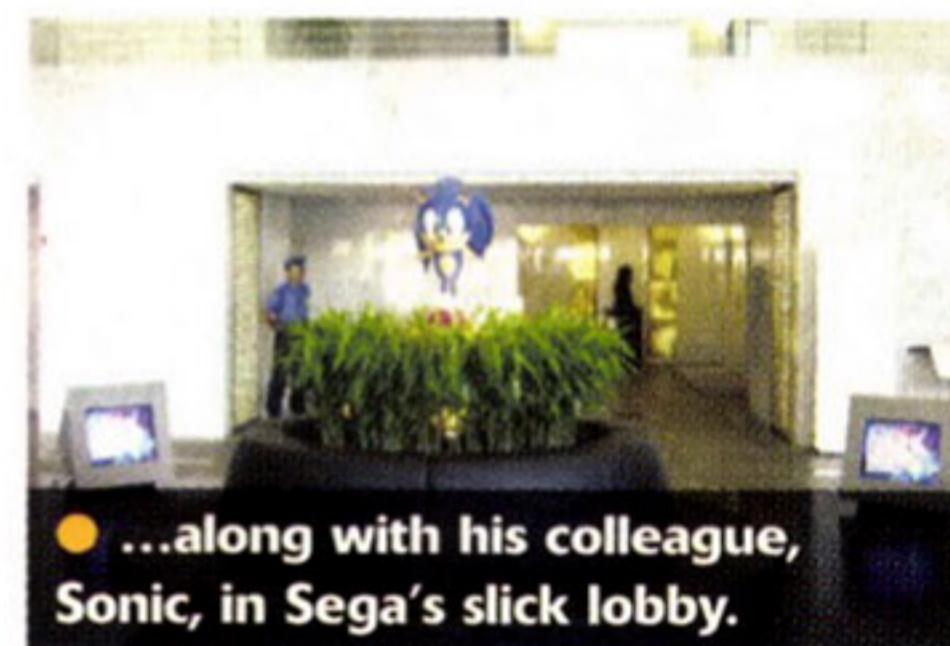
Today I made a few smart tactical decisions: 1) wear slacks instead of jeans for better heat comfort, and 2) bring a small towel from the hotel. Locals do it, and it's way more effective in mopping the embarrassing damp than my hankie! By the time I reach the meeting point, I need a bigger towel...

Mistwalker's home base is a short air-conditioned ride away in an office that could probably be best described as a well-appointed apartment. It's barely enough to house the 13 Mistwalker staffers who work on design decisions, then relay that to the game developers at Artoon (*Blue Dragon*) and FeelPlus (*Lost Odyssey*). And it's also the first studio that has required me to remove my shoes and don slippers before entering!

It's a stark contrast from the second appointment of the day. Trekking through the heat to Sonic HQ at Sega in Haneda, I met with Takashi Yuba, producer of Xbox racer *Sonic Riders*. The game is prepping for release soon, and it'll offer 17 playable characters, starting with Sonic and then Tails. What can we expect? "What's new compared to other *Sonic* games is riding on airboards," says Yuba, "and creating wakes that look like half-pipes. You can ride on the turbulence and make tricks that help you catch up with the race leader."



● Takashi Yuba greeted us at Sega's Haneda HQ...



● ...along with his colleague, Sonic, in Sega's slick lobby.

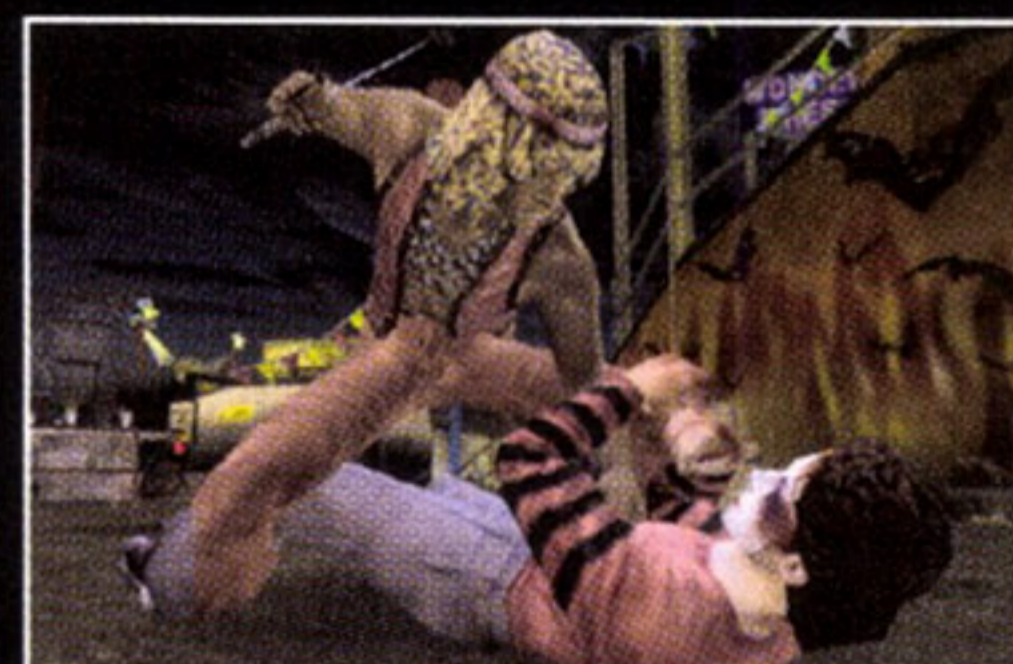
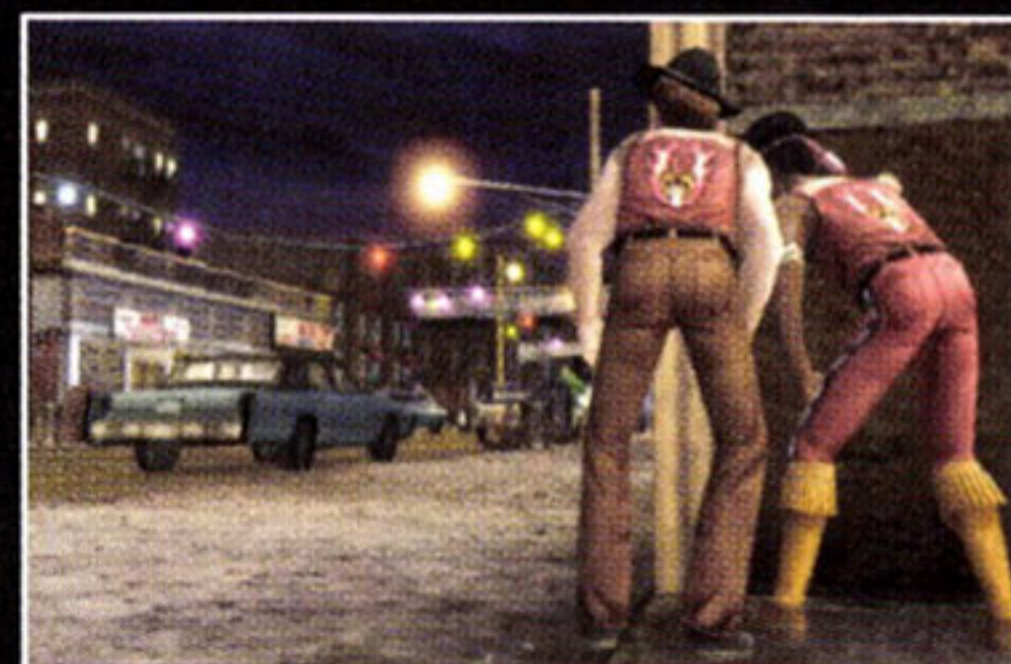
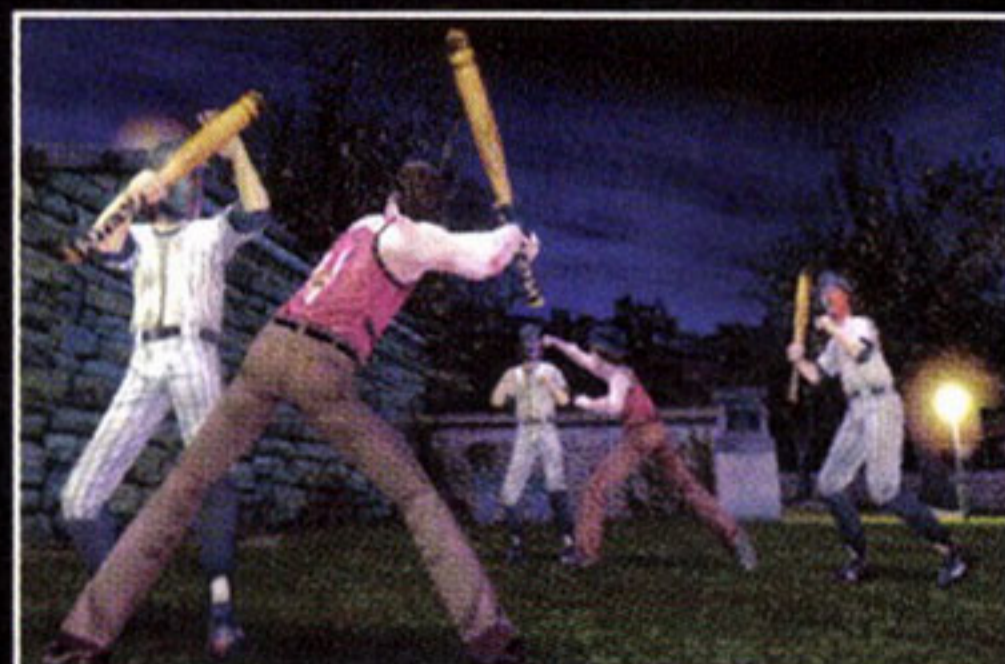


● Sonic looks completely at home on a hoverboard in his latest, *Sonic Riders*.

THE WARRIORS

COMING OCTOBER 2005

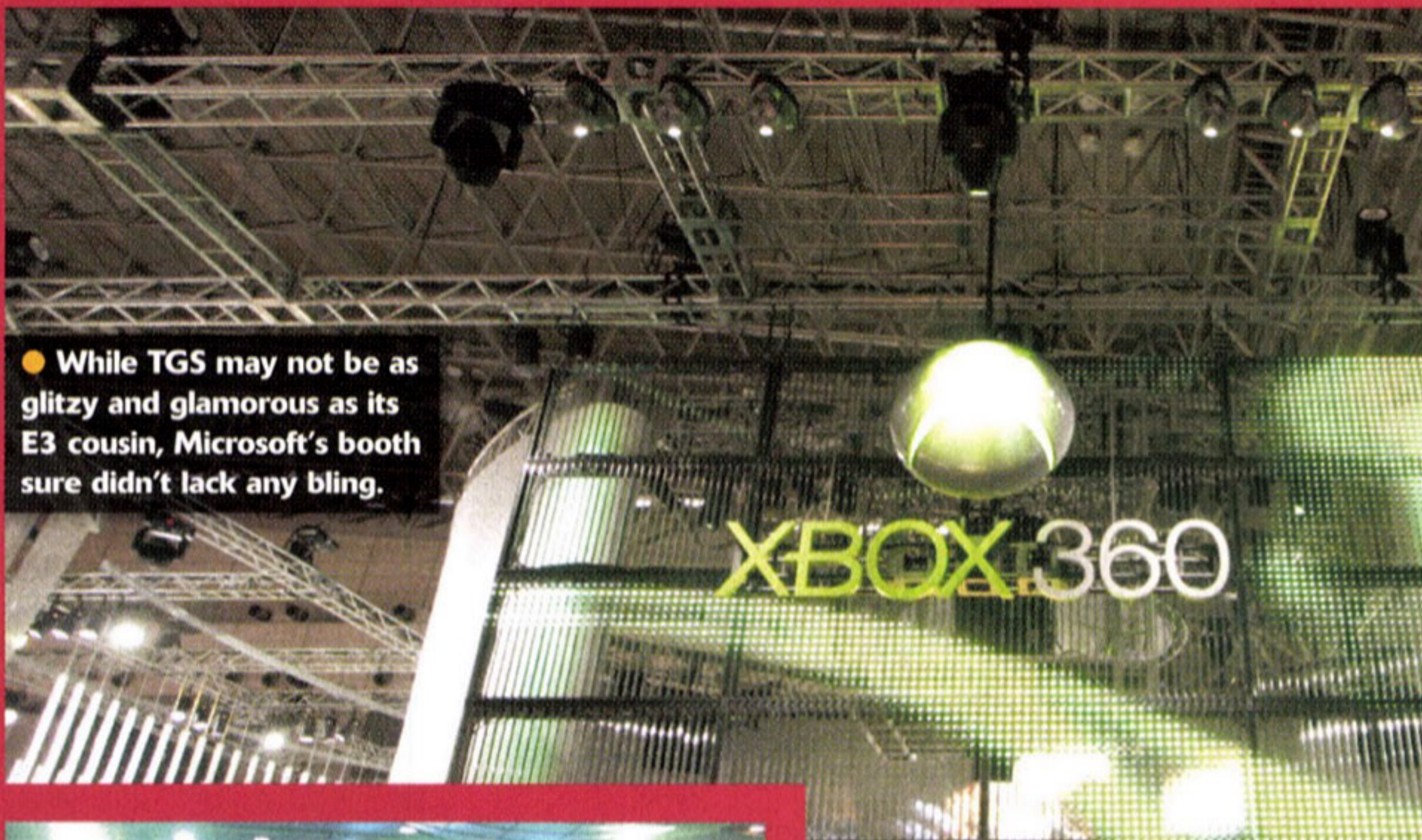
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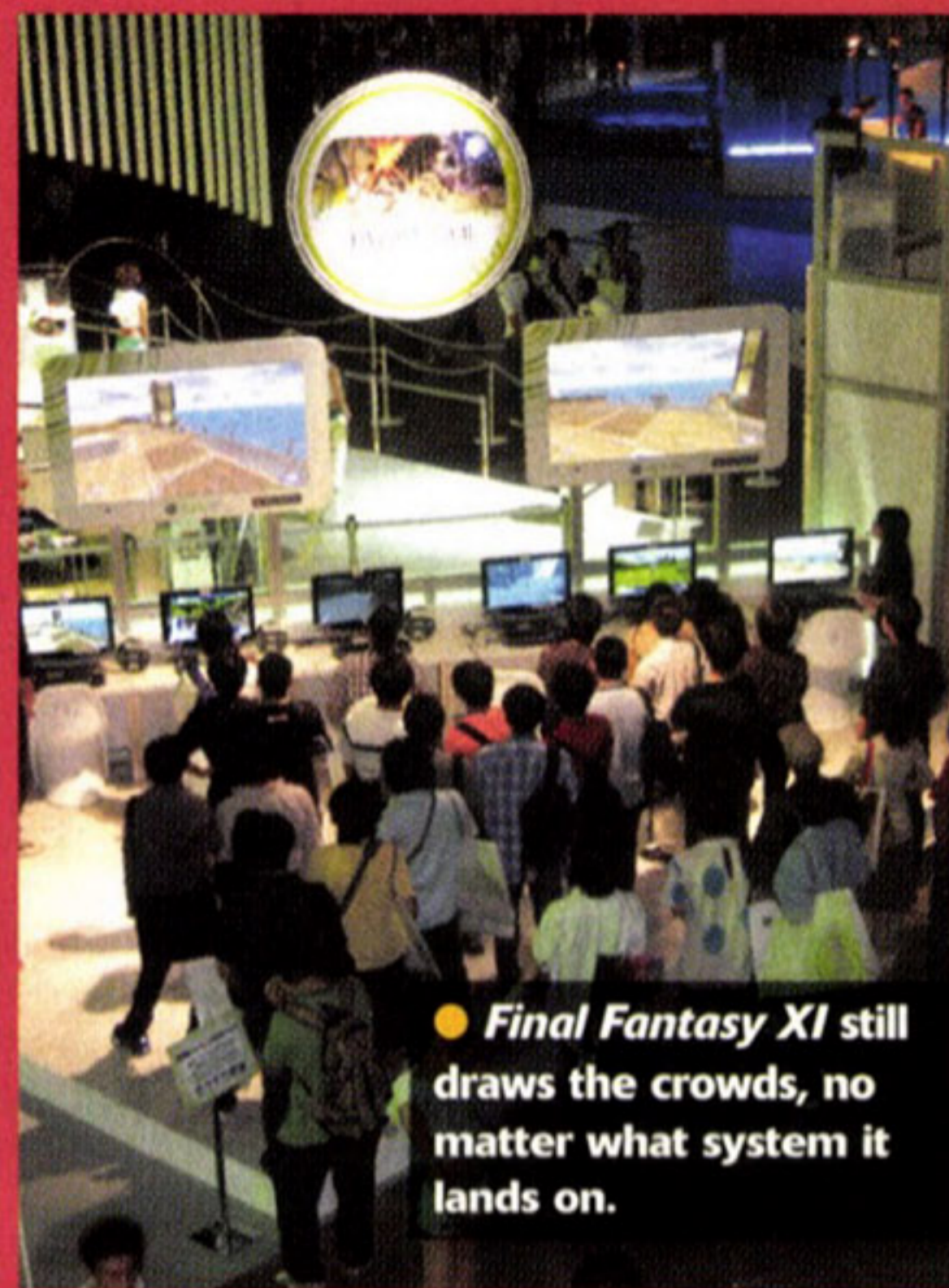
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
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Blood
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Use of Drugs and Alcohol





● While TGS may not be as glitzy and glamorous as its E3 cousin, Microsoft's booth sure didn't lack any bling.



● Final Fantasy XI still draws the crowds, no matter what system it lands on.



● Can you feel the excitement of this press conference? No?



Thursday September 15th, 2005

The Microsoft press conference. If consumer interest is indifferent to Xbox 360 (as suggested by oft-quoted recent polls), then at least the press is willing to hear Microsoft's pitch. It was standing room only at the press conference that saw Xbox Japan's general manager, Yoshihiro Muruyama, introduce Xbox 360 and reveal its December 10th release date for the territory.

We heard that over 100 games were in development for Xbox 360 in Japan (of which 66 have been announced), and that probably seven would be available on Day One in this territory (around 15 are expected on launch day in the U.S. and Europe).

Although *DOA4* was the shining example of Xbox 360's power at E3, Epic's *Gears of War* and Phantagram's *Ninety-Nine Nights* got headlining honors at TGS. Epic's producer CliffyB introduced *Gears*, showing the same footage we saw back in May.

A single version of Xbox 360 with wireless controllers and a hard drive was announced. We heard a rumor that this hard-drive-only option was decided on largely in the hopes of getting the *Final Fantasy XI* beta software available at launch (and if you want to play this MMO, you need the hard drive). Comment on the price of ¥37,900 was mixed – it was expensive for some, seemed a cheap option for others, and was classified as "appropriate" by Muruyama.

Fresh insight, exciting developer news? Maybe another day.

Friday September 16th, 2005

One and a half hours, one train and two subway rides, a warren of tunnels, platforms, and escalators, and finally I arrive at the Makuhari Messe convention center outside Tokyo in Chiba for the opening of the show. Unlike the trade-only E3 show, TGS is open to consumers on Saturday and Sunday. That means Friday is the quieter day for appointments and playing games before the flood of gamers on the weekend.

Time for Chief Xbox Officer Robbie Bach's keynote speech. Covering the same ground as the press conference, Bach did make some bold statements, such as setting a goal of "global market leadership in the next generation," and he added that the power question between 360 and PS3 was essentially a toss-up – "they do some processes faster, we do others." So if that's the case, the success is down to services (Xbox Live being the jewel in Microsoft's crown) and games. A big retail-marketing blitz is also planned, including spots in stores already showing Xbox 360 systems, and letting the Japanese videogame consumer know that Microsoft is really really serious this time.



● It was easy to take a clear picture. The Xbox 360 display had only a few casual observers while most consumers were packed around the recently released (and crazy tiny) Game Boy Micro.



What do I love?

**I love beautiful sunsets.
Unless they're too bright because
then I have to squint.
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**For not much money I can get
a lot of kickin' food which I love.**

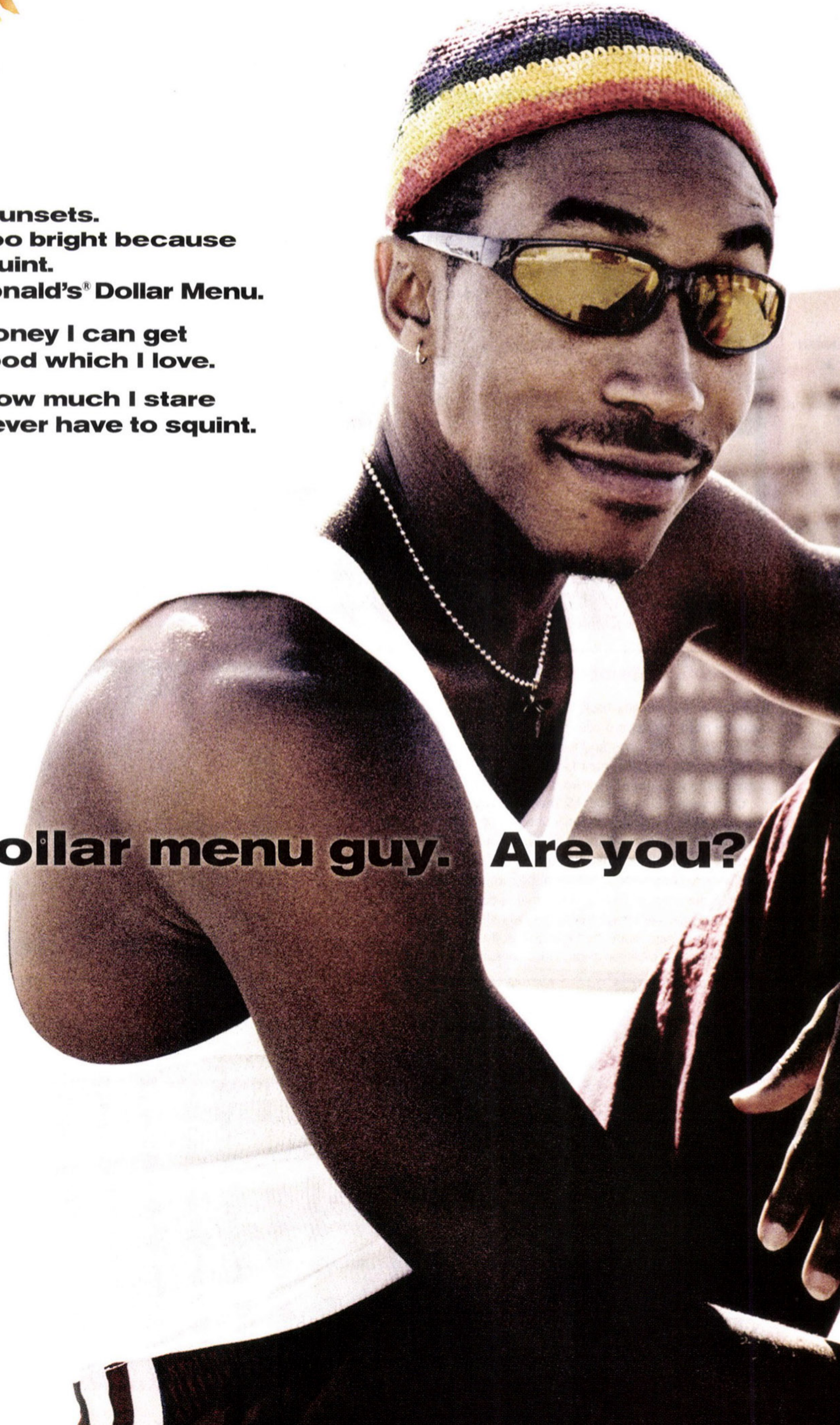
**And no matter how much I stare
at the menu, I never have to squint.**



I'm a dollar menu guy. Are you?



i'm lovin' it™





The Show Within the Show

In an open area between the main two halls of TGS is a concourse blocked at one end by the giant smoking section and the other by a big wall. In between are the "cosplayers" (a slang word combining "costume" and "players") – people that come to TGS; spend maybe an hour or more to pay \$5 for the privilege of changing into their game, manga, or anime character costumes; then congregate outside while impeccably polite cameramen stand in line and request photo sessions.

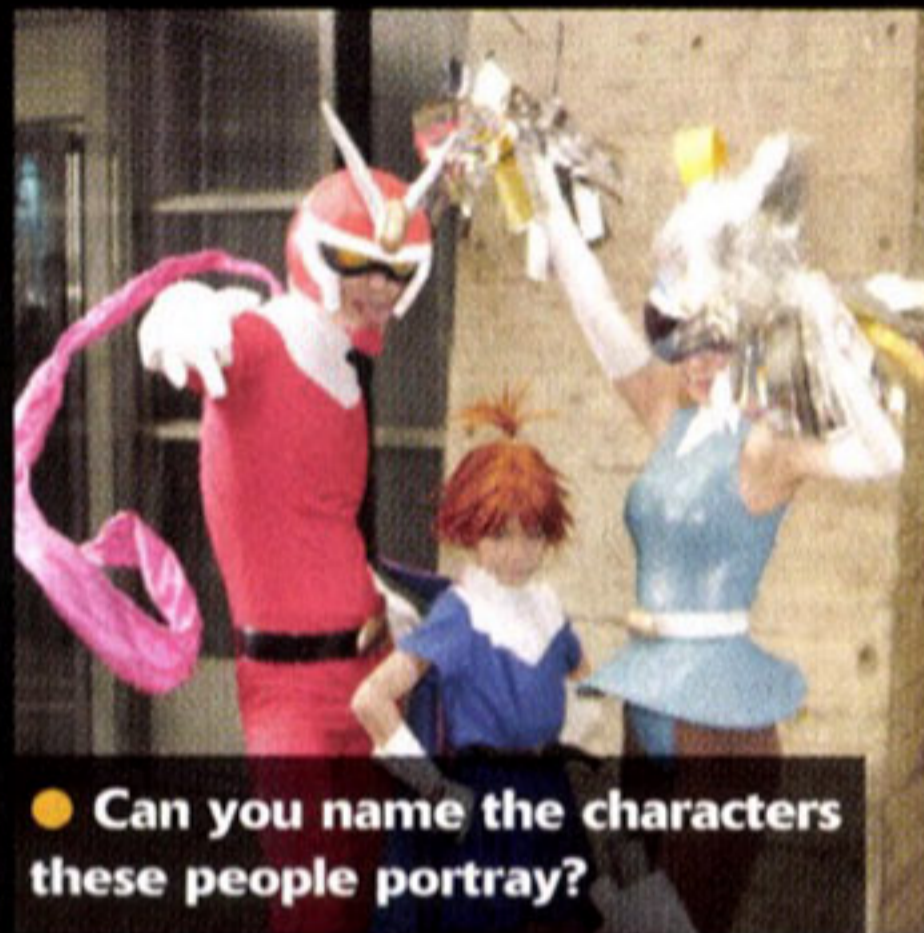
If you don't ask permission to take pics? A very polite Japanese 20-something taps you on the shoulder, and reading from his cell-phone translator, tells you that you need permission from the "performers" before taking pics. As an ugly American, you nod, agree, and continue snapping away from a distance.



● Need ratings? G4 TV's Adam Sessler dons awful eggplant costume in an attempt to bond with the cosplayers to get the inside scoop! Lines around the more scantily clad cosplayers could get long – up to 20 people deep – and could take an hour or more (apparently). Funnily enough, nobody was queueing up to take pics of the eggplant!



● Smart tip – get a costume that covers you head to toe.



● Can you name the characters these people portray?

Saturday September 17th, 2005

First stop of the day: Microsoft VP Peter Moore, the man behind the big Japanese push. So Japan is still an important market, is it? "It's still the second biggest," he says, "and it's important that someone competes with Sony here...it's important for people like the Capcom and Namco presidents to walk out of their front door with Xbox as a viable platform."

On broader issues in the U.S. market, I asked Moore about the two-SKU 360 strategy in the U.S. (only one version will be available in Japan – the one that comes with the hard drive). Clearly frustrated to hear the question, Moore offered that "you'd be surprised how many gamers don't want to save games," meaning they wouldn't need to spend the \$40 on a memory card would make that option only \$59 less than the loaded package. We'll leave that to you to reflect on. And with price sensitivity as a major issue, he believes that the Core System offers a viable option to a more price-conscious consumer.



● Even in Japan, gaming geeks are the same – we all still camp out for 30 second game trailers.

Everyparty Developer: Game Republic Publisher: Microsoft Release Date: December 10, 2005

It's not going to get a U.S. release, but *Everyparty* is worth mentioning mainly because of its enigmatic creator, Yoshiki Okamoto. Hardcore-gamers' games fill his résumé from his time at Capcom, including the classic *Street Fighter* series.

Why this kind of game? "I wanted a game for the Japanese market, and also to create an excuse for a Japanese father to go buy the 360 hardware so that he can play a game with his children," Okamoto told us. "By the way, I got divorced two years ago, and this is the only way I can get to play with the kids," he joked.

So something like *Katamari* or *Mario Party*? "I wanted to make a game to be enjoyed by everyone – a party game," Okamoto told us as he cooled himself with a fan decorated with characters from the game. "It's very hot," he says of the hotel room, "and I'm a middle-aged man." "I'm hot, too," I offer in sympathy. "Ah, because you're a middle-aged man, too," he fires back. Er, thanks!

Meanwhile, back to the demo, this creative virtual boardgame lets you customize your avatar by winning items as you race to the end (around 30 minutes to an hour per game). You can then wear items like ties, coats, and potatoes (!) on your head to strike a unique pose in the Xbox Live lobby.





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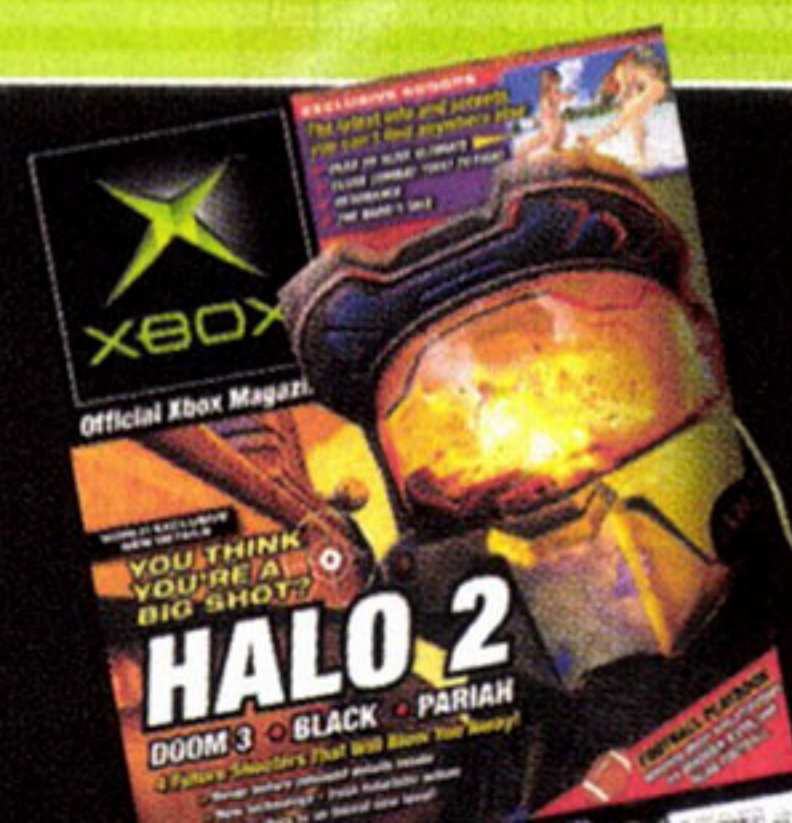
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Ninety-Nine Nights

Developer: Q Entertainment/Phantagram Publisher: Microsoft Release Date: TBA

Originally considered to be a Japan-only release, the reaction at TGS to *N3* (as it's handily known) may very well be sufficient enough to get it on U.S. shelves, according to Xbox's Peter Moore. Why the hype? This epic third-person action game wowed conference attendees with its spectacular special effects as the sword-wielding heroine Inphy (one of seven playable characters in the game) blazed through hundreds and then more than a thousand enemies in one hyper-caffeinated display of stunning power.

Brought together by Microsoft Japan, Tetsuya Mizuguchi's Q Entertainment is busy at work on concept and design while Sangyoun Lee's Phantagram (of *Kingdom Under Fire* fame) provides its technical and development expertise to the graphics engine and level building. "We have very good chemistry," says Mizuguchi, the charismatic head of Q. The collaboration promises plenty of attention to music – a benchmark set by Mizuguchi's previous works (*Rez*, *Lumines*, *Space Channel 5*).



● Don't call it *Dynasty Warriors* – *Ninety-Nine Nights* promises more depth and just the right amount of drama.



● Self-proclaimed "blood brothers" – Q's Mizuguchi (left) and Phantagram's Lee (right) have collaborated on *N3* from the outset of development.



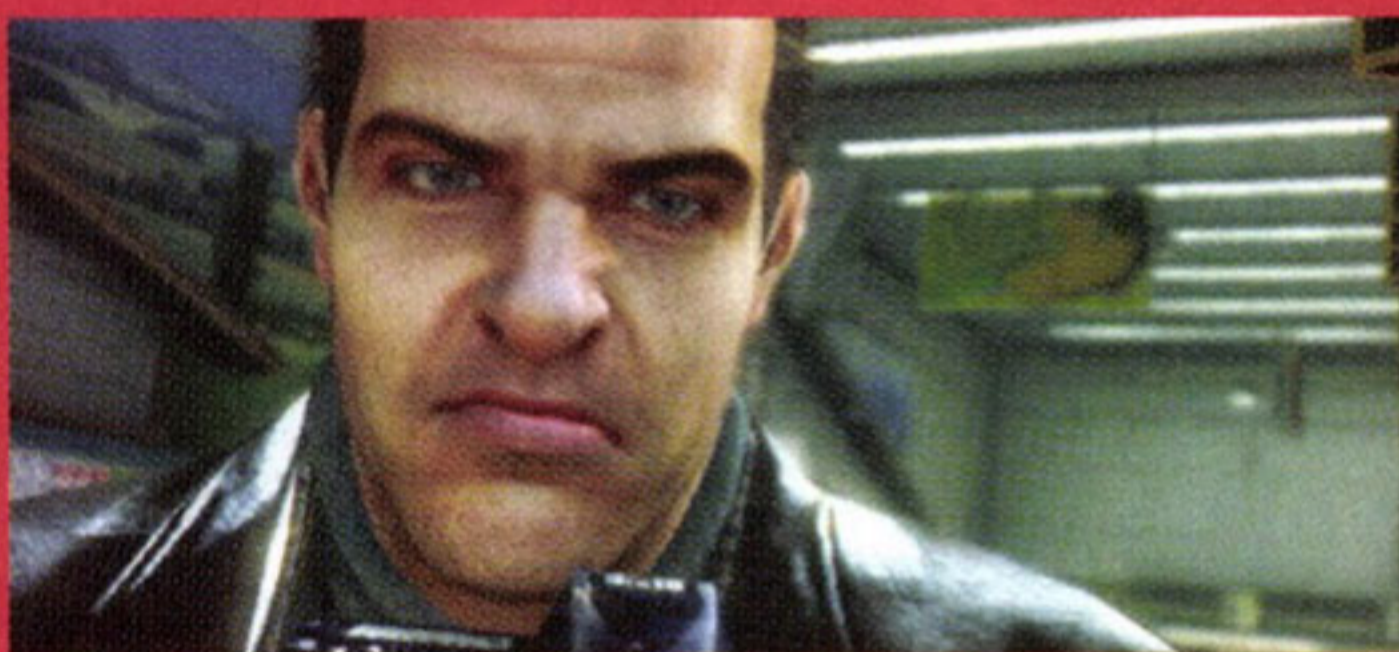
Dead Rising

Developer: Capcom Publisher: Capcom Release date: Spring 2006

This new game from Keiji Inafune (*Mega Man*) looks fabulous – and if you doubt the potential of yet another zombie game, well...don't! Your photojournalist character cuts a swath through hundreds of zombies with a lawnmower! And a chainsaw. And a baseball bat. A tin bucket. How about a patio umbrella? This open-style third-person action game is brimming with the tools to let your own imagination run riot.

It pays to look around the environment as almost any object could be a potential weapon. Sure, smacking down five zombies with one baseball-bat swing for the fences is fun enough, but give them a chance, and one will leap at your neck and start

devouring, requiring you to pound on a button to shake yourself free. Recovering human survivors is important as well because they might just help you later on down the zombie-infested road.



● The all-American phenomenon of shopping malls takes a sinister turn in *Dead Rising*. All those everyday products (brooms, fire extinguishers, and the like) can now be used against the ever-hungry, encroaching zombie hordes.

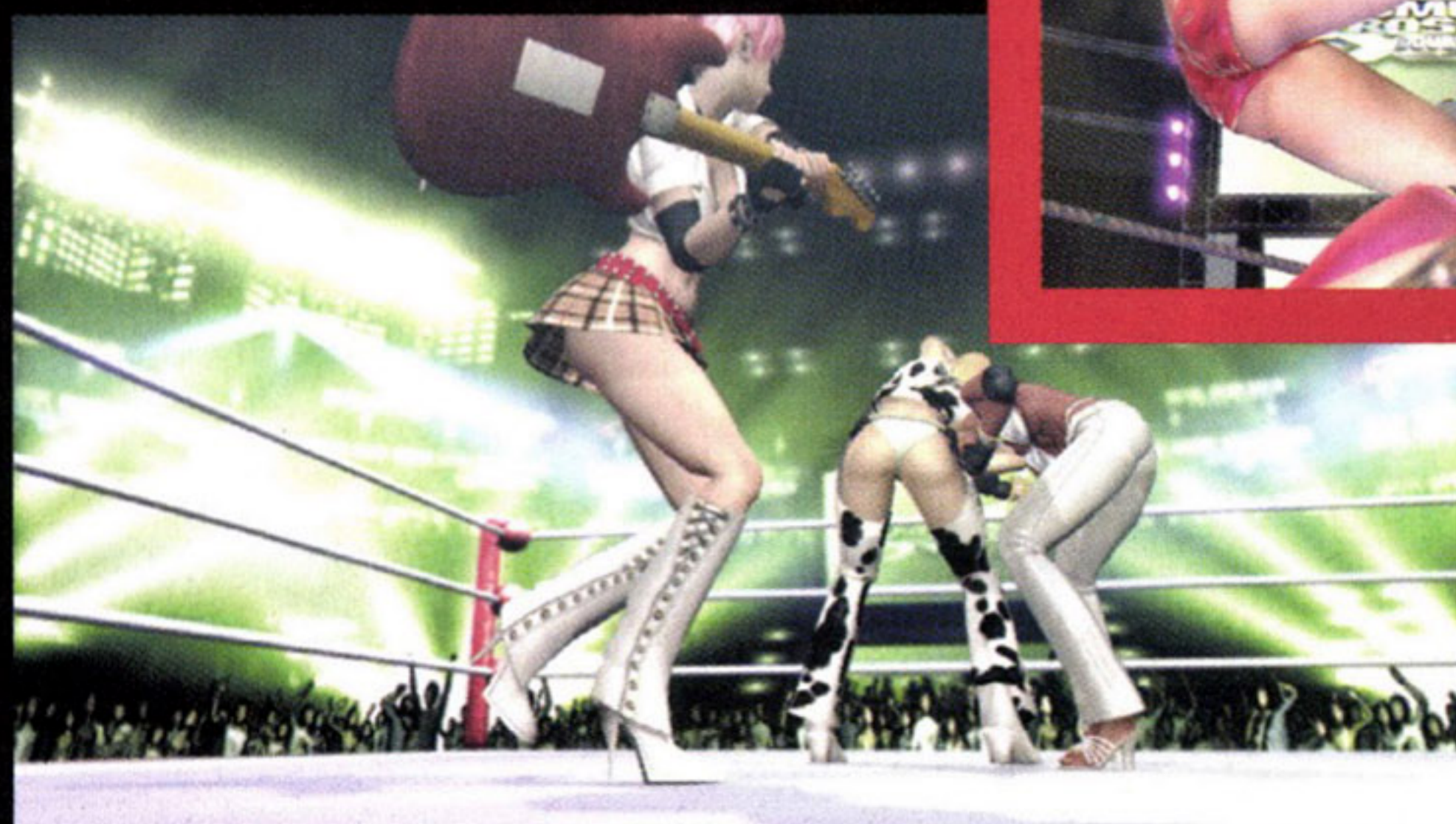
Rumble Roses XX

Developer: Konami Publisher: Konami Release Date: TBA

In what seemed to be the sweltering conference-center basement, *Rumble Roses* developer Akira Uchida talked about the second chapter in the series, which is coming to Xbox 360. Though its PS2 cousin launched last year, this all-female wrestler is adding tag-team wrestling as well as a fighting-game mode, according to Uchida. "I don't want to create a catfight game," he told us, "because that degrades the characters."

New modes are being added, including one that's called the Queen's Match. Uchida wouldn't elaborate much further on what this would entail, other than to say that it's based on a Japanese drinking game called King's Game. Whatever it is, Uchida chuckles thinking about their office play-testing, and guarantees it will be the most-played mode when it launches. "Many of the CG artists

[at Konami] saw the original game, and when they were approached to work on this sequel, said 'hell yeah,'" Uchida exclaimed.



● A brand-new Superstar Mode will be included in *Rumble Roses XX*, offering up superpowered wrestlers with cheeky unlockable costumes.

NO TIME FOR SECOND CHANCES

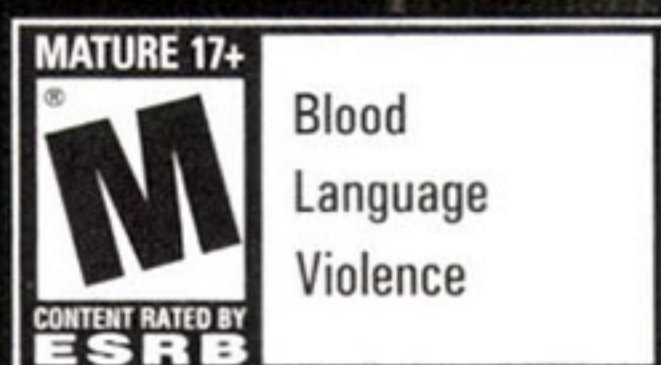
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PlayStation 2

CAPCOM

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Big in Japan

Over 100 games are currently in development for Xbox 360 in Japan. Many of those were confirmed at the Japan Summit earlier this year, and plenty of big names have joined the party, though their appearance in the U.S. won't be decided for a long time. A few highlights from the video reel at Microsoft's booth delivering the latest...

Ridge Racer 6 Namco

We could tell why Namco's racer was kept low-key during the event. Its visuals lack some of the next-gen polish we've seen in games like *Need for Speed*, *PGR3*, and Sega's *Full Auto*. Even the handling seemed sluggish, and comparisons to the PSP *Ridge Racer* didn't seem too off-base. We're hoping for a real push to polish before its release.

Sonic the Hedgehog Sega

Looks like the blue-haired hero has a bone to pick with the remnants of Star Wars' *Clone Wars*. Bouncing off trees, taking down robots...? Sonic is clearly ready for a new platform experience.

Bomberman: Air Zero Hudsonsoft

Wish we knew more. One of the greatest multiplayer games of all time (on Super Nintendo) has a 3D treatment and the same core gameplay plan. We're watching...

Mobile Suit Gundam Bandai

Big robots, giant suits, über-power, and an action-figure set to fit every offering...it may arrive on U.S. shores if fans clamor loudly enough.

Far East of Eden: Ziria Hudsonsoft

A completely retooled riff on the original title in the much-beloved, four-strong series that made PC Engine the premier RPG destination back in the day.

Armored Core 4 From Software

A brief glimpse of what enormous mech units can do to each other in a high-definition future is enough to color us intrigued by what From Software can deliver with its premier franchise.

World Air Force Taito

Sorta *Afterburner*-ish, but with graphics that display in terrific detail the ground 15,000 feet below your jet. It's a real long shot for U.S. release.

[cm] Enchant Arm From Software

A name change would be vital if this RPG were ever to get a U.S. release. Don't count on that, though.

Dynasty Warriors 4 Special Koei

If *DW*-style mass-melee character-combat RPG craziness is your thing, then *Ninety-Nine Nights* is what you're looking for. *DW Special* follows the series' traditions but may not get a U.S. release.



● *Ridge Racer 6* is racing to Xbox 360 for the system's launch.



Monday September 19th, 2005

Today is a national holiday. Some kind of elders' day, apparently. That means most places were closed, including the Tecmo office when I dutifully arrived a half hour early.

At 1pm I wander in the door of Team Ninja and into a lounge-like demo room. The legendary designer, Tomonobu Itagaki, walks in ten minutes later, a white gauzy mask covering most of his face. It's apparently cleaning day today – decided on a whim when Itagaki came in, held his staff meeting, and told everyone to put down programming tools and clean the place up. So the mask is to keep him from inhaling dust. Itagaki then pulls it off and lights up the first of several cigarettes...

"I'm in a good mood today," says the often-moody Itagaki. That's a good start. And we kick off talking about where the game is (about 50 percent complete, he offers) and what he likes among the Xbox 360 launch line-up. "*Call of Duty 2*," he quickly responds. "If I were ever to make a war game, that is the game that I would make." Would he ever consider making a war game? "Right after I do *Tecmo Bowl*," he laughs, meaning never!

How happy is Itagaki with the progress so far? "It would be lying to say everything is smooth sailing...it's all about the issue of time," he says, somewhat resigned to pulling a number of long stints between now and launch.

Has the time crunch to launch forced any compromises on the original design spec? "There's no compromise on the quality," says Itagaki of his determination to make this the best-looking, best-feeling game on 360. "But I've had to compromise on volume. I realized it wasn't possible to fit all the costumes and battle stages on the hard drive, so the plan is to make them available [for a fee] through the Marketplace...and that will help cover the maintenance of the online servers."

New modes had also been suggested, but time is pressing. The one that Itagaki wants to include is a photo mode. "I'm interested personally in photography, and I'm taking lessons with a professional so I can take pro shots of my own," he reveals.

Itagaki then shows us several of the final ending movies for *DOA4*. While I can't spoil the details of each, I can assure you they're worth earning. Several are absolutely hilarious – and that was a surprise. After seeing brooding action scenes, the comedy of some of the movies was amazing. You will get to see what's under newcomer La Mariposa's mask (then be able to play as her without the mask), and you'll watch Kokoro's finale time and time again – I guarantee that!

And with that, two hours was up, and Itagaki pops his mask back on to rejoin the cleaning efforts. Tomorrow he works on the game!



● Tecmo's Itagaki in one of his many pensive moments.



● This is what it's all about – Kokoro, one of *DOA4*'s new glamour girls.

GREAT PLAYERS LEAVE THEIR MARK!



SPAT MAGAZINE

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TEEN
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Dead or Alive 4 Developer: Tecmo Publisher: Tecmo Release date: November 22, 2005

I'm prepared for an ass-whopping. I hopped around the Halloween-themed lobby that'll be available on Xbox Live and works as a type of chat room. The right-analog stick controls eight different emotes that each of the 20-30 characters can display. An underwater lobby is also promised, and Itagaki also revealed that other bizarre lobbies (houses) among the ten to ship with the game include a candy house, a ninja house, and a cloud house. "They're all kind of weird," says Itagaki, "but when you spend time with a game like DOA4, you do this kind of thing for a change of pace." In these houses, you'll be able to buy objects like a TV that lets you watch fights in progress, and you can upgrade the size and quality of the TV set! This is Itagaki's nod to player customization since you won't be able to break the canon of the series by changing the costumes of the characters.

So, time to do battle. Each character I tried exhibited very tight handling on the Xbox 360 controller (which Itagaki rates a "95 percent, only because nothing could get 100 percent"). I fire up series newcomer Kokoro, and get soundly whopped as her moves appear to require more technical finesse than I can muster. But the look of the characters and the tactile feel with the blows is impressive.

Using new character Elliot on the temple battle stage (with the monkeys and steps made famous by the E3 trailer), I manage to smack Itagaki's Christie over the edge, leap down in the hope of finishing her off...only to get soundly slapped down with a countermove. It's Itagaki's intention that countermoves and critical hits will be fairly tough to pull off for newcomers as they're

intended to require practice and show the depth of your skill.

The ninja Ryu is my shining moment! After a few close matches where I got Itagaki's character down to a tiny shard of health, only to come unstuck, I finally get two wins to take the round. "Again!" he barks, restarting with the same characters for a rematch in which he shows who's boss by giving me a sound pummeling!



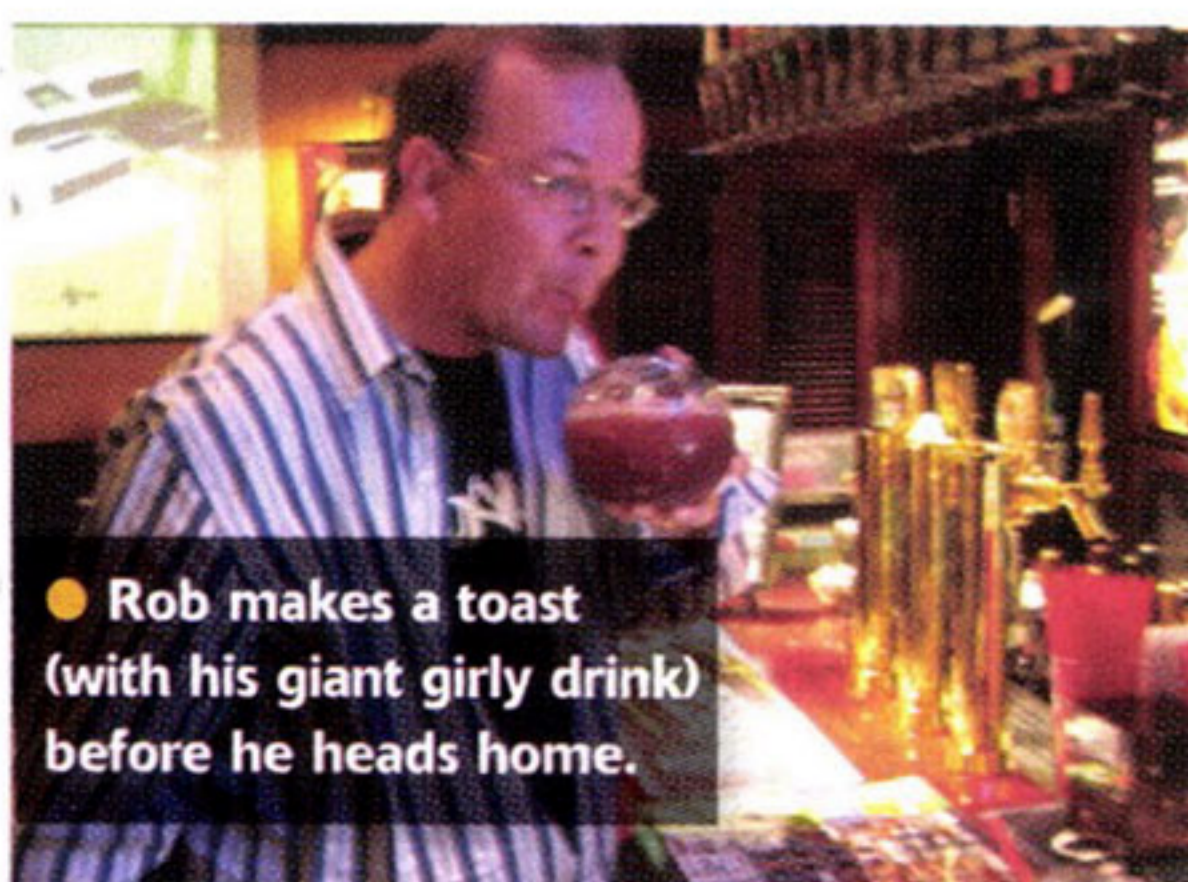
● La Mariposa gets down with Bass in the wrestling ring – motion blur and all.



● The Xbox 360 booth welcomed curious gamers with open arms – and a cute booth babe. Kawaii.



● Bye bye for now, Tokyo – same time, same place next year!



● Rob makes a toast (with his giant girly drink) before he heads home.

Tuesday September 20th, 2005

Homeward bound. It's been a long but fascinating trip to witness first-hand Microsoft's commitment to the Japanese market. The most important question still remains: Will the smart thinking, the signing of key developers, the launch lineup and post-launch support, Xbox Live, and hi-def gaming all combine into an appealing ¥39,700 (about \$360) purchase for the Japanese gamer? The numbers on December 10th will tell a big part of the story as a strong performance out of the gate is vital before Sony gets its PS3 juggernaut rolling.

And I have to say, the trip was about more than Microsoft and Xbox 360. In a culture so ordered and polite, where business is conducted for the most part with a respectful deference, possibly the highlight of the trip was Konami's karaoke event on Sunday. I've heard rumors, but never witnessed a scene like it. Respectable developers, who earlier in the week had been stoically answering questions, let it rip when the door of the karaoke room closed. How can I forget *Castlevania* producer Koji Igarashi belting out Chicago's crooner classic "Hard to Say I'm Sorry"?

Video games are clearly a vital thread in the fabric of the Japanese culture. PSP ads adorn subway trains. PS2 kiosks outside electronics stores let gamers try the latest release. And Xbox titles are passed over on their little shelf space within these cavernous gaming emporiums. And that's what Microsoft intends to change...

XBOX





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MUTATE YOUR TURTLE

4-PLAYER COOPERATIVE ATTACK

UNLOCK TURTLES IN TIME



PlayStation 2



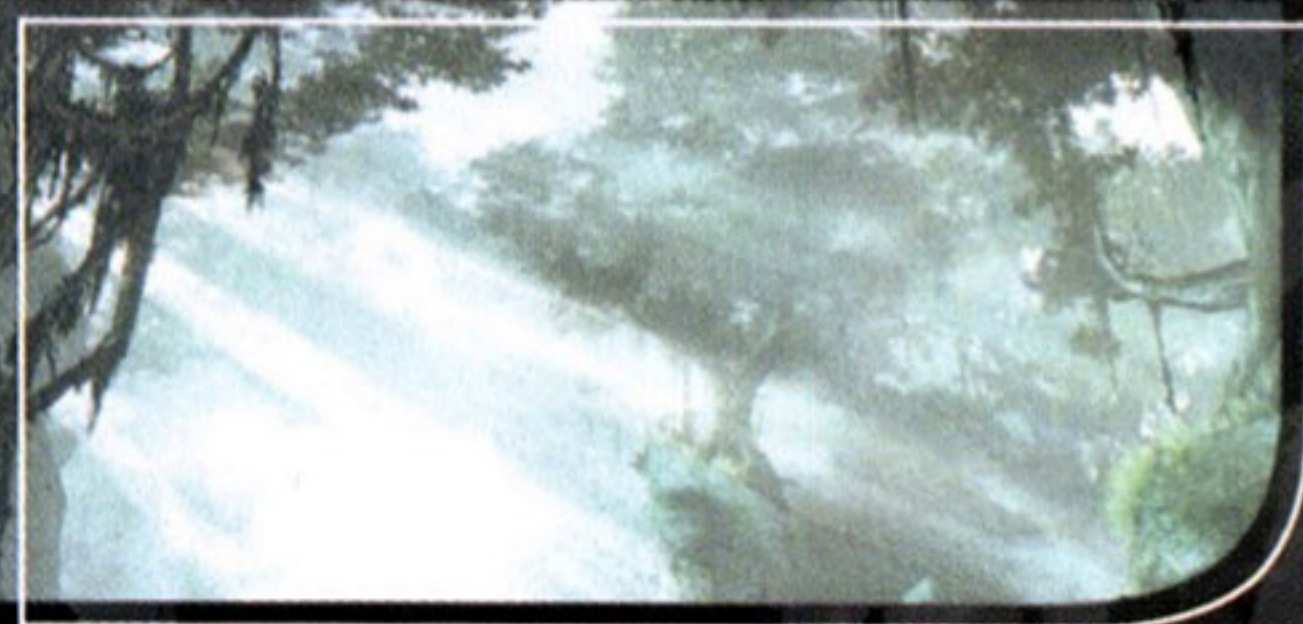
NINTENDO DS



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LOOK INTO THE EYES OF THE

EYES OF THE



THINK YOU KNOW KONG? THINK AGAIN.

BREATHING HEAVILY, YOU CROUCH IN A DENSE THICKET OF JUNGLE VINES. Twenty yards away, a hungry Tyrannosaur rages through the trees, hunting for his dinner. Fear pierces your gut as you realize your trusty weapon is empty. Suddenly, an impossibly huge ape bodyslams the T-Rex, sending it sprawling. And a titanic struggle erupts before your eyes. Welcome to Skull Island – and the unforgettable world of Peter Jackson's King Kong.

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BEAST



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ING KONG FIRST MADE HIS CINEMATIC DEBUT in 1933, thrilling audiences with a powerful story and

groundbreaking special effects for its time. Peter Jackson's current reimagining promises to do no less, bringing the perilous world of Skull Island to life as only Jackson can – Jackson and famed game designer Michel Ancel, that is.

+ + + + + + + +

AN AVID GAMER, PETER JACKSON STARTED DREAMING UP IDEAS

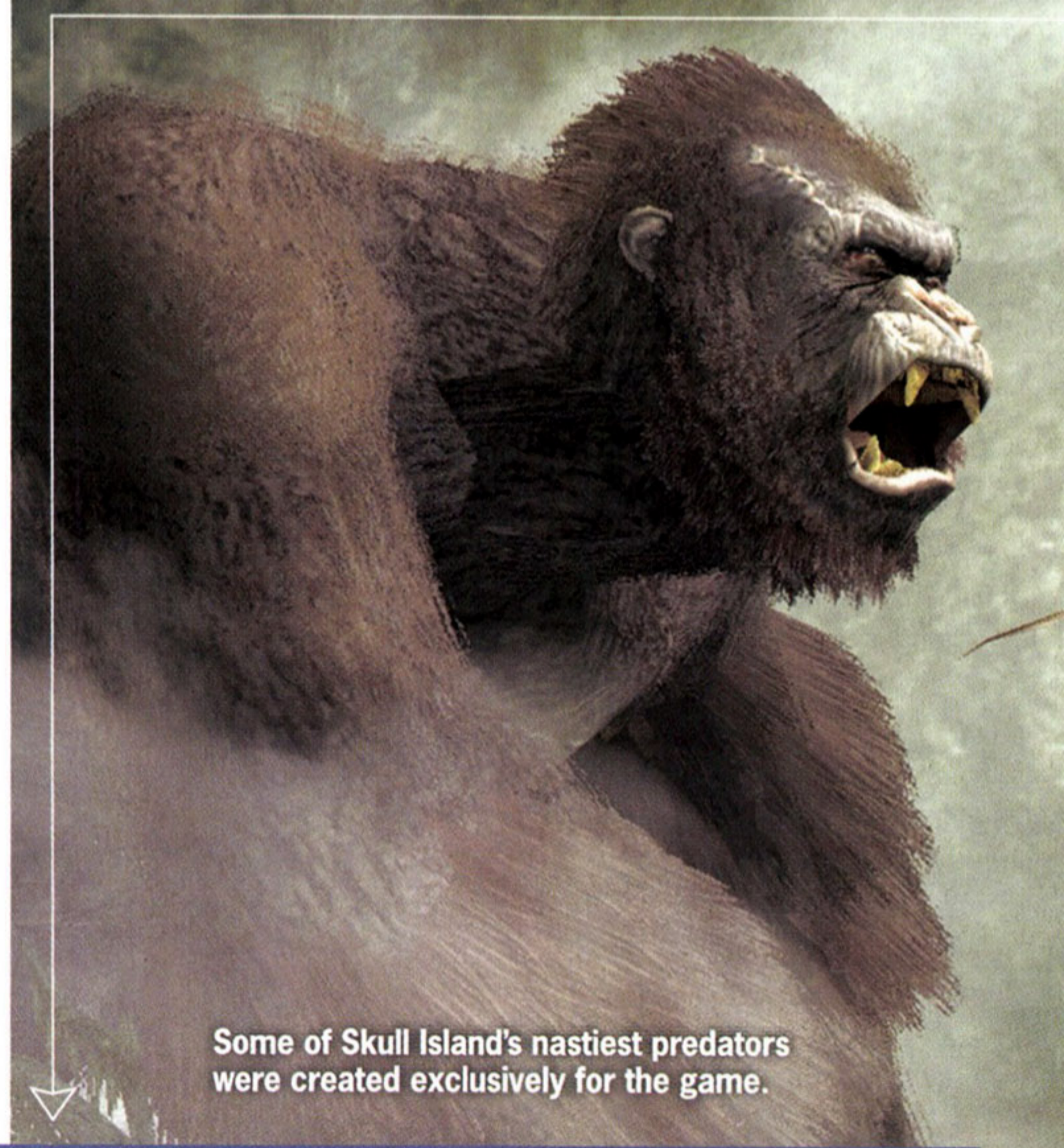
for a King Kong video game as soon as he started the movie. But to make a video game as memorable as the movie, he needed a creative partner with a true talent for rendering both fantasy and emotion. Then he played *Beyond Good & Evil™*, an epic adventure crafted by renowned game designer Michel Ancel. Right away, Jackson knew he'd found his man. And, judging by the jaw-dropping beauty and intensity of the gameplay, Jackson and Ancel have succeeded brilliantly.

BREATHING LIFE INTO A LEGEND

Jackson and Ancel set out to create a game deeper and more immersive than the film itself. So the game had to look and feel just as convincing as the "real" world captured on film. To achieve this, the development team used every trick in the book – plus a few that aren't.

A rare technique called "inverse kinematics" adds frightening realism to the behavior of Skull Island's predators. This technique varies and synchronizes the animations used for each type of creature, depending on the creature's AI. For example, if you're detected by a T-Rex, you'll see the monster turn its eyes and head directly toward you, lunging over rocks and smashing through the jungle in a convincing attempt to make you its dinner.

But techniques like inverse kinematics would mean little without a sophisticated AI system governing the behavior of Skull Island's denizens. Some species attack alone, while others use clever pursuit tactics to attack in groups. Fortunately, your enemies aren't the only intelligent creatures on Skull Island. Your crew will protect you, suggest solutions to problems, and generally react as real humans – real scared humans – would.

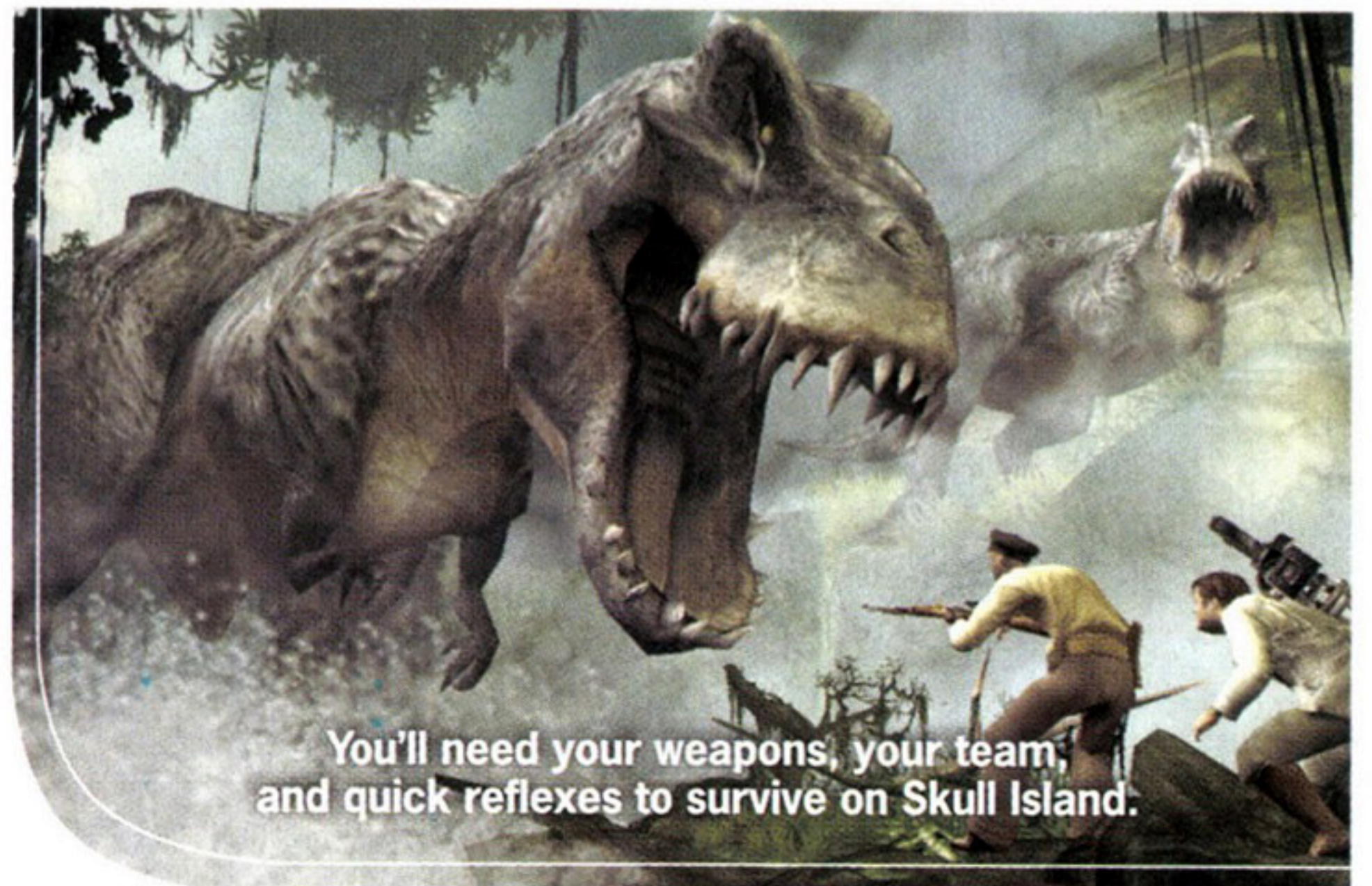


Some of Skull Island's nastiest predators were created exclusively for the game.

"[Ancel] has just a great storytelling skill in making you so involved in the game as a player that you actually become emotionally attached to the characters that you're playing with." – Peter Jackson.

And just wait till you feast your eyes on the stunningly detailed jungle of Skull Island. Thanks to clever layering of the largest number of 2D sprites, filters, and effects ever used in any video game – including meteorological effects like water, fog, wind, fire, and smoke – you'll almost be able to feel the hot, humid jungle air. Blades of grass rustle convincingly around your legs. Sunlight patterns shift subtly. In short, this jungle doesn't just look pretty. It feels alive.

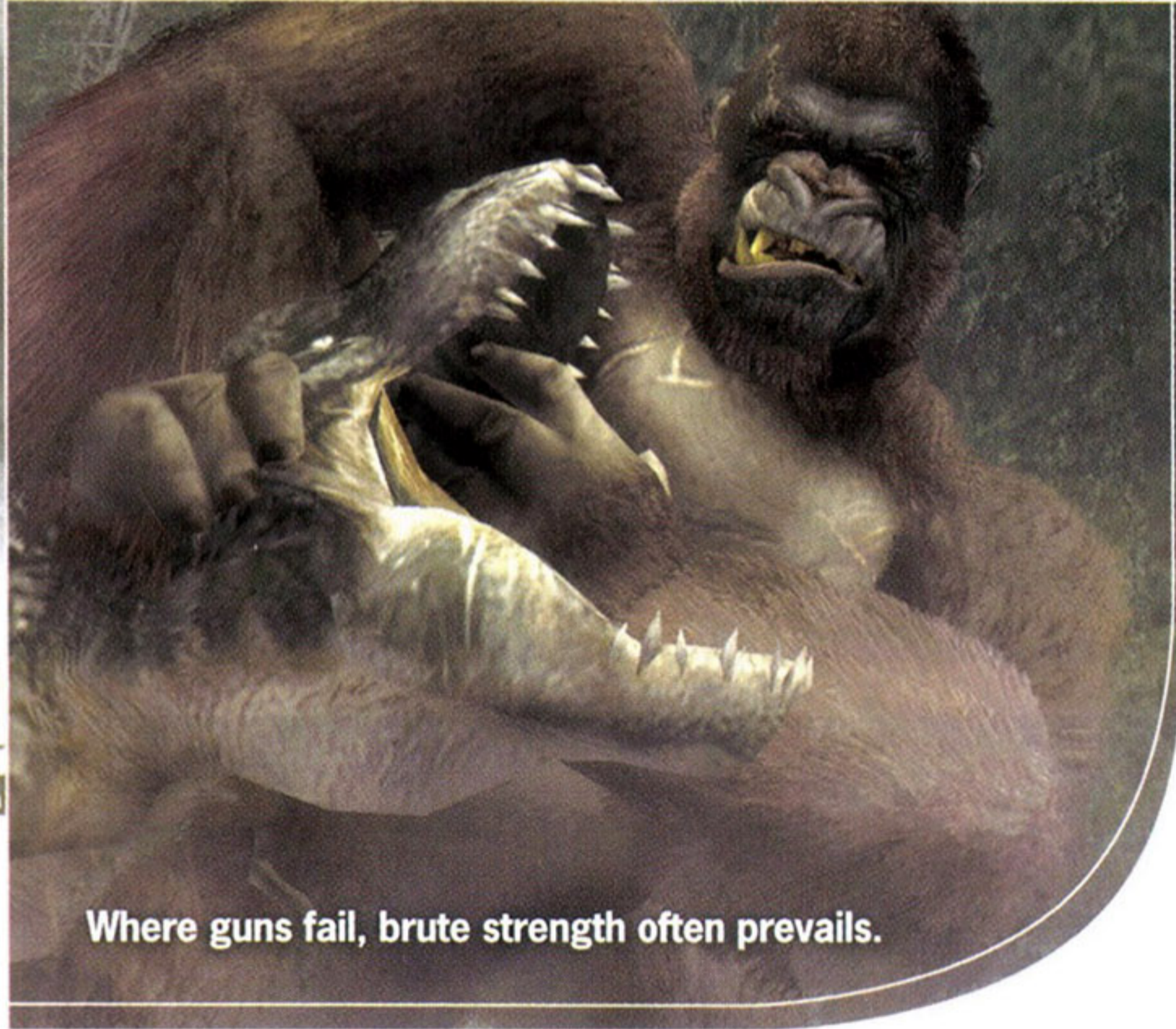
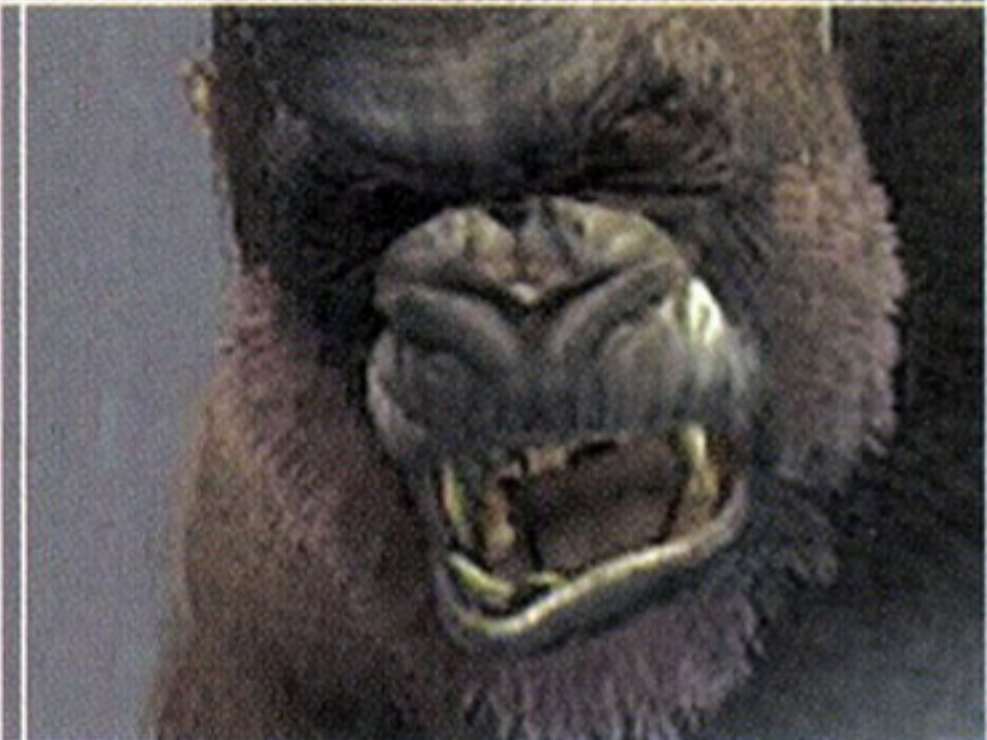
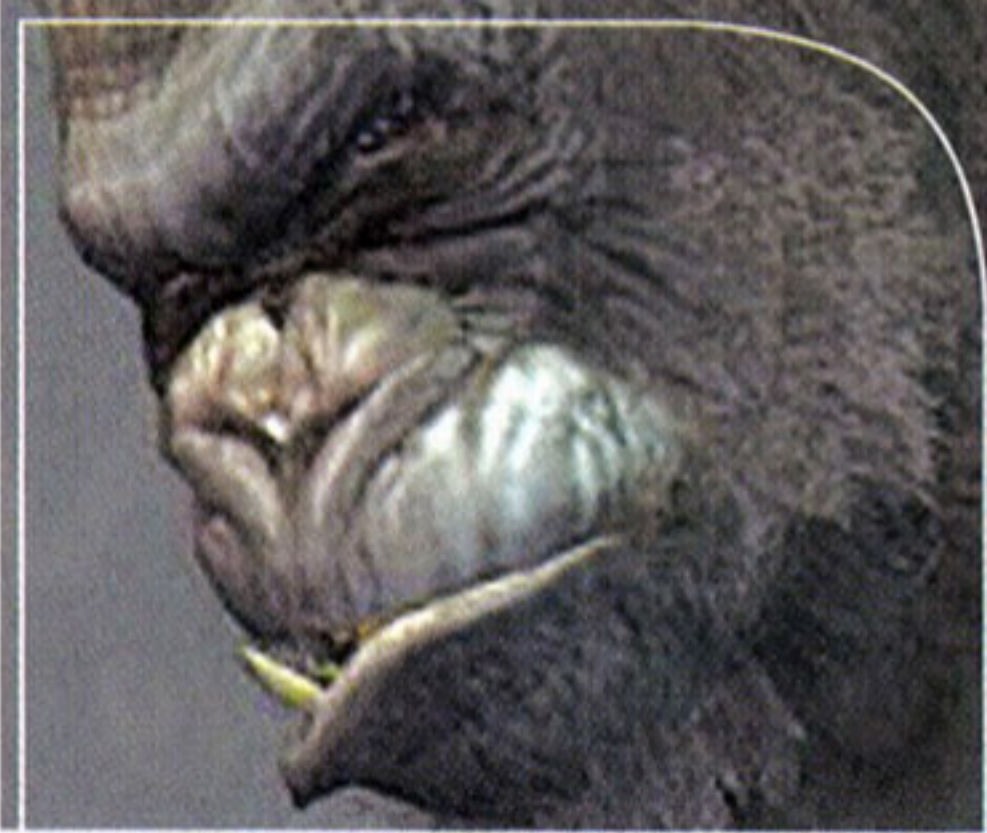
Perhaps the greatest creation of all is Kong himself. Agile and powerful, Kong moves through Skull Island with remarkable force and speed. And take a close look at his fur; the dev team used intricate 3D effects to actually animate each separate strand. The overall effect is breathtakingly real.



You'll need your weapons, your team, and quick reflexes to survive on Skull Island.



WWW.KINGKONGGAME.COM



Where guns fail, brute strength often prevails.

A MASSIVE STEP FORWARD: INNOVATIONS IN IMMERSION

Every technical decision for Peter Jackson's King Kong has been made with an eye to thoroughly immersing the player in the world of the game. For example, you can still move and look around while scripted plot events occur, unlike nearly all other games. And the absence of a heads-up display makes the action feel more immediate. For example, when your character suffers an injury, you won't see any shrinking "health bar." Instead, your vision will blur and turn red.

The game also offers new experiences that don't appear in the movie. In addition to movie creatures, Jackson added beasts not seen in the film. Multiple pathways offer you a different experience every time you play, so that you'll never have to play the same game twice. The difficulty level scales fluidly according to your performance, growing more challenging as you improve.

Most impressive of all is the range of emotions evoked by the alternating gameplay possibilities. By inviting you to play as both Jack Driscoll and Kong himself, the game delivers an unforgettable mix of intensity, realism, and entertainment through a rare combination of first- and third-person play.

PLAYING WITH POWER: HEROES GREAT AND SMALL

Conceived by Jackson and realized to phenomenal effect by the development team, the dual gameplay between Jack and Kong delivers a dramatic shift in perspective and power.

As Jack Driscoll, you're outnumbered and overpowered by predators bigger, stronger, and faster than you. To heighten the sense of fear and danger, you play Jack's role in first-person. You'll have to advance through a dense jungle, never knowing what lurks behind the next tree. Armed only

with the weapons you can carry, you'll never win just by fighting. To stay alive, you'll need other strategies, such as tricking predators into battling each other and using the environment to set clever traps.

At a key moment, you begin playing Kong in third-person. When the camera pulls back to reveal Kong's mighty perspective, you feel a rush of freedom and power. Delivered from the harried perspective of Jack, you inherit swift movements, powerful battle attacks, and the gratifying ability to smash, throw, and scale just about everything around you. But playing as Kong isn't just a walk in the park. Confronted by multiple enemies with clever attack patterns, you'll have to fight hard to defeat huge T-Rexes and outsmart swarms of smaller predators.

The alternating gameplay intensifies the emotions already inherent in the story. Ancel, like Jackson, never loses sight of his audience, meting out new challenges just when you want them the most. The result is nothing short of an unforgettable game experience. ■

PETER JACKSON'S
KING KONG



PlayStation 2



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Previews

Flogging the Strogg



■ You won't be flying solo for the whole game. Often you'll have some help.

Quake 4



It's all about deep alien hurting

PUBLISHER **RAVEN SOFTWARE/ID SOFTWARE** | DEVELOPER **ACTIVISION** | RELEASE DATE **HOLIDAY 2005** | LIVE **HELL YES**

Does human flesh appear finger-licking good to the rest of the universe? Or are cybernetic aliens everywhere just jealous because we don't have metal bits where our appendages should be? Whatever the reason, humanity is at war on distant planets once again, and in *Quake 4* it's the Borg-on-a-bad-day

Strogg collective that have a hankering to wipe homo sapiens from existence.

Set to release this holiday season (meaning on or not far from 360's launch), *Quake 4* picks up where *Quake II's* story leaves off. The Strogg – half-human monstrosities that run the gamut from spike-armed grunts to multi-story cyber-spiders – have been

in a turf war with humans for some time. The first-person action is sometimes solo, occasionally squad-based, and we got to play a few levels of it during a recent visit by id Software to our offices.

Starting at the beginning of the game when your dropship crashes, we took our über-marine, Matthew Kane, out of the wreckage and deep into a darkened base. Since *Quake 4* runs off the *Doom 3* engine (albeit a modified version), the creepy dynamic lighting is out in full force, complete with angry half-mechanical menaces leaping out from around corners and through walls. We had to make our way into the base to meet

up with the rest of the squad, back out in order to retrieve a medic for an injured comrade, then escort the medic back to our holed-up pals inside, putting down Strogg scum with our machine gun the entire time.

The next and even more exciting sequence dumped us in the driver's seat of a huge mechanical walker. Packing unlimited chain-gun ammo and limitless rockets (though you have to reload after spending six), it moves like you'd expect: slow to strafe and pivot, but big and powerful enough to crush the little guys under your feet. The level went on for a satisfyingly long time before the big payoff



■ Does the lighting look familiar? It's the *Doom 3* engine hard at work again.



■ Vehicle support? Yes, sir! Manning gun turrets on a caravan? That's in too.



■ If you wanted to intimidate alien races, you'd create spider dudes, too.

came: a toe-to-toe battle with the aforementioned spider-like crimson deathbringer, called the Harvester. We frantically lobbed homing missiles over the cover we tried to hide behind...and we'd love to tell you that we kicked eight-legged ass and took names, but we'd be lying. So at least you can rest assured that *Quake 4* will be no walk in the park.

And though we didn't get to try multiplayer this time, we were told all about it, and what we heard was music to our ears. Backed by full support for Xbox Live, split-screen, and System Link,

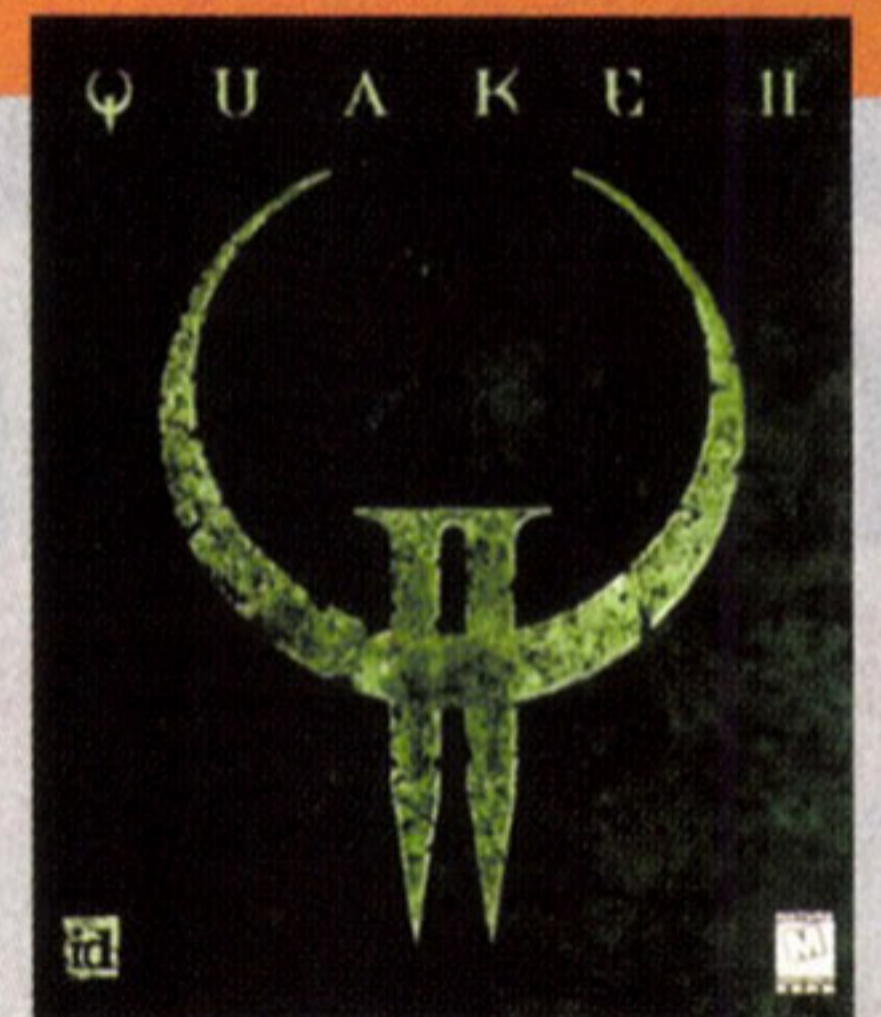
the goal is to replicate *Quake III's* fast-action, twitch-skill fragfests, where maintaining mobility is key, and nailguns and rocket launchers are the weapons of choice.

The player cap will be either eight or ten, down from the PC's 16 (due to the 360's lack of a dedicated server option), but the maps will be scaled down and re-balanced accordingly. We certainly don't mind, as we're big supporters of the "quality over quantity" philosophy. Now if only more publishers and developers would follow suit...

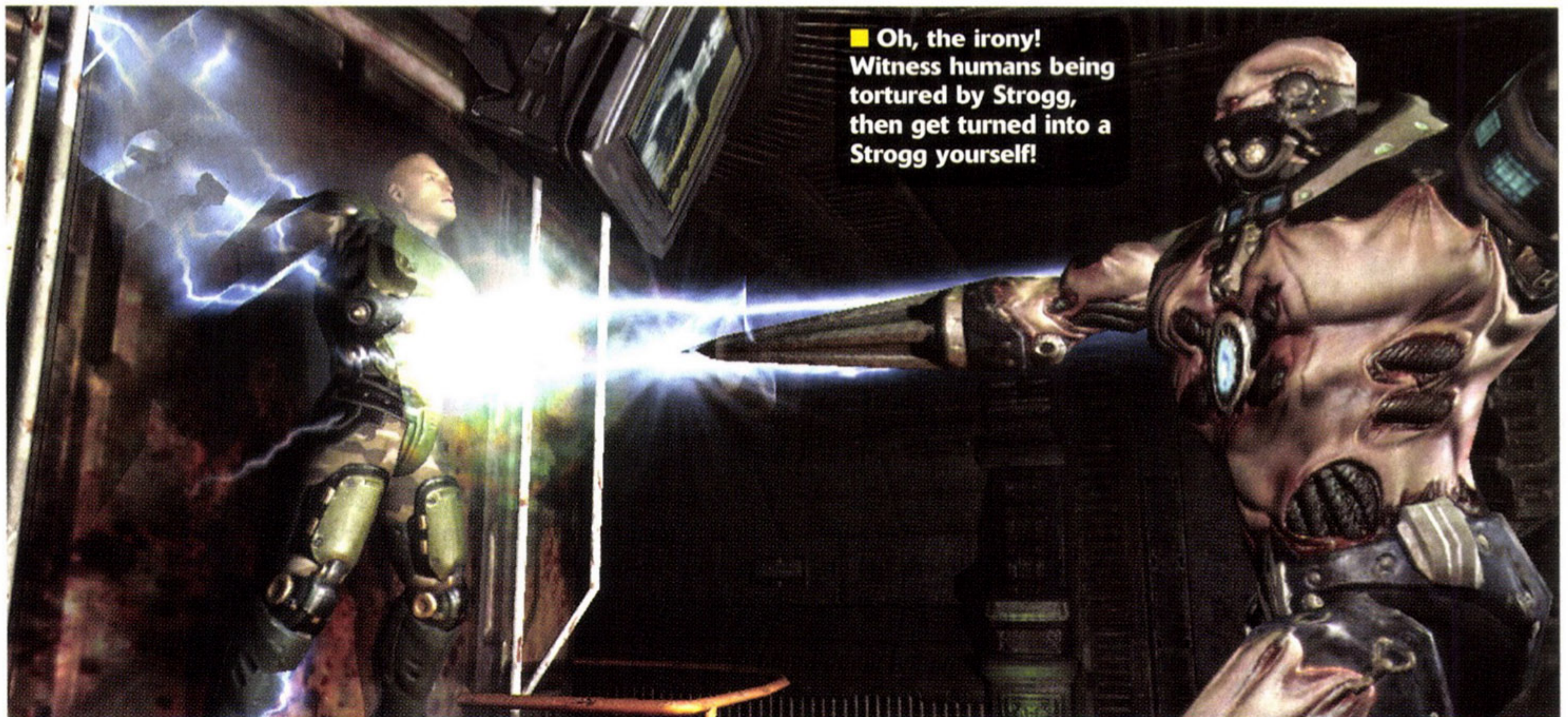
- Ryan McCaffrey

QUAKE II FOR YOU

Want more for your money? The bombshell that id CEO Todd Hollenshead dropped on us during his visit was that the full version of the revered *Quake II* - the storyline predecessor to the new game - would be included with the 360 version of *Quake 4*. You won't have to unlock it, it'll just be there, complete with System Link and split-screen multiplayer (though there's a two-console limit, so the most you could have is eight players with four on each 360), as well as all of the Threewave CTF maps. Hollenshead even hinted that downloadable



character skins for both *Quakes* might be available in the Xbox Live Marketplace.



■ Oh, the irony! Witness humans being tortured by Strogg, then get turned into a Strogg yourself!



■ Stop time, then walk around the explosion to kill your foe. Cool.



■ In the future, lights are still bright and shiny.

■ "I'm going to chunk-ify you, then stop time and walk through your suspended chunks! Chunky!"

TimeShift



Time is always on your side

PUBLISHER **ATARI** | DEVELOPER **SABER INTERACTIVE**
RELEASE DATE **MARCH 2006** | XBOX LIVE **YES**

Sure, *Blinx* and *TimeSplitters* have tried to tread this ground with moderate success before, but our 4D dream is to put time manipulation to (evil) use in a bleeding-edge next-gen first-person shooter. Our dream's about to come true in Saber Interactive's new Xbox 360 action romp, *TimeShift*.

Based primarily in the year 2007, *TimeShift* also includes two versions of 1911 and an alternate 2007. Across that century-plus of years, you as military pilot Michael Swift have volunteered for a secret government time-travel project. Of course it goes horribly awry, skewing the present as you know it, forcing you to figure out and fix what went wrong. But, it's really all about blowing crap up in 4D.

"First and foremost, I want you to feel godlike in your gameplay experience," says producer Kyle Peschel. "Slow time and riddle a body with bullets, watching him twitch as he falls. Stop time and pass through an explosion unharmed. Rewind time, forcing an exhaust fan to spin in the opposite



direction and suck a worker into it." So, sorta like *Prince of Persia* but told like a futuristic first-person shooter? Well, yes and no. Things are a bit more complicated than simply hitting rewind to retry a botched jump or kill. The time powers you possess are much more flexible, giving you multiple ways to approach challenges.

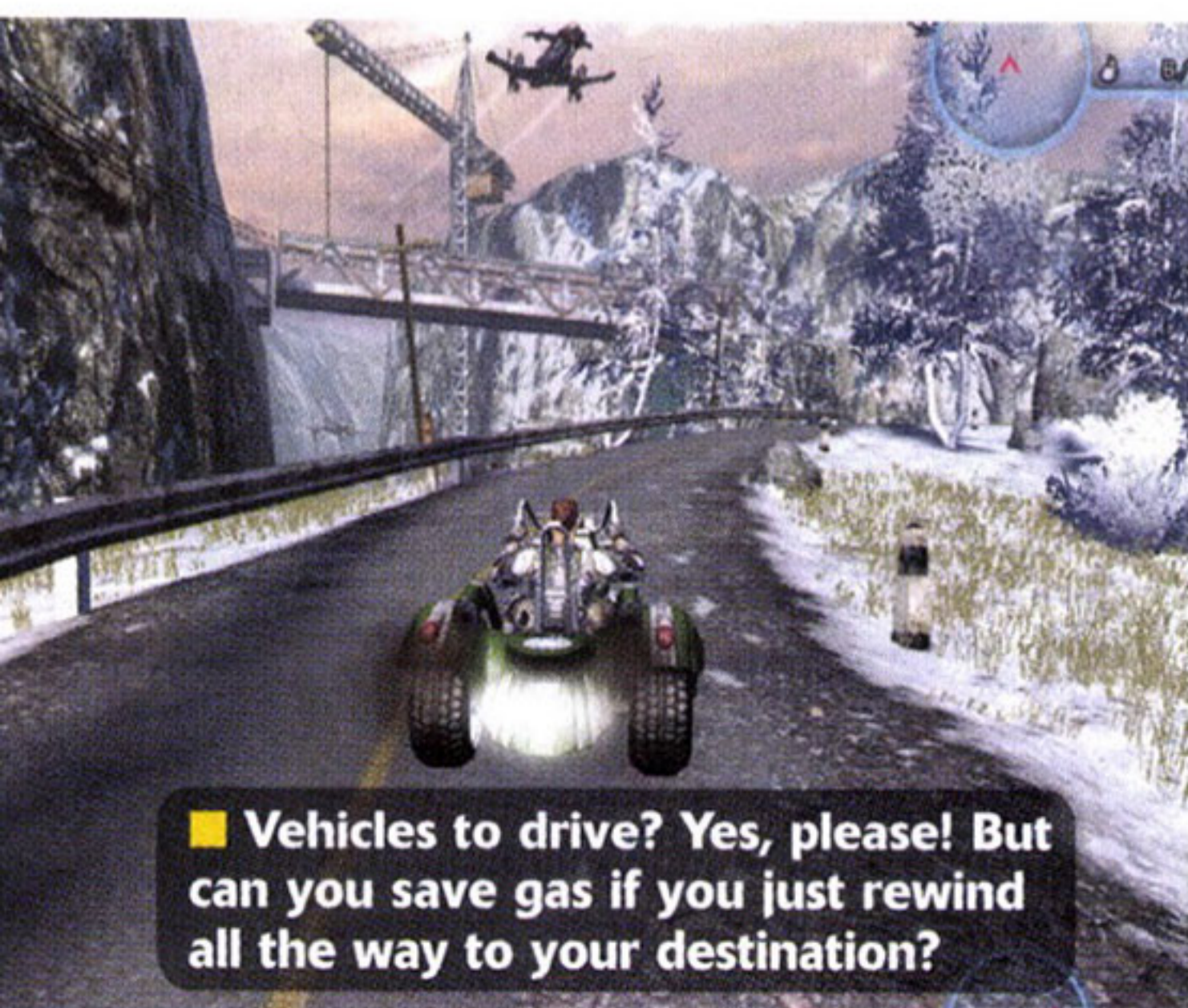
Peschel then gets more excited. "There is something very empowering about stopping time and taking an opponent's weapon right out of his hands, then killing him with it," he tells us. "Or better yet, pulping an imperial soldier and stopping time while his bloody gibs are in the air, then walking through the carnage as it remains suspended in time." Ick.

Gory aesthetics aside, your powers won't grant you complete immunity from harm. Peschel warns that "if you are shot, you

can rewind time, taking the bullet out of your body and sending it back into your opponent's gun, but you will likely bleed to death because you are immune to your abilities. Your wound will not be healed." A nice added twist of complexity to what might otherwise just be a failsafe feature that would unbalance the game.

And multiplayer? We asked, and yes, there will be time-shifting in it, but Saber is keeping a tight lid on it for now. Peschel did imply they've thought a lot about it, though, telling us, "We went through four different implementations of the abilities before we arrived at what we feel is right." Previously only announced for Xbox, we're already itching to mess with time and space in full-on high resolution now that *TimeShift* is heading to 360.

— Ryan McCaffrey

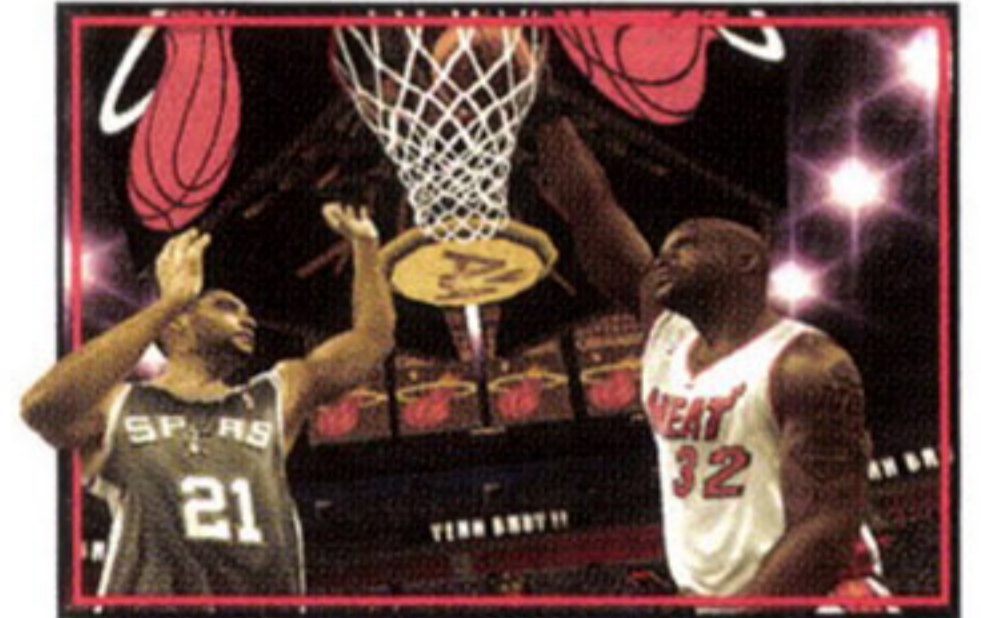


■ Vehicles to drive? Yes, please! But can you save gas if you just rewind all the way to your destination?

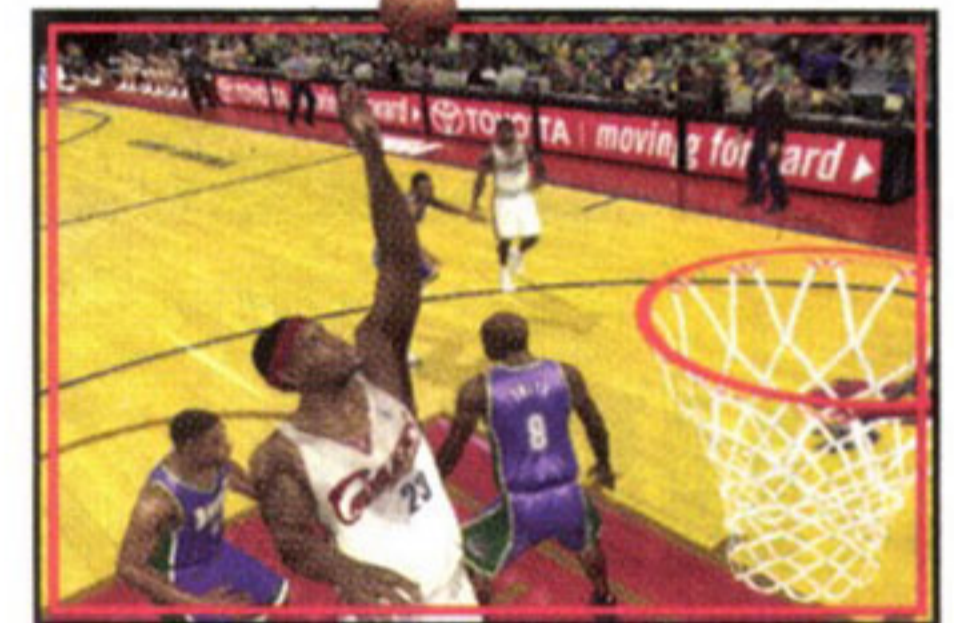


Dominate the:

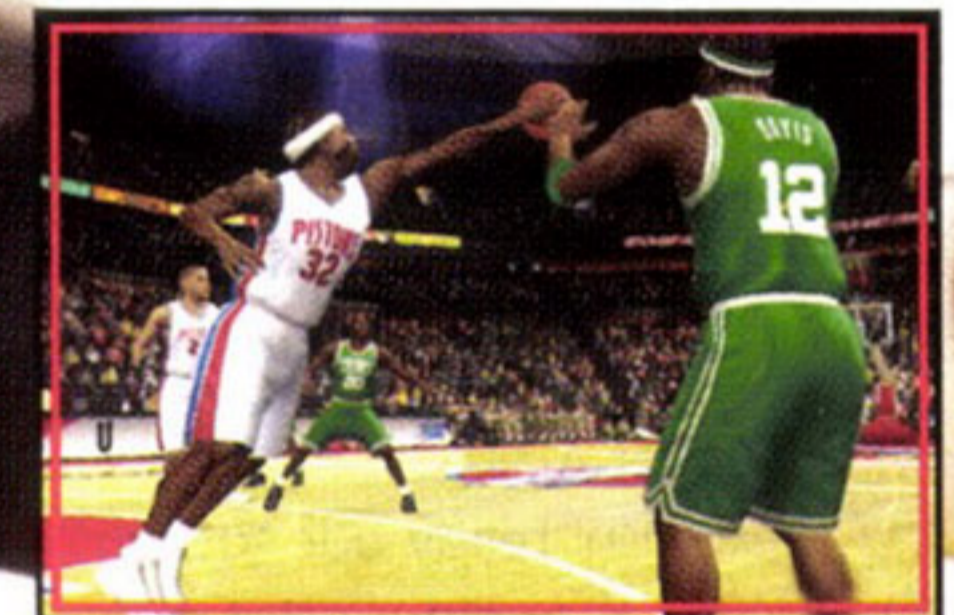
- PAINT
- BACKCOURT
- PERIMETER
- ALL OF THE ABOVE



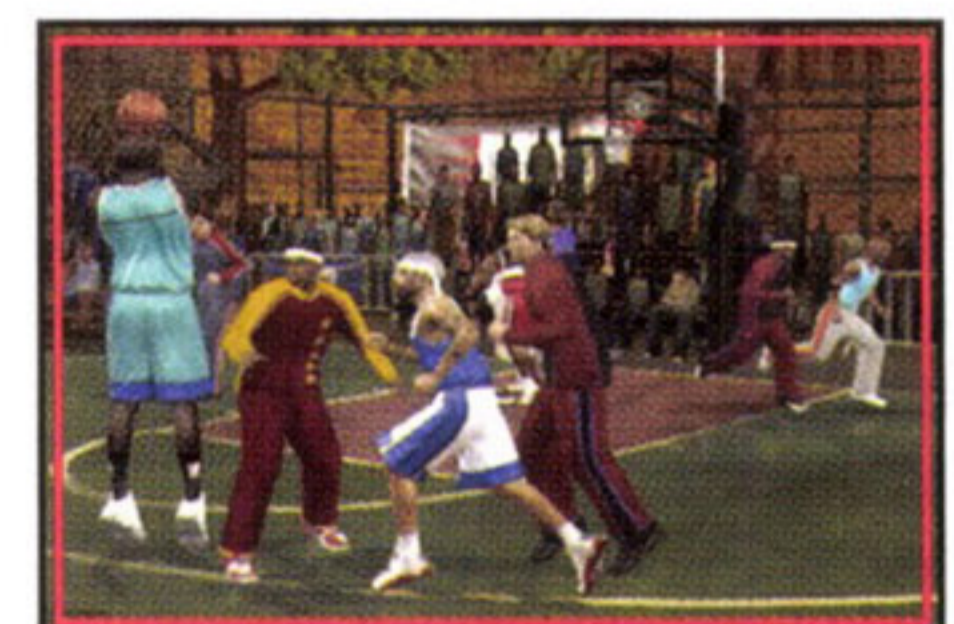
Pull off runners, fade-aways, finger rolls and dunks with the hot new *Shot Stick*.



Set up alley-oops, give and gos, or kick it out for the open three with *Dual Player Control*.



Fight for rebounds, deflect passes and go for steals with new *Strip n Rip System* controls.



Become a real "playa" and take your game to the streets at the legendary *Entertainer's Basketball Classic* at Rucker Park in Harlem.

NBA **2K6**

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NBA 2K6 lets you dominate the action from anywhere on the floor with unprecedented control. Rule the court with new features like the innovative Shot Stick, and run authentic NBA offenses with breakthrough Dual Player Control! www.2KSPORTS.com

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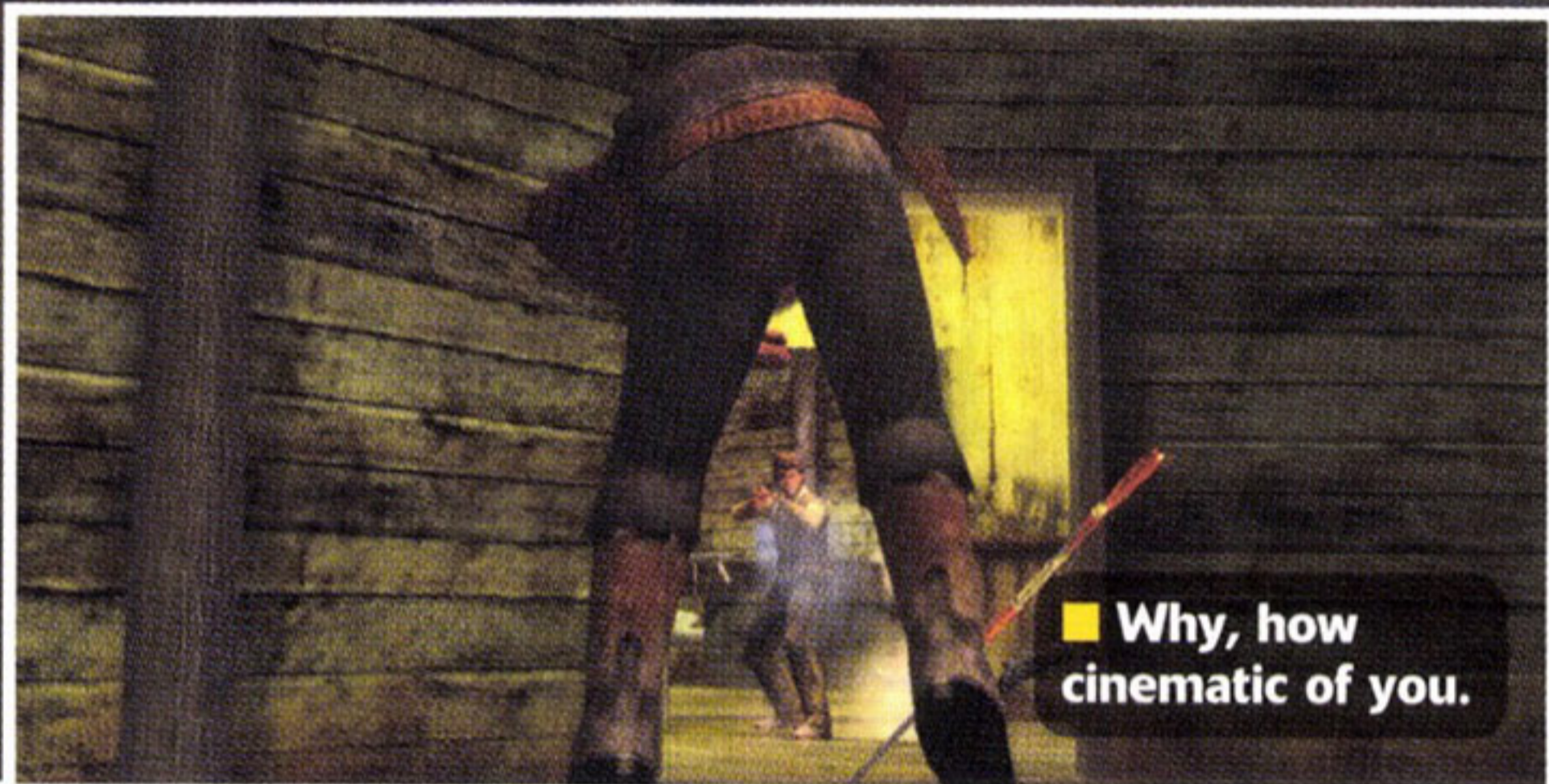
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Preview

Wanted: Dead or Alive



■ What works better than a lozenge for a scratchy throat?



■ Why, how cinematic of you.



ON THE GAME DISC
video

Reading about *Gun* is one thing, seeing it in action is another. This month's disc is your chance.

Gun

Dead men tell no tales – they hit the Start button

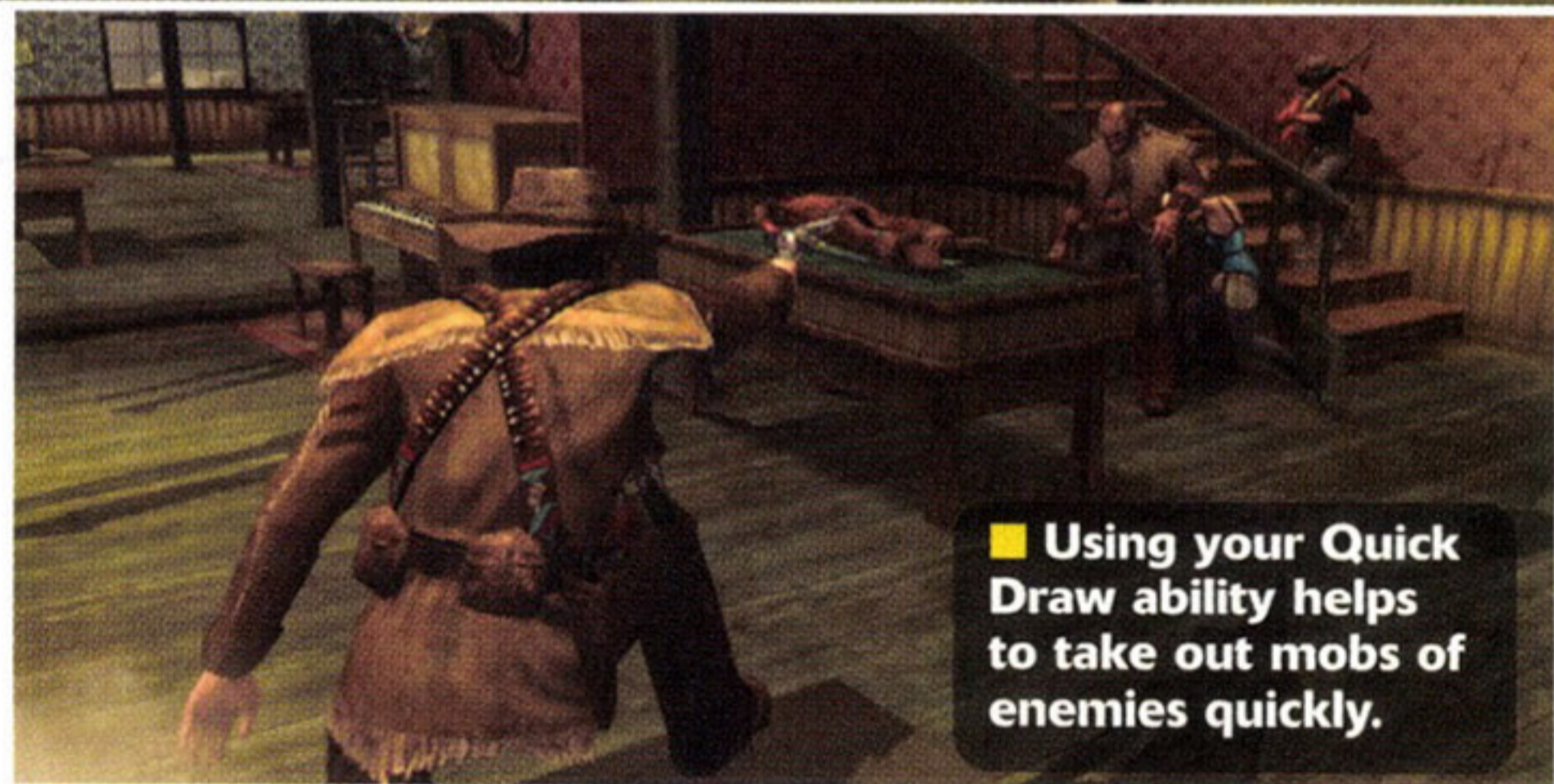


PUBLISHER **ACTIVISION** | DEVELOPER **NEVERSOFT**
RELEASE DATE **NOVEMBER 2005** | XBOX LIVE **AWARE ONLY**

If Activision's rough 'n' ready ode to the wild West, *Gun*, has anything to say about it, urban brawlers are apparently for chumps. Instead of jacking cars, you'll have to tame horses. Instead of shaking down bystanders for green, you'll be skinning animals for barter. But one thing hasn't changed over time – virtual enemies are still bloodthirsty jerks who want nothing better than to tan your

hide with several hundred rounds of lead. And this is what *Gun* aims to do best – take the violent, outlaw nature of the authentic Western frontier (no real rules, everyone's a target) and transplant it into modern-day gaming.

Story takes a front seat amid the mayhem as you wear the holster of Cole Wyatt, a man who's just lost his dad to mysterious, double-crossing gunslingers and has nothing but a brothel token to guide him in his quest



■ Using your Quick Draw ability helps to take out mobs of enemies quickly.

for revenge. Wyatt's adventure across the West dictates all of your missions and objectives – whether it's a shootout at a warehouse or a haphazard horse race that wins you a filly for faster travel.

And while the story serves as a sturdy backbone to the game, it's the action on which developer Neversoft really wants to shine the spotlight. *Gun* offers enough flexibility to incorporate gunfights, horse-riding, and on-

foot roleplaying elements (interacting with NPCs and hunting for food and items). You'll even be able to swig whiskey to gain health or man giant cannons on a steamboat to take out enemy

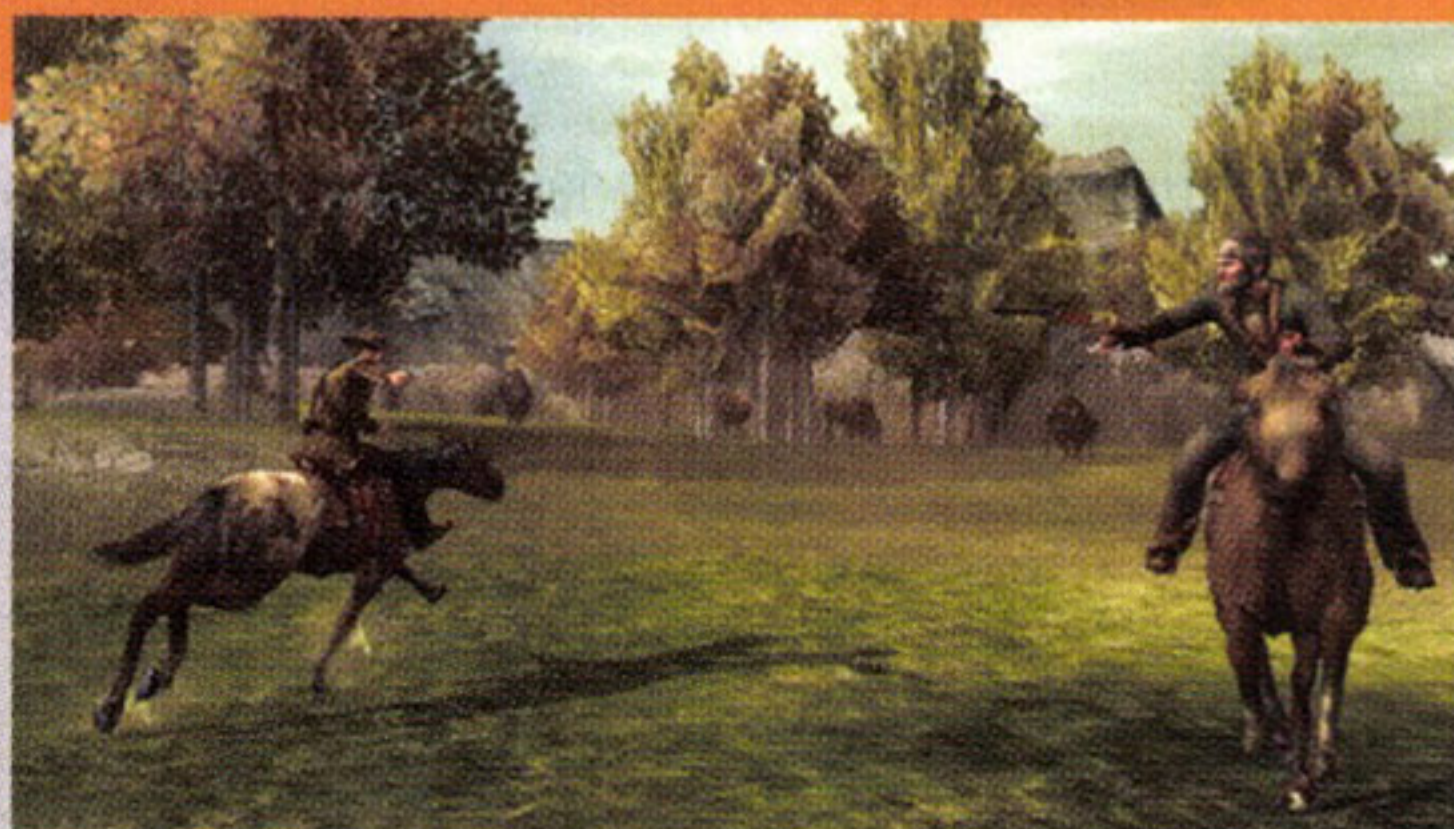
emplacements along a river. Variety is truly the spice of *Gun*'s life, and it shows in areas where you'll be tasked with executing "quick draws" (slow down time and zero in for accurate kills on multiple enemies, which nets skill-point shots) or simply playing poker in town to earn money. You can mine for gold in order to upgrade your weapons, or ranch during downtime to improve your horse-riding skills. And more importantly, you'll be able to sniff out and collect bounties in order to hone your gunplay abilities.

With the wide-open canvas of both Xbox and Xbox 360 versions to work with, Neversoft has certainly done its historical homework, and *Gun* is stuffed with as many ways to die as there are to earn cash or explore its detailed Western world.

– Francesca Reyes

HORSING AROUND

As in the actual Old West, your horse is vital to getting around and just generally surviving. So keeping it alive is crucial – it even has its own health meter, which runs out if you spur it too much. Treat your horse well and you'll be able to pull off skid attacks (take out wolves with your horse!) or outrun danger.





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TAG FRAGRANCES **CONSIDER YOURSELF WARNED**





■ The trusty old Unreal engine still looks good and gets the job done, don't it?

■ Don't worry, Cletus. It's not like they'll send the Army out to bust your still.

■ I may be "being all I can be," but I sure hope my team is too.

America's Army: Rise of a Soldier

Better than joining the actual Army

PUBLISHER **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER **SECRET LEVEL**
 RELEASE DATE **NOVEMBER 2005** | XBOX LIVE **YES**

First-person shooters are designed to make you feel like you're inside the skin of some Gat-wielding space marine, gangster, cop, or covert special-ops; experiencing their action-packed lives first-hand. But some games, like Ubisoft's new *America's Army: Rise of a Soldier* want you to be more than that.

They want you to be a soldier, to experience modern warfare from an ultra-realistic point of view. And except for eating MREs and dropping a deuce in a honeypot latrine, it's about as by-the-book military experience you could have in a videogame.

Like in its real-life counterpart, *America's Army* starts you out at level one – beginning your military life as the lowest grunt who must complete boot camp to learn the basic skills of Army operations. Depending on how you do on the different training grounds, you acquire skill points which you can



then distribute over a wide array of character attributes. Adding points to your obvious skills like marksmanship and stealth will make you better in those areas, but other attributes like leadership and honor are less obvious, but no less important.

Once you've finished rifleman training, you'll be a basic fire team member with an M16 with some very specific orders. This ain't Rambo, so you better stay close and listen up. Your performance on each subsequent mission is scored on the basis of how well you did your job the way you were supposed to. This score then translates into more skill points to develop your customized soldier.

This game is about following your military career up through the ranks and disciplines, all the way to the Special Forces. Still, it's meant to be played in multiplayer too, and your character will persist and rank up online. But *America's Army* doesn't aim to be a rival to *Counter-Strike*. With its dedication to real-world U.S. Army practices and tactics, expect the experience to be more in line with *Rainbow Six*. And just like its free PC counterpart, the Army played a huge role in the game's overall design and direction – and it shows. If it got any more real, you'd find yourself face down in the dirt being called "maggot."

– Tom Price



■ A bridge too far? We'll just see about that.

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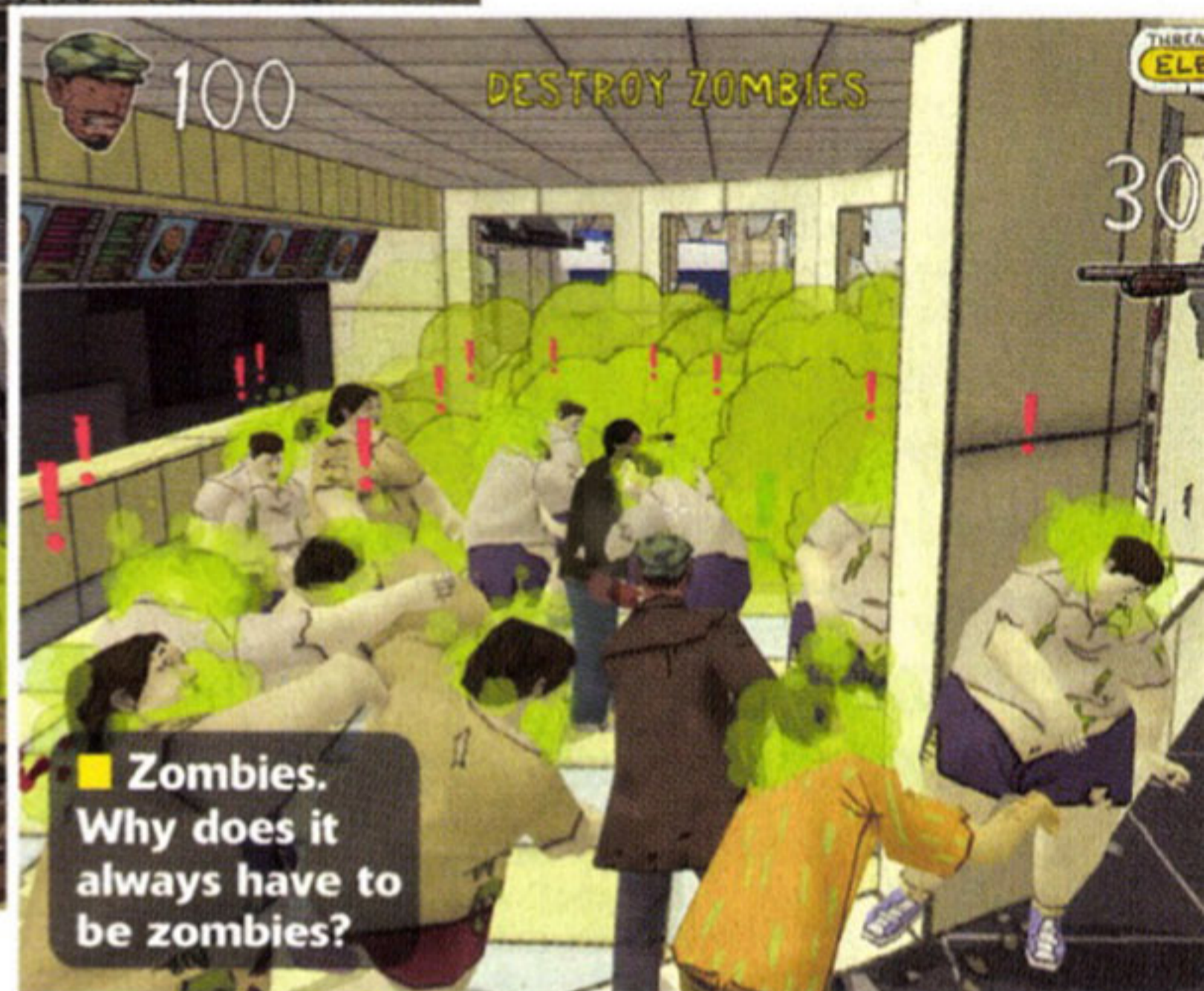


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■ Supersize this! Or something catchy to that effect.



■ Zombies. Why does it always have to be zombies?

American McGee's Bad Day L.A.

Fear and looting in Los Angeles

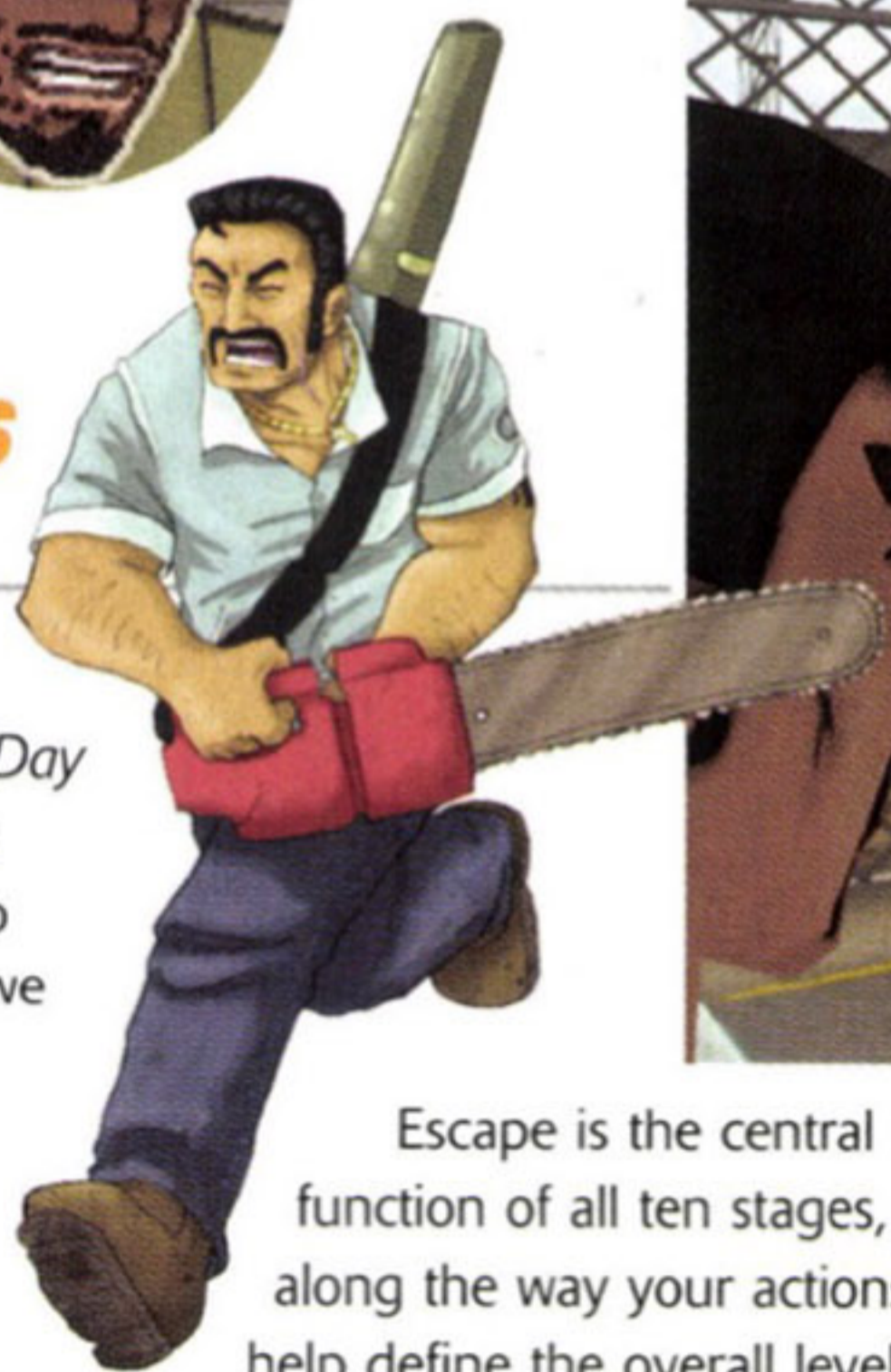
PUBLISHER ENLIGHT | DEVELOPER ENLIGHT
RELEASE DATE EARLY 2006 | XBOX LIVE NO

In the wake of the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, a game that takes a humorous and cartoony look at disasters, both man-made and natural, wreaking havoc on a large American city may seem frightfully inappropriate. But if we can't laugh at what scares us, then we wouldn't be human. And what game auteur American McGee is asking us to laugh at in his

strange and controversial *Bad Day L.A.* is our fear of such terrible events and the things we do to combat them. Remember, all we have to fear is fear itself. That, and zombies, of course.

At the center of the chaos is an unlikely hero for a videogame: Anthony Williams, a cynical and slightly deranged homeless guy who loves women as much as he loves his shopping cart. The game begins with

terrorists crashing a plane full of zombie-creating poison gas onto the 405 freeway during rush hour and continues with earthquakes, tidal waves, and meteor showers. As the world begins to fall apart around him, our anti-hero must find his way to "safety" any way he can.



■ I've never noticed that sign before. Check.

Escape is the central function of all ten stages, and along the way your actions help define the overall level of chaos. Put out fires with your fire extinguisher (one of your main "weapons"), and people will start chilling out. Start shooting paramedics, and the crowd will quickly turn against you. The chaos is monitored by a tongue-in-cheek Terror Alert-style gauge that lowers the more smiley face icons you net (from helping people) or raises the minute you start to amass too many frowny ones (from ignoring those in need or actively harming them).

Along the way, you'll pick up various accomplices that help you in your quest to escape the chaos. A little boy that is constantly

puking (your first mission is to get him to an ambulance, which produces hilarious results), a gardener that turns out to be a general in the Mexican Army, and a right-wing maniac are just a few of the characters you'll encounter.

Other comedic bits come from weird power-ups like dog poo (pulled from a real-world fact that rubbing feces on yourself is the best way to ward off an angry mob). And those American flag power-ups? They instantly lower the Terror Alert gauge a full notch.

It's this parody of things we've become used to that lets *Bad Day L.A.* deliver a massive punch to the irony bone. And we all could use a laugh when the real world is as scary as it is.

— Tom Price



DROPPED

Drop in this winter on the only snowboarding game spinning on the Xbox 360.

- Jeremy Jones
- David Benedek
- Mikey LeBlanc
- Marc Frank Montoya
- Torah Bright
- Wille Luoma
- Devun Walsh
- Travis Parker
- Gigi Ruff
- Nico Droz

- Snowbird, Utah
- Avoriaz, France
- Laax, Switzerland
- Valle Nevado, Chile
- Northstar, California
- Zugspitze, Germany
- DC Mountain Lab, Utah

On Shelves This Season.



XBOX 360™

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RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Reviews

A couple of swingers

■ "Spider-sense tingling... Aunt May will beat my webbed butt if I don't swing out of Times Square now."

■ Instead of webbing, Ultimate Venom's tendrils can grab civilians or slash at his enemies as weapons.

New York is too big to hold just one crazy guy in a mask

Ultimate Spider-Man

DEVELOPER **TREYARCH** | PUBLISHER **ACTIVISION** | ESRB **TEEN** | WEBSITE WWW.ULTIMATESPIDERMANGAME.COM
MULTIPLAYER **NONE** | EXTRAS **DOLBY 5.1, 720P, UNLOCKABLE COSTUMES**

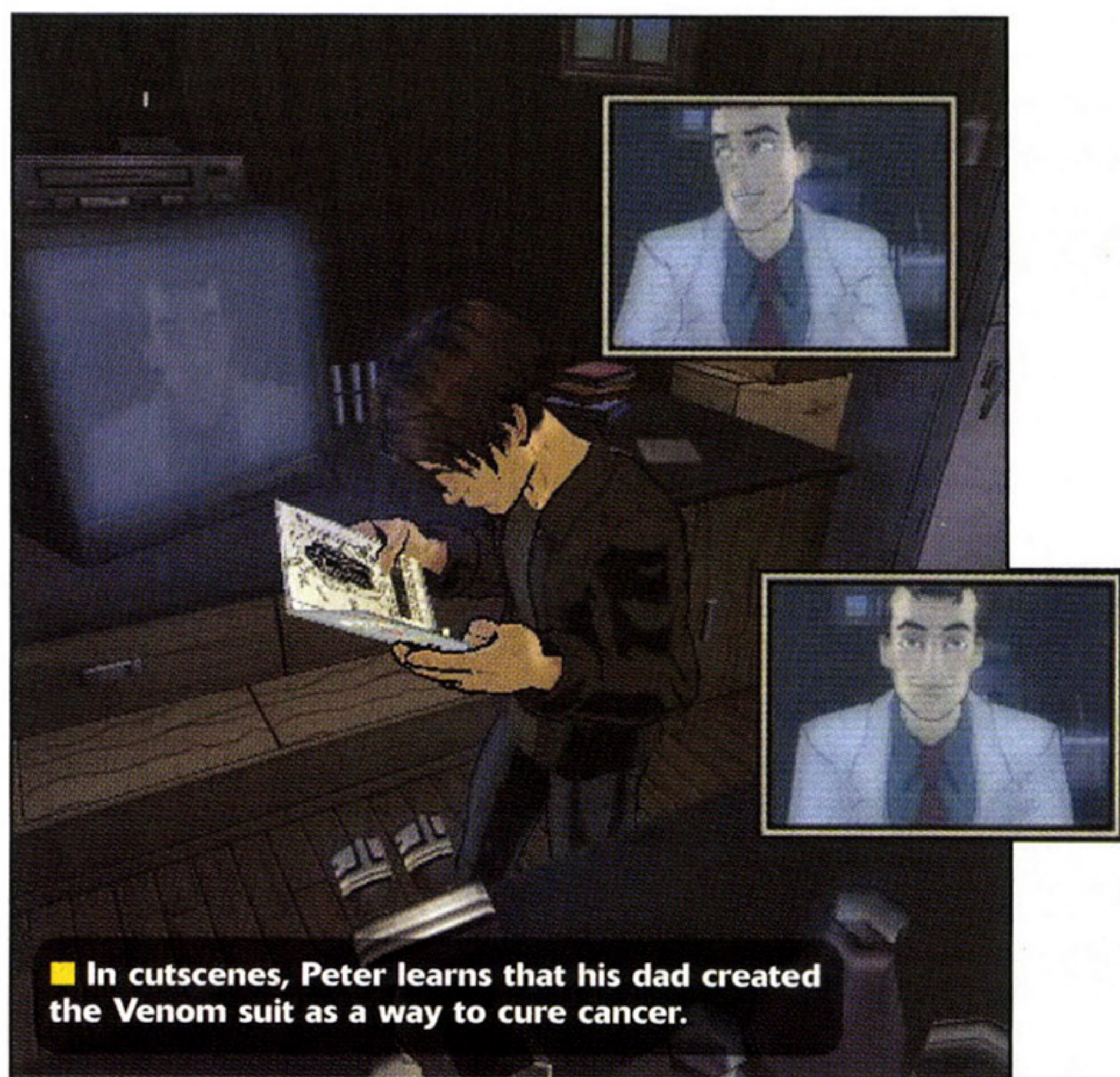
Over the past few years, Treyarch's one-two punch of *Spider-Man* movie games for the Xbox has been, well, amazing. Placing the web-slinger inside a free-roaming reproduction of Manhattan with oodles of story missions, secrets, and random city events has made for a successful "Grand Theft Spider" cocktail – and one "borrowed" by VU Games for its own slam-dunk superhero title, *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*.

But with a third Spidey movie nearly two years away, what's your friendly, neighborhood Activision to do? The answer is to dip back into the local comic store and mine a previously untapped wealth of material – specifically, Marvel's *Ultimate* line of comics, an offshoot brand that re-

imagines the house of M's classic heroes as if they really existed in our world. In it, Spider-Man is a short, gangly, 15-year-old high-school student who lives with his widowed Aunt May in Queens.

For *Ultimate Spider-Man*, Treyarch has adopted its *Spider-Man 2* formula, but with a twist: Not only is Spidey a playable character, but he shares the spotlight with his greatest foe, Venom. The game's story (which is a direct sequel to Ultimate Venom's introduction in the series and is written by the comic's scribe, Brian Michael Bendis) swings back and forth between Spidey and Venom's perspectives as they pursue the man who's partly to blame for the villain's creation.

It's a spectacular setup, and one that's brought to life with



■ In cutscenes, Peter learns that his dad created the Venom suit as a way to cure cancer.

■ Holy cameos! *Ultimate Fantastic Four's* Human Torch flies in to flame Spidey (and race him).



high-quality production values. Cel-shaded to simulate the art style of the comic book, New York City has never looked better – you have the run of Queens and Manhattan this time with very little repetition in storefronts and

environments. Web-swinging around the city, poking your masked schnozz into every nook and cranny, is practically a game within a game. Likewise, the stylized cinematic cutscenes are like watching the panels of the comic book come to life.

If only there was more to actually do in *Ultimate Spider-Man*. The story mode is abysmally short, lasting only about five

hours. After it's finished, you're left with the game's sporadic City Events (beating up muggers, taking the injured to the hospital) and City Goals, which break down into Races and Combat Tours. City Goals are marked on your map, and are started by locating the appropriate icon in the city. In Races, you compete against the clock to swing around the city; with Combat Tours, you simply beat up several groups of gangs without dying. As you might have guessed from the descriptions, these challenges are repetitive and devolve into tedious tasks.

The story missions are also repetitive. There's too much

emphasis on unforgiving chase sequences, where you lose if your target gets too far away from you. Because *Ultimate Venom's* abilities differ from Spidey's (he has a super-leap instead of web-swinging), his chases are exercises in pure frustration hindered by the third-person camera, which doesn't zoom out to show where *Venom* is leaping to.

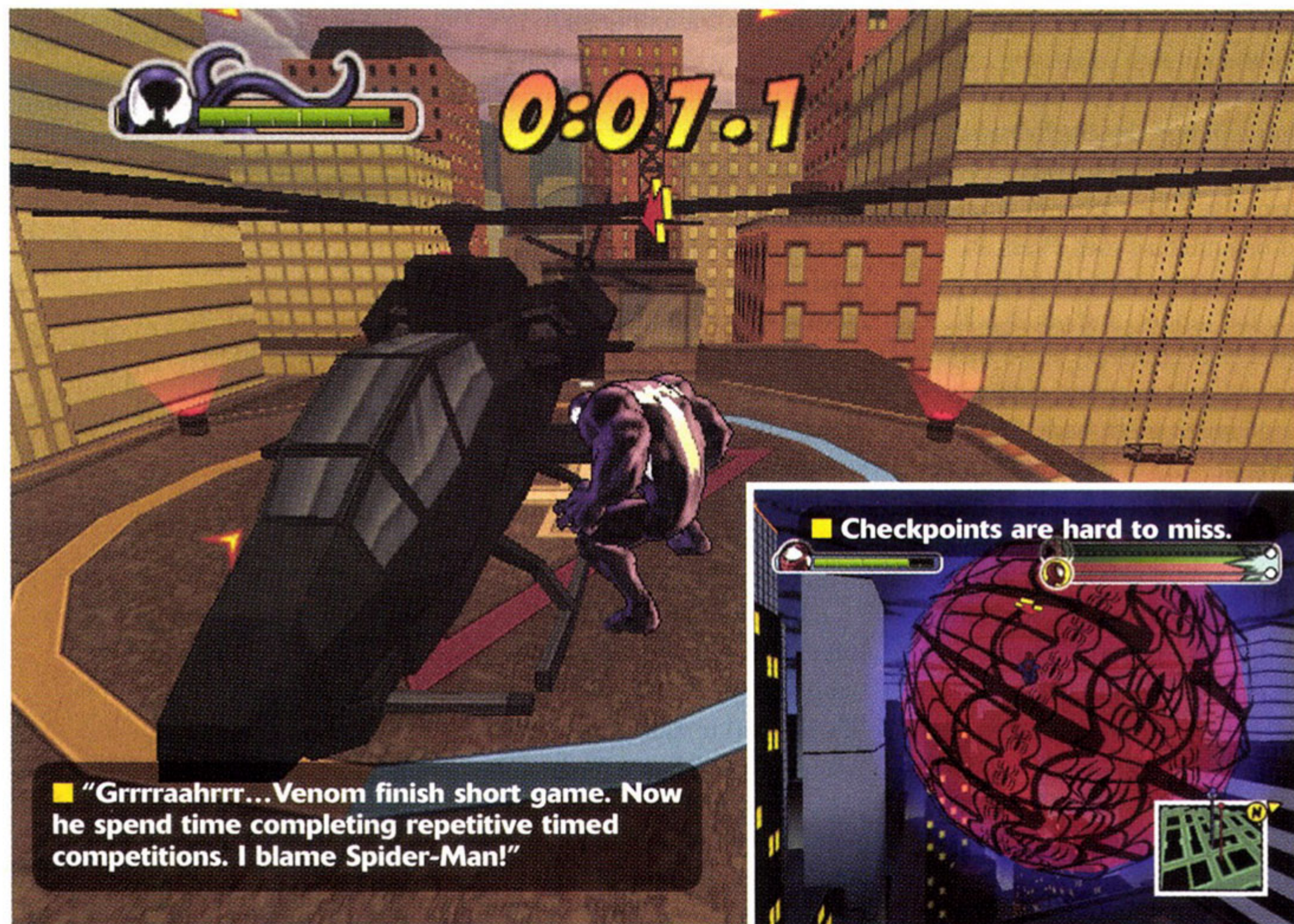
Cameos are made by several *Ultimized* characters – Wolverine, Silver Sable, Green Goblin, and Rhino, to name a few – but you must replay from scratch if you want to see them again. A "Boss Rematch" option should've been included. And how can you have both *Spider-Man* and *Venom* as playable characters and not have a two-player mode?

Ultimate Spider-Man is a letdown, but there is a bright side – it may just be the *Ultimate* weekend rental.

– Chuck Osborn

SEPTEMBER'S X-MAN OF THE MONTH

Uncanny Canuck Wolverine appeared in three different games released during the month of September (*Marvel Nemesis*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, and *X-Men Legends II*), which must be some sort of gaming world record. Where will the mutant mauler pop up next? All we know is, if *Wolvie* unsheathes his adamantium claws in *Halo 3*, Master Chief is toast.



■ "Grrraahrrr... *Venom* finish short game. Now he spend time completing repetitive timed competitions. I blame *Spider-Man*!"

■ Checkpoints are hard to miss.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Utilizing mumbo-jumbo called "3D Comic Inking Technology," the cel-shaded graphics perfectly capture the look of the comic-book series and the vastness of New York City.

Immersion
The huge, free-roaming city and well-written story draws you into believing you are *Spider-Man/Venom*, but the adventures are too limited.

Sound
The first *Spidey* game on Xbox not to employ movie actors, the voice acting is still quite good and does a seamless job of interpreting the edgier *Ultimate* comic universe.

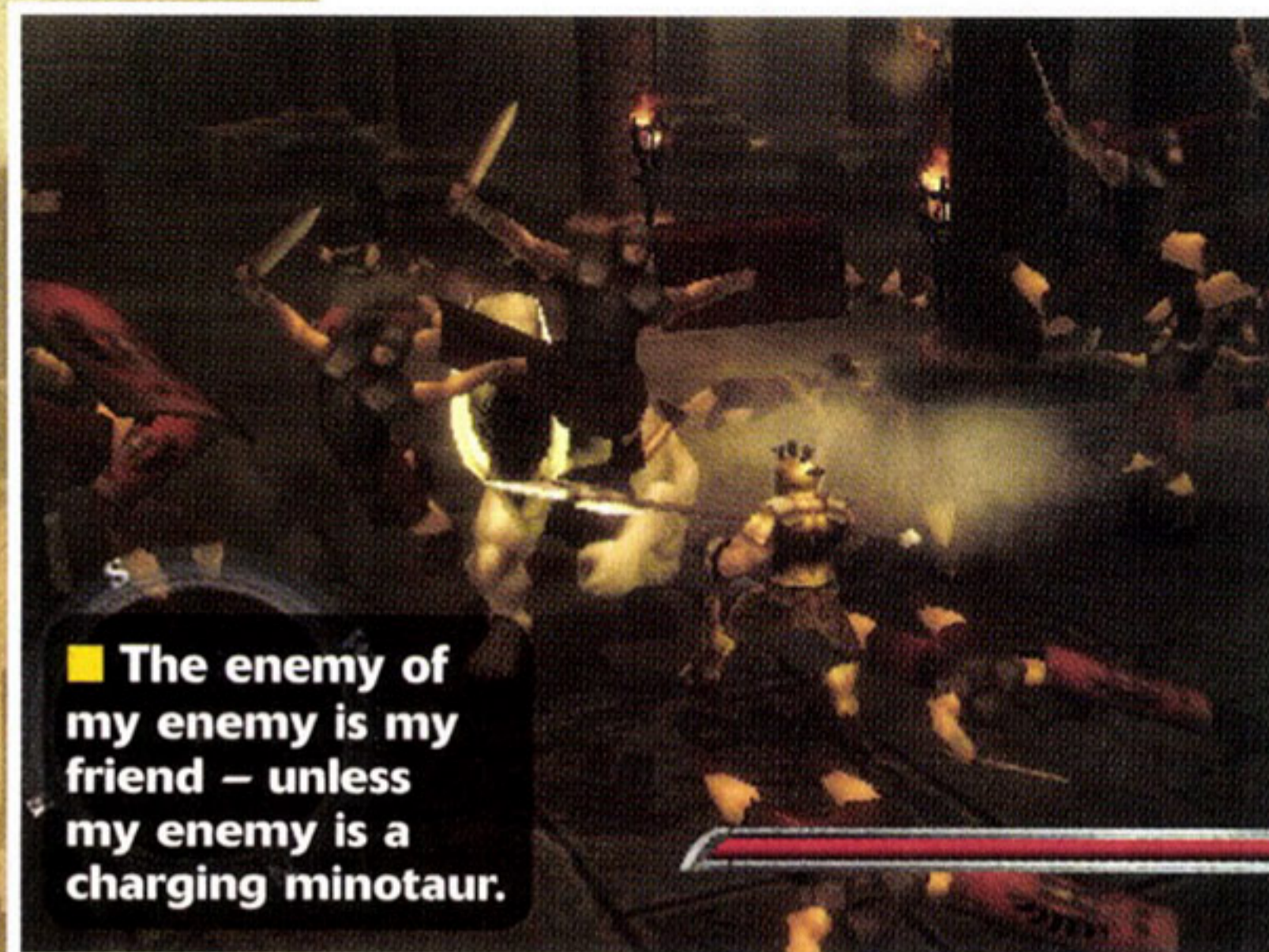
Design
Well-crafted artistically but lacking in story length and new ideas. City events have been largely lifted from *Spider-Man 2* and need more variety.

- + Good. - Bad.
- ? Perplexing
- + Swinging around Queens and Manhattan.
- + The way that dangling strands of webbing stay stuck to buildings for a short while.
- Five hours of story! The credits seemed longer than the game.
- Too many chase sequences. Yeah, having *Venom* keep pace with a guy who flies (*Electro*) is fun... riiiiight...
- Signs touting *Kraven* appear all over the city. Why tease us if he's not even in the game?
- ? How much did *Nokia* pay to have its corporate headquarters in the game, as well as its ads plastered all around the city?

XBOX 6.4 out of 10.0
Official Xbox Magazine



■ **Wonky bow mechanics mar an otherwise spiffy fight against the multiheaded Hydra.**



■ **The enemy of my enemy is my friend – unless my enemy is a charging minotaur.**



■ **Each weapon has two magic attacks you unleash when your Power meter fills – the hammer sends foes flying into the air.**

Mediterranean mass hysteria

Spartan: Total Warrior

DEVELOPER **THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY** | PUBLISHER **SEGA** | ESRB **MATURE**

WEBSITE **WWW.TOTALWARRIORGAME.COM** | MULTIPLAYER **NO**

EXTRAS **UNLOCKABLE GALLERIES, ARENAS, AND ARENA BONUS ITEMS**

You could tile the floor of a hundred Parthenons with the discarded discs of button-mashing action games, but *Spartan: Total Warrior* deftly avoids becoming an instant cliché thanks to its uniquely layered combat and terrifically staged grand-scale battles. Enemies and AI-controlled allies flood the screen, and there is supreme satisfaction to be gleaned from cutting a wide Sauron-style swath through a sea of soldiers. Think of it as *Dynasty Warriors* with Greco-Roman leanings.

In *Spartan*, shield-bashing plays as big a role in combat as the swinging of swords, hammers, and spears. The control scheme serves the chaos well – the A button causes you to lunge directly forward, while the B button swipes your sword/hammer/spear in an arc to nail multiple foes. Press an attack button while holding the left trigger, and you'll pull off a shield-bashing move that breaks your enemies' defenses and knocks them back. The combat is by no means deep or complicated, but the bash-slash-bash-slash rhythm feels fresher than your standard gaming "combo" methodology.

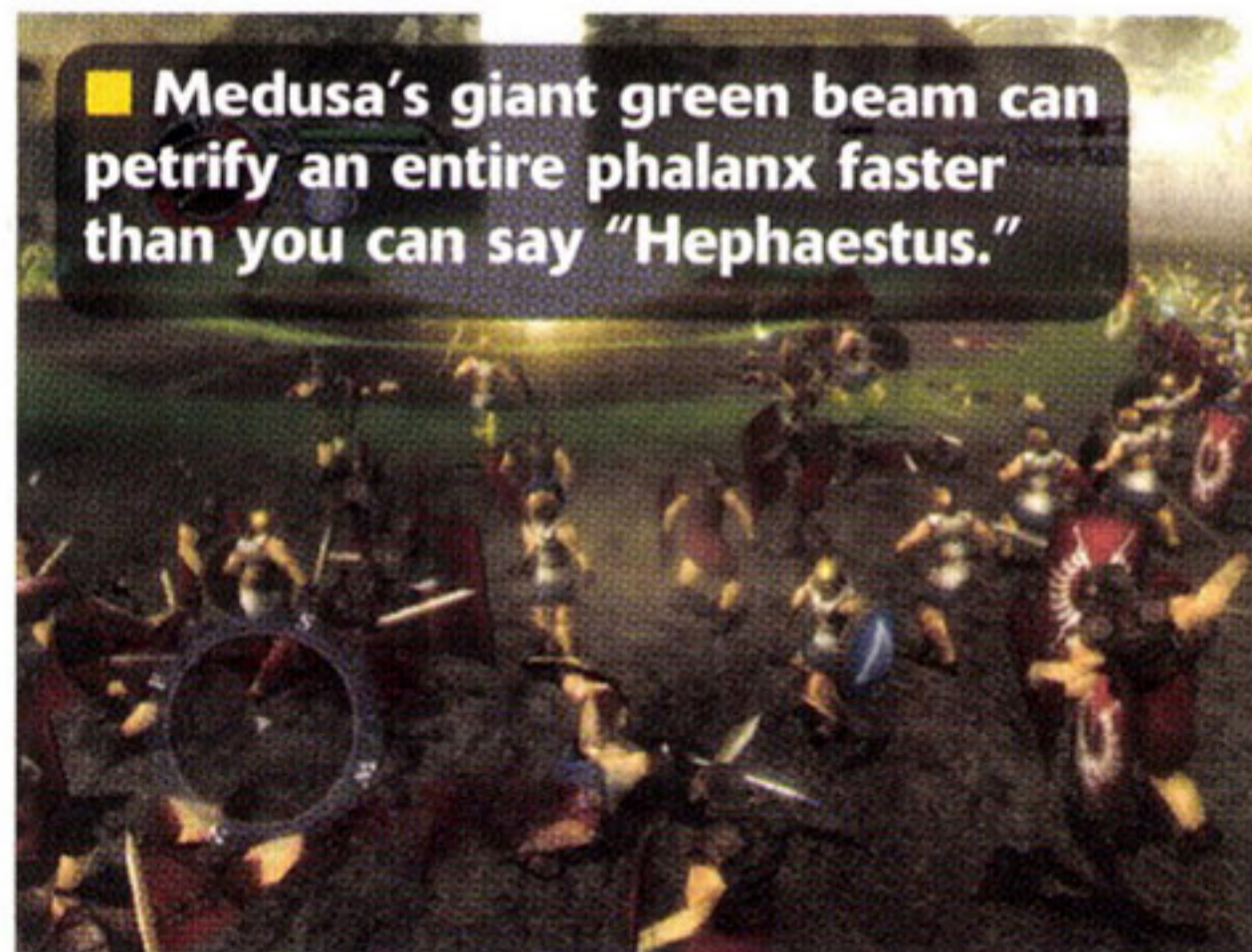
The controls don't work so well when it's time to pull out your bow, however; the camera and the auto-targeting system seem

like they're locked in an eons-old struggle for supremacy. It's also too easy to accidentally click the left thumbstick and unleash the full fury of your built-up "rage" attack when all you really meant to do is issue a polite warning jab.

Other Achilles' heels: The purely superficial "customization" scheme has little effect on gameplay, and a few well-meaning but misguided levels, intended to add variety, end up nearly derailing the Spartan's saga. The most notable of the culprits we can recall? One truly awful boss fight (Nemesis) and an odious, horribly frustrating escort mission (Archimedes).

Spartan: Total Warrior is repetitive, sure, but when the combat is in big 'n' bold mode, it's fun and unique enough that you don't really care that you've just killed "guy with shield" #4728. 'Tis an epic ode to chaos and confusion.

– Sean Molloy



■ **Medusa's giant green beam can petrify an entire phalanx faster than you can say "Hephaestus."**

ON THE GAME DISC
demo
Cut a wide swath through *Spartan: Total Warrior* in the demo on this month's disc.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Super smooth and fluid – if not overly detailed – even when there are 150 guys onscreen, you get a great sense of scale without sacrificing visibility. But many levels have a "boxy" look, and the faces are some of the most heinously ugly in Xbox history.

Immersion
The game's most effective levels are the giant battlefields that require little but your massacring abilities – the more "intimate" missions tend to just make you long for the big stuff. Expect little accurate mythology and/or history.

Sound
Appropriately epic-sounding music fits the bill, even if it doesn't fill you with awe. Lame voice acting and dialogue. Battle sound effects effectively communicate mass chaos.

Design
Fun battle system with a unique shield-bashin' focus. Successfully captures the chaotic hugeness of battle, even if the effect is more aesthetic and emotional than actually important to gameplay.

- + Good. - Bad.
- ? **Perplexing**
- + The awesome battle where the "Medusa machine" turns entire armies to stone.
- + The awesome fight against the Minotaur beneath Rome.
- The inane boss battle against Nemesis, who usually wins because he doesn't need to control the camera.
- The awful Archimedes escort mission.
- ? A customization system that doesn't really let you customize? Argh.

8.4
out of 10.0
Official Xbox Magazine



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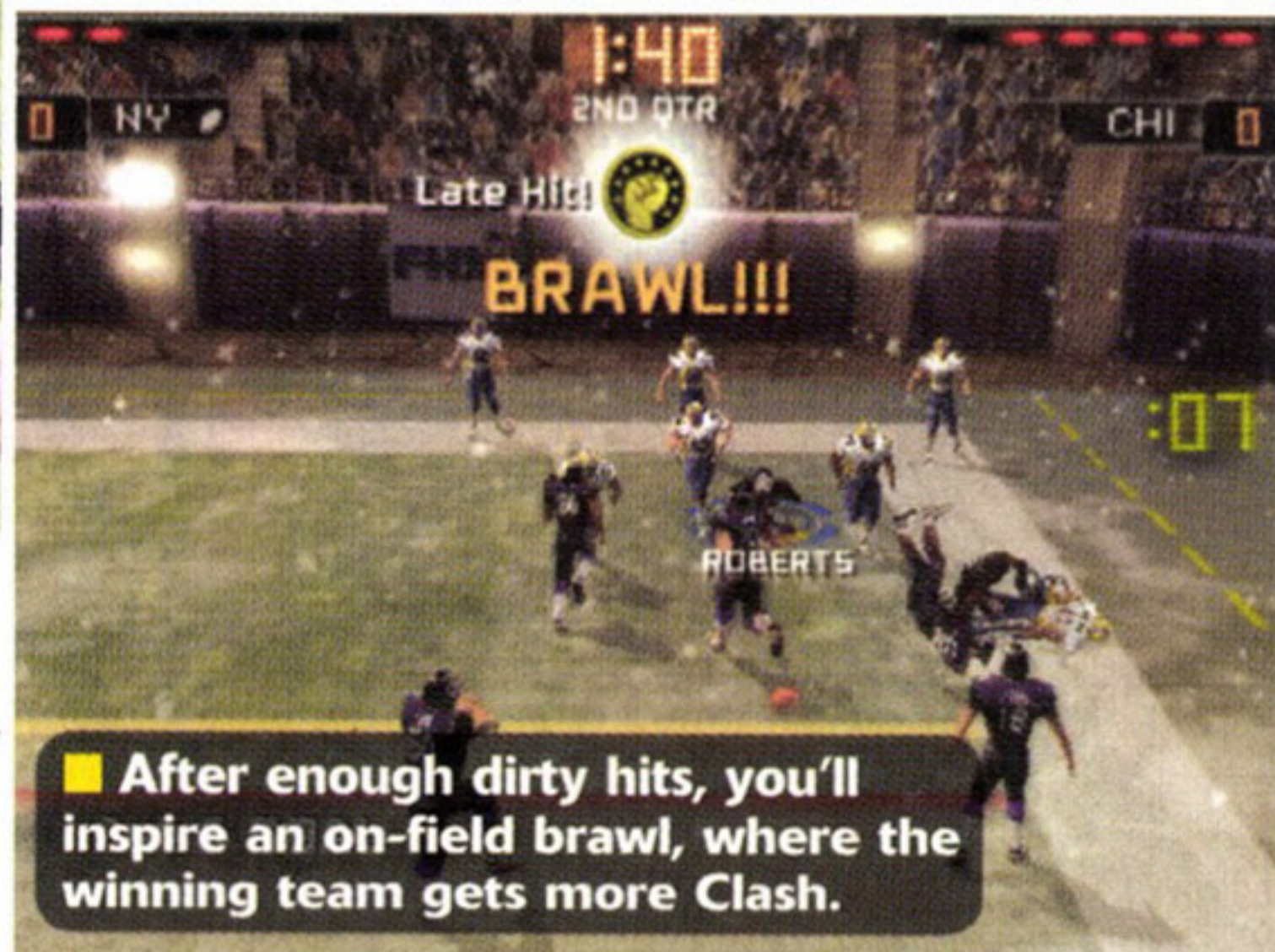
Review

4th and Brutal

■ The taunting vignettes between plays are fun for awhile, but you won't miss them once you turn them off.



■ With a maximum Clash boost, passes can't be intercepted, but you'll have to earn and save that luxury for when it matters most.



■ After enough dirty hits, you'll inspire an on-field brawl, where the winning team gets more Clash.

Not quite Madden, not quite Mutant

Blitz: The League

DEVELOPER **MIDWAY** | PUBLISHER **MIDWAY** | ESRB **MATURE** | WEBSITE **WWW.BLITZLEAGUE.COM**

MULTIPLAYER **2 VIA SAME SCREEN OR XBOX LIVE** | EXTRAS **5.1, MAKING-OF VIDEOS, CHEERLEADER PHOTOS, CYBERBALL ARCADE GAME**

The loss of the NFL license led Midway down a darker, edgier football path with *Blitz: The League*. That's not a bad thing, but you have to wonder if the game could have taken more advantage of its scandalous nature.

The League embraces nearly everything the NFL hates — hard hits, sports betting, and drugs.

Injured players can be pumped full of chemicals and sent back into the game as high as a Denver stadium. And huge passes aren't the only bombs that will be dropped on the Astro Turf; you'll hear some viciously dirty words to match the vicious hits. Take that, Paul Tagliabue!

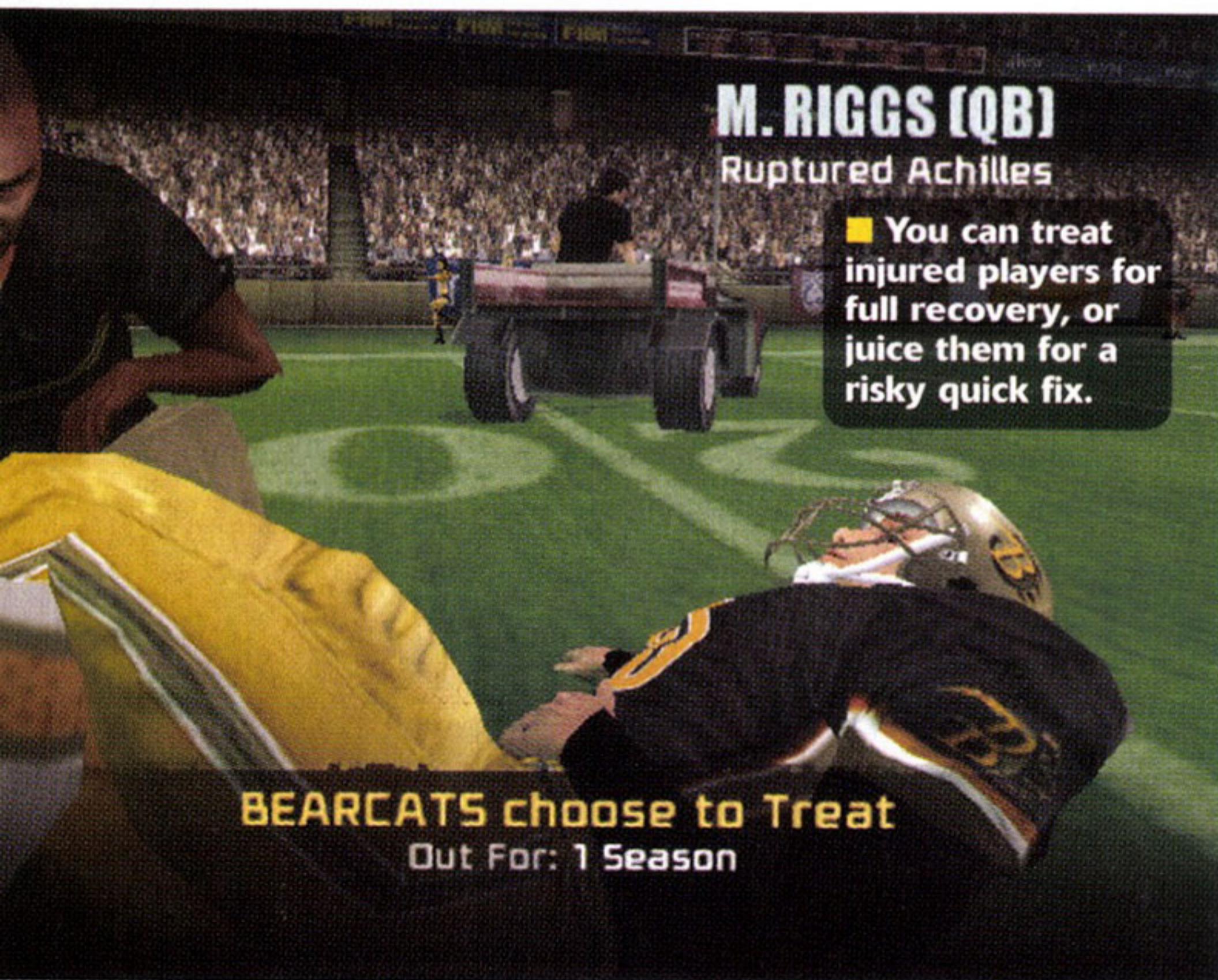
The rest of *The League* is fairly uncomplicated arcade

football, except you get rewarded for inflicting injuries. The more brutal tackles you land during a game, the more cash you can spend to equip your thugs. *The League* uses a Clash special-moves power system similar to the Gamebreakers in EA's *Street* games, so smart plays must be augmented by dirty hits and Clash catches. With crucially timed button-combo tricks earning more money than touchdowns, it's almost like *SSXFL*. If nothing else, pulling off over-the-top highlight moves leads the series back to its wilder arcade roots (thankfully, *Blitz* no longer tries to be *Madden*). And for all the attitude, the trash talk gets boring after a while and slows the game down; good thing it can be deactivated.

With Campaign Mode, you get to create your team's uniform, draft key athletes, then train them up and decide whether or not they "juice" throughout the season. You do feel a sense of ownership, but the game needs to take the fiction further; you're left wanting to make moral decisions in this world rather than just play football in it.

As it is, *The League* makes a fun game of pick-up-and-play pigskin with some extra depth, but it could've been even more fulfilling.

— Dan Amrich



THE VERDICT

Graphics
Crisp, until things go slo-mo blurry with every Clash move. Then again, the players are hopped up on performance-enhancing goofballs...

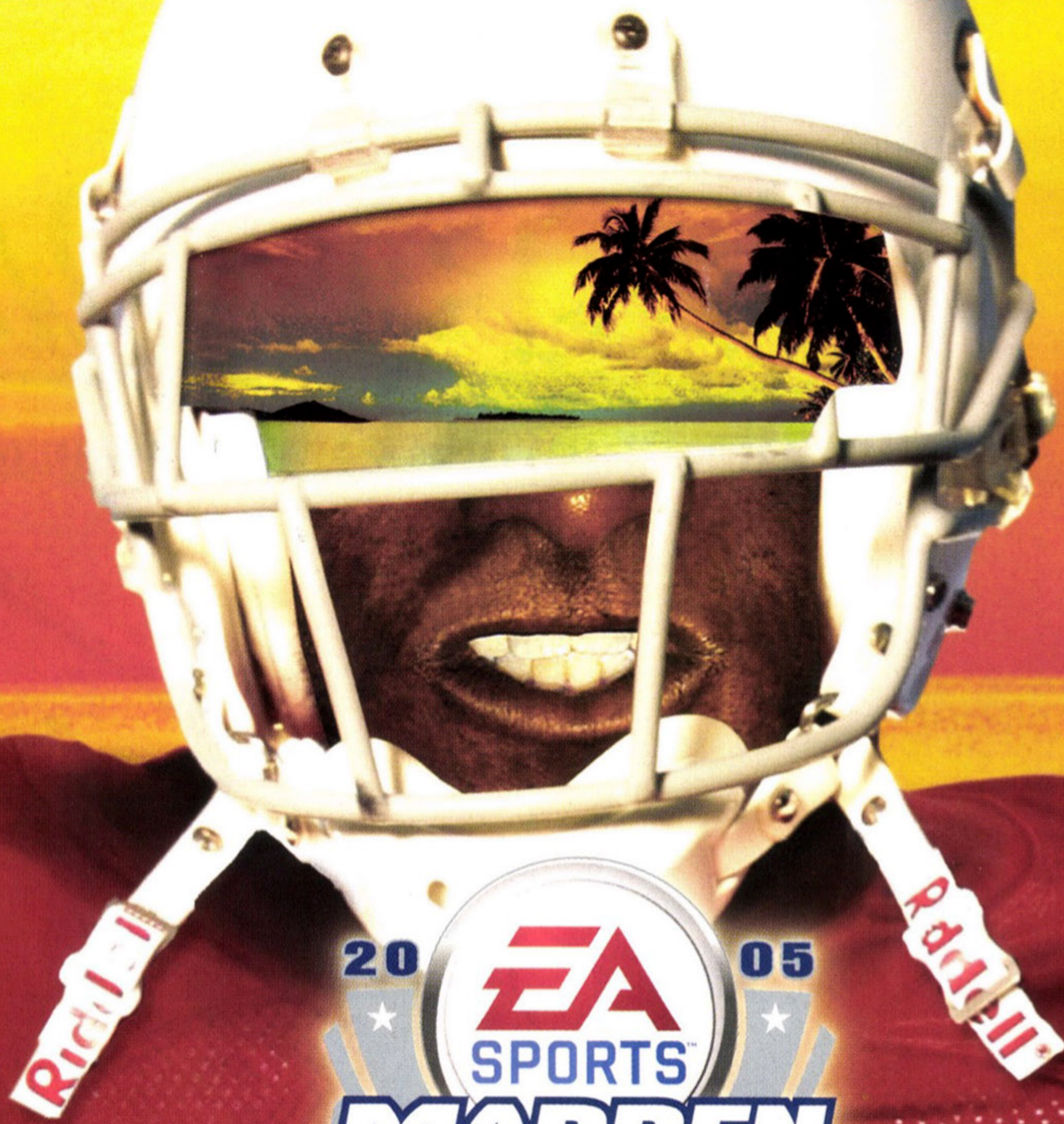
Immersion
While the trash-talking interruptions are intended to make the fantasy football world richer, it's actually easier to get sucked in once you turn them off.

Sound
Vaguely threatening hip-hop fills both the soundtrack and the stadium; home crowds regularly chant that the visitors "suck."

Design
Every week brings new gameplay challenges and fresh unlockables, and curiosity does drive you to play just one more game...

+ Good, - Bad.
? Perplexing
+ *Blitz* embraces its brutal, arcade-y origins.
+ Can use custom teams on Xbox Live.
- The rich world lacks rich interactions.
- Needs more logos and cities for team-creation mode.
? Why is Midway the only company willing to explore this territory?

7.4
out of 10.0
Official Xbox Magazine



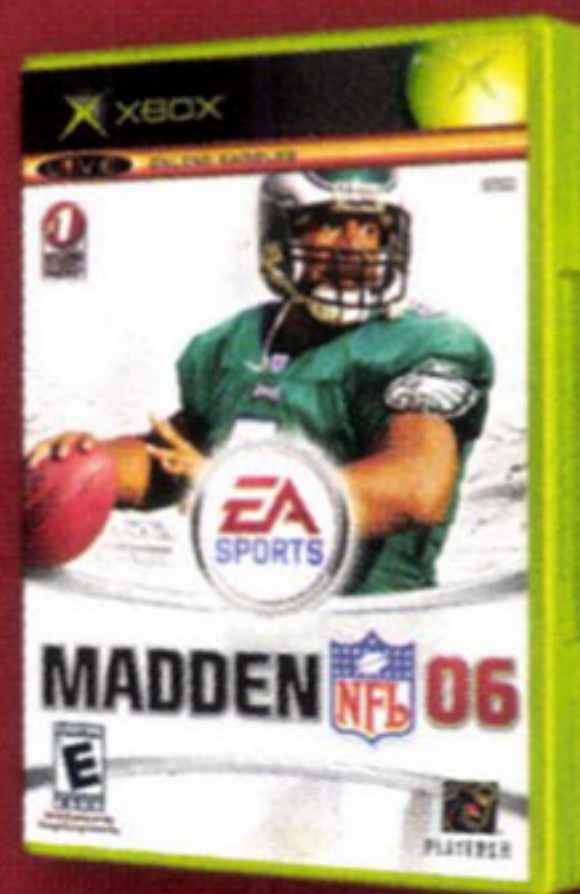
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PHILADELPHIA	9/18	KING OF PRUSSIA MALL	MIAMI	11/13	SHOPS AT SUNSET PLACE
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DETROIT	10/8	GREAT LAKES CROSSING	SAN DIEGO	12/3	MISSION VALLEY
CHICAGO	10/9	NAVY PIER	LOS ANGELES	12/4	HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND
GREEN BAY	10/15	LAMBEAU FIELD ATRIUM	SAN FRANCISCO	12/9-12/10	METREON
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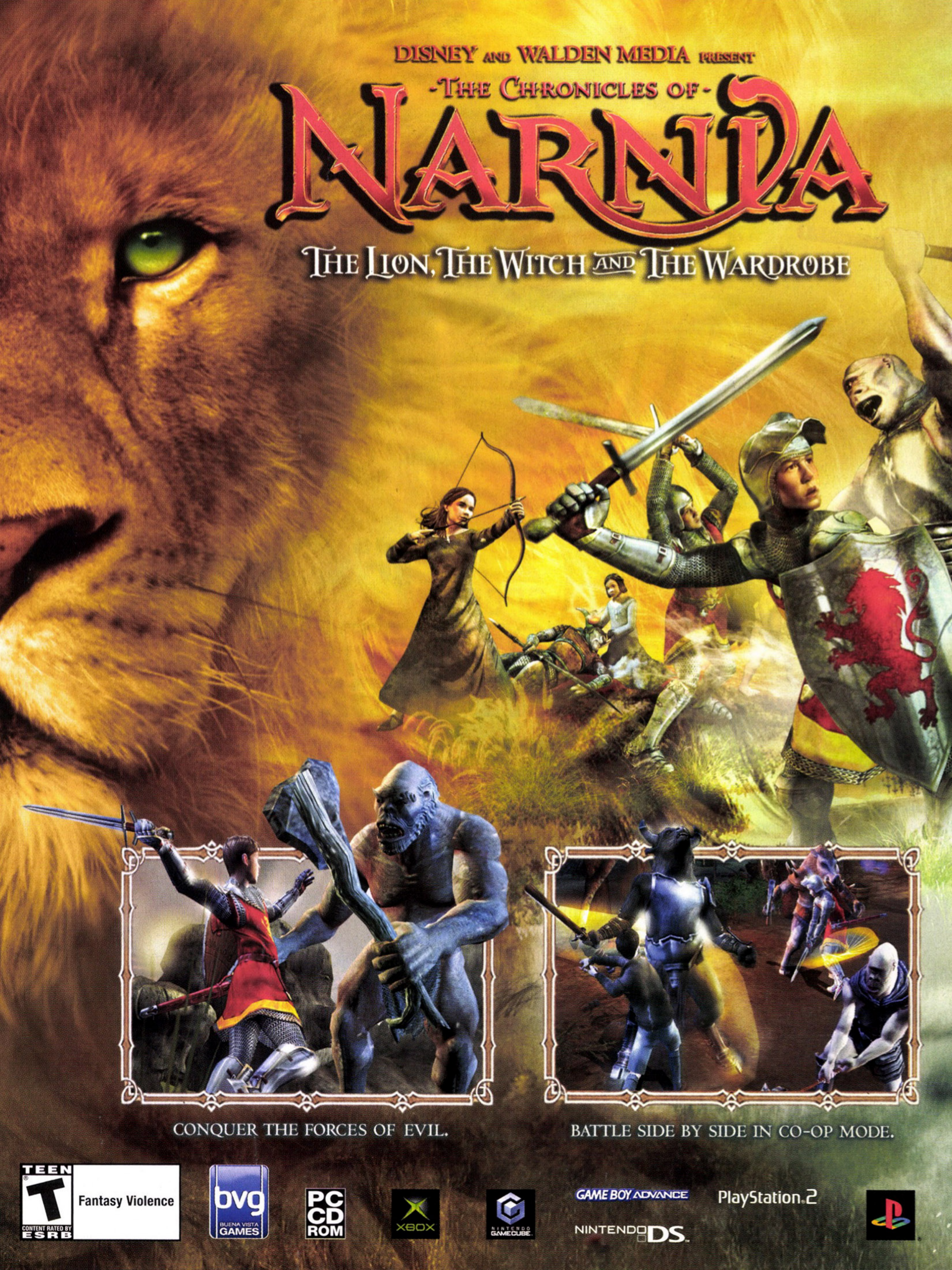
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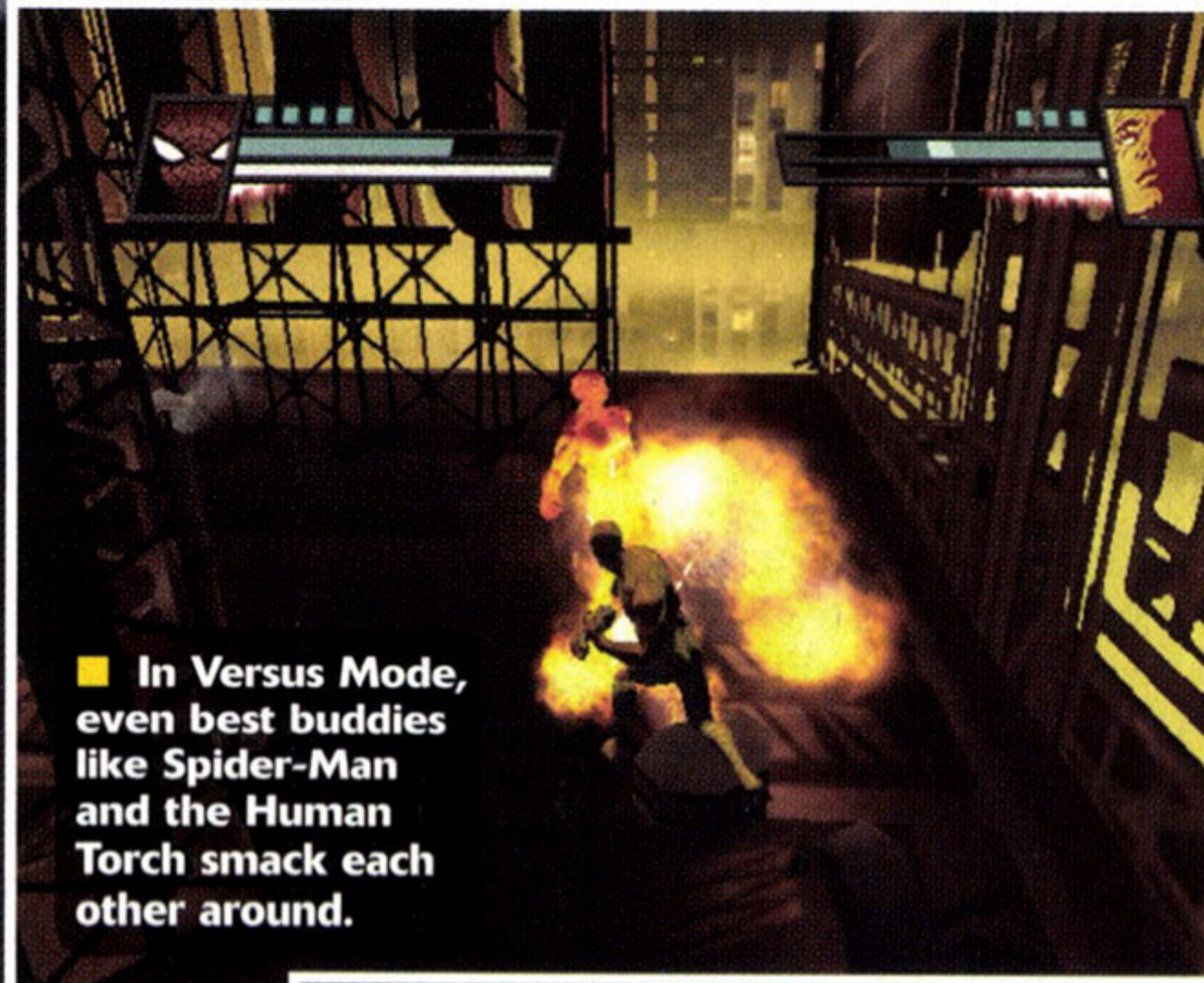
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■ One of the Imperfects, Solara, is on the receiving end of Venom's web of ick.



■ In Versus Mode, even best buddies like Spider-Man and the Human Torch smack each other around.



■ What's a Story Mode without generic robots?

The fall of a not-so-marvelous fighting game

Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects

DEVELOPER **NIHILISTIC/EA CANADA** PUBLISHER **EA** ESRB **TEEN** EXTRAS **UNLOCKABLE COMICS AND BIOS**
 WEBSITE **WWW.EAGAMES.COM/OFFICIAL/MARVEL/NEMESIS/US** MULTIPLAYER **2 ON SAME SCREEN AND XBOX LIVE**

In industry-speak, *Marvel Nemesis* is a fighting game that "demos" well. That is to say, it looks fantastic when watching somebody else play it. For example: Witnessing Iron Man fling a flaming car, causing an opponent to be propelled backwards in slow motion, is nearly as cool as seeing Spider-Man web-swing into the Daily Bugle building's rooftop sign, dislodging the giant "B" onto a group of incendiary barrels, creating a chain reaction of explosions. But, when you pick up

the controller for yourself, you'll find a repetitive, cheap fighter that's all looks and no brains. *Marvel Nemesis* stars a diverse who's who of playable Marvel superheroes (Wolverine, Daredevil, Venom, The Thing) and also introduces The Imperfects, a cadre of new, original superpowered characters. The premise is that by playing through a single-player campaign that presents a series of mini-challenges for each Marvel hero, you'll get the lowdown on each Imperfect and unlock new characters and settings for the game's multiplayer mode.

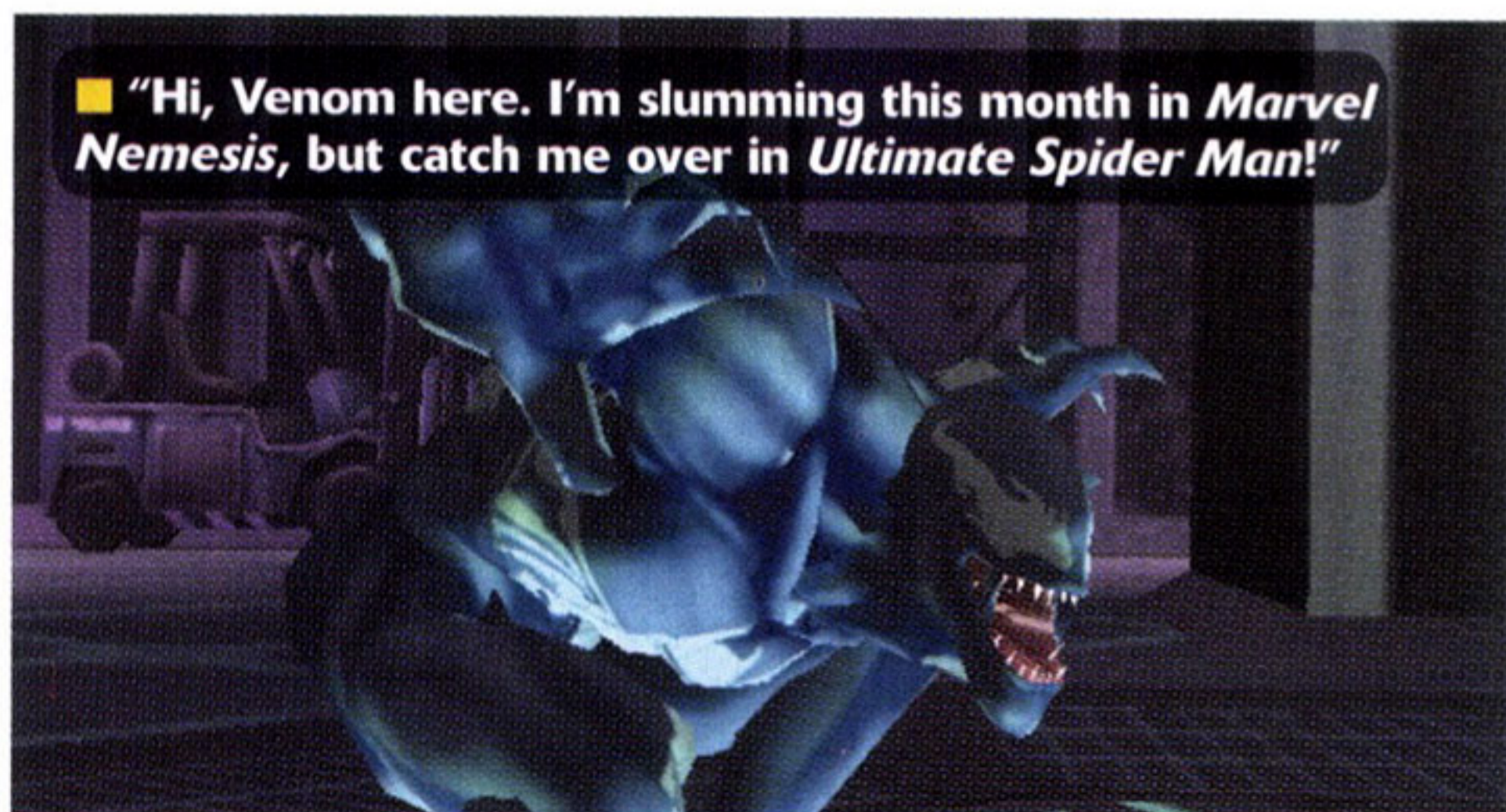
Nemesis' whiz-bang cinematic effects are impressive to watch, but also mar the simple gameplay of the single-player mode. The camera is either zoomed too close, making you vulnerable to frustrating off-screen attacks by multiple enemies, or zoomed so far out that the combatants are indistinguishable and obscured by the scenery. Slo-mo sequences also briefly disorient you, and sometimes allow AI opponents to sneak off extra unblockable attacks as the slo-mo clip unspools.

Gameplay fares better during multiplayer Versus Mode battles when two players square off. As a fighting game, though, *Marvel Nemesis* is no *DOA* or *Soul Calibur* – there aren't any combos to speak of, and each character has only a few unique super attacks and one finishing move. The AI is none too smart, either.

Nemesis' best feature is the mostly destructible environment, with items like poles and generators being ripped out of the ground and thrown or wielded as

weapons. But like in the movies, not even an appearance by super-hottie Elektra can save you from the frustration and repetition.

– Chuck Osborn



THE VERDICT

Graphics
 Skewing toward adult fans, the visuals aren't kiddo or cel-shaded, and the arenas tend to be darkly lit. The playable characters look great, but the generic enemies get dull.

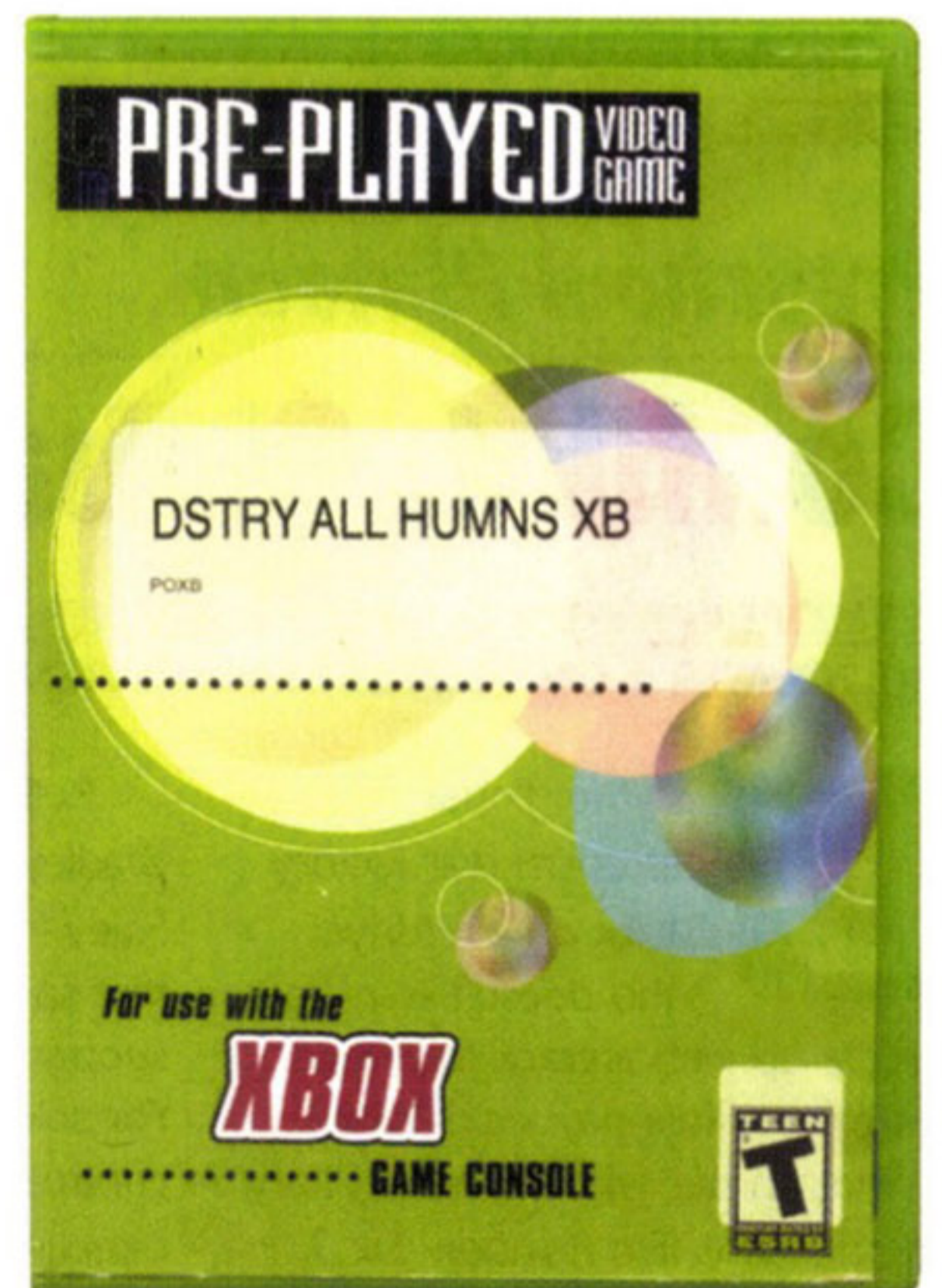
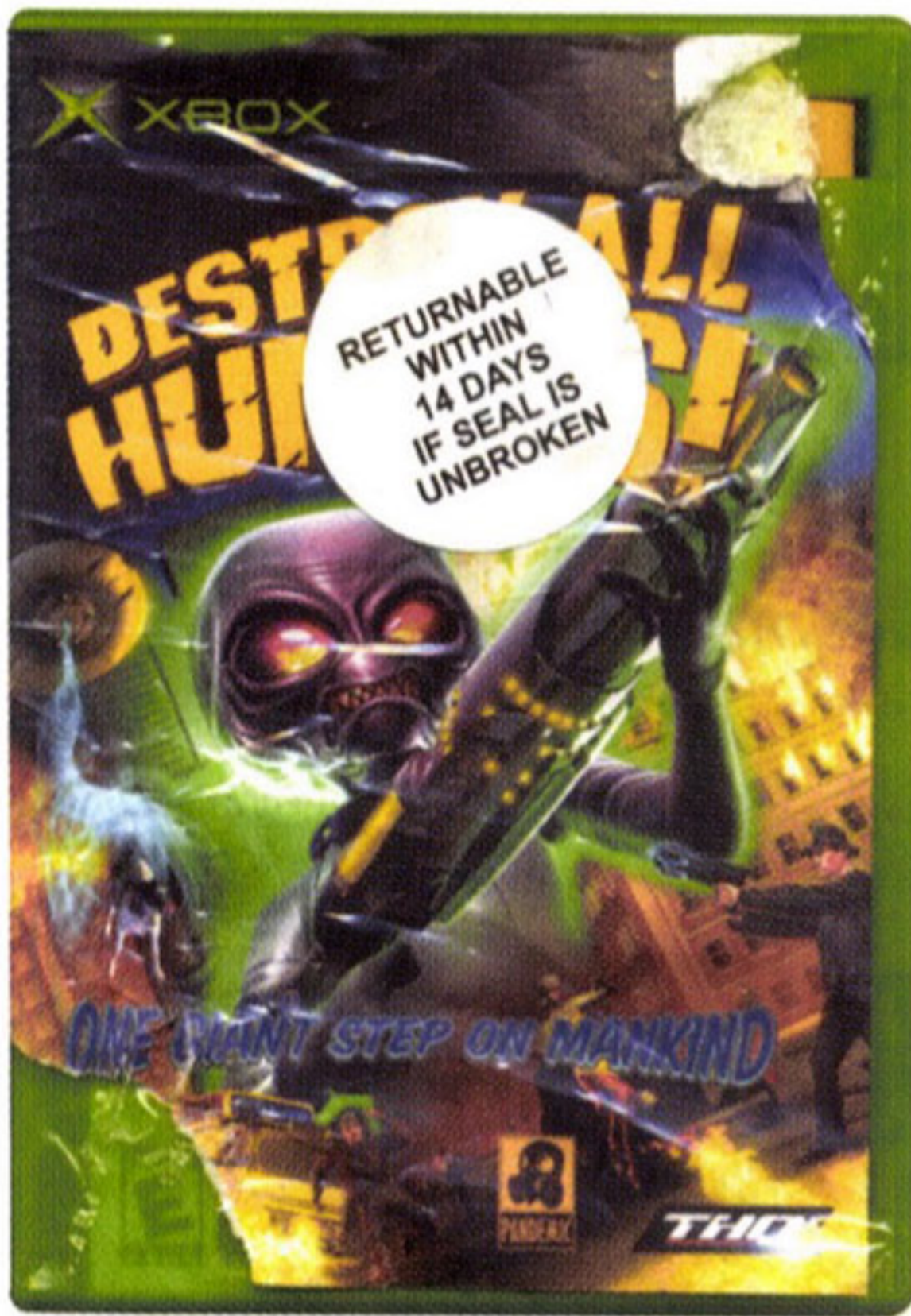
Immersion
 The destructible environments are cool, but you'll be too busy fielding off-screen attacks and cheap enemies to enjoy them.

Sound
 Good overall – the voiceovers are high quality and the musical score has punch.

Design
 Nice to look at, but the control and camera perspectives spoil the experience. The "defeat all the X" challenges get old fast.

- + Good, - Bad.
- ? Perplexing
- + Stuff blows up real good!
- + Unlockable multimedia comic books.
- Cinematic effects detract from gameplay.
- Little depth for a fighting game.
- ? Why isn't there a button to lock focus on your opponent?

XBOX Official Xbox Magazine **5.7** out of 10.0



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Preschool Platoon

Conflict: Global Terror

DEVELOPER **PIVOTAL GAMES** | PUBLISHER **2K GAMES** | ESRB **MATURE** | WEBSITE **WWW.CONFLICT.COM**
 MULTIPLAYER **4 ON SPLIT SCREEN, SYSTEM LINK, AND XBOX LIVE** | EXTRAS **DOLBY 5.1**

With the global terrorism fear factory stuck on overdrive, who doesn't want to saddle up with a crack four-man team for a little payback? While it's not on par with serious military combat sims like *Rainbow Six 3*, *Conflict: Global Terror* satisfies just enough of this genre's requirements to be entertaining.

Returning to the theater are Bradley, Jones, Connors, and Foley in a new world tour of duty that sports some snazzy online support (a first for the series). For solo gamers, the squad controls are fairly simple, and directing your crew to prepare an ambush can be a breeze (though sometimes frustrating in the heat of battle). The highly hyped AI

seems mediocre in comparison to competing titles since your fellow squaddies won't automatically provide cover fire (or take cover themselves sometimes). Still, the beefed-up rag-doll physics provide a silver lining to having your entire squad blown to pieces. What it lacks in hardcore squad dynamics, however, it makes up for with its funky



soundtrack, detailed graphics, and semi-tactical gameplay. *CGT* is competent, but not outstanding.

- Gabe Graziani



Can a game be too realistic?

Sniper Elite

DEVELOPER **REBELLION** | PUBLISHER **NAMCO** | ESRB **MATURE**
 WEBSITE **WWW.NAMCO.COM/GAMES/SNIPELITE** | EXTRAS **NONE**
 MULTIPLAYER **2P IN SPLIT-SCREEN CO-OP, 8 IN DEATHMATCHES ON XBOX LIVE**

Sniping requires patience. You might wait all day for your target. But you can't deny the slo-mo thrill of watching a large-caliber bullet lodge into the eye socket of an enemy, then splatter the wall behind him with goopy brain matter on its exit.

Such is the satisfaction found in *Sniper Elite*, a WWII game where you pick off Russkies at the tail end of the war. Missions are varied on the surface but mostly come down to shooting folks from afar. Pacing is very slow - you'll do a lot of waiting, scouting, failing, and reloading,

and the low-quality, muddy-brown graphics don't give you much to look at during the downtime. Still, the realism in the sniping - compensating for wind and gravity - add to the enjoyment, but you'll have to suffer through the boring parts in between, too.

- Ryan McCaffrey



Give the otaku what they want

King of Fighters

DEVELOPER **SNK PLAYMORE** | PUBLISHER **SNK PLAYMORE** | ESRB **TEEN**
 WEBSITE **WWW.SNKPLAYMOREUSA.COM** | MULTIPLAYER **2 VIA SAME SCREEN OR XBOX LIVE** | EXTRAS **NONE**

Hardcore 2D fighting fans who live for SNK's releases will be happy to hear that *King of Fighters 02/03* offers two spot-on arcade translations. These were the last two *KOF* games on the original 16-bit Neo-Geo MVS hardware, and the goods are in the gameplay. *KOF 2002* returned to classic three-on-three matches

with a massive 44-fighter roster, while *2003* introduced mid-fight character-swapping to keep things



fresh. Both feature buttery-smooth animation, original Japanese voice-overs, and Xbox Live support.

Sharp controls reward technical skills, but both games are still accessible to button mashers, especially with a frustration-free continue mode that cripples the CPU opponent on a rematch. Kudos to SNK for being completists and strong

supporters of Xbox Live - releases like *KOF 02/03* are why its fan base remains so loyal.

- Dan Amrich





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**My gamer fragged
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Now That's What I Call Games, Vol. 4

Capcom Classics Collection

DEVELOPER **CAPCOM** | PUBLISHER **CAPCOM** | ESRB **TEEN**
 WEBSITE **WWW.CAPCOM.COM** | EXTRAS **NONE**
 MULTIPLAYER **2 ON SAME SCREEN (SOME GAMES)**

Last issue we reviewed a slew of classic-videogame collections that had too narrow a focus or didn't offer enough retro-gaming love. Capcom must have felt our pain because this is the collection we were waiting for – it features 22 genuine classics like *Final Fight*, *Mercs*, and *Street Fighter II*, as well as some obscure favorites like *Trojan* and *Vulgus* (Capcom's

first game ever). If you're part of the older generation, you might feel even older when you consider how far graphics and gameplay have come in the last 15 years – but you'll also marvel at how well some of these games held up and how much fun they still are to play. Loaded with cool extras and pixel-perfect re-creations, *Capcom Classic Collection* is one of the best trips down puberty lane you'll probably ever have.

– Tom Price



THE VERDICT

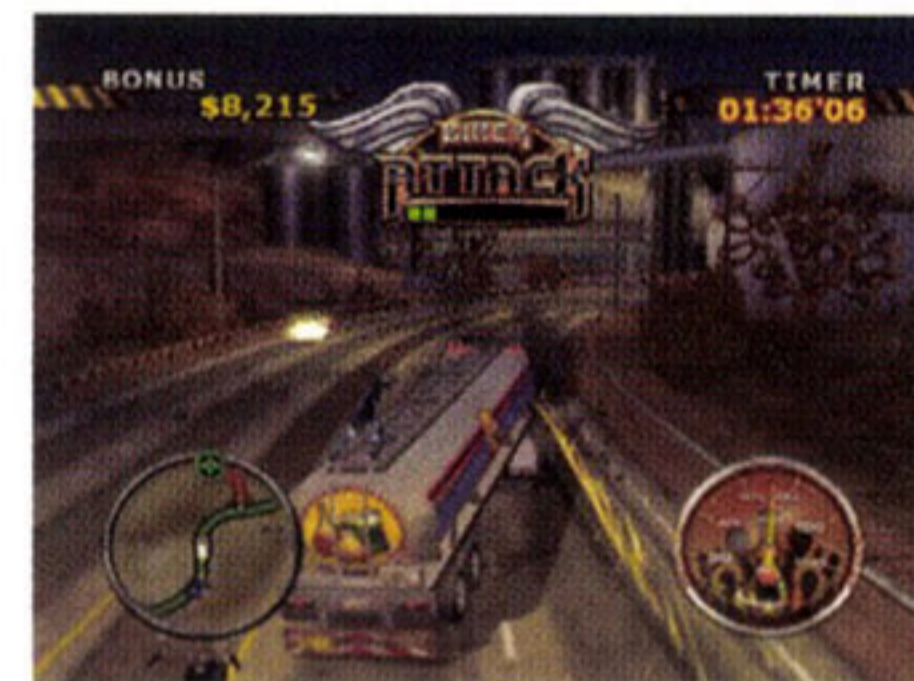
8.9
 Official Xbox Magazine out of 10.0

18 wheels of guilty fun

Big Mutha Truckers 2

DEVELOPER **EUTECHNYX** | PUBLISHER **THQ** | ESRB **MATURE**
 WEBSITE **WWW.BIGMUTHATRUCKERS.COM** | EXTRAS **NONE**
 MULTIPLAYER **NONE**

Strangely, the recent Xbox game that *Big Mutha Truckers 2* most resembles is *Sid Meier's Pirates*. In both, you ferry cargo from one port to another, trying to sell them for as much profit as possible. Except this time you do it with an overpowered 18-wheeler, careening around a short-cut laden map instead of a 17th-century galleon. Maybe because *BMT2* doesn't take itself as seriously as *Pirates*, the addictively repetitive motion seems less tedious. What is tedious about *BMT2* is the glut of relentless jokes at the expense of gays and hillbillies. They're awfully cheap. C'mon people,



in this day and age, we can do much better, especially since the game has some otherwise fun moments behind the wheel and with the casino games at each greasy truck stop.

– Tom Price

THE VERDICT

4.1
 Official Xbox Magazine out of 10.0

Jack of all trades, master of some

The Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge

DEVELOPER **CAPCOM** | PUBLISHER **BUENA VISTA GAMES**
 ESRB **TEEN** | WEBSITE **WWW.BUENAVISTAGAMES.COM**
 EXTRAS **UNLOCKABLE VIRTUAL FIGURINE COLLECTION**

As skeletal hero Jack Skellington, you'll whip, jump, and taunt your way through a quest to save Halloween Town from the big bad Oogie Boogie. The journey involves combo-laden but simplistic whip-work with your upgradeable Soul Robber weapon. To get the most out of the game, you'll revisit past chapters in order earn more

money to best some of the challenges ahead. The voice work is phenomenal, as is the soundtrack and aesthetic – *Nightmare* fans will be delighted by *Oogie's* attention to detail. But though the gameplay ranges from by-the-numbers action to clever rhythm-action-inspired boss fights, it challenges but never excites. On its own, *Oogie's Revenge* is solid but not particularly inspired.

– Francesca Reyes



THE VERDICT

7.1
 Official Xbox Magazine out of 10.0

What we have here is a failure to evolve

Worms 4 Mayhem

DEVELOPER **TEAM 17** | PUBLISHER **MAJESCO** | ESRB **EVERYONE**
 WEBSITE **WWW.MAJESCOGAMES.COM**
 MULTIPLAYER **4 PLAYERS ON SPLIT SCREEN OR XBOX LIVE**
 EXTRAS **UNLOCKABLE TROPHIES, CUSTOMIZABLE OPTIONS**

There was a time when *Worms* represented the pinnacle of gameplay evolution; in the days of 2D, the series fashioned a set of physics rules, provided wacky weapons that obeyed those rules, and let players roam free. Today the series has upgraded these core concepts for 3D play, but unfortunately, the gameplay itself hasn't evolved. Clever design, truly destructible environments, more realistic physics, and more innovative weapons might have returned these invertebrate to their former glory. Instead, improvements include new weapons, new gameplay modes, Xbox Live support, and a



generous dose of customizability. *Worms 4* is still addictive, but the gameplay and tired humor makes this series a knuckle dragging Cro-Magnon compared to the telekinetic flying super-ape it should've been.

– Dan Egger

THE VERDICT

6.5
 Official Xbox Magazine out of 10.0



Easily earned your \$50, too

Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood

DEVELOPER **GEARBOX** | PUBLISHER **UBISOFT** | ESRB **MATURE** | WEBSITE WWW.BROTHERSINARMSGAME.COM
MULTIPLAYER **4 ON SPLIT SCREEN, SYSTEM LINK, OR LIVE** | EXTRAS **480P, 5.1 SOUND**

No argument here – the WWII genre is more played out than Ashlee Simpson. Which makes the latest *Brothers in Arms* all the more impressive for managing to craft another riveting experience in what should be a creatively exhausted landscape. On top of arriving less than a year after the first game, *Earned in Blood* sharpens up the AI, throws in co-op, and unleashes another absorbing single-player campaign. What more could you want from a sequel?

The gameplay continues to hit that sweet spot between the too-cerebral strategy of *Full Spectrum Warrior* and the too-gonzo action of *Medal of Honor*, but a much brighter and more active enemy makes these skirmishes even more white-knuckle intense. As you maneuver your squads to set up suppression and flanking maneuvers, you'll get pinned down at some point, and you'll dally, thinking you have time to find a way out – after all, a ticking clock almost never affects the outcome of videogame battles, right? But then the Germans will rush out from some surprising position, having used the delay to



flank you and crush you. Expect to be kinda pissed, but mostly impressed – exactly the right ingredients to keep you glued to the controller.

The maps continue to evolve from the original as well. And though they traverse the usual terrain (ranging from hedgerows to pancaked villages), the maps offer a more open feel. You can't roam wherever you like, but you'll

find enough feasible paths that you'll rarely feel like you're being herded down the one possible route the designers envisioned.

The gripping multiplayer side beefs up nicely with 10 new maps alongside the original 10 from last game, but it's the addition of co-op (playable over Live) that deserves the most attention. With five Allied and five German missions, along with the ability to set up your own custom

mini-game-style contests, it's practically a whole other game within the game, and the challenges and rewards of coordinating your squad with another human-commanded unit really pay off. So does a return engagement with *Brothers'* intelligent yet visceral squad combat – this series remains the best WWII action on Xbox.

– Paul Curthoys

THE VERDICT

Graphics

The ol' gal called Xbox has plenty of life left in her, and *Earned in Blood* shows her at her finest with gorgeous landscapes, shattering explosions, and graceful animations.

Immersion

Balancing the need to effectively deploy your squads while aiming entirely down the barrel (onscreen crosshairs are for sissies!) keeps you utterly immersed in the game.

Sound

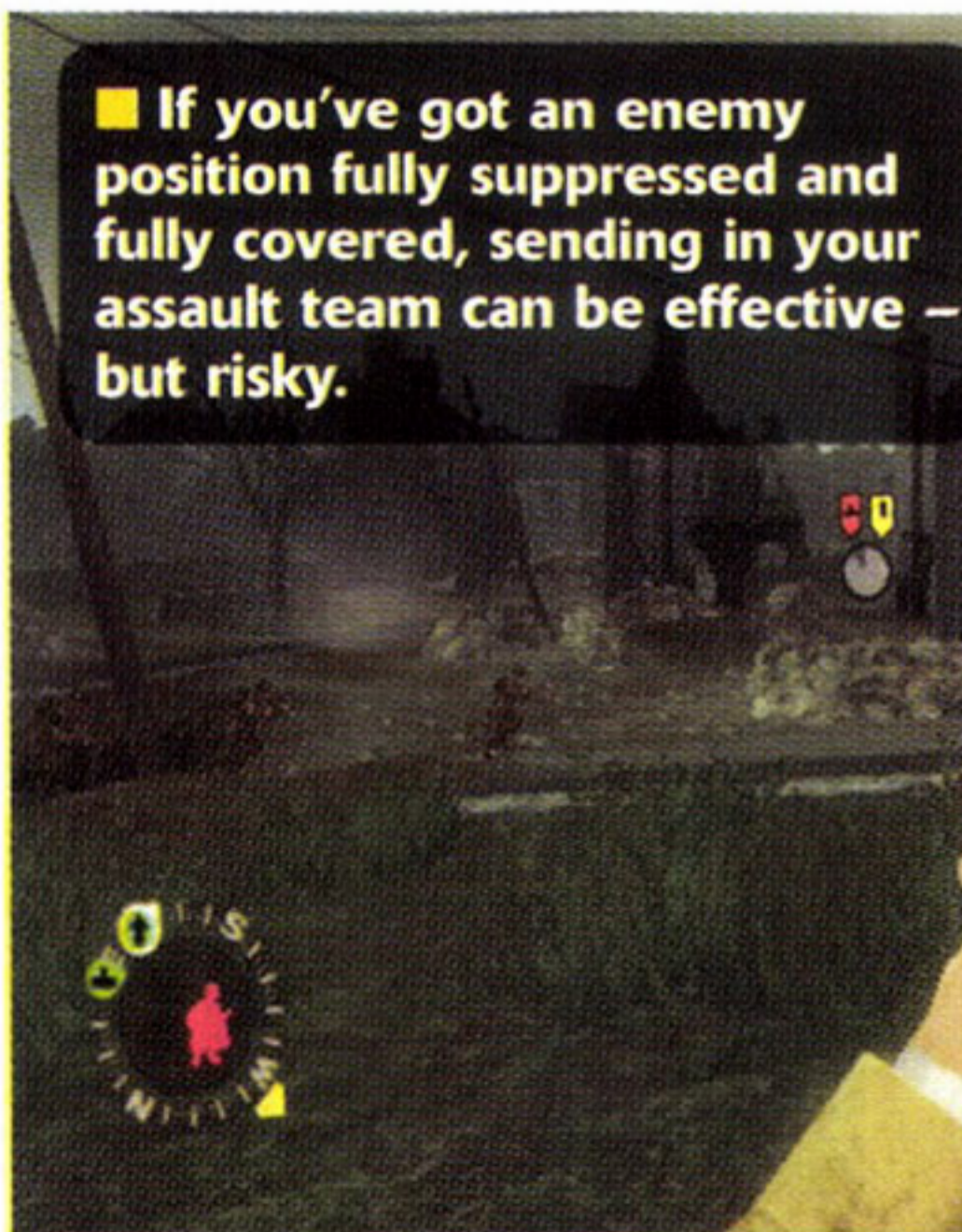
The heroic strains of the theme song hit too cliché a note, but the tense and informative battle chatter keeps the story and the action moving.

Design

New maps, modes, and AI hog the spotlight, but Gearbox also took time to fix the little details, like squad members dying in a mission and then returning in the subsequent cutscene.

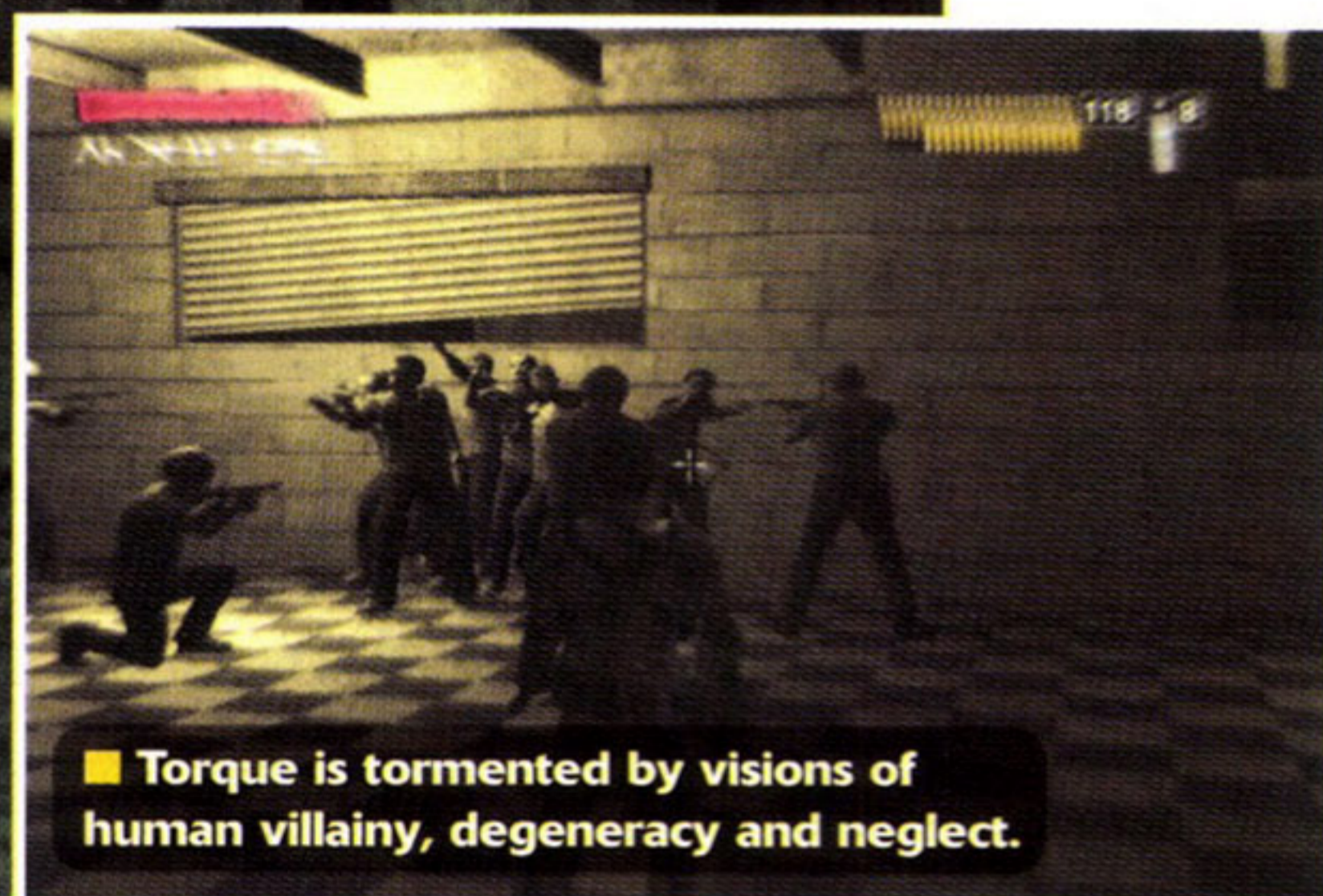
- + Good. - Bad.
- ? Perplexing
- + Challenging AI, great maps, and absorbing gameplay = another stellar battle.
- + Rich, deep multiplayer and co-op.
- Absence of save-anywhere feature (like the PC version has) is just lame.
- Still can't jump over barriers that a real paratrooper could hurdle with ease.
- ? No matter how great the gameplay is, how long can we keep playing WWII games?

XBOX **9.6**
Official Xbox Magazine out of 10.0





■ After slaying his quota, Torque can morph into Rage Mode where special attacks and one-hit kills can cut through enemies like Hattori Hanzo steel.



■ Torque is tormented by visions of human villainy, degeneracy and neglect.

Midway goes over the top with grindhouse, gross-out thrills

The Suffering: Ties That Bind

DEVELOPER **SURREAL SOFTWARE** | PUBLISHER **MIDWAY** | ESRB **MATURE (AND THEY MEAN IT!)**
 WEBSITE **WWW.SUFFERINGTIESTHATBIND.COM** | MULTIPLAYER **NONE** | EXTRAS **480P**

Torque's escape from the gruesome charnel house of Carnate Island in *The Suffering* wasn't much of an escape at all. Now the entire city of Baltimore is under siege by the same macabre predators he faced in prison, along with a fresh crop of grotesque creatures who are mowing down everything and everyone in sight with heavy ordnance grafted to their bloated corpses. Torque's

only motive to survive is the opportunity to take out Blackmore (voiced with gleeful malice by Michael Clark Duncan), the man he believes is responsible for the death of his family.

From the minute you hit the Baltimore docks, *Ties That Bind* hammers you with relentless action, long exhausting sequences of chaos and panic reminiscent of the Marine massacre in *Aliens*. Torque turns a darker shade of

crimson with every arterial spurt as you dish out the pain with everything from fire axes to M-16's (though poor hit detection can drain the exhilaration of some battles).

There are moments of gut-wrenching terror and suspense, but the most remarkable part of *Ties That Bind* is that it never, ever flinches at

depicting gore, evil, and depravity. Panicked locals plea for help before their innards are blown out onto Torque's tank-top; drug addicts weep and shout a string of obscenities while squatting in their own filth. Eech.

The "morality system" from the original game takes on even more significance in *Ties That Bind* – by choosing whether or not to put your ass on the line protecting those you meet on the way, you'll affect the way Torque appears, morphing, Hulk-like, into the physical manifestation of his rage, and you'll also influence some aspects of the plot and endings.

Ties That Bind is mired in a weak and confused story compared to *The Suffering's* simple, urgent objective – escape. But thankfully, the occasional moments of exposition allow you to take a breath before the next gruesome onslaught.

– Logan Decker

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Some spectacular visuals – like watching Torque transform in slo-mo – stand out amid otherwise dim textures, a few lighting glitches, and polygon-starved boss monsters.

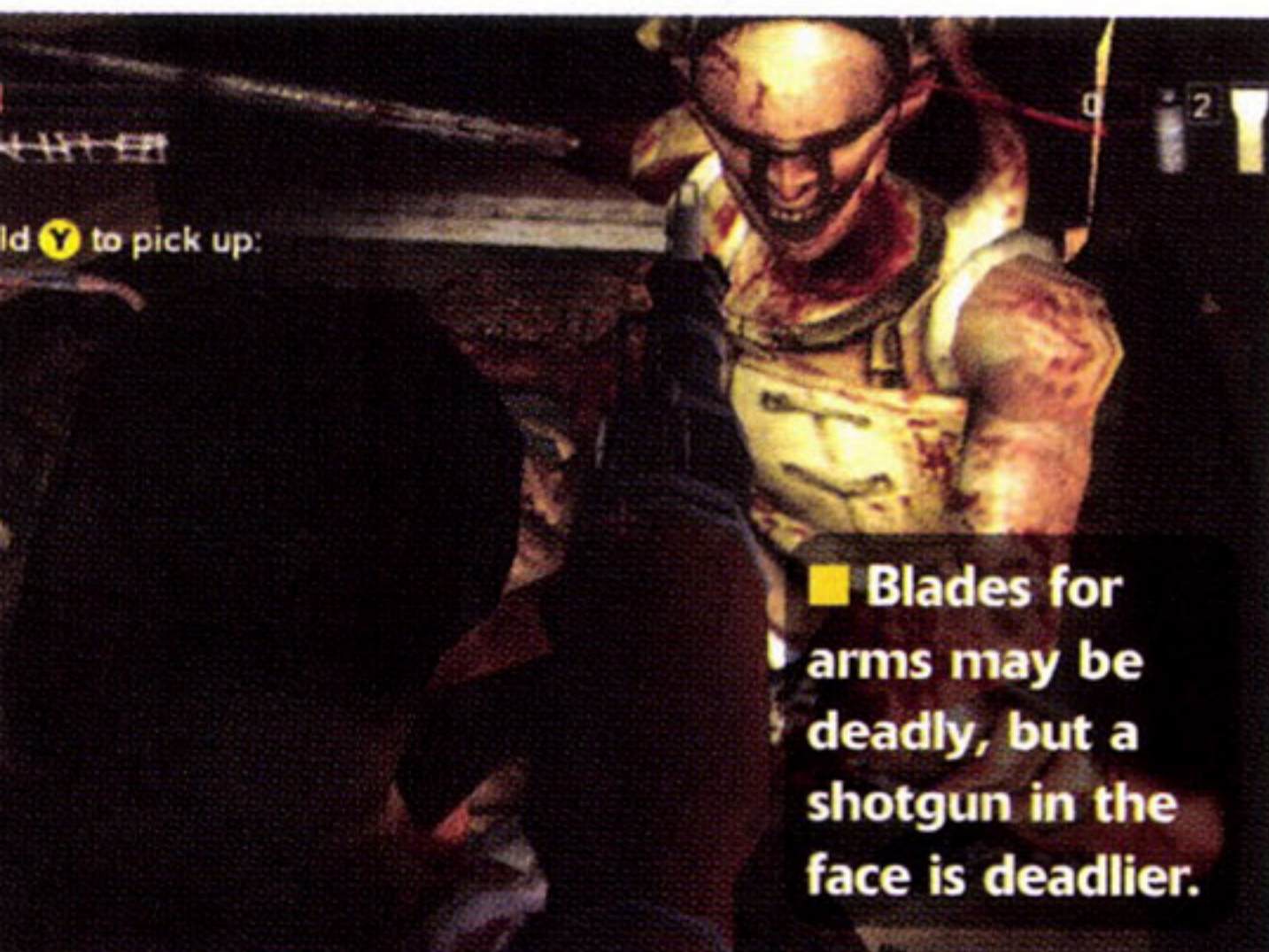
Immersion
With relentless, brutal action from start to finish, *Ties That Bind* isn't as scary as it is intimidating. The no-holds-barred gore and misery delivers what's easily the most shocking game the Xbox has ever seen.

Sound
There's plenty of skin-crawling sound effects (the dinkety-dink of the Slayer's blades scuttling on the ceiling in a dimly lit room is the most unsettling), but the way NPCs blurt out the same two or three lines over and over again feels decidedly coin-op.

Design
Ties That Bind is among the relatively few single-player games you'll want to play over again, putting you back in the action to see how a different moral alignment affects the story and visuals.

- + Good. - Bad.
- ? Perplexing
- + Harsh. Shocking. Punishing.
- + You can save anywhere, anytime.
- + Michael Clark Duncan.
- Bumbling hit detection.
- Unfocused story.
- ? Where's FEMA during all of this?

XBOX **8.6**
 Official Xbox Magazine OUT OF 10.0



■ Blades for arms may be deadly, but a shotgun in the face is deadlier.

A symphony of shells

Serious Sam II

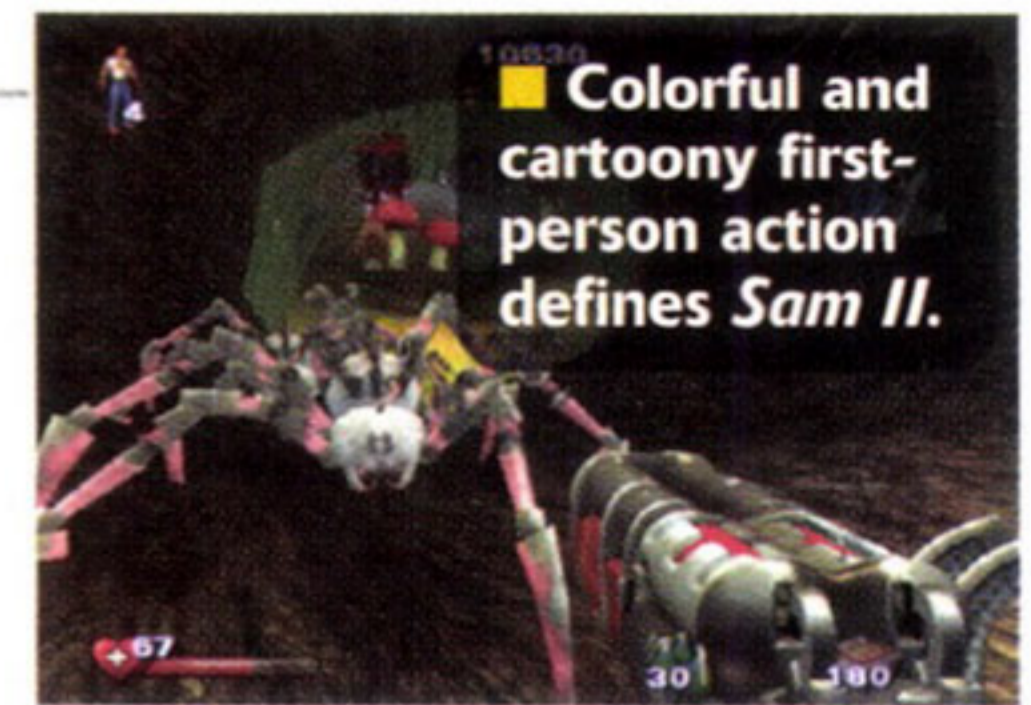
DEVELOPER **CROTEAM** | PUBLISHER **2K GAMES** | ESRB **MATURE** | EXTRAS **480P, DOLBY 5.1**
WEBSITE **WWW.CROTEAM.COM** | MULTIPLAYER **2 IN CO-OP, 4 OVER XBOX LIVE AND SYSTEM LINK**

Focusing on the delicious, cream-filled center of the FPS genre, *Serious Sam II* defiantly declares that a

quality action game has no need for highbrow plots or plausible motivations. Its true success lies in its ability to engulf you in an ultimate arcade-twitch fragfest

where your brain can be regarded as a vestigial organ.

Dedicated to keeping framerates as high as possible, developer Croteam delivers a smooth river of visual silk using the new Serious Engine 2. That's no mean feat considering the hordes of Sam's trademark oddball creatures that hopelessly fling themselves into the line of fire. Granted, the pattern of *Serious Sam II* is fairly easy to pick up on: Move into a new area, kill all the enemies, rinse, repeat. Still, the variety of foes, occasional puzzles (some jumping – gasp!), the handful of vehicular opportunities, and constant barrage of half-chuckle-worthy quips keep the pace going and show off one of this game's



Colorful and cartoony first-person action defines *Sam II*.



"Over the top" doesn't begin to describe the enemies in *Sam*.

best features: its utter lack of seriousness of any kind.

Frustrated with flashlights? Tired of not having enough ammo, ever? *Serious Sam II* serves up a piping hot platter of punishment, free of the FPS clichés that mire other titles.

– Gabe Graziani



Consider yourself warned now

Without Warning

DEVELOPER **CIRCLE STUDIOS** | PUBLISHER **CAPCOM** | ESRB **MATURE** | WEBSITE **WWW.CAPCOM.COM**
MULTIPLAYER **NONE** | EXTRAS **UNENDING PAIN AND FRUSTRATION**

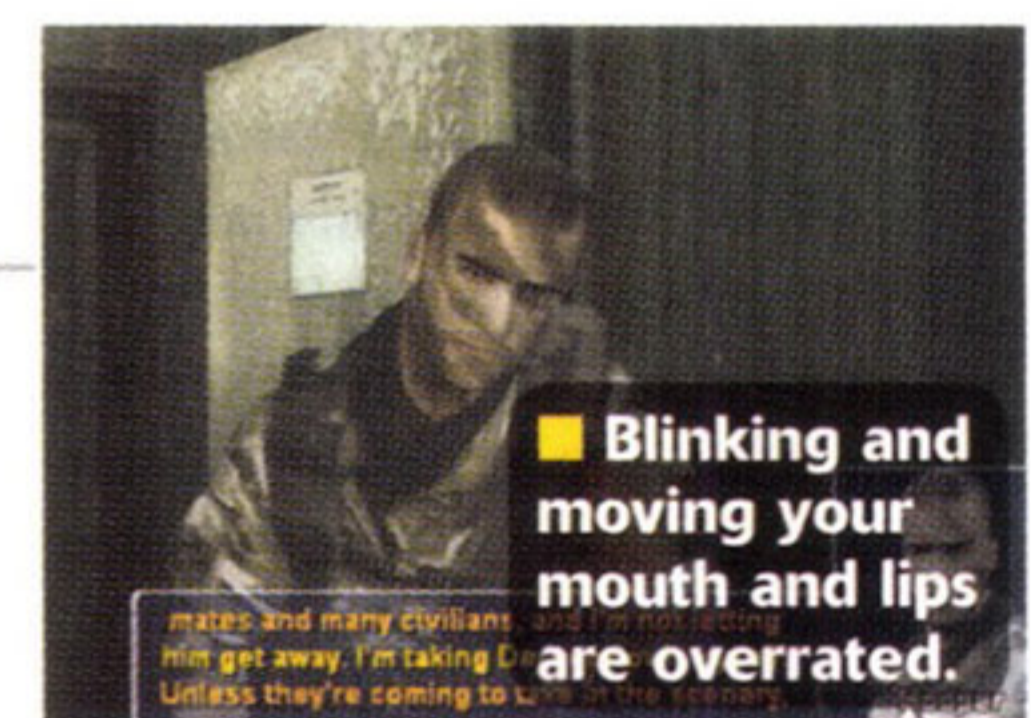
Don't let the promising premise behind *Without Warning* – terrorists have taken over a power plant, and you

have 12 hours to stop them while playing as six different characters with overlapping storylines – fool you: This is easily the worst Xbox game in recent memory.

Fatal flaw number one is the camera. It does not cooperate, swiveling wildly and not showing you much around corners – which is particularly a problem in the "stealth" levels (keep reading).

Next up is the aiming. This is primarily a third-person shooter, and you'll shoot scads of terrorists (around 1178, in fact). But it's nearly impossible to hit anything without using the L Trigger lock-on. So combat consists almost entirely of a thousand alternating trigger presses, which leads to the awful AI. They shoot, they duck behind cover, and they pour out of closet-sized rooms (a.k.a. "spawn holes"). That's it. WTF?

Things get so tedious (the "stealth" levels consist of sneaking



Blinking and moving your mouth and lips are overrated.

around putting out fires) and frustrating that when main characters start dying, you're thrilled because it's one less avatar to play! Top it off with comically bad voice acting and static faces with no blinking eyes or lip-synching, and you've got a virtual mess of epic proportions.

– Ryan McCaffrey



This is Ryan after finishing *Without Warning*.



TURTLE POWER: Reagan, one of *Without Warning*'s worst voice-acted characters, literally sounds like a 30-year-old guy doing a bad Ninja Turtle impression. Cowabunga!

Hey, hey, we're the monks, see?

3 HITS

■ You'll meet and beat some familiar faces – and if you find the hidden icons, you'll unlock some of them for Vs. Mode, too.

BARAKA

HITS
MULTIPLIER36
3 MUL

■ Some areas can't be accessed except in Ko-op Mode with a friend. It's a shame you can't do the same on Xbox Live.

■ FOR RENT: 2BR Outworld apartment, panoramic view, full bath, deadly spiked ceiling, blood gutters. No pets.

Blood is thicker than gameplay

Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks

DEVELOPER **MIDWAY** | PUBLISHER **MIDWAY** | ESRB **MATURE** | WEBSITE WWW.MKSHAOLINMONKS.COMEXTRAS **DOLBY 5.1, UNLOCKABLE MOVIES, VS. CHARACTERS, ARCADE VERSION OF MKII** | MULTIPLAYER **2 ON SAME SCREEN**

The *Mortal Kombat* series and action/adventure gameplay don't traditionally mix well; the flawed *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero* left gamers cold, and *Mortal Kombat: Special Forces* simply sucked. The third mix of platform-hopping and head-chopping may not be the charm, but *Shaolin Monks* is still bloody charming in its own right.

Taking place between the first two arcade games, *Shaolin*

Monks picks up directly where the original *MK* left off – in Goro's Lair. Controlling either Liu Kang or Kung Lao (each with upgradeable special and combo attacks, as well as multiple Fatalities), you'll fight your way through expanded, destructible 3D versions of classic 2D arenas like The Living Forest and The Pit, meeting and/or defeating familiar faces like Johnny Cage and Mileena along the way. Even the button-mashing "Test Your Might" strength mini-game returns, along with a few old-school in-jokes.

MK again teaches us that splatterhouse-style violence solves everything, from hurling corpses into obstacles to open blocked pathways to impaling enemies on spikes. Deathtraps notwithstanding, running and jumping your merry way through Outworld

does get repetitive, but the fighting keep things fresh. It's obscenely fun to button-mash into a massive 40-hit combo against multiple enemies. It's even better to fight alongside allies; the game was designed for two-player "ko-op," but it would've rocked to have that experience in single-player with CPU-controlled allies more frequently than it's offered.

And cheese alert! Your co-stars like to spout off about honor and power in that classic, stilted style of kung fu soap operas, but *MK* has always embraced its campy nature. And so have we.

Shaolin Monks feels like a love letter to fans; *MKII* is even included as a locked bonus. The gory action forgives the occasional awkward jumping exercise, and the expanded classic lore satisfies anybody still carrying the *MK* torch. Go ahead, fanboy – this one's for you.

– Dan Amrich

THE VERDICT

Graphics

Some of the cinemas look awkward, but fluid character animation, cool lighting, and fire effects serve the actual gameplay well.

Immersion

If you had a handful of floating monks and a guy with razors on sticks trying to lop your head off, would you look away?

Sound

Environmental ambience works well in 5.1, but the voice acting sounds hokey and flat.

Design

Character customization and three selectable-on-the-fly camera angles are smart, useful additions. The rest, though, is fairly straightforward platform hopping drenched in blood.

+ Good. - Bad.

? Perplexing

+ Whirlwind combat gets the adrenaline pumping.

+ Rewarding nostalgia trip through *MK* history.

- No ko-op via Xbox Live.

- Weak performances of cheesy dialogue wears thin.

? Why don't you get experience points for dispatching enemies with environmental hazards?



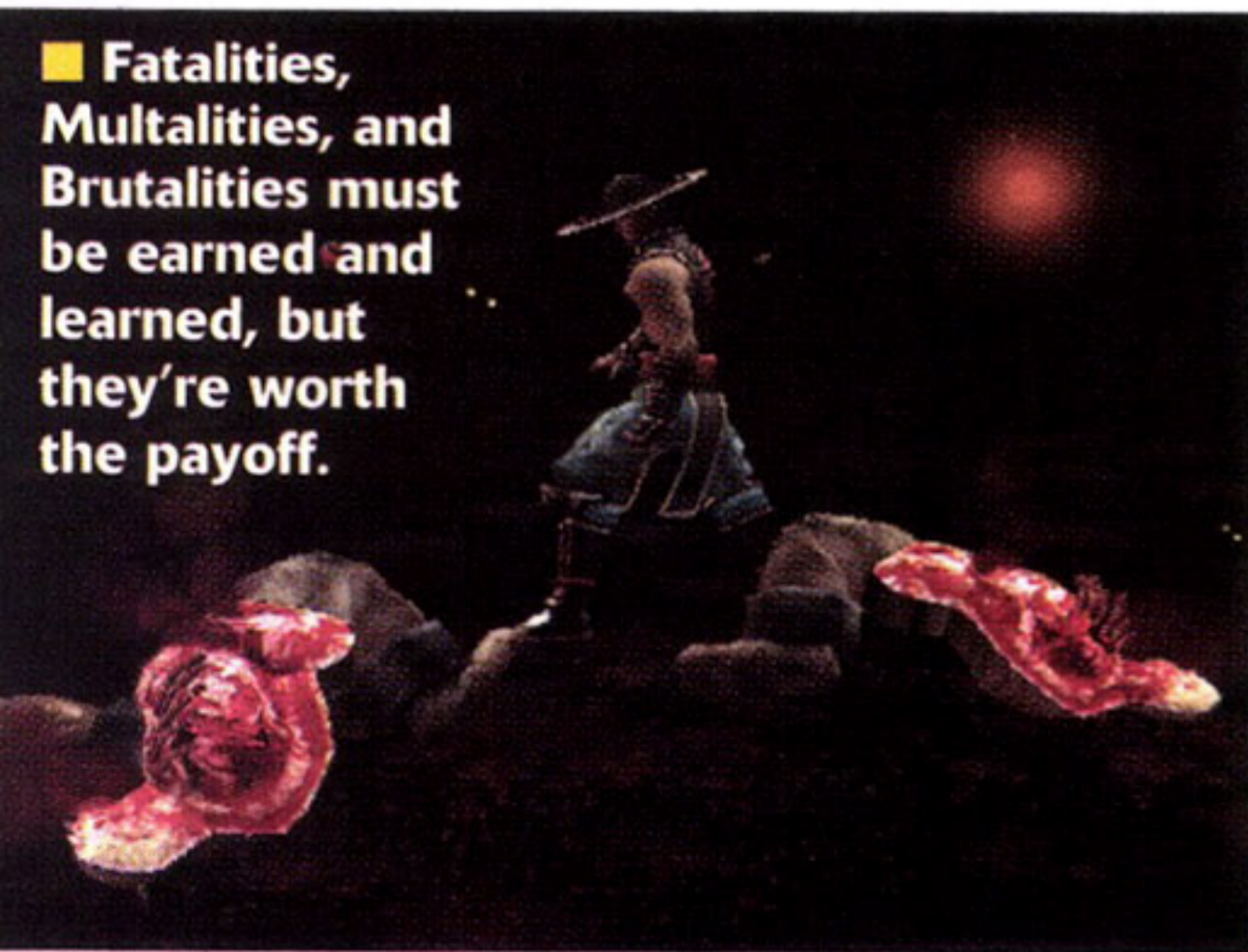
7.6

out of 10.0

Official Xbox Magazine

out of 10.0

■ Fatalities, Multalities, and Brutalities must be earned and learned, but they're worth the payoff.



From way downtown...bang!

NBA Live 06

DEVELOPER EA CANADA | PUBLISHER EA SPORTS | ESRB EVERYONE | WEBSITE WWW.EASPORTS.COM/GAMES/NBALIVE06/HOME.JSP
MULTIPLAYER 4 ON SAME SCREEN OR 2 ON LIVE | EXTRAS 720P HDTV, QUICK TOURNAMENTS

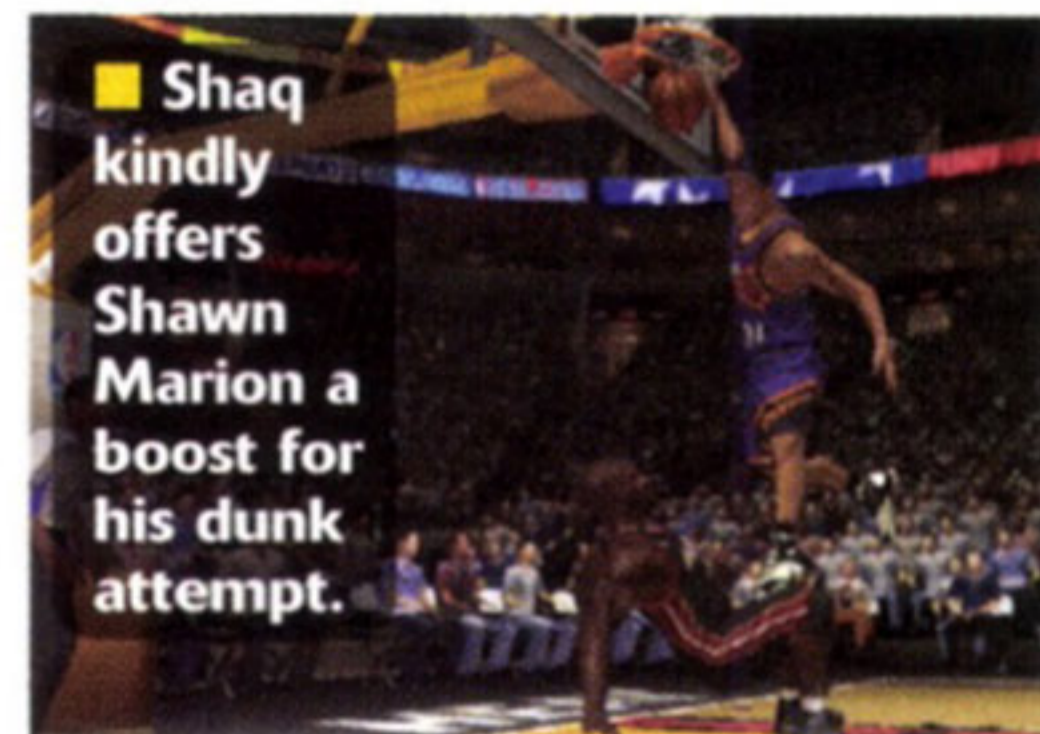
Following Freestyle control and the Pro Hop, *Live's* new baller's bauble is the Freestyle Superstar system, and it fits right into the balanced gameplay, making *NBA Live 06* an impressive hoops experience.

Essentially, your team's best players are your Freestyle Superstars, and they all have four special moves enabled by holding down the L Trigger and pressing a button. Playmaker Steve Nash wings tricky passes, high flyer Dwayne Wade throws down

impressive jams, and so on. Each dazzling trick is risk/reward with gleefully satisfying payoffs.

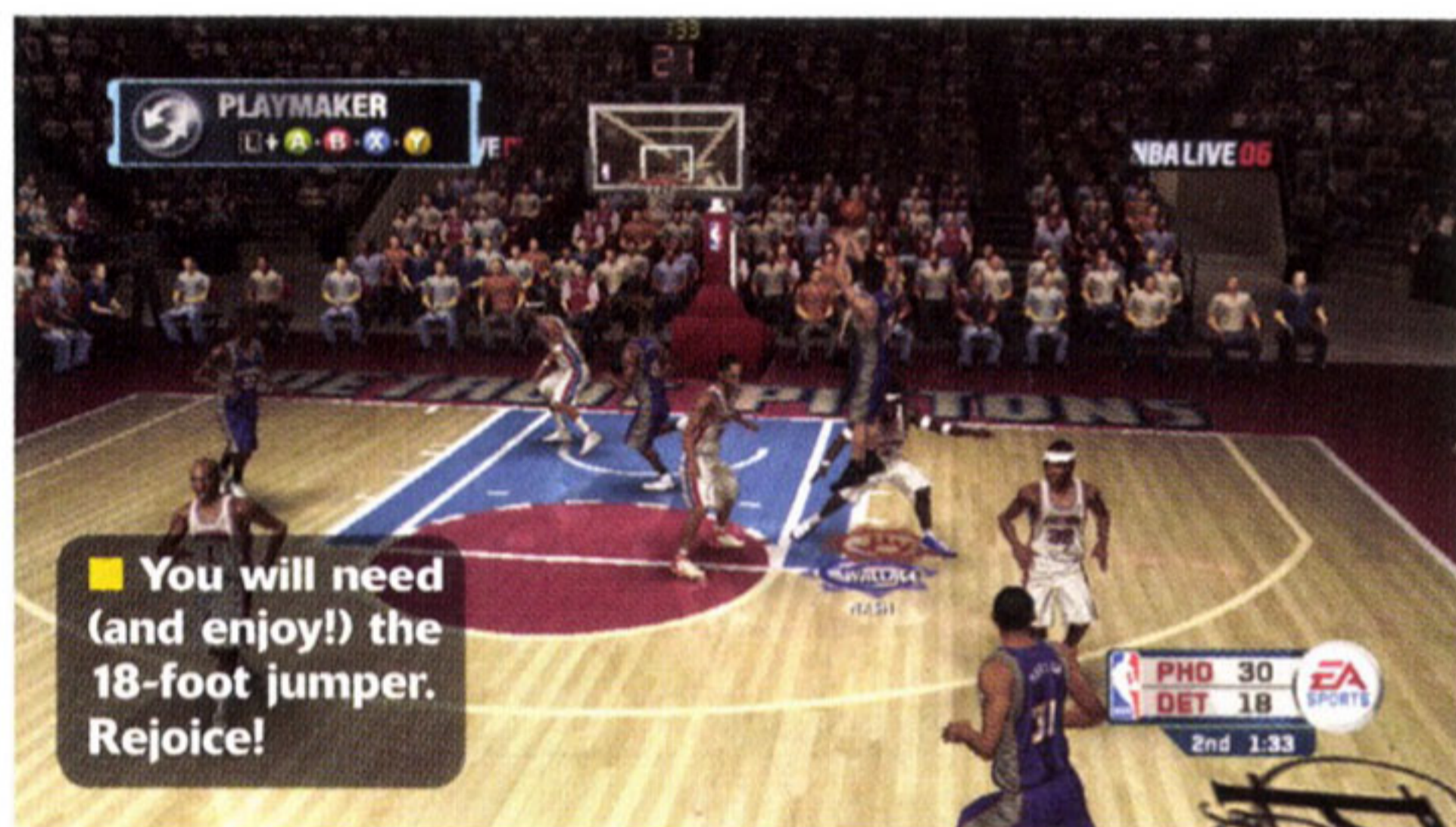
All told, the new and old moves turn *NBA Live* into an excellent representation of the pro hoops game; that is, it's up and down, and the best players create opportunities for themselves or, when double-teamed, their teammates. As a result, the mid-range "J" is not only used, it's a key element (yay!).

Disappointingly, there are controller-winging moments. First, the amount of turnovers down low from shots that go off the back of the glass is ridiculous. Second, lay-ups and dunks are botched with frustrating frequency. Third, animations are a Jekyll and Hyde mix of slick



and sloppy, detracting from the otherwise stunning new 720p graphics engine. Nevertheless, a great flow and fine multiplayer action put a serious spit-shine on *Live's* sneakers.

- Ryan McCaffrey



THE VERDICT

XBOX **8.7** out of 10.0

Official Xbox Magazine

If you don't have control, what do you have, really?

NBA 2K6

DEVELOPER VISUAL CONCEPTS | PUBLISHER 2K GAMES | ESRB EVERYONE | WEBSITE WWW.2KSPORTS.COM/GAMES/NBA2K6/
MULTIPLAYER 4 ON SAME SCREEN OR 2 ON LIVE | EXTRAS XBOX LIVE LEAGUES, 480P WIDESCREEN

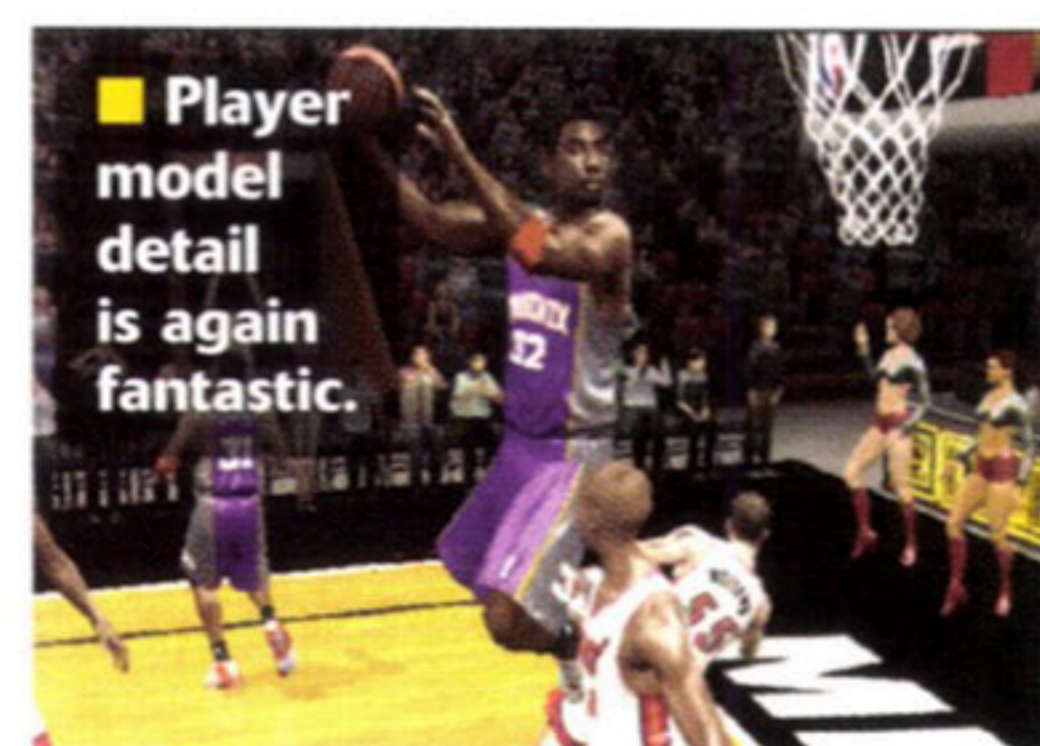
Once *Halo* proved that a first-person shooter could control great on Xbox, every good FPS since has unabashedly borrowed its control scheme. Why, then, won't the *NBA 2K* series run

with *Live's* genius freestyle stick and multiple shot-button layout? This year's attempt is simply not intuitive, whether on its own or compared to *NBA Live*.

The confusion stems largely from the new shot stick. Down

on the right stick pulls up for a jumper, Up goes for a finger roll, etc. Problem is, it's tough to remember which does what, and the game still decides what shot complement you'll use based on where you are on the court. Any friends that want to jump in will need a controls crash course with a pop quiz at the end.

It's unfortunate, because a fundamentally solid sim lurks underneath the puzzling button configuration. The action flows naturally, loose ball fouls actually happen, the boxout button is brilliant, and the direct pass works well on fast breaks. Throw in excellent player models, another addictive 24/7 Mode, and the series' usual online smorgasbord,



and *NBA 2K6* could've been a top-seeded title. Instead, it'll have to settle for merely squeaking into the playoffs.

- Ryan McCaffrey



THE VERDICT

XBOX **7.7** out of 10.0

Official Xbox Magazine



■ Pulling "Monster Tricks" racks up big points, but don't forget to put your foot back.



Going downhill

SSX on Tour

DEVELOPER EA CANADA | PUBLISHER EA SPORTS BIG | ESRB EVERYONE 10+ | EXTRAS 480P, THX SOUND
WEBSITE WWW.EA.COM | MULTIPLAYER 2 ON SPLIT SCREEN

The makers of the excellent *SSX* series should take a page from the *Tony Hawk* series on how to innovate an extreme-sports title. Every new *Tony Hawk* game has attempted to reinvent itself completely from the ground up while bolstering its already solid gameplay with more than just new moves and tricks. The results have been mixed, but *Tony* always seems to offer gamers something completely new and fresh each time out.

SSX on Tour, on the other hand, tries to improve upon its

great predecessors by adding little more than window dressing, and a pretty ugly one at that. The new black-and-white art style that's splashed all over the menus screams "extreme by committee," adding little to the experience than the potential for an epileptic seizure. And instead of actually creating some memorable characters, the game offers up a shallow character-creation option that lets you choose the latest hipster outdoor clothing, a couple of dorky hairstyles and pre-created character faces. If you play as a girl, you get to choose your

own makeup and the size of your female avatar (Size 1, 2, or 3 only?). EA has done great character-creation tools in the past (*Tiger Woods* comes to mind), so there's no reason why it couldn't be done.

But really, it's the gameplay we care about most, and that remains almost completely unchanged from the previous two (Xbox) games which is a mostly good thing since *SSX*'s unique brand of high-flying snowboard tricks have always exuded unparalleled excellence. The rub this time is that you can choose between skiing or snowboarding. The snowboarding is as good as ever, allowing any button-masher to pull off sweet tricks and chain combos together with a little practice. But to put it flatly, the skiing sucks. It's not as smooth or enjoyable as the classic snowboarding, and it's actually a lot more difficult to control. There should be some disclaimer to this effect when choosing your style, but no. The developer seems to think they're interchangeable, which they're not.

If *On Tour* is the first *SSX* game you've ever picked up, you'll have a great time. But if you're a long-time fan of the series, *On Tour* isn't a step in any direction and you'll pine for the

innovation of its predecessors. It's like a bunny-sloper stuck in five feet of powder.

— Tom Price



THE VERDICT

Graphics
If washed-out is supposed to look more realistic, then can we please go back to the crazy colors of the earlier games?

Immersion
There's a big map, and supposedly I'm becoming some sort of hype legend, but otherwise I really have no idea what's going on in the bigger picture. Just let me do tricks in the half-pipe, please.

Sound
Complain all you want about EA Trax, but a few really decent tracks are mixed into the annoying tween-metal-pop that's 75 percent of the playlist.

Design
This game needs a serious shot in the ass if they want us to keep playing. The gameplay is still great; now just build a decent game around it, please.

- + Good. - Bad.
- ? Perplexing
- + Monster Tricks on the thumbstick.
- + Shortcuts down the mountain.
- No sense of progression or story.
- Skiing is too unwieldy and unfulfilling.
- ? Is skiing in there because someone at MTV called it the new "hotness"?



A dark elf! A dark elf! My kingdom for a dark elf!

Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes

DEVELOPER **BLUESIDE/PHANTAGRAM** | PUBLISHER **MICROSOFT** | ESRB **MATURE** | WEBSITE **WWW.XBOX.COM**
MULTIPLAYER **6 OVER XBOX LIVE** | EXTRAS **480P, DOLBY 5.1**

Videogame consoles have a spotty history with real-time strategy games, an extremely popular genre that has been fairly PC-centric over the years. Games like *Starcraft* and *Command & Conquer* just don't translate well, probably because the control schemes of a mouse/keyboard combination never survive the transition to console controllers. But Korean developer Phantagram (working with Blueside) seems to have come up with a solution that works well with its excellent *Kingdom Under Fire* series. *KUF: Heroes* continues to capture the strategy/action hybrid magic very well with some key additions and upgrades that make it a full-bore sequel (well, prequel actually), and it should please fans while winning over new converts.

Heroes capitalizes on the medieval-style fantasy battles (set to shreddin' anachronistic guitar rock) that *Crusaders* had, but packs new features under the hood to make it more enjoyable and deeper than its predecessor. You'll play through multiple storylines as different characters – the “heroes” in the title – leading



legions of soldiers that can be bolstered with new weapons and abilities RPG-style. Commanding troops in battle switches to an RTS feel as you coordinate and direct diverse squads of infantry, archers, cavalry, among others (all upgradeable through an easy-to-decipher tech tree).



The twist? You take part in the gritty, hand-to-hand action in addition to directing your troops on the battlefield. In the thick of it, things can get unwieldy, even with access to an overhead map. And you can't help but wonder if a Pause button in single-player mode would've helped matters.

Of course, there is no pausing in multiplayer, and *Heroes* ups the player count to six for online skirmishes, allowing for some truly epic battles between you and your friends. There's also an instant action mode that lets you build up your army and fight them against all comers on any terrain.

Heroes manages to build complexity while increasing the fun in so many ways that we're anxious to see what's in store for the next iteration. Until then, you'll find us racking up experience points to unlock that super cool, fire-breathing wyvern.

– Tom Price

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Not a big upgrade here, but that's okay – the game looked darn good as it was before. It's pretty amazing to see all those units on the field at once with magic effects going on to boot.

Immersion
The storyline should appeal to hardcore fantasy nerds, but the rest of us will feel committed enough just trying to get our troops outfitted and upgraded exactly the way we want.

Sound
What does heavy metal have to do with the Middle Ages? I don't know, but it sure does rawk.

Design
Pretty impressive depth and complexity, especially when held up against the intensity of shield-banging action in battle.

- + Good. - Bad.
- ? Perplexing
- + Sexy dark elves.
- + Special attacks and powers for heroes.
- Can be extremely tough in higher difficulties.
- Those story screens go on and on and on...
- ? Could I really swing an axe in a crowd and not hit any of my allies?

8.8
out of 10.0
Official Xbox Magazine

(Almost) Ninety-9.0 Bottles of Reviews on the Page



Welcome to that time of year again, kiddies. The time when we have more games to cover and less pages to cover them: the holidays. Due to a floo...um, no. A tidal wa...no, that's not really an appropriate metaphor either. Erm, how about a whole bunch of games to review this month, like 20 give or take (we're too tired to count), meant that we only had one page to spare for Review Roundup. But with the relative calm before the Xbox 360 storm next month (we give up), it's good to remember that there are still

a lot of interesting games coming out for Xbox in the coming months: *Black, Stubbs the Zombie, Bully, Matrix: Path of Neo, Half-Life 2, Prince of Persia 3*. Damn. That's a lot of good stuff.

So in this condensed Roundup, we thought we'd take a misty-eyed look back at the very best the Xbox has had to offer. A pretty impressive list of all 89 of our Editors' Choice games over the years (so far) before we start chilling in the green glow of our new 360s. Don't worry, Xbox - we'll always love you...like Tommy will always love Pam.

Game/Publisher	Issue	Score
Aggressive Inline Acclaim	Oct-02	9.1
Armed & Dangerous LucasArts	Hol-03	9.0
Beyond Good & Evil Ubisoft	Hol-03	9.0
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30 Ubisoft	Apr-05	9.6
Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood Ubisoft	Dec-05	9.6
Buffy the Vampire Slayer EA	Sep-02	9.0
Burnout 2: Point of Impact-Dir. Cut Acclaim	Jul-03	9.0
Burnout 3 EA	Oct-04	9.3
Burnout Revenge EA	Nov-05	9.8
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge Microsoft	Dec-03	9.2
Dead or Alive 3 Tecmo	Dec-01	9.5
Deus Ex: Invisible War Eidos	Hol-03	9.1
Doom 3 Activision	Apr-05	9.2
Dungeon & Dragons Heroes Atari	Nov-03	9.0
ESPN NBA Basketball Sega	Dec-03	9.0
ESPN NFL 2K5 Sega	Sep-04	9.3
ESPN NFL Football Sega	Oct-03	9.3
FIFA Soccer 2004 EA Sports	Dec-03	9.2
Fight Night Round 2 EA Sports	Mar-05	9.0
Forza Motorsport Microsoft	Jul-05	9.0
Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike Ubisoft	Nov-05	9.0
Grand Theft Auto Double Pack Rockstar	Hol-03	9.1
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas Rockstar	Aug-05	9.5
Halo 2 Microsoft	Dec-04	9.7
Halo 2 Multiplayer Map Pack Microsoft	Jun-05	9.0
Halo Microsoft	Dec-01	9.5
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb LucasArts	Mar-03	9.0
Jade Empire Microsoft	Apr-05	9.4
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast LucasArts	Dec-02	9.0
JSRF: Jet Set Radio Future Sega	Apr-02	9.2
Links 2004 Microsoft	Dec-03	9.1
Madden NFL 2002 EA Sports	Dec-01	9.0
Madden NFL 2005 EA Sports	Sep-04	9.1
MechAssault Microsoft	Jan-03	9.3
Medal of Honor: Frontline EA	Dec-02	9.0
Mercenaries LucasArts	Feb-05	9.0
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System Vivendi Universal	Nov-03	9.0
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance Konami	Feb-03	9.0
Midnight Club II Rockstar	Aug-03	9.3
Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition Rockstar	Jun-05	9.0
MVP Baseball 2004 EA Sports	Apr-04	9.1
MVP Baseball 2005 EA Sports	Apr-05	9.0
NBA 2K2 Sega	Apr-02	9.1
NBA Live 2004 EA Sports	Dec-03	9.1
NBA Live 2005 EA Sports	Dec-04	9.3

Game/Publisher	Issue	Score
NBA Street V3 EA Sports Big	Feb-05	9.1
NCAA Football 2004 EA Sports	Sep-03	9.4
NCAA Football 2005 EA Sports	Aug-04	9.1
NCAA Football 2006 EA Sports	Aug-05	9.1
NFL 2K3 Sega	Oct-02	9.1
NFL Fever 2002 Microsoft	Dec-01	9.1
Ninja Gaiden Tecmo	May-04	9.6
Ninja Gaiden Black Tecmo	Nov-05	9.0
Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee Microsoft	Jan-02	9.0
Otogi: Myth of Demons Sega	Oct-03	9.0
Panzer Dragoon Orta Sega	Nov-02	9.3
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within Ubisoft	Dec-04	9.6
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time Ubisoft	Jan-04	9.4
Project Gotham Racing Microsoft	Dec-01	9.0
Project Gotham Racing 2 Microsoft	Hol-03	9.4
Psychonauts Majesco	May-05	9.5
Quantum Redshift Microsoft	Dec-02	9.0
RalliSport Challenge 2 Microsoft	Jun-04	9.0
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: The Tides of War Activision	May-03	9.2
Sega GT 2002 Sega	Oct-02	9.1
Soul Calibur II Namco	Nov-03	9.2
SSX 3 EA Sports Big	Dec-03	9.1
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic LucasArts	Sep-03	9.4
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II - Sith Lords LucasArts	Jan-05	9.2
The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay VU Games	Aug-04	9.5
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Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 EA Sports	Nov-04	9.3
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TOCA Race Driver 2 Codemasters	Jun-04	9.2
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Ubisoft	Dec-02	9.0
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder Ubisoft	Hol-04	9.0
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2 Ubisoft	Sep-03	9.0
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3 Ubisoft	Dec-03	9.2
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Ubisoft	Dec-02	9.6
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Chaos Theory Ubisoft	Apr-05	9.9
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow Ubisoft	May-04	9.5
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 Activision	Apr-02	9.0
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 Activision	Dec-02	9.0
Tony Hawk's Underground Activision	Jan-04	9.0
Top Spin Microsoft	Dec-03	9.0
UFC Tapout Crave	Apr-02	9.0
Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict Midway	Mar-05	9.3
Wakeboarding Unleashed (Shaun Murray) Activision	Aug-03	9.0
Wreckless Activision	Mar-02	9.1

C H A R L I Z E T H E R O N



AEON FLUX

THE FUTURE IS FLUX

PARAMOUNT PICTURES AND LAKESHORE ENTERTAINMENT PRESENT
A VALHALLA MOTION PICTURES AND MTV FILMS PRODUCTION CHARLIZE THERON "AEON FLUX" MARTON CSOKAS JONNY LEE MILLER
SOPHIE OKONEDO PETE POSTLETHWAITE AND FRANCES McDORMAND MUSIC BY JOHNNY KLIMEK AND REINHOLD HEIL COSTUME DESIGNER BEATRIX ARUNA PASZTOR EDITED BY PETER HONESS, A.C.E. PLUMMY TUCKER
PRODUCTION DESIGNER ANDREW McALPINE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY STUART DRYBURGH EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS TOM ROSENBERG VAN TOFFLER PRODUCED BY GALE ANNE HURD DAVID GALE GARY LUCCHESI GREG GOODMAN
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COMING SOON TO THEATRES

DIRTY CHEATS



MotoGP 3



Secret Weapons Over Normandy

MotoGP 3

Unlock Everything

To unlock everything that this game has to offer, go to the main menu and press:

⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, B, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, B, Y, ⬆, ⬆, B

It won't confirm the code entry with a sound, but check out your bike selection and the difficulty settings. If you entered it correctly, the Legend difficulty and all bikes will be unlocked.

Player Unlocks (Player/
Challenge Number to Win)
Alex Barros: 9
Carlos Checa: 7
Daijiro Kato: 6

Garry McCoy: 13
Hitomi Yoshino: 85
Jack Slate: 62
Jeremy McWilliams: 20
John Hopkins: 18
Jurgen Van Der Goorbergh: 21
Kenny Roberts Jr.: 5
Kevin Schwantz: 12
Loris Capirossi: 16
Max Biaggi: 10
Mick Doohan: 15
Nobuatsu Aoki: 91
Norick Abe: 4
Olivier Jacque: 90
Pere Riba: 17
Regis Laconi: 19
Sete Gibernau: 14
Shinya Nakano: 11
Susumu Hori: 1
Tetsuya Harada: 3
Valentino Rossi: 12
Wayne Gardner: 87

Secret Weapons Over Normandy

High-Flyin' Cheats

At the menu with Continue and New Game options on it, enter in the following codes. The phrase "secret code accepted" will show up to confirm the correct code entry.

Code

X, X, X, B, B, B, Y, X, ○, ○, ○, ○, ○
Y, Y, Y, X, X, X, ⬆, ⬆, ○, ○, ○, ○, ○
⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, L Trigger, R Trigger, L Trigger, R Trigger
⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, L Trigger, R Trigger
⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ○, ○
⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, L Trigger, R Trigger, L Trigger, R Trigger
⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, L Trigger, R Trigger,
L Trigger, R Trigger
⬆, ⬆, ⬆, ⬆, R Trigger, R Trigger, L Trigger, L Trigger

Effect

Level select
All missions & planes
Get all environments
Unlimited ammo
Invincibility
Insta-action stages
Big Head Mode

More insta-action replay views



Ghost Recon 2

Handy Cheats

Go to the Start menu, pick Enter Cheats, and put in any of the following codes:

Code

B, B, X, A
B, B, X, B
B, B, X, Y
B, B, X, X
R Trigger, L Trigger, L Trigger,
R Trigger, R Trigger, R Trigger

Effect

Invincibility
Team invincibility
Win
Refill ammo
All maps in Quick
Mission Mode

Awards and Medals

Medal/Award

Purple Heart

Bronze Star
Silver Star
Distinguished Service Cross
Congressional Medal of Honor

Requirement

Get wounded or killed in action
Get 15 kills
Get 20 kills
Get 25 kills
Get 30 kills



BloodRayne 2

Lots of Unlocks

Enter the following codes into the game's Cheat menu, which is accessible from the Main menu.

Code

WANT THIS DARK REALITY TAINT QWEEF
UBER TAINT JOAD DURF KWIS
UGLY DARK HEATED ORANGE QUAFF
ANOMALIES ARE JUAN INSULATED
BONE THIS CURRY VOTE
NAKED JUGGY RESISTANCE PACY
NURTURE HAPPY PUSTULE ERASURE
PENSION REAP SUPER VULGAR
THIS DARK DISTORTED REALITY
BLUE GREEN PURPLE IMP

CARGO FIRE IMP KAK
LATE NUTURE QWEEF SUPER
FAKE BURST CUNNINGLY DISTORTED
BLANK UGLY PUSTULE EATER
DODGE THIS MOIST PIMP
PIMP REAP DARK DARK MUSE
MAJESCO RULES
RAYNE RULES
TERMINAL REALITY RULES

Effect

Unlock all cheats
Unlock invincibility
Unlock unlimited ammo
Unlock level select
Unlock all combos
Unlock fill bloodlust
Unlock refill health
Unlock all movies
Unlock Overload Mode
Unlock frozen enemies
(Toggles on or off)
Unlock 1000 Carnage Points
Unlock 1000 Gun Points
Unlock Juggy Mode
Unlock all powers
Make enemies explode
Unlock unlimited rage
Unlock programmer messages
Unlock programmer messages
Unlock programmer messages



Ad Index December 2005

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BloodRayne 2



The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

Smashy Codes

From the main menu go to Extras, then Code Input to enter the following codes:

Wild traffic*: FROGGIE
Traffic is all taxis*: CABBIES
All vehicles are buses*: TRANSIT
Low gravity: PILLOWS
Double Hulk's damage abilities: DESTROY
15,000 Smash Points: SMASH15
Double-power pick-ups: BRINGIT
Gorilla balloons around the city: KINGKNG
Replace all missiles in the outskirts with cows: CHZGUN
Sepia-tone filter: HISTORY
Black-and-white filter: RETRO
Play as Abomination: VILLAIN (you must successfully complete Story Mode first)

*Code cannot be activated until you have reached the City

Costume Codes

Italian shorts: MUTANDA
Japanese shorts: FURAGGU
American flag shorts: AMERICA
French shorts: DRAPEAU
UK shorts: FSHNCHP
German shorts: DEUTSCH
Spain shorts: BANDERA
Play as Joe Fixit (Gray Hulk): SUITFIT
Gray Hulk: CLASSIC or JANITOR

COMIC LOCATIONS

Simulation

1. After completing the Jump tutorial
2. After completing the Wall

Climbing/Rocket Launcher tutorial

3. After completing the Targeting and Throwing tutorial
4. At the end of the Simulation stage

City

1. Between two taller buildings on a rooftop (El Café de Gerald) in the City
2. Under the northern blow-up gorilla in the City
3. On the side of a tall building near the first bridge in the City
4. Atop the first bridge in the City
5. Atop a missing building in the northwestern side of the City
6. Inside of a cubbyhole that you can only reach from the rooftops in the City, right by the eastern bridge
7. Underneath a ledge on the Division HQ building during the Need-To-Know mission
8. Atop the city hall roof
9. Right beside the "Hulk Flot! Again!" Challenge Marker
10. Atop the arch-like building on the far west
11. In the far northwest corner, atop a roof of a skyscraper
12. Behind a sign on a rooftop about a block down from the Rooftop Jumping 1 Challenge
13. Atop a fast food restaurant on the far northeast side of town
14. Above the catwalk near the bridge on the West side
15. Atop a short roof in the central section of the city
16. On the side of the lighthouse, out in the ocean on the northwest side
17. Atop a skyscraper
18. In a small alleyway that leads to a dead-end between buildings

in the central City

19. Atop a roof near Samson's second intermission in the Protect Samson mission
20. Atop a jointed rooftop near the first hit in the My Other Voice mission
21. Atop a smaller rooftop to the north
22. Atop the smaller rooftop near the giant gorilla
23. Amidst the rubble on the island after completing the game
24. Atop the southern-most skyscraper in the downtown region
25. Above an office building in the downtown region
26. On a small rooftop near the northeast, cluttered in the middle
27. In an alleyway to the northeast
28. Atop a skyscraper in the downtown area, somewhat near the shoreline
29. On the side of one of the skyscrapers near the downtown region (West side).
30. Within an enclave between buildings near the north-central portion of the map

Badlands

1. Atop the roof of the school, across from the parking garage
2. Atop a circular building in the desert
3. Through the valley, near a Smash Point icon
4. On a cliff near Satellite D in the first mission of the Badlands
5. On the side of a rock near the center valley leading to the military base, near the Jump Marker
6. Just north of #5, atop a bridge
7. At the northern-most part of

the stage, near the water and oil equipment

8. High in the air over a useless bridge in a dead-end
9. Inside of a pillar near the left-most valley entrance – you will likely see it appear before the pillar.
10. In an alley near the outskirts of town
11. In a parking lot next to some tanker trucks in town
12. Along the southeastern mountainside wall in town
13. In the center of the valley on the right, on the eastern side out in the open
14. Inside of the security wall-guarded area, within a watchtower
15. In the south, inside of a watchtower near the Jump Marker
16. Atop the bridge in the far south
17. Between garages in the farthest southern area in the Badlands
18. Opposite Comic Book #28
19. To the far west in the military base
20. Behind the travel lodge on the outskirts of town
21. In the farthest western corner on the map
22. Just south of Comic Book #21 on the road
23. Beside one of the many stone pillars throughout the central mountain area, near the north
24. Inside of a crevice within the mountain that can be found while roaming at ground level
25. Within some pillars in the central mountain area
26. Within some pillars to the north of town



Oddworld Stranger's Wrath

Not-Odd Codes

Cheat Mode
NOTE: This requires two controllers. During gameplay, insert a controller into port 2, then remove it. Next, press X, X, Y, Y, B, B, A, A on controller one to enable cheat mode. A sound will confirm correct entry.

Invincibility
Enable the Cheat Mode code above, then press X, Y, A, B, X, Y. The health gauge will turn yellow to confirm correct entry.

Get \$1,000
Enable the Cheat mode code above, then click in the left stick twice, right stick twice, left stick twice, right stick twice. Repeat the code to get more money.

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Put in ©@®& as your player name. Start a new game; you'll see a level-select screen.

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TURNING POINT



Reader Interaction

Mercifully, the big countdown timer has almost reached zero. The Xbox 360 will be upon us shortly, and judging by your letters, it's all you can think about. Not that we blame you, of course, since we're in the same boat. We're getting all sorts of questions about the new system – stupid ones that have been answered in this magazine many times already, as well as brilliant queries about the little details that we haven't thought to ask – so we're answering them all right here, right now. Ask us anything at letters@officialxboxmagazine.com or via U.S. Mail at Official Xbox Magazine, 150 North Hill Dr., Suite 40, Brisbane, CA 94005.



■ ***NOTE:** This comic is intended solely to humorously exaggerate a point. We know that Joanna Dark would never aim a gun at a kid, ever.

Another stress-free customer

Does it come down to the "haves" and "have nots" these days? Who cares! The Xbox 360 at \$399 is a damn good bang for the buck. At the time of writing this letter, regular gasoline is \$2.95 per gallon (Ed. note – Wow, only \$2.95? Does oil rain from the sky and flow from your faucets there?). Gotta drive and definitely have to game! And game prices at \$60? I paid that for the collector's edition of *Halo 2*! I say bring on the \$60 quality of 360 games. You guys provide a fairly decent rating system, and listening to my Xbox Live friends also helps me make sound purchasing decisions.

– Anonymous

We say: Since you're already cool with the idea of \$60 games, this should please you and those who aren't as thrilled about the idea: Microsoft has announced that *Perfect Dark Zero* will cost the tried-and-true \$49.99 (with a \$59.99 two-disc limited edition also available). So it seems not every title will cost \$10 more than what you're used to!

Glass half empty

I'm a loyal launch Xbox owner with 60-plus games. However, I highly doubt I'll buy a 360 on or near launch. Geoff Keighley's column in the October issue (pg. 120) puts serious doubt as to whether or not 360 will have a killer app. On top of that, Bungie is backpedaling from Bill Gates' promise in *Time* magazine to have *Halo 3* out at PS3 launch. In the same issue, Rob Smith continues to preach against backwards compatibility and how we don't need it (pg. 10). He also warns us of the 20 percent price hike on the system and games. On top of all that, Microsoft has developers using beta kits up until the eleventh hour (pg. 22)! So Microsoft wants us to pay 20 percent more for a half-baked console that has very limited backwards compatibility and no killer app? Microsoft is crazy!

– Christopher Smith

We say: Whether you decide to buy it at launch or later, you sound like a

dedicated gamer, Christopher, and there's little doubt that at some point you will own an Xbox 360. Why? A ton of reasons, including a games library that will just continue to grow and get better with time. And check the history books – that's how new systems develop. It's something that happens over time. As much as readers and companies want to proclaim success or failure instantaneously, it's not an overnight thing. And since when did any system launch go smoothly right out of the gate? You have a lot of valid doubts, but we're excited about 360, we're excited about all the games (*Perfect Dark Zero*? Yes! *Madden 360*? Yes! *Project Gotham 3*? Yes!), and who doesn't want to see where this next generation of gaming takes us?

Game review down

I bought *Black Hawk Down* prior to playing it or reading any reviews since your review came well after the game was already out. I knew I was taking

a risk, and needless to say, your 6.2 rating (October 2005 OXM), in my eyes, was extremely generous. Any chance of getting the reviews in the mag sooner?

– Mike Styer

We say: Naturally, it's in our best interest to try and get reviews published in a timely manner – our reviews are a big part of what you're buying each month. Occasionally, though, publishers don't send out advance copies of the game for review. It happens for a variety of reasons, and sometimes the reason is that the game

is crap and they don't want bad buzz coming out before their title. We're not saying that's what went down in this case, it does happen.

Getting what you pay for

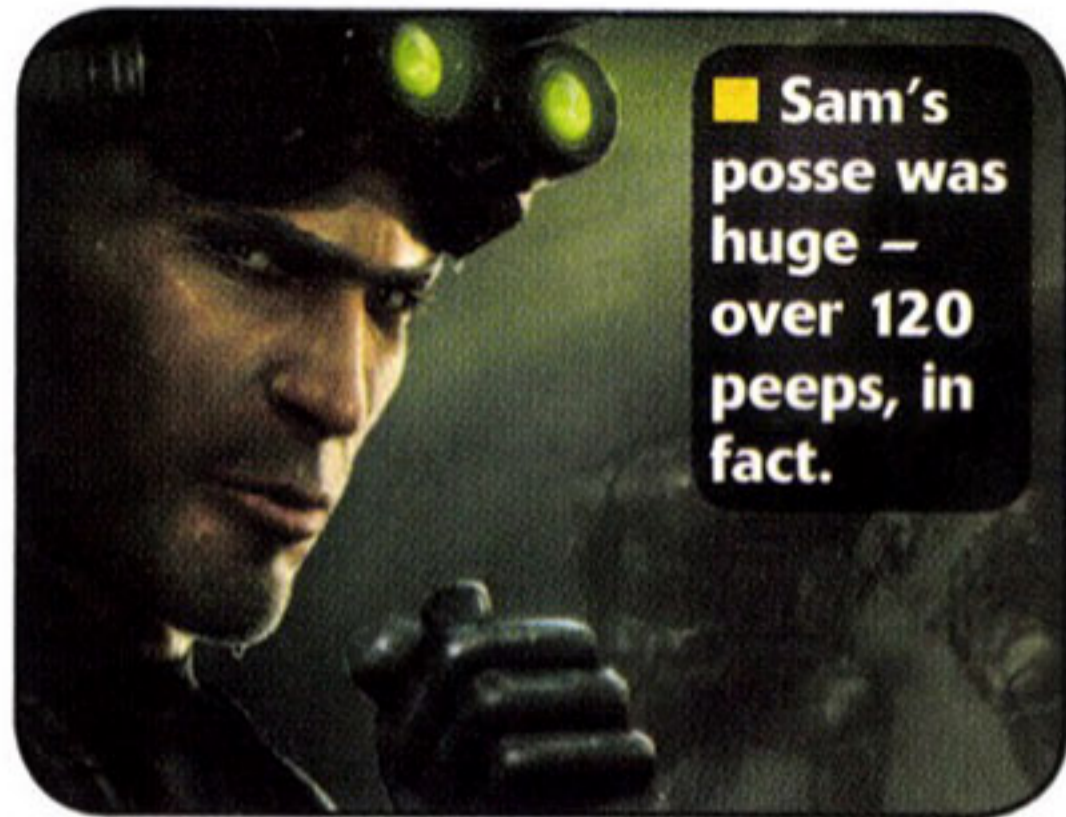
As far as I'm concerned, videogame price increases are way overdue. Game designers need raises too. But honestly, this isn't really anything new. I remember paying \$65 for a limited-edition gold cartridge for *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. *Diddy Kong Racing* went for the same price when it originally came out, and the N64 version of *Conker* cost north of \$60, too. The price increase is long overdue, and as long as the games continue to maintain our attention and keep us out of the local bars, it's a small price to pay.

– Anonymous

We say: You speak the truth, sir. There's a key difference this time



■ **There's a seedy underside to reviewing videogames... okay, it's not that seedy.**



■ Sam's posse was huge – over 120 peeps, in fact.

around, though. The examples you cite had high price tags due to the increased cost of manufacturing cartridges and the memory chips they contained. With Xbox 360 and the next generation of videogames, the price hike is due to the substantially inflated game production budgets. Did you know that the development team for Splinter Cell Chaos Theory (an Xbox 1 game!) was over 120 people in size?!

Cover Captions October 2005

We had some excellent submissions this month, but in the end, Ben Pomidor scores a copy of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* for this witty repartee:

"The bad news is my castle is burning to the ground. But the good news is I just saved a bunch of money on my horse-drawn-cart insurance!"

Here are the outstanding runners-up:

"On a roll of a natural 20, John gets to kick your ass!"

– Jake Betenson

"Am I a knight? Well, no. But I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express last night!"

– Ryan Jennings

"No, no, no! You're selling a next-gen system. Try to look happy, not evil!"

– Thomas Talbot

Send your funniest/smarest captions for this month's cover to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject line "Cover Captions 51," and our favorite scores *Mass Effect* for Xbox 360 when it releases and gets their name in the magazine!



Logical = reality?

Will Xbox 1 games that come out after the release of the 360 all be playable on the 360? You know, it's not exactly backwards compatibility if the game comes out after the system does.

– Christian Setzer

We say: It would certainly make sense for all post-360 Xbox 1 titles to be backwards compatible, wouldn't it? While there are no guarantees, and we'll be hounding every publisher on an individual basis, we have heard rumors that most Xbox games will ship with the required software to play on 360 right on the disc.

Hard-drive dilemma

I still don't really understand the two versions of the Xbox 360. So the more expensive version with the hard drive allows backwards compatibility, while the cheaper version doesn't? I think that backwards compatibility isn't that important since new games will be constantly coming out every month.

So naturally I would buy the cheaper version. But without the hard drive, will there be enough room to save all of the games and music I want, or will I be forced to conserve my space due to the lack of the hard drive?

– Andy Proff

We say: The Core SKU might not be for you, Andy, since you're into ripping music onto your Xbox. Besides, many games will take advantage of the hard drive, and you'd need a \$40 memory card with the Core version anyway, putting you right near the \$400 mark of the standard package. Ultimately, it's your call – but you might be doing yourself a favor and saving money in the long run by picking up the higher-priced package with the hard drive included.

That's affirmative

Will the 360 hard drive have a USB connection or some other way for me to connect it to my computer and pull MP3 songs off of it?

– Dan

We say: Yep, provided your computer is running the Windows XP or Windows Media Center operating system, you'll be able to do just that.

Just because they could, doesn't mean they should

Why has the Halo engine not been picked up by any other game developer? The only licensee I've heard of is *Stubbs the Zombie*, and I'm interested in it just for that reason alone. Heck, the Quake engine has



Hot Button

LAST MONTH'S TOPIC: "Hey OXM, what's your favorite game soundtrack?" Submitted by Jared Cvetas

ROB: Embarrassing answer: The old PC FMV crime thriller, *Ripper*. The soundtrack was Blue Oyster Cult's "Don't Fear the Reaper"...and for some reason, I was hooked on that tune at a time when I very clearly did not know any better.

FRAN: I don't think there's one soundtrack, but lots of bits and pieces. I'm still dying to find a way to get the opening theme song for *Wild Arms* (PS) as a ringtone on my cell phone. Other than that, it's a mish-mash of *Final Fantasy* and *Castlevania* tunes.

PAUL: The achingly beautiful music of the first few games in the *Medal of Honor* series almost wins my vote, but there's no denying *Halo 1*. Sometimes stirring, sometimes edgy and tense, it perfectly captures the essence of the story and the action.

TOM: *Wakeboarding Unleashed Featuring Shaun Murray* – I don't know what Pavement and the Pixies have to do with extreme sports, but this soundtrack could have been lifted straight out of my iTunes folder.

RYAN: All-time? *Ys Book I & II* for the TurboGrafx 16 CD. It's simply brilliant. On Xbox, it's *Halo 2*. Without Marty O'Donnell's score, *Halo 2* is a much lesser game.

THIS MONTH: Got a Hot Topic you'd like to ask the OXM staff?

Email your question to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject line "Hot Button."

seen more action than Jenna Jameson. Where's the love for the Halo engine?

– Roberto Urena

We say: Bungie is a notoriously staunch group of perfectionists – a stance that most would agree has served them well over the past five years. They could indeed make a(nother) mint selling the engine to prospective Xbox developers. After all, it's proven to run great on the system and it's great with outdoor areas. Thing is, Bungie probably doesn't want every FPS on the system to resemble Halo, and we'd bet our paychecks that the only reason *Stubbs* developer *Widload* is getting their hands on it is because the studio is headed up by former Bungie-ite and Halo designer Alex Seropian.

Halo for all

In the October issue you guys said that game data from Xbox 1 couldn't be transferred over to Xbox 360. Does this mean that I will have to re-purchase the *Halo 2* maps, or are they free to me because I have already bought them?

– Spencer Smith

We say: Yes, Bungie wants all of your money. In fact, the maps will now be even more expensive...just kidding! The *Halo 2* maps will indeed be available for free to download through Xbox Live when 360 launches. In fact, they're free on Xbox Live right now if you haven't sprung for them yet!

Got a few thousand dollars?

Help! I heard a DJ on the radio talking about Xbox 360, and he claims we're going to be forced to purchase \$1000 bundles that include several games I might not even want. Say it ain't so!

– Michael Longmuir

We say: Your friendly neighborhood radio jock isn't exactly wrong, but he's not really all that correct, either. In keeping with the tradition begun by last generation's console launches, some stores – mostly online retailers – are trying to lure the "I must have it" crowd by forcing them to buy more stuff with pre-packaged bundles. Most traditional brick-and-mortar shops, however, will be selling the 360 by itself. If you're not itching to buy every peripheral and game in one bundle, it'd be wise to seekout these alternatives.

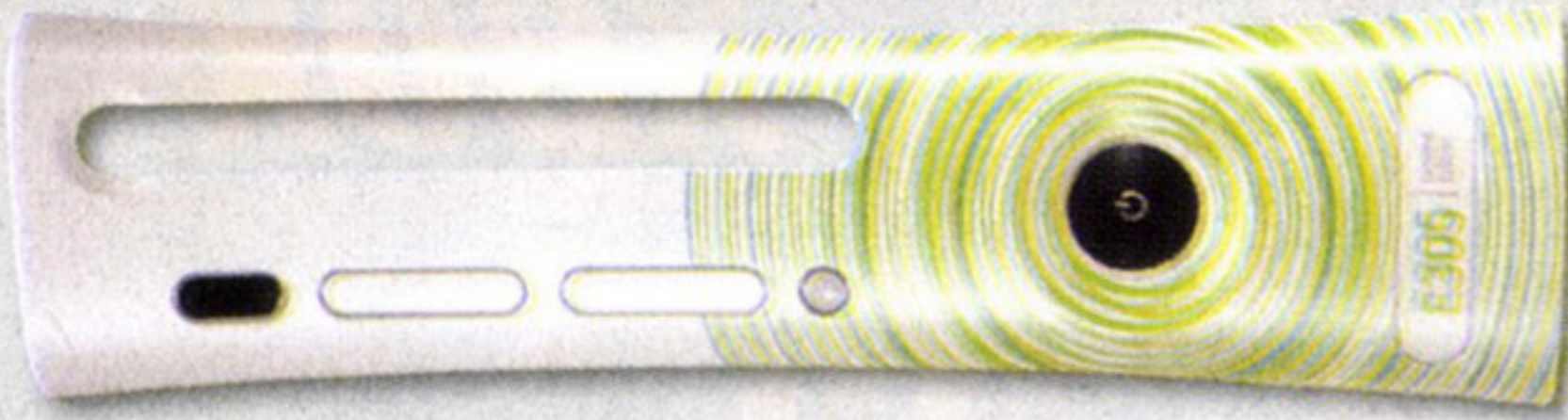
A happy couple

I was just wondering if there was anything I can buy to make the System Link cord longer. That would be nice.

– Traver Koehler

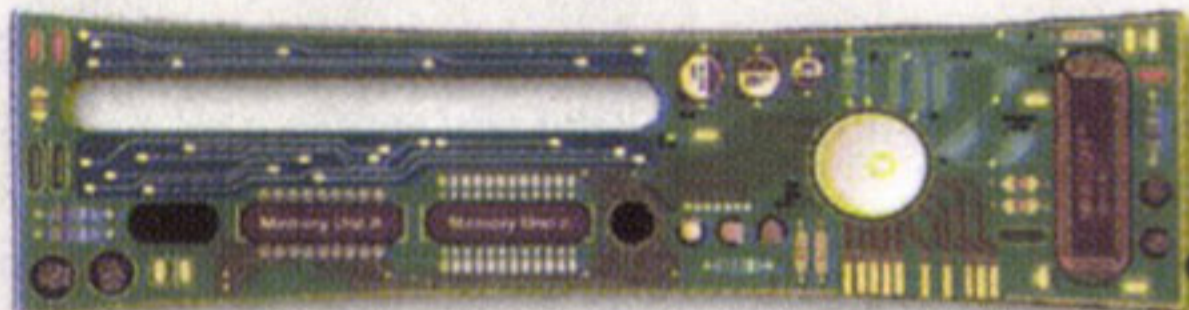
We say: Your wish is now granted, Traver! Head over to your favorite computer store and pick up an Ethernet coupler. It lets you connect two Ethernet cables together, Voltron style, to form one long cord, and it shouldn't cost you much more than a buck or two.

Faceplate Contest Winners



We expected it to be popular, but we didn't expect the literal avalanche of entries we received for our Xbox 360 design-your-own faceplate contest (OXM, August 2005). Thousands of you entered – much to the chagrin of Thomas, our intern, who had to open and sort every single submission – and even the “good” pile was well over 200. So many of you deserve a faceplate, but we only have five to give away. Here are the lucky winners who will each receive a limited-edition E3 2005 Xbox 360 faceplate.

Darin Flug's
“CIRCUIT BOARD”



Eric Jenks'
“THE MACHINE”



Korie Wilson's
“CHERRY BLOSSOMS,”
A.K.A. “NOT SKULLS OR FLAMES”



Gary Gorzoch Jr.'s
“FACE MELTER”



And Renee Parill's
“SILK WITH GLASS BEADS”
— AND YES, SHE REALLY HAND-MADE IT



But we're not done yet! We got so many amazing entries that we're handing out some runner-up prizes – in the form of one-year subscriptions to this magazine – to our favorites that didn't quite crack the top five.

Chanh Tang's
“ACTION”



Ginger Noel's
“FACES AND A WHALE”



William Mack's
“COOLEST ENTRY WITH A SKULL ON IT”



Frank Prior's
“BOMBER'S ROW”

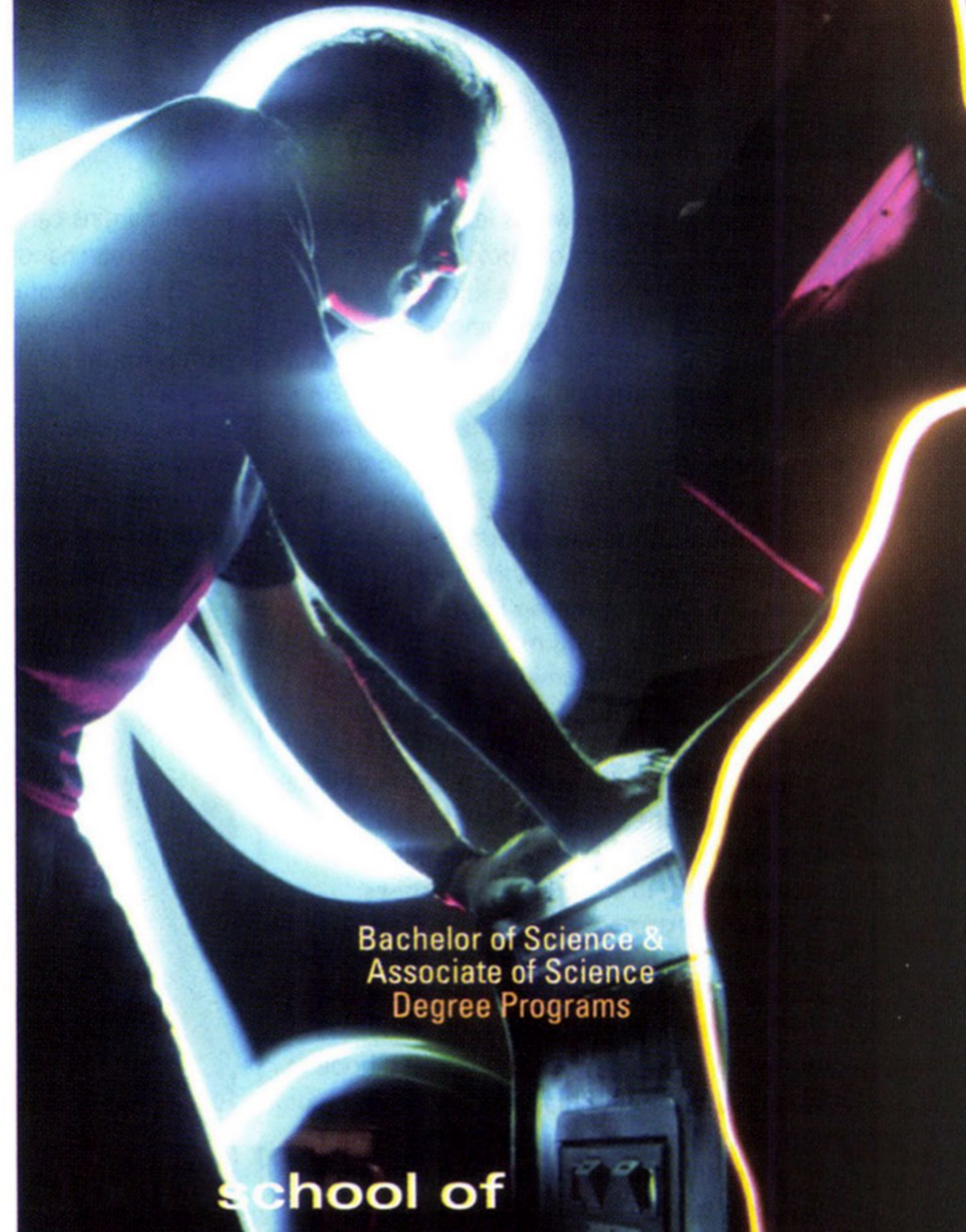


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■ **OTHER ENGINES:** id Software's been licensing its engine technology since the *Doom* days. A lesser known *Doom* licensee was Rogue's late-but-great RPG, *Strife*.

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THE BUSINESS OF XBOX



By Geoff Keighley • geoff@officialxboxmagazine.com

The Rise of Originality



In the weeks leading up to the launch of Xbox 360, there's one thing we know for sure: Don't expect another *Halo* on day one. While another Master

Chief adventure would certainly help Xbox 360 arrive to even greater fanfare, the lack of *Halo 3* does present the opportunity for other original games to break through the clutter. Indeed, the Xbox 360 launch-window lineup features a slew of brand-new properties: *Condemned: Criminal Origins*, *The Outfit*, and even Rare's *Kameo*. But on the surface, launching many original games might seem counter-intuitive – especially given that in 2004, nine out of the ten best-selling games were sequels or franchise extensions.

So why are publishers betting big on original titles for 360? The answer is that the business minds see the start of the next generation as the perfect time to roll out new franchises. First, hardcore gamers who buy a system at launch are usually the same rabid fans who are willing to take a risk on a brand-new franchise. If the hardcore base buys into a franchise and evangelizes it to their friends, publishers hope to end up with the next *Grand Theft Auto* or *Halo*. But perhaps the main reason for launching a new original game alongside a console comes down to supply and demand. The fact that there are so few titles on store shelves at launch means that a new, original game has a chance to stand out from the pack. That's hardly the case in the fourth or fifth year of a console cycle when shelf space is tight and hundreds of games compete for your attention.

This opportunity is appealing, but it also comes with inherent risks. Namely, the cost of game development is rising to an estimated \$10-15 million per game for an Xbox 360 title. That means that original games can be very risky bets when a built-in audience isn't guaranteed. Good marketing and PR can get the title in front of consumers, but even then, publishers are up against industry heavyweights like the next-gen version of the *Madden* series. Even in the face of these challenges, publishers pursue original games because of the potential rewards: Original games seldom carry pricey royalty deals (like paying for a movie license or a sports star), so if a franchise breaks out, the

profit margins can be huge, especially if movie deals or merchandising take off.

The appeal of original games is so strong that Sega of America is betting on two original games for the 360: *Condemned: Criminal Origins* and *Full Auto*. According to Simon Jeffery, president of Sega of America, the company chose to debut original games instead of re-creations of old franchises to ensure Sega delivered next-generation gameplay, not just hi-res graphics. "So many of these supposed

All this is not to say that you can't create new gameplay paradigms using existing franchises. But gamers are already rejecting the idea of paying \$59 (\$10 more than an Xbox game) for titles like *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland*, which so far looks like little more than a higher-res port of the Xbox 1 version of the game. There's nothing inherently wrong with porting a game to the 360, but if gamers are spending \$400 on a new videogame system, they want to play games that feel like they've



■ *Full Auto* – the start of an original Xbox 360 series?

next-gen games are simply next-gen iterations of current-gen games," argues Jeffrey. "The only horsepower being taken advantage of is graphical – we believe that gamers are going to have higher expectations." In this case, the creation of new franchises allows Sega to create

been passed down from the future, not just gussied up from what was available on the Xbox last fall.

Now all that's left to wonder is what games will end up being the *Halos*, *Fables*, and *KOTORs* of this generation. Sequels will no doubt be in great supply for the 360, but at the end of the day, it will likely be new franchises from developers like BioWare, Silicon Knights, and Real Time Worlds (the new home of one of the founders of *GTA*) that have the greatest potential to break out. Microsoft has made a significant investment in new and original game franchises, but their success ultimately depends on whether those new franchises deliver not just new stories and graphics, but also new types of gameplay.

"If a game hits it big and gets earmarked as one of the first true next-gen titles, the bet can pay off in spades."

gameplay only possible on a next-gen system. It's a risky strategy because Sega is betting millions on the 360 and what will be a limited installed base, at least at first. But if a game hits it big and gets earmarked as one of the first true next-gen titles, the bet can pay off in spades.

A 14-year game-journalism veteran, Geoff Keighley writes for publications ranging from *Business 2.0* to *Entertainment Weekly*. He also hosts a show on *G4*, the videogame TV network.

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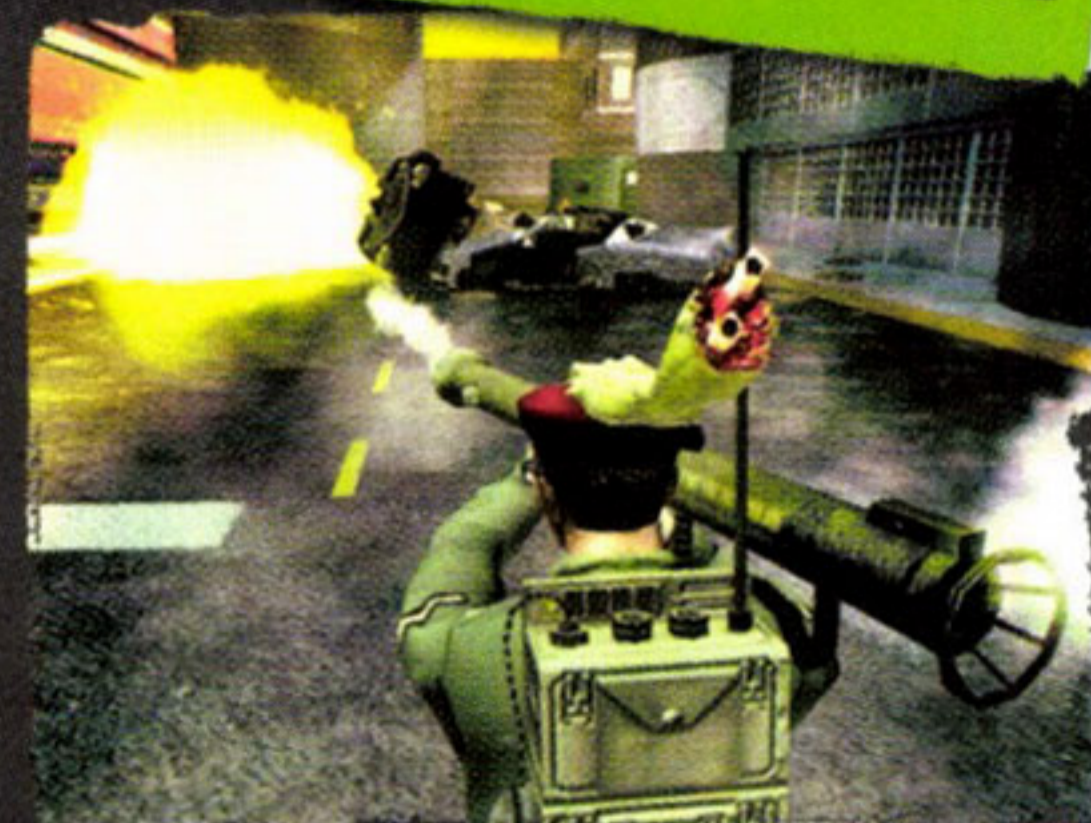
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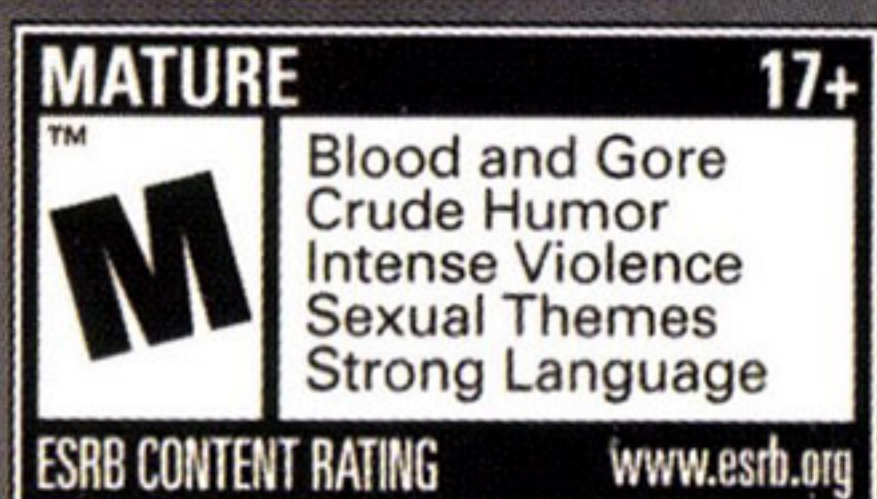
EAT BRAINS: Convert the living into undead allies & build your zombie horde.

PLUS: Use your body as a weapon with gut grenades, unholy flatulence & more!

PLAY CO-OP: On the Xbox and double the damage with a friend. *(Friend not included)*



POSSESS THE LIVING: Clamp your severed hand on the living & use any of their weapons.



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