



RESIDENT EVIL 4...
...RE: Outbreak and **11** other
spooky games previewed!

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Microsoft in **2004 and beyond**

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Soul Calibur II: New modes and
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The **#1 Videogame** Magazine

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- **Behind the scenes** in Hollywood
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FIRST SCREENS!

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KINGDOM HEARTS**
Sequels revealed!

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COVER **#1** OF 5
ARAGORN



**SUPER-SIZED
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247+
GAMES INSIDE**

**KARAOKE
REVOLUTION**



**MARIO KART:
DOUBLE DASH!!**



**SPLINTER CELL:
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■ GTA: Vice City (Xbox) ■ Jedi Academy ■ Castlevania (PS2)
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■ SSX 3 ■ Desert Storm II ■ Star Wars: Rebel Strike ■ Van Helsing
■ Rainbow Six 3 ■ Jade Empire ■ Medal of Honor: Rising Sun...

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Cartoon Violence

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PlayStation 2

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**The Prophecy foretold of a mighty warrior
that would one day save the world.**

That's him in the chicken suit.



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Mild Language
Mild Violence
Suggestive Themes

www.us.playstation.com

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JAK II



THIS WORLD IS
BETTER LEFT TO JAK.

It ain't no namby pamby fairyland, pal. It's a whole new kind of evil. Crawling with ruthless dictators, backstabbing allies and blood thirsty freaks with an appetite for extra rare meat. All pansies kindly tippy toe on out of here. This requires someone with serious ass-kicking savvy. And that someone, my friend, is Jak. This time he's pissed off and battle ready, with a frighteningly large gun, get-the-hell-outta-my-way hoverboard and a nasty case of mutant powers. So please, save yourself the detached appendages and let him handle it.



NAUGHTY DOG

PlayStation 2



LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
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CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

Flaming Fur Ball or Radioactive Rabbit? Choose your weapon wisely or you and your fellow fugitive will be forever subjected to a life of twisted animal testing. Shackled together, Spanx must use the indestructible Redmond as a weapon and tool for escape from an evil corporation.



BUNNY CANNON



HELIUM BUNNY



HARE-SICLE



HARE CLOG

- Flaming Fur Ball
- Bunny Grinder
- Radioactive Rabbit
- Bunny Fuse
- Hare-sicle
- Electro Static Rabbit
- Hungry Bunny
- Hare Clog
- Tug-O-Rabbit
- 10 Ton Bunny
- Bunny Cannon
- Helium Bunny
- Hyper Hare
- Stuffed Rabbit
- Chocolate Bunny

BUST



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IT UP!

OUT NOV. 4!



Dip Redmond in toxic waste to poison enemies, electro-charge him to zap attackers and more!



Demolish everything from security cameras to test equipment.



Knock out the evil lab staff with loads of combo attacks.



"Whiplash is one of those games that just oozes cool." — PSM

Whiplash

WhiplashGame.com

PlayStation 2



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**"ENVIRONMENTS AS INTERACTIVE AS
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Open ended combat allows you to brutalize your opponents in multi-tiered environments with grappling, hand to hand combat, throws, weapons, and a myriad of aerial assaults.

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OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

Every hold has a counter hold.
Every move has a reversal.
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**"STEP OUT OF THE RING AND INTO
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eidos

XBOX



PlayStation 2

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood
Intense Violence
Mature Sexual Themes
Strong Language

"FROM ROOFTOPS TO ESCALATORS, NOTHING IS OFF LIMITS." - FHM

BACKYARD

WRESTLING

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

**OUT
NOW!**

Features over 40 songs from:

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PlayStation 2



PLAYERS



Online and Multiplayer game play available for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system and PC only. INTERNET CONNECTIVITY required. PlayStation 2 console online play requires Internet connection and Network Adaptor for PlayStation 2 (sold separately). The Online icon is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. All features not available on all platforms. See back of game pack for details.

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issue 173 • december 2003

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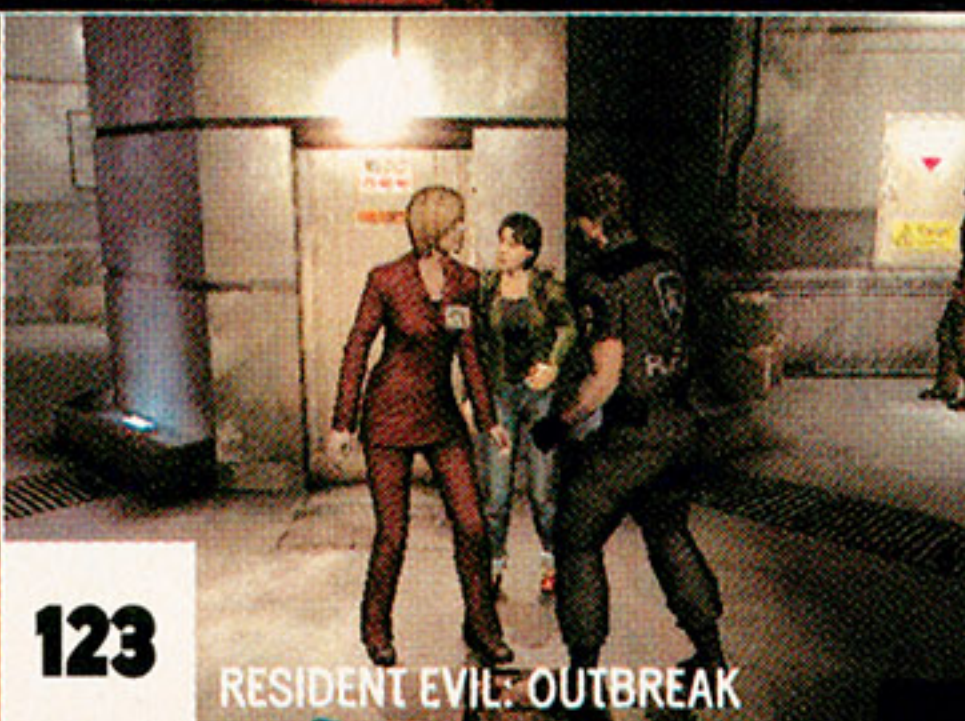
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REVIEW CREW

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editorial



As much as I dread writing these editorials, I extra-dread writing them about the controversy

surrounding videogame violence. Not that it's unimportant.... It's just such a tired topic, and it's no challenge preaching to the choir.

But events this past September force me to speak up again. The *Grand Theft Auto* devil struck again, recently "influencing" two teenage boys to shoot—and kill—a passing motorist in Tennessee; now the victim's family wants to sue the game publisher's parent company, Take 2 Interactive.

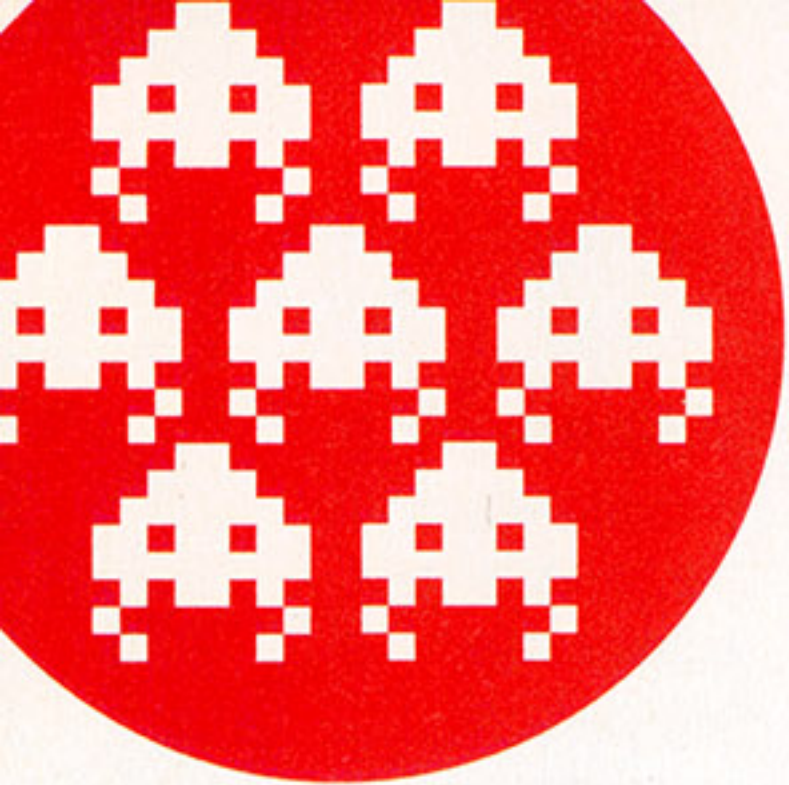
Of course, I have the utmost sympathy for everyone who's suffered in this sad turn of events. But this editorial is directed more toward the opportunist lawyers and politicians who take advantage of these situations to further their careers. Since it seems like they don't already have enough to do, I thought I'd actually help these guys out by compiling a list of other possible targets for lawsuits or campaign attacks. Suing these guys should make as much (or even more) sense as suing the makers of a videogame that's clearly made, and *labeled**, for an adult audience:

1) The parents who let those kids play violent games they're not old enough to play, 2) The parents who weren't able to teach those kids any sense of responsibility or the differences between reality and fantasy, 3) Anyone who's created any form of media that helped influence the creation of *Grand Theft Auto* in the first place (we're looking at you, Martin Scorsese and the estate of Mario Puzo—and we'll throw in HBO for good measure), 4) The parents who allowed those kids to have access to firearms, 5) The manufacturer of the shotgun used in the shootings (correct me if I'm wrong, but technically, didn't the gun do more damage than the videogame?).... You get the idea.

I'm actually not trying to make any political statements about firearms, so please save your angry, pro-Second Amendment letters. I just wanted to point out how arbitrary it is to fault a single game for this horrible tragedy.

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

* Parents, if you haven't already, please familiarize yourself with the ESRB (www.esrb.com), which works almost exactly like movie ratings. Not all videogames are for children, ya know. Especially those named after felonies.



staff

when editors attack

the review crew



DAN "SHOE" HSU, Editor-in-Chief
Shoe's been with *EGM* since 1996, and now he's running this three-ring circus we call a magazine. Shows what a lot of game-playing and ass-kissing can do for one's career....
Now Playing: *Soul Calibur II*, *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*
Fave Genres: Just about everything under the sun

MARK MACDONALD, Executive Editor

In anticipation of *SOCOM II*, Mark's been brushing up on his online smack talk with repeated viewings of the movie *Predator*. "Give away our position once more, I'll bleed you."
Now Playing: *SOCOM II*, *Fire Emblem*, *Viewtiful Joe*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Shooters, "Strategy"



JENNIFER TSAO, Managing Editor
Early in her career, when she worked at MTV and hung with the likes of Tupac and Weezer, Jennifer never dreamed that, one day, she'd work alongside real live *EGM* editors!
Now Playing: *SSX 3*, *Karaoke Revolution*, *Soul Calibur II*
Fave Genres: Action Sports, Adventure, RPG, Music

CRISPIN BOYER, Features Editor

Before *EGM* and the newspaper gigs and the various game-store jobs, Crispin dressed up as the Chuck E. Cheese rat and made a million kids smile. Oh, and he once killed a guy.
Now Playing: *The Return of the King*, *SOCOM II*, *Rebel Strike*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, RPG



CHRIS "CJ" JOHNSTON, News Editor
CJ escaped the perils of deadline by traveling to Japan for Tokyo Game Show—though in his many trips across the Pacific, Chris has yet to witness a giant monster attack.
Now Playing: *Ratchet & Clank: GC*, *Mario Kart: DD*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Puzzle, Music

SHANE BETTENHAUSEN, Reviews Editor

After surviving all-nighters back at ye olde Gamers.com, Shane thought he could breeze through editing a December *EGM* reviews section; 38 games later, he realizes his folly.
Now Playing: *Mario Kart: DD*, *Final Fantasy X-2*, *Karaoke Rev.*
Fave Genres: Action, RPG, Fighting, Karaoke



JOE FIELDER, Previews Editor
Joe wrote a *Star Trek* comic book a few years ago and, while it wasn't very good, he's the only one here who knows what a Tholian is. So, he got to review *Star Trek: Shattered Universe*.
Now Playing: *Beyond Good & Evil*, *Fatal Frame II*
Fave Genres: Action, Shooters, Adventure

DEMIAN LINN, Editor-at-Large

After riding a robotic couch with *Sims* creator and robot-phile Will Wright while "researching" an upcoming story, Demian was eminently qualified to review robo-game *Metal Arms*.
Now Playing: *Mario Kart: DD*, *SSX 3*, *Metal Arms*
Fave Genres: Action, Hockey, Racing, Fighting



PAUL BYRNES, Associate Editor
Having never gone snowboarding, Paul was somewhat surprised to learn that quadruple-backflip tailgrabs, while common in *SSX 3*, are basically impossible in reality. Go figure.
Now Playing: *SSX 3*, *Metroid Fusion*, *Soul Calibur II*
Fave Genres: Adventure, RPG, Fighting

BRYAN INTIHAR, Associate Editor

Bryan's game-store spies taught him all the ways to save big bucks. The end result: multiple copies of *Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure*. The boy's still learnin', people.
Now Playing: *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Sports



SHAWN ELLIOTT, Associate Editor
Shawn may have given up his college teaching gig to play games for a living, but he'll still school you at *Soul Calibur II*.
Now Playing: *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, *Soul Calibur II*, *Beyond Good & Evil*, *Battlefield 1942* (PC)
Fave Genres: Fighting, Shooters, Adventure, Racing

Guest Reviewers



JON DUDLAK
Former fulltime editor Jon Dudlak left our offices to make paper tubes for toilet tissue.



GREG FORD
Why's Ford a grinning fool? Try *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* and *Prince of Persia*.



JOHN RICCIARDI
John's our resident man in Japan. Lesson #1: "Genki" means "healthy."



GREG SEWART
Sewart's been writing about games in magazines for eight years now.



KEVIN GIFFORD
EGM's new web liaison hides a tragic past—he once was a cuddly fox in *GamePro*.



PATRICK MAURO
Syndicated radio host Patrick Mauro gives his slant on sports games.

■ Every two months, **XBOX NATION** offers its independent take on everything to do with Microsoft's console....
■ *EGM* too risqué for the younger gamers in your house? Why not introduce them to our family-friendly sister mag **GAMENOW**....
■ For uncompromising coverage and a monthly disc packed with playable demos, look no further than the **OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE**....
■ From PC to Playstation, the guys at **GMR** cover it all (but somebody, please buy them a vowel).

The Contributors

■ For our Power Shopping article, New York City-based **LAUREN GONZALES** infiltrates the game-store biz to find out how to save major moolah....
■ **JON M. GIBSON** tracks down Dr. Gamingstein, a Wisconsin mad scientist who builds nifty handhelds from deceased consoles....
■ Game scholar **LEONARD HERMAN** and the Digital Press' **JOE SANTULLI** teach the secrets of savvy game collectors in this month's Instant Expert....
■ **SCOTT STEINBERG** kindly convinces (i.e., blackmails) five famous developers to design the ultimate game for our Hit Squad story....
■ **JUSTIN SPEER** faces his fear of the dark in our Scary Monsters feature, and takes a first look at *Plague of Darkness* in Press Start....
■ **CASEY LOE** treks to Canada to see *Jade Empire*, the forthcoming RPG from the developers of *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*.

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Executive Editor Mark MacDonald
Managing Editor Jennifer Tsao
Features Editor Crispin Boyer
News Editor Chris "CJ" Johnston
Reviews Editor Shane Bettenhausen
Previews Editor Joe Fielder
Editor-at-Large Demian Linn
Associate Editor/Production Designer Paul Byrnes
Associate Editor Bryan Intihar
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Tricks Editor David Hodgson
International Editor John Ricciardi
Japanese Correspondent Yutaka Ohbuchi

DESIGN

Art Director Monique Martinez
Associate Art Director Stefan Belavy

CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Baker, David Chen, Che Chou, Robert Coffey, Kevin Convertito, eBoy, Chuck Ernst, James Dziejynski, Jon Gibson, Lauren Gonzales, Leonard Herman, David Hodgson, Michael Jennings, Casey Loe, Miguel Lopez, Andrew Mendoza, James Mielke, Thierry Nguyen, Henry Obasi, Greg Orlando, Andrew Pfister, Thomas Puha, Joe Rybicki, Marc Saltzman, Joe Santulli, Norm Scott, Seanbaby, Carrie Shepherd, Gerry Serrano, Rey Serrano, Nik Schulz, Justin Speer, Scott Steinberg, Gary Steinman, Phil Theobald, Giancarlo Varanini, Dave Ziganay

Founder Steve Harris

ZD GAME GROUP

Senior Vice President Dale Strang
Editorial Director John Davison
Creative Director Simon Cox
Business Director Cathy Bendoff

COPY DESK

Copy Chief Kristen Salvatore
Copy Editors Tom Edwards, Greg Ford, Maritza Refuerzo

PRODUCTION

Art Production Manager Michele Manousos
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Assistant Production Manager Teresa Newson

CIRCULATION

Group Circulation Director Tracy Schultz
Single Copy Sales Director Bob Kerekes
Senior Newsstand Sales Manager Don Galen
Internet and Partnership Marketing Dir. Chris Wilkes

SALES AND MARKETING

Group Publisher Lee Uniaque
415-357-4910, fax: 415-547-8777
Associate Group Publisher Stan Taigen
415-357-4915, fax: 415-547-8777
Advertising Director Marci Yamaguchi
415-357-4944, fax: 415-547-8777

Bay Area

District Sales Manager Mary Gray
415-547-8782, fax: 415-547-8777
Account Executive Aaron Gallion
425-823-1635, fax: 425-952-7028

Southwest

Regional Sales Manager Julie Steelman
714-491-3996, fax: 714-491-3998
Account Executive Eve Friedman
415-547-8781, fax: 415-547-8777

Midwest

Regional Sales Manager Marc Callison
630-810-4095, fax: 630-810-4099
Account Executive Candace Droz
415-357-4920, fax: 415-547-8777

East

Regional Sales Manager Ian Sinclair
203-255-5795, fax: 203-255-4560
Account Executive Amy Mishra
415-547-8780, fax: 415-547-8777

Online

Internet Account Manager Bill Young
415-547-8453, fax: 415-547-8777

Senior Advertising Coordinator Tipler Ubbelohde 415-357-4930
Sales Assistant Allison Rubino 415-547-8779
Marketing Director Rey Ledda 415-547-8775
Assoc. Research Director May Tong 415-357-5430
Marketing Coordinator Wayne Shiu 415-547-8248

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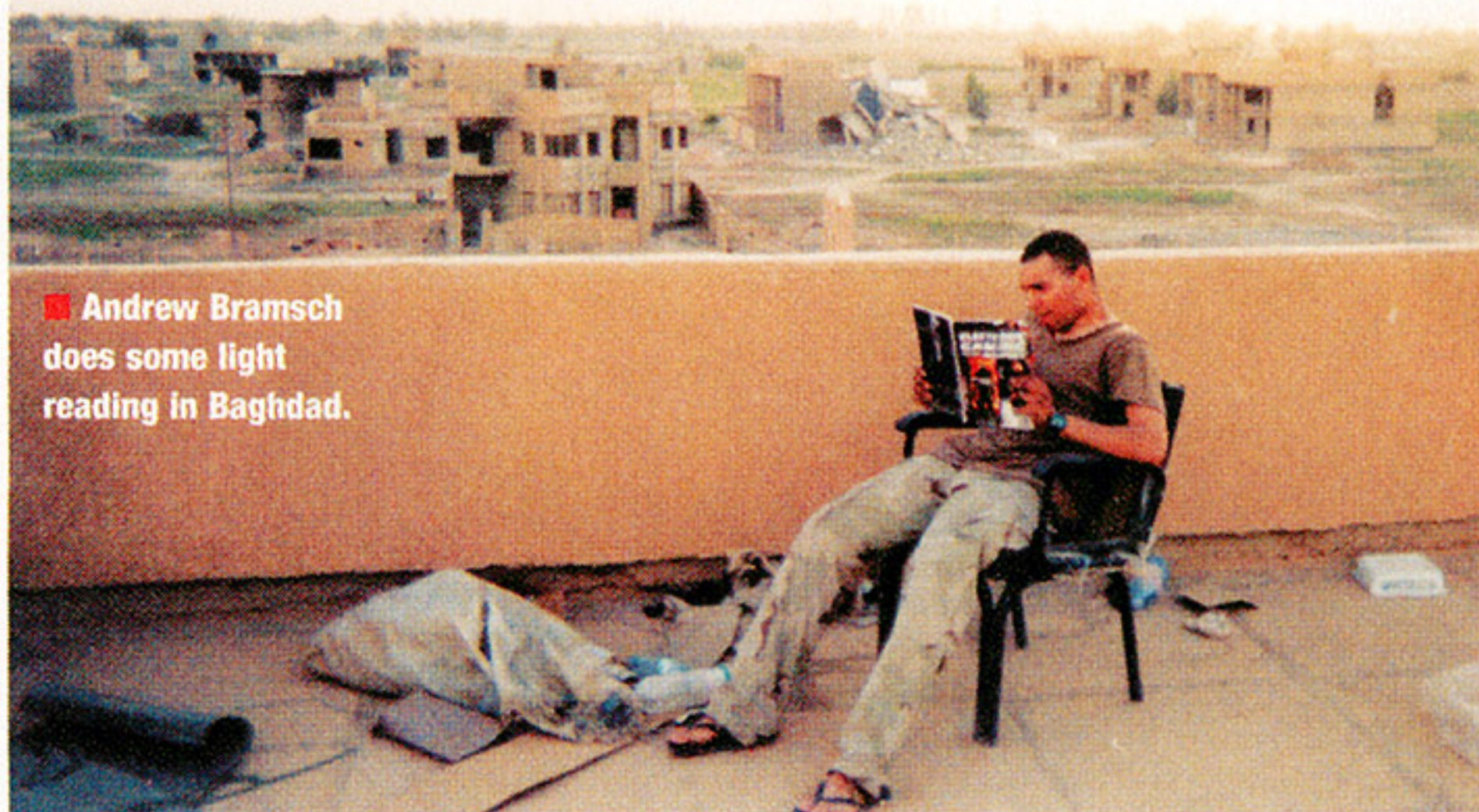
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Letters

ranting, raving, and bruce vilanch's incredibly large head



■ Andrew Bramsch does some light reading in Baghdad.

EGM overseas

I just want to thank you for your great reviews of the videogames that I'll buy when I get back to the States. I'm a soldier with the 82nd Airborne Division; your magazine has helped me enjoy my time in my real-life shooting adventure in Iraq. Too bad there's no restart button. Here's a picture of me in Baghdad.

—Andrew Bramsch

That's...surreal.

books about that one day in American history, and then read even more about World War II in general. Who says games have a negative effect on intelligence?

And by the way, if the difficulty level is on Hard, then the game does re-create the day relatively accurately.

—Aaron Gordon

Frontline Executive Producer Rick Giolito responds: "It's heartening to learn that *Medal of Honor* spurred on

"Has anyone else made a child's life unnecessarily difficult due to video-game-related obsession?"

Summer reading club

I know a lot of people (especially parents and politicians) who think videogames are bad for the mind and get in the way of work or school. Well, when *Medal of Honor: Frontline* came out, I played the D-Day level and was in awe. I wanted to know if the actual day was like the way the game depicted it, so I read up on it. I read four

one of its fans to take a bigger interest in WWII. We strive to deliver an experience that gives players some sense of what it might have been like to have been there.

If *MOH*, in some small way, can contribute to the memory of these extraordinary people who fought to preserve the society we all enjoy today,

unedited Letters



■ Pikachu...you look different.

Talk to the turtle

Hello, I recently obtained a strange pokemon type game called diamond from a place I shall not say. In the game you go to the electric monsters world and talk to a turtle who gives you some sort of mouse then you fight little creatures and if you win you get the creatures phone number and you can fight with the guy. and because I have never left the U.S. and I know that you guys have seen foreign games and I would like to know if it is a pokemon game so please tell me, thank you.

—Joe Windau

Goofballs, everybody! Hopped up on goofballs.

Letter of the month

Pretty hype machine

I've had a subscription to *EGM* for 11 years now, and it never ceases to amaze me how so many gamers write in to complain about "hype"—how such-and-such game got way too much hype and how said game didn't "live up to it." I've read fanboy buffoons bashing everything from *GTA: Vice City* to *Bubsy 3D* (an abomination, granted), but no one seems to realize that it's the gamers themselves who are responsible. Game mags and websites give us more info on certain games because we ask for it. Then when we go out and buy a lemon before waiting for the review, we blame the hype. So for all you young or uninformed gamers out there who just bought the new

Tomb Raider, don't blame the game or its publisher for not living up to the hype; blame the fanboy message boards for creating it and yourselves for believing it. Or just blame *Bubsy*.

—Matthew Bowers

Congrats, Matthew Bowers! As our Letter of the Month winner, you've got a Nyko Air Flo Mouse

coming your way. Keeps your hand cool, you see. It's got little fans inside it.



and spur interest in a generation of gamers that may not be [very] familiar with WWII, then we can all be proud."

Gee, thanks Mom

In *EGM* #171 [page 22], you showed a picture of a license plate with "FF VI" on it, an homage to *Final Fantasy VII*. I have that beat! I love *Final Fantasy VIII*, and eight months ago we were blessed with a dark-haired baby girl we named Rinoa.

—Michelle Villmer

Has anyone else made a child's life unnecessarily difficult due to videogame-related obsession? We wanna know!

Pondering PSP

The upcoming Sony portable, PSP, is being touted as more powerful than Sega's Dreamcast, and maybe even rivaling PlayStation 2. Its wireless-link capability and PS2 connectivity (why else would a portable support Dolby 7.1 surround?) are things Sony is counting on in its upcoming battle with Nintendo's Game Boy. I'm certainly looking forward to seeing the games it offers.

But the Atari Lynx, Sega Game Gear, Neo•Geo Pocket, and many other challengers have failed to compete with the Game Boy and Game Boy Advance, despite sometimes significant performance advantages. The GBA's huge library of games (thanks in part to backward-compatibility) is an obvious reason behind its success, but the real clincher has always been price. None of Nintendo's rivals have ever been able to compete with the consumer-friendly cost of the Game Boy, or at least not until their handhelds were in the closeout bin.

Sony has deep enough pockets so that the PSP will likely last longer than any previous competitor, but it will probably cost two or even three times the price of the GBA when it debuts. And who wants to bet that Nintendo will cut the GBA's price further when PSP launches?

Not to say that PSP is doomed to failure. But I think the portable market will shift into two major groups—PSP being the main choice of hobbyists, while Game Boy Advance will continue its control of the low-end, low-cost market. Unlike the ➤

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"Come into my office and let's have a brain dump." We know a guy who actually said that once. Though we're antibrain-dump, we would like to know what's on your mind. Hit EGM@ziffdavis.com or write to:

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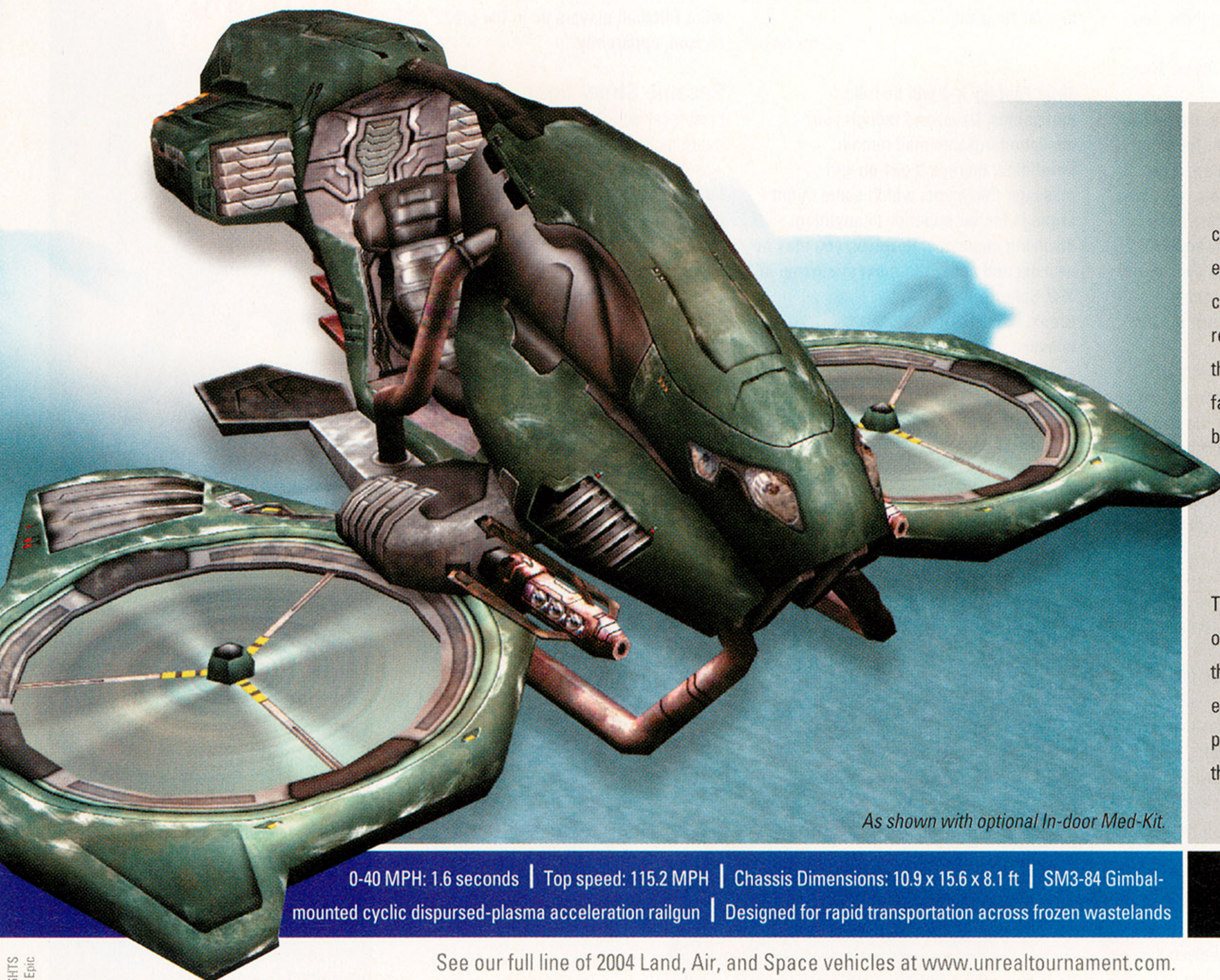
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► console wars, in this case, there may well be room for two companies to thrive and serve their customers well.

—Aaron Marshall

Got some good points there, Aaron, but PSP is a little different from the other failed handhelds you mentioned. A number of developers are already lined up to support it, and there's a huge back catalog of PlayStation and PS2 games that could be ported over pretty easily. More games means more hardware sales, which in turn means even more games.

You're definitely right about PSP's expected high price tag putting it out of reach of some gamers, and the recently announced Dolby 7.1 support does indeed suggest that GBA/GameCube-style connectivity is coming to the PlayStation camp—more on that in Q-Mann (see page 102).

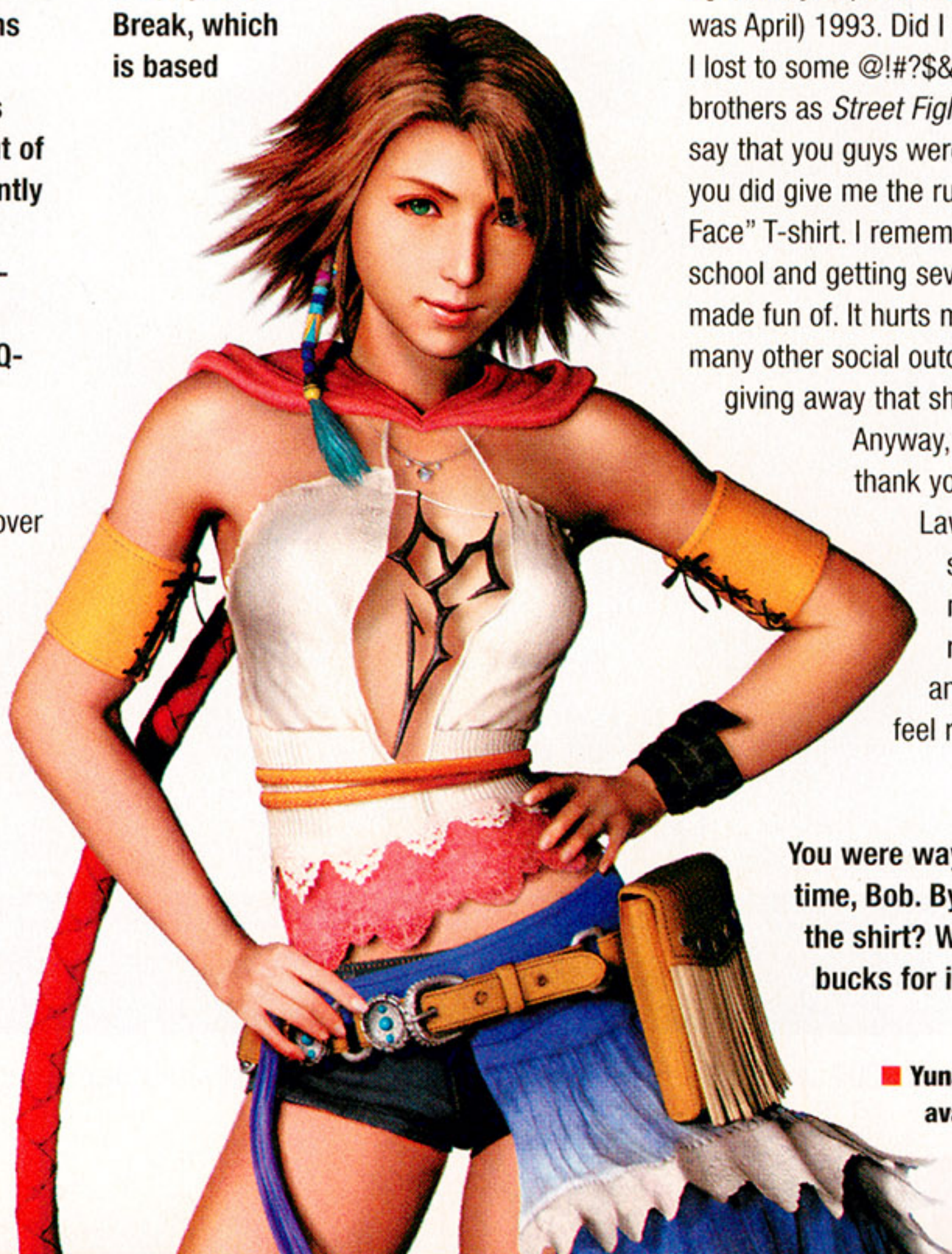
One man's fantasy

What with *EGM* #172's *Final Fantasy* cover story, I was hoping we could talk minigames. Now I'm not one to gripe, but I think the general public is sick of digging around in the mud with a giant bird or playing a game of glorified *Pong* in a goldfish bowl. Are the good folks at Square Enix even trying when they put these extras in? Whatever happened to the chocobo Kentucky derby of *FFVII*? Or *FFIII*'s Colosseum? The most important aspect of *Final Fantasy* minigames is the fact that I can gamble my bleep off and then just go beat on some monsters to earn cash and feed my habit. Please promise me an

online chocobo triple crown! I'll give ya 10-to-1 on the giant chocobo.

—Dave Steps

Final Fantasy X-2 will be full of minigames, Dave, and though your chocobo fantasies may remain unfulfilled, there is a girl-on-girl massage minigame, which some might argue is far, far superior to anything involving chocobos. However, you may be less excited about the main minigame in *X-2*, Sphere Break, which is based



Sesame Street fight

I just received *EGM* #171 and was reading the Game Design-O-Rama bit in Letters, when I noticed Matthew Lawrence's entry for *Sesame Street Fighter*. Today's kids just ain't got no imagination. You probably don't remember, but I sent that same idea in for *EGM*'s Envelope Art contest over 10 years ago, and you published it in April (I think it was April) 1993. Did I win first place? Nope. I lost to some @!#?& who drew the Mario brothers as *Street Fighter* characters! Not to say that you guys weren't generous, 'cause you did give me the runner-up *EGM* "In Your Face" T-shirt. I remember wearing it to school and getting severely pummeled and made fun of. It hurts me to think of how many other social outcasts you created by giving away that shirt.

Anyway, I just wanted to thank you and Matthew Lawrence (idea stealer!) for adding more pain to my repressed memories and for also making me feel really old.

—Bob Morgan

You were way ahead of your time, Bob. By the way, still got the shirt? We'll give you five bucks for it. ►

■ Yuna in short pants: available for all your shiatsu, reiki, and rolfing needs

sputtering outrage



■ Good Charlotte: Proudly making punks angry since 2000!

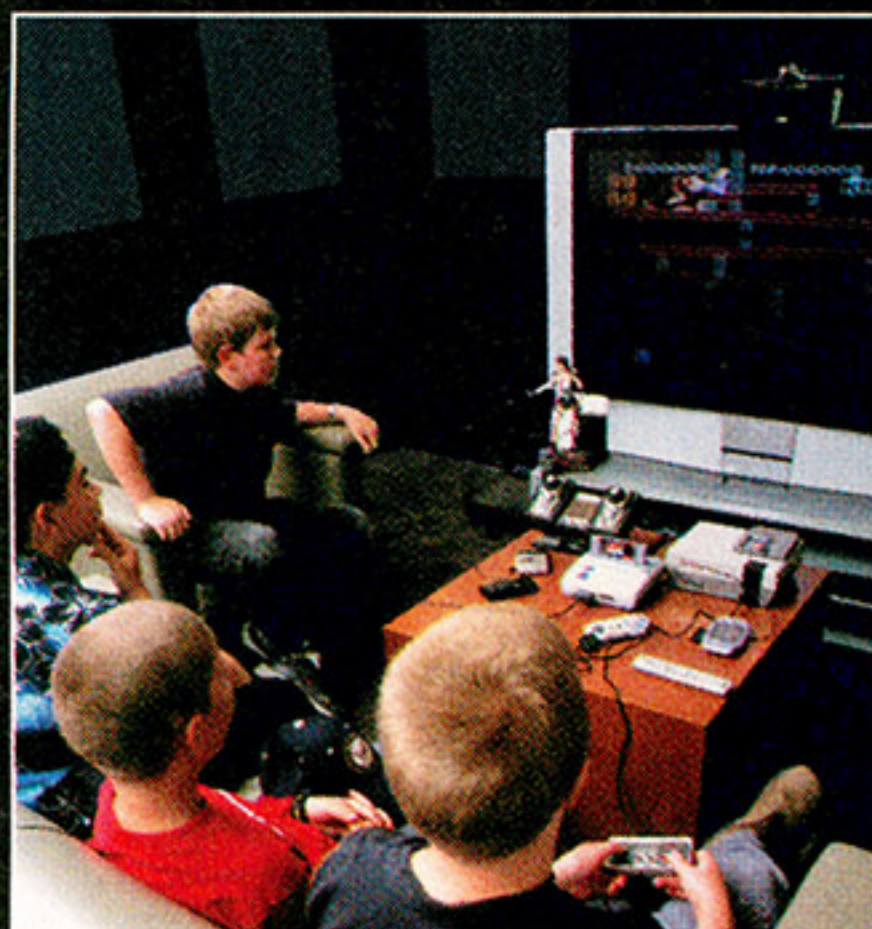
Dave is gettin' upset!

What's the deal with calling Good Charlotte a punk band [*EGM* #171, page 58]? It's bands like these that give actual punk music a bad (or nice, depending on how you look at it) name. Pop-punk bands like Good Charlotte and Blink 182 are key players in *killing* punk music. Where is the message in their songs? Where is the conflict? There's no need to even read the lyrics! You featuring them is just fueling mindless trendiness—everyone thinks they are hardcore now because they bought a spiked bracelet and an Ataris shirt from Hot Topic.

—Dave Crooks

Well, they've got dyed hair, piercings, and tattoos, so they're punk, right? Right?

DANG KIDS! GET OFF MY LAWN!



■ Youngsters: got some kind of nerve

In our "Child's Play" feature in *EGM* #172 (page 50), we had a few irascible little tykes play some of the olde-tyme classic games. They weren't best pleased. But that's nothing compared with our livid readers....

It's a travesty!

I just read your article about what

PlayStation-generation kids think of the games that we "older gamers" grew up with, and I must say, I'm really disappointed in today's youth. To see kids rip on *Tetris*...that game is a classic beyond anything out there. And they want exploding bricks! Sacrilege!

—Tim Borski

It's criminal!

Those snot-nosed punks you had play ancient Atari and arcade games said some incredibly clever things. Too clever. For example:

"It's Zeus. He's taking you away to the Acropolis." Zeus? Acropolis? No. Twelve-year-old kids do not know who Zeus is, and probably a lot of 20-plus-year-olds don't know what the Acropolis is. Sorry, I don't buy it.

"Mario dies way too easy. Oh, grab the umbrella. Those are cool. Unfashionable, gay, but cool." This sounds too clever to have been said by some 11-year-old. It stinks of Seanbaby!

We all know that most kids would play these games for three minutes, say "this sucks," and move on. They wouldn't spout clever quips about E.T. eating Reese's Pieces and *Tetris* blocks blowing up. I think it was very bad of you guys at *EGM* to write witty commentary and claim it was from young kids. For shame! And in case you were wondering, yes, I am bored.

—Al Lica

Hey, don't blame us for somehow finding the funniest kids in America. We were as surprised as you were by what they had to say. The only change we made was to remove the more gratuitous usages of the word "gay." Kids really do say the most homophobic things!

It's an outrage!

I'm 26 years old and grew up playing the games in the "Child's Play" article, along with a slew of other games from

that era. I agree with pretty much everything those kids said. I just think you chose some really poor games; almost none of your picks have aged well. What about *Tempest*, the vector-graphics *Star Wars* arcade game, *Frogger*, *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Bubble Bobble*, *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, etc.? Let the kids play those games so that I can get all shocked and irritated when they make fun and don't understand the games' obvious genius.

—Matt Greer

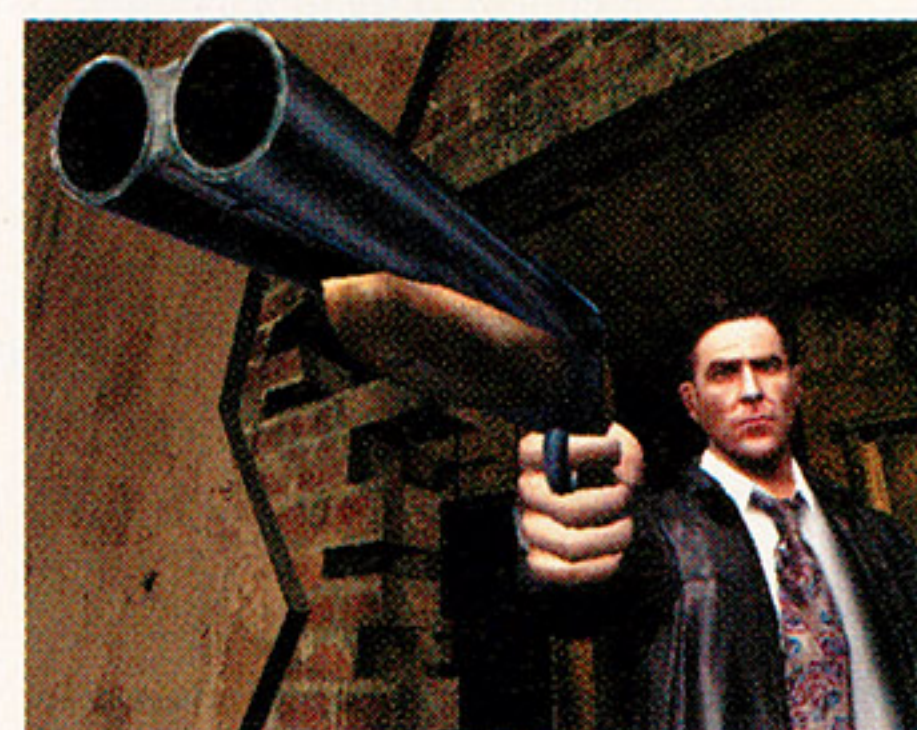
E.T. was crap to begin with, but *Tetris*, *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders*, and Mattel's *Handheld Football* haven't aged well? (OK, so *Handheld Football* is debatable.) We did have the little wiseacres play *Super Mario Bros.*, but space was short and we couldn't include their vicious plumber-mocking in the feature. You can check out the full transcript online at kidsplay.egmmag.com, though! Prepare to be outrageously outraged!

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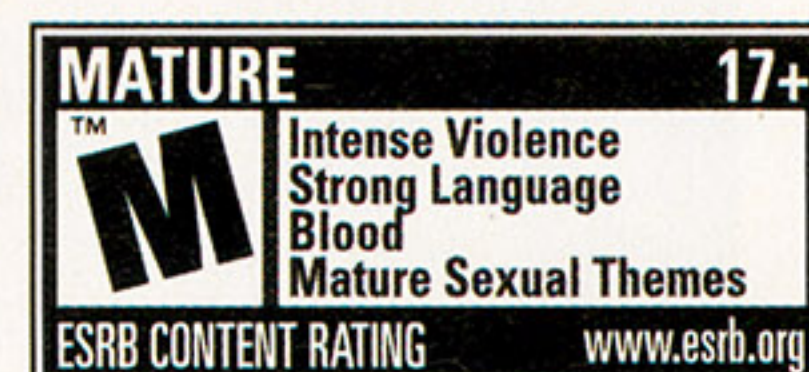
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■ Presidential candidate and videogame hater Joe Lieberman. On the right.

► Mad scientist

In your "Games Are Bad for You, Games Are Good for You" feature [EGM #170, page 68], you cited research done by different universities to support the opposing viewpoints. I read the article and was inspired by the debate over videogames and social interaction. I am a senior psychology major at the University of Southern Indiana, and I am hoping to try to analyze or re-create the studies that you cited to see if the results hold true for each side.

If I do find that gaming hinders social interaction in some way (which I think is a joke! How the hell do you play *Soul Calibur II* or co-op *Halo* and not interact with someone or improve your social skills?), I'll just drop my research and burn all the hard data so that Senator Joseph Lieberman can't get his politically greased, ultraconservative, I'm-still-living-in-the-past hands on it.

—Jamie Jordan

Way to pervert the scientific method, Galileo. But good luck!

Can't mourn, playing

In EGM #171, page 42, you had a small article entitled "You Play Games Where?" which mentioned that Drs. Poco and Buchanan installed Sony PlayStation 2s in their lobbies. Our company, Kidzspace, has been supplying the dental industry with interactive kiosks for over 11 years. Not only will you find Kidzspace systems in dental offices, but we've also installed them in McDonald's restaurants, YMCAs, fitness clubs, hospitals, car dealerships, and even funeral homes. In fact, there aren't many venues where we haven't supplied our products.

—Steve Newhouse
Kidzspace Interactive Inc.

Hospitals and car dealerships, fine. But funeral homes?

Simpsons did it

I was watching an episode of *South Park* recently, the one where the kids were pissed because directors were redoing their movies with "new extra features." The gaming industry has been guilty of this a lot lately. GameCube's *Metal Gear: The Twin Snakes* (a *Metal Gear Solid* remake), PlayStation 2's *Sega Ages* series (recycled Sega classics) and *Wild Arms Alter Code: F* (a *Wild Arms* rehash) are just a few of many offenders. Just because your game made a nice amount of cash doesn't mean you can add three minigames and two CGI movies and call it a new game. Hey, developers, how about you get off your lazy asses and come up with some original ideas? Now if you'll excuse me, I need to play some *Sonic Adventure DX*. Oh, wait.

—Dennis Willis

OOPS!

We forgot to thank GMR's James Mielke for helping us secure the services of renowned *Final Fantasy* artist Yoshitaka Amano for EGM #172's limited-edition cover. 'Cause they're tight, you see.



Missing extremity

I was reading EGMs #170 and #171 when my friend noticed that in Hsu and Chan's "The Soul Still Burns" and "Survival," Hsu's right hand has been replaced with a metal prosthetic. What's the deal? When did this happen? But it does look pretty cool.

—Jordan Rupy

We went straight to the source—Hsu and Chan creator Norm Scott: "Norm here! Not to give away the exciting story, but Hsu lost his hand in a sword fight with rival game developer Akira Yamamoto over in the pages of my comic book, *Hsu and Chan* #3, which you can find at your local comic book shop (if they're any darned good) or at www.slavelabor.com. Horrors!"

word on the street

■ WHAT MOVIE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MADE INTO A GAME?



Hard Boiled! John Woo (before he was Americanized) bringing gun fu to the masses with Chow

Yun-Fat was great on the big screen and could be just as cool on a next-gen system. It's nice and violent too, so it would probably sell well to the masses.

—Brandon Smith



The English Patient. Fly the starved-to-death love of your life in an airplane and get shot down by Nazi

forces patrolling northern Africa. Be the Hindu bomb diffuser and disarm unexploded ordinance with a neat GBA connectivity interface. It'd be grand!

—Clint Keene



Forget *Enter the Matrix*. There should be an *Enter the Dragon* game. Just make sure the dudes who did the *Bruce Lee* Xbox game are far, far away from it.

—Bill Hall



Ninja Scroll. The movie was paced like a game, what with the different "bosses" Jubei faced off

against, and ninja action games are the best action games, so this would be a killer. Make it 2D with *Castlevania*-quality animation, a complex scoring system worth mastering, a double jump...it'd be magic. Konami. Please.

—Julian Holm-Avelar



The fact that there are now multiple games based off the *E.T.* franchise both frightens and arouses

me. I would love to see a movie based off *Max Payne*, though. Oh wait, there already was one—made for TV—called *Payback*.

—Jared Rea

■ If you'd like to participate in Word on the Street, check our message boards at www.egmmag.com.

GAME DESIGN-O-RAMA

Send your game ideas to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject: design-o-rama. Maybe one day we'll publish a serious one!



BRUCE FORCE

This is the story of four Hollywood Bruces on a mission to save their careers. Play with up to four friends and take control of Bruce Campbell, Bruce Vilanch, Bruce Springsteen, and Bruce Willis. *Bruce Force* has several special features throughout the game, such as intentionally campy one-liners, bad Oscar-style jokes, songs about America, and more profanity than the last *Die Hard* movie! If you enjoyed *Brute Force*, this sequel is sure to make you hate it.

—Nate Halterman



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—Philip Nova



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—Kevin Hawkey

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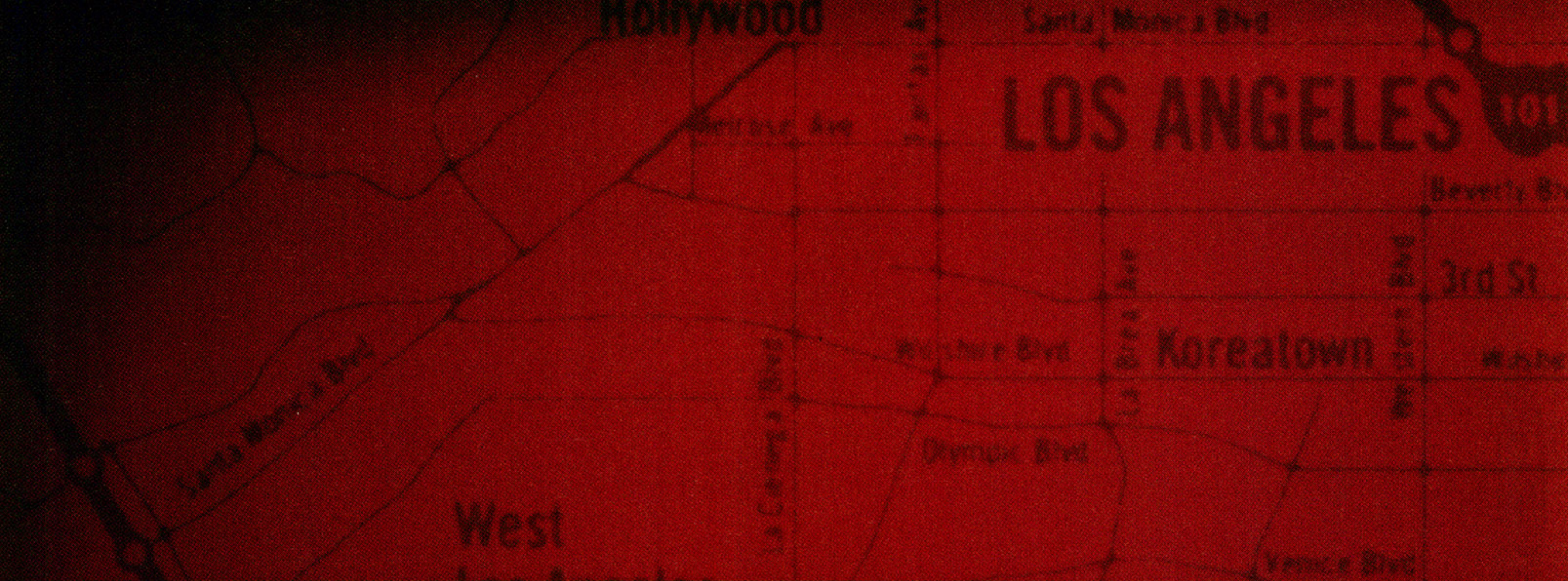


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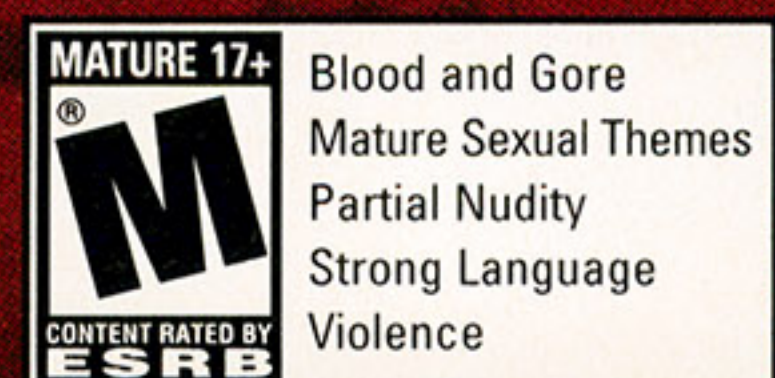


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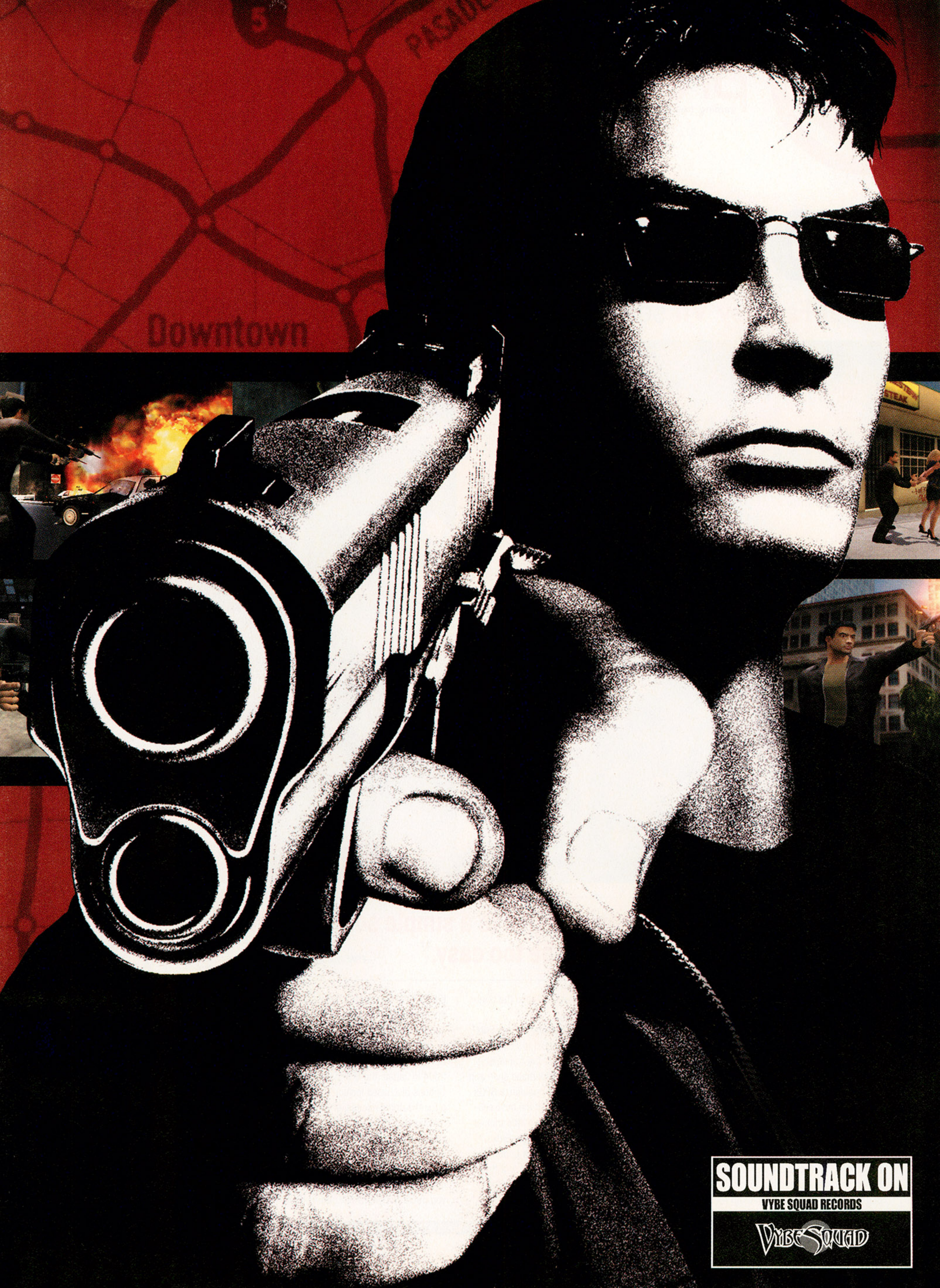


PlayStation®2



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ADVENT RISING

Final Fantasy VII sequel steals the spotlight at Tokyo Game Show



■ Crackling flames? Check. Devilish grin? Yep. Everyone's favorite bad-boy, Sephiroth, is back.



While it's always overshadowed by America's annual Electronic Entertainment Expo, this past September's Tokyo Game Show proved that it's still got some fight left in it, as the event was headlined by major announcements from Square Enix (sorry, no *Final Fantasy XII* yet—patience, grasshopper).

After denying rumors for months of a follow-up to *Final Fantasy VII* (PS1), Square Enix finally dropped the bomb at TGS: Yes, it is making a sequel...of sorts. *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* isn't a game—it's a CG-animated movie. The story picks up two years after the end of *FFVII*, as Cloud must once again save the world from peril—this time, in the form of an epidemic called Star Mark Syndrome. We also know that arch-villain Sephiroth is back, but other than that, the plot remains a mystery. (Will Aerith return

“A game sequel is a simple solution, but that might be too easy.”

—FFVII Producer Yoshinori Kitase

after her infamous death scene in the original *FFVII*? None can say.)

It's easy to understand why Square Enix would want to make a sequel to *FFVII*: It was a true turning point for the franchise, ushering in a new era of cinematic style and darker themes that helped popularize RPGs in North America, and it's still the best-selling *FF* in America to date. It's a little trickier, however, to figure out why Square Enix would make a film rather than a game. “A game sequel is a simple solution, but that might be too easy,” says *Advent Children* (and original *FFVII*) Producer Yoshinori

Kitase. “We wanted to challenge ourselves and do something new—a visual work—and see how our work will be accepted.”

Details are sketchy on how this hour-long CG film will be released in the summer of 2004 in Japan (the U.S. date is TBD). Options discussed include a traditional DVD, a full theatrical release, or maybe even distribution via the Internet. About all we can say for sure is that *Advent Children* is bound to be better than the ill-fated *Spirits Within* flick of 2001, and fans shouldn't be bummed out by its non-interactive nature—you might get your *FFVII* game sequel yet....



■ OK, we can't promise the return of Aerith, but we *can* promise the return of her church.





■ It's hard to look tough when a duck in a sailor outfit and poofy hat is backin' you up.

■ It's big, it's white, and it has huge shoulders.



KINGDOM HEARTS II

PS2 • Square Enix • 2004

Given that the original *Kingdom Hearts* was a blockbuster international hit that contained an unlockable trailer for a sequel (you had to get the best ending to see it), the announcement of *KH2* was less than shocking. But, despite the fact that everyone knows it's coming, Square Enix is still keeping a tight lid on this follow-up to their Disney-themed action-RPG—the brief movie shown at TGS raised more questions than it answered.

As expected, lead heroes Sora, Goofy, and Donald return with a darker, more grown-up look, but so far, we don't know what other party members might join up or which Disney worlds they'll be

exploring. We do know that you'll catch up with main squeeze Kairi, whack some more Heartless with a keyblade, and face off against a mysterious red-haired dude in black cloak, who certainly seems evil. Oh, and this time, the main mouse is in the house for some serious onscreen action—he shows up and saves Sora's butt with some snazzy moves. Who knew Mickey could hold his own in a fight?

Square Enix wasn't willing to divulge a potential release date for *Kingdom Hearts II* outside of "2004," but we heard that series creator Tetsuya Nomura is secretly planning a simultaneous launch in both Japan and North America in time for the '04 holiday shopping season.



KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

Square Enix's tantalizing *Final Fantasy-meets-The Aristocats* cocktail will also make its way to GBA in 2004. *Chain of Memories* isn't just a quickie handheld side-quest—it will pick up directly after the events of the original *Kingdom Hearts* and weave into the story line of *KH2*. Exploration appears vaguely *Zelda*-esque (as in traversing dungeons from a top-down perspective), and combat mixes real-time sword-swinging with a card-based system akin to that of the *Mega Man Battle Network* series. Plus, rabid fans will love this: Cloud (the main character from *FFVII*) will be playable.

QUICK HITS

TGS' notable games

We waded through all the cute and weird games (including one that had you teach a polar bear to sing) to bring you the stuff you should care about from this year's TGS:



Astro Boy

This side-scrolling action title, developed by Treasure (*Wario World*) and coming to the GBA this December in Japan, is based on the wildly popular '60s cartoon series of the same name. Gameplay is divided between beat-em-up levels (à la *Final Fight*) and shooting stages.



Phantom Dust

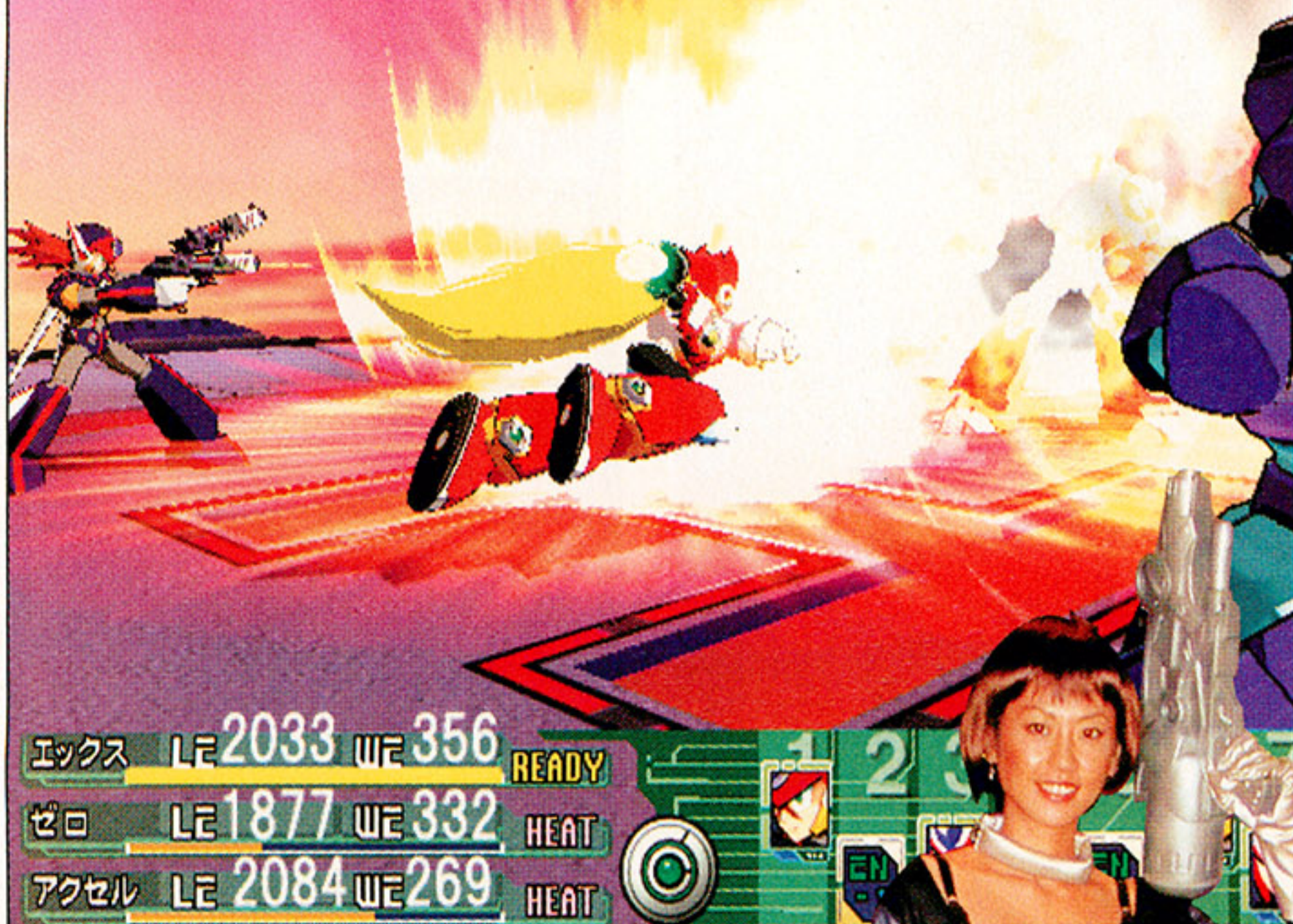
This futuristic third-person Xbox action game (due in 2004) with both single- and multiplayer missions on and offline is the first title with any promise out of Microsoft's Japanese development studio. (Probably because one of the guys behind Sega's awesome *Panzer Dragoon Orta* is heading it up.)



Monster Hunter

PS2 owners envious of *Phantasy Star Online* now have Capcom's *Monster Hunter* to look forward to in 2004. Join with up to three other players online (or play by yourself) and hunt down creatures for their meat and skins, which you can then use to create more powerful equipment and characters.

■ The word "overkill" is clearly not in any of these robot warriors' dictionaries.



MEGA MAN X: COMMAND MISSION

PS2, GC • Capcom • 2004

Throughout Mega Man's 15 years in gaming, there's one genre he's never really been a part of: role-playing. Time to check that off the list, as *Command Mission* is a full-on role-playing game, in which you and your party (of up to three) try to stop the rebellion on Gigantis Island started by General Epsilon and his Liberion Army. Joining the blue one on this mission are X7 teammates Axl and Zero. Capcom promises new faces along the way too, including a mysterious female character.

As you progress through the game's dungeons, you'll be able to customize your characters using accumulated experience points. And, similar to genre-bending RPGs like Nintendo's *Paper Mario*, *Command Mission*'s battles will also include more action-oriented elements (though Capcom is mum on specifics).



WORLD FIGHTERS

PS2, GC • Hudson • TBD
(December 2003 in Japan)

Ever wonder who would win in a fight: *The Transformers*' Optimus Prime or *Castlevania*'s Simon Belmont? Now, you can find out in this *Smash Bros.*-style brawler that stars some of Konami, Hudson, and Takara's most prolific game characters (thanks in large part to recent mergers and joint ventures between the companies). Attacks are unique to each character, from Belmont's whip to Bomberman's bombs to Prime transforming into a semi truck and whipping his trailer at unsuspecting enemies. It's enough to bring a tear to our eyes.



HYPER STREET FIGHTER II

PlayStation 2 • Capcom • TBD
(December 2003 in Japan)

Commemorating the 15th anniversary of Capcom's *Street Fighter* fightin' series, this special package lets you pit characters taken from various versions of the series (*Super*, *Turbo*, *Champion Edition*, etc.) against each other.

GAMES, BABES, AND MORE GAMES

The sights of Tokyo Game Show



■ Show and tell: 1 Sony's dancers feel dancin'-est when singin' about Eye Toy. 2 A bevy of Sonic goods. 3 A pile of Slimes that escaped from the latest *Dragon Quest*. 4 Microsoft will offer custom Xbox decals by hip Japanese designers. 5 Mr. Microphone pressures showgoers to try *Karaoke Revolution*. 6 The new, darker Sora. 7 We feel a sudden urge to subscribe to Live.

>> ELECTRONIC ARTS HAS TEAMED UP WITH SURROUND-SOUND EXPERT THX TO OFFER TITLES WITH THX'S AUDIO AND VISUAL SEAL OF QUALITY. SSX 3 WILL BE THE FIRST.... >>

JAKEWINDHAM

MIKE BLABAC PHOTO, RENO, NV.

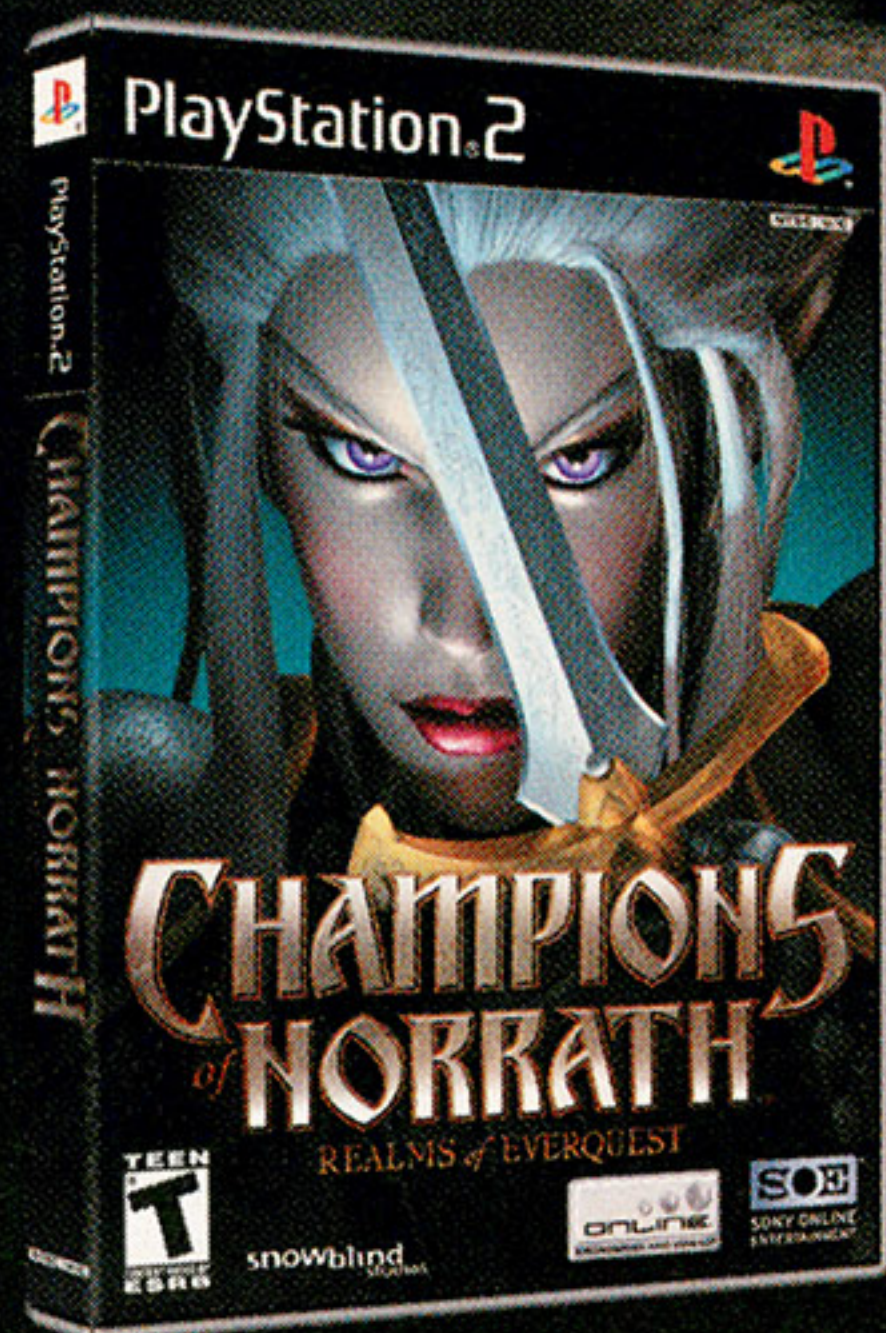


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THE **CRITERIA**



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"EverQuest + Baldur's Gate = Awesome"
— OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE

"With a feature set this deep, this may indeed be the
new champion of action RPGs." — PSM



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PlayStation 2

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Create your Champion from 5 mythic races and 5 classes, customizing the look and name that conveys your unique abilities. Discover over 10,000 items, or create your own. Master weapons, magic and combination combat to conquer hideous creatures and unforeseen evil. But be forewarned — a Champion shall forever be challenged!

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Game Experience may change during online play



press start

TALE OF TWO PLAYSTATIONS

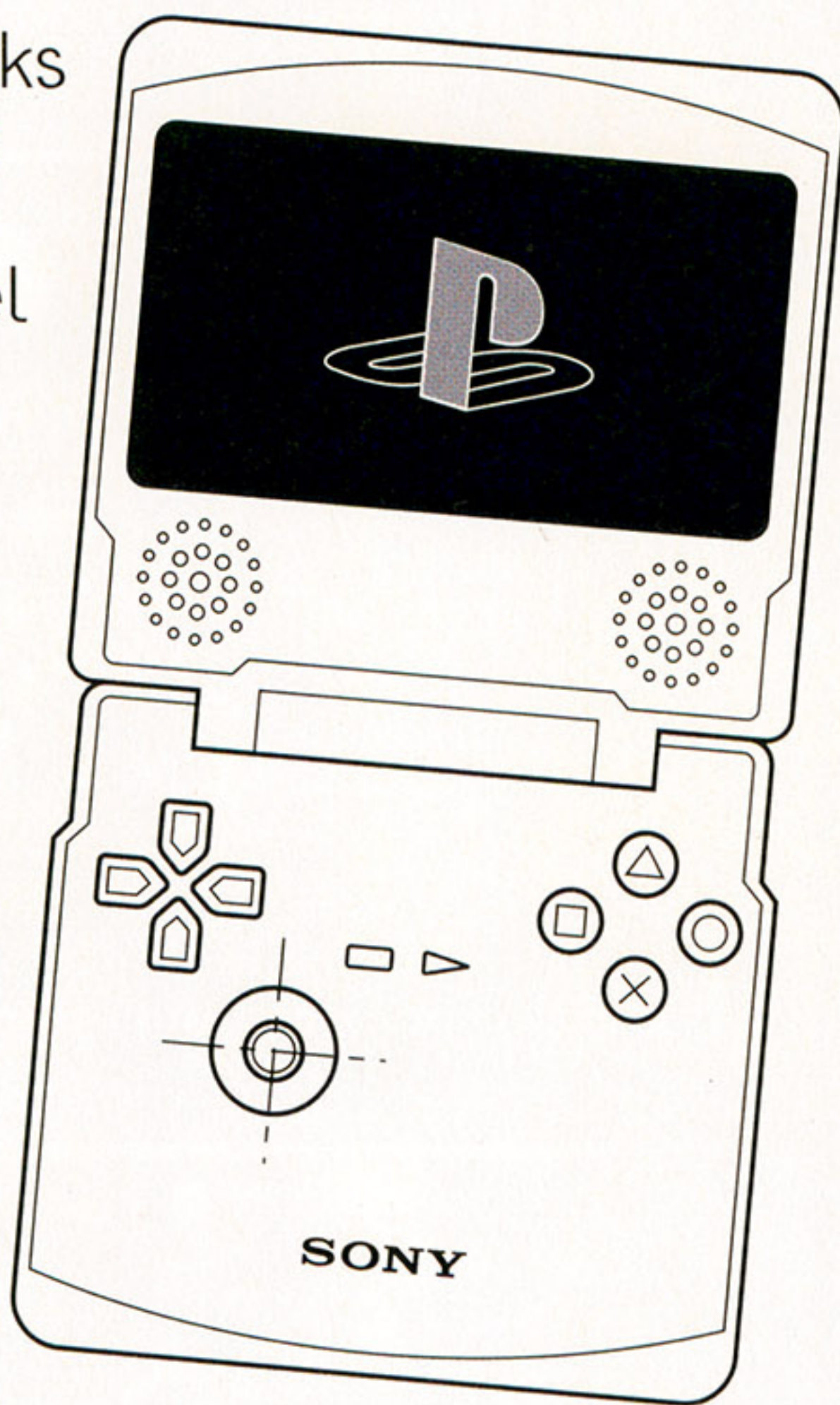
More info leaks out on Sony's portable and deluxe-model PlayStations

Even if you're not counting the days (like we are) till the release of Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP), you've gotta admit this thing sounds sweeter by the minute. A quick recap: Last May, Sony announced it was developing a nearly PS2-quality handheld entertainment device with a backlit four-inch color screen. It will use a universal mini-disk format for games and movies and have a host of high-tech features, including connectivity over local wireless networks. No price has been announced yet, but anything with those and other high-tech features would have to be more expensive than Nintendo's Game Boy Advance.

On a recent fact-finding mission to Sony, we gathered a couple more tidbits of info about this machine-that-would-be-king:

- PSP will launch worldwide simultaneously in late 2004.
- Ten games will be available at launch.
- All Sony first-party development teams have PSP titles in the works. Some will build upon hit franchises (dare we dream of a portable *Gran Turismo*?); others will be new franchises built from the ground up specifically for the portable.

Sony also confirmed that its high-end PlayStation-branded do-everything box,



■ As long as the look of the real PSP is shrouded in mystery, we'll continue using this artist's rendition to show you what you could be playing come next year.

PSX, will be available in the United States in 2004—but that one won't be cheap, either. With a satellite tuner, DVD recorder, PS2 compatibility, and more, it's expected to clock in at around \$1,000.



■ PSX is the perfect thing for people who have a thousand bucks to blow and like their PlayStations big and awkward.

GRUDGE MATCH

King of the Castle



CASTLEVANIA

WHITE CASTLE

The most terrifying place in videogames challenges the most terrifying place in fast food. We dare to pit these houses of pain against each other!

THE MANAGEMENT

Castlevania: An aged, reclusive vampire with a knack for reincarnation

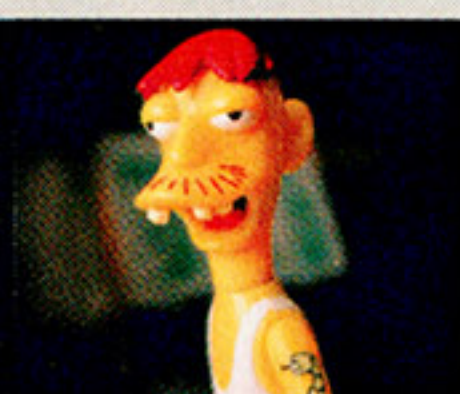
White Castle: Can issue a refund if food contains more than three fingernails
Advantage: White Castle

CLIENTELE



Castlevania: Admission reserved to Belmont clan
Advantage: Castlevania

White Castle: Anyone with the cash to buy a sack of 30 "slyders" (aka hamburgers)



BEST-KEPT SECRETS

Castlevania: Turkey legs hidden in masonry, invisible stairs

White Castle: How they change the fat in the fryer when open 24 hours
Advantage: White Castle

ARCHITECTURE

Castlevania: Gothic edifice flips over so you can get those hard-to-reach places

White Castle: Relief in roof allows archers to fend off health inspectors
Advantage: White Castle

PERILS WITHIN



Castlevania: Flying Medusa heads threaten your every move

White Castle: "Chicken Rings"
Advantage: White Castle



THE GRIM REAPER

Castlevania: Faces you in battle, making you contemplate the irony of killing Death
Advantage: Castlevania

White Castle: Is waiting for you to finish that last bite of bacon double cheeseburger

EXISTENCE THREATENED BY



Castlevania: Nosy vampire slayers
Advantage: Castlevania

White Castle: The Hamburglar



SCARIEST: WHITE CASTLE

It's not the "Holy junk! Frankensteins!" scary, but rather the "I had no idea that burger contained at least 4 percent spinal shavings" scary that fills our pants.

TIDBITS THAT HAVE TRAVELED FROM BEYOND TIME AND SPACE



Nintendo Remakes First Pokémon

In the time-honored tradition of "if it ain't broke, let's try to fix it anyway" (case in point: *Star Wars Special Edition*), Nintendo is revisiting the original versions of *Pokémon* with GBA remakes, dubbed *Fire Red* and *Leaf Green*, that will be released in Japan. No word yet on a U.S. release; it'll be well into 2004 before the remakes are even on store shelves across the Pacific. We can hardly wait to catch 'em all...again.



Capcom Assembles Mega Collection

Just when you thought Mega Man's 15th birthday celebration was over, Capcom pops out an announcement about the *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* for PS2 and GC, coming in February 2004. It's an anthology of *Mega Man 1* through *8*, two arcade fighters (*Power Battles* and *Power Fighters*), and a whole slew of special-edition content and background info on the franchise.

>> SURVIVAL-HORROR HIT *SILENT HILL* IS BEING MADE INTO A FILM DIRECTED BY *BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF*'S CHRISTOPHE GANS. PITY THE GUY OPERATING THE FOG MACHINE....>>



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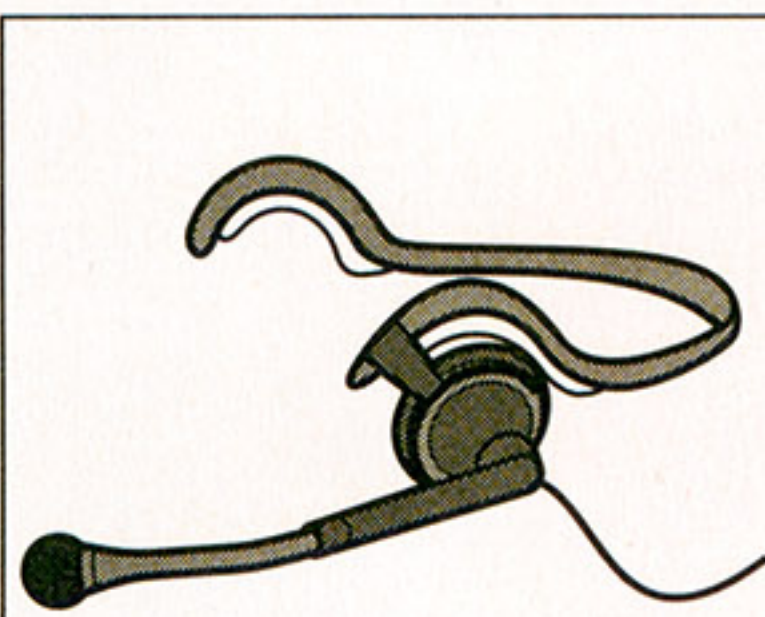
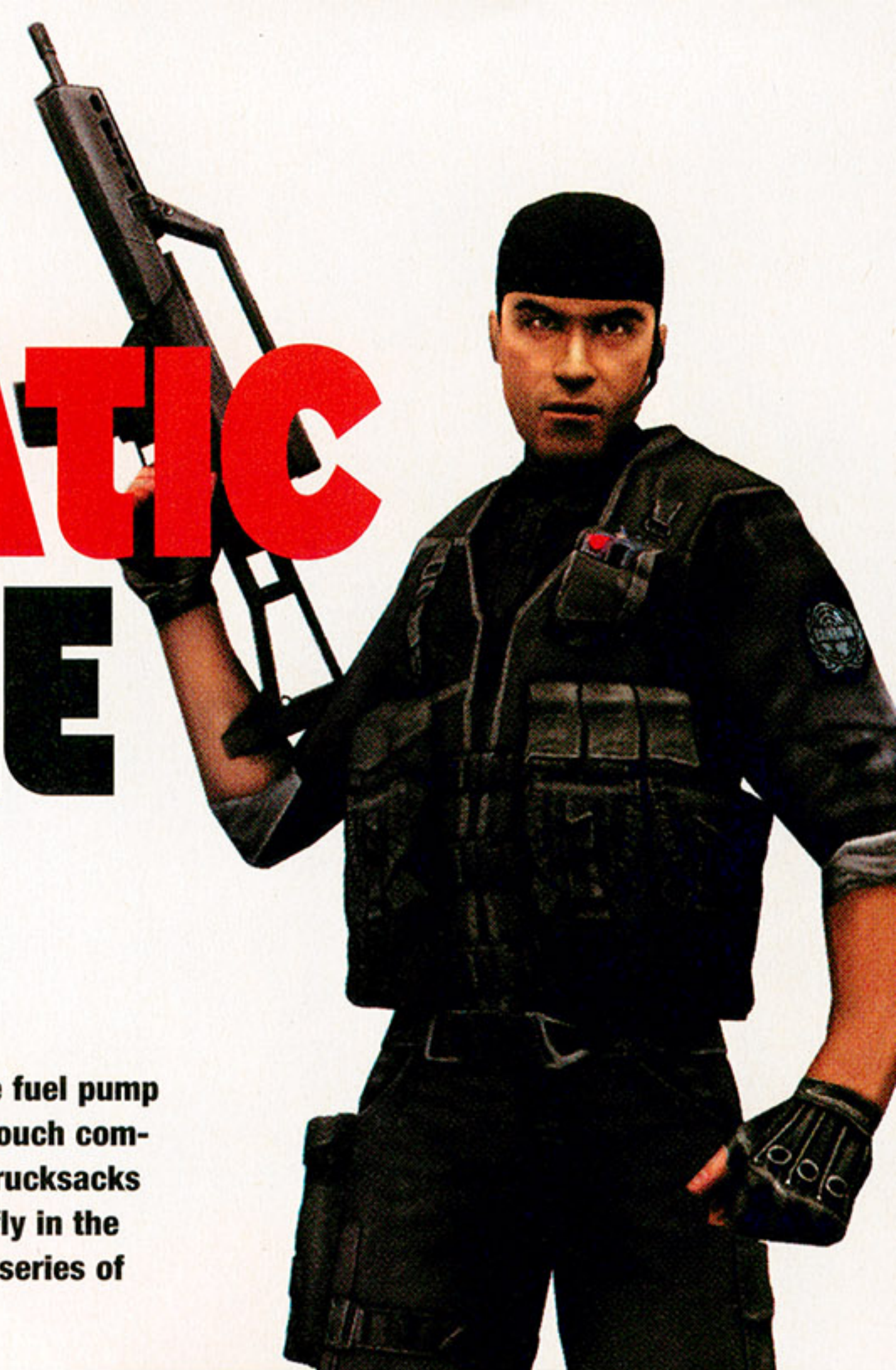
FULLY AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

What to pack for your terrorist-killing spree in **Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3**

Once again, the world faces a crisis only Tom Clancy's band of black operatives can contain. Rock-solid intel on *Rainbow Six 3* reveals that rough-and-tumble terrorists will attempt to compromise

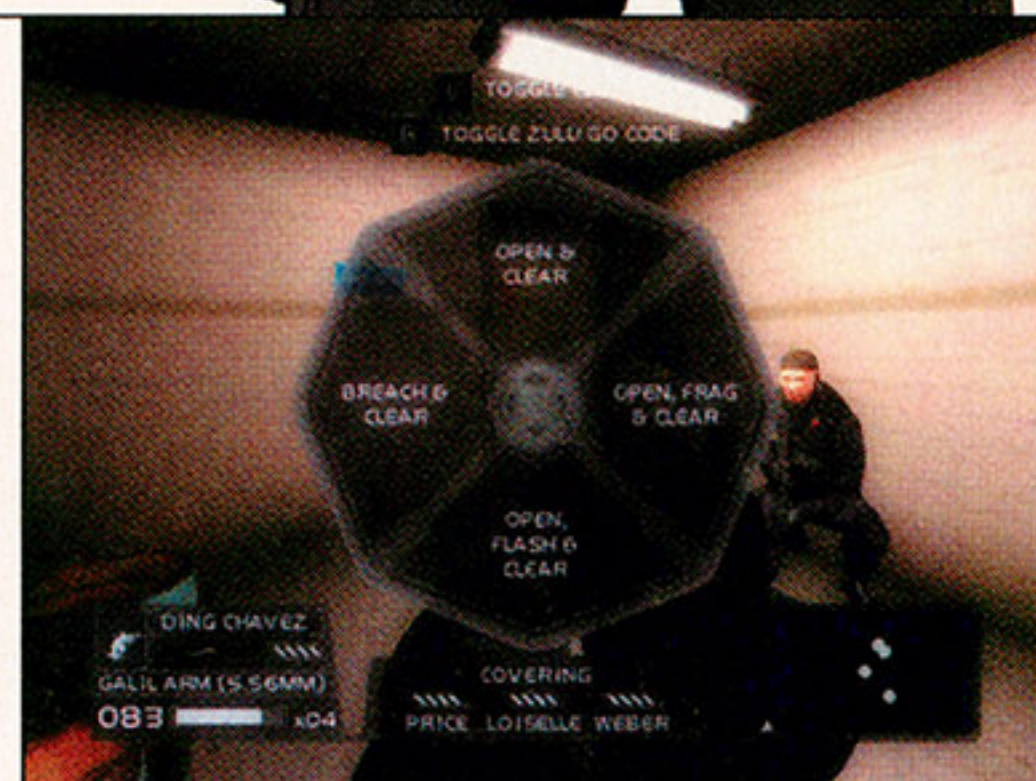
vital U.S. oil interests this November. Packing essential tools of the counter-terrorism trade, however, will enable Xbox owners (we expect PS2 and GC squads to remain on the reserve list until 2004) to punish evil-

doers and keep trips to the fuel pump cheap. Here's everything couch commandos will want in their rucksacks when the bullets begin to fly in the latest in this long-running series of tactical shooters:



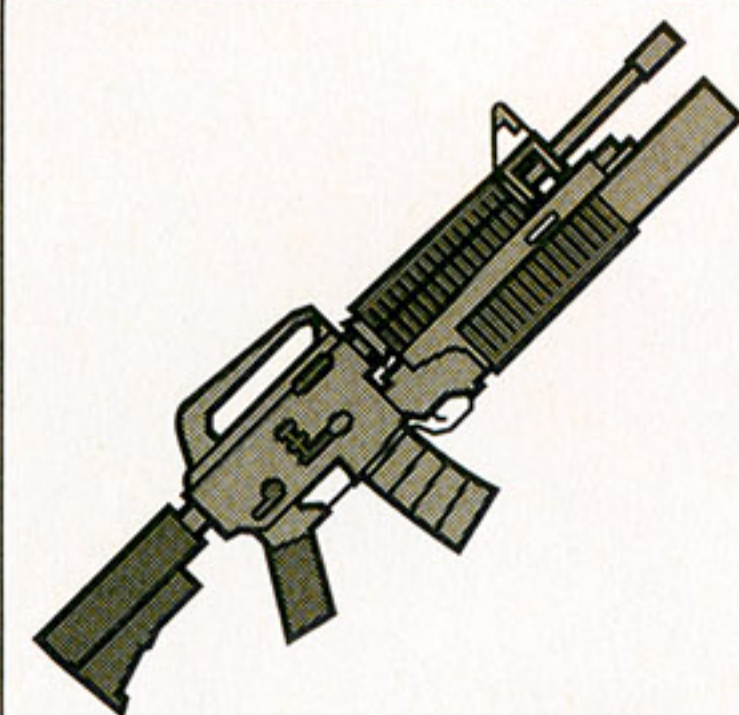
Headset

As any combatant will tell you, communication is essential for success, and that lesson hasn't been lost on *Rainbow Six 3*. Complex commands are all allocated across an intuitive interface that lets you order your boys to flank tangeros and breach hideouts with the touch of a few buttons or, better yet, spoken instructions delivered via Xbox Live headset. Say, for instance, you're about to lay siege to a terrorist safe house. To avoid a potential trap, train your crosshairs on one entry point and shout, "Open, frag, and clear on Zulu!" As your squad posts up, grenades in hand, position yourself behind another door. They'll wait for your "Zulu" mark to start the fireworks, leaving you to pick up the pyrotechnic power play from door number two.



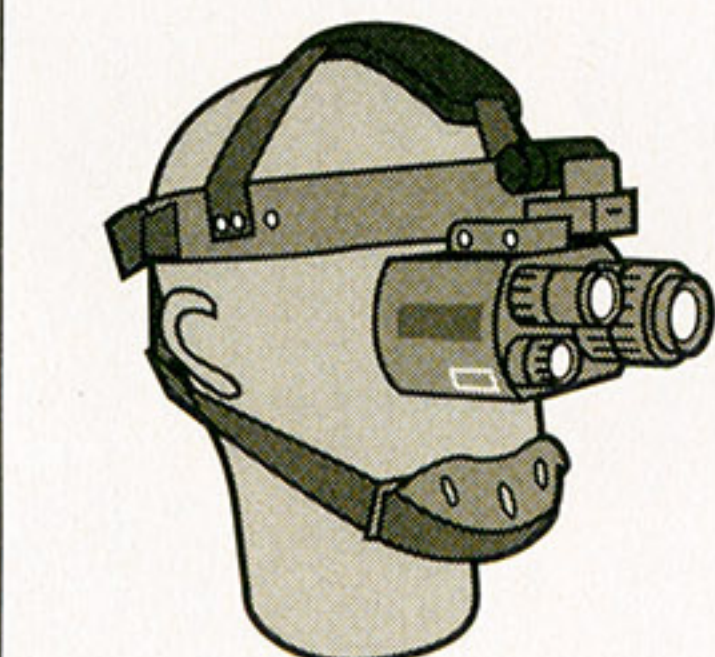
Teammates

While you won't actually be carrying these guys on your back, you'll definitely want them watching it. "We've made the Rainbow squad's A.I. frighteningly efficient," says Lead Designer Mike McCoy. Even in the early version we played, it's obvious that your subordinates are invaluable, triangulating fire and covering your six when your attention is drawn. Camaraderie will prove even more important when you replace your computer-controlled teammates with friends and tackle the entire single-player campaign cooperatively (with up to three squadmates) over Xbox Live. If you have a tough time agreeing on who gets to give the orders, you can always prove your right to lead by being the last man standing in a versus round with up to eight combatants.



M203 Grenade Launcher

Selecting heat from a stockpile of sharply rendered arms lets operatives breathe even easier. Take, for example, the M203 Grenade Launcher. "It's not a weapon that a real Rainbow team would use, except to fire smoke and tear gas," says McCoy. "The high explosive rounds kill too indiscriminately to be of practical use. However, we found that players were having a blast, so the weapon is in the game." Clearly, McCoy and company are prepared to sacrifice some realism for playability and fun. Case in point: light up a hidden hostile with one of the M203's phosphorous rounds and watch the flailing human fireball vacate the shadows, only to take up new residence in your rifle crosshairs. Squad leader Ding Chavez and crew hold no truck with terrorists.



Night Vision Goggles

Remember operative Sam Fisher's phenomenally effective goggles in *Splinter Cell*? *Rainbow Six 3* uses a modified version of that game's engine, allowing you to sport a similar pair with night vision perfect for low-light sniping, plus thermal lenses that'll outline foes even under the cover of smoke. And thanks to that same technology, *RS3*'s atmospherically lit locations and jarringly authentic sound effects (keep the volume low, lest the neighbors call 911) are among the most convincing you'll find on a console. Sunlight streams through curtains in rooms that seem deceptively tranquil...that is, until a terrorist appears from behind a couch to shatter the silence (and your nerves) with an automatic shotgun blast. —Shawn Elliott



>> MICROSOFT ANNOUNCED THAT EPIC GAMES, DEVELOPER OF THE UNREAL SERIES, AND ITS SCION STUDIOS OFFSHOOT WILL MAKE SEVERAL NEW GAMES EXCLUSIVELY FOR XBOX....>>

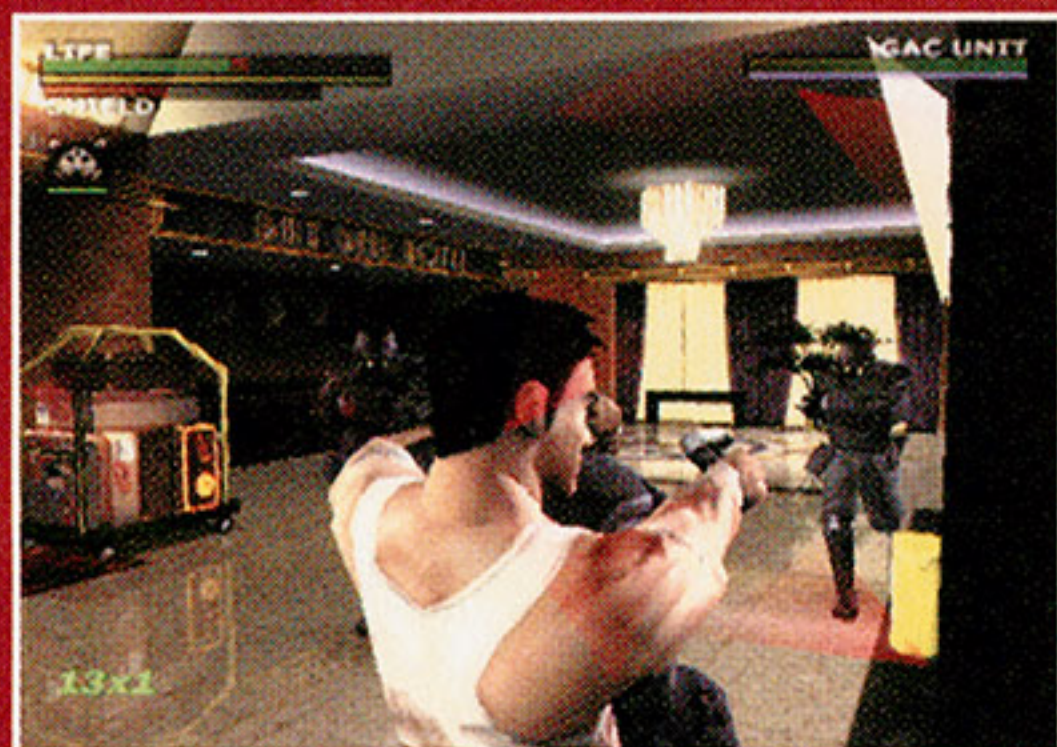
MOST WANTED. AGAIN.

"Move over, Max Payne."
~Gamers.com



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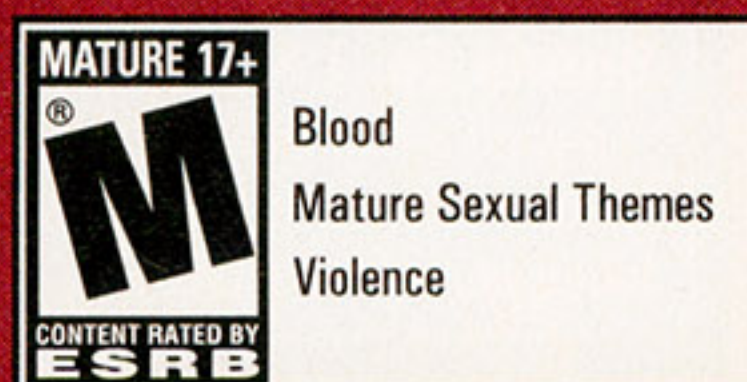
Take down thugs using slo-mo gunplay, lethal disarms and human shields.



Muscle your way through 15 chapters of Hong Kong movie-style action.



Command your K-9 sidekick to attack enemies and retrieve weapons.



PlayStation.2





press start

TOMORROW'S NEWS TODAY

Quick update on the **Splinter Cell** sequel



■ Another series first in *Pandora*: a fully first-person perspective



■ Online play, shown above, will have multi-player competitive and cooperative modes.



For a no-one-knows-he-exists secret operative, Sam Fisher sure is conspicuous. The star of Ubisoft's stealthy military thriller *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* has been popping up everywhere since his Xbox debut this time last year—from PS2, GameCube, and GBA versions of the original game, to regular sneak peeks of the sequel, *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*. New screens and a

teaser video of the game, which is due for all systems in March 2004, recently surfaced (you can check out the goods at www.pandoratomorrow.com), revealing a bit of new intel.

We now see that Fisher won't be such a lone wolf in his next outing: He'll be teaming up with (and going up against) other would-be soldiers in various online modes (on PS2 and Xbox only). The movie also

demonstrates some of the new moves the tough guy has picked up in off-season training. We spied Fisher hanging upside down to shoot someone from the rafters, running up a wall to flip over backward, and nailing a poor sap with an electrifying taser gun.

We'll be playing *Pandora Tomorrow* soon, so check back next issue for a full, proper briefing.

DESERT ISLAND GAMES: MICHEL ANCEL



Every month, we pester a celeb or gaming bigwig to answer the eternal question: If you were stranded on a deserted island, what three games would you want washing up on the beach? This month, we cast away *Rayman* creator Michel Ancel. His latest project, *Beyond Good & Evil*, is due in November (see our review, p. 200). —Marc Saltzman



Ninja Kid (Nintendo Entertainment System)

"I'm sure that this title still has tons of details and minigames that I have yet to find."



Pac-Man (Multiplatform)

"I want to beat this game! I want to see what happens at the end—even if it takes me three years of playing nonstop."



Phantasy Star Online Ep. I & II (Xbox, GC)

"I'd want a multiplayer game, because on a desert island, sometimes you can feel lonely."

BY THE NUMBERS From Boy to Advance



\$99

Price of Game Boy Advance at launch in 2001 (and current price of GBA SP)

\$169

Price of Game Boy at launch (with *Tetris* included) in 1989

\$18

What you'd pay today to get a mint-in-box original Game Boy (and *Tetris*) on eBay

32
Thousand

Colors in Game Boy Advance's palette

4

Colors (or, more accurately, shades of gray) in the original Game Boy's palette

24

Different Game Boy color casings available for all U.S. Game Boy varieties



15
Million

Number of Game Boy Advances sold in the United States since its 2001 debut

150
Million

Number of Game Boys sold since its 1989 debut

100
Googolplex

Hours of productivity lost playing Game Boy games in *EGM* offices

>> A RECENT GALLUP POLL SHOWS THAT 71 PERCENT OF BOYS AND 34 PERCENT OF GIRLS AGES 13 TO 17 HAVE PLAYED ONE OF THE MATURE-RATED *GRAND THEFT AUTO* GAMES....>>



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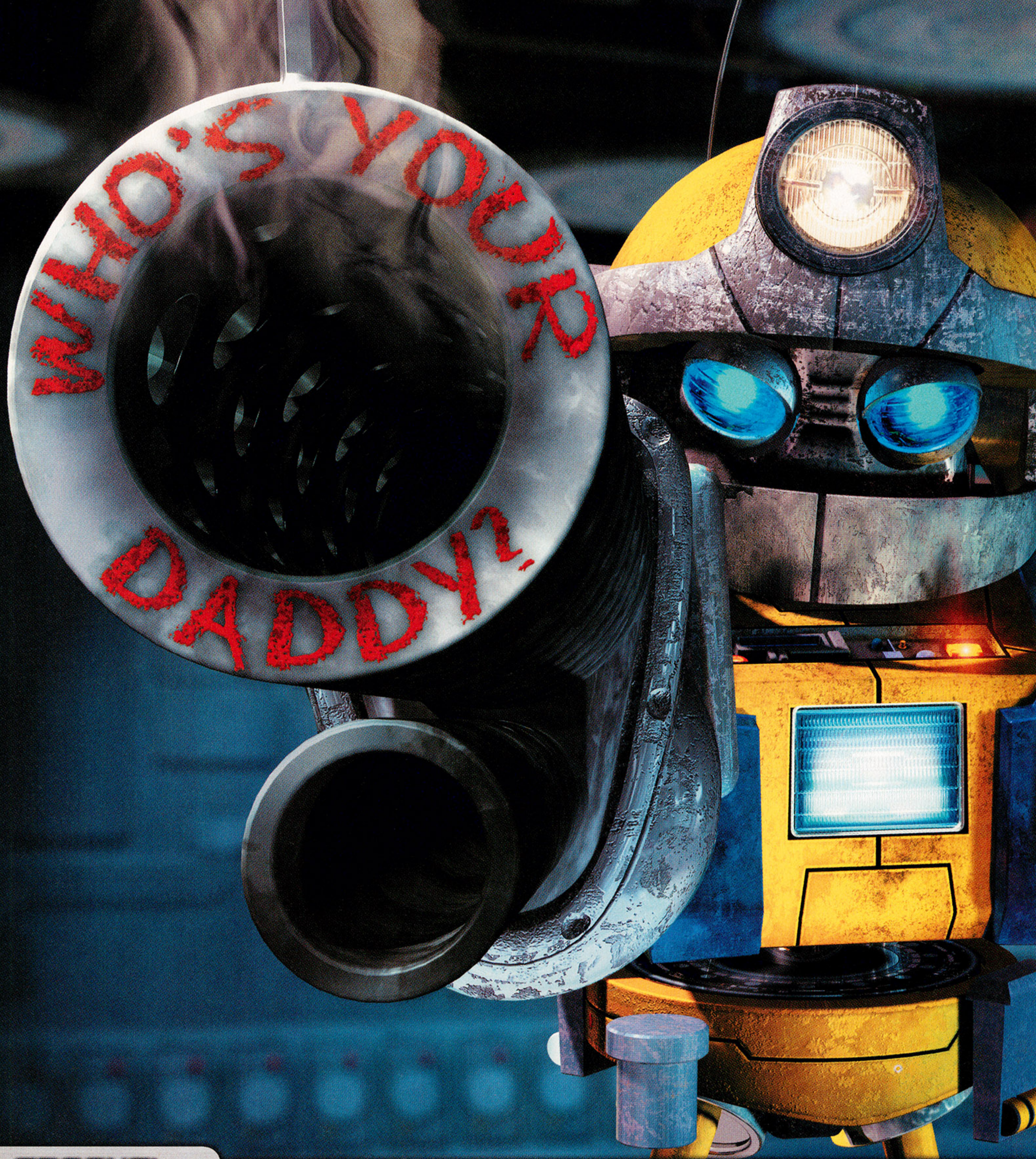


Suggestive Themes
Violence

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PlayStation[®] 2





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LASER



RIVET GUN



SLINGSHOT



SCATTER
BLASTER



RIPPER



CLEANER



TOASTER



Strong Language
Violence



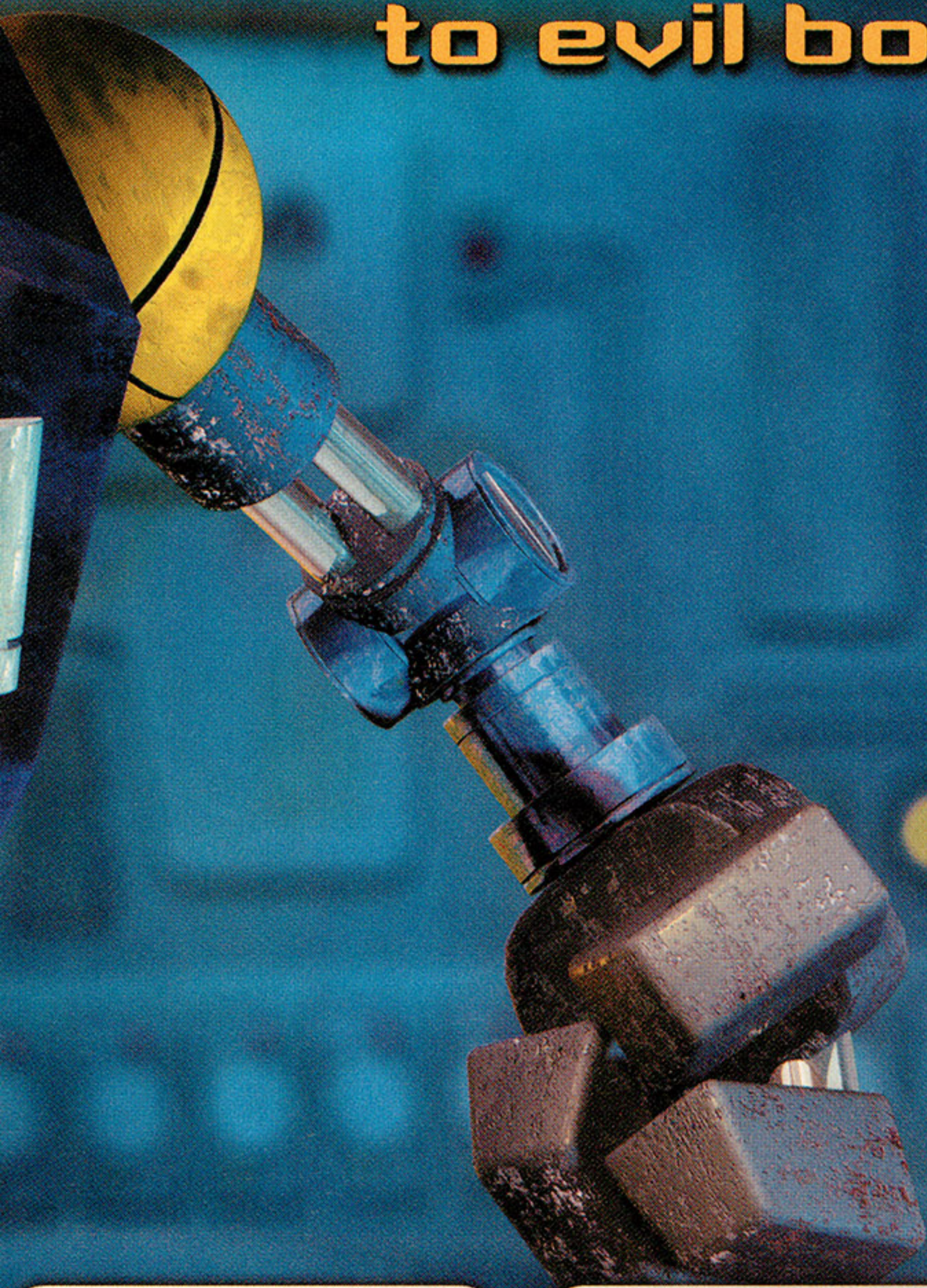
PlayStation 2





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to evil bots everywhere.**



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HIJACKING



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press start

MONKS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

The creators of your favorite Star Wars game have an ancient Chinese secret: **Jade Empire**

After wowing PC game players for years with epic *Dungeons & Dragons* quests such as *Neverwinter Nights* and the *Baldur's Gate* series, Developer BioWare put Xbox on the role-playing-game map with *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* last August. For its Xbox-only follow-up, the company is

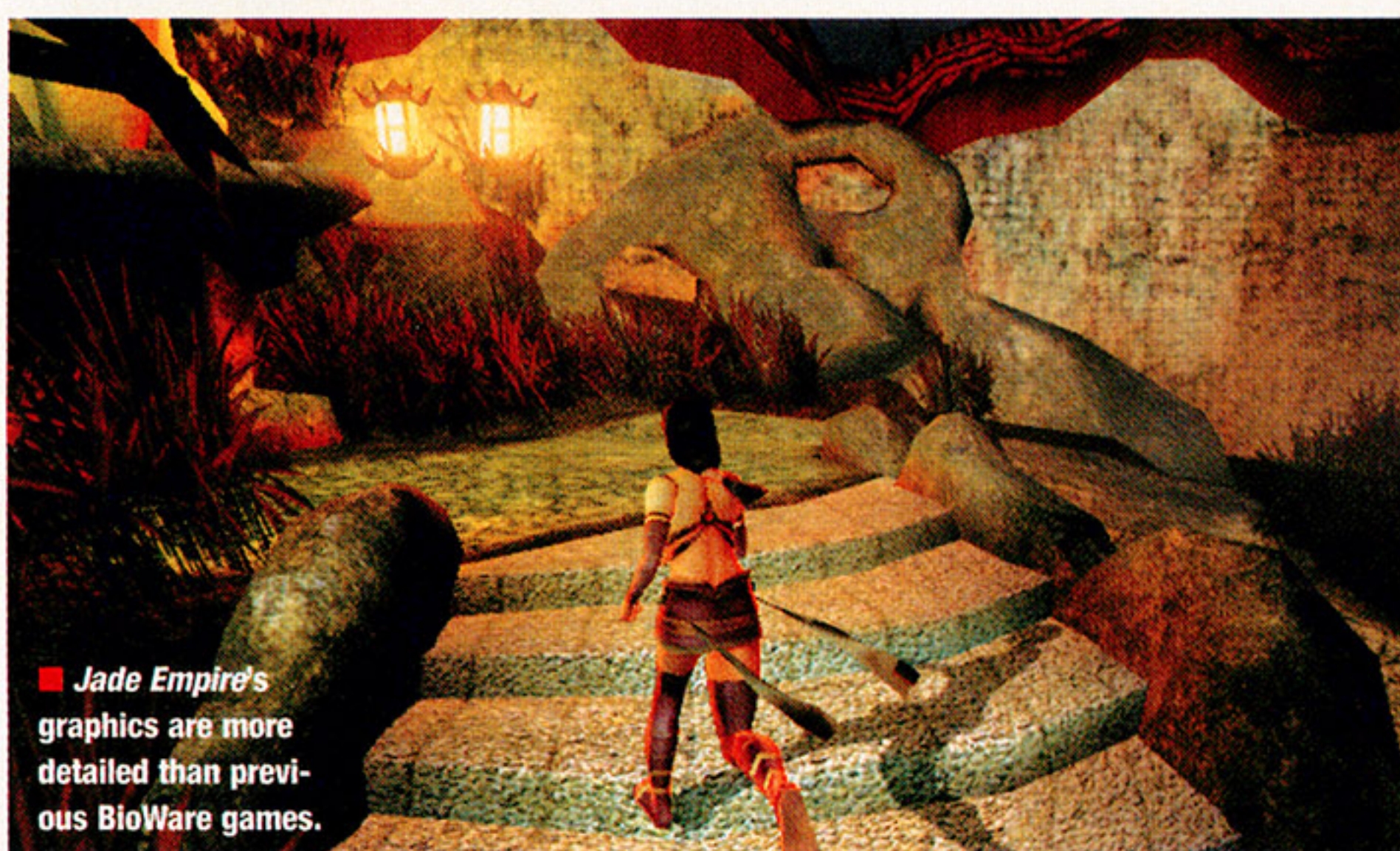
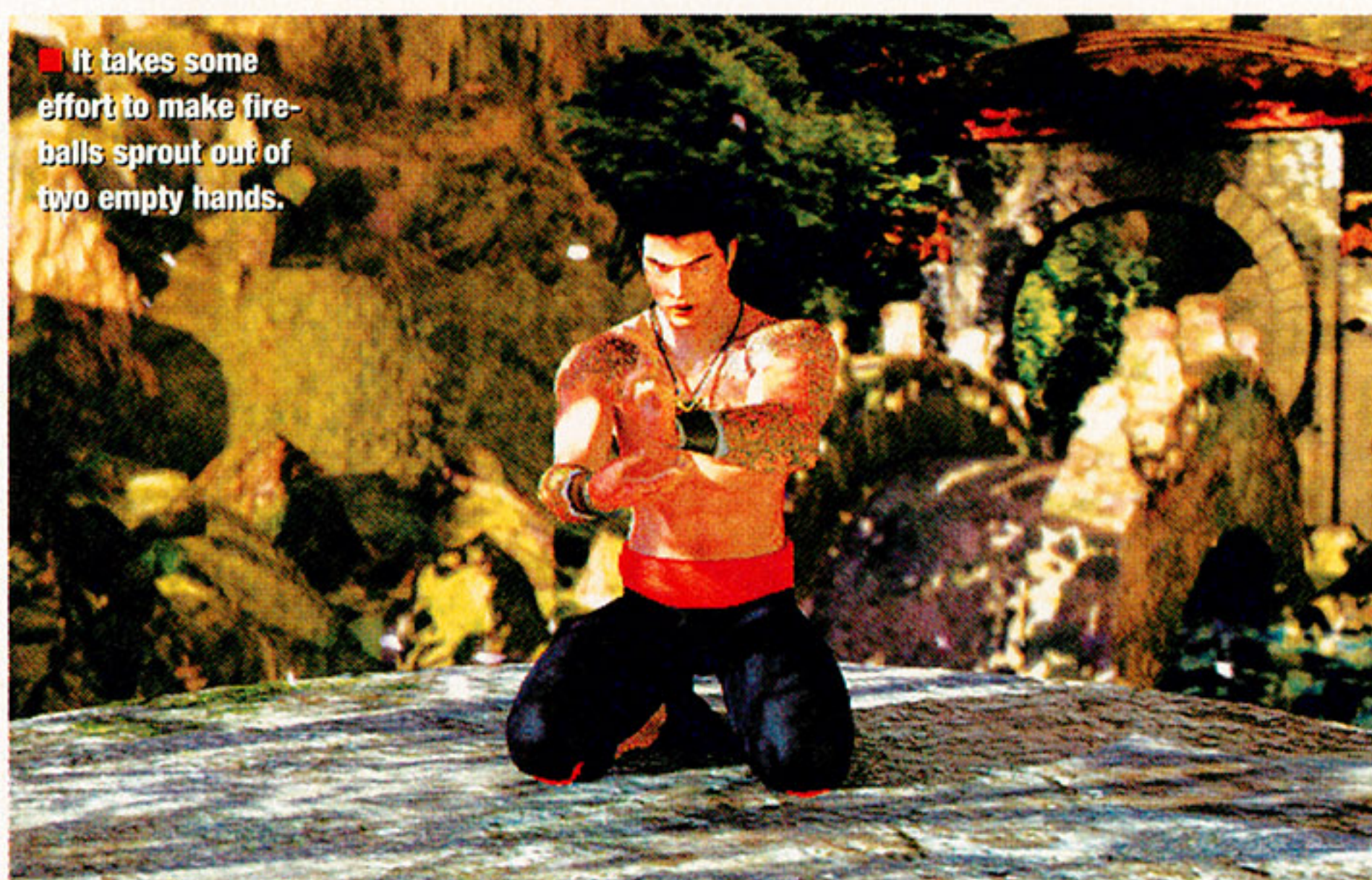
trading the Sith Empire for Imperial China and creating a force to be reckoned with through its first unlicensed title in years.

A fantasy take on medieval China, *Jade Empire* is an action-RPG based on eastern myths and monsters. You begin a quest to avenge your father's murder by choosing a character from a variety of classic fighting



"Moral flexibility is just the seasoning for a main dish of chop-socky ass kicking."

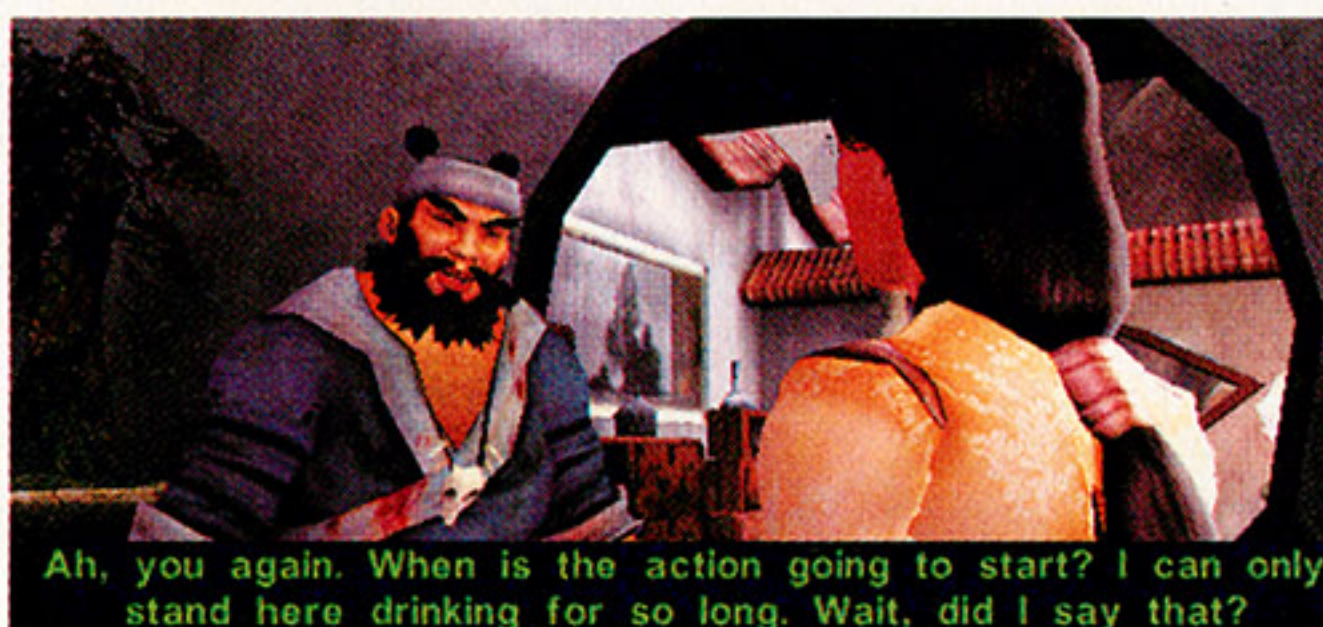
■ It takes some effort to make fireballs sprout out of two empty hands.



■ *Jade Empire's* graphics are more detailed than previous BioWare games.



■ Your master has expressed concern about the crowd you hang with.



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

It takes a village...

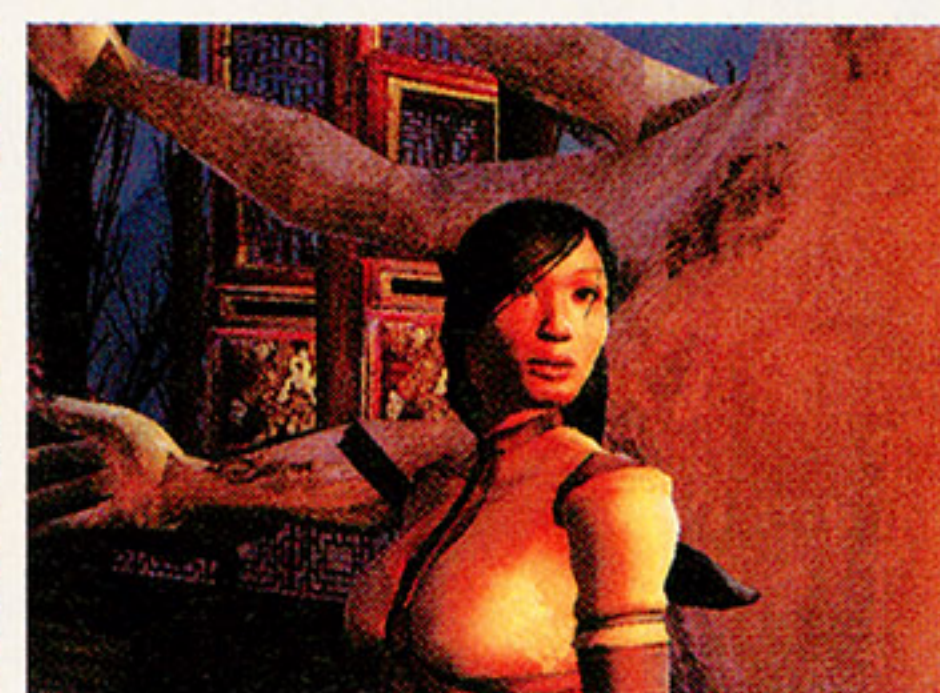
Or better yet, a stronghold. As your reputation grows, you'll attract like-minded individuals to your headquarters. How much time you spend there is up to you; you can fill it with students and allies, decorate it with exotic trophies, fortify it with deadly defenses, and grant audiences to local peasants. Or, you can simply leave it to gather dust as you pursue vengeance elsewhere.

It's a bit like Konami's *Suikoden* RPG series, but idle henchmen don't just sit around and do laundry. When trouble erupts in your domain, you can send "agents" to handle it. Consider your options carefully; a skilled negotiator may forge a peace treaty with a troublesome neighbor, while a simple-minded thug is more likely to return with a few new bloodstains on his ax.

>> WORKING DESIGNS HAS ANNOUNCED IT WILL RELEASE THE ONCE-SEPARATED PS2 RPGS *GROWLANSER II* AND *III* IN THE U.S. AS ONE COLLECTION SOMETIME NEXT YEAR (BARRING ANY



■ At least your stylist let you keep your sideburns and tail.




■ (Left) Practice the martial arts style known as "patty-cake." (Right) You look so winsome.

archetypes (think Bruce Lee, or Jen Yu from *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). From there, you'll strive to put an end to the strange hauntings that plague the land, discover a darkly twisted parallel dimension, and populate and fortify your own stronghold. You'll become a legend in the process, but whether you acquire fame as an exemplar of virtue or a despised warmonger is up to you. As in *Knights of the Old Republic*, you can choose to walk the path of valor or villainy, and you can expect to see this element taken a step or two further in *Jade Empire*. "If anything, the story will have more variety, more differentiation, and a broader path you can travel," says producer Jim Bishop.

But moral flexibility is just the seasoning for a main dish of solid chop-

socky ass kicking. Your hero can learn and master more than 30 martial arts and weapon styles, from chi-based spellcasting to Shao-lin-derived kung fu, all motion-captured from real-world masters. The real-time combat is mercifully menu free, and switching styles is as simple as a tap of the D-pad. This allows you to, say, use Dirty Fighting style to force-feed an opponent a handful of dirt, then switch on the fly to Heavenly Palm style and pound him while he's disoriented. You can also burn some chi to enter Focus Mode, which slows the action for your foes and allows you to score hits with powerful but inaccurate attacks. This "bullet time" effect is hardly a rarity these days, but it's never looked better—or had as many strategic applications.

Even in its current early state, *Jade Empire* is a gorgeous game, featuring detailed characters with billowing cloth and hair, as well as lushly detailed environments that are at least a generation beyond what *Knights of the Old Republic* was capable of. You'll see it for yourself in late 2004, when BioWare will learn if its legion of Xbox fans are willing to give up the Force and embrace the Chi. 

—Casey Loe

fighting in style

The 30 fighting styles in *Jade Empire* are derived from a wide variety of sources.

Willow Style

This graceful defensive art is based on the yang form of tai chi, which means it's a tad deadlier than that deep-breathing crap the elderly learn at the YMCA.

Improvised Weapons

The art of using whatever's within reach as a weapon. Focus on this, and you can become an exalted grand-master of kicking alky ass with a barstool.

Dirty Fighting

These moves do little or no damage but can distract, stun, or knock down your opponent. A welcome choice for players who find "honor" to be a tad overrated.

Fire Style

A pyrokinetic magic style that slows you down but lets you channel your chi to incinerate foes from far across the other side of the screen.

Centipede Style

This deadly art allows you to unleash rapid flurries of weak punches, as centipedes presumably do when they beat the bejesus out of other bugs.

Transformation Style

This skill lets you transform into the spirits of captured monsters. When bare fists aren't cutting it, try some searing hoof beats from a flaming horse demon.

From zero to



Battle for the checkered flag with Crash, friends and foes. Use missiles, bombs, tornadoes and more to pass or blast up to 4 friends in multiplayer mode. It's time to pick up the pace or pick up the pieces.

Pummel opponents with over 15 weapons.

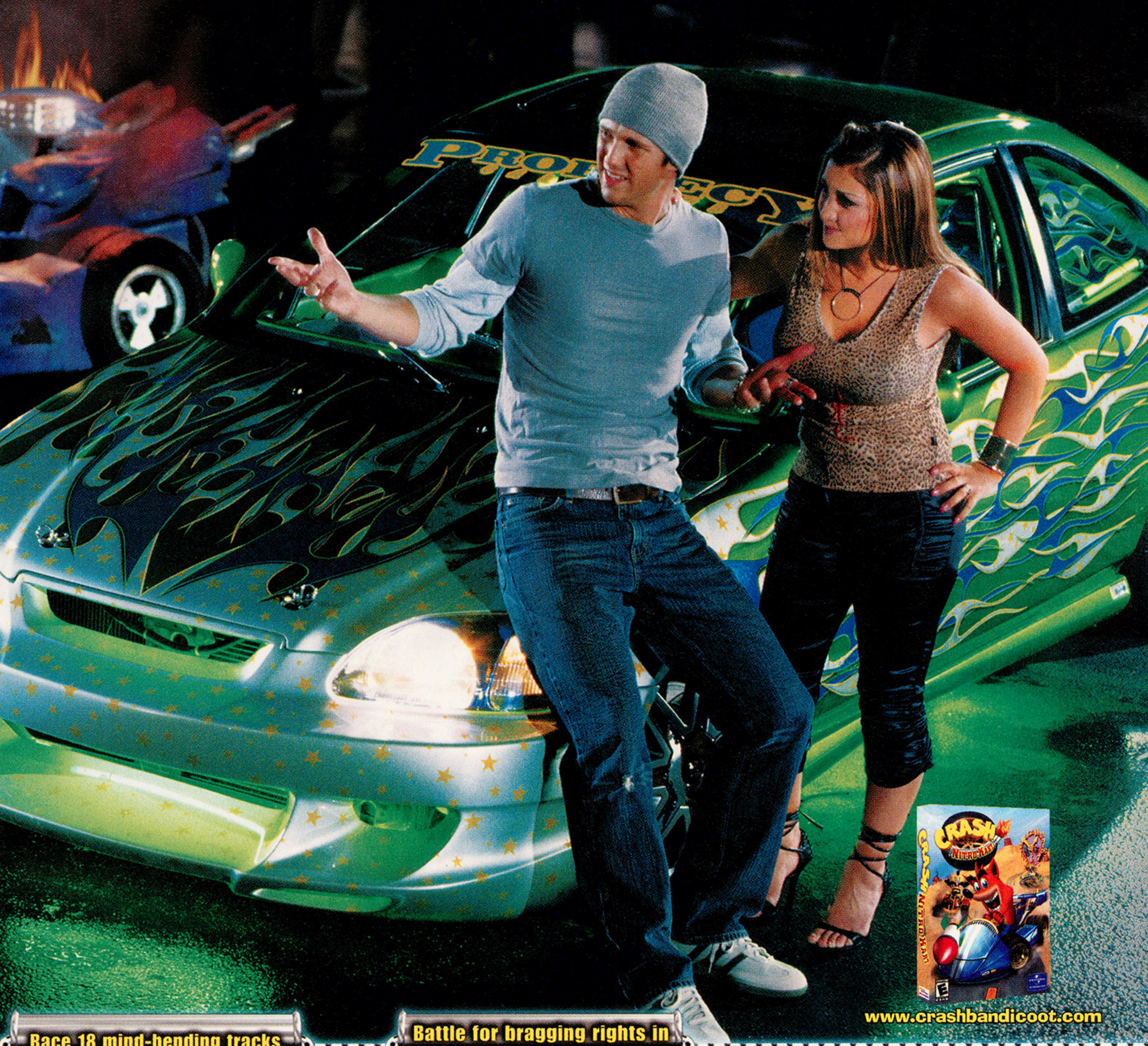


PlayStation®2



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press start

DR. GAMINGSTEIN

One mad inventor breathes portable life into dead consoles

Warning: Many game consoles were harmed in the making of this article. But they've gone to a better place, courtesy of Benjamin J. Heckendorn, a 27-year-old graphic artist from Wisconsin with a passion for soldering together parts of dead game systems to bring stylish homemade handhelds to life. His circuit-board surgeries began in mid-2000 after he lucked into a surplus of classic Atari 2600 cartridges, and his compulsion to create hasn't ceased since. "I'm no electronics expert by any stretch of the imagination," he tells us, "but if you experiment enough, you'll find something that works."

So far, he's created nearly 10 handhelds that work beautifully, including a portable PlayStation and Super NES. Each unit follows the same naming convention: the hacked-down console's moniker followed by the letter p, for "portable." Right now, he's in the lab molding a Nintendo Entertainment System (called the NESp, natch) for his palms, due to be completed later this year. And if you want to wrap your hands around these one-of-a-kinds, you're in luck...sort of. Heckendorn is willing to part with some of his models—which take eight to 10 "monotonous" hours to construct—if the price is right. (His handheld Atari 2600 sells for \$400. The Super NES: \$350.)

But you might want to be patient. Heckendorn is mulling over the idea of expanding his hobby into a full-blown business and scaling up production, as well as selling kits so would-be mad inventors can create their own Frankenstein portables. Log onto his website (www.classicgaming.com/vcsp) to check Heckendorn's progress and see his wares.

—Jon M. Gibson



■ Nothing says "evil genius" like a dogs-playing-poker painting.



The Atari VCSp Rev. 6

With its old-school wood paneling and considerably compact design, Heckendorn's portable Atari 2600 is his definitive claim to fame. "The hardest part was getting the video to work," he grumbles. "Remember those RF switch-box things they had? Obviously, you don't want to use one of those in a portable unit."



The SNESp

Sure, dozens of Super NES classics have been ported over to the GBA, but what about the hundreds that have fallen by the wayside, never to be reincarnated? The SNESp, one of Heckendorn's "personal favorites, design-wise," is his perfect solution. Too bad only two exist.



■ Power saw: The PSP's rear can kill.

The PSP

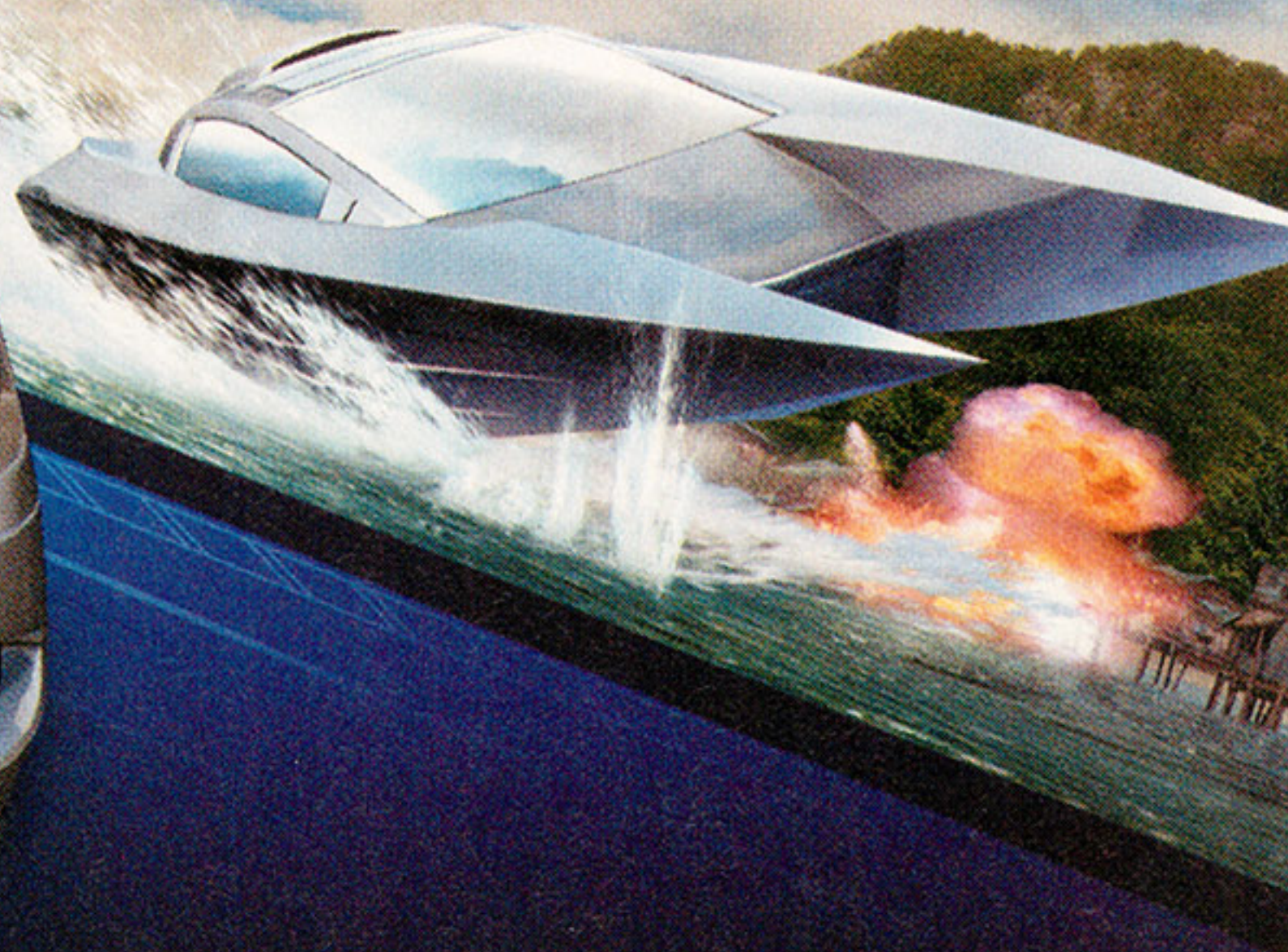
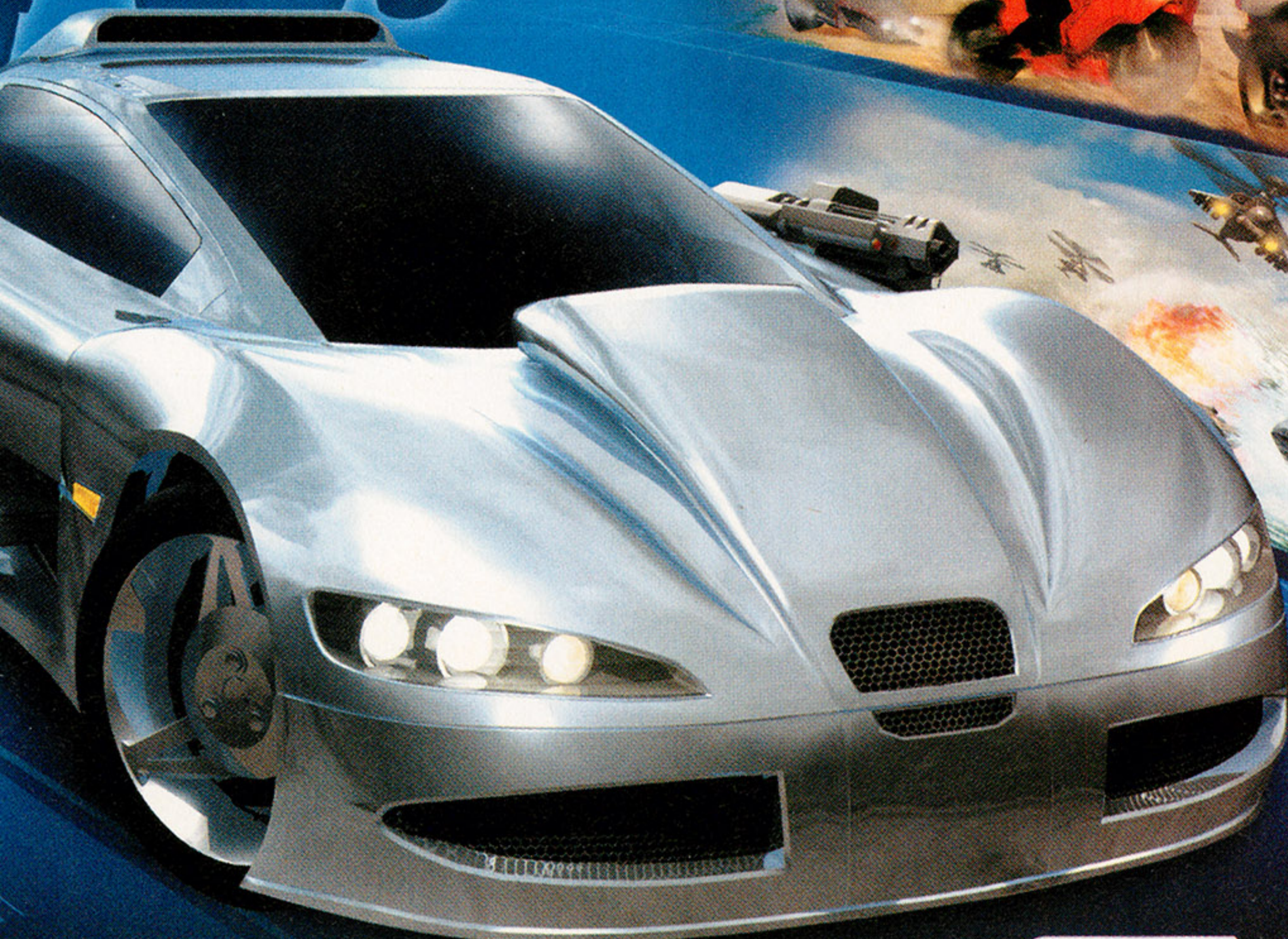
Heckendorn made only one go at a handheld PlayStation, and its CD seems dangerously exposed on the unit's rear—but for good reason. "Fitting every part [into it] was quite the challenge," Heckendorn says. "But hey, it doubles as a pizza cutter or wild-animal hypnotizer." He realizes that demand for this unit is small now that Sony has announced an official portable—also called the "PSP"—for late next year. Has Heckendorn sicced lawyers on Sony for swiping the name? Nah. He chalks it up to coincidence. You dodged that bullet, Sony.

Photographs by Cameron Wittig

>> IN NOVEMBER, SNK WILL RELEASE A COMBO PACK OF THE 2000 AND 2001 INCARNATIONS OF ITS KING OF FIGHTERS GAMES FOR PS2, FOR THE REASONABLE PRICE OF \$39.99...>>

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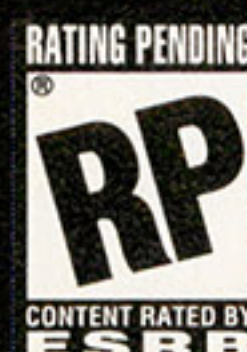


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PlayStation 2



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press start

ONE-MAN WAR FACTORY

■ Agent Sterling will find sticky spots in such far-flung political hot spots as Communist China—where he starts the game in prison—and a claustrophobic Egyptian town filled with trigger-happy street fighters.

Spycraft gets arts-and-crafty in PS2 shooter *Cold Winter*

Communism these days is about as in style as a calculator wristwatch—unless you're Andrew Sterling, a surly British secret agent for whom Red Scare skullduggery pays the bills. He's the superspy star of *Cold Winter*, a PlayStation 2-exclusive first-person shooter due October 2004 from VU Games. But before the thought of another espionage action game has you slapping the ejector-seat button, rest assured that Agent Sterling doesn't operate like *Splinter Cell*'s Sam Fisher or that Jim Bond fella: He comes from the MacGyver school of tinkering and must craft his own gadgets—everything from Molotov cocktails to poison weapons.

In fact, playing creatively is the key to survival in *Cold Winter*, thanks to its high-powered physics system that makes every chair, desk, barrel, and body react realistically. You can tip over tables to create cover or shoot out supporting structures to collapse scaffolding onto approaching enemies. The bad news: Your opponents don't play dumb, either. "The A.I. of each enemy knows how to use cover, move between cover, create cover, and offer fire support to teammates," says Julian Widdows, development director for developer Swordfish Studios. Of course, shooting the bad guys in those big brains of theirs will work, too. 

—Crispin Boyer

>> WORLDWIDE SHIPMENTS OF PS2S TOPPED THE 60 MILLION MARK IN MID-SEPTEMBER. POW. IT'S THE FIRST TIME ONE MANUFACTURER HAS LED TWO HARDWARE CYCLES IN A ROW... >>

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INSTANT EXPERT: COLLECTING

A quickie lesson in videogame hoarding



■ Who needs furniture when you can build a wall-to-wall gaming collection like writer Joe Santulli's here? Not pictured: living space

Unlike with baseball cards, there are no "rookie games" that skyrocket in value if their designers become famous (*Pitfall* creator David Crane's first title, *Outlaw*, is worth just \$5). And unlike comics, games don't have first editions (Atari 2600 pack-in launch game *Combat* is worthless because it's so common). Strange hobby, right? But collecting games is easy if you know the rules....

Where do you start?

Only chumps scour eBay for games. You get the inside track to collecting at expositions and swap meets, and you can spy a list of nearby events at www.digitpress.com/forum under Events & Gatherings. Oh, and keep a box of games for trading purposes—many collectors prefer to swap rather than sell.

Online shops GameStop.com and EBworld.com sell old titles, but you can't be sure of the condition. For old stuff in new shape, turn to www.gooddealgames.com and www.videogameconnections.com.

What price is right?

Consider three things when buying or selling: the completeness, condition, and scarcity of the game in question. Titles with mint-condition boxes and manuals are at least twice as valuable as incomplete games. (And here's a care tip: Store your collection away from light to keep game labels and boxes vibrant.)

Genre type also determines worth. Role-playing games, for instance, hold value longer than other kinds of games, while sports titles plummet the quickest. Games for certain systems retain or improve their value better than others, too. Neo-Geo home-system carts, for example, have held or increased in price in the last five years, whereas stone-age Odyssey² games are dirt cheap.

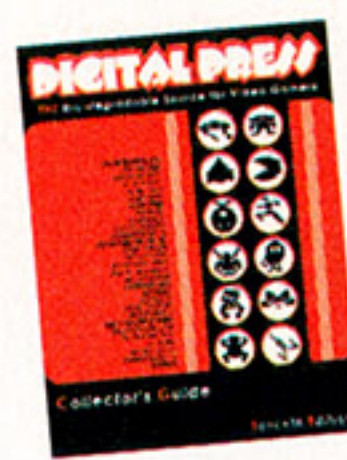
Serious game obsessives rely on the *Digital Press Collector's Guide* (\$25 from www.digitpress.com, where you'll also find an online version). This hefty 512-page

tome packs scarcity ratings, nuggety descriptions, and street prices of games for more than 30 8-bit systems.

The rarest of the rare

The holy grail of most modern collectors is *Nintendo World Championships*, a special 8-bit NES combo cart (it included timed versions of *Super Mario Bros.*, *Rad Racer*, and *Tetris*) produced for a 1990 nationwide gaming competition. Nintendo gave away a regular version as a competition prize, while a special gold cart—of which just 26 were made—was only available from a *Nintendo Power* magazine contest. Gold carts have sold for \$6,500, making this the most valuable game ever. Now go check under your bed to see if you've been sleeping on a fortune.

—Joe Santulli and Leonard Herman



■ The perfect bathroom read.



■ Solid gold

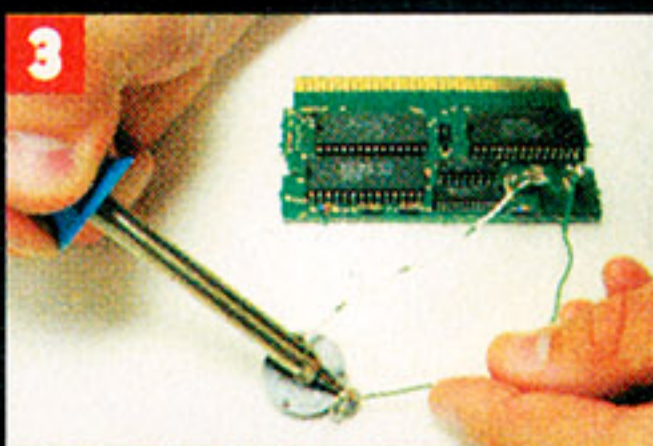
Bring out your dead: How to replace a bum battery in an old game cartridge...



■ Raid Radio Shack for a soldering iron (\$10), wire, and a CR2032 3-volt battery (\$3). Hit www.mcmelectronics.com and get the battery holder (\$1, part #29-1675) plus one of these \$3 screwdrivers: Part #22-1145 opens Nintendo carts, and part #22-1150 opens Sega carts.



■ After removing the security screws on the back of the cartridge (with the appropriate specialty screwdriver), open the cart and pry the battery free, along with its attached metal leads. Leave enough of these leads to act as solder points for the new battery's holder.



■ Now, use solder to connect a few inches of wire between the old battery leads and the empty battery holder, making sure to match up positive with positive and negative with negative. Don't solder the holder directly onto the leads—your cartridge will bulge and may not close.



■ Slide the new battery into its holder and close the cartridge. Or, for tidiness, first attach the holder to the inside of the case with two-sided tape to keep the holder from rattling around. Your classic cart now has a fresh battery that will hold save files for years. It's alive...alive!

OLD SCHOOL 10 years ago in EGM

■ On the Cover: Eternal Champions (Genesis)

Sega's comic-book-style fighter, with 10 of the lamest combatants we've ever seen battling for immortality, landed on our cover this month 10 years ago. And for reasons even we can't fully explain, we included move layouts for Sega's full-body Activator controller in the strategy guide inside.



Game of the Month: Secret of Mana (Super NES)

Square's amazing non-*Final Fantasy* multiplayer action-RPG nabbed the coveted Game of the Month title with an eight and three nines (out of 10) from our Crew.

3DO Releases New System

In late October 1993, Panasonic released its 3DO Multiplayer, a \$700 do-everything game system based on technology developed by the now-dead house of *Army Men*, 3DO. At launch, the console wasn't good for much more than the mediocre pack-in action-racer *Crash & Burn* and playing a video clip from the animated *Batman*.



Jaguar Does Math

The company that put videogames on the map in the '70s released its last game machine in November '93. The \$249 cartridge-based Jaguar would see a few highs (*Tempest 2000*, *Aliens vs. Predator*), but its exceedingly terrible lows (*Club Drive*, *Trevor McFur*) quickly euthanized this cat.



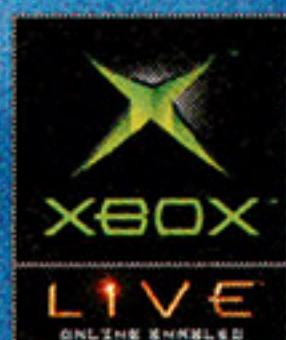
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AFTERTHOUGHTS: JAK II

Talking difficulty and the perils of rapid transit with developer Naughty Dog

Saving the world is never easy—but it's especially tough when you're playing *Jak II*, the sequel from Sony and developer Naughty Dog to the highly acclaimed 2001 PS2 platformer *Jak and Daxter*. We figure that even after playing to the end of this challenging but rewarding game, you'll be pondering as many questions as we were. So, we did you a favor and posed the most burning queries to *Jak II*'s director, Naughty Dog's Evan Wells....

EGM: Some might say *Jak II* is too difficult—not us, mind you, but *some*. Do you think it is?

Evan Wells: I don't think so. We wanted to give players a lengthy experience and

think that guy, who shall remain nameless—Shane Bettenhausen—just sucks at videogames.

EW: That's actually one of the [conditions] in the [game's programming]—a "suck factor." [laughs]

EGM: The city missions where you have to destroy Crimson Guard vehicles are some of the most challenging in the game. Do you have any personal strategies for these?

EW: Use the Vulcan Fury weapon, and make sure you've got a full 200 rounds of ammo for it. The Hellcats won't start running from you until you've shot them the first time, so creep up behind them, line yourself up, and unload on them. You can take them out within a couple seconds.

through. If we added a rapid transit system, you'd end up always using that and never explore.

EGM: Were any missions cut from the final game?

EW: Yes, we did have a couple cuts we had to make. It was really tricky because we have this integrated story, so when you start cutting missions, you run the risk of compromising your story. [For example,] when you went to the construction site to meet the Baron, there used to be a level there with some turret gameplay, some Jet boarding, and fighting more Crimson Guards.

EGM: So, what was Daxter up to between the time they arrived in the future and when he rescued Jak?

EW: That's a very good question. He spent some time learning the city and exploring, getting into trouble. There's backstory I'm not ready to reveal right now that the world will hopefully get to experience someday.


EGM: In the first game, Daxter kept talking about how he once was human and wanted to be changed back. In *Jak II* he occasionally makes a couple cracks, but...is Daxter at all interested in turning back into a human anymore?

EW: Well, that's another bit of the story that I can't divulge right now.

EGM: It sounds like you're talking about future developments for the franchise. Will Naughty Dog's next game be a Daxter game, maybe?

EW: That's been talked about, but we haven't made any final decisions yet.

EGM: At the end of this game, Jak and his friends are still in the future world. Is it safe to assume we're never again going to see the bright, sunny vistas of the first game?

EW: Well, his new home is the darker, grittier world of Haven City and the wastelands around it. Who knows what lies in the future? He could travel to other worlds or explore the one he's in now. We'll see.  —Chris Johnston



■ *Jak II*'s rootin' tootin' shootin' gunplay action was inspired in part by old-school shooters like *Contra* for NES.

"We wanted to give players a lengthy experience and a lot of gameplay..."

—*Jak II* Director Evan Wells

a lot of gameplay for their money. We did extensive focus testing—four different times over the course of development, and we brought in 10 kids a day for six eight-hour days—and we didn't see any show-stopping brick walls.

EGM: One of the editors here noticed that if you fail a mission enough times, the game helps you by giving you more ammo or health. Is that the case?

EW: That is true. We try to make subtle adjustments that good players will never see because they're getting through it. It doesn't kick in until you've tried something many times—usually more than 10. It depends on the task and the time you've spent.

EGM: Well, I didn't notice it at all. I

Then, wait for the alert to die down, find your next target, line up right behind it, and let loose.

EGM: Games with huge world maps—most recently Nintendo's *Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*—usually have a warp system or some kind of faster method of transportation that opens up halfway through. But *Jak II* doesn't have this. Why not?

EW: Our city's not as huge as the ocean is in *Wind Waker*. You can take five minutes to go from island to island in that game, and I think the longest time it'd take you to go from one end of Haven City to the other is about a minute and a half, once all the security gates are open. We wanted to create a city that you learned [the layout of] and the best routes

easter egg hunt



Collecting more precursor orbs will net you things like unlimited ammo, unlimited Dark Jak powers, and invulnerability. But get all 200 and you unlock the option to replay the game in the much more difficult Hero Mode. Collect *another* 200 orbs in that, and....



Jak secrets

Ratchet & Clank billboard —

A billboard bearing the visage of Ratchet and Clank (from fellow developer Insomniac's *Ratchet & Clank*) can be found in the city block right above the northernmost farm block.



Precursor alphabet —

"I dunno if you'd want to take the time, but you can read the signs around the city.... They do all actually say something," says *Jak II* Director Evan Wells. For instance, the poster behind Jak here says "Champions" in Precursor letters.





press start

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Your little minions take to the streets in **The Sims Bustin' Out**

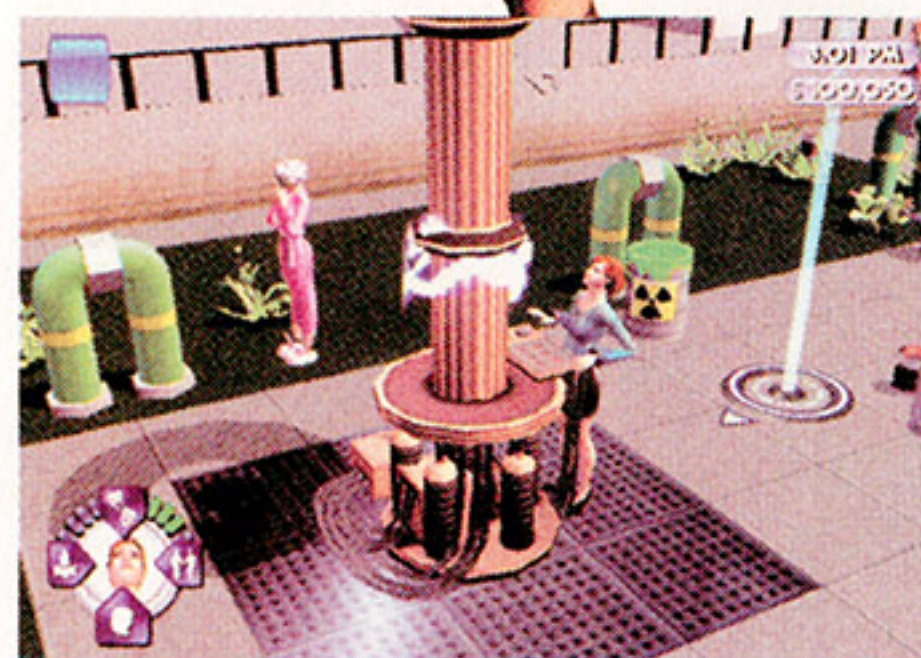


Getting the best-selling PC franchise of all time—the life simulator *The Sims*—to appeal to a console audience was hard work for EA last year. But the virtual varmints have broken in their console shoes, and they're busting out of the house in this sequel, coming in December for PS2, Xbox, GameCube, and GBA. The goal-and level-based gameplay that was so successful in the first game (garnering it *EGM's* Game of the Month award last February) is back, but this time, your Sim is no longer a total shut-in who hops magically from house to house. *Bustin' Out* features a whole neighborhood where your Sims live, work, and socialize—though just how they do this is, as in any *Sims* game, completely up to you.

The basic gameplay architecture hasn't changed. You still care for your Sims' eight "motives"—Hunger, Energy, Comfort, Social, Fun, Hygiene, Room, and Bladder. Your job is

to tell them when to eat, sleep, watch TV, chat with friends, and, yes, pee. And if you forget to tell them to take care of certain needs, well, funny things happen.

This time out, though, your biggest decision is what to do with your Sim's life. *Bustin' Out* offers 12 career choices—each of which takes your Sim down a drastically different path. So if you make your Sim into a mad scientist, he'll head over to the laboratory for a hard day's experiments and unlock wacky stuff like the incubator or Tesla coil. Or if you make him a movie star, he'll rub elbows with bigwigs at Hollywood house—unlocking a gourmet stove to prepare hors d'oeuvres for his schmoozefests. Your choices directly influence how well he does at his job—the secret to success in *The Sims*. It's a huge improvement over the first game, where you basically sat around the house all day while your virtual character went off to



■ The graphics engine has been completely rebuilt, so the world looks more detailed than ever. You can also zoom in much closer to get a good look at your Sim's wretched outfits.

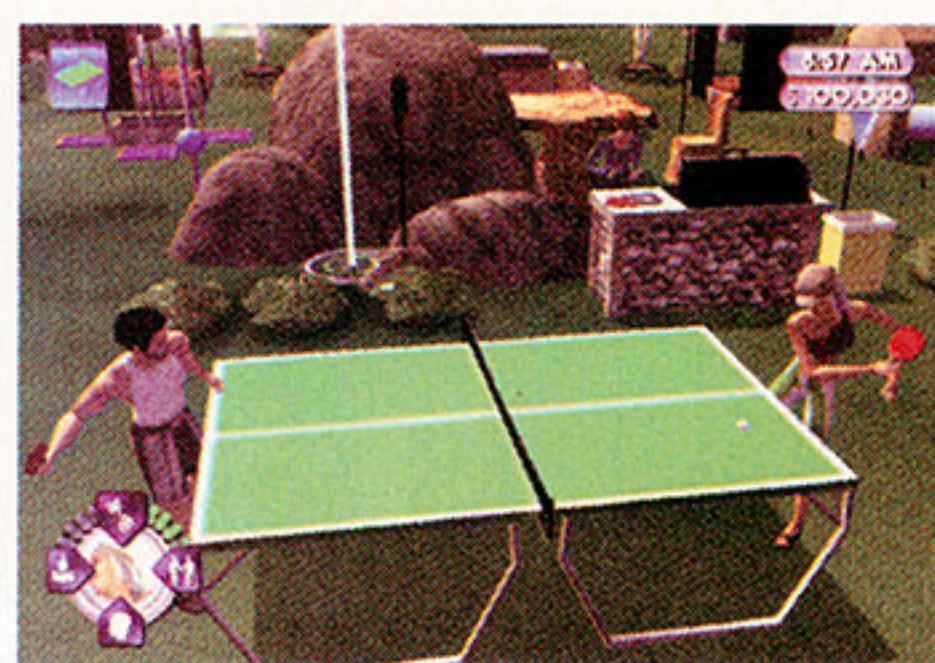


face unseen trials and tribulations on the job.

The other big priority, naturally, is obtaining material goods, and your Sim will have to work his digital ass off to get all the goodies in *Bustin' Out*. Each location has 10 to 20 unlockable items (for a total of almost 200), but any given career path will offer only its unique items. So even after your Sim has beaten his first job, you'll want to take him back to earlier levels, choose different careers, and unlock other items previously unavailable to him.

Essentially, *The Sims Bustin' Out* is about more—more locations, more objects, more social interactions (Pull Finger and Moonwalk are a few of our favorites), more recognizable characters (22 versus last year's four), and up to "20 percent more zaniness and 40 percent more wackiness," to quote one of the game's producers. "*The Sims* is just a totally ridiculous game," says *Sims* Design Director Michael Perry. "And we were really trying to come up with more of that."

—Jennifer Tsao



■ How could you or your Sims get bored with so many fun things to do? The ping pong table and rock climbing wall are two of the hundreds of new objects in this sequel. Who needs IKEA??

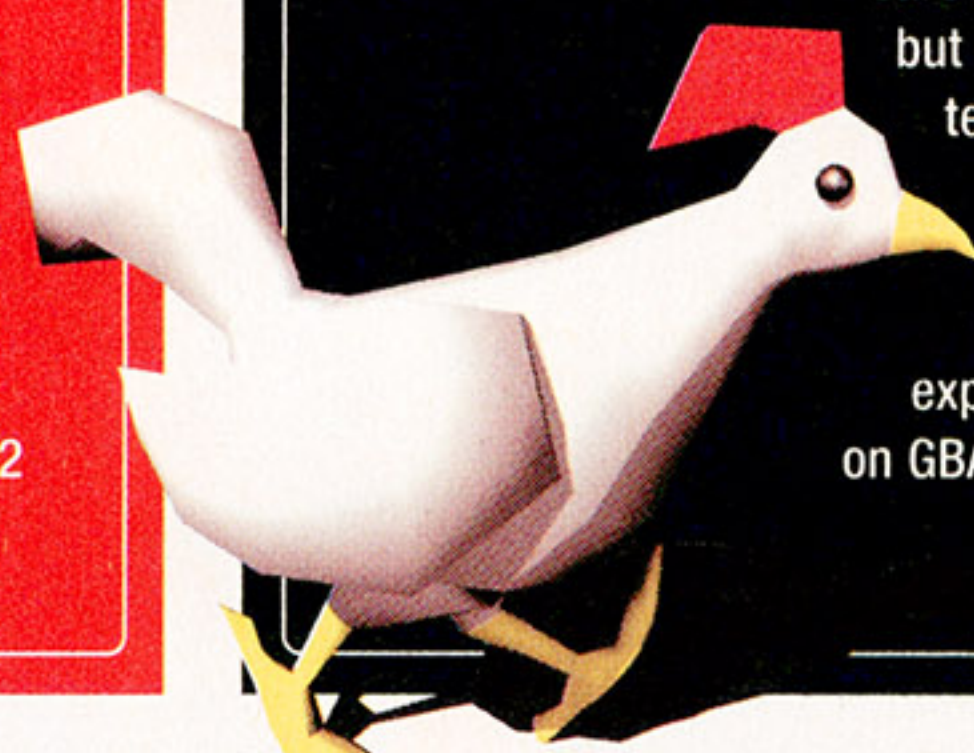
Trading Places

Bustin' Out offers two-player cooperative play, which, besides making the game a lot easier, also speeds up the unlocking of items. You bring your memory card over to a friend's PS2, and your Sim is automatically imported into their game. Then, as you're playing together, when either one of you unlocks something, you both get it—meaning your Sim will have more stuff when you bring him back into your own game. The PS2 version will also feature two-player online play, or you can always just swap objects.

Sim Away From Home

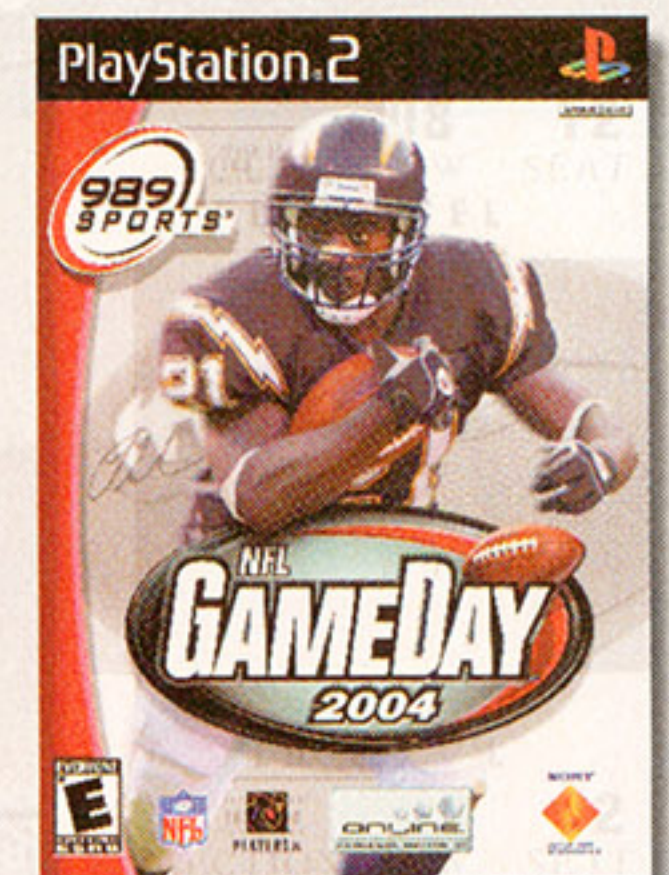
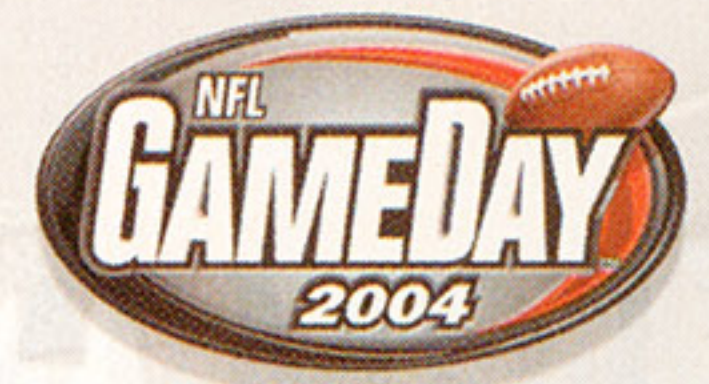
The games may share the same name, but *Bustin' Out* on GBA looks and plays nothing like its big brother. You'll still care for your Sim's basic needs, but here you control your character's movements and actions to complete goals, play GBA-friendly minigames, and earn extra cash. Money, experience, and objects earned on GBA are transferable to your

GameCube game, making this a convenient and portable way to level up your character. And did we mention you get to collect chickens? Bwawkk!



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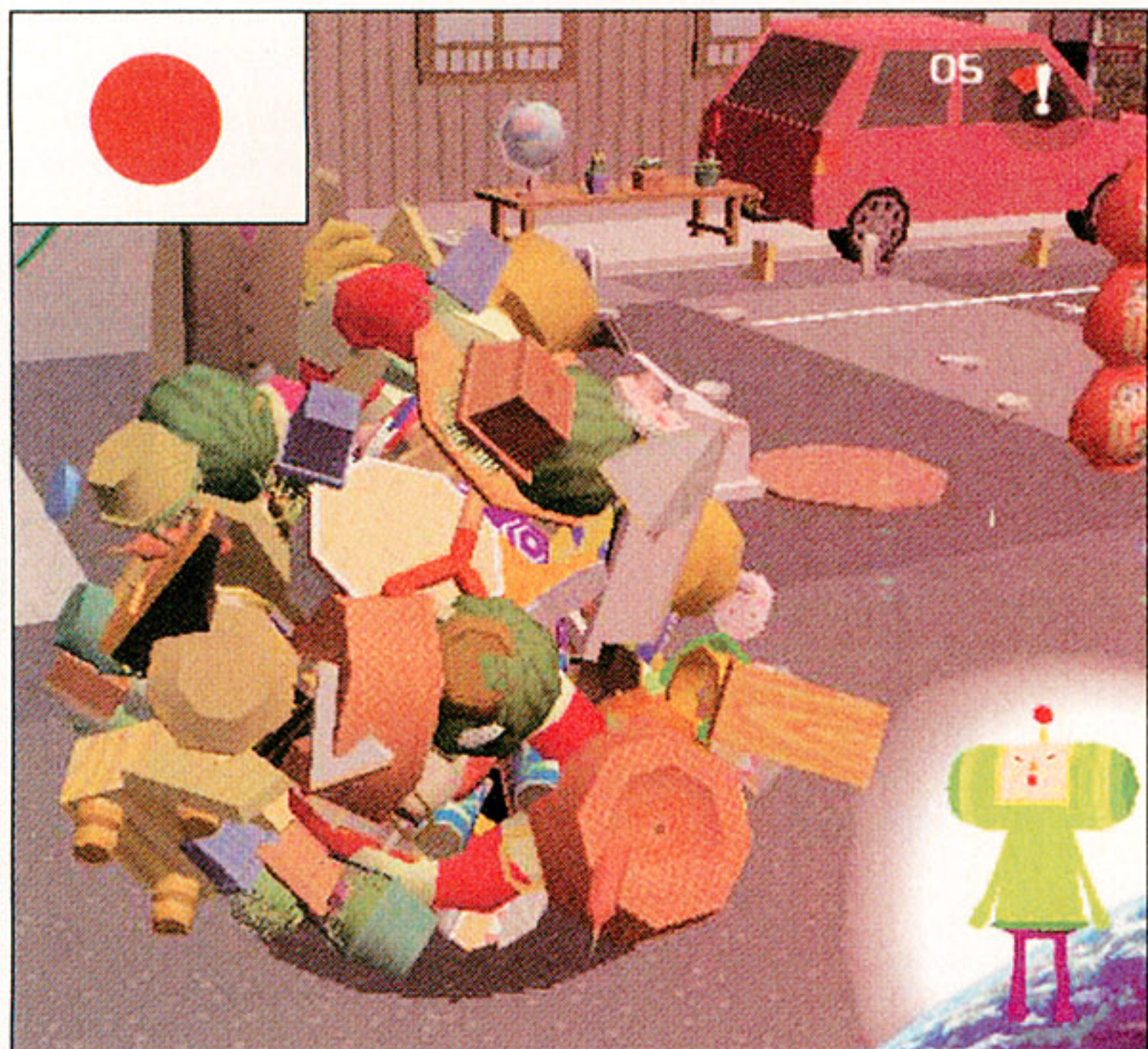


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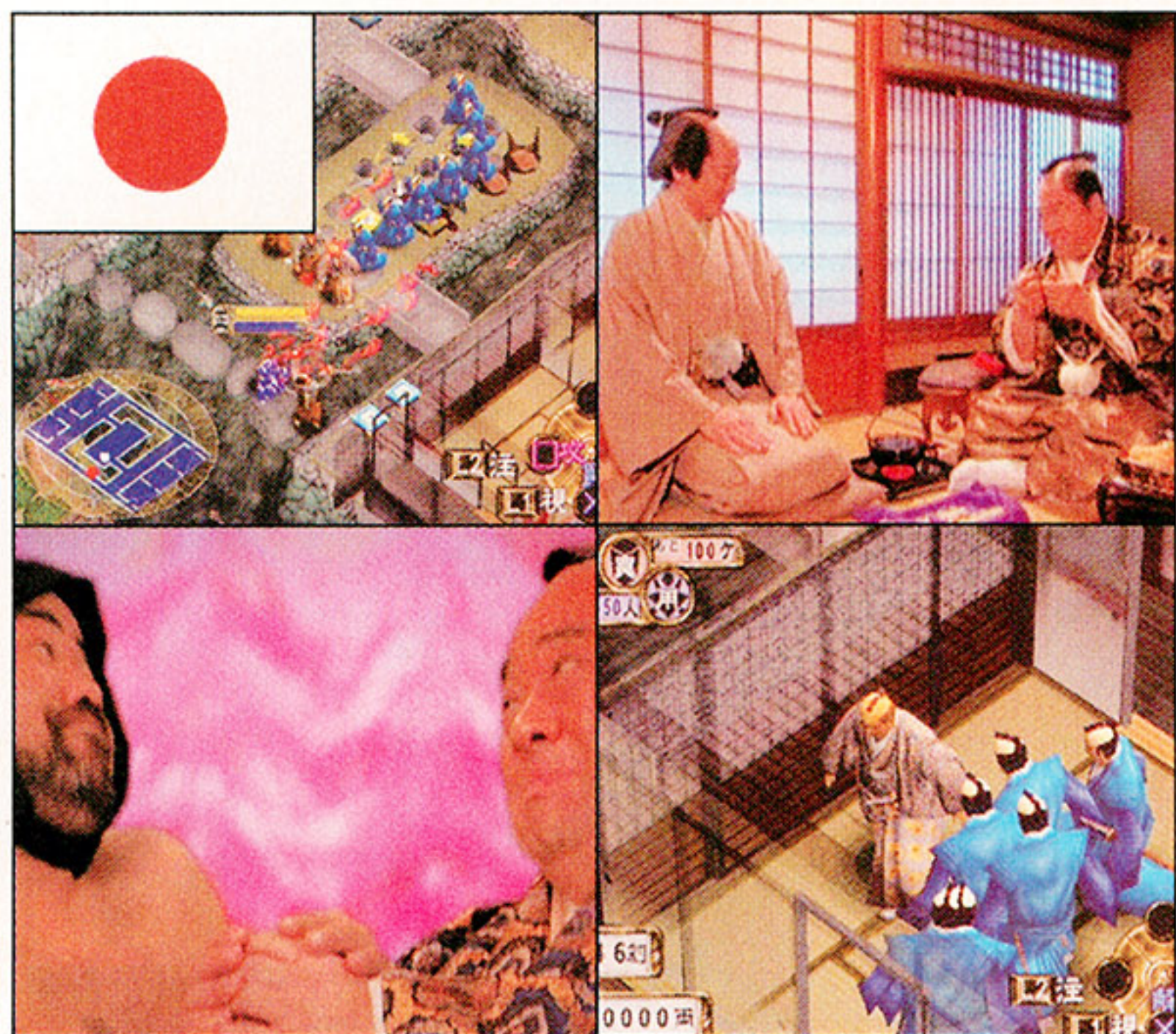
The weird. The wild. The Japanese.



ROLL YOUR OWN PLANET

Have a ball with the twisted PS2 import **Katamari Damashii**

Like many videogames, this new title from Namco (its name literally translates to "soul of the blob") begins with the alcoholic king of a far-away galaxy accidentally blowing up his entire kingdom. So, naturally, as his highness' four-inch-tall son, you must travel to Earth and gather up stuff with which to build new planets. Starting with only a tiny little ball, you roll up things on the street (leaves, pencils, blackboard erasers, trees, little girls), making your pile snowball until it towers over nearby buildings. Get a big enough blob and it's off to the next stage. The bizarre premise is carried out via equally interesting controls: You handle everything via the two DualShock thumbsticks, never touching a button. Your alky dad would be proud!



IT'S GOOD TO BE BAAAAD

Decency? Compassion? **Akudaikan 2** says to hell with that crap

Tired of playing goody-goody ninjas and samurai who do nothing but defend honor and save villages all day? Try life as an akudaikan, or "evil magistrate" from medieval Japan who bleeds peasants dry and stays fat and wealthy through assorted shady business dealings. (He's the guy in the samurai movies who's always frowning and yelling and usually dies near the end.) **Akudaikan 2** (PS2) lets you play as one of these 18th-century fiends, defending your castle against brave, decent samurai. One of the bonus games even features you twirling the belt off a hapless young woman's kimono, removing the rest of her clothes in the process. Shame it'll never come here, eh, lads?

OVERHEARD



"[Nintendo] always announces things like introducing videogames to five million 5-year-olds every year. Which is fine—Sony and ourselves will fight for them when they're 12 and **we'll take it from there, thank you very much.**"

—Microsoft V.P. of Sales and Marketing (and ex-Sega of America President) Peter Moore in an interview with computerandvideogames.com

"I didn't want to hurt anyone."

—14-year-old Joshua Buckner, who opened fire on passing cars with a shotgun last June, killing a Tennessee motorist. Buckner claimed to have been inspired by *Grand Theft Auto*, but plead guilty to reckless homicide and other charges. The family of the victim is suing *GTA* publisher Take 2 Interactive



"Placement of certain videogames is not conducive to the overall environment we strive to achieve."

—Regal Entertainment Group, the country's largest movie theater operator, explaining its decision to ban games featuring "graphically violent character deaths," among other criteria, from its lobbies

LI'L PREVIEWS: DIAL H FOR HEROES

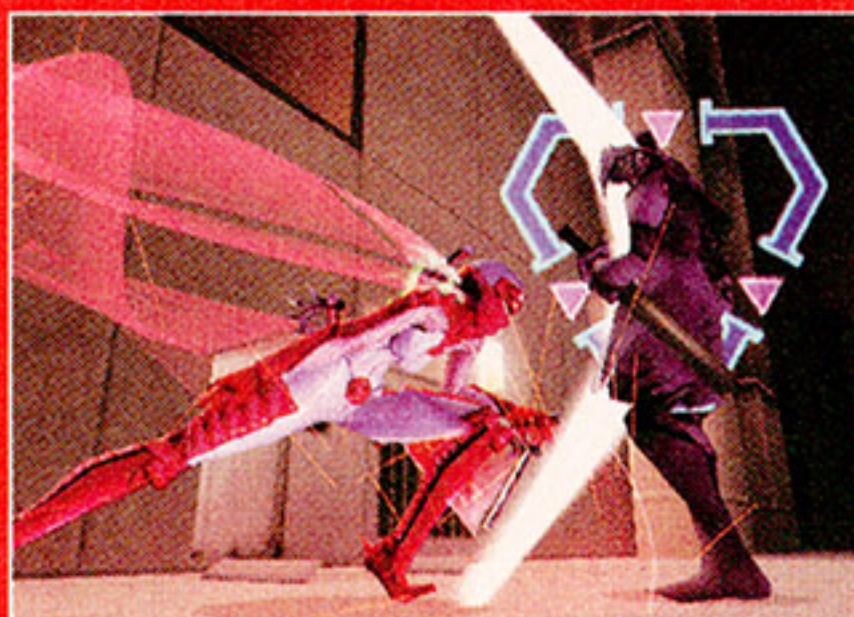
JUSTICE LEAGUE

PS2, Xbox, GC • Midway • 2004 — The Super Friends (Batman, Superman, The Flash, Hawkgirl, etc.) are throwing a party, and they're bringing lots of *punch*! Based on the cartoon, this action/adventure pits you against villains, aliens, and the occasional talking, genius gorilla.



NIGHTSHADE

PS2 • Sega • January 2004 — Couldn't beat the final boss of *Shinobi*? Don't worry, neither could anybody else. Sega's sort-of sequel (called *Kunoichi* in Japan), starring a slinky ninja-ess named Hibana, features similar sword-slicing action, but at a much more forgiving difficulty level. Whew.



MEDAL OF HONOR: INFILTRATOR

GBA • EA Games • November 2003 — After a questionable first-person-shooter outing on the GBA last year, EA is firing back with a 2D *Medal of Honor* game that plays more like the classic top-down shooter *Commando*. You can even jump into a tank and run over little soldiers. (Hey, even tiny, cute war is hell.)





NO TURTLES WERE HARMED IN THE MAKING OF THIS GAME.

(THAT PART COMES WHEN YOU PLAY IT.)

In the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles™ Video Game, you'll discover that there's trouble around every corner. Whether you're playing your favorite Turtle in Story mode or going head-to-head with a neighborhood knucklehead in Vs. mode, it will take all your butt-kickin' ninja skills to stay out of harm's way.



PlayStation.2



GAME BOY ADVANCE



KONAMI
www.konami.com/usa



POWER SHOPPING

Your \$\$\$-saving insider's guide to the local game store

The not-so-rosy economy may scare typical shoppers into spending submission, but we gamers are a hardier breed. When we gotta play, we gotta play—lean wallet be damned. So we've put together this ultimate attack plan for getting the most game for your buck at your neighborhood Electronics Boutique or GameStop—or wherever you feed your bank-draining digital need. And when these stores' home-office suits held info back for fear of revealing "trade secrets," we turned to our inside guys: store managers who shared shopping tips on condition of anonymity.

—Lauren Gonzalez and Bryan Intihar

Feel used

If you can kick your addiction to that new-game smell, buying used is an easy way to save a little green. Major chains Game Crazy and Electronics Boutique set their used game prices after analyzing supply and demand—in EB's case, daily, according to Director of Marketing Liz O'Sullivan.

Our inside guy says: "Used games sell for \$5 to \$10 below the new price. Customers start trading them in about two weeks after their release. Lame games come in much sooner: I had a customer trade in *Enter the Matrix* two days after it came out. Games with replay value are not traded in often. *Halo* [Xbox] is rarely seen, as are some of GameCube's best-selling titles, such as *Super Monkey Ball 2* and *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. Stores carry two to three times more used titles for PlayStation 2 than other systems. Great games on PS2 usually seem like the kind that a gamer will only play through once."

Fair trade

Got games collecting dust? Knock down the price of anything in the store by exchanging your old titles for credit. Keep an eye out for trade-in promotions, too: Stores often run special "trade in three, get a new game free" deals, letting you swap your moldiest titles for shiny, shrink-wrapped hits. Such promotions are especially common around system launches, when you can exchange old consoles and a few games for the latest hardware.

Our inside guy says: "On average, you'll receive half the value of the game's new price at the time of trade. A new release selling for \$50 will get you between \$25 and \$30 in store credit. An older game selling for \$20 new will get less than half—around \$7."

Take it back!

You'll be damned if you'll accept paltry trade-in credit for that cruddy new game you just bought. The bad news: All game chains have a strict no-refund policy. And don't try telling counter jockeys that the game's busted—they'll only exchange it for the same title—unless you make nice with the clerk, or rope your mom into the dirty work....

Our inside guy says: "If a mom's mad that something is wrong with the game, I might stretch store policy if she's respectful. If something goes wrong with a game once in a while and a customer wants credit, that's understandable—as long as he doesn't make [returns] a habit."



70°

90°

110°

130°

YOU DON'T GO TO THIS BEACH FOR
VACATION. YOU GO FOR REVENGE.

40°

20°

0°

20°

40°



★ ★ ★ ★
MISSION DIRECTIVE

Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

August 6, 1942 - Japanese forces have occupied much of China, Indochina, and everything in the Pacific between Australia and Hawaii. It's time to take it back, and the dense jungle island of Guadalcanal is first in line. Infiltrate the island, silence the sentries and pave the way for America's first offensive action in WW II.



Move like a shadow into enemy encampments.



Neutralize the general and experience the Banzai charge.



Clear the way through demolition and stealth.

**MEDAL OF
HONOR
RISING SUN**

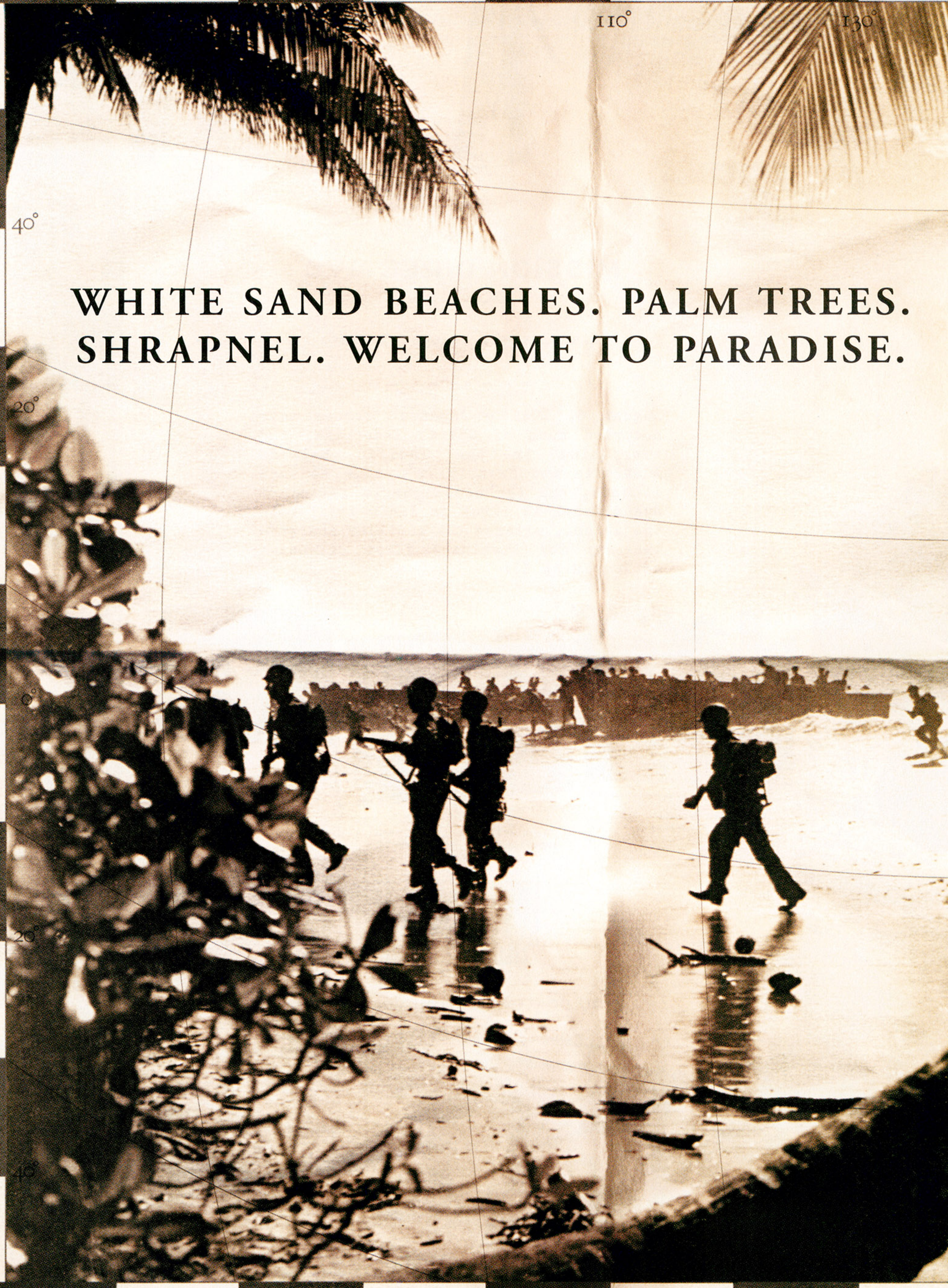
YOU DON'T PLAY, YOU VOLUNTEER.™



Challenge Everything™

40° 110° 130°
20°
0°
20°
40°

WHITE SAND BEACHES. PALM TREES.
SHRAPNEL. WELCOME TO PARADISE.



★ ★ ★ ★
MISSION DIRECTIVE

Philippines, 1942

The next stop on your tour takes you deep into the lush jungles on the Philippine island of Luzon. Your job: Hold the last bridge against the advancing Japanese. And if you can't hold it, make sure no one else can. Partner with a demolition unit, set the charges, and get out alive. The only one to pay a toll on this bridge will be the Japanese.



Provide covering fire for a crippled tank through city streets.



Work closely with other Allied units in the fight for the bridge.



When bullets don't work, bring in the high explosive.



YOU DON'T PLAY, YOU VOLUNTEER.™



Challenge Everything™

Coming Soon

MEDAL OF HONOR
INFILTRATOR



PlayStation®2

GAME BOY ADVANCE



Violence



Bridge on the River Kwai

Ride an elephant mounted with a 50-caliber machine gun, taking out snipers and small, thatched huts with each step on your way to destroy the link between Burma and Thailand.



Yamashita's Gold

Search for the legendary gold buried deep within a jungle fortress. Keep your head down or the only metal you'll find is hot lead.



Fall of Philippines



Singapore Sling

Go under cover. Crash the party then escape on top of a stolen double-decker bus. Navigate a motorboat through the harbor around rotting piers and a Japanese destroyer.

***INTERNET CONNECTIVITY required.** Online game play available for the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system only. PlayStation 2 online play requires Internet connection and Network Adaptor for PlayStation 2 (sold separately).

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MEDAL OF HONOR RISING SUN

YOU DON'T PLAY, YOU VOLUNTEER.™

TOUR EACH BEAUTIFUL ISLAND ONE VICIOUS BATTLE AT A TIME.



Supercarrier Sabotage

Infiltrate the latest Japanese aircraft carrier floating in the middle of the Pacific. Break her hull, steal a Kate bomber and escape just as the carrier explodes below.

Midway

HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

Pearl Harbor

Oahu

Johnston Is.

Eniwetok

Ponape

Kwajalein

Wotje

Tarawa



Pistol Pete

Fight through the dense maze of mangrove swamps to a secret entrance of the island's lower caves and emerge to destroy heavily entrenched artillery pieces the locals call Pistol Pete.



Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941

Join your fellow Marines in defense of our Naval fleet at Pearl Harbor.

Canton

Guadalcanal

SANTA CRUZ IS.

Espiritu Santo

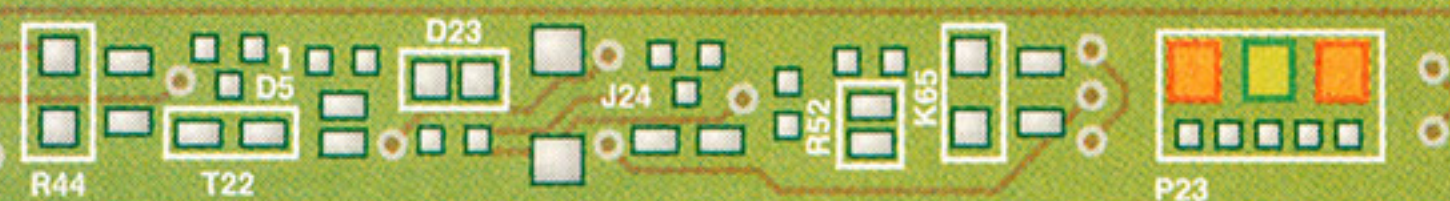
NEW HEBRIDES



Midnight Raid on Guadalcanal



press start



02	02	1	2	3	4	5	6
03	04	7	8	9	10	11	12

SHIELD SHIELD 10
GND GND
D+ ESAK
D- RULEZ
FUB JIO
LKN
DST
DXT
H.K.
L-DOPA

SWEET, TERRIBLE FREEDOM

With *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, it's your thang, do what you wanna do

Decisions, decisions. When the dark, near-future world of Eidos' *Deus Ex: Invisible War* comes to Xbox this December, you'll have all kinds of choices to make: Who

should you work for? Which weapons suit your style? Do you install cybernetic implants that make you stronger, faster, or more stealthy?

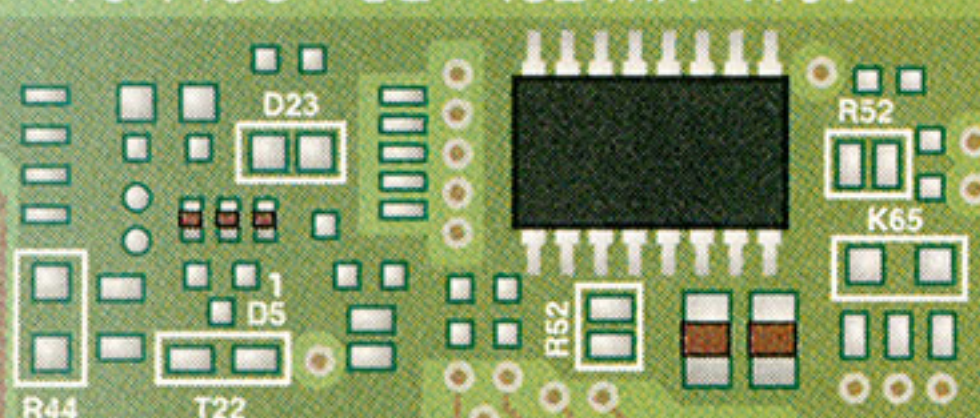
"Play the game the way you want to

play it—as an RPG or action game," says Project Director Harvey Smith. It's even possible to get by without killing anyone, but "you can pretty much go through and set everyone on fire," says

Lead Tester Dane Caruthers. Here's a taste of how all that snappy decision making plays out. [Note: The following spoiler-free scenario is completely hypothetical.]

—Paul Byrnes

FJ 145C • SL • 432 mA 110V



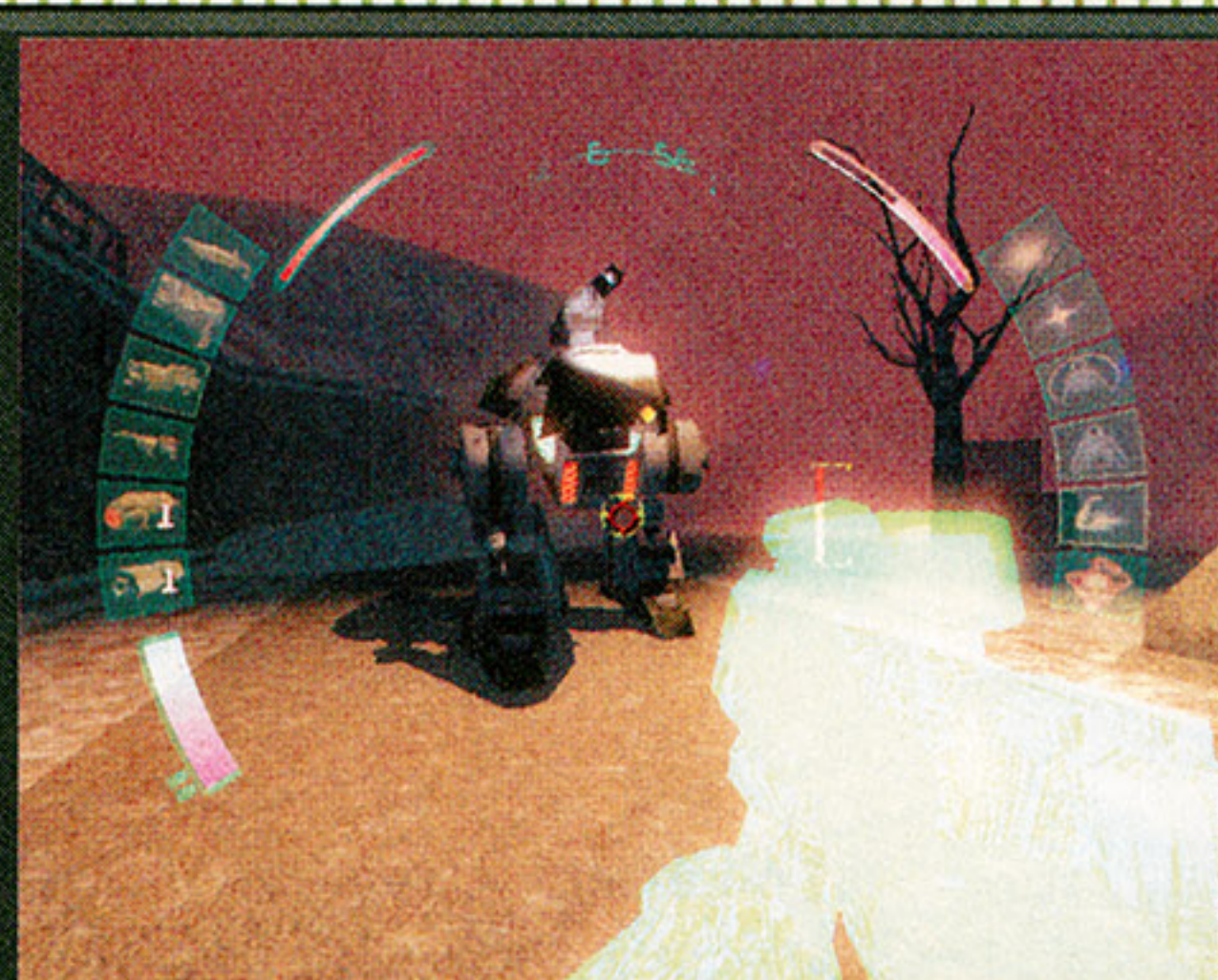
Choose Your Own Misadventure

Suppose the technophile organization known as Omar wants you to rescue a researcher from incarceration—but the panreligious zealots of a rival group called the Order ask you to assassinate her instead. Either way, your first job is to break into the prison where she's being held. What's your approach?



A1. What was that about setting everyone on fire? Let's barbecue!
You use your flamethrower to make cinders out of the guards—one of whom will drop the key you need. Your Regeneration ability slowly heals any damage you took in the tussle.

A2. How about a more subtle approach?
You crawl through a ventilation shaft. Next, you use your upgraded vision to see guards through walls, then activate Cloak or Thermal Masking abilities to sneak past human or robot sentries, respectively.



You're in—and you've found the researcher. What now, spaceman?



B1. I'll rescue her for the Omar.
They seem pleased and offer you more assignments, plus discounts on their black market nanotechnology. The Order, on the other hand, is furious. The group's members may even attack you on sight in the future.

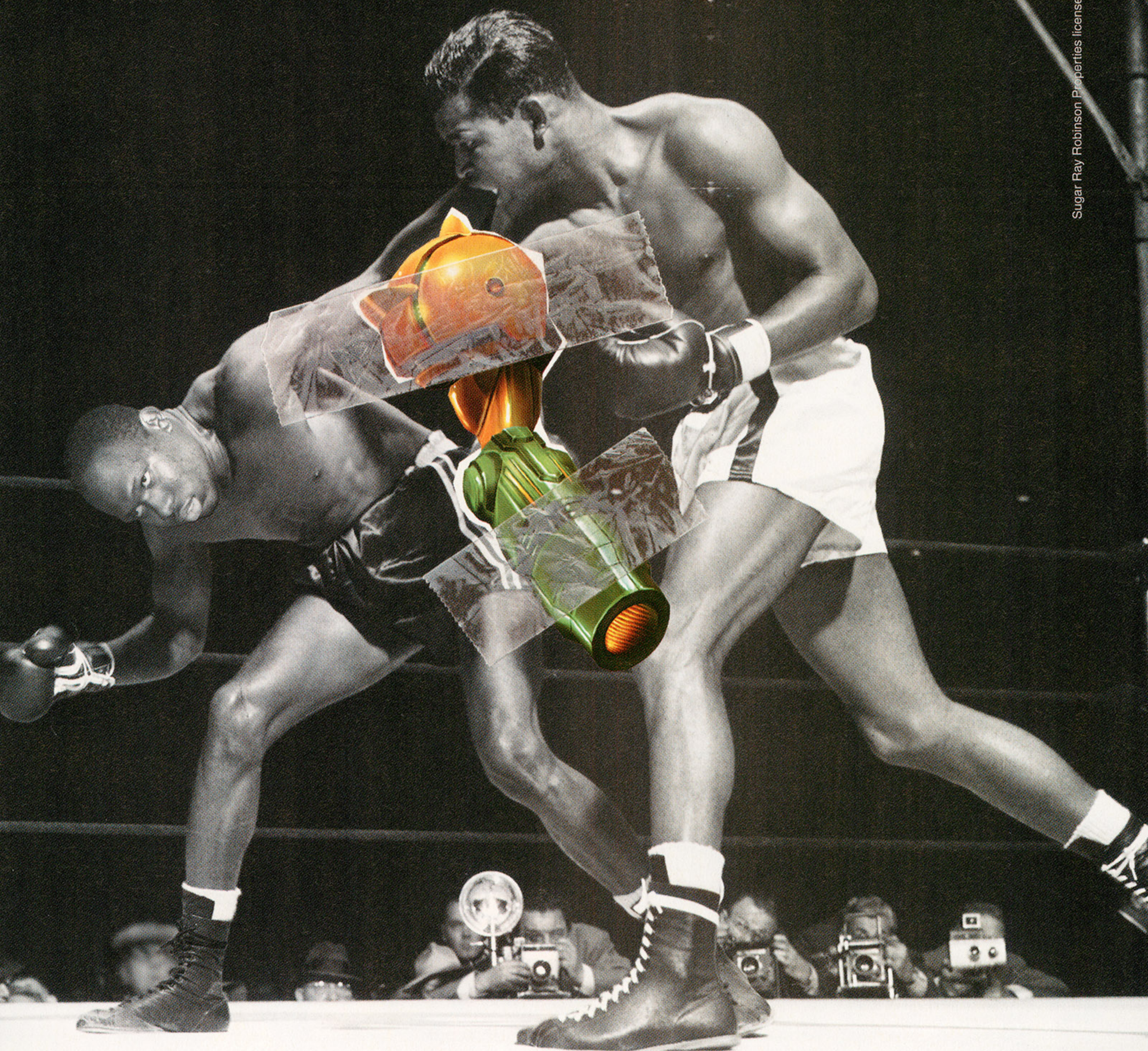
B2. Mr. Flamey wants to work! She's toast.
In exchange for your help, the Order gives you info on the terrorists who destroyed Chicago at the game's outset. Rebuffed, the Omar hikes up its prices—or refuses to sell its wares to you at all.



Of course, this scenario is vastly simplified. Every situation in *Invisible War* can be resolved in many different ways, including methods the developers might not even have thought of. Says Warren Spector, studio director of developer Ion Storm, "The game is about freedom and choices with consequences."

>> XBOX LIVE RECENTLY EDGED CLOSER TO BEING WORLDWIDE, LAUNCHING IN SIX MORE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: AUSTRIA, DENMARK, FINLAND, IRELAND, NORWAY, AND SWITZERLAND.... >>

who are you?



Nintendo®

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press start

CELEBRITY GAMER: RON JEREMY

Hold onto your joysticks, gamers

Ladies love Ron Jeremy and men idolize him. As America's preeminent male porn icon, the adorable galoot (affectionately dubbed "The Hedgehog") has starred in more than 1,700, ahem, straight-to-video hits, such as *Wild Wild Chest*, *Cheerleader Nurses*, and *Ally McFeel*. With his recent headlining appearance in Gotham Games' over-the-top brawler *Celebrity Deathmatch* (available now for PS1, PS2, Xbox, and GC), we couldn't resist the temptation to whiz a few intimate questions by Captain Ron:

EGM: We saw that you made a porn send-up of the *Super Mario Bros.* movie. *Super Hornio Bros.*?

Ron Jeremy: Good grief—you actually remember that? Don't tell me they made a game about it.

EGM: No. Well, not yet, anyway. How'd you land the role as the Mario-esque Hornio Hornio?

RJ: When I went to the Menendez brothers' [murder] trial, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* said I looked like an escaped Mario brother. Which I do, except

the euphoric release one gets from completely decimating an invading horde of aliens?

RJ: When I need a release, all I do is make this noise [utters a suggestive groan]. There you have it.

EGM: If only you could turn that kind of release into a videogame, we're sure it'd sell millions. Did you ever consider a second career in game design?

RJ: Hey, I'm full of great ideas. They should make a game called *Ron the Conqueror*. It'd be like, "You there, eat this. Kiss this. Sit on that." So chunky...so desirable. He'd be an awesome hero.

EGM: And then every guy in America would get to be you for a while. Brings up an interesting question: What kinds of things would we see if the porn industry made games?

RJ: The future of porn is holograms. Eventually, you'll be able map your favorite porn star's face on a Real Doll [an anatomically correct mannequin] or simi-

"If you lose, I get to screw you."

for the fact that I've been trying to lose weight. A bunch of us just thought the idea would make a funny film.

EGM: How much time's left for gaming when you've thrown in the towel for the day on the set?

RJ: Not enough. Lately, all I've been playing is *Conflict: Desert Storm*. It's phenomenal. I can't believe how realistic games are now. Although some titles take it too far—what's the one that lets you rob banks, kill people, and abuse women?

EGM: Oh, right...hmm, can't think of a title that fits that description....

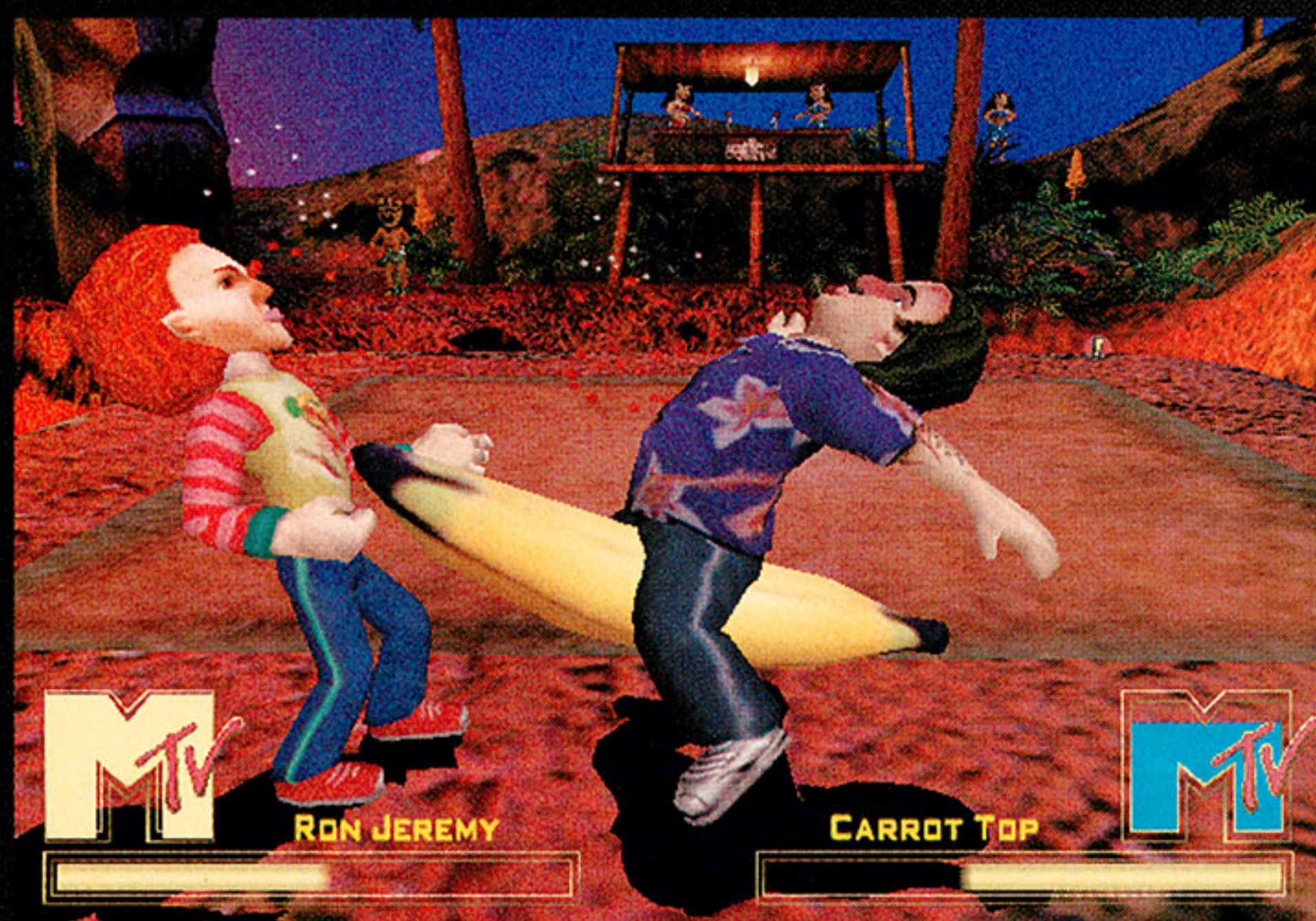
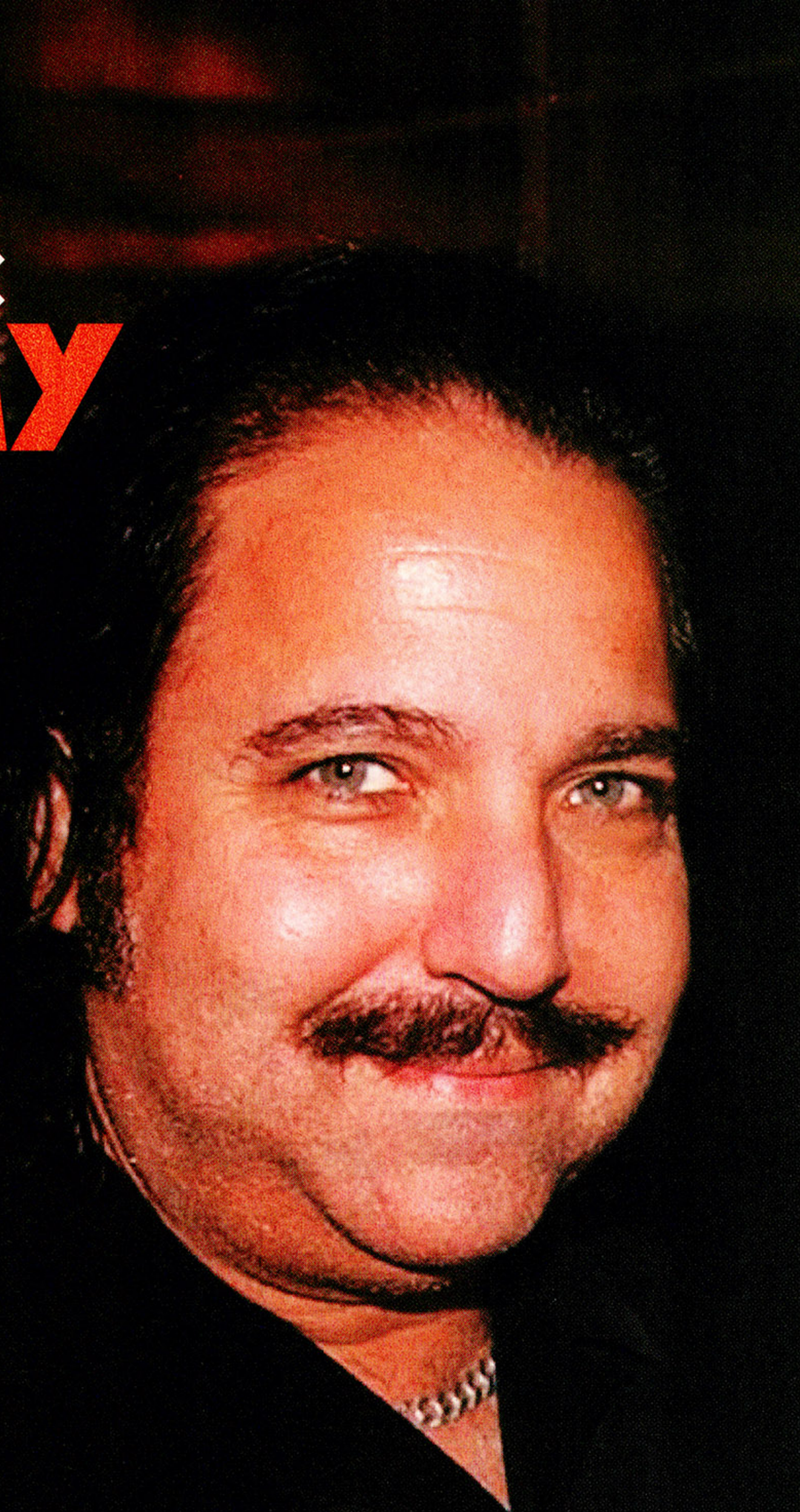
RJ: *Grand Theft Auto*. Shows what I know, eh? The last game I really sunk all my time into was *Virtua Tennis*. The multiplayer [in that] was awesome. And before that it was *Space Invaders*—I seriously kicked ass at it.

EGM: Kicked ass? Or did you just enjoy

lar device. You'll hook it up to your computer, download a favorite porn star's face, like Jenna Jameson's, then [do] the doll with the girl's face on it. [Screw] interactivity—you'll actually get to insert something.

EGM: So you're, uh...something of a Casanova. Give us some tips: What's the best way to put the moves on a game-playing lass?

RJ: Don't put the moves on a girl while she's playing. That's tacky. Nowadays, you gotta ask first. Say [something] like, "Honey, while you're fondling that joystick, let me [fiddle with] your [ta-tas]. Then we can swap places." Just be cute, funny, and natural. If a girl's into gaming, you've already got something in common and a nice relationship that you can build on. Play against each other and make bets. [Maybe something like,] "If you lose, I get to screw you. If I lose, you get to screw me!" —Scott Steinberg



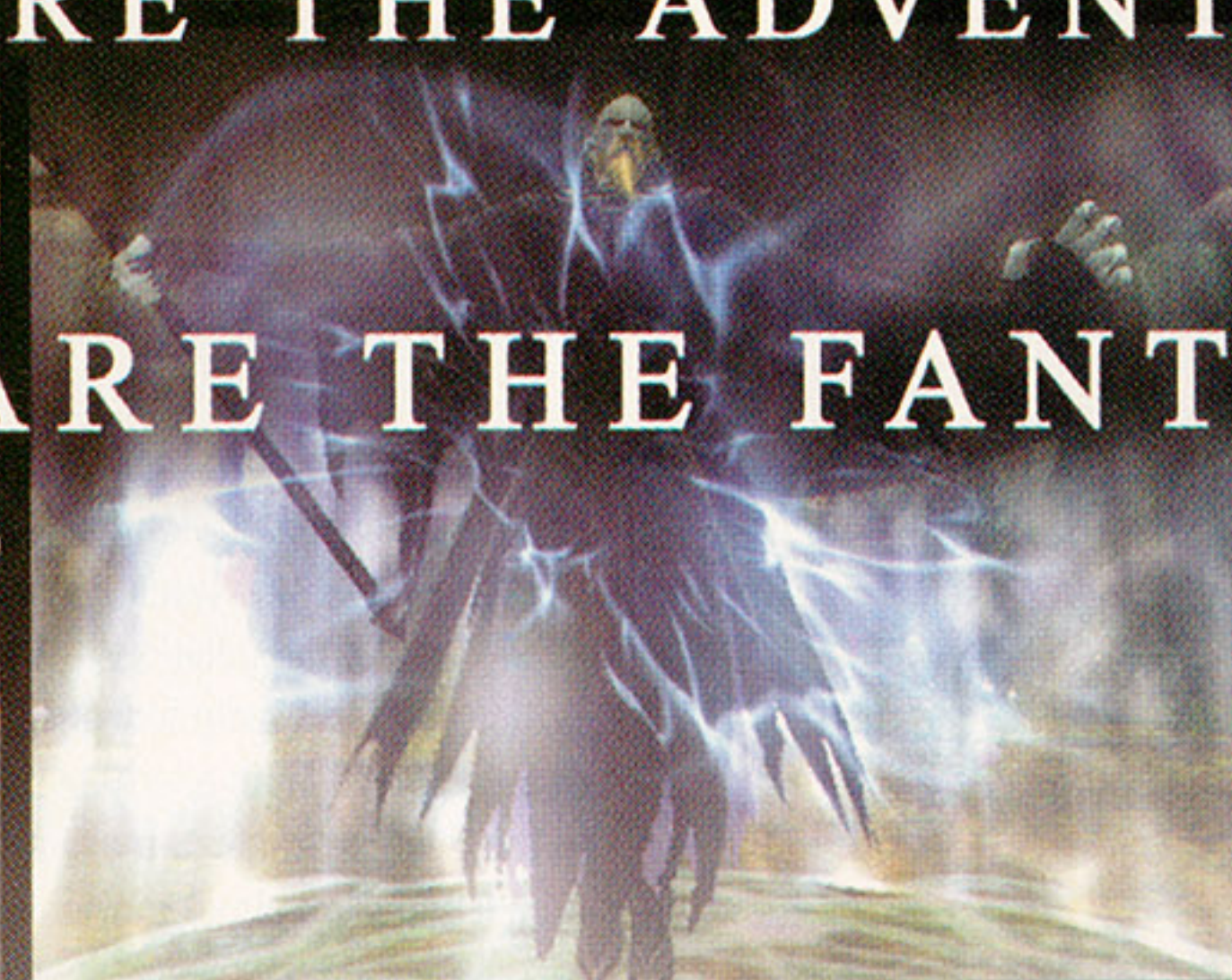
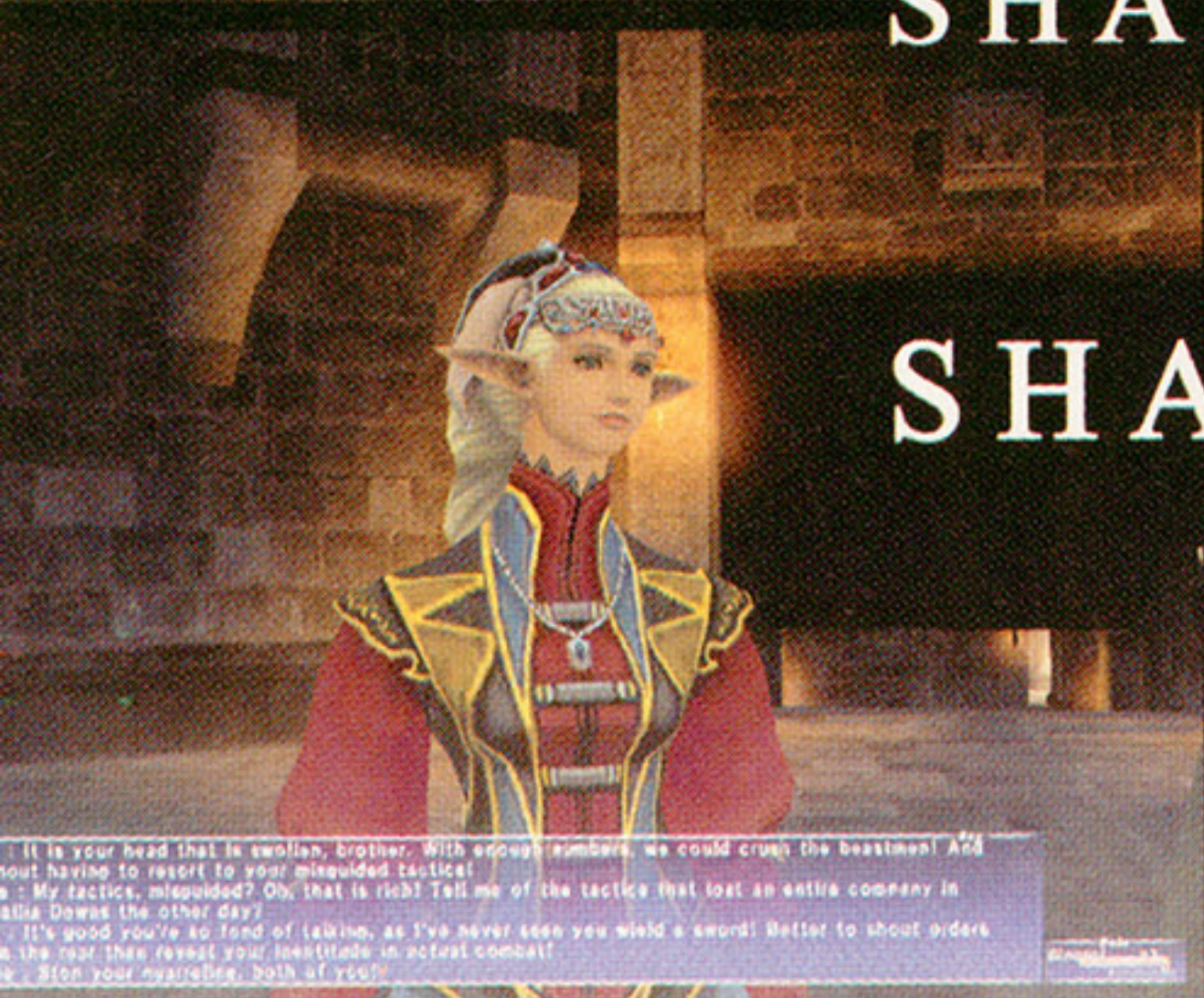
Ron smacks prop-comic Carrot Top with his banana in Gotham Games' *Celebrity Deathmatch*.

Photograph provided by FilmMagic (FilmMagic.com)

>> DIRECTOR UWE BOLL'S (*HOUSE OF THE DEAD*) COMPANY NABBED THE FILM RIGHTS TO VAMPIRE ACTIONER *BLOODRAYNE* (PS2, XBOX, GC). SET YOUR EXPECTATIONS ON LOW.... >>



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Game Experience May
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for
Windows®



XBOX: PAST, PRESENT,

Microsoft bigwig talks about the next wave of big Xbox games and the competition

Is Ed Fries happy? If you own an Xbox, pray the answer is yes.

As the head of Microsoft Game Studios, Fries (pronounced like the Batman villain, not the McDonald's side order) has final approval on every first-party Xbox game—*Halo 2*, *Counter-Strike*, *Fable*, you name it—so his mood can be a direct reflection of the games you end up playing. If Fries is happy, chances are it's because the titles he oversees are looking good and playing right. If he's not happy, well, they aren't. Projects can get delayed, scrapped, or quietly shoved out the door (*Sneakers*, anyone?).

Which is why we were relieved to find him in a good mood when we sat down to talk about Microsoft's next crop of Xbox games.

EGM: You've recently mentioned that Microsoft is changing as a first-party game publisher. How?

Ed Fries: The one thing you've gotta remind yourself is that [Microsoft hasn't] even been a console publisher for two years now. We've been learning a lot; I think we've been making good progress. But the situation has changed a lot, too. When we were starting, not only were we learning about how to be a console publisher, but we were also trying to make sure we had **games in every genre** because we really didn't know what kind of third-party support we were gonna get.

Now that we're really successful and clearly in the No. 2 position...that frees my group up to really focus on not just how to be a console publisher, but how to be a *first-party* console publisher—really focusing on making sure that everything we deliver is something that's super-high-quality, something platform defining, something that you couldn't get anywhere else.



Which might explain Microsoft's miserable foray into the fighting genre with *Kakuto Chojin* (above) and *Tao Feng*.



From the little bit of the *Oddworld* game shown on TV, it appears to be a combo of third-person action and first-person shooting (above), starring a part lion, part moose kinda lookin' thing. Oh, and it's set in a vaguely Old West sorta place. With chicken-people settlers. Yeah.

EGM: So let's talk about the games that are going to do that. A few people seem interested in this "*Halo 2*" game.

EF: Yeah, I played a little multiplayer a few weeks ago. The reception at [the annual E3 videogame trade show] was really thrilling for [developer Bungie]—they put so much work into that **nine-minute live demo of *Halo 2***. They are an amazing team to work with—so many incredibly talented people.

EGM: Do you see *Halo 2* and its online multiplayer game as the killer app that will get everyone on Xbox Live?

EF: I think it's gonna help Xbox Live. Xbox Live is doing great without *Halo*, but I think [it's] gonna get even more people online. One of the things we haven't been able to do yet is talk much about [*Halo 2*'s] multiplayer features. Hopefully, we'll do that sometime soon, maybe before the end of the year, and I think people will understand how *Halo 2* is as innovative in the online multiplayer area as it is in the offline single-player story.

EGM: How about the follow-up to *Munch's Oddysee*, the next *Oddworld* game...what can you tell us about that? We've only seen it in a show that ran on the Discovery Channel.

EF: [Smiles] What can I tell you about that? It's not really a game we're talking about a lot right now....

EGM: We heard a rumor that it had gotten the ax?

EF: No, we're continuing to work with those guys. I'm not sure there's much I can say about it right now...I don't know...we kind of get in trouble if we talk about stuff before we're ready...I'd rather wait until we're con-

fident when it's gonna be out and **what it's gonna be**...and then we can talk about it.

EGM: How about *Crimson Skies*?

EF: Yeah, I've been playing a lot of that over the last few weeks, too. I love the idea of the universe—it's this kind of *Mad Max* in airplanes that takes place in an alternate past, and the main character's really a pirate. It's really a pirate movie where you replace the boats with zeppelins, and cars are, like I said, airplanes, and it has a very Indiana Jones kind of swashbuckling feel. It's a game that we took a whole extra year to make sure it was going to be amazing because I want it to be the start of another big franchise for us.

EGM: What was that extra year spent on?

EF: I think from a visual point of view, it's just a lot more stunning. It has a great multiplayer online capability, like *MechAssault* does, but you know, the next generation beyond that. If



If you haven't seen it already, head over to halo.bungie.net to check out the demo. Now!

we had shipped it last year, basically what you would have had was a pretty traditional setup, kind of linear levels with a story connected to them. Now what we have in ***Crimson Skies*** are sets of hub worlds that are connected by story elements. So basically, you come into a hub world and you have a lot of choice and freedom about what to do next for a while. Then when you're ready, you can go back to the story path and you come out in a new hub world, in a new area.

EGM: All right, moving on: *Psychonauts*. A tough game to describe.

EF: You know, it's your typical...you know, there's only a few games people are making today, right? First-person shooters,

RPGs...so this is your typical game with a kid who comes from a family of circus performers. He goes to psychic summer camp—which is next to the insane asylum—and all the levels take place inside the brains of insane people. You know, it's one of those [smiles].

The level [I was just playing] takes place in the mind of an artist who only works in black velvet. And the entire level is black velvet, so the entire level is black with these incredibly bright glowing colors—like a black light is on all the time. And it just



AND FUTURE

glows off the screen. And of course, it's beautiful, it's just jaw-droppingly beautiful, but it's also incredibly funny, and you run into the dogs playing poker...it's great to have something in our portfolio that's just really unique and artistically challenging and not so blatantly commercial.

EGM: So what have you been playing lately just for fun? We hear you're a big fan of *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*.

EF: It's my favorite game so far this year. When I see something like *KOTOR*, it just feels like the future to me. It's like, wow, here's this incredibly rich new story, and a story that's not told in a linear way where I have to sit



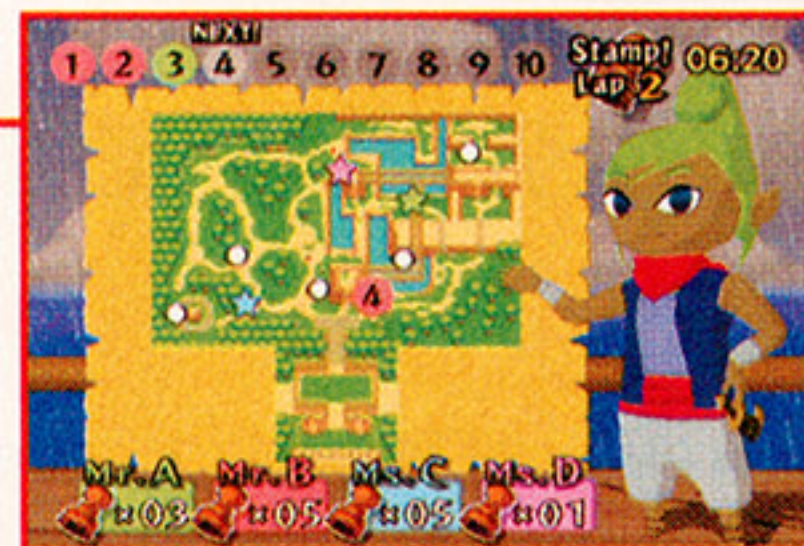
voice as a sign of them being stuck in the past....

EF: I remember [listening to a Q&A session] with [Nintendo President Satoru] Iwata and [Mario and Zelda creator Shigeru] Miyamoto, and someone asked them why none of their

favorite games of all time are Nintendo games. I have no problem loving a Nintendo product, because there's a lot there to love. But when you ask me about the future and where things are going, maybe **[Nintendo and I] don't agree on that.**

EGM: Speaking of the GBA, do you think Sony's PlayStation Portable [PSP] will hurt Nintendo when it comes out next year?

EF: The question for me is how much are Sony and Nintendo really going to be [competing] head-to-head. Because the more and more I hear about [the PSP], it sounds like a [more] expensive machine. They've gotta spin that disc [media], which means they've gotta have good battery technology. They're gonna have [wireless networking], the screen, and everything else...it sounds like an expensive device.



■ Perhaps a reference to Nintendo's misplaced (in our opinion) focus on GC-GBA "connectivity" for the future?

EGM: Was Microsoft considering its own handheld at one time? The rumored "Xboy"?

EF: Microsoft is a place where any small group of ambitious people can go off and look into [something] for a while and see if it makes sense or not, so there's actually been any number of experiments—from within [Microsoft Games] to the cell phone group and the PDA guys. I've talked to a lot of groups over the years who thought about getting into [the handheld business].

EGM: While we're on the subject of the competition, what do you think of the headset mic and, coming soon, the hard drive for the PS2....

EF: ...and more **games that require broadband.** Yeah, it seems like [Sony is] incrementally coming up to an Xbox kind of strategy. It's gratifying, actually. To me, it confirms that we made the right choices, but the thing is, we're light-years beyond that already. Maybe they'll [catch up with the] PS3. And of course, by then, I feel like we'll be even further ahead. —Mark MacDonald

"Seems like [Sony] is coming to an Xbox kind of strategy" —Microsoft Games Head Ed Fries

down and watch 10-minute cut-scenes, but where I really feel like I'm at the heart of the story.

Games so far push a set of emotional buttons that's just so limited, and so when you see *KOTOR* finding ways to push new buttons that in the past have only been pushed by books and movies, that's what gets me excited. I mean, here's a game where all of a sudden you can choose which of these four worlds to go to. I can play the whole middle part of that game in any order I want, but it's balanced right and the story works, no matter what order I do that in. That is cool! And you have all this dialogue and every line is spoken. To me, that feels like the future.

EGM: You've mentioned before about Nintendo games not using

games had voices. And they talked about cost and the time and trouble to localize it to different countries...and I just felt like I was listening to silent-movie directors talking [about how films work fine without sound]. Yeah, it costs more and it's a pain, but that's now a part of making games. I feel like that's just part of the price of doing business nowadays, and it's something everyone should be doing. It's something people should expect from games. We should all be pushing the art form ahead.

[But] you asked me before what's the last game I spent a lot of time on—that'd be the new *Pokémon*.

EGM: *Pokémon*?

EF: Yeah. But then, you know, I've been playing games forever, and some of my



■ Like *SOCOM II* (above), *Warhammer 40,000*, *NFL Blitz Pro*, and *NHL Hitz Pro*.

>> SONY ANNOUNCED *SOCOM II* WILL USE THE UPCOMING PS2 HARD DRIVE FOR DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT IN 2004....>>

GET STOKED!

"Almost every title in the lineup brings a nostalgic smile to my face."

Chris Carle
Editor In Chief IGN Guides/
IGN Codes-IGN.com

midway arcade treasures



OVER 20
ARCADE
CLASSICS!



MIDWAY

PlayStation 2



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TIGHTENING THE **VICE**

Rockstar renovates its town without pity for the Xbox version of **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City**

Last year's trip to Florida was a vacation we'll long remember, a gift that kept on giving. *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (PS2) has given players open-ended gameplay that kicks ass and takes names in book-length tomes, a criminally good series of mission-based objectives, and a selection of '80s rock, disco, pop, and metal so good that the CD soundtrack made it onto the Billboard charts. It's also furnished attention-starved politicians with enough sound bites to fill a thousand news programs, and graciously provided feloniously minded folk with a mute outlet for their boorish and antisocial behaviors. The game was so generous it even made its

setting, the craptacular decade known as the '80s, look good.

This November, *Vice City* is coming to Xbox as one half of the *GTA Double Pack*, which includes graphically updated versions of both *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, for \$50. (PS2 owners can get the package one month earlier and for ten bucks less, but without any of the new enhancements.) You still play a low-level Mafia enforcer rising up from the streets on your way to becoming a drug kingpin—stealing cars, riding speedboats, and flying helicopters as you cut a swath of destruction through the Miami-inspired titular burg, whacking rivals and making deliveries. But

there've been a few changes since the last time you were in town.

Rockstar Vienna's *Vice City* translation leaves the gameplay untouched, but gives the world and its inhabitants a virtual

thrower. The major elements, such as redone character models with more polygons and improved textures, do more than allow everyone to have individual fingers—they bring an additional bit of life to an

“This translation gives *Vice City* some nifty new tricks and a virtual makeover.”

makeover. It's all about the simple, small details, like a car's hood reflecting the green of a stoplight or that extra touch of flare in the fireball erupting from your flame

action game that is, at this point, “been there and done that” to many people.

The Xbox version of *Vice City* also features high-definition TV (HDTV) support,

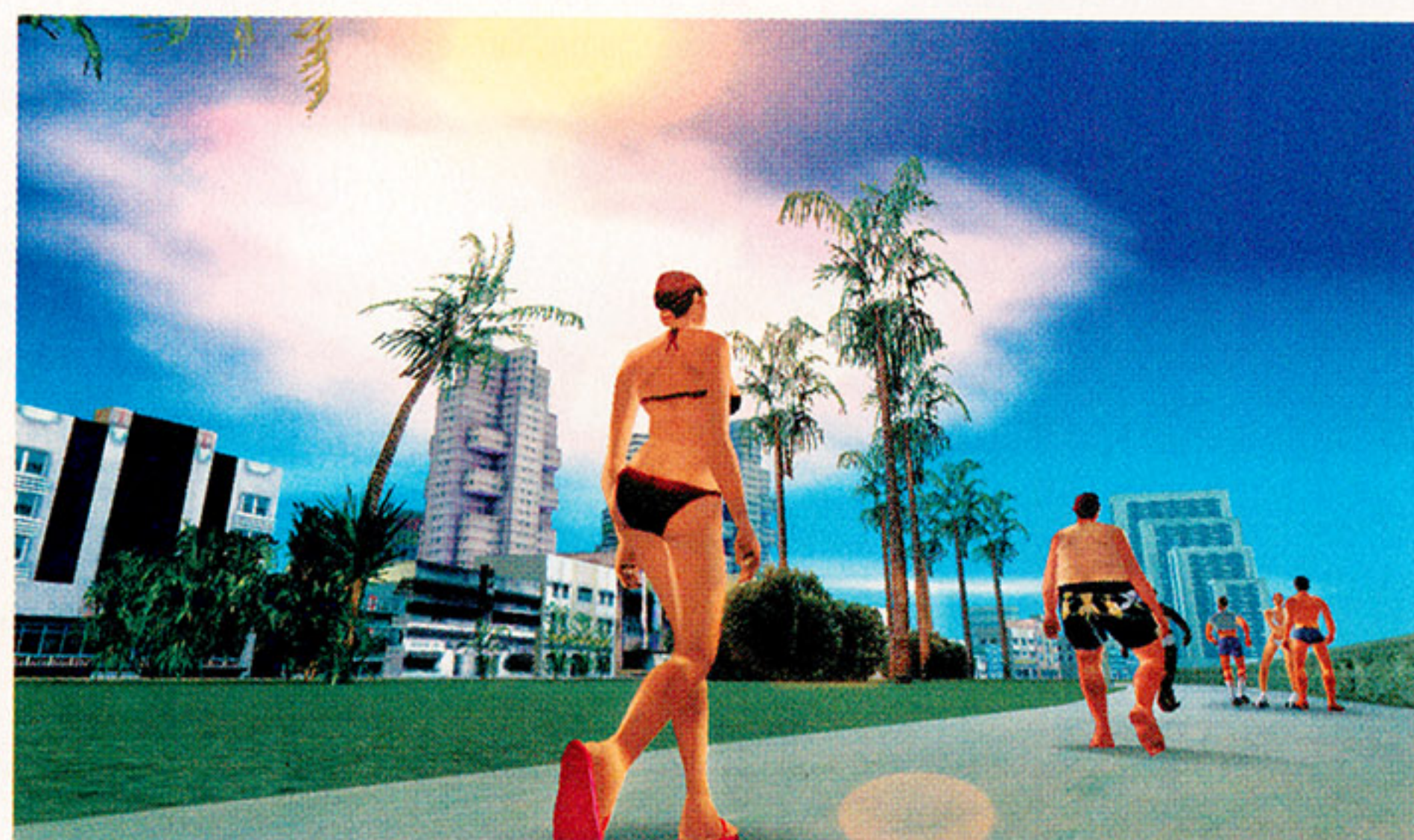
rock out with your c*** out

■ Judas Priest's superstud(ded) Rob Halford.



Photograph by Corbis

Who wouldn't want to listen to *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*'s seven-disc box set soundtrack? Dead people—that's about it. Everyone from one-hit wonder Flock of Seagulls to two-hit wonder Corey Hart is included, packaged neatly on themed albums representing *Vice City*'s diverse radio station offerings. But the cuts from Priest and Kurtis Blow are our favorites. Easily.

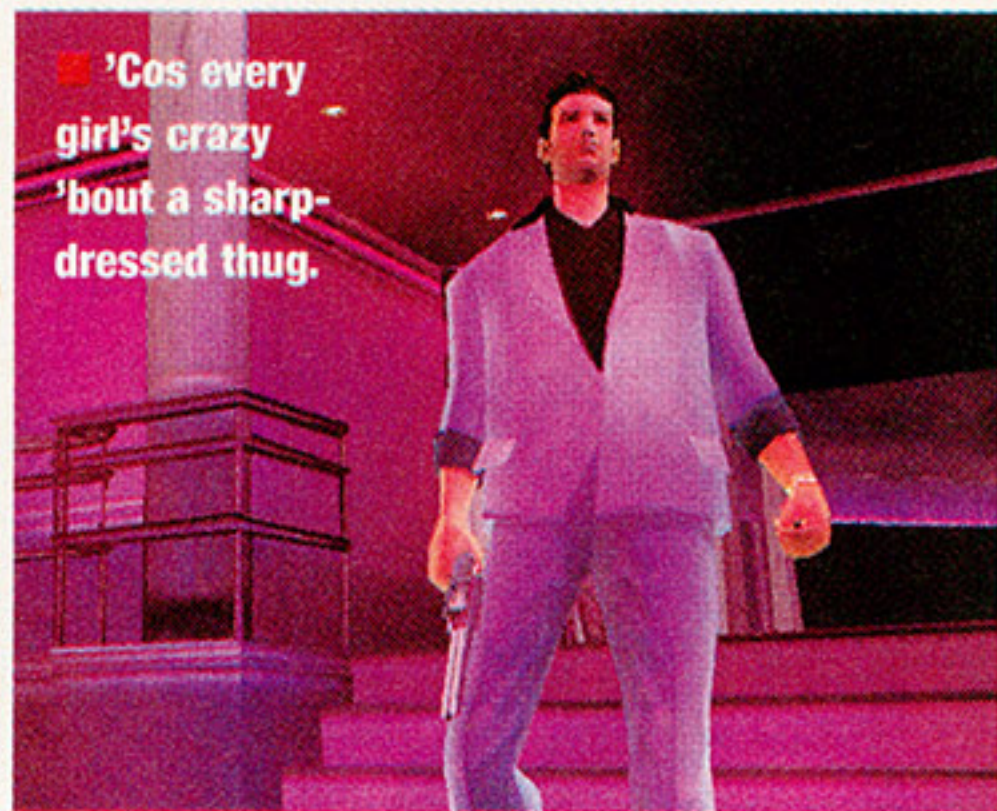


■ Fingers aren't the only part of *Vice City*'s character models that have been improved. Pwhear.

>> THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, MICROSOFT IS BUNDLING LUCASARTS' *STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS* AND THQ'S *TETRIS WORLDS* WITH THE XBOX SYSTEM (AND A TWO-MONTH TRIAL OFFER TO



■ Headin' out to the highway on a fat hog—a vehicle that wasn't in *GTA3*.



■ 'Cos every girl's crazy 'bout a sharp-dressed thug.



16:9 aspect ratio to fill widescreen televisions, and 5.1 surround sound, so you can hear exactly where those police sirens or cursing, machine-gun-toting thugs are coming from. And although the game comes with the same great soundtrack, now, you have the option of making your own; just pop in your favorite CD and save the tunes to your Xbox hard drive, then access them in-game as you please (a handy radio interface pops up whenever you're in a car). The new edition's

fully customizable controls include two preset options—Xbox and Classic. (The driving controls for the Xbox setting are simplified; the right analog stick controls acceleration, while the left one breaks and, when you're stopped, reverses.) All together, these changes make the *Vice City* side of the *Grand Theft Auto* two-pack an old dog with some nifty new tricks. Or maybe better yet, a stolen car with a fresh coat of paint. 🚗

—Greg Orlando



■ How you feel is much less important than how you look. And you look MAHvelous.



Photograph by Corbis

VICE CRITICISM

As criminal Tommy Vercetti, it's all in a day's work to, ahem, "deal" with prostitutes, divest certain members of society of their heads via well-placed shots from a sniper rifle, carjack all manner of vehicles, and then use said vehicles to dispatch rough justice via a drive-by shooting. So it's no surprise that *GTA* is a beloved target of politicians. "Games like *Grand Theft Auto* are particularly troubling," says Presidential hopeful Joe Lieberman, "because they go beyond celebrating violence generally and actually reward players for engaging in organized crime, murdering innocent people, and other forms of perverse, antisocial behavior." He's the reason Al Gore lost the gamers' vote back in '00.

TRY BOTH GAMES ON THE COMPANY'S XBOX LIVE ONLINE SERVICE) FOR THE MACHINE'S REGULAR \$179.99 PRICE.... >>

GET STOKED!

"Forget Counter-Strike: Gauntlet is still the best multi-player game ever!"

Simon Monk
Editor In Chief
Stuff Magazine



OVER 20
ARCADE
CLASSICS!



MIDWAY

PlayStation 2



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press start



FIRST LOOK: PLAGUE OF DARKNESS

Bring out your dead for Namco's killer title

A strange, rolling fog leaves awful things in its wake: decapitated bodies splayed over arcane diagrams, heads skewered on stakes, and slaving survivors wrought with unholy disease. So opens *Plague of Darkness*, a PS2 and Xbox action game (due summer 2004) in which bloody hack-and-slash meets bloodier survival-horror. You play as



■ "Off with their heads!" You'll hack plenty of limbs to stop the *Plague* from spreading.

Templar Knight initiate Duran, whose journey to meet his father is interrupted when the ungodly haze overwhelms his ship. Then, the carnage—and your quest to stop it—begins.

Hefting what looks like the quintessential broadsword, you approach your plague-ridden shipmates with the practical philosophy of live and let die. Your grotesque, bubo-ridden foes can be hewn with nearly a dozen combination attacks and deathblows—torsos rent and limbs torn asunder by circular power swings, overhead strikes, and mighty shield smashes (they're not just for defense anymore).

"The game is set in [the Dark Ages], a deadly and demonic time, and we've tailored aspects throughout to carry the same feeling" says Producer Jon Kromrey. "In addition to head-lobbing and blood

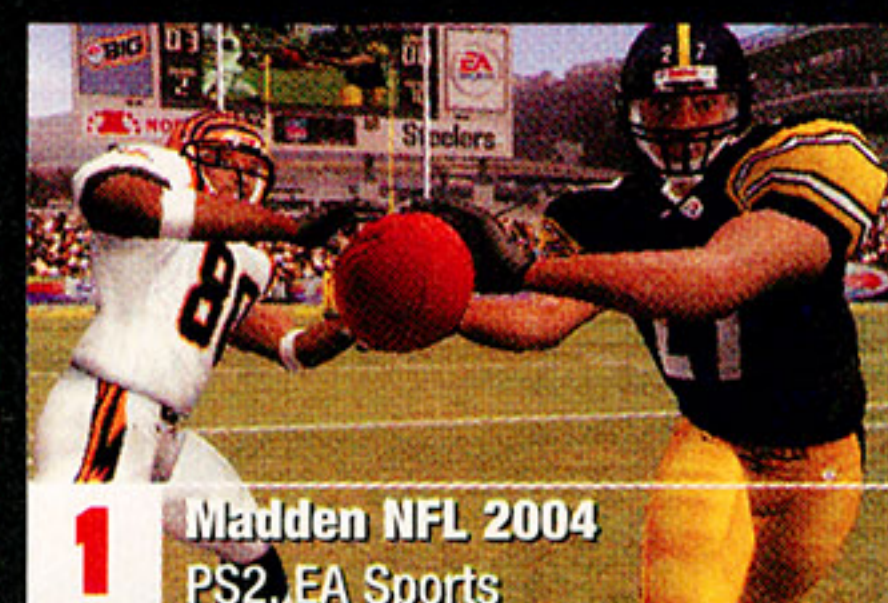
spraying, we're supporting multiple ways to chop up enemies." From these first crimson-tinged screens, the adherence to the two Ds mentioned above is readily apparent. In addition to meaty sword slashes, ranged weapons such as crossbows and knives find their way into the skulls of enemies, with magic spells completing the fantasy arsenal.

While this berserker take on survival-horror seems to be the essence of the game, the powers of ancient Tarot cards supplement the dark formula with a bit of customization. Rather than predict Duran's future with startling accuracy (or offer him misleading love advice), they'll increase his attacks and defense. Rare golden cards hold the power to unbind certain secrets online, but the developer isn't willing to spill all of its guts about that just yet. **A** —Justin Speer



CHARTS

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES
FOR AUGUST 2003



1 Madden NFL 2004
PS2, EA Sports

2 Madden NFL 2004
Xbox, EA Sports

3 Soul Calibur II
GC, Namco

4 Soul Calibur II
Xbox, Namco

5 Silent Hill 3
PS2, Konami

6 NCAA Football 2004
PS2, EA Sports

7 Soul Calibur II
PS2, Namco

8 Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon:
Island Thunder Xbox, Ubisoft

9 Star Wars: Knights of the Old
Republic Xbox, LucasArts

10 Grand Theft Auto 3
PS2, Rockstar

TOP 10 GAME RENTALS
FOR THE WEEK ENDING 9/14/03

BLOCKBUSTER



1 Madden NFL Football 2004
PS2, EA Sports

2 Soul Calibur II
PS2, Namco

3 Soul Calibur II
GC, Namco

4 Soul Calibur II
Xbox, Namco

5 NCAA Football 2004
PS2, EA Sports

6 Madden NFL 2004
Xbox, EA Sports

7 Midnight Club II
PS2, Rockstar

8 F-Zero GX
GC, Nintendo

9 Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour
GC, Nintendo

10 Enter the Matrix
PS2, Atari

LI'L PREVIEWS: FROM JAPAN, WITH LOVE

WILD ARMS ALTER CODE: F

PS2 • Sony CEA • TBA — Calling *Alter Code: F* a remake of the original *Wild Arms* Old West RPG would hurt Sony's feelings.



It's far more than a simple rehash: everything's now in 3D, with a reworked story (complete with voices). Sony currently has no plans for a U.S. release, but we expect it to come eventually.

DRIFT RACER: KAIDO BATTLE

PS2 • Sammy Studios • February 2004 — Drift on the highway and you might get arrested; chances are you're either drunk or asleep. Drift elegantly around twisty mountain roads using one of the 150 cars in *Kaido Battle*, though, and you're a studly racing champ. Strange how that works sometimes.



>> NINTENDO'S PLANT-LIFE MANAGEMENT SIM SEQUEL *PIKMIN 2*, ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED TO SHIP FOR THE GAMECUBE THIS FALL, HAS BEEN DELAYED UNTIL EARLY NEXT YEAR....>>



LET THE GAMES BEGIN JANUARY 2004
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BLAST FROM THE PAST

Love the '80s? Travel back to the early days of videogames at the **Classic Gaming Expo**

If you grew up gaming, the pictures on the next two pages probably bring back memories of Christmas mornings, one-button controllers, and that TV/GAME switch on the back of your old Zenith. But shake yourself outta that flashback—these aren't snapshots from those bygone days. They're from the 2003 Classic Gaming Expo, a weekend event held each summer in Las Vegas where collectors, vendors, and fans of older games (mostly pre-Nintendo, before 1986 or so) congregate. Missed this year's show? No worries, you can tag along with us:

Day One

8:45 a.m. — Escalator to Heaven

Coming up to the convention area of the hotel hosting the Expo, you see two lines of nostalgic gamers stretching back as far as the eye can see. Many proudly sport **vintage gaming T-shirts (1)** so worn out, they probably accompanied their owners through puberty.

9:00 a.m. — Let the Games Begin

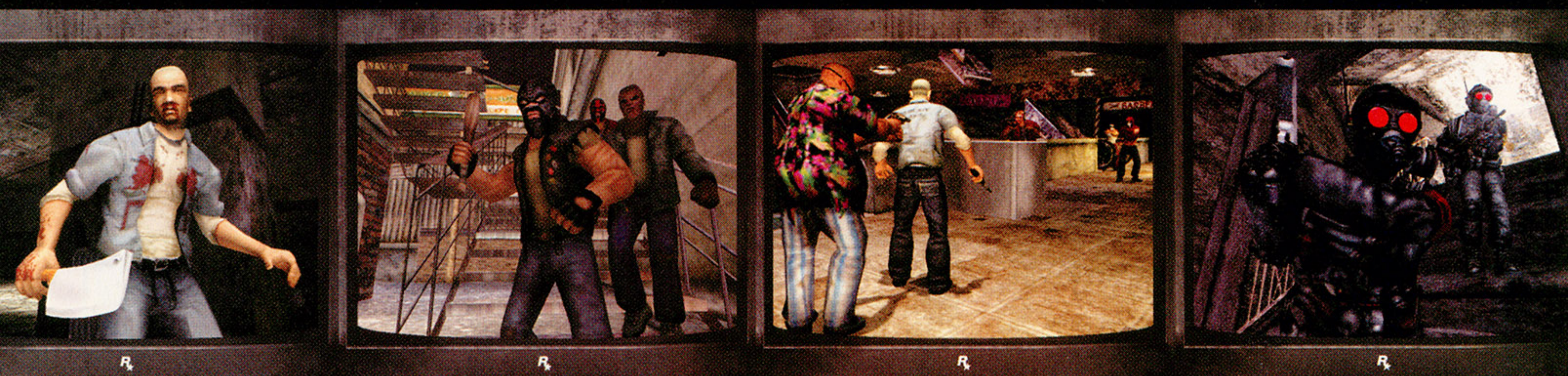
The doors open and a flood of anxious attendees wash over the **dealer tables (2)** inside the Expo's inner sanctuary. The more rabid among the geeks have their attack plan set—they immediately make a beeline for the booths selling **mega-rare wares (3)** for every system from the Atari 2600 to the 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System at prices only a collector could love (\$80 for NES *Solitaire*? No thank you!). Other expensive temptations include the **X-rated Atari 2600 cart *Beat 'Em and Eat 'Em* (4, middle of the bottom row)** and a **\$500 *Pac-Man* pinball machine (5)**. But bargains can be found, like one for sealed copies of the infamous *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* Atari 2600 game. Only \$15 for the game often blamed for the great '80s crash of the entire home videogame market? Not a bad price for a piece of gaming history.

10:00 a.m. — No Tokens Necessary

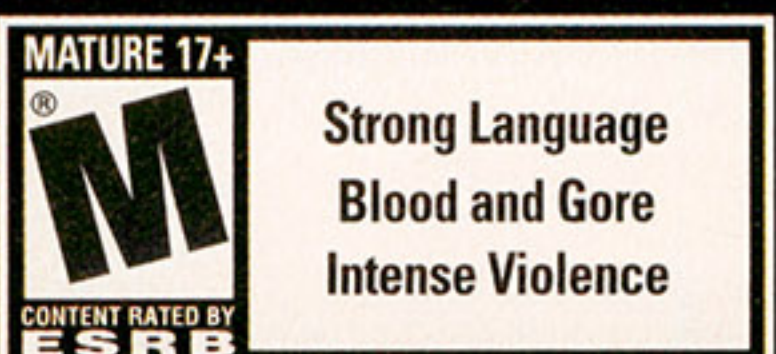
Take a break from the frothing capitalist action at the vendors' booths by strolling along to the **50-plus arcade machines (6)** that line the walls, all set to the bargain price of free. Here, thirty-somethings relive their glory days of putting the smack down on the prince of darkness in ➤



➤ NINTENDO AND DR. PEPPER ARE THROWING A HOLIDAY PROMOTION THAT COULD LAND YOU IN A FUTURE NINTENDO GAME. CHECK WWW.DRPEPPER.COM FOR FULL DETAILS.... ➤



WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/MANHUNT



PlayStation 2



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➤ *Satan's Hollow*, while **Pac-Man** champ **Billy Mitchell** attempts to topple a **Donkey Kong** high-score record (7) (unsuccessfully, with Billy getting angrier after each lost life). And if you aren't careful, you might just learn something...like **the couple that NARCs together, stays together** (8).

11:30 a.m. — The Legends Speak

After beating Borf in *Space Ace*, head over to the keynote area where you can listen to classic-game programmers talk about the good ol' days and the not-so-good new days (many of them are bitter after the final days of their last employer, 3DO). These panels are not only educational, but also a great way to get your coveted classic game signed by the guy who slaved over a hot assembler for weeks to create it—maybe you can even get **programmer Howard Scott Warshaw** to sign that copy of *E.T.* (9). Friends back home will be riddled with jealousy. (Or perhaps pity.)

5:00 p.m. — The Barter System

After the keynotes, it's time for **the swap meet** (10). Dozens of gaming pack rats come out of the woodwork and set **briefcases and boxes of cartridges** (11) on the floor, ready to trade stuff pulled directly from dusty attics and crawlspaces with other collectors. "I'll trade you the combo cart *Super Mario Bros.* and *Duck Hunt* for that mint-in-box original *Final Fantasy*! What? That's a good trade!"

Day Two

10:00 a.m. — Touring the Museum

Start the second day with a trip into the past via the **CGE Museum** (12); all kinds of memories and one-of-a-kind items lie beyond its pearly gates. Rare items on show include a prototype of **Sega's Genesis/32X hybrid console**, **Neptune** (13), and a store display for the **ancient vector-graphics all-in-one Vectrex system** (14), among other **assorted collectibles** (15), old and new. Kleptomaniacs not admitted.

11:00 a.m. — Activision Heroes

Most people may now know Activision as the company behind *Tony Hawk*, but classic collectors know it from the days of Atari 2600 hits like *Pitfall* and *Barnstorming*. Three of **Activision's old-school designers** (16)—Garry "Keystone Kapers" Kitchen, David "Pitfall!" Crane, and Steve "Megamania" Cartwright—host a panel and share stories of the old days. Afterward, they pose for pictures with gamers who grew up playing their titles.

1:00 p.m. — All About Atari

Everyone files back into the keynote room when Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari, speaks. This year he awes the crowd with tales of the company's rise (including one about the first *Pong* coin-op arcade machine that malfunctioned because it was overstuffed with quarters) and later took questions from the audience. Oh, and to the one guy who'd been waiting 20-odd years to ask Bushnell if Atari distributed other people's arcade games because he bought a machine in 1979 with the company's name on it: No one cares.

4:00 p.m. — Game Over

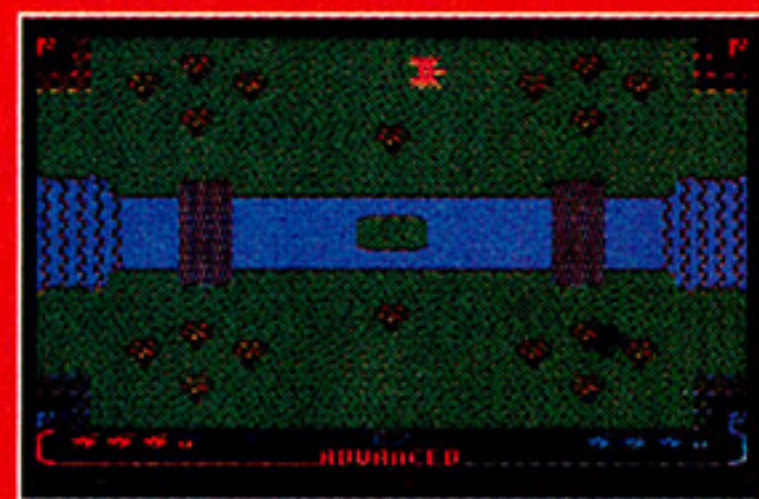
And before you can say "Colecovision *Smurf*," it's all over. We didn't even have time to tell you about the raffles, classic-gaming Jeopardy, gaming cable channel G4 shooting footage, and a whole list of other warm and fuzzy memories. Guess that'll have to wait for next year. 🐉

—Chris Johnston

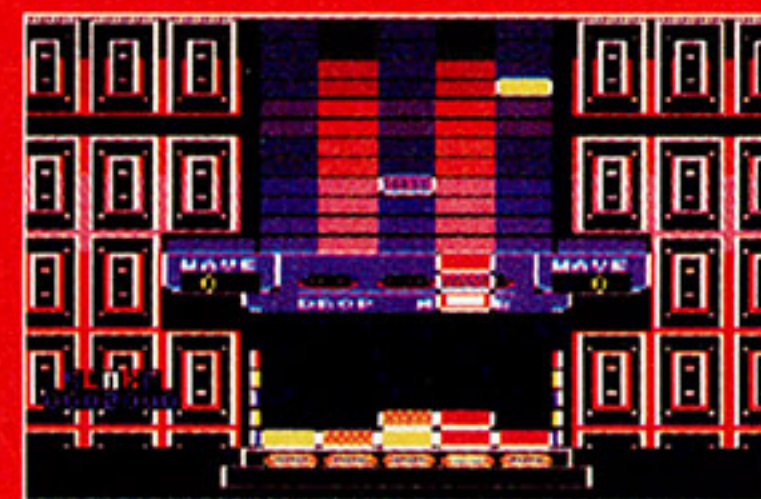


New games for classic systems

Every year at the Classic Gaming Expo, a few new games for classic systems are released by dedicated fans and small upstarts. Here's the cream of this year's crop and where you can find them:



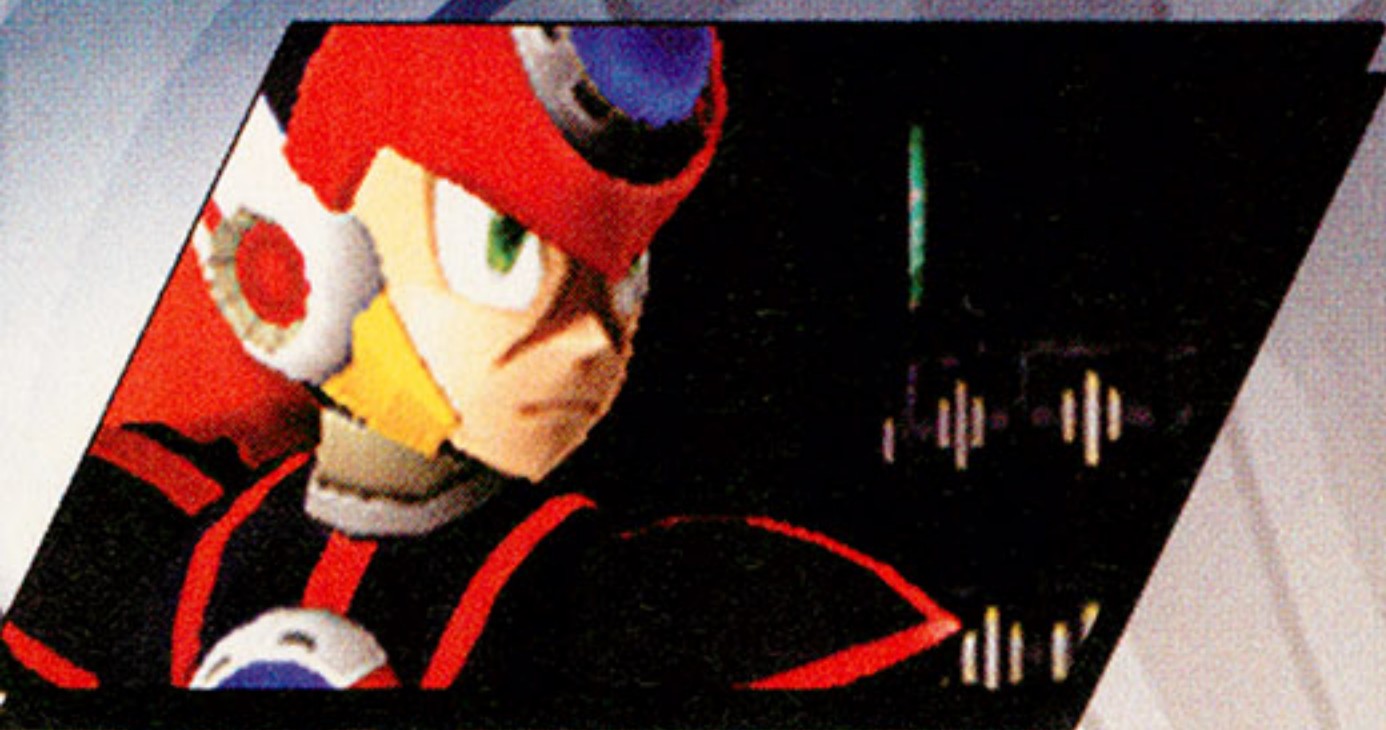
■ **Combat 2 Advance (Atari 5200)**
An update of the original plane- and tank-warfare title *Combat* [the pack-in game for Atari's 2600 system], with better graphics and sound. Available from atari2600.com



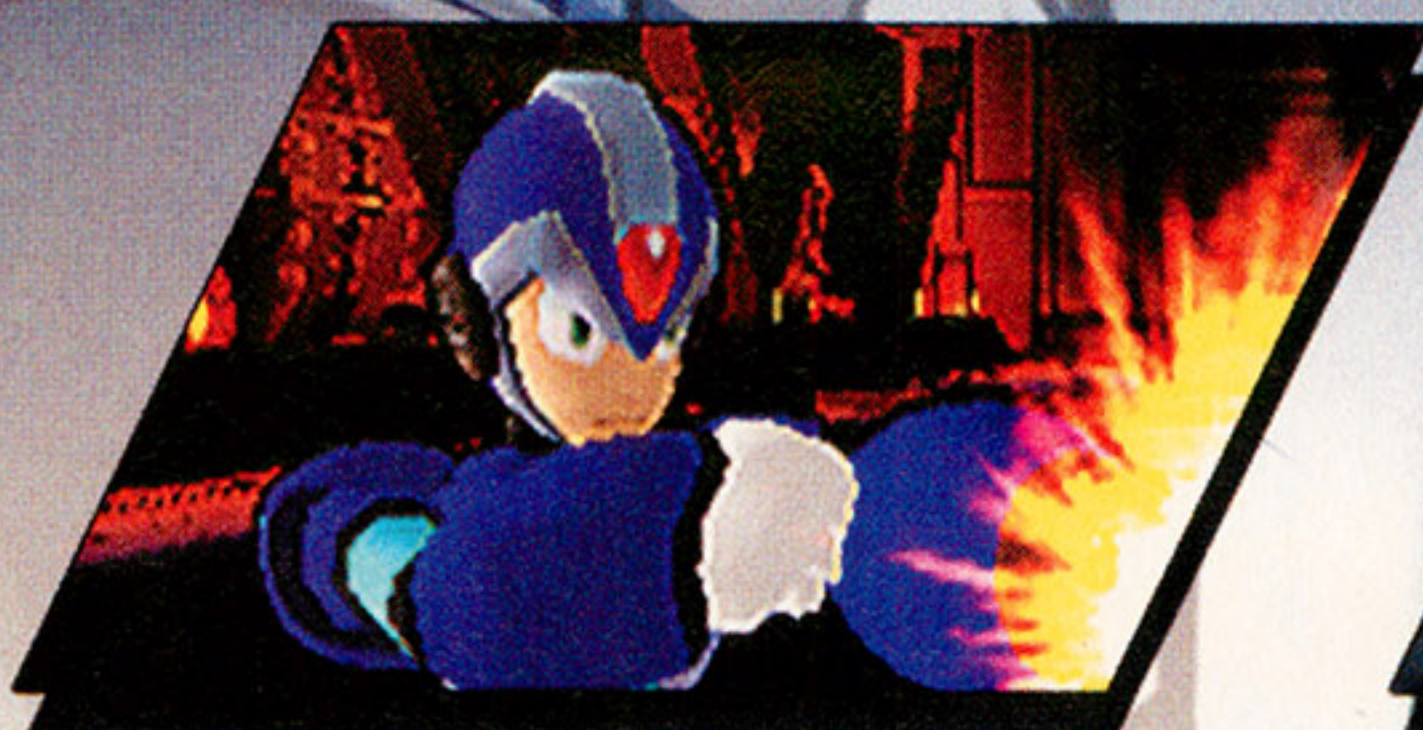
■ **KLAX (Atari 5200)**
Atari's old arcade puzzle game was released for a lot of different systems, but never the Atari 5200...until now! It even includes that sexy voice. Available from atari2600.com



■ **Adventure II (Atari 5200)**
This sequel to the much-loved early '80s 2600 game where you played a key-gatherin', dragon-fightin'...square was shown in demo form. More info available at nwcge.org



INTRODUCING A BRAND NEW
PLAYABLE CHARACTER: AXL



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MIX OF 2D & 3D ACTION

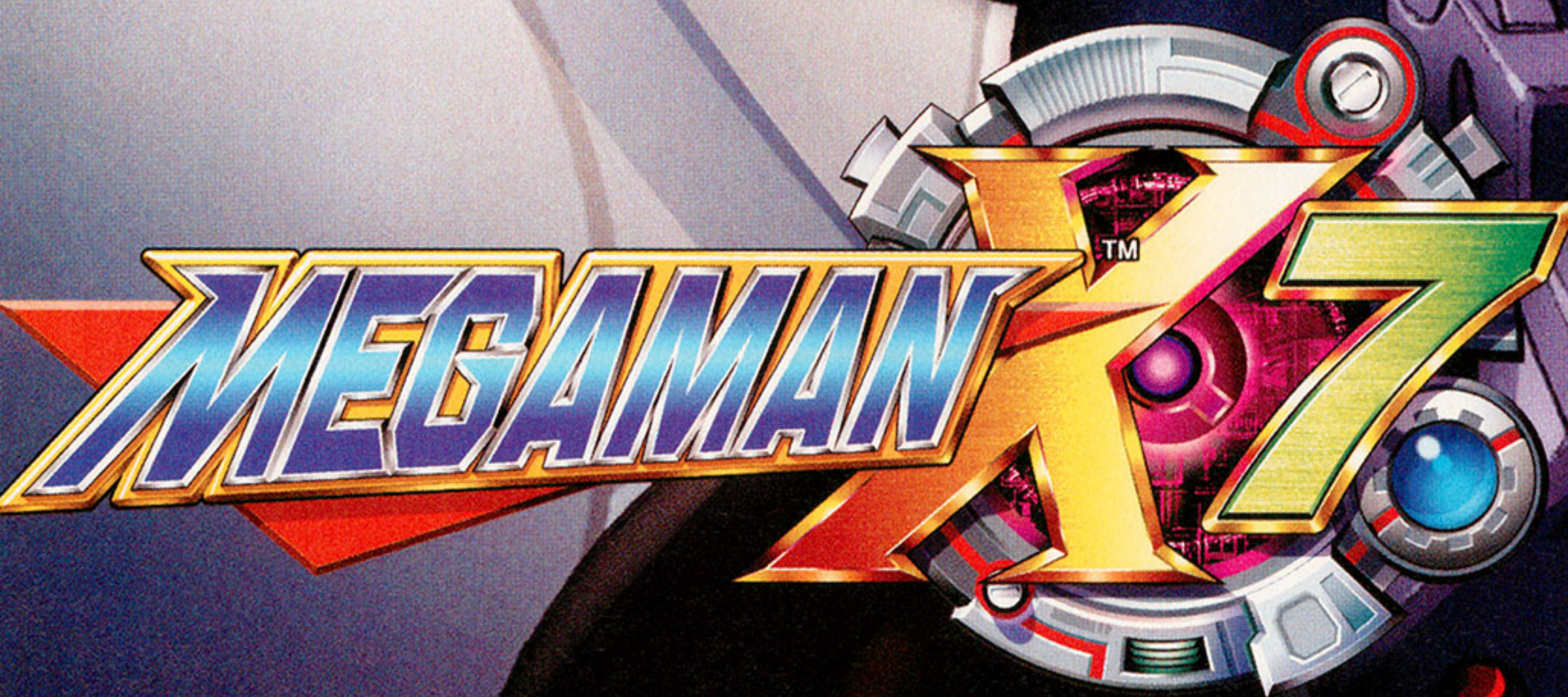


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MEGA MAN X EXPLODES ONTO THE PlayStation®2



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THE Hobbit™

THE PRELUDE TO THE LORD OF THE RINGS™



Violence
Comic Mischief



PlayStation 2

GAME BOY ADVANCE

THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME BECKONS

ENGAGE IN HAIR-
RAISING COMBAT

SOLVE MIND-
BENDING PUZZLES

EXPLORE MIDDLE-EARTH

Long ago, the Lonely Mountain trembled as the Dragon Smaug destroyed the Dwarf-kingdom in fire and rage. Now, the Dwarves set out upon an epic quest to reclaim their stolen treasures. And I, Gandalf the wizard, send with them the most unlikely of heroes: you, Bilbo Baggins of the Shire.



OFFICIAL GAME

BASED ON THE LITERARY WORKS OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN

WELCOME TO MIDDLE-EARTH

thehobbit.sierra.com

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press start



Pearl Harbor's exploding. The brave soul running in front of you—the one desperately attempting to flee from the innards of a ship that's rocking like a Pearl Jam concert minus Eddie Vedder and plus 100 percent more Japanese bombs—just got electrocuted on some exposed wiring and is doing a death-throw jitterbug. It's Sunday, but you may live to remember it as a day of infamy.

Welcome to the first day of your life in *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, the WWII-based first-person shooter set to storm PlayStation

2, Xbox, and GameCube this November. Escape from the *USS California*, and the latest game in the *Medal of Honor* series begins in earnest. As Marine Joe Griffin, you must fight your way out of Pearl Harbor, manning anti-aircraft guns as Japanese Zeros streak across smoke-filled skies. From there, *Rising Sun* takes players across the Pacific theater, with Griffin and his comrades staging a midnight raid on scenic Guadalcanal, trailing a fabled cache of gold in Burma, fighting a desperate battle on the bridge over the river Kwai, and wreaking

havoc on a Japanese aircraft carrier.

You can go it alone, or you can play with a comrade, courtesy of the series' new co-op mode. And though war is indeed hell, Electronic Arts is making its edition of perdition almost heavenly, packing it with more than 20 different weapons; approximately 300 different scripted events (key cinematic moments that sometimes offer alternate paths through a level); improved graphics, animations, and A.I. behaviors; and eight-player online multiplayer for the PS2 version.

the enemy awaits...



■ Soldiers in *Rising Sun* sometimes carry those nasty, multisectioned staves. Ouch.

"The Imperial Japanese army had a very different character and training than the combatants in Europe," *Rising Sun*'s lead designer Kevin Perry told us. "While the common stereotype of a suicidal kamikaze warrior is, of course, untrue, in general, the Japanese fought more tenaciously and with greater personal determination than most other armies. Every Japanese personal weapon had an enormous bayonet attachment, and many hours of training were spent on its use." In other words, expect more close-quarters fighting in *Rising Sun* than in last year's *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (PS2/Xbox/GC), pitting yourself against an enemy that is, as Perry says, "challenging at any range."



■ "Throw me the gigantic golden idol head, and I'll throw you the whip."



>> MORE THAN 1.6 MILLION COPIES OF NAMCO'S EXCELLENT FIGHTER *SOUL CALIBUR II* WERE SHIPPED ON DAY ONE FOR PS2, XBOX, AND GC, MAKING IT THE BIGGEST FIRST-DAY RELEASE IN



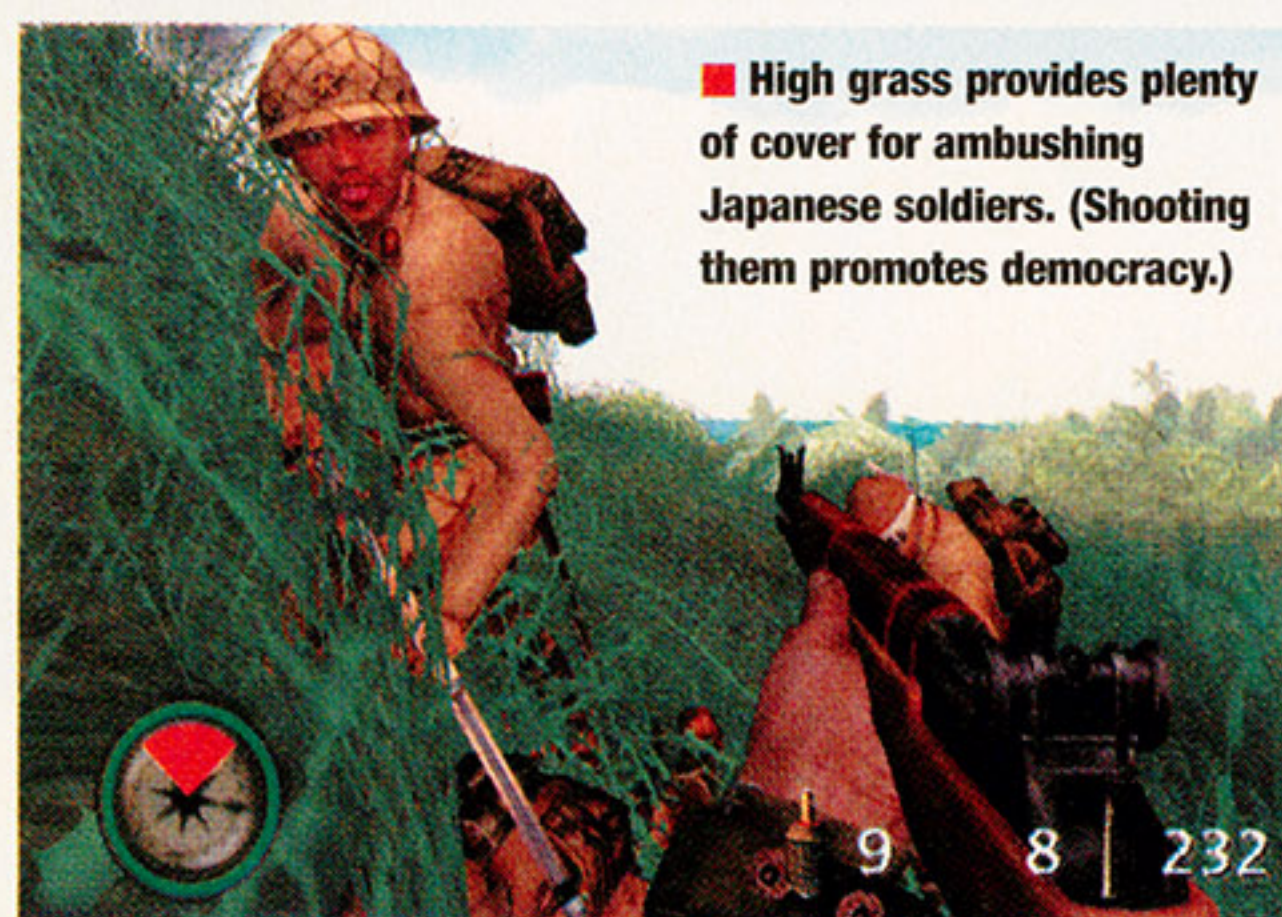
■ Not even Ben Affleck and Josh Hartnett (not shown) could turn the tide of battle at Pearl Harbor.

In motion, all the improvements fall neatly into place. Shoot an enemy in the leg, and he'll grab the wounded limb and hop. A newly implemented squad tactical awareness ensures enemy soldiers use covering fire to snake from position to position and attempt to flank you and yours. At times, the aforementioned scripted events force players to think as fast as they can shoot: Do they wait for squad support or rush in blindly to rescue a threatened prisoner of war? EA is making a statement here. This isn't simply *Medal of Honor: Frontline* set in the Pacific.

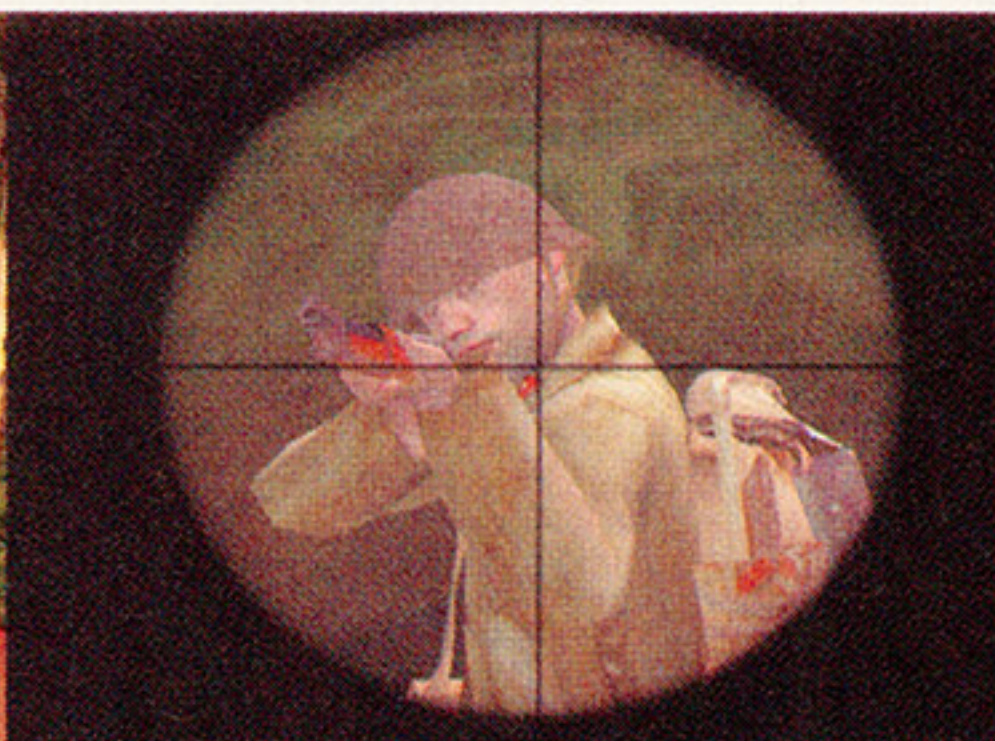


"The war in the Pacific was fought very differently from the war in Europe," says Kevin Perry, lead designer on *Rising Sun*. "The terrain of the war in the Pacific was generally quite forbidding. The few islands are covered in dense jungles and impenetrable swamps. While long vistas were occasionally found, in general, the fighting in the Pacific is very close and personal, [and] the balance of gameplay in *Rising Sun* reflects that."

—Greg Orlando

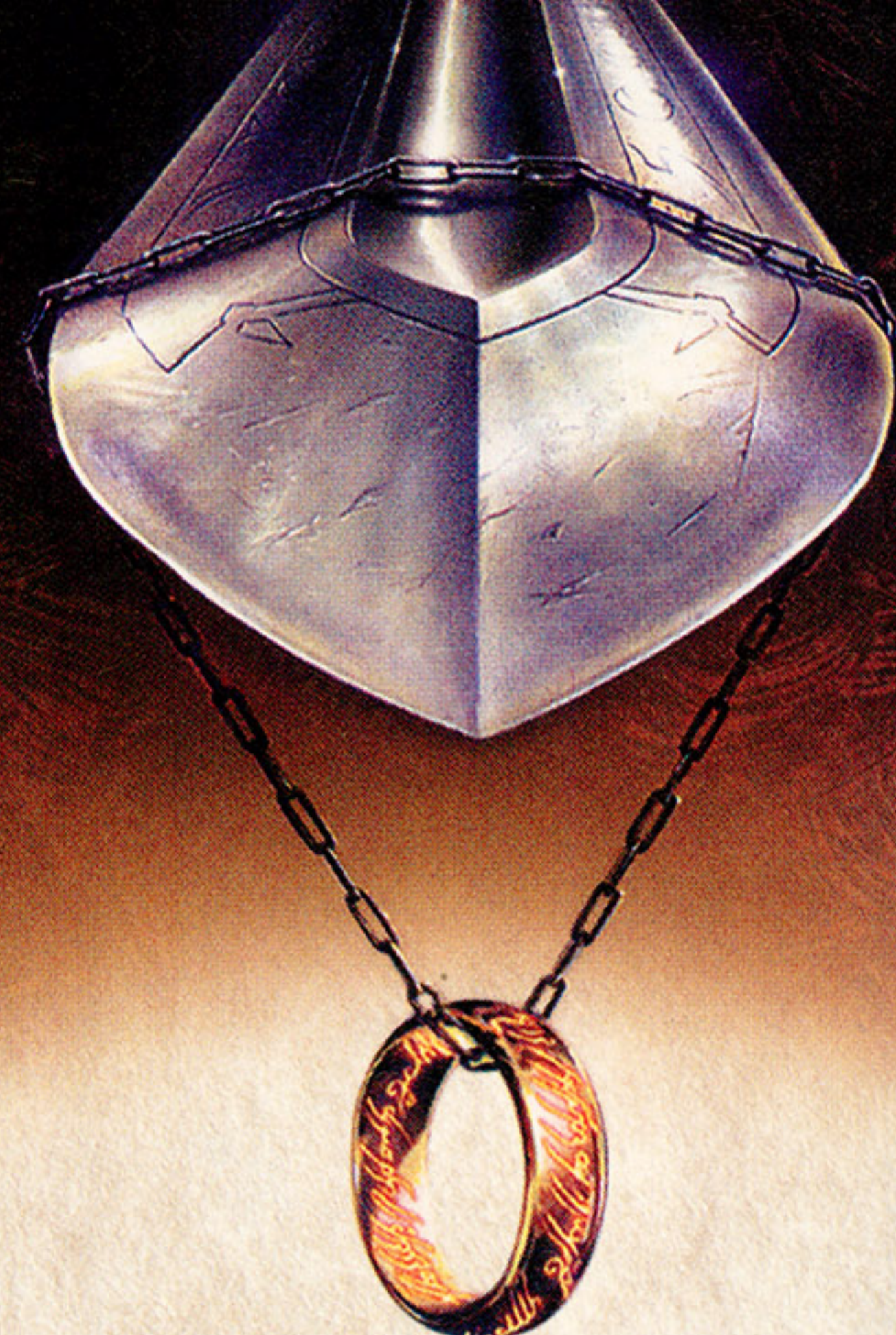


■ High grass provides plenty of cover for ambushing Japanese soldiers. (Shooting them promotes democracy.)

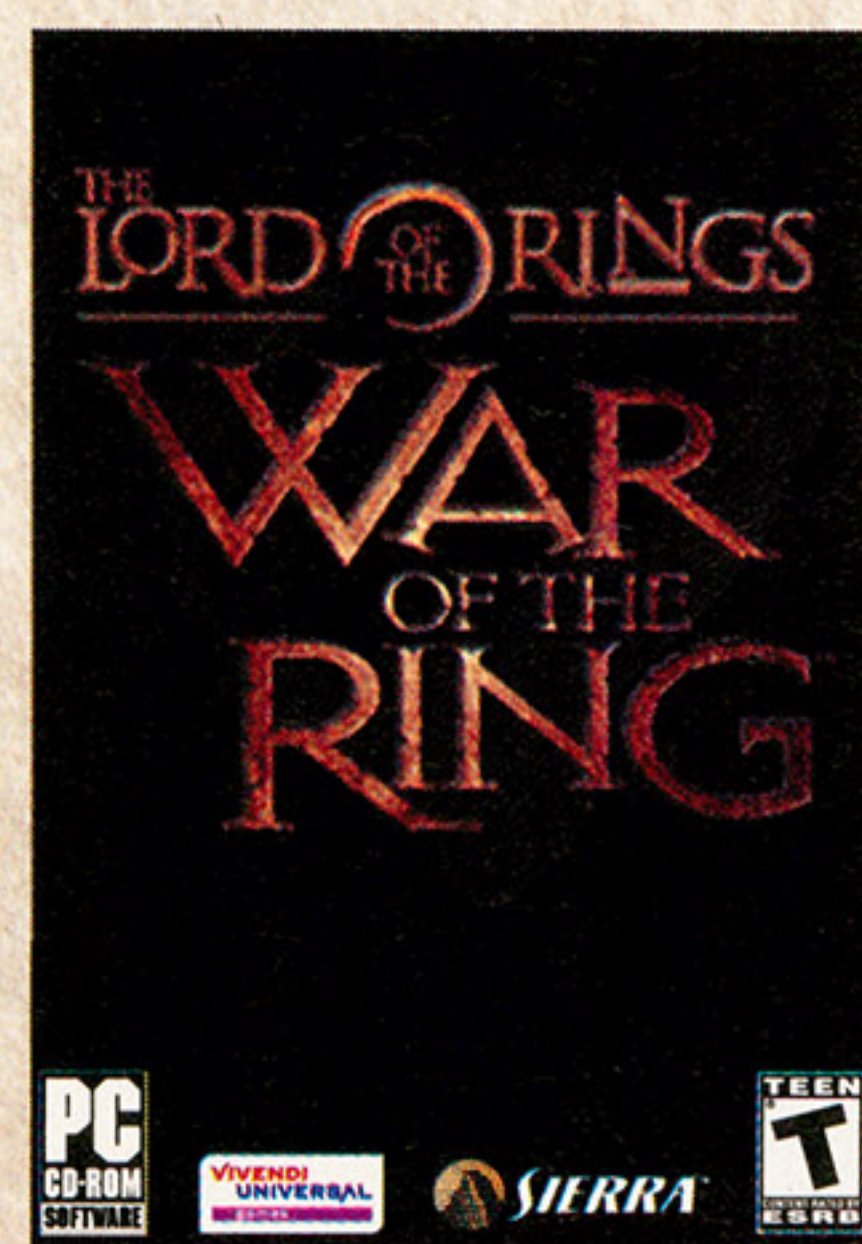


War Games

War is, of course, never a solitary affair. In addition to its nine-mission co-op Story mode, *Rising Sun* offers nine dedicated environments that can be torn up by two to four players. Multiplayer action allows for both deathmatch and team modes, and the PS2 version extends the carnage over the phone lines so that up to eight players can shoot it out online in deathmatch and team play.



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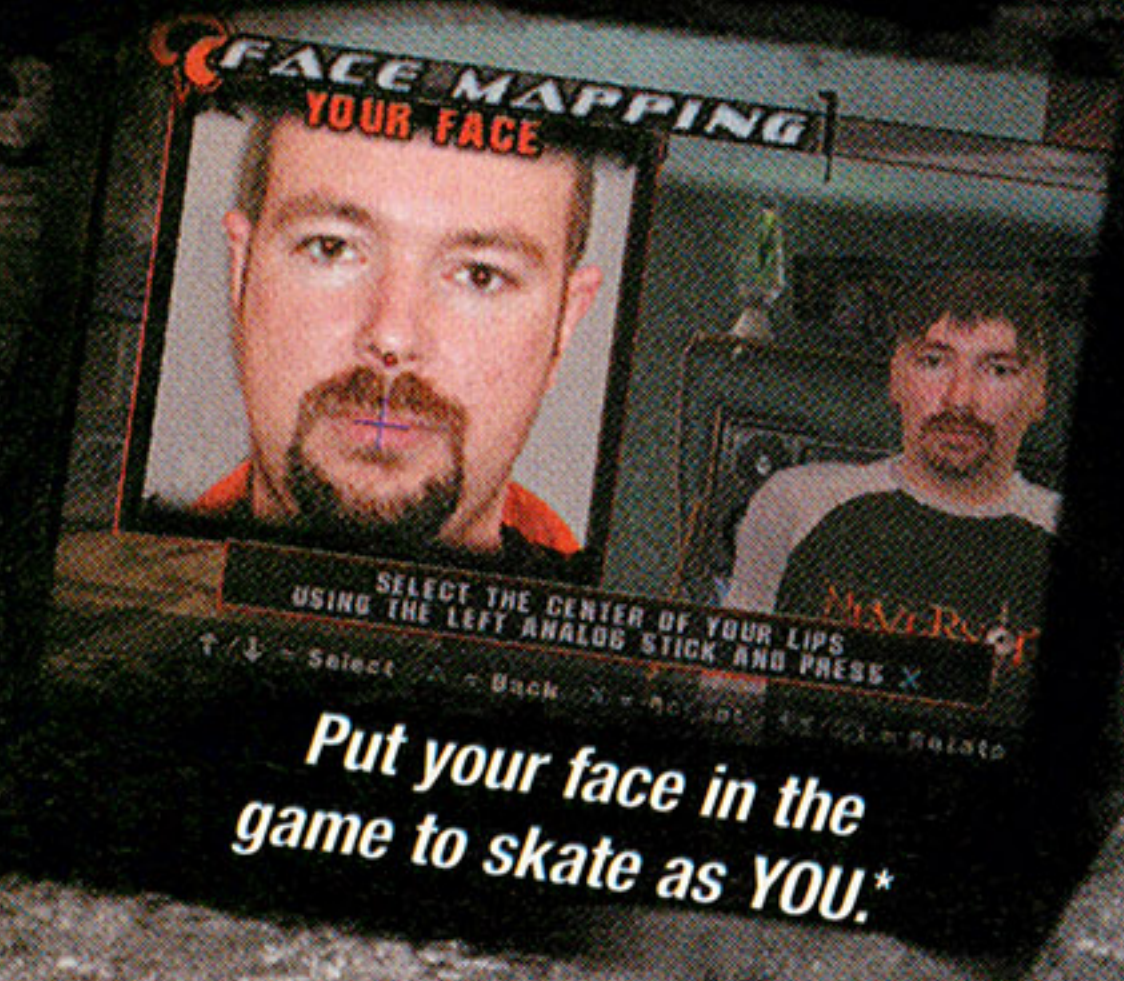
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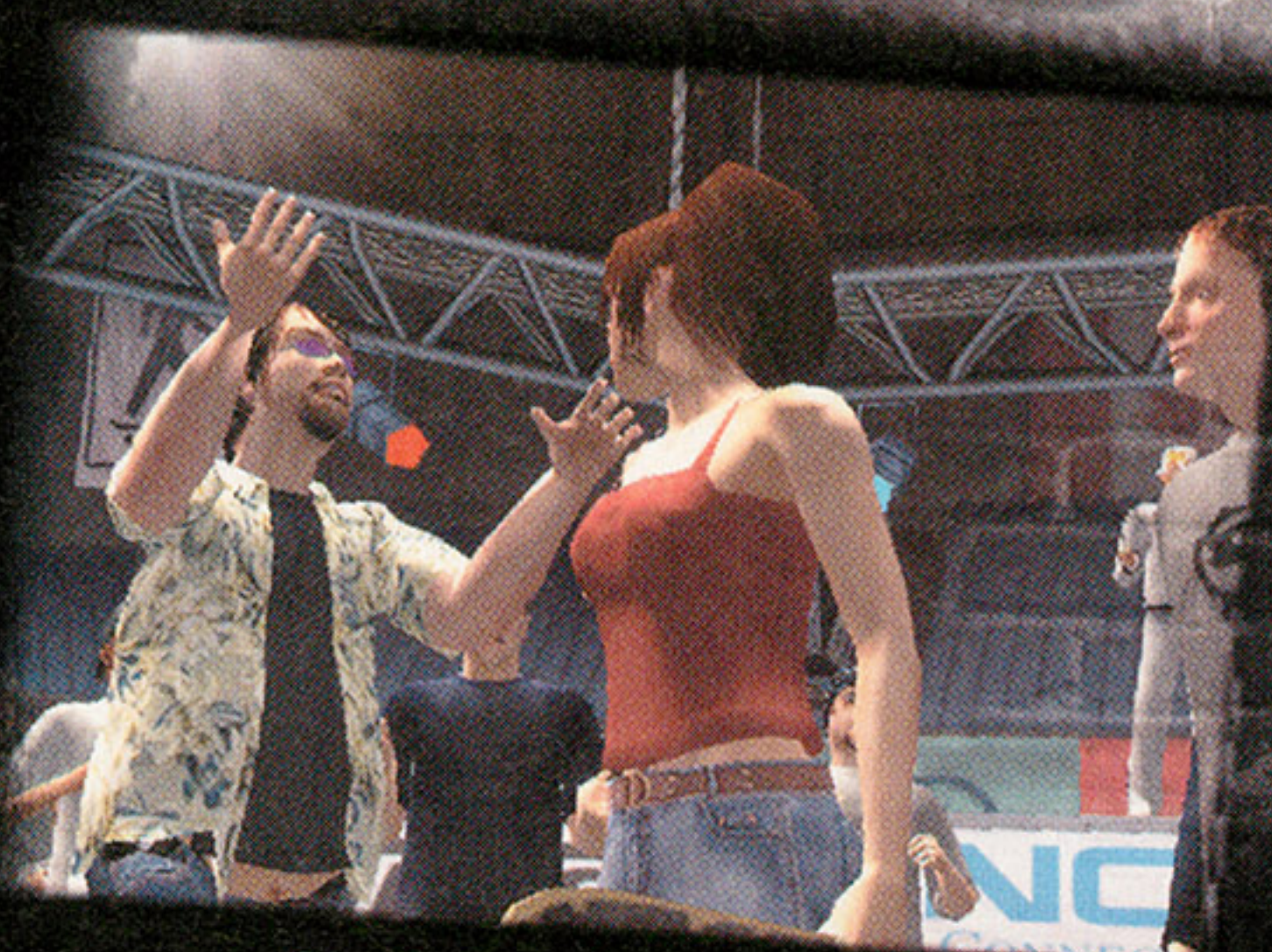
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ACTIVISION



press start



■ If cheaters are ruining your online *SOCOM* experience, form or join a clan to make sure you're gunnin' with the ones you trust.

ONLINE THIS MONTH

Discovering the joy of clans

Gaming online can be a harrowing experience if you don't know who you're playing with. That's why more and more folks are forming clans: groups that are serious about playing together online (and often competing against other teams for bragging rights). Active clan gatherings exist for *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs* on PS2; *Phantasy Star Online* on Xbox and GC; *Wolfenstein*, *Ghost Recon*, and *MechAssault* on Xbox; and just about any online-enabled sports title. All it takes is a Google search on the Web to find communities for your game du jour.

By joining a group that has regular matches, you can turn a title you'd normally mess around with for a week into a game you'll play for months. Witness the community that built up around Sony's *SOCOM*, which six months after its release was still attracting 50,000 users a day, with hundreds of clans spread across the country. "It's [just] more fun to game with your

friends," says 3x./se7en (not his real name) of *SOCOM* clan Triple_X. "You start to know what to expect from your teammates, and that can save your ass on the battlefield."

Clans also help you avoid cheaters. "*Phantasy Star Online* [players are] notorious for hacking and [duplicating ultrapowerful, rare] items," says Lady Deltina Wildfire (not her real name, either), founder of the Star Protectorate *PSO* Xbox guild. "I was sick of [it], and I thought it was about time for someone to do something about it." Rampant cheating also drove more players into *SOCOM* clans. "Now we just try and play in password-protected rooms or rooms of friends that we know are cool," 3x./se7en says.

Finding or forming a clan is pretty easy. You can start by hitting Internet gaming message boards or the sites listed below. To join a group, you'll often have to be approved by the all-powerful clan leader. Don't like what's out there? Then start your



■ Clan info shows up on www.xbox.com, so you can track what games are happening.

own club. "[All] it takes is two or three people to know each other personally to kick things off," says Chad Hermann (yes, that is his real name), webmaster general of socomclans.net. "People will look forward to meeting up with some online friends each and every day to have some good, clean fun." And isn't that what games are supposed to be about?

must-hit websites



socomclans.net — This is the place to check out the clan action for Sony's *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*. The site offers everything a *SOCOM* fan needs: rankings, forums, and other resources for fans of the tactical-squad-based shooter.



easportsonline.com — EA's online sports site tracks leaderboards for all of its Net-enabled PS2 titles, offers forums where users can hook up for games, and shows network-status information (like how many games were played in the last hour).



thecombatzone.net — This clan resource site offers rankings for several online Xbox games, including *Ghost Recon*, *Wolfenstein*, *Unreal Championship*, and *MechAssault*. The site also handles a lot of PC-based first-person shooters.

PC GAMING UPDATE

Hello, Halo



Halo is finally out for PC, and PC gamers can at last say to themselves, "This is the big deal?"

To be fair, once upon a time, playing *Halo* (or more accurately, not being able to play *Halo*) on PC actually was a big deal—PC gamers felt cheated when developer Bungie made it an Xbox-only title. But that time was roughly, oh, two years ago. Time has not been unkind to this shooter, but it hasn't exactly been an ally either.

When we game journalist types first got a gander at *Halo*, we were blown away, especially by the graphics. But that was even longer than two years ago, and while *Halo* is still a decent-looking game, it seems kind of flat when matched up against outstanding titles like *Tron 2.0* or even mediocre ones like *Elite Force II*. The higher resolutions available on PC are very nice, however, so when you compare the Xbox image to that on a PC running the latest hardware, the PC wins hands down.

The PC also wins big with controls. As slick as *Halo's* console control scheme is, it simply cannot compare with the mouse and keyboard combo that makes the personal computer the best platform for first-person shooters.

What else does the PC version have? Two new, very fun multiplayer modes—and bugs: One machine I played the game on had Master Chief hopping like a jackrabbit on crack. I guess he really did get a double dose of that wake-up drug. Driver updates didn't fix the problem, so I guess I'm stuck waiting for a patch.

And while I do that, I might as well just wait for *Half-Life 2*—which may be *Halo's* biggest hurdle. The fact is, run-of-the-mill PC shooters have surpassed *Halo* graphically, and more than a few can match it gameplay-wise. Some, like *Half-Life 2*, can probably blow it away. *Halo* may be the best console shooter ever, but time has marched on, leaving it somewhere in the front of the middle of the pack.

—Robert Coffey,
Computer Gaming World

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HIT SQUAD

We force five famous game makers to create the ultimate videogame

When one major-league game designer announces a new project, it's big news. Now imagine if a bunch of these guys collaborated. *EGM* made it happen. We asked five of the biggest names in gaming to write the recipe for a surefire smash hit. Each was given a piece of the game's puzzle—intro, character, play mechanics, enemies, and ending—to work on. After much debate and more than a few frenzied planning sessions, our crack team of experts came up with *The Persuader*, an imaginary adventure game not coming to a console near you (at least not yet). Here's the breakdown in the creators' words....

—Scott Steinberg

How it begins...

By Peter Molyneux, founder of Lionhead Studios

Latest Project: *Fable*

"A car speeds down a road with two vehicles in hot pursuit. Suddenly, the first car brakes to a halt and a man gets out. He looks tired and disheveled. Official FBI-agent-looking men get out of the two other cars and approach. Then, in a commanding voice, the driver of the first car (you, the player) instructs the first FBI agent to shoot the second agent dead. This game is about you being on the run but having the power—for short periods of time—to get anyone in the world to do anything you want. You are the Persuader."

Your character...

By Warren Spector, designer at Ion Storm

Latest Project: *Deus Ex: Invisible War*

"You're a being of godlike power—but it comes at a price. Each time you use your power, it hurts you physically and psychologically. There's also a balance in the universe, so that for each friend you create, an enemy seems to come into existence. And there are other, less-tangible costs to being a god: Because of your power, a variety of people, groups, organizations, criminal enterprises, and even governments want you on their side, and they won't balk at using force to accomplish their goals. Bottom line: The power to persuade is as much a curse as a blessing."

Your enemies...

By Scott Pease, producer at Neversoft

Latest Project: *Tony Hawk's Underground*

"Government officers won't mind executing you, but corporate agents will try to bring you back using non-lethal force. Masked members of the so-called Trinity Cult are your most dangerous opponents—they're too fanatical to be persuaded. Drug addicts and those lethally wounded are also immune to your powers. Animals cannot be controlled. You aren't unique, either—others gifted with similar abilities will also join the hunt. Thanks to regular TV broadcasts about your predicament, every pedestrian is also a potential threat. Drop your guard and you may be victimized by a regular Joe looking to become a local hero."

The gameplay...

By Dave Perry, president of Shiny Entertainment

Latest Project: *Enter the Matrix*

"To keep the game free-form, the Persuader will have several possible offensive and defensive mind tricks. They involve you either killing enemies by making them do themselves in or having someone else do it for you. Examples of prompting suicide include having someone leap off a cliff, impale themselves, feed themselves into a grinding machine, or walk into water while carrying a heavy weight. Some ways you could have enemies kill each other: Have them strangle one another, crush friends using a heavy or moving object, put poison in a buddy's food, or drown a presumed friend."



How it ends...

By Greg Thomas, founder of Visual Concepts

Latest Project: *ESPN NFL Football*

"As the game comes to a close, there are whispers of soldiers and bombers on the horizon. A battle is coming, and it will be fought by two minds at war. In the end you escape, powers intact and stronger than ever. But what lies ahead for you? How will you use your powers? And at what cost? You catch a woman eyeing your dirty clothes with contempt. You settle back in your seat and gaze outward as the Greyhound rolls anonymously along a stark interstate. Outside, the world and all its wickedness—all its wrongs waiting to be righted—stretches out before you. Roll credits."

Illustration by Chuck Ernst

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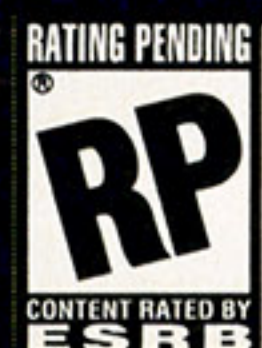
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Note: Rockstar will be following ESA guidelines for M rated games in the marketing of this game. This game contains violent language and behavior and may not be appropriate for persons under the age of 17. It is a comic interpretation of gangster activity and the story, names and incidents portrayed herein are fictitious. No identification or similarity to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is intended or should be inferred. Any resemblance is coincidental. The makers and publishers of this videogame do not in any way endorse, condone or encourage this kind of behavior.

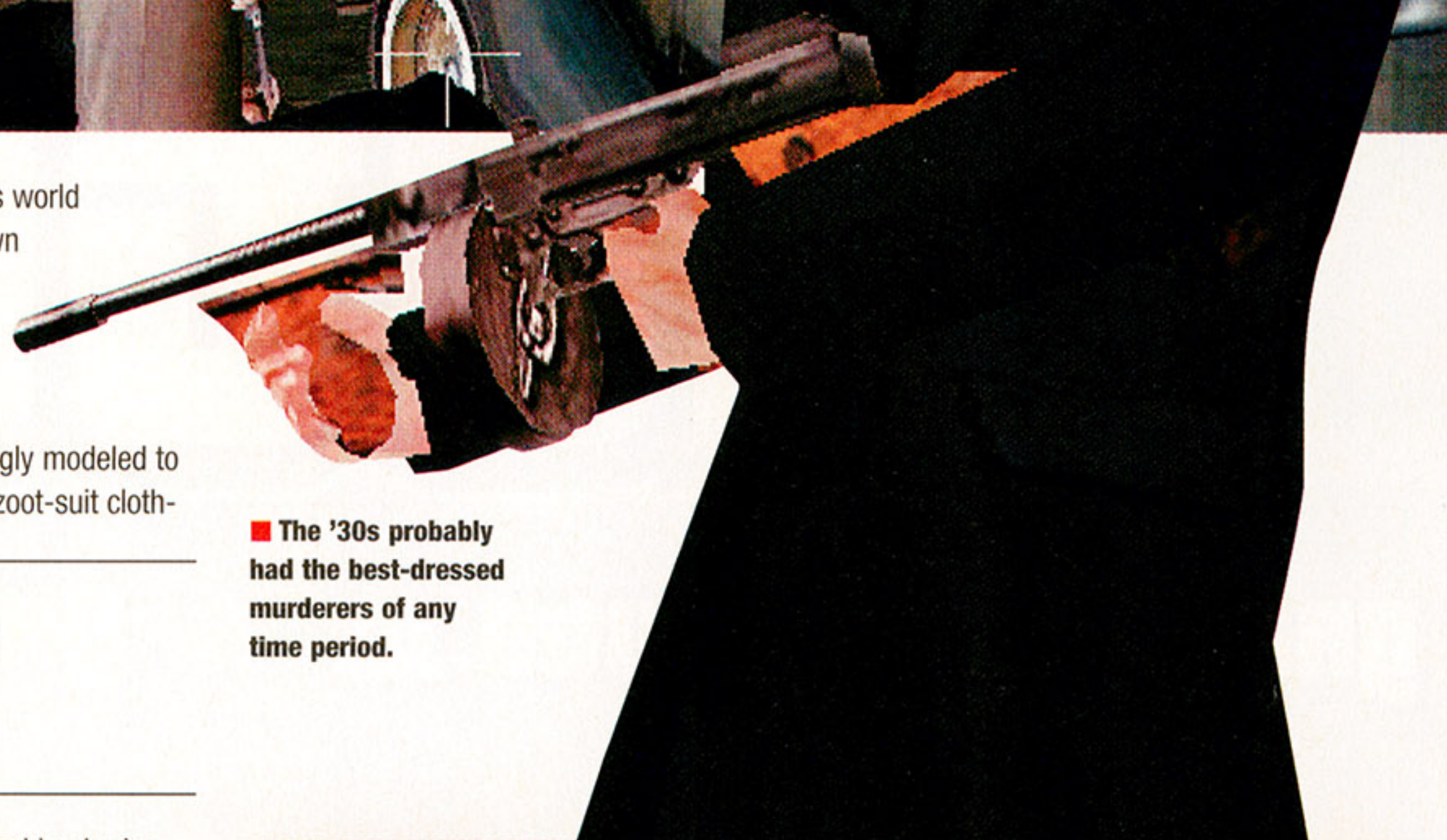
MURDER, INC.

Mafia's town may be Lost Heaven, but its residents are no angels



Merciless beatings, betrayals, and plenty of guns—such is the course of a typical day in Lost Heaven, a city wrapped in the intrigue of a 1930s Mafia power struggle. An unsuspecting cab driver named Tommy Angelo stumbles into the conflict, becomes an employee of the powerful Salieri family, and is forced to run errands for

But creating Lost Heaven's world wasn't as easy as sitting down and combining *The Godfather* with Rockstar's popular crime-game series. Nearly every artistic aspect of *Mafia* had to be painstakingly modeled to reflect the era, including the zoot-suit cloth-



■ The '30s probably had the best-dressed murderers of any time period.

Mafia looks and plays like a '30s prequel to Grand Theft Auto...

the family to help shift the balance of power. If this premise makes *Mafia* (due next January on PS2 and Xbox from publisher The Gathering) sound like a '30s prequel to *Grand Theft Auto*, that's fitting—because it plays like one, too.

ing style, art-deco interiors, and lumbering vehicles, which you'll drive on missions (à la *GTA*). "We spent a lot of time on the cars and were very much inspired by the cars of the era," says Gathering Development Director Luke Vernon. "We tried to make ►

don't sleep with the fishes



Tommy once had an ordinary life as a cab driver. Now that he's part of the Mafia, he has to worry about more than just a passenger barking directions from the backseat. Bullets might be constantly whizzing by his head, but fortunately, the game's levels have been designed so you can get through a few shoot-outs without a scratch by hiding behind strategically placed objects, such as benches, tables, or cars. Just make sure you spot these hideouts before the action heats up or you'll end up like Luca Brasi from *The Godfather*.



■ Wannabe gangster Tommy Angelo finishes a mission focusing on vehicular manslaughter.

>> KONAMI HAS INKED A DEAL WITH COMIC COMPANY IDW PUBLISHING TO CREATE A GAME BASED ON *CVO: COVERT VAMPIRIC OPERATIONS*, A SERIES ABOUT VAMPIRE CIA AGENTS.... >>



■ Are these good guys or bad guys? With the recent spree of crime games, we just don't know anymore.

► them [be] realistic as well as have the right kind of capabilities." Of course, the PC version (released last year) was criticized because the game's driving mechanics were *too* realistic, but traffic laws are a little more relaxed in the PS2 and Xbox editions. Freewheeling around like you're blind-drunk on cheap hooch *will* eventually draw out the cops, but thankfully you won't have to worry about tedious details like coming to a complete stop at most red lights.

As in *Grand Theft Auto*, driving is only half the fun in *Mafia*. There are dozens of action sequences involving tense shootouts in locations from a seemingly deserted gas station to the rooftops of Lost Heaven, with gunplay using historically accurate weapons. (So a Thompson won't be incredibly precise, but

its rapid-fire feature can be invaluable at times.) Those guns will see a lot of play over the course of the game's missions, though you'll often need more brainpower than firepower. For instance, in one stage, Tommy drops in on a funeral at a massive church being attended by dozens of members of another crime family. The objective of whacking all of the enemies is a simple one, but being fired at from nearly every direction makes it a little more difficult, especially if you only have access to a relatively weak weapon. But you can aim your pistol in on an opponent, put a slug right between his beady eyes, and then collect machine gun ammo off his body for use against his crowd of friends. Other missions don't involve such blatant violence. In fact, some parts of *Mafia*

test Tommy's skills as a thief by requiring him to steal cars and break into safes. He'll even act as a getaway driver in some stages.

All of these elements should place *Mafia* on *Grand Theft Auto* fans' hit lists, but will the game's early 20th-century setting give players an offer they can't refuse? "Sure, it's not contemporary," Vernon says. "But it's from an incredibly evocative period of American history." If you end up spouting '30s gangster slang to friends early next year, don't say you weren't warned. 🚗

—Giancarlo Varanini



**I can't drive
55! Literally!**

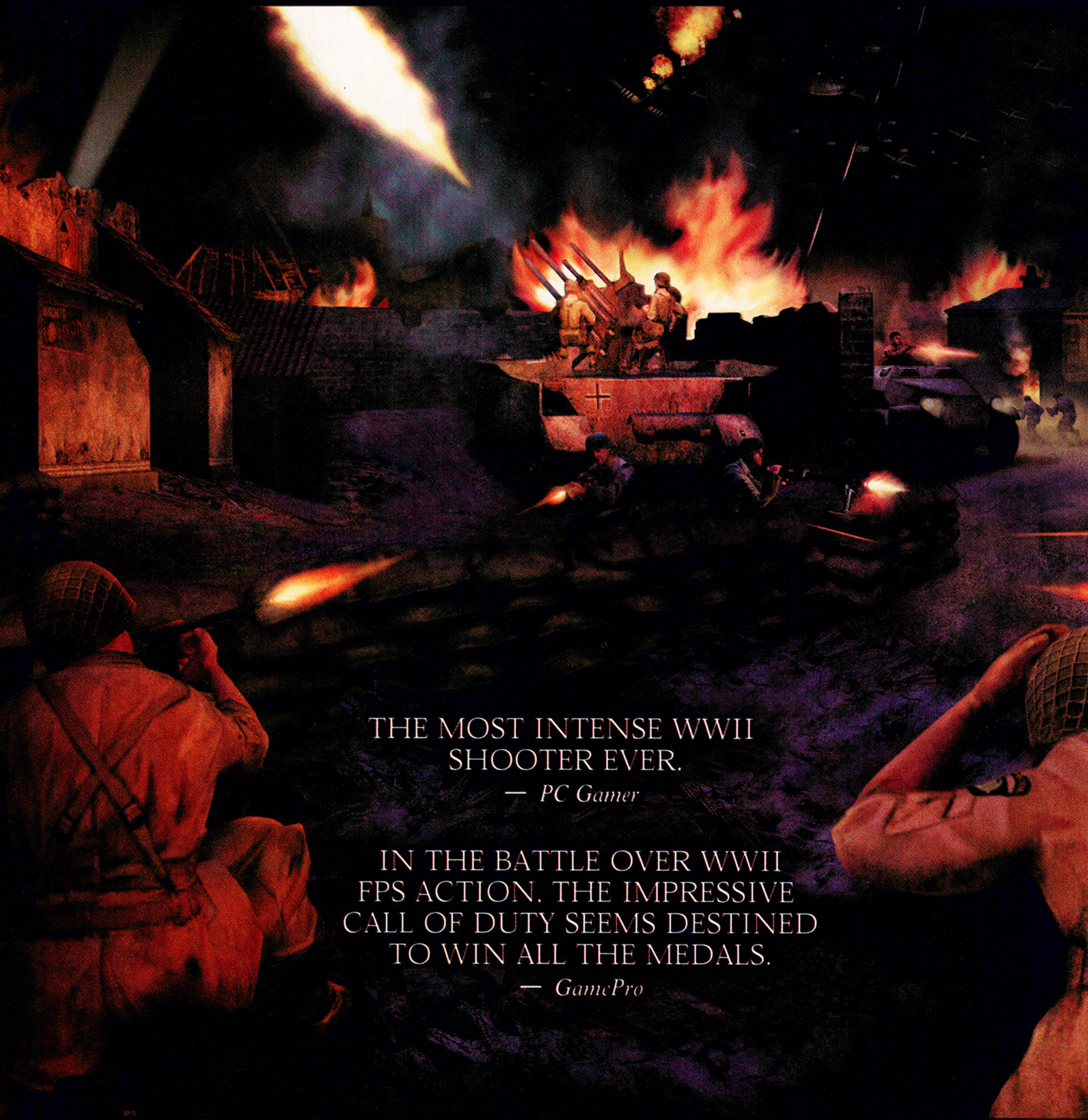


You can choose from a wide variety of vehicles in *Mafia*, ranging from sedans to trucks, but you'll quickly discover that none of them have the speed of modern-day cars. (Sometimes you'll feel like you can get out and run faster.) Fortunately, the vehicles' incredible durability enables them to withstand a hail of bullets and other sorts of vicious assaults for a reasonable amount of time. *Buhh-ding!*



■ Killers lurk around every corner—like newspaper boys, but with firearms.

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press start

THE RUMOR MILL

Gossip that's ready for primetime

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GONE DIGGING

What up, rumor fiends? Welcome once again to *The Quartermann's* monthly page of gossipization and speculation. Yours truly has a Ph.D. in rumorology and is ready to mine some of the choicest 24-karat nuggets you have ever laid eyes on. Before we begin, however, remember to point your comments to quartermann@ziffdavis.com and stow your carry-ons in the overhead bin. (They may shift during our flight.) —*The Q*



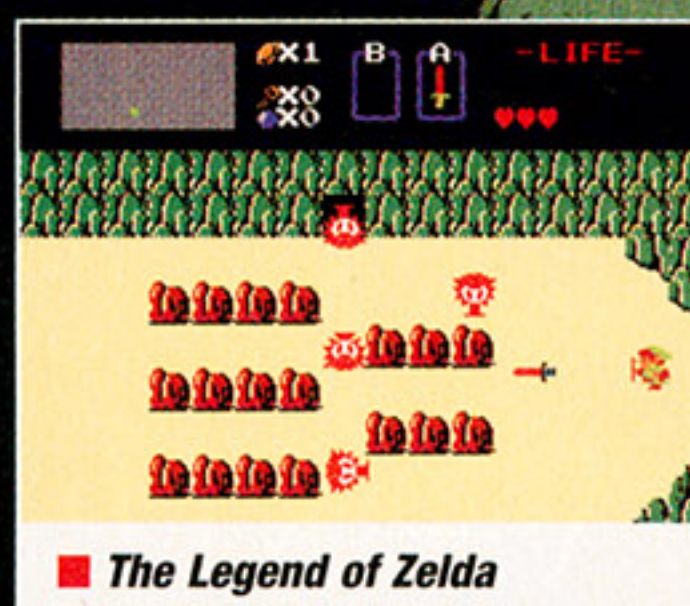
■ *Deception III* set the trap-setting standard.

believe it...or not?

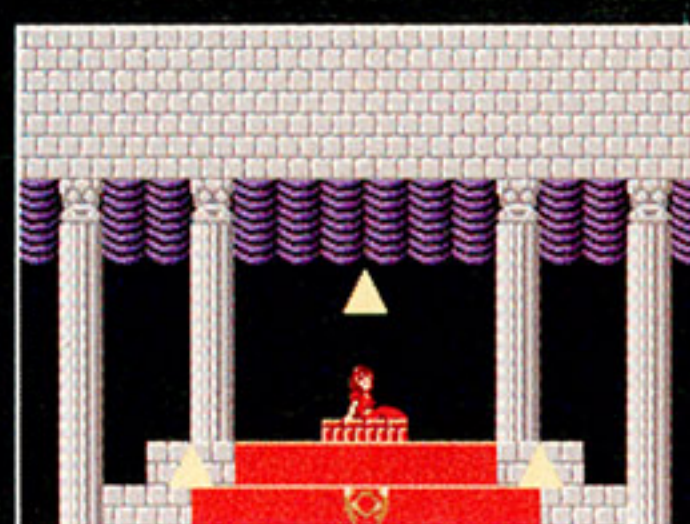
The Q tackles a rumor that's been goin' around and shows it who's boss.

What you heard: I read something about a *Zelda* compilation disc for GameCube, which supposedly has a bunch of games and a documentary on it. Could that be true?

The Q's sources say: Indeed, your master rumorator has heard this as well. Such a disc of wonderment is in the works and will be available this holiday season. It includes both NES *Zeldas* (*The Legend of* and *The Adventure of Link*), the remakes of *Ocarina of Time* and *Master Quest* that were offered with the *Wind Waker* preorder, and a documentary on the series. Word has it this disc will be available only with the purchase of a GameCube console, but...The Q certainly hopes that isn't the case. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to change my undershorts.



■ *The Legend of Zelda*



■ *The Adventure of Link*

PS3 to be PSP-compatible?

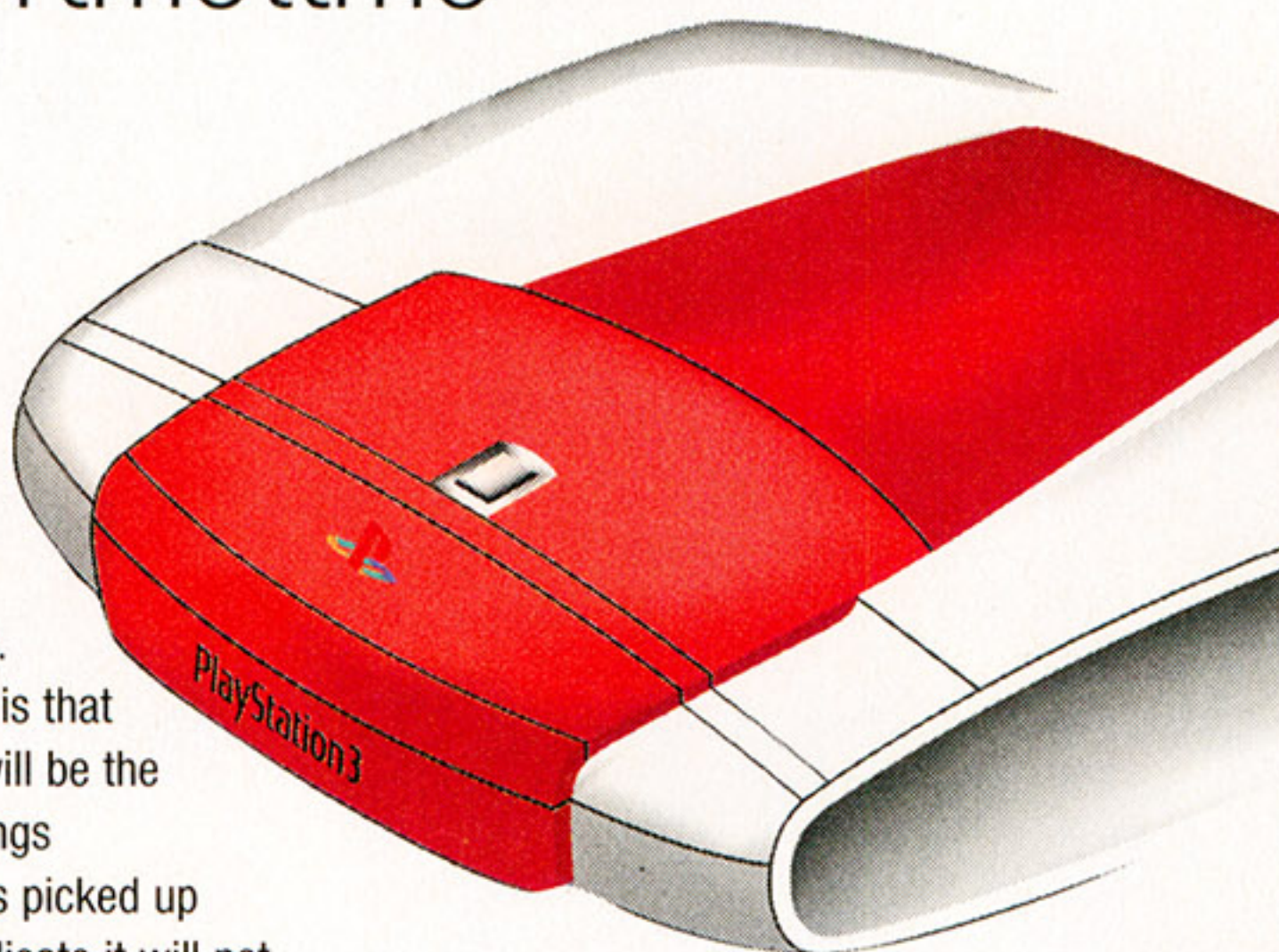
Let's kick things off with a real humdinger. By now, we all know that PlayStation 3 exists (it's shocking, I know). What you don't know is that if all goes well, PS3 will be the ultimate box of all things PlayStation. The Q has picked up transmissions that indicate it will not only be backward-compatible with both PlayStations 1 and 2 but will also include the ability to play portable PSP titles out of the box so that you can play at home as well as on the road. (Think Game Boy Player, but without having to spend an extra 50 bucks.) Now that's something to get excited about.

The long wait for PS3

Speaking of PS3, it seems this übermachine may not be here as soon as we all think. Sony has reportedly decided to wait and get the system out second or third, while Nintendo seems keen on having the first new machine out of the gate, with Microsoft's Xbox 2 close behind. So while work continues on PS3 and its first games are in the planning stages, don't get too hyped about it just yet.

Burning like an Emblem

Ever since sword-wielding combatants Roy and Marth appeared in Nintendo's GameCube brawler *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, we've all wanted a U.S. *Fire Emblem*. Now we have it (the just-released *Emblem* for GBA—see

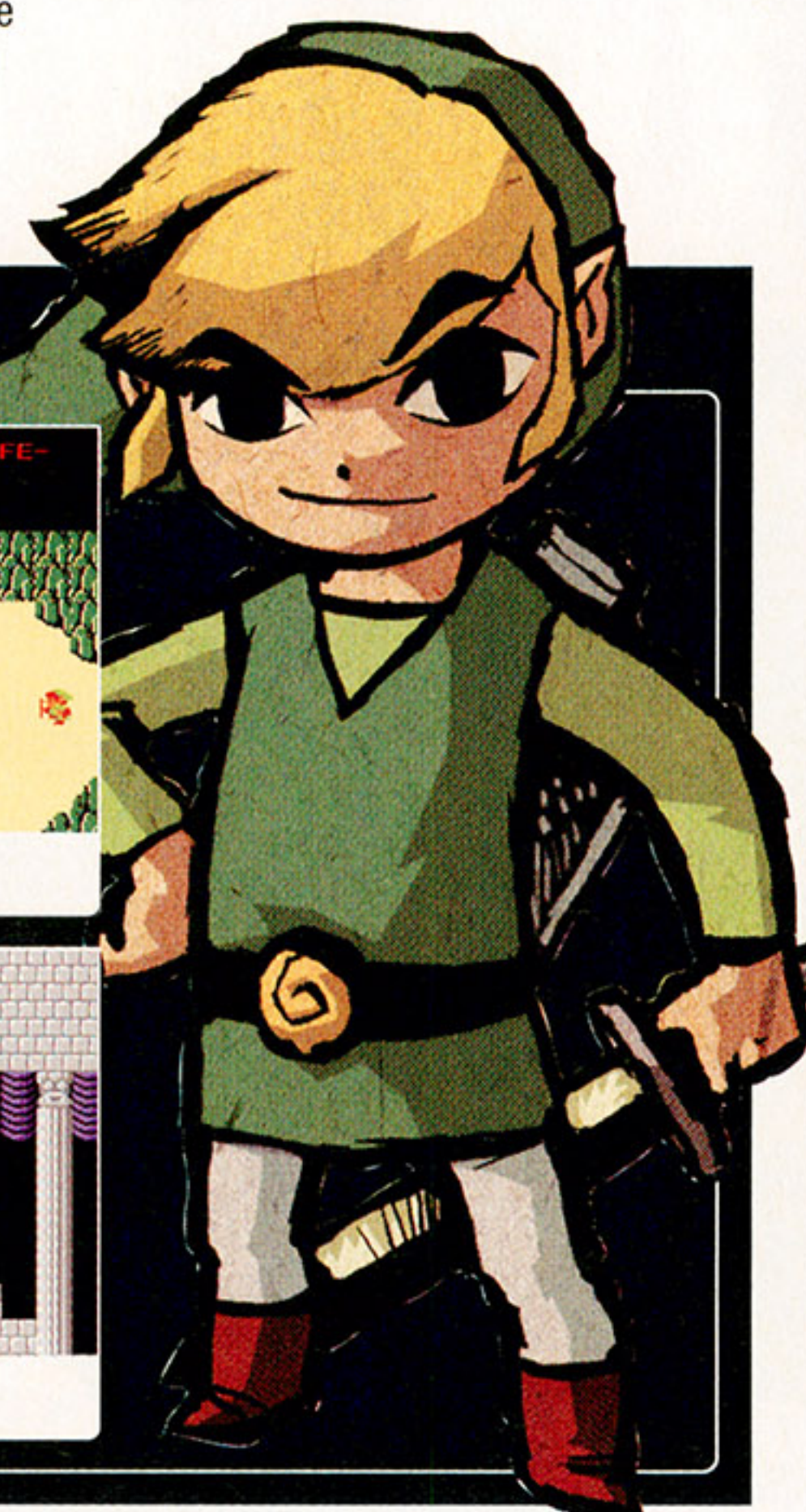


■ Our artist's rendition of PS3 might be wildly inaccurate, but we still like it.

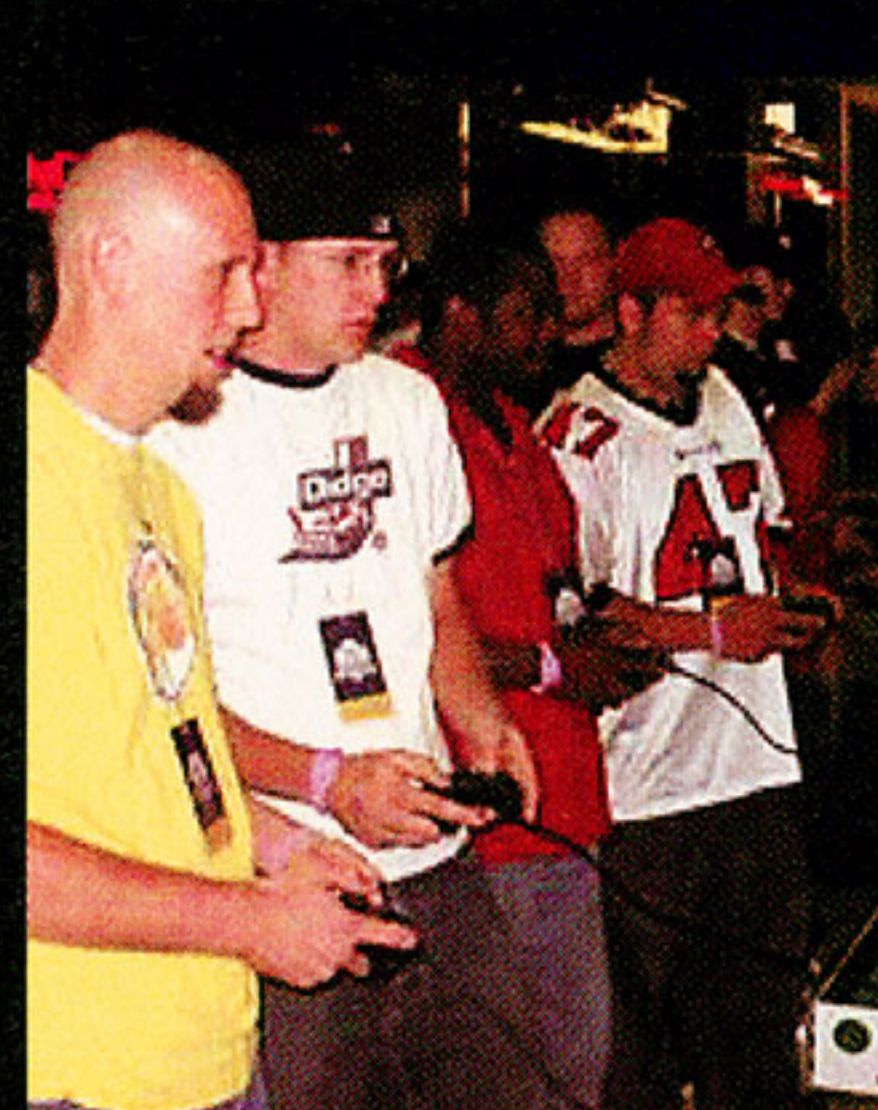
review, page 236). But check this out—the title U.S. gamers are playing is actually a *prequel* to an earlier GBA game released in Japan, produced over here mostly so that U.S. players will “get” the whole story. Whether we'll have the opportunity to play the “real” game as well depends on this release's sales. So...go buy it, ya scrub.

Brand-new Deception

It's been a few years since Tecmo's booby-trap horror-simulator series *Deception* had a new installment, but The Q hears whispers that a next-gen incarnation of the series is right around the corner. Yep, that one right there...go ahead, keep walking...now turn—I didn't set any traps there...Mwuhahaha!



NEWS BITS



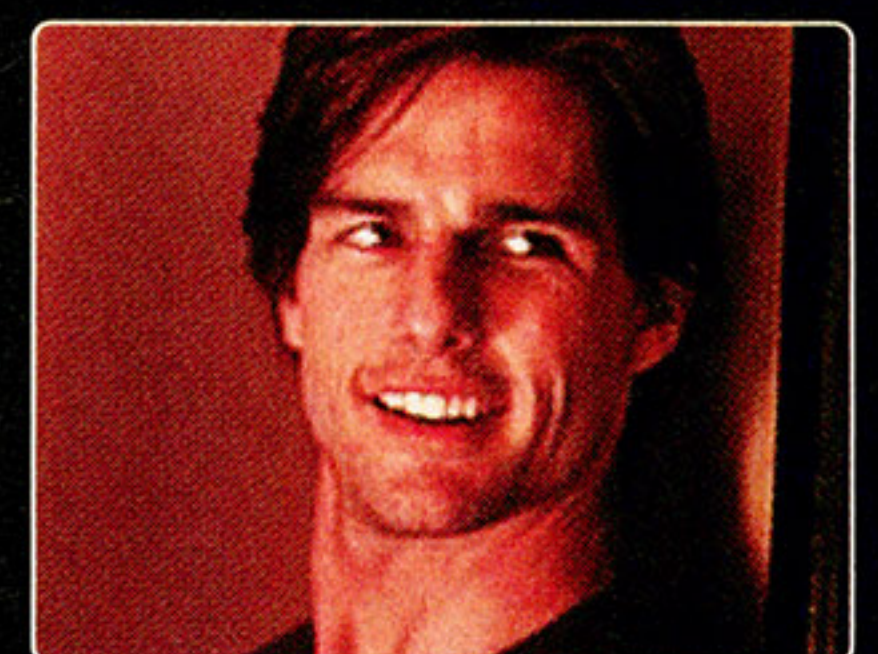
Huddle up for hard cash

Need one more reason to keep playin' *Madden*? We've got 50,000. That's right—the grand prize for the second annual EA Sports *Madden Challenge* has been raised this year to \$50,000. Thirty-two regional champions (log on to www.maddenchallenge.com for select cities) will compete at *Madden NFL 2004* in January for the hefty purse. Where will the finals take place? Vegas, baby. Vegas!

SEPARATED AT BIRTH



■ Kevin, an officer of Raccoon City's police department in *Resident Evil: Outbreak*



■ Actor and scientologist Tom Cruise, who (we're 99 percent certain) has never been terrorized by zombies

PS3 illustration by Andy Hooper, created first for GMR magazine

>>> PUBLISHER SIMON & SCHUSTER INTERACTIVE (OUTLAW GOLF, OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL) IS GETTING OUT OF VIDEOGAMES AND PLANS TO SELL ITS REMAINING ASSETS TO A THIRD PARTY...>>>

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Insanely fast duck and shoot GUNCON² action.



New Weapon Select System lets you toggle between multiple weapons.



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Violence

GUNCON²

PlayStation²



W E L C O M E T O T H E

J E D I A C A D E M Y

YOU WILL NOT LEAVE THESE HALLS AS YOU ENTERED THEM.

YOU WILL UNLEARN ALL THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED.

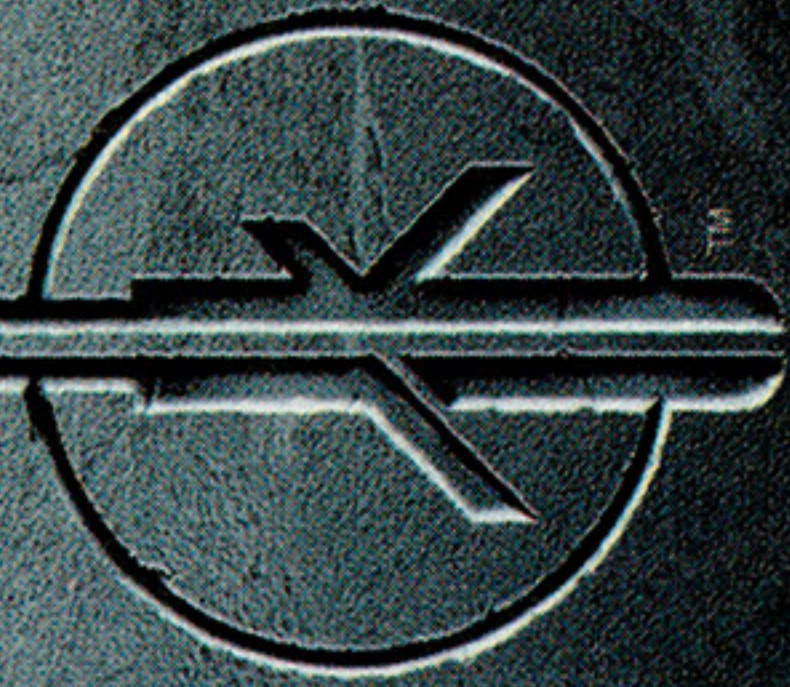
DEDICATE YOUR LIFE TO A HIGHER PURPOSE.

USE THE KNOWLEDGE YOU ATTAIN HERE WISELY.

THE FORCE IS A POWERFUL ALLY. AND A TERRIBLE FOE.

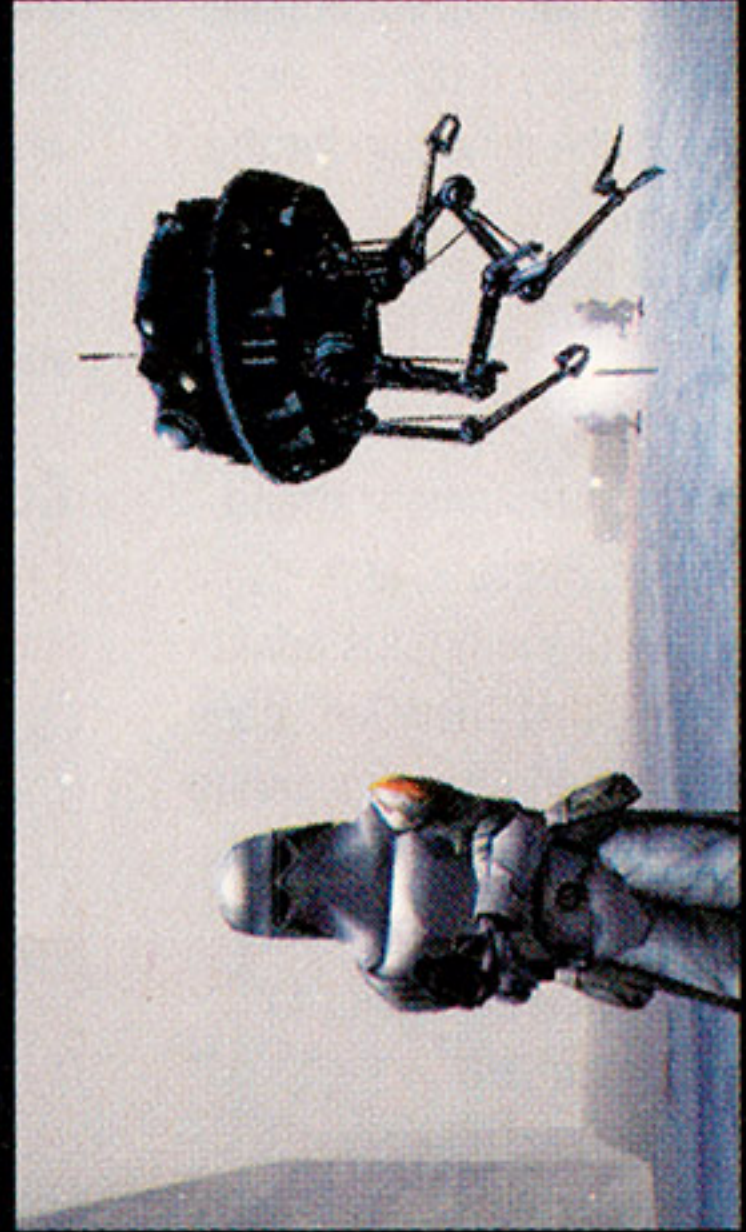
DO NOT BE SEDUCED BY THE DARK SIDE.

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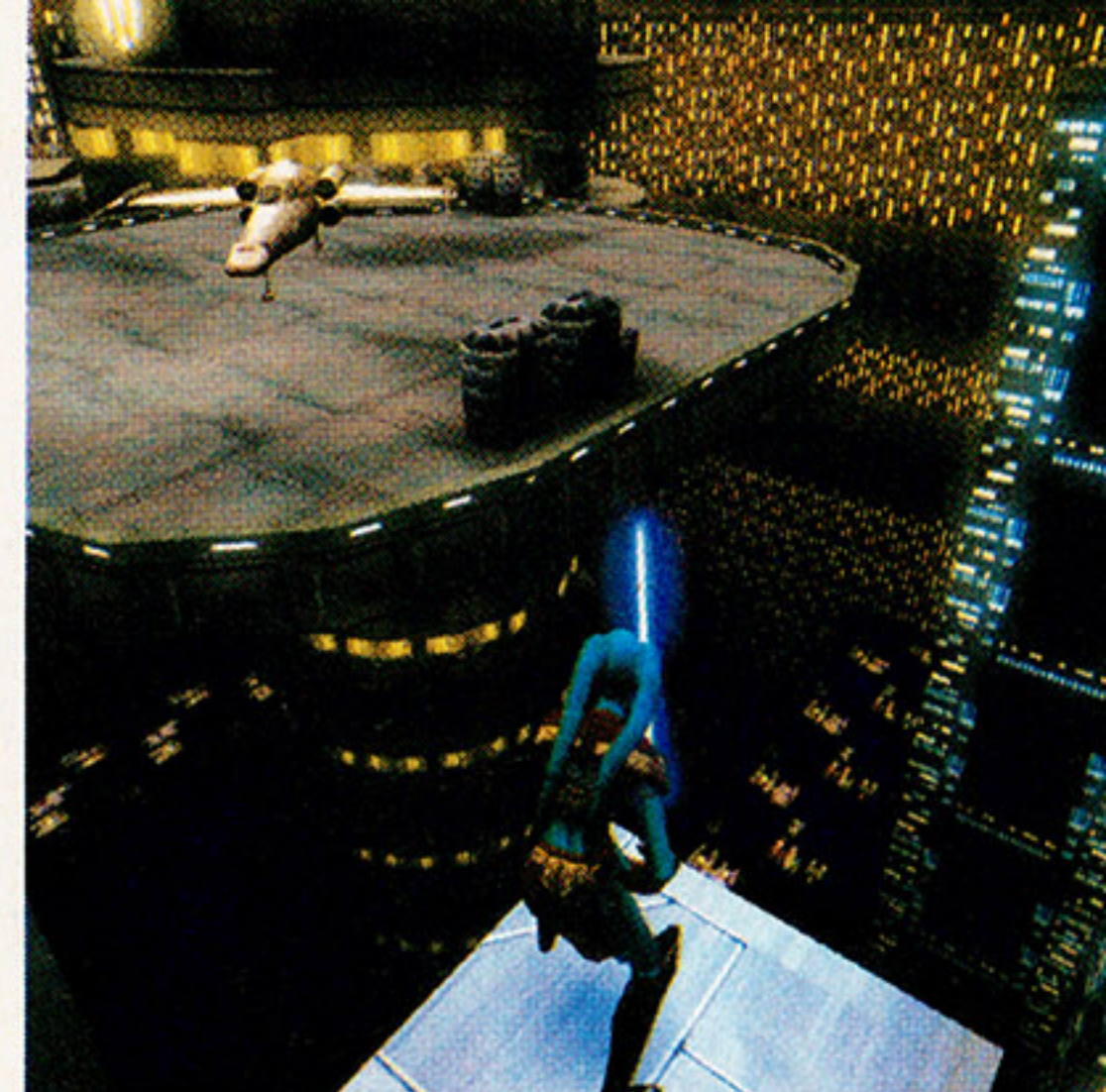
Official Star Wars Web Site
www.starwars.com

WWW.LUCASARTS.COM





press start



■ "I killed them all. They're dead, every single one of them. I slaughtered them like animals!"

KNIGHT SCHOOL

Class is in session at Luke Skywalker's **Jedi Academy**

All you eager padawan wannabes out there, now's your chance to gear up for training. *Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* will be ready for full enrollment this November (though only Xbox owners will be admitted). To prepare you for this intensive study program, we have a sneak peek at the schedule for the Academy's first school day.

Registration (8:00-9:00)

Many races, known and unknown, attend the Academy. Humans, Rodians, and Twi'Lek are but a few of the groups admitted. (Yes, young Jedi—that "new kid" does look a lot like Darth Maul.) After registering as a male or female whatever-you-are, you'll construct your lightsaber, choosing such elements as hilt style and color to determine its basic properties.

Lightsaber fundamentals (9:10-10:30)

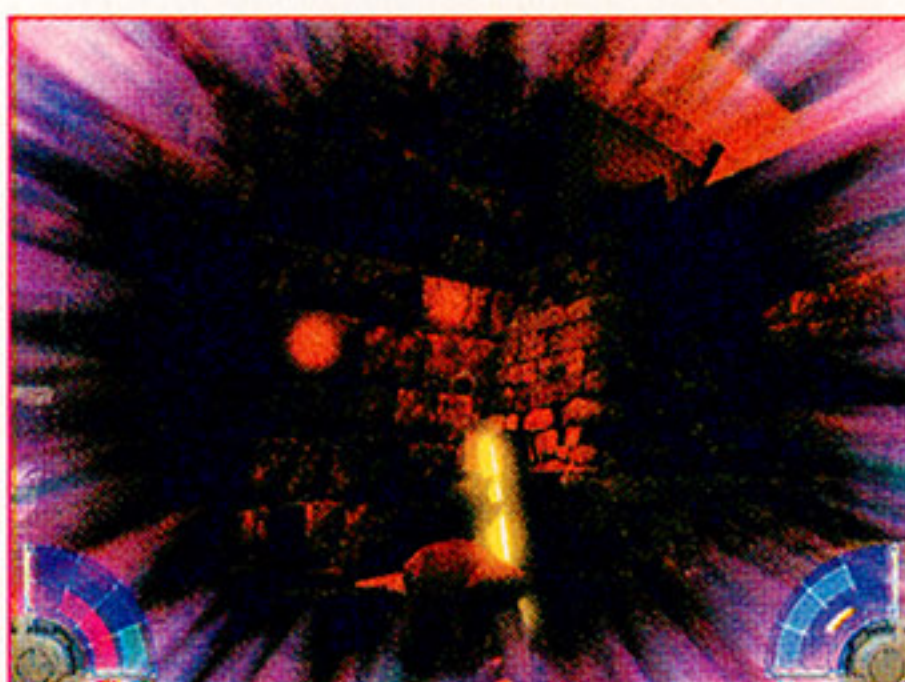


■ You'd better focus, padawan. Training droids like this one reward inattentiveness with sharp stinging blasts. Zzzzapp!!

In your first class, you'll work with training droids (the same kind Master Luke worked

out with on the Millennium Falcon) to learn proper saber wielding. The modern combat approach we offer at the Academy is faster paced than the style the knights of the old Republic used. You'll learn single- and dual-lightsaber wielding, with some light staffsaber training as well. For students who prefer to focus on a single lightsaber, we teach the three combat stances—fast, medium, and heavy—that affect the speed and power of your swings.

Core Force powers (10:40-11:30)



■ Use your Sense Force power to discover objects hidden behind walls like this one.

Before you specialize in light- or dark-side powers, it's important to learn the building blocks of the Force. Here, you'll study fundamental neutral powers—such as using Push to break barriers and stun enemies, Pull to yank far-off levers and disarm foes, and Speed to give yourself that extra combat edge.

Break (11:30-12:00)

Lunch is not provided, but students can purchase meals at the campus cantina. (Tipping our live band is encouraged.)

Field trip (12:00-4:00)

Master Katarn, our newest instructor, will take you on real missions to maintain peace and order throughout the galaxy. Whether it's searching for a lost droid or helping out merchants in distress, much of your actual learning will happen on these missions. In addition to the lightsaber, young Jedi out in the field are permitted to carry two traditional sidearms. Sure to be a hit with young padawans looking to try out their new skills!

Study hall (4:00-5:00)




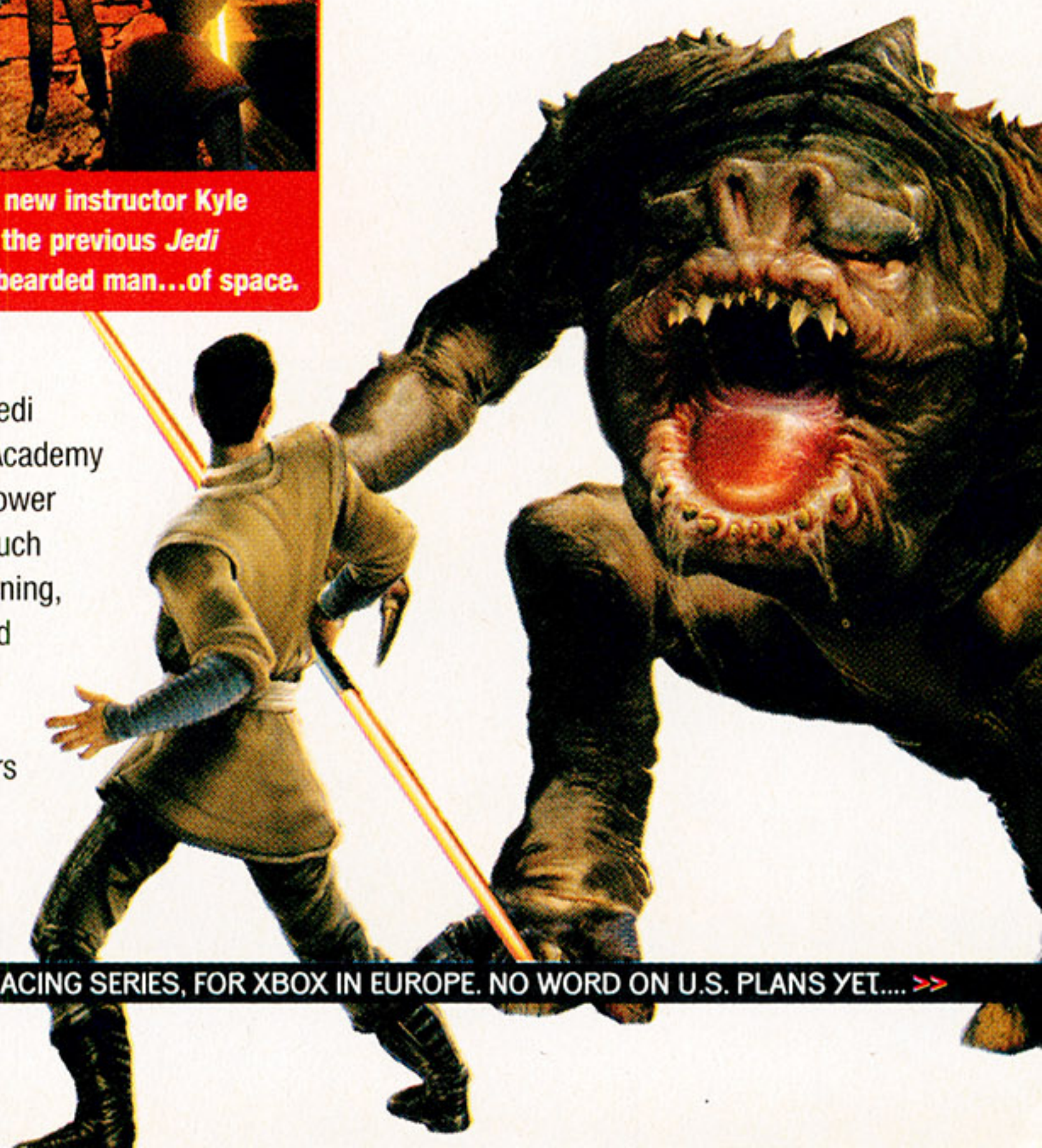
■ It's time to meet new instructor Kyle Katarn, the hero of the previous *Jedi Knight* games and bearded man...of space.

After gaining real-world experience, Jedi often return to the Academy to focus on Force power growth—learning such skills as Force Lightning, Force Grip, Heal, and Mind Trick. Padawans must decide which powers to learn fully (each has three levels). How you choose to

use these powers will decide your ultimate fate as a Jedi. Master Katarn explains that the powers themselves do not have inherent morality; it is how one uses them that determines "good" or "evil."

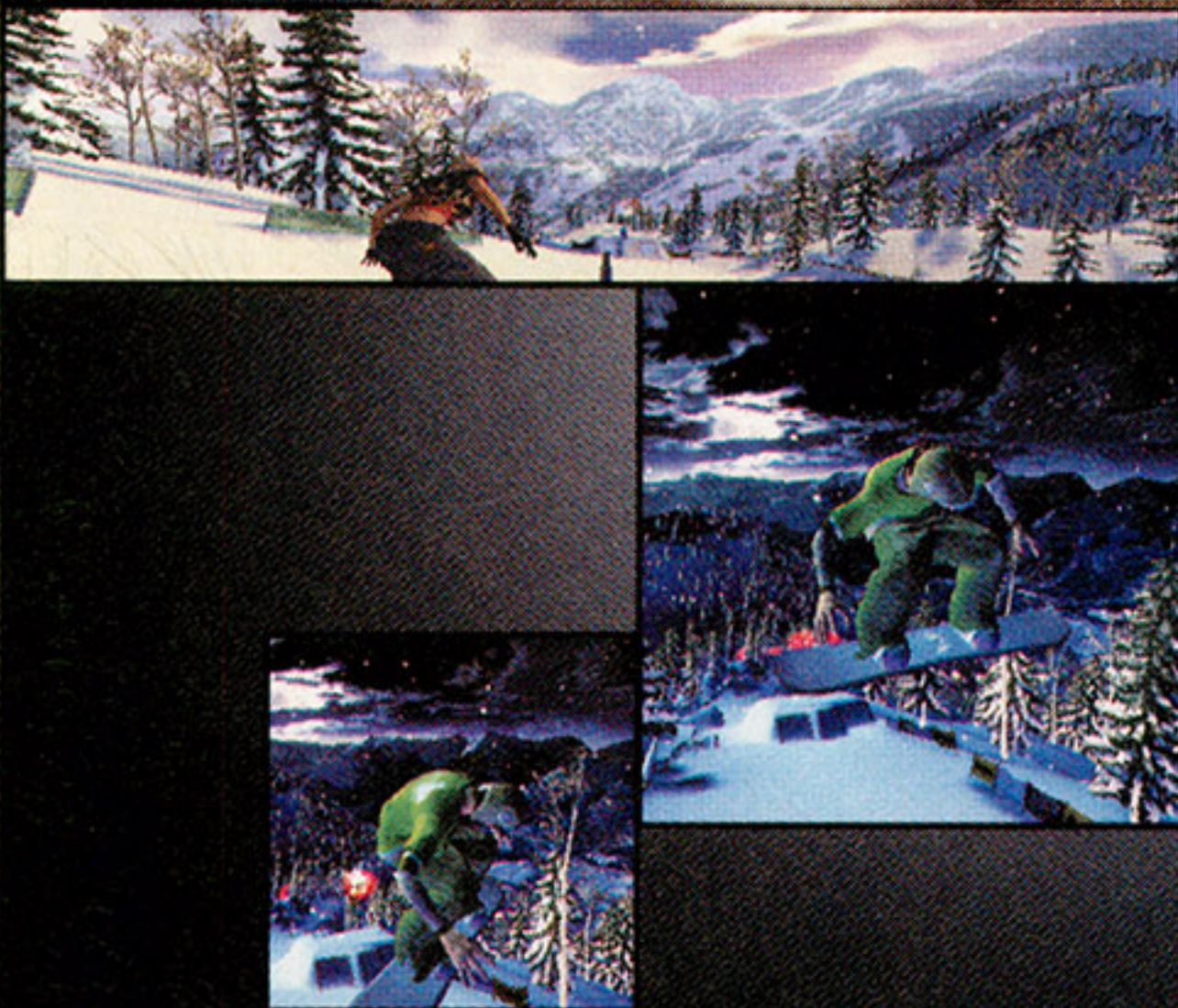
Holo-combat training (5:00-7:30)

The faculty is still hard at work integrating this class into the curriculum. We speculate that you'll go online through Xbox Live to conduct mock deathmatches with other students, but we can't confirm the course quite yet. (Rumors concerning a teachers' strike occurring if funding is dropped for such after-school activities are completely unfounded.)  —Thierry Nguyen



>> CODEMASTERS HAS ANNOUNCED *RACE DRIVER 2: THE ULTIMATE RACING SIMULATOR*, THE SECOND IN ITS TOCA RACING SERIES, FOR XBOX IN EUROPE. NO WORD ON U.S. PLANS YET.... >>

Throw a stylish backside 5,
impress the press, stoke your sponsor and
humble your cousin who's 7 states away.



Microsoft
game studios



Don't call it a sequel. Amped2 is here to declare itself the best freestyle experience on land, sea or air. Shred with friends from across the planet on the Xbox Live™ service and run your mouth as you go on endless runs. Compete with friends or take on some claimer through XSN Sports and get paid in praise. Over 300 indie tunes will play as you reap rewards for pulling tricks like stalls and butter with smooth style. It's your chance to ride with pros and try the new mountain sport, snowskate. The slopes are yours. How they're ripped-up is up to you.

amped2



it's good to play together

xbox.com/amped2



THE HOT FIVE

The newest in new on the games you're clutching a drool cup for

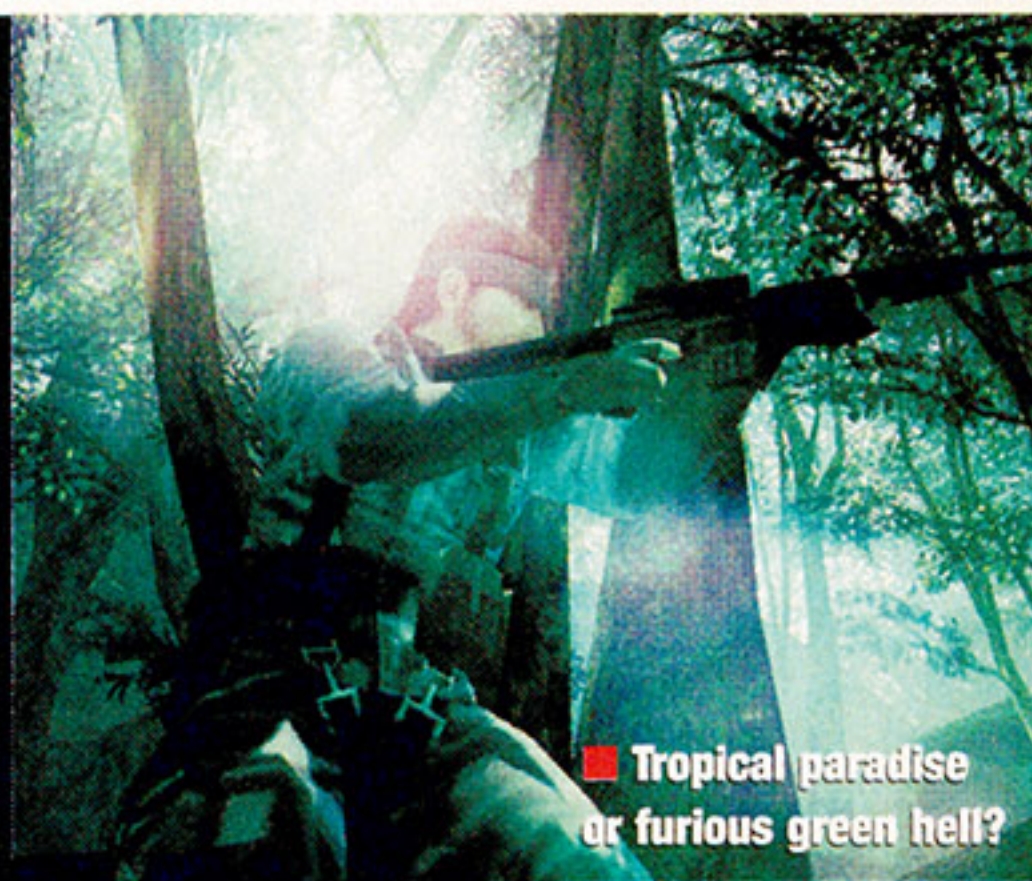
To vote for the games you simply *must* see more coverage of, go to www.egmmag.com between the 1st and 15th of each month.



1

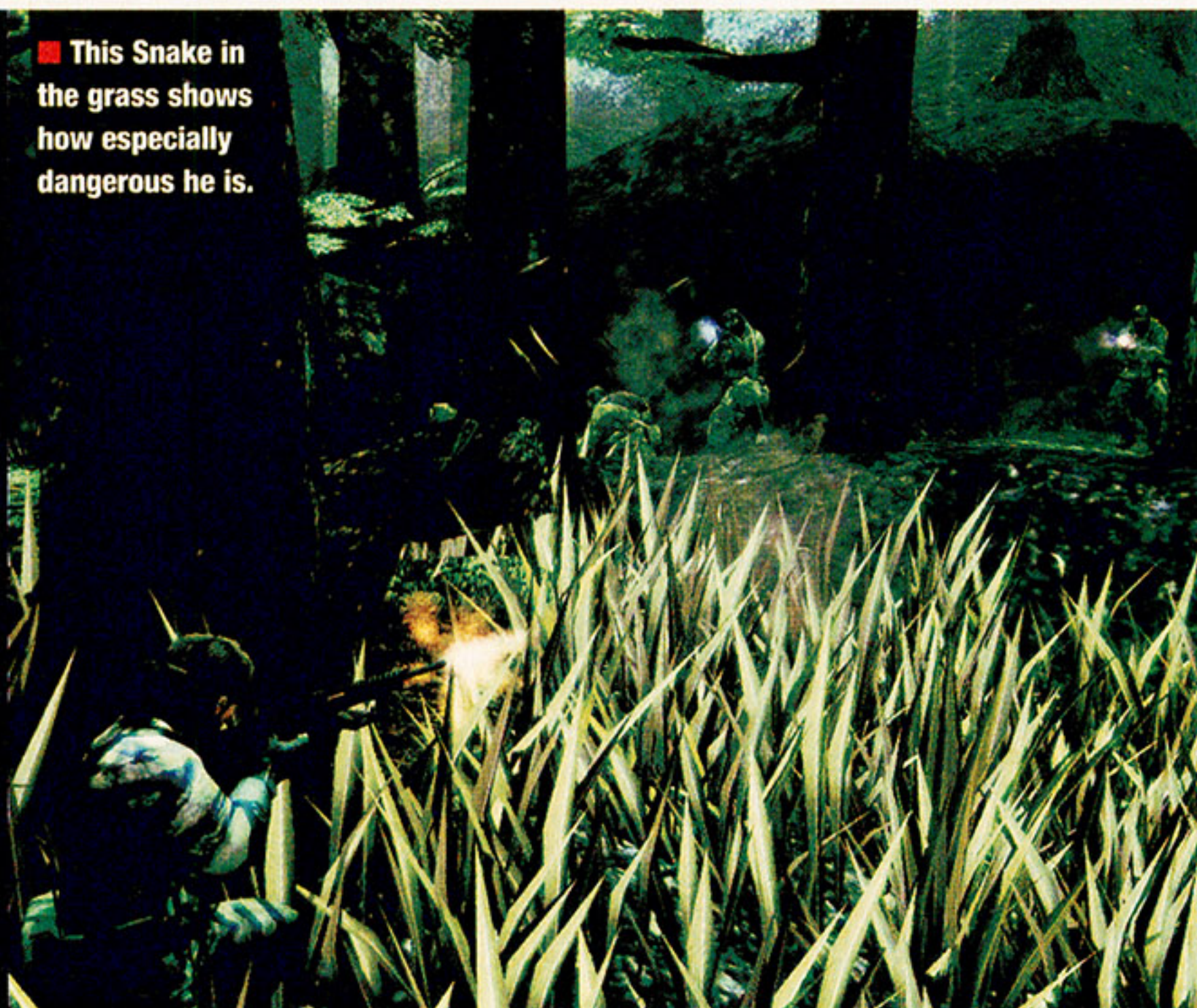
METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

PS2 • Konami • Late 2004 — When you're this hungry for Snake, even the smallest bits of information are delicious. Lucky for us, Konami dropped a few scraps at the recent Electronic Consumer Trade Show in London. Along with encountering deadly jungle booby traps, like a heavy swinging log and Snake-catching snare, our hero crossed paths with a few natural elements: a crocodile, attack dogs, and cave bats. No word yet on whether or not you'll be able to eat them, but talk of downloadable camo patterns has recently escaped designer Hideo Kojima's lips.



■ Tropical paradise or furious green hell?

■ This Snake in the grass shows how especially dangerous he is.



2

HALO 2

Xbox • Microsoft • Early 2004 — Master Chief must be blushing under that big metal helmet of his. *Halo 2* has been voted onto our most-wanted list so many times we're losing count. We know you'll be peeking around corners and taking out angry battle gorillas (known as "brutes") with a modified battle rifle, but what about multiplayer? In addition to the likely inclusion of classic game modes like Capture the Flag, Oddball, and King of the Hill, there are big plans involving Xbox Live. Take a few moments to ponder the possibilities while we pester Microsoft once again for new information and screenshots, as the much-rumored March release approaches.



3

GRAN TURISMO 4

PS2 • Sony CEA • Early 2004

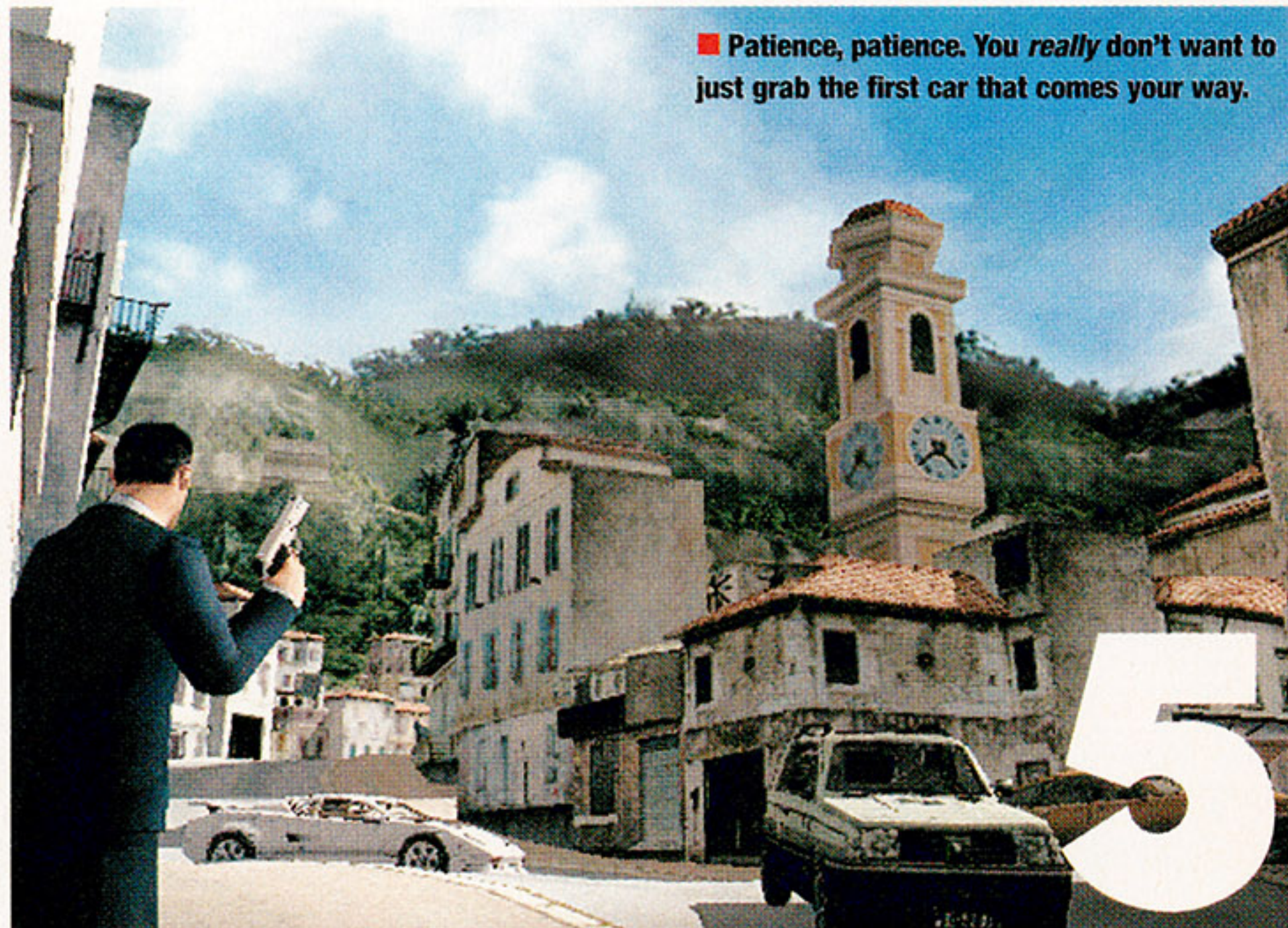
Don't believe what you've read online; the vehicle list for *Gran Turismo 4* has yet to be finalized. Still, fans of the driving sim should keep those hopes high. Expect around 500 licensed vehicles from the past, present, and future of automotive history. Seventies muscle cars, including the Plymouth 'Cuda 440-6, ride alongside modern sports cars like the petite Suzuki Cappuccino—and each one handles more realistically than ever after a substantial physics overhaul. If that doesn't start your engine, nothing will.



4

NINJA GAIDEN

Xbox • Tecmo • November 2003
While ninjas are forbidden to divulge the secrets of their trade, *Ninja Gaiden* Producer Tomonobu Itagaki is bound by no such code. Fresh screens and an interview await you next month.



■ Patience, patience. You *really* don't want to just grab the first car that comes your way.



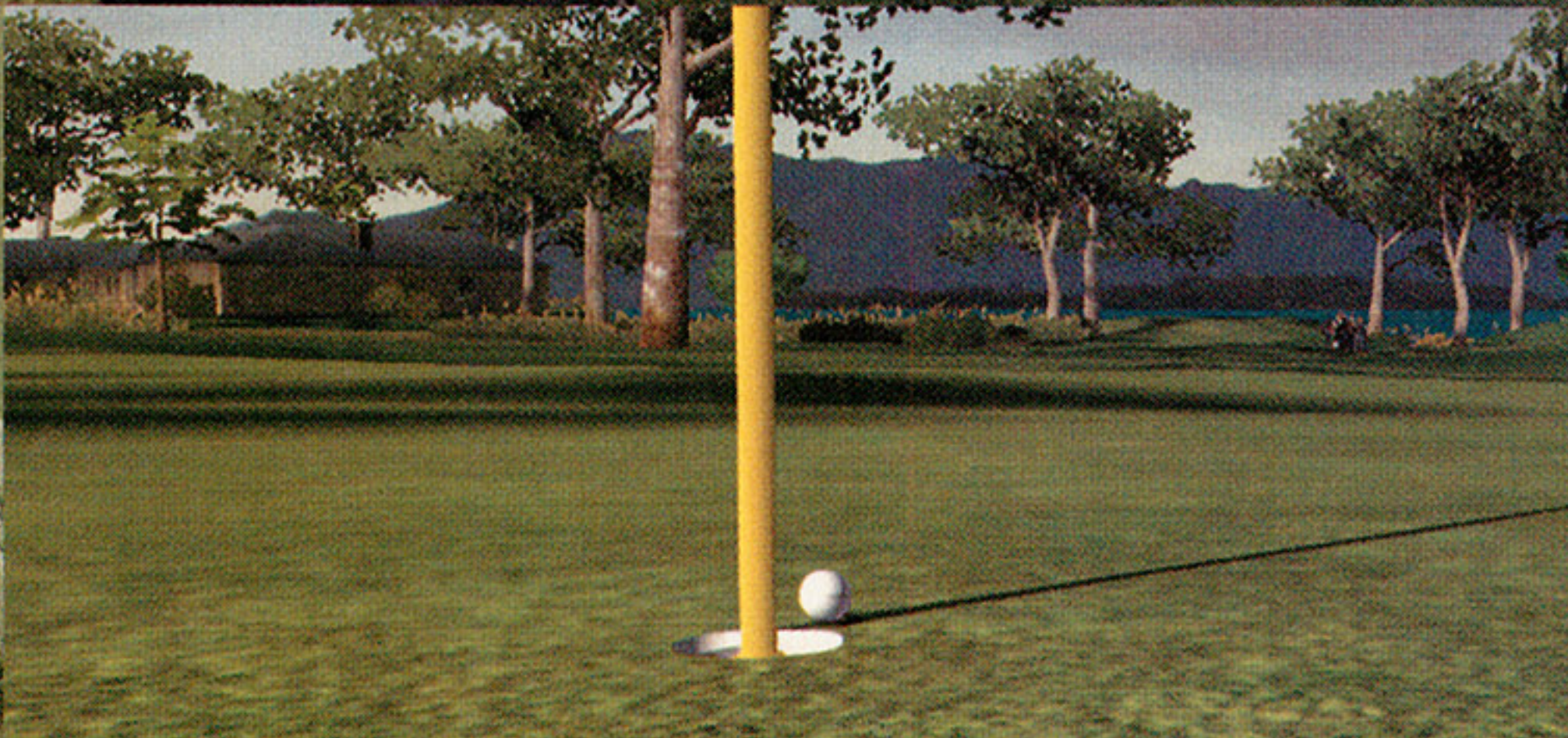
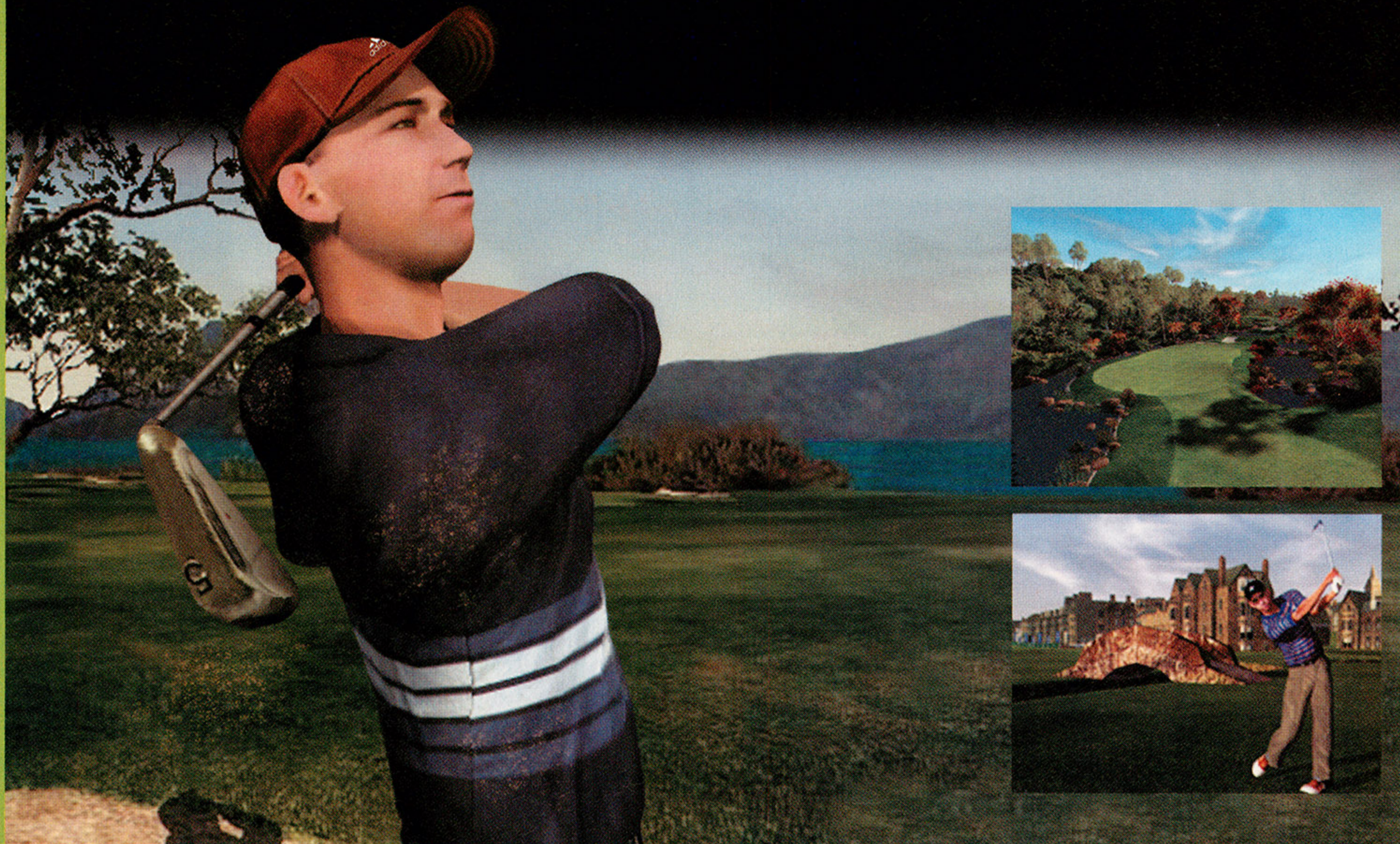
DRIVER 3

PS2, Xbox, GC • Atari • Mid 2004

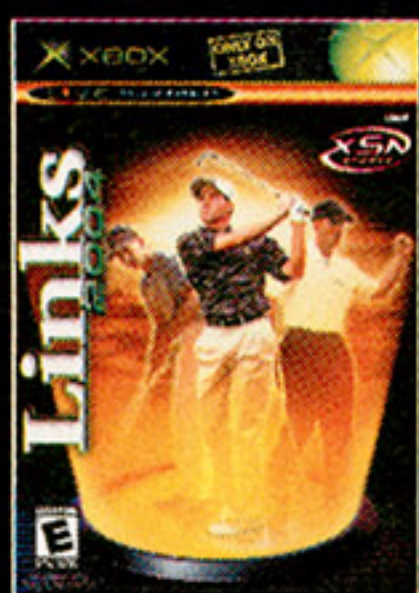
What's new with the game that wants to take back the streets of Miami from *GTA*? All we've seen lately are a couple sharp-dressed thugs shooting the breeze while a few new vehicles, a motorcycle, and a freight-hauling motortruck pass by, seemingly slow as molasses. Let's hope it's just the calm before the storm.

5

Everything in this game is unbelievably realistic.
Including the yutz yelling "YOU DA MAN!"
in your headset as you tee off.



Microsoft
game studios



Links, the best-selling PC golf series of all time, is now on the tee with Xbox. Everything you love about playing 18 has been beautifully re-created down to the last ball dimple. TV commentators whisper about your every swing as you go for the pin. But there's no whispering necessary on the Xbox Live™ service, where trash talk flies farther than tee shots. Use XSN Sports on your PC to check your status on the Worldwide Leaderboard. With over 10 modes of play and 8 famous courses to choose from, you'll give Links a resounding golf clap.



Links
2004

it's good to play together

xbox.com/links2004

XSNsports.com requires a computer, Internet connection and subscription to Xbox Live. Additional fees may apply for Content Downloads. ©2003 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Links, Xbox, the Xbox logos, the XSN Sports logo, the Microsoft Game Studios logo and Xbox Live are either registered trademarks or trademarks of the Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Entertainment Ratings Board. The names of actual products and companies mentioned herein may be trademarks of their respective owners.

COMING SOON

Better start saving up your bones



■ *Beyond Good & Evil's* sultry sneak, Jade.

NOVEMBER 2003



Crash Nitro Kart
(Racing) PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA

Once again, Crash and his cast of furry friends hop into their kiddie cars, but are they fast enough to catch Mario's crew?

Culdcept
(Strategy) PS2

Based on the board game best described as *Monopoly* meets *Magic: The Gathering*. We've somehow managed to resist the pull of both of those separately, but *together*?



ESPN College Hoops
(Sports) PS2, Xbox

Superior play at Sega University unlocks classic and mascot teams. Take the shot!

EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers
(RPG) PS2

It's an ORPG (online role-playing game), all right, but will it be MM (massively multi-player) or MLP (massively lacking play-ers)? Or some gray area between?



Grand Theft Auto Double Pack
(Action) Xbox

Two games (*Grand Theft Auto 3* and *Grand Theft Auto Vice City*) for the price of one. Corrupting Xbox youth has never been more affordable.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone
(Adventure) PS2, Xbox, GC

Are improved visuals enough to attract all of you Muggles to this PS1 remake? At least EA thinks so.



■ Be careful playing with these *Battlestar Galactica* ships. You'll shoot your eye out!



Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly
(Adventure) PS2

Photograph camera-shy phantoms in this horror tale with an unusual twist.

Fire Emblem
(Strategy-RPG) GBA

Use both conventional ground troops and mystical creatures to protect the rightful heir to the throne. (Check out page 236 for the final word.)



He-Man: Defender of Greyskull
(Action) PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA

Unlike in your childhood play sessions, Teela and Evil Lynn won't be getting tender here. (And unfortunately, Orko won't end up slow roasted on a barbecue grill.)

I-Ninja
(Action) PS2, Xbox, GC

Shouldn't the game be entitled *You-Ninja*? (See our review on page 192.)



Karaoke Revolution
(Rhythm) PS2

For all those too shy (or sober) to make fools of themselves at the local karaoke bar. Songs in the game include "I'm Coming Out," "It's End of the World As We Know It," "Kiss Me," "Billie Jean," "Like a Virgin," "Bizarre Love Triangle," "Broken Wings," "Celebration," "Complicated," "Every Morning," "You Really Got Me," and "Hit Me With Your Best Shot." (Stumble to page 216 for the review.)

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

(Space Combat) PS2, Xbox — Soar in space and shoot enemy ships in this game based on a TV series reminiscent of *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*, except not nearly as enduring or endearing. Finally—a game where you play as Lorne Greene!



Beyond Good & Evil
(Adventure) PS2, Xbox, GC

From the creator of *Rayman* comes a tale of conspiracy, murder, and deep, abiding friendship with talking pigs. See if this action-adventure game lives up to the hype in our review on page 200.

Bloody Roar 4
(Fighting) PS2

More blood and a slightly louder roar result in a mature rating for this ferocious fighter. Heed the call of the wild.



Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix
(Rhythm) Xbox

Now Xbox owners can hyperventilate in the privacy of their on homes with this arcade crack-withdrawal sim.

Double Dragon Advance
(Action) GBA

Join brothers Billy and Jimmy for a round of retro, side-scrolling head-bustin'. Hey! I was going to pick up that pipe! D****!



Frogger's Journey: The Forgotten Relic
(Action) PS2, GC, GBA

Apparently, this jaywalking amphibian is feeling somewhat overlooked.

Go! Go! Hypergrind
(Action) GC

If the title alone doesn't make you want to skate, chances are you're not tuned into Tokyo.



King of Fighters Double Pack
(Fighting) PS2

The talk of SNK's demise has been greatly exaggerated. This compilation of 2D brawling bliss includes both *KOF 2000* and *2001*, along with new gameplay modes and characters.

Kya: Dark Lineage
(Action-Adventure) PS2

From flying to fighting to puzzle-solving to exploration, adventurer Kya's got it covered (or so we hope).



Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon
(Adventure) PS2, Xbox

The point-and-click adventure series gets a 3D facelift with its third edition. It's about time, eh?

Counter-Strike
(First-Person Shooter) Xbox

These terrorists aren't going to shoot themselves. Grab your controller and Xbox Live headset and get to work. Stat!



Dynasty Warriors 4 Xtreme Legends
(Action) PS2

This standalone expansion to the successful historically based hack-n-slash series adds new stages and randomly generated skirmishes.



Goblin Commander
(Strategy) PS2, Xbox, GC

Goblins do your bidding in this real-time strategy.

Grabbed by the Ghoulies
(Action) Xbox
Who needs *Perfect Dark Zero* when you have this kiddie beat-em-up?



Legacy of Kain: Defiance
(Adventure) PS2, Xbox

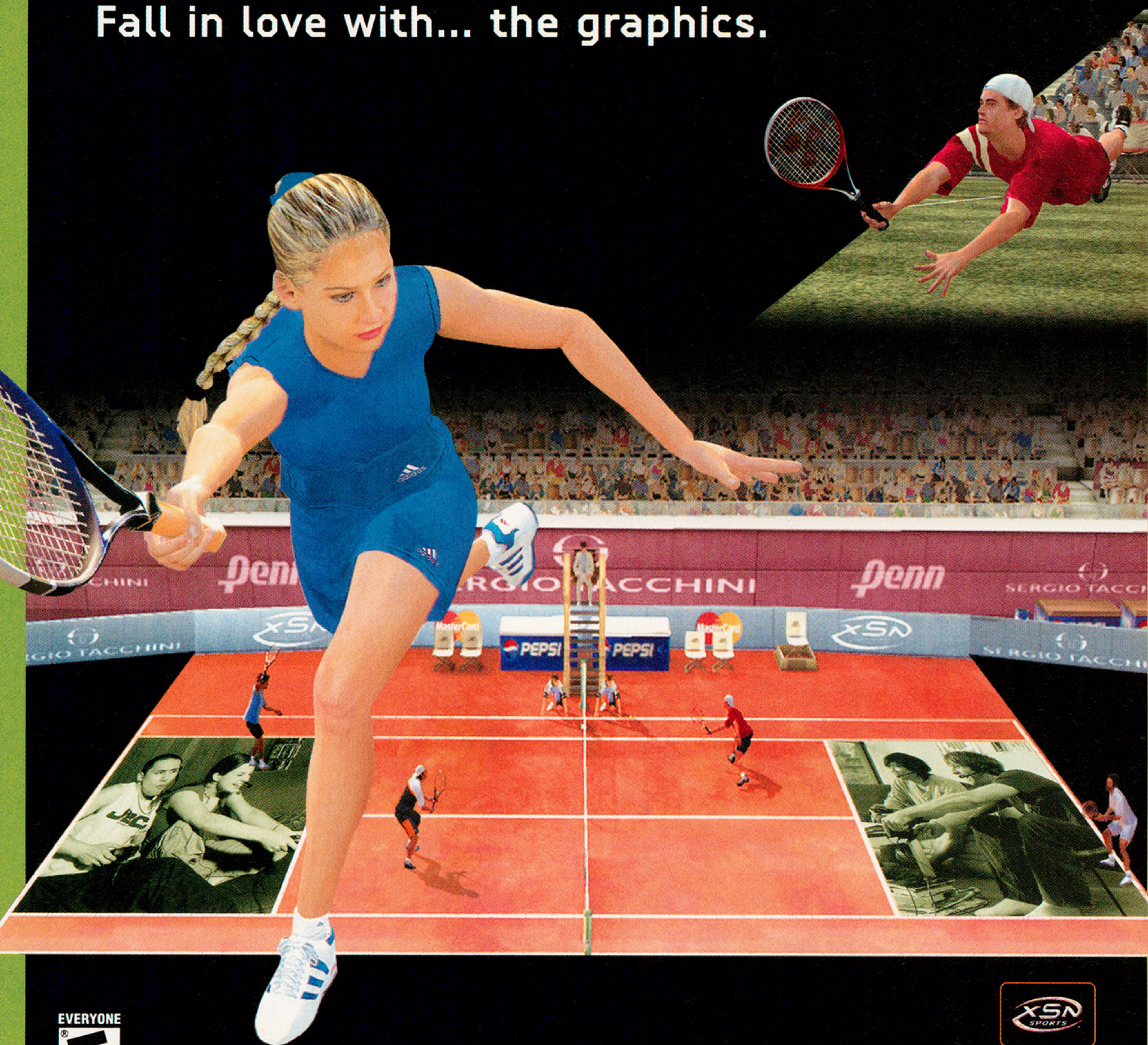
Vampires Razel and Kain know kung fu. Whoa. Let's hope this follow-up to *Soul Reaver 2* wraps up the series' ponderously dangling plotlines.

Links 2004
(Sports) Xbox

Cover athlete Sergio Garcia rarely beats Tiger Woods, but Microsoft hopes the game he endorses can.

■ *Fatal Frame 2's* Wonder-Twins

Slam cross-courts, cross-country.
Plow your way to the number one seed.
Fall in love with... the graphics.



Microsoft
game studios



"Quiet Please"? Puh-leez! Let's dispense with the formality shall we? Top Spin™ is a tennis game that isn't afraid to play it like it is. All the excitement of baseline battles, diving volleys and temper tantrums is in your hands. Grab a court on the Xbox Live™ service and serve up back-handed comments along with vicious backhands. Hit the 'net and use XSN Sports on your PC to track your current world ranking. Whether you play as Sampras, Kournikova, Hewitt or yourself, you'll have to take risks to be crowned king of the court. Just don't try any between-the-legs shots at home.

TOP SPIN™



it's good to play together

xbox.com/topspin

XSNsports.com requires a computer, Internet connection and subscription to Xbox Live. Additional fees may apply for Content Downloads. ©2003 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Top Spin, Xbox, the Xbox logos, the XSN Sports logo, the Microsoft Game Studios logo and Xbox Live are either registered trademarks or trademarks of the Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Entertainment Ratings Board. The names of actual products and companies mentioned herein may be trademarks of their respective owners.



press start:
coming soon

NOVEMBER 2003

■ Mario and Luigi prepare to bash in *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*



■ Paint the town red with your Z4 in *Project Gotham Racing 2*.



Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga (Action-RPG) GBA

Luigi calls this side-scrolling action-RPG *Luigi and his Spotlight-Hogging Plumber Sidekick*. Whatever its name, the two brothers must once again rescue Princess Peach. (Can't she ever stay outta trouble?)

The game allows you to control both characters separately or together for super moves. But that's not the only interesting team-up in the game: You work with Bowser to save the day. Whaa!!!



Mario Kart: Double Dash!! (Racing) GC

Mario, Peach, and the rest enjoy a nice day out at the go-kart track, chucking turtle shells and generally misbehaving. (Dash on over to page 230 for the complete review.)

Mario Party 5 (Party) GC

Nintendo invites you to play more than 60 new minigames at its next plumber's party. RSVP appreciated.



NCAA March Madness 2004 (Sports) PS2, Xbox

Reach the Big Dance with helpful tips and strategies from top Division I coaches. And if you own a PS2, hop online and lead your alma mater to the promised land.

Need for Speed Underground (Racing) PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA

Urban street racing minus Vin Diesel and Paul Walker...just the way we like it. And this game looks *foine!!*



NHL Rivals 2004 (Sports) Xbox

Microsoft's puck offering includes precision passing via the right analog stick.



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

(Racing) Xbox — Another challenger to *Midnight Club II*, the current king of online racers.



Manhunt (Action) PS2

You're the man...and you're hunted.



Ninja Gaiden (Action) Xbox

The deadly assassin Ryu Hayabusa is back (in black) and starring in one of the most visually stunning Xbox games yet.

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time (Adventure) PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA

In which our hero controls time, runs along walls, and slices foes with his scimitar. Turn to page 186 for the final score.



Sega GT Online (Racing) Xbox

Essentially *Sega GT 2002* with a few new cars, tracks, and online play, but at least this one will only set you back a 20-spot.

SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs (Shooter) PS2

Breakdance on the corpses of thine enemies in this heavily tweaked sequel to Sony's killer online app.



Star Trek: Shattered Universe (Space Combat) PS2, Xbox

This one is old-school *Trek*. Guide Captain Sulu and crew through a perilous alternate dimension. Read our log on page 184.

Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy (Action) Xbox

Train in the ways of the Force with Master Skywalker before slicing off the hands of dark Jedis online.



Medal of Honor: Rising Sun (Shooter) PS2, Xbox, GC

Embark on an island vacation in jungle hell, as EA's world war explodes in the Pacific. Branching paths and splitscreen cooperative play add to the excitement.

Metal Arms: Glitch in the System (Action) PS2, Xbox, GC

Like *Ratchet & Clank* with twice the Clank and none of the Ratchet. (See how our reviewers rated this surprise charmer on page 199.)



Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando

(Platform) PS2
More than a dozen different kinds of weapons? Who knew a cat/squirrel thing could kick so much ass? (Turn to page 218 to read why this game is golden.)

Rogue Ops

(Action) PS2, Xbox, GC
Think of this stealth game's assassin for hire, Nikki Connors, as a female Sam Fisher (*Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*).



Space Channel 5: Special Edition (Rhythm Action) PS2

Ulala returns to subdue invading aliens with sass and dancing in this package including the original *SC5* and its unreleased (in the United States) follow-up.

Spawn

(Action) PS2, Xbox, GC
It's hard to imagine McFarlane's comic-book creation faring any worse than his previous solo adventures have. Gameplay ripped from *Devil May Cry* could help.



Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines

(First-Person Shooter) PS2, Xbox
This movie-based game arrives five months late, but comes packed with exclusive movie footage.

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

(Action) PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
Hack-and-slash alongside a friend (PS2 owners can join forces online) in this return trip to Middle-earth.



Midway Arcade Treasures (Misc.) PS2, Xbox, GC

Twenty-two classic games on one disc, including *Defender*, *Joust*, *Robotron*, and *Sinistar*. Quarter up.

NCAA Final Four 2004 (Sports) PS2

Sharpen your basketball skills in the all-new Practice mode before making a run at this year's national championship, or facing opponents online.



Secret Weapons Over Normandy (Air Combat) Xbox

Fly experimental Allied airplanes in France's unfriendly skies.



Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy (Adventure) PS2, GC

In most games, the undead are a horrible scourge—not your puzzle-solvin' sidekick. (Take the full tour of ancient Egypt's wonders on page 204.)

SpyHunter 2

(Action) PS2, Xbox, GC
Take control of the Interceptor, an arsenal on wheels that even James Bond would envy. Chicks dig it.



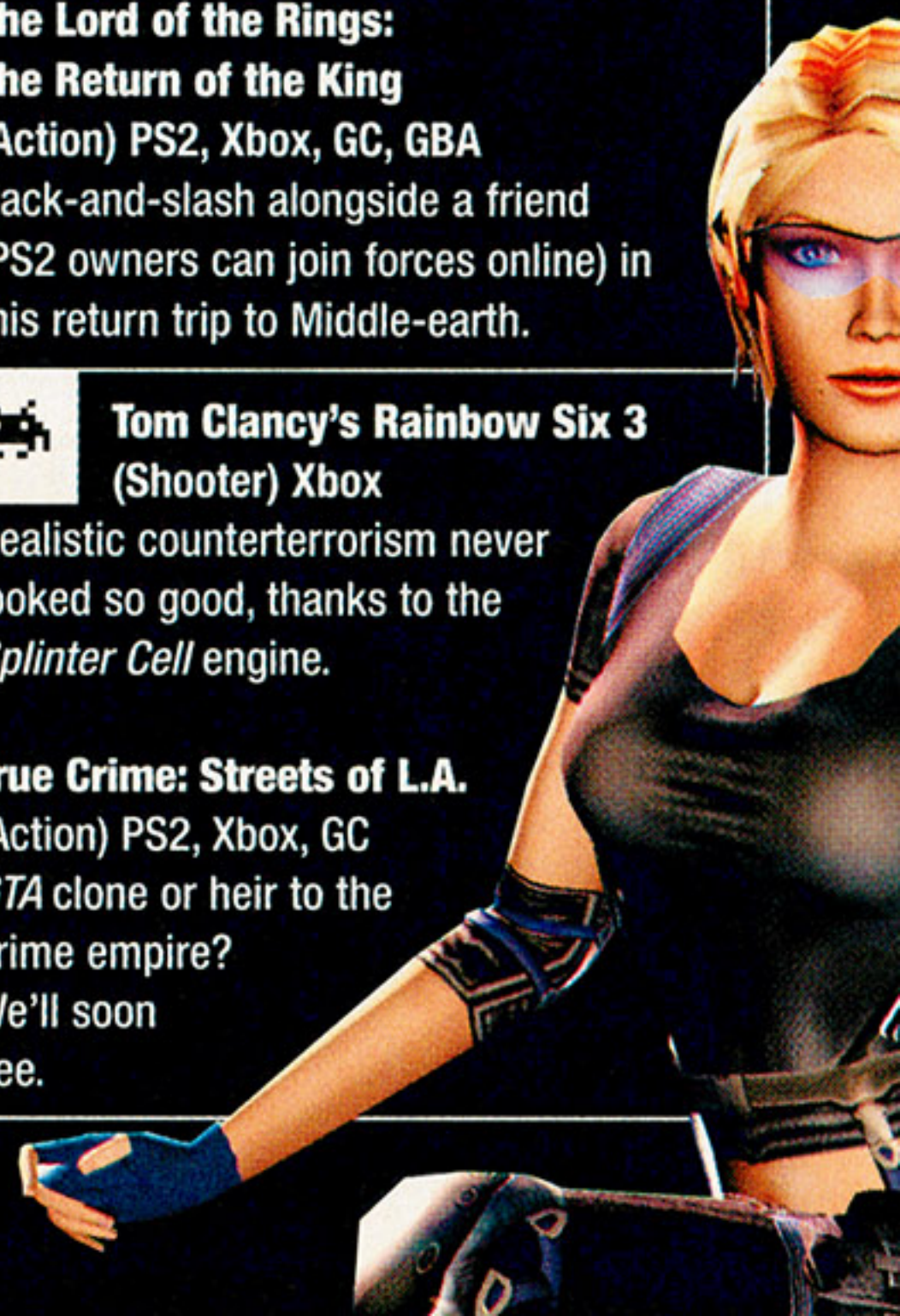
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3 (Shooter) Xbox

Realistic counterterrorism never looked so good, thanks to the *Splinter Cell* engine.

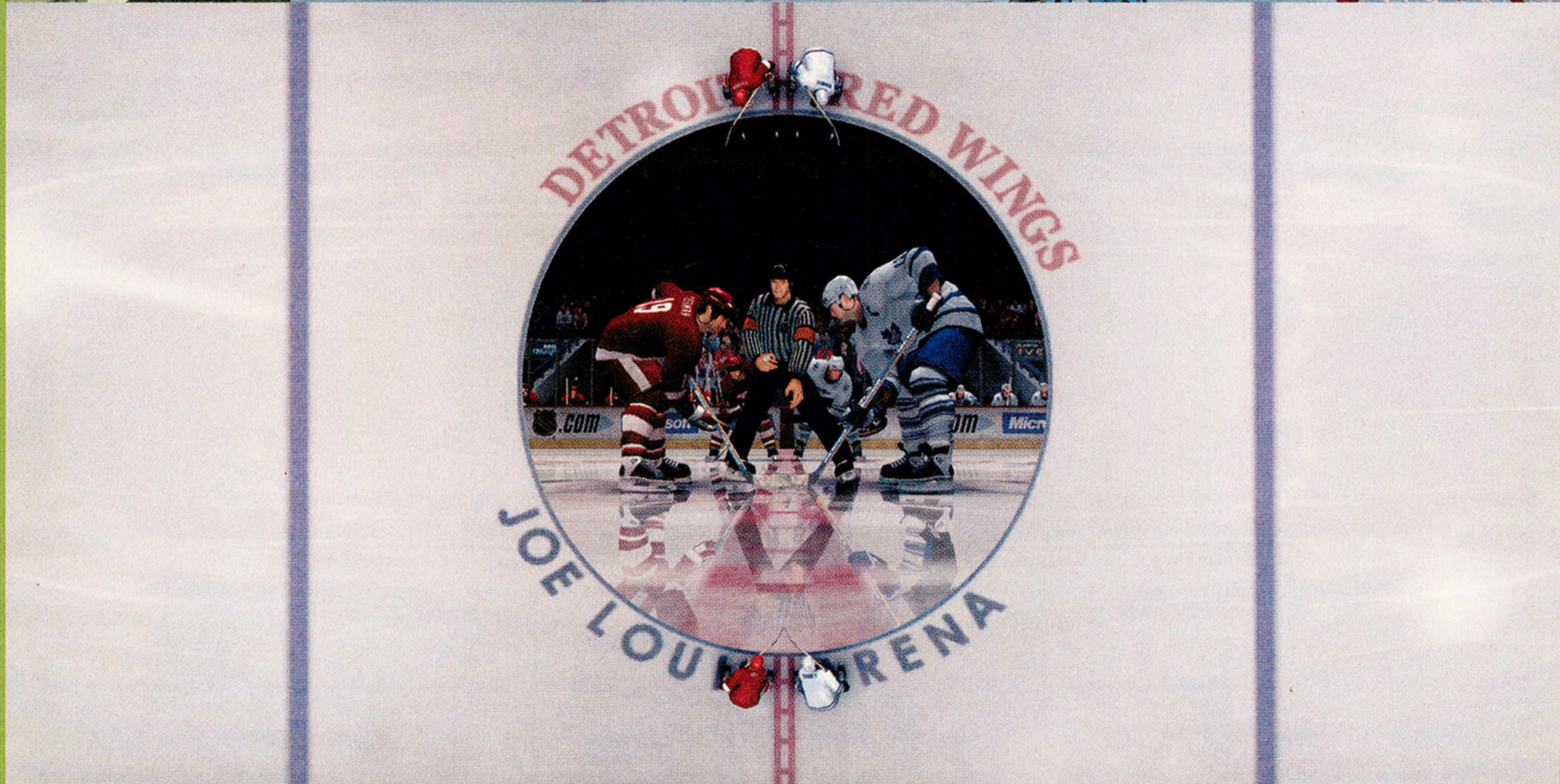
True Crime: Streets of L.A.

(Action) PS2, Xbox, GC
GTA clone or heir to the crime empire? We'll soon see.

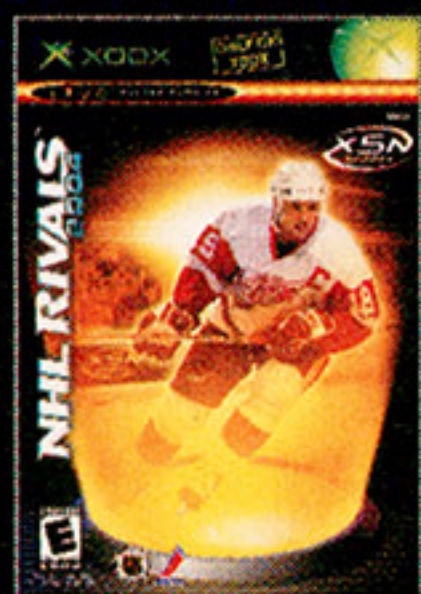
■ Rogue Ops's Nikki



In my league the Maple Leafs and Red Wings settle their grudge in Tempe.



Microsoft
game studios



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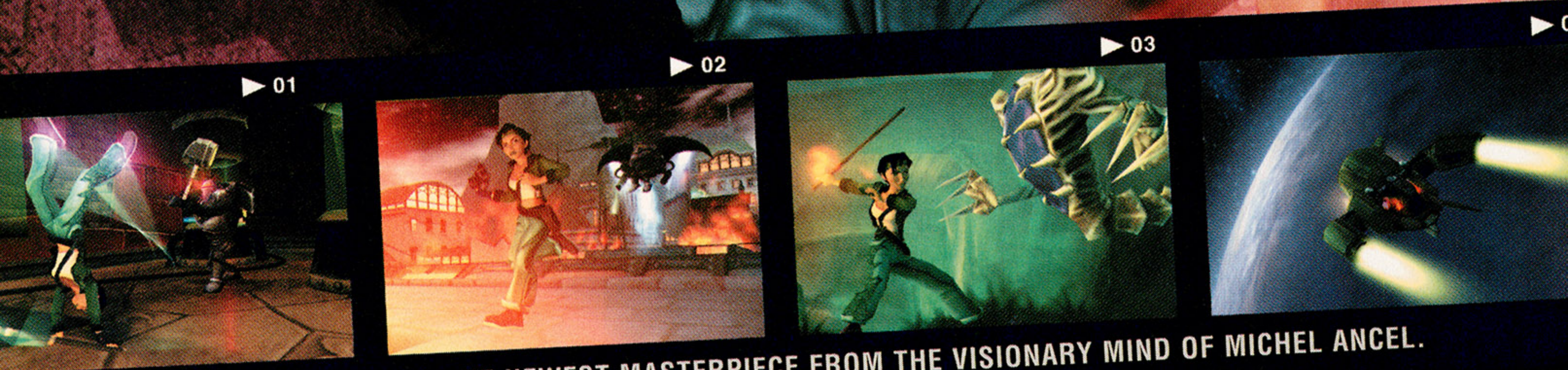
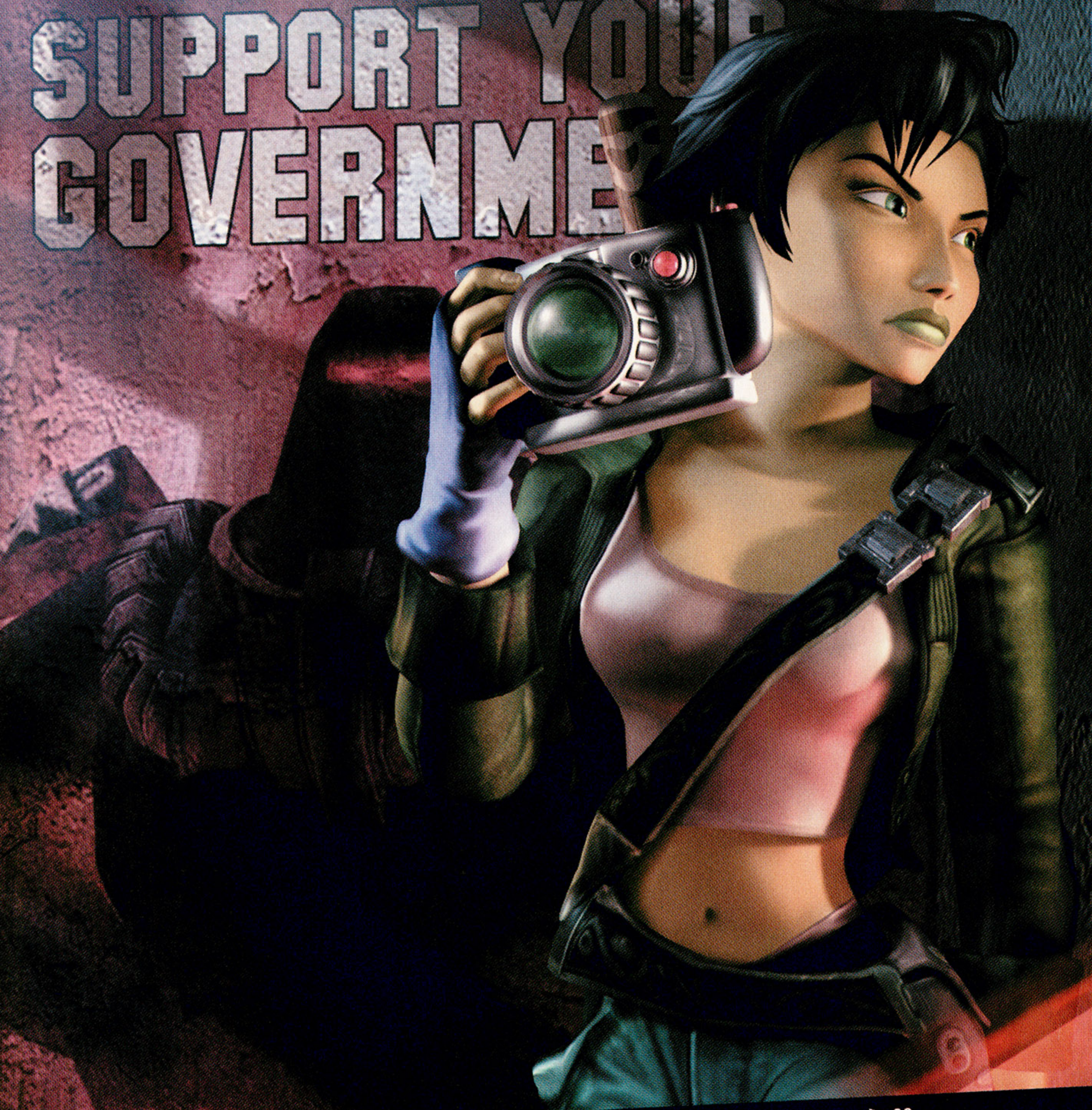
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Violence
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PlayStation®2



...BUT YOU WILL FIGHT FOR THE TRUTH.



▶ 05



▶ 06



▶ 07



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scary games

SCARY MONSTERS

You scream, I scream, we all
scream for horror-themed games

All Hallow's Eve approaches. Games soaked in horror and drenched in blood are perched outside your window like a murder of crows. But before you wake the dead with a bone-chilling shriek of joy, get the facts on which are 100 percent pure nightmare fuel and which are just gothing around—and find out which films and TV shows—

horror or otherwise—each monster mash-up compares to.

The night is long and the light from your television might be the only thing keeping the darkness at bay, so you'll need a game that can keep you awake—and alive—until the morning comes.

Read on, foolish mortal...if you dare! ➤

—Justin Speer

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE





FATAL FRAME 2



RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK

THE SUFFERING



...AND MANY MORE!

Achtung!

Hauptmann — Ihr Flugzeug brennt*



* (Translation: Hey, Captain! Your airplane's on fire.)



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PlayStation 2



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RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK

PS2 • Capcom • March 2004

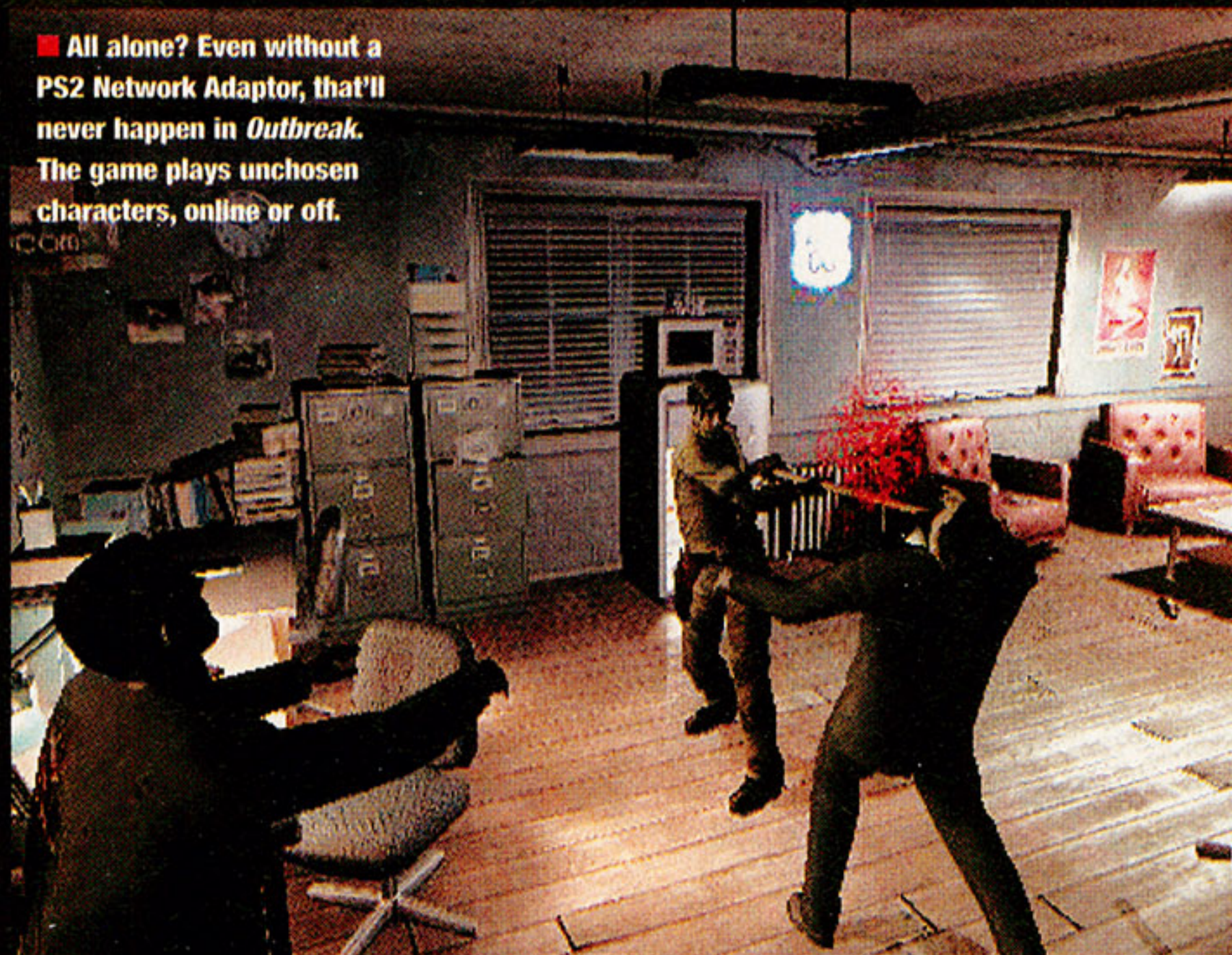
The zombie-infested series that gave name to (and then popularized) the survival-horror genre is dragging its festering animated corpse online early next year for multiplayer play. You'd think that a greater human-to-corpse ratio would dampen the fear factor a bit. "In actuality, it will be scary *because* there are other people there," says Producer Tsuyoshi Tanaka. "Less control [equals] more chances for something to go wrong."

Here's the setup: A waitress, a cop, a surgeon, a plumber, a security guard, a reporter, a subway conductor, and a computer expert walk into a bar, but before a lame joke can ensue, a horde of unruly

zombies breaks in, starts wrecking the joint, and begins gnawing on the closest warm bodies. Using your chosen character's unique skills (such as lock-picking, playing dead, or creating MacGyver-style improvised weapons), you'll work with the other survivors—up to four of the eight selectable bodies will be live players—to find a way out of the city. Communication isn't only important, it's the key to staying alive in Raccoon City.

Instead of using a keyboard or headset to converse with your group, the game requires you to talk to them through limited, situation-specific text selections like, "I have the key!" or "We're all going to die!"

■ All alone? Even without a PS2 Network Adaptor, that'll never happen in *Outbreak*. The game plays unchosen characters, online or off.



While not being able to chat kind of sucks, the upside is that it'll keep your party "in character" and prevent everyone from spoiling each scenario's scares. (You really don't want your friends standing around typing "OMG u sux0rz. LOL!!!!" while a giant carnivorous moth or toothy hunter is chew-

ing your face off.)

The tastiest part of *Resident Evil: Outbreak* is that players who die in the game will have a chance to become undead who can beat down doors and go canibal on their now-yummy friends...if only for a few minutes. Who's LOLing now? ➤

Media love child:



Night of the Living Dead

+



Friends

=



Resident Evil: Outbreak



VAN HELSING

PS2, Xbox • VU Games • March 2004

A legendary monster killer from a bygone era, this black-clad professor/hunter (originally a character from Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*) completed his doctorate in unholy ass-kicking long before the advent of movies or videogames. Based upon the upcoming eponymous Hugh Jackman film, *Van Helsing* is a weapon-heavy action-adventure that builds on the origins of the character while adapting the movie's plot to better suit the medium—which can only mean even further creature conflict after you've kicked down the towering doors of the fabled Castle Dracula.

Sent by the Vatican on a clean-up mission to Transylvania, our hero faces a fearsome array of famous monstrous opponents, including the notorious Count, the Frankenstein monster, and not just any wolfman, but *The Wolfman*. If thoughts of

hokey black-and-white films, Herman Munster, and/or *Teen Wolf* are leaping into your head, don't fear. Along with the title character, these classic movie monsters have received a sharp modern makeover and look scary as hell.

Of course, *Van Helsing* is more monster-hunting action game than white-knuckled fright fest—much like *Devil May Cry* or *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence*, by which the developers were clearly inspired. "We've taken our favorite features from the genre, mixed them with fantastic weapons, and come out with a potent new cocktail," says Lead Designer Alan Tew. The game's arsenal should satisfy the modern fetish for dual pistols, as well as offer an antiquated super weapon: the hand-cranked Gatling gun. Even better, Van Helsing's grappling hook not only helps him scale castle walls, but also reels enemies in for fatal blows.



■ Forget Chakan, the Forever Man.... Oh, wait, you already did.



■ Funny. We don't remember this part in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

Media love child:



The Mummy

+



Blade

=



Van Helsing



■ Can *Siren* hope to spook disaffected teenagers like these?

Media love child:



Scanners

+



Village of the Damned

=



Siren



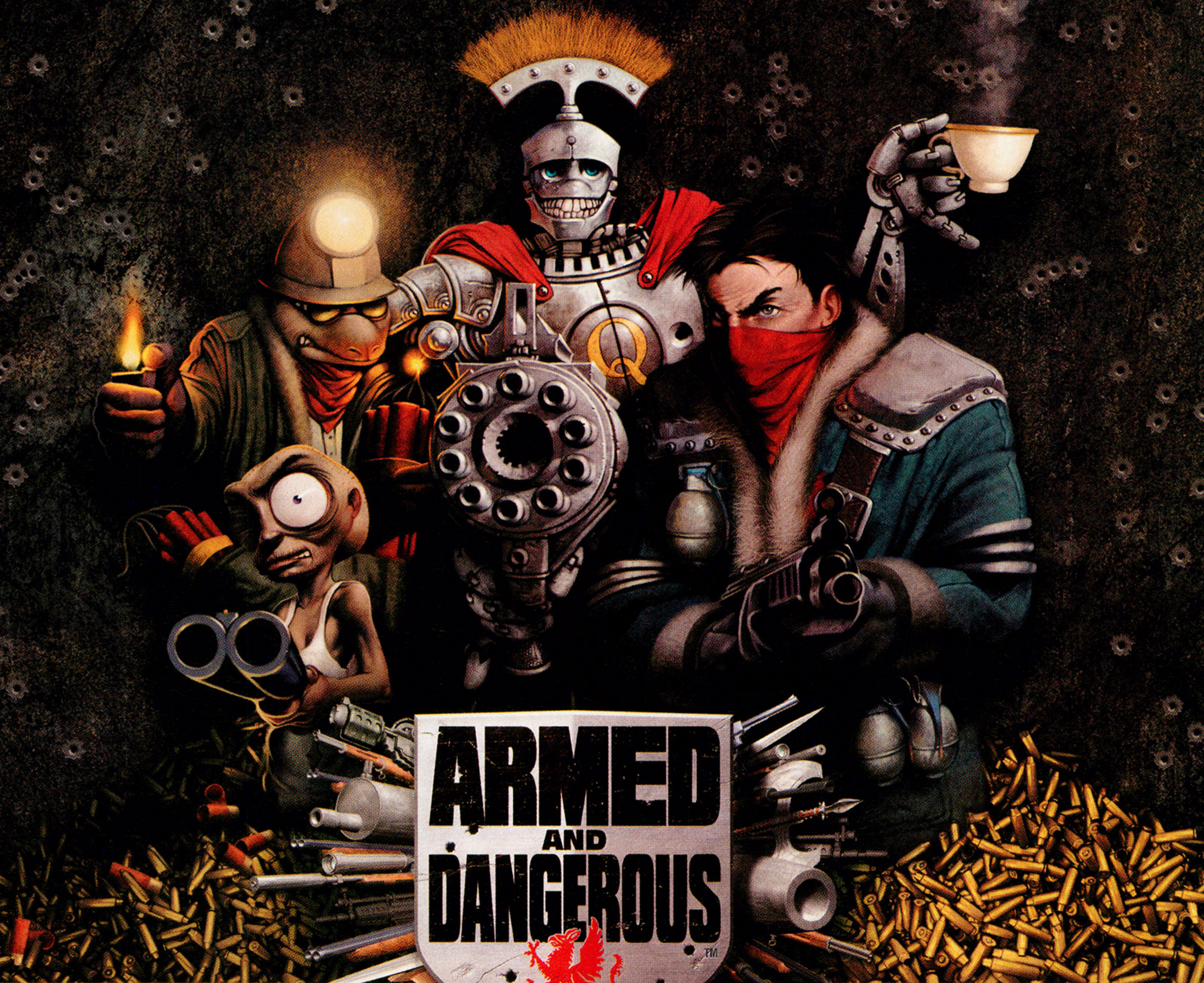
■ "Do you see what I see?" Hopefully not.



SIREN

PS2 • Sony Computer Entertainment Europe • TBD — A gruesome metamorphosis has thrown a seaside community into chaos—you can see it in their hideously realistic faces. Some grin with perverse joy as blood streams from their eyes; strange parasitic growths obscure any expression in others. You'll experience the spooky, disjointed narrative of this action-adventure firsthand through 10 playable characters, but also through the bloodshot eyes of the damned. Each protagonist possesses extrasensory perception that lets him or her see from the perspective of others—which allows you to investigate new areas but may also subject you to a freak's-eye view of unspeakable acts. No word on whether *Siren*'s hellish song will reach North America, but we think it's only a matter of time until Sony see things our way. ➤

THERE'S NO KILL LIKE OVERKILL.



Meet the Lionhearts. A smack-talking rag-tag band of rebels bound on an impossible quest. With an arsenal of outrageous weapons, they're destined for victory in 12,000 bullets or less. If they can make it through an army of psychotic robots and wall-smashing Goliaths, they just might save the world...if they don't burn it down first.



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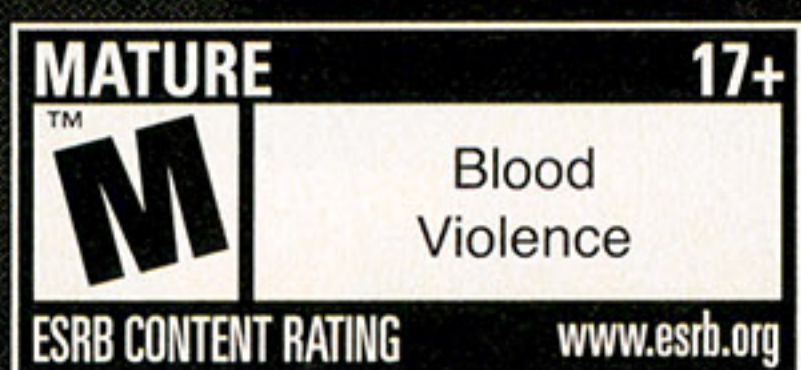
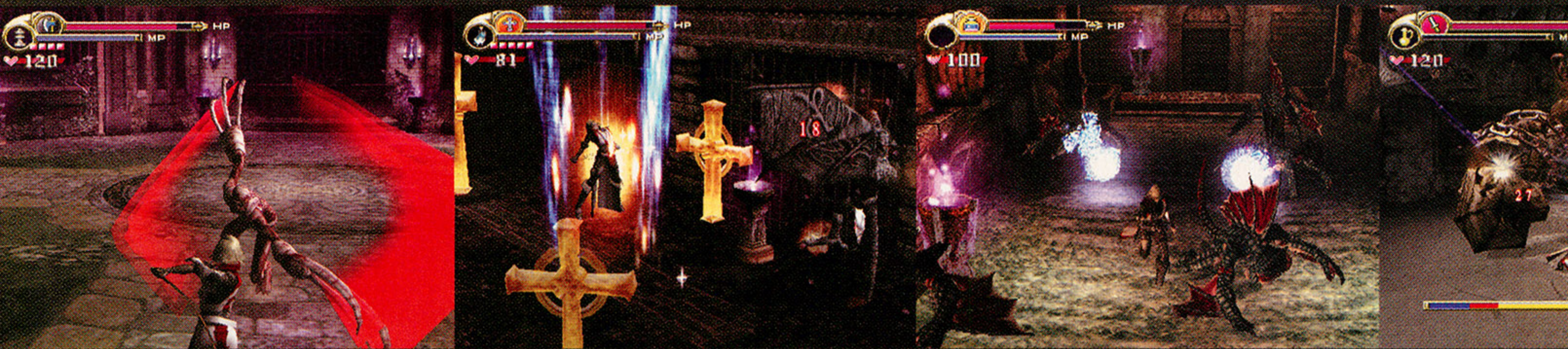


BAPTIZED IN BLOOD, A FAMILY'S FRAGILE DESTINY IS BORN.

At the dawn of the second millennium, the first Belmont makes the ultimate sacrifice. And the destiny of a bloodline is decided. From the creators of Castlevania® Symphony of the Night™ and completely reinvented for its 3D debut on PlayStation®2, Castlevania® Lament of Innocence™ reveals the true origins of the vampire-hunting Belmonts and their tireless quest for Vlad Dracula. A thousand years ago, a legend was indeed born. And the dying hasn't stopped since.

Castlevania® lament of innocence™

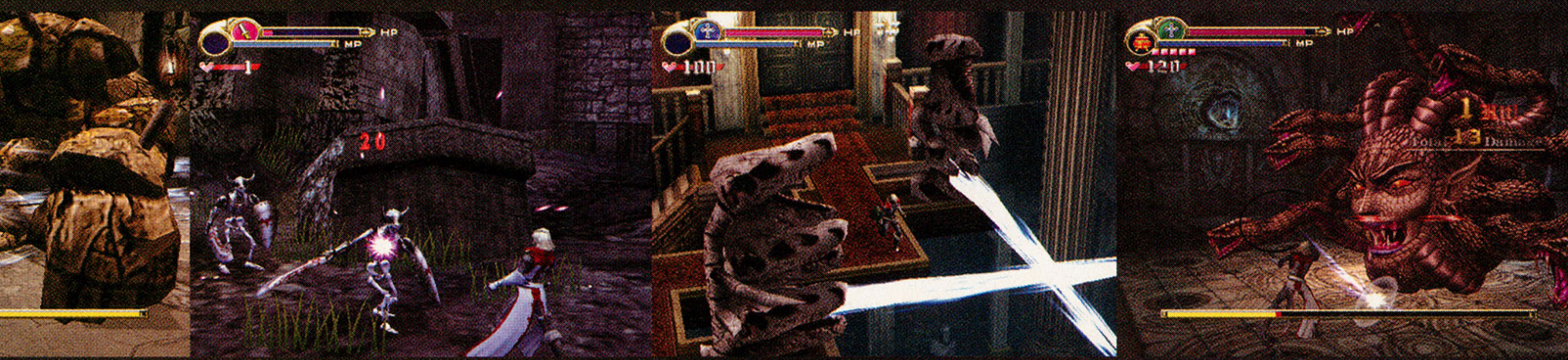
"The visuals at work here are simply magical." - *PLAY* "What does it actually feel like to play? Damned fun." - *EGM*



PlayStation®2



"Konami's classic adventure series looks drop dead gorgeous in 3D and plays brilliantly." - *PSM*



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FATAL FRAME 2: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

► PS2 • Tecmo • November 2003

Perhaps young girls are more sensitive to the unseen than others. Maybe they're just better photographers. After chasing a crimson butterfly into the forest, two twin sisters happen upon a remote Japanese village where a mysterious ritual failed long ago. Arming you with a spirit-dispelling camera, this interactive ghost story attempts to focus its fear in the moments before exposure.

"The most important point of this game is how to entertain a player until the very moment when a spirit or ghost appears in front of him," says Producer Keisuke Kikuchi. By entertain, he must mean "overwhelm with a sense of dread," because you're routinely assaulted by a bevy of disturbing sights and sounds in *Fatal Frame 2*. For instance, your older sister follows you with a slight but disconcerting limp into obscuring darkness. Grainy black-and-white flashbacks of another pair of twins periodically flash across the screen, somehow more disturb-

ing in their implied violence and lack of clarity. You'll strain to hear your sister's footsteps though the creaking of floorboards—if they're even hers.

When you finally come face to face with things that shouldn't be—like the specter of a kimono-clad, broken-necked woman who stares at you with blank eyes while making a pained backward crawl across the floor—you'll have to overcome the shock and focus squarely on the apparition. In order to cause a spirit the most damage, you *should* wait to snap the shutter until just before the ghoulie grabs you, but such grace under pressure requires steely nerves. The chicken-hearted really need not apply to *Fatal Frame 2*.

Your camera reveals other horrors as well. As you progress further into the game, photos of your sister will reveal ghostly hands drawing ever closer...her image becoming increasingly distorted as dark forces attempt to steal her away from you. Make no mistake; this game wants to scare you in the worst possible way. ►

Media love child:



The Ring

+



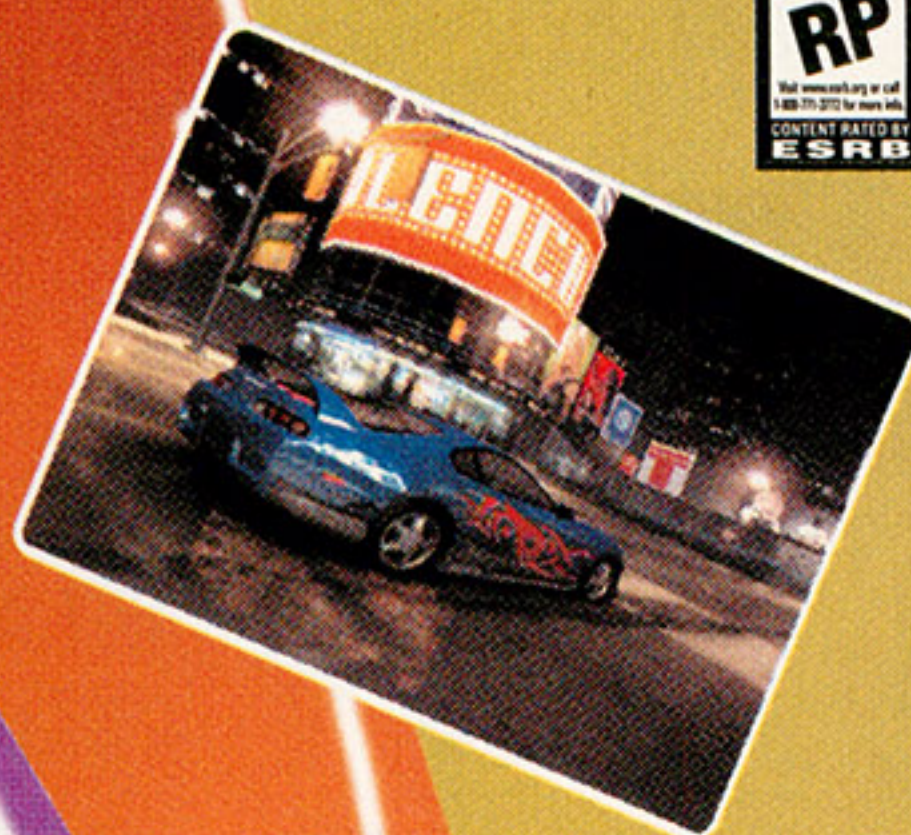
Girl, Interrupted

=



*Fatal Frame 2:
Crimson Butterfly*

REALITY?
SOUNDS
BORING.



NOT YOUR ORDINARY GAME

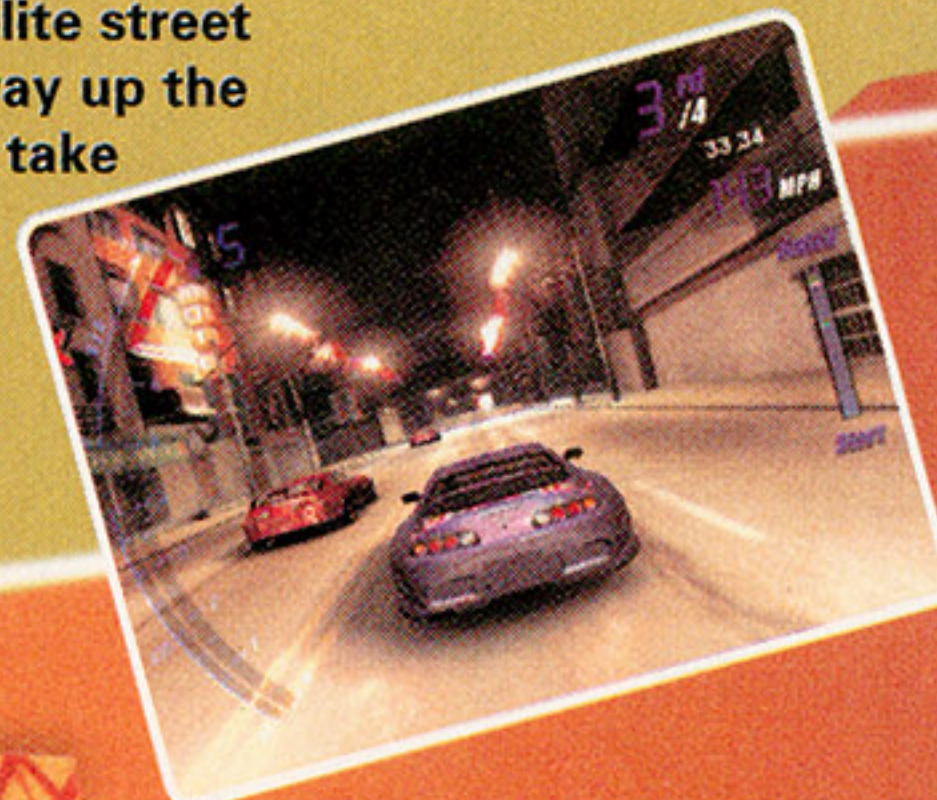
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

PS2, XBX, GC

If you ever long to enter the world of urban street racing and all its grit and glory, then the latest title in the Need for Speed series: Need for Speed Underground is just what you call for. Take on today's most popular tuner cars as you build the ultimate street machine by earning cash to pay for custom body kits and a host of car performance mods.

A number of diverse events set in rough, wet and sometimes nighttime settings make up the heart of street competition. You become a complete street racer only by perfecting skills in each event by means of nailing the perfect shift in drag racing and by putting your street cred on the line, racing through the city streets at all hours of the night.

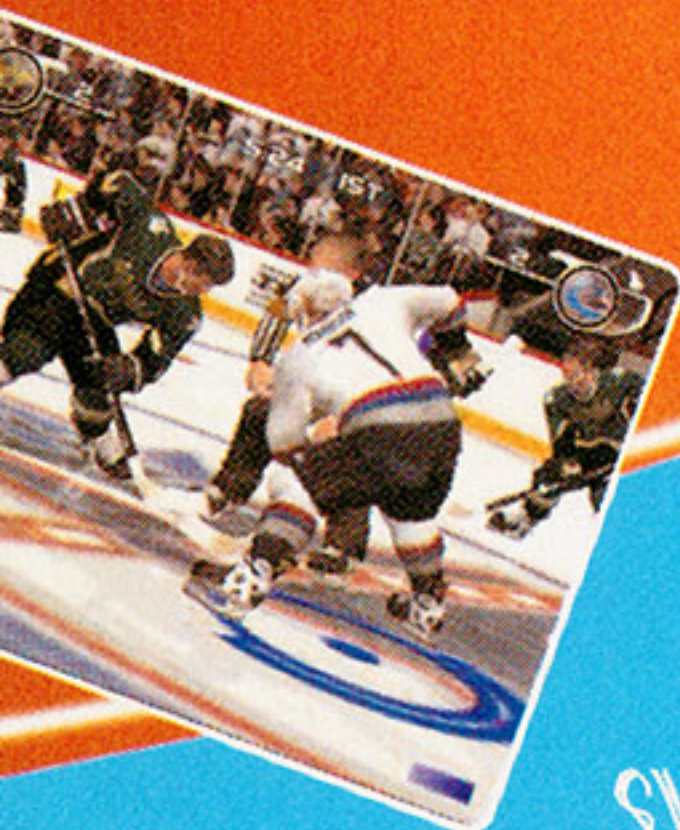
Prove you belong in the elite street racing circles, work your way up the underground rankings and take on the best of the best in each discipline.



BREAK OUT OF



THE ORDINARY



SWEET

CODES

NHL HITZ PRO

PS2, XBX, GC



These codes are entered on the Select Teams screen. Press the button beside the USER prompt on your choose sides controller option, and use your controller to enter one of the following user names to unlock visual cheats:

herk: (Player Head Mode)
You can make the head size big or small.

ingy: (Team Head Mode)
You can make the entire team's heads big or small.

211s: (Puck Size)
You can make the puck size big or small.

sasg: (Puck Shadow)
You can choose to put a shadow around the puck to make it more visible in the game.

carb: (Puck Glow)
Every time you hit the puck, the puck will have a glowing trail mark on the end of it.



BREAKOUT

TRICKS



WAKEBOARDING

UNLEASHED PS2, XBX, GC

Unlock More Boards

At the main menu press Up, Up, Left, Left, Right, Right, Down, Down, Up, Left, Right, Down, Up, Left, Right, Down. The game will say "You got all the boards... Or did you?"

Clear All Gaps

At the main menu press R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2. The game will say "Wakeboarding Royalty."

Unlock All Levels

At the main menu press Square (4), Circle (4), Triangle (4), Square, Circle, Triangle. The game will say "Travel Visa Approved."

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DARE TO LOG ON TO BUTTERFINGER.COM



■ You'll get different endings depending on if you help or hinder the survivors you meet.

THE SUFFERING

► **PS2, Xbox, GC • Midway • February 2004** — Prison can be a pretty rough and scary place. Between the undesirable company, humiliating rituals of everyday life, and constant threat of becoming someone's bitch, a maximum security penitentiary fits the definition of survival-horror even without mass-murdering meat puppets with blades for limbs skittering around. Action-horror newcomer *The Suffering* simply throws the latter in for good measure.

Found guilty for murdering his own wife and son, hardened inmate Torque sits on death row while other prisoners banter back and forth with wincingly harsh profanity. When an earthquake rocks the prison, abominations (whose designs are fittingly inspired by various execution methods) break loose and start raising hell.

During your tension-filled escape, you'll

deal pain using weapons like a makeshift shiv or a shotgun borrowed from the body of a mutilated corrections officer. And if you get really pissed off, you'll explode with rage and transform momentarily into a hulking, violent man-beast. "We want the player to feel empowered in the game-world," says Lead Designer Richard Rouse III, "but still terrified by the disturbing events that take place and the constant feeling that death could be waiting around every corner."

No matter what the method, you'll be seeing a lot of red as you take the game's fiends apart piece by piece. And with the cleaning staff probably eviscerated and hanging from meat hooks somewhere, bloodstains will stay on the wall and the corpses (or chunks thereof) will stay where they fall. We just hope *The Suffering* ends up being as scary as it is messy.

■ He who fights too long against freaky knife babies becomes one.



Media love child:



HBO's *Oz*

+



Hellraiser

=



The Suffering



CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

PS2 • Konami • October 2003

You can't expect to waltz into a vampire lord's castle like you own the place and then put the residents under the lash—unless, of course, you bear the surname Belmont. Even with a thick atmosphere of ruined elegance and dark creatures of every ilk howling for your blood, *Lament of Innocence* is full of so much action, our whip-smart hero hasn't any time to pay heed to fear. Neither will you. See page 212 for the gory, albeit unfrightening, details. ►



■ C'mon. It's an action game in a big spooky building with nightmarish wallpaper on the walls.

Media love child:



Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom

+



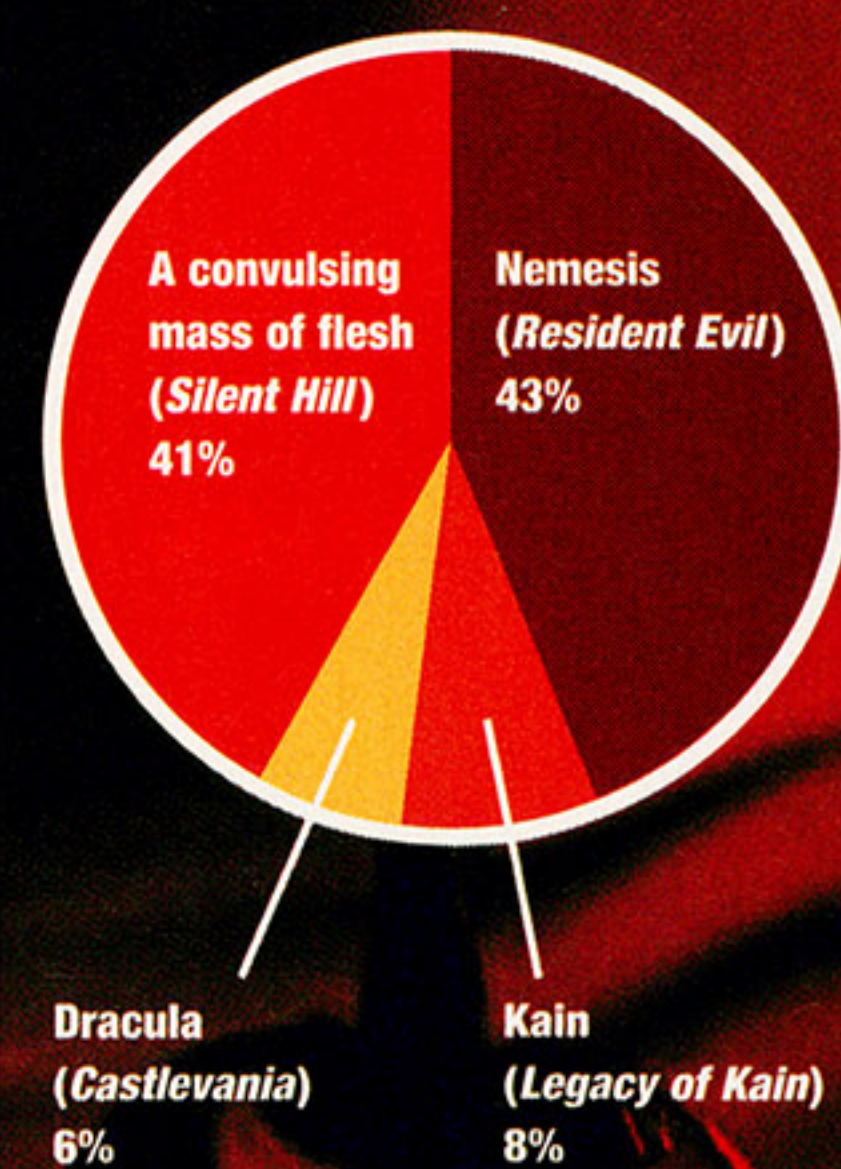
Bram Stoker's Dracula

=



Castlevania: Lament of Innocence

WHO WOULD YOU LEAST LIKE TO SHOW UP AT YOUR DOOR FOR TRICK OR TREAT?



(Source: Gamers.com poll, 10/03)

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Kain defies a few wraiths using his extremely wonky-looking sword.

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

PS2, Xbox • Eidos • November 2003

This vampire series has never really been out to scare the player; the protagonists, the pointy-toothed megalomaniac Kain, and antiheroic wraith Raziel are the real monsters here. In their worlds, you experience unlife on the other side, partaking in the dark pleasures of sucking blood and reaving souls within a deliciously macabre narrative. In *Defiance*,

the pulse has quickened and ruthless action reigns. Along with performing aerial swordplay (as defined by Capcom's *Devil May Cry*), both Kain and Raziel can use telekinetic power to yank enemies off ramparts, splatter them against walls, toss them into roaring flames, or impale them on the splendidly sharp (and sharp-looking) gothic architecture. For the mischievous little Vlad in all of us.

Media love child:



The Odd Couple II

+



Interview with the Vampire

=



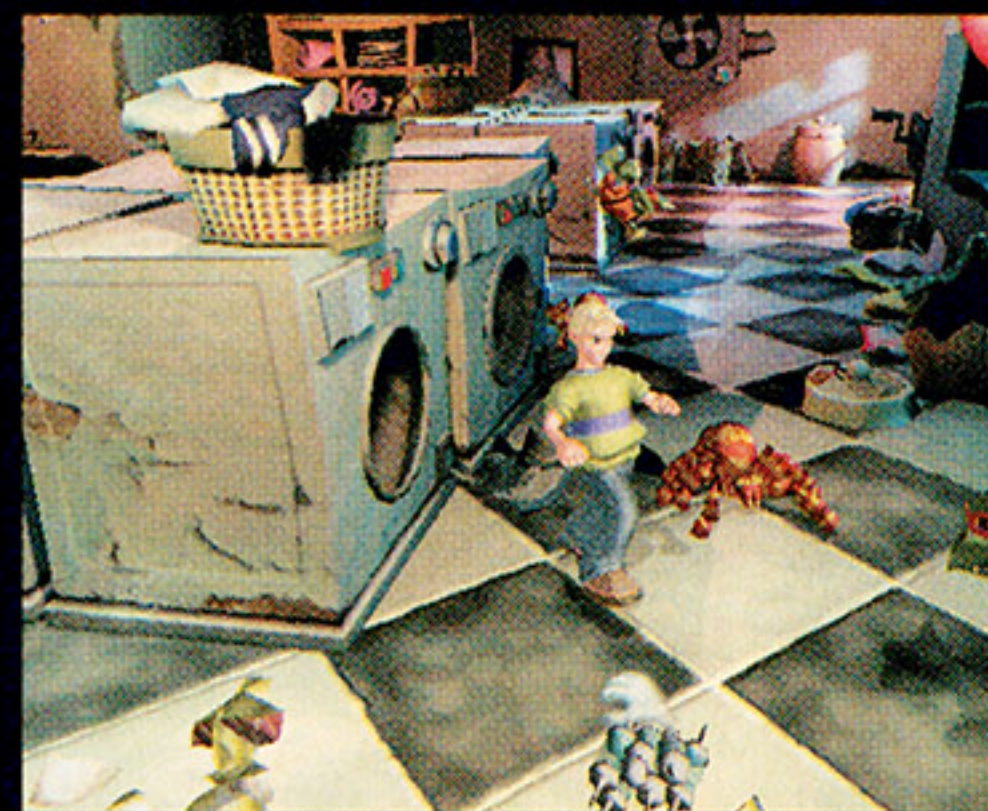
Legacy of Kain: Defiance



GRABBED BY THE GHOULES

Xbox • Microsoft • October 2003

In this frantically paced action-puzzler, you're a young lad in a big, cartoony haunted house crawling with creepy spiders, chattering skeletons, and other kitschy halloweenies. Luckily, you know how to swing a mean couch—and anything else you can get your hands on, from hamburgers to soda-can guns—to take out the baddies and move to the next room. While the cheesy atmosphere probably won't scare you, you'll have to stave off your character's fear by tapping button combinations during shockingly hokey events. Is this the type of game that grabs you by the ghoules and doesn't let go? Our magic 8-ball says, "Don't count on it."



Media love child:



The Goonies

+



Problem Child

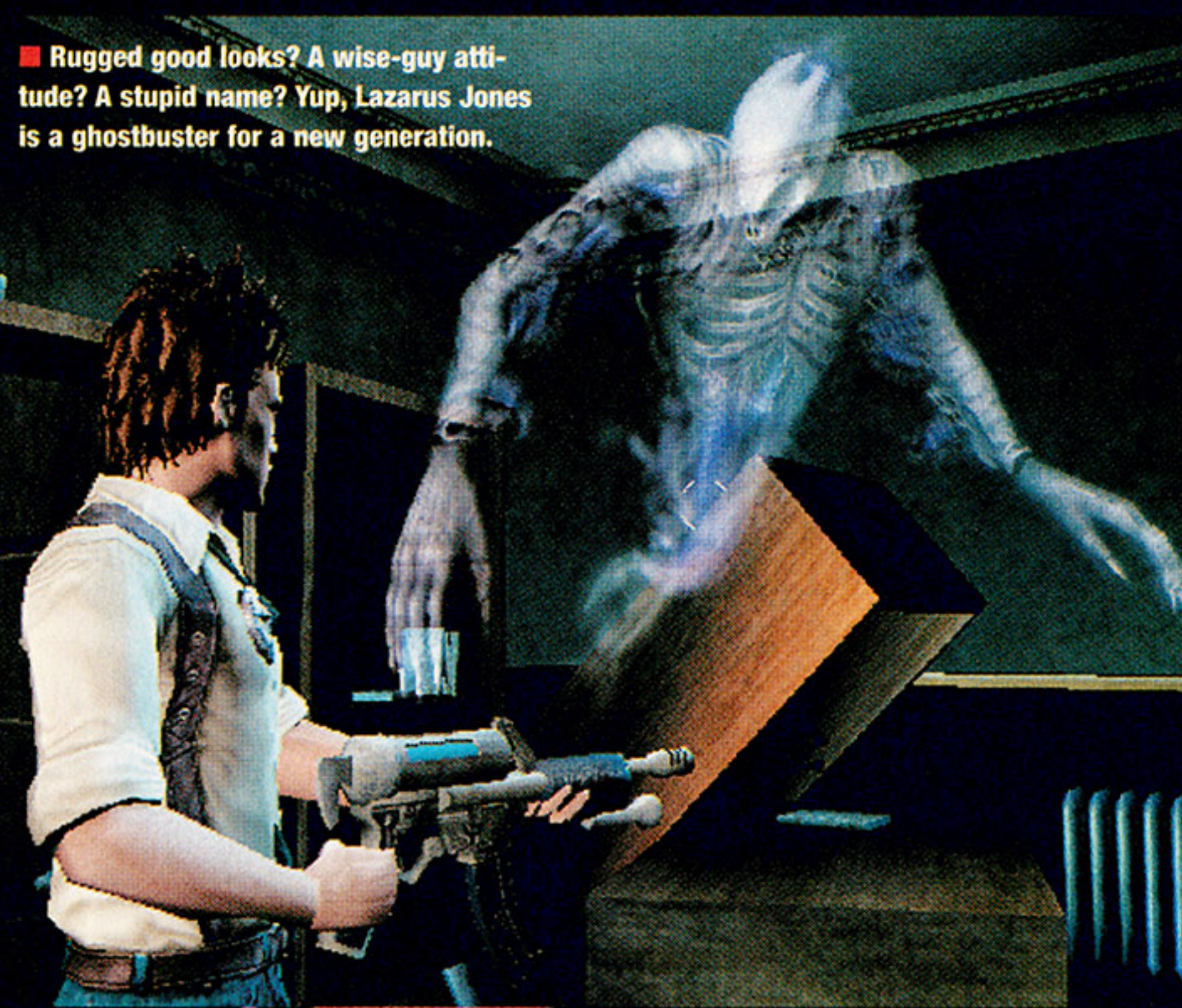
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Grabbed by the Ghoules



Rugged good looks? A wise-guy attitude? A stupid name? Yup, Lazarus Jones is a ghostbuster for a new generation.



GHOST HUNTER

PS2 • Sony Computer Entertainment Europe • TBD

Really, those Brits will hunt anything for sport. The U.K.-based developers behind *Primal* are working on an antispook action game that requires straight shooting, stealthy tracking, and a bit of brainpower. In *Ghost Hunter*, you'll go up against phantasmal fiends that manifest themselves in your plane of existence and hide in your closets. But don't expect a turkey shoot.

Beat the stuffing out of giant, smear-faced teddy bears, flush out invisible poltergeists, and take on sharp-fanged spectral crocodile men using a mix of conventional and sci-fi weaponry—including the ghost-busting capture grenade that anchors the nightmares to the world of the living, allowing you to pump them full of old-fashioned lead. As with *Siren*, Sony's been too knock-kneed to announce the game for the United States...yet, that is. ➤

Media love child:



Ghostbusters

+



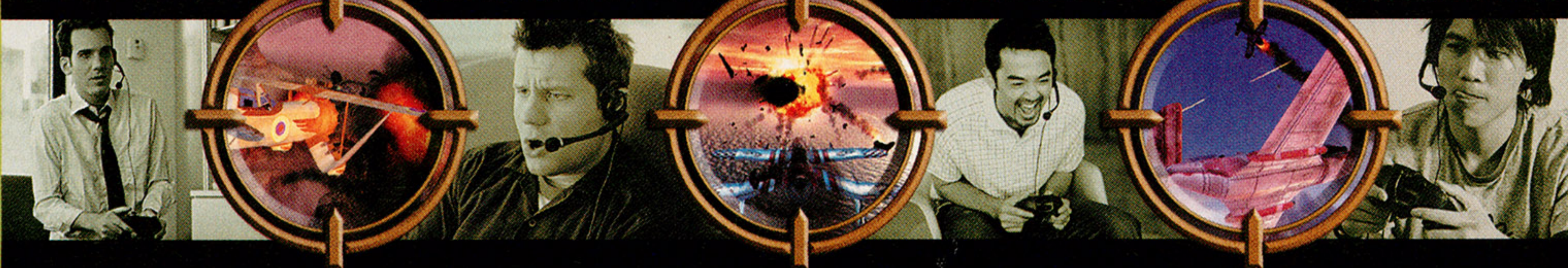
Lethal Weapon

=



Ghost Hunter

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



Suggestive Themes
Violence



fasa studio

Microsoft
game studios



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



it's good to play together

xbox.com/crimsonskies



RESIDENT EVIL 4

➤ **GC • Capcom • 2004** — The rent check is a bit late, but *Resident Evil* is finally renewing its lease on terror. Leon S. Kennedy, who survived more than his fair share of horror while fighting his way out of Raccoon City in *Resident Evil 2*, goes straight to the source—Umbrella HQ—for the fourth proper chapter in this action-adventure series. *RE4* looks to alter the genetics of both the series and the zombifying virus on which it's based: Writhing tentacles and humanoid figures materialize out of swirling black smoke, a severed stag head twitches on the floor, and Leon himself seems to be infected. And you just may be able to witness these horrors from a first-person view. Series creator Shinji Mikami's advice? "Don't pee your pants."

Media love child:



Resident Evil

+



On Deadly Ground

=



Resident Evil 4

GEIST

GC • Nintendo • 2004

A quick glance at this title might lead you to think you're looking at just another first-person shooter, but something's lurking right beneath the surface...something supernatural. And that something is you: an invisible spirit soldier capable of infiltration, bodysnatching, and scaring the bloody bejeezus out of people. Possess an enemy soldier and open fire on his buddies, then ransack the desk of a security officer before probing her mind for an access code. It's your foes, not you, that will be terrified in this full-auto ghost story.



Media love child:



Poltergeist

+



Spy Game

=



Geist

THE HAUNTED MANSION

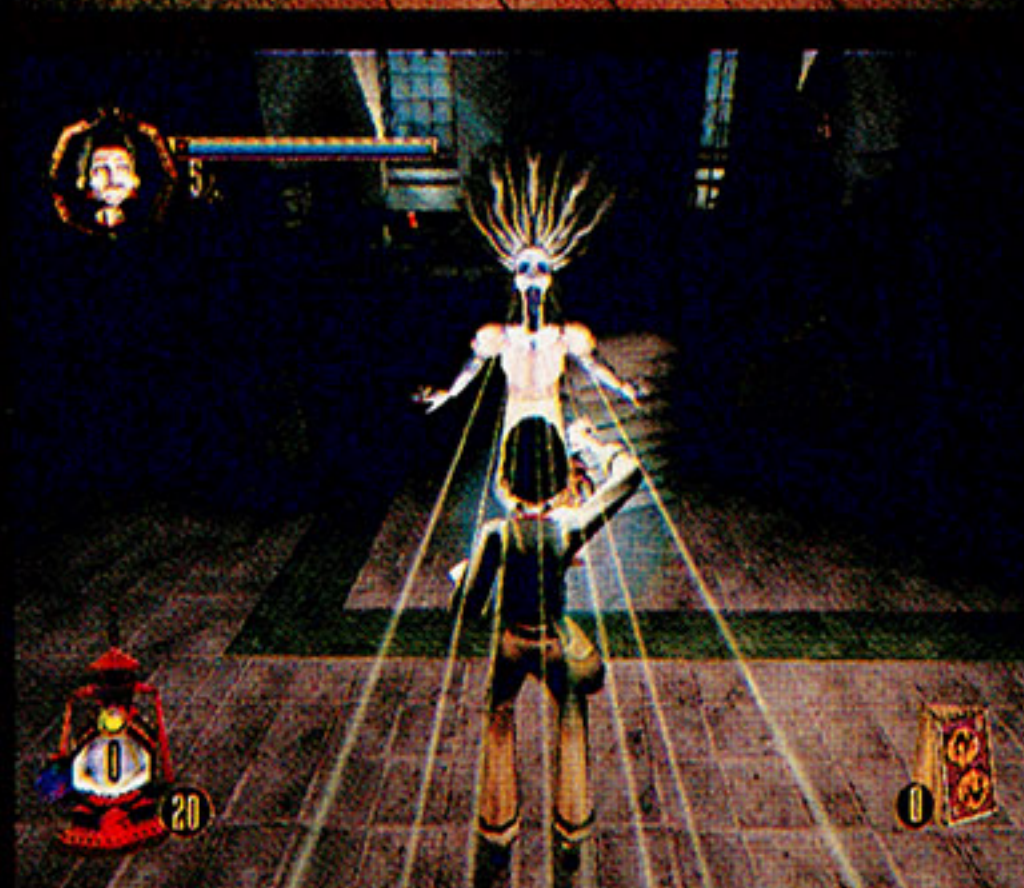
PS2, Xbox, GC •

TDK Mediactive • October 2003

If you've been known to scream and squeal during the *Haunted Mansion* ride at Disneyland, you may contract a mild (but curable) case of the hee-bie jeebies from the game as you explore dusty rooms and cobwebbed secret passages with your trusty ghost-zapping lantern. Nine hundred and ninety-nine spooks await, as do a few borrowed elements from the movie and ride. In place of film lead Eddie Murphy, you play as an unemployed yokel named Zeke who ventures into yonder mansion, unaware of the apparitional habitants that plague its decrepit halls. We're afraid, but more for concerns of quality.



But where were the spiders? Right here, apparently.



Media love child:



House

+

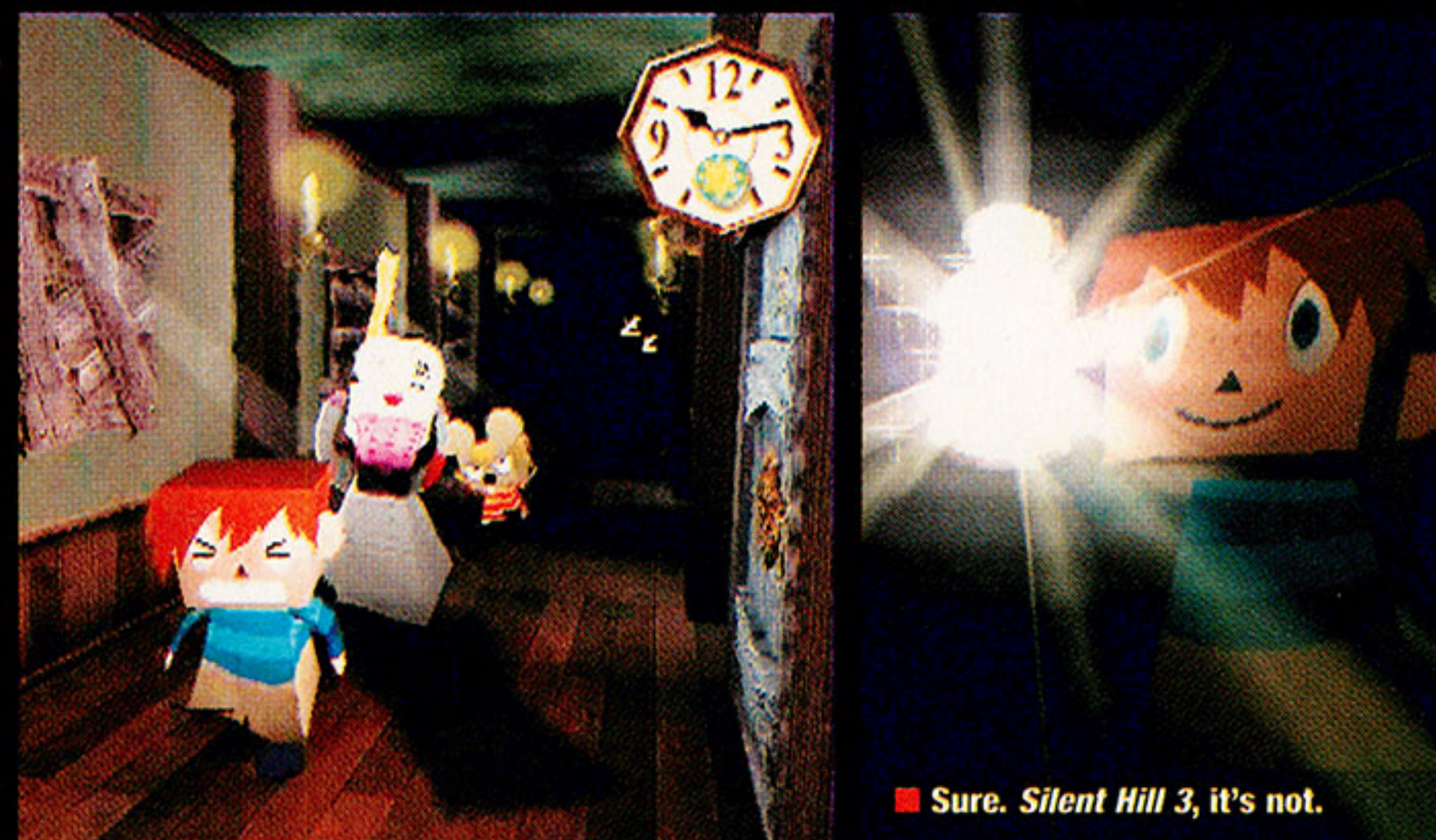


The Addams Family

=



The Haunted Mansion



Sure. *Silent Hill 3*, it's not.

GREGORY HORROR SHOW

PS2 • Capcom • TBA — Being confined in a puzzling haunted hotel isn't easy on the nerves, especially for cube-headed, freckle-faced little boys. Knocking on doors is about the only "action" you're brave enough to take, so you'll need to be sneaky and clever to fool guests into parting with their immortal souls. You won't eat them or anything—you simply trade them in so you can check out. *Gregory Horror Show* is aimed at spooking a slightly younger audience, although the off-kilter, angular-headed characters could likely scare grown men silly.

Media love child:



Rocky Horror Picture Show

+



Pecola

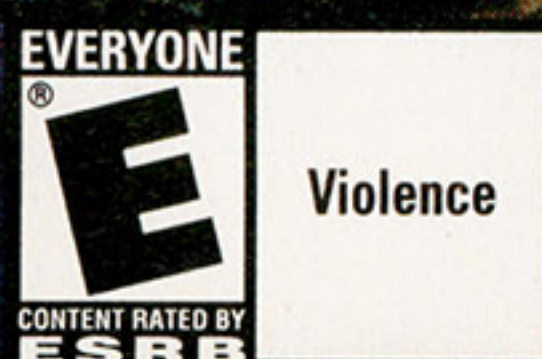
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Gregory Horror Show

who are you?

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IN MY QUEST
FOR REDEMPTION

NOT EVEN MY
DEATH

I COMMAND THE FORCES OF TIME.

DECEIVED BY A TREACHEROUS VIZIER, I WAS LED TO UNLEASH THE DARK POWERS OF THE SANDS OF TIME UPON THE SULTAN'S KINGDOM. NOW, AS DARKNESS CONSUMES ALL IN ITS PATH, MY SPEED, AGILITY, AND SKILL AS A WARRIOR ARE NOT ENOUGH. I MUST LEARN TO COMMAND THE SANDS TO SLOW, FREEZE, ACCELERATE, AND EVEN REVERSE TIME ITSELF. IF I FAIL TO UNDO MY FATAL MISTAKE, ALL SHALL PERISH WITH ME. MINE IS A FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL... NOT GLORY.



Blood
Violence
Suggestive Themes



PlayStation 2

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-GAME INFORMER



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VALVE



Blood
Intense Violence

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in "holy-*#!%-did-you-see-that" heaven.



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it's good to play together

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*"It's stealthy... and damned if it doesn't
look like **an excellent game.***

And there can never be enough stealth gaming"

— Official Xbox Magazine, August 2003

Use the shadows to infiltrate.

*Apply a diverse array
of stealth tactics.*

*Choose from a wide variety of
IMF gadgets and weapons.*

*Guide your IMF team through
action sequences inspired by the
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*"The range of moves seems to be matched only by the number of gadgets
and weapons in his **formidable arsenal.**"*

— GameSpot, May 2003

"We're very excited."

— Game Informer, August 2003

www.MI-game.com



PlayStation®2



GAME BOY ADVANCE

ATARI

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Violence



PlayStation®2



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cover story:
return of the king

ROYAL RUMBLE

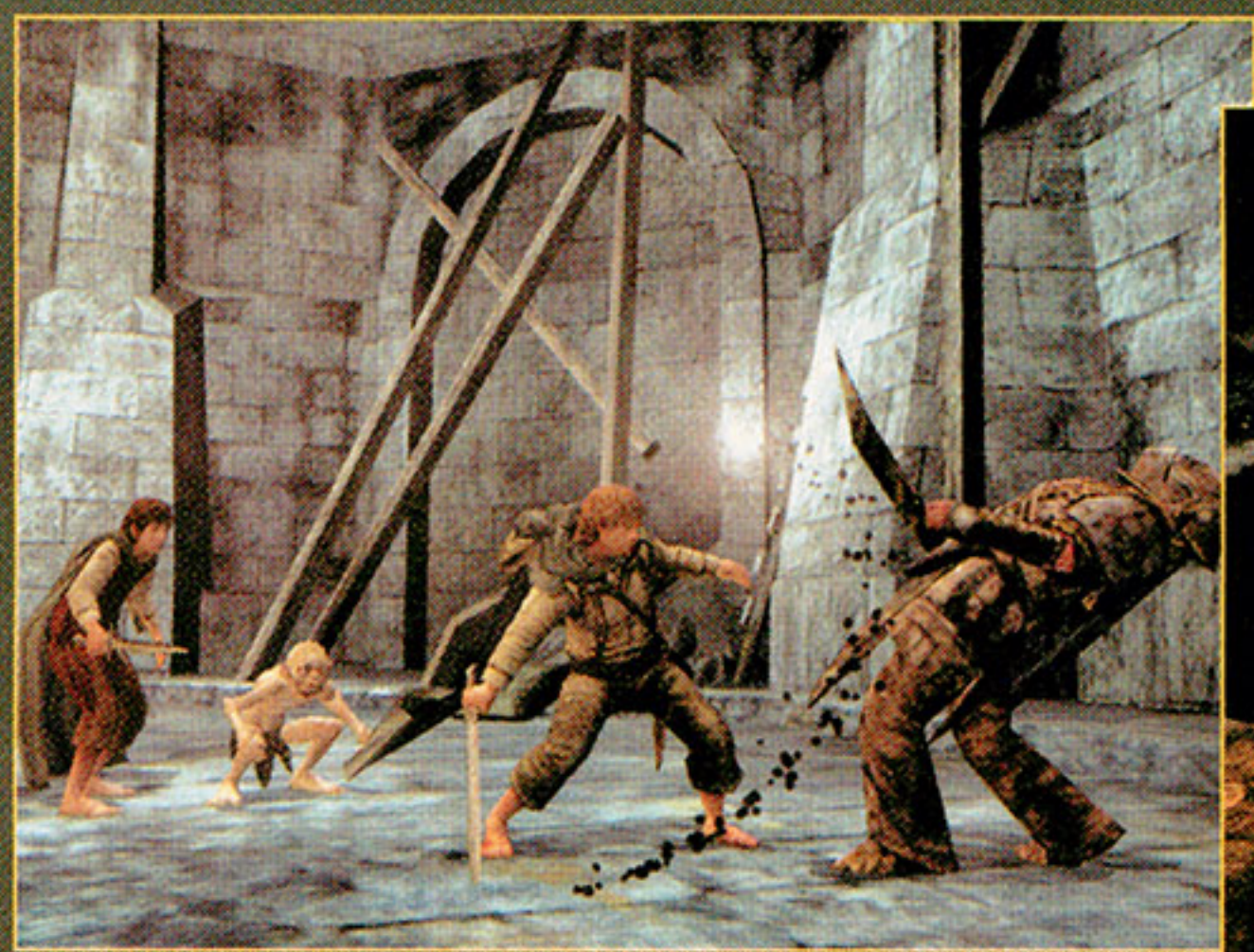
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King melds orc-hewing mayhem with two-player (online!) play and Hollywood gloss to forge the greatest show on Middle-earth

By Crispin Boyer

See our
exclusive review of
Return of the King
on page 181!

■ Like last year's game, *Return of the King* performs the nifty trick of switching from flick footage to real-time gameplay.





■ One early level, which has the walking-tree ents trampling anyone—even Gandalf—who gets in their way, is from a new scene in November's *Two Towers* extended-edition DVD.



Woe is the hobbit's life—the six meals a day, the weekly block parties in his backwoods 'hood, the right to play one of this holiday's hottest games whenever he wants. "We send [preview versions] regularly to all the movie's actors to show them how the game is coming along," says Neil Young, executive producer of action-y slash-and-hack epic *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, which hits PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube simultaneously on November 4, well before the movie hits theaters December 17. "Dom and Billy were up here a couple of months ago trying to strong-arm the artists into making them taller."

The pushy pair Young is name-dropping are

"The experience is less like a game and more like playing out your own version of our film."

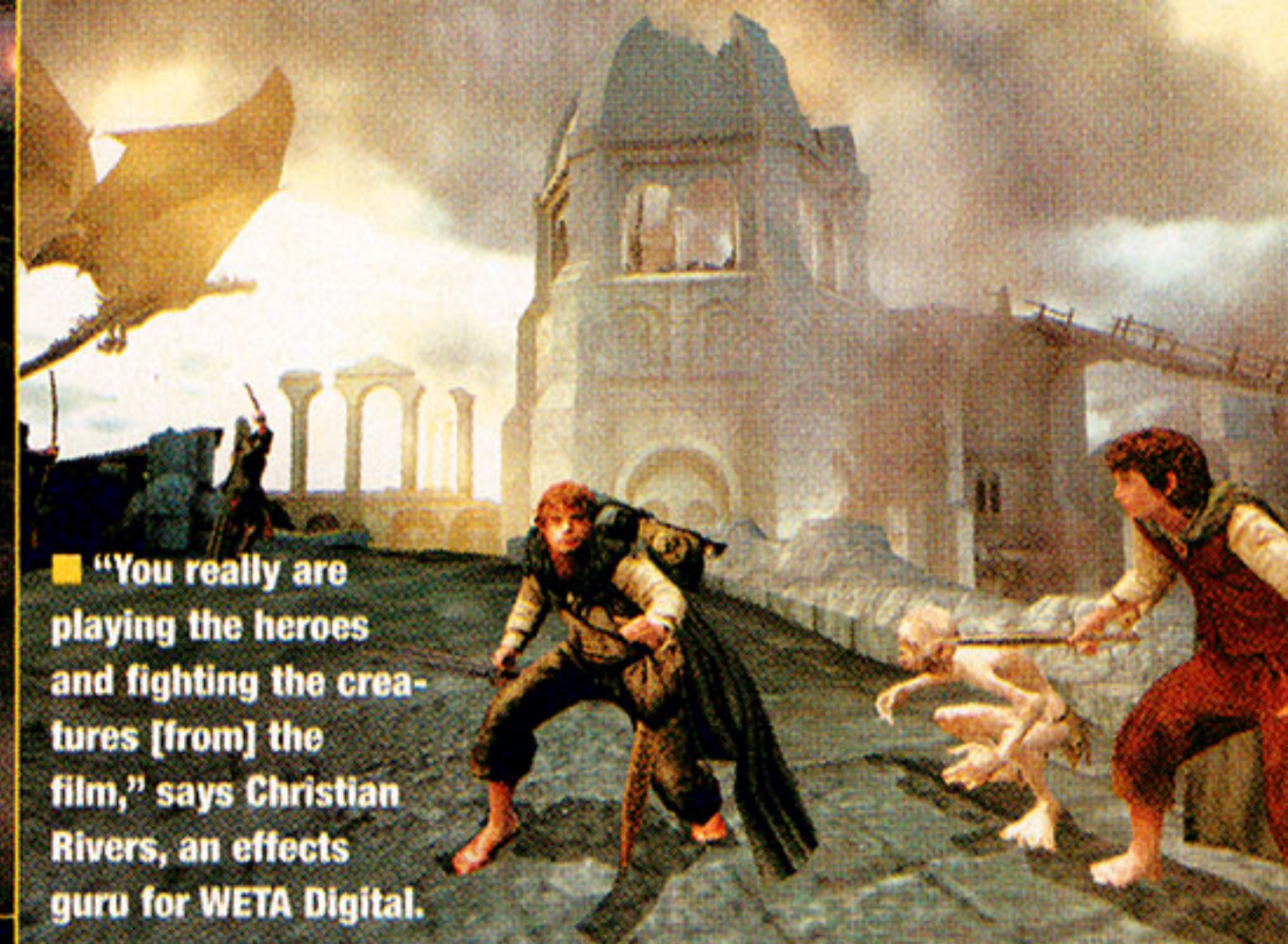
—Christian Rivers, previsualization supervisor for special-effects studio WETA Digital

Dominic Monaghan and Billy Boyd, the guys who play halfling Middle-earthlings Merry and Pippin, respectively. Like all the hobbit actors in the blockbuster flick trilogy, they're crazy for videogames (see for yourself on page 147)—but that's not the real reason they scurried into developer Electronic Arts' Silicon Valley-based studios. As with last year's *Two Towers* prequel game, *Return of the King's* development relies heavily

on participation from everyone involved with the movie, from film director Peter Jackson to the fuzzy-toed stars to the gurus at WETA Digital, the movie's effects house. "Usually, when you make a game based on a film, you get a trip to the set and a free mug—if you're lucky," says Young, who executive produced last year's game. "So it was really important to me to make the videogame feel like a unit on the film." ▶



■ Middle-earth's circus: craps all over that Ringling Bros. outfit



■ "You really are playing the heroes and fighting the creatures [from] the film," says Christian Rivers, an effects guru for WETA Digital.



■ Of all the film's actors, Ian McKellen—the man beneath Gandalf's pointy hat—recorded the most game-exclusive dialogue.

► Show business

Turning the game into a film unit meant putting EA personnel on the movie's New Zealand set to gather more than 200,000 assets—everything from concept art to set diagrams to the precise filigree on royal badass Aragorn's sword. "[EA's] collaboration with [our] creative team and cast is unparalleled," says Barrie M. Osborne, the movie's producer. The environments in the game, for instance, are built from the schematics of Set Decorator Alan Lee. "We don't just take the end result—the celluloid—and run that as video like most games do," says Young. "We take the component pieces used to create those shots and we re-create them and the environments in real time."

Which doesn't mean actual film footage will be missing from the game. Although Jackson didn't shoot any scenes exclusively for the project (as the filmmaking Wachowski brothers did for Atari's *Enter the Matrix*), *Return of the King* still packs in more than 20 minutes of footage from the new movie, the first two films, plus a new sequence from the special extended-edition *Two Towers* four-disc DVD set hitting stores Nov. 18. And all this footage segues seamlessly into real-time gameplay, a trick last year's prequel performed famously—except now the artists have come up with a few more creative ways to blend film and

"We give you everything you felt like you missed in last year's game, then increase the density of [film] imagery."

—Return of the King Producer Neil Young

game. One sequence, for instance, shows from-the-flick footage of the hobbits and Gollum moseying down a path and behind a tree—only to re-emerge on the other side rendered via in-game graphics, with gameplay kicking off shortly after. But even then, you might sometimes think you're watching the movie. "Whether it's the heroes you play or the foes you overcome," says Christian Rivers, previsualization editor for WETA Digital, "the motion, art direction, and combat of the characters are unerringly faithful representations of their cinematic counterparts."

Off to be the wizard

Of course, all this talk of new movie footage and re-created scenes may terrify head-in-the-sand fans who don't want a minute of the flick spoiled before its mid-December debut. But while *Return of the King*—the game—will reveal some events

and sequences from *Return of the King*—the movie—EA's intent is to create an experience that complements the film rather than ruins its surprises. And their key conspirator is wizened white wizard Gandalf. "He's really the great architect of everything that happens in the *Lord of the Rings*," says Young, "and throughout our game's story, we reinforce that idea through three arcs."

It all begins—after a brief montage of scenes from the last two movies to bring players up to speed—at Helm's Deep, site of *The Two Towers*' rain-drenched finale battle. Players start as Gandalf (one of the sequel's new playable heroes, along with hobbits Frodo and Sam and a few secret characters) and charge against Saruman's mutant-orc army besieging the mountain fortress. Complete this prologue stage and the game breaks into three separate paths through *Return of the King*'s story, which packs 13 levels ►

HOBBITS ACROSS AMERICA: RETURN OF THE KING ONLINE

While all three console versions offer two-player cooperative play, only the PS2 *Return of the King* lets two players cooperate from opposite ends of the country, courtesy of an online mode added late in development. Unlike the offline multiplayer game, which must be played in strict level sequence, the online mode can be played in any order you wish: Simply invite players to join you in levels you've unlocked in the solo game. "That'll motivate people to play offline and unlock stuff to make them popular online," says EA's Neil Young. Of course, gamers can start at the beginning and go through the story, cinematics and all, with an online pal. The game also supports voice chat via separately



sold headset microphones, making it easy to coordinate hack-and-slash strategies.

■ Play via dial-up is possible, but EA recommends broadband only. You can also find buds on EA Messenger, set up rooms, or jump into an instant match-up.



➤ (plus four secret ones) in all. The Path of the Wizard continues Gandalf's adventures—with Pippin in tow—to Minas Tirith (the good guys' capital fortress). The Path of the King follows Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli's quest through cav-

shebang is tied together with Gandalf-narration sequences that kick off most levels and drive home the point that everything is going according to the wizard's plan. "It allows us to give insight into Gandalf without necessarily giving away deep



"The EA team is really taking [its] experience from last year and successfully building on it. I can't wait to play the final game."

—Return of the King movie Producer Barrie M. Osborne

ernous, ghoul-filled "Path of the Dead" levels, then to the battle at Pelennor Fields, a titanic clash that makes Helm's Deep look like a domestic disturbance. Survive that nightmare and you'll face an even bigger battle, with enemies stretching to the horizon, at the gates of Mordor. The third path—the Path of the Hobbits—follows Frodo and Sam's perilous cross-country hike to Mordor and the Crack of Doom, the volcano that can "un-make" the One Ring.

Although the three paths follow the adventures of separate Middle-earth characters, the whole

details about the film," Young says. "And because players will have this insight, they'll have this deeper understanding of all three movies."

Action!

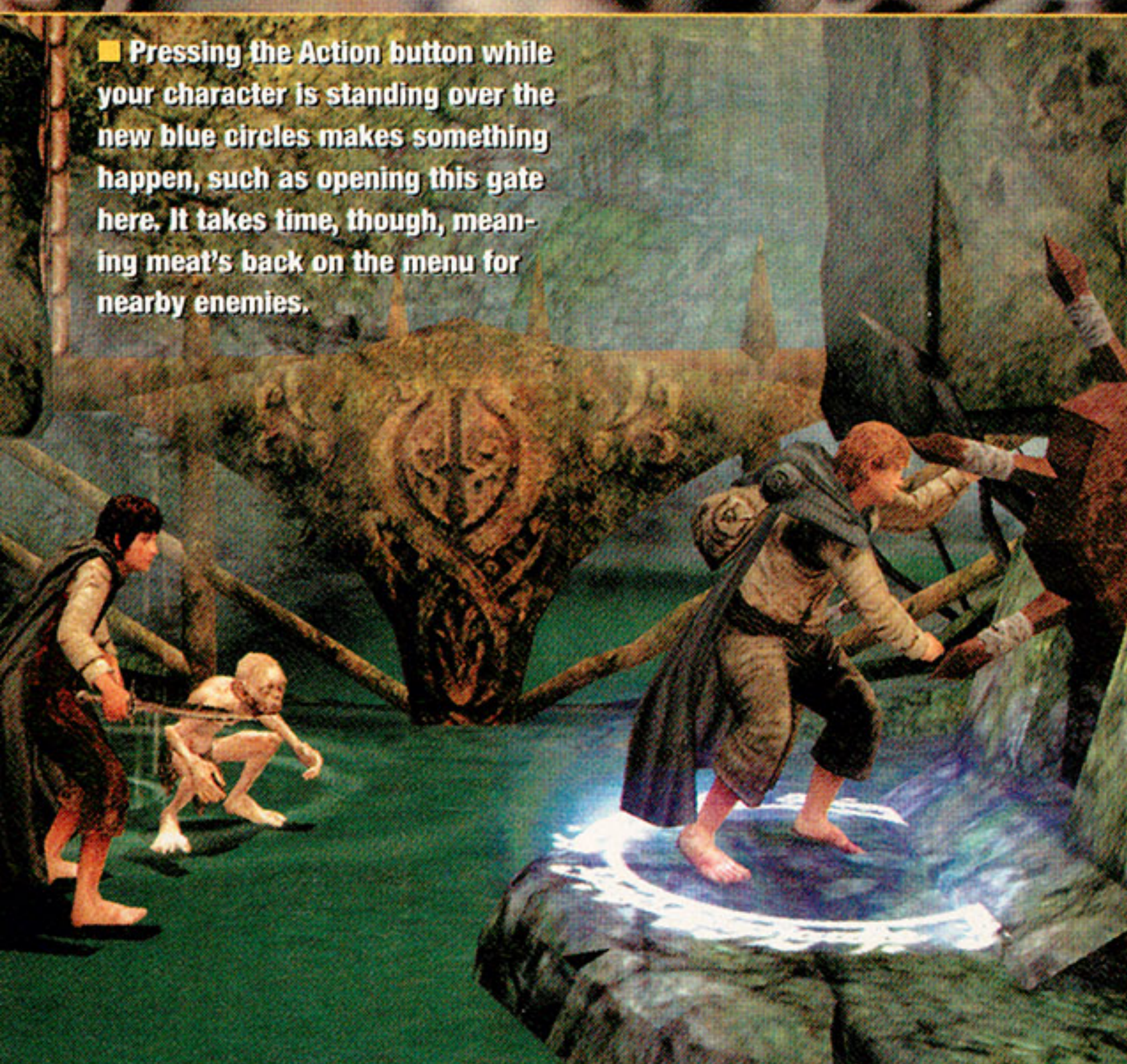
Despite its new playable characters and multiple level paths, *Return of the King* is still an action-packed beat-em-up at its bloody, ax-hacked, sword-impaled heart. It's just a heavily tweaked action-packed beat-em-up. Levels now feature environmental gizmos—catapults to launch, walls to topple onto enemies, chandeliers to drop—that

players interact with by jabbing the Action button while standing on special glowing blue circles. And each character has a new special ability: The hobbits, whose levels mix stealth with combat, don their cloaks and become invisible for a limited time, during which they can creep up on enemies for one-stab kills. Gandalf fires up a ball-lightning shield that zaps any enemies he touches. Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas activate a skill multiplier that ramps up their ability to max out their skill meters.

This circular meter itself is more important this time around, too. Just like in the last game, it fills a notch with every successful attack and parry, and it dips whenever an enemy nails you. Fill it to capacity and you enter Perfect mode, a limited-time powered-up blitz in which you inflict mondo damage. So, why is it so crucial? EA has ramped up the challenge this time, with more ➤



■ Pressing the Action button while your character is standing over the new blue circles makes something happen, such as opening this gate here. It takes time, though, meaning meat's back on the menu for nearby enemies.



LOW BLOWS: HOBBITS TALK BIG ABOUT THEIR GAMING HABITS

What, you think those waist-tall halflings spend all their time in the shire puffing on pipeweed and chowing down on hobbit junk food? Oh, they do. But what pastime goes better with such lofty pursuits than playing videogames? The principal actors behind the fuzzy-toed heroes—Elijah Wood (Frodo), Billy Boyd (Pippin), and Dominic Monaghan (Merry)—don't mince words when it comes to gaming, as we learn from this trash-talk session recorded for the game's unlockable behind-the-scenes videos.

Dominic: Elijah's a pretty good gamer.

Billy: The best player would be Elijah.

Elijah: ...I'm definitely a better gamer than the two of them.

Dominic: Elijah has this insane ability of being able to grab a console and go through a game.

Elijah: I've actually made the controller float, and without touching anything I've managed to play the game. It's only happened a few times, but...

Dominic: I've only been seriously gaming now for probably three or four years.

Elijah: And he's doing very well, but I'm still a much more experienced gamer.

Dominic: But I'm getting there. I could beat Elijah if I get into it.

Billy: I am certainly a lot better than Dom.

Dominic: Ha!

Billy: Dom, who, you know, talks a good game.

Dominic: [Playing game] Oh, look at me go—I'm on fire now.

Billy: He'll say, "I'm getting so good at this game." We say, "OK, give us it." We'll beat him three times in a row.

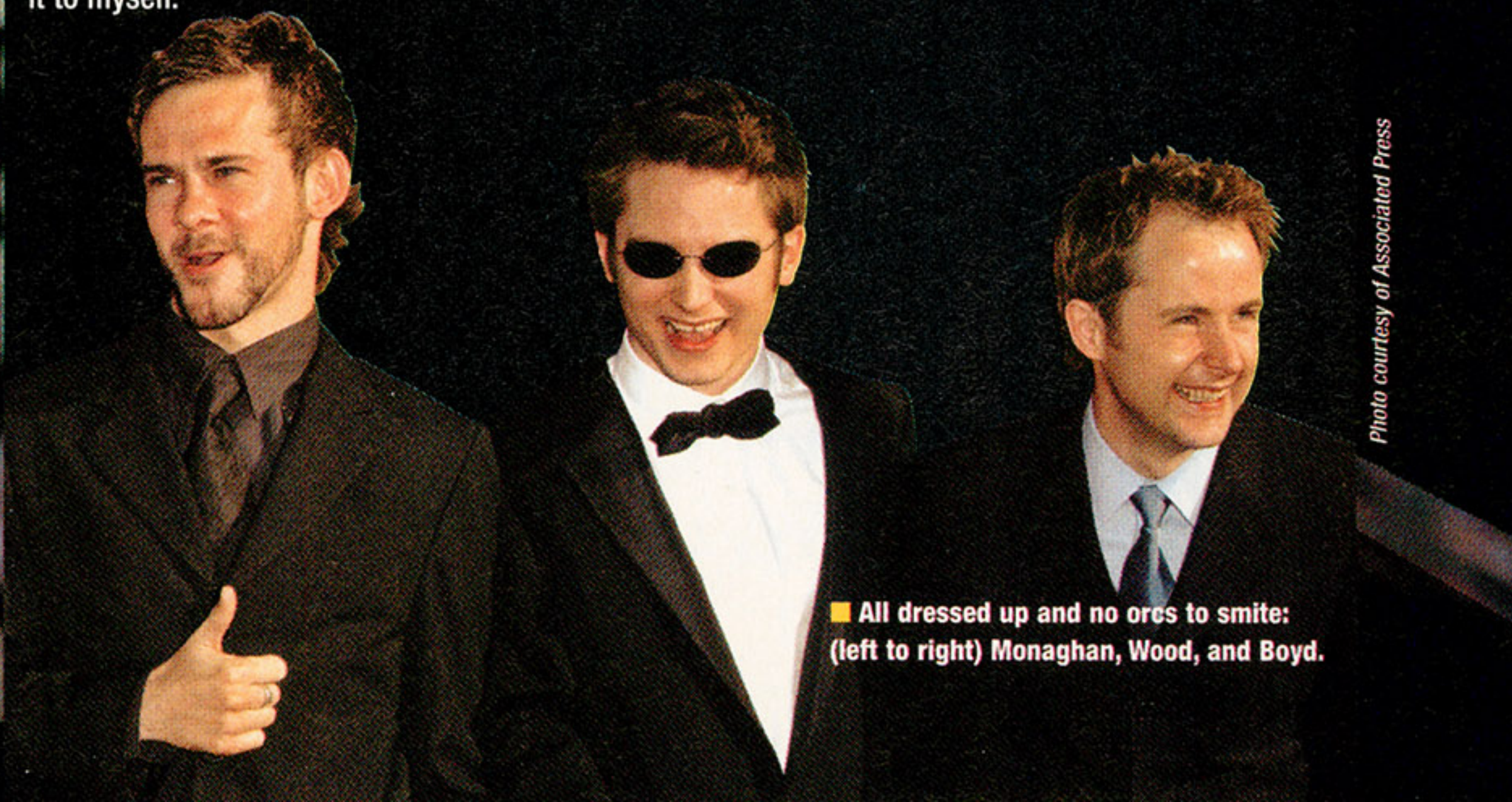
Elijah: Billy's getting better, but he's not great.

Dominic: Billy is awful. He's one of the worst game players of all time. You play a two-player game and you go, "Billy press X," and he'll be like, "Hang on a minute...eh...where...which one is X?"

Billy: I think I do have a special gift for gaming.... I just really haven't opened that gift yet and given it to myself.



Larry D. Curtis for TheOneRing.net



■ All dressed up and no orcs to smite: (left to right) Monaghan, Wood, and Boyd.



■ **Party crasher:** The last game had a troll as a boss. Now, several of these brutes show up in nearly every level.



► simultaneous enemies and harder bad guys, including trolls and crafty new Southron warriors. The game even bumps up the difficulty a tad if you play well. Oh, and just wait until you face super-sized she-spider Shelob. "I want you to play this whole game with that little knot in your stomach," says Young. "I've really tried hard to manage the health power-ups so that you're [in danger of dying] all the time. When you see a health on the floor, you're like, 'Must get!'"

Another reason you don't want to zonk out and just mash buttons: Playing in Perfect mode multiplies the experience points earned from each kill. As in the prequel, you use these points to level up and, between levels, buy upgraded combo attacks for each character. But now, you can splurge on special Fellowship Upgrades that apply to all the characters instead of just one. Buying the basic Orc Hewer attack combo for one character, for example, is fairly cheap, but you're much better off spending a few thousand points more and getting it for everybody. You'll eventually unlock every character for play in every level, after all.

Slay well with others

"It's something we should have done and could have done in time for last year's game," says Young, referring the one feature that every critic griped was missing from *The Two Towers*: multiplayer play. "This year we made multiplayer a priority, and it's a lot of fun." *Return of the King*'s two-player mode works a bit differently from the single-player game (and the PS2-exclusive online mode—see page 146). Instead of starting at Gandalf's Helm's Deep stage, both players begin the game in the King's Path levels and must progress all the way to the finale battle at Mordor's gates. Only then do they unlock the Wizard's Path stages, which in turn must be completed to open up the Hobbit's Path. Along the way, they'll level up their characters and upgrade their combos just like in the single-player game. "The idea is to bring your character to a friend's place on a memory card," Young says, "play cooperatively, build your character up, then bring him back to your own game."

About the only things missing from *Return of*

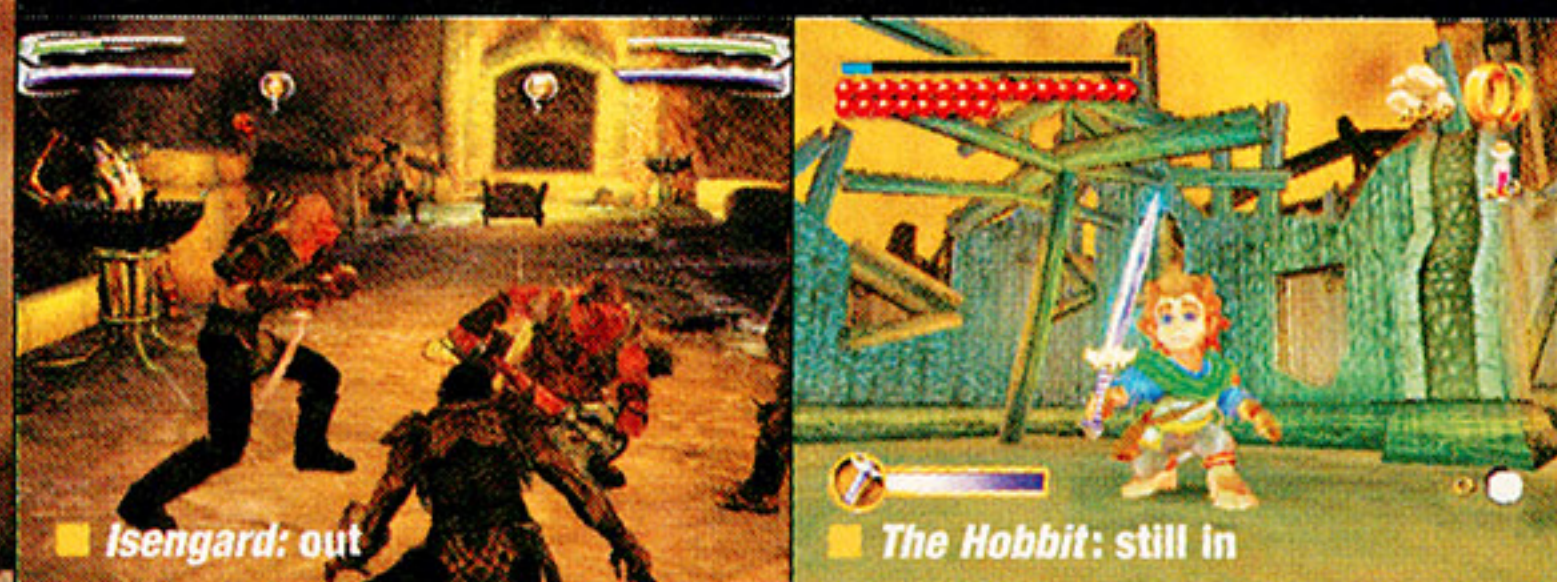
the King are special multiplayer-specific combos—two-player team-up moves that EA planned for the game but in the end nixed because of time constraints. It's not a tragic omission considering how much other stuff—the online play, the charged-up combat, the boosted production values, and the secret extras—makes *Return of the King* stand above typical ho-hum movie-licensed games. "We really tried very hard not to do just a piece of merchandising for the film, which is what a lot of videogames are," says Young. "We wanted to adapt [film Director] Jackson's work for our medium in the same way he adapted Tolkien's work for his medium, and to do it in a genre that we felt comfortable with as game makers and game players." 🐉

Editor's note: Did they pull it off? In a word, yep. But head to page 181 for full disclosure in our exclusive review, plus a breakdown of how the three console versions differ. Oh, and check page 236 for a review of the Game Boy Advance *Return of the King* game. Bonus!

WANT MORE MIDDLE-EARTH?

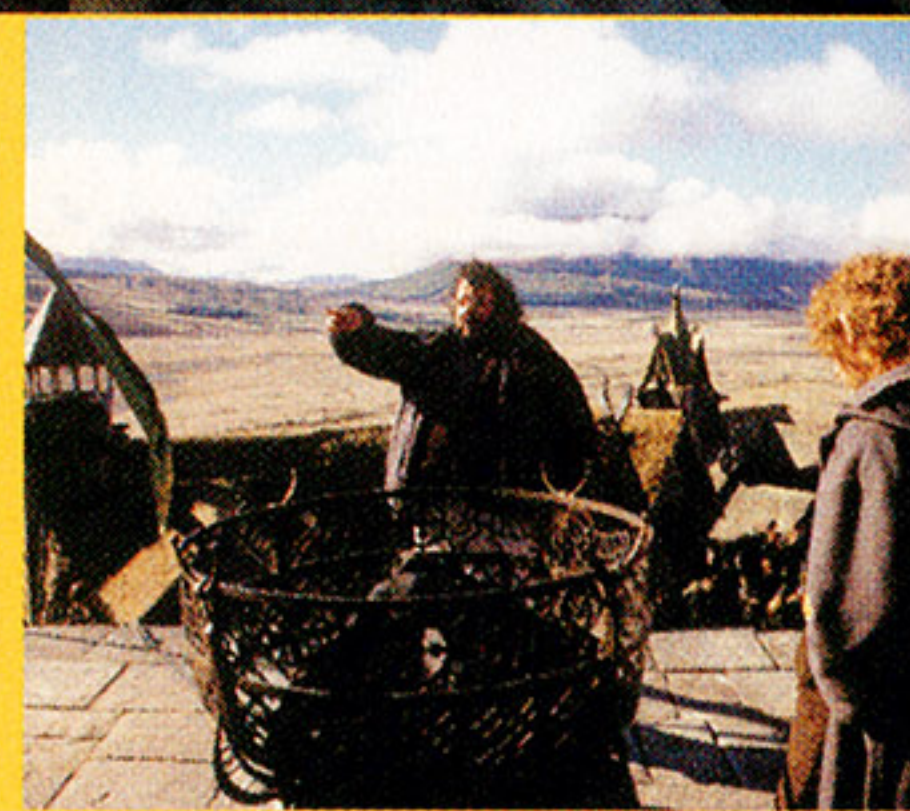
If December's flick and EA's game have you craving more ways to feed your hobbit habits, you don't have many options. EA's next *Rings* thing, called *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, isn't due until late next year. And VU Games—which owns the rights to make games based on the novels—recently canned *The Lord of the Rings: The Treason of Isengard*, its PS2 and Xbox follow-up to last year's disappointing *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Apparently, this sequel just wasn't shaping up: VU says *Isengard* wasn't on track to meet fans' expectations.

That leaves console gamers with *The Hobbit*, VU Games' colorful, kiddified take on the *Lord of the Rings* prequel novel. It's a platform-hopping adventure that follows Bilbo Baggins, the original *Rings* leader, as he hooks up with Gandalf, hangs with Dwarves, swipes Gollum's ring, and confronts treasure-hoarding dragon Smaug. The game is due in mid-November. We'll review it for you next issue.



WIN A TRIP TO MIDDLE-EARTH...

New Zealand's breathtaking backcountry provided the setting for all three *The Lord of the Rings* flicks. So why not check it out for yourself...on our tab! To celebrate the upcoming *The Return of the King* game and movie, *Electronic Gaming Monthly* and Electronic Arts are teaming up to offer a trip for two to this real-life Middle-earth. Just go to <http://lotrcontest.egmmag.com> and answer three simple questions based on our cover story. And don't grovel like Gollum if you don't win the grand prize—we're also giving away precious copies of the game.



GRAND PRIZE (ONE (1) WINNER)

A trip for two to New Zealand (includes round-trip airfare and hotel accommodations)

RUNNER-UP PRIZES (40 FOR EACH PLATFORM)

Electronic Arts' *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* game for PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, and Game Boy Advance

HOW TO PLAY

1. Log on to the contest page at <http://lotrcontest.egmmag.com>.
2. Answer all three questions correctly to complete the entry form.

All correct entries received by January 15, 2004, will then be entered into a drawing for the prizes. Only one entry per person is accepted. Full legal rules available at <http://lotrcontest.egmmag.com>.

There are some individuals who would prefer that we not
publish a game like Go! Go! Hypergrind.

Let them vent.

"Do you like skating? If you do then Go! Go! Hypergrind should rocket to the top of your 'Must buy' list. You won't be disappointed."

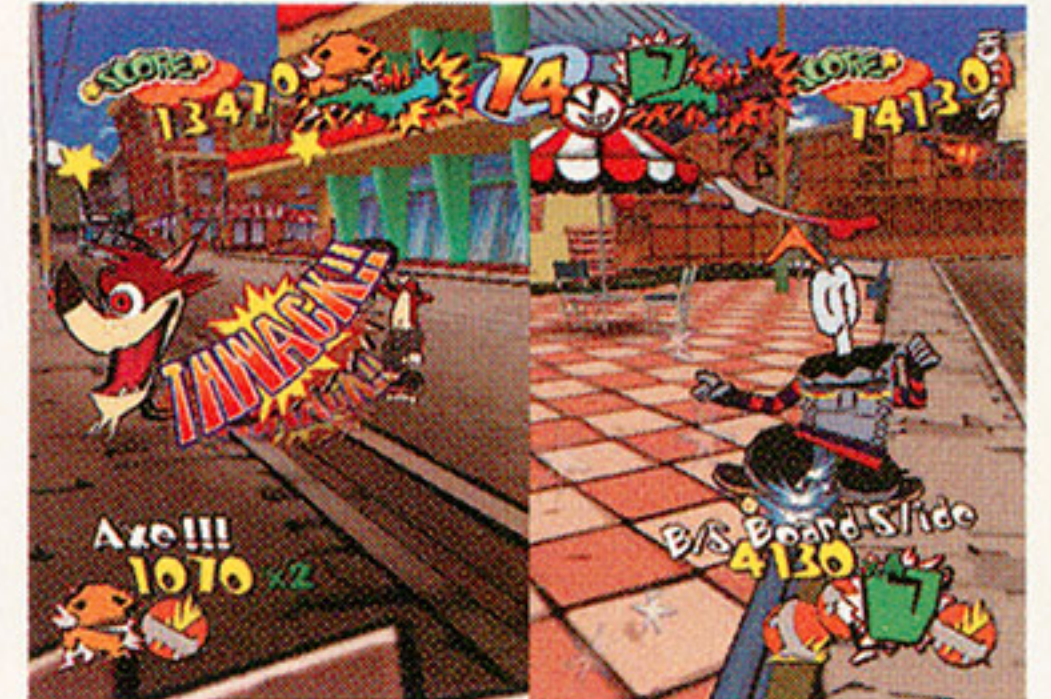
- Nintendophiles



Skate as one of 12 crazy, cool competitors, designed by SPUMCO, the world-famous animation studio responsible for The Ren & Stimpy Show and The Ripping Friends!

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- IGN.com



Compete in a multitude of head-to-head multiplayer modes such as Push, Race and Battle!



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Powerful graphics engine allows for real-time character deformation. The wacky, cel-shaded skateboarders can be subjected to numerous humiliations, such as being set on fire, flattened and covered in caca!

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- NintendoInsider.com

"...absolutely insane..." - GamesAreFun.com



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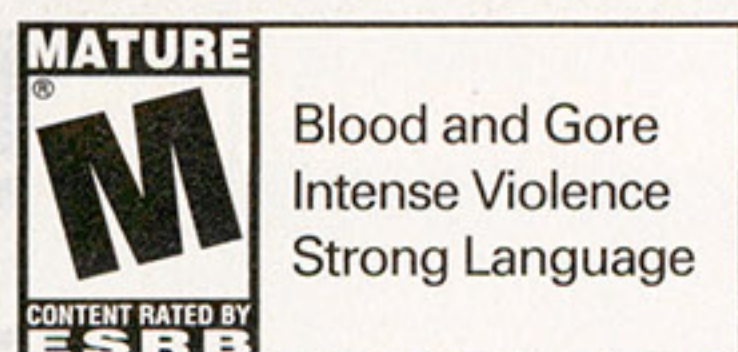
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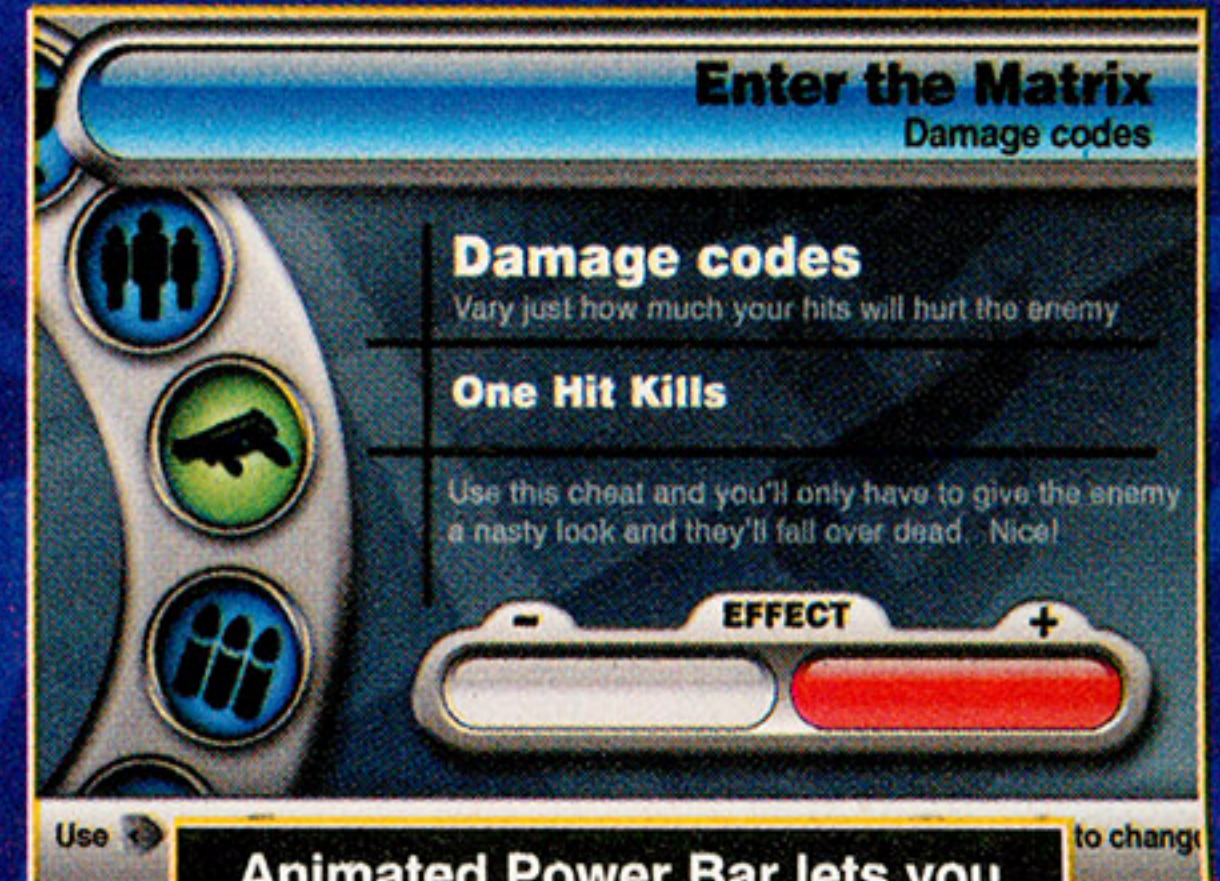


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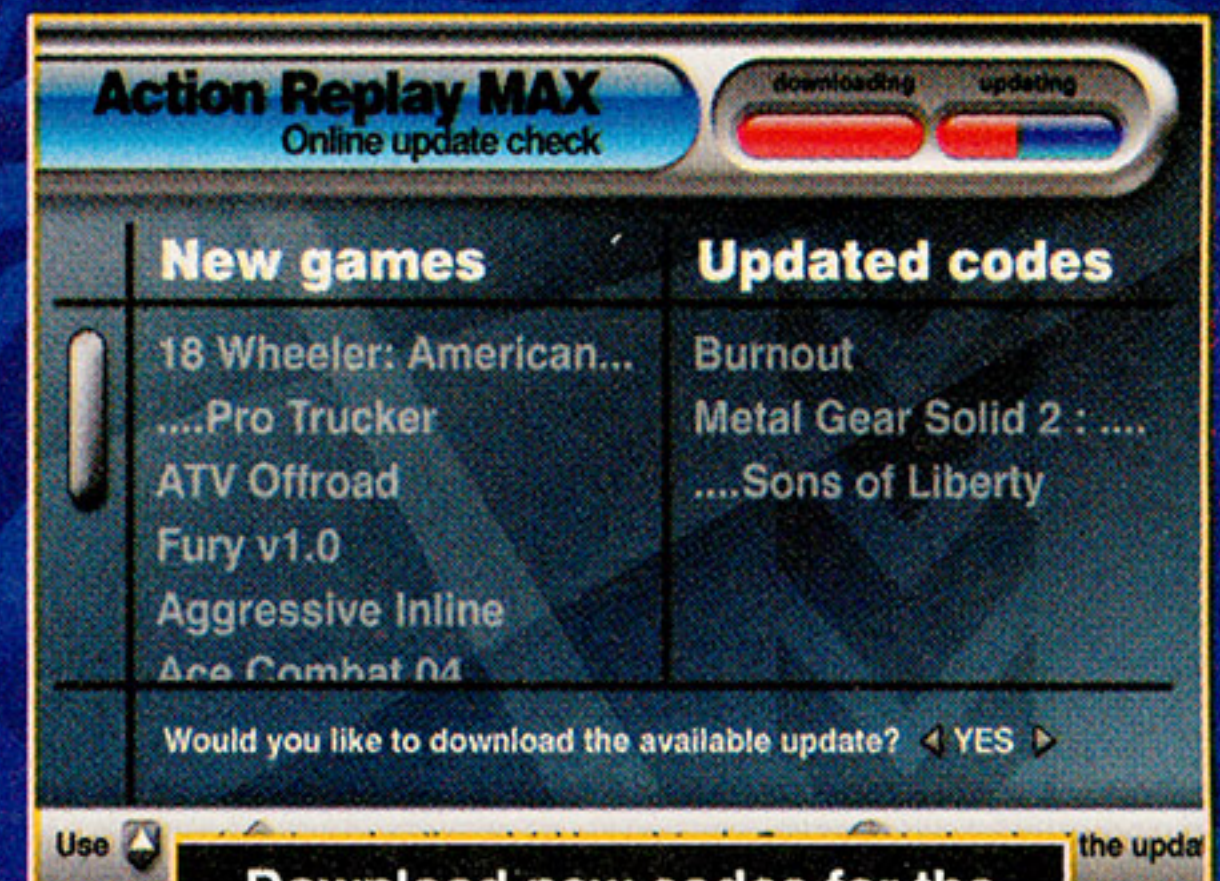
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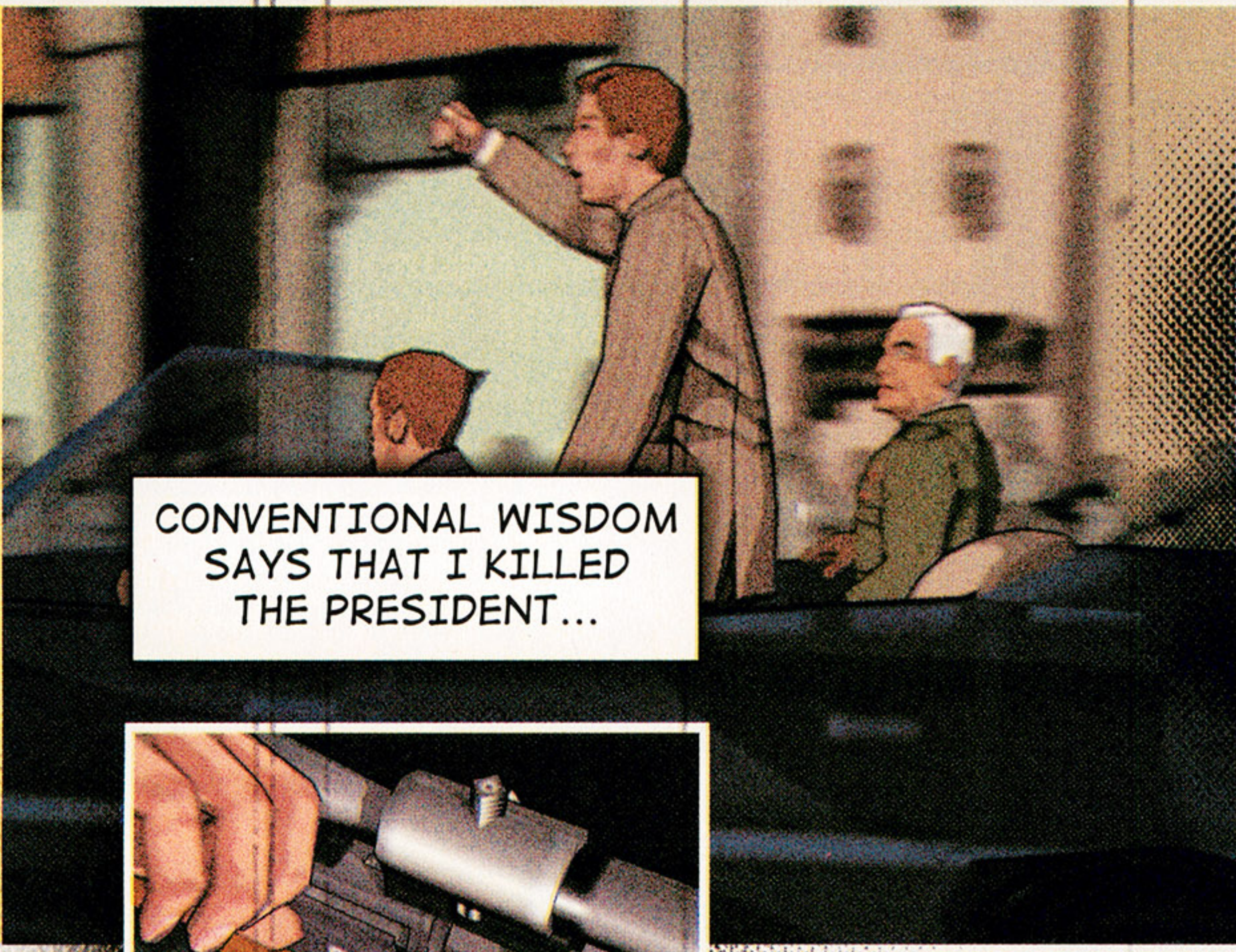


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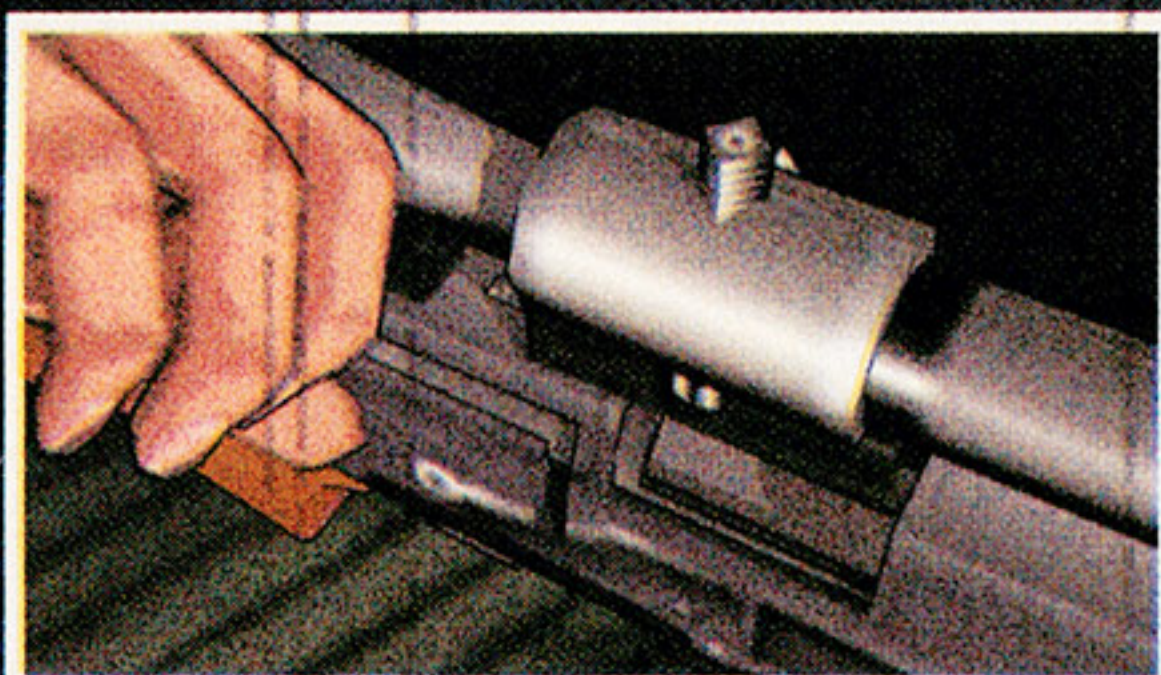
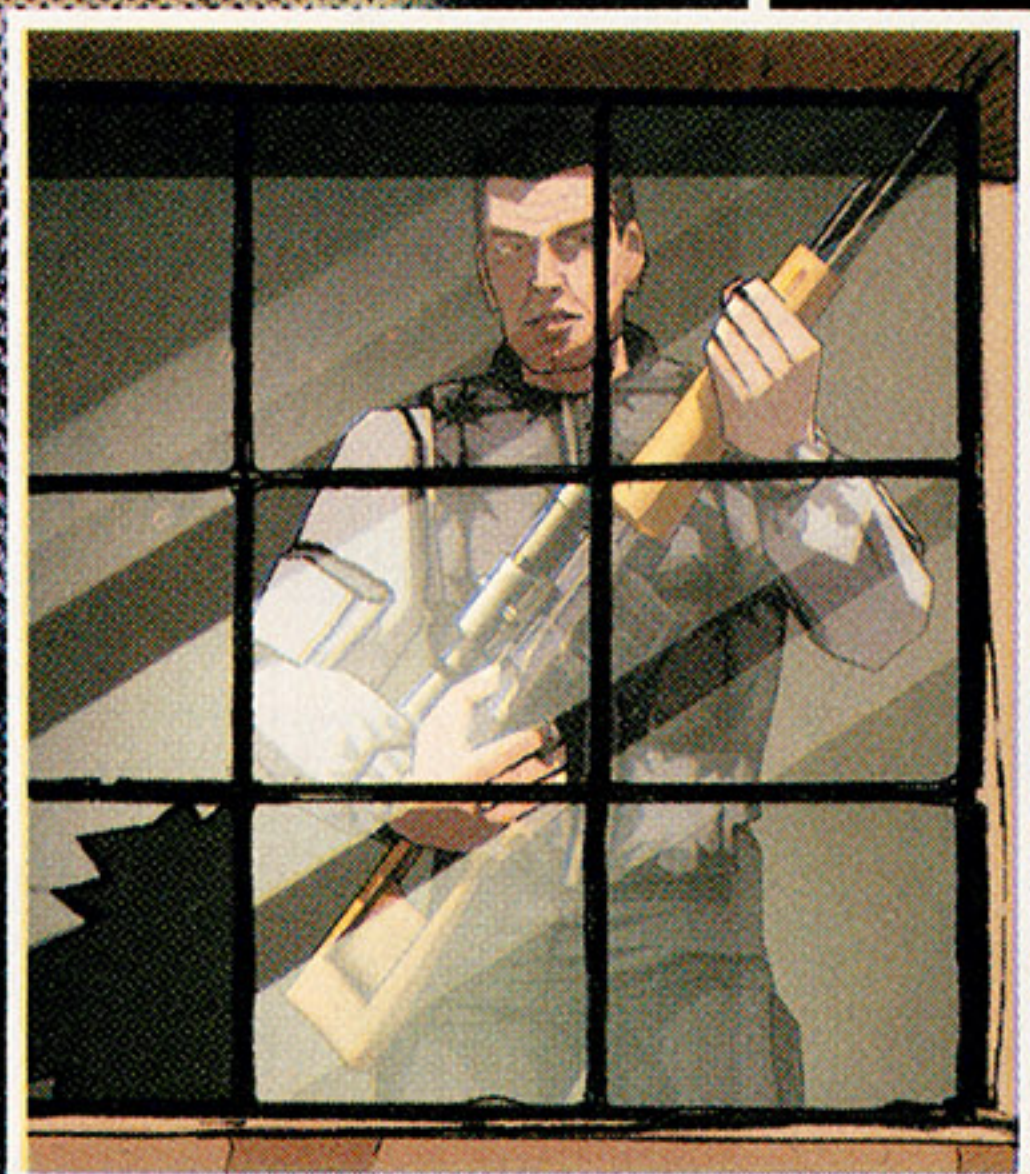


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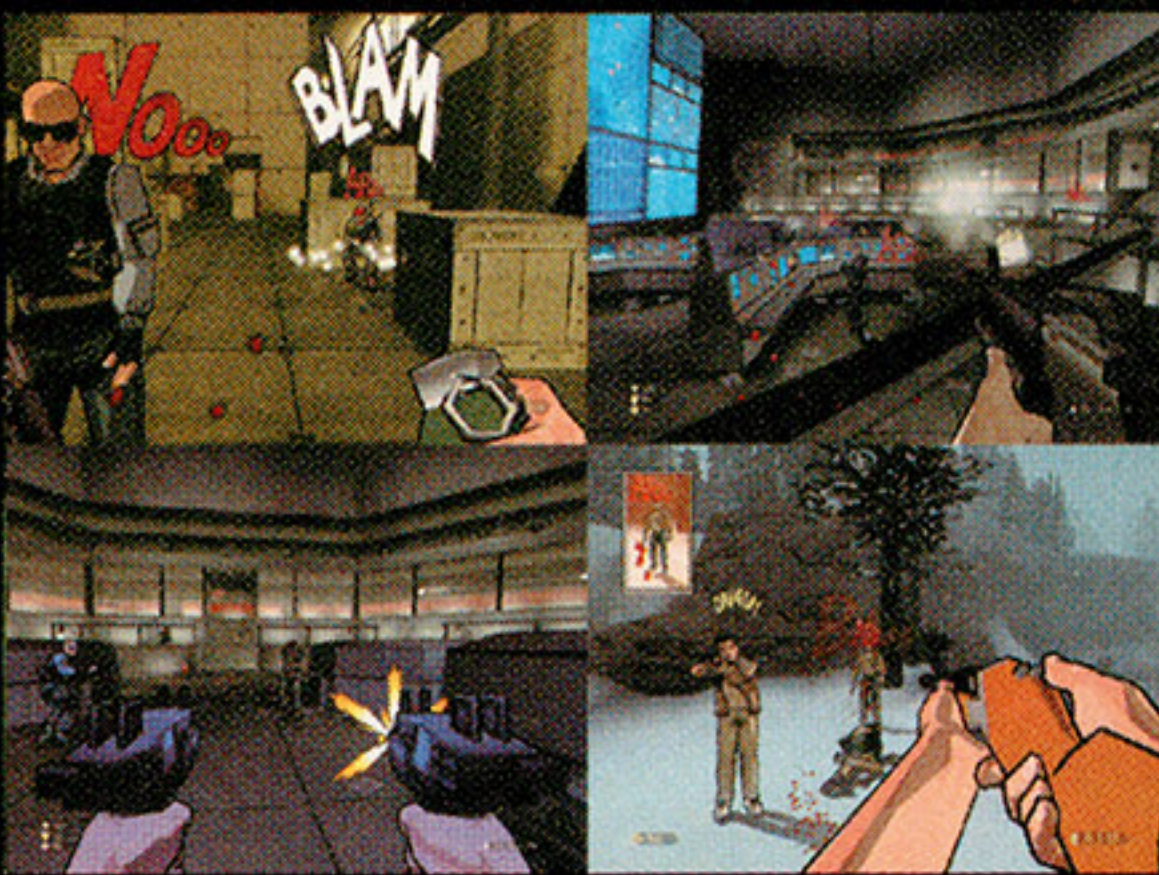
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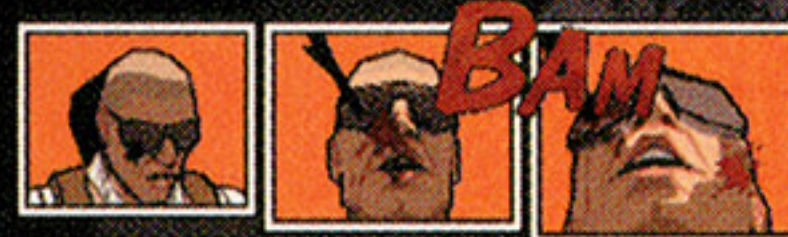
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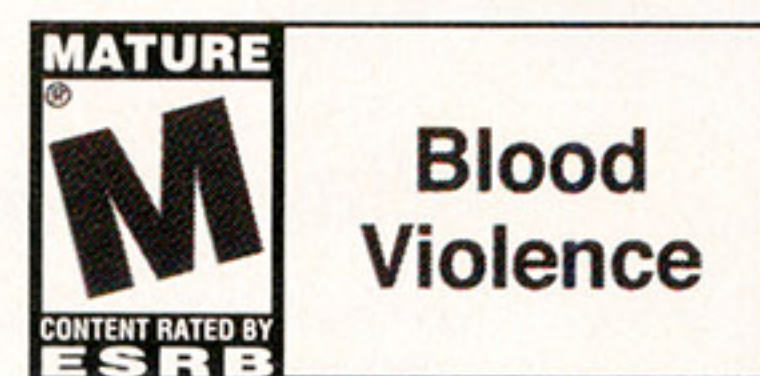
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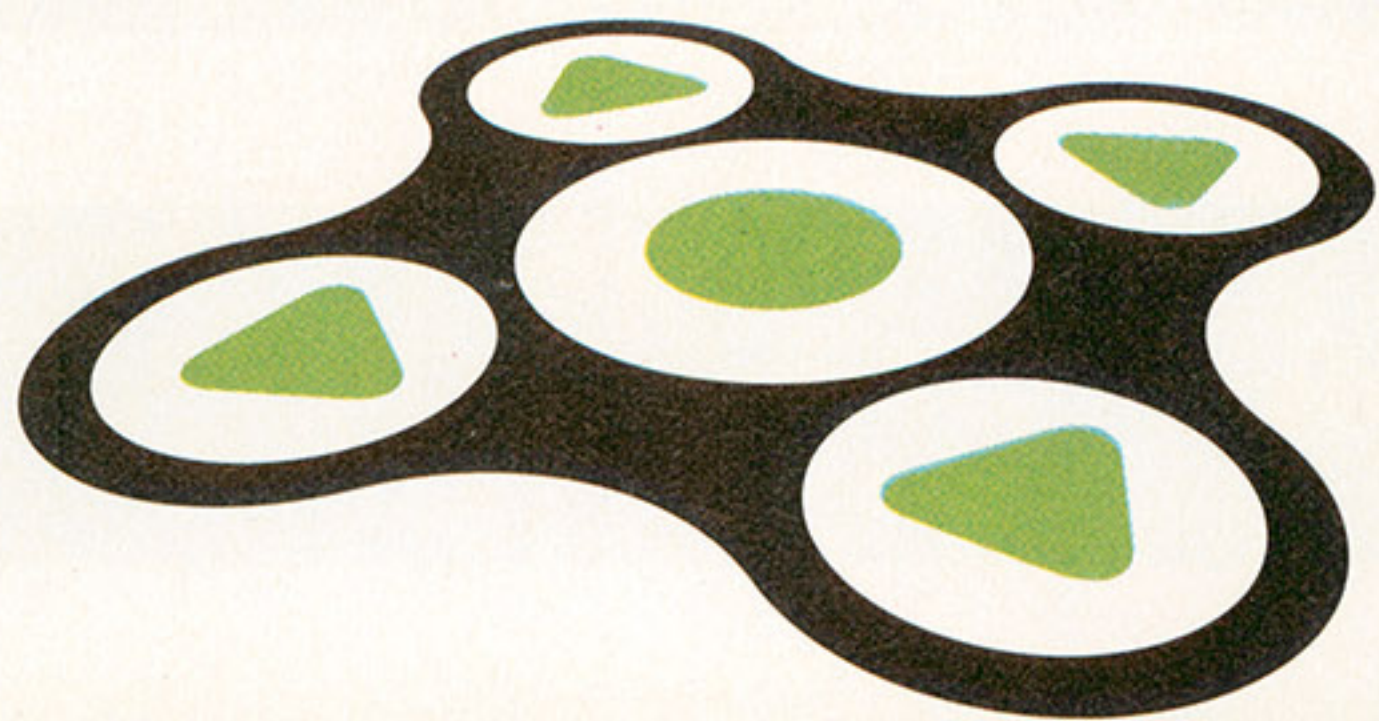
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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

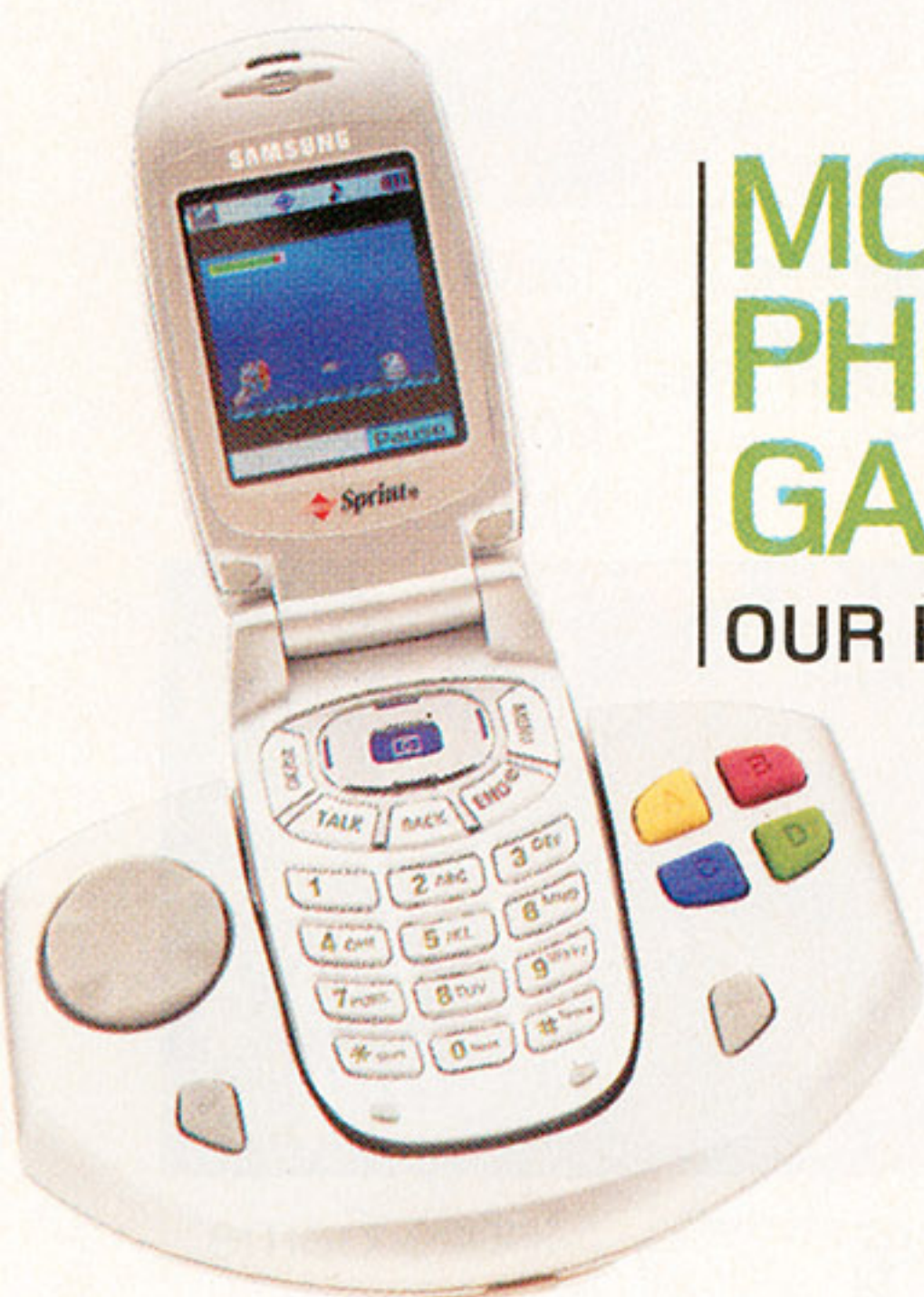
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FEATURE:

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TOMB RAIDER COMES TO N-GAGE



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PREVIEWS AND REVIEWS

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PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

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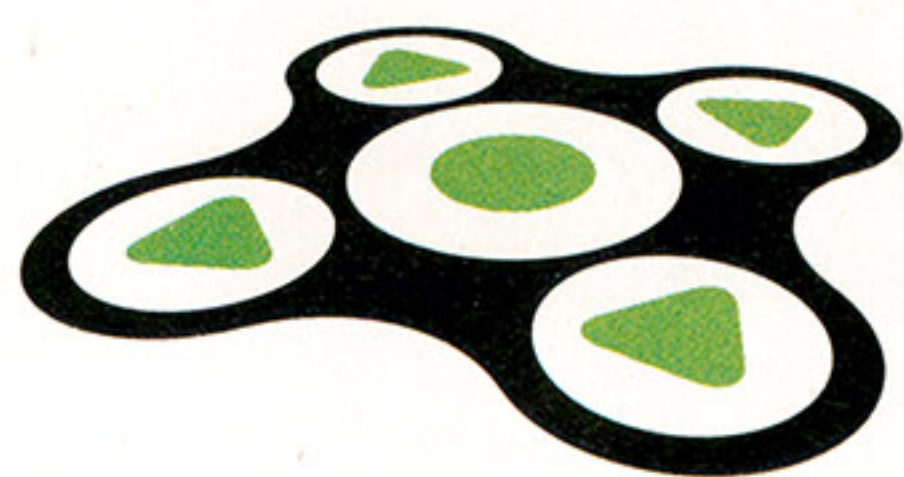
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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR BY MATTHEW BELLOWS

Welcome to Issue 3 of *Wireless Gaming Review* in *EGM* and *CGW*! By the time you read this, Nokia's N-Gage will be on sale everywhere, and TapWave's Zodiac will be available for order on the Web. Both are big developments. Nokia's launch is arguably the biggest event the handheld sector of the videogame world has ever seen.

As might be expected from two companies new to the videogame world, however, the weeks leading up to both platform launches were pretty rocky. At press time, neither Nokia nor TapWave could provide final builds for most of the games they planned to have ready at launch. We've seen what N-Gage Arena can do (http://www.wgamer.com/articles/nga_ge_arena.php), but only for *Pandemonium*. Nokia has been promising much more.

Over the next eight pages, we cover some of the best U.S. mobile games and phones. We talk with the guy who added the special mobile sauce to *Tomb Raider*, *Tony Hawk*, and *Pandemonium*. We get an early peek at Zodiac, the first Palm/Bluetooth videogame platform. And we review some of the coolest new mobile games available.

But for up-to-the-minute news on N-Gage, Zodiac, and the world of wireless games, you'll have to go to our website: www.wgamer.com. And when you read our N-Gage and Zodiac coverage here, keep in mind that the people behind these platforms are new to gaming, and it might show for a bit.

ABOUT THIS SECTION

Wireless Gaming Review in *EGM* and *CGW* is produced by WGR Media to bring you news, reviews, and previews for the world of wireless games. Our editorial approach is simple: We write about the best of the best. There's a lot of junk out there—we don't want you to buy it. We do want to hear what you think, though, so please e-mail questions, comments, or advertising inquiries to Matthew Bellows at matthew@wgamer.com.

ABOUT THE COVER

Cover Art by Adam Hughes. Adam is represented by Top Cow (www.topcow.com). Top Cow is Marc Silvestri, Matt Hawkins, and a whole slew of megatalented individuals, all obsessed with putting out the coolest comic books on the market.

CONTRIBUTORS

Big thanks to everyone who made this section happen, especially Justin Hall (www.links.net); Cashman Andrus, technology editor; Avery Score, games editor; Amy Monaghan, copy editor; Jason Babler, lead designer; and Anne Marie Miguel, special ops.

The *Wireless Gaming Review* supplement to *Electronic Gaming Monthly* and *Computer Gaming World* is published four times per year (March, June, September, and December). For advertising information, please contact matthew@wgamer.com.

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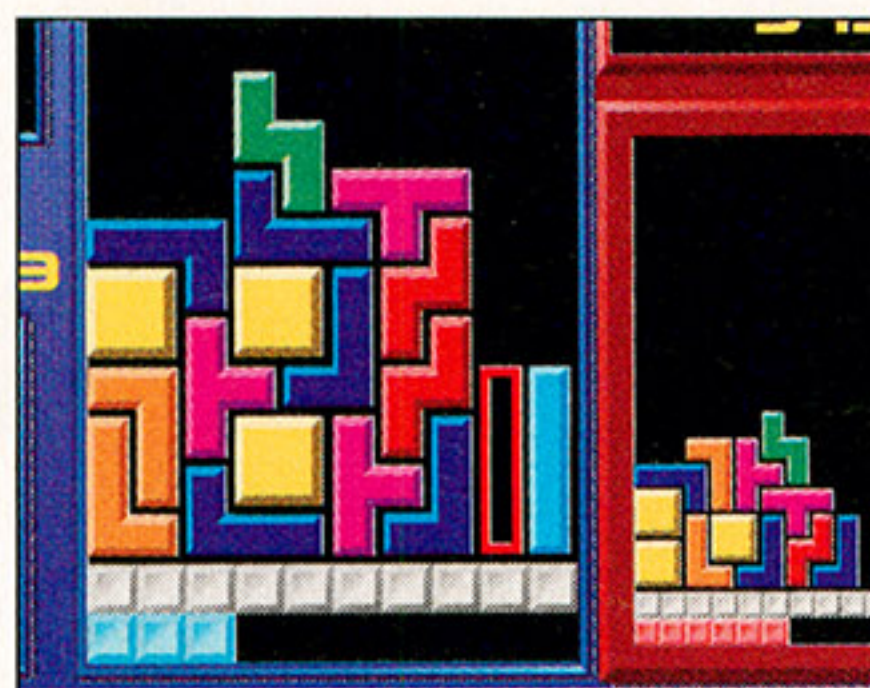
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HOW MANY GAMES? AND HOW MUCH?*

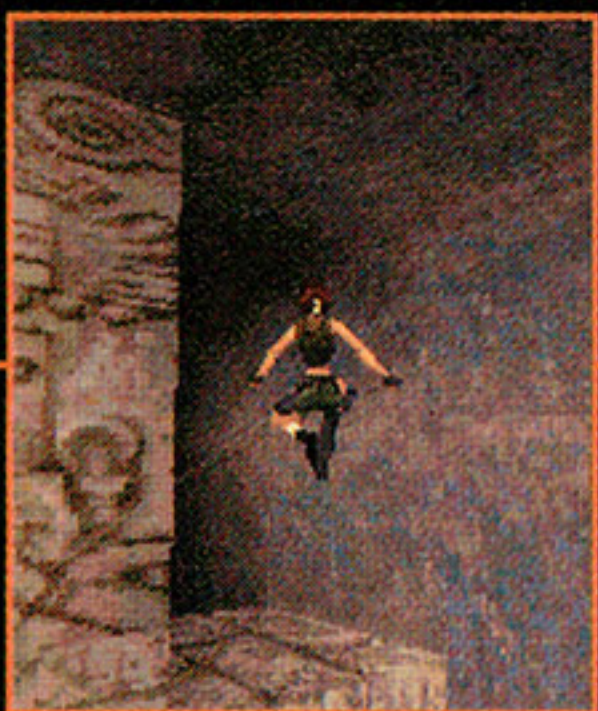
Average prices for mobile games and number of games per carrier

CARRIER	30 DAYS	60 DAYS	UNLIMITED	NO. GAMES
AT&T	\$2.74	\$4.27	\$4.19	301
Sprint	\$2.20	\$2.97	\$3.65	179
Cingular			\$3.97	166
Verizon	\$2.33		\$5.14	142
Alltel	\$2.16		\$4.69	124
Nextel			\$5.49	91
T-Mobile USA			\$4.28	35

* as of August 2003
Source: WGR's Wireless Content Tracking Service

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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

WGR'S

MOBILE PHONE BUYING GUIDE

BY CASHMAN ANDRUS

At a loss for what to ask for this holiday season? Contract (finally) up? Or are you just ready for a new toy? Don't settle for a lame phone—you can do better. To help, we've picked out the two best options from each carrier. Now you'll know what to game on.

Prices will vary depending on carrier

promotions, where you live, and the ferocity of your bargaining skills, so we can't tell you exactly how much these phones will cost when you go shopping. But you can be sure that they're all good choices for both talking and playing.



AT&T

FIRST CLASS: NOKIA 3650

Yeah, it's on the large side and the keypad is whack, but the screen is awesome and the speedy processor means that games tuned for the 3650 are consistently slicker than the same titles on other phones. In fact, this is almost exactly the same hardware used on N-Gage. While it can't actually run N-Gage ROMs, it does pretty much everything else and includes a camera, too.

<http://wgamer.com/phone-52>



ECONOMY: MOTOROLA T721

Motorola's T720 was the flagship phone when AT&T launched its downloadable-games service last year. The T721 is the same phone (with a slightly different faceplate), so you're basically getting last year's technology. On the plus side, there are a staggering number of games available.

<http://wgamer.com/phone-150>



CINGULAR

FIRST CLASS: SONY ERICSSON T616

Sony Ericsson's top-of-the-line phone manages to cram an amazing amount of stuff into a stylish little package. In addition to a camera, large color screen, infrared, and Bluetooth, there is support for not one, but two downloadable application platforms: J2ME and Mophun, which should keep you covered for games (at least until next year...).

<http://wgamer.com/phone-130>



ECONOMY: NOKIA 3595

Just the basics, but it's very well done. This phone is solid but not clunky, pleasant but not flashy, and it doesn't bother with the extra features most people never use. Sound dull? It would be if it didn't also come with a color screen, support for hundreds of J2ME games, and a price tag almost anyone can stomach.

<http://wgamer.com/phone-144>

IF YOU CAN WAIT

PHONES IN THE
PIPELINE – HOT OFF
THE RUMOR MILL

BY CASHMAN ANDRUS

New phones aren't usually the best-kept secrets—from trade-show-booth workers to beta testers to the FCC, a lot of people know about new phones in advance. We've put our ears to the ground to find out what's coming. All of these phones should appear around the end of the year, but no dates were confirmed at press time.



NOKIA 3200

High-end features move into the mass market, plus you can draw, paint, or print your own unique faceplates.

NEC 525

Wish you could get your hands on the same phones the Japanese get? Well, here's one—sort of. This phone adds a built-in camera to the dedicated DoJa processor in its predecessor, the 515, and could appear on AT&T any day now.



SPRINT

FIRST CLASS: SAMSUNG VGA 1000

Yes, it has the impressive list of features we've come to expect from a Sprint Vision phone—big color screen, polyphonic sound, solid J2ME game support—but this clamshell phone also offers support for a clip-on gamepad accessory. There's a sophisticated setup for the integrated camera: electronic flash, digital zoom, multishot mode, and editing options.

<http://wgamer.com/phone-157>



ECONOMY: SANYO SCP-8100

Compared to the other Economy phones, this one feels a lot more like the top of the line—a beautiful screen, quality feel, and excellent gameplay features will keep you traveling in style. Unfortunately, you still have to shell out a few beans, even with a new contract, but you get more than your money's worth.

<http://wgamer.com/phone-137>



T-MOBILE

FIRST CLASS: NOKIA 6610

One of Nokia's first color phones, the 6610 was a rare and expensive item just a few months ago. Though it's been surpassed technologically, it is still a good all-around choice. The size and shape are pocket friendly, the features are good, and the build quality is very solid.

<http://wgamer.com/phone-6>



ECONOMY: SONY ERICSSON T300

With Mophun game support, a color screen, and simultaneous key-press support, some surprisingly good games are available on this phone. This is the handset that blazed a new trail for Sony Ericsson's mainstream line. Several of the newer models are essentially this phone using different plastics, so you can pick your favorite or maybe save a few bucks by sticking with the original.

<http://wgamer.com/phone-22>



VERIZON

FIRST CLASS: LG VX6000

From its curvy silhouette to the extracrisp color status screen, this phone is a thing of beauty. It's got brains and brawn to back it up, too, with cutting-edge BREW 2.0 support to run the latest games from Verizon's Get It Now service, a built-in camera, and all the features you'd expect from a top-shelf phone.

<http://wgamer.com/phone-142>



ECONOMY: LG VX4400

It's a bit of an ugly duckling compared to its sister phone, but the VX4400 still quacks with the best of them. You give up the camera and some of the sleekness, but you keep some dollars in your wallet. And because it's been around longer, there are more games available—a perfect use for all the money you just saved.

<http://wgamer.com/phone-89>



SONY ERICSSON Z600

Sony Ericsson's new top of the line is finally a flip phone. It also has more integrated features than anything you can buy yet, and a gamepad accessory that supports simultaneous key presses.



NOKIA 6600

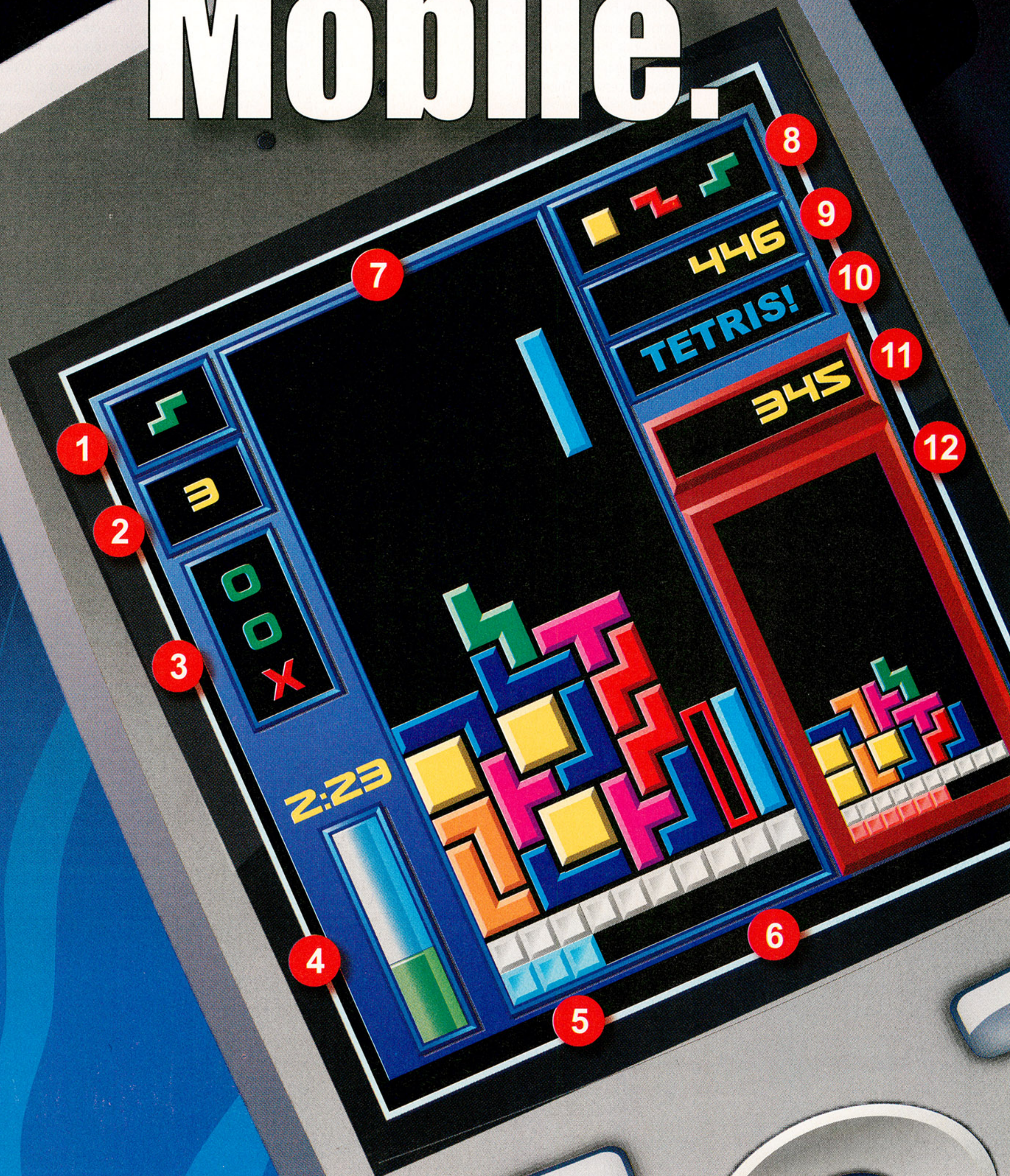
The successor to the 3650, this phone will be smaller, lighter, and more refined. Bonus: finally, a usable keypad!



MOTOROLA V600

Do you like Motorola's style but wish the T720 would finally stop getting rereleased as though it were a new phone? Relief is here. Quad band, integrated camera, and all the rest.

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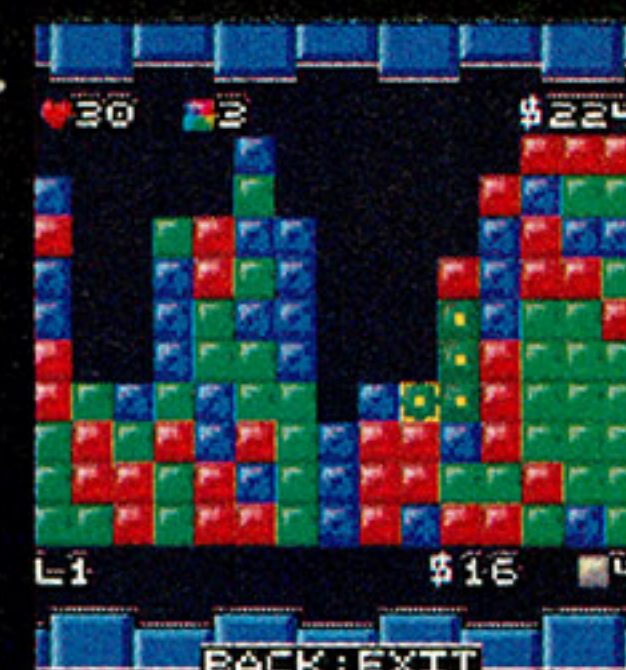
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Tetris



**Tetris
Cascade**



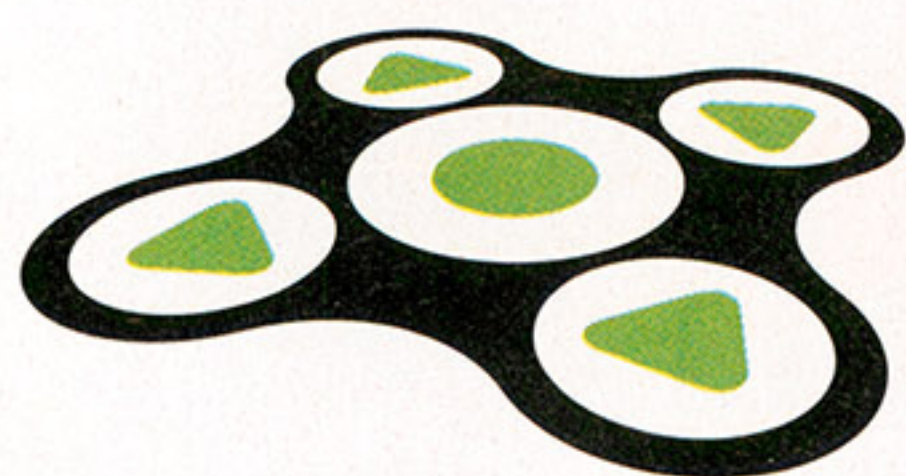
Blue Blocks



Video Poker

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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

LARA, TONY, AND NIKKI UNTETHERED

Adrian Sack, Ideaworks3D's main man, talks about the mobilization and revitalization of our favorite N-Gage characters

WGR: You've got 500 words with America's top gamers, Adrian. How do you want to start?

Adrian: How about "packet-switched multiplayer wireless network latency mitigation technology?" OK, scratch that. I guess I'd like to say that mobile gaming is finally getting interesting. With N-Gage and other stuff coming out, we are worlds away from the games your sister has on her phone. The GBA SP is very slick, but essentially, it's just a shrunk-down version of a late-'80s home console. The networked capabilities of N-Gage make it potentially very significant.

WGR: But mobile titles—even N-Gage titles—still aren't up to platform standards.

Adrian: Depends on what you mean. It's not like a PC, but the graphics and the sound on N-Gage are much better than what we've been seeing on handhelds. When a game is done properly, it's like a PlayStation that you can carry around. PS1 is the benchmark for us, and our technology on N-Gage is running at about 75 percent to 80 percent of a PS1's performance. On *Tony Hawk*, we get 24 to 25 frames per second while mixing two channels of event sound,

plus just-under-CD-quality music. I wouldn't pretend that the N-Gage is the messiah of handheld gaming, but it does have massive potential.

WGR: What did you guys add to *Tomb Raider*, *Tony Hawk*, and *Pandemonium* to make them more than just PlayStation ports?

Adrian: Well, the network stuff is the sexiest. All of our games use it. We've built Shadow Racing into *Tomb Raider*, which means that you can download someone else's route through a custom *TR* maze and race against them. In the original *Tomb Raider*, players never knew who was the best. Now we can find out. We've also contextualized all the *TR* strategy guides, so if you are stuck someplace, you can pull a video solution off the network.

With *Tony Hawk*, we focused on Bluetooth, so you can have races, graffiti competitions and tag. Nokia has big plans for *Tony Hawk* during the launch, but I can't talk about that. Not even to you. It's our ambition to do *Tony* in real time over GPRS, but that's still in the works.

Both Lara and Tony have some pretty cool built-in movie-editing features, so you can finish a level or pull some new stunt, change camera



ADRIAN SACK

angles and zooms, and then upload the movie to N-Gage Arena servers for all your friends to see. We're just transmitting game-state and animation data when you do that, so the actual uploads are very small. No big surprises on your phone bill.

On *Pandemonium*, there's head-to-head Bluetooth coin-gathering races, or you can team up to beat a level. In the middle of a game, you can access the network and buy a power-up for a couple cents, so the races get pretty hilarious. And you can download ghosts from our servers to race against other people.

WGR: All of this is dependent on

getting the servers up and accessible for launch. Will everything be in place by October 7? And will it scale?

Adrian: We've tested again and again, and it works. Nokia has the final word on availability, but it's looking good. And there's a lot of new technology for mobile gaming on the way. Black-box stuff is being developed in an evacuated hyperbaric chamber at our skunkworks lab. There's stuff early next year that I can't talk about, and then there's even cooler tech aimed at the end of 2004. The next few years should be pretty exciting for all of us.



TONY HAWK



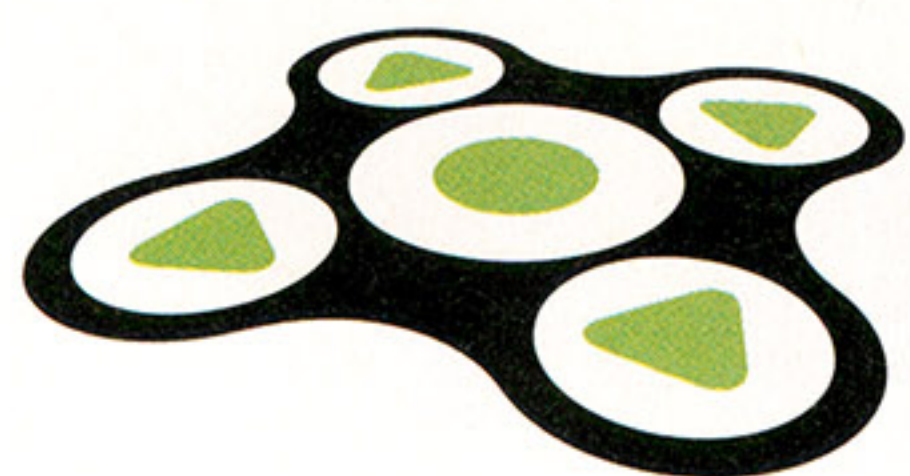
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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

REVIEW

TOMB RAIDER ON N-GAGE

BY AVERY SCORE

When *Tomb Raider* first hit the shelves in November 1996, the world of videogames changed forever. Never had breasts been so beautifully realized in a videogame. Although zaftig females had long been a staple of the gaming world, we were previously restricted to gazing at two-dimensional, pixilated forms. Lara Croft's ponderous, protuberant, polygonal presence was a welcome novelty.

Ms. Croft, a more fetching alternative to the Italian plumbers of the world, is the progenitor of the



Seven years after the original game's release, flipping, strafing and tumbling your way through the game's tortuous caverns with dual Desert Eagles blazing is still highly entertaining.

now-cliché stiff-lipped game girl. Her instant stardom gave rise to myriad other gun-toting heavenly bodies, such as *Dino Crisis*' Regina and, more recently, *Eternal Darkness*' Alexandra Roivas. Her early games defined the 3D action-adventure, with all its strengths and pitfalls.

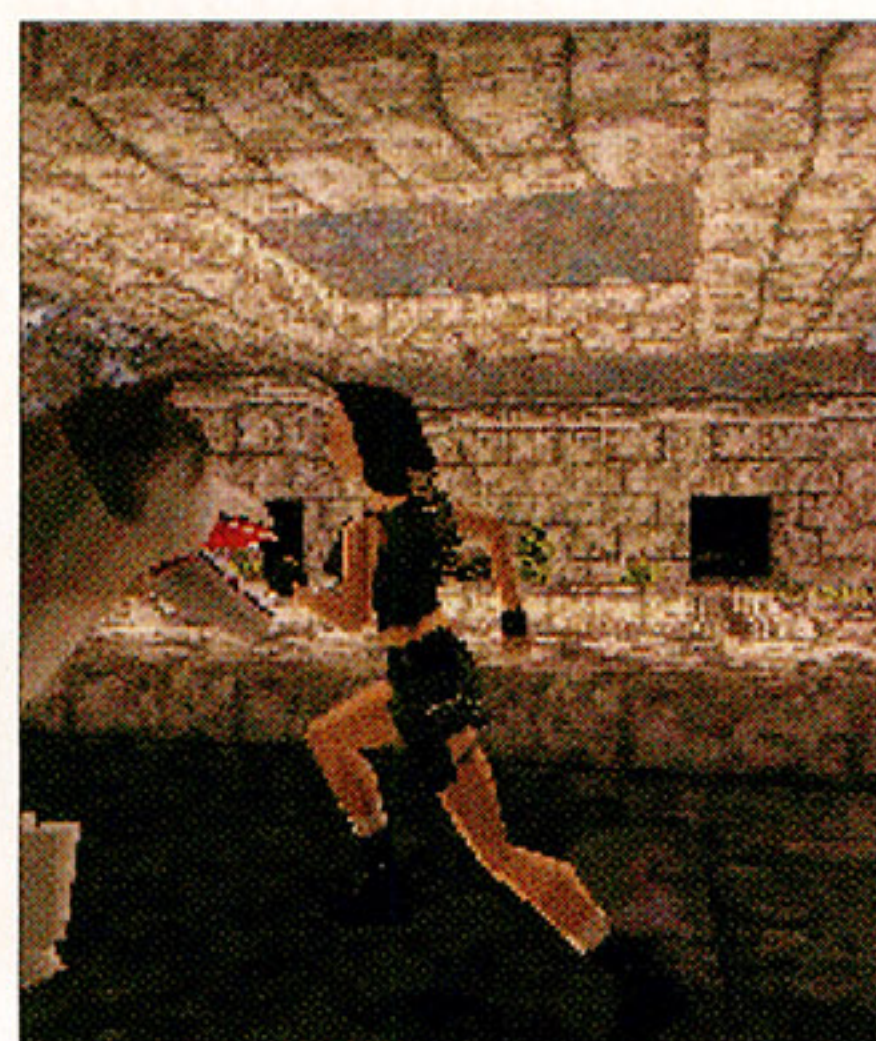
Now, N-Gage reminds us of everything we loved and hated about *Tomb Raider* when we played it on the first-generation, non-DualShock PlayStation. The mobile version's single-player game is nearly identical to its 20th-century forebear, retaining its predecessor's appealing graphics, its platforming elements—and its unfortunate control issues.

Yes, I said control issues. If you've ever felt nostalgic for 3D's infancy, before the advent of analog sticks, *Tomb Raider* will forever cure you. Lara, as you might expect from an impassive, stolid starlet of gaming, is extremely hard to control. The N-Gage's directional pad is a tad better than the unapologetically unergonomic abhorrence that Sony sicced on our unwitting fingertips, but that's not saying much. Additionally, an unfortunate auto-run "feature" has been added to the existing laundry list



of control problems. When you tap forward on the control pad, Lara starts running and won't stop until you press backward on the pad. This further necessitates the use of the Walk key and ensures that even the simplest tasks, such as picking up a medkit, are incredibly difficult. Seven years after the original game's release, flipping, strafing, and tumbling your way through the game's tortuous caverns with dual Desert Eagles blazing is still highly entertaining—if you can master the game's complex control.

The N-Gage iteration of the game isn't a straight port. Making good on

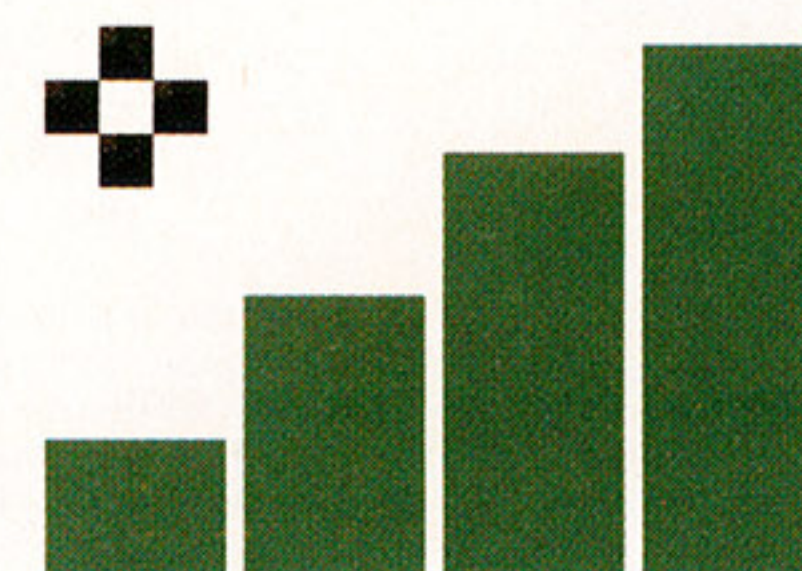


mobile's promise of connectivity, IdeaWorks 3D has gone to great lengths to ensure that *Tomb Raider* will boast a thriving multiplayer community. By far its most intriguing feature is the ability to make in-game movies and upload them to the *TR* server, where they can be viewed by other players. The easy-to-use movie tools allow you to shoot Lara from a variety of angles—and because of the way the game records the films, uploading even long recordings is only a matter of a few kilobytes. My prediction: Ineluctably, gamers will compete to record Lara in the most

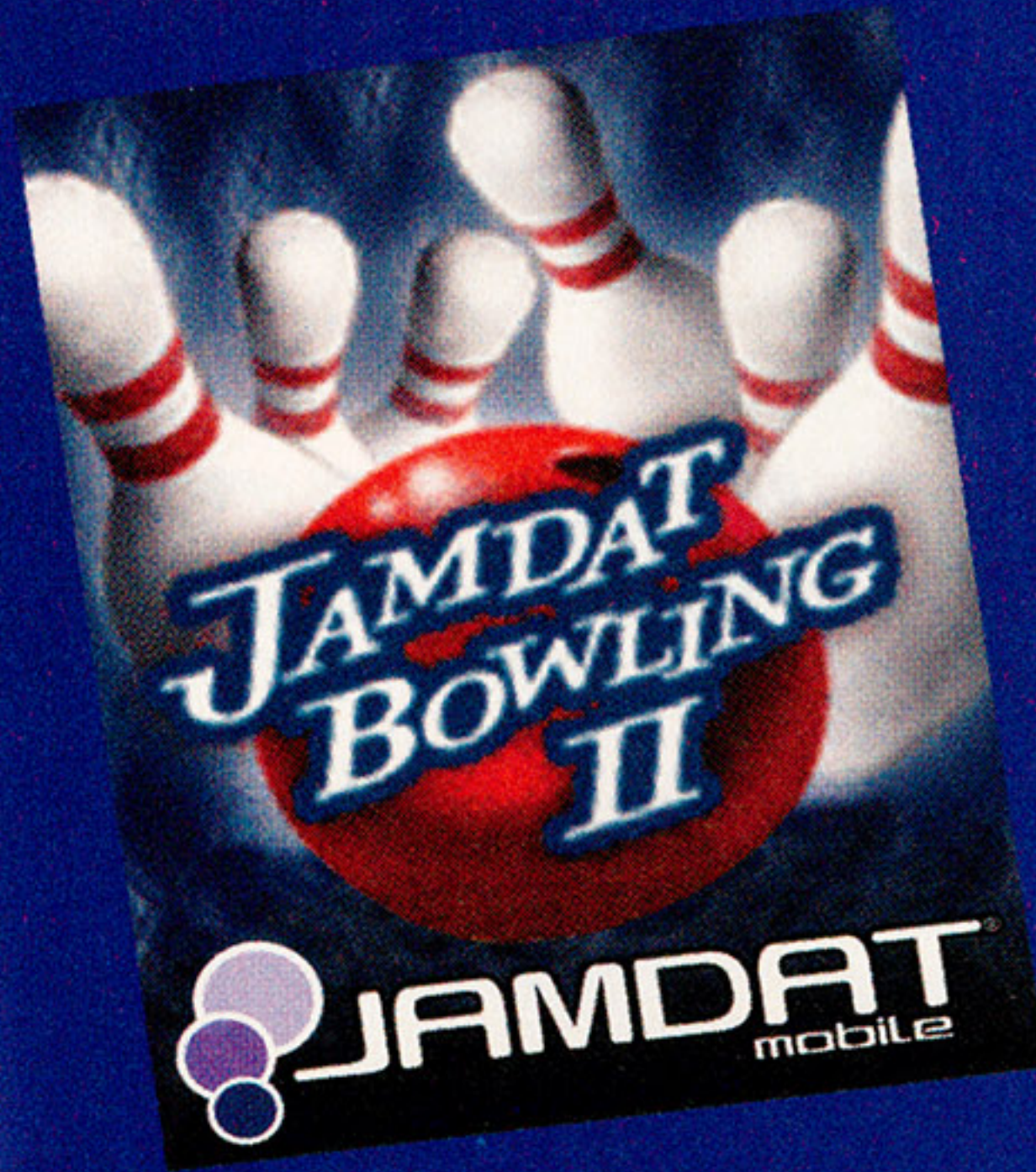
compromising positions. I still vividly remember the helpful suggestions of my friends when we played the original: "Dude, get her up against the wall; you get a way better look at her butt." Depraved gamers now have the ability to make Ms. Croft vamp for the camera. The fall of civilization is nigh. I truly believe that the Mycenaeans were destroyed by a similar game featuring Helen of Troy. That would explain why excavations on those legendary battlefields have proved fruitless.

With her newfound portability and multiplayer features, Lara will make veterans swoon all over again. If you're new to *TR* games, there's no better place to start. If not...isn't love sweeter the second time around?

WGAMER RATING:

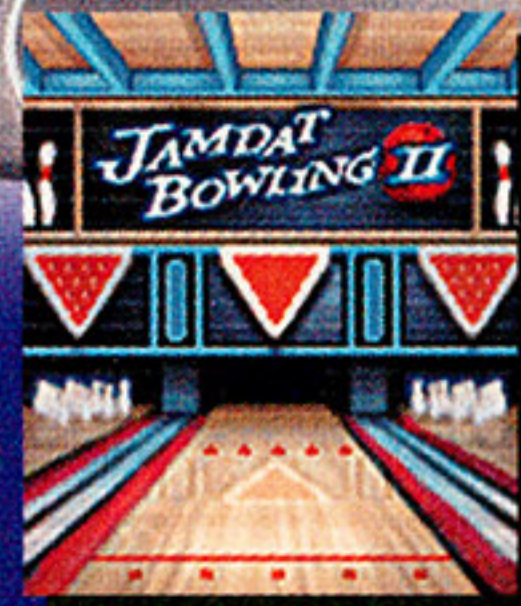


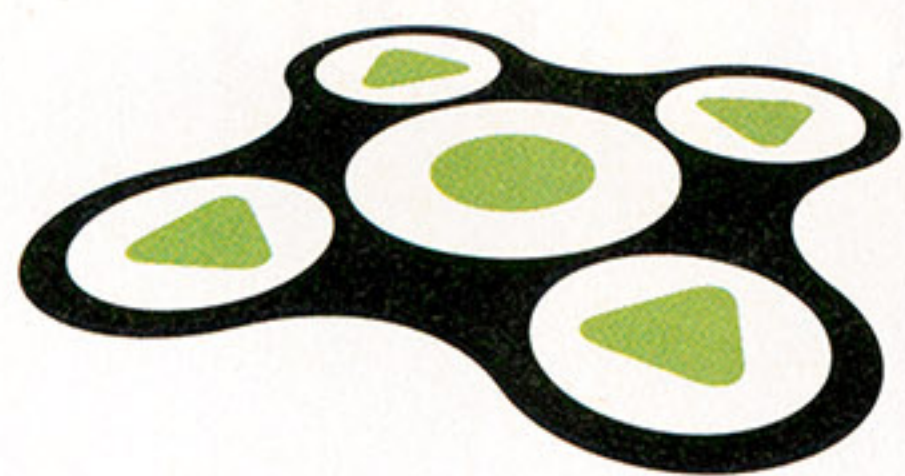
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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

PREVIEW

TAPWAVE'S ZODIAC: A REMOTE CONTROL FOR MOBILE MEDIA

BY JUSTIN HALL



After decades of Nintendo dominance, the handheld gaming scene will soon be flooded with competitors. Rival companies are banking on the maturation of the Game Boy audience—people in their twenties who are eager for a handheld entertainment device with more power than a GBA, and one that doesn't look like it was stolen from a 7 year old.

To attract the sophisticated gamer, TapWave has attached a larger screen, 3D graphics processing power, and an analog joystick to the guts of a Palm PDA. It's called the Zodiac, and it plays *SpyHunter* or *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*.

Most of today's digital assistants are myopically focused on mobile professionals—people for whom the calendar is the most critical part of their virtual life. Tim Twerdahl, a senior product manager at TapWave who was formerly at Palm, left Palm because he wanted to see the PDA evolve. He saw

his younger friends expanding the power of their PDAs with downloaded games or goofy, fun applications. The Game Boy, Twerdahl points out, looks far too childish to appeal to many adults. But if you had a device with the power of a Palm that could be pulled out in front of coworkers, no one need ever know what you're actually doing with that stylus.

Gamers who grew up with the Game Boy will be pleased by the smart product design of the Zodiac. The analog control stick is responsive under the left thumb. TapWave has switched the Palm's orientation from vertical to a more gaming-friendly horizontal. There are a good number of buttons, including shoulder buttons, but not so many that they get in the way.

One thing the TapWave Zodiac won't be doing is communicating—at least, not over long distances. Unlike the N-Gage or other upcoming mobile gaming devices, the Zodiac has no mobile phone capacity or long-range Internet networking capacity. TapWave

has left out functions that others have tried to shove into their devices. The Zodiac is meant for watching or listening to media or for playing games.

However, the Zodiac does boast a Bluetooth connection, denoted with a smart blue LED button at the top of the unit. Press that button and your Zodiac broadcasts a signal that you're available for local-area multiplayer gaming. One person can host a *Doom II* match, say, and a half-dozen players in the area can join the low-latency, in-person, multiplayer fun.

All this mobile entertainment power will cost between \$300 and \$400 per unit, depending on the amount of internal memory—twice the price of most game consoles. But Twerdahl believes that the Zodiac is worth the initial sticker shock because it replaces your MP3 player, digital picture frame, PDA, and Game Boy. Would I buy one? I'm still angling to keep my demo model, but if that doesn't work, I just might.

LAUNCH TITLES FOR TAPWAVE'S ZODIAC



■ Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4



■ Phantom Strike



■ SpyHunter



■ Warfare Incorporated

■ Doom II

■ Galactic Realms

BUNDLED TITLES

■ Stuntcar Extreme

■ AcidSolitaire

AND "SOON AFTER" LAUNCH

■ Duke Nukem Mobile

■ Neverwinter Nights

MOBILE GAME PREVIEWS

SPACE TAXI PINBALL

Developer: Mr. Goodliving
Publisher (U.S.): Pulse Mobile Games

The best pinball games, real or virtual, tell a story. Or, at the very least, they pick a theme and make the gameplay directly reflect it. In *Space Taxi Pinball*, you are, not surprisingly, an intergalactic cabby serving an extraterrestrial clientele. You pick up fares by hitting an In button at the top of the table. This activates a taxi-stand indicator. Slam into the stand to pick up your client and then take him to his destination, marked by another indicator light. Or, you can completely

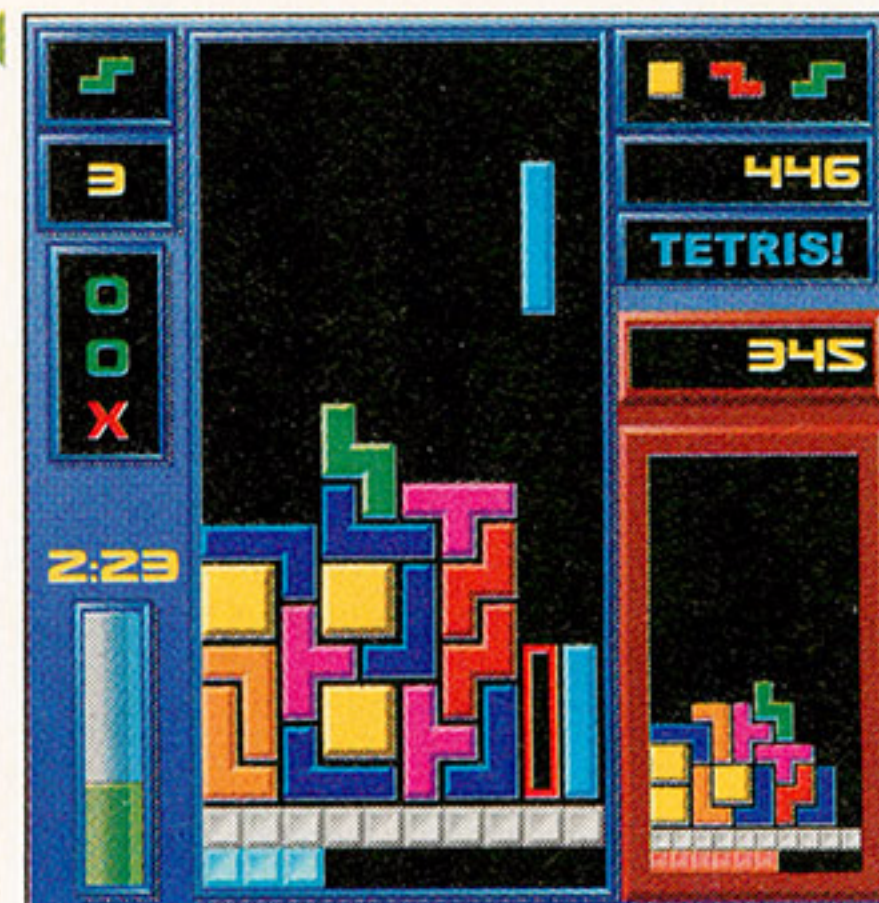


ignore your customers in favor of loftier pursuits, like rolling your way to car upgrades and more gas. Either way, *Space Taxi Pinball* is already shaping up to be the superlative pinball game on mobile.

TETRIS BATTLE

Developer: Blue Lava Wireless
Publisher: Blue Lava Wireless

Shadow racing isn't just for N-Gage anymore. This version of *Tetris*, designed originally to sate the hunger of Japanese mobile gamers, is coming to the rest of the world in early December. Much of it will be familiar, but the Battle part is new. The game will record your *Tetris* efforts and post them on a server. Would-be opponents will be able to download the game you posted and try to beat it. With players contributing games from the U.S., Europe, Japan, and Korea, the competition will be fierce, and Blue Lava promises Celebrity Matches, so



you can finally take Britney on at her favorite game.



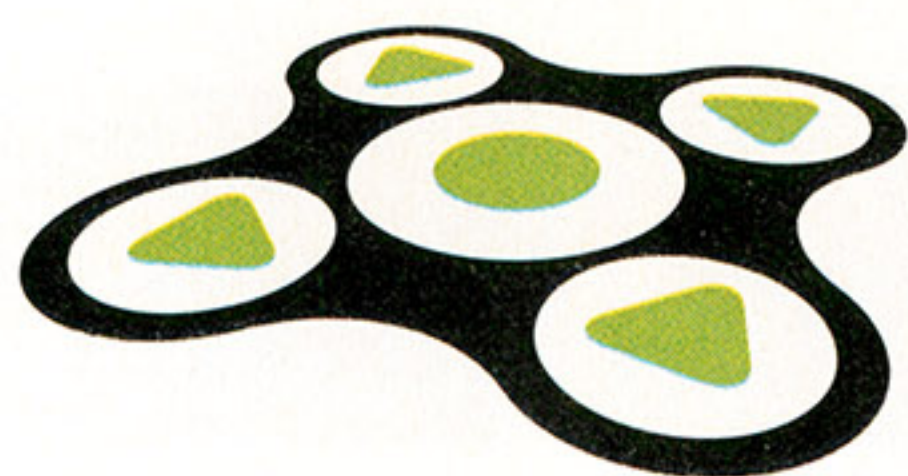
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WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW 101



WIRELESS GAMING REVIEW

WGAMER REVIEWS



WGAMER
RATING:



CARTEL WARS

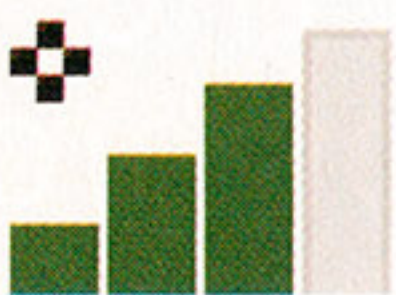
■ PUBLISHER: Gameloft ■ DEVELOPER: Gameloft ■ AVAILABLE ON: Verizon
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT: [HTTP://WWW.WGAMER.COM/GAMEDIR/GAME-1759](http://www.wgamer.com/gamedir/game-1759)

Without a doubt, *Cartel Wars* is the best game yet for Verizon's Motorola T720 phone. This arcade shooter makes *Ground Pounder* (reviewed in our June issue) look very last-gen. Gameloft has a reputation for putting extra effort into its titles, and *Cartel Wars* is no exception. You play as Julia, an anime-style gunner seeking to topple the brutal dictatorship of Colonel Diaz. With a bevy of weapons and power-ups at your disposal, you battle detailed zombies, lackeys, tanks,

and bosses through 10 levels. Is it socially important? No. But what other mobile-phone game lets you hijack a tank? Could it be longer? Yes. But is there a better-looking, better-playing mobile shooter? We don't think so.



WGAMER
RATING:



MINI GOLF

■ PUBLISHER: Synergix ■ DEVELOPER: Synergix ■ AVAILABLE ON: Cingular
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT: [HTTP://WGAMER.COM/GAMEDIR/GAME-1563](http://www.wgamer.com/gamedir/game-1563)

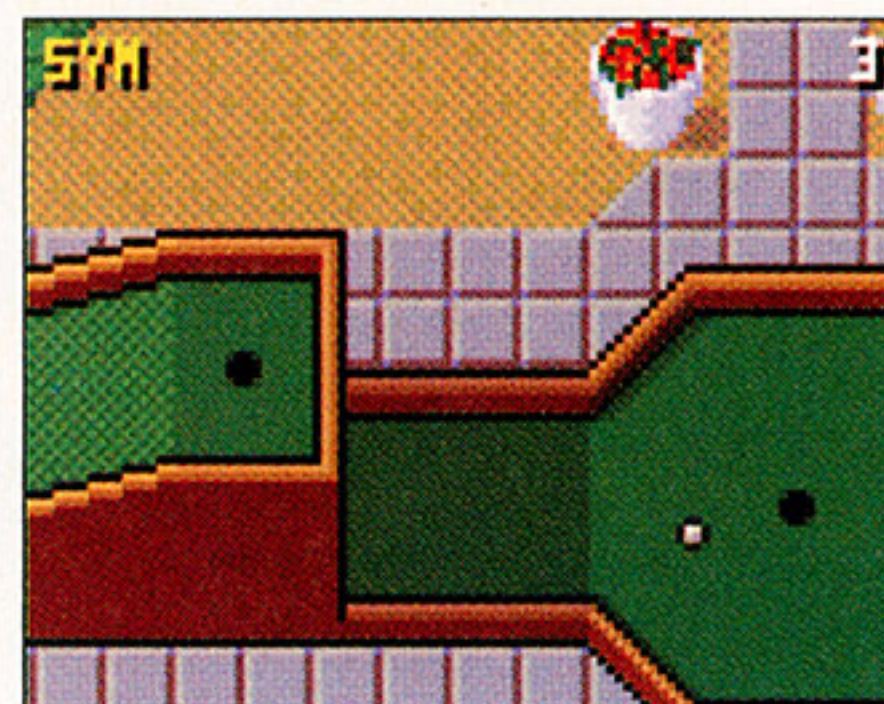
Synergix has realized that no sports lineup is complete without prodigious putting. Enter *Mini Golf* for Mophun phones—18 holes of multiplayer mayhem. You work the terrain, fighting your way past big obstacles and inclines, and the lowest score wins. You can challenge a friend via Bluetooth or infrared, or best A.I. opponents.

Mini Golf's gameplay isn't going to flip your wig. A simple meter system determines a stroke's power and

accuracy. You have to use the right amount of power to avoid overshooting, which takes skill to judge accurately.

Each hole is well designed and fun. The overhead perspective on every ninth hole is especially difficult. No windmills or giant dinosaurs here, but there are numerous potted plants. FUNKY!

Mini Golf isn't innovative, but one shouldn't fault a well-executed, simple concept. The game plays and looks



tight. Take a cue from Happy Gilmore, and get your game face on.



WGAMER
RATING:

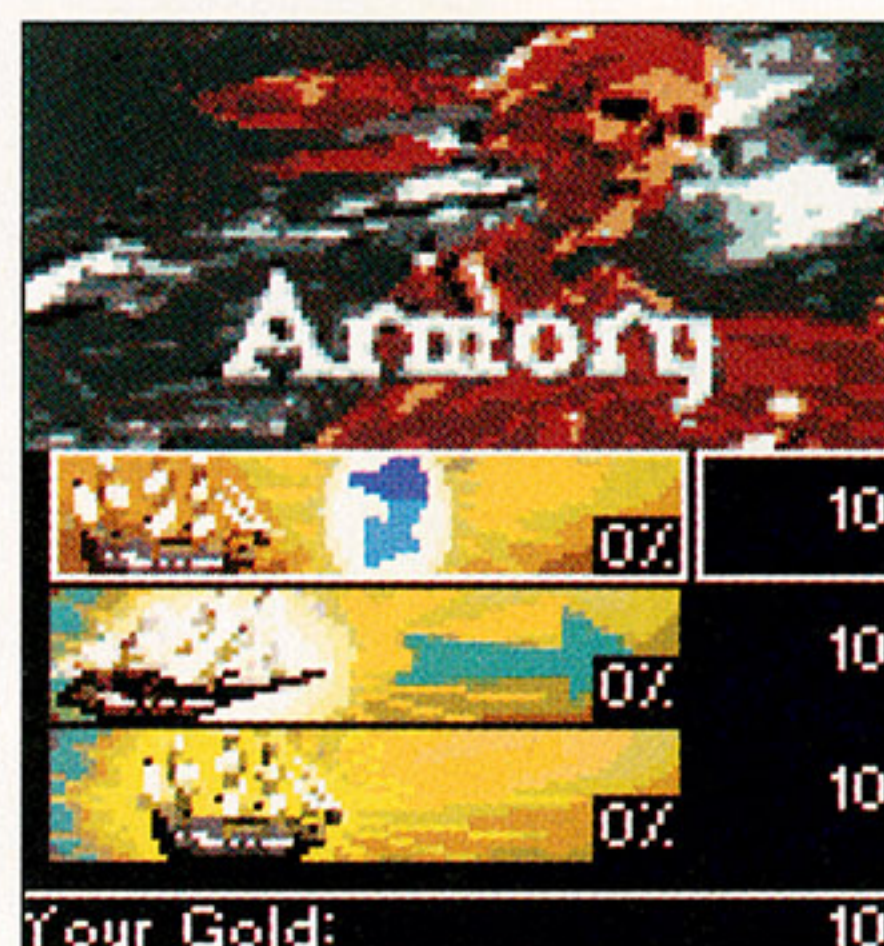


PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

■ PUBLISHER: Walt Disney Internet Group ■ DEVELOPER: Flying Tiger ■ AVAILABLE ON: Sprint, Verizon
READ THE FULL REVIEW AT: [HTTP://WWW.WGAMER.COM/GAMEDIR/GAME-1907](http://www.wgamer.com/gamedir/game-1907)

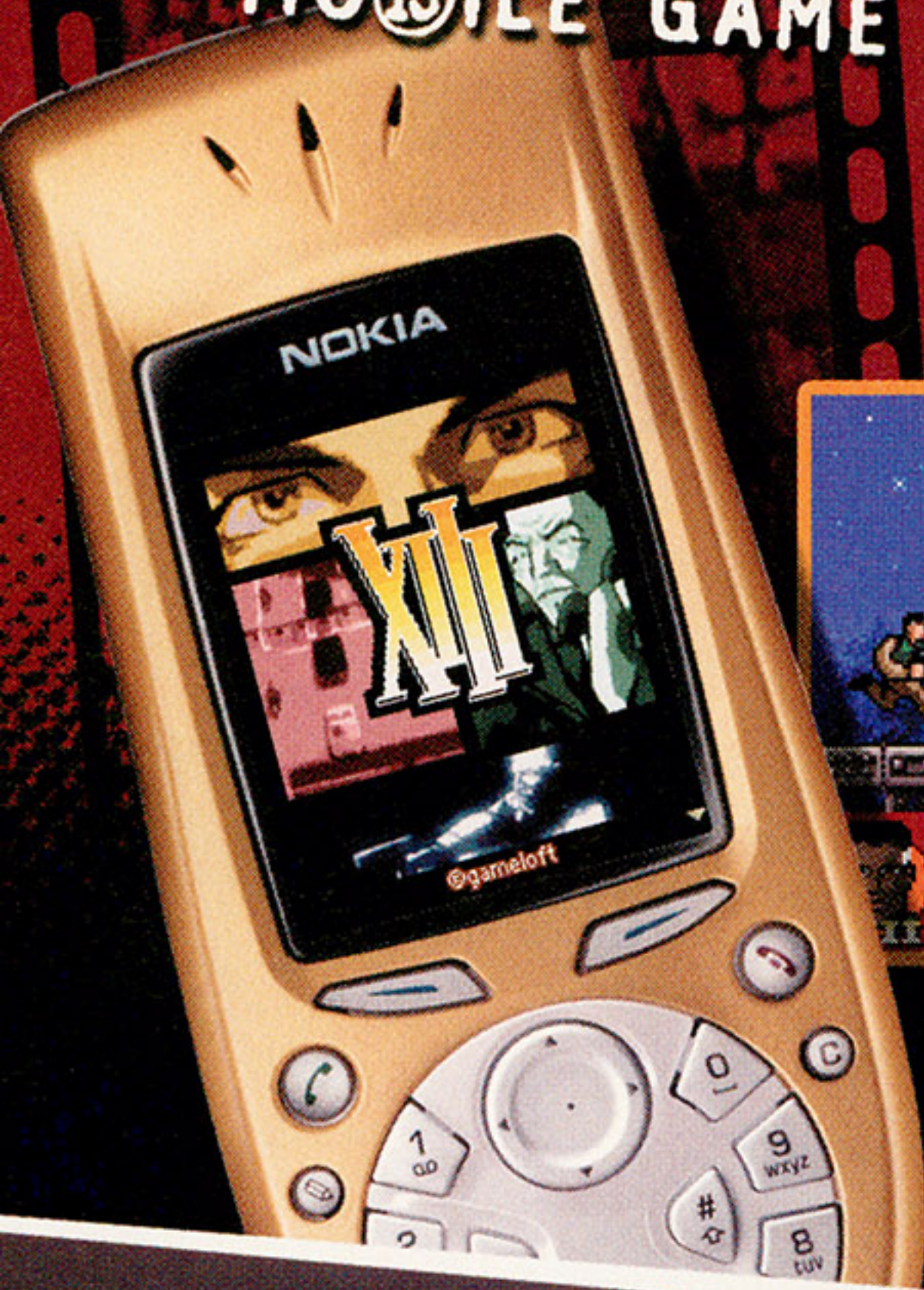
Pirates of the Caribbean is one of the better Hollywood-inspired games. You play as Jack Sparrow, a hardened seafarer looking for his ship, the Black Pearl. You cannonball enemy vessels, collecting booty and parts of a map. You spend the captured gold on ship upgrades, and once the map is whole, you challenge the ghostly hoards who have stolen your ship. In the *Pirates* version that Verizon is offering, there's also swinging from masts and side-scrolling swordplay.

The game's greatest weakness is its control. The directional keys turn you in different ways, depending on which way your vessel is pointing. But a few control problems can't keep Jack Sparrow down. *Pirates of the Caribbean* will get with its nautical combat, and its RPG-esque ship-building will reawaken your inner pirate-loving child.



XIII

MOBILE GAME



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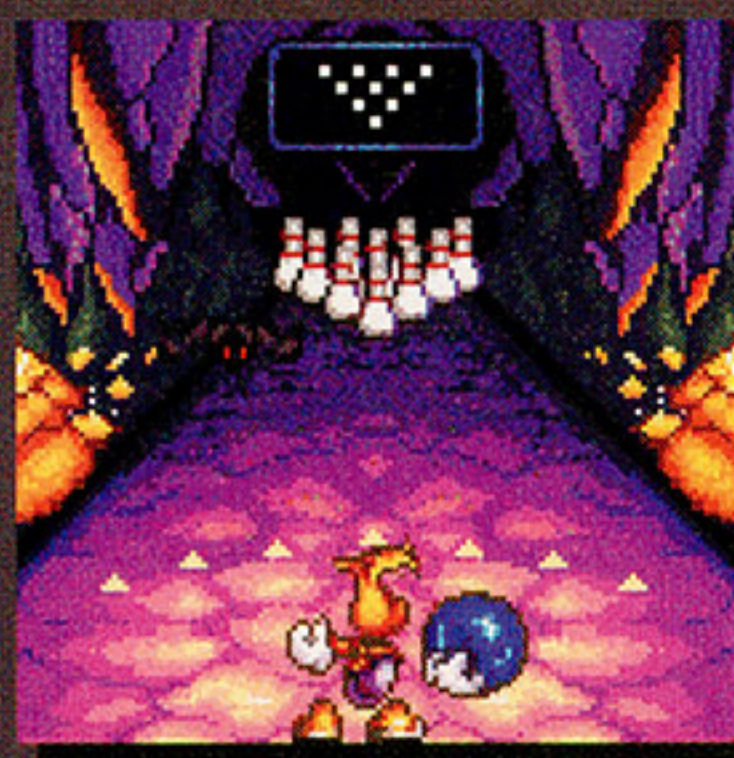
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SIBERIAN STRIKE
Will you be fast enough
to lead the air strike force?

Actual screenshots

Download directly from your phone
through your carrier's portal
or at www.gameloft.com

Gameloft games are available for: (check compatibility)



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3595



Nokia
3650



Siemens
S56



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4400



Motorola
T720



Nokia
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and for:
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Nokia 6800
Siemens C56
LG 6000

gameloft

FREEDOM ISN'T FREE



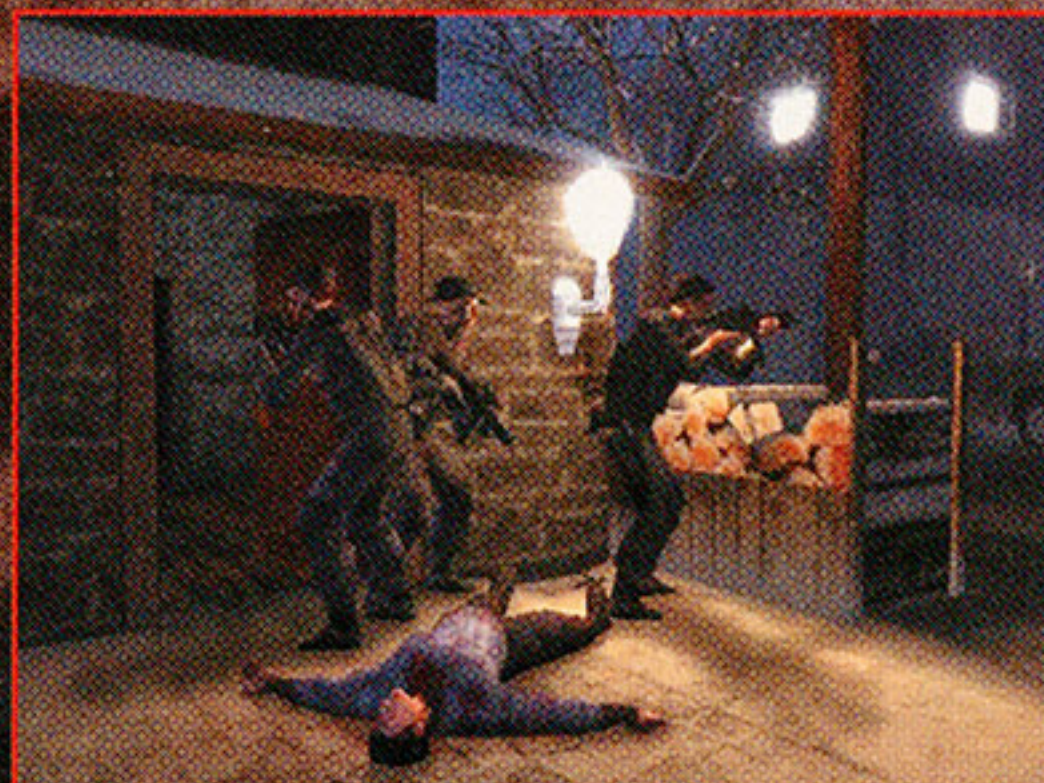
WORLD

Foreign Ambassadors Report Peaceful Face-to-Face Negotiations with Terrorists in Venezuela

By Michael Golden
GLOBAL PRESS NETWORK

was relieved that the situation did not turn violent despite the heightened tensions between the two sides. As of yet, no further details are available.

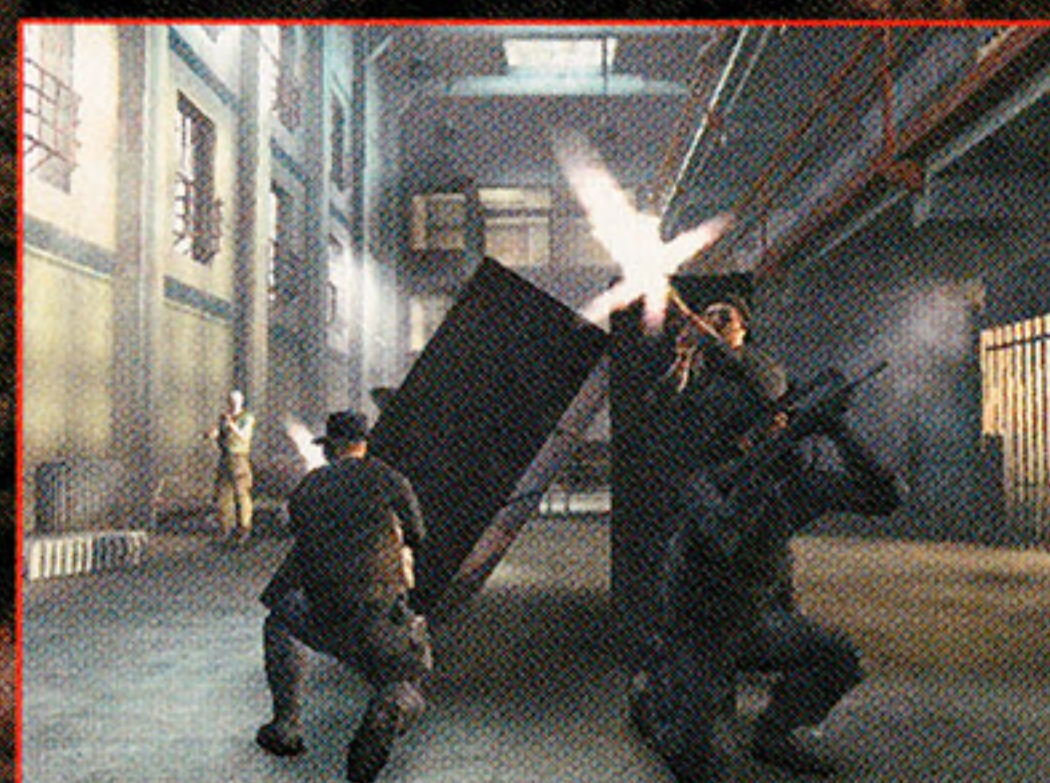
Venezuela - A government official...



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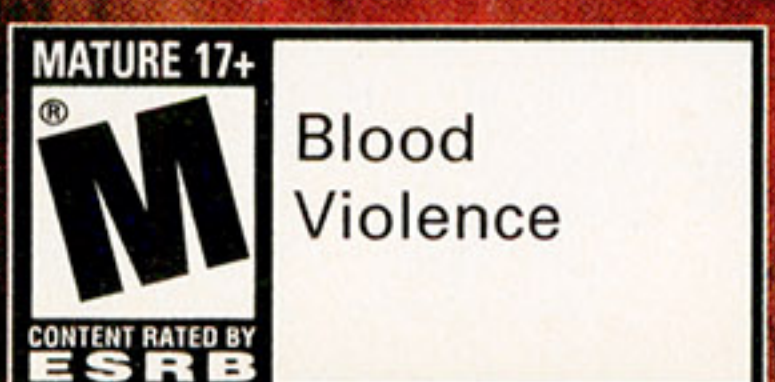
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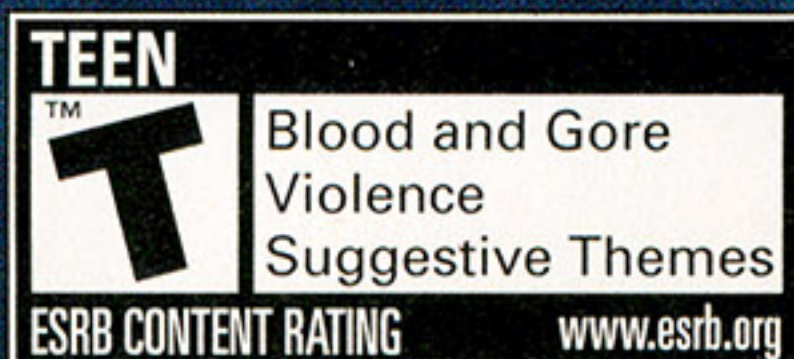
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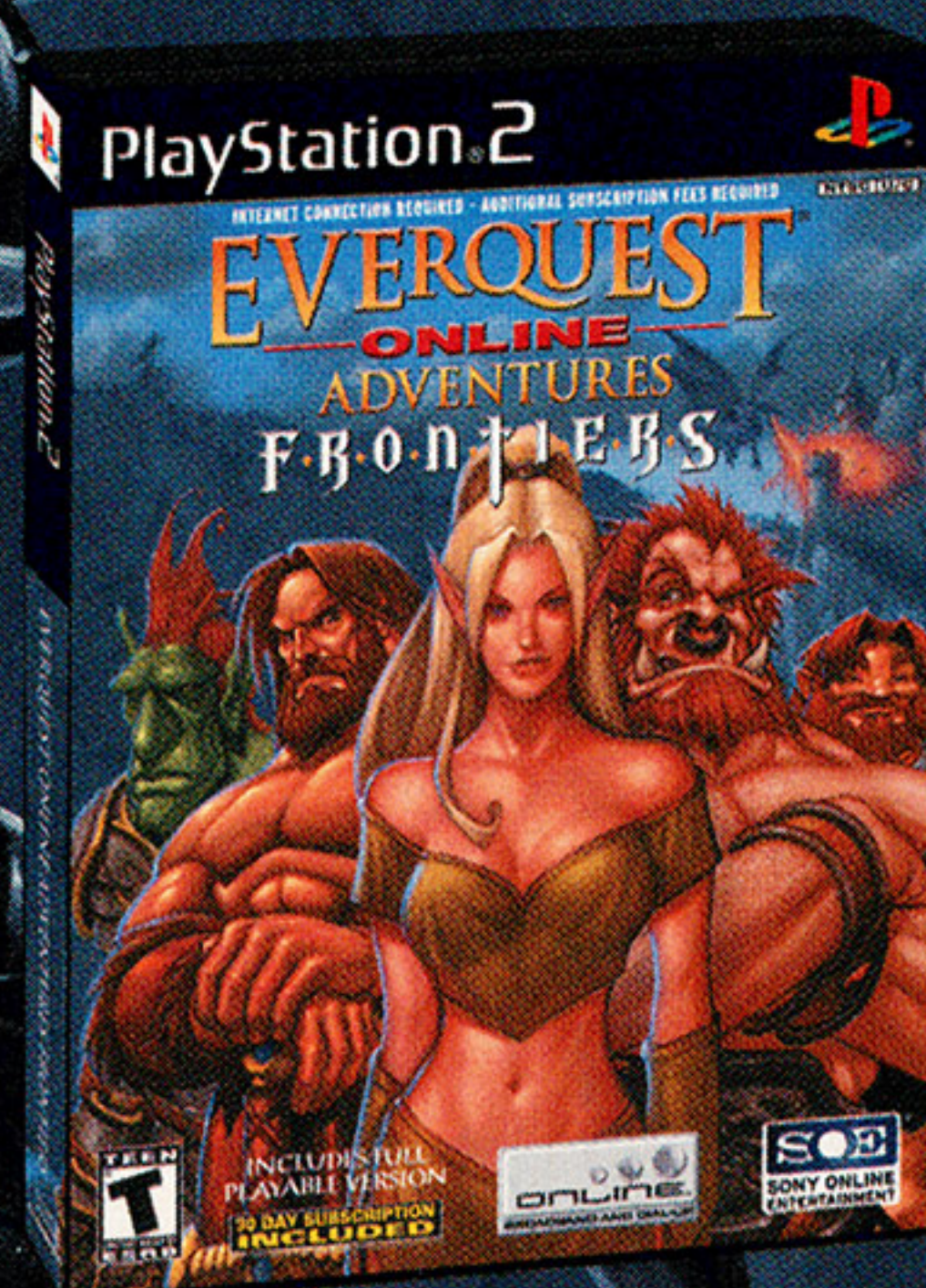
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review crew

your monthly guide to gaming's winners and losers

THE RATING SYSTEM

Each reviewer assigns an overall grade to each game, on a scale from 0 to 10. When a game receives a 10, you can rest assured that it's one of the best games ever made, a classic that will endure throughout the ages. Conversely, when a game gets a 0.0, it is complete and utter crap and should be treated like a deadly biohazard. We utilize the entire scale, so a game that gets a 5.0 is average, which means not bad.

We repeat: 5.0 IS AVERAGE. The scores are color coded, so the brighter the reds, the better the game.

0-4.5
BAD

5.0-6.5
FAIR

7.0-10
GOOD

OUR AWARDS



Platinum Awards
go to games that get all 10s, the ultimate review a game can get.



Gold Awards
go to games with an average score of 9.0 or higher. Quality stuff.



Silver Awards
go to games that average at least an 8.0 (but are lower than 9.0).



GAME OF THE MONTH
This honor is bestowed upon the highest-reviewed game each month. A worthy buy.



SHAME OF THE MONTH
This dishonor goes to the worst game each month that gets unanimously bad scores.

ESRB KEY (Also check out www.esrb.com)

EC-Early Childhood:
Games bearing this mark are suited for infants, toddlers, and Seanbaby.

E-Everyone:
Wholesome fun for the whole family, devoid of hookers, head shots, or heroin use.

T-Teen:
Like PG-13 movies, Teen games feature mild violence and "comic mischief."

M-Mature:
Whereas these games offer all the gore, sex, drugs, and fun of R-rated fare.

AO-Adults Only:
A rare find. We haven't seen an AO game since *Neurodancer* on 3DO.

GAME OF THE MONTH



■ PAGE 230

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

Prepare for more power slides, red shells, and trash talkin'—Nintendo's *Mario Kart* franchise returns in top form on GameCube. Infants racing in baby carriages has never been so brutal.

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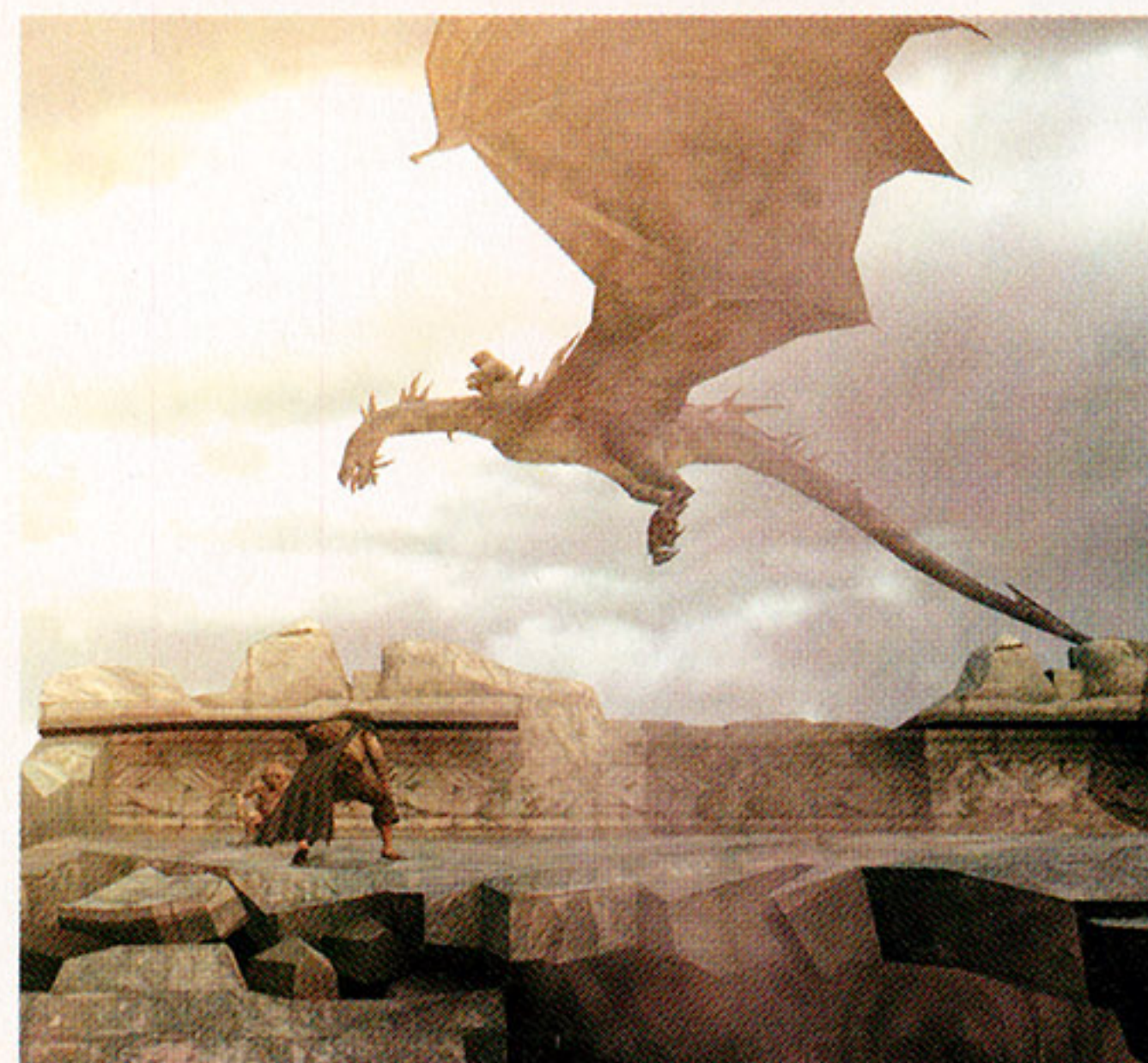
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■ Gimli fires the catapult, cracks a dwarf joke, cries on the inside.

■ As if this orc didn't have enough problems, he also fell on his keys.



■ Artful hacking fills the Skill Meter (lower left) and drops your character into Perfect mode, a limited-time blitz that lets you strike down enemies with a single hit.

■ PS2, XB, GC

ONLINE
(PS2 ONLY)

LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING

No halfling-assed sequel

CRISPIN: Now I know how the sword hand of royal asskicker Aragorn feels after a hard day's hacking. *Return of the King*—due for all systems on November 4—has curled my fingers into blistered claws. But as I sit here soaking in salves and ointments and think back to the 10 hours it took to save besieged Middle-earth, I don't regret debilitating my digits. This game is a thrill ride.

And not just 'cause *Return of the King* unleashes larger hordes of foes than last year's equally slick *Two Towers* prequel. Many of *Return of the King*'s levels actually force you to multitask while you hack and slash. Take Osgiliath—an early mission for new playable halfling Sam—in which you must steer Frodo clear of open areas, lest a soaring Black Rider swoop down and pluck the fuzzy little guy away while you're busy smiting scumbags. In the Battle of Pelennor Fields, a massive clash that could have been the game's finale but

isn't, you have to trigger catapults to cripple rampaging behemoths while simultaneously knocking a Black Rider from the sky, defending small-fry Pippin, and fending off a never-ending crush of enemy warriors. My blisters burn at the memory.

Adding to the chaos: The game doles out just enough health to keep you a few steps from death at all times—and then only if you rely on combo attacks and blocking moves rather than random button hammering. It makes for a white-knuckle experience that can also lead to hair-pulling frustration in a few levels that suffer from unclear objectives. Let me save you from some pain right now: If you get stuck during the siege of Minas Tirith, try using Gandalf's long-range magic attack. Trust me on this.

While players will limp away from *Return of the King* with carpal-tunnel pain, they at least won't have much of the new movie spoiled.

The game actually contains little footage from the flick, although the environments themselves are modeled after the movie's locales. In fact, a few plot points and bosses will be lost on players who haven't read the books. But the whole thing still hangs together as a high-gloss experience that'll make your Middle-earth move.

JOE: *Return of the King* does a fantastic job of putting you into the world of the movie through its graphically stunning reproductions of the film's war-torn sets, smooth transitions from thrilling cinema clips into exciting gameplay, top-notch voice work by the trilogy's actors, and music drawn from the flick's epic soundtrack. Once you start the game, that's it: You've entered Middle-earth, or at least the one from the movie. Granted, that all was true of last year's *Two Towers*, too. So, what's

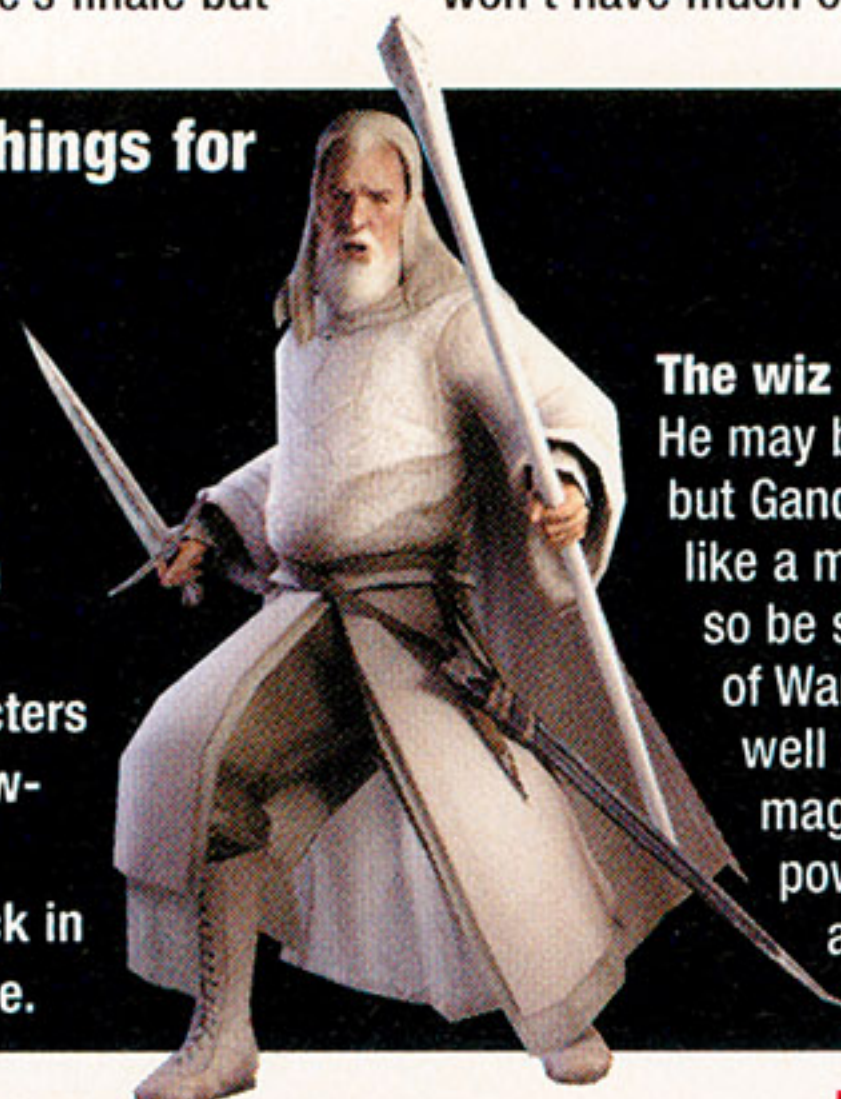


Small Wonders

As you play through the three story paths, you'll unlock chats with the film's stars, concept art, and more. One behind-the-scenes tidbit: Voice actor Andy Serkis based Gollum's voice on his puking cats. How precious. Beat the game completely and you open three more heroes, plus two bonus minigames that pit you against wave after wave of Middle-earth's nastiest.

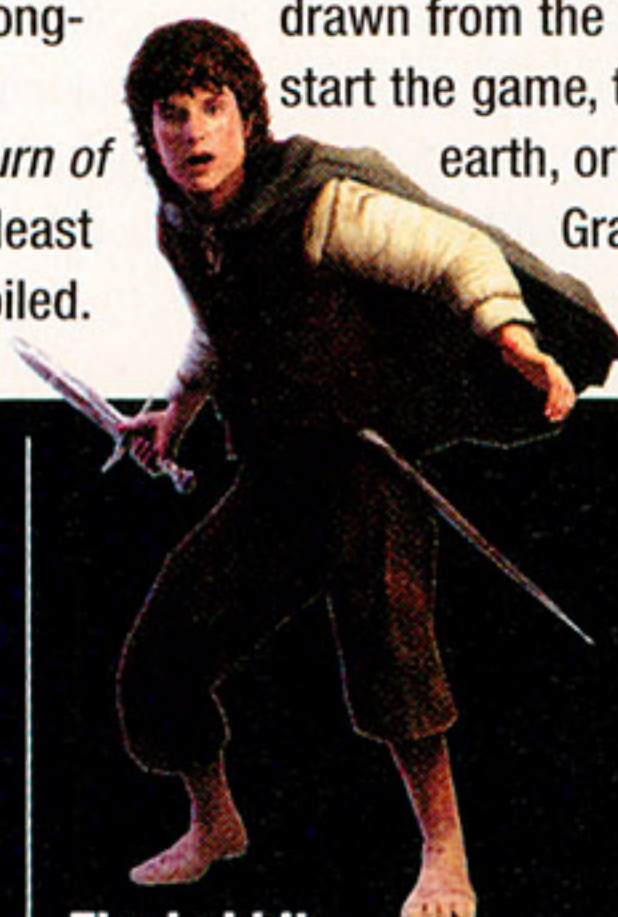
Essential Middle-earth things for Middle-earthlings

Like the prequel, *Return of the King* rewards stylish slayings with experience points you can spend on upgraded stats and combo attacks—except now you can buy special Fellowship Upgrades that juice up all characters at once. Your first essential fellowship purchases: the Orc Hewer combo (it's the most useful attack in the game) and the health upgrade.



The wiz

He may be 7,000 years old, but Gandalf still smites orc like a man 1/435th his age, so be sure to buy his Fog of War attack early, as well as charge up his magic missile. His most powerful ranged attack zaps through multiple enemies.



The hobbits

Buy the Orc Bane combo for Sam and Frodo as soon as possible. The move puts them into devastating Perfect mode instantly, letting them make short work of entire orc families.

The warriors

You'll want to upgrade Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli's new special ability, pronto. This power—activated by holding the shoulder buttons—quickly drops the warriors into Perfect mode, tripling the damage they inflict on foes.



Good: Regal production values
Bad: A few confusing objectives
For the Nitty-Gritty: Read our cover story on page 144



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.5

CRISPIN

8.5

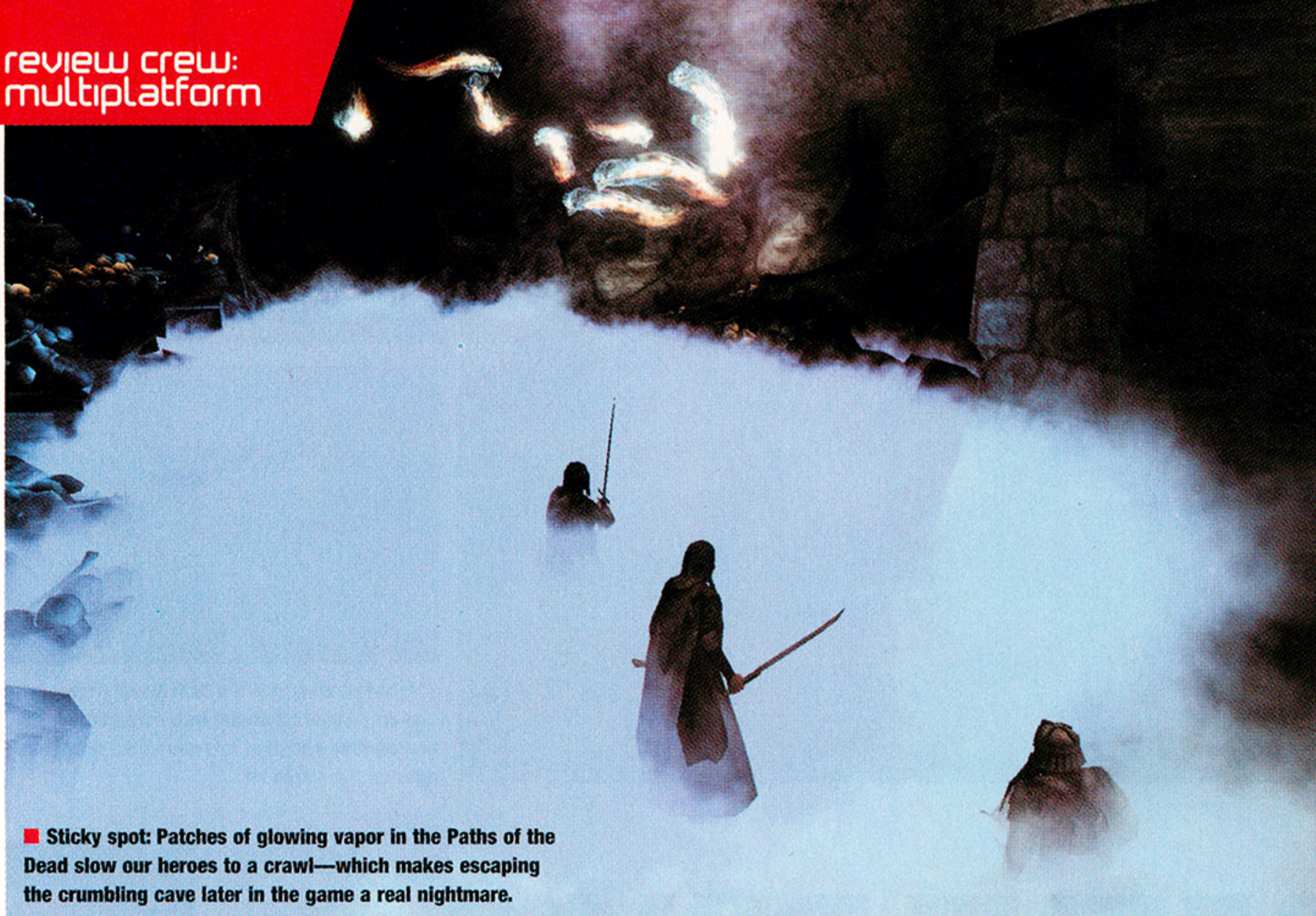
JOE

8.0

SHANE

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: EA Games
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

lordoftherings.eagames.com



■ **Sticky spot:** Patches of glowing vapor in the Paths of the Dead slow our heroes to a crawl—which makes escaping the crumbling cave later in the game a real nightmare.



What's the difference?

Unlike the prequel, *Return of the King* hits all three systems simultaneously. What makes your version so special?

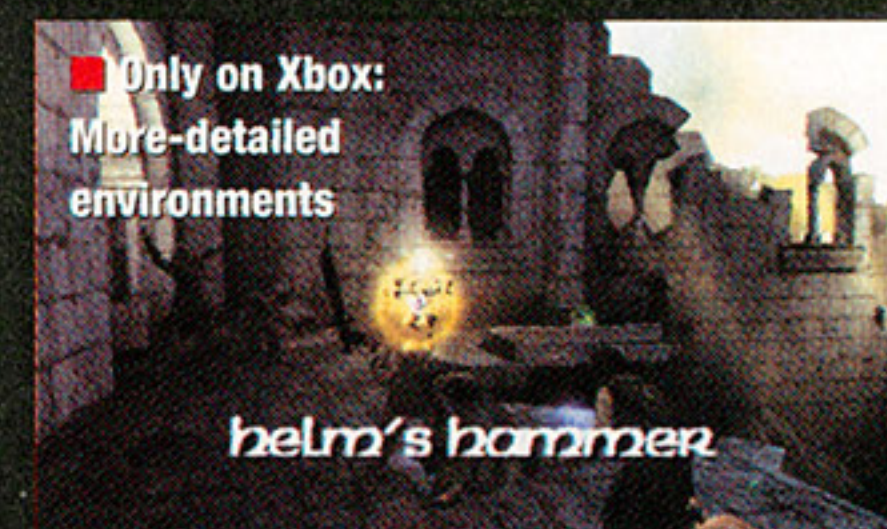
For PS2: It's online!

Slaying with a bud over a broadband connection (EA doesn't recommend dial-up) is fun—as long as both players talk strategy via a headset mic. Otherwise, deciding on a direction to roam the larger levels can get dicey.

For Xbox: Royal visuals

Aside from being the only version with 480p support (for hi-def televisions) and Dolby Digital surround for its cinemas, the prettied-up Xbox game has enhanced lighting and clearer movies.

■ **Only on Xbox:**
More-detailed
environments



For GC: The GBA experience

GameCube players with a GBA link cable can transfer experience points from the handheld version (reviewed on page 236) to the Cube and soup up their characters faster.

changed? *Return of the King's* gameplay has much more variety because the Hobbits (Sam and Frodo), the warriors (Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas), and Gandalf all play distinctly different. You'd think that nothing could possibly compare to cleaving through (almost *Galaga*-like) droves of orcs as Aragorn, but blasting them with Gandalf's magic staff and outwitting them using small-fry Sam's stealth and cunning is surprisingly just as much fun. Each of the three group's stages are also dissimilar enough that—once you've beaten the game and gained the ability to play through levels as any character—you'll want to go back and see how, say, Aragorn fares defending the walls of Minas Tirith or how well Gandalf holds up at the Black Gate of Mordor.

Does *Return of the King* have an Achilles' heel? Sure: It's too frigging hard. The game can make you more irate than exhilarated on many stages,

but its multiple unlockable features, co-op mode, and online gameplay (for PS2, anyway) make up for a lot of the frustration. Besides being tougher than +5 splint mail, *Return of the King* is exactly what a licensed game should be.

SHANE: At the danger of sounding like a broken record (preferably a warped old 45 of Leonard Nimoy's "Ballad of Bilbo Baggins"), I must admit that I agree with my fellow reviewers on just about all their points regarding *Return of the King*. It bests last year's *Two Towers* game by adding more playable characters, a wider variety of level types, and much-needed two-player co-op action.

Like the previous game, *King* offers an audiovisual orgy of Middle-earth splendors that accurately re-creates the film (which, in turn, perfectly adapted the original books with terrifying reverence). Massive armies battle in the background,

siege weapons obliterate fortress walls, and Gollum's loincloth ripples tastefully in the breeze—videogames rarely look this polished and solid. Also, just as in last year's model, a bevy of impressive bonus features (see Small Wonders on the previous page) adds even more pizzazz to the slick package, plus makes a make fine reward for plowing through those legions of orcs.

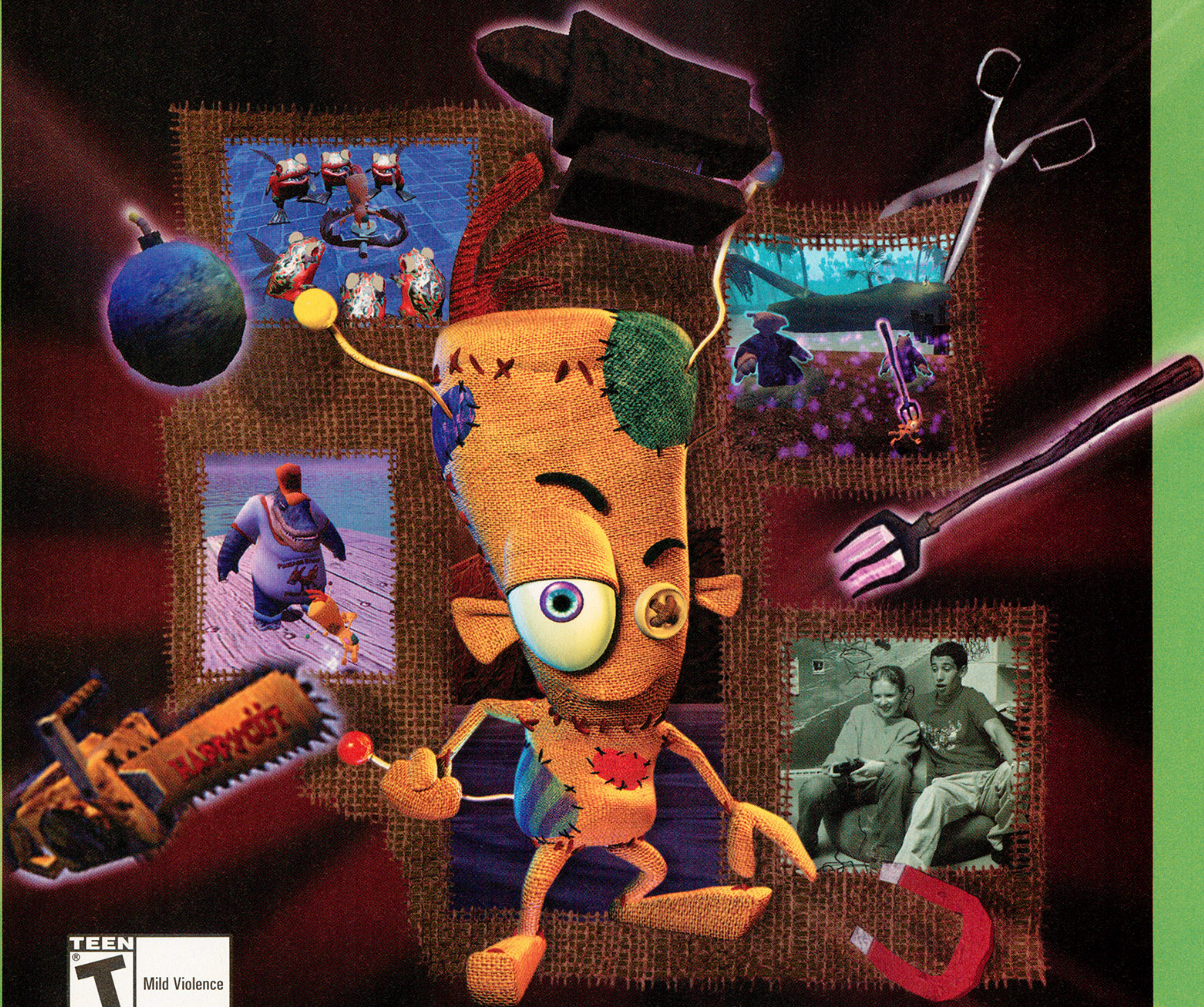
Honestly, the gameplay doesn't quite live up to the presentation's absurd heights of grandeur, but, realistically, it's tough for a hack-n-slash game to offer voluminous depth. Light role-playing elements allow you to customize your characters' moves, upgrade your equipment, and increase your HP, but underneath it all, you're kinda playing *Double Dragon* with extra emphasis on the Dragon. Expect to plow through the entire multipath adventure in a weekend. But oh, what a weekend it is.

Two Can Play
Beat the single-player mode's first level and you unlock *Return of the King's* super-fun two-player co-op game. For extra style, play on Hard. "Enemy hits do 300 percent more damage," says Executive Producer Neil Young. "It's insane."



■ **Missing in action:** The busy battlefields'll have you playing Where's Waldo with your hero.

People tend to look at you differently
when you stuff a voodoo doll full of laxatives.



Microsoft
game studios

You and Vince, the third best voodoo doll in Madam Charmaine's shop, are charged with rescuing his maker from the evil Kosmo the Inscrutable. To get by pit frogs, imps, killadillos and more on the exotic streets of New Orleans, Vince must use his best weapon, himself. See Vince jump into a blender, stick himself with a pitchfork, step into a beartrap and over 25 ways in which Vince can hurt himself, which means he's really helping himself. So don't feel bad for Vince. It's what he does best.

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it's good to play together

xbox.com/voodoovince



Next time you're facing death by helicopter, be sure to take cover behind a jeep.

PS2, XB

KILL SWITCH

Simple.fun

Good: Arcade-inspired action is simple and sweet

Bad: Short adventure gives new meaning to "mission brief"

AKA: Cliff's Notes version of *Splinter Cell*



JON D: If I didn't know better (or if I hadn't spent last month playing *Time Crisis 3*), I'd say *Kill Switch* was actually a fresh stab at reinventing the *Time Crisis* franchise. Like *TC*, *Switch* has you peeking out from behind crates to kill hordes of faceless soldiers ad nauseam. And likewise, its handful of linear missions zip by in just a few hours (once you factor in frequent use of the unlimited continues). No light gun here, though—all action occurs via third-person perspective à la *MGS2*, *Syphon Filter*, and *Splinter Cell*; *Kill Switch* shamelessly lifts scenes from all three games. But *Switch* keeps its action fun and accessible, which actually scored points with me. Walking on eggshells in *Splinter Cell* turned me into a paranoid, neurotic mess, so I'm happy to have a no-bull, arcadey shooter I can just bust through and enjoy for its most basic qualities. A couple of technical glitches got me killed by invincible bad guys sandwiched in the walls, but I still walked away from this one more glad than mad.

SHAWN: Here's an ode to the hard-boiled matinee shot on a shoestring budget—the

videogame equivalent of Chuck Norris hopped up on cordite, massacring his way through a hack plot. *Kill Switch*'s gameplay is as gripping as it is one-dimensional—you're pinned down, with never more than one too-slender concrete pillar between you and tragedy, praying someone's rifle runs dry before they advance on your position. Really, there's not much more to this guilty pleasure than that, but it delivers the goods with gung-ho gusto.

KEVIN: Playing *Kill Switch* gave me a killer flashback to the 1994 glory days of *Doom*, when I would routinely strafe around corners while walking down the street. Cover is *everything* here—you enter a room, hide behind a television, shoot two or three enemies who have comical accents, enter the next room, and repeat several dozen times. It's hardly original (not to mention short and sometimes ugly), but Namco's got both the control and the difficulty level just right. The result: If you think "stealth-action" is secret code for "failing missions over and over," then *Kill Switch* will be intensely refreshing.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	6.0	6.5	7.5
JON D.	SHAWN	KEVIN	

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.namco.com

PS2, XB

STAR TREK: SHATTERED UNIVERSE

We'd sooner play with the captain's log



We're very fond of the original *USS Enterprise*, but it's got to go.



Good: Mirror Universe setting, where everyone nice is *eeevvviil*

Bad: The graphics, missions, gameplay, voicework...you name it

We'd Rather: Memorize the Bible in Klingon than play this



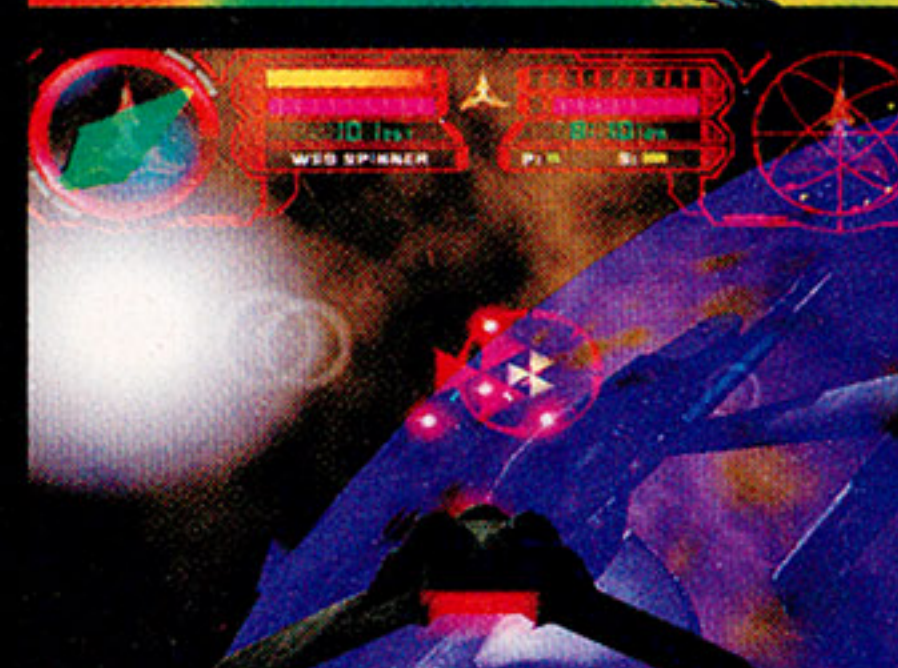
JOE: When you're playing a *Star Trek* game that a) takes place in Classic *Trek* continuity, b) is set in the semi-obscure Mirror Universe (remember the episode where Spock had that rad goatee?), and c) has you serve under Captain Sulu on the *USS Excelsior*, you know it's been made with hardcore *Trek* followers in mind. But *Shattered Universe* is such a shambles that it can't even earn the caveat "for fans only." It lacks any of the elements that might pull someone in, Trekkie or not.

Get ready for yawn-inducing space-shooting missions packed with massive waves of enemies so dumb, they'll sometimes bash themselves to death against the *Excelsior*'s shields. Even unintentionally funny level briefings by Sulu himself, George Takei, can't salvage this wreck. *Shattered Universe* is a major step below the standards set by modern space shooters like...well, frankly, any of them. Even *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* was more entertaining than this.

SHAWN: When Trekkies will pay for a glass of water from which a sick cast member sipped (watch the documentary *Trekkies* for proof), you can bet someone's counting on them to seek out anything bearing the series' insignia, including this space debris. Despite the episode-quality presentation of its cut-scenes, *Shattered Universe* is shamefully uninspired. Trust me, you don't want to fly sortie after mind-numbing sortie of hour-long missions that almost always end in tragedy, forcing you to restart the

whole flavorless affair.

CRISPIN: If *Shattered Universe* was made for inhabitants of the game's screwball alternate dimension, where good is bad and bad is good, it would be freaking great. Because only in a bizarre universe would anyone fancy facing nigh-endless waves of identical enemies, or watching badly computer-generated *Star Trek* characters, or playing frustrating levels that never seem to end. Note to the game's designers: If a mission's secondary objective is to beat it in under 17 minutes, you might want to think about adding in a checkpoint, or maybe just getting out of the game-design biz altogether.

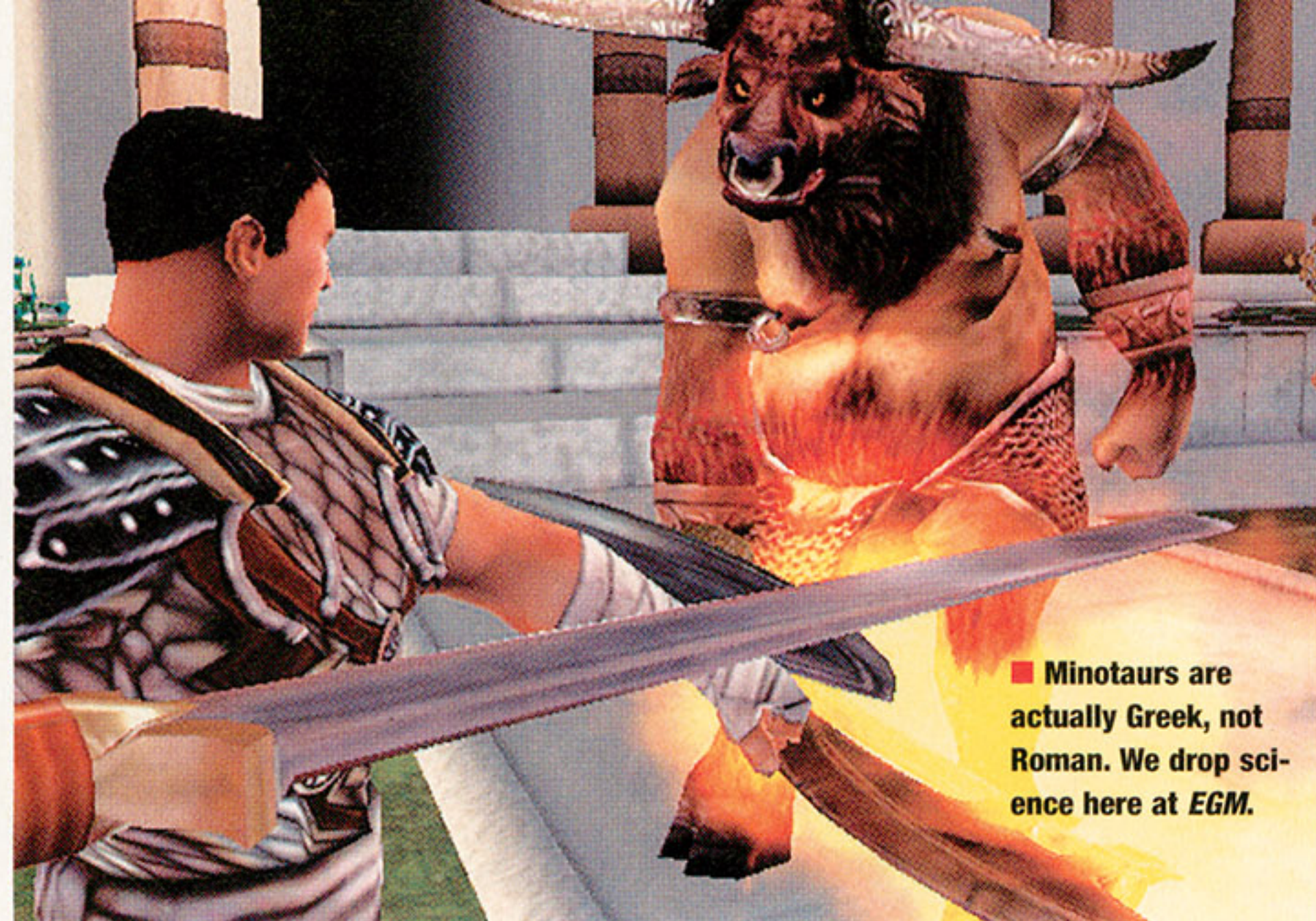


"You Klingon bastard, you killed my fun. You Klingon bastard, you killed my fun. You..."

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	3.0	3.0	3.0
JOE	SHAWN	CRISPIN	

Publisher: TDK Mediactive
Developer: Starsphere
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.tdk-mediactive.com



■ Minotaurs are actually Greek, not Roman. We drop science here at EGM.

■ PS2, XB, GC

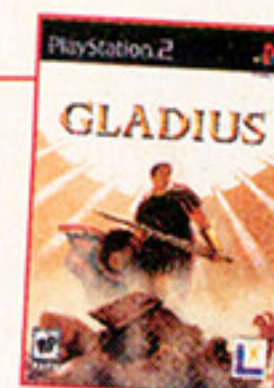
GLADIUS

Do you like games about gladiators, Timmy?



■ (Left) In the immortal words of the late, great John Belushi, "Toga! Toga! Toga!"

Good: The story unfolds through great cinematics...
Bad: ...but you'll fall asleep waiting for the battles to finish
Huge Fans: The crowd claps at every move you make



JOE: Slow-moving even by pokey-by-nature strategy-RPG standards, *Gladius* will devour your life. The battles take forever, since they involve having to scoot your gladiators across the arena floor, waiting for all of your foes to ploddingly make their moves. (Matches take even longer if you must beat a task like busting a team's distant statue.)

If that already sounds like a long wait for your entertainment, that's just the start. You have to beat five or six fights before qualifying in each town tournament and *then* complete eight town tournaments before you can take part in one of the four regional championships. (Take a moment to do the math. @\$%!)

If the number of battles in *Gladius* were cut by at least a third and its combat speed doubled, the game could be on the fast track for star status. It has most of the other important components: immense character depth and a great story. But because its sluggish, repetitive combat takes center stage, it never quite graduates from schlocky dinner theater. Go rent *Caligula* instead.

GREG S: I'm surprised it's taken this long to make a good game based on the bloodbaths of Ancient Rome. I love that I get to build my team in *Gladius*, making sure to balance the heavy, light, and support fighters. And don't listen to these short-attention-span whiners—the battles are awesome. Immense customization and intuitive controls kept me coming back for more, despite its steep difficulty curve. I only wish the developers had spiced it up with lots more blood, stronger crowd reactions, and more epic music.

XBN—GREG O: *Gladius* takes players back into a fantastical history when warriors damn well waited their turn before maiming and killing. A tactical RPG, *Gladius* swallows time whole—and in huge chunks. The game's turn-based battles at first meander, then crawl, then seemingly grind on in defiance of the basic laws of the universe themselves. Tremendously deep warrior-customization options and rich strategy elements make *Gladius* absolutely worthwhile and fun, but prepare to invest serious time.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

6.0

JOE

8.5

GREG S.

7.0

GREG O.

Publisher: LucasArts
 Developer: LucasArts
 Players: 1-2
 ESRB: Teen

www.lucasarts.com

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■ You can soften up foes with the prince's scimitar, but only the Dagger of Time can truly vanquish them.

■ PS2, XB, GC

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

So much to do, so little time



SHAWN: Like an enchanted carpet ride through *1001 Arabian Nights*, *Prince of Persia* is pure magic. Soft lighting effects and elaborate, detailed architecture give the entire experience the quality of an opium-induced vision where time moves at the speed of your imagination. *PoP*'s immersive atmosphere takes you to another level altogether. Even stuff as trivial as continuing your quest after an untimely catastrophe sparkles with creativity—the hero, narrating his own adventure, admits he's gotten it wrong and needs to retell that part of his story.

The same time-warping premise pervades every inch of gameplay. You'll feel like you've loosed a genie the first time you rewind a bungled leap. And getting only a few proverbial wishes (using your abilities depletes your power reserve) creates a unique tension where you're always asking yourself, "Will this work? Is it worth trying?" Often it's the most daring leap of faith—through a curtain of cascading water and

onto a stalactite, or from a rickety wooden beam to a hanging lantern—that gets you where you need to go.

When he's not negotiating ingenious jumping-puzzles, the prince applies his command over the clock to some of the most striking combat seen in a game of any kind. Ever wish you could turn back the hands of time on a battle gone wrong? Here you can correct your mistakes seconds after you've made them; deflecting that blow that snuck in from behind or cartwheeling out of harm's way where you first pressed your luck. You can also vault over foes, stabbing them while you're still upside-down; lunge from walls like a human arrow; or freeze one enemy, allowing you to more effectively deal with others. Half the fun is figuring out which enemy is susceptible to what attack.

Prince of Persia isn't beyond improvement. Some battles throw too many enemies at you and a few of the puzzles are more grueling than

fun, but with the game's seamlessly integrated concept, execution, and atmosphere, they're hardly worth complaining about.

G. FORD: Not since the original *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* have I played a game that controls so gracefully. And *Prince of Persia* is a masterpiece not only because of its perfectly simplistic controls, but also because it instills the player with a confidence I haven't felt in a game before. It does this by giving you control of time.

Since you can rewind a mistake with the press of a button, you won't hesitate to try a particularly insane idea that you wouldn't even risk contemplating in other games. In *Prince of Persia*, you can do that idea, plus you can run up a wall, leap to and shimmy up a column, and jump to a bar you'll then use to vault up to a ledge. It's a liberating experience.

An inevitable sequel could be even better, though. Here, the camera sometimes hops ➤



Princes of Persia Past
Would you believe the prince has been fighting his way through labyrinths loaded with deathtraps and bloodthirsty sultans for over a decade now? *Computer Gaming World* called the original *PoP* "a masterpiece of animation, vivid action, and daunting puzzles." Who would've guessed those comments would hold as true today as they did 10 years ago?

Time as a Tool

Prince of Persia's titular Sands of Time give you five distinct powers:



Revival: Rewinds fatal leaps and reverses your fortunes



Destiny: A clairvoyant vision of dangers to come



Delay: Slows the sands of time to a trickle



Haste: Foes feel only a rush of air before being split in half



Restraint: Turns enemies into sandstone statues

Good: Brilliant design
Bad: A few overly long battles
Don't: Miss it



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

9.5

SHAWN

9.0

G. FORD

9.5

MIGUEL

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.princeofpersiagame.com

who are you?



The race is on in Mario Kart: Double Dash!! Now with two characters per kart—one drives, the other throws stuff. Switch back and forth to mix it up and double the mayhem. Only for Nintendo GameCube.

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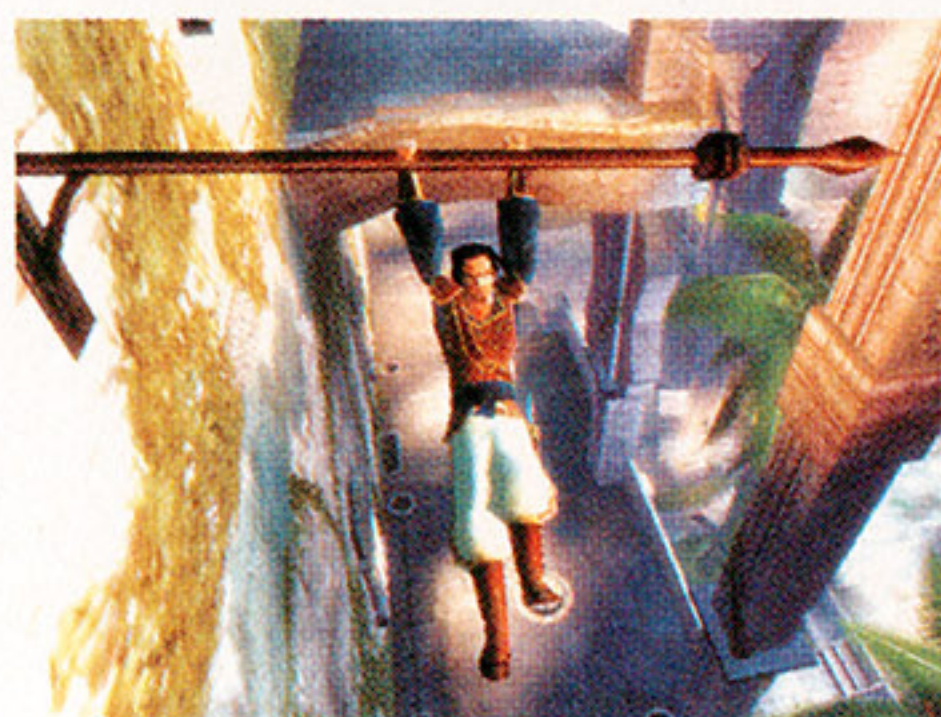
EVERYONE
E
Mild Cartoon Violence
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

MARIO KART
Double Dash!!



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Ico-conscious



Vast panoramas, quietly crumbling castles, and a mysterious maiden in need of a daring rescue—*Prince of Persia* has more than a bit in common with the PS2 cult classic and critics' darling *Ico* (pronounced "Eeeco"). But unlike the latter game's helpless waif, this princess can fend for herself. Farah's bow is handy for dropping harpies your scimitar can't reach, and her girlish figure lets her slip through cracks the prince can't.

➤ around at inopportune times, and the frustration factor can get extremely high if you don't immediately notice a key element to your goal. But those are minor complaints. Try stacking them against a wonderful fighting engine (I enjoyed the long bat-

those carnival-ride warning signs on *Prince of Persia*'s box, cause this game will make your chest explode if you've got a heart condition (in a good way, of course). Just like the classic PC games it's based on, *Prince of Persia* is all about

"...an opium-induced vision where time moves at the speed of your imagination..."

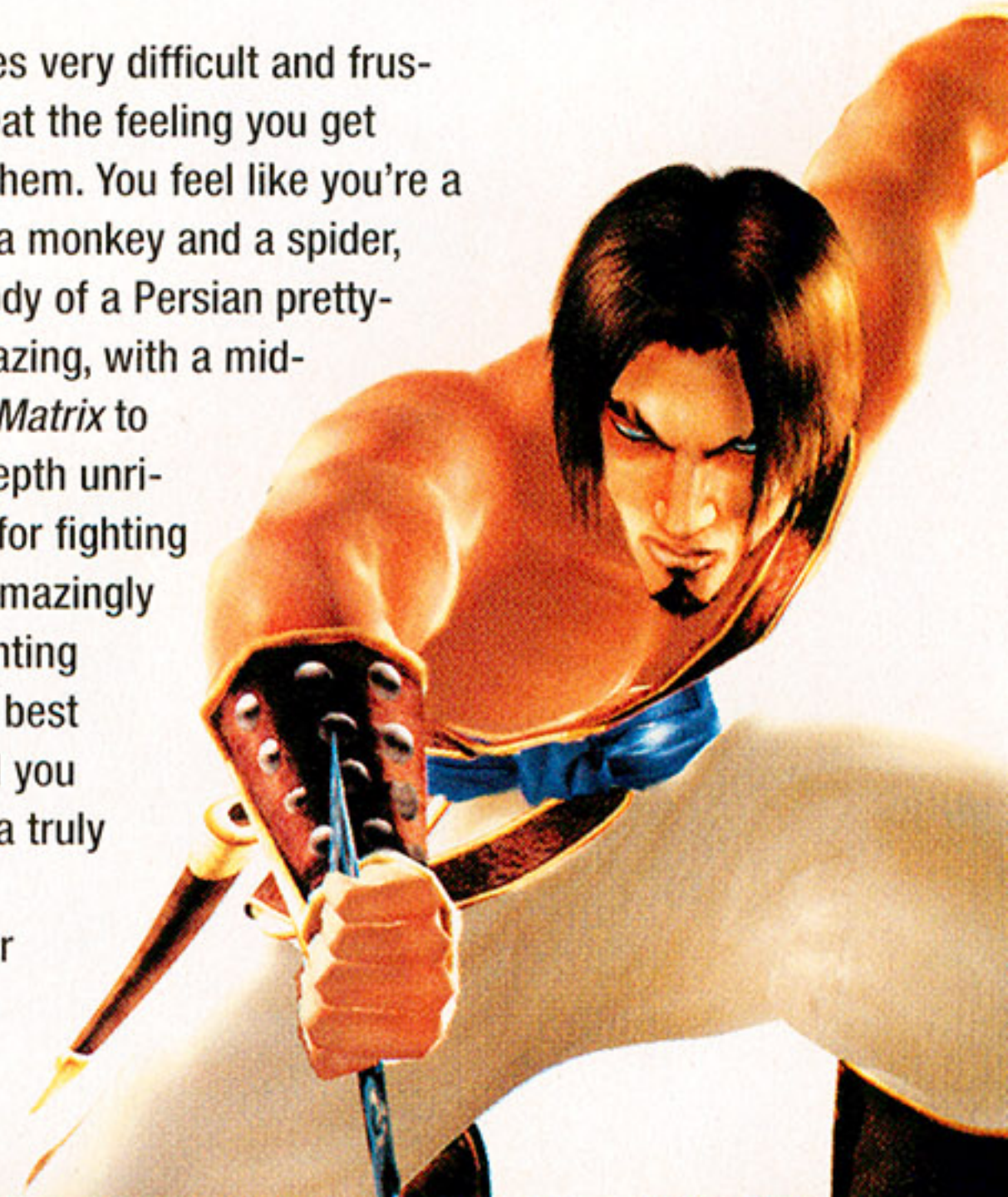
tles—very satisfying), captivating story, and absolutely breathtaking graphics. Best of all, you'll want to show off *Prince of Persia* to friends, family, whoever, because of its strong cinematic presentation. Get this game.

GAMENOW—MIGUEL: They should put one of

death-defying acrobatics performed with super-human precision and finesse, and the end result feels insanely rewarding. You've got a bunch of crazy, brutal moves at your disposal, and the ingeniously-designed, trap-filled environments will have you wracking your brain for ways to navigate them.

Doing so is sometimes very difficult and frustrating, but you can't beat the feeling you get when you finally solve them. You feel like you're a ninja that's mixed with a monkey and a spider, trapped inside of the body of a Persian pretty-boy. Combat is also amazing, with a mid-air ballet that puts *The Matrix* to shame, and a level of depth unrivaled by anything save for fighting games. Sprinkle in an amazingly tangible ambiance, haunting music, and some of the best graphics ever seen, and you have something that is a truly a marvel to behold.

Damn, if it weren't for the touchy camera, this game might just have been flawless.



■ Each enemy has a unique weakness—experiment, then exploit.



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11. ☐ **DANCE** Jennifer Lopez, 'NSYNC
12. ☐ **CHRISTIAN POP** Point Of Grace, Michael W. Smith
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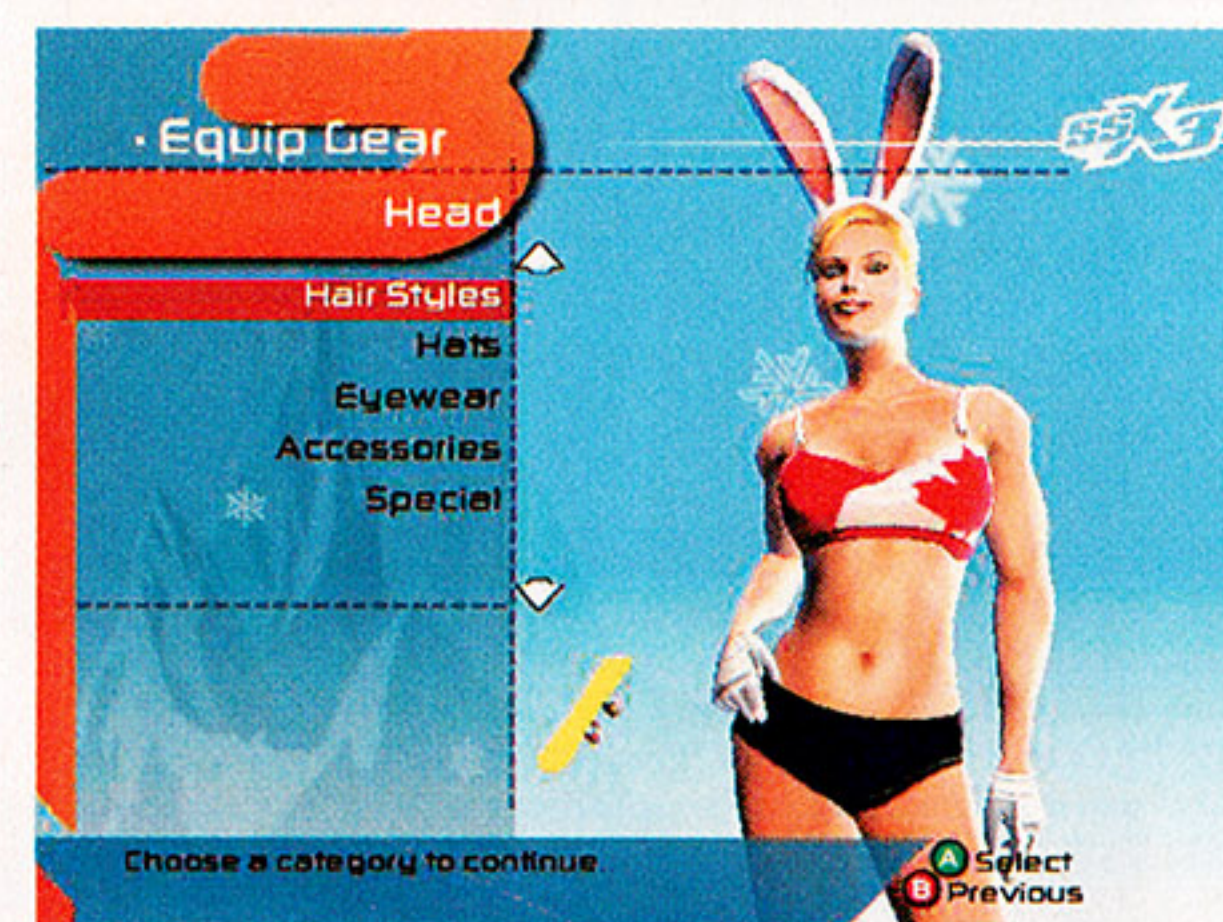
AE



review crew:
multiplatform



These jumps are so big that you'll have time to do the entire hokey pokey before landing. That's what it's all about.



PS2, XB, GC

ONLINE
(PS2 ONLY)



SSX 3

Tony Hawk, eat your heart out

PAUL: I have been to the mountain, and I bring back glad tidings. *SSX 3* is good, so very good. Both deeper and more accessible than its prequels, it adds new moves, courses, and events. At the start of the game, you're dropped on the wilds of a single three-peaked mountain. From there, you can noodle around the wilderness, check out a course or two in pressure-free Practice mode, or go straight to a competition. Win events to earn cash, then spend it on new threads, new moves, building a custom soundtrack, or upping your rider's stats.

The difficulty curve is perfect. Can't win a particular race? No problem. Take a practice run to look for shortcuts or shell out some prize money to upgrade your character, and you'll be right back on the road to snowboarding superstardom. There's so much to do that you'll never get stuck.

I love this game, but I've eaten enough snow to have some gripes. It's too difficult to catch rails—miscalculate ever so slightly, and you'll wipe out hard, killing any combo and losing tons of turbo.

It's tough to tell when you're headed out of bounds, and a lot of places that *really* look like shortcuts—aren't. But enough quibbling.

I have been to the mountain, and I bring back only one commandment: Play this game.

JENNIFER: I approached the newly realistic *SSX 3* with caution. Over-the-top locations like Hawaii made prequel *SSX Tricky* magical for me. And no more Rahzel, the cheeky announcer from the first two games? That's a crime! But a couple of runs was all it took to hook me on the whole-mountain concept. Exploring is so fun: Marked routes branch off into countless back-country options, with tons of cash and bonus challenges hidden in crevices and crannies. The bi-level Boost meter is also a nice twist, providing intermediate boost for Uber tricks but saving the best for the pull-out-the-stops Super-Uber moves. And ultimately, just like on a real peak, no matter what crazy route you take down, all runs lead to the lodge. When you get there, you'll

feel like you spent a real day on the slopes—without expensive lift tickets, annoying lines, and painful injuries. Give that game an award!

DEMIAN: Like a colder, moister version of *Tony Hawk*, the *SSX* series has owned the snowboarding slopes since its inception. Aside from the new, open structure Paul already talked about, the main gameplay tweak for *SSX 3* is the addition of the board flex move—tipping the board forward or backward, like a conventional skateboarding manual—which lets players link tricks together into huge combo strings. The flex (activated by moving the right analog stick) might even be a bit too easy to use; if you just rotate the right stick continuously, there's no way you'll fall. Landing from big jumps also seems much more forgiving now, but if you do bail, you can tap the Tweak button frantically to recover and not lose your boost. Yep, still king of the mountain, although *1080°* (GC) has a title shot later this year.

Trickier than Tricky

Believe it or not, *SSX 3*'s stunt setup trumps *Tricky*'s tried-and-true formula. Now there are two tiers of Uber moves, a combo system like *Tony Hawk*'s, and three entirely new types of tricks. Mix these maneuvers into your repertoire to win more props, more points, and more cash. Step your game up with:



Board Presses: Balance on one end of the board. Use these to keep a combo running as long as you dare.



Handplants: Find an edge and wave your board in the air (like you just don't care). Adds variety to a trick run.



Uber-railsides: No more vanilla railsides for *SSX*. Now they come in chocolate and strawberry, too.



Good: The best *SSX* yet

Bad: PS2-exclusive online mode only supports two-player races

Lame: The superwhite DJ/announcer can't fill Rahzel's shoes



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

9.0
PAUL

9.0
JENNIFER

9.0
DEMIAN

Publisher: EA Sports Big
Developer: EA Canada
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Everyone

www.easportsbig.com



■ PS2, XB

NBA JAM

A blast from the past

Good: Arcade-style play
Bad: Frustrating CPU catch-up
Missing: A difficulty setting

BRYAN: This *Jam* rebirth looks, sounds, and plays much like the original arcade game of a decade ago. Is this good or bad? Well, a little of both. *Jam* vets are sure to enjoy the goofy player models bursting into flames, the crazy announcer spouting absurdities like "Boom-shaka-laka," the multipoint hot spots, and the gravity-defying slam dunks and alley-oops. Not even the bump up to 3-on-3 court action can disrupt *Jam*'s simple-to-control, yet wildly over-the-top gameplay.

Amazingly, though, 10 years removed from its debut, and the series still suffers from the same ol' problems. Most notably, stronger teams (especially the Legend squads) steal victory with ridiculous CPU catch-up antics rather than superior play. Any

lead quickly disappears once the onslaught of cheap knockdowns, shot blocks, and steals begins. And don't bother trying to lower the difficulty—no such setting exists. With rebounding and grabbing loose balls also a hassle, I'm taking my skills and headin' to the street—EA's *NBA Street*, that is.

JOHN R: The *NBA Jam* series has suffered from a serious identity crisis over the years, but it's good to see Acclaim bringing the gameplay back to its arcade-style roots. But while this latest version succeeds in providing a polished, fast-paced, fun game of over-the-top 3-on-3 hoops, it doesn't really offer anything we haven't seen before. If you've played past *Jam* games (or *NBA Showtime*, its spiritual

successor), you've basically played this, which makes it tough to recommend—especially among stiff b-ball competition.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: The recipe for *NBA Jam* is still a good one—as shown by EA's excellent *NBA Street*—but somehow Acclaim's latest entry into the arcade basketball series just falls flat. Single-player games are more frustrating than fun to play: The jam meter works well as an incentive to pull off flashier moves, but hot spots are mostly a cheap reward for overzealous computer opponents that can charge the meter in ridiculously fast fashion. As such, multiplayer action fares a little better, but it's not enough to make the game worthwhile.



■ PlayStation 2 jammers are outta luck: Xbox players can download exclusive *NBA Jam* teams only through Xbox Live.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	6.0	7.0	5.0
	BRYAN	JOHN R.	GIANCARLO

Publisher: Acclaim
 Developer: Acclaim Austin
 Players: PS2: 1-6 w/ Multitap,
 Xbox: 1-4
 ESRB: Everyone

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"I took a slug in the head, but it's all good. I give up."

PS2, XB

SWAT: GLOBAL STRIKE TEAM

Policing stupidity the planet over



"Who do I have to kill for a donut around here? Not this guy, obviously."

Good: Commanding your team via headset
Bad: Atrocious enemy A.I.
Nothing to Do With: The Colin Farrell flick

SHAWN: Working within the law gives *SWAT*'s squad-based action a tactical twist—police rules of engagement authorize only necessary force, and exercising restraint earns you points to spend on power-ups. Problem is, it takes so many direct shots to intimidate perps into surrendering that they're usually pushing up daisies before you can slap on the cuffs. I've shotgunned goons three times in the grill only to have them casually give up and keel over in the same absurd animation. Then, as if to prove that by-the-book arrests really are possible, I found just as many watchmen with their backs turned on open doorways, conveniently waiting to be taken into custody. Perhaps they're not really criminals at all—just ordinary citizens who forgot they were holding rifles when they stopped by the bank.

My team of crack(head) commandos wasn't much brighter, blocking my line of fire, offing hostages, and ordering suspects to freeze while being shot in the face. With gameplay this retarded, even perks like co-op play and voice recognition via headset are all but irrelevant.

MARK: I guess I bonded with my fellow *SWAT* members more than Shawn. Now and then they'll pull some bonehead maneuver or just stand around getting shot, but ordering them to kick in doors, snipe long-range targets, or investigate ahead is so quick and easy (with or without a headset mic), I enjoyed putting them to work. But Shawn's right about the wonky enemy A.I., and *SWAT*'s crude, blocky graphics feel seriously dated. Some exciting teamwork potential exists (especially in co-op missions), but sloppy execution bogs it down.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: The silly A.I. didn't bother me as much as it did Shawn—maybe because I sympathized with the hapless L.A. goons (as a fellow product of California's educational system). Anyway, *SWAT* offers a competent yet uneventful intro to the tactical-action genre. Issuing voice commands is effective, but you might want to wait until you're alone, or you might be hazed repeatedly for sounding like a dork by shouting "SWAT! FREEZE! DOWN! BREACH!" All in all, not great, but not terrible.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

4.0

SHAWN

5.0

MARK

6.0

SCOOTER

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: Argonaut
Players: 1 (2-4 Splitscreen)
ESRB: Mature

www.vugames.com

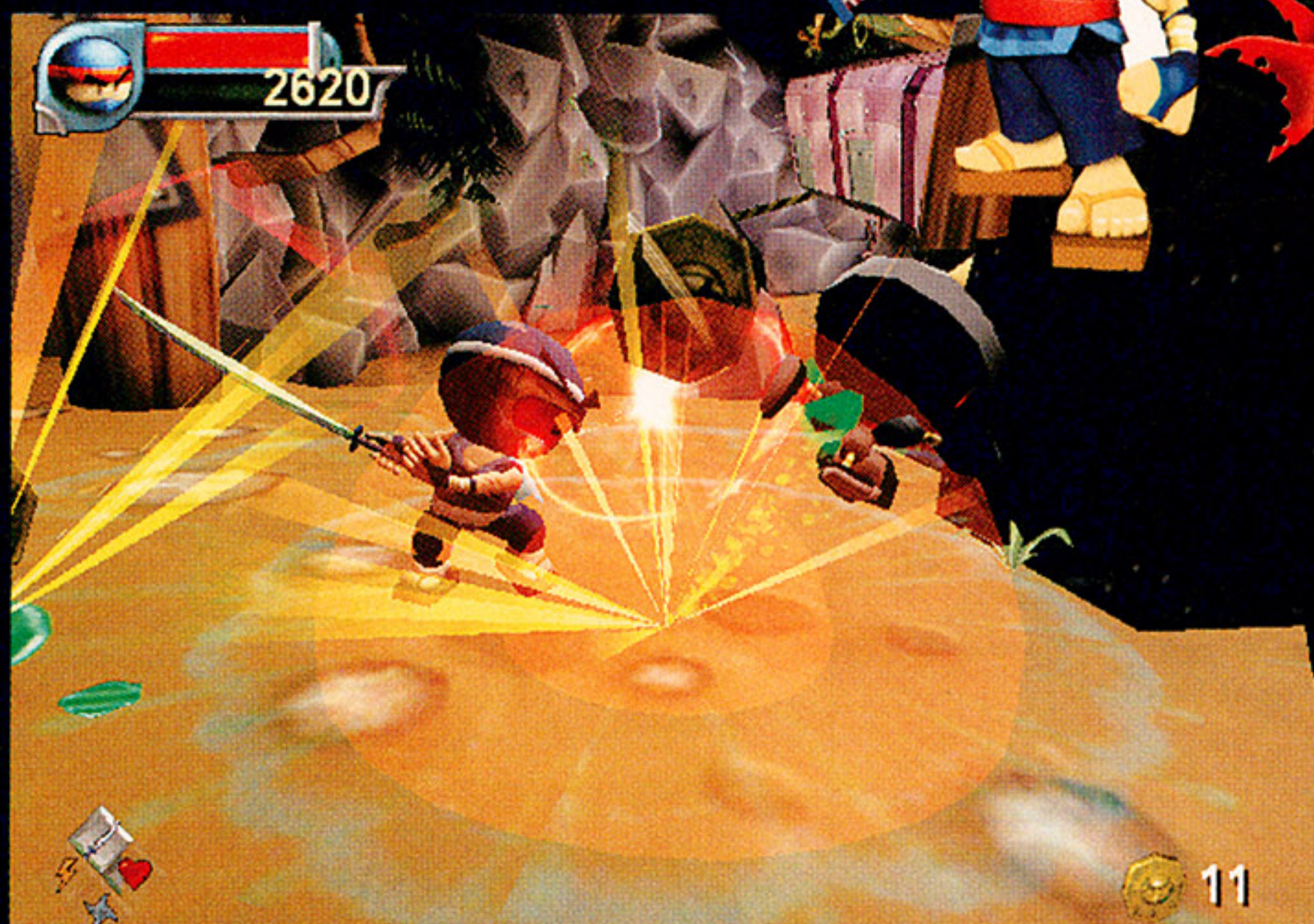


I-Ninja offers a variety of classic platformer challenges, except with a lot more kung-foolery.

PS2, XB, GC

I-NINJA

I ninja, you dead



He may look like he's only 10 years old, but man can that ninja fight!

Good: Unique levels keep gameplay fresh
Bad: Early levels are all too similar
Origin: Developed in the U.K. despite its cute anime look

GREG S: I've come to a point where I almost don't want to try a new platformer unless it's from Nintendo, Sega, or Sony. Too many publishers are flooding this genre with mediocre efforts, so I find it easier just to pretend that something like *Dr. Muto* never really existed. But now, *I-Ninja* comes along to prove that all hope isn't lost.

At first, *I-Ninja* seems like just a repetitive action game with some nice play mechanics. The quirky little hero can slice 'n' dice with the best of 'em, but it's nothing you haven't seen before. Beat the first level, however, and *I-Ninja* opens up in a big way. Almost every level is unique, with goals that range from destroying all enemies to manning a huge, boat-blasting turret to hopping into a giant robot and going into battle. I couldn't put it down. And that's the important part. *I-Ninja*'s not going to steal the crown from the *Sonics*, *Jaks*, and *Marios* of the world, but it's a genuinely fun romp. In a genre so clogged with crap, that's good enough for me.

JENNIFER: I'd have to agree with Greg...about this being a "repetitive action

game with some nice play mechanics." Unlike him, though, I had no trouble putting *I-Ninja* down. What was tough for me was distinguishing the levels from one another, since many of them play so much alike. Sure, there are interesting minigames that deviate from the standard run-and-jump formula, but nowadays, interesting minigames that deviate from the standard run-and-jump formula have become an integral part of the standard run-and-jump formula. Our little hero is cute, but this is nothing more than a rental.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GARY: I love what this game offers—classic 3D platforming action with a supercool mini-ninja dude. The problem is, *I-Ninja* doesn't offer a whole heckuva lot of it. You can blast through the entire game in a few sessions, and you're likely to quickly forget about it when it's over. Despite incorporating everything from robot battles, rail grinding, and bowling, *I-Ninja* liberally rips off every platformer before it. Still, I'm hoping for a sequel that fixes these issues, so we can one day see little Ninja shine so bright.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.0

GREG S.

6.0

JENNIFER

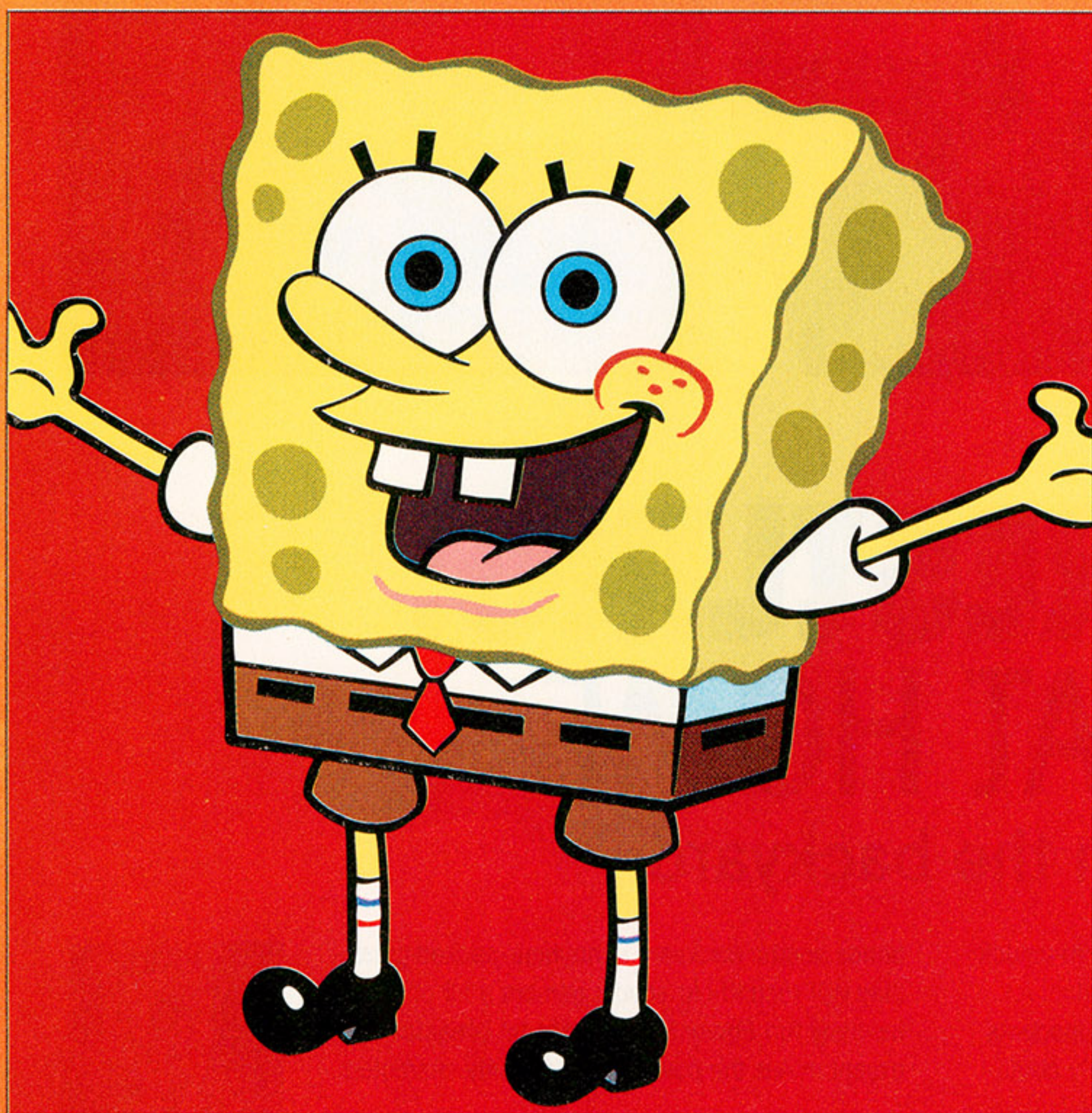
6.5

GARY

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Argonaut
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.namco.com

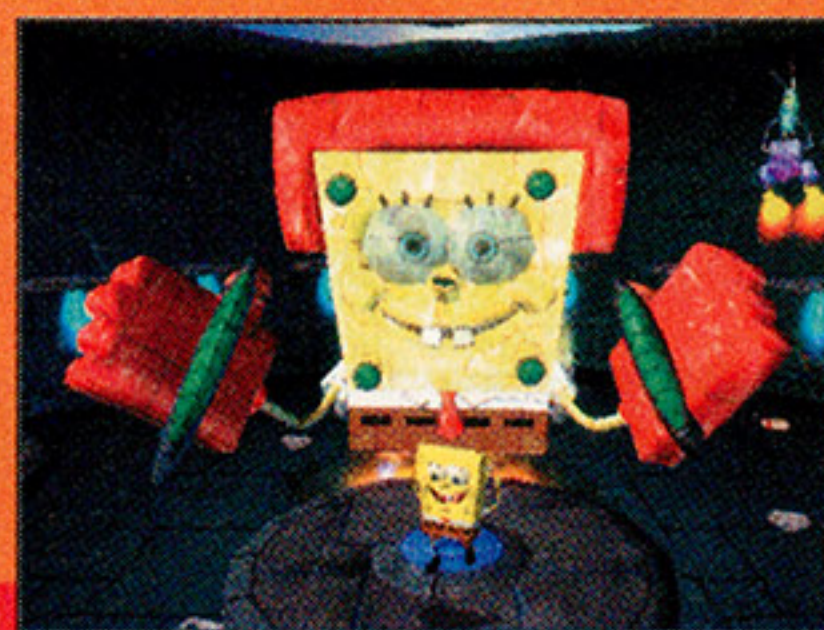
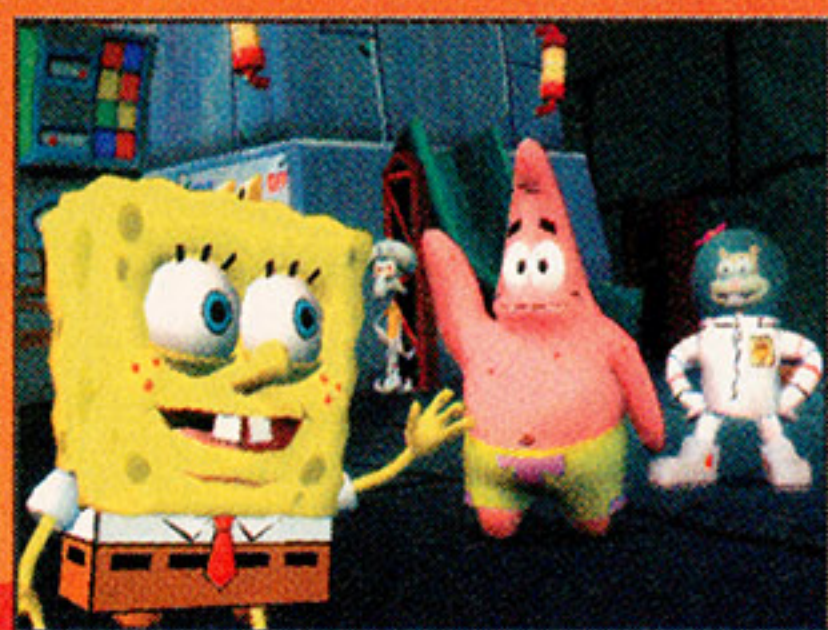
WHO MAKES A BETTER HERO? SPONGEBOB OR A GUY NAMED BOB?



"I have square pants!"



"I'm not wearing pants."



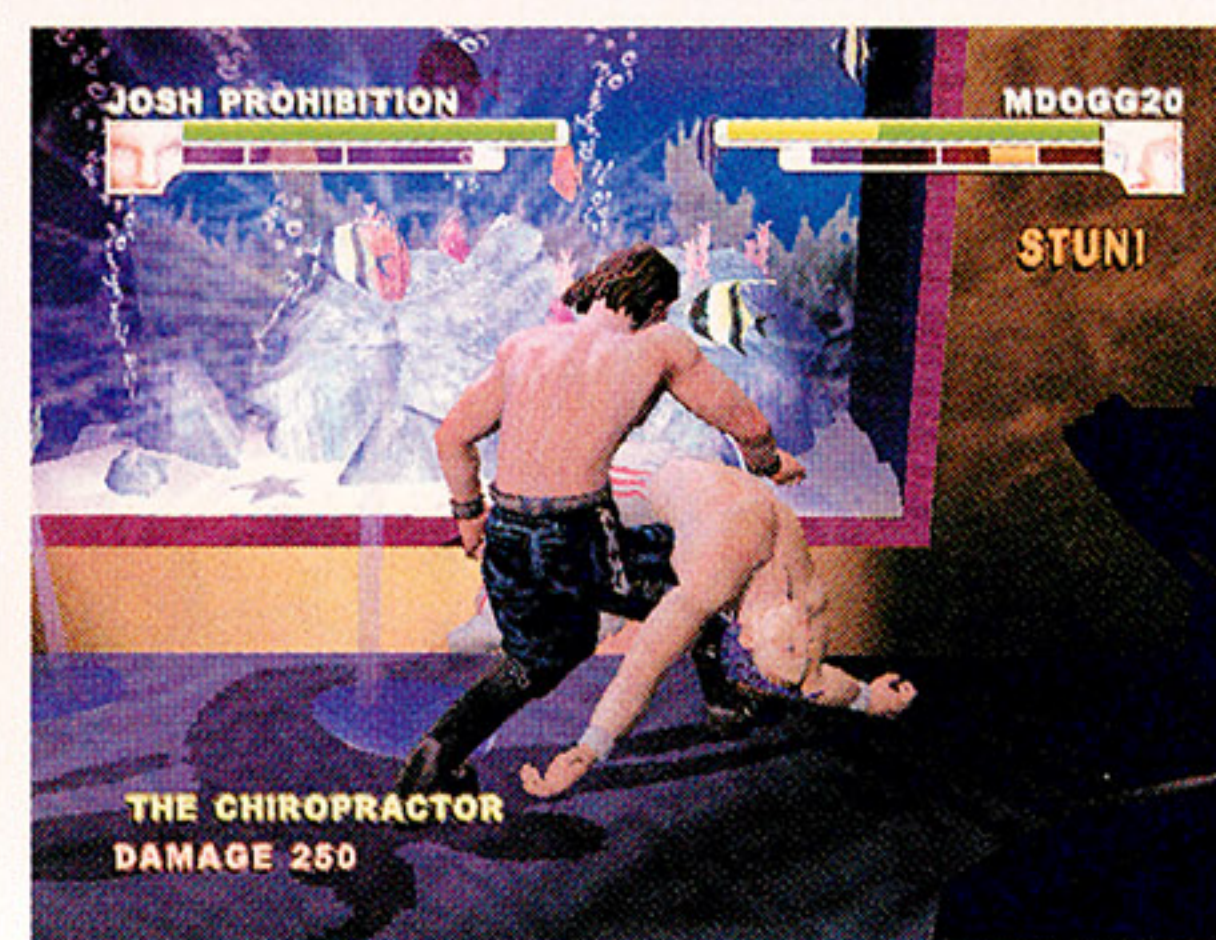
Soak up the new SpongeBob video game this Fall.



Battle for Bikini Bottom



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Rude Boy takes out the (white) trash.

PS2, XB

BACKYARD WRESTLING: DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

Business in the front yard, party in the backyard

SHAWN: If you've ever seen white trash take a triple gainer off a Winnebago and crash through a collapsible table, you know backyard wrestling is ridiculous. But you must admit that with their larger-than-life brand of ultraviolence, these athletes couldn't ask for a better home than your console. Taking the ruckus outside and into truck stops, slaughterhouses (don't ask), and strip joints opens up whole new worlds of pain. Explosive fuel pumps replace padded turnbuckles, and pole dancers become environmental hazards waiting to crack your head with stiletto heels, just to name a few of the sadistic surprises you'll find here.

Don't count on using this stuff the way it was intended, though. Unlike the routines real wrestlers choreograph, these matches are absolute button-mashing chaos. It's still exciting in its own spastic, "Damn did you see that!" sort of way, and it's just the game to enjoy with that buddy who stops by to try out your latest toys but can't be bothered to memorize moves or study demanding strategy.

Nonetheless, you'll wanna play solo to unlock new faces and levels, but brawling against A.I. guys kind of sucks. Cheap computer opponents pull you out of moves and stage unlikely comebacks, try as you might to land that one last hit. And because you've gotta battle three or four consecutive brawlers before advancing up the ladder, even luck won't help you make progress.

GREG S: Pay no attention to the other Greg's complaints; *Backyard Wrestling* is just what the doctor ordered. Assuming the doctor ordered a bunch of idiots trying to kill themselves for the sake of DVD sales. But that's not important. This is a balls-out brawl that's perfect for a quick throwdown with a pal (and maybe a few brewskies). It requires little-to-no strategy and doesn't succumb to the constant grappling you find in most wrasslin' titles...and, frankly, I welcome the simplicity. With hilarious, speedy action in massive, busy environments, who needs boring, predictable WWE superstars? Nerd

bonus points: *Backyard's* mayhem-packed gameplay will remind old-school gamers a lot of the insanely fun *Power Stone* series on Dreamcast, except minus the power-ups and fruity characters.

XBN—GREG O: "Don't try this at home," *Backyard Wrestling* proclaims, and truer words have never been spoken or written. I also recommend not playing it in the following places: Anywhere on Earth. Gameplay here redefines "broken." The action is so hyperfast that the wrestlers are sprinting at all times. It's not just frenetic—it's absurd. Swing a deadly weapon, and you'll find out it's anything but, as enemies oftentimes run right through them unimpeded. Thrown items like tires act as homing weapons, targeting a player even as he (or she) flees in comical terror. A.I. grapplers are as accommodating as they are brain-dead: You can perform aerial attacks with ease because the A.I. foes actually wait underneath platforms, seemingly oblivious to the opponent lurking above. Just don't.



Three-Ring Ruckus

The *Springer Show* meets the sideshow when rap-circus Insane Clown Posse joins regular trailer-park terrors such as Mdogg20 and Rude Boy in *Backyard Wrestling*. While juggalos (as ICP fans cleverly call themselves) will enjoy hospitalizing fools with their heroes, haters like *Xbox Nation* editor Greg "Perhaps a juggalo stole his lunch money" Orlando should have just as much fun serving the clowns a big-top beatdown.



Image courtesy of Fox's *When Juggalos Attack!*



Hurts So Good
The women of *Backyard Wrestling* do more than show their bits in between bouts. Not to be outdone by the boys, these lethal ladies use sex appeal as a weapon by, say, putting you into a hormonal stupor with a lap dance before driving your head into the ground.



Good: Outlandish arenas
Bad: Cheap computer opponents
Choice Music Track: "Juggalo Chant"



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

7.0
SHAWN

8.0
GREG S.

2.0
GREG O.

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Paradox
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Mature

www.bywgame.com



■ Sultry assassin Nikki Connors is no Sam Fisher, but she still kicks Lara Croft's ass.

■ PS2, XB, GC

ROGUE OPS

Nikki breaks more necks than nails



Good: Cunning covert kills
Bad: Lobotomized enemies
Blondes: Have more fun

SHAWN: Skin-searing laser security systems can't stymie her—not when *Rogue Ops*' shadow agent Nikki Connors can use the bodies of incapacitated guards to create a sizzling human bridge across the beams. If that sounds like your cup of cyanide-spiked tea, you'll find crushing hapless goons beneath chandeliers sweeter yet. Despite seeming like just another me-too silent assassin, this gal is refreshingly ungeneric. *Splinter Cell*'s Sam Fisher can't pick pockets for security passes, and I'm sure *Metal Gear*'s Solid Snake would like his own insect surveillance cameras. But next to these guys' spy games, *Rogue Ops* is irritatingly rough around the edges. If you buy it, go ahead and get a walkthrough as well. Realizing the solution to a progress-impeding puzzle has been staring you in the face is one thing, but growing desperate to the point that you're pursuing obvious dead ends for hours is bogus. If only Nikki's pals at HQ could send suggestions when she gets stuck, impatient gamers might bother playing all the way through.

G. FORD: *Rogue Ops* immediately grabs

some points with its polished look and sexy heroine, and it does an admirable job of nailing the finer aspects of stealth and spycraft. But some serious snafus diminish its overall impact. Besides poor enemy A.I., the paint-by-numbers gameplay (requiring surgically precise cursor movement for actions like jumping or climbing) makes the action feel canned. The levels and missions are creative, though, and the stealth kills and gadgets (like the retina scanner) are cool. A decent attempt with untapped potential that has me looking forward to a sequel.

XBN—GREG O: Don't hate Nikki Connors because she's beautiful. Hate her because she's yet another bland, soulless heroine shoehorned into an uninspired third-person stealth adventure. Connors snaps necks, breaks bones, and stuffs bodies into lockers with the best of them, but cannot, say, use her grappling hook to climb to new areas unless she's staring at exactly the right spot and a magical "action icon" appears. Hunting down these arbitrary hot spots is about as fun as mildew. Which isn't that much fun.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.0	6.0	4.5
SHAWN	G. FORD	GREG O.	

Publisher: Kemco
Developer: Bits Studios
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.kemco.com

■ PS2, XB, GC

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

It's hard like a turtle's shell



■ Like his namesake, Leonardo is ambidextrous. And a ninja.



Good: A variety of great-looking levels
Bad: Cheap bosses
April O'Neal Says: "...that's why I invited you for a sleepover."



PAUL: The quartet of former quadrupeds returns to videogamedom, sportin' a sweet art style lifted from the hit new animated series. Like their most popular game, the 1991 coin-op, this is a straight-forward beat-em-up. The Turtles thump and slice their way through hundreds of Foot ninjas, street thugs, robots, and mutant lizard-men before saving the world in a totally tubular fashion.

Alas, it's not easy being green. Swarming foes will keep you paralyzed as they pummel you into turtle soup. To prevent this, practical players will rely heavily upon the three-button combo that hits multiple foes, rarely using the Turtles' other moves. Worse, the game's bosses are completely merciless. Shredder and Co. eschew traditional patterns of alternating attack and vulnerability—they're all offense, all the time. And if you fail to defeat a boss, expect to replay the entire hour-long stage in order to try again.

That said, the game's levels are good-looking and varied, and its cut-scenes should please fans of the cartoon. A fun rental, especially if played with a friend.

BRYAN: After playin' a bunch of modern brawlers (like the *Hunter: the Reckoning* games) that are more about recovering trinkets or protecting poor schlubs than kickin' ass, this pure-action *TMNT* hits the spot. The cartoon visuals look great, and, just like in the old games, pummeling Shred-head and his goons alongside a buddy rules. Yet, with the game rooted in arcade sensibilities, *TMNT* ends up a short and repetitive journey. Noninteractive

environments and scant gameplay differences among the four turtles diminish my desire to replay. Take these ninjas home for the weekend, but don't adopt.

GAMENOW—MIGUEL: If you've been around long enough to remember the classic *Turtles* games, then you'll feel right at home here. Why? Because it plays just like 'em. Now, does this make it a pleasant throwback to simpler times or a boring, repetitive relic of a dark age? That's on you—I find it sharp, fast, and stylish, which is just what this kind of game needs to be. Just keep the volume low—these Turtles be talking too damn much.



■ Mikey gets his shell handed to him by a giant Mouser robot. Bogus.

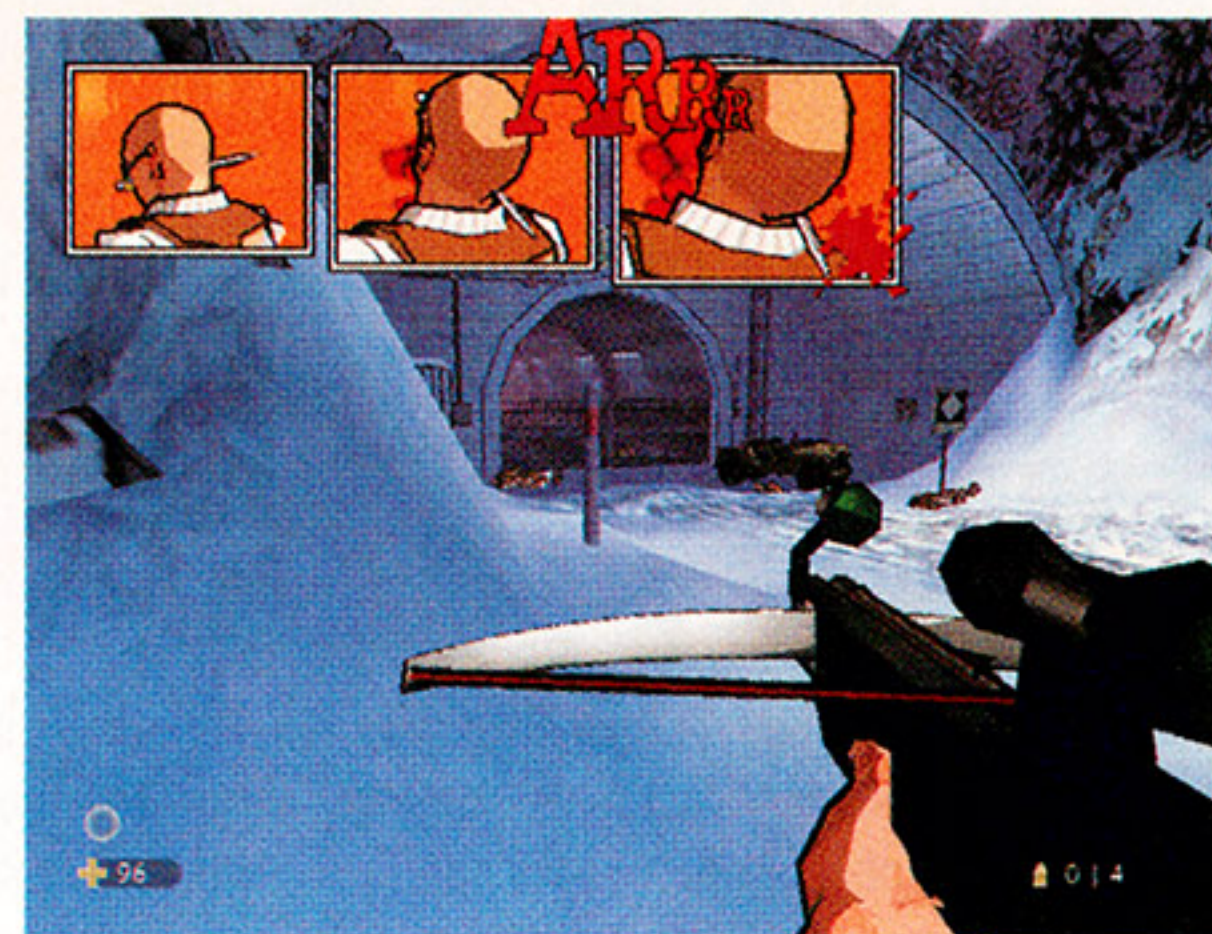
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	5.5	6.0	7.0
PAUL	BRYAN	MIGUEL	

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami Studios
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Everyone

www.konami.com



■ You're a desperate fellow. Take a hostage in order to get shot less.



■ PS2, XB, GC

ONLINE
(PS2, XB ONLY)

XIII

There's no shaking it. It's an unlucky number

JOE: You'd be hard-pressed to find a more visually stunning game than *XIII*, a gorgeous first-person shooter in which you play an amnesiac...who may or may not have assassinated the President. This stylish action title mixes an animated film aesthetic with presentation reminiscent of smart, '60s movie thrillers. And its comic-book look is functional, too. For instance, when patrolling guards approach around a corner, you'll see the "tap-tap-tap" of their footsteps on screen. And if a soldier finds the body of a fallen guard, a cartoon cell of the scene will appear, alerting you of the discovery.

If only the developers had spent half as much time fine-tuning the enemy A.I. as they did finessing the graphics, *XIII* would be incredible. It's been said that it's easy to develop foes whose bullets always hit you and hard to create those that realistically miss. You'll definitely have that in mind while playing *XIII*, because it's populated with soldiers who are complete dead-eye dicks. You get your ass shot off so often in *XIII*, you'll nearly spend more time

reloading your last save than playing. It's ridiculous.

Numerous frustrations pile up to make *XIII* more chore than thrill. You begin most levels with the same amount of health you had from the last, it lacks a save function or working auto-aim feature, and the missions feel like watered-down versions of those in *GoldenEye 007* (Nintendo 64). Even co-op and online (for PS2 and Xbox) play can't save a shooter that has such unappealing fire-fights. Take me in. I give up.

BRYAN: Arriving with more style than the majority of today's games, *XIII* has a fresh presentation that drops you smack-dab into a living, breathing comic book. But style can only take you so far, and it can't stop superhuman A.I. from tainting this first-person shooter. Its baddies are ridiculous crack-shots, and no amount of skill can prevent you from suffering countless cheap deaths. Design hiccups also complicate matters—many levels have poorly placed checkpoints (or none at all), and the insuffi-

cient supply of health packs consistently puts you at a distinct disadvantage. What starts as a hip-looking shooter with a gripping story and varied missions ends in furious, fitful frustration. Keep this unlucky number in mind only when renting.

G. FORD: I was certainly looking forward to this game, if only to see something different being done with a first-person shooter. And *XIII* definitely has that going for it; its comic-book-themed storytelling integrates nicely into the game. But while the style, cut-scenes, and story are all great, the actual gameplay is pretty mundane. The action is old hat for any shooter veteran, as are most of the missions objectives, including the requisite escort and key-gathering excursions. And once the graphical luster wears off, the whole thing actually looks pretty simplistic. But if all you need is a solid shooter fix, *XIII* will do just fine. It has no fatal flaws, and the conspiracy-laced story should keep you going.

XIII Multiplied By...More

Besides offering a full single-player game, *XIII* has numerous multiplayer options. The PS2 edition carries a variety of competitive online modes for up to four players, while the Xbox lets up to eight people shoot it out over Xbox Live. Finally, Cube owners will be able blast each other in four-player split-screen battles. All three versions benefit from a two-player co-op mode, where you can play through *XIII* with a friend.

Mysterious Voices

XIII's voice cast is so full of celebrities, it's a regular *Battle of the Network Stars*. Lead character XIII is played by *The X-Files*' David Duchovny, while rapper Eve voices the mysterious Major Jones and Adam West (the Bat-lead from the '60s *Batman* TV show) portrays the gruff General Carrington.



■ Learn about your past through numerous flashback sequences. (But stay away from the brown acid.)

Good: Great graphics and a fantastic lounge-style soundtrack
Bad: Enemies that rarely, if ever, #\$\$%@ing miss!
You Don't Pronounce the Name: Ex-eye-eye-eye



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

6.5
JOE

6.5
BRYAN

6.5
G.FORD

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft
Players: (See sidebar)
ESRB: Mature

www.ubi.com

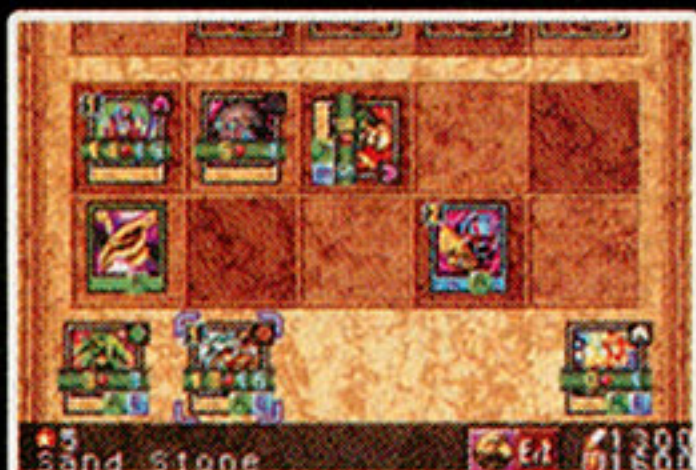
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PS2, XB



ONLINE

ESPN NBA BASKETBALL

Soaring well above the rim



(Left) Richard Hamilton has trouble defending Allen Iverson. He's scared of all those tattoos.



Good: Awesome 24/7 mode
Bad: Camera is set too far away
Eagle Eye Needed: To spot the newly animated uniforms

BRYAN: The name change from 2K to ESPN hasn't affected the quality of this basketball package, and it's a pretty package indeed. ESPN easily shines as the best-looking b-ball game this year—everything from the superdetailed player models to TV-perfect ESPN presentation looks stellar.

Eye-candy aside, the gameplay actually borrows a choice page from *NBA Live*'s book by introducing dribbling moves via the right analog stick. Though not as extensive a repertoire as EA's baller, these crossovers and spins help open up gameplay and accelerate the tempo.

Yet, ESPN truly shines with its innovative 24/7 mode. Create a player from scratch and unlock all sorts of goodies by completing drills and challenges against past and present NBA greats. Like me, you'll keep comin' back for more as special events (sync'd to your console's internal clock) become available on select dates. Minor problems arise—the camera's not close enough to the court, and players far from the ball often stand around like statues—but otherwise, ESPN's hardwood remains the place for shootin' hoops.

PATRICK: Back with the ESPN name and presentation, Sega's already-great game matures even further. Obvious enhancements include better animations (like uniforms that adapt to player movement), a more user-friendly approach to defense, and a redefined free-throw system, but the secret of ESPN's continued court dominance lies in its perfect pace of play. Go to a real NBA game (or watch on television if you live in the sticks or don't have the scratch) and you'll see the exact feel and gait simulated in this game.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: ESPN makes strides toward being a perfect simulation of professional basketball, but until the developers master the riddle of team A.I. (players here don't always respond properly in certain situations), work remains undone. Even so, this year's model is great—improved fastbreaks impart a much quicker and smoother feel to the action, the new 24/7 mode offers incredible fun and depth, and online play works quite well. Overall, it's one of the best basketball games released to date.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.5	9.5	9.0
	BRYAN	PATRICK	GIANCARLO

Publisher: ESPN Videogames
Developer: ESPN Videogames
Players: PS2: 1-2
(2-8 w/ Multitap, 2-10 online)
Xbox: 1-4 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Everyone
www.espnvideogames.com



Online play (for PS2 only) receives a necessary boost with voice-chat and tournaments.

PS2, XB, GC

ONLINE
(PS2 ONLY)



NBA LIVE 2004

Further down the road to victory



Towering Tim Duncan makes these skies not-so-friendly for J-Kidd.

Good: Deep on-court control
Bad: So-so graphics
Insert Here: Your favorite Kobe Bryant joke

BRYAN: Last season's impressive *Live* showing breathed new life into the stagnant series, and its path down the comeback trail continues with superior on-court control. The new "Pro Hop" jump-step move makes driving through the lane easier and flashier, and you can now alter your shot midflight to avoid getting stuffed. Other well-designed additions include separate controller commands for performing dunks, layups, and long-range jumpers, and the ability to quickly switch to an off-the-ball player by pushing the R3 button.

The improvements don't stop there, as this year's edition addresses 2003's problem of being too darn arcadey. Don't worry, you can still run-and-gun in true *Live* fashion, but the improved defensive A.I. tones it down just enough to give it a sim feel. This also means you can forget the days of ridiculously high shooting percentages.

So, is all this enough for *Live* to reclaim the roundball crown? Not quite. ESPN's superslick presentation and addictive 24/7 mode leave EA's title in second place.

PATRICK: *Live 2004* delivers a completely

different feel from *Live 2003*. Last year's game introduced us to Freestyle Control, which was cool, but it made defending too difficult. Thanks to some intelligent tweaks, you'll now find a much better balance between offense and defense. It's not as easy to blow by a defender on the perimeter, but when you do, the adjusted A.I. compensates and another defender picks you up. Plus, more-realistic blocking means you'll no longer swat Shaq with little guys like Steve Nash.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: EA Sports' latest basketball game sports serious improvements, most notably on defense. Players are much better about stepping into passing lanes to deflect or steal the ball, and double teams are especially effective when the ball goes down into the post. This emphasis on defensive play really affects the overall feel and pacing of *NBA Live 2004*, making it look less like a dunk-fest and more like actual basketball. So, if you liked last year's game but thought it was a little too frantic, then you'll assuredly dig *Live 2004*.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.0	8.5	9.0
	BRYAN	PATRICK	GIANCARLO

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Players: PS2: 1-2
(2-8 w/ Multitap, 2-4 online)
Xbox and GC: 1-4
ESRB: Everyone
www.easports.com

■ Chasing metal insects—so goes the life of one with metal arms.

■ PS2, XB, GC

METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM

Armed and dangerous

Good: Jacking enemy bots

Bad: Hard-to-see life bar

Who Knew: Robots loved to swear

G. FORD: With *Metal Arms* practically coming out of nowhere (had you ever heard of it?), I was prepared for a run-of-the-mill third-person shooter. And for a while, that's all it was, with its iffy jumping, typical (although funny) good-versus-bad robot story, and annoyingly puny life bar that you only notice when it's empty. But I'm glad I stuck with it, because after I beat the imposing first big boss, everything began to click.

The decidedly average core shooter gameplay gets a kick in the pants from the bevy of weapons that you manage with a sleek, user-friendly pop-up menu. And while neither the levels nor their layouts are particularly creative, clever gimmicks save them: Manning vehicles, controlling comrades, and wreaking havoc with jacked enemies (an excellent game-

play mechanic) all prove to be worthwhile diversions rather than feeling like last-second throw-ins. And the same goes for the impressive multiplayer modes—they're extremely entertaining. Unfortunately, PS2 players only get two-player action; given the choice, grab the Xbox game. But any version of this tough, satisfying title is worth salvaging before it reaches the scrap heap.

DEMIAN: Robo-protagonist Glitch won't win any sexy awards for robot sexiness, what with his overturned salad bowl for a head and generally clunky demeanor, but he sure knows how to kick metal robot ass. I expected *Metal Arms* to be some kiddy crapfest, but it turned out to be a solid, challenging third-person shooter, with a nice bit of variety in

the level-design department (controllable vehicles, on-rails shooter stages) and a double-entendre-focused sense of humor. Multiplayer is also a highlight, with a decent selection of maps and game types.

JOHN R: What's this? An original, license-free, American-made third-person shooter that's not crap? Believe it or not, it's true. *Metal Arms* is easily a contender for sleeper hit of the year, providing an excellent mix of platform-style exploration and fast-paced, action-packed gunplay that manages to stay fresh and interesting throughout. The weapons are innovative and cool, and the levels are vast and varied. *Metal Arms* has a great sense of humor, too, which is refreshing for a genre that often takes itself far too seriously.



■ *Metal Arms*' two best assets: smooth-controlling vehicles (left) and intense multiplayer action (right).

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.0	8.0	8.0
	G. FORD	DEMIAN	JOHN R.

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: Swingin' Ape Studios
Players: PS2: 1-2; XB, GC: 1-4
ESRB: Teen

www.vugames.com



PlayStation®2



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Xtreme Legends DYNASTY WARRIORS 4

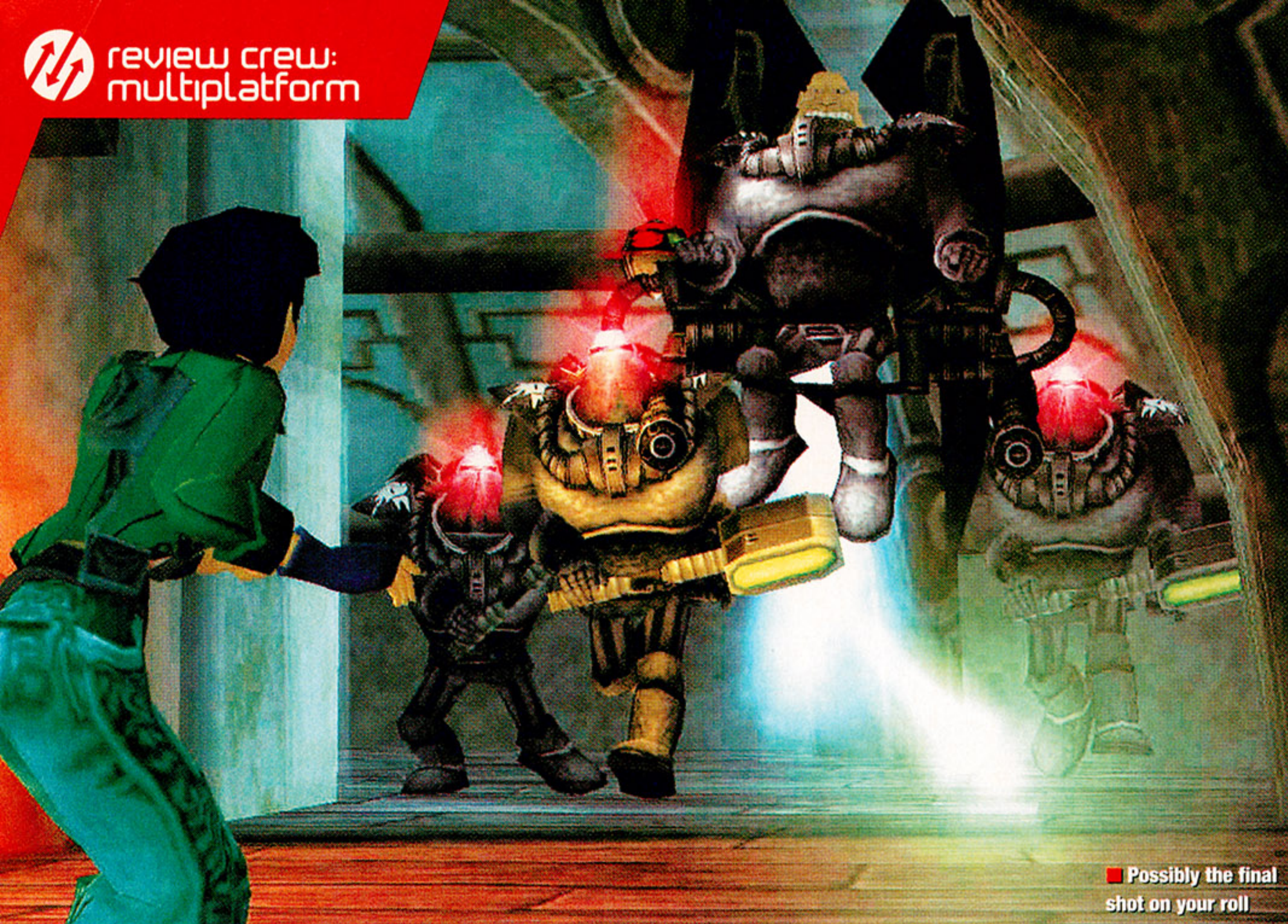
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Duel to the Death



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Possibly the final shot on your roll



PS2, XB, GC

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

Definitely not under-developed

JOE: There's a lot to like about *Beyond Good & Evil*, the best action-adventure game since *Zelda: The Wind Waker* (GC). You play as Jade, a plucky freelance photojournalist working for a rebel organization out to prove that the planet's militaristic government is hiding sinister secrets from the populace. In you charge, camera in hand, to get the truth.

But you don't just take pictures in *BG&E*, you get to drive a speedy hovercraft, sneak through top-secret installations, coordinate with a partner to solve puzzles (much like in *Ico* for PS2), and beat up foes with a big stick. Not only does the game do all of these things well, but it also imparts a constant, magical feeling of exploration as you discover more about its involving story and the colorful inhabitants of the lighthearted, *Fifth Element*-like world around you.

If you've ever thought you'd prefer a short game that's consistently great over one that's artificially extended with stupid, unfun bits, you were thinking of *BG&E*. It's short (about 10 hours), but very

sweet. It's not so easy that you'll breeze through it, nor is it too hard to be frustrating. That makes *BG&E* good for casual players (and even your non-gaming girlfriend), but you'll surely dig it yourself.

SHAWN: Long after you've shot your last roll of celluloid and blown the lid on a body-snatching conspiracy, you'll reminisce about your stay on planet Hyllis. Mixing Walt Disney's colorful whimsy, the industrial distopias of French cinematographers Jeunet and Carot (*City of Lost Children*), and *Zelda* mastermind Shigeru Miyamoto's genius for flexible gameplay, *BG&E* is mesmerizing, ominous, and, most of all, memorable. Unlike other ambitious games that try to be too many things to too many players, *BG&E* pulls its components together beautifully. Your hovercraft handles well, letting you explore pristine waterways, chase crooks, and run races without hassle. The first-rate stealth sections escalate tension rather than induce stress with tedious trial and error. Even

your responsive starship is a joy to pilot. Only *BG&E*'s relative brevity and puzzles that get recycled toward the game's end disappoint.

GAMENOW—ETHAN: Hey Eidos, pay attention: This is the game the last *Tomb Raider* should have been. *BG&E* is packed with personality and girl power, and more importantly, it controls like a dream. The play mechanics borrow from the *Zelda* template in all the right ways (autojumping, enemy targeting, etc.), and the game delivers enough original material keep things fresh. For instance, Jade's camera is an integral tool—a single shutter click can take down an entire government if you're stealthy enough to be in the right place at the right time. Similar creativity manifests itself in Jade's darkly beautiful, Disneyesque world (although bouts of choppiness blight its otherwise fine graphics). An interesting story and entertaining cut-scenes round out this worthwhile package.



Master of Muppets
Beyond Good & Evil is the product of more than three years of work by Michel Ancel, the brains behind Ubisoft's popular *Rayman* platform-game series. That is to say, the first two titles in the *Rayman* series. Ancel skipped *Rayman 3* to work on *BG&E*. That might explain why the game received a 6.5 and 7, while the first two *Raymans* rated high enough to get Game of the Month awards.

She Works Hard for Her Money



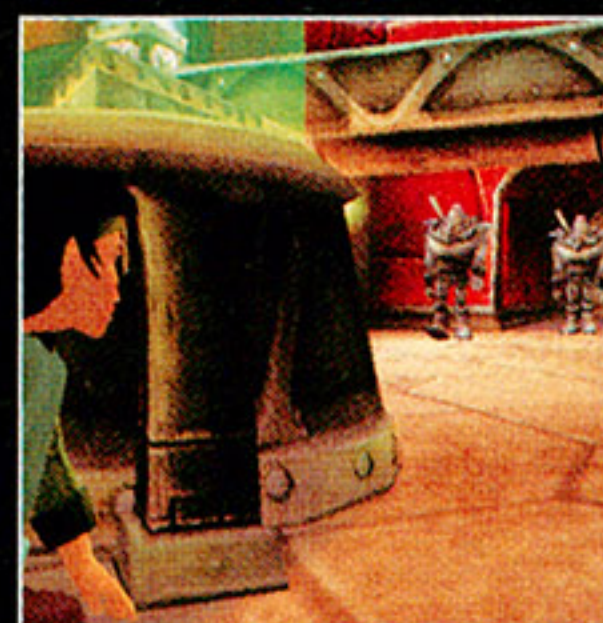
Shutterbug

Use your camera to uncover evidence of government misdeeds or take pics of weird animals for money.



Built for Speed

Beat hovercraft races to bring in bonus bucks. The crafts control well, and the missions are easy and fun.



Hidden and Dangerous

Sneak into enemy installations to uncover the truth for the people, this time pro bono.

Good: Astounding gameplay variety
Bad: You'll wish Jade's staff were a bit more effective in fights
Don't Adjust Your TV: The whole game is indeed letterboxed

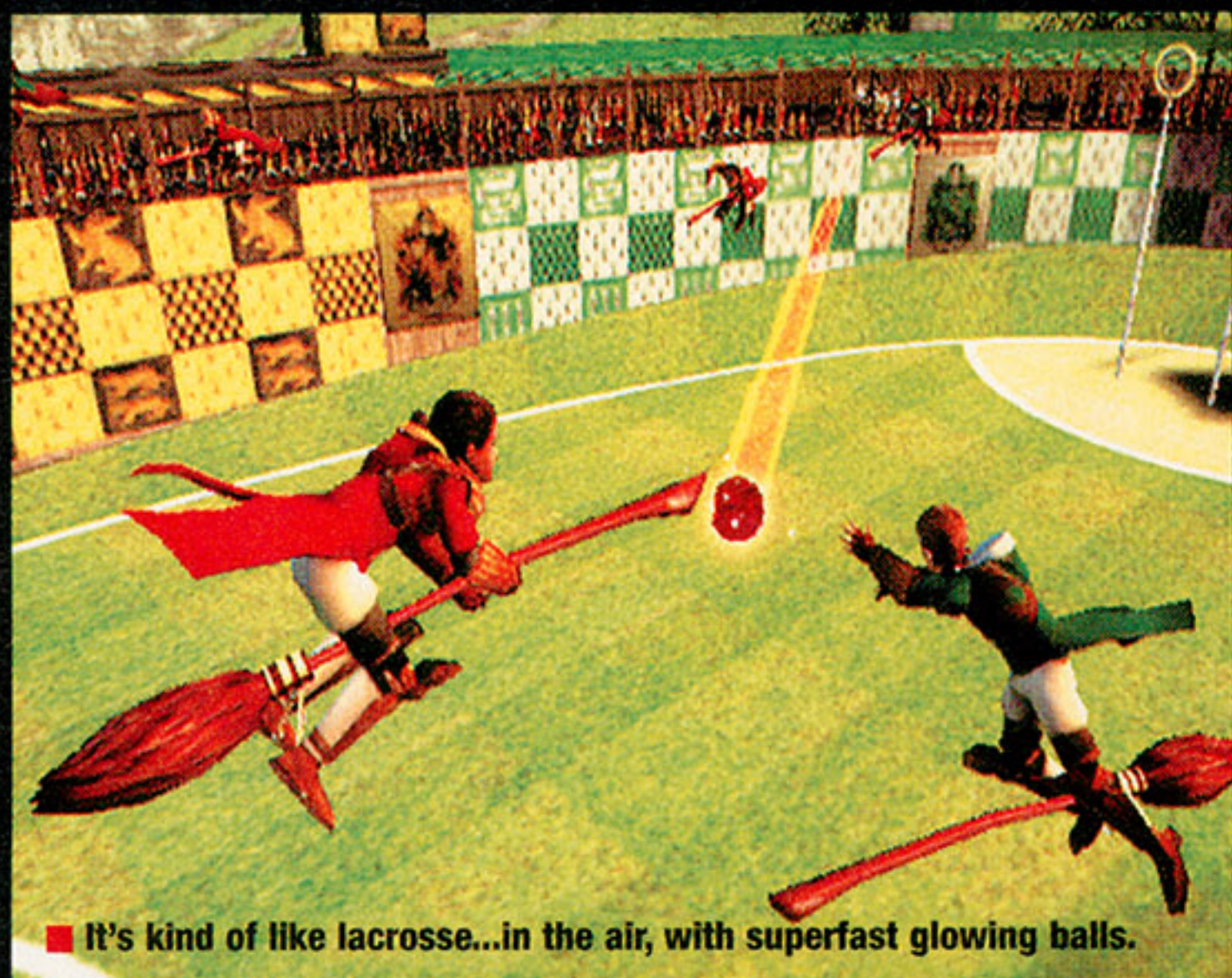


THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.5 9.0 8.0
JOE SHAWN ETHAN

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.ubisoft.com



■ It's kind of like lacrosse...in the air, with superfast glowing balls.



■ PS2, XB, GC

HARRY POTTER: QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP

A truce called between wizards and jocks

Good: Fast, easy to pick up

Bad: You have to unlock most of the cool moves

GC Version: Offers cool GBA-to-GC snitch-grabbing connectivity



SHANE: *Harry Potter* fanatics clamoring for an accurate re-creation of Quidditch, the wildly complex wizarding sport, can finally simmer down. EA has crafted a remarkably playable title that captures the intensity of this creative, chaotic broom-stick ballgame.

Like all of EA's *Potter* games, *World Cup* approaches the fiction with astute reverence, so every character, ball, and broom looks just as you'd imagine. And while most sports sims suffer from repetitive graphics (if you've seen one football stadium, you've seen 'em all), here, you get a crazy variety of colorful Quidditch pitches in places like the sun-parched Australian outback and a Spanish bullring.

The snazzy visuals will initially draw you in, but you'll stick around

for the instinctive, responsive gameplay. Passing, shooting, and tackling are a breeze, and the climactic race to snag the golden snitch that ends each match offers tense thrills. What's weird (and kind of lame), though, is that when you first start the game, you don't have access to several key abilities, like dodging, special shots, or bludger tossing. You must earn these abilities by playing through the single-player game, so don't even bother playing Versus matches until you've unlocked them.

BRYAN: Like all *Potter*-heads, I couldn't wait to jump on a Nimbus 2000 broomstick and catch the snitch. *Quidditch World Cup* successfully delivers that experience. The fictional sport's sights, sounds, and feel are spot-on in this game, and

the unlockable items will keep you playin' for hours. Next time, though, I'm hoping for more game modes, such as co-op, team creation, or even online play. Still, *World Cup* will satisfy both hardcore fans and those whose vocabulary doesn't include words like quaffle or bludger.

GREG S: "Close, but no golden snitch" is how I'd describe *World Cup*. Once you figure out all the special moves and techniques, the single-player game is a blast. Problem is, your performance during each match rarely matters, as winning almost always comes down to simply grabbing that all-important 150-point snitch. Authentic *Harry Potter*? Most definitely. But it's far too limiting to give *Quidditch* the staying power it needs for serious gamers.



■ (Left) Carefully choose the hoop you want to shoot the quaffle into—if you're quick, you can fake out the goalkeeper.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

7.5

SHANE

7.5

BRYAN

6.5

GREG S.

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: EA UK
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Everyone

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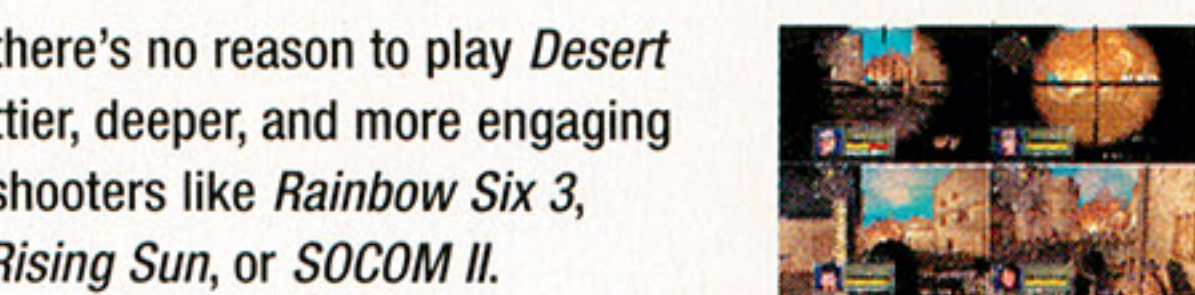
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■ (Below) Slaughter Republican Guardsmen in the dead of night...so you can do it again in another decade.



Band of Brothers
Fighting cooperatively alongside three friends is a surefire way to keep this tour of duty fun and casualty-free. Even a loose cannon like editor Paul Byrnes—who'll hoard ammunition, slit your throat just to make you beg for a medkit, and run you down with your own jeep to "test the physics"—beats computer-controlled comrades in need of constant baby-sitting.

PS2, XB

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II BACK TO BAGHDAD

Back to the front

SHAWN: What was once a timely setting for a squad-based shooter (the first *Desert Storm* deployed during the twilight of U.N. weapons inspections) no longer seems like the most appropriate context for entertainment. Sure, the conflict in question is a decade old and not the war unfolding in today's headlines, but in light of continued casualties, it's worth considering—even if it didn't affect the score I gave the game.

Politics aside, *Desert Storm II* is a flawed operation with a few moments of valor. Switching on the fly between each of your four specialists—sniping, demolitions, small arms, and heavy weapons experts—keeps the action interesting, while immense and active environments (much improved over the last outing) help capture the chaos of combat. When Iraqi soldiers ambush you amid swirling desert sand and the nerve-racking rumble of approaching armor, it's hard to keep a level head.

Unfortunately, much of the disorder is unintentional. Like some half-assed high-school theater

production, nothing works as it should and no one seems to be doing the right thing. When they're not refusing to follow orders, members of your squad stand in the street passively taking fire, and enemies at turrets won't turn around when flanked (talk about sticking to your guns). Then you have displays of stupidity so flagrant, they nearly defy description (see sidebar below). With so many similar games getting it right, overlooking the *Desert Storm* series' flaws is harder than ever.

PAUL: The best—and perhaps only—way to get through *Conflict's* grueling, linear missions is via trial and error. Oh, there's a tank there? Mental note. And three hostiles around this corner, and a sniper up there? Got it. Once you've memorized the terrain and the enemy's positions, having been killed by them a few times, you simply reload your most recent save, choose the right weapon for the job, and let the auto-aim do the rest. Unless you have some fixation on the Gulf

War specifically, there's no reason to play *Desert Storm II* over prettier, deeper, and more engaging military-themed shooters like *Rainbow Six 3*, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, or *SOCOM II*.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: Let's get this out of the way: *Desert Storm II* is far from perfect. Spotty A.I. (infecting both your squadmates and enemies) mucks up the action, and balls-out run-and-gun gameplay sometimes works better than sound tactical strategy. The graphics aren't all that hot, either. That said, the game still improves on its predecessor with a solid variety of missions that are actually fun to play through, though a little frustrating. Ultimately, it'll appeal more to someone who isn't particularly interested in constantly issuing dozens of commands or taking 10 minutes to walk five yards through a city. Plus, the addition of splitscreen cooperative play ekes out a little extra longevity. Definitely worth a rental if you're craving some urban combat.

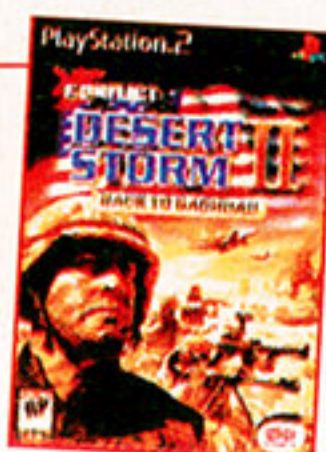


Back to Bughdad

No war unfolds exactly as planned, but it's *Desert Storm II's* improbably glitchy gameplay that guarantees this battle a place in the annals of martial mistakes. While serving Uncle Sam, we saw spotlights shine through solid concrete, walls shoot, and enemies materialize from thin air. Who knows, perhaps it was all some kind of Iraqi psy-ops?



Good: Fighting alongside friends
Bad: Controlling your troops is needlessly complicated
Please Don't: Send us any protest letters



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

5.5
SHAWN

4.0
PAUL

6.0
GIANCARLO

Publisher: Gotham Games
Developer: Pivotal
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Teen

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ONLINE
(PS2 ONLY)

PS2, XB, GC

FIFA SOCCER 2004

Check out what the rest of the world plays

Good: Interesting Career mode
Bad: Tough to aim at the net in the side view
It's Like Hockey: But with more teeth



GREG S: Why isn't this sport more popular in North America? Personally, I'd say because it's boring as hell to watch. And for better or worse, EA's *FIFA 2004* pretty much replicates the action on the field—it looks authentic, it sounds authentic, and it moves just as slowly as it does on TV.

There is a certain tension to the game that makes it exciting, though. When final scores are 1-0 more often than not, you know every move counts out on the field. And that's where EA's game succeeds. You'll find yourself sweating profusely over every intercepted pass and scoring chance you give up.

If it were easier to aim at the net in the side view (which is how I like to play), I'd be more excited about *FIFA 2004*. That and the somewhat chintzy Career mode are the two low points in an otherwise good game. (Though I'm sure Bryan "Sporto" Intihar will disagree with me.) One more year of refinement should do the *FIFA* brand some good.

PATRICK: Konami's *Winning Eleven* has done to *FIFA* what Sega's *2K* (now *ESPN*) series did to *Madden*—it forced EA Sports

to make a better game in order to stay on top. You'll notice the monumental improvements right away—this game looks downright amazing, right down to David Beckham's hair. Beyond the smashing visuals, the addition of Off-the-Ball control gives you the capability to control every player on the pitch, and a much-improved Career mode lets you manage a squad from obscurity to the top. *Winning Eleven 7* doesn't come out until February, so at least for now, *FIFA* is the soccer game to go out and buy.

BRYAN: Greg, you're being a little too rough on *FIFA*. It's a lot like your beloved ice hockey games, only grassier. Anyway, I'm with Patrick on this one. *FIFA*'s Off-the-Ball control not only increases your offensive potency tenfold but also provides hardcore soccer studs with an added level of gameplay they've been beggin' for from the series. Plus, no other game of footie has such stellar graphics or electrifying stadium atmosphere. Next year, give me a Create-a-Player and enhanced Practice mode, and I could be saying, "Winning Eleven who?"



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	9.0	8.0
GREG S.	PATRICK	BRYAN	

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Players: PS2: 1-4 (2-8 w/
Multitap, 1-2 Online)
Xbox, GC: 1-4
ESRB: Everyone
www.easports.com

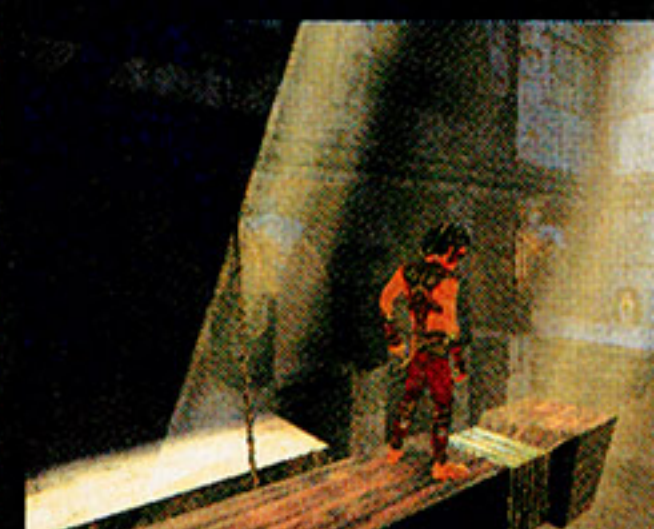
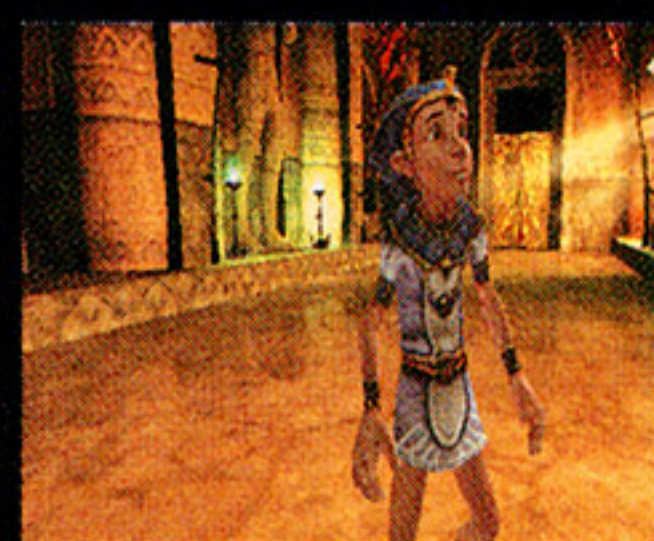
PS2, XB, GC

SPHINX AND THE CURSED MUMMY

Dead and loving it



You'll play as the Mummy, young King Tut, and Sphinx.



Good: Playing as the Mummy
Bad: Screwy camera during multienemy fights
No Sign of: The Rock or Brendan Fraser



G. FORD: *Sphinx*, like most action-adventure games, has its share of swordplay, sneakery, and puzzles. But it also features a compelling twist: In addition to the titular hero, you also control an unkillable mummy (who used to be King Tut). The beauty of this? All the traps our undead embalmees encounters serve only to power him up through his puzzle-laden levels. Set him ablaze, and he can burn his way through wooden trapdoors. Squash him pancake thin, and he can slip between metal bars. It's very clever, and you'll wish you got to spend more time with him. That's not to say the action parts aren't enjoyable; they just seem bland when compared with the creative juices flowing through the Mummy's levels. And while the game world is certainly pretty, I wish it had included more bountiful side quests and nonplayer characters to interact with throughout the adventure, like you'd find in *Zelda's* Hyrule. Still, the main quest makes amends, and collecting monsters is a fun diversion—it's a solid game.

JENNIFER: Unlike my pals on the page, I preferred playing as Cat-Boy. Those parts are simple and elegant: fun but not overly challenging combat and puzzles that take a minimum amount of head scratching. I also enjoyed exploring the vivid world and story—the game really takes advantage of its rich Egyptian setting. This could have been as engrossing as a good Disney movie—if it had any voice acting. Instead, you watch characters' lips move as you click along and read. And would it have killed them to put in more save points?

OFFICIAL PS MAG—

SCOOTER: Here we have a great and clever platformer (starring the mummy) hindered by Sphinx's average action-adventure. Getting the Mummy burnt, shocked, and sliced makes for both fun and funny gameplay. Watching Sphinx do double-jumps and sword strokes, on the other hand, fills me with "eh." I also was annoyed with the "sticky" camera and lack of auto-lock, which makes *Sphinx*'s combat seem a tad mediocre. If only the developer had fleshed out the Mummy's gameplay into its own game. Because ultimately, this is an 8.0 Mummy game entangled by a 6.0 Sphinx game.



Sphinx (top) is all about action. The Mummy (above) is just a masochist.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.0	7.0	7.0
G. FORD	JENNIFER	SCOOTER	

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Eurocom
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

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PlayStation 2

ONLINE



SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS

The best tactical shooter gets (a bit) better



MARK: Some people might say that, compared to the first game, *SOCOM II* is just more of the same. And they'd be right. Almost everything about this squad-based shooter looks and sounds and feels and plays like the original. But I'd like to remind those people of one thing: So what? Online or off, *SOCOM* is still, by far, the best game of its kind on any console. More of it, plus a few improvements, is worth my \$50.

Three things make *SOCOM II* great—first is teamwork. Even when you play alone, you're never alone; your three A.I. teammates always got your back. Order them to open doors, scout ahead, sneak to a position, toss grenades...working as part of a coordinated team of bad-asses offers bigger thrills than pulling the trigger yourself. And, unlike other games, you *will* use your team in *SOCOM II* because they always respond how they should. Well, almost always (they are

definitely improved over the first game). Plus, they're crack shots and make for great (sorry guys!) bullet sponges.

SOCOM II's second big strength is its awesome level design. You'll experience just about every cool special-forces-movie fantasy—question informants, rescue hostages, infiltrate jungle coke labs, fight pitched battles in the downtown streets of the Middle East, etc. Every mission is full of nooks, crannies, and (greatly improved) plants and shrubbery, all of which add to the overall realism and stealth gameplay. It's a blast tracking terrorists through the tall grass by watching for swaying stalks, or appearing out of a dense jungle to slit their throats.

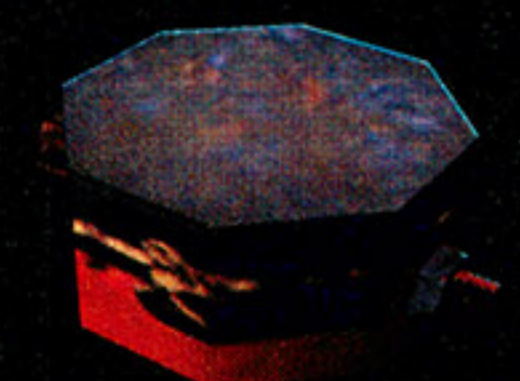
Which brings us to the final, and best, reason to play *SOCOM II*: its incredibly addictive online multiplayer game. The new, bigger maps do a fantastic job of combining in- and outdoor envi-

ronments and the game's overall focus on teamwork. Tons of crisscrossing paths, hiding spots, and ambush points add layers of strategy to the action. Toss in two great new play modes and a host of tweaks that read like a fan's wish list (see sidebar on the next page) and you end up with a sequel that, while not very different than the first ground-breaking game, demands to be played just as urgently.

CRISPIN: Mark is the most grizzled *SOCOM* vet in our platoon, so of course he's going to suffer a few combat-stress-induced flashbacks during this follow-up tour of duty. But even greener soldiers can tell that *SOCOM II* has much in common with its prequel. Although enemies are brainier this time—as are your lethally cunning SEAL squad mates—they still make the occasional braindead move. Single-player missions again feel a little

How 'Bout Them New Weapons?

How do the new toys added for *SOCOM II* work out in the heat of multiplayer online combat? Only time will truly tell how the balance's been affected, but here's our initial impressions based on the first few days of play:



■ **Antipersonnel Mines:** Used to kill or as alarms, these seem like an unfair advantage for terrorists.

■ **Rocket Launchers:** A bit too powerful—players often just sit and wait for enemies with these.



■ **Grenade Launchers:** Great but tough to aim at a distance—a well-balanced weapon and a welcome addition

■ **Shotguns:** A bit much on smaller, close-quarters maps, but cool



■ **Increased chatter between you and your teammates makes *SOCOM II* feel more immersive.**

Good: Tight controls, cool missions, great multiplayer
Bad: Enemy A.I. needs some work
Never Leave Home Without It: M4A1 SD



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

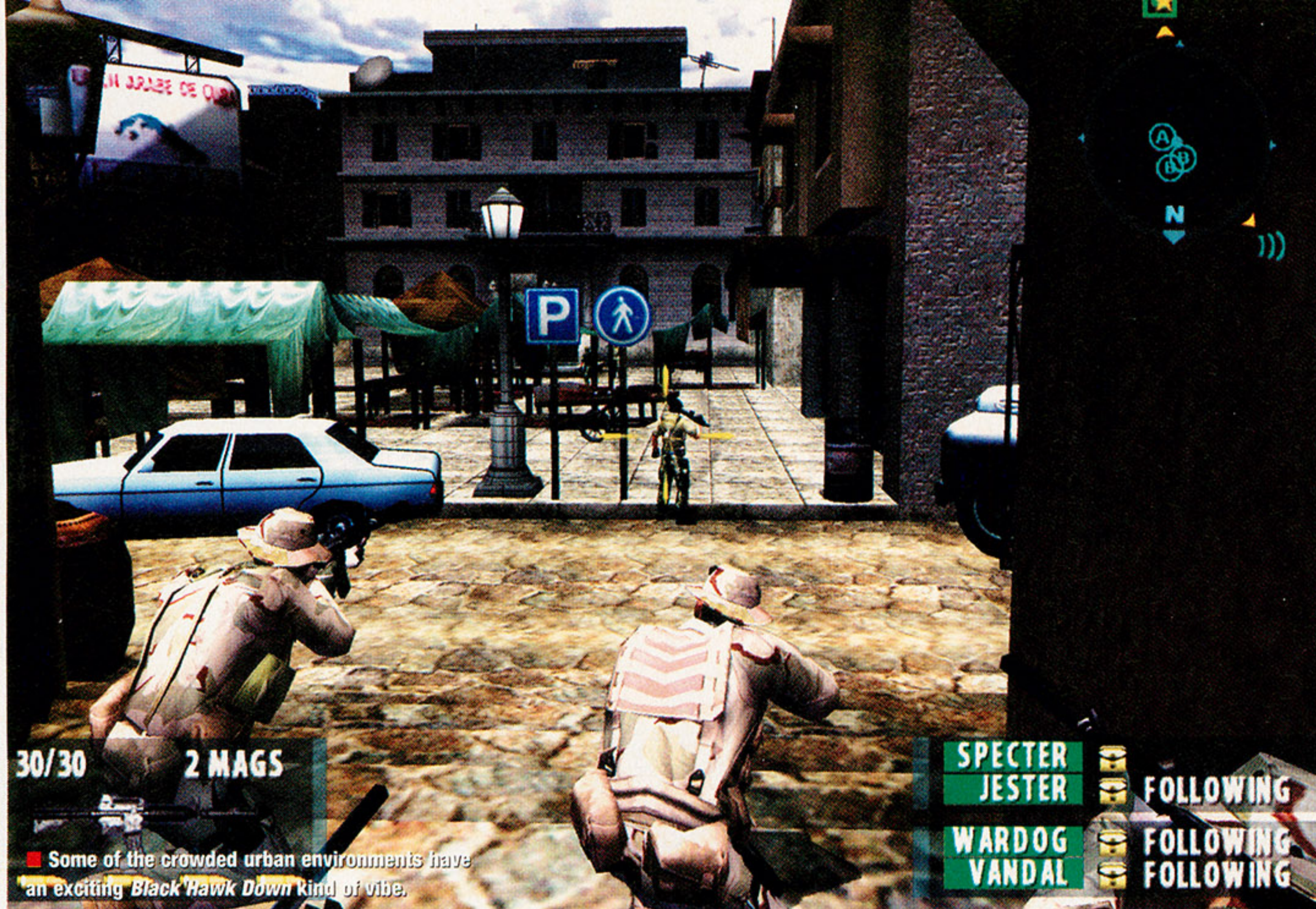
9.0
MARK

9.0
CRISPIN

9.5
JOE R.

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Zipper Interactive
Players: 1 (2-16 broadband online or via LAN)
ESRB: Mature

www.us.playstation.com



canned, forcing you to memorize enemy trouble spots. And spastic players will still accidentally trip the reload button in the heat of a firefight. (If only the game let players disable those touchy analog-stick buttons for good.)

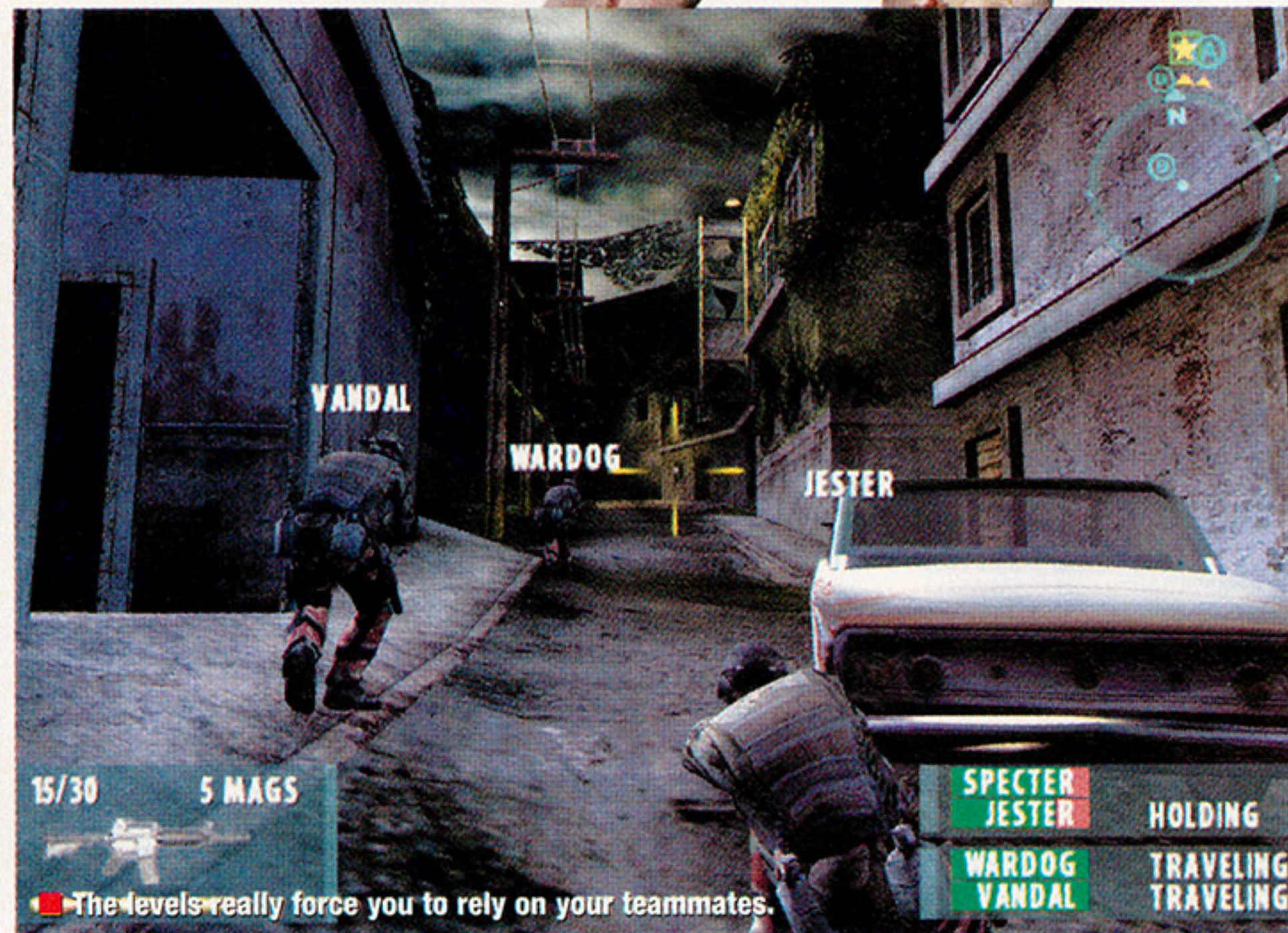
But *SOCOM II* makes up for these little snafus with stellar tweaks, from the more elaborate single-player missions to the spiffier visuals and presentation. And, once again, the online game is killer. The new modes and maps—with their fields of foliage, lead-spraying turrets, and strategic choke points—are a blast. Newbies will embrace the new deathmatch respawning option, which is a great way to practice and try out different weapons for the more serious one-hit-and-you're-out games. My only concern: The terrorist-only anti-personnel mines and auto-shotgun might tip online battles in the bad guys' favor, so be careful out there, SEAL players.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE R: Personally, I think Mark's been playing a little too much of that new-fangled Xbox thing. More of the same? The graphics are a huge step up from the last game in terms of detail and variety. The mission in the run-down factory is a spectacular example of this: The moody lighting and dense foliage make *SOCOM II* feel like a completely different game.

Foliage also plays a much bigger role in the online maps. The wide-open rolling fields of Foxhunt make it possible to hunker down in the grass and be virtually invisible; enemies will literally walk right next to you—nearly step on you, in fact—and never see you.

I was a little disappointed that enemies in single-player mode still have their knuckle-headed moments, but they are more improved in terms of predictability. Not that that's going to make much difference to most of you, who are

going to hop online the minute you tear open the package. You won't be disappointed; the new maps rock like nobody's business, and deeper setup options (sniper rifles only, no explosives, that sort of thing) add even more variety. You may find it harder to take someone down if you have a tendency to just spray bullets all over a room and hope something drops—but that just means you'll have to work on your aim, doesn't it, sailor?



Online Tweak-ery



SOCOM II fixes a lot of annoying multiplayer problems from the first game and adds a few features players have been asking for:

- The in-game scoreboard now keeps track of **who's alive and who's dead**.
- A **Friends List** is included for keeping track of your buddies.
- The new **messaging service** allows players to receive bits of text while in a game—great for telling someone what server to meet you on.
- You can **mute annoying people**, to the disappointment of 13-year-olds everywhere, and the great joy of everybody else.
- It's **totally cheat-resistant**. (We hope.) *SOCOM II* has measures that ensure every dork with a GameShark won't be doing it, at least.
- **Clan and rank designations** are next to each name, so you can instantly see if someone belongs to a team, and if they're a vet or an amateur "noob."

The mission is official. Revenge is personal.



Blood
Mild Language
Violence



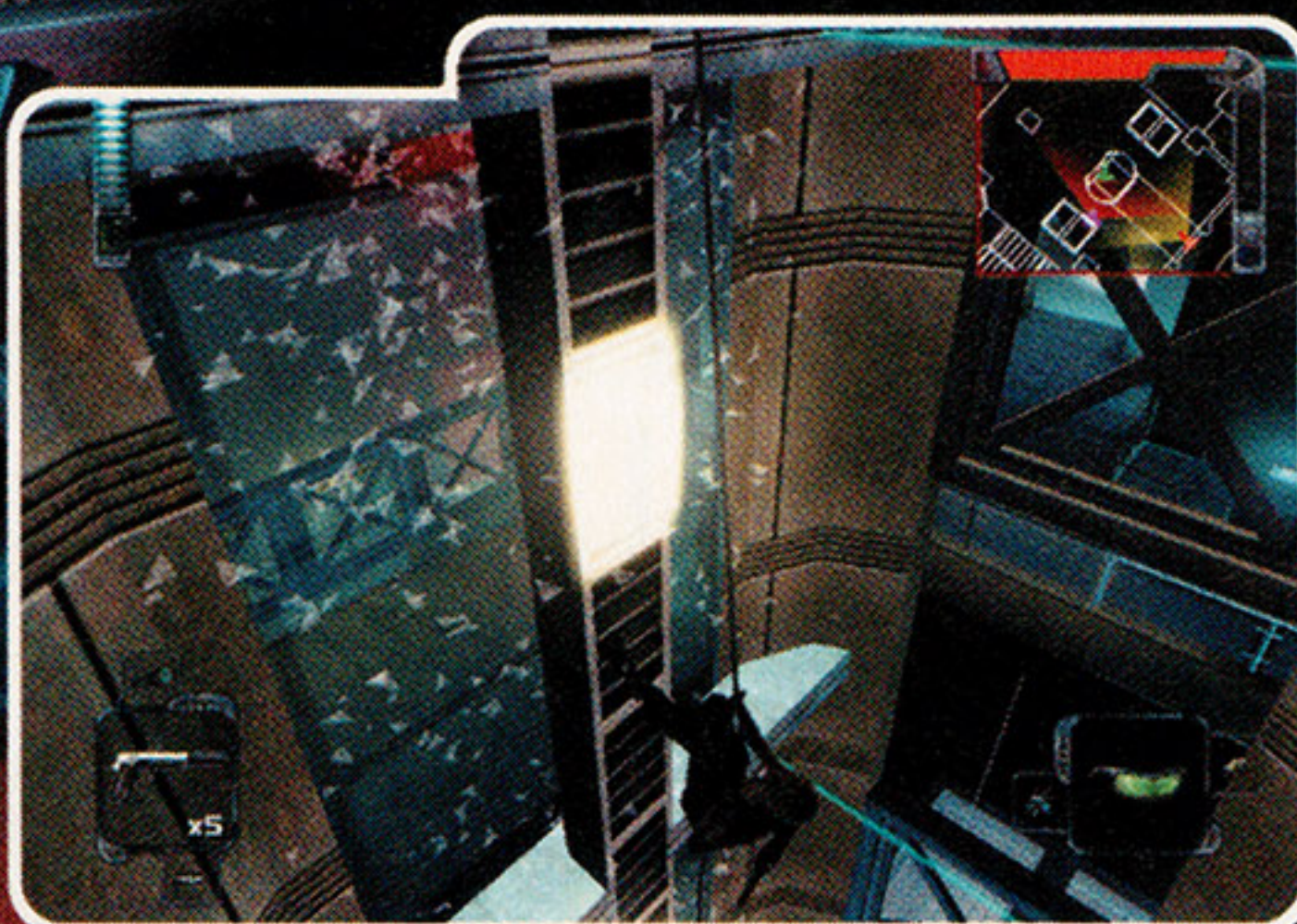
PlayStation.2



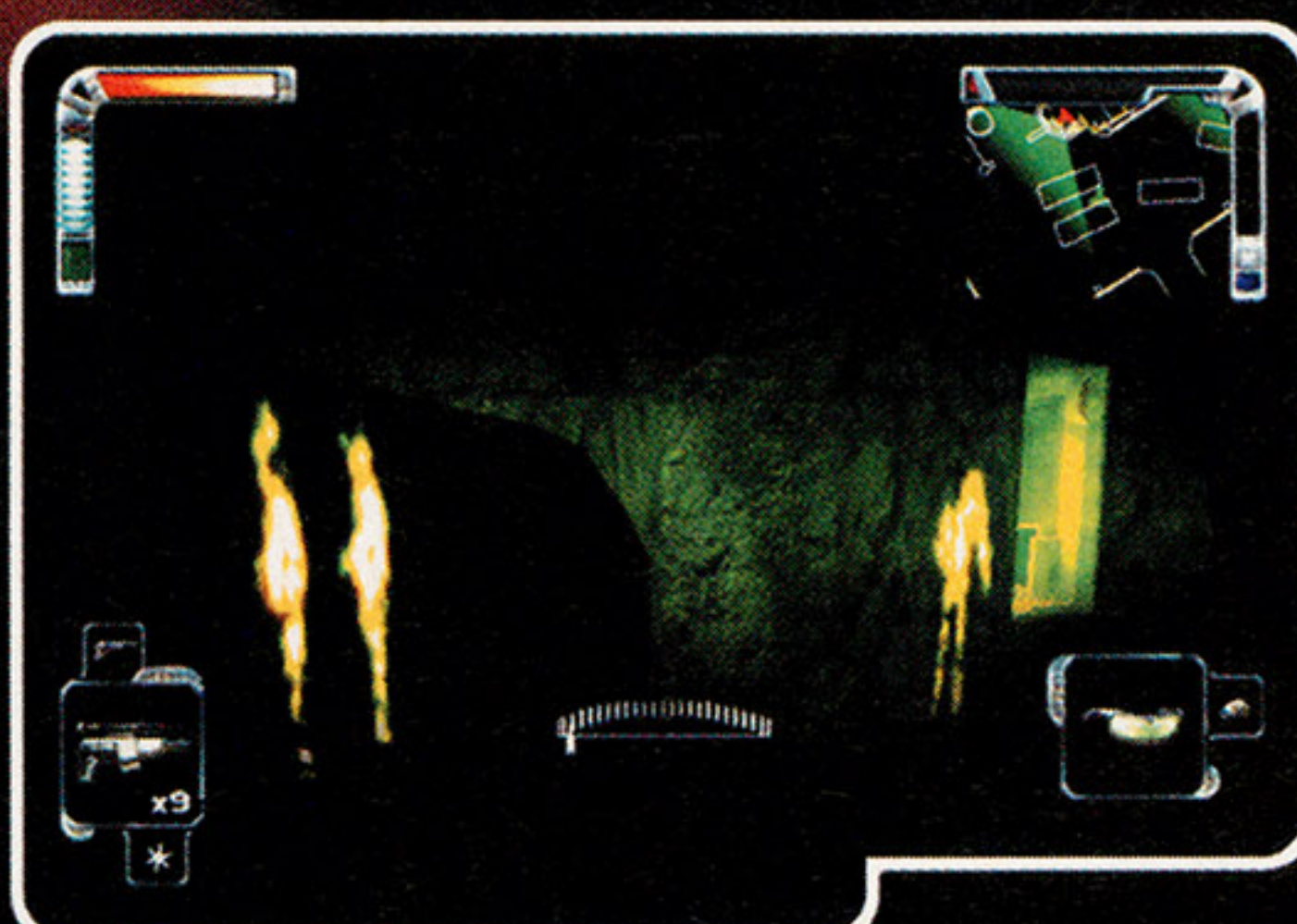
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PlayStation 2

SPACE CHANNEL 5: SPECIAL EDITION

As swingin' as it gets



(Left) Yep, that's Space Michael on the left in the skintight silver jumpsuit. Hooooooooo!



Good: Swingin' game for bargain price
Bad: Why wasn't this released earlier?
Ultimate Guest Star: Space Michael Jackson



CJ: When Sega's psychedelic rhythm-action game *Space Channel 5* originally came out on Dreamcast, I was smitten with its swingin' soundtrack, sensational style, sci-fi story, and saucy Simon-Says gameplay. Maybe I'm exaggerating—and using too much alliteration—but it was good. Unfortunately, most DC owners were apathetic towards Ulala's reportin' exploits. But hopefully that'll change, now that it's on PS2 in a pack that includes the original game and its previously Japan-only sequel.

The gameplay sounds simplistic: You tap buttons to repeat sequences a rhythmic adversary throws at you. But the combination of toe-tappin' music, retro-futuristic style, and rapid-fire pacing injects *Space Channel* with an infectious, addictive quality. The first disc offers the original *SC5*, unchanged except for slight tweaks to the animation. The real treat here lies on the second disc, where *Space Channel 5 Part 2* ups the ante with tougher levels, instrument-playing, singing, and two-player duels. Ulala's antics aren't for everyone, but any fan of music games needs to have this in their collection.

JENNIFER: Stylistically speaking, this game rocks the eye candy, hard. Ulala continually turns up in wackier costumes by the minute, while every new location bursts with multicolored fun—space-age '60s decor, psychedelic flowers, and people in trippy vinyl spacesuits. The game itself, however, lacks the same pizzazz. The rhythm challenges come in a few varieties: so easy it's embarrassing, mildly challenging, and so-crazy-you'd-have-to-be-on-speed-to-succeed. It was that last type that really irritated me, as you have to score perfectly to get credit for the combo.

GAMENOW—PHIL: I never thought I'd see *SC5 Part 2* come to the United States, much less in a sweet, both-games-for-less-than-the-price-of-one package. The original *SC5* is one of my favorite music games, and the sequel is even better. It has all the awesome music and swinging, ultrahip style that made the first one so much fun, but with added variety thanks to new techniques and a survival mode. Sure, both games are pretty short, but when you're getting such a good deal, why complain?

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.5	6.5	8.5
CJ	JENNIFER	PHIL	

Publisher: Agetec
Developer: United Game Artists
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.agetec.com



Demonic warriors from another dimension—now why does that sound familiar?

PlayStation 2

WARHAMMER 40K: FIRE WARRIOR

In cyberspace, no one can hear you chat



Injured? Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I just shot you for looking stupid.

Good: Stupendous devotion to the painted-pewter license
Bad: One shooter cliché after another
Insane: The posse of giant clown-head enemies



SHAWN: For a first-person shooter set in the distant future, *Fire Warrior* looks and plays a lot like 1993. Sure, the sci-fi-meets-satan aesthetic of *Doom* is indebted to the age-old *Warhammer* strategy games, and not the other way around, so the cosmetic similarities are excusable, but the pared-down gameplay is not. *Fire Warrior* is a purely switch-flipping, key-finding, frag-em-all affair, oblivious to any and all genre redefining innovation. After placing bombs on the joints of a walking tank in an hour-long level, for instance, it would've been nice to see the Titan lumber out of its hold and collapse in a smoldering heap. Instead, you faintly hear an explosion as the next scene loads. So much for scripting.

Nor will the milquetoast online mode do much to sweeten the bitter pill of monthly broadband fees. Communicating with people is a big part of online gaming's appeal, yet with no text or voice chat options, *Fire Warrior* muzzles players. What's more, the only way to switch maps or tweak settings is to quit a server and start a new match.

in this future-shocked shooter will actually shock anyone who's played a first-person blaster before. In fact, *Warhammer* is so crammed with clichés—color-coded door keys, exploding barrels, and grimy environments I swear I've already prowled through in *Quake*—that it feels like it's just going through the first-person-shooter motions. Levels and enemies get more interesting about halfway through—and multiplayer is a fun-for-a-few-games diversion—but none of that's enough to pluck this game from mediocrity.

MARK: I think *Fire Warrior* deserves a bit more credit than these guys give it. The objectives and most of the gameplay may feel familiar (it actually feels like an attempt to rip off *Halo* more than anything else), but that's where the clichés end. How many FPSes have you board an enemy ship out in deep space, starting on the outer hull and blasting your way in? Levels like that, along with scripted events and cool art design, eventually got me interested, despite the average graphics and ineffective weapons. Too bad the lazy multiplayer adds no value.

CRISPIN: Shawn's right: Absolutely nothing

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	5.5	5.5	6.0
SHAWN	CRISPIN	MARK	

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Kuju
Players: 1 (2-8 Online)
ESRB: Mature

www.thq.com



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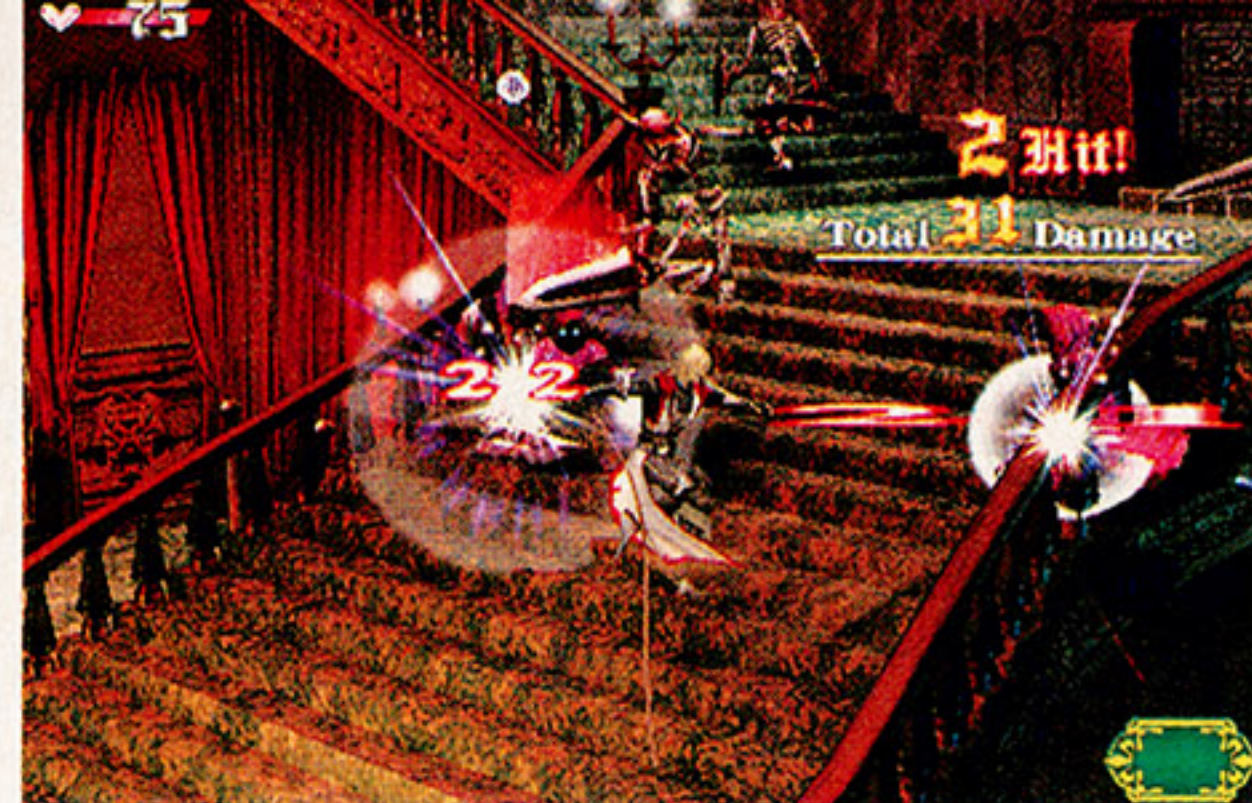


PlayStation®2



Blood
Violence

■ Leon Belmont smites skeletons with a substantial amount of personal flair.



■ PlayStation 2

CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

Reconstruction in progress

SHANE: Konami already redefined this whip-cracking horror action series on PS1 with the revered *Symphony of the Night*. And now (after a slew of *Symphony* siblings on Game Boy Advance), the time for reinvention has arrived once more—and while this beautiful 3D rebirth excels in many areas, the franchise still has room to grow.

From an audiovisual standpoint, this is classic *Castlevania* brilliance. All of the game's environments spring to life with intense detail, subtle lighting, and an overall creepy aesthetic. This skilled artistry carries over into the fluid character animation and impressive spell effects as well. And although it might seem impossible, the music actually outshines the graphical gloss. *Symphony's* composer returns with a phenomenal soundtrack of stunning tunes that perfectly fits the action.

As expected, the game's control feels tight, natural, and responsive. Combat works particularly well—you begin with a small arsenal of whip attacks, but as you use each of them over and over against enemies, you learn new branching combos that inflict serious damage (see sidebar). Plus, mixing subweapons with different magical orbs allows for copious experimentation. Simply fighting a gaggle of skeletons offers stylish thrills, and each of the tricky boss encounters delivers a satisfying rush. And while *Lament* doesn't have a traditional experience system, you'll still want to fight enemies in order to learn new attacks, gather gold, and collect rare items.

So, with ornate looks, chilling sounds, and spot-on control, how does *Lament* falter? Well, for one, the story isn't nearly compelling enough. It's paced badly, with big chunks doled out near the game's end, and the conclusion simply isn't very satisfy-

ing. Also, the game feels short, but luckily offers enough incentives for replay to keep you truckin' a good 20-plus hours before you've seen everything. The game's biggest problem, though, is annoyingly repetitive level design. The castle isn't one interlocking unit as in *Symphony*, but that isn't the real issue—the five substages accessible from the main hub are just too similar. You'll fight through myriad square rooms packed with enemies...the occasional puzzle or platforming section relieves the monotony, but these respites are rare. A sequel with more inventive levels could be truly perfect.

MARK: Two ways this new PS2 adventure lives up to the *Castlevania* legacy: First, the music, haunting and memorable as always, adds a foreboding mood and personality to each section of the castle. Second is the hefty amount of cool secrets and optional bits; you'll definitely return for further

Leon Belmont, Relic Hunter

Lament's many secret rooms and items are extremely difficult to locate. So tricky, in fact, that the majority of players will probably finish the game without discovering the most powerful relics, elemental whips, or secret magical orbs. Even worse, you can easily skip over five optional bosses if you don't pay close attention to the levels you progress through. Our advice—thoroughly investigate every new room you traverse. Jump around like a maniac, whip mysterious statues and railings, look for weird discolored blocks, hell...even try jumping through suspicious-looking walls. If you find a spot where you can't figure out what to do, place a marker stone on your map and return there later in the game and try again. Here's a glimpse of one of the bosses you're probably missing.



■ Careless players will miss out on five entirely optional (and quite cool) boss battles.



■ Walter sure knows how to capture the spooky, vampiric castle decor. That's right—Walter. The bad guy in this game is named Walter. No, really.

Good: Fantastic control, haunting music

Bad: Repetitive level design

Good Luck: Finding the insanely well-hidden secrets



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.0
SHANE

7.5
MARK

7.5
SHOE

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami Tokyo
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.konami.com



■ Defense is new to *Castlevania's* world—time your blocks perfectly to receive a huge MP boost.



Super-sized Combo

Lament's combat system allows you to mix up and string together attacks for massive multihit combos. You earn new combo strings with each successive new whip maneuver you master, so bust these crazy moves out with reckless abandon.



■ First, loosen 'em up with weak hits...



■ ...then, smack them up into the air...



■ ...and finally, pound the ground.

exploration after the credits roll (which won't take long). Other than that, this game doesn't feel much like a *Castlevania*. Which is not to say it's bad—just that it's different, for better and for worse.

The biggest change for the better? Combat. The fighting system is incredibly deep and nuanced, more like a one-on-one brawler than your typical action title. Double jump, block (time your defense just right to receive a bonus), string together strong and weak whip slashes into combos, somersault in any direction—combined with *Castlevania's* fluid, responsive controls, all of these options keep combat fresh and exciting.

Which brings us to the bad changes: The game sets up this wonderful combat system, then gives you little reason to actually fight. Since you don't gain experience from fallen enemies (and they rarely drop anything of real value), you'll oftentimes find yourself using the easier and faster method of

running right past the bad guys whenever you aren't forced to kill them all to unlock a door. Bad change No. 2: Exploring the castle just isn't as much fun as in recent GBA adventures. You no longer find new abilities or solve puzzles to open up new areas (save a few optional bonus sections), but instead mostly hit switches to progress.

A good game—a very good game—but for a series I've come to expect triple-A quality from, I can't help but feel a bit disappointed.

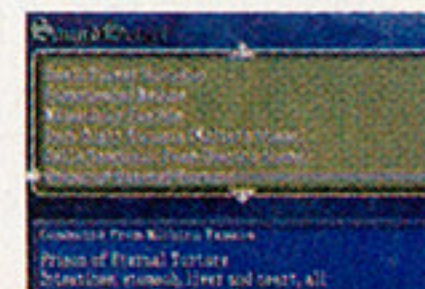
SHOE: I can't seem to get enough *Castlevania*. I played through all the GBA titles recently, I call *Symphony* one of my all-time fave games, and I even enjoyed the unpopular Nintendo 64 outings, which always confounds my fellow 'Vania fans.

Lament confounds me. I was terribly bored the first couple of hours. Then I grew to like it more and more. But it never felt like a good *Castlevania*

game—just a good action game. Most of the recent series' entries put emphasis on well-paced exploration, where you can't access certain areas until you find the right gear. *Lament* puts just about everything out on the table. So instead of anticipation in finding those double-jump boots or breakable walls, you're left with, for the most part, an open-book castle and lots of enemies (and extremely wimpy bosses—until the final ones, that is) to whip over and over and over....

Although combat is repetitive and mostly unnecessary, it's also the thing that kept me going. I was always looking forward to learning new moves, and the Orbs made the series' standby subweapons (ax, cross, knife, etc.) interesting again.

If you're more the *Devil May Cry* type of gamer who enjoys fancy fighting, you'll find plenty to like here. Hardcore *Castlevania* fans, however, may cry because *Lament* fails to live up to its pedigree.



Ye Olde Music Chamber

Once you beat the game, head back to Rinaldo's shop and buy the music box to unlock a sound test, complete with cute liner notes by composer Michiru Yamane.

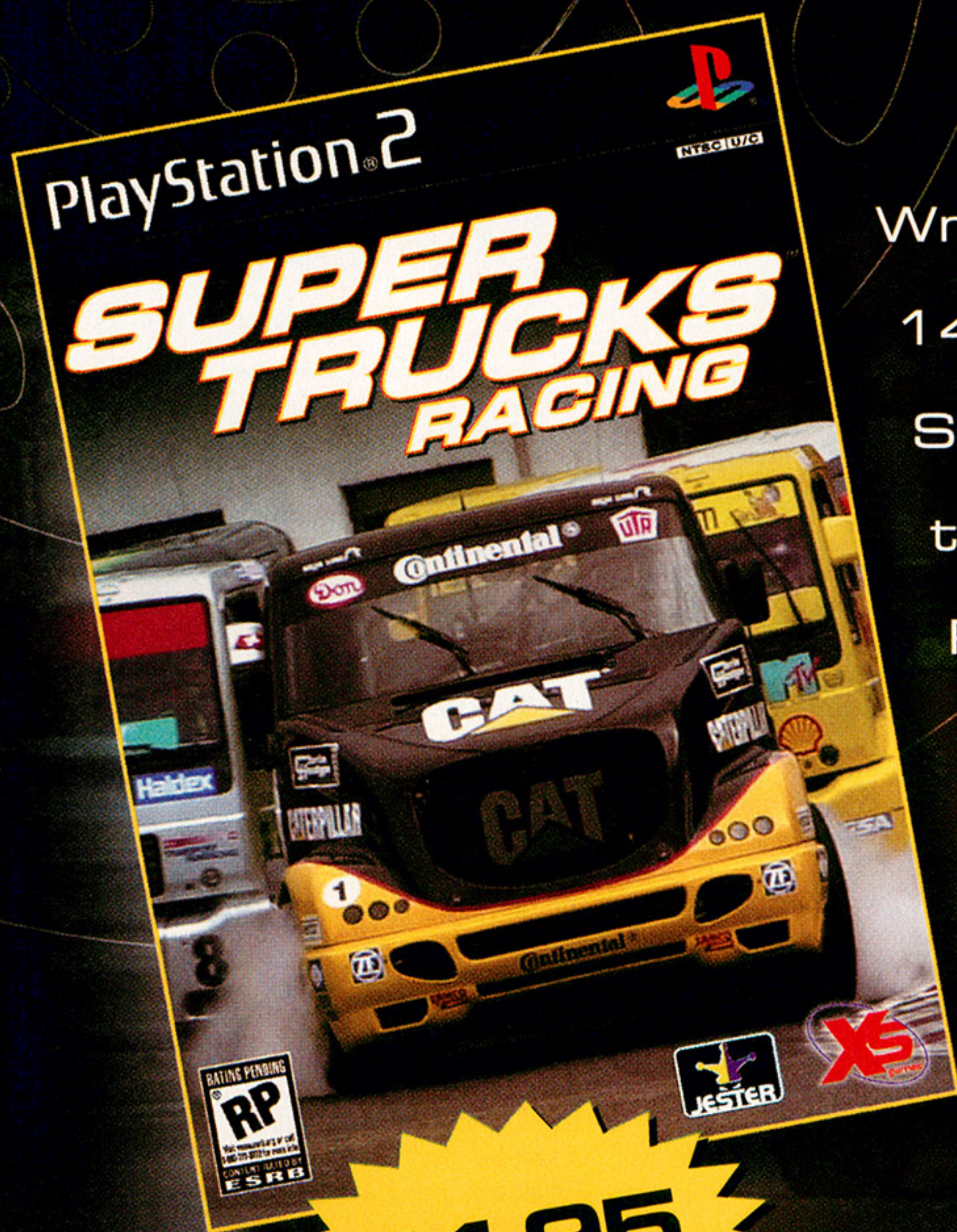


■ Mixing the cross with the blue orb yields this stylish rotating cross shield.



■ Leon lassoes himself a lizardman. Next stop—rodeo clowns.

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TRUCKSTM RACING

Bigtime Damage and Wrecks

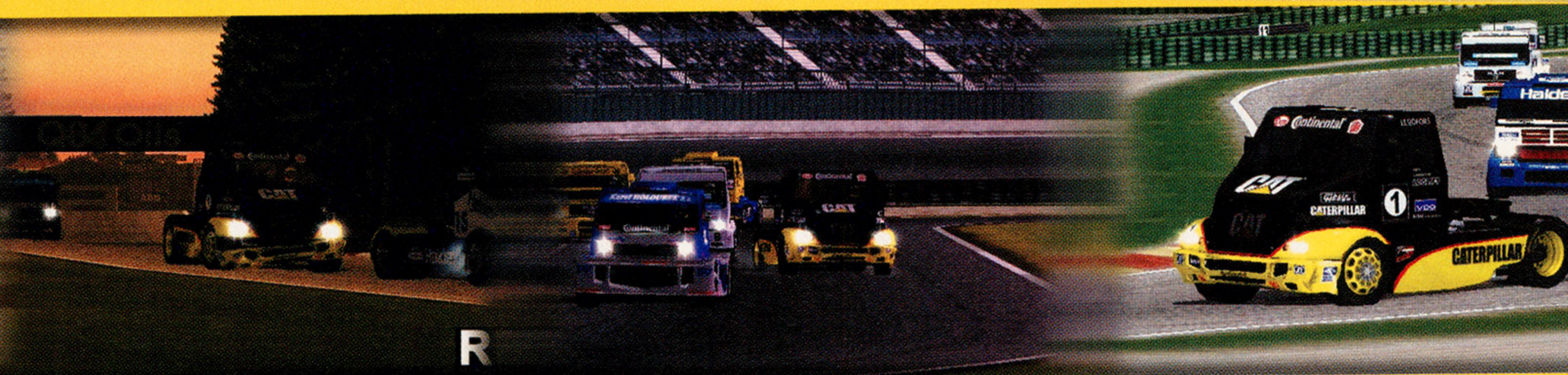
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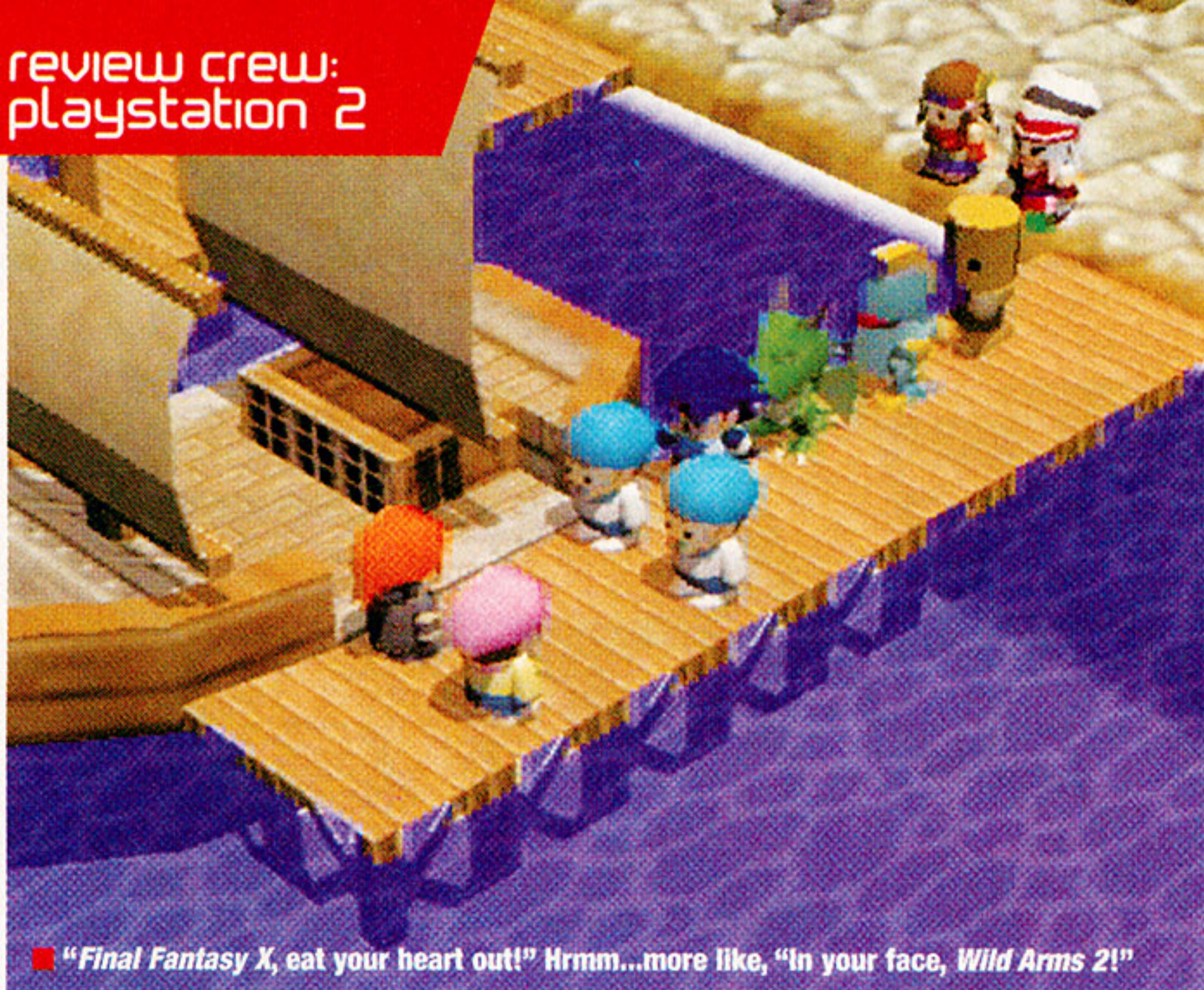
6 Race Modes



PlayStation®2



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information.



■ "Final Fantasy X, eat your heart out!" Hmmm...more like, "In your face, Wild Arms 2!"

■ PlayStation 2

RPG MAKER 2

Making up is hard to do

Good: Allows creative gamers to get their art on
Bad: Frustrating and convoluted interface
Includes: *fu-ma*, the sample RPG created by ex-Enix staff



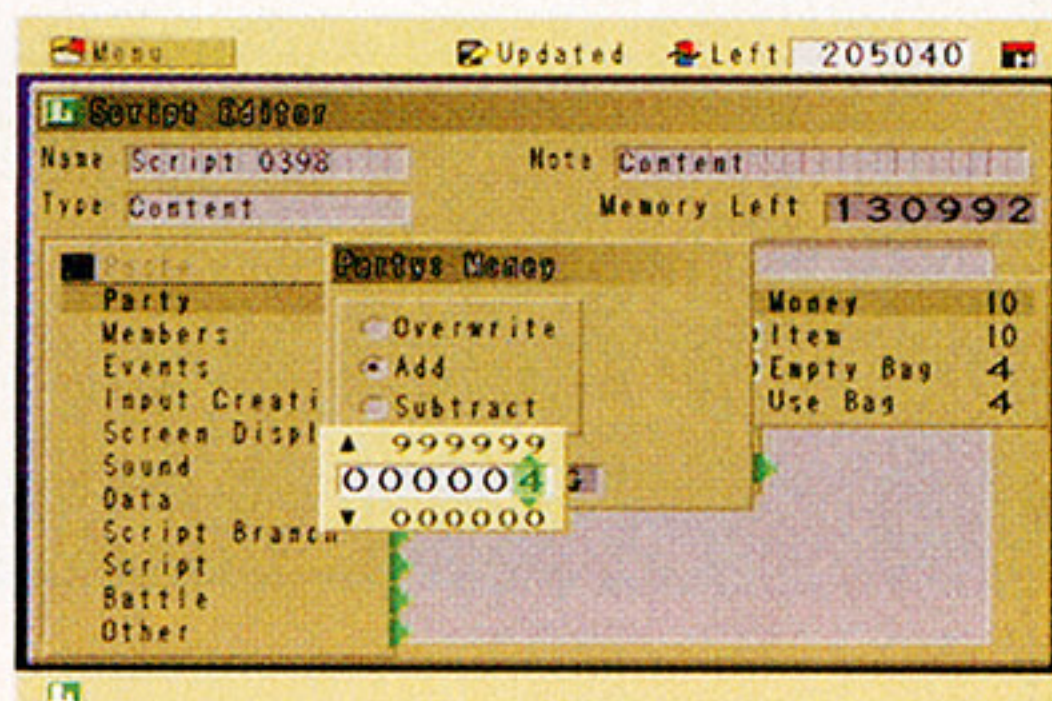
SHANE: As an avid role-playing fan, I've always imagined what kind of awe-inspiring überRPG I could produce if given the chance (flying fortresses, magic crystals, and sassy princesses—my game would have it all!). *RPG Maker 2* threatened to fulfill my fantasies, but after seeing just how much damned work goes into making a functioning game, I've decided to leave the task to the professionals.

If you're a detail-oriented nut that doesn't mind wading through a morass of endless submenus to craft something resembling a playable quest, you'll possibly be able to get into this. Most gamers, however, will be immediately overwhelmed—it's just so hard to get into, and quality results demand a monumental time commitment.

Even if you're part of the hardcore contingent who will actually take the time to master the interface, you'll likely be disappointed with the results of your labor—no matter how cool your RPG's concept is, it'll look like crap. You can't alter the standard graphics much, and the only available visuals look like PS1 ugly duckling *Dragon Warrior VII*...but blurrier.

KEVIN: The first rule of game design you'll learn from *RPG Maker 2*: Gee, making 3D games sure is hard. The keyboard support alone makes the game builder more powerful than its PS1 predecessor, but the whole RPG-making enterprise has one major flaw—the games you produce are ugly as sin. It's all the fault of the unchangeable 3D engine the game uses, you see, so the graphics will be drab and blurry—and the controls endlessly fiddly—no matter how hard you try. So what's the point of mastering all these tools? Good question.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: This is a hell of a powerful application, but it takes a ridiculous amount of work to make even the most basic room in the simplest dungeon. I can't help but think it could have (and should have) been more user-friendly. I'd have really gotten into it if the designers hadn't tried so hard to drive me away. Having to go through a dozen steps just to create a shop owner who says nothing but "Buy or sell?" made my head hurt. There's no arguing with the power *RPG Maker 2* puts in your hands, though.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	5.5	3.5	6.5
SHANE			
KEVIN			
JOE			

Publisher: Agetec
Developer: EnterBrain
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.agetec.com

■ PlayStation 2

KARAOKE REVOLUTION

"Ce-le-brate good times. Come on!"



Mad combos result in more pink light than you'd ever want.



Good: Anyone can play—even the tone-deaf
Bad: Anyone can play—even the tone-deaf
Show-Offs Love: "It's the End of the World as We Know It"



JENNIFER: I can think of lots of ways this genre-defining karaoke game falls short. The singing mechanism, which detects how close you sing to the true pitch and gives points based on accuracy, causes a couple problems. On the forgiving Easy or Medium setting, you'll la-la through the single-player, winning all platinum albums in a matter of hours. But the overly precise technology doesn't allow for improvisation, and unless you can sing with the accuracy of a Gregorian monk, Expert difficulty is too challenging. Also, it breaks a cardinal commandment of karaoke: Thou shalt allow people to sing duets!

But—how can I say this delicately?—none of that s*** really matters. A fun game that helps you sing better is a true entertainment breakthrough. It had stone-cold sober dudes singing "Ladies Night" on a Tuesday afternoon in the office. I personally witnessed Shane using the game's pitch-o-meter to warble around until he found, amazingly, the correct notes to "Wind Beneath My Wings"—a painful yet stunning experience for all concerned.

SHANE: I'm all about bringing the embarrassment, insanity, and fun of karaoke bars into living rooms across our nation—this is a game that *anyone* can pick up and instantly enjoy. Seriously, hand the headset mic to your mom, little brother, or mailman and they'll be gleefully crooning along in no time. Don't get me wrong, there's tons of room for improvement (how 'bout duets, customizable characters, and Eye Toy support in a sequel?), but this is still a monumentally fun party

game. Oh, and pay no heed to Carrie's whining about a lack of tunes—Konami plans add-on discs aplenty.

GAMENOW—CARRIE: I agree with Jennifer that it's easy to beat single-player, even with a horrible singing voice. But personally, I'm glad Konami made the game accessible to the vocally challenged. I'll be the first to admit that I'm no J-Lo, but I had little problem nailing "Waiting for Tonight" on my first try—without knowing the song. My biggest gripe is that there are way too few songs. Even if you really, really love karaoke, you'll tire of the meager selection.

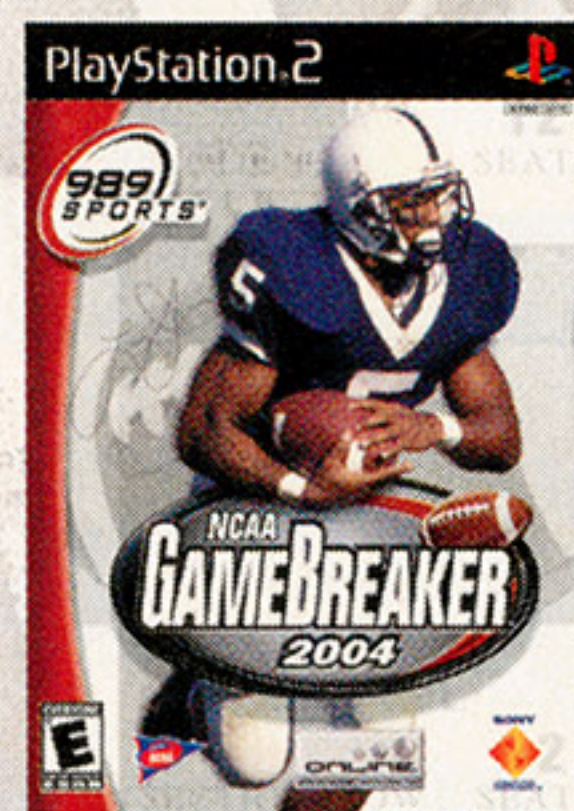


■ The arrow at the bottom left shows how close you're singing to the true pitch.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.5	8.5	7.5
JENNIFER			
SHANE			
CARRIE			

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Harmonix
Players: 1-8
ESRB: Everyone

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PlayStation.2



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Spewing red-hot plasma from the barrel of a massive gun has never been so cute and cuddly.



PlayStation 2

RATCHET & CLANK: GOING COMMANDO



This year's platforming model



SHANE: I was convinced that *Going Commando* was bound to be some lame pseudosequel created to turn a quick buck. I mean, this is the delicate art of platforming, not just some yearly update of *Madden*! I've rarely been so happy to be wrong—Insomniac has crafted a worthy follow-up that handily bests last year's debut.

The premise remains the same: wise-cracking furball protagonist and deadpan tin sidekick hop and shoot their way across the solar system, completing various odd jobs and heroic deeds. The characters have been tweaked a bit for the better—Ratchet doesn't look quite as dorky, and Clank has a lot more to do now (you get to take control of him more often, and he can now attack while on Ratchet's back).

Plot-wise, though, it's kind of a wash. Outside of a few funny quips from Clank, the story consists mainly of goofball fetch quests and corny puns...but hey, platformers aren't really about gripping narratives.

Here, the gameplay is the star. From the get-go, it's supremely easy to get back in the *R&C* groove. Even if you somehow missed the first game, control here is instinctive and precise. At first, *Going Commando* seems like another rote collect-a-thon, but all those shiny bolts you're gathering are indeed valuable—you can spend 'em on new weapons. You can amass a huge arsenal of cool, crazy guns, which can now be upgraded and modified as you progress. Figuring out the best weapon for each enemy encounter demands strategy and experimentation, and luckily, the game's forgiving system of infinite lives and plentiful restart check-

points keep the frustration to a minimum.

As sequels go, this one doesn't look very different from its predecessor, but that's not such a bad thing—the original *R&C* sported fantastic visuals, with a variety of massive planets to explore. The new spherical levels are cool, and the space-shooting bits really impress this time, too. Even so, a little more creativity might have been nice; a new desert planet, a new ice planet, and a few new planets that rip off *Star Wars*' Coruscant are hardly original.

So, other than a vague sense of déjà vu, there's little to fault *Going Commando* with. It's doubtful you'll find a better platformer this year.

CJ: I liked the first *Ratchet & Clank* a lot, except...I didn't like Ratchet. In the first game, the furry dude was kind of an ass, and it's hard to totally dig a ▶

So Perfect and New: Sure, *Going Commando* is a quick follow-up, but they didn't just crap out another identical game. Gameplay improvements abound!



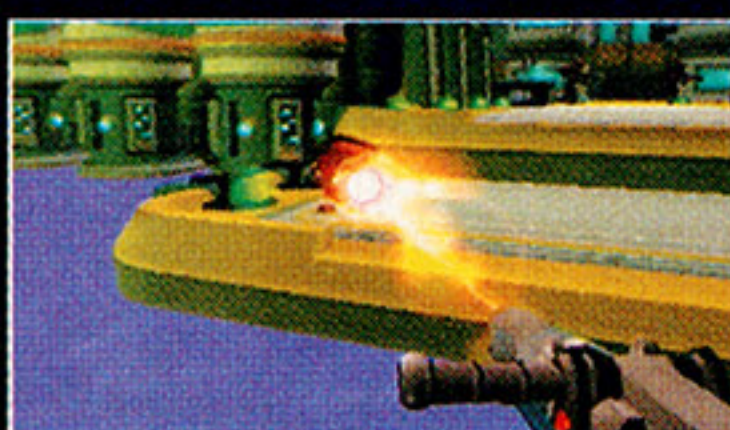
Strafing: It's pure rocket science—now you can run in one direction...while shooting in another. This seemingly simple maneuver makes the gunplay much, much easier.



Spherical Worlds: Although we can't imagine anyone actually living on a planet the size of someone's backyard, hopping across these tiny globes is damned fun.



Space Combat: The *Star Wars*-inspired dog-fights don't suck this time around—they look better, the action's faster, and you can now customize your ship.



First-Person Mode: You can jump into a Ratchet's-eye view for precision aiming, and you can even unlock a secret mode to play the entire game in first-person view.



More Clank: Although there still isn't enough of him to sate our robotic desires, you do get a few chances to control this metallic bad boy and his mechanical hit squad.

Good: Awesome array of weaponry
Bad: Feels a lot like the previous game
Dig Out: Your save game from *R&C* to unlock new weapons



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.5
SHANE

9.5
CJ

9.5
GARY

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Insomniac
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.playstation.com

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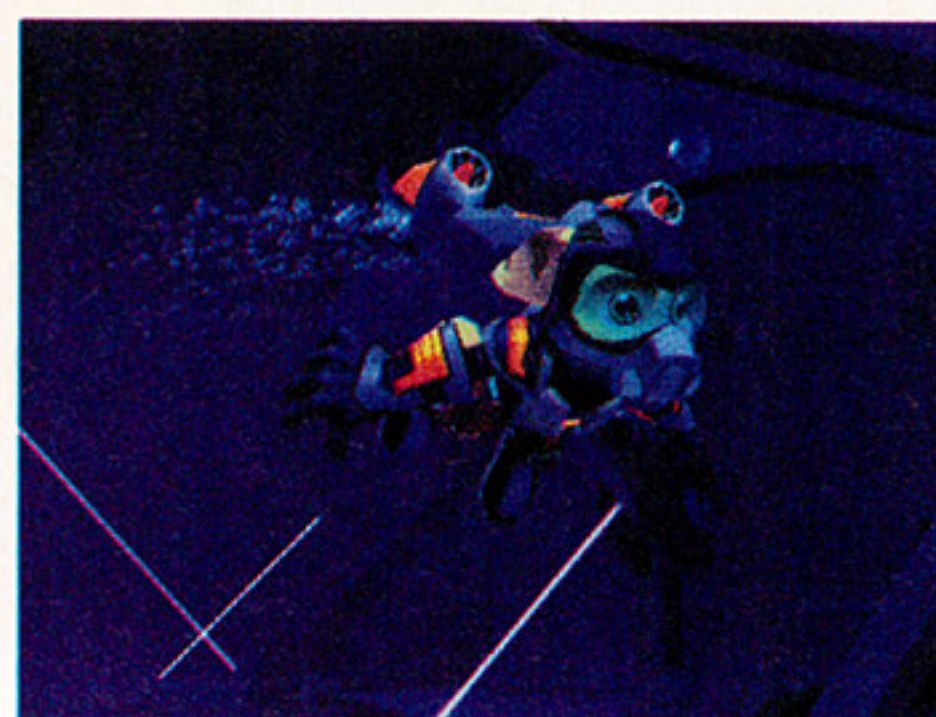
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■ Lancer



■ Heavy Lancer

The first *Ratchet & Clank* offered plenty of kick-ass guns, but they all came factory-standard and stayed that way. Booring. Luckily, *Going Commando* puts the power of illegal aftermarket mods into your hands. Now, when you use a gun long enough, it magically transforms into a much stronger firearm, and you can modify it further by adding special elements like acid, shock, or lock-on. Nice.

➤ game when your lame alter ego pisses you off. But magically, he's now a likeable guy in *Going Commando*. (Sensitivity training, perhaps?) And for me, that goes a long way toward making this a better game.

And boy, oh boy, is *Going Commando* excellent. The platforming-action genre has a lot of competition, but this year, Ratchet runs away with the prize. This is an absolute must-play—even if you didn't play the first one. It's got everything you've ever wanted from an action game. The weapons are bigger, better, more creative, and now fully customizable. Also, a fantastic experience system works just the right amount of RPG-ish depth into the mix, and you won't dread the various minigames and arena challenges. *Commando*'s level design is perfect, providing plenty of things to discover in each challenging (yet extremely satisfying) world you explore. Better than *Jak II*?

Definitely. Set aside some time, 'cause this is a monumental game you do not wanna miss.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GARY: I dunno what Shane is griping about. Yes, the levels look a bit like those in the first *Ratchet*, but that's about as meaningful as saying I look like my brother, so you should like me less because of that. Whatever. The level design is brilliant, the weapons combat is a freakin' blast, the subtle tweaks really do change everything, and the characters are more appealing than the last go-round. Even at its toughest, when you're stuck replaying an especially difficult area, *Commando* is a metric ton of fun, thanks to the fact that you're gaining more experience, your weapons are growing and evolving, and you're earning more bolts to buy new weapons. Those RPG elements seem so straightforward, but they really, truly change everything. I've never felt as encouraged to experiment

with so many different things in a platformer, all for the sake of leveling up and gaining some amazing new weaponry.

The other little tweak that matters so much: strafing. I'm not much of a shooter guy; I come to this game as a pure platformer nut. But the weapons combat has gone from intuitive to blastic bliss. I'm pulling off moves that I never thought possible, like strafing around high-impact baddies while doing side jumps and tossing explosives. *Commando* controls like a charm, making even the most hardcore of feats fairly achievable.

But most of all, *Commando* is incredibly addictive fun. I really, really love this game.



■ Yeah, *Going Commando* has its share of cute critters...perfect for shooting.



■ Ratchet never feels more alive than when he hang-glides over a molten river.

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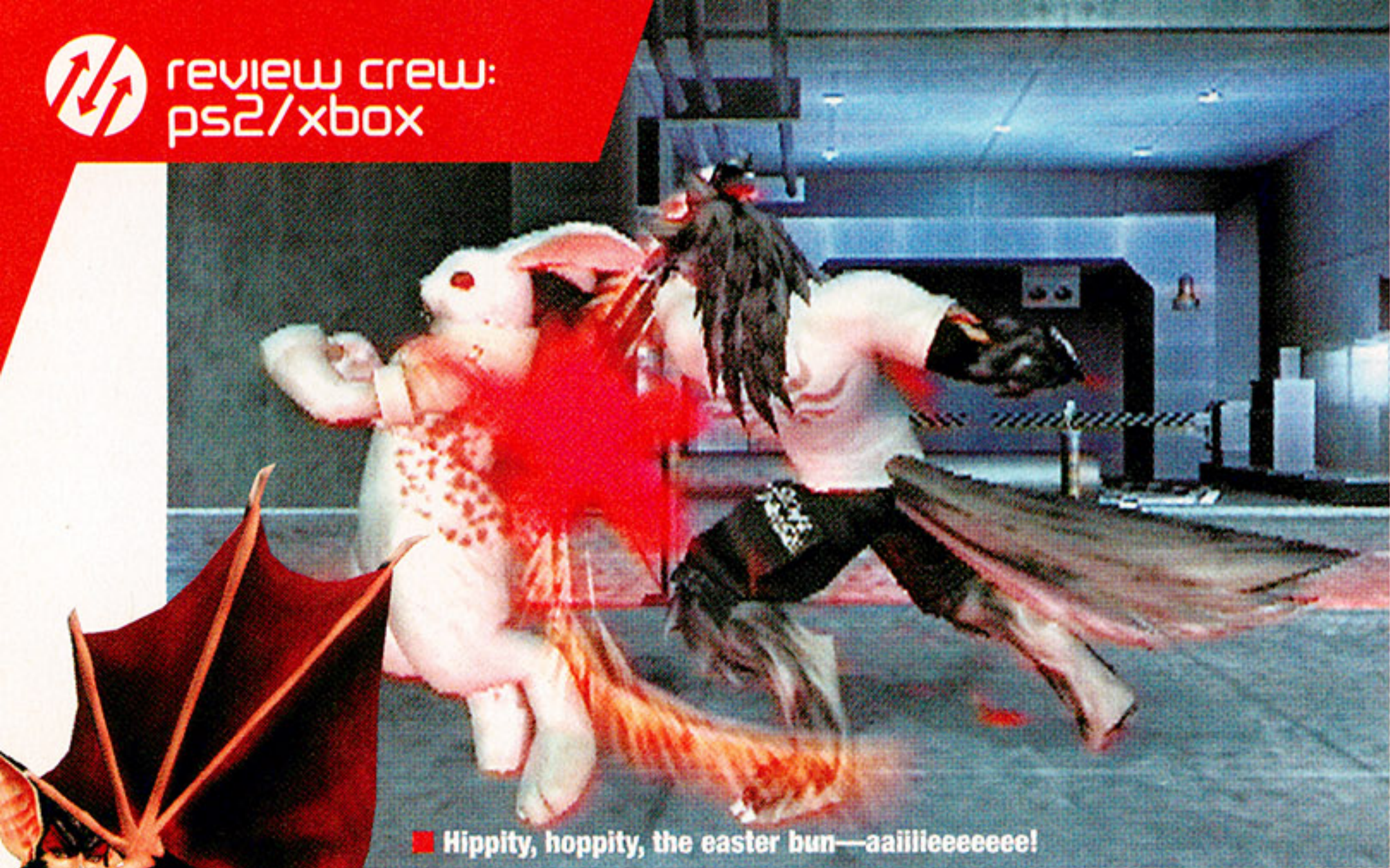


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PlayStation 2

BLOODY ROAR 4

All fur, no fun



(Right) When animals attack: Here, the querulous dung beetle defends his hard-earned feces.

Good: Some of the characters are cool
Bad: Busted gameplay
Needs: Gorilla, Bear, or Crocodile

SHAWN: How this unevolved beast continues to elude extinction is beyond me. Once again, *Bloody Roar*'s call-of-the-wild concept—fighters become the animal kingdom's most feared killers midbout—has been tamed by woeful execution. For this fourth installment, *Bloody Roar*'s breeders tried introducing new genes to the game's anemic bloodline, borrowing counters, three-dimensional movement, and the notion of a fleshed-out single-player mode from pedigree fighters like *Soul Calibur II*.

Unfortunately, something went awry, and none of it works as it should. The abilities your stripped-down combatant earns in Career mode, for instance, are already available in the standard match types. Not that it matters. I blew through the entire section without equipping a single "bonus" item. Fighting friends is equally pointless, thanks to an abuse-prone combo system that rewards frantic scrubs while punishing strategic players. Some games manage to deliver a good time despite being utterly sloppy (see *Backyard Wrestling*), but simple fisticuffs of this sort have no excuse for playing like *Hungry Hungry Hippos*.

PAUL: Each of *BR4*'s praiseworthy features is offset by one (or more) missteps in the same category. The Tiger looks badass, but one character's alter ego is—I am not making this up—"The Spurious," who has a blade on one arm and lichen growing on her. The nice-looking stages don't matter, because you fight within the same tiny force-field-bounded square on each one. And there's nothing good to say about the gameplay, which ignores skill and encourages button-mashing. Stay away from this beast—it bites.

DEMIAN: Usually, when a fighting series reaches its fourth installment, it's doing something right. In *Bloody Roar 4*'s case, however, the only truly positive thing I can say is that it lets me beat on other people as a six-foot-tall rabbit, and even that got old after a few minutes. Shawn and Paul called it—*Roar* is just a shallow button masher, one that's not much fun whether you're playing alone or with friends. And what's the point of even having different stages if every last one is bordered by four invisible walls?

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	4.0	3.5	3.5
	SHAWN	PAUL	DEMIAN

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Hudson
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Mature

www.konami.com



(Right) Earn double bonus points for each second the XSN logo is on-screen. OK, not really.

Xbox

AMPED 2

King of the bunny hill



Casually pull off tricks near photographers to rack up extra points.

Good: Realistic tricks and courses
Bad: Incessant snowboarding lingo like "rip-dog"
Worst Unlockable: A video clip of snowboard marketing guys

DEMIAN: Snowboarding games usually aren't too concerned with realism... 'cause, you know, where's the "extreme" in that? Except for *Amped*, which is full of tricks that someone out there can probably actually do. *Amped 2*'s faithful recreation of the sport may turn off some gamers, however—especially those weaned on *SSX*'s over-the-top trickery.

Amped 2 follows the same structure as the original: create a boarder and win competitions to earn stat points, open new mountains, etc. There's no racing involved (aside from the multiplayer Trick Race mode); you're a wannabe pro freestyler, hoping to impress potential sponsors and get noticed by the media. Those who missed the first game may find the learning curve steep, though—some of the Photo and Pro Challenges, which require you to follow a pre-set course, are quite difficult.

Aside from some minor (but welcome) control tweaks, *Amped 2*'s biggest new feature is Xbox Live and XSN Sports support, so gamers can join online clans and organize competitions. But if you see me on the slopes, do not call me "rip-dog," bra.

SHOE: "Quite challenging" is quite right. Casual freeriders should stay off these slopes: If you're not serious about nailing those sick-scoring combos, you won't get very far in this game.

Xbox Live play is cool, but not the game's main draw (I've played most of these online modes in *Tony Hawk*). *Amped 2* actually changes the action-sports gameplay we're accustomed to by taking advantage of the analog controls. Now, you'll purposely want to slow down your tricks to make 'em more stylish. You may think, "Big whup" but it's about time we got a *Hawk* clone that doesn't play *exactly* like *Hawk*.

XBN—CHE: This series has evolved into a competitive, visually stunning sim with plenty of flair. *Amped 2*'s single-player mode throws you into the mix of a healthy snowboarding career full of photo ops and *Tony Hawk*-style goals. Skilled players will love questing for style points, earned by perfecting tricks in pseudo-slow motion, accentuating aerial form and grace over *SSX 3*'s spastic extremities. Factor in robust Live features and it's the best Xbox boarder.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.0	8.0	9.0
	DEMIAN	SHOE	CHE

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Microsoft
Players: 1-2 (1-8 LAN or online)
ESRB: Everyone

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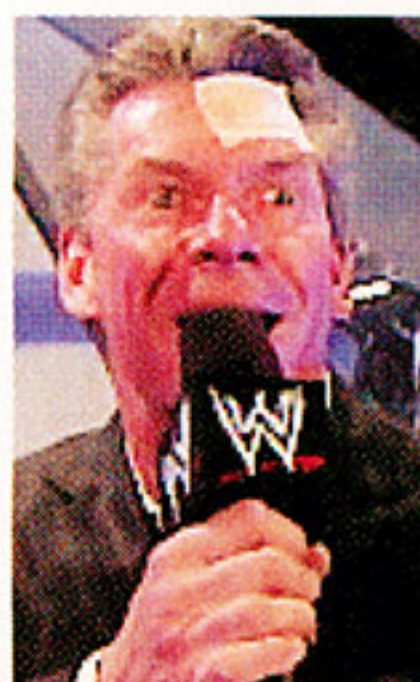
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■ The Rock don't like no fancy-ass tattoos. "It just ain't natural," he quips. The Undertaker is forced to reconsider.



■ "Why...why did I star in this mediocre game?"



Virtual McMahon

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■ Xbox

WWE RAW 2: RUTHLESS AGGRESSION

Raw goes down for the count

GREG S: *Raw 2* suffers from so many problems, it's hard to know where to begin. Developer Anchor added a lot of potentially cool features to this visually polished game, but none of them really work. For example, ambushing a rival before a match doesn't help or hinder you in any tangible way. Same deal with a new feature allowing friendship or enmity with other superstars—they seem to attack or help you randomly no matter what.

Raw 2 really stumbles inside the squared circle, though. At first, this feels like a decent, if conventional, wrestling title. But then you start noticing how slowly the action moves and how your opponents' body parts tend to pass right through your character during grapples and throws. Sloppy.

But go for the pin and you'll really get pissed. The refs seem to stop and wonder what number comes after "two." It's the longest three count ever. Not to mention that it takes them an eternity

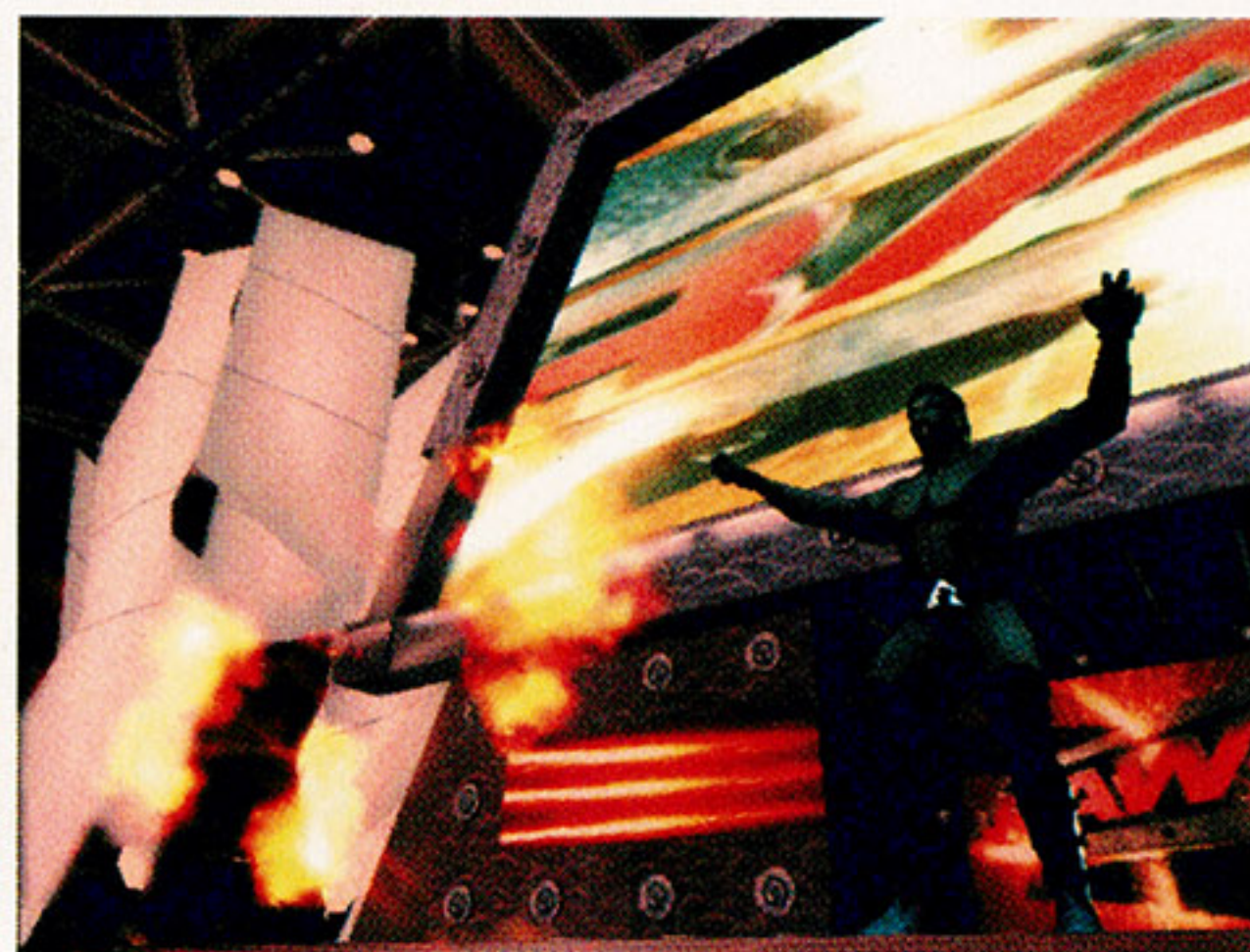
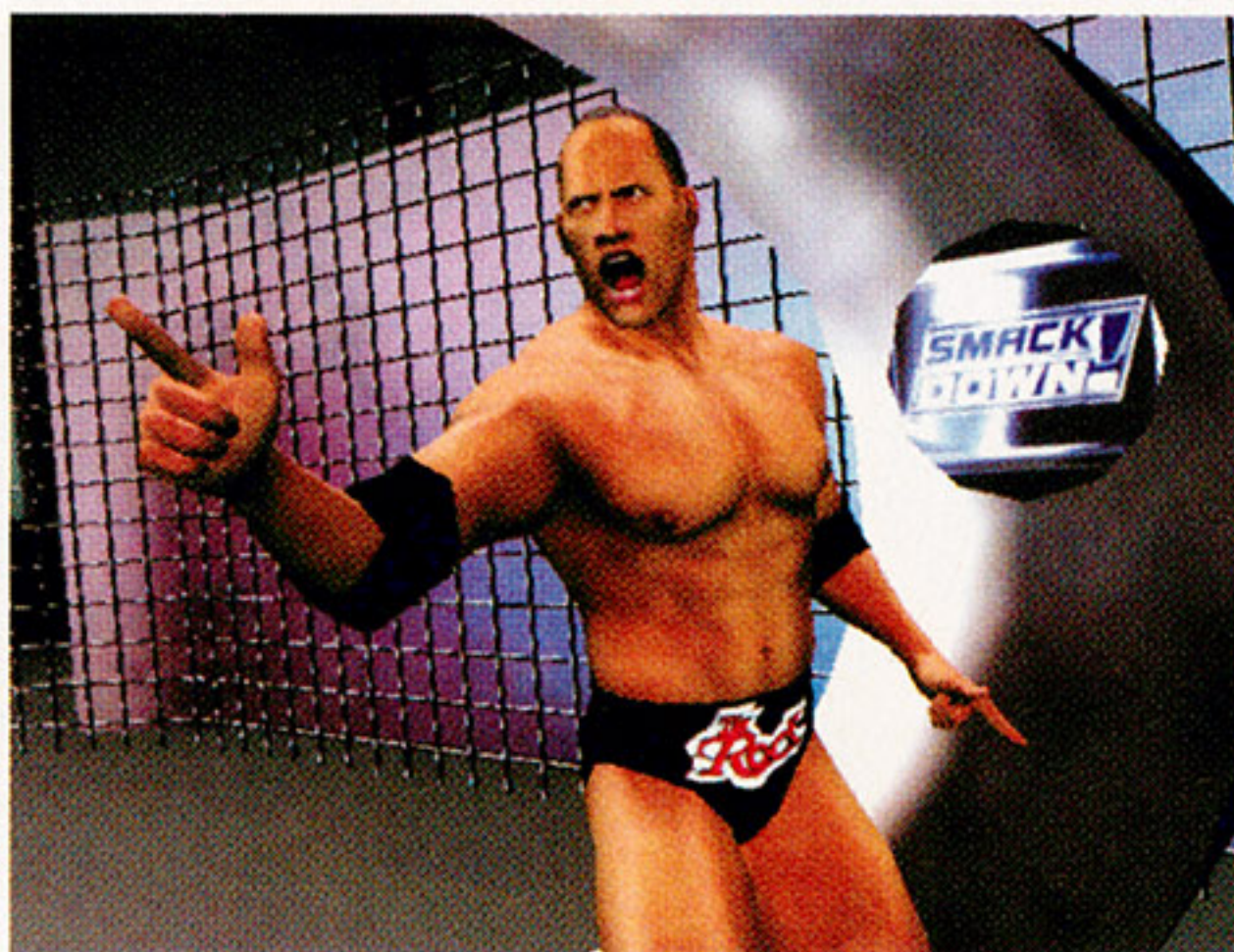
to waddle across the ring and start the count whenever you've got a guy on his back.

It gets even worse, with amateurish, dialogue-deprived cinematics rife with spelling mistakes. I mean, come on; when you can't even get the champion's name right ("Goldburg?"), are you really putting any effort into the game at all? Ring the damn bell; this one's done for.

BRYAN: *Raw 2* has match types galore (Hell in the Cell, Street Fight, Ladder...just to name a few) and even slicker graphics than before. Plus, it includes oodles of Create-a-Superstar options, right down to selecting the pyrotechnics for your grappler's entrance. But don't be fooled. Once again, this series arrives at the fight handicapped. The Season mode sorely lacks the soap-opera-like vignettes I've grown accustomed to seeing on television (isn't that why anybody watches wrestling in the first

place?). And as Greg mentioned, problems from the first *Raw* carry over—matches plod on too long, and animations look unrealistic and robotic. Even diehard WWE fans should treat this as a rental.

XBN—GREG O: *Raw*'s developers listened to the people who demanded more match types and a Season mode—one dripping with cool options like the ability to waylay a foe as he's relaxing in the dressing room. Then, apparently, they all went out for pizza, forgetting such niceties as basic A.I. Tag-team matches are near impossible to win; the computer breaks up every pin while your partner does a Rain Man impersonation. Also, the computer has a tendency to make repeated pins, one after another. It doesn't matter if the wrassler being pinned has health aplenty, either. Each pin must be escaped by button mashing. Players can expect frustration to become their new personal valet.



Good: Excellent graphics
Bad: Just about everything else
In the Words of Stone Cold: "Booooooring!"



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

3.0
GREG S.

5.5
BRYAN

4.5
GREG O.

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Anchor
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Teen

www.thq.com

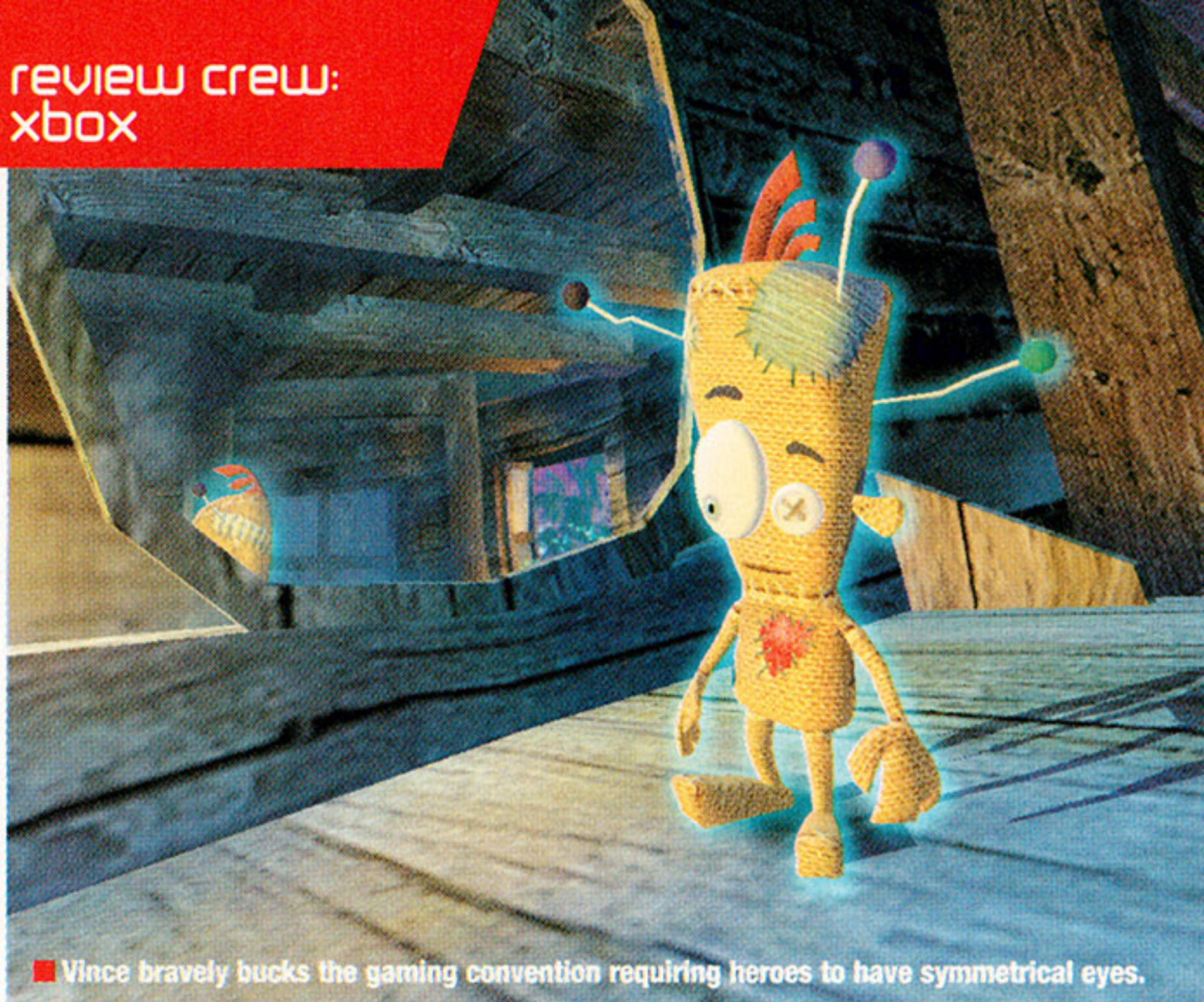


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GF GAMEFLY
rent smart. play harder.



■ Vince bravely bucks the gaming convention requiring heroes to have symmetrical eyes.

■ Xbox

VOODOO VINCE

Stick a fork in him—he's done

Good: Offers old-school platforming action
Bad: Gets superdifficult at the last gasp
Merely an Appetizer for: *Psychonauts*



CJ: *Voodoo Vince* is a run-n-jump platformer that's sugary sweet in the middle but stale and crusty on the outside. At first, it seems like a total yawnfest—the first few levels offer a hodgepodge of uninspired, reconstituted stuff directly lifted from other platform titles. Vince comes off as a thoroughly unlikable hero, and his bored wisecracks mocking his own derivative gameplay only make you hate those sections more. And while our patchwork hero's voodoo attacks are fun, you can usually run past enemies unscathed.

I was ready to dismiss the game after the first handful of levels, but it manages to really pick up in the middle. It's hard to believe it's even the same game. My favorite part? A fantastic haunted-house level, complete with a giant, demented doll boss. At that point, I started enjoying Vince's beboppy jazz soundtrack, laughed at some of its dialogue, and even forgave its muted, earthy graphics. By the end, though, *Vince* reverts to heaps of long, bland platforming drudgery. The last level alone is frustrating and mediocre enough to nullify the fun memories of hours past. Not a good way to finish things out.

KEVIN: When *Vince* was first announced, I thought "Heavens! A no-name platformer that's actually different from all the other no-name platformers!" I was right...sort of. The "hurt Vince to hurt meanies" premise really shines through in the boss battles, most of which are brilliantly hilarious—but they don't come often enough. Instead, most of the game is spent spin-attacking and floaty-jumping like every hop-n-bop since the Stone Age. Ah well. If you can deal with the lost promise, though, you'll find a decent romp.

JENNIFER: *Vince's* makers are obviously a creative bunch. How'd they figure out that New Orleans jazz was the perfect accompaniment for a voodoo doll's quest? I liked the unusual ambiance of the game, too—a compelling melange of Gothic graveyards, dilapidated town squares, and haunted houses. But I get the feeling that after working so hard on this cool stuff, the team ran out of steam. The gameplay is somewhat tired—gimmicky voodoo powers, tedious jumping/flying sequences, and pointless collecting of shiny baubles all keep *Vince* from breaking new ground.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	6.0	6.5	7.0
CJ	KEVIN	JENNIFER	

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Beep Industries
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.xbox.com

■ Xbox

ONLINE

LINKS 2004

Just shy of reaching the tin cup



■ The players look fairly nice, but not as good as those in *Tiger*.



Good: Playing online
Bad: Shallow golfer customization
Four: The total number of golf pros in *Links 2004*



BRYAN: Unseating EA's excellent *Tiger Woods* is nearly impossible, but *Links* hedges its bets by offering something that no other Xbox golf sim does—online play. Xbox Live makes teeing off against other Net players a breeze, and logging on to the XSN Sports website to check out stats or join user-created tournaments really adds to the fun. This game also keeps you happily busy offline; the Career mode includes multiple tours of varying difficulty, and you can perfect your skills with a bevy of addictive minigame-esque challenges.

Although *Links* has been a PC legend for a few decades, this Xbox debut suffers from a few too many bogeys. It's almost laughable that the game's character customization involves merely changing the wardrobe of existing players. Furthermore, the short supply of courses and golf pros definitely disappoints, and putting shouldn't be this easy. Even with these mishaps, *Links 2004* is a passable effort. But if headin' online isn't in the cards, you're better off checkin' out Tiger's country club.

GREG S: It's a good thing you can take *Links* online. Otherwise, there'd be no reason to choose this over EA's *Tiger Woods*. That's not to say Microsoft's classic golf series sucks. Just that it's a close second to *Tiger* in just about every way. That said, I dig the swing meter, wonderfully realistic visuals, and course selection. Plus, it's fun to hear Bryan's excuses when you kick his ass online. But what's with the emaciated players

and ridiculously over-the-top *Matrix*-style replays?

SHAWN: *Links'* cover athlete Sergio Garcia is competent with his clubs, but he just doesn't have Tiger Woods' appeal. Same story with his game—precise analog swinging nicely apes *Woods'* innovative method, and adjustable spin options let even casual par-three players draw and fade shots like pros. But aside from its ample online offerings, *Links'* competitiveness ends there. Create-a-Golfer is utterly underwhelming, and contrary to what Bryan says, simple shot challenges don't amount to exciting minigames.



■ Why is she concentrating so hard? Putting on these greens is a snap.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	6.5	7.5	6.5
BRIAN	GREG S.	SHAWN	

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Microsoft
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Everyone

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ps2



Final Fantasy x-2

Square Enix

Final Fantasy X-2 is the first sequel in the long respected series.

\$49⁹⁵

While keeping to series traditions, the sequel stays fresh with several new elements. Among them, the reintroduction of the ATB (active time battle) system accelerates the pace and excitement of battles. Final Fantasy X-2 is also the first mission-based Final Fantasy, allowing for non-linear gameplay and features new and unique job classes, which provide diverse looks for the leading female characters and an enhanced character development system.

xbox



Grand Theft Auto 3 & Vice City

Rockstar Games

The Grand Theft Auto Xbox™ collection double-pack is coming to

\$49⁹⁵

North American shelves on November 5, 2003. The award-winning Grand Theft Auto 3 and Grand Theft Auto: Vice City together in one collectible release, both for the first time on the Xbox™ video game system from Microsoft.

gamecube nintendo



Star Wars Rebel Strike: Rogue Squadron III

Lucas Arts

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To save Luke, Wedge, Han, Chewie and Leia from Darth Vader and his Imperial forces, you'll have to master X-wings, B-wings, speeder bikes, AT-STs, and tauntauns. In this return to the classic Star Wars trilogy, Rebel Strike includes new multiplayer modes with the entire Rogue Leader game in co-op, endurance, capture-the-base and dogfights.

gameboy advance



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Natsume

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■ Xbox

ONLINE

SEGA GT ONLINE

Spin your online wheels at bargain-bin prices



■ This version of *Sega GT* has more classic rides, and online battles support up to 12 racers.

Good: Awesome online options

Bad: Still doesn't quite measure up to *Project Gotham Racing*

Value Priced: Only \$19.99

GREG S: Normally, the price of a game doesn't affect my opinion of it all that much, but *Sega GT Online* is such a bargain, I really can't ignore it. You get all the excellent offline content of *Sega GT 2002*, along with a nice collection of new cars and a really impressive suite of online play options, all for just \$20. Oh, and if you already put a lot of time into the last game, no worries—you can transfer your garage into *Online* with ease.

Of the various online races, the most compelling has to be the Navigation mode, in which players team up as driver and navigator. While the driver handles the wheel and throttle on a fog-filled track, the navigator's screen is clear. You'll only attain sweet, sweet victory if the navigator barks the proper commands and sends appropriate turn warnings over Xbox Live while the driver reacts accordingly. It's all very cool.

If you're looking for a bona fide sequel to *GT 2002*, you won't get it here. But at this price, and with enough play modes to keep you busy for months, there's absolutely no reason not to take the green

flag with *Sega GT Online*.

DEMIAN: If you're an Xbox Live fan, you need this game, even if you already own *Sega GT 2002*. It's a steal. The additions to the single-player game are minor at best (some extra cars are the biggest news), but as an online racing sim, it's up there with *MotoGP 2*—but with more diverse and interesting multiplayer modes. Hot tip: The 1937 Auto Union Type C absolutely destroys. Just ask Greg, who found out the hard way.

XBN—CHE: All it took was riding shotgun in Demian's Subaru WRX STi, shouting out directions as navigator with the vantage point of an onscreen map, and I was convinced that *Sega GT Online* would forever change online racing. Battling against real opponents on Xbox Live is a blast, but teaming up with buddies for relay and rally races is where it's really at. While this game lacks the requisite overhaul due for any true sequel, *GT Online* still packs plenty of value—especially at just 20 bucks. Pick it up.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.5
GREG S.

8.5
DEMIAN

8.5
CHE

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Wow
Players: 1-4 (2-12 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.sega.com



■ Xbox

ONLINE

TOP SPIN

Swing the cat-gut online



■ Anna, baby, you're a winner in our book.

Good: Huge, deep Career mode

Bad: Drop and power shots are kinda tough to do

Might as Well Call It: *Virtua Tennis 3*

GREG S: Welcome to the best game you'll find on the XSN Sports Network. OK, so maybe those other sports are a tad more mainstream, but once you drop *Top Spin* into your Xbox disc tray, you won't wanna take it out.

Top Spin's control is wonderfully simple: Each button on the controller corresponds to a different style of shot. No weird combos or superprecise maneuvers are needed to succeed on these courts, and anyone can play like a pro in minutes. It all really comes down to faking out the guy or gal on the other side of that net, and getting the momentum going your way.

Smooth graphics, excellent online options, and a hefty Career mode sweeten the deal, but the gameplay's truly the star. Nothing beat the feeling I got when my opponent (let's call him Bryan I...no, that's too obvious...B. Intihar) buckled under the pressure of my intense flurry of skillful lobs and overhead smashes. Even after handing him his ass on countless occasions, I kept comin' back for more.

BRYAN: Microsoft steps up to the service

line and nails an ace with *Top Spin*. I'm not even a fan of the sport and I can't stop playing. Why? First off, the game's intuitive controls mean anyone can pick up the controller and play competitively. Likewise, hitting cross-court winners with ease looks superb, thanks to natural player animations. With an incredibly deep Career mode and online opponents, all that's missing from this glorious package is mixed doubles matches. But hey, there's always next year.

GMR—ANDREW: As a die-hard *Virtua Tennis* (Dreamcast) fan, I was looking for only two things from *Top Spin*: easy access with a shallow learning curve that lets even non-gamers get into it, and an in-depth Career mode for when all the party people go home. Turns out I got more than I wanted—this is probably the best game of tennis I've ever played. Great graphics, plenty of tournaments, and organized online competitions make it indispensable. Plus, it has Anna Kournikova slapping another girl on the butt with her racket. OK, so that's three things.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

9.0
GREG S.

9.0
BRYAN

9.0
ANDREW

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Power and Magic
Players: 1-4 (2-4 online)
ESRB: Everyone

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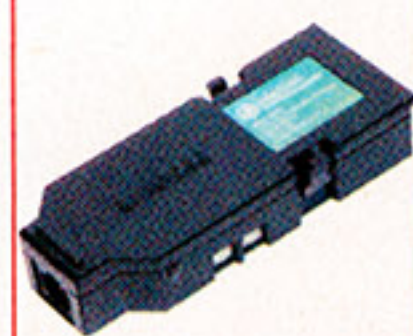


review crew:
gamecube



LAP 1/3

Heroes and villains join forces in a world gone mad.



LAN Kart Chaos

Double Dash!! doesn't offer online play, but gamers with Broadband Adapters can indulge in multiplayer action via local area network (LAN). Since you probably don't have access to eight GCs and televisions, you can use splitscreen in conjunction with LAN to get eight players on two Cubes. Oh yeah, and try 16 players in Co-op mode.

GameCube

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

Life is good

SHANE: I don't care whether you're 12 or 42, the day you get *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* will feel like Christmas morning—pure, exhilarating glee will envelop your soul, demanding that you keep playing “just one more game” into the wee hours of the morning. It's *that* good.

On the surface, the *Mario Kart* formula hasn't changed much. Anyone who's played one of the previous incarnations will immediately know what's up with item boxes, power slides, boost pads, and the like. What really alters the game's strategy is far more subtle: Selecting your characters and kart really matters. In previous games, you knew that a kart driven by a pipsqueak like Toad would handle differently than one manned by Bowser, but now, the pilot/gunner setup exponentially ups the variety. With light, medium, and heavy characters and karts to mix and match, you'll have a blast experimenting with the vast possibilities.

But I digress...just go ahead and stick, say, Koopa Paratroopa and Baby Luigi in a kickass baby carriage and hit the track. First, you'll notice the smooth, vibrant visuals. These imaginative courses don't exactly upstage the detailed worlds of *Metroid Prime*, but they adhere nicely to the *Mario* aesthetic. Course design runs the gamut from deceptively simple (the NASCAR-like simplicity of Baby Park) to the wonderfully insane (try racing through Daisy Cruiser, a tilting cruise ship, or rocketing down the no-rails cliffs of DK Mountain)—every track offers intense thrills.

Of course, you'll also slip right into the silky, responsive controls. Everything simply feels flawless, from the tricky-to-time starting boost to the crucial power slides. Gameplay this instinctive, fun, and balanced is tough to find. Speaking of balance, the difficulty level offers newbies and vets alike a sizable challenge. Racing in the pedestrian 50cc

mode will help break you in, but once you jump to the faster, tougher 100cc and 150cc classes, prepare for serious competition. Unlike *Mario Kart 64*'s lame A.I. opponents (who blatantly cheated to keep pace), the enemy drivers here earn their competitive nature through deft power slides, smart item usage, and some nasty fisticuffs. Luckily, you're suitably rewarded for triumphing in the single-player game—unlockable characters, courses, karts, and modes abound.

Man, I haven't even gushed about the spectacular multiplayer action yet...so I'll leave that to my fellow reviewers. I really can't say enough good things about *Double Dash!!*—it's an instant purchase, undoubtedly one of the most fun gaming experiences you'll have this year, next year, and the year after that....

G. FORD: For me, *Mario Kart 64* stands as one of

Weighty Matters

Double Dash!! features a huge cast of characters, and they all fall into one of three weight classes—light, medium, or heavy. You can combine guys from two different classes, but you'll always race in the kart of the heaviest guy you pick. Here's a look the kart classes.



■ **Light Karts** — Good acceleration and offtrack performance, but a low top speed



■ **Medium Karts** — Nice balance of average handling, speed, and stability



■ **Heavy Karts** — Poor turning and low acceleration, offset by max top speed



■ Any *Kart* veteran can tell you that multiplayer is where the action's at. Splitscreen play is smooth, but hook up the LAN play for serious mayhem.

Good: Brilliant gameplay
Bad: Some of the music sucks
Our Favorite Course: DK Mountain



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

10

SHANE

10

G. FORD

9.5

DEMIAN

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (2-16 via LAN)
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com



■ Watch the sparks to time your power slides—you get a boost when they turn blue.



Battle On

Mario Kart 64's Battle mode was lacking, but *Double Dash!!* delivers three awesomely fun ways to play.



■ **Balloon Battle:** Classic, three-hits-and-you're-dead deathmatch action.



■ **Shine Thief:** It's kart keep-away—try to hang onto the Shine Sprite.



■ **Bob-omb Blast:** Unleash 10-bomb shock and awe on your foolish pals.

the greatest multiplayer games of all time. It's the one N64 game I still go back to regularly, and it's the game I've seen the most nongamers play (well, minus *Ms. Pac-Man* and *Tetris*). And as high as my expectations were for the GC entry to the series, I am astonished at how amazing *Double Dash!!* is.

Shane already filled you in on the incredible single-player stuff and wealth of unlockables, so I'll get right to the good stuff. Like its predecessor, racing in the Grand Prix and Versus modes with some buddies is multiplayer nirvana, with lead changes and last-second victories galore. Players who master the power slide (which is now easier to execute) have the advantage, although the new character-specific weapons help even the field. The secondary Battle modes are all solid diversions (see sidebar), but the new co-op play steals the crown. With one player driving, the other controlling items, and both synchronizing on power slides,

you have an incredibly satisfying team dynamic you just don't see that often.

Yeah, I miss *Mario Kart 64*'s hop and item-dragging abilities, and *Double Dash!!* begs for online play, but when seven hours of playtime feel like one, you know you're experiencing an exceptional game. I don't know if I'll still be playing *Double Dash!!* six years from now, but I wouldn't be too surprised if I were.

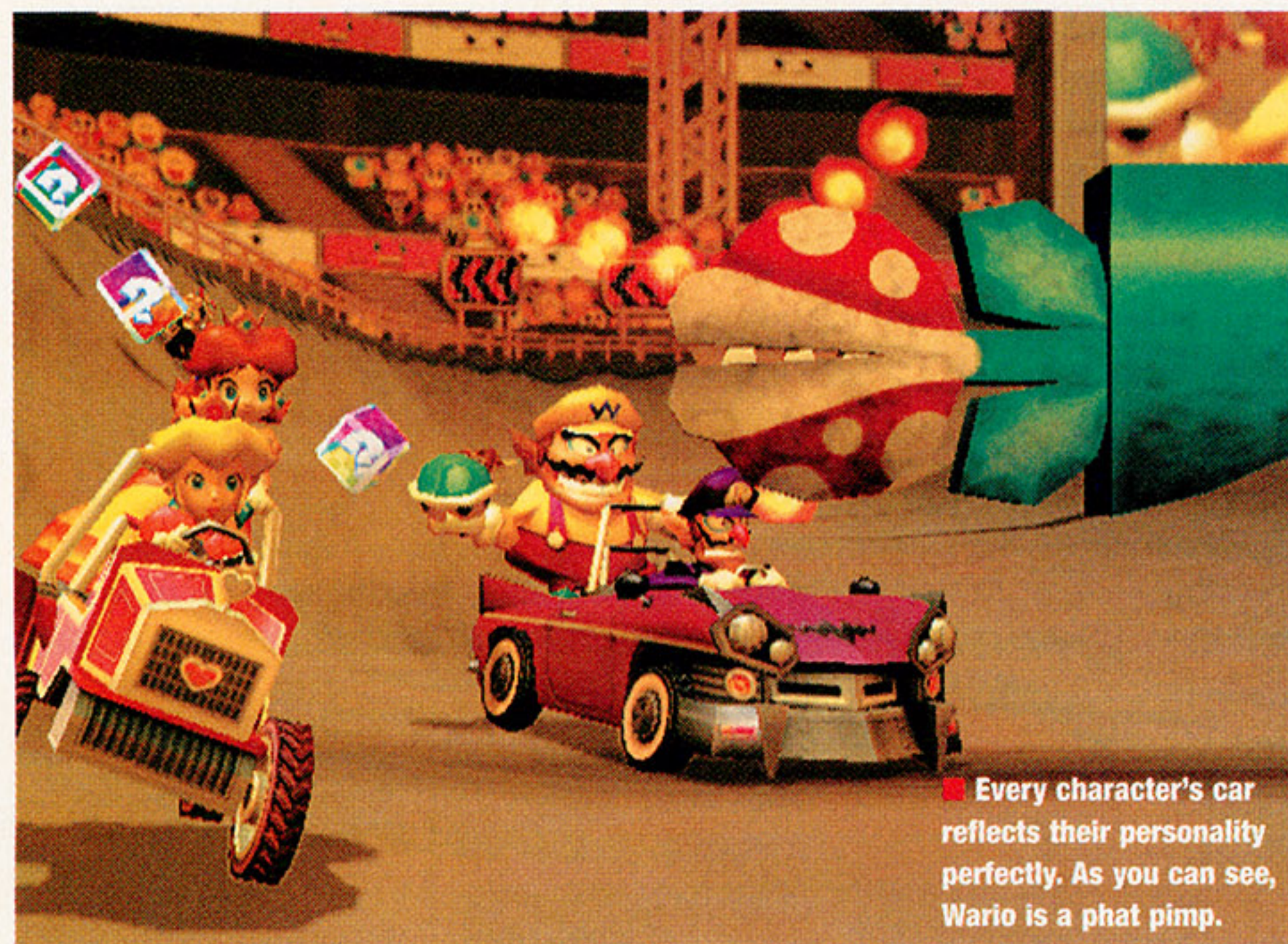
DEMIAN: The wacky hijinks of *Mario Kart* have always appealed to me much more than the teeth-grinding speed and frequent, fiery deaths of Nintendo's other big racing franchise, *F-Zero*. And this latest version of *Kart* further cements the reasons why I'd rather be tossing bananas on the Sherbet Land track: *Double Dash!!* is nonstop, relentless fun, and I can't think of a better (or more accessible) game to play with a group of friends.

Nintendo sometimes errs on the side of caution when it comes to updating classic franchises like this, and I was worried that *Double Dash!!* would just be a prettier version of *Mario Kart 64*. It's much more than that (although I do wish for still more Battle modes and arenas). With two characters per kart—each able to hold an item—there's a whole new layer to the power-up metagame. Playing co-op is even better; with a skilled partner, you can pull off power slide boosts much, much faster, and post significantly quicker lap times than if you're driving solo. Individual karts have subtle handling differences, too, even within the same weight class.

While none of these changes are revolutionary by any stretch, they do put a new twist on the time-tested *Kart* formula, making for even more frantic multiplayer action...and even more ways for Shane to lose.

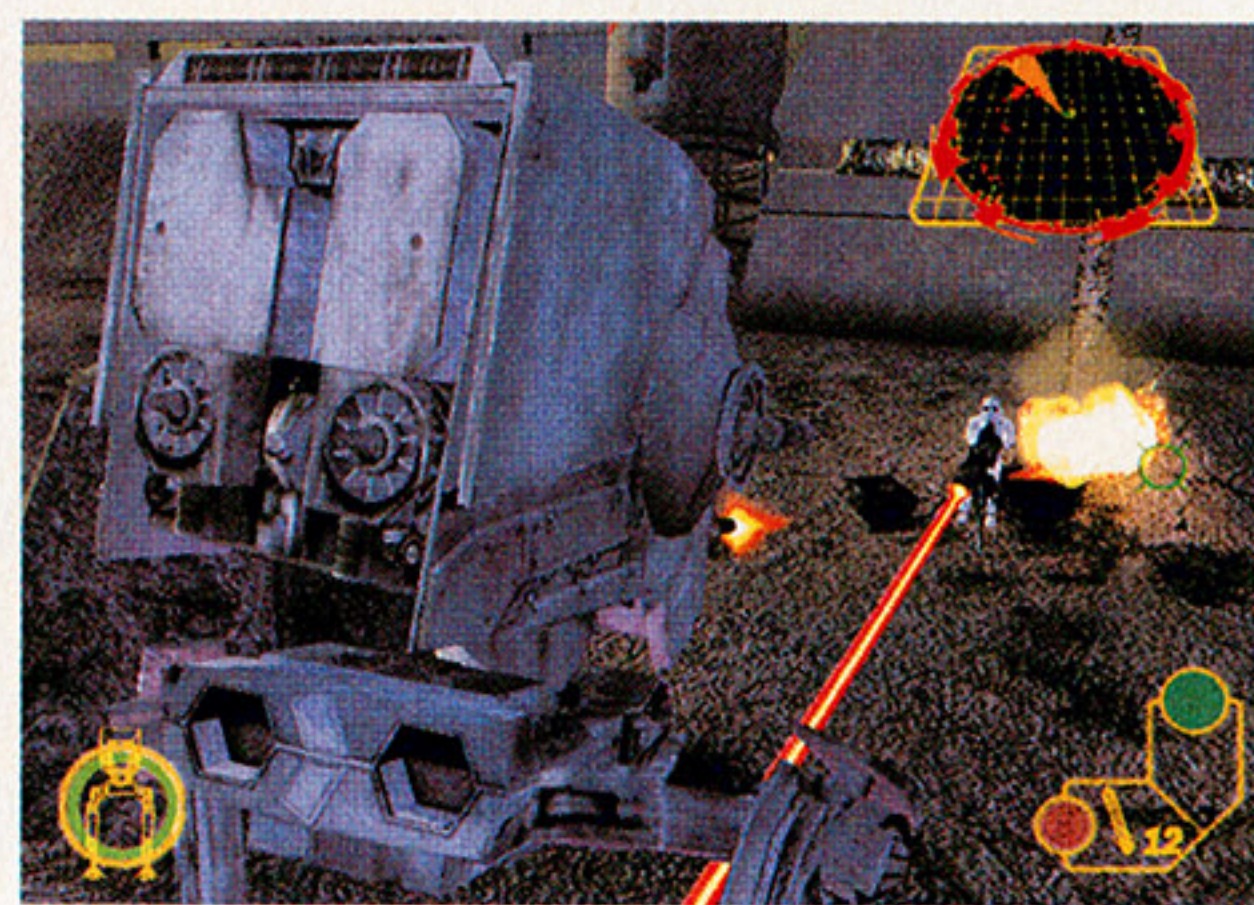
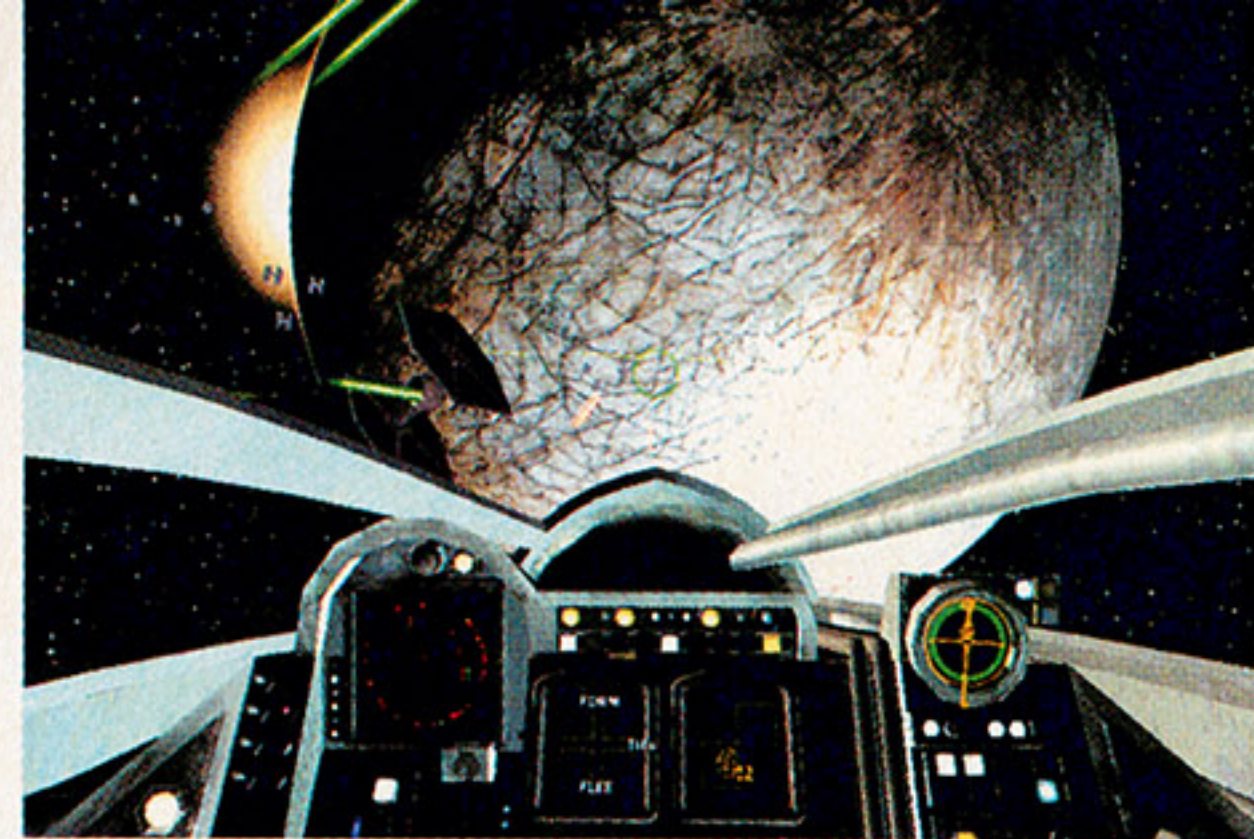
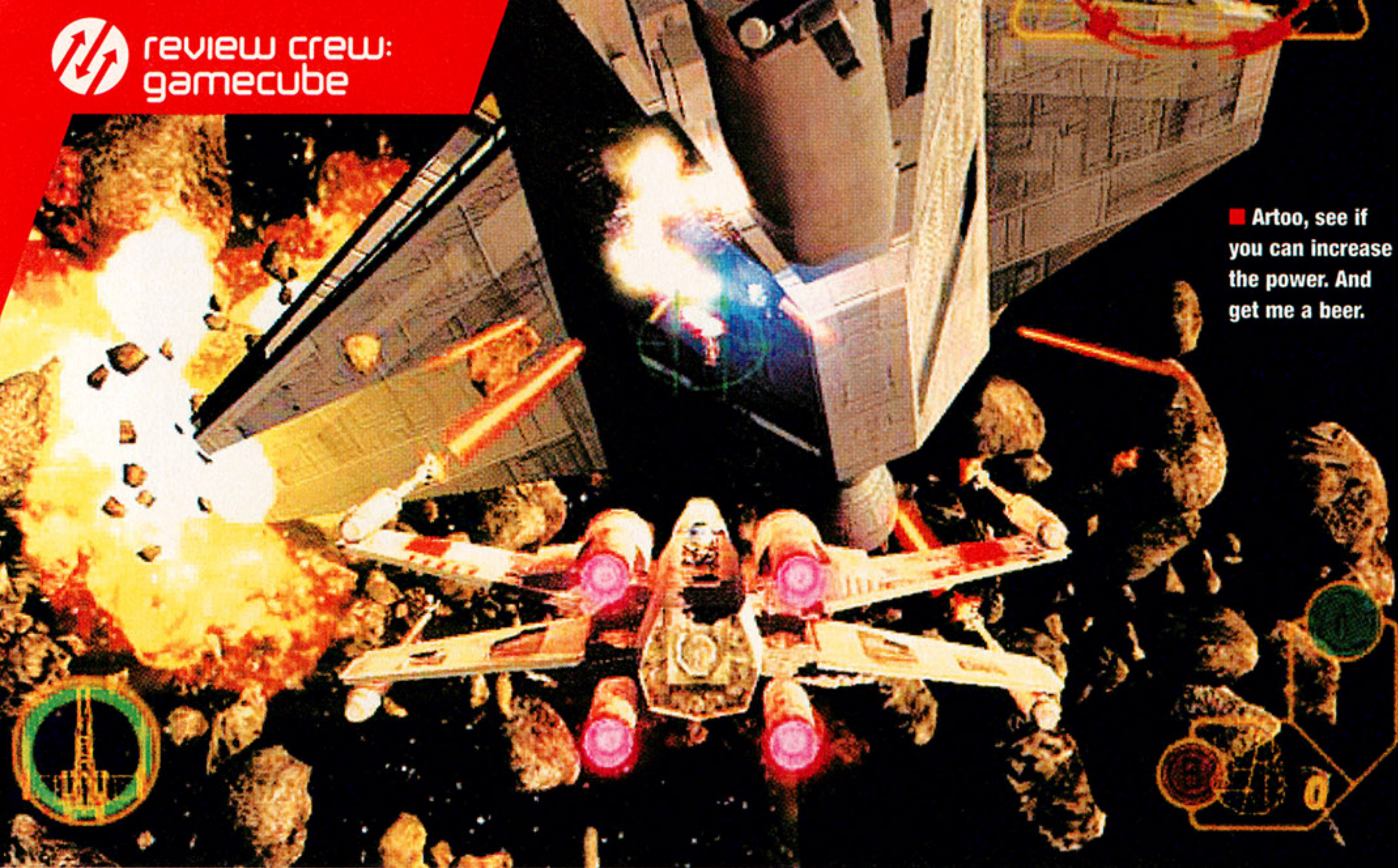


New Faces: *Double Dash!!* invites a host of new faces into the kart-racing realm. If you include all of the secret unlockable racers, you'll find 11 guys who've never set foot on the race-track before.



■ Every character's car reflects their personality perfectly. As you can see, Wario is a phat pimp.





GameCube

STAR WARS REBEL STRIKE: ROGUE SQUADRON III

We're sensing a slight disturbance in the Force

Old Republic

Those who pre-ordered *Rebel Strike* were lucky enough to get a preview disc packing the 1983 *Star Wars* arcade game. But don't weep if you missed out: This classic is also included in the final game. Plus, beat all of *Rebel Strike*'s standard missions and you unlock the rare 1985 arcade coin-op *The Empire Strikes Back*. It beats playing the new on-foot levels.

BRYAN: Like the two previous *Rogue Squadron* games, *Rebel Strike* gives you the chance to live out your greatest *Star Wars* starfighter-combat fantasies. But this trip around the galaxy also features an alternative itinerary, as now you're periodically forced to face action outside the cockpit. You'll race through the forests of Endor on a speederbike, hone your Jedi double-jumping skills on swampy Dagobah, and even rescue a bikini-clad Princess Leia while escaping a long, painful, boring death slowly digesting in a Sarlacc Pit's belly.

Yes, these movie-moment missions all sound tremendously entertaining in theory, but most are woefully executed, sporting overly simplistic gameplay and lackluster visuals compared to the excellent flight stages. These problems are really evident when soon-to-be Jedi master Luke Skywalker or his unsung-hero wingman Wedge

Antilles (*Rebel Strike*'s two main playable characters) head out on foot. Then the game turns into a monotonous run-and-duck shooting parade in which the characters move with the same grace as a *Star Wars* action figure brought to herky-jerky life by a first-year Jedi-academy student.

Thankfully, the direct opposite is true for this series' bread and butter—the flight segments. Once again, developer Factor 5 crafts a first-class aerial-combat experience. Whether flying high in the clouds escorting Rebel forces off the ice planet Hoth or discharging sonic-blast missiles (complete with that explosive guitar-riff sound effect) in the middle of an asteroid field above Geonosis, you're in for an intense and challenging ride in the sky. And *Rebel Strike* tops all that off with some incredibly slick bonuses, letting you test your dogfighting skills in a bevy of Versus battles and—best of all—play through all of prequel

Rogue Leader's missions cooperatively alongside a buddy wingmate. Although I wish more flight missions found their way into the final product, those included are reason enough to try out *Rebel Strike*. But if you're expecting the ultimate all-encompassing *Star Wars* game, then you might want to move along, move along.

CRISPIN: *Rebel Strike* is the *Return of the Jedi* of the *Rogue Squadron* series. It's got dazzling special effects and lots of white-knuckle action, but then it also packs plenty of groan-worthy moments. And easily the game's biggest downer—its equivalent to *Jedi*'s Ewoks in cringe value—is the new on-foot gameplay. I hate to join Bryan and Joe in dumping on developer Factor 5 for trying to add something new to their flight-combat series, but these run-and-gun segments are awkward and dull exercises in simple button

Non-pilot briefing: You'll spend close to half your time in gameplay scenarios entirely new to the *Rogue Squadron* series. Such as....



■ **On-foot levels** — You'll fire your blaster or man turrets to wipe out Imperials.



■ **AT-STs** — Take these surprisingly agile walking tanks for a spin in several levels.



■ **Speederbikes** — Put pedal to metal early in the game, then later in Endor's forest.



■ **Grappling hook** — Zip under AT-ATs and swing across the Death Star chasm.

Good: Top-notch flight combat
Bad: Simple on-foot exploits
Blah: Luke's swamp-hopping Dagobah bonus mission



THE VERDICTS
(out of 10)

7.0
BRYAN

7.0
CRISPIN

7.5
JOE

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Factor 5
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

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■ Luke wishes he'd never climbed out of that warm tauntaun's disgusting belly.



► mashing. You just bound along clumsily (thanks to funky floaty physics) and blast enemies whose laser fire is nearly impossible to dodge. Meanwhile, you hope the camera doesn't get so screwy that you don't know what you're shooting at (which happens a lot in the indoor levels and when you battle the lame final boss).

The good news: The on-foot segments are mercifully short. They only spoil about a third of the game. The other two-thirds—the deep-space dogfighting, speederbike racing, and other vehicle missions—are as thrilling and stunning as ever (even if a couple of levels on dustball-planet Ralltiir seem rushed). Just wait until you zip through Endor's forest on a speederbike, a pulse-quickening ride that's nearly worth the price of admission. And if that's not enough, getting to play the entire *Rogue Squadron* prequel in two-player co-op form seals the deal.

JOE: There's an unstated—although quickly obvious—rule in *Rebel Strike*: If you're in a vehicle, you're having fun. If you're not, you're *really* not having fun. As Bryan and Crispin have already pounded home, the addition of on-foot stages to the *Rogue Squadron* series—which has always been lauded for putting you in the cockpit of *Star Wars*' slickest flying machines—doesn't work out too well. When you slip on the shoes of Rebel heroes Luke Skywalker or Wedge Antilles so they can leave their ships, blasters in hand, the action is abruptly half as exciting, the perspective is suddenly awful, the platform hopping is awkward, and the screen is full of hollow-eyed characters who wander about woodenly and act dumb.

Luckily, these sections are either small parts of missions or unlockable bonus stages, so while the newness of the on-foot sections garners them the most attention, their overall schlockyness doesn't

detract from the overall *Rebel Strike* experience too much. The rest of the game is excellent, packed with missions that are extremely playable, exciting, and entertaining.

And though there's something completely charming about engaging in X-wing-vs.-TIE-fighter dogfights in space or using a snowspeeder to snake a cable around an Imperial walker's spindly legs, the game doesn't simply rely on that. *Rebel Strike* isn't just rehashing glorious *Star Wars* moments that we've played in previous games, because here the missions have a lot of variety. Some even feature unfamiliar spacecraft or are set in slick new environments. The inclusion of the *Rogue Leader* missions as a two-player co-op mode is an icing-on-the-cake bonus, providing plenty to distract you away from the game's problems down on the planet's surface. I just wish you never had to abandon ship.



Almost on DVD
Snippets of the *Star Wars* trilogy set up movie levels. Digitally mastered from the original footage, these crisp clips are the closest we'll get to watching the flicks on DVD until next fall.



■ Why wrap AT-ATs with your cables when it's more fun to tow bombs into their steel hides?



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After the Game



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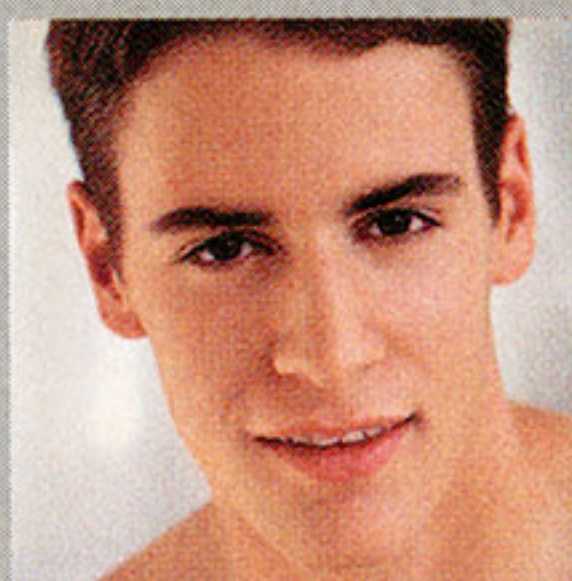
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Even a miniature Aragorn is still so hot. More like *Lord of the Schwing!*

GBA

LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING

It has a familiar ring



If you find EA's console *ROTK* game too drab and grim, you'll love this candy-colored quest.



Good: Great variety of quests and characters

Bad: Garbled graphics make so-so combat even less enjoyable

Link it Up: Transfer your experience to the GC *RotK* game

JON D: Criminey, Atari should have made *Gauntlet* with *LOTR* characters to begin with—the cast is perfect for it (warriors, magicians, even a dreamboat elf-boy, Legolas). And I almost thought I had the remake I wanted in GBA's *King*, but this year's token Tolkien spin-off actually goes a lot deeper than that. The combat, based heftily on last year's handheld *Two Towers* title, is mostly raw and unappealing. But the *Diablo* (PC)-inspired RPG qualities and diverse mini-quests make monotonous fights worth enduring. I saw satisfying changes in my characters' abilities just by tweaking their weapons and accessories, the best of which were usually found rather than purchased. The frail Frodo himself was soon cracking Orc skull with relative ease, even taking on four Orcs at once in a frenzy of murderous Hobbit rage. I was eventually content, however, just to let computer-appointed allies like Sam Gamgee kick all the ass while I hunted for cooler, more "precious" items. Yeah, we'd all be screwed if I had the One Ring.

roller coaster of conflicting emotions for me—first boredom as I hacked and slashed through endless hordes of Goblins, then addiction as I built up Aragorn and Legolas into level-22 demigods, and finally profound emptiness when I realized your only reward for all this is a couple of still pictures from the film. It's a decent dungeon hack, but "decent" is where it stops cold. And if you played *Two Towers* on GBA last year, then consider a *King* purchase very carefully—it's more of an expansion than a sequel.

JOHN R: Fans of dungeon crawlers like *Diablo* and *Gauntlet* will feel right at home with *Return of the King*. The core gameplay is essentially the same as last year's *Two Towers*, though the graphics have been given a minor facelift and the stages are a bit more varied. Despite the marginal improvements, *King* is still a bit too repetitive for my tastes. The non-stop button mashing that's required to perservere gets old fast, but the fantastic *LOTR* universe that the game is based in definitely helps ease the pain.

KEVIN: Playing *Return of the King* was a

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.0	6.0	7.5
JON D.	KEVIN	JOHN R.	

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: EA Games
Players: 1 (2 w/ Link cable)
ESRB: Everyone

lordoftherings.ea.com



If you tire of watching all the battle cinemas, you can choose to turn some (or all) of them off.

GBA

FIRE EMBLEM

Advance Wars for the fantasy-minded



It's a lot like *Advance Wars*, but with several more flying blue alligators.

Good: Lots and lots of unit types

Bad: Weirdly paced

From the Folks Who Made: *Advance Wars*

SHOE: Cheesy dialogue. Cartoon characters. Turn-based strategy that's in-depth enough to hook tactical nuts but accessible enough to anyone who understands "rock, paper, scissors".... Is this just GBA's famous strategy game, *Advance Wars*, in chain mail instead of Kevlar armor? Pretty much.

If you haven't played *Wars 1* or *2*, and you have a taste for some portable war-gaming, try those first. They're less intimidating and slightly more fun. If you're a veteran and are ready for more, this time in a fantasy-themed flavor, then *Fire Emblem* is a great follow-up. Since it has more RPG elements like experience points and item equipping, it gives you more to think about and strategize around, though it's a bit on the easy side.

This is all packaged in the same turn-based format that made *Advance Wars* such a hit—only more strict. You have to play the missions in order (with barely any side quests); you only get the specific units that the game wants you to have (you don't manage any resources to "build" anything new); and you never have as much variety in your armies as you do in *Wars*.

SHANE: Shoe seems determined to shove *Advance Wars* down our throats, but I'd easily recommend *Fire Emblem* over it. Both games offer similar gameplay, but the rich fantasy setting, intriguing plot (Shoe's comment about cheesy dialogue is way off base), and likable characters really propelled me forward, while I always found the *Wars* world dull. *Emblem* has some issues, like repetitive visuals and weirdly balanced narrative (you'll spend the first few hours on a massive tutorial), but it's still a must-play for fans of tactical RPGs.

MARK: Like Shane, I'd give *Emblem* the edge over *Advance Wars*. Character-developing cut-scenes, along with the leveling-up system, made me actually care about my soldiers (something I never did with *Wars*' interchangeable tanks), to the point where I tried to give final death blows to my favorites—so they'd earn more experience points—and restarted missions whenever anyone died. I just wish *Emblem* included more stages, as several gameplay concepts (like vehicles and evolving character classes) seem underutilized.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	8.0	8.5
SHOE	SHANE	MARK	

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Players: 1 (2-4 w/ Link cable)
ESRB: Everyone

www.fire-emblem.com

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

Holiday onslaught

Even though we managed to squeeze 38 reviews into the Crew this month, we *still* had games left over. Here's a sampling of the unlucky runners-up.

SpongeBob SquarePants in: Battle for Bikini Bottom



PS2, XB, GC • THQ • ESRB: Everyone — There are two types of people who watch *SpongeBob SquarePants*: little tykes who think "bong" is a funny sound effect and the college-age crowd who consider it a way of life. This platforming game, like the cartoon, seems designed for both demographics—the controls are so forgiving that, whether you're young and still developing hand-eye coordination, or you're older and playing this through a thick haze of happy, you'll never have trouble getting around Bikini Bottom. Righteous.

Culdcept



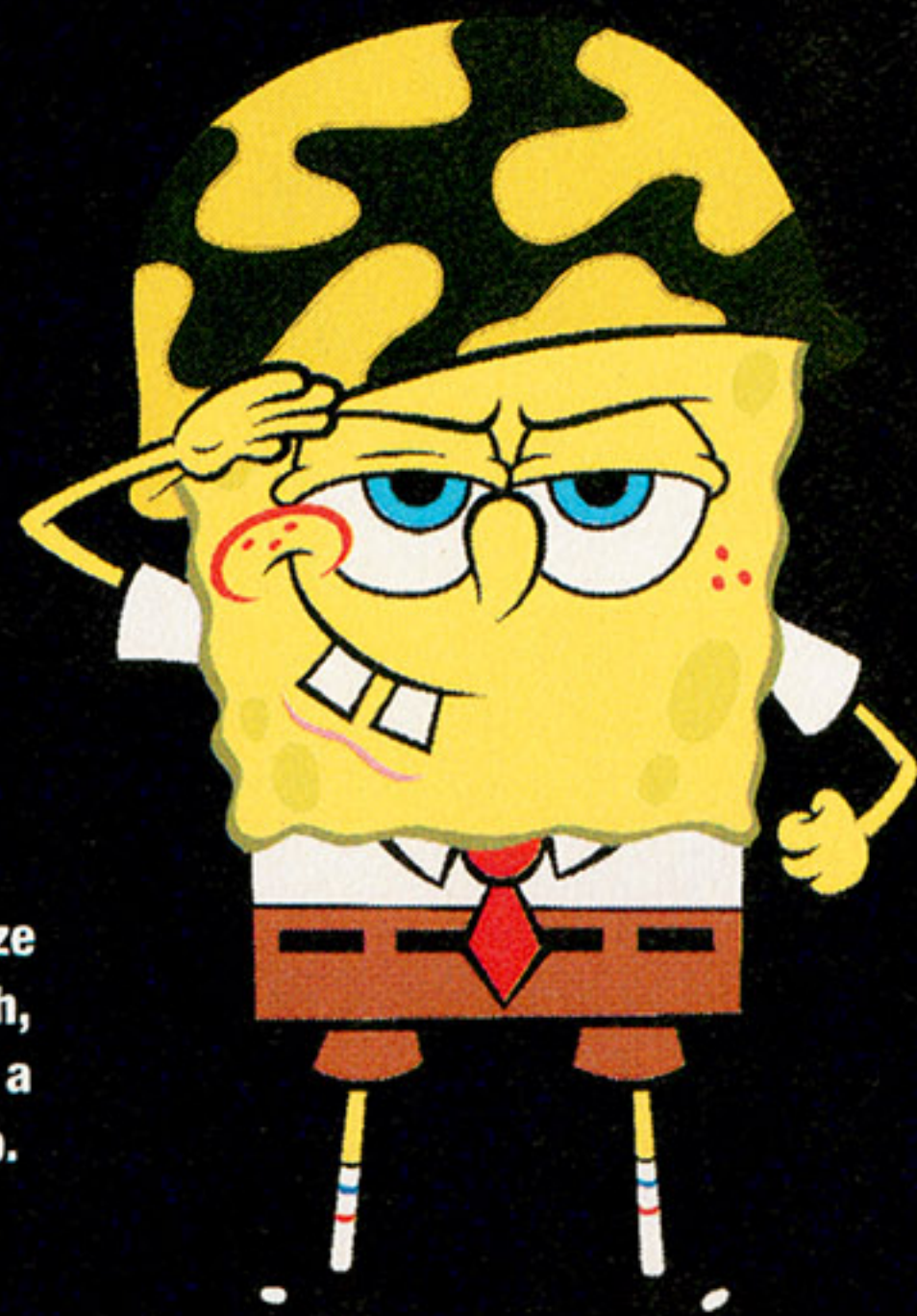
PS2 • NEC • ESRB: Teen — This offbeat board game won't win any beauty contests, but give it a chance and you'll find a profoundly deep, addictive multiplayer experience that somehow blends just the right parts of *Monopoly* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* to succeed. No, really.

Tak and the Power of Juju

PS2, GC • THQ • ESRB: Everyone — Nickelodeon's new, slightly creepy bobble-headed hero debuts in a good-natured, puzzle-packed romp for the player in Pampers. *Tak*'s too candy-coated for the older crowd, but it's a solid platformer with high production values nonetheless.

NBA ShootOut 2004

PS2 • 989 Sports • ESRB: Everyone — Sony's basketball title is the definition of the word "average." No aspect of the game is inherently terrible, though noth-



ing really shines, either. You'll enjoy the plethora of online options, but Sega's *ESPN* and EA's *Live* both deliver far superior roundball packages.

Onimusha Tactics



GBA • Capcom • ESRB: Teen — Capcom injects the stars of its popular PS2 samurai series into a deep, *Final Fantasy Tactics*-style strategy-RPG. We really tried to review this one, but a series of mishaps (Capcom had trouble delivering us a copy that could save our game) left us without enough time to judge it properly. So, if it sounds like your bag, go for it—it's a great game.

Dynasty Warriors 4 Xtreme Legends



PS2 • Koei • ESRB: Teen — If you require another fix of ancient Chinese warlords hacking each other to bits, investigate this value-priced semi-sequel. It offers some new weapons, characters, and challenges as a stand-alone game, and it can also be hooked up with *Dynasty Warriors 4* to "remix" that entire adventure.

World Championship Pool 2003

PS2, XB, GC • Jaleco • ESRB: Everyone — Fiending to play a relaxing game of billiards without all the deep-fried finger foods, hazardous secondhand smoke, and Merle Haggard fans monopolizing the jukebox? Look no further than Jaleco's *World Championship Pool 2003*. With more minigames than butts in a tavern's ashtray, it sure beats slot-machine simulators.

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REVIEWS ARCHIVE

Ratings for recent game releases

greatest **hit**
or miss?

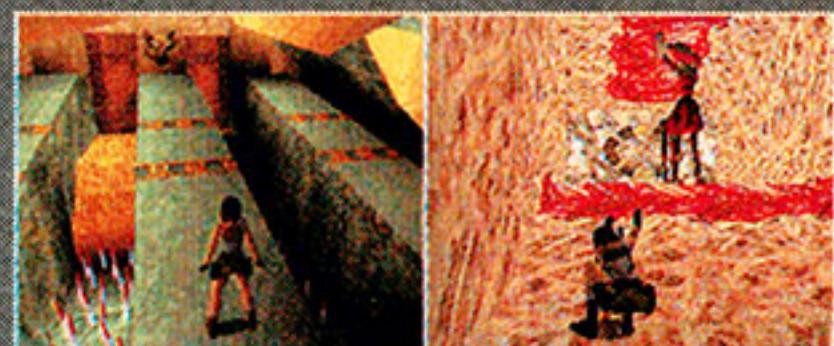


UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP

■ Xbox
■ Released: November 2002
■ Original Scores: 9.0, 8.0, 8.5

UC was the game for those with an itchy trigger finger during the early days of Microsoft's Xbox Live online service. This fragfest kept players hooked with its variety of match types, responsive controls, stunning level design, and vast catalog of weaponry.

FALLEN FROM GRACE



TOMB RAIDER

■ PS1
■ Released: September 1996
■ Scores: 9.5, 9.5, 8.5, 9.0

The original opened a lot of eyes with its 3D environments and challenging puzzles. It also helped that Ms. Croft looked downright smokin' hot.

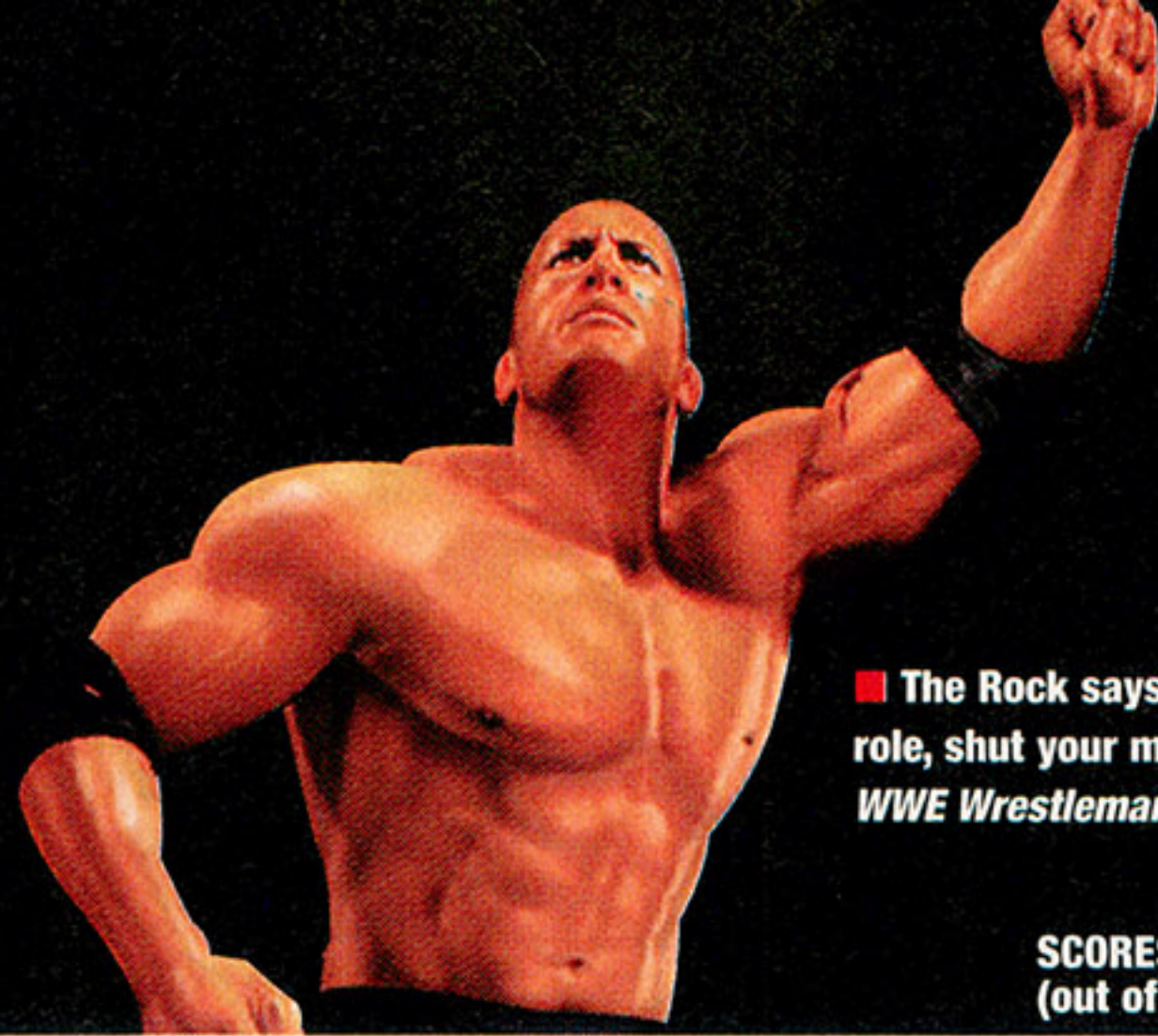


TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS

■ PS2
■ Released: June 2003
■ Scores: 5.0, 3.0, 7.0

Even constant delays couldn't help save Lara's latest tomb raid. *Darkness* fell victim to horrible controls, a muddled story, and a host of annoying gameplay glitches.

GAME	SYSTEMS	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)			AWARD
.hack Part 3: Outbreak	PS2	■ The intriguing narrative will keep .hack vets coming back for more	6.0	6.5	8.0	
Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	PS2	■ Commanding your idiotic troops can be quite frustrating	6.5	8.0	6.5	
Alter Echo	PS2	■ More pink and purple than a prom's worth of dresses	6.5	6.5	4.0	
Ape Escape 2	PS2	■ Similar to its PS1 forerunner, this sequel is still a top platforming banana	8.5	6.0	7.5	
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	PS2, XB, GC	■ Beating up cavalcades of clones gets boring before the end of the first stage	5.5	7.0	4.0	
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	GC	■ The egg-pushing gameplay helps <i>Hatcher</i> feel wonderfully unique	7.0	8.0	8.5	
Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	GBA	■ A portable gem where playing in the sun is an enjoyable requirement	9.0	8.0	8.5	Silver
Bombastic	PS2	■ An addictive, unconventional puzzler...even if it involves some math	8.0	7.5	8.5	Silver
Brute Force	XB	■ Repetitive squad-based shooter recycles too many levels and enemies	6.5	6.0	7.5	
Buffy: Chaos Bleeds	XB	■ A brain-dead <i>Buffy</i> fan's dream and a decent beat-em-up for the unbitten	4.5	6.5	7.5	
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	XB	■ The awesome boost system produces a wicked sense of speed	8.5	7.5	8.5	Silver
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	GBA	■ A must-own addition to every self-respecting gamer's GBA library	9.5	9.0	9.5	Gold
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	PS2	■ Re-creates the movie's characters and locations, but none of its grace	5.0	4.0	3.0	
DDRMAX2	PS2	■ An overly familiar experience for all but the complete novice	6.5	7.5	9.0	
Def Jam Vendetta	PS2	■ The best grappling system of this generation's wrestling games	7.0	8.5	7.5	
Devil May Cry 2	PS2	■ This sequel's demon spawn are sissies compared to the original's	7.0	7.0	8.0	
Dino Crisis 3	XB	■ The vestigial remains of a genre that needed to evolve or die a long time ago	6.5	6.0	6.5	
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	PS2	■ Creative, challenging, and totally deserving of RPG gamers' attention	8.5	8.0	7.5	Silver
DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	XB	■ Stop trying to find a nude code you sickos; it doesn't exist	7.5	8.0	6.0	
Downhill Domination	PS2	■ Huge tracks boast intense attention to detail and gripping gameplay	8.5	8.0	7.0	
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	PS2	■ Without a doubt the best fighter in the <i>DBZ</i> series	8.0	7.5	7.0	
Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Battle 22	PS1	■ Without a doubt the worst fighter in the <i>DBZ</i> series	2.0	1.5	2.0	
Dungeons and Dragons: Heroes	XB	■ Like swimming, story-free dungeon crawling shouldn't be done alone	6.0	5.5	6.5	
Dynasty Tactics 2	PS2	■ Focuses more on hardcore, heady planning than visual thrills and frills	7.5	7.5	7.5	
Enter the Matrix	PS2, XB, GC	■ So many bugs it made even Keanu Reeves say, "Whoa"	6.0	3.5	3.5	
ESPN NFL Football	PS2, XB	■ First-person football isn't as revolutionary as we hoped	8.0	7.5	8.5	Silver
ESPN NHL Hockey	PS2, XB	■ Solid gameplay and slick visuals make ESPN's puck offering the year's best	8.5	9.0	9.0	Silver
EverQuest Online Adventures	PS2	■ <i>Ever-Crack</i> just isn't as addictive on Sony's system	7.5	5.0	6.0	
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	GBA	■ Unparalleled character customization and on-field tactical arrangement	9.0	9.0	9.0	Gold
Freaky Flyers	PS2	■ No self-respecting pilot would put <i>Freaky Flyers</i> on his or her flight plan	5.0	3.0	4.0	
Freedom Fighters	PS2, XB, GC	■ Liberating the Land of the Free from Russian invaders is historically fun	7.5	8.5	8.0	Silver
Freestyle Metal X	PS2	■ X's average motocross action can't overcome its trailer-park trappings	5.0	4.5	5.0	
Futurama	PS2	■ A kleptomaniac alcoholic robot from the future deserves better	4.5	5.0	5.0	
F-Zero GX	GC	■ Fast? Yes. Stylish? Yes. Frustratingly difficult? Oh hell yes	9.0	7.5	7.0	
The Getaway	PS2	■ Do you fancy <i>Grand Theft Auto: London</i> ? Here it is, guvner	7.5	6.0	8.0	
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	XB	■ The single-player mode is an appetizer to the multiplayer's heartier meal	7.5	7.0	7.0	
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	PS2	■ Tommy Vercetti takes America's favorite gaming franchise to greater heights	10	10	10	Platinum
The Great Escape	PS2, XB	■ Rent the movie instead	4.5	4.0	6.5	
Group S Challenge	XB	■ An uneven, seemingly thrown-together <i>Gran Turismo</i> pretender	5.0	6.0	5.0	
High Heat Baseball 2004	PS2	■ The best baseball sim around—even with ho-hum graphics	9.0			
The Hulk	PS2	■ Hulk like smash. Hulk no like stealth	6.5	6.5	7.5	
Hunter: The Reckoning Wayward	PS2	■ Searching for meaningless items makes this one more frustrating than fun	6.0	5.0	6.0	
Hunter: The Reckoning Redeemer	XB	■ Slow, repetitive pacing keeps the thrills in check	7.5	6.0	6.0	
Indiana Jones & the Emperor's Tomb	XB	■ Several of the game's levels inspire fond memories of the films	5.5	8.5	8.5	
Kirby Air Ride	GC	■ Supremely easy for anyone to pick up and play, yet surprisingly deep	6.0	8.0	7.0	
Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	GC	■ Link's GameCube debut features beautiful, cartoon-style graphics	9.5	10	10	Gold
Lethal Skies II	PS2	■ Not even the dull two-player modes earn <i>Skies</i> any frequent-flier mileage	3.0	5.5	4.0	
Madden NFL 2004	PS2	■ Several effective gameplay enhancements keep <i>Madden</i> king of the gridiron	9.5	9.0	9.5	Gold



■ The Rock says know your role, shut your mouth, and play *WWE Wrestlemania XIX*.

GAME	SYSTEMS	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)			AWARD
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	GC	■ Cinch-to-learn controls, funky minigames, and all-around ball-whacking fun	8.0	8.0	7.5	
Mega Man Zero 2	GBA	■ MMZ2 serves up solid action without delivering anything substantially new	6.5	8.5	7.0	
Midnight Club II	PS2	■ High-speed insanity that will also appeal to sim fans	9.0	8.0	9.5	Silver
Midtown Madness 3	XB	■ The colossal cities are even more fun to explore online	7.0	7.5	7.5	
MotoGP 2	XB	■ Photorealistic visuals make learning the demanding controls worthwhile	8.5	8.0	8.0	Silver
NBA Street Vol. 2	PS2	■ If only serious basketball could look as good as this arcade-style baller	9.5	8.5	8.5	Silver
NFL Blitz Pro	PS2, XB, GC	■ Incredibly fast, great looking, totally over-the-top football	7.0	7.0	6.0	
NFL Fever 2004	XB	■ A shallow Dynasty mode tackles <i>Fever's</i> shot at greatness	6.5	6.5	6.0	
NFL GameDay 2004	PS2	■ Online options are <i>GameDay's</i> only saving grace	4.0	4.5	5.5	
NHL 2004	PS2, XB, GC	■ EA skates on the ice with too much force and not enough finesse	8.5	6.5	7.0	
NHL Hitz Pro	PS2, XB, GC	■ Not the most realistic game of hockey, but among the most enjoyable	7.5	8.5	8.0	Silver
Outlaw Volleyball	XB	■ Much naughtier than <i>DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball</i> , plus it's online	7.0	7.0	6.5	
Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II	XB	■ Monster hunting is more addictive than ever with added voice-chat	9.0	9.0	9.0	Gold
Pirates of the Caribbean	XB	■ Barely shipshape Arr-PG won't keep your interest afloat	6.0	5.5	4.5	
P.N.03	GC	■ One truly badass character design is all <i>P.N.03</i> has to offer	4.0	5.0	4.0	
Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire	GBA	■ Leaves even Pokémaniacs with a "been there, done that" feeling	7.5	6.5	7.5	
RoadKill	PS2, XB, GC	■ Delivers violence and four-letter words in a very fun, playable format	5.5	5.0	8.0	
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	PS2, XB	■ Like playing a game of <i>Risk</i> in which you always die halfway through	3.0	6.0	4.5	
Rent A Hero No. 1	XB	■ Ever wished you could deliver Chinese take-out food? Then this is for you	6.5	6.0	4.0	
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: TOW	XB	■ Go online for some good ol' fashioned Nazi-killin'	8.5	9.5	8.5	Silver
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: OR	PS2	■ Devoid of multiplayer modes in any shape or form, but solo-play is fine	7.0	6.0	7.0	
Silent Hill 3	PS2	■ So scary it'll have you stocking up on those adult-sized diapers	8.5	8.5	9.0	Silver
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	PS2	■ A family-friendly <i>Grand Theft Auto: Springfield</i>	8.0	6.5	7.0	
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	XB	■ A dull, dumbed-down shooter with inconsistent A.I.	6.5	7.0	3.5	
Soul Calibur II	PS2, XB, GC	■ Our souls, at least, still burn. Can't speak for yours	10	9.0	10	Gold
Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild	PS2	■ Responsive handling and cool tracks compensate for convoluted trick controls	7.0	8.0	6.5	
Starsky & Hutch	PS2, XB	■ Tailing jalopies along rigidly scripted trails grows tiresome	7.0	3.5	4.0	
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Rep.	XB	■ Follow either side of the Force in the best Xbox role-playing game to date	9.0	9.5	10	Gold
Super Mario Advance 4	GBA	■ Undoubtedly stands the test of time as one of history's greatest platformers	9.5	9.0	9.5	Gold
Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo	GBA	■ This puzzler stacks brain-boggling complexity atop a simplistic premise	9.0	9.0	7.5	Silver
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	PS2	■ Assassinating enemy ninjas is far too easy	7.5	7.0	7.0	
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	PS2, XB, GC	■ An accurate sim that's more fun to play than other less serious golf games	9.0	9.0	9.5	Gold
Time Crisis 3	PS2	■ TC3 remains an uncontested crack shot among light-gun shooters	7.0	7.0	8.5	
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	XB	■ This tactical, team-based online shooter is intense and exciting	8.0	7.5	8.0	
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	GC	■ A stealth masterpiece with near unlimited replay value	8.5	9.5	9.0	Gold
Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	PS2	■ Lara's back, but her gameplay's never been jankier	5.0	3.0	7.0	
Ultimate Muscle	GC	■ Clearly challenges <i>Def Jam Vendetta</i> for the Cube's championship belt	8.5	7.5	7.5	
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	PS2	■ As fleshed-out, complicated, and utterly addictive as fighters come	10	9.0	9.5	Gold
Wakeboarding Unleashed	PS2	■ Provides that twitchy instant gratification every action-sports title should	9.0	8.5	7.5	Silver
Wallace and Gromit in Project Zoo	PS2, XB, GC	■ Wallace does nothing really horrendous, nor anything really praiseworthy	4.5	6.5	6.5	
Wario Ware: Mega Microgame\$	GBA	■ Ideal for those with a three-second attention span	9.5	9.0	9.0	Gold
Wario World	GC	■ Wario's adventure is short and simplistic	7.5	7.0	6.0	
War of the Monsters	PS2	■ Reckless fun in rubber monster suits	9.5	6.5	7.0	
World Series Baseball 2K3	XB	■ Sports the finest-looking player models of this year's baseball crop	8.0	8.0	8.0	Silver
World Soccer Winning Eleven 6 Int.	PS2	■ This exceptional game of footie scores big with precise control	9.0			Gold
WWE Wrestlemania XIX	GC	■ XIX's improved character-creation system atomic-drops you into the WWE	7.5	7.5	6.5	
Xenosaga: Episode I	PS2	■ So many cut-scenes, you'll forget you're playing a game	8.0	8.0	6.5	
XGRA	PS2, XB, GC	■ A consummate copycat, matching the competition in all essential categories	6.5	6.5	7.5	

LEADY TO LACE?



Replacing mascots, racial caricatures are the new main-stays in unorthodox racing games. Each of the following is stereotype central, but *Freaky Flyers'* cast is by far the most offensive, featuring the likes of latino rodents, magic-carpet jockeys, and Engrish-speaking kamikazes.



Freaky Flyers
(PS2, XB, GC)

5.0 3.0 4.0



Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild
(PS2)

7.0 8.0 6.5



XGRA
(PS2, XB, GC)

6.5 6.5 7.5

greatest hit or miss?

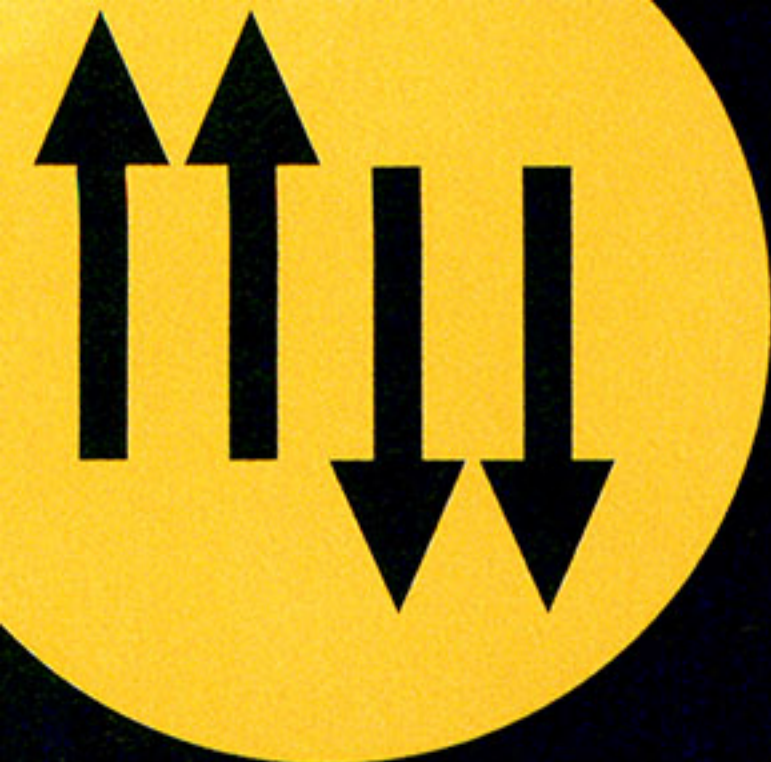


VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION

■ PlayStation 2
■ Released: August 2003
■ Original Scores: 10, 9.0, 9.5

The sort-of sequel to Sega's astonishingly sophisticated fighter arrived on store shelves with a \$20 price tag. With expanded move sets for existing characters, two fresh faces, more cool junk to collect, and the ability to face opponents based on Tokyo's tournament champs, it's 3D combat fine-tuned to near perfection.





tricks of the trade

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Not one, not three, but *two* WWE wrestling games get manhandled in this month's squared circle. Then we take you right into the danger zone with *Crimson Skies*, run and gun in *Freedom Fighters*, reveal a passel of codes for *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and...hey! My jaundice has cleared up! Good times!

—David S. J. Hodgson
tricks@ziffdavis.com

GAME DIRECTORY

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■ PS2, XB, GC

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Better Ready Than Red

Ready to rumble with the Russkies in the most outdated future since *The Jetsons*? Then try out these single- and multiplayer tactics. Those Soviets will be cogs in the capitalist machine in no time, watching American sitcoms and purchasing quality electronics equipment at rock-bottom prices.

Avoid Frontal Assaults

A strategically placed truck may offer a way around a Soviet kill zone. Almost all primary objectives are well defended—the Soviets expect you to make a direct frontal assault on their positions...and be killed before you can even reach the concrete barricades. But in most cases, you can find an alternate way to reach an objective that either bypasses the Soviet defensive positions or allows you to attack the flanks, avoiding their mounted machine guns. When you see a Soviet defensive position, look around for an open window or door, a hole in a wall, or even crates or a vehicle that will boost you over a wall or into an upper level. There's almost always an easier way.

Attack at a Distance

Sniper rifles are great for thinning the enemy ranks before a big assault. If there's no way around a defensive position, engage at long range if you can. Molotov cocktails and frag grenades work well for hitting enemies behind cover. If the enemy has snipers, try to sneak up behind them, kill 'em, and use their sniper rifles against their comrades. Also use aimed fire with



■ Memo to our Soviet occupiers: Don't build your bunkers right below gun emplacements.

assault rifles, pistols, or other weapons and target foes as they peek out from cover. By picking off one enemy at a time, you can clear out a position before you even get near it.

Use of Cover

Cover is vital. Running down the middle of the street is the quickest way to get yourself killed. Instead, crouch down and hide behind crates, dumpsters, and low walls. Avoid using cars and trucks as cover—if they take enough damage they'll explode, killing or wounding anyone nearby. If you must move across an open area, run; you're harder to hit when in motion. Don't stop to return fire until you're in a (relatively) safe spot.

Leadership

Leadership plays an important role in tactics. You'll command up to 12 fighters,

and with a little practice, you can almost complete missions without firing a shot.

Though you can give only three commands, they accomplish a number of tasks. The Follow order instructs your teammates to stay with you, like bodyguards, but they'll still engage the enemy. If you want them to stay put, especially behind cover, issue the Defend order. You can also use the Defend order to have one of your soldiers man a



■ GBA

SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

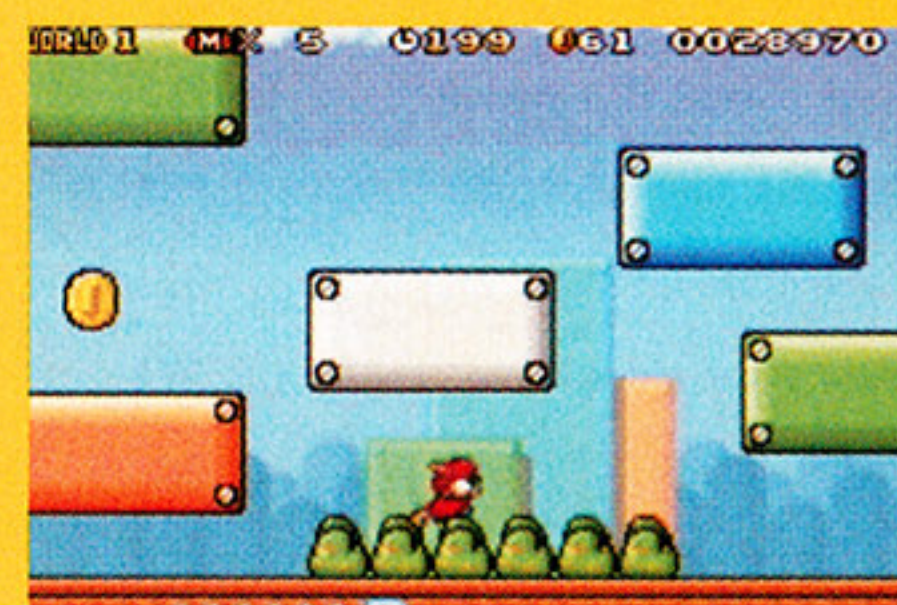
Power Extreme!

See the two flimsy cards that fell out of the game's packaging? Well, one of them is a power-up card. It's got a Super Leaf on it. Obtain an e-Reader by any means necessary, connect everything up, swipe the card, and marvel at the Super Leaf that has magically appeared in your inventory. Now do it again! And again! And again! And...well, you get the idea. Every card with a power-up can be swiped infinite times for increased sanity during the difficult parts of the game.



Whistle for It

Still wondering about the Coin Ship and White Mushroom House? Then you've come to the wrong place: There's no room to tell you about them. Instead, why not relax by locating one of three Warp Whistles in the first or second World? One is in World 1-3; press Down for five seconds on the large white block, then run right, behind the scenery. If you use a Whistle on World 1, you can access 2, 3, or 4. If you use a Whistle on Worlds 2 to 6, you can access 5, 6, or 7. Whistle on World 8, though, and you must return to World 8 only.



TRICKS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIMA GAMES

Is there really a better time to sprint down to your local gaming emporium, sidestep past the screaming kids at the *Soul Calibur 2* demo machine, and slam down the cash for an official and lavishly produced Prima guide to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Crimson Skies*, *WWE Raw 2*, *WWE WrestleMania XIX*, or *Freedom Force*? No. No, there isn't.



machine gun—aim at the gun and give the Defend order. The Attack/Scout order is extremely useful; while aiming, order your team to move to a point under your reticule to scout that area. Scouting is vital to prevent ambushes—send a single fighter ahead, around a corner, or into a building to scope out the scene. You can then recall the fighter (with the Follow command) or order the rest of your team in to fight. Keep at least one fighter with you for protection, especially if you are concentrating on ordering your team around (after giving your team an order, just tap the Follow button and one fighter will return to stay with you). For all commands, tapping the button issues the order to a single fighter, while holding it down orders your entire team.

Multiplayer Tactics

If you want to win, practice. Start off by learning the maps. Plug in a second controller, start up a multiplayer game by yourself, and then explore. Note where weapons are hidden, the quickest routes to bunkers, and passages or cover that will allow you to approach bunkers from the rear. Once you know the lay of the land, become proficient at commanding your team. Try ordering them to take control of a bunker while you are at another location. With this tactic, you can send half your team to capture one bunker while you go for another or the flagpole. Finally, practice using the weapons. Knowing how to accurately throw Molotov cocktails and grenades is vital and allows you to attack without exposing yourself to enemy fire.

■ Xbox

WWE RAW 2: RUTHLESS AGGRESSION

Large, recently shaven (with the exception of A-Train), sinewy men with a flamboyant dress sense—an apt description of the fashionista in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and the tight-spandex-trunk-wearing freak shows appearing every Monday on Spike "Lee" TV. With the all-new, all-cool Season mode in the Road to WrestleMania XIX portion of the game, we thought we'd check out just what evil machinations your sweaty man-beast can get up to during those hours between matches—aside from applying fake tans and various shiny oils.

1. Sweet Fanny Adams

Your Superstar takes absolutely no action during the match and neither gains nor loses anything.

2. Rest

Your Superstar hangs out backstage and relaxes. If he is not approached by another Superstar, he recovers 30 Vitality points. If he is approached by a Superstar and has a friendly conversation, his Popularity and Vitality increase by modest amounts. If your Superstar is approached by a hostile Superstar, however, the two behemoths have a short fight. If your Superstar loses, he loses a great deal of Vitality. Even if he wins, he loses a bit of Vitality. ➤

■ Xbox

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

The Voice Is Strong With This One

That whiny Carth getting on your nerves? Need to make Jolie a little more jolly? Then slap your main controller into port one, plug a second controller into port four, and stab the white or black buttons on the port-four controller to amuse yourself immensely—by changing the characters' vocal pitch.

Takes a Malaking and Keeps on Ticking

Before your final showdown with Malak, stop at the doors outside the room, make sure there are joypads in ports one and four, then press the left and right triggers and Y on *both* controllers. Your Jedi



unsheathes his or her popsicle if you're doing this correctly. Now head in and chat with Malak for a fabulous "other" ending.

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► 3. Surprise Attack

To Surprise Attack another Superstar, instigate a backstage brawl with your target. If you win, you take out a great deal of his or her Vitality, which is the perfect way to soften up an opponent before a match. However, surprise attacks can backfire—if you lose the backstage brawl, you're the one on the short end of the Vitality stick. Sometimes you just won't be able to find your rival Superstar, and you'll suffer a very modest Vitality loss as a result.

4. Interference

When you choose to attempt Interference, you risk some of your Vitality for the chance to interfere in a Superstar's match. This is a good way to help out an ally or just get some payback on a Superstar that you have a grudge against. A successful attempt costs 20 Vitality points but gains you two Popularity points, and you get to control your Superstar as he interferes in the match. Sometimes, however, pesky arena security keeps you from reaching the ring, in which case you accomplish nothing and lose five Vitality points for looking painfully silly.

5. Steal

During a match, you can choose to steal something from a Superstar's locker. A high Luck score helps your chances. If you're successful, however, you lose more Vitality and Popularity than if you had failed. Stealing is a great way to unlock hidden items, such as new options in Create a Superstar mode, Superstar entrance videos, and additional points for your created Superstars' parameters.

6. Set Trap

Setting a trap for a Superstar is the easiest way to deprive him of some Vitality, but even a successful attempt costs you half the Vitality that the attacked Superstar lost. You don't have to actually fight the Superstar, though, so it's a good way to take a big-name Superstar down a peg or two before a match.

7. Manipulate

Manipulate a Superstar to trick him or her into attacking another wrassler. You lose 10 points of Vitality on a successful attempt, but the attacked Superstar loses 20. The Superstar who does the attacking doesn't lose any Vitality.

8. Encourage

Encouraging a Superstar risks a small amount of your own Vitality (five points) to increase theirs if you are successful. Sometimes, the Superstar blows you off, in which case you lose 10 Vitality points but increase the friendliness between the two Superstars. If you can't find the Superstar backstage, you lose five Vitality points.

9. Call Out

Question a Superstar's intestinal fortitude by calling him or her out. Standing in the middle of the ring, your Superstar challenges another Superstar to come on down. If the challenged Superstar comes out, you lose 10 Vitality points but earn five Popularity points; the Superstar you challenged also earns two Popularity points. Sometimes a different Superstar responds to the Call Out—this costs you 10 Vitality points but gives you two Popularity Points and your opponent one Popularity point, as well as increases the hostility between the two Superstars. It also gives you a "Call Out Card" that results in a match between you and the Superstar who responded to your challenge. If no one comes out, you lose five Vitality points and nothing else happens—aside from the yelling, the name calling, and the strutting.



10. Complain

Complaining to another Superstar costs you 10 Vitality points but increases the hostility between you and the other Superstar if you are successful. If you fail to find the Superstar backstage, you lose five Vitality points.

11. Select Manager

Choose Select Manager if you want to have an ally outside of the ring who can watch your back. Superstars with high Charisma who look for Superstars with compatible Alignments have more luck getting them to be managers. A successful attempt nets you a new manager. An unsuccessful attempt costs 10 Vitality points. If you can't find the Superstar backstage, you lose five Vitality points.

12. Break Up

If you're tired of your manager, show him or her the door. This sends the two of you on your separate ways, but be warned—many a WWE feud has been sparked by a jilted manager!

■ Xbox

CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE

Planes Up, Tallyhos Down

You can fly the plane out of the hangar? That's a good start, but it doesn't cut it when you have a pack of bogies on your six. Until you can pull off a loop-de-loop in your sleep, you had better study up.

Attack Runs

On an attack run, approach from the rear and fire off all your weaponry. Attack runs are the preferred method of combat if you have only a few enemies to worry about or think you can get a sneak attack off.

Don't attack a zeppelin from the side; that's where all the guns are, silly. Look for the best angle on the target—which is usually from behind or from a better defensive position, like between buildings that shield you from surrounding enemies or return fire. If possible, ride the brake on the approach to give you more time to inflict damage. Against bigger threats, hold down your primary weapon *and* launch your secondary weapons. That's the old one-two punch.

As you pass the target, switch to full turbo and high-tail it away from return-fire range ASAP. When the enemy blip reaches the edge of your radar, turn and attack again.



Antiattack Runs

Those rotten Dos Muertos and Die Spinne villains also use attack runs. But they get so caught up in the moment that they're easy pickings for a wily flyer.

Lead your fire in front of an enemy on an attack run. During missions in which you must guard a zeppelin or key military objective, enemies will often line up for attack runs at your charge. Unless the object you are guarding is on its last legs, let the bad guys line up all they want. While they pour down on the target, trigger a steady stream of gunfire directly in front of an incoming plane. If you lead your enemy just right, they'll blow up halfway to the target.

The Tight Turn

Flying out in the open air is a breeze, but if you're dogfighting in an enclosed area, the tight turn is your new best friend. It keeps you moving (making you harder to hit) and stops you from crashing into obstacles. Once you get good at tight turns, you can fire at the same target over and over again. It may be kind of boring, but it works. ►

Special Maneuvers	Controller Position
Barrel Roll Left	Click down. Left stick left, right stick right, then release.
Barrel Roll Right	Click down. Left stick right, right stick left, then release.
Brake Stall	Click down. Left stick back, right stick forward, then left stick forward.
Double Barrel Roll Left	Click down. Left stick left, right stick right, then hold.
Double Barrel Roll Right	Click down. Left stick right, right stick left, then hold.
Double Snap Roll Left	Click down. Both sticks left then hold.
Double Snap Roll Right	Click down. Both sticks right then hold.
Fall Stall	Click down. Left stick back, right stick forward, then left stick back.
Immelman	Click down. Both sticks back.
Snap Roll Left	Click down. Both sticks left, then release.
Snap Roll Right	Click down. Both sticks right, then release.
Snap Turn	Click down. Left stick forward, right stick back.
Split Ess	Click down. Both sticks forward.
Wall Stall	Click down. Left stick back, right stick forward, then release.



VS.



What would you say if we told you there was a secret code that would let you play Xbox-exclusive *Spawn*, GC's *Link*, and PS2's *Heihachi* all on one system? That we were lying? Good, because we would be. But wait! We've got an *EGM* exclusive cheat that's almost as amazing....

Soul Calibur II (PS2) Change Weapons on the Fly!

Here's a code to let PS2 gamers mix and match virtually any character with any weapon in *Soul Calibur II*! You can even change to a completely different character's weapon in the middle of a battle! It's a long code, but it's worth it.

While playing the game, player one must pause, select the BGM Volume Option, and set the value from zero to 15, which will change the weapon that the current character is wielding. Don't change weapons while performing an attack, and don't select Necrid, because his character model is too large to work properly with the codes.

Enable Cheats (enter this first)

0E3C7DF21853E59E
EEAF0FBEBBCD635E2

Then enter all these, left column first

0EBE046EBCA99B83	0EBE046EBCA99B8B
CEA1CF10BCA99B84	CEA1CF10BCA99B90
0EBE046EBCA99B84	0EBE046EBCA99B8C
CEA1CF10BCA99B85	CEA1CF10BCA99B92
0EBE046EBCA99B85	0EBE046EBCA99B8D
CEA1CF10BCA99B86	CEA1CF10BCA99B95
0EBE046EBCA99B86	0EBE046EBCA99B8E
CEA1CF10BCA99B87	CEA1CF10BCA99B84
0EBE046EBCA99B87	0EBE046EBCA99B8F
CEA1CF10BCA99B88	CEA1CF10BCA99B9F
0EBE046EBCA99B88	0EBE046EBCA99B90
CEA1CF10BCA99B89	CEA1CF10BCA99B97
0EBE046EBCA99B89	0EBE046EBCA99B91
CEA1CF10BCA99B8E	CEA1CF10BCA99B98
0EBE046EBCA99B8A	0EBE046EBCA99B92
CEA1CF10BCA99B8F	CEA1CF10BCA99B99



GameShark whips out the big sword with *SC2* codes (PS2 only), and GBA *Final Fantasy* fans get *FF Tactics Advance* cheats.

Soul Calibur II (PS2)

Enable Cheats (enter this first)

F447B63E B66C4D16

Infinite Health P1

54D03468 96B44718 1923D624 932BB1F0

Infinite Health P2

54909468 94344558 1961D625 13AB91D0

Infinite Soul Charge P1

54D01628 96B44158 3933D635 03ABB1D0

Infinite Soul Charge P2

5490B668 94344518 1933D635 932BB1F0

Unlock All Locations

04101169 1434638A	04101169 143443AA
04101168 143443AA	04101169 143463AA
04101168 143463AA	

Unlock All Characters

04101068 1434430A	04101068 1434432A
04101068 1434630A	04101068 1434632A
04101069 1434430A	04101069 1434432A
04101069 1434630A	04101069 1434632A

Exclusive! Sudden Death Mode: Player 1

D452376A 14B457AA 24D866E8 16B747B9

Exclusive! Sudden Death Mode: Player 2

D452376A 14B457AA 2498C6E8 143745F9

Final Fantasy Tactics Advance (GBA)

You can spend hours upon hours leveling up and honing your juggling skills, or you can spend moments entering a few key cheat codes. The choice is yours.

Enable Cheats (enter this first)

92D83BB6F3AD A1B6EBF43D05
08A23E1D9A15

Infinite Clan Funds

D76D8D814068 87759D8145E7

No Battle Rules

81527741DF2B

All Clan Skills Maxed

04658ABCA929 DF9B1521DFB1

Have All Mission Items

7F8FC5EAD9B2 725E605EBFA8

Have Everything

765F505F3F8E	DF9B95A15F97
2B94A5BA8DB0	2CB5DEFF8D14
765FD0DF3FAA	DF9B15215FB3
FCA91E178A34	

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■ PS2, XB, GC

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

Secrets in a Half Shell

Our *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* code extravaganza kicks off with a kerpoww! Here's a long list of passwords (different for each platform, wouldn't

you know) that unlock a variety of cheats. Remember to use the password that corresponds with the system you're using to play the game.



Unlockable	Requirement	Password	Permanence
Casey Jones mode	Gather all Crystals in the <i>TMNT</i> GBA version	SRLMD (GC)	Automatic save
Splinter mode	Defeat Oroku Saki in Story mode	MSRLS (PS2), LLMSR (Xbox), LSLML (GC)	Automatic save
Alternate Leonardo costume	Defeat Shredder as Leonardo	LDMSR (PS2), RMMML (Xbox), RSLMD (GC)	Automatic save
Alternate Donatello costume	Defeat Shredder as Donatello	DDSMS (PS2), SRSMM (Xbox), RRSRL (GC)	Automatic save
Alternate Raphael costume	Defeat Shredder as Raphael	DMDML (PS2), LMSDD (Xbox), SLSMM (GC)	Automatic save
Alternate Michelangelo costume	Defeat Shredder as Michelangelo	RRLMD (PS2), DLDSM (Xbox), RLSLS (GC)	Automatic save
Playmates toy database	Collect all Makimonos	LSDRM (All Platforms)	Automatic save
Leonardo gains attacking power	Complete Dojo Stage 3 as Leonardo without being damaged	LMLSD (All Platforms)	Password activated/unsaved
Raphael gains attacking power	Complete Dojo Stage 3 as Raphael without being damaged	RDSRL (All Platforms)	Password activated/unsaved
Donatello gains attacking power	Complete Dojo Stage 3 as Donatello without being damaged	DRLDS (All Platforms)	Password activated/unsaved
Michelangelo gains defensive power	Complete Dojo Stage 3 as Michelangelo with being damaged	MSRMM (All Platforms)	Password activated/unsaved
Michelangelo gains unlimited fire shuriken, and recovery items are always pizza	Complete Challenge mode a second time (PS2, Xbox, and GC) or complete Hard difficulty on GBA version (GC only)	DRDSS (PS2), MRRSL (Xbox), MSSLD (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Leonardo gains unlimited shuriken	Complete Story mode as Splinter (PS2, Xbox, and GC) or complete Normal difficulty on GBA version (GC only)	SMRDM (PS2), MSSRD (Xbox), SSLDM (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Raphael's bandana becomes very long and the effect of power-ups doubles	Defeat Michelangelo as Michelangelo in Story mode (PS2, Xbox, and GC) or complete Easy difficulty on GBA version (GC only)	SLDSM (PS2), LRLMS (Xbox), LSMMS (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Michelangelo's bandana becomes longer and the effect of power-ups doubles	Complete Stage 5, Area 1 as Michelangelo without taking any recovery items after completing Story mode once	MMSLR (PS2), SMRDL (Xbox), RLMSM (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Donatello's bandana becomes longer and the effect of power-ups doubles	Complete Stage 2, Area 5 as Donatello without taking any recovery items after completing Story mode once	DMDRS (PS2), SMLLR (Xbox), MLSDS (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Leonardo's bandana becomes longer and the effect of power-ups doubles	Complete Stage 4, Area 3 as Leonardo without taking any recovery items after completing Story mode once	LLSLR (PS2), SLDDS (Xbox), RSDMM (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Raphael's bandana becomes longer and the effect of power-ups doubles	Complete Stage 3, Area 4 as Raphael without taking any recovery items after completing Story mode once	MSLLR (PS2), SRRLR (Xbox), RSSSR (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Donatello's bandana becomes shorter and his defense doubles	Complete Stage 4, Area 2 as Donatello without taking any recovery items after completing Story mode once	SSSMR (PS2), LLSMR (Xbox), MLMLS (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Leonardo's bandana becomes shorter and his defense doubles	Complete Stage 5, Area 2 as Leonardo without taking any recovery items after completing Story mode once	MRLLM (PS2), MLLSR (Xbox), LDSMS (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Michelangelo's bandana becomes shorter and his defense doubles	Complete Stage 1, Area 2 as Michelangelo without taking any recovery items after completing Story mode once	MRRML (PS2), MRLLD (Xbox), RLDDR (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Raphael's bandana becomes shorter and his defense doubles	Complete Stage 3, Area 3 as Raphael without taking any recovery items after completing Story mode once	LRMDS (PS2), LSMDR (Xbox), SDRML (GC)	Password activated/unsaved
Sound effects of hits change to an electrical sound	Complete Stage 4, Area 5 as any Turtle without being damaged	SMMRS (PS2), LSLSS (Xbox), DDDML (GC)	Password activated/unsaved



HIDDEN CHARACTERS REVEALED!

You know you want 'em—here's how to get 'em.

Character	Requirement	Character's Appearance in Game
Casey Jones	Complete Stage 1 as Raphael	Stage 1, Area 2
Evil Turtlebot	Complete Stage 3 as any of the Turtles	Stage 3, Area 5
Hun	Complete Stage 6 as Michelangelo	Stage 6, Area 6
Splinter	Complete Dojo Stage 3 as Leonardo	Dojo Stage 3
Shredder	Defeat Shredder as any of the Turtles	Stage 6, Area 7
Oroku Saki	Defeat Oroku Saki as any of the Turtles	Stage 6, Area 8
Yoshi Hamato	Complete the Challenge mode as any of the Turtles	Challenge mode boss



Turtle's Heads-up

When the holidays hit, the Turtles are quick to get in the mood. If you play the game on certain days of the year, the Turtles wear unusual costumes that match the holiday. Play on December 24th and 25th and the Turtles wear Santa Claus outfits. Enter the game on October 31st and the Turtles have pumpkin heads. Change the date on your system to one of these three days and start the game to see them in their wacky duds.



Totally Bonus

There are five bonus courses in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Here are the passcodes you'll need to unlock them:

- Course 1:** LSMMS
- Course 2:** SSLDM
- Course 3:** MSSLD
- Course 4:** SRLMD
- Course 5:** LSDRM



Unlock Challenge Mode

To unlock a one-on-one survival match against the game's various bosses, defeat Oroku Saki in Story mode. This is a hidden boss fight that's accessible only after you've completed the game with all four Turtles. ➤



■ PS2, XB, GC

LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING

Be the best Gandalf, Gimli, or other *Rings*-related character you can be with these codes, which will boost a given fighter's experience points by 1000. It's not much in the grand scheme of things, but you can use the code over and over. To activate the code, pause the game and then hold all the shoulder buttons (R1, R2, L1, L2 for PS2; left and right triggers for Xbox; left and right triggers for GC) while entering the appropriate button sequence.

Character	PS2 Code	Xbox Code	GC Code
Gimli	Circle, Circle, Triangle, X	B, B, Y, A	X, X, Y, A
Gandalf	Circle, Triangle, Up, Down	B, Y, Up, Down	X, Y, Up, Down
Frodo	Up, Triangle, Up, Down	Down, Y, Up, Down	Down, Y, Up, Down
Aragorn	Up, Square, Triangle, X	Up, X, Y, A	Up, B, Y, A
Sam	Triangle, X, Down, X	Y, A, Down, A	Y, A, Down, A
Legolas	X, Triangle, Up, X	A, Y, Up, A	A, Y, Up, A



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Secret Missions for Men in Tights

To finish up our wrestling doubleheader, here's the skinny on thwacking oiled-down hunks in the comfort of the secret Warehouse level of Revenge mode! When you defeat Vince McMahon in the WrestleMania XIX Hall, it is replaced with the Warehouse in the Revenge mode Mission menu. These six missions are additional fun challenges that you can play through. Finish them to unlock an additional playable boss character.



Mission #1

Goal: Use the ladder to grab more cases than your opponent!

Conditions for Completion: Several briefcases hang overhead. Use the ladder to reach and grab them.

Time Limit: 5 minutes

Enemies Faced: Worker

Treat this mission like a Ladder match with several prizes hanging above the ground. That means you need to beat down the worker, place the ladder directly underneath a swinging case, and climb up quickly to grab your prize. Do not waste your time wondering who might have bothered to affix those briefcases to the ceiling—that path leads to madness, and madness leads to poor hygiene.

Mission #2

Goal: Climb the pole and grab the case before time runs out.

Conditions for Completion: Use the pole to reach the case swinging high overhead within the time limit.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Enemies Faced: Security Officer

Despite the fact that it's a rather tall pole, there's only one weak enemy standing in the way of your success, so this mission is pretty simple. Of course, if someone had greased the pole, it'd be a different story.



Mission #3

Goal: Climb the chains and grab the case before time runs out.

Conditions for Completion: Use the swinging chains to reach the case within the time limit.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Enemies Faced: Worker

Moving chains are harder to navigate than a single pole, but otherwise, this is the exact same mission as #3. Use the Y button to swing from chain to chain. The best way to reach the case is to watch the chains as they move and climb up one that's heading toward the case.

Mission #4

Goal: Use the ladder and grab the case before time runs out.

Conditions for Completion: Fight off a random Superstar and a Security Officer Ladder-match-style to reach the case hanging high above the ground.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Enemies Faced: Random Superstar, Security Officer

Treat this mission like a Handicap Ladder match. Knock the wind out of your opponents, set up the ladder, and grab that case. But watch out: The metal grating below the case can be smashed through if you perform too many power moves on it! Falling through the grate is an instant mission failure and a devastating social faux pas.



Mission #5

Goal: You've been challenged to a little friendly competition.

Conditions for Completion: Use the ladder to reach three cases before your opponent does.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Enemies Faced: Random Superstar

Like previous missions, this is essentially a Ladder match, where the Superstar who snags the most cases at the end of the time limit is the winner. Use your Ladder match skills to win—knock your opponent silly, set up the ladder on the metal grating at the top of the stairs, and snag case after case as they swing by!



Mission #6: Boss Fight

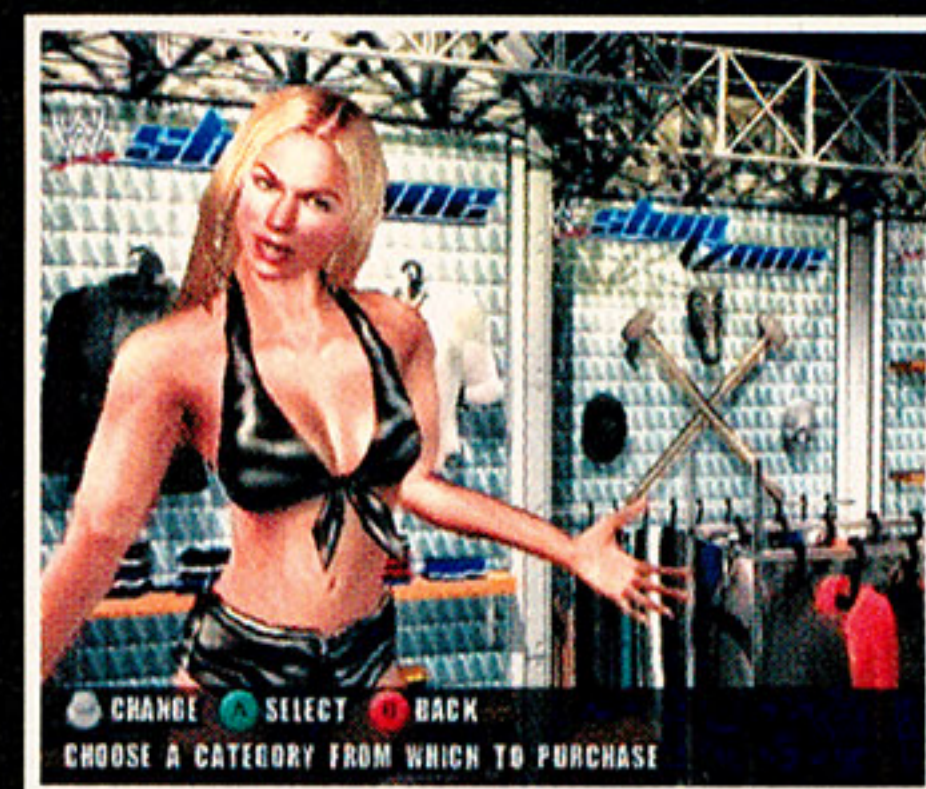
Goal: Get the case within the time limit.

Conditions for Completion: Ascend the level and climb the pole to reach the case, which is swinging from a chain, before time runs out.

Time Limit: 10 minutes

Enemies Faced: Security Officer, Champ Bomber Head

Although you're facing two opponents (and one of them is the boss, Champ Bomber Head), this is basically the same mission as all of the other Warehouse missions, just a bit more challenging. Clearing Mission #6 unlocks Champ Bomber Head as a playable character for Exhibition matches.



ShopZone

So, you've earned tons of cash in Revenge mode, you've unlocked all of the hidden characters and stages, but you still want more? Well, that's what ShopZone is for. Here, you can use your hard-earned Revenge cash to unlock new Create parts for your Superstar, as well as more moves, more weapons, more entrance features, and more Global Ability points.

Parts

From the Parts submenu of the ShopZone menu, you can purchase new Create parts for your created Superstars, from hairstyles to spandex-based ring attire. If you see a "?" in the Appearance submenus while creating a Superstar, it's because that option is still locked away in the ShopZone. Purchase it to unlock it.

Entrances

The Entrances submenu of the ShopZone menu has various options for a created Superstar's entrance. Choose from Animations (the way a Superstar moves during his entrance) or Effects (camera views, pyrotechnics, and other production effects).

Moves

In the Moves submenu, you'll find unlockable individual moves, as well as move templates of existing Superstars that allow you to use all of that Superstar's moves for your own Superstar. If you've been looking for that Shining Wizard, here it is!

Weapons and Ability Points

From this submenu, you can unlock new weapons, which will then appear in your matches and Revenge missions. You can also purchase Global Ability points at \$300 a pop.

THE KING OF FIGHTERS
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THE KING OF FIGHTERS
2001™

THE KING OF FIGHTERS

THE SAGA CONTINUES

episode
6

episode
7

The wait is over. Now The King of Fighters, Episodes 6 and 7, are both here. The sequel, The King of Fighters 2000, plus the final chapter of The Tale of NESTS saga, The King of Fighters 2001, equals fierce 2D action-fighting on 2 DVDs! Duke it out like never before in this special 2-in-1 pack exclusively for the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system.

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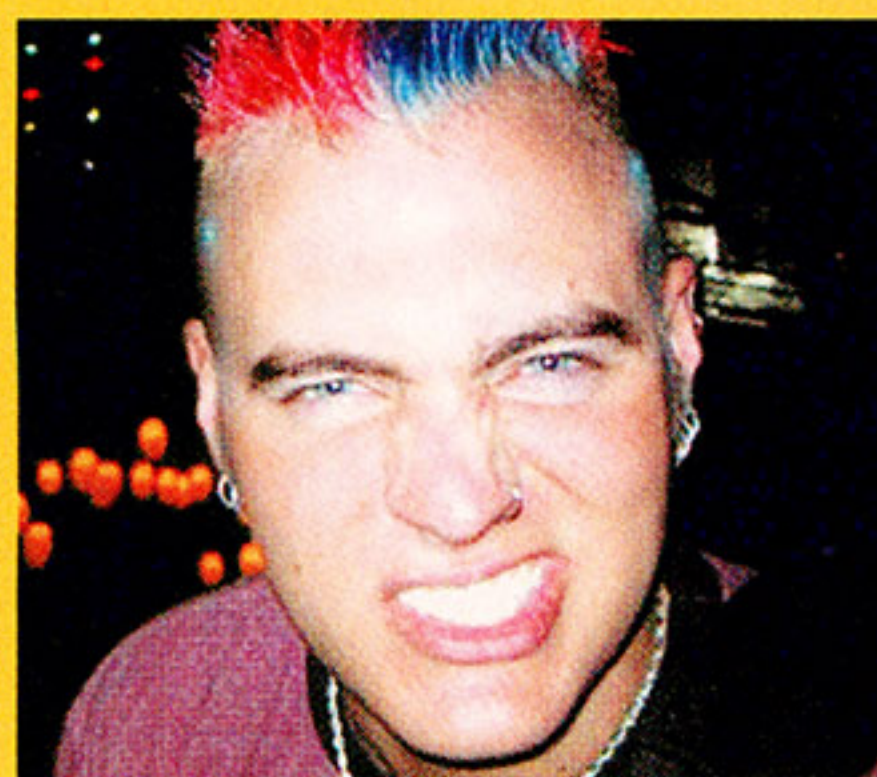
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THE REST OF THE CRAP

Seanbaby reviews bad games for our sick pleasure

sound off



LOSING TOUCH

When normal people walk into a videogame store, their eyes filter out certain types of games—games, for example, that begin with “Dinotopia.” This is an instinct nature is kind enough to wire into consumers at birth. Thanks to my job reviewing bottom-of-the-barrel games, though, I no longer have the luxury of that instinct. When I walk into the store, I don’t even see the game where the female hero wears tiny camouflaged Band-Aids across her nipples while fighting space demons. All I see is the game where the female hero wears a frilly gown to the prom while she out-dances a magic koala to learn multiplication. If the news pundits are right and videogames really do affect us, I’ve got to be at least 70 percent princess by now. —Seanbaby

CHARLIE’S ANGELS



GC • Ubisoft — Do you have a terrible job that forces you to do the same repetitive action for hours? Maybe you’re stuffing envelopes or working an assembly line in a Turkish baby factory. If so, this game is a lot like your job, but your role has been assigned to three girls desperate to show the player what they look like naked.

I was actually sick of this game before I played it, and I have two theories on how that was possible. One, the 17 million fights I was about to have against the same dock worker were going to be so boring that the future actually had to channel some of the monotony back to the current time stream for our safety. And

two, I...you know, I got sidetracked and forgot my second theory, since this game really does have a lot of partially to almost totally exposed breasts, and that seemed more important than my videogame time/space science.

Bottom Line: In this game, you battle the same family of identical zilliontuplets in order to find the stolen Statue of Liberty. Now just imagine how great it is to unlock a bad cut-scene advancing *that* story along.

SHREK: REEKN’ HAVOC



GBA • TDK Mediactive — About 20 minutes into playing *Reekin’ Havoc*, I was interrupted by the muffled sound of a little girl’s voice begging, “Kill me...please kill me.” I called the police, and they told me that the sound, get this, WAS COMING FROM ME. This game is the kind of licensed garbage that crawls inside your darkest fears and lays wolfman eggs. This spastic disaster is like a greatest-hits album of bad game clichés: a lame licensed character, inept graphics, unresponsive controls, and level design so boring that I thought I might have been renewing my car insurance. It’s a failure on a grand scale.

On the other hand, I think it’s possible that the game’s bosses (like Bad Pinocchio and Fake Peter Pan) were thought up by people pretending to be morons for comical reasons. But now that I think about it some more, that kind of irrational and desperate optimism indicates that this game has destroyed at least some of my mind.

Bottom Line: Anyone who can sit through this game for more than a half hour could look upon the hoary flames of the devil himself and laugh.

DINOTOPIA: THE SUNSTONE ODYSSEY



Xbox, GC • TDK Mediactive — During the 2003 E3 games expo, I wandered through

the convention to spiritually prepare myself for what I’d be forced to play in the coming months. Thanks in part to my head looking like a tropical bird, one of the *Dinotopia* developers recognized me near his game and snuck up to joke, “You’ll probably be reviewing this one in a few months!” And I have to say, the guy might not make good videogames, but he’s totally excellent at telling the future.

So buddy, I hope you still have a sense of humor about it, because your terrible game took all the excitement of nature’s prehistoric fury and squeezed it into frilly panties. I thought it would have been about hitting dinosaurs with sticks, and the lengthy training sequence showing me how to use my one attack button certainly supported that theory, so you can imagine how disappointed I was when an hour and a half later, I was still not fighting anything. I did meet a lot of fruity dinosaurs with massively fake Scottish accents who needed my help finding their missing picnic baskets, and one of them even told me, “The harvest was good this year!”

Bottom Line: If Cretaceous-era monsters were raised by Rainbow Brite and their greatest enemy were a ballet dancer with a golf club, this would be the most accurate historical re-creation ever.

INTERNATIONAL KARATE PLUS



GBA • AIA — There was a time when martial-arts games tried to let you do 200 moves with one button. This meant that for the first 10 to 12 months of playing it, your character jerked back and forth clumsily while the computer player kicked your face in the ass. *International Karate Plus* brings that back. The manual assures players that with practice, they will one day get their guy to do something other than cartwheel and lose head blood, but to be honest, I can’t see anyone making this a priority in their lives.

For people who like bad fighting games, though, and are tired of playing imaginary karate against careless button

mashers, this is your thinking-man’s fighting game. If, however, you really are a thinking man, you already know that the chances of finding someone else with an *International Karate Plus* cartridge is like hoping to find someone else who likes to dress up like a penguin and have sex in an Old West setting. So if that’s true, stop reading and contact me immediately. Must be comfortable around livestock and trick ropin’, and please, no real penguins.

Bottom Line: If the game’s genius tagline “Karate that really kicks!” doesn’t give you an indication of the thoughtfulness and effort that went into this game, then welcome to our planet, confused visitor from the stars. 🌌

classic crap

HOLLYWOOD SQUARES

To make watching celebrities answer trivia questions even more exciting, the 8-bit NES version of *Squares* features fictional celebrities even hotter than Hollywood’s hotties—swoon over Mike, Peg, Beth, and, get ready for this...Daz!





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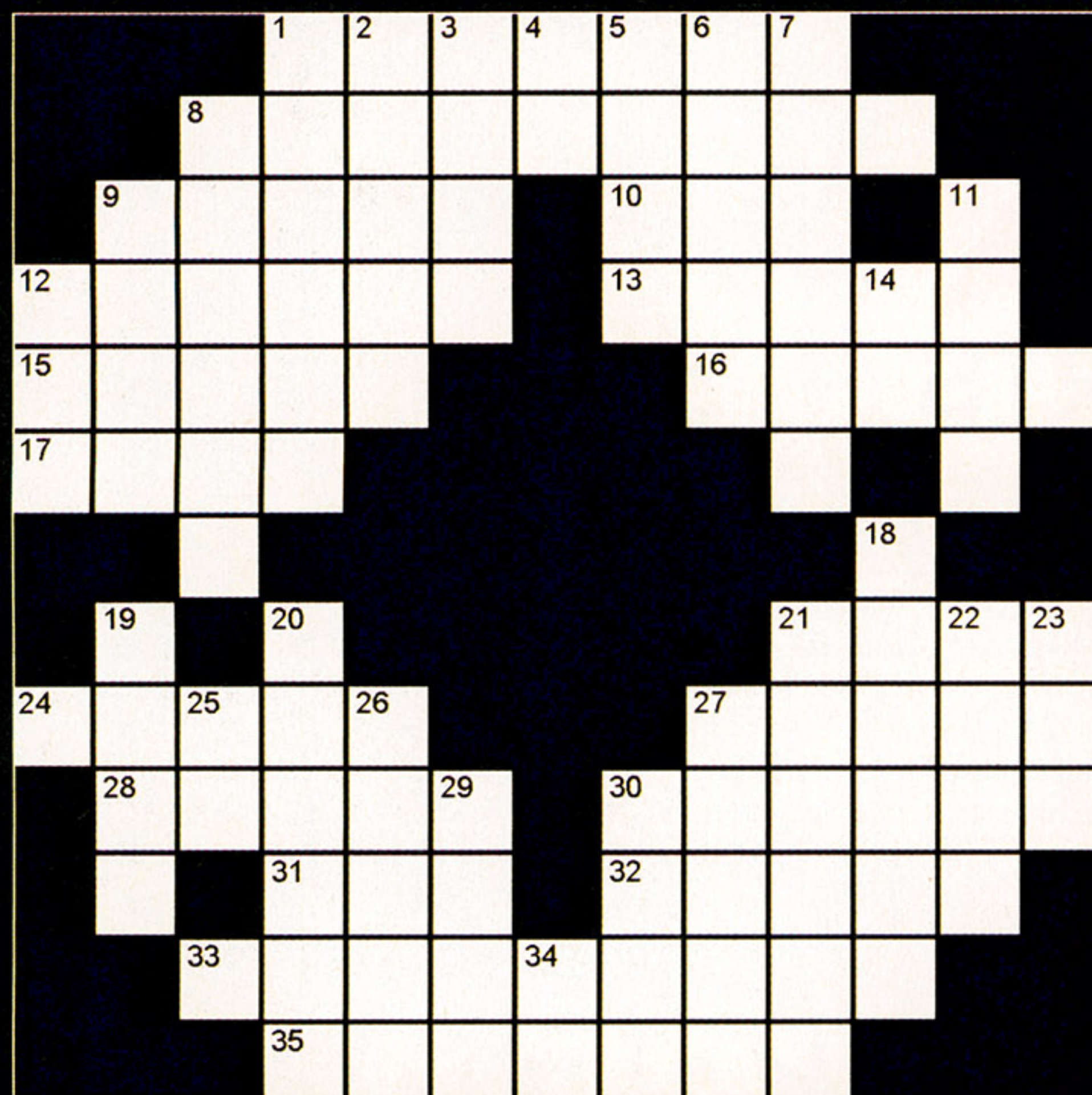
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TOLKIEN-ISM



(Solution on page 252)



ACROSS

1. Frodo or Bilbo
8. Like *Soul Calibur 2*'s Lizardman
9. Princess Zelda's *Wind Waker* alias
10. *Ms. Pac-Man* cut-scene
12. *Metal Gear Solid* Psycho
13. Development, for one, in a game's life cycle
15. Chip maker involved in Phantom console
16. *The Matrix* videogame prefix
17. *Colony Wars* (PS1) bad guy
21. Console DVD-player menus
24. How you'll never find Frodo and Sam in the *LOTR* series
27. Like *Silent Hill*'s atmosphere
28. Unit of measure for the One Ring's weight?
30. What the *Resident Evil Zero* train does, eventually
31. *NCAA Final Four 2001* Oklahoma school (abbrv.)
32. What Pac-Men look like when stretched to fit a 16:9 (widescreen) TV?
33. *Lord of the Rings* PS2 title
35. Like most enemies hit by *Zelda* Link's boomerang

DOWN

1. *Street Fighter II*, compared to *Street Fighter*
2. *Ninja Turtles*' reporter pal
3. *Vice City* or *III* (abbrv.)
4. Dan Hibiki's (*Street Fighter Alpha*) karate suit
5. 1/200 of an Indy race
6. Like the market for PS2's *Mister Mosquito*
7. *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*' little devils
8. A game you keep for two nights before taking back
9. Enemies of *Green Army Men*
11. *LOTR* battleground Helm's _
12. Frequency developers' alma mater
14. NES' nightmarish *Elm* (abbrv.)
18. You'll find these painted on walls in *Eternal Darkness*
19. Black and white bars on the back of game boxes
20. Legolas' ammunition
21. Jolie's *Tomb Raider II* boyfriend Butler
22. *Shining Force* on Saturn and *Final Fantasy* on SNES
23. Button opposite "Start" on most controllers (abbrv.)
25. Might benefit *Virtua Fighter*'s Shun Di? (abbrv.)
26. Like *Persona 2*'s cards
27. Palindrome *Pokémon*
29. Him's outfit in *Powerpuff Girls* GBA game
30. Up, in most flight sims
34. Like an Xbox when the power light's green

FREE CONSOLES!

Need a system? We'll hook you up

Purchasing *one* new console is sure to empty most of our piggy banks. Trying to scrounge up enough cash for two or three is almost ludicrous. We feel your pain, which is why *Electronic Gaming Monthly* is graciously taking out its wallet and buying five lucky gamers the console of their choice, plus three games each. Simply go to <http://giveaway.egmmag.com> and tell us which console you don't own. Five lucky winners will be randomly selected to receive the console of their choice—on us!

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2. Fill out the entry form and tell us which console you don't own.

All entries received by December 7, 2003, will then be entered into a drawing for the prizes. Only one entry per person is accepted.

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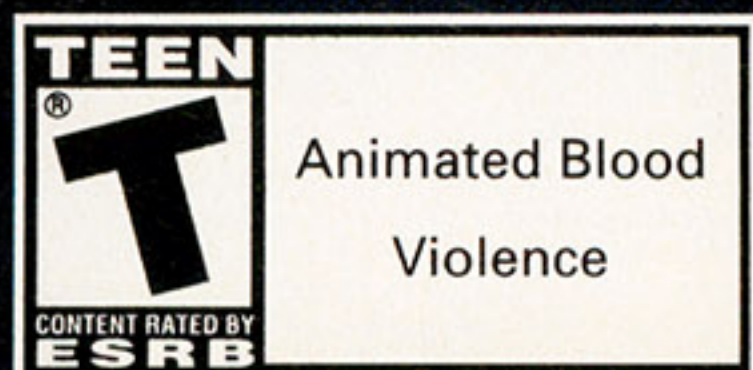
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PlayStation 2





NEXT MONTH: JAN. 2004 • ISSUE #174

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THE
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ISSUE

FEATURES

The only magazine with three independent reviewers for each game brings you the ultimate gamers' holiday buyers' guide. We sort the medalists from the bad apples in this season's bumper crop, and we rate a thousand releases already on store shelves. Also, you won't want to miss "Play Money," where we stalk game developers for an inside look at their lavish lifestyles...and robot factories. Plus, everyone's favorite crappy-game connoisseur Seanbaby attends a cosplay parade—in costume. He'll ridicule dorks. He'll try to pick up chicks. Hilarity will ensue.

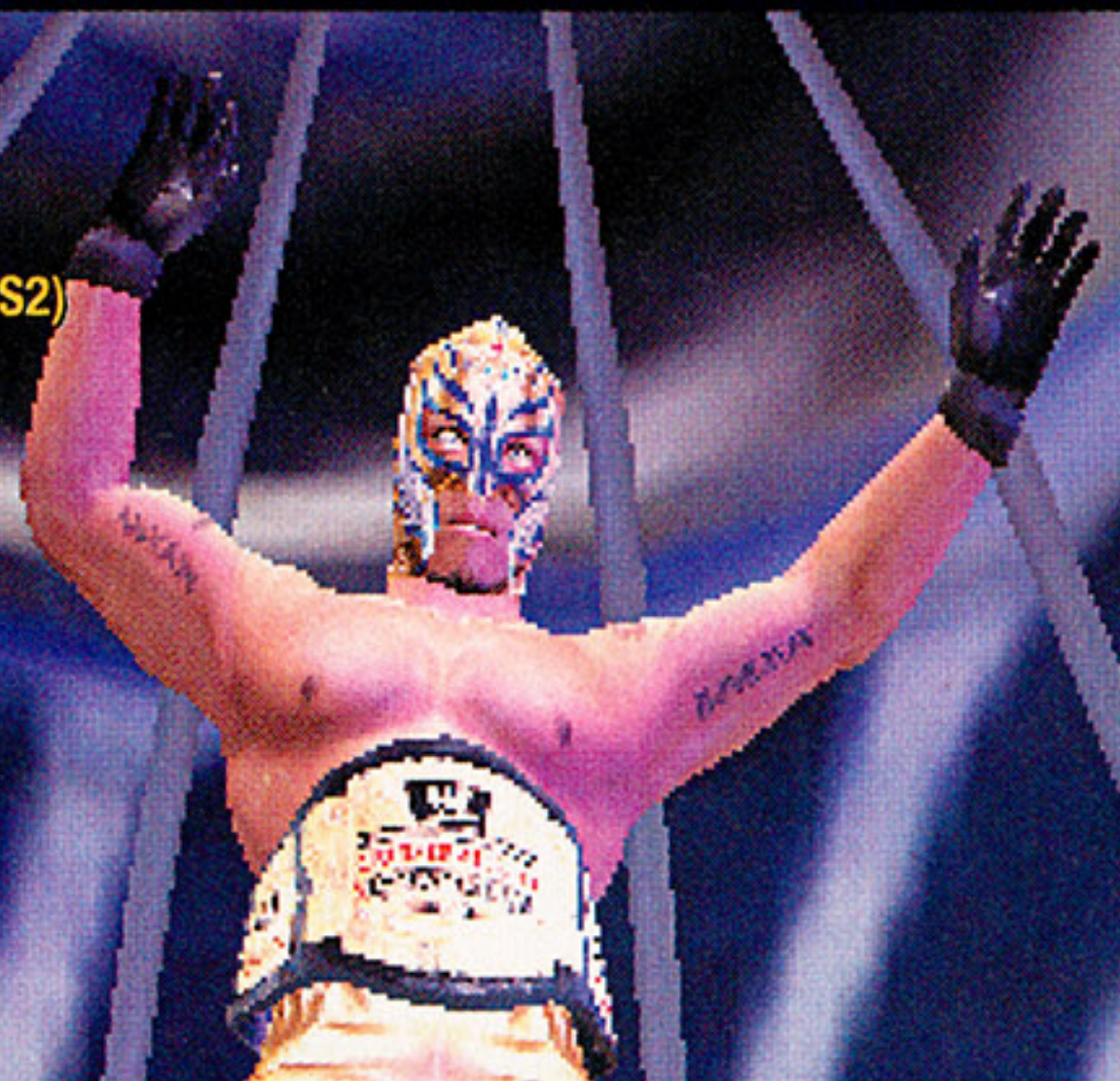


PREVIEWS

- Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow (PS2, Xbox, GC)
- Ninja Gaiden (Xbox)
- Maximo vs. Army of Zin (PS2)
- Gran Turismo 4 (PS2)
- Sonic Heroes (PS2, Xbox, GC)

REVIEWS

- WWE Smackdown: Here Comes the Pain (PS2)
- The Sims: Bustin' Out (PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA)
- Rainbow Six 3 (Xbox)
- Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga (GBA)
- 1080° Avalanche (GC)



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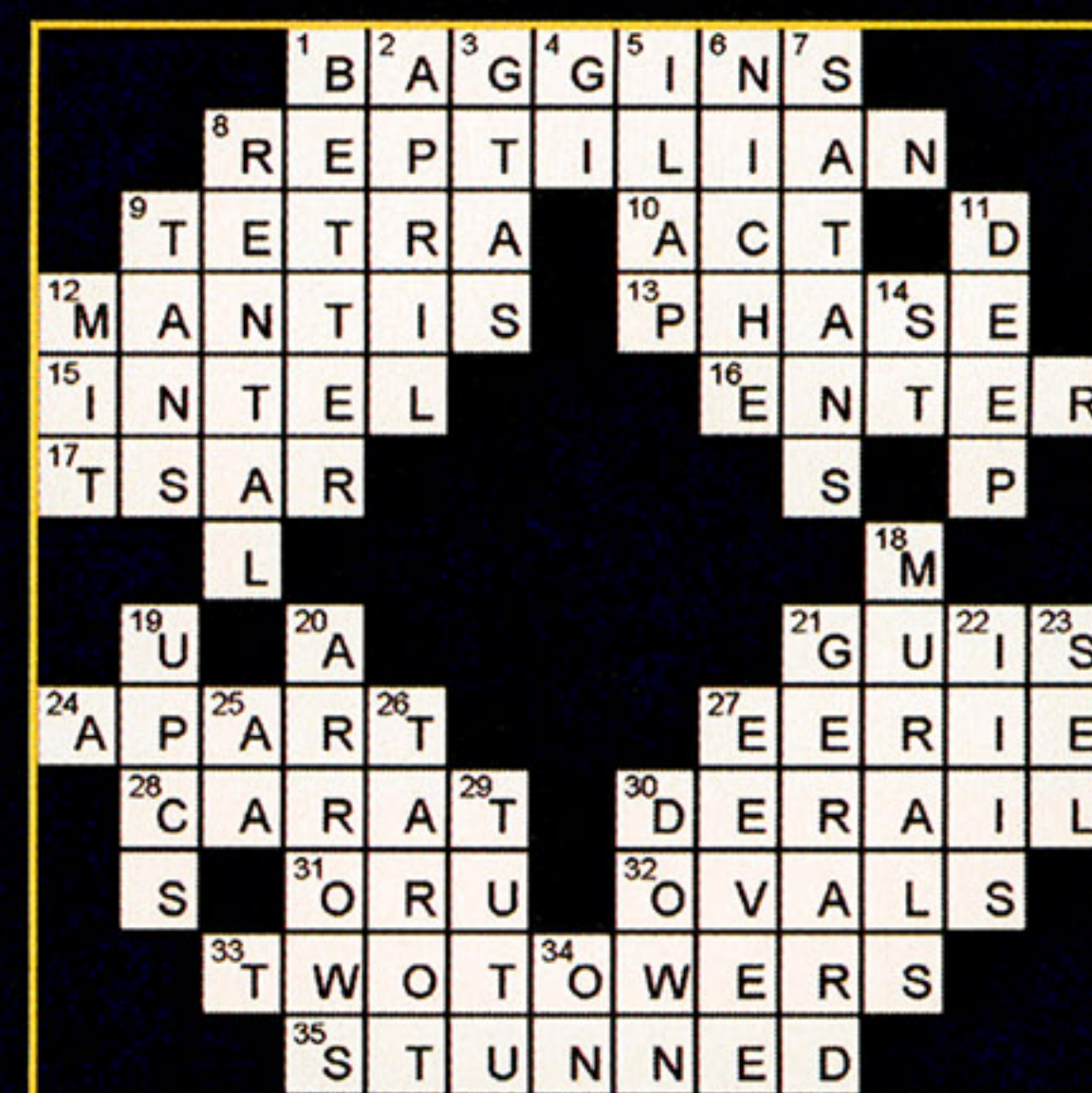
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ANSWERS TO
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CROSSWORD
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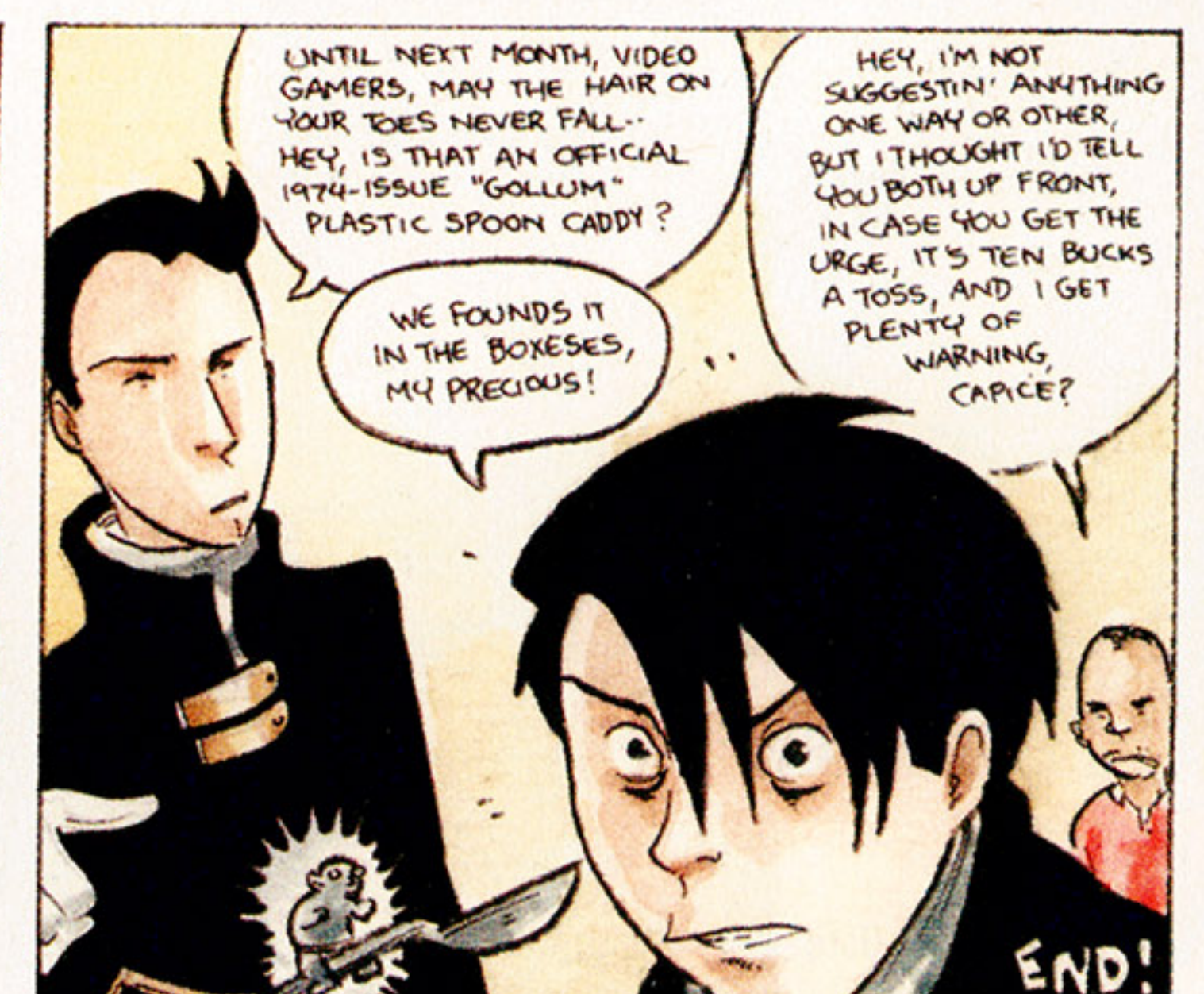
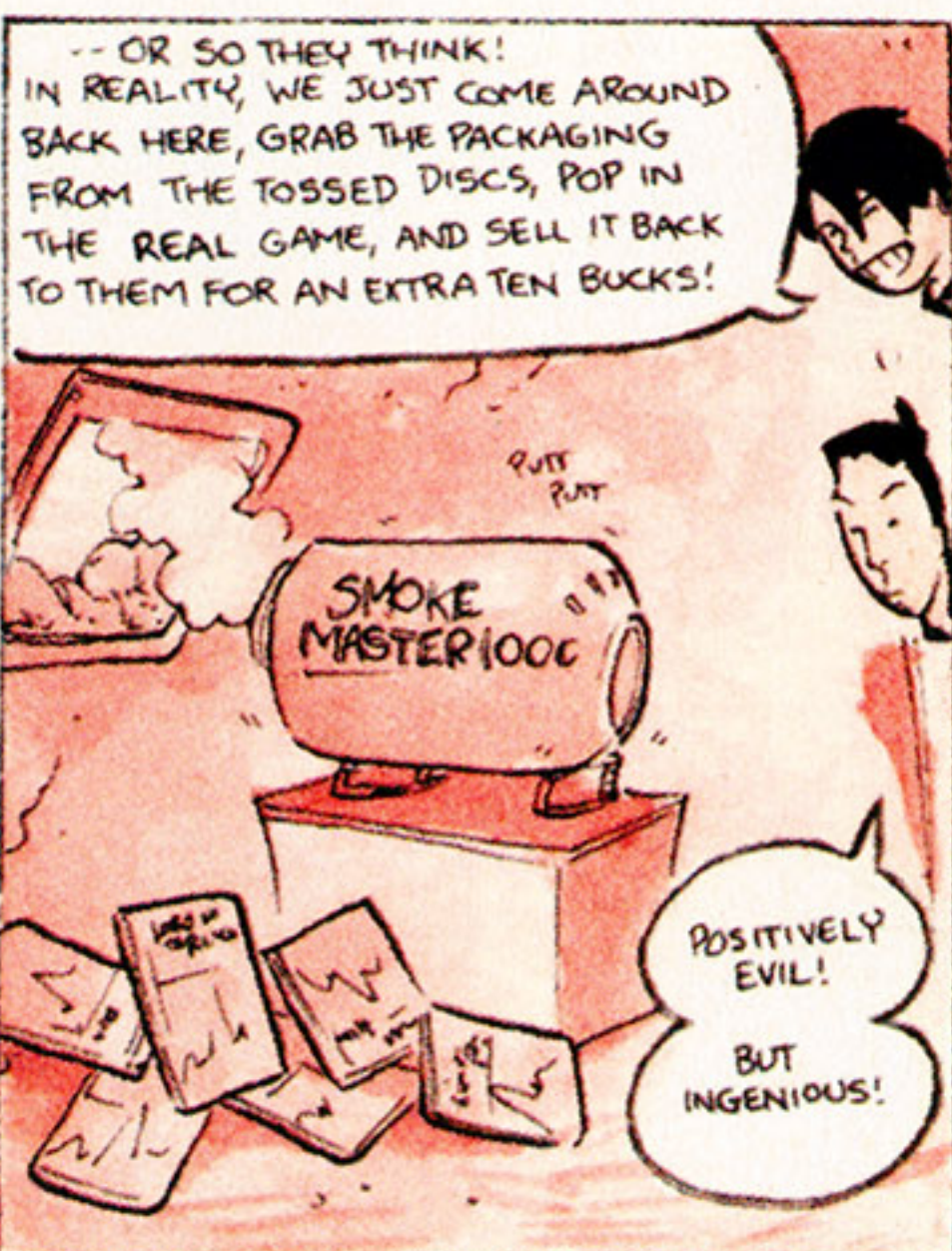
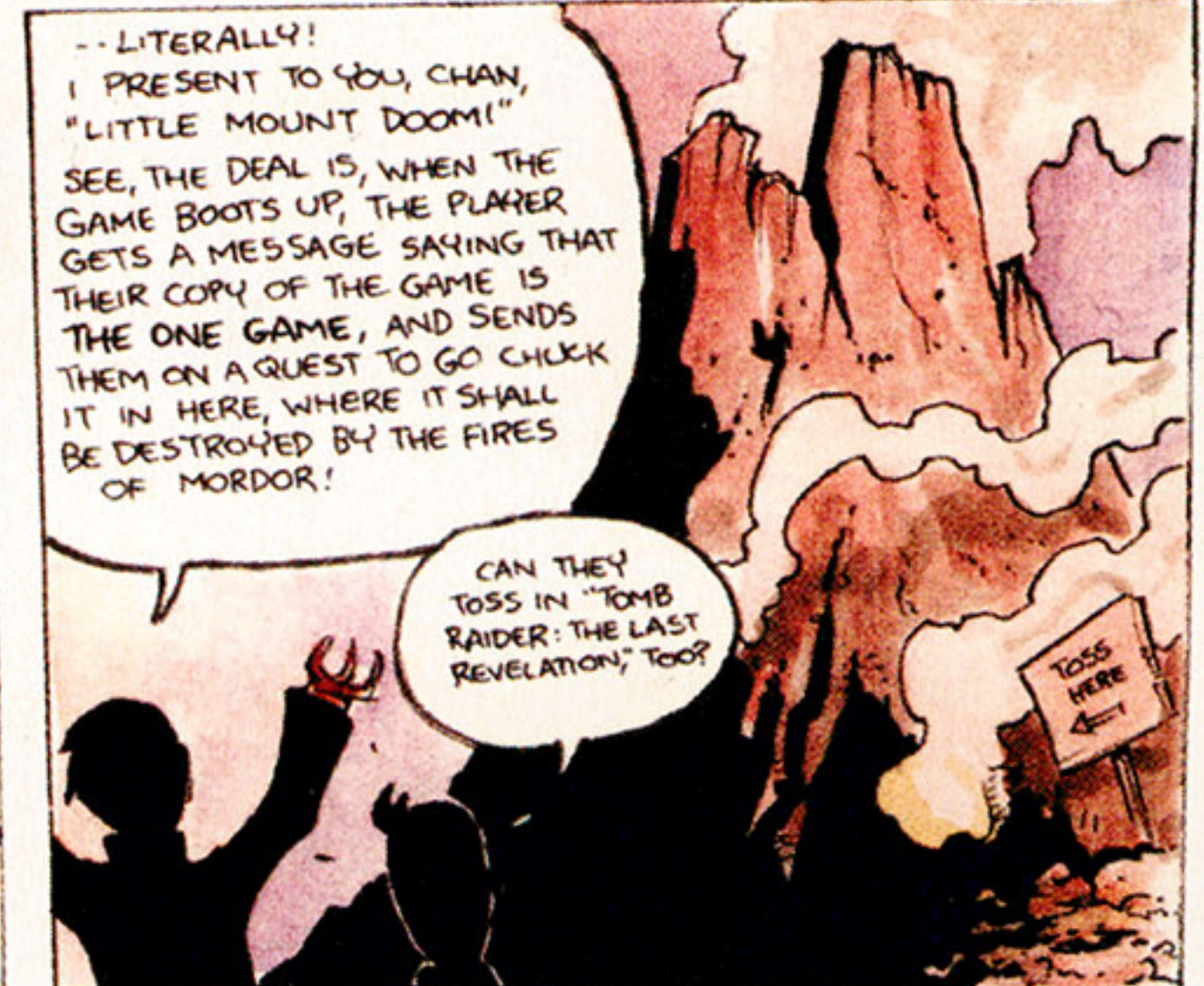
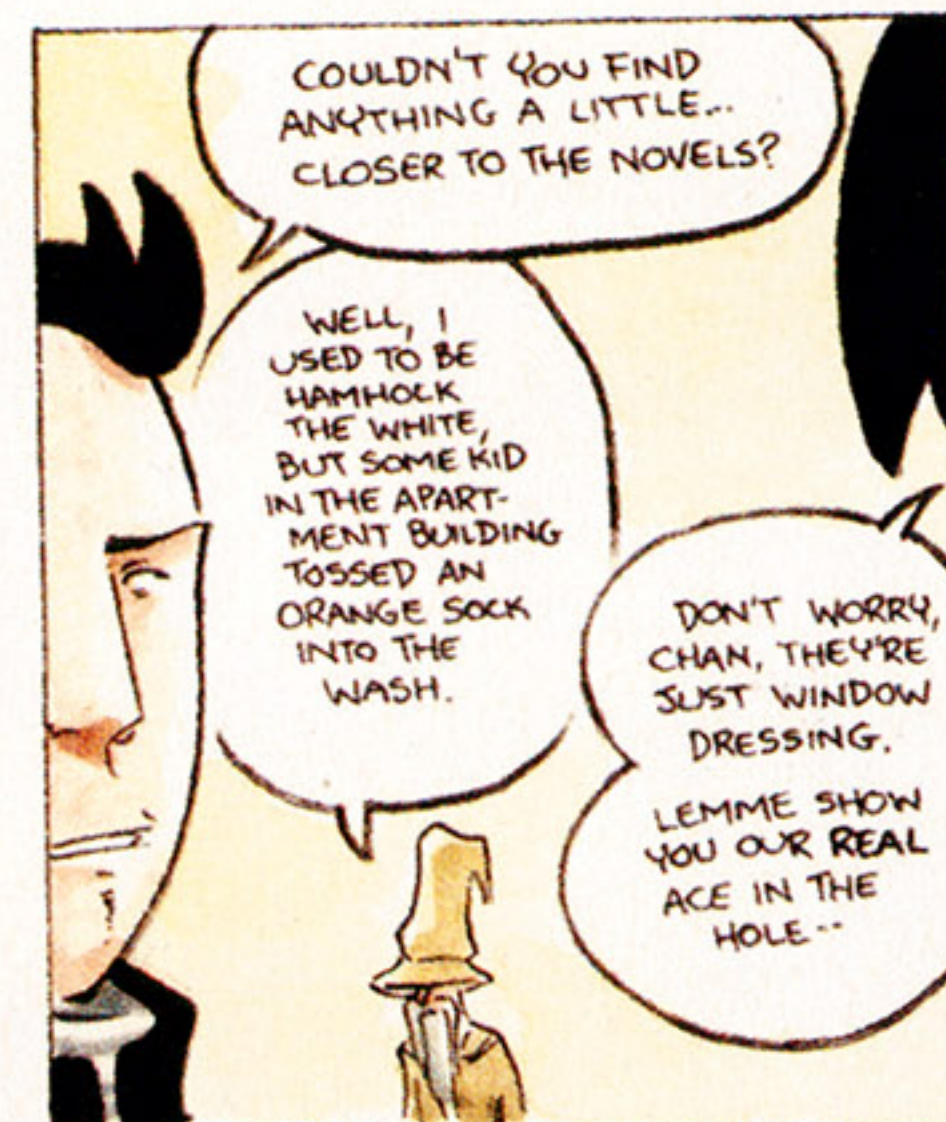
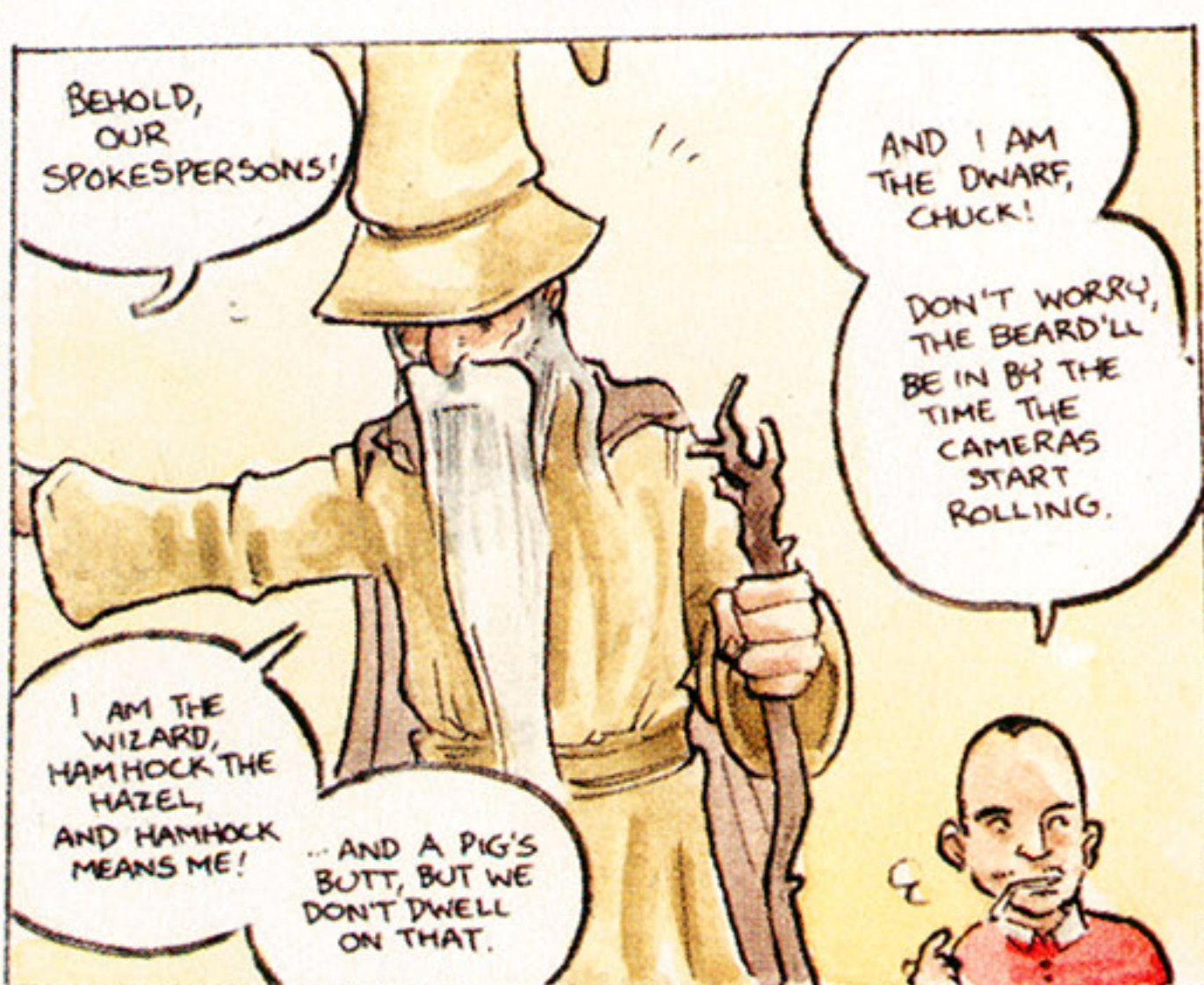
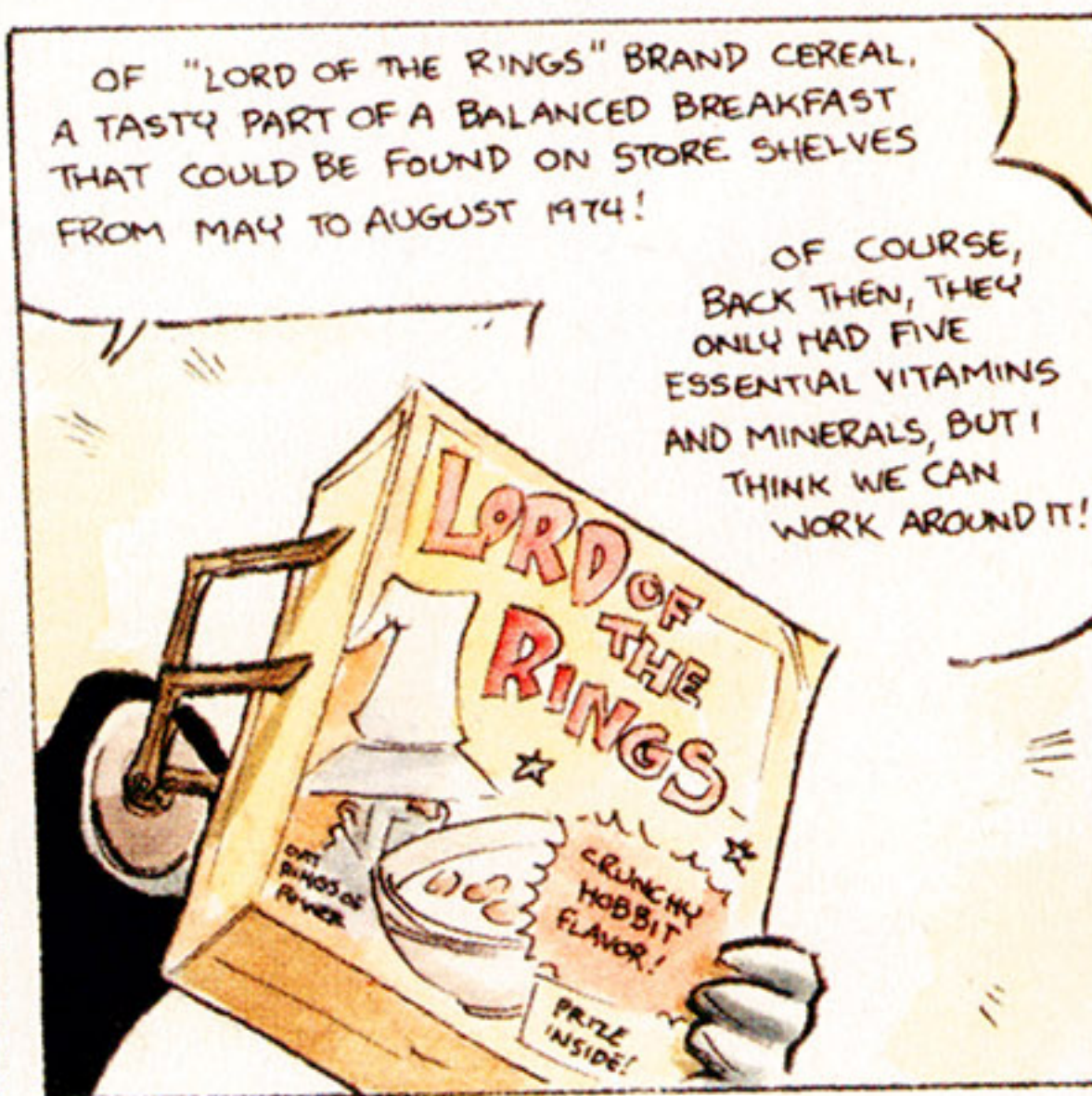
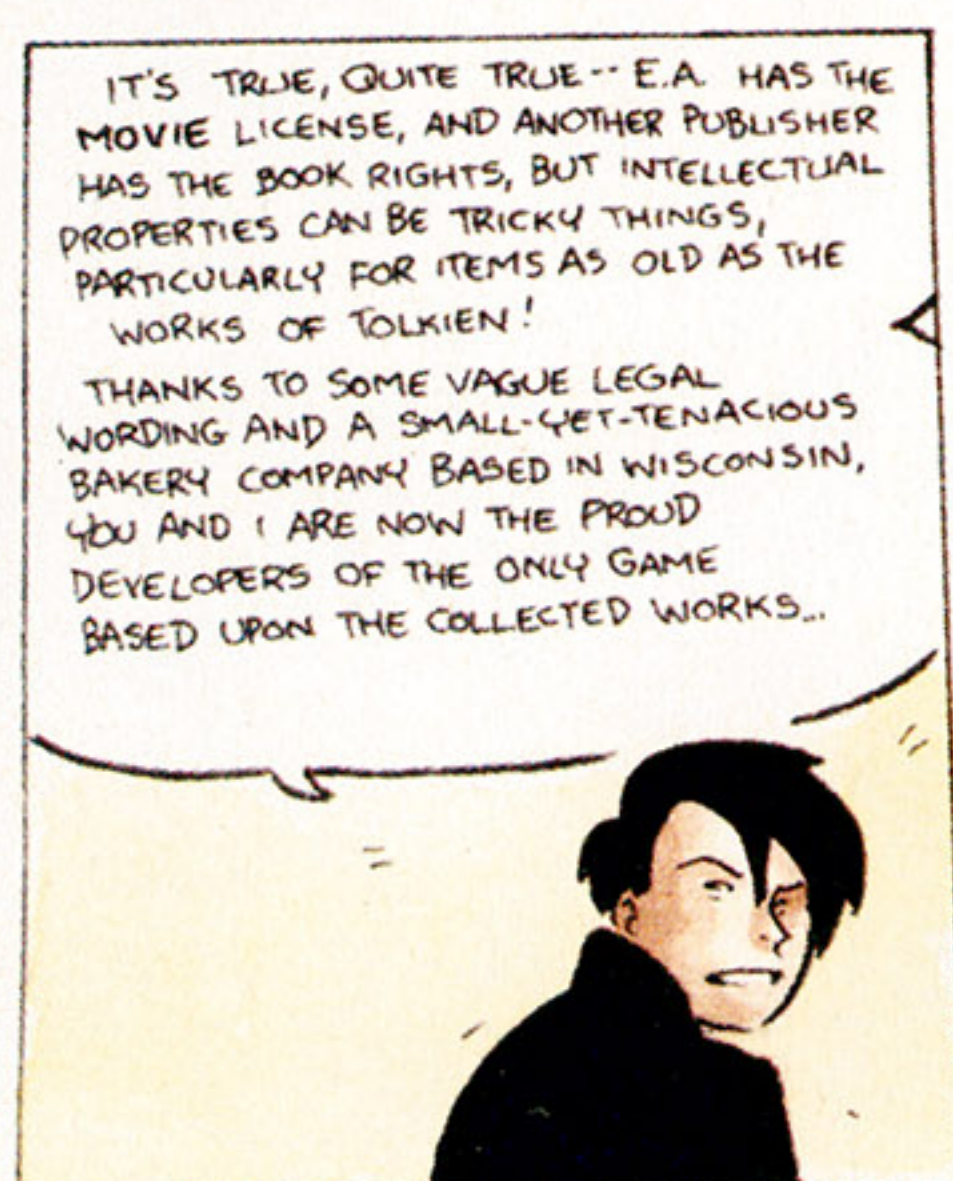
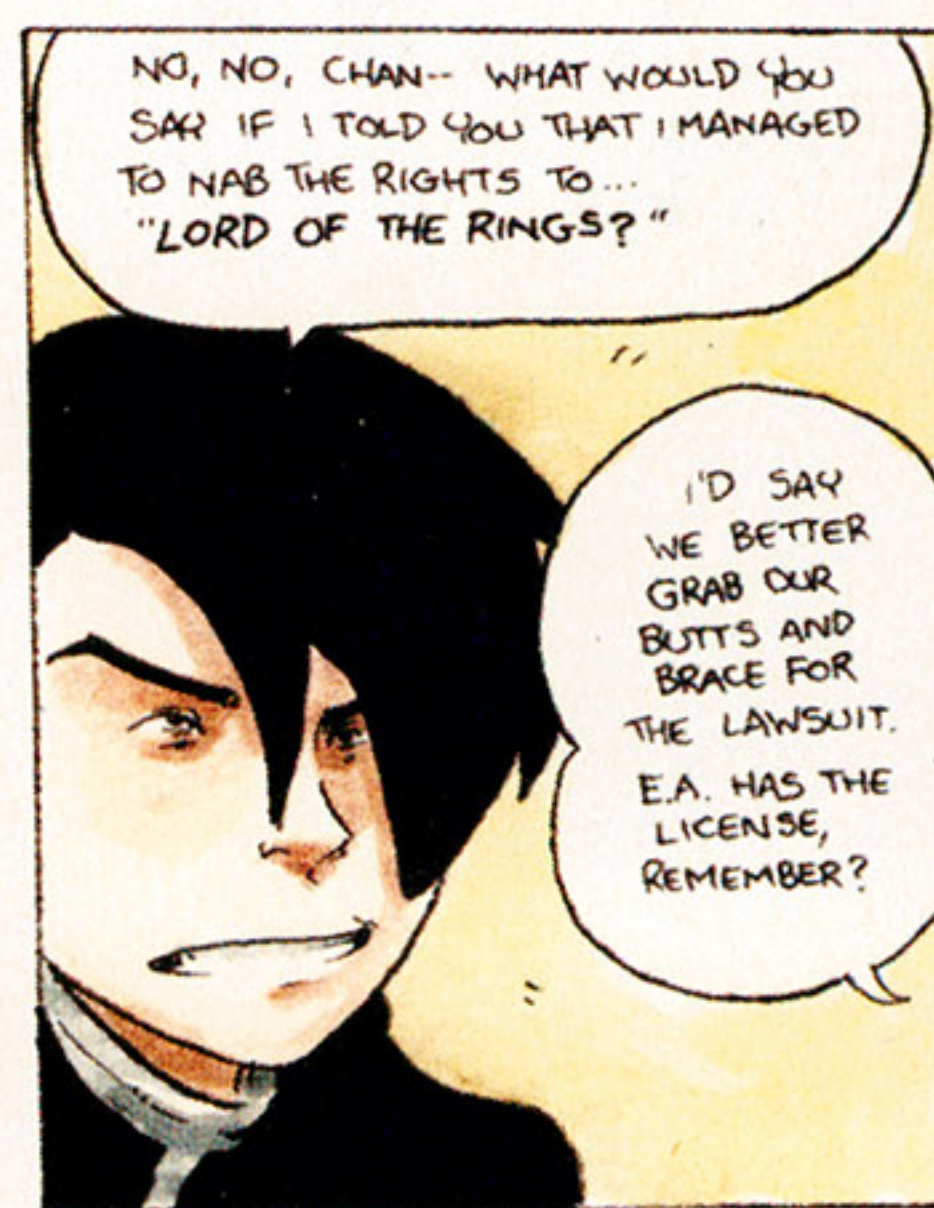
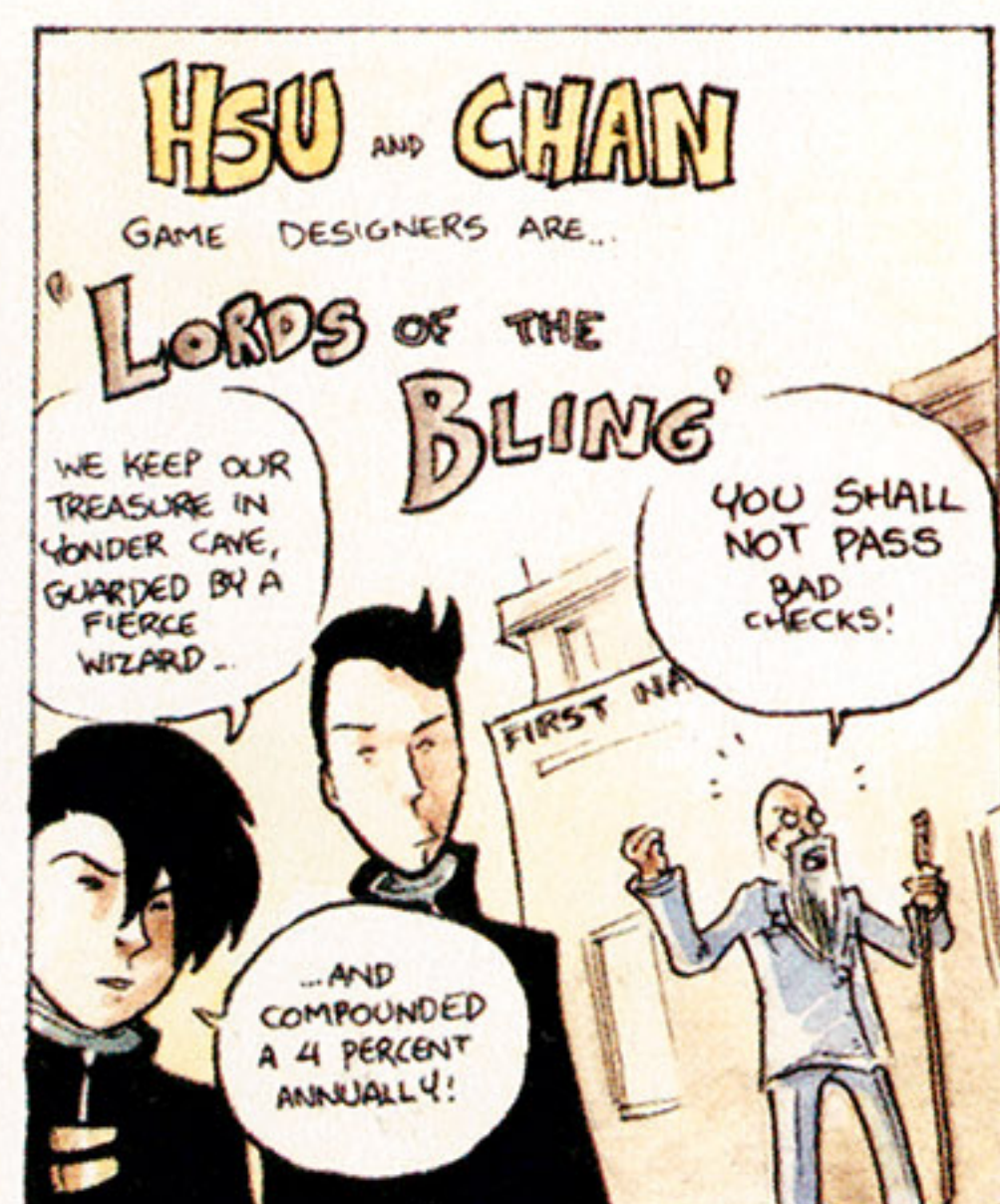
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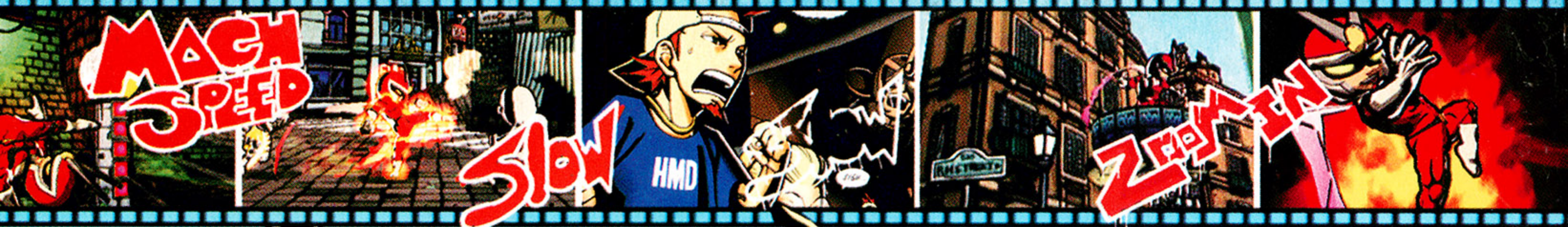


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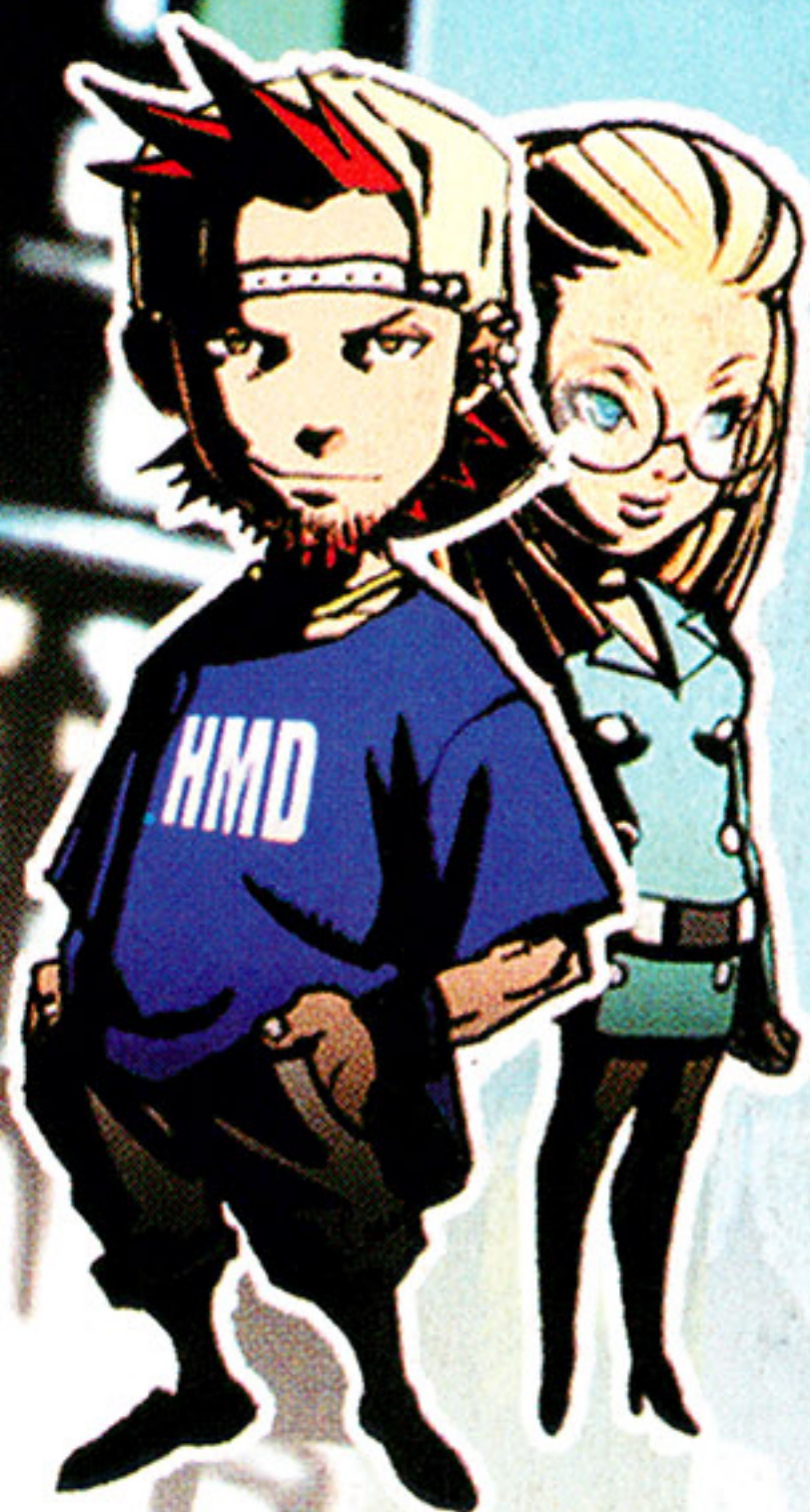
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