


Featuring The Top 50 Games

The Year In Review 2004  (PG. 46)

PSP's Launch RPG Revealed:

Untold Legends  (PG. 49)

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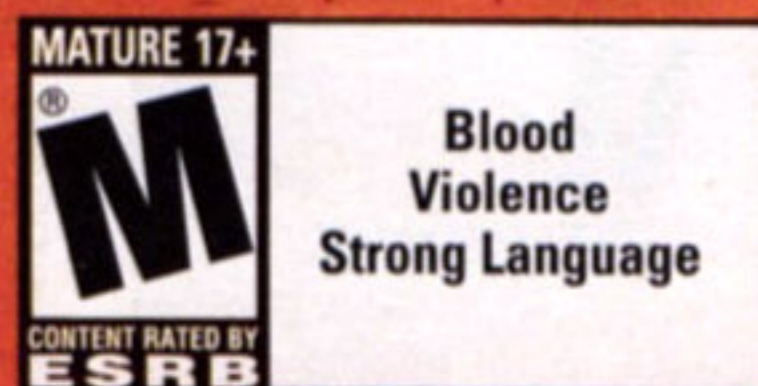
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- Game Informer

"Multiplayer shines in Snowblind"

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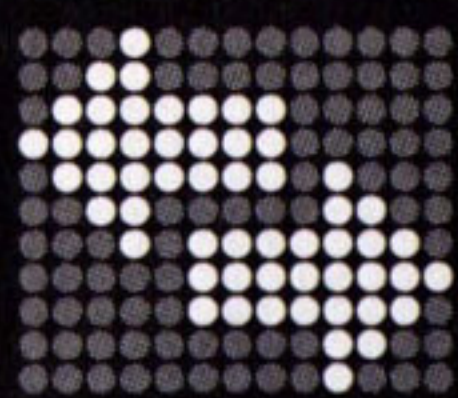


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cover story

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Combining awesome powers, insane co-op gameplay, and a team of four amazing superheroes is something that has to live up to both gamers' demands for quality action and fan requirements for decent treatments of their beloved comic wonder-team. Does Fantastic Four, set to coincide with the upcoming film, meet these lofty goals?

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#### THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Month by month, we're laying out what went down in 2004, and there are some really big events in there that you might have forgotten (remember Microsoft giving their sports titles a "rest"?). It's like our industry's yearbook, without the bad senior pictures and "Most Likely to Star in a Kung-Fu Movie" awards.



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#### THE TOP 50 GAMES OF 2004

This year will go down in the annals of video game history as one of the best ever for gamers - every genre, every platform, and every player had something to be really proud of and excited for. We've got our list of those you can't miss, and a crowning title for one game of 2004.



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Sony's newest baby is forcing gamers around the world to ask new questions about what portable gaming can really be. Can you do that on a handheld? With SOE's latest action/RPG, the answer looks to be both very surprising and very much in the affirmative.

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# STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



## HAPPY NEW YEAR

**ANDY McNAMARA**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Yeah, I know it's February, but we had to wait an extra month this year to bring you our blockbuster Year In Review feature. But this year we bring it to you with an added bonus: a chance to win all the games in the Top 50 just for visiting Game Informer Online (see page 81 for more details).

Looking back, I have a hard time thinking of a year in video games greater than this one. So many great games, so little time. Looking ahead, I must say the coming year will be one of the most interesting and innovative in a long time.

Now, I will admit, I can't tell you all we know about the games coming down the pipe. However, the one constant I have seen from almost every company in the industry is that 2005 will be the year to introduce new (and hopefully fresh) intellectual properties (or IPs as we call them in the biz).

Of course, there will be plenty of highly-anticipated sequels for us to get psyched about, but I think people will be surprised overall by all the new directions the industry will take (due mostly to the fact that this year will see the introduction of Sony's PSP and Microsoft's next Xbox).

As always, Game Informer will keep you up to date on all the latest. So enjoy the issue and we'll see you here next month when we bring you another next generation shocker. What game will it be and for which system? I guess you'll have to come back next month to find out.

**Andy >>** [andy@gameinformer.com](mailto:andy@gameinformer.com)

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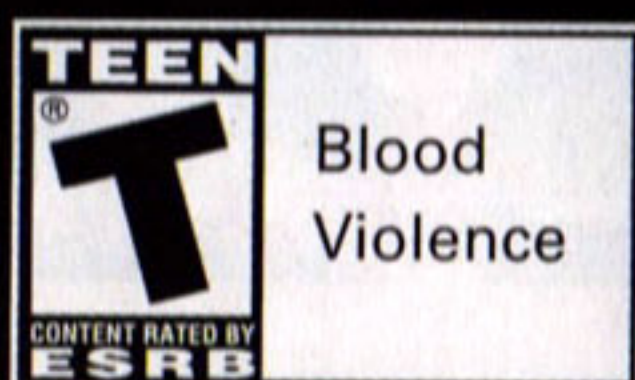
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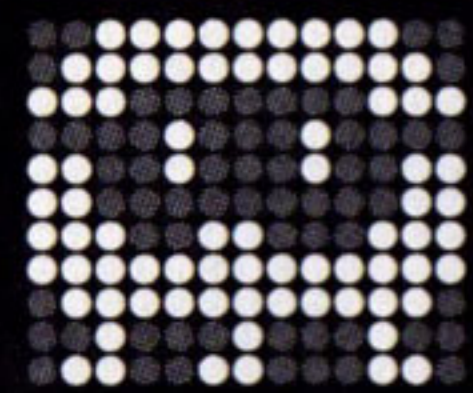


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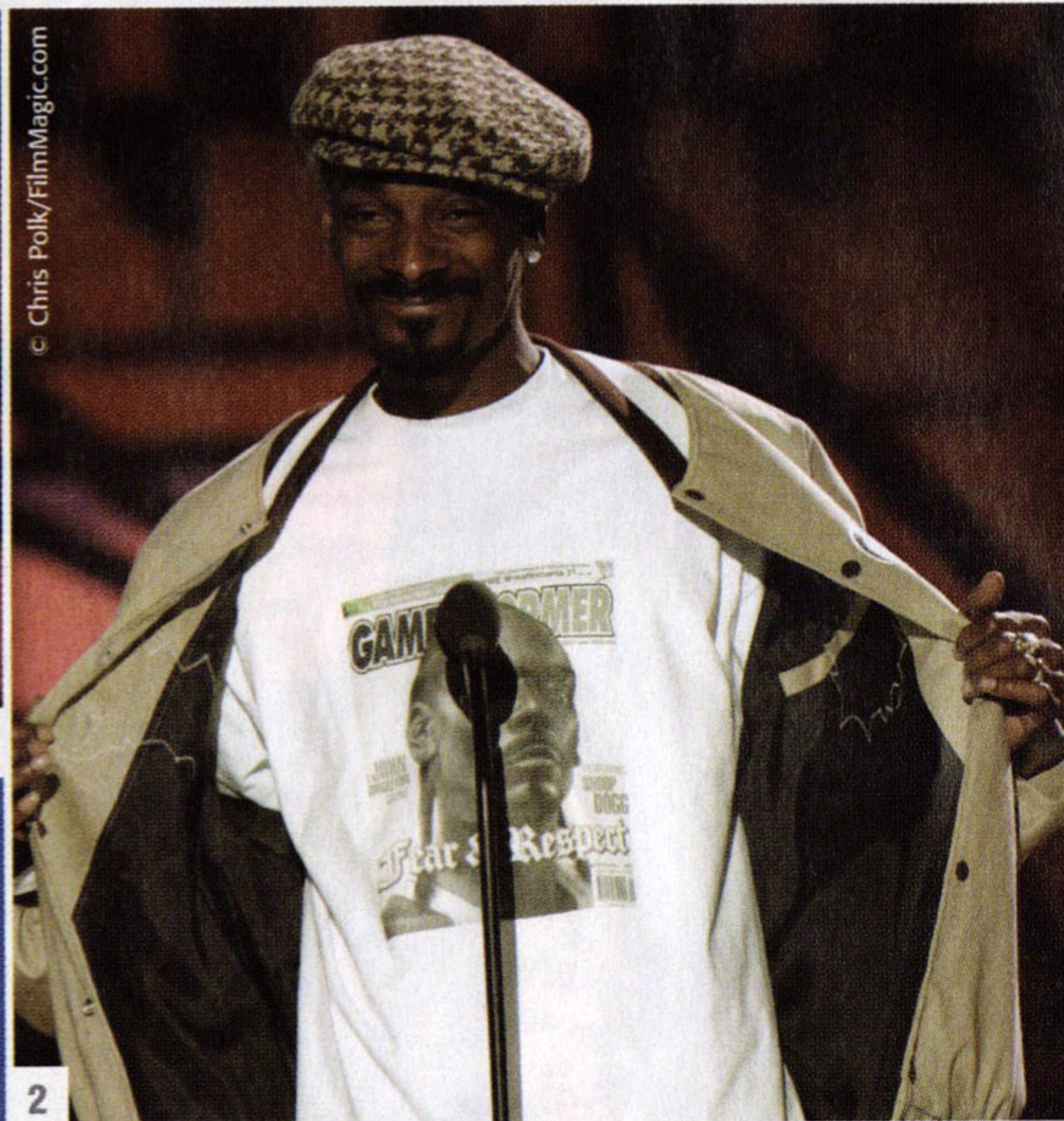


# GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



1

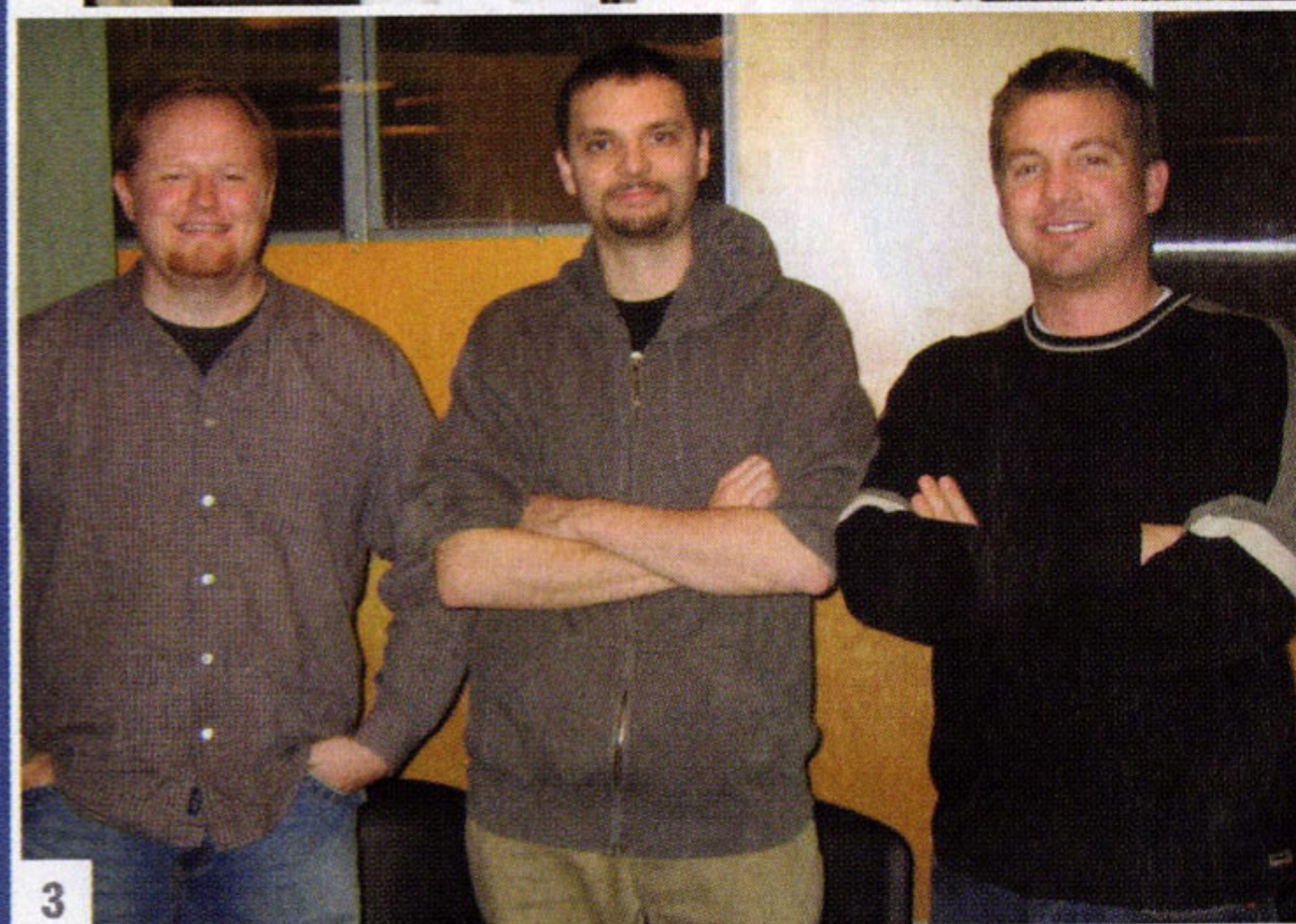


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1 The Midway posse in effect! [from left to right] Serene Chan, Nathan Rose, Tim Granich, Scott Lane, and Natalie Salzman. 2 The Doggfather represents for Game Informer at the Spike TV Video Game Awards, wearing a shirt bearing our Fear & Respect cover 3 Sega's Ethan Einhorn [l] and Bret Blount [r] join forces with Reiner to combat the forces of evil in the universe 4 Gl's Adam parties down with [from left to right] Sony Online Entertainment's Rob Hill, Tamara Sanderson, and Bill Trost 5 Solid Snake vigilantly guards Game Informer's Christmas presents 6 Andy discusses the latest in N-Gage with Ketchum PR's Andrea Schneider 7 Nintendo's Stephen Ward gives DS the Fonzie "Thumbs Up!" Award 8 Movie tough guy Vin Diesel proudly accepts a Spike TV award for "Best Game Based on a Movie" for The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay



3



4



7



6



5

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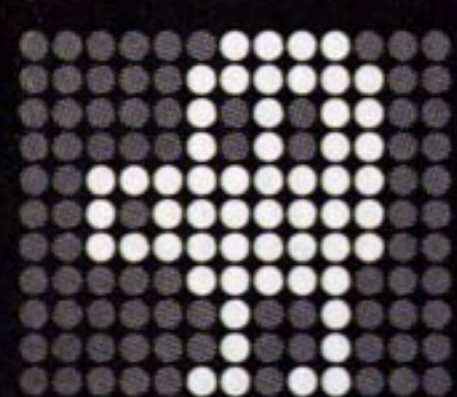
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### UNSUNG HEROES

Since the dawn of video games, there has been a repeated pattern in main characters: you're always "the best," or "the only," or "the chosen one." In nearly every game I play, I play someone who is an unstoppable force in the world's destiny. In action games and RPGs in particular (like Halo, Final Fantasy, and Kingdom Hearts), the fate of the universe is in your character's hands. We need a video game that breaks this pattern.

AJ Person  
Via yahoo.com

■ You want games to abandon their epic settings in favor of more realistic heroes? This might not be such a hot idea, AJ. It seems like this new, blunted genre might just saturate store shelves with products that are considerably duller than everyday life. Imagine opening a gift and finding the hottest new game, "Livin' Low," where you control Fergus Plunkum, an innocuous actuary for a large insurance firm by day, but at night he transforms into a defeated bachelor loafing around his squalid apartment. His desolate life is punctuated by heavy sighing, getting assaulted by volunteers from the Humane Society, and calling Papa John's just to have someone to talk to. See what we're talking about? No fun. As a compromise, maybe you should check out the wealth of already-existing great games that don't revolve around saving the world, like *The Sims 2*, *GTA: San Andreas*, and *Burnout 3*.



### HALO GETS DEVIL HORNS

I waited two years to spend four hours in line so I could play it, but I'm afraid I have to go out on a blasphemous limb here: Bungie dropped the ball on Halo 2. With terrible music, shifting textures, and an ending that is unfulfilling at best, it fell woefully short of expectations.

The FPS bar has been raised in recent years; Bungie even helped elevate it with the first Halo. Why didn't they try harder to reach those heights instead of turning in homework that looks like it was scribbled down during the bus ride to school? I know many will disagree, claiming it is the greatest game ever, but these people cannot realize that dual-wielding is an awfully small bone to be thrown after years of anticipation. There are those of us that look for technical advancement, skill, and art in games. Please pander to us, too.

Wes Howard  
Via email

Why can't developers leave a good thing alone? Don't get me wrong, Halo 2 has the bread and butter of a good game: playability, fun factor, graphics – but the story sucks. In games, like most things in life, the basics are always better. Hasn't anyone at Bungie read the classic Greek tragedies, Shakespeare, or Stan Lee? Good versus evil is what we want in a FPS, not "The Portrait of Master Chief as a Young Artist." I can't believe that these writers get away with stealing story ideas from Star Trek and Star Wars; it seems like poor sci-fi writing is sinking its pretentious plastic fangs into everything these days. As a gamer, I want good games, not *War and Peace*.

Christian Buttner  
Via email

I can't believe that you gave Halo 2 a 10. The [story, gameplay, ending] is absolutely terrible. [Half-Life 2, Metroid Prime 2, Halo] is a far superior game, and it is a true gaming revolution, not just a blatant rip-off of other

games. To me, a 10 represents [insert unattainable abstract ideal here] and Halo 2 has so many flaws that you must just be too stupid to notice them.

Johnny Toughguy  
Via all known forms of communication

■ There are a lot of things Halo 2 doesn't do. It doesn't shine shoes, it makes a lousy crème brulee, and it can't revoke Adam West's restraining order

against us (C'mon, man! One more Batusi for old times' sake!). However, when it comes to delivering an amazing gaming experience, there are few areas where Halo 2 doesn't achieve a crushing victory. Many fans disagreed with our assessment of the game for reasons that can be neatly grouped into two categories: It was too much like the original Halo, and it wasn't enough like the original Halo. If you're actively looking for faults, you'll find them in any game. A score of 10 isn't supposed to indicate a game free of imperfections, but rather one where the minor flaws are eclipsed by overall excellent execution, which Halo 2 has in spades. If you're that desperate to find something to hate, try focusing on clerks at your local organic grocery store. They think they're better than you.

### KNIVES IN GUNFIGHTS

Having a code of ethics is keeping me from achieving higher ranks on Xbox Live, especially on Halo 2. The usage of overpowered weapons (like rockets and energy swords) and dropping games to avoid taking a loss are two things I refuse to participate in. I realize that swords do require a dangerous approach and close range, which I can respect, but not when it is the only weapon people use. Rockets, however, simply take all challenge out of the game. I'm repeatedly killed by them because I believe I should earn my kills with skill-based weapons like the SMG and Plasma Rifle. Even when I'm ahead using my techniques, people frequently quit so they don't drop in the rankings. Please, if you play Halo 2, take my advice and actually earn your way up the ranks instead of blowing your way through with rockets.

Mark Waggoner  
Via email

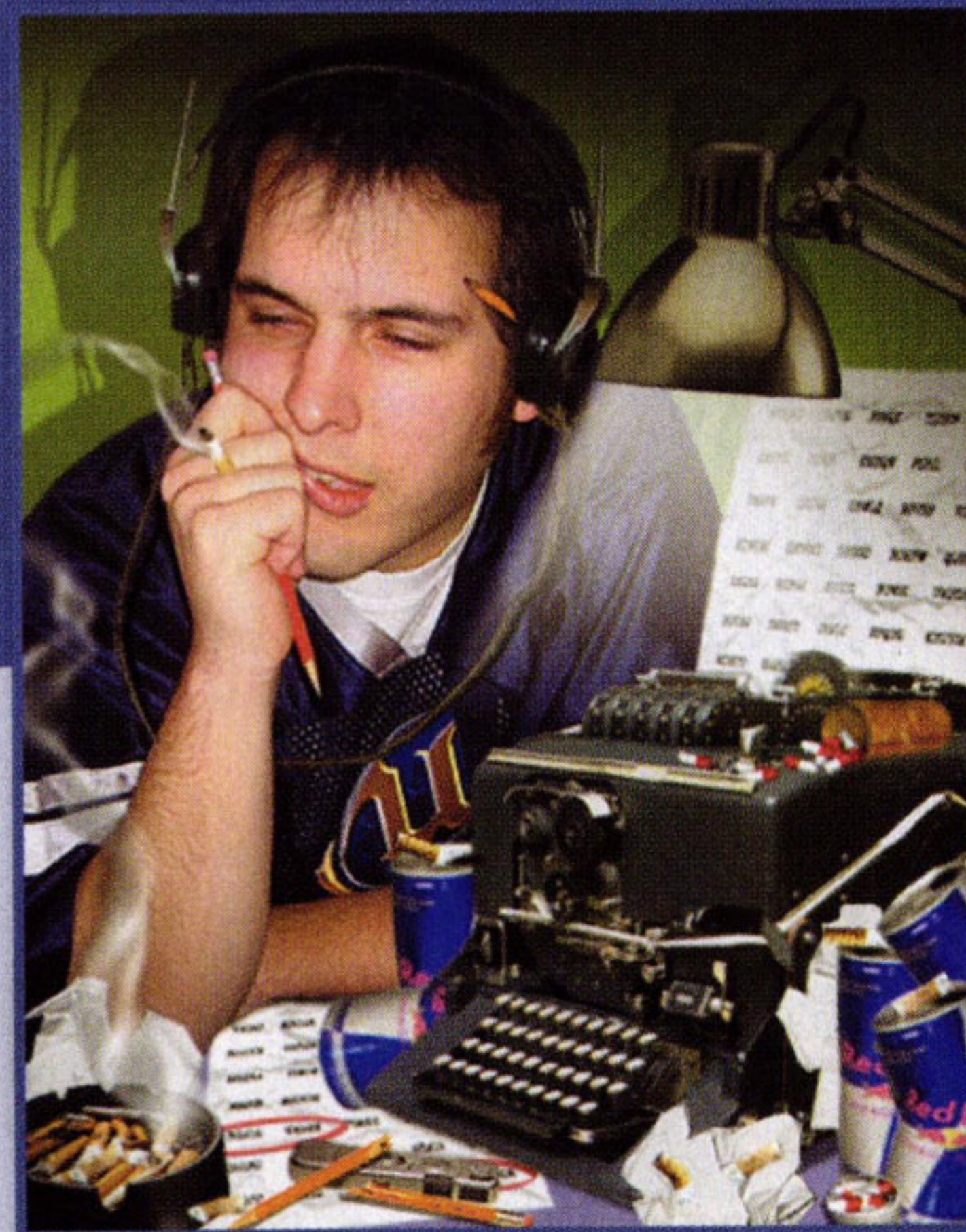
■ We're with you on the people dropping out thing, man. Fortunately, in Halo 2, it actually counts as a loss when a player quits. Also, we heard that every

### WHEN LANGUAGE ATTACKS

Review of page 26: Price, very good idea, but comes on line free, with Internet broadband, and continue with reviews (from the other end of the cable coax). Microsoft probably doesn't want to mix much until software with video games: I don't blame you. I understand, gives you ideas to materialize something, put some school exams there too, and we'll have general audience pleases! If it is possible, work onto rating and collateral magazines including the hydrogen technology of New Jersey. Thank you.

Anonymous  
Teterboro, New Jersey

■ Seven times for thanking happiness the insinuated writing! Actually, if our team of elite codebreakers (aka Adam with four Red Bulls in him) is interpreting this letter correctly, New Jersey's hydrogen technology is poised to become the next nuclear superpower. If its diabolical endgame comes to fruition, the Garden State will soon be harvesting some homegrown, planet-wide devastation. However, we wouldn't start punching everyone who says "wicked cool" just yet; the credibility of the anonymous author is in question, since this (possibly) threatening message also came folded with a receipt from a one-hour pharmacy. The total was \$7.62 (with tax).





LEARN TO SPEAK GETAWAY

“  
MOTORS  
Coppers  
Tossers  
SHOOTERS

...and a little bit of *how's yer father.*

FANCY A BUTCHER'S? ”\*

*the*  
**Getaway**  
*Black Monday*

*Your lessons start 'ere, mate!*

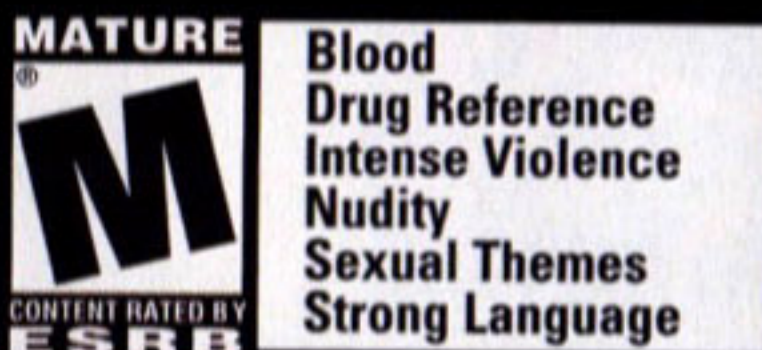
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PlayStation 2

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LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.  
PLAY IN OURS.



\*Cars, cops, scumbags, guns...and a little bit of sex. Wanna take a look?

time someone drops a game, an innocent, adorable little fairy dies a grisly death, so they've got that on their consciences. But rockets and swords are a different matter. Regardless of the game you're playing online, the mark of a good player is the ability to learn where and when to use the tools that are available, and how to develop methods to counteract those tools in enemy hands. If you want to bring your SMG to a rocket fight, that's your choice, but you should probably have a reliable anti-rocket strategy to fall back on unless you plan to become a martyr very quickly. It's commendable that you choose to die for your principles online, but if you expect other people to give up some of the coolest weapons the game has to offer, you deserve every frag you eat.

### HARD DRIVIN'

I bought the hard drive for the PS2 a few months back hoping that they were going to add new maps to SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs. Much to my disappointment, I find that they only have one lousy map available, and you have to buy a non-GI magazine to get it! Why do they want more money for something that most people have already paid at least \$150 for? At least on Xbox Live, you don't have to pay extra for most additional content.

Charles Pierce  
Via aol.com

■ Since its somewhat quiet release, Sony's hard drive hasn't exactly had the best support in terms of games or downloadable content. With Final Fantasy XI primarily driving sales of the unit, there aren't many games out there that make use of the advantages of the hard drive. The situation isn't improving, either. The discontinuation of the old PS2 model in favor of Sony's sleek, sexy new design is essentially the death knell for the short-lived periphery hardware. Due to its incompatibility with the drive, the new PS2 ensures that anyone who buys the console these days will be denied access to the already limited features provided by the HDD, therefore making it pointless for Sony to worry about expanding its functionality any further.

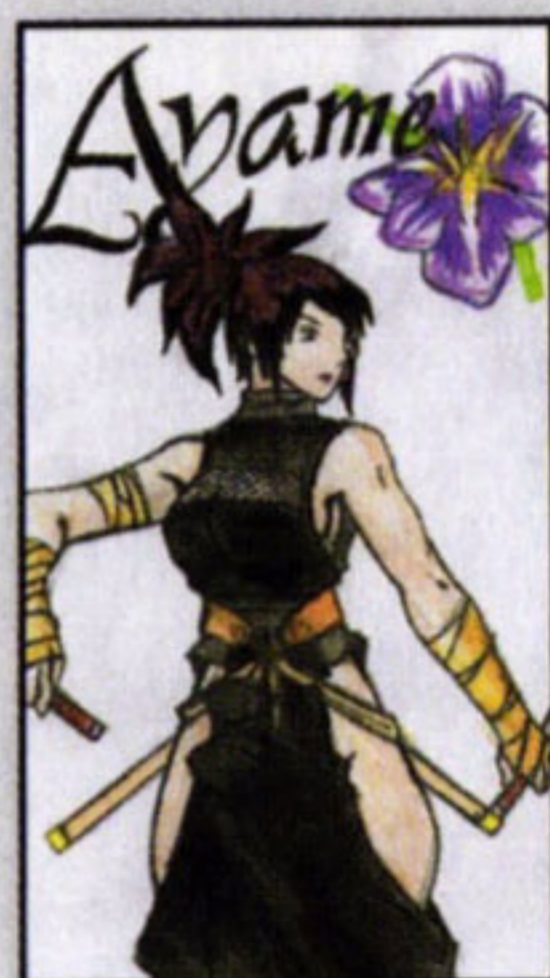
### FURTHER BEYOND

Beyond Good and Evil enchanted me like no other title ever has. It may not be the greatest game, but it is undoubtedly the most underrated release of this generation. This is why I belong to an online community where we try to raise awareness of the game in hopes that Ubisoft will finally give the game the follow-up it deserves. Our support includes petitions, fan sites, fan art, and buying multiple copies of the game. We aren't the only ones trying keep this brilliant game from being forgotten; there is a Flash movie in the works at [www.bgemovie.com](http://www.bgemovie.com) aimed at rekindling Jade's universe. Unfortunately, Ubisoft still has not announced a sequel. Will they ever hear our pleas?

Dennis Meijer  
Via hotmail.com

■ Hey! We belong to a club just like that, except ours tries to get the *Thunder in Paradise* TV series released on DVD. BG&E is indeed sadly underrated, and the best thing you can do is stay on your current path. When a company releases something that has poor sales or generally isn't well-received, it isn't likely to make the same mistake twice (with the possible exception of the *American Ninja* movies). If you can make it clear that a large, dedicated fanbase is eager to give them a second chance, then it improves the odds that they'll take another crack at it. At any rate, it's probably better than our club's strategy, which is writing threat-laced letters to a gadget-infused, tricked-out speedboat.

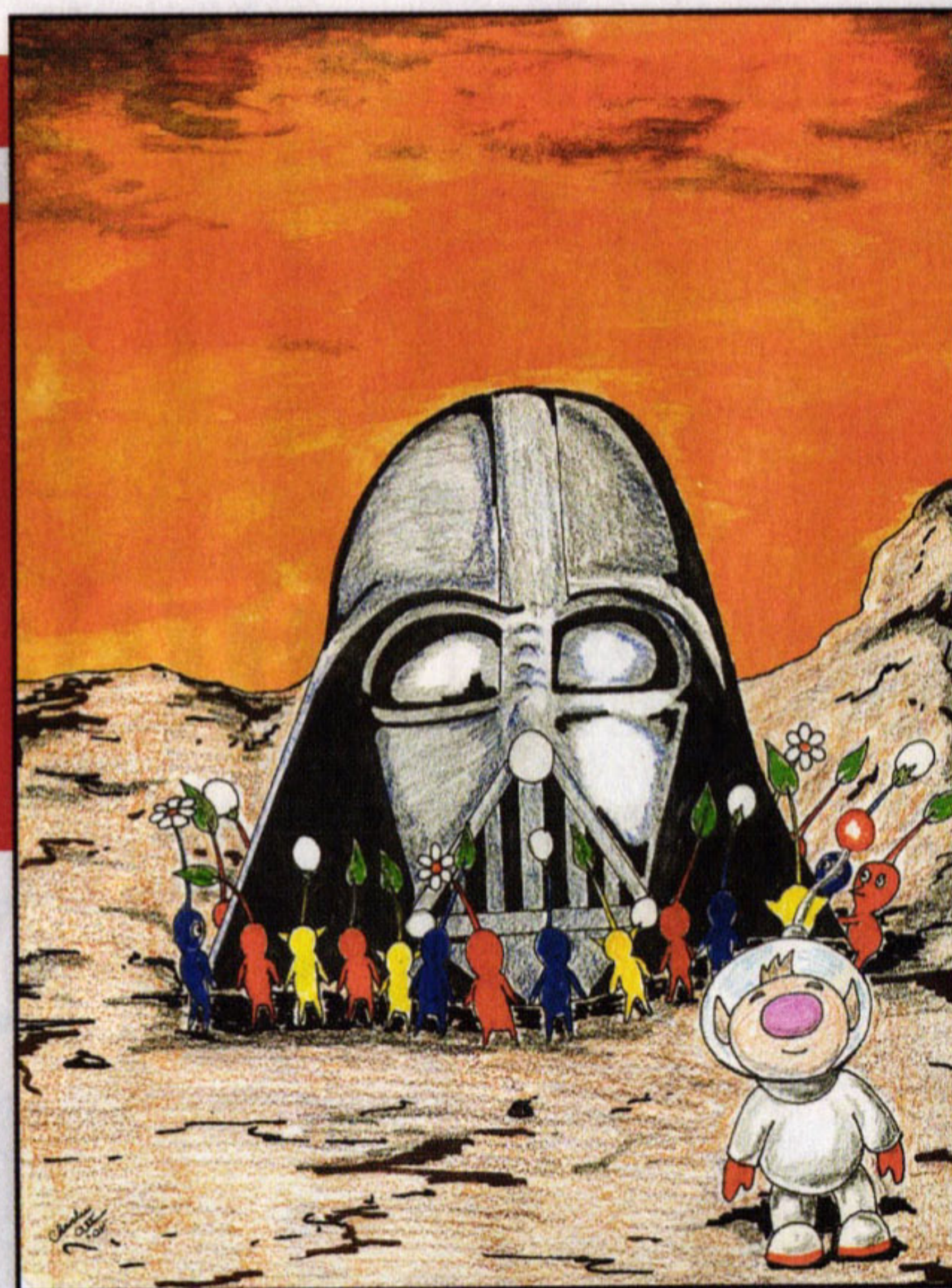
## ENVELOPE ART



**LUIS SANTOS**  
Sleeves and pants are out of the question on a stealth assassin's salary

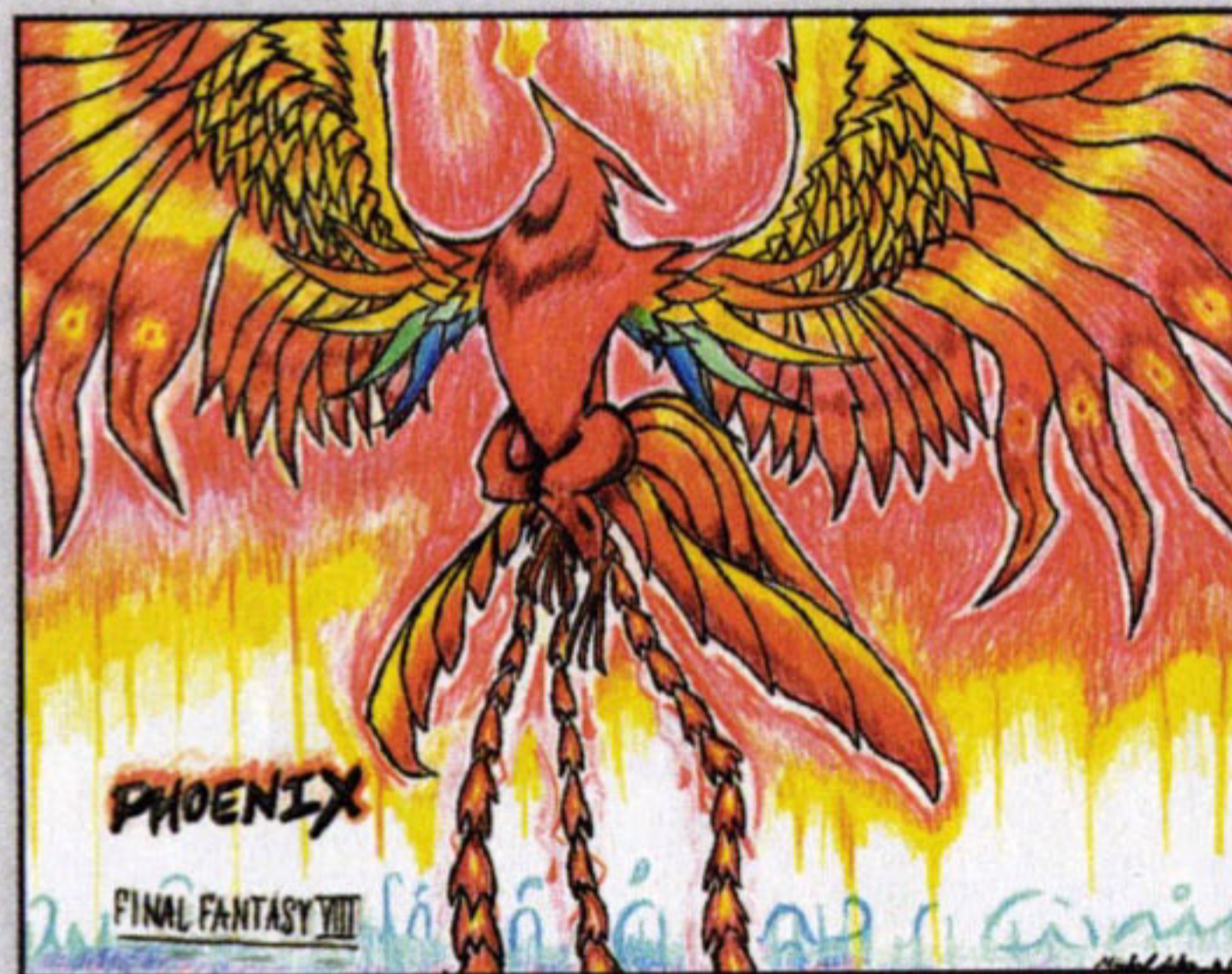
### FEBRUARY WINNER!

**CHARLES M. ATKINS**  
"I'm never going to the beach with talking eggplants again."



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

Send to:  
Game Informer  
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Mpls, MN 55401



**MICHAEL ARTHUR**  
Whoa! Rainbow armpit feathers!



**GUS SMITH**  
Shameless objectification is the new black vinyl



♪ **NATE CHHAY**  
"Anyone you can kill, I can kill better" ♪



**SEAN CRONIN**  
The Prince is making progress with his anger management. Flaming, bloody progress

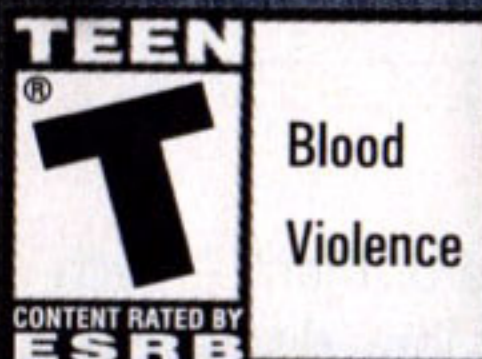
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INFINITE DESTRUCTION.**

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Microsoft  
game studios

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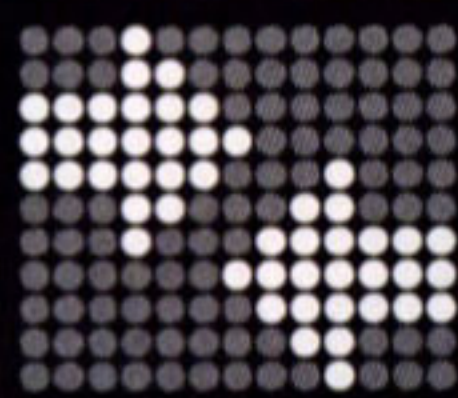
[mechassault2.xbox.com](http://mechassault2.xbox.com)

**MECHASSAULT 2  
LoneWolf**



it's good to play together

XBOX LIVE



# CONNECT

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The Cutting Edge Of Gaming

news

## THE PSP IS HERE

### GAME INFORMER EXAMINES THE PSP



PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi makes an appearance at the PSP launch



Sony finally kicked off the handheld war against Nintendo with the release of the PlayStation Portable in Japan on December 12. Thousands lined up at Shinjuku's Yodobashi Camera in Tokyo, among other places, where Sony Computer Entertainment president and PSP creator Ken Kutaragi was on hand for the festivities (left).

The PSP sold out of its 200,000 units available at launch, with an estimated 85 percent of them being bought the first day. The remaining units were sold through exports and other untracked sales. In the face of the small launch, Sony has said that it hopes to send out 100,000 PSPs every week, with the estimate of shipping half a million systems by the end of 2004. However, Sony officials have admitted that the company will focus on the PlayStation 2 over the holiday season. In comparison, the Nintendo DS made 500,000 units available at its launch, it's approaching a million handhelds sold, and Nintendo expects to have five million of them shipped worldwide by March. Sony is planning to release the PSP in America before the end of March.

Game Informer got its hands on the PSP and the initial launch titles, and we're here to run the system through its paces.

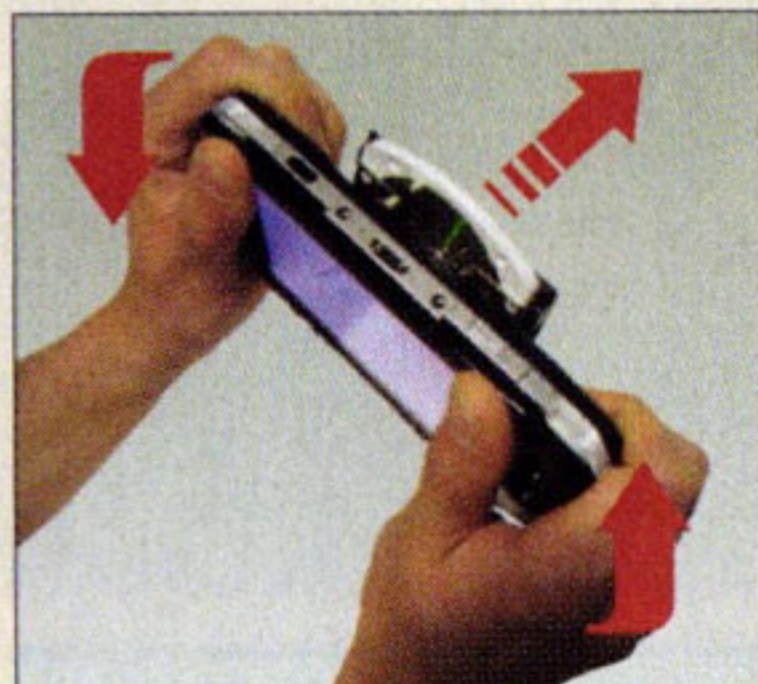
#### MEDIA

Via the Memory Stick, you can easily transfer MP3s, MPEG-4 movies, or photos from your computer, for example, to your PSP. By connecting the two up via a USB cord (not provided), your PC will recognize the PSP's Memory Stick. From here, create a main "PSP" folder on your desktop, and in it put a folder labelled "Music" (or "Photo," etc.). Put MP3s into that folder, then drag the entire "PSP" folder on top of the Memory Stick icon on your PC. From here, you can view photo slide shows on the PSP and you can manually fast-forward or rewind your music – which sounds fabulous on the unit. Sony has just announced a program called Image Converter 2, which lets you convert movie files on your PC for play on the PSP.



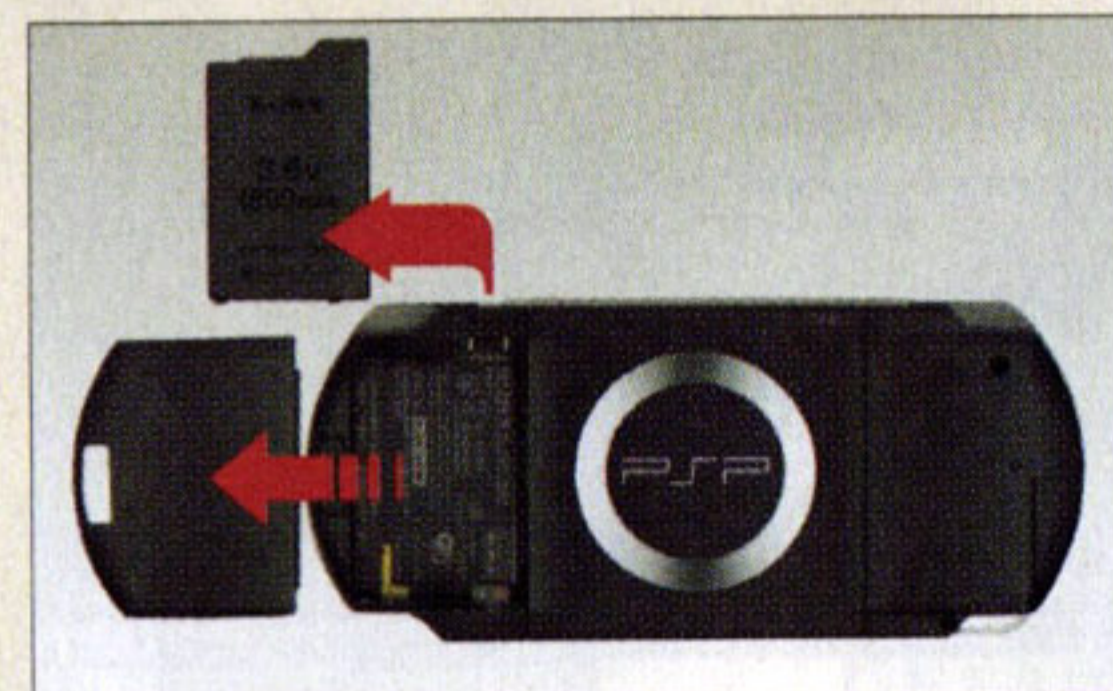
#### PROBLEMS

The initial reports on problems with the PSP are predominately limited to a few things. A small number of consumers have found dead pixels or air bubbles on their screens, while the PSP in general contains a design flaw. By applying a twisting pressure when holding the unit, the UMD door clasp can release, causing the disc door to open unexpectedly. However, in the normal course of playing, this isn't a problem. Load times for games can reach over 20 seconds – particularly when going from the PSP's main menu into the game itself, while in-game load times are anywhere from 10 to 15 seconds, depending on the title.



#### BATTERY

In our hands-on time with the unit we listened to music, uploaded some photos, and played various games on the PSP for close to three hours with no battery trouble whatsoever. Some particularly draining games, like Ridge Racers, can cut battery life to around four hours, while constant Wi-Fi play brings that figure to about two hours. Sony is selling a replacement battery in Japan for approximately \$45. The unit does have a sleep mode which you can set to kick in at a designated time, and there is also a Wi-Fi power save function. The PSP tells you what percentage and how many hours are left on the battery, but it is not known what type of consumption the system is basing its figures on (i.e. music, games, or video). Also, you can charge the handheld while you play it.



#### WIRELESS

The PSP's wireless function has great possibilities, but some of them – such as connecting to a Wi-Fi hotspot and playing against friends long-distance in online games or surfing the Internet – are unknown, as no titles utilize this function yet and there is no browser for the PSP. However, short-distance Wi-Fi play is made very easy. Downloads are also possible, and Sony says it will offer firmware upgrades.

## GAMES

### RIDGE RACERS

Out of all the launch games, Ridge Racers is clearly the one that shows off the visual capabilities of the PSP the best. Real-time shadows slide down the back of your car. It has a good sense of speed, and motion blur occurs when you kick the turbo in. Replays and a real-time map are available. The environments are great, and there's even some basic lens flare to make this title a graphical standout. Using the analog control for Ridge Racers proves that the nub isn't as responsive as your PS2 controller, as the range of motion isn't as great, and there is a small dead spot when steering.



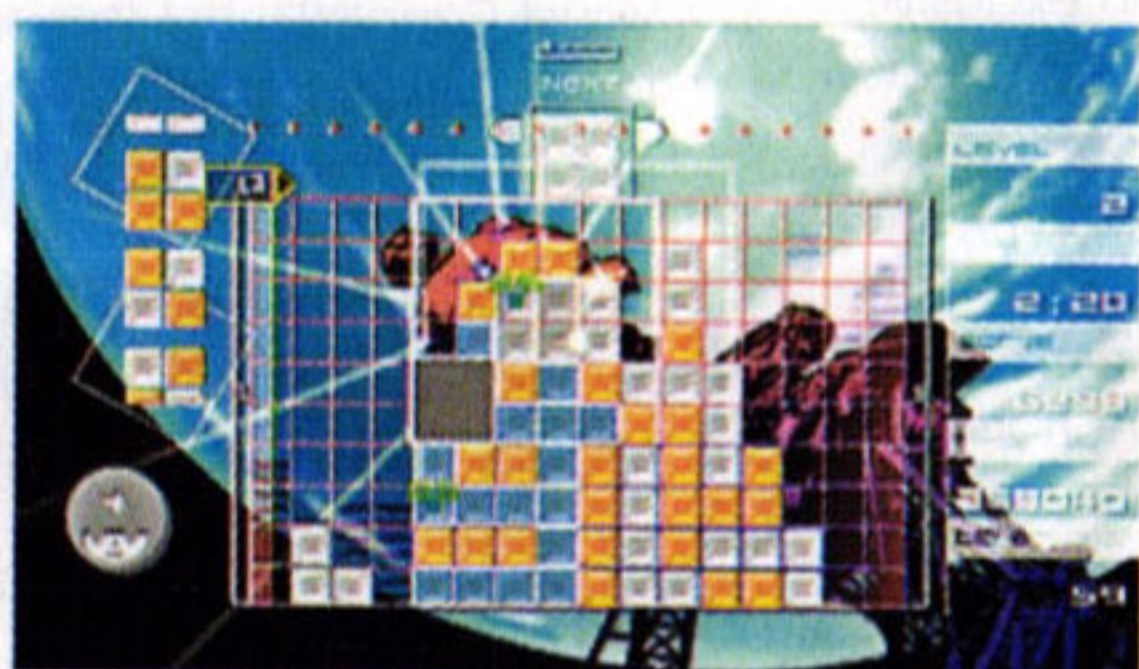
### ARMORED CORE: FORMULA FRONT

Not getting to actually control the sweet-looking combat in this game is as disappointing as it sounds. In true AC style, the game's more about choosing the right parts for your mech, as the computer controls all of the third-person action (although you can switch the camera!). Your job is to assemble a five-mech team and tweak their attributes and strategies before going into battle. Through proximity Wi-Fi, fans can trade parts, and this AC also will hook up to a forthcoming PS2 title of the same name through the USB port.



### HOT SHOTS GOLF

Known as Everyone's Golf in Japan, this title looks almost identical to its PS2 brethren. Perhaps the only missed feature is seeing the caddies. Otherwise, it's the same accessory collecting, character-earning, three-click golf-fest we've known all these years. Up to eight players can compete via proximity Wi-Fi (with everyone playing simultaneously – although you won't see them) or you can go head-to-head and alternate strokes with a single opponent onscreen.



### LUMINES

From the mind of Space Channel 5's Tetsuya Mizuguchi comes Lumines, a music/puzzle game similar to Tetris that combines more horizontal play with the beats of the background music. A simple but addictive title, Lumines makes great use of the PSP's impressive stereo sound.



### VAMPIRE CHRONICLE: THE CHAOS TOWER

This 2D fighter looks pretty faithful to its arcade counterpart (which is known as Darkstalkers in the U.S.). Control wise, the six punch/kick buttons are assigned to the face and shoulder buttons, and it moves pretty smoothly. You can challenge 15 Wi-Fi players near you, and matches can be tailored to your preferences for match time, damage bar length, etc.

## NAVIGATING THE PSP

#### MEMORY STICK

Here, along the underside of the unit, you'll find the slot for your Memory Stick

#### WIRELESS BUTTON AND ANALOG STICK

The PSP will prompt you to turn on the wireless button when necessary if you haven't done so. If left on, you can set this function to automatically go to sleep

#### HEADPHONE JACK

Supports Sony proprietary headphone, as well as third-party ones

#### HOME AND VOLUME BUTTONS

At any time, users can jump to the home screen, where you can access your Memory Stick, music files, etc.

#### BRIGHTNESS, SOUND, SELECT, AND START BUTTONS

The PSP has three brightness levels, and its sound can be muted at any time

#### USB PORT/UMD DOOR SWITCH

#### POWER/HOLD BUTTON

The unit's power button activates by sliding it forward – whether you are turning it on or off. Also, the unit can be turned off for a period, and then turned back on without losing your spot in the game (as long as the UMD is still inserted). The Hold function (used to lock the PSP in the On or Off position) is activated by sliding the button downwards

#### AC ADAPTER INPUT

## DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

## DOA VOLLEYBALL FOR XBOX 2

In an exclusive conversation with Game Informer Online, *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* creator Tomonobu Itagaki said that he plans to bring the franchise to Xbox 2.



## MORE FOR MIDWAY

Midway has acquired its third game studio in the past year, adding *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks* creator Paradox Development to its family. In 2004, Midway had also acquired Surreal Software (*The Suffering*) and Inevitable Entertainment (*Area 51*).



## JUST SAY NO

Nagul Games just got on Senator Joe Lieberman's speed dial. The company is planning a title called *Dealer: Chronic, Pills & Coke*, a third-person, GTA-style game where you set up your own drug empire, including drug labs, hookers, and even marijuana plantations.



## THE RETURN OF DRAKENGARD

Square Enix has confirmed that work has begun on a sequel to *Drakengard* for the PlayStation 2. Further details are unknown at this time, other than that Jeremy is smiling.



## DEATH AND TAXES

An Australian gamer named Deathifier has won an auction valued at \$26,500 for the virtual rights to an island in the MMORPG *Project Entropia*. Deathifier can now sell off the mining and hunting rights to the island for real life cash. With a name like Deathifier, we wouldn't dare trespass.



## MADDEN GETS EXCLUSIVE NFL LICENSE

The football war is officially over. EA Sports has won an exclusive deal with both the NFL and Players Inc. (the NFL players' association), giving the company the exclusive rights to use NFL teams, stadiums, and players in its games for the next five years, starting with *Madden NFL 2006*. This effectively cuts the legs out from under competitor ESPN NFL, who will not be able to continue the franchise with any official league teams or players. It also closes the door on any possible return for Sony's *GameDay* series or Microsoft's *NFL Fever* for the rest of the decade.

The deal covers handheld, PC, and console games, but does not include cell phones or the Internet. It also reportedly does not apply to Atari's *Backyard Football* kids franchise. EA Sports hasn't divulged details of the deal, nor exactly what is in store for us, but it did mention that this exclusive partnership would mean more access and integration of the league within its games. For instance, it plans to utilize NFL Films and the NFL Network in its titles. Beyond *Madden NFL* and *NFL Street*, there are indications that the publisher is planning to unveil a manager-style game in the future.

Game Informer talked to both EA and the NFL, who told us that the NFL approached Sega, EA, and other unmentioned studios with exclusivity on the table. "Going back to the spring [of 2004], we had a review of our video game business," said NFL spokesperson Brian McCarthy. "We told our existing licensees that we'd be open to exploring various types of business models. Both companies were very interested." There is some thought that this deal was struck because the league was unhappy



## MIDWAY EXPLORES LIFE AFTER THE NFL

Midway has been pushing the boundaries of football for years, and it will take full advantage of its lack of an NFL license in the upcoming *Blitz: Playmakers* title, set for release in the last quarter of this year on multiple consoles. "No longer bound to the NFL license," explains Midway's chief of marketing, Steve Allison, "there will be no league restrictions on content. *Blitz: Playmakers* buyers will be assured of one thing – our game will include all the gameplay and fun the NFL won't allow." That means all the dirty hits, endzone dancing, and off-the-field shenanigans that you can handle will finally be included. Per its name, Midway even hired a writer of the controversial ESPN show *Playmakers* to give the game a harsh behind-the-scenes flavor. As for the players, the game will utilize some classic NFL players – who, because they are retired, are not bound by EA's Players Inc. deal.

with ESPN's \$19.99 price point [and EA's dropping of its price in response] and the appearance that the league was sanctioning a discount image. However, McCarthy dismissed this notion, pointing out that this process was started before pricing for the 2005-branded titles was decided.

This year's football war saw the emergence of ESPN as a viable rival to the dominance of Madden. Still, McCarthy and the NFL do not see this sudden lack of competition as a harbinger for a drop in quality. "We think it's actually going to increase the quality of the game. The sole licensee has even more of an incentive to come out with a game that meets not only their high standards, but that of the NFL. So we're going to push them because they are our only licensee." However, McCarthy stopped short of saying the NFL was going to get involved in the nuts and bolts aspect of game development. He did say that with only one licensee, the NFL would now be able to focus its energies and marketing on one title, as well as saying that EA would receive more time and access with the players themselves.

What's next for ESPN? Unfortunately, developer Visual Concepts is not speaking on its future plans. In a statement from co-publisher

Sega, the company says it will soldier on with its other sports games. "The agreement removes the competitive playing field; limiting creativity and innovation – two fundamental principles that drive Sega and our industry to produce better games. Sega will continue to publish a diverse portfolio of sports and entertainment content." Game Informer contacted Visual Concepts, but they wouldn't comment on whether it would go forward with a non-licensed football game, return to NCAA college ball, or if ESPN the company would withdraw its support in light of these recent events.

Certainly the danger does exist of EA (or Sega, for that matter) trying to reach exclusive deals with the remaining pro sports leagues (like the MLB or NBA), but this is unlikely. Madden's majority of ownership of the large football market is a different situation than basketball, for example, where the competition slices up more equal portions of a smaller pie. It would not make sense for the NBA to award an exclusive license to EA because that would instantly negate millions in sales from both ESPN and Midway's *NBA Ballers* – a combo that accounts for a larger total percentage of the basketball market than EA.

While friends and message boards will now be silent on the great debate of ESPN vs. Madden, the question as to whether this is good for gamers as a whole has just begun. Petitions have sprung up online boycotting the NFL which have been signed by thousands of people, and EA Sports will be closely watched for its commitment to the sport versus just cashing the checks of a captive audience. Finally, Sega isn't throwing in the towel. In the words of one anonymous Visual Concepts employee: "Luke might've just had his hand cut off by Vader, and Han might be frozen in carbonite and in the hands of Jabba, but that's just the end of act two, and the war with the evil Empire isn't over yet. Not by a longshot."





**"BEFORE NORMANDY  
WE WERE JUST SOLDIERS."**

**"BUT EIGHT DAYS IN HELL  
MADE US BROTHERS."**

**- SGT. MATT BAKER**



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

**PC**  
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PlayStation 2



**ONLINE**  
BROADBAND ONLY



**XBOX**  
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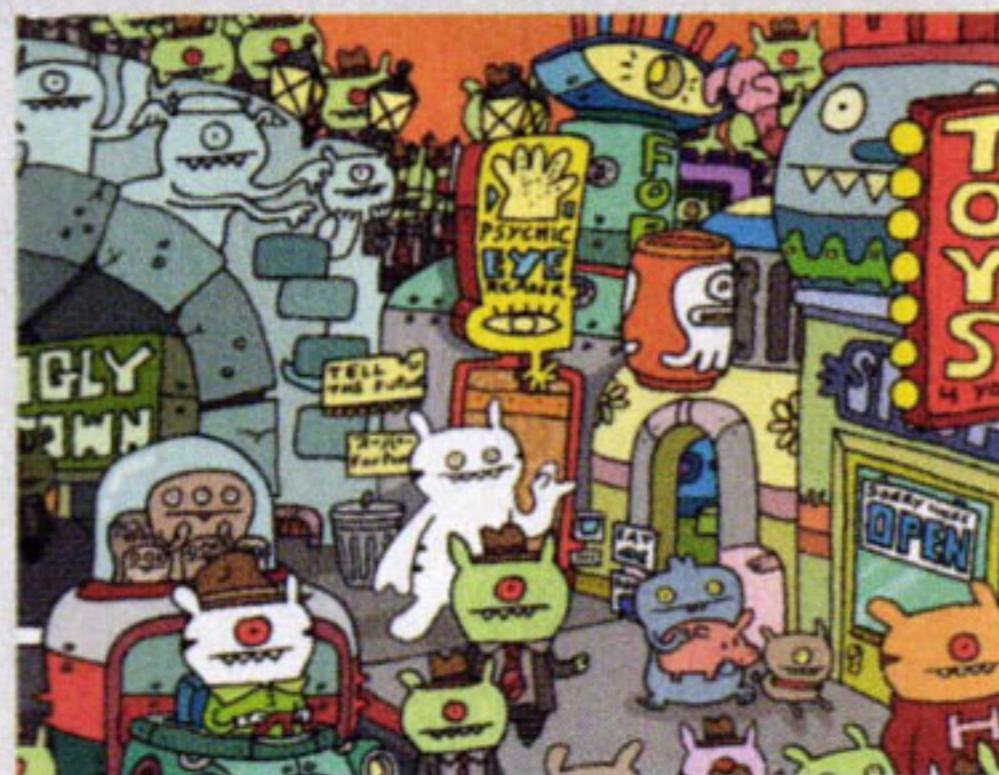
**UBISOFT™**

# LOOSE TALK

## Hot Gaming Gossip

### THE PS3 IS UGLY

Loose Talk has been tipped off about a potentially strange PlayStation 3 game that is based off of the creations of artist David Horvath, the man behind the Uglydolls and Noupa plush/vinyl figures. An animated show is also in the works for Uglydolls (with one in Japan already). The project was originally slated for the PlayStation 2, but has switched over to the PS3, with a release expected – according to Horvath himself – as coming with the “third or fourth wave of games” for the system.



David's Horvath's Uglydolls

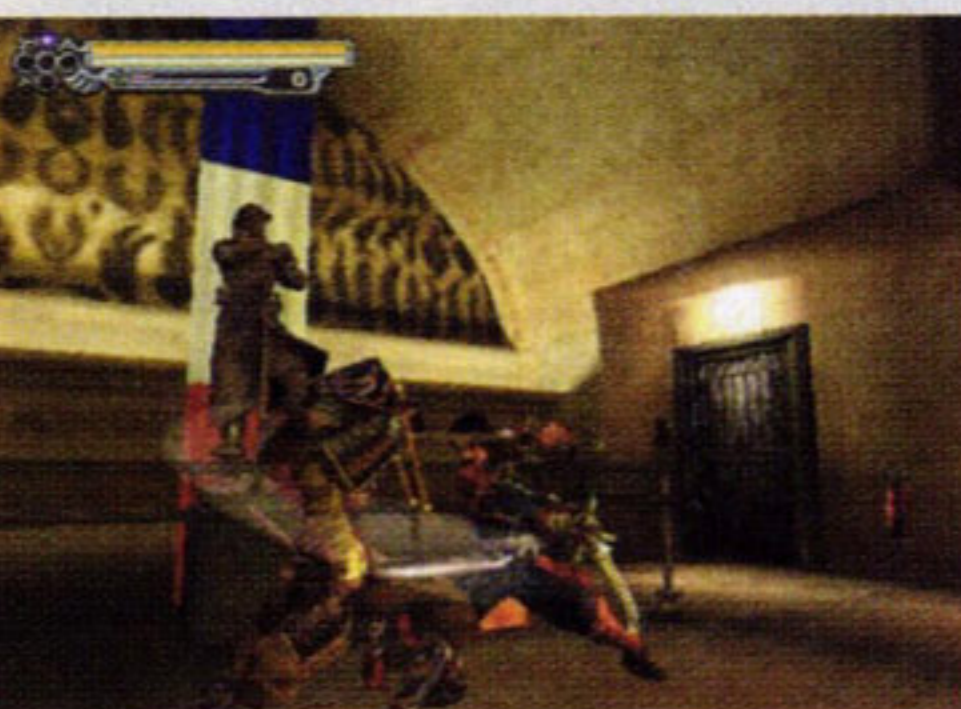
### NINTENDO ONLINE WITH SQUARE



While Nintendo is no fan of online play, company luminary Shigeru Miyamoto recently did reveal that the publisher/developer is working with Square Enix on an online title for the Nintendo DS. With Miyamoto saying that he doesn't expect online to become big until three to four years from now, hopefully we won't have to wait that long for this mysterious collaboration to hit the shelves. And God help us if there's a bucket involved.

### ESPN BRINGS BACK \$50 AND FOOTBALL

The recent exclusive deal for the NFL license by EA Sports puts enormous pressure on ESPN Videogames to keep its head above water with its remaining sports titles. It looks like one way it plans to make up for the loss of its ESPN NFL game is by raising its remaining titles back to the standard \$50 price point – something which was being contemplated anyway with the coming of the next-gen systems. As for football, Loose Talk has heard that ESPN will definitely be creating a pigskin game of some variety.



### CAPCOM EXPANDS PSP

Although Capcom has already committed to bringing some of its franchises to the PSP (such as Viewtiful Joe and Devil May Cry), recently the company openly contemplated its next moves on the system. A survey on its official Japanese webpage asked fans what series they'd like to see on the handheld. So hopefully, if Japanese fans play their cards right, we could be seeing Resident Evil, Onimusha, Mega Man, or even Rival Schools hit the PSP.

### EA HOSTILE TO UBISOFT

Electronic Arts has bought almost a 19.9 percent stake in Ubisoft – a move that the French company had no say on. A spokesperson for Ubisoft speculated that EA was trying to cash in on some of Ubisoft's future, next-gen plans. Although EA doesn't yet have control over what the company's management does, the key word is “yet.” We have a feeling the EA isn't just buying large chunks of Ubisoft out of the kindness of its heart.



**UBISOFT™**

Got some insider info? Email us at [loosetalk@gameinformer.com](mailto:loosetalk@gameinformer.com) and we'll be all ears.

# NAME THAT GAME

## Test Your Sight

This month's game comes from the minds of Sid Meier, Brian Reynolds, and the people at Firaxis. It's similar to its predecessor Civilization II, but takes players off Earth and into space to build their society. The game features seven factions each trying to colonize the planet Chiron in the mold of their particular philosophy, such as fascism (The Human Hive), environmentalism (Gaia's Stepdaughters), religion (The Lord's Believers), education (University of Planet), and more.

(Answer on page 26)

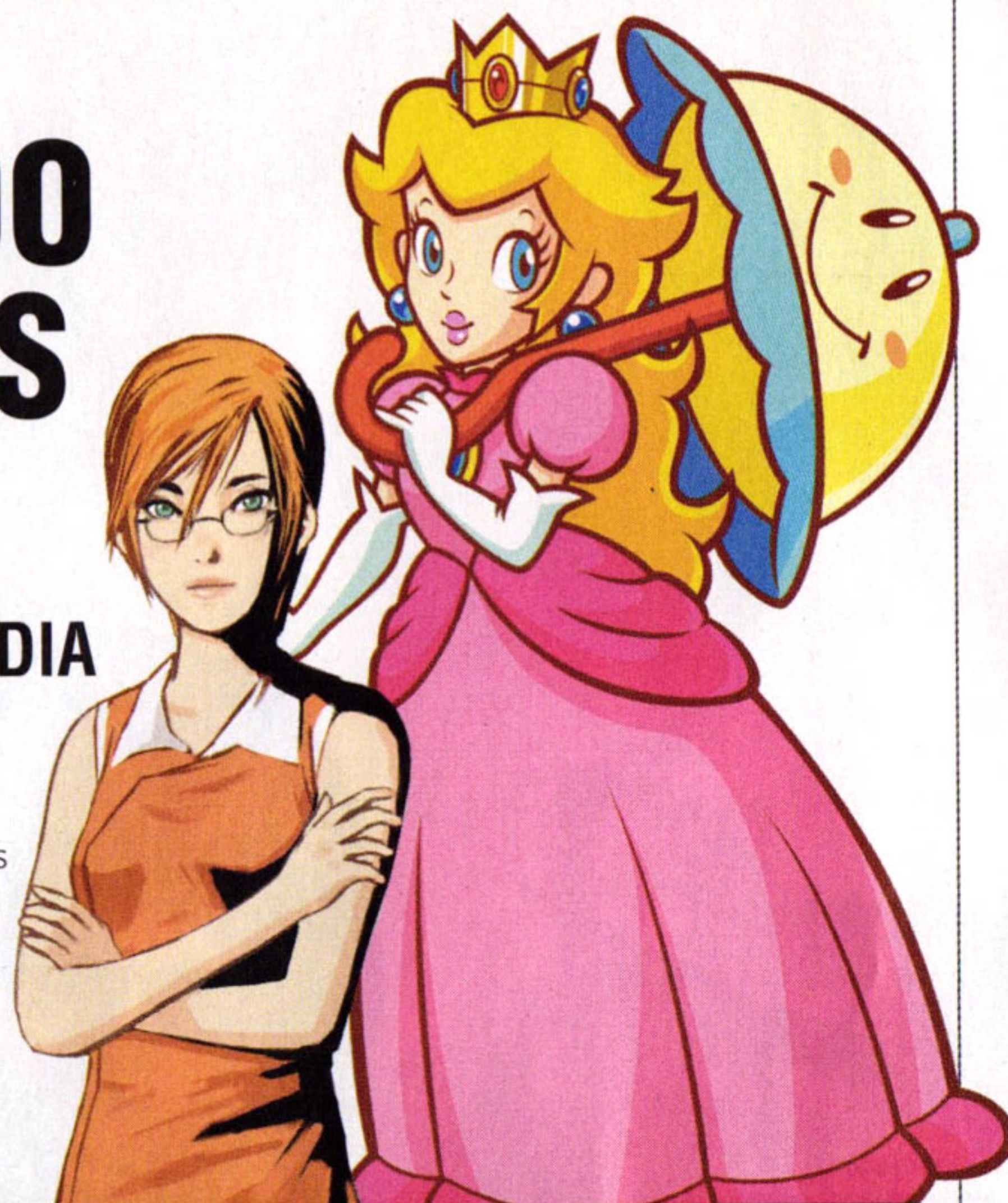


## news

# NINTENDO DELIVERS FOR DS

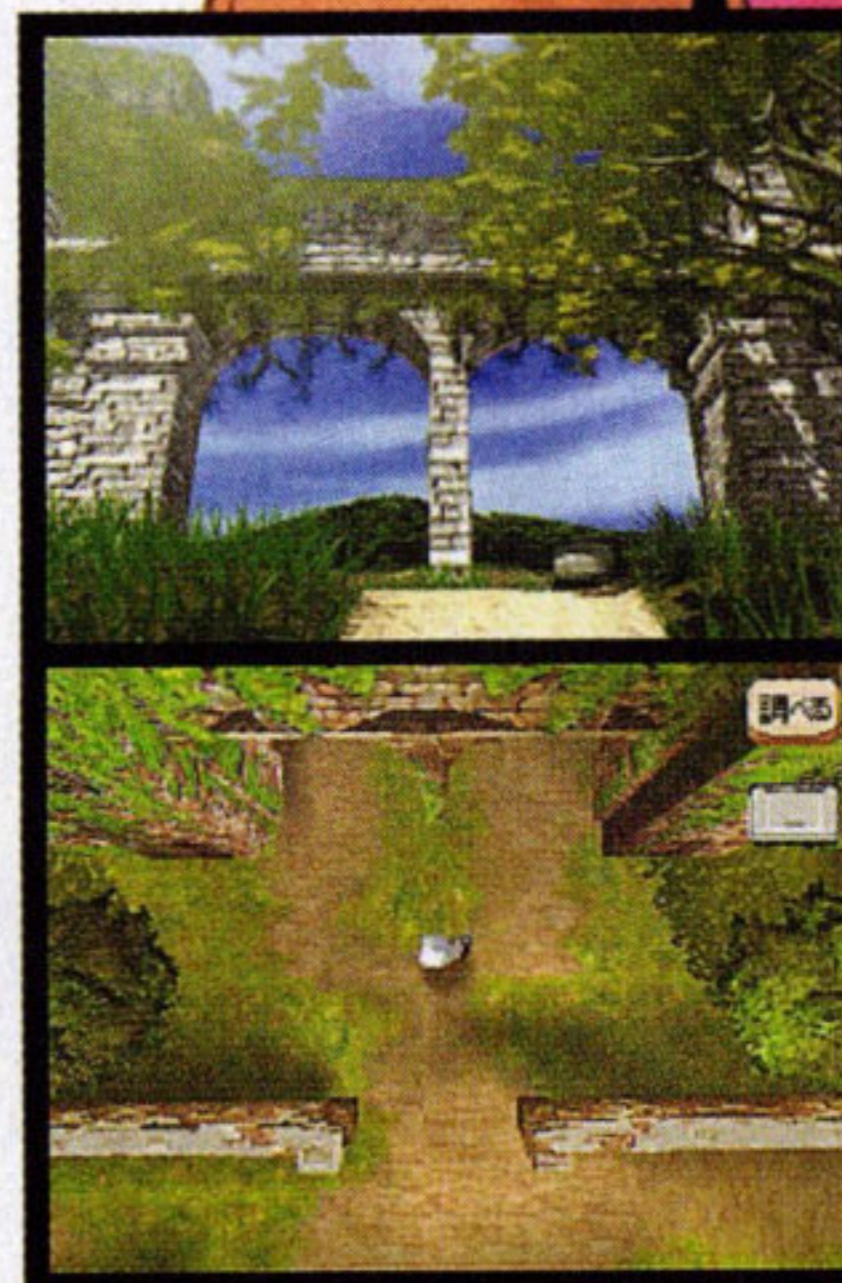
## MORE GAMES, MEDIA PLAYER COMING

Some were disappointed that there weren't more first-party Nintendo games at the launch of the DS, but the company is rolling out the red carpet for a new batch. Some will be here sooner, others later, but all will make use of the DS's special features one way or another in 2005.



### Animal Crossing

This cult hit for the GameCube makes special use of the DS's second screen, allowing you to draw on it. Also, the Wi-Fi capability of the system lets four players meet up and chat in the same village.



### Another

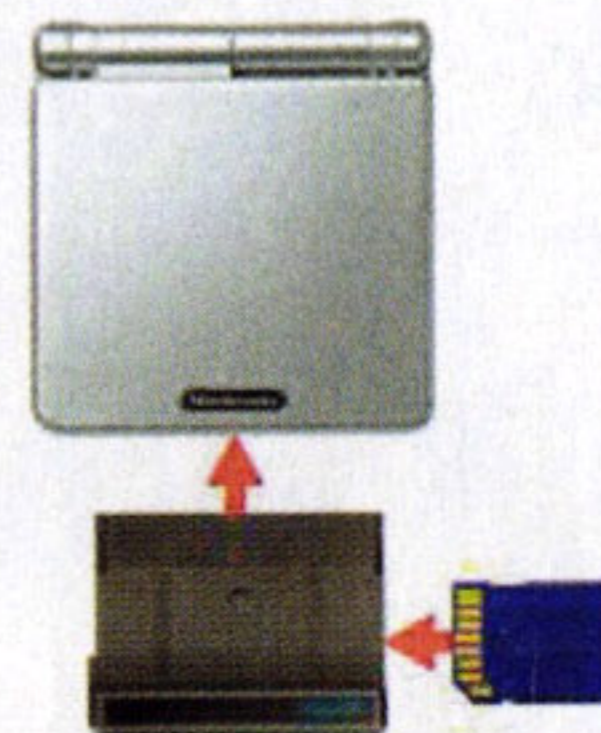
You star as Ashley, a 13-year-old girl searching for the mystery behind her dead mother and missing father, and what a government device known as “Another” might have to do with it. Puzzles will be solved using the DS's touch screen.



### Super Princess Peach

In a welcome turn of events, Princess Peach gets to prove her worth by saving the kidnapped Mario! Helping out in this 2D adventure is Peach's sentient, happy umbrella named Kassa. It's unknown what the top screen does, other than show a large shot of the Princess in all of her vain glory.

In other news, Nintendo is giving Japanese DS and GBA owners video and audio playback through a device tentatively known as Play-yan. By uploading MPEG-4 movies or MP3 audio files from a PC that's connected to an SD card reader, you can then take the SD card and put it in a special adapter – Play-yan. This adapter can then be put into your GBA or Nintendo DS (since it plays GBA titles) for viewing or listening. Play-yan will not come with an SD card reader or any connections to your PC. The GBA battery should last around four hours for movie playback and between eight to 15 hours for music listening (depending if you have the screen on). Nintendo has no current plans to bring Play-yan to America.



games

# COME GET SOME UGLY

## MAJESCO'S NEW ANTI-HERO



Now that you've destroyed all the cute dolls and stuffed animals your little sister got for Christmas, you can step up to some bigger competition – who are armed with bunny rocket launchers and lollipop axes. Majesco's Raze's Hell is a new third-person shooter that lets you visit gruesome death upon a whole world of annoyingly adorable characters exclusively on the Xbox. The spring title spans 20 levels, contains Xbox Live support, and puts you in the shoes of Raze as he goes to war against the Kewletts. Resisting their sick utopian vision, Raze wants his home to stay the same, ugly place it's always been (no, it's not Detroit), and he's got over 10 weapons at his disposal to make sure it stays that way. We like his style.

### R & D

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

PlayStation 2

## GOLDEN GIRL ROUGE AGENT



### GoldenGirl: Rouge Agent

You were a hero once. As an elite salesperson at the J.C. Penny beauty counter, you were the envy of clerks across the store. However, when you failed to powder a virtual nose in a simulator, you were unceremoniously fired. In GoldenGirl: Rouge Agent, the player takes up the role of a maverick beauty technician stripped of rank and honor, driven by a savage thirst for revenge and modestly priced cosmetics. The department store that trained you will now need to find a way to hold you at bay as you spitefully apply mascara and lipstick to all who stand in your way, making all exits from the store into the mall an impenetrable and uncomfortable gauntlet. Dual-wielding perfume bottles and tubes of lotion, you maliciously unleash glamour upon an unsuspecting, unfabulous world. Using environmental traps like eyeliner pencil floor-spikes and toxic blush fog, you reap a radiant, alluring harvest of subtle elegance. When you finally corner those who wronged you, as they tremble before your graceful prowess, you ruthlessly proceed to give them erroneous advice about how best to accentuate their cheekbones. Revenge is sweet; they will certainly look the fools at their next high-society gala! Evil never looked so good.

## THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

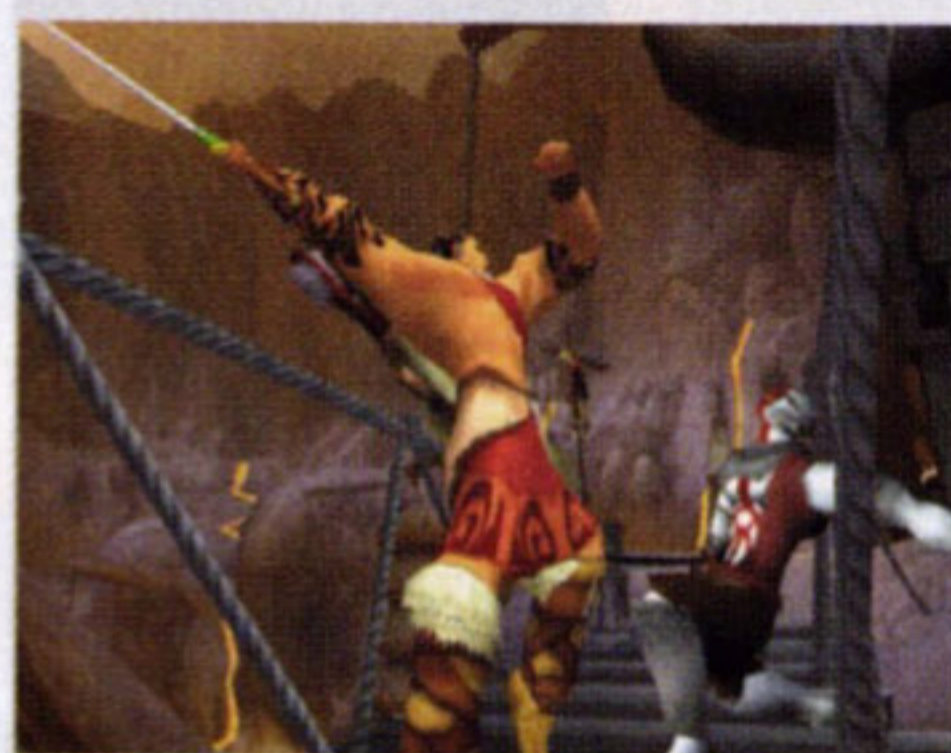
### GOOD

Anyone with a sweet tooth for bizarre gaming gobbled up Namco's Katamari Damacy, and recently the company confirmed a sequel. The title should appear on the PlayStation 2 in the next fiscal year, which spans from April 2005 to March 2006. Namco has also announced versions of both Baten Kaitos and Xenosaga for the Nintendo DS.



### GOOD

On June 9, Xbox owners will get their second dose of GTA love. Grand Theft Auto San Andreas comes out for Xbox and the PC. We anticipate upgrades of some kind, just like the last GTA port. Also, a PSP title from Rockstar is also in the works.



### BAD

Perhaps taking a cue from label mate Gran Turismo 4, Sony's Rise of the Kasai is also ditching its online co-op component. Also spotted on the bus out of town, alongside online play, was a chunk of the game's former fanbase.

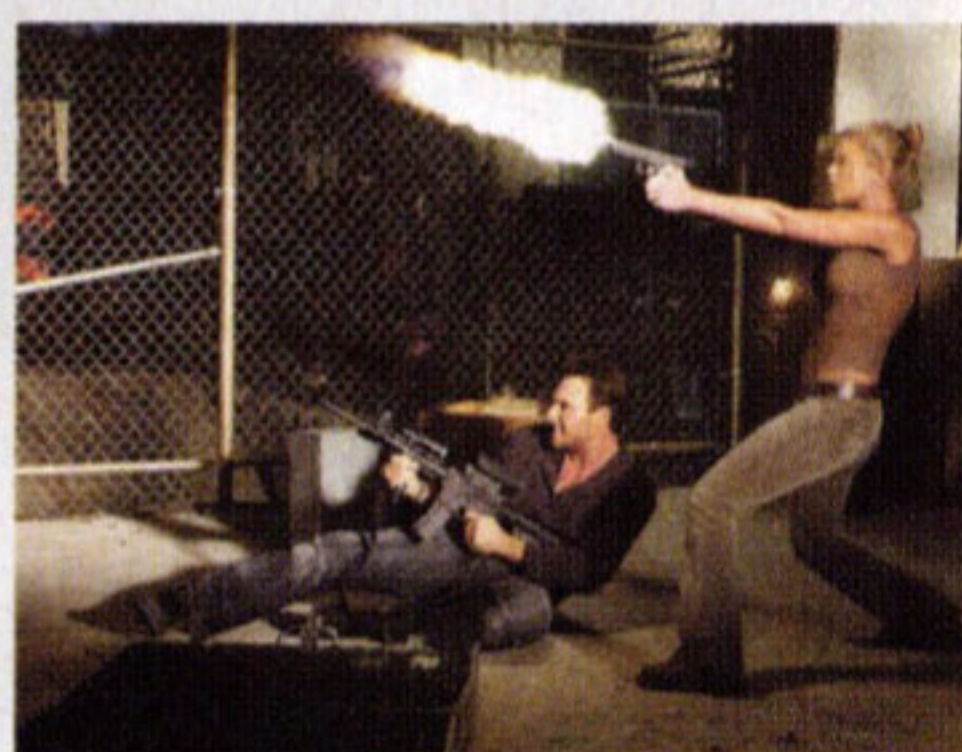
### BAD

Forza is going to ridiculous lengths to be like racing leader Gran Turismo. Now the Microsoft simulation game has announced that it, too is being delayed. The title will come out this April.



### GOOD

Reflections' founder Martin Edmondson has quit the Atari-owned studio. Edmondson created the popular Driver series, which unfortunately nose-dived with Driv3r. The good news is that he is planning a return to video games with a new company and IP. We look forward to it.



### UGLY

Gamers receiving demo discs from Sony's PlayStation Underground recently had their memory cards wiped. The disc contained a demo of Capcom's Viewtiful Joe 2, which when played, would erase all the data on any memory cards in the system. Sony issued an apology, but couldn't refund the hours of the victims' lives.

### BAD

Here's a picture of Christian Slater and Tara Reid desperately trying to stave off the Demon of Irrelevant Movie Stars in the upcoming film Alone in the Dark. You can see the grisly carnage starting January 28.

## TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

### DEVELOPER

**Bill Trost**  
Lead Game Designer, Untold Legends, Brotherhood of the Blade (PSP)



### READER

**JOHNATHON KEY**  
Suitland, MD



- 1 System Shock 2 – PC
- 2 Eternal Darkness – GameCube
- 3 The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past – SNES
- 4 Sid Meier's Pirates! – PC
- 5 Katamari Damacy – PS2

- 1 GoldenEye 007 – N64
- 2 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City – PS2
- 3 Need For Speed: Underground – PS2
- 4 Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy – PS2
- 5 Final Fantasy X-2 – PS2

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five  
724 N 1st St 4th Fl  
Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022  
email: topfive@gameinformer.com  
(attach digital picture)

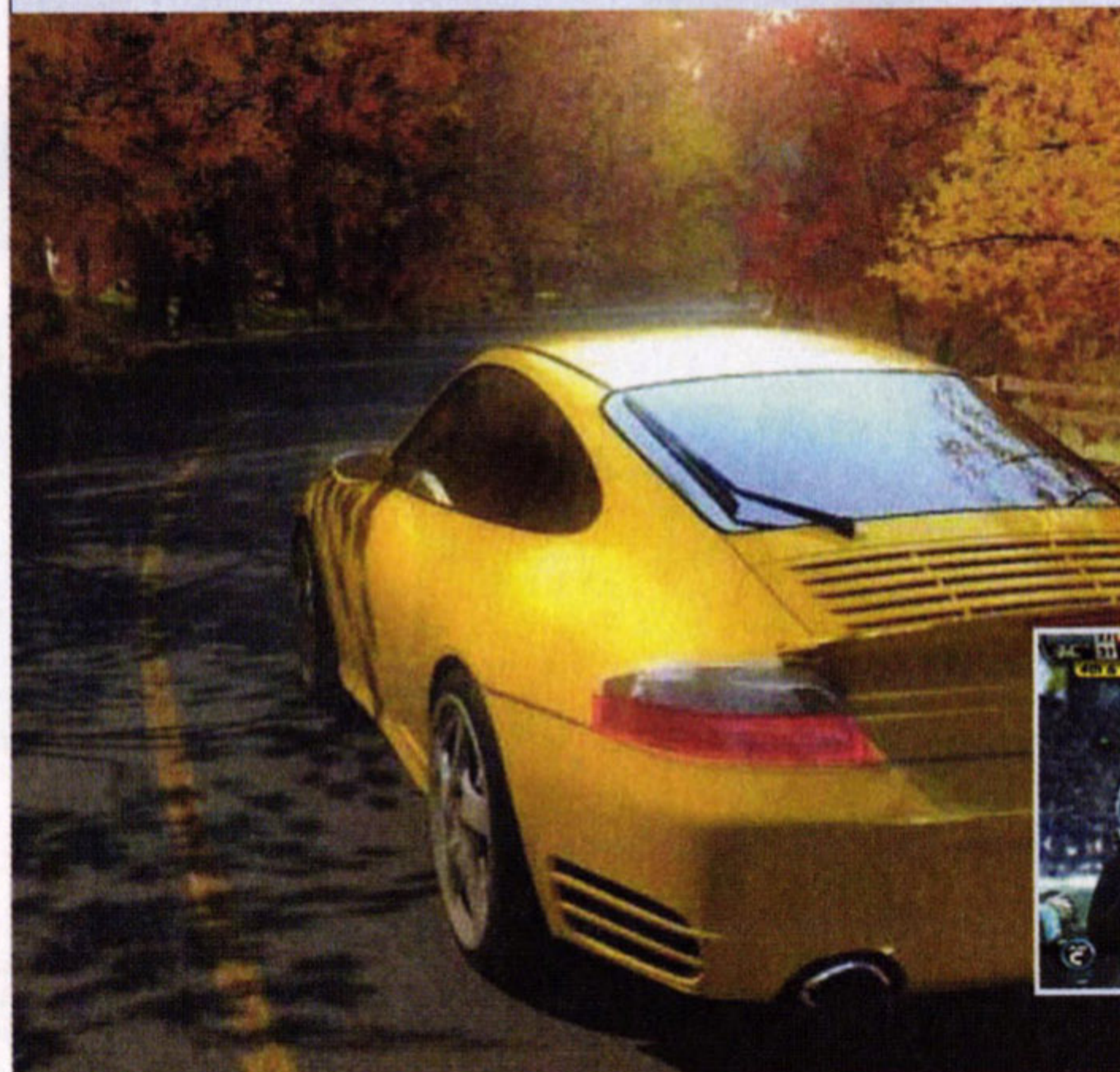
## TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

### Top 10 Exclusive Rights Not Purchased by EA

- 10 The Wayans brothers: Nothing says "Automatic Second Tier" like a Wayans
- 9 Your high school football team: They haven't proved to be a threat...yet
- 8 Domino's Pizza: Ever since they ditched the Noid, they've got no gaming credibility
- 7 Foxy Boxing: Fight Night Meets Catwoman! It's a gold mine!
- 6 CNN: With a name like Wolf Blitzer, you know he's right for video games
- 5 Pork and chicken: Can anything withstand the combined power of both white meats?
- 4 XFL: It never happened...it never happened
- 3 The Federal Government: Soon enough. One thing at a time
- 2 The Force: Possibly an EA pseudonym. Observe: "[The Force] surrounds us, and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together." See also: "The power to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force."
- 1 Post-It Notes: EA doesn't need help sticking anything to anyone

Name That Game Answer: Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri



news

# THE LOOK OF EA'S NEXT-GEN?

## EA LEAKS MOCK-UPS FOR MADDEN, NEED FOR SPEED

These two conceptual pictures popped up on the Internet, and were released by Electronic Arts executives as a prototypical look for two of its biggest franchises on next-generation consoles: Madden NFL and Need for Speed Underground. Game Informer contacted EA about these shots, and while a spokesperson could confirm that they were official, they were only intended as mock-ups and are believed to have been created using only approximate specs of next-gen hardware.



EA's new Madden looks very similar to a gorgeous CG commercial Nike put together last year showing Michael Vick and Terrell Owens playing pitch and catch. The commercial was shot by Motion Analysis Studios using 50 cameras and over 20 mo-cap athletes.

news

# VIDEO GAMES ATTACKED – YAWN!

## 'TIS THE SEASON TO CONDEMN VIDEO GAMES

With parents buying video games for their children this past holiday season, opponents of the industry once again took the opportunity to criticize the industry on Capitol Hill. The National Institute on Media and the Family (NIMF) produced a list of the top ten "Worst Violent Video Games" as part of its ninth annual Video Game Report Card. The report claimed that because the industry doesn't believe that video games are "harmful," it and the ESRB rating system are effectively telling parents to "pay attention to the ratings, but it really doesn't matter if you do."

In response, ESRB president Patricia Vance said in a statement: "The National Institute on Media and the Family report card does a grave disservice to America's parents by suggesting that they cannot trust ESRB ratings. The fact is that a new comprehensive study conducted on the reliability of the video game rating system found that parents agree with ESRB 83 percent of the time." The games on NIMF's own top ten list have all been given an M-rating from the ESRB, designating them as mature titles for those 17 and older.

"If NIMF were forthcoming," said Vance, "it would acknowledge that its own ratings are in sync with the ESRB's virtually all of the time."

Meanwhile, a five-member coalition of parent, church, and women's organizations released its own grandstanding list of bad video games, some of which don't even exist! Besides mentioning Hitman: Blood Money, which isn't even out yet, the list contained Shadow Hearts (it came out in 2001), and some

title called Gunslinger Girls 2 (perhaps they meant Gunslinger Girl Vol. 3 – an import title). Also on the list was Mortal Combat: Deception [sic], Half-Life 2, and, of course, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. Does this mean we can buy GTA: Vice City and it's okay? The funniest part of the groups' self-righteousness was that the list (and all its errors) was syndicated to newspapers around the country, with all of its misinformation blaring just as loud as the moral outrage.

### The NIMF's Worst Violent Video Games

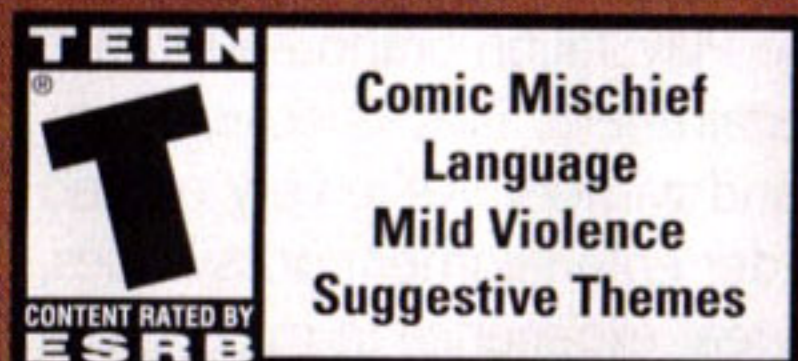
- Doom 3
- Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
- Half-Life 2
- Halo 2
- Resident Evil: Outbreak
- Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy
- The Guy Game
- Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude
- Mortal Kombat: Deception
- Rumble Roses

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the answers,  
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PlayStation 2

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## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1990 ▼

## Big In Japan

House, after having taught English in Japan following his graduation from Oxford University, takes a job in the corporate communications wing of Sony. Early on, he becomes interested in the company's new video game console project.

1995 ▼

## A New Chapter

House is transferred to the company's new Sony Computer Entertainment division, and works in the marketing and communication division helping to launch the original PlayStation.

1996 ▼

## A Mascot Is Born



Crash Bandicoot is released, introducing gamers to a character that would serve as a mascot for PlayStation. House, working in Sony's marketing department, helps promote Crash, a hip and edgy alternative to Nintendo's Mario series.

2000 ▼

## Expanding the Empire

Sony makes a bid to retain its hold on the video game market with the release of the PlayStation 2. Despite a somewhat underwhelming launch lineup, the console quickly dispenses with Sega's Dreamcast and goes on to become the dominant system of the generation.

2001 ▼

## The Big Deal



House and Sony sign one of the decade's wisest business deals: securing Rockstar's ultrapopular Grand Theft Auto franchise as a PlayStation 2 exclusive until 2004. Although ports of the products would appear on Xbox and PC, the latest GTA games will all debut on PS2.

2002 ▼

## A Promotion

House is promoted to executive vice president, where he continues to oversee Sony's marketing and third-party publishing relationships. House wins acclaim for his work on creating Sony's "Live in Your World. Play in Ours." campaign, which is praised by Ad Age and Ad Week.

2004 ▼

## PSP A Reality

Sony releases its long-awaited handheld console, the PlayStation Portable in Japan. It sells out in a matter of hours, while House and Sony Computer Entertainment America continue planning for its spring 2005 U.S. launch.

# ANDREW HOUSE

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

**>> Andrew House is a rare breed in today's mercenary business world: a company man. He's spent nearly his entire professional career at Sony, helping to guide the company's PlayStation brand towards market dominance. We recently chatted with House, getting his views on PSP and the future of gaming. <<**

## Talk about how you came to be involved with Sony and PlayStation in the early days.

I joined Sony in Tokyo way back in 1990. I started out [in the] corporate communications group for Sony Corp. on the consumer electronics side at the headquarters [in Tokyo]. One of the projects that I got involved with was PlayStation way back in its inception when it was a small project. I gradually became more and more intrigued by the project and its potential. Interestingly enough, internally in the company it was quite looked down upon at the time. I think it was viewed by the Sony establishment at the time as being very alien to the core consumer electronics business that was Sony. But thanks to the vision of Ken Kutaragi, here we sit today, 10 years later seeing the company really at the heart of what is successful about Sony.

## What can we expect from the PSP marketing campaign in America?

I think what you'll see us do is some things that are very much in line with the success that we built around PlayStation 2. [We need] the right balance of games front and center because – let's face it – we know that the first buyers of this system are

## Nintendo DS just launched quite successfully in the U.S. and Japan. Are you worried that it might be stealing some of the momentum for PSP?

Absolutely not. I think the products are positioned very differently. I tend to view the DS as an extension of the existing handheld gaming market, which is all very well and good, but what we're trying to accomplish with PSP is something far broader and far more revolutionary. As we've proven since the original PlayStation launch, the industry grew from somewhere around \$5 billion to \$12 billion a year in North America alone. The potential to recreate that kind of magic in the handheld space is really huge.

## It looks very likely that Xbox 2 is coming out in 2005. Is that something that you're looking at in terms of beginning to market PS3?

First, I would say that this is the first company that delivered a ten-year console life cycle, and we have every intention of maintaining a very long commitment for the consumer as far as PlayStation 2 is concerned. Secondly, in terms of when it's right to launch the next generation of consoles, in the

## the new PS2 doesn't have hard drive support, is that idea dead?

No. You're actually talking to one of the most passionate believers in microtransactions as a far more viable business model for online games than the ones that currently exist. I do not see the necessity of a hard drive; I think there are other client-side storage solutions that we can look at. You'll see us actively roll out those plans very soon.

## Does that include downloads with PSP?

Yes. PSP obviously comes with memory stick storage. I think it's a very interesting leap forward that you now have a handheld entertainment and gaming device that uses a storage medium that can interact with televisions and PCs.

## Some people are speculating that digital distribution of games will be a reality in the next generation of consoles. Do you think the time is right for that model?

I think that, with the consumption of whole games, if this generation of hardware is anything to go by, what we've seen as a constant is a year-on-year growth as to just how data intensive games

***The [PSP] really has a potential to be an icon for the consumers.***

going to buy PSP for the games. And then gradually offer the idea of other entertainment possibilities around the system. Though, I think you will see us embrace fashion as an element in our marketing mix more than we have before. Although we've had great success in working with entertainers, that'll be even more crucial as we build the right kind of buzz and the right kind of fashion statement for PSP. And finally, I think that, in keeping with a long Sony tradition, the goal is to not get in the way of the beauty of the product itself. The product really has a potential to be an icon for the consumers.

## What is the schedule for PSP movie and music distribution? Is that something that's going to come around the American launch?

I think you may see some early, very target-appropriate releases that emerge around launch. But, precisely because we know that the early adopter of PSP is going to be focused largely on games, I think that we want to establish the system as a very successful handheld gaming system. Then, within the course of the first year, [we'll] start to roll out other plans and show other possibilities for the system – probably by the fall of 2005.

ten years that we've been in the business we've launched consoles both before and after the competition. The key is to launch when the technology is right, when there is a quantum leap in the consumer experience. And really, those are the factors that will make our decisions.

## Is Sony looking to a more Xbox Live-style integrated online structure that might incorporate the PlayStation Portable and the PlayStation 3 in the future?

I think one of the most intriguing aspects of PSP is the potential for interactivity between different consoles, and the opportunity to create what I call pervasive franchises. [Franchises] that not only exist on your home console but ones you can take with you and enhance the experience. I think that will be an area of focus for us. Our approach to an integrated online service is one that will find the right business model, which we do not believe to be subscriptions.

## Kaz Hirai has talked about "microtransactions" as the future of online – buying individual vehicles in GT 4, for example. Now that

are. When we shipped [PS2] in 2000, we firmly believed we'd never see games that shipped on a DVD-9 and take up almost 9 gigs of capacity. I think, as that trend continues, packaged media will absolutely be the dominant form of how we buy our initial games. What's interesting is the area of episodic content appropriate to certain games. A lot of that is opened up with the possibility of digital distribution.

## Nintendo has made some statements regarding the fact that they don't feel the PSP is a "true" gaming device, but rather a multimedia device. How do you respond to that?

The same charges were laid at PlayStation 2's feet when it first launched. There's a reason why PSP is launched under the PlayStation brand and from Sony Computer Entertainment. That's because we understand gaming and gamers. We're very excited about the other broader entertainment possibilities, but I think we have great experience in making sure that the right gaming content is there first. I think the trend towards convergent devices is already happening; I think those companies that don't embrace it will be passed by. But, with us, that's balanced with a very strong gaming heritage.

# THINKING BIG

■ Sony's Andrew House will play a crucial role in guiding the company into the next generation of home and handheld consoles





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home entertainment

# SCREENPLAY 4805

**Manufacturer:** InFocus  
**Website:** www.infocushome.com  
**List Price:** \$1,299

Switching your home entertainment setup to a full HD wonderland will probably require some finagling. For starters, most TVs won't have enough of the deliciously high-quality component inputs that a multi-console household needs. Pelican's redesigned HD System Selector will let you hook up to four systems through one input, as well as managing the same number of Ethernet connections. For gigantic HD, InFocus' ScreenPlay 4805 will project a high definition 16:9 image up to nine feet wide, and performs better than its predecessors in rooms with windows – blackout curtains are still helpful, but not absolutely necessary anymore.



FRONT >>



<< BACK

home entertainment

# HD SYSTEM SELECTOR

**Manufacturer:** Pelican  
**Website:** www.pelicanperformance.com  
**List Price:** \$79.99

etc

# NINTENDO DS SKINS

**Manufacturer:** DecalGirl  
**Website:** www.decalgirl.com  
**List Price:** \$9.99

Since Nintendo went the bland route and has only released the DS in silver, we think that pimping them out a bit might be the order of the day. DecalGirl offers around 50 designs, from sci-fi festering aliens to simulated hardwood. They won't even mess up the factory finish when removed, so you can redecorate your DS as often as you want, girlfriend!

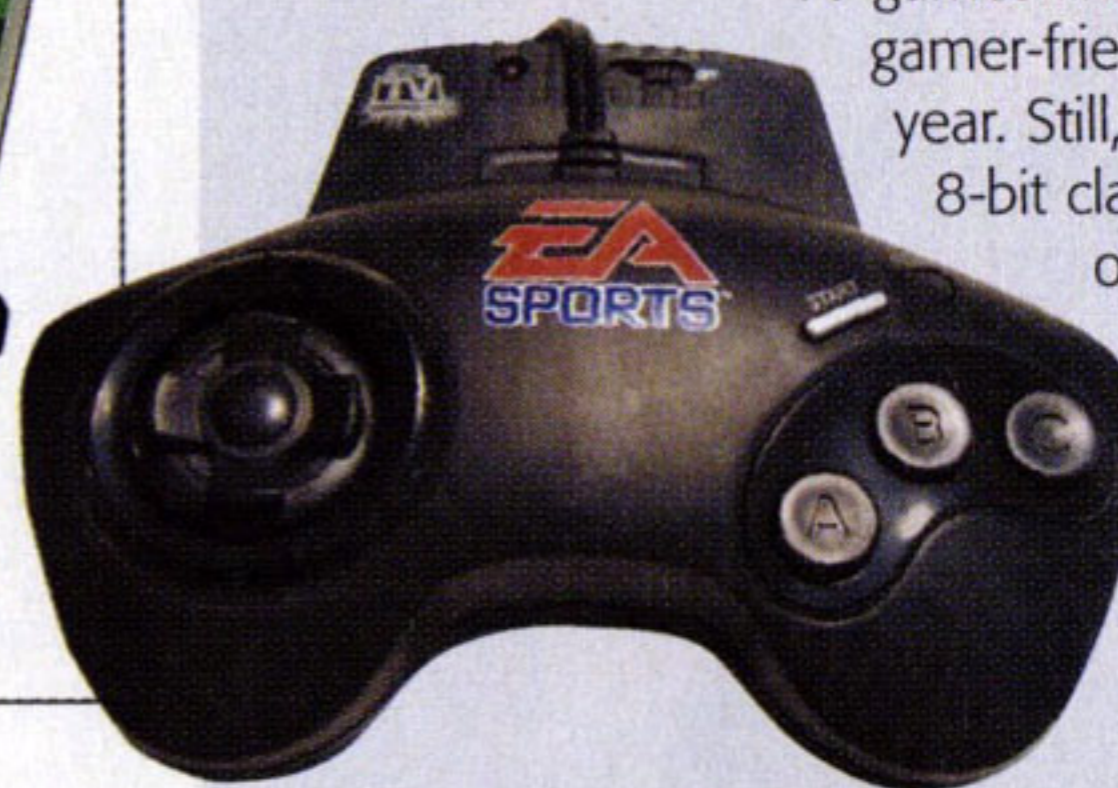


toys

# CLASSIC EA SPORTS TV GAMES

**Manufacturer:** JAKKS Pacific  
**Website:** www.jakkstvgames.com  
**List Price:** \$25 (Single Player), \$35 (2-Player)

With a catchy combination of low price, nostalgically loved titles, and easy no-console-required setup, Jakks Pacific's TV games line is arguably the coolest gamer-friendly gadget of the last year. Still, their titles had all been 8-bit classics riding on fond memories – until now. Madden 95 and NHL 95 each offer full season modes and player stats along with the classic 16-bit titles. It even looks like a Genesis controller!



peripherals

# CHAINSAW CONTROLLER

**Manufacturer:** Nuby Tech **Website:** www.nubytch.com  
**List Price:** \$49.99

There's not much to say about this except that we want it. We want it really, really badly. Like kidney-selling badly (or maybe just platelets, because we're kind of squeamish sometimes). Anyway, Nuby's fully functional controller pays loving homage to the upcoming Resident Evil 4, and even has a speaker onboard that makes menacing chainsaw noises! In case you're wondering, no, it doesn't get much better than this.



toys

# URBZ: MINIOPOLIS EDITION

**Manufacturer:** Atomic Toys  
**Website:** www.atomictoys.com **List Price:** \$5.00



Nice pocketable characters are becoming more and more commonplace for action figure lines. Joyride's Halo 2 series offers a bounty of different sets and each three-inch figure comes with a weapon or two. Atomic Toys' Series One Urbz Miniopolis line features 20 characters (16 people and four pets) which come in five-figure packages.



# HALO 2 MINI SETS

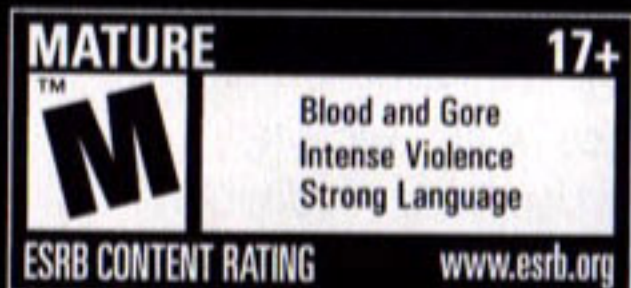
**Manufacturer:** Joyride Studios  
**Website:** www.joyridestudios.com  
**List Price:** \$10.99 (Two Pack), \$29.99 (Five Pack)

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ALIVE

# RESIDENT EVIL® OUTBREAK

FILE #2

SPRING 2005



PlayStation®2



CAPCOM

[www.residentevil.com](http://www.residentevil.com)

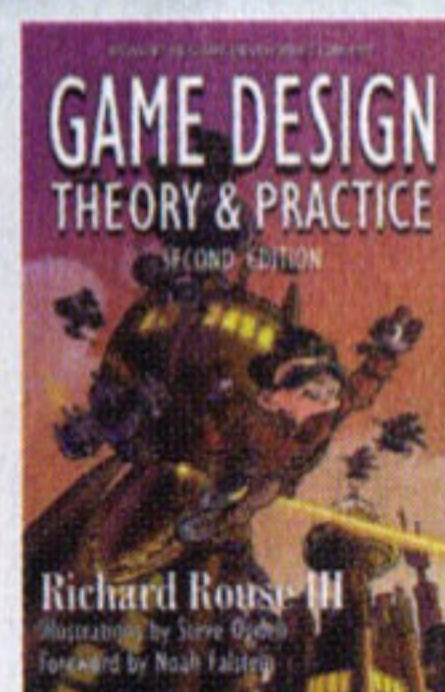
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Online play requires internet connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately).

# THE EVOLUTION OF GAME DESIGN



BY RICHARD ROUSE III,  
DESIGN DIRECTOR, SURREAL  
SOFTWARE, AUTHOR



Richard Rouse's  
*Game Design:  
Theory &  
Practice* Second  
Edition

**W**hen I first set out to write *Game Design: Theory & Practice* four years ago, doing a book purely about game design – and not about game programming – was a tough sell. It took some convincing to get my publisher to buy into the idea that such a book would find an audience. Up to that point almost all game development books had focused on game programming. Fortunately, *Game Design: Theory & Practice* did find an audience, enough for the publisher to request I update the book for a second edition. Today, as the second edition is finally coming out, there are quite a few books dedicated to the subject of game design. What does that say about the state of game development? Optimistically, it would appear today's developers have a keen interest in studying and mastering the fundamentals of game design, with the hope of making our games stronger and more compelling than ever before.

Compared to game technology – which seems to change dramatically every six months – game design advances occur much more incrementally. Whereas books about game programming typically become outdated within a year of their release, game design principles have a much longer shelf life. When I started working on the second edition, I found the original edition of *Game Design: Theory & Practice* was still very relevant to the challenges of modern game development. Of course, I found plenty to add to the book, since game design is a very complex subject that could never be fully covered in a single text. As a game designer you find that, as you work on more titles, you are constantly discovering new ways of fostering compelling gameplay. But at the same time, when compared to game technology, sometimes game design seems to hardly be progressing at all.

Though technology marches ever onward, I maintain the public's ability to detect an improvement in the visuals in a game from one console generation to the next is decreasing. A friend of mine, a non-hardcore gamer, was barely able to tell the graphical difference between Spyro the Dragon for the PSone and Ratchet & Clank for the PS2. If she could not detect a difference in that extreme case, how will she see the differ-

ence between PS2 and PS3 titles? Games are just now reaching the point where they look so good, gamers will be seeking out improvements in something other than the graphics to motivate them to play the hot new game. Game design seems to be the prime area where games have plenty of room left to evolve and grow.

One prominent trend in game design over the past four years is the continued blurring of genre lines. The wild popular and critical success of the recent Grand Theft Auto titles is a perfect example of this; they aren't just driving games, they aren't just action games, but they manage to incorporate elements of both to create an entirely new experience for gamers. The mixture of existing gameplay genres can lead to entirely new genres being created, while at the same time causing old genres to die off. In Grand Theft Auto III's case, the new gameplay may be so compelling it makes games that focus on only driving or only action seem limited and dated. Other recent stand-out examples of game genre blending include Deus Ex, Fable, and Jet Grind Radio, all games that recombined established game mechanics to create something truly innovative. My own game The Suffering sought to be unique by merging elements of first person shooters with survival horror games, something the sequel The Suffering: Ties that Bind will take to the next level. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas seems to have taken genre-blending to its limit by including RPG, strategy, and sim elements into one of the most complex multi-genre games ever.

Beyond genre blending, over the past four years games have continued to advance in other slow but steady ways. More innovative in-game storytelling techniques allow us to finally start relying less on cutscenes and more on gameplay itself to communicate our narrative. More games (such as Deus Ex and Fable) are empowering gamers to live out their own "player's stories," instead of being locked into the primrose path of pre-determined "designer's stories." Games have inch by inch started exploring more "verbs" for player expression, moving beyond "to kill" and "to survive" and onto "to protect" (ICO) or "to grow" (Pikmin). Multiplayer games continue to be fertile ground for game design evolution, with MMOs

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

being one of the few game spaces that allow players to meaningfully explore the verb "to love" from within a game space.

Nevertheless, the evolution of game design can seem frightfully slow. Whereas twenty years ago, significant variations in core game mechanics were commonplace from title to title, today new mechanics are significantly rarer. A big part of the successful evolution of game design comes not only from the creativity of designers themselves, but also from the publishers who fund a project's development, the press that reviews a title, and the public that buys the final game. Publishers, press, and gamers alike need to be willing to take a chance on new and innovative games instead of always falling back on the latest urban street racer or historical military FPS. These more conservative games may be perfectly entertaining, but they do little to explore the vast undiscovered country that is the promise of interactive entertainment. The success of a wildly original title like Katamari Damacy brings warmth to the hearts of game designers everywhere who yearn for a chance to really go out on a limb with a radical new game design concept.

At the end of the day, games provide an interactive experience in a way no other popular art form can. The game's design defines the nature of that interactivity, and so it is innovative and compelling game design that is most likely to make people choose games over novels, films, or other artistic mediums. The promise of games is tremendous indeed. It is the responsibility of those of us present at the birth of the medium, both designers and gamers alike, to make sure game design continues to evolve. ■■■

Richard Rouse III is design director at Surreal Software, a Midway Home Entertainment studio. Most recently, he was project lead, lead designer, and writer on the action-horror title *The Suffering*, and is currently writing its sequel, *The Suffering: Ties that Bind*. Rouse has been developing games professionally for over a decade and in addition to *The Suffering*, his credits include *Drakan: The Ancients' Gates*, *Centipede 3D*, *Damage Incorporated*, and *Odyssey: The Legend of Nemesis*. You can find more information and his book, *Game Design: Theory & Practice* at his web site, [www.paranoidproductions.com/gamedesign](http://www.paranoidproductions.com/gamedesign). Your feedback is encouraged at [gdp@paranoidproductions.com](mailto:gdp@paranoidproductions.com)

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

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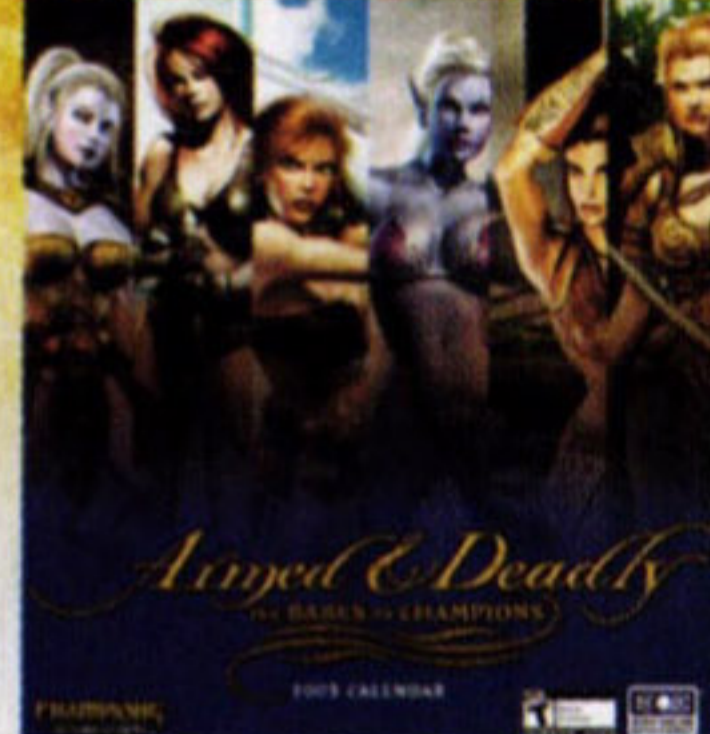


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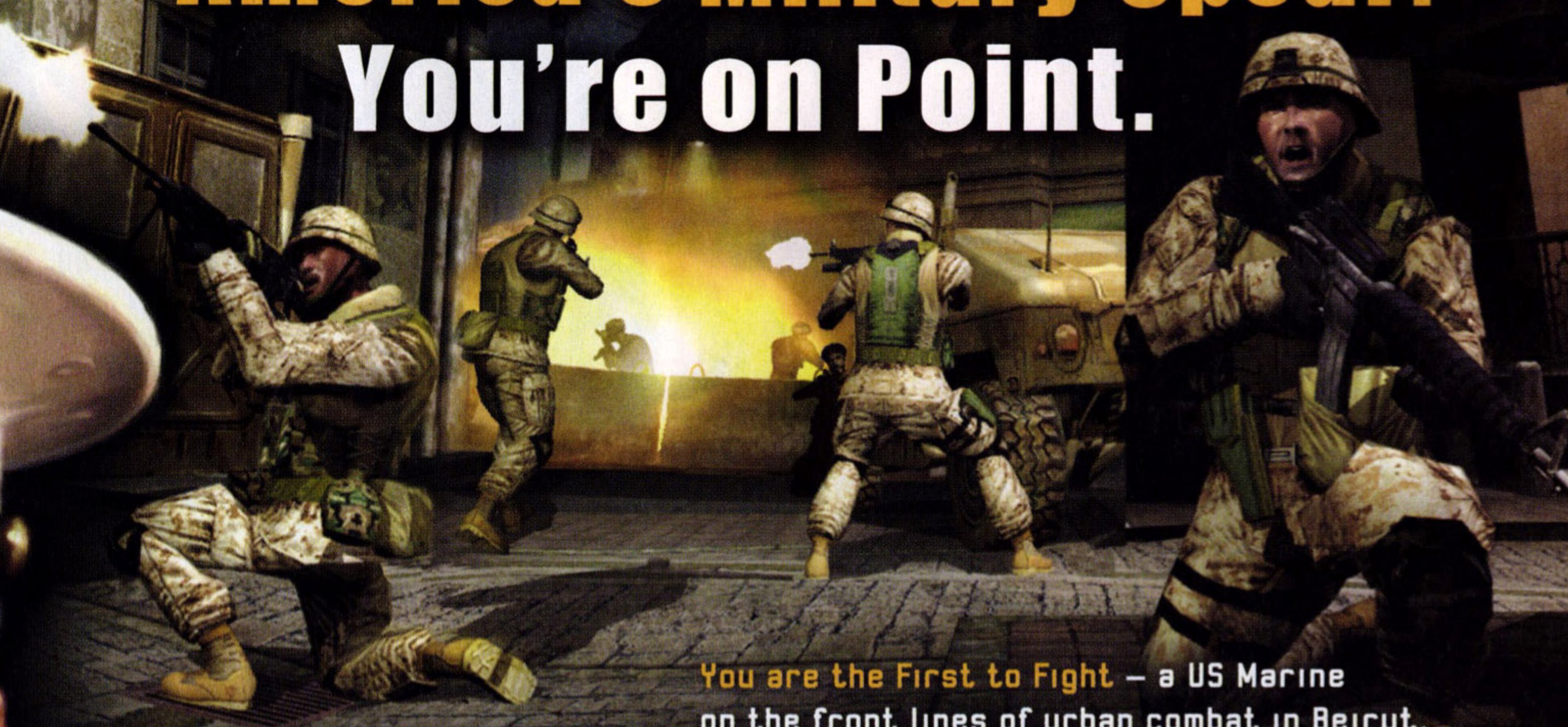
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sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
 <p><b>Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth</b></p>		<p><b>01</b></p> <p><b>NEW RELEASES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Savage Safari Hunt – PS2</li> <li>Phantasy Star Trilogy – PS2</li> <li>Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth – PC</li> <li>Iron Phoenix – Xbox</li> </ul>	<p><b>02</b></p> <p><b>IMAGINA FEB 2-05</b></p> <p>Held in Monaco, IMAGINA is also known as the European Digital Content Creation Trade Show. The expo brings together experts in all forms of digital content creation, including animation, design, architecture, and (of course) video games. With so many techies in one place, you know Monaco will be jumpin'!</p>		<p><b>04</b></p> <p>The Sam Raimi-produced horror flick <i>Boogeyman</i> creeps into theaters. Will the presence of <i>Xena's</i> Lucy Lawless be enough to keep it from totally sucking?</p>	<p><b>05</b></p> <p>Master of creepy art H.R. Giger turns 65 today.</p> 
<p><b>Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death</b></p> 	<p><b>07</b></p> <p><b>NEW RELEASES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fahrenheit – PC</li> <li>Empire Earth 2 – PC</li> <li>World at War – PC</li> <li>Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death – Xbox/GC/PC</li> <li>Motorcross Mania 3 – PS2/Xbox</li> </ul>	<p><b>08</b></p> <p><b>NEW RELEASES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outlaw Volleyball: Remixed – PS2</li> <li>Rave Master: Special Attack Force! – GBA</li> <li>Death by Degrees – PS2</li> <li>Shadow of Rome – PS2</li> <li>Phantom Crash 2050 – PS2</li> <li>Ys: Ark of Napishtim – PS2</li> </ul>	<p><b>09</b></p> 	<p><b>10</b></p> <p><b>NEW RELEASES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Champions of Norrath: Return to Arms – PS2</li> </ul>		
<p><b>13</b></p> <p>The world's classiest man, Jerry Springer, turns 61. He celebrates with lesbian strippers, drunken hicks, and two midgits.</p>	<p><b>14</b></p> <p><b>NEW RELEASES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MX vs. ATV Unleashed – PS2/Xbox</li> <li>Dungeon Siege II – PC</li> <li>Star Fox Assault – GC</li> </ul>	<p><b>15</b></p> <p><b>NEW RELEASES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sega Classics Collection – PS2</li> <li>King of Fighters 2002/2003 – PS2</li> <li>Project: Snowblind – PS2/Xbox/PC</li> <li>Mortal Kombat: Deception – GC</li> <li>Brothers in Arms – PS2/Xbox/PC</li> <li>Digital Devil Saga: Avatar Tuner – PS2</li> <li>Xenosaga II: Jenseits Von Gut und Böse – PS2</li> <li>Tenchu: Fatal Shadows – PS2</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Brothers In Arms</b></p>	<p><b>18</b></p> <p>Keanu Reeves' comic book adaptation <i>Constantine</i> hits theaters. Comic book nerd reaction ranges from extreme rage to less-extreme rage.</p>	<p><b>19</b></p> <p><b>NEW RELEASES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wild Arms: Alter Code F – PS2</li> </ul>	
<p><b>20</b></p> <p><b>KATUSCON 11 FEB. 18-20</b></p> <p>Held in Arlington, Virginia, the convention is touted as a celebration of international animation, comics, and video games as serious forms of entertainment. As a video game magazine, we're all for highlighting these hobbies, but even we find Cosplay and Live-Action Role-Playing a little silly.</p>	<p><b>21</b></p>	<p><b>22</b></p> <p><b>NEW RELEASES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Street Fighter Anniversary Collection – Xbox</li> <li>Shade: Wrath of Angels – N-Gage</li> <li>Tekken 5 – PS2</li> </ul>	<p><b>23</b></p>	<p><b>24</b></p> 	<p><b>25</b></p> <p>The much-delayed werewolf movie <i>Cursed</i> opens in theaters. It can't be all that bad – it's got Scott Baio! No, seriously.</p>	 <p><b>Wild Arms: Alter Code F</b></p>
<p><b>27</b></p>	<p><b>28</b></p>					

# february

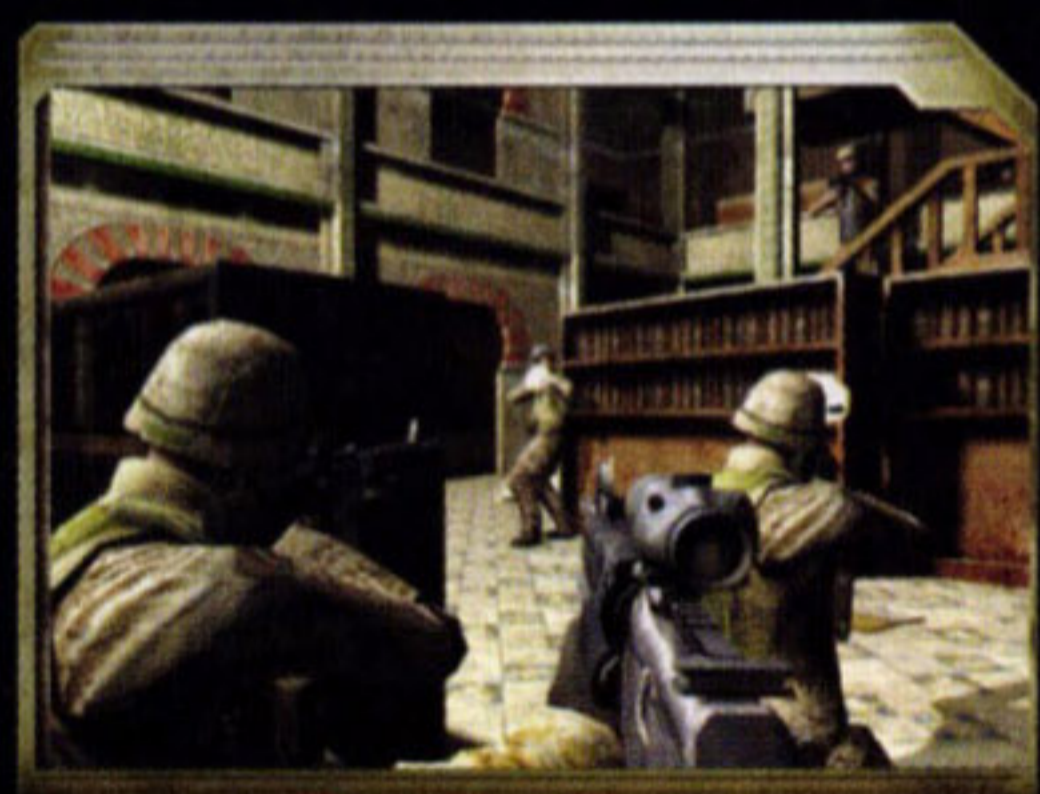
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# FANTASTIC 4





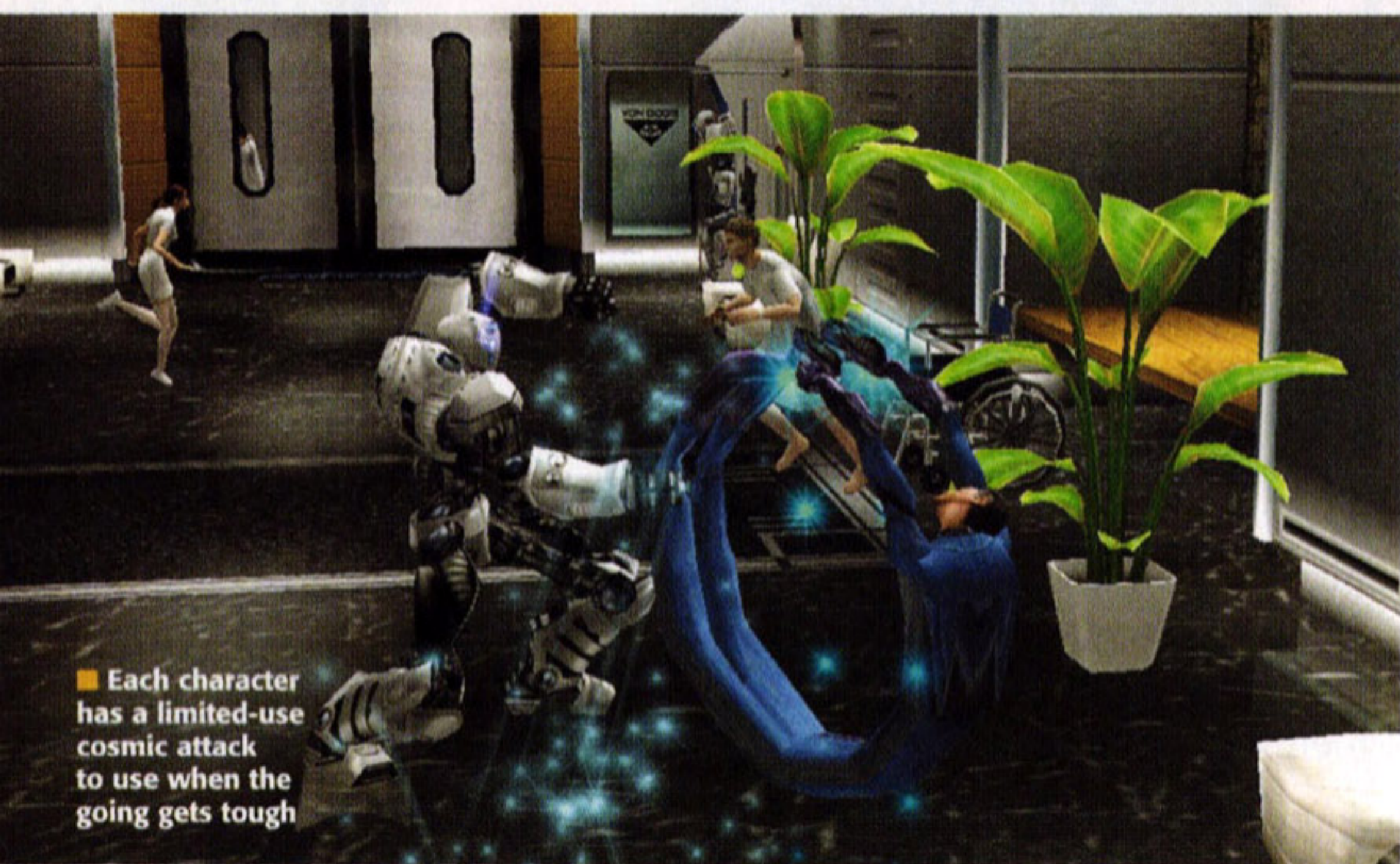
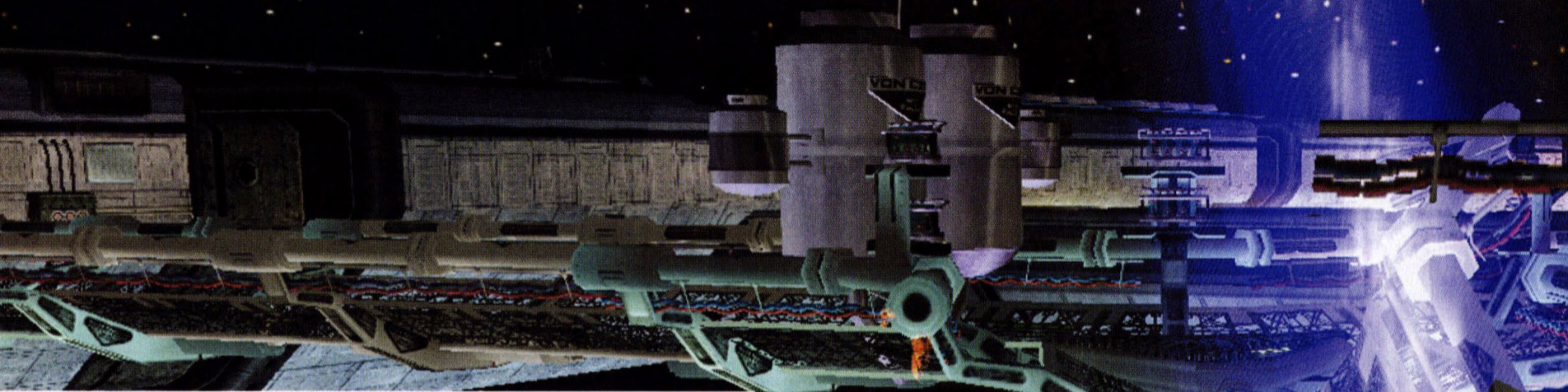
There was a time when the Fantastic Four were on top of the Marvel universe. In an age when heroes were loners, possessed a sense of blind justice, and typically kept themselves busy by stopping jewel thieves and putting out fires, the Fantastic Four redefined what being “the good guys” entailed. Originally created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1961, the series has a long history of placing emphasis on characterization and team dynamics, and is often credited as the single franchise responsible for introducing these concepts into the comic book mainstream. Imagine the X-Men without group interaction. Imagine Spider-Man without moral conflict. Imagine the Hulk without his enormous, lumbering physique. Nearly every Marvel hero owes an immeasurable debt to the groundwork laid by the Fantastic Four, and the time has finally come to revitalize these legendary characters and bring them to the forefront as they instruct the world once again on what it means to be heroes.

In the past, video games based on movies were practically guaranteed a painfully generic action/platform title that utterly failed to highlight anything cool about their licenses. Fortunately, this trend seems to be turning around with upcoming games like *Batman Begins*, as well as last year’s phenomenal *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*. Thankfully, Activision’s *Fantastic Four* (based on the movie releasing this summer) falls right into place amid this changing approach to licensed games. For developer Seven Studios, this project is far more than just cranking out a game in time to coincide with a film’s release – it’s an honor. It doesn’t

take anything more than a stroll through their offices to realize that the team has a genuine passion for the source material; action figures, comic books, and wind-up versions of the Thing adorn nearly every wall, desk, and bookshelf. “The franchise has such a deep, rich history,” explains Lewis Peterson, the studio’s president. “From our perspective, it is a historic opportunity to make a game involving one of the founding fathers of the comic book industry.”

Throughout their tenure, the Fantastic Four have fought dozens of diabolical villains, had countless disagreements among themselves, and even traveled to alternate dimensions. Yet through it all, one key concept has always remained

integral to the series: Individually, they all have great strength, but only together do the members of the Fantastic Four achieve their true potentials. By embracing this notion in several ways throughout the game, Seven Studios ensures that its contribution to the Marvel universe goes well beyond simple licensed product – it gives gamers a chance to interact with the legendary foursome like never before. For the first time, players will not only witness, but also control and experience these icons’ extraordinary abilities to their full extent. If you’ve ever wondered what it is like to have a vast array of super powers, you’re about to find out.



■ Each character has a limited-use cosmic attack to use when the going gets tough



■ Attacks like these will leave visible scars on the environment



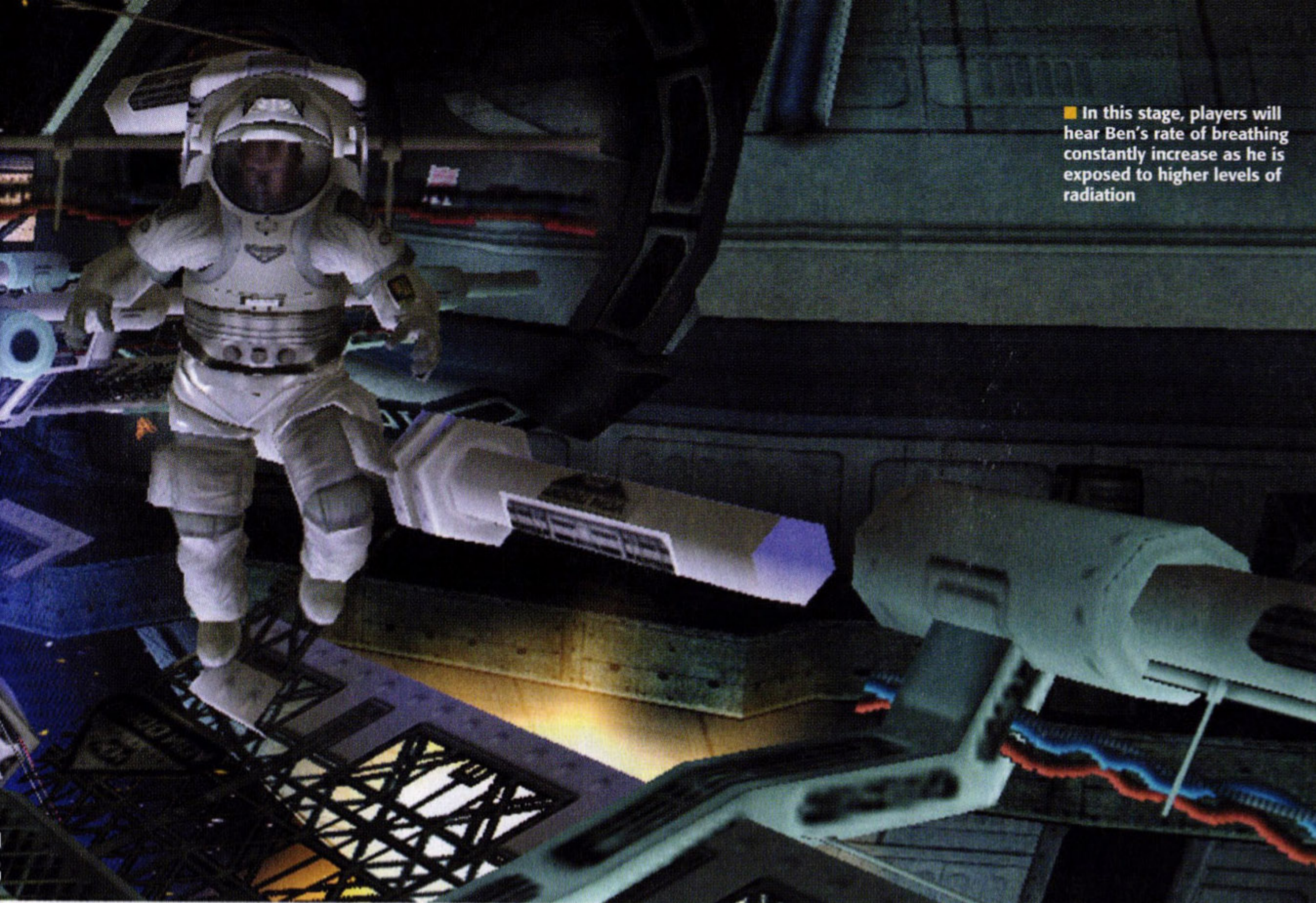
■ Combining characters' abilities is critical to success

**I**n video games, it isn't difficult to tell players they are controlling a superhero – all it takes is a reasonable approximation of the character onscreen. The real trick, and the mark of a truly well-made title, is forging a connection with the character and making the powers so engrossing and fun to use that gamers effectively feel like they become the hero. When done well, these are the moments in gaming that are remembered for years. In 2004 alone, Fantastic Four publisher Activision put gamers in superhero-sized shoes as we swung through the streets of New York with Spider-Man, and fought alongside an entire regiment of X-Men.

Fully aware of how engaging these experiences can be, the team at Seven is committed to providing a continuous flow of opportunities to use the impressive and diverse abilities of the Fantastic Four. "As a franchise, it lends itself well to amazing gameplay options that games have yet to take full advantage of," proclaims Peterson. Given the team-centered nature of the subject matter, the most apparent of these options is the potential for cooperative play. Using a third-person action format (strikingly

similar to *Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone* in terms of gameplay and mechanics), Fantastic Four will allow two players to play through the entire game together from start to finish – there are no boring stints where one player is forced to watch the other wander through a mansion. Many sections of the game will have the entire foursome in the fray (regardless of whether you're playing single-player or co-op), which means that you will be able to freely switch among characters with just the touch of the d-pad. This dynamic also allows the player to experience the full range of the Fantastic Four's unique abilities; the second you get tired of Ben Grimm's overpowering might, you can take control of Johnny Storm and start scorching foes from a distance.

Of course, anyone who picks up the game will be eager to jump in and start wielding these stunning abilities, and Seven is wasting no time putting players in that position. Only a single stage will deal with the characters before they acquire their powers. "There's an anomaly coming towards the planet, and they go out into space to study it," begins Peterson, though art director Damon Conn is quick to interject, "It's not like the nexus in *Star Trek: Generations*, though. It's a cool anomaly.



■ In this stage, players will hear Ben's rate of breathing constantly increase as he is exposed to higher levels of radiation



Not one where William Shatner is riding around on his horse." Orbiting Earth on Victor Von Doom's research station, something goes wrong and the team is exposed to the anomaly's cosmic radiation. The introductory level, which also functions as a tutorial instructing players on basic movement and object interaction, deals with Ben Grimm's noble sacrifice as he systematically closes the station's radiation shields from the outside, protecting his companions within from further harm while exposing himself to even more disfiguring energy. After the mishap, the group finds themselves transformed and confined in Victor Von Doom's research hospital where they are tasked not only with escaping, but discovering the nature of the strange powers with which they have been infused.

"In the film, the characters discover

their powers in the hospital through different means, but in the game, the best way to discover them is through combat," says lead designer Jeff Gardiner. "You get to experience them along with the character." As anyone familiar with Fantastic Four can testify, this means that there is bound to be a broad range of superhuman skills for each character to explore and develop.

Each character's abilities lend themselves to particular gameplay styles. Ben is fairly simple and straightforward – he's really big, and can punch really hard. He also has extended grapple options, so when he grabs a foe he can perform a series of painful suplexes or rabbit punches. Johnny is better suited for ranged combat, launching fireballs and erecting walls of flame to keep the enemy at bay. Reed

is the most balanced, with considerable close-combat skills as well as long-range grapple throws. Then there is Sue, who has perhaps the most impressive mix of defensive and offensive capabilities. While invisible, she can deliver one-hit stealth kills, and if the enemies engage her at any range, she has the ability to subdue them with force encapsulation (a freezing maneuver), force blasts, and telekinetic throws. With skills like that, it's no wonder she is widely believed to be the most powerful of the group.

All told, each character is capable of 40 moves, most of which are unique skills and combos that can be fully upgraded – and that doesn't just mean an additional damage modifier. As the attacks are powered up, they look and feel different, and transform into

*continued on page 43 >>*

*"In the film, the characters discover their powers in the hospital through different means, but in the game, the best way to discover them is through combat"*



■ Johnny's flame attacks can set furniture, drapes, and even human enemies ablaze



■ Nearly everything you see in the environment can be picked up, destroyed, or otherwise manipulated



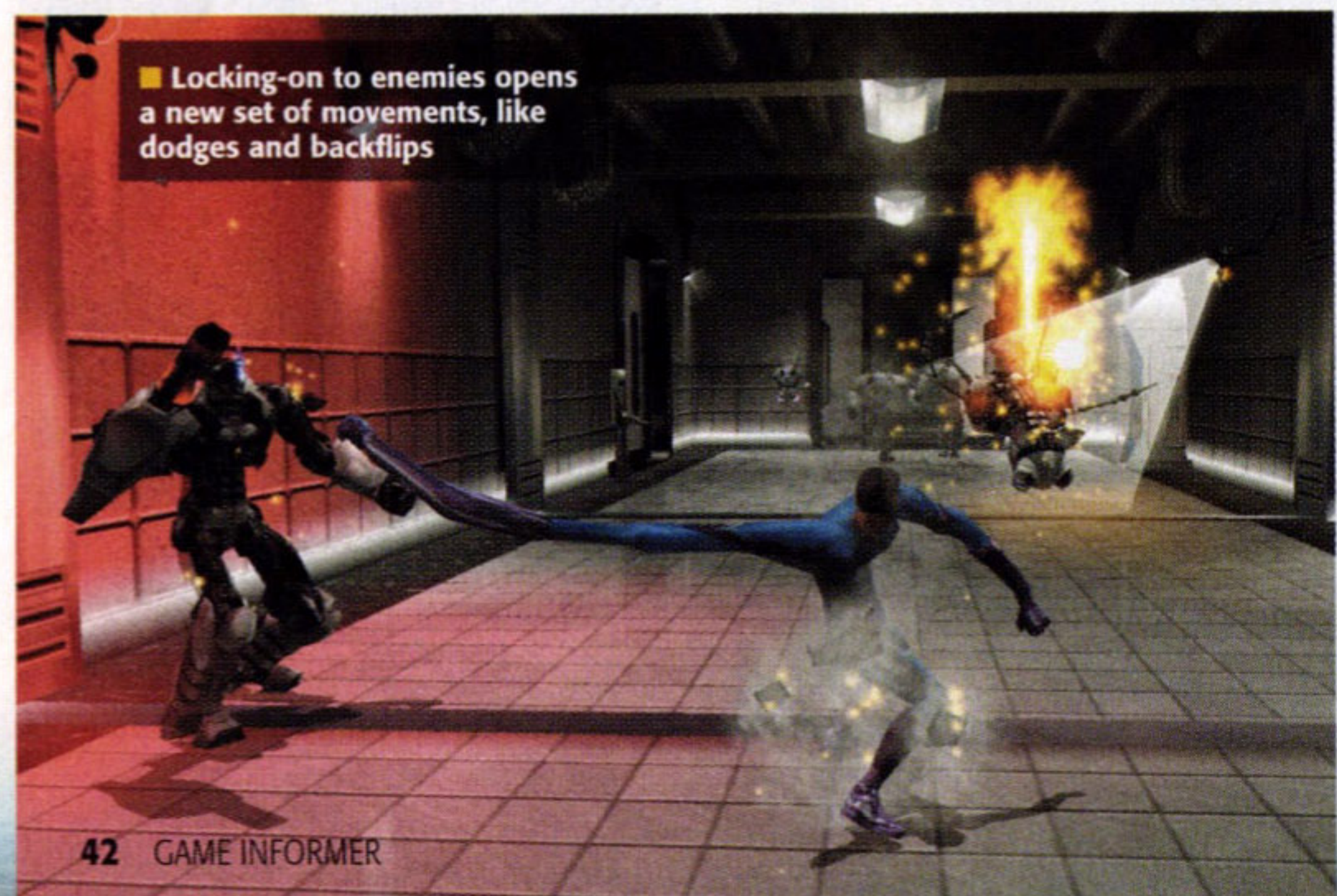
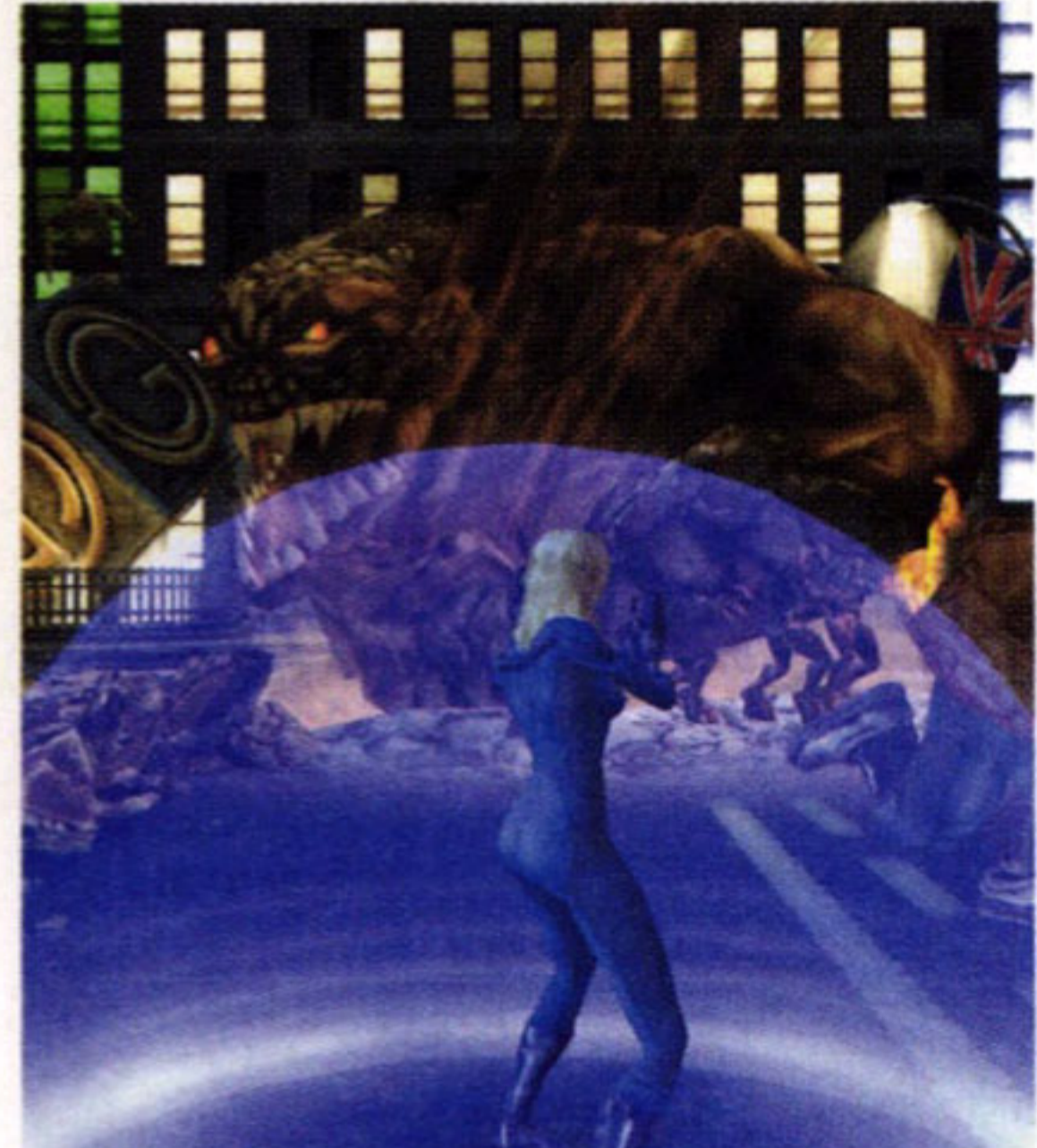
■ Doombots are actually just probes with other functions – like watering plants – until they sense danger and outfit themselves with armor.



■ Enemy AI features 50 brain variables. Foes break your blocks, strafe, and sneak up behind you. Other times, they just get punched



■ Though the Moloid King is the immediate danger, the real threat is the short, fat guy with glasses: Mole Man



■ Locking-on to enemies opens a new set of movements, like dodges and backflips



■ In larger brawls, the team dynamics will play an important role

## PARTS OF THE WHOLE

They've been around for over 40 years, but they've had their ups and downs in terms of popularity. In case you've missed the ups, here's a quick primer course for anyone who doesn't understand what makes the Fantastic Four compelling individually, and how they complement each other as a team.



### Mr. Fantastic/Reed Richards

The leader of the Fantastic Four and widely believed to be the smartest man on the planet (though Victor Von Doom would testify to the contrary), Reed is a scientist at heart. The cosmic accident left him with an elastic form, allowing him to modify the size and shape of his body at will. Living primarily in his mind, he is typically emotionally distant, though he does have romantic feelings for Sue.



### Invisible Woman/Sue Storm

Somewhat shy and reserved, Sue longs to be noticed (especially by Reed). Many would argue that if the Fantastic Four were to fight each other, Sue would emerge victorious. In addition to invisibility, she can project extremely powerful force fields as well as manipulate energy to create a wide array of psionic striking weapons. Sue is Johnny's sister, and despite their extraordinary powers, they still argue and compete like normal siblings.



### Human Torch/Johnny Storm

A hothead even before his transformation, Johnny Storm is a loose cannon. With the power to surround himself with flames and manipulate them, he is wild and extremely capable offensively. He and Ben often take part in verbal sparring matches, though they are quick to put away their differences in the face of imminent danger. Though an integral part of the team, Johnny is often the instigator of its internal conflicts.



### Thing/Ben Grimm

Ben is the tragic hero of the group, sacrificing himself to spare his companions during the cosmic accident. As a result, he was the only one whose physical form was modified to the point that he can't even pretend to be a normal human (despite ingenious trenchcoat-and-hat disguises). With his immense power, Ben is rock solid and dependable, though he still has trouble coming to terms with his lost humanity.

different moves altogether. Furthermore, these modifications can be made at any point in any level, providing you've earned enough points by defeating foes. "We found that with four available heroes, you're never sure who you're going to play next. You want to upgrade your character as soon as possible because that's what's useful to you at the moment," explains Gardiner. Though there is a meter regulating the use of many of these abilities, it regenerates quickly, and it is undoubtedly exhilarating to see the area-clearing bellyflops, room-spanning punches, and psychic swords in full effect.

These improvements may result in more astonishing (and powerful) pyrotechnic displays or feats of flexibility, but attack maneuvers aren't the only way to see evidence of the heroes' special talents — these can be seen even when the powers aren't being used to lay waste to foes. When Reed gets hit in the face, his neck expands as his head is jarred backwards. Sue's block maneuver also functions as a force field that can deflect oncoming projectiles. As Johnny hovers above the ground, a heat shimmer can clearly be seen distorting the surroundings.

Between these subtle details and the ostentatious displays of power, the game promises to be so immersive, you'll practically feel the figure-hugging bodysuit. "What we did was focus on the experience, and made it so that the characters and the levels give a good feeling for what it is like to be the Invisible Woman or Thing," Peterson confides. On the



other hand, being put in the shoes of these heroes means much more than displaying phenomenal cosmic powers; it makes you part of a team. The Fantastic Four have always been able to put aside individual differences to band together against a common foe, and this is no exception. Regardless of how many Doombots you destroy or civilians you save, the time will come when you need to call on the aid of your companions.

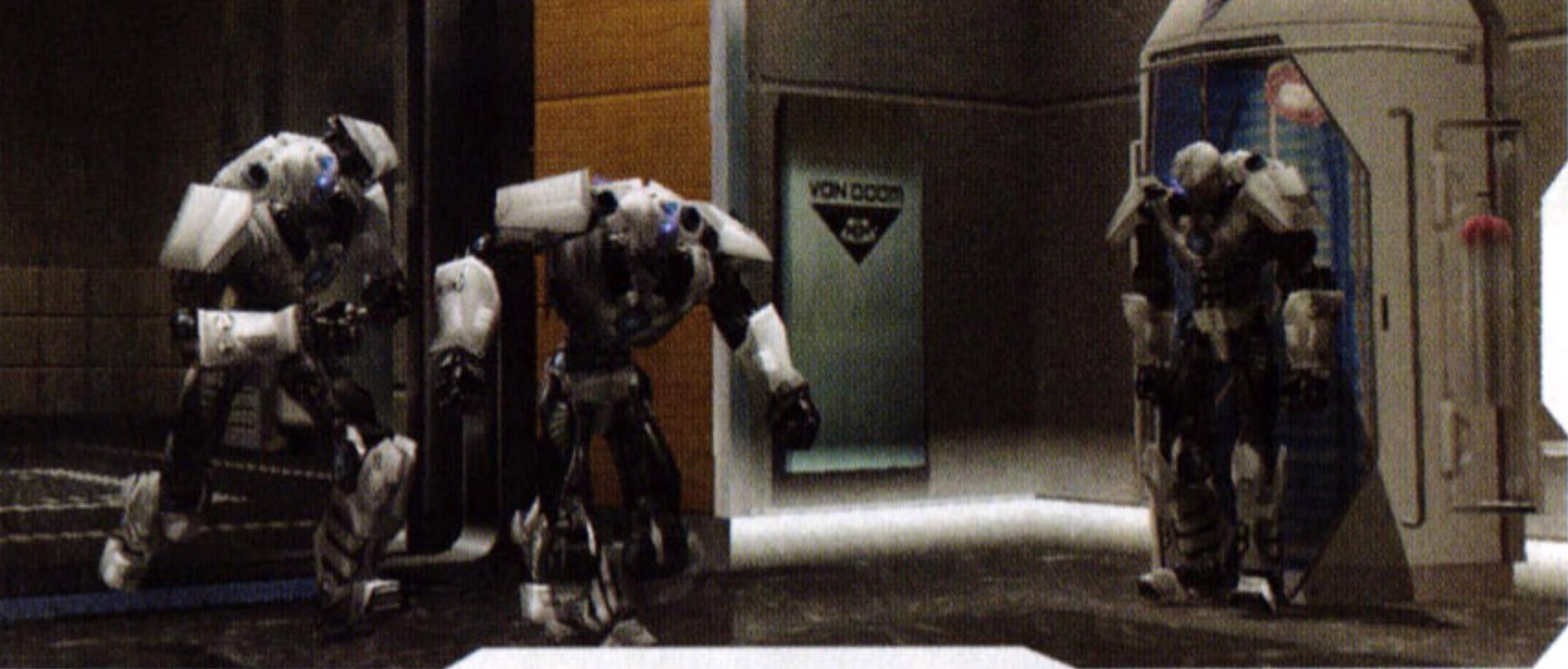
The game takes multiple approaches to the theme of teamwork, even beyond its co-op feature. As the levels progress, players will find that it is not just a perk to be able to alternate control of the four heroes. Eventually, it becomes a necessity. Certain bosses cannot be defeated without the well-coordinated cooperation of the four team members. For example, a boss fight with the Moloid King (a beast released by the infamous Mole Man) requires Sue to project restraining force fields around the creature's hands while Reed and Johnny attack its weak spot from afar. All the



■ A jungle in Tikal is one of the original locations created for the game



■ Each character has 40 attacks, many of which are fully upgradeable



while, Ben is tirelessly fighting off hordes of smaller minions to give the other three space to work. The boss fights aren't just about scoring as many hits as quickly as possible; there is an aspect of strategy to all of the major encounters.

Another instance requiring the combined efforts of the entire Fantastic Four is in an event taken directly from the film. Still trying to cope with his transformation, Ben finds himself on the Brooklyn Bridge in the midst of a catastrophe. A fire truck teeters precariously over the water, and Ben realizes that only he can stop it from going over. At this point, the player maneuvers Ben over to the vehicle, where a minigame triggers and the buttons must be pressed rapidly in order to build up the strength to hold his grip. As the remaining three members of the team arrive, Ben struggles to keep the vehicle from plummeting. Reed, Sue, and Johnny must each tackle their own similar minigames to contribute their skills

to the rescue effort, as well. However, before moving right to the crisis at hand, the player can choose to use the team's abilities to save other nearby citizens in peril; Sue can create a force bubble to shield people from an explosion, while Johnny can pass through flames in order to carry others to safety. Ultimately, the Fantastic Four's cooperation in this mission marks their first, but certainly not their last, success as a cohesive and unified group.

While the entire team will be available for instances like these through much of the game, there are sections that are specifically designed for particular characters. "As for how players will get involved in the game, that is a fundamental," confirms Peterson. "We tailored the experience to each character, made certain levels specifically for certain heroes, especially from a story standpoint." There may even be other surprises in store; though reluctant to give any further details, Gardiner mentions that "there will be portions where the player is controlling characters who are not members of the Fantastic Four." With all of the secrecy surrounding this tidbit of information, something tells us it has got to be good – we wouldn't even rule out the possibility that it might even be the classic perennial nemesis Doctor Doom.

Even if it turns out that he isn't playable, we'll still see plenty of the incomparable Doctor

Doom in-game and onscreen. After all, the only way to see heroes' abilities truly shine is when they are put to test it by a worthy adversary, and there could be no better villain to combat the Fantastic Four than the brilliant and spiteful Victor Von Doom. As the film's antagonist, he plays a key role in the game's events, but he is not the only force of evil at work. Building upon the foundation laid by the movie, other seminal villains such as Annihilus, Diablo, and Puppet Master will also make appearances as the story unfolds. After all, if the game were to exactly follow the movie plot without deviation, not only would it be too short, but we would miss a great opportunity to see some legendary bad guys back in action. In order to expand those areas of the game not covered in the film, Zak Penn, who authored the story for the 2003 blockbuster *X2* (alongside *Metal Gear Solid* voice-over veteran David Hayter), was hired to write the additional material. "We've been talking to the studio to make sure that our experience is similar to their experience," says Jamie Bafus, the game's producer. "We aren't following their storyline exactly, but of course we hit on all the big moments that everyone will recognize."

Despite the game's cinematic roots, don't expect those big moments to be relayed purely through cutscenes and dialogue. "Our

**"We tailored the experience to each character, made certain levels specifically for certain heroes"**



■ The game is designed to accommodate both single-player and co-op playthroughs



■ By satisfying certain goals, players can unlock bonus levels and arena battles

## CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES

Between the movie and the recent *Ultimate Fantastic Four* comics, many classic characters have already successfully made the move to the modern era. However, part of the challenge in creating the game is integrating old favorites that haven't seen a wardrobe update since the 70's. "Those versions were awesome, but we felt they might need a little modification," acknowledges lead artist Buck Chantel. Art director Damon Conn is more emphatic about the need to update the look, exclaiming, "In the old comics, they fight Galactus, but he's got short pants on! That was totally cool in 1969, but today it's like [grimaces] holy s@%\*!" This is why fans will notice many familiar faces from the series have undergone complete overhauls in the visual department. Iconic villains like Annihilus and Diablo look sleeker and much more threatening than their previous incarnations. In fact, they bear many stylistic similarities to the redesigned Doctor Doom and Mole Man from the *Ultimate Fantastic Four* comic series. "Artistically, whenever we've been in doubt, we've looked to the *Ultimate* series as an example," admits Conn. Emulating an immensely popular comic series (the series has sold over 1.3 million copies to date) largely adored by fans hasn't steered them wrong yet, as these conceptual drawings illustrate.



design philosophy is that the player should feel like a part of the action," Gardiner insists. "The cutscenes are good for furthering the story, but they shouldn't show you the big explosions – you should feel those." The approach fits well with the game's ultimate goal of giving the player an idea of what it would be like to actually wield the powers of the Fantastic Four. "Of course, we had to do some story setting," adds Peterson. "But the bottom line is that people want to play as super heroes, and there are so many chances to explore what is cool and interesting about the characters."

At its core, the game takes the energy and enthusiasm currently revitalizing the Fantastic Four franchise and refocuses it into an interactive form that can be experienced in a multitude of ways. Whether creating blazing infernos or projecting energy fields, there is something undeniably fun about such vast power at your fingertips. The Fantastic Four may have some interpersonal issues to contend with, but this isn't a group-therapy game. It's all about action, overkill, and conquering seemingly insurmountable odds. The world needs to be saved, the enemies' numbers are staggering, and you control the most powerful humans on the planet. In the words of Ben Grimm: "It's clobberin' time." ■■■■



AN INTERVIEW WITH

## TIM STORY

Director of the upcoming *Fantastic Four* motion picture

At the creative helm of the *Fantastic Four* film, Tim Story's approach to these important characters and their surroundings has ramifications beyond simply what we see on the movie screen. His vision for the universe affects the feel of the environments, the appearance of the enemies, and the general tone of the franchise – all of which are also represented in Seven Studio's upcoming game. Game Informer recently had the opportunity to speak with Story and hear his thoughts on the current state of the *Fantastic Four*, its characters, and Hollywood's ties to gaming.

### What is the biggest challenge in translating the *Fantastic Four* into a modern context?

Figuring out how to make the use of their powers within the story organic. In the comic book, Johnny is always on fire, but nothing catches on fire near him. We had to make it so he can actually be in a room with people, flame on, and have it make sense. For Sue, we've all seen characters that go invisible, but how do you make it more than what we've seen? The biggest challenge has been taking the comic book and making the powers seem natural for the characters and what they are going through.

### What do you think makes the *Fantastic Four* such compelling heroes?

They're normal people. They don't necessarily like each other all the time, but they love each other. Putting the super powers aside, they're just like you and I. They respond just as we might if we got zapped by a cosmic storm. The *Fantastic Four* runs out of milk just like everybody else. You can envision them in the shower getting pissed off when the water goes cold because someone flushed the toilet in the house. That's what makes them compelling. You can relate to everything they are going through.

### How does Dr. Doom differ from your average villain?

What I've always loved about Dr. Doom is his hatred of Reed Richards. It's complete jealousy. There aren't a whole lot of villains out there whose intentions are extremely pure. Even when they say "I'm going to take over the world," it isn't as specific as this: Dr. Doom just wants to get rid of Reed Richards. It's plain and simple. He just hates Reed, and at the end of the day, it's not much bigger than that. Of course, he's brilliant and able to go toe-to-toe with Reed, so it's a fight of the minds to a large degree.

### With the release of the *Ultimate Fantastic Four* comics, have you made any conceptual changes to adjust to the recent re-envisioned *Fantastic Four* universe?

I must admit, I like that series an awful lot. I love the tone of it. They're younger in that comic than we are portraying them, but I've kind of taken what I gotten from the *UFF* and said, "That's the right tone." It's serious, but it's got some antics to it. They have a lot of fun with the material, but at the same time it's very intelligent. I think it brings a whole other world

to the *Fantastic Four*. I've also borrowed a lot of the film's look from the *Ultimate Fantastic Four* and *Marvel Knights* series. We try to keep the spine of what made each of these characters who they are.

### How does your previous work with *Barbershop's* ensemble cast affect your approach to characters?

I try to keep them at each other's necks. There's always that banter going back and forth. I just love it when families argue – there's no resolution, but at the same time they have to come together and help each other. That's what this film is about. There's not a lot of resolution to what they are going through, but at some point they have to put that fight aside, and go fight something else. It's the rule of the common enemy.

### What do you think of the game so far?

I was shown some of the early stuff, and what was really cool about it was that they found a way to make the characters fight in a cool way. One of the biggest problems to solve in the movie was "how do they fight?" It's not that easy to set up a fight with Reed Richards, because the guy isn't super strong, but he can make a fist the size of a body. Does that mean it's more strength or just more mass hitting you? How far does he stretch? You have to take the physics into consideration, and they've done a great job with that.

### Do you see the partnership of games and movies as being helpful, or is it just another set of suits to satisfy?

I knew when I got into this what I was signed up for. Though it is sometimes taxing because there are a lot of people to talk to while still trying to be 100 percent creative, and it can be hard to be creative when you're exhausted. But the *Fantastic Four* is practically a culture, and I knew going into the movie, I was just going to be presenting one element of what this universe is. There are toys, other comics, TV series, Halloween costumes, and video games. Although sometimes taxing and frustrating, it is extremely satisfying to be a part of a family in terms of product, where you have support from so many different areas, that allows you to put something together that will be supported on so many different levels. I must admit, I can only see the positives of it.



# THE GRAN TURISMO SPORT IN REVIEW 2004



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The sun began to set on this generation of console systems in 2004, as the industry started to look towards the future of gaming. Gamers were rewarded with tons of exciting announcements for the future, as well as a mind-boggling number of great games to play, including the two most anticipated games of all time: Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas and Halo 2. The PC also showed the world that it's still the place to go for cutting-edge gaming. Blockbuster titles abounded, including The Sims 2, Half-Life 2, Doom 3, and the epic World of Warcraft.

Even more exiting was the fact that we had two new handhelds to obsess over: the Nintendo DS and the Sony PlayStation Portable. Both have the potential to take handheld gaming to levels we couldn't have imagined a few years ago.

To celebrate the year that was 2004, we've put together a Year in Review feature that chronicles the highlights and low points of the last 12 months. Also, we've again picked out the 50 Best Games of the Year, presented to you in chronological order. While we did single out one title as the year's best, the rest are simply put forward as examples of development excellence. Hopefully, you'll see some things you like and a few titles that you may have overlooked.





**1** Marvel appointed Ames Kirshen to head its new games development division. Perhaps eyeing its huge receipts from sales of Activision's Spider-Man 2 games, Marvel felt it necessary to focus more of its energies in the profitable game licensing market.

**2** Microsoft head honcho and very rich person Bill Gates used the annual Consumer Electronics Show to announce the Xbox Media Extender kit, which would allow users to utilize Media Center PCs to transmit all types of media to their Xbox and televisions.

**3** The sneaky bunch at Rockstar, noting the numerous game websites that track new copyrights online, registered a slew of erroneous names to throw the media off the track of the new GTA title. Names claimed by the company included GTA: Bogota, GTA: Tokyo, and GTA: Sin City.

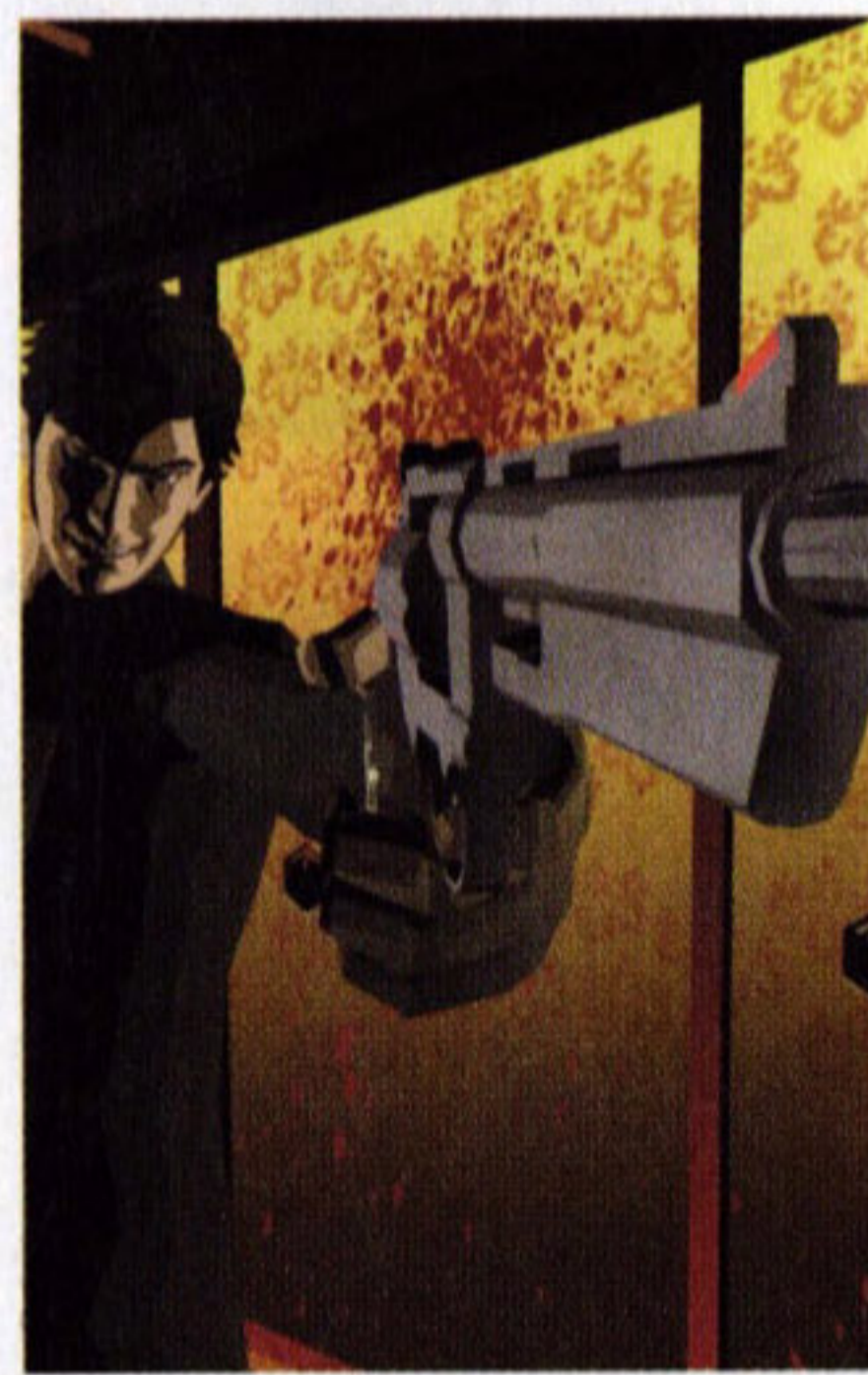
**4** Bungie and small firm Nightmare Armor joined forces to create the year's most bitchin' game accessory: real Master Chief armor! Made of fiberglass and aluminum, and even featuring a blue glow behind the visor, this costume was announced to retail for a hefty \$3,500.

**5** Electronic Arts snagged two quality titles from financially struggling publishers Acclaim and Eidos, buying the rights to Burnout 3 and TimeSplitters 3. Talk about kicking a company when they're down! Burnout 3 was a sign of things to come for EA and developer Criterion.

**6** Video games are making money. This might not seem like news, but in January the Entertainment Software Association announced that total sales of PC and console software eclipsed the \$7 billion mark in 2003. This was a new record, up from \$6.35 billion in 2002.



**T**ake 2 Interactive (parent company of Rockstar Games) released a statement that reduced its projected earnings for the quarter ending in January by nearly \$30 million. Apparently, this financial hatchet job was pulled by an insider: the famously terse detective Max Payne. Although there were several factors that figured in to Take 2's weakening earnings, the key culprit was disappointing sales of Rockstar's would-be blockbuster Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne. Thankfully, the failure wasn't enough to sink the franchise for good, as Take 2 later confirmed that there would be a Max Payne 3 in the future. However, Payne developer Remedy appeared to take the fall for the subpar sales, as reports soon circulated that the company had been pulled from the next installment of the series.



## Nintendo and Capcom: The Honeymoon's Over

The partnership between Capcom and Nintendo to deliver five high-profile exclusives to the GameCube began to show cracks in January when it was announced that Killer 7 was coming to the PlayStation 2. By year's end, only one of the "Capcom 5" (the commercial flop P.N.03) would remain exclusive to the 'Cube. The following months would see an enhanced PS2 port of Viewtiful Joe (and a version of Viewtiful Joe 2) and the announcement that Resident Evil 4 was coming to PlayStation 2 as well. The other of the Capcom 5, Dead Phoenix, dropped off the radar entirely and has most likely been cancelled. One thing is clear: Capcom's strategic alliance with Nintendo has proved to be a massive miscalculation on the publisher's part.

## Clancy Promotes Porn, Tecmo's "Love Pillow"

The Internet is a wild place, a lesson that Ubisoft learned the...um...hard way in January, when it found itself the unwitting dupe of a pornographic website. The scandal started when quick-witted Texas gamer, Tony Ashcraft, noticed that a fictional URL was displayed on the bottom of some posters in a level of Ubi's hit Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3. A quick check of the Internet (or "Internets" as they're known in Texas) demonstrated that the URL was in fact unregistered. Ashcraft quickly scooped up the domain and sold advertising to several pornographic sites. After CNN/Money broke the story, the tale was soon the talk of the 'Net, and Ubisoft was none too pleased. The company promised that, in the future, all websites referenced in its games would be official (and non-pornographic) in nature.

In other sexy news, another company, Tecmo, made waves in January with news that a Japanese-only DOA/Xbox bundle would include not only a special edition blue console but a full-sized "love pillow" bearing the bikini-clad likeness of Kasumi, one of the series' most popular characters. After a small furor erupted regarding said "love pillow," Tecmo relented and altered the design to depict Kasumi in a more modest outfit. Which, of course, made the whole thing not the least bit creepy.



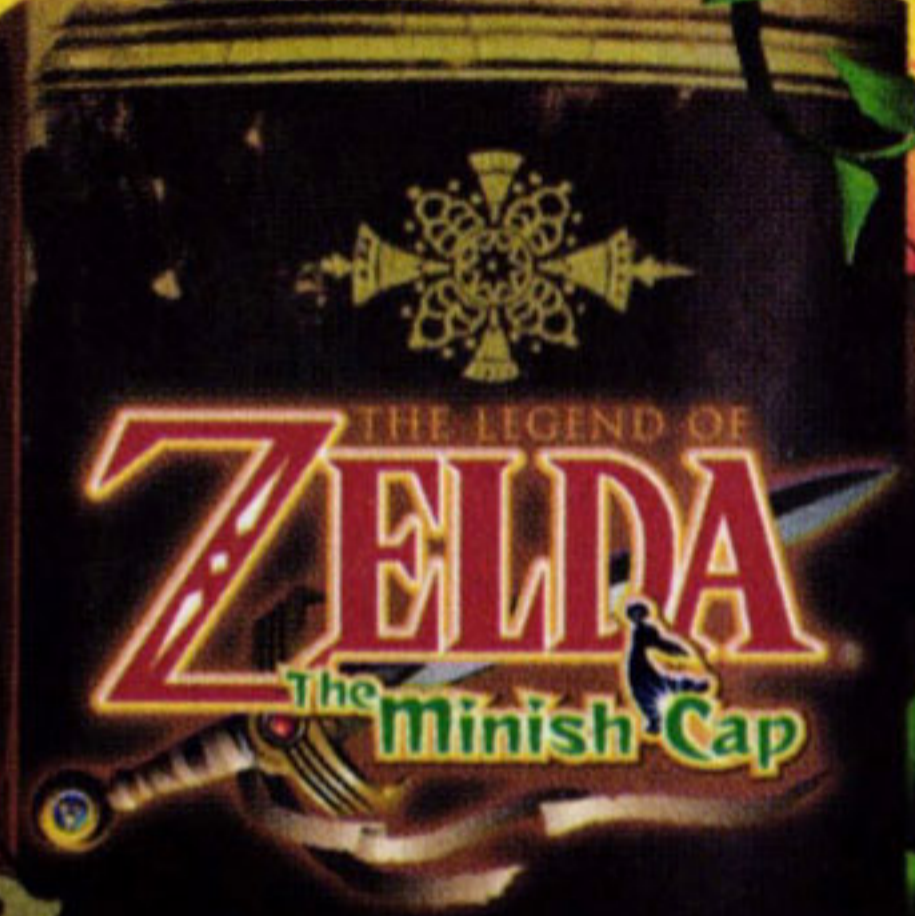
## Fries Breaks Free From Microsoft

In one of the year's most surprising internal shakeups, Microsoft Game Studios' Ed Fries resigned his post as vice president of games publishing. While many in the industry were sad to see one of Xbox's most visible figureheads leave the company, the split did seem to be amicable on both sides, with Fries waiting a few weeks to make the official decision while his successor, Shane Kim, got up to speed.

Kim initially held the position on an interim basis, but was later given the helm of Microsoft Game Studios permanently.

In the months following Fries' resignation, Microsoft trimmed its Xbox games lineup, jettisoning many projects that were not deemed viable. One of these was Psychonauts, a game that Fries had championed internally and in the press. Whatever the circumstances surrounding his leaving, Fries' legacy is apparent in many of the strong developers that still work under the Microsoft banner, including Ensemble Studios and FPS geniuses Bungie, which Fries worked to recruit to Xbox. Later in the year, the fruits of this effort would pay off handsomely with the release of Halo 2.

# WHO ARE YOU?



MYSTIC  
MICROSCOPIC  
CONQUERER

YOU CAN USE THE POWER OF THE MINISH CAP TO GET SMALL  
AND UNLOCK CLUES ON YOUR QUEST TO SAVE HYRULE.  
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA®: THE MINISH CAP.  
ONLY FOR GAME BOY ADVANCE.

EVERYONE  
**E**  
Mild Fantasy Violence  
CONTENT RATED BY  
ESRB

GAME BOY ADVANCE SP





**1** Cyan World's much hyped online adventure service, Uru Live, was cancelled by the developer. Myst creator Rand Miller said the project was shelved because it had failed to generate a solid subscriber base. Myst fanatics were understandably devastated by the news.

**2** The IDGA announced that veteran designer Mark Cerny would receive its Lifetime Achievement Award at the upcoming Game Developer's Conference. Cerny has worked on such series as Marble Madness, Crash Bandicoot, and Sonic the Hedgehog.

**3** Although Fear Effect: Inferno itself will likely never see the light of day due to developer Kronos' untimely demise, game filmmaker Uwe Boll (*House of the Dead*) optioned the movie rights to the lesbian thriller title. In other news, Uwe Boll is, like, the worst director ever.

**4** In February, Nokia CEO Jorma Ollila admitted that the company's N-Gage handheld "had its work cut out" and that sales "are in the lower quartile of the bracket we had as our goal." Which is like saying the flight of the Hindenberg "failed to meet expectations."

**5** Sensing the flagging fortunes of the franchise, Ubisoft dropped *The Matrix Online*. In the meantime, developers Monolith and Warner Bros. continued work on the game, which was eventually picked up by Sega. To celebrate, Larry Wachowski bought a pretty new dress!

**6** Former Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi said that it would reveal "something new at E3 2005, which will use the GameCube as its parent body." He said that the system wouldn't be "high tech," because "consumers aren't demanding for leading edge technology."



# TECMO UNLEASHES MASTER NINJA

**T**ecmo did right by its fans with the announcement of the Master Ninja Tournament, one of the coolest online contests in the history of video games. In February, fans salivated at the prospect of competing for the title against combatants around the globe. Later in the year, this trickle of drool turned into a raging river when Tecmo revealed that the Master Ninja Tournament would actually make use of not one, but two downloadable Gaiden expansion packs – the Hurricane Packs Vol. I and II, which featured new enemies plus enhanced and new levels. Throughout two rounds, players the world over battled for high scores and the right to spar in the Master Ninja finals at the Tokyo Game Show.

## Game Boy Is The Bomb – Literally!

Ah, Americans. Give us a box-like object, and odds are we'll make a bomb out of it. That's just the way we were raised. In February, Houston, TX authorities were shocked to learn that a Livingston Junior High student had actually converted his previously wholesome Game Boy into a bomb. Apparently, the unnamed student had stripped the electronic guts from his handheld and replaced them with gunpowder. Predictably, his plot was foiled by his own big mouth: Another student heard him bragging about the explosive scheme and tipped off a police hotline. The student was arrested with the Game Boy bomb on a school bus travelling to a track meet. Fortunately, the bomb didn't go off and no one was hurt during the incident.



## ON THE RADAR

### PIRACY STINGS THE GAME INDUSTRY

Game piracy has dogged the industry since its inception, but events in 2004 showed just how serious the problem has become. Early in the year, hacker Sean Michael Breen was sentenced to 50 months in prison for bootlegging over \$500,000 in illegal games with members of the Razor1911 piracy ring. Later, in April, the FBI conducted Operation Fastlink, a series of over 120 raids on illegal piracy rings in 27 states and several foreign countries. In an unrelated case, Atari, EA, and Vivendi Universal filed suit against the makers of Games X Copy, PC software that would allow users to easily make copies of their computer games.

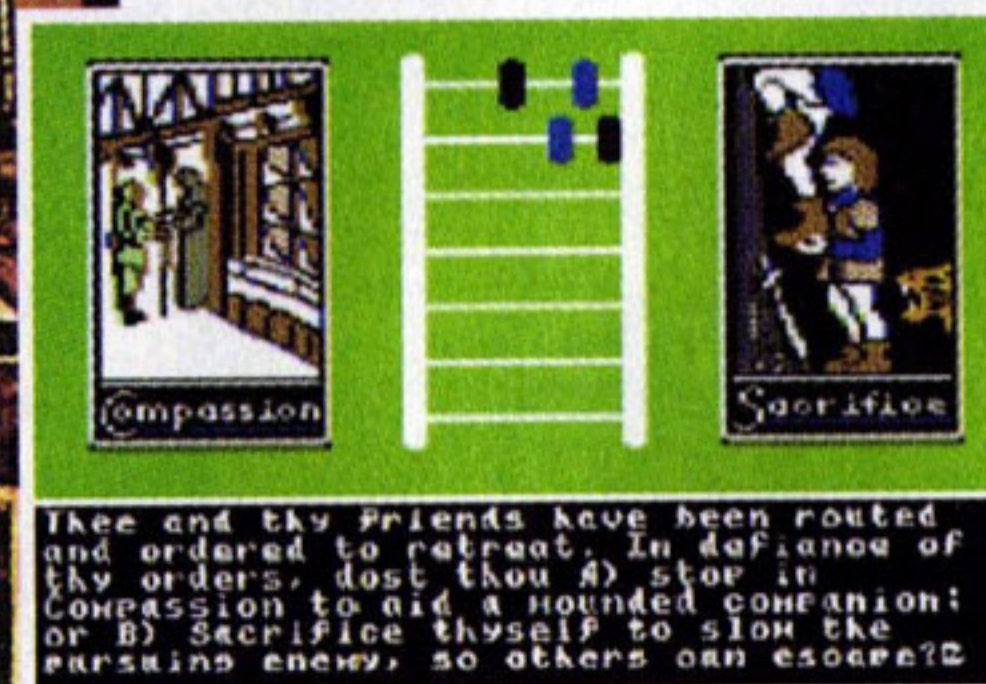
Despite law enforcement's efforts, matters got worse as the year went on. In August, Valve's Gabe Newell confirmed that source code for *Half-Life 2* had been stolen by hackers who had used keystroke recorders installed in Valve's email system. The year's other high-profile PC FPS, *Doom 3*, was also leaked to peer-to-peer sharing networks days before its August release. The BBC reported that at any one time, over 50,000 copies of *Doom 3* were being downloaded, resulting in millions of dollars of lost sales.

Things were no better on the console side, as both *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and a French-language version of *Halo 2* were circulating the 'Net well before their respective release dates. These leaks were rumored to have originated from employees at DVD manufacturing plants. The Entertainment Software Association estimates that the industry loses at least \$3 billion a year from piracy. Based on results of a Macrovision study conducted in 2004, which found that 52 percent of all PC gamers played pirated games, this number will only increase in the future.

## EA Puts Origin Systems To Sleep

Note to developers: You might want to think twice before selling your company to EA. The 800-lb. gorilla of the game industry has shown a strong predilection for dissolving development houses that it acquires and assimilating the remaining staff into its existing studios in recent years. In 2003, famed RTS house Westwood got the ax, and this year saw an equally influential developer disassembled by EA. Origin Systems, the house that Richard Garriott built, was famous for its pioneering RPG series *Ultima*, which began to explore the vast expanse of cyberspace when *EverQuest* was yet but a germ of an idea.

Garriott, who left for NCsoft after selling Origin to EA, was unaffected by the move, but many staffers who were unwilling or not asked to make the move to EA's Redwood Shores complex were out of a job. Later in the year, EA pulled the plug on *Ultima X: Odyssey*, but said it would continue supporting *Ultima Online*.



Take and thy friends have been routed and ordered to retreat. In defiance of thy orders, dost thou A) Stop in Compassion to aid a wounded companion; or B) Sacrifice thyself to slow the pursuing enemy, so others can escape?





**1** In April, the world was saddened by the news that Castle Wolfenstein creator Silas Warner was dead. Warner's work in the industry helped lay the foundation for the action/adventure genre and also provided the inspiration for Wolfenstein 3D, the first FPS ever made.

**2** GameCube, which was selling so poorly in 2003 that production was actually halted, bounced back following its price drop to \$99. Sales were so strong that the unit was nearly sold out in the U.S., requiring Nintendo to relocate consoles from other territories to America.

**3** Bill Carlton's bid to break the Asteroids world record score of 41 million points was foiled when the arcade unit he was playing on at the Ground Kontrol Arcade in Portland, OR broke down. At the time, Carlton had amassed 12.7 million points in 27 straight hours of play.

**4** Adventure game fans were angered by LucasArts' decision to cancel the upcoming Sam & Max Freelance Police, the much anticipated sequel to the legendary Sam & Max Hit the Road. LucasArts cited "market place realities" as the reason for the move.

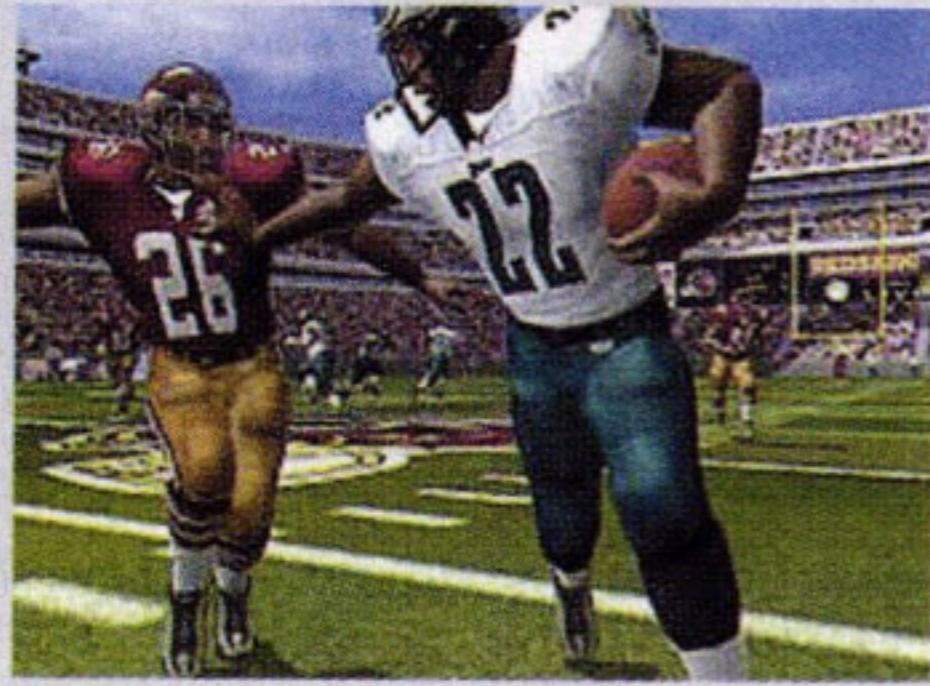
**5** Black & White and Fable creator Peter Molyneux, who invented the "God Game" genre, was deservedly inducted into the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame at the annual DICE Summit. Introducing Molyneux at the ceremony was none other than GI's own Andy McNamara.

**6** Nintendo thrilled old-school gamers with the announcement of a classic NES series special edition GBA – a unit emblazoned with graphics reminiscent of the 8-bit console. The unit was timed to release with a series of NES GBA reissues, including Excitebike and Super Mario Bros.

## XSN Sports: "We're Not Dead, We're Only Resting!"

Microsoft, which had struggled to compete with the likes of Visual Concepts and Electronic Arts in the competitive sports game market, announced that it would not be releasing its usual slate of sports entries in 2004. Affected titles included NFL Fever, NBA Inside Drive, NHL Rivals, and MLB Inside Pitch. Microsoft Game Studio's Kevin Brown stated plainly, "They're just not as competitive as we want them to be."

Initially, the company claimed to be only "resting" the franchises in order to work on bringing them back with a greater level of quality. However, later in the year it became apparent that the changes were permanent when Microsoft shuttered its sports studio in Redmond, WA and laid off 76 employees.



## Rubin Leaves Naughty Dog

Naughty Dog co-founder Jason Rubin had a newsmaking year in 2004. It started at the annual DICE convention, where he gave an impassioned speech regarding what he felt was the mistreatment of the development community by publishers. During the speech, he commented, "The extent to which developers are disrespected is extreme," and went on to suggest that the development community should organize to earn a greater degree of influence over marketing and management.

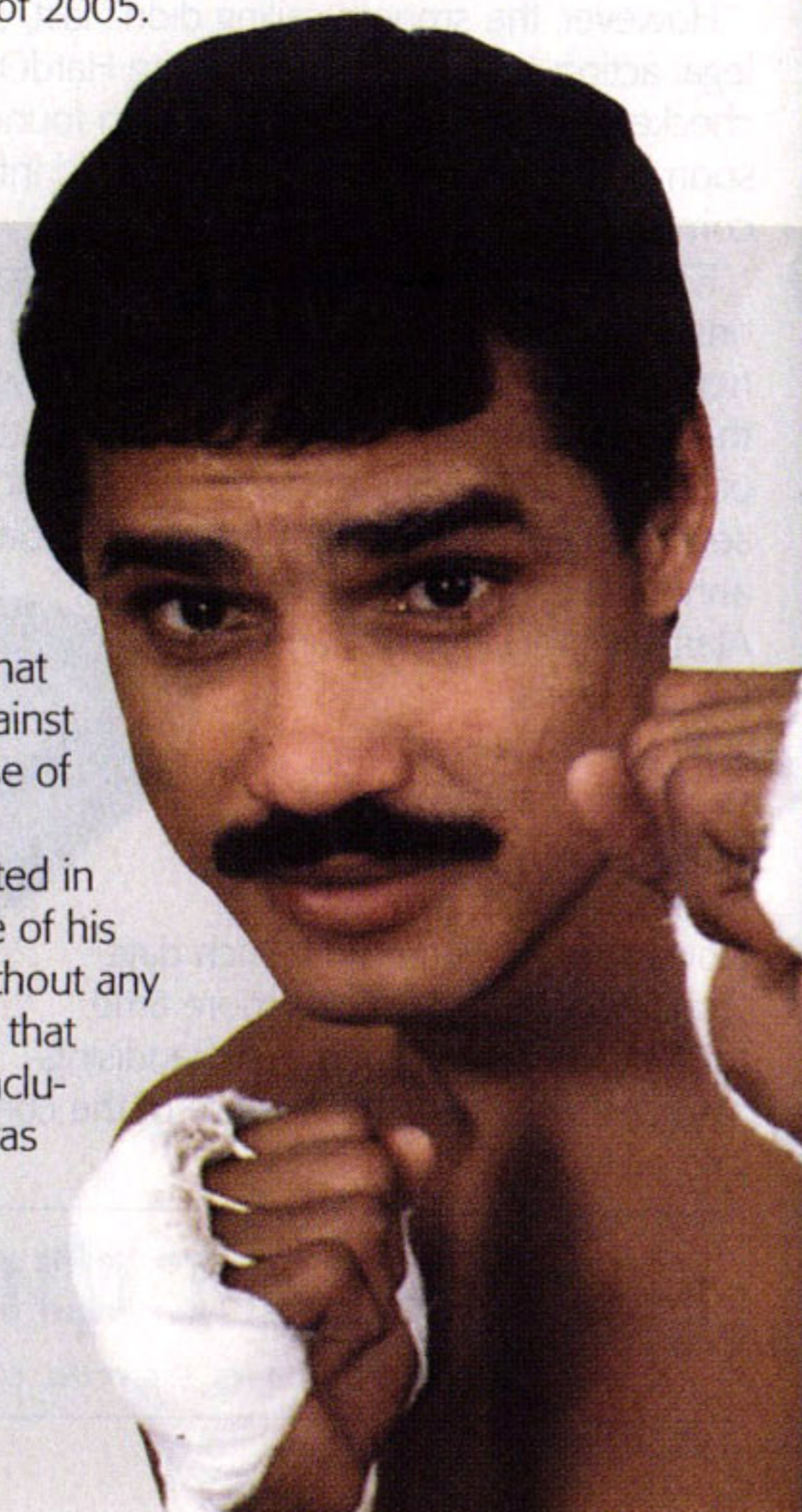


Later in the month, he shocked everyone by announcing that he was leaving Naughty Dog (and parent company Sony) to strike out on his own. "I now want to take on new challenges and create something new. I want to refuel my passion for the business of gaming," he claimed. However, he said he bore no ill will towards Sony, who he praised as an excellent partner, and did stay on through the large part of the year to help complete work on the company's excellent sequel, Jak 3. Rumors that Rubin was going to leave gaming for partnerships in Hollywood abounded, but he has yet to unveil his plans for the future. Rubin departed with Naughty Dog co-founder and programming genius Andy Gavin in January of 2005.

## Boxer Arguello Sucker Punches EA

Lawsuits are fairly common in video games. However, it's never good to get in a legal dispute with someone that can knock you out with one punch. In March, The Los Angeles Times reported that former boxing great Alexis Arguello had filed suit against Electronic Arts, Nintendo, and Sony for the illegal use of his likeness in EA Sport's Knockout Kings series.

Although many famous boxers have been recreated in Knockout Kings, Arguello took exception to EA's use of his physical appearance and boxing style in the title without any compensation. Ironically, it was the game's success that tipped off Arguello – who is not a gamer – to his inclusion in the Knockout King's roster. Apparently, he was unaware of the game until a young boxing fan had approached him and asked him to sign his copy of Knockout Kings 2001.



# EVERQUEST REACHES MILESTONE



On March 16, Sony Online Entertainment's ultra-popular MMORPG celebrated its fifth year of continuous play. Although others were first, EverQuest did much to popularize the genre, as its addictive gameplay helped spawn such terms as "EverCrack" and "EQ widows." While its long-awaited sequel, EverQuest II, wouldn't be released until late in the year, things continued as usual in the virtual world of Norrath, with over 100,000 people playing at one time during peak periods.

Over its five year run, EverQuest has sold over 2.5 million copies, and usually boasts about 420,000 dedicated users. Sony estimates that total playtime for all current characters would equal about 184,000 years. Scary. Although the MMORPG genre has had its problems, EQ's continued success demonstrates the strong allure that virtual worlds will hold for many in the years to come.



**1** April Fool's Day jokes are a tradition in the industry, but Blizzard pulled off a particularly funny hoax concerning its epic World of Warcraft when they announced a fictional new race – the Two-Headed Ogre. Gullible fans made it the talk of the Warcraft boards.

**2** The year's most notable executive departure was the exodus of EA president and COO John Riccitiello, who led the company since 1997 and was probably the most powerful man in the game industry. Little is known about his reasons for leaving.

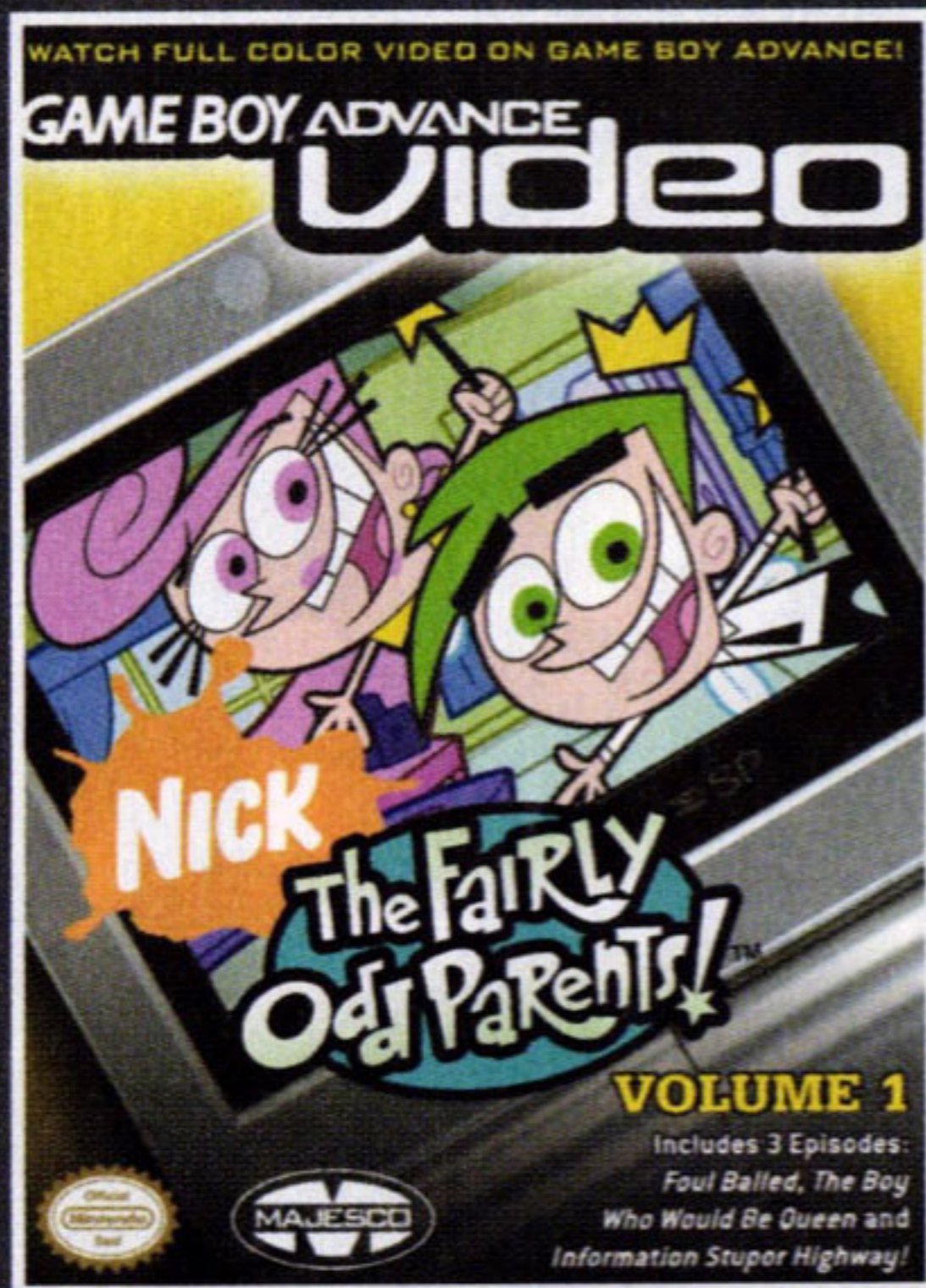
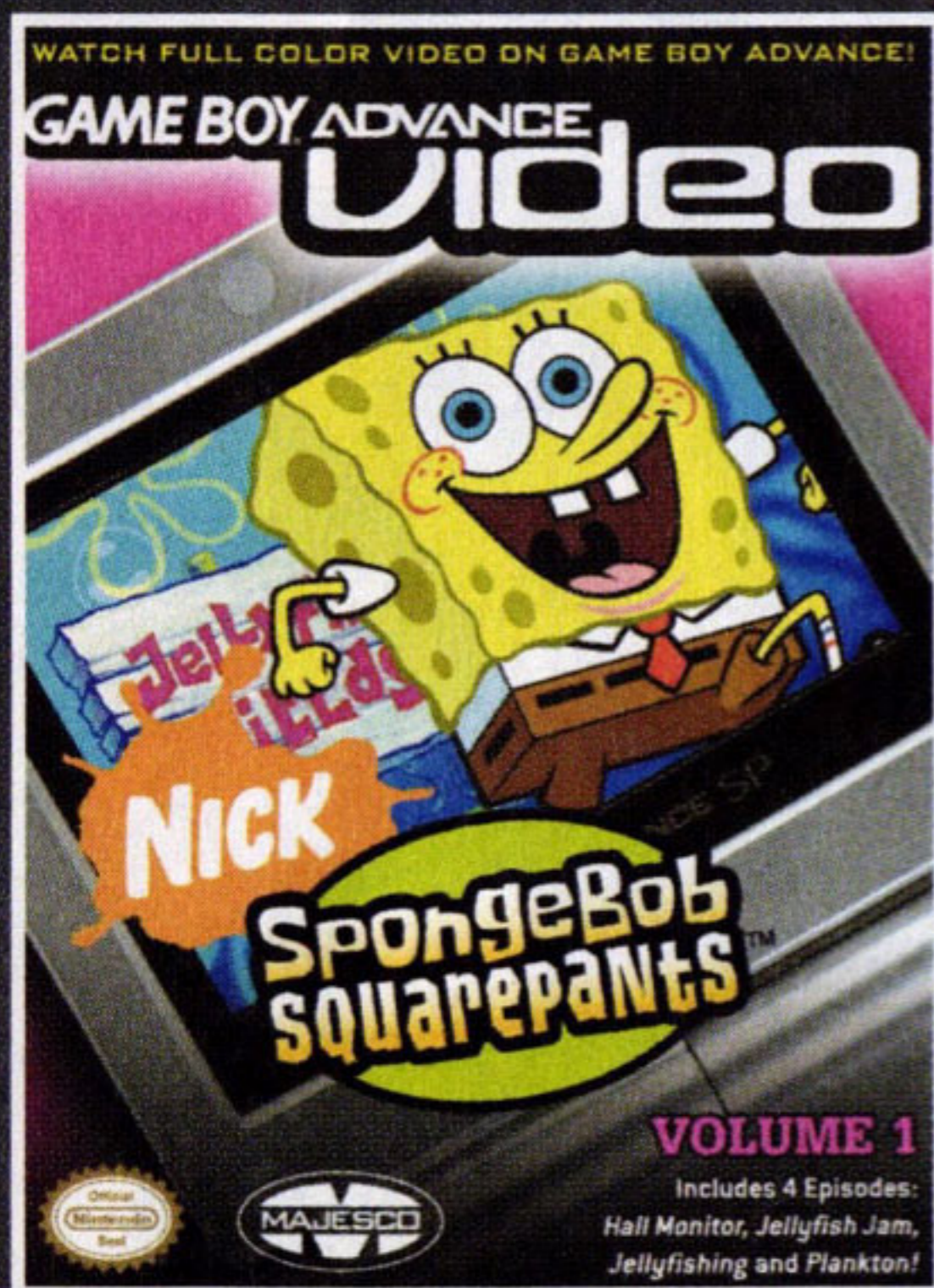
**3** The Nielsen Ratings, the bible of TV advertising, teamed up with Activision to announce that they would be starting a new program to track the effectiveness of in-game marketing. Hope you like ads in your games! This could get out of hand in a hurry.

**4** Hong Kong cinema legend John Woo shocked Nintendo fanboys by purchasing the film rights to the Metroid series through his game firm, Tiger Hill Studios. The director is attached to two other game-related film adaptations: Spy Hunter and Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six.

**5** Silicon Knights, creator of Eternal Darkness, became a free agent in April. Founder Dennis Dyack revealed that its exclusivity deal with Nintendo had ended, and that Silicon Knights would be pursuing projects on all platforms, including Nintendo's.

**6** Viacom CEO Sumner Redstone filed papers with the SEC allowing him to purchase more shares of Midway. Later in the year, he did just that, eventually acquiring over 80 percent of Midway's shares and nominating his daughter for the board of directors.

# GBA VIDEO STRIKES GOLD!



**N**o one paid much attention when Majesco announced that it would be releasing new technology that allowed gamers to play full-motion video on their Game Boy Advances. However, in April it became clear that the company meant business when it was confirmed that it had signed deals to produce GBA video carts for two major licensees – Cartoon Network and Nintendo's Pokémon television series.

As 2004 went on, GBA video began to look like the best business decision of the year. The budget-priced carts, which hold up to 45 minutes of video, flew off the shelves and high-profile companies were soon lining up at Majesco's door. Deals were inked to distribute titles from hugely popular kids properties like Nicktoons, 4Kids (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!*), and *Strawberry Shortcake*. By year's end, even Disney was on board, with Buena Vista licenses including *Kim Possible* and *Lilo & Stitch*. A financial statement Majesco released in September showed a net revenue of \$33.9 million, up from \$4.0 million the year before, with over 79 percent of total sales being attributed to Game Boy Advance Video product. It's safe to say that the only ones laughing at GBA Video now are Majesco – all the way to the bank.



## BBC Dishes Dirt On Nintendo

The BBC released a controversial documentary about Nintendo in April, as part of its *Outrageous Fortunes* series. According to the BBC, the series' purpose is to "[go] in search of the truth behind the biggest brands in the world and the families that control them."

In the episode, host Libby Potter traveled to Japan to interview such Nintendo luminaries as former head (and company kingpin Hiroshi Yamauchi's son-in-law) Minoru Arakawa, who ran the company through the '80s and '90s, and Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto.

Arakawa detailed the struggles related with running the company under the stern leadership of Yamauchi, who was portrayed as a ruthless and demanding businessman that fired his own cousin from the family business. Potter pressed Miyamoto on why he has never received royalties on any of his creations (which earned Yamauchi a fortune of over \$1.4 billion), choosing instead to remain a salaried employee.

The documentary also made more sinister charges against Nintendo, claiming that it was aware that some of its games could cause seizures in children and chose to do nothing to remove the offending sequences from its titles. According to Potter's report, the company refused to turn over incriminating documents regarding seizures until it was twice found in contempt of court by an American judge presiding over a case brought by the family of a child that had suffered seizures as a result of its products. Strong stuff, which – luckily for Nintendo – didn't receive much press coverage in 2004.



■ *Outrageous Fortunes* host Libby Potter

## ON THE RADAR Phantom Phollies!

Infinium Labs and its would-be Phantom console made news in April when a former executive sued the firm for fraud and breach of contract, then retracted the claim the very same day. This made April, well, pretty much like every other month of the year in the topsy-turvy world of Phantom. Things started strong when Infinium unveiled the unit at CES in January (which turned out to look nothing like the final retail model). However, shortly after a list of publishing partners was posted to its website, the company quickly pulled it off and deemed it a "temporary list." Despite the egg on its face, the company gained some credibility at the end of the month when it named former Microsoft exec Kevin Bachus COO and president of Infinium Labs.

However, the smooth sailing didn't last, as Infinium caused a scandal when it threatened legal action against the Internet site HardOCP, which had published a story regarding the checkered business past of Phantom founder Timothy Roberts. A letter threatening a suit was soon posted on the 'Net, which caused Infinium to earn the ire of many in the online gaming community.

E3 was a highlight of the year for Phantom, as the company won strong press by demonstrating a slickly redesigned unit playing actual games. But, instead of capitalizing on this new momentum, things took another downward turn when a September SEC filing revealed that the company had only \$134,226 in cash on hand, and a "working capital deficiency of \$3,962,226." Despite the grim financial news, several big publishing partners were officially announced, including Eidos, Atari, Vivendi Universal, and Codemasters.

All in all, it was a busy year for Infinium, which is probably why the company had to break its scheduled November 15 Phantom launch date to allow its retail partners "more time to plan promotional and merchandising activities" – pushing the release of the console into early 2005.



PHANTOM  
PHANTOM GAMING SERVICE

1994 A.D.



PlayStation®2

FREE RADICAL



XBOX LIVE

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Visit [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org)  
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\*Online play not available on all platforms. INTERNET CONNECTION required for online play. PlayStation®2 online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). Check platform box for online play.

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**1** Konami announced that it would be releasing a comic book series based on its legendary Metal Gear Solid franchise in May in partnership with IDW Publishing. Artist Ashley Wood, who worked on the *Curse of Spawn* series, was tapped as the artist for the project.

**2** In May, Japanese Pachinko giant Sammy revealed that it would be merging with Sega by exchanging stock for the remaining Sega shares it did not already own. Sammy, an up-and-coming game publisher, hoped to merge its financial might with Sega's game know-how.

**3** After receiving a prime spot in Sony's GDC press conference, Backbone Entertainment's PSP title, *Death Jr.*, was optioned for a movie to be directed by Larry Guterman (*Antz*). Not bad for a game that isn't even out yet!

**4** The industry (or at least Visual Concepts) breathed a sigh of relief when it was revealed that a rumor printed in *The Sports Business Journal* that had EA Sports snagging the exclusive rights from Players, Inc. to produce NFL games was just that – a rumor. Or, so we thought...

**5** Final Fantasy composer Nobuo Uematsu and the LA Philharmonic thrilled Square fans with an E3 concert featuring most of his famous FF compositions. The show was held at the awe-inspiring Walt Disney Concert Hall, and was an event for the ages.

**6** Microsoft showed off its new Xbox Live Arcade service, which would allow gamers to download and play classic arcade, puzzle, and casual games for a small fee. The service includes classics like *Ms. Pac-Man* and *Dig Dug* as well as cell phone staples like *Bejeweled*.



## Warner Bros. Says "Make Good Games – Or Else!"



Warner Brothers, keeper of such high-profile licenses as *The Matrix*, turned heads in the publishing community when the company's Jason Hall revealed that royalties on WB's licensed video game products would be tied to published game review scores. Basically, if a title fails to receive a 70 percent or above score on sites like Metacritic.com or GameRankings.com, the publisher must pay Warner Brothers higher royalties. "The bad games are over," Hall boasted to the *Hollywood Reporter*.

Many in the game industry took exception to this new policy, including Atari president Bruno Brunell, whose company published the commercially successful but critically panned *Enter the Matrix*. "Are they joking?" Brunell scoffed.

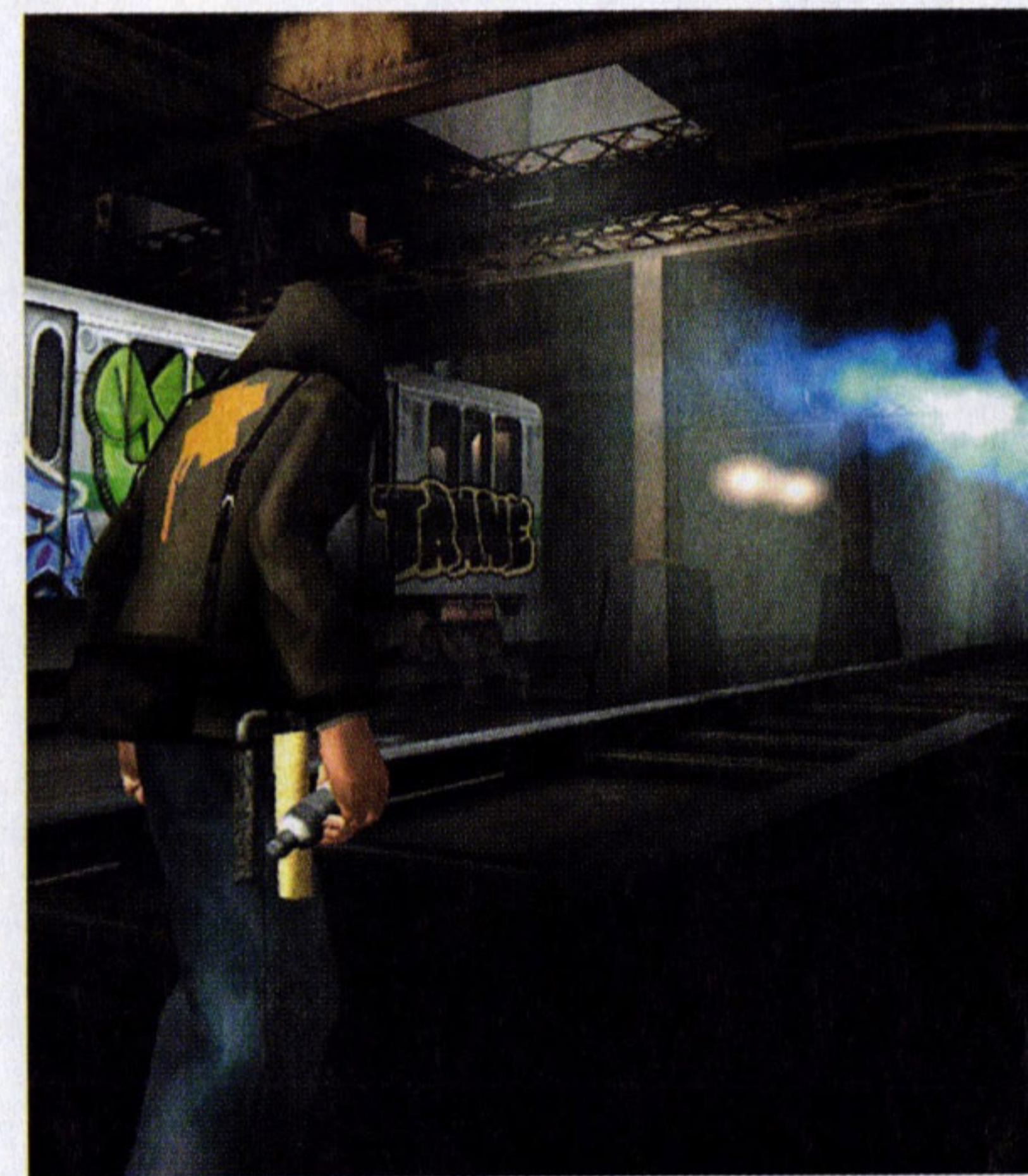
## ON THE RADAR

### GAMES GET SLEAZY

In May, Eidos announced that its dirty-minded Sims knockoff, *Singles: Flirt Up Your Life* (which allows characters to perform intimate acts onscreen), would receive the ESRB's rare Adults Only rating. The uncut version was available for purchase online for weeks before a tamer M-rated version hit store shelves. But this was only one of the classy events in a year that saw games turning up the sleaze factor.

At E3, Eidos also hosted an autograph signing by world-famous porn star Tera Patrick, who was also a character in the company's *Backyard Wrestling 2*. Not to be outdone, Vivendi Universal showed off *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*, updating gaming's original dirty old nerd series for a new generation. Despite depicting everything up to and including sports mascot sex, the title earned an M-rating as well, although an AO PC version was eventually released.

Other notable demonstrations of good taste included Top Heavy Studios' (tee hee!) *The Guy Game*, which wedded actual *Girls Gone Wild*-style video footage of topless women to amateurish trivia gameplay in creating the year's most exploitive and shoddy release. Also baring mammaries in public was Majesco's *BloodRayne*, who "posed" nude in a video game-themed October issue of *Playboy*. Rounding out the year was MTV 2's *Video Mods*, which features scantily clad characters from such titles as *Jade Empire* and the risqué *Outlaw Golf 2* miming along embarrassingly to current pop hits by Black Eyed Peas and others. Now, why is it that video games don't get taken seriously as an art form again?



## Marc Ecko Enters Game Biz

Hip-hop fashion icon Marc Ecko decided to get his game on at E3 with the announcement that he had teamed up with Atari to create an urban-themed action/adventure title called *Marc Ecko's Getting' Up: Contents Under Pressure*. Ecko, a longtime gamer, felt that urban culture had never been accurately reflected in a video game, and stated that *Getting' Up* would provide the authenticity that the market craves in a post-GTA world. The title itself centers on a young graffiti tagger named Trane, who uses his art to rebel against a corrupt political system in a fictional city called New Radius. While some wrote it off as just another marketing gimmick, the initial screens and video released of the game look quite promising indeed.

**T**here's no event larger than E3 in video games, and this year's convention had everything you would expect. As usual, big news abounded on many fronts. Increasingly, the really huge revelations happen not on the floor itself, but at the pre-show press conferences. Microsoft kicked things off with a conference that highlighted its strong product lineup for the coming months as well as its highly touted XNA development platform. The not-so-shocking surprise of the night was the announcement that Electronic Arts had decided to bring its vaunted EA Sports lineup to Xbox Live, a huge coup for the company.

Sony and Nintendo focused on their upcoming handhelds, the PlayStation Portable and the Nintendo DS, respectively. Nintendo's conference was handled by its new VP of sales and marketing, Reggie Fils-Aime, who became an instant Internet sensation with a fiery speech. For Sony, the show was the first time it gave gamers the chance to see and touch the PSP, if not actually play it. Other than these highlights, it was largely business as usual at E3, as big games were played, booth babes groped, and free drinks guzzled by the gallon.





# TIMESPLITTERS

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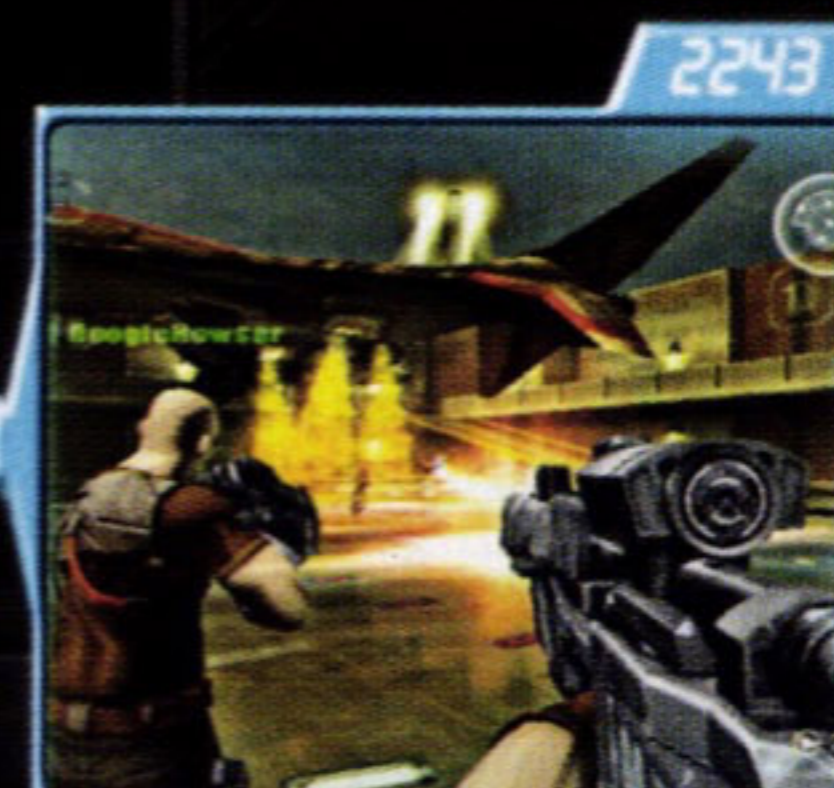
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BATTLE FROM 1920 TO 2450. JUMP THROUGH TIME TO SAVE YOUR PAST OR FUTURE SELF.



ANNIHILATE ROBOTIC, RESURRECTED OR LIVING ENEMIES WITH A WICKED ARSENAL.



SYNC-UP ONLINE FOR INTENSE 16-PLAYER\* TEAM COMBAT & DEATH MATCHES.



Challenge Everything™



**1** Toyota offered fans a playable preview of Sony's Gran Turismo 4 in June, a demo of the game featuring its hybrid Prius car. The disc was offered free to shoppers that requested brochures on the Prius and other Toyota vehicles on the company's website.

**2** Microsoft scrapped Level 5's Xbox Live MMORPG True Fantasy Live Online. Microsoft stated the reasons for the cancellation as "an incredibly crowded and competitive marketplace" and quality issues. No doubt the Xbox's non-existent Japanese user base was a factor as well.

**3** Omaha teen Kimber Wilson, 15, suffered a heart attack during a session of Konami's popular rhythm game Dance Dance Revolution. She was revived by paramedics at the scene and later listed in good condition. The heart condition was pre-existing.

**4** EA and Rhino Records united to bring a little variety into an industry filled with bad heavy metal. EA Trax announced that it would start utilizing Rhino's extensive back catalog in EA titles, including artists such as Jesus and Mary Chain, Faith No More, and Violent Femmes.

**5** Nintendo's Chinese subsidiary, iQue, introduced the popular Game Boy Advance handheld to the country, selling the unit in Shanghai and other Cantonese areas. A Chinese version of WarioWare was released as well. The unit retailed for the equivalent of 84 U.S. dollars.

**6** Oddworld's mysterious Stranger project got inked to a publishing deal with Electronic Arts. As always, early screenshots of the game demonstrated the studio's brilliant art style, but with a more action-oriented bent. It was later retitled Oddworld Stranger's Wrath.



# INTERPLAY'S FINANCIAL MELTDOWN

**J**une was the cruelest month for long-standing publisher Interplay. On the fourth, California state officials closed the company's Irvine offices because the company had failed to provide worker's compensation insurance and pay employee salaries. The state levied fines of \$1,000 per worker for the violations. A few days later, business resumed after Interplay secured insurance. Sadly, on that very same day, Interplay's majority shareholder, French publisher Titus, declared bankruptcy proceedings that would necessitate a reorganization of the firm and/or a liquidation of assets.

Strangely, as these events were unfolding, Interplay CEO Herve Caen staked the company's future on a risky (and expensive) new project: a MMORPG based on the Fallout franchise. The financial news just got worse as the company announced a quarterly loss of \$900,000 based on poor sales of Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II and Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel. However, the weakening financial state finally forced Interplay to sell the rights to make console and PC Fallout titles to Elder Scrolls developer Bethesda. Fans were understandably excited at the news. Still, all was not lost for Interplay, which still retains ownership of the IP and the option to pursue the Fallout MMORPG – if it can make it through 2005.

## ESPN and Take 2 Tackle EA

Take 2 Interactive and Sega joined forces to take on the industry-leading EA Sports line in June, with Take 2 co-publishing and distributing the ESPN Sports series. For Sega, the opportunity to tap into Take 2's (and subsidiary Jack of All Games') distribution muscle seemed to provide a great opportunity. For Take 2, it was a chance to expand its scope into the difficult sports market. ESPN NFL 2K5 was to be the first title released under the partnership, but both companies surprised the industry with an aggressive pricing strategy. The game, and all the year's ESPN titles, were to sell for a bargain-priced \$19.99 in an effort to crack EA's dominance of the market. In addition, ESPN NFL 2K5's release date was pushed up to July 25, coming out a few weeks before Madden 2005.

At first, EA seemed unfazed by the strategy, as company spokesperson Jeff Brown claimed, "There's no compelling reason to change our overall pricing strategy right now... They could give that thing away for free, scotch-taped to a ham sandwich and we're still going to beat them."

However, early sales of ESPN were strong, as 792,000 units flew off the shelves in July alone. Madden, predictably, had one of the year's best launches as well, but industry analysts speculated that ESPN was cutting into EA's sales. Perhaps in reaction, EA announced that its upcoming NBA Live 2005 was going to retail for \$39.99 and instituted a buy-two-get-one-free promotion. At the end of the day, Madden was still tops, but many in the industry praised ESPN's market share growth and revenues. Sadly, this success was all for naught, as EA later scooped up the exclusive rights to the NFL license. [See GI News page 20].



## Driv3r A Dud

Reflections' eternally delayed Driv3r was finally released in June. With a budget reportedly more than 51 million dollars, this was to be the year's token big-ticket flameout. While initial sales were strong on the back of a half-decade of hype and a huge television marketing campaign, the title failed to become the GTA-sized phenomenon that the company had hoped for. Reviews were tepid at best and scathing at worst, and many users of Internet message boards attacked Driv3r with a malice that's usually only found in maniacal moustache-twirling super villains.

## Reality Gaming Makes Headlines

There was a proliferation of reality-based PC first-person shooters in 2004. In June, Kuma Reality games announced that it would be publishing Fallujah Vigilant Resolve, a game based on an April raid of the Iraqi city by U.S. Armed Forces. Some questioned the ethics of making money off the experiences of our fighting men and women, but Kuma's Keith Halper stated that the company sought only to provide "a unique window into real-war news."

Later in the year, Kuma grabbed national coverage with a download that depicted two different versions of presidential candidate John Kerry's service as a Swift Boat captain in Vietnam. Even more controversial was Traffic Games' JFK Reloaded, which allowed players to relive the Kennedy assassination from the perspective of Lee Harvey Oswald. Although the company claimed to be interested in debunking JFK conspiracy theories, there was much public outcry surrounding the game. The Kennedy family soon decried it as "despicable" in the press.





**1** It's not often that games help animals, but Sony did just that with its PS2 title, *Dog's Life*. In July, the company announced that it would be donating a portion of the proceeds of the game to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

**2** Los Angeles passed an ordinance restricting the amount of time minors could spend at cybercafes or LAN gaming parlors. Gamers under 18 are now banned from any cybercafe business from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and from 10:00 p.m. to 8:30 a.m.

**3** Producer Shinya Nishigaki died tragically of a heart attack at the age of 42 in July. Nishigaki crafted such eccentric titles as the *Blue Stinger* and *Illbleed* for Dreamcast. A group of *Illbleed* devotees is currently working on a homebrew sequel to the game.

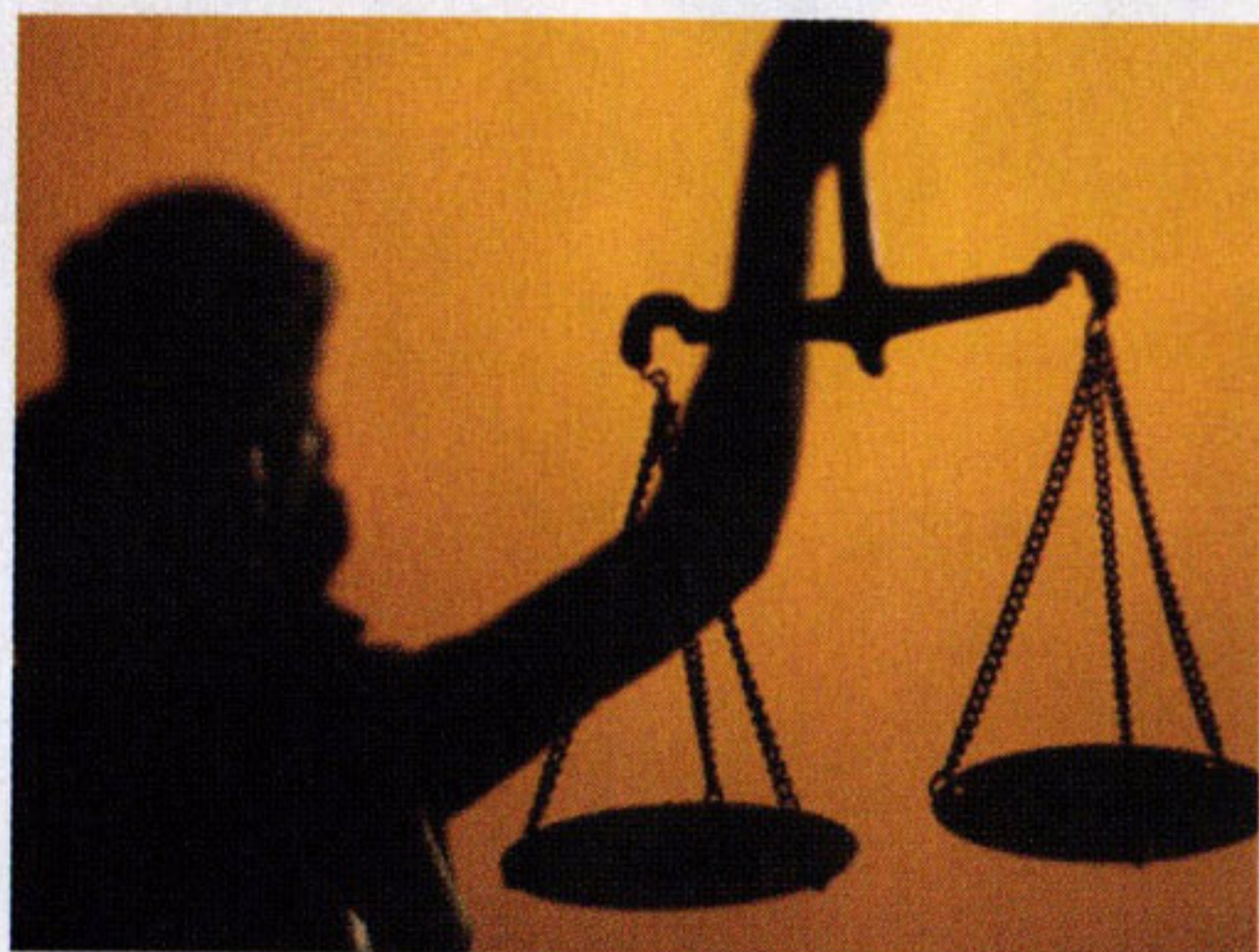
**4** Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer talked a little trash at a conference in July, commenting "I bet we can take Sony next generation." He pointed out that, despite the fact that Xbox has not been profitable, it has made the company a major player in gaming.

**5** A murder of a 14-year-old boy in the U.K. became a scandal when it was discovered that both murderer and victim had played Rockstar's violent *Manhunt* together. Sensationalistic press coverage and opportunistic lawsuits followed, with little regard for the facts.

**6** Nintendo finally released photos of the final retail version of its DS handheld. The new unit was sleeker and more attractive than the one shown at E3, and was received favorably by fans and the press.

## ea SCOOPS UP CRITERION

**e**lectronic Arts was on a buying spree this year, but none of its acquisitions made as large a splash as its purchase of the English middleware masters at Criterion Studios. Earlier in 2004, EA had snagged the rights to the company's *Burnout 3: Takedown*, but in July it went the full monty and bought the whole operation, including the promising FPS *Black*. Most importantly, EA got ownership of Criterion's industry-standard Renderware development tools. While this certainly makes sound financial sense for EA as it moves into an expensive period of next-gen console development, many in the industry worried that EA might restrict other publishers and developers access to Renderware, one of the most commonly used middleware programs in the world, used in titles as diverse as the *GTA* series and *NBA Ballers*.



## Anti-Game Bill Deemed Unconstitutional

In a little publicized but very important turn of events, a U.S. District Court in Seattle ruled in July that a law banning the sale of games depicting violence against law enforcement officers was unconstitutional on the grounds that it violated First Amendment protection of free speech.

Although the Washington State legislature had passed the bill and Governor Gary Locke had signed it into law, presiding Judge Lasnik rejected the law based on the fact that similar acts of violence routinely appear in works of art, film, and literature. Also, Lasnik felt that lawmakers' claims that violence in video games could spawn real-life acts against police officers was "not based on reasonable inferences drawn from substantial evidence."

Needless to say, the game industry body Entertainment Software Association, which had been fighting the bill since its inception, was very pleased, as president Doug Lowenstein felt that the ruling helped "establish video games as constitutionally protected forms of expression."

## ON THE RADAR

### SONY'S PSX WOES

Hey, remember the PSX? You know, that hybrid PS2/hard-drive media device/DVD recorder that was going to revolutionize home entertainment. Well, Sony may be the master of home electronics, but it's also important to remember that even the greatest slugger strikes out at the plate once in awhile. And in 2004, the PSX looked like a product that might be closer to the Betamax than the PS2 on the Sony continuum of success.

At the outset of the year, Sony tried to placate peeved PSX owners by announcing a patch that would restore planned features that were left out in the rush to get the unit to stores in late 2003. By either download or a freely distributed disc, owners were able to add 24x speed HDD-to-DVD dubbing, MP3 and TIFF support, some odd bug fixes, and USB keyboard support, among other features. However, sales remained sluggish in Japan, and soon the company was forced to suspend production of new units altogether.

Then, in a surprise move, the company released two new, revamped models of the PSX in July. These units had the same price point as the original models, but added the patched features as well as other improvements. Still, sales remained flat, and the company was soon forced to drop the price of the 160GB unit from 59,800 yen (\$545) to 44,800 (\$409) and the 250GB PSX from 79,800 yen (\$675) to 59,800 (\$545). This move was sparked by retailers, who were already heavily discounting the PSX in order to clear out stock. Not surprisingly, the PSX's American and European release date was pushed back to sometime in March of 2005. However, if the current trend holds, we wouldn't be surprised if it never makes it to our shores.



## Xbox Live Hits A Million, Nintendo Disses Online

Microsoft's online initiative, Xbox Live, reached an important symbolic milestone in July, claiming its one millionth subscriber. To put this in a little historical perspective, it took such important entertainment services as HBO, America Online, and TiVo almost three times as long to reach this same goal. At the time, Xbox Live had subscribers in 24 countries that had logged on for 220 million online sessions. Average total Xbox Live usage per day was 265,549 hours.

Of course, in the same month, Nintendo looked at these impressive statistics and stated the obvious: Gamers don't want to play online. At least according to Nintendo president Satoru Iwata, who told Japan Spotlight that "customers do not want online games...at the moment, most customers do not wish to pay the extra money for connection to the Internet, and for some customers, connection procedures to the Internet are still not easy." Although he wouldn't rule out the possibility of utilizing online play, Iwata did stress that the current online gaming model was flawed and made profitability very difficult to achieve. As usual, Nintendo seems to be marching to the beat of its own drummer.



■ Nintendo president Satoru Iwata



## Swingin' Ape Snags StarCraft: Ghost

In a shocking twist, Blizzard snatched the much-hyped *StarCraft: Ghost* project from developer Nihilistic and handed the project to Metal Arms: Glitch in the System creators Swingin' Ape Studios. Blizzard will continue working with Swingin' Ape until the project's release in 2005. The game has been the subject of much anticipation and debate amongst gamers since Game Informer debuted it on its cover back in November of 2002, but since then it appeared to have a very troubled development. Blizzard's Ron and Chris Millar, who had been overseeing the project, left the company in 2003, and since then *Ghost* has seemingly disappeared off the radar. Hopefully, Swingin' Ape will be able to guide the project to completion.



PlayStation®2



DYNASTY WARRIORS®

March 2005

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**1** Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi announced that he had formed his own development studio, Mistwalker. Sakaguchi said that the studio was at work on two new RPG projects. Former Square producer Kensuke Tanaka will serve as Mistwalker's vice president.

**2** Sony confirmed that its next PlayStation will use high-density Blu-ray optical discs. Blu-ray is currently competing with rival format HD-DVD to become the dominant storage format for next-generation entertainment. Sony and Panasonic are among the companies backing Blu-ray.

**3** Sega partnered with JC Entertainment to create a massively multiplayer online game based on its Shenmue franchise. Shenmue Online is scheduled to be marketed mainly in Korea and China, and will likely not make it the U.S. Yu Suzuki will be overseeing the project.

**4** Alice producer American McGee revealed that he would be partnering with *Dawn of the Dead* director George Romero to make *City of the Dead*, the self-proclaimed "goriest game ever made." McGee commented, "We hope to bruise a few psyches with this one."

**5** THQ made the "sure thing" business deal of 2004 in August, when it signed a multi-year, multi-game deal to create titles based on Pixar's upcoming CG motion pictures. Later that year, THQ released a game based on the smash *The Incredibles*.

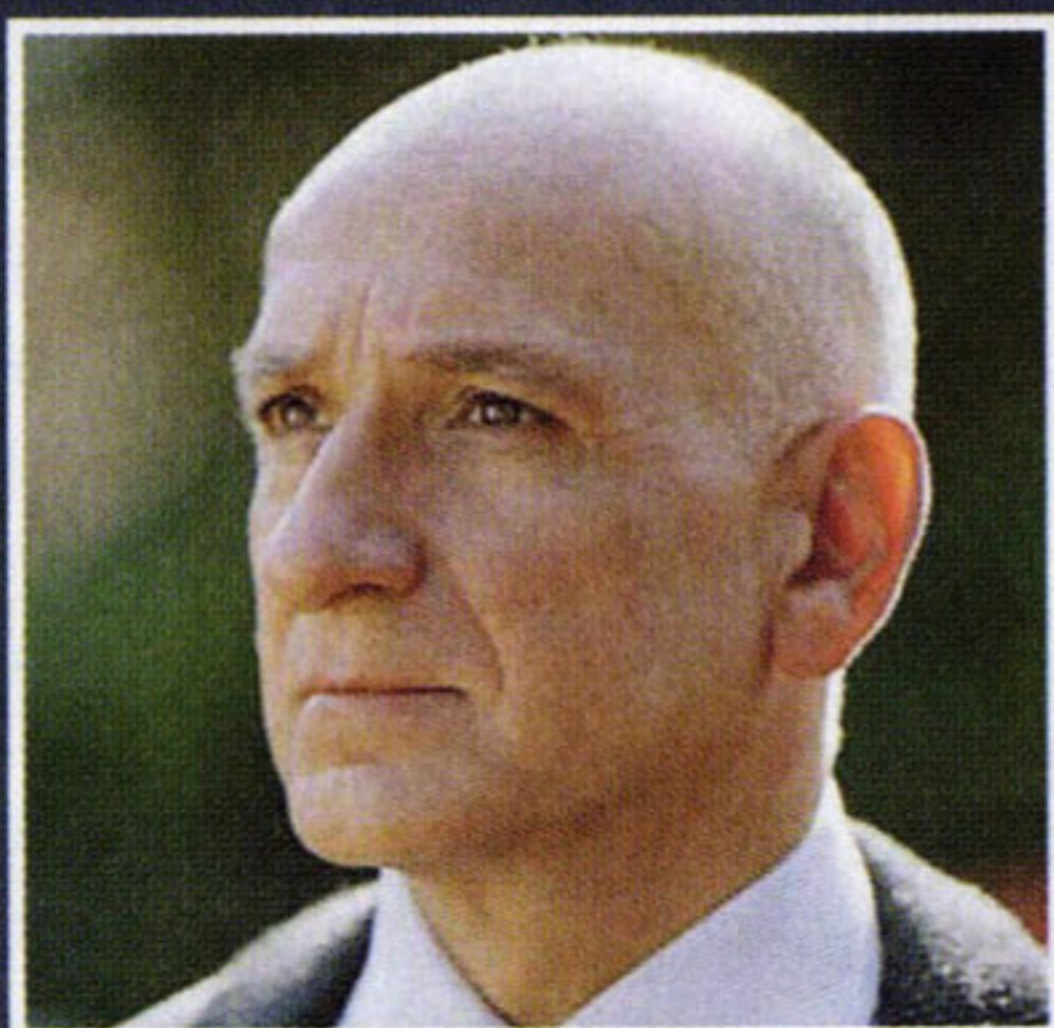
**6** Warner Bros., which was already working with the developer on *The Matrix Online*, bought Monolith Productions. Monolith, a respected PC engine maker, has worked on such games as *Tron 2.0*, the *No One Lives Forever* series, and *Aliens Vs. Predator 2*.



## ALL-STAR CAST SIGNS ON FOR... BLOODRAYNE?

**O**kay, we know we made fun of *House of the Dead* director Uwe Boll a few pages ago, but we have to give him credit: the filmmaker has assembled an A-list cast for his upcoming movie based on the adventures of Majesco's goth vampire seductress, BloodRayne. Playing Rayne herself is Kristanna Loken, of *Terminator 3* and making-out-with-that-singer-Pink-in-a-nightclub fame. Also committed to the project is up-and-coming actress Michelle Rodriguez (*Girlfight*, *Alexander*) and tough-guy Michael Madsen. Strangely, this game-related project will reunite Rodriguez and Madsen, who both did voiceovers for Atari's *Driv3r*.

However, the most surprising signing, however, was British legend Ben Kingsley. That's right – Sir Ben Kingsley. As in Oscar for *Ghandi*. As in *Sexy Beast*. As in *House of Sand and Fog*. As odd as it might seem, Kingsley expressed enthusiasm for the project and for horror movies in general in an interview with the site *Monsters & Critics*. The actor commented, "I think a good horror film can also include sexuality and passion and tensions and sensitivity...if a horror film embraces all these mediums, then it can be a very sensually exciting event for the audience." Kingsley will play Rayne's father and nemesis Kagan, King of the Vampires, whose rape and murder of Rayne's mother leads the half-human, half-vampire heroine to join a force of vampire hunters. Oh, and one more thing: Meatloaf is in the movie, too! You just can't go wrong with Meatloaf.



## Acclaim Goes Down

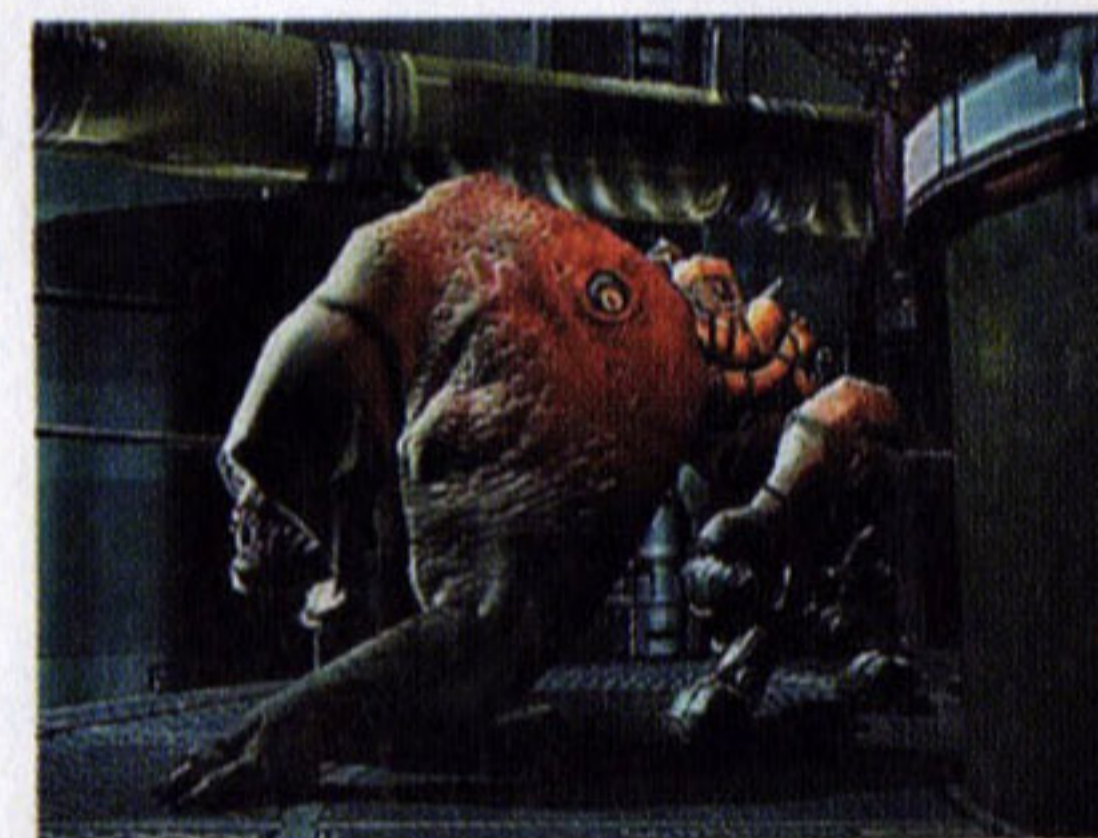
This was a terrible year for the folks at Acclaim, which suffered everything short of being sued by the Olsen Twins. Oh wait, that actually happened, too, when the Twin Terrors took the Long Island-based publisher to court in April for failure to pay royalties from its Olsen-themed line of video games.

As it turned out, Mary-Kate and Ashley were the least of Acclaim's problems. As the year went on, Acclaim laid off employees, released dismal financial news, lost its venerable Turok and Major League Baseball licenses, and saw its stock de-listed. The ax finally fell in August, when the company announced that it would be filing for Chapter 7 bankruptcy. It was a bitter event, with employees being denied COBRA insurance coverage and back wages. In the end, after a nearly 15 year run in the games business, all that was left to do was sell used office furniture and equipment in a bankruptcy auction at Acclaim's former Glen Cove, NY headquarters.

## Doom 3 Hits Stores, Carmack Crashes

Legendary Doom creator John Carmack had a decidedly mixed August. On the positive side, id Software's long-awaited first-person shooter *Doom 3* finally hit store shelves. The title flew out of retail stores as expected, earning the top spot on the PC charts. Thankfully, Carmack and id are already at work on a new IP and project, despite the rumors that he was to retire and pursue his rocketry hobby full-time.

And perhaps it's best that Carmack holds on to his day job. A few days before *Doom 3* hit, Carmack's Armadillo Aerospace suffered a setback in its goal to become the first private company to put a manned rocket into space. During some flight testing, the company's spacecraft crashed to Earth, totally destroying the unit. In good humor, Carmack did post a video and pictures of the crash on Armadillo's website.



■ The crash, flight, and aftermath

## Civil Unrest Rocks Star Wars Galaxies

Sony Online Entertainment found out in August that when you create a virtual, living world, real-world problems are sure to follow. In one of the year's most interesting stories, players of *Star Wars Galaxies* staged a demonstration in Theed, the capital city of Naboo, to protest a rash of account suspensions stemming from a "credit duping" operation. Certain users had discovered a way to illegally replicate large numbers of credits (*Galaxies*' currency), and as a result, the fake credits had permeated *Galaxies*' economy. When SOE discovered the scheme, the company suspended the accounts of all players who had come in contact with the fake credits. Unfortunately, due to the fact that many *Galaxies* players are employed as artisans (selling armor and other items) and the common practice of "tipping" other users, many of the suspended players had no idea they had been given duped credits.

Angry at SOE, a large group of users gathered to protest the suspensions. As the protest greatly hindered the servers' performance, SOE customer service reps began to break up the crowd by instantly teleporting protesters into space. SOE justified its heavy-handed tactics by releasing a statement regarding mass protests by releasing a statement on its forums: "Occasionally in *Star Wars Galaxies*, players feel the need to express their discontent with mass protests. With mass gatherings maliciously organized to disrupt other's play experience, we will restrict the number of players gathering in any one area to maintain the stability of the service."

The uproar eventually subsided and players were given the chance to appeal their suspensions, but civil unrest is more common in *Galaxies* than one might expect. Other past incidents include a Wookiee uprising in March and a 2002 demonstration on Tatooine in which Imperial forces killed a handful of protesters.



**1** Electronic Arts and USC broke ground on the Electronic Arts Innovation Lab, a facility within the university's Robert Zemeckis Center for Digital Arts. The building will be used to teach game development, and was enabled by a large donation from EA.

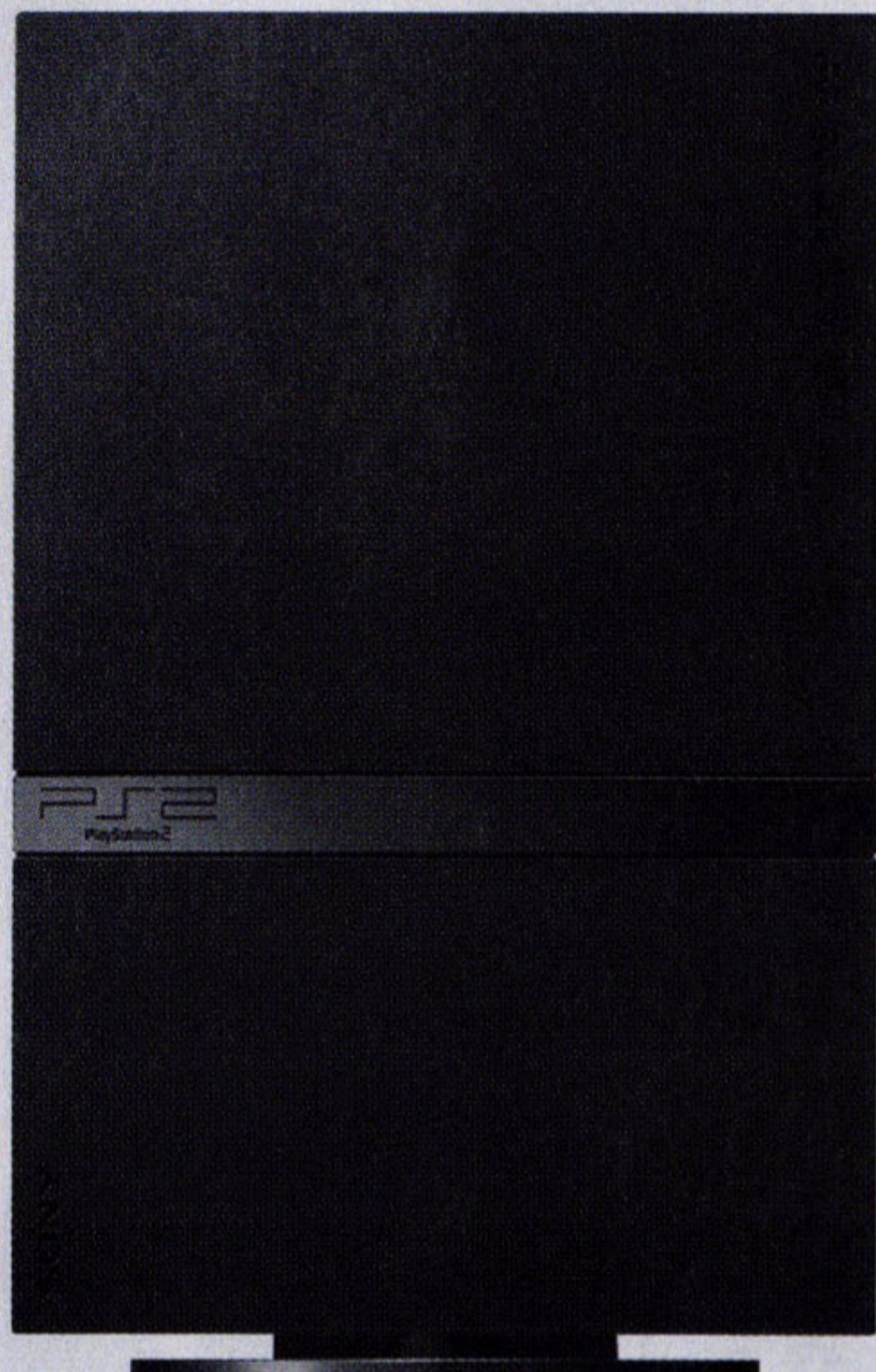
**2** Despite rumors that The Rock was slated for the role, actor Karl Urban signed on to star in Universal's film adaptation of Doom. Urban has played roles in such films as *The Bourne Supremacy* and *The Lord of the Rings* series.

**3** Namco's quirky PlayStation game *Katamari Damacy* won an intensely loyal following upon its release in September. So rabid was the response, the website Gamespot reported that most retailers were almost completely sold out of the title within a few weeks.

**4** The hot new trend in video games is...surgery! In September, two Nintendo DS surgery titles were announced in the space of a few weeks. One, *Atlus's Caduceus*, has a sci-fi bent, while *Spike's Tendo Dokuta* features a more realistic plot. Guess we didn't get the memo.

**5** Former Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi announced that he wanted the company to move into the anime business to make movies based on its game properties and...um... ancient Japanese poetry. Hope it's as good as the *Super Mario Bros.* cartoon!

**6** Comedy Central funnyman and drunk-about-town Dave Attell signed on with Global Star to provide commentary for the company's risqué golf game, *Outlaw Golf 2*. He was actually pretty funny, too, even if the game itself was a bit of a dud.



## Sony Debuts Tiny New PS2

Sony has always insisted that its consoles have a 10-year lifecycle and, just as it revamped the original PlayStation when it released the compact PSone hardware in 2001, the company announced that it would be launching a new model of its PlayStation 2 console. Although rumors had been circulating that a "PStwo" was in the works, many were surprised that Sony decided to release a new version of the hardware so early in the console generation. The unit itself drew rave reviews from the press for its amazingly small size (roughly the size of a hardcover novel) and the fact that the unit's broadband and 56k modems were built into the hardware. The only complaint was that the new hardware was not compatible with Sony's PS2 Hard Drive, which released earlier in the year. Given the fact that the new unit did not support the Hard Drive, and the low number of titles (with the exception of Square Enix's *Final Fantasy XI*) that actually support the add-on, it began to look like Sony was getting ready to abandon the Hard Drive altogether.

## Molyneux Apologizes To Fable Fans

While, in our opinion, releasing one of the year's most engaging action/RPG experiences is nothing to apologize for, *Fable* creator Peter Molyneux did just that in September through a posting on the Lionhead Studios message board. Responding to fans that were disappointed that certain features that he has spoken about in interviews were pulled from the game, he explained the situation:



"We strive to include absolutely everything we've ever dreamt of and, in my enthusiasm, I talk about it to anyone who'll listen, mainly in press interviews. When I tell people about what we're planning, I'm telling the truth, and people, of course, expect to see all the features I've mentioned. And when some of the most ambitious ideas get altered, redesigned or even dropped, people rightly want to know what happened to them."

Molyneux went on to suggest that his habit of talking about games long before their completion was probably responsible for building up unrealistic expectations about Lionhead's titles. Later that year, he commented in an interview with *Game Informer*, "I feel that this should be a place for talking about the passion of developing games before they're actually finished...but, if it's going to hurt Lionhead and the games we're making, then obviously I won't do it."

Regardless of the controversy, *Fable* was embraced by gamers, winning generally favorable reviews and becoming one of the fastest-selling Xbox titles to date.

# PSP COMING OUT PARTY at TGS



Since its announcement at E3 in 2003, the PlayStation Portable has been the subject of fevered debate and anticipation in the gaming community. We'd all seen the sexy unit on display at E3 2004 and drooled at the gorgeous screenshots of PSP titles released since then. However, the Tokyo Game Show in September was the first time that Japanese gamers and international press actually got a chance to get their hands around the unit and play. A slew of PSP product was on display at TGS, and models walked the show floor with PSPs strapped to their waists. Overall, reception was mixed, with many coming away impressed with the system's technological power and others decrying the lack of truly innovative games on display.





**1** Australia, which has perhaps the most restrictive rules on video games in the world, took the dramatic step of banning Vivendi's *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* in October. The game received an M-rating the U.S. and was available in most major retailers.

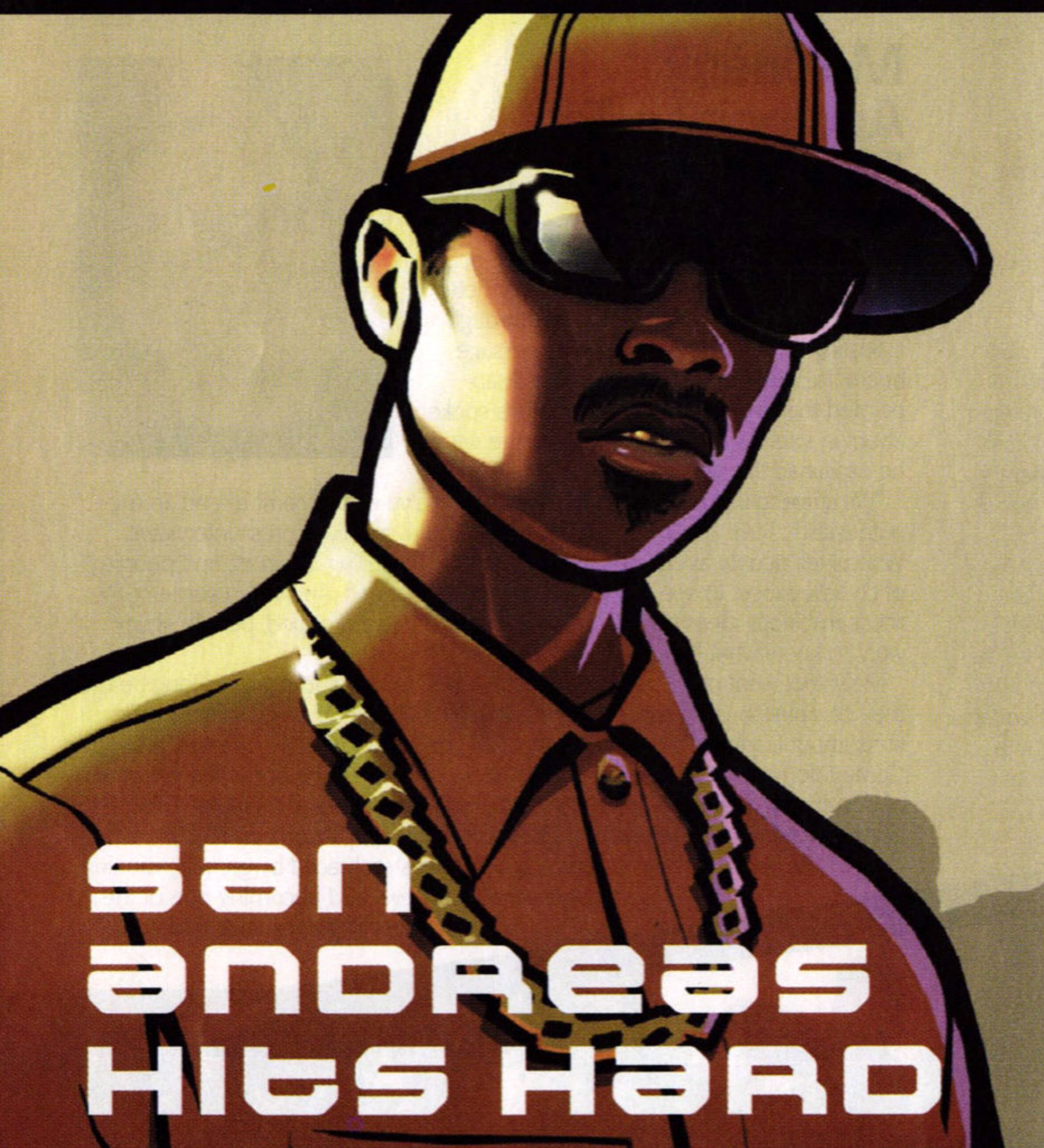
**2** *Smart CEO* magazine honored one of video games' own in its October issue. Jeffrey Briggs of Firaxis (*Civilization* series, *Alpha Centauri*, *Gettysburg*) was awarded the publication's annual "CEO of the Year" award for his expert guidance of the development house.

**3** SYNJ Industries' *Alien Hominid*, a popular Flash animated browser game, made the difficult transition from Internet favorite to proper console title. O3 Entertainment announced in October that the PS2 version of the game had gone gold and was ready for manufacture.

**4** The estate of famed director Akira Kurosawa greenlighted another game project based on his works, a "historical" game by Koei. The title will be based on the upcoming film version of the script of an unmade Kurosawa film called *Oni*, to be directed by Kurosawa's son, Hisao.

**5** THQ continued to make power moves in 2004. After scooping up *Relic* and the Pixar licenses, in October it re-signed its valuable Nickelodeon deal and also picked up the late Acclaim's street racing title *Juiced*. THQ outbid Take 2 Interactive for the rights to *Juiced*.

**6** "There's a kizzler on the rizzoad." Electronic Arts announced an odd musical collaboration would grace the soundtrack of its upcoming *Need for Speed Underground 2* soundtrack, a remix of The Doors' classic "Riders on the Storm" featuring Snoop Dogg.



# SAN ANDREAS HITS HARD

**A**fter hype had been building throughout the year and rumors of its title, cast, and gameplay swirled all over the Internet, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* finally became a reality on October 26. On the eve of its release, Rockstar built even more anticipation for the project by releasing details about the game's cast of voice actors, which included such notables as Samuel L. Jackson, Chris Penn, James Woods, and Charlie Murphy. The game's radio DJs were just as impressive, including hip-hop legend Chuck D. of Public Enemy, P-Funk leader George Clinton, and – most surprisingly – notable hard rock singer/eccentric millionaire hermit W. Axl Rose. *San Andreas* would mark Axl's first publicly released recorded work since his erstwhile group Guns N' Roses' "Oh My God" appeared on the *End of Days* soundtrack in 1999. As expected, *San Andreas* burned up the sales charts, moving millions of copies in the U.S. and breaking U.K. sales records with a first-day tally of 677,000 units sold.



■ Erratic Guns N' Roses lead singer Axl Rose made a rare recorded appearance as a DJ in *GTA: San Andreas*

## Gaming's Best Compete At World Cyber Games

The concept that video games can be a spectator sport seems more credible with each passing year. In 2004, the world's leading gaming league, the World Cyber Games, held a successful championship event at the Bill Graham Auditorium in San Francisco in October. Over 30,000 fans watched teams from 59 countries compete for medals in such popular online games as *CounterStrike: Condition Zero*, *StarCraft: Brood War*, *Unreal Tournament 2004*, and *Halo*.

Surprisingly, the scrappy upstart team from the Netherlands actually took home top honors, winning gold medals in *UT*, *WarCraft III*, and *Project Gotham Racing 2*, earning them the highest total team points of the competition. Before the tournament began, the Korean team was generally considered to be the favorites for medal totals. The U.S. did have a bright spot in Matthew Leto, who earned \$20,000 for winning his second consecutive *Halo* title.



## WWE Bodyslams THQ, Jakks

The WWE filed a lawsuit against its licensing partners Jakks Pacific and THQ in October, leveling charges of bribery and unfair dealings in the negotiations that resulted in Jakks and THQ owning the video game rights to the popular wrestling promotion. According to the suit, the WWE claimed that Jakks executives Joel Bennett, Jack Friedman, and Stephen Berman had bribed a WWE official in order to secure the deal. While THQ has generally done a good job of making and marketing its WWE games, the wrestling league claims that rival publisher Activision had actually made a larger offer which was ignored in the negotiation process. The suit sought to nullify any and all WWE licensing contracts, including the one held by Jakks and THQ. The original agreement was slated to run through 2009.



## Nintendo Announces Online Strategy...in China

Nintendo, a company that has frequently appeared derisive about the viability of online gaming, actually announced a coherent Internet strategy in October. The problem (for American Nintendo owners, at least) was that this initiative was for Nintendo's Chinese iQue subsidiary. The iQue system, which is essentially a large controller that plays N64 games on rewriteable flash memory cards, has been a success in China. Nintendo will be selling a USB Cable Upgrade that allows users to access the Internet via their PC's USB connection. The iQue Internet service would let players download new games onto flash cards, as well as use Nintendo's servers to store games they've already purchased. In addition, it was announced that Internet multiplayer gaming would also be available in the future. Hey, that sounds pretty cool! But, wait, we forgot that no one wants Internet gaming. Sorry about that outburst.







**1** South Korea banned Ubisoft's tactical shooter *Ghost Recon* 2. The title's plot focuses on a clash between the U.S. and North Korea in the near future. South Korea, which has a history of conflict with its North Korea, said *Ghost Recon*'s plot went "too far."

**2** Longtime *Final Fantasy* composer Nobuo Uematsu left Square Enix in December, his place of employment since 1986. Uematsu vowed to continue creating game music and touring with his rock band, The Black Mages, who perform new versions of *Final Fantasy* scores.

**3** Valve won big in November, releasing its epic shooter *Half-Life 2* and prevailing over Vivendi Universal in a lawsuit. Valve sued for damages resulting from Vivendi's distribution of its titles in cybercafes, which violated its limited publishing agreement.

**4** Hell hath no fury like a woman...er...chip manufacturer scorned. After its deal to make the GPU for Xbox 2 fell through, Nvidia formed a rebound relationship with Sony. In December, it was announced Nvidia was making the PS3 graphics processor.

**5** In a year of good decisions, Majesco made one more: signing on to publish *The Chronicles of Riddick* developer Starbreeze's next title. Based on the comic series *The Darkness*, the game is scheduled for next-gen systems.

**6** Marvel sued Korean MMORPG giant NCsoft in December, claiming that the company's popular *City of Heroes* violated copyright laws. Marvel claimed that the game's character creation features allowed players to make avatars that too closely resembled Marvel comic heroes.

# DS LAUNCH LIVES UP TO THE HYPE

**W**hile many questions remain about the Nintendo DS, the company proved that it knows how to successfully launch a handheld console on November 21st. Within the first week in the U.S., Nintendo sold through a whopping 500,000 units at retail. On December 12, the handheld launched in Japan, with gamers quickly scooping up another 460,000 DS units. These encouraging numbers actually surpassed Nintendo's and most analyst's predictions. In response, Nintendo upped its U.S. shipments, planning to have 1.4 million consoles on our shores by the end of the year.

Although neither the U.S. or Japanese launch created the kind of mania that we commonly associate with new systems, both went very smoothly, with most customers who wanted a DS coming away with unit in hand. In the weeks following, there were some shortages and the inevitable eBay price markups, but overall the DS launch looked like a win for Nintendo, which said it hopes to now sell over 5 million units worldwide by the end of March 2005.



Japanese gamers line up for the chance to buy a Nintendo DS



## Halo 2 Mania!

There are games, and then there is *Halo 2*. Bungie's highly touted Xbox sequel's release on November 9 saw gamers coming out in droves to finally get a chance to play the year's best title. Anticipation was so high that Gamespot.com reported that several small Midwestern chains had actually broken the street date and sold copies as early as November 4. Despite the controversy, retailers nationwide saw long lines on November 9, and Microsoft's worldwide marketing vice president, Peter Moore, soon released a statement touting the over \$100 million generated by *Halo 2* sales the first day. That figure was later revised when Microsoft's numbers came in, to a mind-boggling \$128 million on day one. By early December, the game had moved a total of 3.3 million units in the U.S. alone.

## A Rough Year For Gran Turismo 4

What would have been Sony's biggest in-house release of the year ended up not even making 2004. The game, developed by the notorious perfectionists at Polyphony Digital, has seen tentative release dates come and go, but most expected that *Gran Turismo 4* would make it to retail by the holiday season. But, despite the fact that Sony announced that it was pulling the game's online features (a move that was quite disturbing to fans), GT 4 just couldn't seem to get finished, and in November it was announced that it wouldn't be released until the first quarter of 2005.



## EA Plagued By Labor Troubles

EA was the subject of criticism in November, when a spouse of a company employee posted a screed decrying the practice of unpaid overtime on a personal blog. Citing the practice of switching personnel from crunch time on one game to crunch time on another and the lack of "comp time" (time off for overtime worked), the posting soon became the cause celebré of the industry. Gamespot reported that a San Francisco law firm was filing a class action lawsuit against EA on behalf of its employees. Soon, the International Game Developers Association chimed in with a statement decrying industry labor practices. Later, a suspiciously leaked "internal" email from EA management revealed that the company was in the process of overhauling its employees' workloads and its overtime policies.





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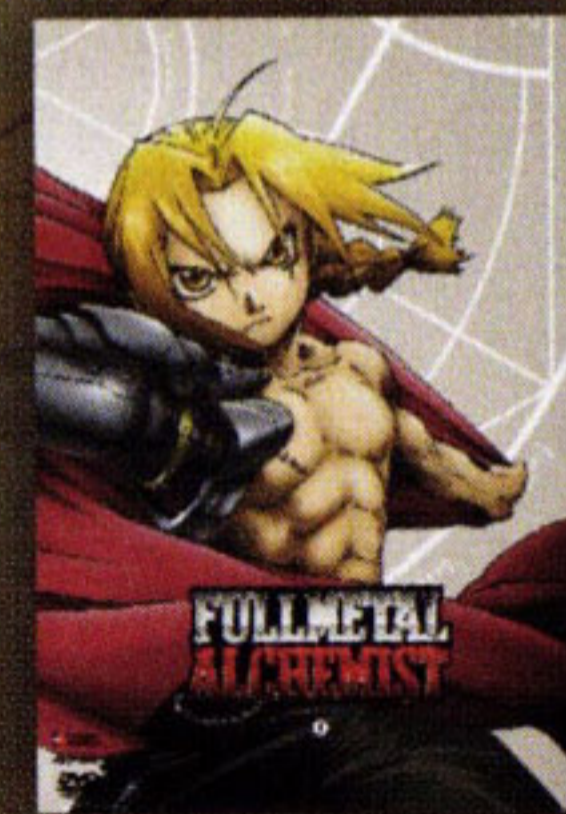
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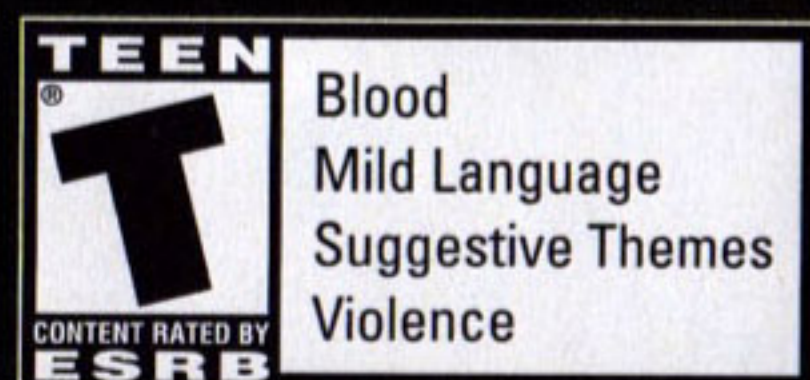
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# THE TOP GAMES OF 2004

## Metroid: Zero Mission

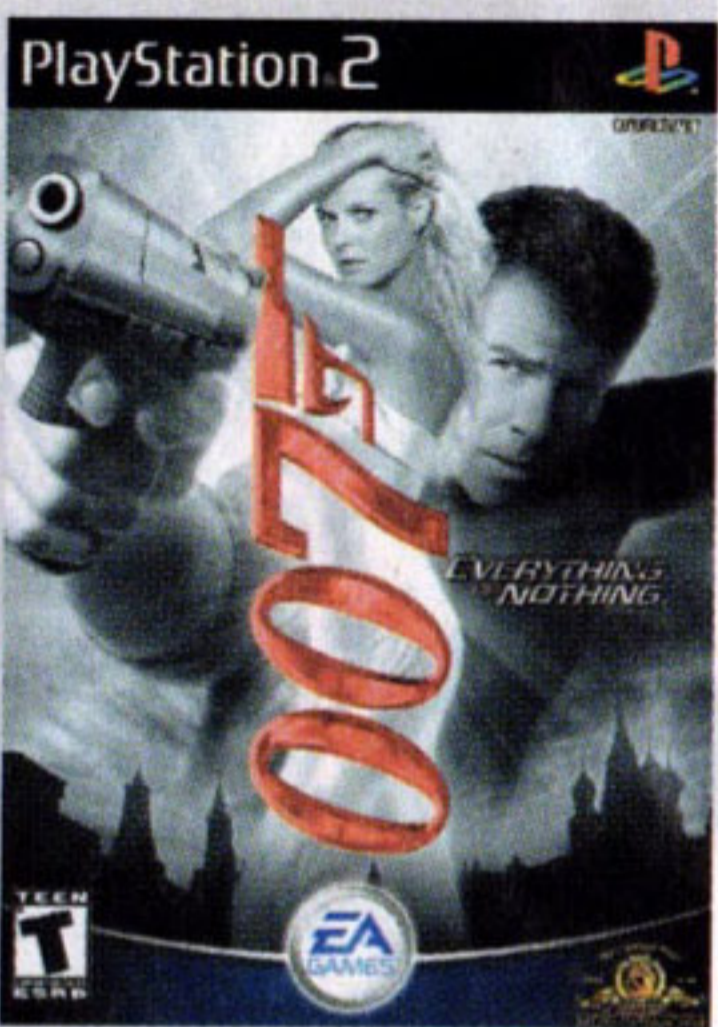
**System:** Game Boy Advance **Release:** February 10  
It's no easy task to re-tool an 8-bit game for current hardware, but Nintendo did everything we could ask for and more with Zero Mission. Not only did the 2D Metroid formula get tweaked to the best it's ever been, the added epilogue rocks – it's a blast to play and a great story bonus to fans of the series. Even if you weren't alive yet when the original came out, Zero Mission is tight enough in both control and design to easily deserve its own piece of side-scrolling immortality.



## James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube  
**Release:** February 17

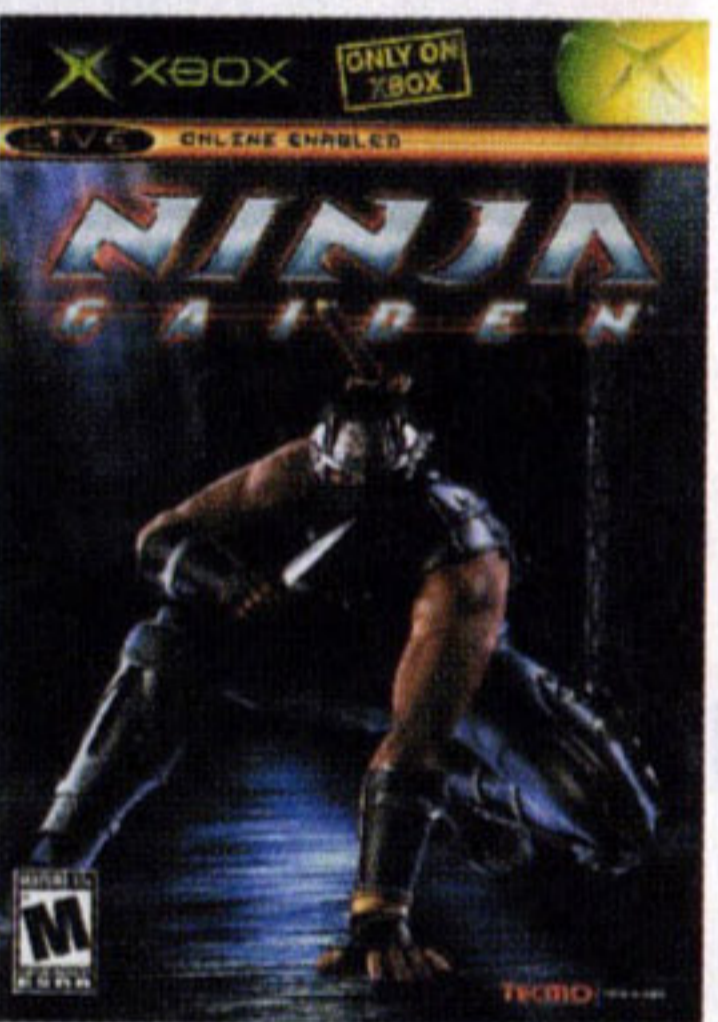
Some characters seem to consistently get the screw when it comes to their video game (mis)adventures. British super-spy James Bond, especially in the third-person, is one of those. But this year it seems that a new page was turned in the Bond saga by Electronic Arts' Everything or Nothing. The game puts players through their paces and successfully integrates more of the high-flying action seen in the movies by giving us real actors, lots of explosions, and point-of-view switches that makes the action feel fresh.



## Ninja Gaiden

**System:** Xbox **Release:** March 2

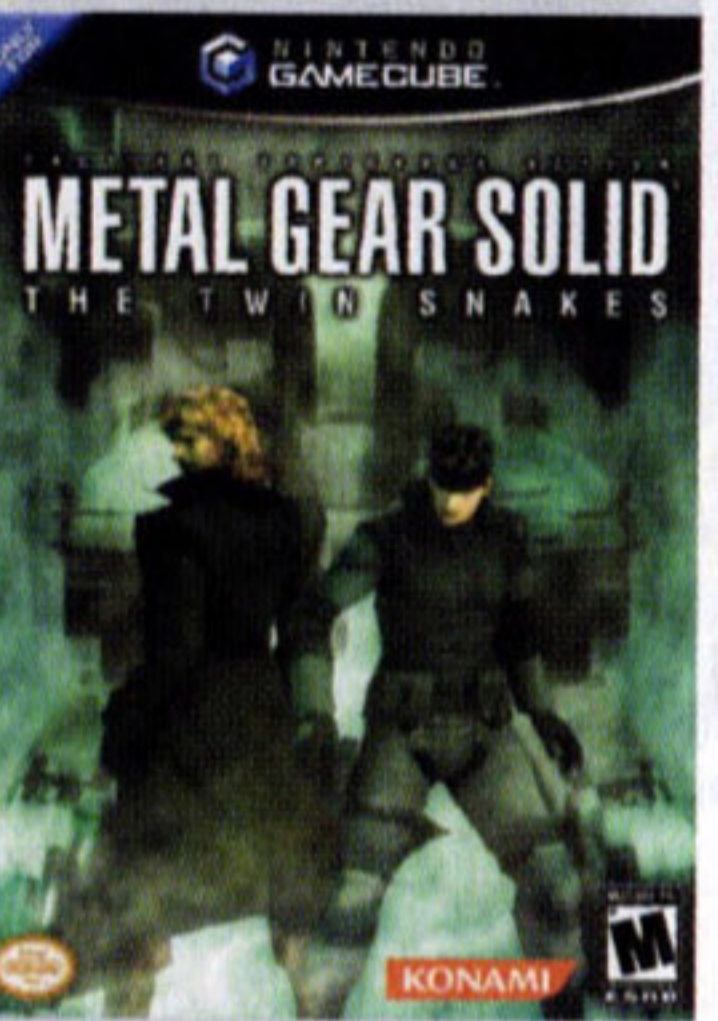
When a mark of achievement for any gamer is making it past the first boss of a game, you know that the experience is going to be brutalizing. So why do we like to punish ourselves to such a degree? It's not because gamers are masochists, but because this action title is so grueling (but fair) that you can actually feel your gaming skills growing as you push further through its quest. Fusing unbelievable graphics with deep combat and killer foes, Team Ninja's opus gets better with downloadable content that will make even master ninjas cringe.



## Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes

**System:** GameCube **Release:** March 9

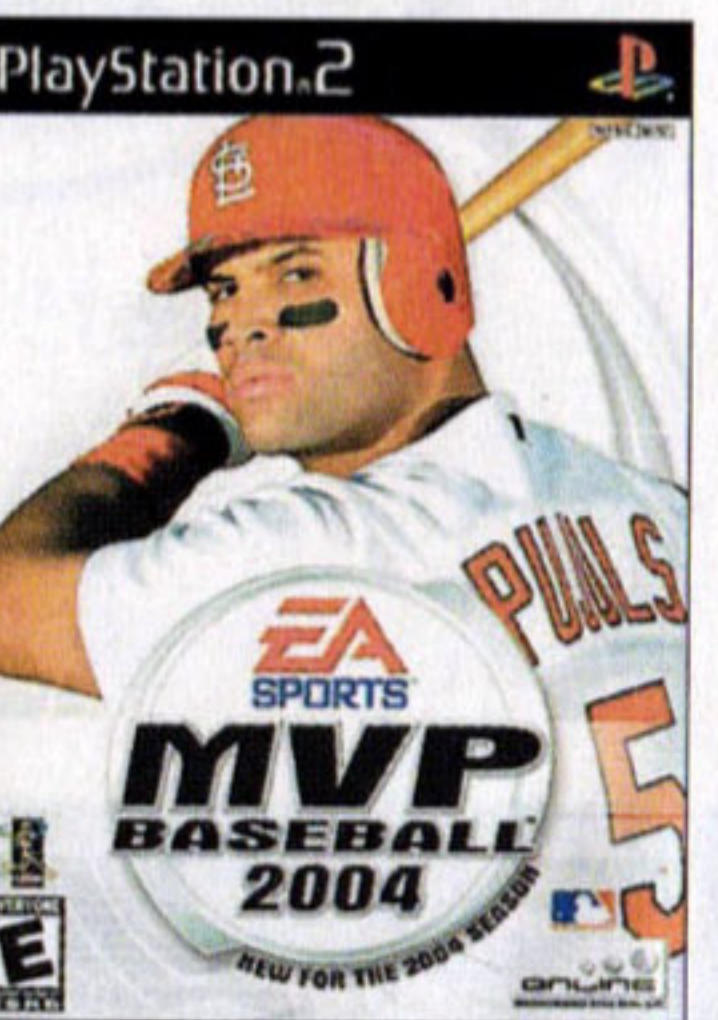
To call Twin Snakes a simple port is even more of an understatement than calling Psycho Mantis an "abnormal individual." With enhanced gameplay, graphics, and re-recorded dialogue from the original cast, Twin Snakes breathes new life into the original Metal Gear Solid, one of the best games of all time. If nothing else, it also gives the world another chance to watch a heartless cybernetic ninja threaten a pants-wetting, locker-cowering nerd.



## MVP Baseball 2004

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube  
**Release:** March 9

The Boston Red Sox finally kicked Babe Ruth to the curb, the Chicago Cubs choked for the 96th time in a row, and EA Sports showed us that baseball isn't just about corked bats and steroids. In MVP Baseball 2004, the cerebral battle between the pitcher and batter is captured brilliantly, showing just how intense these match-ups can be. With a game on the line, anxiety takes over, you start second-guessing your actions, and before long, you are sweating bullets and watching your opponent jack a ball into the parking lot. Never before has a baseball game delivered realism and excitement quite like this.



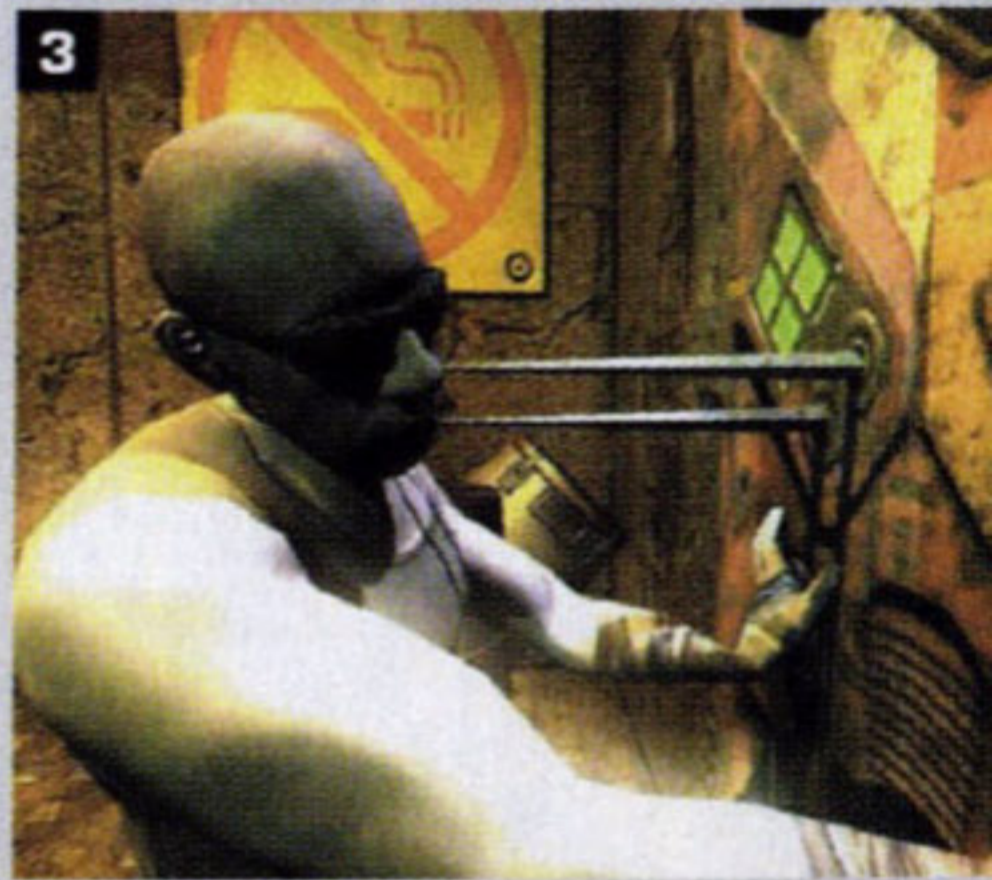
## THE TOP 10 HEROES OF 2004

**1 Prince (Katamari Damacy)**  
*He's the strong, silent type thanklessly fixing the mess caused by his overbearing and demoralizing father. It's really a struggle for the ages, and our Prince pushes through the cosmic disaster with understated grace.*



**2 Naked Snake (Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater)**  
*The chef's plate offered to 1960's forest combatants is littered with sleepy 'shrooms and delicious alligator nuggets. This Snake partakes of nature's aforementioned bounty and still manages to do things so cool that Master Chief and everyone's favorite dark elf are both impressed.*

**3 Riddick (Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay)**  
*He is a profoundly terrible human being, but players still find Riddick likeable, even endearing. Characters this complicated – despicable, principled, amoral, and charming at the same time – don't come to video game land very often.*



**4 The Bard (The Bard's Tale)**  
*Self-referential humor always does it for us. That's why the Cary Elwes-voiced cad called simply "The Bard" is such a riot. With naughty and nice dialogue options through the whole game, players get to see both sides of this shallow, self-centered blowhard. And we mean that in a good way.*



**5 Professor Charles Xavier (X-Men Legends)**  
*Professor X has always been the bomb, but there's a very special section of X-Men Legends that utterly secures his spot on this list. We don't want to give it away, but let's just say that there are few things more bad ass, in this plane of existence or otherwise.*



**6 T3-M4/HK-47 (Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords)**  
*If a British butler like those in old movies reveled in the suffering and pain of others, it would be HK-47. If your toaster could elicit chuckles and pride with a series of indiscernible bleeps and squeaks, it would be T3-M4. Together, they are a tag team of delicious robot personality.*



**7 The Arbiter (Halo 2)**  
*We won't reveal who he is exactly in case you're one of the four people who hasn't played Halo 2 yet, but we will say this ugly alien is one of the most human and fully realized characters in the game. Halo 2 may be all about defending the Earth, but the Arbiter certainly gives us a sympathetic glimpse at the other side.*



**8 Ryu Hayabusa (Ninja Gaiden)**  
*Ninjas rule. This, like photosynthesis, is an undeniable fact of nature. Though Ryu certainly couldn't be described as chatty, we do feel that the poetic carnage he's capable of speaks volumes.*

**9 CJ (Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas)**  
*Hands down, this is one of the most complicated, well-formed, and human characters on this list. Struggling through the harsh realities of San Andreas, CJ shows us what this lifestyle is all about, for good or ill.*

**10 Gordon Freeman (Half-Life 2)**  
*Dork power reigns supreme with our scientist hero Gordon Freeman at the helm of salvation. Supplemented with a super suit, this scientist proves that anyone can be larger than life, as long as they have access to an outfit suped up with space-age polymers.*





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## Unreal Tournament 2004

**System:** PC **Release:** March 16

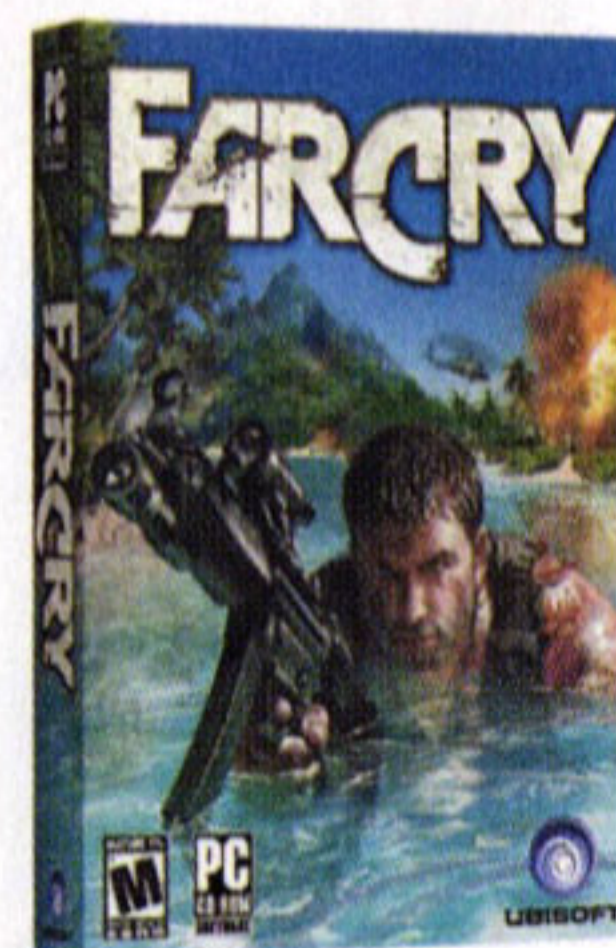
For the most part, it's hard to justify putting a yearly update to an annual franchise on this list. UT 2004, though, couldn't have been an easier choice. Lag-free, beautifully rendered matches on maps large or small, old or new, are only the half of it – the brand-new Onslaught mode takes the best parts from Battlefield 1942 and applies them to UT's signature lightning-fast, hectic fragathons. Plus, some of the most unique and entertaining vehicles in all of first-person shooting are new to UT 2004. To date, this title is the bar that all other online FPSs must measure up to.



## Far Cry

**System:** PC **Release:** March 23

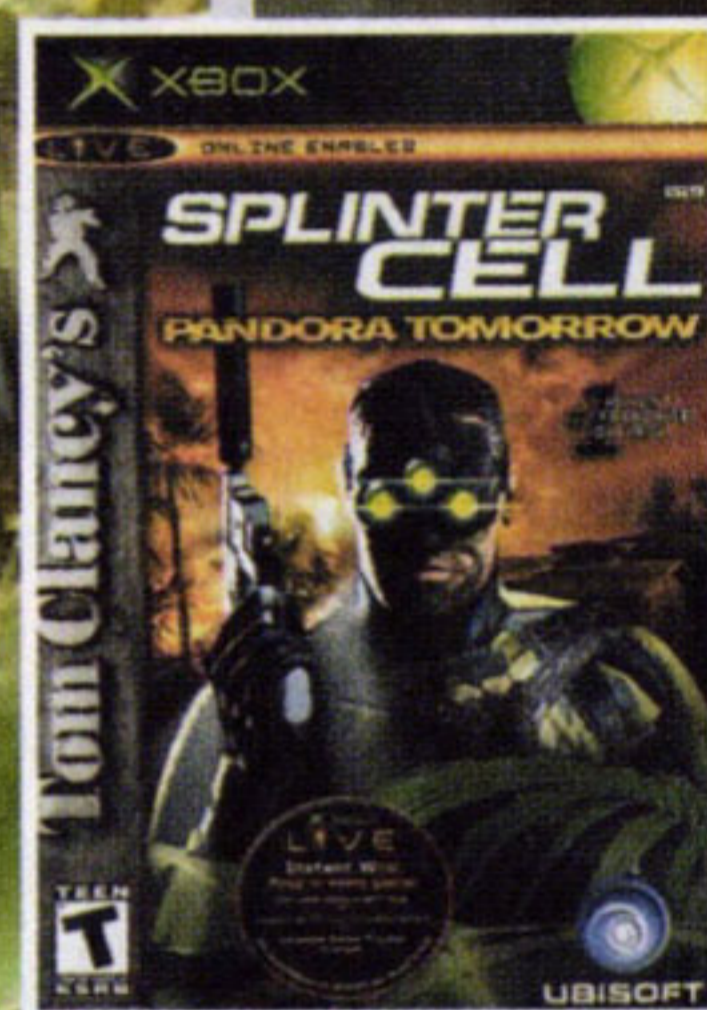
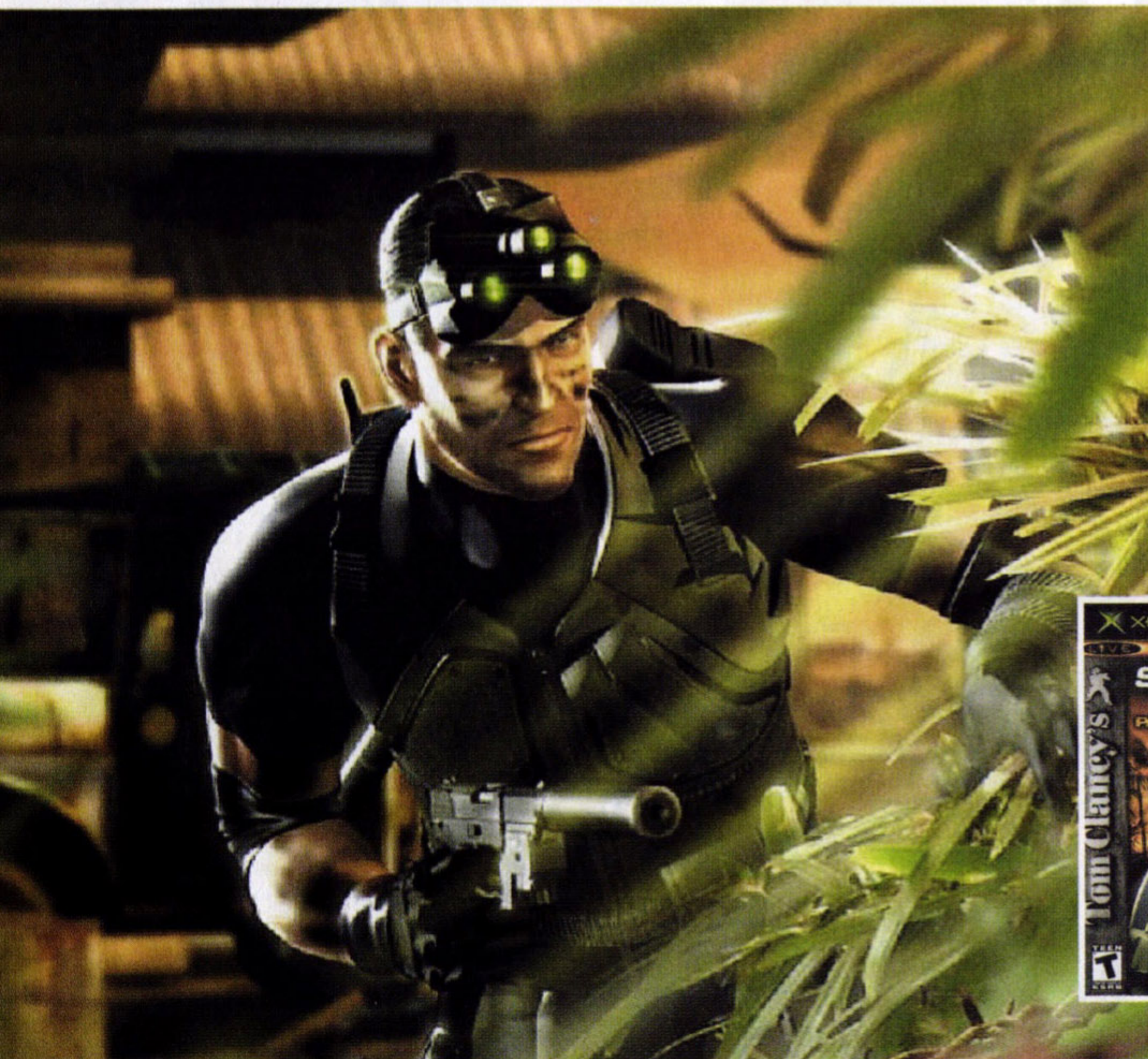
On top of the technological feat of presenting unprecedented draw distances with a stunning level of detail, developer Crytek came out of nowhere to parlay its wonderful engine into an amazing game. Far Cry's emphasis on combining stealth and action and allowing players to choose their own path through each level has been tried and biffed by many a title, but this game pulls it off in epic fashion. Plus, there's nothing quite like enemy AI good enough that you feel smart for beating it.



## Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow

**System:** Xbox **Release:** March 23

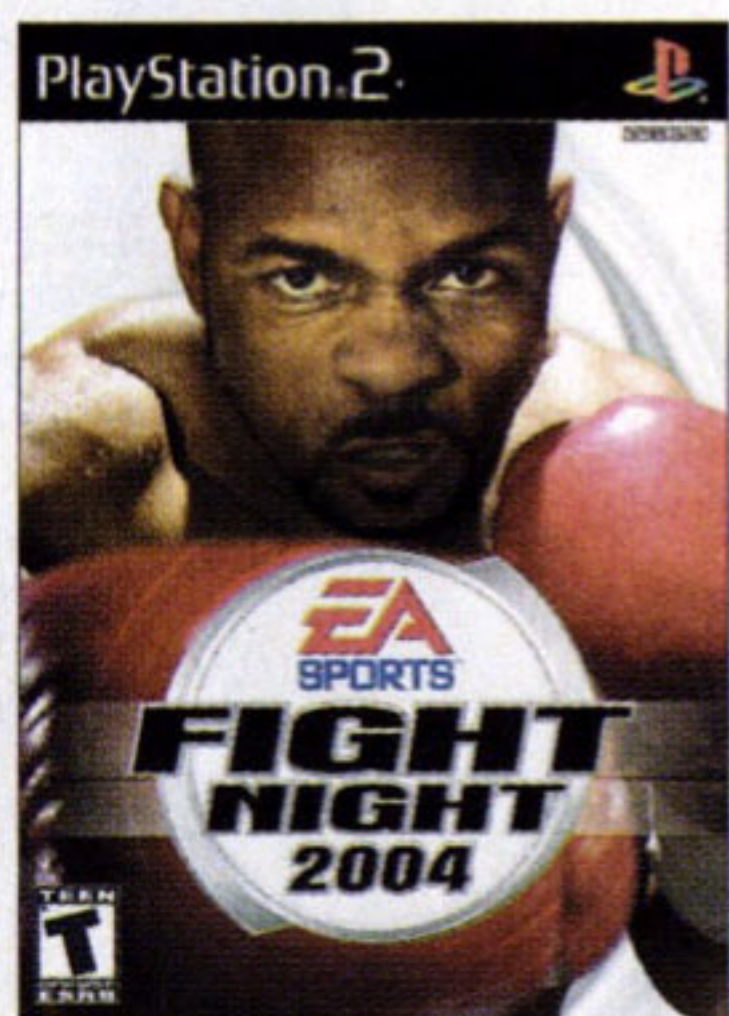
Also released on PS2 and GameCube, the Xbox version of Pandora Tomorrow is easily the best. Featuring truly stunning visuals with staggering shadows, Pandora Tomorrow looks amazing, has a fantastic story, and has eliminated most of the problems found in the first title. In addition to the fantastic single-player mode, the game features one of the most unique online modes around: four-player spy versus mercenaries scenarios. With each team offering a completely different gameplay style, Pandora Tomorrow's multiplayer mode is unlike anything else, and simply must be played by all stealth/action fans.



## Fight Night 2004

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox **Release:** April 5

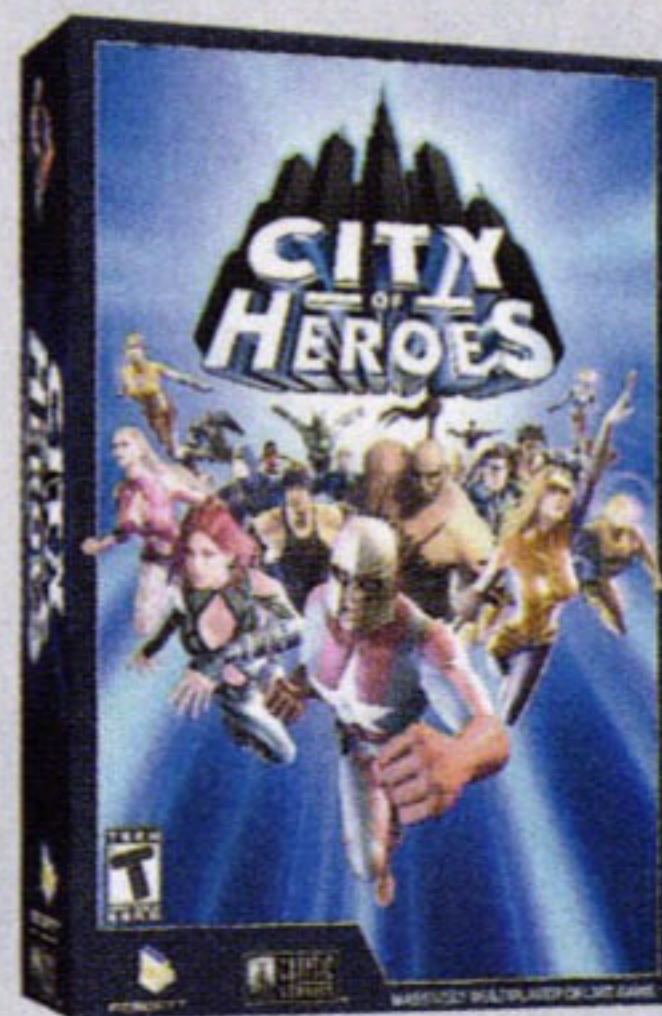
Fight Night 2004 not only rises spectacularly from the ashes of the old Knockout Kings franchise, but it takes EA Sports' previous flirtation with analog control to all new levels. In the process, it makes a gameplay leap unheard of in the sports genre. With its all-analog punches, players learned real-life boxing lessons such as the importance of footwork and knowing patience. This adherence to the sport signals a unique union of gameplay and realism that has players either praying for the bell or keeping victory in their corner.



## City of Heroes

**System:** PC **Release:** April 27

Affectionately termed "The Widowmaker" in many circles after its release, NCsoft's MMO revolution taps into something truly primal in this geek world we know and love – superheroes. Abandoning the usual conventions of such a game, City of Heroes takes players into a fast-paced, large-scale battle of good versus evil from the very first moment of play. This gameplay, tied with a ridiculously detailed character creation system, was probably cause for many a "sick" day in corporate offices.



## Onimusha 3: Demon Siege

**System:** PlayStation 2 **Release:** April 27

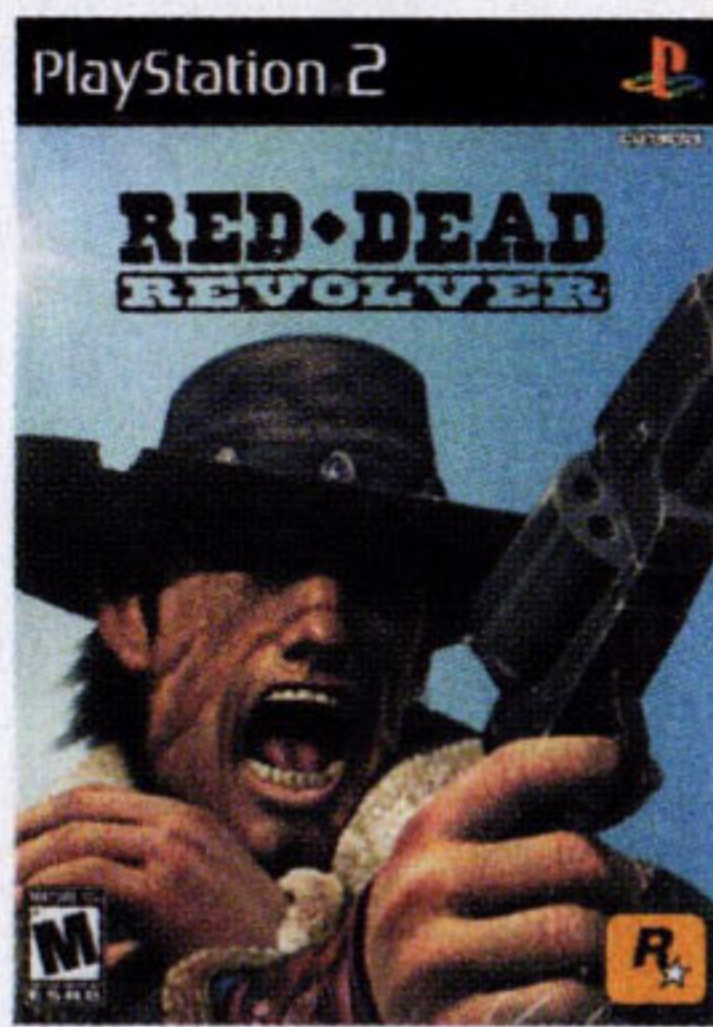
Although there have been occasional unsubstantiated rumors saying that another Onimusha game is on the horizon, Demon Siege is (as of right now) the climactic end of a much-beloved trilogy. Capcom clearly intended to send this series off with a bang. The opening cinematic is nothing short of genius, the star power (lending both voice and likeness) offers compelling characters, and an expertly refined combat system combine to make this one of the most frantic, rewarding, and enjoyable games of the year.





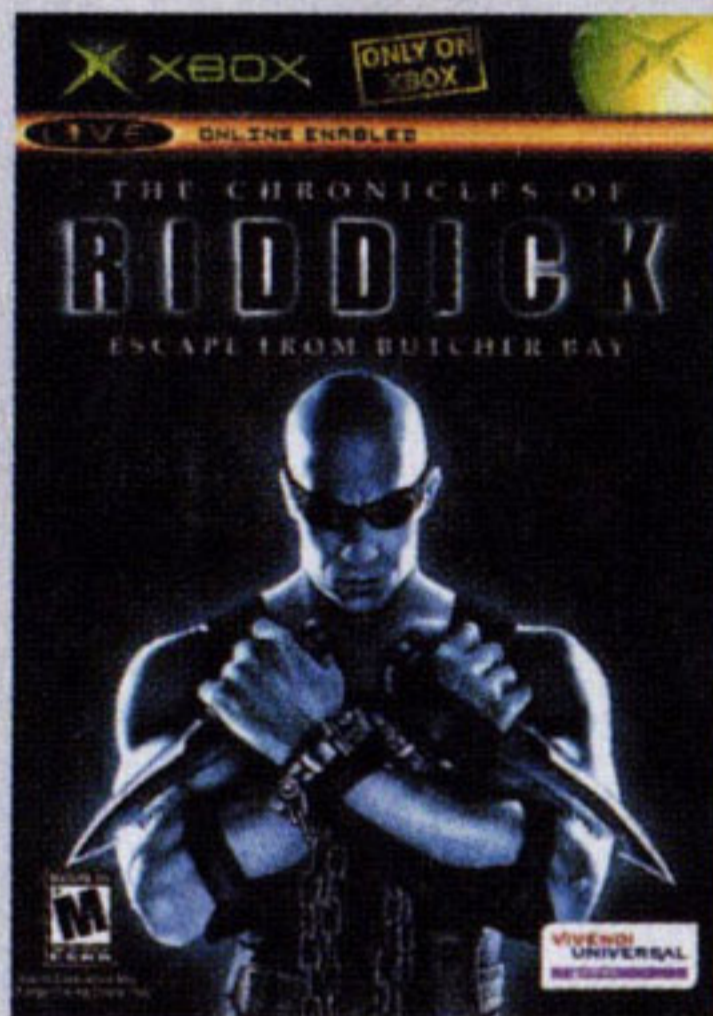
## Red Dead Revolver

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox **Release:** May 4  
Cowboys are the ninjas of America – and like their martial artist counterparts, our mysterious warriors don't get the respect they deserve in the video game realm. Pulling heavily from the spaghetti westerns that brought this era of American history a romantic, hardboiled feel, the main character is an orphaned warrior with a past, the locales are ragged and dusty, and the boss fights are over the top. Red Dead Revolver's emphasis on fast-paced action and atmosphere made it one of the most giddily enjoyable games of the year.



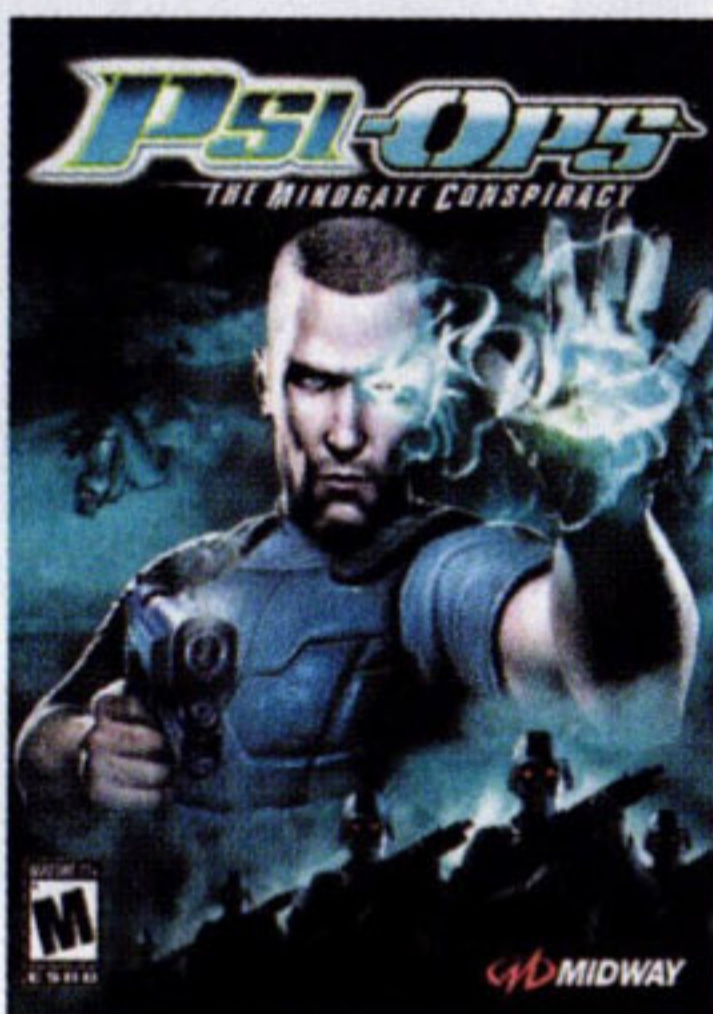
## The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

**System:** Xbox **Release:** June 1  
Few other titles have defied the expectations for licensed games more brilliantly than Escape from Butcher Bay. Seamlessly combining stealth action with gunplay and innovative first-person melee, its gameplay is the equal of its stunning visuals. The graphics are among the most gorgeous seen on a console to date, and the story easily eclipses that of the movie it was tied into. The voice work by Vin Diesel and the rest of the cast is top notch, proving that the fusion of Hollywood and the game industry can yield some amazing results.



## Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox **Release:** June 14  
There is a great thing going on with home consoles these days – developers are starting to consciously (and consistently) mess with what players expect, how they think about combat and puzzle solving, and making stories that we care about. Midway's Psi-Ops does all of these with undeniable skill to truly exhilarating results. Popping a foe's head like a ripe cherry tomato or levitating boxes to make a platform are not gameplay abilities to scoff at – they are actions to revel in.



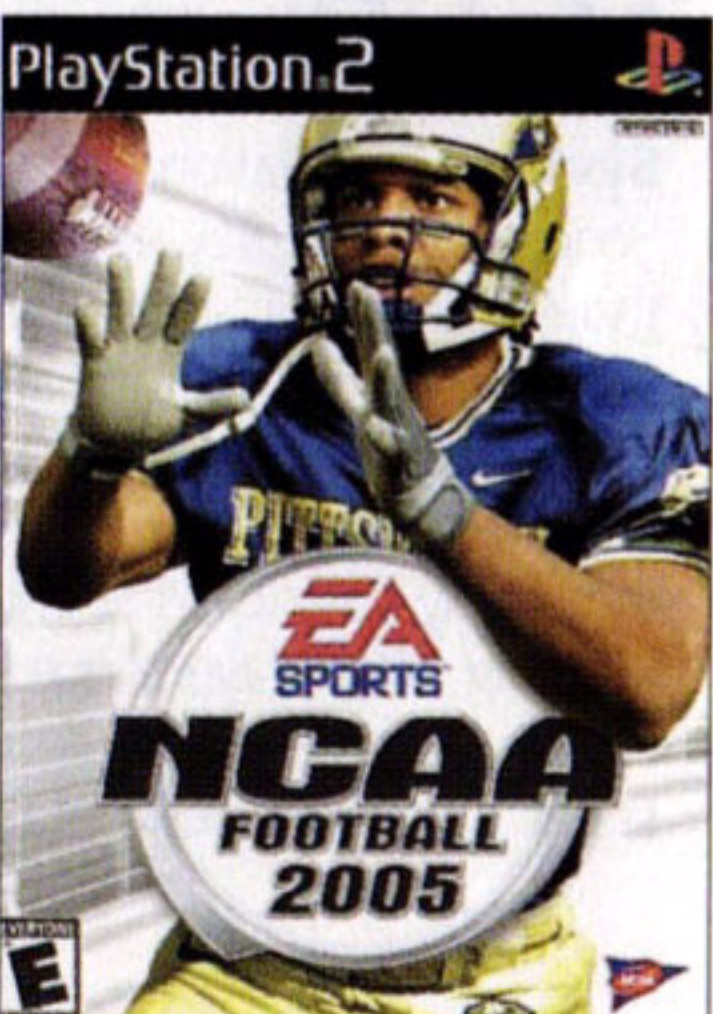
## Tales of Symphonia

**System:** GameCube **Release:** July 13  
Combining stunning storybook graphics with an intricate plot, Tales of Symphonia is the savior of many despairing GameCube RPG enthusiasts. Frenzied real-time battles highlighted by a complicated ally AI mechanic keeps the action coming, while the vibrant visuals and clever characters create an immersive and engaging world. This is a perfect example of a game that breaks from several genre conventions and still manages to come out on top as one of the best RPGs of the year.



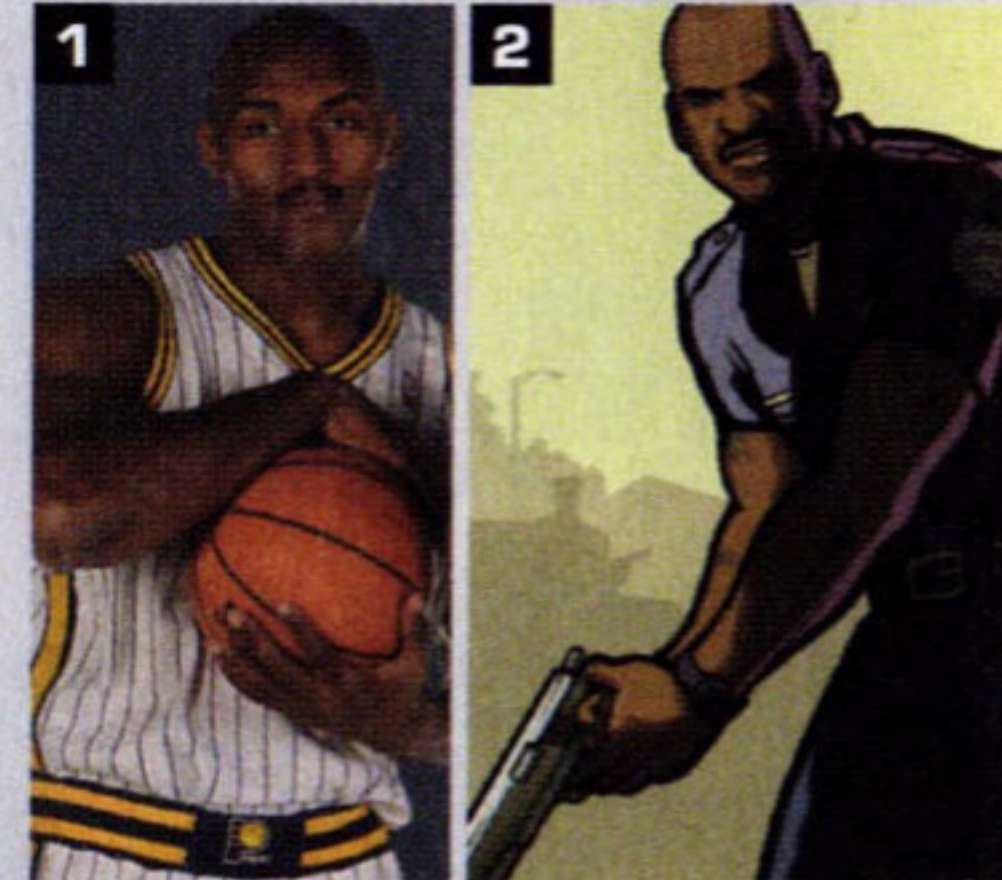
## NCAA Football 2005

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube **Release:** July 14  
NCAA Football 2005 finally steps out of the shadow of Madden and delivers a unique experience from its NFL big brother. The influence of home field advantage upon players is both a subtle and sledgehammering way to bring the college football experience to your living room. Adding this new feature to the Dynasty options that the series has long been known for has allowed it to carve out a die-hard fanbase that has almost gone unnoticed. A return to glory for the Fighting Irish? Yes, even that is possible.



## THE TOP 10 VILLAINS OF 2004

**1 Ron Artest (NBA Live 2005 and ESPN NBA 2K5)**  
*Here is a character so vile, so annoying, so utterly devoid of any redeeming sportsmanlike code that he was a lock for this award, and he's a real person! Mr. Artest, you're hands-down the biggest villains of the year. Congrats.*



**2 Officer Frank Tenpenny (Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas)**  
*A dirty cop who just might make Harvey Keitel's Bad Lieutenant squirm, this Samuel L. Jackson-voiced bad guy antagonizes us and CJ into a boiling rage. We'd call him a stupid jerkface, but he's Sam Jackson, so we're a little scared of him.*



**3 Ocelot (Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater)**  
*He's not quite the battle-hardened butt-kicker he'll become in later years, but this prequel details how a mean little SOB becomes one of the most feared men ever to grace a battlefield.*



**4 Darth Nihilus (Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: Sith Lords)**  
*Described as "a wound in the Force" and capable of consuming all life on a planet, Darth Nihilus is arguably one of the most brutal villains in the Star Wars mythos. He eats freakin' global populations!*

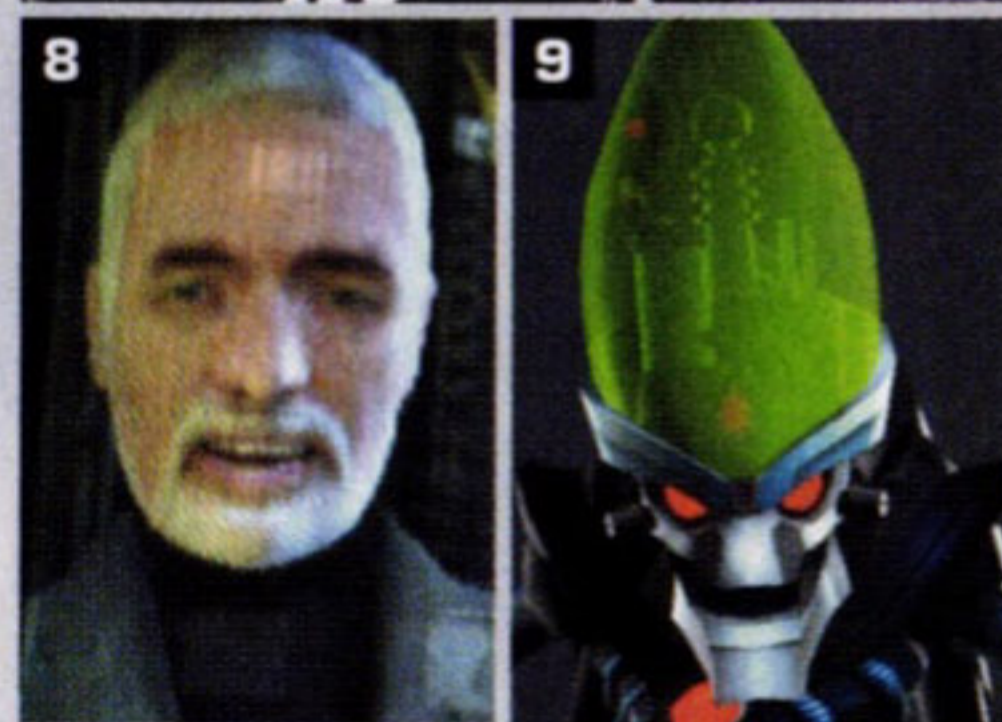
**5 Black Ninjas (Ninja Gaiden)**  
*Perhaps the hardest "goon" type enemies ever in a video game, these jerks will slice you down in seconds flat – and they have a pesky habit of hunting in groups. Bah! We hate the black ninjas, because they make us look like chumps.*

**6 Big John (Viewtiful Joe 2)**  
*He used to get work in Tinsletown, but since the parts are getting slim, John is now spending time hunting down heroes Joe and Sylvia. He does have an exceptional fashion savvy to go along with the outlandish weaponry, but that doesn't mean that he's a softy.*



**7 Edgar Barret (Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy)**  
*Like all good super-villains, Barret has a nefarious endgame – but he also has exceptionally powerful psychic abilities. These psi-powers, coupled with constants threats of punches to our hero's delicate bits, offer one of the most engaging boss fights of this generation.*

**8 Dr. Breen (Half-Life 2)**  
*Having yourself "elected" as the Administrator of Earth and then selling out the human race for alien rewards is downright despicable. This and his molding the thoughts of unsuspecting humans make him nothing short of a boil on the backside of humanity.*



**9 Dr. Nefarious (Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal)**  
*He wants to exterminate all organic life, which is certainly not a very nice thing to do. But he's just so good at being bad, which is why he's earned a spot here despite his common villainous goal.*



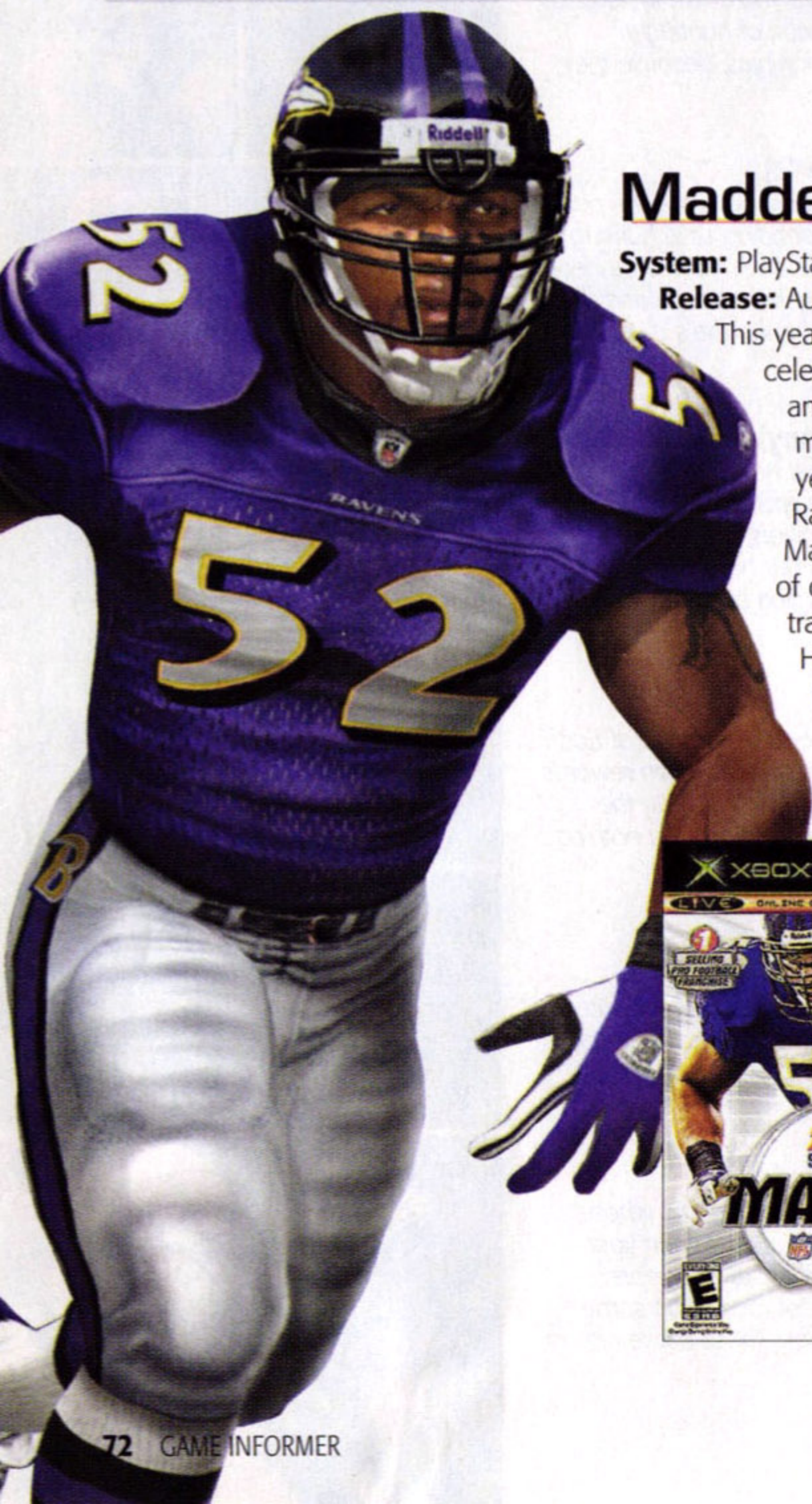
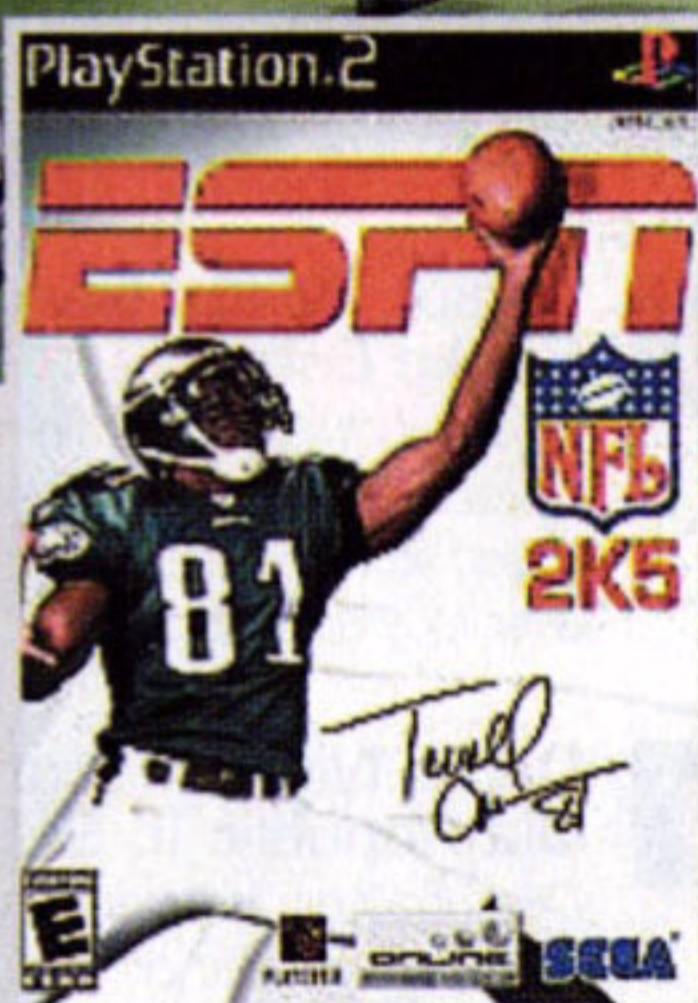
**10 Butterscotch (Alien Hominid)**  
*An animate mound of butterscotch pudding whose main attack is throwing globules of custard in your general direction – do we need to say any more? There's nothing to top this, except for maybe some delicious dark chocolate shavings. Those make almost anything better.*





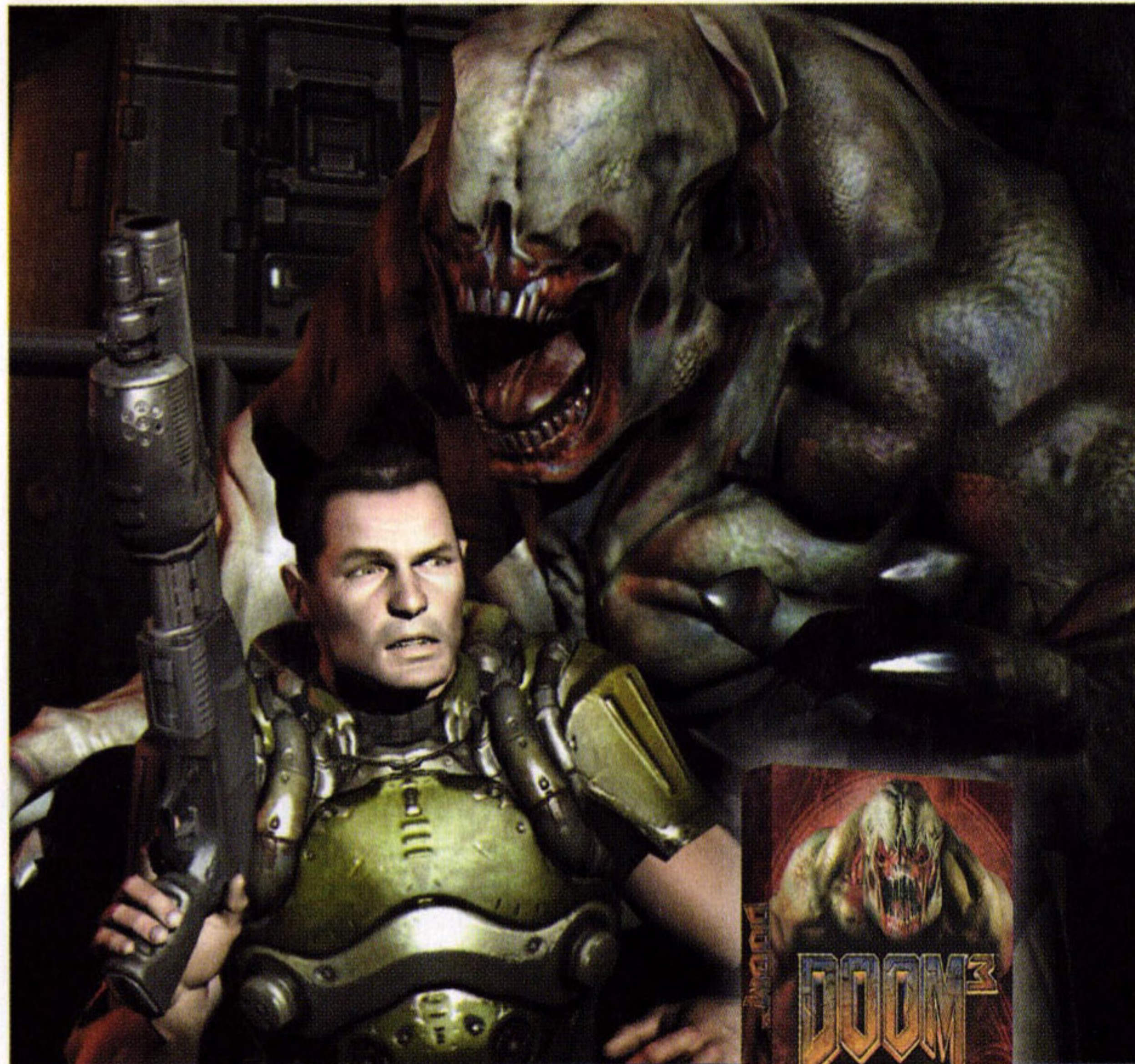
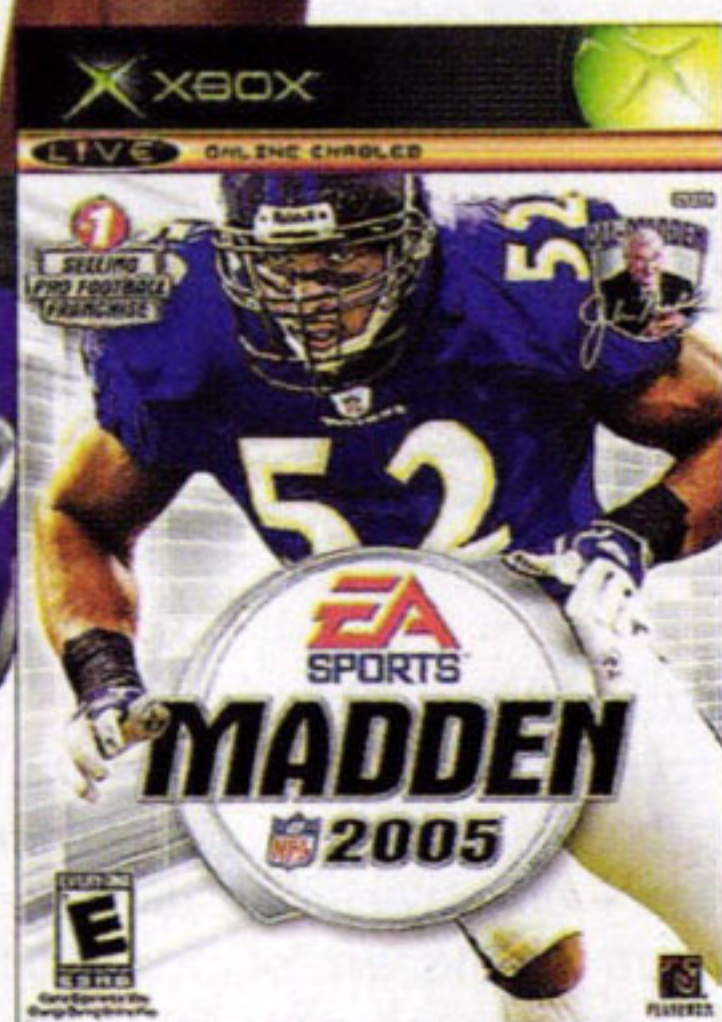
## ESPN NFL 2K5

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox **Release:** July 20  
Like Barry Sanders, developer Visual Concepts' ESPN series was taken from us before it was time, thanks to EA's recent exclusive deal with the NFL (see page 20 for more). At least the series went out on a high note, however, with this year's installment beating rival Madden for the first time due to its tackle breaking, QB evades, deep franchise mode, eye-opening presentation, and informative online profile system. We can only dream of what 2K6 would have brought us, but this game is good enough that we're going to be playing it for quite a while.



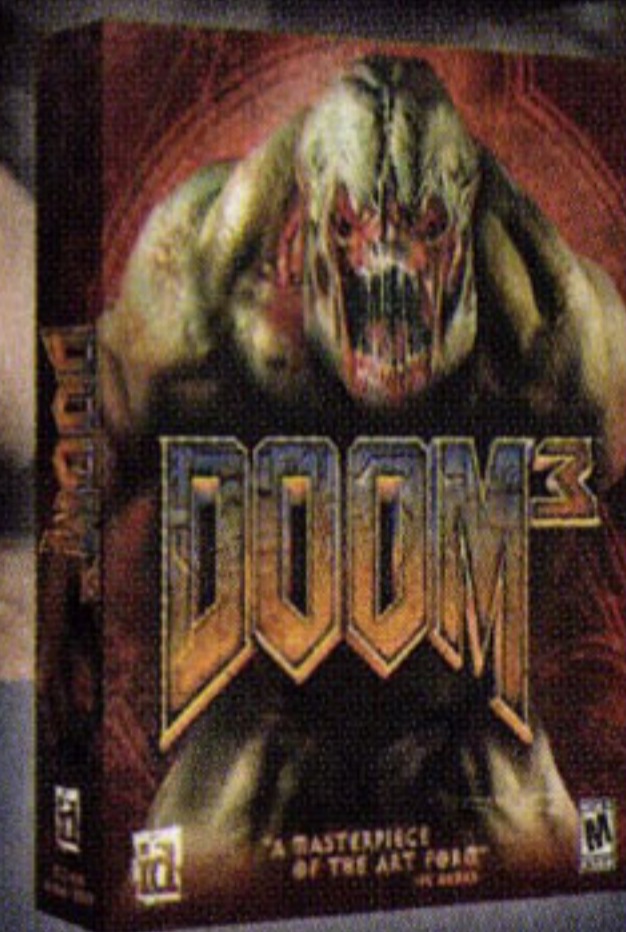
## Madden NFL 2005

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube  
**Release:** August 9  
This year the Madden franchise celebrates its 15-year anniversary, and the series is only picking up more steam with each passing year. Reflecting its cover star, Ravens' linebacker Ray Lewis, Madden 2005 gives players a host of options to stop offenses in their tracks, including the boot-rocking Hit Stick. As a testament to the franchise's status as the standard for the sport, the series is literally synonymous with video game football, and is respected by pro players, celebrities, and millions upon millions of gamers the world over.



## Doom 3

**System:** PC **Release:** August 3  
We had been waiting for id to finally say that the team's horror opus is "done" for what seemed like an eternity, and when it debuted this year, few could say that they were disappointed. The game challenges players with hoards of undead, chilling graphics, and impressive weaponry. We never thought that shadowy corners and pools of light could be equally threatening, but the dark recesses of this game hide unspeakable horrors and the occasional spotlight exposes all of us more than we'd like. Lesser games have tried and utterly failed at what Doom 3 does best.



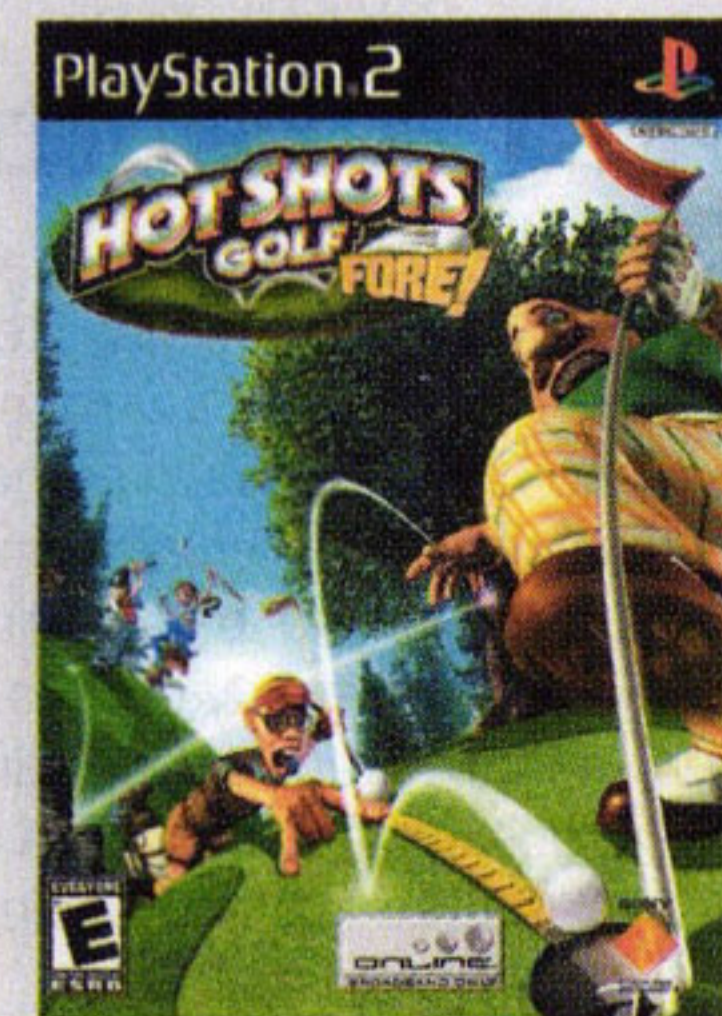
## Astro Boy: Omega Factor

**System:** Game Boy Advance **Release:** August 17  
Don't let the little boy in underoos deter you, this handheld adventure is both a loving homage to old-school side-scrolling action and a skillful execution of modern gameplay conventions. Portable games sometimes suffer from the limitations of their platform — Astro Boy: Omega Factor, on the other hand, exemplifies why this format can be unique and vital by providing fast-paced, color-saturated action. On top of all of this wizardry, Omega Factor offers true replay; we're just going to say that the end isn't really the end.



## Hot Shots Golf Fore!

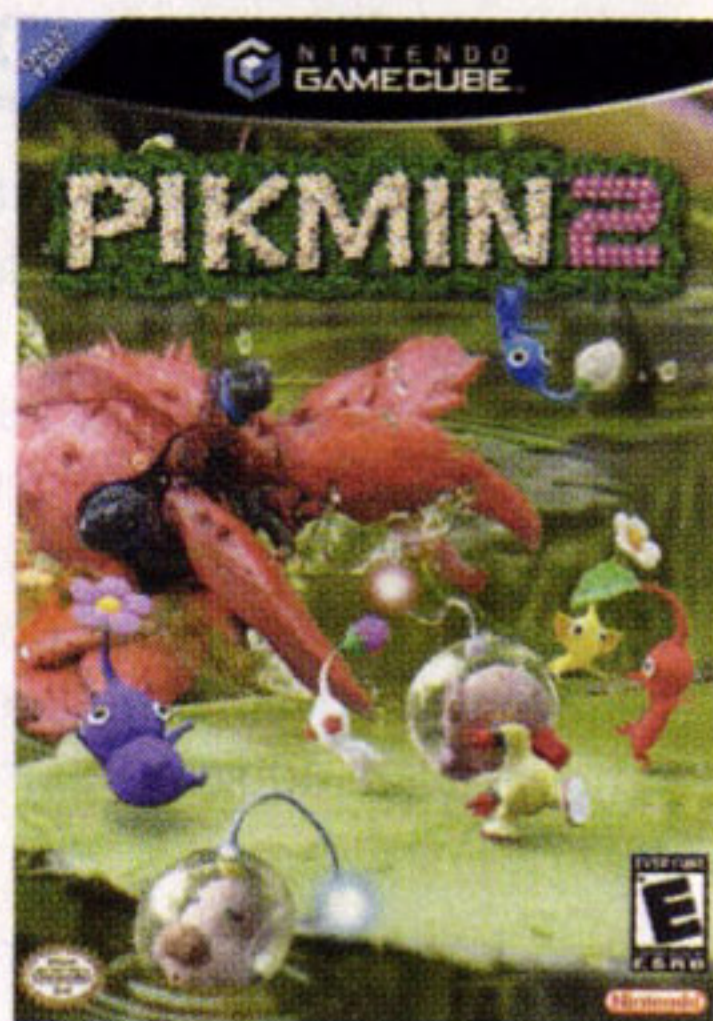
**System:** PlayStation 2 **Release:** August 17  
Solid golf gameplay never goes out of style. That's not to say, though, that Hot Shots Golf Fore! by Clap Hanz doesn't rock in the upgrade and innovation fronts. Online play, a bucket of new courses, and more Sony mascots than any self-respecting gamer can shake a nine iron at make this a title that deftly balances the challenge of adding features while keeping what players love best. There are few sports with such a long-standing video gaming tradition, and even fewer series that continue to make the experience this fresh.



## Pikmin 2

**System:** GameCube **Release:** August 30

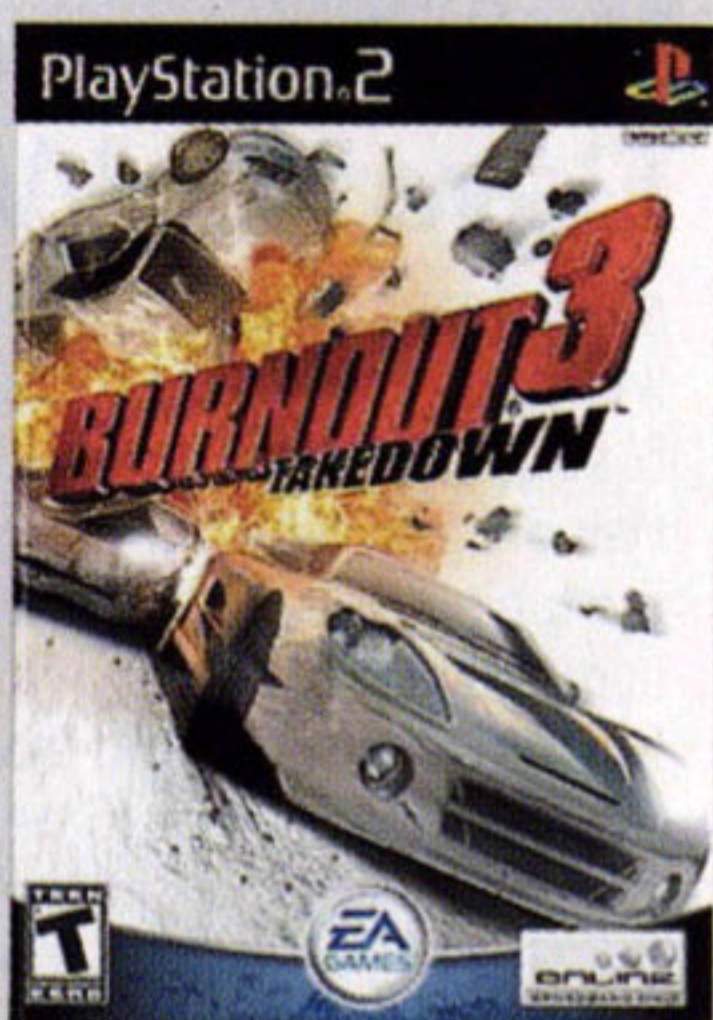
No matter how you look at it, anthropomorphic plant creatures are unquestionably adorable. Improving upon the formula that made the first Pikmin so darn charming, Pikmin 2 adds widely varied troop functions and a strangely addictive multiplayer mode to an already engrossing strategy framework. Thanks to Pikmin 2, when you think of funny-looking short guys digging up junk this year, now you can imagine an amazingly quirky gaming experience instead of Uncle Percy in your backyard sandbox.



## Burnout 3: Takedown

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox **Release:** September 7

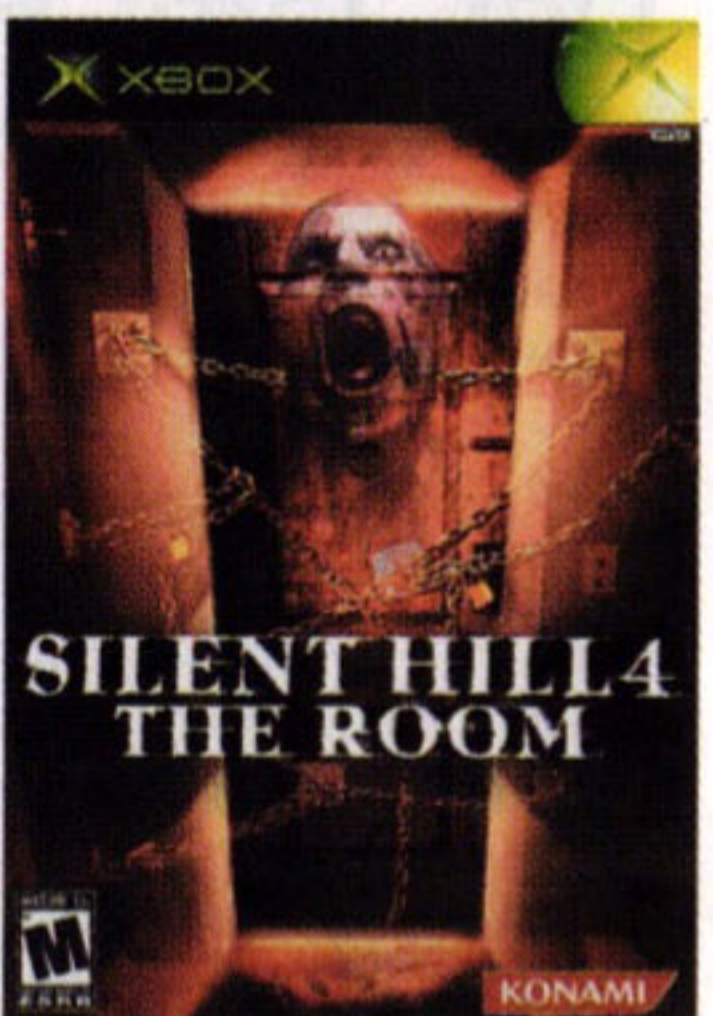
People have often said that metal wrenching car crashes aren't any fun at all. True, having your real-life auto involved in a bender of the sorts shown through beautiful slow motion in Burnout 3 would be the bummer of the decade. The relief for all of us is twofold: one, games aren't real and two, Criterion knew all of us well enough to stoke the fires of destruction in one of the most exhilarating displays of gaming demolition this side of the millennium. Weep with joy as you cause massive pileups without the guilt, expense, or insurance increases.



## Silent Hill 4: The Room

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox **Release:** September 7

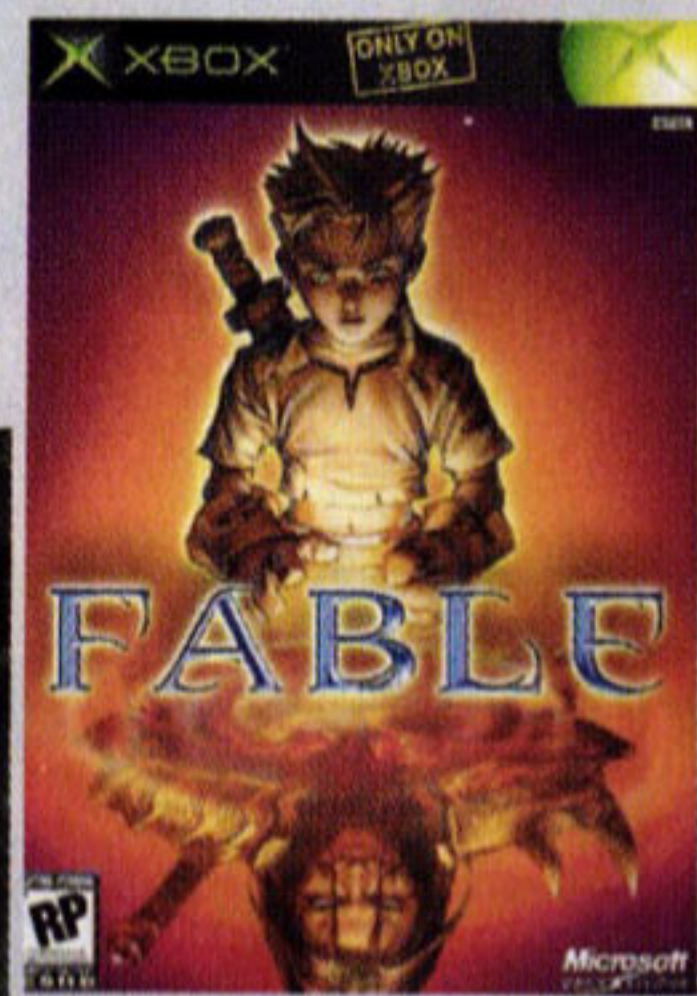
Sequestering players in a decaying apartment, forcing them to become morally questionable voyeurs ogling the outside world, and then changing the rules of what is safe are risky and high-concept additions to the sometimes stagnant survival horror genre. Silent Hill 4: The Room terrifies players both with macabre enemies and, through pure design skill, the threat of everyday situations turning into ghastly nightmares. This game will creep into the recesses of your mind and never really leave.



## Fable

**System:** Xbox **Release:** September 14

Up until Fable's release, BioWare virtually had a lock on the open-ended RPG that featured actual choices and consequences. No longer, though – Fable brought a world to life with its multifaceted NPCs, amazing environment design, and player-influenced society. With the abilities you can attain in Fable, the entire world is literally yours to do with as you please, and that's a hard-to-resist power trip. Who knew that being lauded as a hero or covered from as a villain is, in some ways, better than saving the world?



## THE TOP 10 DISAPPOINTMENTS OF 2004



- 1 Driv3r**  
 After the debacle that was Driv3r, we hear that Tanner can't even get arrested – even for grand theft auto. Over three million gamers worldwide were suckered into buying this piece of garbage that didn't even benefit from the multiple delays in its four-year development. And what the hell is "Driv3r"? Lesson: Never trust a game that can't spell its own name.
- 2 Marvel Sues NCSoft**  
 Comic book company Marvel is suing City of Heroes developer NCsoft, saying that the game's created heroes infringe on Marvel's own copyrighted band of tights-wearers. Who is Captain Marvel? He's the guy in a suit who sucks dollars out of wallets and shoots lawsuits out of his eyes.
- 3 Gran Turismo 4 Delayed**  
 Sony hits us with a double whammy, not only delaying the game until this spring, but yanking out the title's online portion – one of the game's shiny new features – and putting it on a separate release. Are we going to have to pay extra for that? Someone tell creator Kazunori Yamauchi to shut up about GT 5 and just finish the one he's already started.
- 4 No Barry Bonds**  
 Looks like Barry was too busy swallowing "The Clear" and rubbing "The Cream" on his arthritis (or was it his hemorrhoids?) to want to appear in any of this year's baseball games. Instead we had to settle for a Giants outfielder who bore no likeness to Barry. Although that guy probably did steroids, too.
- 5 Sony's PS2 Hard Drive Support**  
 You've got a better chance of getting an ingrown nose hair than coming across a PS2 title that supports this thing, because Final Fantasy XI is the only one that takes full advantage of it.
- 6 The Death of Acclaim**  
 We won't miss the sub-par games, but it's always a shame when a video game company shuts down. The company was on the rebound, but after a history of bad decisions, "Dinosaur Hunter Turok Goes Extinct" was a headline waiting to happen.
- 7 The Nintendo DS**  
 Although it claimed that DS was only a temporary tag, Nintendo wimped out and stuck with the uninspired name. Coupled with a lackluster launch lineup, the handheld doesn't feel as revolutionary as we'd like. But we have no doubt that Nintendo will turn things around. As the saying goes, there's always next year.
- 8 Infinium's Phantom**  
 We'll probably be threatened by lawyers for calling the Phantom a disappointment (don't ask), but after the encouraging showing at E3, what else can you call the system for missing its launch in November or the company operating under a four million dollar deficit? Infinium is also being sued for fraud and breach of contract.
- 9 GoldenEye: Rogue Agent**  
 Disappointment is exactly what describes this game, especially because some of the original team worked on it and it lets you play as a villain. It just doesn't live up to the level of quality we've come to expect from EA.
- 10 Ads in Games**  
 Want to know why Need for Speed Underground 2 makes you drive everywhere? So you can stare at all the dumb advertisements in the game. This is a trend that we hope goes up in flames like a zeppelin accident.

## THE TOP 10 DEVELOPERS OF 2004



### 1 Valve

The earth-shaking achievement of *Half-Life 2* would be enough to get Valve onto this list of greats, but with the addition of its Steam distribution software, the company assured a number one spot. Automatic updates, server management, and digital distribution are no small goals, and Valve has delivered this year.

### 2 Team Ninja

Both of its games, *Ninja Gaiden* and *Dead or Alive Ultimate*, made it onto our best of the year list. With nearly complete disregard for what others think, this studio provided gamers with some of the most blistering difficulty and beautiful graphics of the entire console generation, much less 2004.

### 3 Crytek

Coming practically out of nowhere, German developer Crytek dropped one of the best surprises of the year on unsuspecting gamers in the PC title *Far Cry*. With a debut as impressive as this, we can't help but look forward to what this company is planning for the future.

### 4 Rockstar North

Here's a big challenge: Take a beloved, almost revered, franchise and make it feel fresh. In the face of hundreds of imitators, Rockstar North managed to do the unthinkable and mold *San Andreas* into both a solid continuation of the franchise and expand on it so much that the series is addictive all over again.

### 5 Bungie

What's to be said about the development team responsible for our game of the year? That they're awesome, that we'll wait breathlessly for their next release, or maybe that (because of *Halo 2*) we're having problems making deadline every month? As a whole, Bungie has single-handedly made Xbox's killer app – again.

### 6 Visual Concepts

Taking on the industry's unchallenged powerhouse in Electronic Arts sports games by dropping the price of your football title to \$20 is a bold move. Making a game that deserves to knock *Madden* off of its high horse is another. What we love best is that, year after year, ESPN games truly innovate.

### 7 Blizzard

Launching an MMO, as anyone who plays them knows, isn't a task to take lightly. With months of buzz and a widely-lauded beta period, the launch of *World of Warcraft* wasn't perfect, but the team really outdid itself by fixing the problems and letting us revel in the great world it had created.

### 8 Starbreeze

Dangerous territory – that's a place where this Swedish development team was not only treading in, but also running through at full bore. Its *Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* is one title that defies both the expectations of a movie-licensed game and what a standard FPS can deliver. Story, combat, and industry-shaking graphics are all done with such skill that we couldn't put the controller down.

### 9 EA Redwood Shores

Incorporating Maxis (the prolific Sims developer) with Redwood Shores' other franchises (anyone heard of *Lord of the Rings*?), this division of Electronic Arts is a highlight of the publisher's giant development stable. Consistently solid titles at a truly impressive rate is the group's defining feature.

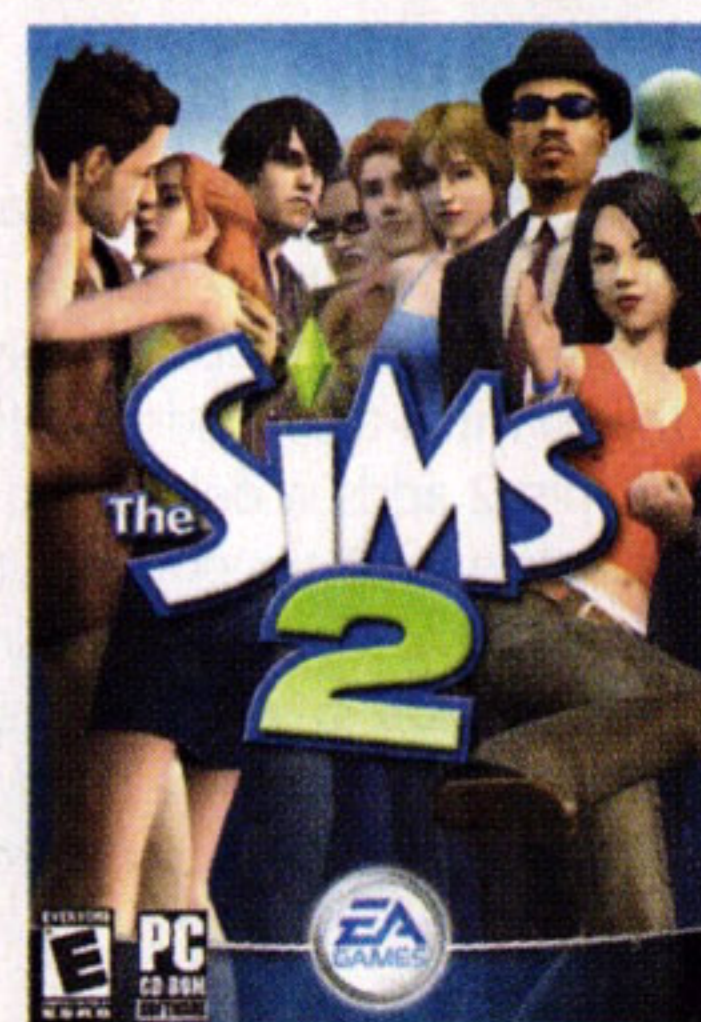
### 10 Midway Chicago

Making gigantic strides by providing startlingly new experiences (*Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*), innovation (*NBA Ballers*), and fulfilling fans' greatest wishes (*Mortal Kombat: Deception*), Midway's Chicago studio is setting the bar higher for the rest of the industry at large.

## The Sims 2

**System:** PC **Release:** September 14

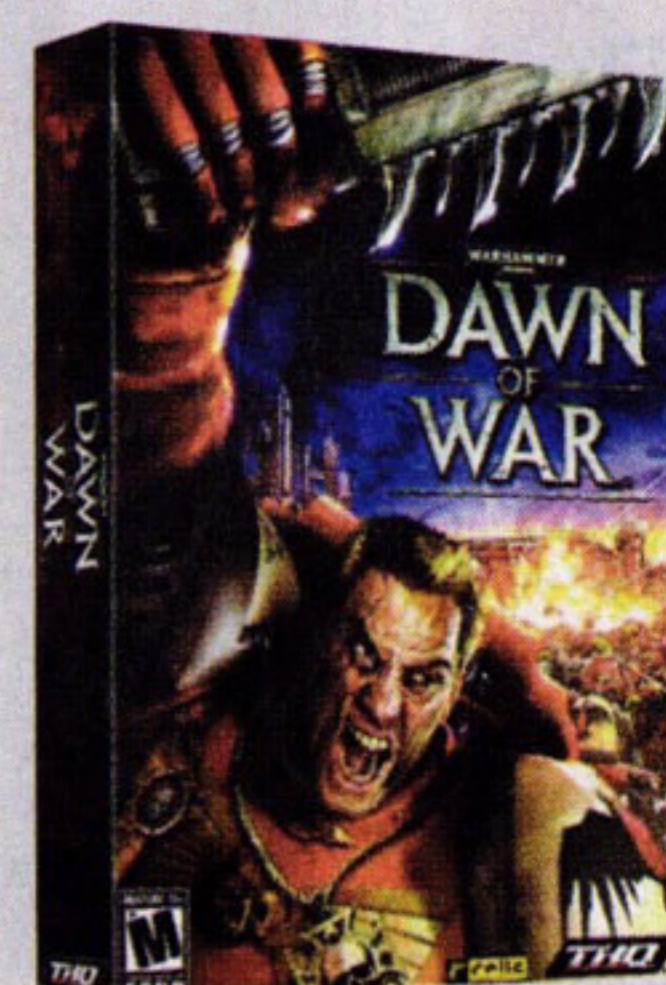
This franchise is a colossal force in the gaming industry – the original game sold enough copies to outfit entire countries, and the expansion packs have kept players addicted for years now. So, when *The Sims 2* came out with its incredible graphical update and family tree systems, we got hooked all over again. Being a cruel puppet master or building a noble lineage to withstand the ages is more rewarding, challenging, and just plain addictive than ever before.



## Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

**System:** PC **Release:** September 20

It isn't often that a new RTS franchise can hang with the big boys like *Warcraft* and *Command & Conquer*. *Dawn of War* does so easily by bringing a slew of new concepts to the table and executing them smoothly. Developer Relic somehow makes it look easy to tread the very thin line of fun between micro and macro level strategy, complexity and simplicity. It even does all this while keeping the rabid Warhammer fans happy with their dedication to recreating the tabletop game accurately. Salute!



## Def Jam: Fight for NY

**System:** PlayStation 2/Xbox/GameCube

**Release:** September 21

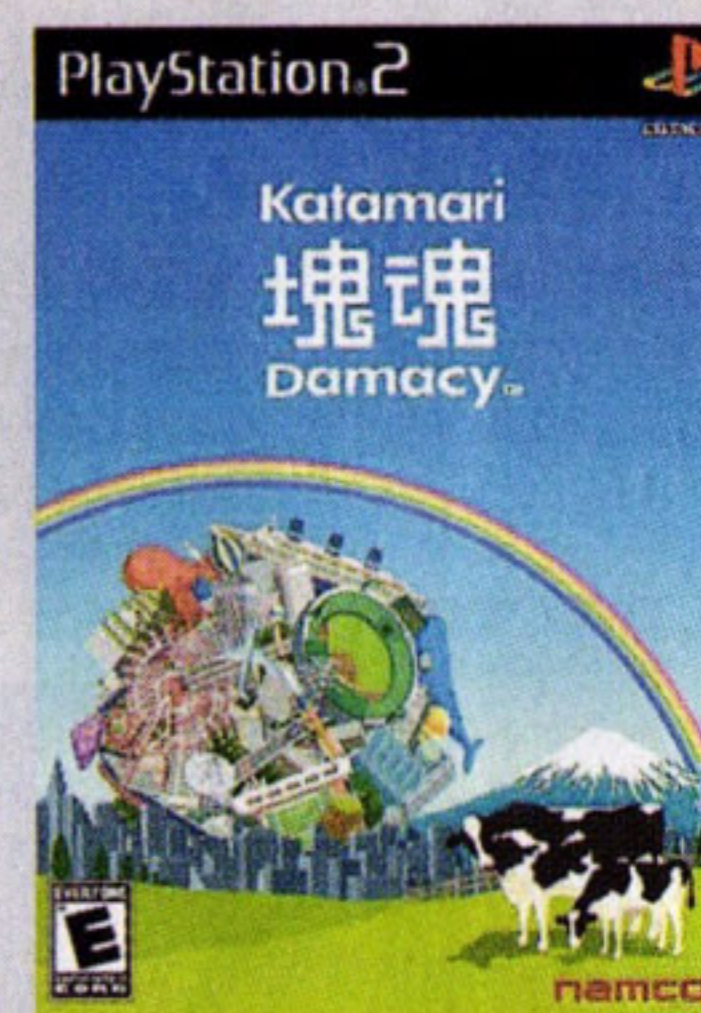
A fusion of a wrestling game and a traditional fighter, *Fight for NY* combines a robust fighting mechanic with hip hop music, highly interactive environments, celebrity fighters, and hundreds of unlockable extras. The bevy of cosmetic changes you can apply to your fighter and a compelling story make for an engaging single player experience. Also, the brutal combat is just as fun for up to four players. Featuring multiple fighting styles, dozens of playable characters, detailed visuals, and a great soundtrack, *Def Jam: Fight for NY* is one of the most surprisingly enjoyable brawlers of the year.



## Katamari Damacy

**System:** PlayStation 2 **Release:** September 21

This Namco quirkfest proves one point over and over again: Bizarre charm coupled with borderline English translation can make an otherwise iffy game one of the events of the year. *Katamari Damacy* took advantage of nonsensical graphic elements (lots of rainbows, singing ducks, and dancing pandas round out the mix) and a great soundtrack to worm into our otherwise cold, empty shell of a chest cavity. The King of All Cosmos demands that you check this out, or get left in the dark recesses of starless space.



## X-Men Legends

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

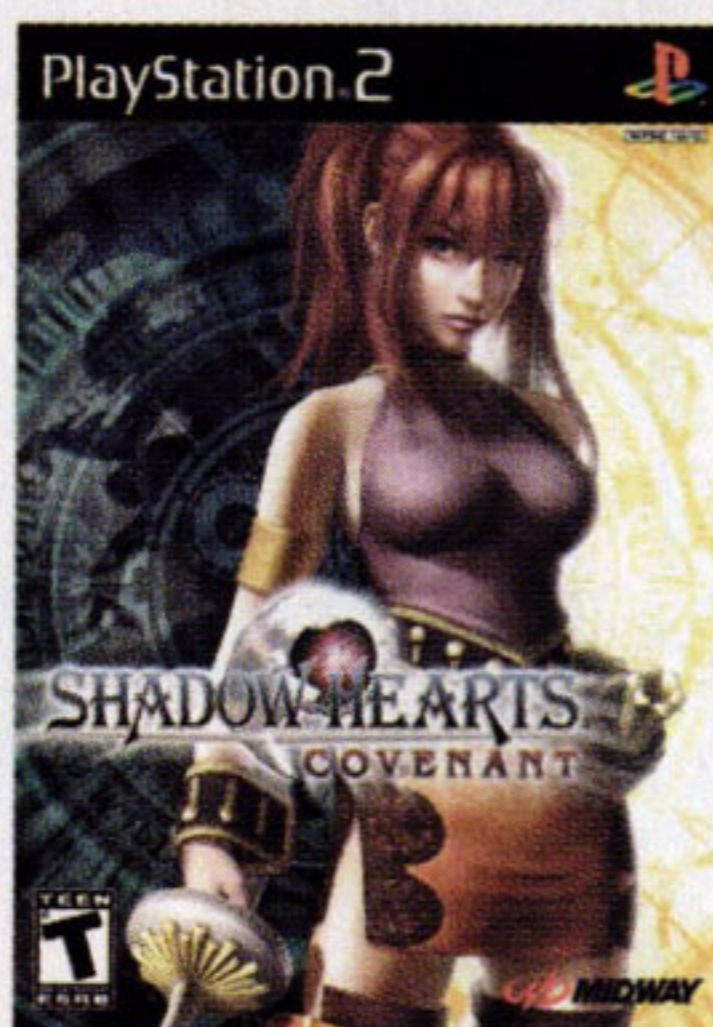
**Release:** September 21

Activision's masterful homage to everything X-Men gets our unofficial nod for best multiplayer experience. Up to four gamers can co-op their way through the long main story as well as participate in flashback missions and training in the Danger Room, while customizing the abilities and strengths of more than 15 playable mutants. Inside jokes from the comics pop up frequently (Colossus and Wolverine's "fastball special" comes to mind), and the balance between heroes' skills and weaknesses is handled well throughout.



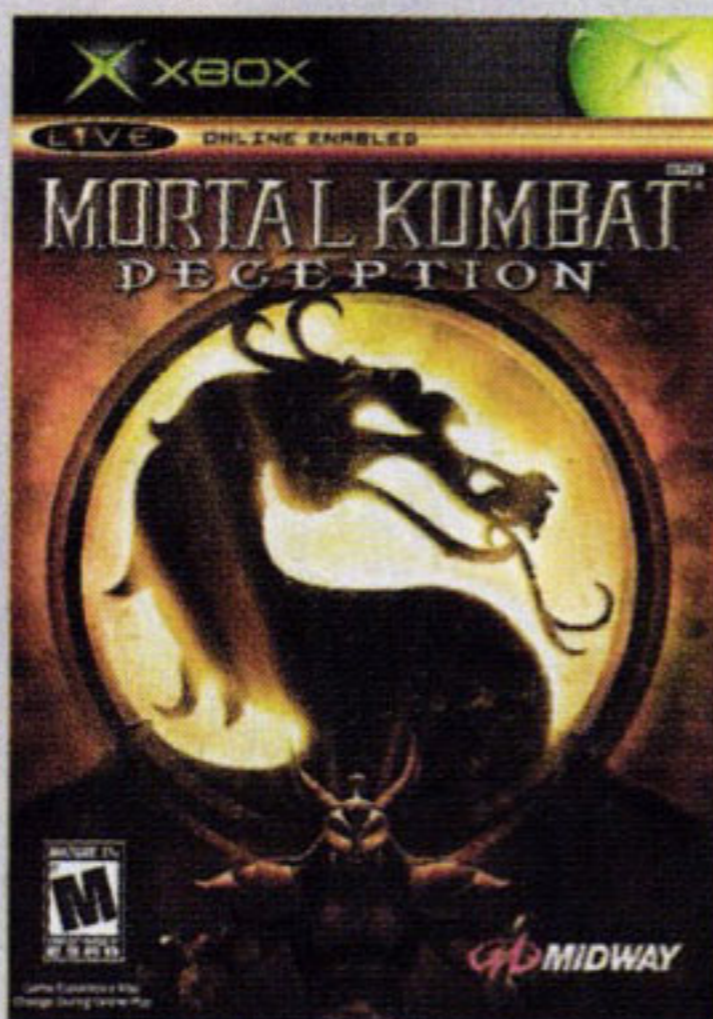
## Shadow Hearts: Covenant

**System:** PlayStation 2 **Release:** September 27  
Everything about this game is a mix of established features and unexpected tweaks. A standard RPG random encounter system is coupled with a much-improved Judgement Ring that manages everything from attack accuracy to shopping discounts. The somewhat clichéd tale is twisted into a heartfelt mix of truly crazy characters, funny dialogue, and real-world settings. Besides standing out from the crowd for its gutsy modifications of genre conventions, Shadow Hearts: Covenant earns its keep by doing the classics with skill.



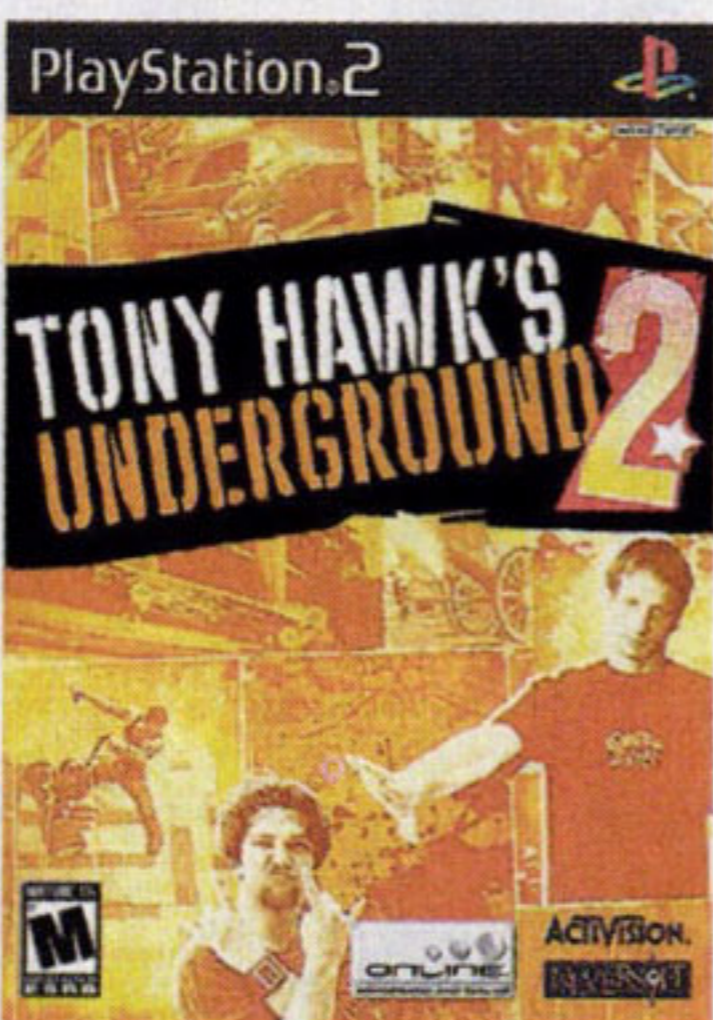
## Mortal Kombat: Deception

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox **Release:** October 4  
Not only does Deception refine and improve the fighting engine introduced in Deadly Alliance, it also adds online play and a bucket of additional features, such as an MK version of chess and a puzzle game. An improved training mode is also offered in the form of Konquest mode. With so many different ways to play, a ton of unlockables, and the rock solid combat at its core, no other fighting game around is as fully stacked as Deception.



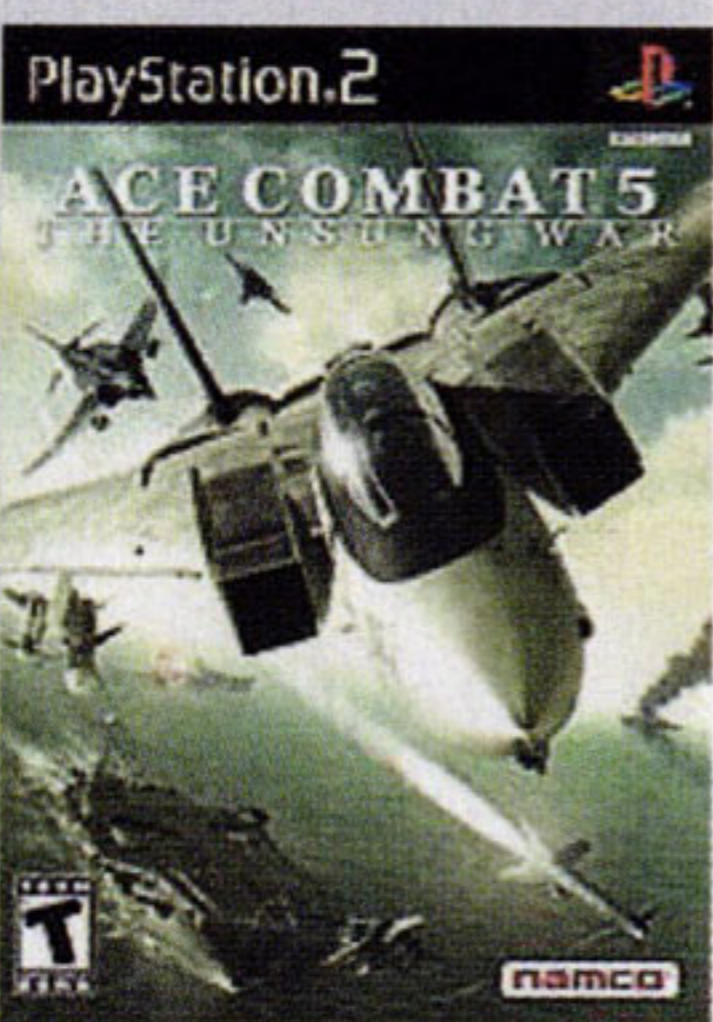
## Tony Hawk's Underground 2

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube **Release:** October 5  
Last year's THUG was a huge departure for the Tony Hawk series, thanks to its shift to a story-based adventure. This year's THUG 2 still offers the Story mode, as well as a Classic mode, which offers the traditional skating action seen in the original trilogy. Not only is THUG 2 two great games for the price of one, it also adds new moves, classic levels, and the great soundtrack the series is known for. Neversoft's baby grows by leaps and bounds each year, and with this entry it has released arguably the best game in the series yet.



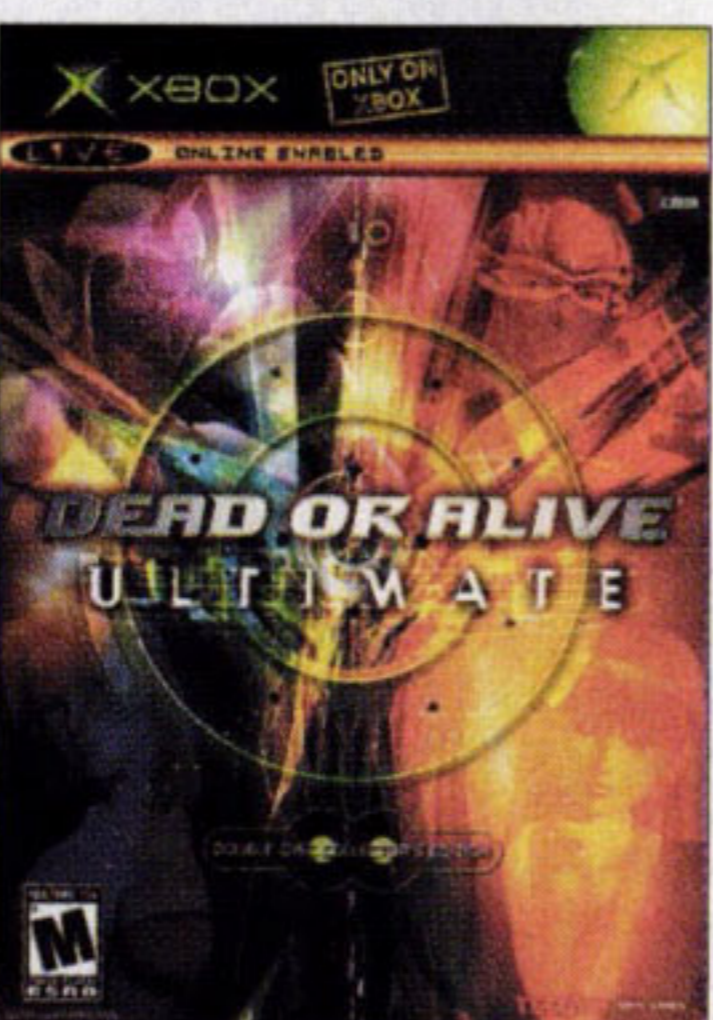
## Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War

**System:** PlayStation 2 **Release:** October 25  
For a lot of gamers, flight simulation titles fall into categories of either inaccessibility or disinterest. If there's one game this year that will change minds, Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War is it. Great graphics, an engaging squad control system, and interesting missions combine forces with one of the best-told stories of 2004. Constant radio chatter between your teammates and the others in the air are the main ways that the tale is relayed, and since it's during missions, the fate of your fellow countrymen seems that much more engaging.



## Dead or Alive Ultimate

**System:** Xbox **Release:** October 26  
Team Ninja's loving update of their premier fighter is flush with fanboy treats. The original DOA (previously unreleased in the States) is included for a little historical perspective and all-new stunningly beautiful cinematic sequences bring to light some of the fighters' backgrounds; but the crown jewel is undoubtedly the main game mode – a gorgeously updated version of DOA 2 with online play. Taking advantage of Xbox Live, Ultimate provides a brutal arcade feel that's been missing since stand-ups were the machines of choice.



## THE TOP 10 PUBLISHERS OF 2004

1



### 1 Electronic Arts

Once again in our number one position, the pure force of Electronic Art's publishing empire cannot be denied. With a huge roster of hits and constantly-improving quality, the company has proven that putting out a lot of product doesn't have to mean that it's sub-standard in the fun or innovation departments.

2



UBISOFT™

### 2 Ubisoft

Supplementing its die-hard franchises with higher-concept, riskier fare has proven smart two years in a row for Ubisoft. Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow changed how we thought about online competition and Prince of Persia: Warrior Within took chances for the newly updated franchise.

### 3 Activision

Rocking with both licensed titles and original IPs, Activision has had a banner year. Spider-Man 2, Tony Hawk's Underground 2, X-Men Legends, and Doom 3 were each full-fledged events in their own rights, and the rest of the company's lineup was consistently solid.

### 4 Microsoft

Suddenly, Microsoft is one smart company. They released great titles that sold through the roof (two things that don't always go together), and at the same time canceled product that they didn't see as profitable. It's sad for some fans, but from a business perspective, the moves are what will keep the company's game division alive and well.

### 5 Nintendo

A slow year for the GameCube, but 12 gangbusting months for their handheld division earn Nintendo this spot in the top half of our list. Gamers begging for more ate up classic re-releases and the DS launch went smoothly worldwide. The only reason that the N isn't higher is that we're wondering how these moves are really building toward a solid foundation in the next round of consoles.

### 6 Rockstar

The controversial publisher doesn't put out many games in a year, but what it banks on is gamers knowing that each game is quality. If Rockstar wants to become a brand that people will buy because they know and trust the name, then the company is well on its way.

### 7 Midway

Chicago-based publisher Midway had a year that no one expected. The last 12 months have been punctuated by impressive new franchises like Psi-Ops and The Suffering, as well as expert updates to its core games like Mortal Kombat.

### 8 Sony

Perhaps not their most outrageous year from a software-sales standpoint, the company has really laid a great foundation for the next few years leading up to a new console launch. The PSP released in Japan, EyeToy support continues to be strong and innovative, and the redesigned PS2 is selling like hotcakes.

### 9 Tecmo

Making games for the hardcore crowd doesn't seem to be profitable for many publishers, but Tecmo's year proves that the plan isn't impossible. Ninja Gaiden, Dead or Alive: Ultimate, and the Fatal Frame series all appeal to those who seek out unique, challenging, and beautiful experiences in video games.

### 10 NCsoft

Redefining a well-established genre is enough to cheer, but NCsoft not only changed how people experience massively multiplayer online games, the company also serves as an illustration about how a good marketing plan can change everything. Players ran toward City of Heroes in droves, and that might be the understatement of the year.



T H E  
**MATRIX**  
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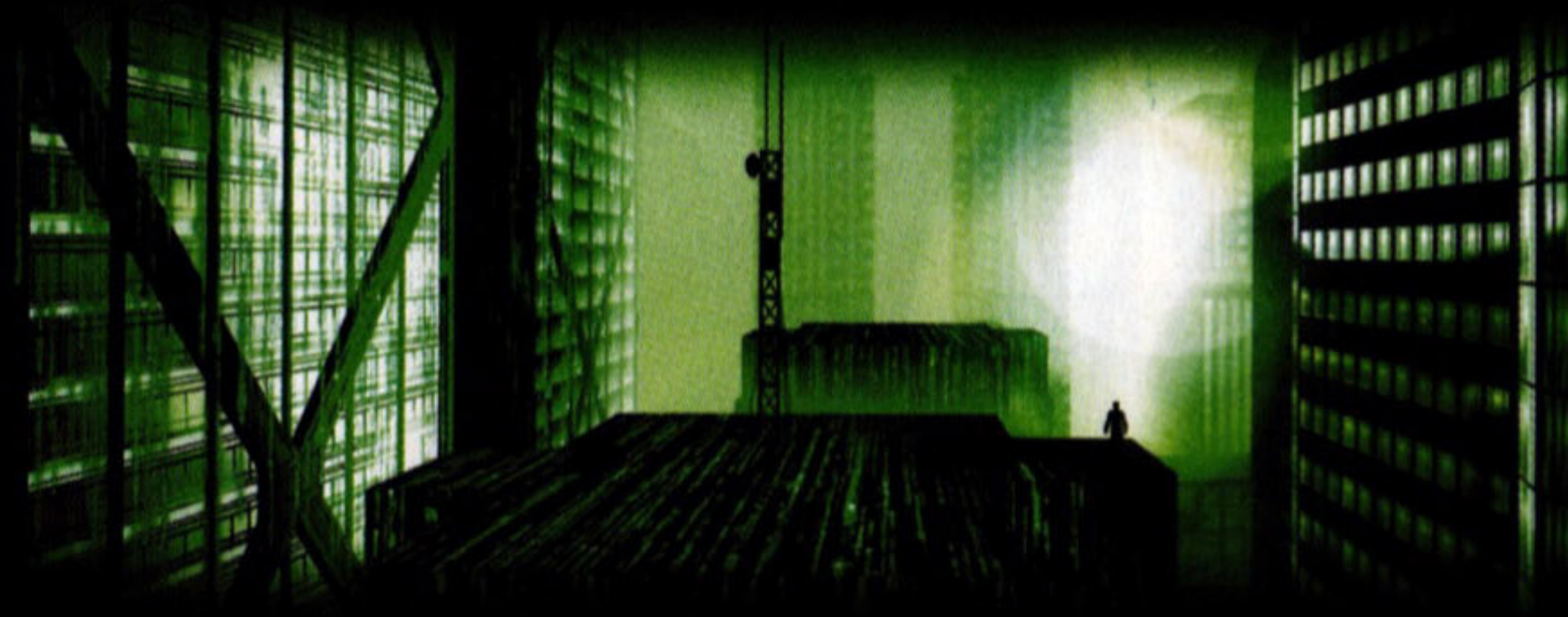
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I know why, night after night,  
you sit in front of your computer.

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- ▶ Escape character regret. Reconfigure your character's abilities and performance on demand.
- ▶ Communicate with people in and out of the game in real-time using AOL® Instant Messenger™ technology.

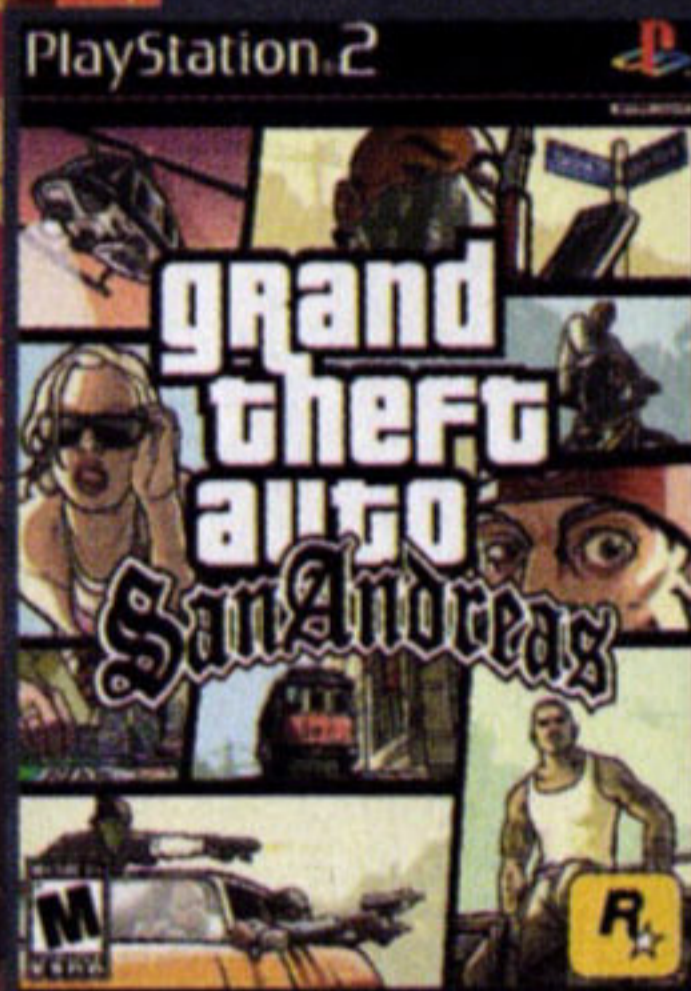




## Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

**System:** PlayStation 2 **Release:** October 26

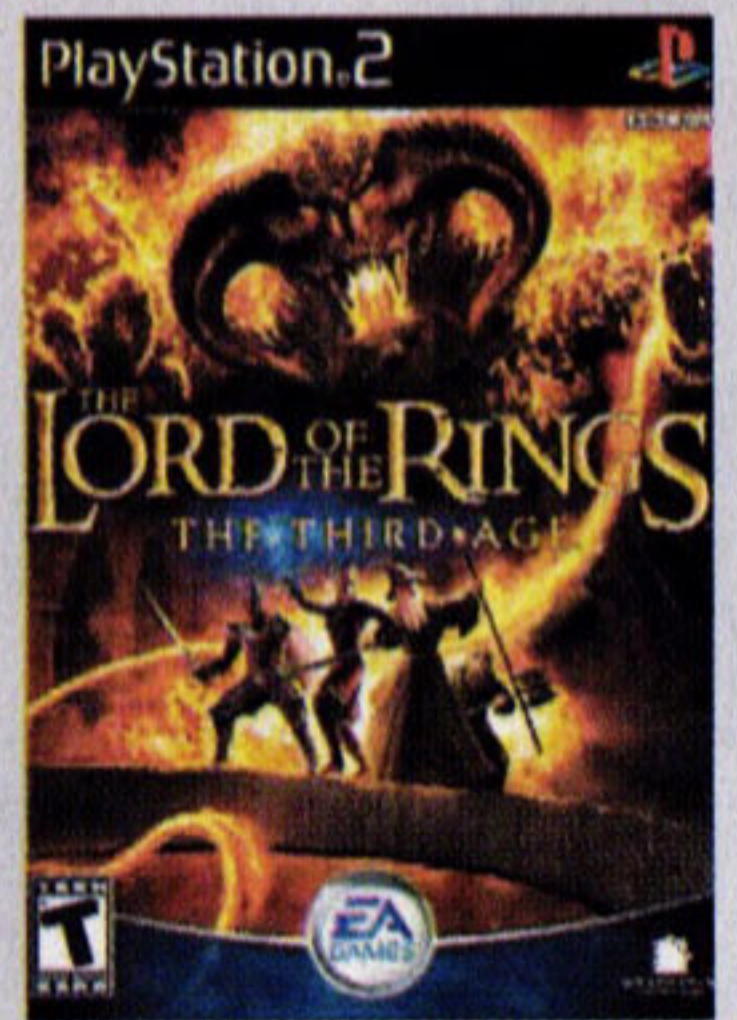
Evading the fuzz and setting the town ablaze has never been so exhilarating. When you are faced with the choice of landing a stolen military jet at your private airstrip or bailing out, skydiving, then parachuting to safety, you know that you have something great on your hands. The level of freedom that players have at their fingertips is staggering, and the sheer size of this project is simply daunting. San Andreas also fires direct hits with an incredible story that is chock full of pop culture wackiness and stellar performances from its A-list cast. This truly is one for the ages.



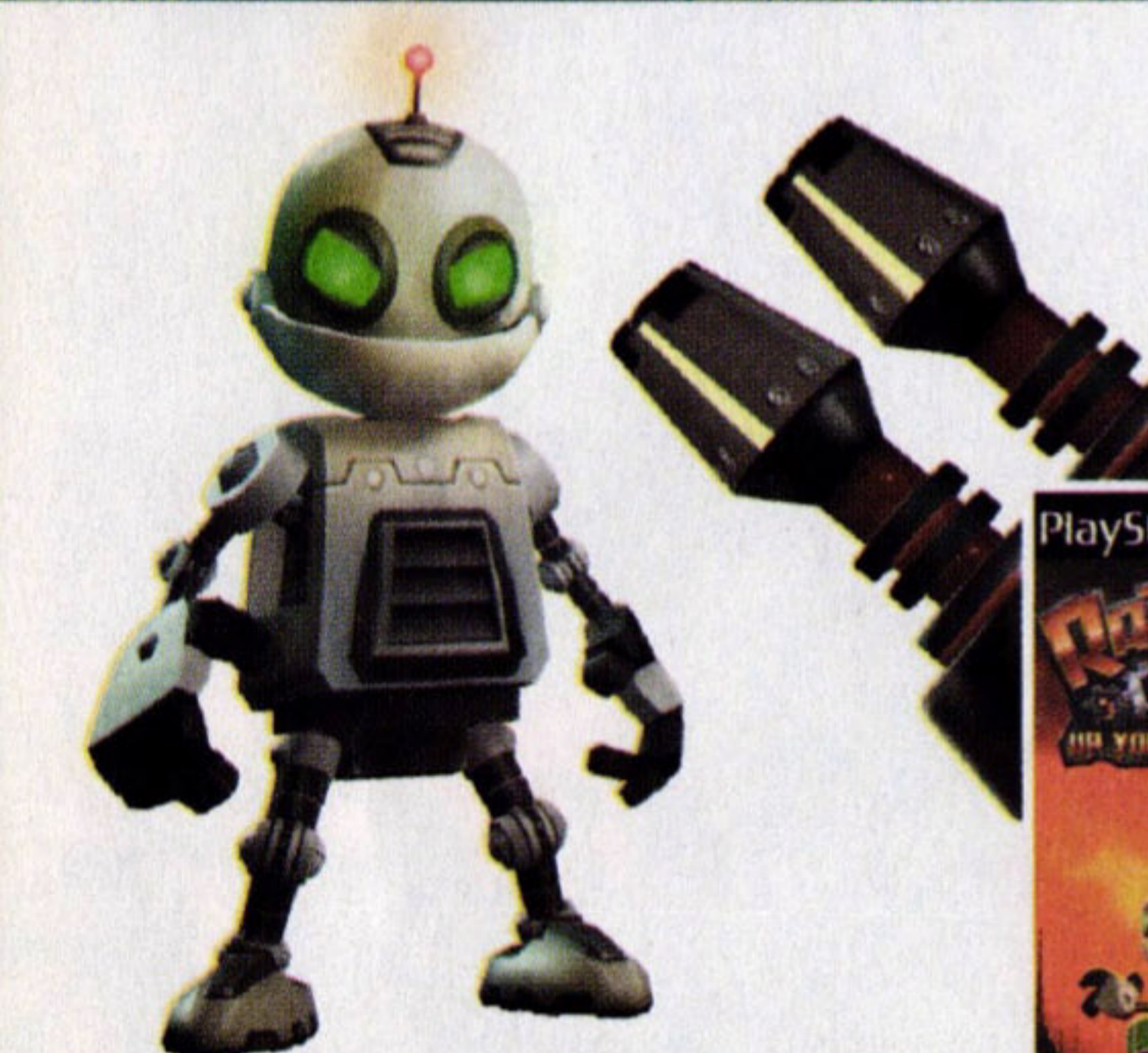
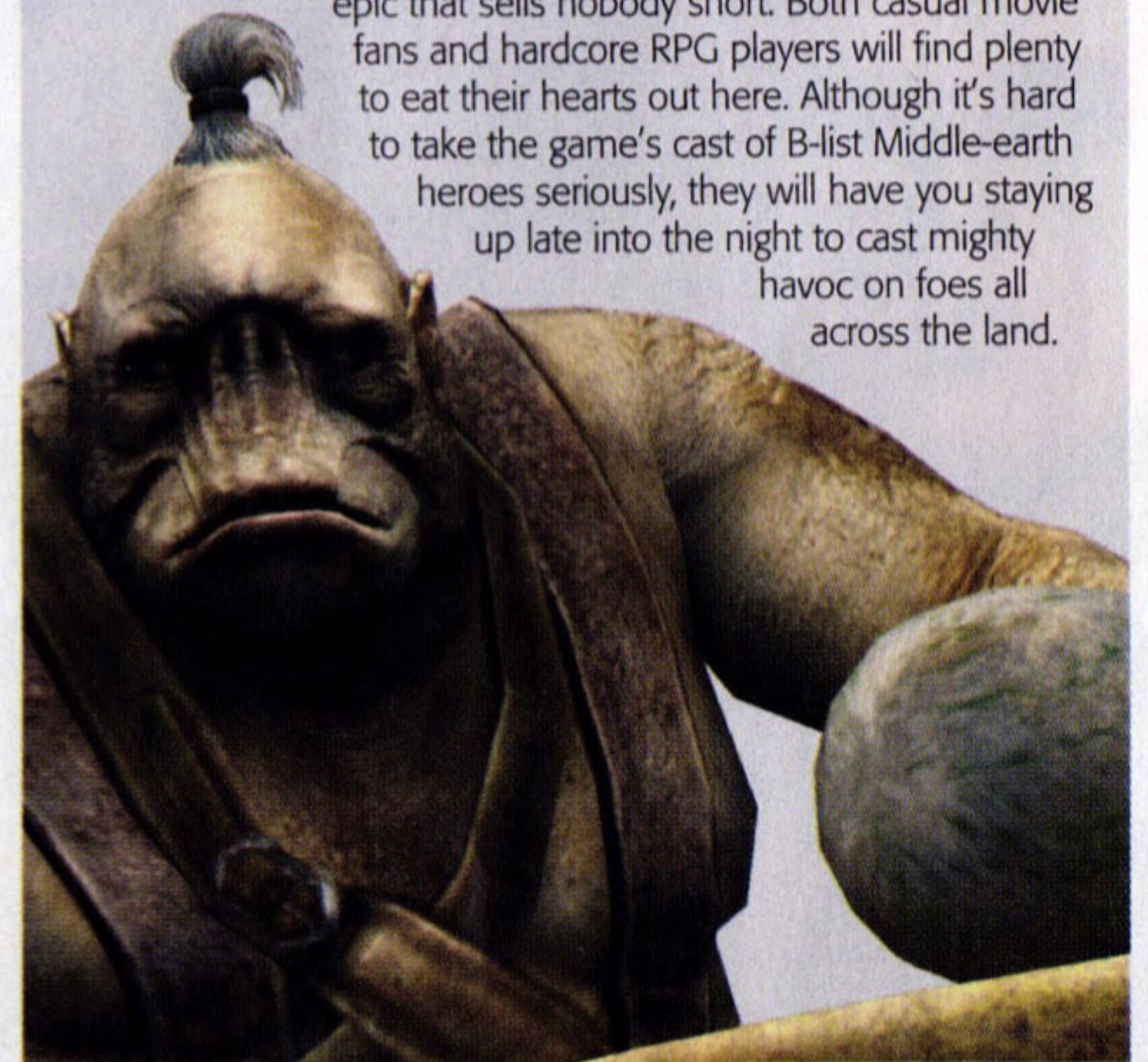
## The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube **Release:** November 2

It takes balls for EA to step out of the cozy confines of the movie trilogy the way it does with The Third Age. This game also finds the publisher/developer stretching its talents into the realm of turn-based RPGs. Thankfully, these risks pay off



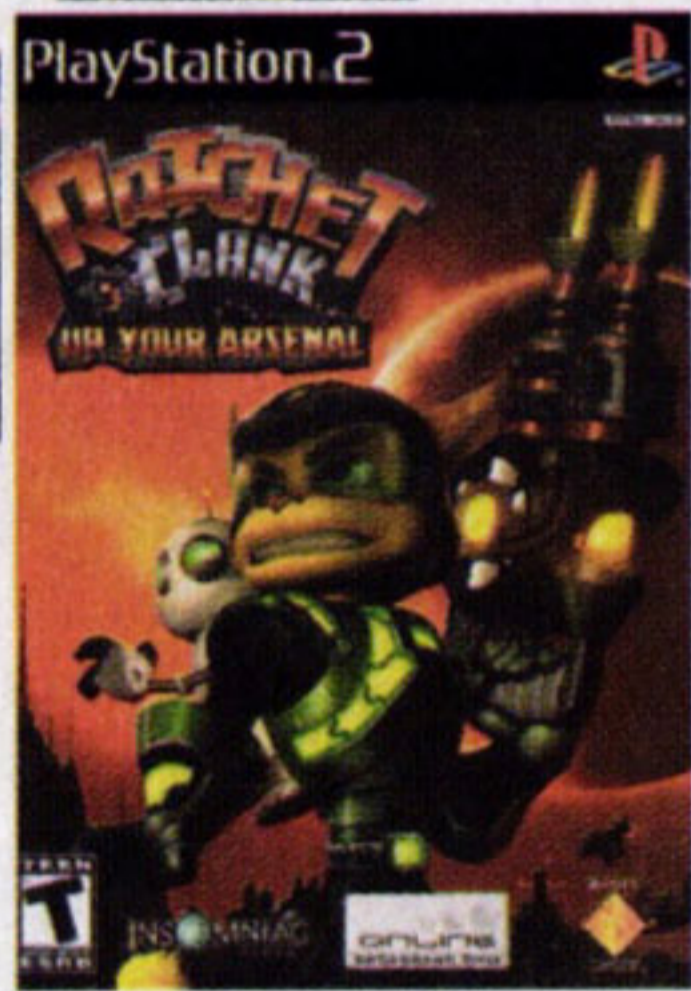
in a rich and involving epic that sells nobody short. Both casual movie fans and hardcore RPG players will find plenty to eat their hearts out here. Although it's hard to take the game's cast of B-list Middle-earth heroes seriously, they will have you staying up late into the night to cast mighty havoc on foes all across the land.



## Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal

**System:** PlayStation 2 **Release:** November 2

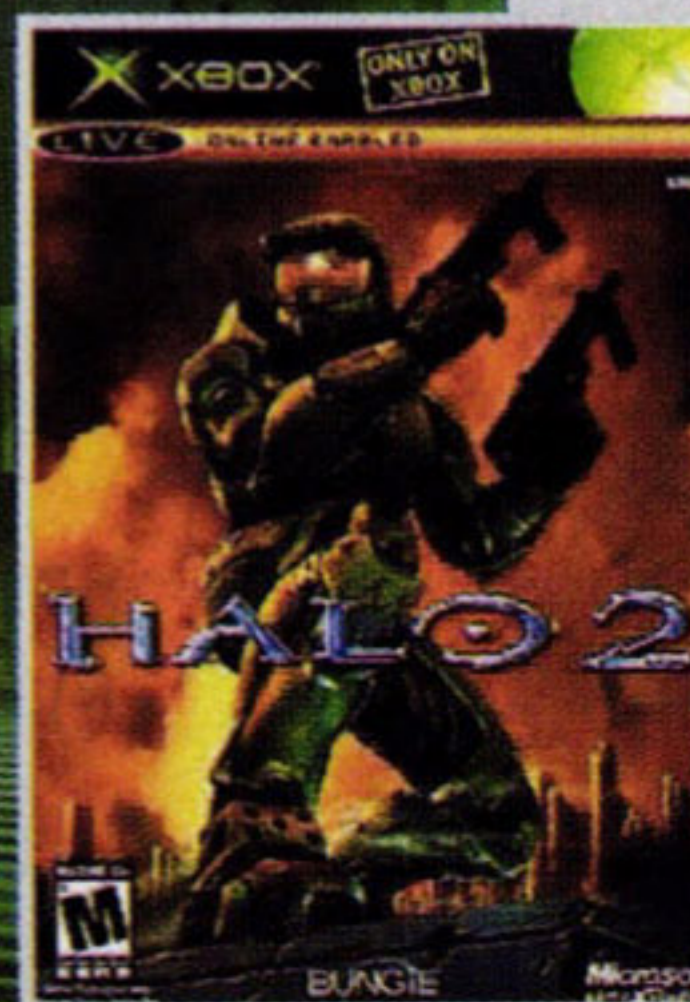
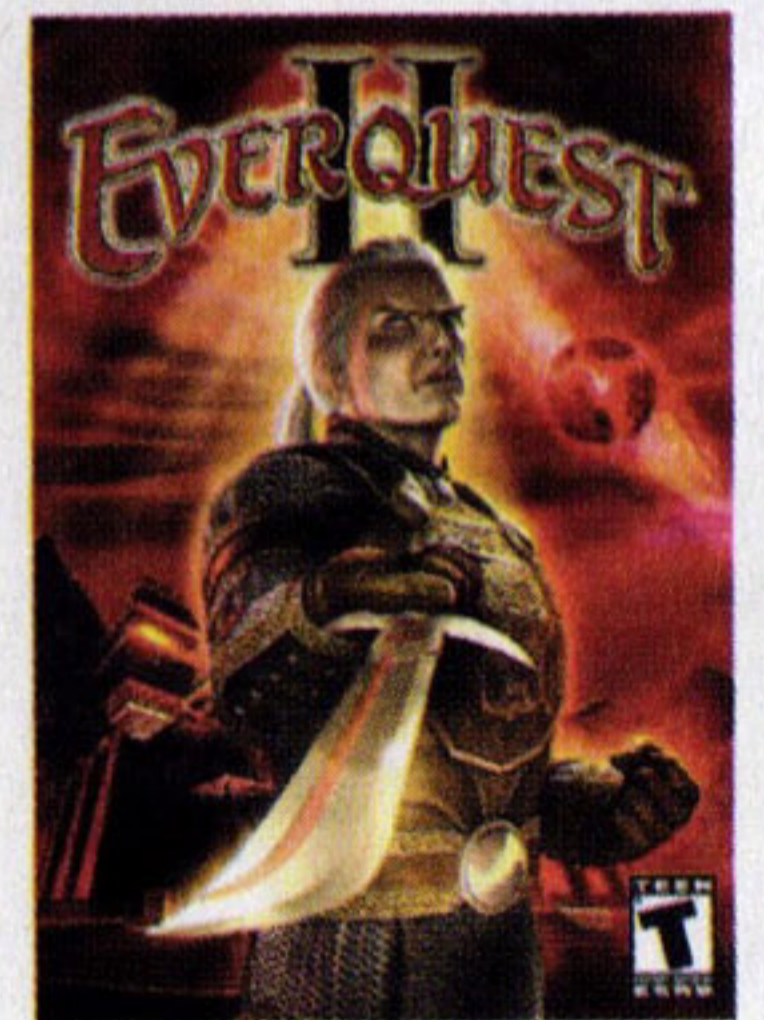
Weapon-based platforming has never been so sweet. We loved the second game featuring Ratchet and his robotic sidekick Clank, but are nothing short of pleasantly shocked with the third entry in the series – Up Your Arsenal. Insomniac's genre-defining entry is an absolute must-play for the hilarious story, insane weaponry, and constantly entertaining and exhilarating gameplay. Top all of this design mastery with a truckload of online multiplayer options, and action/platform games will never be the same.



## EverQuest II

**System:** PC **Release:** November 9

If it's a large world and endless content to adventure through that you want, EverQuest II does it better than any game to date. The improvements that EQ II introduces over the original could fill this entire magazine, but a technical powerhouse of a presentation and much-improved combat and grouping mechanics easily top the list. This MMORPG has a crafting system that manages to be just as cool, fun, and powerful as adventuring, which should really be all you need to know about how many things there are to do in Norrath these days.



## Halo 2

**System:** Xbox **Release:** November 9

How do you describe a game that has captivated so many people so completely? Some are floored with the story mode and its refreshingly different take on the tired space marine theme. Others want nothing more than to beat that one guy's time in Legendary mode, and even more can't stop (no matter what's at stake in their personal lives) playing online until the wee hours of the morn. It's no understatement to say that this is the best game of the year, and what we're happiest about is that the honor is earned for so many different, yet equally valid reasons.

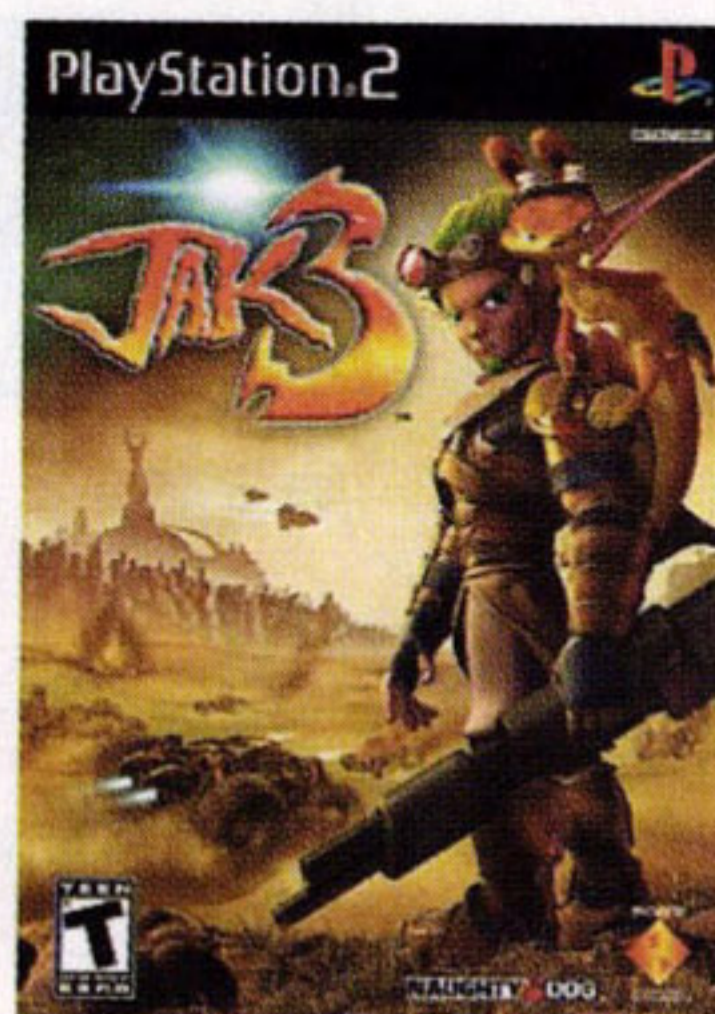




## Jak 3

**System:** PlayStation 2 **Release:** November 9

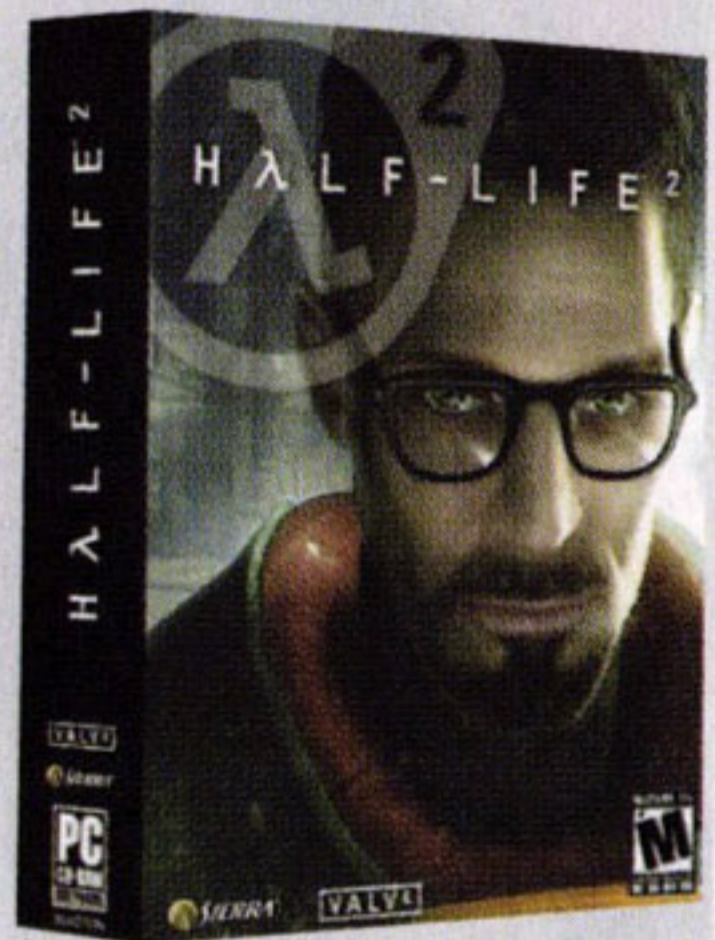
As a trilogy, Naughty Dog's Jak and Daxter franchise has consistently made giant evolutionary leaps with each entry, culminating in this climactic finale. Cinematic cutscenes and storytelling rival the greatest that this medium has to offer. While a story of this depth is something that is rarely seen in the action/platform genre, part of its success is how subtly and skillfully the tale is woven through the series' trademark gameplay mix of gunplay, platforming, and vehicle missions.



## Half-Life 2

**System:** PC **Release:** November 16

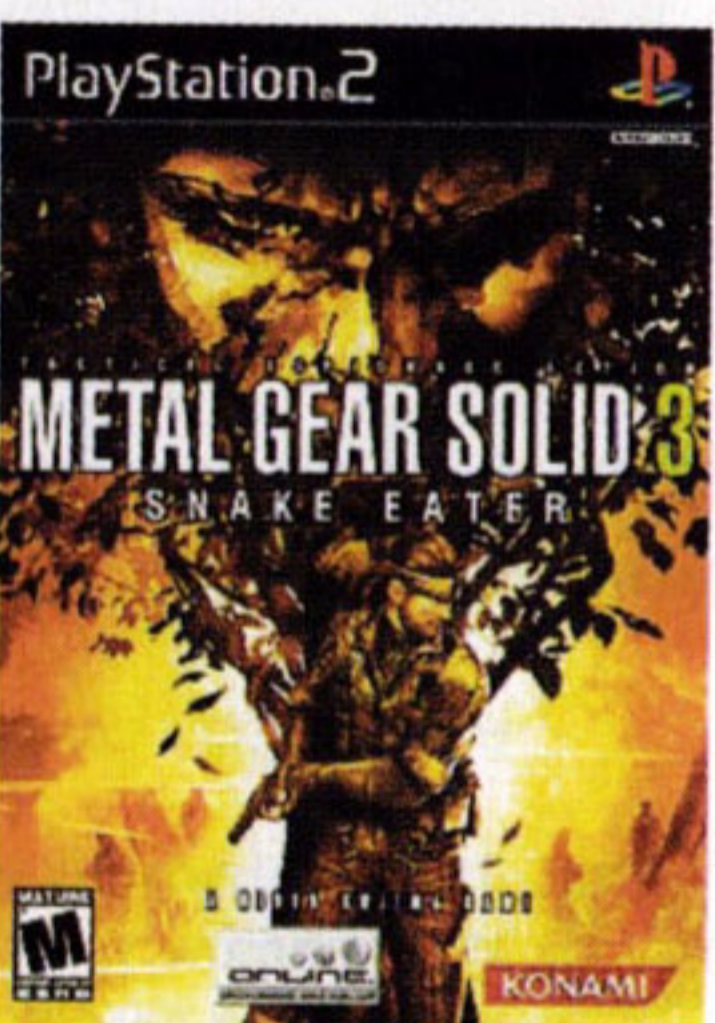
One would think that with all of the hoopla and ludicrous expectations that gamers had of Half-Life 2, it'd be bound to disappoint. But even the most cynical gamer is hard-pressed to find fault in this title – from dismembering zombies with sawblades to dodging through the ruins of civilization to avoid an attack helicopter, Half-Life 2 provides moment after moment that will stick with you for the rest of your life. We still cringe in fear at the sound that Striders make as they open up with their cannons.



## Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

**System:** PlayStation 2 **Release:** November 17

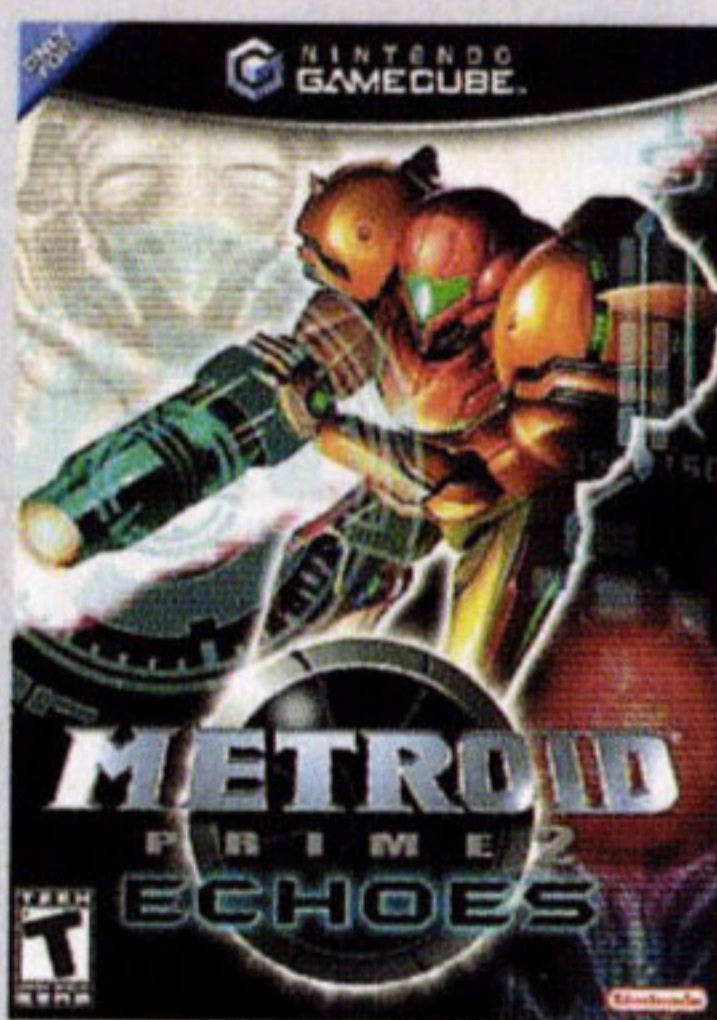
Before its release, even stalwart series fans were skeptical of some of the things Snake Eater promised to bring to Metal Gear Solid. Hunting for food, contextual camouflage, and the conspicuous absence of Solid Snake raised a few cautious eyebrows. However, when the obscuring fog surrounding this title finally lifted, these elements combined with an absorbing story and a compelling cast to form one of the most cinematic and captivating adventures of this console generation.



## Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

**System:** GameCube **Release:** November 18

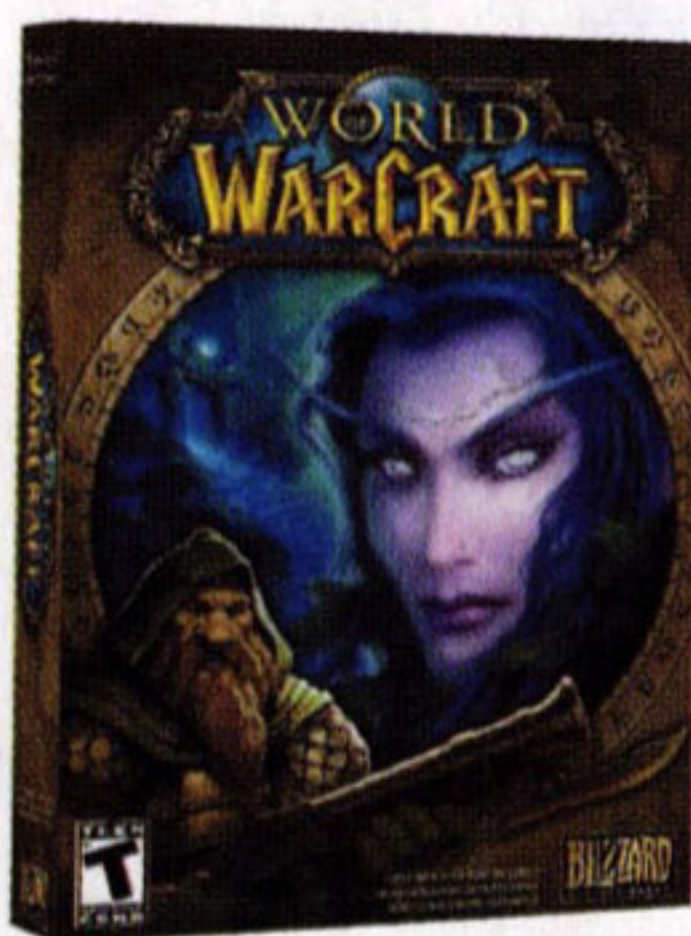
Testing the will, abilities, and determination of the average gamer and rewarding them heartily upon completion, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes is a cruel mistress. Dark and Light versions of the world (and the main character) provide an excellent opportunity for interesting weapons, the series' trademark labyrinthine level design, and buckets of enemies. On top of the lengthy single-player story mode, Nintendo and Retro Studios brought gamers a four-player split-screen option as well, satisfying almost all of our wishes.



## World of Warcraft

**System:** PC **Release:** November 23

PC gamers have been waiting a long time for a new game from legendary developer Blizzard, and World of Warcraft does nothing to disappoint. Somehow, the long-standing MMORPG format has been tweaked here to make every facet of play simultaneously more accessible, less tedious, and simply more fun. Add on the raucous player-vs-player combat over contested territory, and there are few titles that will put your social life in as much danger as this one.



## THE TOP 10 BIGGEST DORKS OF 2004

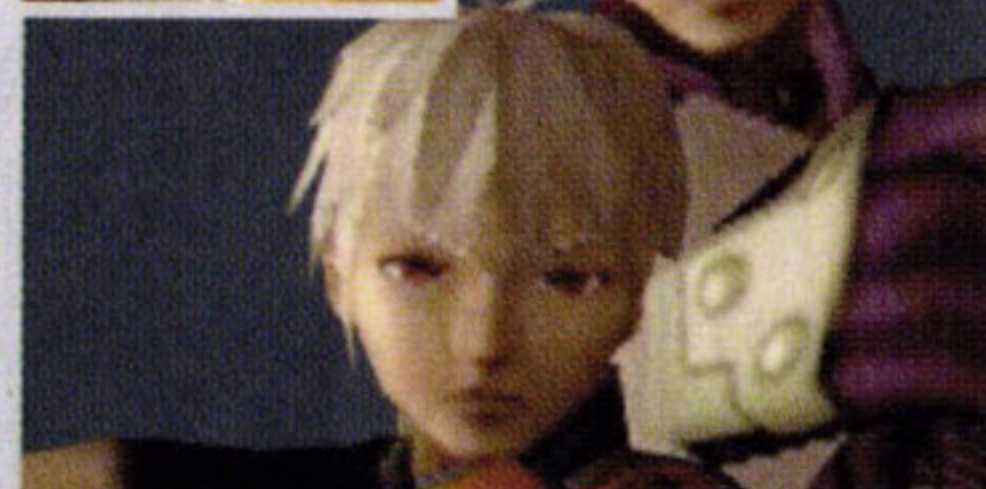
### 1 Captain Rhama (Galleon)

When one of your attacks involves running around in circles with your arms outstretched, you're destined to become GI's infamous Dork of the Year. We've seen toddlers with better fighting skills, and most of them dressed better, too.



### 2 Chi and Mu (Seven Samurai 20XX)

Funny, we don't remember rollerblading kids who rap in the Kurosawa movie. Must be in the director's cut. The presence of these two losers helps lower the quality of their shabby game even further, resulting in one of the most embarrassing titles of the year.



### 3 Pitfall Harry (Pitfall Harry)

Harry's constant barrage of unfunny jokes is obviously masking his insecurity and loneliness. We know you need to be loved, Harry. We know you need to be accepted. We know, but we still hate you.



### 4 D-Tritus (Scrapland)

We know what you're thinking: How could this guy be considered lame? He's got so much going for him! He's got the looks of a cyborg Muppet, moves like he's controlled by a drunken puppeteer, and speaks with a dreamy voice as grating as Urkel's. How could we dislike him? Maybe we just disagree with his politics.



### 5 Lazarus Jones (Ghosthunter)

A cross between Egon Spengler and AJ from the Backstreet Boys, Lazarus Jones is about as cool as fungus. Sure, he has a ghost inhabiting his body, but she'd surely love to be exorcised just to get away from this nerd.



### 6 Gerard and Pierre (Shadow Hearts: Covenant)

We try to avoid taking potshots at easy targets, but we simply couldn't pass up these delicate litte fruitcups. They make dresses for your doll if you give them male erotica, and they're French. Please insert your own jokes here – they pretty much write themselves.



### 7 Bam Margera (Tony Hawk's Underground 2)

We enjoy Bam's personality about as much as we enjoy the itching, burning sensation of wearing a fiberglass thong. Yeah, we know being annoying is his whole schtick, but we think it's really a self-loathing cry for help. Hey, if we were Bam, we'd hate ourselves, too.

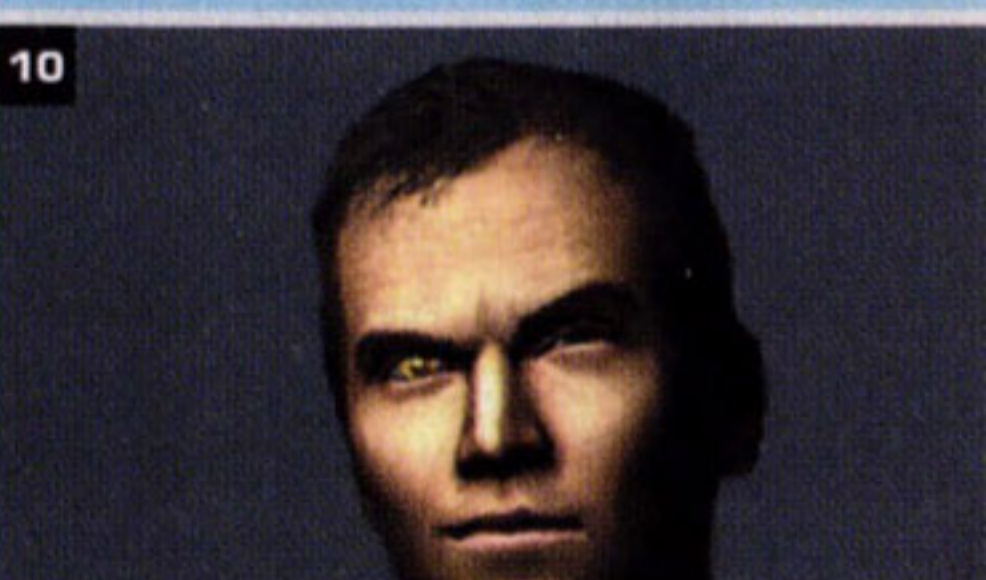


### 8 Magnus Tide (Yager)

This drunken-looking doofus never stood a chance at not totally sucking. Even if Magnus Tide didn't spout lame, uninspired one-liners, you simply can't be cool if your name sounds like a medieval wizard's laundry soap. You just can't. Nice hair, too – how's the Kid 'n Play tribute band working out for you?

### 9 Murray and Bentley (Sly 2: Band of Thieves)

Imagine the movie Ocean's Twelve if you removed all the cool actors like Don Cheadle and Bernie Mac, and replaced them with Carrot Top and the guy who played Uncle Joey on Full House. A heist just isn't as cool when your partners are dweebs, is it?



### 10 GoldenEye (GoldenEye: Rogue Agent)

Although purported to be "evil," former MI-5 agent GoldenEye is really just a big pouting baby. "Fire me, will you? Fine, I'll go join the bad guys' team! How do you like that?" But considering he's got the personality of a block of wood, we're surprised that they would want him, either.

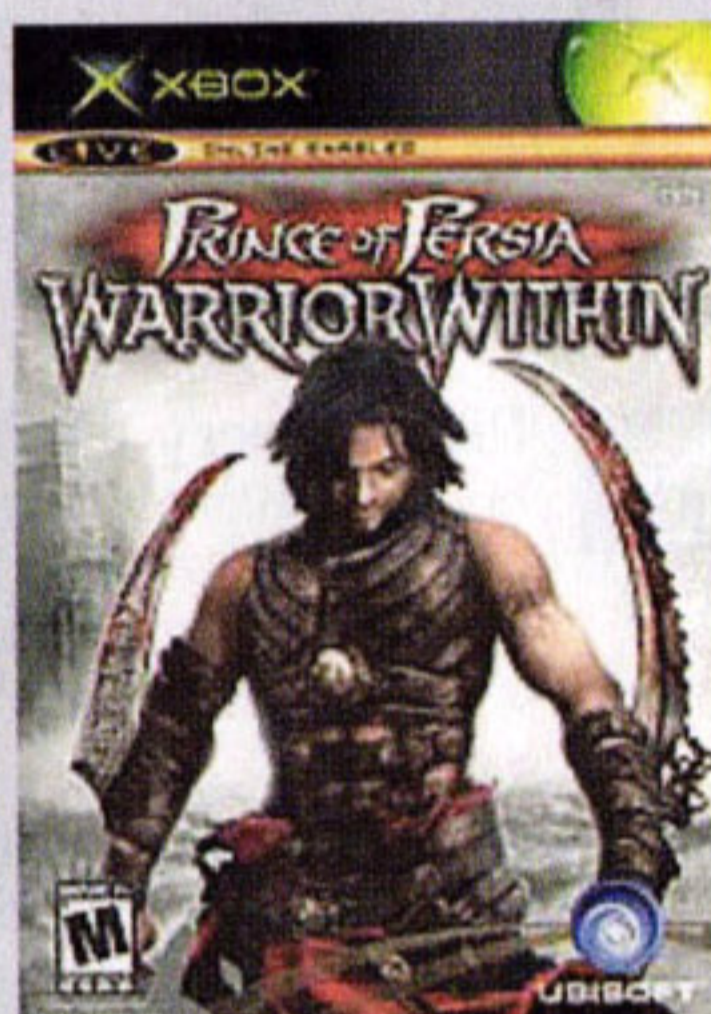
## Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls

**System:** Game Boy Advance **Release:** November 30  
It's true that these two games have been released in other guises on this continent, but Square Enix isn't just shilling out a rehash for the heck of it with this handheld gem. Besides the undeniable quality of the classic source material, this version of the first Final Fantasy games features a seriously impressive amount of new content after the original adventures end, improved graphics, and streamlined menu systems (no small feature, if you remember the originals).



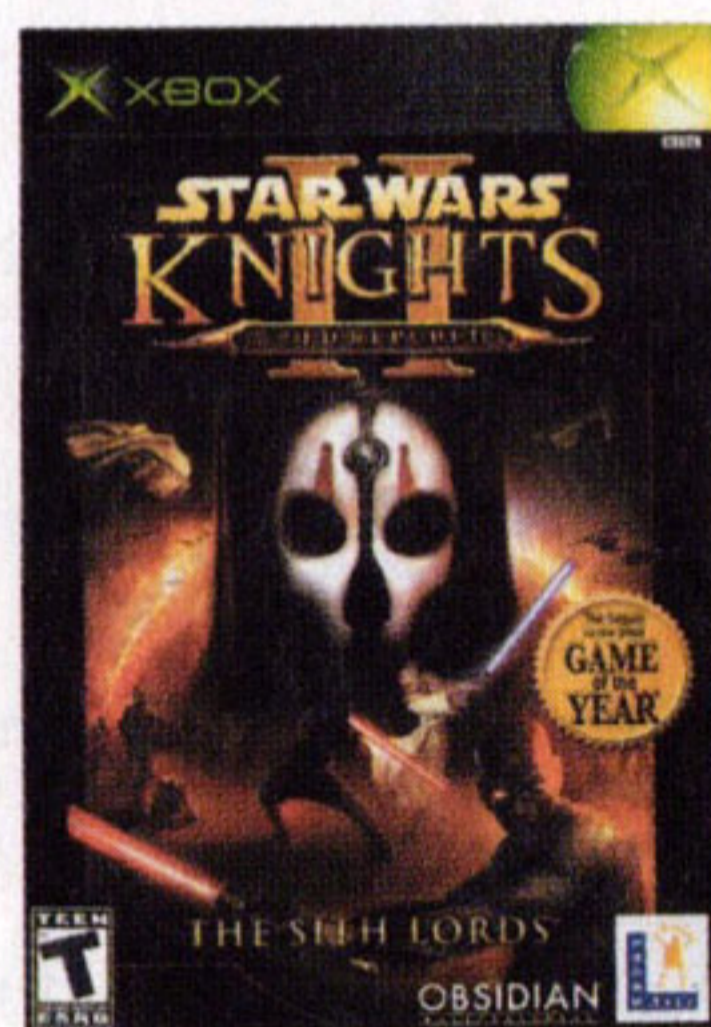
## Prince of Persia: Warrior Within

**System:** PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube  
**Release:** December 2  
For all the fear that fans of the series had about this sequel (a more mature lead character with an updated combat engine), Ubisoft proved once again that it has the right idea when it comes to this franchise. Offering up a nuanced and engaging action/platform sequel with some of the best level design ever seen in the genre will quiet the critics in no time flat. Leaping, flipping, swinging, and slashing are rarely combined with this level of artistry.



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

**System:** Xbox **Release:** December 6  
When you have an assassin droid who openly praises each malicious atrocity that you commit, it's hard to pay attention to the Jedi Order's teachings of patience and virtue. Even with a new developer, The Sith Lords rekindles the magic of the original release, and expands upon the Light and Dark Side dynamic. More sinister and less clear cut than the previous chapter, the story is brimming with personality and steeped in Star Wars mythology. They say that lightning never strikes twice, but Force lightning, on the other hand, is another story altogether. This is one jolt of excitement that is well worth subjecting yourself to.



## Viewtiful Joe 2

**System:** PlayStation 2, GameCube **Release:** December 7  
It may be more of the same, but when the source material is as excellent as Viewtiful Joe, we're not complaining. The iconic graphical style returns as well as Joe and his deliciously madcap action moveset, but he is joined in a bigger way this time by his girlfriend Sylvia. The duo messes with time to annihilate their foes, move obstacles, and solve devilish puzzles through this chunk of cannot-be-missed gaming bliss.

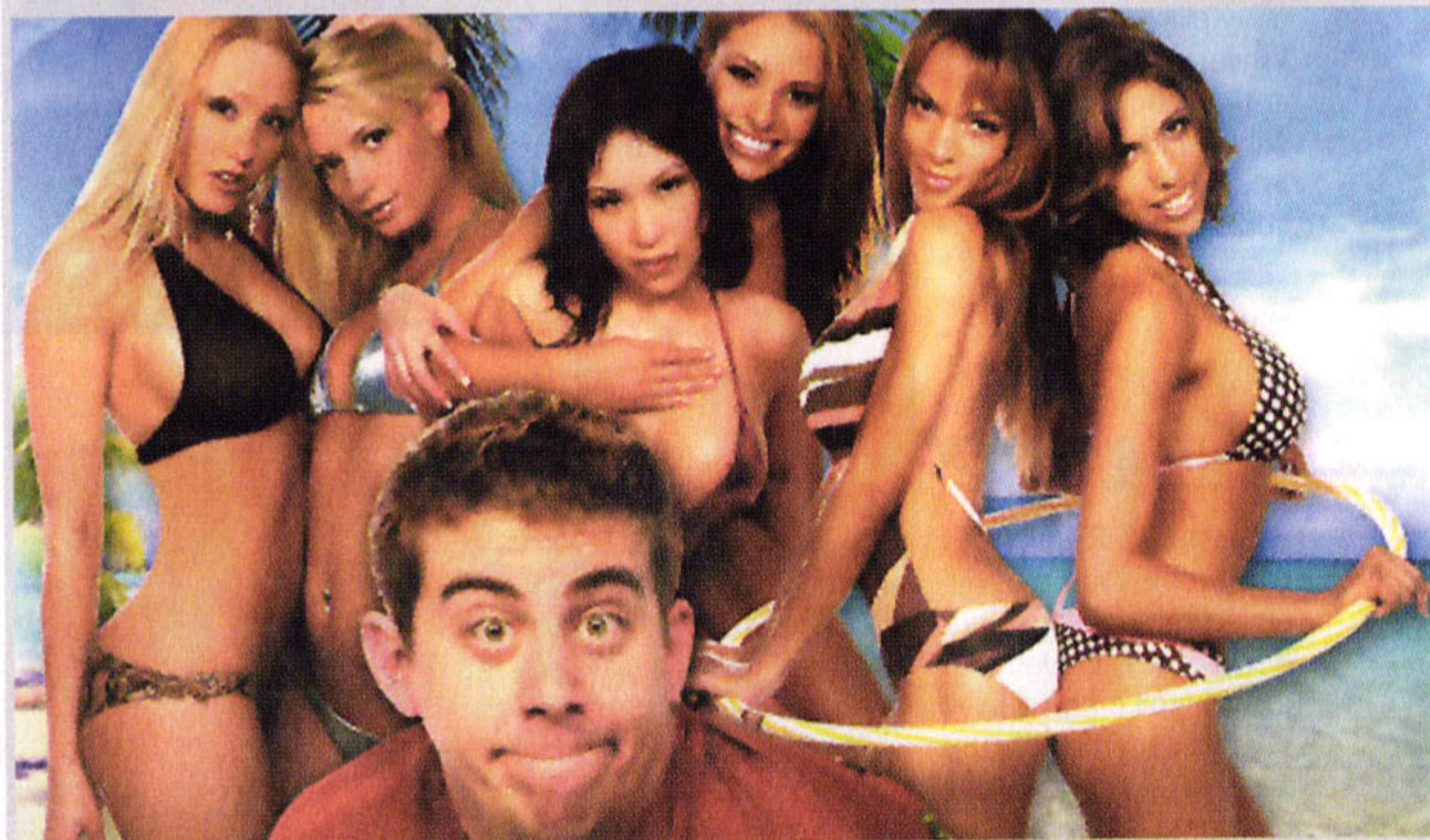


## MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf

**System:** Xbox **Release:** December 28  
Adding tons of depth to the MechAssault formula with additional vehicle types, Lone Wolf's campaign mode is even better than the first game's. But where this title really shines is on Xbox Live. In its Conquest mode, players battle each other for control of an entire solar system in a war that rages on whether you're playing or not. Few other games offer such compelling reason to go online, and the frantic, engaging gameplay will keep you hooked once you do.



## THE TOP 10 WORST GAMES OF 2004



- 1 The Guy Game**  
*Barely qualifying as a video game, The Guy Game is a trivia title that (eventually) awards the player with nearly attractive girls flashing their...um, assets. The horrible commentary team and inane questions manage to make nudity boring, and makes us wonder who is more pathetic: those who made this game or those who play it.*
- 2 Fear Factor: Unleashed**  
*Heights and eating bugs simply aren't scary when translated into video games. Then how did this game manage to fill us with such deep, bone-chilling dread? Horrible, horrible broken minigames! We still get nightmares.*
- 3 McFarlane's Evil Prophecy**  
*Todd McFarlane is well known for his creepy monster toys, but this is easily the most frightening thing he's yet unleashed. With awful controls, terrible level design, and lame characters, this game truly is an evil creation. Its only saving grace is that it is so muddy-looking and dark that it's hard to see how crappy it truly is.*
- 4 The Nightmare of Druaga: Fushigino Dungeon**  
*When you save your game, it actually forces you to quit and turn off your PS2. But when dying makes you lose almost all of your items and gameplay is just this sluggish, uninspired, and bland, then there's no reason to ever turn it back on.*
- 5 Seven Samurai 20XX**  
*Boring, linear "kill everything then go to the door" gameplay makes up the bulk of this laughable title. While intended to be a celebration of Akira Kurosawa's masterful movie, this game is more like a giant steaming dump on the filmmaker's grave.*
- 6 Way of the Samurai 2**  
*There's no one overriding problem with this game – it fails on all levels equally. The worthless controls, pathetic graphics, and pitiful combat combine into a "perfect storm" of suck. Between this and Seven Samurai 20XX, it was a very bad year to be a Japanese warrior.*
- 7 Catwoman**  
*While graphically decent, painful platforming and downright stupid combat that forces you to hit all enemies into nearby containers pushed this title down into the Basement of Shameful Games. In other words, it's about as good as the movie.*
- 8 Cy Girls**  
*We know it's a shock, but this game based on a line of dolls simply isn't very good. Your choice of two horrible camera systems awaits in this title, which makes it difficult to see the completely generic action. Plus, it has none of the clever plotting or dialogue typically associated with obscure toy lines.*
- 9 Bad Boys: Miami Takedown**  
*Loosely based on Bad Boys II but without either of its stars, Miami Takedown has the dubious distinction of being one of the few instances of "entertainment" ever created that would have been improved with the addition of Martin Lawrence.*
- 10 (tie) A Sound of Thunder/Thunderbirds/Power Rangers: Dino Thunder**  
*Basically, if it was on GBA and had the word "thunder" in the title, it sucked.*

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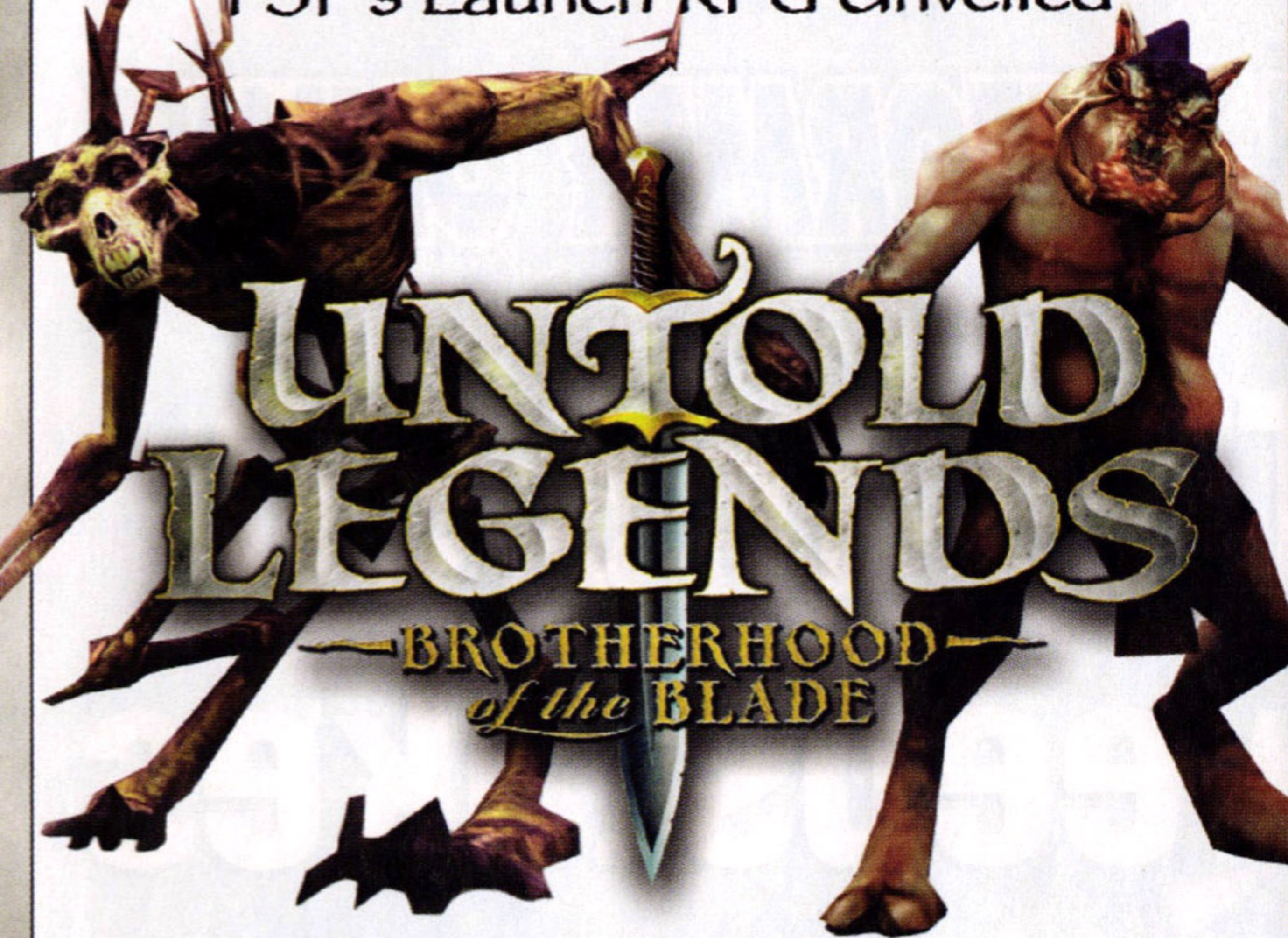
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PSP's Launch RPG Unveiled



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT  
> **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MARCH



**T**he development of launch titles for a new system is a path filled with roadblocks, pitfalls, and a woeful lack of road signs. Nobody really knows the true potential of a freshly released piece of hardware; to this day, four years after the PlayStation 2 debut, new ways of utilizing the power of the machine are still being discovered. However, in the course of our exclusive first look at Sony Online Entertainment's new project, *Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade*, it quickly became clear that this title will be able to stand on its own merits and not rely on the novelty of the PlayStation Portable hardware.

The legend that the game intends to tell is that of an unimaginably ancient city, cut off from the rest of the world by the surrounding wilds. This city of Aven has been isolated for so long that its dwellers no longer even question it. Even their histories and traditions don't acknowledge a greater world or civilization. As far as they know or care, the entire world consists of Aven and its immediate region. The wilds are a place of fear and superstition to the city folk; their greatest punishment is an exile outside the walls of Aven. However, such outcasts have formed their own society, one just as old as that of Aven, and their jealousy of the city has prompted them to keep the old knowledge alive. In classic RPG form, there will no doubt be terrible truths revealed as the player advances beyond the safety of Aven and (we assume) saves the world from ancient evil.

### You Can Do That On A Portable?

Given the fact that SOE has "Sony" as part of its name, you'd think that it would have unprecedented access to all sorts of tightly guarded internal goodies like tech specs and early development kits for the PSP. According to SOE artist Todd Luallen, however, the team had to start with literally nothing more than guesswork for the kinds of feats this hardware would be capable of. When the first actual unit arrived in the offices, though, the real work could begin. The first step of this phase was a scaling-up of all their assets and expectations. The PSP's power far outstripped the estimates SOE had come up with.

The capabilities of Sony's portable are breathtaking. First, consider a monster model with a stunning level of detail. Then put several of them onscreen at the same time, as well as the player's avatar. Oh, and it's snowing — let's draw individual snowflakes drifting through the air. How about some real-time shadows, lighting, and gorgeous particle effects for those monsters? And perhaps some sparkly spell effects coming off of the player character and baddies alike. Put it all in smoothly animated motion, and you've got a feel for what *Untold Legends* looks like. Of course, it would be a shame to limit the love to the visually oriented abilities of the hardware. That's why you've got limited voice work for characters, ambient sounds like water rushing and fire crackling, and four-player wireless co-op.



■ Because no fantasy game is complete without dual-wielding



■ Monster designs are varied and unique



■ "No spiders will wreck my ghost slumber party!"



■ Monster designs are varied and unique

The most impressive element, though, is the gigantic randomly generated levels. For one thing, there are over 100 of them. These are created on the fly (though you can save a map if you're not done with it yet and have to take a break) according to a set of criteria laid down by the designers. Everything about a particular level is hand-tweaked – the size and number of rooms, weather, lighting, enemy density and types – you name it. The designers

are even able to specify encounters, set pieces, or story events to occur at a certain percentage of the way through a stage. Yes, other games have done it before, but Untold Legends takes it to a new level by piecing them together tile-by-tile rather than room-by-room. In layman's terms, this means that the building blocks that the PSP works with when making a map are much smaller than those in a standard game, which allows for far greater diversity

between each instance.

Over and above the huge number of levels in the game, Untold Legends offers plenty more content on that little UMD disc for players to chew on. Most of your avatar's equipment shows up cosmetically, and there's a small amount of customization available in the form of three or four choices each for skin color, hair color, and hairstyle. There are more than 70 total models for enemies and NPCs, and the designers can make special versions of the regular models to give them a different

coloration or new AI and abilities to spice things up a bit. We don't know what the exact number of unique monster types is, but given the presence of over 50 sub-bosses and six or seven true bosses, you can bet that there will be plenty one way or the other. The loot you find varies in quality and effect as much as that of the classic Diablo II, and uses a similar system of prefixes and suffixes to make for a nearly endless supply of distinct items. There will, of course, also be unique named equipment of great power for you to drool over.

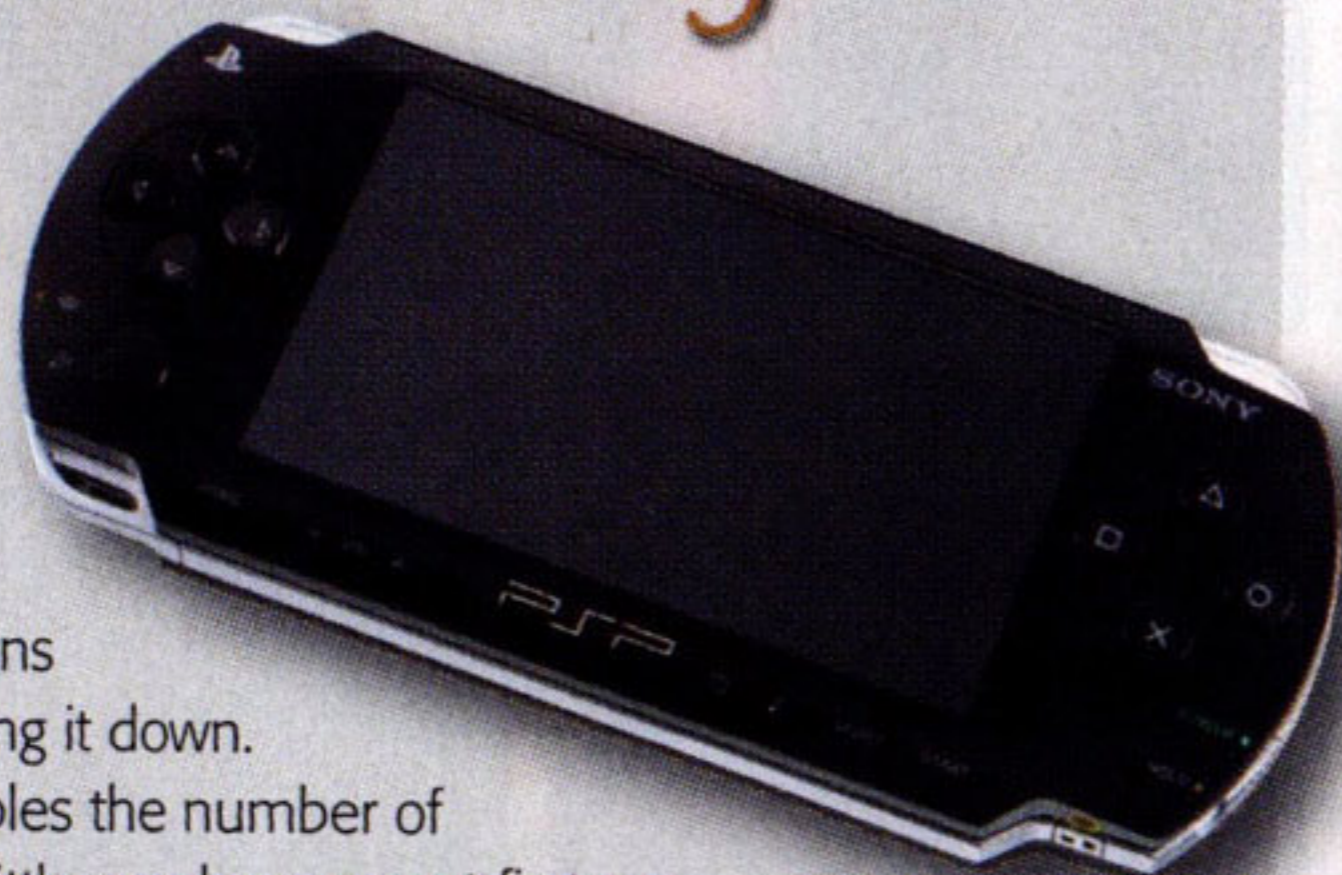
(continued on page 85)

## Controlling Your Destiny

As the PSP is two buttons shy of a PS2 controller, adjustments must be made to accommodate controlling an action/RPG on the unit.

The basic scheme is almost identical to Champions of Norrath, but the right shoulder button serves as a shift key, which changes the functions of any other button press while holding it down.

This handy mechanic effectively doubles the number of face buttons on the PSP, and if it's a little cumbersome at first, we got used to it quickly – 15 minutes into our playtime with Untold Legends, we had no trouble whatsoever smashing up the hordes of evil. On a note to those with big hands, though, the PSP's analog stick is placed so close to the edge of the unit that your left thumb can get a little cramped during long play sessions.



■ Bathing in lightning is the only way to remove dungeon-stink



## Knight

These doughty warriors are also known as the Shaeluun Maul and utilize the secret combat arts of their order to smite their enemies. Each individual knight is a descendant of a ceremoniously arranged union between two other knights, and is thus pure of blood and ordained from birth to join the order. Probably the most archetypal of the four playable classes in Untold Legends, the Knight goes about his business in the old-fashioned way: beating things to a pulp. On top of being the most melee-oriented of the characters, the Knight can use his unique skills such as Aura of Valor to bestow beneficial effects that aid himself and his allies in battle. This powerful ability increases the rate of experience gain for the Knight and his companions – a definite party favorite.

## Wildling

These fierce berserkers are chosen based on their incredible strength, perseverance, and hunger for vengeance. They are so dedicated to battle and bloodshed, in fact, that it's a common belief among the people of Untold Legends that Wildlings are infected with some sort of bizarre disease. All of that aside, everyone loves a hybrid class, and the Wildling is a pretty cool one. She can certainly hold her own in melee, but she also possesses great skill with throwing weapons, allowing her to soften up her enemies before they reach her. We don't know how the whole "dedicating your life to bloody vengeance" concept works out in gameplay, but we can only assume that it will be suitably entertaining.

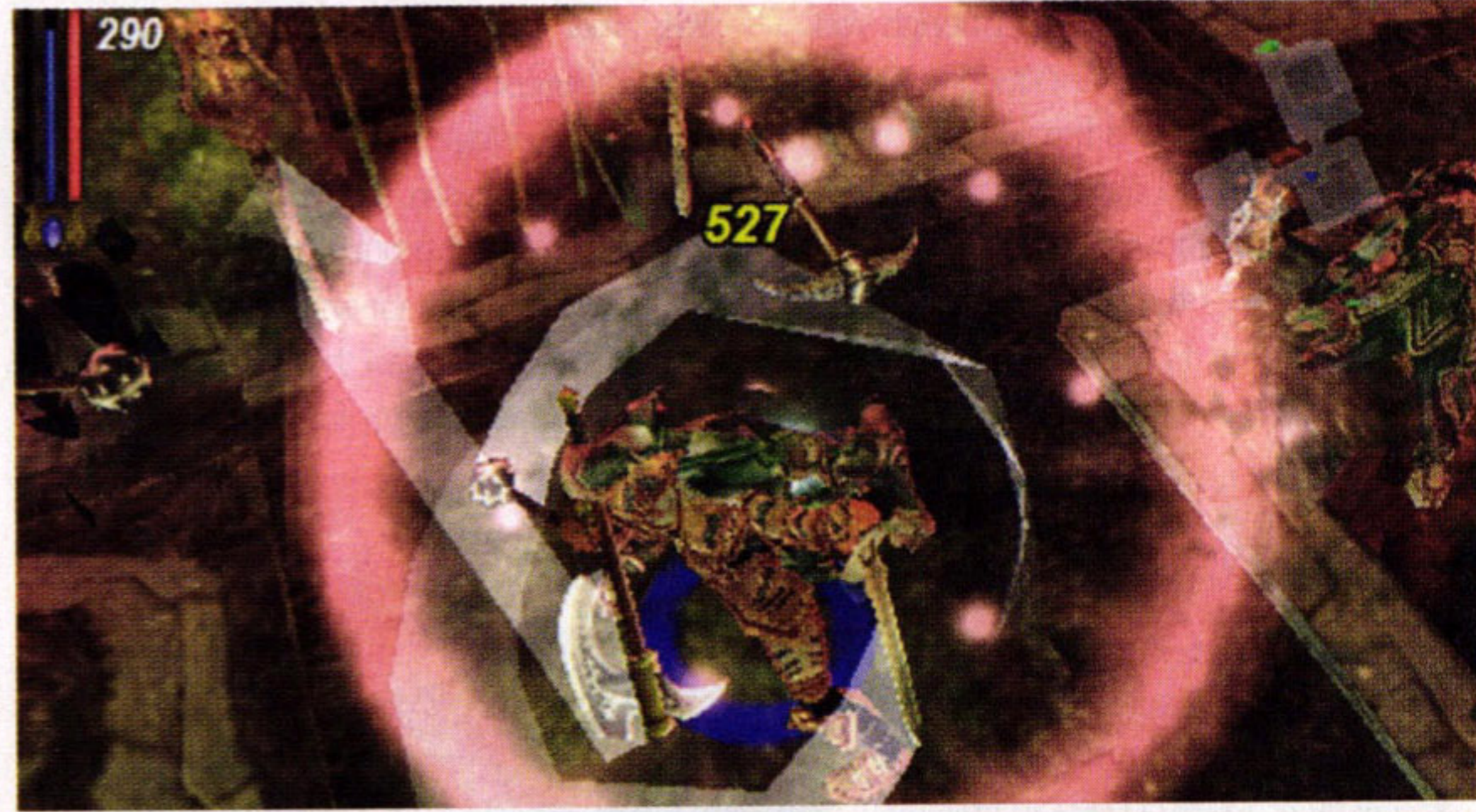
## Druid

If Greenpeace had access to mystical powers (and a propensity toward violence), they'd be Druids in Untold Legends. Sensing a growing corruption in the land, the Druids of the world have come forth to cleanse it wherever it may be. With his ability to call on the beasts of the natural world to protect and aid him, the Druid is a force to be reckoned with. The pets he can summon and his nature magic make the Druid more of an indirect and strategic class than most. He is also the primary healing class in Untold Legends, with skills such as the aura-like Nature's Medicine, which increases you and your allies' regeneration rates – easily making them sought-after as companions.

## Alchemist

A scientist of incredible brilliance, extreme curiosity, little regard for consequences, and the closest thing Untold Legends has to a standard mage, the Alchemist brings something a little different to the table. Though she is not helpless in melee combat, her skills focus mainly on doing damage from afar and staying away from her enemies. Besides the obvious fireballs and such that are her bread and butter, the Alchemist can actually transmute stored money into potions and even create golems. Best part about the class? You can explode your faithful golem servant to damage everything around it. Sacrificing your minions for personal gain: Priceless.

# A New Breed of Hero





■ Enemies have plenty of special abilities too



■ Behold – particles on a handheld!

### Tried, True, But Also New

At first glance, Untold Legends has a lot in common with tried-and-true action/RPGs like Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance and SOE's own Champions of Norrath. Skill trees, character statistics and classes, and an extensive inventory system all come as no surprise. Under the hood of both the technical aspects and design philosophies of the game, though, it quickly becomes clear that Untold Legends pays homage to its forebears rather than trying to recreate them. From the story to the down-and-dirty coding, this title has been built from the ground up for the PSP, minimizing its disadvantages and making the most of the system's strengths.

Since Untold Legends is on a portable platform, the designers want it to be simple, intuitive, and worthwhile to get on the bus, boot up the system, hook up with anyone in range for some wireless multiplayer, and have a meaningful play session in the time it takes to get to

Legends also moves into newer, more interesting ground in terms of skills. For one thing, the character classes (see page 84), break somewhat from the heroic fantasy mold – an Alchemist will play quite differently than the standard magic-slinging nuke machine we like to call a wizard. One ability that has already been confirmed is an odd twist on a regular old charm spell. When an enemy falls under the sway of this skill, it will obviously become friendly to the player and attack his or her enemies. Its statistics will also be buffed up far beyond its normal power level. When the charm wears off, though, it retains its newfound power and comes after the player again. A careful balancing of risk versus reward will be necessary to keep from reloading your last save.

Our hands-on time with an early build of Untold Legends demonstrated, in no uncertain terms, that all of these disparate elements are well on their way to making a fun game. Adventuring out from the city,

hope for that "über" loot drop. Taking in the rich ambience provided by the lush graphics is a treat. The real kicker, though, is doing it all with a friend or three. Barring some dreadful development implosion, Untold Legends will bring its own flavor of the action/RPG experience to portables like we never imagined would be possible.

With a feature list that reads more like a forthcoming triple-A console title than a launch game on a new portable machine, Untold Legends has enough going for it to make us even more impatient for the U.S. PSP debut. If what we've seen of Untold Legends so far is indicative of its quality, as well as the possibilities of gaming on the go in the future, we're in for a very entertaining 2005. ■ ■ ■

**“Adventuring out from the city, smoothly dispatching hordes of pig-men, and fighting unique bosses in fantastic settings is all part of the package – and we only saw a very small portion of the full game.”**

your destination. The entire structure of the game is set up to let players digest it in chunks of time as small as a few minutes. Even if you out-level the buddy you've been questing with, you can still play together – the monsters you go up against will scale to the power level of your party.

While players will certainly have access to fantasy standbys like lightning bolts and healing spells, Untold


smoothly dispatching hordes of pig-men, and fighting unique bosses in fantastic settings is all part of the package – and we only saw a very small portion of the full game. Exploring the huge maps that the random generator cranks out is a blast thanks to the enemy variation and the ever-present



■ It's against the rules for female adventurers to armor their thighs, apparently



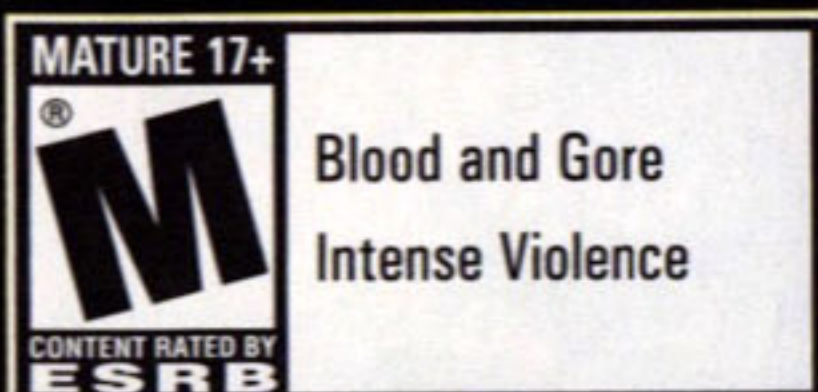
■ Nothing like a big area-of-effect spell to impress the ladies



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PlayStation®2

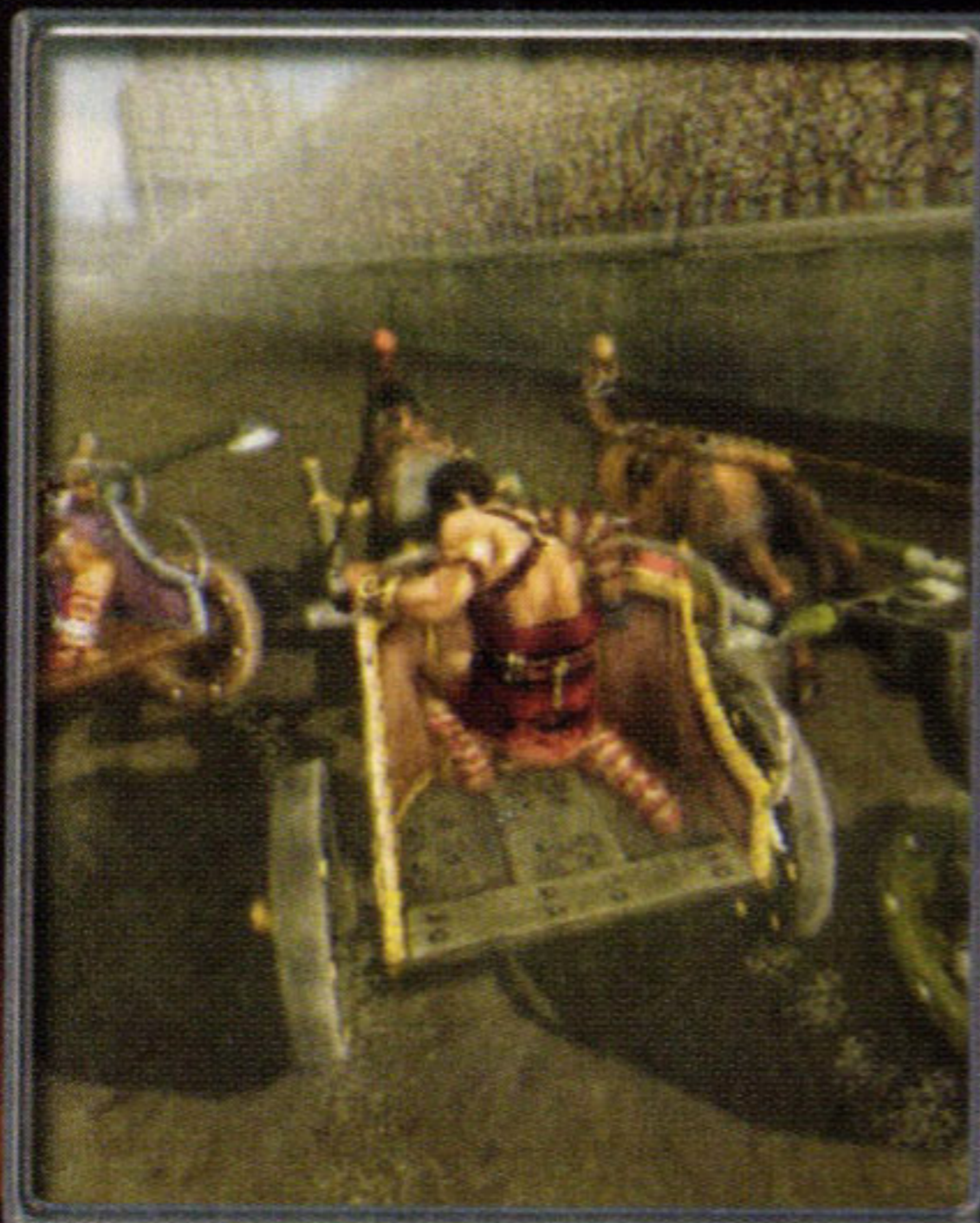




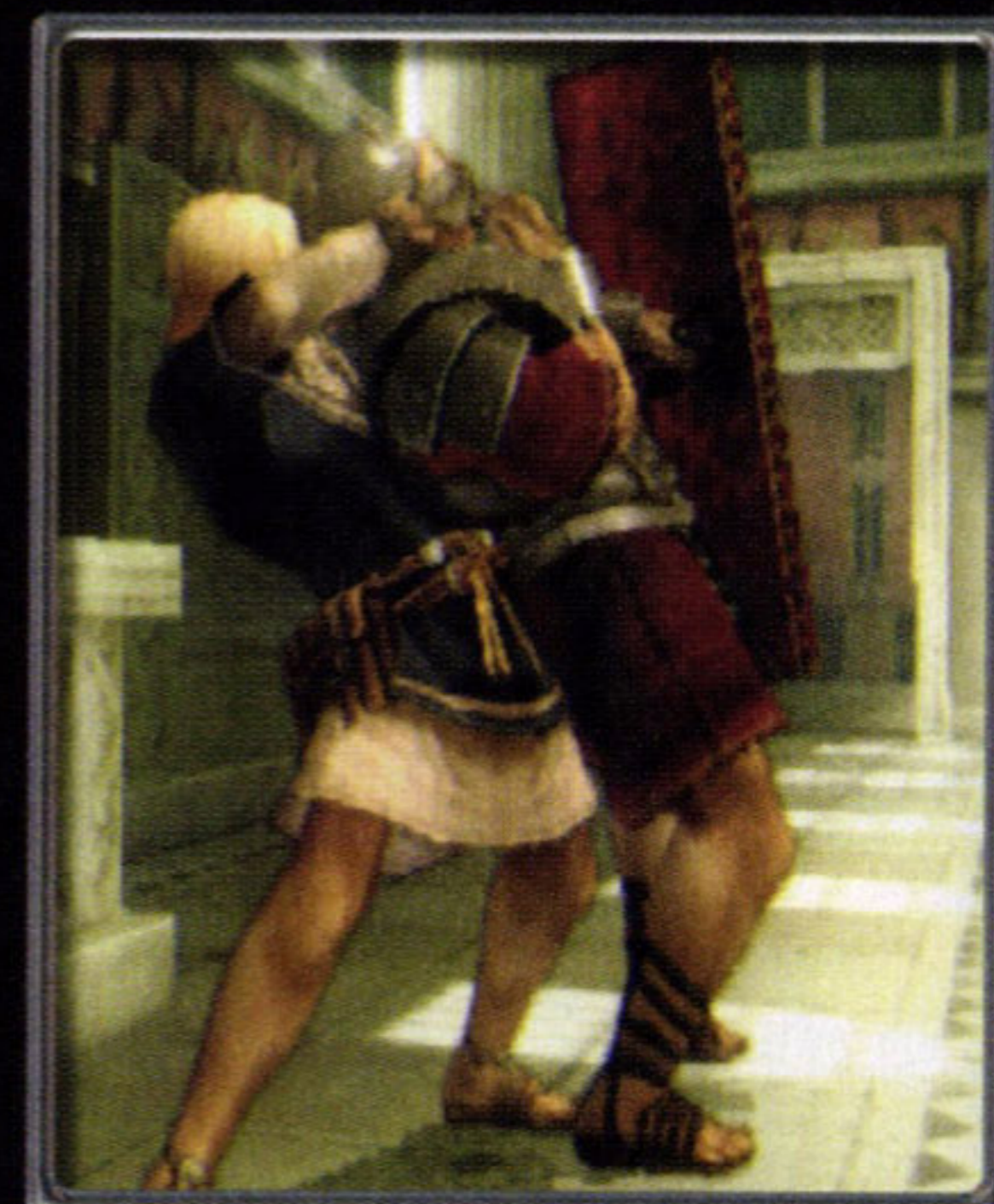
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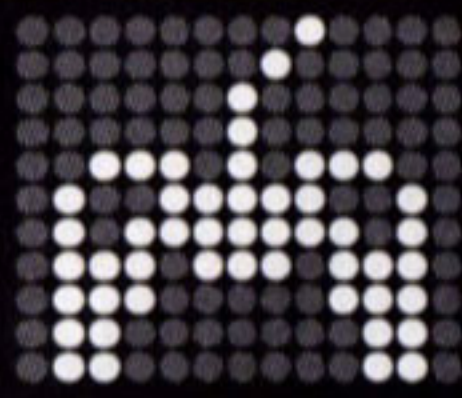
44 B.C. ROMAN EMPIRE

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# PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

## Rainbow Six: Lockdown

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT  
> **DEVELOPER** RED STORM (PS2), UBISOFT MONTREAL (XBOX/PC) > **RELEASE** SPRING

### TWO MORE SIXES

**T**he already-large library of Tom Clancy shooters is about to get even bigger. Ubisoft has unveiled the newest addition to the family: Rainbow Six: Lockdown. Like Ghost Recon 2, the PS2 and Xbox releases will be noticeably different, although they will share the same name (like most Clancy games, the PC version will be nearly identical to the Xbox). It seems that Ubisoft has heard the complaints that the Clancy shooters are all too similar and implemented some major – and much needed – changes. Regardless of which version you pick up, Rainbow Six: Lockdown has some new features in store.

The single-player campaign will be largely the same in either version. Rather than being stuck with the same three teammates as you were before, you will now have a pool of 12 troops to choose from, each with his or her own skills. You can choose your squad mates and their weapons based on the mission

briefing and command them with more ease than ever before, thanks to a new contextual order system – the command menu will pop up onscreen when near doors or other important points so you can issue your orders. Your squad won't execute until you issue a Zulu Go Code, however, giving you time to get into position.

The command menu isn't the only thing that's changed. The biggest difference is how sniper missions are treated. To increase realism, only your squad's sniper can sharpshoot, and several designated sniper stages have been added. You'll play a mission as the sniper and cover the Rainbow team, then replay the same mission as the squad. With this change, Ubisoft hopes to further highlight how specialized each character is and add new depth to campaign mode. However, Ubisoft knows online play is a huge draw for this franchise, and has planned unique features for each release.





■ The Xbox version features a better lighting engine than the PS2



■ Attempts to steal early copies of the new issue of Game Informer have never been successful

## PlayStation 2

The PS2 release will feature an expanded focus on the community aspect of the game, including friends lists, matchmaking, and other features to more closely mimic those of Xbox Live. It will also sport two exclusive maps, the ability to play as mercenaries, and a new mode called Rivalry. In this game type, the two teams will race to be the first to complete a set of objectives. For example, one team may have to hack into a computer and defend it, while the other must protect it from being hacked. The first team to complete two of their three objectives wins.

## Xbox

Improved graphics with real-time light and shadows will appear on the Xbox version. While this iteration won't feature playable mercs or the Rivalry mode, it does include the exciting Career mode, which allows players to create a unique online character. There are four character classes to choose from including Spec Ops, Commando, Engineer, and Medic. Each class has its own specialty, and playing online matches earns experience points that can be used to upgrade a character's skills. Each skill has sub-skills, a character's appearance can be altered, and equipment can be purchased, allowing for highly individualized characters. The characters created in Rainbow Six: Lockdown may even be usable in future Clancy shooters to add incentive to truly perfect your online avatar. ■ ■ ■



■ "I knew it! The Seaweed Monster was Old Man Withers after all! We have to tell Scooby and the gang!"

**LOCKER ROOM**

SERVICE RECORD HELP

NAME	Mahub
SPECIALIZATION	COMMANDO
SERVICE STARTED	20/10/2004
CURRENT LEVEL	27
NEXT LEVEL	0%
CREDITS	226840
WEAPON OF CHOICE	MP10
SIDEARM OF CHOICE	P592
MEDALS OBTAINED	3

KYRON - Mahub

■ All your important stats are tracked in career mode

BACK

**LOCKER ROOM**

SKILLS MANAGEMENT HELP

COMMANDO

TRAINING POINT : 1

- ASSAULT RIFLES
- HEAVY WEAPONS
- MEDIUM ARMOR
- HEAVY ARMOR
- GRENADIER
- ENHANCED RECOVERY
- RIGID SHIELD

HEAVY WEAPONS

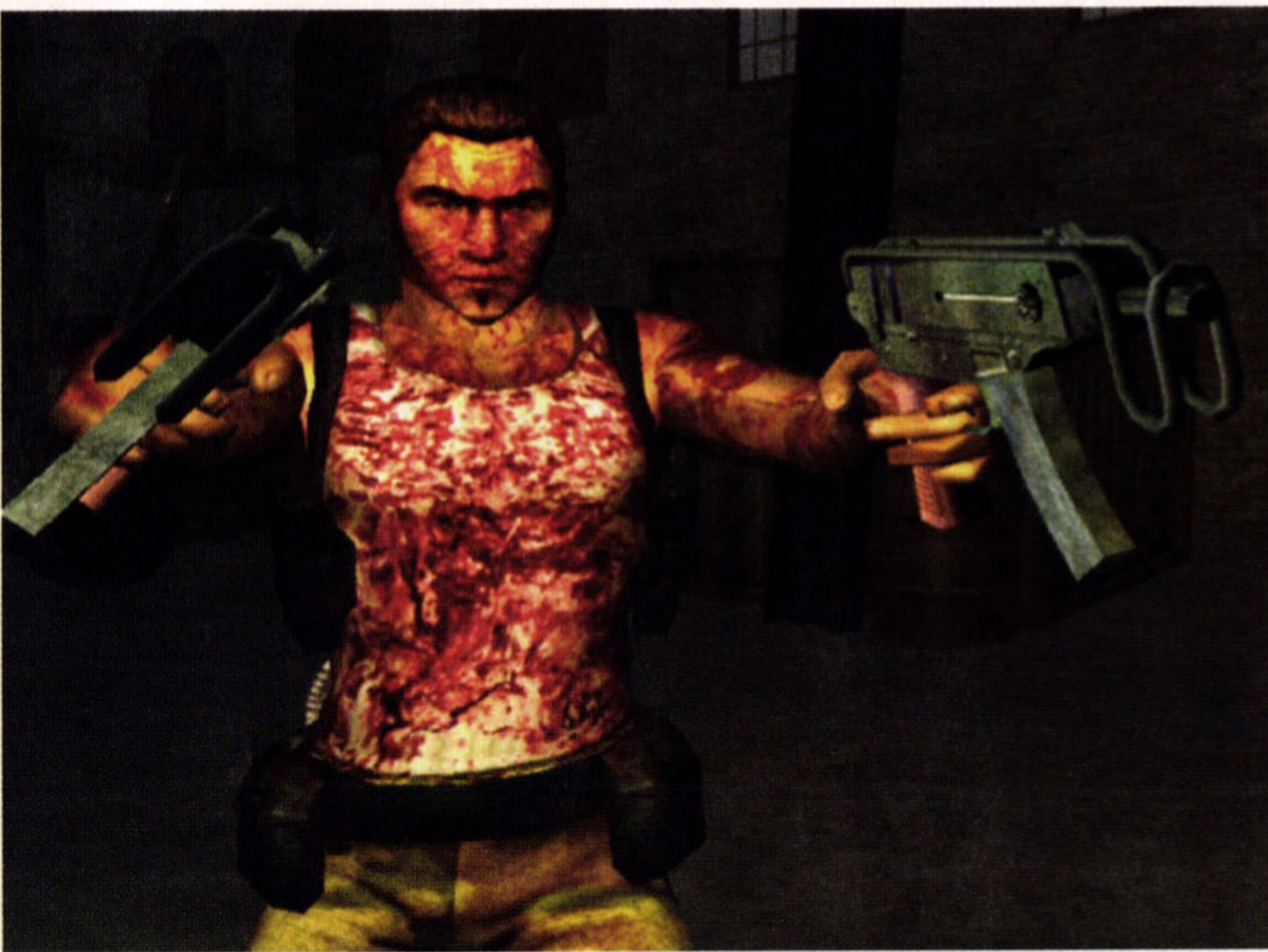
ACCURACY	★ ★ ★
DAMAGE	★ ★ ★
RELOAD	★ ★ ★

GRANTS THE ABILITY TO USE HEAVY WEAPONS.

KYRON - Mahub

■ Every skill has sub-skills, which can be individually tweaked

BACK SELECT



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

# The Suffering: Ties That Bind

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** SURREAL SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** FALL

## FREEDOM OF CHOICE

**O**ne of the major themes of the first game was the suffering of prison," says Surreal Software president Alan Patmore, "This game is about the suffering and horrors of poverty." The game in question is *The Suffering: Ties That Bind*, the second in a series starring Torque, a violent criminal who may or may not have murdered his family. Rather than the prison setting of the first game, *Ties That Bind* takes place in the slums of Baltimore, in areas that Patmore describes as "an urban prison." While themes of pain, imprisonment, and madness run through both games, Surreal Software has many changes in store for the second *Suffering* title to ensure that the sequel improves on the

original in as many ways as possible.

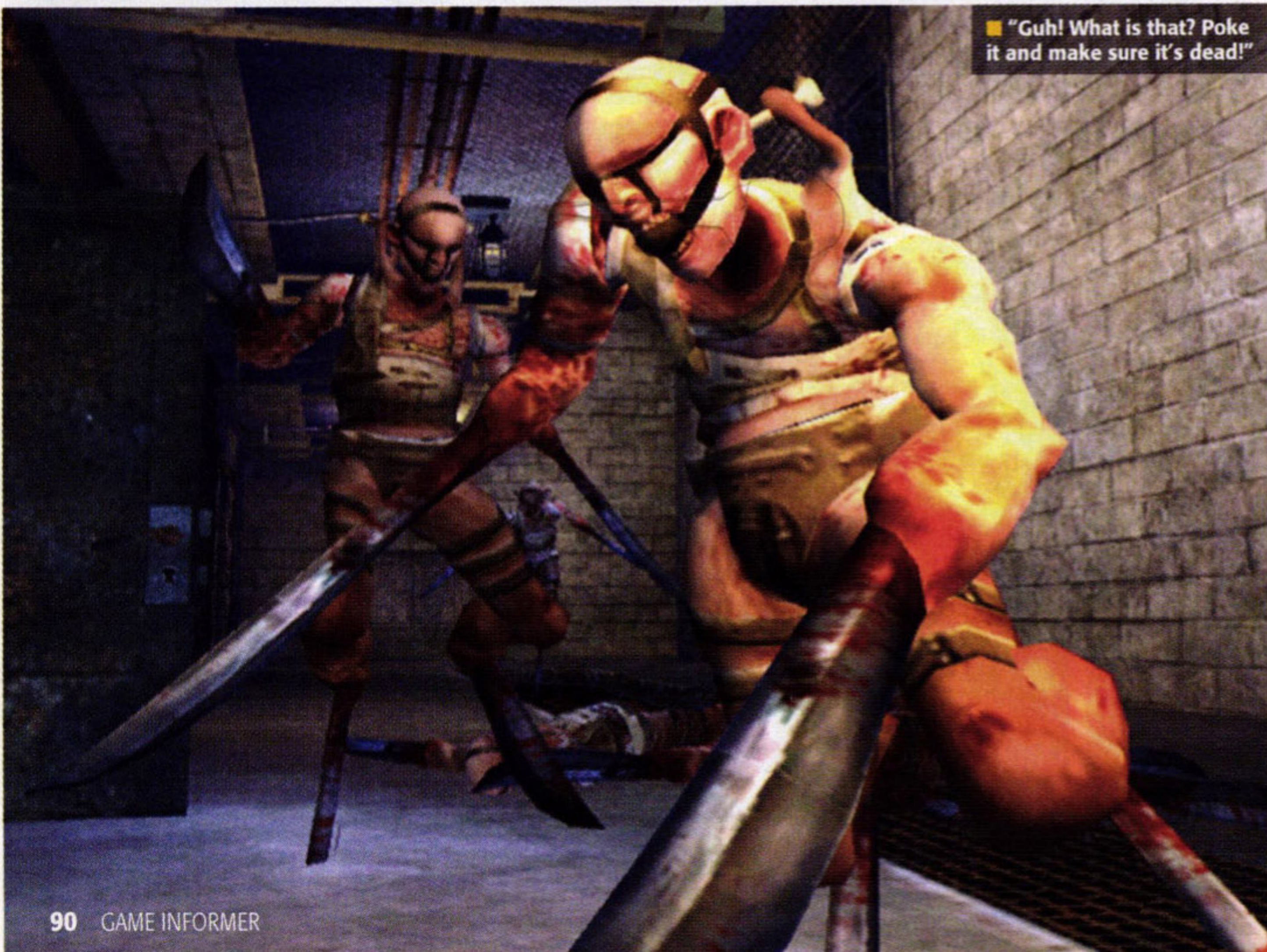
In *The Suffering*, a series of moral choices made throughout the game determined which of three endings the player earned. If you have a save file from *The Suffering*, the ending you earned will determine which of three beginnings you'll play through in *Ties That Bind*, and the morality system returns with a greater impact on how the story unfolds. Certain characters may accompany you if the dark path is taken, and ignore you if you lean towards the light. The combination of the beginning you earned and the way you play will also significantly affect the story. If you earned the evil ending of *The Suffering*, the ghost of Torque's wife Carmen will treat you suspiciously even if you are

taking the good path. With several different ways to play through the game, Surreal Software hopes *Ties That Bind* offers incentive to play through the game several times.

The morality system also has a noticeable effect on Torque's greatest weapon, the ability to turn into a raging monster. This time around, the look of the beast will change significantly based on how you play, and will even earn alignment-specific abilities. The light and dark paths will both offer unique powers, while the neutral path results in the least powerful insanity form. Regardless of how you play, you will encounter more inhuman beasts than before. *Ties That Bind* features several new monster types, as well as significant variations on each. Many will

and as the grim, mentally unstable convict, you must battle through the demon-infested slums of Baltimore to face him in a final confrontation.

While there is a new setting and new enemies, most of what fans liked about *The Suffering* will return with improvements. Surreal promises that *Ties That Bind* will blend action and horror even more successfully than the first, and the puzzles will remain grounded in the real world. The stages will be larger and less linear, and the clunky inventory system has been replaced with a weapon management scheme nearly identical to that found in *Halo 2*. Not only does this eliminate the cumbersome former system, it also ratchets up the intensity by limiting the amount of firepower the player can carry. This change, along with all others Surreal has made, was designed to improve both the horror and action elements of the game to create a true hybrid of the two genres. Based on what we've seen, *Ties That Bind* has the potential to be an intense, disturbing experience that both appeases and unsettles players. And we mean that in the best possible way. ■ ■ ■



■ "Guh! What is that? Poke it and make sure it's dead!"

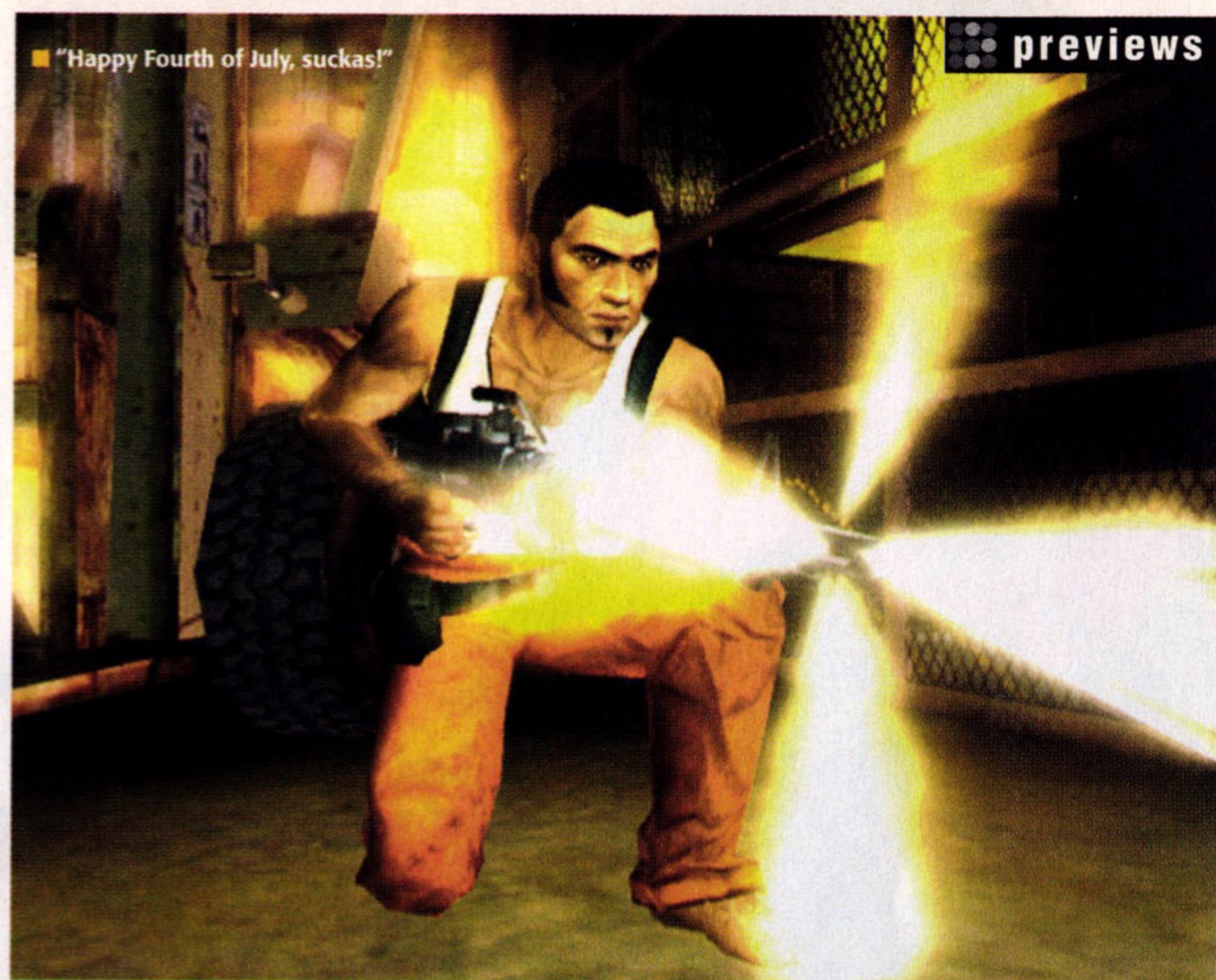
return from the original game, as will several characters like the nefarious Dr. Killjoy. Your main foe, while new to the series, is a man with a long history with Torque. The crime lord Blackmore may be the man truly responsible for the death of Torque's family,



■ Torque is a bad man, but we certainly admire his impeccably groomed facial hair



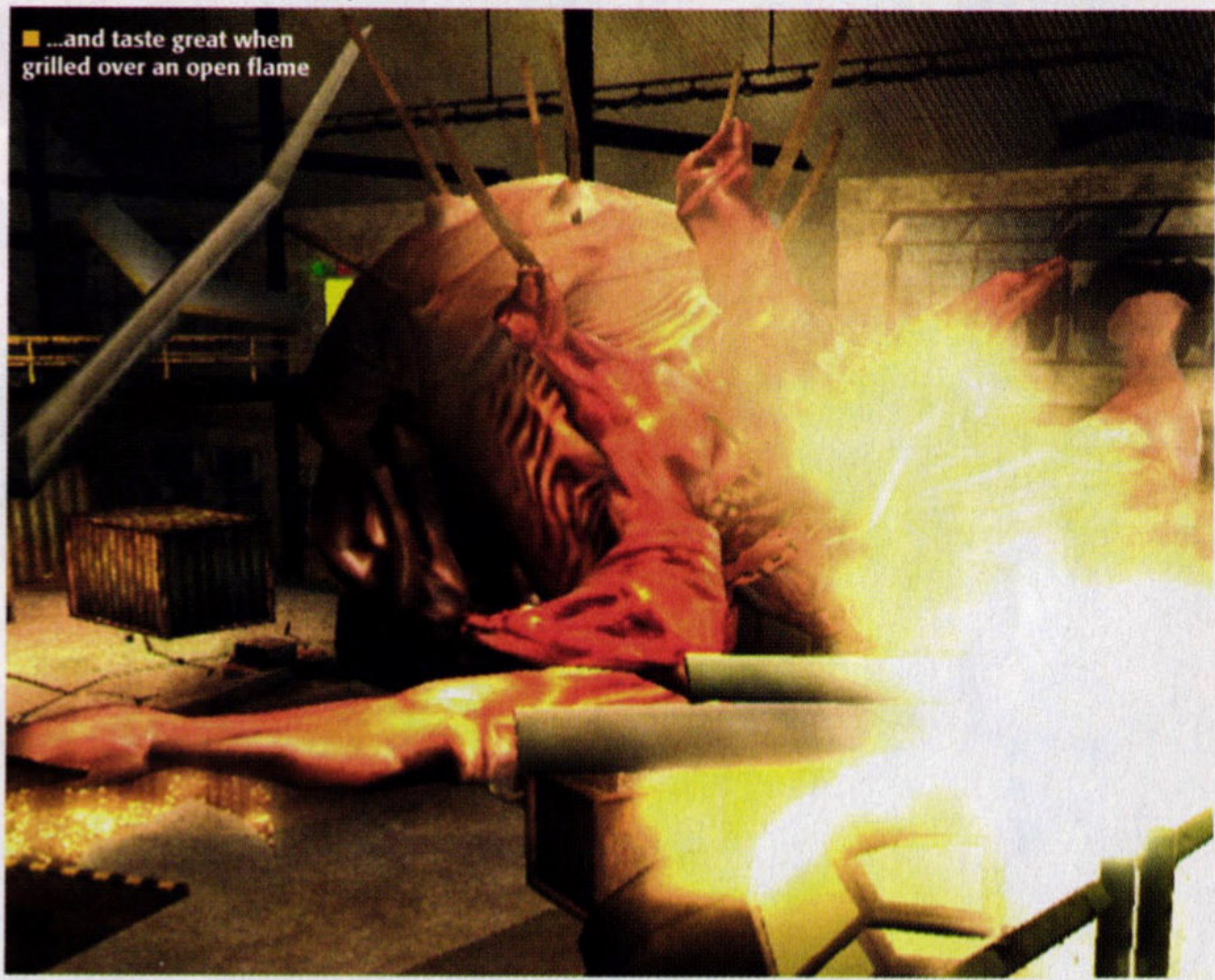
■ "Yeah, I know I look gross, but do you have any idea how hard it is to find a decent outfit when you have freakin' sword limbs?!"



■ "Happy Fourth of July, suckas!"



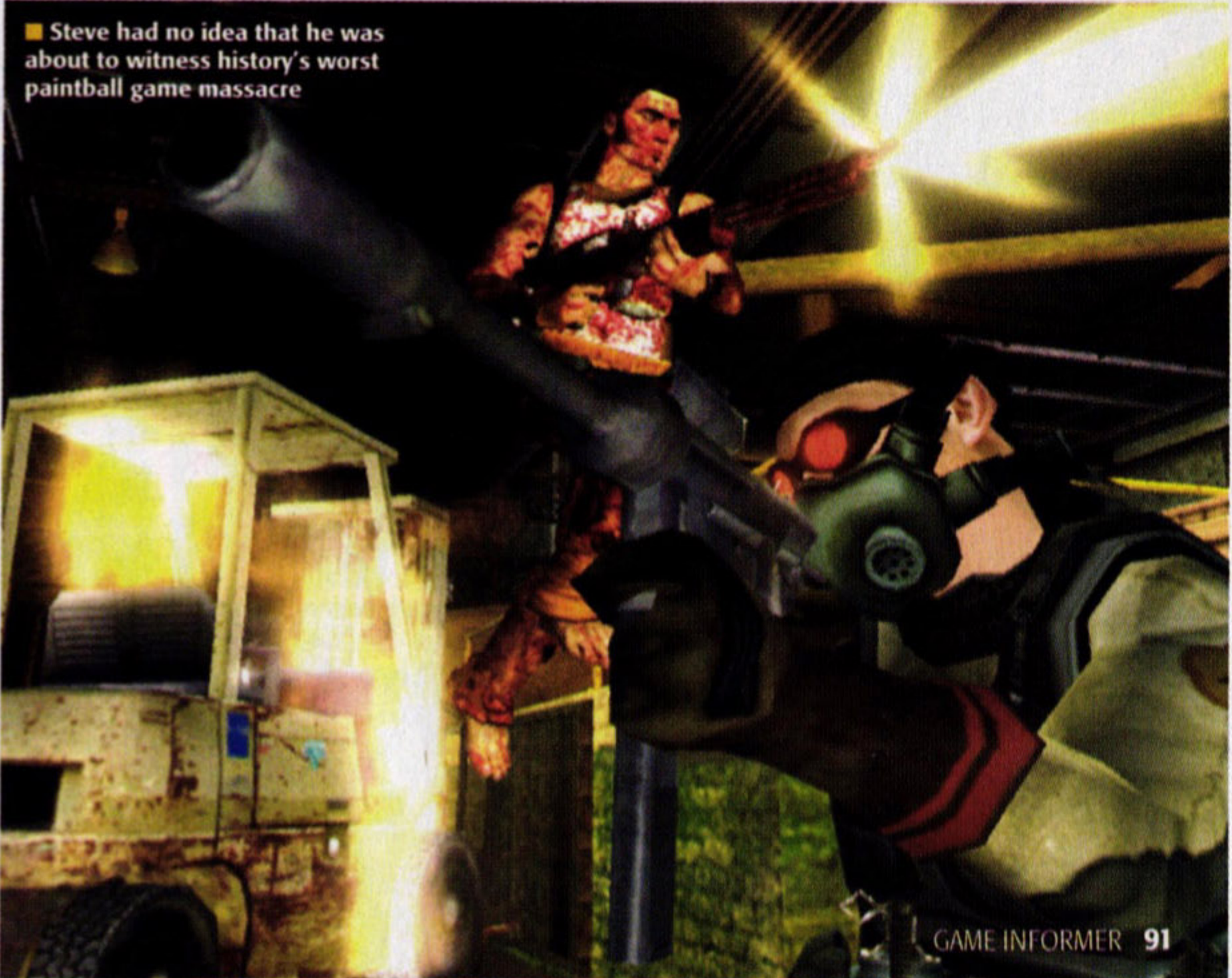
■ Some of the new creatures are absolutely huge...



■ ...and taste great when grilled over an open flame



■ "This is the worst prom ever."



■ Steve had no idea that he was about to witness history's worst paintball game massacre



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# Tides of men will face the tides of war. February 2005



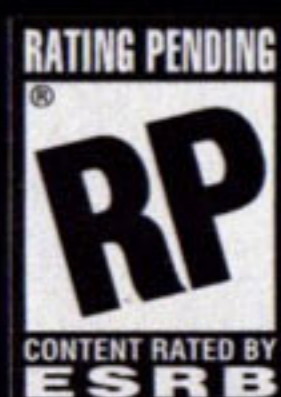
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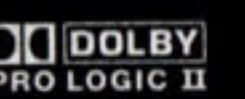


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PlayStation®2



# RESSEN III

決戦

A Kou Shibusawa Production | An Action Strategy Game



■ "This guy looks like a chump. His wallet is mine!"

XBOX 2 | PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

# The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS > **DEVELOPER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS > **RELEASE** WINTER

## LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

Last October, Game Informer took a glimpse into the future of gaming and brought the world its first look at a next-generation title in development: The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. Bethesda's next entry in the revered Elder Scrolls series, Oblivion is slated for release on Xbox 2 and potentially the PlayStation 3 as well. Since it is such an important title, secrecy around it is tight, but we still managed to persuade Bethesda's executive producer Todd Howard to share a few more details on the highly anticipated project.

As the screenshots clearly demonstrate, graphics are a huge part of Oblivion's appeal, but the next generation of consoles will be able to bring much more to games. Improved NPC AI is another feature Bethesda is touting as a major change. Characters will exist 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the world of Oblivion, and will have their own goals and motivations. "What we're focusing on now is how the AI affects the player, how you actually see

that stuff happening," says Howard. "One of the things we found we could do is create other 'adventurers.' Guys who go around the world and hunt for treasure, slay creatures, and explore dungeons. So we're experimenting with how the player could interact with them easily and see all this cool behavior."

The improved intelligence of the NPCs and the incredible visuals of the game also guarantee the presence of some visceral, intense combat. When asked about the game's swordplay elements, Howard answered, "We're tweaking the combat system now that bows and magic are going in. We're adding the special skill moves you can learn and trying to get the fight moving around more, so the player won't just be standing there clicking away non-stop. We're layering in the Havok physics system more into the combat, which helps push all the people around in fun ways. We're really committed to getting that feel of people bashing swords into each other."

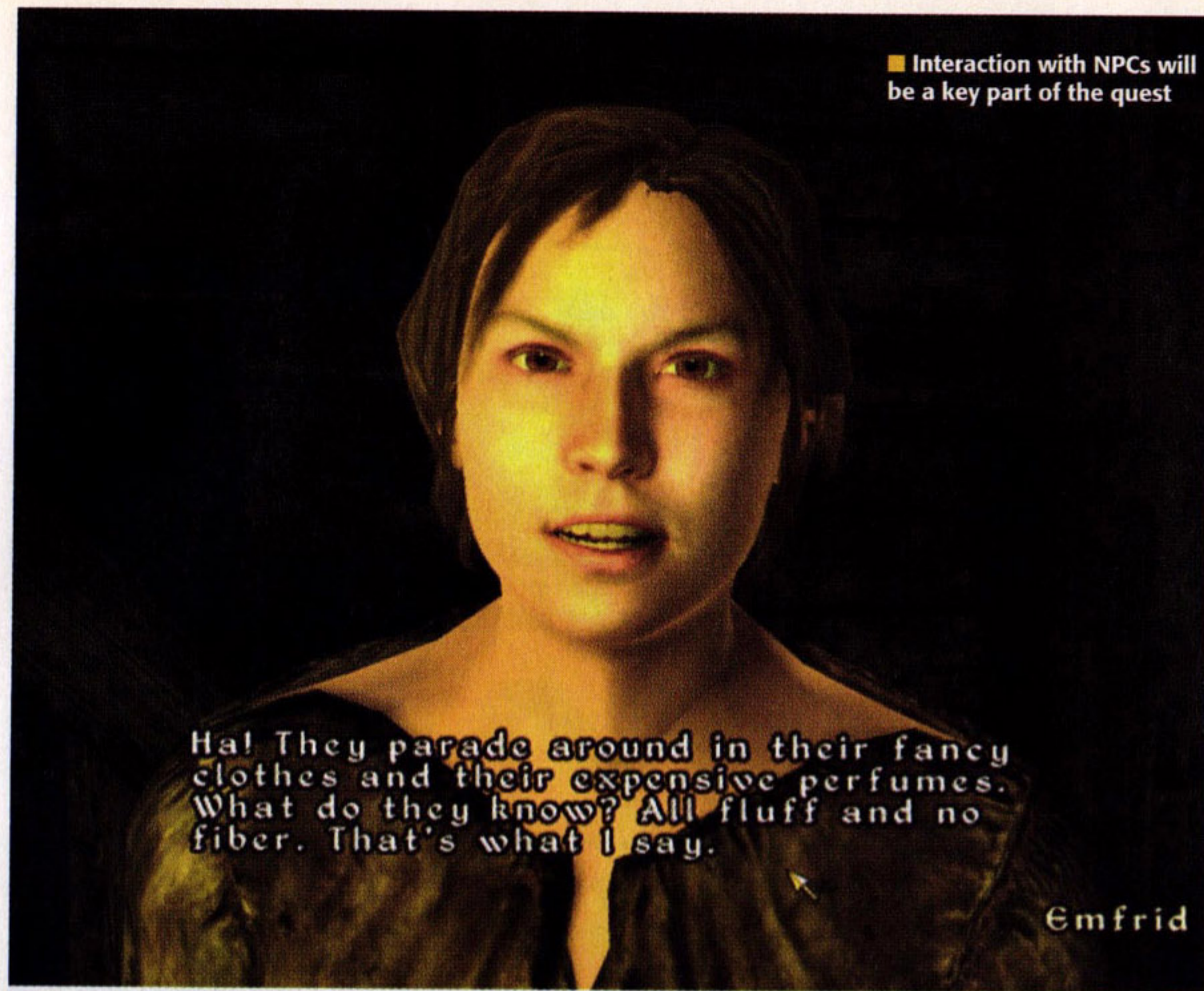
The emphasis on combat and the graphics are two things Bethesda is counting on in luring new gamers into the somewhat daunting RPG genre. While role-playing games can tend to be dense and confusing to newbies, Howard is certain Oblivion will be able to overcome that barrier. "There are little things they expect in terms of interface and feedback that make it more appealing," he says. "In Oblivion, when you shoot an arrow at somebody, if you hit them, it hits, blood comes out, and it sticks in their armor. It feels very real; it feels like you actually did it. In a previous generation, your character skill may have had you miss, and if you hit, a damage number would have



floated above his head. The same things are happening in both examples, but one is presented in a way everyone understands and is entertained by." We have no doubt that The Elder Scrolls IV will entertain, but suspect that it will do much more than that. Based on what we've seen, we expect to be completely blown away when Oblivion hits next generation consoles shortly after they release. ■ ■ ■



■ Interaction with NPCs will be a key part of the quest

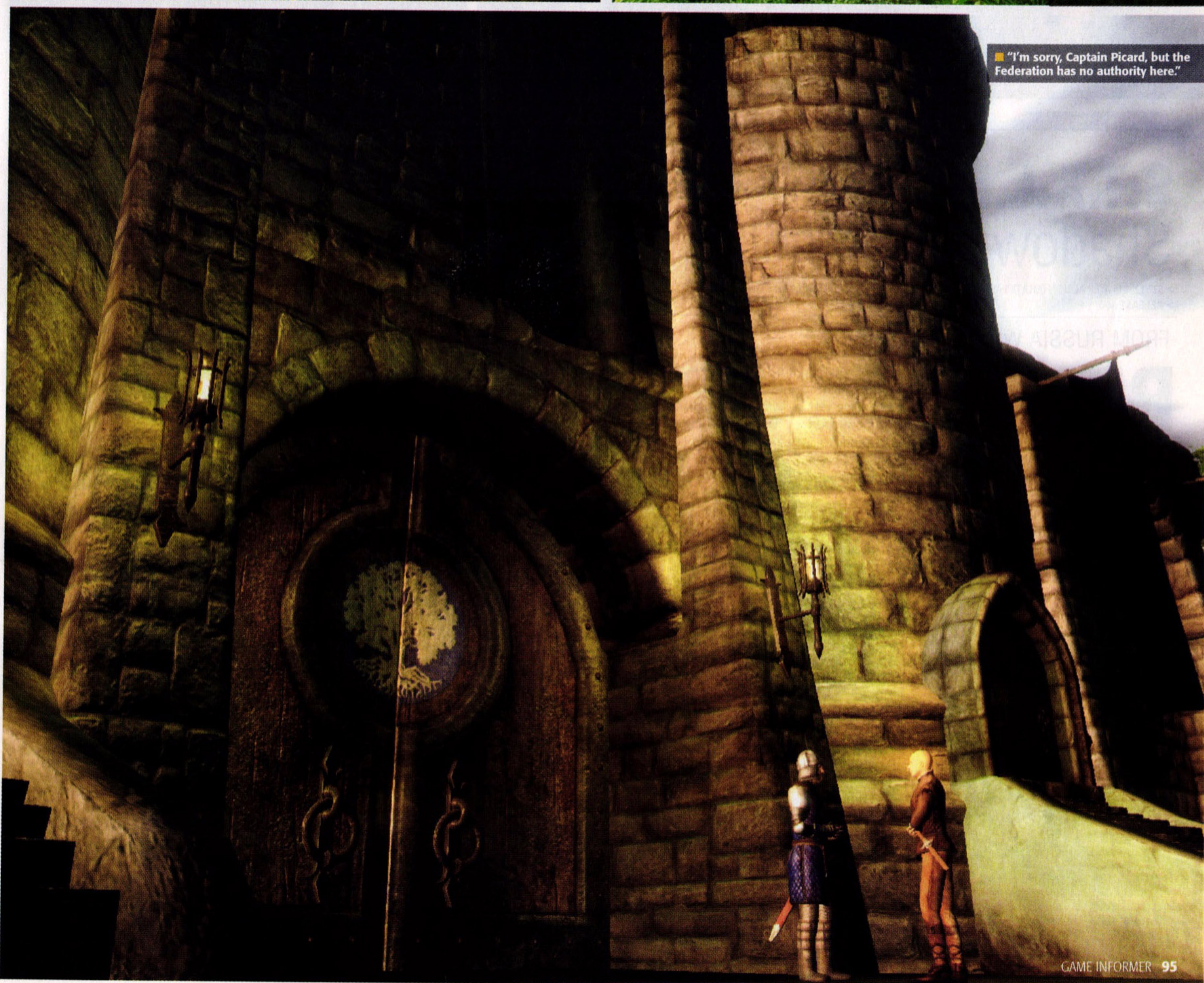


Ha! They parade around in their fancy clothes and their expensive perfumes. What do they know? All fluff and no fiber. That's what I say.

Emfrid



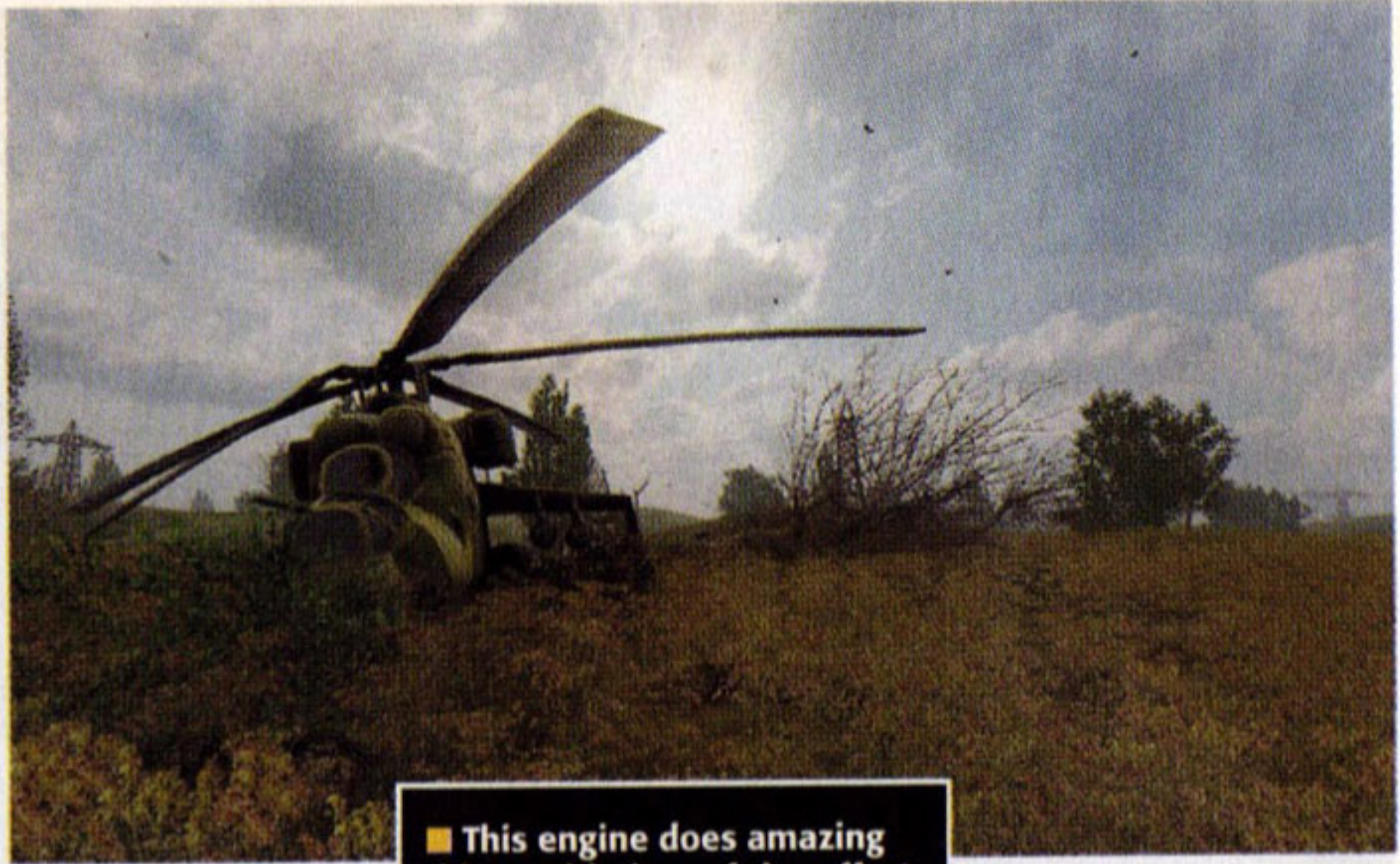
■ The wilderness is full of animals, as well as deadly monsters



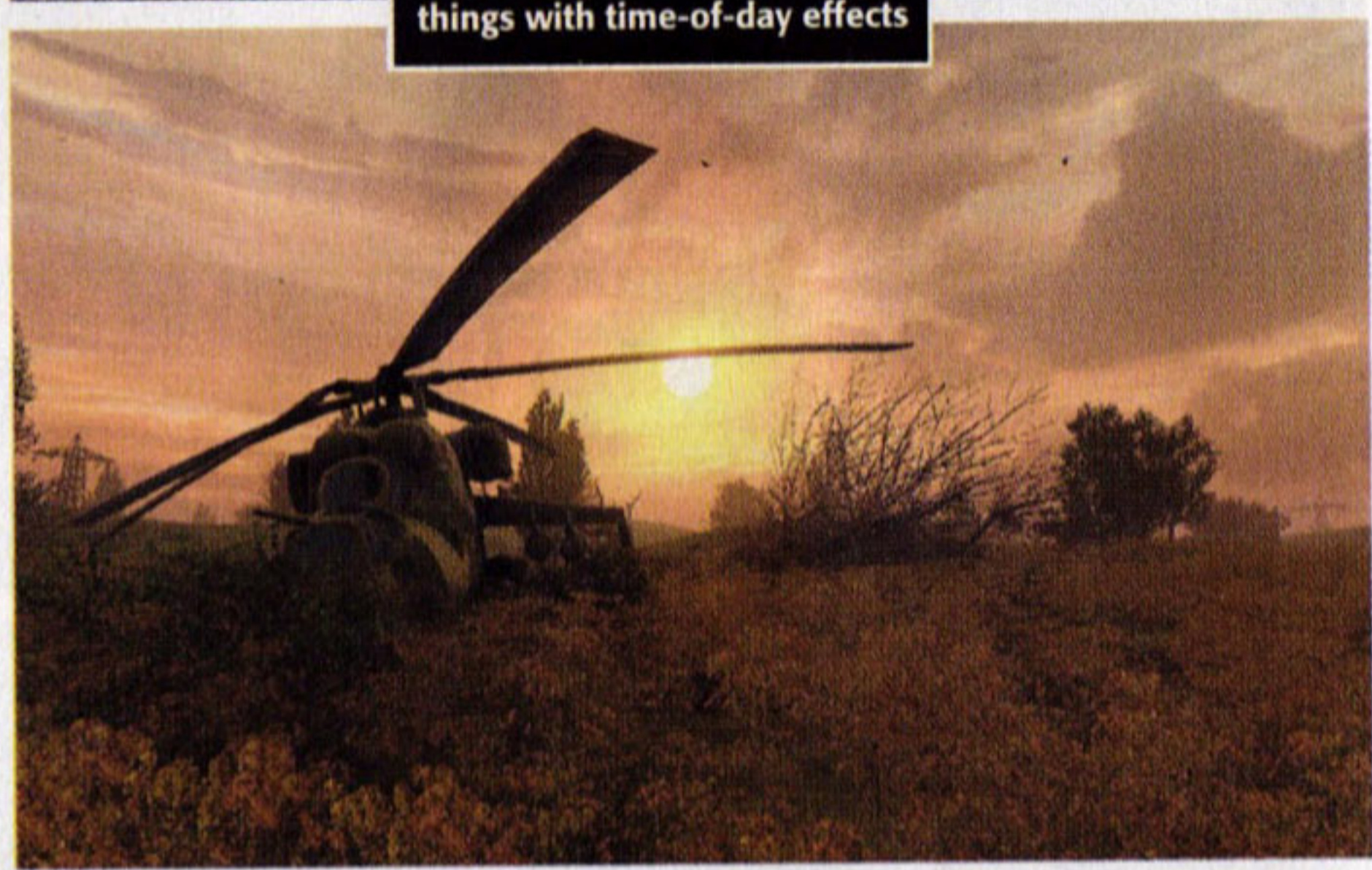
■ "I'm sorry, Captain Picard, but the Federation has no authority here."



■ There's no extraneous punctuation in this stalker



■ This engine does amazing things with time-of-day effects



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

# S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** GSC GAME WORLD  
> **RELEASE** MAY

## FROM RUSSIA WITH AWESOME

**P**C gamers, prepare yourselves. We know that you may not have recovered from the recent onslaught of incredible titles, but publisher THQ is bringing yet another triple-A game out early next year. Developed by Russian company GSC, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. looks to be ready to hang with the big boys of first-person shooting. After interviewing GSC Project Manager Anton Bolkashov about this ambitious title, we couldn't be more excited about it.

The basic idea behind the game is that the player is an artifact hunter in the fallout zone around the site of the Chernobyl reactor failure. Apparently, scientists want objects from the Zone to study their strange powers. Although THQ

is being very secretive with the details surrounding the single-player game, Bolkashov stated, "We are building a certain intrigue around the player's destiny directly related to the happenings in the Zone. The player is to reveal a certain mystery behind the place." We couldn't learn what that mystery is about, but Bolkashov also said, "We have a creature using telekinesis, while another one makes a good use of telepathy to control zombies and,

what's most dangerous, the player himself!" You can bet your boots that with mind-control powers going around, there's a lot more going on in the Zone than a mere cancer risk.

Since the entire game takes place in the irradiated Zone, recreating it with real-world accuracy (including the obvious fictional twists) is key in the eyes of the development team. "We are the living witnesses of the accident. Many of our parents took part in evacuating people from the site," said Bolshakov. "Of course, having all that personal experience, and in particular after visiting Chernobyl several times during 2002-2003, we do understand and feel the

atmosphere necessary to render in the game. It's going to be a genuinely spooky Chernobyl-based game." As if a no man's land around a nuclear explosion site wasn't creepy enough.

However, the most exciting part of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. isn't even the sci-fi story, twisted real-world setting, or even the incredibly gorgeous graphics. GSC aims to make the title a "survival FPS." On top of the action that being an FPS implies, the game will also require players to find safe places to sleep, supply themselves with food, and avoid radioactivity. A healthy amount of NPC interaction, such as trading and conversing, is promised as well. Additionally, according to Bolshakov, "All the monsters and creatures act independently of the player. The player will witness life in the Zone as it goes on: monsters hunt, feed, and fight with NPCs; computer-controlled stalkers accomplish the same tasks as those of the player. This concept makes the player no longer the centerpiece of the gaming universe, but a mere element of the system trying to survive."

This is quite the impressive list of features for any game, much less one from an unknown developer which already sports visuals comparable to the likes of Far Cry. If GSC can pull off even half of these, though, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. will undoubtedly be entertaining. Should the developer come through on all fronts, we could have a classic on our hands. ■ ■ ■



■ Must be one serious rifle to take down a chopper



■ The environments have been painstakingly modeled

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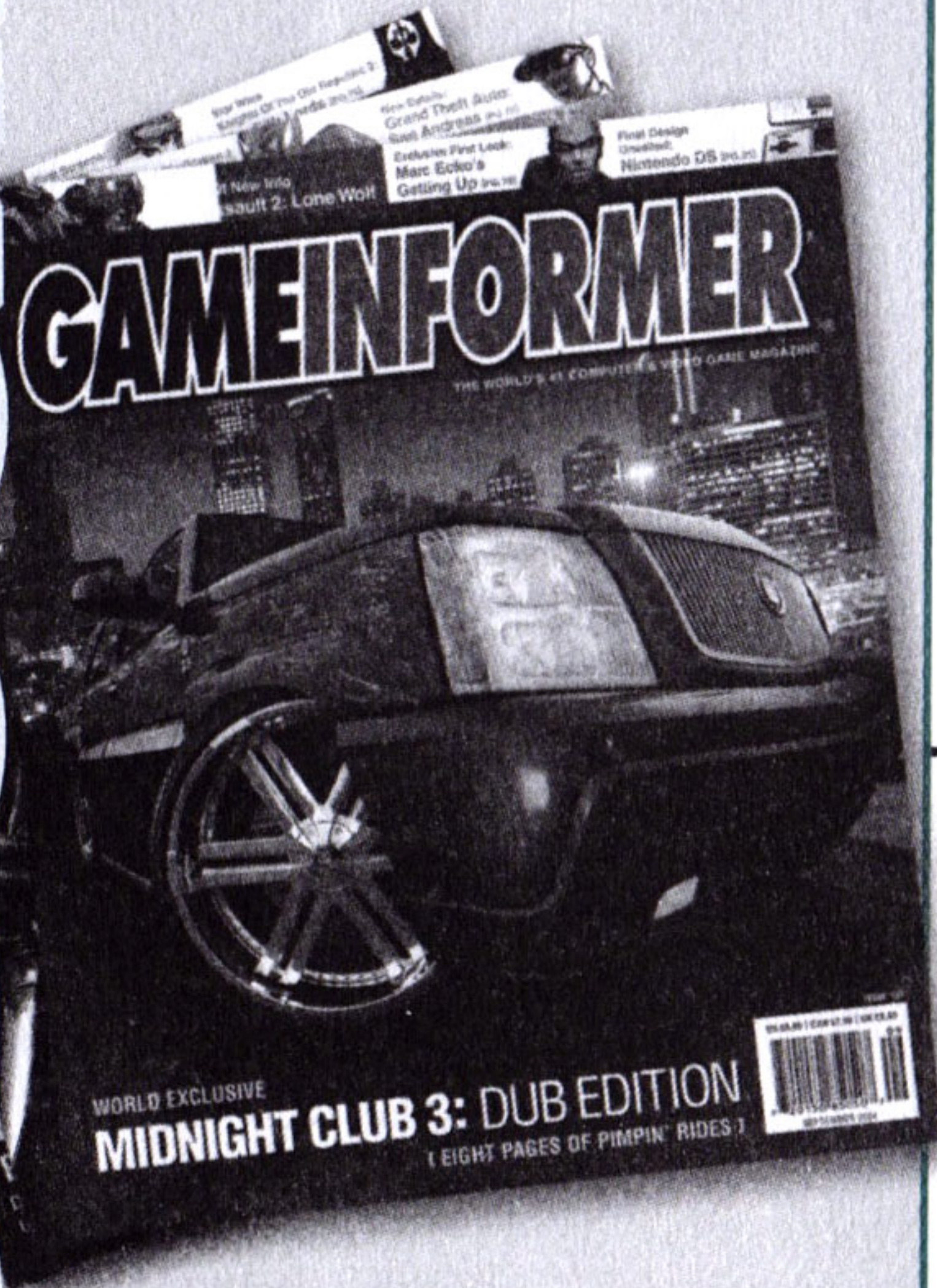
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Art Courtesy of Midway



PLAYSTATION 2

# Shining Tears

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SEGA  
 > **DEVELOPER** AMUSEMENT VISION > **RELEASE** MAY

## SHINE ON

**A**lthough dormant for several years, Sega's long-running Shining series is coming back in a big way. The recent Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon for the GBA pleased handheld fans, while the upcoming Shining Force title will certainly delight console gamers. But players won't have to wait until that title's release to return to the Shining world, thanks to the action/RPG spin-off Shining Tears.

We recently had the chance to check out this title first hand, and while it doesn't feature the traditional turn-based combat of the other games, we're confident that fans won't be disappointed. Shining Tears features one of the most interesting combat mechanics in the genre today. In battle, players control not one but two characters in real time. Your primary character is controlled with the left analog stick and attacks with the circle button. The secondary character follows your lead and attacks automatically, but can also be controlled directly with the right analog stick. Using the two characters in conjunction is key to defeating the hordes of foes that swarm your way. Hitting the R1 button sets up a linked attack (the results of which vary based on the characters used), and hitting it again executes the attack. These linked attacks are the most devastating tactic in the game, and can decimate multiple foes if used wisely. Of course, those who don't want to worry about two characters at once or simply want



to play with a friend can hand the reins of the companion off to a second player.

With many different linked attacks to learn, figuring out the best way to use them obviously involves a bit of strategy. But the depth of the combat (which at first appears deceptively simple) doesn't stop there. Each character also has a special attack, some of which are triggered by the link

activation and others are unveiled when dashing with the R2 button. One character, for example, breathes fire when the link attack is initiated, while another is surrounded in a halo of ice while dashing. Characters can also unleash combo attacks with careful timing of the attack button, and new skills are learned as characters level up.

While the combat is a departure for the series, the plot is the stuff of classic role-playing games. The main character Xion is a young man in possession of

a legendary set of jewelry called the Twin Dragon rings. One ring is magically affixed to his hand, and when a partner dons the other, both are endowed with incredible power. However, one wearer is filled with the power of light, the other the power of darkness. Xion and his friends each have a light and dark version, altering both their abilities and personality. Together with a band of warriors called the Weissritter, Xion enters into battle with the invasion force of the sinister Rune Geist. Of course, this is just the beginning. Those who want to learn how the story unfolds will have to pick up the game when it hits stores this March. ■ ■ ■



■ The dashed ring shows the area of effect for linked attacks

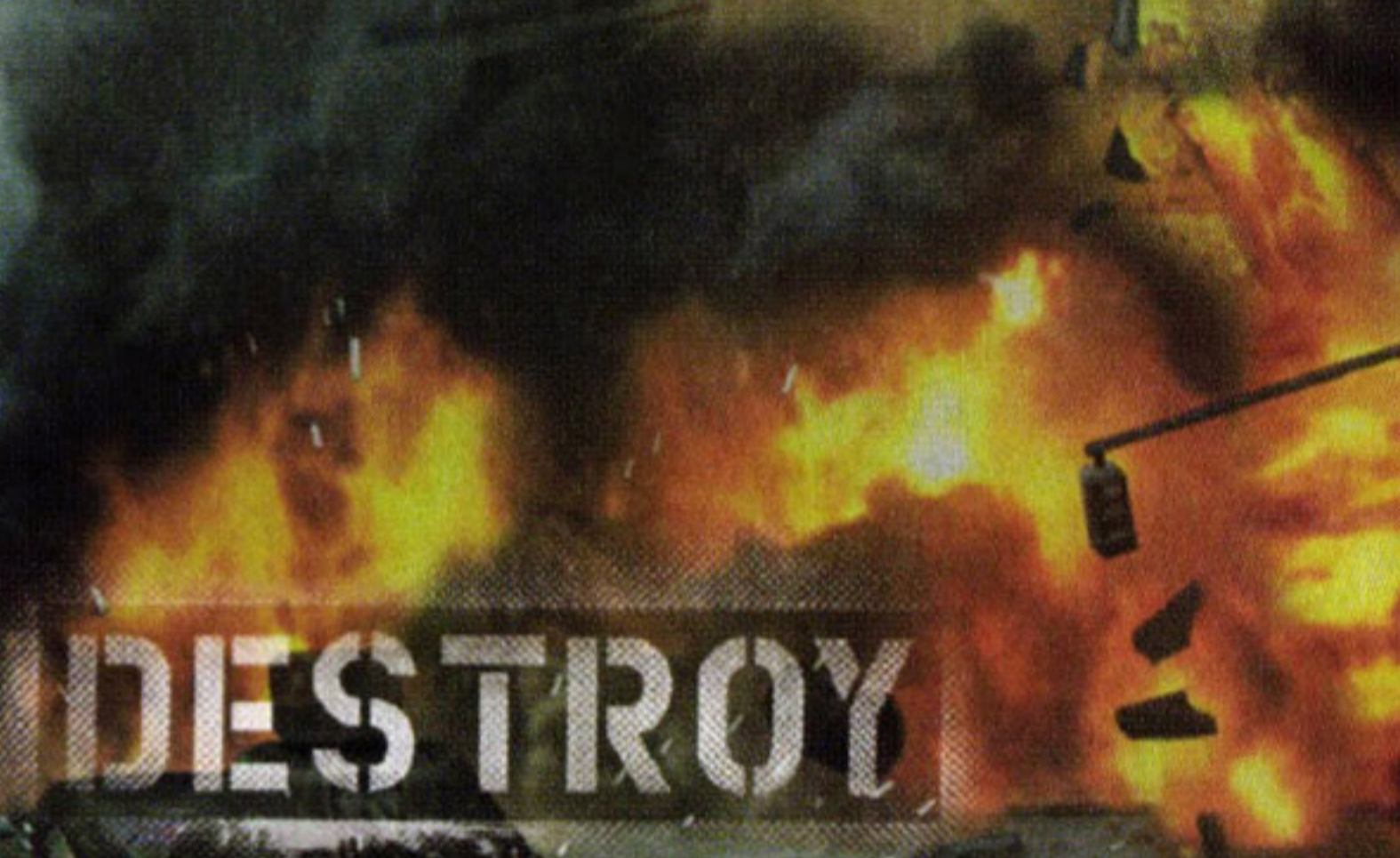
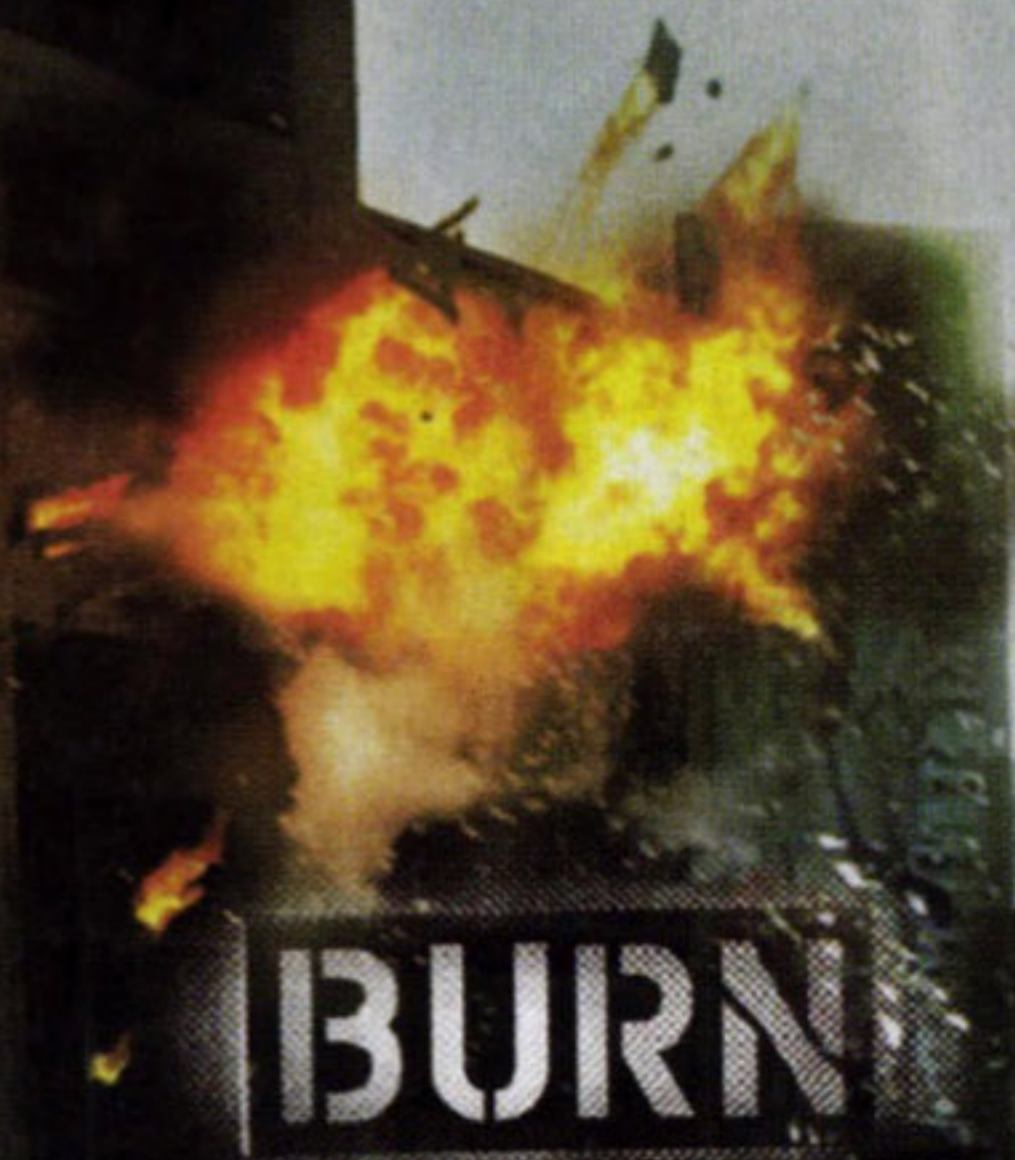


■ Two players can work through the quest cooperatively



■ Every environment sports the game's unique, hand-drawn work

If the Lion's Mane were ever to be broken, Shildia would be doomed. It must be defended at all cost!



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PlayStation.2



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# MERCENARIES

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

# Medal of Honor: Dogs of War

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EALA  
> **RELEASE** MARCH 15



## CRY HAVOC!

**M**edal of Honor has offered us many of the finest WW II recreations of the past, but EA's latest military shooter is promising several new features to assure that excellence is maintained as the series moves into the future. By giving the player even more power over the changing landscape of the European theater than ever before, Dogs of War promises to reinvigorate the franchise with new features and leadership capabilities.

You'll play the role of US Army Lieutenant William Holt, a field agent for the recently formed Office of Strategic Services. While many previous games in the series have cast you as a heroic ground trooper, the approach this time places you in the lofty and challenging position of leadership. Of course, you'll still participate just as heavily in the ground offensive, but this time you'll have the added chal-

lenge of helping to plan the attack. You'll be offered choices both before and during missions that allow for multiple approaches to completing a mission. Each objective will be ranked for its relative difficulty and danger to you and your men. Beyond this, in your role as an OSS agent, you'll rapidly switch roles as the game progresses. In one mission, you may be accompanying a crack team of snipers, while the next has you manning heavy artillery. While in battle, you'll be able to direct your fellow troops with squad commands, which should flesh out the strategic elements of the game to a much higher degree than previous console offerings.

One particularly enigmatic element of Dogs of War is the new Rally Meter, a sort of adrenaline-charged boost that may be activated when you're backed into a corner

or in serious danger. The feature is sure to be a necessity against the constant onslaught of German forces you'll be facing. Among these opponents will be 36 SS boss fights. Defeating these foes gains you one of three dozen tactical deployment cards, which you'll then be able to use to your advantage in troop dispersal.

Beyond single-player, there will now be nine unique multiplayer game modes, which can all be played on the nine new game maps. For those who care deeply for the history and heritage of the era the games represent, Captain Dale Dye has returned as military technical advisor to the development team. His added expertise continues to shape the series as it moves into a more leadership oriented approach. So congratulations, soldier – you're looking at a promotion when Dogs of War releases later this year. ■ ■ ■

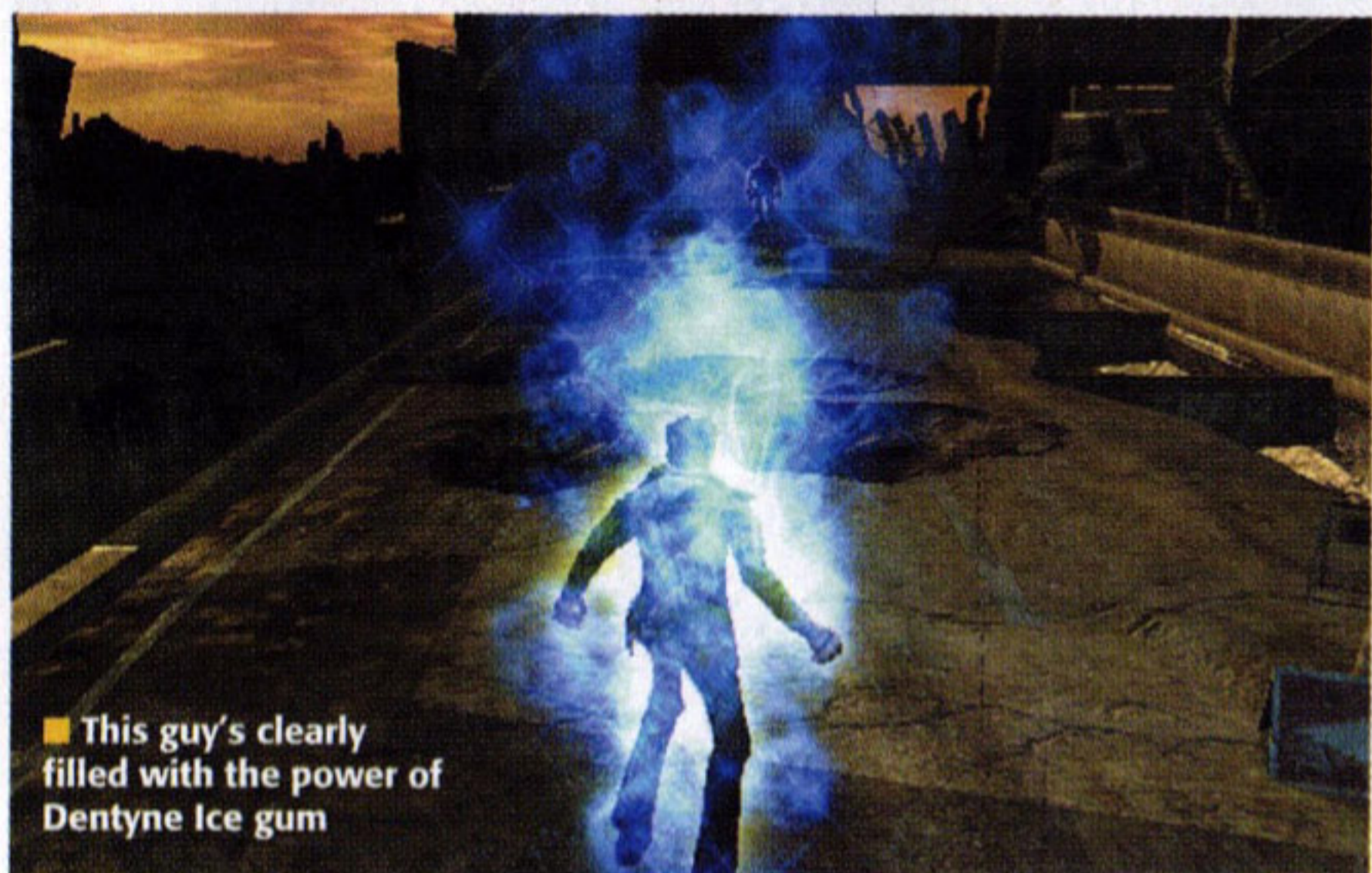


■ Don't turn around, uh-oh, Der Kommissar's in town, uh-oh



■ "Everyone aim in different directions and start firing! We're sure to hit something"





■ This guy's clearly filled with the power of Dentyne Ice gum



■ Peter Gabriel's videos just keep getting weirder and weirder



■ We're so tired of the same old "summon lightning Batman" attack. It's in, like, every game these days!

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

# Phantom Dust

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO  
 > **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS JAPAN > **RELEASE** WINTER

## A PHANTOM NO MORE

**M**any readers may be wondering why we haven't covered the gorgeous Japanese-developed Xbox title *Phantom Dust* for quite a long time. That's because Microsoft had no intention of releasing it stateside, despite positive word on the game from the *Land of the Rising Sun*. But now Majesco has had the good sense to bring *Phantom Dust* here, so American gamers will finally be able to check out this online-focused psychic warfare game.

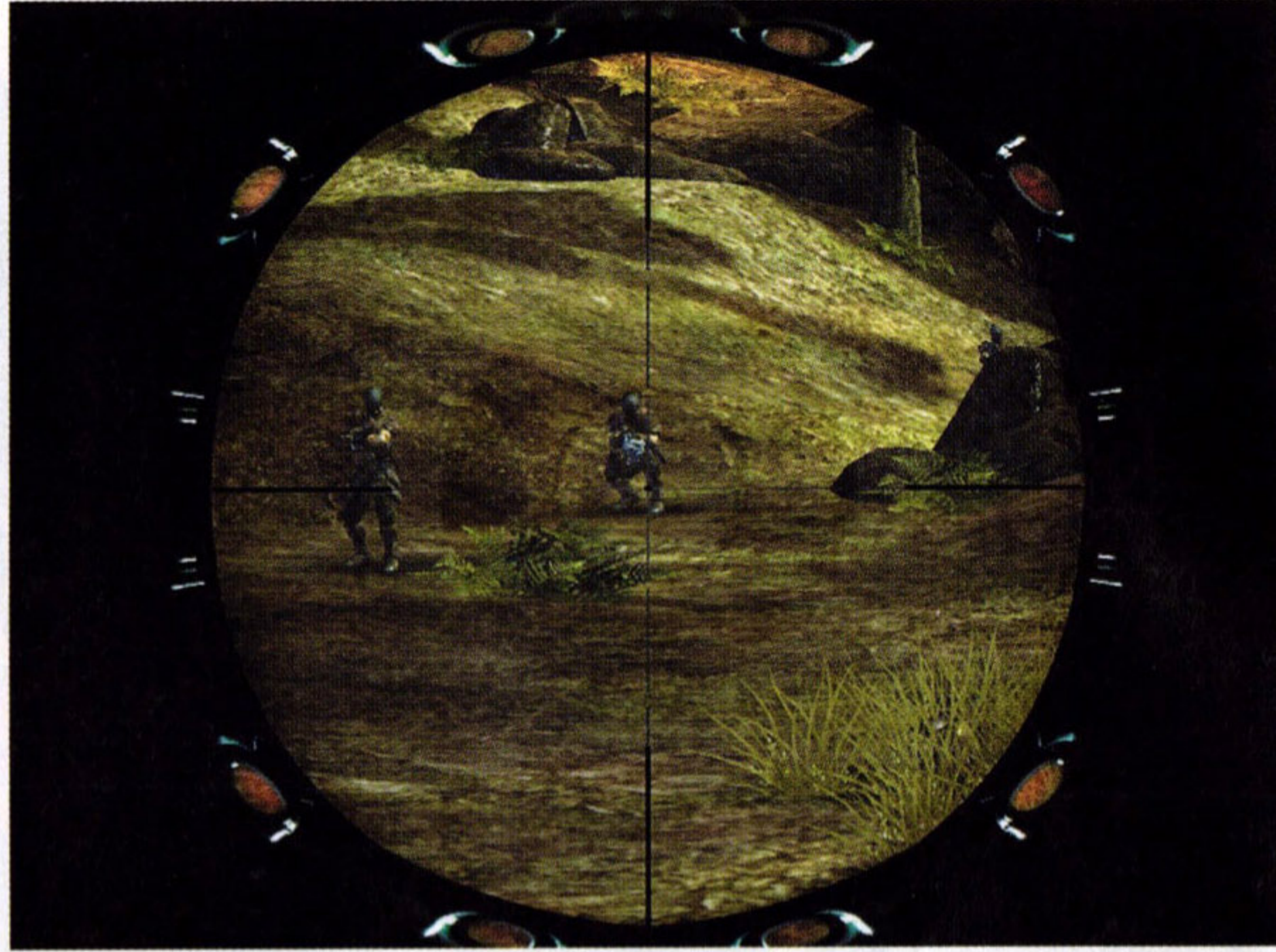
The world of this game is a battle-torn and polluted Earth in which mankind has retreated underground. A mysterious substance in the air has wiped the minds of you and your friends, but also endowed you all with fantastic psychic powers. Over the course of the single-player game, you'll duke it out with other psychics on the ravaged planet's surface and discover your lost identity. The plot, while cool, is a bit familiar, but that's not the main draw of this title. Thanks to Xbox Live and System Link support, it's all about duking it out with your friends online.

At its core, *Phantom Dust* is like a card game, only ramped up with incredible graphics and explosive action. At the start of each match you can choose which psychic powers to equip from a huge pool of options. You can select up to four powers at a time, each one mapped to a different face button. However, those you start with won't always be the ones you end up with. Some abilities can steal powers from other

players, and you can even find new abilities on the battlefield. These powers overwrite those you started with, so you may find your arsenal constantly evolving over the course of a single match.

While there are many defensive powers and special abilities like levitation, most of the psychic skills are focused on causing as much destruction as possible. Not only do these massive attacks look gorgeous, they can actually destroy everything in a stage. But the destruction is far more than cosmetic – flying chunks of debris can cause as much damage as an enemy attack. With so much carnage going on in every match, defensive powers are just as important as offensive attacks.

Regardless of which powers you choose, you'll have to consider your selection carefully. You only have a certain amount of slots to fill with your abilities, and those same slots are used to pick up Aura particles, the battlefield drops that power your psychic skills. If you overload on powers, you won't have much space to pick up particles, which will leave you vulnerable when your Aura is depleted. But on the other hand, if you leave too much space in your arsenal for particles, you'll be outgunned. It just goes to show that while *Phantom Dust* is all about frantically paced action, it's a much deeper game than most shooters. Fortunately, it's now one that the U.S. gaming community will be able to experience for themselves. ■ ■ ■



■ Each weapon is unique and upgradeable



■ Earth in the future isn't a nice place to visit, and you definitely don't want to live there



■ Vehicles have been created by Earth's prisoners from ancient salvage

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

# Pariah

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (XBOX), 1-PLAYER (PC) (ONLINE AND XBOX LIVE MULTIPLAYER TBA), PS2 (TBA)  
 > **PUBLISHER** GROOVE GAMES > **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL EXTREMES (XBOX, PC), PSEUDO INTERACTIVE (PS2)  
 > **RELEASE** MARCH

## PRISON PLANET EARTH

**T**he original creators of Unreal are ready to branch into something new, and we'll be able to enjoy the fruits of their labor when Pariah shows up this spring. We got the chance to chat with James Schmalz, founder and creative director of Digital Extremes, and he filled us in on the new project. "We have been working on the Unreal universe for eight years now. It was time to do something fresh and new and exciting."

From all that we've seen, Pariah looks to be all those things and more. Set in the distant future year of 2520, Earth has long since been abandoned by the rich and powerful, as they colonized far flung planets that had not been strip mined and deforested down to the wasteland that is now Earth. Now,

those colonies send their prisoners back to their once beautiful home planet, where they live out their lives amid the polluted desolation. Enter Dr. Jack Mason, a disillusioned doctor sent to Earth to accompany an off-planet prisoner transfer of a diseased young woman. That is, until their ship is shot down over the prison lands of Earth, leaving Jack and his infected patient stranded and in search of an escape.

One of the coolest features of Pariah is the new M.A.P. (Make and Play) Editor. Designed to be a fully functional yet easy to access map creator, it should allow for Xbox owners to enjoy for the first time the excitement of multiplayer level design and file sharing on Xbox Live. "Anybody can jump in with it, mess around, and you don't have to worry about breaking things. We tried to give as much flexibility and power to the user as possible, to allow them to create whatever they want. On top of that, you can make your map, save it, and then go to Xbox Live and share it with other people. It's giving the power of creativity to people and then allowing them to share that with their friends," Schmalz told us. Within the M.A.P. Editor, you can set player starting spawn points, create terrain, ramps, vehicles, weapon emplacements, and more. Of course, your created maps as well as the developer created multiplayer maps will be available to play in all the on-and offline game modes, including deathmatch, assault and defend, and a unique playground mode. "We want to

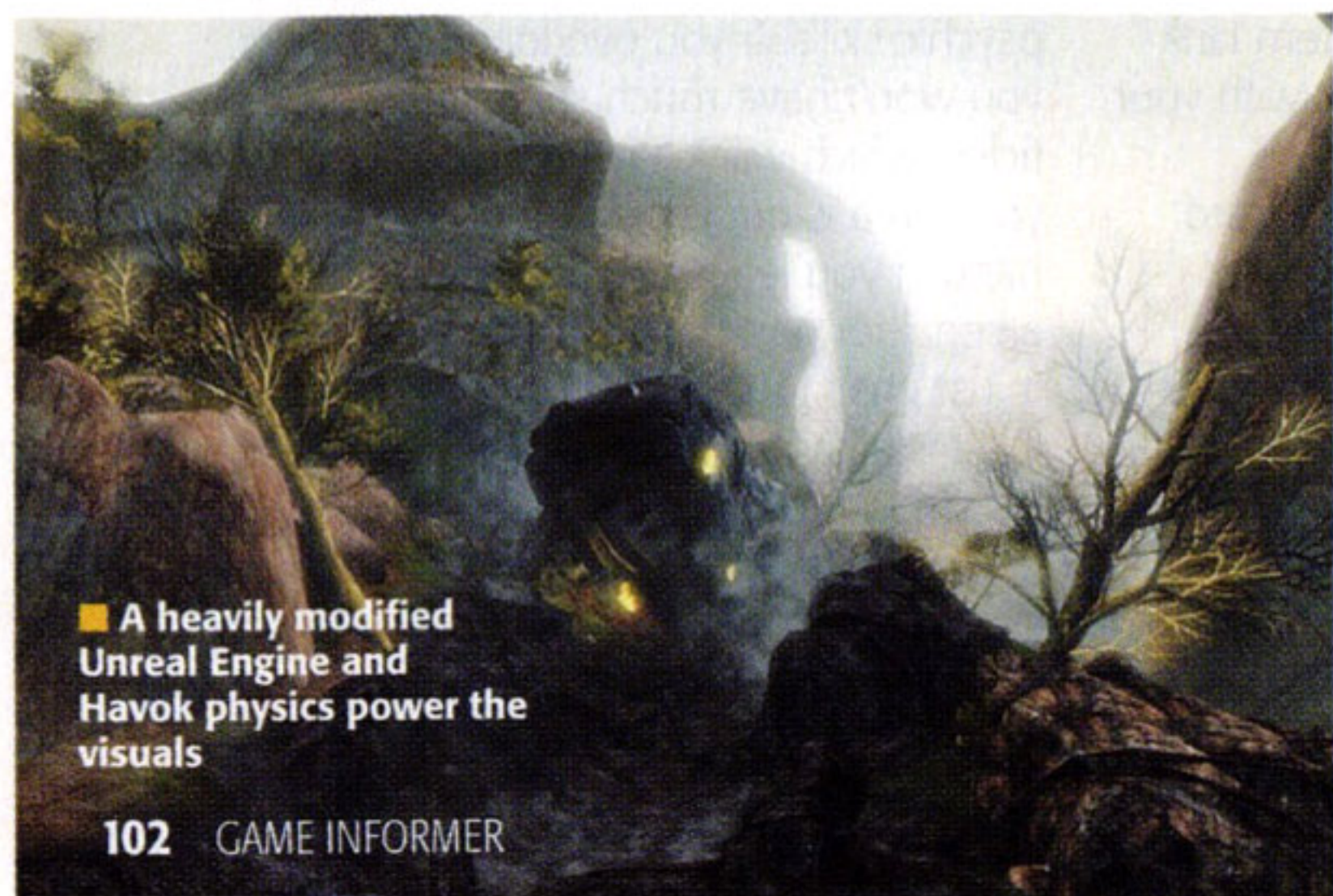


■ An online enabled map editor for Xbox? Sweet

have our own flavor of multiplayer. We've got upgradeable weapons, so it's a very different feel from any other multiplayer game, especially on Xbox."

The upgradeable weapon functionality is one of the most interesting components of both the single and multiplayer experience. As you play, you'll encounter weapon energy cores, and these can be used to improve your weapons through three levels of power. The improvements will affect not just damage, but visual effects as well. Schmalz gave us an example: "The final upgrade to the grenade launcher is a mag grenade. So imagine you shoot out this incredible magnetic device, and it's sucking up bits of metal and debris from the ground as it's flying through the air, and then it lands and explodes in this big huge ball of flak, slicing apart your enemies in the distance."

We were also told that the team is working hard to complete a co-op mode for the main story, wherein the second player would adopt the role of a guard who manages to survive the initial crash. Between that, the involving single player story, and the creators of Unreal handling multiplayer, Pariah is shaping up to be one of the most exciting possibilities of 2005. ■ ■ ■



■ A heavily modified Unreal Engine and Havok physics power the visuals

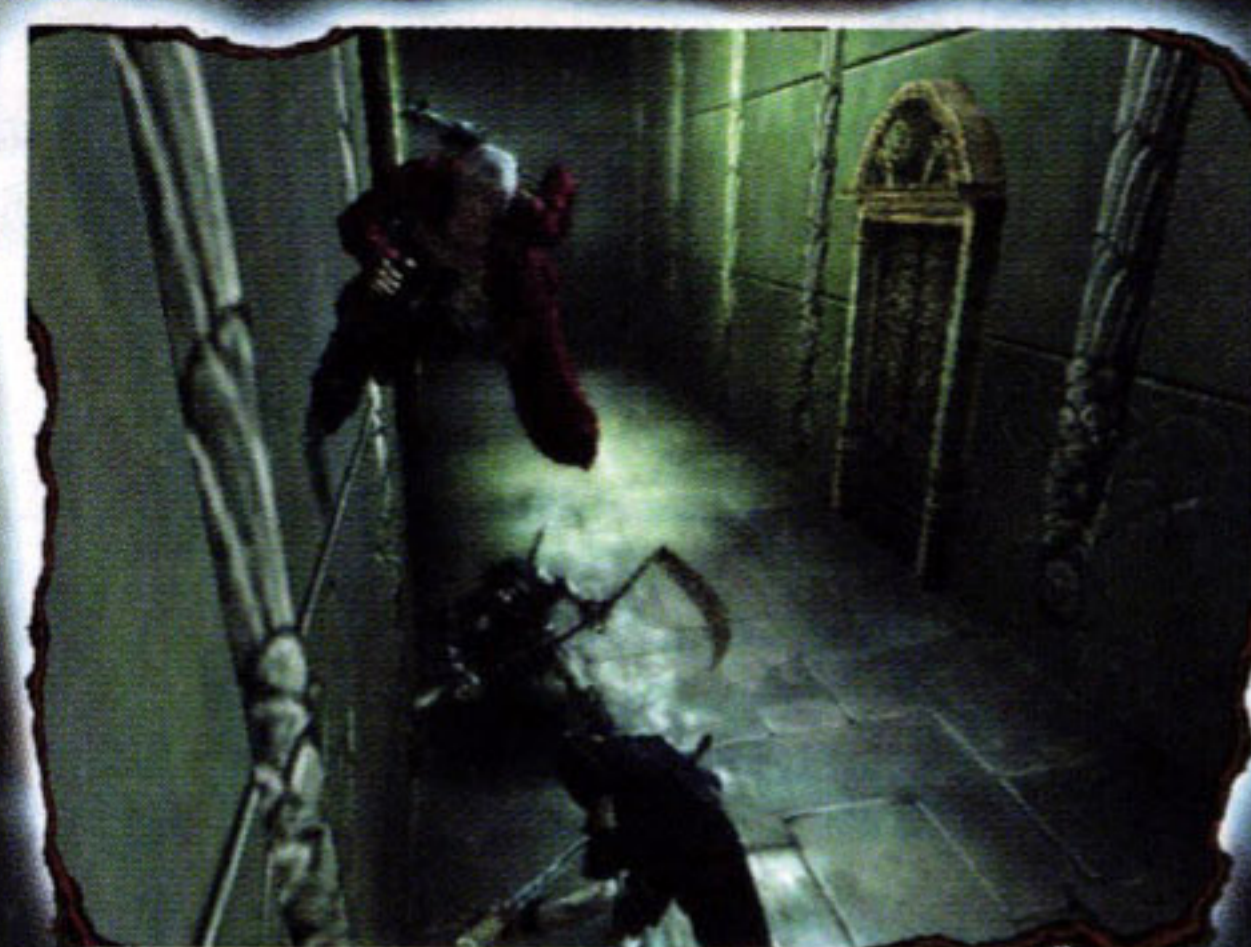
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the game begins,  
the badass meter  
is likely to  
flat-out shatter”

— PSM



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Killer evasive, agile moves



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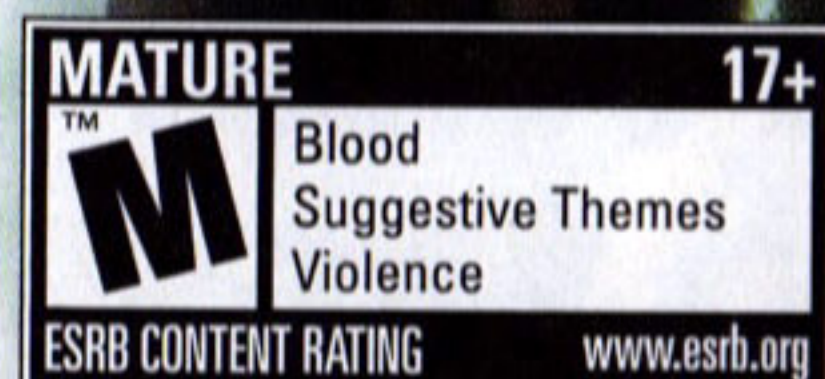
**GUNSLINGER STYLE**  
Blow away enemies from all angles

# Devil May Cry<sup>®</sup> 3

DANTE'S AWAKENING

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PLAYSTATION 2

# Resident Evil Outbreak File #2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA BROADBAND) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM  
> **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** MARCH 15

## DOOM AND GLOOM

**T**hose crazy kids trying to get out of Raccoon City have even more trials and tribulations to work through – and the mutated madness only looks to be more insane this time around. We recently got some hands-on time with Outbreak File #2, and from what we've seen, there's a lot to talk about. This is no mere pack of new stages – Capcom has plumped up the sequel with gigantic new enemies, updated play mechanics, and some really great maps (including an old fan favorite).

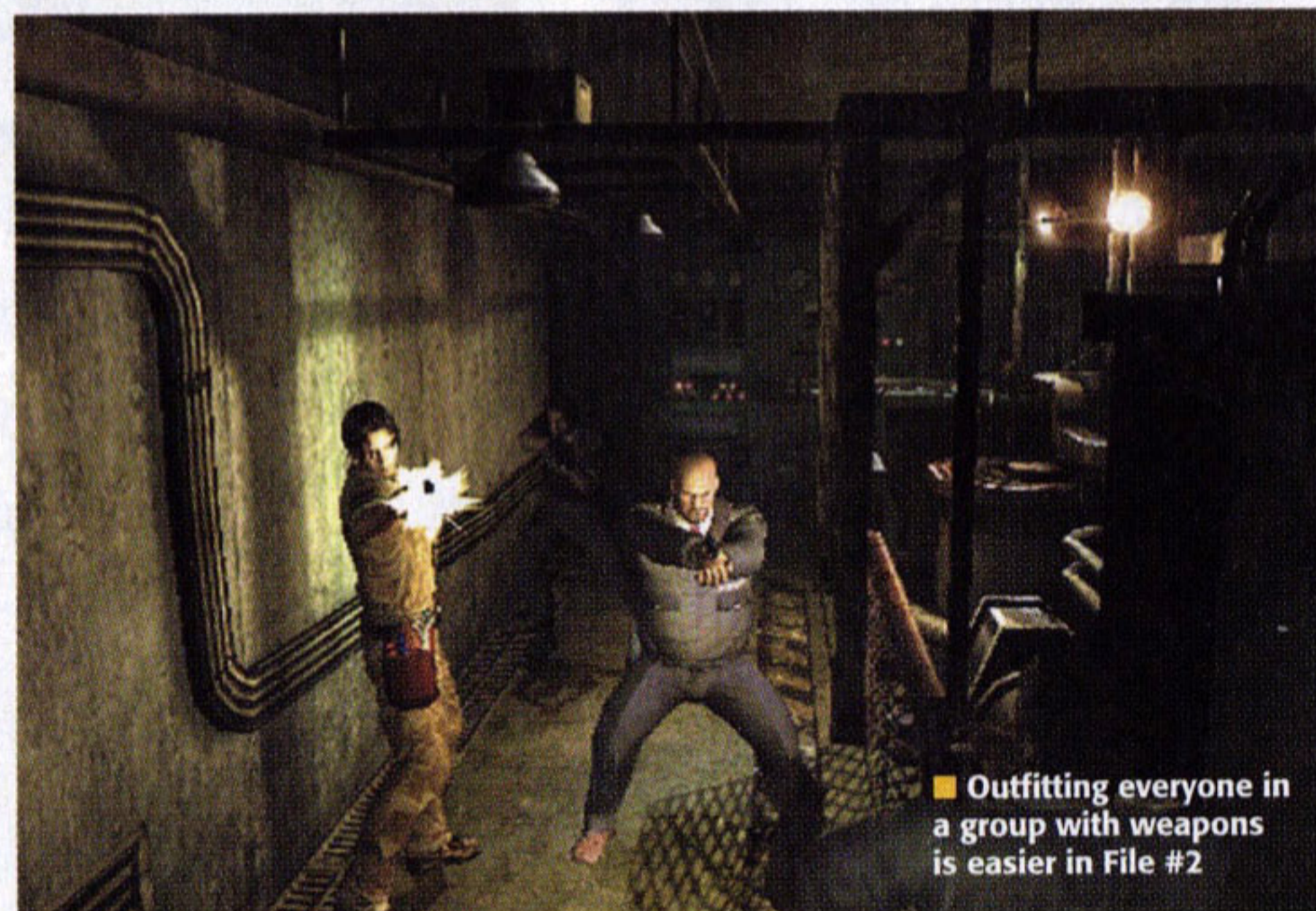
From the start of the game, four areas are available and a fifth opens after you successfully complete the first set. It might not sound like a lot, but when you think about the fact that one of the stages is the police station from Resident Evil 2, the scale becomes a bit more clear. You did read that right – the level entitled "Desperate Times" features the entire station from RE 2. Fanboys, start your engines.

Another area, called "Wild Things," shows off some of the game's new features to horrifying and grotesque effect. Essentially, Raccoon City is going to be the target of a military airstrike and one of the places to pick up survivors for evacuation is the city zoo. The sad thing is that it hasn't been a good day for the transplanted flora and fauna on display. Gigantic predators like alligators, lions, and elephants have been mutated along with their flying brethren in the bird (hornbills are new enemies) and insect families. The opening cutscene shows zombies hunched over a fallen rhino, tearing off chunks of flesh like feral beasts. Icky for sure, but the level offers more paths to completion and interesting-looking environments than anything in the first entry.

From a gameplay standpoint, Capcom is cleaning up some of the methods and abilities of the games' many playable characters. In solo mode, players pick their controlled character along with the support crew (in the first Outbreak, your team was dictated by the level). They've also included a first for the RE series as a whole – the ability to walk and aim at the same time. It sounds silly to trumpet a feature so common in other games, but with this franchise, it really is a big deal.

Multiplayer online mode still won't have voice chat or in-game keyboard functionality,

■ These giant demon lizards (our name, not Capcom's) hide in deep waters



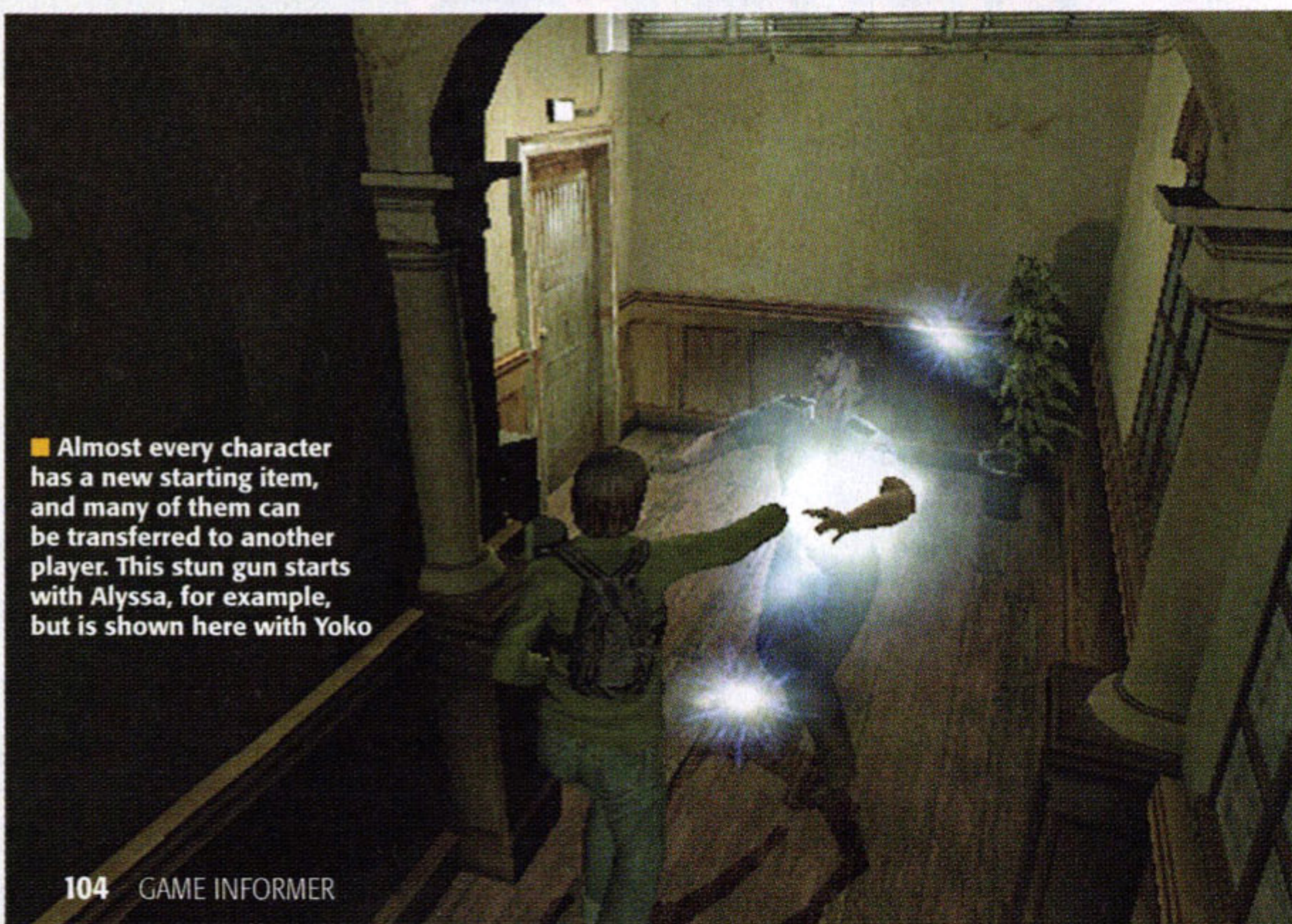
■ Outfitting everyone in a group with weapons is easier in File #2



■ The elephant is supposed to be a boss, but if you kill him early in the level, the game will find another super enemy for you to face

something that causes us great grief, but the team still insists the decision is designed to maintain realism and heighten fear. We're not entirely sold, but the development team has added the ability to point to rooms on a map (even if the player you're talking to hasn't been to that area of the stage before), to ease navigation.

In all gameplay options, it's clear that all of the levels, character moves, and items have been expanded on or improved in some way. We'd spill more specifics (and there an immeasurable number of tweaks in every part of the game), but we've got to leave some surprises for those brave enough to face this biohazard offshoot in just a few short months. And thank Capcom for the nightmares that zoo level will surely leave you with. ■ ■ ■

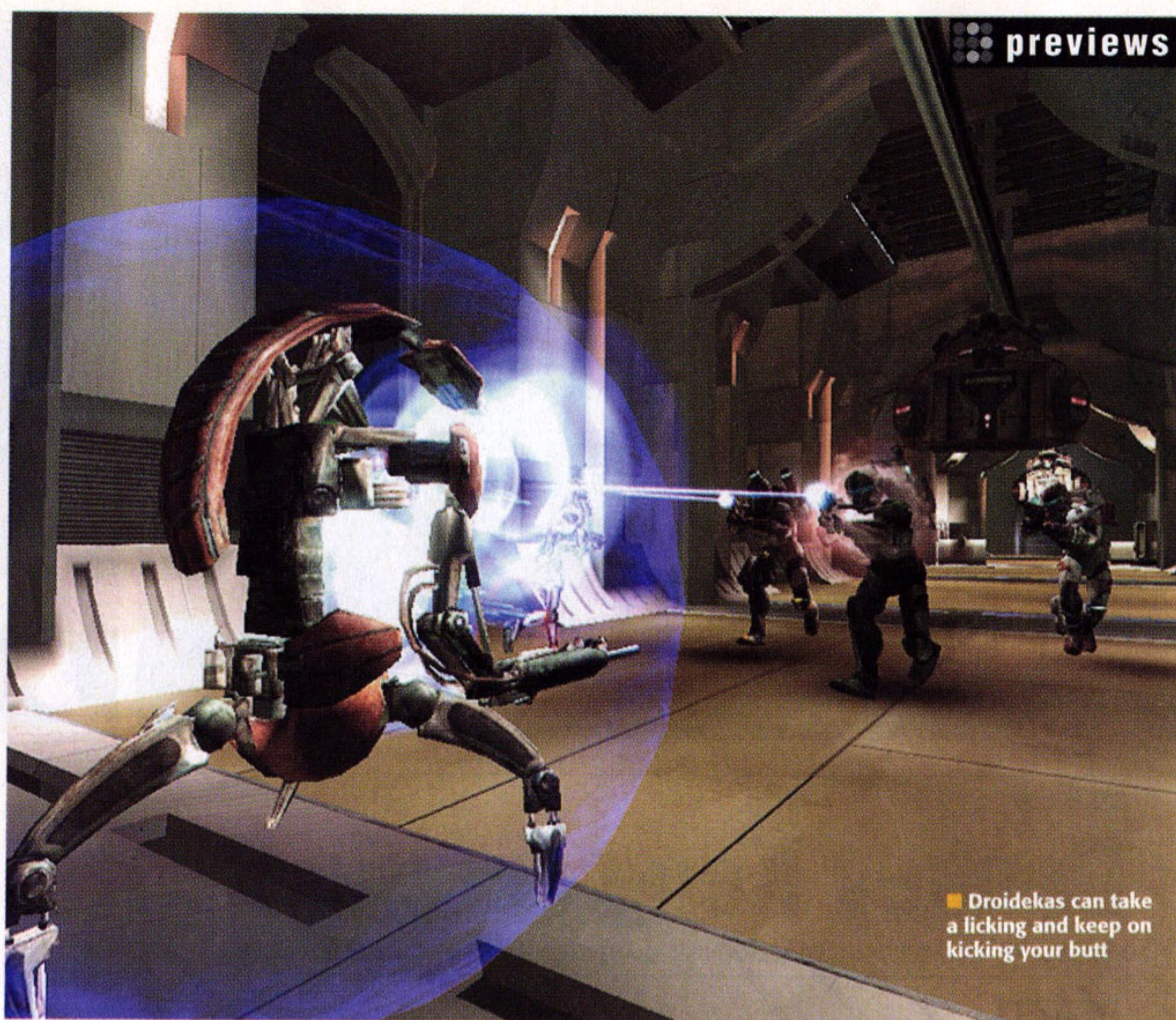


■ Almost every character has a new starting item, and many of them can be transferred to another player. This stun gun starts with Alyssa, for example, but is shown here with Yoko



■ The zoo is a genius place for the RE franchise to go – mutated big cats rule!

Hints of Episode III?



Droidekas can take a licking and keep on kicking your butt

XBOX | PC

# Star Wars: Republic Commando

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

## EPISODE 2.5

**W**e know you're excited about this one. Well, you're not excited enough. The moment you see it in action, you'll know why. After extensive hands on time with the game, it was clear just how impressive Republic Commando is turning out to be, and we literally can't wait for the final version.

As the harrowing years of the Clone Wars begin, the Jedi are leading the clone army into unending combat with the Separatist forces. But behind the scenes, a specially trained group of clones has been created. These commandos think more independently and are fiercely devoted to their own squad. You are the leader of this covert Delta Squad, and you are the Republic's secret weapon.

Those familiar with the controls of Halo should immediately feel at home as you begin your first mission, set during the explosive opening battle of the war on Geonosis. From the very beginning, the thing you'll notice most is the incredible action occurring at all times in the periphery. While you are fighting your own battles against droids and the bug-like Geonosians on the ground, ship to ship combat is occurring overhead, and artillery laser fire is bursting forth from nearby cannons. On the ground, it's not long before you begin to hook up with your squad mates. These "brothers" have all developed unique personalities due to their specialized individual training. As the game progresses, you get to know each one's quirks and tendencies, both in conversation and in battle. As their leader, you're tasked not only with completing objectives, but also keeping your squad alive

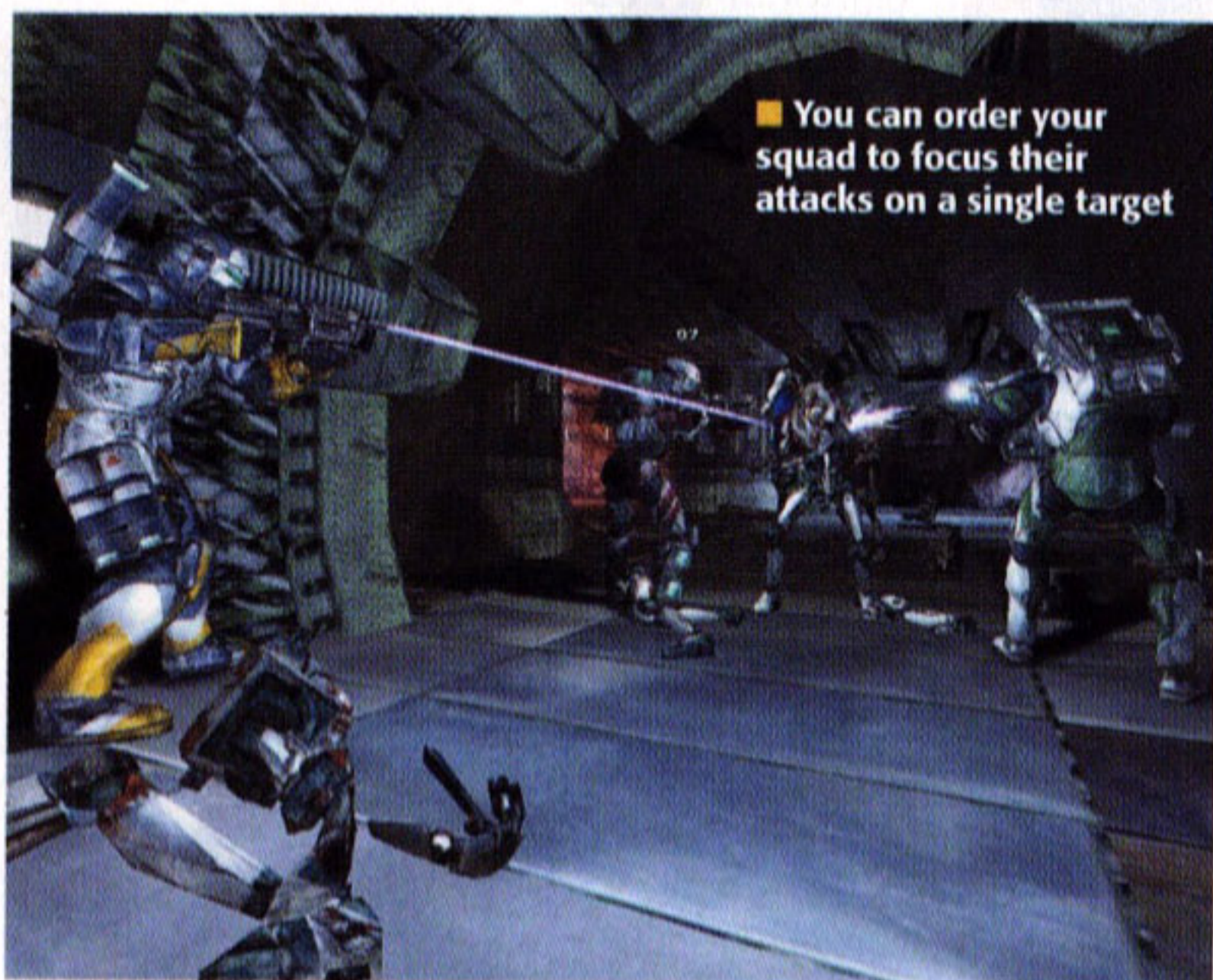


Close range melee attacks are often essential

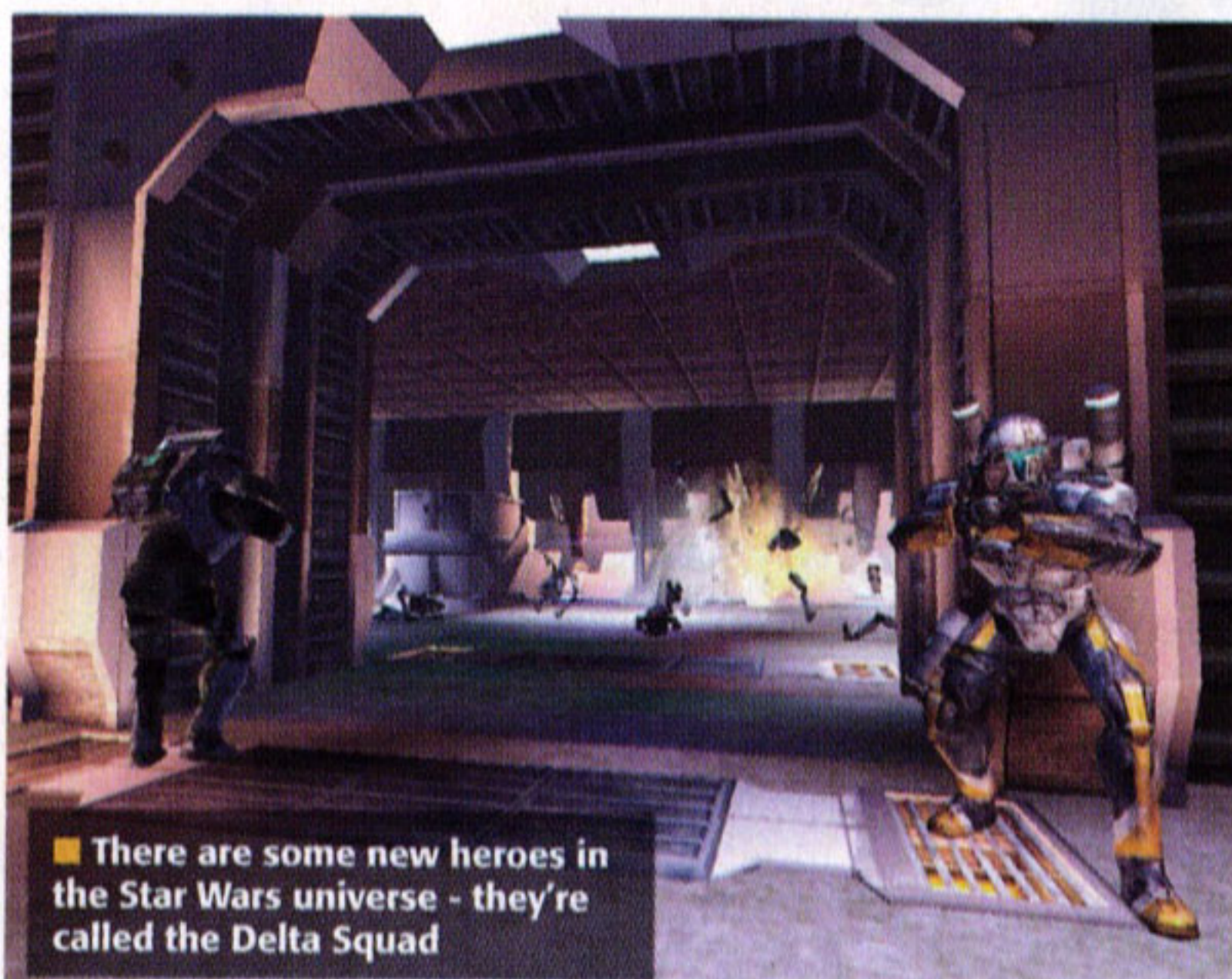
and functional. All of the commands you give are based on a single button press and are contextual to the situation. If there's a door that must be breached, you just look at it and press A and the squad will immediately move into position. If, instead, there's a good spot for your sniper to take up firing, look at that area and press A, and he will set off on his ordered task. Almost every action imaginable is available this way, from healing teammates to slicing computer terminals. But more importantly, it prevents constant distraction from the action since the command functions are so intuitive.

Visuals throughout the game are uniformly extraordinary. Explosions and heavy weapons fire will send you reeling, and temporarily blur out your vision. When in the dark, your low light visor reveals a washed out world of grays and blacks where hidden figures lurk in the shadows. When the greenish blood of Geonosian foes splatters your visor, a sort of laser window wiper sweeps across your view as your armor's automated systems clean your view port. And as your companions take fire, you'll see the crackle of their shields as those force fields take the brunt of the damage. While admiring the view, you'll be accompanied by the memorable strains of John William's music, and we suspect some of the music may even be pulled from the Episode III score.

As the game continues, your crack squad will move on through the Clone Wars, and each new level acts as a snapshot of that mysterious time period between *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. It's also clear that the latter part of the game helps to introduce one of the movie's newest villains: General Grievous and his nefarious team of bodyguards. When you're finally done with the campaign, you can start to tackle the four-player split screen multiplayer component (on Xbox), or take the game online with up to 16 gamers. For years, fans have hungered to delve into the heart of the Clone Wars. While lightsabers and Jedi are great, it's nice to see another side of this galaxy-spanning conflict. You can also be assured that Republic Commando's release in March should thoroughly whet your appetite for the movie, which at that point will only be a couple of months away. ■ ■ ■



You can order your squad to focus their attacks on a single target



There are some new heroes in the Star Wars universe - they're called the Delta Squad



ADVANCE TO CORESHIP

The Orkin Man level is a little odd



GAMECUBE

# Donkey Kong Jungle Beat

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO > RELEASE MARCH 14

## BEAT IT

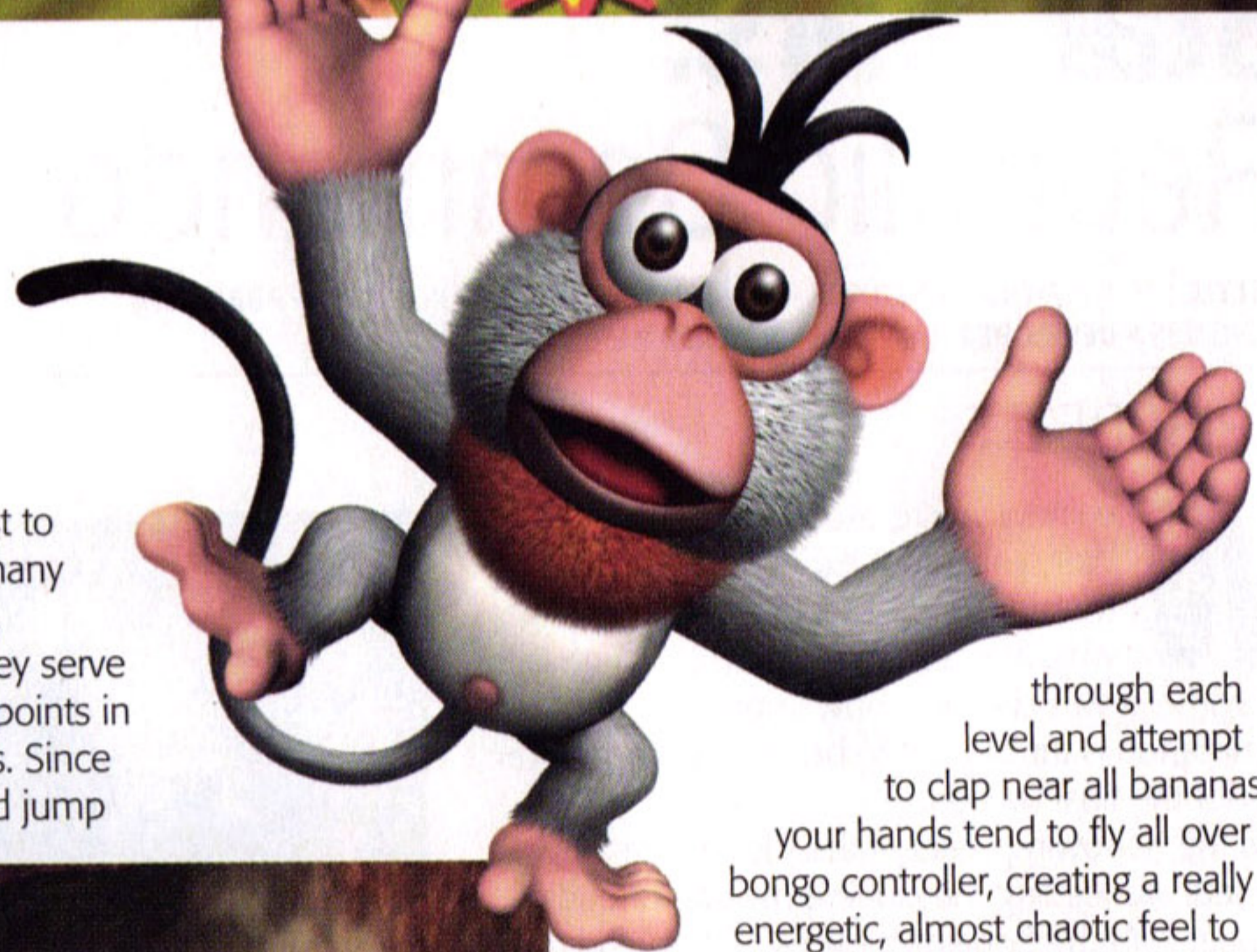
Leave it to Nintendo to combine two of our favorite things: big monkeys and frantic pounding on inanimate objects. Ever since it was unveiled at E3, we've been dying to check out this drum-controlled platformer in greater depth. Fortunately, we recently had a chance to get hands on with the game and check out its unique charms. Now we can safely say that Jungle Beat is as much fun as a bunch of liquored-up monkeys loose in a sporting goods store.

While the basic gameplay of Jungle Beat is incredibly simple, the unique method of controlling it adds more challenge than you might think. DK is steered by hitting either the left or right bongo, and his speed increases the faster you beat. Hitting both at once makes the ape jump, and clapping (or hitting the side of the bongo controller) unleashes a sonic wave attack. Jumping on certain enemies causes the camera to zoom in, and you can make DK unleash a can of hot monkey rage by beating on both drums. This technique is used frequently in boss fights, as well as several other places in each stage. It can be somewhat tricky at first to adjust to the control scheme, but once you do, the bizarre method really adds to the fun. A standard GameCube controller can be used, but doing so really strips this title of a lot of its charm.

Each stage in the game is broken into three

smaller levels. The goal of the first two levels in each stage is to go through it and collect as many bananas as possible. Walking into a banana adds one to your total, while clapping near it multiplies its value. Bananas are everywhere in a stage and are even released by enemies when defeated, and it is in your

best interest to collect as many as possible, because they serve as your hit points in boss battles. Since you run and jump



through each level and attempt to clap near all bananas, your hands tend to fly all over the bongo controller, creating a really energetic, almost chaotic feel to gameplay.

In the final area of each level, DK squares off against a boss, each of which requires a different strategy to beat. The first boss simply forces you to dodge him, then jump in with a flurry of monkey punches, while another requires you to stun your foe by hitting back the fruit he throws before using him as a punching bag. It's quite easy to figure out how to beat each boss, but pulling it off is not as easy.

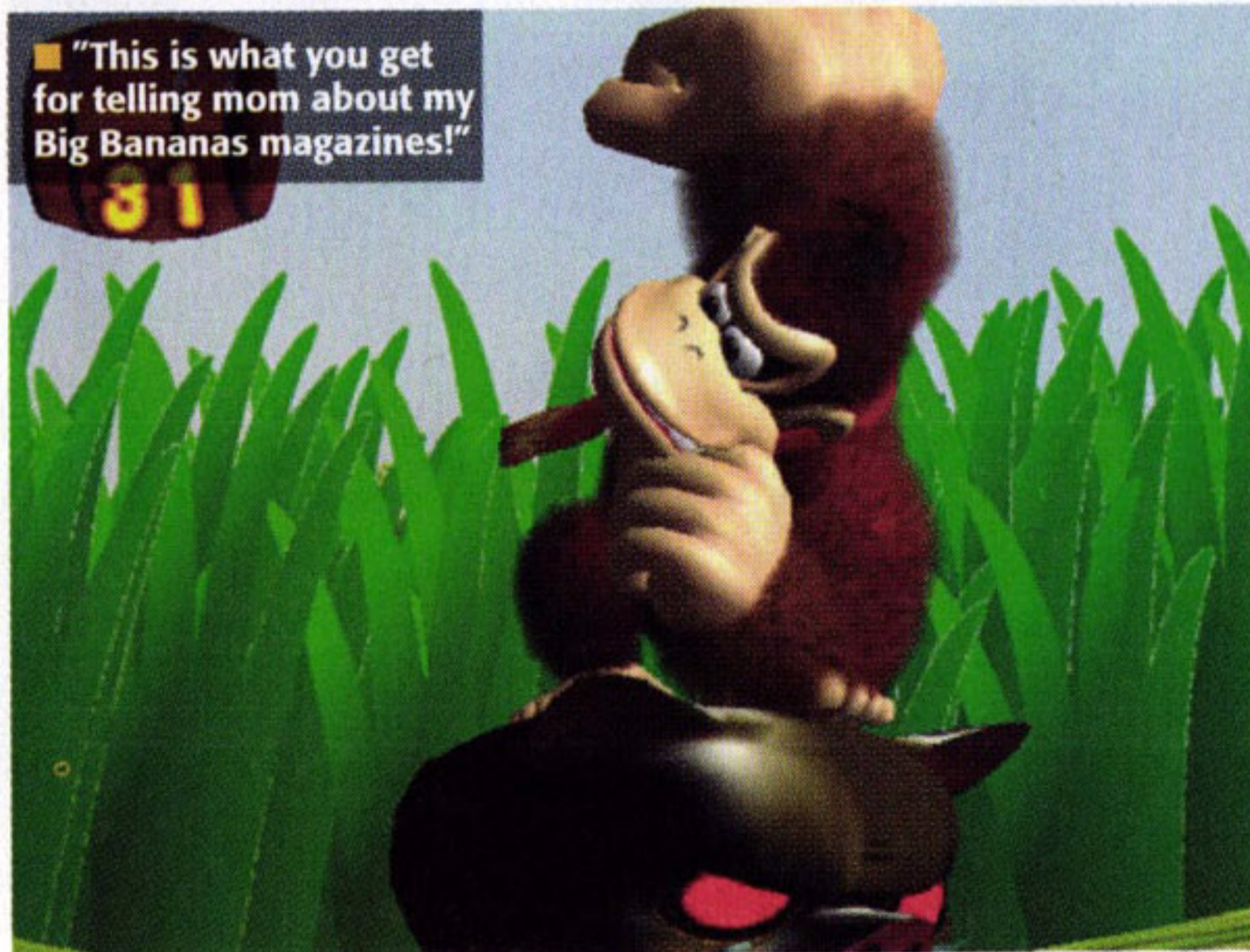
The simplicity of this game's basic concept somewhat masks what a fun and original title it truly is. The inventive control mechanic instantly sets it apart from other platformers and earning medals based on performance adds replay value. The graphics are nice and sharp, and the sound brims with classic Donkey Kong appeal. And, if nothing else, it's nice to play a game with the bongo controller that doesn't penalize us for our freakish lack of rhythm. ■ ■ ■



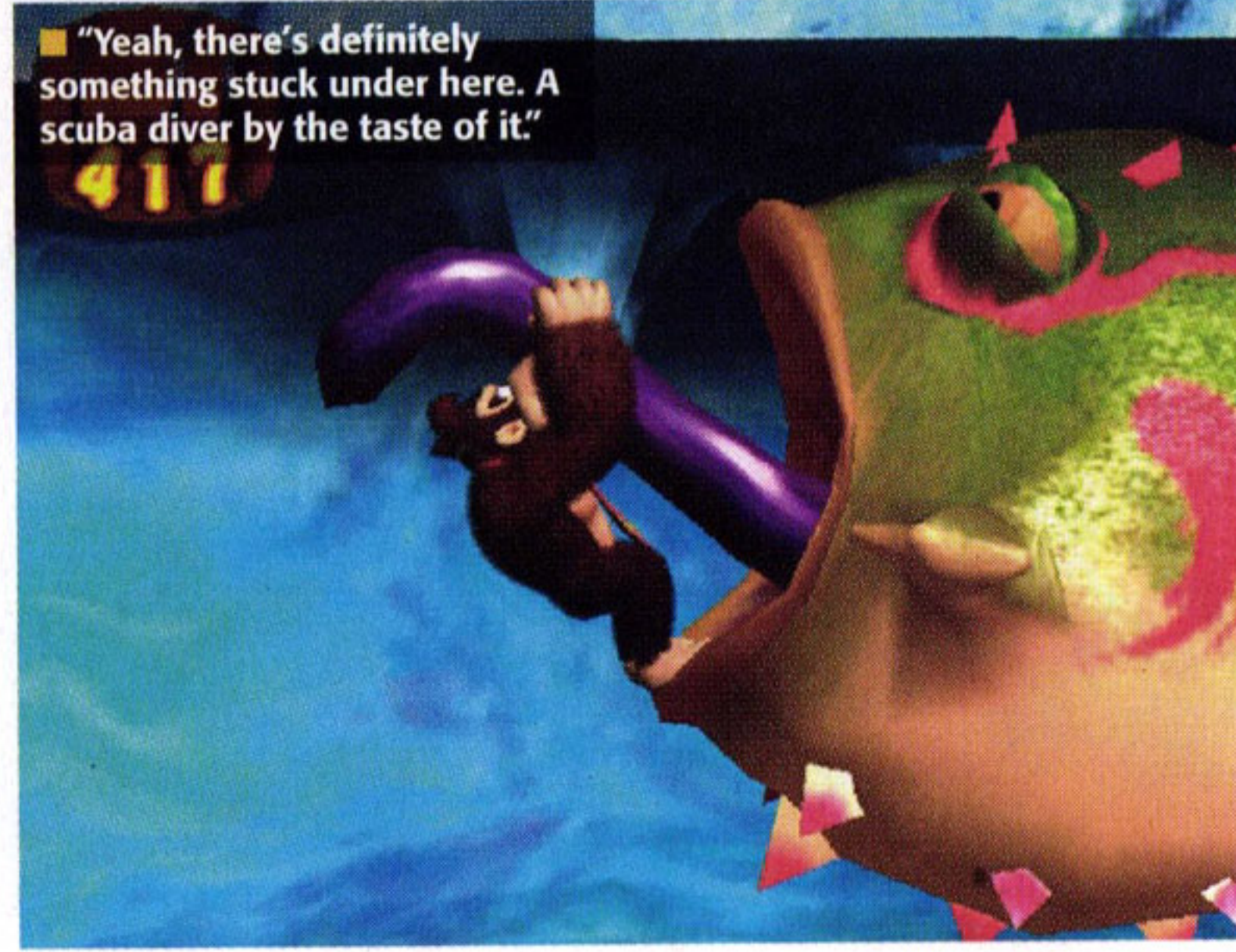
■ DK's willingness to do anything to get bananas is a clear sign of obsessive/compulsive disorder



■ DK is a part-time spider mechanic, and will change your spider's oil for only \$14.95



■ "This is what you get for telling mom about my Big Bananas magazines!"



■ "Yeah, there's definitely something stuck under here. A scuba diver by the taste of it."



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# Super Monkey Ball Deluxe

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MARCH

## TAKE THE CHIMP CHALLENGE

**O**n the GameCube, a system known for its excellent party games, both Super Monkey Ball titles were standouts. In March, the PlayStation 2 and Xbox are getting their own hot simian injection. For those who haven't rolled the monkeys yet, the basic idea is to navigate goofy mazes Marble Madness-style to earn points that unlock party games. These minigames are the true draw of the title, ranging from hang-gliding to tennis and bowling. Even though Super Monkey Ball Deluxe is more of a special edition than a new title, it will nonetheless give GameCube-impaired gamers the chance to experience the best that Sega's star chimps have to offer.

SMB Deluxe features a similar story mode to the one that the second title offered, but with one primary concern addressed. Many people justly felt that

a good portion of the mazes in SMB 2's single-player relied more on blind luck than skill, and Sega has identified and removed them. To keep things on par with the other games, SMB Deluxe contains 250 of the best maps from both original titles as well as 50 new ones. Ideally, this will result in a much-improved single-player game, and remove the need to save your points to unlock whichever minigame you want to play and simply reset the console to play a different one.

Since SMB Deluxe also includes every single minigame from the first two titles for your partying pleasure, it should be a slam dunk for anyone who hasn't played those games. Because, in all seriousness, rolling around a little ball that has a monkey in it has to be one of the quirkiest, most entertaining ideas to ever hit consoles. ■■■



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

# Phantom Kingdom

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE > **DEVELOPER** NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** TBD



## NO RELATION TO BRAVE

**P**rolific publisher/developer Nippon Ichi Software has recently announced the forthcoming release of another strategy/RPG for the PlayStation 2 in Japan. Though the company hasn't committed to a U.S. release yet, it seems unlikely that it wouldn't bring it stateside given the recent opening of NIS America offices. Phantom Kingdom looks to share the same anime stylings as Nippon Ichi's previous offerings (Disgaea, La Pucelle, Phantom Brave), but features a totally different combat system.

You know a game doesn't take itself too seriously when the story concept is that the lord of the netherworld (and main character), Lord Zetta, blew up his own kingdom and convinced three evil gods to remake it. The catch is that Lord Zetta is a nobody in this new world – he has to build up an army and conquer it all over again. Of course, the gods he made the bargain with in the first place, being evil, amuse themselves by messing with Zetta as he tries to regain

his throne. It's worth noting that if this follows at all in the footsteps of Nippon Ichi's past projects, "evil" translates much more to "mischievous" than "cruel."

The big twist to the strategy in Phantom Kingdom is that you'll have to use the INVITE system to field your troops. What this boils down to is summoning buildings onto the battleground, from which your soldiers pour forth to crush the opposition. How exactly this works is unknown, but Nippon Ichi's pedigree regarding playing around with the strategy/RPG formula is impeccable. Also promised is a variety of randomly-generated settings in which to fight it out. Everything from modern warfare (complete with rocket launchers) to more traditional fantasy swords-and-sorcery will appear in Phantom Kingdom. If Nippon Ichi's last three titles are any indication whatsoever, this game will provide another gigantic, tactically deep, and mischievously funny title. We'll let you know as soon as a U.S. release date is announced. ■■■



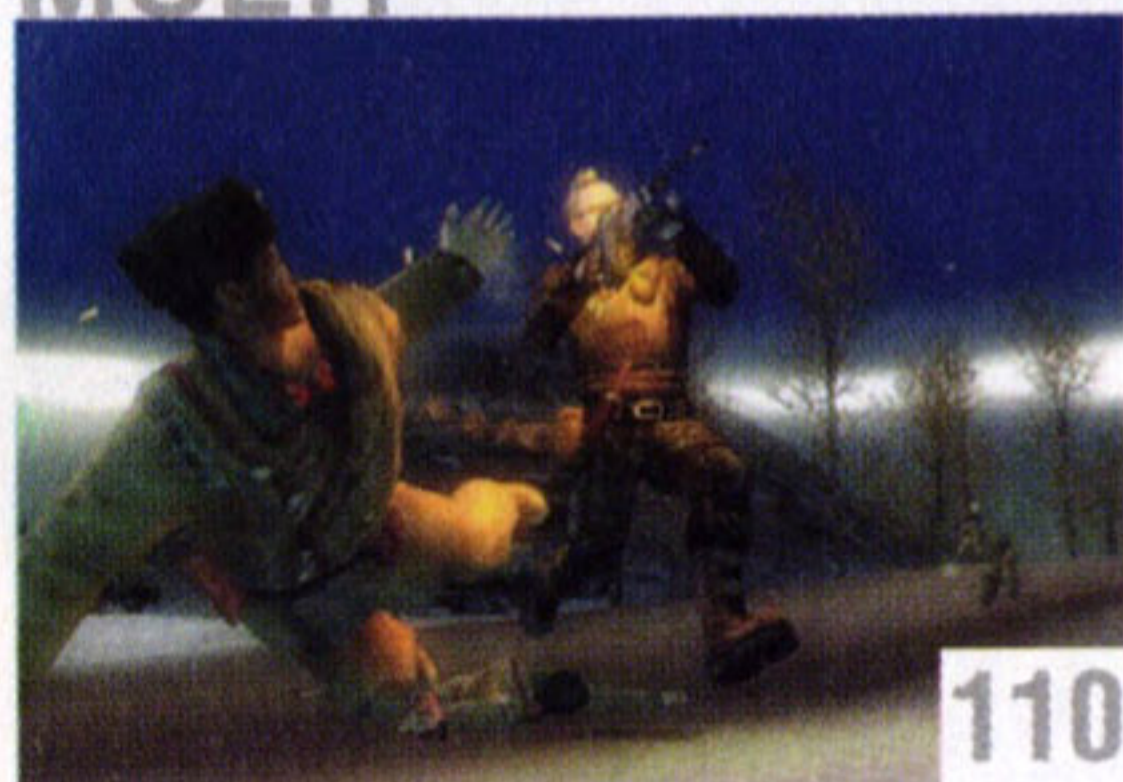
■ The story cutscenes are as anime as can be



# REVIEWS

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## The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap

Melding the best traditions of previous Zelda games with some incredible new features, The Minish Cap is the classic tale retold in a new light. Shrink to the size of a thimble and explore the tiny world beneath your feet. Battle evil sorcery, fight diabolical monsters, and save the princess. Sometimes the oldest formulas are still the best. With clever puzzles, a world-spanning adventure, and a boy hero with nothing but a big heart (or maybe three) to sustain him, the legend is as alive as it ever was. Get ready to start humming that familiar tune – Link's new game is on page 124.

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

### THE SCORING SYSTEM

- 10** Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
- 9** Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
- 8** Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.
- 7** Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.
- 6** Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.
- 5** Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
- 4** Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
- 3** Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
- 2** Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
- 1** Infernal. Forged by lesser demons from the steaming pile of Mephistopheles' excrement, these damned games managed to escape the confines of Hell's eighth circle.

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

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

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

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

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

> **Replay Value**

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

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

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

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

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



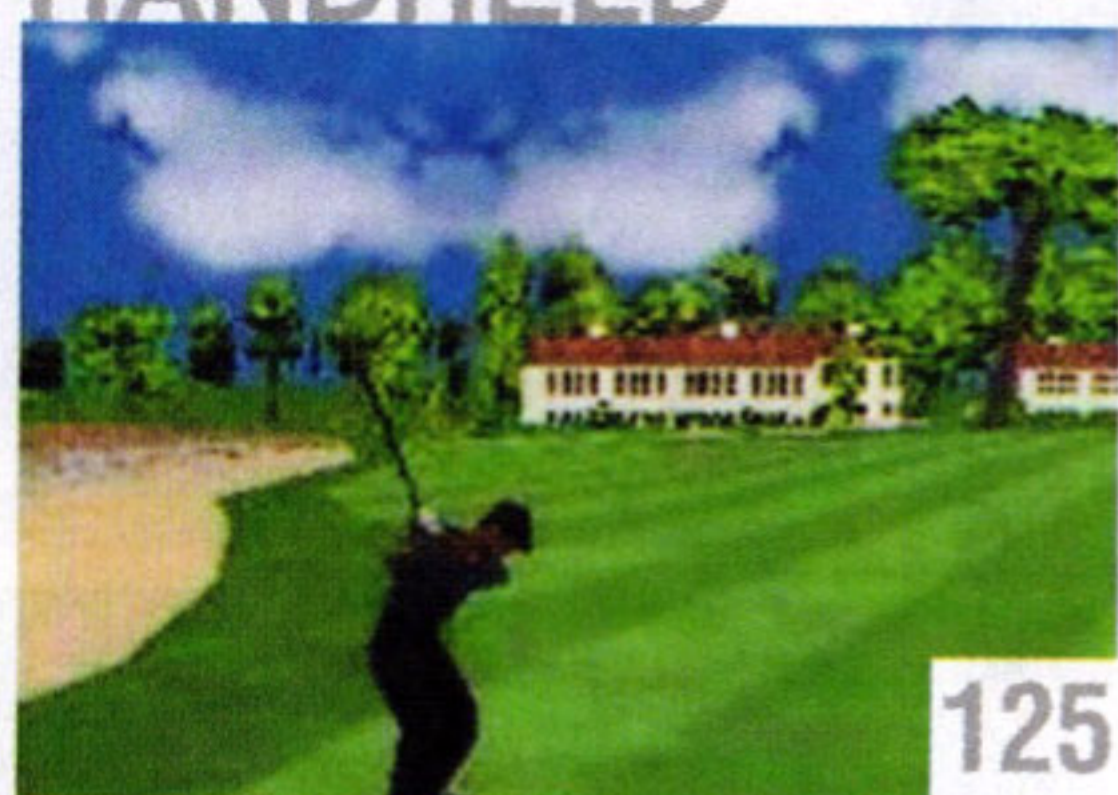
PC



EverQuest II

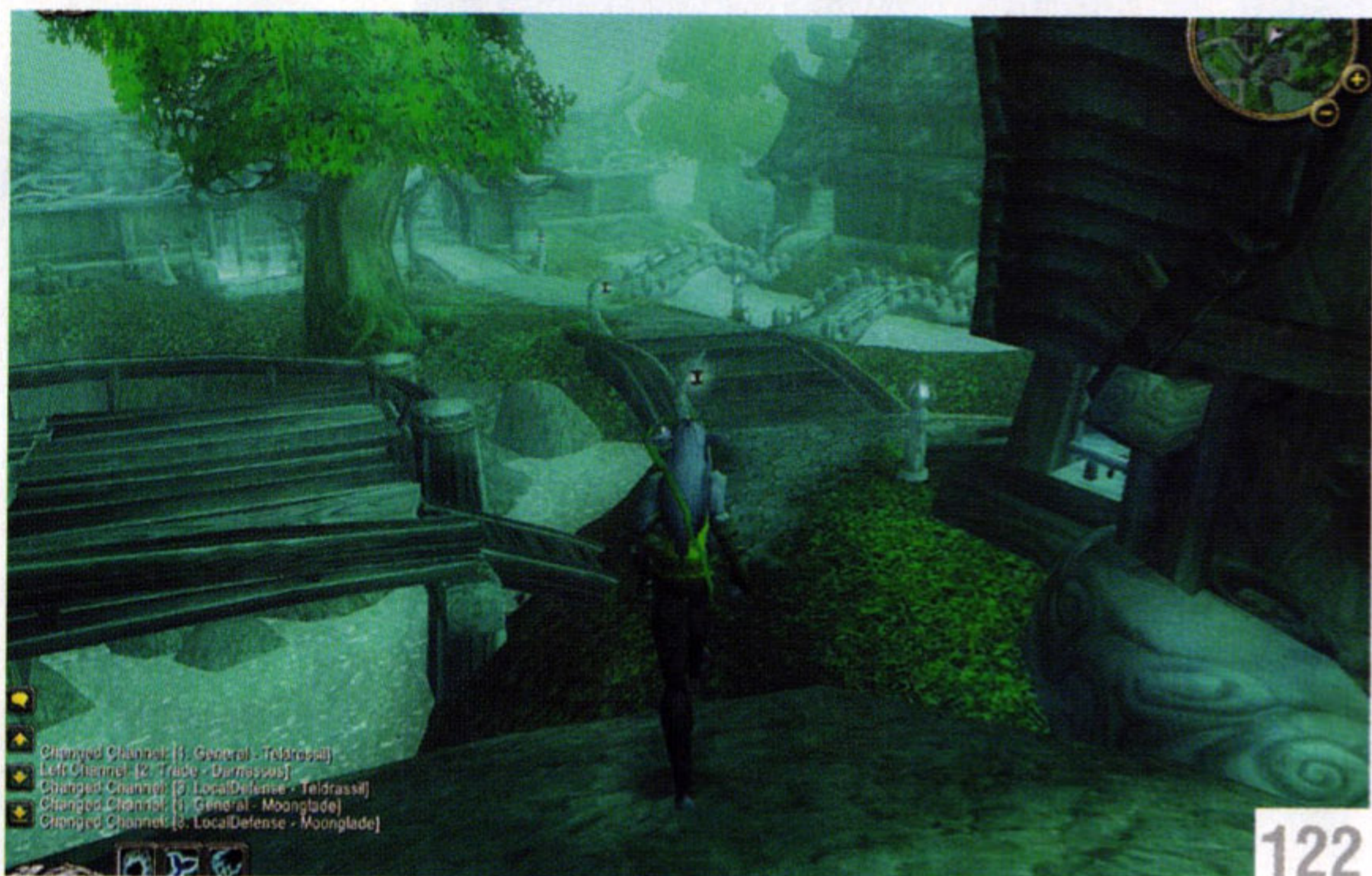
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HANDHELD



Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005

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# World of Warcraft

It's been a while since a Blizzard Entertainment game hit shelves, and fanboys the world around have been anticipating the release of the famed developer's MMORPG the whole time. In what has become a nice little trend for PC gamers, the final product lives up to expectations and more. Whatever your style of play, regardless of whether you've tried the whole MMORPG scene, World of Warcraft delivers in nearly every way possible. Check out the full review on page 122

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pg. 121

## the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

<b>ESRB</b> CONTENT RATED BY <b>ESRB</b>	<b>CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 3 AND OLDER.</b>	<b>ESRB</b> CONTENT RATED BY <b>ESRB</b>	<b>CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS 17 AGES AND OLDER.</b>
<b>ESRB</b> CONTENT RATED BY <b>ESRB</b>	<b>CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 6 AND OLDER.</b>	<b>ESRB</b> CONTENT RATED BY <b>ESRB</b>	<b>CONTENT SUITABLE ONLY FOR ADULTS.</b>
<b>ESRB</b> CONTENT RATED BY <b>ESRB</b>	<b>CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 13 AND OLDER.</b>	<b>ESRB</b> CONTENT RATED BY <b>ESRB</b>	<b>PRODUCT IS AWAITING FINAL RATING.</b>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**CG** – Computer-Generated graphics

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

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

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

**FPS** – Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First-Person Shooters like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty

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

**frontend** – A game's menus and options

**funnyhat** – What burnt-out editors wear when they need inspiration to come up with a joke no one will read anyway

**GBA** – Game Boy Advance

**GBC** – Game Boy Color

**GC** – GameCube

**HDTV** – High Definition Television

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

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

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

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

**minigame** – A small, simple game within a larger one

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

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

**N64** – Nintendo 64

**NES** – Nintendo Entertainment System

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

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

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

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

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

**PS2** – Sony PlayStation 2

**PSone** – Sony PlayStation

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

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

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

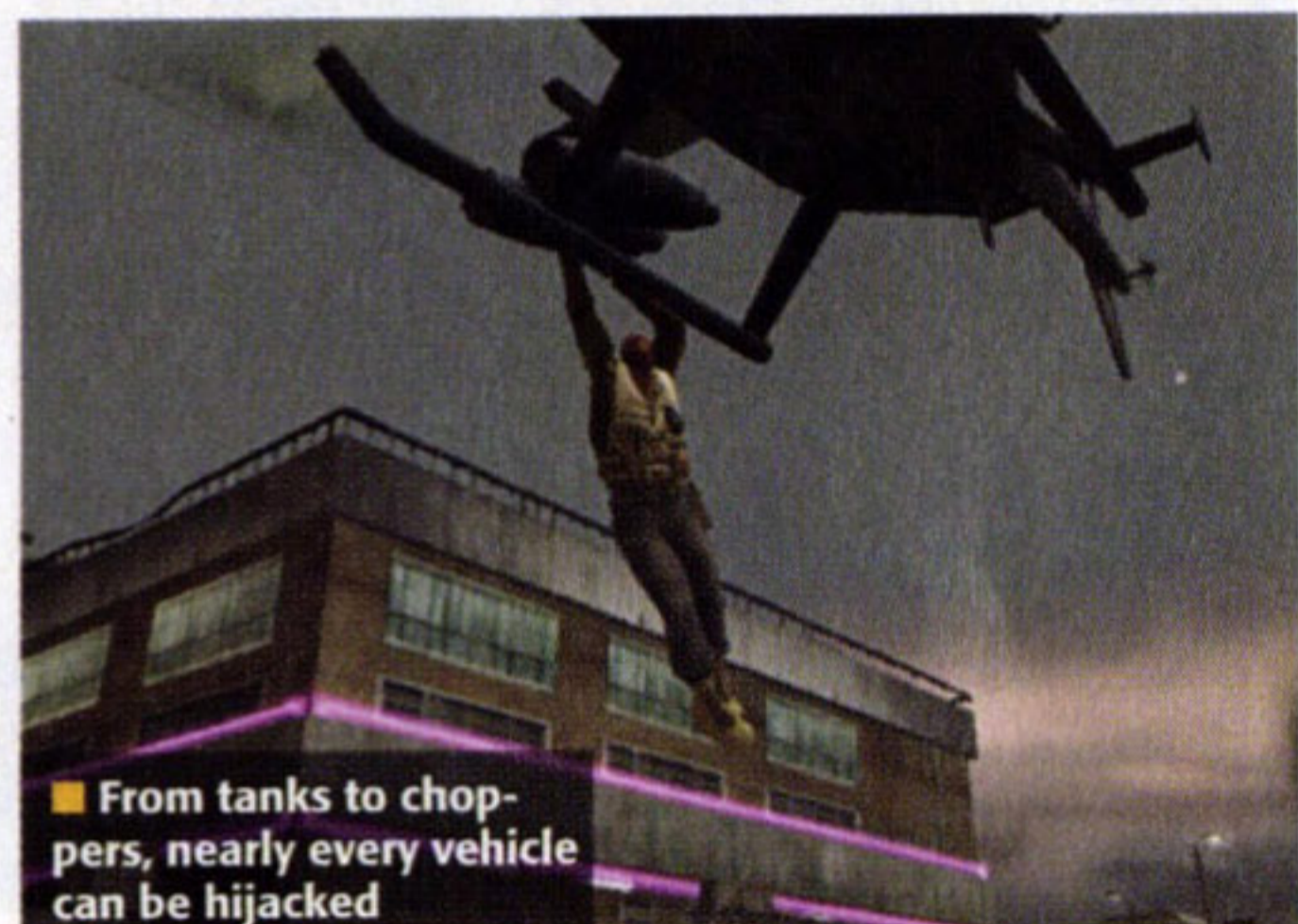
**shooter** – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius

**SNES** – Super Nintendo Entertainment System

**sports** – A term we use for games like MaddenNFL

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

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



**BOTTOM LINE** 7.5

- > **Concept:** Run and gun while pledging your allegiance to whoever has the deepest pockets
- > **Graphics:** Apart from some really pretty particle effects, nothing stands out visually
- > **Sound:** The game's high point. The mayhem is accompanied by a rousing and majestic score
- > **Playability:** Great job giving each vehicle a unique feel, but none of them are particularly fast or fun to drive
- > **Entertainment:** Your enjoyment directly depends on how long you can stand the "go here and kill these people" formula
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 7.75

If developer Pandemic's Full Spectrum Warrior restricted players to the confining box of military tactics, then Mercenaries takes the blinders off and lets gamers step out into a wider world. Full Spectrum Warrior was a game of robotic toy soldiers, and Mercenaries also lacks a soul as it plays the part of rebel without a cause. I had fun running and gunning with each double and triple cross, but at the end of the day, the title remained a flitting butterfly (albeit one packed with anti-tank missiles), with no one aspect really grabbing my imagination or lifting Mercenaries above being a collection of generic action missions. I will say this: Kudos to Pandemic for allowing enough wiggle room in the title's design to give you the freedom to complete jobs for all the competing sides without breaking the game. After all, you are a professional with a job to do, and Mercenaries makes it a fun day at the office.—KATO

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# Mercenaries

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JANUARY 11 > **ESRB** T

## YOU'VE LOST THAT LOVING FEALTY

**M**aybe you've heard this one before: as a battle-hardened badass, it is your job to explore an expansive free roaming environment by stealing vehicles and using overpowered assault weapons to clear your path. Of course, the landscape is also peppered with various characters eager to assign you missions and reward your efforts. Sound like a tune you've been dancing to for a while? Though you may not find Mercenaries incredibly original or compelling, it gets a ton of mileage out of the fact that it is always fun to watch things explode. Always.

Set in a politically unstable North Korea (with several foreign powers vying for supremacy), Mercenaries puts you in the shoes of one of three elite soldiers-for-hire. Though each character technically has particular strengths, the effect they have on actual gameplay is negligible — any character can use any weapon and drive any vehicle. Fortunately, there is a ton of each to experiment with, leading to some truly hilarious carnage. I especially loved flying around in a helicopter, lowering a winch to grab a passing civilian car, and then slinging it into

enemy fortifications. Then again, it's hard to beat that warm feeling you get after brutalizing an international criminal and leaving him lying handcuffed and prone next to some C4.

Though I certainly enjoyed dinking around like this for a while, Mercenaries banks on the appeal of wholesale destruction rather than genuinely engaging gameplay. Though it is to be commended for trying to expand the standard "cruise around doing missions" experience, the things it adds don't really contribute much. For instance, though the concept of warring factions and fluctuating loyalties is cool, it is painfully weak in execution. If you work with the Chinese, you cheese off the Russian Mafia. However, if you bribe them, then

**the edge**

*When All Games Aren't Created Equal*

Though both versions look and feel pretty much the same, there are a few things that give the Xbox a slight advantage. The loading screens on the PS2 get a bit too long, plus the Xbox supports 480p.

■ From tanks to choppers, nearly every vehicle can be hijacked

everything is fine again. In other words, who you work for and who you blow up doesn't have any real repercussions; if you've got cash, you've got friends. Much like the impressive and abundant explosions the game contains, whatever spark of interest Mercenaries may ignite quickly fizzles out due to lackluster mission objectives, flat story and characters (though Matthias, the Swedish merc, has some funny moments), and a generally derivative feel. Like the boring guy the girl always dumps in romantic comedies for the dynamic and spontaneous "Mr. Right," Mercenaries can temporarily fill a void in your life, but you won't want to hang on to it forever.—JOE

■ "Hmm. I think the Jeep and the truck need some alone time"



■ The physics and particle effects spice up some otherwise standard action





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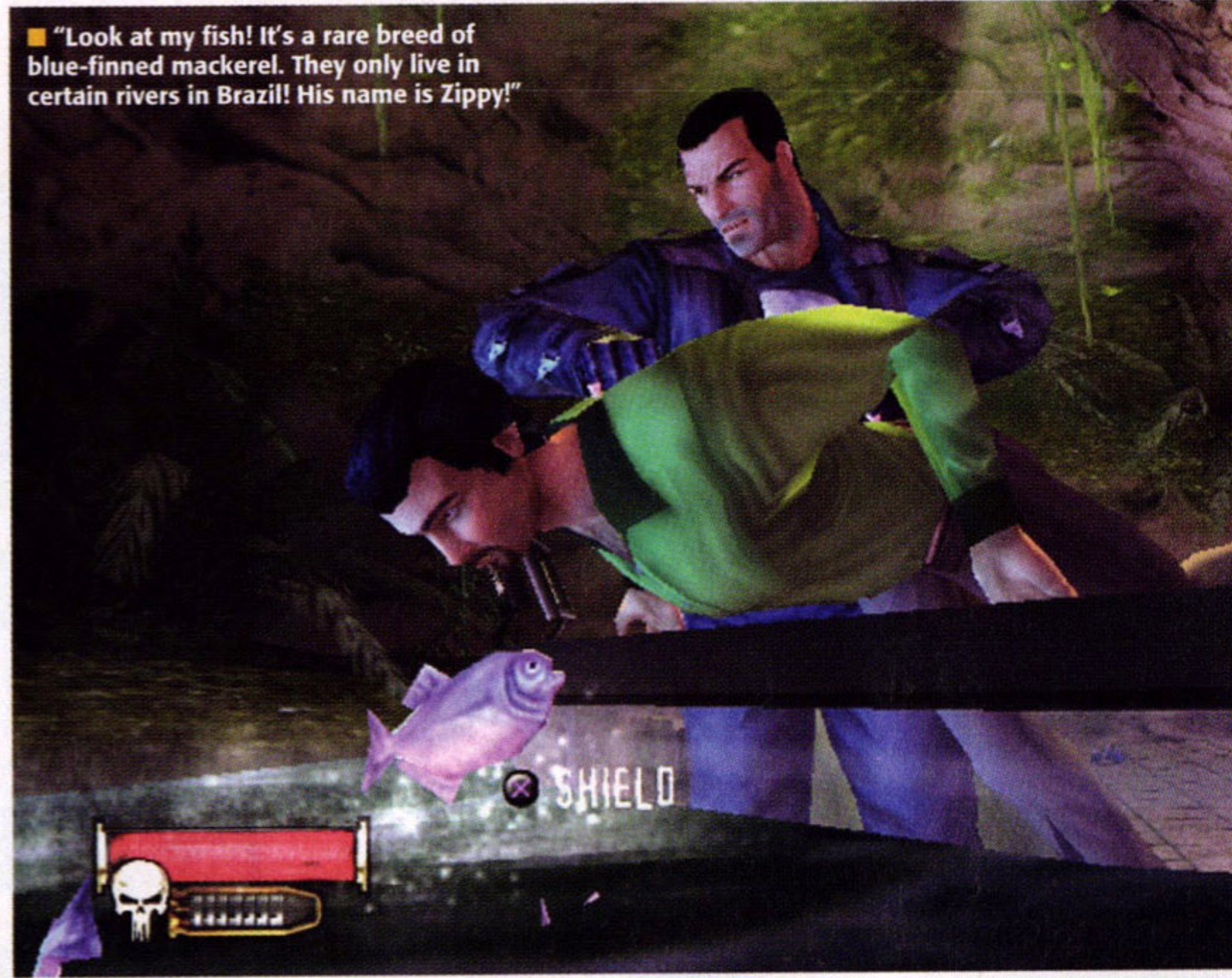
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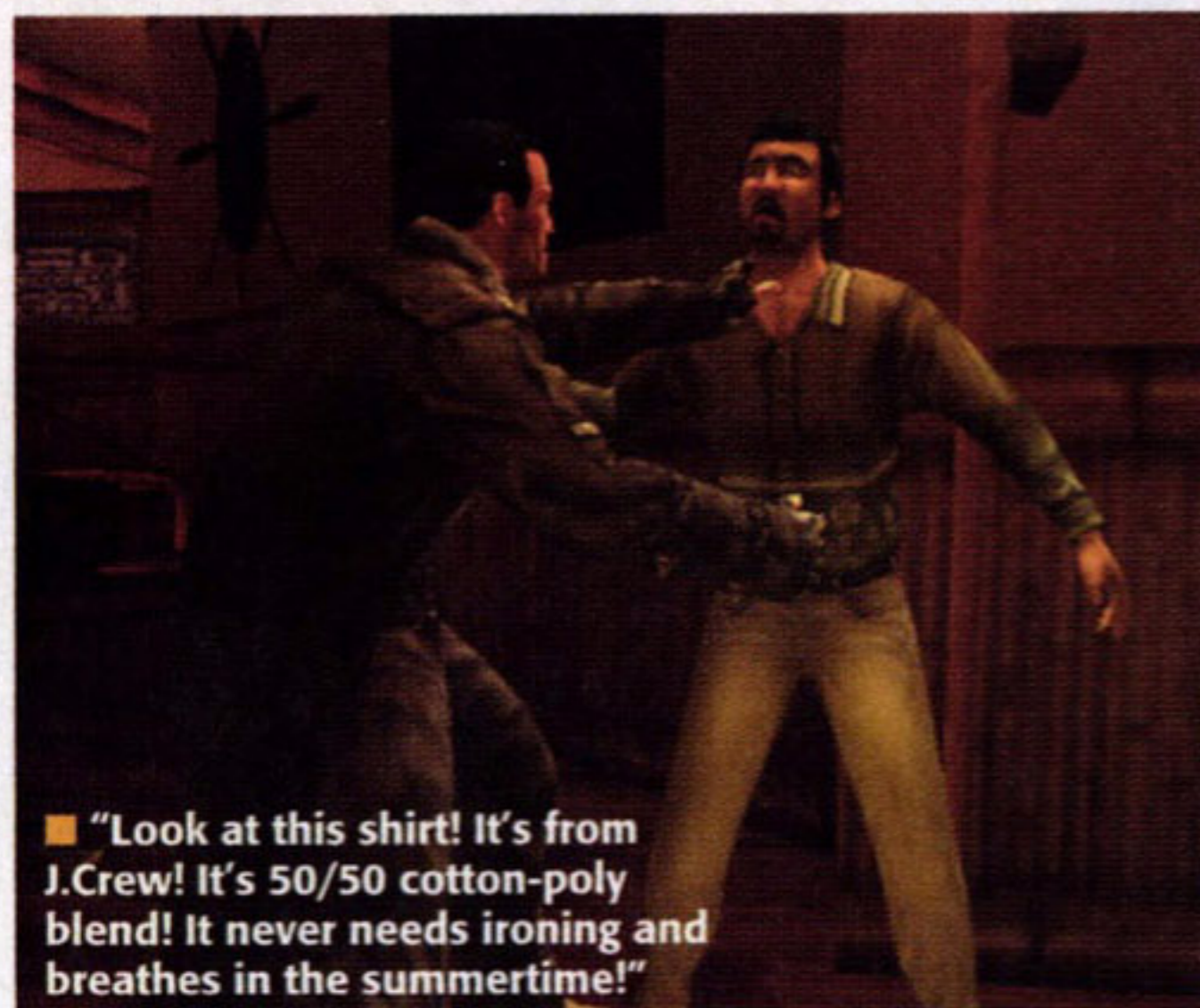
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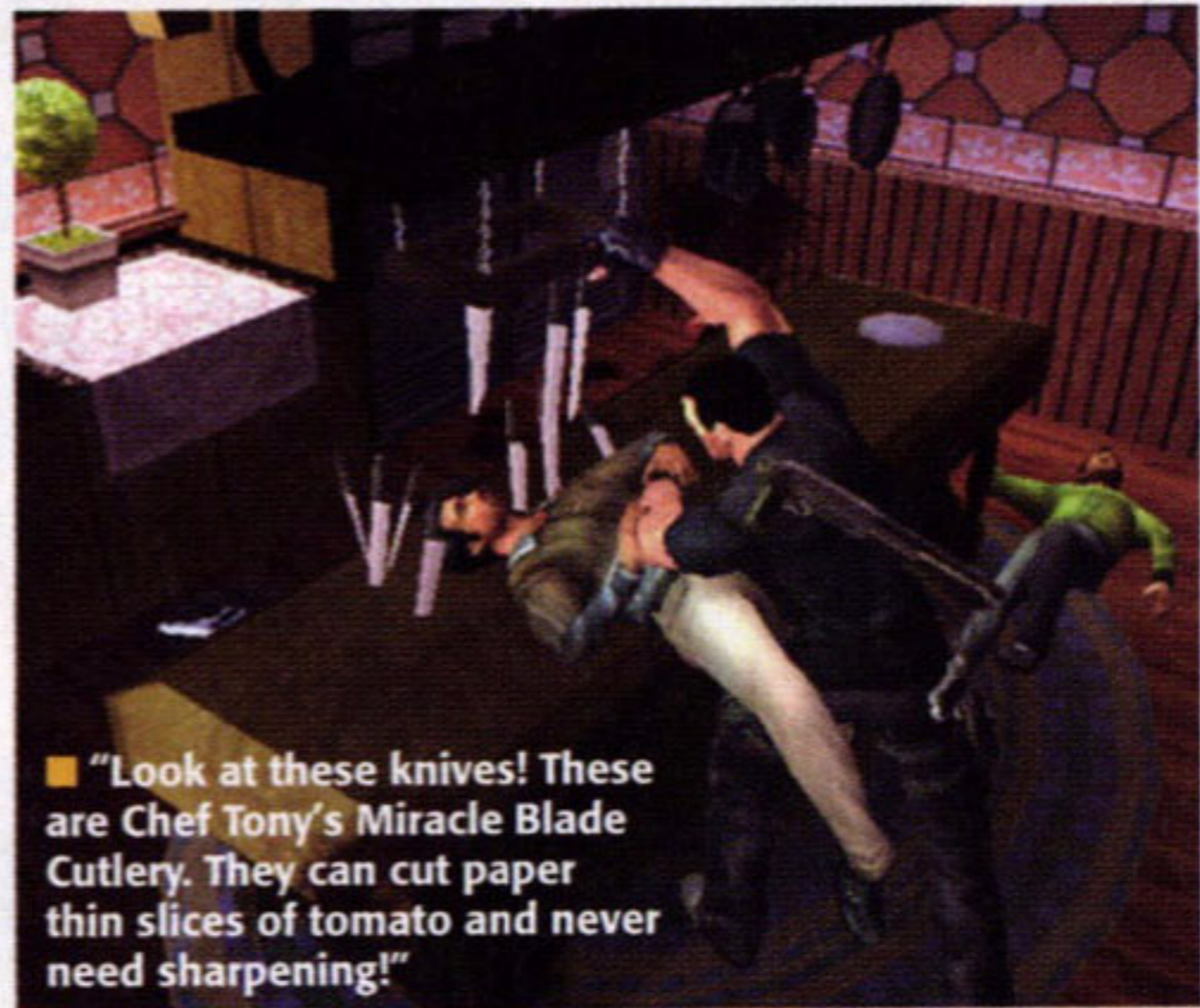
■ "Look at my fireplace! Notice the hand-carved molding and hand-painted gold leaf!"



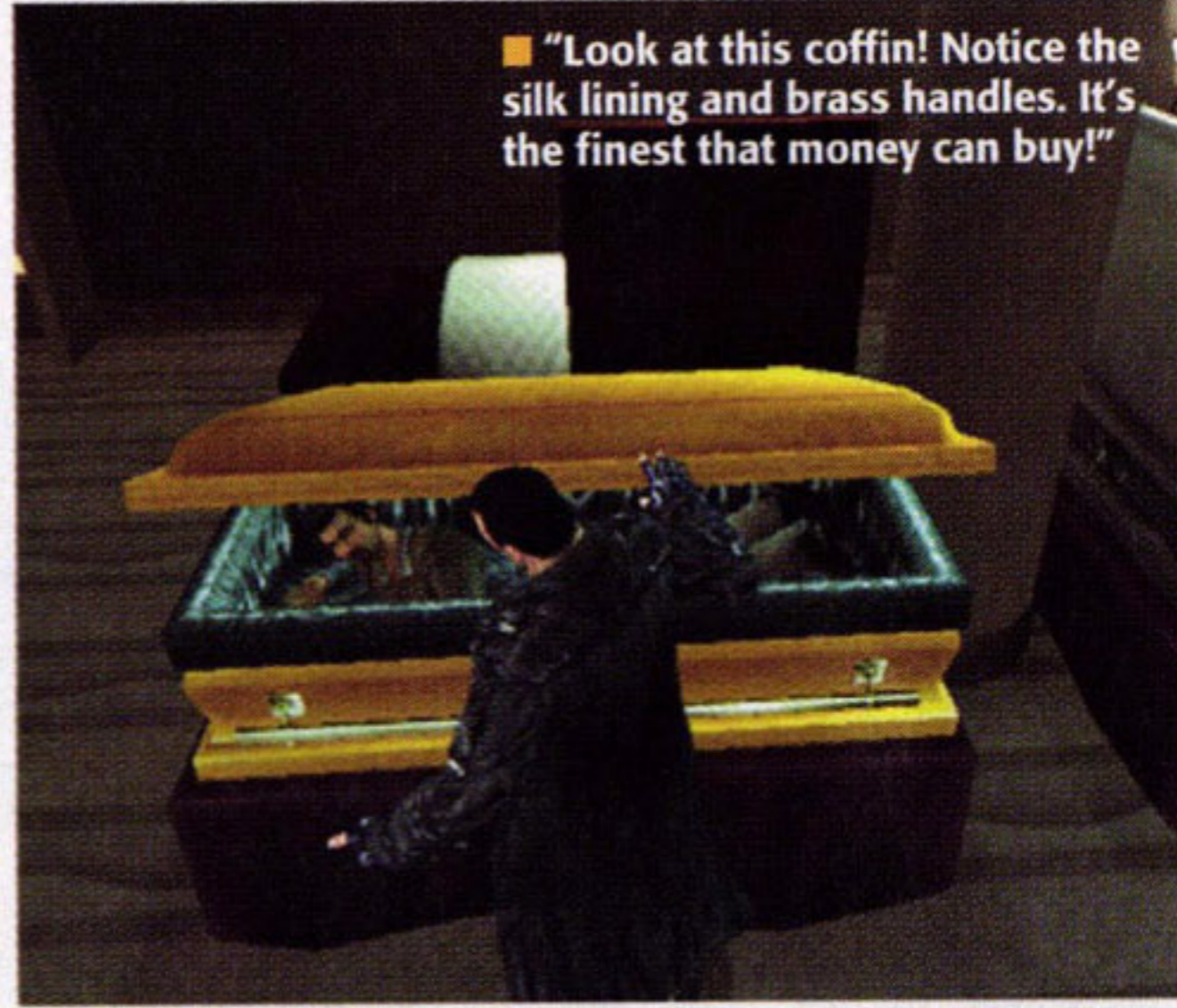
■ "Look at my fish! It's a rare breed of blue-finned mackerel. They only live in certain rivers in Brazil! His name is Zippy!"



■ "Look at this shirt! It's from J.Crew! It's 50/50 cotton-poly blend! It never needs ironing and breathes in the summertime!"



■ "Look at these knives! These are Chef Tony's Miracle Blade Cutlery. They can cut paper thin slices of tomato and never need sharpening!"



■ "Look at this coffin! Notice the silk lining and brass handles. It's the finest that money can buy!"

**BOTTOM LINE** **7.5**

> **Concept:** Enter the sick mind of Frank Castle and obliterate countless foes with guns ablaze or by torture

> **Graphics:** The environments leave much to be desired, but the detail in the character models is very impressive and the black and white polarizing effect rocks

> **Sound:** The Punisher's dialogue (voiced by Thomas Jane) is both witty and rightfully disturbing

> **Playability:** General movement is a bit sluggish and the targeting system is not very precise. The interrogations are great, however

> **Entertainment:** It delivers something new with its shocking kills, but remains a middle of the road action game

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** **7.25**

For better or for worse, this game stays truer to its source material than most comic book games out there. It really captures the violence and black humor of the Garth Ennis/Steve Dillon run of the comic, which is perversely fun for the first couple hours. But beyond that, the game starts to grow stale, as there is really no variation to the run and gun gameplay. The interrogations and special kills that are so shockingly amusing in the early stages even start to feel like a chore — since they become increasingly less common as the story progresses, it feels like even Volition grew tired of the gimmick. Still, this game is good for a few evil laughs, but I think I'll continue to get my Punisher fix in comic book form. —JEREMY

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# The Punisher

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** VOLITION > **RELEASE** JANUARY 11 > **ESRB** M

## VIDEO GAMES' NEW BAD BOY

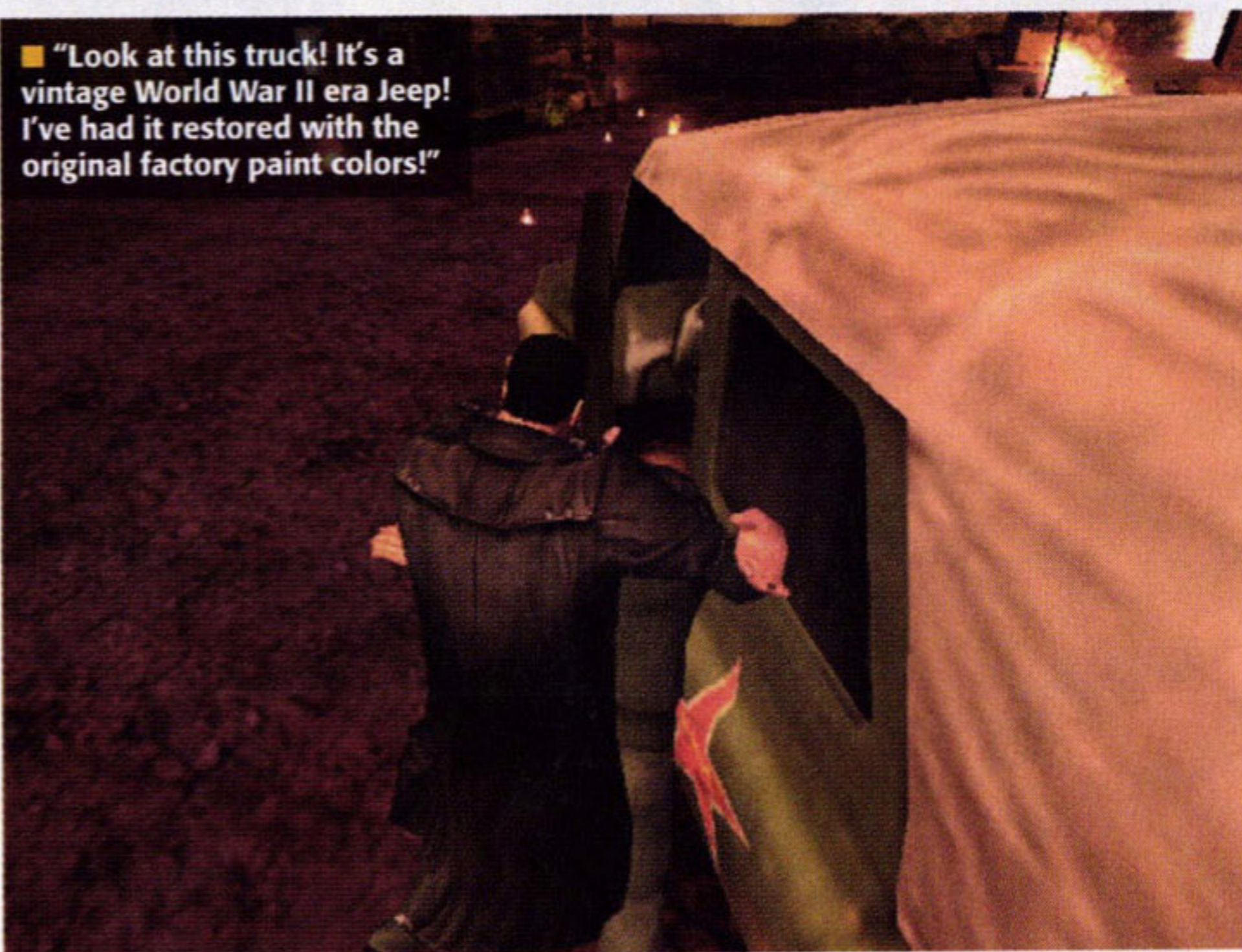
Until a developer creates a game that puts players into the shoes of a severely demented protagonist who disembowels his adversaries with a plastic fork and wears their intestines as suspenders, *The Punisher* will hold the notorious distinction of being the most grotesque and violent game to date. While most of the gameplay unfolds through fairly tame and enjoyable shootouts reminiscent of the *Max Payne* series, it paves its own bloody path with a unique interrogation system that shows just how ruthless and psychotic *The Punisher* can be.

Whether you are holding an adversary at gunpoint, dangling them off of a ledge, or threatening to grind the flesh off of their face on an electric sander, *The Punisher* knows just how to make people talk. It's what happens after they squeal that is truly disturbing. You can do the humane thing and let them go, or you can finish them off in a way that usually leaves a blood smear the size of Rhode Island. Horror movie fanatics like myself will appreciate just how creative Volition has been with the vast array of deaths in this game. Limbs and heads are lost in fans, bodies are crushed in compactors, humans are added to shark and python diets, facial cosmetics are taken to the next

level in deep fryers, and I've learned that wood isn't the only thing that burns in fireplaces. These executions are so grisly that you can't help but grimace at each drop of blood that is spilled. They are sick. They are wrong. But they are also executed brilliantly. If you think that a specific execution may be too much for your heart to handle, don't do it. Just get the info you need and release your prisoner. The player is the one who determines how violent the action gets. Do you value your ethics? Or do you want a gruesome thrill? The choice is yours.

Mechanically, the interrogation system is easy to use and the array of actions that *The Punisher* can utilize is quite impressive. Volition also did a phenomenal job with level design. No two stages feel alike, and each is brimming with unique death traps, scripted events, and questioning techniques. The game also embraces the atmosphere of the comic series to such a degree that it also feels like you are playing through one of its stories. Several

■ "Look at this truck! It's a vintage World War II era Jeep! I've had it restored with the original factory paint colors!"



of Frank Castle's recent affairs in the comics are recreated, and Volition even enlisted the talent of longtime Punisher scribe Garth Ennis to give this script that authentic feel. To much surprise (this is going to floor you), this game isn't nearly as gory as the comic book. Regardless though, *The Punisher* still takes video game violence to the next level. In many ways, it makes *Manhunt* look as meek and mild as *Sesame Street*.

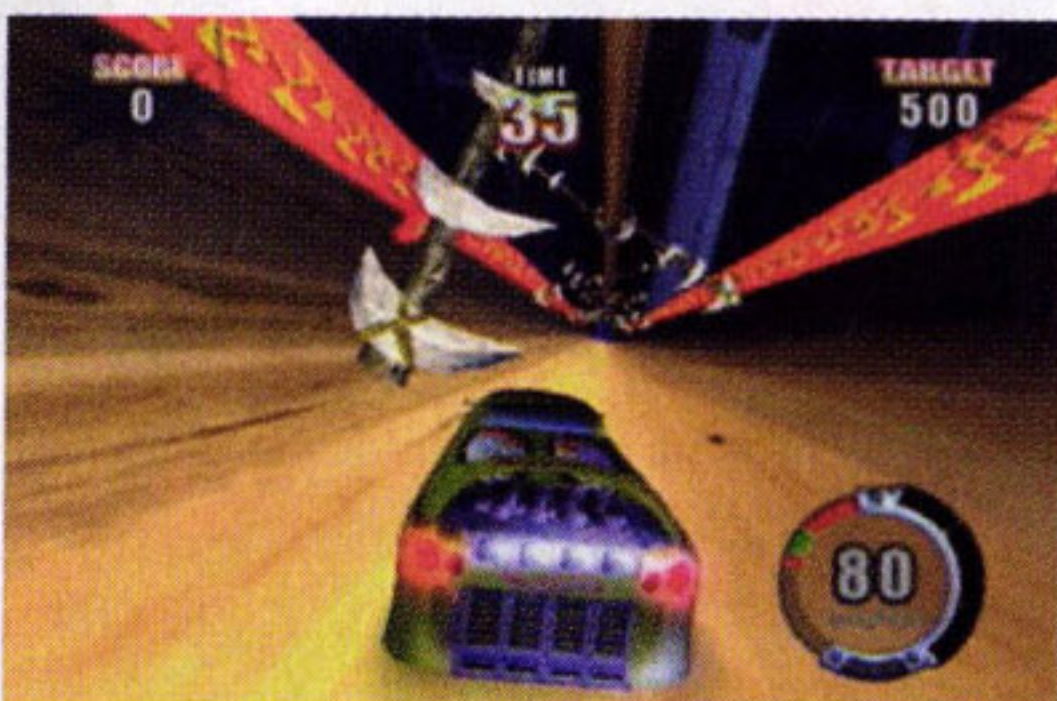
It's a decent play, but it doesn't stack up to other run and gun shooters like *Max Payne* and *Psi-Ops*. Laughable enemy AI, a poor targeting system, and sluggish movement really hold it back from being anything more than average. —REINER

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

## Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge

**BOTTOM LINE** 6.75

> **STYLE** PS2: 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA ONLINE), XBOX: 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** CLIMAX > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E



Climax makes some of the best mediocre games in the business. While that sounds like damning by faint praise, I mean it as a compliment. Like its recently released *Crash 'n' Burn* (published by Eidos), *Stunt Track Challenge* makes the most of what it's working with. It does the Hot Wheels license proud by

sticking to the over-the-top maneuvers that we all imagined our lil' cars could do when we were kids. Now, don't expect the next *Burnout 3* or *GT 4*, but the bite-sized, stunt-oriented stages are for the most part well-executed and keep things fresh between the more conventional races – even with the painfully dorky “host” character. The single-player is fairly short, but I do applaud the fact that they've included online contests, assuming you can actually find some other people out there that are playing this game. Good fun – nothing more, nothing less. —**MATT**

XBOX | GAMECUBE

## Scaler

**BOTTOM LINE** 4.5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE > **DEVELOPER** A2M > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 20 > **ESRB** E

Wow, generic platform games have reached a new pinnacle of dull and cliché. It's not so much *Scaler's* fault as it is poor timing and the fact that eight billion games have come out with essentially the same features (multiple animal forms and sliding on rails/wires/vines, for example). This collect-a-thon featuring a “wise-cracking 12-year-old” offers some seriously dull lead characters, hyper-repetitive action, and a babysitting-required camera that makes the unoriginal platforming even more of a pain. Did I like this game? Oh my word, no. Do I see a future with the characters and universe? Not so much, which is the main reason that I can't give *Scaler* any bonus points for the nicely consistent art style that is its one highlight. —**LISA**

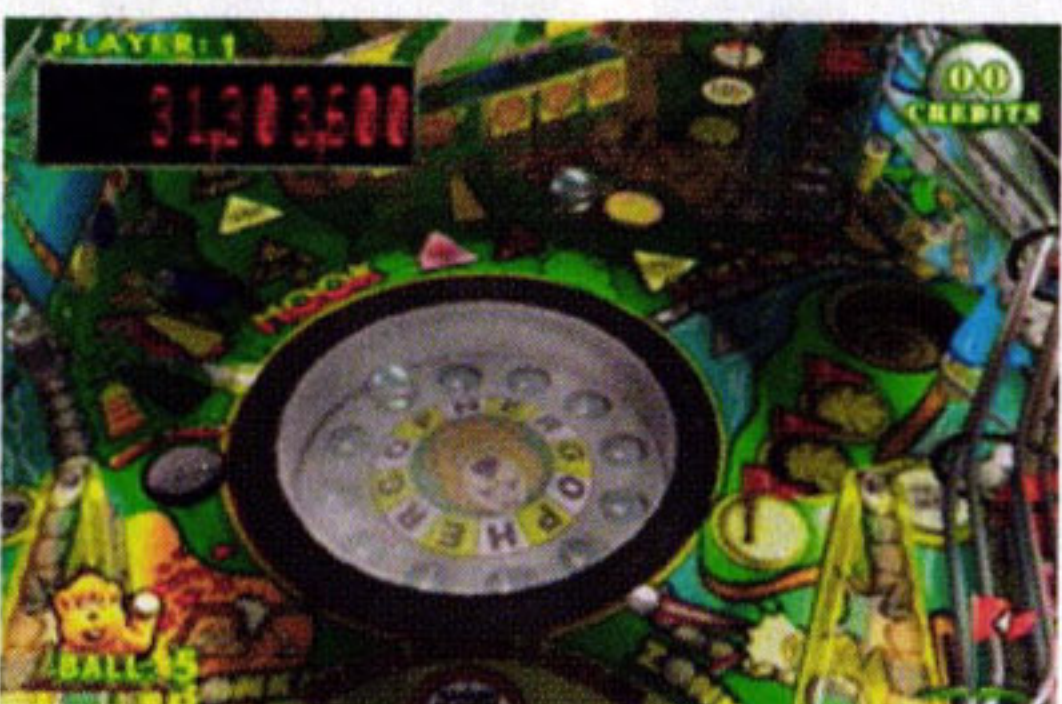


PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

## Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection

**BOTTOM LINE** 6.75

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CRAVE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** FARSIGHT STUDIOS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** E



Rather than offer the ultimate in over-the-top video pinball, *Pinball Hall of Fame* aims to educate the masses on the history of the legendary arcade amusement. It features seven classic Gottlieb tables from the '50s through the '90s, complete with historical information on each. While I love the concept,

you can't hide the fact that some of the older tables seem a bit pedestrian by today's standards. Still, I'd definitely go back for more flipper action with *T'eed Off*, *Genie*, and *Black Hole* (which features a cool recessed lower playfield). I also wasn't crazy about the camera, which zooms in close to the ball so you can't see the complete table when the ball is at the top. Still, it's interesting to see how pinball has progressed through the years, noting the considerable point score inflation that's taken place. —**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

## NFL Street 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA BIG > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 22 > **ESRB** E



### TOUGH GUY TOWN

This series' mixture of show-boating flash and primetime play is an intoxicating combo that hides its simple premise as a pick-up-and-play, multiplayer-on-the-couch game. This brand of football was defined in the original *NFL Street* perhaps a little too well. I say that because it's sequel time and all *NFL Street 2* can come up with on the field is one new move.

The game has expanded in other ways, but this was mainly to diversify and get away from the grinding, boring structure of the first title. You can play through challenges with your created team (*NFL Challenge*), take your favorite team against all the other NFL franchises (*NFL Gauntlet*), or cruise the city picking up players and playing *Street Event* minigames (*Own the City* mode). When you step back and think about it, *NFL Street 2* has diversified to essentially offer three different ways to play the game. I'm torn as to which way I like to play best, and it's almost a shame there isn't one ultimate way to experience the entire title. For instance, I like the feeling of building up the skills of each team member in *NFL Challenge*, but this is absent in *Own the City*. For its part, however, this mode changes things up with *Street Event* minigames – some of which are better than others (all are online,

however).

Despite the myriad ways to experience the game, at its heart, this sequel is virtually unchanged in the gameplay department. I loved the wall jump, which works really well as an evasive maneuver, but the *GameBreaker 2* (see below) is a big fat egg. Apart from the lack of additions, there are problems that aren't cleaned up as well. Players' response to your commands can be sluggish, there are no hot routes, and defenses lack any kind of ball swat move. I also don't like how the impact gear isn't prevalent.

This series is one that posits itself as of the pick-up-and-play variety, which is certainly true. But that doesn't leave it long enough legs to help it run away from the moniker of “mediocre.” —**KATO**



### THE DEAL BREAKER

Two beefs that I had with the first *Street* were that you didn't use your *GameBreakers* enough, and that they were too powerful. Neither has changed. Also, *GameBreaker 2* is a crock because you don't control it. Your reward for filling up your meter twice is to sit back and watch a non-interactive sequence of your team stealing the ball. That's a fumble all right – and EA committed it.

### the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Because of the easier, streamlined controls, each console plays identically. However, the Xbox clearly runs away from the others in the graphics department.

**BOTTOM LINE** 7.5

> **Concept:** You'll love the wall moves, but the majority of the changes this year are structural

> **Graphics:** I was surprised that there didn't seem to be a lot of new tackle animations

> **Sound:** Contains the usual host of EA Trax tunes, including a clutch of exclusive songs

> **Playability:** Players' response to your controller inputs is a tad slow, but signature moves are easier to pull off

> **Entertainment:** More fun than the first, but not by much. This is the game last year's should have been

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 7.5

Ryan Leaf comes to mind when I think of the new *GameBreaker 2*. All this hype and excitement, and they turn out to be the most disappointing aspect of the game. It's a major buzz kill that the computer controls these maneuvers for you. I want to play the game, not watch it from the sidelines! And why does this game make *Xzibit* look like the greatest talent in football? What's next? Ray Charles in *NFL Street 3*? On a positive note, the new wall moves are implemented nicely and really open up the running game. *Own the City* mode also offers up a nice variety of challenges and unlockables. At its core, this is still a hard-hitting game, but the majority of new content just doesn't sit well. —**REINER**



■ The 108 Stars of Destiny return. If they have a character portrait, odds are you can recruit them.

PLAYSTATION 2

# Suikoden IV

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE JANUARY 11 > ESRB T

## 108 HEROES FOR SAIL

Any game featuring a hero with an extreme bowl cut is going to have to try a little bit harder to endear itself to the gaming community. Fortunately, with outstanding gameplay trumping its predecessor and a plot to rival today's global power struggles, Suikoden IV covers more than enough ground to compensate for the fashion follies of its nameless hero ("Buster" in my playthrough. Try it. It works). From the little touches like dilated pupils and oddly satisfying death animations to the grand world-enveloping storyline, Suikoden IV is a unique and gratifying RPG experience for gamers seeking something a little different.

As fans of the series have come to expect, the battle system for Suikoden IV has been entirely reworked. Though characters can still perform combo attacks with each other, the pairing system from the previous game has been scrapped in favor of a more traditional four-person lineup, with each warrior acting individually. To give the combat a little more variation, you'll occasionally have fights that depart drastically from the standard form: Ship battles have you

firing your rune cannons across a grid-based battlefield, and the one-on-one duels (think "Rock, Paper, Scissors," but with swords) make a return. Though these additional combat styles are simplistic, they are still great fun, and a welcome deviation from the normal pattern.

With the numerous entertaining battles and engaging story, part of me wants to wholeheartedly recommend Suikoden IV, but it gets hamstrung in a couple of important places. First of all, with the advent of recorded dialogue, the whole "silent hero" concept has ceased to be endearing, and instead makes every story point surrounding him awkward. The supporting cast typically won't even do the "What was that? You want us to attack?" work-around, which renders your main hero a strangely mute non-presence in the events determining his fate.

Perhaps the biggest detriment to Suikoden IV can best be characterized by Milhouse Van Houten's immortal utterance: "When are they going to get to the fireworks factory?" There are always exciting events just looming on the horizon, but many require bouts of oceanic exploration before they unfold. Here's the problem: your ship moves like a landmass with sails, and random encounters spring up every five seconds or so. This means that every time you need to go exploring, the game is artificially extended by about 45 minutes because of the inordinate amount of time it takes to traverse even a small expanse of the ocean.

Fortunately, between these bouts of tedium (which aren't a constant problem), the story progresses at a respectable clip, with plenty of revelations and a steady influx of new members to keep your party interesting. Add to that several moments in the story that will leave you staring at your screen slack-jawed in awe, and you have an outstanding adventure that rewards you well for your perseverance. Wisely borrowing elements from classics like Final Fantasy X and Chrono Cross, at its best moments Suikoden IV sits right up there with the most outstanding RPGs ever created.—**JOE**

**"At its best moments, Suikoden IV sits right up there with the most outstanding RPGs ever created"**



■ Duels and ship battles are two ways the combat stays fresh



■ A party full of cat people? Jeremy's dream come true!

**BOTTOM LINE 8.5**

> **Concept:** Another 108 Stars of Destiny are in desperate need of rallying. Get crackin'!

> **Graphics:** Crisp, colorful visuals (especially running in 480p) and a stunning oceanic setting puts this entry leagues ahead of its predecessors

> **Sound:** The score is beautiful, and the addition of voice acting (except for the silent hero) breathes life into the world

> **Playability:** The new battle system is fast and fun, but controlling your ship is like driving a soggy sweater

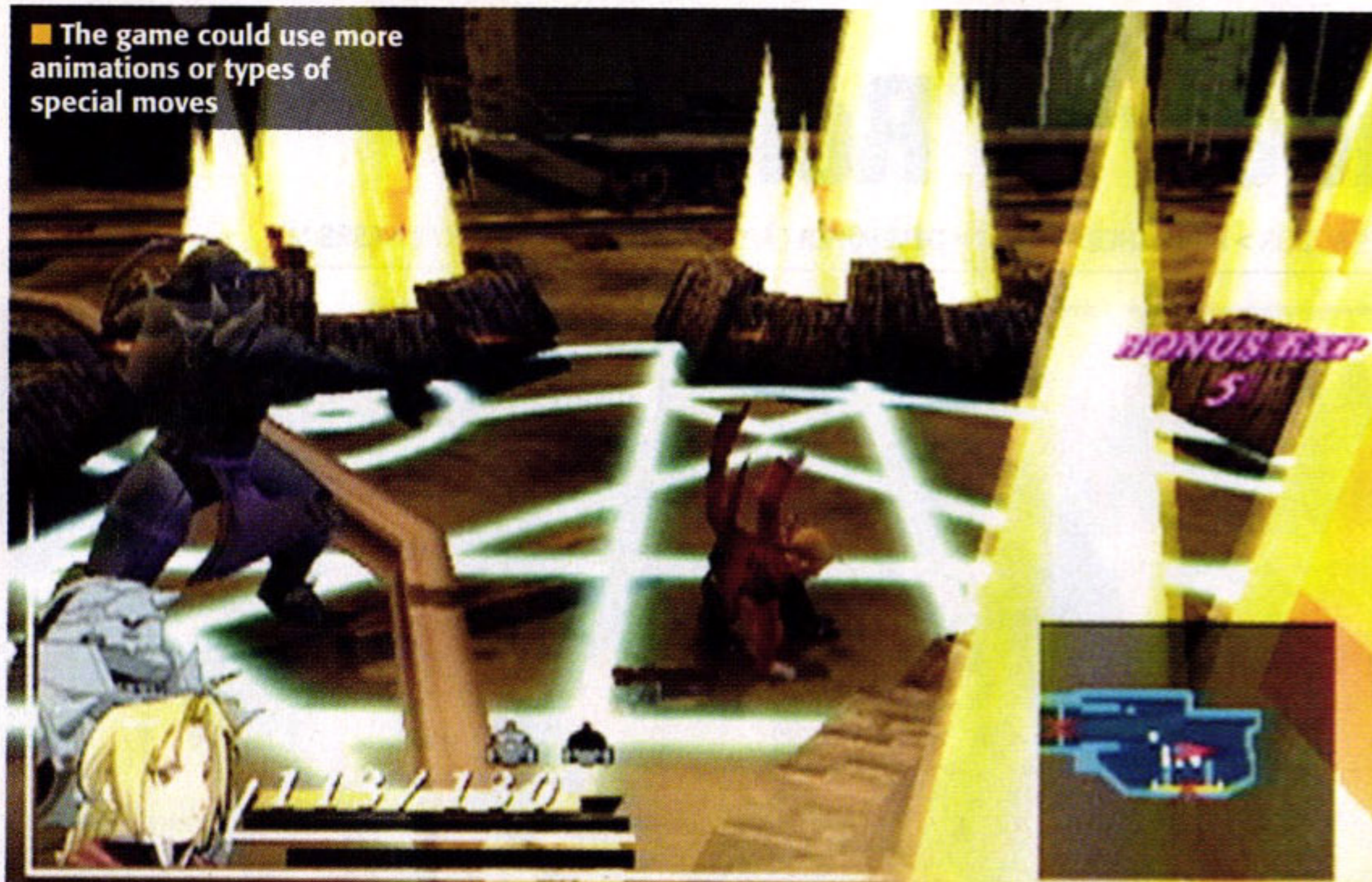
> **Entertainment:** When it's good, it's amazing. When it's bad, it utterly stifles the urge to continue playing

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 8.75**

While not as emotionally charged as the triptych tale of its predecessor, Suikoden IV's story lures you in with uncertainty and the sinking feeling that a terrible fate will befall your character and the world. The inclusion of excellent spoken dialogue helps flesh out the characters, but for some reason, Konami opted to keep the lead character silent. This absolutely drove me nuts. People are conversing with him, why is he just standing there? Your main character may seem like a ghost at times, but Konami did a tremendous job with the supporting cast. Combat has also improved dramatically, and thankfully, Konami has ditched the horrendous teammate system from the previous iteration. I love how the Rune of Punishment has a backlash, and combo attacks are always fun to watch. Ship battles are a bit simple, yet are a nice addition, and nothing beats questing for all 108 of the Stars of Destiny. Once again, Konami has crafted one of the finest RPGs to date. Don't miss it.—**REINER**

■ The game could use more animations or types of special moves



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

# Fullmetal Alchemist and the Broken Angel

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** RACJIN  
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 18 > **ESRB** T

## DUBIOUS SCIENCE

I have hope for this series, more so for Fullmetal's cartoon version airing now in the States, but I have a cautious optimism about the games as well. I know that's weird, considering the score that Broken Angel is receiving, but it's more a testament to the franchise than this one entry's failed execution.

For gamers who don't know anything about the series, it revolves around two brothers who have trained in the mojo power/magic/scientific discipline of alchemy. As a gameplay device, you have two characters at all times (the brothers) one of which can transfigure environmental objects into weapons and other useful items.

Ed, the stronger alchemist, spends a lot of his time making weapons and telling Al (the younger brother whose soul is bound to a giant suit of armor — it's a long story) when to follow, charge, and defend. This sounds like an engaging combat mechanic that should be both laden in strategy and compellingly action-packed. It is neither of these things.

What this Fullmetal Alchemist game brings us is a long list of interesting ideas that are either not developed in any meaningful way or are faulted by another game design faux pas. The RPG elements, for example, fall into the first camp. You

gain experience from each enemy slain that gives you bonus points to be allocated between the brothers in usual categories like attack and defense. Sadly, these upgrades have little to no discernable effect on gameplay. Essentially, RPG aspects are non-features.

Also, the list of small issues I have with the game stack and compound on each other to bring the entire experience down to something I'm most likely to describe as borderline misery. Targeting is bad, there's no crosshair for projectile weapons, the camera is a constant problem, the level designs are prohibitively linear, the enemies (while cool) are too often repeated and they spawn in waves of annoyance. The combat system offers little outside the realm of pressing square repeatedly, and there is way too much unspoken dialogue. There's a lot that I have issue with here, obviously.

All of these complaints aside, I couldn't help but be charmed by the characters (especially when Al gets actual spoken dialogue — his voice is hysterical) and I think that the overall story arc holds a lot of promise to make some cool games. The execution of this entry is almost unplayable because it's just so darn dull and clunky, but the ideas are there to make something interesting. —LISA

**BOTTOM LINE** 4.75

> **Concept:** Bring nebulous interpretations of science to an odd couple pair of brothers, insert anime hilarity

> **Graphics:** Nice character models, weird animations, and undeniably blocky environments make a mixed bag

> **Sound:** For some reason, the crazy music appealed to me in a very nostalgic way

> **Playability:** It's just so dull and unbelievably repetitive that I don't know why anyone would go for more than a single two-hour session

> **Entertainment:** Starts off well and dives down from there

> **Replay Value:** Low

**Second Opinion** 5.25

I could regale you with descriptions of the frustrating, broken and dull aspects of Full Metal Alchemist. I could tell you how there's too much meaningless text, an unwieldy camera, and odious level designs. I could also tell you how the cool overall concept or even the inventive monster designs aren't enough to salvage the game from its own failures. But you don't need me to tell you all that. You just need to know not to play or spend your money on it, and move on to something else better deserving of your time and attention — like a Chia Pet. —MILLER

PLAYSTATION 2

# The Getaway: Black Monday

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** TEAM SOHO  
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 11 > **ESRB** M



## BLOODY 'ELL!

If Guy Ritchie and Quentin Tarantino collaborated on a crime film, only to realize that they hated each other's guts halfway through filming and wanted nothing more than to sabotage the project, a cinematic failure along the lines of The Getaway: Black Monday would likely be the result. Amid hardhearted action sequences and vulgar cockney dialogue, the plot unfolds through flashbacks, flashforwards, blurring time periods, and maybe even some wormhole-related anomalies. I applaud Team Soho's grand scope and attempt to bring ambitious storytelling to the video game front. With beautifully animated and well-acted sequences fueling every second of the story, it definitely feels like an interactive motion picture. Sadly, it's also a bit hard to follow, and not nearly as gripping as Charlie Jolson's twisted mind games from the original entry in the series.

Additionally, you never really get the impression that the three playable characters are connected to the events at hand. In the original title, you really got the sense that you knew who Mark Hammond was, and would go to any length to help him exact revenge on Jolson. In this entry, Sergeant Ben Mitchell's personality is paper thin, Eddie comes across as a cheap attempt to diversify the action with hand-to-hand combat,

and Sam's hard-edged ways just gnaw at your nerves. It is nice that you can alter the events at hand to bring about multiple endings, but as you can imagine, my disinterest with the plot to begin with didn't necessarily transition into the desire to see different outcomes.

Without a truly engaging story to fall back on, it was up to Team Soho to create a thrilling gameplay experience. Sadly, the game is still firing blanks and driving on four flat tires. Team Soho did little to improve upon this series' shoddy gameplay. Targeting is still incredibly frustrating, your character movements are very mechanical, the vehicle physics are painfully inaccurate, and although improved, the enemy AI is still prone to blindly running right into the barrel of your smoking gun. The changes or new additions that Team Soho has implemented are minimal at best. The game now boasts a pause screen map system, you can fire a gun while driving, and motorcycles can be jacked. The game does have moments of brilliance, and I was impressed with the diversity of missions, but in an age where Grand Theft Auto continues to improve with each passing release, a mediocre Getaway sequel gets beat down in a bad, bad way. —REINER

**BOTTOM LINE** 7

> **Concept:** A hard-boiled British crime caper that will make you scratch your head in confusion over the plot twists, and shake your fist over the shoddy gameplay

> **Graphics:** London's gorgeous details are diminished by the bumbling animations of its occupants

> **Sound:** The only area of the game that doesn't have faults. The voice-acting and score are perfect

> **Playability:** Bollocks!

> **Entertainment:** Very ambitious, but also very disappointing

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 7

As always, the English are living in the past. In keeping its bad targeting and camera, as well as the awkward movement of its characters, this game has all the grace of the Queen of England getting drunk and stripping for pounds — just like the first Getaway. The simple and repetitive action is sharply contrasted by the explicit care put into everything from the stellar voice-acting to the cinematic cutscenes. Although I like the philosophy behind the HUD-less interface, I often wanted a little more direction during missions to complement the impressive wide-open environments. Rue Britannia! —KATO



PLAYSTATION 2

## Ghost Recon 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT  
> **DEVELOPER** RED STORM > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 30 > **ESRB** T

### GHOST REJECT

I applaud Ubisoft for trying something new by making the Xbox and PS2 versions of Ghost Recon 2 entirely different games. However, like most titles in the Tom Clancy shooter library, they simply don't feel that different. Basically, if the Xbox version Ghost Recon 2 had a minor stroke and lost some of its motor skills, but could still function, you'd get this game.

The typical Clancy squad-based shooter setup remains in place, but everything suffers from a lack of polish. Each level is as linear as could possibly be – you pretty much follow a set path to your objective in every level, with few (if any) alternate routes. Your squad has been reduced in size to three AI teammates, which is just as well, since they're about as useful as a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest. They're so vestigial that I didn't even notice they were gone when playing the occasional lone wolf missions.

The linear missions and worthless squad AI were my biggest issues with this game, but those are just two instances of Ghost Recon 2's overall lack of polish. Character models are nice, but the environments are fairly barren and drab. Online options are scant, and the lack of co-op mode is completely weak. Hit detection feels slightly off, and the story is paper-thin. It lacks the original Ghost Recon's strategic focus, opting for a more straight-up action feel. Yet, since it has the traditional Tom Clancy squad-based control scheme, it plays too slowly and feels too clunky to succeed as a run and gun shooter. Occupying a gray area between traditional and tactical shooters, Ghost Recon 2 attempts to bridge the gap between the two that results in a title which fails on both fronts. —**JEREMY**



**BOTTOM LINE** 6.5

> **Concept:** Simplify the original Ghost Recon and add a healthy dose of boring

> **Graphics:** Character models are good, but there's nothing here you haven't seen before

> **Sound:** I suggest cranking a John Williams score while playing this to add some excitement and drama

> **Playability:** The controls are simpler and easier than the original, but all of the missions are FUBAR

> **Entertainment:** War! Uhh! What is it good for? Absolutely... nothing!

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

**Second Opinion** 6

Ghost Recon 2 on the PS2 is one of the better-looking games to appear on the console. Unfortunately, all of the development focus was apparently on the graphics, because the action itself falls apart on several levels. Particularly stupid is the lack of checkpoints – fail a mission, and you'll have to start it over. Add myriad control frustrations, bad collision, and some of the cheating-est AI I've ever seen, and GR 2 simply doesn't deliver. As for online, I'll tell you one thing: SOCOM it ain't. —**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 2

## Shadow of Rome

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



### SALVOS FOR SAVAGERY

Generally, games that try to bunch together multiple gameplay types fall prey to a handful of frequent issues – illogical control schemes, lack of depth in a particular gameplay mechanic, and/or unbalanced coolness between the main characters. Capcom's Shadow of Rome still loses steam in certain areas because of these common pitfalls, but does do an exceptional job of avoiding them on most occasions.

The premise, for those who haven't been following the title, is to set players in the time immediately following Julius Caesar's assassination. Frequently, the game will switch back and forth between two characters: Caesar's nephew Octavianus, who handles the stealth side because he's kind of a weenie, and Agrippa. This character's father has been accused of the murder and his mother was killed because of the scandal. He has turned to the life of a gladiator in hopes of saving the father and avenging the mother. It's heady stuff, and the friendship between these two is the main reason that players will want so desperately to be successful – we'd really like to make them both heroes.

While Octavianus' covert portions of the gameplay mix work well enough, distracting the guards through whistles is never really a sure thing, and the level design doesn't really help to make these sections more compelling or rewarding. Most of the segments are a welcome relief from the intense action (more on that later), but lack the finesse shown in the combat portions. Climbing down from a box shouldn't require a hotspot-enabled action button press.

Overall, they aren't bad or broken, but they do suffer from some dull spots.

While Octavianus is creeping around, Agrippa (a military muscled man) is recruited as a gladiator. This is where the game soundly earns its mature rating. You will beat men to death with their own arms, you will burst heads like ripe melons, and when you've caused enough spewing blood, you will cheer for the crowd and they will shower you with affection. And all of that is mighty fun – not entirely because of the gore, but also because gladiatorial combat is much more complicated than one would first guess. Simply beating enemies isn't the hardest part of a bout, appeasing the crowd and fueling their bloodlust is. With that in mind, Capcom developed the Salvo system, which rewards players and gauges the crowd's response by setting certain moves at a higher value. More often than not, it's much harder to entertain the morally bankrupt spectators than just survive.

While this is historically accurate, there are few games in memory that caused me such a moral dilemma. It's a blast, and the combat is a great balance between a wrestling and a fighting game, but I felt like a terrible human being. I guess that's the price you pay for being a gladiator. —**LISA**



**BOTTOM LINE** 8.5

> **Concept:** Mix gladiatorial combat, stealth action, and a quasi-historic look at ancient Rome

> **Graphics:** Really sharp and nicely colorful – characters pop off of the screen

> **Sound:** The music is pretty subdued and I feel like it could have made more impact during the gladiator combat, but the voice acting is generally good

> **Playability:** Switching control schemes between gameplay types is done well, with each having their own quirks and strong points

> **Entertainment:** A blood-spewing good time, if you can bend your moral code a bit while you play

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 8.5

Beating foes with their own limbs to the crowd's roar made every demented cell in my body scream with joy. But man cannot live on death alone, and Shadow's stealth is fun in its own right. However, killing the weak and stealing from the dead in battle is your true love. The fact that weapons break makes you constantly adjust your playing style. The phrase: "Don't make me break a sword off on your ass" was coined in Rome many years ago. I would like depth through character upgrades and a better targeting system, but then again you are just a gladiator – you will kill on command and you will like it. —**KATO**





GAMECUBE

# Mario Party 6

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER BOARD > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** HUDSON SOFT  
> **RELEASE** DECEMBER 6 > **ESRB** E

**BOTTOM LINE** 6.25

> **Concept:** Candyland-esque board game crammed with minigame blowouts, this time with the addition of a microphone

> **Graphics:** Bright and colorful, the visuals do justice to both the iconic characters and the recognizable art style

> **Sound:** Genre appropriate, but largely uninteresting

> **Playability:** Simplistic to a fault, although some of the minigames control quite poorly

> **Entertainment:** Slightly less banal this year, but mostly more of the same

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

### Second Opinion 5

Mario Party 6 has all the fun of taking turns, waiting patiently, and watching repetitive interludes. Admittedly, Mario Party and I did have a few chuckles, but not in that "two chums enjoying each other's company" way. It was more of a "playground bully pointing and laughing at the kid who wears a cape to school." If you win a round of Mario Party, you simply feel ashamed of yourself for being praised by a game in no position to judge quality.—JOE

## BORED WALK

It's not that Mario Party can't be a kick from time to time. But when the greatest fun and laughter you get from a game happens when you're laughing at it, (and not in the nice way, mind you), then something's wrong. This installment is in several ways a step up from previous years, but the new gloss doesn't hide some of the glaring flaws that remain in the franchise, and I was left with a general sense of disconnection both from the game and the beloved characters within it.

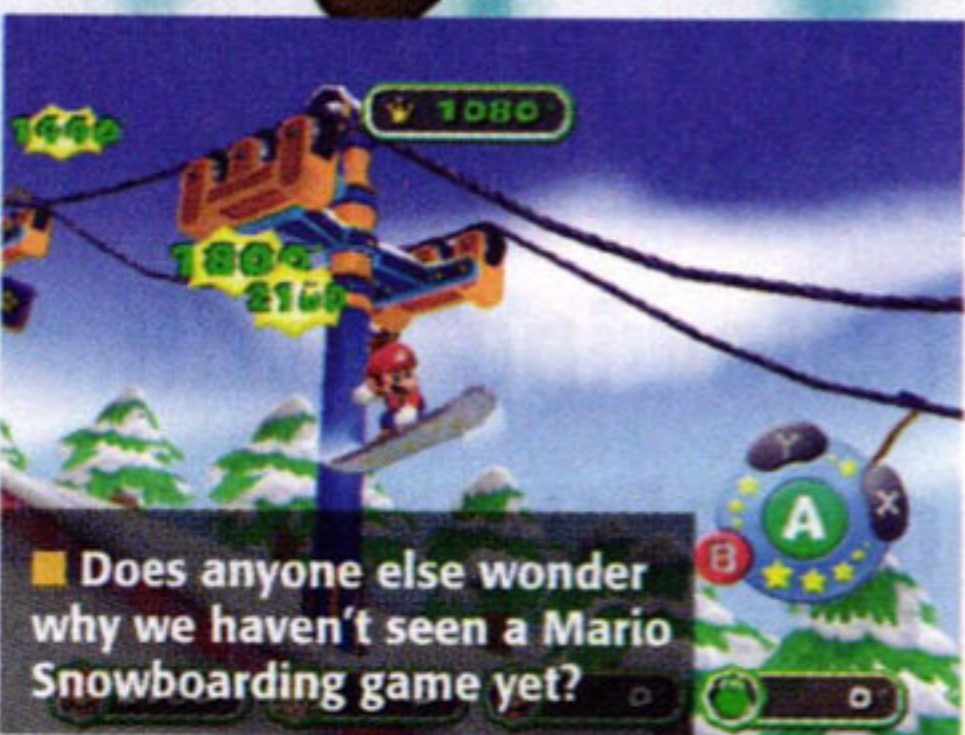
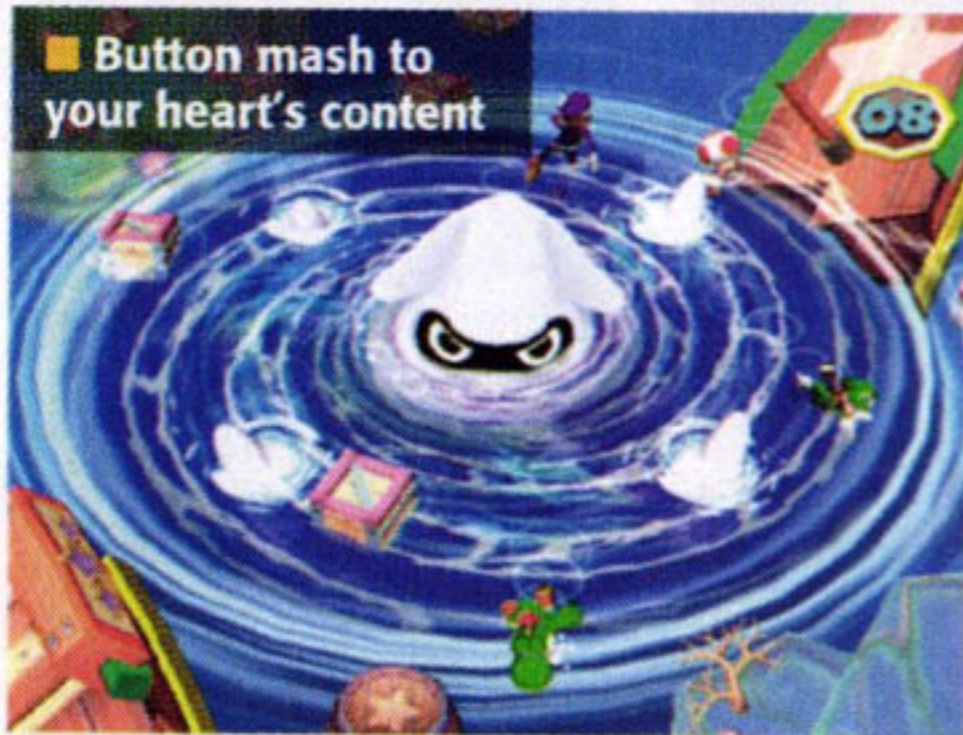
The biggest change this year comes in the form of the microphone, a packed-in peripheral that allows for a few unique game types. Unfortunately, several of these just aren't very much fun, requiring the logical functionality of a golden retriever in order to complete. Nonetheless, it can be pretty funny to see your friends shouting wildly at the characters on screen, even if the new minigames themselves aren't that great.

The other game types have seen

a cursory overhaul, and party mode can be fun, but only if you have the full four players. Playing against the AI is tedious and boring in the extreme, as you're forced to watch every last move they make on the board rather than getting on to your own actions. There are dozens of minigames packed away inside the game, which keeps the variety fresh. Unfortunately, several of them are won or lost on sheer dumb luck, and many others are kind of boring. The best of them are so inane and silly that they tend to elicit some laughter, and that can be good.

The new Mario Party may be a decent choice for your game sessions with less experienced players, if for no other reason than the simplistic controls should even the playing field for everyone. Still, I can't help but draw comparisons to that party your one friend throws every year. You know the one. Everyone feels compelled to show up, and it's nice to see some familiar faces, but no one's really having a very good time.—MILLER

In this minigame, you'll shout numbered commands into the microphone as the Shy Guys scramble to do your bidding



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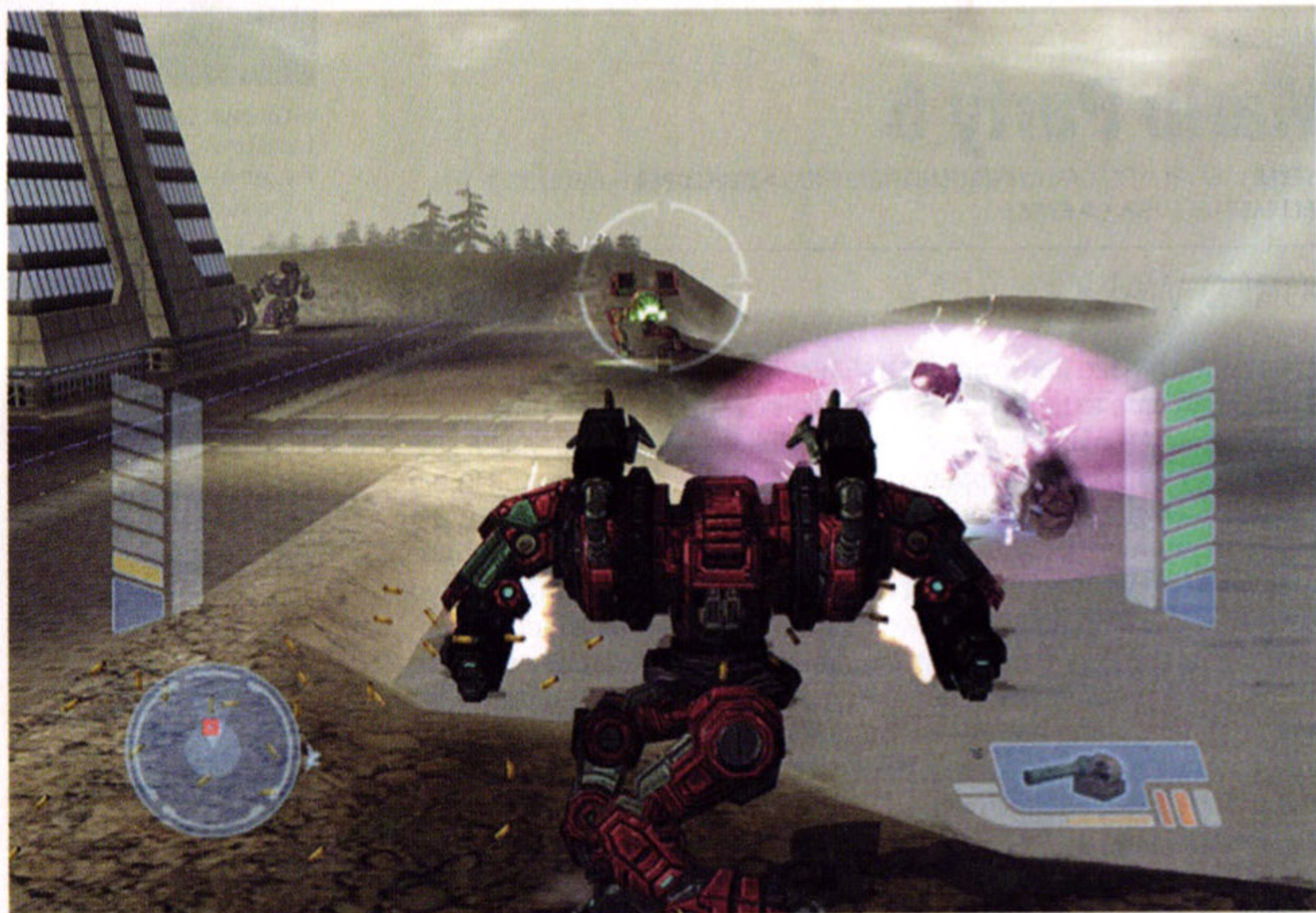
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XBOX

# MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS  
 > **DEVELOPER** DAY 1 STUDIOS > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 28 > **ESRB** T

## ROCK 'EM SOCK 'EM ROBOTS

**M**echAssault was, in my opinion, the best Mech game of this console generation. MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf builds on this solid foundation by adding new gameplay features, vastly improved graphics, and new online functions. With so many clear improvements, Lone Wolf is an even better game than the first, but also has a few flaws that the original didn't.

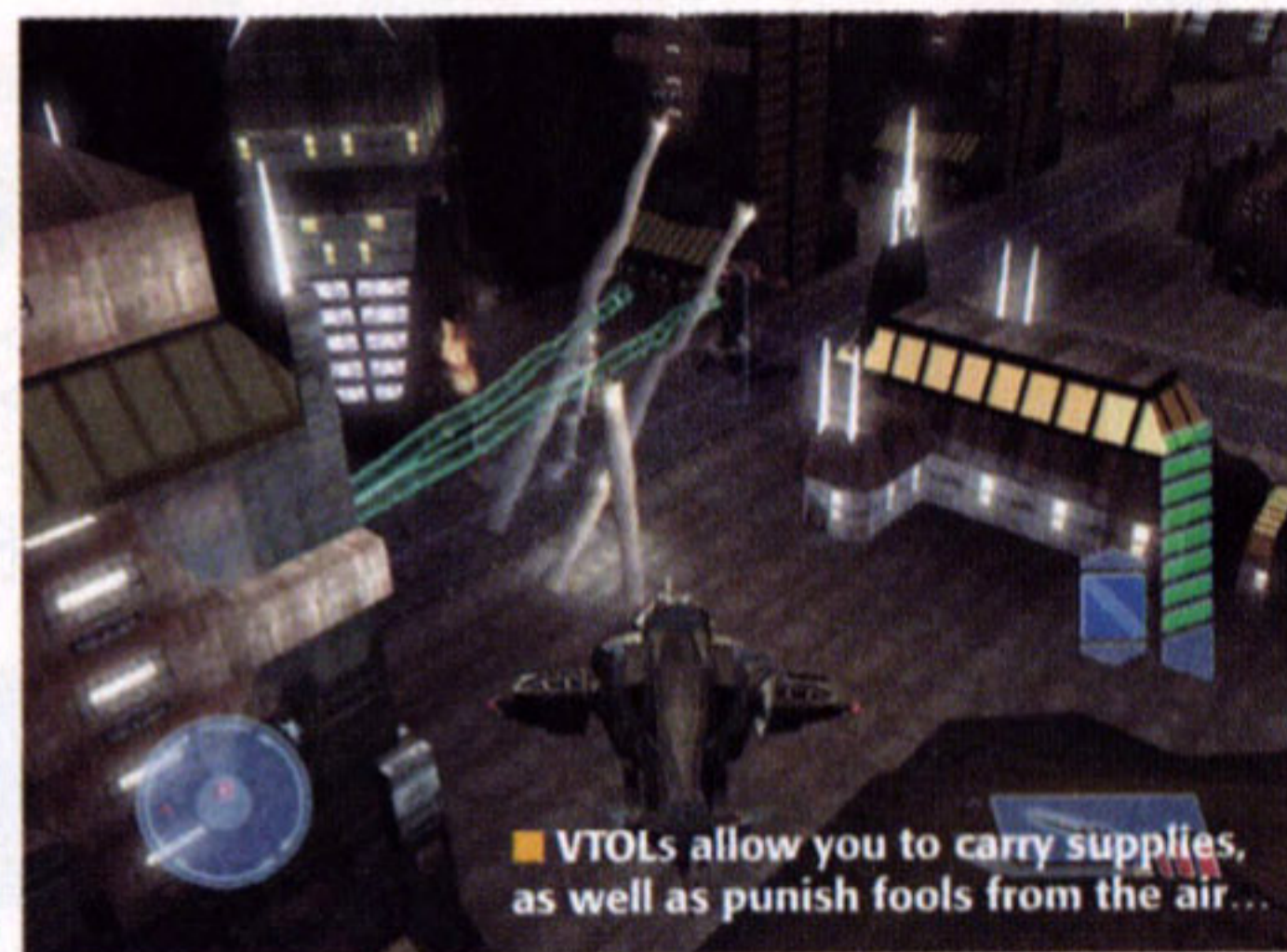
The biggest difference in Lone Wolf is that there are other types of vehicles to pilot besides giant robots. Besides Mechs, you'll control battle armor, tanks, and VTOLs over the course of the game. You can even get out of your vehicle at any time during a mission and run around. All of the different vehicle types control well, but the missions that require you to spend a lot of time on foot somewhat suck. My pilot character tended to stick to the environment a lot, leading to many deaths I couldn't avoid.

These on-foot missions, as well as a few others, contributed a lot to the uneven difficulty level of the

campaign mode. While I beat the game in about 12 hours, much of my time was spent repeating a handful of tough stages scattered throughout the game, which made for some uneven pacing.

Okay, now that I've covered what I didn't like about Lone Wolf, I can move on to what I loved about it. The core gameplay is just as fun as the first, and I really liked the variety of missions. I personally found the tank levels especially enjoyable – using its cannon as a sniper rifle will never get old. The ability to switch vehicles really emphasizes the scale of the Mechs – much more so than in the first title, I felt like I was piloting an unstoppable engine of destruction. The inclusion of both new and old Mechs makes for a good selection of the giant war machines.

The addition of a couple of classic boss battles is also a really nice touch. The final boss is one of the coolest-looking foes I've faced in a long time, and overall the graphics are great. Both the Mechs and



■ VTOLs allow you to carry supplies, as well as punish fools from the air...



■ ...while tanks can handle smaller Mechs or act as snipers

**"...deserves the huge following it will certainly develop."**

environments are much more detailed than in the first game (although there are some heavy draw distance issues), and the cutscenes look fantastic. The soundtrack is really fitting, and the story is engaging, while a bit sparse.

Of course, online play is a huge part of the MechAssault franchise, and in this arena Lone Wolf certainly doesn't disappoint. It plays much like the first title's online mode, although the new vehicle types add a lot of flexibility within individual maps. It's fast and frantic to the point where it can be difficult to formulate a strategy, but seldom frustrating. The new vehicle types have allowed for some interesting game types and maps, so Lone Wolf's online play really offers something for everyone. Conquest mode, in which different teams vie for control of the solar system in a persistent war, will no doubt become one of the biggest draws on Xbox Live.

While some of MechAssault 2's new features came with unexpected side effects, Day 1 must be applauded for doing so much with this sequel. Despite its flaws, Lone Wolf is a terrific game that deserves the huge following it will certainly develop. —**JEREMY**

**BOTTOM LINE** **9.25**

> **Concept:** Destroy everything that moves in a giant robot or other vehicle. When you're done with that, destroy others online

> **Graphics:** The Mechs look great, the cutscenes amaze, and blowing things up looks just swell

> **Sound:** Throw the horns up for some rockin' metal and the soothing sounds of futuristic war

> **Playability:** It's never been easier to rain horrific destruction down upon your foes

> **Entertainment:** Giant, heavily armed robots plus online play equals a ton of fun

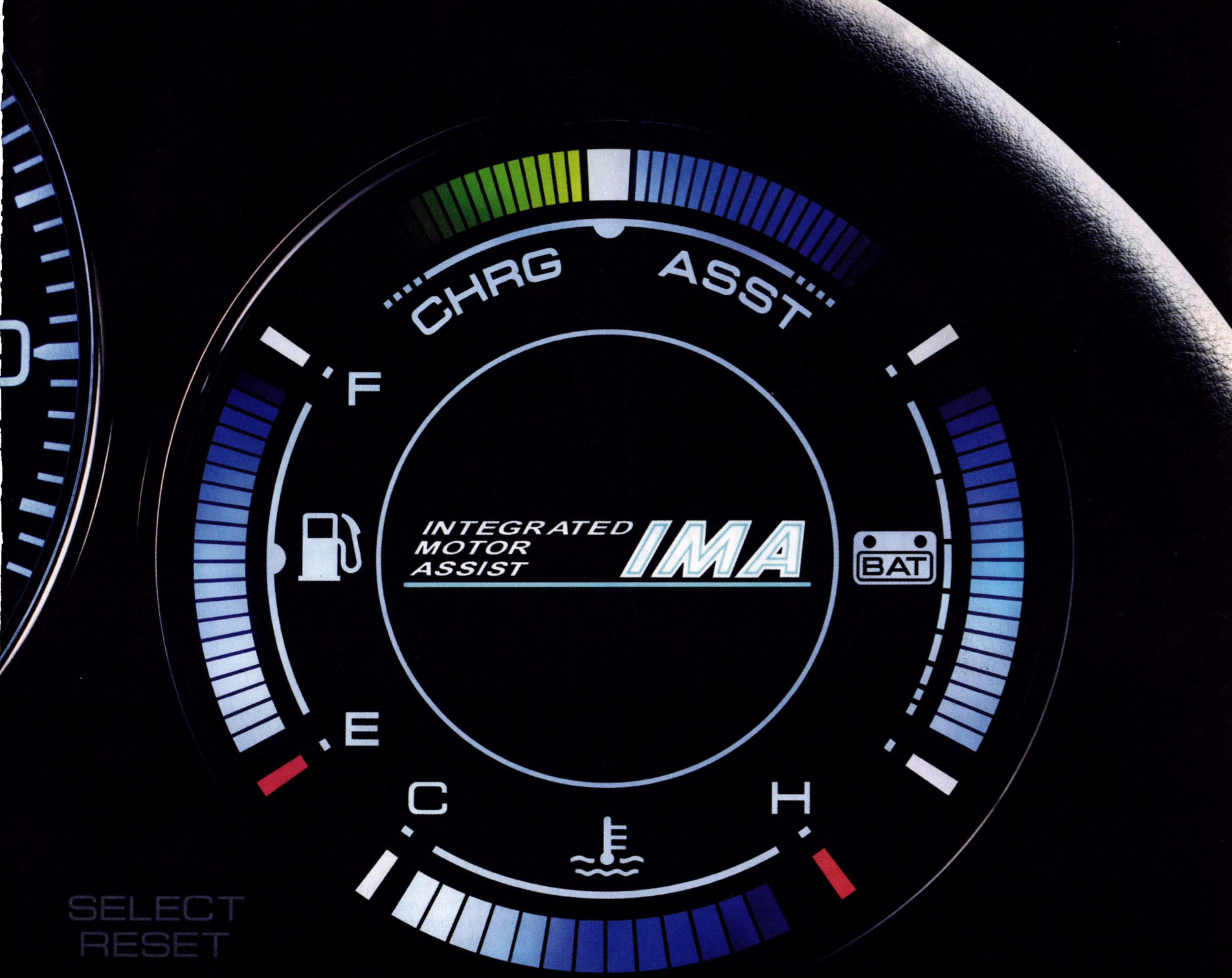
> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion** **8.75**

No one does rampant destruction quite like a Mech Warrior. As a great follow up to a stellar game, Lone Wolf is no exception to the rule. It offers some of the most impressive destruction and particle effects you'll come across anywhere. The onscreen chaos is tremendous in scope, and demolishing everything in your path is cathartic on a profound level. That's why I have something of a major gripe with the on-foot sections of the single-player game. While usually short, they take away what I like most about the series – that overwhelming sense of power. Also, an inordinate amount of distance fog throughout dulls some of the visual excitement. There's also something of an uneven difficulty curve as you play, with levels hopping back and forth between really hard and super easy, but overall the campaign mode is excellent. Multiplayer gamers should be extremely pleased with the new innovations in their department. Switching vehicles adds a surprising layer of teamwork and strategy, and the intergalactic Conquest mode is highly addictive – proving there's more than one reason to get Xbox Live this winter. —**MILLER**




■ Despite the additional vehicles, Mech combat is still the heart of the game



SELECT  
RESET



A fuel gauge? Or a gauge of intelligence?  
47 city. 48 highway.\* The Civic Hybrid.  **HONDA**



■ Femie [zrt] purple [bzt] lightsaber does not [zot] compute

**BOTTOM LINE** 9.25

> **Concept:** A Star Wars mystery set in the old times that offers up a fantastic story and role-playing bliss

> **Graphics:** Better facial models, but the environments are still bland and slowdown does occur

> **Sound:** The score fits perfectly into Star Wars canon, and the character dialogue is some of the best to date

> **Playability:** The same engine with a few enhancements around the edges. Influencing characters and making items are done well

> **Entertainment:** You absolutely have to play it twice to see where the story goes for light and dark

> **Replay Value:** High

XBOX

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

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT  
> **RELEASE** DECEMBER 6 > **ESRB** T

## LONG LIVE THE SITH

**S**mug Statement: The Sith Lords is smart, deep, dark, and stands as the best thing to happen to Star Wars since Timothy Zahn penned the extraordinary *Heir to the Empire* trilogy. Much like a Padawan learning the ways of the Force from a Jedi Master, Obsidian Entertainment has embraced the teachings of BioWare, built upon the original formula, and forged a powerful sequel that will take your breath away faster than Vader ever could.

In the five years that have passed since the fall of Lord Malak, the Dark Side of the Force has spread across the galaxy like a disease. Sith Lord attacks have devastated the Old Republic, and the Jedi guardians are on the verge of extinction. The Republic's only hope of survival lies within your uncertain hands. Awakening in a battle-damaged vessel that is spinning uncontrollably through an asteroid field, you have no recollection of your past, yet you can feel the Force flowing through your veins. Will you side with the Republic and battle the Sith scourge? Or will you fade into darkness and let evil reign?

This compelling introduction pulls you into the plot, keeping you completely transfixed as you tip the scales between the light and dark and scour the cosmos for clues that will unearth your enigmatic past. The tale is paced to perfection and never once feels like it is making unnecessary detours to lengthen the experience.

From HK-47's amusing "droid prejudice" banter to Kreia's cryptic messages, the game is overflowing with fascinating personalities and some of the most believable characters to ever be brought to life in a game. Again, pacing is used expertly to develop relationships with the player. As the plot unfolds, you'll be forced to decide who to trust, who to keep close, and who to keep a watchful eye on. When you communicate with your allies, your choice of words will affect your standing with them. If you have a high enough influence over them, they may open up to you and follow your ways (be it light or dark).

The game also dives deeper into Star Wars lore as it utilizes a much wider selection of alien species, weapons, and gear, as well as planets that we really haven't seen much of in the movies or games. Obsidian can also be commended for creating not one, but two of the most fearsome and awe-inspiring nemeses in the Star Wars universe. Discovering who these Sith Lords are is another of the games exciting mysteries.

On the gameplay front, Obsidian stuck to the formula of the original game, but has built upon it with little additions and subtle tweaks. Of course, this still means that your supporting party will blindly run over a clearly visible mine, load times are just as extensive, some of the loose ends in the plot are not tied up (what's up with the HK droids?), and slowdown occurs when too many characters

### A Taste of the Dark Side

Listed below are a handful of hate-filled responses that your character can make. As you can probably guess, those on the receiving end are never pleased with the tone you take.

- > "Your 'bad feeling' is going to be replaced by blinding pain if you don't be quiet."
- > "If you have anything else useless to say in the future, keep it to yourself."
- > "When they find your body, they'll have to sew you back together for your funeral."
- > "The next time someone calls me a Jedi, they'll be lying in a pool of their own blood."
- > "I kill who I want, when I want."

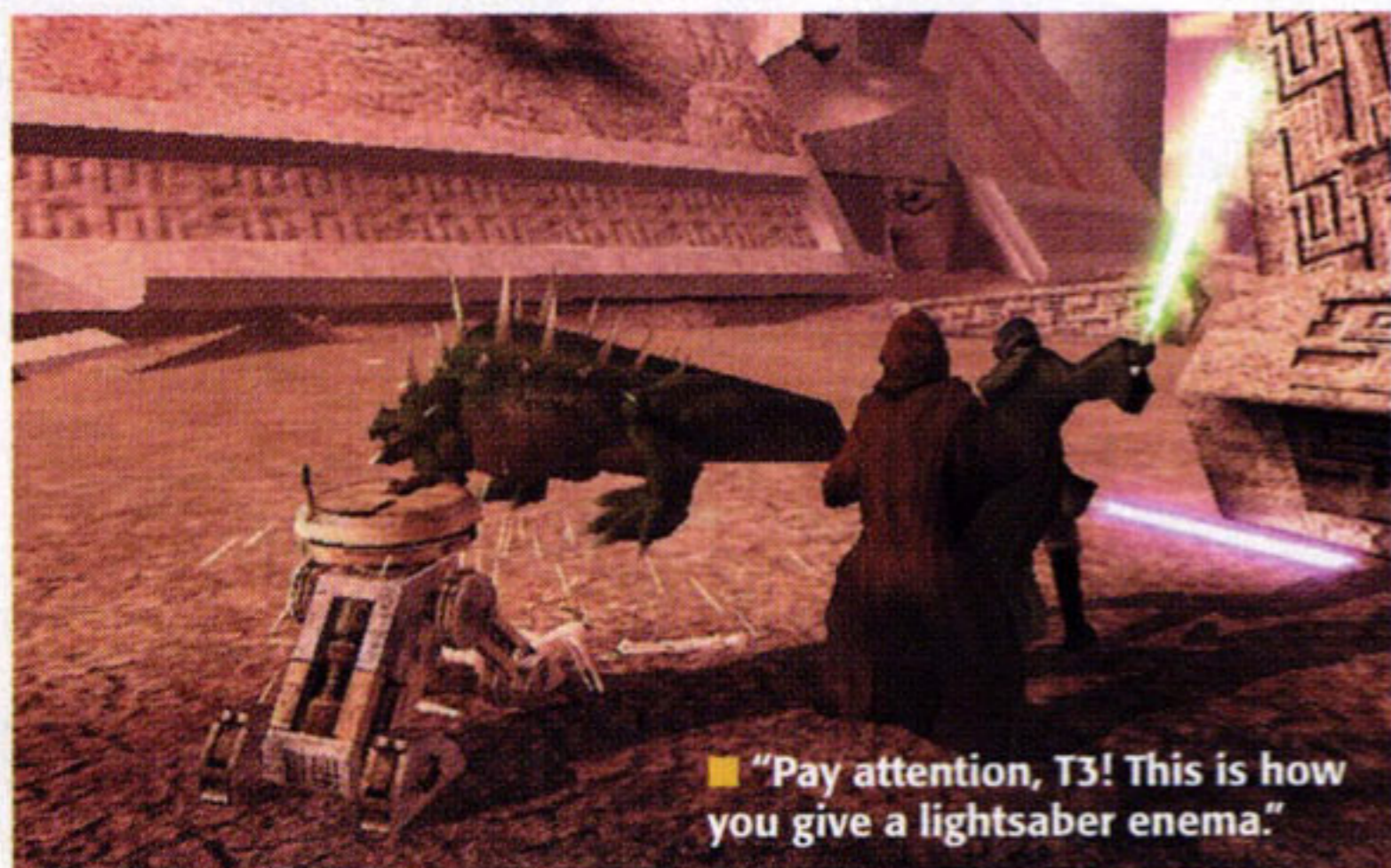
engage in battle. In short it still has its annoyances, yet the new material more than makes up for them. As you engage in conversation, you can now tap into your skills to add a new level of persuasion. For instance, if your character is knowledgeable to the subject matter, you may be prompted with an awareness option. Another interesting addition is the ability to break down items into components that you can turn around and use to create a wide variety of things.

The missions that you'll undertake are just as varied, and the consequences to your actions can be just as cataclysmic. A raised level cap won't stunt your characters growth this time around, and the variety that stems from the new character interactions only heightens the reasons to play this game numerous times. Many of the visuals are a bit underwhelming, but the detail in the facial modeling is much more defined, and you won't see as many unintentional identical twins throughout your journey.

It's almost impossible to deny the charms that emerge from this title's expertly crafted story and unbound freedom. The Sith Lords is a crowning accomplishment for video games and one of the finest Star Wars stories ever told.—REINER

### Second Opinion 9

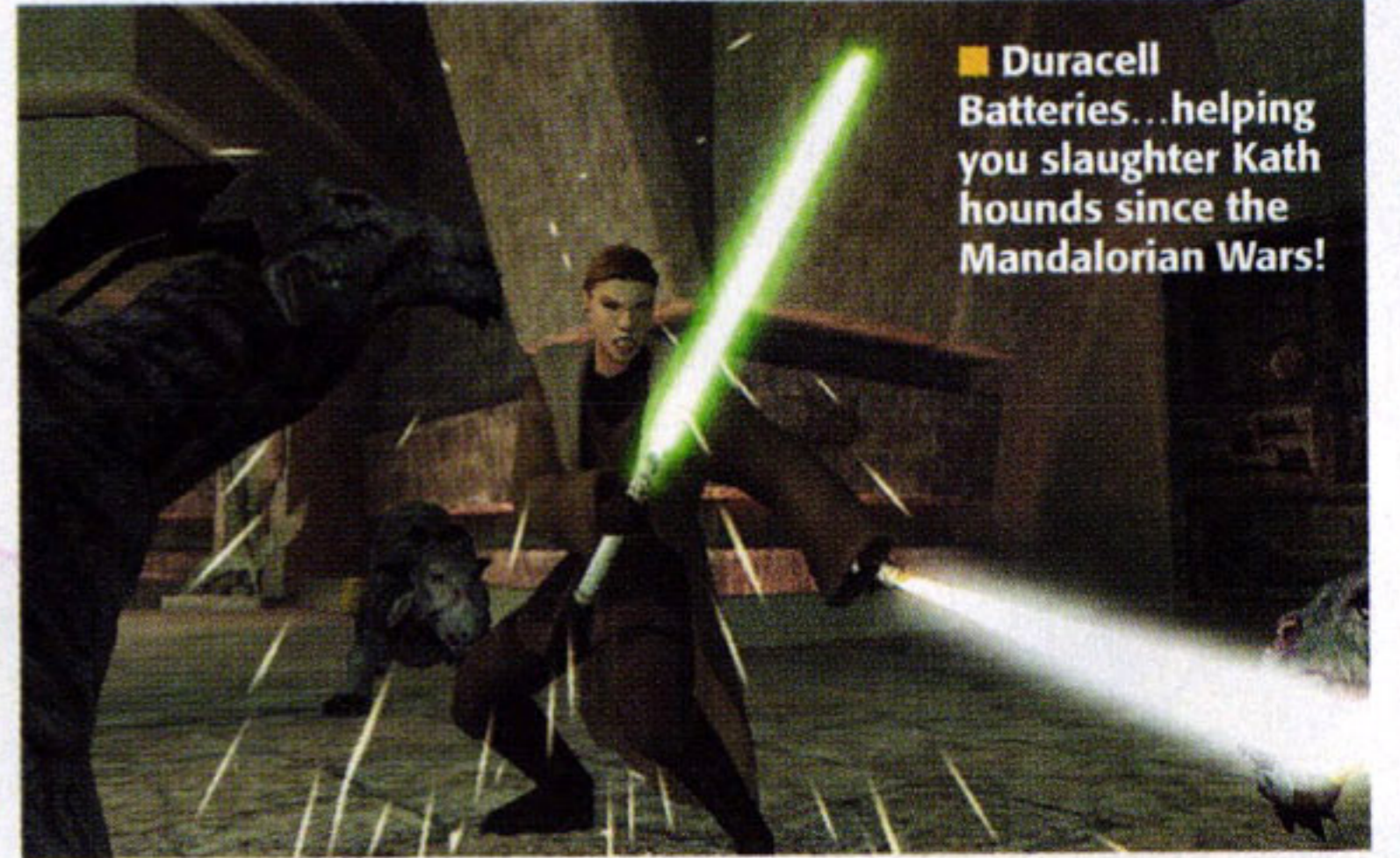
The call of The Sith Lords is impossible to resist. Embracing the dark side, I twisted an apprentice to my corrupt will, polluted the Force with senseless slaughter, and was told by my loyal HK unit that I was like "a delightful random cruelty generator." Even more than its predecessor, The Sith Lords provides countless opportunities for players to revel in the aftermath of their own choices. Essentially, anyone who said that Obsidian couldn't live up to the standards set by BioWare's first installment should be stuffing their mouths full of Bantha fodder right about now. Every exemplary aspect of KOTOR has actually been improved through expanded dialogue options, tons of alignment-specific variables, and a more engaging story. Honestly, I want to give this game an even higher score, but I just can't ignore the multitude of technical problems (like pathfinding and battle glitches) and certain key plot point omissions. Regardless, despite the imperfections, The Sith Lords crushes the feeble windpipes of any other RPG of 2004.—JOE



■ "Pay attention, T3! This is how you give a lightsaber enema."



■ Anakin Skywalker is not only the most powerful Jedi in the universe, he's also the inventor of the galaxy's favorite extreme sport, Bug Surfing!



■ Duracell Batteries...helping you slaughter Kath hounds since the Mandalorian Wars!



XBOX

# Gungriffon: Allied Strike

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** TECMO > **DEVELOPER** GAME ARTS  
> **RELEASE** DECEMBER 14 > **ESRB** T

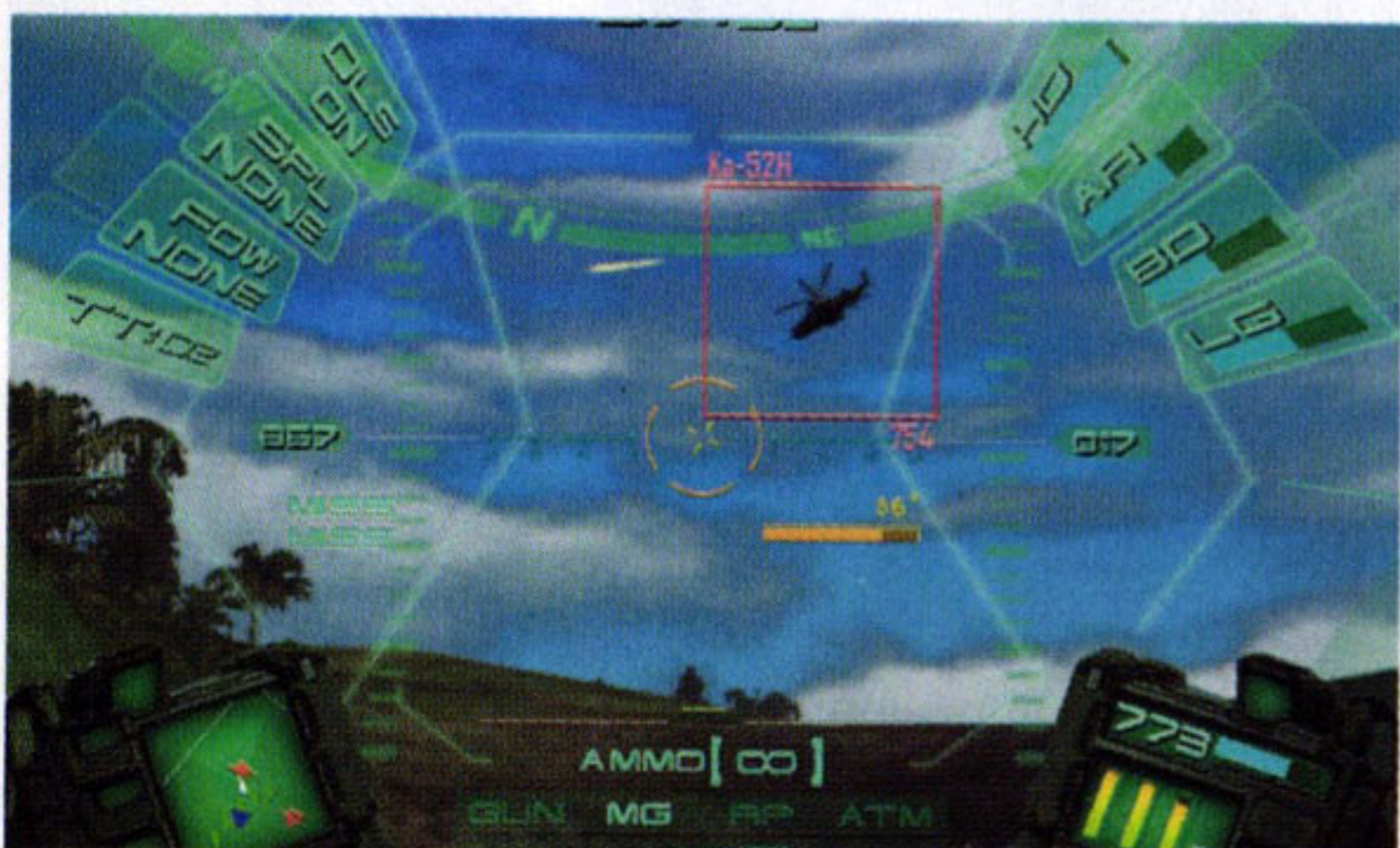
## LACKING POLISH

I play a lot of mech games. I like the more strategy-based offerings just as much as the titles that are all about an enjoyable mindless scrap. Allied Strike purports to be both, but isn't really either. Instead, it feels like a war machine that is too far behind the times, and it gets blown away by its competitors before it can even begin the battle.

The first feature that will strike you as off-kilter about Gungriffon is the visuals. There's a vague sort of blur about them that makes it seem like you're looking through a mesh screen. Everything looks flat and colorless. The next thing you'll discover is that you don't know what the heck you're doing. There's no semblance of a tutorial to give you any guidance, so you're left to learn the controls on your own. Without any story introduction and very little in-game dialogue, you're left to wonder why you're fighting and whom you're fighting against. There are a bevy of weapons, mechs, and other customizations to

explore, but it's never clear what should work best in any given situation. Consequently, your first hours with the game end up being a guess and check period filled with much cursing, foot stomping, and gnashing of teeth.

I have to admit to being a fan of switching between first- and third-person views on the fly. I also appreciated that the enemy AI seemed intelligent enough to try and flank me from time to time, but my ally AI would often dive in way over its head and get destroyed quickly, which was annoying. Online multiplayer is a worthwhile addition to the series, and I was glad to see it present. If enough people end up playing, there could be some rewarding strategy/action gaming to be found. However, I can't help but conclude that there's too little innovation and production value to really make that a genuine option, particularly when there are some other mech games of significantly higher quality available on the console. —MILLER



**BOTTOM LINE** 6

> **Concept:** The tried and true model of mech combat in a post-apocalyptic future

> **Graphics:** Remarkably drab given the console it's running on. Colors are washed out and weapon effects are lackluster

> **Sound:** Poor balancing of music and sound effects makes it seem like you're hearing everything from a distance or through a tube, but some of the explosions are impressive

> **Playability:** Way too many options right out of the gate and no tutorial to explain them lead to several hours of frustrating trial and error

> **Entertainment:** For mech fans that want a taste of tactics with their explosions, there might be something worthwhile here, but most players will be either dumbfounded or bored

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

**Second Opinion** 5

When faced with the decision of piloting a High Mac in Gungriffon, or spending just as much money on a sack of Big Mac's at McDonald's, gluttony is definitely the way to go. Sure, you'll probably spend most of the night hunched over a toilet, but at least you won't have the misery that this game delivers etched in your mind for all of eternity. Certainly, I love how the jump jets work, but where's the excitement? The missions are incredibly dull, and why am I battling these forces in the first place? Where the heck is the story? It's nowhere to be found! Simply put, this release is very uncharacteristic of the quality that we've come to expect from Tecmo. —REINER

XBOX

# Oddworld Stranger's Wrath

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** ODDWORLD INHABITANTS  
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 25 > **ESRB** T



## ORIGINALITY CAN GO A LONG WAY

A stunning and exquisitely realized masterpiece that delivers a gaming experience unlike any that we've seen before, Stranger's Wrath rekindles the artistic allure of Oddworld's previous works, and is truly visionary in its delivery of gameplay. Once you set foot in this imaginative world, you won't want to leave it.

Players assume the identity of the Stranger; a drifter turned bounty hunter that hides a secret that requires a specific, yet unrevealed, surgical procedure costing twenty grand. With each criminal that you bring to justice, you'll inch closer to this goal — a goal that leads to a shocking twist in the game. I gasped when I found out exactly what the Stranger was hiding.

Leading up to this point, the majority of your time is spent chasing down wanted criminals. By communicating with villagers via a streamlined Gamespeak system, players will learn the location of their targets, among other amusing things. The new Gamespeak interface is not as complex as it has been in previous Oddworld titles — it now requires just one button press — but it is just as humorous. I was often in tears over some of the things that were being said between Stranger and the inhabitants of this crazy world.

As remarkable as the presentation is, the true star of this title is gameplay. I was blown away by the game's ability to seamlessly transition between frenzied FPS and harrowing third-person platforming. Oddworld has also created a highly innovative ammo system. Not only are you using wildlife as "live" ammo, you actually have to scour your surroundings and hunt for more munitions. The ammo that you unload produces a variety of results. Firing a Bolamite at a foe will tie them up in sticky webbing. Stunkz scent will make anyone near it gag. Boombats explode. And the Chippunk is just so darn cute that enemies will go to any length to squish it. Boss fights are demanding of different strategies, and even the way that the health system is managed is a complete departure from what we are accustomed to, as you shake off damage like a wet dog does water. All told, the gameplay package is creative, fun, and the perfect fit for an Oddworld game.

If you are of the belief that you've seen everything that video games have to offer, getting to know the Stranger will make you realize that we haven't even begun to scratch the surface of what can be done in game development. —REINER

**BOTTOM LINE** 9

> **Concept:** Oddworld just got odder...but in a very pleasing way

> **Graphics:** There's a little draw in, but it doesn't take away from the magnificence of the vistas and the creatures that inhabit the land

> **Sound:** You'll be hard-pressed to find better character voices in a game. The soundtrack is also a perfect fit, and hearing your ammo take jabs at you is just flat out funny

> **Playability:** Excels in both first- and third-person. The original ideas that are applied to boss fights, ammo, and healing are mighty impressive

> **Entertainment:** Genuine and completely satisfying, this is an adventure that everyone has to take

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 9

There are few series as truly memorable as Oddworld. That's why I'm so overjoyed that this dramatic departure in gameplay style still manages to hold on to the incredible appeal of the franchise. Uproarious hilarity mixes with not so subtle social commentary amid a gorgeous backdrop of artistic beauty. The new action and combat is stellar, offering the smoothest combination of third- and first-person gaming that I've encountered. Everything melds into an experience that feels totally genuine and involving. Funny, challenging, and curiously powerful, Stranger's Wrath is a game of impressive quality and meticulously crafted fun. —MILLER



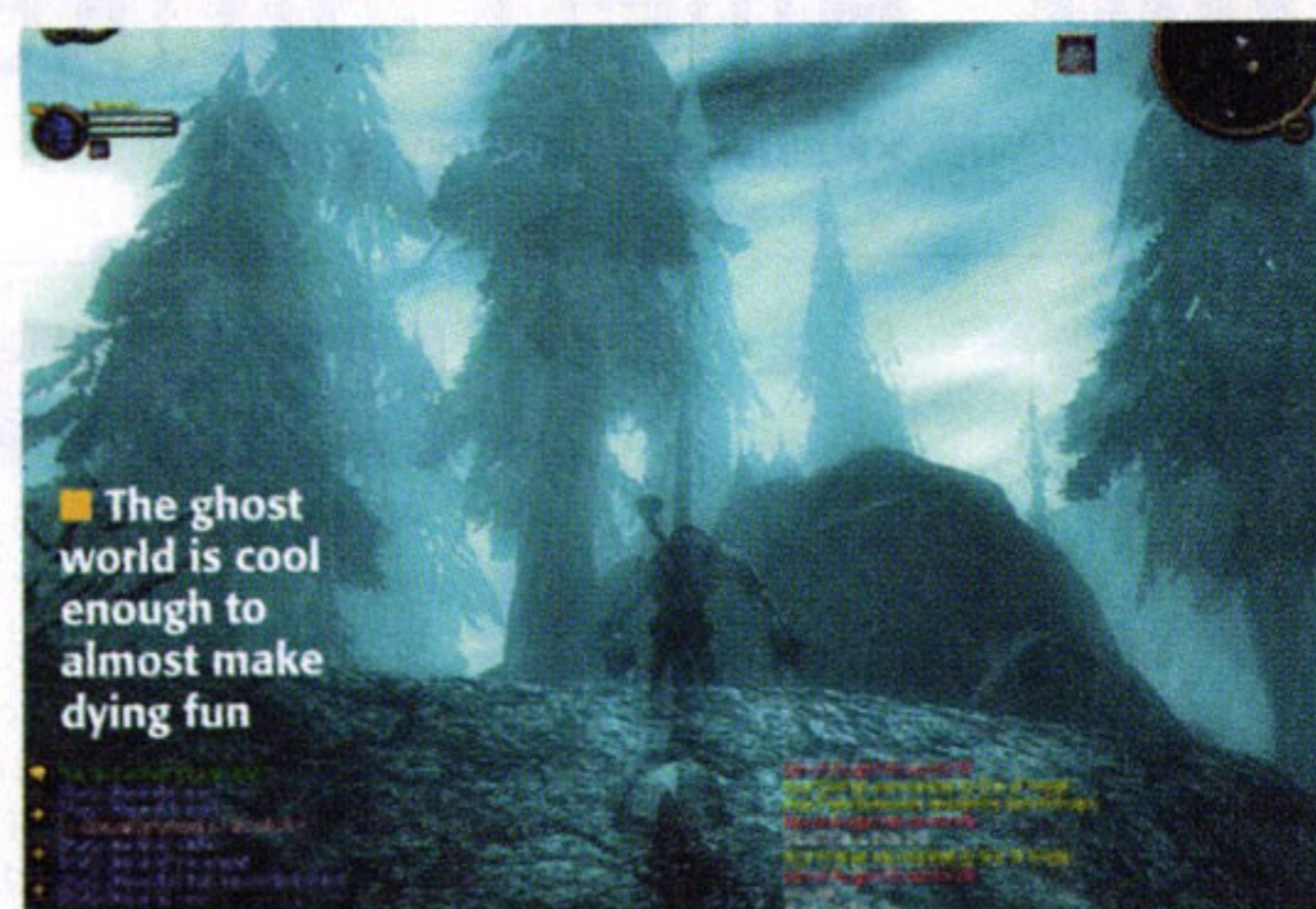
Here's a look at the critters that you'll be able to fire from your crossbow



PC | MAC

# World of Warcraft

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT  
> **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 23 > **ESRB** T



**BOTTOM LINE** **9.5**

- > **Concept:** Perfect the model that EverQuest made popular
- > **Graphics:** Colorful, diverse, and a gorgeous fit for the Warcraft universe
- > **Sound:** Mood music, thundering effects, and limited Warcraft 3-style voices make a rich environment
- > **Playability:** The default user interface has its limitations, but there are already wonderful mods out for it
- > **Entertainment:** Simply the best, most polished, and flat-out fun MMORPG to date
- > **Replay Value:** High

## WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD IT IS

**H**aving had the privilege of playing in the World of Warcraft beta for the last several months and logging several days playing in the retail version, I feel qualified to say this to all the haters and the doubters: You are wrong. Blizzard has done it again, succeeding in epic fashion to craft a title that once again makes me fear for my social life. Though WoW doesn't radically differ from the tried-and-true MMORPG formula, the subtle tweaks, additions, and special layer of Blizzard polish make it an amazing and fresh experience.

From the moment you log in to WoW, it draws you in and keeps you enthralled with its endless content, entertaining combat, and delightful presentation. Perhaps the single thing that makes adventuring and crafting in WoW so captivating is the way that you can choose your own pace and style of play. Whether you are popping in for half an hour before dinner or pulling a 16-hour power session on the weekend, you'll be able to find something to do, accomplish it, and feel like you actually got somewhere. This has largely to do with the quest system — throughout my playtime, I was on a variety of quests, ranging from simple delivery to intense dungeon crawls. Unless you're trying to get a crew together to do something very specific and all of

your friends are offline, it's awfully unlikely that you'll be sitting in town looking for a group like some other MMOs are infamous for.

The sights of the world of Warcraft are anywhere from grandiose to chilling to simply beautiful. While the Forsaken (my race of choice) battle to keep the evil Scourge and do-gooder humans from eradicating their fledgling undead society in the corrupted Tirisfal Glades, the night elves work ceaselessly to purify the towering forests of Kalimdor of the aftermath of the great war against the Burning Legion. These struggles are epic, and the way that they are presented hammers the point home. Also, the world is drawn in the slightly off-kilter Warcraft style, which lends that extra little immersive touch. Though WoW doesn't sport the sheer bleeding-edge technology of EverQuest II, it nonetheless is one of the best-looking games I've ever played. Plus, this allows WoW to run acceptably on even low- to mid-end machines.

WoW also does many more things that almost completely remove the tedium and "grinding" commonly associated with the genre. Tradeskills are easy to learn, simple to use, and allow you to craft useful items. Combat is fast and fluid, with little "sit on auto-attack until the monster is dead" going on.

Travel times are not bad at all, since all of the towns and cities are linked by quick transit. Basically, nothing ever feels like a timesink that's just there to keep you playing and paying the monthly fee. It really says something when I've yet to be bored or annoyed for a single moment after playing an MMORPG for weeks.

Some people have been afraid that WoW sacrifices its long-term appeal in favor of ease of use, much like the way certain folks think of City of Heroes. To this criticism, I say humbug. WoW offers both depth and breadth of content for players to experience, and I seriously can't imagine anyone getting bored with the game before the inevitable expansion comes out. Between tradeskills, questing, exploring, high-level dungeons, and player-vs-player combat, there is so much to do in WoW that it seems silly to think that there's not enough content. What really blows my mind, though, is that it's all fun. This truly is the best online role-playing game to date. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to defend my people from a filthy human invasion. —**ADAM**



**Second Opinion** **9.5**

Blizzard didn't do it first, but they've done it the best. While most of the standard massively multiplayer conventions are in place, all of the non-fun fat has been trimmed away, leaving behind a wholly unique and absorbing experience that is simultaneously simple, deep, and incredibly engaging. The game's acronym of "WoW" may be the first word that escapes your mouth when you emerge into the gorgeous artistic beauty of Azeroth. The epic grandeur of the setting combines with continually entertaining activity. You never feel bored or disinterested. Every turn of the corner brings a new sight, sound, battle, or wonder. Combining many of the best qualities of Blizzard's former games, along with the finest aspects of MMOs, World of Warcraft's only major fault is that it may make playing other similar titles seem like a chore. It's quite simply phenomenal as it solidly sets a new high bar for the genre. —**MILLER**

**BOTTOM LINE** **8.5**

> **Concept:** Revisit the world of Norrath with improved graphics and interface

> **Graphics:** For all the graphical effects, the look is a tad bland, but the animations are spectacular

> **Sound:** Unbelievable amounts of voice-over bring the game to life

> **Playability:** The new Heroic Opportunities give the game a fantastic and engaging new play mechanic

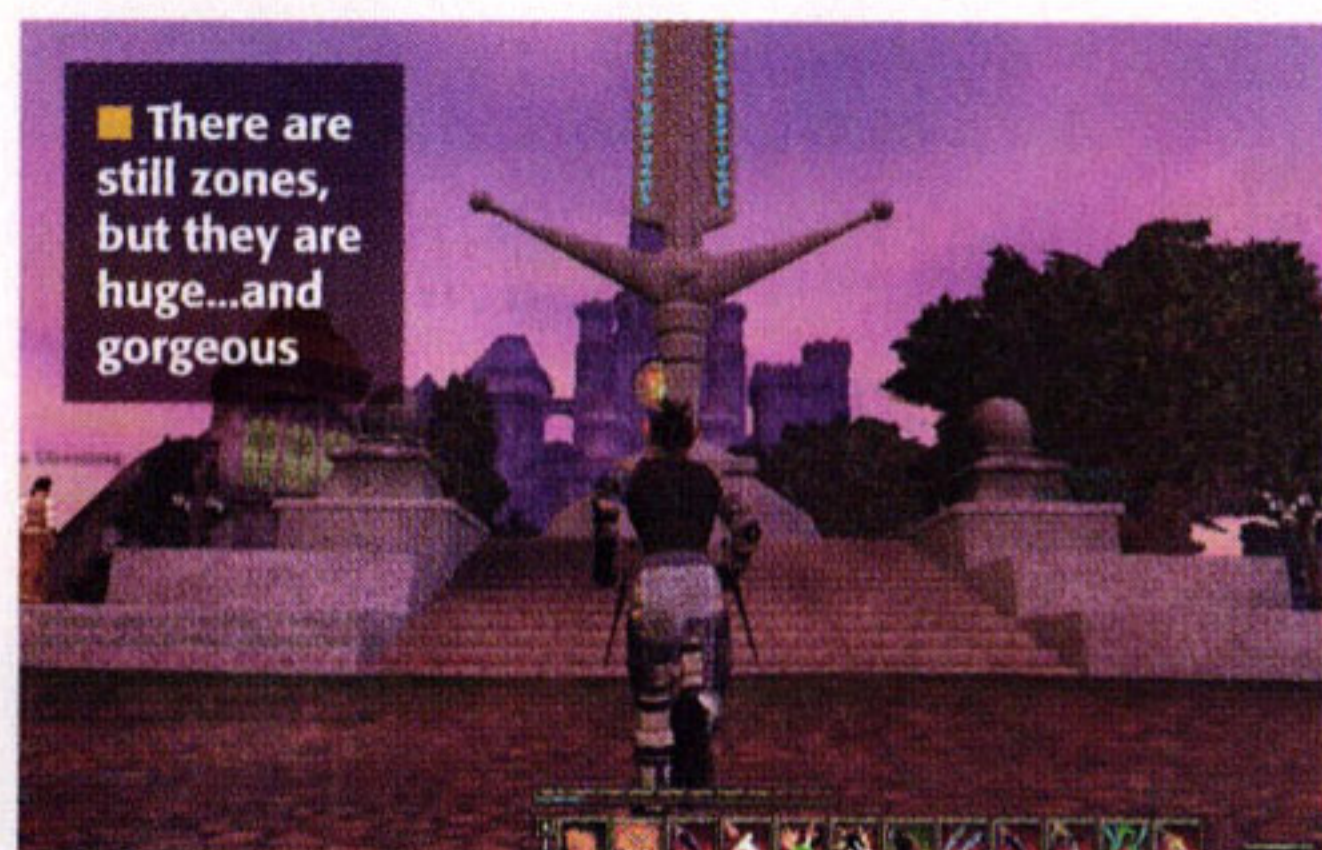
> **Entertainment:** You can and will spend months in this game once you get past its rather slow beginning

> **Replay Value:** High

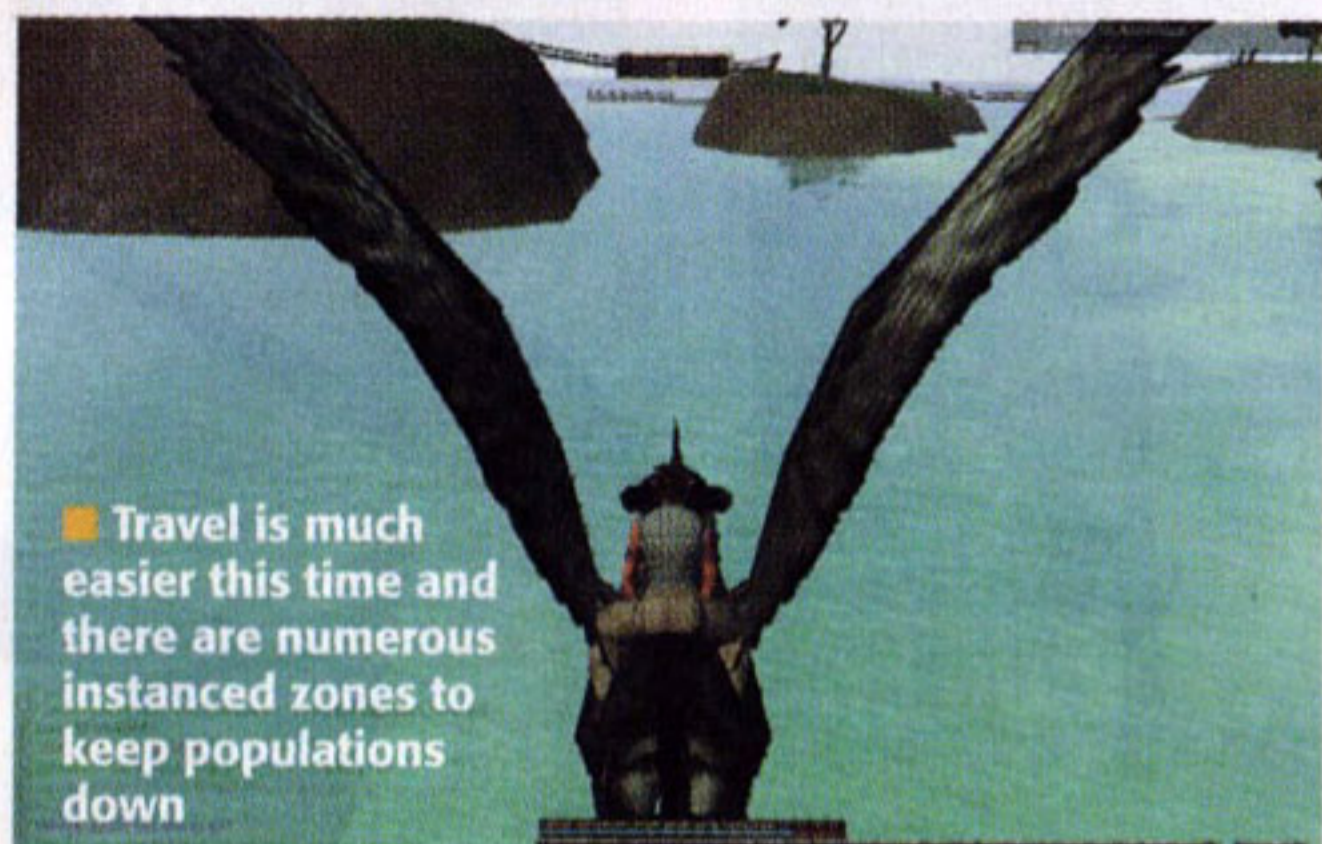


**Second Opinion** **8.5**

EverQuest II offers massive, huge, gargantuan, and several other superlative adjectives' worth of content. Seriously, even without the inevitable expansions, I think you could play this game for a solid year and not run out of things to do, places to explore, and monsters to smash. That being said, EQ II is not without its frustrations. Particularly, as a new player, in learning the subtleties of the many complex systems embedded within the game. There are tons of statistics, skills, and player interaction elements that must be grasped before you can really get into EQ II. If and when you get over that hump, though, you're in for a serious slice of MMORPG goodness. The Heroic Opportunities system expands the interactivity and intensity of combat by a surprising amount, and greatly magnifies the rush you get from being part of a tight-knit adventuring crew. I also really like the amount of control you have over the appearance of your character – nothing intimidates the bad guys like having a carbon copy of the Big Unit bearing down on them. However, unless you're fairly hardcore into the MMORPG scene, I have the feeling that the long and arduous learning curve will severely hamper your enjoyment of what EverQuest II has to offer. —ADAM



■ There are still zones, but they are huge...and gorgeous



■ Travel is much easier this time and there are numerous instanced zones to keep populations down



■ Combat is far more intense

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

# EverQuest II

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 8 > **ESRB** T

## THE RETURN OF EVERCRACK

As a long time fan of the original, I went into this game expecting a lot. Unfortunately, I walked away from my experience with EverQuest II with both excitement and a little bit of disappointment.

Obviously, the game is impressive graphically. Especially the animations of the characters, particularly in battle where the avatars unleash a dance of death that far exceeds anything you would expect from an MMORPG. Combine the awesome looks with the thousands of hours of voiceover work, and Norrath comes to life like never before (though, at times, it does feel a tad bit too renaissance festival for my tastes, but it's good nonetheless).

In fact, I was giddy for my first four or five hours with the game as I worked my way through the training isle. At this point, I was convinced that Sony had learned from some of its previous mistakes and had a created a game that was not only deep, but easy to get into and not so much of a grind, but an adventure.

Unfortunately, this excitement was short-lived. The game design quickly reverts to classic EQ once you choose your home city and the game truly begins. Over the next 20 hours, EQ II had me killing vermin in droves and basically wishing that I was playing

any game other than this. In fact, I was so distraught I was ready to call it quits.

Then it happened. I hit level 10 and I finally got to choose my class (this begins with the player as one of four archetypes, which lead to different classes, then eventually at level 20 to a subclass), and the game finally showed me what it had to offer. Yes, I'm a little annoyed that it took this long to get into, and shame on EQ II's level designers for making it so difficult to get into, but once the flood gates open, it hits you with a tide of fun.

Most impressive of which is the ingenious Heroic Opportunities gameplay mechanic. Basically, it's a combo system, which gives the player something to pay attention to during combat. Start an Opportunity solo and various actions flash on screen that you can link to unleash different attacks or effects. Do it in a group, and it moves from class to class, letting the players feed off each other to create devastating feats. It's surprisingly fun, and lets good groups be great, and bad groups...well, playing with crappy players is never a joy.



■ Enemies are labeled so you can easily find mobs to solo or take on with a group

For the most part, EQ II is impressive and really rights a lot of wrongs from the original, but at the same time, many of the gripes from the previous game quickly surface. Basically, EQ II is a game where grouping makes all the difference in the world. Sure, mobs are labeled for groups or solo, and soloing is definitely possible, but that doesn't mean that it's all that fun.

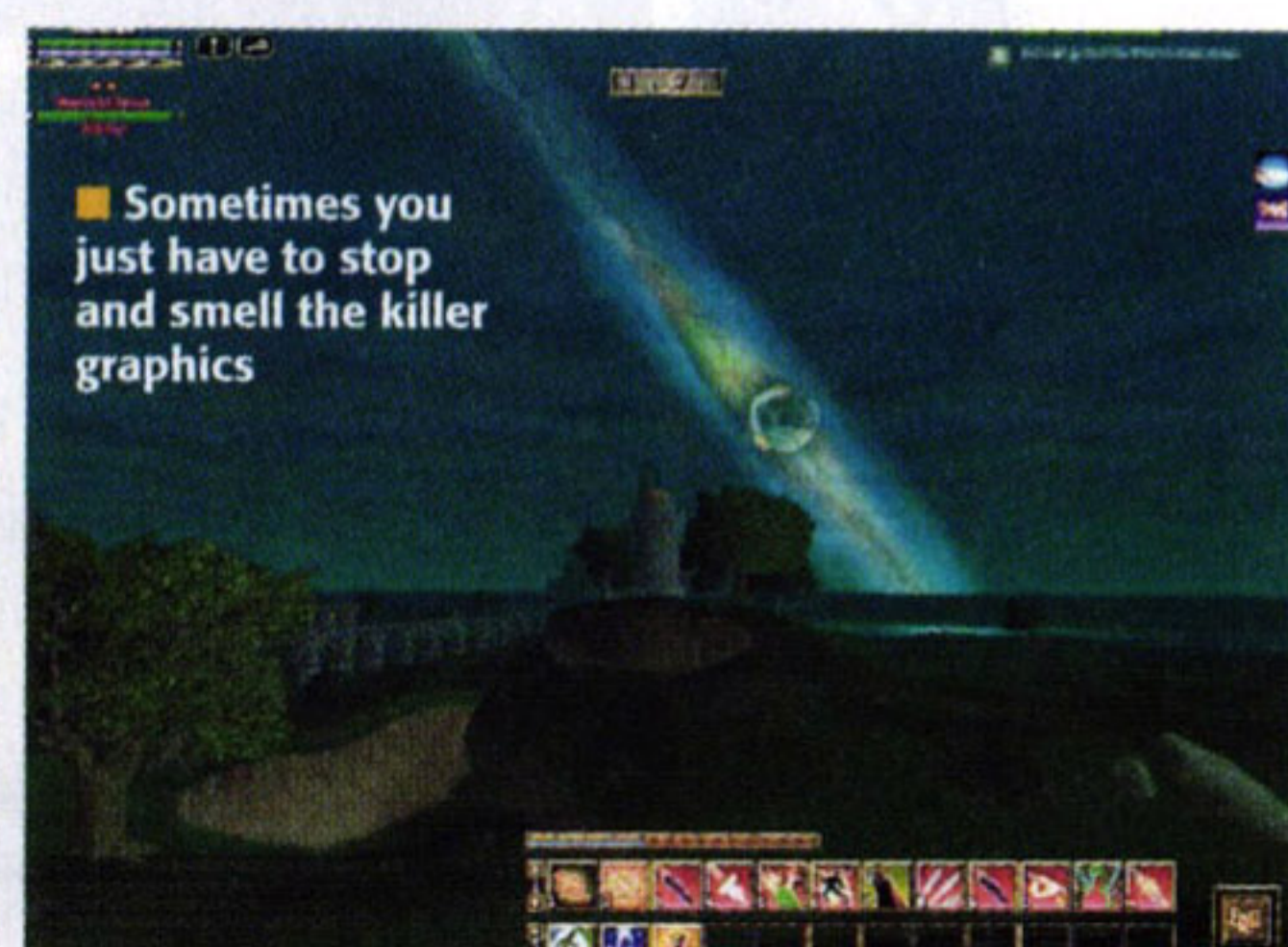
If you have the time, EverQuest II is, in my opinion, the best group-orientated MMORPG on the market. Its one major drawback being that it still requires a serious commitment of time to experience the game the way it was intended. While other games like World Of Warcraft went out and made an everyman's MMO, EQ stuck to its guns and made another grinder that didn't go out of its way to make it easy to play for those just looking for a quick and fun adventure. —ANDY



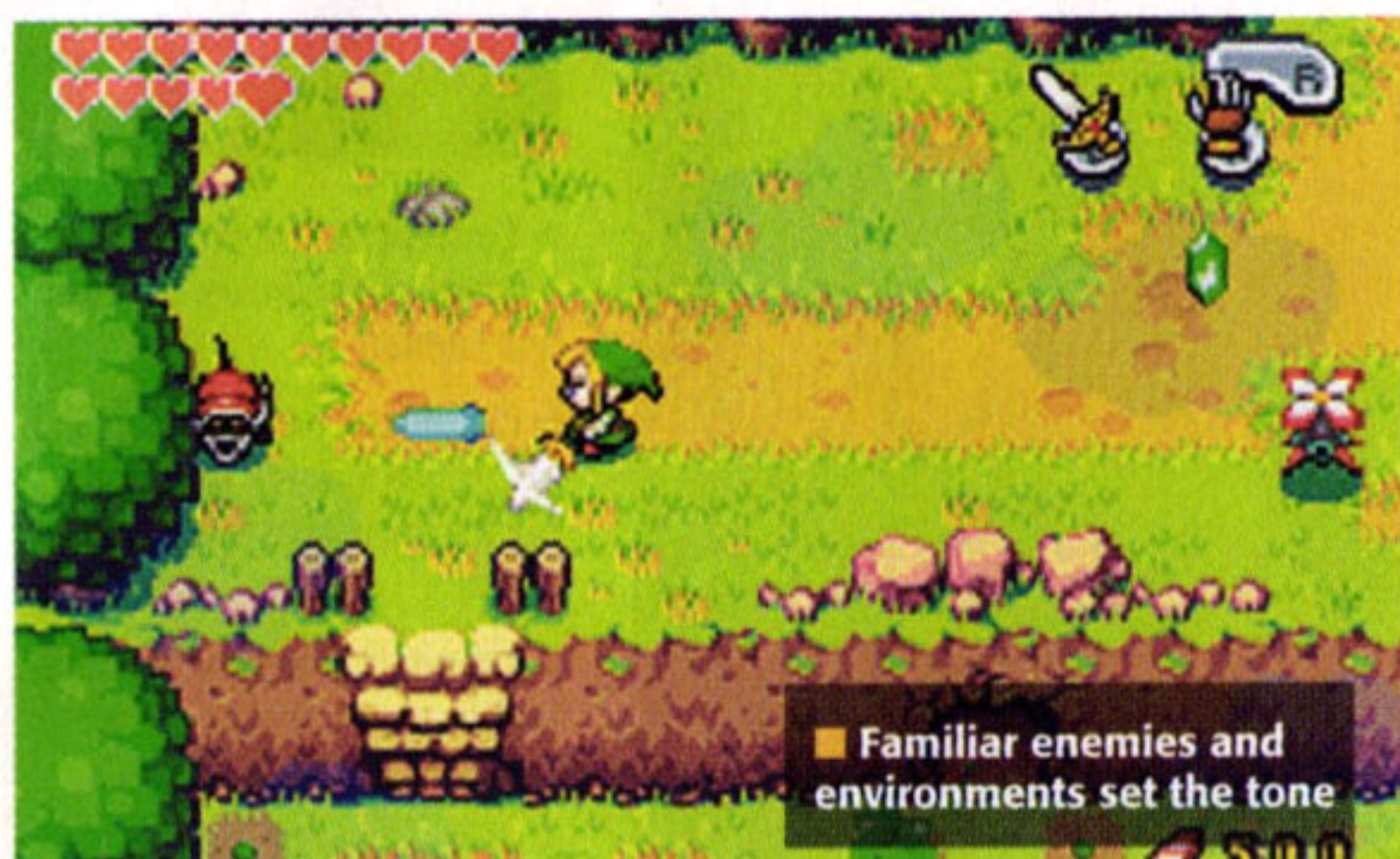
■ Dungeon crawls with a great group is what EQ II is all about



■ The effects in the game are second to none



■ Sometimes you just have to stop and smell the killer graphics



Familiar enemies and environments set the tone



Boss fights are a tad easy, but still exhilarating



Dungeon puzzles are as devious as ever

GAME BOY ADVANCE

# The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM  
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 10 > **ESRB** E

## SMALL HERO, BIG ADVENTURE

There's always been a certain magic to Zelda games. The classic formula should have gotten old by now, but it hasn't. Perhaps it's because we all identify on some level with this shy, unlikely hero. Maybe the games remind us of our own childhood. Or perhaps these titles are consistently of such high quality that we can't help but love them. Regardless, *The Minish Cap* succeeds in all these ways – simultaneously embracing its links to the past while offering numerous innovations that keep gameplay fresh, exciting, and a true joy to play.

The greatest of these novel concepts is the ability to transform from normal size down to the diminutive form of the Minish, a race of tiny people living right under the noses of the humans. This opens up entirely new realms of gameplay, as puzzles and even combat must be accomplished in different ways. When miniaturized, the smallest puddle becomes a deep lake, and the most mundane creatures become monstrous foes.

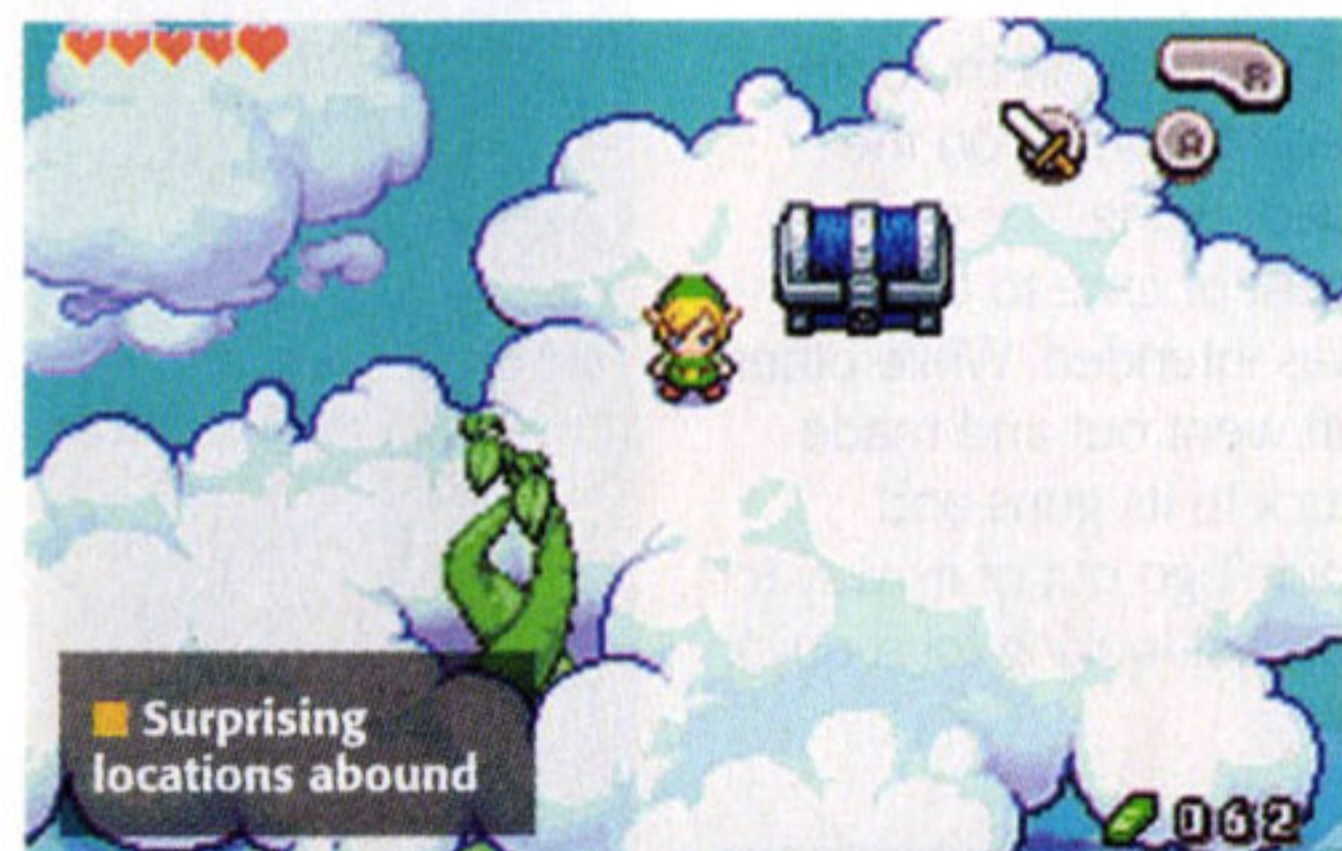
There's a new item called the Gust Jar that allows you to suck up obstacles and enemies before blowing them back out in a burst of air. It's one of the cooler new power-up items I've encountered in any

of the Zelda games, and adds yet another level of complexity to how you play. Another new ability allows Link to double himself, creating a ghostly after-image that mirrors his moves for a brief time. As you might imagine, this results in some clever and unique brainteasers that are a nod to the recent *Four Swords* games. In all these ways, the game challenges you to think in multiple dimensions and carefully remember details on your journey. A large cast of characters fleshes out the land of Hyrule, and monsters both large and small await your blade. To further connect you to the world's people, you will now collect items called Kinstones – broken halves of coin-like objects that can be fused with the Kinstones that other characters in the world have collected. By doing so, you'll open up portals, treasure chests, and secret doors all over the map. It's an addictive side quest that serves as a worthy compliment to the main adventure.

One of my few complaints is that while the

puzzles in the game are uniformly challenging, some of the combat is easier than I might have liked, especially against the bosses, who were often one-trick ponies requiring minimal skill. Even so, the fights are satisfying in their simplicity, and you have access to all the familiar weapons and techniques, including the boomerang, spin attack, and bow. The old and new features combine to make a game that feels both true to the Zelda heritage while offering an entirely unique experience.

But more than any of this, the game charms you with its stalwart hero. This silent little boy with ruffled, messy hair is faced with seemingly insurmountable odds. Through him, the game establishes a hero whose pure heart and will are carrying him forward. All the elements of *The Minish Cap* (even its presence on the GBA) contribute to the idea of a tiny force for good that strives to triumph against a huge evil. It's a classic adventure that more than lives up to the legacy of a classic series. —MILLER



Surprising locations abound



Fusing kinstones becomes an addictive hobby



When you're tiny, the world looks totally different



Link can create a spectral double of himself



The clichéd story is somehow still exciting



**BOTTOM LINE** 9.5

- > **Concept:** The time-honored Zelda tale retold in yet another new form
- > **Graphics:** Mixing the familiar images of previous Zelda games with humorous and detailed new character designs results in an impressive success for the GBA
- > **Sound:** Some of the most memorable and recognizable tunes in gaming sound great even on those little GBA speakers
- > **Playability:** Responsive and flexible with a nearly perfect learning curve that moves from simple to challenging
- > **Entertainment:** Like many of its predecessors – a true classic
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 9.5

There's a bird sitting on my head, I'm no larger than a toenail clipping, and I've been stuck on the same puzzle for the last three hours. Long story short, I'm having the time of my life. For any of you who played the remarkable Super Nintendo title *A Link to the Past*, *The Minish Cap* will bring a tear to your eye. This is classic Zelda gameplay in all its glory. The journey is a tad easy for my liking (boss fights are a breeze), but I can't get enough of the creative puzzles and new gadgets. Shrinking in height to a two-pixel speck is not only hilarious, it's one of the most compelling concepts that the series has offered up in a long time. Minigames are also in great abundance, and you can collect over 130 different figurines that shed some light on the characters in the world (which also happens to be one of my favorite aspects of *Wind Waker*). From its stunning visuals to its gameplay finesse, *The Minish Cap* is another harrowing Hyrule adventure that you'll remember for a lifetime. —REINER

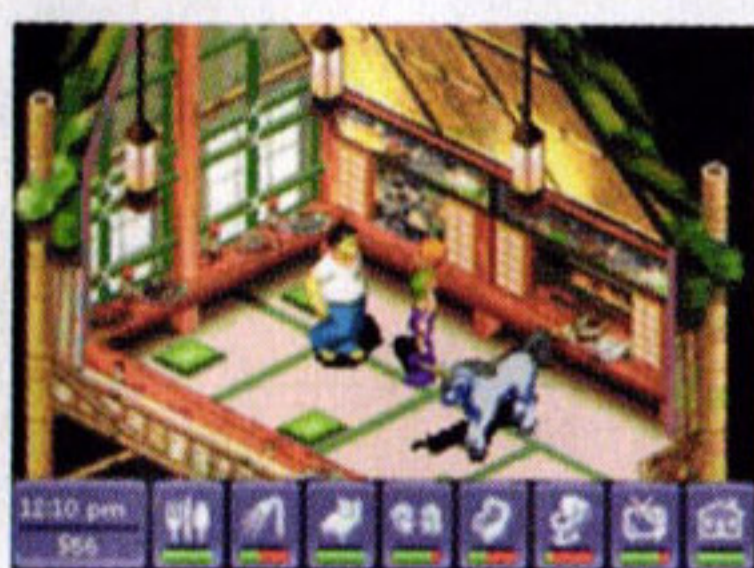


## The Urbz: Sims in the City

**BOTTOM LINE** 8

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** GRIPTONITE GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 10 > **ESRB** E

NINTENDO DS



You know those teen movies where the obviously attractive girl is cleverly hidden behind baggy clothes and glasses until the popular chicks dress her up so everyone in school can appreciate her true beauty? With the handheld Urbz titles, it's like the GBA version is the heroine at the beginning of the movie, and the DS version is the one at the end. Sure, all the ingredients for a rewarding experience are there from the start, but by the climactic conclusion on a whole new handheld system, the DS version walks away prettier, smoother, and more...um, interactive. The occasional control wonkyness is the one new negative, which is counteracted by the added minigames and location (Splicer Island), so I'm giving the versions the same score.—**LISA**

## Need for Speed Underground 2

**BOTTOM LINE** 3.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** POCKETEERS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E

GAME BOY ADVANCE



I would love to give this game some bonus points for technical wizardry, of which it displays quite a lot, but ninja coding does not a fun game make. Instead, this is a pockmark on the face of driving games everywhere. Because of the extremely bizarre physics, the drift and drag modes are the only ones that feel even remotely predictable, except that it says I'm pulling a 300-foot serpentine drift at 95 miles per hour – that seems close to reality, right? Well, it doesn't, and this weird ass-end swing out makes circuit racing all but impossible until you re-learn the concepts of physics, weight distribution, and even gravity. Little touches are there, but this is a package that, overall, should be Bondo-ed, buried, and left for future generations to get a chuckle out of.—**LISA**

## Fear Factor: Unleashed

**BOTTOM LINE** 3

> **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ARUSH ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL CONCEPTS STUDIOS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17 > **ESRB** T

GAME BOY ADVANCE



In real life, eating a bowl of cockroaches or jumping between moving helicopters might be excused as spontaneous eccentricities of being young. In Fear Factor: Unleashed, these same tasks start to take on a less capricious feel as they are hastily cobbled together into a mournful facsimile of a video game. Of the meager 12 "challenges" offered, two are identical, one is virtually impossible, and all of them are completely broken. In your twilight years, you will have to answer for the inglorious mistakes of your youth; stuffing maggots in your craw is an excusable error, but if you play Fear Factor: Unleashed, you deserve to find forgiveness in the heart of no human.—**JOE**

## The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age

**BOTTOM LINE** 8

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** GRIPTONITE GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 > **ESRB** T

GAME BOY ADVANCE



This is EA's second title called The Third Age, and like the console game, we see the publisher fortifying its place as an RPG purveyor of some skill. A pure strategy game, I loved the combat's flank system, where you receive a semi-random amount of command points to spend on actions per flank. Since you can move characters and attack between flanks, there are plenty of ways to out-manuever your opponent. Smart strategy also means using terrain and choosing your companions wisely. Despite its adherence to the genre, battles can be frustratingly long, and surprisingly, the lack of a driving story make this title a little dry for some. Not for me, however.—**KATO**

## Pathway to Glory

**BOTTOM LINE** 7.75

> **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS OR N-GAGE ARENA) > **PUBLISHER** NOKIA > **DEVELOPER** NOKIA/REDLYNX > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 29 > **ESRB** T

N-GAGE



Pathway to Glory, while undoubtedly one of the standouts of the N-Gage lineup, nonetheless falls short of being an amazing title on its own merits. I do very much enjoy the turn-based combat, presentation, and deep strategic concerns presented by the environments. However, the game's interface simply doesn't give you enough information to make sound tactical decisions. Ranges, lines of sight, and move ranges must all be eyeballed. Also, it's often difficult to tell what exactly a feature of the environment is – my guys were getting blown away for a good three tries through a mission before I figured out that the hill I was hiding behind was actually a trench. PtG is still a solid portable strategy game, but it can't stand up to the likes of Advance Wars.—**ADAM**

## Pocket Kingdom: Own The World

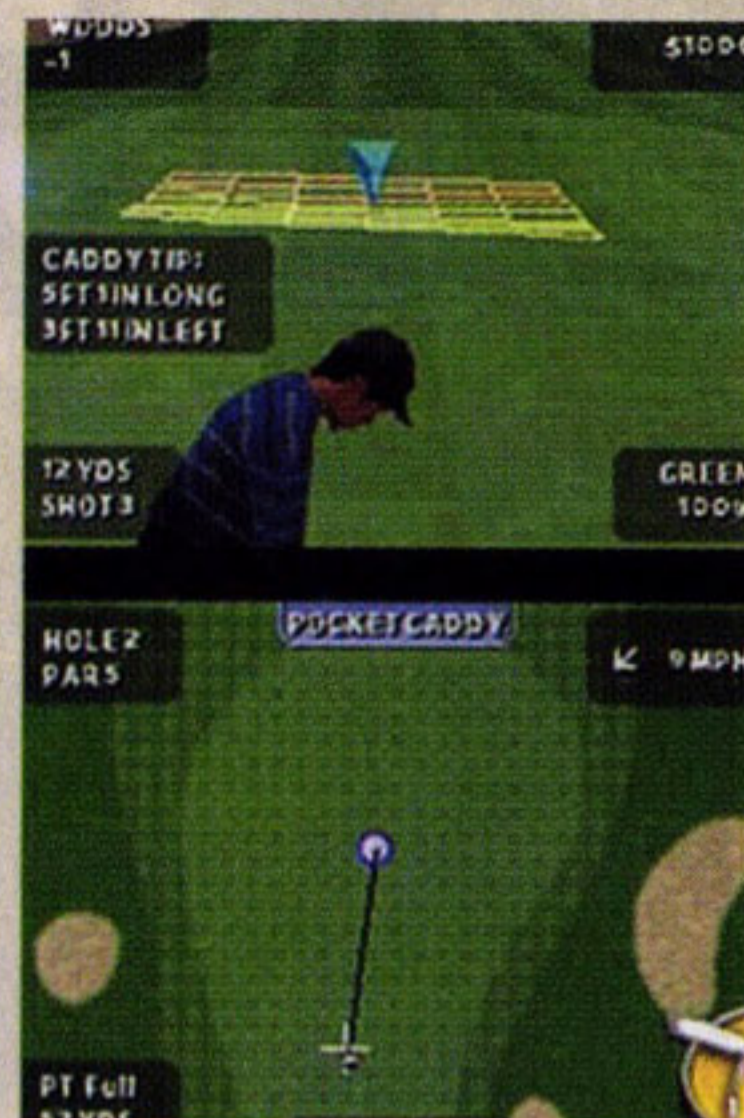
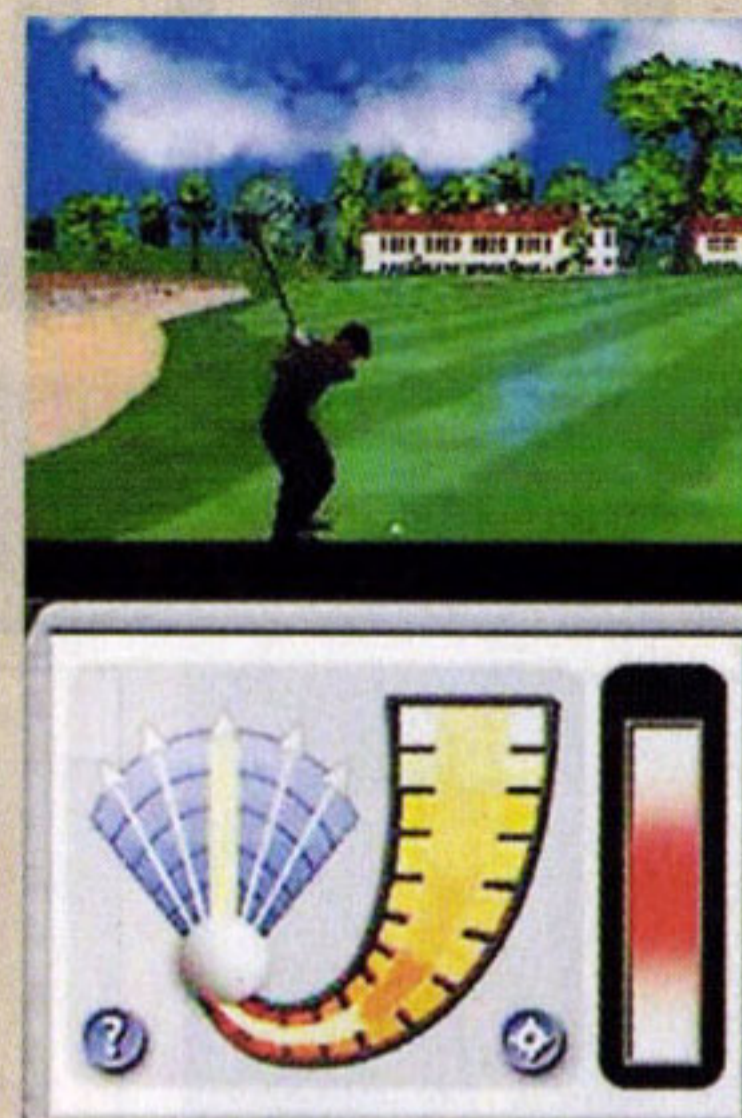
**BOTTOM LINE** 8

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG (MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER VIA N-GAGE ARENA) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 23 > **ESRB** T

N-GAGE



Pocket Kingdom is just the kind of clever and ingenious medicine the N-Gage needs to appeal to the gamer crowd. Basically, the game has a series of menus that the player navigates to set up groups that you send to various locations to collect items and do battle. It can at times be a tad tedious since you find yourself constantly flipping from menu to menu, but if you dig deep enough you will quickly find yourself addicted to its charming, albeit basic gameplay. Plus, the game's "leet"-speak dialogue is some of the funniest I have read in a long time.—**ANDY**



NINTENDO DS

## Tiger Woods PGA Tour

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 14 > **ESRB** E

### I'D RATHER CLUB BABY SEALS

**Y**ou'd think that there's not much to a golf game. Some green textures, a ball, and a selection of clothes that make you look like a total rube. But, as this game proves, it's a lot harder than you think. For all of those who are dreaming of pulling the club back and letting it rip, you'd better think again. This series just doesn't translate to anything enjoyable or even workable.

Like a pizza covered in chocolate, this game's touch screen swing is appealing for about half a second before you swear it off forever. Let me rephrase that. It's not that I don't like the touch screen swing, it's that what my ball subsequently does that is so baffling. Many times I was told I had a perfect shot hit at the perfect percentage, only to see the ball dribble from my impotent club. Putting was better, but also an inexact science. Because of the slippery touch screen, your target reticle slides all over the place. Aiming your putt often takes more than a few tries. This wasn't helped by the automatic camera changes which would take place, meaning you often had to start putting all over. Furthermore, the graphics weren't crisp enough for you to accurately read the green when the caddy couldn't give you hints. And I still haven't figured out how to put backspin on the ball.

Although the DS seems like a perfect place for Tiger's brand of hands-on golf, I'm afraid that – beyond the inconsistency issues I've pointed out – the touch screen simply doesn't imbue the kind of fun, responsive feel that a console analog controller does. Instead, it makes me want to shove the stylus up my nose in an attempt to manually stimulate my brain in the hope of releasing some pleasure endorphins.

—**KATO**

**BOTTOM LINE** 4

> **Concept:** EA Sports attempts to bring a hands-on golf swing akin to the consoles' use of the analog stick

> **Graphics:** Runs the animations of anguish and the fist pumps you've come to expect

> **Sound:** Sounds exactly like a quiet, uneventful day on the links should sound

> **Playability:** With little semblance of continuity between your actions and what happens to your golf ball, I suggest you prepare for the unexpected

> **Entertainment:** I wouldn't miss my root canal appointment for this game

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 6.5

In the real world, whenever I hit the links, Godzilla-sized chaos ensues. Let me just put it this way: I've hit more people than I have greens. I didn't think it was possible, but my swing is even worse in this game than it is in reality. The touch screen swing mechanic harnesses the spirit of the sport as players must swipe the stylus across the screen with the motion of an actual swing. Assuredly, this is a fun gameplay technique, but it's also incredibly sensitive and terribly inconsistent. With the same power, club, wind and lie, some shots would hit their mark, and others would fall way short or soar over the green. I couldn't hit a shot to save my life. In this regard, this is probably the most challenging (and realistic) golf game out there. So, if you enjoy other golf related activities like cursing, and tossing objects (the stylus doubles as a club), step right up. At the very least, this game will make you feel good about your real life golf game as your digital persona sucks more than you.—**REINER**



# CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

## TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For October 2004 Based On Units Sold

### 1 HALO 2



Please welcome our special Charts guest writer Chuck "that guy who talked up the new Pitfall game to all of his friends, camped out in front of a store all night to get the first copy, and to this day declares that no other game even comes close to touching it" Spikowski. Whadda have to say about these games, Chuck? "I just can't get behind a game that doesn't have a talking cheetah. Therefore, Halo 2 is crap."

### 2 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS



"Everyone keeps talking about how much freedom the Grand Theft Auto games deliver. Well, can you swing on a vine? NO! Can you jump on crocodiles? Um... NO! Can your character wear stylish dungarees? I don't think so! Chalk another one up for Pitfall!"

### 3 HALO 2: LIMITED COLLECTOR'S EDITION



"Oh, so this one is a special edition, huh? Well, you know what's really special? Harry's Heroic Handbook. That's right! Does Master Chief have a handbook that tells him how to be a great hero? No sir! Nice armor, dork!"

### 4 NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 2



"There is really nothing 'underground' about this game. Does it have caves? I think not. Does it have mine shafts? Guess again. Therefore, it's not really 'underground,' is it? They should make a game called 'Pitfall Harry's Underground.' He'd wear a miner's helmet!"

### 5 WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW



"These wrestlers are a lot like gorillas, but they're nowhere near as tough as the apes you'll find in the jungles of the Yucatan. If Harry was in the WWE, he'd be champ in no time. He's wrestled with a lot of big hairy goons in his time, that's for sure! Speaking of sweaty men..."

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Halo 2	N/A	XBOX	10	11-04	\$49
2	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	1	PS2	10	10-04	\$50
3	Halo 2: Limited Collector's Edition	N/A	XBOX	10	11-04	\$55
4	Need for Speed: Underground 2	N/A	PS2	8	11-04	\$49
5	WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw	N/A	PS2	8.5	11-04	\$49
6	Madden NFL 2005	9	PS2	8.75	08-04	\$31
7	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	N/A	PS2	9.5	11-04	\$50
8	The Incredibles	N/A	GBA	N/A	11-04	\$28
9	Need for Speed: Underground 2	N/A	XBOX	8	11-04	\$49
10	Super Mario 64 DS	N/A	DS	8.5	11-04	\$30
11	Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	N/A	PS2	10	11-04	\$39
12	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	N/A	GC	9.5	11-04	\$49
13	NBA Live 2005	2	PS2	8.25	09-04	\$32
14	Dragonball Z: Budokai 3	N/A	PS2	5	11-04	\$47
15	Jak 3	N/A	PS2	9.25	11-04	\$40
16	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	5	PS2	9.75	10-04	\$46
17	Pokémon Leaf Green	13	GBA	8	09-04	\$30
18	ESPN NBA 2K5	4	PS2	9	09-04	\$19
19	Pokémon Fire Red	11	GBA	8	09-04	\$32
20	Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	N/A	GBA	6	10-04	\$27

## TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Dragon Quest VIII	N/A	PS2
2	Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	N/A	PS2
3	Momo Taro Densetsu USA	N/A	PS2
4	Mario Party 6	N/A	GC
5	Slot Up Core 5	N/A	PS2
6	Naruto 3	N/A	GC
7	Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories	N/A	GBA
8	Dragon Ball Advance Adventure	N/A	GBA
9	Pokémon Emerald	2	GBA
10	Advance Wars 1 + 2	N/A	GBA



Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

## TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	World of Warcraft	N/A	PC
2	The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap	N/A	GBA
3	Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	N/A	Xbox
4	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	1	PS2
5	Halo 2	4	Xbox
6	MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf	N/A	Xbox
7	Oddworld Stranger's Wrath	N/A	Xbox
8	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	3	PS2
9	Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	6	Multi
10	Half-Life 2	5	PC



The Staff's Favorite Picks

## TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World of Warcraft	N/A	\$49
2	Half-Life 2	N/A	\$54
3	The Sims 2	2	\$44
4	Zoo Tycoon 2	N/A	\$38
5	Roller Coaster Tycoon 3	6	\$39
6	The Sims 2: Special Edition	3	\$44
7	Rome: Total War	4	\$38
8	Sid Meier's Pirates	N/A	\$43
9	Zoo Tycoon: Complete Collection	N/A	\$29
10	Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	N/A	\$43



Based On Monthly Units Sold

### PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	9	Dec-04
Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed	5.5	Jan-05
Armored Core: Nexus	7.25	Sep-04
Asterix & Obelix XXL	6	Sep-04
Astro Boy	5.5	Sep-04
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Athens 2004	6	Aug-04
ATV Offroad Fury 3	7	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05



The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age - PS2 - Dec-04

Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Battle Assault 3		
Featuring Gundam Seed	4	Jan-05
Blood Will Tell	5	Nov-04
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	7.25	Jul-04
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Capcom Fighting Evolution	6	Dec-04
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
ChoroQ	6.25	Oct-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Corvette	5	Jun-04
Crash 'n' Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Crimson Tears	5	Aug-04
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme	8.25	Oct-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Dog's Life	7	Sep-04
Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3	5	Jan-05
Driv3r	6	Aug-04
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	7	Sep-04
Echo Night: Beyond	6	Aug-04
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
EyeToy: AntiGrav	7	Dec-04
EyeToy: Groove	6	Jun-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	7.75	Dec-04
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	8.75	Oct-04
Front Mission 4	7.25	Jun-04
Funkmaster Flex Digital Hitz Factory	6.75	Oct-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Galactic Wrestling		
Featuring Ultimate Muscle	4.25	Jul-04
Gallop Racer 2004	8.25	Oct-04
Get On Da Mic	5	Dec-04
Ghosthunter	6.5	Sep-04
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	7.25	Dec-04
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Gradius V	8.25	Oct-04
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	10	Dec-04
Gretzky NHL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Growlanser: Generations	7.5	Jan-05
Guilty Gear Isuka	6.75	Dec-04
Gungrave: Overdose	4.25	Nov-04
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Headhunter: Redemption	6.75	Oct-04
Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jun-04
Hot Shots Golf Fore!	9	Sep-04
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Inuyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask	4.25	Jan-05
Jak 3	9.25	Nov-04
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	8.25	Aug-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	8.25	Nov-04
Katamari Damacy	8	Oct-04
Killzone	7.5	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	6.5	Nov-04
Kuon	6	Nov-04
La Pucelle: Tactics	8	Jun-04
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	4	Aug-04
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Mega Man X8	8.25	Jan-05
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	9.5	Jan-05

Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
MLB Slugfest Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
Monster Hunter	5	Nov-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
MTV Music Generator 3	8	Aug-04
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
Neo Contra	7.75	Nov-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04

Nightmare of Druaga: Fushigino Dungeon, The	4	Nov-04
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	9	Jun-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
Phantom Brave	8	Sep-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Puyo Pop Fever	7.25	Aug-04
Ratchet and Clank: Up Your Arsenal	10	Nov-04
Rapala Pro Fishing	8.25	Oct-04
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Ribbit King	7	Jun-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Rumble Roses	7.75	Jan-05
Samurai Warriors Xtreme Legends	6.75	Jan-05
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Sega Superstars	8	Dec-04
Shadow Hearts: Covenant	8	Oct-04
Shaman King: Power of Spirit	6.5	Jan-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Shellshock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	7.5	Nov-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Sly 2: Band of Thieves	8.75	Oct-04
Smash Court Pro Tournament 2	5	Jul-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spy Fiction	7.5	Oct-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	8.25	Aug-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	8	Sep-04
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Taiko Drum Master	7.75	Dec-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Technic Beat	7.5	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	6.75	Nov-04
TOCA Race Driver: Ultimate Racing Simulator	7.5	Nov-04
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Transformers	7	Jun-04
Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	5	Aug-04
Ty the Tasmanian		
Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
UFC Sudden Impact	6.5	Jul-04
Under the Skin	5	Oct-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe	9.5	Sep-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
Way of the Samurai 2	3.25	Jul-04
WWE Smackdown! Vs. RAW	8.5	Dec-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	3.25	Dec-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	6	Jan-05

King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures, The	8	Jun-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Mario Power Tennis	8.5	Jan-05
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	9.5	Jan-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Paper Mario 2: The Thousand-Year Door	6.75	Nov-04
Pikmin 2	8.75	Aug-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Rainbow Six 3	5.75	Sep-04
Ribbit King	7	Jun-04
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Tales of Symphonia	8.75	Jul-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian		
Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
WWE Day of Reckoning	8.25	Oct-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04

### XBOX

Army Men: Sarge's War	5	Oct-04
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space	7	Jan-05
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04

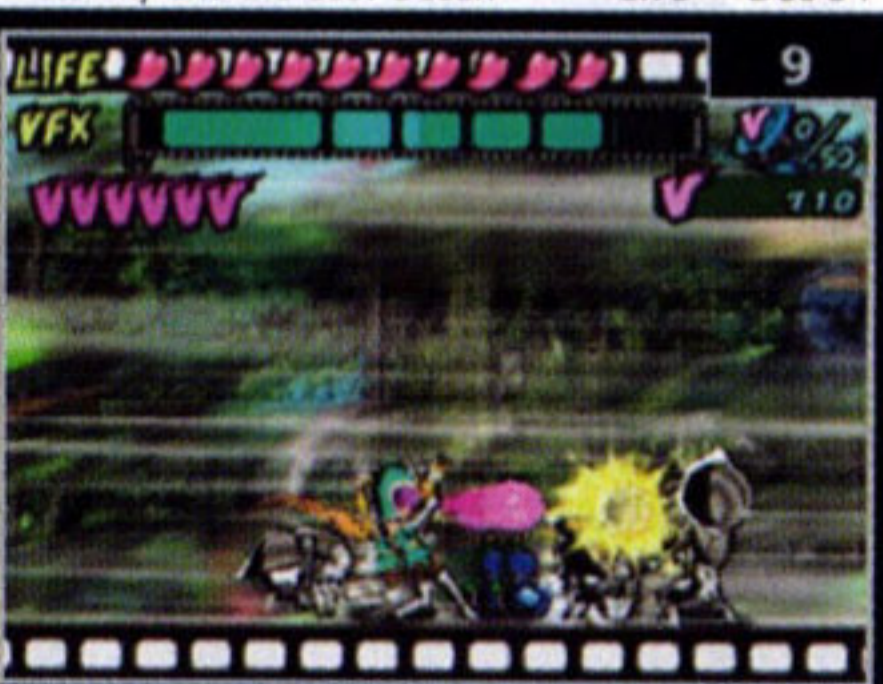


MLB Slugfest Loaded - Xbox - Jul-04

Bumout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, The	9.5	Jul-04
Colin McRae Rally 2005	8.25	Oct-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Crash 'n' Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 2	7.75	Dec-04
Dead or Alive Ultimate	9	Dec-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Driv3r	6	Aug-04
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
Fable	9.5	Oct-04
Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut	9.25	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Full Spectrum Warrior	8.25	Jul-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Galleon	4.25	Oct-04
Ghost Recon 2	8	Jan-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Guilty Gear X2 #Reload	8.25	Sep-04
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Halo 2	10	Dec-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jun-04
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
IndyCar Series 2005	6.5	Aug-04
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Karaoke Revolution	7.75	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04

### GAMECUBE

Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Amazing Island	7.25	Sep-04
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Baten Kaitos: Wings of Eternity and the Lost Ocean	8.75	Dec-04



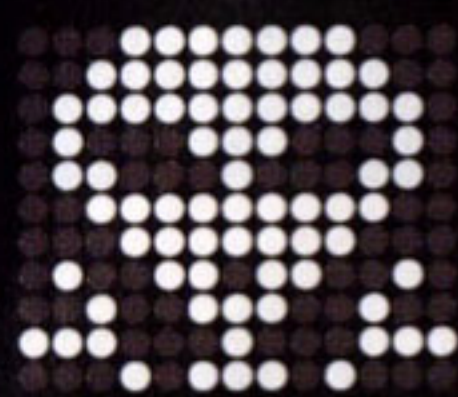
Viewtiful Joe 2 - GC - Dec-04

Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Donkey Konga	7	Nov-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05

Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders	7.75	Nov-04
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Mafia	8	Jun-04
Malice	5.5	Aug-04
Manhunt	9	Jun-04
Men of Valor	7.75	Nov-04
Metal Slug 3	8	Jul-04
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
MLB Slugfest Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
MTV Music Generator 3	8	Aug-04
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors	7	Oct-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
OutRun 2	6.5	Dec-04
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Pro Fishing Challenge	4.25	Sep-04
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Pure Pinball	5.75	Oct-04
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	8	Sep-04
RalliSport Challenge 2	7.25	Jun-04
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Samurai Warriors	7.75	Sep-04
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	5.75	Aug-04
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
ShellShock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Sims 2, The	8.75	Nov-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Steel Battalion: Line of Contact	7.5	May-04
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Sudeki	7.75	Sep-04
SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom	6.5	Nov-04
Syberia II	6.25	Nov-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Thief: Deadly Shadows	7.25	Jul-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
TOCA Race Driver 2	7.5	May-04
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	5	Aug-04
Tron 2.0 Killer App	7	Jan-05
Ty the Tasmanian		
Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
Ultra Bust-A-Move	7	Dec-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Wings of War	6.5	Nov-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Yager	7	Oct-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Dawn of Destiny	6	Jun-04

### PC

Armies of Exigo	8	Dec-04
Aura: Fate of the Ages	7.25	Sep-04
Axis & Allies	7.75	Jan-05
Battlefield Vietnam	8	May-04
Besieger	6	Aug-04
Breed	5.75	Jun-04
Call of Duty: United Offensive	8.75	Nov-04
City of Heroes	9	Jul-04
Chris Sawyer's Locomotion	7	Nov-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay Developer's Cut, The	9.25	Jan-05
C		



## Code of the Month

# Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Here's a handful of secrets straight from Rockstar North!

**Extra Income** – A great way to make some quick funds is to kill the drug dealers that are harassing the citizens of San Andreas. You can spot drug dealers by looking for shady people wearing black sweatshirts. Not only will they drop a ton of cash, each one you down will add to your running respect level. Of course, this technique will allow CJ to wear whatever he pleases, and still maintain a high respect level.

### REAL WORLD TIES

Once again, Rockstar has created a handful of websites and phone numbers that you can dial up from your computer or phone. Here's the complete list.

1-866-505CRIM	1-866-505-2746	Crimson Executive
		Wife Removal
1-866-FACEFEAR	1-866-322-3332	Inversion Therapy
1-866-FUNCULT	1-866-386-2858	Epsilon Program

[www.cluckinbellhappychicken.com](http://www.cluckinbellhappychicken.com)  
[www.fearitdoit.com](http://www.fearitdoit.com)  
[www.westcoastraplegends.com](http://www.westcoastraplegends.com)  
[www.epsilonprogram.com](http://www.epsilonprogram.com)  
[www.exsorbeo.com](http://www.exsorbeo.com)  
[www.maccerr.net](http://www.maccerr.net)

### PHOTO OP

When you walk past certain people on the streets, they will flash signs in your direction and make small talk with you. If you have a camera, some of these characters will pose for pictures.

### EARLY BULLETPROOF SAVANNA

Finish the 'High Stakes, Low-Rider' mission, and you'll notice that Cesar and his car stay at the finish line. Unfortunately, the doors are locked...but not for long. Push the car to the nearest garage and the doors will become unlocked. On an interesting note, this car will stay bulletproof.

### FLYING HIGH WITHOUT A LICENSE

As you probably learned, you need a pilot's license to fly a plane in San Andreas. That is, unless you know how to break into Los Santos airport. To get in, head over to the man in the little building outside of the airport. He's the guy who says "Only people holding a valid pilot's license may enter!" Park any car in front of the building he is in. Now, jump on top of this car and leap towards the building. If you do this correctly, CJ will grab onto it. Pull yourself up and enter the airport. Just enter a plane and you can hit the friendly skies.

### GREAT LOVE

The girlfriend portion of San Andreas may feel like a minigame of sorts, but there's actually a lot that can be gained by courting a girl. They'll fix your cars, get you out of the hospital or jail with all of your weapons, and a ton of other things. Here's how to make them fall head over heels in love with you. Bringing roses to them always helps. Just whip them out by pressing L1 to surprise them.

**Denise Robinson** – After you rescue her from the burning apartment, don't show up at her house without tons of sex appeal. Complete dating with her and you'll have a Pimp Suit delivered to your wardrobe.

**Michelle Cannes** – This girl loves men with a bit of weight to them. Eat tons of fatty foods then go see her when you put on some serious pounds. If you date her enough, Hippy Clothes will be delivered to your wardrobe.

**Helena Wankstein** – You really don't need to do anything fancy for her. Don't have too much muscle or fat and she will eventually reward you with Country Overalls!

**Barbara Schternvart** – She likes her men gigantic. Eat a lot, but make sure that you look nice. Woo her and she'll give you a SAPD uniform.

**Katie Zhan** – This girl loves muscles and sex appeal. Max them out and take her out on the town enough and she will give you a EMT uniform.

**Millie Perkins** – If you don't have patience for Millie in the 'Key to Her Heart' mission, just off her and take the card.

make all girls wear swimsuits and all vehicles beach related rides.

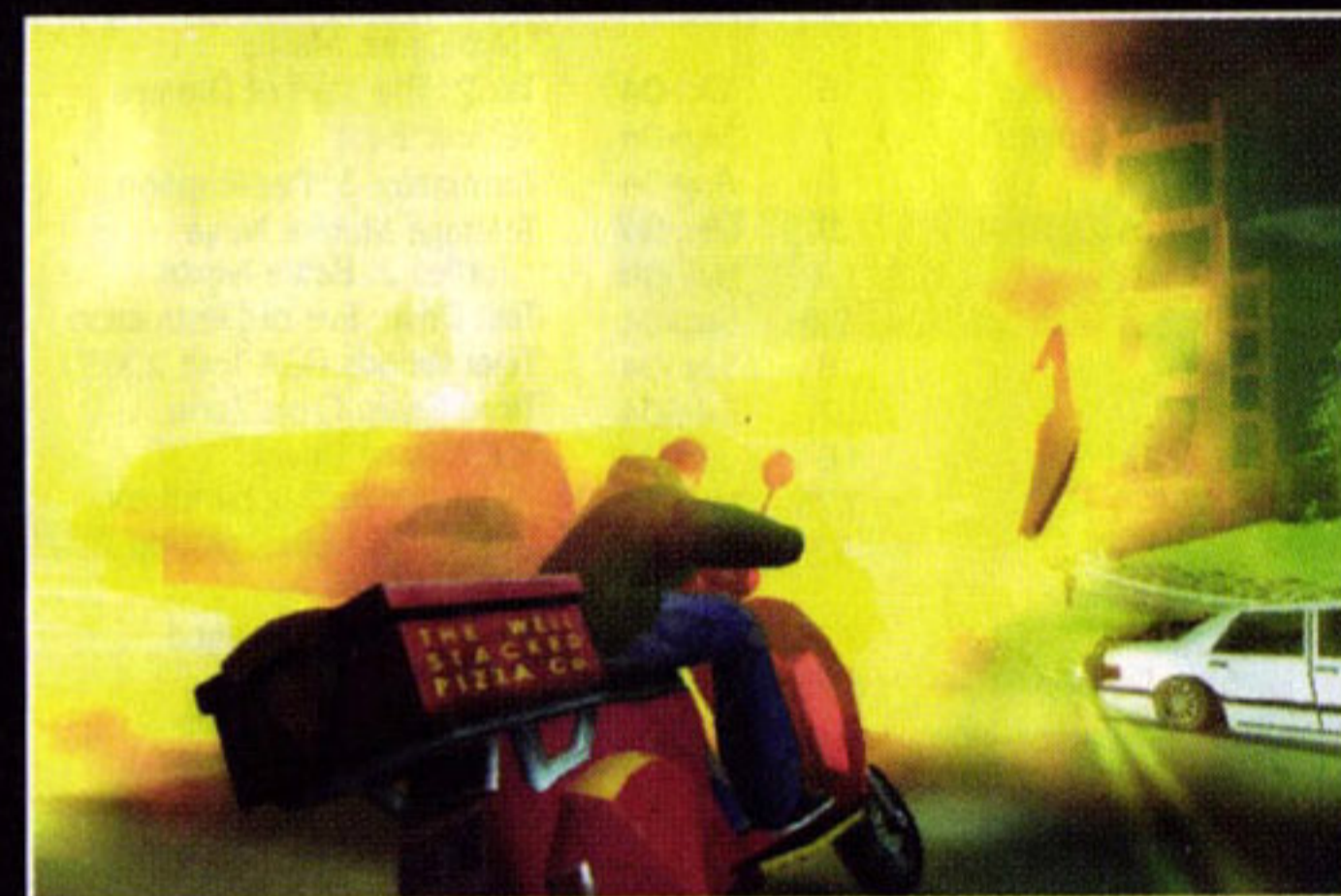
### STUNT PLANE

Input , Up, L1, L2, Down, R1, L1 (x2), Left (x2), ,  to spawn a stunt plane.



### HYDRA JET

To make a Hydra Jet drop in front of you, enter  (x2), , , , L1 (x2), Down, Up.



### VEHICLES OF DEATH

Any vehicle that you drive becomes invulnerable and any vehicle you touch explodes when this code is entered: L1, L2 (x2), Up, Down (x2), Up, R1, R2 (x2).



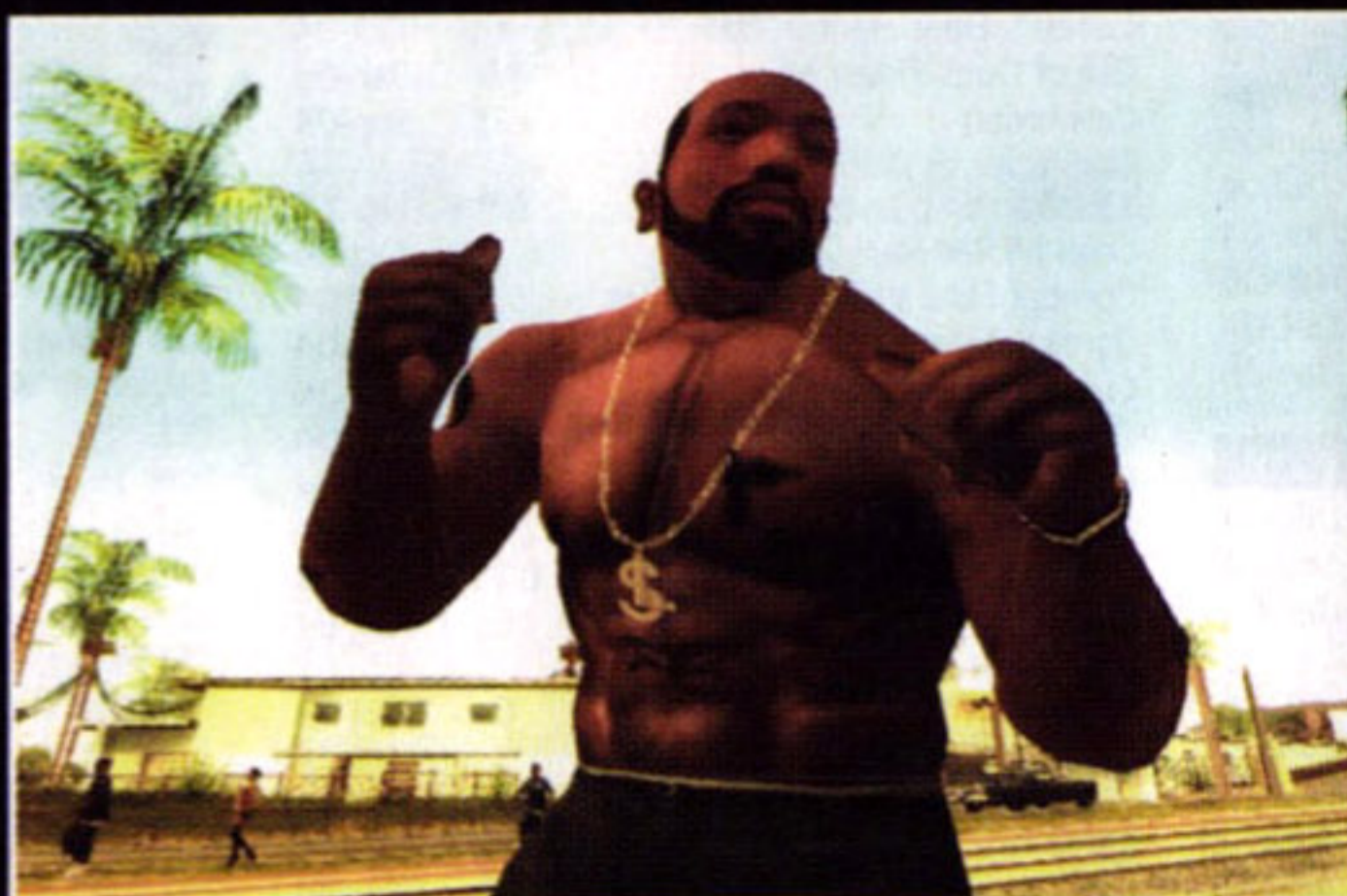
### HIGH JUMP

Enter Up (x2),  (x2), Up (x2), Left, Right, , R2 (x2) to jump 10 times higher than normal.



### CJ PHONE HOME

Input the code , ,  (x2), ,  (x2), L1, L2 (x2), R1, R2, then grab a bike and bunny hop when the moon is out to recreate a familiar movie scene.



### MAXIMUM MUSCLES

Enter the code , Up (x2), Left, Right, , , Left to make CJ ripped.

### FATTY FAT

To make CJ fat, input , Up (x2), Left, Right, , , Down.

### THEM BONES

To make CJ skinny input , Up (x2), Left, Right, , , Right.

### BEACH PARTY

Enter the cheat Up (x2), Down (x2), , , L1, R1, , Down to

**Attention All Cheaters!**

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to [secretaccess@gameinformer.com](mailto:secretaccess@gameinformer.com) for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

**MULTI-SYSTEM****GoldenEye: Rogue Agent**

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

From the main menu, go to the Extras menu. Enter these codes there. A message will confirm correct entry.

**Unlock All Skins** – Down, Left, Up, Left, Right, Down, Left, Up

**Paintball Mode** – Right, Left, Right, Left, Down (x2), Up (x2)

**PLAYSTATION 2****Call of Duty: Finest Hour**

From the main menu, select Options, then Player at the level select screen, hold Up on the second controller and, on the first controller, enter this sequence.

**Unlock All Levels** – Start, Select (x2), □

**Godzilla: Save the Earth**

At the main menu, scroll to the bottom and hold (in order) L2, ○, R2. Then release them in the order ○, R2, L2. Enter these codes in the window that appears.

**Gameplay Cheats**

<b>Health Regenerates</b>	536117
<b>Indestructible Buildings</b>	812304
<b>No Energy Recharge</b>	122574

**Player 1 Cheats**

<b>Invulnerable</b>	338592
<b>Invisibility</b>	531470
<b>Super Damage</b>	259565
<b>Super Energy Recharge</b>	819342

**Player 2 Cheats**

<b>Invulnerable</b>	259333
<b>Invisibility</b>	118699
<b>Super Damage</b>	927281
<b>Super Energy Recharge</b>	324511

**Player 3 Cheats**

<b>Invulnerable</b>	953598
<b>Invisibility</b>	507215
<b>Super Damage</b>	500494
<b>Super Energy Recharge</b>	651417

**Player 4 Cheats**

<b>Invulnerable</b>	198690
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<b>Invisibility</b>	198690
<b>Super Damage</b>	988551
<b>Super Energy Recharge</b>	456719

**Unlockables**

<b>100,000 Unlock Points</b>	532459
<b>150,000 Unlock Points</b>	667596
<b>200,000 Unlock Points</b>	750330
<b>Unlock All Challenges</b>	975013
<b>Unlock All Cities</b>	659996
<b>Unlock All Monsters</b>	525955
<b>Unlock Everything</b>	246518
<b>Unlock Gallery</b>	294206
<b>Unlock Godzilla Final Wars</b>	409014

**Need for Speed: Underground 2**

Enter these at the title screen (the one where it says Press Start).

**\$1,000 (Career Mode, "No Save" only), RX-8, And Skyline (Quick Race)** – Left (x2), Right, □ (x2), Right, L1, R1

**Start With \$200 (Career Mode)** – Up (x3), Left, R1 (x3), Down

**Unlock Best Buy Vinyl** – Up, Down, Up, Down (x2), Up, Right, Left

**Unlock Hummer H2 Capone (Career Mode)** – Up, Left, Up (x2), Down, Left, Down, Left

**Unlock Performance I Parts** – L1, R1, L1, R1, Left (x2), Right, Up

**Unlock Performance II Parts** – R1 (x2), L1, R1, Left, Right, Up, Down

**Unlock Visual I Parts** – R1 (x2), Up, Down, L1 (x2), Up, Down

**Unlock Visual II Parts** – L1, R1, Up, Down, L1, Up (x2), Down

**Yu Yu Hakusho Dark Tournament**

From the main menu, choose Options and then Cheats. Enter these codes there; the relevant entry will highlight if you did it correctly. You re-enter any code to disable it.

**Free Spirit Energy P1** – □, X, ○, □, X, ○

**Free Spirit Energy P2** – Down, Up, ○, Left, X, Right

**No Damage P1** – ○, □, Down, Left, ○, □

**No Damage P2** – Up, □, Left, □, ○, □

**Turbo Mode** – ○, X, Right, X, Up, □

**Unlock All Chapters** – Up, Down, X, ○, □, Right

**Unlock All Environments** – Up, Right, Left, Right, X (x2)

**Unlock All Fighters** – □, Up, □, ○, Down, ○

**Unlock All Modes** – Left, Right, Down, Right, X, ○

**Unlock All Tokens** – ○, □, ○, □ (x2), Down

**XBOX****Ghost Recon 2**

During gameplay, pause and go to In-Game Options. From there, select Enter Cheats. Enter these codes there; a message will confirm entry.

**Complete Mission** – B (x2), X, Y

**Refill** – B (x2), X (x2)

**Superman** – B (x2), X, A

**Team Superman** – B (x2), X, B

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – last seen with Karl Malone's wife)

**Need for Speed: Underground 2**

Enter these at the title screen (the one where it says Press Start).

**\$1,000 (Career Mode, "No Save" only), RX-8, And Skyline (Quick Race)** – Left (x2), Right, X (x2), Right, L, R

**Start With \$200 (Career Mode)** – Up (x3), Left, R (x3), Down

**Unlock Best Buy Vinyl** – Up, Down, Up, Down (x2), Up, Right, Left

**Unlock Hummer H2 Capone (Career Mode)** – Up, Left, Up (x2), Down, Left, Down, Left

**Unlock Performance I Parts** – L, R, L, R, Left (x2), Right, Up

**Unlock Performance II Parts** – R (x2), L, R, Left, Right, Up, Down

**Unlock Visual I Parts** – R (x2), Up, Down, L (x2), Up, Down

**Unlock Visual II Parts** – L, R, Up, Down, L, Up (x2), Down

**Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection**

Enter these at the Codes screen.

**Factory Tour** – DGC

**Love Meter Machine** – LUV

**Payout Mode** – LAS

**Playboy Machine** – PKR

**Xolten Machine Army** – XTN

**GAMECUBE****Need for Speed: Underground 2**

Enter these at the title screen (the one where it says Press Start).

**Start With \$200 (Career Mode)** – Up (x3), Left, R (x3), Down

**Unlock Best Buy Vinyl** – Up, Down, Up, Down (x2), Up, Right, Left

**Unlock Hummer H2 Capone (Career Mode)** – Up, Left, Up (x2), Down, Left, Down, Left

**Unlock Performance I Parts** – L, R, L, R, Left (x2), Right, Up

**Unlock Performance II Parts** – R (x2), L, R, Left, Right, Up, Down

**Unlock Visual I Parts** – R (x2), Up, Down, L (x2), Up, Down

**Unlock Visual II Parts** – L, R, Up, Down, L, Up (x2), Down

**Mod World****DAVID VS. GOLIATH**

[www.zangogames.com](http://www.zangogames.com)

Some sort of space-time anomaly must be gripping the Earth, because David vs. Goliath started out development as a retail game, and at some point, a wonderful madness seized the developers, because they decided to release the full version for free over the Web. Sure, you have to put up with the occasional advertisement, but it's still a free game that's way more polished than your standard Java Arcade ditty.



The premise behind DvG is twofold: Goliath is an alien, and David an action hero. So, logically, you'll have to use your slingshot to battle Goliath's invading hordes and save the Earth from a terrible fate. Fortunately, you'll be able to scavenge some alien technology to aid you in your struggle – there's nothing like rocking the cradle of civilization with rocket launchers and lasers.



While DvG certainly doesn't have the kind of technical prowess on display in Half-Life 2, it's a quick, fun romp through 30 levels of old-school Ikari Warriors-style 2D action. And, in case you weren't convinced of DvG's sense of humor, the highest difficulty level is Ninja. If the concept of controlling a ninja David cutting his way through Goliath's robot alien hordes with lasers doesn't appeal to you, you might want to have your blood awesome level checked.



One final word about DvG – it might be wise, as with all free software, to run SpyBot ([security.kolla.de](http://security.kolla.de)), AdAware ([www.lavasoftusa.com](http://www.lavasoftusa.com)), or your anti-spyware software of choice after installation. Remember, the Web is a dark and scary place, and your best defense against questionable things popping up on your desktop is safe surfing.

# EverQuest II



## Community Manager Steve Danuser (a.k.a. Moorgard) Shares Leveling Tips

### DO EVERY QUEST YOU CAN FIND

While grinding for experience may be the norm in other games, EQ II has put the "quest" back in EverQuest. As you explore the cities and the world beyond, NPCs may beckon you and ask for help. Be mindful of your surroundings; you may also find that a quest begins when you examine an item, use an object, or encounter a specific situation. Accepting such quests may lead you to slay a threatening foe, search for a missing companion, assemble a powerful weapon, or perform a variety of other tasks. Quests provide an array of different rewards including experience, money, weapons, armor, prestige items, titles, and more. Be sure to talk to everyone you encounter in your travels or you'll be missing half the fun and challenge of the game.



### MAKE FRIENDS

While you can solo to your heart's content, grouping lets you earn experience much faster – and provides access to better loot, too. Of course, not everyone who plays a massively multiplayer game knows what they're doing, so you want to remember the smart players you group with so you can hook up again. Right-clicking on another character lets you add that player to your friends list so you can keep track of them when they're online. Hitting the Y key opens your Community window where you can see which of your friends are online. It also lets you keep an ignore list so you can block out anybody who annoys you.

### KNOW YOUR CLASS

Nobody wants to group with players who don't know the basic abilities of their class. While you can figure out a lot on your own by reading the game manual, sometimes you need a bit of guidance to really maximize your potential. Be sure to check out the Class pages on the EQ2Players.com website, which features plenty of tips and tricks for playing your character successfully. Follow the links to class-specific fansites that provide additional strategies that will transform you from a clueless noob into a highly sought-after expert. Once you develop a reputation as a good player, you won't have to look for groups – they'll come looking for you.

### UPGRADE YOUR SPELLS AND COMBAT ARTS

Spells and combat arts are the bread and butter of every class. While you are granted most of your spells and combat arts through normal character advancement, a majority of these can be upgraded in a variety of ways. There are many different ranks for each spell and combat art, ranging from Apprentice to Adept and even Master. The higher the rank of the

spell or art, the more powerful it will be. Apprentice I spells and combat arts are usually granted to you automatically for gaining experience. Others can be acquired by purchasing them from a merchant, having an artisan craft them for you, or finding them as loot throughout the world.

### KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Norrath is filled with creatures great and small, and you need to be able to tell which will provide a worthy challenge from those who will grind you to dust with a single hit. Fortunately, EverQuest II includes an incredibly detailed "con" system that tells you everything you need to know about an enemy with a single mouse click. You can see whether the encounter is made up of one foe or several, as mobs that are linked together will all highlight when you click on one. The target window tells you not only the color con of the enemy (from grey, which provides no challenge or reward, to red, which will generally pulverize you), but also whether the opponent is intended for soloing or a group of three or more players. Additionally, if the opponent is tougher than normal there will be a varying number of arrows above their name. The more arrows above the name, the greater the challenge.

### EXPLORE THE WORLD

Norrath is a vast and dangerous land, and exploring it can be a difficult but often rewarding endeavor. When you discover new points of interest throughout the world, you will receive experience points toward your adventure level. The more difficult the area is for you to get to, the greater the experience reward will be. There are other less tangible benefits to exploration as well. Knowing your surroundings can be an invaluable tool in your adventures – you will know where to find creatures, how to get to other areas of the world, and will have a greater chance to get out of a potentially lethal situation. Sometimes the road less traveled is exactly where you will find the most personal benefit, so discovering these areas can be very worthwhile.



### MAINTAIN YOUR EQUIPMENT

The most successful adventurers are always equipped with the best weapons, armor, and other beneficial items and equipment. No matter what class you are, never neglect the benefits of proper armor and equipment; some of it may provide you with enhanced attributes, greater resistances, and other valuable effects. Jewelry and other accessories can also enhance your character in many of the same ways as weapons and armor. You must also take care

to choose the proper items for your character; using a ring that bestows improved strength, for example, will not be as useful to a mage as it would be to a fighter. Seek the right equipment for your class and level, and you will find it a boon for your success as an adventurer. And don't forget to stop at a mender for repairs if your gear becomes damaged due to an untimely death.



### EAT WELL, DRINK HEARTY

A true adventurer needs more than stale bread and murky water to stay healthy and energetic. Acquiring appropriate food and drink is necessary for proper health and power regeneration. Food increases the rate at which your health regenerates, while drink increases the rate at which your power regenerates. If you aren't eating and drinking meals intended for your level, you aren't regenerating as quickly as you could be. You can find out what the value of food or drink is by examining it and checking the color con, satiation level, and duration. Contact your local provisioner if you wish to obtain the best food and drink.

### HEROIC OPPORTUNITIES

While battling your foes, your actions have the chance to initiate heroic opportunities. Completing a heroic opportunity will yield a variety of beneficial effects, such as direct damage, group heals, and debuffs on your opponents. The ability to coordinate such opportunities with members of your group will greatly enhance your overall efficiency and can provide for some interesting tactical combat. If your group isn't using heroic opportunities, then you aren't fighting up to your full potential. Don't forget to take advantage of heroic opportunities when battling alone, as they will prove equally beneficial in solo play.

### LEARN A TRADE

So your plan is to head to the nearest dungeon and slaughter beasties until you're decked out in a full set of bronze armor with cutting-edge weapons, eh? Not so fast, Galahad. Regularly upgrading your armor, weapons, spells and arts, and food supply is a costly business. While you can make some cash selling the drops you get from your fallen opponents, consider another alternative to building up your bank funds: crafting. Don't worry, EverQuest II doesn't use the mind-numbingly boring click-and-combine method of previous games – crafting is a much more interactive process. Besides building up a nice bank of coin, the artisan lifestyle allows you to become a more self-sufficient adventurer by building your own gear or spell upgrades. You may also find that your fellow artisans are willing to provide discounts on other crafted items in exchange for your services – never underestimate the influential power of a tradesman.

# World of Warcraft

## Keep Yourself Intact

*PvP Tips From Senior Game Designer Tom Chilton, Blizzard Entertainment*

### MASTER YOUR CHARACTER'S ABILITIES

Every character class in World of Warcraft has a unique set of abilities. Mastering these abilities by becoming familiar with their effects and their power costs (mana, rage, or energy) is critical to success in defeating enemy players. You will want to know without hesitation which abilities to use when you need to deal damage quickly, efficiently, or to control your opponent's movement speed.

### KNOW YOUR ENEMY'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Each class match-up requires a different strategy in order to maximize your character's chance of success. Duel friendly players of varying classes in order to learn how best to handle an opponent of that class. Against some classes, you may wish to charge into combat and deal damage as quickly as possible. Against others, you may wish to play a game of hit and run. There may also be situations where you have to wear the opponent down over the course of a long fight, in which case it may serve you well to pace yourself and conserve some of your more powerful but less frequently usable abilities. Each match-up will present a different set of problems, and you certainly don't want to be taken by surprise when the enemy reaches into their bag of tricks.

### USE CONSUMABLE ITEMS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

One thing that can tip the scales in your favor or compensate for a disadvantage or mistake made during battle is the use of a consumable item such as a potion. Your choice of potion use is also a decision that should be made with care. A healing potion might always seem like an obvious choice, but if you're in a really bad situation, it may only prolong the inevitable. In some cases, it may be better to use a potion of swiftness in order to give yourself a chance to recover and perhaps to fight once you've gained better control over the terms of the encounter. There are also times when a healing potion may not even be the best option for healing. For example, if your character has the ability to heal, it can sometimes be more advantageous to drink a mana potion, cast a heal spell, and have some mana left over for offense.

### ALWAYS BE ON THE LOOKOUT

There is almost nothing that will tip an otherwise fair fight in favor of the enemy more than being surprised. While in contested territories, it is crucial to learn to move and fight in such a way that you are aware of approaching enemies. While running from place to place, learn to scan the field, looking to your sides and occasionally behind you too, all while still moving toward your destination. While fighting, pan the camera around to scan the horizon in any direction an enemy might approach from.

### TURN THE ENVIRONMENT AGAINST YOUR ENEMY

One of the more subtle, but key factors in building an advantage for yourself is learning how to take advantage of the environment. This not only applies to the tactical use of terrain (such as using the terrain and camera angles to spy on an opponent so you might attack at the best possible time), but also to

the use of nearby creatures. For example, if your enemy is likely to use abilities that have an area of effect, it can be wise to get a monster to chase you into the fight, knowing that as soon as the enemy's area effect ability is used, it will cause the creature to attack them. This is especially useful if your character has some method of manipulating the monster's decision about who to fight. For example, using the vanish ability as a rogue will cause any monsters that are fighting you to attack a new nearby target (like your enemy).

### ANTICIPATE YOUR ENEMY'S REACTIONS

As often as you are likely to panic when things start going wrong, it is worth remembering that your opponents are likely to do the same when the tables are turned. When given a viable opening, it is often valuable to sacrifice efficiency in order to pressure your opponent, putting them on the defensive. Knowing what characters of their class like to do when in such situations is invaluable. Be prepared to interrupt a key healing spell, to slow their movement just as they want to escape, or to put a damage over time effect on them just as they're thinking of vanishing.



### SET UP A PVP ACTION BAR

If you expect to engage in PvP, it will definitely be worthwhile to set up a special action bar to use for PvP. This way, you can have the most critical PvP abilities available to you for swift use by not including any abilities that you may only use against AI opponents (i.e.: abilities that add or remove threat from monsters).

### CHOOSE YOUR TARGETS WISELY

In any group encounter, a key factor in determining the outcome is using the firepower of your group wisely. Are there any targets that you can kill quickly to thin their numbers? Is there a healer that must be distracted or killed first? Good target selection and teamwork can easily make the difference between a convincing victory and total defeat.

### MAINTAIN A SPEED ADVANTAGE

One of the most effective methods of controlling an encounter is to maintain a speed advantage over your opponent. Any abilities or items that provide a speed boost will grant you a very strong advantage in PvP since you will be able to prevent the opponent from escaping, or give you the ability to get out of harm's way should the tide turn against you.

### REMAIN CALM

Take a deep breath and have fun. After all, you won't win many battles if your hands are shaking.

# "I turn dot.coms into money."

—Justan Brandt

*B.A. in Technology Commerce  
Class of 2004*



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## KING OF FIGHTERS: PROTECTOR OF THE SECOND DIMENSION

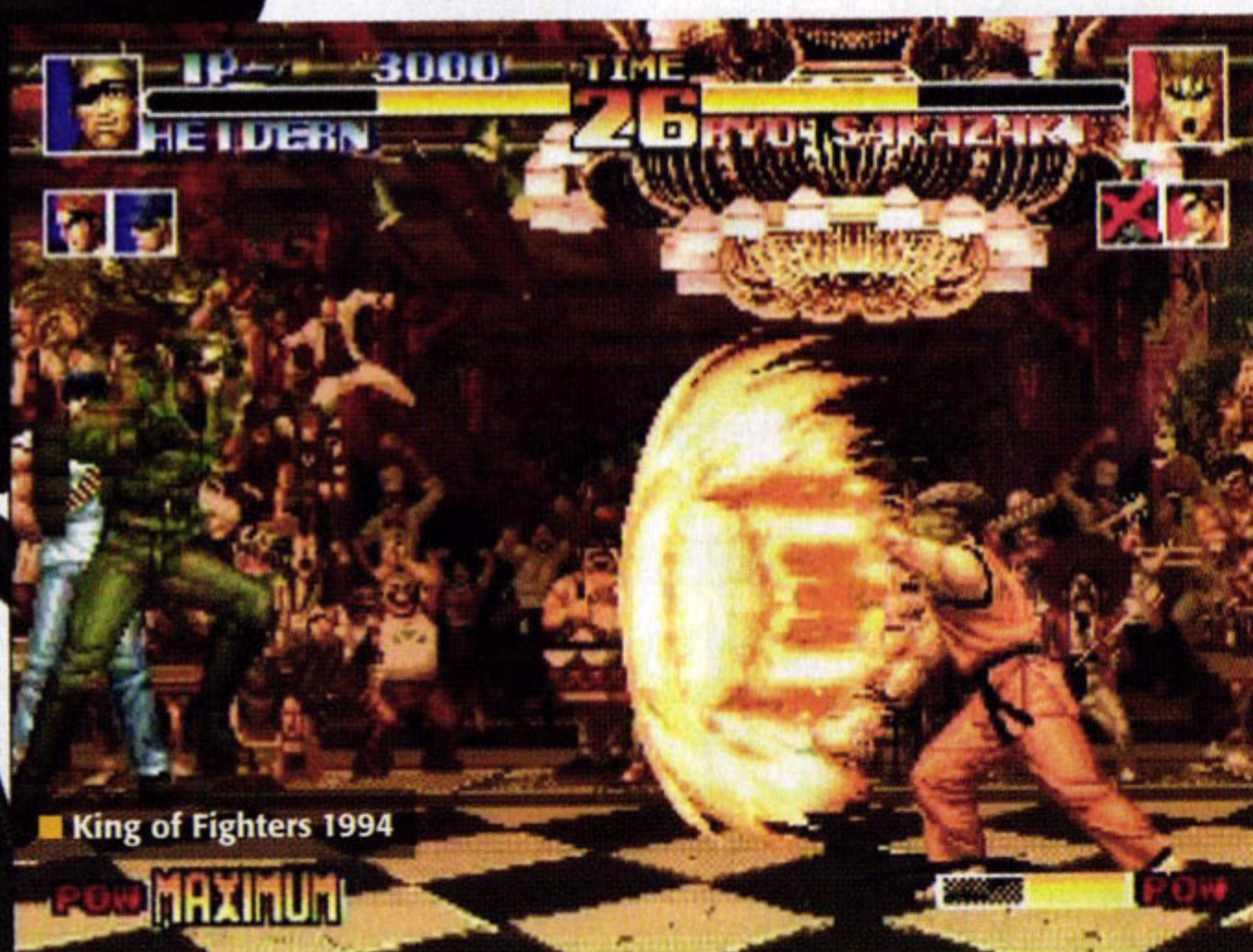
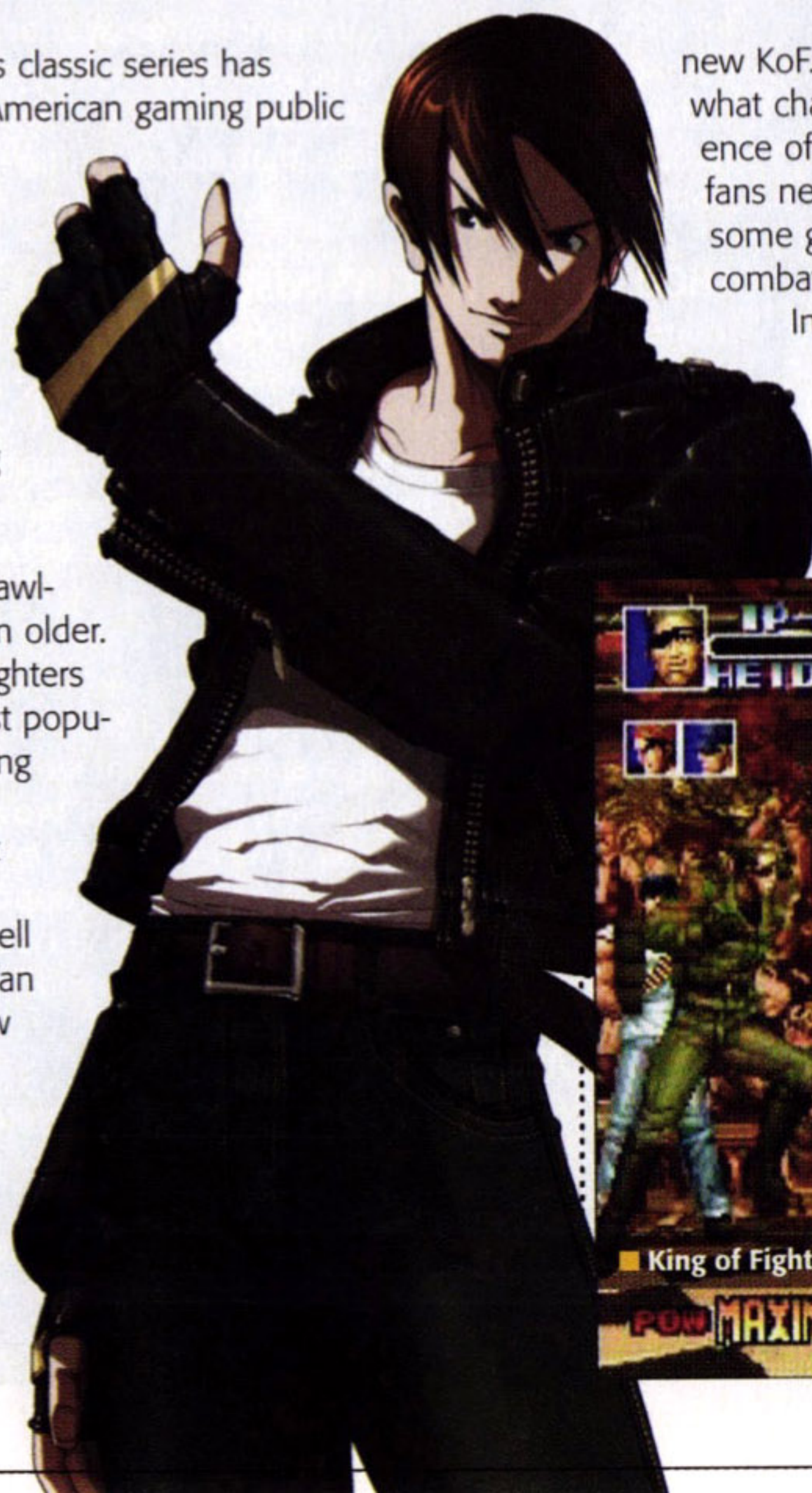
In simpler times, before home consoles could provide anything more visually astounding than Mode 7, and when Xbox Live was nothing more than a twinkle in Bill Gates' eye, arcades were the place to go for serious gaming. In addition to superior graphics, the quarter-devouring game cabinets also provided an opportunity for competitive gaming unlike any other. This attitude was best exemplified as 2D fighting titles rose to prominence as the most popular arcade machines. Everyone remembers the contributions of games like Street Fighter II in kicking off the fighting craze, but for 10 years there has been one noteworthy franchise holding vigil over the 2D fighting genre, keeping it alive year by year by infusing it with new energy and innovations: SNK's King of Fighters.

Though quite popular in Japan, this classic series has been underrated by much of the American gaming public for years, save for a cult following that has sprung up around it. Though it is far from the only 2D fighter on the market, KoF is the only one left from the original vanguard that still sees a yearly entry and protects the gameplay elements that elevated the fighting genre to its current glory.

Even though the series itself recently celebrated a decade of brawling, many of its characters are even older. At its inception in 1994, King of Fighters brought together some of the most popular warriors from SNK's other fighting franchises (like Fatal Fury and Art of Fighting), and even a few select characters from unrelated games (Athena from Psycho Soldier, as well as the Ikari Warriors). Building on fan response, every year there are new additions and cuts from the fighting roster. We had a chance to speak about the colorful crew with Tsuyoshi Mieno, a planner for the series. He explains, "The entire development staff always discusses which characters to add or take away for every

new KoF. There's only one main factor we look at when deciding what characters will make the next KoF roster — will the presence of this character be enjoyed by KoF fans." In other words, fans never need to worry that their favorites like Iori and Kyo (or some genetic equivalent) will leave in favor of a lame write-in combatant.

In addition to its legion of fighters, another way KoF has set itself apart is through the use of storytelling. If asked to explain the story of most 2D fighters, most gamers would maybe shrug their shoulders and offer something like "a bunch of people need to beat each other up." Even Mieno himself admits that "combat







is always a priority, and more important than storytelling. When it comes to creating a character's background, we design the characters first and create background stories for them later." Even with the focus on the battles, King of Fighters still stands out in the fighting genre as having the most intricate and involved plot on the market. The past 10 years has seen the culmination of two main arcs (the Orochi and the NESTS sagas), and the series is still going strong with a new chapter surrounding a mysterious hero named Ash. Involving bloody feuds, ancient cosmic forces, and genetic cloning, each entry takes the player deeper into the interconnected lives of the participants.

Much like a non-sports gamer might view the yearly football entries as simple roster updates, many casual fighting fans are generally unaware of the delicate updates that King of Fighters undergoes for each iteration apart from the obvious changing of the guard. One of the defining aspects of the franchise constantly getting tweaked is the team mechanic. In fact, the team-based structure incorporated into so many



"These Guys vs. Those Guys" games actually got its start in the first King of Fighters. When other series were focusing on single-character combat, KoF was broadening the experience by giving players three characters to control in turns. The system has been altered over the years, experimenting with four-person teams and companions who act as "strikers," but the spirit has always remained intact: Becoming the King of Fighters isn't a solo effort. "Every fighting game was one-on-one until we launched the KoF series," says Mieno. "By focusing on teams, it has created a variety of options during battles. Also, it has expanded a player's fighting strategy. Since we started focusing on team battles in the early stage of KoF's development, KoF has become one of the best games of its kind."

Despite the fact that it has been striving for years to improve everything that makes the 2D fighter appealing, KoF isn't the first series that comes to mind in the genre. After all, Capcom's Street Fighter II did reinvent the one-on-one fighting system. Fortunately, though Capcom and SNK are in direct competition, they have occasionally pooled their collective knowledge to create games that fuse their two unique styles together. However, even with their three cooperative SNK vs. Capcom titles, the rivalry between the companies hasn't died down, though it may have turned a bit more friendly. Mieno expands upon the attitude the

## Fighting on the Fringes

King of Fighters is more than a yearly arcade title followed by a console port. The following are just a few examples of the other forms the series has taken:

### KING OF FIGHTERS R-2

This title for the NeoGeo Pocket Color features child-like, caricatured depictions of KoF favorites.



### KING OF FIGHTERS EX: NEO BLOOD

Moving to a handheld system people actually play, the GBA's Neo Blood features the classic gameplay and style of the series, but in a smaller form.

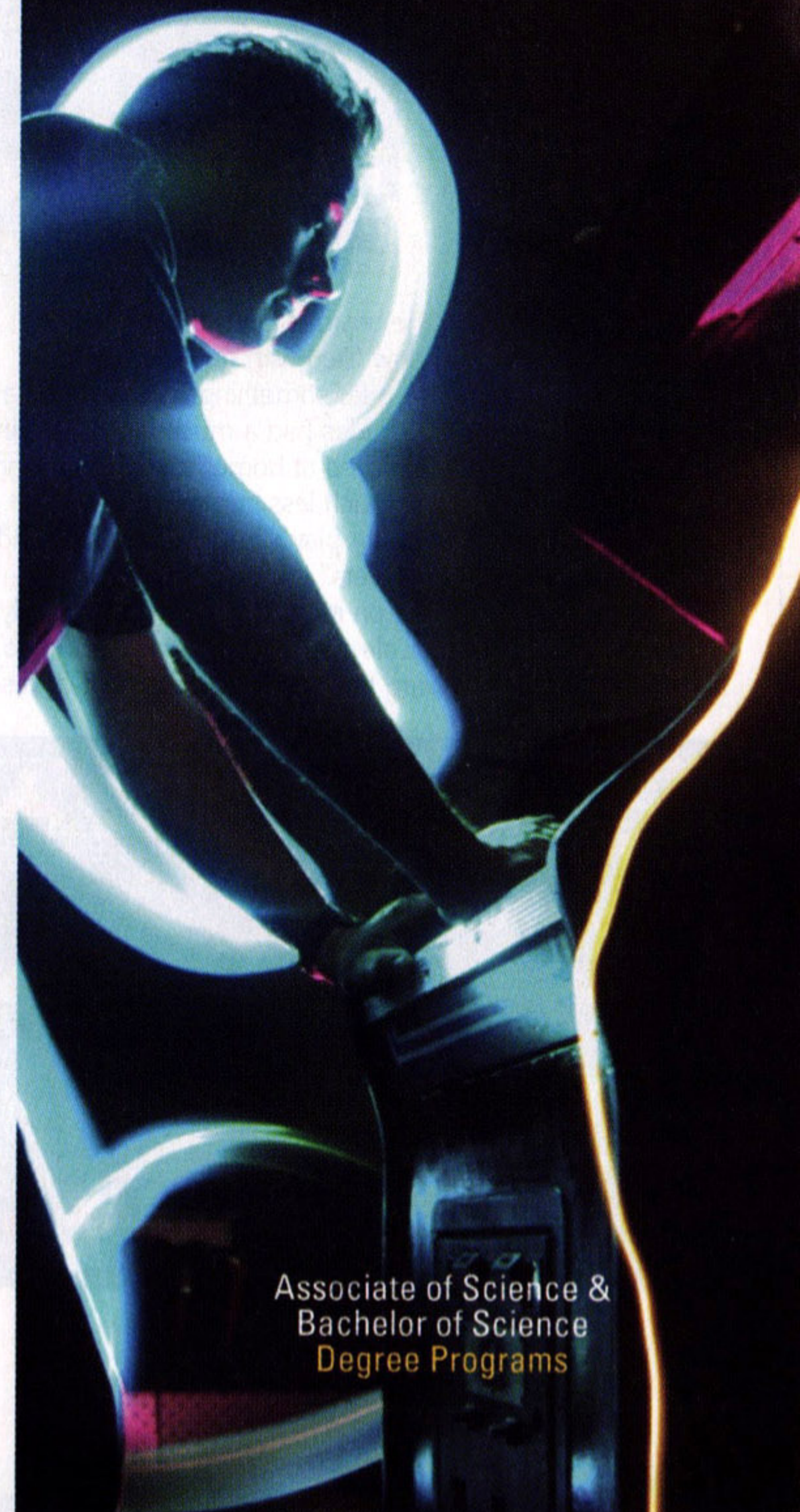
### KING OF FIGHTERS: MAXIMUM IMPACT

Exclusive to the PS2, this title marks the series' first foray into the realm of 3D fighting. How KoF will continue down this branching path remains to be seen.



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SNK team takes toward its major 2D rival: "We always enjoy seeing the differences in the titles Capcom creates using the same materials that we do. And our teams work especially hard to one-up them. It is a great challenge. We compete in the same genre, so we believe that we have a stronger rivalry than ever before."

There is no denying that the face of gaming has changed over the years. 2D games are now regarded as "niche" or "hardcore" titles, and the arcades, once a hotbed for competitive gaming, are now filled with unwieldy gimmick machines in an attempt to offer something you can't find at home. "In the early 90's, arcades had a much bigger role in determining what gamers played at home," theorizes Mieno. "These days, arcades have much less impact. However, arcades are still great places to play games with friends and communicate with other players." It is with this mindset that the KoF has continued on its course of releasing yearly updates (usually with console ports following a year or two later), doing its part to keep the frenzied 2D combat of yes-



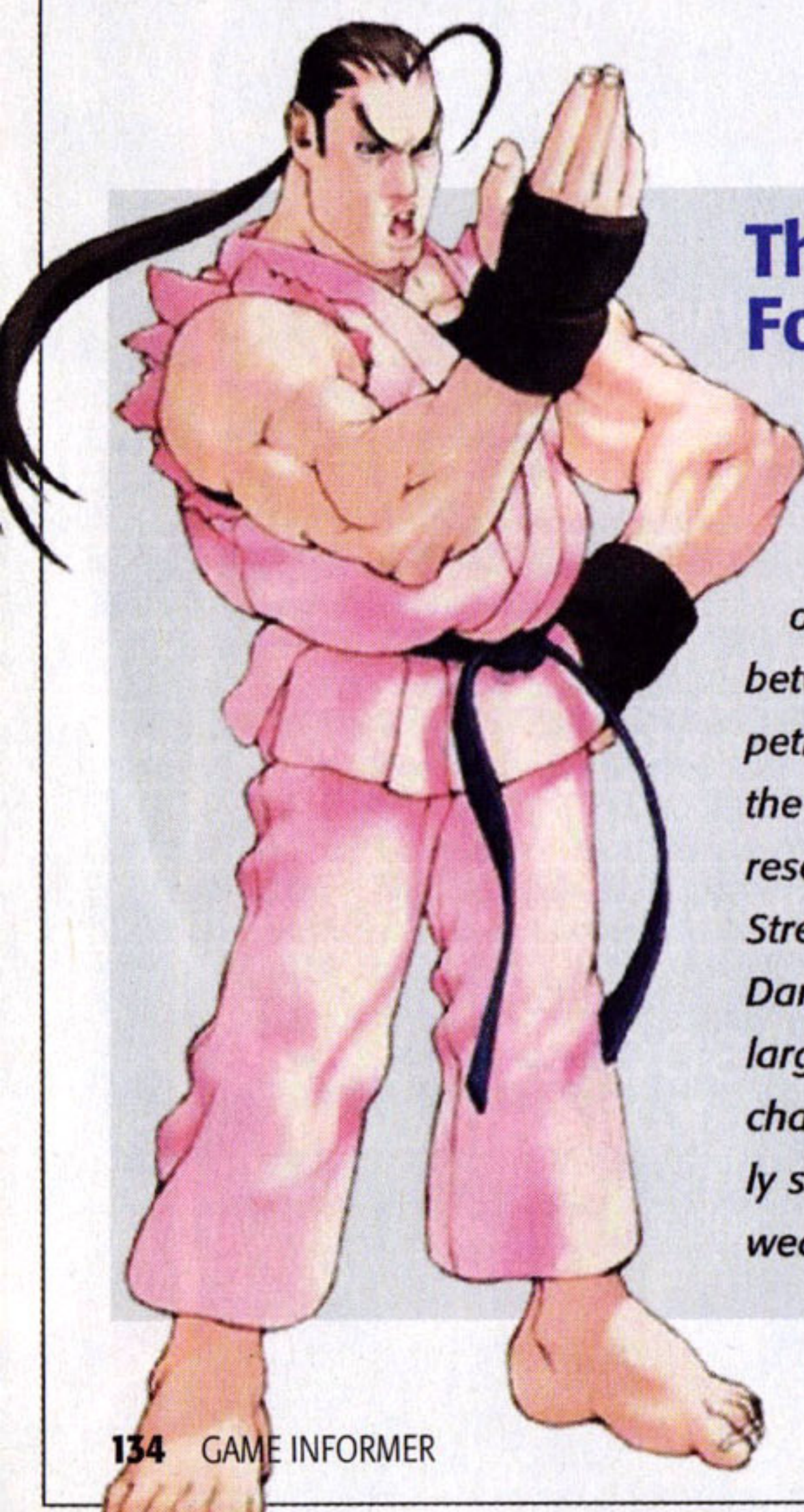
King of Fighters 1998

teryear alive. The future looks like it will hold even more innovations for SNK's stalwart combatant. Even though the latest KoF game actually made the treacherous jump to 3D, Mieno is quick to point out that this doesn't mean that the series is finally abandoning the 2D format that has sustained it for so long. "We believe 2D and 3D fighting are both attractive to our fans," he tells us. "KoF games in 2D and 3D may go in differ-

ent directions in the future. However, our ultimate goal is to create a better KoF world every year." This approach has led to a decade of quality fighters that are accessible to casual gamers, yet feature the balance tweaks that diehard fanatics demand. As long as King of Fighters is around, you can count on at least one arcade game that doesn't cost \$2 to play, doesn't rely on firehoses or plastic ATVs, and still manages to rekindle the joy you felt feeding your hard-earned quarters to a machine in hopes of testing your mettle in a pixilated proving ground.



King of Fighters 2001



## The Sincerest Form of Flattery

*Though no one will give any official comments, there appears to be a little bit of friendly sparring going on between SNK and Capcom's competing fighting franchises. Addressing the fact KoF's Ryo bears a striking resemblance to Street Fighter's Ryu, Street Fighter Alpha retaliated with Dan Hibiki, a generally useless fighter largely believed to be a pure parody character. Dan's moveset is suspiciously similar to Ryo's, except he's much weaker and sports a stylish pink gi.*



## GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Schoolkid



### SUPER METROID

> FORMAT SNES  
> PUBLISHER NINTENDO

You first start out at the Space Colony where you left the Metroid hatchling from Metroid II: Return of Samus. You find all of the scientists dead, and the hatchling missing. You reach the end of the colony to find the Hatchling and Ridley! You immediately start fighting him, but he gets away and, in classic Metroid style, a time bomb is set and you must escape.



After chasing Ridley to Zebes, you find the planet dead. But, after you collect your first item, the place comes to life – there are enemies everywhere now. The game doesn't have much of a story, but it has a ton of exploring and very deep gameplay. You can do over 30 different things with your beams alone, and then there are still more gameplay elements that aren't necessary to beat the game, but they are in there for you to discover.

The world is huge, and it can be frustrating trying to figure out where to go, but I enjoyed exploring the detailed environments; you can see seed pods falling in Brinstar and electricity climbing all over broken wires in the wrecked ship. The music fits exactly the place you're in, and it gives the game a creepy feel at times. There are amazing boss fights too, from the huge Kraid and the haunting lifeform Phantoon to the best battle in the game, Mother Brain herself. All of these bosses require different strategies to defeat, keeping the game fresh from Crateria to Tourian.

Late in the game you even find enemies that have been drained of their life and crumble at your touch; there is no detail that has been overlooked. You even find some Chozo



statues on the planet – some help you while others aren't very happy to see you. The game is all about exploring, and you will spend about 10 hours playing your first time through. The items are cleverly hidden and finding them is one of the best parts of the game, though it can be difficult at times. This game is the very essence of action/adventure, and a must have for any fan of the genre.

## THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY



Though Mario is the undisputed king of video game icons, he has seen many challengers to his throne over the years. Some have fallen under his feet, while others have been turned to his cause. An era of rivalry ended in February 2002 when Mario's fiercest competitor joined him on Nintendo's hardware: Sonic the Hedgehog. On February 5th that year, Sonic Advance released for the GBA, followed shortly by Sonic Adventure 2 Battle (an enhanced port of the Dreamcast's Sonic Adventure 2) on the GameCube. These occasions mark the first time Sonic appeared on any Nintendo system. Even with Sega no longer in the console wars, it's good to know classic gaming legends like Sonic can still find a home.

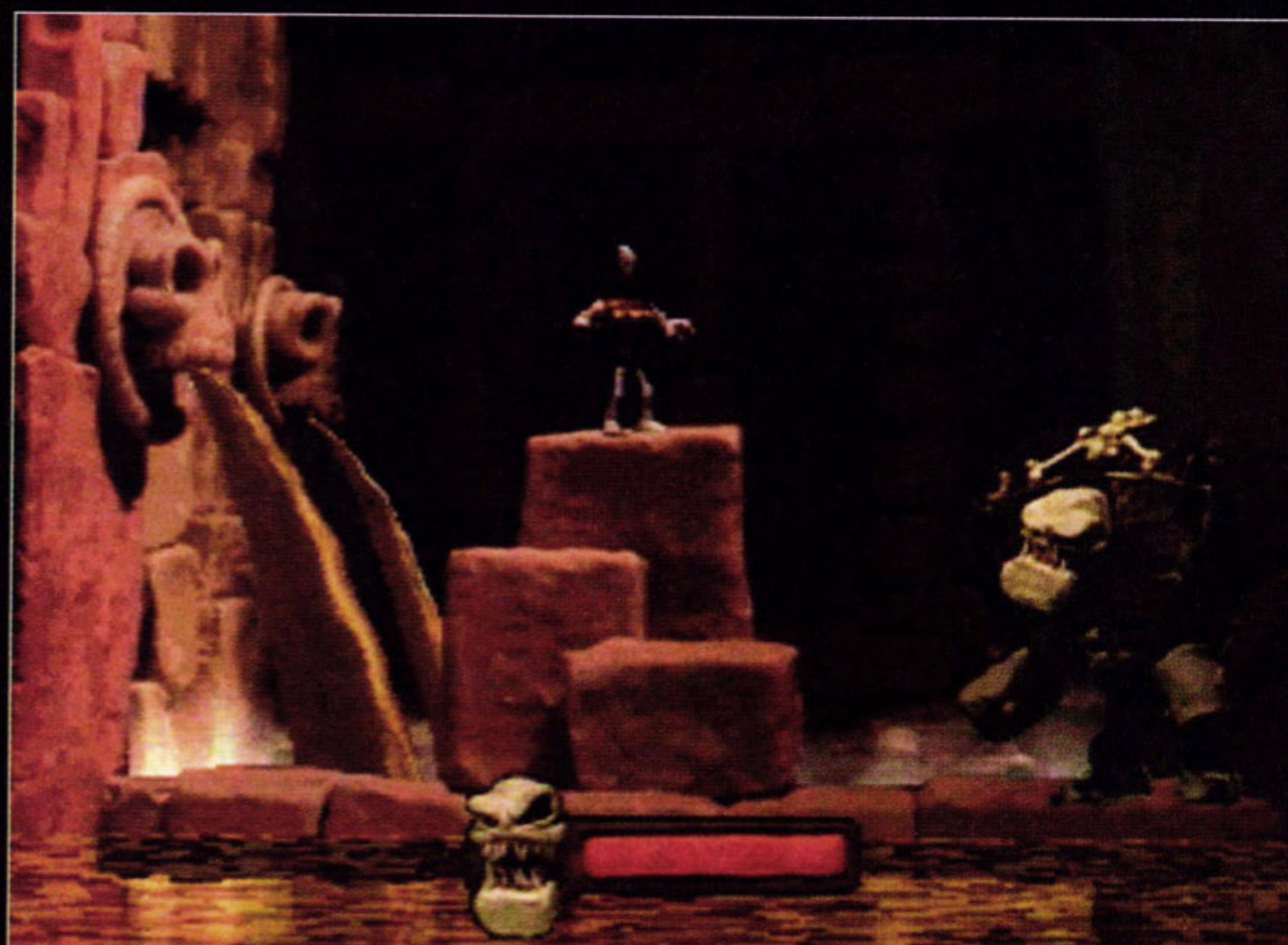
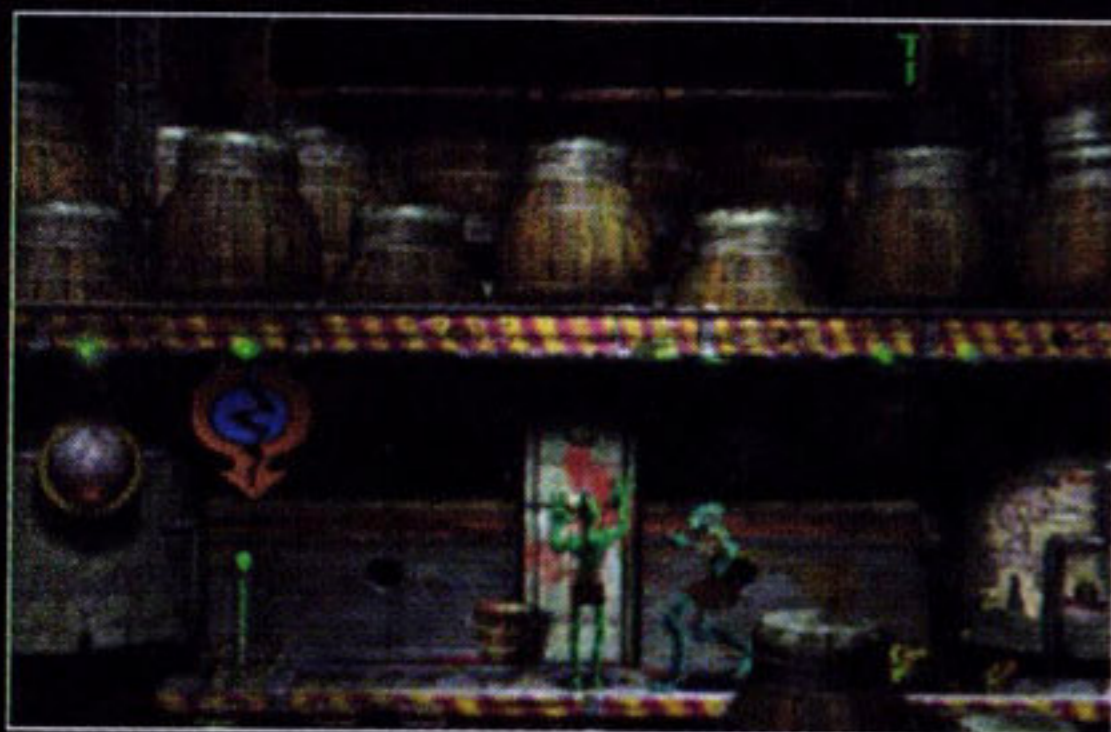


PSONE

## ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER GT INTERACTIVE > DEVELOPER ODDWORLD INHABITANTS > RELEASE 1997

With a new Oddworld game on its way to store shelves, it might be a good time to track down the original in the series, a title that has aged remarkably well, remaining a truly exceptional gaming experience as the years have passed. You play as Abe, a forlorn and frightened slave trying to escape his abusive corporate masters. Abandoning the traditional platforming methods of eliminating your foes, Abe's frail body forces him to run from his captors as often as confront them. When you do stand your ground, it's often in order to possess your enemies' bodies for mischief. You can interact with the other slaves using the truly innovative GameSpeak actions, allowing you a limited vocabulary of vocal communication. Delving heavily into themes of environmentalism and brains over brawn, Abe succeeds at being one of gaming's great heroes, even as a complete and total weakling. Hilarious, quirky, and gorgeous even now, Abe's Oddysee belongs in your gaming library.



PSONE

## SKULLMONKEYS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS/DREAMWORKS INTERACTIVE > DEVELOPER THE NEVERHOOD > RELEASE 1998

One of the most unique platformers of all time, Skullmonkeys is the pseudo-sequel to the cult hit PC game The Neverhood. Like that game, all of the characters in Skullmonkeys are made of clay, and animated in full Tim Burton-esque claymation. The levels all have a look that compliments the clay characters, and the graphics hold up remarkably well. Between stages, players are treated to brief claymation vignettes starring the characters that are simply hilarious. Unfortunately, many who played this game never saw many of its best bits, as it is almost relentlessly hard. Tricky platforming makes up the majority of the game, and these myriad jumps and obstacles are made all the more difficult by slightly slippery controls. But despite the challenge of this title, nearly every second of gameplay is fun, thanks to the unique look and Klayman, the likable protagonist. Special praise must be given to the sound as well – the song that plays in bonus rooms might just be the funniest thing you'll ever hear in a video game.



SNES

## THE COMBATRIBES

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER AMERICAN TECHNOS INC > DEVELOPER TECHNOS JAPAN CORP > RELEASE 1993

The popularity of side-scrolling brawlers like Double Dragon led to a slew of imitators, some more successful than others. One of the weaker clones came to Super Nintendo courtesy of Technos. A port of an arcade title of the same name, The Combatribes pits three selectable characters against the unified gangs of New York City. These enemies include such threatening foes as clowns and hockey players, and look uniformly silly, as do the playable characters. You only have a handful of attacks to use against your foes – only two of the Super Nintendo's buttons are used. Despite the incredibly short length of the game (it can be beaten in about 20 minutes), there is only a handful of enemy types, and you even fight all the bosses twice. The levels (save for the last stage) are only two screens large, but each stage still feels like a chore. With its short length, tiny stages, limited combat, and handful of enemy types, The Combatribes might be one of the most underachieving games in history.



\*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Skullmonkeys (GI #59 3/98), Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee (GI #52 8/97)

## VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

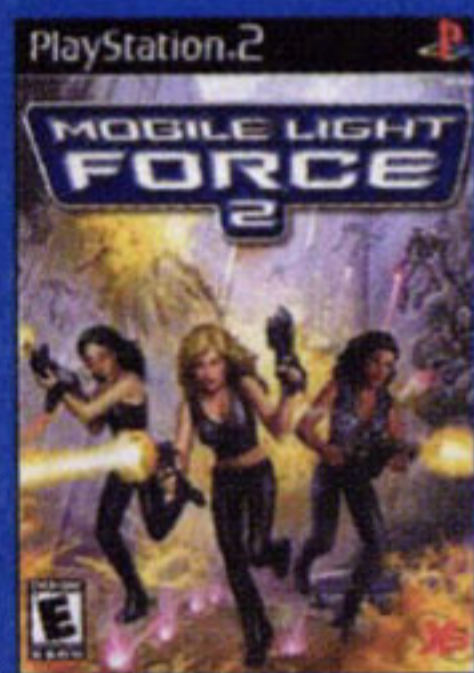
Hollywood loves the video game industry, and there are more and more shows dealing with games on TV. Games are melding with all other aspects of entertainment, so it seems natural that they start to merge with the music industry. Game soundtracks are now available on CD, but it's high time that video game characters started releasing their own albums. Take our test to see how your knowledge compares to these hot new musical releases.

**1** What is the name of the girl that PaRappa the Rapper is trying to impress with his mad skills?

- A. Um Jammer Lammy
- B. Sunny Funny
- C. Paula Fox
- D. Chop Chop Master Onion

**2** Despite its terrible cover and lame title, Mobile Light Force 2 is actually a port of a respectable Japanese shooter. What was its original name?

- A. Assault Suit Leynos 2
- B. Formation Armed F
- C. Shikigami no Shiro
- D. Sengoku Ace



**3** What company developed the underrated NES title Snake Rattle 'N Roll?

- A. Gottlieb
- B. Sega
- C. Namco
- D. Rare



**4** Remember Bubsy the Bobcat? Probably not. What was the last game this failed platforming hero starred in?

- A. Bubsy 3D
- B. Bubsy in Fractured Furry Tales
- C. Super Bubsy
- D. Bubsy in Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind

**5** Most gamers know that the Super Nintendo was released in 1991, but what year saw the release of the redesigned top loading NES?

- A. 1991
- B. 1992
- C. 1993
- D. 1994



**6** You may remember the Make My Video series for the Sega CD as one of the most popular franchises in history. Which of these still-huge music groups did NOT star in the series?

- A. INXS
- B. Kriss Kross
- C. En Vogue
- D. C&C Music Factory



**7** How many points does each minigame cost in Super Monkey Ball?

- A. 500
- B. 5,000
- C. 250
- D. 2,500

**8** The character Karnov starred in his own game, and was also a playable character in the Fighter's History games. He also appeared as a boss in which other Data East title?

- A. Karate Champ
- B. Bad Dudes vs. Dragon Ninja
- C. Two Crude Dudes
- D. Bloody Wolf



**9** What classic movie saw the release of two completely different NES games with the same name, one by Taito and the other by Ubisoft?

- A. Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade
- B. Batman
- C. The Rocketeer
- D. Darkman

**10** In which game did Mario's evil counterpart Wario make his first appearance?

- A. Wario's Woods
- B. Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins
- C. Wario Land
- D. Mario Party



## BREAKDOWN

83% of the time, parents agree with the ESRB rating for a game after personally examining the title, according to a recent study. Five percent of the time, parents said a game's rating was too strict.

50% of the men's bathroom in the Game Informer offices is in functional condition. Thanks, Miller!

37% of Americans said they expected to give or receive a video game this holiday season. But thanks to our tampering at the North Pole, everyone got socks. Take that, chumps!

98% of the GI staff spends all of their free time playing Halo 2 on Xbox Live. Matt can't play with his old timey hand-crank Internet connection.

50% of all video games are sold during the holiday season, approximately. The rest are sold when Reiner goes out shopping.

## ★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



**0-1:**  
Nick Kang:  
True Crimes of the Heart



**2-3:**  
Crash Bandicoot:  
Has-been Mascot Blues



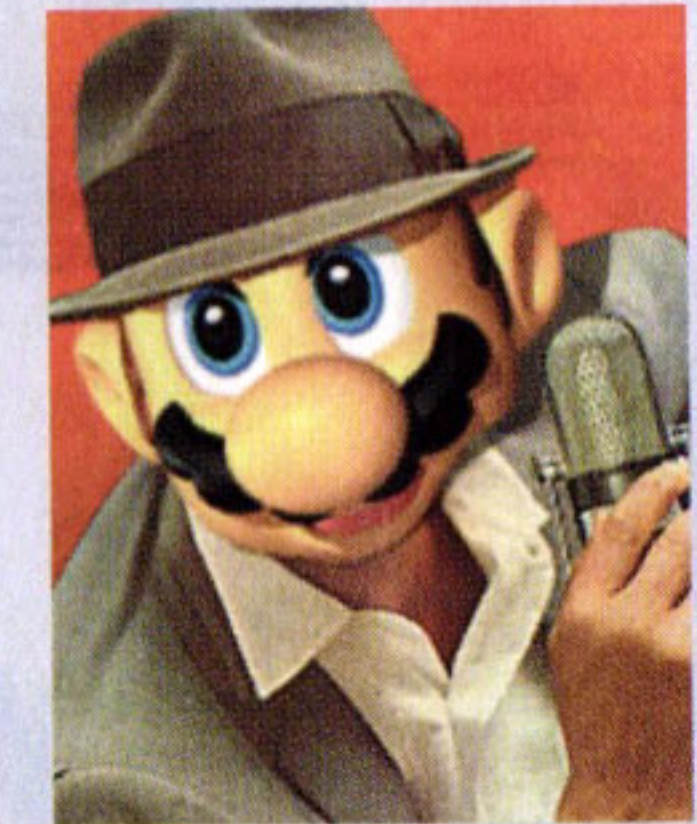
**4-5:**  
Gex N' Vexx:  
XXXtreme Metal!



**6-7:**  
MC Sonic: Blazin' Rhymes



**8-9:**  
Solid Snake:  
Metal Gear Solid Gold Hits



**10:**  
Mario Sings the Songs  
of Dean Martin



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As Leon encounters unimaginable horrors, he must find out what is behind the terror.

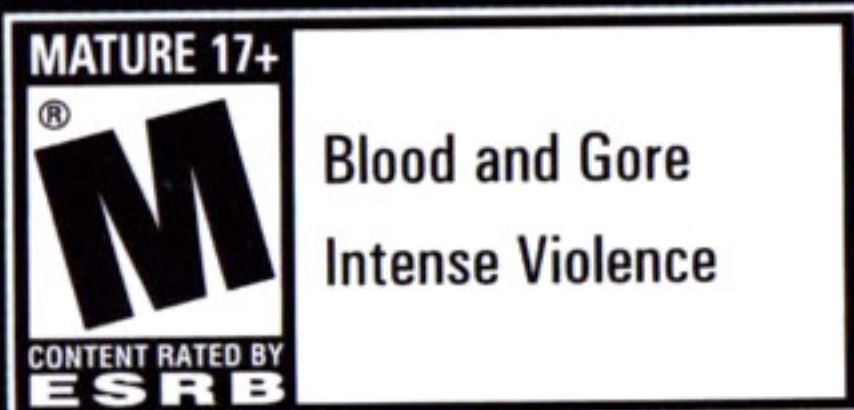
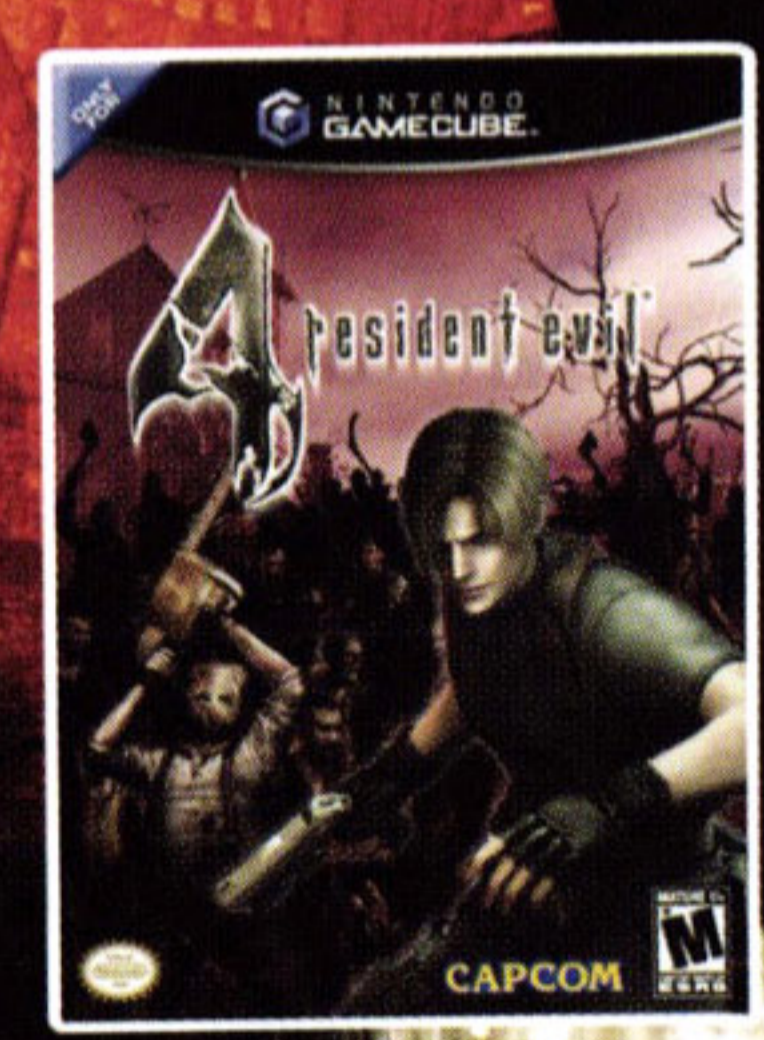


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