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read this issue!

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- WHAT OTHER MAGS HAVEN'T TOLD YOU
- 10 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE MOVIE DIRECTORS

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INTERVIEWS, TIPS,
& FREE POSTER, YO

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Cover 1 of 2

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- Official Xbox Magazine - 8.9/10



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"APEX is **fast**, pretty, and **controls almost perfectly**."

- Electronic Gaming Monthly Silver Award, 8/10



"...**top notch graphics**, excellent track design, and well designed single-player campaign...**totally sweet**."

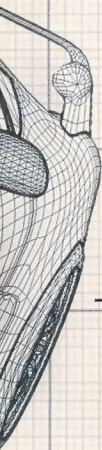
- GMR - 8/10

"**Pristine** and **sharp visuals** help define APEX as a solid racer... **spectacular course** designs that beg to be driven...the track variety **beats any current racing game** out already... the sense of speed is absolutely dizzying."

- GamePro - 4.0/5.0

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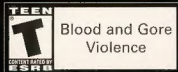
GAME BOY ADVANCE



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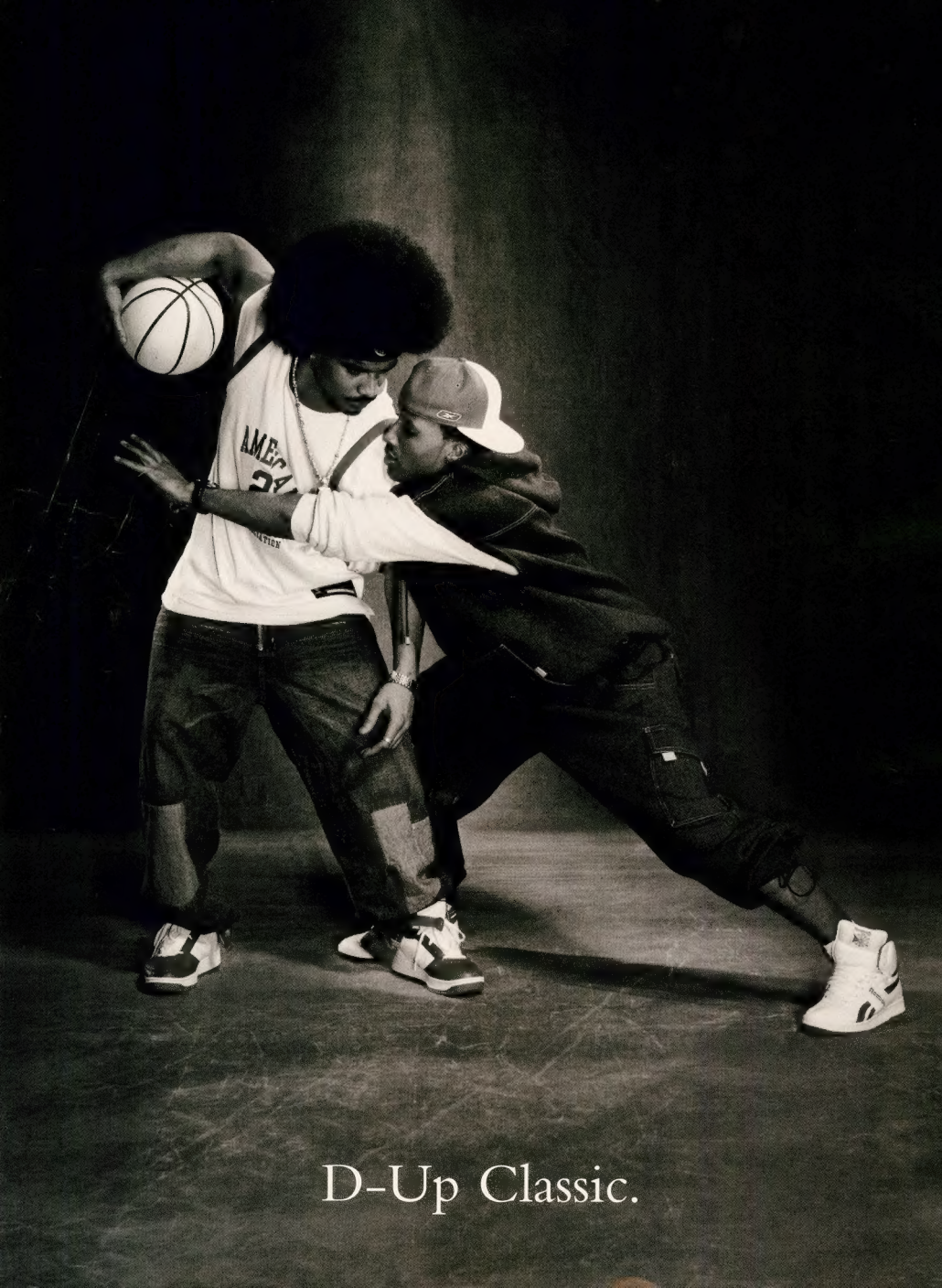
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Tumble Down the Rabbit Hole

Let's face facts. Games based on popular movie franchises usually fall way short of the standards set by their film counterparts. We were given an exclusive backstage pass to see how **Enter the Matrix** is trying to change all that. Take your pills and come join us.

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Definitely No Angel

Ms. Croft is taking her sweet ol' time transitioning to life on the Ps2. Our **hands-on preview** checks out how **Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness** is shaping up.

► Which **Def Jam: Vendetta** moves were toned down because they were considered too raunchy? Don't you wanna know.... Find out on **page 44**.

► Read everything you need to know about this year's fine crop of baseball games before making your purchase on **page 50**.



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Previews 68

Not only do we start to unravel the mystery of Yuna's journey in **Final Fantasy X-2** (PS2)—we also dish out the first details on the PS2 sequel to **Jak and Daxter**. Plus, read about Xbox sci-fi shooter **Black 9**, **X2: Wolverine's Revenge**, **Deus Ex 2**, and a remake of the Dreamcast game **Sonic Adventure** for GameCube.

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Check out how **Splinter Cell** holds up on PS2, and if **Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire** are good enough to make you wanna "Catch 'em all." We also evaluate **ZOE2**, **NBA Street Vol. 2**, **Clock Tower 3**, and **Dynasty Warriors 4**.

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Get the lowdown on all the **Dark Cloud 2** supporting characters, and find out how to unlock the secret cars in **The Getaway**.

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SYSTEM COLOR KEY



KELLY

REC



I JUST FEEL LIKE, THIS IS ME.

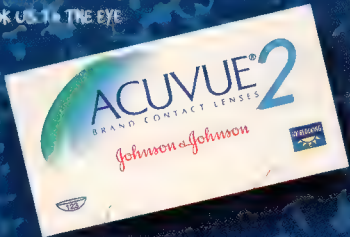
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EDITORIAL

Let's all go to the movies...

By Dan "Shoe" Hsu



A \$50 videogame. A \$10 movie ticket. What happens when you combine the two? You get a wallet that's \$60 lighter, that's what. But nowadays, you also get a totally new experience—a sum-is-greater-than-its-parts sorta thing.

Take *The Matrix*. If you see the next two theatrical releases without paying any attention to the videogame *Enter the Matrix*, you're gonna blow right past a big chunk of the cyberthriller myths. "Big deal," you say. "I'm gonna miss out on some movie characters shooting up enemies in a game with a half-baked plot line." Well, smartypants, read our cover story to see how the directors of the movies intentionally crafted the *Matrix* story line to weave through the flicks, the upcoming *Animatrix* DVD, and the videogame.

Later this summer, you'll get to see *The Hulk* on the big screen. You'll also get to play *The Hulk* videogame. Why will you want to do both? I don't want to spoil anything here, but those who watch the movie very carefully will get to do things in the game that others won't.

Now that videogames are a \$10-billion-a-year industry, you'll see a lot of arranged marriages between Hollywood films and their interactive counterparts. And why not? It's fantastic for marketing (you don't have to try very hard to sell a *Lord of the Rings* videogame) and half the creative work is done for you (though that's not really a good thing...).

My only hope is that developers have outgrown the movie-to-game funk of the '80s and '90s. Remember the crap that was *Home Alone*, *Dragonheart*, and *Batman & Robin*? (You probably don't, as playing these would've permanently damaged areas of your brain.) Now, movie games aren't all terrific, but they're certainly getting better, and the more Hollywood pays attention to them, the more resources developers will get to create a great experience.

Speaking of damaged brains, I'd like to say good-bye to one of the hardest working editors in the biz: Greg Sewart. Sadly, he really did have to go back to Canada. We'll miss you, Greg.

We have a fresh crew in place, though. Please say hello to Joe "ex-GameSpot" Fielder, Demian "ex-Incite" Linn, Bryan "ex-GameWEEK" and should be spelling his name "Brian" Inthair, Paul "ex-Daily Radar" Byrnes, and Shawn "ex-nothing particularly exciting but he was a teacher" Elliott. None of these guys is Canadian, but they're still damned talented.

On another note, if there's ever a time when you need to trust me, it's now. **MAKE SURE** you check out the next issue (*EGM* #167). Not only will we have one of the coolest exclusives ever, but this will be our totally new, totally redesigned relaunch issue. What should you expect to see? Come back in 30 days to find out.

—Shoe, Editor-in-Chief

Contributors



Greg Sewart

Before the *INS* dragged long-time *EGM* Previews Editor Greg Sewart back to his Canadian homeland, he reviewed one more game while hiding in our crawl space.



Jon Dunhak

The guy behind our *Splinter Cell* review and crossword could work anywhere, but he chose to run a factory so your children and children's children will have paper tubes.



Jon Gibson

In my review of *Neuromancer* scribe William Gibson, Jon is a very tall, very young freelancer who wrote a very short story on game commercials in Press Start.



Casey Lee

Who better to review *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire* for us than the industry vet who wrote its strategy guide? Hey you, Pikachu, you are this man's little yellow bitch.



Seanbny

Would it warm your heart to know that this humor writer was born with only one lung? It's not true. But he does review some very special games in Rest of the Crap (pg. 140).



Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine

Todd Zuniga, Chris Baker, Sam Kennedy, and John Davison can review a PS2 game from 300 pages. Funny: That's exactly how far they spy on our side of the office.



GameNOW

Guest reviewers Carrie Shepherd, Ethan Einhorn, Phil Theobald, and Miguel Lopez put together a magazine with more heart, wit, and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* coverage than anybody.



GMR

Like extra cash? No? Then avoid EB stores, where you can subscribe to *GMR* for \$50 and get 10 percent off used games. It's the home of reviewer James "Milkan" Mielke.



Xbox Nation

Microsoft says the Xbox is potent enough to create its own mag. Well, they're right, but reviewers Evan Shannon and Greg Orlando are there to push the Start button.



Computer Gaming World

The Ancients say that inside every console you'll find a "computer." So we appease the old gods by letting *Computer Gaming World's* Scooter Nguyen review *Golden Sun*.

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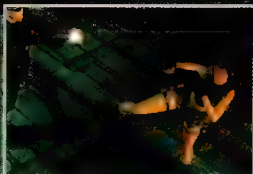
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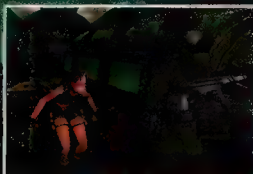




Out of the tombs. Into hell.



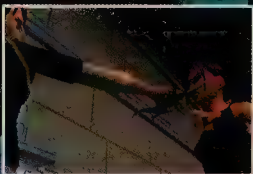
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Letters to the Editors

OUTRAGED LETTER OF THE MONTH

Congratulations, **Dameon Willich**, if that is your real name. You win a copy of either *NBA Street Vol. 2* (PS2) or *Splinter Cell* (PS2), our game of the month co-honorees. Or you could probably have the old copy of the *D&D Monster Manual* that's been lying around the office.

HANDBAGS AT DAWN

Regarding the "Knights of the Kitchen Table" box in *EGM* #163 [pg. 90]—normally I'd shrug it off, but since it's conceivable that someone reading the article could be a prospective client, I can't let Chris Baker's statements (calling the Seattle Knights a "band of freaks in armor that attends Renaissance Faires," and "guys who teach themselves to fight in their parents' basements," for example) pass without comment. While I'm glad Mr. Baker is of the opinion that we "at least know what they're doing," the blurb was at best condescending, and at worst, actively damaging to our professional reputation. Mr. Baker's comments are uncalled for, and reflect badly on the level of professionalism at your magazine.

I'm glad Mr. Baker got a "good laugh" out of our website. It is intended to entertain the casual browser as well as inform prospective clients. If he had investigated further, he might have discovered that The Seattle Knights is a real theater troupe that trains professional, certified actor-combatants and stunt people, many of whom have performed stunt work in films, television, video, motion cap-



ture, and live theater. We spent years learning to safely perform our craft, and we get paid to do it. None of us taught ourselves to do this in our parents' basements. I'd like to see a retraction/apology in your next letters or editorial page.

Dameon Willich
Director, Seattle Knights
ironwolfe@seattleknights.com

Sounds like someone's historically accurate banded mail is chafing in all the wrong places. Former Previews Editor Greg Sewart added many of those comments to Chris Baker's text, which is kind of funny when you think about it, seeing as how Sewart's now safely out of harm's way, up in Canada. Have fun storming the castle!



Mark MacDonald: Elf Water

I've had faith in your magazine for a long time! I've read each issue front to back! I even created a Dan Hsu shrine out of extra *EGM* issues I had lying around! But when I saw the horrible, biased, and revolting score for *Zelda* by that jerk Mark MacDonald, I vomited! A 9.5? How much money did Microsoft and Sony shove into your wallet, you biased, horrible, and revolting score-giver! U r teh making me angrie!!! You should be fired...for your name alone! I mean c'mon, "MacDonald"? Ha! And another thing, you only gave the review five pages! Five? It deserves at least ten, or fifteen!
I will now burn every single *EGM* I

own, and I'll never look at another one again until you apologize for every good score you gave to Xbox and PS2! You all make me sick!

Jon—An ex-EGM fan
MetroidHunter89@aol.com

We've received, oh, let's say one or two e-mails about Mark's *Zelda* score. Mark responds to all the fan-boys, with signature restraint:

Dear a***s,**
In the interests of space, allow me to point out just three of the countless holes in your "argument":
1) When we write our reviews, we don't consider what award a game might ultimately get (or not get)—no one even knows the other

SHORTS

I'm writing to tell you guys something I noticed while I was playing *Resident Evil Zero*. If I am not mistaken, Billy's tattoo says "MAKE LOVE." Just thought you should know.
Chad Lewis

Good work, Chad, that's some top-quality sleuthing. Will it be a Trivial Pursuit question in 30 years? No.

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And note this, too: We also reserve the right *not* to edit your letters (that mail) if leaving them in their original form will make you look silly due to egregious grammar and spelling mistakes.

reviewers' scores until they settle on their own.

- 2) We received your bitchy letters mid-February. The game comes out mid-March. You haven't even played it yet. You have no idea if my score is too low, too high, or right on the money. (And by the way, it's right on the money.)
- 3) Go to hell.

Bonus Mission

My boyfriend is a voice in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, and I want everyone to look for him and run him over, beat him with a nightstick, or whatever method you prefer. He's one of the blond guys that hang around the hotel. He has no shirt on and his swimming trunks are red. So, how

SHORTS

I think *The Bouncer* (PS2) was the best game ever! You should give it a higher score.
Rouse

No.

about beating him up? I would really appreciate it. Thanks.

vdegamegr1@aol.com

Gaming Has Matured

I was just reading a recent issue of *EGM*, and it strikes me odd that people say "the gaming industry has matured" just because a bunch of games where you hurt things and they squirt blood have come out.

How is that mature exactly? *GTA* games are as far from maturity as they come. Things are so parodied that they become unreal and even cartoonish! *Zelda: The Wind Waker* is "not grown up enough" for many gamers, and yet it's very mature. The game is so serious that the developers want you to feel the things Link feels. So please, I'd prefer if the words "gaming has matured" do not cross my eyes again.

DeathBuu@aol.com

Spotted Disc

I dropped by my local Electronics Boutique today to pick up a couple of new games. I specifically asked for new copies of both (no one seems to understand that DVDs are much more sensitive to dirt and scratches than CDs). However, when I got home I noticed that one of them was in some kind of ghetto shrink-wrap, and was missing the security seal stickers along the sides. The disc was in obviously used shape, with little splitches and dings on the media side of the DVD.

I headed back to EB and called them on it, and they exchanged the disc for a new one. I thought the whole thing was a bit odd, so I did some checking online when I got home. Apparently, most major retail chains do this—selling what they consider "good condition" used games as if they were new.

Ben Lincoln

EB and other retailers will shrink-wrap returned games and sell them as new, which isn't so bad, really. That's probably what happened. Any retailer selling used games as new, though, is cruisin' for a bruisin' from the suit-wearing thugs at the Better Business Bureau. They'll mess ya up, spreadsheet style!

DOA: Xtreme April Fool's

Some thought it was too obvious, a mere shadow of last year's Sonic-and-Tails-in-Super-Smash-Bros. jelly jape. Some threatened to burn all future issues and cancel the subscriptions. Some lied and claimed they actually did unlock the topless mode in *Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, even though we made the whole thing up. Yes, it's that time of year again.



Liked It

I'll admit it: I'm a big fan of your April Fool's pranks, but this year's joke was very disappointing. I mean, who in the world would actually believe that *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* only got a 9.5 from one of the reviewers? Next year, maybe you should try a fake nude code or something.

Steve Wilkerson

Very nice job on the recent issue and the joke in the back. First, you had the world believing that Sonic and Tails were in *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, and now you get the preteen world hot and bothered with a nude code for *Xtreme Beach Boobies...er, I mean Volleyball*. Within minutes of reading it I visited an online message board—all over the page, I saw topics of rage and frustration: "OMFG I CANT GET THE NUDE CODE TO WORK!!!!!!" I did laugh.

Bo Hunter

Cry Babies

If that *DOA: XBVB* topless code is this year's April Fool's joke, I am going to hunt you all down, tie you to a chair, and force you to watch me cry. For now, though, I'm off to have some private time with the ladies.

Mitchell

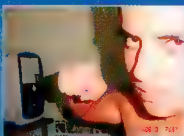
I went out to buy *DOA: XBVB* solely because of topless mode. You bastards lied. I followed the directions but received no due recom-

pense (e.g., topless women). Now I am stuck with a lackluster game with great jiggle effects. I demand that you repay the expense of the aforementioned game and compensate me for the five hours of my life spent trying to unlock the aforementioned mode.

Jason Schweitzer

How dare you! How could you! That was a low blow! OK, it was

the best April Fool's joke ever, but if you do anything like that again I'll...well, just look at the picture. Catch my drift?



Joshua Larcamo

General Pervs

You know how in *DOA: XBVB* there is the topless mode? Well, can you please send me some screenshots of the game like that just without the stars covering all the "good stuff"?

Name withheld

I tried the topless cheat for *DOA: XBVB* several times, following the directions in *EGM #165* very closely, but no dice. Finally, I gave up and decided to play some *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, and to my surprise, Sonic and Tails jumped out topless! It was very traumatizing.

Michael Barker

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LETTERS

Getting to Know: Brett Isaacoff

You should designate a little section in each issue for readers to send in pictures and a little bio of themselves. I'll start ya off.

Age: 15

Likes: Dir en Grey

[a Japanese goth band—Google it]

Dislikes: All the hype *Kingdom Hearts* got. It's

not that great of a game!

Interesting fact: I play bagpipes.



Brett Isaacoff

OK, enjoy it now because we probably aren't going to do this again. The picture was just too funny. And the Dir en Grey part. And the bagpipes.

Vin Diesel Dissed

I admire how you sought to support

Dan Hsu's editorial in *EGM* #165 with a real-life example. Despite an interview with "celebrity gamer" Vin Diesel and his appearance on the front cover,



Call for Entries

Got some ideas about how the next-generation PlayStation, GameCube, or Xbox might look? We bet you do. Put pen to paper (or crayon, if you must—or Adobe Illustrator, best-case scenario) and send your prototype sketches by April 16, 2003 to:

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101 2nd Street, 8th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105

Or e-mail files to egm@ziff-davis.com, subject: Next-gen Systems. The best ones will be published! That's it. That's the prize. Stop reading this already.

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OOPS!

I love the crossword puzzles in the mag, but I would like to point out a glaring error in *EGM* #165's puzzle. The clue for 35-down says, "Take one step to stop the clock in *Madden 2003*" and the answer is "knee." What? Take a knee to stop the clock? When a quarterback takes a knee it is because he is trying to run out the clock, not stop it. What would John Madden say...and would it be even remotely coherent?

Jason Dunfee

Oops.

SHORTS

Has Japanese illustrator Yoshitaka Amano ever released just a book of all his artwork? I love the stuff? I love the stuff? I was wondering if I could somehow get a hold of all his other work, too.

John & Karen Chapman

We asked the Internet and it said "why, yes." Go to amnosworld.com for all your Amano book needs.

later in the issue, you said his movie was "horrible," gave the game version of *xXx* a Tobie Award for "crapulence," and likened Vin Diesel's acting skills to those of a chair. There is no doubt left that the reviewers at *EGM* have complete journalistic freedom; I am glad my favorite magazine is not a sellout. I just won't expect many celebrity gamer interviews anytime soon, unless it's Elijah Wood or Keanu Reeves.

David Binkley

Yeah...could you do us a solid? Don't tell Vin's people about that one. And turn to page 51 for some Elijah Wood action. By the way, Keanu Reeves kinda has that chair thing happening, too.

Mom's Pissed

I couldn't believe your Final Word in *EGM* #163! You think it will be five years or more until 30- to 40-year-old moms become interested in gaming? Mark says, "The systems are already in their houses for their kids..." Excuse me, but I'm a 32-year-old mother of four, and we have every new console system, including GBA. But guess what! None of my kids are old enough to play! I buy the systems and games for myself, and play them until people start throwing their hands up in dismay. And yeah, I like *Animal Crossing* and *The Sims*, but my favorite games are the ones I'm not supposed to like: *World Series Baseball* and *NASCAR Thunder*.

A 30-something mom doesn't have to be a washed-up, boring old loser. A lot of us do have our priorities straight! Don't underestimate us—or our influence on the gaming market.

Heather Deshaibes

Snap! Hey, we're behind you 110%, but honestly, how many of your gal pals play videogames? That's not a rhetorical question.

Rim Shot

DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball? More like *Asleep or Awake: Xtreme Narcoleptic Boring Ball*. Ha.

Gillott

Ba-dum, tishh! But have you tried the nude code yet? ☹

QUESTION of the Moment

What game franchise should be retired for the good of all humanity?

Mega Man. Is Capcom trying to see how many prequels-to-the-sequel-side-story-spin-off-director's-cut-remixed-editions they can make of *Mega Man* each month? evil_chocolate_penguin@yahoo.com

For the love of God, somebody stop *Turok*. These worthless pieces of crap can probably be blamed for every major international conflict since the franchise started.

Fuzzy

The *Dragon Ball Z* franchise must end! Not only does the show suck (weird people acting constipated and shooting fists out of their palms), but the only half-decent game they've made is *Budokai*.

Zak M.

For the love of Pete, the *Army Men* franchise. Send Sarge and his heroes to the grave with a tiny firecracker, sandbox-style!

Alex Dugan

Someone please "finish" *Mortal Kombat*. The novelty wore off some time ago. *MK* is the *Police Academy* of videogames.

Actually, I wouldn't mind playing a *Mortal Kombat* game with characters from *Police Academy*. Something about ripping out Steve Guttenberg's spine appeals to me.... Babelfish4@aol.com

Zelda. Nintendo's decline in quality games from Nintendo 64 to GameCube has become blatantly apparent. I mean, two 10s and a 9.5 just don't cut it these days. P.S. Just kidding!

Thomas Lynch

No offense to *Resident Evil* fans, but it's getting kind of ridiculous. It's like they add another game to the *Resident Evil* series every day. Please make it stop!

Mark Marchitto

Definitely *Tomb Raider*. I think everyone has seen enough of her. And having a new black shirt and bigger boobs just isn't cutting it. Sorry Lara, but you have to go.

Ryan Chambers

Final Fantasy. Am I the only one that doesn't like those games? Nice hair.

Evan Trask

Next Month's Question of the Moment:

Well, there isn't one...at least not yet. Question of the Moment is joining the 21st century and going online! *Woo!* Each month we'll post a question on our message board (hit www.egmmag.com and you can't miss it), and then we'll stand back as the magic happens!



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"Still the Best!" -GamePro, 5/5

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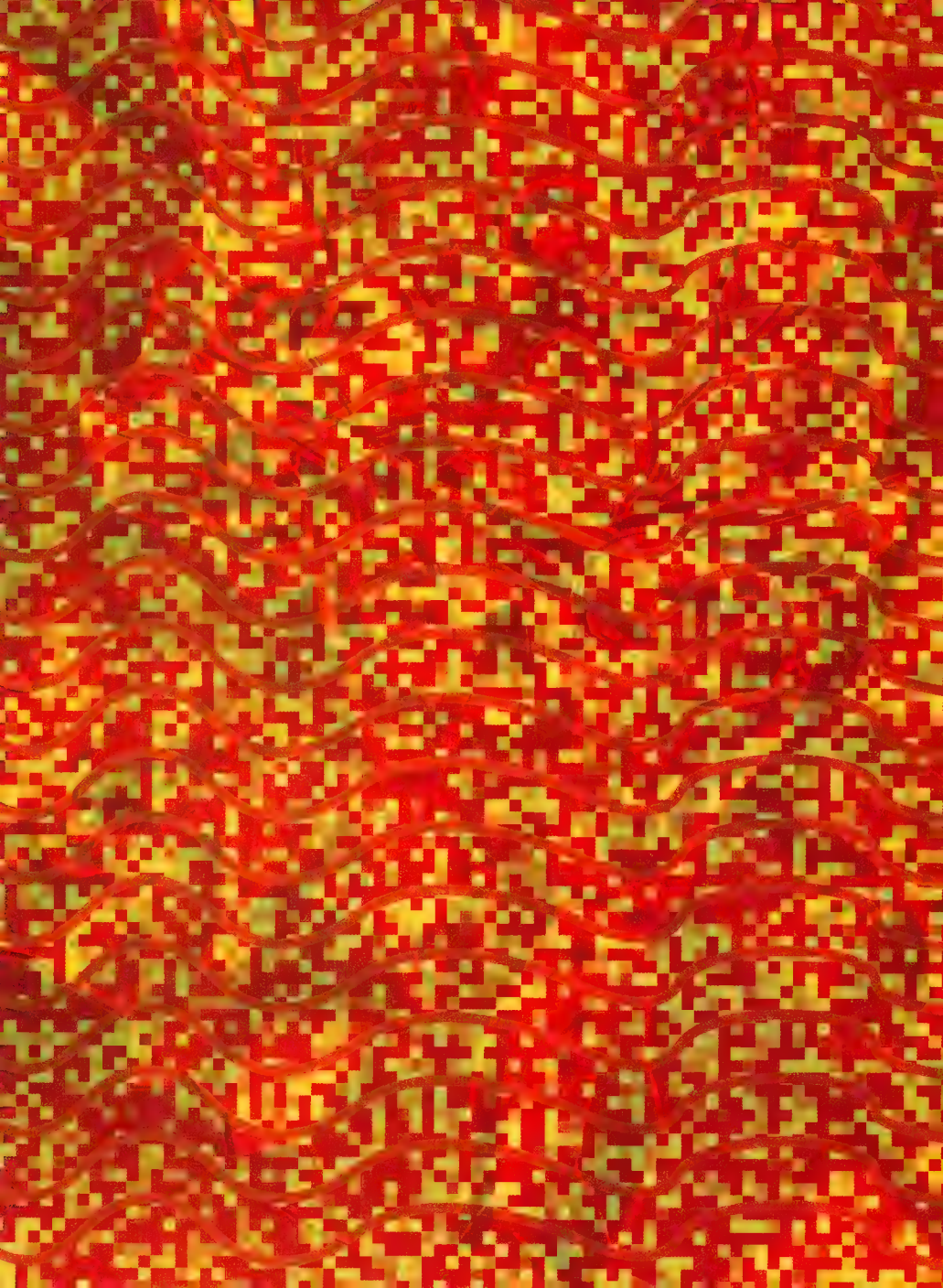
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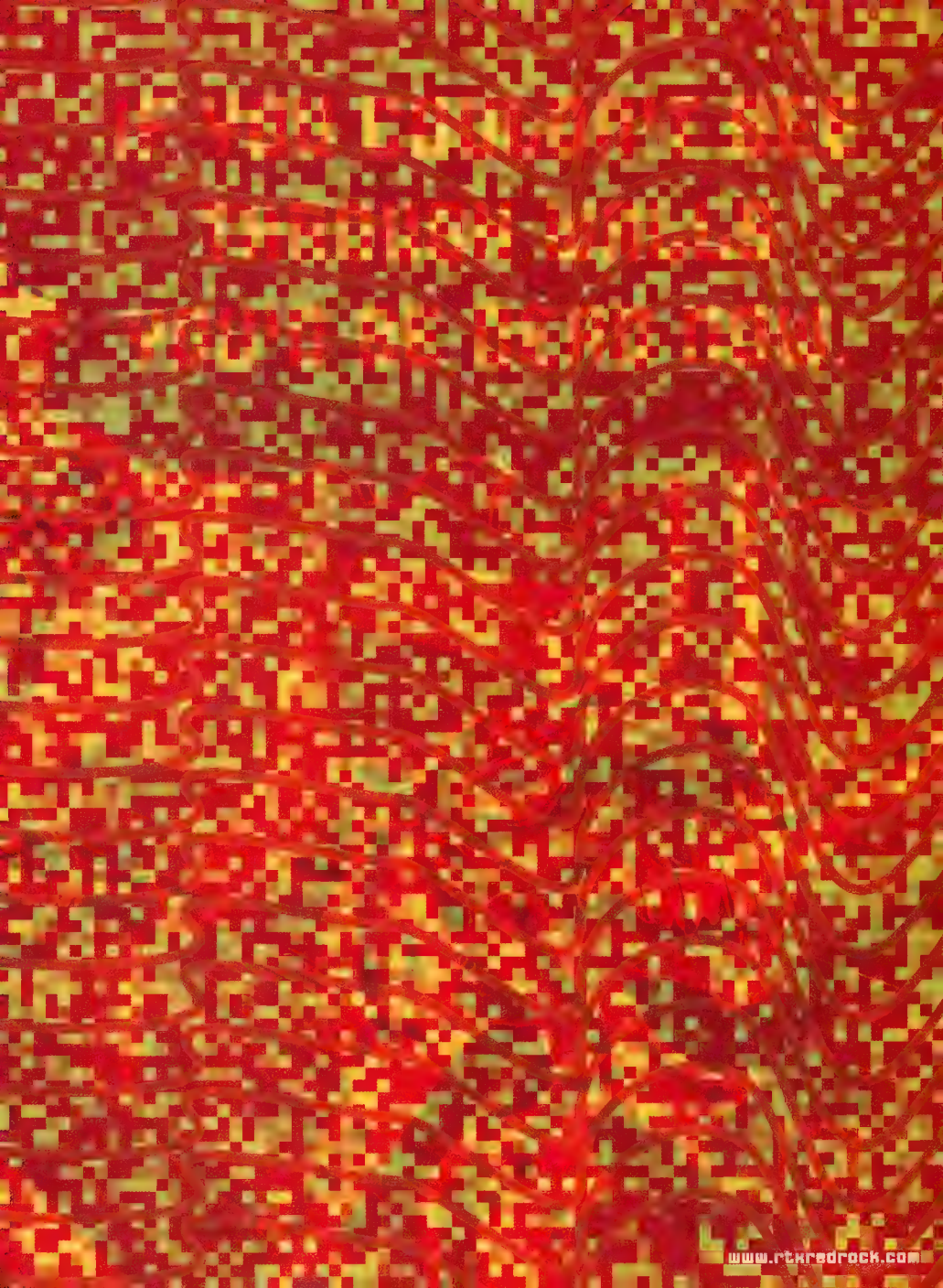


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PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system screenshots shown.



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PlayStation 2



GAMING



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The Hottest Gaming News on the Planet

Dead and Buried?

Will Lara Croft's first PS2 game resurrect Tomb Raider fervor? We dig up what's new...and whether it's really improved

It was an unlikely scene for a murder conspiracy, especially since the victim was a celebrity. But deadly deeds were planned at 2 Roundhouse Road, an ordinary brick-and-glass building within an office park nestled in the sparse English countryside. Here, inside a dim but airy room coated with tacked-up storyboards and filled with humming workstations, more than a dozen people plotted the assassination of the woman who paid their salaries.

They were going to kill Lara Croft.

That was three years ago, when artists, programmers, and designers for *Tomb Raider* developer Core Design crafted the series' fourth game, *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation*. At the time, the team was winding down the PS1 *Raider* games and prepping Lady Croft for her next-generation PlayStation 2 adventures, amidst grumbles that each new installment—churned out every year since the series' 1996 debut—was too much of the same of 'shoot-and-climb formula. "Everybody asked for more interaction with the environment and its char-



Artwork: Chuck Ernst

acters...but Core never delivered," says Luis Cunha, head of Lara mega-fan site The Croft Times (www.cubeit.com/ctimes).

So Core ended *The Last Revelation* by crushing our heroine under rubble, leaving fans to wonder if she was a goner. This wasn't a heat-of-the-moment murder; it was premeditated. "It gave a clean break, so we could start [her PS2] game fresh," says Core Development Director

Adrian Smith. "We didn't want to have to go into much history and what she'd been doing."

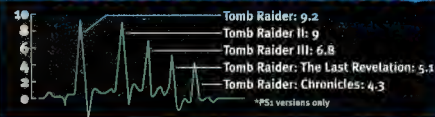
Now, on the eve of its mid-May PS2 debut, the *Tomb Raider* franchise has reached a turning point: Lara's new game, *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*, will either heat her series up again or lack the necessary spark. All long-in-the-tooth franchises face this situation. Just ask Crash Bandicoot. But the folks at Core know the score. "Five games in five years is a lot," Smith says. "We had a load of new ideas that we wanted to bring in."

Tales from the bible

Those ideas have waited for *Angel of Darkness*, Core's first *Tomb Raider* game that's not hitting a mere year after the last one. With this extra breathing room to plan things properly, Core is creating one giant story and keeping it all in a massive three-folder series bible. "It's similar to the *X-Files*," Smith says, "where you know



TR SERIES AVERAGE REVIEW SCORES*



KUNG FU

What's new: When Lara kicks off her quest, her big guns are nowhere in sight (insert easy joke about what's holstered in her sports bra); she has to make due with punches, kicks, and combos that'll have thugs spitting teeth. **But is it improved?** The hand-to-hand antics at the start of the game are a novelty—we spent most of the time sneaking past enemies. Once we found Lara's guns, we preferred slinging hot lead rather than her dukes.



CHATTY CROFT

What's new: Lara now talks tough with characters for items and info. These chats unfold via dialogue choices. **But is it improved?** The version we played still wasn't populated with talkative folks, but we're told the streets of Paris will teem with clue-givers.



STEALTH FIGHTER

What's new: As a wanted woman on the lam in Paris, Lara'll have to make with the sneaky-sneaky. Tapping the L2 button snaps her into Stealth mode, a hunched-over stance that lets her skulk behind bad guys. Jab Circle near a wall, and she'll cling to it, then stink along and peer around corners. Lara can also sneak up on enemies and snap their necks. Way to rebalance that karma, accused murderer. **But is it improved?** Stealth is more than a gimmick this time—it's crucial. Many puzzles involve figuring out ways to get from point A to B unseen, although we still saw plenty of old-fashioned switch puzzles.

WALK THIS WAY

What's new: Lara doesn't walk like a remote-control '60s robot anymore. Now, you just tilt the analog stick in the direction you want her to mosey. **But is it improved?** The control setup was a messy and cumbersome work-in-progress in the version we tried, but Core is still tweaking the interface.

"This is the first new game since the original."

—Core Development Director Adrian Smith

there's this big sinister plot, and each chapter affects it and gets closer to revealing it. So there will be a natural ending to this game, but it's also the beginning of the big story."

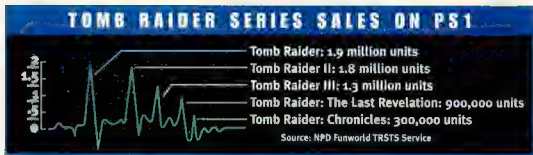
Angel of Darkness' shorter-than-usual 12-hour adventure begins with Lara very much alive, but in a black mood and unwilling to discuss what she's been up to since her brush with death. Someone has framed her for the

murder of her mentor, Werner Van Croy, and all she knows is Croy's death has something to do with a conspiracy to revive an ancient race.

Sounds like another day at the office for Lara, right? We can assure you that tombs will be raided during Lara's adventures through Prague, deep under the Louvre, and into the bowels of a freaked-out lab. But, Smith says, "It certainly won't be the same old thing."



PRESS
START

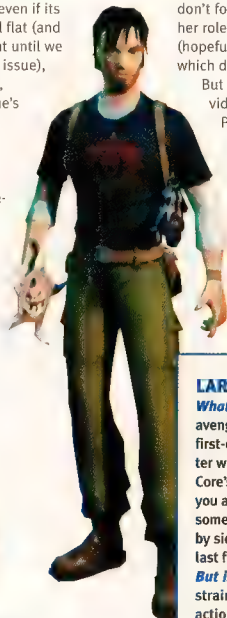


Darkness crawls: Lara has had her move to this game—it's the law. Now she gets down and dirty.

Lara's alive...but well?

What it will be is a larger blend of gameplay styles than past *Raider* titles, melded to a new control setup that pulls away from the clunky grid-based movement system the

series had used. But even if its improved features fall flat (and we'll reserve judgment until we review the game next issue), Lara's short-term fate, at least, is certain: She's not going anywhere. Core is already deep into development of *Angel of Darkness*' sequel. And Lara's status as a digital-danger-girl icon hasn't slacked with the sales of her games. She's still landing on magazine covers, and



don't forget that Angelina Jolie is reprising her role as Lady Croft for this summer's (hopefully better) *Tomb Raider* movie sequel, which does not tie in with *Angel of Darkness*.

But Lara's fortunes began with videogames, which makes her rebirth on PS2 that much more crucial to Core and publisher Eidos. They've already killed her once. Can they bring her back to life? "I don't think we'll ever beat what we did on the original game as far as creating that sort of buzz," Smith says. "But this game is infinitely different from any other *Tomb Raider* games, and I truly believe that it is what's needed on PS2." 🐾

—Crispin Boyer

CHARACTER BUILDING

What's new: Chalk it up to a bum knee from too many two-story falls: Lara isn't her usual super self at the start of *Darkness*.

She can't leap as far or dangle from ledges forever. Instead, you must build up her abilities by finding power-ups, which come in two brawn-boosting flavors: upper body and lower body.

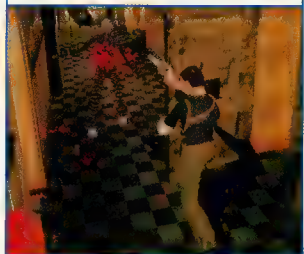
But is it improved? Core tells us the game will fully soup up Lara about halfway through her adventure, whether you find all the power-ups or not. So we wonder, "What's the point?" In the meantime, let's flex....



LARRY CROFT

What's new: Kurtis Trent—who's out to avenge the death of his pop—is Lara's first-ever playable ally. "He's the character who's watching from afar," says Core's Adrian Smith. "He's often ahead of you and where you want to be, or he has something you want." The two fight side by side in one scene, and you spend the last fifth of the game in his shoes.

But is it improved? Don't expect to strain Kurtis' brain: His levels focus on action, gunplay, and telekinetic combat with his bladed Frisbee. If nothing else, his survival-horror-style trek through a spooky nuthouse will give you a nice break from the all the tomb raidin'.



ABOVE THE WAIST

Beef up Lara's upper body, and she'll shimmy along longer ledges—great for finding alternate routes above prowling guards. She'll also slide down zip lines and clutch sheer rock walls. Oh, and her chest jiggles now, too. You don't even need a power-up for that.

BELOW THE WAIST

Beyond an extra boost to her leaps and vertical jumps, lower-body power-ups will also allow Lara to kick down doors and find secret areas.



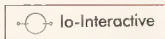
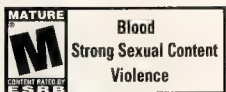
Hunting Season Begins...



HITMAN 2

SILENT ASSASSIN

May 2003



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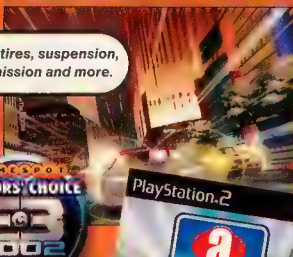
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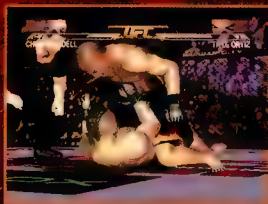
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HAS A GAME.

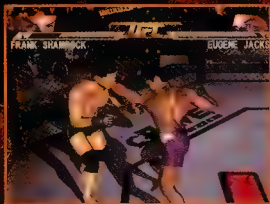


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PRESS
START



Nokia N-Gages Gaming

It's a phone! It's a console! It's expensive as hell!

Finnish mobile-phone giant Nokia used a chilly February evening in London to unveil its stab at handheld gaming, the N-Gage. Combining the capabilities of a well-stocked cell phone and a gaming console, N-Gage's communication features appear to be its biggest draw. Imagine playing games with your friends either locally via Bluetooth (a wireless network technology that connects devices up to 100 feet away) or from anywhere over cellular networks—and then calling them afterward to gloat over your win! How much would you pay for a device that does that and plays MP3s and is a radio? \$100? \$200? Whoa, ho, ho...don't answer yet.

We always say it's all about the games, and Nokia rolled out a few big guns, with Sega headlining the short but sweet list (see sidebar). Despite being in development for only a month, demos for *Pandemonium* and *Tomb*

Raider were pushing 3D graphics akin to early PlayStation 1 titles—pretty impressive for a handheld. Very impressive for a handheld that's also a phone. Games will be sold separately on cartridges.

Now, how much would you pay for all this?

Well, while N-Gage will launch in the United States and Europe by Christmas, no price has been set. And unfortunately, Nokia's only statement on the matter is "definitely less than \$540!" Phew, thanks for narrowing it down.

—Ravi Hiranand

N-Gage Games

Several big names plan to make games for N-Gage. Here's a list of who's involved and what you can expect from them when the device debuts later this year.

Nokia—*Virtually Board Snowboarding 2, Kart Racing, Bounce*

Sega—*Sonic N, Super Monkey Ball, Puyo Puyo, Sega Rally, Virtua Tennis*

Taito—*Taito Memories, Super Puzzle Bobble*
TMG—*MotoGP, Red Faction, MLBPA Baseball*
Eidos—*Tomb Raider, Pandemonium*

Acclaim—No titles announced yet, but we'd guess a certain skateboarding game involving the words "Tony" and "Hawk" is in the works.

Shining Light on the Phantom

When we heard about start-up Infinium Labs' plan to launch an ultrapowerful broadband-only console called Phantom (www.phantom-console.com)—by this Christmas—the flimflam meter hit 10 and exploded. We were convinced it was a hoax; the company

wouldn't return our calls or e-mails, the word "infinium" is already trademarked by another company, and Infinium Labs' listed address is actually a Mail Boxes Etc. in Florida. But after much digging, we can confirm that the Phantom is real—real ambitious and real unlikely to succeed, but real nonetheless. The plan is for Phantom to play regular PC games preloaded on the system, downloaded from Infinium's servers, or on a pay-per-play basis via a subscription service. Think of it as DirectTV for gamers.

Good luck, Infinium Labs, or whatever your name is once the lawyers get done with you.

RAMPANT HOAXERY



The videogame media is a pretty juicy target for hoaxers, what with all the online news sites run by guys who never leave the house except

to attend cosplay conventions. Parsons School of Design student David Yoo perpetrated one recent, wildly successful hoax as a class project—MAVAV.org (Mothers Against Videogame Addiction and Violence). At its height, MAVAV's vitriolic antivideogame ranting attracted more than 60,000 hits per day and inspired thousands of sputtering e-mailed rebuttals from videogame fans worldwide—many of which were cc'd to EGM's own inbox. Thanks for that.



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(Source: Infinium Labs' VP of Retail Sales Jason McDermott's now-deleted posts on Internet message boards.)

* so very, very rough

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IMAGE PROBLEM

When box art must be ridiculed.... This month: *Sorcerer's Maze* (XS Games) • "Look deeply into my beard, children," says the wizened mage on the cover of this \$30 PS1 title, "and I will explain to you the mysteries of dragon eggs, ancient elf lords, and generic stock imagery for cheapo games that have nothing to do with sorcerers or mazes or even kids with transistor radios and pullover sweaters."

Microsoft Recalls Kakuto Chojin

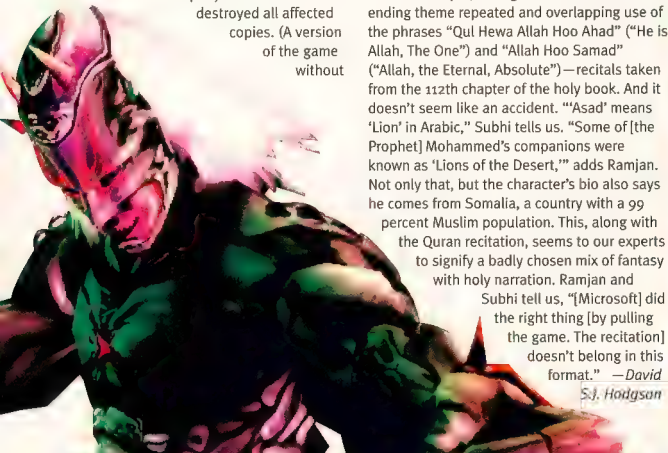
If you're one of the few who bought *Kakuto Chojin*, our condolences: You're the owner of one crappy 3D fighter (Microsoft's first for Xbox). But your luck may be changing. Now, it seems you're the owner of a crappy 3D fighter that's also a collector's item. Microsoft pulled *Kakuto* from shelves in early February after it discovered that a background music track included an inappropriate verse from the Quran, the Muslim holy book. The company has since

destroyed all affected copies. (A version of the game without

the prayer is now available, but we doubt it will do anything to help *Kakuto Chojin's* already lackluster sales.) A similar recall occurred in Japan.

So, what was the offensive chanting about? And is it worth all the fuss? We went to the Muslim Educational Trust in Portland, Oregon, and spoke to Assistant Director Gail Ramjan and Principal Wafa Subhi to find out.

"It is inappropriate use of the Quran," remarks Ramjan, noting in the character Asad's ending theme repeated and overlapping use of the phrases "Qul Hewa Allah Hoo Ahad" ("He is Allah, The One") and "Allah Hoo Samad" ("Allah, the Eternal, Absolute")—recitals taken from the 112th chapter of the holy book. And it doesn't seem like an accident. "Asad" means "Lion" in Arabic," Subhi tells us. "Some of [the Prophet] Mohammed's companions were known as 'Lions of the Desert.'" adds Ramjan. Not only that, but the character's bio also says he comes from Somalia, a country with a 99 percent Muslim population. This, along with the Quran recitation, seems to our experts to signify a badly chosen mix of fantasy with holy narration. Ramjan and Subhi tell us, "[Microsoft] did the right thing [by pulling the game]. The recitation [doesn't belong in this format]." —David S.J. Hodgson



Heresy in the U.S.A.

A three-step program to get from "indifferent" to "offended" with the unedited *Kakuto Chojin*.

1



Choose Asad as your character. Hammer on the buttons until you

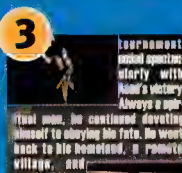
reach the end boss (hey, didn't we tell you the gameplay was crap?).

Step down the she-demon. Prick up your ears when the fight's done.



2

3



Listen to the ending music. The Quran fragments start immediately.

Of course, you could just go easy play "Background Music" on the Options screen. But the realistic idea is to check you're playing this crap on a game.

BUSH & CHENEY VS. ALL YOU FOOLS



Sure there's been a lot of talk about videogames causing violence, but can they prevent it, too? If we're at war by the time you read this, the answer is no, but at least Mikel Reparaz tried. Reparaz launched a successful online money-raising campaign to buy George Bush a PS2, complete with *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*,

Conflict: Desert Storm, and an extra controller for Dick Cheney, in hopes that "you [Bush] accept these gifts and use them, rather than the lives of Iraqi civilians and our U.S. servicemen, to fulfill any militaristic fantasies." No thank-you notes on White House stationery as of yet, but check evilninja.net/buybush for updates.



PRESS
START

“...other pure wrestling games tend to have matches that drag on and on and on. It becomes a long, drawn-out experience.”

—Def Jam Producer Josh Holmes



Afterthoughts: Def Jam: Vendetta

Before Def Jam: Vendetta arrived, wrestling games were about men in tights beating each other senseless for hours. But EA has broken free of those constraints to deliver a game that, like NBA Street and SSX, has genre-busting, universal appeal, with help from some of hip-hop's biggest stars. We sat down with Vendetta Producer Josh Holmes to talk about wrestling game conventions (and the breaking thereof), working with hip-hop's top names, and what had to be cut to get a Teen rating.

EGM: Now that the game's done, what do you think of the finished product?

Josh Holmes: As a team, we're very happy with the result and very proud of what we accomplished. In a lot of ways, it's more than we hoped.

EGM: But let's say you had another month for development. What do you wish you could tweak?

JH: If we had some more time, there would've been some additional music. One of the big challenges with this game was the music licensing. Hip-hop is a notoriously difficult genre to license music for. We felt it was important to have a good mix of old-school hits and new breaking music, and within that,



That back beat really gets ya in the kidneys.



From that expression, it looks like he's getting the foot-flicking of his life.

you usually have a number of samples you need to clear as well.

EGM: There are 40 characters to choose from in Versus mode, but only four that you can play with through the Story mode. Don't take this the wrong way...but what were you thinking?

JH: It was just a creative choice we made. We wanted to make a clear distinction between the heroes you're able to develop and the opponents you face. The heroes are vessels you can put yourself into and experience the story through their eyes. It would've been cool to allow people to go through Story mode with the other characters, but it would've changed the experience a lot.

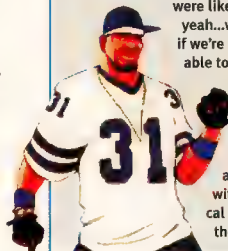
EGM: Vendetta's missing a few conventional wrestling game standards, like customizable multiplayer matches and a Create-a-Wrestler feature. Why did they get the ax?

JH: In creating the game, we wanted more of an arcade-style, quick pick-up-and-play experience with a lot of depth in its own right. Part of that simplicity is keeping the number of options to a minimum and

THE WRATH OF 100 B*TCHES

Since the Def Jam artists worked so closely with EA Canada to put their likenesses into Vendetta, we had to ask: Did anyone want to have some kind of really crazy super move or be super-powerful to the point where you were like, "Uhhh...no?" "Oh yeah," Producer John Holmes tells us. "Redman had this crazy move where once he got his opponent down, he wanted '100 b*tches to come from the audience and kick the guy in the nuts.' And we

were like, 'Yeah, yeah...we don't know if we're going to be able to do that.' We gave him a move that stays true to the spirit of what he was asking for, but within the technical constraints of the game."



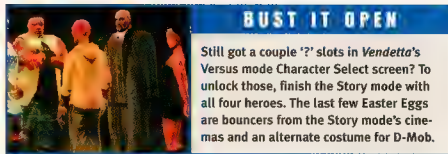
VIVA LA DUNK!

The time is now, people. No more waiting for the court to shine. We must seize the moment and make it our own. With moves and meters. We are ready for primetime. We are ready for primetime.





PRESS
START



BUST IT OPEN

Still got a couple '?' slots in *Vendetta*'s Versus mode Character Select screen? To unlock those, finish the Story mode with all four heroes. The last few Easter Eggs are bouncers for the Story mode's cinemas and an alternate costume for D-Mob.



focusing on creating a really well-tuned, balanced, and polished gameplay experience. It's very similar to the approach we took with *NBA Street* (another EA Big title).

EGM: In our experience, the K.O. system (where you can defeat an opponent with a super move without pinning him/her) really helps keep matches to a realistic length. Was that the goal?

JH: When we came onto the project, we had *Aki [WWE No Mercy for Nintendo 64, Ultimate Muscle for GC]* as the world's greatest wrestling developer—I think that's pretty widely acknowledged. And we wanted to blend the gameplay into a hybrid of wrestling and fighting. Part of that was having a really intense feel to the matches, where they had a natural progression, so the intensity built to a climax and there was an end in sight. The K.O. system came from brainstorming around that. I've found that other pure wrestling games tend to have matches that drag on and on and on. It becomes a long, drawn-out experience.

EGM: It's gotta be a challenge to put together a T-rated game with artists who use very M-rated lyrics. Did you have to cut anything?

JH: We decided early on we wanted to deliver a game that was suitable for a T audience. We worked closely with the ESRB throughout the process, running ideas by them and getting

their feedback on what they thought was appropriate. In the end, there were some minor things. We had to make a couple modifications to moves that were incredibly violent.

EGM: Can you give us an example of a move you had to tone down?

JH: One of the girls who has high heels, Tai, had a special move where she would grab the legs of her opponent and grind the back of her heel into the upturned crotch of her foe, which was incredibly painful-looking, especially with the sound. I think it would've been OK against most of the male characters, but when you got her doing that to a female who's wearing a skirt, she was grinding her high heel into the girl's panties...and it didn't really work. So, that's one minor example. We tweaked the move, and it didn't affect much. It's still a really cool, really painful move.

EGM: That hurts just to hear about. So, what was it like working with Def Jam guys like Redman and Method Man? Did they show up all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed in the morning?

JH: It was actually a really great experience. Red and Meth were really enthusiastic; they're huge gamers. In particular, Method Man has been there for us every step of the way. Ever since he saw the game, he's been hyped about it. He's been playing it and giving us

PRO STRATEGIES, YO

If you've been playin' *Vendetta* for a while, you probably have your own strategy for winning. But we thought we'd ask producer Josh Holmes for his advice on...

The best fighter in the game: "It's gotta be D-Mob. He's pretty stacked. All of his attributes are pretty maxed out, and there's nobody who can hold their own against him...except maybe DMX."



His personal strategies for winning:

"I usually go for the K.O.; I'm not a pin guy. Usually, what I'll do is get my first Blazing move, pull that one off, and maybe do a couple of Turnbuckle moves to take down my opponent's health before he can recover from the special. Then I'll build up a second Blazing and keep his health near the Danger zone, send him into Danger, and K.O. him. But when you're playing against an expert, it becomes harder to pull off a strategy like that."

feedback, and giving us direction since day one on how he wants to appear and how he wants to fight.

EGM: Finally, we gotta ask: Are you thinking about a sequel yet?

JH: Not yet. We're just really curious to see how this one does. We're really happy with how it turned out, and the response so far has been overwhelmingly positive. If it's successful and people enjoy the game, we'd be stupid not to come up with some sort of a sequel. But we're in a wait-and-see mode right now. 🎲



Take to the streets.



A revolution is sweeping the streets. It's all about freedom now. The freedom to control your own future. The freedom to play your game, your way. The revolution is here. Viva la revolution.



PRESS
START

New Excuse To Talk About Halo 2

Normally, we wouldn't run a huge screenshot of some dude standing in a big metal room. But that's not just any dude—that's the Master Chief. And that's not just any big metal room—that's a big metal room from *Halo 2*, the follow-up to the best-selling Xbox first-person shooter that was *EGM's* 2001 Game of the Year. Hot dog! So, yeah, we

admit it, we're hungry for anything new on this game, and we're probably not alone. Since it's not due out until this fall and developer Bungie is working on it in virtual isolation, even this somewhat plain new screenshot got us excited. Here are a few facts we already know about *Halo 2*, plus some idle, pathetic speculation:



GANGSTA LEAN: Looks like the Master Chief is leaning around the corner here, doesn't it? Doesn't it? (Work with us here people.) That's one of his new abilities—he can peek around corners to see what he's up against before entering a room. Other new moves include a full sprint and melee-attack combos.

MYSTERY SHADE: *Halo 2* uses new shadowing techniques to make everything look even more realistic, which makes us wonder: What's casting this shadow? Looks like a new vehicle of some sort! (Does too! Shut up!) Bungie has promised plenty of new rides, including troop transports, an ATV four-wheeler, and the alien equivalent of a jeep.

NEW GUN: More accurate but with a lower firing rate than its *Halo* equivalent, the new assault rifle also includes a scope for longer-range sniping.

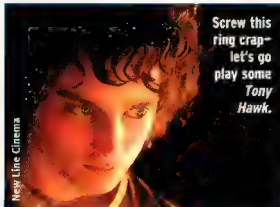
IMPROVED METAL GRATE: *Halo 2* will contain more than twice the amount of grating as the first *Halo*. OK, maybe not.



PRESS
START

CELEBRITY GAMER

Hobbits Play Games, Too



Screw this ring crap—let's go play some Tony Hawk.

New Line Cinema

Celebrities are people, too—just incredibly rich ones. You like games; they like games. Each issue, we talk to a different celebrity who plays games, is involved in their creation, or is lucky enough to be in one.

Although he's a fantasy expert, *Lord of the Rings* trilogy star Elijah Wood is strictly down to earth about his games. Given all the time the guy's spent on the *LOTR* set cooling his fuzzy feet in a trailer, he should be; homeboy's got a lot of free hours to kill in front of his favorite console. We couldn't resist prodding the Hobbit heartthrob to spill the beans about his favorite title and the lengths to which Electronic Arts went to make its *LOTR* game memorable.

EGM: Must be tough sitting around making epic films. How do you relieve all that stress?

Elijah Wood: Videogames. I love 'em to death. Sean [Astin, who plays Sam] and I played tons of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* on the *Lord of the Rings* set. That game is amazing. We couldn't keep our Hobbit hands off it.

EGM: What makes you think your game, *The Two Towers*, is anywhere near as addictive?

EW: Have you seen the graphics? I'm really impressed with the way the game

turned out. Come on—tell me you don't see the attraction.

EGM: Graphically, sure, but what about the gameplay?

EW: Hey, I'm a gamer, too. All right, so *The Lord of the Rings* is a hack-and-slash title, and I'll admit there's not much to it. But Electronic Arts did a great job with what they were given.

EGM: That's better than doing a crappy job with what they were given—still sounds like a backhanded compliment, though.

EW: Look. We all know movie games never turn out right. It's always a rush job to have the game's launch coincide with the release of the film, and there's not enough real art attention to detail put into the process. Just know that the developers worked really hard to create something that was true to the film and maintained its integrity.

EGM: What was it like hearing your voice emanating from a PlayStation 2?

EW: Pretty cool, actually. Doing voiceover work was a lot of fun and made the title sound so much better. It's not as freaky as you'd think, and it was a good way to get my big, hairy foot in the door of the world of gaming, so to speak.

EGM: So a sequel's not out of the question?

EW: Depends on the particular project. I'm looking for more mature roles now, movie or game. If there's a quality script attached, no matter how big or small the project, then I want to be a part of it.

EGM: Now casting: *Lord of the Bedsprings*: Even Girls Gone Wild?

EW: Thanks, but I'll have to pass on that one.



The Director's Cut

See if you can match the celebrity Hollywood director with the recent game commercial he filmed.

THE DIRECTORS



1. ALEX PROYAS
(The Crow, Dark City)



2. DOUG LIMAN
(The Bourne Identity, Swingers)



3. BRETT RATNER
(Red Dragon, Rush Hour)

THE COMMERCIALS

A. SLY COOPER

Our sly raccoon thief proves that even mammals can indulge in crime.



B. METROND PRIME

Samus obliterated alien scum, does some morph-batting, and fights a boss.



C. SHINOBI

Ninjas slice up a convenience store in the hunt for burrito and Shinobi.

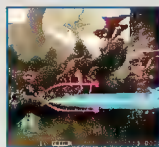


Amuse (r) B. (r) (c) (c)

LAST-MINUTE UPDATE

Metal Gear Solid is coming to the GameCube! Yes, you read that right. In an interview, Nintendo bigwig Shigeru Miyamoto mentioned that the big N and Konami are working on a new edition in the uber-popular stealth-action series. No release date or other details were announced, but that shouldn't stop Cube owners from dancing in the street.

R-Type Final, the latest in a line of beloved shooters, is due this June in Japan for PlayStation 2. A U.S. date is TBD.





PRESS
START



Seeing the Bright Side

Is the future of after-market GBA lights still glowing?

While most gamers are giddy that Nintendo released its Game Boy Advance SP on March 23 (with a built-in light so they can play without donning a miner's headlamp), at least one entrepreneurial GBA fan has every reason not to celebrate. He's Adam Curtis, president of Triton Labs (www.tritonlabs.com) and designer of the Afterburner, GBA's first internal-light kit. Demand for his \$25 doodad, which must be installed in the GBA via a delicate operation we detailed back in *EGM* #157, has been high: 75,000 of the lights (which can also be bought preinstalled) have shipped since the kit launched last fall.

But now that Nintendo has unveiled its GBA SP—with so-called front-light technology that's the same as the Afterburner's (Curtis jokingly says he has no plans to sue)—you'd figure the kit's prospects might dim. Curtis disagrees. "We are confident that significant demand will remain for the Afterburner for at least another year," Curtis says. "There will be those who prefer to install an Afterburner in their current system rather than spend \$100 for the new GBA. And from the pictures I've seen, gamers with large hands will be much more comfortable with the horizontal ergonomics of the original GBA." Even if demand for the Afterburner does

plummet after GBA SP's March debut, Curtis says his company has new products on the horizon that will likely cause just as much of a stir as the Afterburner, especially since they'll be compatible with the new GBA SP. And, ultimately, "The gamer half of me is very happy to see Nintendo release an internally lighted system," he says. "The original goal of [my] project has been realized in full."

You can order an Afterburner kit from tritonlabs.com, and if the thought of eviscerating your GBA and wielding a soldering iron is daunting, the folks at www.portablemonopoly.net will do the surgery for some extra cash.

Overheard

"Nintendo does not make violent games like [Grand Theft Auto]... We need to find something that is a substitute for [GTA] in terms of a game that sells. It's our mission to find an alternative that is unique and nonviolent."

—Zelda and Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto

"Always played in private rooms (clubs) and with the most beautiful women who saw the game. I'm sure the characters appeal to them."



Download of DQA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball on the Internet. Visit our website - the game online. There is no netplay.

"It's easy enough for children to use independently yet so advanced it exceeds the needs of hardcore gamers."

—Line from Infinium Labs' press release on their Phantom console; we'll believe it when we see it

Spring Broke

Wondering what you've got to show for all that cash you spent on spring break? We're here to make you feel a little worse—check out all the fun you could have had:



Illustration: Jeremy "Norm" Scott

WHAT YOU DID ...

YOU COULD HAVE ...

Bought a plane ticket to Cancun, then purchased drinks for you and 10 potential Mrs. Yous

Cost \$500

Bought an Xbox, *Girls Gone Wild* DVD, *DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, and suntan lotion to use as you see fit

Took a road trip to Tijuana, got an impulse tattoo, underwent tattoo removal one week later

Cost \$400

Rented 50 games, gone on a tequila bender, and then tried to redistincting Max Payne's life from your own

Went to Vegas, played 30 games of blackjack, bought a lap dance (cost varies with your luck at both)

Cost \$300

Bought a PS2, *GTA: Vice City*, and 100 hours' worth of cash to spend at the game's Pole Position strip club

Got a part-time job selling *Reservoir Dogs* posters to college kids

Profit \$200

eBay'd that mint-in-box *Panzer Dragon Saga* (Saturn) and spent the week playing GBA in your kiddie pool

Spent 10 rolls of quarters seated in front of the *Ms. Pac-Man* machine at Pizza Hut

Cost \$400

Hell, that sounds like a winner to us. Throw in one of them stuffed-crust pizzas, and we'll be there next year.

The Human Anatomy

as deconstructed by Tao Feng

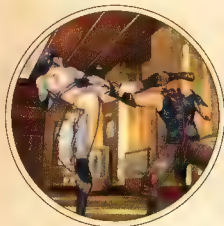


FIG. 1. - Considerable Pain

The process of deconstructing the anatomy begins with bruising at the point of contact, leading to bloody contusions and cerebral hemorrhage.



FIG. 2. - Physical Disability

The deconstruction nears completion as limbs weaken and break from continuous physical abuse, finally rendering the enemy useless.



FIG. 3. - Environmental Destruction

Opponents are often hurled into walls and glass situated nearby, resulting in injuries of variable depth and size.

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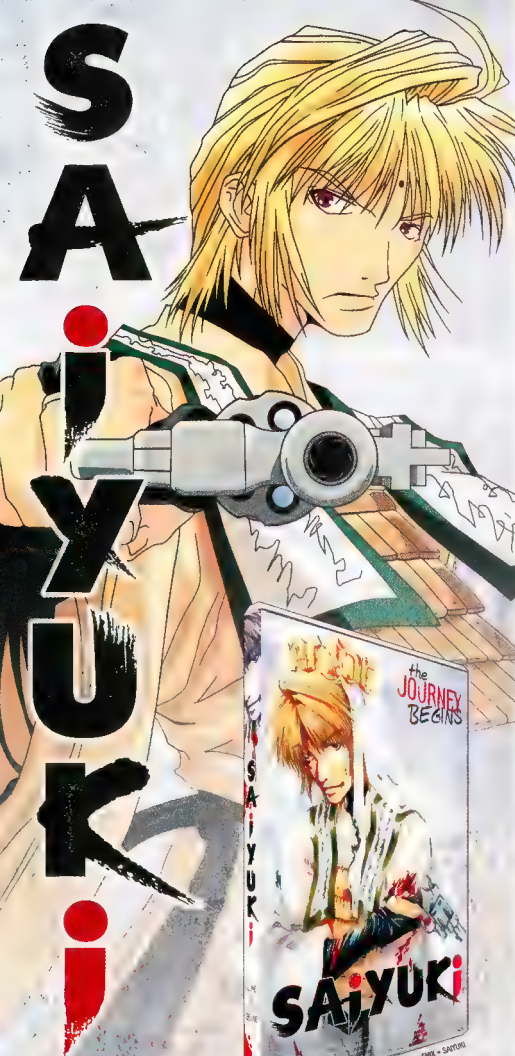
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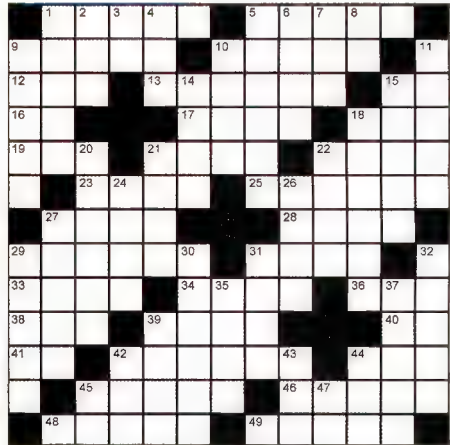
S A I Y U K I



PRESS
START



Follow the White Rabbit



- DOWN**
- Like Neo and 10 across of the *Matrix* series
 - Naval of *N64 Zelda: OOT* does this
 - PS2 DVD remote medium
 - Object of Tomba's affection
 - Scrape, Service, or Hill*
 - Root of Q*bert serpent's name
 - Munch's *Oddworld* accomplice
 - The Matrix...loaded* (movie sequel)
 - Will sound if you get found in *Metal Gear*
 - Some of *Bloodrayne's* bad guys are these
 - Power up meter built into the *Matrix* game
 - Gallop Racer* track, Golden
 - The Wavebird eliminates these
 - Blue Oyster Cult would fear him if they'd played *Castlevano* (NES)
 - Beach volleyball. Is played only this way in the world of *Dead or Alive*
 - Pokémon #86
 - The red one will take you inside the *Matrix*
 - Gameplay guideline
 - Something to slide on in *Tony Hawk*
 - Monk Kart 64's* mountain
 - Developer of game based on *The Matrix*
 - Square-pansied Bob of GBA, PS2, and GameCube fame
 - NFL A's playing surface
 - Competitive gamers "play..." (2 words)
 - Deus Ex* modifications, for short
 - Full *Matrix* game name... *the Matrix*
 - Duck...or...for Red October* (both NES)
 - Like *Double Dragon's* Billy and Jimmy Lee
 - FGM's is found at the bottom of its pages
 - One of these might intersect a *Fighting Street* (abbrv)
 - Egyptian sun god referenced in a Game Boy/NES title, *Pyramids of*
 - Noneditorial content in EGM, for snort
- ACROSS**
- To gun down from afar
 - Street Fighter Rose's* weapon
 - Matrix* publisher label
 - Female star of the *Matrix* game
 - Slowdown in network connection speed
 - Plays the net in *Winning Eleven 6*
 - Big boss, to Solid Snake (abbrv)
 - Pirates-peak* (PS2)
 - Panzer Dragoon Saga's* (Saturn) leading ady
 - 1983 arcade game from Konami, 'n *Rope*
 - Gran Turismo 3* Acura model
 - Saturn's Mr. Bones doesn't have any
 - Westernmost neighbor to Blanka's Brazil
 - "Three," to *Street Fighter's* Vega
 - One of *GIA's* gangs
 - 70s Motley band heard in *Vice City*
 - Alpine Racer* (PS2) locale
 - In *Mario's* world, they come in red or green
 - Game piece in *Shanghai*
 - Alone* (NES) or *Run King* (GG)
 - Tekken's* Phoenix x
 - PS2 Resident Evil game that uses the Network Adaptor (abbrv)
 - Year he's surrounded by it in *The Thing* (PS2, Xbox)
 - Duke Nukem: Zero* or *WWII Crush*
 - Darkstalkers* sequel, for short
 - Options menu negative
 - Matrix* martial art
 - Built the GameCube's graphics chip
 - Sonic's "precocious"
 - Vulcan of *Metal Gear Solid* (PS1)
 - Devil May Cry* swordsmen
 - Stereotypical RPG wise man

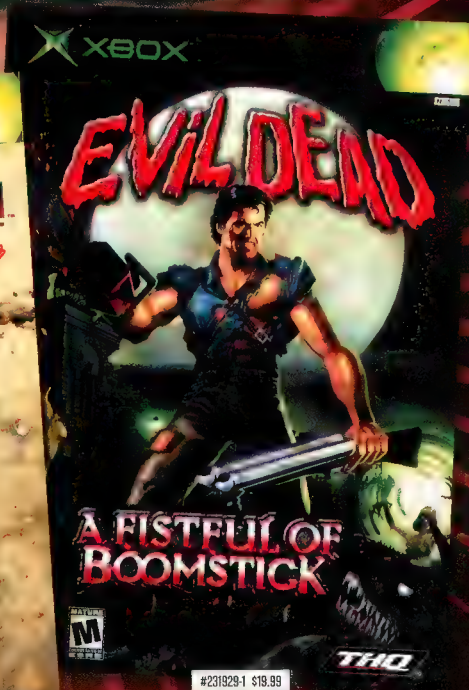


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FLICK WATCH: DRIVER

"From the makers of *Resident Evil* comes *Driver: The Movie!*" That's right, a big-screen version of Infogrames' good guy/dud guy car game is in the works. The film is scheduled to begin production this year under the direction of Paul Anderson (*Evil's* director). Why do games like *Driver* and *Crazy Taxi* get scooped up while *Metal Gear* gathers dust? We may never know.

Quartermann — Game Gossip & Speculation

Good (morning, afternoon, evening—pick one) gamers, 'tis I, your illustrious host to the world of videogaming rumors—The Q-Mann. I appear before you once again to deliver a virtual bounty of gaming gossip and rumors for your reading pleasure. Please, read what I have to say and be amazed at the future!

Sony Sequels

A bevy, a passel, or possibly a throng of Sony séquels lurks around the corner. A new *Syphon Filter 2* is on the way, and this time it's got online connectivity. Want 3D platformers? How do *Ratchet & Clank 2* and *Sly Cooper 2* (not to mention *Jak and Daxter 2*—see page 74) sound to you? We have it on good authority that they're all currently in development. We haven't heard from *Gran Turismo* in a while, which is reason enough to be suspicious—expect an online installment (maybe called *GT4*) to make an appearance later this year.

Y Splinter Sequel

Sam Fisher may be back in action earlier than you think. Word has it *Splinter Cell 2* is scheduled to debut in early 2004.

Expect more of what you loved from the first one, plus possible Xbox Live connectivity for online play. The Q's psyched about that ti'l bit of news...

Final Fantasy XI Beta Tests

Square has begun preliminary beta tests of its massively multiplayer online role-playing game, *Final Fantasy XI*. Beta testers are playing the Japanese version Stateside, but at least it's progress toward a U.S. release later this year....

Multiplayer Rings

Tired of saving Middle-earth by yourself? You may not have to for long. The Q has learned that EA is planning multiplayer support for the next *Lord of the Rings* game coming out this fall. (Kinda fits the hack-n-slash gameplay, doncha think?)

Tenchu Side Story >

The new *Tenchu* game recently hit PS2, and word has it a side story is in the cards. Plus, The Q hears the producer of Sega's *Shinobi* has defected to Activision's Japanese development studio to work on the game. Sneaky, sneaky....

KOTOR Stumbles, But Doesn't Fall

If you're a *Star Wars* junkie who owns an Xbox, you might be wondering, "Where the hell's my *Knights of the Old Republic!*" A fair question, surely. Current scuttlebutt tags a summer release after all the smoothing and polishing's been done. Besides, we wouldn't want a janky game, would we? Wait for it....

Bond to Switch Perspectives

The Q's sources indicate James Bond might be changing his first-person ways in the next game (scheduled to hit as early as the end of this year). Expect the new game to include a third-person view (à la *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear*). In addition, another *Bond* in the works is supposedly a direct sequel to *Nintendo 64's GoldenEye*....

The Hot Q: Console Prices to Drop Soon

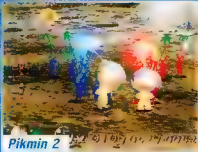
Predicting console price-drops is a tricky business. They're inevitable—the question is, when? This year, The Q's sources have heard we may have new prices for all our favorite consoles (Xbox, PS2, and GameCube) as early as E3. Of course, when one drops, they all follow suit, limiting any short-term advantage....

And with that, I must bid you adieu for another month, my friends. But don't worry—30 more days and I'll be right back at ya with another boatload of the juicy stuff. If you feel like dropping me a line, send e-mail to quartermann@ziffdavis.com. Until next time....

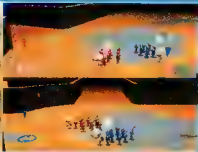
—The Q



Bits of Q



We interrupt this Q-Bits column to give you a last-minute update on some upcoming Nintendo titles.



Pikmin 2—Miyamoto confirmed this one a couple months ago, and here's the first pair of screens. Notice

again, our man's got a third row, perfect for this sequel's new two-player mode. Release TBD.

Kirby's Air Ride—This was originally announced for Nintendo 64 but shelved. Now, it's back and looks a bit like *Super Monkey Ball* (don't you think?). Release TBD.

Expect both of these to take up some real estate in

Nintendo's booth in Los Angeles at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in May. It'll be there with bells on.



Kirby's Air Ride

LIGHTS.....CAMERA.....ATTACK!!!



In a world where violence and celebrity go hand in hand, one video game beautifully glorifies both. *Kung Fu Chaos* is the story of director Shao Ting's mad obsession to assemble top 70's martial artists — throw them onto movie sets and have them beat the duck sauce out of each other. With 21 big-budget locations, 8 hot-tempered actors and a cameo by a mystery master, it's never the same movie — er, game twice.



Blood
Mature Humor
Mild language
Violence

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Just Add
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PRESS
START

Charts - January 2003

TOP 20 BEST-SELLING GAMES OF 2002

1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Rockstar			
	10 Che 10 Greg S 10 Milkman			
2	Grand Theft Auto III Rockstar			
	9 Crispin 9 Greg S 10 Milkman			
3	Madden NFL 2003 EA Sports			
	9 John R 9.5 Jon 9.5 Dean			
4	Super Mario Advance 2 Nintendo			
5	Gran Turismo 3 A-spec Sony CEA			
6	Metal of Honor: Frontline EA Games			
7	Spider-Man: The Movie Activision			
8	Kingdom Hearts Square EA			
9	X-Box Microsoft			
10	Super Mario Sunshine Nintendo			
11	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 Activision 02			
12	Yu-Gi-Oh! The Eternal Duelist Soul Konami			
13	Dragon Ball Z: The Legacy of Goku Infogrames			
14	Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers EA Games			
15	Yu-Gi-Oh! Dark Duel Stories Konami			
16	Yu-Gi-Oh! Forbidden Memories Konami			
17	NCAA Football 2003 EA Sports			
18	Sonic Advance THQ			
19	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Ubisoft			
20	SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Sony CEA			

Source: NPD TRS'S Video Games Service. Call Kristin Barnette/can't afford at (510) 625-3481 for questions regarding this list. A "—" indicates the game was not reviewed.

TOP 10 RENTALS

BLOCKBUSTER

1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City rockstar		
2	LOTR: The Two Towers EA Games		
3	Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Infogrames		
4	James Bond 007: NightFire EA Games		
5	Madden NFL 2003 EA Sports		
6	WWE SmackDown! SYM THQ		
7	Dead to Rights Namco		
8	SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Sony CEA		
9	Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2 EA Games		
10	Conflict: Desert Storm Gotham Games		

Source: Blockbuster Video, January 2003

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES IN JAPAN

1	Devil May Cry 2 Capcom			<p>U.S.A.! U.S.A.!</p> <p>Although <i>Ratchet & Clank</i> (now at number 12) has slipped off the chart, <i>SmackDown! SYM</i> brings the trailer park to Tokyo with a surprising second-place showing. Of equal interest is the appearance of debonair Brit James Bond in <i>NightFire</i>, in the eighth position. Witness the softening of Japanese isolationism.</p>
2	WWE SmackDown! SYM Yuke's			
3	Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire Nintendo			
4	Taiko no Tatsujin Namco			
5	Nintendo Puzzle Collection Nintendo			
6	Makai Senki Disgaea Nippon-ichi Software			
7	Nobunaga's Ambition Koei			
8	James Bond 007: NightFire Electronic Arts Square			
9	Power Pro-kun Pocket 5 Konami			
10	Operator's Side Sony CEI			

Source: Weekly Famitsu, week ending 2/9/03

SmackDown! SYM

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PlayStation.2





PRESS
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Coming Soon

April

- Backyard Baseball (Sports) GC
- BattleBots (Action) PS2, GC
- Brute Force (Action) Xbox
- Colin McRae Rally 3 (Racing) PS2
- Conflict: Desert Storm (Action) GC
- Dragon's Lair 3D ("Adventure") PS2
- Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick (Action) PS2, Xbox
- Freedom: Battle for Liberty Island (Action) PS2, Xbox
- Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee (Fighting) Xbox
- Golden Sun: The Lost Age (RPG) GBA
- Hamtaro: Ham Ham Heartbreak (...uh, Misc?) GC
- High Heat Baseball 2004 (Sports) GB
- Ikaruga (Shooter) GC
- Lufia: The Ruins of Lore (RPG) GBA
- Midnight Club II (Racing) PS2, Xbox
- MLB 2004 (Sports) PS2
- Pinobee's Great Adventure (Platform) PS
- Rent-A-Hero No. 1 (Action) Xbox
- Run Like Hell (Action) Xbox
- Stake (Action) Xbox
- Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo (Puzzle) GBA
- Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell (Action) PS2
- World's Scariest Police Chases (Action) Xbox
- X2: Wolverine's Revenge (Action) PS2, GC, Xbox, GBA
- Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition (Card Game) GBA

May

- .hack Part 2: Mutation (RPG) PS2
- Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow (Action) GBA
- Color Quest (Monster Breeding) PS2
- E.T.: Return to the Green Planet (Action) PS2
- Enter the Matrix (Action) PS2, GC, Xbox
- Fila World Tour Tennis (Sports) Xbox
- Gladius (RPG) PS2, GC, Xbox
- The Hulk (Action) PS2, GC, Xbox
- Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb (Action) PS2
- Lost Kingdoms II (RPG) PS2
- Mafia (Action) PS2, Xbox
- MLB Inside Pitch (Sports) Xbox
- NBA Street Vol. 2 (Sports) PS2, GC, Xbox
- RTX: Red Rock (Action) PS2, GC
- Smash Cars (Action) PS2
- Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut (Action) GC
- Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack (Action) GBA



NBA Street Vol. 2 (PS2, GC, Xbox)

- Speed Kings (Racing) PS2, GC
- Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (RPG) Xbox
- Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness (Adventure) PS2
- Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell (Action) GC, Xbox
- Urban Freestyle Soccer (Sports) PS2, GC, Xbox
- Wario Ware, Inc: Mega Microgame5 (Action) GBA
- Wario World (Action) GC
- Wolfenstein: Operation Resurrection (Action) PS2
- Wolfenstein: Tides of War (Action) Xbox
- WWE Raw 2 (Wrestling) Xbox

June

- 1080° Avalanche (Sports) GC
- Advance Wars 2 (Strategy) GBA
- Aliens vs. Predator: Extinction (Strategy) PS2, Xbox
- Backyard Wrestling (Wrestling) PS2, Xbox
- Charlie's Angels (Hot Girl on Girl on Girl Action) PS2
- Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge (Flight) Xbox
- Crouching Tiger, Hid. Dragon (Act.) PS2, GC, Xbox, GBA
- Deus Ex 2: Invisible War (Action) Xbox
- Donkey Kong Country (Action) GBA
- Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes (Action) PS2, GC, Xbox
- F-Zero GC (Racing) GC
- Freaky Flyers (Action) PS2, GC, Xbox
- Freestyle Metal X (Sports) GC, Xbox
- Mac Griffin: Bounty Hunter (Action) PS2, GC, Xbox
- Midtown Madness 3 (Racing) Xbox
- Outlaw Volleyball (Sports) Xbox
- Rock 'N Roll Racing (Racing) GBA
- Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix (Action) Xbox
- Splashdown 2 (Racing) PS2
- Starsky & Hutch (Action) PS2, Xbox
- Wakeboarding Unl. feat. S. Murray (Sports) PS2, Xbox



1080° Av



Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness (PS2)



Wakeboarding Unleashed feat. Shawn Murray (PS2, Xbox)

IMPORT CALENDAR

Import Pick of the Month Fire Emblem: Sword of Raging Fire



Fire Emblem, one of Nintendo's oldest franchises never to come to North America, is about to make a second appearance on Game Boy Advance in Japan. *Rekka no Ken (The Sword of Raging Fire)* is a prequel to last year's *Fuuin no Tsunagi (The Sealed Sword)*, and it once again stars the Pharaen swordsman Roy (featured in GC's *Super Smash Bros. Melee*), this time as a younger, gentler ass-kicking warrior. The *Emblem* series features deep, additive strategy/RPG gameplay (think *Advance Wars*, but with swords and knights), making Nintendo's decision to keep the games away all the more unfortunate.

PlayStation 2

- 3/27 *Soul Calibur II*, Namco (Fighting)
- 4/10 *.hack Vol. 4*, Bandai (RPG)
- 4/17 *Final Fantasy XI: Vision of Ziraat*, Square (RPG)
- 4/24 *DDR Max 2: DDR 7th Mix*, Konami (Music)
- 4/24 *Metal Slug 3*, Playmore (Action)

Game Boy Advance

- 3/21 *Made in Wario*, Nintendo (Action)
- 3/28 *Shin Megami Tensei*, Atlus (RPG)
- 3/29 *Dragon Quest Monsters: Caravan Heart*, Enix (RPG)
- 4/18 *Zoids Saga II*, Tomy (RPG)
- 4/24 *Hunter X Hunter*, Konami (RPG)
- 4/25 *Fire Emblem: Rekka no Ken*, Nintendo (Action)
- 5/8 *Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow*, Konami (Action)

GameCube

- 3/27 *P.N.03*, Capcom (Action)
- 3/27 *Soul Calibur II*, Namco (Fighting)
- 3/28 *Shaman King: Soul Fight*, Bandai (Action)
- 4/10 *Dokapon DX*, Asmik (RPG)
- 4/25 *Giftpia*, Nintendo (RPG)
- Apr. *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, Nintendo (RPG)
- Apr. *Mobile Suit Gundam*, Bandai (Action)
- Apr. *Viewtiful Joe*, Capcom (Action)
- May *F-Zero GC*, Nintendo (Racing)

*Schedule subject to change without notice. Consult your local import game store for the latest release info. *Hey dudes, thanks for rescuing me. Let's go for a burger... Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

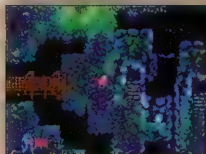
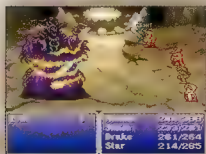
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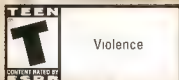
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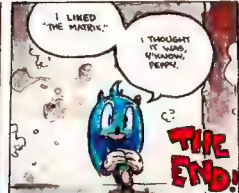
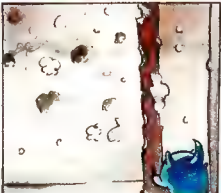
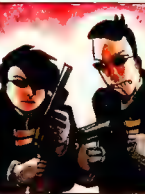
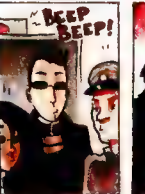
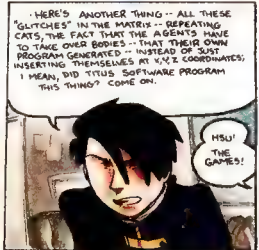
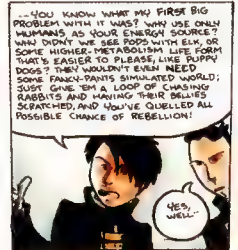
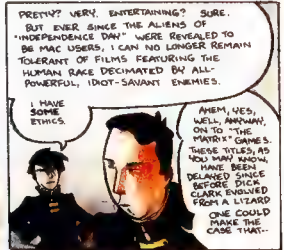
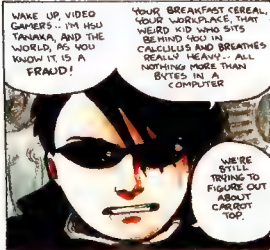
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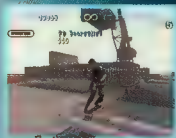
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- NEW MUSICAL SCORES • EXCITING NEW STORYLINES

MATURE



Blood and Gore
Violence
Partial Nudity



PlayStation®2

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no arms. no legs. huge features.

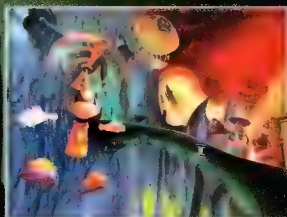
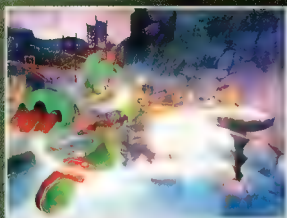


PlayStation 2



GAME BOY ADVANCE

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Rayman 3

HOODLUM HAVOC



Official trailer featuring "Madder" by Groove Armada, courtesy of Jive Records.



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CHOOSE YOUR PATH

It is four thousand years before the Galactic Empire. Thousands of Jedi and Sith are fighting an epic battle between light and dark with you at the epicenter and the fate of the galaxy hanging in the balance. You can side with the light or succumb to the darkness—but in the end you must choose and let the galaxy suffer the consequences.

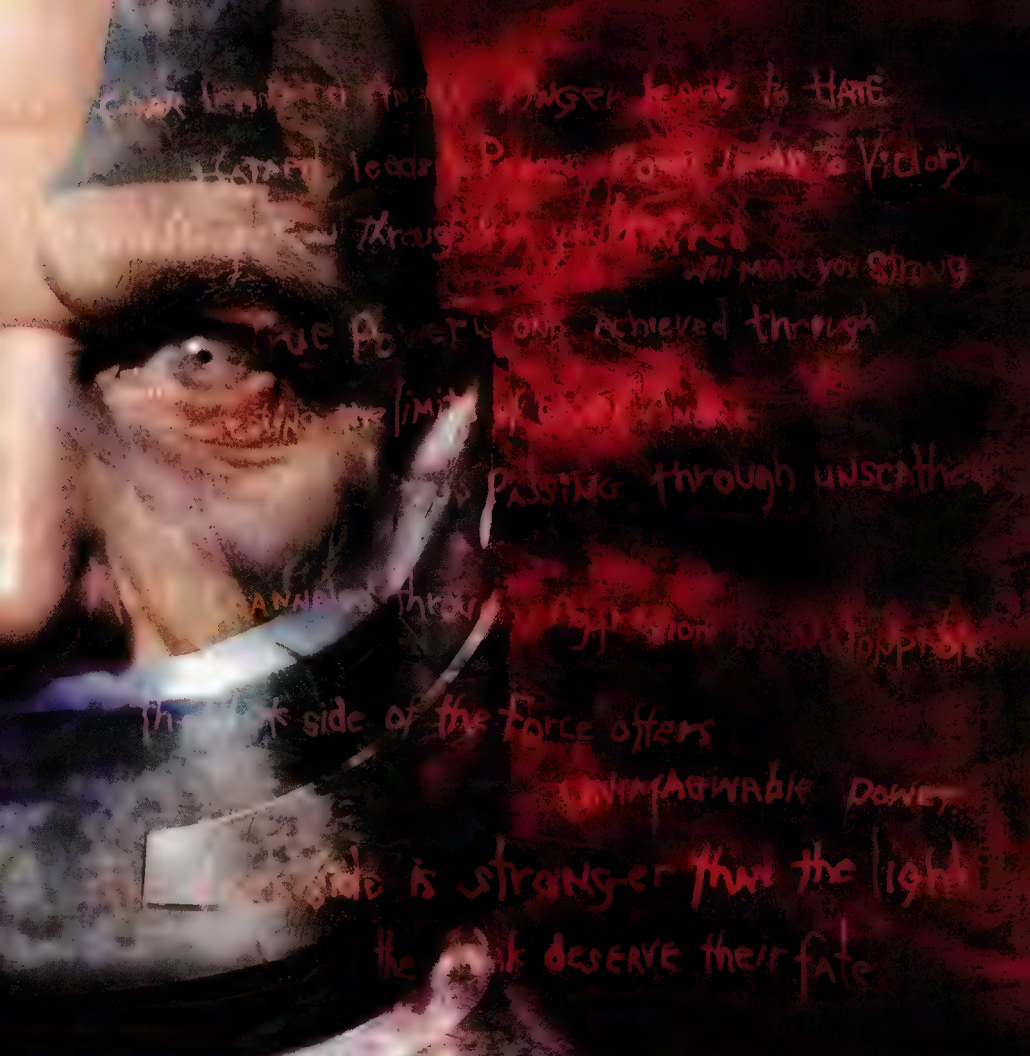


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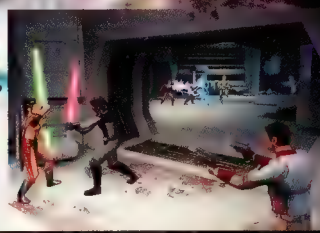
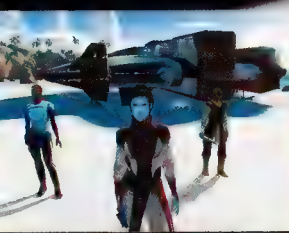
VIOLENCE

 XBOX

BIOWARE
CORP



...power leads to the... anger leads to HATE
 ...power leads to... through... Victory
 ...power leads to... through... will make you Strong
 ...power leads to... achieved through
 ...power leads to... passing through unscathed
 ...power leads to... the dark side of the Force offers
 ...power leads to... IMAGINABLE POWER
 ...power leads to... the dark side is stronger than the light
 ...power leads to... the dark side deserve their fate



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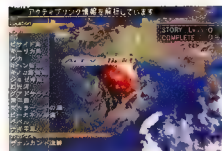
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Final Fantasy X-2

Publisher:	Square Enix U.S.A.
Developer:	Square
Players:	1
Genre:	RPG
% Done:	73.9%
Release:	Fall 2003
Agey Un:	None
The Good:	Yuna...in hot pants. Oh, and Rikku in a bikini. No wait, Paine in S&M leather. It's all so good!
The Bad:	The mission-based gameplay might shock series regulars who expected a linear plot.
And The Ugly:	FFX's costars (Lulu, Wakka, and Kimahri) are relegated to nonplayable cameo roles here.



You can select your next mission from this handy overworld screen.



Yuna wears her satins like a lady, and she also sprays hot lead into any monster standing in her way.

As you read this, legions of Japanese gamers are already enjoying *Final Fantasy X-2*, the first-ever direct sequel to an *FF* game. Lamentably, we're still a good six to eight months away from its U.S. release (due to translation time, English dubbing, global market positioning, yadda yadda), but now that it's out somewhere, at least we finally know more about X-2 than "Yuna looks mighty good in those daisy dukes."

First off, fans desperately want to know what's up with the plot. Here's the scoop—two years after Tidus, Yuna, and Co. defeated the world-destroying beast known as Sin, the realm of Spira has begun to heal its physical, spiritual, and social wounds. Yuna, however, has yet to fully recover from Tidus'

uh...mysterious disappearance after trouncing the monster (how's that for spoiler-free?). Luckily, all hope isn't lost. After finding a magical sphere hinting to his whereabouts, Yuna sets off with cousin Rikku and a mysterious new friend named Paine to find more spheres and, hopefully, her missing boyfriend.

Just as Yuna's put away her old summoner's robes in favor of frolicsome hip-buggers, the developers bravely steamrolled much of *FFX*'s established gameplay for this sequel. First off, X-2 is mission based. Instead of going about the quest in a purely linear fashion, you can now tackle a large number of mini-adventures in any order you choose, thanks to the gals' globetrotting Celsius airship. The overall narrative remains intact, but what you see along the way

DRESS YOU UP IN MY LOVE

Although our three lovable heroines appear to be the game's only playable characters, thanks to the new Job Wheel system, variety isn't lacking. In X-2, you'll uncover a slew of job classes for the girls as you progress, including classic *FF* fare like black or white mage, gambler, and thief—and creative new jobs like pop star, dark gunner, and mascot. Each job features unique stats and abilities (not to mention a snazzy outfit), and you can switch between them during battle using the Dress Up command.





SILLY AND EXPENSIVE

In Japan, diehard *FF* nuts will be able to purchase these \$200 replicas of Yuna's Tiny Bee pistols. They're functional controllers that have all the required buttons for playing the game, but they don't work like a GunCon—all the shooting action is purely implied. No word on a U.S. release, but don't hold your breath.



Check out the mag wheels on Yuna's fueled-by-girl-power Celsiuss airship.

to your ultimate goal is completely up to you. Also, Square has revamped the combat system, bringing back the classic *Final Fantasy* Active Time Battle concept (where enemies will continue to pummel your characters while you make your choices). The end result: faster, more dangerous combat. Yuna also

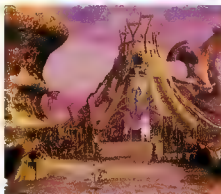
The one area *X-2* hasn't changed much from its prequel is in its graphics. Since it takes place in the same world as its forerunner, you'll visit many of the same locations, only updated with two years of renovation. You'll view previously unseen areas of Spira as well, so it's not merely a nostalgic geographical

"The developers bravely steamrolled much of *FFX*'s established gameplay for this sequel."

see more action while scampering about the field and dungeon screens. Now, she can jump and pull herself up onto ledges. Don't worry, she's not going all Lara Croft on us, but it adds some excitement to the previously uneventful walking bits. Finally, *FFX*'s Sphere Grid character customization system gets trashed in favor of the all-new Job Wheel system, a melding of *Final Fantasy V*'s beloved job system and playing dress-up (see sidebar).

retread. As expected, Square also includes a healthy dose of brilliant CG cinemas and ridiculously over-the-top spell effects. The music, however, might blindside you. Longtime series composer Nobuo Uematsu isn't involved at all. Instead, *The Bouncer*'s sound team delivers a mix of pop, R&B, and other styles you'd never expect on an *FF* soundtrack. But change can be a good thing, right? ♣

—Shane Bettenhausen



Return to memorable *FFX* locales.



NEW FACES AND OLD FRIENDS

Paine



This new party member's humor clashes with the other girls' giggly effervescence.

LeBlanc



This brazen lady leads a rival group of sphere hunters competing with Yuna for the goods.

Nooj



This grizzled veteran of the war against Sin leads The Youth League, a group of rebel teens.

Old Friends



You'll meet some *FFX* alums—Kimahri, Lulu, and Wakka will cheer you on, but won't join up.

X2: Wolverine's Revenge

Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Gene Pool
Players:	1
Genre:	Action
% Done:	85%
Release:	April 2003
Also On:	GC, Xbox
Web Address:	www.wolverinesrevenge.com

The Good: Wolverine's more than a cutout action character with claws.

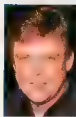
The Bad: Killing hordes of faceless henchmen. Yawn.

And The Ugly: Said lackeys after a thorough slicing...wait, they just disappear.



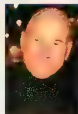
EVERYONE BUT HUGH

To ensure that *X2* sounds as good as it looks, Activision turned to some big-name voice talent:



Goodbye, Luke. Mark "Will Read Dialogue For Food" Hamill gets gruff as Logan.

Who better to play the Professor than the man himself, Patrick Stewart?



While Wolverine's no stranger to videogames, comic-book readers know the full range of the X-Man's abilities have previously been slighted on the consoles. What with his signature pig-stickers, it's always been easy to overlook the ol' Canucklehead's other mutagenic gifts. Of course, Wolverine's claws will always take center stage, and developer Gene Pool has devised plenty of satisfying ways for you to use 'em in its upcoming action game, *X2: Wolverine's Revenge*. You'll get a meat-and-potatoes series of wild slashes, perfect for tearing through an equally redundant menu of generic goons, while other acrobatics include somersaulting, sliding, and spin kicking.

Thankfully, though, *Revenge* goes a bit beyond this programming-by-the-numbers by letting you cull these clones with several flashy finishing moves. More than just lethal tinsel, these special attacks can be indispensable in boss battles. For example, to best the juggernaut, you'll need to pry free his hel-

met with aerial attacks before you and X-pal Colossus can finish him with a straight-from-the-comic Fastball Special combo attack.

So, what's the fuss about the furbal's other, often overlooked, talents, you ask? Well, for one, if Wolvie's always doing what he does best, his accelerated healing factor won't kick in; he has to sheath his claws in order to regain lost health. But it's access to his heightened senses that really puts you inside this killing

Cool and collected or a savage berserker, it's really up to you.

machine's Adamantium-plated skull. "We thought long and hard about the mutant abilities of Wolverine," explains Executive Producer Rob Letts, "and tried to tailor the gameplay to really bring his awesome potential

THE SKILLS TO MAKE THE KILLS

Berserker Rage



Unbridle the wrath of a dozen orangutans.

Superhuman Senses



Thwart state-of-the-art defenses with raw animal instinct.

Fast Healing



Save the bandages—Wolvie regenerates health on his own.

Now, keep moochers away from your
NEW Longer-Lasting
Juicy Fruit!

**HERE'S
HOW IT
WORKS!**



1. Wear car door.



2. Moochers approach.



3. Roll up window.



4. Keep Juicy Fruit!

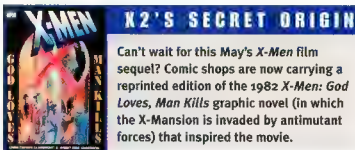
NEW!
Longer-Lasting
Juicy Fruit

**CAR
DOOR**



Gotta Have
Longer-Lasting
Sweet?





X2'S SECRET ORIGIN

Can't wait for this May's *X-Men* film sequel? Comic shops are now carrying a reprinted edition of the 1982 *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills* graphic novel (in which the X-Mansion is invaded by antimutant forces) that inspired the movie.



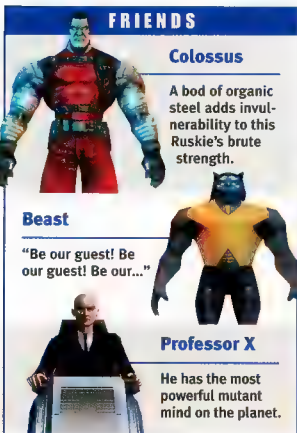
alive." And it shows. *Revenge* is designed so stealth is, at least some of the time, a viable alternative to wholesale slaughter. When you hold down the L2 button, the screen goes gray and red, and environmental noise dulls to a quiet drone. Suddenly, you're at one with your surroundings: You can follow previously undetectable footprints, scan the UV spectrum for evidence of booby traps, and surprise your quarry from the shadows. Wolverine can be cool and collected or a savage berserker—it's really up to you.

Adding welcome depth to the breadth of

these genetic blessings is a story line crafted by comics scribe Larry Hama. So, despite having titular ties to the *X-Men* movie sequel due out this May, *Revenge*'s plot has much more in common with the long-running comic book. It also means that underlying the standard series of lackeys and locked doors is a solid story that Letts calls "fast and punchy." All we know so far is that Wolverine must trek deep into the Canadian wilderness, returning to the clandestine Department H facility. There, he must locate an antidote to the viral bomb that's just been discovered in his system.

Yeah, the infamy of shoddy superhero titles could be Wolverine's real worst enemy. But if *Revenge*'s gameplay consistently puts his powers to meaningful use, perhaps the clawed one can escape the comic-book-to-video game jinx. 🍄

—Shawn Elliott



FRIENDS

Colossus

A bod of organic steel adds invulnerability to this Ruskie's brute strength.

Beast

"Be our guest! Be our guest! Be our..."

Professor X

He has the most powerful mutant mind on the planet.

FOES

Sabretooth



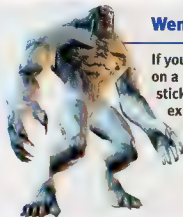
Power for power, this psychotic murder machine is the Cucklehead's evil incarnation.

Lady Deathstrike

Wolverine in a Wonderbra? Sabretooth in tights? Yeah, even the mighty Marvel think tank can lose a tread.



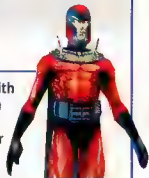
Wendigo



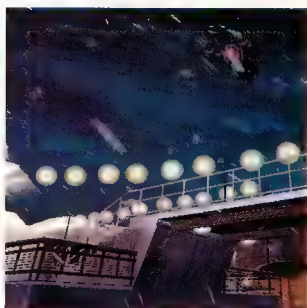
If you ever snack on a human drumstick, you can expect to host this immortal spirit of an albino Sasquatch.

Magneto

Now, how's our man with a metal-laced skeleton gonna take down the self-proclaimed master of magnetism?



Sniikt! Pop Juggernaut's shiny top like a tin can.





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Jak II

Publisher:	Sony CEA
Developer:	Naughty Dog
Players:	1
Genre:	Action
% Done:	60%
Release:	September 2003
Also On:	None
Web Address:	www.jakand-daxter.com

The Good: It's the sequel to one of our favorite PS2 platform games.

The Bad: We're still mad about the lame "extra" ending of the last game. Aren't you?

And The Ugly: Jak, after a dark eco transformation, can get pretty ugly.



After Jak's time in prison, his eyes are no longer wide and soulful; they're glaring and ominous. His hair has grown out, his body is buff, and he has a soul patch (always a sure sign of evil). But the biggest change? Get ready for it: Jak... speaks! (He was mute in the first game.)



Jak and Daxter make friends wherever they go, right? Wrong.

Given the popularity and critical acclaim of *Jak & Daxter*, a sequel was a no-brainer. What we didn't expect was that a follow-up to the kid-friendly platformer would follow with such a dark, gritty, more mature approach. As you can see, developer Naughty Dog has left behind the bright *Crash Bandicoot*-style backdrops of the original in favor of a setting that looks more like a war zone.

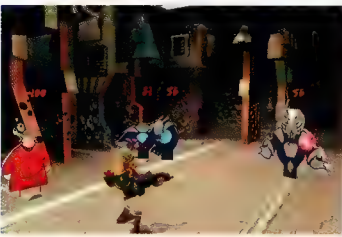
When we last left Jak and Daxter, they were peering into a mysterious, glowing doorway. At the start of *Jak II*, we learn that doorway is actually a portal to a dark, depressed city in a completely different time period. Naturally, the pair enter the doorway, but they aren't given a warm reception on the other side; the natives grab Jak, throw him in jail, and experiment on him using dark eco, the mutagenic goo from the last game.

Daxter eventually helps his friend break out of

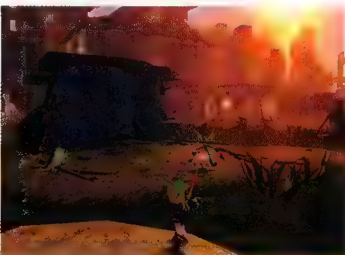
prison, but hard time has changed Jak into an angry, street-smart tough guy (see the sidebar for details). With this new attitude comes a new focus on gameplay, too. Jak now has access to four guns, each loaded with a different kind of projectile—and the game's fighting is also more combo driven. For example, you can spin kick, then follow up by smacking a goon in the face with the butt of your gun. Or you can jump into the air and blast downward to apply a brutal finishing touch.

There are a number of changes to *Jak II* from a technology standpoint, as well. Every one of the hundreds of different computer-controlled characters you run across in the city look different; you can travel through the entire town in a number of futuristic flying cars, and the cut-scene graphics have improved dramatically. Darker, bolder, prettier—all told, this is definitely one sequel to look forward to. **A+**

—Ethan Einhorn



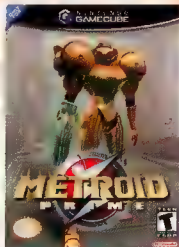
Jak II is much tougher, so you'd better hone your skills.



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Color Quest

Agetec • May 2003 • Also On: None—If you're a budding Picasso who derives pleasure from customizing your car logo in racing games, decorating your room in *Animal Crossing*, or breaking out that dusty Super Nintendo copy of *Mario Paint*, you'll be all over Agetec's *Color Quest*. It's a creative reworking of the *Monster Rancher* concept, except this time you actually design the cuddly creatures you bring to battle.

At the game's outset, you can create little more than a tiny blobbish freak, but as you progress, you'll be able to forge nearly anything from a massive, tentacled monstrosity to a ramshackle rendition of Freddy Krueger. Your creation's stats and skills change depending on the colors and shapes you employ (undulating appendages increase agility, objects placed in monsters' hands up attack, and so on), so success is more about careful consideration than random doodling. Combat combines traditional RPG-style attacks (magic, fight, heal) with a paper-rock-scissors hierarchy of dominance, so winning is a mix of skill and luck. Fighting your way through the surprisingly long single-player experience is only part of the fun—pitting your artistic creations against your friends' sketchbook rapsallions should settle some long-forgotten art-class rivalries.



Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick

THQ • May 2003 • Also On: Xbox—Let the one-liners commence. Cult horror-movie favorite Ash is giving this whole videogame thing another shot after the criminally disappointing survival horror-style *Evil Dead: Hail to the King* (PS1, DC). *A Fistful of Boomstick* isn't a sequel, but an entirely new action game based on the signature *Evil Dead* formula of chain saw-wielding wiseass meets shambling zombie horde. Bruce Campbell voices Ash with predictable aplomb, thank goodness, with VIS (*State of Emergency*, *Earthworm Jim 3D*) handling development duties. In fact, *Evil Dead* is based on *State of Emergency*'s basic game engine, which means it should be able to handle dozens of bloodthirsty zombies all moaning and limping onscreen at once. We just hope the mission objectives are a little more interesting than *SOE*'s. Combat certainly will be, as Ash can wield two weapons at a time. And thanks to the magic of target autolocking, he'll be able to take out a zombie with a no-look, over-the-shoulder shotgun blast while chasing down another foe for some impromptu chainsaw surgery, delivering rapid-fire catch phrases all the while. Hail to the king, ba—hold up, maybe we should wait for the review...



Nothing takes the "un" out of "undead" like Ash's boomstick.



Ash also picks up a few magic attacks. Handy.



marc eckō
scopes

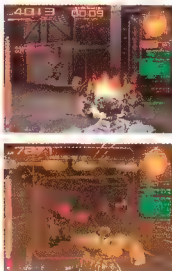


THE COSMO!



Armored Core 3: Silent Line

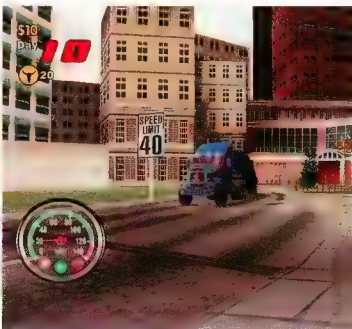
Agetec • Summer 2003 • Also On: None—When a developer just adds a subtitle to a game name instead of dubbing it a true sequel, you usually can't expect too much. But with *Silent Line*, Agetec says it will address the main complaint against its mission-based robot-combat series: Your mech's always been too slow! In addition to quicker controls, it also promises a wider selection of parts to trick out your robot, smarter backup mechs to assist you on missions, a new targeting feature that lets you selectively shoot parts of foes, and the ability to import your old 'bot from *Armored Core 3*. The only feature missing is online play, which was included in the Japanese version. (Grumble, grumble.)



Big Mutha Truckers

Empire Interactive • May 2003 • Also On: Xbox
Ma Jackson ain't a pretty lady. Hell, she barely passes for human. But somehow, she spawned four kids—with four different daddies, no less. Now, she's leaving her trucking company to the offspring who can make the most money runnin' goods from one place to the next. *Truckers* isn't just a racer, it's also a trading game where you buy various items and sell them for profit elsewhere. Of course, you have to learn the fastest routes between cities (that means loads of shortcuts, people). Along the way, you'll run from the cops and avoid motorcycle-gang hijackings. Oh, and you might have a couple run-ins with some of Ma's illegitimate children as well, of which there are quite a few.

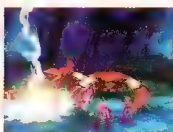
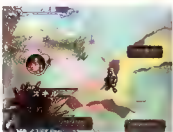
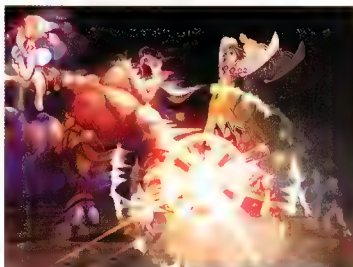
For some reason, this game reminds us of when Fudd beer made all of those hillbillies go blind....



Unlimited: SaGa

Square Enix U.S.A. • Summer 2003 • Also On: None
Finding a *Final Fantasy* aficionado among RPG fans is easy, but locating a fervent admirer of the *SaGa* games (Square's other long-running franchise) is much more difficult. It's not that *SaGa Frontier* and *SaGa Frontier 2* (PS1) were terrible games, but they were completely odd and never caught on with the mainstream.

Unlimited: SaGa is the series' first PS2 installment, and while it's still pretty damned weird, it's definitely interesting. With seven interrelated scenarios (some are supposedly 40 hours long) to be tackled in any order and a revolutionary art style that looks like animated sketches, *Unlimited* definitely breaks new ground for the genre. Problem is, the mind-warping difficulty, bizarre movement system (you don't actually walk around, so dungeons play almost like a board game), and wildly complex battle system (filled with more giant spinning wheels than your average game show) might scare off all but the most hardcore role-playing faithfuls.



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Blood and Gore
Violence

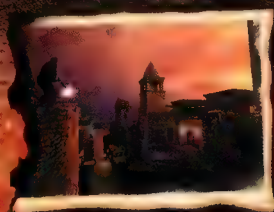


OVERTHROW HITLER'S EVIL EMPIRE.

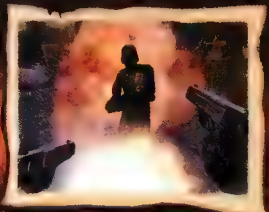
You are B.J. Blazkowicz, a US Army Ranger recruited by the OSA and the Allies' top specialist in covert operations, heavy weapons and assassination. Hitler's head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, is twisting science and the occult into an army capable of annihilating the Allies. The balance of victory is in your hands.

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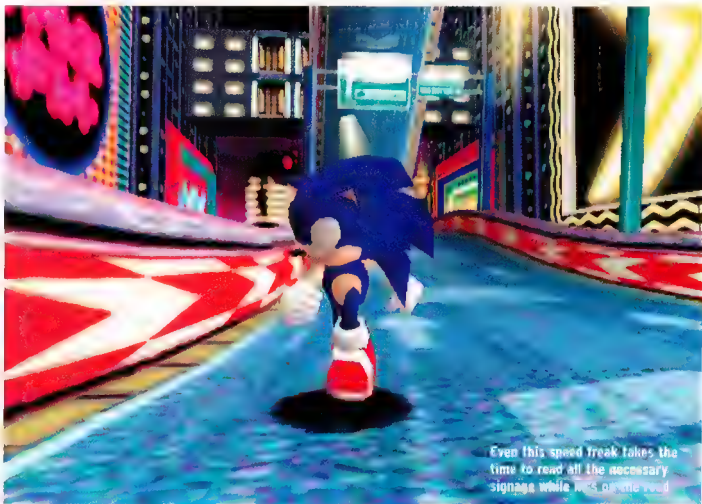
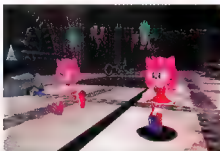
Screenshots taken from Xbox™ video game system and PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system gameplay.
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PREVIEW

Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut

Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	Sonic Team
Players:	1
Genre:	Action/Platformer
% Done:	65%
Release:	May 2003
Also On:	Dreamcast
Web Address:	www.sega.com
The Good:	GameCube owners finally receive Sonic's finest Dreamcast adventure.
The Bad:	It's basically the same game as before.
And The Ugly:	Dr. Robotnik's moustache. Somebody get that man a razor, quick!



Even this speed freak takes the time to read all the necessary signage while he's on the road.



Nope, that's not Sonic after he fell into a tub of bleach. It's Super Sonic, and you can only play as him and access the game's true ending if you complete all six characters' journeys. In the last stage, Sonic's abilities are upgraded to the max as he draws the emeralds' power and challenges Chaos' last form, Perfect Chaos. Even though it's a short level, it's an intense thrill ride that's a must-play for Sonic fans.

Rumors have circulated for years about two of today's most talented developers—Mario maker Shigeru Miyamoto and Sonic's pop Yuji Naka—working together on a secret game project, mainly because Naka-san often gives props to Miyamoto's work. So, while that secret project has yet to materialize, it's hardly surprising that Nintendo's systems have become the (so far) exclusive new playgrounds for Sega's speedy blue hedgehog.

Thankfully, after a subpar GameCube debut in *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle*, Sega's mascot returns in a slightly enhanced version of the original *Sonic Adventure* (which launched with Dreamcast in 1999). Unlike its sequel, this game—now sub-titled *DX: Director's Cut*—keeps the superstar rodent at center stage. (*Battle*, on the other hand, gave equal play-time to all of Sonic's superbuds, but only Sonic's

levels were superfun.)

The hedgehog's back, doing what he does best: foiling the plans of his egg-shaped, walrus-mustachioed nemesis, Dr. Robotnik, who has summoned a giant water monster called Chaos. Robotnik plans to turn Chaos into a 40-story killing machine by fueling him with Chaos Emeralds, so it's up to Sonic and his pals (more about them later) to find the emeralds first.

If you never played *Adventure* on Dreamcast, or its Cube sequel, buckle up—in this game, speed thrills. Backgrounds blur and levels corkscrew as Sonic bounds from platform to platform or boosts to max speed to outpace environmental hazards such as a titanic killer whale. *Adventure DX* features a wide range of locales, each with multiple objectives. In one wicked tornado level, you need to pounce on trampo-

LET'S CONNECT



The Tamagotchi-inspired Chao creatures star in *Adventure DX's* racing minigame. The more time you spend caring for them, the better they perform. You can also spoil the little guys on the road via the GC-GBA link cable. Just download the Chao Garden (where you care for the Chao creatures) to your GBA and head out. In order to save your Chao's progress, you'll need to download the garden into one of the three GBA Sonic titles—*Sonic Advance*, *Sonic Advance 2*, or *Sonic Pinball Party*. Otherwise, the garden disappears when you switch off the handheld.



line-like devices to skyrocket about. And when Sonic isn't retrieving gold rings or scouring for Chaos Emeralds, he'll face off against Robotnik and different Chaos-monster forms.

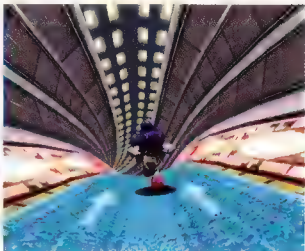
Like the title says, the game also includes adventure elements, but they're pretty basic; they mostly involve moving objects from point A to point B to access new stages. Sonic also finds upgrades along the way, such as new shoes that'll help him gain enough steam to conquer those mammoth loop-de-loops familiar to series vets. Sonic will also meet up with five familiar and not-so-familiar faces (see sidebar), who eventually become playable characters.

You might be asking, "What makes this game different from the Dreamcast version?"

The answer: not much. You can link up your Game Boy Advance to raise those cute and loveable Chao creatures for *Adventure DX's* racing minigame. And Sega is promising slicker visuals (in our version, the characters looked improved while most of the game appeared the same) and 50 new mini challenges (time trials, grab the rings, etc.). But it's a bummer Sonic Team didn't develop new areas for these additional missions, and you don't need to complete them to open up *Adventure DX's* much cooler ending.

We're a bit confused about why Sega decided to release the worst of the two *Sonic Adventure* games first, but hey, *Adventure DX's* arrival is better late than never. 🐾

—Bryan Intihara



SONIC AND FRIENDS

Sonic



Sonic's levels are so fast-paced, some might complain of motion sickness. Expect to collect numerous gold rings, race through stages in a designated time limit, and take on various Chaos forms.

Tails

Sonic's wingman gets time in the spotlight as he races Sonic and takes on Robotnik.



Knuckles



It's hard to tell whether Knuckles is Sonic's friend or if he's waiting for the perfect moment to take his place. Each of his stages requires finding three pieces of a broken emerald, which might explain why they are the least favorite among most Sonic fans.

Amy

Sonic's (intimate?) lady friend. You better show her some respect, because Amy comes armed with a hammer she ain't afraid to use.



Big the Cat

We're still trying to figure out why Sonic Team decided to let you take control of an overweight feline. In each stage, Big fishes for his lost frog. Zzzz...



E-102 Gamma



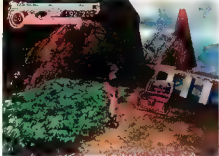
This Robotnik-designed robot eventually tells his creator to take a hike. E-102's levels consist of destroying everything in his path.



PREVIEW

Lost Kingdoms II

Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	From Software
Players:	1-2
Genre:	RPG
% DONE:	98%
Release:	May 2003
Also On:	None
Web Address:	www.activision.com
The Good:	Tons of new cards to find and upgrade
The Bad:	It's easy to waste cards by mistake
And The Ugly:	Use up all your cards and you're toast



Tara can barely go 50 feet without tripping over a chest with a new card in it. That's a good thing.



The first *Lost Kingdoms* was a cult favorite RPG, thanks to its epic story line and unusual but surprisingly intuitive battle system. *Lost Kingdoms II* improves upon these strengths and addresses many of the original's weaknesses, which just might lift its cult status and turn it into a GameCube RPG worthy of everyone's attention.

LKII takes place 200 years after the first game. Evil

You can transform your character *Altered Beast*-style.

wizards are threatening the Kingdom of Argwyll with synthesized Runestones—talismans that summon and control monsters. You play as Tara, a young girl raised by thieves and mysteriously possesses a true Runestone and is, in short, the kingdom's only hope. Who is Tara? Where'd she get one of them Runestones? You'll need to use the gem's power to answer these questions and protect the realm from invaders.

The original battle system returns for the sequel, with some key enhancements. As before, collectible magic cards allow you to summon creatures that fight on your behalf in real-time. With experience, you can improve the creatures' abilities. A new addition to the system lets you use multiple cards to launch powerful (and visually dazzling) combo attacks. And of course, you've got a much bigger deck to play with this time—of the 200 cards to discover and power up, half of them are brand new.

Having magical beasts fight for you is thrilling, sure, but sometimes you get a hankerin' to dish out a spank-

erin' without proxies. *LKII* has many new cards that let you attack enemies directly or transform your character *Altered Beast*-style and personally issue a beatdown. These transformation cards also help you solve puzzles and reach new areas—you can morph into an aerial creature to fly over a broken bridge, for example.

Battles happen in real-time, but—as in any good card game—there's still plenty of strategy. All cards have

associated elements that interact in rock-paper-scissors fashion: water defeats fire, fire defeats wood, and so on. Bear this in mind and use your cards wisely, lest you use all your creatures and attacks, leaving Tara defenseless like the waify girl she is. —Paul Byrnes

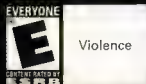


Kangaroo Jack begins his Elvis-esque descent into booze and overeating, 600 pounds and counting...

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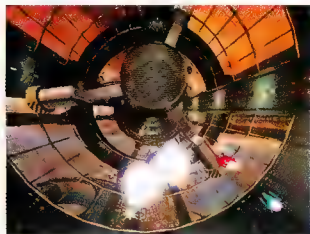


PREVIEW
GALLERY



TOKEN ENTRY

Players of the arcade version of *F-Zero* (which looks identical to the home version) can use their GameCube Memory Card to race their craft in the full-moving cabinet. Sega hasn't said whether such interfacing will unlock special characters or vehicles, but it seems likely.



F-Zero

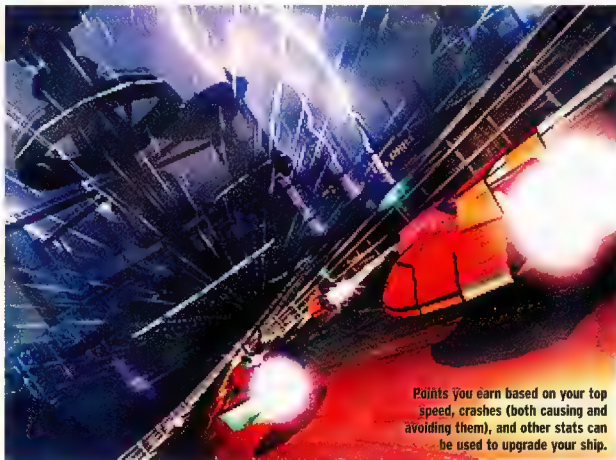
Nintendo • Summer 2003 • Also On: None
Andre Komatsubara is sweating.

It can't be the weather on this brisk winter morning that's got Japan's No. 1 *F-Zero* player (he won a Nintendo-sponsored tournament years ago) all hot-n-bothered. And it's certainly not from exerting himself—he's been shuffling through a line for the last hour. To borrow an old slogan, it's gotta be the game.

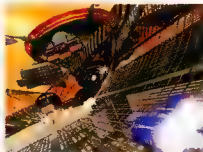
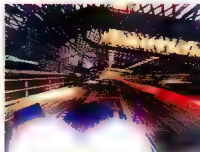
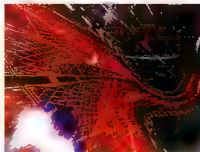
Andre has just finished his first play of the new *F-Zero*, the Sega-developed GameCube and arcade update to the famous hover-racing series. Having tried the same 50-percent-done version of *F-Zero* ourselves, we can understand why he's all shook up; this game is intense.

F-Zero has always been about speed, but this latest version makes previous incarnations feel like a trip to pick up the kids from soccer practice. Colorful buildings and bright neon signs blur as you streak through the wild, futuristic cityscapes—and that's before you hit any of the strategically placed turbo pads or your boost button. Then, things get even faster.

The track designs only add to the chaos. Sometimes, courses split in two, with both roads twisting around until one is suspended, level down, above the other. Another unique level is actually one long, twisting cylinder—you ride along the outside at any point on its




Points you earn based on your top speed, crashes (both causing and avoiding them), and other stats can be used to upgrade your ship.



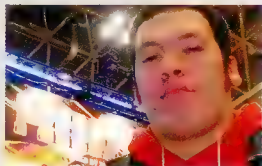
360 degrees. And the jumps? Once, we hit a ramp at such an insane speed, we clocked a 10-second hang time before landing. Yeah, you'd be sweating too.

Oh, and there's always the chance your ship might explode, since its energy meter goes down each time you use a boost, hit the side of the track, or run into another racer (as the one to three other splitscreen players and up to 30 computer-controlled opponents are well aware). If you don't refuel by driving over spe-

cial sections of the course, you'll lose precious seconds docking with a repair ship.

Many questions still remain about *F-Zero*: How many courses will be offered? What new characters are planned? And when exactly will the game be released in America? Andre certainly doesn't know, but as he wipes his brow and moves to the back of the hour-long line for five more minutes of *F-Zero*, he does offer some advice: "When you play, don't wear a lot of clothes." 

ZERO HERO: A 30-SECOND INTERVIEW WITH F-ZERO CHAMP ANDRE KOMATSUBARA



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EGM: So, you won an *F-Zero* competition?
Andre Komatsubara: Yes. It was a no-handicap contest with more than 30 contestants. But I was the only battle racer among them.

EGM: Battle racer...?
AK: I love playing rough, you know? I don't like just racing through the track to win. I want to use side attacks, wreck the other players, and then win.

EGM: Doesn't going out of your way to attack others make it tougher to win?
AK: Oh yeah, it definitely makes it tougher to win, but I can't help it. That's what I love about *F-Zero*. Usually, racing games are just about who can drive the fastest. But in *F-Zero*, you can also wreck other cars. Not just push them away—actually crash them. [laughs] I don't like Time Attack mode—I want to compete with others and win.

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VIOLENCE



PlayStation 2



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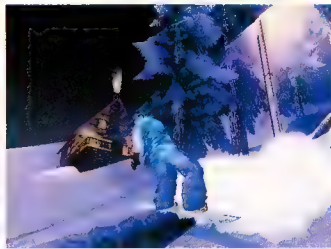
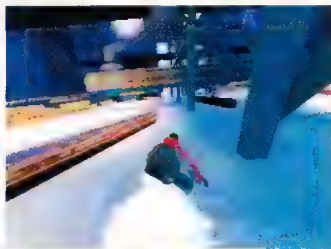
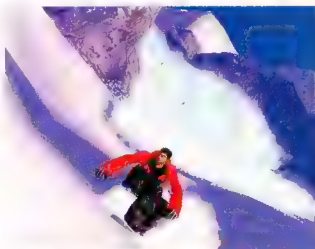


1080° Avalanche

Nintendo • Summer 2003 • Also On: None

It's been more than five years since the original 1080° first raced onto Nintendo 64, but Nintendo's snowboarding franchise is *finally* strapped in and geared up for a return on GameCube this summer. You'll travel to areas reachable only by helicopter where the fresh powder is as soft as a feather bed, but collapsing wooden bridges and falling evergreens make your downhill journey ever so dangerous. Also, be on the lookout for monstrous avalanches that can make you the next great snowboarder to grace the obituary pages.

The action gets even crazier when you add tricks such as Toe-grabs and Rail Slides to your repertoire, all while trying to stay in front of the pack. Combine this with a two-player Versus mode, and 1080° *Avalanche* is primed to please snowboard junkies (like *EGM* editors Crispin and Shoe) who are desperate to extend their riding season.

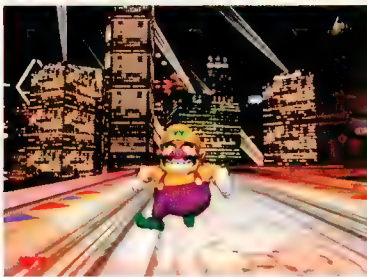
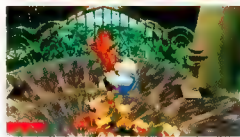
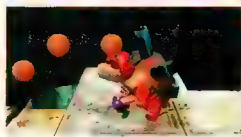


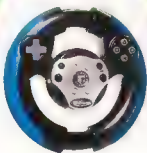
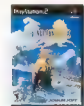
Wario World

Nintendo • May 2003 • Also On: None

You can't keep a good bad guy—or in Wario's case, a psychotic Italian leprechaun—down. At right are the latest screens of *Wario World*, a 3D side-scrolling action game in which you take control of Wario's evil twin as he tries to regain his riches from the clutches of a mysterious black diamond that's changed the loot into a horde of baddies.

Unlike Wario's portable adventures, *World's* gameplay is straight-up action, so he has new ways of dealing with enemies instead of the ol' run-into-them-elbow-first routine. For instance, you can now grab and twirl a foe around, knocking other nearby enemies out of the way, or lift him up and perform a floor-shaking pile driver, creating a ripple through the ground that'll knock other enemies on their asses. Or, if it's simplicity you prefer, you can always toss your foes into a background object. Any way you decide to go, once you've dispatched a bad guy, he turns back into the lost treasure and brings you ever closer to discovering who did this to your fortune. Look at it this way: It's the closest thing we'll ever get to a licensed game for *Leprechaun in the Hood*. "I want me gold!"





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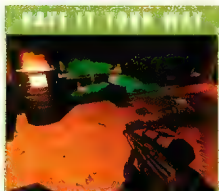
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PREVIEW

Deus Ex 2: The Invisible War

- Platform:** PC
- Developer:** Ion Storm
- Players:** 1
- Genre:** First-person shooter, action-RPG
- % Done:** 65%
- Release:** Winter 2003
- Plot Dir.:** None
- Web Address:** eidosinteractive.com
- The Good:** Customizable heroes, multiple solutions for every puzzle, great weapons and tools
- The Bad:** No multiplayer options, and Ion Storm isn't sure about Xbox Live support
- And The Ugly:** Bye-bye, Chicago



Choosing your character's sex and abilities is just the start of the gameplay options *Deus Ex 2* presents. For instance, lighting will be dynamic to the point that you can create shadows to hide in, or you can shoot gas barrels to unleash a toxic cloud that causes your enemies to choke and die in horrific fashion. From what we've seen of it, it's clear that you'll impose your will on the game, and not the other way around.

Deus Ex 2 begins with a bang, not a whimper, according to Ion Storm's Project Lead Harvey Smith. "We start the game by killing off everyone in Chicago," he says.

That tragedy, apparently sparked by terrorists, forms the backdrop of this new first-person shooter-cum-action/role-playing game...but beyond cryptic mention of human cells as an invisible weapon in an invisible war, the developers are keeping mum on the plot.

We do know that *Deus Ex 2* is set in the not-too-distant future—roughly 15 years after the events in the original game. This time, you'll jump into the role of Alex D—a secret agent of sorts—and you choose whether Alex is male or female. Since nanotechnology has become more commonplace in this brave new

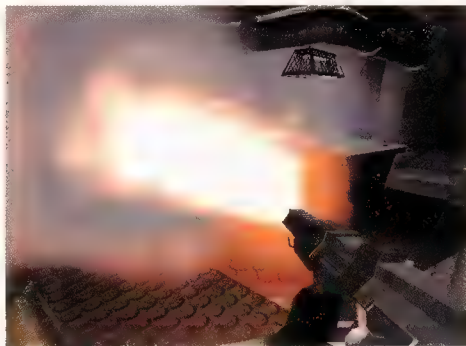
world, you'll improve your hero using special neural interface bio-modification chips. Render him/her a brutish figure strong enough to kill enemies by picking up crates and using them as projectiles, or create a stealthy sort who can slink through the entire game without ever picking up a weapon. Or, aim for some point in between.

"It's your experience," says Ion Storm's Studio Director Warren Spector. "We want to empower players. We want them to create the experience while we get out of the way."

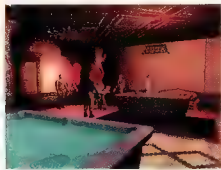
That's *DE2*'s biggest draw: the freedom it presents to players. Modification chips (some of them illegal) boost strength, suck energy from the dead, or make you tough as steel. One particularly useful (and shady) biomod will allow you to possess the game's



We think it was Shakespeare who said, "Oh, brave new world, with such buff crocodile-dogs and surly bartenders in it."



Above: Play it sneaky or shoot him
Above left: Happiness is a warm gun
Below: Some wild and/or crazy guys



"We want to empower players. We want them to create the experience." — Ion Storm Studio Director Warren Spector

droids. With it enabled, Alex D can saunter into a room as a cleaning robot (no one ever suspects the cleaning robot), eavesdrop on an important conversation, leave, then possess an ass-whomping military robot, storm into the same room, and lay waste to foes with extreme prejudice.


Smith and Spector don't want to reveal much more about the game just yet, but they have said that *DE2* will take you to Seattle, Cairo, an Antarctic base (inspired, they admit, by John Carpenter's *The Thing*), and a number of additional spots around the globe. Ion Storm has written approximately 20,000 lines of text for the game. Like its predecessor, *DE2* will have multiple endings.

The game looks delightful in motion, with highly detailed characters; menacing, burnished-metal robots; and even cool, bump-mapped (a graphics technique only Xbox and PCs are capable of) sofas that, Spector laments, currently look like a dinosaur's hide. We're a little concerned about the game's A.I. after seeing a character run into a table and get stuck there, but it's still early, and the game looks very promising.

"We're using everything Xbox has to offer," Smith says, remarking that this version will be identical to the PC game in look and content. You'll be able to judge that for yourself when the game ships at the end of this year. ♣ — Greg Orlando

BY THE WAY, THE BOB KILLER

"In a really good game, you're not just increasing your character's stats, you're also figuring out who you are," Warren Spector says, telling a story that illustrates how different people's experiences can be with *Deus Ex 2*. "My wife was playing an [early] version of the game, and she accidentally killed a dog. It squeaked horribly and fell to the ground in a spreading pool of blood. She was so upset by it, she refused to play. The consequences of her act were so overwhelming, she had an emotional response to a virtual act of violence. That's what it's all about! There's no other medium that can do that."





PREVIEW

Black 9

-  Majesco
-  Taldren
-  1 (2-16 Online)
-  Third-person shooter/RPG
-  40%
-  November 2003
-  Might come to PS2
-  www.majesco-games.com

The Game: A twist on action games plus lots of Xbox Live love

The Story: Why isn't there a first-person mode?

And The Why: Flashbacks of the Tom Selleck movie, *Runaway*, while getting swarmed by spider-bots

WHO ARE THE BLACK 9?

Here's a list of the different illuminati factions you need to deal with during the game and where they originated....

Genesis – The Sega system evolves into a robotics and A.I. company.

Zubrin Group – Based upon Dr. Robert Zubrin's theories on space colonization

The Tea-Drinking Society – Oriental mysticism and countless kung fu flicks

The Black Dragons – The Sopranos meets the Triads.

EarthNOW! – *GameNOW* editors become radical environmentalists.

New World Order – Old-world government, Dbya style—God help us all.

Glimmer A.G. – As Oliver Stone puts it, the "military-industrial complex."

My Private Money – Sounds like a bad financial dot-com, doesn't it?

La Société de la Luminière Mon Dieu! The French eventually take over the media.



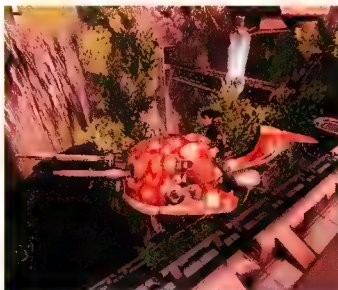
Majesco has been almost as enigmatic about its new title, *Black 9*, as the nine secret societies the game is named after. Is it an RPG? Is it a third-person sci-fi action game? Is it an even more aggressive *Unreal Championship*? Actually, it's a mix of all those things, with a deep, story-driven single-player campaign and ambitious multiplayer modes.

CEO Erik Bethke at developer Taldren foresees a rather dull future, at least by videogame standards. "Not much is going to change 78 years from now," he says. "There's no apocalypse, no World War III, no clichéd, bleak cyberpunk future." Luckily, there will be plenty of cybernetic technological developments and duplicitous, warring secret societies to keep us busy in 2081. In an effort to keep spoilers to a minimum, we'll leave it at this: You'll find a linear but plot-twist-riddled single-player campaign where you'll cross paths with the nine different illuminati

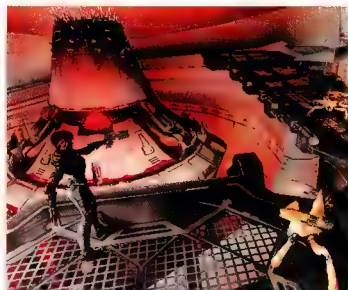
sects as you fly to Hong Kong, the moon, and Mars.

On the surface, *Black 9* looks like your standard-issue third-person action-adventure game, but it actually has the story and character growth of an RPG. Take, for example, your three alter egos in the game: There's the military bruiser, a stealthy hacker/thief, and a cyber mage with nanotech "magic" abilities. But just because you play as a soldier doesn't mean you have to blast and bash your way through the entire game. If you develop hacking skills or buy nanotech upgrades, other ways to achieve each objective present themselves. Bethke was quick to bust out old *Dungeons & Dragons* references, saying players can be any permutation of a multiclassed magic user, fighter, or thief—or you can create a jack-of-all-trades (note: not an official *D&D* character class).

With every completed mission, you gain attributes



Go for a spin on a hoverbike à la *Halo*.



Babbage—the big computer—sends in the drones.

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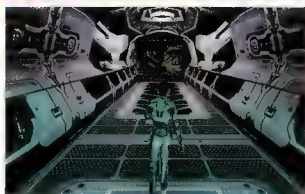
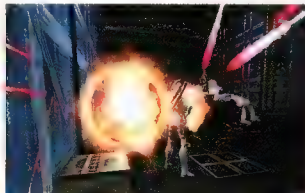
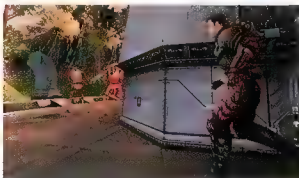


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and skill points that increase your potential. And with all the credits you earn on the job, you'll also be able to fine-tune your mercenary with brand-new weapons, supplies, and nanotech implants. Screw the clothes—it's the stats that make the man.

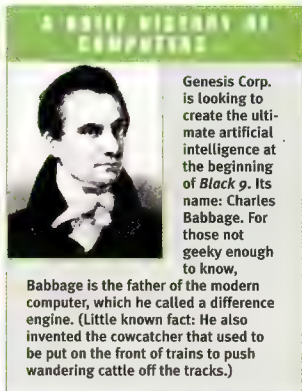
In the early build we played, only a handful of standard-issue ballistic weapons were in place. Handguns, machine pistols, and the like were fired from a third-person chase-cam perspective, while some sniper weapons push you into a first-person view. Ultimately, *Black 9* will include grenades, mines, detonation packs, crossbows, and much more—roughly 20 weapons in all. And vehicles? In our demo, we boarded a hoverbike, donned a flight pack, and climbed into an assault ground car. Word



has it six to eight vehicles will be available.

But it's the variety of 30 different skill and nanotech upgrades that impressed us most. Some are bland but helpful, like those that improve targeting or give you onscreen stats of enemies in view. But then there's the genuinely cool new inventions; Urban Tracking, for instance, turns you into a cyber bloodhound able to see stray DNA molecules that come off your prey (they appear onscreen as colored blips that fade over time). Or take the magnetic grappling hook that lets you work out your Spider-Man fantasies as you swing through the levels. Other nanotech-based skills work a lot like magic in most fantasy RPGs. Five schools of spells are planned, one for each of the four elements and another called drain, which focuses on leeching health, mental energy, and chi (used for spell-casting and other cyber skills).

The single-player campaign is shaping up to be a huge character-building quest, but



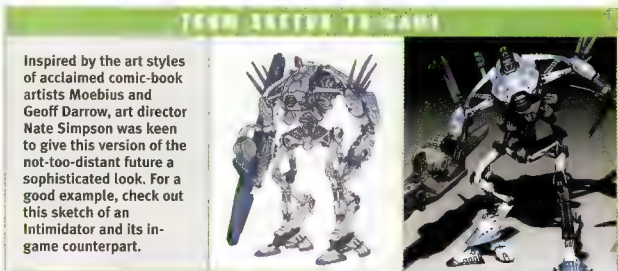
Genesis Corp. is looking to create the ultimate artificial intelligence at the beginning of *Black 9*. Its name: Charles Babbage. For those not geeky enough to know,

Babbage is the father of the modern computer, which he called a difference engine. (Little known fact: He also invented the cowcatcher that used to be put on the front of trains to push wandering cattle off the tracks.)

Taldren also has some big multiplayer plans in store via Xbox Live. You'll get a Co-op mode, where you can go through the whole game online with a buddy, as well as combat scenarios supporting up to 16 players. Bethke explains, "We're using the backstory of *Black 9* to pit mercenary agents of the various Illuminati in thematic scenarios. There will be capture-and-hold matches like in [the PC game] *Battlefield 1942*, rescue/kidnap a VIP missions, and scenarios that have you hacking into or defending important installations." Multiplayer will also sport additional crafts not available in the single-player game.

The developers still have plenty to do before *Black 9*'s November target date, but Taldren is definitely onto something. The only mystery left is figuring out what we're anticipating the most: seeing the finished graphical flourishes, the single-player action/RPG experience, or the multiplayer scenario-based matches. 🎮

— Darren Gladstone



Inspired by the art styles of acclaimed comic-book artists Moebius and Geoff Darrow, art director Nate Simpson was keen to give this version of the not-too-distant future a sophisticated look. For a good example, check out this sketch of an Intimidator and its in-game counterpart.



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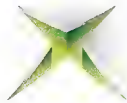
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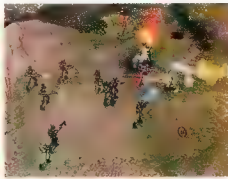


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Aliens vs. Predator: Extinction

Electronic Arts • Summer 2003 • Also On: PS2—You might assume this would be a first-person shooter like the last two *Aliens vs. Predator* PC games...but you'd be wrong. Oddly enough, *Extinction* is a console-exclusive real-time strategy game in which you build and battle armies, à la *Starcraft*. You'll play mission-based levels as the colonial marines, Predators, or Aliens, and each team has its own abilities. For instance, the marines use the latest hi-tech weaponry, Predators rely on their advanced stealth technology, and Aliens attack en masse and impregnate their foes. Every unit you'd expect—from Alien facehuggers to marines in exosuits—will be present, as well as new creatures like the Predator Hydra and Alien Ravager. And special weapons like the Marine's airstrike will have you using movie quotes like, "I say we nuke it from orbit. It's the only way to be sure."



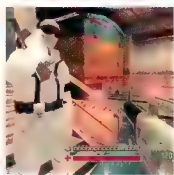
Wakeboarding Unleashed featuring Shawn Murray

Activision O2 • June 2003 • Also On: PS2—What's this? *Tony Hawk* tied to a towline? More or less, since you can expect to experience a familiar, Zen-like oneness with *Murray's* masterful controls. Aside from the obvious differences between riding water and asphalt, it's the wakeboarder's ability to cut and reconnect to his tether on command that distinguishes this latest O2 entry. (In one of several imaginative locations, it's possible to grind the length of a roller coaster before returning to your leash.) In addition to the now-standard Trick attack and H.O.R.S.E. challenges, two players can take turns at the wheel and on the wake. And in Tug-o-War, tandem wakeboarders score points that shorten one another's lines until someone is torn to pieces by the boat's propeller.



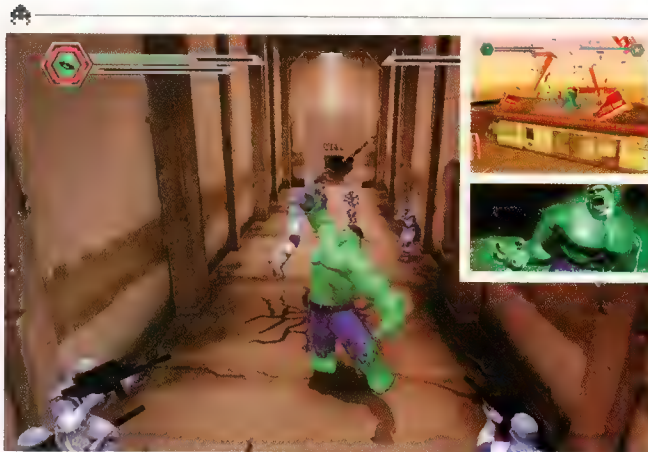
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix

Activision • June 2003 • Also On: None—Assume the role of John Mullins, a merc working for the antiterrorist group The Shop, in the hyperrealistic (and extremely gory) first-person shooter *Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix*. As in the first *Soldier* (PC, PS2, and DC), Mullins tackles everything from hostage rescues to search-and-destroy missions, wielding more than a dozen meticulously re-created real-world weapons. State-of-the-art modeling and animation, location-specific damage, and scenarios based on Mullins' experiences (he's a former Special Forces officer) lend authenticity to the game. Bad guys await your bullets in such diverse locales as Prague, Hong Kong, and Kamchatka. Best of all, *Double Helix* supports various forms of online bloodletting (Deathmatch, Team DM, Elimination, and Infiltration) via Xbox Live.





PREVIEW
GALLERY



The Hulk

Universal Interactive • May 2003 • Also On: PS2, GC—No longer just a supporting member in the *Marvel vs. Capcom* franchise, the Hulk gets top billing at the box office and on your consoles this summer. In this game set one year after the film, the Hulk's nemesis, The Leader, plots to destroy Earth by creating an army of gamma-irradiated creatures, forcing the not-so-mild-mannered scientist Bruce Banner to unleash the greener side of his personality. In some levels, you'll play as the less-confrontational Banner (voiced by the film's star, Eric Bana) and use stealth to complete the mission at hand. As the Hulk, you'll let loose on hordes of military personnel, destroy buildings like they're made from papier mâché, and prove once and for all who's the strongest one there is.



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PREVIEW
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Rent-a-Hero No. 1

AIA Games • Spring 2003 • Also On: None—Believe it or not, he's walking on air! When a mild-mannered suburban kid finds a costume that gives him special powers, he sets out to make good use of them. You'd probably guess he'd beat up criminals and foil an arch villain's plans—and he does—but he also finds time for more lighthearted tasks. He reconciles feuding lovers, saves pets from trees, and runs errands (at superspeed, no less) for his neighbors. Although this quirky RPG was previously released in Japan for Sega's Mega Drive and Dreamcast, this spiffed-up Xbox version will be its U.S. introduction.



Starsky & Hutch

Empire Interactive • June 2003 • Also On: PS2—Streetwise Starsky and soft-spoken Hutch, true friends and partners, fight crime their own way over the objections of their tough-as-nails but well-meaning captain. If that sounds trite, it's because *Starsky & Hutch* (broadcast 1975 to 1979) became the archetype for virtually every TV buddy-cop show since. The game features the loose-cannon cops, the classic red-and-white Ford Gran Torino, pimpish informant Huggy Bear, and a whole lot of mission-based driving and shooting. True to the spirit of the show, *Starsky & Hutch* encourages vehicular mayhem, fierce gunplay, and teamwork. That's right—two-player cooperative play means one partner can concentrate on driving like a maniac while the other makes the bullets hit the criminals. And yes, support for steering-wheel and light-gun controllers is planned. Man, this is sure looking better than the those old *Dukes of Hazzard* games...



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Now, we slip you the pills for our exclusive hands-on look at

ENTER THE MATRIX

By Bryan Intihar

Larry and Andy Wachowski, the notoriously secretive filmmakers behind the *Matrix* movies, don't want you reading this story. We just spent a full day as the first outsiders to play *Enter the Matrix*, the PlayStation 2, GameCube, and Xbox game based on the Wachowskis' cybermystical universe. It doesn't hit your console until May 15—the same day *The Matrix Reloaded*, the first movie sequel, materializes in theaters—but we've already seen and played too much.

And we're ready to talk. We'll tell you about things—how the game's story unfolds, how its hyperactive kung fu combat really works, how you can actually hack into your game console—that no other magazine has seen.

All you must do is choose between two paths.

Swallow the red pill to transport yourself to the fantasy world that is *Enter the Matrix*. Head back to reality with the blue pill if you want to know who truly orchestrated this massive undertaking. (Here's a hint: It wasn't the game's developer.) To quote Morpheus from the first *Matrix* film: "We have shown you the door. You must walk through it."



Eat me!
 Follow the red pill for our exclusive hands-on preview. Enter the Matrix. We'll reveal...

- The bonus driving missions—pg. 103
- How to hack your console—pg. 106
- How the kung fu really works—pg. 109

No, eat me!
 Choke down the blue pill for a dose of behind-the-scenes reality. Get on down the blue road for...

- The Wachowskis' secrets—pg. 102
- An insider's look at the flick—pg. 104
- The game's stars fess up—pg. 108

Artwork by Chuck Ernst





Shiny told us that the Xbox version (shown here) will pack sharper graphics and more eye candy. And while the game fits onto a single DVD for PS2 and Xbox, the GameCube version will be a two-disc set.



ENTER THE MATRIX—BLUE PILL

If you want a simple gauge of how involved the Wachowski brothers were in making the *Enter the Matrix* videogame, think about this: The brothers had to approve every screenshot you see on these pages. Yep, these guys are obsessed. They logged major frequent-flier miles zipping to the offices of Shiny Entertainment, the game's developer, to see how things were progressing, or they had Shiny staff fly out to the movie set in Australia with updated versions of the game. The brothers even produced the first *Enter the Matrix* trailer. Throughout development of the game, the Wachowskis would conjure up new scenes that would require additional last-minute

filming. They even had Jada Pinkett Smith (who plays Niobe, one of the game's main characters) fly back to Australia to shoot additional scenes just for *Enter the Matrix*. "The crew that worked on these scenes in Australia literally walked off the set shaking their heads going, 'I can't believe we just did that for a videogame,'" says Shiny President David Perry.

Enter the collaboration

But Perry isn't grousing about the Wachowskis' control-freakery. After all, the brothers are hardcore gamers, as well as filmmaking wonderboys—they know what it takes to make a good game. And Perry's just happy to have the opportunity to make *Enter the Matrix* after his company kissed away the opportunity—because of "bad timing," he says—back when the Wachowskis first shopped around the license (when they were working on the original film). Shiny got a second shot at it only after both *Metal Gear Solid* creator Hideo Kojima and *Halo* developer Bungie Studios turned the project down (the brothers are huge *Halo* fans). "I think they [the brothers] were looking for a combination of the technology we were able to demonstrate along with a shared opinion of what this game could be," says Perry, explaining why the Wachowskis gave Shiny another shot.

The Wachowskis Don't Play GameCube...

...and 9 other things you don't know about the men behind *The Matrix*

Larry and Andy Wachowski, the auteurs behind the *Matrix* films, are so secretive, they have a no-publicity clause in their contracts. Doesn't matter: We still dug up some dirt.

10. Both are young: Andy is 35; Larry is 37.
9. They were raised on the mean streets of Chicago.
8. Marvel Comics hired them to write the obscure and unsuccessful series *Ectokid*.
7. The Wachowskis' first screenplay, *Carnivore*, never made it to the big screen.
6. According to Jada Pinkett Smith, who plays Niobe, the Wachowskis are obsessive over their actors' hairstyles.
5. It's rumored that, after the *Matrix* trilogy, the brothers want to make a movie based on the comic-book series *Plastic Man*.
4. They are huge fans of videogames and Japanese animation.
3. Their favorite gaming genres are *action* and *role-playing* games.
2. A recent game fave is *Splinter Cell* (Xbox).
1. The Wachowskis own a PlayStation 2 and an Xbox, but not a GameCube.



ENTER THE MATRIX—RED PILL

It took almost three years to get our hands on a *Matrix*-based videogame, but we finally logged exclusive playtime at the offices of *Enter the Matrix*'s developer, Shiny Entertainment (best known for the Genesis/Super NES-era *Earthworm Jim* and *MDK* for PS1). We uncovered never-before-seen levels, picked about 100 fights with some familiar (as well as new) *Matrix* enemies, and discovered just how deep this rabbit hole goes.

It begins with a package

Enter the Matrix's plot has been shrouded in mystery...until now. It turns out the Wachowski brothers decided that both the



second film, *The Matrix Reloaded*, and the game would pick up where the last of *The Animatrix* animated shorts (see sidebar on page 105) ends. In that final episode, you watch the rebel hovercraft Osiris stumble upon evil machines drilling a hole through Earth. Before the hovercraft is ravished by thousands of tentacled-robot sentinels, a crewmember drops off a package at a mailbox inside the Matrix. The package contains a message about the machines' advances toward the last human city of Zion. This is where *Enter the Matrix* kicks off.

Rather than having you play the game as the all-powerful Neo (played by Keanu Reeves in the films), the Wachowskis wanted to go in another direction and build upon the second film's events by telling a parallel



Mystery men: The super Wachowski brothers Andy (left) and Larry (right).

"They knew we weren't going to go off and try to mess up their design or break everything they wanted to see happen." The two groups—the filmmakers and game makers—then set off to give people an all-new experience: a movie-based game that doesn't stink.

While Shiny began developing a cross-platform game engine, the Wachowskis spent the end of 2000 putting the finishing touches on the game's script. Wait—whazzat? A game script? That's right...the brothers wrote an entirely new story for *Enter the Matrix*, spanning 244 pages and featuring three of the movie sequel's supporting characters. The Wachowskis then broke new ground by filming an hour of footage solely for the videogame at the same time they were shooting *The Matrix: Reloaded* and *The Matrix:*

Revolutions. By incorporating this new footage into a videogame, the brothers were able to expand their sci-fi universe without having to cram too much stuff into the next two movies. That means *Matrix* fans will get the whole story only if they play the game as well as see the movies, and Perry promises that players who go through *Enter the Matrix* will be in for some real surprises that will make the movie experience that much more rewarding. Gamers will have a better understanding of certain events in *Reloaded* because they're triggered by what transpires in the videogame. For example, in the game, there's a balls-to-the-wall driving mission that ends with you entering right into a scene from *Reloaded*. If you only see the movie, you just see Niobe arrive, and you miss out on the dra-

Leave the Driving to Niobe

Racing mini-missions give your fists of fury a rest

Enter the Matrix breaks up its kung-fu glory with four vehicle missions in two variations, depending on whether you play as Niobe or Ghost.

Speed-freak Niobe does all the driving. In this mission, you must race to the nearest hard line (remember the ringing phones from the first movie?) out of the Matrix. Another requires you to listen for police sirens so you can locate and rescue other rebels. It all feels more like the racing in *Grand Theft Auto* than *Gran Turismo*.

If you play as Ghost, you do all the shooting. Ghost will hang out the passenger window with firearms and take out trailing police cruisers and agents. While in control of Niobe, you can also activate Ghost and have him autotarget any enemies in close proximity to the vehicle as you dodge oncoming traffic.

Shiny also included one long hovercraft mission set at the very end of the game. Again, Niobe acts as the pilot while Ghost mans the weapons, trying to keep a sentinel sector at bay.



matic chase that took place beforehand.

Still, one hour of exclusive movie footage was not enough for the brothers to tell their story. The game's script also includes more than an hour of cut-scenes that Shiny created using the game's graphics engine. "These scenes help keep the game flowing," Perry says. "The movie footage is usually a payoff that explains something that has happened." The motion-capture process used to create the scenes—filmed in the United States and Australia—took six months. The film's fight choreographer, Yuen Wo Ping, and his stunt team also completed the motion capture, to ensure that the game's combat system would feature the same stunning martial arts moves made famous in the original *Matrix* movie.

The Wachowskis also demanded



story that further explains the Matrix's ins and outs. To accomplish this, the game includes two playable heroes, Niobe and Ghost, who are supporting characters in the next two *Matrix* movies. You pick the character you want, then start the game.

Just as the plots of *Reloaded* and *Enter the Matrix*'s intertwine, so do Niobe and Ghost's paths. Both start the game in a post office where they must retrieve that all-important package left by the Osiris crew. The two then go on separate journeys, but ultimately reunite down the road. In the power plant stage, for example, your goal as Niobe is to make it through the level without falling victim to heavily armed SWAT members. But as Ghost, your job is to back up Niobe and snipe unsuspecting enemies before they whack her. The two also work together in the driving and hovercraft missions (see sidebar on page 103).

Although Neo, Morpheus, and Trinity will never do your bidding in the game, they fre-



It won't be this easy for Niobe when the notorious Agent Smith arrives on the scene.



Like *Metal Gear*'s Solid Snake, Niobe can peek around corners, scouting the area for threats.

quently appear in the movie footage and in-game cut-scenes. *Enter the Matrix* features approximately 80 characters, and Shiny promises you'll confront all the big-league bad guys, including Agent Smith and the odd-looking, silver-dreadlocked twins who first show up in the movie sequels. While playing the game, we also met freaky vampire-like enemies. Finishing them off required the use of—you guessed it—a wooden stake, à la *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Shiny President David Perry wouldn't explain the origin of these oddball creatures, saying it would give away too much of the story

before the movie's May 15 debut.

I know more than kung fu

Of course, your method of doing away with the game's army of agents, evil twins, and other ripped-from-the-flick nogoodniks is no secret: Both main characters know *Matrix*-style martial arts moves that make Steven Seagal look like a bloated has-been (well, more so than usual). *Enter the Matrix* replicates the movies' high-flying martial arts with a combat system that combines souped-up chop-socky techniques with 24 different

(continued on page 108)

Death from Above: Slowing down the game via the Focus button (see pg. 109) gives your character's punches and kicks that extra "oomph" needed to take the enemy down with one perfectly executed move, as playable dude Ghost demonstrates in these two screenshots.

EGM Goes Hollywood

One editor turns in an extra-special performance



Acting!

Squint hard during *The Matrix Reloaded* and you'll spy EGM Reviews Editor Shane Bettenhausen as Background Driver No. 32 during a mega car chase, then later as Crash Survivor No. 3. Let's debate this star's ego...

EGM: How'd you land the gig as an extra?
Shane: I saw a casting call online and tried out with friends. Two of us got the callback.

EGM: Carrie-Anne Moss: thong or old-lady panties?

SB: All my encounters with Carrie were brief and, sadly, did not involve her briefs.

EGM: What accessories will your Guy-With-a-Head-Wound action figure feature?

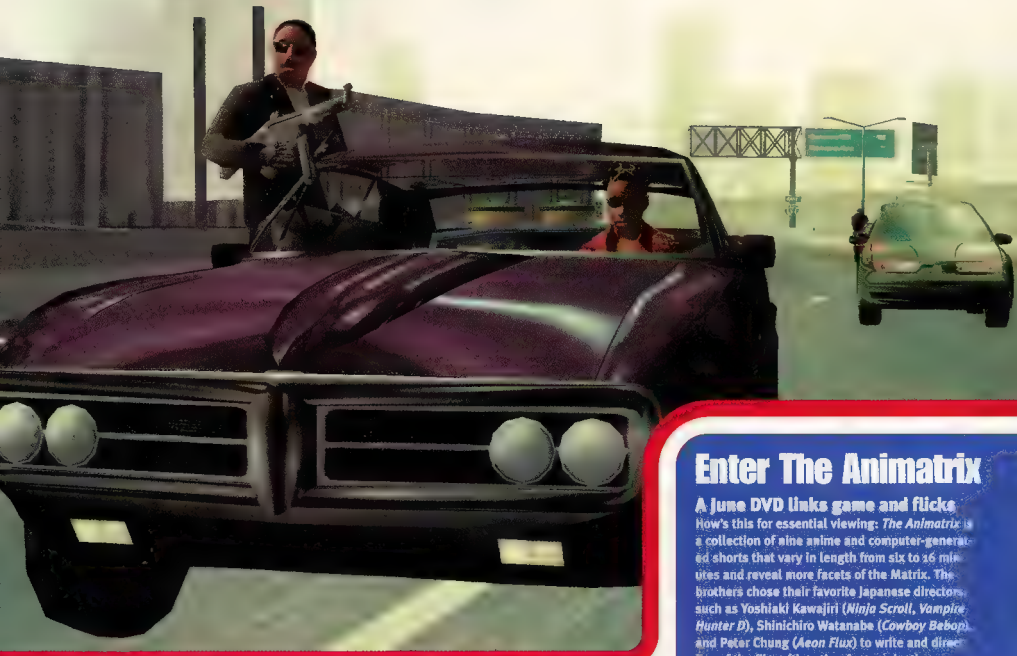
SB: A flannel shirt, sunscreen for the 40-hour shoots, and a deep sense of ennui.

EGM: Right, so how does the movie end?

SB: I dunno. The scenes we shot were all in the middle. I think—unless the movie ends with a semi crashing into a bunch of cars or a big dance number in Zion.

EGM: Will you trot the red carpet May 15?

SB: Nope. Even the finest background actors are snubbed when it comes to the big premiere. I'll just be the guy in the theater screaming, "That's me!"



Enter The Animatrix

A June DVD links game and flicks

How's this for essential viewing: *The Animatrix* is a collection of nine anime and computer-generated shorts that vary in length from six to 36 minutes and reveal more facets of the Matrix. The brothers chose their favorite Japanese directors, such as Yoshiaki Kawajiri (*Ninja Scroll*, *Vampire Hunter D*), Shinichiro Watanabe (*Cowboy Bebop*), and Peter Chung (*Aeon Flux*) to write and direct five of the films (the other four are by the Wachowskis). The team that created the

→ that Shiny deliver additional game content that every player would want to experience, but would not be able to access easily. "They had us make it so players will get to have a sparring match with Trinity," Perry adds as an example, "but they will skip right over that part unless the player does what is necessary in the game to reach it." The point? Replayability. "When people see screenshots in magazines of Trinity fighting, they'll say, 'Whoa! Who's fighting Trinity? I didn't do that,'" says Perry.

Aladdin on steroids

This isn't the first time Perry has worked with a famous Hollywood franchise. In 1992, he developed a Sega Genesis game based on the first *Terminator* movie. Perry describes it as "the worst thing ever." Movie executives set up so many obstacles, it became nearly impossible for him to create a quality game. He was forced to base it on a character, Kyle Reese, who dies in the first movie—there couldn't be a Sarah Connor character, and the game's main enemy was indestructible. Perry had better luck with *Disney's Aladdin* (1993, Sega Genesis) because the directors were into videogames, and he was able to work with the movie's animation team. But the *Enter the Matrix* project has involved so much more cooperation with the filmmakers, Perry likens

it to "Aladdin on steroids."

For instance, when it came time to choose the motion-capture studio for the game, Shiny teamed up with the film's Oscar-winning visual-effects supervisor, John Gaeta, so the team could reach the level of quality the brothers wanted. "When the Wachowskis have something in their mind they would like to see, they go for it," explains Perry. "They say, 'This is what we want to see. Find a way to get it done.'" Even if everybody comes back to them saying it's not possible, the Wachowskis' philosophy is to scour the earth and find someone who can make their dreams a reality.

Even the game's publisher, Infogrames (Atari label), is upping the production values. The company plans to release a 30-minute *Making of Enter the Matrix* DVD (produced by the same people who put together the film's DVDs) some time this year. Don't be surprised this Christmas to see a special edition of *Enter the Matrix* bundled with the extra DVD.

Which first: movie or game?

All of this unprecedented collaboration between the Wachowskis and Shiny leaves us with one white-hot question: Do we need to see *Reloaded* before playing the game, since both plots intersect? Perry says yes. "The game has good things in it that would give away some secrets you don't



linked *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* produced the final *Animatrix* short, *The Final Flight of the Osiris*, which is essentially a nine-minute roller coaster that includes one of the sexiest sparring matches we've ever seen. The events of this film also have a direct impact on the *Reloaded* and *Enter the Matrix* story lines. If you're interested in checking out *The Final Flight of the Osiris* prior to *The Animatrix* DVD and VHS release (June 3), this short is being shown before the next Stephen King mindbender *Dreamcatcher* (hitting theaters in March). And visit www.theanimatrix.com by the beginning of May to download four of the animates for free.



We're still trying to figure out how this Marilyn Manson lookalike fits into the *Matrix* saga. Shiny says we'll have to wait until the game's release to find out.

Want to know first." He adds, "On the other hand, when you've seen the movie, you don't even want 24 hours to go by before you see the rest of it [by playing *Enter the Matrix*]." Looks like May 15 will be one busy day.

Editor's note: Before you go into suspended hibernation until the *Matrix*'s May debut, we have our own movie-inspired game for you to play—with some major *Matrix* goodies as prizes for the winners. Just follow the white rabbit in our next issue for all the answers. We guarantee this super-cool contest will make you say, "Whoa." 🐰



You Made Your Console Do What?

A guide to hacking the Matrix

The game's cheat system, available at the Main menu, is a funky little bonus designed to make you feel like you're hacking into the Matrix. By jabbing in old-school DOS commands, you can download new fighting styles and various behind-the-scenes goodies like concept art. Shiny hopes to also let you download blueprints for levels you've already beaten, then place health or weapons in certain rooms before re-entering that area. Just think: boom out of thin air.

```

ONE BASTER-51 Personal Computer 01999
ROM BIOS LOADED v8.13 - rev 8
RAM CRC check: (000000h)
Drive - Serial: 042825 - BENEVOLENT
Input System - DIRECTX
Booting...
Paths SECURE: [SAFE: 00]
Encryption [ENABLED: 05 80]
Virus Scan - "CHECKING"
SCAN
SCAN PASSED.
WinFSG - Virus Database: 000000000000000000000000
Update needed.
<Press Any Key>
    
```



Here's another twist for true hackers: You'll actually be able to take control of your console, watched a Shiny rep hack into the PS2 and make the machine's disc tray eject and controller vibrate. No word on whether the Xbox version will split out Bill Gates' zillion-dollar bills.



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Niobe does her best Neo impression from the first movie. Only with the proper use of Focus can you break the boundaries of the computer-generated world called the Matrix.

➔ (continued from page 104)
types of weapons.

Newbies can advance by simply mashing the Kick, Punch, Jump, and Action (which is either a block, throw, or counterthrow) buttons, but they'll miss out if they don't explore the most intriguing gameplay feature: the Focus meter.

More than just another iteration of the slow-mo bullet-time effect that games like *Max Payne* and *Dead to Rights* ripped from the first *Matrix* movie, Focus power allows you to pull off brutal, superpowered moves while ramping down the speed of the onscreen action. Just tap the Focus button to initiate these attacks, which last as long as you have juice in your Focus meter. After some trial and error, we were able to create some gorgeous-looking fight sequences reminiscent of the first flick. Take the chateau level, for starters. As we entered its massive ballroom, a pack of vampire wannabes flooded the scene. When playing as Ghost, by activating Focus at precisely the right moment, we ran up the side of a wall, then jumped off and performed a cartwheel flip with acrobatic grace. While hanging upside down in midair, we pulled out our pistol and began blasting the assailants. The actual aiming is automatic, so you can execute these superhuman moves without wor-

You Are Not the One

A guide to our heroes



NIobe
aka Jada Pinkett-Smith
(*The Nutty Professor, A Different World*)

REBEL RANK: Captain of the Logos hovercraft
ATTRIBUTES: The fastest pilot in the rebel fleet and a hand-to-hand combat assassin
LOVE INTERESTS: Past romance with Morpheus

EGM: Did you ever think you'd wind up in a *Matrix* videogame?

Jada Pinkett-Smith: No. After I got the movie scripts, they said they had another one for me—a videogame script. So, I'm thinking it's gonna be this little 30-page script with a list of noises that I have to make. But it was huge. Massive. Even bigger than regular (movie) scripts.

EGM: Why should we play as Niobe?

JPS: Besides the hand-to-hand combat, you'll learn about her relationship with Persephone [the voluptuous vixen from *Reloaded*].



GHOST
aka Anthony Wong
(*True Romance, movie name-sake, there's no trace of this guy anywhere.*)

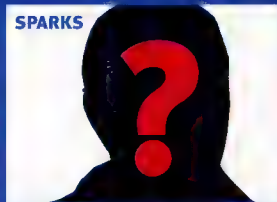
REBEL RANK: First mate of the Logos hovercraft
ATTRIBUTES: A gun specialist who is a "deep-thinking killing machine"
LOVE INTERESTS: Has a past with Trinity

EGM: Did you ever think you'd wind up in a *Matrix* videogame?

Anthony Wong: I had heard whispers of a non-profit game on the Internet. Yeah, right. Then I saw the game script and I went, "I'm one of the two leads. Oh my god."

EGM: Why should we play as Ghost?

AW: There's some cool stuff that happens in the Zen garden. The driving mode is exciting to play as Ghost because you get to actually shoot all of the oncoming policemen and pursuers. He's also better looking [than Niobe].



SPARKS
aka Lachy Hulme
(*Crikey! Check him out with Steve Irwin in Crocodile Hunters.*)

REBEL RANK: Logos operator
ATTRIBUTES: Provides mission objectives
LOVE INTERESTS: Our guess is the lady in red from the agent-training program

EGM: Did you ever think you'd wind up in a *Matrix* videogame?

Lachy Hulme: I didn't know anything about the game. I started looking through [the game script] and I'm on every page. I started to panic. I'm thinking, "Jesus Christ, when do I start?" Then the schedule arrives and it says, "See you at 9 a.m. [for filming game footage]."

EGM: Since we can't play as Sparks, tell us some *Matrix* trivia nobody knows.

LH: I can tell you that there's only 250,000 people living in Zion.



rying about enemies' positions. As Niobe, Focus enabled us to pull off simultaneous attacks on multiple enemies with Jean-Claude Van Damme-style split dual super-kicks. We were also able to juggle policemen in the air with a rapid-fire blast of punches to the chest, only to then finish them off with a boot to the rib cage that sent them across the room like we were punting a football. Now, add fully interactive environments to the equation and the action gets that much more intense. For instance, you can blast apart the first room of the post office level, which is reminiscent of the original film's marble foyer. Just cut loose with your MP5 machine gun and watch the concrete chunks fly. We also made a mess of the chateau's fine selection of liquor bottles as we obliterated the bar, and caused problems in the kitchen as our gunshots left all the hanging pots and pans in disarray.

The rabbit hole goes even deeper

The only *Enter the Matrix* topic we can't touch is the movie footage filmed for the game; that's where the Wachowskis drew the line. The brothers won't let anyone other than Shiny employees catch a sneak peek. In fact, Shiny recently sent the game to Sony to start the approval process, but only after removing all the game's story elements—almost two hours of movie footage and in-game cut-scenes—per the Wachowskis' orders.

We do know the game won't have a cliffhanger ending like *Reloaded*. And Perry says the third film—*The Matrix Revolutions*, due in November—will answer any questions left after finishing *Enter the Matrix*. Maybe by then, we'll finally have reached the bottom of the rabbit hole. 🐇

Load Sparring Program...

How to use Focus to turn up the heat.

We learned *Likely-split* that to get the most out of the Focus meter (which slows down gameplay à la *Max Payne*-style and opens up new attacks) during hand-to-hand combat, it's best to use it judiciously and simply tap the Focus button instead of holding it throughout combos. For example, we executed a devastating attack sequence by hitting Punch, then dialing in Focus plus Kick, then letting go of the Focus button and ending with another Punch. Holding down the Focus button throughout the entire Punch-Kick-Punch combo wasn't nearly as effective, and it drained the meter too quickly. Shiny Prez David Perry says that the lobby battle scene in the original *Matrix* film shows the perfect example of how you should use Focus: by varying the speed of the action through fast and slow intervals. The better you learn when and how much to use Focus, the more realized your in-game battles will be. Let's learn kung fu.

Loading complete. Ready—

ACTION BUTTON

- By walking up behind an enemy and hitting only the Action button, your character will perform a simple *Choice* attack.



A

- In the same situation, if you hit the Action button while quickly tapping Focus, your character will grab the enemy by the jaw and snap his head back until his body collapses.



A + F

- Now, add a jump to that same button combination and you'll stick your foot in front of the enemy so you trip him—and then proceed to slam his head into the floor, squashing it like a grape.



A + F
J

KICK BUTTON

- With no Focus, your character uses his or her standard range of kicks.



K

- If there are enemies on either side of your character and you execute a Kick with a slight tap on Focus, you'll perform a midair split kick that'll knock both enemies senseless.



K + F

- If you bring the jump button into the mix and your character is near a wall, he or she will use it as leverage to leap into the air and deliver a boot to the enemy's noggin.



K + F
J

PUNCH BUTTON

- Just like a normal Kick, a Punch without Focus does little damage.



P

- But with a quick tap on Focus, you'll uppercut the enemy's face and spring him into the air. If timed correctly, you can keep punching, juggling the enemy for an infinite combo.



P + F

BREATH DRAGON

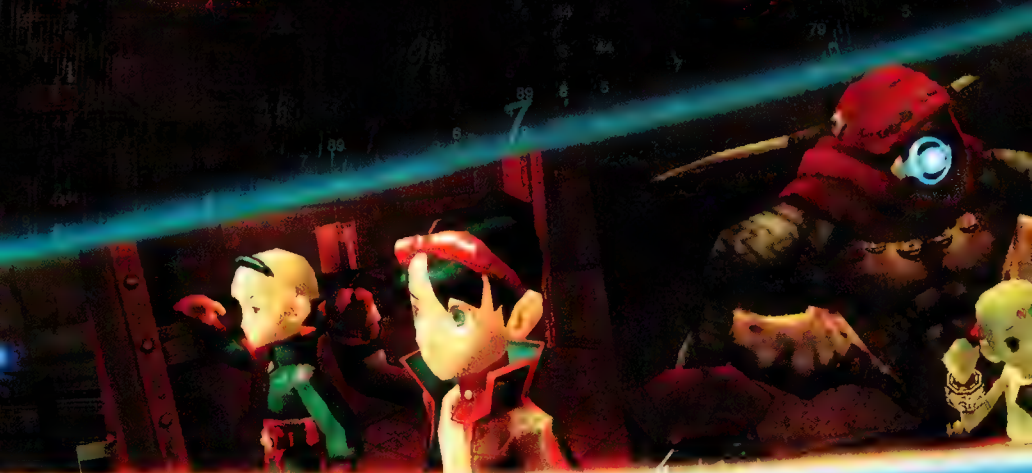


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CHILDREN
Blood
Partial Nudity
Violence

PlayStation 2

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Review Crew

Our Philosophy

EGM rates games based on how they compare with other titles on the same system. The highest score we'll give a game is a 10. When a game receives a 10, you can rest assured it's one of the best games ever made—a revolutionary title that truly stands above everything else in its genre for its time.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

At the other end of the spectrum sits the lowest score a game can receive: a 0.0. This is the kind of game you want to avoid at all costs. It's pure crap. In the middle lies the average grade, 5.0. We repeat: 5.0 IS AVERAGE. Simple, ain't it?

Our Awards



Platinum Awards go to games that get all 10s, the best and rarest review a game can get.



Gold Awards go to games whose average score equals 9.0 or higher.



Games that average at least an 8.0 (but lower than 9.0) receive **Silver Awards**.

The Crew



Shane Bettenhausen Reviews Editor

As the release date for his silver-screen debut in *The Matrix Reloaded* nears, Shane's becoming increasingly "Hollywood"—now he only communicates to his fellow EGMers through his publicist.

Favorite Genres: RPG, Action, Fighting
Current Faves: *Ikaruga*, *Final Fantasy X-2*



Crispin Boyer Features Editor

Crispin worked out his antisocial tendencies when *State of Emergency* hit the PS2. Now that it's on Xbox, the only misdeed Cris can muster is gulping down those "Do not eat!" packets that come with beef jerky.

Favorite Genres: Action, Adventure
Current Faves: *Amplitude*, *Ikaruga*, *Splinter Cell*



Shawn Elliott Associate Editor

Shawn was carving carpet whenever Activision stopped by until Shoe confiscated the cardboard and told 'im he couldn't have a complimentary copy of *Wakeboarding Unleashed* even if they offered.

Favorite Genres: Online, FPS, Fighting
Current Faves: *Wakeboarding Unl.*, *Splinter Cell*



Joe Felder Previews Editor

The newest editor here at EGM, Joe's already jonesing for *Starcraft: Ghost* so much that he spends most of his time in the office muttering lines from the original *Starcraft*. "Ghost reporting!" "Bye, bye, bye!"

Favorite Genres: Shooters, Action/Adventure
Current Faves: *Tenchu: WoH*, *Metroid Prime*



Dan "Shoe" Hsu Editor-in-Chief

The politicians are right: Games are bad influences on kids and dumbasses. Shoe tried some of the stuff he's seen in snowboarding games, but the rails didn't treat his shins too well. Unretouched photo!

Favorite Genres: Everything
Current Faves: *Unreal Championship*, *Ikaruga*



Bryan Intihar Associate Editor

Working on this month's cover story has done something strange to Bryan. He now thinks that the Matrix is real and that he, not Neo, is truly "The One." Someone help him, please.

Favorite Genres: Action, Adventure, Sports
Current Faves: *Enter the Matrix*, *Street Vol. 2*



Demian Linn Editor-at-Large

Boy, this California thing is working out great. They aren't crazy at all. Demian's already a certified Avatar Metaphysical Toastmaster, and his Miracle Swimming class starts next week! Who's up for some Bikram?

Favorite Genres: Action, Hockey, Racing
Current Faves: *NBA Street Vol. 2*, *Zelda: OOT*



Mark MacDonald Executive Editor

The announcement of a new R-Type game and constant *Ikaruga* sessions took Mark back to his high school days in the '80s, when the Shooters flowed like wine. Those were simpler times.

Favorite Genres: Action, Adventure, Shooters
Current Faves: *Ikaruga*, *Zelda: The Wind Waker*

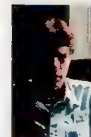
Games of the Month (tie)



NBA Street Vol. 2 Splinter Cell

p. 118
p. 120

The satisfying stealth of *Splinter Cell* and the hot-dogging hoops action of *NBA Street Vol. 2* equally impressed our Crew, so both games share the honor. In other news, prepare for a senses-shattering, new-and-improved Review Crew section next month.



Paul Byrnes Associate Editor

Paul will kick your ass in *Tekken* or *DOA3*, he holds his own in *Halo*, and he'll beat your best *Tetris* score. But you'd clean his clock in any version of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, guaranteed. There. His shameful secret is out.

Favorite Genres: Adventure, RPG, Fighting
Current Faves: *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, *SSX*



Greg Ford Associate Editor

After reviewing nothing but baseball games the past two months, Ford noticed something unusual happen to him. Smacked at first, he just shrugged it off and joined the company softball team.

Favorite Genres: Action, Adventure
Current Faves: *The Sims*, *Star Wars (Famicom)*



Chris "CJ" Johnston News Editor

CJ spent most of this month sick with a combination of a cold, the flu, and bronchitis. The cure? A couple rounds of *Dr. Mario* on the copy of *Nintendo Puzzle Collection* for GC that the sick bastard just imported.

Favorite Genres: Action, Adventure, Music
Current Faves: *Phantasy Star Online (Xbox)*



Jennifer Tsao Managing Editor

The guys around the office were more than willing to join Jennifer in a little multiplayer *Amplitude* this month—right up until they discovered that her "winning strategy" involved actual dance moves.

Favorite Genres: Action sports, Adventure
Current Faves: *The Sims* (again!), *NOLF2*



Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Harmonix
Players: 1-2 (2-4 w/ Multiplay or Online)
Also On: None
Sequel to: *Frequency* (PS2)
Best Feature: Great selection of music
Worst Feature: Getting to faraway music tracks
Website: www.playstation.com

As with any music game, how much you enjoy *Amplitude* really depends on whether or not you like the music included on its soundtrack. Luckily, it's a diverse mix here: a hodgepodge of techno, alternative rock, and club mixes that includes songs from the likes of Garbage, Papa Roach, Slipknot, and Run-DMC. If you like those artists and can successfully tap your fingers to a beat, you should give *Amplitude* a shot. Of course, it'd help even more if you're familiar with 2001's *Frequency*, as this is its direct sequel. Gameplay-wise, you still rock out using the DualShock's shoulder buttons to "play" the music, but ***Amplitude pumps it up*** with more music than the original, a higher degree of difficulty, a new power-up, and an Online mode out of the box. It's still not perfect, though, and despite a few cosmetic changes, this is still basically the same game. One seemingly innocuous tweak, however, does make a serious impact: The plane that represents the music is now flat rather than cylindrical (as it was in *Frequency*), which makes it easier to keep track of everything but actually hinders gameplay. Now, there's really no fast way to go from one side to the other—a big problem in more difficult songs where keeping your combos up is key. Despite that, *Amplitude* is really fun, especially in its Versus and Online modes. **CJ**

Don't go slam dance in traffic if you tuned out the thumping-god rhythm game *Frequency*. Instead, jam over to sequel *Amplitude*, which refines the first game's button-beating gameplay (score multipliers are easier to spot) while adding music from mightier supergroups. It's this hit list of 20-plus tunes—from bubbly pop to whiplashing metal—that makes *Amplitude* a music game for the masses (though with too many songs, it would be perfect). Even all-thumbs players will own most of the music. Win an online duel or get into your zone to complete the trickier hits, and *Amplitude* becomes a rockin' rush. Plus, chicks dig it, making it great for couples play. **Crispin**

When playing *Amplitude*, if at any point you start to feel that doing well in this game means you've actually got soul, please stop immediately, go buy a Busta Rhymes or Stevie Wonder album—a Janet Jackson video will go in a pinch—and take a few minutes to see what real groovin' is about. Pressing a couple buttons on a controller just isn't my idea of true rhythm-action. *Amplitude* works well for what it is—and the soundtrack contains some of my favorites: Brezler, Bink 182, and even the new Bowie (it's cool), but as Olivia Newton-John said in a similarly soulless but catchy number: wanna get physical *Samba de Amigo* (CD), where have you gone? **Jennifer**

VISUALS	SOUND	INGENUITY	REPLAY
7	8	6	7



Publisher: Midway Sports
Developer: Midway
Players: 1-2
Also On: GC, Xbox
Cover Athletes: Shouldn't act in cut-scenes
Best Feature: The new special pitch
Worst Feature: Too much time between pitches
Website: www.midway.com

I don't want to like *SlugFest*. I'm hardcore. I'm a purist. I'm the baseball-video game ambassador. But in my first game, I punch Todd Helton in the face, then kneel him in the junk. He drops the ball; I race to second. I laugh. Next game, I throw at Scott Rolen's head, he collapses to the ground, and, yep, I laugh. Game after that, the loading screen has the two chaty announcers taunting an intern. I laugh. There may be no crying in baseball, but ***SlugFest 20-04*** features plenty of laughs. Funny-bone tickling aside, this new version actually appeals to serious hardball fans. Not really serious fans, mind you—you can still drive in 35 runs in 10 games with Barry Bonds—but detailed player stats and bigger rosters expand the gameplay depth, meaning you'll want to finish the season instead of just goofing through one-off exhibitions. At its heart, though, it's still arcadey fun—the new special pitch simply rules, as do the hot dames on the loading screens and the plentiful (and often useful) cheats. Overall, it's a blast to play, with insanely over-the-top pitching, batting, and fielding anyone can pick up and enjoy. I wouldn't hold off for next year's model, either. History tells us (if *Hitz* and *Blitz* are any indication) this second entry will be *SlugFest*'s shining moment; there's not much more ground to cover, so buy this one and you're golden. It's a definite hit—right in your eye. **Todd**

SlugFest returns for a second season of hardball that even people who've never swung a virtual whooping stick can pick up instantly. Aside from some lackadaisical outfielders who take forever to react to well-hit balls, the gameplay is fast, fun, and simple. It's funny, too, although the commentators' goopy anecdotes become repetitive. Also, like its extreme cousins *NFL Blitz* and *NHL Hitz*, *SlugFest* regrettably lacks the depth needed for serious solo gaming. Luckily, **multi-player action shines**—it's always a blast to vibrate your buddy's controller via the Taunt button after hitting another pitch over the fences. Just don't expect *High Heat*-style complexity. **Bryan**

There's no doubt that *SlugFest* delivers a good time—as the arcadey alternative to this season's baseball-sim glut, it offers rollickin' two-player fun. Taunting your buddy after he blows a big lead (which will happen) is great, and the over-the-top whooping and exaggerated animations capture a competitive spirit the serious MLB sims lack. But that's not enough to cover the annoying control flaws, like a frustrating running game and spotty defense, especially in the outfield. **If you're looking for a solid one-player game, look elsewhere.** But if you're dying for a rock-em-sock-em multiplayer experience, *SlugFest* is perfect for a double header. **G.Ford**

VISUALS	SOUND	INGENUITY	REPLAY
8	7	6	7



Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Players: 1-2
Also On: Xbox
Replaces: The tired *Triple Play* series
Best Feature: Pitching is actually fun!
Worst Feature: Hitting is way too simple
Website: www.easports.com

Imagine you have a puppy that has been retarded for as long as you can remember. You now have the power to give the puppy an operation to make it not retarded. You've loved this afflicted puppy (which, apparently, does not age) for years, but you dream of a better life for him...so you take the chance. Let's call this puppy *Triple Play*, and let's call its new-and-improved nonretarded form *MVP*. This new puppy looks sweeter than a 460-foot Sammy Sosa later, and its wickedly awesome new pitcher/batter interface topples anything done in previous games. Finally, **for the first time ever, pitching is actually as much fun as hitting**, thanks to a strategic, realistic interface that perfectly balances risks and rewards. How many puppies can say that? Problem is, the hitting is still too much like when you called the puppy *Triple Play*. Which means this puppy needs a stern talkin' to and some serious discipline. Basically, if you push up, you hit a fly ball, even on a low pitch. If you push down, expect a ground ball, even on an eye-high heater. This is way lame. But, of course, there's no sense in badgering the poor puppy. So, let's look at another improvement—the Franchise mode. Here, you can simulate seasons and lump in and out of all of the games as they happen...super-duper kick-ass! If I were the owner of this puppy, I'd be pleased. Next year, I hope the puppy will be even more not retarded. **Todd**

MVP's most innovative feature—its complex pitching/throwing meter—totally goes against the realistic, meter-free, virtual-immersion look of most baseball games. With an array of multicolored arcs hanging above your player, you never forget you're playing a videogame. That said, this meter system lifts *MVP*'s pitching game above other titles' point-and-click-a-outs. Also, the simple batting controls prove surprisingly deep, and the Home Run Showdown mode is highly entertaining. **EA took a risk with its new franchise, and it pays off.** Let's hope the company delivers less-repetitive announcers and more control over jumping and diving next year. **G. Ford**

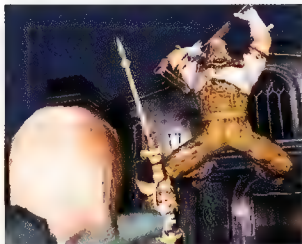
EA finally woke up and smelled the pine tar—say adios to *Triple Play* and hello to a franchise that competes with Sega's *WSB* and 3DO's *High Heat*. What's changed? For starters, the developers found a way to make an enjoyable pitching game that actually requires skill. The hitting's not shabby, either—connecting with the ball gets easier with every swing of the bat, although home runs are quite rare. The presentation's sweet, too, with insightful commentary and graphics that shine. *MVP* does have some problems, like its touchy throwing meter and fielders who are often out of position. Minor issues aside, though, *MVP* remains a worthy baseball choice. **Bryan**

VISUALS	SOUND	INGENUITY	REPLAY
8	7	8	7

Clock Tower 3



Alyssa spends most of *Clock Tower* running, hiding, and acting like...well, like a fifteen-year-old high school student (she is one, after all). Only during boss fights does she finally break out the sacred bow and go all Buffy on that serial killer ass, as Sledge-man here is about to discover.



Try hiding from a crazed serial killer by covering behind a transparent fish tank and see if it doesn't make your heart skip a beat. Not having the ubiquitous sniper rifles or ninja swords at your disposal brings a sense of realistic fear to *Clock Tower 3*—even with the game's outlandish plot and idiotic enemies. I loved the diverse, spooky settings, the old-fashioned charm of using holy water to fight enemies and lavender water to calm your panic meter, the eerie music, and the process of unlocking the stories behind the various murder victims. Some of the story line schmalz was a bit shudder-inducing, but the CG cut-scenes, which I normally hate, were as interesting as every other part of the game, and beautiful to watch. My main gripe with the game is that the puzzles are too easy. Not only are there no stumbers, there aren't even many points in the game when you'll have to evaluate the situation and think about what to do. Outside of some tense, action-packed boss battles at the end of each level, the game's just not challenging. In fact, *CT3* plays more like an unfolding, increasingly weird adventure title (like *Myst* or the *Broken Sword* games) than a traditional survival-horror thriller. That said, I really liked playing it. The bottom line is that ***Clock Tower 3* is a fun game with a fantastic, surprising story behind it.** I kept playing just to find out what happened next.

Carrie

CT3 can't decide on an audience. With its hokey, R.L. Stein thrills, much of the game feels like survival-horror lite for the campfire storytelling set. You spitz ghouls with holy water, solve simple puzzles, and recover from near bludgeonings with lavender baths—hardly the stomach-turning terror of, say, *Silent Hill*. Even the serial killers on your heels are more irritating than frightening—that is, until the chilling cut-scenes depict each of these murderers' most gruesome deeds in morbid detail, bravely pushing the envelope for gaming gore. And although the truly sick cinemas make the biggest impact, the plush visuals and unique combat aren't half-bad either.

Shawn

Despite its brutally violent cut-scenes and crazed serial killers chasing you all over with big, sharp things, I found myself literally yawning through much of *Clock Tower 3*. You spend 70 percent of the game just running and hiding from the aforementioned psychos, which might be exciting if they didn't all follow the same moronic charge-attack-charge pattern. (How some of them managed 30+ victims is beyond me.) The game is also relatively short and very easy, with puzzles so simple they would bore a fifth-grader. Only the decent graphics, creepy soundtrack and (eventually) interesting story make *Tower 3* worth an overnight rental for horror fans.

Mark

VISUALS SOUND INGENUITY REPLAY
7 7 6 3

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom/Sunsoft
Players: 1
Also On: None
Featured In: EGM #165
Best Feature: Increasingly weird story line
Worst Feature: "Puzzles" that aren't the slightest bit puzzling
Website: www.capcom.com



Forget the first two *Clock Tower* games. *Clock Tower 3* has a new look, a new 3D control scheme, and a standalone story that doesn't require previous *CT* experience, so no one should be scared off.

But the game will scare you. Developers Sunsoft and Capcom took an ingenious route

to inducing fear: casting players as a teenage girl, Alyssa, who—no weapons except holy water—must evade hostile enemies as she tries to find her missing mother.

Throughout the intricate story line peppered with exquisite cinematics, Alyssa unlocks the mysteries behind some horrible murders—but in turn, a few homicidal maniacs chase her. A Panic Meter rises as Alyssa's enemies hit or scare her; if it fills up, she freaks out and becomes almost impossible to control. It's a little irritating, but it definitely increases your own panic level as you play.

Although the puzzles are easy to solve with your brain effectively turned off, the story is compelling enough that you'll want to pay attention to find out what happens next. Plus, the action elements—running from would-be killers and engaging in some fairly hardcore boss battles—keep *CT3* from ever being another clichéd adventure game, and the strikingly designed environments deliver a great feeling of creepy realism. Unfortunately, while *Clock Tower 3* is fun to play and the story is both intriguing and gory enough to satisfy survival-horror fans, it's probably disturbingly easy for anyone who's ever finished a *Resident Evil* game. Those hoping for a lengthy adventure will be disappointed, and the short, simple quest might not justify its \$50 price tag.



It's no wonder *Clock Tower 3*'s cinematics are so good—Kinji Fukasaku (the recently departed director of the cult-classic flick, *Battle Royale*) directed them—he's often described as "the last great Japanese action-movie director." And the story, another of the game's strong points, was written by Flagship, the company that penned the scripts for *Resident Evil* and *Onimusha*.

MEGAMAN KICKS OFF HIS 15th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION



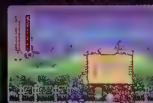
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Dynasty Warriors 4



Your troop morale meter (at the top right of the screen) is crucial. It spikes when you annihilate high-ranking officers and plummets when baddies breach your defenses. Don't ignore indicators of your army's confidence, or your troops are liable to strand you inside a circle of haters.



Maybe you think *Dynasty Warriors* has had more use-less updates than AOL, or that it owes its success to the empty shelves *DW2* shared with *Fantasia* back in PS2's infancy. But play this fourth entry in the series and you'll reconsider. No other game so seamlessly melds punch-n-munch gameplay with the stat management and grand scale of real-time strategy. **The combat has been refined to near perfection**, and the way *DW4* keeps its perfunctory kill-em-all premise from growing stale is pure genius: Even when you're just chopping through a sea of chumps, you must adapt your attacks and retreats along with the changing tides of war. This isn't to say things never sour. At its worst, enduring the audio is like being assaulted to a speed-metal score while onlookers drown out your sobbing with Chinese opera. (Note to Koei: Asian classical music is oil to butt rock's unpotable water.) There's also the fact that each new installment offers only subtle tweaks in place of real change. One-on-one duels, a complete roster of playable bosses, and new siege engines add depth, but only serious fans will really appreciate these minor upgrades. Meanwhile, the unevolved visuals and persistent slowdown this far into the series are just plain sad. If you picked up *Xtreme Legends* this past holiday season, you might not need this. *DW4* is a bigger treat for those who thought they'd never try it.

Shawn

Don't let the supposedly enhanced strategic elements fool you: *Dynasty Warriors 4* is still all about hacking and slashing. And that's perfectly OK, because this series excels at making melee combat entertaining. Upgrading your characters with stronger weapons and new items provides just enough incentive to keep me in the fray. Chopping through the single-player game is hardly revolutionary, but it's good, mindless fun. Meanwhile, *DW4*'s multiplayer options get mixed marks; the limited Versus battles disappoint (fighting in the pitch black isn't my idea of fun), while the **two-player Co-op mode takes the edge off the game's rather difficult stages**.

Bryan

You'll hear a lot of critics (including the two losers on this page) dismiss *DW4* as just "more of the same." Well...maybe it is pretty similar, but that's just fine with me. This series has enthralled me since *DW2* at the PS2's launch, and I'm still just as hooked with this edition. Fighting swarms after swarms of ancient Chinese guys with unpronounceable names just never grows old, and even though I've beaten the game twice (once as the unlockable Lu Bu), I still have every intention of returning to it several more times. Even if new features like siege engines and Create-A-General don't add as much as I'd hoped, **this is still the most fun, polished offering of the series to date**.

Chris B.

VISUALS	SOUND	INGENUITY	REPLAY
7	6	6	7

Publisher: Koei
Developer: Omega Force
Players: 1-2
Also On: None
Featured In: EGM #165
Best Feature: Epic battles
Worst Feature: Been-there, done-that design
Website: www.koeligames.com



"People of China, bring me your best...so I can serve 'em up like General Tso!"

It's one of those timeless truths: Nothing's certain except death, taxes, and the timely succession of *Dynasty Warriors* updates. Despite massive success in Japan, *DW*'s obese warlords and obscure settings don't resonate with as many gamers on U.S. shores—which is a shame, because beneath the series' far-flung feudal trappings lies a solid beat-em-up that's grown more complex with each successive iteration. Think of *DW* as the rightful successor to classic hack-n-snackers in the vein of *Final Fight*—except, surprisingly, there's a lot more happening here. In a series of *Braveheart*-sized battles, you'll marshal friendly forces and monitor their morale, raise a retinue of bodyguards that help even the odds when enemies attack, escalate intense rivalries with other would-be rulers (and eventually add them to your own growing roster),

collect and tweak new killing tools, and, oh yes, gobble dim sum. So, how does this pan out when you're actually playing? Well, even if you're just mashing buttons, it really feels like you're acting as a general in someone else's colossal real-time strategy campaign. Of course, if you're a die-hard *DW* fan (Meng Huo's man-diaper costume optional), you already know this, and you'll heartily enjoy the latest update. But if you're new to the ancient-Chinese brawling scene, now's a perfect time to jump into the fray.

IN WITH THE NEW

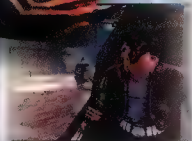


What's new in *Dynasty Warriors 4*, anyway? With more bodyguards (up to eight) watching your back, your enemies won't blindside you...as often. The ability to duel with officers adds another dimension to the somewhat exhausted (and exhausting) core gameplay.

There are also new siege engines: battering rams, catapults, bridgelayers, and tricked-out wooden cow tanks like the one pictured here. Unfortunately, you don't take the helm of these musty war machines; instead, they appear from nowhere for you to protect or demolish.

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What's going on here? Only in the fantastical world of *NBA Street Vol. 2* could a scenario like this possibly unfold: The ever-grounded Boston Celtics legend, Larry Bird, soars through the sky making present-day NBA superstar Vince Carter look foolish.



Like a big-budget Hollywood film with monster production-values, *Street Vol. 2* instantly had me glued to my seat. The glue seeped in further as stylish graffiti flitted across the T.V. screen, followed by some concept art that's funkier than Curtis Mayfield's *Superfly* soundtrack. (Pause for a moment: You should know that I saw immense potential in the original *NBA Street*, so I was totally ready for a no-dribbles-barred experience this time around. Would this live up to my lofty expectations? OK, back to my gleyu euphoria.) So after this gleaming and artsy welcome commanded me to feel at home in glitzy, mid-'70s hoops culture, I soon discovered that the gameplay is, by far, the game's greatest gift (and shouldn't it be?). Everything that needed fixing from the last game (lack of Multitap support, poor rebounding, not enough incentive to keep playing, no way to defend special moves) has been dealt with swiftly. The multitapler is fantasy and rebounding is spot-on; the Career mode has you playing to unlock NBA legends (so much cooler than a dorky Rastafarian named Biggs), and a new defensive counter adds tons of strategy to the game. Still, *Vol. 2*'s visual style is what wows me more than Pete Maravich's bevy of moves. The player models are uniquely "Street-styled" and set against photo-realistic backgrounds. Think Gerhard Richter meets *NBA on NBC*. All things considered, this is a **must-own game on any system.** **Todd**

If you like your basketball with extra monster dunks and triple slamma jamma, you better be stittin' down. *NBA Street Vol. 2* refines and tweaks the original's **already excellent gameplay** and adds four-player support and a whole bunch more stuff to unlock. You can even edit each baller's tricks, shots, and dunk moves, allowing you to customize players to an insane degree. *Vol. 2* will keep you amused for many hours (poor Bryan was so addicted, he was losing sleep), and that's just the single-player game—with a few friends on the stick, this is the sort of game that keeps on giving. Even if basketball titles aren't normally your thing, check this one out. **Demian**

Vol. 2 is exactly the sequel I'd hoped for. It implements several fresh gameplay elements, like trick counters and multiple Gamebreaker levels, that'll instantly hook both *Street* newcomers and veterans alike. The game is **scarily addictive**—I found myself awake until the wee hours playing to unlock past NBA greats and upgrade my own player's attributes. And even though Demian continually found a way to snatch victory from my jaws of defeat, multiplayer was a blast. Don't forget to pump up the difficulty for single-player games, though; otherwise, there's abso...tely no challenge at all. Cakewalk difficulty aside, *Vol. 2* is an expectation-surpassing follow-up. **Bryan**

VISUALS	SOUND	INGENUITY	REPLAY
8	7	7	9

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Big/NuFX
Players: 1-2 (2-4 w/Multitap)
Also On: GC, Xbox
Featured In: EGM #164
Best Feature: Announcer Bobbito Garcia
Worst Feature: Default difficulty is too easy
Website: www.easportsbig.com



Unlock hidden characters (like James Worthy, pictured above) in the NBA Challenge mode.

N*BA Street Vol. 2* builds upon the breakthrough success of the original *Street* by enhancing every possible facet of the game, starting with its infectious personality. *Vol. 2* is buzzing with cultural B-ball significance, from its funky art-style to its fresh beats; it clearly taps into the unique, genuine spirit of street ball. And it respectfully borrows from every generation since James Naismith invented basketball, cleverly putting old-school legends like Earl "The Pearl" Monroe and Wilt "The Stilt" Chamberlain on the same asphalt as new schoolers Allen Iverson and Shaquille O'Neal.

The gameplay's been improved as well—we can't get enough of the four-player support, defensive counters to stop special moves, and passes off the backboard (and occasionally our opponent's skulls). Also, the crucial Game-breaker bonus (where you can gain extra

points while subtracting from your opponent's score) now doubly screws your rival with twice the point-stealing power. If you're not happy with the default regulations, though, investigate My Rules, an option to tailor the game to your liking. If you're ballin' with a beginner, spot them 10 points. In a hurry? Play to 11, instead of 21. Don't like Gamebreakers? Turn them off. The only part of the game they forgot to beef up was the difficulty in the single-player contests—it's woefully easy, so be sure to bump it up before hitting the streets.

WHO'S DJ CUCUMBER SLICE?



DJ on 89.9 FM in NYC, magazine writer, and now *NBA Street Vol. 2* announcer (and, if you're crafty, a hidden character), Bobbito Garcia's got more verbiage than Dennis Rodman has tats. What's his favorite part of the game he emcees, you ask? Garcia explains: "I like the fantasy aspect of NBA players participating in playground basketball. So many people would love the opportunity to go up against NBA-level athletes, but how often does a 6-foot-9-inch highflier with a handle show up around your way to run full? And what's the likelihood of you being able to compete? So the game allows experiencing that on an equal plane."

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Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell



Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Ubi Soft Shanghai Studios
Players: 1
Also On: GC, Xbox
Featured In: EGM #165
Best Feature: Acutely awesome A.I.
Worst Feature: Tedious toughness
Website: www.splintercell.com

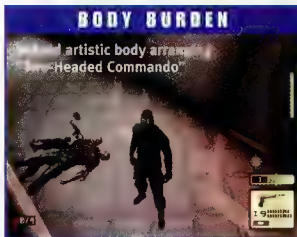
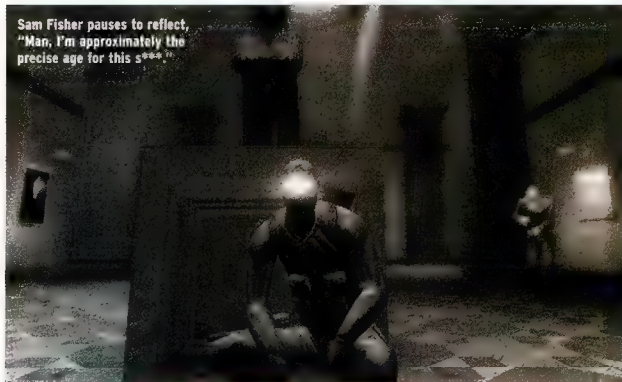


sharply defined, and real-time moving shadows contort with every slight change of lighting. Weather effects give a palpable energy to the stages where they're a factor. And the always-available free-look camera gives you a perfect view of whatever you'd like, whenever you'd like it.

You've suffered long enough. It's been a few months since that no-good Xbox-owning friend of yours first dangled *Splinter Cell* in front of you, knowing quite well Ubi Soft wouldn't bring it over to competing platforms until (gulp) 2003. But you held out, and your patience is about to pay off.

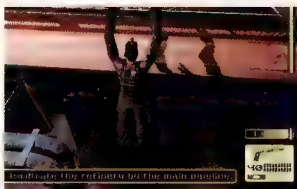
It's true the PS2 can't quite match those oh-so-good Xbox visuals, but *Splinter* is still one of the biggest lookers on the console. The darkest and grittiest of environments are

But all these fancy visuals are much more than gravy; they're an essential part of *Splinter's* multilateral gameplay. Your primary weapon in all 10 missions (yep, 10—Ubi tacked on another sweet little treat to beef up the PS2 translation) is stealth. In fact, guns, bullets, grenades, and the like—while extremely useful at times—are secondary to one overriding gameplay tool: not being seen. Get in, get out, and leave no trace is your M.O. here. Light is your most persistent enemy, and it's used brilliantly to make things



Hiding the Evidence

Splinter Cell's Sam Fisher never leaves a man behind (not a dead one, anyway). That means you'll need to find a place to stash the corpses you create, lest another enemy soldier happen along and discover your handiwork. It can be grueling—hauling 200-pound stiffs around is about as easy as it sounds, and closet doors have a vindictive way of slamming shut just as you pick up your human cargo. But if you don't find a dark closet, stairwell, or other out-of-the-way nook into which you can drag these dudes, you'll pay for it later. Your enemy-alerting alarm level will rise as comrades of the fallen find out why Boris and Nikolai never punched out last night.



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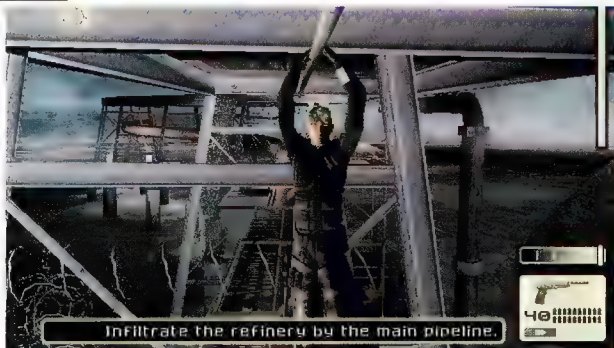
PlayStation 2



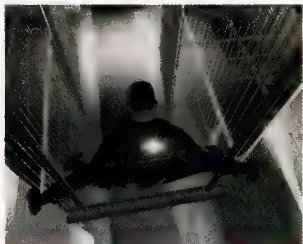
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Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell (cont.)



This Jean-Claude Van Damme-style split maneuver might look totally rad, but chances to actually use it in the game are sadly infrequent. If you long to get the drop on guys, you can choose to wait in ambush in any hallway you like—Sam's rock-hard quads will never give out.



Well, here it is: the game Xbox fanboys insisted couldn't be done on the PS2, running in fine form on Sony's machine. Granted, this port isn't as visually impressive as the Xbox version—the lighting effects have been noticeably dialed down—but it's a great game regardless. **Splinter Cell completely retains the intense play mechanics that made it Microsoft's biggest title last year.** And this release is more than just a straight translation—lots of skillful nips and tucks have been made to improve the game's flow. The alarm system is more forgiving, many stages have been streamlined in terms of layout, and an entirely new mission has been worked into the middle of the adventure. It's interesting to note that the new level's areas are more visually refined (and, arguably, more fun to play through) than those brought over from the Xbox—which kind of makes you wish they'd done an entirely new *Splinter Cell* for PS2, built from the ground up. But, you take what you can get, and in this case you're getting a title that easily rivals *Metal Gear Solid 2* in the fun department. No whiny heroes, campy dialogue, or wacky plot twists here—just gritty, realistic stealth action that's as strategic as it is addicting. And each stage demands so much critical thinking and creativity, you'll want to replay them all several times just to explore the possibilities: Overall, a must-have title.

Ethan

that much tougher for you. Sure, you can sometimes charge forward guns-a-blazin', but sticking silently to the shadows will never fail, and it's a lot less messy.

The game steers you toward a more subtle style of infiltration, but you always have options in *Splinter Cell*. Do you take the long route through the ventilation system, or cap the security cameras in the hall and try the direct approach? Hang upside down from a water pipe until the sentry passes and slip

through undetected, or grab him from behind and see if he's got any info you can extract? Go for the head shot, or disable the trigger-fingered hand? The most satisfying part of the game is devising an alternate way of solving a problem and then besting the crafty A.I. to get it done. You'll probably fail a few missions trying, but the first time you pull off an insanely sneaky trick to get past a half-dozen guards in broad, betraying daylight, you'll feel like the slickest spy on the continent.

I'm one of the innocent dummies who didn't play the Xbox *Splinter Cell*, so its insanely good graphics never spoiled me. But this PS2 port looks so outstanding, you won't care what you're missing. The graphics aren't even the main draw for me—it's the terrific balance between straight-up action and stealth that makes every mission memorable. **Supercooperative controls and a highly functional camera round out the stellar gameplay,** but the game is sometimes too realistic—minor frustrations (mostly to do with hiding bodies and the sensitive A.I.) tried my patience as stages grew more complex. The fun factor is still huge; it's a must-buy for most any gamer.

Jon D.

I'm with Jon on this. The fact that *Splinter Cell* is one of the best-looking PS2 games around is the icing on what is fundamentally a very tasty cake. For me, the excellent stealth gameplay, tangible sense of danger, and believable scenario (take that, *MGS2*) render this a must-play experience. There are a couple of trifling problems though—mostly control-related frustrations with certain maneuvers (like dangling from a ledge, or trying to grab a drain pipe)—that continually annoyed me, so I lopped a bit off my final score. Despite this, it's **a very satisfying game,** and the fact that there's extra stuff here that wasn't in the Xbox version is a big plus for PS2 owners.

Jon D.



Night Vision—the secret of successful snoops, sneaks, and sleuths

Darkness is definitely Sam Fisher's friend when it comes to sneaking up on bad guys and avoiding security cameras, but it's not always easy on a gamer's eyes. That's why Sam's infrared goggles are a lifesaver—they'll light up both the screen and any warm bodies that happen to be in it, but they won't give away your position like natural light does. Plus, you'll kind of feel like the Predator, which is a nice bonus.

VISUALS	SOUND	INGENUITY	REPLAY
9	9	9	8

Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner

That drone's chance of surviving the next five seconds: nil

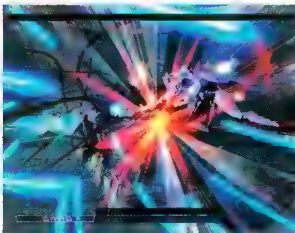


Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami CE Japan
Players: 1-2
Also On: None
Featured In: EGM #164
Best Feature: Everything goes boom real purty
Worst Feature: Short—very short
Website: www.konami.com

ZOE's giant robot star, Jehuty, has nasty luck—in *The 2nd Runner*, a chump once again takes it for an explosive joyride through space. In this case, the finder/keeper is Dingo Egret (who's thankfully not a whiner like the first game's pilot, Leo), and the loser/weeper is again Nohman, a deranged dictator who has seized control of Mars.

Only your mech-combat skills can keep Jehuty out of Nohman's grubby, evil hands, so prepare for some serious fighting. These battles are fast and intense, with wave after wave of evil robots attacking, dozens at a time. Dingo and The Big J have plenty of ways to serve up enemies' just desserts—lasers, missiles, and a massive sword—yet the controls are pick-up-and-play simple.

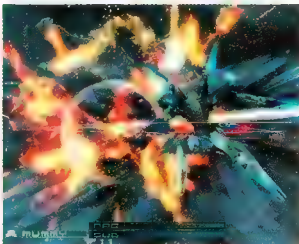
Action is at the core of the game, and it makes for a sweet and chewy core, indeed.



Blowing stuff up with your giant robot pal never gets old, thanks to a variety of available attacks and pitch-perfect difficulty level.

A compelling story provides further reason to keep playing. The pacing is tight—there's always a boss battle or an animated cut-scene just around the corner. Make yourself take a break, though, or you might finish the game in one sitting—no kidding. That's *The 2nd Runner's* fatal flaw: Although it has some extra missions (simple enemy kill-a-thons) and a two-player Versus mode, most gamers will be finished with *ZOE2* when they finish the story. And the story is simply too short.

Explosions, lasers, and smoke trails—what the hell is going on? When you're destroying dozens of enemies at a time, the flash and dazzle don't let up for a second. If you're having a hard time figuring out these screenshots, don't worry: When you're in the driver's seat, it's clearer than clear.



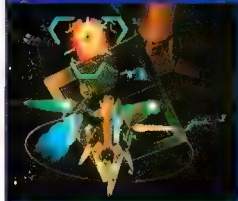
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner is a tasty mélange of action-packed gameplay, unique visual style, and an engrossing story. Each element complements the others. The tight, responsive control draws you in; the plot and characters provide motivation to keep playing; and beautiful, anime-inspired graphics pull these pieces into a cohesive whole. Events in the narrative frequently affect your objectives during gameplay, like when a comrade's robot is disabled and you have to carry it through hordes of bad guys to safely reach an exit. Or when a giant robot's A.I. goes AWOL, and you have to grab the machine and give it a few noogies in order to delete the bugs without destroying the robot. The plot's not perfect, though; the gist of *ZOE2's* tale won't surprise anyone who has seen an animated Japanese movie in the last 15 years. And the dialogue desperately needs to be rewritten by a fluent English speaker. Also, the characters' voices range from pretty good to bloody horrible. Unfortunately, Dingo "Ate My Baby!" Egret is both the most egregious perpetrator of bad voice acting and the game's main character. In spite of these problems, *The 2nd Runner* is a fantastic game. Its nonstop action makes it consistently challenging and fun—but it's over too quickly. It's like a delectable smoothie made of only the finest fruits and yogurts from the most exotic corners of the world...in an eight-hour shot glass when you're craving a 20-hour tumbler. **Damn. Paul**

I'll say this without hesitation: *ZOE2* is the best game I've played since *Metroid Prime*. The mad, visceral thrills I experienced while playing it are pretty much unrivaled, and it looks positively amazing. It's the sort of game that prompts onlookers to ask, "What the hell is happening? Are you even controlling it?" It's that fast and insane. But you know what the best thing is? You feel completely in control the whole time. Once you learn the basic commands, you can bust moves that'll make you freak out—truly stunning stuff. Some will complain about its short length, but trust me, the game is plenty challenging, and you'll feel pretty accomplished once you finish it. **Miguel**

I don't know 'bout the rest of you, but it took me a good couple hours before I could get over the name of *ZOE2's* main hero: Dingo. Now, I'm sure there are some happening Dingos out there, but it's not really a savior-of-the-universe name. Regardless, *The 2nd Runner* is an incredible experience that no PS2 owner should miss. It improves on just about everything from the first game—even the already-stellar visuals (this time, they're just plain sick). Gameplay is instinctive, chaotic, and breathtaking. Unfortunately, the entire thing is still very linear, a bit too segmented, and repetitive—and I can't help but feel that it doesn't quite live up to its potential for perfection.

Sam K.

HARDWARE WARS



Jehuty can grab certain environmental objects and use them as weapons. In fact, sometimes you have to do this to survive. For instance, if you don't grab a wall panel to protect yourself, Nephtis will smash you into lifeless smithereens (left). Even enemy robots aren't off-limits—use them as shields or throw them into a bunch of your buddies and watch the fireworks if you wish. You can also swing poles like baseball bats or throw them like spears, or even toss barrels à la *Donkey Kong*.

VISUALS	SOUND	INGENUITY	REPLAY
9	8	7	5

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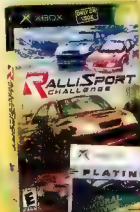
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Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Studio Cambridge
Players: 1
Also On: None
Featured In: EGM #146
Best Feature: Fantastic graphics
Worst Feature: Plodding pace
Website: www.primalgame.com



I'm a huge fan of third-person action-adventure games like Eldos' similarly themed *Soul Reaver* series, and I also really enjoyed Sony's *MediEvil*, so I had high hopes for *Primal*. But I can't help feeling let down by it. Without a doubt, the game is absolutely gorgeous, both in its in-game graphics and its *Buffie The Vampire Slayer*-style story sequences. It's definitely one of the recent batch of PS2 games giving Xbox titles a visual run for their money. The voicework is equally impressive and, save for the cheesy guitar-laden tracks that play during combat, so is its soundtrack. On top of the game's high production values, it's got a few nice gameplay touches, like an excellent mapping feature and the option to ask your gargole friend Scree for hints when you're stuck. Unfortunately, *Primal* doesn't hold up in the areas that count the most: **its combat is mindlessly repetitive**, its puzzles aren't very inventive, and there are often long, boring stretches between the action. I'd much rather spend time with Sony's underappreciated *Drakan: The Ancients' Gate*, which had more technical problems but was ultimately much more fun to play. Also, *Primal* is a big game but, like most story-driven action-adventure games, once you're done, you're done—even with its DVD-style unlockable extras. It'll likely take you longer than a three-day rental to beat, but you'll have little cause to play it again.

Joe F.

Primal's lush levels full of swaying trees and quietly falling snow create an ambiance that invites patient exploration. And the deep symbiotic partnership between heroine Jen and her stony tour guide Scree makes the occasionally mindless backtracking somewhat bearable (though too much atmospheric bleakness and too many vague milestones often had me second-guessing my progress). Still, where else can you scale walls built at M.C. Escher-like angles, possess statues, and siphon your partner's soul? Too bad theousy camera and stilted, janky melee with *Goosebumps* monsters spoil the atmosphere. *Primal* courts greatness, but gets cold feet.

Shawn

These guys don't appreciate my Jen. She's complicated, she's seen tough times, she's a half-demon babe who hangs out with a talking gargole... I can see how they'd want to step back. But I think she's a great character in a beautiful, interesting game. The gorgeous visuals, sound, and voice acting create a perfect atmosphere, with cinemas that flow seamlessly in and out of gameplay. Yes, it's slow-paced, which will turn off anyone without much patience. And at times I wanted a fully interactive world, too (instead you go on rails—wide and hard-to-find rails, but rails nonetheless). Figuring out what to do next might take time, but it's worth it in this cool, moody game.

Jennifer



Publisher: 3DO
Developer: 3DO
Players: 1-4
Also On: None
Better than: Portal Runner 2
Best Feature: Quality CG cut-scenes
Worst Feature: Asinine camera
Website: www.3DO.com



With its *Tro* story-style plastic servicemen and over-the-top, almost-cartoony action, *Sarge's War* initially seems like a decent tour of duty for tots. And as long as I keep reminding myself it's just a kid's game, I can overlook some of its dubious design choices, like the difficulty-draining, overly generous autoaim. I can try to appreciate the bizarre mish-mash of kiddie and real-life environments (one level, you're in little Jimmy's playroom; the next, you're in Nam). Heck, sniping a few tan tangos from their tin can hiding spots even got me pumped...that is, until the **dunkey gameplay problems knocked off my kid-colored glasses**. The killjoy camera, which you must constantly correct, is frustrating enough, and then you discover that autoaiming and strafing occupy the same shoulder button. As a result, you'll accidentally auto-track offscreen targets and be forced to choose between losing your lock and getting a look at whatever you're emptying magazines into. These same technical troubles also mar the multiplayer modes, where any incentive to make yourself a mobile target is totally destroyed by the bright autoaim bracket that's always on top—roll, leap, and lunge that way you may. Standing still and holding down Fire is all the strategy you need here. This is no bloodless *Battle of the Bulge*—just another anemic action romp under the *Army Men* banner.

Shawn

Why blow good dinero on *Sarge's War* when you can replicate the experience for free? Here's how: Step 1) Dump a bag of tan toy army men in any room of your home. Step 2) Dart from one piece of furniture to another while blasting the tan toys with a cap gun. Step 3) Rearrange the toys and furniture slightly, then start again at step 2. Cha-ching! You just saved 50 bucks! Better still, you won't have to battle through this game's repetitive levels (most of which are a subtle variation of the previous stage) and deal with the iffy control. **Why won't Sarge shoot when I press Fire?** Things liven up near the end, but by then, the horrors of *War* had set in a glazed-eyes daze.

Crispin

Sarge's War sets the standard for being standard. In this banal third-person shooter, Sarge uses the usual boring weapon assortment to dispatch the monotonous (and monochromatic) Tan army forces. On every uninspired level, he tediously searches for bombs in order to blow up enemy ordnance. This routine starts thin and wears thinner. Any aspect of the game that aspires to distinction is negated by mediocrity. The areas where Sarge wages Lilliputian war among giant shoes and beer cans would be quite memorable, if not for the lackluster graphics and ho-hum level design. Although the vapid *Sarge's War* is the best *Army Men* game yet, it's still nothing special.

Paul



Publisher: Atari
Developer: Treasure
Players: 1-2
Also On: Sega Dreamcast (Japan)
Play 10 Hours: Get unlimited continues
Best Feature: Creative, intense gameplay
Worst Feature: It's rather short
Website: us.infogrames.com



Most gamers likely fall into one of two camps: Those who've never heard of (and maybe can't pronounce) *Ikaruga* and those who've already imported it from Japan. And since I don't have to bother explaining what's so great about this game to the hardcore fiends who've been playing it on their Japanese Dreamcasts for months, I'm talkin' exclusively to you average joes: You simply must try this game. Now, I know that old-school shooters are also as popular as the Spice Girls these days, but luckily, this one's good enough to help revive the genre. I'm not recommending *Ikaruga* so highly because it has spectacular graphics (in fact, the visuals here are merely average) or tons of diverse levels (nope—you could count 'em all on one hand). Instead, **incredibly innovative, wickedly addictive gameplay** is the compelling reason to pick this up. It's pure genius—every enemy in the game is either black or white and shoots bullets of that color. You can switch your ship's color between the two, and when you're the same color as the bullet headin' at ya, you'll absorb it rather than perish. It gets a little more complex, since your white bullets cause more damage to black enemies (and vice versa) and you get massive point-bonuses for consecutively killing foes of the same color. Sound confusing? Maybe, but after a few sessions, you won't be able to put it down for a long, long time.

Shane

I had a Gollum from *LOTR: The Two Towers* moment when writing this review: "Yesss...game iss pretty. The gameplay iss wonderful!" "But nooo...game iss too hard, and most people won't appreciate it!" "But master gamerness will like game! It'ssss old school and hardcore!" "But nooo...no gamerness are not old school and hardcore, so we cannot recommend game?" So, how do I review this one? I'm a sucker for 2D shooters, and *Ikaruga* shoots with the best of them. The black/white gameplay twist will test your skills like nothing before, but if you weren't raised on classics like *Raiden* and *R-Type*, you probably won't see why we think *Ikaruga* is so preciouss.

Shoe

Like Keanu Reeves said in...well, every movie he's ever been in: Whoa. *Ikaruga*'s onslaught of baddies, bullets, and bosses push your reflexes to their limits, while its brilliant black/white-switching and combo-scoring systems make for surprisingly deep gameplay. As you learn patterns and develop skills (assisted by excellent practice modes and instructional videos), playing *Ikaruga* evolves from just hoping to survive, to wanting to beat the game, to finally just *having* to perfect each stage. My only major gripe is that, despite being infinitely replayable, it could use more levels. Still, if you value mastery and high-score bragging rights, this will blow your socks off your ass.

Mark



**A TEST OF SKILLS...
A BATTLE OF WILLS!**

犬夜叉



INUYASHA
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INUYASHA
A Feudal Fairy Tale

TEEN T
Suggestive Themes
Violence
ESRB



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The Sims

HITMASTERS CHOICE EDITION
EGM
SILVER
REMY COLOR-CORRECTED



The graphics are better on the GameCube version than on PS2, but they're still not quite cutting-edge. Luckily, this game isn't about amazing graphics, 'cause when you're waiting to see just how long it takes for your Sim to pee his pants, you don't really care how crisp the lines are.



In case you missed my review in EGM #163 of the virtually identical PS2 version of *The Sims*, I'll admit here that this game turns me into a sex-crazed flirt eager to get friendly with all the fine Sims (of either sex) within spitting distance, and the virtual soap operas I inevitably create keep me totally hooked. That all probably sounds bizarre, hard to imagine, and potentially scary or sad, but trust me, it happens—even the sensible Demian was hosting keggers (see below). The fun Get a Life mode teaches you how to take care of your Sims in manageable doses, and you're rewarded every time you accomplish something. By the end of the game, when you've learned how to make your Sim successful at work, find him lots of friends, and transform his house into a swains' bachelor pad, you'll probably surprise yourself by actually caring about him. You'll be proud when he comes home from a hard day on the job and learns he's earned a promotion and raise, and you'll cheer him on when he scores with the hot chick at the party. The open-ended Play the Sims mode might seem rather intimidating at first, but once you've played through Get a Life, you'll really understand how to push the boundaries and get creative. The freedom *The Sims* allows is brilliant, and it's about time GameCube got an innovative title like this.

Jennifer

Think of *The Sims* as *Animal Crossing* without the psychotic cartoon animals. It's the original relationship/house furnishing/body function simulator, and even though it's gained some features in the PC-to-Cube transition (I'm lookin' at you, multiplayer games), you may find the constant trips to the toilet, meal prep, and home maintenance initially daunting. Stick with it, though, and virtual life gets a lot better, thanks to maid service, heart-shaped hot tubs, and raging keggers with the gals (and guys!) down the block. This version is identical to the PS2 game features-wise, but looks slightly better. It also suffers from the odd in-game loading times, which really aren't a big deal.

Demian

Social faux pas! Decorating disasters! Why ruin my own life when I can mess up a simulated one instead? *The Sims* remains your best option for experiments you wouldn't dare perform in real life. The game is brilliantly conceived and executed, and while I personally could do without all the tedious care and feeding—especially in the somewhat aimless Play the Sims mode—I found the challenge of balancing needs and achieving specific goals in the Get a Life mode compelling. More furniture and decorating options would be nice, but there's plenty to play with here. I (like Demian) noticed some occasional slowdown, but it didn't affect gameplay—or my score.

Carrie

VISUALS 7 SOUND 8 INGENUITY 9 REPLAY 10

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: Maxis
Players: 1-2
Also On: PS2, Xbox
Featured In: EGM #163
Best Feature: Satisfying Get a Life mode
Worst Feature: Sim time sometimes goes too slow
Website: www.thesims.com



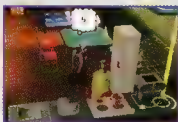
micromanagement to a twisted and perverse experiment in various forms of digital cruelty.

The Play the Sims mode is great for control freaks or budding sadists. You build a house and create a family to your liking, then direct them as you see fit, whether that's keeping them healthy and happy or making them beg for mercy (and they *will* beg). If that seems overwhelming, then the new console-exclusive Get a Life mode is for you. With specific goals in each level that grow progressively more difficult (and more interesting), Get a Life's excellent learning curve offers tons of satisfying moments. Unlockable two-player competitions round out the great variety in this brilliant and quirky game.

They say it's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game, and *The Sims* really proves that point. In either the level-based Get a Life mode or the open-ended Play the Sims mode, you quickly learn that the meat of the game—maintaining your Sims' motives (Hunger, Fun, Energy, etc.)—can range from a hugely satisfying exercise in

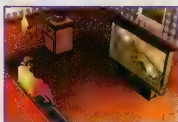
QUIZ: YOUR SIM PERSONALITY

Use this handy quiz to find out whether you'll be a benevolent dictator—or just a dictator.



You're a loser who lives with your mom. If you cook her dinner, she'll help you get your own place. You:

- A. Grab a cookbook, learn a recipe, and start fryin'.
- B. Sell her TV and order a pizza with the cash.
- C. Lock her outside till she dies of starvation.



Your new pad just isn't a home without a plasma-screen TV. To come up with some extra dough, you:

- A. Work hard until you score that big promotion.
- B. Learn to paint, then peddle your art for a profit.
- C. Sell your roommate's electric guitar.



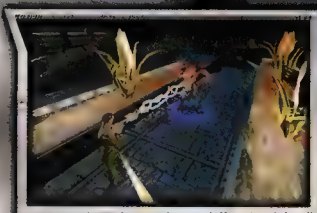
You've got a crush on the chick next door so you invite her to a party, where you proceed to:

- A. Warm her up with a joke, then turn on the charm.
- B. Get her drunk and invite her into the hot tub.
- C. Trap her in your room and ignore her cries for mercy.

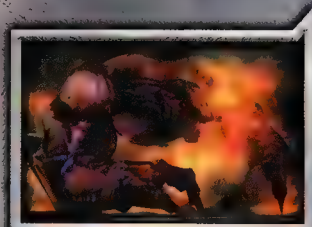
KEY: However you answered, you'll find a few fun moments in *The Sims* (but if you picked all Cs, you're one sick puppy).

Think Fast, Act Fast, Or Die Fast.

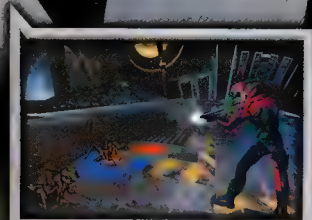
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MATURE
M
Blood and Gore
Violence
Strong Language

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WWE Crush Hour



Publisher: THQ
Developer: Pacific Coast Power & Light
Players: 1-2
Also On: PS2
Best Feature: Low price
Worst Feature: Simply existing
Needs: Tobias Bruckner's T-Rex with tractor treads as an unlockable car
Website: www.thq.com



Forget Dolly the sheep and Eve the wonderbaby—*Crush Hour* is a perfect example of the perils of cloning. Though this *Twisted Metal* copy has been infused with the WWE's in-your-face attitude, it's lost all the fun and flavor of its source of inspiration. Truth be told, this hillbilly hybrid of wasslin' and monster car wreckin' is more mutant monstrosity than respectable knock-off. From the sterile "signature" moves (Rakishi could've flung his loincloth instead of firing the same laser as the 29 other losers) to the colorless commentary and ripped-off rooftop arenas that play like a homeless man's *TM*, one thing becomes abundantly clear: *Crush* is nothing more than a

shameless attempt to make as much loot with as little effort as possible. To its credit, the game sells for just 20 bucks. It also controls reasonably well and is inadvertently hilarious (although much less so if you're the one forking over \$20 for it). Ordinarily, this is where we'd also acknowledge *Crush Hour's* potential appeal to rabid wrestling fans, but aside from the six lines of sampled celebrity dialogue and the occasional bootleg-quality video clips that bracket matches, you'd hardly know you're playing a WWE tie-in at all.

Sample commentary for the thrilling action depicted below: Edge...continues to...fire. Edge...continues to...shoot in all directions. Edge...continues to...twisty rockets! (Except, imagine it delivered in garbled, piecemeal bursts approximately three minutes after each action.)



Conceptually, I adore the idea of wrestlers in atomic-powered toboggans tearing the living crap out of one another, but *Crush Hour* fails to actually deliver a passable game based on this absurd premise. Does it have cool, *Twisted Metal*-style vehicles? Nope. Blind children could've whittled cooler cars using butter knives on wood blocks. At least the core combat's solid, right? Dream on. Combos are nonexistent, the secondary ordinance is unimpressive (twisty rockets, anyone?), and none of the nearly indistinguishable "custom" moves are logically connected to the inbred characters that execute 'em. Plus, the dry, ass-crack-ugly levels are utterly devoid of secrets. Amazingly, the poorly advised in-game commentary might actually be the game's most embarrassing aspect: *Crush Hour* takes fewer than a dozen Jim Ross sound bites and recombines them with Speak & Spell fluency to produce incoherent stammering about things that happened three minutes ago. It's terminally asinine. But worst of all, though *Crush Hour* sits on a comedic gold mine as rich as any imaginable, it takes itself seriously—and that's a pity. Played for laughs as a ludicrous farce, this just might have worked. As it stands, **it should be completely avoided at all costs.** Even if you were cursed with a superfluous 21st chromosome, you'd have more fun reading *Highlights*.

Shawn

It's an idea whose time has come and, in the time it took to type this sentence, gone. Despite the predictable shoeorning of the license (i.e., tired sound clips from spandex-clad behemoths), even ardent WWE fans will be bored with *Crush Hour*. Vaguely wrestling-related stages offer players the opportunity to drive around in circles; attack foes with standard-issue guns, rockets, and lasers; and stave off death by collecting endlessly respawning health items. There's nothing new or innovative here, and even the mild thrill of powering The Rock's car through a lumberjack-themed arena dissipates long before players rack up 10 (or even 20) wins.

Gary D.

I smell what THQ is cookin', and it's damn foul. Sadly, *Crush Hour's* strongest selling point—the slapped-on WWE license—is what hurts the game most. **Wrestlers spouting generic one-liners while engaging in car wars is just plain dumb.** Remove the wrestling theme and this game still falls short of the bar set by the *Twisted Metal* series. It's visually unappealing and sonically repulsive. Plus, the gameplay's dull—a slim selection of weapon upgrades, pitiful special attacks, and the fact that blindly ramming into things is more effective than shooting basically leaves no room for fun. *Crush Hour* will disappoint even the most devout wrestling lunatics.

Bryan



Rather than customize each wrestler's ride to match his or her personality, *Crush Hour's* makers simply assigned numbers to an assortment of Hot Wheels cars. These were then placed in a bag and drawn at random by their respective drivers. At least, that's our theory.

VISUALS **SOUND** **INGENUITY** **REPLAY**
 4 2 2 4



*In the malevolent dusk
of a solar eclipse,
Dracula's evil becomes
imprisoned in shadow.*

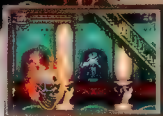
*The prophecies of old
foretell of its return,
with the destined dawn
of a future alignment.*

*Upon its release from
the embrace of time,
darkness stirs and shifts
to resurrect the master.*

*Born into a soul
of innocent blood,
Dracula rages in wrath
to consume the light.*

Castlevania

Aria of Sorrow



Animated Blood
Mild Violence

GAME BOY ADVANCE

www.konami.com/usa



Developer: Acclaim Sports
Publisher: Acclaim Studios Austin
Platform: PS2, GC
Genre: Bundled ice packs
Key Feature: Classic teams and players
Worst Feature: Frustrating batting system
Website: www.allstarbaseball04.com

There's a tremendous crop of top-quality baseball games this year, but *ASB 2004* isn't one of them. It simply can't compete. First of all, **the batting is physically painful.** In order to avoid constant check-swings, you'll have to pound on the pressure-sensitive button with all your might. Plus, lining up the finicky batting cursor just isn't fun. Around the sixth inning (when you've just finished icing down your throbbing fingers), more frustration sets in as you continue to acclimate to the unpredictable fielding control. It's too hard to judge routine fly balls because the non-adjustable camera angle is set so far back you feel like you're playing *ASB 2004* from the Goodyear blimp. Even if you're perfectly positioned inside the circle designating where pop-ups land, there's no guarantee you'll catch them. Besides the nagging game play issues, *ASB 2004* suffers where the series shined in years past—the visuals. The player models and stadiums are subpar compared to those in Sega's *WSB* and EA's *MVP*. Fluid player animations are the game's only visual saving grace. In its defense, *ASB 2004* comes packed with a ton of extras such as downloadable rosters, MLB legends (including the likes of Gehrig and Ruth), and even Negro League greats. The entertaining Pick-Up and Scenario modes also help, but with so many baseball games out there offering tighter gameplay, I can't recommend this one.

Bryan

If you paid me enough, then maybe I'd play this game over the best-of-the-crop *High Heat '04*. While *All-Star* feels like it's been crafted for baseball lovers by baseball lovers, some poor execution drags it down into mediocrity. First and foremost, **can we please get rid of cursor battling?** I'm never a fan of cursors, and *All-Star's* makes me especially punch-a-wall angry. If I want to pull the ball, I should swing early, right? Not here—I just have to adjust the cursor. Why is that? Isn't this baseball? Cursors aside, the pitches are thrown at such eye-popping speeds, you won't hit them anyway. Nifty unlockables, pretty visuals, and good commentary help, but not enough.

Todd

All-Star Baseball definitely has awesome extras, such as a bev of hidden uniforms, moves, cheats, and other nifty secrets—as well as a cool Scenario mode that throws you into nail-biting situations. And playing in classic stadiums with Negro League and Major League legends stirs up a nice nostalgic feeling. Too bad the actual game play isn't very good. Hitting is a chore—linking with *ASB's* signature batting cursor while trying to turn around a fastball is hellish. Combine this with imprecise fielding, and you're left with more frustration than fun. Rent it to check out the impressive bonus features, but if you're looking to buy a baseball game, you can do much better.

G. Ford

VISUALS SOUND INGENUITY REPLAY



Publisher: Infragames
Developer: Pipeworks Software
Platform: PS2, GC
Genre: Mechagodzilla 3
Key Feature: Four-player monster mayhem
Worst Feature: Sluggish control
Website: us.infragames.com

If you're reading this review and wondering whether *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee* is something you'd enjoy, first fill out this quick and easy questionnaire: 1) Do you like giant monsters as portrayed by men wearing rubber suits? 2) Do you like smashing things up (namely office buildings) real good? 3) Do you not mind if the controls aren't exactly *Street Fighter*-responsive (read: sluggish)? If you answered yes to all three questions, then you're precisely the kind of person who'd enjoy rubbernecking (literally) with fighters like Godzilla, Rodan, and Megalon. (If you answered no to the above queries, you're likely a hateful miser like Paul—see below). If you've glossed over our previous GameCube coverage, know now that *Godzilla: DAMM* is a no-nonsense brawler—less finesse than straight-up mess—designed to let four folks kick each other's movie-monster asses with punches, throws, and laser breath. Xbox owners will be glad to know this version comes with new features the Cube one lacked, like enhanced graphics (mutant dinosaur skin has rarely looked this soft and supple), new arenas to trash about in, and a streamlined control scheme. The combat is simple button-mashing material, but it fits the subject matter perfectly. For younger gamers and Godzilla fans in general, this is fan service at the top of its game.

Milkman

Godzilla: DAMM faithfully re-creates the inhabitants of Monster Island, but puts them in a lukewarm, shallow fighting game with unresponsive controls. *DAMM* is bursting with exploitable moves—for instance, if you throw your opponent into the force field surrounding the arena, he'll bounce back, and you can throw him again. Repeat as desired. One monster can burrow underground with impunity and attack from below at its leisure. **The only way to win is to discover your character's cheap moves and jam on them relentlessly.** If, like Milkman, you want the genuine Godzilla in a fighter, give *DAMM* a shot. If you'd rather have genuine fighting, stay far away.

Paul

As a single-player game, *Godzilla's* average at best. The monotonous one-on-one matches in Adventure mode simply serve as a means to open up beasties to use in the far-superior Versus battles. Still, *DAMM* is the perfect reason to invite a bunch of friends over to beat each other senseless while scarfing down pizza and beer (the "root" variety if you're not of age). But beware—the game favors button mashers, contains plenty of cheap moves, and has controls that are sometimes frustrating. This version has only slight improvements over its Cube cousin (Mechagodzilla 3), the promise of Live content updates, and custom soundtracks, but we'll take what we can get.

CJ

VISUALS SOUND INGENUITY REPLAY



Developer: Arat
Developer: Babylon Software
Platform: PS2, GC
Genre: Also On None
Key Feature: Real-looking go-karts
Worst Feature: Not enough cool power-ups
Website: us.infogames.com

I love a good kart racer—especially one like this where the go-karts are actually based on the real thing. But with *FK*, striving for realism might actually limit the appeal. Since most kart games are built upon recognizable characters and over-the-top special attacks (like in *Mario Kart* or *Crash Team Racing*), the generic *Karting* feels too bland. It's a shame, really, since it's a solid racer with smooth visuals, a bouncy soundtrack, and some creative track designs. And while it does have power-ups and a combat system (you swing a baseball bat at your opponents), clocking guys with an ordinary bat isn't quite as fun as shooting say, a fluorescent-green turtle shell at 'em. **Thankfully, a cool team-play aspect makes up for the lackluster fighting.** When you start your racing career, you join one of two teams. Then, out on the track, you've gotta help your teammates while pummeling your enemies. Go a whole race without screwing up one of your partners and your karma rises a bit, earning you new abilities and better karts. It's an interesting idea that keeps you playing.

Greg S.

VISUALS SOUND INGENUITY REPLAY



Developer: THQ
Developer: Cranky Pants Games
Platform: PS2, GC
Genre: Also On: PS2, GC
Key Feature: Superb spitscreen multiplayer
Worst Feature: No online action
Website: www.redfaction.com

While the first *Red Faction* staged a coup in the formulaic first-person-shooter genre, this sequel, curiously, sides in many ways with the rulers its predecessor kicked out of power. The vehicles you commandeer now ride on rails (in the first *RF* you had full control), and the more finicky Geo-Mod scenery-destruction engine quells the potential for environmental vandalism. Even the plot plays out like some made-for-UPN, *A-Team* 2005 movie compared to the first *Faction's* high-concept, *Total Recall*-style story. Still, *Faction 2* remains a rocket ride with airtight controls and quicksilver pacing that's rarely interrupted by aimless wandering—the blistering single-player mayhem will keep you hooked throughout. Multiplayer, though, is where your techno-heat packs the biggest punch. Once just an afterthought, this mode has matured into a full-fledged four-player firefight. Granted, it's not online, but 40 play-balanced maps, a dozen inspired weapons, and customizable bots make for good spitscreen compensation.

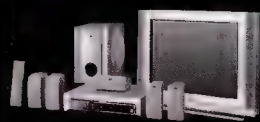
Shawn

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Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Vis Interactive
Players: 1-6
Also On: PS2
Cool Stats: Rhode Island, denial
Best Feature: Multiplayer, \$20 price tag
Worst Feature: Lackluster Story mode
Website: www.stateofemergency.com

Reworked and redone for Xbox, this third-person anarchy simulation shakes the very firmament of modern thought: Put simply, *State of Emergency* disproves the scientific theorem that it's impossible to polish a turd. The ultraviolent premise of its PlayStation 2 forebearer lives on—you'll find explosions, fire, gunfights, beatings, and carnage aplenty. It makes the Roman Circus seem like a **Family Circus cartoon**. As a freedom fighter, players wreck stuff, kill people, and try to avoid authority's skull-crushing truncheon. Gameplay—whether open-ended or mission based—generally hits the scale at frenetic, with hundreds of cops, looters, citizens, gang members, and rebels choking the screen. Developer Vis screwed the pooch by making the PS2 version single-player only, which proceeded to sink thanks to poor A.I., a dearth of mission types, and unbalanced challenges. The Xbox version has had its single-player action tweaked to little effect; characters in need of protection still charge foolishly into gunfire, and the improvements to the game's balancing may have been done by chimpanzees. Luckily, a new multiplayer mode offers salvation. Here, players need not worry about repetitive missions, impossible tasks, or computer-controlled dolt who don't understand this simple equation: bullets + flesh = bad. With four players, the carnage quadruples and the state of euphoria increases exponentially.

Greg O.

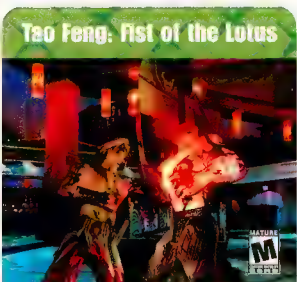
Anyone who nuked a few food courts in the PS2 version of *State of Emergency* knows this game plays dirty, with its cartoony ultraviolence and gimmicky mass of humanity that's fun to watch for a few hours but soon loses its novelty. That's when you sober up to the game's shortcomings—mainly, **there's not much of an actual game here**. Escort missions in the story-based Revolution mode become maddening (prepare for endless do-overs), and singling out targets in a crowd is no laugh riot. The developer did add tweaks that make the game suck less, but the real lure here is the multiplayer. Get four pals to split the \$20 price, and this game's a steal!

Chrispin

Man, I never thought I'd be playing this again. Last year's disappointing PS2 version was a total bore, so Rockstar's fighting a perilous battle trying to make Xbox owners give a damn now. I'll give them some credit, though—the improvements here (moderately fun multiplayer modes, a rebalanced single-player game, and custom soundtrack support) definitely sweeten the deal, and **shipping this thing at \$20 is a wise choice**. Problem is, the underlying experience is still riddled with subpar visuals, frustrating aiming, dippy A.I., and lots of tiresome missions. Pick it up if you're desperate for some brain-optional four-player mayhem, but don't bother playing it solo.

Shane

VISUALS SOUND INGENUITY REPLAY



Publisher: Microsoft
Distributor: Studio Gigante
Players: 1-2
Also On: None
Highlight: EGM #164
Best Feature: Breathtaking visuals
Worst Feature: Thoroughly janky gameplay
Website: www.xbox.com

The timeless cliché of not judging a book by its cover puns double duty with *Tao Feng* because 1) the cover is laugh-out-loud ugly while the game looks quite swanky, and 2) although the graphics look fantastic, the accompanying gameplay is fundamentally busted. Your initial foray into the game world will leave you amazed—each of the gorgeous fighting arenas oozes with subtle interactive details. For example, you can grab a support beam, swing around it, and launch into your opponent, knocking him into a bridge that smashes open and releases a fluttering flock into the air. Sounds awesome, right? Well, it would be if the fighting engine didn't feel shoddy and broken. A combination of *Mortal Kombat*-style dialed-in combos, cheap one-button special attacks, and the fighting game's best effective blocking system render *Tao Feng* miserably unfun in the long run. Oh, I shouldn't forget the painfully obtuse Practice mode that features no visual reminder of the long-ass combo you're attempting. Or the hokey, overlong voiceover that precedes every match in the single-player Quest mode. Or the laughable enemy A.I. (try simply jump kicking the sword-wielding final boss repeatedly—it worked for me). Overall, it's a **bravely simple but brainless fighter** not worth your money or time.

Shane

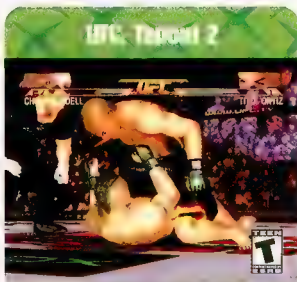
Tao Feng seems to fill a wish list of fighter features, but its **piecemeal approach results in schizophrenic gameplay**. Case in point: Why put welfare-cheese Chi attacks (acid regurgitation, anyone?) in a game inspired by more elegant fighters—namely *Virtua Fighter 4*? You won't want to bother setting up juggles when one-button Chi blasts deal more damage. And why pair such expansive arenas with confining controls tailored more toward fighting on a track? *Tao Feng* isn't a turd, though. With more eye candy than an art museum and many borrowed bits from the genre's best, it's fun in short sessions. I just can't see experienced pugilists sticking around.

Shawn

Playing Tao Feng is a lot like diarrhea; the longer it lasts, the more irritated you get. The various bits simply don't come together: Awkward animations, poor collision detection, a lackluster combo system, and hopelessly generic character designs do not a quality game make. Matches dispatch elegance in favor of sheer brutality, resulting in awkward, lumbering fights with all the grace of a weeping stool pigeon. The few laudable innovations (interactive environments, limb damage) are rendered void due to the game's many inherent flaws. *Tao Feng* serves as a reminder that Microsoft needs to do a much better job choosing its horses. Wait for *Soul Calibur 2*.

Evan

VISUALS SOUND INGENUITY REPLAY



Genre: TDK Mediactive
Developer: Dream Factory
Players: 1-2
Also On: None
Workshop: International Male
Best Feature: Eight-player ladder
Worst Feature: Long load times, short bouts
Website: www.ufcvideogames.com

While an uncompromising dedication to realism doesn't exactly cripple *Tapout 2*'s mixed martial arts action, it does limit the appeal for those unfamiliar with the sport. For example, most of the fighters are unrecognizable unless you're a UFC fan, and the fact that they're all dressed for the same Hanes commercial doesn't help, either. But at least these pugilists are limber, lifelike, and brutally solid, unlike the plastic people in previous UFC titles. Plus, **the fighting system, although newbie-friendly, is complex enough to encourage mastery**. Each fighter has a few custom kick-punch combos, and they all share the same intuitive commands for submission holds and counters. Once I'd warmed up to kicking shins and wrangling in the reversal-heavy man-pretzel grades, I had a good time battling buds in the Versus mode. And when you both acquire the skills to survive for more than 20 seconds, the fun really heats up. I can't say as much for the single-player contests, with their Everest-steep difficulty curve and lack of continues, though. The Career mode offers the same action, but with more generic, less-balanced combatants—although Building my own backfence in tighty whities (known as The Tenderloin Tussle) is fun fun fun using the stock fighters. Overall, UFC aficionados do dig it, and even the uninitiated might enjoy *Tapout 2*'s two-player brawlin'.

Shawn

UFC is such a nice sport, I bet jai alai players are jealous they don't get a game. *Tapout 2* incorporates so many different combat styles, it's hard to do them all justice—the capoeira fighter I created had about one move that looked vaguely capoeira-esque, and it was one I had to unlock. **The fighters here look great in a shiny Ken doll sort of way, but the gameplay and general presentation are merely passable**. Striking moves lack variety, the promising Career mode suffers from bad design, and you can wax the floor with computer-controlled characters if you're willing to employ cheap and repetitive tactics (which I am). For the hardcore UFC fans in the house only.

Demian

Every time I play a new UFC title, the result is the same: I get a sudden urge to be doing something, anything, else. The problem may lie with the fact that I'm not a real-life UFC fan, so the fighters all look the same and their combat styles seem interchangeable. But it probably has more to do with the boring gameplay, which is **just not much fun**. Matches often last mere seconds, so you'll spend more time on the loading screen than actually fighting. You'll win round after round with basic combos and simple submission moves, keeping the excitement level between ho-hum and unremarkable. At least this version looks real good and has a fairly decent Career mode.

CJ

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Run Like Hell

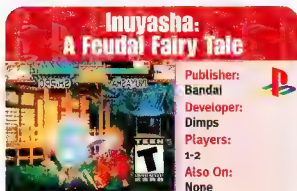
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Digital Mayhem
Players: 1
Also On: PS2

Listen For: Captain Janeway
Website: www.interplay.com

Best Feature: Surprisingly interesting plot
Worst Feature: Janky camera angles obscure action

Before the age of videogames, philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre commented, "Hell is other people." Had he been around to experience *Run Like Hell*, he would have changed it to, "**Hell is playing other people in a game with a really bad camera.**" Flawed yet truly fun, *RLH* makes players work to get grizzled space hero Nick Conner off the doomed space station Forsetti. Alien space invaders are wreaking havoc, Nick's allies are dropping like flies, and the damn camera keeps jerking wildly as if fed a particularly potent stimulant. A frantic pace and wonderful sense of creeping doom keep players running and gunning smoothly—well, except for that flaky camera. Story-wise, there's some real narrative depth here; *RLH* has Conner hunting for his true love amid the chaos, and the game fleshes out its characters nicely. Here on Xbox, the game's been beefed up to the PS2 version with improved graphics, additional rooms to explore, and a brand-new level set in a hydroponics bay. It's only a new hat on an old game, but it helps make *RLH* more pleasurable for newcomers and vets alike.

Grey O.



Inuyasha: A Feudal Fairy Tale

Publisher: Bandai
Developer: Dimps
Players: 1-2
Also On: None

Inuyasha means: "Dog demon"
Website: bandaigames.com

Best Feature: Plenty of extras for fans
Worst Feature: Stiff gameplay

If you're thinking "Inu-what," then you obviously haven't seen the popular Japanese anime (currently airing on Cartoon Network) this fighter's based on. It's a good show, and fans will find lots to like here (especially hardcore anime purists, who will be happy it's subtitled and not horribly dubbed into English). At first glance, this may look like another zB fighter, but the Story mode—where you pummel the show's stars to collect mystical crystals—offers an involving plot. Character-specific dialogue and a handful of inventive minigames (like destroying a large boulder within a time limit) keep this mode surprisingly fresh. Play enough of it to unlock the Backpack—a menu with a wealth of fan-friendly goodies including art galleries, sound tests, and an option to customize the characters' victory taunts. But ultimately, that's all window dressing for a bland-looking, simplistic fighting game. *Inuyasha's* button-mash gameplay feels stiff and dry, so even Versus matches aren't likely to hold your interest for long. Still, for the price, it'll satisfy anime lovers as a decent tie-in.

CJ



Publisher: THQ
Developer: Sonic Team
Players: 1 (2-4 linked)
Supports: GC-GBA Link
Worst Name: Cream the Rabbit
Best Feature: Vivid, beautiful graphics
Worst Feature: Unoriginal level designs
Website: www.thq.com

As a survivor of the great Super Nintendo vs. Sega Genesis console war of 1991, I feel like I'm in *The Twilight Zone* every time I control Sega's hyper hedgehog on a Nintendo platform. But as long as he's in top-quality games like *Sonic Advance 2*, I'm cool with him running in Mario's crowd. This sequel improves upon every aspect of the first GBA *Sonic*: The graphics are snazzier, the music's catchier, the bosses pose more of a threat, and each character now sports a surprisingly deep arsenal of special attacks. Also, this time around it actually isn't a struggle to snag the Chaos Emeralds—SA2's tense, robot-pursuit bonus stages are legitimately fun. That same creative spark doesn't quite carry over to the regular levels, as most are borrowed from previous *Sonic* games (I've spent through a few fire, ice, and music-themed stages in my time). Luckily, they're so exciting and pretty, you won't mind the lack of ingenuity. In fact, you'll probably want to tackle these stages multiple times in order to unlock all the hidden goodies, which include secret levels and two additional playable characters. Plus, some wacky four-player versus games (when you link up multiple GBAs) and a Chao-raising simulation (when linked up to *Sonic Adventure 2* on GameCube) further extend *Advance 2's* impressive depth. This is the best original action-platform game on GBA, hands down.

Shane

This is exactly what I hoped the first *Sonic Advance* would be—a fun, fast-paced romp with level designs on par with those in the classic Sega Genesis games. *Advance 2* is a pocket adrenaline rush; it's the perfect complement to the more moderately paced *Mario* games already in your collection. Sonic has finally been given a sense of refreshing new moves—the tornado attack, backwards somersault, megabounce, and more—so he's no longer limited to his standard running, jumping, and spinning. My one gripe is that the game is way too short, but that's been a problem with *Sonic* games since their introduction a decade ago.

Ethan

Simple fact, folks: Sonic belongs in 2D. That's why I enjoyed the original *Sonic Advance*, and this sequel is just as good. The level designs are classic *Sonic*, and you'll have to play them multiple times to explore everything. Level-specific animations also add an extra element of fun (like when you watch Sonic hold onto his blue butt as he slides down a hill in the Ice Paradise Zone). And while I was skeptical of the new character, Cream the Rabbit, she won me over—her animations are cute and she attacks with a cuddly Chao, for crying out loud! The on-the-run boss fights get tiresome, but overall, this is a great continuation of the *Sonic* series.

Phil



Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Atomic Planet
Players: 1-2 (on one GBA or linked)
Also On: PS2, Sega Saturn
Hottest Chick: Hsien-Ko from *Darkstalkers*
Best Feature: Deviously addicting
Worst Feature: Telling gems apart on a dark screen
Website: www.capcom.com

No longer will you need to place a triple-digit eBay bid to play *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. Here it is—a pixel-perfect port of the game's crown jewel...and it's portable to boot. As with all the best puzzles, *SPFIT* successfully stacks brain-boggling complexity atop the simplest of premises. Arrange like-colored gemstones so they share horizontal or vertical borders, then shatter your collection with a matching Crash gem. Doing so creates space for you and crowds your competition—all while your superpowered Capcom fighters duke it out in the center of the screen. It's easy to learn yet immeasurably subtle, just like its spiritual granddaddy, *Tetris*. And indeed, knowing when to amass screen-filling multistrings (at the risk of having your master plan buried in debris) and when to quickly counter with small, steady strikes gives each game a cool, clever balance. As with its street-fighting progenitor, solo play is fine for practice and unlocking additional characters (guess who?), but multiplayer is the clincher. The zany two-guys-on-one-GBA setup is awkward; link-up with the right combo, though, and you'll be demanding "luno mas" until your batteries are tapped. My only complaint comes with the handheld territory: Differentiating gem types on the dark and dinky GBA screen is dicey and can—will cost you combos. Still, it's a small price to pay for portable puzzle perfection.

Shawn

Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo may be old, but it's still one of the best puzzle games ever made. That's fully, this handheld incarnation delivers a stunningly accurate port. All the combo-forming, gem-smashing gameplay is here, along with all the unlockable secrets. It even supports the GBA Link Cable. Too cool. The only things I could find wrong occurred during large combos when some slight slowdown and sound dropout reared their glitchy heads. Still, since you're not actually controlling anything as the combos shatter, this doesn't affect gameplay. Like the original *Tetris* on Game Boy, you can play *SPFIT* forever.

Phil

All the guys around the office (like the two above) act as though this is the greatest thing since *Tetris*. My theory: Those blockheads just don't have the brainpower to appreciate true masterpieces like *Puyo Pop*, *Tetris Attack*, and *Pokémon Puzzle*. *Puzzle Fighter* is a damn fine game, but certain design elements (like the clear-all Super Gem and garbage blocks that can help a player more than they hurt) make come-from-behind victories too commonplace. This leads to exciting games, sure—but ones that don't necessarily take serious skills to win. You'll find lots to like here (I didn't have a problem with the graphics like Shawn did), but better portable puzzlers exist.

Shoe



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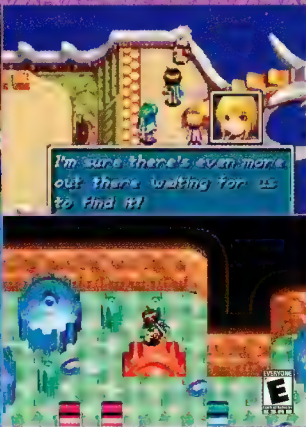
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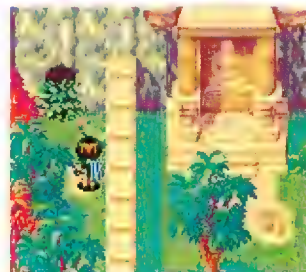
PLANTRONICS



Gateway



Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Camelot
Players: 1 (1-2 linked)
Import You: Golden Sun characters
Featured In: EGM #157
Best Feature: Controlling two parties at once leads to great puzzles and battles.
Worst Feature: It's more of the same, but much, much harder.
Website: www.nintendo.com



Stuck? Often, your Psynergy powers are the key.

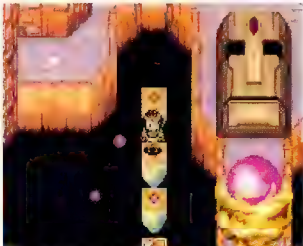
game's party and manage two adventuring groups at once.

The Lost Age may be an immediate continuation of the first game, but the graphics, sound, and gameplay mechanics have scarcely evolved. This isn't necessarily a bad thing—the original *Golden Sun* looked pretty sweet, had an epic (by GBA standards, anyway) soundtrack, and offered a solid mix of fun battles and tough puzzles. This one follows that same pattern, but on a grander scale—the dungeons are more challenging, and the Djinn spell effects are even more impressive, making it a top-notch continuation to the GBA's finest RPG series.

Previously on *Golden Sun*: Our intrepid hero, Isaac, leads a feisty band of young adventurers on a quest to rescue two lovely maidens, Jenna and Sheba, from the clutches of the vile Mars Clan. During the climactic showdown at Venus Lighthouse, a cataclysmic tidal wave assaults the land and Jenna's brother craftily escapes with the girls to safety. What will become of the two groups of heroes?

Got all that? OK, now you're ready to tackle *The Lost Age*. Even if you finished the first game (and especially if you didn't), you'll need this refresher course, since the sequel thrusts you directly back into the dense story. There's an interesting plot twist, though: This time around, you control the former damsels in distress. You'll explore mysterious continents, hook up with some newfound friends, and master a bevy of new magical attacks. Plus, you'll eventually meet up with the first

A plethora of awesomely tricky dungeons offers *The Lost Age's* finest moments. You'll be pushing blocks, rappelling down cliffs, causing tremors, digging holes, freezing puddles (we could go on, but you get the point) in nearly every cavern and shrine. Few RPGs, portable or not, offer such puzzling fun.



Unlike most RPG follow-ups, *The Lost Age* isn't a complete, standalone sequel. Instead, it's essentially the second act of one gargantuan story (much like that other fantasy megahit, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*). It picks up mere moments after the first *Golden Sun*, which is cool for fans of the first game, but confusing for series newcomers. Being a direct continuation also means it neither looks nor sounds any better than its forerunner. These nearly identical production values disappoint slightly—then again, I prefer improved, challenging gameplay over new visuals any day. And *Age* completely delivers in the gameplay arena; it's a much deeper and more rewarding RPG this time around. You'll be bombarded by countless Djinn summons, useful new Psynergy powers, and wondrous places to explore. You have to work hard to earn everything, though, as **Age sports some remarkably tricky puzzles and labyrinths.** I'm a sucker for difficult dungeons, so these brain-benders kept me enthralled (and occasionally baffled) throughout. I especially like having more playable characters, and here you control second-stringers Felix, Jenna, Sheba, and Piers at first, and eventually add the original four GS characters. At this rate, I'm game for another chapter or two in the future; the finest portable roleplaying franchise ever deserves to continue.

Scooter

Whoa, who are these people again? Even though I did finish the first GS, it still took a few hours before I fully recalled the events that had transpired way back in 2001. (Maybe 15 months between releases was a bit too long, Nintendo.) Confusing plot aside, ***Lost Age* is a stellar RPG** with its priorities in the right place—its lightning-quick random battles aren't the main source of challenge. Instead, you'll spend most of your brainpower solving incredibly clever puzzles in the game's dungeons. It's not going to win any originality contests (this looks, sounds, and feels nearly identical to its predecessor), but when more of the same means more top-notch roleplaying, I can't complain.

Shane

I never solved the original *Golden Sun*, so this sequel left me pretty confused from the get-go. The events that took place at the end of the first game are important to this one, and the long (and hard-to-follow) text prologue that introduces *Lost Age* didn't help much. Once I did finally come to grips with what was going on, I thought the story was fine, but nothing special; the same goes for the abundant random battles. What really makes the game click, though, are its ingenious puzzles (consider investing in a hint book) and lush, stunning visuals. ***Lost Age* is no *Final Fantasy*, but it is the best RPG you can get on GBA right now.**

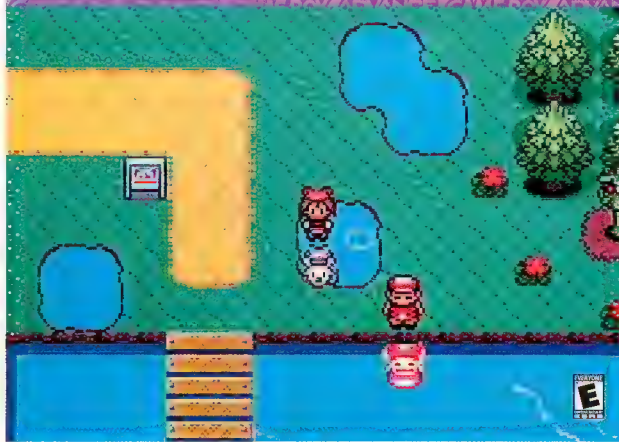
Ethan

VISUALS SOUND INGENUITY REPLAY



Just as in the original *Golden Sun*, you'll have to scour the land to locate feisty elemental Djinn. Equip these friendly monsters, and you'll significantly increase your characters' stats. You can also summon them in battle to rain destruction upon enemies, and even combine two different types of Djinn to call forth screen-filling super-beasties for maximum damage.

Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire

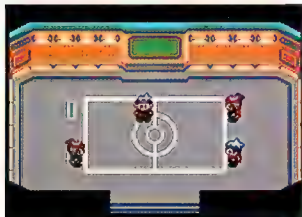


Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Game Freak
Players: 1 (2-4 linked)
Featured In: EGM #162
Best Feature: Tons of new Pokémon to catch
Worst Feature: Same ol', same ol'
Website: www.pokemon-games.com

For too long, Nintendo has sat idly by as Konami's *Yu-Gi-Oh!* steals the hearts of elementary school children everywhere. Well, no more! *Pokémon* is finally here for Game Boy Advance, but can the series reach the levels of success that the prior entries enjoyed? It's hard to say at this point, but with a new quest in a new world, 100+ new Pocket Monsters to collect, and the ever-popular multiplayer battles (with up to four com-



batants this time), it'll probably lure *Poké*-fans back into the fold. Our reviewers wished that a little more effort had gone into making this a truly impressive, next-gen update, though. As it stands, it's a solid adventure, but nothing earth-shattering.



Much like your bedroom in *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver*, *Ruby* and *Sapphire* give you a special, private place for you to call your own. This time, however, it's a hidden cave that you have to dig out on your own before decorating it with plants, toys, and lovable little Pokémon dolls.



I suppose I should be ashamed. I'm a 28-year-old man, and I love *Pokémon*. Sure, all the cartoons, cards, toys, comics, and other merchandise got a bit (OK, a lot) excessive, but at the heart of the phenomenon, there were some great videogames. Now that the craze has died down, these new GBA releases arrive with minimal hype. *Ruby* and *Sapphire*, like the previous Game Boy games, are simple yet fun RPGs with great strategic battles and the ever-addictive "catch 'em all" hook. Unfortunately, these allegedly advanced versions are a lot like the older games. They're disturbingly similar, really. Nintendo seems to be following the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" rule with this series, and it's beginning to wear thin. Don't get me wrong, *Ruby* and *Sapphire* are still great fun, and I became addicted all over again, but I felt as though I'd done this all before. Which I have, multiple times in *Blue*, *Yellow*, *Gold*, and *Crystal*. Sure, there are enhancements here and there—more colorful visuals, occasional graphical effects (reflections in water, etc.), *Pokémon* contests (kind of like a dog show), some gimmicky e-Reader connectivity, and equally gimmicky 2-on-2 battles—but nothing takes advantage of the GBA's power. This is really tough for me to judge. I do love them, but the feeling of "been there, done that" looms large over the entire experience. Better have some big improvements next time, Nintendo, or I may not be so nice. **Phil**

These other guys are being too easy on *Ruby* and *Sapphire*. Yeah, they do sport a handful of cool features, including strategic 2-on-2 *Pokémon* battles and a Trait system that finally makes each critter into more than the sum of its stats. But the quest and play mechanics are just so painfully stale. The new characters are carbon copies of the old ones, the new world is functionally identical to Johto and Kanto, and the gameplay changes are little more than subtle refinements. Unlike CJ, I think avid fans will be happy, but everyone else will find their patience tested by games that strive to be little more than remakes of the original with different *Pokémon* and snappy GBA graphics. **Casey**

Pokémon's back, and while I've adored the past 'mons, something's different this time. These new versions look better, are better organized, and have a sexy new gimmick (2-on-2 battles)—but there's a problem. I just can't shake the feeling that I've played these games three or four times before—and the new garnish isn't enough to take the series to the next level. In many ways, they aren't even as complex as *Gold* and *Silver*. Of course, *Pokémon*'s always been fun, and *Ruby* and *Sapphire* are no different. They're still great RPGs that, if you've never gotten up close and personal with *Pikachu* before, deserve playing (yes, seriously). But *Poké*-pros (like myself) will be a little disappointed. **CJ**

VISUALS SOUND INGENUITY REPLAY

There's no denying that the *Pokémon* games look very similar. See if you can identify each version based on these pictures:





The Rest of the Crap

Reviewing the games no one else bothered to



Normally, the names of the games I'm forced to review begin with the words "Sabrina the Teenage Witch" and end with something like "Idiotic Shopping Adventure." And guess what? This month isn't different. However, as a prize for the outstanding insights in my review of *SpongeBob's X-treme Pedestrian Safety*, this month, I was given two games with titles that do not involve any puppets or cartoon characters. But all this meant was that I had to actually play the games before I decided to hate them.

Tom and Jerry: War of the Whiskers

Publisher: NewKidCo

ESRB: T

NewKidCo heard the badly spelled complaints from stupid gamers everywhere claiming that more than two attacks in a fighting game confused and enraged them, so *Whiskers* is as

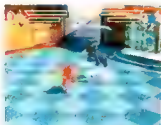
dumbed-down as scientifically possible. If, through some kind of comical antics, you somehow find yourself playing this game and you're the type of person who enjoys a variety of combat attacks, there's good news. The camera often, and for no apparent reason, zooms several miles away from the action, so you can imagine that the tiny, distant creatures are doing whatever moves you want. Of course, videogames are like women—if you have to close your eyes and think about a better one in order to have a good time, put your pants on before someone catches you with that beast!

Antz Xtreme Racing

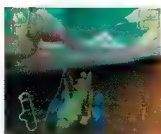
Publisher: Empire Interactive

ESRB: E

This is what happens when market researchers play practical jokes on game developers. "Gentlemen, our polls indicate that the public hubbub



It's great for kids—as the cat beats the mouse to death, they're all smiles!



Even more exciting than the *Annie Hall* shooter

for a racing game based on the 5-year-old Woody Allen movie *Antz* is through the roof! And when you're done with that, our focus groups are willing to do anything for a *Happy Days* flight simulator."

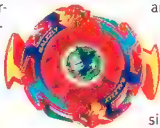
The game features four types of racing, each more extreme than the last. In fact, by the time I made it to the second type of racing—giant grasshoppers with wheels—I found it so extreme that I felt like I was doing it a disservice by not playing it while jumping out of a plane strapped to a rapping surfboard. Luckily, I had neither, so to maintain the integrity of the word "extreme," I stopped playing this crap.

Beyblade: Let it Rip!

Publisher: Crave Entertainment

ESRB: E

Beyblade is so bad, it will change the way you feel about hiring the handicapped. However, to be fair to the very special people behind this game, they didn't have a lot to work with. *Beyblade* is a cartoon about kids



launching futuristic tops into a tiny arena and letting them bang

around until one falls out. The videogame is very faithful to this concept, which obviously was a mistake, since it's like making a game based on special Happy

Meal toys for kids under age three. Once the player presses the Launch button (i.e., "lets it rip!"), the interactivity ends. You just sit back and watch the damn space dreidels bonk against each other until it's over. Depending on how much fate hates you, that can take as long as five minutes. Supposedly, you can control your Beyblade during these "battles," but in reality, your Beyblade takes your button presses as vague suggestions at best. This game is unimaginably bad. It's like flipping a coin that somehow takes five excruciating minutes to land.

Whirl Tour

Publisher: Crave Entertainment

ESRB: E

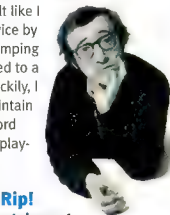
While the scooter-loving band Flipside is rocking the Castle Coliseum, they're suddenly sucked into an evil dimension. It's up to you (and your totally radical scooter) to save your imprisoned bandmates.



This level features rocket scooters AND hate crime?! Where's our sticker for Game of the Year?

Strangely, this warp-portal drama is hardly worth mentioning compared to the madness that is this band. The developers were careful to appeal to every single possible Gen-Y youth, so Flipside is an impossible mix of conflicting musical styles. There's a hip-hop DJ, a goth keyboard player, an emo girl, a punk guitarist, and a girly bubblegum-pop lead singer. If these people met, they wouldn't write happy songs about scooters; they would engage in a savage combination of gang warfare and tortured poetry.

Sadly, the plot of *Whirl Tour* is its only real draw. If you've played *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, good—play it again and take my word for it that this game is exactly the same, only awful. Of course, I doubt anyone was optimistic enough to expect the same people who came up with the dumbass idea of an industrial-rock/punk/hip-hop/electronic/country-western/pop band that rides scooters to invent an entirely new genre of gaming.



D.J. Jazzman's insightful match commentary, "Well," sums it up nicely.



Classic Crap

If you replaced the swords in *The Legend of Zelda* with fruit, and instead of slashing your enemies to death, you forced those enemies to pray by throwing fruit at them, then you'd have *Spiritual Warfare for the ol' NES*. To make this rip-off even more holy, the player is occasionally thrown into a thrilling biblical trivia quiz where correct answers make an anonymous disembodied head's bow-tie spin around, which as I understand it, is the classic symbol of Jesus Christ's appreciation.



If you bought all these games, it would cost about **\$270.**



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LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.



R.Y.N.O.

IT STANDS FOR RIP YOU A NEW ONE.
GET IT?



DEVASTATOR

COME ON, IT'S CALLED THE DEVASTATOR.
WHAT DO YOU THINK IT DOES?

ONE GIANT STEP BACK



TRESPASSER

YOU NO LONGER HAVE TO PAY
ATTENTION TO THOSE
"NO TRESPASSING" SIGNS.



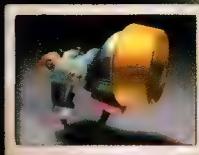
BLASTER

IT'S RAINING BULLETS AND SOMEONE
FORGOT HIS UMBRELLA.



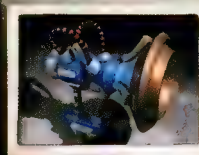
TESLA CLAW

LET'S JUST SAY THE RESULTS
ARE NOT PRETTY.



MORPH-O-RAY

DID SOMEBODY
ORDER CHICKEN?



TAUNTER

"YOUR MOTHER IS SHOWN PIER,
NO, REALLY, SHE IS."
SEET TAUNTING IS FUN.



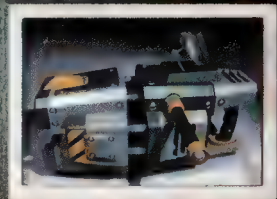
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PYROCITOR

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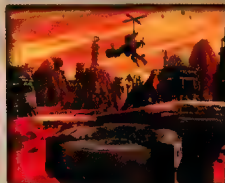
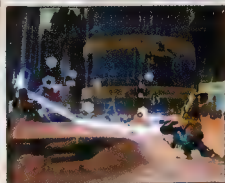
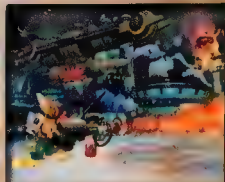
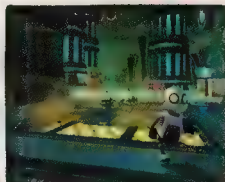


HYDRO DISPLACER

FISH OUT OF WATER! FISH OUT OF WATER!

WARDS FOR MANKIND

RIP THE GALAXY A NEW ONE.
YOU DECIDE HOW.



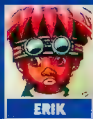
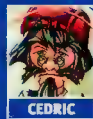
PlayStation 2



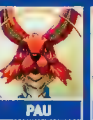
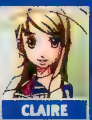
Mild Violence

Dark Cloud 2

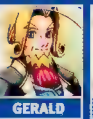
Complete information on all 24 supporting characters!



Cedric—*Location:* Start. *Joins:* In chapter 2. *Abilities:* Bonus points with weapon/parts upgrades. Sells Ridepod parts. **Erik**—*Location:* Start. *Joins:* In chapter 2. *Abilities:* Makes bombs. Sells gunpowder. **Borneo**—*Location:* Start. *Joins:* In chapter 2. *Abilities:* Boosts item acquisition from monsters. Sells ore. **Julia**—*Location:* Start. *Joins:* When you acquire Parn. *Abilities:* Bewitches (charms enemy). Sells arm-bands. **Gordon**—*Location:* Palm Brinks in front of Max's house. *Joins:* Give him holy water. *Abilities:* Bonus attack on plants. Sells Georama parts. **Parn**—*Location:* Palm Brinks in studio. *Joins:* Give him gold paint. *Abilities:* Escapes dungeons. Sells paint.



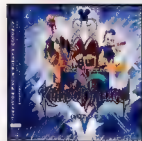
Donny—*Location:* Underground channel entrance. *Joins:* Give him dark and indestructible coin. *Abilities:* Opens locked doors, locked chests. Sells repair powder. **Ferdinand**—*Location:* Max's house. *Joins:* Give him a chestnut. *Abilities:* Makes premium chicken. Sells recovery items. **Claire**—*Location:* Coffee shop in her room. *Joins:* Show her a picture of Lafresda Stern. *Abilities:* +2 enemy rage chip. Sells gift capsules. **Pau**—*Location:* Mount Gundur. *Joins:* Give him a carrot. *Abilities:* Detects gate keys and mimics. Detection (Map Display). **Stewart**—*Location:* Max's house. *Joins:* Give him 2,000 Guida for auction. *Abilities:* Heals (3 min into the floor). Sells shoes for Max. **Adel**—*Location:* Max's house. *Joins:* Give her thick hide, hunk of copper, sturdy cloth. *Abilities:* Recovers WHP on unequipped weapons. Sells fruit.



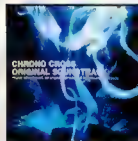
Aunt Polly—*Location:* Polly's Bakery. *Joins:* Run her errand. *Abilities:* Makes bread. Sells ingredients. **Blinkhorn**—*Location:* Palm Brinks police station. *Joins:* Beat his 2-minute time to boat and back. *Abilities:* Shows monster notes. **Milane**—*Location:* Palm Brinks weapon shop. *Joins:* Build up the Gladius twice. *Abilities:* Bonus points when upgrading swords. Sells tools and swords. **Firm**. **Gerald**—*Location:* Max's house. *Joins:* Build gun. **Bell Trigger**. *Abilities:* Bonus points when upgrading guns. Sells guns. **Mayer Need**—*Location:* City Hall. *Joins:* Tell him "1221" as password. *Abilities:* Increases money from enemies. Exchanges medals. **Priest Bruno**—*Location:* Palm Brinks church. *Joins:* Put out all church candles. *Abilities:* Revives you from death once. Sells status recovery items.



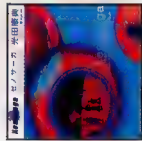
Rufio—*Location:* Palm Brinks near lake. *Joins:* Show him a picture of the moon. *Abilities:* Bonus damage against undead. Sells elements. **Fabio**—*Location:* Palm Brinks pier. *Joins:* Catch a Nonky over 60 cm long. *Abilities:* Makes fishing bait. Sells fishing bait. **Mema**—*Location:* Inside City Hall during day. *Joins:* Clear 10 stages of Spheida. *Abilities:* Cures (heals fully). Sells clothes for Monica. **Corrine**—*Location:* Morton's house. *Joins:* Find her in a game of hide-and-seek. *Abilities:* Always get the angel side of coin flips. Sells hair ornaments for Monica. **Granny Ross**—*Location:* Max's house (night), City Hall (day) *Joins:* Say "Let's go together." *Abilities:* Makes cheese. Sells amulets. **Dr. Dell**—*Location:* Palm Brinks. *Joins:* Get him to diagnose Lin. *Abilities:* Cures abnormal statuses. Sells mighty healing.



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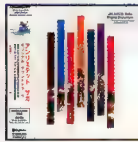
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Getaway From It All

Fancy toolin' around town in a prime porambulator?

When you slaps, we're gonna 'ave you! But not in the Or way you're thinking. Drop in on Hammond's manor foot suite, and he'll 'ave you round for a quick squizz at some dolly means. Hidden ones. There are 12 of these bleeders, and we're here to tell you where they are, which modern they're in, and how much of a laugh they are. For best results, finish all 24 missions of the mission, choose Free Roaming mode from the Extra Features, then start yer larkin' abaht!

Go-Kart, TVR, Lotus M250, and Nissan Skyline

Let's snag four of the 12 hidden cars straight away. From where you start Free

Roaming mode, make a 180-degree turn. Drive forward,

to the T-junction and take a right (see smaller images below). Illustrate a route. Go forward a bit, then turn right again at the four-way intersection

toward Marble Arch, turn left and merge with the traffic, then immediately follow the road around to the right. Drive forward, keeping Hyde

Park on your left. Keep going until you come to the grass-covered island in the road. Toot it straight over the

island, through the gate (which is usually closed), and drive up the path to the mansion. You'll find the Nissan

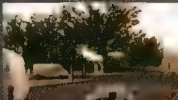
Skyline and the TVR parked just out front, free for the taking. Take a

butcher's in the garage where you'll find the comedic go-kart and the Lotus M250. That's four delicious

autos to choose from already (well, three delicious autos and a go-kart),

and we're just getting started. If you are so inclined, please indulge in a donut or two on the lawn before leaving the premise. After stealing cars (not to mention breaking and enter-

ing), what's a little vandalism? Some call it gratuitous. We call it a sweet bonus for a job well done.



White Nissan Skyline

This freakin' insane combination of import power and funky-fresh styling is just

waiting for Nissan to grow bollocks and release it. Stateside. Until then, at least

we can drive it in virtual London. Start at the entrance to

Charlie's Warehouse, turn right, right, and get onto the road. Drive forward and take the first right (at the light blue shop,

called Minty). Turn right at the next intersection, driving against traffic (see small picture, right). Look for a pile of cardboard



Saab 9x

Would you like to test-drive a Saab? Piece of cake. Or soone. Whatever. From the start of Free

Roaming mode, drive to the lowest level of the NCR car-park in Chinatown, and there's your new

Saab 9x. As you leave the crime scene, ponder this conundrum: Why do Saabs have heated rear

warm when you're pushing them! Ha! A funny joke at Saab's

expense. Good times. If you're like us, you'll nick this bucket of bolts just to wreck it. We suggest driving the wrong way in one of London's many traffic circles. Ten

(meaningless) points per circuit. Challenge your mates! Or don't.



MZ2

The MZ2 is easier to secure than a dodgy DVD player on Tottenham Court Road (that is,

quite easy indeed). You begin Free Roaming mode with this

bad boy. Gun the engine, guvnor! Like you mean it, now!

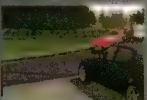
Golf Cart

From the front gate of the mansion, turn right and drive

forward. When you see two gray posts on the left, turn into Hyde

Park. Drive on the path until it splits in two with a large clearing in front of you (see small

pics). Look for the cart near two large reds and a tree.



Hi-Jet Pickup

If you want to fulfill your "cockney chimney sweep" fantasies,

you'll need the proper set of wheels. Get to the mansion gates, turn around, and drive

straight down the road. Eventually, you'll see a trail

heading into Hyde Park. Follow the trail to the end of the road.

After, Ye





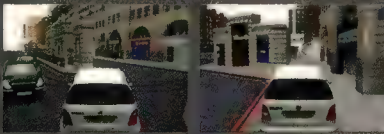
Peugeot 306 Street Racer

To access one of the best street racing cars you've never heard of (think Subaru WRX, but added Frenchness), begin your search on Westminster Bridge, facing the Houses of Parliament. Gaze at the marvel of gothic architecture (the pokey building with the big clock) then head west. Drive past Big Ben, and when you reach the first intersection, hang a left. When you get to the roundabout, turn right. Follow the long stretch of blue boards on the right side of the street until you reach a gap with a row of boxes. Drive through the boxes. The Peugeot 306 is waiting in this underground car park behind the hut. It's here in both Normal and Free Roaming modes. It's a horrific yellow color, too!



Lotus Esprit

This is a classic, popularized by the quintessential English gent. No, not Liam Gallagher; we're talking about the second-best James Bond of all time, Roger "Pleasant" Moore. In the car, start from Charlie's Depot. Head straight through the gates and hang a right. Then sit back, relax, and push your accelerator pedal to the floor, because you've got a long and tedious distance to travel. In a straight line, keep driving (and driving) until you spot a turnout on the right side of the road. Round that turnout to the very end, then swing around, behind the building. Look for an alcove on the right where you'll find the Esprit parked inside. It's available in both Normal and Free



Roaming modes. Unlike Bond's version, this one doesn't have far-fetched aquatic abilities. But thugs might think twice before tangling with the driver of this excellent machine.

Tank

This is available in Free Roaming and Normal modes. Once you've marveled at what centuries of inbreeding can produce, turn from the front gate of Buckingham Palace and face the Victoria Memorial. Now turn right, drive through the posts, and head across the small grassy area. Turn left at the junction. Continue forward, checking the right side of the roadway for "pavement" (if you're getting into character) or a pile of autumnal leaves. "Fall leaves?" What're you on about? In England they say "autumnal," and so should you. Near the trees, you'll see a gate. Drive through it to find the tank. *Grand Theft Auto*, eat your heart out. What was that? Helicopters? Curses! You



win this round, GTA!) To make irresponsible use of your newfound firepower (as we know you must), press L3 to fire the cannon! Now you'll be ready, Tommy, when "ze Germans" arrive.

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FINAL WORD

License to Thrill or Make Us III?

Shawn Elliott, Associate Editor: Games based on licensed properties: Are they truly improving, or are we just impressed they're reaching a point where they're playable at all?

Chris "CJ" Johnston, News Editor: I don't think licensed games as a whole have really improved; there's still plenty of licensed garbage out there. But I do think you're right—we're all enticed by a gaming experience that will add to our enjoyment of a good movie. I'm still a bit skeptical that the *Matrix* game will be great, but I'm keeping an open mind.

Bryan Intihar, Associate Editor: Good man. I was shocked to learn how involved the Wachowskis were with *Enter the Matrix*. It almost feels as though they're as passionate about this game as they are about the next two *Matrix* movies. I hope this is a positive sign for future movie-based games.



Can close directorial ties help *The Incredible Hulk* smash mediocrity?

Shawn: I'm not sure, but didn't both Hideo Kojima and Bungie decline the Wachowskis' offer to make a *Matrix* game? The way I see it, the bigger names in programming can't be bothered with other people's ideas—especially when those ideas are already as well-known as *The Matrix*. It seems as though it's so much easier for the industry's top studios to bypass all the red tape and egos in favor of their own concepts. Once in a while, though, you'll get a genuinely cool anomaly like *Kingdom Hearts*. But what distinguishes that game is that Disney left its properties in someone else's playground—a playground indigenous to gaming.

Shane Bettenhausen, Reviews Editor: Back up a sec', fireball. The success of EA's *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* proves that good, movie-based titles can easily be huge sellers, but last summer's *Spider-Man: The Movie* showed that mediocre titles based on a hit flick can also be massively successful. It would seem



Miyamoto: "Yes! Crapulent is good...but can we drape last night's linguini from his 'stache?"

the quality of the game might not matter to the masses, but the failure of the crapulent *Scorpion King* and *John in Black* games proves the public has some modicum of taste.

Demian Linn, Editor-at-Large: What, you didn't like *Scorpion King*? As the guy who wrote the strategy guide, I'd have to say that *Scorpion King* is great for people who like games where you hit things, and, er, things sometimes hit you back. I agree with Shawn, though: You're just not going to find many high-quality development teams that are excited about putting their hearts and souls into someone else's half-crappy idea. Unless it stars The Rock; then you get the best.

Joe Fielder, Previews Editor: The Rock notwithstanding, I'd like to see more licensed games go beyond the events of the movie, like *The Incredible Hulk* game (oh, please be good). I loved the *Spider-Man* movie, but hated playing Spidey before he got his costume in the game. Granted, that game had more villains in it than the movie did, but it still couldn't do more. It's usually the licenses that aren't beholden to any film, like *Aliens* vs. *Predator*, that can go that extra mile.

Crispin Boyer, Features Editor: Well Joe, I hear *Hulk* Director Ang Lee is working closely with the game's developers, just like the Super Wachowski Bros. are super involved with *Enter the Matrix* maker Shiny. That's gotta be the niftiest new trend in licensed gaming: filmmakers and game designers actually cooperating with each other and incorporating ideas into each other's projects, and not just giving lip service to the cooperative process. Do you think *Mario* creator Shigeru Miyamoto had any input in the *Super Mario Bros.* movie? Not bloody likely. And if he did, that guy should just stick to making games.

Shawn: Truth be told, he was tied-up with the *Super Mario Bros. Super Show*.

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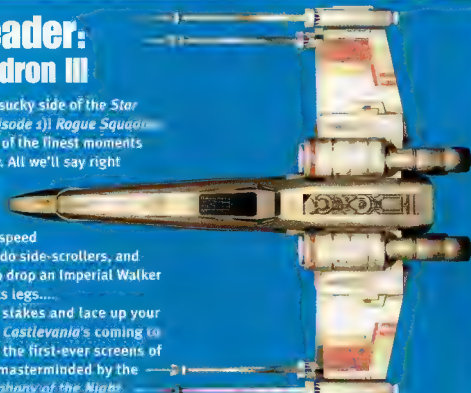
NEXT MONTH

Issue #167, on sale May 6

Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron III

Set a course for the unsucky side of the *Star Wars* galaxy (sorry, *Episode 3*)! *Rogue Squadron III* lets you relive more of the finest moments from the classic trilogy. All we'll say right now is that the Ewok-infested forests of Endor haven't been explored at near light-speed since the Super Nintendo side-scrollers, and there are other ways to drop an Imperial Walker when you can't lasso its legs....

Plus, sharpen your stakes and lace up your *Hex* leather, 'cause *Castlevania's* coming to your PS2! We unleash the first-ever screens of this next-gen update masterminded by the geniuses behind *Symphony of the Night*.



Reviewed Next Month:

- *Auto Modellista* (PS2)
- *Lost Kingdoms II* (GC)
- *Midnight Club II* (PS2, Xbox)
- *X2: Wolverine's Revenge* (PS2, Xbox)

Previewed Next Month:

- *Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes* (PS2, GC, Xbox)
- *Full Throttle II* (PS2)
- *Onimusha 3* (PS2)
- *Pikmin 2* (GC)
- *Spy Hunter 2* (PS2, GC, Xbox)
- *SWAT: Global Strike Team* (Xbox)
- *Madden NFL 2004* (PS2)



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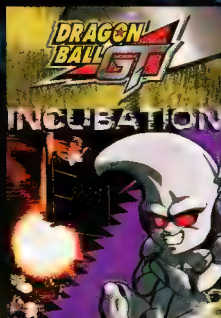


Auto Modellista

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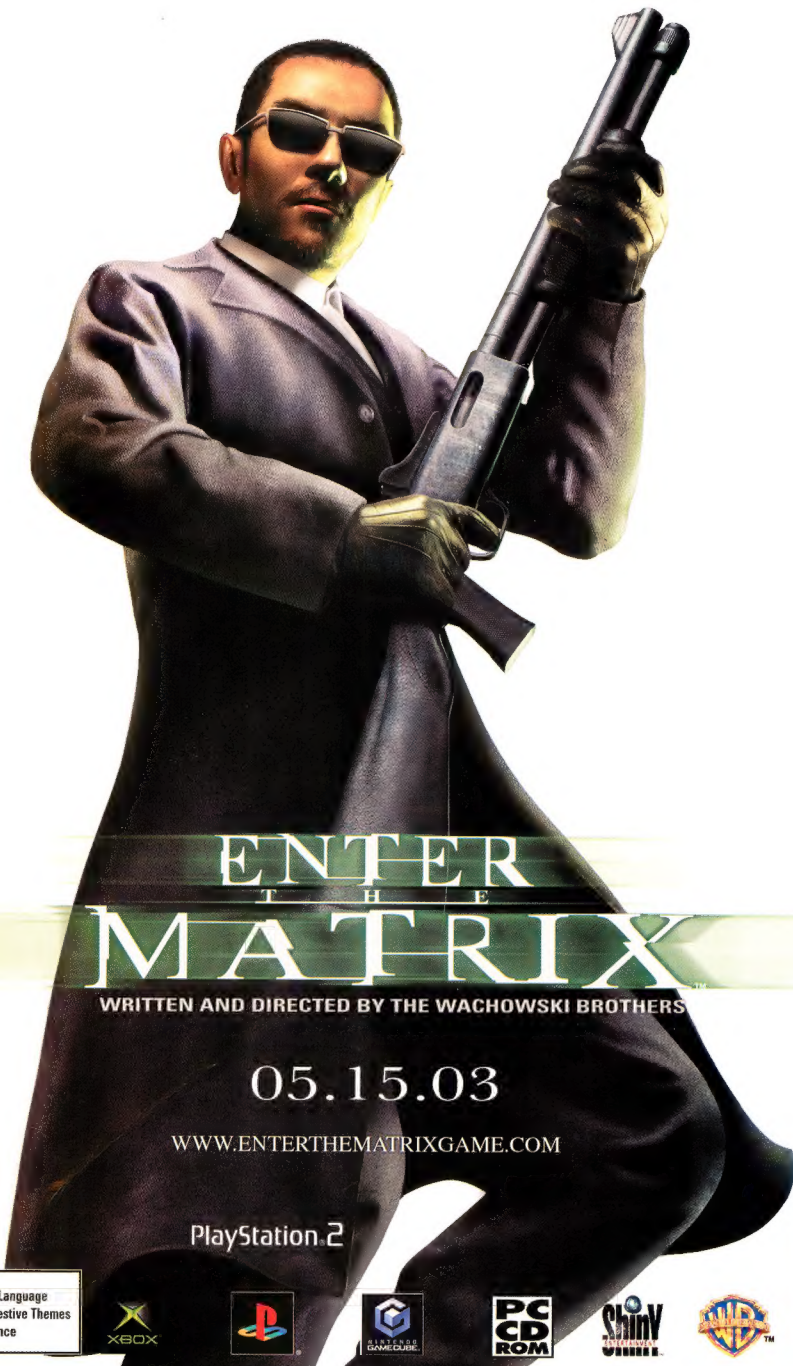
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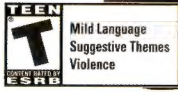
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