ODDWORLD'S NEW GAME REVEALED pg.20

GAMEINFORMER

The Final Word On Computer & Video Games

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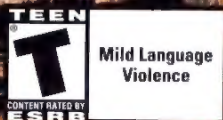
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ISSUE 124

AUGUST 2003

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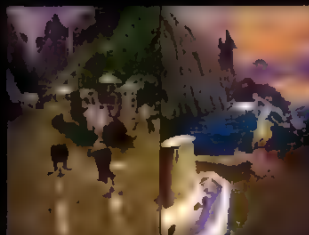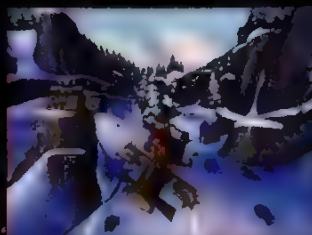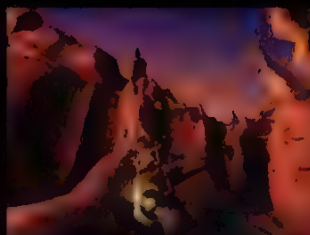
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PlayStation 2

XBOX

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

TEEN
T
Comic Mischief
Mild Violence
Suggestive Themes
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

12 EDITOR'S FORUM

Chet bids adieu to the game industry, as a shocked world tries in vain to pick up the pieces. We do our best.

14 GI SPY

The Game Informer paparazzi stalk the video game industry, bringing you candid photos of all the action.

16 DEAR GI

It's surely hard to believe, but we have an entire mailbag of intelligent, insightful, and even well-written letters. While some will surely complain, there are no random cheese queries or dissertations on ninjas to be found.

20 NEWS

What's this you hear? Ashamed that you didn't have any poignant insight to share? Get the full gist on what's shaking in the industry, who's selling what, and a few tidbits of gossip to dazzle yer peeps with.

58 PREVIEWS

Gratefully, a constant influx of new games keeps us busy making sure that you get all the best information right on time. We just want to keep you informed – like the nightly news without the pastel suits and helmet hair.

84 REVIEWS

You've heard about divining rods, right? Hold the stick and it will point you to water, you know, if you were trapped in the old west or something. Anyway, we're like a divining stick to guide one through their journey within a local gaming retailer. Maybe not the most rock-solid analogy, but you're smart and get the point, right?

107 CHARTS

What's hot? What's not? What's up? What's down? It's not NASDAQ, it's the Retail Sales Data and the GI editors' Top 10 Games.

110 SECRET ACCCESS

It's only cheating if you feel badly about it. Otherwise, it's deemed a "programmed enhancement to your digital counterpart."

114 CLASSIC GI

An exclusive interview with Sonic game designer and Naughty Dog co-conspirator, Hirokazu Yashuhara. In addition, we have our usual feast of Classic Reviews to wet your nostalgic whistle.

118 ETC

We've got more books and figures than any edition of ETC in recent memory. Got some extra shelf space to fill? Make it styling with high-quality figures or intelligent reading material.

EDITORS' FORUM

THE HANDHELD GAMING GOLD RUSH

ANDY McNAMARA
andy@gameinformer.com

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Portable gaming is happening all around the world on Game Boys, cell phones, and personal data assistants (PDAs) as we speak. This isn't just an underground movement, either. I'm talking about millions of people playing and paying for the ability to take their games on the go. And it's not over yet....

This year alone will see the introduction of Nokia's N-Gage and TapWave's Helix, and 2004 will bring the introduction of Sony's own PlayStation Portable (PSP). That won't be the end of it, either. Sprint is still actively pursuing its own vision of portable gaming with phones that connect to controller bases and whatever other kinds of gadgets it can invent to explore the new frontier that's out there.

The big question is: What does this all mean to the hardcore gamer? I know that I have had a hard time answering this question. People already know and love their Game Boy Advances; and in some cases, still love their Atari Lynx, Wonder Color Swan, NeoGeo Pocket Color, TurboGrafx Express or even Game Gear. So why would we want to look to this new batch of handheld entertainment?

On one hand, you can play games on your phone or PDA. Cool. I can dig that. On the other, these games are often pretty lame. Nine out of 10 cell phone and PDA games are nowhere near as entertaining as the ones we can find on a dedicated unit (and I won't even mention what they are like compared to a high-end PC laptop). So for me, I really can't find an attraction yet. Fortunately, these new entrants into the handheld market still have time to develop titles that bring gamers like us into the fold. We just have to sit back and wait until they give us the compelling content we demand at a price we can afford.

REINER | reiner@gameinformer.com

In Japan, Capcom just issued an eight-disc box set of Resident Evil for GameCube. This monstrous package includes all of the RE games, two memory cards, and both volumes of Wesker's Report. It's an amazing compilation and something gamers would froth at the mouth for. Imagine how great anthologies along these lines would be for Final Fantasy, Zelda, or Mario – especially if you throw DVD extras like interviews, original Japanese versions, and commentary tracks into the mix. I think that I can safely say that we're all sick and tired of buying incomplete collections and GBA ports!

MATT | matt@gameinformer.com

Ah, the summer video game doldrums. It's as inevitable as sunburn and mosquito bites. I know that all the publishers are holding their big guns for a holiday release, but I always get frustrated by the lack of big-name games being released during these months. I'm not saying there's nothing to buy – in fact, I'm highly recommending you check out Downhill Domination – but it sure would be nice to have a huge blockbuster like Halo 2 or Gran Turismo 4 to help me hide from the light of the sun during the dog days of summer. Joystick Jockey 4 Life!

KRISTIAN | kristian@gameinformer.com

I know that BioWare has moved on, but I stand firm in my assertion that the Infinity Engine is quite possibly the best RPG engine ever conceived. The ease of use, the artistic license it granted the developers, the rock-solid coding - it should never have been abandoned. Maybe I'm becoming a stodgy old RPG gamer clinging to games of the past, but I don't give a crap. Didn't the Icewind Dale and Baldur's Gate series sell enough to show there's a continued interest? Give us more! On a personal note, I'd like to bid a fond farewell to my friend Chet Barber. He worked his butt off for us here at the magazine, and I wish him health and happiness in his new endeavors.

JUSTIN | justin@gameinformer.com

I'm a cheap bastard. I rarely buy games for full price. Conversely, if a $20 title is any good, I'll definitely pick it up. I don't get why more companies don't release their games cheaper from the get-go. I know the stores and the hardware manufacturer have to get their slice of the profit pie, but I think a lot more people would gamble on games – especially more niche or obscure ones – if it wasn't such a large financial risk. The lower price would inevitably breed more crappy games, but just check out the lame titles we reviewed this issue: I guarantee most of them come out for $50. Best wishes to Chet – he's good people, and he treads the path he believes is right.

KATO | kato@gameinformer.com

After doing the football feature, I really believe that each game out there's got its own thing that's going to hook gamers (which unfortunately isn't always true). So, don't just go out and buy the franchise you always do. Be open-minded (and not a marketing slave who thinks that "Madden" is a by-word for video game football) and at least check out what the competition has to offer – I don't think you'll be disappointed. Finally, the thing I'm going to miss most about Chet is hearing him complain over the phone to anonymous and powerless customer service people about the injustice of their companies' miscellaneous fees. Keep up the good fight, buddy.

CHET | chet@gameinformer.com

This will be the last month you see my mug in the mag. I am leaving the game industry for other endeavors – the most important of which is graduate school, where I plan to study hard to help make our world the most beautiful place it can be. I want to say thanks to everyone on staff, especially Reiner for getting me a position at GI in the first place. I also want to thank our publisher, Cathy Preston, for her amazing support, which I promise won't be in vain. Finally, I would like to thank my girlfriend most of all. Your continued love and direction will help me achieve my potential. Peace out.

LISA | lisa@gameinformer.com

It feels like there are more movie or TV licensed video games right now. If you really want to know, I'm not necessarily opposed to the trend. Both industries (film and gaming) seem to finally be understanding a crucial point: Like adapting books to the screen, a movie's video game counterpart shouldn't be an exact replica of its namesake. Please, add to the experience (like the plot in Enter the Matrix) or just take the most action-packed parts (as in The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers) – but don't recreate the movie. And to Mr. Chet: Visit, dammit!

NEXT ISSUE

We could tell you what is in the next issue of Game Informer, but unfortunately if we did, we would have to kill you. In fact, next month's cover story is so secret, we don't even know what it is. But you can count on seeing Soul Calibur 2, P.N.03, Rogue Ops, Backyard Wrestling, Black & White 2, and Viewtiful Joe...perhaps. Maybe. We aren't really sure.

P.N.03
PRODUCT NUMBER

P.N.03

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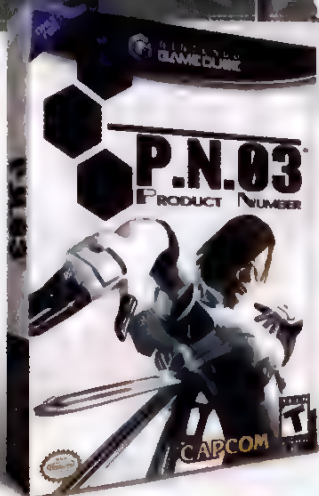
BRADYGAMES Strategy Guide AVAILABLE

TEEN T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Suggestive Themes
Violence

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE SEAMY UNDERBELLY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

1 Ubi Soft's Clint Hayashi, pictured here in GI's reception area **2** Sony's Ryan Bowling and Andy have a beer over a steaming pot of octopus in Japan **3** Are Rogue Ops producer Mario Aguera and Bender Helper's Natalie Salzman chilling in the VIP section of an exclusive nightclub? No, it's just another day in the ultra-glamorous Game Informer lobby **4** Activision's Ryh-Ming Poon cuddles with Neversoft's official canine mascot, Logan **5** Midway's Devin Shatsky and Jeremy Airey pose for our camera. Hope they like this shot, or we may have to break out the flowers again next month! **6A/B** Midway's Aaron Grant, Marci Ditter, and Tim Cummins weren't happy with the unflattering GI Spy picture we ran of them a few months ago (see inset), so they marched down to the basement of their local JC Penny and had these family photos taken. Bask in their beauty! Feel the love!! **7** Justin gives a heartfelt eulogy for Kristian's deceased sea monkey, Mr. McSwimsalot. Ashes to ashes, flush to flush

WOW >>>

I'M SORRY!!!!
I'M SORRY!!!!

Hello. I just wanted to say how much I love your magazine, but was not pleased at the comment in issue 122, page 62 which says,

"If you've walked through a toy store lately, the sensation that you've actually traveled 16 years into the past probably hit you over the head like a ton of bricks. As unbelievable as this may seem; toys, comic books, and cartoons based off of '90s properties have become the latest craze. The Transformers, Strawberry Shortcake, G.I. Joe, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and those detestable Care Bears (Die Satan Spawn!!!!) have all make a remarkable resurgence."

"**and those detestable Care Bears (Die Satan Spawn!!!!)**"
I am a little upset at this because I spent a great deal of my time trying to get this property AND others back (I sent petitions with over 10,000 signatures) to numerous companies and if the Care Bears didn't come back we would never have seen TMNT come back or many other fine shows. So, I think it would be nice if an apology was written in an upcoming issue, because we worked so hard on this and here it is being thrown back in our faces. I know you didn't know about our hard work and you can't be blamed for this, but I really would appreciate it if something could be said about this. Keep up the good work!

Thank you very much,
Jeff
Via charter.net

■ **Golly. What to say?**

JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS >>>

I was playing the PS2 version of Enter the Matrix and heard something interesting. As the game moved further into the post office, I overheard two guards talking. They said something to the effect of, "Did you get the new cover sheets for the TPS reports?" I also heard them talking about the printer not working. Did anyone else notice this or am I just nuts? I tried to find out if the Wachowski brothers had anything to do with *Office Space*. But, as far as I can tell, *Office Space* is a Mike Judge film.

Chad
Via verizon.net

■ **Ahh, young, observant one; you have noticed a great truth in Enter the Matrix. Although the postal employees don't allude to Mr. Judge's film when you infiltrate their place of employment as Ghost, Niobe hears them discuss a memo received earlier requesting a cover sheet on their "TCS" reports and general disdain for the broken printer.**
We talked to Dave Perry (president of developer Shiny Entertainment), and he said, "The design team loves the movie [*Office Space*]. Well spotted." Presumably, TPS reports (from the film) was changed to TCS reports (in the game) to avoid pesky legal issues.

A READERSHIP DIVIDED >>>

As a fan of GI, I must ask you a question about your review of Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided in your issue 122. The game is not complete, and I was wondering how you could rate the game? Its initial release may have been scheduled for May, but the real release is not until an unannounced time in June. How could you rate a game that was still in beta and still has time to improve even more?

Granted, a 9.5 out of 10 is not bad at all, but this game may have received a perfect 10 or maybe a lower 8 out of 10 depending on the finished product. This frustrates me, as I don't like to see a game judged before completion.
Matthew
Via hotmail.com

I just received my June issue of Game Informer in the mail today (May 20th), and I was very surprised to see a review of Star Wars Galaxies in there. I have to say that I think it is a bad business practice to do a review on a game (even if you gave it a high score) when it is not even finished yet. Presently, SWG is in beta 3 and is mostly complete, but there are still things being tested and tweaked. While I do pretty much agree with your review of the game and I can understand the desire to get a jump on your competitors, I think it would have been better to wait until it had actually been released.

Paul Blessing
Via email

■ **To accurately review a MMORPG like Star Wars Galaxies, one would need to revisit the title each month to account for upgrades, bug fixes, patches, additional features, and a growing online community. With LucasArts giving us the go-ahead and a launch date less than a month from the time we played it, Game Informer's assertion is that Galaxies was in reviewable form. LucasArts specifically gave us the build we played for review purposes, so any problems with our review should be addressed with them.**

ENTER THE CRAPPER >>>

Dude! You guys were so right! Enter the Matrix is a fun game with good sound. Sure, it has problems, but I liked the story.
Tommy
Via email

Your recent reviews of Enter the Matrix amazed me. I've been playing video games and reading reviews for more than 15 years. Enter the Matrix's reviews were: 1) distorted by ongoing PR hype that boldly pushed a video game where no game has been pushed before, and 2) asserting an opinion that unique and well-executed cutscenes are more important than gameplay.

The contents of the game reviews themselves are inconsistent with the scores given. The four reviews pointed out major flaws and big problems with the title's gameplay, but were sympathetic and lenient when scoring the title. The movie sequences in a game can't justify bringing the score up so high. Movie sequences are very important tools for GAMEplay – nothing more and nothing less. If the gameplay fails, the title is bad and should be graded as such. Review grades should reflect this key aspect and shouldn't become evaluations of a movie's expansion pack.

Enter the Matrix is certainly not a revolution when it comes to gameplay, and it isn't a revolution between the game and movie industry (as it was touted). The involvement of professional directors and writers in video games opens exciting new opportunities and is a desirable result of the industries' increased cooperation; but Enter the Matrix isn't progress in this regard, it's a step backward.

The title and your ambiguous reviews only highlighted the fact that new ideas are needed to incorporate movie sequences into games.

Sincerely,
Klaus Hertweck
Milwaukee, WI

MASON

■ **While some readers certainly think that the men in pretty, white jackets should be called to take the Enter the Matrix reviewers away to their padded cells, other Matrix fans have let themselves have fun with a title that is a departure from the usual movie-licensed video game fare.**
Klaus seems to align himself with the "make these nutcases go away, we're sick of their weirdness" brigade. From the letters we received, the controversy revolves thusly: those who say that games should be fun to play, not just fun to watch; and those who say that the games should be fun, not just technical marvels.
While gamers are ferociously divided on the merits of Enter the Matrix, it can't be denied that the movie industry's involvement made the game something different – and in an era of rehashes and mediocre sequels, any title with innovation should get some attention.

READ(ER) ERROR >>>

I have been a Game Informer subscriber for the last two years, and have yet to read any information on the PS2's infamous "Disc Read Error." I have been told that these errors occur because of voltage screws and/or a dust problem. What's the deal? My PS2 is useless right now because you have failed to guide me in how to cheaply correct this problem. Until then, my Xbox is keeping me afloat. Please help me fix my PS2 or show me where to go.

Garret
Via email

▪ We certainly get our jollies by helping those poor, unfortunate souls with busted equipment. For complete instructions on how to get your PlayStation fixed, check out us.playstation.com/support/howtoobtainservice or, more directly, call 1-800-345-7669 for repair pricing and shipping information. If your PS2 is less than 90 days old, the machine is still under warranty and you will only be responsible for shipping costs.

When we talked to the very courteous and informative representative John, he suggested the following trouble-shooting techniques, "Try different games to see if they all give the same results. Make sure the disks are free of scratches and/or fingerprints. Clean the disks with a cloth wipe – these are available at most electronic and music stores. Try the system without a GameShark or similar device plugged in. Try the games in a different PS2 to determine if it's the games or the system that is having problems. Run the PS2 self test and try again."

If these steps don't resolve the issue, you'll probably have to send the system to Sony for repairs. Give them a call for a shipping address, packaging instructions, and a service identification number. We were quoted 15 to 20 working days for the repairs to be completed and Sony foots the bill for return shipping via UPS Ground.

GTA: ATLANTIS >>>

What's the deal with the next GTA title? I heard a while ago that there was a rumor that the next GTA title was going to take place in medieval times. Please tell me that this is not true! What would you do…steal horses and donkeys or something?

Drew Kirkwood
Via email

I have heard from a few people online that there are rumors of a new Grand Theft Auto coming out by the end of the year that is based in Las Vegas. Is this true?

Peter
Via aol.com

I've heard rumors about the next Grand Theft Auto game will be at San Andreas. Is this true?

Cyberdragon
Via email

▪ Oy vey. Well, you want to know what we heard? Someone told us that their cousin's friend works at Rockstar, and they wanted everyone to know this little tidbit on the next GTA game: Bobby McFerrin, who will be performing covers of hits by the Trans-Siberian Orchestra, is supplying the seven-disc special edition soundtrack.

Stop! That was a joke, people. We don't know much more than you do (which is apparently very little), but we'll certainly let everyone in on the scoop when it arrives. The only persistent rumor we've heard is that the game will mine the pop culture treasure trove that is the 1970s. However, we don't expect GTA 4 this year, as Rockstar North's game for this holiday season will be a new franchise called Manhunt.

ENVELOPE ART

Kristina Marroquin
Monkey camping? Who says this isn't the greatest country in the world?
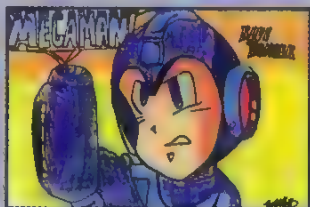
Zachary L. Elliot
"Note to self: Don't go shoplifting in Saudi Arabia again."

Maurice Johnson
Superman's thighs look like butts

AUGUST WINNER!
Luis G. Cabrera
"There's a choice we're making/We're saving our own lives/It's true we make a brighter day/Just you and meeee!"

Nicholas Hinojosa
Later, we paid this guy $200 to airbrush this on the side of our custom van. Sweet!
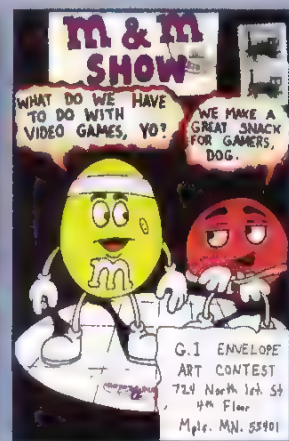
Charles M. Atkins
At Van Halen's request, we removed the brown M&M from this envelope art

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ODDWORLD UNVEILED

Oddworld Inhabitants' *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee* was a marquee game for the **Xbox's** launch in 2001, but it failed to connect with consumers. However, the developer is coming back with an all-new title in the series that totally breaks away from the ugly duckling of Munch. Tentatively titled **Oddworld 4**, the developer is getting ready to unveil a new character, **Steef**, and a whole new direction.

While we personally think it's the tobacco industry's sly attempt to introduce Joe Camel to a new generation of gamers, Oddworld Inhabitants' own **Lorne Lanning** describes Steef as a combination of a horse, lion, gorilla, and **Clint Eastwood**! Whatever the inspiration, Lanning is ditching Abe and Munch in favor of a more action-oriented experience that fluidly combines gameplay and story elements. Not only does the mysterious Steef conceal a deadly crossbow – which can be used in first-person sequences – but he also alters his shape as the game progresses. We'll see him grow horns and maybe even gallop like a horse. *Oddworld 4* is over a year away, but Lanning and crew are hard at work blending the amazing graphics we've come to expect from the developer with this new approach.

Steef
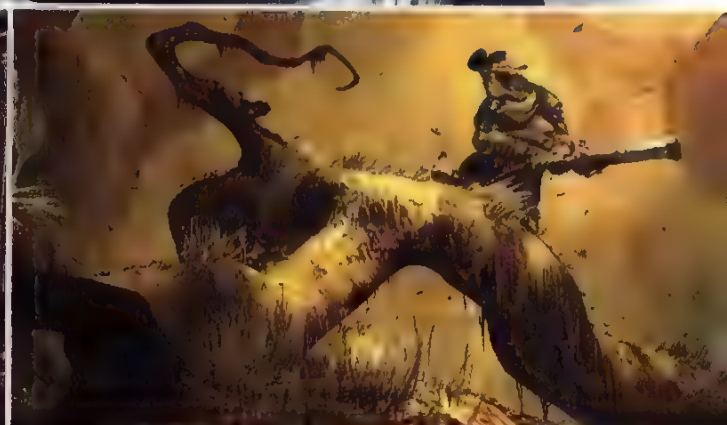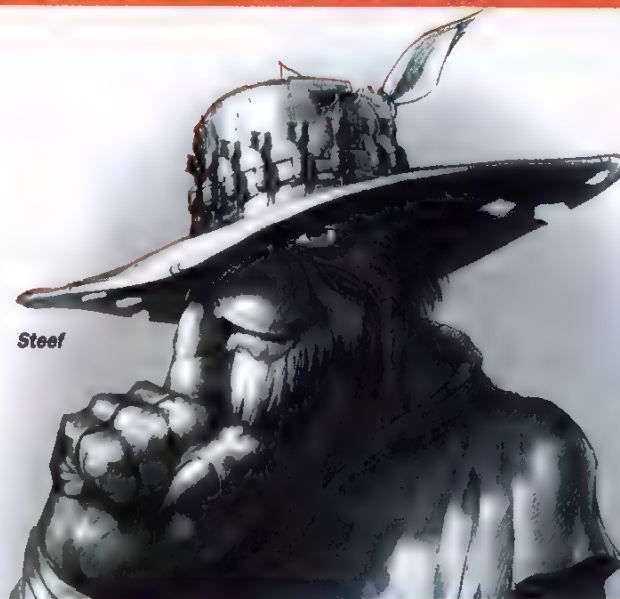
MAGIC'S NEW BATTLEGROUND

You used to think that **Magic: The Gathering** was a card game only for total geeks, but if **Atari** has its way, it'll soon make a complete nerd out of a perfectly normal (yeah, right) person like yourself. *Magic: The Gathering Battlegrounds* is a real-time combat strategy game set in an isometric view which brings all the traditional card battling of the series to life on the **Xbox** and **PC** this November.

The game will feature seven Duelists (Legends) from different Magic card sets. *Game Informer* talked to Kirby Fong, Atari producer for *Battlegrounds*, who told us that developer Secret Level consulted with the creator of the original card game, **Wizards of the Coast**, over things like picking the Duelists. "The tug of war was, 'Yeah, let's use this one,' but that one maybe looks cool as art on a card, but not in a video game." Another instance where compromises had to be made was in implementing *Battlegrounds'* exclusive swipe and parry melee moves – options not found in the card game.

Players will create their custom decks using two colors out of the game's five schools of cards. Quest mode allows you to participate in 70 battles and earn cards (all of which have been faithfully replicated from the original game) upon their completion, while you endeavor to collect pieces of a magical talisman. Online players can face off, and even take a peek at the cards used by high-ranking participants. Atari is planning downloads a few months after the game's release, although it won't divulge just what they may be.

JOHN WOO HARDBOILED WITH SEGA

Legendary filmmaker **John Woo** is teaming with **Sega** for a multi-year video game contract that will include at least three titles to be headed by Woo's **Tiger Hill Games** studio. This partnership will draw on both new and pre-existing ideas of Woo's, which leaves open the door for video game adaptations of such films as **Hard-Boiled** and **The Killer** – both starring **Chow Yun-Fat**.

Woo's oft-imitated Hong Kong-style brand of action should make the leap perfectly into the gaming world, where he has already left his influential mark on such titles as **Capcom's Devil May Cry** and **Namco's Dead to Rights**. Tiger Hill Games has already started on a trio of titles, although none of them have platforms or release dates assigned.
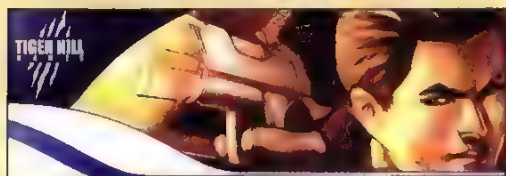
Sinner
Play as an assassin who has been murdered and sent to Hell. Your character has to escape its 18 levels for a chance to return to Earth and exact revenge.

Stranglehold
This game features dual heroes, where the fates of a policeman and a gang leader become strangely entwined after the cop's son is killed.

Burglar
After your father – a thief – is ironically killed in his house by a burglar, you must take up his trade and avenge his death.

THE MATRIX ONLINE

THE MATRIX MOVES ONLINE

Ubi Soft's The Matrix Online was behind closed doors at E3, but now we can share with you one of the first sketches of the game. Why just a doodle, you ask? Well, we could go into a long-winded, patronizing explanation – but if you've seen **The Matrix Reloaded**, you've probably already had enough of that.

The game is being developed by **Monolith Productions** (not **Shiny**, the creators of **Enter the Matrix**), and will feature a sprawling cityscape, a fluid mission structure, and even the chance to run around as an agent! Of course, your character's martial arts moves will become more fantastic as you become accustomed to The Matrix. As of now, *The Matrix Online* is only on the **PC**, and is shooting for a release in the second half of next year. Until then, let's dance!
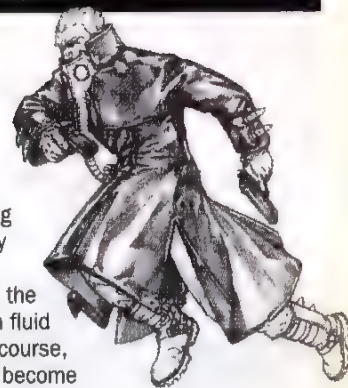
SONY GIVES UP GHOSTS

Sony is cooking up a pair of ghastly concoctions for the **PlayStation 2**. The first, *Hungry Ghosts*, comes from Japanese developer Deep Space, and is slated to appear over there this summer. The game starts with your character standing before the gates of judgement after his death. Whether you go to heaven or hell depends on your actions throughout the adventure. Naturally, this gives the player much freedom and allows for numerous endings.

For all you **Ray Parker Jr.** fans out there, here comes **SCEE Cambridge Studios** (of **MediEvil** and **Primal** fame) and its newest PS2 title, **Ghosthunter**. While you won't be dancing your way through the streets as the white-hot eighties singer, you will control Lazarus Jones while you endeavor to tame poltergeists run amok. The game utilizes the studio's 3D engine used in *Primal*, so it should look like a million bucks. Indeed, the vaporous ghost effects we've seen are quite spectacular. Says Lazarus on Luigi and his mansion adventures: "Luigi is a wimp." *Ghosthunter* should appear before the end of the year.
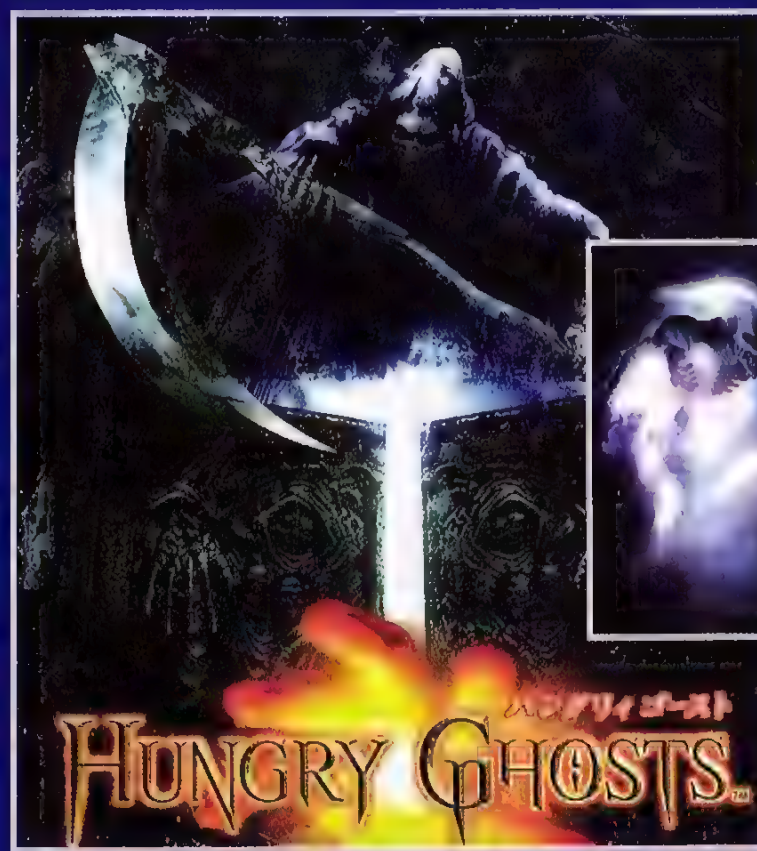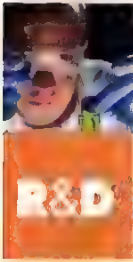
Ghosthunter

Hungry Ghosts

DONKEY KONG: BARREL MADNESS!

Do you remember all of those times where you were playing Donkey Kong in the arcade and you said to yourself, "Man, controlling Mario is cool and all, but wouldn't it be awesome if I could play as a barrel?" Well guess what, buttercup?! We have a breakthrough idea that allows just this! Donkey Kong: Barrel Madness is a four-player game that taps into Nintendo's wildly popular connectivity. It's the same as the original 1981 arcade classic, but now it has an extra layer of fun! One player assumes the identity of Mario using a Wavebird controller (it won't work with the standard controller), and the three other players control barrels with Game Boy Advances hooked up to the GameCube. Functionality-wise, you can't control the bouncing that the barrels make, but you can choose which ladders they go down. If your barrel hits Mario, you win! From here, you'll have to switch controllers so you take over the fat plumber. It's stinking brilliant! Eat your heart out, Shigeru Miyamoto! We just took your game and made it, like, a thousand times better!

NAME THAT GAME

In December 1990, John Carmack and John Romero (soon to form id Software) released their first product together. This PC game was very notable for several reasons. It not only signaled the birth of an innovative new company, but the game itself was the first to bring side-scrolling, Super Mario-style action to the PC. This title was offered as shareware via Apogee Software, and was the first in several iterations for the series.

TOP 10 GAMES CATS LIKE TO PLAY

10 Licking themselves

9 Brutal: Paws of Fury

8 Watching Seaman for hours on end

7 Tiger Woods' Tidy Cat Sandtrap Challenge

6 MMORPGs. They are as addictive as catnip

5 Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball Pussy Party

4 Gran Turismo 4 Featuring Toonces: The Cat Who Could Drive a Car

3 Any game that lets them snooze, like Primal

2 Tekken Tag Tournament (all they have to do is mash their paws on the controller)

1 ChuChu Rocket

DEVELOPER TOP 5

MADS PRAHM,
Lead Designer, IO Interactive
(IO developed *Freedom Fighters*)

1 Half-Life – PC

2 Hitman: Codename 47 – PC

3 Grand Theft Auto III – PS2

4 StarCraft – PC

5 Halo – Xbox

READER TOP 5

HANK ABBOTT
Cleveland, OH

1 Final Fantasy X – PS2

2 Grand Theft Auto III – PS2

3 ToeJam & Earl in Panic on Funkotron – Genesis

4 Final Fantasy VII – PSone

5 Super Spike V'ball – NES

STUDY SEZ: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS ARE GOOD FOR YOU

Our lab-coated scientists are better than your lab-coated scientists! Finally, a study that says video games (even violent ones) aren't pure evil. In research published in a recent issue of the scientific journal **Nature**, Dr. Daphne Bavelier, an associate professor of cognitive neuroscience at the University of Rochester, and others found that people who play first-person shooters showed dramatically improved visual attention skills.

Despite using a small sample of participants, the study found that playing for as little as 10 hours bestowed a marked increase in visual skills, even amongst novice players of the genre. The benefits include abilities such as identifying objects in one's peripheral vision, switching attention quickly, and tracking many items at once. Dr. Bavelier and her colleagues did not find that games in other genres, such as action or real-time strategy, produced the same results. The study did not find a direct correlation between improved visual skills and overall intelligence, although they do comprise an important component in many IQ tests.

In one test, male and female non-gamers were trained for 10 consecutive days on **Medal of Honor: Allied Assault**, while others played **Tetris**. Only those playing MoH showed better visual skills. While these improvements waned within a couple of months for the newbies, those who were constant gamers showed permanent results.

3DO FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY
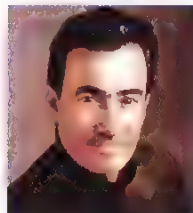
Despite having dodged numerous bullets in recent years, publisher/developer **3DO** is filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. In past times of need, **Trip Hawkins**, chairman and CEO of 3DO, had reached into his own pockets and helped save the company, but not this time. "While we hope that this news will generate additional new opportunities," said Hawkins, "at this point we are focused on pursuing either the sale of the entire company or its assets." Up for grabs are well-known franchises like **Army Men**, **High Heat Baseball**, and **Heroes of Might and Magic**, as well as **The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse** – a promising title still in development (see issue #121 for more).

Trip Hawkins

Trip Hawkins, the founder of **Electronic Arts**, was also responsible for bringing the public the **3DO** console (a 32-bit, disc-based system) in 1993. Given Hawkins' resilience, we've no doubt that he'll pop up again with another venture sometime soon.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Shot down behind enemy lines.
A prisoner of the Nazi war machine.
You must guide your band of heroes in the
greatest escape in history.

Strike at the Reich with an
authentic WWII arsenal

Commandeer motorcycles, jeeps
and other military vehicles as
you speed to freedom!

Attack from the shadows as you sneak
past Nazi guards and the Gestapo

PlayStation 2

XBOX

PC

MGM INTERACTIVE

GOTHAM GAMES

SCRUMPTIOUS!

When **EA Sports'** last *Rugby* title came through the offices, the staff was confused. Confused -- but happy. Despite not knowing a lick about rugby, scoring our first try (equivalent of a touchdown) was quite a thrilling experience. Now EA is giving us another shot at glory with the return of the sport to the **PlayStation 2** (shown) and the **PC** this fall in *Rugby 2004*.

Although this title will lack online options, it is matching other titles from the sports publisher in the feature department by giving fans intuitive controls and plenty of career options. Besides participating in the Super 12 and Domestic leagues, you can compete in World Cup Rugby. Players' accomplishments will earn them trade and maintenance points that can be used to strengthen their squad.

We don't know a whole lot about the sport of Rugby, but we can bet that grabbing someone's fuzzy warbles is something that's frowned upon

He may have a swimming cap on and his shorts hiked a little high, but he can run like the wind

In a pre-match ritual, this squad is about to undergo its team physical. First up, a visit from the proctologist

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

GOOD – Sony's *ICO* is returning in a sequel titled *Nico*. Thankfully, you won't be leading around the ex-**Velvet Underground** "singer" to her next score.
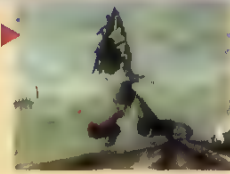
UGLY – After a much-troubled history, **Argonaut Games** has cancelled development of *Malice*. The game was once the toast of the **Xbox**, but was then quietly swept under the rug and setting to go to the **PS2** – where it obviously didn't fare any better.

SAD – **Sega** has announced that it has turned off the servers for all **Dreamcast** online games except for *Phantasy Star Online* and *Phantasy Star Online Ver. 2*. If you listen closely enough, you can hear "Taps" playing softly in the background.

GOOD – Following up last month's story about the state of Washington's law restricting certain M-rated video games to those under 17, the **Interactive Digital Software Association** (IDSA) is challenging the law in federal court. Also, the **United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit** has shot down a St. Louis County law prohibiting the sale of graphically violent games to minors.

GOOD – **Tecmo** of Japan is selling *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* swimsuits on its online site in Japan. We don't know when your girlfriend's birthday is, but we have a feeling this is the first time you'll remember it.

LOOSE TALK

If loose lips are spraying hot video game gossip, we're sucking up the secret saliva and drooling it all over this section. Got a secret to tell? Email us at loosetalk@gameinform er.com and we'll be all ears.

Eidos' *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* saga gets weirder. Despite being delayed numerous times, the team had to rush to the very end fixing bugs on the game. Regardless, the title had to be out the door by June 30. The reason? That was the last day the game could be counted towards this fiscal year -- money that Eidos is banking on.

Nintendo is determined not to get behind the eight ball in releasing its next console after the competition. Work has already begun on the successor to the **GameCube**, and news of a renewed contract with chipmaker **ATI** is one of the first signs. Best of all, Nintendo is not only aiming to meet **Microsoft** and **Sony** when they release new consoles in 2006, but beat them by releasing its next hardware in 2005.

This just in from Obvious City: **Microsoft Games** has already begun work on *RailSport Challenge 2* for the **Xbox**. The game should appear around the end of the year.

At a recent event in the UK, **Sony Computer Entertainment Europe's** Chris Deering may have hinted at a price for games for the **PlayStation Portable** (PSP). He stated that titles on the handheld's **Universal Media Disc** format (UMD) could be as high as 60 euros ($70), but will more likely be about 20 or 30 euros. According to Deering, movies and music on the UMD should be comparable to current DVDs and CDs. For more on PSP, check out our last issue (#123).

We applauded **Eidos'** boutique label **Fresh Games** for publishing Japanese titles here in the States, but after four releases, things have slowed down. Whether Eidos is having trouble finding good games to put out or the company needs the cash elsewhere (as may have been the case with the recently cancelled *Fear Effect: Inferno*. Also, see above), don't expect much from Fresh Games in the future.

How cool is *PlanetSide*? So awesome that an expansion pack is already being worked on for this fall. New weapons, maps, and vehicles are on the top of the list, and we hear that you may be given the chance to form platoons.

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Gran Turismo 4 is perhaps the most hotly anticipated racer in video game history, with over 500 vehicles signed on for the future PS2 chart-topper. There is still a slew of as-yet-unsigned cars that fans are screaming for. It's time to let your voice be heard! Take this month's quiz, and match your score with the corresponding car below. Then, write Sony Computer Entertainment America and DEMAND they include it. Better yet, chain yourself to the SCEA offices until they agree to your demands. Good luck.

QUESTION 1: What does Microsoft call its original controller – the big one?

A. Duke
B. Controller-B
C. Sidewinder B
D. Outlaw

QUESTION 2: What is the name of the first Belmont in the Castlevania history to take on Dracula?

A. Leon
B. Simon
C. Richter
D. Sven

QUESTION 3: At the end of the system's life, a company released a game for the NES based on the movie Attack of the Killer Tomatoes. What is the name of this publisher?

A. Interplay
B. Sony Imagesoft
C. Jaleco
D. THQ

QUESTION 4: What is the maximum speed that Peach, Yoshi, and Toad can drive in Mario Kart 64?

A. 40 kph
B. 70 kph
C. 100 kph
D. 150 kph

QUESTION 5: This is one of the more obscure Jaguar games featuring penguins. Although it is clearly influenced by the Lemmings titles, it isn't exactly a puzzle game. Can you name this game?

A. Penguins
B. Bernard & Rodney
C. Penguin Doom
D. Attack of the Mutant Penguins
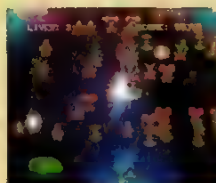
This odd game actually received decent scores from critics!

QUESTION 6: In 1998 a study was conducted to reveal the amount of pirated software on the Chinese market. What is this estimated percentage?

A. 75%
B. 85%
C. 95%
D. 98%

QUESTION 7: The NES game, GI Joe: A Real American Hero, lets you command four playable 'Joes. Who didn't make it into your platoon?

A. Snake Eyes
B. Lady Jaye
C. Rock & Roll
D. Blizzard

QUESTION 8: Youree Cleomii Harris (AKA Miss Cleo) appeared in Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto: Vice City as a character. What is her name in the game?

A. Auntie Poulet
B. Auntie Cleo
C. Miss Poulet
D. Miss Cleo

QUESTION 9: The name Ikaruga isn't just the title of a video game on Gamecube, but it actually has a meaning in Japanese. What is it?

A. Spotted Dove
B. Gray
C. Colored Hawk
D. Defender

QUESTION 10: How much did the original Game Boy cost when it debuted in July 1989?

A. $99.95
B. $109.95
C. $119.95
D. $149.99

Score & Rank

0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10
The Classic Low-Rider	The Deductible	The Souped-Up Pacer	The Ladies' Choice	The '66 Nova	The Leftumator

Video Game Trivia Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.D 4.B 5.D 6.C 7.B 8.A 9.A 10.B

GBA SP CELEBRATES SUCCESS

To celebrate selling over one million units of the new **Game Boy Advance SP** in the United States, **Nintendo** will be offering two new color models starting Sept. 8 – Flame and Onyx. As you can see, that means red and black to your average Joe/Jane.

BREAK DOWN

20% of Sega of Japan's development staff is being trimmed. The company is also consolidating some of its game studios

100% The safety increase now that Kristian has finally gotten a new car (alignment included)

60% of our Top Ten Games of E3 will appear on Xbox. Only 20% are scheduled to appear this year

37% of the staff is psyched that video game Rugby is coming back. The rest can't wait for Field Hockey

0% The percentage of the staff using corked bats. Who's on 'roids? We don't know

COLIN MCRAE RIDES AGAIN

Codemasters is already talking about the next install-ment in its racing series **Colin McRae Rally 4** for the **PlayStation 2** and **Xbox**. The game is scheduled to appear on shelves this winter – even though *Rally 3* came out just earlier this year.

Besides being able to get behind the wheel again so quickly, we're excited because you'll now be able to play as other drivers besides just Colin (even though feeling the wind blow through our kilts makes us smile). Other new features include two- and four-wheeled competi-tions, multiplayer career options, more realistic physics, and the parts challenges. These are segments where you can earn car upgrades by successfully test-driving parts for companies.

KILL 'EM ALL WITH METALLICA

Lars Ulrich first set his sights on bootleggers for stealing his cash, now he's going after you! **Metallica** has signed a deal with **Vivendi Universal Games** for a multi-platform car combat game set to debut in 2005. The unnamed title will feature voiceovers and music from the band. Here's a poetic sample of some of the type of lyrics the boys have in store for us:

> "Invisible kid. Never see what he did.
> Got stuck where he hid.
> Fallen through the grid."
>
> – "Invisible Kid"
> by James Hetfield

Whew! To think we've been mangling the English language all this time. At least **Jason Newsted** was lucky enough to be fired just in time to avoid this debacle!
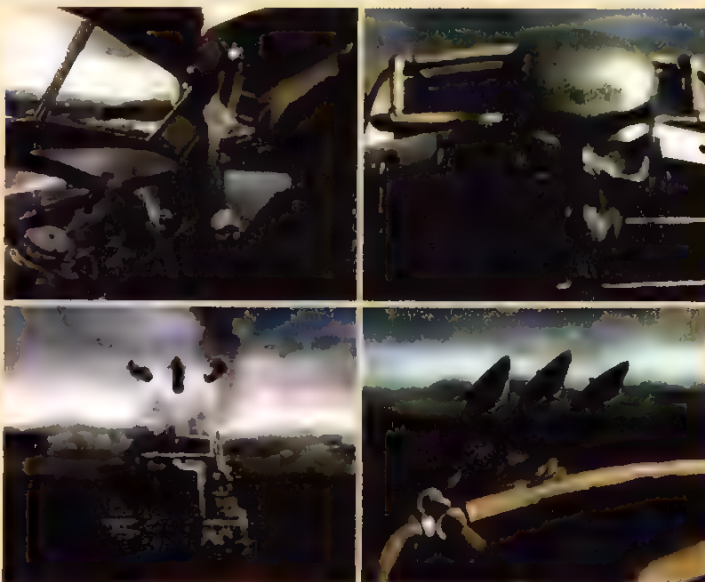
GOOD AT WOLFENSTEIN? WANNA BET?

Move beyond the mere glory of being a great online FPS player with a lot of frags to your credit. Now, thanks to **www.youplaygames.com**, you can start getting money off of suckers for the pleasure of killing them. The site has signed on **id Software's PC** hit **Return to Castle Wolfenstein** to deliver an interesting twist to online gaming.

Those signed up for the site's service can earn money by participating in *Wolfenstein* games and accumulating cash as you kill opponents – or lose it out of your account if you're a little slow on the draw. The site hosts contests covering all different skill levels, so you can have fun in low loss/gain events, or go for it all in high stakes battles. Although *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* is the only title available on the site now, youplaygames.com is in talks to offer up others. Watch your back – and your wallet!

DRIVING

THE GAME

I t's amazing when you really think about it. The Gran Turismo series is a truly astonishing feat in the history of video games. Not only has it sold more than 30 million copies worldwide, it has managed to set a new benchmark for what we have come to expect from a racing game with each series addition. Gran Turismo 4 promises to change your perceptions once again.

Deep in development at Polyphony Digital, many facts regarding this massive project are still murky. What we do know is that the game will feature more than 500 cars and over 50 tracks (for reference, there were just over 150 cars and 19 tracks in Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec). For anyone who attempted to unlock the first PlayStation 2 iteration's daunting amount of races and vehicles, this number seems nothing short of unbelievable.

Even more incredible is the fact that the original game engine has been thrown out and rebuilt from the ground up. According to Polyphony Digital's president Kazunori Yamauchi, who sports an aerodynamic white shirt over his compact frame, there really was no other way to do it. "GT 3 was a demonstration of what the PS2 could do; whereas GT 4, since it is built on the same [console]

POLYPHONY DIGITAL

technology, lets the team dig further into what we want to do as game creators."

All the modes that we loved in the original, like Arcade and Simulation, will still be here; but the team has obviously worked very hard to hone the experience. One of the major innovations of GT 4 is the rebuilt physics engine, which not only makes the cars more stable to drive, but also enables the designers to create tighter courses for even more

intense racing. This increased accuracy is very obvious in the Grand Canyon level where the control is razor sharp, even when driving a rally car that drifts through most every turn.

Similar to the physics engine, the graphics have also received a bump in quality. Utilizing various techniques, the team was able to capture and create an almost photo-realistic environment. But, that is not the end of the innovations planned for Gran Turismo 4.

Kazunori is dedicated to adding more of the human element to the title. During a demonstration we saw of the game, there were spectators who clapped and cheered for the drivers on the track, then dodged the oncoming traffic as it approached. While we haven't seen this new addition actually running in-game, we do have confirmation that it is in the works.

GRAN TURISMO 4

THE REAL DRIVING SIMULATOR

PERFECTION

KAZUNORI YAMAUCHI
PRESIDENT – POLYPHONY DIGITAL

Kazunori addresses the issue by saying, "We are working on incorporating this aspect – as we are always experimenting with the power of the PS2 – but we are uncertain at this time if it will make it into the final product."

There have also been hints that other items (or creatures) will be added to help flesh out the flavor of the different race courses. Animated pit crews have received a definite green light, but how they will affect pit strategies is still uncertain.

Like the previous installments, all the world's premiere auto manufacturers will have licensed versions of their cars available for play (the exact models are still unknown, as contracts and approvals are still in the works). The races will still consist of six-car fields, but this time around you can take the racing online and compete against five other players from around the world.

Sadly, GT 4 will not utilize Sony's upcoming hard drive, so don't expect downloadable cars or tracks. The game will also not support voice-chat during racing, but it will feature an in-depth menu screen to help build gearhead communities of like-minded racers. It is also likely that voice communication will be possible in the online lobby prior to races.

Other areas of the game have also been retooled. For example, the ability to "bounce" off other cars or walls was a major concern for many players in GT 3, and Polyphony knows this complaint needs to be addressed. "One solution we are looking at," Kazunori explains, "is to somehow penalize those that use rough driving in some form or another. Most likely time. For example, we could add a speed limiter to that vehicle momentarily to discourage that practice."

Curbing rough drivers isn't the only area of the game that Kazunori believes needs refining. "There were so many races in GT 3 that some of the users noticed that, when they looked at the percentage complete, it ▶▶

The Gran Turismo 4 team

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** POLYPHONY DIGITAL ■ **RELEASE**

never moved. Some found the experience to be more like work than fun. I don't want to bore my users by doing that; I want the game to be more user-friendly."

To accomplish this feat, the team is working on adding more depth to every aspect of the game – from license tests to races. Think of it as finessing fun out of the product instead of just adding more horsepower, cars, and graphical tricks.

This philosophy is best seen in the new opponent artificial intelligence. By giving the computer-controlled vehicles a better understanding of the race and their surroundings, the AI drivers should be able to anticipate other's reactions, learn from their own mistakes, and

even have more consideration for the line being used by the other cars on the track. That's not to say they won't have emotional reactions to your driving. Bang into an opponent too often, and he will make sure to let you know he is there next time he gets the chance.

There are also many other areas of the game that are still a mystery. Museums and classic cars have been announced, but it remains unclear if there will be classic races that players will be able to participate in. Also, the Tune Shop and Car Dealership areas in the Simulation mode will get a much-needed expansion, but to what extent we do not know. Kazunori is also looking to capitalize on the recent underground street racing

phenomenon that fueled the success of Rockstar's Midnight Club II.

"Street racing is very popular in the States, and we are very interested in that trend. I hope to include more street racer type cars than we did in GT 3," he adds. That's not the end of all the things GT 4 has in store either, as Kazunori promises there will be more surprises.

Let's just hope it's not the release date, which is currently set for the ambiguous "winter" retail season. When we asked Kazunori if he felt the game would come out in 2003, he could only echo our thoughts with this simple phrase: "I hope."

GT 4 will feature a refined Replay mode

The rebuilt physics engine should help players who had problems spinning out on straightaways with the more powerful vehicles

The Driving Force Pro from Logitech, designed exclusively for Gran Turismo 4, offers a full 900 degrees of movement – just like a standard automobile. Also improved is the intensity of the force feedback, which now gives the player precise vibrations from the road. You can feel every bump, and the sensation is so intense that it will put up a good fight in the corners. All told, it makes for an intense experience, especially in the Rally courses where you will find yourself testing the limits of the wheel's rotation radius

On the surface, the game plays much like GT 3, but after spending more time with it, we can assure you that all the vehicles have a very different (and more realistic) feel once you master the new physics engine

In regards to the new history portions in the gameplay, Kazunori states, "One of the nice things about being a game is that GT 4 will give people a chance to actually drive some of these historic cars that people would normally not be able to drive."

ダンロップコーナー
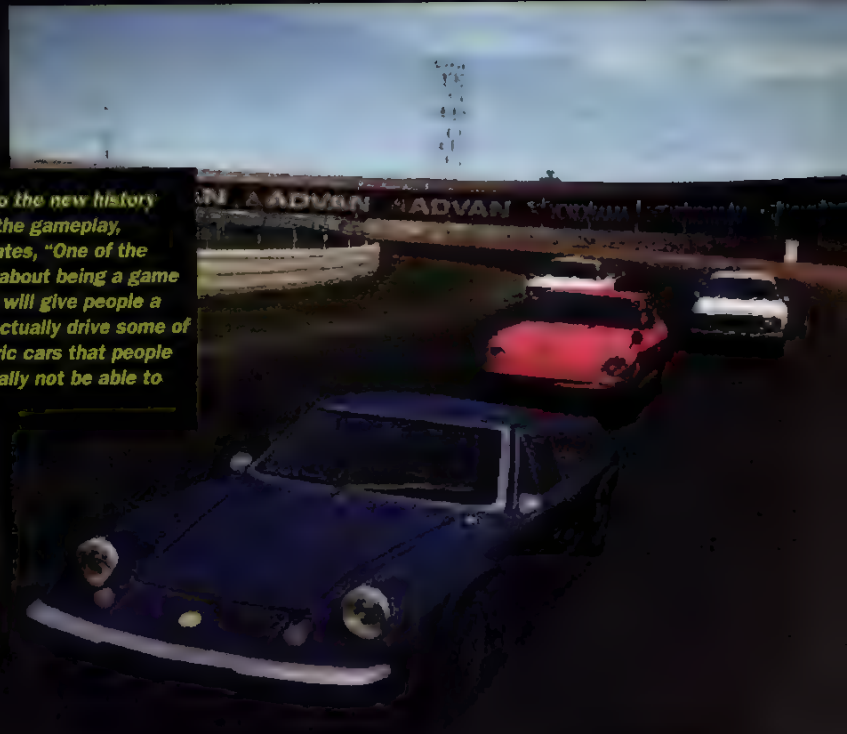
FROM SHOW FLOOR TO GAME STORE:
A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT THE CREATION OF GRAN TURISMO 4

To learn more about the how Gran Turismo 4 captures all the magic of racing, Game Informer traveled to Polyphony Digital in Tokyo to meet with the people who make it all happen. In an uncharacteristic move for the secretive development house, they not only opened up their doors to us, but let us in on a number of secrets regarding the process of creating this blockbuster series. If you ever wondered how a car goes from your driveway to a virtual highway, this information will be eye-opening to say the least.

From the realism displayed in the tracks and vehicles to the sampled engine sounds, no racing game can compete with Gran Turismo's breadth of licensed vehicles or its dedication to perfectly simulating the racing experience.

The key to Polyphony Digital's success comes from its own "secret blend" of characteristics and statistical models that, in the end, simulates the way cars drive. Taking into account just over 30 different parameters (such as weight, speed, friction, and wind), its highly guarded formula can accurately reproduce a show floor model car in a virtual gaming environment. To give you an idea of how exact this recipe is in Gran Turismo 4, Polyphony Digital gave us some examples of how close the game is coming to duplicating a real-world racing experience. After taking the average lap-time of a Honda S2000 at the Tsukuba racing circuit, the team is able to match that same average – in-game – with only a difference of 0.4 seconds. Just to prove that it's not a fluke, we were also given examples of how Polyphony was able to match a VW Lupo at that same track, and a Mazda RX-8 at Laguna Seca – both with a margin of error under one second. Impressive.

You would think that reaching this level of detail would require an insane amount of data, but that is simply not the case. Gran Turismo guru Kazunori explains, "We had assumed this as well. But at the end of the day, so far, we have found that as long as we get the core right, usually, the rest just falls into place. The other small details just happen."

So, while the formula may be basic in design, getting the data is not so simple. Numerous times throughout the development process, the team descends on various courses and takes cars out on the track to test the consistency of the recipe.

"We try cars in GT 4, then we do it again at the track. For example, if a car in the game can take the first corner on a certain track at 80 mph, we take that data and compare it to the actual car on the actual track. We look at what its speed is going into and out of the corner, and various other pieces of data."

Kazunori couldn't deny that taking the cars out for a spin is a good time, but this testing process is very important for the final game. As a matter of fact, unlike many titles, Polyphony Digital doesn't use focus groups to see if the game feels right or is entertaining to play. Instead, Kazunori relies on matching the in-game vehicles to their real-life counterparts and even brings in real race drivers like Takasi Ohi to get feedback.

It all seems like a lot of effort just to make sure that the game is realistic, but all of Polyphony's hard work pays off in the gameplay. You can feel the car slide into a corner. You can sense its bulk and the pull of gravity as you travel up and down the tracks.

What's next for the Gran Turismo team? A trip to Motegi racing circuit in mid-July where the team will get to test and analyze over 200 cars

THE TRACKS

HIROSHI SAMATSU
COURSE DESIGNER

▼ Is it real or is it Memorex? Recreating the look and feel of some of the world's most famous race tracks is no easy task, but it takes a careful eye to tell the difference between the photograph and the in-game model.

At the core of GT 4 is the physics engine, but a car without a road to drive on isn't worth the oil you feed it. Enter Hiroshi Samatsu, a quiet and reserved course designer who oversees the 15-person team that is charged with creating all 50-plus planned tracks in Gran Turismo 4. He is also personally responsible for the stunning Grand Canyon environment that was shown at E3.

Once Kazunori and the rest of the team come up with the list of locations they wish to feature in the game, as well as famous courses that they want to recreate, a long process of collecting data begins. "The first thing we do, generally, is go out and visit the tracks and take as many pictures as possible," explains Samatsu. "We take 20,000 pictures at a minimum, with an average closer to 30,000. Every inch of that track is being documented. If you see bleachers or a stand there, it will be [rendered] and inserted into the game."

Using tape measures, helicopters, and even cranes, the team tries to capture the spirit of each course. When asked how many parameters they look for, Samatsu laughs and gives it to us straight: "The list is endless if you take a real-life circuit. We start with the width of the track and how it varies along the way. We will also measure the width and length of the red and white bumper strips. How wide the road stripes are, the height of the railing, building measurements...just about anything you can think of."

In fact, the team often constructs too many pieces. Samatsu says, "Since the team is always in a constant battle with the amount of data, there are times when we go back and rip stuff out to make sure that the game will play at the speed and the quality that we are looking for."

Since each track design team member is responsible for all the art assets and the overall feel of the course, there are times when collecting measurements just isn't enough. While there is no set benchmark vehicle, the team will conduct "repetitive trial and error with various vehicles on the courses to try and find the ultimate balance between the course and the excitement the player will feel [when playing]."

The licensed courses are obviously replicated down to the last turns, but for the fictional tracks, the team is able to create new experiences. The designers certainly look at other courses for inspiration, but overall, ▶▶

photograph

in-game model

Even the road surface is captured to ensure that the player can't tell the difference between the game and the real thing

photograph
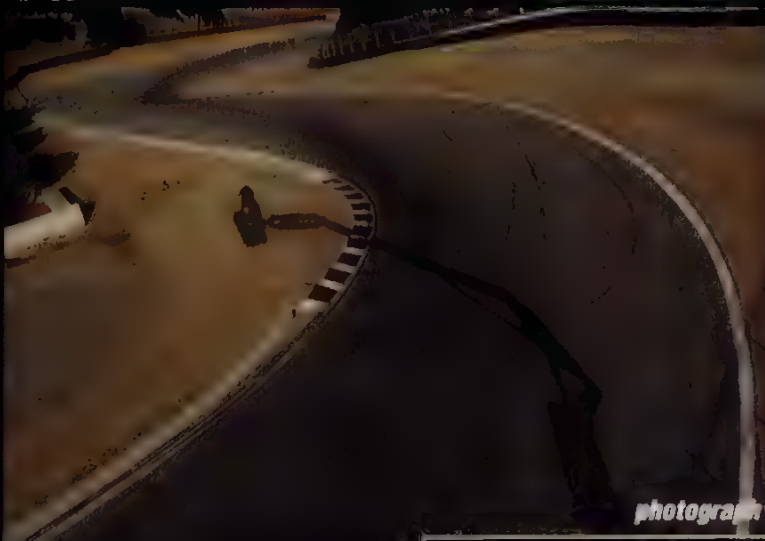
in-game model

Laguna Seca's famous chicane recreated perfectly

The rendered version has a better greenskeeper

the type of race it is designed for dictates the layout of the roadways. On Samatsu's own Grand Canyon course, for example, it is designed specifically for rally cars — a demanding brand of racing that has its own requirements.

"A rally turn is very unique in that the cars drift around the corners, so those were important aspects that I looked at to make sure they felt right." Of course, the final word on any track comes from Polyphony head Kazunori.

"Sometimes [Kazunori] will come back and say, for instance, that he doesn't like the fourth corner. Then I will bring it back to my team and we will sit and brainstorm and try to come up with ideas as to why Kazunori said that. What are the factors that make that turn feel wrong? It could be many different factors. It could be the arc of the curve, the bank, or any number of reasons."

The track designers will also work very closely with the programming team. The coders can even make the designer's job easier by creating tools that instantly create the guardrail for the entire course

or other such shortcuts. "Sometimes it's very little stuff," comments Samatsu, "but it helps us get our job done, and saves us a lot of time. And let us worry about the atmosphere."

All this hard work does seem to be paying off. It's obvious the team is very happy with the look of the game, and the addition of photo-realistic environments really makes all the difference in the world. "People will see the Grand Canyon course, and know that's what it is without even asking. It's nice to see computer graphics get this close to reality.".

The Dunlop Wheel looks more realistic in the modeled picture

Like the tracks, the cars also receive a lot of care in the development of Gran Turismo 4. Car designer Mutsumi Sakakibara walked us through some of the techniques he and the rest of the team use to capture the look of the vehicles.

"The first thing we do is study the car," states Sakakibara, "look at it from all the different angles, and take pictures." Like the track designers, this team also uses photography to capture the nuances of each automobile. In fact, 200 specific photos are taken of each and every car from a uniform set of points.

The team also tries to collect as many details as possible from the manufacturers. Some are better than others. "Very rarely, but occasionally, we have manufacturers that are very, very cooperative and give out CAD [computer-aided drafting, a common engineering tool – Ed.] data. Some just deliver catalogs and dimensions."

Once all the information is collected, the designers still face a number of challenges. The most difficult task is getting the look of the car perfected while working within the data and size constraints of the game engine. On average, a model is anywhere between 4,000 and 5,000 polygons. So, it takes a certain amount of skill to find the right balance of aesthetics, given the limitations of the PS2's processing capabilities.

Sakakibara adds, "Generally, the manufacturers are happy with the final models, but sometimes say that this particular model doesn't come with that bumper or those alloys or those emblems."

This brings up an excellent question, one that is no doubt already running through your mind: Will the player have the ability to give visual modifications, like bumpers or spoilers, to the cars?

"Right now, we are just hoping that we will be able to do that with some cars, but it will be unlikely that we will be able to do that with all the cars we have," Sakakibara equivocates.

On the surface, it seems like he might be avoiding the issue, but his reasoning does make sense. For every version of a car with a different bumper or effects package, there is less space left on the disc for more cars – and less time for his team to create them. In the end, the design team believes that a wider assortment of cars is more valuable than a short list of cars that feature modifications. In an ideal world, Sakakibara would like to see modifications and damage for all the cars; but at this time, he knows the work of creating 500 cars is already a daunting task.

However, Sakakibara did let it slip out that the team plans "to bring most of the cars from GT 3 to GT 4, hopefully, depending on the licenses."

After seeing and speaking with all the teams, it's evident how dedicated they are to crafting the perfect racer. The attention to detail, from the car models to the track recreations, is nothing short of phenomenal.

MUTSUMI SAKAKIBARA
CAR DESIGNER

1

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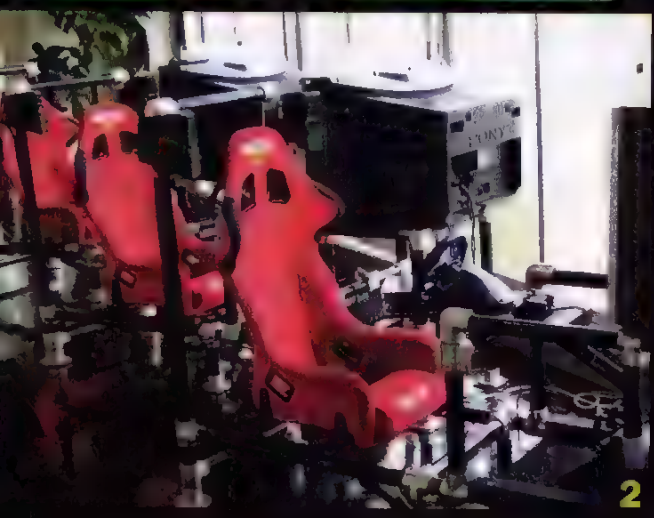
POLYPHONY DIGITAL

Game Informer has visited a lot of developers over the years, and we must admit that Polyphony Digital has some of the most impressive digs we've ever seen. From the moment you step off the elevator, you can feel the racing energy. The entire place is designed like a high-tech parking garage. **1** It even has columns labeled like a parking ramp, and an elevator that can deliver full-size cars to any floor of its Tokyo office building.

In the front half of the building, you will find a series of racing pods **2** designed specifically for showing the game at conventions, lined along the wall just on the other side of a trophy case **3** filled with awards for Polyphony Digital's products.

As you enter the game development portion of the office, you are greeted by a huge hydraulic racing simulator **4** that was built (with Subaru's help) specifically to play Gran Turismo. Just up from there is the main testing station for GT 4, which features eight televisions **5** representing all the various formats Gran Turismo can be played on (including NTSC, PAL, and various high definition sets), so the designers can make sure that the game looks good no matter what type of monitor you play it on.

All around the office, you can see bits and pieces of racing culture: shocks lying on the ground, racing fire suits **6** hung up with the coats. Plus, there are literally dozens of car models **7** in each and every cube. It's like being in a toy store.

But the best place of all is the "hang-out" room. **8** Not only does it have a huge collection of PSone and PlayStation 2 games, it has hundreds of magazines from around the world, a gigantic collection of racing videos, exercise equipment, an electronic drum kit, and even a massage chair.

And just when you think there couldn't be any more, you discover that Polyphony Digital has its own hotel so employees who pull an all-nighter have a place to crash. Or, if they are feeling tired, they can just retire to the a specially built, traditional style Japanese room **9** (complete with a low table and tatami mats) to chill.

Of course, Kazunori's office **10** is just the kind of stately place you would expect the creator of Gran Turismo to sit. But even his impressive office is not the biggest highlight of the development house. Believe it or not, it's the parking lot **11** (which, we might add, is on the roof). Featuring American muscle, German know-how, and Japanese style, it looks like a pit stop for race cars from around the world. **12** The highlight of course, is Kazunori's beautiful Porsche GT3. Sadly (for us saps that don't drive Porsches), that's not the fastest of the six cars he owns. He recently had a Honda S2000 juiced up with a carbon fiber body and just about every racing modification you can think of. When we asked if it was fast, Kazunori just laughed.

4

8 9

10

11

12

A completely original and unique sci-fi experience
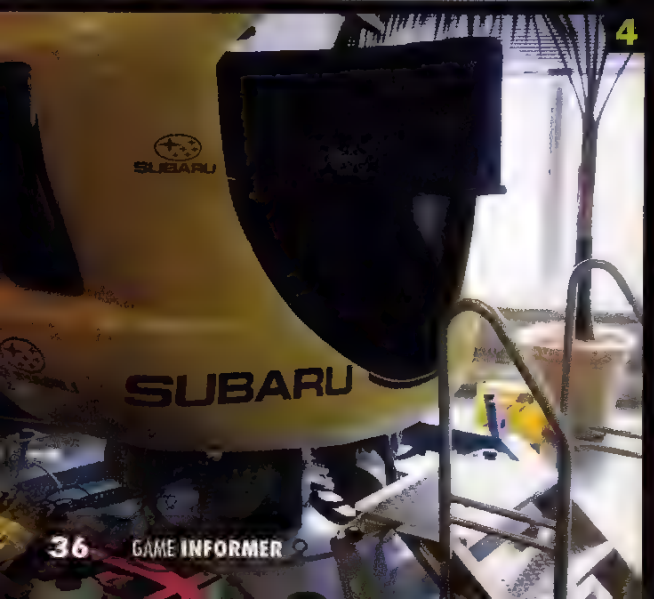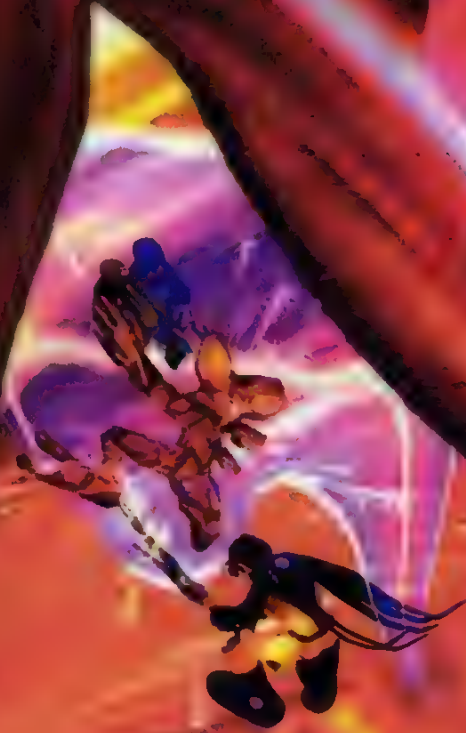
Use TimeDilation to stop time and cue up insane combos
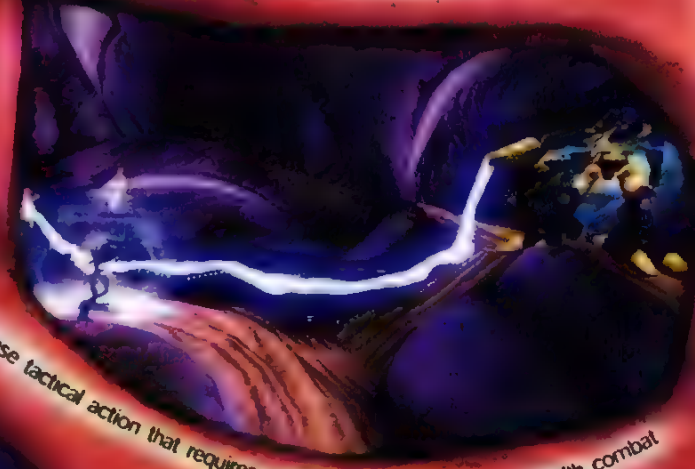
Intense tactical action that requires close-range, long-range and stealth combat
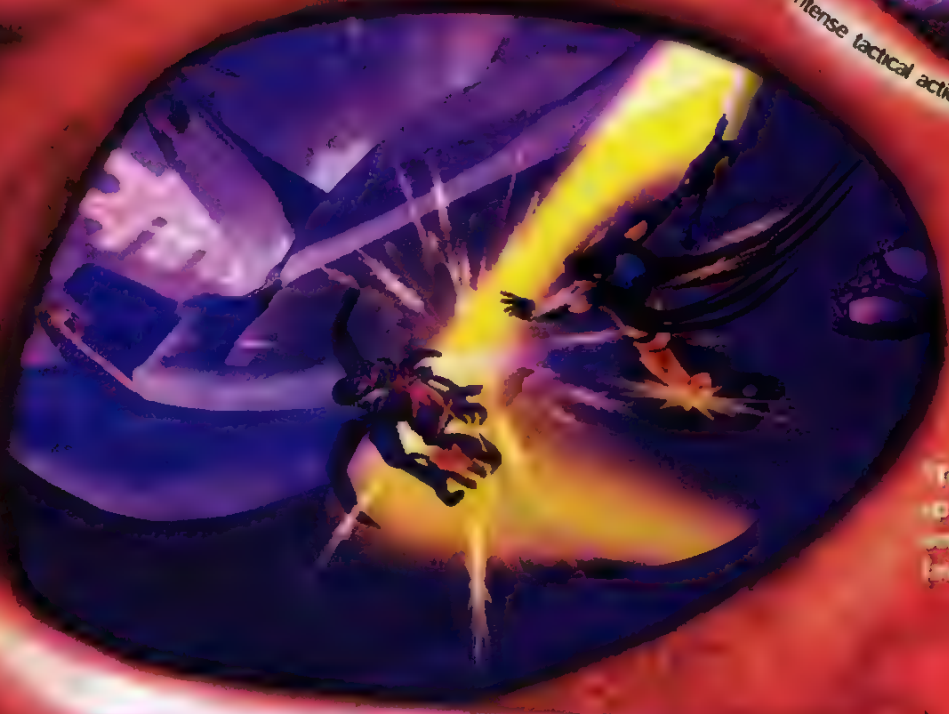
"They'se often say that watching outrage set up a massive combo and then unleash it over a series of literally dozens of blows in cinematic fashion is something to behold."
- PSX2.com

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WAR *GAMES*

MAKING SENSE OF THE VIDEO

MILITARY

Walking the show floor at E3, it's not uncommon to see a host of scantily clad ladies strutting their stuff for the assembled geeks. However, this most recent convention was odd in the fact that you were almost as likely to see a man in military fatigues as you were a bottle blonde in a bikini. From the U.S. Army troops that were stationed outside of the LA Convention Center to EA's crowded Medal of Honor theater, camouflage was clearly the most fashionable color of the season. The effect was a bit strange, due to the fact that every time you turned around you saw some new game featuring a buff guy in combat gear running around shooting Germans, terrorists, or some other breed of geo-political bogeymen.

Is this increased interest in realistic military action a by-product of increasingly dangerous events unfolding in the Middle East? That's a possibility, as art generally tends to reflect the world around it. More likely, however, is the fact that game publishers around the world are

eyeing the strong sales of titles like EA's Medal of Honor: Frontline and Ubi Soft's Tom Clancy games and deciding that they want a piece of the action for themselves.

Whatever the reason, it's certainly created a bit of confusion on the part of consumers. With so many military titles vying for your dollars, how can you decide which war game is right for you? For this reason, we decided to create a buyer's guide of sorts for this blossoming section of the market; breaking down the differences between the major competitors in the genre, and even bringing to light a few sleepers that may have eluded the attention of the mainstream press. Whether you like first-person shooters, third-person action, or strategy; there is a game in these next eight pages for you. So, lace up your boots, private, because Game Informer basic training begins now. Let's move out.

GAME INDUSTRY'S
MADNESS

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

System: Xbox/PC • **Publisher:** THQ
Developer: Pandemic • **Release Date:** 2004

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Facts regarding Full Spectrum Warrior's plotline and setting are as closely guarded as Saddam Hussein's whereabouts.

RECON: Full Spectrum Warrior totally caught us by surprise at E3, and went on to become one of the true stand-out games of the show. It's had quite an interesting background as well. The project actually started as a light infantry training simulator for the U.S. Army, which was being created by a joint partnership between developer Pandemic and the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies. After seeing how impressive this title was becoming, THQ scooped it up and is publishing it for Xbox and PC. Basically, it's like a 3D version of Commandos, but with an insane degree of depth and tactical authenticity that adheres to real U.S. military standards.

SITREP: As you can see, this game is graphically mind-blowing, and as a result has been the subject of much talk in the video game world. From what we saw at E3, Pandemic has come up with a control scheme that is fully capable of delivering a ton of flexibility without overwhelming the player with detail. Our only concern is that too many gamers might expect this to be a shoot 'em up based on the screenshots. This is far from the case, as you only command your troops and don't actually engage in combat yourself. Still, we'll take this over another generic third-person action game any day.

BATTLEFIELD COMMAND

System: PC • **Publisher:** Codemasters
Developer: 1C Company • **Release Date:** Spring 2004

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Features many different battles from World War II.

RECON: As a real-time strategy title, Battlefield Command has done some interesting things to set it apart from the pack. 1C Company took actual aerial photographs from the time period and extrapolated their mission landscapes. This in turn gives players a unique opportunity to strategize through terrain the way it looked when the likes of Rommel and Patton gazed at its possibilities. On the combat end of the spectrum, a complex AI system reacts uniquely to each formation and unit you throw at it, and the array of units available will be pleasantly plump; around 300 is the figure at present. To make sure players are getting their money's worth, over 100 missions are being drawn up – some of them will be smaller in scope than others, but you can rest assured that big ones will be in there, too.

SITREP: Battlefield Command has variety going for it. The gargantuan size of the game itself, and the fact that so many different troops can be deployed into battle in such varied locations, is certain to tickle many war buffs' fancy. We're curious how the frequently arduous resource collection system will work, and what emphasis will be put on politics, if any. Additionally, research trees might become rather boring if players are forced to discover and rediscover the same technology over and over again. However, the game is a long way from release, so more information on these subjects should be forthcoming soon.

AMERICA'S ARMY

System: PC • **Publisher:** U.S. Army
Developer: U.S. Army • **Release Date:** September 20

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Present-day conflicts in a number of different settings from around the world.

RECON: The first, second, and third thing to remember about this highly realistic online FPS is that it is totally and completely free. As the game first rolled out many months ago, the Army was shocked at its immediate and staggering success. Before the first full release day was through, it was already evident that many, many more servers would be needed to accommodate interest. After playing catch-up with their enormous player base, the U.S. Army design team sat down and began work on what is now called version 1.7.20. However, that's a little misleading – the game's improvements will actually be trickled down piecemeal through patches over a period of time. A number of new vehicles and weapons are in the works, as well as more specific player roles as medics, engineers, etc. where the player is actually required to attend a virtual class on his chosen profession, then pass a test in order to acquire the skill. A bevy of impressive visual effects are also on the way, and from what we've seen, this game will likely rival many others that you have to pluck down $50 to play.

SITREP: Through the Army's savvy implementation of better menus, readout structure, and improved sound; the early patches for America's Army are sure to greatly heighten an already-excellent play experience. We expect that over the next 10 years (the amount of time planned for the entire project) we'll see some pretty amazing things from the men and women in green.

CALL OF DUTY

System: PC • **Publisher:** Activision • **Developer:** Infinity Ward • **Release Date:** Fall

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Call of Duty will put players behind the eyes of three different soldiers from World War II in this highly realistic FPS. The American soldier will experience the legendary 101st Airborne drop behind enemy lines in the days preceding D-Day. The British section will focus on the 6th Airborne Troop as they assault Pegasus Bridge, and the Russian portion deals with the battle of Stalingrad.

RECON: In what may amount to a major coup, over 20 of the original Medal of Honor: Allied Assault development team defected from Electronic Arts and began Infinity Ward. It's well known that Allied Assault set a benchmark in a number of areas, so the anticipation surrounding this game is nearly palpable. To that end, Call of Duty will feature a number of different locations, and promises to convey the camaraderie of a squad through intense battle scenes; sabotage, stealth, and sniper missions; and vehicle-based levels. The AI has been thoroughly refined as well. Your squad will emulate a trained unit by using authentic tactics when faced with a firefight. Be it laying down suppressing fire, covering fire, or even pulling wounded comrades to the rear, you're in store for some impressive encounters. Call of Duty is looking like a winner already.

SITREP: There can be little doubt that Activision has a rock-solid hit on its hands here. Not only does the game look and sound fantastic, but its developer's pedigree virtually guarantees a compelling and entertaining product. The implementation of cutting edge AI technology is sure to give players a thrill, and the accurate ballistic models as well as the incredible sound should all combine for an incredible experience.

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT – BREAKTHROUGH

System: PC • **Publisher:** Electronic Arts • **Developer:** EA LA • **Release Date:** Fall

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: The focus of this, the second Allied Assault expansion, will be on the struggle to retake Italy beginning from the battle for the Kasserine pass in northern Africa. We shouldn't have to tell you that Breakthrough is set in World War II, but we will anyway.

RECON: More of the same isn't always a bad thing – especially if you're talking about Medal of Honor: Allied Assault. From a single-player standpoint, Breakthrough looks to be hitting all of the high points with a lot of emphasis being put on blistering action, as well as giving players the feeling that they're part of a war; not just a single soldier taking on an entire army. The weapons set has also changed for the long journey ahead, as has the online component. Liberation mode will place characters who have been defeated into a holding cell where players who are still kicking can then rescue them. Also included in the multiplayer portion will be the ability to drive tanks, call in artillery strikes, and defuse mines.

SITREP: There's a reason why there are so many Medal of Honor games due to release in the months ahead – it's a good franchise with a lot of success under its belt. One thing to keep in mind is the fact that Allied Assault's last expansion pack was shorter than its fans would have liked. Hopefully, this won't be the case with Breakthrough, and at this point it seems as though the robust single-player experience and the expanded multiplayer role will keep its sales up and its customers happy.

FORM UP, SOLDIER!

Civilians have a difficult time determining exactly how many people make up the assorted grouping designations used by the military. These figures are based on Army and Marine Corps ground force numbers, and do not include armor, artillery, or cavalry formation variations.

FIRE TEAM | 5 to 7 Soldiers

Two fire teams make a squad

SQUAD | 10 to 13 Soldiers

A squad is usually commanded by a staff sergeant

PLATOON | 40 to 52 Soldiers

Comprised of four squads, a platoon is commanded by a lieutenant, with a sergeant being second in command

COMPANY | 69 to 190 Soldiers

Comprised of two or more platoons and a headquarters section. A company is commanded by a captain

BATTALION | 560+ Soldiers

Comprised of four or more companies and a headquarters section. A battalion is commanded by a lieutenant colonel

REGIMENT | 1,120+ Soldiers

Comprised of two or more battalions. The term "regiment" was officially dropped by the Army in the 1960s during its division reorganization effort. The Army and the Marine Corps presently use the term "brigade" instead. However, traditional regiments still use their regimental identification in an unofficial capacity

BRIGADE | 4,000 to 5,000 Soldiers

Comprised of three or more battalions, and smaller units tailored to meet the brigade's individualized and anticipated requirements. A brigade is commanded by a colonel

DIVISION | 9,000 to 15,000 Soldiers

Comprised of around nine battalions typically. A division is capable of sustaining ongoing combat, and is led by a major-general

CORPS | 20,000 to 40,000 Soldiers

Comprised of two or more divisions. A corps is commanded by a lieutenant-general

ARMY | 50,000+ Soldiers

Comprised of one to eight corps. An army is commanded by a lieutenant-general or higher rank

SÖLDNER: SECRET WARS

System: PC • **Publisher:** JoWood Productions
Developer: Wings Simulations • **Release Date:** Fall 2003

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: The United States, Russia, China, and Japan...in the year 2010.

RECON: This game flew under the radar, but won praise from many who saw it in action at E3, and was even picked as one of wargamer.com's best of show. Developed by Wings Simulations (creators of the tank sim Panzer Elite), Söldner is a tactical action title that can be played in either a first- or third-person perspective. The game's setting is a near future where world superpowers don't square off against each other with full-scale campaigns, but rather send out small groups of special forces to make surgical, covert strikes. You'll be cast as a commander of one of these cadres, leading your troops as well as light armored vehicles, helicopters, and aircraft. Although the futuristic premise might scare off hardcore sim fans, the developers assure us that the game is grounded in realism, and many of the weapons are based on information secured from the research laboratories of some the world's most-respected weapons makers.

SITREP: This is a title that may take many by surprise. Graphically it looks ready for the big leagues, and many of its features are well ahead of the accepted curve. Wings Simulations promises that their destructible and deforming terrain engine is second to none, and they have implemented a character creation system that allows for over 60,000 different variations. Other impressive facets of the game include a single-player mission generator and the Customizable Multiplayer Modes – a tool that will make it very easy for players to create their own unique versions of most types of popular online contests like deathmatch, infiltrate, and capture the flag.

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS 2

System: PC • **Publisher:** Gathering of Developers
Developer: Illusion Softworks • **Release Date:** September

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Many of the geographical extremes troops visited during World War II make their way into Hidden and Dangerous 2, including North Africa, Czechoslovakia, Norway, and Burma among others.

RECON: Gathering of Developers is hoping to expand on its popular, but somewhat buggy, entry into the first/third-person squad-based tactical shooter market with improved graphics, control, and a thick plot. Much of the game will find you leading a squad around various environments as you are challenged to solve a number of tactical problems with a limited number of resources. One mission could have you infiltrating a base, while another may demand that you steal sensitive German documents from a heavily fortified compound. How you use your other squad member's strengths and weaknesses will likely decide the outcome of the mission. If you get bored with the 23 single-player levels, a 32-player online mode featuring deathmatch and skirmish modes will be available, as well as two different single-player modes. Lone-wolf will allow you to play the campaign without the benefit of the rest of your squad, and Carnage is simply a way to see how many people you can eliminate before being squashed yourself.

SITREP: When we saw this game at E3 this year, it looked crisp and very interesting. The number of different play settings is sure to satisfy those who partake, and the non-linear level design will help elevate the replayability, not to mention the online modes. The engine Mafia employed is used to fuel the game's graphical appetite, and is likely to bring more fans of this series into the fold.

MEN OF VALOR: THE VIETNAM WAR

System: Xbox/PC • **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Developer: 2015 • **Release Date:** 2004

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: The Vietnam War, featuring locations around Da Nang, the Perfume River, and a number of others.

RECON: Game development tends to go in cycles. World War II is a very popular setting for many games presently, but there seems to be a new breed of titles popping up centering around the Vietnam War. 2015, which put together a little title called Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, has since experienced much tumult and change. Seeking steady ground, Vivendi Universal has given the company the backing it needs to continue making amazing first-person shooters. Men of Valor seeks to accurately portray the U.S. involvement in Vietnam from the beginning all the way through the Tet offensive and beyond. Relying on their acute attention to detail and intricate battlefield knowledge, 2015 is setting out to create the definitive war-based shooter of its time. Featuring skilled AI, impressive graphics, and the ability to play through the game in a cooperative mode with friends (not to mention the obvious online component), Men of Valor has a lot going for it.

SITREP: This is one of the first triple-A titles we've seen that tackles the actions of this controversial war head-on. That being said, we're excited at the possibilities this location opens up. The cooperative play component is sure to be wildly popular, and if the graphics can keep up with the industry's ever-increasing technology, 2004 could be a very good year. We have a feeling that when it finally releases (no exact date has been divulged yet), it will delight even the most jaded of gamers.

MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN

System: PlayStation 2/Xbox/GameCube • **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Developer: EA LA • **Release Date:** Fall

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: The Pacific Theater following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Featured locations include Burma, Guadalcanal, and Singapore.

RECON: If there is one series that brought realistic, historically accurate war gaming to the mainstream audience, it's Medal of Honor. The first two PSone titles were classics and Medal of Honor: Allied Assault redefined the term "harrowing" with its awesome recreation of Omaha Beach. This time around, the epic scale will be even grander, allowing you to experience such events as Pearl Harbor, the Battle of Guadalcanal, and even the chance to destroy the Bridge over the River Kwai. At E3, EA set up a theater to show a playable demo of the Pearl Harbor level, and needless to say our jaws hit the floor when we saw swarms of Japanese planes bearing down on the gun position the demo leader was manning. Also, we duly noted the game's improved visuals, which were definitely at the top of the heap for console shooters.

SITREP: There are few things that are a sure bet in video games, but Medal of Honor is one of them. The jungles of the Pacific islands will definitely provide a richer setting for your adventures, and open up the possibilities for more complex, stealth-based gameplay. Also, EA listened intently to the complaints of those who felt that Medal of Honor: Frontline was a linear cakewalk, and is constructing levels that allow you to take multiple paths and accomplish objectives in a variety of different ways. Also, we can expect more of the series' legendary sound design, which is unparalleled in the world of gaming.

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II – BACK TO BAGHDAD

System: PlayStation 2/Xbox/PC • **Publisher:** Gotham Games
Developer: Sci/Pivotal • **Release Date:** Fall

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: As the name suggests, Back to Baghdad takes place around the Iraqi capital during the height of the 1991 Gulf War.

RECON: New for this iteration of Republican Guard-shooting action is more combat, and more say in what your troops do and how they do it. The ability to raise your squad members' skill levels in whatever way you see fit will grant players a good degree of control over how their troops develop, and thereby how you play the game. Also upgraded for the sequel is weapon-specific targeting; badly needed upgrades to the lighting and environmental effects; and the new vehicles, weapons, and enemies that you'd expect to see in a follow-up release. The squad-based gameplay dynamic is back in full force, as is the ability to choose between playing as a U.S. Delta Force or British SAS group.

SITREP: Although Conflict: Desert Storm received its fair share of critical jeers, many people picked it up anyway and liked it. With over one million copies sold worldwide, it stands to reason that Gotham would go back to the well. Enter, Back to Baghdad. The efforts being made to address the previous game's low points seem to be progressing at flank speed, but whether or not these changes can truly bring Conflict Desert Storm II into the ranks of the military game elite has yet to be seen.

BATTLEFIELD 1942: SECRET WEAPONS OF WORLD WAR II

System: PC • **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Developer: Digital Illusions CE • **Release Date:** September 9

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Although Battlefield 1942 is a rather self-explanatory title in terms of when and where this game is set, it doesn't follow any dedicated storyline. Players are spawned into historic maps with the goal of eliminating the enemy and accomplishing their mission. The maps are set in and around the European Theater.

RECON: Countless video warriors have been bathed in their own digital blood courtesy of this extremely popular and well-built franchise. Never one to lay about as opportunities to make more money slide by, Electronic Arts is set to release another expansion pack featuring weapons, vehicles, and items from World War II that were on the drawing board as the war came to a close. The first and most exciting addition to your arsenal is a jetpack. There will only be one pack available on most maps, put in a strategic location where both sides have an equal chance to get at it. Also included will be a Flying Wing, a remote-control rocket, a mobile anti-aircraft unit, new tanks, and updated weapons for the various character kits.

SITREP: Battlefield 1942 doesn't have a fanatical following for nothing, and Secret Weapons looks to further solidify its position as one of the premiere multiplayer experiences. It is possible that EA could experience a decline in playership with the increasing popularity of Activision's recently released Day of Defeat – but either way, this is a title that will likely put a smile on any fan's face.

SNIPER ELITE: BERLIN 1945

System: PlayStation 2/Xbox/PC • **Publisher:** Wanadoo
Developer: Rebellion • **Release Date:** 2004

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: During the spring of 1945, the Russians were in Berlin and bent on occupation. Sniper Elite is set in and around Berlin during this time frame.

RECON: This is an interesting concept from a smaller company. As a German sniper who has been recruited by the OSS (the precursor to the CIA), it'll be your job to bump off an assortment of Russians as they pillage war-torn Berlin. The levels will exhibit a refreshing non-linearity as players will be challenged to find ways to accomplish their missions without being led by the nose as many other games of this ilk are want to do. Also planned is a fascinating split-screen cooperative mode and an online multiplayer component. The single-player portion will encompasses 10 missions and will allow players to switch between first-and third-person perspectives at the touch of a button. An assortment of weapons is planned, and you'll find everything from machine guns and flamethrowers to panzerfausts and sticky bombs available to you.

SITREP: This type of stealth/action game has been generally well received in the past (think Hitman 2), and Rebellion is paying careful attention to the nuances that make sniping an interesting and fun occupation. The game is sure to challenge player's reflexes, problem solving skills, and resourcefulness as they look for the perfect perch and the clean getaway. The graphics may hold Sniper Elite back, but it's still early in development, so there's a lot of time for improvement.

M91 X 6

SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

System: PlayStation 2/Xbox/PC • **Publisher:** LucasArts
Developer: Totally Games • **Release Date:** Winter

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Join the fight over Europe, the Pacific, Asia, and North Africa as the Allies battle the feared German Luftwaffe during the four years that preceded the invasion at Normandy during World War II.

RECON: Some of you may remember a title by the name of X-Wing. No? How about TIE Fighter? Still no? Then you're a moron, and shouldn't be reading this magazine. However, if you've just come out of a coma, and have a hankering for World War II-based combat flight simulators, you're boat is about to come in this winter. Lawrence Holland, the creator of the aforementioned titles is hard at work on Secret Weapons Over Normandy, the second WWII action flyer masterminded by Holland. This iteration finds players joining a secret squadron of elite pilots who are bent on destroying German plans. You'll be given the opportunity to fly 20 authentic aircraft from the era through a staggering 30 missions. Considering that Mr. Holland has such an impressive track record, it stands to reason that SWON will likely be a force to be reckoned with.

SITREP: Just as the X-Wing and TIE Fighter games were able to allow any type of gamer to have fun (not just flight sim fanatics), so too will Secret Weapons Over Normandy. We're very interested to see how this one turns out this winter, but we have every confidence that the game will live up to the increasing amount of hype surrounding it. Why LucasArts and Holland parted ways many years ago is no longer important – each is dedicated to making this title the best game it can be, and the benefactors of this renewed relationship will be all of us (and Holland's wallet).

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS

System: Xbox • **Publisher:** Codemasters
Developer: Bohemia Interactive Studios • **Release Date:** Winter

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: During the confusing and politically charged time when Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost and perstroika policies were rocking the Soviet Union to its very foundation, a Soviet underground resistance group seized control of an island community. Unable to deal with this surprisingly strong threat, Russia has enlisted the help of NATO to restore order. NATO dubs this mission Operation Flashpoint.

RECON: Although this is essentially a port of the PC version, the Xbox iteration also contains a prequel campaign named Resistance, which is set years before NATO enters the picture. Players will assume the role of Victor Troska, an ex-Special Forces soldier who leads a resistance effort against the powerful Soviets on a new 100-square kilometer island created specifically for this game. Of course, the original game is also available for play. As a private, you'll work your way up the ranks by following your leader's orders, and then eventually issuing your own through an advanced squad-management system. The game's highly realistic models and physics make sure you'll feel like you're on the battlefield, and the plethora of vehicles will make sure you stay there. There will also be an intricate weather system, and even accurate star constellations for night navigation.

SITREP: The PC version of this game was quite successful, and with its additional features, Operation Flashpoint is sure to strike a chord with the predominantly hardcore Xbox audience. At the same time, there is going to be an influx of this type of game on Microsoft's console, so it'll be interesting to see which title weathers the storm the best. OpFlash looks to be in an excellent position at present, and has its predecessor's notoriety to help it jump out from the pack.

SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS

System: PlayStation 2 • **Publisher:** Sony Computer Entertainment America
Developer: Zipper Interactive • **Release Date:** November

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: A wide range of locales, including Algeria, Albania, Brazil, and Russia.

RECON: As the sequel to the best PlayStation 2 online experience to date, people around the world are eagerly awaiting SOCOM II. Zipper Interactive is using this opportunity to perfect what was already an impressive package. Twelve new single-player missions are there, and promise to offer more variety and even the chance to work together with British SAS and Russian Spetznaz agents. But, of course, online play is the heart of the SOCOM experience, and that is where the bulk of the improvements have been made. The live voice chat functionality is slated to get an overhaul, with a new "who's talking" display that helps eliminate confusion, as well as sub-channels for defensive and offensive communications. Also, you'll be able to represent your posse with new online clan rankings.

On the gameplay side, there are two new types of multiplayer missions: Breach and Escort. To tackle these new challenges, a host of new weapons are available, including the latest models of Light Armored Weapons and (yes!) rocket launchers. Of course, you'll need all the help you can get, as your enemy is now equipped with armored jeeps and tanks.

SITREP: We doubted Zipper could make much of an improvement to SOCOM in such a short period of time. We were wrong. With new hi-res textures, it's looking better than ever, and the play mechanics have been improved by a new "get-down" button that lets you hit the deck quickly and easily. From enemy AI to a single-player experience that promises to be more engrossing than the first, SOCOM II is the rare game that offers the playability of a console game with the depth of a PC title.

COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN

System: PC • **Publisher:** Eidos • **Developer:** Pyro Studios • **Release Date:** September 1

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: World War II, with missions occuring on the Russian Front and during the Allied invasion of Normandy.

RECON: Commandos has a huge following on PC, and for good reason. Its squad-based strategy formula is a perfect mix of RTS depth and the action-game accessibility. Fans expect a lot from Eidos and developer Pyro Studios, and will not be disappointed by Destination Berlin. Aside from the expected graphical updates (which include impressive new particle and explosive effects), Pyro is incorporating a ton of improvements into its already impressive game engine. Longtime fans will be interested to learn that the familiar squad members (Natasha and the Driver, to name two) have been jettisoned in favor of some new, more versatile commandos. You'll also be pleased to note that characters aren't as specialized as they were before, meaning that thief characters can now do simple tasks like drive a vehicle or lob a grenade. Of course, you'll need to be fast on your feet to avoid the stiff enemy AI, which now features guards that are more aware of sound -- so step lightly, soldier!

SITREP: Commandos 3 is almost certain to be a hit, if only for the fact that it still has a relatively unique niche in the market. It's also making steps towards expanding its appeal towards the mass market. This time around, cinematic cutscenes will help give the series a little dramatic heft, and a vastly improved tutorial mission will help ease the fears of those who were put off by Commandos 2's high degree of difficulty. Also, the sometimes slow pace of the past won't be the rule in Destination Berlin, as some stages will force you to strategize under duress, making it necessary for you to complete your moves before all your comrades are wiped out. Even more interesting is the addition of multiplayer, which supports up to eight players for online or LAN matches.

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

System: PlayStation 2/Xbox/GameCube/PC • **Publisher:** Ubi Soft
Developer: Ubi Soft Montreal • **Release Date:** Fall

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Like many details about this game, Pandora Tomorrow's setting and plot are being kept under tight wraps.

RECON: Although it's not officially called Splinter Cell 2, Ubi Soft is adamant that this is a full sequel, not a mission pack or expansion. Although it's coming to all systems, the Xbox version will be the only one to get what promises to be a revolution in stealth action: the inclusion of Xbox Live multiplayer support. How Splinter Cell will work online is unknown, but we do know that there will be some new playable characters (including a female agent) to accommodate the action. Also, Microsoft fans are promised a host of future downloadable goodies, including new levels and missions. That's not to say that the game won't rock on other platforms, as the already-stellar gameplay is being fine-tuned to ease some of the frustrations that we had in the first.

SITREP: Man, Ubi Soft is so secretive about this title that we're beginning to think that it would be easier to infiltrate the real-life NSA than it is to get them to spill the beans about Pandora Tomorrow. That said, we don't think they're hiding anything, as we have full confidence that this title will be worth the wait. Multiplayer alone is reason enough to be excited, but we have also learned that the already-amazing graphics and lighting systems are getting yet another overhaul, as is the physics engine. Looks like more money in the bank for Clancy and the gang.

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

System: PC • **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Developer: Digital Illusions Canada • **Release Date:** Early 2004

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Vietnam in the late 1960s, with locations in and around the Ho Chi Minh trail and the streets of Hue, among other areas.

RECON: If you play PC games, chances are you've already played the mind-blowing Battlefield 1942. Now, in a recently announced shocker, EA has decided to take a more modern slant on the franchise's exquisite multiplayer mayhem. Like 1942, this title will feature both a single-player experience and 64-player online matches, which will allow you to play as either the U.S. Armed Forces or the North Vietnamese Army and Vietcong. Given the jungle setting, the trusty helicopter will be the main mode of travel, but we also know that the NVA will have Russian T-54 tanks and Mig-21 jets in their arsenal.

SITREP: This product was announced literally days before our press deadline, so details are understandably a bit scarce. However, given EA's resources and usual devotion to quality, it's quite possibly going to be one of next year's standout PC titles. Vietnam is obviously a difficult part of American history to deal with, so let's hope that it will be handled with good taste. But, these concerns aside, the prospect of multiplayer jungle warfare is simply too compelling to be denied.

KILL SWITCH

System: PlayStation 2/Xbox • **Publisher:** Namco
Developer: Namco • **Release Date:** Winter

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Although the game's plot is a bit unclear, we do know that levels will take place in North Korea, the Middle East, and the Caspian Sea.

RECON: Kill Switch is a bit of an odd duck in comparison to the other games in this feature. While most of the titles you'll read about here are being created by veterans and enthusiasts of the military simulation world, this Namco shooter is actually the product of the team that created the Pac-Man World series! Talk about a change of pace. Kill Switch will offer a different flavor for those used to conventional third-person action as well. It's certainly the most arcade-oriented of the upcoming war games, but it is far from mindless. In actuality, taking cover is every bit as important as your trigger skills, and Kill Switch allows you to hide behind almost every object, wall, and doorway in the environments. You'll also be able to do a "blind-fire" maneuver, which let's you put your gun over your head and cap enemies at will (although with decreased accuracy).

SITREP: Trying to evaluate Kill Switch's prospects is difficult, if only because we know so little about the game's plot, setting, characters, and whether or not there are any other play mechanics beyond the "take cover and fire" formula. We have read reports that the lead character is a bio-engineered soldier, so it's possible he has some superpowers that haven't been revealed yet. Let's hope there is some degree of variety added, or Kill Switch may well wear out its welcome after a few levels.

WORLD WAR II: FRONTLINE COMMAND

System: PC • **Publisher:** Strategy First
Developer: The Bitmap Brothers • **Release Date:** August

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: The mountains of southern Germany and the beaches of Normandy.

RECON: Strategy First is a well known force in the world of hardcore real-time strategy, and with World War II: Frontline the company has united with another respected developer, the Bitmap Brothers – a company famed in Europe for its Amiga hits Xenon and Speedball. Now, the bros are coming back with a real-time strategy title based on historical events of the greatest conflict in history. Unique features of the game include a morale system, which will affect troop performance, a "fog of war" dynamic that can obscure some areas of the map, and an emphasis on sound that allows your units to react to some enemy units by hearing them, even if they are out of their line of sight.

SITREP: While it's hard to expect this game to compete with the big boys in the genre, World War II: Frontline Command should be a nice alternative to the Command & Conquer series for those who prefer a more realistic setting for their strategy thrills. There are some concerns about the troop AI and pathfinding routines, which have proved a bit suspect so far, but let's hope that can be resolved before the game ships. Despite these concerns, we can't wait to see what the Normandy beach invasion looks like from a God's eye view.

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

System: PC • **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Developer: EA LA • **Release Date:** Winter 2004

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: The Medal of Honor franchise is about to jump theaters. The Pacific is a big place, and the Japanese owned a lot of it during World War II. Pacific Assault will send players to many of the better known locales in that big body of water west of California.

RECON: Pacific Assault is quite a ways away from its eventual release next year, but as expected, the EA LA team is hard at work on the project, and it is already turning heads. The level everyone knows about at present is of course the Pearl Harbor scene where a peaceful December day is shattered by a savage Japanese air assault. As you progress through the game, you'll find a greater emphasis put on individual character progress, and it's likely that for the first time, the player will see the face of his onscreen alter ego, and watch as he ages and takes on the 1,000-yard stare. Although the game will run on the same Quake III engine, improvements are being made to everything from the water effects to the textures themselves. The action will still be intense, and the close proximity of jungle fighting will likely heighten the suspense and urgency of each mission.

SITREP: Most everyone familiar with this franchise remembers the much talked about Omaha Beach scene from Allied Assault. Pacific Assault representatives are promising other such memorable moments, but more importantly, they're also promising not to gut the gameplay formula that has brought the series such acclaim. Will the loss of the 20-plus members of Allied Assault's development team make a difference in this title's overall quality? As with all things, time will tell – but every indication we've seen leads us to believe that Pacific Assault will be every inch the game its predecessor was.
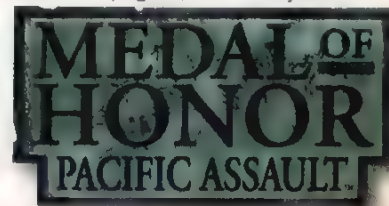
FREEDOM FIGHTERS

System: PlayStation 2/Xbox/GameCube
Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** IO Interactive
Release Date: August 29

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: New York City, in an alternate universe where the U.S. lost the Cold War and Russkies rule the globe.

RECON: Wow, this game goes through more name changes than Ol' Dirty Bastard (that's Dirt McGirt to you). First it was Freedom: The Battle for Liberty Island, then it was Freedom: Soldiers of Liberty, now it's known as Freedom Fighters. Whatever the title, this game was playable – and very impressive – on the show floor at E3. It's really amazing how IO Interactive has come up with a control scheme that allows you to both engage in third-person action and command a squad of freedom fighters with a minimum of hassle. Through a system of icons, you'll be able to tell your men to follow, attack, or to take out specific installation or enemies. Even better, EA has just confirmed that the title will be coming to GameCube, a system that often gets left out of the military scene.

SITREP: While console squad-based action has traditionally been a mess of suspect AI, clunky control, and annoying level design, Freedom Fighters actually seems to be hitting all the right notes. So far, it appears to have the elusive quality of being "easy to pick up, difficult to master" down pat. Don't be scared, you're in good hands with IO Interactive.
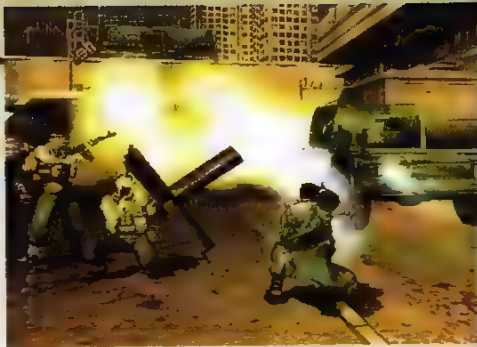
COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO/ COUNTER-STRIKE X

System: Xbox/PC • **Publisher:** Microsoft
Developer: Valve • **Release Date:** August 12 (PC), Late October (Xbox)

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Both versions will focus on theoretical present-day conflicts and areas of interest.

RECON: Let's put an end to all of the confusion surrounding these titles right now. The PC version (Condition Zero) is embracing the single-player side of gaming with an 18 mission frag-filled extravaganza; and has an updated online component with additional maps, an official bot for online and offline play, and updated graphics. The Xbox version will also have online and offline play in addition to exclusive maps for both modes, as well as the inclusion of the popular levels from the original PC title. Valve representatives have also told us that the graphics for Counter-Strike X will eclipse its PC companion. We'll believe that when we see it, but each version of this title sounds like it will be building on the enormous success of the original.

SITREP: When Counter-Strike first hit the scene, it reached an elephantine popularity level. Not only was it incredibly fast and challenging, but it was also heralded for exhibiting an astonishing amount of accurate military detail. Drawing on this huge installed base of gamers and the popularity of the subject, Valve has taken the next logical step with the introduction of both the Xbox and PC updates. Will the Xbox version be able to give the popular Ghost Recon franchise a run for its money? Will the PC version be able to fend off the ever-increasing number of competitors? These remain to be seen, but the Counter-Strike family is definitely a good one to belong to if you're looking to make your mark.

RAINBOW SIX 3

System: Xbox • **Publisher:** Ubi Soft
Developer: Ubi Soft Montreal
Release Date: November 18

THEATER OF OPERATIONS: Several undisclosed locations in the Middle East.

RECON: We know what you're thinking: "I've already played this on PC, why bother with the Xbox version?" Well, Ubi Soft has a little surprise in store for you. This is not a port, but rather a standalone title built from the ground up with an engine that utilized portions of the Splinter Cell architecture. An entirely new plot line has been created, and numerous tweaks have been made to the gameplay, putting less of an emphasis on tactical-preplanning and more of a focus on action. Also, taking a cue from SOCOM, you'll be able to use the Xbox Voice Communicator to order around your troops. This will also come in handy during the game's Xbox Live mode, which will feature both Vs. and co-op play, and online stat tracking.

SITREP: This looks like something special, at least special enough for the game's lead producer, Chris Lebbos, to boast, "Rainbow Six 3 will be the best-looking game released this fall – hands-down." Them's fighting words, but a look at this screenshot should be enough to convince you that Rainbow Six 3 has enough bite to back up its bark. With some awesome Xbox Live functionality, this could be the best competition for Counter-Strike X this year. We can't wait.
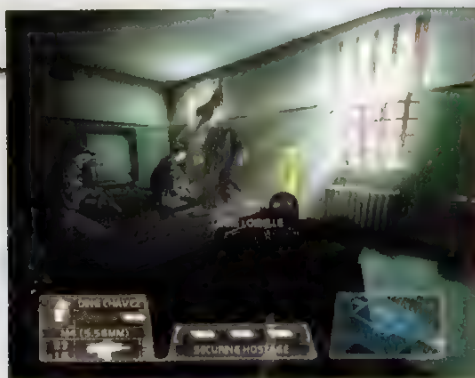
To those of us not in the military, all of the titles and uniform insignias are a bit of a puzzle. Seeing this, we've seen fit to enlighten those less informed with this handy chart. Due to space constraints, we were only able to include a full run-down of the Army's rank structure.

ENLISTED RANK STRUCTURE

Rank	
PRIVATE	
PRIVATE FIRST CLASS	
SPECIALIST (when required, ranks under Corporal)	
CORPORAL	
SERGEANT	
STAFF SERGEANT	
SERGEANT FIRST CLASS	
MASTER SERGEANT	
FIRST SERGEANT	
SERGEANT MAJOR	
COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR	
SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY (unique post)	

COMMISSIONED OFFICER RANK STRUCTURE

Rank	
SECOND LIEUTENANT	
FIRST LIEUTENANT	
CAPTAIN	
MAJOR	
LIEUTENANT COLONEL	
COLONEL	
BRIGADIER GENERAL	★
MAJOR GENERAL	★★
LIEUTENANT GENERAL	★★★
GENERAL	★★★★
GENERAL OF THE ARMY (wartime rank only)	★★★★★

Redzone Offenses

Keeping Score With This Year's Football Crop

In football, being in the redzone means you're inside your opponents' 20-yard line, which puts you in a good position to come away with a touchdown. An effective offense is capable of converting these chances into seven points a high percentage of the time. Each of this year's football games is loaded with offensive weapons. Fans of all stripes will be pleased to find that each publisher's title has unique features to get you excited, which helps them turn their own redzone chances into points on the board. You'll have your pick of suitors and can choose the team that you feel is the best fit for your tastes.

Is NFL Blitz's new direction worth checking out? Who's got the deepest franchise mode? What makes GameDay's online functionality so great? What's Sega doing that Madden isn't? How has NFL Fever changed for the better? These questions and more will be answered in the following pages, as Game Informer runs through the ins and outs of your favorite franchises as well as what to keep your eyes open for in this year's batch of football titles.

All facts and figures are subject to change by the developer

	Madden NFL 2004	ESPN NFL Football	NFL Fever 2004	NFL GameDay 2004	NFL Blitz Pro
Platform(s)	PS2, Xbox, GC, PC	PS2, Xbox	Xbox	PS2	PS2, Xbox, GC
Publisher	EA Sports	Sega Sports	Microsoft	Sony/989 Sports	Midway Sports
Developer	EA Tiburon	Visual Concepts	Microsoft	RedZone Interactive	Midway
Release Date	August 18	September 2	August 13	August 12	September 3
Franchise Mode/# of Years	Yes/32	Yes/30	Yes/25	Yes/20	Yes/10
Multiple Franchise Users	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Fantasy Draft	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tournament Mode	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Expansion Mode	No	No	No	Yes	No
Preseason	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Create-a-Team	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Create-a-Player	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Create-a-Play	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Pro Bowl	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hall of Fame	Yes (PC only)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
User Stat Tracking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Middle-of-Game Saves	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
# of Plays per Team	240 Off. and 140 Def.	500	650 Avg.	375 Off. and 125 Def.	300
# of Off. Play Formations	13 Avg.	30	27	25 Avg.	9
# of Def. Play Formations	9 Avg.	5	21	7	7
# of Polygons per Player	2,400	5,500	8,000	2,800	3,000
# of Player Animations	2,500	2,600	2,000	1,400	1,500
# of Stat Categories	299	350	69	150	87
Off. Hot Routes/# of Routes	Yes/8	Yes/9	Yes/7	Yes/8	Yes/5
Def. Hot Routes/# of Routes	Yes/3	Yes/13	Yes/6	Yes/4	Yes/5
Assignable Defensive Backs	No (DBs can swap spots)	Yes	Yes	No	No
ONLINE OPTIONS Online Play/Band	Yes (PS2 only)/Broad & Narrowband	Yes/Broad & Narrowband	Yes/Broadband	Yes/Broad & Narrowband	Yes (PS2 only)/Broadband
Online Chat/Method	Yes/Voice and Keyboard	Yes/Voice and Keyboard	Yes/Voice	Yes/ Voice and Keyboard	Yes/Voice and Keyboard
Online Tournaments/User Made Tourney's	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/No
Roster Downloads/Frequency	Yes/Two Weeks	Yes/Three to Four Weeks	Yes/Two Weeks	Yes/Weekly	Yes/(TBD)
Online Matchmaking	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Fair Play Settings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online User Stat Tracking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Web Page Support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Real Time Results Ticker	Yes	No	Yes (via PC)	Yes	No
Online Message Board	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Non-Default Rosters Online	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Online Subscription Price	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free
Commentary	John Madden, Al Michaels, Melissa Stark	Chris Berman, Dan Stevens, Peter O'Keefe	Kevin Calabro and Ron Pitts	Dick Enberg, Dan Fouts, Ian Eagle	Peter Grosz and Keegan-Michael Key
Cover Star	Michael Vick	Warren Sapp	Peyton Manning	LaDainian Tomlinson	Terrell Owens

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

ESPN NFL Football

PUBLISHER SEGA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2

SEGA'S FIRST-PERSON FOOTBALL MAY

REVOLUTIONIZE THE GAME

After accruing experience and accolades, last year Sega tried to take on the juggernaut that is Madden. The result? While critical opinion was very high on NFL 2K3, sales weren't. Despite dropping the GameCube from its sports plans, don't think for a second that Sega is backing down an inch. With a new name for its franchise, this year's effort from Visual Concepts is a daring attempt that is not only their best yet, but one which could change the way we play football from now on.

EA Sports' motto may be "It's in the game," but ESPN actually puts you there through optional first-person play. That's right; you'll be able to drop back, scan the field with your right analog stick, and make the correct reads before you toss the ball – all from the eyes of the quarterback.

Once the receiver catches it, you'll be switched to his perspective. Imagine running a route over the middle and getting smacked by a waiting safety, or being blindsided by cover boy Warren Sapp. Big hits like these can even knock you unconscious momentarily. When you come to, the first thing you'll see is blue sky and the trainer over you. To help players adjust to the speed of this new mode, two aides are given. First, arrows on the side of the screen indicate when someone's charging you from behind or outside your view. These get redder as they approach. Second, by hitting R3, players can momentarily slow down the game in order to help with decisions. This feature is available as a meter that has to be charged up. Although only exhibition play is available in this mode (the game's Franchise mode uses the standard

third-person view), Sega's First Person Football is far from a gimmick. However, getting used to changing players on defense can take some time.

ESPN NFL Football is making strides in other areas as well. New player models have been added, as has a more friendly – non-analog – play-calling system. Off the field, fans will enjoy the increased "primetime" presentation (including Chris Berman's analysis before, during, and after the game), an improved Franchise mode, and the new Crib area where you can chill out between games and admire over 300 unlockables. Elsewhere, challenges remain such as improving passes over the middle and smoothing the animations.

▲ Even with the new defensive move, McQuarters flails to no avail

DEPTH CHART
(Preseason Estimates Only)

Frontend	Gameplay	Online	Graphics
90	90	80	90
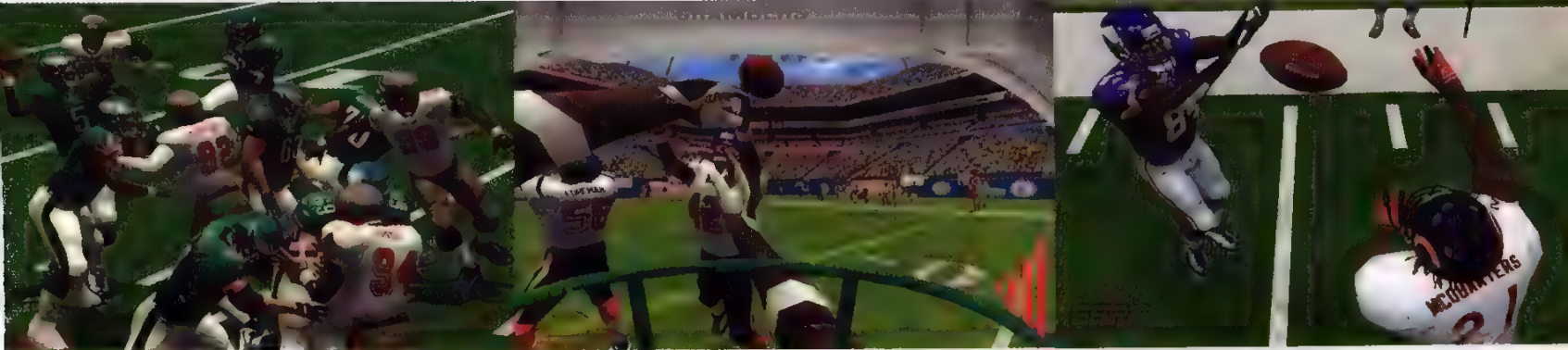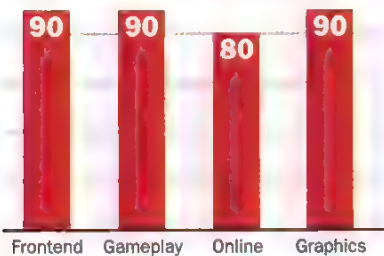
▲ After scoring, the fans still call Pinkston a "no-good bum"

• SCOUTING REPORT •

Sega's first-person football might not be for everyone, but the rewards for this franchise could be astonishing. Regardless, growth in other areas also warrants praise. Sega is once again making a strong push for the top and is hard to ignore.

Madden NFL 2004

■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 18

For a sports developer like EA Tiburon, the question comes up every year. Who do you please: pick-up-and-play fans of the series or the hardcore sim guys? It's not an easy decision to make. This year's Madden asks: Why not try to do both?

EA Sports representatives told us that the new Playmaker controls (allowing the QB to dictate receivers to break out of their routes via the right analog stick when you move out of the pocket) were

GOOD DEPTH
MAKES IT HARD
TO BEAT

designed specifically for cover star Michael Vick. Well, for those of you who like to sit down and play a wide-open game of football, you'll appreciate the options this gives you. The new play-calling menus offer other gameplay bonuses, such as additional plays, formations, and personnel packages to tinker with. To counter your plans, defenses have an extra nickel formation, the ability to rotate the coverage of their safeties, and a run-stuffing option. On top of this are a host of momentum-based animations that scream realism.

To the hardcore sim crowd: Prepare to have your mind blown. The Owner's mode brings depth that is unparalleled in any other sports game – period. Not only are you in charge of the team's finances (including determining signing bonuses for contracts), but you control its very look. Redesign your stadium, change the uniforms, rename the franchise, or move the team. Even the hot dogs fear your power. Coaches and trainers have been added to the mix to aid your Super Bowl quest, and the Mini-Camp minigames are back and better than ever. A pass-catching drill is new, as is your ability to add stat points to players that run these drills well. As with any team, Madden brings up concerns heading into the season, including having more over-the-shoulder catches, smarter defensive backs, and the elimination of the dreaded "catch-up AI."

Can fans have it both ways? Yes. Pick-up-and-play people will enjoy how open and intuitive, yet complex, the game can be. Madden's greatly expanded online plans (PS2 only) open up a whole new world to the casual player, giving everything from broadband to voicechat to numerous ways to structure your tournaments and play style – including a way to cut cheaters out. GameCubers can hook up their GBAs to get exclusive Madden cards, as well as see cheerleader animations, stats, and suggested plays on their handheld.

▲ Jeff Blake gets tucked in with a goodnight kiss

▲ Receivers' head tracking of the ball is very welcome

		BRONCOS		
CUB COMMUNICATIONS STADIUM			FAN SUPPORT	
STADIUM TYPE	OUTDOOR/GRASS			
AVG ATTENDANCE	54,048			

	PRICE	VS EXPECTED
ROCKY MOUNTAIN OYSTERS	$3	
BRISKET SANDWICH	$4	
SPINACH PIE	$4	
POPCORN	$3	
POP	$4	
BEER	$6	

▲ Your team's concession upgrades will be region specific

Playmaker controls on offense (above) allow Bruener to get open and on defense (below) for the safeties to shift

DEPTH CHART
(Preseason Estimates Only)

Frontend	Gameplay	Online	Graphics
95	90	80	90

• SCOUTING REPORT •

Madden just keeps picking up steam. Similar to Michael Vick in real life, the question remains as to whether scrambling QBs are the future. How useful or well implemented will the Playmaker controls for the quarterbacks be? In terms of frontend features, Owner's mode is an absolute dream.

▼ Nothing says "hello" like a stiff arm

▼ Coach will say things like, "Watch for the draw play. And someone get me a hot dog – NOW!"
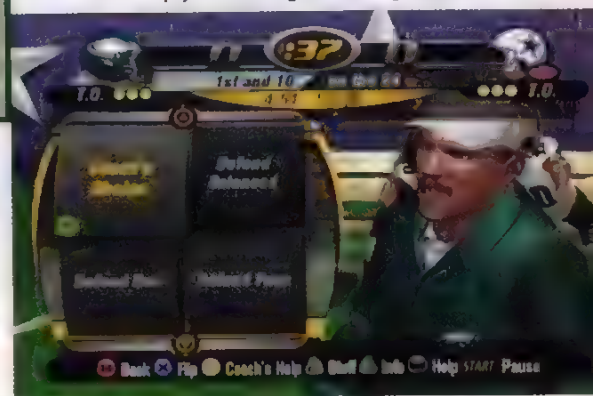
▼ Added animations and gang tackles make Fever flow
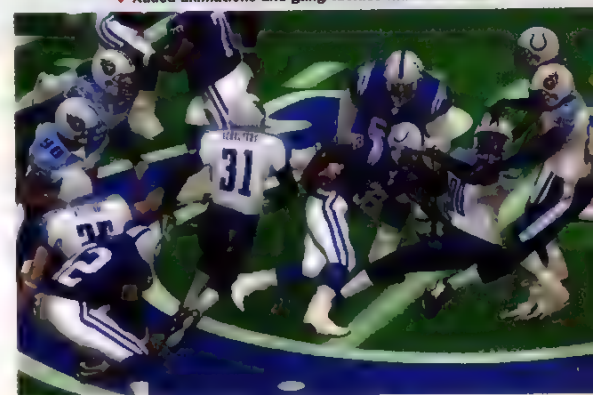
▼ Some tackle animations will crash out of bounds

NFL Fever 2004

■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 13

After a relatively successful first year, Microsoft rested on its laurels and released a follow-up title in 2002 that was largely unchanged. Big mistake. Like the Redskins' coach Steve Spurrier, the company found that it couldn't hang with the big boys. Welcome to the video game NFL, where there is no offseason. This year, however, lessons have been learned and changes – even innovations – have been implemented. Now that's more like it.

Leading the charge this year is the Read and Lead passing system. After the snap, the player will have control of a reticle on the field through the right analog stick. You position this to wherever you want to throw the ball and then you fire away. The benefits of this are many. Not only does it add an extra dimension of skill to your air attack (you can also use icon or trigger passing); it allows you more precision than before. Maybe you have to throw it to the sideline on a quick out pattern so the cornerback doesn't jump on the ball and intercept it for a quick six. Or, perhaps the receiver is running

a fly pattern and you need to throw it over the shoulder opposite the defensive back to avoid the pick. The Read and Lead system also brings out Fever's added animations, with behind-the-body catches and more. Gang tackles are abundant this year, and the character models and faces have been tweaked.

Defenses have their own tricks, too. Before the snap, you can send linebackers on fake blitzes, shift the line, and your DBs can be told to cover either on the inside (to jump on quick slants) or outside of a receiver (to guard against fly patterns down the sideline). The question remains, however, as to whether or not defenses will be able to guard against the bomb pass – as well as the running game – which has been so effective for offenses in previous editions of Fever.

This year's changes should make online, through the all-inclusive XSN network, even more enjoyable. The ability to create your own tournaments through a variety of filters is cool, as is having your entire Microsoft sports bio handy.

NEW BLOOD BRIGHTENS FEVER'S PROSPECTS
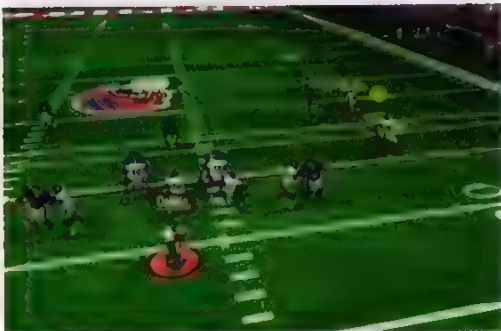
▲ Here, Collins can use Read and Lead to either hit Shockey in the flat or throw Toomer a fade to the sideline

DEPTH CHART
(Preseason Estimates Only)

Frontend	Gameplay	Online	Graphics
80	80	85	85
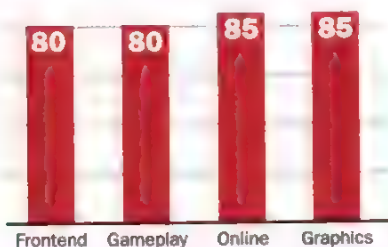
• SCOUTING REPORT •

While some areas still need to be addressed, NFL Fever is starting to catch up to the rest of the league, whether it comes to its gameplay depth or its willingness to innovate. NFL Fever 2004 is this year's dark horse, and it's one to watch.

▲ Offensive lines will now react like they should

▲ Notice the sports ticker keeping track of online tilts at the bottom

NFL GameDay 2004

■ **PUBLISHER** SONY/989 SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** REDZONE INTERACTIVE ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 12

A t Sony's E3 press conference this year, the company celebrated its new online partnership with EA Sports. Wait a minute. Doesn't Sony itself make Madden rival GameDay?! Despite this obvious disrespect, 989 and developer RedZone are working overtime to bring their product up to speed, and oddly enough, GameDay is sporting a very robust online component – take that, EA Sports!

While Xbox owners have bragged about having voice technology before everyone else for online play, GameDay is taking things one step beyond. Voice recognition has been added, allowing you to call plays, check hot routes at the line (the number of which have doubled), and even talk in the huddle with others on your team. Imagine the guy controlling Keyshawn Johnson screaming at you to give him the damn ball! Apart from this, Sony is putting together an online package that includes synchronization with a 989 website (including a message board covering both your PS2 and PC), weekly roster updates (with rating

GAMEDAY IS STARTING TO ADDRESS ITS AREAS OF NEED

changes), tournament options (up to 64 participants), and even a real-time sports ticker that keeps you updated on all the 989 online games being played at that particular moment.

Last year, GameDay trumpeted an all-new engine. For 2004, the overhaul continues. Everything in the looks department has been redone. Totally new models, more dynamic lighting and shadows, detailed fields and stadiums, and a bunch of new animations are just the beginning. Beyond simply being neat to look at, the latter addition is very important. Whereas before your offensive tackles used to be very stiff in their pass protection, now they'll block more realistically and actually slide out to form a true pocket. Likewise, the improved pass-catching AI will bring out more animations than ever, such as sideline grabs. To round things off, GameDay's playbooks are the result of RedZone watching hours of official NFL film to make sure that teams' formations and tendencies are correct.

DEPTH CHART
(Preseason Estimates Only)

Frontend	Gameplay	Online	Graphics
75	75	90	80

• SCOUTING REPORT •

This franchise has historically had its problems, but it is following a very wise draft strategy for itself – build now for the future. It may not be totally there yet, but with perhaps the best online plan and other additions, it's heading in the right direction.

NFL Blitz Pro

■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 3

Midway's Blitz once labored under a curse similar to the Cincinnati Bengals: different year, same lousy results. Like the Bungles, this franchise is undergoing significant changes. Unlike them, however, Midway looks to be set for a breakout year. The series has switched to 11-on-11 play, and this has opened huge doors for the game – but without taking away from the bruising hits or fast action that it is known for.

A NEW DIRECTION REVITALIZES THE FRANCHISE

The changes this year have made Blitz a legitimate contender among the sim titles. This is because it gives players many of the staples of the realism-based games. Offenses can give their Impact Players hot routes, defenses can blitz on the fly, and there's even a running game. Best of all, Midway is working really hard to make its players think and react like they would in real life. Sure, you'll still have those leaping one-hand catches by receivers, but you'll also see DBs cover their zones like they should or offensive linemen pull and block accurately. All of this takes place at the fast pace you're used to, not to mention the post-play late hits – which include taking out players and coaches on the sidelines!

Blitz Pro even has a Franchise mode. In proper Midway fashion, it adds a twist to the usual lineup of stats and roster management. Do well and you'll earn points you can apply to your player's attribute ratings. We've been told there are over 30 different ways to earn these points, such as a blowout bonus (beating someone by more than 20), defeating a division rival, or having a player rank among the NFL's elite in stats. In exhibition play, you can spend these points at the Blitz shop, where things like fantasy teams can be unlocked.

Not to be outdone, Midway is also competing in the online (PS2 only) arena. Apart from using voice chat, the game is instituting an awesome tourney system. The Blitz Pro Tournament will consist of five tiers, with everyone starting on the bottom. In order to move up the ladder, you have to play 10 games with different teams, and those with a certain record can move up to the next tier. Fail that, and you'll be bumped down into a lower level – although you still have a chance to work your way up again. Champions should be crowned about every month, and will be awarded various prizes.
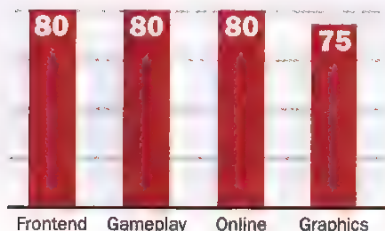
▲ Nothing feels better than bowling over the coach who cut you from your old team

▲ Goaline bragging can make you cough up the ball if you're not careful
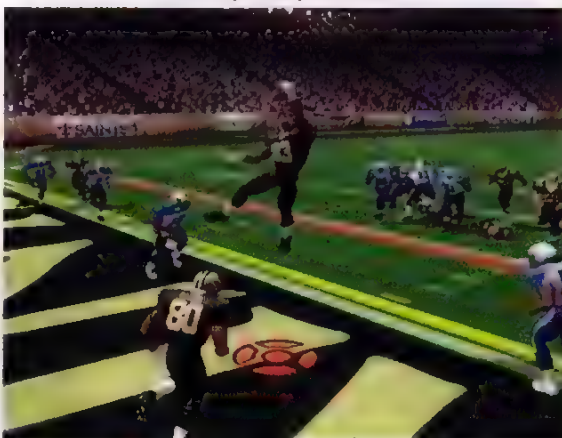
▲ This game has lost none of its Blitz flavor

▲ Blitz Pro's commentary contains musings on *Corky Romano*, microwave beef jerky, and the AFL – the Azerbaijani Football League

DEPTH CHART
(Preseason Estimates Only)

Frontend	Gameplay	Online	Graphics
80	80	80	75

• SCOUTING REPORT •

Midway is trying to hit the best of both worlds, and it just might work. If Blitz Pro can tune the AI so that players make smart choices on the field, then it'll have a great combination of both strategy and pounding action. This title's gameplay approach and tournament features should make for a dangerous duo online.

You'll marvel at Fable's detailed environments – they even have stairs!

Magic can be your character's focus, or help enhance combat
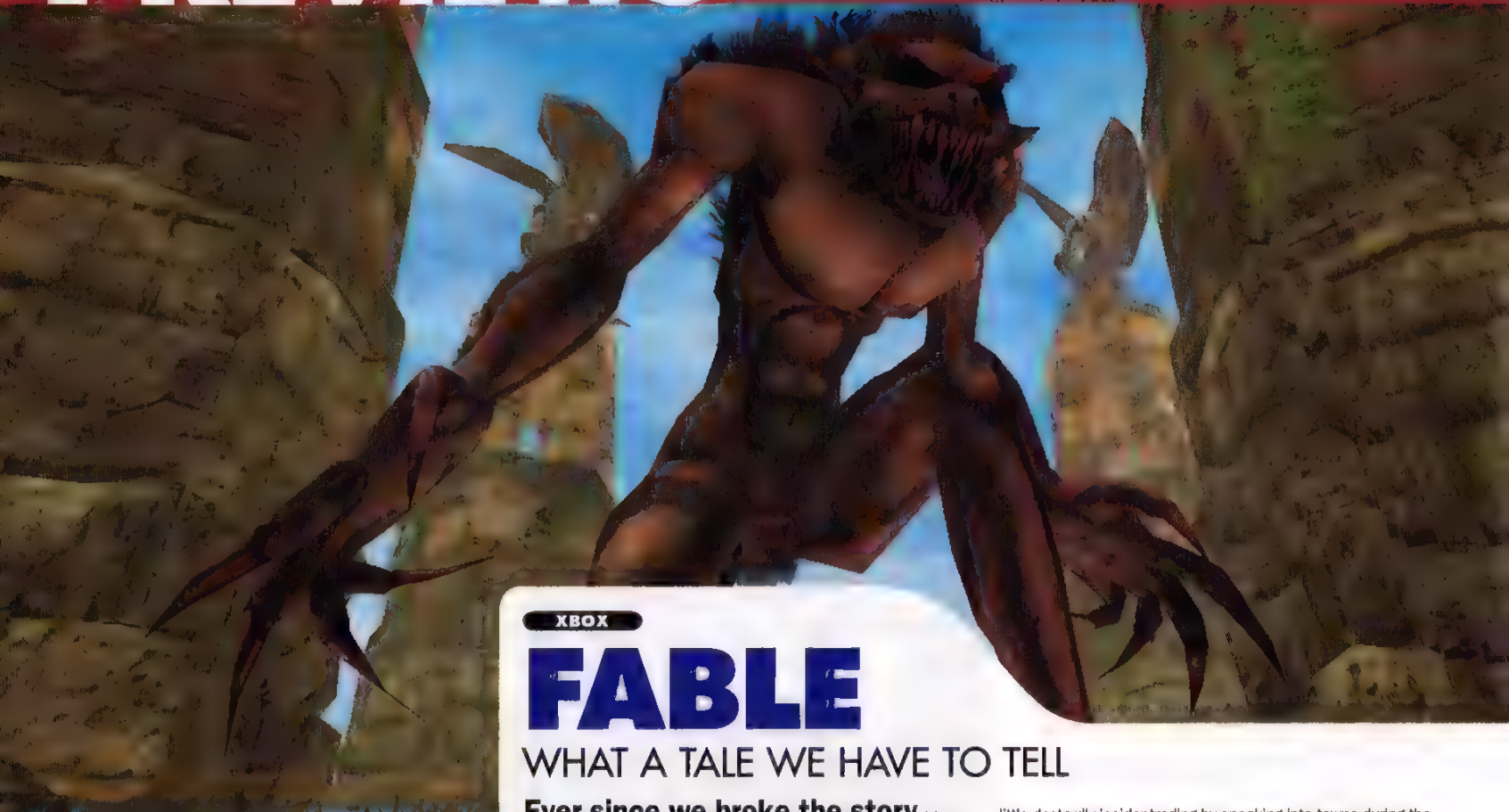
FABLE

WHAT A TALE WE HAVE TO TELL

Ever since we broke the story on Peter Molyneux's epic Xbox action/RPG, Fable, back in January, gamers around the world have been waiting with bated breath for the title to arrive on store shelves. Unfortunately, recent reports have confirmed our suspicions that the game is going to slip to a 2004 release date. Let's hope that Big Blue Box and Lionhead are making the most of their time, as this is one of the games that Xbox fans are counting on. From what we saw at a behind-closed-doors demonstration of the title at E3 (hosted by Molyneux himself), Fable certainly looks to be coming along nicely.

"One thing [I've noticed] with role-playing games," commented Molyneux, "is quite often the world doesn't seem to notice that I'm doing anything heroic." This observation goes a long way towards illustrating what makes Fable such a unique experience: the constant interaction and cause-effect relationship between the player and the world.

Like any good RPG, Fable's basic gameplay structure revolves around accomplishing various quests. However, the way that you complete these quests will depend on just how daring you are. Throughout the world are many Hero Guilds, where you go to get quests and address your adoring fans. On these platforms, you can increase the stakes of every quest though the "boasting" system. For example, we saw one of the developers bet a portion of the 100 gold coins he was to be awarded for saving five maidens by claiming he could do it without health power-ups, without weapons, and finish in under three minutes.

With the money you earn, you'll be able to buy items, weapons, and even houses. For those of you with aristocratic ambitions, you can purchase titles like "Slayer of the Longsword" (might we suggest "Farmer Ted, King of the Dips**ts?"). Of course, Molyneux revealed that some Lionhead game testers are actually doing a little dastardly insider trading by sneaking into towns during the night, killing shop owners, and then buying up the stores the next day at fire-sale prices.

Certainly, we would never endorse that type of behavior. Unfortunately, it seems like the saucy boys at Big Blue Box have a few other rude skills for you to pick up along the way. By far the most impressive aspect of Fable we saw is the advanced learning system that has been put in place. Walking through the world, if you see an NPC engaging in some activity you've never seen before (these could range from combat moves to new vocabulary words), an icon will appear over them. All you have to do is assign that skill to one of your eight d-pad slots (more can be saved to be swapped in and out), and you have now acquired that ability. While most of you will use this to gain new tactics, we have heard that some sickos in Fable have already learned how to belch, fart, and relieve themselves at will. Conker, eat your heart out! As you can tell, in the world of Fable, the possibilities truly are endless.
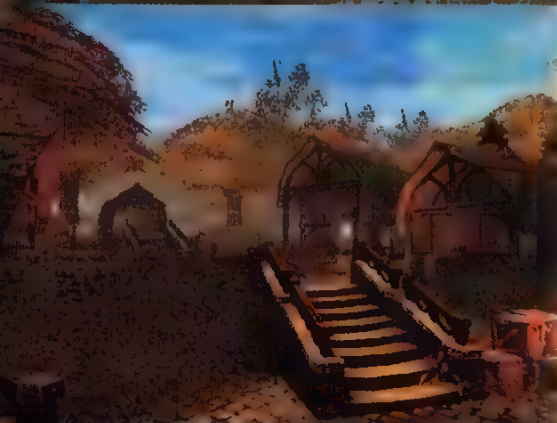
Characters will evolve in many ways. Hopefully yours won't have disturbing chest hair

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** BIG BLUE BOX/LIONHEAD STUDIOS
■ **RELEASE** 2004

Check out the elaborate outfit on this warrior character

Based on your preferences during combat, your character will develop some skills more than others

Swordplay is always key, but sometimes you really just need a giant can of Raid

Fable will give you the chance to fight grotesque, hairy-backed creatures — like your mother! (Zing!)
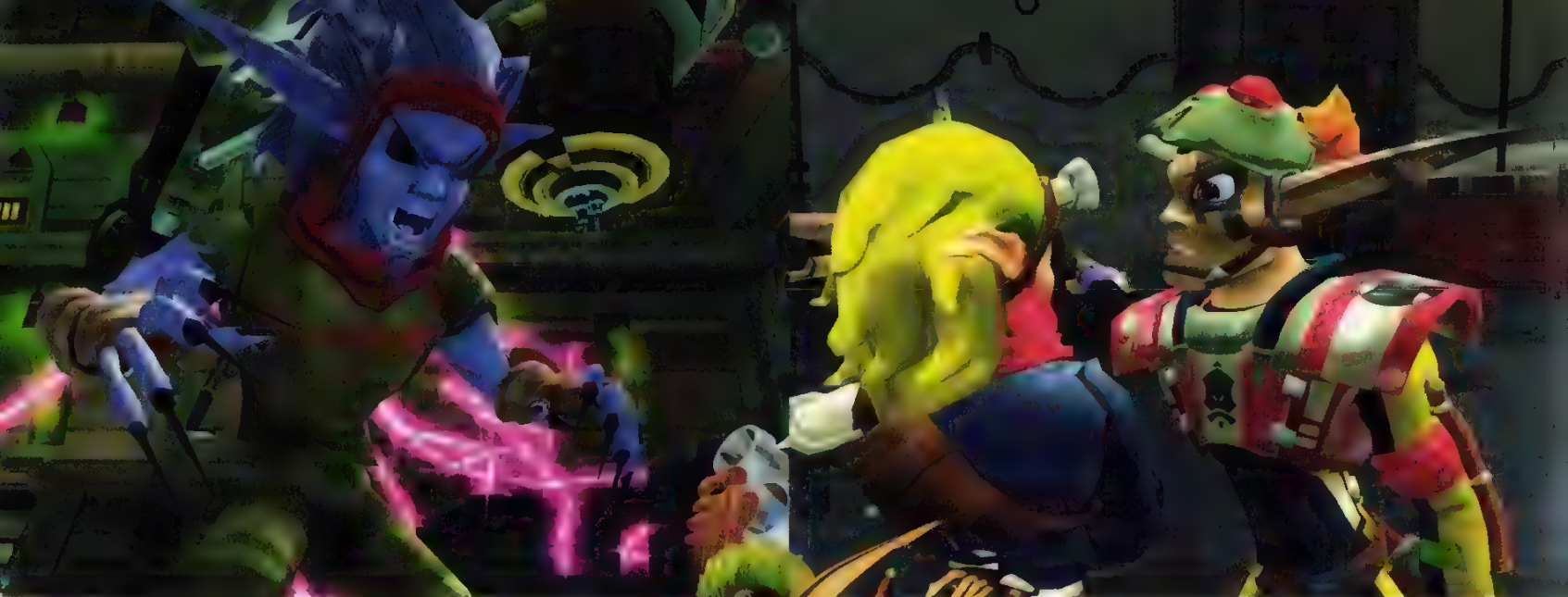
JAK II

JAK: BACK, AND BETTER THAN EVER

In our Jak II cover story (Issue 120), Game Informer was allowed to spill the beans on the sweeping changes being implemented by the Naughty Dog team. This time around, you'll be doing everything from piloting flying vehicles and blasting foes with a host of high-tech armaments to busting tricks on a hoverboard. As generous as the boys were with us, there were still a few details left undisclosed.

While we did get Naughty Dog's Jason Rubin to confirm that Daxter would indeed be a playable character this time around, he was a little vague as to just what kind of gameplay this would entail. Thankfully, our well-placed mole in Santa Monica has now uncovered the inside scoop on Daxter's antics. Although he will only star in a few sequences, Jak II will see him stretching far beyond the second-banana role he played in the first adventure.

A couple of the game's numerous minigames will star Daxter, one of which will see the little guy trying to beat down vermin in a variation on the familiar "whack-a-mole" arcade amusement. Another, much more interesting diversion will be styled after Sony's Parappa the Rapper, and may even (oh God, let this be true!) see Daxter flaunt his skills on the microphone. Boo-yah!

Finally, Daxter will partake in a chase sequence that serves as a tribute of sorts to Crash Bandicoot, the franchise that put Naughty Dog on the map. As those beloved PSone titles made so famous, Daxter will be running toward the screen, being pursued from behind by a mysterious nemesis. Could this foe be Dark Jak, our hero's evil alter ego?

Speaking of Dark Jak, we also learned that his abilities will be much greater than we had previously thought. In addition to being nearly invincible, Dark Jak will have four additional combat powers -- including a powerful shockwave and an ice uppercut that freezes opponents in midair. Dark Jak must have been hitting the gym as well, because we hear he now has the strength to kick heavy vehicles out of his way like David Beckham on steroids.

As if these revelations weren't enough, we've also heard that the game's cutscenes have been overhauled to give them a cinematic punch that Naughty Dog hopes will lend Final Fantasy a run for its money. That's right – there will be more than snippets of an old geezer rambling on about his yakows! This time you can expect epic action, graphical fireworks, and shocking plot twists.

As you can see, Jak II is an incredibly deep game that sounds better each time we get a new update. This fall, Naughty Dog should take the action/platform crown once again.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA ■ **DEVELOPER** NAUGHTY DOG ■ **RELEASE** FALL

Jak hops in a mysterious rig to do some laser blasting
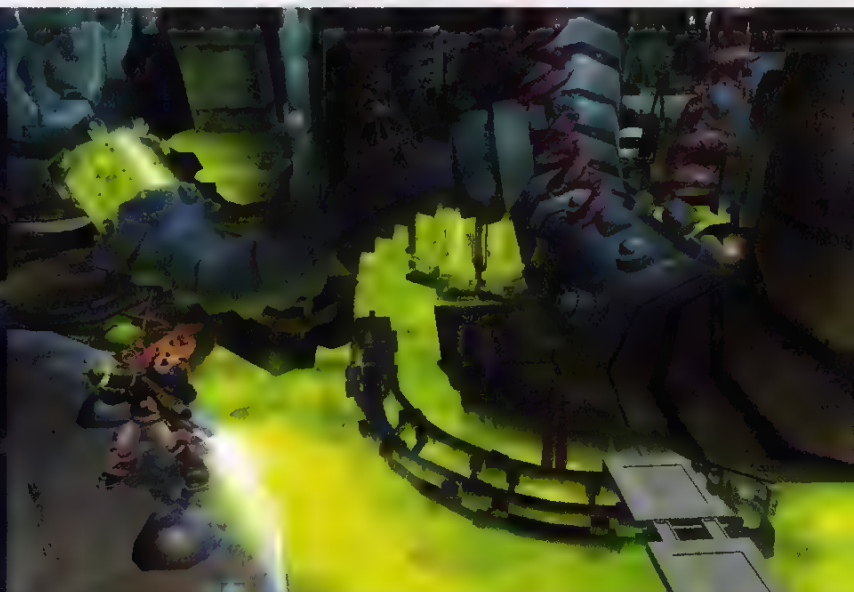
Jak II's engine has gone through some massive upgrades, making these cool plasma effects possible
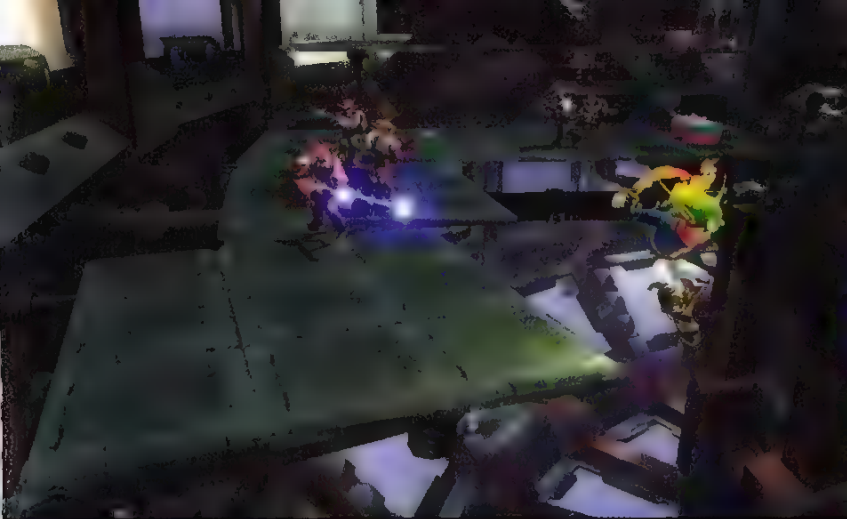
Frequently, you'll be platforming for your life

Check out these cool, *Star Wars*-inspired enemies

You won't believe Jak II's lighting and particle effects

You'll have a lot of firepower at your disposal, but sometimes you've just got to be a man and run for it

"Jak, I hate this part of the job, but the other guys in N-Sync feel like you are just not working out"

FINAL FANTASY XI

COMING SOON...REALLY

After a year of uncertainty, Square Enix has at long last confirmed that Final Fantasy XI is coming stateside. Beta testing is currently underway for both the PC and PlayStation 2 versions, and from what we hear, localization is coming along smoothly – which should result in a late 2003 release date for the PC version and early 2004 for the PlayStation 2 iteration.

If you plan on purchasing the PlayStation 2 version, make sure that you are wearing jeans with fairly deep pockets when you head to your retailer. Not only will you be required to purchase the game, a Network Adaptor, and your choice of broadband or dial-up service, you'll also have to fork out the cash for the PlayStation 2 Hard Drive and Square Enix's monthly PlayOnline fee. Topping it off, to streamline communication with other players, a USB keyboard (preferably Logitech's Netplay Controller) is an absolute necessity. All told, Final Fantasy XI could very well make Steel Battalion look like the bargain of the century. PC users, on the other hand, simply need the game and the service.

That's not to say that you won't get the bang for your buck. The game itself can be played...well...forever. With gameplay architecture stylized much like the PC hit EverQuest, you could very well lose your life trying to level up your character or unearth a rare weapon. Exploring new lands, teaming with allies, accepting missions, and doing what you can to help your nation are the driving forces behind gameplay.

Interestingly, Final Fantasy XI is a cross-platform title. This means that the PlayStation 2 and PC versions link together to the same world allowing users from both platforms to communicate and quest together.

Outside of the game itself, Final Fantasy XI comes packaged with the PlayOnline Viewer – a portal to a host of applications such as free email, chat rooms, downloads, and an ever-handy Friend List. The game is also equipped with the wildly addictive card game Tetra Master, which can be played either solo or against other users online.

Since the Japanese version released well over a year ago, Square Enix is throwing U.S. gamers a bone and is including the expansion pack, Rise of the Zilart, in the packaging as well.

Up to 18 people can join into the same party. Combat is presented in real-time

Familiar MMO chat commands like Say, Tell, Shout, and Party are included

RACES

When the game begins, players will be asked to create a character. In total, there are five different races to choose from. Each race features a number of customization options (such as the style of hair, eyes, etc).
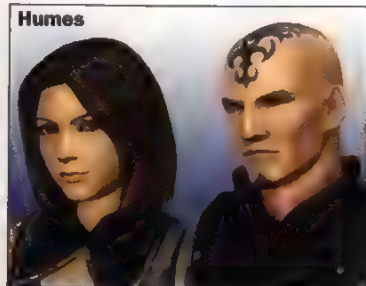
Humes
Allegiance: Republic of Bastok
The Humes are the most balanced race in the game and can transition into any job. In the Japanese version of the game, the Humes are the most popular race – mainly because players model their characters after themselves. It's also the easiest race to pick up and play.

Galka
Allegiance: Republic of Bastok
When it comes to sheer strength, the Galka (a male-only race) excel in hand-to-hand combat. To much surprise, they also make great monks.

Tarutaru
Allegiance: Federation of Windurst
These little cuties may not look like a powerful race, but their magical abilities are second to none. As you can probably guess, the Tarutaru make the best Black, White, and Red Mages.

Mithra
Allegiance: Living with the Tarutaru in Windurst
The Mithra are great hunters and thieves. The race is predominately female (males are not playable but are in the game).

Elvaan
Allegiance: Kingdom of San d'Oria
Confident in their fighting prowess, the Elvaan exhibit exceptional strength and make great warriors. The Elvaans' high Mind and Vitality can also be tapped to make a respectable Red Mage or Monk.

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA (PLAYSTATION 2), SQUARE ENIX (PC) ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
■ **RELEASE** WINTER (PC), FIRST QUARTER 2004 (PLAYSTATION 2)

THE ONLINE KINGDOM

The world of Vana'diel is divided into three warring countries: Windurst, Bastok, and San d'Oria. Players will be able to select which nation they choose to side with. Your country and its townsfolk will present Missions and Quests to the player. Missions give players a glimpse at the mysteries of Vana'diel, whereas Quests unearth more of the underlying storyline. Once a mission is completed, the player's Mission Rank will rise. When a quest is finished, your nation's people will reward you with items and information. To go even deeper, at the end of each week, all three of the nation's Conquest levels will be evaluated and ranked by the game. The empire that comes out on top will be rewarded greatly. To raise your federation's Conquest level, players will need to accept Signet missions from the town's guards.

REPUBLIC OF BASTOK

This powerful industrial and mining city was established by Humes and is surrounded by the rocky wastelands.

KINGDOM OF SAN D'ORIA

Dubbed "A City Within a Fortress," San d'Oria resides within a mountainous wooden area of Vana'diel. It is the homeland of the Elvaan.
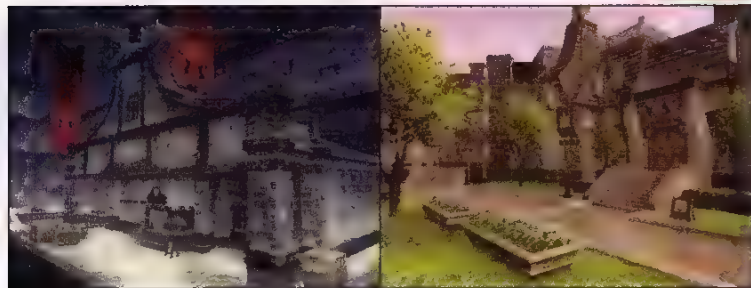
FEDERATION OF WINDURST

Windurst is the most serene region in the world. The Tarutaru and Mithra coexist peacefully within this lush town.

ユウナ HP MP
リュック HP 2 MP 1
パイン HP 49 MP
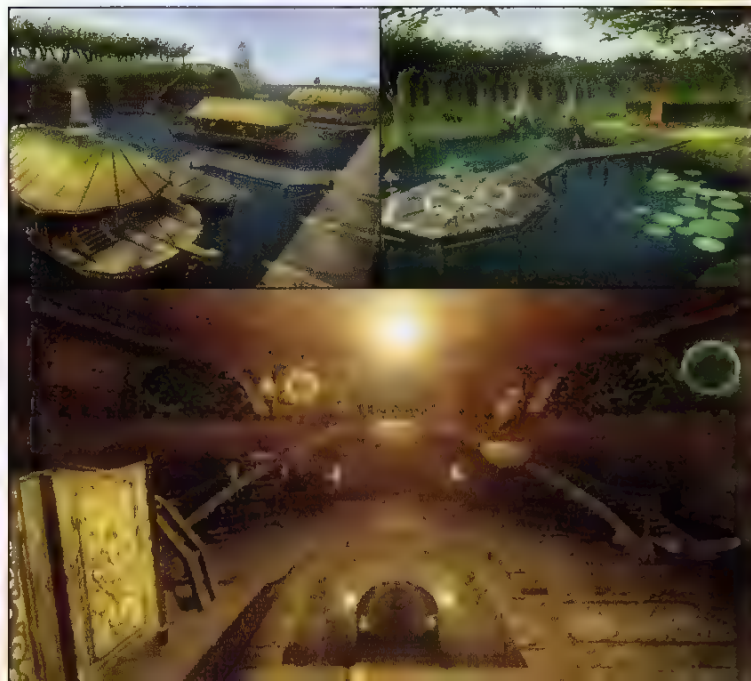
PLAYSTATION 2

FINAL FANTASY X-2

GRRRLS ARE THE BEST!

Final Fantasy X's emotionally charged and highly ambiguous ending left gamers frothing at the mouth for a definitive conclusion. For the first time in Final Fantasy history, Square is continuing the story and is forging a straightforward sequel that picks up two years after the cataclysmic events that rocked the world of Spira.

Oddly, the story is the only direct link that Final Fantasy X-2 has to its predecessor. The entire game emanates an outrageous Spice Girls mentality. For instance, it begins in a blitzball stadium. Rather than watching a fevered match of everyone's favorite underwater sport, Yuna appears on a stage and does her best Britney Spears impersonation. After the concert ends, Yuna, Riku and a new character named Paine are confronted by a mysterious new foe. Before they can fight this enemy, the heroic trio engages in a pageant of over-the-top *Charlie's Angels* action poses.

On the gameplay front, most of the title is non-linear and sectioned off into missions that can be tackled at any time. Rather than just navigating the Sphere Grid to determine what type of class your character is, Square Enix has implemented a versatile job class system. At any step during play (even within combat), players can switch classes on the fly through the new Garment Grid. All within a heartbeat, Yuna can attack as a Berserker, then switch to the Songstress class to perform a spell.

In the end, Tidus may have been a loser, but he was tolerable. This new direction, on the other hand, may be too much for fans to stomach. It feels nothing like the Final Fantasy games that we've grown to love.

Class transformations unfold with cinematics similar to summons in previous games

Combat once again makes use of the ATB system

■ **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 3

TRUE FANTASY LIVE ONLINE

BIG ADVENTURE NOW INTERNET!

LIVING BEINGS

Level-5 has implemented a number of interesting features that should ensure that every human-controlled character is unique in appearance. For starters, the game has an incredibly deep character generator that allows players to tweak everything right down to the lip color, hairstyle, and facial shape. As the game unfolds, the appearance of your character will change in accordance to how you play. If you run out of food and your character goes hungry, his or her physique will grow frail and thin. If you chose blacksmith as a profession, the character's arms will become brawnier. Not only will the physical appearances change, their abilities will too. For instance, if you do something that adds weight to your character, running will be hindered.

Creating characters is an involving process

TRAVEL FOR THE WEARY

Running for minutes on end seems to be a recurring theme within most massively multiplayer online RPGs. While running is still an option in True Fantasy, players can also choose to travel in style. Horses, camels, dragons, and broomsticks can be mounted and ridden to your heart's content. If you happen to be with a party, carriages and boats can move groups of players at once.

Check out that camel toe...on the camel

Groups of people can travel within a carriage

The masterminds behind the Dark Cloud series are quickly becoming the go-to developer for triple-A role-playing games. Not only has Level-5 been enlisted to develop the next installment in the Dragon Quest series, it is creating True Fantasy Live Online – a massively multiplayer online RPG for Microsoft.

Within True Fantasy, hundreds of players will be able to inhabit the same land and quest together. Thanks in part to voice communication support, forming teams and coordinating attacks will be a breeze. As is the case with most MMORPGs, True Fantasy is entirely open-ended. You'll have the ability to go wherever you like and do whatever you desire. Tired of adventuring? Why not settle down in a village and become a cook or tailor?

From what we've seen thus far, True Fantasy is shaping up to be a serious contender along with Final Fantasy XI and the Phantasy Star Online series. The combat system is incredibly smooth and just as complex as it was in Dark Cloud 2 and the cel-shaded graphics are just as beautiful. Unfortunately, a release date – let alone a season or year – has yet to be determined.

AN EVER-EXPANDING WORLD

The world of True Fantasy is as alive as a digital world can be. Cities are bustling with merchants and fellow citizens, time passes (at an exaggerated pace), and thanks in part to the ability to download new content to Xbox's hard drive, new locations and structures will be added on a timely basis after the game ships.

The world goes through day and night changes

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** LEVEL-5 ■ **RELEASE** TBA

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK
INTER(NET)CONNECTION

When we first heard about Resident Evil Outbreak, we were extremely intrigued about how this new chapter in the saga was going to mesh with what we'd come to know and love. Was it going to be a free-for-all full of zombie-capping vigilantes? And how was multiplayer going to affect the puzzles and scare factor? After getting some hands-on time with the title, we can safely say that Outbreak's slightly different approach keeps all the core elements you'd expect from the franchise.

The game is structured around chapters and the grouping of up to four characters per segment. You start out by choosing from one of eight characters, each with their own specialties. Some may begin with weapons (Kevin); while others' purpose might be the ability to pick locks (Alyssa). Further adding to the unique nature of each character, cutscenes are experienced only through your player's viewpoint. Also, several different endings are possible depending on how you and your crew work together throughout the game. As always in Resident Evil, there are even some instances when you will be left on your own – alone and vulnerable – to join up with a party later.

While it may seem harder to keep the suspense when environments are more wide open and you are no longer all alone, fear enters because your sense of desperation is heightened. You might have to fend of zombies with a shoulder charge while another character fumbles trying to get a door open. Trust us, your heart will race.

Capcom has not divulged the fee structure for Outbreak yet – but whether you want to tie your fortunes in a zombie-infested Raccoon City with the fate of others, or would rather try and go at it in the single-player offline experience, this Resident Evil should be a bold chapter in the series. After all, you can even become a zombie!

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE (UP TO 4-PLAYERS VIA BROADBAND ONLY) ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM ■ **RELEASE** WINTER

THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR

Because of the unique abilities and items for each character, working together is paramount to staying alive. For instance, in one scene we played, we started out in a bar being overrun with zombies. After we all independently searched the nearby rooms for items, we figured out that one person held the key to an escape door. After regrouping on a landing past a set of stairs, we came across more zombies and – just in time – some herbs. True to Resident Evil's usual scarcity of supplies, we had to hesitate before we grabbed them all, as some had to be left for the other players, and thus the good of the party. Similar cooperative situations will come up time and time again in the game. Sometimes, it'll be helping catch your newfound friends after they jump across a chasm, or you'll be escorting a wounded – but still vital – member of your team to safety. Capcom will have set text messages you can send to those in your party, but whether the game will support voice chat has not yet been announced.
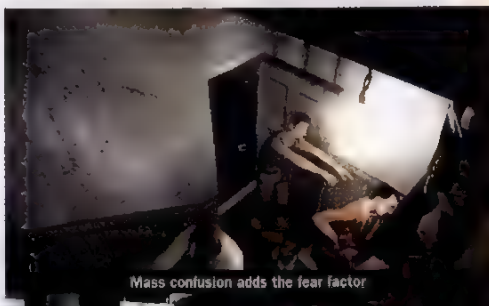
Mass confusion adds the fear factor

Providing cover for others will be vital

This seat is reserved for the elderly, pregnant women, and insistent people with guns

This player is using Outbreak to meet chicks and feed his leg fetish

Zombies with no teeth make for a good time

ALYSSA   CINDY   DAVID   GEORGE   JIM   KEVIN   MARK   YOKO

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

NASCAR THUNDER 2004
ON THE LEAD LAP

The field of NASCAR games has narrowed to just one this year (on all systems), but that doesn't mean pole sitter EA Sports won't work hard on race day. Graphically, the series seems unchanged in many ways, but more effects bring the beating and banging alive. Smoke and sparks abound, crashes are more spectacular, and you can even blow a tire. Rookies will find more info to help them along (like the SpeedZone tutorial/minigames), while veterans can dive into 40 new Lightning Challenges, Happy Hour, a deeper Career mode, and more. Online includes peer-to-peer racing, and EA Sports has just told us Thunder will support voice chat.

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 28-PLAYER BROADBAND OR 18 VIA LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON ■ **RELEASE** FALL

If Rusty spins Gordon...

EAT IT, GORDON!

We all hate Jeff Gordon, but here's your chance to really go out and prove yourself against the SOB. NASCAR 2004 takes the usually stale opponent AI and injects some real life into it, through opponents who really can treat you like a friend or foe. Crumple a guy's back fender, and he'll do a lot worse to you the next lap around. On the other hand, teammates (or someone you've already treated with respect) might help you draft or pass instead of slamming the door in your face. Pre-existing, real-life rivalries and friendships have been included, and you'll see them illustrated during races via a handy icon system. This new dynamic really brings out the passion of the sport. During a season or career, a constant tally of allies and enemies will be kept, included a rating of how much your peers respect you, so you can watch the drama unfold all year long.
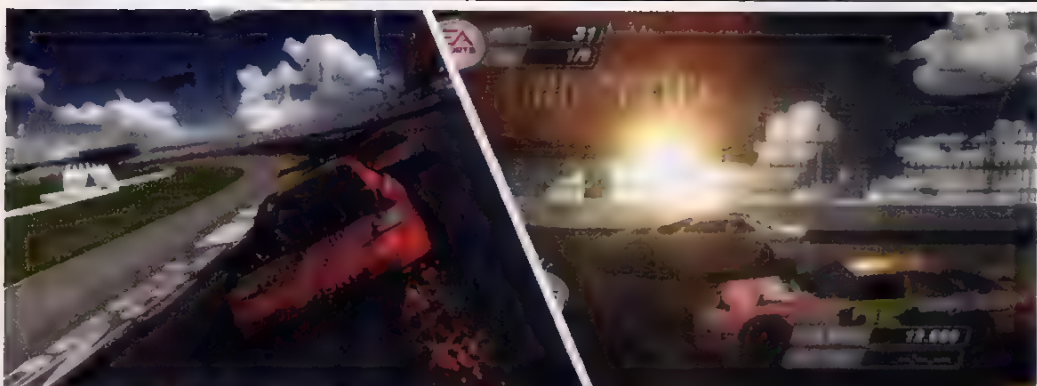
OF JOHNSON RODS AND GARAGES

Last year's Career mode has been overhauled for the better. Both the menu system and the R&D portion of your shop have been replaced to make things easier and more interesting. Upgrades to your car must be bought through the garage. Buy a Flowbench and you'll get a boost in your ride's power. By purchasing this, you can then get an Engine Balancer, which increases engine efficiency, as well as decreasing your repair or overhaul costs. All told, these additions make the learning curve for your career both easier and a whole lot more fun.

Someone gives Flyin' Ryan payback

...their rivalry only increases

Xbox

This is a beat-down from the thug's point of view, before he sees stars
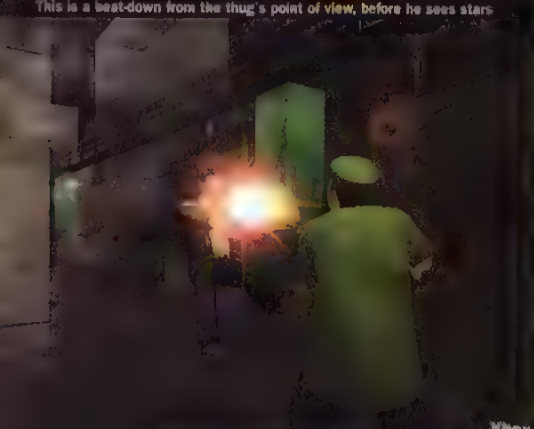
Xbox

"Message for your sir – aaargh!"

Xbox

"Drop the magazine, or this guy gets it!"

Xbox

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA

A CITY WITH EVEN MORE VICES

It's been a while since we last brought you the lowdown on what's crackalackin' with the seamy underbelly of Los Angeles in True Crime. We blame it on those dang Map to the Stars' Homes things they sell on Hollywood Boulevard. Did you know that Alex Winter, better known as Bill S. Preston Esquire in the Bill and Ted trilogy (including the little-known third installment, *Bill and Ted: More Than Friends*), lives in the back of an In & Out Burger? He must get discounted rent for slicing onions part-time. He signed our napkin and quickly ushered us out the back door.

True Crime will evoke comparisons to the Grand Theft Auto series, and for good reason. You can drive a bunch of different vehicles, you shoot people who cross you, and it has non-linear aspects to the missions. But, the fact that True Crime won't let you rock a van with a lady of the night isn't the only thing separating these two games. Streets of LA's star Nick Kang is on the good side of the law. He doesn't jack cars; he commandeers them. He only kills guilty people; of course, some are only guilty of jaywalking, but hey – when you fight the law, the law wins.

This batch of screenshots highlights the gun battles and fistfights of True Crime more so than the cruisin'. The out-of-vehicle stuff doesn't take a back seat to the driving in the least. Unarmed, Kang possesses a formidable hand-to-hand offense. Kicks and punches are thrown like one-liners at a comedy club. Things get more advanced when you travel to various dojos in the environment to learn a few new skills. They're a bit like Neo's fight with the Oracle's protector in *The Matrix Reloaded*. Cool combos, grapples, and stealth attacks will all be at your disposal.

Sometimes, you need to fight fire with fire – though our source at the Minneapolis Fire Department seems to disagree. When the action gets really heated, Kang can unload ammo with the best of them. The targeting here looks much more honed than Grand Theft Auto, and more obvious than The Getaway's. It even allows for aiming at multiple enemies. Hong Kong action staples like slow-motion dives spice things up, and there's also a heavy dose of wall-slinking.

The city of LA isn't just mentioned in the title; Los Angeles is faithfully reproduced street for street in this game. This encompasses hundreds of square miles that include Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, and Hollywood. From what we've played, the attention to detail is impeccable. We saw the big Hollywood sign, the Walk of Fame, and even the hotel we stayed at during E3 (we love you, Red Roof Inn!).

The voiceover cast emulates this LA style, with a flurry of famous stars. Christopher Walken, Gary Oldman, and *Romeo Must Die*'s Russell Wong highlight the list. All the pieces are in place for True Crime to be a blockbuster game. We'll find out for sure soon.

Xbox

PS2
"I'm not working in a cube anymore, man. No way. You can't make me."

PS2
"Nobody's touching my vat of delicious pork products!"

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** LUXOFLUX ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

CHALLENGE
2469 POKO

PIKMIN 2
IT'S FUNNY WHEN THEY SCREAM

Captain Olimar is in some trouble.

While attempting to rebuild his ship within 30 days during the first Pikmin game, his company went bankrupt. To save it, Olimar must pay off a whopping debt of 10,000 Pokos. This time around, the premise requires Olimar to return to the planet he just escaped and salvage treasure in order to save his ailing company.

If you missed the first title, the gameplay in Pikmin is a mixture of strategy, puzzle, and action. You preside over a bunch of little flower bud-like creatures called Pikmin, of which there are various types with different attributes to aid you in solving the numerous kinds of puzzles. Some Pikmin can carry bombs, some can swim, and others can survive in fire. Thus far, we only know of two new Pikmin: the large and stout purple Pikmin, and the small and quick albino Pikmin. Their specific abilities are, unfortunately, still unknown.

In Pikmin 2, Olimar will have the help of his partner Loozy (Olimar = Mario? Loozy = Luigi?), who will try to nab goodies and command faithful troops. By pressing the Y button, you'll be able to switch characters on the fly and take teams to separate areas. Nintendo has also made selecting different color Pikmin easier by mapping them to the d-pad, which should make accidental deaths less frequent.

The gameplay will still be broken down into days, but there won't be a limit as to how long you can scavenge – encouraging more exploration of the environments. The locales seem to be on par with the original, but now you'll be taking your Pikmin into underground caverns. Each cave that you enter will be randomly generated, so no two will be the same.

Pikmin 2 will also feature two-player split-screen modes, allowing you and your buddies to team up for some Pik-dude action. You can either cooperate to accomplish level goals together, or race to collect the most Pokos.

With the addition of multiplayer possibilities, unlimited days, and randomly generated caverns; Pikmin 2 is shaping up to be a meaty sequel. Just remember, albeit fun in a sick and twisted way, killing your Pikmin isn't advantageous.

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 27

Pikmin love shiny things

"I know we dropped that penny around here somewhere."
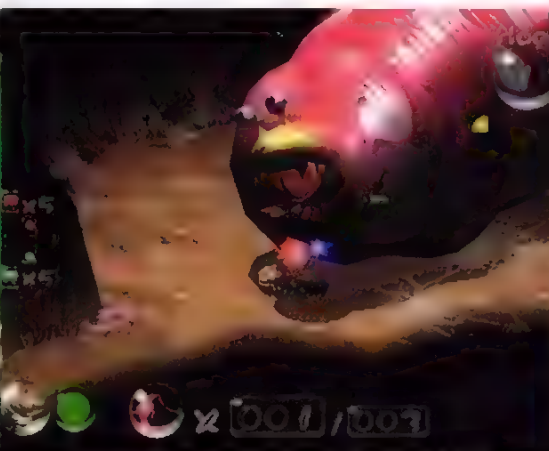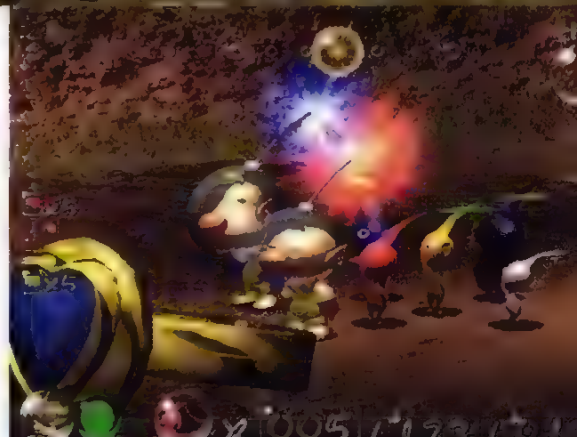
"Hey guys, after we ride this slide let's try out the lazy river!"

"Red Snot Guy" was voted Video Games' Ugliest Enemy in 2001

Rubber Duckies are worth a whole lot of Pokos

Range SHORT

165

50.0x RATE

4 HITS

HP	1350		HP	933		HP	1526
MP	240		MP	348		MP	141
Guts	74%		Guts	99%		Guts	99%

Nell has nerves of steel. We dare you to get into a staring match with her

A reject from *America's Next Top Model* chases Fate through a beautiful environment

SHORT

ヴァーティカル・エアレイド
SPECIAL ATTACK

13
13
15
12
22

20% RATE

HEAT UP

4 HITS

	442		HP	330		HP	458
	55		MP	51		MP	54
	99%			90%		Guts	100%

MANUAL

This guy looks like an reincarnation of the Great Mighty Poo, but we think he's actually made of mud, not feces

PLAYSTATION 2

STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

ITS TIME WILL COME – EVENTUALLY

In last November's issue, we broke the story on Star Ocean, the highly anticipated PS2 role-playing game. That's right, we were first. That makes everyone else the worst -- you included, tough guy. Since then, we haven't heard much of anything about the title. Much of that veil of silence can most likely be attributed to the merger between Square and Enix, and the upheaval that accompanied it.

Few major changes have taken place since our feature, but loads of polish and a ton of tweaking have been instituted. At this year's E3 convention, the game sat sandwiched between the upcoming Final Fantasy titles, X-2 and XI, and was in playable form. It's shaping up nicely, though it's still a few agonizing seasons away from release in the U.S.

Games like Suikoden III and Xenosaga have taken RPG plot lines to the next level. Star Ocean is definitely up to the challenge. The galaxy is split into three commanding entities. Prime protagonists Fate Linegod and Sophia Esteed are just chilling on a resort planet when it's brutally attacked by the smallest and least threatening of the factions. The two escape the ensuing chaos, but have to face the fact that it may be them specifically that this federation is after. Throughout the journey, many other faces will join their cause. What's so special about these two, anyway? We don't know, but we're sure the tale will unfold over a few dozen hours of gameplay.

Speaking of gameplay, Star Ocean tries doing some things to set it apart from the mooing herd. The battles don't occur randomly; instead, enemies show up in the overworld and skirmishes only happen when you touch them. Once the lines have been drawn, you have a variety of attacks. Up to three heroes can be in the battle at once – like Final Fantasy X. You take control over one of the trio, and can either issue commands to the others or let their AI take care of themselves. However, switching which character you're in charge of is extremely easy. Special attacks, magic, and status changes are all here.

Other, not so obvious, facets give Star Ocean its originality, too. For instance, stereotypical shops aren't here, per se. Instead, you must collect the raw materials to create your own weapons and items. This is done using a junction system, similar to the one in Final Fantasy VIII. What you come up with depends on the properties of the resources, as well as who you take them to.

A lot has changed in the RPG genre since we got our first look at Star Ocean: Till the End of Time. Does it have what it takes to contend with the heavy hitters? With FF X-2 going an alternate route and FF XI doing the MMO thing, this is likely Square Enix's flagship "traditional" role-playing game. That is a coveted spot, and not one to be underestimated.
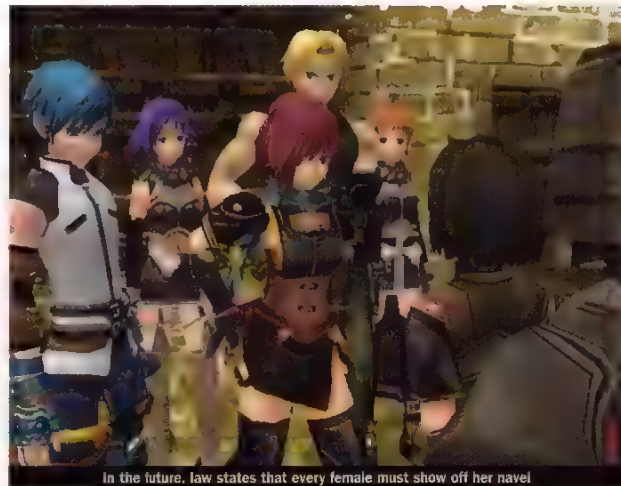
In the future, law states that every female must show off her navel

■ **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE ■ **RELEASE** SPRING 2004

Spider Mines are a new weapon for the series

Players can now wield two assault rifles at once

In all, there will be 20 brand-new maps and a few new characters

Ships battle it out in an aerial confrontation
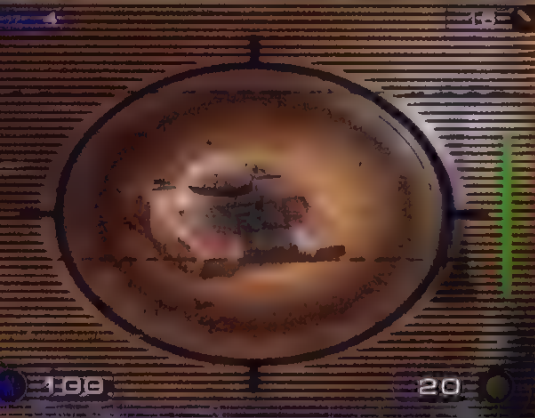
"Kiss your tank goodbye!"

We are still uncertain, but it looks like multiple players can control vehicles

PC

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

MILKING IT?

Unlike the additions for the original Unreal Tournament, which players could download for free, Atari will charge gamers for these yearly installments. Yes, to remain in line with the present trend of online titles, Atari (like a dealer) is going to make you pay to support your addiction.

Foremost, land, air, and space-based vehicles will be available. Atari hasn't confirmed whether players will be able to employ them in current 2K3 modes, although it's a reasonable guess that they won't be, as most maps simply aren't conducive to vehicular combat. However, the developers could design maps for present game modes that would suit one or all of these vehicles.

It's more likely that Atari will relegate vehicles only to the two new game types: Assault and Onslaught. Assault makes a welcome return from the original UT, and basically requires one group to invade a base and take control of it. The other team must simply defend. In one scenario, players will engage in space combat and attempt to down or defend a Skaarj mother ship!

Details on Onslaught remain scarce, but it resembles Domination in that teams must vie for command of certain

control points. Onslaught's maps will supposedly be large enough to accommodate each of the three vehicle types; plus players will have access to new Onslaught-exclusive weapons like the Spider Mines.

Atari will add a number of peripheral features so as to streamline 2K4. A new user interface (UI) will make scrolling through menus less tedious and allow for greater filtering options; and for those of you into building Mods, you can actually create your own UI! Next, Atari has decided to integrate UnrealTV completely into the server browser in order to permit hundreds of people to view matches with hardly any impact on server performance. Finally, players with microphones and 3D audio capability can take advantage of the enhanced audio chat system. Although it sounds fancier than its actual functionality, it's still welcome. Enable it and players can specifically detect in what direction a teammate's voice emanates from!

If you're new to the series, you need to purchase both versions to enjoy the full package. However, Atari will at least include the two 2K3 bonus packs so that you don't have to waste time and energy trying to download them.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** EPIC GAMES/DIGITAL EXTREMES
■ **RELEASE** FALL

The detail in the character models is phenomenal
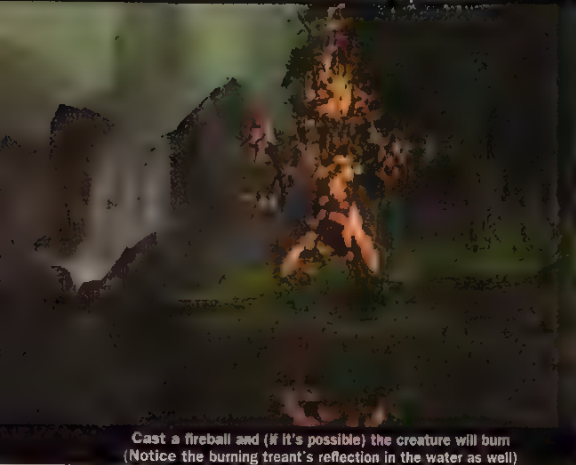
Cast a fireball and (if it's possible) the creature will burn (Notice the burning treant's reflection in the water as well)

PC

EVERQUEST II
THE EVERCRACK STRIKES BACK!

SOE's press release states that EverQuest II is "based 500 years after EverQuest, and is a new and different game experience in a changed world marred by a fantastic life-changing event." What that life-changing event is, Sony Online isn't saying; but we do know that players will climb their way into this new massively multiplayer online RPG by creating their own unique character from 16 races and 48 classes.

If the thought of 48 different classes doesn't get your head spinning, the player creation options will. We asked EQ II art director Stuart Compton how many options there were, and he answered us with an "Eep!"

"I'm not good enough at math to do a permutation computation on that scale. A lot? A whole lot?," he adds jokingly. "Let's deal with the categories; hair, beard (for the guys), facial features, facial texture, skin color, eye color, hair color, not to mention some special categories for the severely non-human races."

On the surface, that seems pretty general; but once the player gets a hold of the face-shaping options that enable a wide variety of manipulations, you'll realize that you can create, "tiny-nosed anime characters to Cro-Magnon thugs," according to Compton.

There is also a new race in this sequel, the rat-men known as Ratonga. Compton describes them as "a top-notch thief, sneaky guy. They are small, maybe about dwarf size, and nimble. They are fairly sophisticated and intelligent."

Of course, all of this character development goes to waste if there aren't some interesting dungeons to take your avatar into, and the development team has also expanded this portion of the game considerably. For example, the dungeons themselves are more interactive with the player. As you walk down corridors, dust settles from the ceiling and large mysterious crashes in the distance cause the entire passage to shake and hunks of rubble to fall. It's all very menacing – and very cool to see in action.

Luckily, this is just the beginning of the list of improvements in the works for EQ II. There will be player-owned real estate. Motion-captured, highly detailed fighting animations that Compton states will feature, "a lot of variety, as we recorded several variations of each type of attack and up to 10 or more 'special' moves for each form or weapon." In addition, look for a brand new quest system, a fantastic looking particle system, a new dedicated trade skill class, and player-controlled ships for travel. Prepare for your social life to end this winter.

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** WINTER

Flying books! This game is going to rule
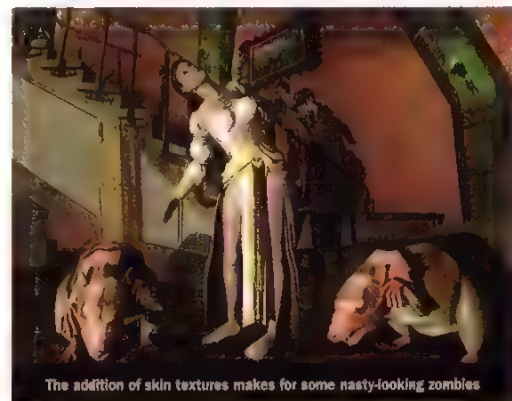
The addition of skin textures makes for some nasty-looking zombies

HOMEWORLD 2

FORM UP

The first Homeworld title took PC gamers by the short ones and hasn't let go. Because of this stunning success, and because two is always better than one, Sierra has seen fit to give the world an overhauled look at a game that wrote its own rules. With that in mind, it must be remembered that sequels of successful games have a difficult task ahead of them. We, the gaming public, have expectations. Not only does the offspring need to live up to its parent's achievements, it needs to eclipse them for most people to be satisfied. It must look better and sound better, and it has to play better as well. The Relic team knows this, and from the looks of their charge, they are more than up to the challenge.

SHELTER THE LEADER

In many strategy-oriented games where a player groups large numbers of units together then issues movement or attack orders, the unit types tend to become snarled and confused as the faster subjects surge ahead of the pack and the rest play catch-up. Additionally, when attacking and defending, units are no more aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses than they are of their enemies'. This type of mindless dronery has officially ended. Allow us to illustrate: Let's assume that you've built a capital ship, and have a number of other supporting craft lounging around the vicinity. In comes an opposing force, bent on destruction. By grouping your units into what Relic has dubbed a "strike group," the AI will catalogue what types

of ships you select, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how it will be most beneficial to arrange them in a formation. As your newly formed strike group coalesces, you'll find that your capital ship is in a position where it is most easily defended, and a few of the craft in your group will be tasked (automatically, mind you) with its support and defense. When the battle is about to begin, the AI will then look at your opponent and decide on the best method of attack – it won't sent units blindly to their deaths. If the battle is taking a turn for the worse, attackers will break off from their targets and aid in the defense of your larger, more vulnerable craft. Have you crapped yourself yet?

WHOA...

The imagery this game has in store for us is stunning. Look at those fantastic screenshots! Everything from the painstakingly detailed textures to the excellent particle effects of the first Homeworld have been sent into the graphical stratosphere with Homeworld 2. When we saw the game in action, it was hard to believe the amount of care each and every environment and structure received to make it look its absolute best. Let's hope that most people will be able to run it on non über-machines. But you need a new PC anyway, right?

The damage this ship is taking will show up after the explosions have abated

Here's a sight you don't want to see if you're trying to defend your position

You can see a strike group forming up on the left

Torpedo-tastic!

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY (UP TO 6-PLAYERS VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SIERRA STUDIOS ■ **DEVELOPER** RELIC
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26

Caption: As always, Sunnyvale is a hotspot of satanic activity

Caption: The stake will be your vampire-smokin' weapon of choice

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: CHAOS BLEEDS

THE GANG'S ALL HERE

Buffy the Vampire Slayer was a standout on the Xbox last year, so it's odd that Vivendi Universal and Fox Interactive have made some big changes for the development of Chaos Bleeds, a multiplatform sequel slated for September release. We were surprised to learn that the Collective, the team behind the first Buffy and the equally stellar Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb, has not been hired on for the follow-up. Instead, workhorse development house Eurocom (which has worked on everything from Crash Bandicoot: Wrath of Cortex to James Bond 007: NightFire to HydroThunder) will be crafting the highly anticipated title. It's odd, since the Collective did such a bang-up job on the original, but one certainly can't argue with Eurocom's track record.

Despite these changes, fans of the first Buffy should not worry that the game is going in a radical new direction. No, this is still very much the occult beat 'em up that you know and love – one with a few new tricks up its sleeve. Envisioned as a "lost episode" that takes place between shows 17 and 19 of season five, Chaos Bleeds is a family affair that lets you play as six of the series' most popular characters: Spike, Willow, Buffy, Faith, Sid, and Xander. Even better, all the actors, except for Ms. Sarah "I'm too cool because I make out with Freddie Prinze Jr. and was in *Scooby Doo*" Gellar, came on to do voice work for the game.

Each of these characters lends their own twist to the basic, button-mashing brawling. For instance, Willow, being a witch, prefers to use spells like a fireball instead of her fists; while Xander, who's a bit of a wuss, must rely on weapons like crossbows to get his dirty work done. As before, you'll be able to pull off a startling number of unique combos (over 100 in all) with a minimum of button presses. Also, the developers were wise enough to keep the intuitive inventory management system that the Collective had created.

Graphically, Chaos Bleeds is as much of a looker as its titular heroine. Even on the PS2, the character renders are detailed and crisp, which is especially evident in the eerily realistic facial models. Eurocom also promises that the game will feature such visual eye-grabbers as volumetric smoke and lighting effects.

So, what more is there to say, really? Buffy is sassy, spunky, and even – as TLC might say – crazysexycool! She's already a legend in TV-land, and is well on pace to becoming a feminine icon on the video game scene as well.
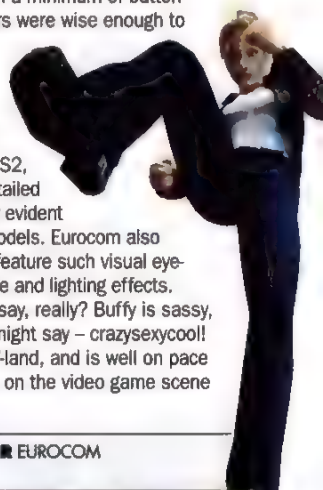
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL/FOX INTERACTIVE ■ **DEVELOPER** EUROCOM
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

Caption: Chaos Bleeds' in-game facial renders are very realistic

Caption: Check out the particle effects on that chick! Yow-zah!
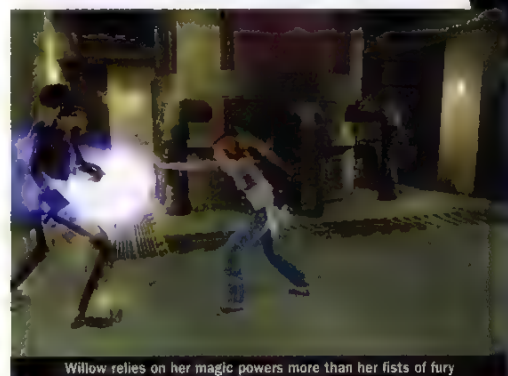
Caption: Willow relies on her magic powers more than her fists of fury

X-MEN LEGENDS

EVOLUTION DEFINED

If there's one thing that Raven Software knows how to do, it's driving comic book fans absolutely stark-raving mad. We were recently treated to a behind-the-scenes sneak-peek at X-Men Legends that left us in complete and utter awe. Not only did the team-based gameplay look too good to believe, the graphical details (which were enhanced through 720p widescreen support) rivaled the likes of Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance. Up to four players will be able to quest together in an adventure that should consume at least 30 hours of your life. You'll be able to suit up as 15 different X-Men who can level up and join specific teammates for tag-team special attacks. As irresistible as this game is shaping up to be, we're just going to have to sit back, control our drool, and wait for the game to ship in fall 2004. Excelsior!

The entire mansion is available for exploration

Each teammate will be awarded individual experience points

All of the X-Men feature unique special attacks and attributes

The game will support simultaneous four-player action

Wolverine shows off his buns of steel to Cyclops
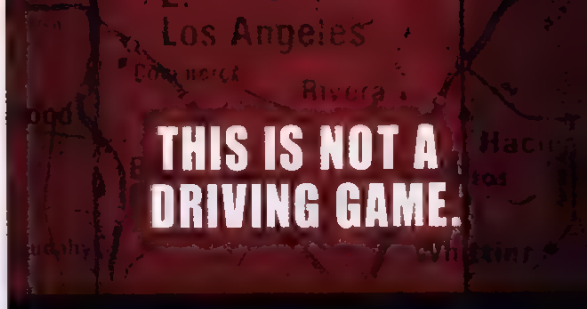
■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE ■ **RELEASE** FALL 2004

THE HOBBIT
REPLETE WITH MORE CRUSTY FEET

Vivendi smartly snagged the rights to develop games based on Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* book series to coincide with the release of Peter Jackson's films. Unfortunately, the poor quality of Vivendi's Fellowship of the Ring left fans disappointed and, in many cases, irate.

Recognizing its mistakes, Vivendi has enlisted the help of respected developer Sierra to complete the prequel, The Hobbit. Because Sierra has a responsibility to follow the books to an extent, the video game will feature a bit less action and instead place more emphasis on story, platforming, and puzzles.

Solving puzzles will consist of finding certain objects and placing them in the correct spots. However, some will be of a different ilk. Bilbo Baggins (the hero, of course) possesses the ability to harness the power of the Ring, which endows him with certain techniques such as invisibility. This fact has allowed Sierra to create obstacle-based puzzles that utilize these special abilities.

To keep gameplay exciting, Sierra has been granted some leeway to fudge a few scenes so that the action element doesn't seem too emaciated. Bilbo will have a couple modes of attack, including projectile weapons, a sword, and a staff. These will be necessary to defeat the game's bosses and a sometimes-overwhelming onslaught of orcs.

Rumor has it that Gandalf will be a playable character

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE
■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** SIERRA
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26

MAFIA
THIS LITTLE THING OF OURS COMES TO PS2

Sure, Mafia took a few cues from the Grand Theft Auto series, but Illusion Softworks definitely took Rockstar North's blueprint and turned it into an experience that had its own unique identity. Where GTA is a cartoonish broadside aimed at skewering the ridiculous nature of modern society and pop culture; Mafia displayed a masterful, sincere brand of storytelling detailing the saga of a simple working man who is dragged into a life of crime against his will.

Given that it was a hit on PC, the Xbox port was a no-brainer; but we were surprised to hear that Gathering of Developers is now bringing the game to the PlayStation 2. Can Sony's console handle this ambitious title? Yes, says Gathering of Developers producer Andrew Morley.

"[This] version of Mafia has had to take into account the fixed specifications of the PS2," comments Morley. "And, while this has been a challenge, we're pleased with the results. The LS3D engine is being used as in the PC version, but [it's] completely redone to fit PS2 requirements. The missions remain faithful to the PC version."

To make sure the game appeals to the console crowd; the control scheme, mission pacing, and especially the driving aspects of the game have been completely retooled. Basically, expect that the sometimes painfully slow car sequences of the PC version to be revved up a bit to accommodate the tastes of the PS2 audience.

"It's well known that console gamers expect a different experience than hardcore PC gamers," says Morley. "We believe that the console crowd will love the game. The action and pace of the game has been one of the biggest areas addressed, especially in the transition from the PC mouse and keyboard control method to a controller. We have completely changed the way the car is controlled and also the car parameters have been improved in order to provide more action play experiences."

Mafia is certainly an epic title that should not be missed, whatever the platform. Plus, Morley even hinted that there may be some hidden extras put in especially for this console version.

This PS2 port is looking very impressive

See what happens when you don't tip the bellboy?
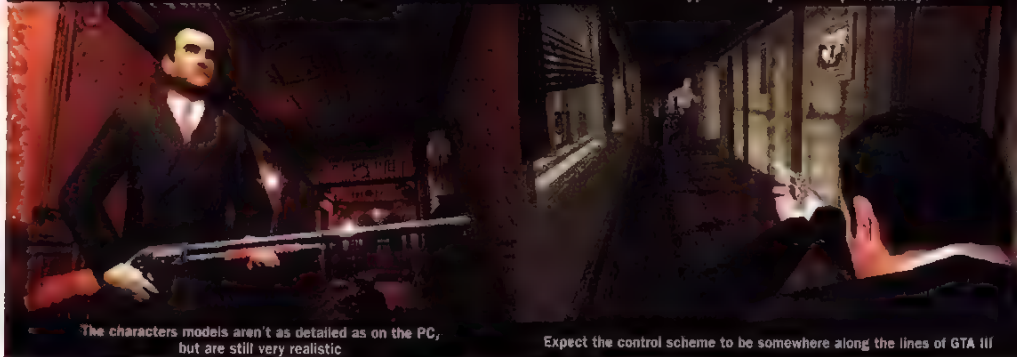
The characters models aren't as detailed as on the PC, but are still very realistic

Expect the control scheme to be somewhere along the lines of GTA III

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** ILLUSION SOFTWORKS ■ **DEVELOPER** GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11
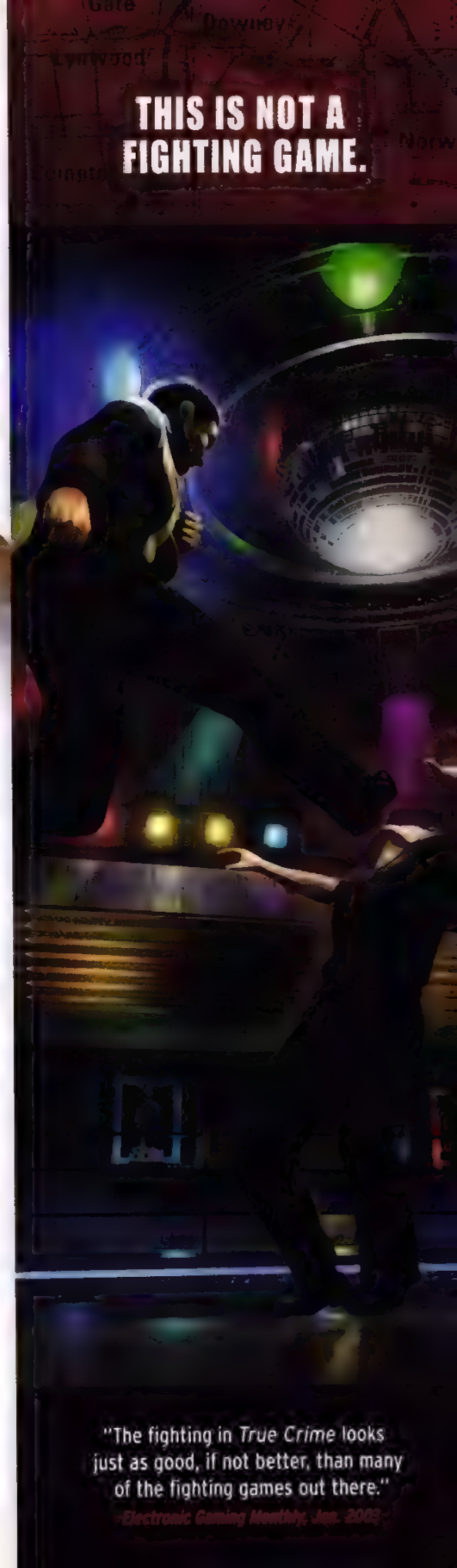
LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

TAG TEAM

Legacy of Kain: Defiance is the latest entry in a franchise known best for all-powerful antiheroes, big swords, blood sucking, and soul capturing. Defiance features (for the first time in the series) two playable characters. Longtime fans will be excited to learn that this iteration finally allows you to take on the role of both the titular demigod Kain and Raziel (an angel of death) from the Soul Reaver games.

You'll battle through the world of these two characters as they attempt to understand their place in the universe and save their realm from eternal damnation. Amy Hennig, project director at Crystal Dynamics, boasts that, "[The] new combat system emphasizes intuitive controls, over-the-top attacks and combos, powerful telekinetic assaults, and visceral finishing moves which draw from our heroes' dark, vampiric natures."

Each character has their legendary sword to deal out massive melee blows in addition to a brand-new palette of telekinetic abilities. Combos enhanced with these mental skills can last upwards of eight hits and easily demolish most foes. Your powers can also be used to move distant objects, smash locks, shatter windows, and generally wreak havoc in environments; a feature Crystal has taken advantage of for most of the game's puzzle-solving elements. The action plays out through a new camera system that grants the player full control but also dynamically switches the perspective to afford the most cinematic vantage point.

Clearly, the plot of this vampire-demon-underlord epic is being closely guarded, but it certainly looks like the developer has thought long and hard about how to innovate within their series of blood-sucking, soul-stealing "heroes."

Both Kain and Raziel are playable characters

"Your feeble skin is no match for the darkside."

Each character is equipped with a legendary sword. Eat that. Sting!

Classic vampire action is back in effect

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS ■ **DEVELOPER** CRYSTAL DYNAMICS ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

PC

BREED
CDV SIRES SHOOTER

Okay, Timmy, it's time we had a discussion. You see, CDV and Brat Designs like each other very much. Sometimes, when couples feel that way, they make a baby – in other words, Breed. It's just like when Daddy and Mommy had you. Of course, we imagine their union will last longer than your parents' did, since Daddy ran off with a Hard Rock Casino waitress on their honeymoon to Vegas.

Breed is easy to write off as yet another FPS, but there's a lot more to it than just that. First off, there are over 15 vehicles – like dropships, tanks, and jeeps. The action flows seamlessly from being in space, to hitting the planet's atmosphere, to hoofin' it toward an enemy base. It also varies between indoor and outdoor levels in landscapes that span 256 kilometers (for those of us who measure in miles, that's still a lot). The missions can be tackled several ways, so you can tailor your strategy to your own style.

Breed's engine, called Mercury, is extremely powerful yet beautiful (like the girl in the club who knees you in the solar plexus when you ask her sign). There's talk of a console port to be announced before year's end, so you non-PC playaz won't have to drink Haterade for too long.

"What is it?" "Who cares, shoot it!"

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/SHOOTER (UP TO 32-PLAYERS VIA ONLINE OR LAN) **■ PUBLISHER** CDV **■ DEVELOPER** BRAT DESIGNS **■ RELEASE** AUGUST 26

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES
UWHAOO!

The history of Black Ops is a curious one. The studio has had its hands in developing everything from Street Hoops to Knockout Kings to Bond games to the upcoming X-Files title. Likewise, the motivation of the T-800 model Terminator has been hard to pin down. In the first *Terminator*, it tried killing John Conner. In *T2: Judgment Day*, he helped keep John alive. According to trailers we've seen, in the upcoming movie, Arnold's robotic character will play both sides – alternating between wanting to help Conner and trying to take him out. Talk about moody!

The game's plot incorporates elements from the film, which released in July, but also goes off on its own. Much like Atari's Enter the Matrix, Rise of the Machines will feature exclusive footage – starring Schwarzenegger himself – specifically filmed for the game. Incidentally, T3 marks the first time Arnold's voice and likeness will be used in a video game. Score!

Terminator 3 is first-person shooter/third-person brawler hybrid with you filling the heavy shoes of the T-800. We can only assume you won't always be shooting people in the knee, á la *T2*. All manner of weapons will be at your disposal – including grenade launchers, assault rifles, and

lasers – as you fight both human and cyborg enemies from the past and future. Melee tactics take advantage of his advanced strength by letting you toss people into walls and delivering fearsome kicks.

As tough as Schwarzenegger is, the über-badass T-X will grind your butt into paste, then brush her teeth with you. It'll take much more than a few shotgun shells to the C-cups to keep her down. Likewise, Atari and Black Ops know that it'll take more than a few robots with guns to make this game great, and they'll be putting in work to ensure that Rise of the Machines is a killer app.

"I'll ask you one more time: Who is your daddy, and what does he do?"

This is what the T-800 sees. Arnold himself sees in green – for money

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **■ PUBLISHER** ATARI **■ DEVELOPER** BLACK OPS **■ RELEASE** FALL

KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER

XBOX'S CREATURE FEATURE

Rare originally debuted Kameo as a GameCube title, but (following Microsoft's acquisition of the company) it is now one of Xbox's most exciting titles of next year. While the jury is still out on Rare's Grabbed by the Ghoulies; this title demonstrates all the gameplay depth, graphical detail, and innovative concepts that were the hallmark of the legendary development house's best work with Nintendo.

Players assume the role of Kameo, a fairy princess who must rescue the six Elemental Ancestors from an evil troll named Thorn. In her pursuit of Thorn, she'll combat a variety of fantasy-based creatures and solve different sorts of puzzles, which Rare has built around the attributes of 18 allied monsters.

Before Kameo can morph into these allied monsters, she must catch them. Rare – the purveyors of the idea "bigger and more always means better" – has built an additional gameplay mechanic around capturing them. First, Kameo's cohort Meepo detects a potential monster partner in the environment. Next, players must snag it through an elaborate-looking gameplay mechanic that actually resembles those found in fishing titles. Once in your possession, you simply need to wait a certain amount of time for your creature to mature.

Rare has only shown a few allies at this point, but they seem interesting and fun, nonetheless. The first resembles a humanoid plant with boxing gloves that is most advantageous in melee encounters with numerous enemies. The second one is made of rocks and has the ability to launch projectiles or execute a super move. The last ally creature looks like a caterpillar. We have yet to witness its abilities, but we presume they will involve digging.

Although Rare remains secretive, it reveals, "Gamers can also capture other incidental creatures such as worms and butterflies which have a secret purpose." We suspect that "incidental creatures" are those that Kameo cannot morph into, but if apprehended, endow her with special abilities like flying – although this is an assumption we're making based on screenshots featuring Kameo with and without wings.

Couple all this with the fighting and puzzle components, and it seems as if all the bad press surrounding Rare's E3 showing might be a bit premature. Given this game's high concept and the main character's shape-shifting ability, it certainly has the chance to be one of the most rewarding third-person action games in Xbox history.
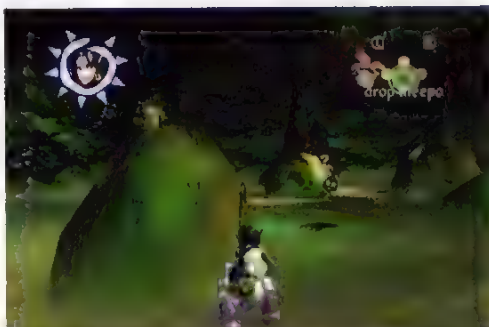
Kameo can use the stealth to sneak up on critters
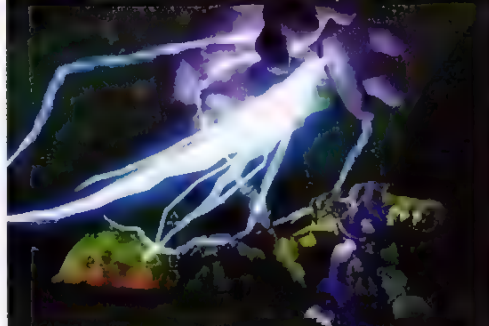
Each ally monster is also of an element type – earth, wind, fire, etc.
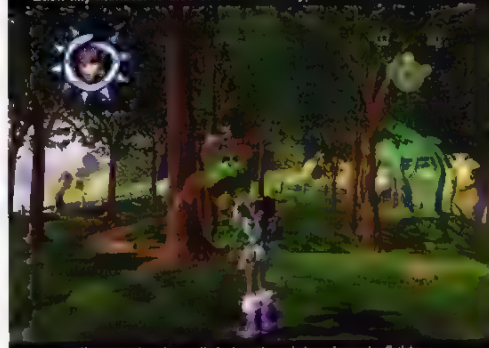
They start out small, but mature into adequate fighters
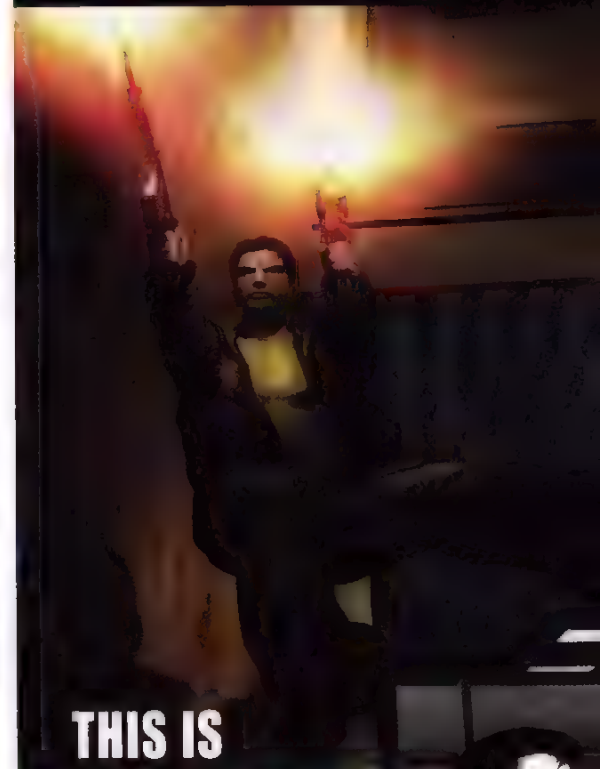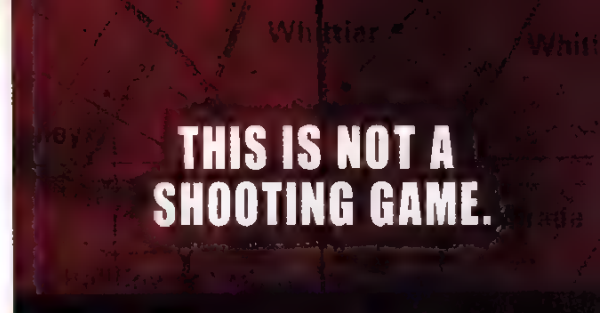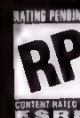
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** RARE ■ **RELEASE** SPRING 2004

EVERQUEST ONLINE ADVENTURES: FRONTIERS

GET A TAN!

Why do you need more EverQuest? Don't you know that you look like a pasty blob? Maybe we shouldn't be telling you that Frontiers has enough new stuff in it to choke a holstein, but we'll do it anyway. You look like you could use an additional 10 levels for that 50th level character you've coddled into existence. Ga-CHANG! We waved our plus-four Wand of Nerdiness, and it is so. What's that? You're still not satisfied? Fine, how about a new race and a new class to deal with...Ver-PLAUCK!!! There, now you've got orcs and alchemists. Man, are we hooking you up or what? Because orcs haven't gotten stupid yet (the game is set well before the PC version), they're able to become necromancers in addition to their typical classes. Since we're feeling so generous, we'll also give you an eBay-esque item auctioning system that allows players to bid on items that other players have put up for sale. Once the bid has won, the money is taken out of the buyer's bank account, and the item appears. Oh, and we'll also give you a bunch of new skills, areas to explore, monsters to kill, and items to find. Zing-BLIXANAINSIAMZXCCXX!!!!!

Dangerous new creatures are just one of the things to look forward to

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
■ **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
■ **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
■ **RELEASE** FALL

WARCRAFT III: FROZEN THRONE

MIGHT MAKES RIGHT

The evolution of the WarCraft series has been a lengthy and interesting one. With each successive title there's always been a slight altering of the core gameplay. The most dramatic of these changes came with the advent of WarCraft III and its persistent heroes. Frozen Throne is looking to take that idea and make it a much bigger part of your experience. This increasingly individualized play will elicit a number of maps where players will spend more time with their heroes than they will pumping out offensive and defensive fodder at their bases. To this end, a Hero Stash, found at the beginning of assorted missions, will allow you to place up to six additional items for your Hero to peruse at his or her heart's content.

Also updated has been how you progress through the different maps. On some occasions, you'll find yourself reentering an area you've already been to, but exploring a section that was previously unavailable to you due to any number of juicy circumstances that Blizzard is so adept in creating. Furthermore, the famed CG department has been hard at work creating new dazzling imagery that we all play for hours to see. Although these updates are nice, one thing is for certain: Gone are the days of leading a faceless horde against another faceless horde. The story progression and character building have received an enormous amount of attention, and you may find that Frozen Throne plays a bit more like an RPG than it does an RTS.

New units and locales are a couple of things Blizzards has in store for you

Naval battles will break up the land-locked levels

It wouldn't be WarCraft without a lot of poundin'

In-game cutscenes will further complement their CG brethren
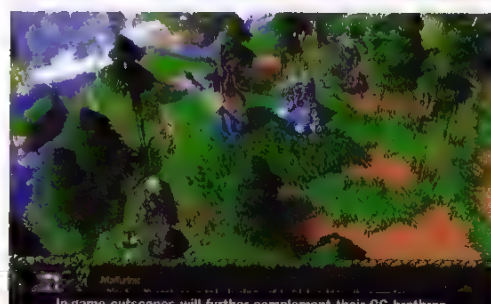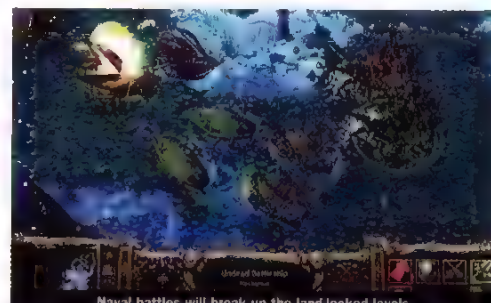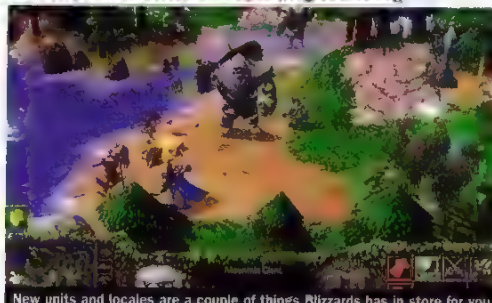
■ **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE AND LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD ■ **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD
■ **RELEASE** JULY 1

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: OPERATION SURMA

IMPOSSIBLY DELICIOUS!

Atari is seeking to take the latest installment of the Mission Impossible series in a new direction – one obviously influenced by a little game called Splinter Cell. However, given that high-tech skullduggery is what MI is all about, it's hard to fault Atari for attempting to put a new twist on one of the high watermarks in console stealth. Based on the game's E3 showing, we're very excited and can safely say that this game will have everything but Tom Cruise dancing around in his underwear.

Like Sam Fisher, Ethan Hunt can perform a variety of stealthy moves and employ numerous crazy gadgets to aid him in his exploits. His stealth techniques consist of creeping, disposing of bodies, choke holds, methods of distraction, and a silencer. Although he lacks Sam's limber ability to do the splits, Ethan's special binoculars more than compensate. With them, he can photograph foes, send their mugs to headquarters, and have their faces converted into one of those nifty lifelike masks! This helps Ethan infiltrate areas previously off limits, and creates an open-ended dynamic unique to the series.

Operation Surma also draws inspiration from its film counterparts. In one such case, Ethan dangles from a ceiling in an attempt to bypass the security alarms of a building, which is obviously reminiscent of Tom Cruise hanging from the ventilation ducts in the CIA building. Between the two movies, many other scenes stick out too, so let's hope Atari doesn't stop here.

Fortunately, at least one element in Surma will be new: the story. A secret underground group has developed a revolutionary microchip called ICEWorm that allows the user to disable any security system, rendering powerless the world's largest organizations. Your mission (no, we won't say it) is to destroy the chip before the creators can sell it and ruin the free world's economy. It's not going to be easy, but we think Ethan and the posse (which includes Luther, who is modeled after and voiced by Ving Rhames) are more than up to the task.

There will be a few stealth-specific attacks

Is that Tom Cruise? Naw

The lighting thus far is pretty impressive

"Play dead...or else!"

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** WINTER

GAME BOY ADVANCE

SWORD OF MANA

THE ORIGINAL SACRED FORCE

Originally branded as Final Fantasy Adventure for Game Boy back in '91, Sword of Mana really marked the beginning of the illustrious Mana series. The Secret of Mana – the SNES game that fans adored – was actually the sequel.

Borrowing elements from the numerous subsequent titles, Sword of Mana will offer amenities and enhancements to take advantage of the leap in technology. Foremost, the story will be fleshed out. Although the basic plot and protagonists remain the same, significantly more dialogue will heighten the depth of the characters and provide more insight into their plight. In fact, the demo already seems more text-heavy than the entire FFA title!

Similarly, Square Enix will refine Sword's gameplay by including elements that echo Secret of Mana's. Players travel and fight in a three-quarter, overhead view, have access to an items wheel, and receive aid from an AI-controlled partner that can be guided through a limited command set. And, rumor has it, connecting two units will allow a second gamer to join for cooperative play.

One particular difference is the manner in which the charge attacks function. Instead of waiting a certain amount of time for the meter to fill, you must fight. The more enemies you defeat, the faster the meter fills.

Graphically, it's a tad better than the SNES Secret of Mana

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME
■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 3

PHOTOPHILE

LUPIN THE THIRD

CIMA: THE ENEMY

Although nearly unknown in the States, Lupin the Third and his moral trio of crooks (Goemon, Jigen, and Fujiko) started their antics in the '70s in manga. Since then, they've been featured in thousands of comics, hundreds of TV shows, and a few dozen movies. Call Lupin a mixture of Robin Hood, James Bond, and Mel Brooks, and you kind of get an idea of what this universe is like. Hopefully, this video game incarnation will feature a compelling story that does justice to the series and gameplay mechanics that involve more than simply sneaking around, solving puzzles, and shooting and slicing a few enemies. Bandai has yet to name this game and only tentatively plans to release it in November.

The GBA can always use another original RPG to add to its already-large collection, and CIMA looks like a winner. Designed by Natsume, the game chronicles the conflict between humans and CMA – a race of semi-human creatures. Maybe it's because they unleashed that crappy alcoholic beverage on us. No wait; that's ZIMA. As the guardian between the two worlds, Arc has to try to keep the peace. NPCs can be used to solve puzzles and affect the story, and this title is touted as being filled with more emotion than an episode of *The View*. Look for it this winter.

GRADIUS V

Original shooters are becoming harder to find than Zubaz at a yacht club. Luckily, Konami is reinvigorating one of the most well-known horizontal shooters in video games: Gradius. Keeping its side-scrolling roots and old-school gameplay, the title's graphics have received more than just a shot, but a veritable fifth of vodka to the arm. The weapons and levels are brand new. You'll keep warm this winter with plenty of Gradius V's laser fire.

SIMCITY 4: RUSH HOUR

Lounge Lane
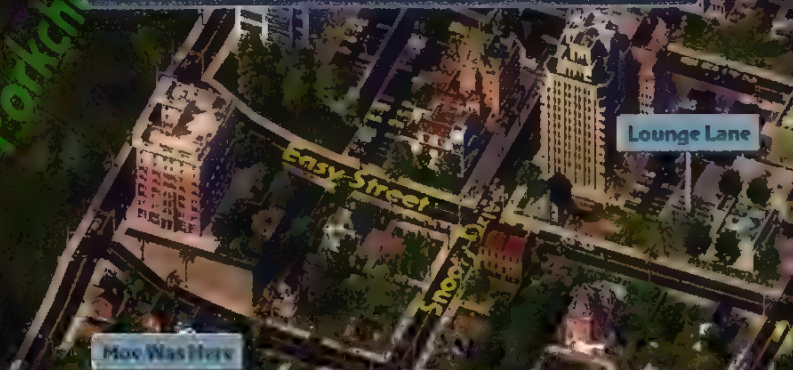
You're not the only one who hates traffic – Maxis does, too! The Rush Hour expansion pack is all about making the drive easier for your Sims. You'll be given an abundance of tools to root out the troubled spots in your transport grid, and with features like the new avenue builder, it'll be easier than ever to get the stoppage flowing. Included is the ability to name your streets and landmarks, and even take control of individual vehicles themselves. You'll also be able to chase down criminals to earn new structures and vehicles. Look forward to unsnarling gridlock this fall.

DOG'S LIFE

In Dog's Life, you will take the role of Jake, a dog who needs to put the kibosh on a nefarious dognapping scheme. Your success is determined by how well you take care of Jake, marking your territory, stealing, fighting, helping and hurting humans, and chasing cats. Dog's Life will introduce "Smell-o-Vision" – a first-person view where smells stand out as colors – and you'll be looking at the world through Jake's eyes. Developed by Frontier Developments, Dog's Life is currently only slated for release in Europe.

DESTRUCTION DERBY ARENAS
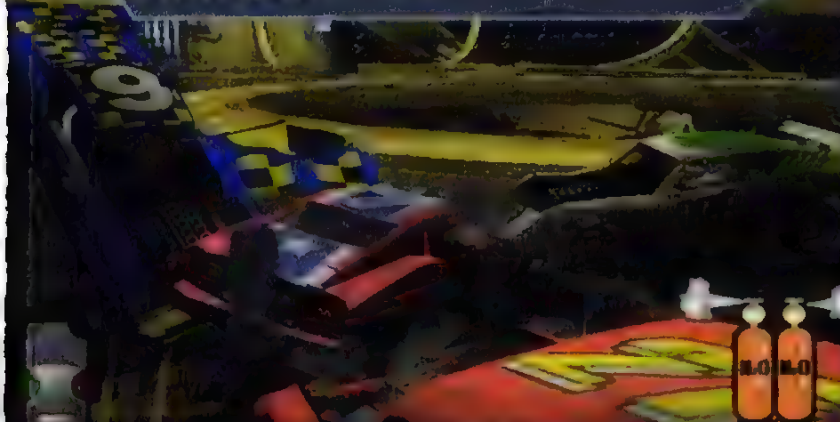
Steel bends; debris flies everywhere; no one is safe. No, it's not your orca fat upstairs neighbor doing Tae Bo again; we're talking demo derbies! This chaotic sub-genre has produced some great titles, most notably Psygonsis and Reflections' Destruction Derby 1 and 2 on the PSone. Now, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe is bringing the carnage to PlayStation 2 in Destruction Derby Arenas. Using next-gen technology, we'll see cars get totaled like never before in unbelievable environments. Sony hasn't set a release date – or even stated if it is U.S.-bound – so you'll have to recklessly motor around the Wal-Mart parking lot in your hatchback for a while longer. Watch out for that cart!

APOCALYPTICA

Oh no, it's Neo-Satan! Only the power of Xbox and third-person online shooting can dethrone him from his reign of darkness, with the pestilence and the hurting and the ravine. Up to eight people can have a blast on Xbox Live engaging in Deathmatch or Mission modes. Teams consist of four-person squads, tons of weapons, and a total disregard for personal safety. Konami brings the proposed end of days to us in November.

MYTHICA

As we've said before, to be successful in the glutted MMORPG market, you need to have a gimmick and gameplay. Microsoft is trying its hand at development this time (it published the Asheron's Call titles), and has honed in on what could be a very interesting idea. You'll find yourself as a reincarnated demigod in a mythical Norse environment. As you level-up your character, you and a group of friends (you could play alone if you wished) will have the ability to complete missions and quests in private sections of the game called Private Realm Modules. These areas will allow players to have a much more personalized experience in terms of NPC interaction, and objective possibilities can also be expanded. Mythica is set to release sometime next year.
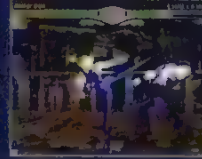
AHDY

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Classic Video Game Collecting, Chipotle Burritos And The Too-Much-Food Coma That Follows, Giant Ferris Wheels **Dislikes:** The Fact That I Don't Own A Super-Expensive Sports Car, Forums Peeps Who Freak Out Over Reviews **Current Favorite Games:** PlanetSide, Advance Wars 2, Gran Turismo 4, Virtua Fighter 4 EVO, Soul Calibur II, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic

Now retired from the rock scene, Andy spends endless hours locked in his home office; enjoying the benefits of high definition television and surround sound far away from those scary things he has often heard referred to as people. A longtime fan of Metroid, Andy has been reviewing video games professionally since the days of the 8-bit NES. While a big sports fan in real life, Andy isn't the first to line up for sports titles, but is always willing to put in the extra hours to play a good RPG or strategy game.

MATT

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Puzzle, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Jay-Z's S. Carter Collection Mixtape, Recording, *The Matrix Reloaded* Why Are Fanboys Acting Like It Killed Their Dog Or Something?, *Finding Nemo*, Smooth Jazz, Jazz Smoothies **Dislikes:** Looking Through Want Ads For Bassists, Pro Gear, Pro Attitude, Hunting Down Screenshots, Bouncing Checks **Current Favorite Games:** Downhill Domination, Jak II, Halo, Pac-Man

While record collecting, watching reality television, and playing video games might sound like a state of retarded adolescence, Matt manages to scrap together an almost meaningful existence out of these activities. His encyclopedic knowledge of pop culture is either amazing or annoying, depending on how close your desk is to his. Less esoteric than his colleagues, Matt prefers traditional action and platform games.

JUSTIN

Handle: The Digital Deviant **Expertise:** Action/Sports, Action/Adventure, Fighting, RPGs **Interests:** Finding A Good Charity, Pineapple Juice (Straight), Improving My Posture, Waterslides, Black Flag **Dislikes:** The Nation's Job/Unemployment Situation, Time Zones, The Lack Of Pineapple Juice In MN, Smooth Jazz **Current Favorite Games:** Downhill Domination, NBA Street Vol. 2, Enter the Matrix, Super Smash Bros. Melee

Unlike most gaming jabronis, Justin knows there's life outside video vegetation. He's a former GWAR slave and moonlights as wrestler Justin "Violent" Lee in the Minnesota independent scene, where he violently bonds with other sweaty males – a practice that just gets blank stares when attempted on other GI reviewers. Justin's gaming tastes are highly old-school, and he plays 16-bit classics as often as he plugs into the latest titles.

CHET

Handle: The Joystick Jockey **Expertise:** Fighting, Action, RPG, FPS, Shooter, Action/Platform **Interests:** New Prospects, Minneapolis, Graduate School, Riding Bikes, Dog Park, *28 Days Later* **Dislikes:** Broken Monitors, Lunds' Lack Of Organic Bread, *The Haunting Of Hill House*, The Mad Ghoul **Current Favorite Games:** Street Fighter Alpha 3, Mortal Kombat II, Actraiser 2, Space MegaForce, Samurai Showdown 2, King Of Fighters '98, Super Castlevania IV

Chet considers gaming to be a lifestyle, which means that he spends a ridiculous amount of time with his games. When he's not in an intense session of UT, or relaxing with one of his consoles, he's hopelessly seeking out arcades where fighting games still rule. Although he places all other activities at a distant second, he realizes the importance of society. Unfortunately, mimicking the motions for Dragon Punches and Fireballs only confuses and scares most people.

REINER

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** Console Online Gaming, Game Boy Player (Advance Wars 2 Looks Sweet On A TV!), Coca-Cola Classic (The Drink Of Video Game Champions), High-Def Sports **Dislikes:** NASCAR (If I See Another Car Make A Left Turn, I'm Going Postal), The Downfall Of 3DO (No More Army Men??? Ah...Bummer) **Current Favorite Games:** PlanetSide, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Silent Hill 3, Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising, Shaq-Fu

Reiner considers himself the biggest Star Wars fan in the world. Along with his impressive collection of Star Wars action figures, he has seen the trilogy 669 times. A fan of all game types, role-playing games are his strong suit. In his nine years as a professional gamer, Reiner has achieved the impossible. Penetrating the pixel boundary, he not only plays games, he's in them. Thus far, Reiner has appeared in Dragon Force, Alundra, and Perfect Dark. He will also be featured as playable characters in two forthcoming releases.

KRISTIAN

Handle: The Video Viking **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, Sports, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Craps (The Gambling Game, Not "Having The"), The New Led Zeppelin DVD Set, People With First Names For Last Names (John Mark, James Kevin, etc), 2003 Nissan Altima 3.5 SEs **Dislikes:** *Everybody Loves Raymond* (Not Me, Jackass!), Bird Poop, Leon Trotski **Current Favorite Games:** Day Of Defeat, Madden NFL 2003 (Xbox), PlanetSide, Gallop Racer 2003: A New Breed

Kristian enjoys opening a can of whoop-ass on his buddies at the ping pong table, then running off to the driving range for a lesson in humility and anger management. The original text-driven Zork started Kristian on the gaming road; Ultima 6, NES Baseball, and Zelda made sure he stayed. Still an avid RPG fan, he can always find time to pound out a good sports game.

KATO

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Jim Or James Brown, *Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix*, New Coke (Gone, But Not Forgotten. Of Course, I Like The Notion And Not The Taste) **Dislikes:** The Cable TV Idea That Talking Louder Makes You Right, Smoother Jazz **Current Favorite Games:** Gitaroo Man, NHL 2K3, NHL 2004, NASCAR Thunder 2004, ESPN NFL Football, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic

When not buying copious amounts of records, Kato can be found exercising good taste, feeding the goats, and trying in vain to update his wardrobe into the 21st century. Like other young men of his generation, he quickly found out that the one true real world application of good grades was the free arcade tokens that were given out as a reward. With allegiance to none, he takes on every game with an equal eye.

LISA

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Puzzle, RPGs, Action/Platform, Horror **Interests:** New Cell Phones, Frisbee Golf, Hummus, *Everything Is Illuminated* By Jonathan Safran Foer (The Best Book That I've Read In The Last Five Years) **Dislikes:** Losing Stuff, Laundry, Dead Cell Phones **Current Favorite Games:** Uru: Ages Beyond Myst, Resident Evil Outbreak, Magic Pengel: The Quest For Color

Barring a brief and ill advised "I want to be popular, so I'll stop playing games" phase in late junior high, Lisa has been subjecting her friends to drawn out boss battles since age 8. She has been known to wax philosophically about why Jigglypuff is desperately under-appreciated and wish that some "big" games were more fun, even if that means less pretty.

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

THE SCORING SYSTEM

Game Informer's rating system ranges from 0 to 10, and is similar to school grading. 7 is average, 9 and above is exemplary work, 5 and below is a failure. Aside from concept, entertainment, graphics, playability, sound, and replay value (all explained to the right), other factors that influence a game's final score are how much game you get for your money and how all the game's elements come together.

10	Perfection. One of the best games of all time, if not THE best game of all time. This game is virtually flawless, and thus this rating is rarely given out.	
9	Worth owning. Fans of the genre should definitely enjoy this game, but even those who don't normally like this type of game may find themselves getting hooked.	
8	Worth playing. Still a great game, but arguably so. It may not be the best ever, but there's enough to keep your fingers wrapped around the controller for some time.	
7	Worth renting. Unless you're a fledgling gamer, you've probably seen everything this game has to offer before. Still, just checking it out won't ruin your weekend.	
6	Limited appeal. There are always a few people who will fall in love with a game of this caliber, but for the most part, those playing it will be yearning for something more.	
5 below	Garbage. From this point down, it's just a matter of how much of a failure the game is. The lower the score, the more you're hating life for playing it.	

CONCEPT

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

GRAPHICS

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

SOUND

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

PLAYABILITY

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

ENTERTAINMENT

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

REPLAY VALUE

The longevity of the title.

- **High** – You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.
- **Moderately High** – Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
- **Moderate** – Good for a few months or a few times through.
- **Moderately Low** – After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
- **Low** – You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

eC	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.
E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.
T	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.
M	Content suitable for persons ages 17 and older.
AO	Content suitable only for adults.
RP	Product is awaiting final rating.

XBOX PC HANDHELD

Ghost Recon:
Island Thunder pg. 96

EVE
Online pg. 101

Mortal Kombat
Tournament pg. 104

NEWBIE CHEAT SHEET

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

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

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

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

action – A term we use for games like Zone of the Enders and Gauntlet

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

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

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

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

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

CG – Computer-Generated graphics

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

eBay – Place to find great deals, money vacuum

fighting A term we use for games like Street Fighter and Dead or Alive

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

FPS – Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First Person Shooters like Doom, GoldenEye, and Unreal Tournament

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA Game Boy Advance

GBC – Game Boy Color

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

Isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like StarCraft or Red Alert 2

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

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

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

minigame – A small, simple game within a larger one

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

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

N64 – Nintendo 64

NES – Nintendo Entertainment System

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

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

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

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

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

PS2 Sony PlayStation 2

PSone – Sony PlayStation

puzzle A term we use for games like Tetris and Chu Chu Rocket

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

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

shooter – A term we use for games like Mars Matrix and Gradius

SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System

sports A term we use for games like Madden NFL

strategy – A term we use for games like Command & Conquer and Fallout Tactics

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

STAR WARS® KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC™

GAME OF THE MONTH
STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Set 4,000 years before the Galactic Empire ruled the galaxy, Knights of the Old Republic takes players to an unexplored sector in the Star Wars universe, where Jedi and Sith number in the thousands. With BioWare at the development helm, this is one of the most comprehensive RPGs to date, allowing players to choose their destiny. Will you follow the light side of the Force and strive for peace? Or, will you follow the dark side and rule the galaxy with an iron fist? The choice is yours. pg. 94

PC GAME OF THE MONTH
STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II

Trekkies, you're about to have yet another reason to ignore your usual day-to-day activities. Elite Forces II has all of the action and sparkle of a high-end first-person shooter coupled with the intricate Star Trek universe. Who says you can't go two days without food? pg. 100

GAME INFORMER

PLAYSTATION 2

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION

STILL VIRTUALLY ASS-KICKING

"...consider it a stand-alone update priced fairly at 20 clams."

D on't mistake Evolution as an entirely new entry in the series; rather, consider it a stand-alone update priced fairly at 20 clams. As such, players get the same stellar gameplay with a few improvements and additions, including touched-up graphics, redesigned stages, two original characters, and most significantly, a new gameplay mode dubbed Quest.

Quest thrusts you into an arcade gaming experience that you would encounter if you lived in Japan. Players choose a character and virtually travel to different arcades (referred to as game centers in Japan) to battle against other competitors. Unfortunately, this traveling merely involves moving a cursor to various locations on an overhead map. Although Sega does a fantastic job of creating AI that not only gets progressively harder, but varies in fighting style in an attempt to simulate the human experience; it would be more engaging if you could walk around in a virtual world seeking out competitors and tournaments. Perhaps this idea is the basis for VF 5 or an online edition! We can only hope.

Furthermore, Quest supports certain tournaments that are governed by different rules – much like those found in Soul Calibur 2. In one type (Hyper Action Battle), Sega greatly reduced the pause in between moves, thereby enabling you to

create insanely large combo strings. In another event called Seesaw Game, each competitor begins with half an energy bar. As the name implies, you add energy to your life bar according to the amount of damage you inflict, and the same goes for your opponent. This energy tug-of-war, as you'd suspect, often results in some very intense matches.

Winning these battles in Quest mode mainly yields money and prizes. With your dough, you can purchase a whole host of secrets such as new models, body parts, and accessories. The only other reward for victory is respect. Beating certain virtual competitors will earn you their badges, and once you win any game center's tournament, you automatically become its champion. However, if you continue to play at that arcade, those defeated foes will challenge you for their badges and your spot.

Despite all of the wonderful effort put into making Evolution a must-buy, I do have a few minor gripes. First, the throwing mechanic should require a little more technique. Second, Sega might discontinue manufacturing the original VF 4 in favor of Evolution, which doesn't seem detrimental on its surface. However, Evolution lacks the AI training component from Kumite mode. – **CHET**

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA ■ **DEVELOPER** SEGA ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 12
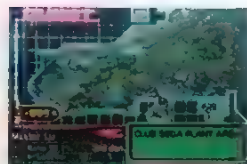
Quest mode is loaded with different locations and match types
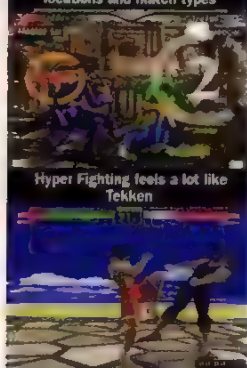
Hyper Fighting feels a lot like Tekken

A bonus 10th Anniversary Edition of VF 1 is included

The graphics are touched up and look a bit crisper

Throwing your opponent is an easy way to knock off a lot of health

SECOND OPINION

As far as I'm concerned, there are three fighting franchises that I think are truly brilliant: Virtua Fighter, Street Fighter and Soul Calibur. Sure, there are some good ones out there today and in the past, but these are the pinnacles in my book. So while Evo may only be a semi-sequel, it still delivers some amazing gameplay and visuals. Sadly, this edition of the game removes the awesome Kumite mode, but it does replace it with the incredibly entertaining Quest mode. Like Kumite, you can still gain titles, but the added attraction is that you work your way through arcades earning respect and winning tournaments. The fighting is always intense, but once you add the pressure of a tournament, it makes for some very exciting matches that had me swearing at the TV in both the agony of defeat and the thrill of victory. Add two new characters, a 10th Anniversary Edition of the original, a cheap price tag, and this game is a no-brainer. Buy it.

ANDY – 9.25

PLAYSTATION 2

DOWNHILL DOMINATION

CIVILIZATION'S SPEEDY DECLINE

"This game does the equivalent of grabbing you by the groin and tossing you off a cliff."

Rocketing down a steep crag with nothing but a foam egg protecting your fragile melon sounds like a damn good idea for a video game. Until now, it's been an untapped premise. The obscure PSone game, No Fear Downhill Mountain Bike Racing, comes to mind; but the only accolade it received was Longest Name. Enter Incog, fresh off the disappointing War of the Monsters, but still in the pink from the amazing Twisted Metal: Black.

Downhill Domination is definitely influenced by EA BIG's SSX and Freekstyle. It's a race game where tricks abound. It also alludes to PSone's Jet Moto. If I were a movie reviewer, I'd say something about a "white-knuckle thrill ride," but thankfully I'm not a movie reviewer. Kidding aside, this game does the equivalent of grabbing you by the groin and tossing you off a cliff – which is much more entertaining than it may sound.

The game's speed is flat-out intense and puts many futuristic racers to shame. Much of the velocity can be attributed to the downward slant the races take. Through much of the 24-plus levels, you'll be tilted at an 80-degree angle. Obstacles (llamas, passersby, etc.) and pickups (speed bursts, weapon upgrades, etc.) appear almost out of nowhere; and the decline allows you to get more air than an oxygen bar.

These stages are massive – the largest I think I've ever seen in a racing game. Not only are they long, but there's a lot of room for lateral movement and plenty of alternate paths. They also really take advantage of their locations. I could barely see during the Siberian snowstorm, and I had to avoid lava in the Hawaii level. City streets, waterfalls, and dark caverns also show up.

Physics play a big role here. It's as if Sony told Incog, "We lost Rainbow Studios [makers of ATV Offroad Fury], and it's your job to pick up the slack." When you go careening into a tree, your body flops around painfully. Also, you have to lean forward or backward to take optimal advantage of the contours of the levels.

Racing isn't all you do. Tricks are a big part of Downhill Domination's charm. You've most likely seen them all before, but they do add to the fun. Put some distance between your wheels and the ground, then bang on the shoulder buttons and triangle to execute some sweet moves. At the end of the race, you're awarded cash based off your tricking.

You also get money for combat (think Road Rash) and ranking. With this capital, you can upgrade parts or unlock new items and features. The list of upgrades is a little shallow, so you won't be doing it as often as with your baller in NBA Street Vol. 2, for example. This, and the fact that the interface and HUD aren't as user-friendly as I'd like them to be, are my only complaints in an otherwise entertaining offering. Fans of both racers and extreme games will likely put Downhill Domination at the top of the gaming pile. – JUSTIN

■ STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA ■ DEVELOPER INCOG
■ RELEASE JULY 22

The local wildlife doesn't like you imposing

Take out your frustrations by beating down opponents post-race

There's a first-person view that pulls out during tricks

Spend enough money and you can mount a sheep!

"I'd tank you not to roll over me, sir."

SECOND OPINION

I have to admit that I actually mocked this game around the office when it was announced. After having played the crappy mountain biking sequences of Infogrames' forgotten Dreamcast "gem" Xtreme Sports, I just didn't think that pedal-powered vehicles could make for an exciting racing game. Leave it to Twisted Metal creators Incog to prove me wrong. I was simply blown away by this title's sense of speed, outrageous and massive track designs, and accurate control. Downhill Domination was definitely inspired by SSX (especially the trick system), but the bike physics and mechanics definitely give it a feel all its own. At times the sense of speed is almost overwhelming – reaching Wipeout or F-Zero speeds on an 80-degree slope strewn with rocks and trees will put your reflexes to the test. Although it's not a terribly deep game, the long Super Career mode is very satisfying, and the action itself is gripping enough that I never once got bored. Although its premise may be off-putting, trust me when I tell you that Downhill Domination is one of the best new extreme sports games in a long while.
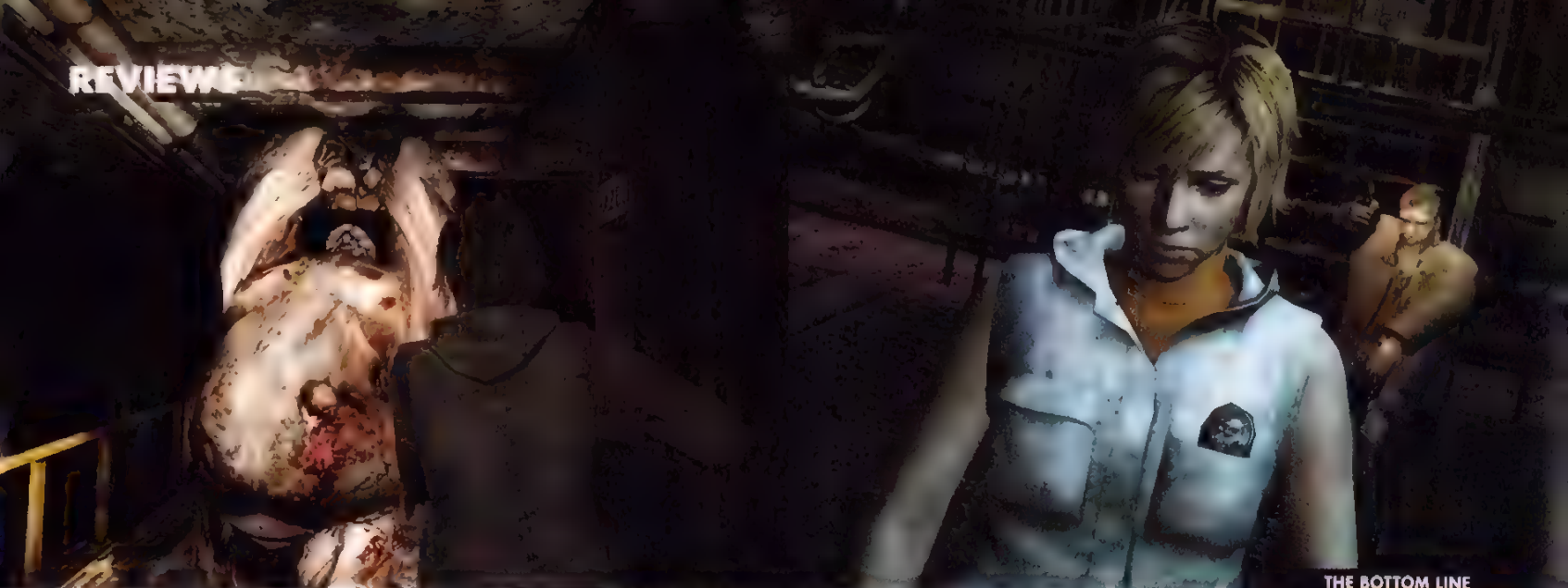
MATT – 8.5

"...Silent Hill 3 embodies the true essence of horror and never once gives the player a moment to relax or breathe."

SILENT HILL 3
HORROR PERSONIFIED

Silent Hill 3 weaves an unnerving web of psychological horror that is illustrated with some of the most grotesque and sadistic visuals seen in any game, television show, or motion picture. Just the thought of a woman eating a fetus is disturbing as is, but in the world of Silent Hill 3, it's an ordinary everyday occurrence and something that you'll have to stomach continually during play. Nerves of steel and the ability to accept the most shocking of content are an absolute necessity if you dare venture into this ghastly game.

Through a slow pace, frightening "what just happened?" moments, and the never-ending sensation that something horrible is about to occur; Silent Hill 3 achieves horror in a truly classical sense reminiscent of such films as The Shining and Rosemary's Baby. Players step into the shoes of Heather Morris, a somber teen who suddenly finds herself alone in a demonic alternate reality. As Heather progresses deeper into this strange new world, the plot and true conflict slowly emerge. As you can probably guess, this is one of those stories where you won't know everything until the credits roll. Much like The Sixth Sense, Silent Hill 3 is riddled with clues, allowing players to formulate their own theories prior to the climax. I can safely say, however, that no matter what you figure out, the last five minutes of gameplay will leave you speechless.

As clever as the storytelling dynamic is, the gameplay actually leaves much to be desired. Heather's movements are very robotic, and her combat prowess is limited to standing in place and firing or slashing until she or the adversary perishes. The enemy AI is also suspect and usually has no defense to stop Heather from simply running by and avoiding conflict altogether. On top of this, the puzzle-solving element – something that the series is heralded for – has been toned down considerably, so you won't find yourself racking your brain over a riddle. Most of the puzzles revolve around scouring the massive worlds to find an item that can be used to open a door. As a whole, the gameplay is uninspired and hasn't evolved since the first entry in the series.

Konami concentrated all of its development efforts on the storytelling and visual atmosphere. With blood seeping out of cracks on a wall, invisible children whispering as their bloody footsteps appear right in front of you, and sweeping shadows that move accordingly to changing light sources; Silent Hill 3 embodies the true essence of horror and never once gives the player a moment to relax or breathe.

Play-wise, there's not much going on, but the graphics will surely suck you in and the story will keep you attached until the very end. – **REINER**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 5
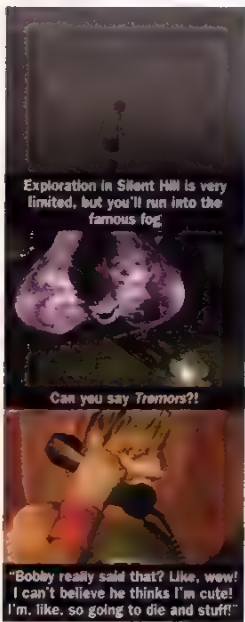
Exploration in Silent Hill is very limited, but you'll run into the famous fog

Can you say Tremors?!

"Bobby really said that? Like, wow! I can't believe he thinks I'm cute! I'm, like, so going to die and stuff!"
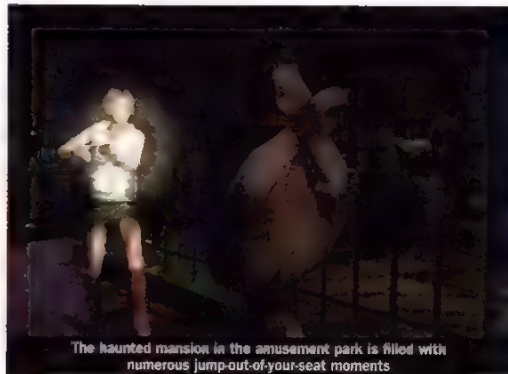
The haunted mansion in the amusement park is filled with numerous jump-out-of-your-seat moments

What is this...barbecued dog?

"Hmmm....Tastes like chicken!"

PLAYSTATION 2

ALIENS VERSUS PREDATOR: EXTINCTION

EVERYONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM

There is about as much point to doing this game as there is to rolling around in a room full of tacks (I hate when that happens). Throwing Aliens, Predators, and Marines into a free-for-all has the potential to be bloody good fun, but is this really what you had in mind?

Probably the worst thing about this game is that RTS fans can get their kicks from the genre elsewhere on the PC – and done better, too. You'll miss things like camera control, intelligent AI, and set battle formations for your units. Also frustrating is the fact that you don't carry over supplies or accomplishments from mission to mission. You have to start over from square one every time. This is particularly bad because there are some cool upgrades to attain.

Unlike other similar RTS titles, Extinction excels at differentiating its species. Aliens are cool because they build their numbers by infesting hosts; Marine dropships make finding Atmos key; and Predators can use their cloaking ability for stealth. If there's one thing I like that pulls Extinction away from most RTSs, it's that the game largely cuts out your typical resource management, letting you concentrate on searching and destroying. Even this is a burden, however, as you waste lots of time traversing the map looking for action. You can look, but you won't find it here. – **KATO**

- **Concept:**
  Sounds like the fight of the century. Yes, that's what it sounds like

- **Graphics:**
  A fairly bland part of the game that fails to stand out whatsoever

- **Sound:**
  A rich experience in both orchestration and sound effects

- **Playability:**
  Lacks a number of amenities common in the genre

- **Entertainment:**
  Not wholly unredeeming – but not a lot else, either

- **Replay Value:**
  Moderately Low

SECOND OPINION

Ah HA! EA is able to make mistakes! I don't get to say this too often about something that comes down the EA pike – this is a stinker. A big stinker. Think of how the bathroom smells after your fat aunt Edna has been in there for 25 minutes. To its credit, Extinction did attempt to meld an idea (Aliens versus Predator and its sequel were fantastic PC titles) that's had some success into a new genre, but to no avail. The gameplay is simply too stunted and sloppy for one to get into the plot. Sure, each race requires a little finesse to clear their missions, but the constant need to visit and revisit the same technology you've built over and over is irritating. This title could have benefited from some persistent characters and a better research structure. If you're a newbie to the world of RTSs, you might think you've got gold on your hands here, but the simple truth of the matter is that Extinction simply doesn't do enough to gain the respect of an RTS veteran.

KRISTIAN – 6.5

Aliens' infestation ability makes for a mobile force

A very welcome sight

Specialist infantry units love to BBQ

Guys standing around in battle? Yeah, that looks about right

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** FOX INTERACTIVE/ELECTRONIC ARTS
■ **DEVELOPER** ZONO, INC. ■ **RELEASE** JULY 21

PLAYSTATION 2

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS
A DEVIL WITH D-CUPS

> "It's 2003, yet I'm still stuck turning six hidden gears in order to open one friggin' door? That's just archaic."

A million-selling franchise finally making the jump to the current console crop should be cause for celebration. With Tomb Raider, however, the buzz has been more negative than anything. Going into this review, I resolved to transcend all my preconceived notions and just play the damn game. Unfortunately, this resulted in me screaming, "Damn this game!"

Angel of Darkness is a disappointment on all fronts and a crystal-clear example of a stubborn developer unwilling to change with the times. Lara Croft still has her charm and is a dynamic character, but the game she's dropped into isn't fit for a woman who has a pair of such gigantic…er, movies to her credit.

Control has always been a sore spot with Tomb Raider, and Core made some valiant attempts to correct it. Instead of requiring you to line up perfectly to climb a ladder or flick a switch, Lara does it for you. This brings up its own problems, as you'll grab a ladder while passing by it. Walk and stealth modes are toggled, which is helpful. No doubt attempting to draw praise for having "RPG aspects," Tomb Raider now makes Lara level-up certain abilities. For example, there are doors that won't budge until she "feels stronger," and moves like the sprint that aren't immediately available. While refreshing at first, it comes off as a cheap tease in execution.

Tomb Raider uses the tried-and-true method of increasing replay by repeated menial tasks. Tried as in trying my patience, and true as in truly aggravating. With all the hoops you have to jump through just to get to the next section, I was expecting a doggie treat and a tummy scratching for my effort. It's 2003, yet I'm still stuck turning six hidden gears in order to open one friggin' door? That's just archaic. Games like Deus Ex and Eternal Darkness have proven that puzzles don't have to be ridiculously monotonous.

To me, the series' most memorable moments are when you're in a massive, five-story area, making daring jumps and taking out enemies from a higher elevation. These events are here (the nightclub scene is especially cool), but they aren't nearly as numerous as I'd like. Instead, you have to sift through endless conversations with French denizens, or search for ancient symbols at an archeological dig. A satisfying blend of action and adventure is never established.

Only the most devoted Lara Croft followers will get their money's worth with this release. The rest of us will grow increasingly frustrated with the overly anal and buggy gameplay, and pawn it off on our gaming newbie friends. Angel of Darkness just proves the point: You can't go Tomb again. – **JUSTIN**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS ■ **DEVELOPER** CORE ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

Hanging out in the nightclub is definitely sweet

Every Tomb Raider fan's dream: four levers to pull!!!

The hand-to-hand combat is decent
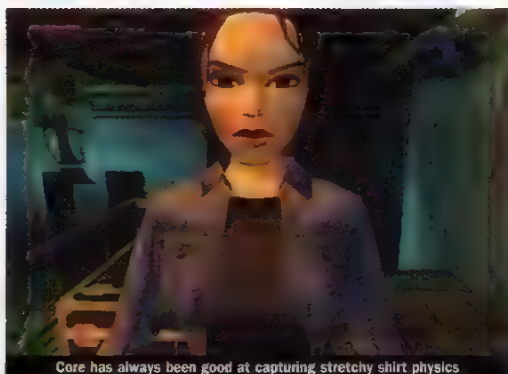
Core has always been good at capturing stretchy shirt physics
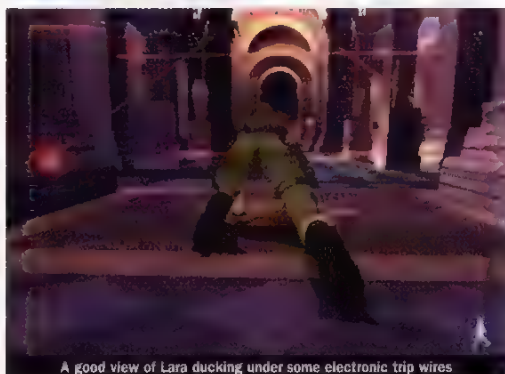
A good view of Lara ducking under some electronic trip wires

SECOND OPINION

My, how the mighty have fallen. Tomb Raider's PlayStation 2 debut may be a little easier on the eyes; but, at the end of the day, it's still the same song and dance for Lara. Actually, that's not quite fair. I always found the Tomb Raider games to be enjoyable. Due to the lack of innovation between each installment, it was just a matter of how much of it I could handle. Angel of Darkness is by no stretch of the imagination a respectable game. The controls are incredibly clunky (even more so than before), and the majority of puzzles are tedious, time-consuming, and idiotic. The biggest kicker, however, is the dreadfully slow pacing. Within the first 10 hours of play, I encountered maybe (and I stress the word *maybe*) 10 enemies. Nothing spells excitement like one battle an hour. Simply said, Tomb Raider is tragedy plus time, stress, and boredom.

REINER – 5

F1 CAREER CHAMPIONSHIP

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 23
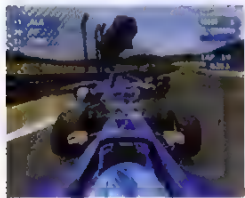
EA Sports has stretched out the Career mode, but this game as a whole is still incomplete. While F1 driving demands a high skill level, I don't appreciate how your car's handling lacks that fine touch. Also frustrating is the poor AI, average graphics, and an almost non-existent damage system. While EA Sports is trying to give this sport depth, this game seems to neglect other areas – almost a role reversal from previous efforts. The result is a title with an odd un-EA Sports feel to it. – **KATO**

E 7

SUMMER HEAT BEACH VOLLEYBALL

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 17

Sex doesn't always sell (see BMX XXX), but I still wish this game was a bit sexier. The play is serviceable – the control scheme grows on you – but the character models are quite shoddy. It lacks depth, despite minigames and unlockables. I want upgradable characters like NBA Street, or DOA Xtreme's attention to detail (i.e. hotties). Summer Heat is a good volleyball sim, but that's all it is. Thus, it's geared toward hardcore v-ball fans – all 11 of you. – **JUSTIN**

E 6.75

SMASH CARS

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** METRO 3D
■ **RELEASE** JULY 24

I try to avoid cliches like "been there, done that," but that Mountain Dew slogan is begging to be used in reference to this game. Like RC Revenge and Stunt GP, Smash Cars is a remote-controlled racer with little new or unique. To make matters worse, the visuals are a throw-back to the early days of the PS2, if not Dreamcast. There's novelty in human characters that pick up and toss your car if you run into them, and some depth to the upgrade system; but I can't think of a good reason why you'd want to play Smash Cars. – **MATT**

E 4

FREESTYLE METALX

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 9-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 23

For a motocross game, MetalX is pretty hardcore. The soundtrack is stuffed with old-school heavy hits (Motörhead, Megadeth, Twisted Sister); the levels are muy grande; and there are a bunch of modes that encompass all you can do on a bike. Those things don't make it a must-have by any means – especially with buggy collision, generic goals, and unattractive graphics. However, they keep it out of Suck City, and move it on up to Rentopolis or Buywhenitscheapsville. – **JUSTIN**

T 7

FREAKY FLYERS

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 4
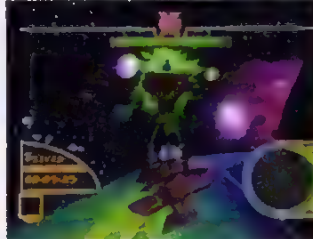
With 34 playable characters and expansive theme-driven levels that are overflowing with shortcuts, narrow passes, and interactive objects; Freaky Flyers definitely has what it takes to draw players into the fold. Once you get there, however, you'll be bored to death by the dullness and sheer simplicity of gameplay. The graphical quality is certainly impressive, and it does continually reward players with CG movies at the end of each stage and the occasional hidden character, but the meat of the game really has nothing going for it. The racing is slow as molasses, the weapon selection is pathetic, and it only supports two-player split-screen. – **REINER**

E 6

EJAY CLUBWORLD

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SIMULATION
■ **PUBLISHER** EMPIRE INTERACTIVE/CRAVE
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 16

While I could live out my virtual DJ fantasies with almost any title like this, I just didn't get my groove on with Ejay Clubworld. This is mostly due to the interface, which doesn't offer the ease-of-use of MTV Music Generator 2 or the on-the-fly sample manipulation of Music Maker. I am annoyed by the fact that you can't place samples between measures (I'm a geek!). It's definitely got a lot of depth, and techno fans will love the fact that it's endorsed by the legendary Carl Cox and features many famous real-world clubs. Still, the devil is in the details, and Ejay Clubworld's clunky controls will wear on you after a while. – **MATT**

E 7

THE ITALIAN JOB

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

Every time you pass a mission in Story mode, the game asks if you are sure you want to play the next section. You want to know why? Because it is serious gut-check time and you really have to ask yourself if you want to continue playing this dreadful game. The missions are short, the graphics are average at best, the playcontrol is horrendous, and having to listen to the monotone voice-over relaying the story is like listening to fingernails grading on a chalkboard. The circuit and stunt modes are better, but not by much. Sure, Mini Coopers are neat little cars, but I think I would rather be run over by one than play this game again. – **ANDY**

T 5

MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER
A 32-BIT HALO

THE BOTTOM LINE

M **7.25**

I f Bungie Studios developed Halo for the PSone, I have a feeling that the scope of gameplay, cinematic cutscene quality, and graphical details would be identical to Mace Griffin on PlayStation 2. Yes, this is a major slam against Mace, but at the same time and in a very roundabout way it's a bit of a compliment.

You can clearly see similarities between Mace and Halo throughout this game's coding. The levels feature a plethora of scripted events, which makes your surroundings feel alive, and are used to build the story and deliver the sensation that you're but a pawn in the unfolding conflict. The game also transitions seamlessly between running and gunning to manning a vessel in space. It's an impressive feature, but it basically goes to waste. The space combat portions are incredibly short, which is a godsend since the vehicle controls are abysmal.

The FPS portions of the game are decent. The weapon selection is well rounded, the game makes use of a slick lock-on technology for close-quarters combat, and enemy types are varied between stages. At the same time, the AI is generations behind where the genre is today. All said, it plays fairly well. It's not the best shooter out there, but it's definitely one of the most ambitious and is at least worth a look. – **REINER**

■ **Concept:**
An FPS/space combat hybrid developed in the Halo vein

■ **Graphics:**
The texturing and detail within the character models are light years behind the Xbox version, PlayStation 2 benchmarks, and the FPS genre in general

■ **Sound:**
The orchestrated score is impressive, but the spoken dialogue borders on the worst in all of gaming

■ **Playability:**
FPS segments control well and you gotta love the high-powered arsenal, yet the space combat is simply horrendous

■ **Entertainment:**
Another ho-hum FPS that lacks a multiplayer component

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Think of Mace as a poor man's Half-Life. There's a story, but it's not as good (although it certainly is engaging); there's a good mix of platforming and FPS action (but with clunkier controls); and there are quite a few more bugs and examples of bad AI. All told, however, it's not a bad game. Go with the Xbox version if you have the option.

ANDY – 7

INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB
SUBLIME SWASHBUCKLING

THE BOTTOM LINE

T **8.25**

E very action game needs a great character. This game definitely has one of the best ever created – the tough-as-nails archeologist Indiana Jones (recently picked as the second-greatest hero in movie history by the American Film Institute). For my money, the Indiana Jones series is second to none, and I am happy to say that the franchise has finally been given a proper video game treatment.

The Collective, who also crafted the surprise hit Buffy the Vampire Slayer, really knows how to make quality games based on high-profile licenses. The company does this in a couple of obvious, but hard-to-achieve, ways. For one, the combat is actually entertaining, encompassing guns, whips, fists, grappling, and even environmental objects like chairs and bottles. This isn't even counting all of Indy's other platforming-oriented maneuvers. What's more impressive is that this huge move set is incorporated into a simple control scheme that keeps frustration to a minimum.

I do love this game, but there are some drawbacks that keep it from joining the ranks of the elite. Most notable is the severe graphical degradation that occurred in porting it to the PS2. If you have the ability, play this on Xbox. My other major gripe is that some levels rely too heavily on tricky platforming, which brought back some bad memories of Tomb Raider. However, this title's epic scope, engrossing story, and addictive combat system easily outweigh these minor concerns. – **MATT**

■ **Concept:**
Find precious antiquities, fight Nazis, and explore gorgeous ruins with whip in hand

■ **Graphics:**
This game was created for Xbox, and the PS2 version suffers as a result

■ **Sound:**
Amazing. In addition to John William's iconic theme, the score is widely varied. Also features a dead-on Harrison Ford imitator

■ **Playability:**
Does a good job of incorporating a large variety of combat and platforming tactics

■ **Entertainment:**
This is a great example of how to do a licensed game right

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderate

Sequences like this help to break up the Tomb Raider-style action

Here's some classic Indiana Jones whip swinging

Indy has a huge set of moves

Swimming is cool, but watch out for giant white alligators!

SECOND OPINION

Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb is pretty close to realizing the potential that Tomb Raider has always had...with the stylish addition of a fedora. From a technology standpoint, the title certainly has areas that need improvement. The framerate grinds to a halt when more than three enemies are onscreen. In addition, the overall graphics lack the prowess of today's big-name titles. But graphics aren't everything, right? Indy does have a great lead character, spectacular integration of John Williams' movie score, and fun levels that are sufficiently challenging and varied. While the platforming aspects can get frustrating, and getting your darned whip around gargoyle heads is sometimes inconsistent, Indy exhibits everything that Tomb Raider should: interesting locations, fun level design, witty one-liners, and cool headwear.

LISA – 8

THE ITALIAN JOB

MINI MEDIOCRITY

The Italian Job is a licensed product, but just barely. Since there is no FMV from the film and none of the stars' images or voices were used in the cutscenes, it's basically just a run-of-the-mill racing title with Mini Coopers. I'm not saying that a game has to follow the movie it's tied to exactly, but this is really pushing it. So, we've already established that this isn't going to do much for Marky Mark fans. What we're left with is just another driving game – one that fails to distinguish itself.

The story mode is essentially a series of point-to-point missions like Crazy Taxi, only minus the wild, over-the-top excitement. Since the city environment is very generic, you don't really get much of a thrill from exploring it. This weakness is exacerbated by the fact that many of the checkpoints are repeated time and time again. I actually had more fun with the Stunt Mode, which requires you to negotiate some tricky obstacle courses. Unfortunately, after finally succeeding in getting an A rating on the first three to unlock the next course, I was dismayed to discover that the fourth stage was just the first three strung together. Rip-off! All told, The Italian Job is a workmanlike, uninspired racer that just doesn't do enough to sustain my interest. – **MATT**

> ## SECOND OPINION
> There certainly have been worse games made to cash in on their movie license, and even worse driving games out there; but The Italian Job manages to grasp the lowest possible rung on the ladder called "mediocrity."
>
> **LISA – 5**

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS ■ **DEVELOPER** CLIMAX
■ **RELEASE** JULY 8

THE BOTTOM LINE

E EVERYONE

5

■ **Concept:**
A point-to-point racer (very) loosely based on the Mark Walhberg caper movie

■ **Graphics:**
Crisp, but not very detailed or inspired

■ **Sound:**
Jazzy lounge techno that reminds me of the score from Ocean's Eleven. None of the film's stars did voiceovers

■ **Playability:**
If you can press A and steer, you'll have no problems – except for those pesky (and apparently super-human) cops

■ **Entertainment:**
Doesn't really seem tied to the movie in any way, and the basic gameplay isn't enough to make this stand out

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderate

GAMECUBE QUICKIES
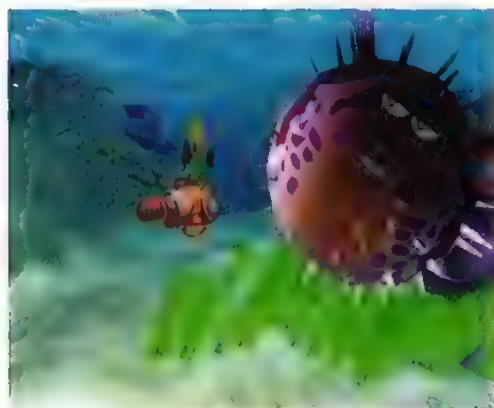
FINDING NEMO

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE
■ **PUBLISHER** THQ
■ **RELEASE** MAY 12

Admittedly, Finding Nemo truly is a kid's game; but unlike a lot of titles geared toward the younger set, this one is actually fun and well designed, with great graphics and good sound. Following the storyline and comedic tone of Pixar's movie, you play as four of the main characters. Long load times mar the title, but lots of cutscenes are mixed with the action. The title's only worth it for kids, but at least they'll enjoy it. – **LISA**

E 6.75

SX SUPERSTAR

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

Last time I played this game, it was being released by THQ and was called MX Superfly. I didn't really like it then, and I don't cotton to this generic motocross stunt title now. That's not to say that it's absolutely horrible; it's just that you've already played a bunch of games (ATV Offroad Fury, Freekstyle, or this month's Downhill Domination) that do the same thing with different vehicles and better graphics and gameplay. I like the little career storyline SX Superstar gives you, but that's about the only thing that came close to holding my interest. – **MATT**

E 6

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

GIVE IN TO THE DARK SIDE

Through such series as Baldur's Gate, Icewind Dale, and Neverwinter Nights; developer BioWare has racked up an impressive list of hits – many of which are regarded as some of the most compelling and sophisticated PC role-playing games to date. Traditionally, console RPGs favor simplicity and ease of use over the complexity and wealth of options that BioWare chooses to implement into each of its games. Thankfully, the brilliant minds at this famed development house had no intention of bowing down to the industry standards for its first foray into the Star Wars universe.

In Knights of the Old Republic, BioWare's daunting development philosophy is in full effect, and it's used to bring console gamers closer to Star Wars than they've ever been before. Knights' story takes place 4,000 years before the Galactic Empire came into power, in a time where Jedi and Sith number in thousands and are locked in war. Rather than stepping into the shoes of a prefabricated character, players are invited to create their own personality. You can start out as a scoundrel, scout, or soldier. As the game unfolds, you'll run headlong into two interesting developments. On the one hand, you'll find out that the Force may in fact flow through your veins. Two, the actions that you make are judged, determining whether your character will align with the light or dark side of the Force. Even the most irrelevant confrontation could lead you down one path or the other, as every conversation in the game allows you to interact with responses that are fashioned as good, neutral, or evil. Good is usually something along the lines of, "Yes, I will help you save your daughter." Neutral is, "I haven't the time to help you." While evil might be, "I will slit your throat shortly after I gut your daughter."

Many of the choices will alter the complexity of the quest – giving reason for players to complete the game twice. BioWare has even fashioned two distinctly different endings, one for each allegiance to the Force.

The structure of the game is linear, like most console RPGs. However, through lengthy side quests and minigames that range from competing in swoop races to mounting a turret for space combat to loosing all of your Credits in an addictive card game called Pazaak, Knights feels entirely open-ended and gives players freedom to veer off of the path frequently.

In true BioWare form, almost everything in the game can be tinkered with, customized, or upgraded. You can reinforce armor with new alloys; add a hair trigger and sight to your blaster; install neuro implants; hack into computers; repair droids; and even build your very own lightsabers. The options that are at your disposal can be a little daunting at times, but thankfully the user interface is easy to pick up and comprehend.

In a similar vein to BioWare's crop of PC titles, battles are turn-based and use a rule set similar to many d20 pencil and paper games. The action that unfolds can be viewed in real-time or through a slick pause interface that allows players to issue commands to their party members and form complex strategies at a comfortable pace. You can also assign combat scripts to individual party members to streamline the process in advance. How complex the battles are is not necessarily determined by the game, but rather how much the player puts into them. It's a brilliant system and something that will keep you entertained for hours.

From a graphical standpoint, the size of the environments, vibrancy of the lighting effects, and the fact that every item you don is shown cosmetically on your character are definitely impressive. At the same time, however, characters' facial expressions are a little stiff, and the real-time cinematics are usually quite cheesy. In comparison to other Xbox titles, Knights' visuals are middle of the road.

I was actually more taken aback by the sound. All of the dialogue in the game (of which there's a ton) is, in fact, spoken. Of course, all of the alien species speak in their authentic tongue. BioWare also made the wise decision to not recycle John Williams' scores. Composer Jeremy Soule was brought in to record 90 minutes of amazing new music for the game.

The quest can be completed in around 40 to 60 hours, and the story that unfolds is worthy of film. However, at the end of the day, this game is all about building the ultimate Star Wars badass. Believe me when I say that there's nothing cooler than a wookiee wielding two swords or a droid with a flamethrower that pops out of its head.

Deserving of the highest of accolades, Knights of the Old Republic is a dream come true for Star Wars fans, and the most noteworthy Xbox release since Halo. – **REINER**

All of the aliens speak in their authentic languages

Here's a good example of how diverse your character's responses are

Players can pause the action to script their next moves

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** BIOWARE ■ **RELEASE** JULY 15

Swoop racing is but one of the distractions

"...a dream come true for Star Wars fans, and the most noteworthy Xbox release since Halo."
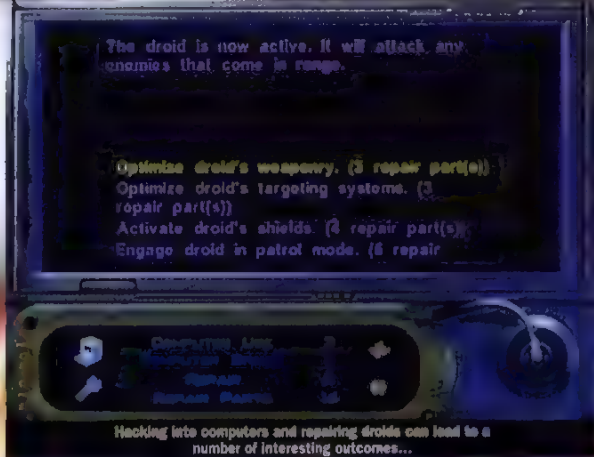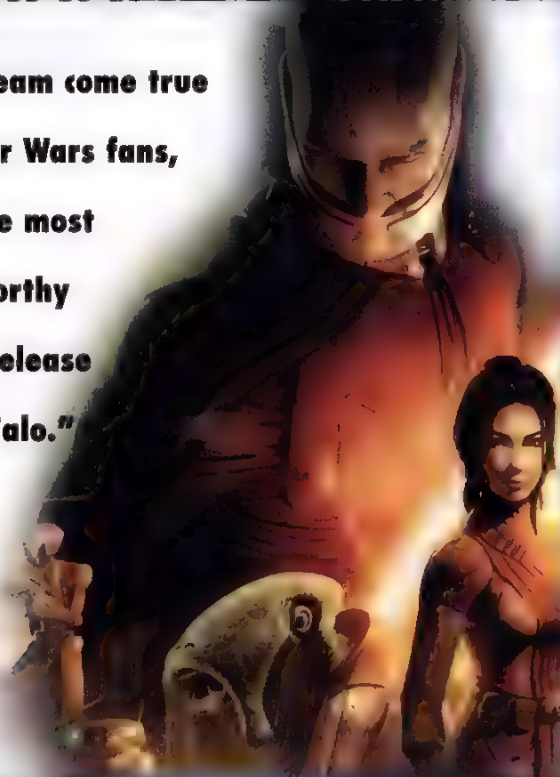
Hacking into computers and repairing droids can lead to a number of interesting outcomes...
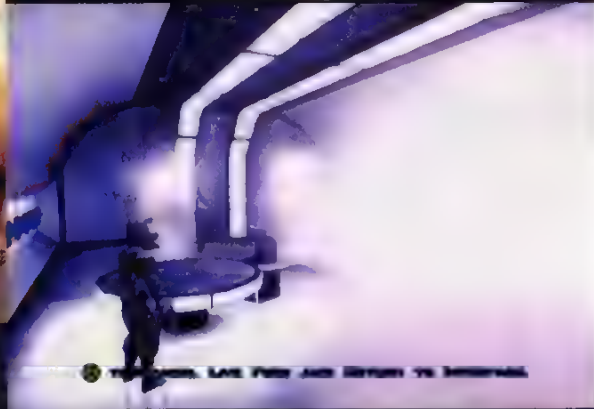
...like releasing poisonous gas in a room full of adversaries

The meter on the left shows where your character stands between the light and dark side of the Force

Travel between planets is sometimes interrupted with turret-based battles

THE BOTTOM LINE

T TEEN ESRB

9.5

■ **Concept:**
An incredibly deep Star Wars RPG set over 4,000 years before the formation of the Galactic Empire

■ **Graphics:**
Impressive lighting (especially on the sabers), decent battle animations, and beautiful environment details

■ **Sound:**
Over 90 minutes of newly orchestrated music by composer Jeremy Soule and tons of spoken dialogue

■ **Playability:**
Combat and character customization couldn't be better. The teammate AI scripting is a tad temperamental at times

■ **Entertainment:**
Bursting with longevity and reasons to play it over and over again

■ **Replay Value:**
High

SECOND OPINION

The braintrust at BioWare has constructed an absolute diamond in Knights, and Xbox owners should be foaming at the mouth to lay their hands on it. In a fashion typical of this esteemed company, KOTOR takes on a life of its own as you guide your character through the galaxy and mold him or her to your tastes. Become an apprentice of the dark side or strive for good – it is completely up to you. The only gripes I have with the game are relatively minor (camera issues, frequently recurring NPC models), but I can't say enough about the unbelievable depth woven into the fabric of this title. Similarly, the skill architecture and rule bindings lend the title a kind of pencil-and-paper timelessness that is nearly impossible to resist. This is by far the best RPG ever released on Xbox, and is probably in the top five to be released on any current console. Buy this game immediately.

KRISTIAN – 9.5

THE BOTTOM LINE

8.25

■ **Concept:**
Coordinate attacks through assorted environments all while trying to stay alert and alive

■ **Graphics:**
Comparable to the original PC Ghost Recon, with all of the attention to detail you've come to expect from a Clancy inspired title

■ **Sound:**
If you have a nice system, you'll feel like you've jumped into the television

■ **Playability:**
For newbies, there's going to be confusion right out of the gate. Nothing substantial has changed that vets need worry about

■ **Entertainment:**
As with most things from Red Storm, if you dig this type of thing, you're in for a treat

■ **Replay Value:**
High
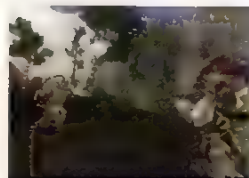
XBOX

GHOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER

GILLIGAN'S WORST NIGHTMARE

"The most notable addition that Island Thunder offers is the enhanced online play."

In parts of southwestern Minnesota, there's a saying. It goes a little something like this: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Obviously you can see the wisdom behind this statement; feel free to use it when appropriate. To this end, the Red Storm people have taken their popular Ghost Recon franchise and simply added new missions. Yeah, they've implemented some online functionality as well, but it's basically the same game. Not that that's a bad thing – GR was and still is a fantastic game. The question you have to ask yourself is whether or not you're interested enough to plunk down more cash for a few new levels and online play. Let's see if we can figure it out.

The most notable addition that Island Thunder offers is the enhanced online play. With the eight new multiplayer maps and four fan-favorites from the original Xbox version of Ghost Recon making a reappearance, there will be plenty to experience, and link play is available for those who like to tote their Xbox to a friend's place. Also, the downloadable content is sure to keep things interesting for those who get bored easily. A bevy of maps are available, including Desert Seige environments which players will be able to play through in the Mission mode and multiplayer, but they are not

available in the Island Thunder story arc.

For the solo soldier whose parents refuse to allow him Internet access because of an indecent surfing incident at school, the single-player mode contains eight missions set in post-Castro Cuba (Castro will keel over in 2006 according to Red Storm). As with the other Ghost Recon games, you'll have a couple of fire teams at your disposal, but switching between the members can be taxing and confusing. Why the name of your trooper doesn't appear somewhere when you go from one person to another is beyond me. Also, your enemies tend to have incredibly good vision – too good in most cases. Poorly trained paramilitary personnel probably wouldn't be able to pick a fully camoed trooper out of a dense forest, but who knows.

Island Thunder is what you make of it. If you're the methodical type who loves to drown in the details, set up intricate raids, and get your hands dirty (so to speak); I see no reason why you won't enjoy this release. On the other hand, if you need medication in order to concentrate on one thing for longer than three minutes, go elsewhere. – **KRISTIAN**

Sitting in the open for too long is not a good idea

Working together to clear a structure

"You're dead, Jeep guy!"

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE AND LINK PLAY) ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** JULY 15

One well-aimed grenade will clear out the party in front of these troopers

The character models look like they're about to jump out of your screen

SECOND OPINION

Ghost Recon was easily one of the best Xbox Live titles, and this edition offers gamers even more of the same (since Island Thunder is almost exactly identical to the original). But that's a good thing. There are even a couple of new additions to the Live portion, namely downloadable content and stat support. For fans of the original, the numerous multiplayer maps will give new life to the online experience. For anyone who missed the original, Island Thunder is a great place to jump in with its impressive single player missions deep in the lush foliage of Cuba. I still wish the series would add an onscreen representation of your weapon, but this is a minor gripe. All told, Island Thunder – with its numerous online and multiplayer options – is more than enough to keep any couch soldier happy.

ANDY – 8.5

"The world is truly your oyster. Whether or not there's a pearl in it depends on how much you enjoy the freedom given to you."

"No, we're not doing anything illegal, offismuggle – uh oh."

"Someone's going to have to sew patches in the sails"

Your enemies aren't always human...or alive

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

ONE LONG PLANK

Pirates is an open-ended role-playing game in the vein of Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind. What you do and where you go is up to you, and it's filled with more exploration and freedom than story-driven RPGs. This is both good and bad, and is at the very least unique.

Character creation is absent, as Captain Nathaniel Hawk is the protagonist. A pirate's life includes importing and exporting goods, engaging in sea battles, dodging storms, expanding your convoy of ships, and about a million other things. There is no set order or path to these tasks.

On land, you're either in a town or traversing the untamed wilderness. Civilization is bustling with activity. Your main tasks are hiring captains (who posse up with you) and crew, fixing and buying ships, and getting freelance missions. You can move between key locations with a fast walk option. Underhanded tactics range from entering homes and raiding their chests, to flat-out killing everybody you meet.

Unfortunately, this option for deviance isn't as deep as in Morrowind. You can only take certain items, and you can't even strip corpses of their valuables. For example, I met with some smugglers in a secret location, but I didn't go for their deal. The cops showed up, and were defeated by our group. I turned on the smugglers and killed them, too. Take that! However, I had nothing to show for it, since I couldn't steal the cargo they were trying to sell me. What kind of pirate am I supposed to be?

Your ship is obviously the way to get from island to island – which is very exploration-based, since there is no overworld map. Storms and enemy ships are the two things to watch out for. Hurricanes come from nowhere, and your best bet is to try to outrun them. You gain experience for weathering the storm, but it puts a hurtin' on your ship.

Sea battles are a sight to behold. While they take time to get used to, they're highly dramatic. Since you're on an old-time boat, you're at the mercy of the wind, and can really only use your rudder for navigation. It's slow, but a time-skip option moves things along. Lob cannonballs and hope to sink the enemy, or try to get alongside them and board the ship. After boarding, you must dispatch the crew – which is no easy task, but the vessel becomes your reward.

In Pirates of the Caribbean, the world is truly your oyster. Whether there's a pearl in it or not depends on how much you enjoy the freedom given to you. There is a lot of time spent wandering aimlessly, but there are also cool things that you couldn't do in a Final Fantasy or Xenosaga. I think it exceeds the quality of Morrowind, as many things that bothered me in that game aren't here. It's also a beautiful title – especially on the water. If you have the time and the desire to sail the seven seas on your own terms, grab your eye patch and give this a go. -- **JUSTIN**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS ■ **DEVELOPER** AKELLA ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

"Think ya brought enough guys?"

"Another beautiful sunset without a wench of me own. Yargh."

SECOND OPINION

Pirates of the Caribbean may draw inspiration from the Disney film; but make no mistake, it is the sequel to Bethesda's incredible PC RPG, Sea Dogs. Thankfully, the Disney license is mostly transparent. The entire world is open from the outset, and like Elder Scrolls III, Pirates relies on the player's intellect to figure out what to do next. In this regard, the game is strictly for hardcore role-players who don't mind wandering aimlessly for hours on end. If you can get into it, Pirates is hard to put down. It's the type of game you can lose yourself in. Hire shipmates, form an armada, pillage villages, do as you please. The hand-to-hand combat is a tad simplistic, and your teammate AI is questionable at times; but the ship battles, ocean weather effects, and sheer scope of the game are praiseworthy. It may be a little rough around the edges, but it is thoroughly enjoyable and a welcome change of pace from the typical console RPG.

REINER – 8

00:35.21
0007016

THE ITALIAN JOB

MERELY A PICKPOCKET

Climax Group's mission based racing game is a prime example of how to make something that is just plain vanilla in all the worst ways. The two cities, LA and Hollywood, are both rendered in drab, efficient-looking buildings. The paths that cut through those structures are populated with empty storefronts and there isn't a single pedestrian in sight. Texture maps lack any depth, and the entire experience feels like cruising through a studio backlot more than barreling down the streets of LA.

It's not to say that The Italian Job is a horrible game. It clearly went through some testing, as I didn't encounter much by way of weird pop-up, suspect AI, poorly executed collision, or framerate difficulties. It's just that what is there is the bare bones. You are only afforded a small handful of cars and not much by way of customization. The story mode features cutscenes whose only animation is the camera moving around a car or van, and alternate modes only encompass two players.

The Italian Job lacks the planned skill of the criminals that the game portrays; and instead, comes off as a mindless licensed product. – **LISA**

THE BOTTOM LINE
M **5**

■ Concept:
Make a glorified Mini commercial with a thinly veiled heist-gone-awry plotline. Wait...that is the movie. Make a game based on said movie

■ Graphics:
Certainly not utilizing the Power Of The Xbox™

■ Sound:
Voiceover work and sound effects are good

■ Playability:
Driving controls are solid to a fault

■ Entertainment:
A good, solid, 15 minutes of fun. By that time, you've finished half of the story, decided you suck at platforming with a car, and have driven a few circuit races

■ Replay Value:
Moderately Low

■ STYLE 1 OR 2 PLAYER RACING **■ PUBLISHER** EIDOS **■ DEVELOPER** CLIMAX GROUP **■ RELEASE** JUNE 24

FREAKY FLYERS

FREAK NASTY

My gut reaction to Freaky Flyers was that it sits in the same sorry vein as Cel Damage or Blood Wake. My inner optimist tried convincing me that it could be a next-gen Diddy Kong Racing. I hate it when my instincts are right.

This game has some things going for it, admittedly. There are a bunch of unlockable characters (including five exclusives just for Xbox), and levels that are high in detail and pretty open. Stages even feature extreme game-style goals. That's the good stuff.

The bad stuff is much more plentiful. First off, I'm not a fan of the AI. Opponents get speed bursts and health pickups seemingly at random. Secondly, the aforementioned missions aren't worth taking time out of races to complete, since their effects are lame and only last one race. Multiplayer would most likely be where the fun is, but all this supports is two-player split-screen – no Xbox Live, or even four-player. Lame! Midway tried really hard to inject humor into the characters and cutscenes, but as is often the case in games, it comes up short. If there aren't developers who can be funny, I suggest companies hire someone who can.

It's a shame when a title is in development for this long, and comes out with more cracks in it than a sumo tournament. What could've been simple fun is simply not worth playing. Next! – **JUSTIN**

This snake looks pisssssed

Your journey takes you inside the human body. Ewww...

These red rings boost speed

The CG cutscenes show a modicum of humor

■ STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RACING **■ PUBLISHER** MIDWAY **■ DEVELOPER** MIDWAY **■ RELEASE** AUGUST 4

THE BOTTOM LINE
T **5.75**

■ Concept:
Planes replace karts in this character racer

■ Graphics:
Big heads in tiny vehicles – what more can I say?

■ Sound:
Terrible original music and voiceovers that lay the fake accents on so heavy that you can rarely understand them

■ Playability:
All the requisite elements are here

■ Entertainment:
The few things that could've saved this title – story, multiplayer, minigames – all fail to deliver, making this another entry in a failing "kartel"

■ Replay Value:
Moderately Low

Battle in Progress!

ALIENS VERSUS PREDATOR: EXTINCTION

GAME OVER MAN!

Creating a compelling real-time strategy game for a console is perhaps one of the most difficult things to do. Not only are you limited by the number of buttons, but the game pad will never be able to give players the precise control that a mouse delivers. That said, Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction does a nice job for what it has to work with. You can set teams to the d-pad for easy selection of up to four groups. There are quick keys to move the cursor instantly to the nearest event, and the game also features a rather ingenious shortcut that lets you double-tap on any unit to instantly select all the members of that type. You can even set your soldiers' posture to aggressive, defensive, no attack, or stand ground. So, as you can see, the controls are fairly straightforward and do a good job of giving the player all the tools he or she needs to enjoy the missions.

The game itself is fairly basic. There are seven missions for the three races (Marine, Alien, and Predator) and tutorials for each. Besides the overall goal on each level, there are also target times and optional objectives to give the player more bang for their buck. Sadly, the gameplay doesn't offer much as far as resource management is concerned, and the fights themselves are hard to handle (since you can't pause and issue commands).

Having played a ton of PC RTSs myself, I found this game to be almost archaic in design, but not completely void of entertainment. Since there are a number of cool Alien and Predator units that are fun to see and play, Extinction does have some redeeming value. However, graphically the game falls way short of what I expect from the Xbox, and the lack of online support or multiplayer of any kind is unforgivable. Fans of the license will get a kick out of this one, but that's about it. – **ANDY**

Each campaign has its own unique feel with specialized units that range from low-end grunts to high-tech warriors

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS/FOX INTERACTIVE
■ **DEVELOPER** ZONO, INC ■ **RELEASE** JULY 21

THE BOTTOM LINE

T **6.75**

■ **Concept:**
A real-time strategy console game where you can play as the Marines, Aliens, or Predators

■ **Graphics:**
It's not that the game looks bad, it's that it's not very impressive considering the size of the models and level maps

■ **Sound:**
The one tune is really intense

■ **Playability:**
There's a learning curve to the controls, but it's not terribly steep

■ **Entertainment:**
Compared to PC games of the same ilk, Extinction falls short

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderate

SECOND OPINION

As pleasant of a surprise as it is to see a real-time strategy game on Xbox, Aliens Versus Predator is a convincing reason why this genre is more or less extinct on consoles. The idea is a sound one, and there's certainly enough content within the Alien, Predator, and Marine universes to create a deep and varied experience. Unfortunately, developer Zono's idea for this game was to keep it simple – perhaps fearing that the console crowd wouldn't be able to comprehend an RTS in the PC vein. There really is nothing to it. Approximately 99 percent of your time is spent setting waypoints and attacking whatever crosses your path. To make matters worse, you can't build bases, and each team only has up to 10 different unit types. Without substance or a rousing strategic element, this highly intriguing game falls to the wayside as a depthless disappointment.

REINER – 6

INDYCAR SERIES

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

Visually, there is no getting around it – this game is about as ugly as IndyCar is unpopular (but it's still better than the PS2 version). But what it lacks in looks, it makes up for in other areas. The Masterclass is cool, not so much for its challenges, but more for what it teaches you about your car. This is extremely important, because winning races is going to be dependant on how well you fiddle around with your tire pressure, camber, and spoilers. This kind of precision is replicated on the track, where brushing with the wall could be a brush with death. – **KATO**

E **7.5**

SX SUPERSTAR

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

Superstar doesn't aggravate me for any particular reason. Everything from the graphics to the control prove to be at least adequate enough. Even the tracks offer a surprising bit of variety. However, it doesn't excel at anything either. The trick system is boring at best; and Championship – an attempt to mimic Pro Racer Driver's fabulous career mode – merely acts as a laughable excuse to string races together. – **CHET**

T **6.5**

FREESTYLE METALX

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 9-PLAYER ACTION/RACING
■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY SPORTS ASYLUM
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 23

I went into this review expecting motocross for headbangers. With Twisted Sister, Mötley Crüe, and Megadeth on the soundtrack, it will certainly appeal to the mullet and six-pack crowd. The gameplay is more related to the Tony Hawk titles than anything else. Each stage features assorted mission-based goals, competitions, and hidden items to find. As you'd expect, tricking out is the name of the game. The gameplay is easy to pick up and surprisingly deep; but more importantly, it's continually fun. The levels are extremely large and the feats you're asked to complete are nicely varied. It's by no means as good as the heavy hitters in extreme games, but it's definitely in the same league. – **REINER**

T **7**

STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II

MORE BANG FOR YOUR TREK

"Elite Force II delivers with an expert mix of action and suspense, and a robust array of weaponry."

As I have said about other licensed games, this type of title's eventual success or failure relies on its ability to transcend its subject matter. In this instance, as is the case with an inordinate number of Trek-based games, the play is entertaining in its own right, and the license only serves to create a richer and more dynamic universe. If only all television and movie-based games were like this…but that's a tirade for another day. As it stands, both new and old-schoolers should pay attention to Elite Force II.

At the title's outset, you take control of the Hazard (not Hazzard) Team – a group of highly trained close-combat soldiers who serve as the green berets of their assigned vessel. The game opens with a bang as you traverse a Borg sphere deep in the delta quadrant in your mission to release the Voyager from the belly of the structure. Through a number of twists and turns in the story, you'll eventually end up on the Enterprise, with good old captain Picard (voiced by Patrick Stewart) giving you orders and getting you into trouble. Although there are some interesting enemies to deal with, some have a decidedly *Simpsons*-esque quality to them – namely giant bugs with rockets attached to their backs. I was expecting dogs with bees in their mouths that shoot bees at you when they bark to make an appearance, but luckily the bug portion passes fairly early in the game.

Strange insects notwithstanding, the plot is solid, and gives the player ample opportunity to connect with their character. To this end, Ritual has injected some RPG-like elements to the game's more sedate levels which can affect your relationship with your teammates. For example, you may be talking to one of your ensigns and when she asks you a question, you're given a number of responses that will then slightly alter your relationship. It's not like if you choose the wrong answer the person will shoot you in the back during a mission, but it's a nice diversion from the typical FPS formula.

Speaking of formulas, as a straight-up run and gunner, Elite Force II delivers with an expert mix of action and suspense, and a robust array of weaponry. You're given a number of different ways to turn your enemies into tribble food, and the interspersed puzzle elements don't bog down the action too terribly much. The level design on the other hand, can be confusing – in fact, I don't think I ever want to see another Jefferies tube ever again. Aside from these, and a few other control foibles, Elite Force II is solid, and will serve to entertain even those who have had little to no exposure to the Star Trek world. For those of you who enjoy testing your skills against humans, a decent multiplayer component is also available. – **KRISTIAN**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE OR UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
■ **DEVELOPER** RITUAL ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

We love space clothes!

This Romulan shows off her femullet

Drama in engineering
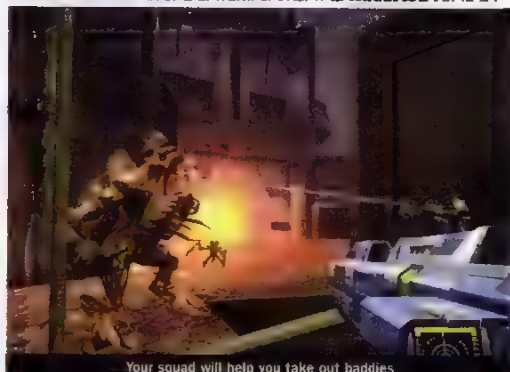
Your squad will help you take out baddies
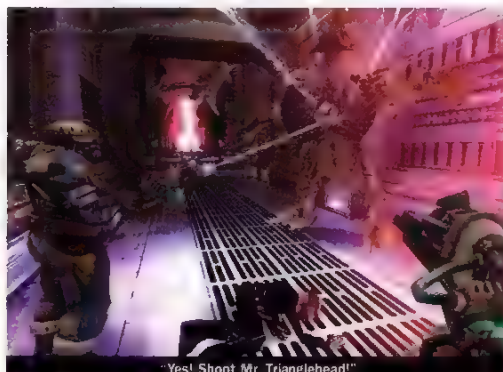
"Yes! Shoot Mr. Trianglehead!"

THE BOTTOM LINE

8.5

T TEEN
ESRB

■ **Concept:**
Run around Star Trek-inspired environments shooting Star Trek-inspired things

■ **Graphics:**
If your machine is capable of running this game at 1600x1200, you won't be disappointed

■ **Sound:**
Authentic sounds and involvement from notable actors make Elite Force II worth hearing

■ **Playability:**
Aside from some bizarre control defaults, everything seems to behave the way it should

■ **Entertainment:**
As with most reasonably well done Trek games, fans will absolutely eat this one alive

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

I wouldn't label myself a Trekkie, but the Next Generation series sucked me into Star Trek – as it did many casual TV viewers. EF II's adventure takes place on the Enterprise-E, lead by Picard (with voice acting by Patrick Stewart), which is certainly incentive enough for fans to purchase the game. If you're a Trekkie and are already excited, wait because the news gets better. EF II actually sports solid gameplay that will even engross a few general sci-fi aficionados. The missions are varied, the control is tight, every enemy and boss is relentless, and the story proves to be interesting. On the other hand, FPS nuts won't find anything particularly fresh about the gameplay. My only serious gripe concerns EF II's periodic lack of direction. On too many occasions I found myself wandering only to find out 15 minutes later that an obscure switch or door halted my progress!

CHET – 8.25

PC

EVE: THE SECOND GENESIS

A VISUAL SIREN

"EVE is probably the best looking, worst playing space-based MMO I've ever spent time with."

Woe to those who buy this game thinking they'll be able to enjoy it for a few minutes a day, then put it away. EVE is probably the best looking, worst playing space-based MMO I've ever spent time with. I was hoping to find myself in an Earth and Beyond-type environment, complete with a bustling market economy and a robust pirate population to hunt down and destroy. Instead, I roamed throughout a massive, mostly empty environment with very little NPC activity, and grappled with more movement and map-related bugs than I'm used to. There are numerous elements borrowed from various other titles, but EVE seems to implement them poorly for the most part.

When I say the play area is big, I mean huge. You could literally spend hours and hours travelling from one end of the galaxy to the other, and the sense of speed and distance is expertly implemented. As you go in and out of light speed; the planets, stations, and surrounding environments all react appropriately to your velocity. Not only that, but they look fantastic while doing it. Every texture, effect, and structure exhibits a craftsmanship that few other titles enjoy. Different star-systems have a unique architectural style and a distinct feel that you won't find anywhere else. Although this level of visual accuracy is nice, the gameplay stands as a distant second comparatively speaking.

The instant you're given control of your ship after the tutorial portion, problems begin to pop up. First and foremost among these is the map system. If you're going to have a play area this gigantic, you have to give players a useful tool to aid in navigation. The map system used in EVE is interesting, but becomes a jumbled mess of lines and text if you attempt to manipulate it in any way. Similarly, the docking portion of the game is badly bugged. Normally this wouldn't be a huge deal, but if you want to change systems or go into a station, you need to dock. Because the speed dynamic is so accurate, you often come out of warp quite a distance from your eventual target, and your sublight engines are so slow, it's not unheard of to wait for as long as five minutes to initiate the actual docking sequence. As a result, a game that is already suffering from a lack of action is nearly eviscerated by poor mapping and buggy mechanics.

Joining a corporation (EVE's version of a guild) is compelling to a point, but much of the activity centers around mining for ore in one of the game's numerous asteroid fields to ensure your organization is making money. I'm sure I don't have to tell you that this is excruciatingly boring. There is potential for a pirate outfit to have a lot of fun, but I'm not convinced that it could be consistently fun. Unless you're really into this type of game, I would suggest something else. – **KRISTIAN**

The amount of customization you're able to put into your character's head is incredible

This container is what you'll find after you destroy a ship or jettison any cargo

The number of different ships available to you is staggering

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** SIMON & SCHUSTER ■ **DEVELOPER** CCP
■ **RELEASE** MAY 15

Asteroids have never looked this good

If you destroy another player's ship, you'll likely find that a bounty will be put on your head

SECOND OPINION

It takes brave and hardy people to colonize the depths of space, and that same fortitude will be required of anyone wanting to wade into this title. The practical laws of this universe drag it down before it ever reaches the speed of light. The freedom to travel (among a multitude of galaxies) and set up corporations from scratch is awe-inspiring, but the implementation isn't fun. Simply navigating the universe is an arduous affair. "Yo, Magellan! Are we freaking there yet?!" Combat suffers from a similar letdown. Of course, there are many who will dive into the symbiotic economy (you can even place a bounty on someone) and the chance to make a fortune in the unconquered regions of space, but the prospect of being an asteroid farmer doesn't thrill me. My hat goes off to CCP for wanting to let players wholly determine the ebb and flow of the universe, but the reality of this game is, like space, cold and empty.

KATO – 6.5

PC

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND – BLOODMOON

I'M A WOLF, MAN!

O n the newly formed (in the development sense) island of Solstheim, there are things that have gone amiss. The rumor on the mainland is that only Nords, snow, and werewolves inhabit the area; and when you arrive, you find out that the rumors are mostly true. It's a blast exploring the island and, in typical Bethesda fashion, the complex web of plot lines and play options is simply too sumptuous to be ignored. Although you can aid the ailing outpost town as it attempts to gain purchase in the region, the most entertaining and enticing bit of play is contracting lycanthropy – the disease that leads to becoming a werewolf.

Between your inoculation and eventual transformation, three days pass during which you can seek out a healer to rid you of your illness, or you can embrace the dark side and become a werewolf. The sense of danger when your character morphs for the first time is exhilarating, and feasting on flesh to satiate your bloodlust is a hilarious chore you must complete each night if you wish to stay alive. Your wolf form also enjoys a number of strength and sight-related ability jumps, but if anyone ever sees your transformation, you'll be hunted and shunned for the rest of the game. This is an expansion pack worth having if there ever was one. – **KRISTIAN**

THE BOTTOM LINE

T TEEN

9
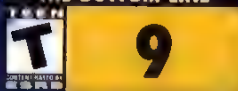
■ **Concept:**
Explore a new island and become a werewolf! What more could you want?

■ **Graphics:**
Good for this type of game but blocky when compared to others

■ **Sound:**
A virtual library of audio clips has been accumulated to keep your ears pricked

■ **Playability:**
If you're just getting started in the RPG world, you're going to be overwhelmed before the opening sequence is over

■ **Entertainment:**
Getting immersed in this world just got a lot easier and hairier

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderately Low

SECOND OPINION

The previous expansion pack, Tribunal, confined players to a somewhat linear progression. With Bloodmoon, Bethesda has restored the original game's open-ended design and has also implemented a host of interesting additions – such as the ability to transform into a werewolf. Granted, the technology is beginning to show its age, but it's still a blast to play and one of the deepest RPG's around.

REINER – 8.25

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
■ **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
■ **DEVELOPER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 6

PC

DAY OF DEFEAT

PREPARE TO BE FUBAR-ED

O nce in a while, a game is released that has the potential to rule my life. Day of Defeat is one of these games. Although it is a mod of Counter-Strike, which in turn was a mod of Half-Life, it has kept a lot of the core gameplay that made its cousin so successful. Gone is the "if you're dead, you wait" phenomenon of CS that put deceased characters into a spectator buffer until one side completed its objectives or everyone from one squad was annihilated. Instead, there are still objectives, but players respawn after being dropped – which produces a non-stop cornucopia of action.

Better yet, the game is available for free, but like most things that are free, there's a catch: You have to own Half-Life to run Day of Defeat. However, if you just get off your penny-pinching butt and buy the game, you won't have to worry about that. At the same time, this is a mod of an old game, and it shows. Textures are muddy, structures are blocky, and the animations are decidedly low-end. The particle effects are good, however, and the noise is incredible. The sound of bullets whizzing past your ear or slamming into some nearby surface is disturbingly realistic. As a pure action game, this is a perfect purchase for those who want to kill, kill, kill! – **KRISTIAN**

Someone is about to die

Three Brits wait as the enemy draws near. The enemy? Gonorrhea

Crouching will diminish your weapon's kick and increase your accuracy

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 32-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** VALVE
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 1

THE BOTTOM LINE

T TEEN

8.5

■ **Concept:**
It's Counter-Strike, but set in the European theater during World War II

■ **Graphics:**
Unfortunately, Day of Defeat uses the same modified Half-Life engine as CS does

■ **Sound:**
All of the "pops" and "bangs" you'd expect from a WW II title

■ **Playability:**
It'll take FPS veterans a couple of minutes to set up the controls to their liking, then it's off to the races

■ **Entertainment:**
Day of Defeat is the kind of game you could play for five minutes or five hours – and either would be fun

■ **Replay Value:**
High

SECOND OPINION

From a graphical standpoint, Day of Defeat isn't quite up to code. However, if you can overlook the bland texturing, archaic lighting, and blocky environment designs; the remainder of the game proves to an exhilarating experience. Much like Counter-Strike, Day of Defeat is a Half-Life mod with gameplay that focuses on quick, close-quarter combat between two squads. Due to the microscopic size of the maps, you'll always find yourself in the thick of the fray, praying that a sniper hasn't drawn a bead on you. The matches come and go at breakneck speeds, and all of the maps promote teamwork to seize territories. The gameplay functionality is simple, but deep enough for FPS junkies to sink their teeth into. With a blistering pace, well thought out map designs, and incredible sound (like bullets ricocheting overhead), Day of Defeat hits you with adrenaline-filled intensity and an addictive gameplay hook.

REINER – 8.5

WILL ROCK

SHOOT CRAP!

Much like the game, we'll get the plot out of the way early and concentrate on why it's fun to blow stuff away. Your character (Will Rock) has figured out how to open a huge temple in Greece that houses all of the Grecian gods, who by the way are really pissed off at humanity. There's some other crap that happens; but the point is you're facing off against every mythological character you can think of. Oh, P.S., some weird Greek god separatist group has kidnapped your girlfriend and will sacrifice her to Zeus if you don't save her. To that end, you're given the tools of the ass-kicking trade. Everything from pistols and shotguns to machine guns and crossbows are available for meting out punishment, and this game's characters are gluttons for punishment.

Like Serious Sam, you're faced with wave upon wave (upon wave) of adversaries as you solve some fairly boring switch puzzles and look for better weaponry. The puzzle elements almost detract from the experience after the third or fourth one, but there are enough gigantic open areas teeming with hordes of fodder that you forget what it took to get you there. The enemies themselves aren't simply there when you enter an area. Instead, they'll continually spawn in from various locations around your vicinity until you've gone though a certain amount of waves, at which point a door usually opens. I found a few bizarre control and collision hiccups that furrowed my brow, but by and large this is a game that starts with a bang and doesn't quit. If there were a god of catharsis, Will Rock would be his altar. – **KRISTIAN**

"Oh no. You do NOT shoot arrows at me!"

Nothing says "I hate you" like hot lead

The shotgun - fun to shoot since Doom

Will attempts to shoot his reflection in the crotch

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE OR LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT
■ **DEVELOPER** SABER INTERACTIVE ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 9

THE BOTTOM LINE
MATURE M **7.75**

■ **Concept:**
Blow up anything that moves, or looks like it could move

■ **Graphics:**
I'm pleasantly surprised with the high texture quality

■ **Sound:**
Licensing "I Wanna Rock" for the opening music was a stroke of genius

■ **Playability:**
More action! Less plot! More action! Less plot!

■ **Entertainment:**
If you loved the Serious Sam games, baby, this one's for you

■ **Replay Value:**
Low

SECOND OPINION

When this game opens up with Twisted Sister's "I Wanna Rock," you can't help but get giddy with excitement. From there, the opening slide show that sets up what is ultimately an incredibly weak story about ancient Greek gods and the capture of a hottie that you must rescue, you can't help but be just a little disappointed and confused. Luckily, once the derivative story is out of the way (I had so hoped for an entire hair metal-based shooter), the game kicks in with some Serious Sam-esque first-person mayhem that, in the end, is this game's true value. Like Croteam's Sam, Will Rock is a cathartic assault of baddies that will have you twitching from all the insane amount of baddies. While the enemies aren't quite as inventive as Sam's, there were a number of beasts that scared me enough to make me lean back in my chair and blast away in hopes of escaping alive. It's nothing special graphically, but it is definitely fun.

ANDY – 8

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE

FIGHT IT OUT!

Dungeons & Dragons gamers tend to be very touchy about the games based on their beloved rules set, and BioWare knows this. Shadows of Undrentide is aimed at those very people. More attention has been put on accurately portraying our beloved pencil and paper universe digitally – as evidenced by the game's institution of a number of new classes, and a tighter storyline with less hunt-and-peck adventuring. The henchmen have also been fleshed out a bit, as have many of the abilities and 50 new spells that have been added for your casting pleasure. Of course, one can't talk about this game without mentioning the incredible Aurora Toolset, which is now even cooler as those who like to tinker will have access to all of the new material used in Undrentide.

While this is all well and good, I simply don't like this series as much as the Baldur's Gate or Icewind Dale epics. The three-dimensional graphics are decent, but the isometric Infinity engine lent a whimsical tinge to the aforementioned games, and its control structure was immeasurably better than the clumsy radial menus used in Neverwinter. Although still good, the BioWare folks have definitely done better as far as D&D titles are concerned. – **KRISTIAN**

THE BOTTOM LINE
TEEN T **8.25**

■ **Concept:**
Investigate a Kobold uprising and have the goodness in your heart to put it down

■ **Graphics:**
Not a lot in the way of improvement that I could see, but everything still looks pretty good

■ **Sound:**
As with many BioWare products, ambient effects and voice-acting abound

■ **Playability:**
Again, the original game's control and menu system makes a reappearance with small tweaks here and there

■ **Entertainment:**
While still good, the Neverwinter series seems to have less of a soul than the Baldur's and Icewind Dale series did

■ **Replay Value:**
High

SECOND OPINION

For NWN fans, this expansion is basically a no-brainer, since it has a decent variety of new content. This includes a new 20-hour quest that will demand at least two play-throughs so you can play it once as a do-gooder and again as an evil bastard. Check that – be evil the first time.

ANDY – 8

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 64-PLAYER ONLINE OR LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI
■ **DEVELOPER** BIOWARE/FLOODGATE ENTERTAINMENT
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 18

GAME BOY ADVANCE

WING COMMANDER PROPHECY

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA LINK)
■ **PUBLISHER** DESTINATION SOFTWARE/ELECTRONIC ARTS
■ **RELEASE** MAY 23
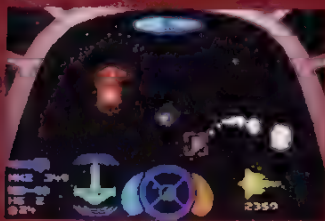
This handheld conversion of the 1997 PC title doesn't have the B-quality acting or amusing FMV sequences that we've come to expect from the series, but the gameplay is fundamentally sound – which is surprising, since it's entirely 3D. While the quality of the polygonal models brings back memories of the 386 processor, the fact that developer Raylight Studios was able to create convincing and enjoyable gameplay around it is an impressive feat. It plays just like the PC series. The dogfighting even includes a targeting assist icon, wingmen commands, and a handy radar. The missions suffer from repetition and the controls are limiting, but the heart of the game – the combat – is done as well as it could be. – **REINER**

T 7

GAME BOY ADVANCE

SIMPSONS ROAD RAGE

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING (2-PLAYER VIA LINK)
■ **PUBLISHER** THQ
■ **RELEASE** JUNE 23

The title screen picture is nice. Now that I got the positives out of the way, let me talk about why this game blows. Springfield looks like a parking lot with chalk drawings of streets on it and a few cardboard box "buildings" scattered haphazardly. It's virtually void of driving freedom – the map blows. It has no trademark Simpsons charm, either. The gameplay is apocalyptically bad, with impossible navigation and likely the worst Mode-7 in the history of cartridges. Here I thought Crazy Taxi: Catch a Ride stunk! I had no idea that the genre could get this foul. – **JUSTIN**

E 2.25

GAME BOY ADVANCE

FREEKSTYLE

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (2-PLAYER VIA LINK)
■ **PUBLISHER** DESTINATION SOFTWARE/EA BIG
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 1
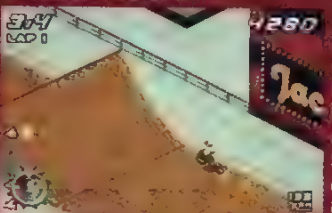
A lot of companies try to redo the old RC Pro Am isometric offroad racing formula and Destination Software's version of Freekstyle does it better than most. Why? It actually contains a good, unique mechanic for turning which let's you slide around curves and even whip out a muddy 180° if you want. The trick system is similar to those used in most extreme sports GBA titles like Tony Hawk, and it's pretty easy to land some sweet moves off of the huge, Excitebike-inspired ramps. I don't know how long you'll want to play this, but you'll have a pretty good time doing it. – **MATT**

E 7.5

GAME BOY ADVANCE

MORTAL KOMBAT: TOURNAMENT EDITION

RISING ABOVE THE ALLIANCE

The core gameplay mechanics haven't changed in the slightest since last year's phenomenal handheld conversion of Deadly Alliance. Tournament Edition simply adds depth to the experience. On the multiplayer end, up to four players can compete for a trophy in tournaments or team up in an intense Tekken Tag-styled two-on-two team match. On the character front, Midway has implemented Bo Rai Cho, Nitra, a new female character named Sareena, plus two additional secret fighters. Overly brutal Weapon Fatalities are also a part of the mix, and for those of you who love to master combos, a handy Practice mode is here for you to hone your skills.

The movement of characters is still a little choppy, but Midway has ironed out the balance issues between fighters and tightened up the gameplay as a whole. All around, it's the same great handheld fighter with a host of much-needed and superfluous enhancements. What more could you ask for? It even features reverse compatibility to Deadly Alliance. Simply said, fighting on the go just got better. – **REINER**

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY ■ **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 25

SECOND OPINION

Gamers get another GBA fighter with clunky controls, grainy graphics, and a broken combo system. On the other hand, if you must own a GBA MK title, know that Tournament Edition plays slightly better than Deadly Alliance.

CHET – 5

THE BOTTOM LINE

M **8.25**

■ **Concept:**
An updated version of last year's game with new characters, four-player support, and reverse compatibility

■ **Graphics:**
The animations are a little jerky, but the character models look fantastic

■ **Sound:**
The dialogue and soundtrack are very impressive

■ **Playability:**
Not as smooth as it could be, but it still has that MK feel

■ **Entertainment:**
The new four-player action adds depth to an already great game

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderately High

GAME BOY ADVANCE

ROAD RASH: JAILBREAK

AN ITCH NOT WORTH SCRATCHING

The Genesis Road Rash games are the poo – take a whiff. It still stands as one of my favorite racing series of all time. I am still waiting for a great handheld translation, and rest assured that 2000's GBC port wasn't it. Thus, I had lofty expectations for this game, despite not being a huge fan of any post-16 bit entry into the series.

Jailbreak (not to be confused with Mary-Kate and Ashley's Jailbait) does little to evoke those fond Road Rash memories. While its environments are slicker and slightly more open than those on Genesis; the control, speed, and combat are all lacking. Having various power-ups available to ward off competitors is just a cop-out, attempting to compensate for the game's shortcomings. There are no rivalries, no bike shop, and only three other racers. Adding insult to injury, every sound effect in Jailbreak makes me grimace.

The GBA can easily handle the things that made the Road Rash series great, but this is just another failed attempt at a decent GBA racing game. If it wasn't for Mario Kart: Super Circuit, I'd be convinced the racing genre has no place on handhelds. – **JUSTIN**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING (2-PLAYER VIA LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** DESTINATION SOFTWARE ■ **DEVELOPER** DESTINATION SOFTWARE/ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 1

SECOND OPINION

Jailbreak has all of the attitude you would expect from a Road Rash game. Unfortunately, none of the other trademarks of the title – like big air, insane crashes, or incredible sense of speed – are here. I like the addition of power-ups, but otherwise the racing is pretty archaic (even in multiplayer).

ANDY – 5

THE BOTTOM LINE

T **4.5**

■ **Concept:**
Motorcycles and violence usually go well together, but not here

■ **Graphics:**
It's easy on the eyes

■ **Sound:**
I couldn't turn down the volume fast enough

■ **Playability:**
I would've traded the goofy power-ups for being able to punch in different directions using the shoulder buttons

■ **Entertainment:**
This doesn't capture the coolness of the old-school Road Rash games in the least

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderately Low

CHARTS

In association with the NPD TRSTS Video Games Service, Charts presents an in-depth listing of the best-selling software on a month-to-month basis. Are the games you spend your hard-earned dollars on top sellers? Take a look below to find out. We've also compiled a listing of the top-selling Japanese software, and, of course, we included a Top 10 list of the games the GI staff is currently enjoying.

NPD TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For March 2003 Based On Units Sold

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
1	N/A	**Splinter Cell**	PS2	8.5	Apr-03	$49

PlayStation 2 owners finally have a big, burly Sam Fisher of their own to cuddle with on starry summer nights. Even people who already own the Xbox version picked this one up, if only to hear the sound the case makes the first time you open it: "Fffisher!" Sam is so dreamy. With his rugged good looks and salt-and-pepper hair, who wouldn't want him lurking around in the shadows?

2	2	**Pokémon Ruby**	GBA	7.25	Mar-03	$30

People love rubies. They're beautiful in jewelry, they make great Pokémon titles…in fact, the only thing with rubies that sucks is ruby red grapefruit. Really, who eats that stuff? The name's not fooling anyone. You might as well eat a leaky battery – it probably tastes better. [Editor's note: Do not eat a leaky battery!]

3	6	**Def Jam Vendetta**	PS2	8.5	Mar-03	$49

This is a good start in bringing rappers to the mainstream, and it's a fun game and everything. We just wish the hip-hop record label would've listened to our suggestion: Def Jam brand jams – the dopest thing ever to go on toast. Flavors include Bling-Bling Berry, P to tha Iz-each, and Where's My Damn Money Cherry. The slogan is, "It's gotta be Def Jam, cuz jelly don't shake like that!"

4	3	**Pokémon Sapphire**	GBA	7.25	Mar-03	$31

Uh oh – Ruby is pulling away from this identical Pokémon release. It looks like Nintendo is going to have to have a 'phire sale to try to even the odds. Get it? Huh-HA, HA! Oh, we got millions of 'em. Here's another: What's short, green, and used to star on 21 Jump Street? Richard Treecko! BURR-oh, yeah!

5	N/A	**NBA Street Vol. 2**	PS2	9	Apr-03	$50

We've been playing this game so much, it inspired us to lace up our Roos and head out to the Loring Park playground. Sure enough, the GI posse held court. We blocked every shot and drove the lane uncontested. Matt messed around and got a triple-double. We basically took the other team to school – something they're probably used to, since they were all seven-year-olds.

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
6	N/A	**Midnight Club II**	PS2	9	Apr-03	$49
7	1	**The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker**	GC	10	Mar-03	$50
8	N/A	**Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide: Stairway to Destined Duel**	GBA	7.5	Apr-03	$36
9	N/A	**Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Battle 22**	PSone	5	Mar-03	$20
10	N/A	**Golden Sun: The Lost Age**	GBA	8	Apr-03	$31
11	N/A	**Final Fantasy Origins**	PSone	9.25	Apr-03	$30
12	7	**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City**	PS2	10	Oct-02	$46
13	13	**Dynasty Warriors 4**	PS2	7	Mar-03	$49
14	10	**MVP Baseball 2003**	PS2	9.25	Mar-03	$49
15	N/A	**X2 Wolverine's Revenge**	PS2	5.5	Apr-03	$48
16	N/A	**NBA Street Vol. 2**	Xbox	9	Apr-03	$50
17	9	**Yu-Gi-Oh! The Duelists of the Roses**	PS2	8	Feb-03	$46
18	N/A	**NFL 2K3**	PS2	9.5	Aug-02	$10
19	12	**SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs**	PS2	9.5	Aug-02	$58
20	N/A	**Hamtaro: Ham-Ham Heartbreak**	GBA	N/A	Apr-03	$30

JAPAN TOP 10

Source: Dempa Japan
. Sold

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	**Virtual On: Marz**	PS2
2	N/A	**Pokémon Box Ruby & Sapphire**	GC
3	N/A	**Hamtaro 4**	GBA
4	N/A	**Winning Post 5: Maximum 2003**	PS2
5	4	**Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire**	GBA
6	3	**Fire Emblem: Flaming Sword**	GBA
7	N/A	**The Sims**	PS2
8	6	**Made in Wario**	GBA
9	N/A	**Final Weapons Sweetheart**	PS2
10	7	**Dragon Quest Monsters: Caravan Heart**	GBA
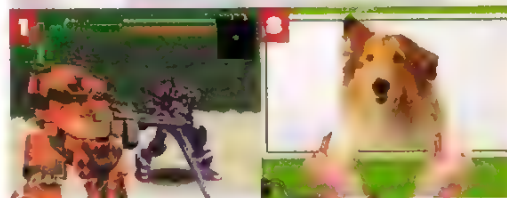
GAME INFORMER TOP 10

The Staff's Favorite Picks

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	1	**PlanetSide**	PC
2	2	**Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising**	GBA
3	N/A	**Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic**	Xbox
4	3	**Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker**	GC
5	9	**NBA Street Vol. 2**	PS2
6	4	**Midnight Club II**	Xbox
7	N/A	**Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution**	PS2
8	N/A	**Xenosaga Volume I**	PS2
9	7	**Enter the Matrix**	PS2
10	10	**Gallop Racer 2003: A New Breed**	PS2

PC TOP 10

Based On Monthly Units Sold. Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Service Kristin Barnett Von Korff (516) 625-2481

POS.	L. MO	GAME	MONTH	PRICE
1	N/A	**The Sims: Superstar**	May-03	$29
2	N/A	**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City**	May-03	$45
3	N/A	**Enter the Matrix**	May-03	$47
4	3	**The Sims Deluxe**	Sep-02	$41
5	N/A	**PlanetSide**	May-03	$48
6	N/A	**Rise of Nations**	May-03	$50
7	2	**Command & Conquer Generals**	Feb-03	$46
8	4	**The Sims: Unleashed**	Sep-02	$28
9	1	**Delta Force: Black Hawk Down**	Mar-03	$38
10	5	**Battlefield 1942**	Sep-02	$47

RAYMAN 3: HOODLUM HAVOC

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT ■ **REVIEWED** MAR-03
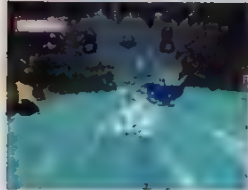
As usual, the plot is equally fanciful and incomprehensible, but -- let's face it – you're not playing Rayman games for the storytelling. You're playing it to marvel at the gorgeously rendered environments, giggle at Globox's antics, and enjoy some good old fashioned platforming done with a fresh twist. By that standard, Rayman 3 is a great success. – **MATT**

E 8.5

PLAYSTATION 2

Aero Elite: Combat Academy	6.75	May-03
All-Star Baseball 2004	8	Apr-03
Amplitude	8.75	May-03
Ape Escape 2	7.5	Apr-03
Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits	8.75	Jul-03
ATV Offroad Fury 2	9	Jan-03
Auto Modellista	8	Jun-03
Battle Engine Aquila	7	Feb-03
Big Mutha Truckers	7.5	May-03
Black & Bruised	7.5	Mar-03
BMX XXX	7.75	Jan-03
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	8	Mar-03
Cabela's Big Game Hunter	7	May-03
Chaos Legion	8.5	Jun-03
Choplifter: Crisis Shield	6.5	May-03
Clock Tower 3	8.5	May-03
Colin McRae Rally 3	8.75	May-03
Contra: Shattered Soldier	8.25	Dec-02
Dark Cloud 2	9.25	Mar-03
DDR Max	7.5	Dec-02
Dead to Rights	9.25	Jan-03
Def Jam Vendetta	8.5	Apr-03
Devil May Cry 2	7	Mar-03
Disaster Report	8	Mar-03
Dot Hack Vol. 1: Infection	8.25	Mar-03
Dot Hack Vol. 2: Mutation	7.75	Jun-03
Dr. Muto	7.75	Dec-02
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	7.25	Jan-03
Drome Racers	7	Jan-03
Dynasty Warriors 3: Xtreme Legends	8.75	Jan-03
Dynasty Warriors 4	7	Apr-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jun-03
Everblue 2	8.75	Mar-03
EverQuest Online Adventures	9	Feb-03
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	7.75	Jun-03
Evolution Skateboarding	5	Dec-02
FIFA 2003	8	Dec-02
Fighter Maker 2	6.5	Feb-03
Finding Nemo	6.5	Jul-03
Fisherman's Challenge	7.5	Mar-03
G1 Jockey 3	8	Jun-03
Gallop Racer 2003: A New Breed	8.5	May-03
Getaway, The	9	Feb-03
Grand Prix Challenge	7.5	May-03
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	10	Dec-02
Guilty Gear X2	8.75	Mar-03
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	6	Jan-03
Haven: Call of the King	8.25	Jan-03
High Heat 2004	7	Apr-03
Hot Wheels: Velocity X	6	Feb-03
Hulk, The	5.5	Jul-03
Hypersonic Xtreme	7.25	Mar-03
IndyCar Series	7	Jun-03
Island Extreme Stunts	6	Feb-03
James Bond 007: NightFire	7.75	Jan-03
James Cameron's Dark Angel	5.25	Jan-03
Jet X20	7.5	Dec-02
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	8.75	Apr-03
K-1 World Grand Prix	6.5	Jul-03
King of Route 66, The	7	Apr-03
Legends of Wrestling II	7	Feb-03
Lord of the Rings, The: Fellowship of the Ring, The	3	Dec-02
Lord of the Rings, The: The Two Towers, The	9.25	Dec-02
Marvel Vs. Capcom 2	8.5	Dec-02
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	8.5	Apr-03
Midnight Club II	9	May-03
Minority Report: Everybody Runs	6.75	Feb-03
MLB 2004	6.5	Apr-03
MLB Slugfest 2004	6	Apr-03
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	9.5	Jan-03
MotoGP 3	7	Apr-03
Music Maker	8	Jul-03
MVP Baseball 2003	9.25	Apr-03
Naval Ops: Warship Gunner	7.5	Jun-03
NBA Starting Five	6.25	Dec-02
NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA College Basketball 2K3	5.75	Jan-03
NCAA Final Four	1.25	Jan-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.75	Jul-03
NCAA March Madness 2003	8	Jan-03

Ninja Assault	6.25	Feb-03
Pride FC	8	Feb-03
Primal	6.75	May-03
P.T.O. IV	7.75	Mar-03
Rally Fusion: Race of Champions	8	Dec-02
Ratchet & Clank	8.75	Dec-02
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	8.5	Mar-03
Red Faction II	8.75	Dec-02
Reel Fishing III	3	Jul-03
Reign of Fire	6.25	Dec-02
Resident Evil Dead Aim	6	Jun-03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Operation Resurrection	7.5	Jul-03
Robotic Alchemic Drive	7.75	Dec-02
RTX Red Rock	6.5	Jul-03
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	9	Dec-02
Shinobi	8	Dec-02
Silent Line: Armored Core	7.5	Jul-03
Simpsons Skateboarding	1	Dec-02
Sims, The	9	Feb-03
Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus	9.25	Nov-02
Speed Kings	6.5	Jul-03
Splinter Cell	8.5	Apr-03
Star Wars: Bounty Hunter	5.75	Jan-03
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	7.75	Feb-03
Sub Rebellion	7.5	Jan-03
Suikoden III	9.5	Dec-02
Summoner 2	8	Nov-02
Super Bust-A-Move 2	7.5	Dec-02
Superman: Shadow of Apokolips	7	Nov-02
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	9	Apr-03
Thing, The	8.25	Nov-02
TimeSplitters 2	8.25	Dec-02
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	9.25	Dec-02
Treasure Planet	7.75	Jan-03
Tribes Aerial Assault	8	Nov-02
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger	7.75	Nov-02
Unlimited SaGa	6.5	Jun-03
Vexx	6.75	Apr-03
V-Rally 3	8.75	Jan-03
Wakeboarding Unleashed Featuring Shaun Murray	8.25	Jul-03
War of the Monsters	6	Feb-03
Wild Arms 3	7.75	Nov-02
Winning Eleven 6	9	Apr-03
World Series Baseball 2K3	6.75	Apr-03
World Tour Soccer 2003	8.5	Feb-03
Wreckless	7.75	Dec-02
WWE Crush Hour	5.25	May-03
WWE Smackdown: Shut Your Mouth	7.5	Dec-02
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.5	Jun-03
X-Men Next Dimension	7.75	Jan-03
Xenosaga Episode 1: Der Wille Zur Macht	9.75	Mar-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Duelists of the Roses	8	Apr-03
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	8.5	May-03

GAMECUBE

Army Men: Sarge's War	6	May-03
ATV Quad Power Racing 2	8	Mar-03
Batman: Dark Tomorrow	0.75	Mar-03
Big Air Freestyle	6	Nov-02
Black & Bruised	7.5	Mar-03
Blood Omen 2	7.5	Jan-03
BloodRayne	7	Dec-02
BMX XXX	7.75	Feb-03
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	8.5	Feb-03
Capcom Vs. SNK 2 EO	7.5	Nov-02
Conflict: Desert Storm	6	May-03
Cubivore	7.5	Nov-02
Darkened Skye	6.75	Jan-03
Dead to Rights	8.75	Jan-03
Def Jam Vendetta	8.75	Apr-03
Die Hard: Vendetta	6	Jan-03
Disney Sports Football	6.75	Mar-03
Disney Sports Soccer	8	Feb-03
Disney's PK: Out of the Shadows	4.75	Mar-03
Dr. Muto	7	Dec-02
Dragon's Lair 3D	7.75	Feb-03
Egg Mania	7.75	Nov-02
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jun-03
Evolution Worlds	7	Dec-02
FIFA 2003	8	Jan-03

Ghost Recon	7.75	May-03
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	8	Nov-02
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	8	Jul-03
Hulk, The	5.75	Jul-03
Ikaruga	9	May-03
James Bond 007: NightFire	8	Jun-03
Knockout Kings 2003	7.5	Nov-02
Legend of Zelda, The: The Wind Waker, The	10	Apr-03
Legends of Wrestling II	6.75	Feb-03
Lord of the Rings, The: The Two Towers, The	9.25	Jan-03
Lost Kingdoms II	8.5	Jun-03
Mario Party 4	3	Dec-02
Medal of Honor: Frontline	8.75	Dec-02
Mega Man: Network Transmission	6.25	Jun-03
Metroid Prime	9.5	Jan-03
Minority Report: Everybody Runs	6.75	Feb-03
MLB Slugfest 2004	6.75	Apr-03
Monsters, Inc. Scream Arena	5	Dec-02
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	9	Jan-03
NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.5	Jul-03
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	7.5	Nov-02
NHL Hitz 2003	8.75	Nov-02
Outlaw Golf	7.75	Dec-02
Pac-Man Fever	7.25	Nov-02
Phantasy Star Online Version I & II	8	Jan-03
Rayman Arena	7	Nov-02
Red Faction II	8.75	Apr-03
Resident Evil 0	9.25	Jan-03
Resident Evil 2	8	Apr-03
Resident Evil 3: Nemesis	7.75	Apr-03
Robotech: Battlecry	8.5	Dec-02
Shrek Extra Large	3	Jan-03
Sims, The	8.75	May-03
Skies of Arcadia Legends	9	Feb-03
Sonic Adventure DX	5	May-03
Sonic Mega Collection	8.75	Dec-02
Speed Kings	7	Jul-03
Splinter Cell	8.5	May-03
Spyro: Enter the Dragonfly	4.75	Jan-03
Star Fox Adventures	8.75	Nov-02
Star Wars: Bounty Hunter	5	Feb-03
Star Wars: Jedi Outcast	8.75	Jan-03
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	8.25	Dec-02
Sum of All Fears, The	5.5	Apr-03
Summoner: A Goddess Reborn	9	Apr-03
Super Bubble Pop	8	Feb-03
Superman: Shadow of Apokolips	8.5	May-03
Swingerz Golf	7.75	Jan-03
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	8	Nov-02
TimeSplitters 2	8.5	Nov-02
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	9	Dec-02
Top Gun: Combat Zones	6.75	Nov-02
Transworld Surf: Next Wave	5.5	May-03
Tube Slider	6.5	Jun-03
Turok: Evolution	7.75	Nov-02
Ultimate Muscle	7.5	Jul-03
Vexx	8.25	Mar-03
Wario World	8.5	Jul-03
Whirl Tour	7.5	Nov-02
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions	7.75	Jan-03
WWE Crush Hour	4	May-03
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.75	Jun-03
X-Men: Next Dimension	7.75	Jan-03
Zapper: One Wicked Cricket	8.75	Dec-02

XBOX

All-Star Baseball 2004	8	Apr-03
Antz Extreme Racing	5.5	Dec-02
Apex	7.75	May-03
ATV: Quad Power Racing 2	7.5	Apr-03
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	8.5	Dec-02
Barbarian	7.25	Nov-02
Battle Engine Aquila	7	Feb-03
Black Stone: Magic & Steel	3	Feb-03
Blade II	6	Nov-02

MECHWARRIOR 4: MERCENARIES

■ **FORMAT** PC ■ **STYLE** 1 TO 16 PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **REVIEWED** JAN-03

Successfully completing missions will give you contract money, as well as salvage from the smoldering hulks you left on the battlefield. From there, you can choose to use what your salvage team has gathered, or sell it off like the crap that it is. This play formula works seamlessly, and the open-ended story line provides for the kind of replay value you won't see in the multiplayer portion. I loved upgrading my mechs and watching my team kick ass in the field, but the AI is quite suspect at times and the terrain looks decidedly dated. Who cares?! This game rules. Get it. Now. – **KRISTIAN**

T 9.5

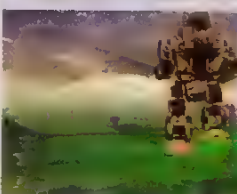|		
Blinx: The Time Sweeper	7.75	Nov-02
BloodRayne	7.75	Dec-02
Bloody Roar Extreme	6.5	Jul-03
BMX XXX	7.75	Jan-03
Brute Force	8.25	Jul-03
Burnout 2: Point of Impact Developer's Cut	8.5	Jun-03
Capcom Vs. SNK 2 EO	8.5	Jan-03
Colin McRae Rally 3	8.75	Dec-02
Commandos 2: Men of Courage	6	Nov-02
Conflict: Desert Storm	6	Nov-02
Crimson Sea	7.75	Feb-03
Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	7.5	Mar-03
Deathrow	5	Jan-03
Defender	8.25	Feb-03
Dr. Muto	8	Dec-02
Dragon's Lair 3D	7.75	Jan-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jul-03
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	8	Jun-03
Fatal Frame	9	Jan-03
Furious Karting	6	Jun-03
Ghost Recon	8.5	Dec-02
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	7.5	Jun-03
High Heat 2004	7.25	Apr-03
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	8.5	Dec-02
House of the Dead III, The	6.5	Nov-02
Hulk, The	5.75	Jul-03
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	8.5	Mar-03
James Bond 007: NightFire	7.75	Jan-03
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	8.25	Apr-03
Kakuto Chojin	6.25	Jan-03
Kung Fu Chaos	6.5	May-03
Legends of Wrestling II	6.75	Feb-03
Lord of the Rings, The: The Two Towers, The	9.25	Feb-03
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	8	Jul-03
Marvel Vs. Capcom 2	8.5	May-03
MechAssault	8.75	Dec-02
Medal of Honor: Frontline	8.75	Dec-02
Metal Dungeon	6	Feb-03
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	9.25	Jan-03
Micro Machines	6	May-03
Midnight Club II	9	Jul-03
Midtown Madness 3	5.25	Jul-03
Minority Report: Everybody Runs	6.75	Feb-03
MLB Inside Pitch 2003	5.5	Jun-03
MLB Slugfest 2004	6.75	Apr-03
Monopoly Party	4	Dec-02
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	9.5	Dec-02
MotoGP 2	8	Dec-02
Murakumo	5.75	Mar-03
MVP Baseball 2003	9.25	Apr-03
NASCAR Thunder 2003	9	Nov-02
NBA Inside Drive 2003	7.5	Nov-02
NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.5	Jul-03
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	8.5	Nov-02
NHL 2003	7.75	Nov-02
NHL 2K3	9.25	Dec-02
NHL Hitz 2003	8.75	Nov-02
Nightcaster II: Equinox	5.75	Feb-03
Panzer Dragoon Orta	8.25	Jan-03
Phantom Crash	7.5	Jan-03
Prisoner of War	7	Nov-02
Pro Race Driver	9	Apr-03
Pulse Racer	3	Feb-03
Quantum Redshift	6	Nov-02
Rally Fusion: Race of Champions	8	Jan-03
Red Faction II	8.25	Apr-03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	9.25	Jun-03
Robocop	3.5	May-03
Robotech: Battlecry	8.5	Nov-02
Rocky	7	Dec-02
Roller Coaster Tycoon	2	Jun-03
Run Like Hell	8	May-03
Seablade	4	Jan-03

Serious Sam	9	Dec-02
Shenmue II	8	Jan-03
Shrek: Super Party	3.25	Jan-03
Sims, The	8.75	Apr-03
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	8	Jul-03
Speed Kings	7	Jul-03
Splinter Cell	8.75	Jan-03
Star Wars: Jedi Outcast	9	Dec-02
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	8.5	Jun-03
State of Emergency	7	May-03
Steel Battalion	9.5	Dec-02
Superman: The Man of Steel	4.75	Jan-03
Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus	7.25	Apr-03
Thug, The	8.25	Nov-02
TimeSplitters 2	8.5	Dec-02
ToeJam & Earl III: Mission to Earth	6	Nov-02
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	9	Dec-02
Total Immersion Racing	6.5	Jan-03
Toxic Grind	6.25	Feb-03
Transworld Snowboarding	6.5	Jan-03
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger	6.5	Nov-02
UFC: Tapout 2	6.25	May-03
Unreal Championship	8.75	Jan-03
Vexx	8	Mar-03

NBA STREET VOL. 2

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** EA BIG ■ **REVIEWED** MAY-03

NBA Challenge pits your team against all other NBA squads. Unlike last year, you can't update your roster with defeated players – so choose your crew carefully. This makes every game a challenge, but I honestly miss this feature from last year. You can craft a custom squad of your five favorites, but it's not the same. My few complaints are very minor, like the shot clock resetting incorrectly and generic players sometimes looking too similar. I don't feel the same elation as I did playing the first Street, but Vol. 2 advances the series and gives fans more than enough reason to pick it up. – **JUSTIN**

E 9

Wakeboarding Unleashed Featuring Shaun Murray	8.5	Jul-03
Whacked	2	Dec-02
Whiteout	6.25	Dec-02
World Racing	5	Jun-03
World Series Baseball 2K3	7	Apr-03
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.5	Jun-03

PC

1503 A.D.: The New World	7.5	Apr-03
Age of Mythology	9	Jan-03
Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings	8.5	Feb-03
Battlefield 1942	9	Nov-02
Celtic Kings: Rage of War	7	Nov-02
Command & Conquer Generals	9.25	Apr-03
Cultures 2: Gates of Asgard	7.75	Nov-02
Divine Divinity	7.75	Dec-02
Earth & Beyond	9.25	Dec-02
Europa 1400: The Guild	8.5	Feb-03
EverQuest: The Planes of Power	9.5	Jan-03
Freelancer	9.5	May-03
Harbinger	6	May-03
Highland Warriors	6.5	Apr-03
IGI 2: Covert Strike	7.25	Apr-03
Impossible Creatures	7.5	Mar-03
Mafia	9.25	Nov-02
Master of Orion III	8	Apr-03
MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries	9.5	Jan-03
Medal of Honor: Spearhead	8.25	Jan-03
Medieval: Total War - Viking Invasion	8.75	Jun-03
No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy in H.A.R.M.'s Way	9	Dec-02
PlanetSide	9.25	Jul-03
Postal 2	7.5	Jun-03
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	7.25	May-03
Restaurant Empire	6.75	Jul-03
Rise of Nations	9	Jul-03
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2	8.5	Dec-02
Shadowbane	6.75	Jun-03
SimCity 4	9.75	Feb-03
Sims Online, The	9	Feb-03
Sims: Superstar, The	8	Jul-03
Spring Break	7.5	Nov-02
Star Trek: Starfleet Command	9.25	Jan-03
Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided	9.5	Jan-03
Stronghold: Crusader	8.75	Dec-02
Sybena	6.75	Nov-02
Tropico 2: Pirate Cove	8	Jun-03
Unreal: The Awakening	9.5	Mar-03
Unreal Tournament 2003	9.5	Dec-02

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	9.25	Jul-03
Aggressive Inline	7.75	Dec-02

Airforce Delta Storm	6.75	Dec-02
All-Star Baseball 2004	6.5	Apr-03
Altered Beast: Guardian of the Realms	7.5	Feb-03
ATV: Quad Power Racing	6	Dec-02
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	9.25	Jun-03
Contra Advance: The Alien Wars EX	6.75	Dec-02
Crash Bandicoot 2: N-Tranced	7.5	Jan-03
Crazy Taxi: Catch a Ride	4	May-03
Daredevil	5	Mar-03
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 3	8.25	Mar-03
Defender	2	Feb-03
Donkey Kong Country	9	Dec-02
Doom II	8.5	Dec-02
Dragon Ball Z: Legacy of Goku II	7.5	Jul-03
Driver 2 Advance	7.75	Nov-02
Dungeons & Dragons: Eye of the Beholder	5.5	Mar-03
Fire Pro Wrestling 2	9	Mar-03
Gaidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension	7.75	Dec-02
Game & Watch: Gallery 4	3	Feb-03
Godzilla Domination!	4.5	May-03
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	8	Apr-03
GT Advance 3: Pro Concept Racing	7.25	Mar-03
Incredible Hulk, The	4	Jul-03
Iridion II	8	May-03
Justice League: Injustice for All	4.25	Feb-03
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	8.75	Jan-03
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past, The	9.25	Jan-03
Legends of Wrestling I	0.75	Mar-03
Lego Bionicle: Matoran Adventures	7.75	Nov-02
Lord of the Rings, The: Fellowship of the Ring, The	5	Dec-02
Lord of the Rings, The: The Two Towers, The	6.75	Feb-03
Lost Vikings, The	7	Jun-03
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	7.75	Apr-03
Lunar Legend	7.5	Feb-03
Masters of the Universe: He-Man – Power of Grayskull	3.75	Jan-03
Mega Man & Bass	8	Mar-03
Mega Man Battle Network 3: Blue and White	8	Jun-03
Metroid Fusion	10	Jan-03
Monster Rancher Advance 2	8.5	Jan-03
Muppets: On With the Show	5.5	Jun-03
Ninja Five-O	8.25	Jul-03
Phantasy Star Collection	8	Feb-03
Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire	7.25	Apr-03
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	8	Mar-03
Revenge of Shinobi, The	6	Feb-03
Ripping Friends: The World's Most Manly Men, The	4.75	Dec-02
Robotech: The Macross Saga	8.5	Jan-03
Rocky	7.5	Jan-03
Samurai Jack: The Amulet of Time	8	Feb-03
Sega Rally Championship	5	Mar-03
Sega Smash Pack	7	Dec-02
Sonic Advance 2	7.5	May-03
Sonic Pinball Party	6	Jul-03
Splinter Cell	8.5	Jun-03
Spyro 2: Season of Flame	7.5	Dec-02
SSX Tricky	4	Dec-02
Star Wars: The New Droid Army	6	Feb-03
Super Ghouls N' Ghosts	8.5	Nov-02
Super Monkey Ball Jr	8	Feb-03
Super Puzzle Fighter II	9	Apr-03
Tomb Raider: The Prophecy	6.5	Jan-03
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	8	Jan-03
Virtua Tennis	7.75	Jan-03
Wacky Stackers	6.5	Jan-03
Wario Ware, Inc.: Mega Microgames	7.5	Jun-03
WWE Road to Wrestlemania X8	7	Mar-03
Yoshi's Island: Super Mario Advance 3	8.75	Nov-02
Yu-Gi-Oh! Dungeon Dice Monsters	8	Apr-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition: Stairway to the Destined Duel	7.5	Jun-03

PLAYSTATION 2

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
7/21/03	Aliens vs Predator: Extinction	Electronic Arts
8/26/03	Alter Echo	THQ
7/15/03	Armored Core: Silent Line	Tommo
9/30/03	Backyard Wrestling	Eidos
9/23/03	Battlestar Galactica	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi Universal

CHARLIE'S ANGELS

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT ■ **RELEASE** JULY 15

Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle has got it all. Let's see…three of Hollywood's hottest and sexiest leading ladies, check… comedy genius Bernie Mac, check…the most annoyingly named director (McG) in film history, check…and a video game by Ubi Soft, check and mate! Yep, this looks to be a blockbuster summer for the Angels, but we hope that the box office is big enough to carry this lackluster title to the top of the charts, because it looks like it's going to need a little help. However, it does have some pretty realistically rendered versions of the lovely Angels (and Bernie, for you ladies out there), and even features that crazy "slow-down time" effect that's been so popular since that one movie Keanu Reeves was in (we think it was *My Own Private Idaho*).

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
7/29/03	Butt Ugly Martians	SVG
8/26/03	Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004	Activision
9/16/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
8/5/03	Chaos Legion	Capcom
7/15/03	Charlie's Angels	Ubi Soft
8/12/03	Chopifter: Crisis Shield	Xicat
8/19/03	Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft
9/9/03	Dance Dance Revolution: Max 2	Konami
9/15/03	Daredevil	Encore
8/26/03	Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atlus
9/2/03	Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure	Activision
8/12/03	Dot Hack Vol 3 Outbreak	Bandai
7/22/03	Downhill Domination	Sony
9/23/03	Dynasty Tactics 2	Koei
7/29/03	Ejay Clubworld	SVG
8/1/03	ESPN NFL Football	Sega
8/4/03	Freaky Flyers	Midway
9/22/03	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts
8/12/03	Futurama: The Game	Vivendi Universal
9/29/03	Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim
8/19/03	Gladius	LucasArts
7/22/03	Great Escape, The	Take 2
9/1/03	Gunfighter 2: Return of Jesse James	Ubi Soft
9/23/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
8/19/03	Hunter: The Reckoning Wayward	Vivendi Universal
9/9/03	Ice Nine	Bam Entertainment
9/16/03	Jak II	Sony
9/1/03	Kengo 2	Ubi Soft
9/16/03	Lethal Skies II	Sammy
8/12/03	Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts
9/16/03	NBA ShootOut 2004	Sony
7/15/03	NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts
8/12/03	NCAA GameBreaker 2004	Sony
9/2/03	NFL Blitz Pro	Midway
8/12/03	NFL GameDay 2004	Sony
9/22/03	NHL Hitz Pro	Midway
8/5/03	Reel Fishing III	SVG
9/9/03	Risk Global Domination	Atari
9/22/03	Road Kill	Midway
9/30/03	Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	Capcom
8/12/03	Romance of the Three Kingdoms VIII	Koei
8/5/03	Silent Hill 3	Konami
9/9/03	Simpsons: Hit and Run	Vivendi Universal
7/24/03	Smash Cars	Metro3D
8/26/03	Soul Calibur II	Namco
9/25/03	Sphinx and the Shadow of Set	THQ
8/4/03	Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild	THQ
8/1/03	Star Trek Shattered Universe	TDK Mediactive
9/16/03	Starsky & Hutch	Take 2
9/16/03	True Crime: Streets of LA	Activision
8/12/03	Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution	Sega
9/10/03	Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	THQ
7/29/03	XGRA	Acclaim

GAMECUBE

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
9/29/03	1080°: Avalanche	Nintendo
9/23/03	Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	Sega
8/26/03	Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
9/1/03	Chessmaster	Ubi Soft
8/25/03	F-Zero GX	Nintendo
9/2/03	Freaky Flyers	Midway
8/19/03	Gladius	LucasArts
7/29/03	Grooverider: Slot Car Thunder	Encore
9/23/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
9/2/03	Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi Universal
8/12/03	Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts
7/26/03	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo
9/23/03	Medabots Infinity	SVG
8/19/03	Motor Trend Lotus Challenge	Capcom
7/15/03	NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts
9/2/03	NFL Blitz Pro	Midway

XBOX

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
7/21/03	Aliens vs Predator Extinction	Electronic Arts
8/26/03	Alter Echo	THQ
9/30/03	Backyard Wrestling	Eidos
9/23/03	Battlestar Galactica	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
9/1/03	Chessmaster	Ubi Soft
9/2/03	Crimson Skies	Microsoft
9/25/03	Crypt Hunter	Metro3D
9/15/03	Daredevil	Encore
8/5/03	Dino Crisis 3	Capcom
9/2/03	Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure	Activision
8/28/03	Dronez	Metro3D
9/3/03	Dynasty Warriors 4	Koei
8/1/03	ESPN NFL Football	Sega
9/2/03	Fila Tennis Champions	Xicat
8/4/03	Freaky Flyers	Midway
9/22/03	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts
9/1/03	Fuel	Dreamcatcher
8/12/03	Futurama: The Game	Vivendi Universal
8/5/03	Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubi Soft
9/29/03	Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim
8/19/03	Gladius	LucasArts
7/22/03	Great Escape	Take 2
7/29/03	Grooverider: Slot Car Thunder	Encore
8/26/03	Group S Challenge	Capcom
9/23/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
8/12/03	Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts
7/15/03	NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts
9/3/03	NFL Blitz Pro	Midway
8/13/03	NFL Fever 2004	Microsoft
9/22/03	NHL Hitz Pro	Midway
8/26/03	Otogi: Myth of Demons	Sega
8/26/03	Pro Cast Fishing	Xicat
9/22/03	Road Kill	Midway
8/18/03	Scooby Doo: Night of 1000 Frights	THQ
9/9/03	Simpsons: Hit and Run	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Soul Calibur II	Namco
8/1/03	Star Trek: Shattered Universe	TDK Mediactive
7/15/03	Star Wars: Knights of Old Republic	LucasArts
9/3/03	Starsky & Hutch	Take 2
9/16/03	Top Spin	Microsoft
9/16/03	True Crime: Streets of LA	Activision
9/1/03	Ultimate Beach Soccer	Dreamcatcher
9/23/03	Voodoo Vince	Microsoft
9/29/03	WWE Raw 2	THQ
7/29/03	XGRA	Acclaim

PC

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
9/3/03	Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft
7/25/03	Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic	Take 2
9/30/03	American Conquest Fight Back	Hip Interactive

CELEBRITY DEATHMATCH

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2/XBOX/GAMECUBE/PC ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** GOTHAM GAMES
■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16

It's been a long time since we blew the doors off this hot title, so we thought we'd check in to see just what kind of progress Celebrity Deathmatch is making. From what we saw at E3, it doesn't appear much more polished than it was when we did a feature on the game a few months ago, which is not a good sign. Still, it is possible that Celebrity Deathmatch might make up for its homely looks and clumsiness with a ton of personality and a winning sense of humor (just like the Game Informer staff does!). Just kidding – we have really bad personalities.

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
7/22/03	Anarchy Online: Shadowlands	Funcom
9/9/03	Apocalyptica	Konami
7/22/03	Aquanox 2 Revelation	JoWood
9/2/03	Backyard Football 2004	Atari
8/12/03	Baldur's Gate: Ultimate Collection	Vivendi Universal
9/1/03	Battlecruiser Generations	Dreamcatcher
9/9/03	Battlefield 1942: Deluxe Edition	Electronic Arts
9/9/03	Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WWII	Electronic Arts
9/18/03	Black 9	Majesco
9/1/03	BloodRayne	Vivendi Universal
8/28/03	Breed	Hip Interactive
8/26/03	Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2004 Season	Activision
8/26/03	Cabela's Grandslam 2004 Trophies	Activision
9/16/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
8/19/03	Chaser	JoWood
8/19/03	Cold Zero	JoWood

PC (continued)

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
9/22/03	Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	Eidos
9/1/03	Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Vivendi Universal
9/2/03	Crusaders Kings	Strategy First
8/12/03	Dora The Explorer: Animal Adventures	Atari
8/5/03	Etherlords II	Strategy First
8/18/03	EverQuest: Evolution	Verant Interactive/989 Studios
8/5/03	Fire Department	Atari
9/2/03	Firefighter 259	Global Star Software
7/29/03	Flight Simulator 2004	Microsoft
9/22/03	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts
9/2/03	Friday Night 3D Darts	Global Star Software
9/2/03	Friday Night 3D Pool	Global Star Software
8/1/03	Friday Night Bowling	Global Star Software
9/16/03	Galidor: Defenders Outer Dimension	Electronic Arts
9/2/03	Ghost Master	Vivendi Universal
9/29/03	Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim
9/2/03	Great Empires Collection 3	Vivendi Universal
7/22/03	Great Escape, The	Take 2
9/16/03	Greyhawk The Temple of Elemental Evil	Atari
9/30/03	Half-Life 2	Vivendi Universal
9/30/03	Halo	Microsoft
8/26/03	Heaven and Hell	Hip Interactive
9/23/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Homeworld 2	Vivendi Universal
9/2/03	Horizons Online	Atari
9/16/03	Hoyle's Card Games 2004	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Hoyle's Casino 2004	Vivendi Universal
7/29/03	Hoyle's Majestic Chess	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Hoyle's Puzzle Games 2004	Vivendi Universal

1080°: AVALANCHE

■ **FORMAT** PC ■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 29

1080° Snowboarding was one of the most beloved extreme sports games of the 64-bit era. Heck, we still have good memories of that N64 classic. However, that game came out way back in 1998, before titles like Tony Hawk's Pro Skater and SSX redefined the genre. Can this long-awaited sequel still compete amidst a much tougher field? We'll have to see, but 1080° Avalanche does distinguish itself from the crowd with cool changing environments (the avalanches in the title) and an emphasis not on tricks, but on hardcore snowboarding fundamentals. All this and it looks great, too!

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
9/16/03	Hoyle's Table Games 2004	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Icewind Dale: Ultimate Collection	Vivendi Universal
9/15/03	Inquisition	Strategy First
8/26/03	Kawasaki Racing	Atari
9/30/03	Law & Order II: Double or Nothing	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Links Championship Edition	Microsoft
8/12/03	Lion Heart	Vivendi Universal
8/19/03	Lock On Modern Air Combat	Ubi Soft
9/9/03	Lords of the Realm III	Vivendi Universal
9/2/03	Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi Universal
8/12/03	Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts
9/16/03	NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts
9/16/03	NHL 2004	Electronic Arts
8/12/03	No Man's Land	Hip Interactive
8/26/03	OC Racing	Jaleco
9/2/03	One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	Tri-Synergy
9/23/03	Rainbow Six 3 Athena Sword	Ubi Soft
7/29/03	Rebels Prison Escape	Hip Interactive
9/2/03	Ring II	Global Star Software
9/3/03	Rugby	Electronic Arts
7/28/03	Savage	igames
9/15/03	Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts
9/22/03	Sim City 4 Rush Hour	Electronic Arts
9/15/03	Space Colony	Take 2
7/21/03	Space Haste II	Strategy First
9/15/03	Starsky & Hutch	Take 2
9/1/03	Team Fortress Online	Vivendi Universal
9/22/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
8/26/03	Tron 2.0	Disney Interactive
9/1/03	Ultimate Beach Soccer	Dreamcatcher
9/2/03	Ultimate Demolition Derby	Global Star Software
9/19/03	WarCraft III Battlechest	Vivendi Universal
9/9/03	Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	THQ
8/9/03	World Championship Pool 2003	Jaleco
8/5/03	Zoo Tycoon: Complete Collection	Microsoft

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
9/9/03	Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami
8/26/03	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft
9/8/03	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo
9/23/03	Hobbit, The	Vivendi Universal
9/9/03	Ice Nine	Bam Entertainment
8/12/03	Lizzie McGuire	Disney Interactive
8/12/03	Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts
7/28/03	Monster Truck Madness	THQ
9/2/03	Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee	THQ
8/26/03	Onimusha Tactics	Capcom
8/25/03	Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo
9/2/03	Rocket Power Gravity Zone	THQ
9/15/03	Scooby Doo Mystery Mayhem	THQ
9/22/03	Star Wars: Flight of the Falcon	THQ
9/22/03	Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3	Nintendo
9/16/03	Woody Woodpecker Crazy Castle 5	Kemco

SECRET ACCESS

SILENT HILL 3

It's scary as hell, but it didn't frighten us enough to avoid giving our GI readers a few codes.

Bonus Costumes – To use them, you must finish the game first and unlock the Extra Costume option. Once you do that, enter the following case-sensitive passwords. Now you can equip them during gameplay.

Block Head – PutHere2FeelJoy
Don't Touch – TOUCH_MY_HEART
Heather Shirt – HappyBirthDay
Gamereactor T-shirt – SH3_Wrestlarn
God of Thunder – GangsterGirl
Golden Rooster – cockadooodledoo
Killer Rabbit – BlueRobbieWin
Onsen – I_Love_You
Play Shirt – sLmLdGhSmKfBfH
Royal Flush – 01_03_08_11_12
The Light – LightToFuture
Transform Costume – PrincessHeart
Transience – ShogyouMujou
Zipper – Shut_your_mouth

Douglas in Underwear – Complete the game once, highlight the Extra New Game option at the Main Menu. Press Up (x2), Down (x2), Left, Right, Left, Right, O, X. If done correctly, Heather will sigh after you select a Riddle level. Now, in some scenes, Douglas will wear his underwear.

Extra Options Menu – Press L1 or R1 at the Options screen to display the Extra Options Menu.

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen playing as the Viking's center for the sexy Daunte Culpepper)

CODE OF THE MONTH
THE HULK

Unless otherwise noted, all codes must be entered at the Code Input screen under the Options screen. The codes are unlocked in the Cheats menu.

Desert Battle Movie Art – FIFTEEN as a code during gameplay at a terminal.
Double All Enemies HP – BRNGITN
Double Hulk's HP – HLTHDSE
Full Rage Meter – ANGMNGT
Half All Enemies HP – MMMYHLP
Hulk Movie F/X Movie Art – NANOMED as a code during gameplay at a terminal.
Hulk Transformed Movie Art – SANFRAN as a code during gameplay at a terminal.
Hulk Versus Hulk Dogs Movie Art – PITBULL as a code during gameplay at a terminal.
Invulnerability – GMMSKIN
Play as Gray Hulk – Enter JANITOR as a code during gameplay at a terminal.
Puzzle Solved – BRCESTN
Regenerator – FLSHWND
Reset High Score – NMBTHIH
Unlimited Continues – GRNCHTR
Unlock All Levels – TRUBLVR
Wicked Punch – FSTOFRY

B.J. Grant
New York, NY

TENCHU 3: WRATH OF HEAVEN

The stealth assassin strikes back with yet more codes. Lock, load, and enjoy!

All Multiplayer Mode Missions – Press L1, R1, L2, R2, Right, □, L3, R3 at the Mission Selection screen in Multiplayer mode.

Bonus Rikimaru Stage – At the title screen, press L1, Up, R1, Down, L2, Right, R2, Left.

Control Enemies – In story mode, pause during gameplay. On controller two, press L1, R3, R1, L3, Right, □, Up, □, L2, Left, □, Down, R2. If the game resumes automatically, you'll know that you've entered the code correctly. Now, get close to an enemy or NPC, and you should be able to control their actions with controller two. Note that enabling this code may cause the game to crash. This code will grant you complete access to every enemy simultaneously. When you enable the code near an enemy with a question mark on the radar (which indicates the foe isn't aware of your presence), you can use basic controls with the d-pad. Press Left or Right to rotate every enemy on the map. R1 will cause enemies to duck. Press X to make them jump; press it again to cause them to double-jump. Press Up to make foes move forward. Note that they cannot attack when they are unaware of you. If they have an exclamation point, their moves will turn offensive. The controls are the same for enemies in the question mark state, except that they can move backwards and attack with □. Although you might be inclined to attack enemies using enemies, you cannot inflict any damage.

Display Score and Time – Pause during gameplay and press Right (x2), Left (x2) on controller two.

Increase Score – Pause during gameplay, then hold L1 + R1 and press Right (x2), Left (x2) on controller two to add 100 points to your score.

Toggle Special Abilities – Pause during gameplay, then hold L1 + L2 and press Up (x2), Down (x2). Release L1 + L2 and press □ (2x), R1, R2.

Unlimited Item Capacity – At the Item Selection screen, hold L1 + L2 + R1 + R2 and press □ (x3), Up, Left, Down, Right, □, Up, Right, Down, Left. You can still only carry six types of items, but your capacity for those items is unlimited.

Steve "Scrappy" Neale
Rockville, MD

WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED

It's another Tony Hawk rip-off, but an interesting one that actually doesn't play poorly at all. Enter the following codes at the Main Menu. A message will indicate a correct code entry. Note that you have to enter these codes quickly in order for them to work.

All Gaps – R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2
Level Select – □ (x4), O (x4), △ (x4), □, O, △
Second and Third Boards – Up (x2), Left (x2), Right (x2), Down (x2), Up, Left, Right, Down, Up, Left, Right, Down

Sophie Wells
Redmond, WA

MIDNIGHT CLUB II

If you pay attention to Secret Access, you'll notice these codes are exactly the same as the PS2 counterpart. However, the PS2 codes don't work in the Xbox version. Note that these cheats adjust the game's difficulty. Nine is the most difficult while zero is the easiest.

Cheat Mode – Highlight Options Mode at the Main Menu. Press Down to highlight Options: <name>. Now press left or right on the d-pad until Options: Cheat Codes appears. Press A and enter one of the case-sensitive cheat codes.

Difficulty Settings

howhardcanitbe0	howhardcanitbe5
howhardcanitbe1	howhardcanitbe6
howhardcanitbe2	howhardcanitbe7
howhardcanitbe3	howhardcanitbe8
howhardcanitbe4	howhardcanitbe9

Tru Frii
Minneapolis, MN

INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB

We have yet to discover any real codes for this game, but until we do, these tricks aren't too bad.

Infinite Grenade Capacity – Obtain two grenades, which is the maximum number you can hold in your pack. However, if you jump into water while holding a third grenade, you can place it into your pack. Repeat this procedure as much as you like for unlimited grenade capacity.

Missing Hat – Whenever you pause the game, check out Indy's head. You'll notice that his hat disappears.

"The Game Molester"
*Washington, D.C.*

MOTOGP 2

These codes are few, but sweet. The first cheat is especially funny looking.

Floating Bike Mode – Edit the logo on a custom bike to read "kingpin".

Minigames – Go into the Options Menu and watch the text (not video) credits. Scroll down until you get to the credits for the minigames. When it appears onscreen, press A. To confirm correct code entry, the screen with the "Mini Games" title will have the "A" in "Games" change to resemble that found on that controller button.

John Kimball
Los Angeles, CA

BRUTE FORCE
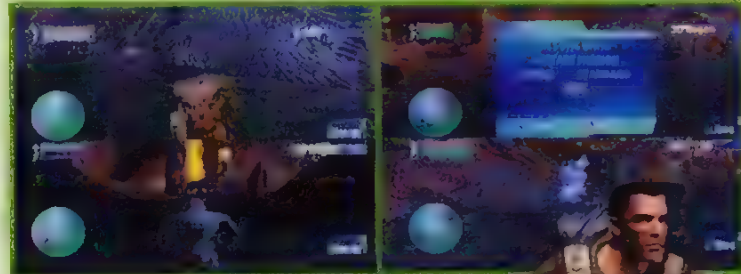
Although these codes are of the traditional sort, we have compiled some cool glitches and noteworthy hints.

Art Gallery – Collect all of the artifacts in the game.

Bonus Multiplayer Characters
Get the hidden DNA containers to unlock various characters in Multiplayer mode.

Confed Marine – Mission 1 or Mission 6
Feral Colonist – Mission 2
Feral Outcast – Mission 3
Feral Shaman – Mission 9
Fire Hound – Mission 13
Gunthar Ghent – Mission 10
Hunter Lord – Mission 18
McTavish – Mission 14
Militia – Mission 5 or Mission 11
Outcast Shaman – Mission 7
Seer Follower – Mission 4
Seer Priest – Mission 8
Shadoon – Mission 12
Shrike Heavy – Mission 16
Shrike Hound – Mission 17
Shrike Soldier – Mission 15

Dead Characters Speak – In a few of the missions, you can cause your teammates to speak even though they are dead. For example, if you allow Tex to die in chapter two before he speaks of the dead man on spikes, he will still talk.

Keep Items – If you die in the Story mode, join the game using another controller to bring back that perished character. Now, immediately quit the game. You've revived your dead comrade!

Maximum MK ASLT Ammunition – When you come across a duplicate MK ASLT, keep picking it up. Your maximum ammo will rise to 600.

Regain Special Faster – If you use your entire special meter, run to a safe spot and duck. Your special meter will be replenished significantly faster.

Mike Huber
Lackawanna, NY

STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS

Hate yourself for buying this game? Well, our super-secret code cracker discovered these. For his services, please send four stalks of broccoli, six shitake mushrooms, a dozen leaves of mustard greens, and two avocado burritos. Enter all of the following cheats at the Codes screen under Bonuses.

All Bonus Materials – IGIVEUP
All FMV Sequences – GOTPOPCORN
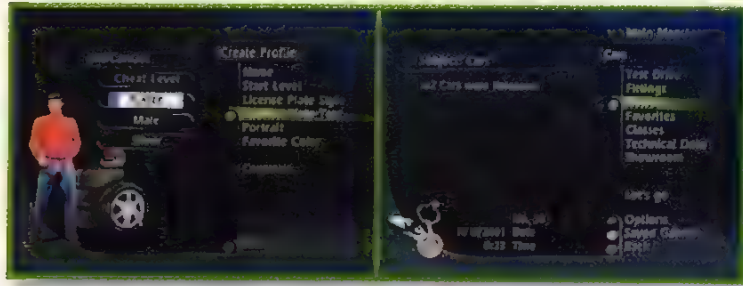**All Multiplayer Levels** – LETSDANCE
Team Photos – YOURMASTERS
Three Bonus Objectives for Current Mission Complete – ALITTLEHELP
Unlimited Ammunition – NOHONOR

Chermaine Patterson
St. Paul, MN

WORLD RACING: MERCEDES BENZ

Enter all of the following codes as user names in the single player mode.

Almost All Single Player Cars, Status 10, and 80% Completion – AllUCanGet
All Championships – JamSession
All Missions – Miss World
All Tracks (Except Waypoint) – Free Ride
Status 1 – Top 10
Status 2 – HUIBUH
Status 3 – N.I.C.E. 2
Status 4 – TaxiDriver
Status 5 – Halbzeit
Status 6 – No Hat!
Status 7 – McRace
Status 8 – Jiu-Jitsu
Status 9 – Goodzpeed

John Robbins
Fargo, ND

ULTIMATE MUSCLE

A silly game that lacks any super cool codes? Lame.

Biocken Jr. (Story mode) – Complete Story mode as Jaeger.
Bone Cold – Collect 300 Toy Capsules.
Buffalo Man (Story mode) – Complete Story mode as Dik Dik Van Dik.
Eskara – Collect 100 Toy Capsules.
Hanzo – Collect 200 Toy Capsules.
King Muscle (Story mode) – Complete Story mode as Kid Muscle.
Panda Man – Complete Story mode as Skullduggery (Kin Kotsu Man).
Ramen Man (Story mode) – Complete Story mode as Wally Tusket.
Robin Mask (Story mode) – Complete Story mode as Kevin Mask.
Skullduggery – Complete Story mode as Bone Cold.
Sunshine (Story mode) – Complete Story mode as Checkmate.
Terry Man (Story mode) – Complete Story mode as Terry The Kid.
The Ninja – Complete Story mode as Hanzo.
Wars Man – Complete Story mode as Eskara.

Jack Black
Sacramento, CA

WARIO WARE INC: MEGA MICROGAMES

Lots of minigames rolled up into one game sounds like a better idea when all of the minigames are absolutely strange.

Boss Mode – Complete the game to unlock an option to fight just bosses.
Dr. Wario Minigame – Obtain 15 mails against Blue Jimmy.
Fly Swatter Minigame – Get 20 mails against Yellow Jimmy.
Intermission Bonus – If you press A during a break and it shows a character, something cool will happen.
Paper Plane Minigame – Beat Red Jimmy.
Pyoro 1 Minigame – Complete the Wario stage.
Pyoro 2 Minigame – Finish the challenge score on every Microgame.
Scroll Faster on Grid – Scroll through the writing faster on the grid by tapping or holding L or R Buttons.
Staff Mode – Complete the game to unlock an option to view the game's developers.
Wario's Sheriff Minigame – Snag 25 mails against Red Jimmy.
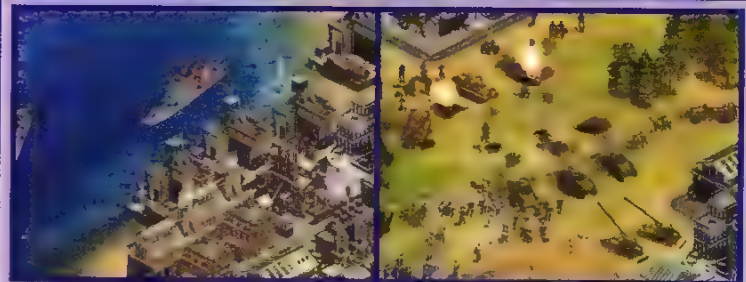
Martin King
Dallas, TX

IRIDION 2

Enter each of the following codes as passwords to achieve their desired effect.

End – 4RC8!
Jukebox – CH4LL
Level 2 – 9PTBY
Level 3 – TYHLY
Level 4 – 9VDBW
Level 5 – SLZGW
Level 6 – TDZQ4
Level 7 – 5M!H6
Level 8 – N59G6
Level 9 – 558GY
Level 10 – 54!H4
Level 11 – PCGZW
Level 12 – NPH74
Level 13 – 9GF46
Level 14 – SOL46

Dalton
Jasper, MI

RISE OF NATIONS

Press Enter during gameplay, then type one of the following codes to enable the corresponding cheat. The information within <> indicate the possibilities that can be inputted. The <> should not be written. A 1 and 0 are Boolean expressions meaning on and off.

1000 More of All Resources – cheat resource all+1000
Adjust Damage to Object or All Selected – cheat damage <name or no entry> <+ or -> <number>
Change Game Explore Configuration – cheat explore <normal, explored, all>
Defeat Nation – cheat defeat <name>
Deploys the Currently Selected Unit(s), If They are Deploying Units – cheat deploy
Display Achievements – cheat achieve
Drop a Nuke at Pointer Location – cheat nuke
Drop a Wild Bird at Pointer Location – cheat bird
Finishes Selected Building(s) or Next Item in Queue – cheat finish
Force Alliance With Nation – cheat ally <name>
Force Encounter With Nation – cheat meet <name>
Force Encounter-off With Nation – cheat unmeet <name>
Force Peace With Sation – cheat peace <name>
Force War With Sation – cheat war <name>
Kill Object or All Selected – cheat die <name or no entry>
Machine Guns Around Every Human Capital – cheat safe
Packs the Currently Selected Unit(s), If They are Packing Units – cheat pack
Set AI State – cheat ai <on, off, or debug>
Set All Players to Human and Full Map – cheat sandbox
Set Difficulty – cheat diff <0-5>
Show Combat Ranges – cheat ranges <0 or 1>
Show or Change Age for Nation – cheat age <number> <name>
Show or Change All Library Tech Levels for Nation – cheat library <number> <name>
Show or Change Civic Level for Nation – cheat civic <number> <name>
Show or Change Commerce Level for Nation – cheat commerce <number> <name>
Show or Change Military Level for Nation – cheat military <number> <name>
Show or Change Resource – cheat resource <name> <goodtype or all> <+ or -> <number>
Show or Change Science Level for Nation – cheat science <number> <name>
Show or Change Technology – cheat tech <name> <tech or all> <on or off>
Toggle Bounding Box Mode – cheat box <0 or 1>
Toggle Full Map – cheat reveal <on or off>
Toggle Game Pause – cheat pause <0 or 1>
Turn Off Computer Control – cheat human <name>
Turn On Computer Control – cheat computer <name>
Victory for Nation – cheat victory <name>

Jake Roberts
Baltimore, MD

Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition: Stairway to the Destined Duel

This is the second and hopefully last set of Yu-Gi-Oh codes. To activate them, hit the R Button and go to the Misc icon. Select Password and input the following codes to unlock the desired card.

Alligator's Sword – 64428736
Alligator's Sword Dragon – 03366982
Alpha The Magnet Warrior – 99785935
Ameba – 95174353
Ancient Brain – 42431843
Ancient Elf – 93221206
Ancient Jar – 81492226
Armed Ninja – 09076207
Armored Glass – 36868108
Armored Rat – 16246527
Armored Starfish – 17535588
Armored Zombie – 20277860
Axe Raider – 48305365
Baby Dragon – 88819587
Backup Soldier – 36280194
Banisher of the Light – 61528025
Barrel Rock – 10476868
Battle Steer – 18246479
Battle Warrior – 55550921
Beautiful Headhuntress – 16899564
Bell of Destruction – 83555666
Beta the Magnet Warrior – 39256679
Big Shield Gardna – 65240384
Binding Chain – 08058240
Bio Plant – 07670542
Black Dragon Jungle King – 89832901
Blast Sphere – 26302522
Block Attack – 25880422
Blue-Winged Crown – 41396436
Boar Soldier – 21340051
Call of the Grave – 16970158
Cannon Soldier – 11384280
Card Destruction – 72892473
Ceasefire – 36468556
Chain Destruction – 01248895
Chain Energy – 79323590
Claw Reacher – 41218256
Clown Zombie – 92667214
Copy Cat – 26376390
Crass Clown – 93889755
Crawling Dragon – 67494157
Crazy Fish – 53713014
Crush Card – 57728570
Cyber Commander – 06400512
Cyber Saurus – 89112729
Cyber-Stein – 69015963
Dark Bat – 67049542
Dark Elf – 21417692
Dark Gray – 09159938
Dark Hole – 53129443
Dark Human – 81057959
Dark Rabbit – 99261403
Dark Sage – 92377303
Dark Witch – 35565537
Dark Zebra – 59784896
Darkfire Dragon – 17881964
Deepsea Shark – 28593363
Delinquent Duo – 44763025
Disk Magician – 76446915
Dokuroyaiba – 30325729
Dragon Piper – 55763552
Eldeen – 06367785
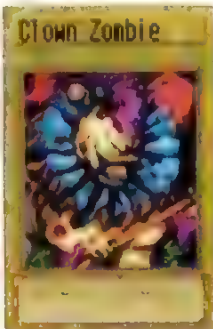
Electric Lizard – 55875323
Electric Snake – 11324436
Electro-Whip – 37820550
Eternal Rest – 95051344
Exile of the Wicked – 26725158
Exodia the Forbidden One – 33396948
Fairy Dragon – 20315854
Fairy's Hand Mirror – 17653779
Fairywitch – 37160778
Faith Bird – 75582395
Fake Trap – 03027001
Fiend Sword – 22855882
Firegrass – 53293545
Fireyarou – 71407486
Flame Champion – 42599677
Flame Ghost – 58528964
Flame Manipulator – 34460851
Flash Assailant – 96890582
Flower Wolf – 95952802
Flying Kamakiri #2 – 03134241
Gaia – 06368038
Gaia Power – 56594520
Gale Dogra – 16229315
Garma Sword – 90844184
Garma Sword Oath – 78577570
Garnecia Elefantis – 49888191
Garoozis – 14977074
Garvas – 69780745
Gatekeeper – 19737320
Giant Soldier of Stone – 13039848
Giant Trunade – 42703248
Graceful Dice – 74137509
Grappler – 02906250
Gravedigger Ghoul – 82542267
Greenkappa – 61831093
Griffore – 53829412
Guardian of the Labyrinth – 89272878
Guardian of the Sea – 85448931
Happy Lover – 99030164
Hard Armor – 20060230
Harpie Lady – 76812113
Harpie Lady Sisters – 12206212
Harpie's Brother – 30532390
Harpie's Feather Duster – 18144506
Hero of the East – 89987208
Hinotama Soul – 96851799
Hitodenchak – 46718686
Horn Imp – 69669405
Horn of Heaven – 98069388
Horn of Light – 38552107
Hourglass of Life – 08783685
House of Adhesive Tape – 15083728
Insect Queen – 91512835
Jam Breeding Machine – 21770260
Jam Defender – 21558682
Jinzo #7 – 32809211
Jirai Gumo – 94773007
Kaminari Attack – 09653271
Kanikabuto – 84103702
Karate Man – 23289281
King of Yamimakai – 69455834

Kiseitai – 04266839
Krokodilus – 76512652
Kumootoko – 56283725
Kunai With Chain – 37390589
Kurama – 85705804
Lady of Faith – 17358176
LaLa Li-oon – 09430387
Larvae – 94675535
Laser Cannon Armor – 77007920
Last Day of Witch – 90330453
Last Will – 85602018
Leghul – 12472242
Leogun – 10538007
Lesser Dragon – 55444629
Little Chimera – 68658728
Little D – 42625254
Lord of the Lamp – 99510761
Lunar Queen Elzaim – 62210247
Mabarrel – 98795934
Magic Jammer – 77414722
Magic Thorn – 53119267
Magical Ghost – 46474915
Masked Sorcerer – 10189126
Master & Expert – 75499502
Mechanical Spider – 45688586
Metal Detector – 75646520
Metal Dragon – 09293977
Metal Fish – 55998462
Minomushi Warrior – 46864967
Mirror Force – 44095762
Monstrous Bird – 35712107
Moon Envoy – 45909477
Mooyan Curry – 58074572
Morinphen – 55784832
Morphing Jar – 33508719
M-Warrior – 56342351
Mystic Box – 25774450 5
Needle Worm – 81843628
Negate Attack – 14315573
Nekogal #2 – 43352213
Nemuriko – 90963488
Neo the Magic Swordsman – 50930991
Nobleman of Extermination – 17449108
Ookazi – 19523799
Orion the Battle King – 02971090
Pale Beast – 21263083
Panther Warrior – 42035044
Paralyzing Potion – 50152549
Parasite Paracide – 27911549
Petit Angel – 38142739
Petit Dragon – 75356564
Petit Moth – 58192742
Premature Burial – 70828912
Prevent Rat – 00549481
Princess of Tsurugi – 51371017
Prisman – 80234301
Prohibition – 43711255
Queen of Autumn Leaves – 04179849
Queen's Double – 05901497
Raigeki – 12580477
Red Archery Girl – 65570596
Red Medicine – 38199696
Red-Eyed Black Dragon – 74677422
Relinquished – 64631466
Remove Trap – 51482758
Rock Ogre Grotto #1 – 68846917
Rogue Doll – 91939608

Root Water – 39004808
Rose Spectre of Dunn – 32485271
Royal Decree – 51452091
Sebek's Blessing – 22537443
Shadow Specter – 40575313
Share the Pain – 56830749
Shield & Sword – 52097679
Shining Fairy – 95956346
Skull Mariner – 05265750
Skull Red Bird – 10202894
Snatch Steal – 45986603
Solemn Wishes – 35346968
Solitude – 84794011
Sonic Bird – 57617178
Soul Hunter – 72869010
Spellbinding Circle – 18807108
Spirit of the Harp – 80770678
Stain Storm – 21323861
Steel Scorpion – 13599884
Sword Arm of Dragon – 13069066
Tenderness – 57935140
Terra the Terrible – 63308047
Tiger Axe – 49791927 or 40907090
Time Machine – 80987696
Time Seal – 35316708
Togex – 33878931
Toll – 82003859
Tomozaurus – 46457856
Toon Alligator – 59383041
Torike – 80813021
Tornado Wall – 18605135
Torrential Tribute – 53582587
Trap Hole – 04206964
Trent – 78780140
Trial of Nightmare – 77827521
Tribute to the Doomed – 79759861
Two-Headed King Rex – 94119974
Two-Mouth Darkruler – 57305373
Type Zero Magic Crusher – 21237481
Ushi Oni – 48649353
Vermillion Sparrow – 35752363
Versago the Destroyer – 50259460
Violet Crystal – 15052462
Vishwar Randi – 78556320
Wall of Illusion – 13945283
Warrior Elimination – 90873992
Warrior of Tradition – 56413937
Water Element – 03732747
Water Girl – 55014050
Water Magician – 93343894
Water Omotics – 02483611
Whiptail Crow – 91996584
Wingweaver – 31447217
Witch of the Black Forest – 78010363
Wood Remains – 17733394
World Suppression – 12253117
Wow Warrior – 69750536
Yado Karu – 29380133
Yamatano Dragon Scroll – 76704943
Yami – 59197169
Zanki – 30090452
Zoa – 24311372
Zone Eater – 86100785

"The Rhino"
Toledo, OH

SONIC'S ARCHITECT

GI INTERVIEWS HIROKAZU YASUHARA

Most people associate the Sonic series with Sega visionary Yugi Naka. While Mr. Naka is undoubtably a legend in the gaming world, few realize that many of the concepts that made Sonic the Hedgehog such an icon were actually conceived by Hirokazu Yasuhara, one of gaming's least known, but most respected game designers. Now working with Naughty Dog on Jak II, Mr. Yasuhara was kind enough to grant us this interview, which sheds a new light on the familiar history of Sega and Sonic.

Talk about how you got involved in the video game industry. What led you to this career path? Were you a computer enthusiast as a kid?

No, I was not a computer enthusiast when I was young. When I was a kid, there were no personal computers. The Apple II had not yet been created. I was an ordinary kid who played outside or read comics. The first video game I played was Breakout at the local game arcade. I was about 10 years old. The game is still one of my favorites. My first experience with computers was at college when I studied machine engineering. I graduated from the Science University of Tokyo in 1988. I love roller coasters and I wanted to create those machines after college. Nintendo had become popular among young people at that time, but I was not attracted by consumer games. I was first interested in the game industry because of Sega's Space Harrier. I was impressed by the power of the specialized computer hardware the game used.

How did you come to work at Sega? Was that your first job in the industry?

I wanted to work at Sega because they were making amusement machines for arcades. I called Sega's recruiter when I was a senior and I got a job. It sounds easy, right? At that point Sega had yet to offer its IPO. It was not a big company, but rather a mid-size company which had just gotten into its growth years and was hiring young talents from other fields. I was hired as a game designer. It was my first job in the industry and my first real job in life.

You are probably best known for working on the Sonic games on Sega Genesis. You were credited as the game planner, director, and lead game designer on those games. What was your involvement in those titles? What were your main duties, and how much of a part did you have in coming up with the Sonic's basic gameplay concepts and mechanics?

I started to work for Sega after I graduated from college in 1988. After training, I made several small games in conjunction with Mark Cerny whose company, Cerny Games, now contracts with Naughty Dog. Then I got assigned to establish a Sega R&D subsidiary in the U.S. with Mark. Fate determined a different turn of events, however. Two Sega employees, [Yugi] Naka, a programmer, and Ooshima, an artist, started to create a new character game. At the time, I did not have a specific project that I was working on, and I was supposed to go to the United States in a few weeks. Then the Gulf War occurred and my move to the U.S. was postponed for three months. I joined Naka and Ooshima as a game designer, planning to work on the project only until I went to the U.S. But, I ended up staying in Japan for a year until we finished the project. Naka showed us code that caused a sprite to move smoothly on a curve by determining its positions using a dot matrix. He wanted to make a platform game that used this algorithm to move a character quickly. His original sample displayed a ball moving inside of a long, winding tube on a wide map. It did not look fun because you did not feel the speed of the ball. I thought, "How can I make it a good game?" First, I made a tentative map using a green field

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME | BY LES ABERNATHY

Every month one of Game Informer's readers picks his or her personal choice for Greatest Game Of All Time.

FEAR EFFECT 2: RETRO HELIX

■ **FORMAT** PSONE
■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS

I bought this sequel on the cheap before buying the first Fear Effect, thinking that it was just another follow-up to just another Resident Evil rip-off. The first cutscene alone blew that thought right out of my head. Within the first minute, I had seen more partial nudity, swear words, and great voice-acting than I have seen in any game. I just sat there, with my jaw open, in complete shock over what I was playing.

My second thought was: With this much sex and cussing, the gameplay has to be terrible. Within the next five minutes,

I was blown away a second time. Granted, the controls take some getting use to, but once you learn all the little button tricks, the game characters are easy to control. The only real problem with the gameplay is the difficulty level. Even on normal (there is no easy), this is one hard game. You walk down an empty hallway one minute, and the next room contains three guards that quickly shoot you to death. The puzzles are also no walk in the park. You actually have to figure out the puzzle instead of playing a game of trial and error. After playing this, I

which I had planned to use on a new game when I reached the U.S., and then placed the characters Ooshima had designed in it. Then we did a lot of brainstorming, and built the basic concepts of the game. I designed the movement of characters, the game stories, all of the stage maps, all of the enemy mechanics, and designed all of the game mechanics.

Mr. Yugi Naka is well known in the press as the creator of Sonic. How did you collaborate with Mr. Naka on the project, and what are your memories of that experience?

Naka is an extremely talented programmer. He never gave up or said no to my game mechanic ideas even when they were challenging. My memories of the creation of Sonic is that we all worked very, very hard! The three of us worked together until 5 am and resumed at 10 am. We slept five hours a night, at the office, for almost for six months.

Do you ever wish that your contributions to the Sonic legacy were more well known to the average video game player?

I have not worried much about it, but I have to admit that it doesn't seem fair that few people know about my work on the titles. And it is not just me. Ooshima created the Sonic character, but nobody knows about his huge contribution to the success of the series. The recognition that I have received recently has been nice, but having Miyamoto-san stand next to me playing Sonic at CES, and congratulating me for the success of the game was gratifying as well! I still keep his business card as a motivation generator.

Why do you think that Sonic struck such a chord with gamers in the early 90s? What made those games special? What are you most proud of about them?

Sonic was a cool game. And the graphic style was new compared to Nintendo's platformer. Also, Sonic has an attitude. He had these cheeky expressions. It was new to show the emotional side of a character. It was considered a waste of data space to give a character a lot of facial expressions before Sonic.

You might think the most interesting aspect of Sonic is his speed. But, as the game designer, I say the most important aspect of Sonic was his "dazzle." The original program Naka showed me had speed, but speed alone was not enough to make the player excited. When you make a game you have to give the gamer more. Dazzle is the excitement that goes directly from the eyes to the brain. If you go to an amusement park, you understand immediately. I made stage mechanics so that a player is constantly [amazed] by controlling the character. That is why you get so excited when you play Sonic. Sonic's speed combined with the shape of the level and the gameplay keep the mind involved.

After the original four Sonic games, you went to work with Traveller's Tales on Sonic 3D Blast and Sonic R. How did this come about? Did Sega ask you to work with them?

Yes, Sega asked me to work with Travellers' Tales. Sonic R had received awful reviews at E3, and Sega wanted me to improve it. I was asked to help out even though I was not working on Sonic games any more.

Many fans of Sonic were not as happy with those games. Why do you think that was? Were you trying to move too far ahead of the technology of the consoles with your ideas? Did this make the development process difficult?

I worked with Traveller's Tales in Manchester and I think that, although I only joined the project in the middle, the final version of Sonic R is actually quite good. I understand that it is difficult to reverse negative impressions on the game after it receives bad reviews at E3. People do not play or buy it, so they cannot change their opinions. However, I do admit that the base concept of Sonic R, in which the player "drives" running characters, is not great.

With regards to Sonic 3D Blast, my participation was only in drawing a handful of level maps. I tried to create maps that were as good as possible. Traveller's Tales is a talented company. There weren't any technology problems, but the games seemed to lack a certain motivation.

Were you personally happy with the project?

HIROKAZU YASUHARA

No. I was opposed to the company's decision to create games that use "Sonic-something" so that they can sell it easily. That is one of the reasons why I left the Sonic development group. I wanted to make good games, not any games that used the Sonic character in a haphazard way.

Sonic is the one platform star that has struggled to find commercial success in three dimensions, in comparison to Mario, Crash Bandicoot, Spyro, and others. Do you think that it is difficult to make that character work in 3D?

No, I don't think so. I believe there are a lot of ways of using cameras which might make a 3D Sonic possible that haven't been tried yet.

What prompted you to leave your partnership with Sega?

The biggest reason is that Sega stopped making its own consoles and started supporting all consoles. I want to make a game that utilizes the maximum power of whichever console it is created on. I think that it is important to work in a company where all games are dedicated to a specific hardware.

What did you do in the time between working with Naughty Dog and leaving Sega? What were some of the games and projects you were a part of?

I made Floigan Bros. at Visual Concepts. I joined the team because I was attracted to AI characters. I always want to develop new character games with new creative tools.

How did you get involved with Naughty Dog?

When I played Jak and Daxter and ICO, I was excited that these were the first of a new generation of character games. You couldn't see graphics that good on a $200,000 workstation 10 years ago. I was looking for a new challenge and I mentioned to Mark Cerny that I was interested in Naughty Dog. He introduced me to them.

**How has working with them been different from your experiences at other companies?**

Everybody at Naughty Dog is very motivated to make good games. The most important thing in creating a good title is that everybody has the ability to participate in the creative process. Creating a game is a matter of teamwork and not a job that can be left in someone's sole possession. Everybody should be able to express their own ideas, environmentally and ability-wise. In fact, there are few companies comprised entirely of game fans. I've seen people who work for game companies as a job and not a calling. I don't like seeing that.

Is there a big difference between working on a game in Japan and working on one in the U.S.?

Naughty Dog reminds me of the early Sega days when I made the Sonic games. Everybody works late at night and on weekends – fortunately or unfortunately!

What are your primary duties on Jak II? What skills do you think that you bring to the table that makes this game different or better than the first?

I design game stages and make blueprints for game mechanics. Jak II is not a direct sequel of [Jak and Daxter]. Rather, it is a totally different game. From the technological side, we developed a superior game engine. This made it possible to create movie-like game mechanics. I really like that ability. I can now create game mechanics and unique ideas that have been impossible until now. I think that my contributions to Jak II will add a new twist to Naughty Dog games. I would like to think that people will get more interested in Jak II because I am on its creative team.

> "Everybody at Naughty Dog is very motivated to make good games."

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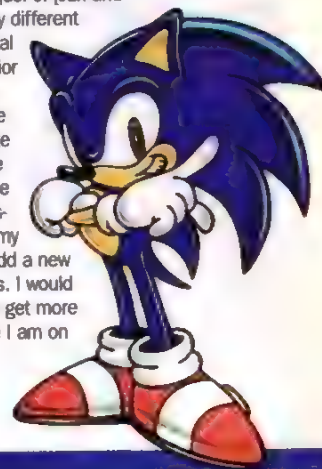
found titles like Resident Evil to be mind-numbingly easy.

All the people who are responsible for the sound should get a medal. Music is nice and creepy. The heartbeat sound when danger is near was twice as creepy. And the voice-acting was the very best ever. The thing about this game's dialogue is that they hired real actors to do it. People with actually professional careers, and who have even been known to star in some of my favorite anime films. Other developers should use games like Fear Effect and Metal Gear Solid as an example when it comes

to hiring their voice actors.

I'm not the biggest fan of cel shading, but Fear Effect 2 does it well. Most games use cel shading to make things look more cartoon-like [cough, Zelda, cough], but Fear Effect 2 should be kept as far away from children as possible. Still, the cel shading brings to life many little details. Raising eyebrows and Hana's wiggling butt come to mind.

Yet, after all of this mature-rated goodness, the best part of the game are the great characters and plot. The story stars

two busty babes battling beasts from beyond perdition (say that three times fast). There are also two guys named Glas and Deke, but they're not on the cover for a reason. If you take a minute to look beyond the cleavage of Hana and Rain, you'll discover they actually have personalities. Hana is a gun-waving bad ass, while Rain is the mature one who is a wiz with computers. With the help of Glas and Deke, they battle their way through a trap set by evil forces and find a cure for a plague while they're at it.

HIROKAZU YASUHARA'S GREATEST HITS

Mr. Yasuhara has amassed an unparalleled track record in the world of character action games. As you can see, the Sega Genesis might not have been the successful system that it was without his contributions. Today, Yasuhara continues to innovate in the genre as part of the Naughty Dog team, working on the company's high-profile sequel, Jak II for PlayStation 2.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
Genesis 1991

The revolutionary platformer propelled Sega's Genesis to the top of the console heirarchy – beating the mighty Nintendo.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
Genesis 1992

This game coined "blast processing." It also introduced Sonic's sidekick, Tails, and offered simultaneous two-player platforming.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3
Genesis 1993

Sonic 3 didn't hold any new innovations, but perfected the original trilogy with typical Sega craftsmanship.

SONIC & KNUCKLES
Genesis 1994

Knuckles gets co-billing and is a playable character. Also allowed you to unlock secrets with your old Sonic games.

SONIC 3D BLAST
Saturn, Genesis 1996

The first attempt at a 3D Sonic, and not a very good one. Developed by Traveller's Tales with Yasuhara's help.

SONIC R
Saturn 1997

Sonic meets Mario Kart in this decent, but unmemorable Saturn title. Yasuhara's second collaboration with Traveller's Tales.

FLOIGAN BROS.
Dreamcast 2001

Yasuhara worked with Visual Concepts to create this oddly lovable Dreamcast curio.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

On July 5th, 1985, at Johnny Zee's Family Fun Center in Victoria, British Columbia, one of the most insane events ever held in the world of video games took place: The Iron Man Contest. Organized by video game record keeper and referee extraordinaire Walter Day of Twin Galaxies (www.twingalaxies.com), the event challenged many of gaming's top arcade players to test their will in a marathon gaming session that lasted well over two days. It was certainly memorable, as players forewent sleeping, eating, and even bathroom duties to attempt to best their opponents. Some passed out at their machines; Pac-Man champion Billy Mitchell dragged a Centipede unit into the bathroom so as to not interrupt his game; but finally, 18-year-old James Vollandt racked up a superhuman 67.25 hours of Joust – talking only four twenty-minute breaks (one of which was due to a machine malfunction).

ARCADE

RAMPAGE
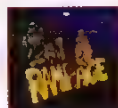
RETRO RATING 8.25
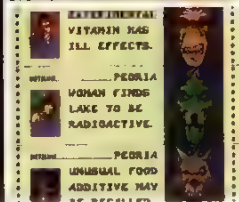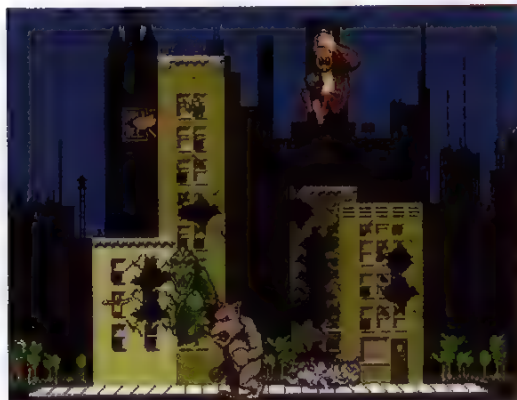
During the mid-eighties, Rampage was a very refreshing alternative sitting next to a lot of cookie-cutter arcade games. It had three joysticks, each letting players control a different mutated behemoth: George the ape, Ralph the wolf, and Lizzie the lizard. Cities crumble at their feet as you scale buildings and bash foundations in Cincinnati, Chicago, and New York. The military steps in – dispatching soldiers, tanks, and helicopters to prevent the onslaught; but they are easily crushed, too. If you feel so inclined, you can snack on foot soldiers or regular citizens. If the powers-that-be get the best of your critter, it transforms back to its original naked-human self and slinks embarrassingly off the screen. While Rampage doesn't have a load of depth, it's still a vastly entertaining game. The cities are well done and the carnage looks great. Over the years, Midway has tried to recreate the success of the original, but nothing compares to the first Rampage.

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 3-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** BALLY MIDWAY ■ **DEVELOPER** BALLY MIDWAY
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1986

N64

CASTLEVANIA

RETRO RATING 6
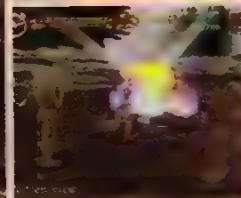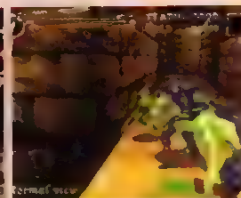
In the spirit of most classic series from the 8-bit and 16-bit days, Castlevania got its own attempt at 3D. No, we don't mean Lament of Innocence – the PS2 title shown at this year's E3. We're talking about the N64 game that tried to use the technology of a 64-bit cartridge to make free-roaming skeleton-slashing a reality. It succeeded in this, but little else. The subweapons, power-ups, and gothic monsters are here; but so is a terrible camera, a lack of a map, and some of the foggiest textures this side of San Francisco. Two playable characters can be selected, but neither one is actually named Belmont. Time-of-day-changing items are a cool idea, but there aren't nearly as many things to collect as in the epic and legendary 2D PSone game, Symphony of the Night. In fact, nothing here matches the brilliant Symphony game, which earned fame for Igarashi, its producer. An updated semi-sequel on N64 called Legacy of Darkness released less than a year later, fixing some of the problems but still not doing enough to be very successful.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1999

NES

TRACK & FIELD

RETRO RATING 8.5
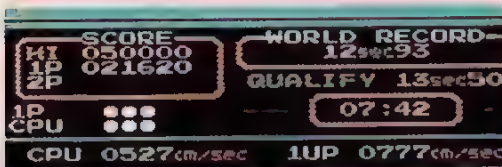
Very few old-school games are inherently enjoyable enough to remain nearly as fun as they were when first released. Track & Field for NES proves its staying power with a host of simplistic, yet exciting and invigorating, events such as Skeet Shooting, Archery, 100-Yard Dash, Long Jump, and the Javelin Throw. Although each of the games require timed presses, button mashing, or a combination of both; you never seem to grow tired of trying to top the world record. Ironically, the event that requires the most skill (High Jump) is the most poorly implemented. We didn't understand how to perform the High Jump back in the day, and we don't get it now. Besides the graphics and sound, only Track & Field's lack of a simulation mode seriously hurts its overall quality. Nevertheless, its faults are easily overlooked, especially if you remember playing the first benchmark in Olympic gaming and loving it.
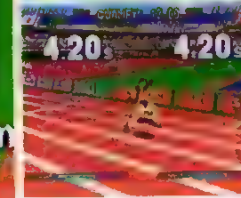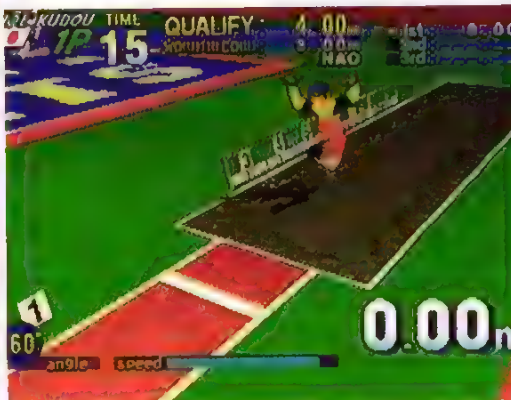
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1987

SATURN

DECATHLETE

RETRO RATING 7.5

Although Decathlete offers more events and a few unique controller techniques, it really hasn't evolved itself beyond Track & Field – despite the nine-year gap. The High Jump, Discus Throw, and 1500-Meter Race events take a new approach, and thereby add an element of variety, but they still don't compensate for this title's lack of innovation. Furthermore, Decathlete is missing a couple of notable games such as Skeet Shooting and Archery. Without these timing events, we actually enjoyed our time with Decathlete less than Track & Field! We commend Sega's attempt at adding simulation elements, which you would expect to increase the game's depth. However, Arcade simply breaks events up into two days, and Decathlon mode merely forces you to play through every game in a specific order. The only notable improvements Decathlete makes over Track & Field is the ability to select characters with different attributes and graphics.

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA ■ **DEVELOPER** AM3
■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1996

DUNGEONS & DREAMERS

> Manufacturer: McGraw Hill/ Osborne Media
> Website: osborne.com
> List Price: $24.99 (hardcover)

Dungeons & Dreamers (by Brad King and John Borland) aptly explains how today's landscape of massively multiplayer online gaming really started with paper games like Dungeons & Dragons. Lord British, MIT, and id Software all make their requisite cameos in this study of computer entertainment's evolution.
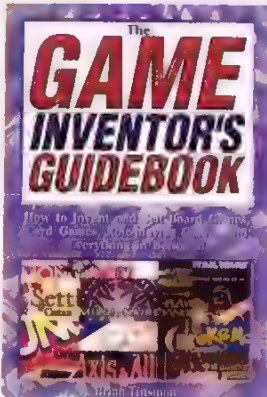
GAME INVENTOR'S GUIDEBOOK

> Manufacturer: Krause Publications
> Website: krausebooks.com
> List Price: $14.99 (trade paperback)

We really do get all of your mail asking about how to make a game. Responses would be long enough to justify a book. Luckily, Brian Tinsman has written all of the steps down in *The Game Inventor's Guidebook: How to Invent and Sell Board Games, Card Games, Role-Playing Games, and Everything in Between.* The title speaks for itself.
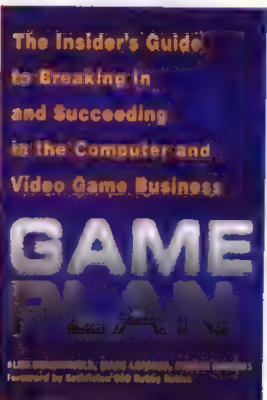
GAME PLAN

> Manufacturer: St. Martin's Press
> Website: stmartins.com
> List Price: $14.95 (trade paperback)

Alan Gershenfeld (former senior vice president of Activision), Mark Loparco (former senior producer at Disney Interactive), and Cecilia Barajas (senior director for Civilization: Call to Power) joined forces to write a tome on getting into, understanding, and surviving in the video game industry.

TRIGGER HAPPY

> Manufacturer: Arcade Publishing
> Website: arcadepub.com
> List Price: $25.95 (hardcover)

Everyone wants to sound smart, right? Stephen Poole's *Trigger Happy* uses traditionally heralded forms of "art" to argue that video games are a valid and inspired example of culture. Study up for your next debate with someone claiming that games are a waste of time.

X-ARCADE/X-ARCADE SOLO

> Manufacturer: XGaming > Website: xgaming.com
> List Price: $149.95 (X-Arcade), $99.95 (X-Arcade Solo),$19.95-$29.95 (console adapters)

Are you sick of buying a new arcade fighting stick every time a new console comes out? Fear not, because XGaming has released the X-Arcade and X-Arcade Solo! Built to withstand even the roughest gamer's button mashing; you'll be able to use these with your PC/Mac (MAME, here we come!), Dreamcast, PSone, PS2, GameCube, and Xbox with optional adapters. Each unit comes with one console adapter of your choosing. The X-Arcade is built from arcade-quality parts and has a lifetime warranty, so your little brother can jump on it all he wants after you kick his butt in Soul Calibur.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: ARMIES OF MIDDLE-EARTH

> Manufacturer: Play Along Toys > Website: playalongtoys.com
> List Price: $6.99 (single pack w/beast), $9.99 (3-packs),
> $16.99 (figures w/accessories), $29.99 Playsets, $49.99 (Helm's Deep)

Rule them all. Collect them all. The sole purpose of this exciting new toy line is to allow Lord of the Rings fans to assemble epic-sized armies of their very own. The bloody battle of Helm's Deep, the terrifying chase of Khazad-dûm, and four additional environments are already in the works. Releasing this summer and continuing throughout the remainder of the year, Play Along Toys has created over 60 figures for these familiar scenes. Almost every famous face has been recreated with the highest level of authenticity and fit into the line's three-inch scale. The list of upcoming products is very impressive, and includes such standouts as Saruman in his chamber, Gandalf on Shadowfax, Shelob in Cirith Ungol Pass, Treebeard invading Isengard, and Mount Doom. To ensure that people assemble large armies, Play Along Toys is issuing three packs of orcs, Uruk-hai, Riders of Rohan, and Gondorian soldiers. The prices are fairly reasonable, but rest assured, it will cost you a pretty penny to build an army of 10,000 strong.
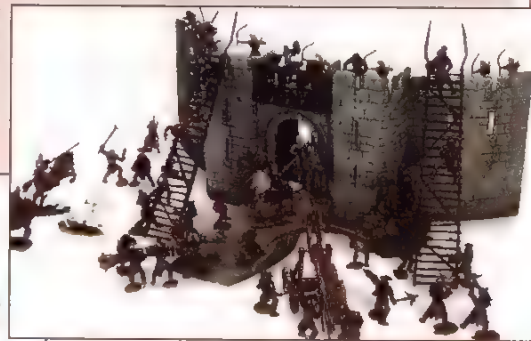
WARCRAFT FIGURES: SERIES 1 AND 2

> Manufacturer: Toycom > Website: toycom.net > List Price: $12.99

The first series of WarCraft figures are available as of June this year. This initial batch features Prince Arthas, Shandris Feathermoon, a Night Elf Archer, and Dreadlord Tichondrius. The second series (due in the early fall) has Medivh, Grom Hellscream, and a Dwarven Rifleman. Each figure comes with that character's accessories.

LAURA CROFT RESIN STATUE AND BUST

> Manufacturer: SOTA Toys > Website: sotatoys.com
> List Price: $59.99 (bust), $99.99 (statue)

This August, a lucky 2,000 people can get their hands on Lara Croft – at least a statue or bust based on scans of actress Angelina Jolie. The bust stands at 8" and the statue is a full 13" tall.

LARA CROFT: THE CRADLE OF LIFE FIGURES

> Manufacturer: SOTA Toys
> Website: sotatoys.com
> List Price: $39.99 (set of three figures)

Lara, Lara in wetsuit, and a Shadow Guardian are each included in this set taken from the forthcoming summer flick. The dual Laras feature more than 20 points of articulation and an extra set of bare arms, for when it's hot outside and Lara wants to go sleeveless.

DIABLO FIGURES: SERIES 1

> Manufacturer: Toycom > Website: toycom.net
> List Price: $12.99

Diablo Series 1 includes the Necromancer, Corrupt Rogue, and Baal's Minion of Destruction. Each figure sports as many as 17 points of articulation and stands between 6" and 7.25" tall. Look for them in the fall.

STARCRAFT FIGURES: SERIES 1

> Manufacturer: Toycom > Website: toycom.net > List Price: $12.99

Early this fall, your favorite specialty toy outlet will receive the first series of StarCraft figures. The collection includes Firebat, Hydralisk, and Tassadar (the Protoss High Priest). Each stands around 7" and has between nine and 14 movable joints.
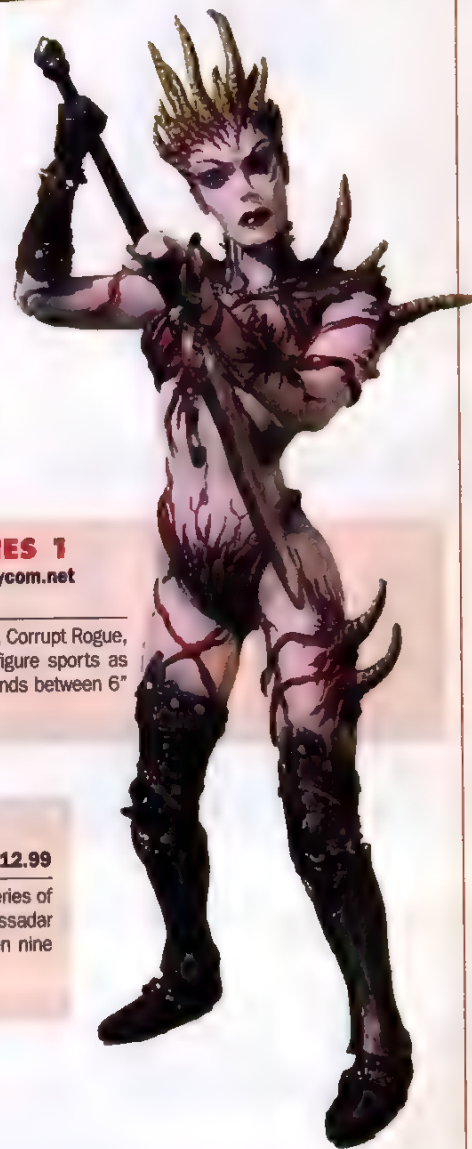
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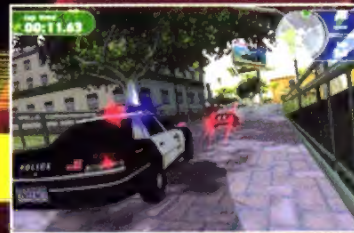
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