

EXCLUSIVE MOVIE INFO:
SPY HUNTER pg.62

DREAM MACHINES: 5 PCS TO DIE FOR



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Computer & Video Games

MAX PAYNE 2

THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT
ROCKSTAR'S TRAGIC
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OVER
450
REVIEWS

PRINCE OF PERSIA



We Explore
The Sands
Of Time

PG. 46

PUCK THIS



GI Breaks
Down The
Upcoming
NHL Season

PG. 56

XENOSAGA 2



Must-See
New Pictures
Inside

PG. 68



ISSUE
125

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A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a person's face, focusing on the right eye which is glowing with a bright green light. The skin is dark and textured, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of the face and the intensity of the eye. The background is dark and indistinct.

UNITED AT BIRTH...



Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence

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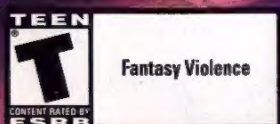


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Condition 3 - The chamber is empty and hammer is down with a "sawed magazine" in the gun.

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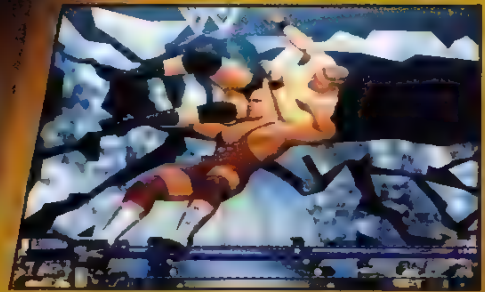
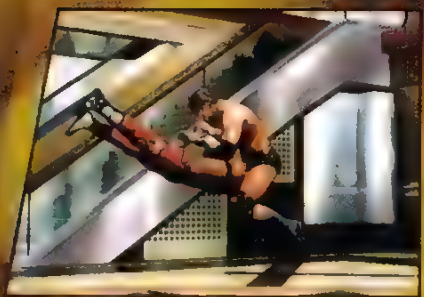
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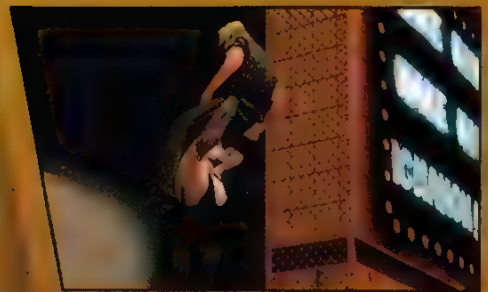
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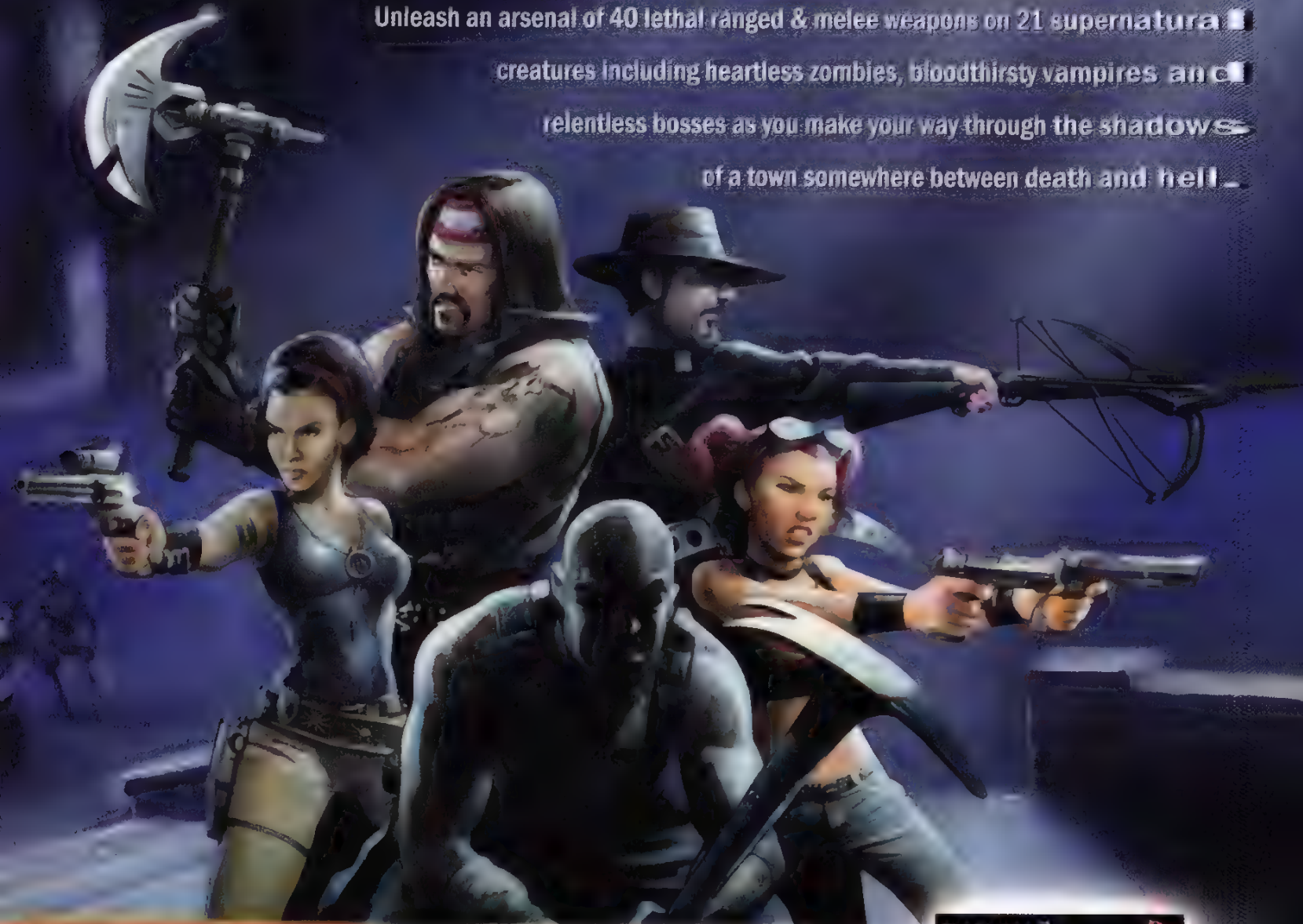
fantasy town of Ashcroft in White Wolf's spine-chilling pen & paper RPG

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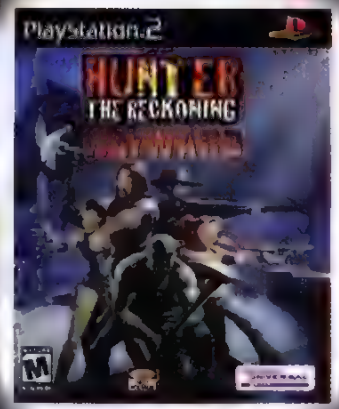
creatures including heartless zombies, bloodthirsty vampires, and

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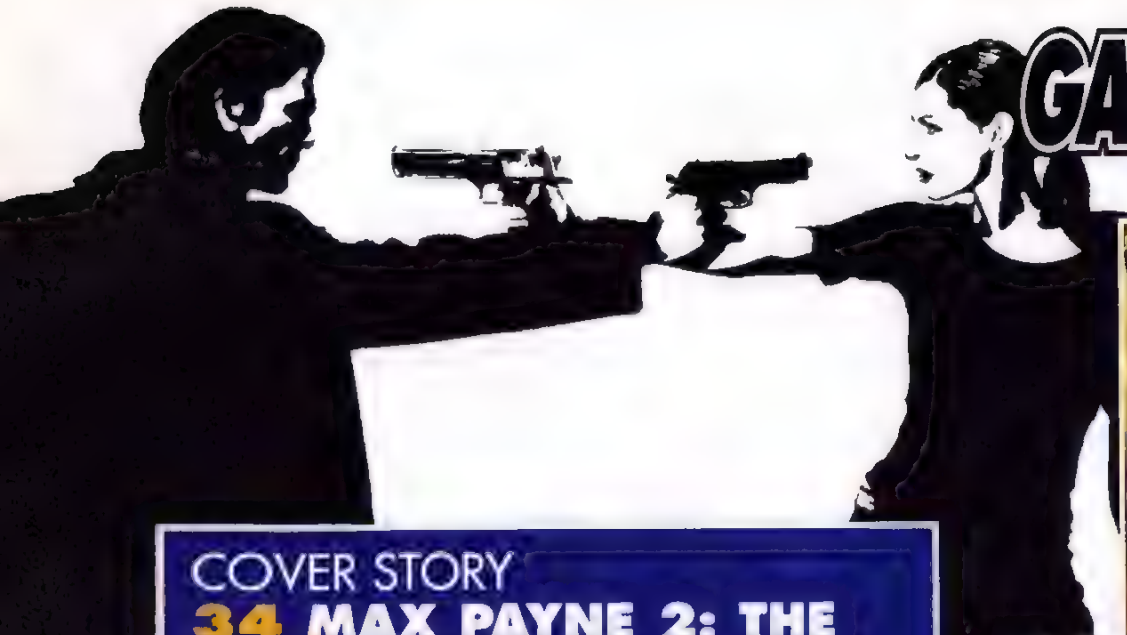


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PlayStation 2



COVER STORY

34 MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

Rockstar's latest entry into the Max Payne saga has been long awaited by many gamers out there. What does it have up its sleeve for this installment? How about a love story? Weren't expecting that, were you?



FEATURE

46 THE PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

Spending time in Ubi Soft's Montreal studio, we learned a lot about the philosophy of The Sands of Time. Check out what's in store for the Prince come November.



FEATURE

54 DREAM MACHINES

Everyone wants a sexy new computer. But what to buy? In our lineup of some of the world's most advanced PCs, there should be something that tickles your fancy.



FEATURE

56 BEHIND THE NET

Nearly everyone (save for one obviously missing regular) is putting out their NHL-inspired titles. We offer some early insights, while waiting breathlessly for their actual release.

FEATURE

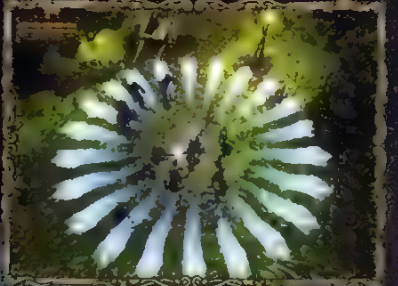
62 SPY HUNTER: THE MOVIE

The Rock? Hunting spies? The producers of an upcoming Spy Hunter flick spill the beans on some of their devious plans.



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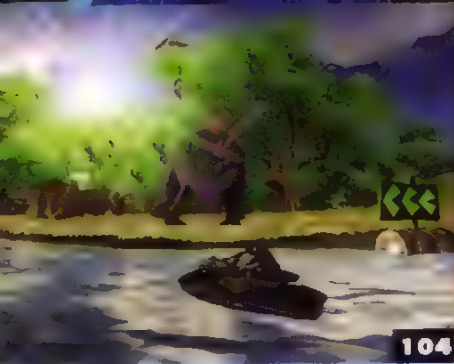
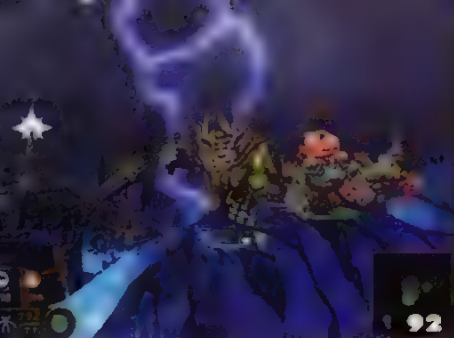
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PlayStation.2

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16 EDITOR'S FORUM

We're known for the poignant insights held within this lauded forum. Okay, maybe not so much, but check it out for the hidden gems.

18 GI SPY

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

20 DEAR GI

Either we're attracting a different crowd, or the world has grown increasingly more insightful in recent months. Well, the world except for that Care Bears guy. He still has us rolling.

24 NEWS

Hitting all the bases in the opening spread alone: Robotech and snuff films for hire. A big-time game reports not-so-surprising delays. This and more industry scuttlebutt await.

66 PREVIEWS

Is it just us, or do games keep getting better and better? This issue is so packed with titles we're lusting after, that it's amazing that we can get anything done. 'Tis a good time to be a gamer.

102 REVIEWS

With bad summer movies come some bad summer games. Likewise, we had to choose between sweltering heat and some big stinkers this month. But, on the plus side, there were a couple of games that made us happy, happy campers. See who falls where.

129 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.

132 SECRET ACCESS

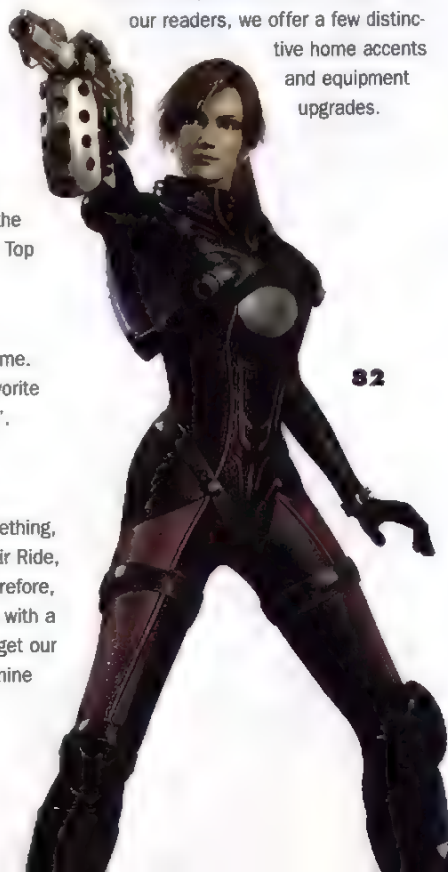
Sometimes, people get stuck in a game. Other times, they want to make a favorite player have a bobblehead-like noggin'. Either way, we can help you out.

136 CLASSIC GI

Kirby, the beloved pink blob of...something, is having a resurgence with Kirby's Air Ride, which is previewed in this issue. Therefore, it seems fitting to honor Kirby's past with a retrospective. And, as expected, we get our hands on some older titles to reexamine our feelings on them - GI style.

140 ETC

Everyone knows that their societal worth is based on the stuff that they have. To fill that need, and increase the value of our readers, we offer a few distinctive home accents and equipment upgrades.



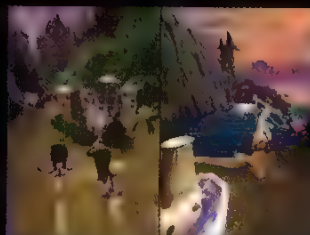
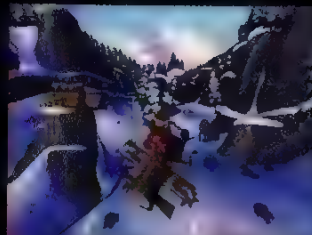
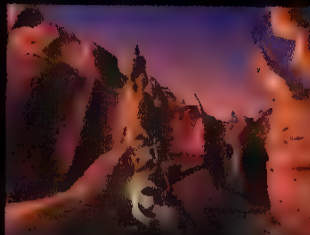
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EDITORS' FORUM



MAGAZINE MADNESS

ANDY McNAMARA
andy@gameinformer.com
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Another issue bites the dust, and the world of Game Informer continues to change. Last month we lost Chet; this month we say goodbye to Kristian. Is it me that stinks? I always thought that funny smell was coming from Reiner; but with the way we are turning over editors lately, maybe it's me.

Either way, we wish them luck in their future endeavors. The good news is that we have a new pup in the office, Jeremy. Make sure you torture him over the coming months, as we will be sure to. But the thing is, he only fills one of the two spots on the team. So, if you can actually write a complete sentence (there's probably like...maybe...one of you out there?), love PC games (and console games, too), then let me know. And yes, you must be over 18 and move to or live in the Minneapolis area.

You may find this hard to believe, but there are even more changes in store. Did you know that gameinformer.com is getting a much-needed face-lift September 1st? How would daily news, a review archive, codes, forums, and a whole host of other Game Informer goodness grab ya? That's what I thought. So, tell your friends - and even your enemies. Game Informer goes online on September 1st. Or at least that's when we think it's going to happen.

Enjoy the issue.

REINER | reiner@gameinformer.com

As of late, I've been using my Xbox quite a bit more than my PlayStation 2 and GameCube. A number of factors can be attributed to my playing preference. For starters, I recently invested in a high-end HDTV. As you probably know, the Xbox is the only system that truly takes advantage of 16:9 widescreen support and high-definition capabilities. Secondly, I love what Microsoft is doing with Xbox Live. Having downloadable content, like extra maps for Return to Castle Wolfenstein, gives players a reason to come back for more. The Xbox is also home to this summer's blockbuster, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic. All told, I can't turn my machine off.

MATT | matt@gameinformer.com

God love the crazy sports fans on this staff, but I can't help but wonder if the hardcore sports sims aren't dangerously close to disappearing up their own butts. I mean, the franchise modes are getting so complex I might have to go back to school for my MBA before I can play the new Madden. Call me crazy, but Tecmo Bowl for NES is still my favorite football game of all time. That's one reason why I'm really excited for NFL Street. In other (sadder) news, it's been tough to see Kristian move on, and I will miss him tremendously. Lucky for us, we managed to pick up Jeremy, who should be an excellent addition to the staff.

KRISTIAN | kristian@gameinformer.com

Well cowpokes, the time has come for yours truly to ride off into the proverbial sunset. I've had a truly remarkable experience here at Game Informer, and will probably miss the opportunity to write for all of you good folks most of all. Sure, I'll miss the Christmas parties where certain unnamed circulation personnel drop their pants for no apparent reason; but after three years, I'll probably miss the office's fantastic Internet connection the most. I kid. As for what might be next for me, who knows? What matters for now is that it has been a privilege to create for you month in and month out. I hope you've enjoyed reading my stuff as much as I've enjoyed writing it. Smell you later.

JUSTIN | justin@gameinformer.com

Moms get a bum rap in video games. Look at Metroid. How many times has Samus gone after MOTHER Brain? What about shooters which require you to take out the MOTHER ship? These women carried us for nine months, and this is how we repay them? The only games paying homage to mothers are Pokémon titles and Animal Crossing. There, Mom often sends her love and some handy care packages. Of course, she lets her preteen kid go into the cruel world and play with monsters, but that's beside the point. But seriously, I want to bid farewell to Kristian. He was the man for his time and place. Never before has someone made me laugh so hard. His pop culture knowledge is second to none. I'll miss you, K-bro.

KATO | kato@gameinformer.com

That's two editors down in the last two issues! It seems like there's stuff in the fridge that's got more tenure than some of us here in the office. It's too bad we've got to say goodbye to these friends, but you can be rest assured that the quality of this magazine won't slip an inch. Why just the other day, I was telling our new guy Jeremy that the key to keeping this ship running smooth was making sure I have a constant stock of cold Coke to greet me in the morning. Let's see how good a listener he is - the future of the magazine depends on it. Please feel free to do your part in welcoming him into the fold with all of your console conspiracy theories, prison-sent letters, and bizarro-best artwork.

LISA | lisa@gameinformer.com

My GBA has been getting a lot more play in the last few months - but I've also been looking at some of the other handhelds coming in the next few months (or next year for the PSP), and it makes me worry for my favorite gaming-on-the-go platform. Tapwave's Zodiac, Sony's PSP, and even the Nokia N-Gage have some advantages over the GBA. I just feel badly that Nintendo hasn't pushed the hardware for their pocket baby as far as it could have, and now it's in a catch-up position behind Sony with regards to hardware. Rolling the dice against the big S hasn't worked well for Nintendo in the past. And Kristian, that dude cracked me up like few others in this universe and I have great respect for him.

JEREMY | jeremy@gameinformer.com

Since I'm the new guy, I feel like I should stand up at the head of the classroom and introduce myself. I'm Jeremy, I'm from Minneapolis, and I'm a Sagittarius. I like long walks in the park, poetry, unicorns...wait, no I don't. I like video games and have since the glory days of Atari. When I was a kid, I wrote my parents a list of 200 reasons that they should buy me and my brothers a Super Nintendo for Christmas. Two hundred! Reason number one was "multiple scrolling." With something so horrifically dorky in my past, I guess it was fate that I grow up to write for a video game magazine. So I'd like to thank Andy, Reiner, Matt, and everyone else here at GI for the chance to do just that. I promise I'll be good. So, can I sit down now?

NEXT ISSUE

Okay, there's this company that makes really, really good RPGs. And like, it made an RPG, for a console that starts with X, that is really, really popular. Next month, Game Informer has the world-exclusive look at its next game that is a totally new and original title. Which - if you knew who the developer was and what system it was for - you might have a good idea of what we're talking about, but you don't. These aren't the droids you're looking for. Move along.

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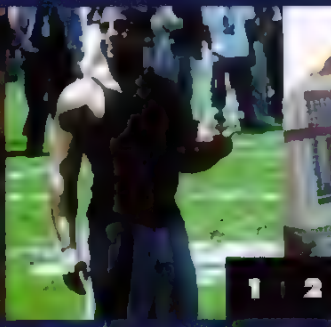


PlayStation 2



*Online feature available only on the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system.
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GI SPY



CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE SEAMY UNDERBELLY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

1 At Camp EA in Redwood City, the Ravens' Ray Lewis shows off for the crowd. Let's hope nobody made him mad! **2** Ubi-Soft Montreal's Yannis Mallat casts a steely gaze at the *GI Spy* camera...how eerie...it's almost as if he's staring right into our souls. We hope he doesn't know about how we wet the bed until we were 17 or that time we felt funny when our Aunt Joyce hugged us! That would totally ruin our cool "rep" in the industry. **3** *GI Spy* stops by to congratulate our publisher, Cathy Preston, on being selected as one of the *Minnesota Business Journal's* 25 Women to Watch. Hopefully, we'll watch her give us all raises – or at least not fire us for incompetence! **4** Nintendo product development lead, Chris "Grit" Campbell, gives the crowd a demonstration on this sweet F-Zero arcade cabinet at a recent Nintendo event. **5** The Sammy Studios gang: a great bunch of developers, and an even better basketball team! **6** Visual Concept's Asif Chaudhri, Anthony Chau and Ben Bishop search for the *Game Informer* offices. Pssst...it's right behind you! **7** *GI's* new web slave...er...editor...Chris Cook (seen here after downing two bottles of Cristal) attacks the pins at our exclusive bowling party, held at the Bryant Lake Bowl's VIP Champagne Room.



**CONTROL.
EITHER YOU GOT IT
OR YOU DON'T.**



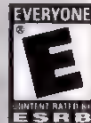
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With pressure-sensitive controls, you can do it all. Stop on a dime or turn on the jets. Juke lightly or fake a defender out of his pants. Drop the hammer or hit like a water boy. Play on your own or see what you're made of online. So, what's it going to be?

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PlayStation.2



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DEAR GI

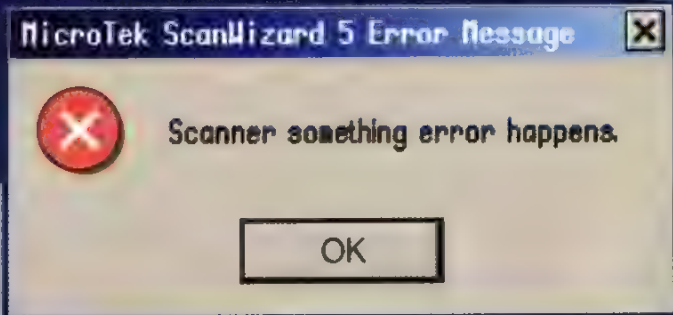
ALL YOUR BASE >>>

I was looking on the Internet for video game articles and I came across the word "Engrish." What is Engrish and could I have some examples?

Via Yahoo.com

For all of our Engrish needs, Game Informer goes directly to engrish.com. The site offers this handy and succinct definition, "Engrish can be defined as humorous English mistakes that appear in Japanese advertising and product design. While Engrish can be found all over the world, the most frequent and most humorous examples are from Japan." Further elaboration on the cause of Engrish is also offered. "Engrish is used as a design element in Japanese products and advertising to give them a modern look and feel. There is often no attempt to try to get it neither right, nor does the vast majority of the Japanese population (i.e. consumers) ever attempt to read the English design element in question. There is therefore less emphasis on spell-checking and grammatical accuracy. (The same can be said for the addition of Japanese or Chinese characters to hats, shirts and tattoos found in the US or Europe)."

Examples? How about the "All your base are belong to us" phenomenon of a few summers back? Also, the successful completion of the NES title *Ghosts 'n Goblins* rewards you with a screen proclaiming, "Congraturation. This story is happy end. Thank you." This, of course, is an example of just plain poor spelling and translation. We're hoping that the GOO.N line of infant diapers is one of those "graphic design" decisions and not a reflection of some parents' intentions for their children.



SETTLE >>>

Dear GI,

Why are you guys so hard on games? Can't a game just be fun anymore? You act like every single title that comes out is supposed to be an Academy Award winner. It is possible for a game to be fun without super in-depth menus, weapons systems, controls, etc. I think we should all try to remember what these things are...games.

John Doughnut
Via yahoo.com

I just have to say that your magazine totally kicks! But anyway, I am very curious to know why you have been giving out really high scores? It all started when you gave a perfect 10 to *Metal Gear Solid 2*. Then came a 9.75 for *Super Mario Sunshine*. After that, there were pairs of perfect 10s (right after each other) to *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* and *Metroid Fusion*. Then again, you scored two games with 9.75s: *SimCity 4* and *Xenosaga Episode 1*. And finally, *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* – you gave a perfect 10 to that. I think the staff (no offense) should be harder on the games. None of those titles are perfect or even close! Get your head straight, GI!

Coin Kennedy
Santa Barbara, CA

At Game Informer, we score games based on a number of criteria: concept, graphics, sound, playability, entertainment, and replay value. The plight of most critics is to balance personal feelings with the responsibility of recommending products to the public. No matter how much fun some members of the staff have with *Resident Evil* games, for example, it can't be left out of the review that the franchise's control scheme leaves many gamers looking for more accuracy.

Besides scoring how much fun we had with a game (a highly personal and objective marker), we are responsible for pointing out a title's technical successes and failures. Games are fun, and the whole point of playing them is to enjoy oneself – so if you're having fun, does it really matter what score we gave the title? On the flip side, we're here in an attempt to guide your \$50 to the right place.

EXPERIMENT RESULTS: SUCCESS >>>

Let me comment on your fine magazine: When you guys have your act together, you produce one of the best video game mags out there. In your latest issue, I was blown away by the E3 coverage. It was clear that you put a lot of work into that feature, and I appreciate the commitment.

Blackjac
Via email

Hey Game Informer! I just wanted to let you know that I both loved and hated your E3 coverage. Loving it because it

CASTING COUCH >>>

Am I the only one who is not excited, and in fact pissed, about Nicolas Cage being cast in the new *Dead to Rights* flick? I mean c'mon! Shouldn't they cast someone who doesn't appear to be having a perpetual hangover? Who are they going to cast to play the stripper? Sigourney Weaver? Note to casting agents and producers everywhere: There are actors in Hollywood that don't suck. I'd better not see Sandra Bullock as Samus Aran in the *Metroid* movie...or we are going to have problems!

E Yarbrough
Via yahoo.com

Oh woe, how bittersweet are Hollywood's adaptations of video game classics. We are still running that online petition to get Meryl Streep in as Princess Toadstool – in our opinion, there's no actress alive today that can capture the complex subtleties of our favorite damsel. Well, maybe Susan Sarandon, but she really peaked with *Stepmom* and may not be up to the task. In her corset-clad heyday of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, perhaps, but not now.

We're also gunning for Marilyn Manson as Psycho Mantis and Bob Hoskins for Mario Marlo – oh wait, that last abomination already happened. At least Ben Affleck isn't massacring the nobility of superheroes...crap! That happened, too!

showed me what the event is truly like and offered more information than any other feature I read on the topic. Hating it because I'm only 15, live in Ohio, and am not in the industry – so I can't go!

With appreciative admiration and simultaneously wishing damnation,

Scott
Via aol.com

Our coverage of E3 2003 was a bit of an experiment this year and, judging from your letters, it worked perfectly. The primary goal wasn't to determine who had the best show, but to make it more clear what the event is truly like.

CUSTOMIZE >>>

What are "mods?" I hear people talking about modding games, but I have no idea what they're talking about. Even in your magazine, you talked about Bungie helping people mod the PC version of *Halo*. But, what does it all mean?

Kyle Herz-Lane
Via email

"Mod" is just shorthand for "modification." In the world of video games, this usually refers to creating new levels, characters, or weapons for an existing game. *Counter-Strike*, for instance, was a mod of *Half-Life* that included new objectives, environments, weapons, characters, and sounds – essentially an entirely new game.

Communities surrounding multiplayer-centric games like *Tribes*, *Half-Life*, and *Doom* are generally the most active, and aficionados of those types of titles enjoy the ability to expand on their favorite games. The more it can be modded, the longer shelf life it seems to have, and this is a major distinction between PC and console games.

SEQUELS GONE SOUTH >>>

I want to get a game-related tattoo, but I don't know if I should. My family and friends are telling me it's a bad idea, but what do they know? Do you think I should do it?

Gracie





P.N.03
PRODUCT NUMBER

P.N.03

DANGER AROUND EVERY CURVE.

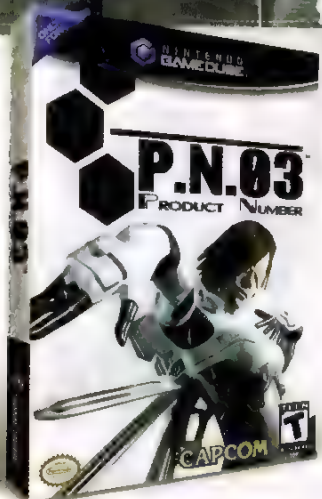
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Suggestive Themes
Violence

ENVELOPE ART

SEPTEMBER WINNER!

■ Just ask all of those people who have Dante permanently inked on their helmets what they think about jumping the gun on tattoo selection. Point made?

But, we're out to help those in need. First, here's a disclaimer: "Game Informer does not endorse or encourage permanently emblazoning any symbol, character, or witty word puzzle on your person. Any sanctioning (implied or stated) is merely intended to be good humor, and not a suggestion to let Vinny down the block repeatedly prick you with a pin with the intention of acquiring indelible body art or modification."

That said, here are a few gaming-related ideas we came up with:

- Zelda's triforce
- The Konami code
- Any Space Invaders character, blown up to show off its pixilated glory
- Dr. Mario pills and germs
- Laura Croft's braid or Kid Icarus' wings on your back



Andrew Cole

We don't think Link is there to reserve Brute Force!

PRECIOUS METALS >>>

I am just wondering, what does it mean when a game has "gone gold?"

Nick
Via hotmail.com

■ All games go through a series of code tweaks and bug fixes before they are wrapped in a clamshell case, shrink wrapped, and trucked off to your local gaming emporium. Once a company has decided that the title is ready to ship, it is deemed that it has "gone gold." This means that the version on the "gold disc" sent to the pressing factory and video game review outlets is the final version that will appear in stores.



Tin Salamunic
"Nice chin, buddy!"



Paul Lazzeri

We love Substance Mgetaar! 2!

GUILESSLY >>>

Hey guys. I owe you a big fat apology! I've been subscribing to and reading your magazine for years – and the whole time, I've been knocking your 2D, old-school reviews. I've called you geeks, dorks, dweebs, and a whole string of unprintable four-letter "nicknames," but now I'm a convert.

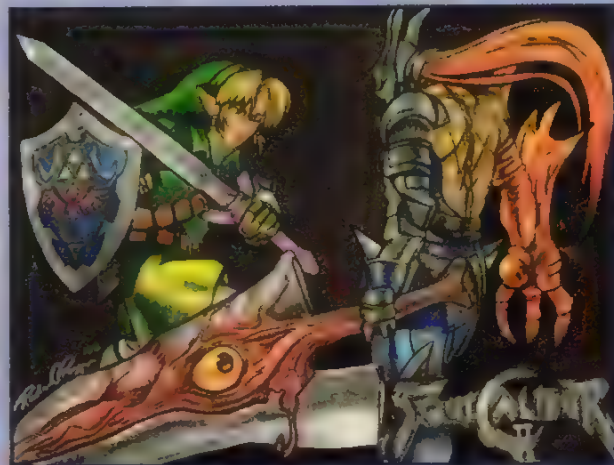
I've always been a geek, but I'm an old-school geek now, too. I always said, "Who would play an old, 2D game in the 3D era?" I laughed at your Castlevania: Circle of the Moon review. I was appalled at you giving Metroid Fusion a higher score than Metroid Prime. The list goes on and on.

Anyway, my wife recently bought me a GBA SP as an anniversary gift. I politely thanked her, but I thought to myself, "Why would I want this kiddie toy? It doesn't have any games I would play!" (I think that she just wanted to visit Animal Island, but that's beside the point.) I was in Gamestop the next day, and lo and behold, they had a sale on GBA games. On the shelf were Zelda: A Link to the Past, Metroid Fusion, and Castlevania: Circle of the Moon. I remembered that you had raved about all three, so I tried them.

Well guess what? Between the GameCube/GBA connectivity and the GBA games I bought, my little system hasn't been off since! I actually do like Fusion better than Prime, and Castlevania is incredibly addicting with the RPG-like character building. You guys were dead-on with your reviews.

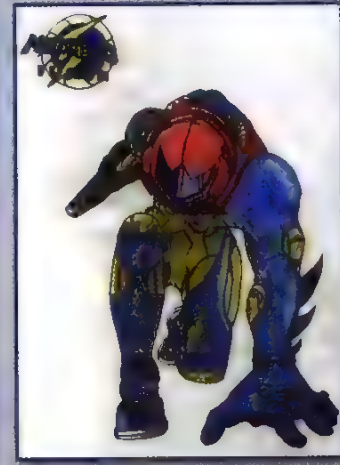
So, I'm writing to tell you that I'm eating a big slice of humble pie as I'm playing Meroid Fusion, thinking about Castlevania, and wondering how to get the moon pearl in Zelda.

Thomas Barnes
Via email



Richard Reagan

They should use those swords to give each other decent haircuts



Gabriel Roché

Samus gets ready to race against Seabiscuit!

■ We know that more of you will come around due to this wee testimonial. For the rest of you that would actually like to eat a piece of humble pie, it tastes somewhat like butterscotch – especially if you're playing Metroid Fusion at the same time. Now, believe us all the time!

THINK YOU KNOW NHL HITZ? THINK AGAIN...



-NICKLAS LIDSTROM

IT'S TIME TO GO PRO WITH THE NEW NHL HITZ PRO. FOR THE FIRST TIME AUTHENTIC NHL FEATURES DIE-HARD HOCKEY FANS DEMAND HAVE BEEN COMBINED WITH MIDWAY SPORTS TRADEMARK FAST AND FURIOUS GAMEPLAY, DELIVERING AN ALL-NEW NHL HITZ PRO EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT FROM WHAT YOU'D EXPECT FROM HITZ AND DIFFERENT FROM WHAT YOU'LL GET WITH ANY OTHER HOCKEY VIDEOGAME.

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PlayStation.2



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GTA MAKER'S DARK NEW WORLD

The **Grand Theft Auto** auteurs at **Rockstar North** are readying their newest creation: **Manhunt** for the **PlayStation 2**. The game (scheduled for a fall release) has a different take on the subject of violence than the studio's previous efforts. Don't worry; from what we hear, *Manhunt* has its own share of controversy.

A visit to the title's website (rockstargames.com/manhunt) gives us a glimpse at a shocking world (it even freaks us out) where it appears some sickos pay for made-to-order snuff films.

In order to prevent ending up on the wrong side of one of these death flicks, you're going to have to survive Carcer City's roving gangs and other dangers. Primitive weapons like baseball bats will be among your few saviors in this dark world of survival. We are fascinated to see how Rockstar North's new game changes the rules once again, and should have more for you on *Manhunt* in the near future.



Like *GTA*, *Manhunt* features fictional companies such as this website, *valiant-ent.tv*



What danger lurks in the shadows of this first screenshot for *Manhunt*?

SONY DETAILS PLAYSTATION PORTABLE SPECS

At the PlayStation Meeting 2003 news conference in Japan, **Sony** spelled out some of the technical specs and other features of its upcoming **PlayStation Portable (PSP)** handheld system. This includes a wireless network system for head-to-head gaming and downloads. **Ken Kutaragi**, **PSone** and **PS2** creator, spoke at the event and stated that, because of the PSP, "The video game market may change in a big way." Kutaragi said that it is expected to debut in the last quarter of 2004.

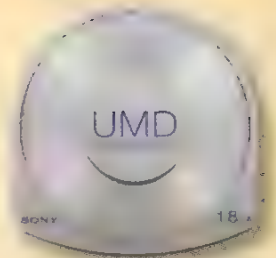
The handheld's dual CPU setup will be comprised of two 32-bit processors – the more powerful of which (dubbed the CPU Core) handles the 3D-rendering of surfaces, lighting effects, and resource management. The Media Engine will handle sound, movie, and asset management. In comparison, the **PSone** only has one processor to deal with all of a game's computations. These CPUs are roughly 10 times more powerful than that of the **PSone**.

While Sony did outline a connectivity feature with the PlayStation 2 via USB 2.0, the PSP will also have infrared capabilities to reach other PSP units, cell phones, and more. Sony is concerned with security and is working to ensure that the system's Universal Media Disc gives the best protection possible to developers. The unit will feature one analog stick, the usual four face buttons (plus ones for Start and Select), and only two shoulder buttons.

Kutaragi also spelled out the next steps for the handheld. A prototype of the PSP will be available by the time **E3** rolls around next May, and launch titles will become evident at the **2004 Tokyo Game Show** in

September. Meanwhile, **PC**-based emulator software tools will go out to developers this fall, with the final hardware set arriving for studios in the spring.

A price has not been officially announced, but some analysts estimate it will cost between \$150 and \$250. For more on PlayStation Portable, please see our news story in the July issue (#123).



PSP's Universal Media Disc

NEW PLAYSTATION PORTABLE TECH SPECS

- CPU:**
 CPU Core and Media Core
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 - 333MHz
 - 2.6GHz/sec. bus bandwidth
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 - 2 MB sub memory (eDRAM) for Media Core

- Communication**
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 - USB 2.0 (PSP, PS2, PC, etc.)



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- Ice Cube: Death Certificate** (Priority) ★ 31682
- Dashboard Confessional: MTV Unplugged V2.0 (w/DVD)** (Vagrant) ★ 46868
- Dashboard Confessional: The Places You Have Come To Fear The Most** (Vagrant) 46869
- N.W.A.: Greatest Hits** (Priority) ★ 31690
- Alkaline Trio: From Here To Infirmary** (Vagrant) 46892
- Neil Young: Decade** (Reprise) ★ 08953

- Nelly: Nellyville** (Universal) ■ 44854
- Creedence Clearwater Revival: Chronicle—20 Greatest Hits** (Fantasy) 01520
- Sublime: Greatest Hits** (MCA) ■ 32113
- New Found Glory** (Drive-Thru Records) 40074
- Soundgarden: A-Sides** 17-track best-of set. (A&M) 24937
- DMX: It's Dark And Hell Is Hot** (Def Jam) ■ 24977
- 2Pac: Still I Rise (Fast, Outlawz)** (Interscope) ■ 32575
- Genesis: Turn It On Again—The Hits** (Atlantic) 32606
- The Best Of Ted Nugent: Great Gonzo!** (Epic) 32622
- Ice Cube: Greatest** 20 greatest hits! (Polydor) ★ 40288
- Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers: Greatest Hits** (MCA) 02390
- American Idol—Greatest Moments** (RCA) 45795
- Kelly Clarkson: Thankful** (RCA) 48257

- Chevelle: Wonder What's Next** (Epic) 46411
- Everclear: Slow Motion Daydream** (Capitol) 48052
- Lisa Marie Presley: To Whom It May Concern** (Capitol) 48056
- Bone Thugs-N-Harmony: The Collection, Volume 2** (Epic) ■ 38211
- Willie Nelson: Greatest Hits & Rare Tracks (1959-1971)** (Rhino) 63284
- The Exiles: Inertia** (Virgin) 48133
- Fatboy Slim: You've Come A Long Way, Baby** (Astralwerks) ■ 48227
- American Idol Season 2—All-Time Classic American Love Songs** (RCA) 48258
- Piacebo: Sleeping With Ghosts** (Virgin) 48273
- The Chemical Brothers: Dig Your Own Hole** (Astralwerks) 46388
- Pink: Can't Take Me Home** *There You Go, Most Girls, etc.* (LaFace) 33260
- Rob Zombie: Hellbilly Deluxe** *Living Dead Girl, more.* (Geffen) ■ 25717

- Sean Paul: Dutty Rock** (Atlantic) ■ 46320
- Lynyrd Skynyrd: All-Time Greatest Hits Remastered** (MCA) 33339
- Johnny Cash: American IV—The Man Comes Around** (Lost Highway) 45851
- Jay-Z: Blueprint 2.1** *Excuse Me Miss, etc.* (Def Jam) ■ 48547
- Nas: God's Son** *Made You Look, I Can* etc. (Columbia) ■ ★ 48558
- Elton John: Greatest Hits** (Polydor) 03077
- Puddle Of Mudd: Come Clean** (Flawless/Geffen) ■ 41188
- Nickelback: Silver Side Up** (Roadrunner) 41322
- Silpnok: Iowa** (Roadrunner) ■ 41324
- Rain: Stewart: Greatest Hits** (Warner Bros.) 33779
- Run-DMC: Greatest Hits** (Arista/BMG Heritage) 45587
- The Police: Every Breath You Take—The Classics** (A&M) 03515

- Pink: Missundaztood** (Arista) 41844
- Taproot: Welcome** (Atlantic) ■ 45904
- Ozomatli: Embrace The Chaos** (Interscope) ■ 41525
- Jason Mraz: Waiting For My Rocket To Come** (Elektra) 45910
- Britney Spears: Britney** *Overprotected, more.* (Jive) 41562
- 2Pac: Greatest Hits** (Interscope) ■ ★ 26422
- Bob Marley: Legend** (Island) 53521
- The Killers: Brothers Band: The Road Goes On Forever** (Mercury) ★ 41812
- Disturbed: The Sickness** (Giant) ■ 34229
- Mystikal: Ghetto Fabulous** (Jive) ■ 20640
- John Mayer: Room For Squares** *No Such Thing, Your Body, ... more* (Columbia) 41654
- Phil Collins: Hits In The Air Tonight, many more.** (Atlantic) 26695
- Michael Jackson: Thriller** (Epic) 41913



The Eminem Show (Interscope) ■ 44644



Chimaira: The Impossibility Of Reason (Roadrunner) 48624



Trapt (Warner Bros) ■ 46118



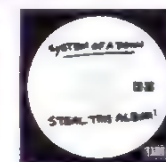
Avril Lavigne: Let Go (Arista) 44805



Linkin Park: Reanimation (Water Bros) 44984



Good Charlotte: The Young and the Hopeless (Epic) 45764

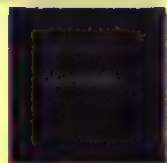


System Of A Down: Steal This Album! (Columbia) ■ 48166

- Lucinda Williams: World Without Tears** (Lost Highway) 46936
- Fear Factory: Hatefiles** (Roadrunner) 46948
- The Essential Blue Oyster Cult** (Legacy) 46901
- Red Hot Chili Peppers: What Hits?** (EMI) ■ 00144

- Nas: Nastradamus** *Title track, more.* (Columbia) ■ 32831
- The Ataris: So Long, Ateolia** (Columbia) 48023
- John Mayer: Any Given Thursday** (Columbia) ★ 48042

CLASSIC ROCK ESSENTIALS!



AC/DC: Back In Black (Legacy) 46987



Guns N' Roses: Use Your Illusion II (Geffen) ■ 25534

- Marc Bolan & T. Rex: 20th Century Boy—Ultimate Collection** (Hip-O Records) 45386
- The Very Best Of Kiss** (UTV) 45363
- Elvis Presley: 30 #1 Hits** (RCA) 45794
- The Essential Santana** (Legacy) ★ 46087
- The Essential Ozzy Osbourne** (Legacy) ★ 46776
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Rob Zombie: The Sinister Urge (Geffen) 41965

Styx: Greatest Hits (A&M) 00403

Trick Daddy: Book Of Thugs—Chapter AK Versus 47 (Atlantic) 34450

No Doubt: Rock Steady Hey Baby Hella Good, Underneath It All, Running, more (Interscope) 42112

Nirvana Nevermind (Geffen) 15600

Limp Bizkit: New Old Songs (Interscope) 42169

DMX: ...And Then There Was X Party Up, etc. (Def Jam) 34619

Public Enemy: Fear Of A Black Planet (Def Jam) 34718

Madonna: GHV2 15 smash hits from 1992-2001 (Warner Bros.) 42356

Alan Jackson: Drive (Arista Nashville) 42359

The Lord Of The Rings—The Fellowship Of The Ring/Sdtrk. (Reprise) 42376

Josh Groban (Warner Bros.) 42384

Merle Haggard: 20 Greatest Hits (Capitol Nashville) 42401

Whitney Houston: The Greatest Hits 4 new songs, #1 hits, remos (Arista) 34819

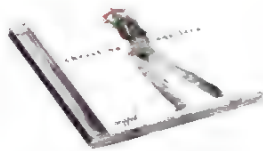
3 Doors Down: The Better Life Kryptonite, Loser, more. (Universal) 34858

Kylie Minogue: Fever (Capitol) 42506

Britney Spears: Oops!...I Did It Again Stronger, plus more hits (Jive) 34934

Norah Jones: Come Away With Me (Blue Note) 42810

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Vanessa Carlton: Be Not Nobody A Thousand Miles (A&M) 43272

Simple Plan: No Pads, No Helmets...Just Balls (Lava) 42665

Shakira: Grandes Éxitos (Sony Discos) 46140

Doves: The Last Broadcast (Capitol) 43854

Dave Matthews Band: Under The Table And Dreaming (RCA) 05996

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Jennifer Lopez: J.Lo (Epic) 38580

Kelly Osbourne: Shut Up (Epic) 46222

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Sum 41: Does This Look Infected? (Island) 46227

Our Lady Peace: Gravity (Columbia) 44815

Korn: Untouchables (Epic) 44824

TrustCompany: The Lonely Position Of Neutral (Geffen) 44831

Santana: Shaman (Arista) 45273

N.E.R.D.: In Search Of... (Virgin) 48148

Foreigner: Complete Greatest Hits (Rhino/Atlantic) 44852

The Vines: Highly Evolved (Capitol) 44885

The Very Best Of Motörhead (Sanctuary) 44896

Superjoint Ritual: Use Once And Destroy (Sanctuary) 44897

Ozzy Osbourne: The Ozzman Cometh Best-of, plus rarities (Epic) 44959

Filter: The Amalgamut (Reprise) 44977

The Flaming Lips: Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots (Warner Bros.) 44983

Eagles: Greatest Hits 1971-1975 (Asylum) 23481

Trick Daddy: Thug Holiday (Atlantic) 45323

The Used (Reprise) 45334

Jars Of Clay: Furthermore—From The Studio/From The Stage (Essential) 46291

Beyond The Valley Of The Murderolls (Roadrunner) 45369

Stone Sour: Bother, Inhale, etc. (Roadrunner) 45370

Mariah Carey: Charmbracelet (Island) 46330

Fleetwood Mac: Greatest Hits (Warner Bros.) 00796

Christina Aguilera: Come On Over, more. (RCA) 31228



The New Breed CD/DVD (Interscope) 48540



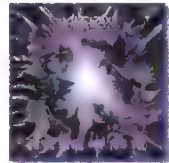
Bruce Springsteen: The Rising (Columbia) 45141



Disturbed: Believe (Reprise) (Capitol) 45562



Lenny Kravitz: Greatest Hits (Jive) 48457



Anthrax: We've Come For You All (Sanctuary) 48343



Queens Of The Stone Age: Songs For The Deaf (Interscope) 45358



The Donnas: Spend The Night (Atlantic) 45902

Eminem: The Marshall Mathers LP Stan, The Way I Am, etc. (Aftermath) 25051

Grease/Sdtrk. The original film soundtrack! (Polydor) 35125

The Best Of Judas Priest: Living After Midnight (Legacy) 42809

Ghostface Killah: Shaolin's Finest (Epic) 42834

MTV—The Best OfTRL Pop (UTV) 42885

Grand Funk Railroad: Capitol Collectors Series (Capitol) 73258

The Very Best Of Winger (Rhino) 42913

Alabama: Greatest Hits (RCA) 20247

8 Mile/Sdtrk. (Universal) 46091

Eminem: The Slim Shady LP My Name Is, more (Aftermath) 28121

Godsmack: Voodoo, Keep Away Whatever, more (Republic) 26170

The Essential Waylon Jennings (RCA) 12991

Fat Joe: Loyalty (Atlantic) 46000

Ruff Ryders—Ryde Or Die, Vol. 1 DMX, Jay-Z, more (Interscope) 28351

Tommy Lee: Never A Dull Moment (MCA) 43543

Jahel: Still Ghetto (Warner Bros.) 46115

Jaguars: El Primer Instinto (BMG US Latin) 46135

The Doors: Essential Rarities (Elektra) 36202

R. Kelly: Chocolate Factory (Jive) 46176

2Pac: R U Still Down? (Remember Me) (Jive) 21492

Ja Rule: The Last Temptation (Murder Inc.) 46186

Snoop Dogg: Paid The Cost To Be Da Boss (Priority) 46187

Outkast: Stankonia Ms. Jackson, So Fresh So Clean, more (LaFace) 36784

Godsmack: Awake (Republic) 36773

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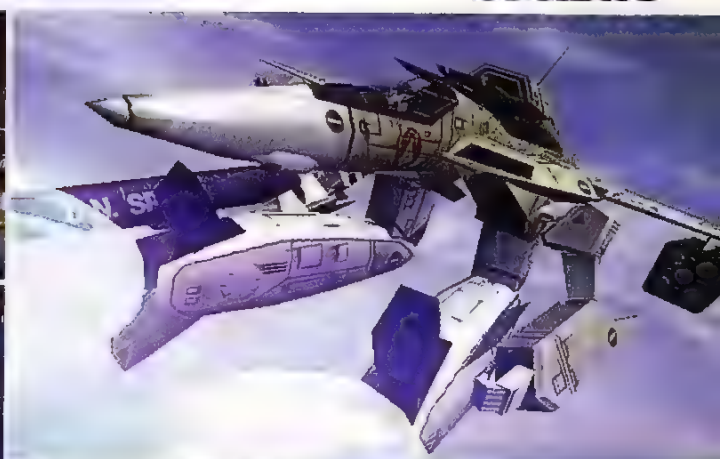
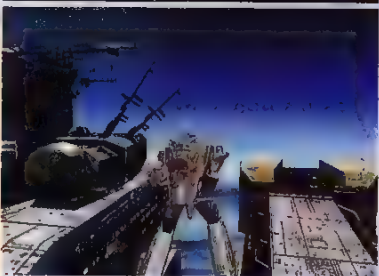
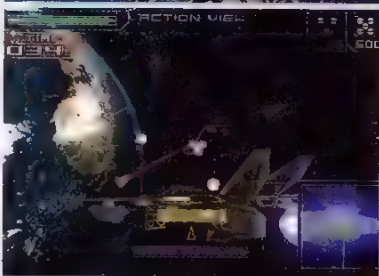


SEGA'S ROBOTECH REDUX

Sega and Bandai are teaming up to bring you the beginning of the Robotech saga in **Super Dimensional Fortress Macross** this October in Japan. What's *Macross*? It's the Japanese name for the animated series that started it all. The show's title was changed to *Robotech* (and other storylines were added) when it came to America in the eighties.

Sega is behind the development of the game, and it's put **Yu Suzuki's** old **AM2** studio on the project. Those behind the **Aero Dancing** flight franchise are working on *Macross*, and they will fully utilize all three forms of the Veritech fighters.

As for the publishing, Bandai is handling this title in Japan. Last year, **TDK** released **Robotech: Battlecry** through its license agreement with the animated show. Thus, it seems like there may be conflict between the two companies, as *Macross*— even under a different moniker— is the foundation of the *Robotech* story. *Game Informer* contacted Bandai representative Linda Shannon, who could only say that the company "would consider publishing it in the States."



Tapwave's conceptual rendering of Zodiac featuring a real in-game screenshot of the system's *Spy Hunter*

TAPWAVE INTRODUCES ZODIAC

Tapwave, a company founded by ex-Palm employees (the PDA maker), has officially announced its handheld gaming system called **Zodiac**. It runs an enhanced version of the Palm OS 5.2.6 operating system, and the unit will retail for \$299. Pre-orders at tapwave.com will begin in mid-September, while Zodiac is expected to ship in October.

The handheld features an analog controller, MP3 functionality, video capabilities (AVI, MPEG4, QuickTime, etc.), support for Bluetooth close-proximity multiplayer gaming, an ATI Imageon graphic accelerator, and much more.

Tapwave has games like **Spy Hunter** (shown), **Doom II**, **Neverwinter Nights**, and **Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4** dialed up for the system; but it says that the platform's open source sensibilities will allow for developers to make untold games for Zodiac. In fact, over 400 companies have contacted Tapwave to create content for the system. Zodiac's launch should see a mix of third-party, first-party, licensed, and Palm games.



D.O.

Game Informer's research and development operatives search the globe, seeking out the untapped licenses that will become tomorrow's killer games. If you have any great ideas for games of the future, be sure to drop us a line. Maybe we'll use our god-like power over the video game industry to turn you into a millionaire – or just steal your idea.

SEABISCUIT: FROM LOSER, TO WINNER, TO GLUE



Right now, the video game industry is ablaze with titles that tie into feature films. So, why not make one based on what could quite possibly be 2003's picture of the year? Much like the video game adaptations of *The Hulk* and *The Matrix*, *Seabiscuit: From Loser, To Winner, To*

Glue is not a simple remake of the film that everyone loves so dearly. It's an untold side story that takes us far beyond the movie and shows us the shocking truth behind racing's famous dark horse. In the movie, he's a champion that defied the odds; but in the game, we learn that *Seabiscuit* was actually a baryard bully with an oat problem who had a crush on a cow named Betsy. The game explores his tormented life and the sacrifices he had to make to become the king of the furlongs. Of course, since it is a game, training for races is just part of the fun. You will also have to stop ninjas from hoarding all of the barn's hay, and help Cluckita the chicken recover all of her lost eggs. What exactly does "To Glue" stand for in the title, you ask? Well, let's just say that it has a shocking ending!

NAME THAT GAME

Sega and developer Visual Concepts' foray into the first-person view this year with ESPN NFL Football has been done before. As recently as 1997, a company added a Helmet Cam to its title that put you in the game and in the thick of things. Another interesting clue is that it lacked the NFL license. Thus, if you wanted the Panthers and the Patriots to play, you had to settle for Charlotte versus Foxboro!



(Answer on page 32)

TOP 10 FEATURES MISSING FROM FOOTBALL GAMES

- 10 More refs screwing up and deciding the outcome of close games.
- 9 Pat Summerall's brown noising. It wouldn't be Madden without his lap dog Pat.
- 8 Unlockable video of Cardinal kicker Bill Gramatica hurting himself celebrating after a kick.
- 7 A first-person mode for fans of the classic Saints teams of the eighties. All you see is the inside of a paper bag.
- 6 For Madden, defensive backs who can catch.
- 5 Real-time jock itch.
- 4 A Canadian football option. How 'bout dem Roughriders, eh?
- 3 Visible buttcrack bulgepout on their home uniforms. We're not kidding, it really happens!
- 2 Wide Right mode, where you can live through the Buffalo Bills' four consecutive Super Bowl losses.
- 1 The Ray Lewis murder mystery minigame (if you get off spot-free?)

DEVELOPER TOP 5

KRAIG KUJAWA, GAME DESIGNER, NFL BLITZ PRO



- 1 Halo – Xbox
- 2 NFL Blitz – Arcade
- 3 Mr. Pac-Man – Arcade
- 4 Castlevania: Symphony of the Night – PSone
- 5 Super Metroid – SNES

READER TOP 5

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- 1 Final Fantasy VII – PSone
- 2 Chrono Trigger – SNES
- 3 Gunstar Heroes – Genesis
- 4 Castlevania: Symphony of the Night – PSone
- 5 The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time – N64

Game Informer is a monthly magazine that features the latest news, reviews, and previews of the most popular games. Please contact us at 10101 E. Mississippi, Denver, CO 80231. Phone: (303) 750-8000. Fax: (303) 750-8001. Email: info@gameinformer.com. Website: www.gameinformer.com. (All rights reserved.)

LARA LEAVES CORE DESIGNS

Reuters news service in Europe reports that **Eidos'** cornerstone franchise, **Tomb Raider**, is switching developers from U.K. creator **Core Designs** to U.S.-based **Crystal Dynamics (Legacy of Kain)**. The latest in the series, **Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness**, has been panned by most critics for its poor quality despite its long development cycle. Eidos-owned Core Designs has been developing the *Tomb Raider* series since 1996.

This earth-shattering news comes on the heels of the announcement that **Jeremy Heath-Smith**, Core's founder, was stepping down from the company. This change of developers for the famous series was made after an internal review of the franchise in the wake of *Angel of Darkness'* less-than-stellar debut. Also, movie studio Paramount claims that the game's poor performance affected the bad box office returns for the film **Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life**.



BLIZZARD LOSES DIABLO TEAM

According to a statement from **Blizzard Entertainment**, **Blizzard North** co-founders **Erich Schaefer** and **Max Schaefer**, along with **David Brevik** and **Blizzard** vice-president **Bill Roper**, have left the company. The Schaeferes and Brevik were the force behind the **Diablo** series. Their success caused the creation of subsidiary **Blizzard North**. The four are planning to start up their own game studio in the near future.

This development follows the January departure of the **Millar Brothers (StarCraft/WarCraft)** from **Blizzard** to work with **Jaleco** on **Goblin Commander** (see our preview on page 92). The speculation is that publisher **Vivendi** may have been the trigger for this latest exodus.

Blizzard Entertainment remains upbeat regarding this bump in the road. Says **Mike Morhaime**, president and co-founder, "We want to convey that **Blizzard's** success has never been attributable to any one person or small group of individuals, and I am confident that we have the teams in place to continue creating some of the best games in the world." Accordingly, **Rick Sels**, head programmer on the *Diablo* series, will take over as the development lead for **Blizzard North**.

SEGA SHUFFLES DEVELOPMENT DECK

In order to create more cooperation and efficiency among its development teams, **Sega** has undergone a wholesale structural change. First off, the legendary **Yu Suzuki** will lead a brand-new subsidiary named **Cinematic Online Games**, while **Hiroshi Kataoka** becomes the head of Yu's old **Sega AM2**. Meanwhile, all the other development subsidiaries will be reduced from nine to seven, with four being closed and two added. Both **Sega Rosso (Sega Rally)** and **United Game Artists (Space Channel 5)** will disappear and be merged into other divisions. One of the new companies will focus on sports titles for Japan, while the other will be Yu Suzuki's new gig that will focus on major releases.



Yu Suzuki

As for the other **Sega** developers, staff and responsibilities will be shuffled. For example, **Sonic Team** and **United Game Artists** will focus on titles aimed at casual gamers, while **Hitmaker (Crazy Taxi)** and **Sega Rosso** will work on developing for new platforms. Meanwhile,



Overworks (Shinobi) and **Wow Entertainment (House of the Dead)** have melded together to become **Wow Works**. It does not appear that any of **Sega's** gaming franchises will be dropped in this shuffle.

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BUDOKAI GETS BUFFED UP

Atari's *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2* is trying to expand upon the basic fighting template that the first *Budokai* subscribed to when it released last year. True to the publisher's dedication to converting the ins and outs of the animated show to video games, players will now be able to perform fusions – the melding of two characters and the absorbing of enemies. However, that doesn't mean that there isn't some imagination here. The new Dragon Mode lets a team of Z Fighters embark on a quest to capture all seven Dragon Balls and perform in some battles that never happened on TV.

Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2 ships for the PlayStation 2 this December.

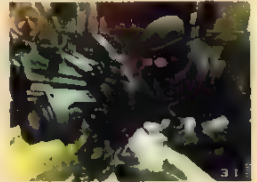


THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

BAD – Think *Half-Life 2* is too good to be true? Developer Valve's September release date might be. The studio and publisher Vivendi are unsure of the game's release date. Meanwhile, versions for all the consoles are being considered.

UGLY – *Conspiracy* is suing Eminem for allegedly renegeing on a contract to do a PSone/PC music game. The rapper apparently pulled out to look for a bigger deal. We'd love to see the suits at Conspiracy partake in a rhyme battle to keep the singer.

GOOD – Word is spreading through Europe of a *Lost Boys*-developed game by Sony of Halo-killing proportions called *Killzone*. The first-person shooter will use the USB headset, and will also feature a number of online options



GOOD – For its yearly contributions to video games, the sport, and culture as a whole; pro football's Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio is inducting EA Sports' *Madden NFL Football* video game. Do we get anything for playing it all the time?

BAD – Nintendo has delayed *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* for the GameCube until February. That's okay, we don't have three friends and money to blow on all those link cables anyway.

BAD – The Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) is investigating Activision, THQ, Midway, Acclaim, and other video game companies regarding the issue of revenue recognition.



NAMCO SENDS PLISSKEN NEW MISSION

Dreamy! This new art for Namco's *Escape From New York* license has us thinking of getting this airbrushed on velvet for our living room – or a tattoo. The publisher has announced that it has secured the services of legendary director John Carpenter and Snake Plissken himself, Kurt Russell, for help on the games based on the series of movies. The first of these will appear in time for Christmas 2005 on undisclosed consoles.

The star of both *Escape from New York* and *Escape from L.A.*, Kurt Russell, will be offering his gritty voice to the titles,

and was happy to help out. "Bringing Snake into the video game world should be a blast." Kurt hasn't sounded this excited since son-in-law and ex-Black Crowes frontman Chris Robinson told him he was coming by for a "glaucoma party."

The games will replicate the post-apocalyptic America of the films, and we imagine there will be plenty of action, stubble, and eye-patches to go around.

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@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

Excited about Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP) handheld already? So is Eden Studios (*Kya*, the *V-Rally* series). Although the hardware hasn't been unveiled to the public yet, word has it that the developer is planning to start a 70-person strong studio dedicated to making games for the platform next month. Given how high the company is on *Kya*, don't be surprised if a PSP edition of the game is the first offering from Eden for the handheld.

Quake IV art assets were recently leaked from a source within developer Raven Software. Think they weren't real? Publisher Activision and co-developer Id Software immediately threatened to cease working with any website or publication who ran the shots. This one's okay, though.

What's up with EA Sports' *Knockout Kings* franchise? We haven't heard a word from the boxing series, even at E3, and it doesn't look to be surfacing anytime soon.



Instead of just porting *Ghost Recon: Island Thunder* to the PlayStation 2, Ubi Soft is giving fans of the console another kind of Christmas present. The publisher is planning to bring an online *Ghost Recon* game to the system before the year is out.

Capcom has cut the funding out of *Red Dead Revolver*. The PlayStation 2 western shooter debuted at E3 in 2002, and it's been downhill ever since. Meanwhile, the budget keeps going skyward. Part of the reason is that the game was overhauled in mid-stream. Where it'll end up now is anyone's guess.

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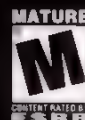
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TRIVIA



Todd McFarlane, *Spawn's* daddy, has done a lot of notable things in his illustrious career – even bigger than the time he drew the cover art for *Game Informer* (see issue #104, *Metal Gear Solid 2*). For example, he managed to buy literally all of Mark McGwire's 1998 home run balls. Our question is: What is the next collecting conquest McFarlane will embark upon?

Question 1: In the GameCube hit, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, which classic Nintendo character would you unlock by beating the game with all 24 of the other fighters?

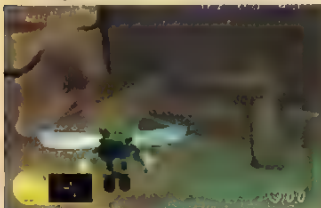
- A. Ganon
- B. Kid Icarus
- C. Mr. Game & Watch
- D. Shigeru Miyamoto

Question 2: Cashing in on the success of Ridley Scott's movie, the Atari 2600 had a game called *Alien*. Which all-time great video game did it rip off?

- A. Adventure
- B. BurgerTime
- C. Pac-Man
- D. Mr. Do

Question 3: Sony of Japan put out a PS2 game starring a blood-sucking little insect who tormented a nice Japanese family. Eidos later released it in the U.S. under its Fresh Games label, calling it *Mister Mosquito*. What was the original name?

- A. Sly Skeeter and the Family Itch
- B. Ka
- C. Robo Stinger Happiness Disrupt
- D. Miyo



Question 4: In the obscure Genesis title, *Gain Ground*, you would guide your squad of soldiers to the exit of one-screen levels, picking up more tricks along the way. Which of the following was not with you at the start of the game?

- A. A guy in red who fired his rifle up-screen
- B. An arrow-shooting blonde dwarf
- C. A girl in red who could throw grenades up-screen
- D. A shirtless guy with a beard who tossed spears in any direction

Question 5: Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen have appeared in more video games than we care to remember. In the Game Boy Color title, *Get A Clue*, the girls try to solve mysteries with the help of their dog. What was its name?

- A. Clue
- B. Watson
- C. Pawprint
- D. Uncle Joey

Question 6: Who is this handsome chap?

- A. Shadows of the Empire's Dash Rendar
- B. Highlander: The Game's Duncan MacLeod
- C. Perfect Weapon's Captain Blake Hunter
- D. Fighting Force 2's Hawk Manson



Question 7: Philips' CD-i, a CD-based gaming system released in 1995, tried a lot of things to stretch the bounds of software. One such example is a title called *Antistatic*. What was it about?

- A. It played ambient and trance music while displaying trippy images

- B. It's a protest sim where you fight for a worthy cause
- C. It let you combine the functions of your TV, radio, and lights so they could all be controlled by your CD-i
- D. It's a platformer starring a pair of socks stuck together by static electricity

Question 8: Which Madden football game was the first one to feature an ambulance that would drive onto the field to pick up injured players?

- A. John Madden '93
- B. It was always "in the game"
- C. John Madden '92
- D. John Madden '94

Question 9: Forget the Xbox "hamburger," the Atari Jaguar's controller is by far the largest. How many total buttons – not including the d-pad – did it have?

- A. 12
- B. 17
- C. 15
- D. 52



Question 10: Before he was called Pac-Man, the arcade legend was going to be named something else. That moniker got scrapped, however, for fears of nasty arcade patrons vandalizing the letters on the arcade cabinet. What was the original name?

- A. Puck-Man
- B. Round Hitter
- C. Part-Man
- D. Wee Willy Winkie

ACTIVISION DROPS STAR TREK

Publisher **Activision** has terminated its **Star Trek** license agreement and filed a lawsuit against media company **Viacom**. Activision alleges that "through its actions and inactions, Viacom has let the once proud Star Trek franchise stagnate and decay." Thus, the company is seeking to recoup supposed monetary damages because it claims that Viacom's lack of ongoing movie and television production and marketing for Star Trek hurt Activision's video game products. Viacom denies any wrongdoing, and characterizes the pair's relationship as a "fruitful collaboration." There are no current plans for any new Star Trek movies, and apart from support for its *Star Trek: Elite Force II*, Activision has no more Star Trek games in the works.

Viacom suspects that Activision is trying to renegotiate the licensing deal between the two companies, but in a statement regarding the lawsuit, the video game publisher was steadfast: "Activision has terminated the agreement and filed a complaint seeking to recover the damages it has suffered and will suffer as a result of Viacom's failure to abide by its agreement."



BREAKDOWN

100% The amount by which Sega hopes its software sales will jump in the next five years

98% The decline in profit suffered by the entire Sony corporation in the last fiscal quarter

14% of the staff aren't living and loving Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

60% of gamers reside in the United States, according to a recent survey

80% of hard work is perspiration. The rest of it is Cool Ranch Doritos

Score & Rank



0-2:
155 lbs. of fat sucked out of Camie Wilson's body



3-4:
The frozen cadaver of Ted Williams



5-6:
Sumo mawashi (diapers) worn by Yokozuna Musashimaru

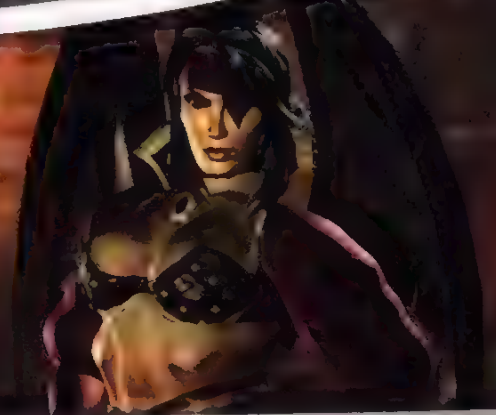


7-9:
Keanu Reeves' failed IQ tests



10:
Tennis star Anna Kournikova's sports bras

A Deadly Tournament...



MORTAL KOMBAT TOURNAMENT EDITION



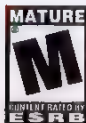
NEW! MULTI-LINK
CAPABILITIES ALLOW UP
TO FOUR PLAYERS TO
BATTLE IN TOURNAMENT
AND TAG TEAM PLAY.



**Tournament Launches,
August 2003**

Revenge.

THE DEADLY ALLIANCE BETWEEN SHANG TSUNG AND QUAN CHI REMAINS INTACT. CAN THEY BE DEFEATED? A NEW SET OF WARRIORS CROSS THE THRESHOLD INTO A DEADLY TOURNAMENT TO SEEK REVENGE AGAINST THE EVIL WARLORDS.



Blood
Violence

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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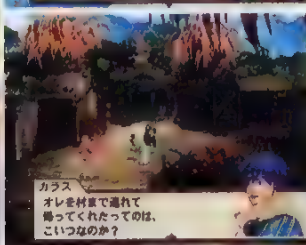
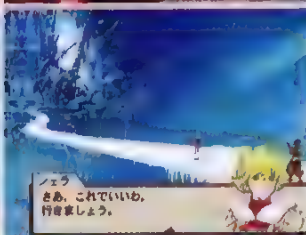
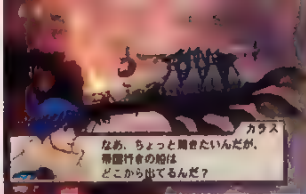
MIDWAY

NAMCO'S GC RPG UNVEILED

We've heard about **Namco's** plans to bring the traditional RPG experience to the **GameCube**; and here it is courtesy of **Xenosaga** developer **Monolith Soft**. **Baten Kaitos** presents a beautiful, fantastic world where continents float in the sky, and its residents can fly courtesy of Heart Wings.

You play as Kalas, a 17-year-old young man whose family has been murdered. He also suffers from having been born with only one wing – the other is mechanical. Furthermore, Kalas has a unique gift that enables him to communicate with those from another spirit plane.

Combat in **Baten Kaitos** is all done with Magnus Cards. Don't worry, however, as this isn't **Yu-Gi-Oh** or anything. Instead, the game's attack and magic system flows pretty fast as you can stack up actions on top of each other. Monolith Soft and Namco expect the title to appear in Japan before the end of the year. A U.S. release date has not been given at this time.



MAX PAYNE VS. MAXX PAYNE

The box for the hit game **Max Payne** calls its main character "a man with his back against the wall. Fighting a battle he cannot hope to win." **Darryl Peterson**, better known as former **World Championship Wrestling** superstar **Maxx Payne**, shares more with the game's protagonist than a name, as he too is gearing up for a fight. Rather than guns and fists, this battle will be waged through legal precedent and high-paid attorneys. Peterson and his lawyers have filed suit against **Rockstar**, **3D Realms**, **Gathering of Developers**, and **Remedy** for the sum of \$10 million – claiming the companies unlawfully used the name Max Payne for the video game.

Peterson tells *Game Informer* he has been using the Maxx Payne name (also Max Payne, Maxx Pain, and Max Pain, among others) since 1988. He spent several years wrestling for WCW using the moniker, and has even done some video game work. He supplied his voice for **Twisted Metal 2** and **Rogue Trip** – the latter showing his name in the credits. It was at those sessions that Peterson says people in the video game industry made mention of his name, then turned around and based a game around it.

"If you work for somebody, and they go 'Wow, what a great name!' and they invent an empire out of it, and they didn't bother to make one phone call to me – that's just downright unfair," Peterson says. "I want a reckoning. I want people to know that I invented the name. It's not right to just take something that's somebody else's because you have more money than them."

A spokesman from publisher **Rockstar/Take 2 Interactive** only stated, "Take 2 is involved in routine litigation in the ordinary course of business and does not comment on the status of any particular lawsuit."

DATA FILE

► Hollywood production company **Hypnotic (The O.C.)** has purchased the television and film rights to **Silicon Knights' Eternal Darkness** GameCube game.

► Atari's (nee Infogrames) **Alone in the Dark** is not only set to start filming a feature-length movie on July 14 in Vancouver, but will star **Christian Slater**.

► The **GameCube** has now been liberated! **Electronic Arts' Freedom Fighters** is spreading to Nintendo's console, and should game out this fall.

► An Xbox edition of **Unreal II: The Awakening** is being planned for this Christmas. **Tantulus** and **Legend Entertainment**, in conjunction with **Epic Games**, are developing the game. Also, Xbox-specific control and performance tweaks and multiplayer modes are on the docket.

► **Rainbow Six's** first next-generation iteration, **Rainbow Six 3**, will be an Xbox exclusive when it hits stores before the end of the year. **PlayStation 2** and **GameCube** versions were originally planned.

► As part of its new **Tecmo Wireless** division, the publisher is letting gamers download sweet screenshots like this through **AT&T's mMode**. Tecmo also promises mobile gaming based on some of its franchises.



► **THQ** has announced a name change for **Sphinx: The Shadow of Set**. The game will now be known as **Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy**. Whatever you want to call it, check out our coverage in the June Issue (#122).

► More kyo for your dough! **Yu Suzuki** and **Sega** have started work on **Shenmue III**. A special edition of the title will also feature the other two installments in the series. No platform has been announced for **Shenmue III**.

► The **Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA)**, which represents video game publishers, has changed its name to the **Entertainment Software Association** effective immediately.

► A man in the U.K. has reconfigured the European **PlayStation 2 Network Adaptor** to run a web browser allowing you to surf to almost any site on the Internet.

Name That Game Answer:

Madden Football 04

LET THE DANCE OF FLESH AND STEEL BEGIN.

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...the peace that followed the Great War, the skills of war were largely practiced in the arena. Schools of gladiators from strange lands hardened themselves in local leagues hoping to compete in the glorious tournaments of Imperia. This is Gladius: An epic gladiatorial RPG that will take you to the far ends of the earth as you recruit, train and run a customized school of gladiators. Fight with hundreds of deadly weapons. wield powerful magic. And master the dance of flesh and steel. Gladius: Your life begins and ends in the arena. WWW.GLADIUS.COM

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PlayStation 2






LOVE WILL
WILL
YEAR
US
APART

MAX THE FALL

When we were offered the opportunity to do a story on the return of Max Payne — the game that spawned dozens of clones and helped Rockstar establish itself as a force in the popular culture — we couldn't wait for the chance to see what the notoriously controversial company had in store for us.



PAYWNE 2

OF MAX PAYNE

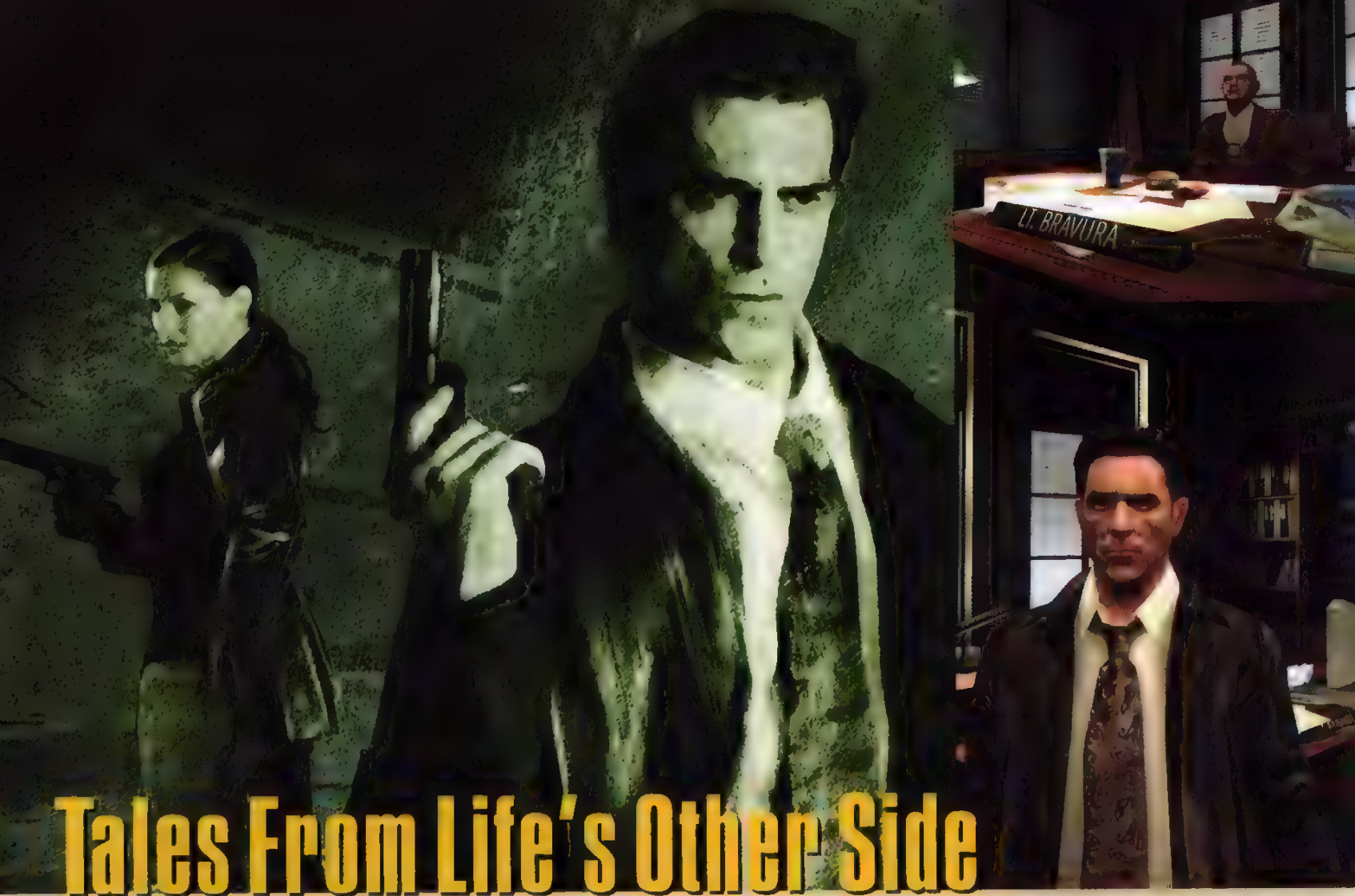
The original Max Payne was a breakout hit, selling over four million copies worldwide — largely off the strength of its hardboiled tale of a man wrongly accused and then-unprecedented use of slow-motion shooting (famously dubbed “bullet time”). For both Rockstar and the Finnish creators of the series, Remedy Entertainment, the success was both a blessing and a curse.

“Max Payne has caused us an interesting problem. A couple of years ago, we put together a game that we thought was pretty good; we had high hopes. Everybody starts out hoping that a game sells a million copies,” comments Rockstar COO Terry Donovan. “Out of the box,

• Max Payne does four [million]. Very few franchises or characters have that type of success.
 • Basically, you’re stuck there with a very successful franchise and the typical catch-22 publisher dilemma. You can do more of the same for the quick cash. Or, you can go away and do something pretty impressive. For [Rockstar and Remedy], it really wasn’t a hard decision.”
 • This commitment to crafting a sequel that exceeds the original explains the two-plus years that will have passed since the original was released. What it doesn’t explain is the “new direction” that Rockstar had been hinting that Max Payne 2 would take. Given the fact that

• the company has already scandalized the mass media Senator Joe Lieberman, and parents around the world with the Grand Theft Auto series; we naturally began to speculate on the graphic and gritty avenues that Max Payne 2 might explore.

• However, in the world of Max Payne, things are never as they seem. The truth behind this game actually proves to be more surprising than any display of virtual gore. Defying both our expectations and the mainstream media’s perception of Rockstar as purveyors of cheap shock tactics, Max Payne 2 is something that we never could have guessed...a love story.



Tales From Life's Other Side

It's been said that love is the drug; love is a many-splendored thing; love is all you need.

But love is rarely the central focus of a video game. Will gamers accustomed to Rockstar's usual satirical, testosterone-charged offerings embrace a story built around the most powerful of human emotions? Can a video game even hope to deliver a story that truly affects the audience in the way that a great book or film does? In theory, of course it can; but there's a difference between doing something and doing it right. Staking the long-term fortunes of one of your company's most notable franchises on a narrative device as tricky as love seems a bit risky, doesn't it?

"Don't get me wrong, I would be lying if I said it was easy," remarks Max Payne 2's lead writer Sam Lake. "But we think we can pull this off. We feel it's high time to take the risk and get some grown-up themes in games. And keep in mind that there are love stories and then there are love stories. This is a film noir love story. It's dark and tragic and violent. The 'Romeo and Juliet'-type of a premise, a love story between a cop and a femme fatale murder suspect, is perfect for an action game."

To strengthen Lake's point, and to further drive home the fact that – although it does involve a torrid affair – Max Payne 2 does not find Rockstar going the way of soft-focus Harlequin romance novels, Rockstar PR director Jeff Castaneda reassures us, "Don't worry, we haven't gone totally soft."

The story that Max Payne unfolds promises to be a dark ride through the life of a troubled man plagued by demons both old and new. The crux of Max Payne 2's plot is his desire for Mona Sax, a dangerous woman who leads him into a strange series of events that threaten his very existence.

Like so many of the film noir classics that inspired Remedy and Rockstar [see our Film Noir Primer on page 38], Max Payne 2 is structured as a tragedy of sorts – a tragedy with enough violence, intrigue, and diabolical plot twists to satisfy any fan of life's seedier side. As the game's subtitle ("The Fall of Max Payne") would suggest, fate has not dealt Max a kind hand since the end of his first adventure. At the outset, he stands accused of killing his own partner. Only this time, he's guilty and has already confessed to the crime. Following this stunning revelation, we see the story unfold in a series of flashbacks as Max recounts where it all went so wrong.

In the beginning, we learn that Max not only survived the ordeal of the first game, but actually emerged looking like a hero thanks to the machinations of the enigmatic senator Alfred Woden. Although now exonerated, the death of his family

and the corruption that he faced lead him to leave the DEA and take a job at his former employer, the New York Police Department. Ironically, the very man that once pursued him, Jim Bravura, is now his boss.

Working the homicide beat, Max comes across a case that will change his life forever. Mona Sax, a professional killer who Payne thought was dead, is the prime suspect. Although he senses that Sax cannot be trusted, their uncontrollable attraction leads him to the first of several errors in judgment that begin his descent into what reveals itself to be a hellish web of corruption, lies, and murder.

Although both Rockstar and Remedy were hesitant to reveal too much regarding specific plot details, they would say that several characters who survived the last game do make return appearances – including Woden, Russian mafioso Vladimir Lem, and meddlesome mob stooge Vinnie Gognitti.

Sam Lake promises that the story, although it does contain more than its share of bizarre turns, will be much more focused and coherent than the previous game. Much of this is due to the fact that there is a smaller cast of more fully drawn characters. Also, Lake – despite his recent success – spent some of his downtime in school studying screenwriting.

"Thanks to [the screenwriting classes] and the experience I got from Max Payne," Lake said, "this time around I had a much better grasp of what I was doing, instead of just going about it by blind instinct alone."





A Different Kind Of Payne

If you've looked at any of the screenshots accompanying this article, one thing should already be obvious: Max Payne is a changed man, in both the literal and metaphorical sense. The tremendous suffering and stress he has been through has written its story across his face, resulting in a character that looks a decade older than he did in the last game. In some ways, it's difficult to recognize this Max Payne as the same person, and for good reason.

Lake explains, "When we began working on Max Payne, we were essentially a 'garage band' with very limited resources, and many design decisions were made from that standpoint. One such decision was to cast the models for the characters from a close circle of friends and relatives. We had to make do with a very small pool of amateur models."

Success does have its benefits, and the healthy returns from its initial investment in Remedy led Rockstar to enter into a full partnership with the company for the follow-up – one that meant both more money and more cooperation during the development process.

"They turned 'round to us and said, 'Can we have a bigger budget?' We said, 'Cool,'" recalls Terry Donovan. "Also, they wanted access to the production team in New York that works on Grand Theft Auto, who deal with motion capture, facial digitization, acting, casting, voice-overs, and that kind of content."

After helping Rockstar audition more than 200 actors, Lake and the rest of the Remedy staff felt they had finally found the perfect Max Payne. Although it means that Lake won't be able to reprise his starring role (the writer was

A Film Noir Primer

What is film noir anyway? Even though we've all used the term a million times to describe one dark and mysterious movie or another, the real meaning of the term seems to have faded due to overuse. *Film noir* (which literally means "black cinema" in French) was a phrase coined to describe a certain breed of hardboiled dramas that became popular in the 1940s. Using a palette of shadowy grays and blacks, film noirs told tales of corruption, murder, greed, intrigue, and sex. Such familiar plot devices as the cynical detective, the femme fatale, the double-cross, and a plot told through flashbacks were all in large part popularized by the noir genre. This style of filmmaking is also one of the primary influences behind Max Payne 2. Here are some of the most important moments and movies in film noir history. One more thing – this list is meant to be neither definitive nor comprehensive, so film geeks save your angry letters.

Raymond Chandler (1888-1959)



If the noir genre could be attributed to a single man, that man would be Raymond Chandler. Chandler, the creator of the legendary detective Philip Marlowe, melded tangled plotlines, flawed characters, and spare prose into a formula that many consider to be the pinnacle of crime fiction. Many of his books, including *The*

Big Sleep and *The Long Goodbye*, were turned into noir films, and he also wrote the screenplay to the classic *Double Indemnity*. Like one of his characters, Chandler drank himself to death in 1959.

The Maltese Falcon (1941)



Legendary director John Huston's first film, *The Maltese Falcon*, is also hailed as the beginning of the film noir movement. It starred Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade, a world-weary detective who becomes embroiled in

a plot to find a jewel-encrusted artifact (the falcon of the title) by a mysterious woman with bad intentions. An amazing film, remarkable for Huston's great directorial skills, Peter Lorre's memorable turn as the swishy, creepy Joel Cairo, and Bogart simply being Bogart.

Double Indemnity (1944)



Featuring a screenplay written by Raymond Chandler and directed by Billy Wilder (*Some Like It Hot*), *Double Indemnity* was Wilder's only contribution to the genre. This was one of the first films to use the common ploy of telling the story through flashback. The tale at hand was suitably dark, recounting a doomed

love affair between a femme fatale (Barbara Stanwyck) and a drab insurance salesman (Fred MacMurray) who conspire to kill her husband in order to collect the couple's insurance policy. Features gangster movie icon Edward G. Robinson as an insurance investigator.



actually the model for Max in the first game), he does claim to be "very happy with Max's new look."

One thing that hasn't changed is Max Payne's trademark graphic novel-style cutscenes, which played a vital part in establishing the pulp fiction ambience the first time around. We suspect that these static visuals were also due in part to the economic constraints under which the first title was produced. They proved to be such a hit with both critics and fans that Remedy has decided to stay the artistic course. If anything, they are even more effective, showcasing a more refined art style and the campy, over-the-top tough-guy dialogue that fans expect.

In one scene we witnessed, Max meets Mona in a back alley. After a brief exchange, Mona asks Max, "What do you want from me?"

Max, our laconic street philosopher, mulls this question over internally: "The Things I Want' by Max Payne. A smoke. A whiskey. For the sun to shine. I want to sleep. To forget. To change the past. I want my wife and my baby back. Unlimited ammo and a license to kill. Right then, more than anything, I wanted her." As this monologue unfolds, Max and Mona engage in, shall we say, a very vigorous coupling up against the wall of a building. Mr. Castaneda was right about one thing: Max is certainly not going soft.

The Postman Always Rings Twice (1945)



Presenting the film noir as Shakespearean tragedy, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* casts John Garfield and Lana Turner as star-crossed lovers drawn together in a roadside bar.

Together, they devise a scheme to kill Turner's husband (detecting a pattern here?). Surprisingly, they actually get away with the crime, but end up meeting a fate much worse in a surprise ending. It's modeled on noir author John M. Cain's novel, but much of the plot was altered and sanitized to suit the standards of the day.

The Big Sleep (1946)



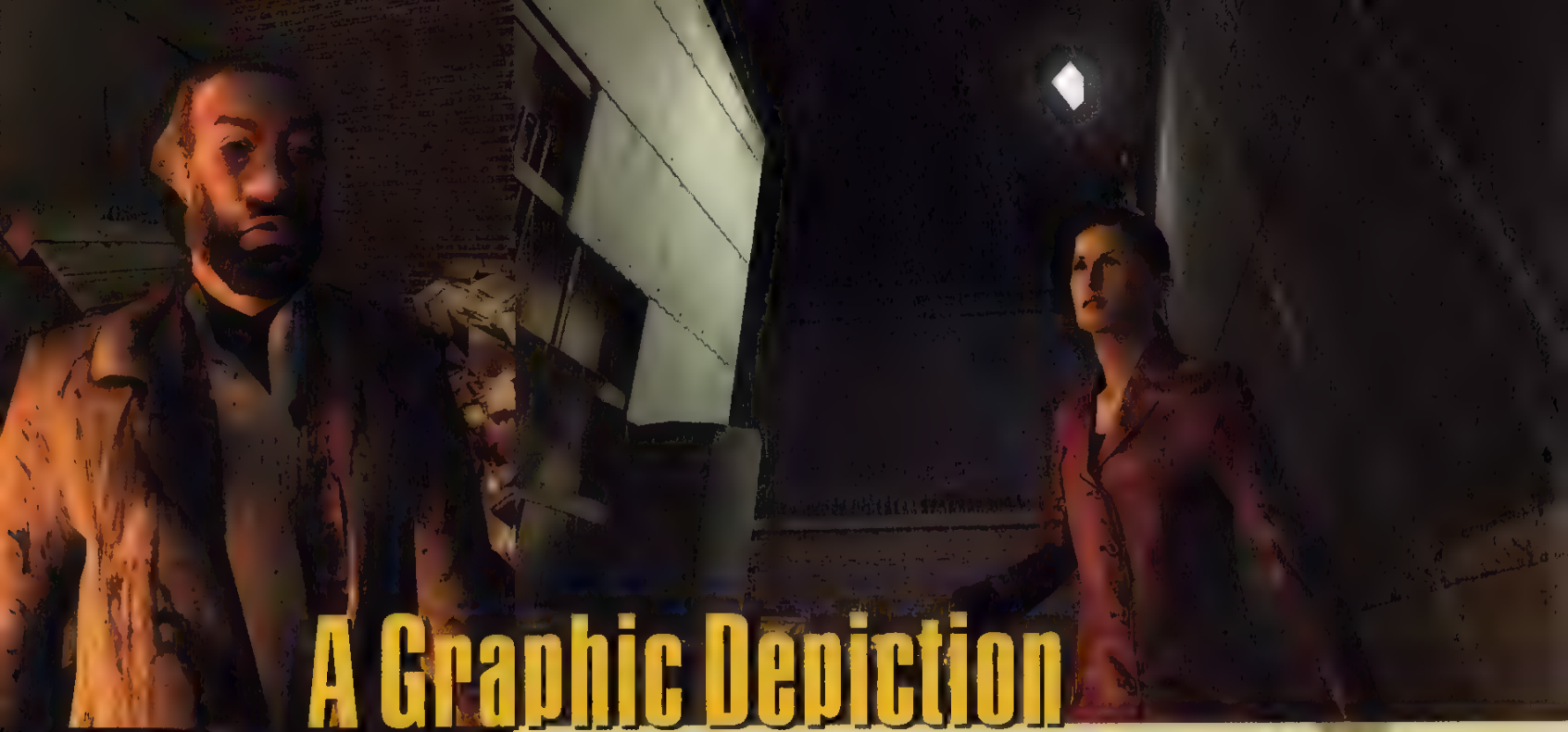
Based on the Raymond Chandler book of the same name, this is another film that features the unparalleled pairing of Humphrey Bogart (as Chandler's Philip Marlowe) and Lauren Bacall. The plot is complex to say the least, perhaps even a bit confusing. Incorporating such-for-its-day controversial subject matter as pornography, blackmail, and gambling – not to mention the flirtatious chemistry of the movie's two stars.

Notorious (1946)



This film noir is so influential Duran Duran named a song and album after it! Directed by mystery master Alfred Hitchcock at the height of his powers, *Notorious* boasts a powerhouse cast including Cary Grant, Ingrid Bergman, and Claude Rains. In the film, Devlin (Cary Grant) recruits the emotionally fragile Alicia

Huberman (Bergman) to infiltrate a cadre of Nazis who are hiding a stash of uranium. Like all Hitchcock films, *Notorious* features some amazing camerawork and is highly recommended.



A Graphic Depiction



ALTHOUGH Max Payne's gameplay redefined the shooter genre, it was not a graphical masterpiece. Realizing that success in the rapidly evolving PC market can never be taken for granted, this was the area in which Remedy has implemented the greatest number of improvements. To achieve this, the development team rolled up their sleeves and went about ripping apart the original graphics engine.

Lake said, "The Fall of Max Payne is using our own engine, heavily revamped and rewritten since the original Max Payne. The technology is there to facilitate the best possible game experience – more detail, deeper immersion, and cooler action. We have done loads of things to achieve this. We've added facial animations and lip-synching, improved the lighting a great deal, added mirrors and dynamic shadows, and licensed a physics engine, to name a few improvements."

Yes, that's a veritable laundry list of technical enhancements, but what it

translates into is a game that is simply gorgeous. Seeing it in action, we marveled at the level of detail that Remedy has achieved. The nighttime city looks eerily real, as we saw rain splashing on the ground and neon lights reflecting on puddles and casting real-time shadows. During combat, shotgun blasts showered sparks off of a parked van, which then exploded in a huge pyrotechnic display. Texturing (which was a bit grainy in the first) has been improved exponentially, as has nearly every aspect of the game's visuals.

The in-game character models also eclipse their predecessors. Facial features can now be fully animated – allowing the developers to raise eyebrows, furrow brows, and recreate accurate lip movement. On a homeless character, the developers zoomed in close so we could see the deep lines and pockmarks that scarred his face. It's come so far that Max now has more than one expression! Jokingly, Castaneda remarked, "We didn't want him to have that constipated look he had all through Max Payne."



The Third Man (1949)



Written by literary genius Graham Greene (*The Quiet American*), *The Third Man* welded noir seediness with the burgeoning mood of Cold War paranoia – a match made in heaven, if we do say so. *The Third Man* revolves around hack writer Holly Martins, who has relocated to Vienna to work for his friend Henry Lime (played by Orson Welles).

Unfortunately, when he arrives he finds out his friend is dead – or is he? (Hint: He's not, and he's involved in all sorts of shady dealings). Essential for a number of reasons, especially Welles' bravura performance.

Kiss Me Deadly (1956)



Sadly, this brilliant movie is now most often associated with lite-metal trollop Lita Ford, but that doesn't mean that *Kiss Me Deadly's* rock-hard noir is anything to mess with. It features Ralph Meeker as Mickey Spillane's iconic badass detective Mike Hammer. After picking up a

strange (but extremely attractive) hitchhiker, Hammer finds himself embroiled in a plot that centers around a mysterious box called "The Great Whatsit," which Quentin Tarantino paid tribute to with the glowing suitcase in *Pulp Fiction*.

Touch of Evil (1958)



Orson Welles, over a decade past his classic directorial debut *Citizen Kane*, melded traditional noir to his innovative filmmaking technique in *Touch of Evil*. If you can get past the fact that Charlton Heston is supposed to be Mexican, you'll marvel at this dismal and gritty take on just how low human beings can sink. It's notable for its breathtaking opening scene, an extended

crane shot that veers from angle to angle with no cuts or editing, and Welles' own creepy performance as the fat, corrupt lawman Hank Quinlan. This stands among the best American cinema of the 20th century, and is one of Welles' most realized films.



Chinatown (1974)

Boasting a cast that includes Jack Nicholson, genre pioneer John Huston, and Faye Dunaway; controversial director Roman Polanski recast the film noir for the cynical post-Watergate



era with *Chinatown*. Nicholson, as hard-bitten private dick Jake Gittes, uncovers a nest of scandal, corruption, greed, and sleaze in a film that earned a number of Academy Award nominations, and a win for Best Original Screenplay. *Chinatown* is nearly perfect in every respect, and has one of the most memorable lines in film history: "Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown."

L.A. Confidential (1997)

Director Curtis Hanson, who had previously worked on such B-grade potboilers as *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* and *Bad Influence*, was rocketed into the Hollywood big leagues with this adroit adaptation



of neo-noir author James Ellroy's best-selling portrayal of corrupt cops in post-war Los Angeles. As a genre exercise, it's a good one – throwing everything from call girls to pornography rings to multiple murders to a conniving Hollywood gossip writer (an excellent Danny DeVito) into its byzantine plot. It's a little convoluted, but held together nicely by top-notch performances by Guy Pierce and Russell Crowe.

Memento (2000)

If *L.A. Confidential* was a tribute to the noirs of old, *Memento* took the conventions of the genre and twisted them into something brave and new. Sure, telling a movie in flashbacks is a common noir device, but how about a movie told entirely in reverse? In *Memento*, Guy Pierce is an amnesiac with no short term memory, who must unravel the mystery behind the murder and rape of his wife based only on some scant notes and tattoos which hold the keys to the solution. This is a remarkable film in many respects, and its time-twisting narrative will have you scouring the DVD for clues.





Evolving Bullet Time



PROBABLY

the biggest challenge

Remedy faced

when conceptualizing the sequel was how to address the host of games that had copied Max Payne's "bullet time" slow-motion action. Many of you probably still have fond memories of the first time you experienced it, as you leapt into the air and effortlessly took out groups of gangsters in one, sweeping motion. Then, after you'd experienced bullet time, you experienced it again in a number of subsequent games. It's a situation similar to one that the Wachowski brothers overcame in making *The Matrix Reloaded* – coming up

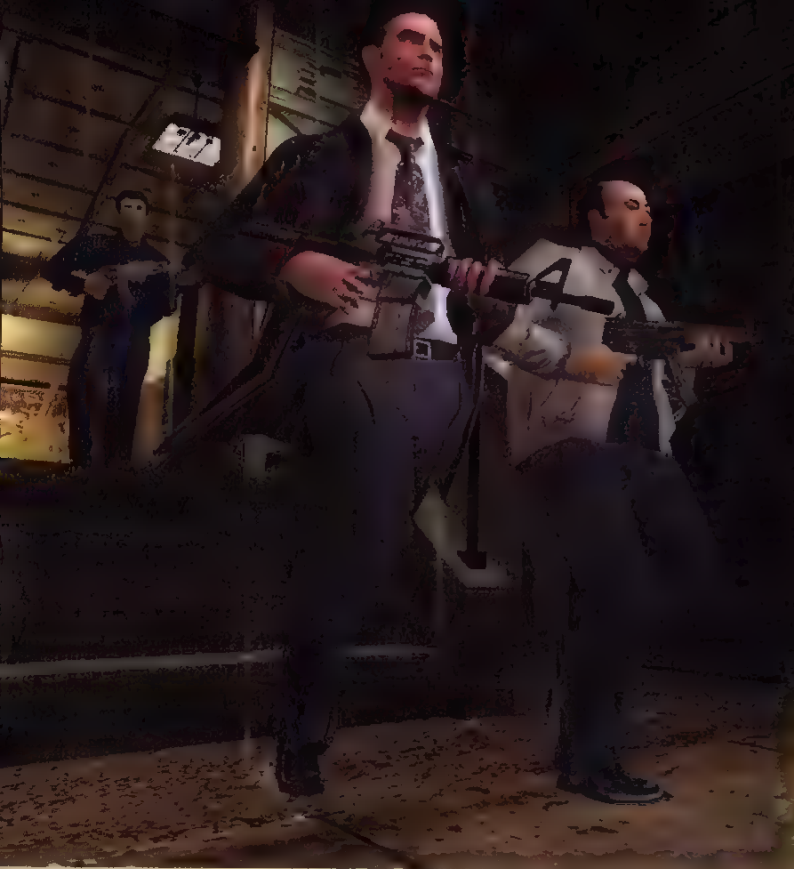
with ways to surprise the audience after the techniques you pioneered were turned into another cinematic cliché.

The always-quotable Terry Donovan gives a blunt assessment: "The answer to your question is: if a load of other people are doing it, how do you deal with it? You do it better than they could possibly imagine."

For Remedy, this meant making improvements into their already-strong gameplay design, in hopes of assuring that bullet time will remain the benchmark for third-person shooter action.

"It has been copied a lot, hasn't it?" opines Lake. "We find it very flattering. We've also had a couple of years to inno-





Risk Assessment

ALTHOUGH we felt fortunate to get an advanced viewing of the game, our time with Max Payne 2 raised more questions than it did answers. Is today's audience ready for a mature, character-driven love story in an action game? Have gamers been burned by too many bullet time copycats? Can Remedy put together a game that both tells a story and delivers the kind of gonzo gunplay that its fans demand? Terry Donovan acknowledges the dangers that lie ahead.

"It's tough not to go back and do it again when something is that successful, but everything that Rockstar is about is taking risks," replies Donovan. "To go away for two and a half years and go back, involves a risk. There's no guarantee that you'll catch the flavor again. However, we're confident in Remedy as narrators. We believe that, if done well, gamers will appreciate a narrative driven by something other than one of the other prime motivators you usually see. Love, as you point out, is tricky subject matter, so it remains to be seen. But, it wouldn't be Rockstar and it wouldn't be Remedy if there weren't some risqué subject matter."

Given Rockstar's shocking success over the past few years and the obvious devotion that Remedy exhibits for its hard-luck detective, it would be difficult to bet against Max Payne 2. This fall, when Max Payne 2 is finally revealed in its finished form, expect that gamers around the world will be lining up to discover the answers for themselves.

vate and brainstorm on how to make bullet time even cooler. We've had a lot of time to fine-tune it, and we have done a lot to make it an even more integral part of the gameplay. We've done things like separating the player and the enemies to different time scales. This way, we can have the enemies moving in extreme slow motion while the player still moves a bit faster with a faster rate of fire. It gives you a great feeling of power, and it looks great with the air filled with massive amounts of particle effects and empty shells, spinning slowly past the camera."

Unloading your Glock in God-like fashion feels good before, but the refined gameplay, coupled with engine enhancements like the new particle effects and Remedy's use of the industry-standard Havoc rag-doll physics engine makes the sensation even more vivid. Now, enemies flail and spin in the air, crumpling to their knees and slumping to the floor.

Although the developers are not changing the game's focus on blazing gunplay ("[Remedy is] totally committed to an intense experience," offers Donovan. "You're not wandering around, messing about for a couple of hours. You go from intense scene to intense scene."), the team does realize the need to offer levels that provide more depth and variety than in the past. One major addition sees Max working with NPC characters. One scenario has him coming to the aid of three gangsters, assaulting a crowd of gunmen in a back alley. Running out of a building, his companions took out snipers, covering

different positions and utilizing cover like dumpsters and parked cars. It's an exciting new dimension to the game, but not the only new surprise that Remedy has in store for fans.

Lake elaborates, "There is also more variety to the gameplay. To give you just one example, we have a police station location in the game where you get to play Max through a busy night. You get to talk to your fellow officers, answer phones, interview witnesses, interrogate felons in custody and so forth – all that's part of a cop's work."

Another facet of the franchise that is also receiving more care and thought is the console conversion. While the Xbox port of Max Payne was as good as we could have hoped; the best-selling PlayStation 2 version was very disappointing, and appeared to suffer from both a rushed production schedule and the constraints of the console itself.

"The conversion was something that was thought about after the PC game was finished, rather than before," explains Donovan. "Considering how well the console versions sold, the development methodology is somewhat different this time around. Rockstar Vienna is working a little behind Remedy [on the PS2 version], but with the same asset base and everything working hand-in-hand. Remedy is involved with making sure that that the core game transfers very neatly, because obviously it's in our best interest that the difference between [all three versions] should be as little as possible."

SPLASHDOWN[®]

Rides Gone Wild[™]





Theme park inspired locales



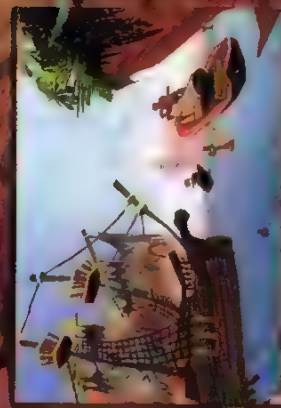
Each lap changes to open new paths and shortcuts



Insane stunt system



Wild waves, rapids and jumps



EVERYONE
E
 MILD LYRICS
 MILD LANGUAGE
 ESRB



PlayStation 2



www.thq.com

The Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time



The first Prince of Persia

game is so often cited as an inspiration to developers, that the title has become legendary – a rite of passage for gamers and game makers alike. Millions have led the acrobatic Prince through his convoluted palace wrought with traps, decaying paths, and sword-wielding enemies. But, since the character's first game in 1989 and its sequel in 1996, a release that truly lives up to the extremely high expectations of the brand hasn't been realized.

For this reason, one welcome surprise at this year's E3 was Ubi Soft Montreal's forthcoming *The Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. After getting an opportunity to spend some quality time with the development team and the game, it looks like this release is going to achieve much of what the original did: moving the action genre to the next level by challenging gamers' skills and developers' standards for animation, level design, and art direction.

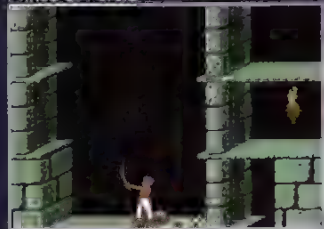
■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2/XBOX/GAMECUBE/PC/GAME BOY ADVANCE ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** UBI SOFT MONTREAL ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

The Prince's Portfolio

The Prince has a long career across almost every platform ever available to the American public. Here are a few key years, releases, and systems that have made the Prince who he is.

1989

Prince of Persia



PC, Macintosh

1991 - 1992

Prince of Persia

Sega Game Gear, Sega CD, NES, Super NES, TurboDuo

1996

Prince of Persia 2



Super NES

1998

Prince of Persia Collection



Macintosh

1999

Prince of Persia 3D



PC

2000

Prince of Persia: Arabian Nights
Sega Dreamcast

2003

A port of Prince of Persia hidden in The Sands of Time (Oh yeah, we saw them putting it together. Hope that it makes it to the retail release)



Larger enemies will require more strategy with blocking and counter moves

Ubi's involvement in the Prince of Persia saga started in early 2001. The company was on a buying spree and had recently secured the entertainment divisions of Mattel, who owned the rights to Myst and Prince of Persia, among others. The prestigious Ubi Soft Montreal studio (well known for the Splinter Cell series) was asked to start work on an all-new Prince of Persia game. By the time the middle of 2001 rolled around, the team had a few ideas about how they thought the Prince should move in a 3D environment.

Yannis Mallat, producer on The Sands of Time, says, "What we wanted to do was have Jordan [Mechner] on board with us from the beginning, and I invited him here in July." At their request, Mechner, the creator of the original Prince of Persia title that so revolutionized the idea of what video games could do, came by the Montreal studios. What they showed him was a series of almost 20 animations – things like the Prince running along a wall, flipping over an obstacle, and kicking enemies like a mad whirling dervish. With pride, Mallat remembers, "The core team and I were watching his face as he was watching the thing. He was totally amazed. We saw at that time that we had something really great. That was the start of the project."

The team immediately began a period of intense pre-

production. A basic idea they had about this game was that they needed to ignore the previous entries from a narrative point of view. Patrice Desilets, creative director for The Sands of Time, explains, "We say that it's before the first games, but there's no real link between the stories. It's always a prince in Persia, living an adventure. We wanted to keep the experience of the first two in this game. That experience, even for fans, is small memories of feelings. We are trying to give those feelings back."

During these early stages, they needed to make rules that the Prince, the enemies, and the environments were going to be held to. For example, when the Prince is running on or rebounding from a wall, he is always at a ninety-degree angle. It's pretty simple as a rule, but that's where the fun can be had with level designs. The animators and level designers worked together extensively during this stage to make sure that the Prince's abilities and the environments complemented each other. In addition, Mechner, who was originally going to be a consultant on the project, tasked himself with cleaning up the plot and recording dialogue for the handful of main characters. Early in the development cycle, Mechner commented to the team that he had "rediscovered the joy of making video games."





The glowing bellies of your enemies is the Sands of Time living within them. Creepy, eh?

This story that a handful of people worked so hard on is deceptively simple. The gameplay and narrative devices are based entirely on the Sands of Time – literally a pool of sand. “The Sands of Time are mysterious. It’s like the ring in *The Lord of the Rings*, or the Force in *Star Wars*. It’s something you can master, [or] it can destroy you,” explains Mallat.

Obviously, it begins with a Prince...in Persia. His father, the sultan, is presented with an opportunity for an easy military victory – at a price. The vizier of a wealthy palace in India has offered information to make the conquest a simple one for the Persian sultan and his tempestuous son. The sultan accepts the terms of the deal, which revolve around the vizier supplying vital reconnaissance and the sultan giving the vizier first pick of one treasure from the palace. Father and son trek to India, and that’s where the player starts the game.

While a battle rages outside, the Prince wanders inside and stumbles upon the Sands of Time. He picks up a dagger, not realizing that this weapon is the Excalibur of ancient Persia – he who holds the weapon, controls the sands. Without mentioning the find to his father, the Persian army heads back home.

Some time later, the sultan is entertaining a neighboring leader and wishes to offer him a gift: the Sands of Time. He is touched, as the Sands are beautiful, but doesn’t understand what it is that they do. Enter the traitorous vizier from stage left – he would be happy to explain that the sands have the power to manipulate time; but if used inappropriately, they will turn everything they touch into

evil versions of their former selves. Only those who have something made from the sands would be saved from this wave of horrible mutation.

At the same time as this conversation is taking place, the Prince is once again investigating the Sands. Holding the dagger, he unwittingly unleashes the Sands and everyone in the palace is effectively killed – turned into sand creatures capable of only inhuman grunts and bloody attacks. The Prince turns quickly to see that the guards and harem girls are lurching toward him with weapons drawn.

What follows is the first real in-game tutorial. You get a taste of the Prince’s moves and first sight of the Princess – who will be your only companion from here on out. While the Prince battles, the Princess yells for him to use the dagger. “It’s the only way to kill them,” she hollers. Now, why is she alive...and how does she know about the dagger? For the rest of the game, she may be both your enemy and ally.

Although the beginning, a brief period in the middle, and the end of the game feature cutscenes to explain the story; most of the tale is told through “sand visions.” The palace functions much like a dungeon in *Zelda* in that you have to kill all of the enemies to progress to the next room. As the Prince makes his way through each foe, the Sands of Time held within them pool in the room. After clearing the area, they form a column that the Prince steps into and has his sand vision. “We use this to deliver level design hints and also to unfold the story. It’s visually impressive because it has its own art direction,” says Mallat. The appearance is something like the flashbacks in *Memento*; they are choppy, dark, and not immediately understood by the player.



Although you can strike enemies until they fall, then deliver the finishing blow: attacking some from behind will deliver a one-hit kill



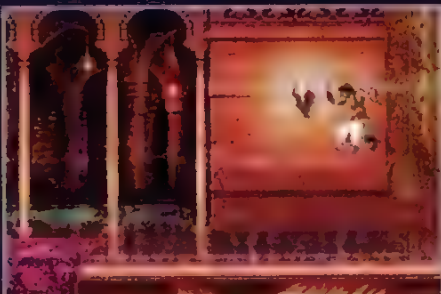
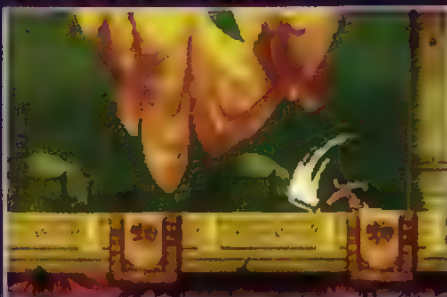
The Prince must collect the Sands of Time by killing sand creatures.



Even in this cinematic shot, every area you can see is someplace you will visit during the game.

HANDHELD PRINCE

The Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time is set to launch simultaneously on all systems. By "all," we mean literally all. One of the best pieces of news that we got while in Montreal was that the GBA version is getting just as much attention from the devoted developers as the bigger console and PC titles. In it, the Prince has nearly the same move set, although not in 3D. He can climb up poles, rewind time, and has to execute the final blow with the dagger.



Everything in this game revolves around the sands: the art direction, the Prince's movement, the plot, and the way that the story is delivered. Art director Raphaël Lacoste explains that, "Everything in the environments needs to be justified. We want it not to be realistic, but believable." In the name of that goal, all of the environments in what Mallat describes as the third main character – the palace – are washed in colored fog. "Even when you get up close to the walls, they aren't blurry, but they look like a painting," says Lacoste.

Lead level designer David Chateaufneuf told us, "Everywhere that you can see while playing the game is a 'real' place – somewhere that you will be in 20 minutes or were already at four hours ago." In addition, the team felt that it was an absolute necessity for the platforming areas of the game to be a room that would have a purpose in a real palace. One level that we played involved getting to the bottom of a tower. You would run over a switch while sprinting along the wall and stop on a platform that came out because you hit that switch. The trick is that the platform will pull back in a few seconds and you have to keep moving. In that same room, you'll later have to run along the wall, hit a switch, jump off the wall, grab onto a pole holding a large lantern, swing off that pole like a crazed gymnast, land on the platform, run, and leap to the stationary balcony on the other side. Then, you breathe a little and check out the rest of the room.

If it sounds complicated, well, it is. But the repetitive nature inherent in timed-platform exercises of this scope isn't frustrating because you get a step further with each try. This is a calculated decision by the entire Sands of Time team – they want you to have to work for it, much like Mechner's first Prince of Persia game; and they want you to take advantage of the powers that the Sands of Time offer you. The Prince – as the chosen one with the dagger – has the ability to manipulate time by rewinding up to 10 seconds, fast-forwarding to manage a group of foes, or freezing enemies in their tracks. Rewinding, in particular, is extremely useful. You can jump off of a balcony, realize that you've plunged to your doom, and (if attempted in time) rewind to the second before you leapt. It's a nifty feature that's presented like a rewinding VHS tape, complete with tracking lines and grainy effects.





The Prince isn't all about the hack n' slash. Large portions of the game require you to outsmart the palace's malfunctioning security system



Camera angles highlight your more impressive moves



This merchant was having a better day before the sands were unleashed



Although the Prince doesn't really get new weapons throughout his journey, his sword goes through a dramatic transformation. The dagger (at right) is a constant companion, and the reason he wasn't transformed by the Sands.



"It's always a prince in Persia, living an adventure."

- Patrice Desilets, creative director

To sell these moves in the original Prince of Persia, Mechner had done painstaking rotoscope work to animate the character's actions, tracing film footage of his brother frame by frame. This time around, Ubi Soft used motion capture for the initial tests. When asked how they are handling all the movements in this title, and if they're using motion capture, Mallat explains, "[Motion capture] is good to get wonderful animation cycles. But the problem is that, in a video game, you don't watch animations; you play animations. In tons of games, you have wonderful animation cycles, but the in-between is jerky." Instead, the team is hand-animating over 750 different motions. That's not to say that the Prince has 750 combat moves available to him; rather that every possible segue, attack to various-sized opponents, and all conceivable user inputs are being taken into consideration. We can safely say that the work put forth is a tribute to the franchise, and well worth the effort.

But with 750 animations for the Prince alone, he must have a lot of moves, right? We asked for a number. What we saw most often is that people would start counting on their hands

and then multiplying for moves off of enemies, rebounding from walls, finishing attacks, those with a jump, special moves...the mental math was clearly staggering. What was finally decided was that there are roughly six moves per face button on the controller and 12 different move packages.

Combat within the game almost always involves multiple enemies. Unlike The Mark of Kri, which had the player sweep an analog stick along the line of enemies and the game assigned a button to each foe, the Sands of Time method is more hands-on. Players select the attack target by pointing the analog stick in the direction of the enemy and select an action: block, attack, jump, counter, etc. But this is not turn-based combat in any sense of the word. While the early enemies will fall quickly, later baddies demand a strategic attack. Also, after each enemy is felled, you have to stab them with the sand dagger to retrieve the Sands of Time. If you don't do this quickly enough, they will rise up to be fought again.

The dagger, your sword, and the arsenal of acrobatic maneuvers are the only things going for the Prince in battle;

but the sword's power and appearance will evolve with the Prince's as the journey progresses. The team is calling this the "Die Hard effect." As the Prince sees more battle within the castle, he will shed items of armor or clothes that aren't useful anymore. He starts with full leather shoulder pads and chest protectors, but by the end, he's only sporting shoes and the trademark white, puffy pants. The sword evolves from an average blade to what can only be described as bad ass.

The first Prince of Persia set out to change the way people experience games: it was challenging, but beautifully animated; it had a story, but was more about mastering the palace and the Prince's moves. The Sands of Time is out to make the same leap for the industry - pushing animation, combat, and platforming action further toward the next step. In all honesty, this title looks to be the treatment everyone should hope that their favorite old-school game franchises receives.



Running along and up walls is a frequently-used move through the Prince's entire journey



NAME: IRWIN FINKLE

SCREEN NAME: THE EXTRINATOR

PROFESSION: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

SPECS: HUSBAND, FATHER OF FOUR

WEAPON OF CHOICE:



NOTES: GOLD-BLOODED KILLER WHO
WON'T THINK TWICE ABOUT PUTTING
ONE IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD OF
HIS ENEMIES.

TURN-ONS: "PREYING ON YOU AND
OTHERS WITH WEAK SCREEN NAMES."

FAVORITE PREY: CHAOS-RAPTOR



MANTRA: ONLY IN DEATH DOES
DUTY END.

DREAM MACHINES

5 PCs To Die For!

PC Gaming, in many people's minds, is the ultimate experience. It's you sitting right in front of the screen, with so many commands at your disposal. There is no other platform that gives you the ability to modify games or add graphic cards to crank up the power of your hardware. It's really the die-hard gamers' playground.

If you have been looking for a new computer, and could care less about how well it runs Microsoft Excel, this round-up of the world's most powerful gaming machines is for you.

FragBox

Processor:
2.66GHz Intel Pentium 4

Graphics Card:
nVidia GeForce FX 5600 128 MB video RAM

Cool Extras:
80 GB Hard Drive, 512 MB RAM (Upgradable to 1 GB)

Price:
\$995

Website:
falcon-nw.com

Falcon Northwest also has a wide variety of high-end desktops, but their new FragBox is specifically designed for the PC gamer on the go. Featuring a 2.66GHz Intel Processor, an nVidia GeForceFX 5600, and a compact 8" by 12" footprint, this machine is perfect for the dorm room or just taking with you to a LAN party. Encased in clear plastic with a cool blue-neon glow coming from its core, you can't help but like the look of it. Front USB, microphone, speaker connections, and Firewire make for easy use.

Our favorite part of the FragBox is the price. Sure, it's not the fastest machine in the lot, but with a cheap price tag you really can't go wrong. Add in a nice \$329 NEC 15" LCD monitor and you can play your PC just about anywhere.



Maingear F131

Processor:
3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4

Graphics Card:
nVidia GeForce FX 5900 256 MB video RAM

Cool Extras:
Dual 120 GB Seagate Barracuda Hard Drives, Flash Card Reader, CD-R/W, DVD-R/W, 16X DVD ROM

Price:
\$3,091 (without monitor)

Website:
maingear.com

The newest member of the elite computer gaming market is upstart Maingear. Offering a wide assortment of machines from cubes to mobiles, their F131 is definitely one of its best, and the PC certainly looks the part.

Featuring a sleek silver casing with a blue hue beaming out from its logo on the front, all will be mesmerized by its beauty. Hidden behind its good looks is a monster of gaming hardware. Built with all the latest and greatest components and coming in at a comparable price point, the Maingear is an easy choice for even the most discerning gamers.

The machine can be a little loud, but the flip-top bay for USB, Firewire, and microphone inputs on the tower's top more than makes up for any annoyances. If you are looking for a machine that will give you maximum playing power without clearing out your pocketbook, look no further than the Maingear F131. Also grab the NEC 22" Multisync FE2111 Flat CRT for \$569 if you really want to live the high life. The thing is smoking.

**Voodoo
F-Class**

Processor:
AMD Athlon XP 3200+

Graphics Card:
nVidia GeForce FX 5900 256 MB
video RAM

Cool Extras:
Imola Orange Case & Monitor,
Dual 30 GB Hard Drives, 1 GB RAM,
Intricate Voodoo Tattoo

Price:
Each machine is custom. So if you
are asking, you can't afford it

Website:
voodoopc.com

The self-professed "Dream Machine" from Voodoo is indeed a fabulous looking piece of computer equipment. You can get them in an assortment of racy colors and a variety of cases. The F-Class even gives you the cool clear side panel with a light source to not only give you a good view of the inner workings, but let you bask in its nerd-glow as you sit in your dark abode playing games into the wee hours.

Voodoo machines aren't for everyone. But if you can afford one, they are extremely well built. Not only is it rather quiet (and for anyone that has owned an Alienware tower, you know of the loud fan hum we speak of), it's super sleek in design for easy expansion. Our one complaint is that the machine doesn't offer front inputs for USB or Firewire, a definite annoyance for iPod users or digital camera fanatics.

If you consider yourself a PC connoisseur, there really are few other options that let you express your love for the almighty computer. From crazy colors to the fastest in processors, the Voodoo F-Class is in a league of its own.



**Alienware
Area-51M
Extreme**

Processor:
3GHz Intel Pentium 4

Graphics Card:
nVidia GeForce FX Go5600

Cool Extras:
DVD Remote That Even Lets You
Surf The Web, Compact Design,
Stereo Speakers, Alien Eyes On Lid
That Light Up

Price:
\$3,099

Website:
alienware.com

Take just about any PC on this page and imagine what it would take to stuff it all into a laptop. Sound impossible? Well, it's not, for the newly redesigned Area-51M mobile gaming machine from Alienware.

It may not be the lightweight, super-slender laptop your dad totes around the office, but this baby can cook. Featuring a 3GHz Intel Pentium 4, an anti-glare 16 inch TFT high-resolution display panel, 2 DDR SDRAM sockets, a multifunction card reader, wireless 802.11 support, and a host of other goodies; it's easy to dream of a brighter day where this PC powerhouse is with you everywhere you go.

Like any laptop, there is a certain amount of video lag; but that is the price you pay for being able to whip out your machine anywhere and play Half-Life 2. If you are looking for a portable machine and love gaming, make sure you just forget your belief that a laptop should be light as a feather and easy to carry – just buy a backpack and this portable powerhouse.

**Dell
Dimension
XPS**

Processor:
3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4

Graphics Card:
Radeon 9800

Cool Extras:
3 Year Warranty, Windows XP
Professional, 1703Fp Ultrasharp
Digital Flat Panel Display, 240 GB
RAID 0 Hard Drive

Price:
\$3,547

Website:
dell.com

At one point in Game Informer's career, we only bought Dell PCs for gaming. To be frank, they sucked. There was way too much software loaded on that we didn't need, and getting good graphics card drivers was a pain in the behind. Enter the new gamer-friendly Dell Dimension XPS. Not only can you get a fairly clean machine software-wise, you can load it up with all the latest hardware so the machine really flies.

The Ultrasharp Digital Flat Panel was an especially nice addition, and the thing is just simply gorgeous to look at. While the XPS doesn't sport any fancy glowing colors, the box is better looking than we thought it would be from the pictures. Plus, it has a cool front bay door that folds to the side rather than flapping around like most high-end PCs. It also features USB, Firewire, and a headphone jack under a front panel for easy use – a definite plus in our book.

If you love tweaking your machines after you buy them, the Dell may not be for you; but if you are looking for ease of use and a comprehensive warranty, you really can't go wrong with the XPS.





BEHIND THE NET

An In-Depth Look at This Year's Hockey Titles

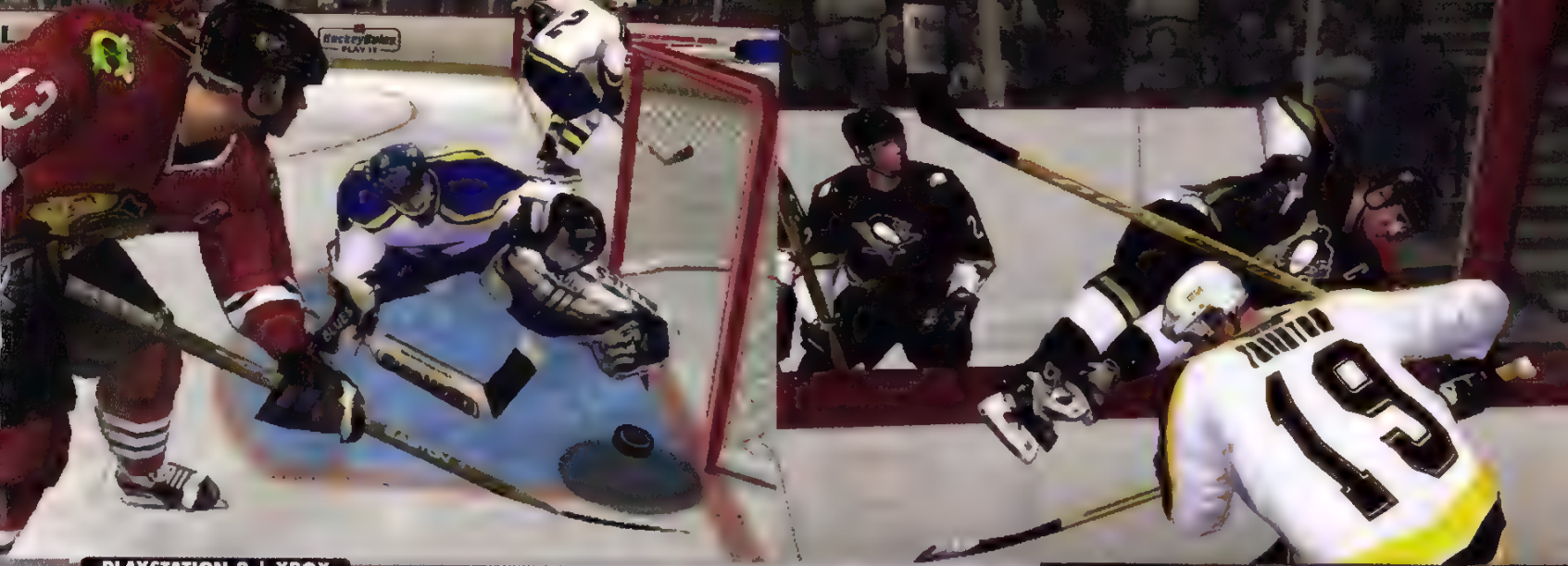


Throughout the course of gaming, Electronic Arts has been revered as the ruler of the rink and the only company capable of delivering entertaining hockey. Over the last couple of years, however, newcomers like NHL Hitz and Sega's 2K series have given gamers different options that are just as good, if not better, than EA's product. With this year's batch of games, the competition is really starting to heat up. After hearing how disappointed fans were with last year's NHL title, EA has completely revamped the game from the ground up. Sega is also starting from scratch, and has even changed developers. Midway's NHL Hitz has adopted the philosophy of the pros to go with its over-the-top antics. Amidst this year of change, Microsoft is launching its very own franchise, and hopes that NHL Rivals' online presence is the key feature that gamers are looking for.

Usually, sports titles are updated from year to year. For this season, however, everything is different and everything is new. Will hockey fans embrace the realism that EA is shooting for? Does Sega's "more is better" attitude excite gamers, or will they stick with a title that just delivers the basics like NHL Rivals? Did Midway improve Hitz with 5-on-5 play and authentic rules, or is it too much like every other game? Of course, you're probably also asking yourself, "Why hasn't 989 Sports suited up for this year's season?"

We've played each game extensively, and have talked closely with the developers to secure all of the answers and info that you are looking for. Do you just need to purchase one title? Read on to find out!





PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

ESPN NHL HOCKEY

■ PUBLISHER SEGA SPORTS ■ DEVELOPER KUSH GAMES ■ RELEASE SEPTEMBER 16

Last season, with EA falling from grace, Sega produced the most rewarding hockey simulation. Apparently, it wasn't good enough. For this year's release, Sega has ditched the 2K moniker in favor of ESPN and has also changed development houses from Treyarch to Kush Games. Rather than starting from scratch, Kush is still working with the same engine from last year's release. Considering the time it takes to get acquainted with Treyarch's coding and Sega's development philosophy, Kush has made a number of remarkable enhancements. At the same time, however, you can clearly see some areas that were passed over and forgotten about.

The gameplay has evolved substantially, and gives players a greater degree of control over the action. Two new deke options have been implemented. By pushing the right analog in different directions, players will perform special moves like a quick stop or a puck flip. Additionally, holding down the B or circle button activates a manual deke, which allows players to freely move the stick in different directions.

Kush is also addressing the difficulty level – primarily the unbeatable goalies. In such, it will be much easier to score this year. Snipers will be able to hit the top shelf from the blue line, and by jamming on the shoot button, players who

are tied up in scrums in front of the net will do everything in their power to get the puck past the goalie. They'll even dive for it. To accompany actions like this, Kush has created a number of new animations, including flashy sequences like players barreling over the boards.

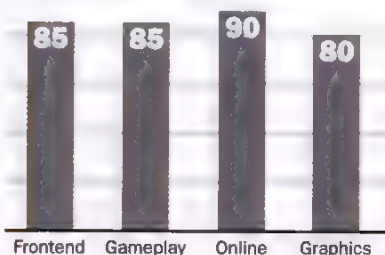
As far as the Franchise mode is concerned, little outside of multi-user support has changed since last season. Much like the Crib in ESPN NFL Football, a number of unlockable goodies can be found in the new Skybox feature. In this stylish room, players can view historic jerseys, trophies, and countless other items that they've unlocked through this game's robust token system. Of course, you can also compete in an air hockey minigame. The Skybox is not as deep as its football counterpart, but it is comparable and provides a driving force that the competition lacks. Being able to unlock things like pond hockey and classic uniforms should keep gamers playing for eons.

Going one step further, Kush has created a handful of skill games that are based on the All-Star event. The categories range from Hardest Shot and Accuracy Shooting to Puck Control and Fastest Skater.

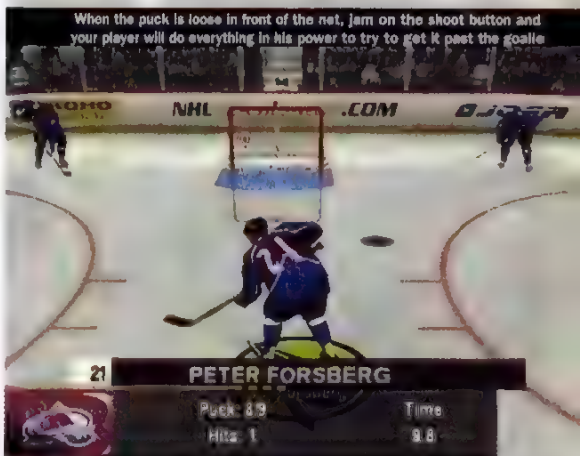
ESPN also boasts a new graphics engine that features flashy helmet mapping and the smallest of details. For instance, if a player is missing a few teeth in real life, they'll lack them in the game as well. For online purposes, ESPN will support voice chat for both Xbox and PlayStation 2, plus a host of gameplay options.

DEPTH CHART

(Preseason Estimates Only)



The new quick stop maneuver is accompanied by ice spray effects



The minigames are feverishly addictive and support multiplayer competitions



• SCOUTING REPORT •

Much like EA, this is a rebuilding year for Sega's hockey. Rather than competing on the franchise front, ESPN focuses on gameplay, collectibles, and minigames. It's definitely heading in the right direction, but the array of new features and shortened development time may lead to the game being spread too thin in key areas.

ESPN
NHL HOCKEY

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

NHL 2004

■ PUBLISHER EA SPORTS ■ DEVELOPER EA SPORTS CANADA
 ■ RELEASE SEPTEMBER 16



Within Dynasty mode, you'll have your very own office that can be furnished



Even the goalies get into the fighting this year



The Bruise Control allows players to select which hit they'll lay onto the opposition



The camera views, which were one of the biggest drawbacks from last year's release, have reverted to their former glory



Tie-ups occur alongside the boards and in front of the net

After winning over the hearts of gamers for a decade strong across almost every conceivable platform, EA's mighty NHL franchise was finally upstaged last season. In an attempt to take the series to the next level, EA reworked the way the game looked and played, which proved to be costly. It didn't perform up to code; the graphics were degraded to a certain degree; and the commentators focused more on comedy than the sport itself. To say the very least, hockey enthusiasts turned to Sega's NHL 2K3 and Midway's NHL Hitz 2003 for their needs.

With this year's release, EA is basically starting from scratch – much like it recently did with baseball. When development began, the focus was to get back to the basics and concentrate on the physical side of the sport. When you pick up the controller, you'll notice that the entire button layout has been modeled much differently. There are now two pass buttons: one for normal passes, the other for saucers. Holding them down determines how hard your pass will be. You can also angle passes away from your teammates to the boards or open ice.

Just as significant of a change, EA has moved the checking controls to the right analog stick – which allows players to dictate where they throw a hit. In total, EA plans to have over 100 different hits in the game, and has even motion-captured two-player collisions to ensure that these sequences look as realistic as possible. By applying a shoulder button (which EA calls the shift) to your hits, you can perform poke and hip checks. The shift button also works in unison with all of the face buttons for specific moves like diving and blocking shots. The game also features a tie-up button. As you can probably guess, this function can be used to tie up a player in front of the net and along the boards.

Keeping with the physical theme, fighting is no longer completely out of your hands. You'll have the ability to determine when players drop their gloves and beat each other senseless. And yes, if you continually run into the goalie and unleash slapshots at him well after the whistle, there's a chance that he will become irate and try to take out his aggression on your face.

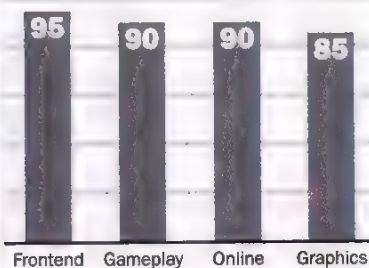
The entire offensive and defensive AI scripts have been completely rewritten, dekes are easier to perform, and goalies are insanely realistic – with over 90 save animations for butterfly, standard, and hybrid types.

As far as fantasy options go, NHL's Dynasty is just as comprehensive as Madden's Owner's mode. As you progress through seasons, you'll earn points that can be used to purchase new equipment for locker rooms, hire goalie coaches, and upgrade the vehicle types for travel on the road. You can also adjust ticket prices. The fans that come to your games are fully polygonal and will react realistically to certain situations. For instance, they'll heckle players and may even leave the stadium during blowouts. Online play (for PS2 and PC only) is just as impressive and offers USB headset support.

To round out the experience, the new commentary team of Jim Hughson and Craig Simpson focuses on the finer points of the sport and not what kind of *Beavis and Butthead* remarks they can make about it.

DEPTH CHART

(Preseason Estimates Only)



TRAVEL LEVEL: 0 TRAVEL LEVEL: 1 TRAVEL LEVEL: 3

Cost: 25KS	Cost: 50KS	Cost: 100KS
Each New Level: All players' attributes +2 for road games	Each New Level: All players' attributes +2 for road games	Each New Level: All players' attributes +2 for road games
As you progress throughout Dynasty mode, you'll have the opportunity to enhance the way your team operates. Upgrading travel is just one of the options		

• SCOUTING REPORT •



After a rocky year, EA is back where it needs to be. The gameplay is smoother than ever and the new features only add to the excitement. But has EA gone too far? Are the controls too complex? When it comes to replay, however, EA has the online and franchise modes covered better than anyone.



FEATURE

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NHL HITZ PRO

■ PUBLISHER MIDWAY ■ DEVELOPER NEXT LEVEL GAMES ■ RELEASE SEPTEMBER 22

With the change in moniker comes a completely different gaming experience. NHL Hitz Pro now features 5-on-5 hockey and stronger ties to the authenticity of the sport, as opposed to the 3-on-3 arcade styling and highly exaggerated presentation of previous years. The realism in play is embedded into every aspect of the game. Each team features full rosters and lines. On the ice, players will fatigue realistically. If they play aggressively and throw a ton of checks, they'll tire quickly. The presentation also hones in on the realism of the sport. Insanity no longer ensues in goal celebrations and the out-of-game sequences make sense to the situation at hand. Visually, you'll also see close attention paid to the little details in the game, ranging from a player wearing his jersey untucked to the design on a goalie's helmet.

While it would seem as though Hitz is becoming more of an authentic simulation, it's actually the same hard-hitting game as before. The new direction simply expands upon the experience.



The games in Pick-Up are 3-on-3

Your players will still catch fire and the commentary team is just as high-strung. Without a doubt, NHL Hitz remains the fastest game on ice with the biggest bone-

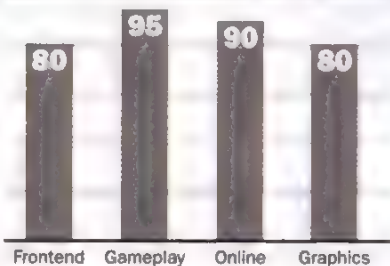
crushing checks and highest scoring affairs.

With 5-on-5 play, players have more variables at their disposal. You can set up the offense and flip around lines to offset the defense. Developer Next Level Games has also tweaked the gameplay and AI to open it up even more. When a player is behind the net, two new actions can occur: They can either take the puck themselves and try to perform a flashy wraparound move, tucking the puck into the corner of the net (which no other hockey game has); or they can attempt a saucer pass over the top, in hopes that one of his teammates will knock it in. The AI in Hitz features deflection desires, which means that if the puck is airborne, they may make an effort to bat it down or take a swing at it. If you felt that stick handling was too much like a yo-yo before, manual stick control is now included. The general movement of players is not as robotic, either. The players now glide like they should.

Outside of gameplay, a number of new options are available. You can learn how to play the game in newly implemented Hockey School mode; enter Pick-Up Hockey for match-ups on a frozen pond or in a roller rink; go online to compete in tournaments (PS2 and Xbox only); or play for 20 full seasons as an up-and-coming team in Franchise mode. To appease sim fans, every statistical category is tracked and a full 20-man draft is in the game.

DEPTH CHART

(Preseason Estimates Only)



The 5-on-5 dynamic expands upon the offensive and defensive opportunities



Players can stuff the puck in the net with a new wraparound maneuver



In Pick-Up mode, you can play on a pond or lace up your roller blades and compete on a parking lot



Realism is now the angle for celebrations and out-of-game sequences

• SCOUTING REPORT •

Although it leans more toward realism, Hitz is a spastic hockey game and remains in a league of its own. The gameplay is much deeper than before, and the inclusion of Franchise mode gives gamers a reason to keep coming back for more. It's a different direction than the other hockey games, but may become something that everyone will want to play.





Goalies react realistically to the location of the puck



Players will be able to select who their rivals are on XSN Sports



XBOX

NHL RIVALS 2004

■ PUBLISHER MICROSOFT ■ DEVELOPER MICROSOFT ■ RELEASE NOVEMBER

With the competition either renovating or rebuilding their games from the ground up, the timing really couldn't be much better for Microsoft's hockey debut. Rather than trying to give gamers everything right out of the door, the focus for this year's game is to nail the basics and grow from there. That's not to say that it isn't deep, you just won't see a lot of fluff or irrelevant material tossed in for good measure. Microsoft has also made the wise decision to ship the game when it's done and not push for the beginning of the hockey season. As of now, the release date isn't concrete, but the company hopes to have the title on store shelves no later than November.

On the ice, *Rivals* brings something new to hockey, but also taps into features that we've seen in other titles. The face-off system, for instance, is designed similarly to last year's *NHL Hitz*. When the puck is dropped, you'll be able

to block the puck with your stick, kick it, or win it clean. The entire face-off system is based on stick placement and moves performed by the player.

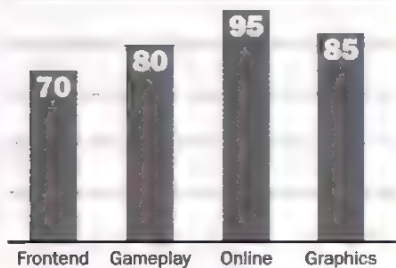
The gameplay itself focuses on a player's individual talents and is broken down into Enforcers, Agitators, and Snipers. Each of these classes features different abilities, moves, and overall styles of play. In every other hockey game, each player is basically the same. Of course, personalities also come into play. Therefore, each player has a Fighting Fuse meter. If a particular player is renowned for throwing down and being a bad boy on the ice, his fuse will be shorter than others. Rile him up by throwing out an assortment of checks or hooks and he'll drop his gloves. The player on the receiving end has a say in this, however. Even if someone wants to fight, you'll have

the ability to back down and avoid being charged with a costly penalty.

The biggest feature in *Rivals* is actually found at the main menu. This game will be equipped with Xbox Live support and will take full advantage of the new XSN Sports. This means that you'll be able to create your own leagues, talk trash, select rivals, and check the current happenings, stats, and trade proposals from any web-based service (including cell phones). Outside of the impressive online functionality, *Rivals'* frontend is fairly slim. You can only play through one season, and fantasy options are nowhere to be found. It does have decent pick-up options like historic rivalry matches, where you can recreate some of the most heated games of all time; but it doesn't have much in the way of customization.

DEPTH CHART

(Preseason Estimates Only)



Enforcers keep the peace and bust faces



The attention to detail is second to none

• SCOUTING REPORT •



Microsoft's inaugural hockey release is designed from a conservative point of view. You won't find a wealth of game modes or fantasy options in *Rivals*, but it does have a diverse gameplay package and robust online presence. It's perfect for pick-up-and-play sessions, but may not have what it takes to lure hardcore hockey fanatics its way.



NHL FaceOff 2004?

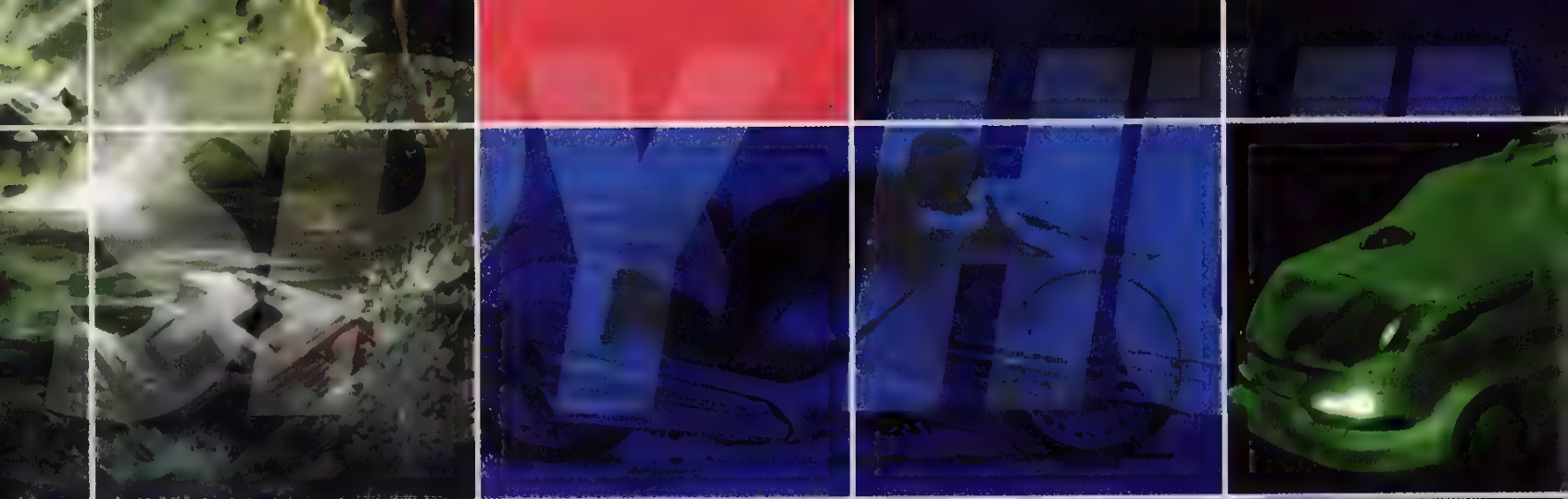
Rather than trying to create a new game from scratch as every other developer has basically done this year, 989 Sports has decided to take a year off with FaceOff. This comes as quite a surprise since the company had already cancelled its product for the 2002 season, hoping that the two-year development cycle would create a better product. Hopefully, the more time vested will equate to a remarkable new direction for this troubled franchise.



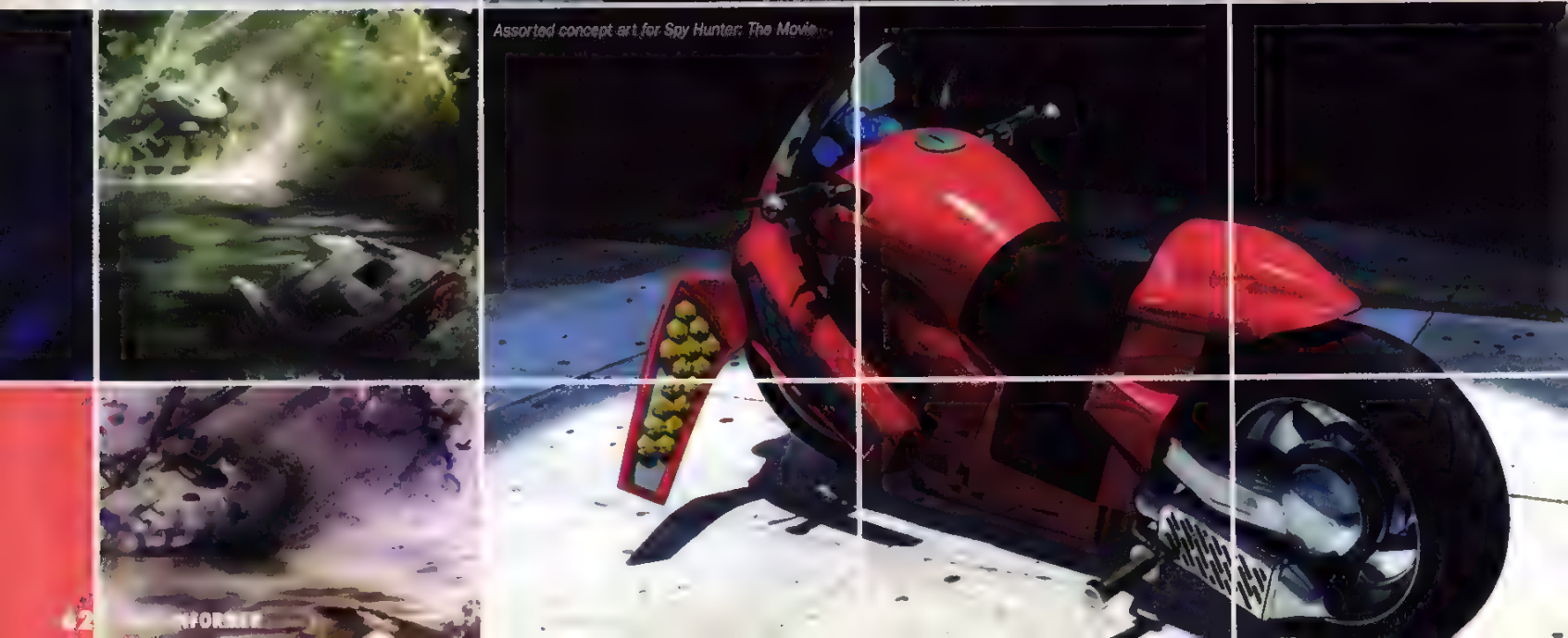
FEATURE

All facts and figures are subject to change by the developer

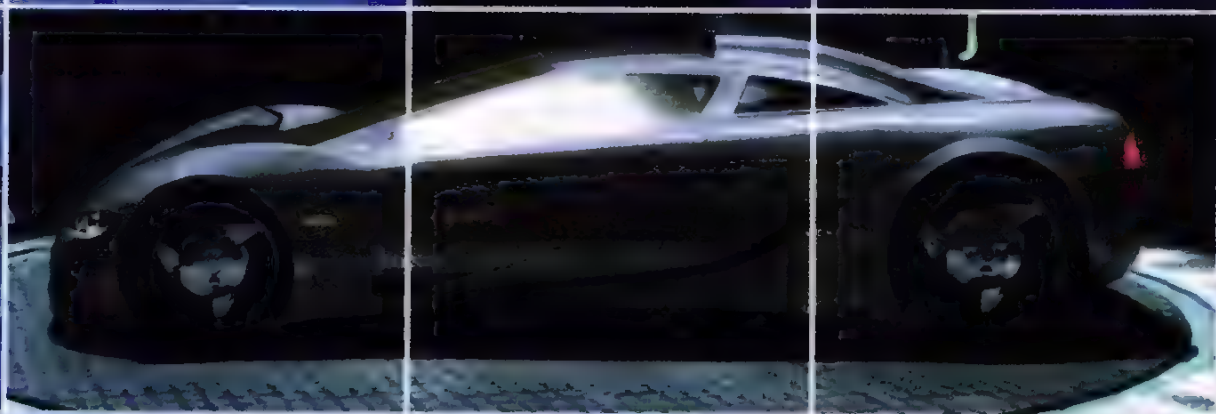
	NHL Hitz Pro	NHL 2004	ESPN NHL Hockey	NHL Rivals 2004
Release Date	September 22	September 1 (Xbox), September 16 (PS2, GC, PC)	September 16	November
Franchise Mode/# of Years	Yes/One	Yes/20 Years	Yes/Unlimited	No
Multiple Franchise Users	Yes/30 (Franchise)	Yes/30 (Season), Dynasty (1)	Yes/30 (Franchise)	No
Fantasy Draft	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tournament Mode	Yes (Online Only)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Playoff Mode	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Create-a-Team	Yes	Yes	No	No
Expansion Mode	No, Create-a-Team Replace NHL Team	No, Create-a-Team Replace NHL Team	No	No
Create-a-Player	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Classic Teams	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
International Teams	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Hall of Fame	No	Yes, for the GM in Dynasty Mode (GM Hall of Fame)	No	No
Variable Season Lengths	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chooseable Tie-Breaker Options	No (Always Overtime)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Saucer Pass	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Manual Line Change	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
International Rules	No	Yes	Yes	No
Delayed Penalties	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Degradeable Ice	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
In-Air Puck Grabs	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
# of Post-Season Awards	24	18	15	18
# of Polys per Player	5,818	4,500	6,000+	6,200
Broken Glass on Boards	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Analog Dekes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
On-the-Fly Strategy Changes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
# of Fighting Moves	1	30	5	6
# of Star Players Face Mapped	667	800	600+	100+
Player-Specific Moves	No	No	No	Yes (for player styles like Sniper + Agitator)
ONLINE OPTIONS				
Online Play/Band	PS2 & Xbox (Broadband Only)	PC & PS2 Online (Broadband and Dial-Up)	PS2 & Xbox (Broadband and Dial-Up)	Yes
Online Chat/Method	Keyboard (PS2 Only)	Voice Chat & USB Keyboard Chat (PS2 Only)	Voice Chat (Both)	Voice Chat
Online Tournaments/User Made	Yes (User Made)	Yes (User Made)	TBA	Yes (User Made)
Roster Downloads/Frequency	No	Yes, one to four times a month de- pendant on frequency of transactions	Yes, Monthly	Yes (Beginning of Season, All-Star Break, Playoffs, End of Season)
Online Matchmaking	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online User Stat Tracking	Yes	Yes	TBA	Yes
Web Page Support	No	No	TBA	Yes (XSNSports.com)
Online Message Board	No	No	TBA	Yes
Non-Default Rosters Online	Yes	No	No	No
Online Subscription Price	TBA	No	No	Monthly Xbox Live
Commentary	Harry Teinowitz & Tim Kitzrow	Jim Hughson & Craig Simpson	Gary Thorne & Bill Clement	John Davidson & Sam Rosen
Cover Star	Nicklas Lidstrom	TBA	Jeremy Roenick	Steve Yzerman



SPY HUNTER



Assorted concept art for *Spy Hunter: The Movie*



THE MOVIE

Game Informer recently got a chance to chat with Adrian Askareh and Chuck Gordon, the brains behind the upcoming Spy Hunter movie featuring Dwayne Johnson, otherwise known as the Rock. Adrian is an ex-entertainment attorney turned producer, and Chuck is best known for his work on Die Hard 1 and 2, Field of Dreams, October Sky and the upcoming The Girl Next Door, to name a few. The film, being developed by Universal Studios, will begin production in January. This big-budget feature will be more than just a movie. It's going to change the way people look at video games – at least that's what we feel like after talking to these two. Read on to get a glimpse of their vision, and see what the future holds for the Spy Hunter III video game.

GI: What made you decide to pick a video game license for a movie?

Adrian: Well, when I was an attorney, I did a lot of work for video game companies; and you know, I've always wanted to. I am always looking for good ideas. Chuck can tell you the same thing. When you're a producer, it doesn't matter where an idea comes from. It could be a magazine article, a newspaper article, a book, a comic book, someone's idea on a napkin, or a video game.

Spy Hunter was just a phenomenal idea to be turned into a movie. But what also gives it that additional punch is that the video game business is just exploding, and it's bigger than the film business in many ways. The idea of having a successful video game and a successful movie at the same time is just two giant pieces of this big pie that you're involved with, so they sort of drive each other if it's done right.

GI: Who signed on to write the script?

Chuck: Michael Brandt and Derek Haas.

A: Their last film was *2 Fast 2 Furious*, which has done about a hundred million dollars domestic at Universal.

GI: Tell us about the Spy Hunter movie. Where are you at? When do you hope to have it finished?

A: We hope to go early next year. We're waiting on a new draft of the script that we should have in the next three or four weeks, and we hope to go right away. The Rock is anxious and waiting for the script.

GI: We can believe that. Did you work with him early on in the development?

A: Yeah, we met with him and got some thoughts [on the project]. It was interesting because it turned out that – and we didn't know this when we set him up – it was one of his favorite video games growing up.

GI: Can you give us a little direction for what a Spy Hunter does over and above just driving down the street and shooting bad guys?

A: What's interesting is that when you play the game, it's just the Interceptor going up against other vehicles. Obviously, that's exciting and that's visual and visceral and you can have a lot of fun with it, but that's not enough to make a movie around. So, what we've decided to do is just to put that concept into a really exciting story and [then] focus on the concept of spies, and what it means when spies go rogue and the threat and the danger and the risks involved in people that know all your secrets. [Some are willing to put themselves] up for sale to anybody who is willing to pay them the right amount of money.

It's sort of the concept of *Enemy Within*, and based on that concept, we are going to play a new twist on the spy genre – which is really not just [about] a spy, but a guy whose job it is to hunt down spies. This guy is a Spy Hunter from A to Z. He's not James Bond, he's not going to go in anywhere with a tuxedo; and he's not Triple X, either. His mission is to be covert and track and hunt down dangerous spies and assassins who've gone rogue.

GI: Are you going to try to shoot the movie with an actual car and modify it to look like the Interceptor or go CGI?

A: Well, both yes and no. There's a giant car company that's been on our heels wanting to make the Interceptor a production design.

GI:!!!!

A: I can't tell you who they are, but it's huge. You can't duplicate the Interceptor [in the] game. But we want to make sure the Interceptor itself has a commercial sense to it and feels like the Interceptor everybody loves. So, we are going to try and find that middle ground. We've talked to special effects companies about their ideas, but our goal is to try to do as many real car battles and car chases as we can rather than just CGI the whole thing.

GI: What kind of cross-promotion between the game and the movie are in the works?

A: One of the things that Midway wants to do is to try and maximize that. So, *Spy Hunter II* is coming out this fall; but is not going to fit in the window of the movie, because we're not going to be in production until late January, so they have to do some basic cross-promotion.

The big enchilada comes when *Spy Hunter III* comes out – and I can tell you this, it's been green lit. And *Spy Hunter III* is going to evolve the *Spy Hunter* [series]. It is going to be timed to release just like the *Matrix Reloaded* and its game. They are going to be on a day and date with the movie.

Midway is taking Alec Sects, for the first time in the history of the genre, out of the car. So, it's going to have car and out-of-the-car adventure – think *Metal Gear Solid*. They're tentatively calling it *Spy Hunter: Alec Sects*. You're going to see vehicle battles, but they are going to have levels where Alec gets out of the car and hunts down rogue spies and assassins on foot with different kinds of weapons and gadgets.

GI: Are you going to shoot any extra scenes, à la *Enter The Matrix*, for the game?

A: Absolutely. One of the things that they're talking about is having Midway send a crew of four to six people on the set of the movie and just shoot different scenes and use the assets.



GI: So, you aren't going to do anything crazy and turn the Interceptor into Kit from *Knight Rider* and make him talk, are you?

A: Oh no, the car is not going to be like that. It doesn't talk, but we are keeping all the transformations as much as we can. The tone of the movie is to be very grounded, not fantastical. But, it's going to have lots of kick-ass Interceptor action in it.

C: I'd say the only thing that we really want to do is protect the whole brand of the game. You know, we're not producers who go out and change everything to where you won't recognize it.

A: We are convinced that we can make a kick-ass movie, and by that I don't mean just box office. I mean a movie that everybody goes to, everybody enjoys like *Spider-Man*, *The Lord of the Rings*, or *X-Men*. [A movie] that has the integrity to take the material seriously, and not just cash in on a brand name. Our plan with *Spy Hunter* is to deliver that, and we want to set the bar so high for everybody who's going to do movies based on video games – including us.

We want to make a movie for the fans of the game, people who love the Interceptor, love the concept of the *Spy Hunter*. In fact, the *Peter Gunn Theme* will be all over this movie. That's going to be all over the film, but we are going to make sure that this movie delivers not only to the fans of the *Spy Hunter* game, but also the people who don't play *Spy Hunter*. That's why we want them to go for sort of a global adventure with intrigue. We want this movie to be for the Rock what *Indiana Jones* was for Harrison Ford. This is his signature franchise.

GI: Do you hope to do any other video game movies in the future?

A: Actually, right now Chuck and I are working on two other video game projects. I can't name them. Actually, I think I can name one of them, right Chuck?



“We want this movie to be for the Rock what *Indiana Jones* was for Harrison Ford.”

ADRIAN ASKARIEH

GI: Chuck, did you imagine 10 years ago, when you worked on *Die Hard*, that one day you'd be making movies about video games?

C: I really didn't. I've got to give it to Adrian. When I first met Adrian and [we decided we] wanted to do some projects, he brought this game out and I looked at it and I went, "Whoa, this is phenomenal." I mean, it's really great; it opened a whole new world to me. Like Adrian said, there are so many spy movies, but for the idea of actually having the *Spy Hunter* I thought, "What a perfect movie."

C: Yeah, you can name one of them.

A: We are also going to be doing Midway's *ESPionage*. [This game] doesn't come out until March of '04 but we are doing that, but [it's early in development]. There are names being thrown around surrounding the director/writer and even a couple of actors that are pretty substantial." We are also working on another title, but I can't tell you what it is. But when you find out about it, you will probably faint.

CHUCK GORDON



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PREVIEWS



PS2



Street's environments can be used to the fullest. Watch out for those trash cans



PS2

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NFL STREET

TERRELL TIME!

It seems a little ironic that just as Midway alters its Blitz formula to try to compete with sim-mongers like Madden, EA Sports Big decides to make a seven-on-seven smash-mouth football game. What are we going to see next? Warren Sapp and Chad Clifton trading jerseys and a handshake? Of course, this is a perfectly logical move when put in the context of just how popular the publisher's NBA Street series has become. The big question is: Can EA and the sport succeed where Blitz has been failing in recent years?

Street's gameplay is no big secret. It accentuates showboating to a level that might even make Terrell Owens blush. The powerful Gamebreaker status is earned by stringing together moves and taunts in one glorious combo. We recently got some hands-on time with the title, and were rewarded with an almost Tony Hawk's Pro Skater-esque experience. Running down the field, the buttons were flying as we stiff-armed, spun, and danced our way all over the place. Meanwhile, the screen lit up detailing our accomplishments, such as "showboat+stiffarm+TD." We were only treated to one level, but EA is promising a total of seven locations, complete with obstacles like trash cans to navigate. You can even bounce the ball off of walls for an INT or a lucky catch.

The score's for the stat box, but the real respect is all in bringing home the benjamins, baby. While games are won by who gets the most TDs (there aren't quarters, the first to a certain score wins), money points are also tallied. These will earn you all sorts of customizable options for your players in the NFL Challenge mode, where you build up the stats (you can upgrade your team as you go) and tats (tattoos and other clothing accessories are yours to play with) as you conquer 31 other teams. NFL Street's success will likely be determined on how engaging this off-the-field stuff is. One way it spices things up is in the cool Pick-Up mode. Here, the computer randomly picks 40 real-life players from a field of 300. Then, you and your buddies take turns selecting teammates – just like on the playground. The strategy comes in the fact that players have to play on both sides of the ball. So, a guy like Jeremy Shockey would be an absolute bruiser when catching the ball and plowing down the field, but how good is he going to be on defense?

Sure, NFL Street apes some of the outrageous play of Midway's old Blitz, but where it makes a difference – and how it will succeed – is largely based on its use of the football player's personalities and amplifying them into something that's larger than life and the game itself.

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS BIG ■ **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
■ **RELEASE** EARLY 2004



MARCELLUS WILEY

Besides being a defensive end for the San Diego Chargers, Marcellus is a gamer – and not a very good one, if he does say so himself!

Are you a gamer? What kind of stuff do you play?

Ah man, I'm still stuck on Pac-Man, Dig-Dug, Frogger, Galaga – the old-school era. The new games are sweet. I have Xboxes all around the house and PlayStation 2s, and in the cars and everything. My friends love it, but I'm just not as good as them. I think that once I get good at the games, I'll play them a little more. So I just buy 'em and play every now and then.

What about the rest of the guys on the team?

You know what's so funny? These guys won't even pack a change of clothes on a road trip, but they have to pack a PlayStation 2. I just think it's funny that you'll see a guy get off a bus for a road trip and leave his playbook on the bus, but he'll grab his PlayStation 2 and he'll be playing Madden all day. Seriously – it's unbelievable. On the stretch line [in practice], they're yelling at each other at who owes who money, and they have tournaments and play the season, and it's going to be the same thing with Street.



BARRY SANDERS

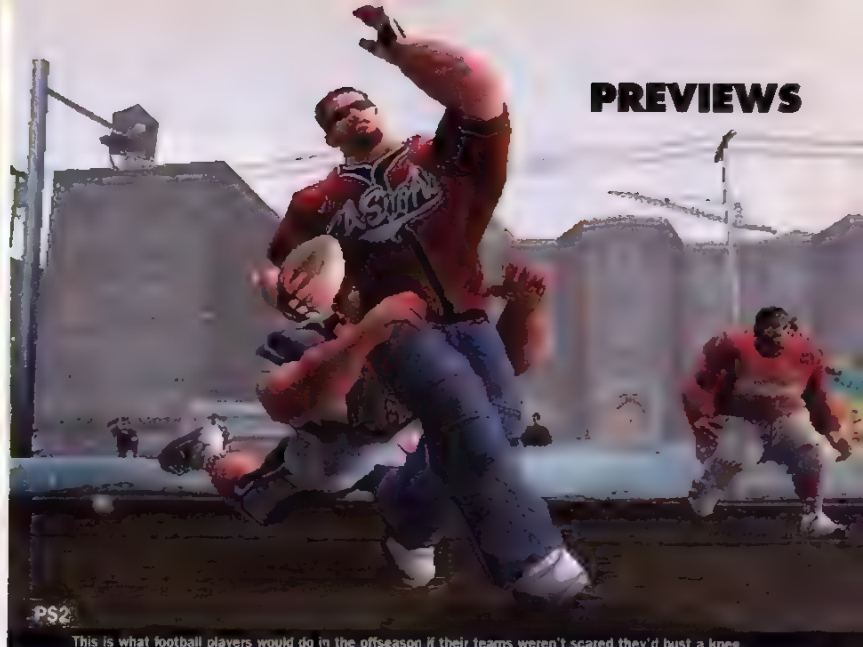
Barry Sanders is coming out of retirement! Well, sort of. The legendary running back has agreed to appear in EA's new football title, and took time out to speak briefly with us.

What do you think of this take on football?

I think it's brilliant that they really came up with the idea. I mean, how long have kids really been playing street football? To be able to capture that, I think you really grab people's attention, and I think you've got a broad appeal with that concept. Hey, I played street football – I played it with my big sisters – so I think it's great.

What do you miss most about playing?

I don't know if it's football, but since I was a kid, I was always involved in some organized sport. So, I think if there's anything I could say that I have fond memories of, it's competing. Professional football was just a part of my competing career. But at the same time, I understood that that's what I was giving up when I retired.



This is what football players would do in the offseason if their teams weren't scared they'd bust a knee



What the hell does Ricky "The Human Cannonball" Williams need shoulder pads for?



"Hee-Haw!"



PLAYSTATION 2

XENOSAGA: EPISODE II JENSEITS VON GUT UND BOSE

ER FREUT SICH WIE EIN SCHNEEKÖNIG

On July 21, Japanese development house Monolith Soft unveiled its entire 2003 lineup. Along with the GameCube RPG *Baten Kaitos* (see pg. 32) and an enhanced version of the original *Xenosaga* dubbed *Reloaded*, Monolith pulled away the curtain on *Xenosaga: Episode II Jenseits von Gut und Bose* (which means "Beyond Good and Evil" in German). Within the trailer that was shown by the development team, you can clearly see that the series has evolved greatly between chapters. The anime look that accompanied the original release has been fleshed out to include the highest level of realism within its leading characters and environments. For instance, the eyes are a bit smaller and the bone structure in the faces is better defined. The main character from Episode I, Shion, makes a return in this follow-up, but her bubbly teenage attitude and funky glasses have been replaced with a sophisticated adult appearance. The same can be said for Kos-Mos. She looks more like a human than she does a cyborg. From what we gather, these changes will be reflected through the passing of time between the end of Episode I and the beginning of the next chapter.

Not much has been revealed about the plot, but we have learned that many of the twists and turns will have strong ties to Junior and his past. Shion's brother Jin, who was a supporting character in the first game, now has an emerging role and will likely be playable this time

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** NAMCO
 ■ **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH SOFT ■ **RELEASE** TBA



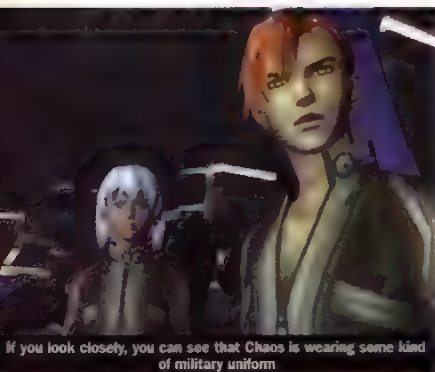
around. Regardless of what the conflict may be, we can only assume that the game will once again reference the Bible and theology extensively.

Monolith hasn't released any details regarding gameplay at this time, but it has been noted that fan input is being weighed heavily in the creation of this title. For those of you who played the first game, character development was equivalent to rocket science. We can only imagine that this aspect will be completely reworked or at the very least simplified. Characters will still have the ability to pilot AGWS units. Monolith was gracious enough to debut two of these. Both of these mechs have a medieval flair to them and look like lance-wielding knights.

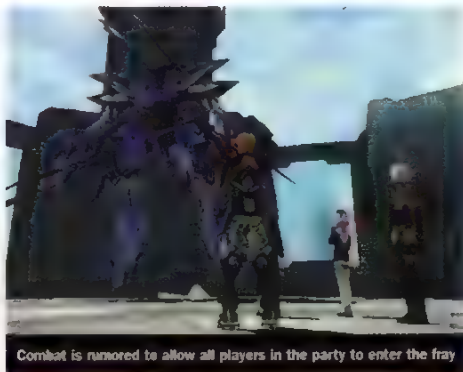
As you probably know oh so well by now, Monolith doesn't want to divulge too much information at this point. From the brief teaser that we got, however, there's more than enough here to get us excited and eager to return to this science fiction world. Namco will once again handle the publishing duties, but a release date for Japan and the U.S. has yet to be announced.

XENOSAGA: EPISODE I RELOADED

Re-releasing role-playing games has become a big thing in Japan. Much like *Kingdom Hearts: Final Mix* and *Final Fantasy X International*, *Xenosaga: Episode I Reloaded* features an English dialogue track plus an assortment of little changes like new costumes for Kos-Mos and Momo. Namco is also including a trailer of Episode II in this package. A stateside release is highly unlikely, but if you just happen to be moving to Japan anytime soon, it will street on November 6.



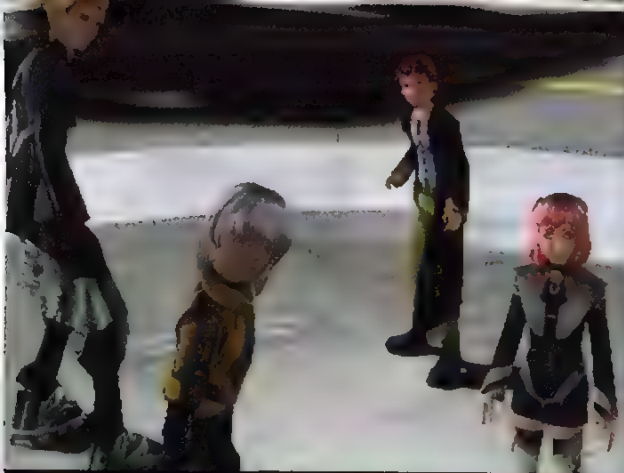
If you look closely, you can see that Chaos is wearing some kind of military uniform



Combat is revamped to allow all players in the party to enter the fray



Kos-Mos gets reacquainted with an old outfit... ...and Momo shows off a completely new look



Four familiar faces



You can hardly recognize Shion now



The graphics have improved significantly between chapters



We can only imagine what kind of god-like powers Chaos wields in this sequel



There's a chance that Junior may emerge as the main character in this quest



Could this be another playable AGWS?



If not for the red eyes, Kos-Mos looks human



The game will once again feature a ton of cinematics

PREVIEWS

CHAOS

We learned firsthand that Chaos' eternal innocence was a facade hiding a monster with incredible might. We're frightened to see where Monolith will take this character next. From a cosmetic stance, the only thing that has changed is his hair.



JIN UZUKI

Jin is Shion's brother. In the first game, he played the voice of reason who walked Shion through different conflicts in her life. This time around, he's taking center stage and will likely be at Shion's side throughout the majority of the game.



KOS-MOS

Out of all of the characters that we've seen thus far, Kos-Mos has changed the most between Episode I and II. She no longer wears her headgear and has donned a sleek new outfit. She also carries herself with newfound tranquility.



SHION UZUKI

In Episode I, we watched Shion come to terms with the ghosts of her past and evolve into a confident individual. Looks can be deceiving, but it would appear as though she matured into an intelligent and strong-willed woman.

THE LINEUP

From the assortment of screenshots spanning these pages, you can clearly see that the whole gang is back. Are they all playable again? Monolith won't say just yet, but we have a feeling that there will be some significant changes in the character roster. As of now, Monolith has highlighted four people.



XBOX

NINJA GAIDEN

GUY-DEN OR GAY-DEN? STOP HATIN'!

Trying to get new details on Tecmo's upcoming Xbox Ninja Gaiden title has been like trying to squeeze blood out of a turnip. In-house developer Team Ninja, headed by the irreverent Tomonobu Itagaki, has been tight-lipped as usual. That was until we told Itagaki-san that we'd print the elusive nudity code to DOA Xtreme Beach Volleyball in the next issue if he didn't grant us an interview. Thankfully (especially since we were just pulling his leg about the code), he agreed, and now we have 1,000 halogen bulbs shedding light on this impressive title.

Team Ninja is well known for crafting some of the best fighting games of all time, and its DOA 3 helped the Xbox weather its stormy first year. Ninja Gaiden star Ryu was a major force in that game, though millions of requests from women for him to show up Speedo-clad in the volleyball game fell on deaf ears. The main differences between a fighting game and an action game are the controls and how to craft a camera that complements the experience. As far as control, Itagaki knows his ninjas and realizes the need for them to be easily manipulated. He tells us about the first time he played the new game, saying, "I thought simply, 'How can such a smooth and speedy action game exist?' The player can manipulate Ryu Hayabusa, a character that moves around more quickly than characters in any other game, with control more wired to the senses than in any other game. We were able to implement a control system that brings out every last drop of skill in the player."

How does the camera keep up with the lightning-quick exploits of Ryu? How, indeed. It's a problem that plagues most action games – whether they rely on the third-person view of the character's rear end, or go the fixed camera route, which has some jerky shifts. Itagaki gives credit where credit's due, saying, "The camerawork [in Ninja Gaiden] is fantastic. The programmer in our team that spent one year developing this camera engine is one of this year's Team Ninja MVPs!" Whether he gets to sit in on DOA girl auditions as a reward couldn't be verified as of this writing.

As you can see from these screenshots (insert slide whistle sound here), Ryu packs a few implements of demon death. The ol' standby blade is always close at hand, but many of these pictures show off his surprising prowess with nunchuks. The bow and arrow weapon is ideal for picking off enemies from afar, thus helping to avoid getting slimy monster residue on your freshly laundered ninja outfit.

With all of these tricks up Ryu's sleeve, Team Ninja is hard at work making sure that his opposition will be able to give him a run for his money. In regards to the bosses, Itagaki says, "They are all brilliantly designed. Right now, we are in the middle of teaching them how to kill Ryu Hayabusa in the most dramatic and incendiary ways possible."

Surely, the story behind all of these epic struggles is a grand one; but Itagaki tells us he wants to avoid specifics, and let people discover the plot as they play through the game. Instead, he informed us, "It is the story of the coolest Super Ninja in the world. Remember, this is coming from a guy who loves ninjas so much that his interests got the better of him and he named his organization Team Ninja, so you know I'm serious."

The outspoken developer gave us a few more golden quotes, like this one in regards to Ninja Gaiden's graphics compared to those in DOA 3: "I have grown bored with the graphics in DOA 3. Please imagine the graphics that a man who can say this would create." As far as other ninja games, he admits to being a big fan of old-school Shinobi, especially Shadow Dancer for the Genesis. But when asked about Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven, he states, "I have never played it and I have no interest in it."

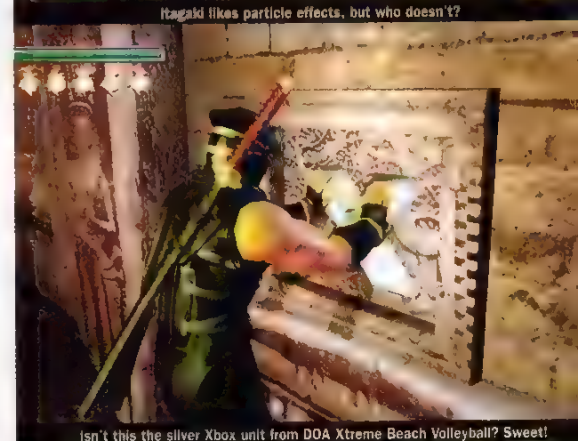
Before the interview closed, Itagaki made one final comment – one that should be very exciting to Team Ninja fans everywhere: "Xbox Live is fantastic. From here on out, our games will actively use Xbox Live as much as possible." To quote Jay in *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, "I think I just filled the cup."



This room screams puzzle elements



Itagaki likes particle effects, but who doesn't?



Isn't this the silver Xbox unit from DOA Xtreme Beach Volleyball? Sweet!

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER TECMO ■ DEVELOPER TEAM NINJA ■ RELEASE NOVEMBER 15



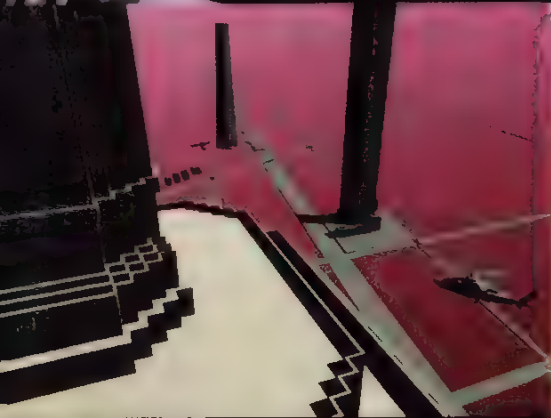
Nunchuks require you to get pretty close, but they do pack a wallop

Here's a mere taste of the size of this game's bosses



Notice how the arrows stick in the enemy's tattered flesh





Although this shot plainly shows a helicopter, we don't know what role vehicles play in the game.



These enigmatic shots lead us to suspect that Killer 7 may have at least...



...two alternate universes

GAMECUBE

KILLER 7

FRAYED ENDS OF SANITY



Until recently, the only thing that we were certain of regarding Capcom's potentially groundbreaking GameCube title *Killer 7* was the fact that its unique brand of dark, anime-inspired cel shading was quite simply one of the most intriguing examples of art direction we'd since since...well...ever. Obviously, Capcom – never a company to shy away from taking high-profile risks, be it *Steel Battalion* or the equally eccentric *Viewtiful Joe* – is approaching this undertaking with a level of graphical design and visual artistry that most developers could not conceive of, much less execute successfully in real-time.

Although much of the game remains cloaked in secrecy, the company has released some details regarding *Killer 7*'s appropriately twisted story. This strange saga spins the tale of Harman Smith, a man consumed by the madness that preys upon his psyche. Psychotic in the truest sense of the word, Smith embodies no less than seven (natch) distinct personalities.

As if his own tortured delusions weren't enough, unfolding world events prove to be more horrifying than any madman's wildest dreams. Kun Lan, a notorious criminal overlord, has let loose a mysterious disease named "Heaven's Smile,"

which turns all it touches into violent zombies affixed with horrific permanent smiles (where's Batman when we need him?). These poor souls have begun to wreak havoc on the city streets, and have ruthlessly murdered the only solace in Harman's tortured existence – his girlfriend, Suzy.

If there is one thing that can unite Smith's seven personas, it's the desire for vengeance on Kun Lan and his grotesque minions. As you progress through the story, you'll be able to play all seven of Harman's incarnations. Each personality has his (or her?) own special abilities and strengths, so we imagine that switching between all of them will play a crucial role in the title and its level design.

And what about gameplay? This is the area of *Killer 7* that remains a mystery. Other than the fact that there will be seven different gameplay styles, Capcom has remained mum on the subject. All we can hope is that the game will be as interesting to play as it is to look at. If this ambitious project is successful, it will go a long way towards reaffirming both Capcom's place among the elite developers in the world, as well as the GameCube's reputation as a system that offers up gaming's most unique and innovative properties.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 4 ■ **RELEASE** 2004



Something tells us that dress isn't tied-dyed



When Ninja Pimps Attack!



Heaven's Smile might sound like a nice disease, but it sure ain't pretty



Either this guy is a super-killer or a dance major



Expect some gory action



At least one of his personalities knows karate



Look at the brilliant use of light and shadows



Here's one indication that all is not how it seems in Killer 7

THEIR METHODS



Play as Sphinx, the cunning demigod.

Travel beyond Egypt, to amazing new worlds.

Interact with hundreds of enemies and allies.



"...deep exploration, tight swordplay, brain teasing puzzle solving,
...within a brilliant and drop-dead beautiful Egyptian world."

- PSE2

"Best GameCube Adventure Game, E3 2003"

IGN.com



TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Fantasy Violence

SPHINX
AND THE CURSED MUMMY

EUROCOM

ENTERTAINMENT
SOFTWARE

TWO HEROES.
THEIR MISSION IS THE SAME.





SPHINX

AND THE CURSED MUMMY



"Sphinx handles the hard work. His levels involve battling monsters with a sparkling sword, climbing hand over hand past perilous pitfalls, and avoiding death traps. As for the mummy, who plays the comedic foil, pain is the name of the game. Being burned, beaten, or crushed to a paper-thin consistency doesn't just provide laughs, it's also essential for solving puzzles. Where gamers are concerned, these opposites will definitely attract."

- TechTV



PlayStation 2



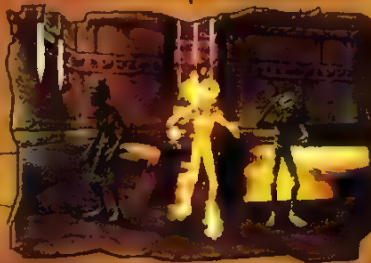
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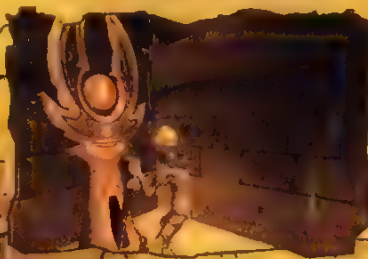
COULDN'T BE FARTHER APART.



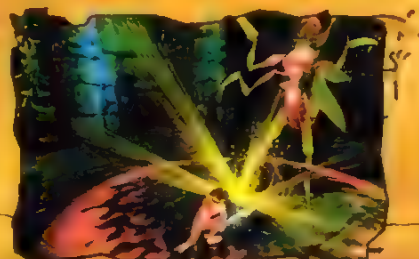
Play as the Mummy, he's a sucker for punishment.

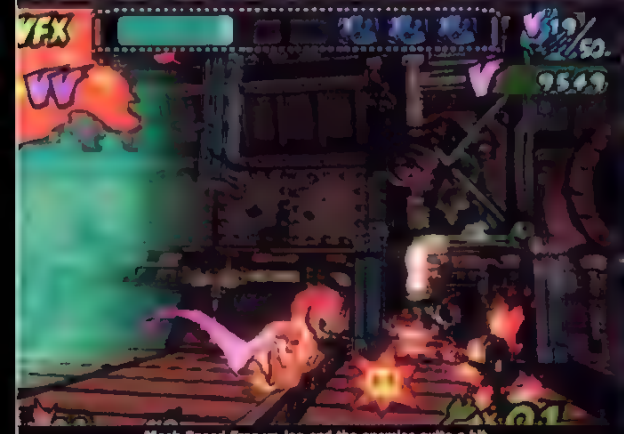


Use the Mummy's immortality to solve puzzles.



Vanquish your enemies.





GAMECUBE

VIEWTIFUL JOE

HENSHIN-A-GO-GO, BABY!

You may think it's hard to look cool in a pair of red tights; but after a few minutes with Capcom's Viewtiful Joe, you may opt for a pair of your own. From Hideki Kayami, the director of Devil May Cry and Resident Evil 2, comes Viewtiful Joe – a fresh new pseudo 2D, cel-shaded, side-scrolling beat 'em up.

You play as Joe, a regular guy who's a huge fan of action movies. He and his girlfriend Sylvia go to see a movie that stars his favorite character, Captain Blue. In the movie, Captain Blue is defeated. Suddenly, the film comes to life. A mysterious villain grabs Sylvia and sucks her into Movieland. Joe's job is to follow in the footsteps of his hero, become the next action stud, and rescue his girlfriend.

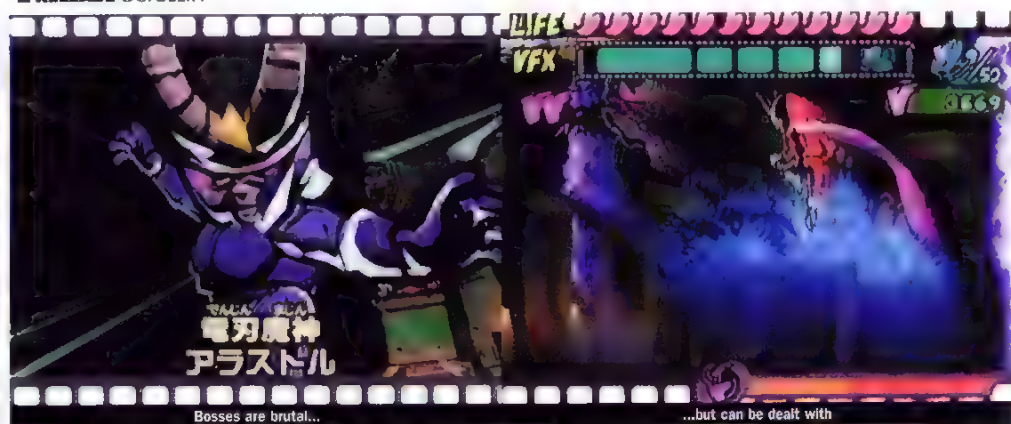
Capcom has made Viewtiful Joe an extremely cinematic experience, but not in the same vein of a Final Fantasy or Xenosaga title where you watch hours of cutscenes. You're the star of each episode. As Viewtiful Joe, you can slow down time and speed it up, as well as zoom in and out of the frame. By alternating between these different movie elements; Joe can evade enemy attacks, string kick and punch combos together, open up secret areas, and solve puzzles.

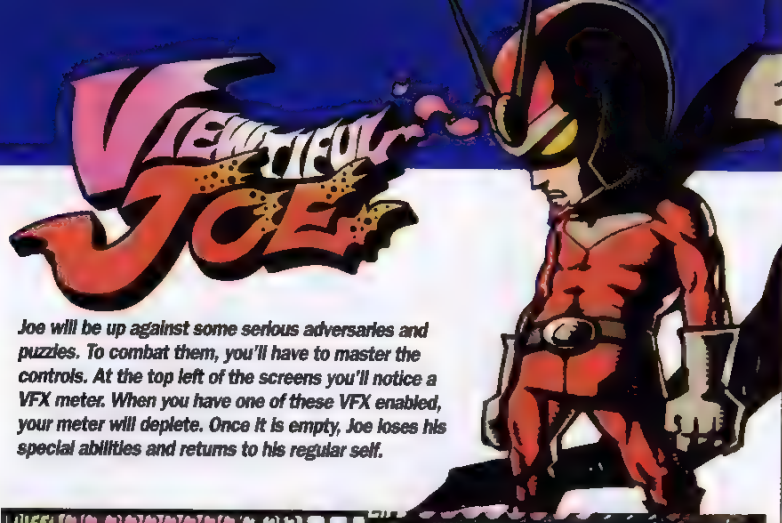
You are graded at the end of each level on time, defense, and V-Points (Viewtiful Points, which can be equated to style points). The bigger and more complicated your attacks and combos are, the more V-Points you earn. At certain times in the game, you can spend these to power-up Joe with projectile weapons, extra moves, extra lives, and more. It's basically an incentive to kick ass viewtifully.

In the version we previewed, the controls were spot-on, and clearing a room of enemies was highly entertaining. We came upon a hallway where enemies were pouring in from all sides and we were quickly surrounded. By slowing down time, we jumped high in the air, unleashed a barrage of punches and kicks, and annihilated all before we touched the ground! Eat that, evildoers!

The first release from the much-hyped Capcom 5 (the five GameCube exclusive titles Capcom announced last year) may not be as stellar as we hoped (P.N. 03 reviewed Page 111). Still, GameCube owners shouldn't write off Capcom quite yet. With impressive visuals, unique gameplay, and a cool new character, the company could have a new successful franchise in its arsenal.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 4
 ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7



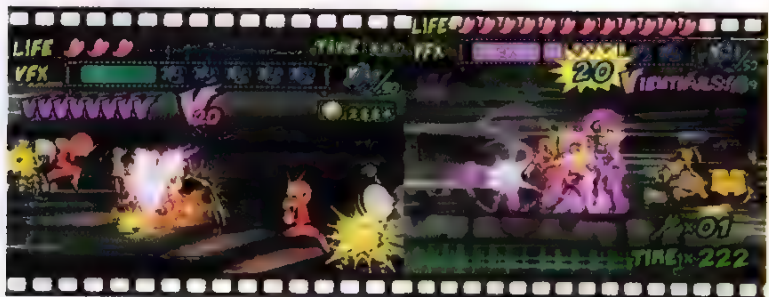


Joe will be up against some serious adversaries and puzzles. To combat them, you'll have to master the controls. At the top left of the screens you'll notice a VFX meter. When you have one of these VFX enabled, your meter will deplete. Once it is empty, Joe loses his special abilities and returns to his regular self.



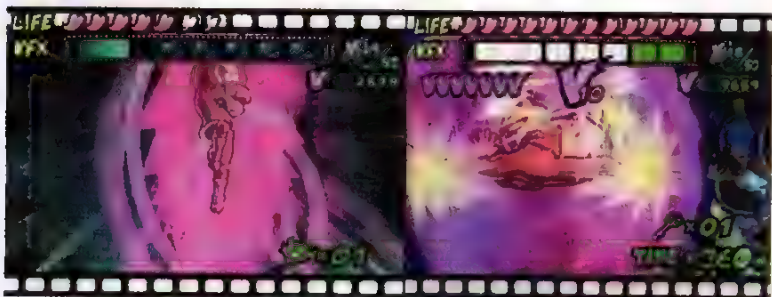
SLOW

By pressing the L shoulder button, you will be able to slow down time. Not only does this enable you to evade and dodge attacks or deflect projectiles, but certain enemies can only be attacked at this speed. Regular explosions become more devastating, and floating platforms descend automatically when you're in Slow mode.



MACH SPEED

The R shoulder button speeds up time in the game. If you're in need of plowing through a pile of enemies or reaching an area quickly, this will help you accomplish that. Special items are hidden in the background, and you won't be able to reach them unless you're using Mach Speed and attacking enemies at the same time. Floating platforms rise in Mach Speed mode to get you to higher ground quicker.



ZOOM

Flicking the c-stick forward or pressing the B button zooms the camera in on the action. Special attacks and jumps can be utilized when Zoom is used alone, or in conjunction with Slow or Mach Speed.



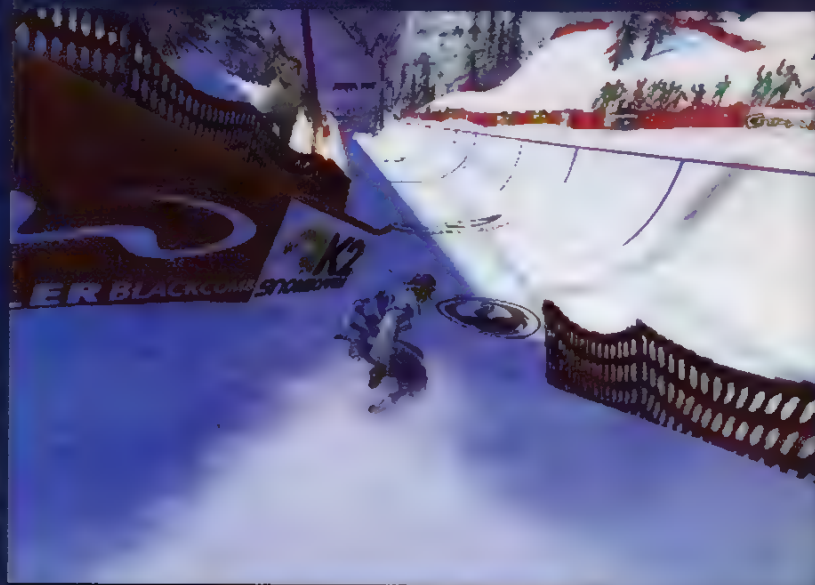
GAMECUBE

1080° AVALANCHE

NO ROOM FOR TWO PLANKER WANKERS

1080° Snowboarding on the Nintendo 64 redefined the snowboarding genre, and this winter the sequel hits the GameCube. When we first viewed this title at last year's Cube Club, controls were sluggish, and the game was too early to get a good impression. A year has passed since then, and NST has reworked quite a bit. As it stands now, 1080° is looking beefy enough to compete with the likes of SSX.

1080° Avalanche will feature dynamic environments including collapsing wooden bridges, rockslides, cave-ins, and not too surprisingly – huge avalanches. Returning modes include Match Races, Time and Trick Attack, and Half Pipe. What else NST will have in store for boarders has yet to be determined. Get your board ready – 1080° returns this winter!



"Hey, dude! Where can I score some sweet powder?"

■ STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS ■ PUBLISHER NINTENDO ■ DEVELOPER NST
■ RELEASE DECEMBER



Ducking around corners – a video game staple since 1998



"This'll only hurt for a second..."



"...because after that, you're dead."



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

ROGUE OPS

PUT THIS IN YOUR TOMB AND BURY IT

Kemco is one of those

companies that have been around a long time (it published the Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle Game Boy series, the SNES shooter Phalanx, and even the N64 Daikatana), but hasn't put out a big game in quite a while. Enter Rogue Ops, a stealthy action/adventure game featuring a sneaky new starlet. Named Nikki Connors, she joins the secret spy organization, Phoenix. Her husband was a former employee before his demise, and now that he and her other family members are dead, she has come looking for answers.

Rogue Ops' gameplay is very reminiscent of some popular titles like Splinter Cell, Metal Gear Solid 2, and Hitman 2. Nikki has a bunch of gadgets at her disposal and will use them, along with her wits, to solve the many puzzling obstacles standing in her way. For example, she'll be heading down a staircase, but a force field is in the way. If she touches it, a gun turret will blast her to ribbons. If she pick-pocketed the security card from one of the guards, she can just manually shut it off. Or, she can shimmy along a column and drop down beyond the force field's range.

Like most spies, Nikki can do a lot of different things. Instead of memorizing complex button assignments, however, developer Bits Studios has simplified things. By looking around at certain objects, you'll sometimes see a cursor. If it's orange, you have to get closer. If it's green, you merely hit the action button to interact with it. This includes climbing ladders and pipes, activating switches, using a grappling hook, and a bunch of other commands.

Nikki has one of the coolest pairs of glasses known to Man. These things can see through walls and pick up on heat signatures from living beings. Adding upgrades only further enhances its abilities, so it can do things like see skeletons of potential victims.

The combat in Rogue Ops is pretty slick. It's got all the staples like silencers and sniper

rifles. Aiming is done the same way Nikki looks around (holding a shoulder button) and another shoulder button fires. The only time you're not using a weapon in battle is when you're being all sneaky-like, you naughty kitty. Stealth kills require you to get a little closer to an unwary enemy, and wait for a meter to fill. Once you hit a button, a timer goes down; you have to hit a sequence of directional presses before time expires. Fail, and you get the beat-down instead. But succeed, and you're treated to some really sweet death scenes.

A few other items worth mentioning are: a Metal Gearsque map which shows enemy positions and security camera placements, the ability to slow down time with adrenaline boosts, and AI that notices blood stains and eventually footprints. Nikki Connors could be the next big female star in games, and Kemco's going big-time with Rogue Ops, baby! It's shaping up to be a big title for this Christmas. Keep your eyes open for it.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE
 ■ **PUBLISHER** KEMCO ■ **DEVELOPER** BITS STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER




X-ray specs exist! We knew it!

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.



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



Break from the shadows as you sneak
past Nazi guards and the Gestapo.



PlayStation 2



RATING PENDING

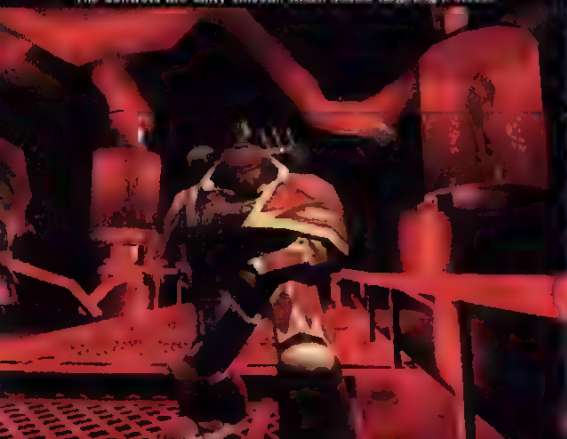


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The controls are silky smooth, which makes targeting a breeze



The Chaos are everywhere in this game



Scripted events unfold all around you as you progress through levels

PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

WARHAMMER 40,000: FIRE WARRIOR

FROM PEN & PAPER TO FPS

Widely considered to be the science-fiction Dungeons & Dragons, Games Workshop's Warhammer 40,000 is a unit-based pen and paper role-playing game that has generated a furiously loyal fan base and has spun off into countless books, comics, and video games. To date, this license has been tapped to create a handful of different turn-based and real-time strategy games for both console and PC. European developer Kuju Entertainment has different plans.

Placing Warhammer 40,000 into the framework of a first-person shooter may seem like a bit of a stretch or a poor choice given the content, but it's actually shaping up to be the most ambitious and accurate video game interpretation yet. Every character model, animation, and detail in the game had to be approved by Games Workshop. In this regard, everything appears exactly how it should.

The story is also deeply embedded into Warhammer lore and is presented through highly detailed FMV sequences complete with spoken

dialogue. We don't want to give too much of the plot away, but we can tell you that the character that you will control is a Tau warrior named Kais; and at some point in the adventure, the Chaos will make a startling appearance. If you're not familiar with this universe, the Chaos are the enforcers and ultimate badasses in Warhammer.

Fire Warrior isn't just for hardcore fanatics, however. Kuju Entertainment studied the FPS market extensively, and came to the conclusion that only one game features decent controls. That would be Halo. In such, Fire Warrior's controller schematic is stylized in a similar fashion to the Xbox FPS giant. The movements in Fire Warrior are very precise. Your character has a quick turning radius, the pace is swift, and you won't need to rely on auto-aim to hit your target. You'll also see a vaguely familiar health/shield system, and your character can only wield two weapons at a time.

In total, there are 15 different armaments that fit into the Imperium, Tau, and Chaos arsenals. The action unfolds across 21 impressively large levels, and never once did we see a mid-level break to load. Fire Warrior is also one of the few PlayStation 2 games to support 16x9 widescreen. Outside of the single-player campaign, Kuju has incorporated online play for both versions of the game. We didn't get to mess around with this aspect on the PC, but the PS2 online functionality supports eight players through broadband and offers such modes as deathmatch, team deathmatch, and capture the flag.

So, has Kuju essentially created Halo for PlayStation 2? That still remains to be seen, but we were very pleased with what we have witnessed thus far and can't wait to see how the game turns out upon its September 10 release date.



The Chaos weapons rock!

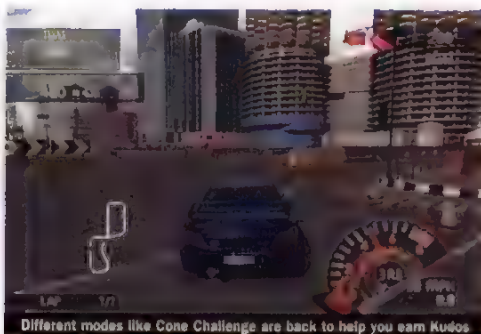
■ STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ PUBLISHER THQ ■ DEVELOPER KUJU ENTERTAINMENT
■ RELEASE SEPTEMBER 10



XBOX

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

BACK ON THE STREETS



BURN IT AND EARN IT

The Kudos system has received rave reviews ever since developer Bizarre Creations' Dreamcast title, *Metropolis Street Racer*. New to this year are points for drafting behind other cars, Kudos for taking a good line through a corner, and more variable damage penalties. Drafting is useful because, if managed right, you can use it to slingshot around and overtake the car ahead of you. Also new is the fact that instead of playing jokers, you can wager Kudos by choosing your difficulty level. Before a race, you'll be asked to choose which skill level you want. These will demand that you earn a certain amount of Kudos, come in second place against hard opposition, or finish under a set time, for example.



THE 100-CAR GARAGE

Earning and unlocking has always been what *Project Gotham* was all about, but this time Bizarre Creations is making things a little more interesting with a redesigned user interface. Included in this revamped package is a fully articulated garage. Instead of opening up cars in sequence, you can spend the tokens you've earned on whatever you want.

The original Project Gotham Racing

was notable for both its graphics and car physics. From what we've played so far of the sequel, work in these areas has progressed nicely. The added cities, including Edinburgh, Moscow, and Barcelona look grand and magnificent. The new graphics engine has even allowed for little touches such as blowing trash or flying birds. Also, the over 100 cars (including classics like a Pontiac GTO) respond exceptionally well to the vagaries of braking, drift, and steering depending on the ride you've got. The game's use of your controller's force feedback also plays an important part in understanding a car's limits.

This year, Xbox Live is in tow and offers more than multiplayer racing. Single players will be able to have their best runs appear on a leader board or can compete against ghost cars. Those who do well enough can be represented as a ghost themselves for others to beat. Microsoft is currently exploring downloads. Whether this will encompass tracks, cars, or both is still up in the air.

■ **STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)**
 ■ **PUBLISHER MICROSOFT ■ DEVELOPER BIZARRE CREATIONS**
 ■ **RELEASE OCTOBER 1**

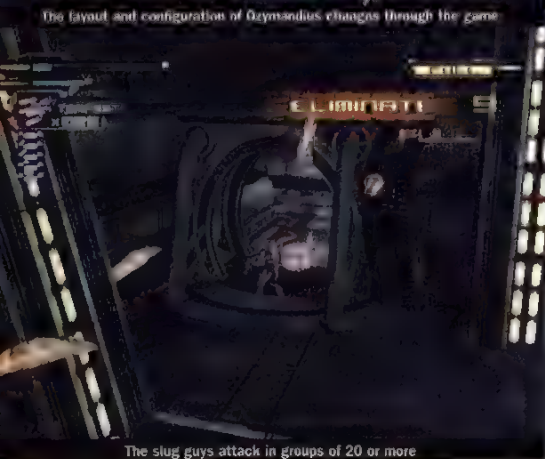




Hammerhead dinos are everywhere in the ship



The layout and configuration of Ozymandius changes through the game



The slug guys attack in groups of 20 or more

XBOX

DINO CRISIS 3

EVENT HORIZON WITH DINOS

At first glance, it seems as though Capcom is running out of locales to infest with dinosaurs traveling through the third energy. Even those *Leprechaun* movies didn't delve into space horror until the fourth entry (and after that, the wee Irish demon-fairy wreaked havoc in 'da hood – maybe for *Dino Crisis 4*?) But after having a chance to spend some serious time with a *Dino Crisis 3* demo, we can safely say that the space adventure is, at bare minimum, more tastefully done than those *Leprechaun* flicks.

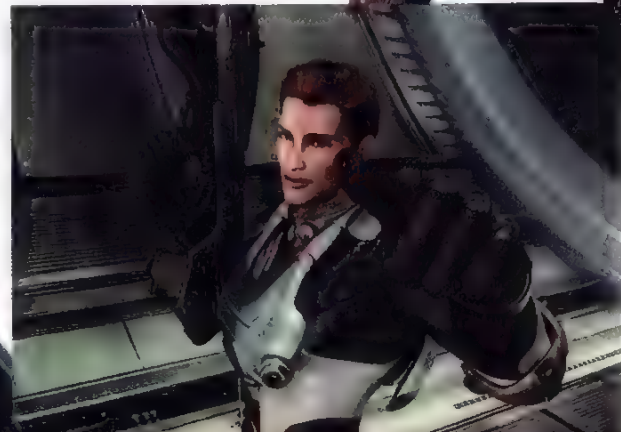
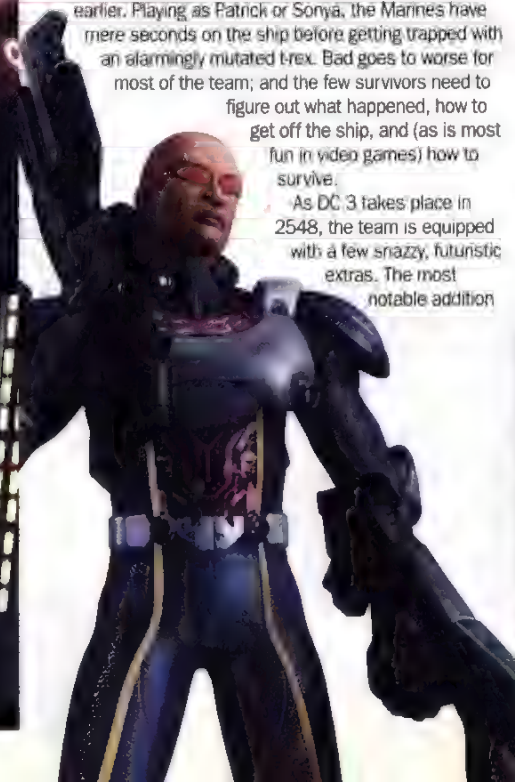
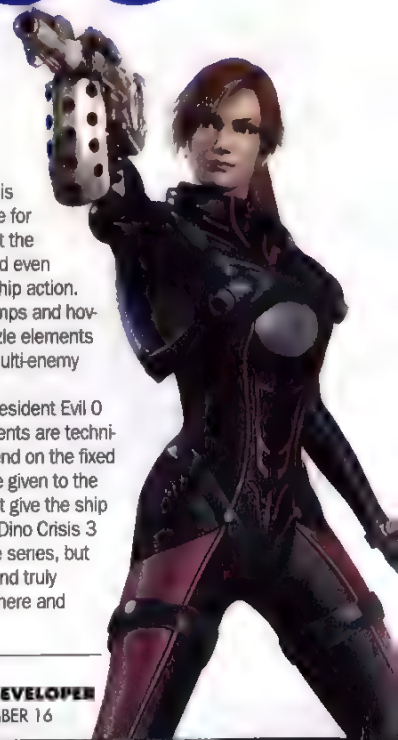
The plot centers around a troop of space marines out to investigate the Ozymandius, an extremely large and well-armed spaceship that had disappeared 300 years earlier. Playing as Patrick or Sonya, the Marines have mere seconds on the ship before getting trapped with an alarmingly mutated t-rex. Bad goes to worse for most of the team, and the few survivors need to figure out what happened, how to get off the ship, and (as is most fun in video games) how to survive.

As *DC 3* takes place in 2548, the team is equipped with a few snazzy, futuristic extras. The most notable addition

to the *Dino Crisis* universe is the "hyper booster unit," or jetpack to us average gamers. Capcom takes advantage of this new feature by requiring its use for puzzle solving, defense against the dinos that attack in droves, and even some interesting outside-the-ship action. The jetpack aids with super jumps and hovering – opening up unique puzzle elements and enabling stunningly fast multi-enemy attacks.

Like recent Capcom titles (*Resident Evil 0* comes to mind), the environments are technically 3D, but the controls depend on the fixed camera angles. Credit must be given to the level designers and artists that give the ship a real sense of scale. Clearly, *Dino Crisis 3* is a departure in theme for the series, but the graphics, intense action, and truly cinematic cutscenes are still there and looking better than ever.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16



"I squish your head. I squish your head."



XBOX | PC

STAR WARS: JEDI ACADEMY

THE WEAPONS OF A JEDI

Last year's return of Kyle Katarn in *Jedi Outcast* (formerly the *Dark Forces* series) was a triumphant comeback for one of the few good Star Wars franchises out there. Finally, a video game's lightsaber duels and Force powers were able to keep up with George Lucas' increasingly complicated Jedi choreography, giving fans an experience they never could have dreamed possible when playing with their stiff Kenner figures back in the day. So why is PC developer Raven Software pulling the Kyle Katarn rug out from under us? Because it's time for you to step up and feel the power of the Force.

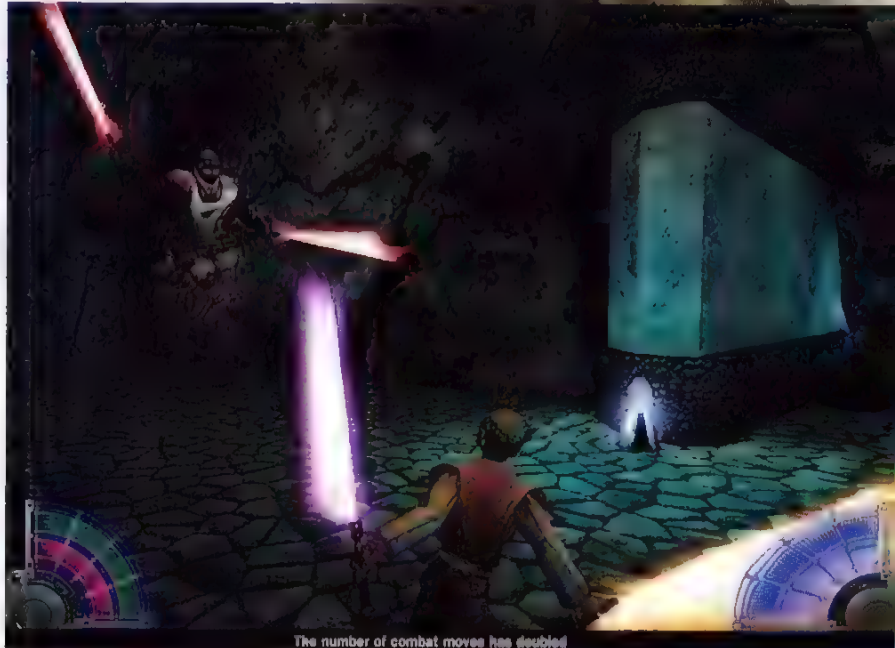
Letting players create their own characters is a natural progression for the series, and it opens up some great possibilities. You can choose from the Human, Rodian, Twi'lek, Kel Dor, and Zabrak species; and it gets more interesting from there. Not only can you choose your lightsaber's color and handle; but, over the course of the game, you can personally craft your fighting style. Each saber (which has changeable parts) will have its own set of standard attacks, special moves, and acrobatic feats. As such, your character will fight differently if he or she chooses to aspire to mastering two single sabers in each hand or the infamous Darth Maul dual blade. When all is said and done, Raven estimates that over 2,000 different character combinations are available, and that *Jedi Academy* will feature double the combat moves of the first. Even the game's mission structure can suit your needs, as certain adventures will help you develop the skills you want to focus on. Of course, the temptation of the dark side will always beckon.

Jedi Academy is also expanding its multiplayer horizons with two new modes. *Siege* is just as the name implies and will call upon a group of characters to take back a certain location. The key to success will be for players to draw from a varied mix of classes in order to be best prepared for whatever situation may arise. *Power Duel* is an expansion of *JK II's* *Duel*, and it allows for two players to go up against a single opponent, similar to Darth Maul's battle with Obi-Wan Kenobi and Qui-Gon Jinn in *Episode I*.

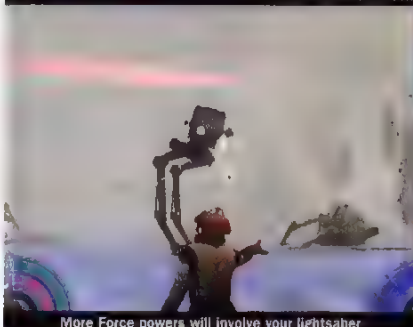
At this time, Xbox is the only non-PC home for the game, as there is no official word as to whether GameCube will once again host the series. Developer Raven did say, however, that both the Xbox (handled by Vicarious Visions) and PC iterations will mimic each other.



Tauntauns are just one of your transportation options



The number of combat moves has doubled



More Force powers will involve your lightsaber



Smell that Sarlaac's Boba Fett breath!

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) ■ **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE (PC), VICARIOUS VISIONS (XBOX) ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 (PC), NOVEMBER 18 (XBOX)



PLAYSTATION 2

TRANSFORMERS ARMADA: PRELUDE TO ENERGON

LET'S ROLL OUT

Before you drop a load into your Underoos, Transformers Armada is an entirely different property than the popular '80s television series. To recap, first there was Transformers, then there was Beast Wars, now there's Transformers Armada. Get it? Got it? Good. With strong ties to the recent toy line, comic book series, and Cartoon Network television show; the much-beloved robots in disguise will make their video game debut next May exclusively on PlayStation 2.



Naturally, Optimus Prime is one of the playable characters

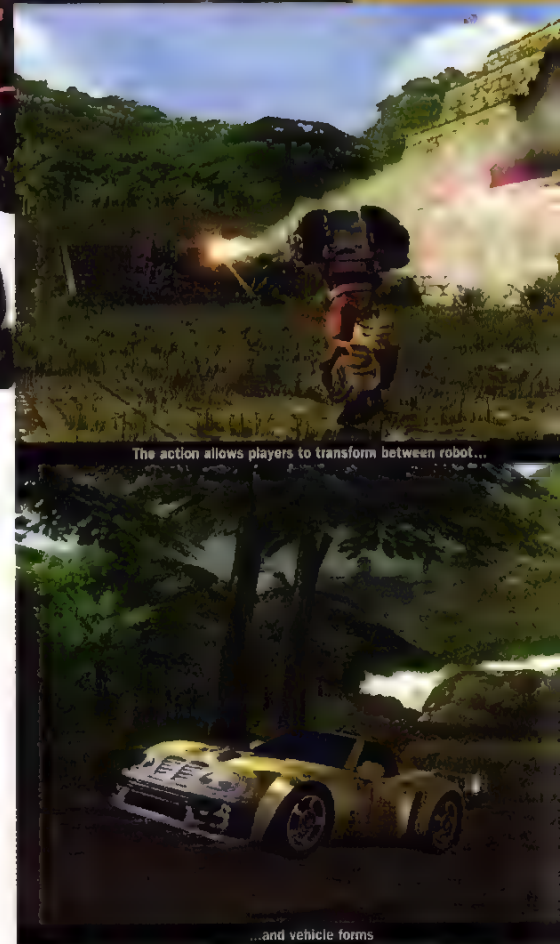
Through development spearheaded by Atari's Melbourne House (Men in Black: Alien Escape, Le Mans 24 Hours), Prelude to Energon focuses on the power struggle between the Autobot and Decepticon armies. Players will join the ranks of the Autobots and will be able to control Optimus Prime, Hotshot, and one yet-to-be unveiled character. Of course, you'll have complete freedom to switch between robot and vehicle form. As one could only hope, the transformation sequences are seamless and presented through amazing real-time animations.

Throughout the course of the game, players will be able to tap into the power of Mini-Cons – miniature robots that, when combined with a Transformer, enhance its fighting abilities. A wide variety of Mini-Cons can be collected and used in unison. With this collective might, you might just have a chance against Megatron and his Decepticon forces.

Transformers Armada is still a ways off, but many of the Game Informer staff screamed hysterically and fainted like teenage girls at a Beatles concert after seeing the game in action. Mark your calendars, folks. This could be the Transformers game we always dreamed of.



Here's Hotshot pictured next to a Mini-Con



The action allows players to transform between robot...

...and vehicle forms

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) ■ PUBLISHER ATARI ■ DEVELOPER MELBORNE HOUSE ■ RELEASE MAY 2004

"...the best game of its type this year." -- PS2.IGN



REEL FISHING III



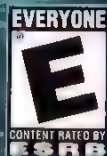
Selling Fishing Franchise!*



The Most Incredible Fishing Experience Ever!!

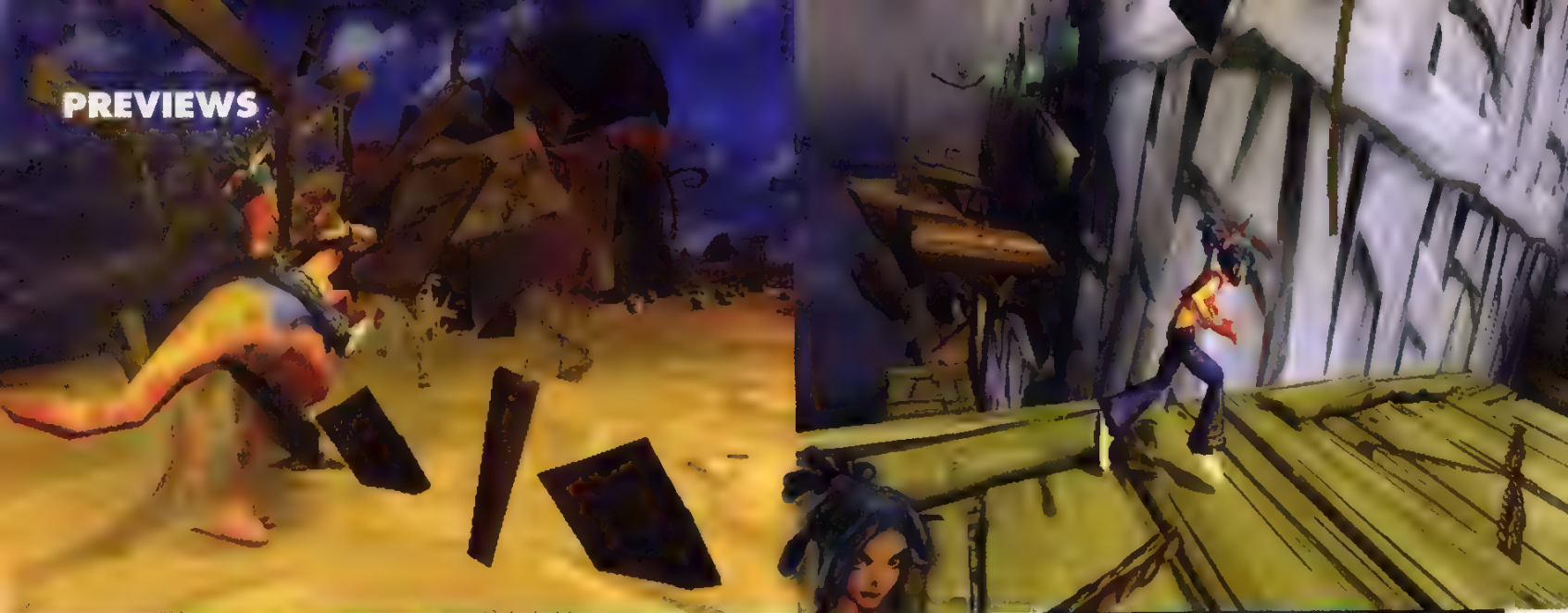
Do you remember the very first time you went fishing? The fresh air...the soothing sounds of nature around you...the tranquility of the water. Reel Fishing III is a true-to-life fishing experience with a magnificent 3-dimensional fishing engine, beautiful environments, life-like fish and realistic nature sounds!

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PlayStation 2





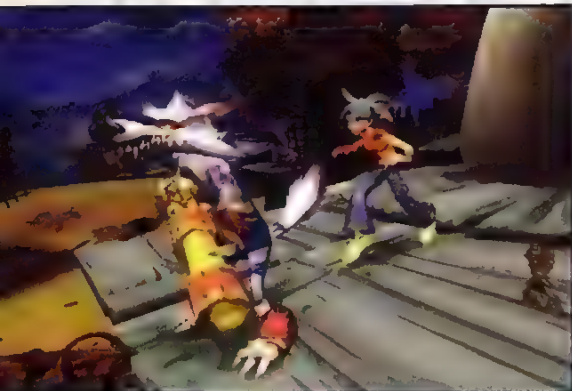
PLAYSTATION 2

KYA: DARK LINEAGE

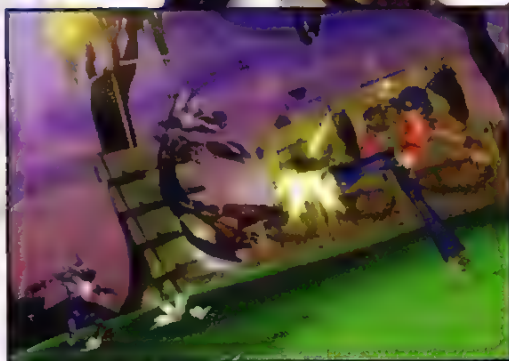
MULTI-TASKER

Eden Studios is best known for its successful and long-running V-Rally series of racing games. So, what is a developer that normally focuses on the exacting physics of handbrakes doing making a colorful, fantasy-based action/platform title? We had a chance to visit the Eden offices, play the game, and pick the team's brains about the title. "We had always wanted to make different types of games," explains senior producer Constantine Hantzopoulos. "The physics concepts in a racing game aren't all that different from wind currents, boomerangs, and sliding." After spending some time with *Kya*, we can safely say that Eden is ably meeting the goals of starting a new, fun, and challenging platform title. Look forward to this game in November.

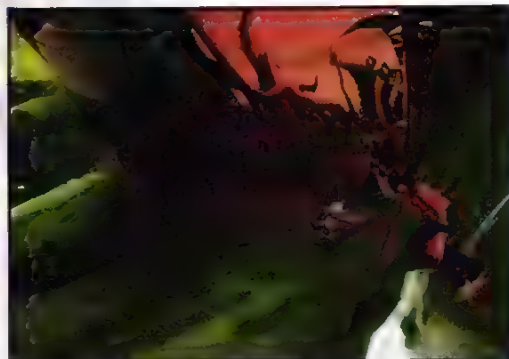
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** EDEN STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER



There's always a "smart" way to finish a level in *Kya*. Usually, that means sneaking around and tricking bad guys into doing your dirty work. For example, Wolfens that have been hit, but can't see a perpetrator, assume that their friend bonked them on the head, and then retaliate. Stupid Wolfens!



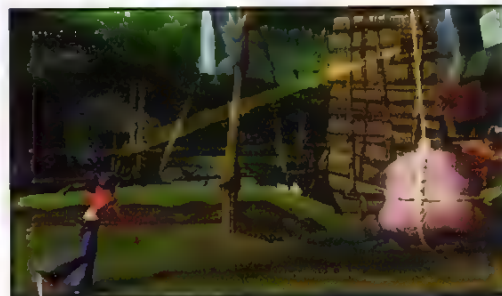
Wolfens almost always attack in packs (wolves...packs... get it?). *Kya* can swing one around to attack the others or ride piggyback for faster blows. Enemies will learn which moves are your favorites and block them, so you'll have to switch up often.



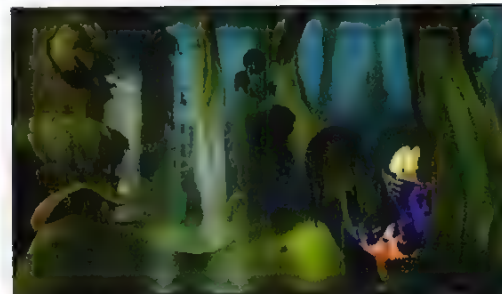
Each of the nine main environments are huge – so some fast, fun transportation must be in order. Enter *Kya*'s sliding mechanism. It's like snowboarding without a board, or barefoot water skiing without the boat, or...you get the idea.



Nativ City's population and shopping district grow as you free Nativs in the game. Their re-opened stores offer upgrades and supplies that are necessary to complete *Kya*'s adventure.



Kya's implement of choice is the boomerang; and she'll use it for attacking, defending, and puzzle solving. The weapon can be upgraded to include sniper and Nikita missile-like remote control.



The world of Nativs and Wolfens is most easily (and sometimes necessarily) traversed via air currents. *Kya* will free fall like an acrobatic X Games participant or be blasted to the tops of trees, all in the name of exploration.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

GLADIATOR: SWORD OF VENGEANCE

OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!

Acclaim's Manchester studio is still a relatively unknown force in the game industry, but we expect this to change with the fall release of *Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance*. This third-person melee action game is not only the most promising title to be associated with Acclaim for some time; it could well establish the gladiator as a new icon for gamers around the world.

It's obvious (or at least it should be to those of you who have eyes) that this is an amazing looking game. These pictures will give you some idea of the intricate character models, complex environments, and ethereal lighting that provide *Gladiator's* haunting look and feel quite unlike any title we've seen. Playing a demo of the game, we watched in awe as our hero walked through a field of high grass, each fully animated blade swaying in the breeze. Beautiful vistas like this are the rule, not the exception in *Gladiator*—which uses a cinematic, dynamic camera system akin to Sony's criminally underrated *ICO* to set a dramatic backdrop for the bloody action at hand. It's amazing what can happen when your point of view isn't directly attached to someone's rear end.

The combat system is equally ambitious, incorporating the ability to perform killer combos that take out multiple enemies in a single, balletic motion. We thrilled as our character plunged his sword deeply into a combatant's

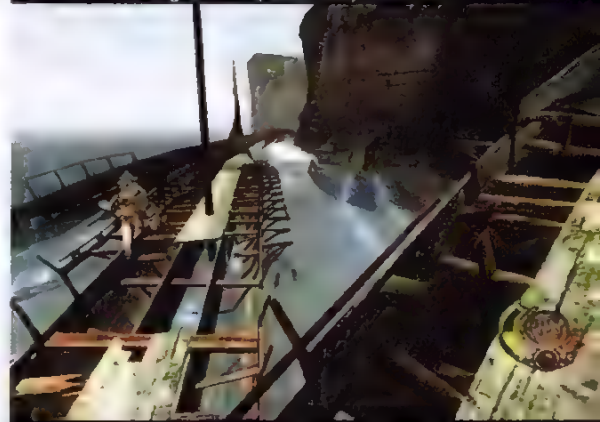
abdomen, then swung around, rolled on the ground, jumped up and decapitated another hapless victim. These types of complex tactics are made possible by an advanced AI system that targets and prioritizes enemies based on proximity. With a little fine-tuning, it may well set a new standard for hack n' slash combat as we know it. However, there is also the danger that the heavily-scripted fighting could be a bit too automatic, and eventually dull. Although, your set of moves and arsenal of gladiatorial weapons will expand throughout the game, even allowing you to gain magic power-ups like Hercules' Strength by completing several challenges in the Elysian Fields.

Roman gladiator competitions were notorious for being unbelievably savage and bloody, and Acclaim Manchester is intent on providing a ton of gory finishing moves (over 60 in all), called Death Blows. Honestly, you won't believe just how graphic these moves are. Let's just say that the *Mortal Kombat* influence can be felt in every last drop of blood that spills to the floor.

Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance is a game at the crossroads. Will it become a beautiful, but ultimately boring, hack n' slash pretender; or a true contender for the Xbox and PS2 action throne?



The evil Emperor Aruntius is staging a series of grueling gladiator competitions that you must survive



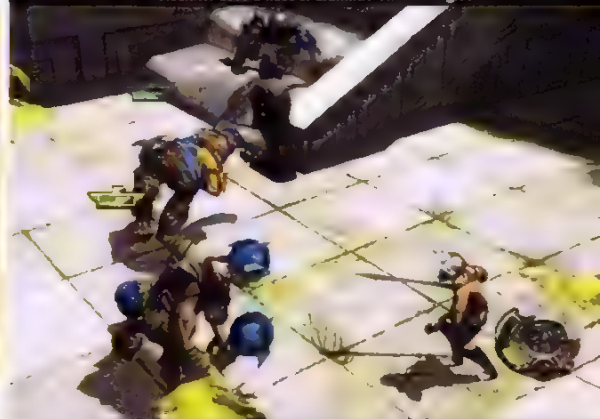
Gladiator uses a host of dramatic camera angles



As you can see, the lighting system is amazing



This grass is fully animated, swaying in the breeze



The shoulder buttons select your primary and secondary targets

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER ACCLAIM ■ DEVELOPER ACCLAIM MANCHESTER ■ RELEASE OCTOBER 14

PREVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2

SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN

THE EPIDEMIC IS POSTPONED
UNTIL 2004

Spanning across 17 pulse-pounding missions set in such territories as Toronto, Belarus, Brazil, and Uganda, the action that unfolds in Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain can be tackled in two different ways. You can run and gun by your lonesome, or hop online and team-up with three additional human players for cooperative play. Rather than suiting up as Gabe Logan again, you'll now create a character who begins the game as a new recruit for the Agency. As you progress through the title, you'll gain experience and level up much like you would in an RPG. By gaining levels, you'll earn higher ranks, new techniques, and a wider arsenal.

From what we've seen since we ran our extensive cover story (see issue 120), the gameplay is definitely moving in the right direction and still retains the classic Syphon Filter feel. While most of your time is spent running and emptying countless clips, you'll also have to use a fair amount of stealth. The online aspect works very well, due in part largely to the handy transparent map that tracks the location of everyone in your squad and the ability to verbally communicate through a PS2-compatible headset.

The release date has slipped to February of next year, which is a bummer, but we're hoping that the extra time Sony injects into this game leads to a killer app that will generate a hefty online community much like SOCOM has.



Is this guy squatting to aim, or does he have some junk in his trunk?

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE)
■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
■ **DEVELOPER** SONY BEND ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 2004



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

BALDUR'S GATE II: DARK ALLIANCE

BACK TO THE DUNGEONS

Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance was a real gem for PlayStation 2 owners with a jones for action/RPGs and the Dungeons & Dragons universe. The high appeal of D&D and Baldur's Gate, in addition to the excellent development work put in by Snowblind Studios, made a huge splash in the marketplace, with sales qualifying for Sony's Greatest Hits program.

Strangely, Snowblind then made the surprising move of abandoning ship, opting to work on Sony's upcoming EverQuest game "inspired" by Dark Alliance, Champions of Norrath. That sounds like trouble, but thankfully the game is now being created by the very capable Black Isle Studios (Icewind Dale, Fallout) using a modified version of the original DA engine. While it won't be online, this two-player dungeon

explorer is shaping up very nicely. First off, there are now five characters to play as: a human barbarian, dark elf monk, moon elf necromancer, dwarven rogue, and human cleric. Unfortunately, you won't be able to name your character, but you will be able to upgrade classes. For example, with more experience, a dark elf monk can become an assassin.

One pet peeve that many had with the last game – the difficulty of changing spells – will be solved with new d-pad Quick Slots, which allow you to sub in and out sets of magic for fast access. Of course, you'll need all the firepower you can get, as this adventure will be much longer than the first – especially if you want to discover all the hidden areas and unlockable D&D characters.



The barbarian character looks, appropriately, like Conan

Selecting spells will be easier thanks to the d-pad Quick Slots

Same great lighting effects...

...same great water effects

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** BLACK ISLE STUDIOS
■ **RELEASE** LATE 2004



PC

BLACK & WHITE 2

IT DON'T MATTER IF YOU'RE
BLACK OR WHITE

Black & White is one of the most important and successful PC games of the last few years, but you can trust that Lionhead Studios mastermind Peter Molyneux is not one to rest on his laurels. This sequel will expand on the god gaming goodness of the first in nearly every aspect, giving you many ingenious new ways to smite or bless your pathetic human populace as you see fit.

Your human armies play a much larger role in *Black & White 2*, and you'll soon be waging huge wars and laying siege to neighboring cities with hundreds of troops. The cities themselves will be extremely detailed, allowing you to create beautiful, flowering parks and gardens if you wish. The better your city is, the easier it is to attract new followers.

Last time around, we saw the way that your behavior (for good or ill) could affect the environments. This time, the large creatures at your command will change cosmetically, growing hearty and hale or frail and mangy, based on your decisions. In addition, you'll also have a host of epic miracles in your arsenal. These spells range from environmental disasters like earthquakes to the Siren – a beautiful apparition that can lure people from miles around with her beguiling melodies. Of course, given the usual care that Lionhead Studios puts into its products, we can expect that these innovations are but a few of the things that *Black & White 2* has in store for us.



■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
■ **DEVELOPER** LIONHEAD STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 2004

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PREVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2

HOT SHOTS GOLF ONLINE

ONLINE'S JUST FINE - NIGHTTIME, ANYTIME!

Sony's Hot Shots is one of, if not the best-selling, most critically acclaimed golf franchise in console video games. An online version for PS2 released in June in Japan - where the series is called Everybody's Golf. It has since taken the country by storm.

The game is basically Hot Shots Golf 3 (which recently earned Greatest Hits status in the U.S.) with an online component. You can play online or off, but you need an account either way. You also need to install the game to the PS2 hard drive. It also costs a few bucks per month to play vs. friends; just like real life, online golf ain't cheap.

Creating your customized golfer is the first step. There are many appearance options available, and more can be bought with performance points, just like Hot Shots 3. However, you don't earn anything for playing it offline. Lobbies exist for you to wait to get on the tees.

The coolest thing about Hot Shots Online are the real-time tournaments, where you swing clubs with 99 other human players. Many tournaments have special conditions, and between holes you see a leader board giving props to those on top. Bulletins even show up to describe special accomplishments.

Sony has yet to announce plans for the game in the U.S., but we remain hopeful. We've already taken our plaid pants to the dryer.



Will you people shut up? I'm trying to golf!

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (ONLINE TBA)
 ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
 ■ **DEVELOPER** CLAP HANZ ■ **RELEASE** TBA



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

BACKYARD WRESTLING: DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

D-VON! GET THE LAWNMOWER!

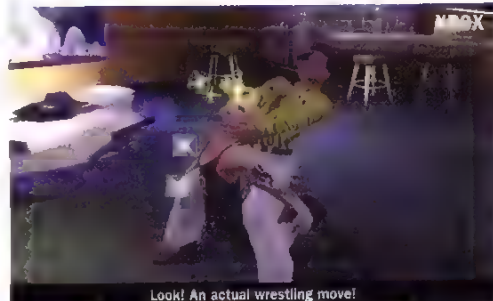
Wrestling fans have been waiting with bated breath to hear more on Backyard Wrestling. New wrestling game franchises don't come around too often these days, though Def Jam Vengeance did well for EA Sports Big. While Don't Try This At Home does feature a few rappers, it's all about violent behavior, baby!

The environments (including a strip club, mansion, and slaughterhouse) have a stunning degree of interaction. Everything that isn't nailed down can be picked up and heaved or bashed over someone's head. There are many high-elevation areas to either leap from or toss your opponent off of. Throw someone into a stack of speakers and they'll short circuit, electrocuting the victim. The only thing more destructive than a table is one that's in flames, and you can get the blaze started with ease.

Obviously, the title features tons of ways to dish out pain. However, it tries very hard to make it extremely easy to do whatever you want to your opponent. Most of the major actions are done by pressing one of two buttons. Regular strikes are easy enough for your cat to perform, and the more traditional moves come after a successful lock-up. Between many actions, the receiving character will flash. At that point, you can counter the move being attempted. It's possible to dash away from objects thrown your way, but your character gets tired quickly. Guess he shouldn't have smoked that pack of unfiltered before the match, huh?

The list of wrestlers is pretty extensive. Real pros include ECW's Sabu and Mad Man Pondo - a guy famous for stapling dollar bills to himself before, during, and after matches (no lie). They're joined by many lovely ladies, including the DVD series' Tylene Buck. Then there are those rabid Juggalos, headed by ICP. A recently announced create-a-wrestler mode is a welcome addition, and is something Def Jam was lacking.

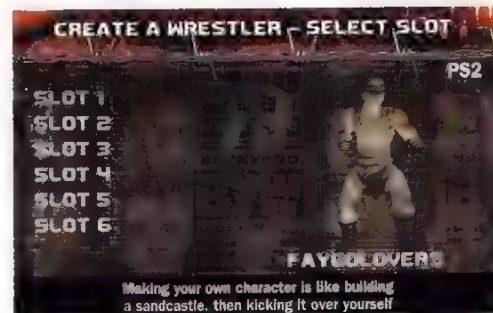
Backyard Wrestling also has plenty of blood for people who miss seeing crimson masks in video games. It's still too early to tell if the gameplay will be as good as the brutality, but we can already see a lot of you sickos out there having a good time with this game.



Look! An actual wrestling move!



Violent J's all fired up



Making your own character is like building a sandcastle, then kicking it over yourself

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** EIDOS INTERACTIVE ■ **DEVELOPER** PARADOX ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9 (PS2), SEPTEMBER 22 (XBOX)



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

We'll be frank – we were a little concerned when we heard that the venerable Need for Speed series was taking what looked like pretty obvious inspiration from Rockstar's Midnight Club series and entering the world of late-night, import car racing. However, if there is one thing that EA knows how to do, it's taking a popular formula and doing it bigger and better than any other company can.

After seeing a very impressive demo of the game at E3, our concerns melted away. This game's amazing graphics, tight control, and host of upgradable cars assuaged any doubts we may have had. Using techniques gleaned from Hollywood movies, NFS Underground conveys a sense of speed unlike any racing title we've seen. As you approach maximum velocity, the camera begins to shake, passing

lights begin to blur, and your view suddenly takes on the effect of a jet flying through heavy turbulence [see picture above]. It's hard to describe, but trust us when we say that it's extremely cool and should not be missed.

Although NFS Underground won't have Midnight Club II's awesome open city environments, it will trump the competition in one important area: customization. Each of the 20 licensed vehicles (which include makes like Honda, Toyota, Nissan, Ford, Mazda, and Volkswagen) can be altered with additions like wide-body kits, rims, engine parts, and various visual alterations. Real after-market manufacturers OZ rims and Kenwood stereos have already been confirmed, and many more are promised.



The lighting system is highly advanced, as is the wicked enemy AI.

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE FOR PS2 & PC ONLY) ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
 ■ **DEVELOPER** EA BLACK BOX ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

PREVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

PITFALL HARRY

PATHWAYS TO ADVENTURE!

Pitfall Harry and adventure go together like spring break and STDs, so it's no wonder that Activision is giving this legendary franchise one more three-dimensional update. However, unlike Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure or Pitfall 3D, this title forgoes the Indiana Jones look for a cartoonish, platformer façade that should lend some much-needed comedic punch to this old-school classic.

Featuring advanced physics and a dual-analog control scheme inspired by Ape Escape, Pitfall Harry seeks to strike a fine balance between the straight-up arcade action of the past and the epic exploration of present platformers. So far, it looks pretty impressive – especially the physics engine, which uses the popular Havoc tools, allowing for blocks that bob in water and vines that swing with uncanny realism (and we've swung on many a vine in our day, so we know).

In addition to his fists and feet, Harry has a few gadgets to help him in smiting angry natives and scorpions; including an innertube that functions as a "bobbin" style raft, a slingshot, stink bombs, and a torch. Many of these are used in the minigame modes, most of which take inspiration from classic games like Hogan's Alley.



Pitfall Harry likes to karate kick endangered species! What a meanie! Somebody alert Greenpeace!

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** EDGE OF REALITY
 ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER

PREVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE

POTTER YEAR ONE: REDUX

Hmmm. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone? Didn't that come out a few years ago, perhaps to coincide with the movie's release? Indeed, those with a strong memory will recall that Harry's first-year misadventures appeared on Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, PSone, and PC back in 2001.

EA now sees fit to re-launch the title on the current batch of next-gen consoles (PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube) this November. Warthog, the UK-based development team who recently delivered Mace Griffin and had previously translated Harry's hijinks in The Chamber of Secrets (released in 2002), is heading up development of this remake, and promises suitably updated graphics and controls (the first suffered from a no-jump-button-required control scheme and bland textures). In addition, they are ridding the title of any load time, which was a big issue in the earlier release; and adding new spells, creatures, locations, and an improved ending. Hopefully, Warthog will be able to fix the problems of yore before launch.



Obviously, the troll was an important part of the book and first games

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
 ■ **DEVELOPER** WARTHOG/ARGONAUT
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

GOBLIN COMMANDER

GOBLIN IT UP

Okay, so you've already heard about Ron and Chris Millar's surprise move from Blizzard (where they spearheaded the StarCraft series) to Jaleco. You've also probably heard about their upcoming console action/strategy game, Goblin Commander. But, the question remains: How is this highly touted title going to provide both the ease of play that console gamers demand and the depth that strategy freaks lust after?

Well, the primary way that the creators are dealing with this problem is by crafting a game that has a much smaller scale than an enormous PC RTS title like Warcraft. Basically, you'll have up to three clan armies under your command, each made up of 10 members. Along with the usual mix of

warriors and support soldiers, each grouping has its own unique Titan – a large monster that can only be directly controlled by the player. As you rally your forces, directing them to waypoints through a simple point-and-click system that assigns a face button to each of your three clans, you can then jump in and become a Titan, crashing through a fortress wall or launching rocks off a giant catapult attached to your back. Other members of your clan can also be controlled at critical junctures. It's certainly a different feel from the usual strategy game, and one that seems to go a long way towards reconciling the demands of both strategy and action fans' tastes.

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY (ONLINE TBA) ■ **PUBLISHER** JALECO ■ **DEVELOPER** JALECO ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER (PS2), WINTER (XBOX, GAMECUBE)



At times, you'll take direct control of your Titan and do some serious damage

The battles can get a little bloody

Where's Smoky the Bear when you need him?

The models are very detailed for a console strategy game



PC

HALO

MASTER CHIEF ENTERS THE BIG LEAGUES

Halo is the best console FPS ever – period, amen. However, there are still some hardcore PC fans who remain unconvinced that Bungie's baby is capable of hanging with the cream of the keyboard-and-mouse crop. Needless to say, Gearbox Software (who have been charged with bringing the game to PC) are feeling the pressure.

"We're pretty concerned about doing a good job – the last thing we'd want to do is disappoint anyone," comments Gearbox president Randy Pitchford. "We've had this kind of pressure before, having worked with the Half-Life and Tony Hawk's Pro Skater franchises, but Halo seems to bring a whole new gravity to it."

To make sure that the port lives up to the Halo legacy, Gearbox and Bungie have been working hand-in-hand, improving parts of the original engine, while making sure the game is "scaleable" for those of us that don't drop four grand on a new computer every year-and-a-half. As far as the single player game goes, don't expect any changes ("Halo is an award-winning narrative – we're not so cocky or egotistical

to think that muddling with it will improve anything," claims Pitchford), but new online multiplayer features should blow us away. This component of the game has a ton of added material: including new maps and easy-to-use modding tools. Also, you'll be able to go to battle with a host of wicked weapons and vehicles, including a new Warthog equipped with triple rocket launcher (sweet!), Banshees, the Fuel Rod Gun (an advanced type of plasma mortar), and the tantalizing flamethrower.

Of course, the Halo PC phenomenon won't really start cooking until the modders get their hands on it. Randy Pitchford, for one, can't wait. "I'd love it if some folks invented new weapons or vehicles that really promote team play. I'd like to see something along the lines of a capital ship being driven by one guy while other guys are in gunners' turrets or landing pods waiting to jump off at the enemy base. Team wars on Halo really excite me – I want the Halo equivalent to the Normandy invasion." So do we, Randy. So do we.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** GEARBOX SOFTWARE/BUNGIE ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER



Halo 2 won't be out this year, but the PC port of the original will kick off online multiplayer madness this fall

PREVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

ROBIN HOOD: DEFENDER OF THE CROWN

ROBIN AND HIS FIVE HOODS

Before Robin Hood ever

became tainted by green tights, your local renaissance fair, or Kevin Costner (with Brian Adams in tow); developer Cinemaware was plying its medieval strategy craft quite well. The company has accumulated a pretty good fan base for its Defender of the Crown series through the years. The newest installment revolves around Robin Hood, but loses none of its traditional turn-based trappings. Instead, it tries to augment them with cutscenes and more hands-on events. Instead of that steal from the rich and give to poor hokey (communist!), Robin's mission is to unite the kingdom against Prince John and restore the throne of King Richard. This is a perfect setup for Cinemaware's finely tuned strategy, complete with managing your forces and executing battlefield tactics. However, there is much more to this game. Like the classic Defender of the Crown games which graced nearly every system from the Commodore 64 to the Philips CD-i, this new incarnation features five types of "Action Sequences." Sword fights, jousting, sieges, archery ambushes, and army battles will put you on the spot. Losing none of its charm, jousting is once again presented from the knight's point of view in first-person. Since you control Robin Hood, you will be called upon to pick off enemies with your bow from the treetops of Sherwood Forest.



Manly warriors? Looks to us like a couple of "Shakespeare in the park" thespians camping it up

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE
 ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CINEMWARE
 ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30

PREVIEWS



GAMECUBE

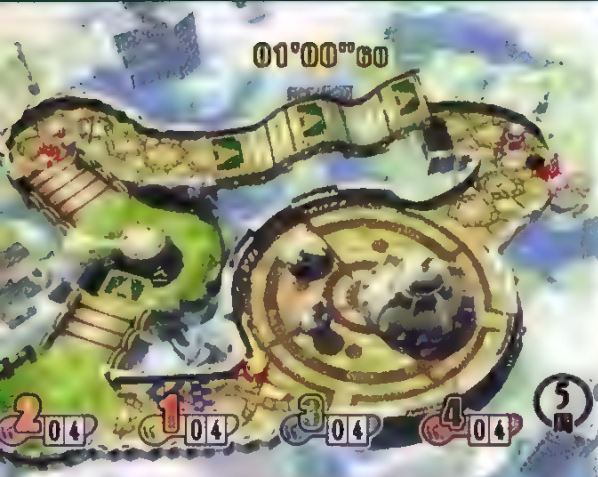
KIRBY'S AIR RIDE

FROM 64-BIT TO GAMECUBE

At first glimpse, Kirby's Air Ride looks like a Mario Kart knock-off, but it's quite a bit different. Vehicles are comprised of stars, motorcycle wheels, jet birds, something that resembles a washing machine, and other unlockable craft. Controls are basic, with the A button controlling the breaks, attacks, and boost – there's no gas button.

Since Kirby is in a hovering vehicle, he can float off jumps, ride rails, and more. Power-ups seem to be taken right out of Super Smash Bros. Melee; and Kirby can inhale abilities like spikes, fire, and even become Link and knock people around with a sword. There are also helpful abilities like transforming into a bird or a tire, which can help you cross the finish line quicker.

Kirby's Air Ride will also be the first GameCube title to take advantage of LAN connectivity, and up to four systems can be networked together for some multiplayer madness. Even with its one-button simplicity and wacky track layouts and vehicles; the gameplay is fast, fun, and addictive. Another kiddie game on GameCube? Be careful, you may be swiping your little brother's copy once you get hooked!



Kirby + GameCube + Super Off-Road = Good times!

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4 PLAYER ACTION/RACING (UP TO 8 PLAYER VIA LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** HAL LABORATORIES ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 13



PC

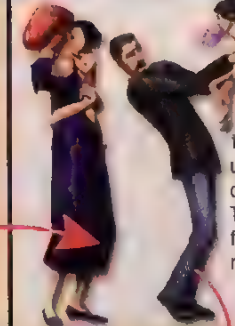
THE SIMS 2

THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

There is a cornucopia of new features in The Sims 2 – multi-level dwellings, in-depth character creation with the ability to modify facial features, and an exponentially increased number of Sim reactions – but the biggest innovation in this sequel must be the character DNA. Will Wright and company are putting a lot of effort toward showing you how lifestyle affects appearance, traits, and happiness as you play through generations of family members. What you do as a teen could have an effect on your great grandchildren's attributes. How's that for pressure to eat your vegetables?



Going through the awkward teen years digitally can mean starting to date, expressing belligerence toward authority figures, or hosting a party that wasn't so much sanctioned by the parental units. A Life Score is given based on the decisions you make and the experiences you have (first step, first kiss, etc.) through the entire game.



You've married, journeyed further down your chosen career path, spruced up the house, and are probably starting to pop out a kid or two. Now you've got to clean up spittle, pick up toys, and change diapers. Romance? That's what your 20s were for! Now go out and get that minivan, you soccer mom!

We're all going to get old and die – and now the Sims will, too. These golden years are when you get to spoil the grandchildren and harass their parents. Keep doing what you're doing – because in short order, all that's going to be left of your Sim is an urn on the fireplace mantle. No, seriously. We've seen the urns and they're lovely.



At this stage, your Sim will probably start showing visible signs of how they've lived their life. Characters that laze on the couch can grow a cute little paunch; but those exercising, health-conscious Sims will sport a rock-hard six-pack. Now you can start talking about the stock market and fantasizing about that gated retirement community in Florida.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** MAXIS ■ **RELEASE** SPRING 2004

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SOUL CALIBUR II



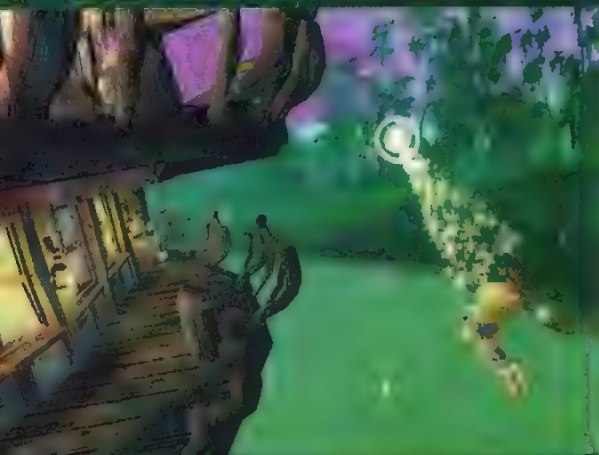
REFLECTIONS OF TRADITION. Exclusively on the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, Tekken legend Heihachi jumps into the Soulcalibur II arena. The battle will be hard fought with old Soulcalibur favorites and new masters ready to battle anyone with the guts. And the fighting continues with over 10 modes of play, including the new Weapon Master Mode, giving you the chance to unlock hundreds of weapons, costumes, arenas and hidden characters.



Violence
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation 2

PREVIEWS



XBOX

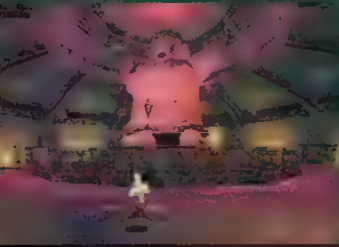
VOODOO VINCE

NO PACIFIST MASOCHIST

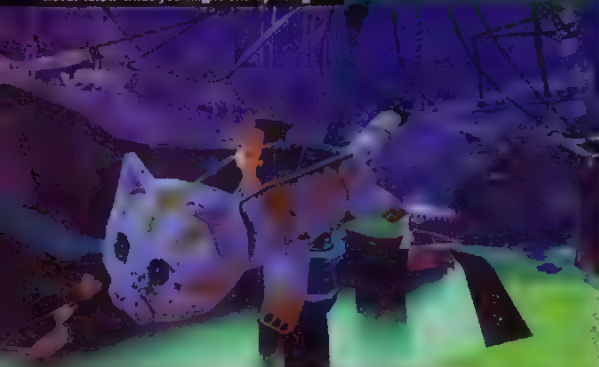
The concept is deceptively simple. In a notebook, Voodoo Vince's creative director Clayton Kautzler has the sentence, "A game where getting hurt = good" scrawled next to a sketch of the lead character Vince. But from these humble beginnings has burgeoned a world where the protagonist has anvils drop on him, jumps into vats of acid, gets impaled by pitchforks, and is chewed up by a giant blender.

After Madam Charmaine's "third-best voodoo doll" accidentally comes to life, he is thrust into a very obvious adventure. Developer Beep Industries has used the Xbox to imbue its 40 levels with some rich textures and alluring designs. The game's areas are large, varied, and offer much to collect. The flow of enemies and puzzles, however, try to keep Vince from being a straightforward action/platformer. This is where the fun comes in. Being a voodoo doll, obviously the best way to hurt your foe is to set yourself on fire or turn an alien ray gun on yourself so they can inflict pain on the enemies around you. This comes in handy during some of the game's puzzle sequences.

One ingenious level called for Vince to send two model trains on a collision course with him in the middle—in order to defeat a boss. Another involves a giant sausage maker and a collection of small, cute animals. Get in line, boys and girls!



Voodoo Vince has many minigames, so you never know what you might end up doing



This is what happens when you eat the spiked Meow Mix

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
 ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** BEEP INDUSTRIES
 ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23



PC

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

WERE YOU IN THE S#!%?

What more can game companies do with WW II? It's yesterday's news, man! The latest Battlefield 1942 expansion (reviewed on page 123) has jetpacks, for cry Pete! Thus, EA and Digital Illusions are moving on up, to the Eastern Hemisphere side. 'Nam has been a motion picture darling (for lack of a better term) for years now, so it's time video games adopt the grizzly jungle battles as their own.

Battlefield 1942 blended military realism with fast-paced, online action. Vietnam really kicks things up a notch. First off is a new graphics engine, which is admittedly quite necessary, as 1942 isn't the best-looking FPS out there. Now you'll be able to see the stitching on a soldier's jacket (hopefully the soldier is dead when you're looking that intently at him, or you're in trouble). You'll see normal mapping, bump mapping, and maybe even some experimental rash mapping (poison ivy sticks).

The new location requires a much more detailed landscape. Where 1942 had lots of generic land, expect Vietnam to be densely covered with vegetation. This also brings about a new gameplay dynamic, as you can go prone in some shrubbery and essentially vanish from view. Enemies can still sniff you out by scrolling the cursor over your position, but hopefully by then you'll have already squeezed the trigger and dropped them.

Battlefield is striving to capture the essence of Vietnam. This means you'll get a whole new set of vehicles and weaponry. We're talking napalm, tank-transporting helicopters, and some powerful jets. We're really looking forward to this game. After all, the man in the black pajamas is a worthy adversary. We have no doubt that there are some emotions and tension in Battlefield Vietnam that could only be portrayed through a game—not a movie.



"You must answer me these questions three, 'ere the other side ye see."



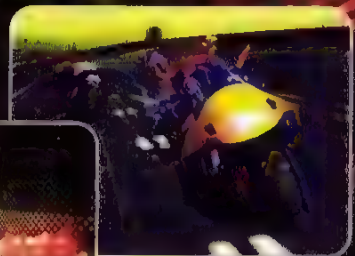
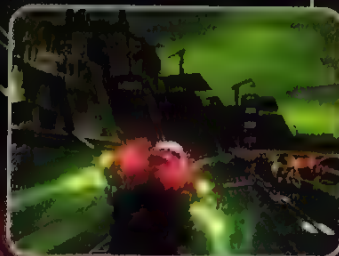
"Woo, hoo... winchy woman. See how high she fie-lee-les!"

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TBA) ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS
 ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 2004

XGRA

EXTREME G⁺ RACING ASSOCIATION

In 2025 life on the fast track is a cutthroat business. On 14 incredibly challenging tracks with variable weather systems and startling environments, the XGRA (Extreme Gravity Racing Association) pits 8 unique teams of the world's fastest, gutsiest daredevils against each other in a high-octane bloodsport. Destroy everything from gas pipes and bridges to opponents—even unfortunate spectators!—and rule the XGRA, where the winners make a name for themselves and the losers make a mess.



Mild Language
Mild Violence



PlayStation 2



Acclaim
acclaim.com/games/xgra

PHOTOPHILE

XBOX

DINOSAUR HUNTING: THE LOST WORLD



You may have thought that dinosaurs were long gone, but there still are a few of the pesky buggers roaming around, and it's your job to tag 'em and bag 'em. Japanese developer Scarabe (featuring ex-*Sega* talent) is handling this Xbox exclusive, and is basing it off of the Arthur Conan Doyle book *The Lost World*. For those of you who think that Michael Crichton and Steven Spielberg invented dinosaurs, don't worry, you'll get your fun. The *Lost World* will reportedly involve digging in feces à la *Jurassic Park* when the game releases in Japan next month. News on a U.S. release date is forthcoming.

GAMECUBE

PAC-MAN



You don't need one of those rectal thermometers to tell that you once again have Pac-Man fever. This time, however, it's a whole new virus altogether. Pac-Man for GameCube is the essence of connectivity and multiplayer fun. One person acts as the yellow dot-muncher, playing the game as usual on his/her Game Boy Advance. Only thing is that the ghosts aren't AI, they're controlled by the other three human players who watch via the TV screen. The one who catches Pac-Man gets to strap on the feedbag and yellow pantsuit themselves. This is a collaboration between Miyamoto and original Pac-Man creator Toru Iwatani, and it'll come out when they decide it's good and ready.

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

MONSTER 4X4: MASTERS OF METAL

Monster trucks: Is there anything they can't do? They're more obnoxious, loud, and gas-guzzling than all the SUVs, Hummers, and Harleys in the nation combined! Is there any wonder they're such a big hit with good ol' boys and girls everywhere? In Ubi Soft's new *Monster 4x4* (due out in November), these masters of metal get to take it to the streets—racing in places the law wouldn't possibly allow. All the famous trucks are here—Grave Digger, Spider-Man, and Predator are among them—but the drivers are funny fictional characters. You'll laugh; you'll cry; you'll knock over a hot dog stand. It's all here!



PLAYSTATION 2

ALTERED BEAST



Though it already rose from its grave to show up on Game Boy Advance a few months back, what fans of the classic Genesis/coin-op game want is a console update. That's what Sega and WOW are fitting to give them this fall. Now you have eight different monstrous forms you can take on, including a dragon, minotaur, and werewolf. These can all be customized for maximum effectiveness over the game's six 3D stages. We like to call it the multiple personality disorder simulator, don't we? Yes, we do.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

THE SIMS BUSTIN' OUT



At Nintendo's E3 press conference, Mr. Will Wright talked about putting his beloved Sims on the GBA, but didn't have anything to show us. Now we know that The Sims Bustin' Out launches on the handheld at the same time as its console brethren and features an impressive activity list. Players create a Sim, satisfy their needs, improve the status of their abode, cruise around a handful of locations, and even adopt pets. In addition, items are no longer purchased through a catalog. To take advantage of GBA connectivity, daily auctions can be attended or hosted to purchase and sell items. Look for all versions in December.

GAMECUBE

GO! GO! HYPERGRIND!



Neversoft perfected the art of video skateboarding, but it didn't make it weird enough, damn it! Thankfully, Atlus is coming to the rescue with Go Go Hypergrind, a bizarre cel-shaded extreme sports title developed in partnership with Spumco, the animation company behind *Ren & Stimpy* and *The Ripping Friends*. The game requires your character to perform dangerous routines while auditioning for a Hollywood action film. Along the way, you'll bust everyday tricks familiar to the skating world, as well as crazy stunts that result in your character being set on fire and flattened.

PHOTOPHILE

PC

DUNGEON SIEGE: LEGENDS OF ARANNA



This November, Microsoft Game Studios is letting players leave the Kingdom of Ehb for greener pastures on the island of Aranna. The expansion pack to the 2002 RPG features nine new areas, including a tropical jungle; additional spells; new special effects; and more creatures with the introduction of Clockwork Beasts and Doppelgangers, among others. Also, players can use the new half-giant as a playable character (in addition to the original farm boy or girl) and later change their character into a wolf, lava monster, or troll through spells.

PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

AXLE RAGE



Finally, a guy named Axle that doesn't spend all his time getting hair transplants, doing heroin, starting riots, and writing nasty emails to Slash! Unlike Axl Rose, Axle Rage is a member of the feared "No Dice" motorcycle gang, who terrorize the fictional metropolis of Nalldale. Basically, Axle and co. battle it out both on foot and bike all over the huge, open cityscape. Think Grand Theft Auto meets Road Rash. Although we don't have any information regarding a publisher or release date, Akella, who did *Sea Dogs* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, is developing it.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING



The only thing getting hotter than Peter Jackson is EA's Lord of the Rings series of brawlers. In the fold now is a much-needed co-op multiplayer mode. Even with the franchise's sword-swinging ways, it does contain some subtleties. At a recent event, we were able to get a good hands-on with the title, and are happy to spill the beans on one of the game's finer points - hobbits. Despite his bravado, Samwise obviously can't take on a whole army. What he can do, however, is use the ring's invisibility to pick his fights, perform stealth kills, and trip a number of environmental objects. Return of the King hits before the movie does on November 3, so if you're worried about spoilers, maybe you should read the book first!

ARCADE

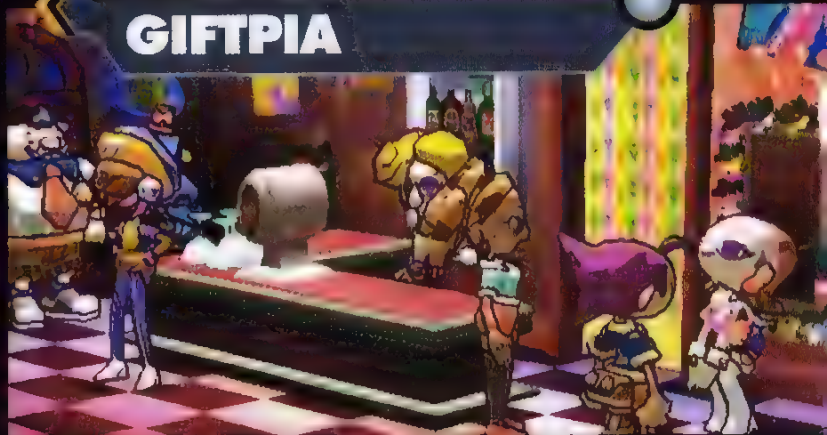
OUTRUN 2



Sega's Outrun hit arcades in 1986, which means that this sequel is the hands-down winner of the "Long Time Coming" award. Take all the things you like about the original (a cute passenger, slow traffic, and sweet wipeouts), and add in current racing staples (a variety of vehicles, great graphics, and kickin' sounds), and you've got all the makings of a surefire arcade hit. It's just that this time, you'll be spending dollars instead of quarters. Oh well, that's inflation. We just hope you can pull over and ditch your girlfriend if she gets too mouthy on your road trip.

GAMECUBE

GIFTPIA



In this nonviolent RPG, Pockle wants to be an adult. It's a lot more difficult than just growing a bad teenage moustache, however; and when he oversleeps and misses his coming-of-age ceremony, his future is in serious doubt. You've got to aid Pockle in redeeming himself by helping the other inhabitants on your island and trying to earn enough cash to hold another ceremony. Is this the next generation of Animal Crossing? Let's just hope Nintendo gives a release date and more info soon.

PC

COMMAND & CONQUER GENERALS: ZERO HOUR



EA Games is launching the first expansion pack for their highly successful Command & Conquer Generals series. Zero Hour features 15 new single-player missions; an all-new Generals Challenge mode with 12 adversaries to demolish; and a truly impressive number of new technologies, weapons, and vehicles. In addition, you can head up one of three unique armies (the high-tech U.S. forces, the Chinese war machine, and the more guerilla-orientated GLA). Command & Conquer Generals is required to run Zero Hour, which is due out this fall.

PC

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



We want to clear up a few misconceptions on this highly anticipated title. First, everything that was in Unreal Tournament 2003 will be included in this package – not to mention patches and other updates. It will also work with UT 2003's servers. For those of you who already got in on the 2003 action, a rebate program is being developed by Atari and Epic to give a little back to UT completists. We're excited to check out Onslaught mode, which is massive and has a focus on vehicles. The more we learn, the more we're anxious for the November release.

PLAYSTATION 2

AIRFORCE DELTA STRIKE



This title marks the third installment in Konami's Airforce Delta series, which began on the Dreamcast, moved to the Xbox for the sequel, and now finds its home on the PlayStation 2. With over 60 stages, 100 aircraft, and 20 different pilots each featuring individual storylines, it sounds like a monster of a game. Unfortunately, we'll have to wait until December to see if it really is as cool as ice...as in as cool as Iceman. You know...that guy from *Top Gun*. No, it's not Tom Cruise. He played Maverick. Think more along the lines of *Real Genius*. Oh for Christmas' sake, peep! It's the dude with the lips! Think *Batman*!

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

WHIPLASH



We at Game Informer know all about being chained to our desks during deadline, but Whiplash has two animals chained to each other. Spanx is playable, and Redmond is reluctantly along for the ride in this quirky, original action game by Crystal Dynamics and Eidos. Use your "friend" as a grappling hook, toilet clogger, or flaming projectile as you make a break to escape a product testing facility. Now, do you see why we don't use shampoo that was tested on animals? Or any shampoo at all, for that matter? This creative couple will be stuck in your PS2 and Xbox this fall.

PHOTOPHILE

PC

THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC



EA has announced that Makin' Magic will be the final expansion pack for the original Sims game. In this installment, your virtual characters have caught the Harry Potter bug. They can cast spells, concoct charms, and traverse to Magic Town. One flick of the wand can take care of the chores, improve your love life, and create pandemonium for your neighbors. The game will feature 150 additional items, new cooking abilities, and tons of magic-filled animations. An exact release date hasn't been set as of yet, but EA hopes to have it out shortly.

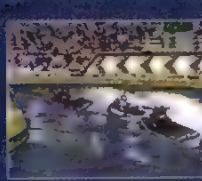
PC

CONTRACT J.A.C.K.

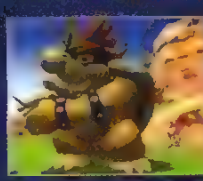


The J.A.C.K. is an acronym for Just Another Contract Killer. The setting is the space between No One Lives Forever 1 and 2 – a pair of very successful and critically acclaimed first-person shooters. The main character is NOT Kate Archer, but rather some dude named John Jack. You've been hired by HARM, and since you'll do anything for a buck (yes, even that), you're going to have to go on some underhanded and evil missions. We're confident Monolith won't embrace this dark side too much by refusing to include some of the trademark humor that made the NOLF games so good. We love to laugh. And eat ice cream. The game releases in November.

REVIEWS



Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild pg. 104



Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour pg. 110



ANDY

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Animal (The Muppet), Sleep, Weekends Spent In Front Of The Computer Eating Junk Food **Dislikes:** Ebay Bidders Who Have More Money Than Smarts (Unless They Are Bidding On My Garbage), People Who Drive 50 In A 55 **Current Favorite Games:** Bombastic, Soul Calibur II, PlanetSide, Final Fantasy Tactics Advance, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic

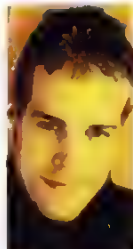
Now retired from the rock scene, Andy spends endless hours locked in his home office; enjoying the benefits of high definition television and surround sound far away from those scary things he has often heard referred to as people. A longtime fan of Metroid, Andy has been reviewing video games professionally 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:** 28 Days Later, Led Zeppelin's How The West Was Won 3 CD Live Set (Bonham is God!), Shoes, The Carnegie Deli In NYC **Dislikes:** Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle Of Life, Reiner Not Going To See Seabiscuit On Day One (Traitor!), GI's Editor Exodus **Current Favorite Games:** Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild, Alter Echo, Stuntman (GBA), Downhill Domination

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:** Taking Football Breaks (Great Stress Reliever), Mouse Hunting, Water, Dave Brockie Experience **Dislikes:** King Of The Hill, Karl Malone - A Laker, Uncle Kracker, Elderly Drivers (They Should Be Tested Annually), Jettas **Current Favorite Games:** Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild, Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness, Outlaw Volleyball, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Scrabble

Unlike most gaming jebrons, Justin knows there's life outside video vegetation. He's a former GWA 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.



LISA

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Puzzle, RPGs, Action/Platform, Horror **Interests:** The Watchmen, New Tattoos, Fancy Shoes, Squee, Alias Season One On DVD, Pirates Of The Caribbean (Johnny Depp Makes Me Happy In That Flick) **Dislikes:** Waiting For The Lord Of The Rings: Return Of The King, The Smell Of Tar **Current Favorite Games:** The Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Demikids, Outlaw Volleyball

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.



REINER

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** Samsung's 50" DLP HDTV (There Is A God!), Johnnie Cochran's Chewbacca Defense, Spoken Dialogue Becoming The Norm In Games, The Punisher Movie **Dislikes:** The Fact That Someone Hasn't Made A Colonostomy Bag For Gamers, Going Outside, Sleeping **Current Favorite Games:** Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Final Fantasy Tactics Advance, Magic Pengel: The Quest For Color, Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour

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 673 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 a playable character in two forthcoming releases.



KRISTIAN

Handle: The Video Viking **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, Sports, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Minnesota Vikings Football, Cities And Knights Of Catan, The 3rd Infantry Division, Pioneer Quest: A Year In The Real West **Dislikes:** Anchor People Who Feign Interest In Local Sports Teams, Apricots (You'll Never Be Peaches! Never!), Dead Grass, Chocolate Ice Cream **Current Favorite Games:** Freelancer, Super Mario World, Day Of Defeat, 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:** Noonday Underground, Sausage Races, Barry Sanders, The Petty Family, The Video Viking, 28 Days Later **Dislikes:** Crybabies Like Eric Crouch, NBC's NASCAR Coverage, Oven Mitts, Adhesives **Current Favorite Games:** Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Pzaak, ESPN NFL Football, Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour, Project Gotham Racing 2, Stuntman (GBA)

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 at as reward. With allegiance to none, he takes on every game with an equal eye.



JEREMY

Handle: The Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Adventure, Fighting, RPGs **Interests:** Working At Game Informer, San Francisco, Adult Swim, Final Destination 2 **Dislikes:** Sunburn, When Friends Move Back To Chile, When Big Summer Movies Suck **Current Favorite Games:** Resident Evil 0, Rise Of Nations, Typing Of The Dead, Return To Castile, Wolfenstein: Tides Of War

Obsessed with anything on a shiny silver disc, Jeremy fanatically collects video games, music, and movies. When not buying bigger media storage systems or filling his mind with useless trivia, Jeremy likes to write silly books, short stories, and comics that no one ever reads. Although he will never be able to stop himself from buying new games, Jeremy firmly believes the best system of all time was the Super Nintendo.

Our crack (or crackhead) 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 familiarity 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 soon 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.



Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.



Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.



Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.



Content suitable for persons ages 17 and older.



Content suitable only for adults.



Product is awaiting final rating.



XBOX
Alter Echo pg.114



PC
Battlefield 1942:
Secret Weapons
of WW II pg.123



HANDHELD
Jet Grind
Radio pg.125

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 (=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 Mano Party

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

cell shading - A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cells

CG - Computer Generated graphics

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

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

frame rate - 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

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

N64 - Nintendo 64

NES - Nintendo Entertainment System

new guy - Much-needed help, whipping boy

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 Grandus

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



FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE™

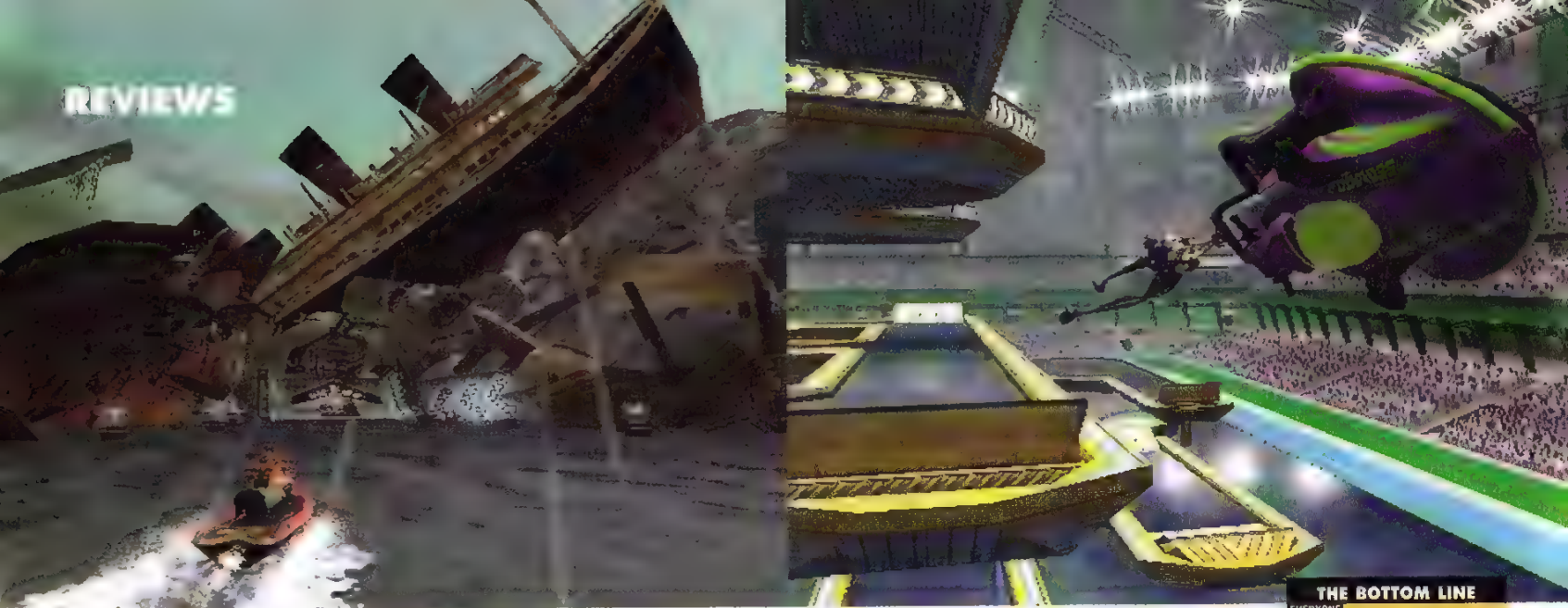
GAME OF THE MONTH FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE

It's been a long five years since the original Final Fantasy Tactics came out on PSone in 1998, but strategy gamers everywhere have finally gotten their wish with the release of Tactics Advance this month. Featuring 300 missions and more jobs, items, monsters, and spells than you can possibly imagine, it's easy to see why it won our Game Of The Month. pg. 124

PC GAME OF THE MONTH WARCRAFT: THE FROZEN THRONE

Blizzard's Warcraft series continues to impress with its latest expansion, The Frozen Throne. With a new race and deeper gameplay, the world of real-time strategy continues to bow down and pay homage to the undisputed king of the genre. So do we. pg. 122





"This is an incredibly ambitious project, yet everything it attempts exceeds all expectation."

PLAYSTATION 2

SPLASHDOWN: RIDES GONE WILD

H2 WHOA!

The first Splashdown did pretty well for itself, and rightly so. It used Rainbow Studios' physics savvy to craft a landmark waverunner game. Now under the THQ banner, Rainbow uses Rides Gone Wild to prove that it can accomplish even more with the concept – like add lots of compelling gameplay, creative levels, and a ton of unlockables. This is an incredibly ambitious project, yet everything it attempts exceeds all expectations.

The big-ticket items here are the eight adventure courses. These follow the formula of a regular old race, but it's what's going on around them that's really amazing. For example, you'll visit a dinosaur park where things aren't entirely kosher; race the canals of Venice while spies attack spies; and watch in awe as things go haywire in the Bermuda Triangle. Twists and turns occur every lap, and it's almost hard to concentrate on the competition at hand.

Equally fun is the indoor circuit. Multi-tiered pools are connected via a series of jumps, which give you plenty of chances to trick out, as well as fall to your doom. A handful of Freestyle courses make for even more pools and jumps, but this time all you do is pull off stunts – which are plentiful and cleverly executed, by the way. I'm also a fan of the technical time trials, which are just basic short tracks with no frills. The gameplay and graphics engines are deep

enough that it's fun just tooling around.

The water physics were what initially drew me to the first Splashdown. Defying logic, they're even better now. Colorful reflections dance across the surface. Waves are much larger, though most courses are best played with calm seas. There aren't many new aspects to the vehicle physics, but there doesn't need to be. Leaning back to hydroplane or hunching forward into turns becomes second nature. I do wish for more accurate interaction with the other riders, who just mindlessly collide with you.

Accomplishing everything in Rides Gone Wild is more than a weekend excursion. You'll likely pick one mode and stick with it for a while before peeking around at everything else – maybe buying a few experimental courses in the secret-unlocking Warehouse. No matter how you play, you're going to feel like your money was well spent.

Splashdown's a slow loader – which I'm sympathetic to, since it takes over two minutes to complete a lap in some courses. However, a "Next Race" option would've cut down on loading various pre-race screens. It takes some of the flow out of doing time trials. But, a little extra sitting around is a small price to pay for a high-quality title like Rides Gone Wild. It's one of the finest racing games on land, sea, or air. – JUSTIN

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE
E 9.25

- **Concept:** Take the best aquatic racer and load it with options until it's as full as a water balloon
- **Graphics:** Amazing water effects and environments with little slowdown. This makes the PS2 look like gold
- **Sound:** I'm not a big fan of the music, but at least there's no Smashmouth. The voiceovers are thoughtful and numerous
- **Playability:** Great physics and a very intuitive trick system
- **Entertainment:** As long as you don't get seasick, there's a whole lot of fun to be had with Splashdown
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

After E3, I was worried that Rainbow was planning to turn Splashdown away from its hardcore simulation roots into a gimmicky kart racer on water. Thankfully, this stellar sequel actually manages to improve on the original in every way. The new adventure-style courses are huge, brimming with detailed visuals and awe-inspiring scripted events that change the liquid landscape from lap to lap. From ducking under huge dinosaurs to zipping through the hallways of a flooded school, it's amazing how inventive these track designs are. That's not to say that those of us looking for demanding gameplay have been left out. The new branching trick system is much deeper; the new wave physics allow for large swells; and there is an equally long series of realistic indoor tracks to be conquered. I really can't praise this game enough, but only state that it is without a doubt one of the best racing games available on any platform.

MATT -- 9.25

■ STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING ■ PUBLISHER THQ ■ DEVELOPER RAINBOW STUDIOS ■ RELEASE AUGUST 4



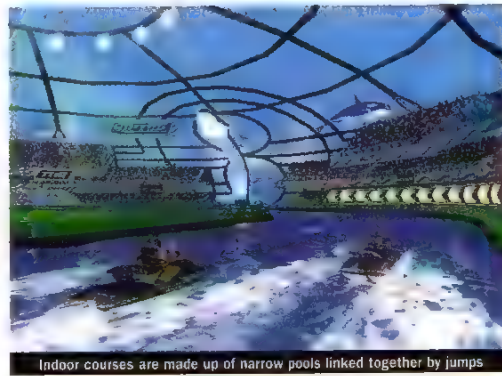
In the outdoor levels, shortcuts abound

Those dinosaurs have a secret you'll find out next lap

In Freestyle mode, it's all about doing tricks



The reflections on the water are breathtaking



Indoor courses are made up of narrow pools linked together by jumps



"It may be management freaks like myself who derive the most from this year's Madden."



PLAYSTATION 2

MADDEN NFL 2004

HOT ROUTES

The game of football is changing. While announcers like Madden himself may pay homage to guys like Brett Favre who are apparently "just out there to have fun," slinging the ball in the NFL these days couldn't be more complex. Whether it's players like Michael Vick breaking the mold for quarterbacks, players' salaries, or the politics of new stadiums; there's a lot that goes on beyond the three hours on a Sunday. Madden NFL 2004 is keeping up with the changes in the sport on and off the field.

True to life, players have gotten faster and more dangerous. Although offensive lineman's knockdown stats have finally been fixed, defensive tackles will scream around corners and linebackers will blitz more than ever. Your remedy is, of course, the Playmaker controls. I actually didn't use the scrambling commands that much, but they did work reasonably well. The most valuable addition here is the ability to change the direction of a run without switching out of your original formation. I used this countless times to avoid the blitz. Also very handy were the instant personnel changes in the huddle. Unfortunately, apart from assigning double teams, I didn't have much use for the defensive Playmaker controls. Online, on the other hand, is hard to ignore (especially when compared with last year's bare-bones approach) with its user tracking and voice chat.

Equally noteworthy is the positive visual effect the new animations have on the game. Players will finish their blocks 10 to 20 yards down field (while arm tackles and miscellaneous tripping is reduced in the inside running

game), and the action extends well beyond the whistle. Guys shove, plow out of bounds, and finish their tackles in ways that make last year's Madden look like a collection of stiff-jointed robots.

Of course, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Developer EA Tiburon has told me that it never uses "catch-up AI," but all I can tell you is if the computer is down and needs a score - look out. Similarly, your defensive backs are no better at catching interceptions, whether they are aimed at their hands or their face. I did notice, however, more over-the-shoulder catches and an increase in fumbles when you hit the QB while they are throwing the ball.

Building your franchise takes more skill than ever. For instance, you must manage your rosters more shrewdly, because not only do you not know your draft choices' overall ratings until AFTER you sign them, the CPU is smarter in the trades it accepts. Of course, the Owner's mode is a whole new can of beeswax that will keep you up nights. I got a rush when I noticed that my team's strong play and cheap ticket prices meant that I could see more fans in the stands. The amount of options at your disposal will not only open your eyes in terms of what it does for video game sports, but for how it introduces you to the complexity of the real game of football today - something which may distress those who don't like seeing words like relocation, signing bonus, and revenue stream in the pages of the sports section. Accordingly, however, it may be management freaks like myself who derive the most from this year's Madden. - KATO

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
 ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 12



THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE
E
 ESRB

9.25

- **Concept:**
The additions are very alluring, but old problems rear their head
- **Graphics:**
More detail has been wrung from the PS2, even if it still has that problem with "sparkles" due to brightness
- **Sound:**
AI Michaels has some good scripts, and you'll notice more jabbering before snaps
- **Playability:**
The Playmaker controls are about as responsive as you'd expect. Will you use them?
- **Entertainment:**
This year's additions definitely weigh more in favor of franchise buffs
- **Replay Value:**
High

SECOND OPINION

This year's Madden is a bold new step for video game sports. Through the inclusion of Owner's mode, you'll have the chance to renovate stadiums; hire coaches and staff; improve players in mini-camps; set concession and ticket prices; relocate to a new city; and even redesign uniforms. It's amazing how much material and customizable options are in this game. On the field, it's not quite as glamorous, but better than past efforts. The Playmaker allows you to change the direction of plays, call for blocks, tweak defensive formations, and direct receivers on the fly. Better yet, quarterbacks now run and throw with greater ease. Altogether, the gameplay is finally gelling together like I always hoped it would, but the biggest draw in this year's game is the depth that has been implemented into team management. Fantasy football fanatics needn't look further.

REINER - 9.25



"[ESPN] doesn't just tack on more, but instead gives gamers a new experience."

PLAYSTATION 2

ESPN NFL FOOTBALL

THE BEGINNING OF AN ERA

To your average person, the other non-Madden football games may be an anonymous blur, but developer Visual Concepts is doing just about everything it can this season to get your attention. Unlike previous years, however, this series isn't merely trying to keep up with Madden. Being able to play in a first-person perspective is a bold new direction that signals a distinct and welcome change in the endlessly repetitive annual cycle of sports gaming. While all the features you've come to love from this Sega Sports franchise are still intact, I'm glad for this new mode. It doesn't just tack on "more," but instead gives gamers a new experience – a lesson that the all sports titles should take a cue from.

Simply put, playing in the optional first-person mode is a revolution you must be a part of. You feel your heart race as you sit in the pocket desperately scanning the field, trying to unload the ball before Warren Sapp gets in your face. When you're on defense, you'll get a high from recognizing the offense's sweep play and blowing it up in the backfield. This is when the game makes you feel truly alive. This, people, is the battlefield we call football. Some may have a problem with it, but it makes you feel a part of football like never before. The sport is about more than stats (die, fantasy football!), and this mode gives you a great appreciation of what actually happens on the field. It also succeeds because it runs at a blazing speed and its feel conforms to what fans of the franchise have come to expect from the regular perspective in the past.

Will you want to play the regular old way? Yes. You can do both, as VC has implemented a toggle that lets you play both perspectives in your Franchise mode. You'll want to do this,

because first-person misses out on the excellent ESPN presentation features – and the halftime report, stat replays, and other visual touches that are a must-see. You could talk about TV-like realism simply due to this game's great animations (gang tackles are everywhere, and I love the guys diving over piles), but thanks to all the work done on the presentation, you actually think you're watching ESPN's Sunday Night Football. The amount of primetime pumped into this game makes Madden look like a VHS tape of your local high school team. This even extends to the Crib, which blows out sports unlockables to an all-new level, and had me contemplating a profession change to interior decorator.

Is it all style over substance? No, but I will say that apart from first-person mode, the gameplay changes aren't as drastic – heck, Franchise mode is basically the same. On the one hand, the charge system, hot routes, defensive coverages, and d-line special moves have all been redone for the better (meaning more sacks). However, ball velocity over the middle – while improved – still isn't as zippy as it needs to be, and one hold over from last year bothers me. The CPU doesn't throw long. Even on the hardest setting, the computer never chucked a pass against me longer than 12 yards. In fact, Michael Vick never took off running, either. So, if you play alone, it's going to be dink and dunk.

You can go tit-for-tat about who's got a better football franchise – Sega or EA – but through its sheer attention to repackaging and even reinventing video game football, Visual Concepts has come up with a game that cannot be ignored. Whatever you do, don't pass this one up. – KATO

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2



Replays are cool again!

"The kicker's third leg is this big!"

ESPN's presentation is unrivaled



First-Person defense takes discipline

You'll spend hours on your Crib



The passing game is largely the same...



...but the running game is as strong as ever

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE
E 9.25

- **Concept:** Massive strides have been made in certain areas, while some problems linger on
- **Graphics:** Even on the PS2, this game looks razor sharp. From the animat ons to the presentation, it's simply stunning
- **Sound:** Chris Berman's presence makes a huge difference, even if he's not in the booth
- **Playability:** First-person play will take getting used to, but it works really well
- **Entertainment:** Whether you'll play in first- or third-person, I suggest you buy this game
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Madden has become a deeper simulation, but it hasn't evolved to the degree that Sega's title has. ESPN NFL Football is jam-packed with new features, innovative ideas, and must-see elements. First-person football sounds like a nightmare, but Sega figured out a way to make it work. It can be a little disorienting at times, but it captures the realism of the sport better than any other game. ESPN will also please graphics snobs with its detailed out-of-game cinematics and smooth animations. Even collectors of sports paraphernalia will get something out of this release. With the newly implemented Crib mode, you can unlock a wide variety of things ranging from helmets and bobbleheads to trophies and even team-textured sofas. The play is still a little spotty, especially in the passing game, but it's still home to the best running attack. When it comes to sheer entertainment, Sega's game definitely delivers the most.

REINER - 9.25



PLAYSTATION 2

NFL BLITZ PRO

THE LAUDABLE AUDIBLE

Traditionally, the Blitz series has all the sophistication of Bill Romanowski with onion breath. So why try to complicate the franchise's simple formula now? Because it works better this way. Eleven-on-eleven football is exactly where Blitz Pro needs to be.

For those loyalists, don't fear the addition of hot routes, go-to-guys, and the like. Frankly, by giving players more realistic options, the offensive firepower only increases. While the running game takes getting used to, you'll find the stiff arms and power charges are pretty well balanced. Defenses hold their own, however, as they dispense all the hits you've come to expect from Midway. There's even some polish added to the running animations and movements of peripheral players like offensive lineman. I also appreciate the game's shaping of franchise and online to its own likeness, instead of just following the sim titles.

If there's something that holds this title back, it's not its newfound premise. More refinement is needed on the game in general, and Blitz Pro can be limiting. However, this is exactly the kind of jump I've been waiting for Midway to make for years. —**KATO**

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY SPORTS
 ■ **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 29



PLAYSTATION 2

HUNTER: THE RECKONING-WAYWARD

SAVE THE LIVING-IMPAIRED!

So, it's time to kill a load of zombies again, huh? Is it Tuesday already? Hunter dispatches the undead in button-mashing fashion. Each playable character has melee and ranged attacks, as well as a magical "edge."

Enemies pop up out of nowhere, sometimes causing damage before you can even see them. No matter, you'll simply mince them up like the Ultimate Chopper (minus the stylish, colored handle). Well, maybe not that simply. You see, it's overly difficult to stop mid-combo. Your hero continues swinging long after a zombie has either perished or dodged your attack. Using the right analog for aiming doesn't help much. Once you come up against tougher enemies, like the pistol-packing undead, this control faux pas will take its toll. Instead of being a mad dash to the goal, most levels make you find things. You may backtrack for what seems like an eternity, looking for the last spirit to set free or disc to uncover. The camera often becomes a liability, especially in areas where you can't zoom out. Character advancement is bare-bones, which hurts replay. I'll stick to LOTR: The Two Towers or Dark Alliance, thanks. —**JUSTIN**

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL/INTERPLAY
 ■ **DEVELOPER** HIGH VOLTAGE ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 19

SECOND OPINION

I wasn't as taken with the original Hunter as a lot of people were, and this sequel only reconfirms my belief that the praise heaped on this series is due more to the sorry state of the hack n' slash genre than the merits of the games themselves. Good, but not good enough.

MATT — 6.75

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE
E **6.25**

- **Concept:** Take one part Gauntlet, one part Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance, blend, and try to choke it down
- **Graphics:** A surprising amount of zombie types, but little else of interest
- **Sound:** Music picks up when you're surrounded. The voiceovers work
- **Playability:** Tap the attack button a few times, and watch your character spin out of control
- **Entertainment:** Mindless violence, and no match for more advanced action games on PS2
- **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

REVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2

ALTER ECHO

AWESOME COMBO

With an expansive combo system and manic hack n' slash gameplay, Alter Echo can best be described as Tony Hawk meets Kingdom Hearts. This may sound like a foul crossbreed, but it's actually a winning combination that feeds off of gamers' timing, reflexes, and skills. For a combat-intensive title, it actually has a lot of variety. At any given time, players can morph between three different combat forms that deliver melee, stealth, and firearm action.

Of course, the game rewards players for performing well with points that can be used to purchase new moves, special attacks, abilities, and combo sequences. Developer Outrage Games can also be commended for trying something different with the visual presentation. Almost every texture in the game is soaked in bright neon colors to deliver a stylistic sci-fi setting.

Unfortunately, where Alter Echo excels in graphics and gameplay, it comes up short in plot and personality. The story sequences, which cannot be skipped, are the snoozefest of the century. To add to the pain, the main character is as dumb as bricks and has a great shot of winning the Most Annoying Video Game Character of the Year award. It's a fun game to play, but it's hard to get into it when you're the world's biggest nerd. —**REINER**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ
 ■ **DEVELOPER** OUTRAGE GAMES ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 28

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN
T **8**

- **Concept:** A respectable action game that allows players to switch between three forms on the fly to concoct insane combo strings
- **Graphics:** The pastel color palette is colorful, but they're also barren of detail. The animation system seamlessly switches between melee and firearm action.
- **Sound:** Nails on a cracked floor. One thousand.
- **Playability:** The combat engine is shockingly deep and intuitive. The camera bugs, though.
- **Entertainment:** Where it lacks in personality, it makes up for in gameplay.
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

The developers were trying to form a bond between character and gamer, and they came very close. Morphing and comboing is really cool, and the time-stop attacks are even better. The look is also unique. Where they went wrong is making enemies too tough, too soon. The real fun is in destroying tons of baddies in a row, and the AI doesn't facilitate this like it should. Still worth a look.

JUSTIN — 7.5

REVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: CHAOS BLEEDS

WILLOW IS HOT

If you're a fan of the original Buffy game—which non-Xbox owners probably didn't play. While Chaos Bleeds has both a new publisher and developer, it still radiates many of the shining points of the collaboration of EA and the Collective.

My main complaint with the first Buffy was its insane level of difficulty. Chaos Bleeds is much more manageable. That's not to say it's a walk in the park—more like a cautious stroll through the cemetery. Foes are tough but beatable. Another variance is the shying away from button-mashing. The game is equal parts puzzle and beat 'em up. This prevents wear and tear on your thumbs, but some of the searching is tedious. If I had my druthers, it would be 70 percent fighting and 30 percent puzzle.

As in *Willow: The Two Towers*, Buffy attempts to give fans of the license all they can ask for. The writing is trademark Slayer, and everyone gets in on the action. Extras abound, and they may even get you to replay that level you spent an hour on, just to unlock another interview.

I wish the camera and control would've received more refinement, but they won't make you die too often. All in all, Chaos Bleeds caters to a larger audience, while at the same time doing more for hardcore Buffy fans. It definitely exceeds my expectations. — JUSTIN

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T 8.25

- Concept:** Add a little puzzle solving to balance out the slaying.
- Graphics:** Sweet models and environments, but the lighting is kind of lame.
- Sound:** Great voiceovers. Who needs Sarah Michelle Gellar anyway? Her voice doubles as spot on.
- Playability:** A bug or two, but solid overall. The combat stays fresh hour after hour.
- Entertainment:** There are many reasons to play through Chaos Bleeds extras, the TV-quality storyline, and playing as nearly the entire cast.
- Replay Value:** Moderately High.

SECOND OPINION

Buffy's console brawlers have always been surprisingly satisfying. You can play as a handful of colorful Buffy alumni, glee at the very Buffy-like dialogue, and take advantage of the many unlockable extras like interviews and multiplayer fighting modes. Nice work, Buffster—your game is officially deemed fun.

LISA - 8.25



PLAYSTATION 2

DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS

DON'T DIS THIS GAME!

The current generation of consoles has yet to see a truly outstanding strategy/RPG—until now. Atlus, the company behind the Tactics Ogre and Ogre Battle series, is a master of the genre. Disgaea brings about more than enough twists and turns to make it perhaps the company's best effort.

Prince Laharl is the main character, but he's far from a hero. Rather, he's a royal demon with a bad attitude. It's refreshing to play a game like this from the bad guy's perspective, and the dialogue that accompanies the plot is both well written and well voiced. You create allies to fight with him, as well as pick up ragamuffins along the way.

There are several battlefields in Disgaea. You've got your regular, plot-driven fights. Then there are randomly-generated 10-level dungeons that exist in every one of the game's items; completing them levels-up said item. Single-person fights increase your standing with the Dark Assembly—a governing body that you need to appease to get things like new items or more competent drones. In combat, the innovations keep coming. These include being able to throw both enemies and allies; multicolored, status-affecting platforms; and some crazy double-, triple-, or even quadruple-team attacks.

The only things I can take points off for are underwhelming graphics (par for the genre), and a camera that sometimes makes certain squares on the field all but impossible to see. Disgaea has amazing attention to detail, thrilling battles, and a great story to boot. Snatch it up quick before it disappears like all other Atlus classics before it. — JUSTIN



EVERYONE E 8.75

- Concept:** Bring the strategy/RPG genre up to the current console generation.
- Graphics:** They won't win any awards, but the game's visuals do have their moments. Smooth animation.
- Sound:** Quirky music and hilarious voiceovers keep me from putting on a CD.
- Playability:** Plenty of new innovations, and the tutorial is efficient and painless.
- Entertainment:** This is one of the best strategy/RPGs to come down the pipe in a long time. It'll keep you engaged for months.
- Replay Value:** High.

SECOND OPINION

I fear that, despite our pleas, Disgaea may be relegated to the abyss of cult fandom faster than it deserves. This title doesn't necessarily revolutionize the world of video games, but it subtly and expertly perfects a few points—moving the entire genre a little closer to nirvana. The mini-dungeon within each item is one example that increases the replay, strategy, and variety of this title. In addition, cutscenes are extremely funny and the voice work is definitely worth turning up the volume for. If anything keeps this game a bit shy of perfection, it's the few complications that arise from the game's lower-quality graphics. The cutscenes would have benefited from some animation and the battlefields can be tricky to fully analyze. But I assure you that Disgaea is definitely a worthy purchase for any gamer.

LISA - 8.25

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2 PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** EUROCOM ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 4

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** ATLUS ■ **DEVELOPER** NIPPON ICHI ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS VIII

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER STRATEGY
 ■ **PUBLISHER** KOEI
 ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 12



Koei keeps plowing along with this series. However, fans will notice a few key differences, the most important being the addition of multiplayer. This series is continually being refined, with battles being larger in scale and relationships being more important than ever. The sheer depth of your duties can leave you swimming. This fact will please fans, who will only become more involved in the minutiae of command, while the ritual monotony and sometimes less than user-friendly menu system don't help pique others' interest. — **KATO**

E 7

MAGIC PENGEL: THE QUEST FOR COLOR

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/ROLE-PLAYING
 ■ **PUBLISHER** AGETEC
 ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24



This is one of those quirky titles that you'll be glad you found. The easy comparison here is Pokémon Stadium, with a little twist. You're a Doodler — a human capable of making doodles (Pokémon-like creatures) that can be used in battle at the arena. The main draw (Ha. Ha. Draw. Get it?) is creating your own characters through a rudimentary 3D-paint program. Be warned — great skill is required to get something that doesn't just look like a Jell-O mold gone awry. — **LISA**

E 8

THE GREAT ESCAPE

■ **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** GOTHAM GAMES
 ■ **RELEASE** JULY 22



I'm so glad that developers are finally realizing that current movies aren't the only licenses to glean inspiration from. But, I also really loved the movie version of *The Great Escape*, and this isn't really the testament that I was looking for. It looks and plays (especially in the first "go and get this" section) like a cheap Hitman 2. But, to its credit, Steve McQueen's character is playable and looks alarmingly like him. — **LISA**

T 6.5

NFL GAMEDAY 2004

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE)
 ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY/989 SPORTS
 ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 12



The developers of GameDay have tried to address some of the franchise's many needs this year. However, the game isn't totally there yet. Graphics and online are where the attention's focused, but

I think they should have continued down the road to refinement. GameDay fans will recognize the coding that's underneath this title, but I think you can also see that things are getting steadily better for the franchise. — **KATO**

E 7

CHESSMASTER

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER BOARD
 ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT
 ■ **RELEASE** MAY 27



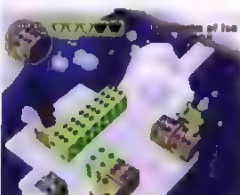
This is strictly for hardcore chess players (i.e. people a lot smarter than me...I mean...I...or me...damn!), but I can't think of a game that can deliver the amount of depth of Chessmaster. It's got a simple interface,

extensive tutorial modes (hosted by legendary GM Bruce Pandolfini) for players of every level, 825 simulated historic matches, and even online play! Of course, I didn't have to go online to get my butted whipped (the first of the game's 150 AI players took care of that in about 15 minutes), but it should be a thrill for PS2 owners to get their chess on over the world wide web. Also, if you get bored with the staid visual presentation, the Chess Battlefield mode lets you use a set consisting of fully animated fantasy warriors and orcs. — **MATT**

E 8.75

BOMBASTIC

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 5-PLAYER PUZZLE/ADVENTURE
 ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
 ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26



Believe it or not, this game is a sequel to the 1998 PSone puzzler Devil Dice. For those of you who might have missed the original, I'll give you a quick run-down. You can ride on and push around dice. When

you maneuver the dice, it flips as you move in a direction. The goal is to match up like numbers in sets that equal that number. For example, you want to put together two twos or four fours. In Devil Dice, when the numbers were matched up they disappeared. In Bombastic, they explode and can ignite dice within range that are exactly equal or one less in value. Hence the new name to match the new game mechanics, which incidentally, can really create some massive chains. Also added is a Quest mode where you must solve puzzles through five worlds, each with three levels and a boss. If the new gameplay elements aren't enough to get you excited about this title, then the fact that it's coming out at 30 bucks and the original game is hidden inside should seal the deal. It's a great puzzler. Definitely a little weird, but most certainly good. — **ANDY**

E 8

FUTURAMA

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
 ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL/FOX INTERACTIVE
 ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 12



This doesn't suck as bad as most Matt Groening-related video games, but that's kind of like saying someone is the least smelly person in France. No, it isn't the synapse-frying, post-traumatic stress-inducing

nightmare that Simpsons Skateboarding was; but rest assured that Futurama fans are going to have to take their lumps just like us Homerphiles have been for years. The cutscenes are great, making an episode's worth of good animation here for the viewing, but I wouldn't want you to pay \$50 and suffer through this hack-job of a game just to get to it. Buy the DVDs instead, or just watch the show on TV. — **MATT**

T 5.25



PLAYSTATION 2

DOT HACK VOL. 3: OUTBREAK

STILL WORTH IT

I have to admit having more than a little distaste for Bandai's tactics with the Dot Hack series. The company hasn't shown me that it couldn't put out this whole saga in one (very large) chunk — instead it's opted for the strong-arm tactic of making gamers pay full price for each of the entries.

This concept bothers me because the issues that plagued the first entry (bland graphics, forgettable music, and one of the worst cameras in the last three years) are still issues in this third volume. I understand not changing the look of characters or even environments in a story that is supposed to take place over a short period of time — you need to retain the same appearance to keep people in the same frame of mind. But the camera? Come on, guys, you can fix that without sacrificing the story.

Speaking of the story, this has always been the strong point of the series, and Outbreak doesn't disappoint. Orca is still in a coma, and you (as Kite) are trying to figure out why. In addition, updates to the World have proven unstable and there are far fewer players roaming around. The entire mood is much darker than the earlier games. I appreciate the scope of this tale, and it makes up for some of the bad feelings I have about the cost of playing the whole series. — **LISA**

THE BOTTOM LINE
T 7.5

- **Concept:** Pessimists would say that the concept is to wring more money out of RPG gamers. Optimists would say that it's to continue the epic saga in a fitting way.
- **Graphics:** The plot dictates that environments in *The World* are starting to decay. I think it just looks crappy.
- **Sound:** Voice work in both English and Japanese will cover most die-hard fans in their native language.
- **Playability:** The camera still requires constant attention.
- **Entertainment:** Dot Hack is continuing a good storyline.
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High.

SECOND OPINION

Volume three brings some slight changes to the series; but honestly, I wasn't as interested in the new Grunty functions as I was the story. Not only are things ramping up, but I appreciated the darker tone. The state of the servers is kind of creepy, where you're wondering, "Where the hell is everyone?!" Fans in it this far will be hooked to the end.

KATO — 7.5

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** BANDAI
 ■ **DEVELOPER** CYBER CONNECT 2 ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9



"Mario worshippers will be entranced. To the rest of us, it's just a fun little golf game."

GAMECUBE

MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

SIMPLY PAR

Mario anything is generally the great no-brainer in the video game world. He races, he swings rackets, and he plumbs (or whatever plumbers do) better than any other digital character in existence. Mario Golf is no exception, and earns its almost custom-built place as the GameCube's best golf game. However, I can't help thinking our plunger-wielding paisan phoned this one in.

The new control interface is user friendly and definitely caters to beginners. If you so choose, an automatic swing only requires you to pick the power of your shot. Otherwise, you can manually adjust back- and topspin. Putting is refined over the 64-bit predecessor as well, and things like wind direction and terrain effects are easier to determine. This game swings clubs with the best of them.

I always welcome the Nintendo clique of peeps in my games. The gang's almost all here from the outset, unlike most golf titles which start you with a skeleton crew and require you to unlock the rest. Their skills don't differ a whole lot, so who you pick is mostly a matter of aesthetic preference. Accept an opponent's challenge and beat him or her, and you earn a stat-enhanced star version of that individual.

Medals are earned for birdies, eagles, and holes in one. Pick up a certain amount, and you'll get a few more playable costars. That's the extent of the RPG elements or rewards available. Modes like Ring Golf and Coin Golf are okay, but when I get nothing for beating them, I'm not motivated to play

them. Mini-Golf from the N64 Mario Golf is noticeably absent.

I have a love/hate relationship with the game's courses. The first few are decently designed, but they're blander than you'd expect in a Mario offering. Once you win a few tournaments and get more courses, business picks up. The beach-themed one has fun shapes for islands and sand traps. Peach's own course adds warp pipes to the mix. Bowser's has enemies scattered around that will put a hurtin' on your ball.

I have more issues with this game than most Nintendo-published products, which makes me worry that the company's quality assurance department may be slipping. Things like the camera not always panning toward the hole on putts or large-nosed characters' schnozzes getting in the way of reading the green just shouldn't happen. Leaves on trees have the physics of rubber walls when hit. Character models are inferior to those in Super Smash Bros. Melee. I also loathe most of the music – save for the Super Mario Bros.-inspired tune when you putt.

Mario Golf takes the same requisite strides in detail and graphical quality that go along with the bump in console technology, but doesn't strive to do much more. It pales in comparison to the PlayStation 2 Greatest Hit Hot Shots 3 in nearly every way, and is just slightly better than Swingerz Golf. Mario worshippers will be entranced. To the rest of us, it's just a fun little golf game. — **JUSTIN**



- **Concept:** Mario and his crew, like most celebs, spend their days off hitting the links
- **Graphics:** Nicely done details in some aspects while simultaneously failing to blow me away
- **Sound:** Put a taco under my ears and call me a cheesehead, because the music is grating
- **Playability:** It's almost too easy to pitch, fade, and add spin
- **Entertainment:** This is an accessible golf game that anyone who knows Mario will get some fun out of. Just don't expect an instant classic
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

This may sound strange, but I rate this as a slightly un-Nintendo game. Now, let me explain. Mario Golf is no disappointment. Developer Camelot knows its stuff, and this title is every bit the golfing good time you'd expect, barring a few gameplay problems. First of all, compared to a rich series like Hot Shots Golf, Mario comes up short. The unlockables are nowhere near as good, and – surprisingly – it doesn't have as much character. See? Isn't that a strange thing to say for a Nintendo title? Apart from a few cool courses utilizing various icons from the Mario games (and some dam tricky holes), unlocking a star version of Diddy Kong just doesn't whet my whistle. Also, the camera can hinder – a problem I wouldn't expect Nintendo to allow. You will certainly have a blast with Mario Golf, but the company has to realize that as time goes on, our expectations get bigger, not smaller.

KATO — 8

■ **STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS** ■ **PUBLISHER NINTENDO** ■ **DEVELOPER CAMELOT** ■ **RELEASE JULY 28**



Other golfers write you to talk smack

Where's the hole? This can be problematic

These pipes bring you to other parts of the hole – or to raw sewage



You wouldn't think Hades would be a hotbed for character-based golfing, but it is



Trust us: If we would've gotten a hole in one, you would've seen that celebration here instead



"If you don't die of boredom playing the game...it can be completed in a measly four hours."

GAMECUBE
P.N. 03
 A CONCEPTUALLY SOUND DISASTER

From a glance, P.N. 03 would appear to have all of the makings of a certifiable Capcom hit. With a stylish science fiction setting that combines the sterile, white-walled architecture of *THX-1138* with the technology ravaged sand dunes of *Mad Max*; the environments are simply breathtaking and the setting is, for the most part, foreign to video games.

The protagonist of this adventure is also of a different breed. While Vanessa Z. Schneider proves to be just as acrobatic and heroic as most video game stars, the methods she goes through to dispose of her adversaries is completely unconventional. She doesn't wield firearms, and never once will she lay a hand on a foe. In a fashion similar to Space Channel 5's Ulala, Vanessa combines dance with her ability to project lasers from her palm. This may sound a bit strange – which, in theory, it is – but it actually looks quite cool and is very reminiscent of the exaggerated over-the-top feats in *Devil May Cry*.

With the dynamic framework and original heroine design, P.N. 03 really does have an undeniable allure. It feels different and new – something gamers always crave. The fact that legendary game creator and father of the Resident Evil series Shinji Mikami supervised the creation of gameplay makes it all the more enticing. So, why is this game – one

that shows such potential – a complete and utter waste?

The seductive female lead, inventive gameplay, and alien atmosphere will certainly suck you in; but once you get there, you'll be exposed to the ugly truth behind P.N. 03. Within a matter of seconds of play, you'll learn firsthand that this game is abysmal and far from engaging.

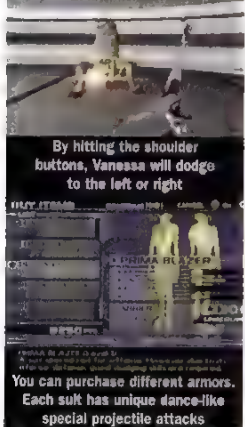
Vanessa's assortment of dance-related moves certainly look graceful, but controlling her is a different story altogether. She moves like a robot with rusty joints. Without a strafe maneuver (you can only dodge or roll to the sides), it's next to impossible to navigate the environments. The auto-targeting system works well, but with only one primary weapon and a handful of special attacks, blowing away robots gets old rather quickly. A typical gameplay session goes as follows: Jam on the fire button...evade the enemy's retaliation fire by dodging to the right...fire again...dodge to the left...fire...move on to the next enemy. Since you can't jump and shoot – or do anything different for that matter – you're stuck doing the same thing from start to finish.

If you don't die of boredom playing the game, you'll run headlong into the most disappointing aspect of P.N. 03: It can be completed in a measly four hours. As if I need to say it, P.N. 03 is best left undiscovered until the day you find it in a bargain bin for a reasonable price. – **REINER**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 4 ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9



The two environments you'll encounter are set in the desert or simple white interiors



By hitting the shoulder buttons, Vanessa will dodge to the left or right

You can purchase different armors. Each suit has unique dance-like special projectile attacks



Vanessa dances when she attacks



The palm shot is the weapon you'll use throughout the entire game



THE BOTTOM LINE
T
5.75

- **Concept:** Watch a hot girl dance as she destroys robots with a laser that shoots out of her hands
- **Graphics:** The animations are fantastic and the environments scream with detail. Unfortunately, all of the visuals are repeated way too often
- **Sound:** No spoken dialogue, just tons of sub-par techno music
- **Playability:** Fire, dodge, and manhandle shoddy controls until the credits roll
- **Entertainment:** It's only four hours long and there's no reason to play it again
- **Replay Value:** Low

SECOND OPINION

Even though there are basically two environments in this entire game, you can't help but like both the way it looks and the pumping soundtrack delivered in Dolby Digital. Sadly, once the game starts up, all that great production goes right out the window and you are left with some questionable playcontrol. I will admit that, in time, you become accustomed to the cumbersome controls; but it doesn't change the fact that many of the tactics are to hide (and stare) in a corner, hop out, shoot, and retreat. On the positive side, her moves are poetry in motion and some of the action is intense with you spinning and flipping through a stream of bullets. However, what looks smooth onscreen is robotic and choppy in the palm of your hands. I wanted to like this game, but no matter how much I tried I just couldn't get past its problems. If you are a shooter fan and truly interested in the title, my advice would be to rent it first, as it can be beaten in an evening.

ANDY - 6



"F-Zero GX is designed specifically for hardcore gamers and people who are gluttons for punishment."



The FMV scenes in Story mode are done well

By winning tickets, players can buy parts that can be used to customize and build their very own rides

The stages in Story mode vary between full-on races to head-to-head heats

GAMECUBE

F-ZERO GX

NINTENDO'S CAN OF WHOOP-ASS

I have to hand it to Sega: F-Zero GX is one of the few games that I've come across that can kick my ass up and down the street. After spending a full day with this title, I walked away from my GameCube physically exhausted, hoarse from yelling at the screen, and bloodshot from not blinking for hours on end. With speeds that border on being too great for the human eye to comprehend and computer opponents that never once falter, F-Zero GX is designed specifically for hardcore gamers and people who are gluttons for punishment.

Oddly, the beginning of the game is incredibly easy. For the first few races, you'll laugh at how downright awful the computer adversaries are. However, just when you think that you can conquer the game without effort, the difficulty curve shoots through the ceiling and kicks into high gear. In some of the stages, if you don't hit a turn just right or activate the turbo at a precise moment, the computer will blow by you and leave you in the dust. This is a feature that can be viewed as both a blessing and curse. On the one hand, I love the fact that the difficulty is relentless and geared toward improving your reflexes and all-around gaming skills. At the same time, I don't feel compelled to beat myself senseless by playing the same track over and over again. The sense of gratification is fantastic, but the means of reaching it is sometimes similar to being locked up in an iron maiden.

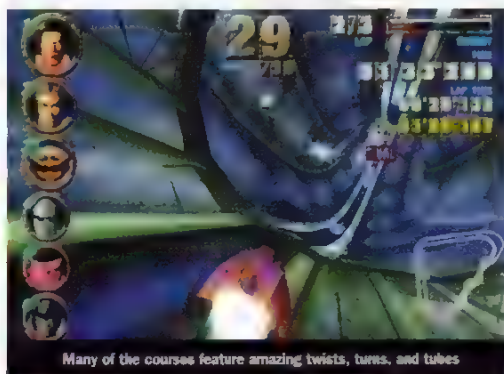
The controls are implemented perfectly, and the framerate never wavers from a constant 60 frames per second; but, like I

said, all it takes is one mistake to throw a race. Thankfully, the game does a good job of rewarding players. By winning races or completing circuits, you'll earn tickets that can be used to purchase a wide variety of things that range from additional characters and vehicles, parts to build your very own ride, and Story mode stages. Unlike all of the previous F-Zero titles, this one has some semblance of a plot. Each stage in Story mode begins with an FMV sequence that usually describes why you entered a specific heat or challenged a particular foe. The cinematics rival the likes of Final Fantasy in quality, which should be reason enough to convince gamers to want to see more.

Like its predecessors, F-Zero GX is an attractive game that continually dazzles the eye with its vibrant neon backdrops, blinding particle effects, looping track designs, and tremendous speeds. The split-screen multiplayer is decent, but it's not as intense as battling the large field in single-player. Sega has also made this version of the game compatible with the recently released arcade machine. It's a bit of a hassle to drag your butt down to the arcade, but if you really get into this game, you can insert your memory card and unlock new material through the coin-op.

F-Zero GX is just as entertaining as it is frustrating. If you've broken controllers before, it might be in your best interest to skip it. Conversely, if you seek challenge, you'll get it in spades. —REINER

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** SEGA ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 25



Many of the courses feature amazing twists, turns, and tubes



Tapping the Z button initiates a spin attack, which can be used to knock out the competition

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T 8.25

■ **Concept:**
A revival of Nintendo's futuristic racer that delivers blinding speeds and flashy visuals, but an ultimately shallow experience

■ **Graphics:**
Beautiful neon lighting; detailed FMV story sequences, smooth framerates

■ **Sound:**
Sega proves that techno music can be just as painful to the ears as the hair metal in Sonic Adventure

■ **Playability:**
The racing is insanely fast and the controls are spot-on, but some of the races are way too difficult

■ **Entertainment:**
Limiting in modes and multiplayer, but high on challenge

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Not only is F-Zero fast, but it's graphically and aurally stunning. The futuristic racing angle may be rather tired, but GX shines at offering intense racing through and on tubes, as well as really big jumps. While I enjoy playing the game, it has some areas that bothered me — namely the difficulty. A lot of the tracks on both novice and standard are fairly easy, and just require pounding the boost in the home stretch to win. Then out of the blue, come tracks and Story mode challenges that are ridiculously tough. The competitors are blazing fast, and falling off the track is fairly easy (and instantly ends the race). I'm always up for a good challenge, but F-Zero's single-player experience isn't interesting enough to overcome the frustration you face on the hardest courses. Overall, F-Zero GX is good, but not as great as I expected. The same can be said for the multiplayer, which really should've included online or LAN support.

ANDY — 8



THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE
E 8.75
ESRB

GAMECUBE

MADDEN NFL 2004

SOME YARDS IS BETTER THAN NO YARDS

I'm not the hardest of hardcore football fans, but that's why I'm reviewing this game on GameCube – a system not known for sports games. Despite the GC's lack of armchair quarterbacks, EA still tries to stuff as much as it possibly can into one little disc. While PS2 has the patent on online and Xbox has the best graphics, the only thing GameCube gamers can rub in their friends' faces is connectivity. However, getting play recommendations and more cheerleader animations isn't going to wow anybody. Thankfully, there are plenty of across-the-board enhancements. Since there isn't much more that can be done gameplay-wise, Owner Mode is this year's MVP. It's fun toying with the nuances of football's underbelly. I like how you can mess with as much or as little as you want to. Mini-Camp is still one of the game's most entertaining features, the cards are great (though not as sweet as the Crib in ESPN NFL), and Bio is ingenious.

There are still gameplay additions, but without the Madden 101 tutorial – found in the other versions – you're kind of on your own. Also, a difficulty level between Pro and Rookie would be helpful. Regardless of your football IQ, Madden NFL 2004 will entertain. GameCube is the weakest of the three versions, but it's still a heavy hitter. Besides, this is your only pure choice for NFL action on the console that Mario built. – JUSTIN

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 18



Ask members of the GI office who should get this, and you'll get two distinct answers. He was out of bounds! But since you viewed the replay, you can't challenge.

Nothing's finer than being in the middle of a Jet sandwich. Connectivity will give you new cheerleader animations. Isn't that special?

SECOND OPINION

I was going to chide the console for not having online yet; but when you look around, this is the only hardcore football title on the system! I guess that's what you call a captive audience. Still, GameCubers continue to live a sheltered life where a bump in graphics is their only real calling card that separates them from the other versions. Then again, with the mind-boggling depth of Madden, this is not a sports game to sneeze at. Madden is totally a game of choices this year. Some will use the Playmaker controls to their fullest, while others won't; but I suggest you familiarize yourself with them, because they are handy in a pinch. Similarly, going the Owner's route is rewarding if you choose to dive in. Luckily, EA Sports has made it easy to navigate and understand, so I suggest you don't be shy about jacking those prices up!

KATO – 9

REVIEWS



GAMECUBE

CHARLIE'S ANGELS

MAKE IT STOP!

Oh...my...god. This game is nothing short of an embarrassment. Worse than asking "When are you due?" when there's no bun in the oven. Worse than throwing back a few too many and belting out "You Make Me Feel Like A Natural Woman" at some highbrow French restaurant on a first date.

I don't even really know where to start with how this game is neither fun or impressive. The graphics? When Justin walks by my desk and says, "That's supposed to be Cameron Diaz, right?" it's a bad sign. Angels should be easier to recognize – not require a stabbing guess based on hair color.

At least they got most of the cast to lend some recording time laying down dialogue. Then again, it's poetic and poignant lines akin to, "I just can't believe that someone would sell out their heritage like that!" in addition, the library of moves available must be based on the Little Golden Books (short, simple, and saccharine sweet), and they have to be unlocked. The point? You can't even execute a throw until the third level – which means you can get through at least the first two areas with random, repetitive button mashing as your only attack. That's fun! – LISA

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN
T 2
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

■ **Concept:** Bring the Angels to next-gen consoles "by any means necessary."

■ **Graphics:** Wow. This would have been super-cool on Dreamcast. That's not to say that Dreamcast is bad, but this is supposed to be 2003.

■ **Sound:** Voice work by the movie stars. That's good, right? Lucy Liu is cool, right?

■ **Playability:** If you're really good at hitting the X and Y buttons, you'll be really good at this game.

■ **Entertainment:** Gouging out my left eye with a blunt, splintery stick is more fun. Honestly.

■ **Replay Value:** Low.

SECOND OPINION

Hey, I found the design document for this game written on a bar napkin! Here it is: "Get Charlie's Angels license. Make rendered models of Angela. Copy Streets of Rage for Genesis. Make lots of money. Go to Disney World!" Pathetic with a capital "P"! "P" also stands for "Please, please, please, don't buy this game."

MATT – 2

■ **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT
■ **DEVELOPER** NEKO ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** JULY 8



XBOX

ALTER ECHO

A BRAWLER WITH BRAINS

"If you like brawlers, platformers, or both, Alter Echo should be on your list of must-plays."

When THQ first brought Alter Echo to our office months ago, I must admit that I was intrigued. During our demo, developer Outrage Games constantly talked about massive combos and a combat system that not only offered a lot of variety, but some intense gameplay.

At the same time, however, I couldn't help but see the silly looking character and average graphics, and think to myself that Alter Echo was going nowhere. But now, with a review copy in hand, I think that, despite all the things that Alter Echo has going against it, the game is indeed everything the developer promised (which, believe it or not, usually isn't the case).

The story, which is not this game's strong point, follows the adventures of a Shaper named Nevin. With the help of the mysterious Echo, he is able to switch between three forms: sword, gun, and stealth. Not only does each form have a wide array of combos, you can purchase new moves and upgrades as you advance through the game. There are also combos that can be created by morphing through the various forms. For example, you can pounce onto a hapless sucker in stealth form, then quickly switch to the gun form. The enemy (if he is not too big or invulnerable to the attack) will then find itself inside the chamber of your gun after the transformation.

Pound on the X button to torture him, or launch him from the gun to set up another combo chain. The choices are actually quite endless. As I played through the game, I found combos I liked and techniques that were absolutely essential to getting past certain annoying enemies.

You would think that all these combos lead to massive button-mashing, but Alter Echo is much deeper than that. All the enemies have various weaknesses that you must always be thinking about. "Will the gun form work on this guy?" "Is that guy too big to throw?" If you use a combo too often, the enemies will block your attacks – forcing you to change up your technique or die.

To help break up the action, there are also Sync nodes and time dilation attacks that challenge the player to a rhythm-styled minigame. These are very simple in design, but they do require timing and a little bit of brains to move the cursor to the correct icons. This area of the game can be frustrating at times, since with each move the pace increases. It's nice to see a game that actually challenges the player on all fronts.

Sadly, the adventure and levels are a tad short; but this title is definitely worth a try, as it has some outstanding gameplay design. If you like brawlers, platformers, or both, Alter Echo should be on your list of must-plays. – **ANDY**

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN
T
ESRB

8

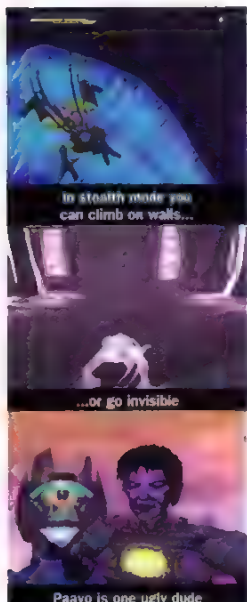
- **Concept:** Combo your way through a wacky plasma world
- **Graphics:** The environment is bright and colorful, yet plain at the same time
- **Sound:** The voiceovers are cheesy, but the music and sound effects work perfectly with this title
- **Playability:** A little over-the-top at first. In time, it becomes second nature
- **Entertainment:** Not the greatest story or characters, but the gameplay is top notch
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Good hack n' slash games come around about as often as new Quentin Tarantino movies. Why am I telling you this? Just to illustrate why you should take the time to check out Alter Echo, a new THQ property that manages to make some very familiar formulas feel fresh again. This is accomplished through the use of your character's morphing ability – which lets him switch between his sword-slashing human form, a gun-toting mech, and a reptilian stealth creature that can climb walls and turn invisible. Much like Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance, you flip between three play styles with the shoulder triggers – allowing for a variety of cool tactics, including cross-form combos. Of course, certain enemies can only be defeated by specific techniques, giving the game a bit of strategy that most of its ilk lack. Yes, the story and main character are appalling, but they couldn't ruin this good thing.

MATT – 8

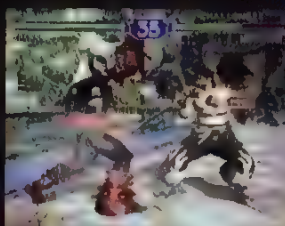
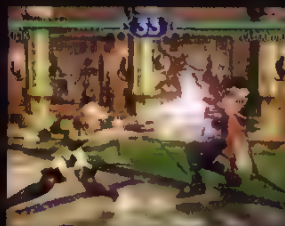
■ **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ ■ **DEVELOPER** OUTRAGE GAMES ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26



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SOUL CALIBUR II



TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Violence
Suggestive Themes



REFLECTIONS OF POWER. Exclusively on the Xbox, Todd McFarlane's Spawn changes into the Soulcalibur II arena. The battle will be hard fought with old Soulcalibur favorites and new masters ready to battle anyone with the guts. And the fighting continues with over 10 modes of play, including the new Weapon Master Mode, giving you the chance to unlock hundreds of weapons, costumes, arenas and hidden characters.



XBOX

NFL FEVER 2004

OFFENSIVE COORDINATION

"[Microsoft is becoming] attuned to what it is that sports fans want."

Nothing drives a football fan up the wall like watching their team sit by and do nothing as it hits the bottom of the division and keeps on digging. No, I'm not actually talking about this year's NFL Fever. After treading water last year, Microsoft has changed some key components of its development team, and is starting to become attuned to what it is that sports fans want year in and year out: bigger, better, and more.

The game's Read and Lead passing system is simply a blast to play. It's not perfect, but it's a breath of fresh air to the sport. That not only applies to this franchise, but to all the football titles out there. Also new is the ability to control the ball's height when you throw via the right analog stick. In tandem, this duo allows really good, complex flexibility. The perfect pass in Fever is a combination of timing, ball speed, and placement – which is certainly true in real life. It may make things a little harder, as you'll have to work on getting your bombs right, unless you want the safety camping out and intercepting your ass. However, when you get the hang of it (I suggest playing through the training games, which are fun as well), you'll feel like a pro bowler. There were some times when I got gutsy enough to zip the ball into triple coverage like Brett Favre on fire. Not smart, but because of Read and Lead, I was just able to eek the pigskin into the WR's hands. Score.

Fever has grown in other areas, most notably in the pre-

snap department. Having coaches talk to you is a great touch, and one that feels good when the old man's strategies pay off. Another helper is a general defensive audible that lets you re-align your players to cover the run inside or the pass on the sideline, for example. These changes – along with an L trigger player change, a DB ball swipe move, and more – help bring the series up to speed with the competition. As much as this area has grown, I think the CPU play lacks personality. Playbooks are largely the same for all the teams, and clubs that have the deep ball or whose QBs like to run aren't distinguishable from the others.

Although Xbox fan boys think that Fever is the bomb simply because of the polygon count in its models, I think it has the worst looking players. I don't like everyone being squatly like they just dumped in their shorts; it negatively affects the gameplay because of their lower center of gravity. For all its improvements, Fever falls into the same trap that the other football games do this year – lots of glitzy new stuff, but some of the same-old-same-old once you pop open the hood. The defensive AI can be bad, and Franchise mode is untouched from last year. Worse than that, it's barely adequate. Given Madden's robust Owner's mode, lots of work is going to be needed here for the folks at Microsoft to even try and catch up. Can they make it? Not this year, but this franchise is getting its motor running down the right path. – KATO

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT
 ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 19



This fantasy field is on an aircraft carrier



A tight end no more



The pre-snap options get better and better



The tattles in the trenches are more fierce



Read and Lead lets you wedge the ball just about anywhere

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE
E
 MICROSOFT
 EA GAMES

7.5

- **Concept:** This iteration makes some great changes, but the formula – for good or bad – is largely the same
- **Graphics:** Microsoft needs to seriously consider changing the character models
- **Sound:** Some of the best grunting you're ever going to hear outside of prison
- **Playability:** Read and Lead allows you some great control and is totally fun
- **Entertainment:** Despite flaws, you'd be hard pressed not to have a good time slinging the ball around
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Fever hasn't made a large enough leap to compete with Madden and ESPN. The XSN online support is by far the most appealing out of this year's games, and the slick Read and Lead passing system adds a whole new dimension to the gameplay; but it still struggles with the basics. The ball physics appear to be based on the moon's gravity; player animations remain stiff and build-legged; the defense struggles to read plays correctly; Franchise mode doesn't offer anything new; and the playbooks don't necessarily hone in on the team's particular strengths. Don't get me wrong, it's still a respectable game and it is quite fun to play. The competition is just too great for Microsoft's hopeful. Both Sega and EA have redefined how we play video game football. Fever simply makes online play a little deeper and easier to get into.

REINER – 7.75

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Circle one answer per question please.

Male or Female

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25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49
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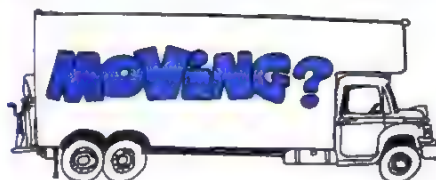
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09/03



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THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE
E 9.25
ESRB

- **Concept:** Fine-tuned pigskin action with a strong focus on improving broadcast cinematics and Franchise mode
- **Graphics:** The out-of-game sequences are plentiful and true to the sport. The gameplay animations are just as impressive
- **Sound:** The commentary is quite good, yet the crowd sounds are fairly generic
- **Playability:** ESPN's running game is unmatched, and the new Charge move opens it up even more. On the other hand, passing is still a little floaty
- **Entertainment:** Offers more bang for your buck than any other Xbox football title
- **Replay Value:** High

XBOX

ESPN NFL FOOTBALL

PHATTER THAN MADDEN

Out of this year's crop of pigskin titles, ESPN has changed the most. Along with the innovative first-person mode, the game now boasts realistic broadcast-quality cinematics, a plethora of collectibles that can be unlocked through a new reward system, an improved running game, redesigned play calling, and a host of additional tweaks and upgrades.

As far as the Xbox is concerned, ESPN is this year's most complete football game simply because Madden lacks online functionality, and Fever's gameplay is of a lower grade altogether. Comparatively, Madden still has the best passing game and deepest Franchise options; yet ESPN's running game is unmatched, and TV-style sequences which range from weekly wrap-ups with Chris Berman to players leaping into the stands after a touchdown are far and away superior to anything in EA's camp. On top of this, unlocking new furniture, framed jerseys, and trophies in your very own Crib give ESPN an irresistible hook not found in any other title.

The gameplay is very similar to last year's product, but it's definitely tighter than before. If you're a sim junkie, Madden is definitely the way to go. For all other play needs, however, you can't go wrong with ESPN. — REINER



Through extensive gameplay, you can deck out your Crib with a wide variety of football paraphernalia

You can also collect different bobblehead toys. There's one for each team!

The Weekly Wrap-Up features commentary by Chris Berman, a complete rundown of scores and stats, and even shows highlights of key matchups

First-person gameplay is an absolute riot

SECOND OPINION

In a genre infamous for its lack of innovation, ESPN blindsides gamers with two huge changes. First-person is the next evolution of video game football, and the title's presentation is second to none. Both this and ESPN's unlockables may sound like small things; but these aspects have no equal in any other football game, and they will be replicated in the future. I can't wait to rip my own music into the Xbox and chill out to it in my Crib while I take in some air hockey or drink my bobblehead (hey, I'm in the privacy of my own home!). I think the need for some small gameplay tweaks is the only thing holding it back from taking over the world, as some of the mistakes from last year linger. If the only thing keeping you from getting this game is that you're used to playing Madden, then I suggest you open your eyes and expand your horizons.

KATO — 9.25



XBOX

MADDEN NFL 2004

THINGS LEFT UNSAID

This year's Madden is by no means a giant leap forward for the football game genre. Instead, it's another solid upgrade to a system that has been in place since 2001. This year's big attraction is the Owner's Box function. Tinkering with ticket prices, coordinating fan appreciation days, and all sorts of other managerial minutiae is cool as it adds to the immersion factor. The off-season shenanigans have also received a boost with the incorporation of the Mini-Camp option that allows players to essentially bet development points on how well their chosen player can complete certain tasks. This is all well and good, but the actual football shares many of the problems last year's version suffered from.

The AI has been noticeably upgraded for both offense and defense, and thereby gives the game a much more organic feeling. That being said, I still had instances where a d-lineman broke free and simply bounced off the quarterback instead of slamming him to the ground, and a number of other collision/animation-based problems. Most frustrating is the inordinate number of dropped interceptions — I had no fewer than 12 during one of my games. In short, Madden is still excellent, but has left the door open to its competitors. — KRISTIAN

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE
E 9
ESRB

- **Concept:** More managerial functions give this year's entry a role-playing tinge
- **Graphics:** Updated animations, but nothing terribly different from last year
- **Sound:** Commentary is much improved, with very specific references to assorted things throughout the game
- **Playability:** The playbooks have been changed, but you can create plays to replace old favorites
- **Entertainment:** Franchise mode is so robust it alone would be worth the price of entry
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

The graphical upgrades don't make up for not having online play. However, the Owner's mode will keep you as busy as a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest — and I mean busy (and ass-kicking). The franchise still carries around some of the problems it has for years. You know what I'm talking about, and you know this great series could still be better.

KATO — 9

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 1



"...a brawler with a bite."

THE BOTTOM LINE



8

- **Concept:** A straight-up sequel with different playable characters and not nearly as much platforming
- **Graphics:** Some of the best particle effects around
- **Sound:** Spoken dialogue by many of the show's actors. The music picks up as the action intensifies
- **Playability:** The combat system rocks, and each of the different characters adds something to the mix
- **Entertainment:** It can be completed in a day, but it's well worth the price of admission
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

XBOX

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: CHAOS BLEEDS

TIGHT JEANS & POINTY TEETH

Chaos Bleeds is designed as a lost episode to the fifth season of the television series. To give the game an authentic tie, many of the actors from the show, including Nicholas Brendon (Xander), Anthony Stewart Head (Giles), James Marsters (Spike), and Amber Benson (Tara), reprise their respective roles through voicework. Sadly, Sarah Michelle Gellar (Buffy) and Alyson Hannigan (Willow) did not lend their voices to the project (reasonable facsimiles were hired) and are represented only through likeness.

Respected UK studio Eurocom has replaced the Collective as the development team; but rather than starting from scratch or creating a new direction for the series, Chaos Bleeds is stylized as a direct sequel to last year's Xbox game and shares the same technologies. In a sense, Eurocom was able to correct many of the mistakes from the first release to create a more compelling product. For instance, the focus of gameplay no longer amalgamates hand-to-hand combat with Tomb Raider-styled exploration and platforming. This time around, combat takes precedent and variety stems from the inclusion of different playable characters. At certain points in the story, control switches from Buffy to other characters such as Spike, who can pound vamps better than anyone; Faith, the former slayer and all around badass; Willow, who unleashes a flurry of powerful spells; weapons-reliant Xander; and Sid, the

loveable and possessed ventriloquist dummy.

All of the characters feature unique attacks and feel quite different from one another. The combat system can best be summed up as a brawler with a bite. Explosive combo strings, blinding magic, and the sharpest of weapons take center stage. The controls are a little tighter than the last release, but it's basically the same beat 'em up action as before. Of course, assuming the role of different personalities produces a plethora of alterations and additions.

For some reason, however, Eurocom determined that the revitalized combat wasn't enough to entice players. As you're dusting vampires, you'll also have to keep your eyes peeled for items that can be used to open locked doors or new areas in a stage. This scavenger hunt element seems fairly straightforward and trivial at first, but as you progress through the game, you'll find yourself scouring every inch of an environment to find a key, a box that can be pushed, or a hidden path. These puzzle elements are implemented very poorly and act as unwanted distractions that often have you pulling out your hair wondering what you should be doing next.

Thankfully, the intensity of battle, breathtaking graphics, and intriguing story are powerful enough to overcome any shortcomings in the game. As a whole, it's a much better game than the first, and geared more toward Buffy enthusiasts. — REINER

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL/FOX INTERACTIVE ■ **DEVELOPER** EUROCOM
 ■ **RELEASE** AUGUST 26



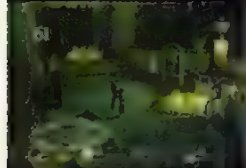
In this stage, Buffy must escort Giles to safety



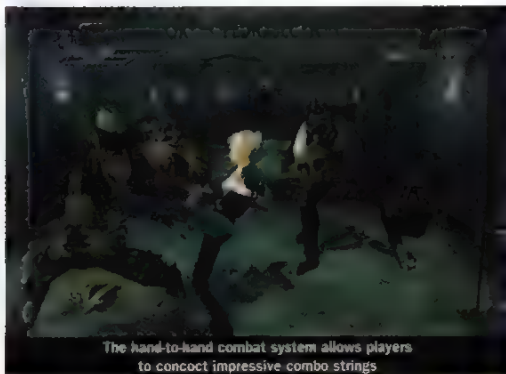
The list of playable characters includes Buffy, Faith, Spike, Willow, Xander, and Sid. An additional 20 characters can be unlocked for multiplayer



Eye popping particle effects are in great abundance



The multiplayer modes, which range from Survival and Domination to the amusing Slayer Challenge and odd Bunny Catcher, are quite entertaining



The hand-to-hand combat system allows players to concoct impressive combo strings



Willow can dispose of undead adversaries through impressive magical blasts

SECOND OPINION

Although the Collective (developers of the first Buffy) are MIA for the sequel, Eurocom steps in and does an admirable job of replicating the high-quality brawling action that put Buffy on the video game map. In many ways, this is an even better game. It allows you to take on the role of most of the show's main characters, each of whom have their own unique combat moves and abilities. I especially liked playing as Willow (Insert band camp joke here), as her magic-based attacks were a nice break from all the punching and kicking. For Buffy diehards, this is a complete package, with excellent character models, voice-acting, and dialogue. However, there are some zits on this lovely face of a game. The puzzles seem to be either painfully obvious or completely random. Also, there's really not much here except for some great combat and a popular license — which, for now, should be good enough.

MATT — 8

STRENGTH. COURAGE. DESIRE.

DYNASTY WARRIORS 4



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TEEN
T
Mild Language
Violence
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB



XBOX 09.04.03



PlayStation 2



REVIEWS



XBOX

OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL

I CAN SEE YOUR UNDEROOS!

Although Outlaw Volleyball can be compared to DOA Xtreme Beach Volleyball, they really aren't the same game at all. Granted, both titles share an affinity for pushing the envelope of swimsuit physics and feature a "gentle breast sway" graphic effect, but the real difference is that DOA Xtreme was a day at the beach, whereas Outlaw Volleyball is actually about bumpin', settin', and spiking.

Developer Hypnotix is carrying on its Outlaw series by integrating characters from the golf game (Ice Trey and El Suave, among others) and upgrading the fight-for-momentum feature, creating more bizarre play locales, and ensuring that the sport is actually well-represented. It's obvious that this is intended to be a great volleyball title and gut-achingly funny at the same time.

While the controls and dialogue are truly excellent, I do have a few teeny gripes. First, there is some random framerate chuggyness, but the graphics are otherwise as smooth and supple as most of the characters' heinies. Secondly, the soundtrack is a whole new flavor of painful. Just make your own playlist and enjoy the deep, fun volleyball madness. — **LISA**

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE
M 8.25

- Concept:** Continue the tradition of games with the only sport that encourages near nudity of its players.
- Graphics:** While the particle effects are a little weak, and the framerate has an occasional chug, the overall effect is still impressive.
- Sound:** Worst... soundtrack... ever! Maybe this is an exaggeration, but not by much.
- Playability:** Perhaps the best volleyball game to date.
- Entertainment:** It's hard to be funny at each point, but Outlaw Volleyball pulls it off — and what's funny is really, really funny.
- Replay Value:** High.

SECOND OPINION

This is more than just a hilarious volleyball game — though it definitely is that, with clever commentary, dudes in thongs, and great cutscenes. It also has solid gameplay, character-building, and some enthralling modes. I'll even go so far as to call it the best volleyball game on the market, and I was a big fan of DOA Xtreme.

JUSTIN — 8.5

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SIMON & SCHUSTER INTERACTIVE ■ **DEVELOPER** HYPNOTIX ■ **RELEASE** JULY 8



XBOX

THE GREAT ESCAPE

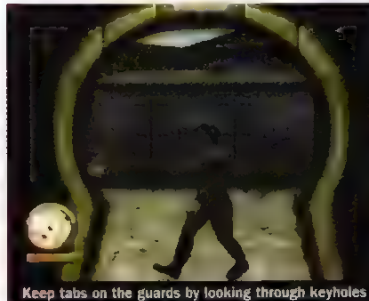
SNEAKIN' STEVEN

It's great to see that some publishers are beginning to look beyond this summer's big action blockbusters for game licenses. Sammy has a game based on Akira Kurosawa's legendary *Seven Samurai* in the works, and now Gotham Games brings forth a stealth/action tribute to the classic Steve McQueen war movie *The Great Escape*.

The game follows a loose approximation of the film's plotline and lets you play as four different characters — one being Steve himself. The basic gameplay formula is very similar to Eidos' Hitman series, forcing you to sneak past prison guards accomplishing various tasks and missions to escape German prison camps. Simply put, this genre takes a lot of patience and careful planning; those of you who prefer running and gunning would be advised to look elsewhere. Gotham has added some nice control mechanics to make things a little easier on you, the best of which is a look feature that lets you peek around corners with the d-pad.

However, it's definitely not a polished game, as the enemy AI is extremely erratic. Sometimes, guards will sniff you out with superhuman powers like Agent Smith in *The Matrix*; others will simply walk around in circles like they took the Mercedes short-bus to the Reichstag. Also, there are some missions that favor gunplay, which requires you to push down on the right analog for the sniper scope and pull the right trigger to fire — an arthritis-inducing configuration that had me reaching for the Aleve. A few vehicle sequences are a nice break from all the sneaking around, but are not especially easy or fun to negotiate.

While *The Great Escape* does have its faults, I really enjoy this style of gameplay. For me, the infectious old-school vibe and the fact that it delivers a ton of nerve-racking situations were enough to make me ignore any frustration I have with the less-than-perfect execution. — **MATT**



■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** GOTHAM GAMES ■ **DEVELOPER** PIVOTAL GAMES ■ **RELEASE** JULY 22

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN
T

7

- Concept:** Inspired by the classic film, this little stealth game overachiever mimics Hitman 2.
- Graphics:** Like Steve McQueen, it's handsome, but a little rough around the edges.
- Sound:** A nice score and ambient sound helps build the tension.
- Playability:** There are loads of inconsistencies in the gameplay and AI, but I still had fun with this.
- Entertainment:** Good, but several steps off the pace set by Hitman 2.
- Replay Value:** Moderately Low.

SECOND OPINION

I give props for this game's impressive variety: You'll pilot tanks, shoot down bombers, sneak around POW camps, and snipe villainous scum. I also golf-clip the way its four playable characters are introduced, even if they are void of personality once they're at your mercy. At its best, *The Great Escape* seems to be a Medal of Honor with more sneaking, or a WWII-era Hitman. However, it doesn't really deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as those titles, because it's as sloppy as a two-year-old at a spaghetti dinner. You spend more time fighting its quirks than you do "zee Germans." Enemy shadows show through walls, vehicles are cumbersome, and your own head obstructs many views. The graphics are more far than flak, and I would've liked some sort of ranking screen between levels. The film was a revolutionary motion picture, but I hypothesize that this *Great Escape* will be lucky to elude bargain bins for any period of time.

JUSTIN — 6.5



THE BOTTOM LINE

XBOX

GROUP S CHALLENGE

LIKE A LEMON WITH NO TASTE

The inevitable and unfortunate byproduct of many simulation racing games' attempted attention to detail is a soulless vacuum, where players shuffle from exhaust kit to exhaust kit and race to race like a village idiot collecting shiny coins on the ground. While you won't find that summation on the back of Group S's box, my words encapsulate much of what this title is about.

I can't fault Group S for its graphics. Apart from the basic shadowing and occasional pop-up, this is just about what you'd expect out of the Xbox. Instead, it's on the track where this game loses its shine. Courses are repetitive and races fall prey to a number of common shortcomings. Questions like "Is there damage?" "Are there racing fields with more than six cars?" and "Can you tweak the number of laps?" all are answered in the negative. There's not even online! Worst of all, your cars lack any sort of "feel," making things even more antiseptic.

The game's focus is on collecting the large number of cars. While I do like the Duel mode, where you must earn certain cars in order to win the pink slips of others, I dislike that you can't sell autos from your garage. Also annoying is that you cannot customize between Championship races. This means you don't invest in upgrades. You have to keep buying new cars to progress. Because you are discouraged from altering your autos, you just forget about them, which severs any possible emotional connection this game attempts to develop. — KATO

EVERYONE
E 6.75

- Concept:**
Think you've got ADD? This game is a good way to find out
- Graphics:**
While the cars themselves look very good, I was surprised to find the occasional pop-up
- Sound:**
True to this title's nature, this aspect is bland and uninspired
- Playability:**
The e-brake is fun, but I want a real rear view mirror
- Entertainment:**
If you're interested in the repetition of completion for completion's sake, then this is up your alley. But then so is stamp collecting
- Replay Value:**
Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Boy oh boy, this is a realistic racing game! It's racing; it's realistic; and you bet your sweet bippy it's a game, son! Okay, now I'm already about out of things to say about Group S Challenge. The fact that I'm stumped for witty pull-quotes doesn't necessarily mean that it's a bad driving title, it just speaks to the fact that it's an extremely generic take on the genre. It's got everything you want: a good selection of vehicles, nice control, and graphics that are on par with the best console racers on the market. However, it just doesn't really excite me like *Midnight Club II*, *Apex*, or *Project Gotham Racing*. Also, I'm knocking a few points off for annoying menus and repetitive course designs. Overall, I'd say you couldn't go wrong with Group S, but there are many other games out there that you should play before you give this a try. Put it this way: Why eat a slice of Wonder Bread when you could have a Schnitzer's marble rye? — MATT — 7.75



The inset camera in the corner is the game's one original thought

Duel mode requires that you own certain cars in order to win others

Eleven cars down, many more to go

Line-Line mode teaches you the best route

STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING PUBLISHER CAPCOM DEVELOPER DIGITAL STUDIO RELEASE AUGUST 26

XBOX

BIG MUTHA TRUCKERS

STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING PUBLISHER THQ RELEASE JUNE 20



BMT is relatively funny, has an excellent soundtrack, a bunch of cool missions, and a clever economy mechanic. Why the mediocre score? You're in a truck. Driving a semi will just never be fun due to how cumbersome and slow it is to operate. The damage you can cause with your big rig doesn't compensate for these annoyances. This is about as good as a semi game can get.

You definitely won't regret checking it out for a weekend, but you'll soon go back to something with a little more tiger in the tank. — JUSTIN

FRESH T 7.25

XBOX

PRO CAST: SPORTS FISHING GAME

STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION PUBLISHER CAPCOM RELEASE AUGUST 26



This release is one of those good news, bad news deals. The good news is that it's the first fishing game on Xbox. The bad news is, it's not a very deep one. Basically, in either Arcade or Simulation mode, you sit in a little corner

of the lake and try to catch as many fish as you can in the allotted time. The controls, although basic, are pretty good. I love using the right analog to reel in and the left to set the hook, but other than that, the gameplay is pretty drab (and I mean that in comparison to OTHER fishing games). It would have been nice to see the action a little more exciting, and some more interactivity once the hook is set. Also, why aren't the fish weighed in pounds? I understand the whole metric system thing, but I prefer to see my lunkers in good old lbs. Not a bad first effort, but this game should have looked and played much better. — ANDY

FRESH T 5.5

XBOX

GROOVERIDER: SLOT CAR THUNDER

STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING PUBLISHER ENCORE SOFTWARE RELEASE JULY 29



Okay, what we're dealing with here is a racing game that doesn't let you steer. DO YOU UNDERSTAND THIS? You can't steer; you just control your speed with the analog stick and jump tracks with the shoulder triggers. It's kind of like making a platforming game where you can't walk.

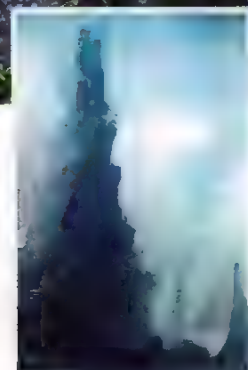
This is an extremely, extremely bad idea for a game. I can't even really describe this other than to say it's some kind of unholy mix between RC Pro Am and Frogger, but without any of the things that made those games fun. Not every kid's plaything makes a good game. That's why they haven't made one called "Dead Rat With A String Tied To Its Tail," and why they should not have made this

— MATT

FRESH T 2

PC

GAME OF THE MONTH WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE



PC

WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE A MORE CRAFTY 'CRAFT

"...the quintessential expansion pack; with more to do, see, and experience on many different levels."

With any Blizzard expansion, everyone wants to know if what's new is as good as what they've come to know and love. No fear, WarCraft fans. That familiar feeling is back in full effect, but the play has been twisted a bit. The franchise as a whole has been angling towards offering a more robust role-playing experience, and Frozen Throne seems to be a large step in that direction. Throughout much of the new single-player missions, you will get the distinct feeling that the days of nearly anonymous characters battling similar figures has hereby ended. Of course, Frozen Throne's parent title was the purveyor of this play type, but its expansion – in the parlance of our times – has taken it to the next level.

There are many instances where you'll find yourself completing missions with absolutely no resource-gathering whatsoever, as you strive to keep your characters alive throughout various maps. Again, this isn't a novel creation in itself, but Frozen Throne definitely uses it to drive the plot more than its predecessor. The resulting level tempo is broken up nicely, and the missions themselves seem more thought out and pertinent to the story arc. The new race introduced for this expansion is the serpentine Naga, who have been awakened to layeth down the smack for assorted reasons. As expected, you're able to play this race

eventually, but they're not available for multiplayer scenarios.

Graphically, it's obvious that Blizzard has paid close attention to detail, as evidenced by your demon hunter's footprints burning into the ground or boiling water when he steps into it, but the overall look seems to be aging a little too quickly for my tastes. The models are blocky, and the textures suffer from muddiness. The spell and particle effects are still good, and your battles will certainly have the potential to be enormous, but it's time for a visual update.

That being said, Frozen Throne is the quintessential expansion pack; with more to do, see, and experience on many different levels. The single-player campaigns should occupy your time for at least a dozen hours, and the CG cutscenes are as good as you had hoped they would be. There's absolutely no reason that I can think of not to buy this game if you consider yourself a WarCraft fan. The multiplayer portion is also improved in typical battle.net form. Blizzard has not taken its fans for granted, and it shows in the game's excellent pacing and engaging plot. — KRISTIAN



THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN
T
ESRB

9

■ Concept:

A more role-playing-focused effort from Blizzard still produces an excellent game

■ Graphics:

The blobby character models are becoming a bit tiresome. Clean-up would have been nice

■ Sound:

Blizzard's patented audio Easter eggs are as hilarious as ever, and the voice-acting is well done

■ Playability:

The new race dubbed the Naga is fun to play, but unavailable in multiplayer

■ Entertainment:

A purchase from which you'll get your money's worth

■ Replay Value:

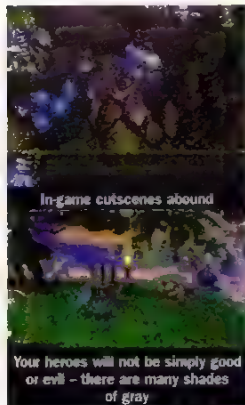
High

SECOND OPINION

For a WarCraft fan, The Frozen Throne really is a no-brainer. Blizzard Entertainment continues to deliver some amazing content even within the confines of an expansion pack. While the world of PC expansion packs has generally trained you to believe that a new unit within a bunch of me-too missions is enough, Frozen Throne shatters all your expectations by giving you a wide assortment of new and innovative missions to test your RTS skills. In fact, the game is so fresh that it almost feels completely new once you really get into it. Plus, you can't help but love the new race. If you're a WarCraft fan, you already own this game; but if you have haven't taken the time yet to play this RTS, Frozen Throne should push you over the edge. It's that good. Plus, the multiplayer is very well-balanced, and will keep you hooked for months on end.

ANDY — 9

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE AND LAN) ■ PUBLISHER BLIZZARD ■ DEVELOPER BLIZZARD
■ RELEASE JULY 1

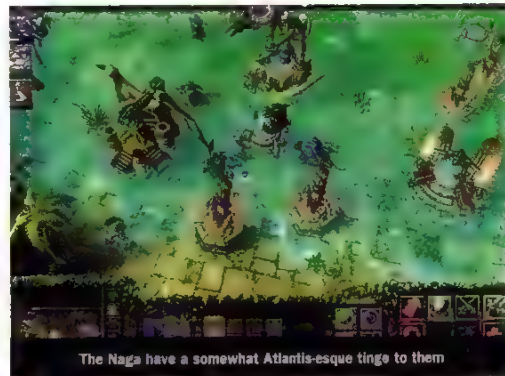


In-game cutscenes abound

Your heroes will not be simply good or evil — there are many shades of gray



Multiplayer functionality always comes down to how well you can handle your favorite race



The Naga have a somewhat Atlantis-esque tinge to them



PC

BATTLEFIELD 1942: SECRET WEAPONS OF WWII

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

With the rate at which expansions are coming to Battlefield 1942, you just can't help feeling that EA is trying to milk its hardcore crowd for all it's worth. Like Road to Rome before it, Secret Weapons of WWII features – surprise – new maps, troops, and weapons. There are eight new battlefields, 16 new vehicles (seven of which were prototypes), and four new weapons (including a new one-hit kill knife) to be exact.

But that's not the end of the new additions. There are British Commando and German Elite troops, a top secret German Rocket Pack that allows players to fly and fight at the same time, a C-47 Cargo plane that works as a mobile spawn point, and a new "objective-based" gameplay mode to round out the additions. Compared to Road to Rome, Secret Weapons obviously offers a lot of new content, but sadly I don't feel that either expansion has really pushed the game to new heights.

As a Battlefield 1942 fan, I can't help but get excited about the new stuff; but at the same time I feel like I'm ready for something really new to push this game beyond its basics. Two expansions in a year's time is impressive, and it's nice to see such support for a product, but I'd rather be playing a sequel that takes advantage of the latest technology. – **ANDY**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 64-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9



We like to call this the Mary Poppins entrance.

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN **T** 8.75

- **Concept:** Add content as quickly as possible to the runaway multiplayer hit
- **Graphics:** Let's be realistic here: They need work
- **Sound:** The music and sound effects are adequate, but are nowhere near the Medal of Honor franchise
- **Playability:** Running around, hopping in and out of vehicles, and killing human opponents just never seems to get boring
- **Entertainment:** As a single-player game it basically stinks, but multiplayer is truly epic
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Die-hard FPS freaks may think it's either sacrilegious or just lame to have a slew of vehicles in so hallowed a genre. To them, I say, "HAI!" Having so many of them to drive, ride in, or shoot out of goes a long way toward adding realism to the wartime experience. Their own side's tanks may squash those who prefer to hoof it every so often, but you can still earn your stripes without much trouble. I did have to keep saying to myself, "It's only a game" when I would see the German jetpack in action, however. I guess after you've put out a ton of games that authentically replicate WWII like EA has, you have to start using odd prototypes to keep it fresh. Of course, multiplayer is where it's at with the eight new maps. For deathmatch n00bs like myself, taking on the elite Bfers is a trial by fire akin to playing a pick-up game with the LA Lakers; but I dig it. This is a great expansion that won't disappoint.

JUSTIN - 9



PC

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

NOW ENTIRELY DEPP-FREE!

Those looking for the chance to control a virtual Johnny Depp may be disappointed, but anyone yearning for life on the high seas will be thrilled with Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl. As Captain Nathaniel Hawk, both land and ocean are open for exploration, as are your gameplay options. Much like Bethesda's Sea Dogs (Pirates was originally conceived as Sea Dogs II), you can choose the path of good and hunt down the pirate scourge, or choose evil and become a pirate yourself.

Many quests and activities are presented, but it's entirely up to you which you pursue and how you complete them. RPG fans will love the open-ended feel of the game, but more casual gamers may be put off by the lack of guidance and the game's few minor control issues. Combat feels especially shallow, which can make swordfighting a bit repetitive. Aside from these minor quibbles, Pirates is pretty solid. Graphically, it's a bit plain at times, but the character models are highly detailed and the sea battles are breathtaking. The real draw is the open-ended gameplay, which makes it easy to lose hours in Pirates' world. This is probably the closest you can get to becoming a pirate without wearing an eye patch. – **JEREMY**

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN **T** 7.75

- **Concept:** Fight pirates, sea monsters, and the undead in this role-playing game loosely tied to the summer blockbuster
- **Graphics:** Detailed character models and beautiful water effects make up for the occasional bland backgrounds
- **Sound:** Completely enjoyable, but never annoying
- **Playability:** The complex control scheme is a slightly clunky yet functional
- **Entertainment:** Hardcore RPG fans and pirate aficionados will dig the chance to live the swashbuckling lifestyle
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

If you want the comic swashbuckling of the movie, look elsewhere. The sequel to Sea Dogs, this is an odd, waterlogged RPG, one that delivers a ton of depth and some cool naval battles. Sadly, this doesn't seem tailored for PC, as the swordplay is pretty clunky with a keyboard and mouse (I even saw some tutorial text refer to the A button on the Xbox controller). I still dug the ship warfare, but overall this game is a little too meandering and aimless for my taste.

MATT - 7

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

GAME OF THE MONTH
FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE



"Not only is this game incredibly deep, but for a strategy fan like myself, it is addictive enough to destroy your social life."



GAME BOY ADVANCE

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE

BIGGEST GAME BOY GAME "EVAR!"

I can't begin to tell you how long I have been waiting for this title to come. Before I played massively multiplayer online games, there was only one other title that my play time was best registered in days, not hours. That game, of course, was the original Final Fantasy Tactics on PSOne. Sadly, for this review I was unable to put in the 150 hours that this game deserves, but I can tell you this title is just as deep and engrossing as the original, if not more so.

Like the original, Final Fantasy Tactics Advance is all about turn-based combat. For the Final Fantasy fan, all the items and weapons are familiar; but unlike the RPG editions, all the movement and action is done on a huge grid. Also, there is no overhead map. To find battles, the player travels to the local town pub and asks for tasks to complete. In total there are an amazing 300 missions in the game, but the player will also find himself battling for turf with other clans (which is basically a guild with all your players in it) in random encounters on the Ivalice world map.

While the 300 levels may seem like an obscene amount, many of them can be done by sending a clan member to handle it, who will then come back later and report success or failure. But even though some tasks can be completed in this fashion, there is still an ungodly amount of standard battles to complete.

At the heart of any Final Fantasy Tactics game is the job system. By completing missions and winning battles, the player gains job points that enable characters to unlock new careers. Unlike the original, every job is not open to every race. For example, only Vieras can become quick-footed fencers, and Bangaas are tailor-made warriors. But even with this limitation, the job list is gigantic. There are 42 different combinations of race and job including Paladin, Fighter, Beastmaster, Animist, Sniper, Fencer, White Mage, Black Mage, Archer, Thief, Soldier, Warrior, White Monk, Bishop, Templar, Assassin, Juggler, Red Mage, and Dragon – to name a few.

Beginning to understand the depth here? This is just the beginning. For a character to memorize a spell or special attack, they must equip an item with that power for a certain amount of attack points before that ability is learned. So, if you want to teach your characters lots of different stuff, you can spend months on end endowing them with new moves across all the various jobs.

The gameplay also introduces some interesting new challenges and enhancements. For example, each battle features a Judge who awards points for doing certain abilities, as well as gives out yellow and red cards for doing restricted moves or attacks that he dictates at the beginning of each encounter. Get too many yellow cards or a red card, and the offender will be sent to jail – which in turn costs the player money to spring him. You can also capture monsters, as well as trade characters via the link cable. Or, perhaps even better, you can hook up two machines and play the game co-operatively with a friend.

Not only is this game incredibly deep, but for a strategy fan like myself, it is addictive enough to destroy your social life. It does have a couple of drawbacks however. For one, the story is very adolescent and reminds me a lot of the *The NeverEnding Story* (which isn't a good thing). And for a game this difficult, I really don't see why the story couldn't have been more engaging to an adult. Secondly, while it is very cool that each race has its own version of the black mage, for example, it is a shame that your clan members look almost exactly like the people you fight most of the time. After a good 12-hour session, it's pretty easy to kill your own people if you aren't paying attention. And finally, it is a bummer that you can't rotate the camera.

However, none of the little problems really matter once you dig into this epic game. If you own a Game Boy Advance and love strategy, you simply must play this game. It might even be better than Advance Wars, and that's saying a lot in my book. – ANDY



THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE
E 9.5

- **Concept:** Use the Final Fantasy universe to create epic turn-based battles
- **Graphics:** Simply gorgeous 2D art that will make fans of Final Fantasy pine for the days of old
- **Sound:** One of the best-orchestrated soundtracks I've ever heard on the Game Boy Advance
- **Playability:** All the jobs, items, and missions in this game can be quite overwhelming for gamers not willing to put in the time
- **Entertainment:** If you loved it on PSOne, you can't live without this title
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

This isn't just a game...it's an investment. You could play this title for a lifetime and barely scratch its surface. I put in 300+ hours into the PSOne Tactics game, and as scary as it may sound, I can see myself going well past that mark with this handheld sequel. It's not for everyone, however. In many ways, the Tactics series is the video game equivalent of chess. It's the thinking man's (or woman's) game. You really have to contemplate each move that you make. On this note, it is quite slow and geared more toward people who want to utilize their wits and not necessarily their gaming skills. Comparatively, the design is reminiscent of the 32-bit precursor; but it does feature deeper jobs and abilities, detailed sprite graphics (it looks even better), and linked multiplayer support. If you dig strategy games, or are seeking a deep and rewarding challenge, this is money well spent.

REINER - 9.5

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX/NINTENDO
■ **DEVELOPER** PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT DIVISION-4 ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15



GAME BOY ADVANCE

JET GRIND RADIO

A MINI BOOM BOX

Since the original Jet Grind on the consoles offers a simple interface, this replication of the title on Game Boy Advance is very true to its cousins in design. Of course, the GBA isn't quite capable of creating the game in 3D, so the graphics are redone in an isometric world – similar to the Tony Hawk GBA editions. Surprisingly, all the pieces are here. The environments are colorful, and the characters feature a lot of their moves including rail grinds, wall rides, and move-entering graffiti sessions.

Even the game modes are well represented with custom graffiti, up to 4-player multiplayer (each one must have a copy of the game, by the way), and a listening mode to just “jam-out” to the tunes. In total there are 15 levels across four stages, with plenty of landmarks and designs seen in the console versions.

While the game is certainly solid, controlling the characters in the isometric world isn't as intuitive as I would like it. All told, this GBA edition is done well enough that fans of the series will be satisfied with the on-the-go experience, but don't expect to be blown away. – ANDY

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ/SEGA
 ■ **DEVELOPER** VICARIOUS VISIONS/SEGA ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

SECOND OPINION

I spent a large chunk of time making my own tag because the isometric view and its resulting controls leave this version a step behind its big brother. It's worth the money, though, for the features that still remain.

LISA – 7.5

THE BOTTOM LINE



- **Concept:** Shrink down the Jet Grind Radio experience into an isometric view
- **Graphics:** The environments are nice, but the characters are a tad fuzzy
- **Sound:** Vibe-o-licious tunes are a hallmark of the series. It is a shame the GBA can only produce them in low fidelity
- **Playability:** The perspective and controls can be annoying at times, but it is playable
- **Entertainment:** All the pieces are here to keep JGR fans happy, but the experience just isn't the same
- **Replay Value:** Moderate



GAME BOY ADVANCE

SHINING SOUL

A ONE-BUTTON GAME

From a design standpoint, Shining Soul is stylized much like the Diablo series. In such, the world that you traverse consists of a town and a handful of dungeons. There are four character classes, an array of items and weapons to unearth, and a robust experience system with customizable attributes.

Unfortunately, as intriguing as the design may be, the real-time combat interface gives new meaning to the word simplicity. It relies solely on the player's ability to tap the A button. There's nothing to it whatsoever. To make matters worse, the enemies will walk right into your blind flailing, which means that you don't even need to move! In the event that you actually die, you can warp right back to where your character perished. Monsters won't even regenerate, either! I love the setup that Sega created; but in the end, Shining Soul is lacking all of the things that make games entertaining. The action is poorly designed and repetitive, and the quest is void of challenge.

– REINER

SECOND OPINION

This is a decent Diablo clone. It looks good and has plenty of rare items to equip. Enabling enemies to attack while you're on menu screens makes you strategize a bit more, which is welcome. Fans of old-school Zelda and the DBZ games will like this.

JUSTIN – 7.75

THE BOTTOM LINE



- **Concept:** A comprehensive role-playing setup that goes to waste through a horrendous and overly-simplified combat engine
- **Graphics:** The environments are detailed nicely, but the animations are usually so bad that they're laughable
- **Sound:** The score is typical to most 16-bit RPGs, but it's nothing special
- **Playability:** Let's see here, you can tap A to attack and...uh...did I mention that you can hit A to attack?
- **Entertainment:** I tapped A so much that the A on the button is actually imprinted on my thumb
- **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** ATLUS/SEGA
 ■ **DEVELOPER** SEGA ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9



GAME BOY ADVANCE

STUNTMAN

HOLY CRAP!

The names Fernando Velez and Guillaume Dubail might not mean anything to you, but they should. No, they aren't obscure soccer stars – this pair specializes in ground-breaking GBA games. After a promising showing with V-Rally 3 last year, they've outdone themselves with Stuntman – a technologically stunning recreation of the console hit.

The first thing you should know about Stuntman is that it's not some cheap Mode 7 rip-off. Using both rendered objects and savvy pixel scaling, this is a 3D game just like the one you either loved or hated on PS2. It's got the same demanding goals, requiring you to hit cues and perform risky stunts as you drive your way through a series of movie shoots. The fact that they've managed to recreate a version of the original's ambitiously designed course is impressive enough, and they even pull it off with a minimum of collision problems and bugs. What's more, scripted events like exploding buses and collapsing pillars unfold as you drive by, a feat that must have required some fancy programming. Although the vehicle control and physics have been dumbed down a bit, it's almost like it better that way, as you don't have to contend with oversteering and the handbrake is now conveniently placed on the shoulder buttons. Well done! – MATT

THE BOTTOM LINE



- **Concept:** Amazingly, a 3D port of Stuntman comes to the GBA!! Whoda thunk it?
- **Graphics:** At least half a generation ahead of everything else on the GBA market. Full 3D environments and even rendered facial models in the cutscenes
- **Sound:** Brief voiceovers alert you to the next maneuver, and the music evokes the feel of each movie
- **Playability:** Very solid, and it's nice to have the handbrake on a shoulder button
- **Entertainment:** Call me crazy (Matt, you're crazy – Ed.), but I actually like this better than the PS2 version
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Finally, someone is doing something on the GBA that doesn't reek of cheap, old SNES cologne! There may be the occasional collision or sound script bug, but this game is nothing but solid fun. I suggest, however, you have a GBA SP or at least a good light. Like the PS2 edition, this game is hard to put down.

KATO – 8.5

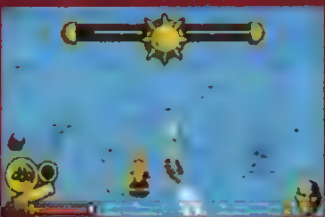
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI
 ■ **DEVELOPER** FERNANDO VELEZ AND GUILLAUME DUBAIL
 ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

REVIEWS

GAME BOY ADVANCE

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** TDK MEDIATEVE
 ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 19



This GBA game follows the console versions of Pirates of the Caribbean; perhaps to a fault. Essentially, it's the same design: When you aren't engaging in high seas ship

battles, you wander about coastal towns looking for gold, and completing various tasks. Unfortunately, the limitation of the handheld format has forced the developers to strip away all of the political, economic, and ship strategy elements that made its big sister titles interesting in the first place. This lack of depth, coupled with the weak combat and repetitive levels, equals a pirate game that won't even manage to steal away an hour of your precious time. — **MATT**

E 5.5

GAME BOY ADVANCE

SPACE CHANNEL 5: ULALA'S COSMIC ATTACK

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ/SEGA
 ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 17



You really couldn't ask for a better version of Space Channel 5 on Game Boy Advance. Sure Ulala doesn't look as hot as she does on the big screen, but she still has the

moves; and all the dance-party gameplay elements are here. In no time at all, I found myself singing along with the mesmerizing chant of "Right, left, chu, chu, chu!" The game is not terribly deep, but neither was the Dreamcast version. On a collectability note, you may want to pick this one up just in case Lady Miss Kier from Deee-Lite wins her lawsuit and shuts the series down. — **ANDY**

E 7

GAME BOY ADVANCE

DEMIKIDS LIGHT & DARK

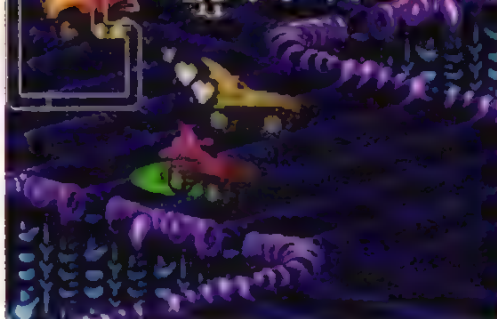
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ATLUS USA
 ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 15



Demikids (both Light and Dark versions) are what the last Pokémon entries should have been. It takes advantage of the GBA's graphic capabilities — making this a respectable-

looking and imaginative title that has you controlling a different pre-teen lead character (depending on which version you pick up) who's wandering around and gathering demons to save our world from a time fissure. Like Pokémon, a vast majority of the foes you encounter will be the same in Light and Dark; but if you have any affinity for the GBA Pokémon games, Demikids is a must buy. — **LISA**

E 8.25



GAME BOY ADVANCE

ROCK N' ROLL RACING CLASSIC ROCK

Way back when Genesis and Super NES ruled, Rock n' Roll Racing was parked in the upper echelon of the racing genre on both systems. History repeats itself, and this GBA port brings back all the thrills and fond memories of its ancestors.

The game is presented in an isometric view, also utilized by RC Pro Am and Super Off-Road; but the weapons add another dimension to the contests. Each car has a projectile, rear attack, and defensive move. The option to upgrade your vehicle, and even buy new ones, drives you to keep playing. Tracks are plentiful, as there are several planets with a handful of courses on each. Complete a division with enough points to move on to stiffer competition.

The premise is simple, but Rock n' Roll Racing really shines in its excellent control and revolutionary soundtrack. Before Pro Skater and Vice City, this game licensed some killer rock songs to uphold its image. "Born to be Wild," "Peter Gunn Theme," and "Bad to the Bone" are all in rotation here. This game's formula has been duplicated before, but it's still the king and will make the hours fly by. — **JUSTIN**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (2-PLAYER VIA LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** BUZZARD
 ■ **DEVELOPER** BUZZARD/MASS MEDIA ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 17

SECOND OPINION

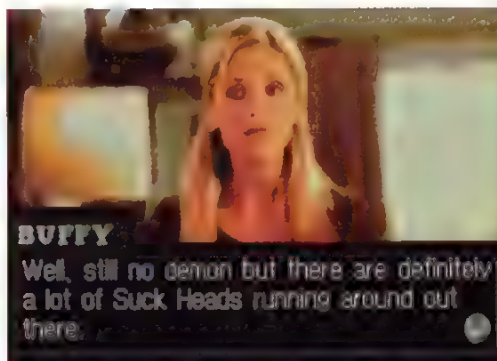
Nearly 10 years on, this port of the SNES classic Rock n' Roll Racing still holds up favorably to the state of the art in GBA racers. With solid control, surprising speed, and a sublimely cheesy soundtrack of digitized classic rock, this is about the best handheld racing game you'll find that doesn't have the words "Mario" and "Kart" in the title.

MATT - 8.25

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE
E 8.75

- **Concept:** A port of one of 16-bit's best racing games
- **Graphics:** Comparable to the SNES version — very colorful and vibrant
- **Sound:** Great licensed rock anthems. The speech is good but potentially annoying. It can be turned off if you're so inclined
- **Playability:** Highly accurate control with a slight learning curve
- **Entertainment:** Just like back in the day, the only racing game on the platform that's finer is Mario Kart
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High



BUFFY
 Well, still no demon but there are definitely a lot of Suck Heads running around out there.



GAME BOY ADVANCE

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: WRATH OF THE DARKHUL KING

SICK AND WRONG

Wow, Buffy has certainly been dissed by people who don't get the wit and intelligence of the series, but I don't think that being shunned by the Emmys is anything near this atrocity.

In concept, the game does have a great set of goals: a combat-based platform title with modifiable weapons, a few puzzles, and cutscenes starring series favorites (mostly Xander, Giles, and Willow). Each of these features is present, but the problems arise from the most base of requirements. In a game, you need a control scheme that makes sense and works. Buffy's doesn't. At all. In addition, I have to state that a combat/brawler title *must* have more than five attacks or players get mighty bored. Try as I might, there's nothing that I can compliment or even remotely endorse in this game.

It got to the point where I felt sorry for vampires, because the pain I experienced while playing must be similar to what they go through when pushed outdoors at noon on a bright, summer day. — **LISA**

SECOND OPINION

Good God, Buffy, who did you piss off at Natsume? Somebody's obviously got an axe to grind with the comely vampire killer, because this horribly botched, insanely aggravating platformer plunges into the corpse of fun like a stake in the back. The only plus: In most levels, you can skip the annoying combat by just running and jumping over enemies until you reach the end.

MATT - 4

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN
T 4.25

- **Concept:** Use the valley-girl slayer to rid Sunnydale of its undead inhabitants
- **Graphics:** Some animations and areas are nice, but none are great
- **Sound:** Completely forgettable and not useful for gameplay
- **Playability:** A control scheme and execution so horrid, it negates any positive aspects of the title
- **Entertainment:** Painful and uninspired. What did we do to deserve this?
- **Replay Value:** Low

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ ■ **DEVELOPER** NATSUME
 ■ **RELEASE** JUNE 24

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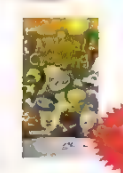
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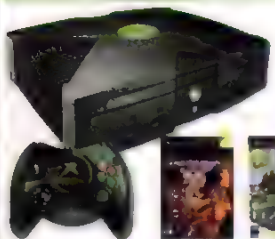
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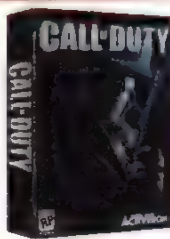
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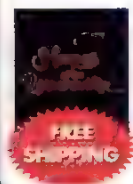
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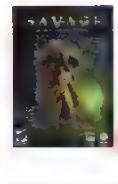
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CHARTS

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

Rankings Based Upon NPD Data For May 2003 Based On Units Sold

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
1	N/A	Enter The Matrix	PS2	8.5	May-03	\$49

Are we surprised this game is on top? We'll answer that with another question: Does Jack Osborne shop for jeans in the husky section? Still, as many units as Atari has moved, the game is going to need to stay on top for a long freakin' time to make up for the cost of the license. We're talking about staying #1 until *Matrix Revolutions* is the TBS Saturday night movie; or even worse, until you finally talk a girl into going out with you of her own free will.

2	N/A	Enter The Matrix	Xbox	8.5	May-03	\$49
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Since nobody's gotten on the ball and made a game based on *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey* (imagine getting to be Station's good robot Bill and Ted as you battle the evil robot usses), we have nothing better to do than buy Enter The Matrix. While we'd rather challenge Death to Twister than fight another cheap helicopter boss battle, this game is not without its charm.

3	5	NBA Street Vol. 2	PS2	9	Apr-03	\$50
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This Street is paved with gold, as it's both one of the best and one of the most popular games so far this year. It's Duncan like Tim. It's a thrilla like Przybylla. It hauls ass like Robert Traylor. It can hang like Zhi Zhi Wang. It smells like a Malik Rose. Well, you get the point.

4	N/A	Return To Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	Xbox	9.25	May-03	\$47
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Is this game the second coming of Halo? No, but it may be the best FPS to come out for Xbox since Bungie's measuring stick launched with the system; and that seems to be good enough to give it #4 honors for the month. Remember the highly touted Jaguar port of the original PC Castle Wolfenstein? The one with 90-degree angles everywhere and 2D enemies? Yeah, Jaguar sucked.

5	N/A	Brute Force	Xbox	8.25	May-03	\$49
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Frankly, we're surprised this game sold so well in its initial month on shelves. A lot of you bought it, and must've told your friend to buy it, too. Reiner, on the other hand, ripped it pretty hard, and you know what that means: more hate mail! Yay! He likes to swim in it like Uncle Scrooge on Duck Tales. Woo-oh! He also has webbed feet.

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
6	2	Pokémon Ruby	GBA	7.25	Mar-03	\$33
7	4	Pokémon Sapphire	GBA	7.25	Mar-03	\$34
8	1	Splinter Cell	PS2	8.5	Apr-03	\$49
9	8	Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition: Stairway to Destined Duel	GBA	7.5	Apr-03	\$36
10	6	Midnight Club II	PS2	9	Apr-03	\$50
11	N/A	Enter The Matrix	GC	8.5	May-03	\$50
12	N/A	Grand Theft Auto III	PS2	9.5	Oct-01	\$20
13	7	The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	GC	10	Mar-03	\$39
14	16	NBA Street Vol. 2	Xbox	9	Apr-03	\$50
15	12	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	PS2	10	Oct-02	\$47
16	10	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	GBA	8	Apr-03	\$30
17	15	X2 Wolverine's Revenge	PS2	5.5	Apr-03	\$48
18	9	Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Battle 22	PSone	5	Mar-03	\$21
19	3	Def Jam Vendetta	PS2	8.5	Mar-03	\$50
20	N/A	Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	GBA	9.25	May-03	\$30

Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Service • Kristin Barnett-Von-Korff (515) 625-2481

JAPAN TOP 10

Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	Silent Hill 3	PS2
2	N/A	Initial D: Special Stage	PS2
3	N/A	Animal Forest e+	GC
4	N/A	Soft-Boiled Hero 3D	PS2
5	N/A	Pop'n Music 8	PS2
6	N/A	Let's Make a J-League Pro Soccer Club	PS2
7	N/A	Mother 1 & 2	GBA
8	2	Pokémon Box Ruby & Sapphire	GBA
9	N/A	Viewtiful Joe	GC
10	N/A	Sangokushi Senki 2	PS2



GAME INFORMER TOP 10

The Staff's Favorite Picks

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	3	Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	Xbox
2	N/A	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	GBA
3	N/A	Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild	PS2
4	N/A	ESPN NFL Football	Xbox
5	N/A	Madden NFL 2004	PS2
6	2	Advance Wars 2	GBA
7	5	NBA Street Vol. 2	PS2
8	1	PlanetSide	PC
9	N/A	Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	PS2
10	N/A	Outlaw Volleyball	Xbox



PC TOP 10

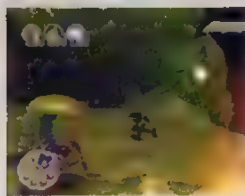
Based On Monthly Units Sold Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Service Kristin Barnett-Von-Korff (515) 625-2481

POS.	L. MO	GAME	MONTH	PRICE
1	N/A	Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne	Jun-03	\$34
2	1	The Sims: Superstar	May-03	\$29
3	N/A	Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided	Jun-03	\$49
4	N/A	Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Jun-03	\$29
5	4	The Sims Deluxe	Sep-02	\$43
6	6	Rise of Nations	May-03	\$48
7	N/A	Finding Nemo	May-03	\$19
8	N/A	Star Wars Galaxies Collector's Edition	Jun-03	\$77
9	2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	May-03	\$46
10	N/A	Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos	Jul-02	\$39



VEXX

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM ■ **REVIEWED** APR-03



Vexx tries hard to be Mario's evil twin by duplicating many of the platforming superstar's gameplay elements and environments. Due to bad enemy pop-up, a lousy camera, and an abundance of crummy underwater levels, it's bad in a

different way than intended. Good luck collecting 100 coin-type items, as the counter is reset far too easily. I respect all the ambition that went into Vexx's minigames, power-ups, and tasks; but poor execution keeps this game from competing with Ratchet & Clank or Jak and Daxter. — **JUSTIN**

T 6.75

PLAYSTATION 2

Aero Ellis: Combat Academy	6.75	May-03
Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	6.75	Aug-03
All-Star Baseball 2004	8	Apr-03
Amplitude	8.75	May-03
Apocalypse 2	7.5	Jun-03
Arc the Lad	8	Jun-03
Twilight of the Spirits	8.75	Jun-03
ATV Offroad Fury 2	8	Jan-03
Auto Modellista	8	Jun-03
Battle Engine Aquila	7	Feb-03
Big Mutha Truckers	7.5	May-03
Black & Branded	7.5	Mar-03
BMX XXX	7.75	Jan-03
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	8	Mar-03
Cabela's Big Game Hunter	7	Mar-03
Chaos Legion	8.5	Jun-03
Chopfall: 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
DeJ 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
Downhill Domination	8.25	Aug-03
Dr. Muto	7.75	Dec-02
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	7.25	Jan-03
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	7.25	Jan-03
Dynasty Warriors 3	7	Jan-03
Xtreme Legends	6.75	Jan-03
Dynasty Warriors 4	7	Apr-03
Ejay Clubworld	7	Aug-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jun-03
EverQuest 2	8.75	Mar-03
EverQuest: Online Adventures	9	Feb-03
Eye Dead	8	Jun-03
A Fistful of Boomstick	7.75	Jun-03
Evolution Skateboarding	5	Dec-02
F1 Career Championship	7	Aug-03
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
Freestyle MetalX	7	Aug-03
GI Jockey 3	8	Jun-03
Gallop Racer 2003	8	Jun-03
A New Breed	8.5	May-03
Getaway The	8	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
Heaven: 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 Extreme	7.25	Mar-03
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	8.25	Aug-03
IndyCar Series	7	Jun-03
Island Extreme Stunts	6	Feb-03
Italian Job, The	6	Aug-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	8.5	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 Two Towers, The	9.25	Dec-02
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	7.25	Aug-03
Marvel vs. Capcom 2	8.5	Dec-02
Meta, Gear	8.5	Apr-03
Solid 2: Substance	9	May-03
Midnight Club II	8	Jun-03
Minority Report	6.75	Feb-03
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
Navy Ops: Warship Gunner	7.5	Jul-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
PTO, IV	7.75	Mar-03
Rally Fusion	8	Jun-03
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	Jun-03
Reign of Fire	6.25	Dec-02
Resident Evil Dead Aim	6	Jun-03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Operation Resurrection	7.5	Jun-03
Robotic Alchemic Drive	7.75	Dec-02
RTX Red Rock	6.5	Jul-03
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	8	Dec-02
Shinobi	8	Dec-02
Silent Hill 3	8.25	Aug-03
Silent Line: Armored Core	7.5	Jul-03
Simpsons Skateboarding	1	Dec-02
Sims, The	8	Feb-03
Smash Cars	4	Aug-03
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
Sukoden II	8.5	Dec-02
Summer Heat	7.75	Aug-03
Beach Volleyball	6.75	Aug-03
Super Bust-A-Move 2	6.5	Dec-02
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	8	Apr-03
TimeSplitters 2	8.25	Dec-02
Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	5.5	Aug-03
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	9.25	Dec-02
Trouble Planet	7.75	Jan-03
Unlimited SaGa	6.5	Jun-03
Vexx	6.75	Apr-03
Virtual Fighter 4: Evolution	8	Aug-03
V-Rally 3	8.75	Jan-03
Wakeboarding Unleashed: Featuring Shaun Murray	8.25	Jul-03
War of the Monsters	6	Feb-03
Winning Eleven 8	9	Apr-03
World Series Baseball 2K3	6.75	Apr-03
World Tour Soccer 2003	8.5	Feb-03
Wrackless	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	Dec-02
Xenosaga Episode 1: The Two Towers, The	9.75	Mar-03
Dee Wile Zui Mochi	9.75	Mar-03
Yusaku: The	8	Apr-03
Quillets 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
Balmain: Dark Tomorrow	0.75	May-03
Black & Branded	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	May-03
Corridor: Desert Storm	6	May-03
Darkened Sky	6.75	Dec-02
Dead to Rights	8.75	Jan-03
DeJ Jam Vendetta	8.75	Apr-03
DeJ Jam 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	Feb-03
Dragon's Lair 3D	7.75	Feb-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jun-03
Evolution Worlds	7	Dec-02
FIFA 2003	8	Jan-03
Finding Nemo	6.75	Aug-03
Ghost Recon	7.75	May-03
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	8	Jul-03
Hulk, The	5.75	Jul-03
Itanjan Job, The	5	Aug-03
James Bond 007: NightFire	8	Jan-03
Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, The	10	Apr-03
Legends of Wrestling II	6.75	Feb-03
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, The	9.25	Jan-03
The Two Towers, The	9.25	Jan-03
Lost Kingdoms II	8.5	Jun-03
Mario Party 4	8	Dec-02
Medal of Honor: Frontline	8.25	Dec-02
Mega Man Network Transmission	6.75	Jun-03
Metroid Prime	8.5	Jan-03
Minority Report	6.75	Feb-03
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
Outlaw Golf	7.75	Dec-02
Phantasy Star Online: Version I & II	8	Jan-03
Red Faction II	8.75	Apr-03
Resident Evil 0	9.25	Dec-02
Resident Evil 2	8	Apr-03
Resident Evil 3: Nemesis	7.75	Apr-03
Robotek: Battlery	8.5	Dec-02
Shrek: Extra Large	3	Jan-03
Sms, 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 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	8	Feb-03
Shadow of Apokolips	8.5	May-03
Swinger Golf	7.75	Jan-03
SX Superstar	6	Aug-03
TimeSplitters 2	8.5	Dec-02
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	9	Dec-02
Transworld Surf: Next Wave	5.5	May-03
Tabo Slur	6.5	Jun-03
Ultimate Muscle	7.5	Jul-03
Vexx	8.25	Mar-03
Wano World	8.5	Jul-03
Wesleyan	8	Jan-03
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 Crock	8.75	Dec-02

XBOX

Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	6.75	Aug-03
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
Battle Engine Aquila	7	Feb-03
Black Stone: Magic & Steel	3	Feb-03
BloodRayne	7.75	Dec-02
Bloody Roar Extreme	6.5	Jul-03

SPLINTER CELL

■ **FORMAT** GAMECUBE ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT SHANGHAI STUDIO/UBI SOFT MONTREAL
 ■ **REVIEWED** MAY-03



Sharing many of the traits of the PlayStation 2 version, this incarnation is void of the impressive shadow casting and dynamic lighting found in the Xbox and PC versions. Whether or not the lighting differences had anything to do with it, Ubi Soft decided to rearrange the level maps. If you've been biding your time and have opted to wait for the GameCube release before playing Splinter Cell, some of the best stealth gameplay ever created awaits. It really is a beautiful title, and since the GameCube hasn't seen anything even remotely close to it, it's an absolute must-have. — **REINER**

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BMX XXX	7.75	Jan-03
Brute Force	8.25	Jul-03
Burnout 2: Point of Impact: Developer's Cut	6.5	Jun-03
Capcom vs. SNK 2 EO	8.5	Jan-03
Colin McRae Rally 3	8.75	Feb-03
Crimson Sea	7.75	Feb-03
Break in Brass	7.5	Mar-03
Xtreme Beach Volleyball	5	Jan-03
Deadrow	8.25	Feb-03
Defender	8.25	Feb-03
Dr. Muto	8	Jan-03
Dragon's Lair 3D	7.75	Jan-03
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jul-03
Eye Dead	8	Jun-03
A Fistful of Boomstick	8	Jan-03
Fatal Frame	9	Jan-03
Xtreme Beach Volleyball	5	Jan-03
Freestyle MetalX	7	Aug-03
Furious Karting	6	Jun-03
Ghost Recon	8.5	Jan-03
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	8.25	Aug-03
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	7.5	Jun-03
High Heat 2004	7.25	Apr-03
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	8.5	Jul-03
Hulk, The	5.75	Jul-03
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	8.5	Aug-03
IndyCar Series	7.5	Jun-03
Italian Job, The	5	Aug-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	Mar-03
Legends of Wrestling II	6.75	Feb-03
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, The	9.25	Feb-03
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	8	Jul-03
Marvel vs. Capcom 2	8.5	May-03
Medal of Honor: Frontline	8.75	Dec-02
Meta: Gear Solid 2: Substance	9.25	Jan-03
Meta: Gear Solid 2: Substance	9.25	Jan-03
Midnight Club II	9	Jun-03
Midtown Madness 3	5.25	Jul-03
Minority Report	6.75	Feb-03
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	Jan-03
MotoGP 2	8	Jan-03
Murakumo	5.75	Mar-03
MVP Baseball 2003	9.25	Apr-03
NBA Street Vol. 2	9	May-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.5	Jul-03
NHL 2K3	9.25	Dec-02
Nightcrazer II: Equinox	5.75	Feb-03
Panzer Dragoon Origin	8.25	Jan-03
Phantom Crash	7.5	Jan-03
Pirates of the Caribbean: Ruler of the Seas	7.75	Aug-03
Pulse Racer	9	Apr-03
Pulse Racer 3	3	Feb-03
Rally Fusion	8	Jan-03
Race of Champions	8	Jan-03
Red Faction II	8.25	Apr-03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tactics of War	9.25	Jun-03
Robocop	3.5	May-03
Rocky	7	Dec-02
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2	2	Jun-03
Run Like Hell	8	May-03
SeaBass	4	Jan-03
Sensless Sam	9	Dec-02
Shenmue II	9	Jan-03
Shrek: Super Party	3.25	Jan-03
Sms, 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	8	Dec-02
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	9	Aug-03

Star Wars: The Clone Wars	8.5	Jun-03
State of Emergency	7	May-03
Steep	8.5	Dec-02
Steep: Battleground	4.75	Jan-03
Superman: The Man of Steel	6.5	Jan-03
SX Superstar	6.5	Aug-03
Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus	7.25	Apr-03
TimeSplitters 2	8.5	Dec-02
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	9	Dec-02
Total Immersion Racing	8.5	Jan-03
Toxic Grind	6.25	Feb-03
Transworld Snowboarding	8.5	Jan-03
UFC: Tapout 2	6.25	May-03
Unreal Championship	8.75	Jan-03
Vexx	8	Mar-03
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

CRIMSON SEA

■ **FORMAT** XBOX ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KOEI
 ■ **REVIEWED** FEB-03



You probably know publisher Koei for either its Dynasty Warriors brawlers or the tactical intricacies of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms series. Crimson Sea is an obvious attempt to expand the company's horizons into more traditional gameplay directions, and it succeeds — but with mixed results. It features swarms of enemies at once without a hint of slowdown, and the targeting system gets you in the killing groove like an old-school shooter. Unfortunately, the game's combos are of the simpler sort — like Dynasty Warriors. I appreciate Koei's efforts — and they're not in vain — but I got the feeling that more could have been done to truly make this a title that turns heads. — **KATO**</

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Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
PLAYSTATION 2		
8/18/03	Alter Echo	THQ
9/23/03	Battlestar Galactica	Vivendi Universal
10/7/03	Bionicle	Electronic Arts
8/26/03	Bombastic	Capcom
8/26/03	Bufy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004	Activision

SSX 3

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2/XBOX/GAMECUBE ■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS BIG ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 1



The best keep getting better in SSX 3, a sequel to the highly popular snowboarding franchise. While Nintendo resurrects the ancient 1080° franchise, those of us who have seen SSX 3 wonder how it ever hopes to compete with EA

Sports Big's wintery wunderkind. With new characters and hidden challenges, open-mountain environments, and even an award system that lets you earn MP3s, it's pretty much the complete package for action/sports fans of any stripe.

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
9/22/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
9/23/03	True Crime: Streets of LA	Activision
9/23/03	Urban Freestyle Soccer	Acclaim
10/7/03	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom
9/24/03	Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	Bam Entertainment
9/8/03	WWE WrestleMania XIX	THQ
9/15/03	XGRA	Acclaim

XBOX

8/18/03	Alter Echo	THQ
9/23/03	Battlestar Galactica	Vivendi Universal
10/7/03	Bionicle	Electronic Arts
8/26/03	Bufy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004	Activision
9/16/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
9/1/03	Chessmaster	Ubi Soft
9/15/03	Daredevil	Encore Software
9/16/03	Dino Crisis 3	Capcom
9/2/03	Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure	Activision
9/3/03	Dynasty Warriors 4	Koei
10/1/03	ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega
9/2/03	ESPN NFL Football	Sega
10/7/03	FIFA 2004	Electronic Arts
9/2/03	Fifa World Tour Tennis	Xicat
9/16/03	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts
10/2/03	Fuzion Frenzy 2	Microsoft
9/23/03	Gladius	LucasArts
8/26/03	Group S Challenge	Capcom
10/1/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
9/23/03	Hobbit: The	Vivendi Universal
8/29/03	Magi	Natsume
9/16/03	NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts
9/30/03	NBA Jam 2004	Acclaim
9/29/03	NFL Blitz Pro	Midway
8/26/03	NFL Fever 2004	Microsoft
9/16/03	NHL 2004	NHL
9/22/03	NHL Hitz Pro	Midway
10/1/03	NHL Rivals 2004	Microsoft
10/1/03	Oddworld: Munch's Odyssee 2	Microsoft
8/26/03	Otog: Myth of Demons	Sega
10/7/03	Pitfall Harry	Activision
8/26/03	Pro Cast Fishing	Capcom
10/1/03	Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft
8/18/03	Scoby Doo: Night of 100 Frights	THQ
9/9/03	Simpsons: Hit and Run	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Soul Calibur II	Namco
10/1/03	SSX 3	Electronic Arts
9/3/03	Starsky & Hutch	Take 2
10/1/03	Sudeki	Microsoft
9/22/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
10/1/03	Top Spin	Microsoft
9/23/03	True Crime: Streets of LA	Activision
9/1/03	Ultimate Beach Soccer	Dreamcatcher
10/1/03	Unseen The	Microsoft
9/23/03	Urban Freestyle Soccer	Acclaim
9/15/03	US Open 2003	Dreamcatcher
9/23/03	Voodoo Vince	Microsoft
9/24/03	Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	Bam Entertainment
9/15/03	WWE Raw 2	THQ
8/26/03	XGRA	Acclaim

PC

9/30/03	Age of Mythology: The Titans	Microsoft
10/1/03	Airport Tycoon II	Global Star Software
9/30/03	American Conquest: Fight Back	HO Interactive
8/26/03	Anarchy Online: Shadowlands	Funcom
9/9/03	Apocalypse	Konami
9/2/03	Backyard Football 2004	Atari
8/25/03	Battle Fields	Matrix Games

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2/XBOX/GAMECUBE ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2 PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23



Here's an example of a game with a huge potential to be either extremely great or incredibly bad. Ubi Soft doesn't have a lot of solid experience with fighting games or brawlers, so we are a bit skeptical that they can pull off this kind of

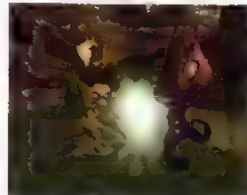
high-flying martial arts action. Still, recent video we've seen looks impressive to say the least, showing off some very intense, smoothly animated swordplay.

9/9/03	Battlefield 1942: Deluxe Edition	Electronic Arts
9/9/03	Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WW II	Electronic Arts
9/1/03	BloodRayne	Mayhem
9/12/03	Bread	Hip Interactive
8/26/03	Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2004 Season	Activision
8/26/03	Cabela's Grand Slam: 2004 Trophies	Activision
9/16/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
8/19/03	Chaser	JoWood
9/23/03	Chrome	Strategy First
8/19/03	Cold Zero	JoWood
9/22/03	Command & Conquer: Generals: Zero Hour	Electronic Arts
9/1/03	Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	Eidos
9/1/03	Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Vivendi Universal
8/19/03	Crime Cities	Encore Software
9/2/03	Crusaders Kings	Strategy First
10/7/03	Deer Hunter 2004	Atari
10/1/03	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos
10/1/03	Emergency Services Sim	Global Star Software
8/19/03	Engins Rising Tide	Dreamcatcher
10/1/03	Enter The Matrix: Special Edition	Atari

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
8/18/03	EverQuest: Evolution	Verant Interactive/989 Studios
9/30/03	EverQuest: Lost Dungeons of Norrath	Verant Interactive/989 Studios
8/25/03	Fading Sun's Noble Armada	Matrix Games
9/2/03	Firefighter 259	Global Star Software
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
9/16/03	Galidor: Defenders Outer Dimension	Electronic Arts
8/19/03	Ghost Master	Vivendi Universal
9/2/03	Great Empires Collection 3	Vivendi Universal
10/1/03	Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus	Vivendi Universal
9/30/03	HalfLife 2	Vivendi Universal
9/15/03	Halo	Microsoft
8/26/03	Heaven and Hell	Hip Interactive
9/23/03	Hobbit: The	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	HomeWorld 2	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Hoyle's Card Games 2004	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Hoyle's Casino 2004	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Hoyle's Puzzle Games 2004	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Hoyle's Table Games 2004	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Ironwind Dale: Ultimate Collection	Vivendi Universal
10/1/03	JediKnight V	Global Star Software
10/1/03	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs. Death	Vivendi Universal
9/30/03	Law & Order II: Double or Nothing	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Links Championship Edition	Microsoft
9/9/03	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
10/1/03	Mall Tycoon II	Global Star Software
10/1/03	Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	Take 2

TAK AND THE POWER OF JUJU

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2/GAMECUBE ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14



This little platformer – designed in part by Nickelodeon – is challenging Microsoft's Voodoo Vince as the king of video game sorcery. Juju – main character Tak's magic power – is similar to voodoo, and allows him to transform himself into a

number of different forms, including a chicken. Utilizing these forms will be necessary for solving the game's myriad puzzles. Hopefully, this part of the package will allow Tak to distinguish himself from the character/action crowd.

9/22/03	Medal of Honor: Allied Assault – Breakthrough	Electronic Arts
10/1/03	Men of Valor, Vietnam	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Micro Mayhem	Jaleco
10/7/03	Nancy Drew: Danger on Deception Island	Atari
9/16/03	NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts
9/16/03	NHL 2004	Electronic Arts
9/2/03	One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	Tri-Synergy
8/18/03	Paradise Cracked	Tri-Synergy
9/23/03	Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	Ubi Soft
9/15/03	Republic: The Revolution	Eidos
9/2/03	Ring II	Global Star Software
9/3/03	Rugby 2004	Electronic Arts
8/18/03	Runaway: A Road to Adventure	Tri-Synergy
8/25/03	Savage	iGames Publishing
9/22/03	Sim City 4: Rush Hour	Electronic Arts
9/29/03	Sims: Double Deluxe: The Starsky & Hutch	Electronic Arts
9/3/03	Star Wars Jedi Academy	LucasArts
9/1/03	Team Fortress: Brotherhood of Arms	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Temple of Elemental Evil: Greyhawk	Atari
9/22/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
10/1/03	Train Simulator 2.0	Microsoft
8/26/03	Tron 2.0	Disney Interactive
9/12/03	UFO Aftermath	Tri-Synergy
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	Vivendi Universal
8/9/03	World Championship Pool 2003	Jaleco

GAME BOY ADVANCE

10/7/03	Backyard Hockey	Atari
10/3/03	Banana: Rise of San Tzu	Ubi Soft
9/15/03	Bionicle	THQ
9/18/03	Bionicle	Konami
9/23/03	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft
10/1/03	Demolicks: Dark Version	Atari
10/1/03	Demolicks: Light Version	Atari
9/30/03	Disney Party	Electronic Arts
10/7/03	FIFA 2004	Electronic Arts
9/8/03	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo
10/1/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts
10/1/03	Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	Natsume
9/23/03	Hobbit: The	Vivendi Universal
9/22/03	Jimmy Neutron: Jet Fusion	THQ
10/7/03	Lion King: The	Disney Interactive
8/25/03	Mortal Kombat: Tournament Edition	Midway
9/2/03	Odoworld: Munch's Odyssee	THQ
8/25/03	Pokemon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo
9/9/03	Power Rangers Ninja Storm	THQ
9/10/03	Rocket Power: Gravity Zone	THQ
9/15/03	Scoby Doo: Mystery Mayhem	THQ
9/9/03	Shangha Soul	Atari
10/1/03	SSX 3	Electronic Arts
10/7/03	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts
9/16/03	Woody Woodpecker: Crazy Castle 5	Namco

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
GAMECUBE		
9/30/03	Auto Modelista	Capcom
9/23/03	Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	Sega
10/7/03	Bionicle	Electronic Arts
8/26/03	Bufy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi Universal
9/16/03	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take 2
9/1/03	Chessmaster	Ubi Soft
9/30/03	Disney Party	Electronic Arts
9/2/03	Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure	Activision
10/7/03	Drome Racers	Electronic Arts
8/25/03	F-Zero GX	Nintendo
10/7/03	FIFA 2004	Electronic Arts
8/18/03	Freaky Flyers	THQ
9/16/03	Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension	LucasArts
9/23/03	Galadius	LucasArts
10/1/03	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Natsume
10/1/03	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Natsume
9/23/03	Hobbit: The	Vivendi Universal
9/15/03	Jimmy Neutron: Jet Fusion	THQ
9/2/03	Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi Universal
9/23/03	Medabots Infinity	Natsume
8/19/03	Motor Trend Lotus Challenge	Xicat
10/7/03	NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts
9/29/03	NFL Blitz Pro	Midway
9/16/03	NHL 2004	Electronic Arts
9/22/03	NHL Hitz Pro	Midway
9/9/03	P.N. 03	Capcom
10/7/03	Pitfall Harry	Activision
9/9/03	Simpsons: Hit and Run	Vivendi Universal
8/26/03	Soul Calibur II	Namco
9/22/03	Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	THQ
9/8/03	Spirits & Spells	Dreamcatcher
10/1/03	SSX 3	Electronic Arts

SECRET ACCESS

SPEED KINGS

To activate this cheat, input the following text at the Player Setup screen as a Handle.

Unlock Everything – borkbork

David "The Ford Truck Man" Irons
Big Bear Lake, TN

SILENT HILL 3



Complete the game to unlock the Extra Costume mode on the Main Menu. From here, input the code below. Please note that this cheat is case sensitive.

Game Informer Tank Top – gameinformer

"The GI Staff"
Minneapolis, MN

PRIMAL



To activate the codes below, head into the Options menu and hold R1, L1, R2, and L2 for five seconds until the Cheat menu appears. To input the codes, you'll need to hold the X button on the corresponding cheat line and press left and right to cycle letters. Hitting Left or Right without X held simply moves to the next space. Once a code is entered, you'll need to hit □ to activate it. The cheats that affect gameplay will turn orange when entered correctly.

- 16 Vikt Interview** – On the Bonus C line, input LORDOFCHAOS.
- Actor's Feature & Making Of** – On the Bonus B line, input PRIMAL.
- All Movies** – On the Bonus E line, input OBLIVION.
- Aquis Scenes** – On the Aquis line, input MOONPOOL.
- Easy Kills** – On the Easykill line, input KILLSWITCH.
- Invincibility** – On the Invulnerability line, input MONSTROUS.
- Solum Scenes** – On the Solum line, input WINDCHILL.
- Trailer Video** – On the Bonus D line, input MORTALIS.

Jenny Frederick
Houston, TX

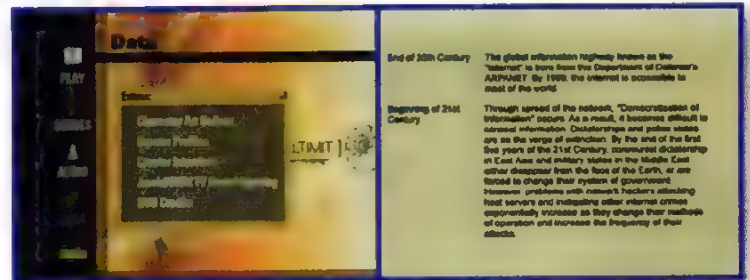
TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

To activate this ever-handly cheat, input the following sequence at the in-game pause menu.

Level Select & Skip – Simultaneously press and hold L1, R2, Down, and Δ for three seconds. Release these buttons then quickly tap ○, Up, □, Δ, Right, Down. This may take a few tries to nail. Timing is everything.

Randy Johnson
Phoenix, AZ

DOT HACK VOL. 1: INFECTION



This code only works on the DVD companion that came with your game.

Bonus Movie – At the Title screen, enter Data, then highlight Main from the menu on the left. From this screen, press Right, then wait a few seconds and hit Left to access a hidden timeline that walks you through the history of Dot Hack. Very cool!

Thomas Rodemaker
Chicago, IL

DOT HACK VOL. 2: MUTATION



This code only works on the Liminality DVD companion that came with your game.

Bonus Information – At the Title screen, enter Data, then highlight Character Art Gallery from the menu. From here, press right to access a hidden icon. Hit X to unearth an extensive log of story information.

Thomas Rodemaker
Chicago, IL

WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED

Enter all of these cheats at the Main Menu with Career, Free Ride, and Free Dive modes. When a code is entered correctly, a message will flash up on the screen.

- All Boarders** – Rotate the Right analog stick clockwise 15 times
- All Boards** – Up (x2), Left (x2), Right (x2), Down (x2), Up, Left, Right, Down, Up, Left, Right, Down
- All Gaps** – R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2, R1, L1, L2, R2
- Level Select** – □ (x4), ○ (x4), △ (x4), □, ○, △
- Unlock Everything** – Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen throwing back the drizzle and wizzle with Snoop Dogg, ya bizzle!)

ENTER TO WIN

Send in your codes and passwords, and if we choose your entry as Code of the Month you'll win a wonderful prize from the Game Informer Vault! All other entries printed within these hallowed pages will receive a Secret Access t-shirt.

Send To:
Secret Access
Game Informer Magazine
724 North First Street, 4th Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401
secretaccess@gameinformer.com

RTX RED ROCK

To enable this code, you'll first need a TV that supports progressive scan capabilities. To enter this cheat, head into the Options menu then select Codes. Now, input the sequence below. If the screen turns black or blue, your TV does not support this feature. You'll need to reboot to return to the normal resolution.

Progressive Scan Mode – Right, Up, Right (x2), Up, Right (x3), Up, Right.

"The Dingle Berry Snatcher"
Boulder, CO

TENCHU: WRATH OF HEAVEN



We ran a ton of codes last month, but your hackers have just unearthed another batch! Viola! As in Frank and Bill!

All Characters – At the Press Start screen, press L1, R2, L2, R1, Right, Left, L3, R3.

All Items – At the Item screen, hold R1 and L1, then tap Up, □ (x2), Left, □ (x2), Down, □ (x2), Right, □ (x2).

All Mission Layouts – At the Mission Selection screen, press R3, L3, R2, L2, R1, L1.

All Powers – During gameplay, pause, hold L1 and L2, then tap Up (x2), Down (x2). Release L1 and L2, then press □ (x2), R1, R2.

B-Side Sound – At the Press Start screen, hold L1 and R2, then press Down, □, Up, □, Right, □, Left, □. Now, enter Options, Sound, then Language. Select the B-Side option.

Demo Level – At the Press Start screen, tap Up, Down, Right, Left, × (x3).

Increase Items – At the Item screen, hold R2 and L2, then tap □ (x3), Up, Left, Down, Right.

Regain Health – During gameplay, pause, then tap Up, Down, Right, Left, □ (x3).

"The Rhino"
Toledo, OH

FREESTYLE METALX



Enter all of these case-sensitive codes at the Cheats screen in the Options menu.

\$1,000,000 – sugardaddy

All Bike Parts – garageking

All Levels & Events – universe

All Posters & Photo Slots – seeall

All Rider Costumes – johnnye

All Riders – dudemaster

All Songs – hearall

All Special Stunt Slots – fleximan

All Videos – watchall

Tino "Gimme Your Money" Bambino
Bronx, NY

CODE OF THE MONTH

MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER



To enter these codes, select Electro Cosh (baton) as your weapon, then input the sequence for the desired code below. When a cheat is entered correctly, a message will appear in the lower left hand corner.

Auto-Focus Mode – Left Trigger, Right Trigger, Left Trigger, Right Trigger, A, B (x2), A, B, A

Big Head Mode – Left Trigger, Right Trigger, Left Trigger, Right Trigger, A, B (x2), A, B (x2)

Detach Camera – Left Trigger, Right Trigger, Left Trigger, Right Trigger, A, B (x2), A, Y, X

Double Damage – Left Trigger, Right Trigger, Left Trigger, Right Trigger, A, B (x2), A, Y (x2)

Infinite Ammo – Left Trigger, Right Trigger, Left Trigger, Right Trigger, A, B (x2), A, X (x2)

Invulnerability – Left Trigger, Right Trigger, Left Trigger, Right Trigger, A, B (x2), A, X, Y

One-Hit Kills With Electro Cosh – Left Trigger, Right Trigger, Left Trigger, Right Trigger, A, B (x2), A, B (x2), A (x3)

Corey Williams
Orange County, CA

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN



Enter all of these codes at any point during gameplay when you are on land. When you enter a code correctly, text will appear in the upper left hand corner of the screen.

\$100,000 – A, X, Y, B, Y, B, X, B (x2), A

50 Skill Points – A, B, Y, X, Y, B (X2), Y, B, A

God Mode – A, Y, X (x2), Y (x2), B, Y, X, A

Neutral Reputation – A, X, Y, X, Y, B (x2), Y, B, A

Orlando Bloom
Hotguy Valley, UT

INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPERIOR'S TOMB

To activate this code, head to the Press Start screen and input the following sequence. If entered correctly, you'll hear a sound.

Invincibility – Hold the L and R Buttons, then using the d-pad tap Up (x2), Down, Up, A, X, A, B, Up, Down, Y, Start.

Steven Tao
Indianapolis, IN

OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL



The Bigger Chests cheat has to be seen to be believed.

All Characters & Costumes – Enter Exhibition mode, then head to the Character Selection screen. From here, hold the L Button and tap Left, White, Right, White. This code must be entered very quickly for it to work.

Beating Tokens – Head into Exhibition mode and begin a game. During play, hold the L Button and tap White (x3). This will only work if you don't have any Tokens.

Bigger Chests – During gameplay, hold the L Button, then tap B, Up (x2), B, Y.

Big Head Mode – During gameplay, hold the L Button, then tap B, A, B, Y.

Maximum Stats – Enter Exhibition mode, then head to the Character Selection screen. From here, hold the R Button and tap Left, White, Right, White.

*“Joystick Juggalo”
Lancing, MI*

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX

These cheats can be entered at any point during gameplay. If you input them correctly, a message will appear.

All Weapons – Click and hold the Left analog stick, then tap X, Y, A, B.

God Mode – Click and hold the Left analog stick, then tap B, A, Y, X.

Infinite Ammo – Click and hold the Left analog stick, then tap Black, A, Y, White.

Level Select – Click and hold the Left analog stick, then tap Black, B, A, White.

*Shigeru Kuji
Tokyo, Japan*

WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED



Enter all of these cheats at the Main Menu with Career, Free Ride, and Free Drive modes. When a code is entered correctly, a message will flash up on the screen.

All Boards – Rotate the Right analog stick clockwise 15 times

All Boards – Up (x2), Left (x2), Right (x2), Down (x2), Up, Left, Right, Down, Up, Left, Right, Down

Level Select – X (x4), B (x4), Y (x4), X, B, Y

Unlock Everything – Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right

*“GI Droid”
(location unknown – last seen
wearing Britney Spears’ panties)*

PRO RACE DRIVER

To enter these cheats, head into the Options menu and access the Bonus folder. Input any of these cheats at the Enter Bonus Code menu.

Credits – CREDITS

Enhanced Damage – DAMAGE

Realistic Handling – SIM

*Steven Berg
Rockford, IL*

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

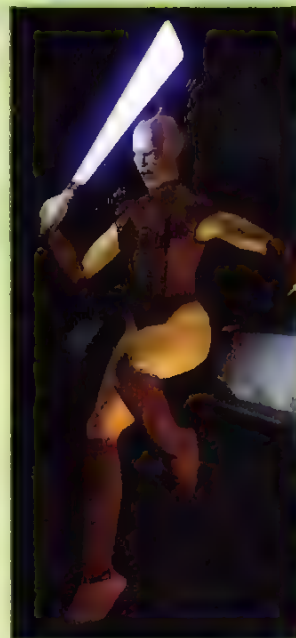


Alter Voice Pitch – If you have a second controller lying around the house, plug it into the fourth controller slot on the Xbox. When your characters speak, pick up this controller and hit the Black button to lower the pitch of their voice, and White to raise it. Press B to switch the voices back to normal. This is a really fun cheat!

Play as Juhani – On Dantooine, after you construct your lightsaber, the counsel will send you on a mission that takes you deep into the wilderness. At an ancient shrine, you will encounter Jahani, a Jedi who has succumbed to the dark side. How you handle this situation will alter the game significantly. If you kill her, another Jedi member will lean toward the dark side. Conversely, if you convince her to turn to the light side, she will join your party and become a playable character.

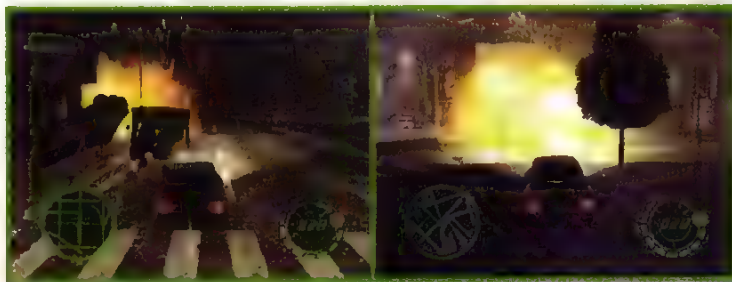
Play as HK-47 – On Tatooine, if you go into the droid shop, you'll see the assassin droid HK-47 standing in the corner. You can bargain with the salesperson to get the price down, but you will need the necessary funds to unlock him.

Bonus Items – If you talk to your party members on the Ebon Hawk, they will offer a service or will even construct an item for you if you have the necessary parts.



*“The GI Staff”
Minneapolis, MN*

MIDNIGHT CLUB II



To enter these cheats, head into the Options menu and scroll over to the Cheat Codes function. From here, input any of these case-sensitive codes.

All Car Abilities – greasemonkey

All Locations – theworldismine

Change Difficulty – howhardcanitbe [after the “e” input a number from 0 to 9 to adjust the difficulty level]

Faster Gameplay – howfastcanitbe [after the “e” input a number from 0 to 9 to adjust the speed]

Infinite Nitrous – zoomzoom4

Missiles & Machine Guns – lovenotwar (press White to fire missiles and click L3 for machine guns)

Most Dedicated Stat – bigbrother

*Ozzie Canseco
Madison, WI*

TOTAL IMMERSION RACING

Enter all of these case-sensitive cheats as Driver Names.

All Cars – loaded

All Tracks – Road Sweeps

CART Car – Downforce

Low Gravity – Feather

No HUD – No Dogs

Slow-Motion – Poke

Nancy Reagan
Washington, DC

BIG MUTHA TRUCKERS



Enter all of these codes at the Cheats menu.

All Cheats – CHEATINGMUTHATRUCKER

Automatic Navigation – USETHEFORCE

Damage Toggle – 6WL

Diplomatic Immunity – VICTORS

Evil Truck – VARLEY

Fast Truck – GINGERBEER

Infinite Time – PUBLICTRANSPORT

Level Select – LAZYPLAYER

More Money – LOTSAMONEY

Smaller Pedestrians – DAISHI

Daunte Culpoper
Fumbillitis City, MN

SONIC ADVENTURE DX DIRECTOR'S CUT

We have a ton of codes and secrets for this GameCube remake. You'll need to play it extensively to get the minigames. Believe us, though, it's worth the effort!

Sonic Blast – 130 Emblems

Sonic Chaos – 60 Emblems

Sonic Drift – 40 Emblems

Sonic Drift 2 – 130 Emblems & Complete 20 Missions

Sonic Labyrinth – 100 Emblems & Complete 20 Missions

Sonic Spinball – 80 Emblems

Sonic Triple Trouble – 130 Emblems

Tails Adventure – 130 Emblems & Complete 60 Missions

Tails Sky Patrol – 130 Emblems & 40 Missions

Sonic 2

Level Select – At the Sonic 2 Title screen, Tails will blink twice. When his eye is closed on the second blink, simultaneously press Down, Left, A, B, and Start to unlock the Level Select menu.

Sonic Chaos

Level Select – At the Sonic Chaos Title screen, press Up (x4), Right, Left, Right, Left, Start.

Sonic Labyrinth

Level Select – At the Sonic Labyrinth Title screen, press Up (x2), Right (x3), Down (x6), Left (x9).

Sonic Spinball

Level Select – Enter Sonic Spinball's Sound screen and play these music tracks in order 0, 2, 1, 5, 6, 6 to unlock the Level Select.

"The Vidman"
Uptown, MN

MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

Special Contests – At the Title screen, hold Z and press Start to make the Special Contests option appear at the Main Menu.

Diamond Dave Davis
Las Vegas, NV

SUPERMAN: SHADOW OF APOKOLIPS



Enter all of these codes at the Cheat menu in the Options screen.

All Character Bios – INTERVIEW

All Intermission Sequences – POPCORN

All Level Attack Stages – SIGHTSEEING

Backwards Controls – SUPERMAN

Everything Unlocked – I WANT IT ALL

Explore Metropolis Mode – WANDERER

Extra Difficulty – NAILS

Infinite Health – FIRST AID

Infinite Power – JUICED UP

Easier Button Mashing – SORE FINGER

No Power – JOR EL

No Time Limit – STOP THE CLOCK

Play as Clark Kent – SECRET IDENTITY

Slow Motion – SLOW MOTION

Jacob Peemonster
Rubbersheet City, PA

JET GRIND RADIO

Sega Scream – When a game boots up, tap the A button quickly. Instead of hearing the classic Genesis Sega, you'll hear the hyperactive Sega scream.

"Daddy Fat Sacks"
Memphis, TN

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

To enter this cheat, head to the Select Game screen and highlight the Erase icon. You'll hear someone say "not bad" if entered correctly.

50 Lives – Hold Select, then tap B, A, R Button (x2), A, L Button.

Patrick Williams
Jolie, RI

GUILTY GEAR X: ADVANCE EDITION



Enter all of these codes at the Press Start screen.

All Extra Mode Fighters – Right, Down, Left, R Button (x2)

All Guilty Gear Mode Fighters – Left, Down, Right, L Button (x2)

Original Mode – A, B, A, L Button (x2)

Play as Testament – Up, Down, Right, Left, A

Maynerd Chocolate
Bristol, WV

WING COMMANDER PROPHECY

Input this cheat at the Press Start screen. When entered correctly, the screen will flash.

Allen Ships in Tactical Database – R Button, L Button, A (x3), B, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up, A

Mickey Ratt
Los Angeles, CA

CLASSIC GI

THE KIRBY COMPENDIUM



Kirby has become a staple in the Nintendo world, and has appeared in over a dozen games on several platforms. Each was developed by HAL Laboratories – the company responsible for the classic NES Lolo series and the N64 sleeper Pokémon Snap. The origin of the character started when HAL was designing a Game Boy title easy enough that gamers of any skill level could play through and enjoy. During production, a final character model had not been decided, so someone just used a smiling blob as a placeholder. Obviously, the dummy model became the game's star.

His name started as Popopo, which isn't nearly as endearing as Kirby.

Also, there was a debate as to what color Kirby should be.

On the Game Boy, color didn't matter because you couldn't see it anyway.

Some of the designers wanted him pink, while others thought he should be yellow. Kirby appeared white on the Dream Land box.

It wasn't until the NES title Kirby's Adventure that he was forever deemed pink. The rest, as they say, is history. Enjoy a telling look at all things Kirby.



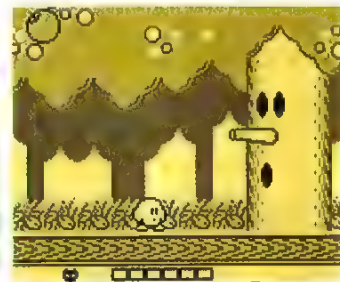
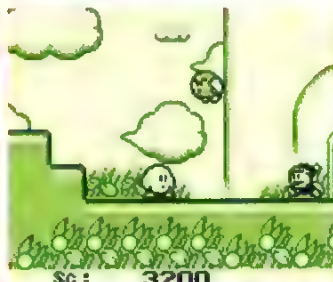
KIRBY'S CREDITS



KIRBY'S DREAM LAND

- ★ Platform: Game Boy
- ★ Release: August 1992

This is the game that started it all. Back then, Kirby lacked the power to absorb his enemies' abilities. He still had a formidable arsenal, however: inhaling, spitting out, flying, and a few power-ups that made him shoot projectiles. It's an extremely short game, even by early Game Boy standards, but it has several memorable scenes and plenty of action.



GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME | BY MARK GREENE

Every month one of Game Informer's readers picks his or her personal choice for Greatest Game Of All Time.



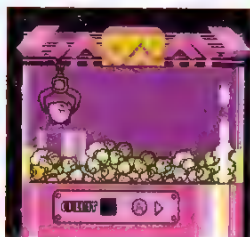
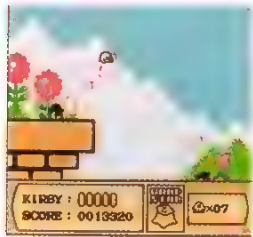
LUNAR: THE SILVER STAR

■ FORMAT SEGA CD
■ PUBLISHER WORKING DESIGNS

Role-playing games are now one of the most popular genres of video games, but in 1993, they weren't nearly as well known. Back then, I had a Sega CD that I paid a whole lot of money for, because I admittedly thought FMV games were the wave of the future. Man, was I stupid! Anyway, I was out a whole lot of cash and had only Sewer Shark and a few other lame games to show for it, when I saw Lunar at the store. The box was beautiful, all decked out in shiny silver. I hadn't been into RPGs up

to that point, thinking they were slow and boring like the original Dragon Warrior. Still, I was desperate for some entertainment, so I picked it up.

The first singing scene blew me away. It was like watching an anime, with great animation and crystal-clear voice. There was none of the FMV graininess that made me want to puke. The dialogue is amazing, too. Not all of it is spoken, but all of it is thoughtful and hilarious. All the characters for a good story are there: Alex is the



KIRBY'S ADVENTURE

Platform: NES ★ Release: May 1993

This brought the surprise Game Boy hit onto the NES, bigger and better than before. Kirby looked much more at home in color, and he had a whole slew of new tricks thanks to being able to take on the powers of creatures he ate. Kirby's Adventure featured some very entertaining minigames that were unlocked in the overworld. Also, the game told you when you still had items to find in a certain stage, which motivated you to fully complete it.



KIRBY'S PINBALL LAND

Platform: Game Boy ★ Release: November 1993

Kirby's a ball, so it was only a matter of time before he started doing the types of things balls do. This game released the same time Sonic Spinball did on Genesis and, for the most part, kicks the hedgehog's butt. Kirby's Pinball Land was amazing for the technology it used. Its ball physics were some of the most accurate of any pinball video game to date, and it had more levels of arcade action than one would imagine. The title's battery backup made sure you could keep your high score going...and going...and going.

KIRBY'S AVALANCHE

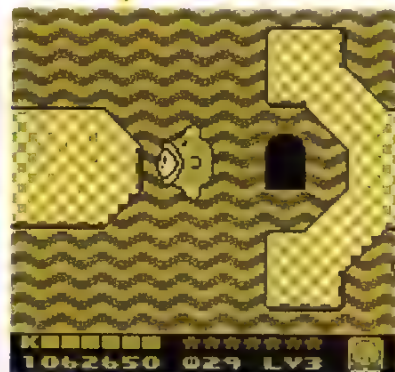
Platform: SNES ★ Release: February 1995

Puyo Puyo was an arcade game that released in 1992, and it proved to be one of the most addictive puzzle titles since Tetris. Nintendo – who also owned the rights to Tetris – wanted to bring it to the U.S., and decided to use the Kirby universe. Stack up blobs that stick to like colors, and when four are joined, they disappear. Massive combos rain rubble down upon your opponent. This game didn't have much to do with Kirby, who played a more passive role – cheering you on and talking smack in cutscenes.

KIRBY'S DREAM COURSE

★ Platform: SNES
★ Release: February 1995

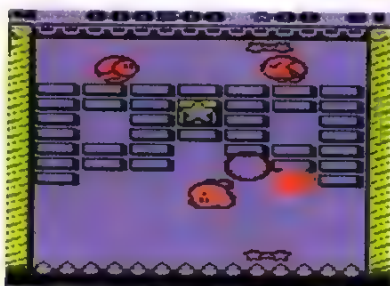
Eschewing his platform roots, Kirby took to the Dream Course. This game is a mixture between mini golf and pool. There is a set number of enemies on each of the eight stages' holes. Roll or bounce Kirby into them using some simple but effective techniques, and the final bad guy turns into the hole. Certain monsters will give you their powers when you wipe them out; allowing you to turn into a UFO, use spikes to halt movement, or grab an umbrella to float down from up high. There's a ton of replay in perfecting your strategies, and being able to design your "logo" is icing on the cake.



KIRBY'S DREAM LAND 2

★ Platform: Game Boy
★ Release: May 1995

Kirby gets some help this time around. His friends include Rick the hamster, an owl named Coo, and fishy Kine. You wouldn't think Kirby would need backup, but the double teams these three bring about are pretty cool. Dream Land 2 adopted many of the things that made the NES Adventure great: an overworld, larger size, and the motivation to complete everything.



KIRBY'S BLOCK BALL

★ Platform: Game Boy
★ Release: May 1996

In the vein of Breakout and Arkanoid, Kirby once again relies on his round shape to tackle a classic gameplay formula. Hit A when he hits the paddle, and he will grow in size, taking out more blocks on his path. Some levels feature multiple paddles – on the top or sides of the screen. Bonuses and boss battles make this more than just a typical block-breaker, and the physics are as good as those in Pinball Land.



KIRBY SUPER STAR

★ Platform: SNES
★ Release: September 1996

Advertising this as "eight games in one" is deceiving, but Super Star is still longer than your average Kirby game. The minigames are also some of the best of the franchise. The gimmick this time is that Kirby can give up his inherited power in favor of an AI helper to fight alongside him. It's a beautiful 2D game, but was unfortunately released at a time when most people already abandoned their SNES.

hero; Luna is the love interest; Ramus is the best friend who lacks confidence; and Nail is the comic relief.

You think it's going to be these four just strolling along on an adventure, but then you end up losing two of them relatively early. Things like that don't normally happen in games, so it came as a real shocker. I guess every



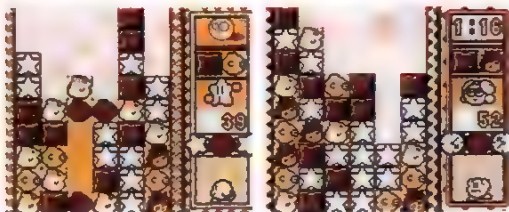
hero needs a damsel in distress, but Luna gets taken right when you start really bonding with her.

The game doesn't look that great outside of the cutscenes, and even its play is pretty generic, but the personality of the characters – future acquaintances like Ghaleon, Kyle, and Nash are especially interesting – and the

situations they get put in carries you through and keeps you hooked. There are some twists that will definitely shock you.

I stayed loyal to Working Designs' other Sega CD games – Vay, Popful Mail, and Lunar: Eternal Blue. I even bought the PSone remake just to see the new scenes, but nothing compares to the first time I played Lunar: Silver Star on Sega CD. To me, it's the greatest game of all time.

CLASSIC FEATURE



KIRBY'S STAR STACKER

Platform: Game Boy ★ Release: April 1997

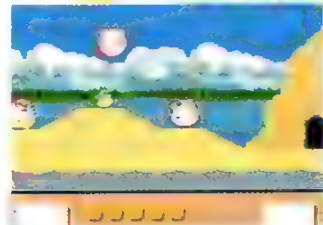
Kirby enjoys riding stars; in this game, he plays with them. Like his other puzzle game appearance in *Avalanche*, our pink protagonist doesn't do much here. Pair up one of his three friends from *Dream Land 2* to make them disappear – taking away any stars between them and turning any boxes into stars. Again, chains are beneficial. There's a bunch of modes, as well as several difficulty levels. Like another underrated Game Boy puzzler by the name of *Mario's Picross*, it received a Japan-only SNES version.



KIRBY'S DREAM LAND 3

Platform: SNES ★ Release: November 1997

This is the first in the *Dream Land* series to move away from the Game Boy. Its soothing yet bright colors were very original, and Kirby gets a lot more help from his animal friends. This game also allows for two people to play simultaneously. Again, at this point, most people had shelved their Super Nintendo in favor of PlayStation or N64.



KIRBY 64: CRYSTAL SHARDS

Platform: N64 ★ Release: June 2000

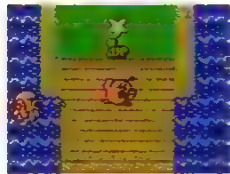
Kirby's only released N64 title takes inspiration from *Dream Land 3*, but finally puts the pink puff in 3D. The gameplay is still in the traditional 2D style, though. A few new friends are introduced (King Dedede even joins your side), but most important is the ability to combine two powers together for amazing results. Like most early polygonal games, Kirby's probably not as good-looking as he is as a 2D sprite (despite great cutscenes here), but *Crystal Shards* is still a welcome entry to the franchise.



KIRBY TILT 'N' TUMBLE

Platform: Game Boy Color ★ Release: April 2001

As the first – and so far only – game to use Nintendo's Tilt Response Technology, *Tilt 'n' Tumble* tossed our poor pink hero like never before. Instead of using the d-pad to move Kirby, you manipulate the Game Boy unit itself, and your hero responds onscreen. To move him forward, tilt the system down. To make him stop, hold it level. Kirby can even make long leaps if you gather a head of steam, then pop the Game Boy up like you're flipping a pancake. It's a great gimmick that works perfectly.



KIRBY: NIGHTMARE IN DREAMLAND

★ Platform: Game Boy Advance
★ Release: December 2002

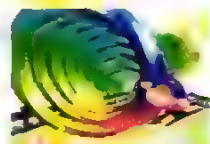
Almost a decade later, Nintendo fancied up Kirby's Adventure with bright, colorful graphics and new minigames, and released it as Kirby's first GBA game. Only the most discriminating Kirby fan can tell it's the same game, however, and it is just as much fun as it was on the NES. Some different levels would've been nice, but these are designed far too well to complain.



KIRBY'S AIR RIDE

★ Platform: N64
★ Release: Cancelled

This is the original incarnation of the title coming to GameCube later this year (see preview on page 94). It started out as a *Marble Madness*-inspired obstacle course with Kirby as a ball – sort of a 64-bit Kirby's *Dream Course*. Then, it moved to a more racing slant, with Kirby hopping on a star. It looked most like a snowboarding game, and would've had an emphasis on multiplayer.



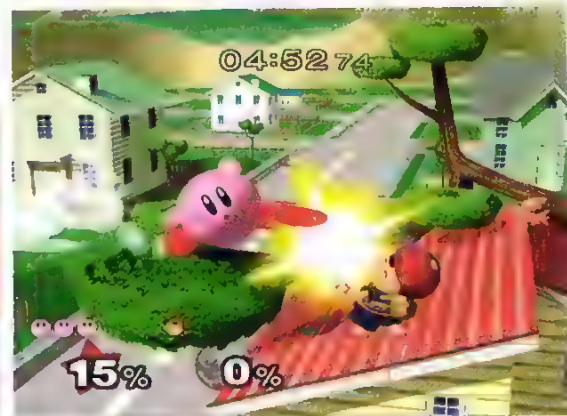
CAMEOS



SUPER SMASH BROS.

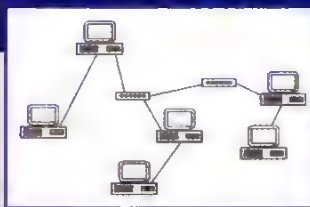
Platform: N64 ★ Release: April 1999

Kirby, as one of Nintendo's most public figures, participated in both *Super Smash Brothers* games – where Nintendo's elite meet to beat...each other down. Kirby's flying gave him a distinct advantage, as did his ability to swallow any of the other fighters, thus stealing their abilities.



SUPER SMASH BROS.: MELEE

Platform: GameCube ★ Release: December 2001



THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

Local access networks, or LANs, are something gamers take for granted. The first LAN was put into service in September of 1977 at the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York. The company behind it was Datapoint Corporation, based out of San Antonio, TX. Called ARCnet (short for Attached Resource Computer network), it consisted of a group of nodes that could communicate over a short distance – such

as a campus or office. ARCnet connected up to 255 computers together – none of which had Return To Castle Wolfenstein installed on them, unfortunately. Surprisingly advanced, it allowed different transmission types to be used, such as twisted-pair wire, fiber optic cable, and coaxial cable. Next time you and your friends are geeking out to *Battlefield 1942*, remember 1977 and Datapoint Corporation's ARCnet.

NES

MAGIC DARTS



RETRO RATING

7.75



To say that this is the best console darts simulator may not be saying much (quick – think of another one), but Magic Darts really does capture the essence of the sport/hobby/game. Aiming is easy enough that you can do it accurately after your fifth Corona, but tricky enough that a triple-20 isn't guaranteed. Use the dart cursor to show where you want to aim, hit the horizontally-scrolling meter to see how close you'll be to your mark, then hit a button for height and another for power. It sounds complicated here, but it's smooth in execution – especially if you've played video golf or bowling before. There's no league play to speak of, but with four-player support and 701, 501, 301, Round the Clock, Count Up, and Half It; you can be assured your money's worth – although bar favorite Cricket is absent. The cast of dart-hurlers is varied, too – you've got an alien, musclehead, ape, and robot among normal human players. Magic Darts wins the game, but with no competition, it's only playing against itself.

■ STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS ■ PUBLISHER ROMSTAR ■ DEVELOPER ROMSTAR
 ■ YEAR RELEASED 1991

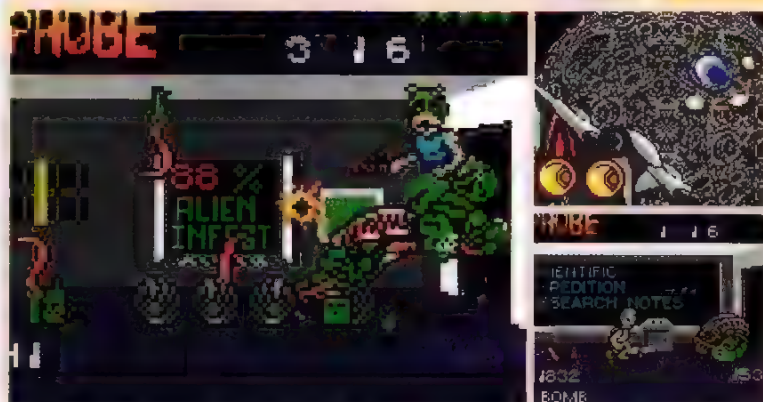
LYNX

XENOPHOBE



RETRO RATING

7.5



A "xenophobe," as defined by the dictionary, is one who is unduly fearful of the unfamiliar. In this game, however, your fears are quite justified. As a crack team of space aces, Xenophobe has you traveling from space station to space station, clearing out the area of the undesired alien element. Little ones will latch onto your body, big ones will thrash you, and errant tentacles will wrap around your face. There are plenty of weapons and items scattered around in the side-scrolling bases to even the odds. Eliminate all hostiles or set off the self-destruct device, and it's on to the next infested heckhole. The graphics are pretty good for Lynx, and the gameplay has more legs than one would think. Perhaps the best feature is linking up four Lynx systems together for some multiplayer alien-splattering. Do you know three other people with an Atari Lynx? We didn't think so. Still, this is one of the better games in the handheld's library.

■ STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER ATARI ■ DEVELOPER BALLY MIDWAY
 ■ YEAR RELEASED 1992

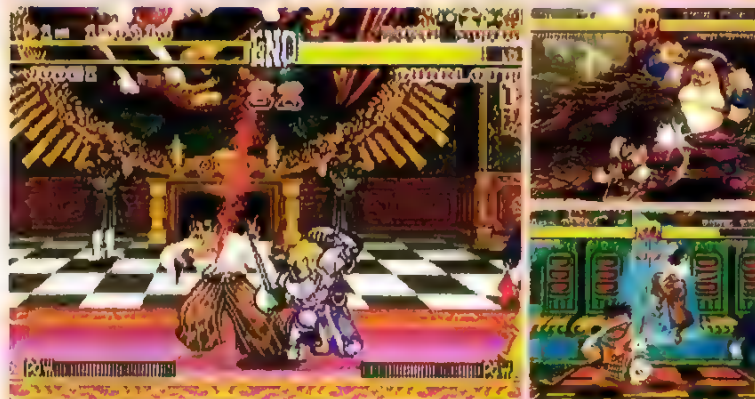
3DO

SAMURAI SHODOWN



RETRO RATING

8



Rallying the fighting game fans, 3DO received the best translation of Samurai Shodown – one of the finest fighters ever created. Players select one of 12 characters to battle other samurai types and ultimately encounter the insidious Amakusa Shiro Tokisada. It sounds unspectacular, but two elements set SS apart from the myriad Street Fighter wannabes of the time: weapons and the lack of combos. Each character possesses a unique weapon that plays an integral role during gameplay, and the combo system is almost nonexistent. Instead, gameplay focuses on the strategic element of the combat itself: learning counter moves and identifying the best course of action in a given situation. One could even consider SS the precursor to the fighting style the Virtua Fighter series has perfected! Unfortunately, this version suffers from a few flaws such as poor sound, slightly choppy graphics, and the 3DO's stiff controller. So, if it's authenticity you want, the original Neo Geo game is still king.

■ STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ PUBLISHER CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
 ■ DEVELOPER CRYSTAL DYNAMICS ■ YEAR RELEASED 1994

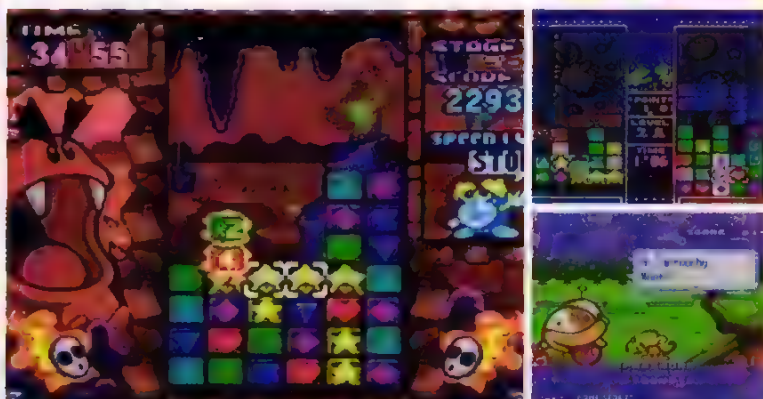
SNES

TETRIS ATTACK



RETRO RATING

9



Think Tetris, and you imagine shapes made up of four square blocks dropping on one another. The only similarity this game has with the original Tetris is that they're both puzzle games. That doesn't mean Tetris Attack is a dud, however. In fact, it's one of the best titles in the genre. Players have a two-square wide cursor which reverses the blocks it's in front of. Matching up three like shapes horizontally or vertically will make them disappear. In single-player, which features a cute story with characters based in the Yoshi's Island world, the goal is to get the block pile below the goal line. For multiplayer, it's all about destroying the competition with combo attacks that rain debris on your opponent's side. For either mode, once the blocks touch the top of the screen, it's lights out. Difficulty comes from pile size and the speed in which they rise – which can get pretty intense and frantic. This same aesthetic was duplicated in the Game Boy/N64 cart Pokémon Puzzle League. It's a classic in any form.

■ STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE ■ PUBLISHER NINTENDO ■ DEVELOPER INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS ■ YEAR RELEASED 1996

LOGITECH CORDLESS CONTROLLER FOR XBOX

- > **Manufacturer:** Logitech
- > **Website:** logitech.com
- > **List Price:** \$69.95



Description:
Wireless controller for Xbox. A 2.4GHz cordless transmitter plugs into the controller port and sits in front of the console while you chill on the couch.

Features:
Around 50 hours of battery life and rumble capabilities.

Range:
Up to 20 feet

Requires Batteries:
Yes (4 AA, included in package)

PREDATOR WIRELESS FOR PLAYSTATION 2

- > **Manufacturer:** Pelican Accessories
- > **Website:** pelicanacc.com
- > **List Price:** \$39.95



Description:
Wireless controller for PlayStation 2. Offers four RF (Radio Frequency) channels and the receiver will also work with the PS2 DVD remote.

Features:
Rumble capabilities and 120 to 200 hours of battery life (depending on rumble usage).

Range:
Over 50 feet

Requires Batteries:
Yes (2 AA, included in package)

AIR FLO EX FOR PLAYSTATION 2

- > **Manufacturer:** Nyko
- > **Website:** nyko.com
- > **List Price:** \$29.95



Description:
An upgrade to last year's Air Flo controller. Cool, fresh air is pumped out through the controller's handles to dry gamers' sweaty palms (nudge, nudge, wink, wink).

Features:
Multi-speed fan for varying levels of airflow, variable vibration function, and improved grips.

Range:
10-foot cable

Requires Batteries:
No. Controller is powered by PS2

CHAMELEON CONTROLLER FOR PLAYSTATION 2

- > **Manufacturer:** Pelican Accessories
- > **Website:** pelicanacc.com
- > **List Price:** \$14.95



Description:
Budget-friendly redesigned PS2 controller. L2 and R2 buttons are recessed, allowing gamers to use their middle fingers for more than just traffic incidents.

Features:
Compact size and availability in five colors.

Range:
8-foot cable

Requires Batteries:
No. Controller is powered by PS2

FF X-2 FIGURES

- > **Manufacturer:** Kotobukiya and Square Enix
- > **Website:** artfx-kotobukiya.com
- > **List Price:** \$14.99

Rikku, Yuna, and Paine from the highly anticipated Final Fantasy X sequel are coming to action figure land. Each of the three characters are high-quality sculptures of the vixens in their default outfits, and all offer an interchangeable hand with a weapon of choice. An expected handful of articulation points offer a broad range of movement. Kotobukiya and Square Enix last offered the stunning Final Fantasy X figures, so you know that these are going to be must-haves for the FFX-2 crowd. Hunt now and buy early.



ACTION SPORT ACCESSORIES

- > **Manufacturer:** Case Logic
- > **Website:** caselogic.com
- > **List Price:** \$7.99 to \$14.99

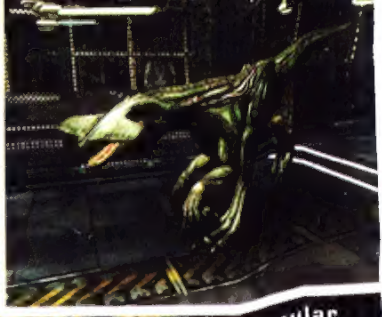
Three gods of extreme sports have stamped their seal of approval on a new line by Case Logic. Each athlete (Tony Hawk, Shaun Palmer, and Dave Mirra) had a hand in designing their case's features and style. Tony's collection sports images from his custom skateboard line; Mirra's takes a streamlined, steel gray route with gage metal zippers; and snowboard junkie Palmer opted for a functional collection designed to work in the snow. While each man's line offers products from CD visors to digital camera cases, we are most interested in the GBA and GBA SP storage units. Quite handy indeed.





If you think golf is hard, try it with chain chomps, warp pipes and a fairly odd foursome. Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour. It's not easy being Mario.





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Experience fast action & reflex intense battles

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DINO CRISIS 3



BRADYGAMES Strategy Guide AVAILABLE



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