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Serious Sam
For PS2 and GC

INDUSTRY
SECRETS

HOW TO GET A JOB IN VIDEO GAMES PG. 60

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS FORGOTTEN REALMS



A Spectacular New
Adventure From The
Developer Behind
The Two Towers

WORLD EXCLUSIVE #3

BLOODRAYNE 2



Jaw-Dropping
New Screens
That Will Blow
Your Mind

MONSTER PREVIEWS

Battle for Middle-Earth
Star Wars: Battlefront
RalliSport Challenge 2
Robotech Invasion
Gran Turismo 4
Baten Kaitos
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Area 51
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ISSUE 100 FEBRUARY 2004

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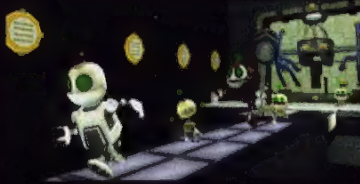


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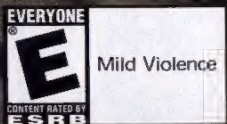
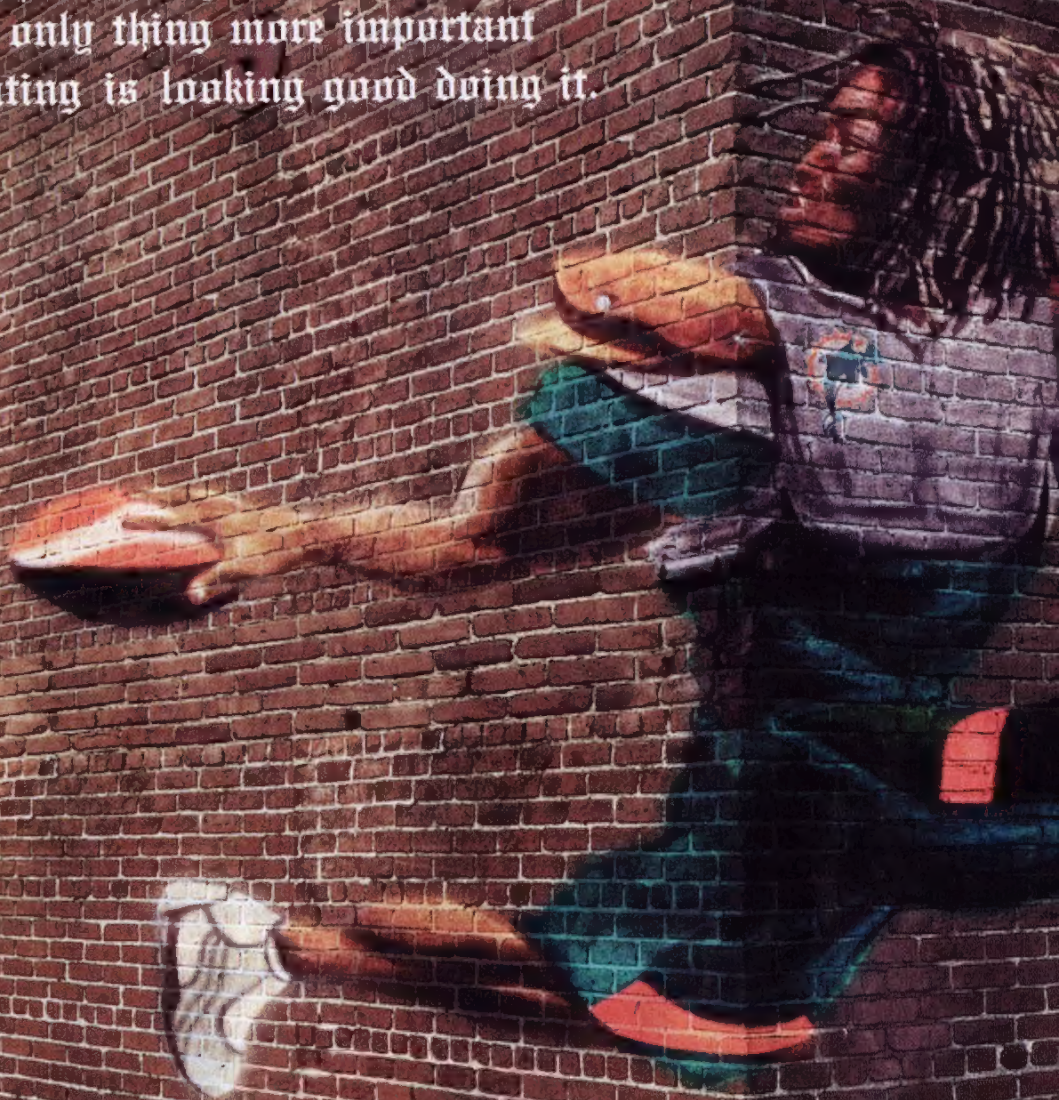
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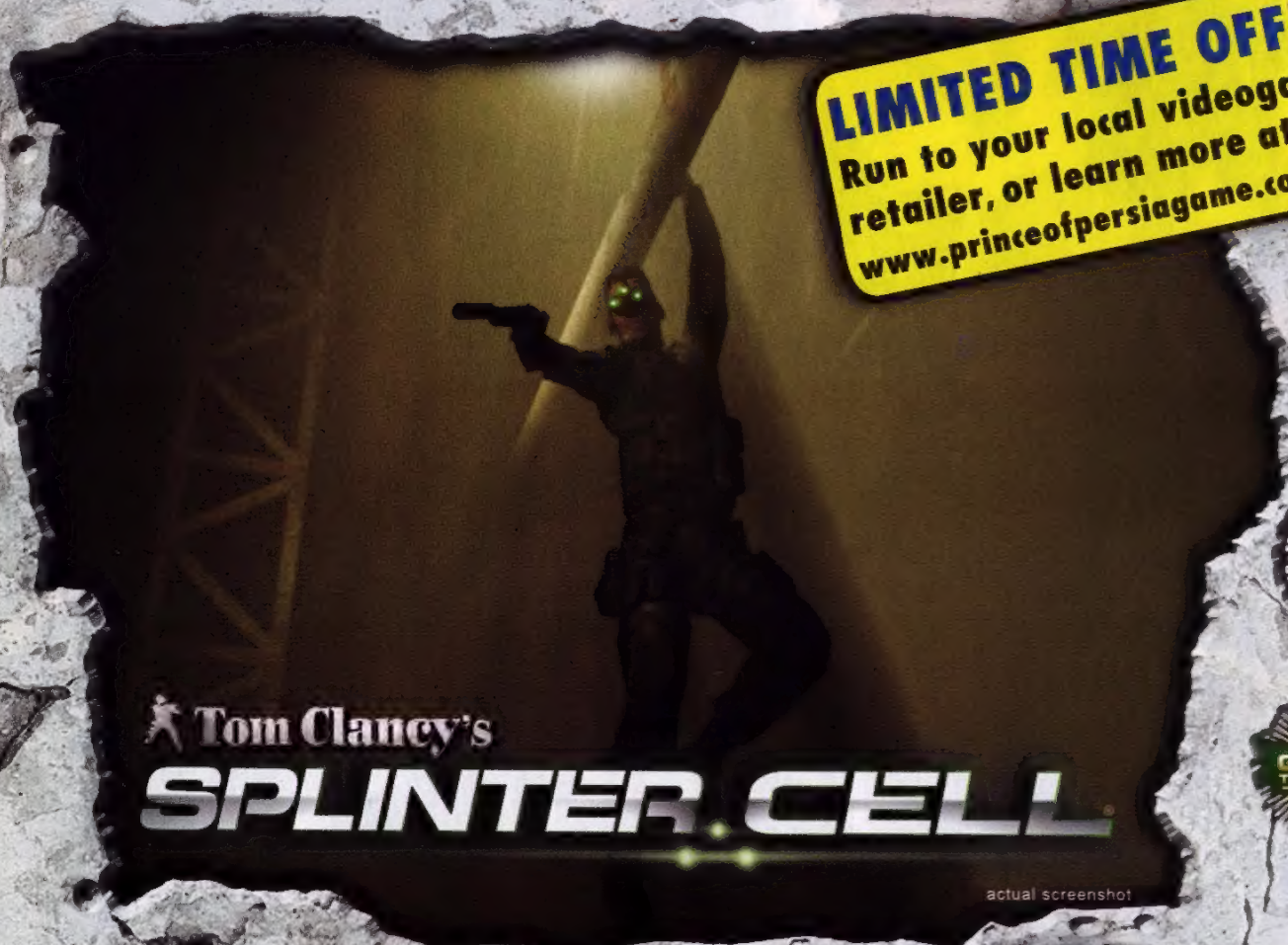
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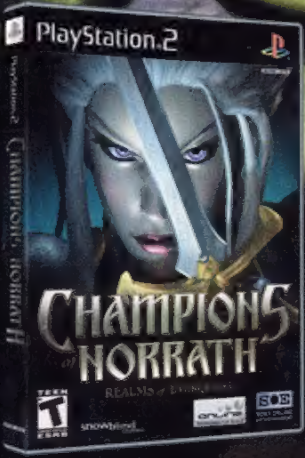
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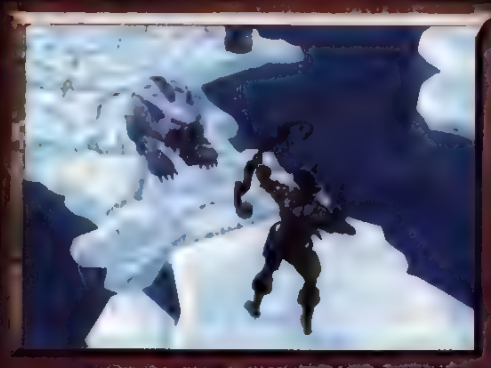
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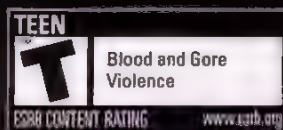
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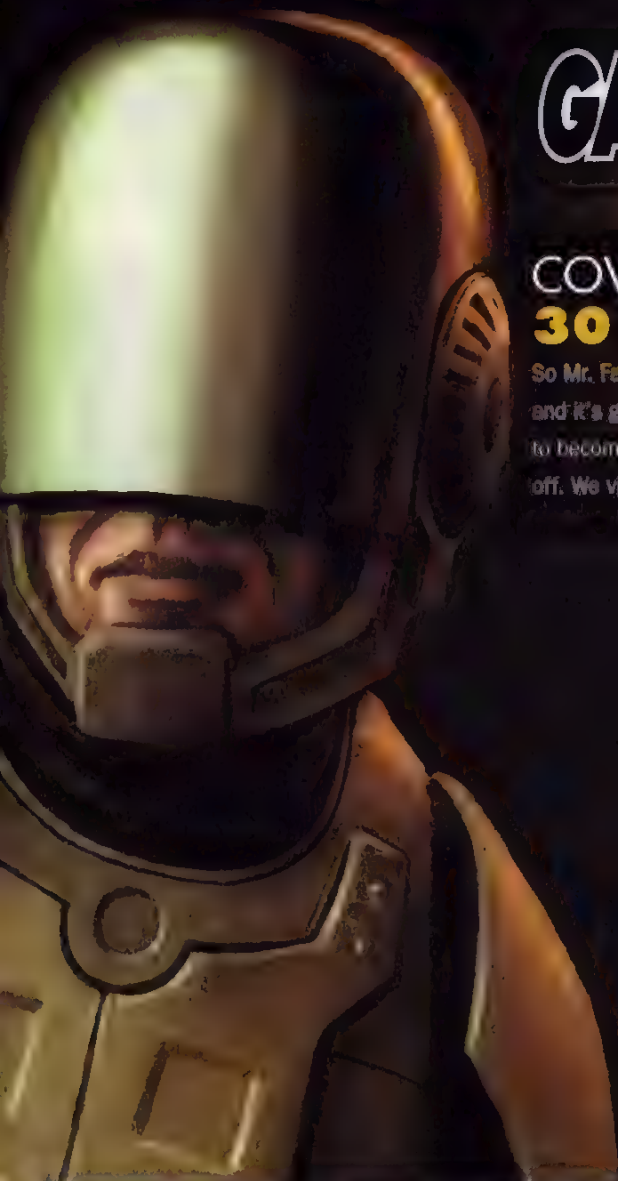
GAMEINFORMER

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30 RIDDICK – THE GREAT ESCAPE

So Mr. Fast and the Furious wants to make a game? And, he wants it to look better than Doom 3, and it's going to be based off the Pitch Black movie franchise? Sounds risky, but with what is sure to become the buzz phrase for this decade, normal mapping, Vin and company just might pull it off. We visited the developers and came back to spill this mother lode of insider information.



FEATURES



42 DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: FORGOTTEN REALMS

Everyone knows that people were excited to get their hands on EA's *The Two Towers* game, but what could that possibly have to do with D&D? More action, less dice rolling, and a story by dark elf master R. A. Salvatore? You read that right, and yes, it's very, very cool.



52 BLOODRAYNE 2

A half-vampire, half-human hunter chick – and as her heritage would imply, the lady is one bad momma to boot. Uninspired graphics and jerky animation plagued the first entry, but even those problems couldn't mar its charm. How's the sequel coming? We'll let you know what's up.

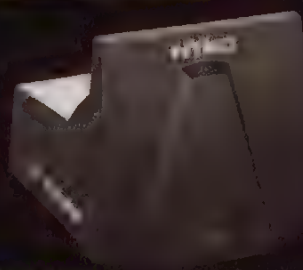


60 GAME JOBS

So you want to get into the video game industry? Well, we thought that you might like to know what different jobs in the field entail and how some people who have them right now got there. We interview noble industry veterans to find out what it took and what their jobs are like now.

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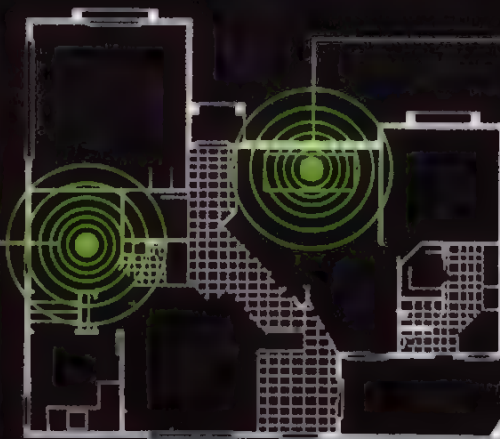
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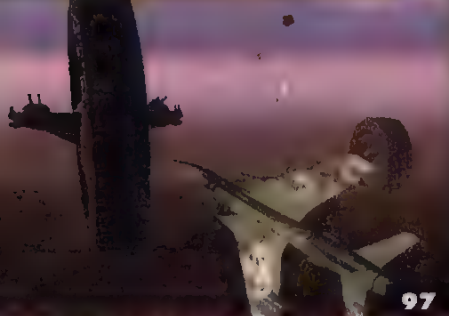
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14 EDITOR'S FORUM

Sometimes, video game editors just wanna have fun. This is where we get down with our funky selves – check it out.

16 GI SPY

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

18 DEAR GI

Sometimes, video game magazine readers just wanna have fun. This is where you get down with your funky selves. Unless you do that in the privacy of your own home while singing into the green plastic spatula that is normally a pancake flipper and not a microphone. We just don't necessarily want to know about that.

22 NEWS

Once in a while, we like to call this the "Cocktail Party section." Okay, not all of us do that, and those who do utter the phrase when no one else is around. But, the label isn't entirely off – this is where you're going to get the insight and gossip to sound smart during your next conversation.

68 PREVIEWS

Big games are popping up on the horizon again – there are a few you surely haven't heard of, but should be lusting after. There are even a few updates on games that have been dancing through all of our heads like sugarplum fairies for quite some time now.

92 REVIEWS

The industry is winding down, taking a break from the madcap holiday buying season. But, that doesn't mean that all of the good stuff has already come out. We'll let you in on what to pick up for your holiday break/potential snow day this season.

117 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.

120 SECRET ACCESS

Tripping up over a level? Looking for an alternate costume? Want to get

that flame-thrower from the get-go? GI will hook you up and not even call "foul" when you claim to have beaten the game without help.

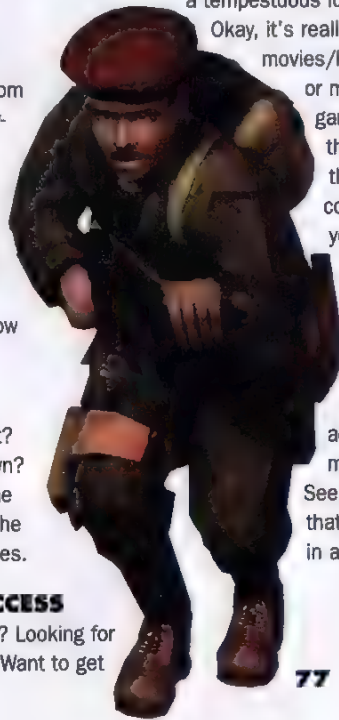
124 CLASSIC GI

Marketing scam or no, the video game and movie industries have always had a tempestuous love/hate relationship.

Okay, it's really more like a good movies/bad game relationship or maybe even a good game/bad movie sort of thing. Whichever it is, the Classic Feature is covering some crossovers you may have forgotten about.

128 ETC

Just because the holidays have passed doesn't mean that the accessory/toy/gadget market is slowing down. See what we're pining after that isn't made of polygons in an abstract construct.

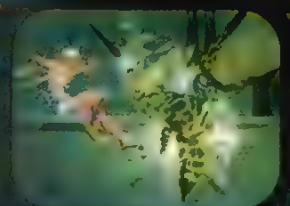


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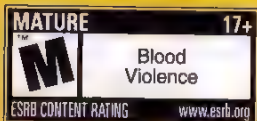
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EDITORS' FORUM



THE ROAD AHEAD

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

No matter which way you cut it, slice it, or dice it, 2004 is going to be an amazing year for video games. Not only should it be the biggest year for software this generation (Halo 2, Fable, Gran Turismo 4, Half-Life 2, Doom 3, Metroid Prime 2), it should also give us a peek into what the future holds for the next generation of console hardware.

Throw in a new handheld machine from Sony, as well as a new hardware announcement from Nintendo at E3 (rumors point to this system being a handheld gaming device that features a docking bay so you can continue playing on your home television), and you can see why this year should be the most exciting yet.

As always, Game Informer will be there to keep you up to date with all that video games have to offer. Last year, no other video game magazine offered up more editorial pages or more exclusive first looks than Game Informer. I can promise you that, in 2004, Game Informer will feature an even greater number of these earth-shaking stories.

This month we start off with the unveiling of Riddick, Dungeons & Dragons: Forgotten Realms, and BloodRayne 2, but you can expect to see even more groundbreaking exclusives in the coming months.

Enjoy the issue, and stay tuned...the world's number one video game magazine is only going to get better.

REINER | reiner@gameinformer.com

Given the graphical realism that developers are incorporating into games these days, I can't even begin to fathom what the next batch of consoles will be capable of. I can fondly remember standing in an arcade, staring in awe at Double Dragon, and proclaiming, "Games will never look better than this." With upcoming titles like Half-Life 2, Riddick, and Doom 3 pushing the envelope, will the next systems deliver visuals on par with *Jurassic Park*? And what kind of financial strain will this put on developers? Is the cost of a game going to rival a blockbuster film? I guess we'll just have to wait until 2005 to find out.

MATT | matt@gameinformer.com

In the writing of this issue, I had occasion to pull out some PSone titles to take screenshots. I was actually shocked by how horrid these games that I once imagined being gorgeous looked to my 2004 eyes. The texturing, framerate, and controls seemed simply unacceptable. It's sad in a way, because I think that the 32-bit era will be the first period of game history that won't be fondly remembered. The early arcade classics and the 8-bit 2D masterpieces have the benefit of embodying a perfect simplicity that is not available in today's console games. PSone titles just seem like amateurish and sloppy versions of products currently on the market.

KATO | kato@gameinformer.com

I finally had enough free time to finish Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic. Awesome game. However, I didn't like the way I defeated the end boss. I did the old run-around-until-your-magic-replenishes trick. Boring. Of course, I still beat him. Which makes me wonder: Should I feel cool that I found a way around the game's obvious intention to make this battle hard? Do I blame the game? Or should I feel like I cheated? I lean towards the latter, which is why I guess I've never been one to use a strategy guide for Metal Gear Solid 2, for example, and then complain about how short and easy the game is. Think about it.

LISA | lisa@gameinformer.com

My new lime green Game Boy Advance has become my favorite travel accessory. Not for its snazzy color scheme, but really because it had a gangbuster year of quality software. It's almost gotten to the point of being problematic - my fitful switching of cartridges between Super Mario Advance 4, Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, and The Sims: Bustin' Out is annoying to people sitting next to me on the plane and I live in eternal fear of breaking a cartridge. At home, I break out the Game Boy Player and some nifty SNES-styled controllers that Billy picked up in Japan. These things make me happy. I think that this resurgence proves that old-school gaming isn't dead, it just has to be really well done.

JEREMY | jeremy@gameinformer.com

I've spent a lot of time around "smaller" game developers lately, and it got me thinking. Just like in the movie industry, there are major companies and your "indies," for lack of a better term. The indie games may not always be as pretty as the big boys' stuff, but they turn out great titles nonetheless. By this point most moviegoers have realized that going to smaller films promotes diversity and results in better films all around, but gamers haven't quite drawn the same conclusion. If we, as gamers, don't support the little guys, they'll go away, resulting in fewer titles and less daring concepts. So go ahead, buy a smaller title today, and help promote diversity in gaming.

ADAM | adam@gameinformer.com

PC editor is very much a 'feast or famine' kind of a position. Whereas last month the section had Deus Ex: Invisible War, Civ III: Conquests, and FF XI; this issue the best we've got to offer is Hordes of the Underdark. Not that it's a bad game - far from it, it's just that I hate to give Game of the Month to an expansion pack. So next time you PC gamers out there are bemoaning the fact that there's nothing new and exciting on the shelves this month, remember that poor old Adam has to play and review all the crap so that you don't have to. On the plus side, enough incredible titles came out for the holidays that any sane person ought to be more than happy for a good long while.

JOE | joe@gameinformer.com

I'm Joe, the newest of new guys. Have you ever noticed that in games, TV, and film, there are really only two types of new guys? I might be the new guy who is real mysterious and sits quietly by himself all the time until some imminent danger looms, and right at the last second I get really awesome and save everybody. Or, I might be the new guy who drops things, gets wedgies, and smells like nachos, but always manages to steal the jock's girl in the end. Only time will tell which of the two I turn out to be. Now, I don't want to spoil the surprise for any of you, but I will say that I had my lunch money stolen by a hobo this morning. Take it for what you will. Thanks to all of the GI staff for having me aboard!

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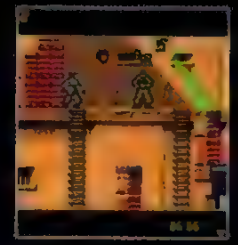
Games available on: Nokia 3560, 3595, 3600, 3650, 3100, 3200, 3300, 6100, 6200, 6800, Motorola T720, V300, V400, V600, i90, i95cl, Siemens C56, S56, M56, SL56, LG vx4400, vx6000, Sony Ericsson T610, T616, Samsung E105, E715.



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GI SPY



CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE SEAMY UNDERBELLY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

1 The *Simple Life* stars Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie are also big enthusiasts when it comes to fighting games! This is a true statement, if by "enthusiasts" you mean "professional skanks" and by "fighting games" you mean "celebrity parties with free drinks and lots of paparazzi!"

2 Hip-hop's most eccentric star, Andre 3000, takes time off from lying on booties and talking to God to check out Namco's *Soul Calibur II* backstage at the Billboard Music Awards. D'oh! Now we've got "Hey Ya!" stuck in our head again!

3 Andy represents for gaming during one of his regular appearances with the 93X Morning show in Minneapolis. Here, Andy poses with the show's hosts, Weasel, Nick, and Josh.

4 One-third of rap's holy trinity, DMC of Run-DMC, laying down the law in *Soul Calibur II*. Don't mess with him -- he'll cut the head off the devil and throw it at you!

5 Here's Game Informer Online's own version of Paris Hilton, Billy Berghammer, seen here in Japan with members of the *Final Fantasy XII* team.

6 Mario achieves Tinseltown immortality by being the first game character to have a wax statue displayed in the legendary Hollywood Wax Museum. He even managed to stiff-arm Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss out of the prestigious lobby display area!

7 A bestful Jeremy parties down in Sweden with the posse from Vivendi Universal and *Riddick* developer Starbreeze.

REC

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76

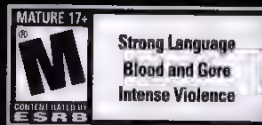
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- THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

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PlayStation 2



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DEAR GI

FRUITY >>>

I've been looking at Final Fantasy XII art and screenshots. It looks very impressive, but in every picture of Vaan I've seen, he seems to be holding something that looks like a Paupu fruit. I know you said on one of your online articles that R is uncertain if Ashe and Vaan will have feelings for each other, but perhaps this is a clue to the answer of that question.

Emily

Via aol.com



Good eye, Emily. In last year's Square/Disney blockbuster, Kingdom Hearts, the legend of the Paupu fruit was first told. Apparently, the destinies of two people who share the star-shaped food will forever be entwined - romantic, like when Lady and the Tramp shared spaghetti, isn't it? But, despite the fact that we see

Vaan holding the fruit, we still don't know whom he's chowing down with. Oh, the mysteries of FF XII, and its release is so far away!

The quick and dirty answer to your questions is yes, it's available for specific titles and therefore is certainly possible. Currently, Need for Speed: Underground players on PlayStation 2 can race against their PC brethren, but other combinations of consoles are not available. In addition, the upcoming PS2 version of Final Fantasy XI will put PC and PS2 players onto the same servers. The main reasons that this handy option isn't widely available are that, for example, Xbox Live service is managed by Microsoft, and no one blames them for not wanting to encourage people to pick up PlayStation 2 or GameCube versions of titles they offer online. In addition, as Andy alluded to in his review of the PC edition of FF XI, servers managing multiple platforms also need to accommodate drastically different control schemes. It's certainly not a roadblock, but it is a hurdle on the way to multi-platform game nirvana.

KEYBOARDS, PEOPLE >>>

In your December issue of GI, you have a Secret Access entry for Max Payne 2 that lists a lot of goodies. I am having problems being able to bring up this so-called "console" using the tilde (~) key, I can't find it on my Xbox controller. If you could instruct me on how this actually works, I'd be very happy.

Jason

(and a surprising number of other players)

Via email

Now everyone, this is a group exercise. Boys and girls, find your copy of the December Game Informer (Issue 128) - if you need to, go take it out of the frame you use to store its glory, we'll wait. Everyone back? Now, turn to page 196 and look to the middle of the right-hand column. Locate the Max Payne 2 codes. Does everyone see the PC symbol next to it? That means that the codes are for the PC edition of the game - not the console editions. There are also subtle clues hidden in the directions (things like making a shortcut to the game and starting it from your hard drive with the "developer" switch). No, you don't need to feel guilty, but we wouldn't advise confessing this little faux pas to anyone else.

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE >>>

During this joyous holiday season, I suffered a terrible loss: My GameCube died. I was crushed. To make matters

worse, the precautions booklet says that only experts should repair the damaged hardware, and they have a warning: "Use of controls or adjustments or procedures other than those specified herein may result in hazardous radiation exposure." What radiation, where is it, and how do I properly dispose of my deceased GameCube?

An Enraged Gamer

Via Juno.com

Instead of signing yourself "An Enraged Gamer," we would have suggested "A Conscientious Gamer Who Doesn't Want To Be That Guy That Put Hazardous Materials Into The Ground Water." Maybe it's not quite as catchy, and it certainly doesn't capture that angst pain that a console's passing elicits from players around the world, but it does offer a nice ring of social consciousness. Chicks dig that. Trust us. But, to answer your question, people with a computer, gaming console, cell phone, or other electronic device that they want to dispose of should contact the Public Works division of their local government for specific directions. The requirements vary from city to city, but you'll generally need to take the defunct hardware to a specific location designed to handle the chemicals.

CHUMP CHANGE >>>

In the December 2003 issue on page 92, under the picture of the Nissan R-34 Skyline GT-R, the caption is "You will never own this car. Never." This statement is painfully incorrect. In the United States, there is one company in California, MotoRex, which imports, legalizes and sells R-32, R-33 and R-34 Skylines to the general public. For a measly \$95,500, you can be the proud owner of a new Nissan Skyline R-34 GT-R V-spec II.

Mwaterma

Via email

Then it's a good thing we found that extra change under the couch and sold our C + C Music Factory complete collection on eBay - because now we've got just enough to buy a car so beautiful, so fast, and so crazy hot that we'll surely be popular! Just think of possibilities: reunions without shame, easy admittance to any club of our choosing, and beautiful arm candy at our beck and call. Oh yes, the world will be our oyster, and all will fear and respect our excellent taste in automotive design.

STROKE THE EGO >>>

You did a great job on your "Top 50 Games of 2003" article. The layout, design, and use of graphics were all top-notch and resulted in a handsome article. Keep up the good work!

Cliff

Via worldshare.net

Between breaking down the year in a month-by-month format and not naming a "Game of the Year" for 2003, we thought that our wrap-up would be a little more controversial. Despite our fears, you readers pulled through - pointing out that the reasons you liked the concept were the same reasons we did it. None of us could agree on one game that was best, but there were 50 that were mighty nice. Game Informer Online forum users agreed, discussing the feature in depth with comments like, "Keep it like this. The style shows what major things happened...not just ranking them. I don't know how, but you GI people have transcended yourselves (and the rest of the industry) again. I see nothing but good things in the future." from Surgex5. Although we still can't quite get comfortable using web-names for quotes, Bjorn06 said, "I really liked how you didn't rank the games but gave us a list and we can decide." So, success all around!

THEORIZING >>>

Has anyone made it so that people can play online games using two different game consoles? An example is that since I have a PlayStation 2, and my friend has an Xbox, we would like to be able to play games like John Madden against each other. Is it available or even possible?

Brian Alexander

Via yahoo.com

HOLY CUSTOMIZATION, BATMAN >>>

I just wanted to share with you my own limited edition Xbox. I used Tamiya spray paint (TS27 Matte White) for surface primer. After it was completely dry, I used Tamiya TS26 Pure White color and let it dry for 2 or 3 hours. You can use any color of design vinyl stickers on the system. I used the XXQMAIN Carbon Fiber Cut Sticker.

Edward Delacruz
Astoria, New York

Here's the deal - customization is cool. But, doing work on your home consoles voids your warranty. Then again, the manufacturer's warranty goes kaput after 90 days, so continue with the home pimpin' people and send us some pics!



CIMA

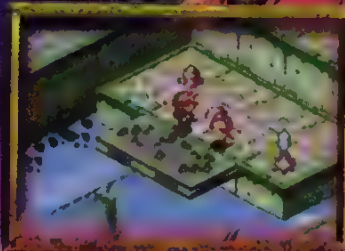
The Enemy

**A REVOLUTIONARY
NEW TYPE OF RPG!**

For decades, the Human race and the CIMA race have been in constant conflict with one another.

Join Arc J., a Gate Guardian between the two worlds as he struggles to protect a group of pioneers and ultimately tries to find peace.

CIMA: The Enemy is an intriguing, real time RPG with a new "active system" - the ability to make the NPCs in the game active!



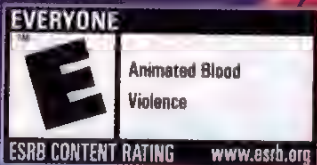
The "Active System" lets the NPCs in the game to solve various puzzles and to affect the storyline of the game!



An intriguing and Compelling Storyline filled with Love, Hatred, Friendship, Revenge, Honor, Humor and Sadness!



An Innovative and Unique Battle System featuring both Action and Strategy Elements!



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ENVELOPE ART

GET IN THE GAME >>>

I was lacking several of the newer GI issues, so I hadn't really heard anything about XIII until my brother and I were at a friend's house and were playing the demo on his PC. Things were going fine, and we had found some throwing knives when a guard started shooting at us. My brother ran towards the guard, got the knives out, and launched one right into the guard's face - triggering the spiffy headshot sequence. Lo and behold, the guard was none other than Reiner of GI, who now had a large throwing knife stuck in his eye! This took my brother and I completely by surprise, and we took the opportunity to snap some screenshots of the deceased. The next day XIII came up in conversation [at a local gaming retail outlet] and the manager showed us a security guard who bore a striking resemblance to Andy McNamara. So basically, I wanted to congratulate you guys on getting yourselves into another game in which fans (or...whoever) get to mutilate you.

Andrew B
Via hotmail.com

• When Lisa and Jeremy camped out to review XIII, no one could figure out why they weren't getting any farther in the game. You want to know why? Because they just kept trying to lay fallen Reiners and Andys in positions resembling "a loving embrace." Good times, good times.

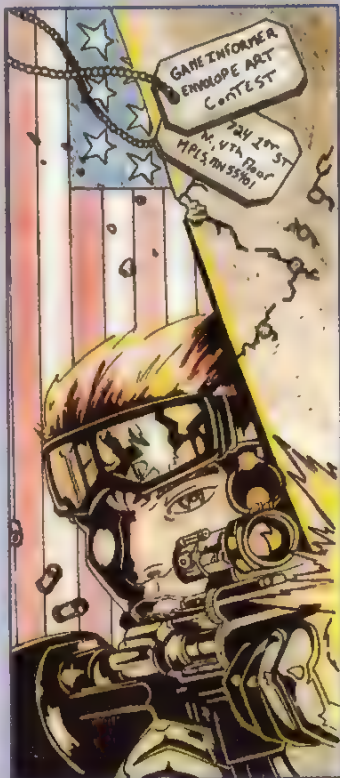
TOO EARLY FOR MENTAL MATH >>>

Dear GI,

While I enjoy your magazine very much, I have a couple of issues that have been bothering me. To begin with, I am continually frustrated by your rating system. Analysis of the December 2003 issue reveals that the average rating for all console and PC games reviewed was 7.58. If you eliminate the games that did not have second opinions, the average rises to 7.9. The importance of the second opinions is dubious in any case as their ratings for the same games averaged 7.74. Taking these numbers into account, your use of a 10-point scale seems at best inefficient and at worst misleading. Now, I recognize that reviews are subjective and that other people may like games that I do not. But as a person who utilizes this data to make decisions regarding game purchases, I would find it helpful if you could review your game rating process and perhaps provide more decisive criticism and contrary second opinions.

Sincerely,
Brian Simpson
Via email

• Each month, here at GI, we embark on a daunting quest. Prudence requires that we carefully weigh the pros and cons of each impending interactive gaming opportunity - balancing the benefits of TCP/IP based online options versus a robust and hearty solo experience. Concurrently, it is frequently observed that multiple participants in said electronic entertainment have similar observations and offer similar conjecture on the software in question. This fact is not to the reader's detriment, as supporting opinions reiterate that the main observant is, in fact, not crazy. Conversely, we dispute the claim that our review system is inefficient as it is based on the system used by educational institutions for categorizing a student's understanding of the principles and requirements of their assignment. We tried to make a pie chart to go along with this, but were distracted by the myriad pretty colors resulting from the different categories of information required. We apologize for our failure.



David Imrle
After he shoots these people...he's going skiing!



FEBRUARY WINNER!

William Benitez
Hey! Who let Pac-Man in this picture?!
He doesn't even work for Nintendo!

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

Send to:
Game Informer
Envelope Art Contest
724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401



Adam Bolorn
Clank without Ratchet
is like Captain America
without Bucky



Alfonso Elias
Winner of the
Honorary
"This is
awesome,
but Alfonso
always
wins"
award

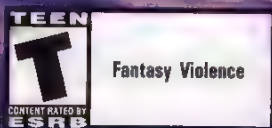
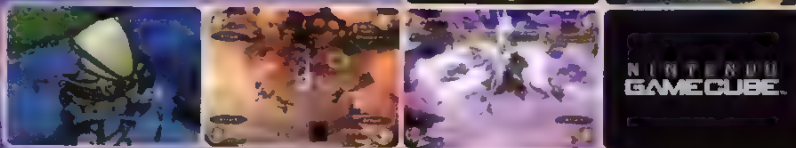
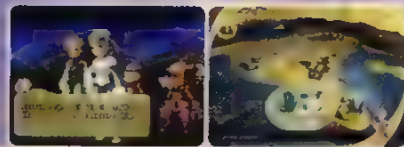
Rebecca Gill
"He stole
my pizza!
Waaaaahh!!!"



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 ...caravan. You can battle them alone, or for the...
 ...Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles. Nintendo Game Boy Advance.



Final Fantasy
 SQUARE ENIX

*Available while supplies last. See retailer for details. Deposit toward game may be required. Developed by SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. © 2003, 2004 THE GAME BOY ADVANCE GIVEAWAY PROGRAM IS A TRADEMARK OF SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. THE NINTENDO GAMEBOY ADVANCE AND GAMEBOY ADVANCE SP ARE TRADEMARKS OF NINTENDO.

VU BLABS ABOUT FIGHT CLUB

Vivendi Universal is here to talk about **Fight Club**, and it doesn't care what the damn rules are. The one-on-one brawler is obviously based on the movie, but it is unknown if either **Brad Pitt** or **Edward Norton** are involved with the project. The title is being developed by **Genuine Games** out of Scotland, and is set to appear for the **PlayStation 2** and **Xbox** by the end of the year. There is a 99.9 percent chance that the game won't feature an **IKEA** shopping minigame, but we can (and do) hold out hope.



HALO 2 NOT TILL NEXT CHRISTMAS?

Christmas came and went with nary a sight of **Xbox's Halo 2**. Few actually thought the game would come out in time, but fans were ever hopeful it would ship during 2003. *Game Informer* has learned that **Bungie Studios'** sequel likely won't appear until fall, with a release in holiday 2004 even a possibility.

Insiders involved with the development of the title told *Game Informer* that the title was nowhere near ready for a showing in at the beginning of this year – a situation which hasn't seemed to change much since last May when *Halo 2* first debuted. If what we've heard is true, and taking into account the average development cycle for project of this size, it's likely that your Christmas wishes for the game may come true – only a year late.



SAMMY OWNS MAJORITY OF SEGA

Sammy Corporation has acquired a majority interest in **Sega**, owning 22.4 percent of its shares. Plans for a merger were announced last spring, which Sega executives originally rejected. Sega's previous majority partner was **CSK**.

Sammy hopes to immediately benefit from the move by growing its arcade sector – an area that is more profitable for Sega than video games. "Titles that sell in the console sector are limited. We want to strengthen the arcade game sector since it has higher profitability," said Sammy president Hajime Satomi. To help this strategy, the company is being asked by its new owners to support Sammy's own AtomisWave arcade board, including in arcades through America and Europe.

Recent history at Sega has been very tumultuous. Not only has its software not been selling up to expectations, but it has been experiencing a talent drain as of late. **Space Channel 5** creator **Testuya Mizuguchi** and **Wow Entertainment (Sega GT)** head **Rikiya Nakagawa** have left, its studios have been totally restructured (leading to uneasy feelings among the talent), and even gaming legend **Yu Suzuki** is less involved in his **AM2** studio than he once was.

In happier Sega news, **Virtua Fighter Generation: Judgement Six No Yabou** (formerly known as **Virtua Fighter Quest**) has been announced for Japan this summer (an American release is not currently scheduled). The **GameCube** and **PS2** title is structured like an RPG, and is being geared towards younger players with simplistic controls rather than complex button combos.



Virtua Fighter Generation





RACE IN VIDEO GAMES: AN UNEQUAL FACE

The issue of race in video games is every bit as complex as it is in real life. It's easy to point to an overtly racist title like the white supremacist mod *Ethnic Cleansing* and condemn it. However, what you see – or, more importantly, don't see – in your average video game may have just as much to say about race in this country. The representation of races in video games does not match the racial diversity of the population that plays them. Even a two-year old analysis from 2001 conducted by the organization Children Now stated that 86 percent of heroes in video games studied were white males – a percentage that certainly does not speak to the identities of all of the people playing games today.

The first question is whether it is the industry's job to accurately represent the racial diversity of its buying population. Sony Online's chief creative officer, Raph Koster says yes. "I am not sure video games have a choice any more than TV or movies do. If there are humans depicted in the game, it's going to come up. We could sin by omission by not including ethnically diverse casts of characters, for example. I don't think that it's a political correctness thing – it's just the right thing to do."

Changing the situation, of course, is no easy task. Racial quotas are a superficial solution that do not address the root of the problem of why under-representation is occurring in the first place. Industry veteran and lead designer and writer for Surreal Software (currently working with Midway), Richard Rouse III, says it's simply a matter of the development community itself. The people that make the games are mostly either white or Japanese males. Japan has had a historical lack of racial understanding due to its overwhelmingly homogenous society.

Simply plugging in minority characters is a forceful approach that could compromise the integrity of the games themselves, but worse yet, cause them

to be ingenuine. That is already the same outcome brought about by many of the stereotypes of minority characters in games today. African-Americans males are relegated to being sports stars, support characters, or their skill-set is more about brawn than brains (black females are almost non-existent). Asian guys automatically know martial arts. Rouse points out another subtle damaging stereotype – using race to be hip and add street flavor, so to speak. "When it comes off as sort of a 'Hey let's make this more black to make it cool' sort of thing... That can be a problem. I think kids will pick up on ingenuine stuff. They are smarter than we think they are in terms of knowing when things are false." The problem of being disingenuous is even more important as games attempt to get closer to reality, where capturing characters – whether in a

good or bad light – is key.

Progress is being made, as video games are already mirroring the makeup of America in their own intrinsic ways. For example, many titles – particularly RPGs – give players a robust character appearance set so that when you choose your hero, they can often be of whatever race or sex you want. This is no small matter or a coincidence. Sony Online's Koster told us how beta testers for *Star Wars Galaxies* specifically asked for epicanthic folds so that Asian players could make their eyes look like they do in real life.

Ultimately, the solution to adequate representation of ethnic minorities in the landscape of video game characters comes down to a broadening of the races of the people who actually make the games. As universities and technical colleges start to offer a more concrete track of courses for the next generation of developers, the talent pool for the industry can be diversified. Hopefully, the future they make will be a virtual world for everybody.



Call of Duty: Finest Hour makes progress by featuring the 761st Black Panther tank division, the first African-American armored unit

THQ'S VIGILANTE JUSTICE

Having a horribly bad feeling that *The Punisher* movie is just going to stink? Well THQ's here to help spread some good will, announcing that it plans to release *The Punisher* for Xbox and PlayStation 2 in the fall. The game's being developed by *Red Faction* creators Volition, although it is unknown if the title will be in the first person like that FPS franchise. In the meantime, enjoy this art from the game – featuring a Frank Castle uniform, consisting of a t-shirt bought from a comic book store!



HATTORI HANZO

Commander of the Iga Ninja.
Lethal spy and a guardian of the...

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MARCH 2004

PlayStation 2



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.

STEVE BARTMAN'S WINDY CITY ADVENTURE



Based on the true story of Chicago's favorite citizen, Steve Bartman's Windy City Adventure retells the remarkable story of a man who single-handedly crushed any hopes that the Cubs had of going to the World Series and quickly became the most hated fan to ever attend a

baseball game. In a mode titled I'm Just a Man, you'll step into the shoes of Bartman and experience the emotional turmoil that rocked his soul. In the time that it takes security to escort you out of the stadium, you'll need to dodge incoming beverages and jam on the X button to hold back tears as fans chant "A**hole!" After you make it back home safely, you'll need to call the phone company to disconnect your line and pack your bags as quickly as possible. From here, it's just a matter of making it out of the city alive. In another mode called Justice, you assume the identity of an ordinary Cubs fan that watches Bartman's crime unfold on TV. It's at this point that the hunt for Bartman begins. You'll need to gather clues from people who attended the game and track the scum down before he jets. What happens when you reach him is entirely up to you. We recommend using the Louisville Slugger.

TOP 10 NAUGHTY SOUNDING VIDEO GAMES

- 10 Final Fantasy
- 9 Fur Fighters
- 8 Dragon BallZ
- 7 Manhunt
- 6 The Adventures of Batman and Robin
- 5 Ring of Red
- 4 Blasto
- 3 Ultimate Muscle
- 2 GoldenEye
- 1 Pole Position

DEVELOPER TOP 5

JEFF POFFENBERGER
PRODUCER,
ACTIVISION

- 1 AutoDuel – Commodore 64
- 2 Half Life – PC
- 3 Ultima I – PC
- 4 Quake II – PC
- 5 Wing Commander – PC



READER TOP 5

JOHN EVERETTE
HINSDALE, IL

- 1 Paper Mario – N64
- 2 The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker – GC
- 3 Soul Calibur – DC
- 4 Star Fox 64 – N64
- 5 Vectorman – Genesis



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.

BARRY BONDS OUT OF BASEBALL



We all make fun of sports video games, saying that the only thing that changes from year to year is the rosters. Well, this joke may not be funny anymore. Why? No **Barry Bonds**. Because the home run-hitting Giants outfielder has refused to re-sign with Major League Baseball's Players Association merchandising agreement, several publishers have already decided to not include the six-time MVP winner in their titles. As of press time **Electronic Arts**, **Sega Sports**, and **Acclaim** told *Game Informer* that Bonds would not be in their upcoming games. **Midway**, **989 Sports**, and **Microsoft** either wouldn't comment on the matter or characterized the situation as up in the air.

When a player enters the league, he signs with the Players Association. Because of this agreement, the Association can then turn around and license the player's likeness for use in video games. Bonds is the first player to not sign with the Association in its 30-year history. While it would appear that Bonds is free to sign whatever agreements he likes now that he is free of the Association, in regards to his appearing in video games, it's not that easy.

It looks like the Players Association is having the last laugh. A source told *Game Informer* that the MLB players represented in this year's titles are tied to the MLB league license itself, and if you want Barry, you'd have to forfeit both the MLB name and every other real-life player in the league. Thus, it looks like either Barry Bonds will be in a non-MLB game all by himself, or this year's baseball games will introduce the Giants mysterious new power hitter who goes simply by the number "25."

TURBINE TAKES ASHERON'S CALL FROM MICROSOFT

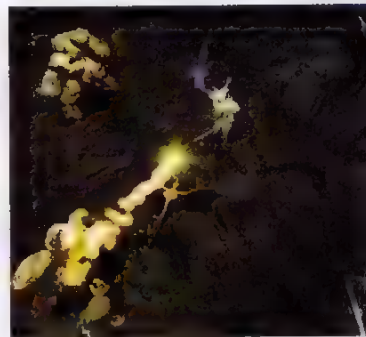
Turbine Entertainment, creators of the *Asheron's Call* MMORPG series have bought back the intellectual property rights to the franchise (past and future) from **Microsoft**. The two have been working together since the release of *Asheron's Call* in 1996. This move now means that Turbine will have to transfer the games' server and customer support over to itself, among many other things. This switch is expected to take up to a year. While Turbine characterizes the buyout as amicable, and that Microsoft has been an invaluable partner, the company posits the move as a way to get closer to its fan base.

No sooner had Turbine broken free of Microsoft than it announced that it had secured \$18 million in order to self-fund the **Atari**-published *Dungeons & Dragons Online* project, which is scheduled to hit the **PC** in late 2005.

BLACK ISLE STUDIOS CLOSES

Black Isle Studios, the developers of such titles as *Icwind Dale* and *Fallout 2*, has seen its staff all but laid off, with only two employees remaining as of press time. Publisher **Interplay** claims, however, that both *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II* and *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel* will still see a release. Furthermore, it says that *Fallout 3* remains a pending project (although unlikely), and will only say that the studio remains open, despite the loss of staff.

Interplay's woes continue with the news that it has sold *Galleon: Islands of Mystery* to European publisher **SCI**, stating that the game "no longer fits with Interplay's strategy going forward." SCI plans to release the **Xbox** game in the UK in the spring, and is now searching for worldwide partners.



NAME THE GAME

There are only about three people in the world who play games on their Macs, but in 1992, this title was the bomb for a whole world of Mac gamers. Fans of Microsoft's



Xbox will be interested to know that this month's selection was actually developed by Halo-creators Bungie. This first-person shooter rivaled Doom, and was also notable for its network play.

(Answer on page 28)



25th Anniversary
www.koei.com



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

BAD – The Internet was recently abuzz when someone posted a video of themselves burning through *Super Mario Bros. 3* in its entirety in 11 minutes without dying once. It turns out this miraculous feat of gaming was aided greatly by the use of emulators, hacks, and computer programs over a period of two years.

GOOD – For 37 and a half hours, **Drew Gamble** danced his way through *Dance Dance Revolution Extreme* at the Space Balls Arcade to earn a place in the **Guinness Book of World Records**. Congratulations!

BAD – Santa delivers rain check slips to kids all over America as **Tecmo's Ninja Gaiden** retreats to February.

MAYBE – **Tiger Telematics** has unveiled the **GameTrac**, a handheld game system based on the Windows CE operating system and capable of everything from digital camera functions to wireless network gaming. The unit is expected to cost \$200, debut in April, and will offer games downloadable to its 256MB memory cards.



BAD – **Sony's** all-in-one wonder unit the **PSX** suffers a setback in its feature set before its launch in Japan. You will have to download future patches to play back MP3s, CD-R, and other formats not available at launch. Also, the DVD recording speed has been halved to 12x.

GOOD – **Microsoft**, in conjunction with the USO, kicked off Operation: Live Connections over the holidays, which allowed family members of the armed forces to play **Xbox** games with and talk to those serving overseas.

GOOD – A Chinese court ordered game company Beijing Arctic Ice Technology Development Co. Ltd to pay Li Hongchen \$1,210 and two years worth of virtual weapons, equipment, and stats for its Red Moon online game. A hacker had stolen Hongchen's account, and the court held the company liable due to its poor server security.



UGLY – **Sega** is suing **Electronic Arts** and **Fox**, claiming that EA's *Simpsons: Road Rage* is a rip-off of *Crazy Taxi*. Maybe Sega should sue themselves, because the *Crazy Taxi* series just keeps imitating itself with the same routine.

GOOD – To commemorate the 25th anniversary of its release (which was actually in 2003. Go figure), **Taito** will distribute 10,000 new **Space Invaders** arcade cabinets in America.

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.

The enemies of **Prince of Persia** are regrouping and asking for a beat down once again. **Ubisoft's Montreal Studio** is working on a new *Prince* game that will feature the same engine utilized in *The Sands of Time*.

THQ is spinning a rumor of its own. The publisher is claiming that both the **Xbox** and **PlayStation 2** will be lowered to \$149. Perhaps these announcements will come at the industry's **E3** convention in May.

Electronic Arts signed up for the **Superman** license in the summer with little fanfare. Since then, the mega-publisher has been mum on its plans for the beleaguered series. The reason? *Loose Talk* has heard that EA is waiting for the movie tie-in, and as long as the resurrection of the film franchise remains mired in developmental hell, the video game will be on hold.

With a deal with the devil in one hand, and a guitar in the other, guess who walked into **Bungie Studios**? **Steve Val**. Could it be that the *Crossroads* foil/Frank Zappa under-study, and former David Lee Roth axe man is recording some music for **Halo 2**? Still, our money is on Ralph Macchio.



SANADA YUKIMURA

Brave defender of Osaka Castle.
Brilliant tactician and a leader of the...

SAMURAI WARRIORS

FROM THE CREATORS OF KESSEN AND DYNASTY WARRIORS®
MARCH 2004

PlayStation 2

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VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

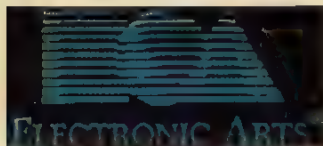
Signing celebrities to big projects can mean big money in the video game industry, with the likes of Ray Liotta and Jet Li lending their talents to some big-name releases. Here's a look at what could've happened had some of our favorite 1980s stars made the transition to the new millennium.

Question 1: King Arthur's legendary sword, Excalibur, has made an appearance in nearly every Final Fantasy game. It did not, however, appear in FF X. Which ultimate weapon in that title is named after a predecessor to Excalibur?

- A. Lulu's Onion Knight
- B. Auron's Masamune
- C. Tidus's Caladbolg
- D. Kimahri's Spirit Lance

Question 2: True or False: EA used to develop games for the Macintosh way back in the day.

- A. True
- B. False



Question 3: Which sports franchise bears the "curse" that every athlete on its cover will supposedly suffer a horrible misfortune?

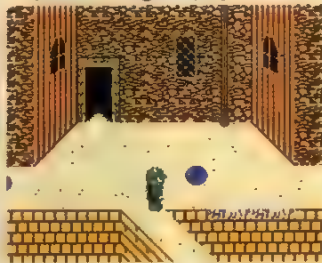
- A. EA's Madden
- B. 989's GameBreaker
- C. 3DO's High Heat
- D. Konami's Winning Eleven

Question 4: Back in 1996, Namco released the first Soul Blade title. One of the fighters available was announced by the narrator as "Guest Fighter" instead of his/her name, like everyone else. Who was it?

- A. Mitsurugi
- B. Voldo
- C. Siegfried
- D. Han Myong

Question 5: What would happen occasionally in Deadly Towers for the NES to spice up the gameplay?

- A. Chickens would fly at you and attack
- B. You would get sucked into a randomly-generated alternate dimension which you had to fight your way out of
- C. A crazy French pirate would offer you a chance to play a Battleship-esque minigame
- D. Nothing. There was no spice in the gameplay



Question 6: What NES game frequently told players, "What a terrible night to have a curse..."

- A. Castlevania II: Simon's Quest
- B. Zelda II: The Adventure of Link
- C. Bionic Commando
- D. Double Dragon 2

Question 7: What title pioneered the rumble feature on controllers?

- A. Star Fox 64
- B. Super Mario 64
- C. Final Fantasy VII
- D. Crash Team Racing

Question 8: Zero Wing, an old Genesis game from 1991, featured what is commonly considered the worst translation of all time. Which of these horrid phrases was not part of the Zero Wing story?

- A. All your base are belong to us
- B. Someone set up us the bomb
- C. Bringing destruction is 'ZIG' coming
- D. You have no chance to survive make your time



Question 9: Shaquille O'Neal rode his early-'90s popularity wave all the way to a quickly forgotten SNES/Genesis title. What was it called?

- A. Shaqtaquar
- B. Love Shaq
- C. Shaq-Fu
- D. Shaquille O'Neal's Combat Basketball

Question 10: What is the top-selling PSone game ever in Japan?

- A. Final Fantasy VII
- B. Dragon Quest VII
- C. Brave Fencer Musashi
- D. Arc the Lad III

EA AND MICROSOFT STILL TALKING FOR XBOX LIVE

Electronic Arts' big announcement last E3 was that the company would be exclusively providing online games for PlayStation 2. The company is far and away the best-selling publisher for sports titles, and its absence from Xbox Live is notable. However, the two sides are still talking, and there is hope that we may be able to play Madden NFL online via the Xbox (or Xbox 2) in the future.

The disagreement between the pair boils down to the business model. Microsoft requires that third-party publishers relinquish a certain amount of control over the product, in return for which Microsoft provides the servers, customer service, etc. However, this centralized structure is not to EA's liking. Chief among the concerns is that Microsoft has a direct tie to consumers through your credit card – a lucrative connection that EA wants to have for itself.

Game Informer talked to both companies, and luckily, they are confident about getting a deal worked out. Andre Vrignaud, director of platform strategy for Xbox Live, characterizes the possibility of the pair coming to an agreement as pretty good. "I think there's a reasonable chance that we will make this work. We have talked in the past and we continue to talk with them. I think it's fair to say that there's interest on both sides of the fence to make this work." Furthermore, Vrignaud points out that despite what some might say, Microsoft is not being "unfair" in its online structure, pointing out that there are a lot of third-party publishers that have been happy to work with the company with little complaint.

The vice president of Marketing for EA Sports Nation (its own all-encompassing online service), Chip Lange, doesn't disagree with the status of the negotiations. "The conversations are not stalled and they continue to be there. There are some fundamental differences in our business plan and objectives, but ultimately we continue to talk and both sides continue to show best efforts to resolve this thing."



75% The amount towards completion for the Japanese spring release of Koei's action/RPG title Crimson Sea 2.

19.1% The percent stake global asset management firm Schroders has in Eidos. You could say they're banking on Lara Croft's ass-ets! [Get off the stage! – Ed.]

100% of the staff got lumps of coal for Christmas

90% increase in the amount of Iron Maiden being listened to in the office. 0 percent features Blaze Bayley

12% of Joe's underwear has withstood the punishment of our atomic wedgies

Score & Rank



0-2

Candace Cameron in Rogue Ops



3-4

Macaulay Culkin in Dark Cloud



5-6

Ted Danson and Kirstie Alley in Resident Evil



7-8

Mr. T in Splinter Cell



9-10

Scott Baio in Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance

koei

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thank's!
25th

PlayStation 2



SAMURAI WARRIORS



戦 国 無 双

FROM THE CREATORS OF KESSEN™ AND DYNASTY WARRIORS™

MARCH 2004

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM
RATING PENDING TO TEEN
RP-T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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ALSO AVAILABLE



GI NEWS

WANT TO PLAY HALO, MARIO KART ONLINE?

GameCube owners can finally get with the 21st century and start throwing turtle shells at people across the world. Yup, thanks to programs such as **Warp Pipe** (warppipe.com), **Nintendo** fans can use LAN-enabled titles **Mario Kart: Double Dash**, **1080° Avalanche**, and **Kirby Air Ride** to play online around the world. This means that you don't have to make your friend ride his bike across town with his **GameCube** in tow (although that handle sure is cute) just to play some non-split screen multiplayer. This kind of pioneering spirit from enterprising gamers is a welcome innovation for those tired of Nintendo's stubborn refusal to give us the online gaming we want.

First off, you must have a GameCube with the Broadband Adapter, a **PC** (some of these online-enabling programs, such as Warp Pipe, also support Macs), a spare network cable, and a fast broadband connection. Plug your 'Cube into your PC's hub, router, or network card (making sure it's already connected to the Internet).

Next you must download the software itself. From here, you will connect to players via your PC by sending or receiving IP addresses of other gamers. At the time of this writing, Warp Pipe was still in beta, and had no lobby. The only way to meet and exchange IP addresses to play others was through the site's forums. Make sure that you do not have any firewalls, and that your port 4000 is forwarded (open). If you have other problems, head over to the Warp Pipe site and check out the troubleshooting for help.

If you're rolling your eyes, saying, "Three games, big whoop!" Then delight in the fact that if you have an **Xbox** and a PC, there are all sorts of possibilities (with no subscriptions to pay for). Basically, any system link-enabled game on the console can be played as an online title - even if it's not **Xbox Live**-enabled. If the word "**Halo**" just popped into your mind, then you are starting to see how sweet this is.

Software supporting Xbox tunneling (as this process is called) is more numerous than for the GameCube, with sites like xboxlink.co.uk being just the tip of the iceberg. Software such as **Xlink Messenger** supports lobbies, the Voice Communicator, skins, and even your homebrew games for those with a modded Xbox. Work has also begun on an Xlink Messenger for GameCube. Furthermore, future versions of Warp Pipe will support voice chat, instant messaging, and more.



DATA FILE

► **Electronic Arts** is working on titles for **Sony's PlayStation Portable**, due out later this year.

► **Sony of Europe** representatives have confirmed that **The Getaway 2** is currently in development for the **PS2**.

► Not quite as dead as we thought, **Eidos'** boutique label **Fresh Games** is coming back with shooter **R-Type Final** for the **PS2** in February.

► **Brave Shot** is **Square Enix's** first foray into a deal to provide **Verizon Wireless** customers with games. The shooter is now downloadable, with more titles from the publisher coming shortly. Meanwhile, **Activision** is working on a Java and Brew-based version of **Street Hoops**.

► **Konami** is once again coming through for Saturday morning cartoon kids. First **Yu-Gi-Oh!** and now **Shaman King**. The publisher plans to put out games based on the anime show for the **PS2** and **GBA** starting this summer. Elsewhere, Konami has picked up the RPG **Y's VI: The Ark of Naphethim**, and plans to bring it to consoles this year.

► **EA Sports** has switched the cover star for its **NHL 2004** game. **Joe Sakic** will now replace **Dany Heatley** on the box. EA made the decision after Heatley was involved in the automobile accident death of teammate **Dan Snyder**.

► **Take-Two** is officially closing the **Gotham Games** label, after such disasters as **Starsky & Hutch** and one hit in **Conflict: Desert Storm II**. In the future, **Gotham's** titles will be redistributed to **Rockstar** and **Take-Two's** budget line **Global Star Software**.

► Now that **TDK** is a part of **Take-Two**, **Activision** has stepped up and snagged the rights to **DreamWorks' Shrek 2**. The publisher also plans to make video games based on the studio's upcoming animated films **Shark Tale**, **Madagascar**, and **Over the Hedge**. In other **Activision** news, the company has committed to numerous **True Crime** games to take place in different cities, and more **Call of Duty** titles.

► **Rockstar's** ultraviolent title **Manhunt** has the distinction of being the first video game ever banned in **New Zealand**.

Name That Game Answer:



GTA MAKERS OFFER APOLOGY

Take-Two Interactive Software and its subsidiary **Rockstar Games** have officially apologized to the Haitian people and the government of Haiti for some of the content in **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City**. Future copies of the game have also been altered. The infamous gangland tale contains fictitious animosity toward Haitians by a rival Cuban gang, who scream "Kill the Haitians" at one point.

Part of the statement read: "**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** is a virtual crime world, in which characters are involved in criminal activities, including fictional gang warfare between rival groups. In creating the game, it was not our intention to target or offend any group or persons or to incite hatred or violence against such groups or persons."

The statement from **Take-Two** goes on to say that the media at large has both mischaracterized the gameplay and taken certain statements from the title out of context. Standing by its product, **Take-Two** says, "As with literature, movies, music and other forms of entertainment, we have strived to create a video game experience with a certain degree of realism, which we believe is our right." However, the company has removed the comments from future copies of the game.

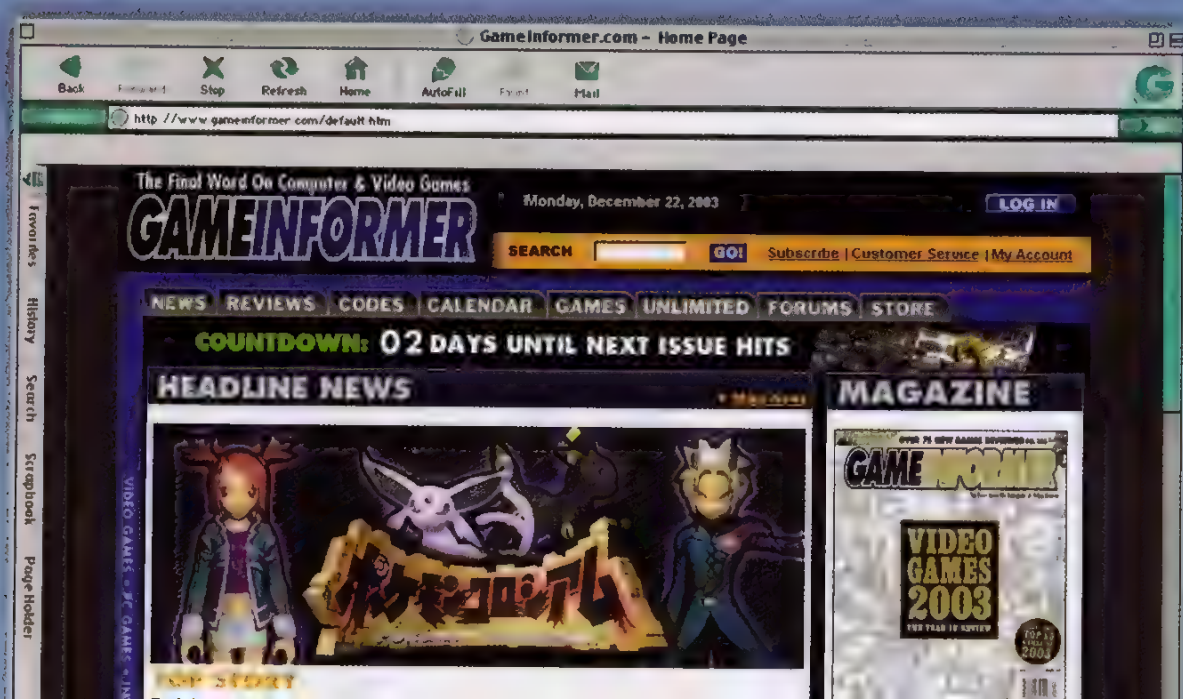
Despite the change, some groups, such as **The Haitian American Coalition**, were not appeased by **Take-Two's** action, and have promised to continue to protest. The groups are trying to get the game itself removed from store shelves. The **HAC** has even involved Florida attorney general **Charlie Crist**, to check if **Vice City** violates any of the state's hate crime laws.

In lighter news, **Rockstar Games** has confirmed that it has acquired the rights to western **Red Dead Revolver** from **Capcom**. The title will be developed by **Rockstar San Diego**, and is expected for the **PlayStation 2** and **Xbox** this spring. Also in the works is a video game adaptation of the film **The Warriors**, **Manhunt** for the **Xbox** and **PC**, and a **Grand Theft Auto** for the **Game Boy Advance**.

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THE

GREAT

ESCAPE



RIDDICK

A small developer, a moderately successful movie, and an unproven technology may seem like a risky combination for a game, but Swedish developer Starbreeze Studios is confident it is the equation for a blockbuster. Its new title stars a character described as “Hannibal Lecter as an action hero,” and will utilize a new technique to create some of the most stunning graphics ever seen. Combined with unexpected twists on a familiar genre, Starbreeze’s new release looks certain to be one of the biggest titles of 2004.

The title in question is Riddick, based on the universe created in the sci-fi action flick *Pitch Black*. The film, which starred a then-obscure actor named Vin Diesel, introduced the world to Riddick, a futuristic murderer with the ability to see in the dark. After the ship transporting him back to an interstellar prison crashes, he becomes the only hope for the survivors as they face off with light-sensitive aliens during an eclipse.

The film was only a minor hit at the box office, but the positive reviews, healthy DVD sales, and Vin Diesel’s rising star power

were enough to justify a sequel with a larger budget. Positioning the new film *Chronicles of Riddick* as one of its summer blockbusters, Vivendi Universal decided to release a game to tie in with the film. Starbreeze Studios was offered the job, and it jumped at the chance. But rather than retell the film’s story, the team chose to take the game down a much more exciting path.

Early in the discussions about the character’s second film, film producers considered making a prequel to explain his origins. The first movie revealed little about

his past – Riddick was a murderer who had an operation in prison to allow him to see in the dark. Despite the fact that the prison was the most notoriously secure jail in the Known universe, he had somehow escaped, only to be recaptured by his nemesis, the bounty hunter Johns. Although it was decided to make the second film a true sequel, Vivendi Universal Games and Starbreeze saw the appeal of the prequel and consulted with Vin Diesel and *Pitch Black* director David Twohy about telling the story of Riddick’s earlier adventures. Both were thrilled with the idea and gave





■ These heavy guards are tough, but aren't the baddest enemies you'll face.

“The combat system is certainly amazing, and it won't be the only way that Riddick varies from a typical FPS – in many ways, Riddick is an entirely different animal.”



■ Even the bath rooms are places you wouldn't want to visit.

the project, Vivendi Universal, a well-known video game fan, even took an active role in the creation of the game, contributing both his likeness and distinctive voice.

A lot of games feature tough protagonists, but few are as downright bad as Riddick. A convicted murderer, it's even implied in *Pitch Black* that he's a cannibal. But despite his evil nature, Riddick possesses a spark of humanity that makes him easy to get behind. At the finale of *Pitch Black*, the antihero seems a somewhat changed man, but still someone you don't want to get in a bar fight with. "Riddick is barely-controlled rage. His basic attitude is that if you're standing in front of a door, and he needs to get through the door, he'll say, 'Move or I'll kill you.' If he kills you after that point, he feels like he gave you his word, and

he kept it," offers Vivendi producer Pete Wanat, the man in charge of the process on the publishing side. His counterpart at Starbreeze, a tall, lanky Swede named Lars Johansson, is far too humble to say much about the game, despite all the talented folks on the project. But Wanat has no problem energetically explaining what sets Riddick apart from other games. He is obviously proud of the project, and he has good reason to be. He's quick to point out how this title differs from others in the genre. Even the concept is different. Riddick is an escape game; many games involve breaking into something, while this one is all about busting out.

At the start of the adventure, the title character is arrested and brought to Butcher Bay prison, a planet used solely to incarcerate the most dangerous criminals in the galaxy. During the course

of the game, Riddick will attempt to escape from three different levels of security and make his way through an amazingly varied set of environments. Early on, he will find himself in the lowest security level of the prison, which most closely resembles a traditional jail. But as Diesel's character progresses through the story, he'll be moved into Double and Triple Max security levels. Each of these areas has a completely different look, but the same mood of oppressive gloom, and will feature several subsections. By completing the game, players will learn the story of how Riddick successfully made his way out of the toughest prison in existence.

While the player will experience the game through the jailbird's eyes, this is no mere first-person shooter. It certainly is heavy on the action, but Riddick won't even pick

up a gun in many areas of the game. The firearms in the prison are DNA-coded so that only guards can fire them. Riddick must enter a sample of his DNA into a computer before he can even touch a gun. Up to that point, fists are his primary weapons. In first-person view, you'll duke it out with other prisoners, stab guards with a shiv, or sneak up behind them and snap their necks. You will even be able to pull off combos and counter moves, many of which were added after consulting with Vin Diesel himself. "We wanted to make sure the character felt like Riddick not just in the way he looked and talked, but in the way he fought," says Wanat. The combat system is certainly amazing, and it won't be the only way that the game varies from a typical FPS - in many ways, Riddick is an entirely different animal.

Starbreeze's goal with their new project was to make the most realistic, immersive game possible, which meant

doing away with many of the conventions found in the FPS genre. Gone is any form of on-screen display; your health meter is only visible when taking damage, ammo counters are found on weapons themselves, and while you can hide in shadows, there is nothing resembling a stealth meter. You'll be able to tell when you're concealed in blackness when your vision darkens, just as if you were really crouching in shadows. But more impressive than what was taken away are the things that were added. Look down at the ground and you'll see your feet. Pass in front of a strong light and your shadow will fall across the wall beside you. These details go a long way in creating a fully immersive experience.

Indeed, the details in this title are astounding. Although it's only in pre-alpha stage, Riddick is already one of the prettiest games ever, easily eclipsing anything heretofore seen on the Xbox, a system known for its graphical



■ The ammo counter on your gun is the only way to keep track of your rounds



■ The flashlight on your gun lets you revel in the gory details



■ Actions like climbing show off the incredibly detailed Vin Diesel model

splendor. Metal surfaces reflect light, show wear and rust, and will even glow briefly red from heat when sprayed with bullets. Punching an inmate will make his face bruise, and stocking caps on prisoners' heads even look fuzzy. The blood you'll inevitably spray on the wall is animated; watch it long enough and it will begin to trickle down the wall. Of course, since the central character can see in the dark, lighting is of the utmost importance. There is not a solitary static light source in the entire game - every single light can be shot out. As a result, the lighting engine has to effortlessly cope with constantly changing light and shadow. Splinter Cell made shadows into a gaming staple; Riddick takes them to the next level.

While every developer strives to make a great-looking game, for Riddick astounding visuals are a necessity. "One of the first things we talked about was how important the visual representation of gameplay was. So many of Riddick's abilities are based on eyesight," explains Wanat. "This needed to be a pretty game because it's right for the character." Because vision is such a central part of who Riddick is, the player must be able to believe they are actually looking through his eyes. You will see your own blood fly past your face when injured, but more importantly, you'll have several different vision modes. Before Riddick has his eyes enhanced to see in the dark, he will have two vision modes: standard and stealth. Most of the game will be

■ Every character features full rag doll physics for the most realistic (and bloody) deaths possible



“ Every area of the game looks absolutely filthy with realism; you can practically taste the dirty air as you work your way through the prison’s many environments. ”



■ Guards will react intelligently and actively, dodge your attacks



■ The prison yard is where you'll spend your rec time...until you are transferred to the higher security areas

played in standard mode, but in stealth mode you'll see the corona of your retina around the edges of the screen. This mode indicates to the player that you are moving quietly, an invaluable tool for sneaking up on your enemies. Only in this mode will you be able to hide in the shadows, which adds a rich stealth element to the game without using any onscreen indicators to detract from the realism.

Later in the adventure Riddick will have his eyes "shined" by Pope Joe, a character created specifically for the game by Vin Diesel. The eye shine surgery allows him

to see in the dark. The tentatively named "Riddick Vision" casts a shimmering, purple haze over the environment, similar to how Riddick's eyesight was visualized in *Pitch Black*. As Riddick can cast any area into abject darkness by shooting out the lights, his eye shine gives him a distinct advantage over his enemies.


Although the entire game takes place in prison, Riddick will see amazingly varied sights in his quest to escape. He'll face off with his fellow inmates, guards in heavy power armor, feral albino mutants, and even a species of subterranean aliens. His

adventure will take him through dingy jail cells, barely lit mines, a clinical cryo-sleep facility, and smog-choked, sweltering workshops. Every area of the game looks absolutely filthy with realism; you can practically taste the dirty air as you work your way through the prison's many environments. It looks as if you could place your hand on any wall and end up with the slimy residue of years of neglect on your fingertips. The authentic details of Riddick's world are unparalleled, thanks to a new technique called normal mapping.

■ There are vicious gangs in prison, each sporting a unique look



■ Until his DNA is entered into the database, Riddick's only weapons against heavily-armed guards are his fists



■ Even though the graphics are already gorgeous, this version of the game is still pre alpha!

KEEPING THINGS NORMAL

Normal mapping is a technology used to exponentially add to the amount of detail that can be included on a 3D object without greatly increasing the processing power required to display it. Upcoming mega-titles like Halo 2 will make partial use this technique; Riddick will use it for every object in the game. It's a complicated subject, but understanding the technique is the best way to explain how Riddick is able to look so great.

To create a three-dimensional object, the standard method is making a wire frame version of an object, then wrapping a skin around it to add detail. Imagine making a shape out of chicken wire, then covering it in paper mache. 3D modeling works in the same way, only digitally. These models can be made in either low or high-resolution, which is basically a measure of how detailed the object is. Obviously, high-res objects look much better, but are far more taxing on hardware.

Both high-res and low-res models are made up of polygons, the basic building blocks of 3D graphics. In traditional 3D modeling, the polygon count is the best indication of graphics quality. As polygons are used to create the details and contours of a complicated object, the higher the polygon count, the better the visuals.

Low-res models typically have flat surfaces, while high-res models usually have intricate details of texture sculpted out of polygons. Normal mapping turns all of that on its ear.

On its fundamental level, normal mapping is wrapping a high-res skin around a low-res object. Except to 3D modelers, that explanation doesn't make a whole lot of sense, so Pete Wanat and Starbreeze's art director Jens Matthies offered us an example to clarify. Pete grabbed a stool, and excitedly asked us to imagine that the stool was a 3D object created for the game. The shape of the stool would be created in low-res, and a high-resolution "wrapping paper" of the stool would be created for detail. At a distance, it would look like a high-res model because it has all the details in place, but all the surfaces would actually be flat. The reason that the illusion of a normal mapped item does not fall up close is the true appeal of normal mapping.

Normal mapping takes its name from the normal—the term for which direction an object reflects light. The normal for the top of our stool is up, while the normal for the right side is right, and so on. A normal mapped

texture contains all the information the lighting engine needs to determine which way the light should reflect. Jens Matthies showed us the process of creating a normal map for a wall, and it really cleared up the technique. Basically, a flat texture is created, but every area that is supposed to look three-dimensional has its normal information encoded into it. For example, the wall has several small bolts. Although they are actually flat, the tops of the bolts are encoded to tell the lighting engine that light should reflect upwards when it hits them. When the final object is animated, light plays off it realistically, even though the actual object is basically devoid of intricate shapes. It's a

complex process, but results in dramatically nicer graphics than traditional modeling, without putting a huge strain on the console's processor.



■ This is what a high-res model of Diesel's head looks like.

■ ...and this is the low-res version...

■ ...and this is the low-res model with normal mapping applied.



■ Here is an example of a completely normal mapped item in the game

■ Notice how the light reflects uniquely off of every surface



■ The camera switches to third-person to make certain actions possible



CREATING A MONSTER

The astounding visuals are certainly a big draw, but there's a lot more to Riddick than a pretty face. Every other aspect of the game has received the same attention to detail as the graphics, and the result is a title that will amaze from top to bottom. Starbreeze has paid equal attention to Riddick's sound. Rather than pull effects from existing sound libraries, sound designer Gustaf Grefberg and his team created 90 percent of the sound effects themselves. Their countless hours of taping strange machinery and hitting raw meat with their fists resulted in a game that's every bit as impressive

aurally as it is visually. Riddick's ambience is dark and foreboding, but sounds completely organic and never derivative.

Of course, great audio and visuals means nothing if the gameplay isn't there to back it up. To ensure that Riddick can give the blockbuster titles a run for their money, the game is absolutely stuffed to the gills with content. It features everything a triple-A shooter needs, such as a tight control scheme, full rag doll physics, and destructible environments. There's even a primitive cigarette-based barter system between the inmates. Riddick can

trade smokes with his fellow cons in exchange for weapons, favors, and information. But Starbreeze didn't stop there; there are added goodies like context-sensitive kills. For example, in one of the prison work areas, there is a large mineral grinder in the floor. Should a guard foolishly step near it, Riddick can sneak up behind him and push him in with a touch of the action button. The guard will be quickly reduced to nothing more than a spray of red mist. If players are feeling particularly sadistic, guards can be knocked unconscious, dragged over to the grinder and fossed in. Dragging

bodies in games has always been fun, but in this title the results can be especially gruesome.

Although the majority of the game plays out through Riddick's eyes, there will be times when you can see the dead-on likeness of Vin Diesel. Whenever certain activities are involved, such as scaling boxes, climbing ladders, or crawling along a ledge, the action will fluidly shift to third person. These segments are usually brief, but effortlessly deal with actions that are typically difficult in first-person games. Many of these third-person segments will appear as part of alternate

■ Later in the game, you will be able to pilot one of these mechs and unleash waves of destruction



AN INTERVIEW WITH VIN DIESEL

In just a few short years, Mamma Diesel's boy has gone from a total unknown to one of the biggest names in Hollywood. His short film, *Multi-Facial*, which he wrote, directed and starred in, caught the attention of Steven Spielberg, who added a part for him in *Saving Private Ryan*. Since then, he's starred in films like *XXX*, *The Fast and the Furious*, and *Boiler Room*. He's also a huge video game fan, and took some time to talk with us about his upcoming title.

You're a self-professed video game fanatic. What do you look for in a game?

Interactive escapism.

What games are you currently playing?

I am thoroughly enjoying *Soul Calibur II* and *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*.

How is your video game company, Tigon Games, involved in *Riddick*?

As a producer of COR and having worked on the film for 5 years, I was able to bring insight to the world of *Riddick*. I wanted to make sure that there was a consistency between the movie and the game. It was an incredible opportunity to work with Vivendi Universal Games and a very innovative developer, Starbreeze. I wanted the quality of the film experience to carry over into the game.

What is the current status of the first announced Tigon Games release, *Perrone*?

Some really great stuff. I just can't talk about it. Sorry.

It's said that you take your voiceover work very seriously. Is there any difference between doing voiceovers for movies and games? How do you approach your voice work?

I take my voiceover work very seriously. In the case of *Iron Giant*, I would go home and not be able to talk for hours. Voiceover work for games or animation is easier as an actor because you don't have to match to pre-existing shot footage, as you do in ADR for film. The important thing is to breathe life into a character.

The challenge is to convey all the nuances and layers of a complex character through voice only. Because I have lived and breathed the *Riddick* character for so long now, due to the film, preparing for the voiceover work was more about ensuring *Riddick*'s entire dialogue was perfectly 'on-model'. I spent several hours with the game's dialogue writers polishing *Riddick*'s lines and helping to communicate what his motivation, actions, and reactions would be in the set of circumstances he finds himself in during this game.

With the release of the game and the new movie, do you think *Riddick* will become one of the classic sci-fi series?

I'm a guy who grew up playing *Dungeons & Dragons* obsessively – preferably as a "Half Drow Witch Hunter" – so I'm a fan of the fantasy world. David Twohy, who understands science fiction better than most guys I know, and I wanted to create a fantasy-like mythology combining the best of the sci-fi and fantasy worlds to create a universe, or multiple universes, that we would want to interact with. Everyone involved in the game and movie really got into that. We were determined to give audiences every opportunity to dive deeper and deeper into these characters and worlds.

Will people who haven't seen the movie(s) get into the game?

Anyone who plays through this game will have important information that pertains to the movie, as well

as backstory that was previously unrevealed. However, the game simultaneously works as a self-contained product. This game has raised the bar for first-person shooters and is using technology and a level of graphics unseen in any console game prior. So ultimately it's going to be a great game to play, which is really the point of doing a game that can stand independent of the movie or enhance and add to the moviegoing experience. The game actually takes place before *Pitch Black* and *Chronicles of Riddick*, in the toughest prison in the universe – Butcher Bay. Well, toughest prison at that time. It's a story driven first-person shooter, with a heavy dose of intelligent puzzle solving and adventuring.

Do you feel like the game and the new movie are two parts of the same project, or are they two separate but equal projects?

The game actually started to be developed before we had a script for *Chronicles* because everyone felt that *Riddick* is a perfect character for a video game. It was also a great opportunity to build our backstory. As the movie started to come together, we began enhancing the game and bringing in extra components that would build the overall storyline and would give players of the game some additional insight into what is happening in the films. These are separate projects that are components of a much larger story.

What are your thoughts about who *Riddick* is? Why do people like such a bad guy?

Riddick doesn't subscribe to anyone else's rules or religion. He gets through life his own way, and, sometimes, as you'll see in the game and the movie, it ain't pretty. He has to do what he has to do.

Will those who play the game get more out of the new movie than those who don't?

Yes. Those who play the game will get a deeper understanding of the universe. They'll spend more time with *Riddick* in exile, they'll get more details as to the origin of his eyes, and they'll see him come closer to understanding who he is and why he does the things that he does.

How do you think *Riddick* will compare to some of the other mega-releases, like *Doom 3* and *Halo 2*?

I think *Riddick* will definitely deliver an experience that will appeal to players of the games you mentioned, but like any project, it should be judged on its own merits. It will look, feel, sound and play great, and really, that is all players care about.

Do you think *Riddick* will be seen as "that Vin Diesel game"?

No, I don't. Just like a movie, there are many talented artists who come together and contribute to create the gaming experience. I think when people play this game they will acknowledge all the talented people involved. It may be referred to as the incredible Vivendi Universal game or the showstopping Starbreeze game or the first Tigon game!

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK – THE FILM

With both a new game and movie hitting this summer, the universe created in *Pitch Black* is about to get a whole lot bigger. While the game will flesh out *Riddick*'s past, the film will reveal his future. It's even been suggested that *Chronicles* is

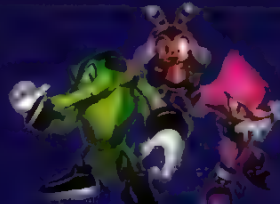
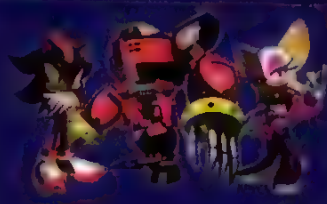
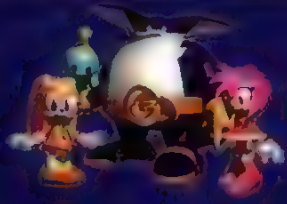
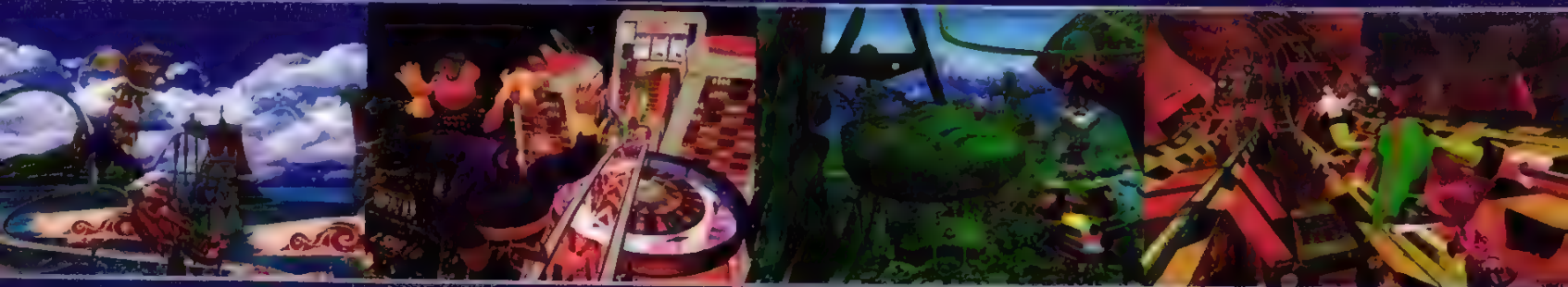
only the first chapter of a new sci-fi trilogy. Here's what has been revealed about the movie so far.

In the five years since the events of *Pitch Black*, *Riddick* has hidden in the outskirts of the galaxy, avoiding the bounty hunters after him. Always on the move, he finds himself on the planet Helion, which has been invaded by the religious zealot, Lord Marshal. Leader of what he calls the "10th Crusade," Marshal is also the head of a group called the Necromongers, who are intent on destroying all human life around them. When he will not join their cause, *Riddick* is exiled to an underground prison,

where temperatures range from sub-zero to volcanic. With the help of a woman from his past and a mysterious elemental, *Riddick*'s actions will help decide the fate of every being, living and dead, in the galaxy.

Along with Vin Diesel, the movie stars Judy Dench, Colm Feore, Alexa Davalos, and Thandie Newton. Currently scheduled for a June 11th release, the teaser trailer can be seen in front of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* in most markets.





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PlayStation 2





THE LANDS OF

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS FORGOTTEN REALMS

In 2002, Stormfront Studios developed The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers for publishing giant Electronic Arts. It was one of the few video games at the time that augmented and even elevated the movie license it was based on. Stormfront was happy to reap the benefits of its hard labor, and still talks fondly of The Two Towers to this day.

What did publisher Electronic Arts think? It, too, was pleased – so much so that it didn't ask Stormfront Studios to head up the development of the series' sequel, *The Return of the King*. If the first was such a hit, why not? The exact answer is something only EA can answer, but Don Daglow, Stormfront's



president and CEO, is not surprised about his company not being asked back for *The Return of the King*. He has seen it before. A serious veteran of the industry, Daglow was one of Intellivision's first five programmers. He was even Electronic Arts' 43rd employee. In fact, the two companies share a rich common history. Stormfront has developed for EA 11 of the studios' 15 years in existence. Daglow has seen other games he's worked on, like EA's NASCAR or Tiger Woods series, being handed to other studios just when they were taking off. "Once the movie hit that big, we knew what was going to happen," he says.

Electronic Arts' loss became Atari's gain. Looking to do something different with its Dungeons & Dragons

franchise, the publisher formerly known as Infogrames approached Daglow and Stormfront about working its magic in one of the universe's most beloved settings – the Forgotten Realms. Although D&D is usually associated with drier treatments on the PC, Atari was eager to couple the property with Stormfront's unquestionable skill in the action genre. "This is an iteration on the style. [It's] pushing forward," says Devin St. Claire, lead artist for the project. Atari didn't want to simply present a hack n' slash title set in the Forgotten Realms; it wanted to create something special. Together with Stormfront, it turned to *The Dark Elf Trilogy* writer R.A. Salvatore, and Dungeons & Dragons: Forgotten Realms was born.

■ FORMAT PLAYSTATION 2 ■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER ATARI ■ DEVELOPER STORMFRONT STUDIOS ■ RELEASE LATE 2004

TOMORROW

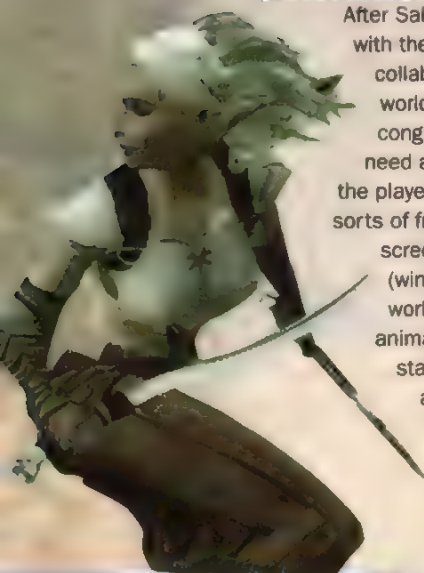
The pairing of Stormfront and the best-selling author (who's a Forgotten Realms authority) wasn't just a happy accident that fell into the developer's lap. Knowing that at its heart, Forgotten Realms was going to deliver skull-busting action above all else, Stormfront's design director Jason Epps felt from the beginning that the game's story was going to be more important than the genre itself often demanded. "Beat 'em ups are fun, fun games, but they need a little something to push them along."

After Salvatore was on board with the project, the two sides collaborated to mesh a pair of worlds that aren't necessarily congruent. Video game scripts need a taut efficiency to drive the player, while novels give you all sorts of freedom. In the middle was screenwriter Robert Goodman (winner of an Emmy for his work on the *Batman Beyond* animated series), who was a staff writer for Warner Bros. and had even worked with comic book legend Frank Miller in an adaptation of *The Dark Knight Returns*. He took Salvatore's

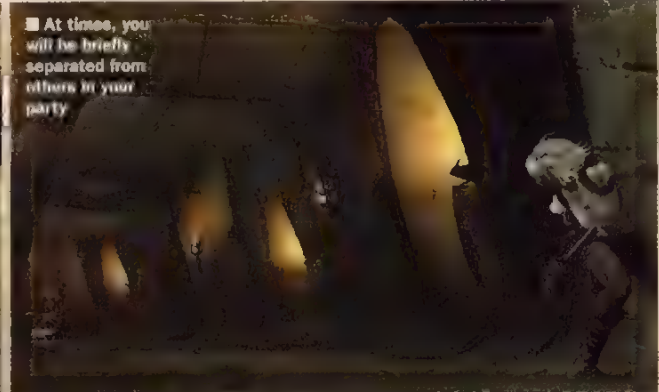
story and forged it into a script for the title, sometimes massaging the author's writings into something more manageable from a video game perspective. However, Stormfront and Salvatore were often on the same wavelength, and the result is something that both parties are proud of (check out page 49 for more on this acclaimed writer and his collaboration with the studio). "We very much wanted to tell [the game] like a story, very much like an action movie," comments Epps. "So it felt a lot more like you were learning about the characters and about the world as you adventured through it, as opposed to 'giant monologue, play some level, another giant monologue, play some more or hear dialogue between some characters you don't really even know.'

Salvatore was really gracious and fantastic in his ability to help us do that."

The game starts out with the marshaling of two armies on the field of a great battle. Two generals, one a Slaad and the other a Githyanki, stand before each other, both trying to lay claim over Faerûn. As the massive armies engage, the two generals find each other in the chaos and start to trade blows, soon forgetting the maelstrom around them. Their struggle leads them to a nearby cave, where a young, black-bearded Khelben Blackstaff spies their personal battle from the shadows. He starts an incantation. Desiring to stop their warmongering and plans to control Faerûn, he seals the pair into a Bloodstone for all eternity – or so he thinks.



Each character presents their own advantages in battles



At times, you will be briefly separated from others in your party



The yuan-ti's thirst for biological experimentation on other species continues

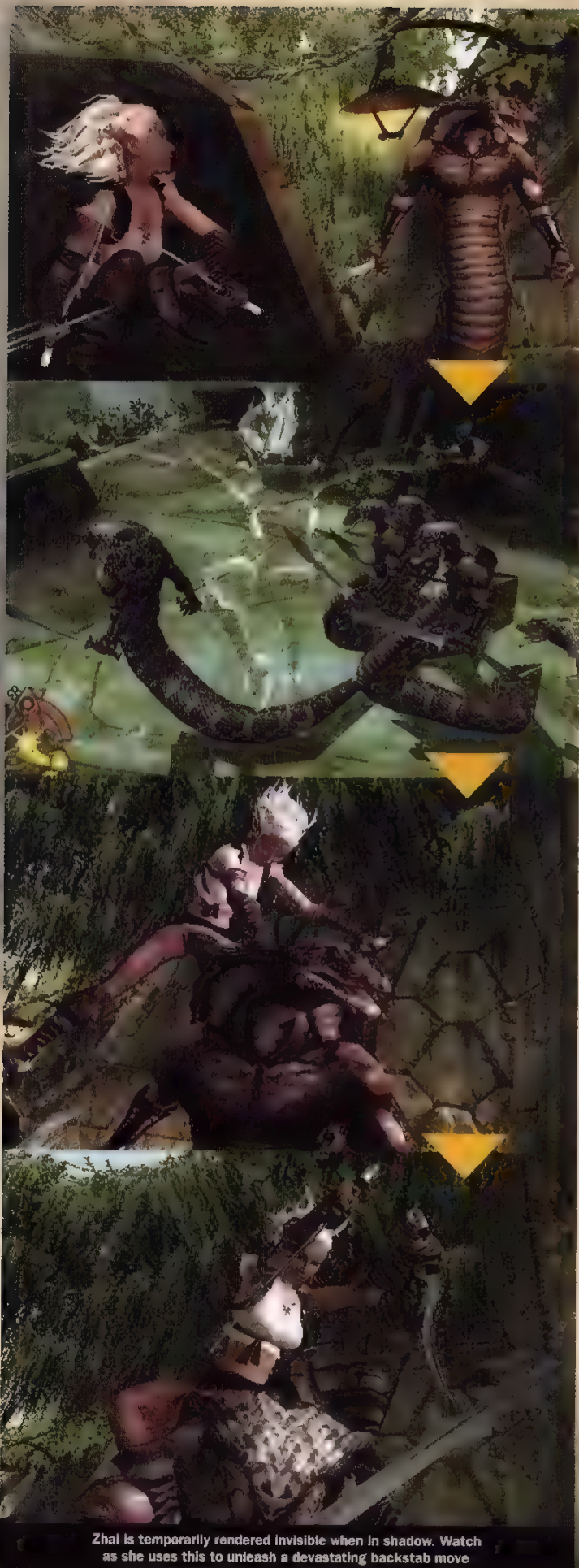
If you were impressed with the relentless pace of combat that Stormfront created in *The Two Towers*, what you'll see in here will easily exceed your

expectations. The game features a three-hero party comprised of a fighter (Rannek), a sorcerer (Illius), and a thief (Zhai) as they slash and fight their way through the *Forgotten Realms*. Typical? Yes. But what you can do with this trio is refreshing for an action title. Players can flip to any other character in the party at will. Given the waves of enemies that come at you, juggling three very different heroes simultaneously is no easy feat in execution.

Your party, coming together from disparate backgrounds and motives, attempts to re-form the Bloodstone. The warring generals from the opening sequence have somehow escaped Blackstaff's imprisonment, and it's your job to recapture the evil that's been unleashed. Even as Stormfront's Epps tells us this, he can sense that this hardly sounds like a story worthy of R.A. Salvatore — especially given the team's belief that the game's tale is going to be one of the things that elevates this title above the rest. Epps, Daglow, and producer Alyssa Finley assure us that there will be more than enough twists and turns to keep you guessing.

As players make their way through the game's more than 10 levels, and

the body count increases, experience points and gold will be rewarded. Similar to *The Two Towers*, the combos you use and kills you notch will put you in a rarified state of grace. Once you reach this status you begin to receive increased experience and gold for each subsequent kill. When you finish a level you are free to spend what you've earned on weapons (where D&D players will recognize such equipment as the Short Sword of Wounding, Staff of the Magi, and the Frost Brand), items, and combos. We imagine that most gamers will play through the title with the warrior (even though situations during levels will certainly dictate that you utilize everyone in the party), and only return later to finish the game with the others. This brings up the question: What happens to those you neglect to buy weapons or combos for? Stormfront has foreseen players going through the game one hero at a time, and it is prepared. Similar to Bioware's *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, the other characters will automatically level-up with you, and you will be able to choose from packages that grant them specific sets of upgrades.



Zhai is temporarily rendered invisible when in shadow. Watch as she uses this to unleash a devastating backstab move





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ven though the game isn't scheduled to come out until the end of the year, our hands-on time with it showed that many of the game's principals were firmly in place.

One of our big concerns was

how well the other characters would behave when you weren't controlling them. After all, you'd hate to have to worry about one of your heroes acting like a total fool the second you stop commanding them. We can honestly say that the AI is working great. We witnessed scenes where we would start a combo attack with Rannek the warrior, for example, and then switch to Illius the sorcerer to pummel Rannek's enemy with some projectile attacks. You could actually see Rannek finish the combo we'd assigned to him and then keep up the fight on his own. Smart. Moreover, we were glad to see the AI fully utilize each character's strengths. In one instance we played through, three large, menacing foes surrounded our character. Before we could begin to panic, Illius had cast a sleep spell on them, making our job suddenly much more manageable.

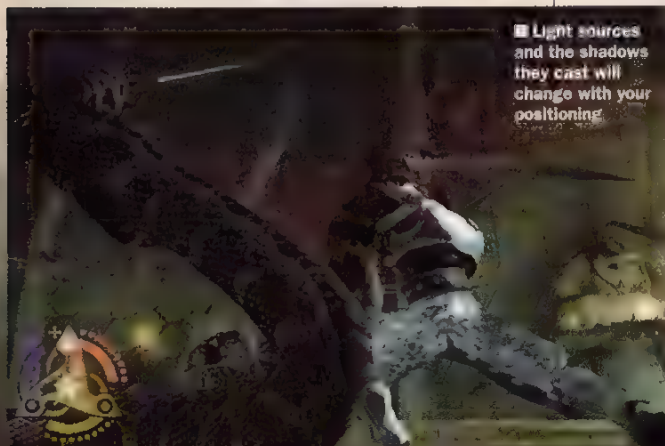
Naturally, each of the characters has their own strengths and weaknesses. One handy skill is Zhai's proficiency with stealth



kills – particularly useful when one of your compatriots is engaging a foe. Not only can she perform a stunning backstab maneuver consisting of her leaping up on the shoulders of an enemy and plunging her dual knife blades into their neck, but shadows will render her invisible for a brief period of time.

Earlier, we talked about being rewarded with more experience points and gold if you utilized some of the more difficult combos regularly. There is another benefit – Super attacks. These are earned by performing well enough to push your skill meter to the max, which will then unlock these devastating moves. One of Zhai's, for example, calls for her to whip daggers in a sweeping radius around her. You can see the game's intuitive AI in action in the fact that, although the CPU won't perform these powerful attacks

while it's controlling one of your friends, it is smart enough to use combos that earn Supers on its own. Conceivably, you could pull a triple whammy as everybody earns a Super attack, allowing you to switch between characters in quick succession and unleash total hell on the enemy.





THE LAY OF THE LAND: STORMFRONT'S TAKE ON THE FORGOTTEN REALMS

"We're not a history class," declares the game's design director, Jason Epps. Several times in our visit with the developer, we alternately remembered and forgot that this is a title set in Dungeons & Dragons' famed setting. That's okay, Epps doesn't want the title to hit people over with the head with its license. He figures that there are other games out there that can do that. Sure you'll recognize locations throughout Vaasa and Damara, but what he and the rest of the team want *Forgotten Realms* to do is utilize the items, monsters, and locations of the world without making the player ever feel like they are a slave to some set of rules that they may not understand. Pick up and play is definitely the order of the day.

However, that doesn't mean that the game screws up the D&D cosmos. In fact, *Stormfront* is proud of the fact that the title adheres to all of the role-player's rules as set out by Wizards of the Coast. The developer raves at the company's cooperation throughout the project's creation. Epps gives a particularly good example. "What they will do is find a way within the rules to let us do what we're doing. The Super attacks are a very gamey kind of thing. Actually, it has a basis in D&D. For the fighters, it's the whirlwind attack. The good thing is that players who play the game, if they really know all the spells, [they] come right out of the spell books." There is reverence for the world, and that is something that was always the goal. "We treat [The *Forgotten Realms*] like a real place. We don't just sort of have a D&D movie-style of treatment where it's very glib. We take it all very seriously."

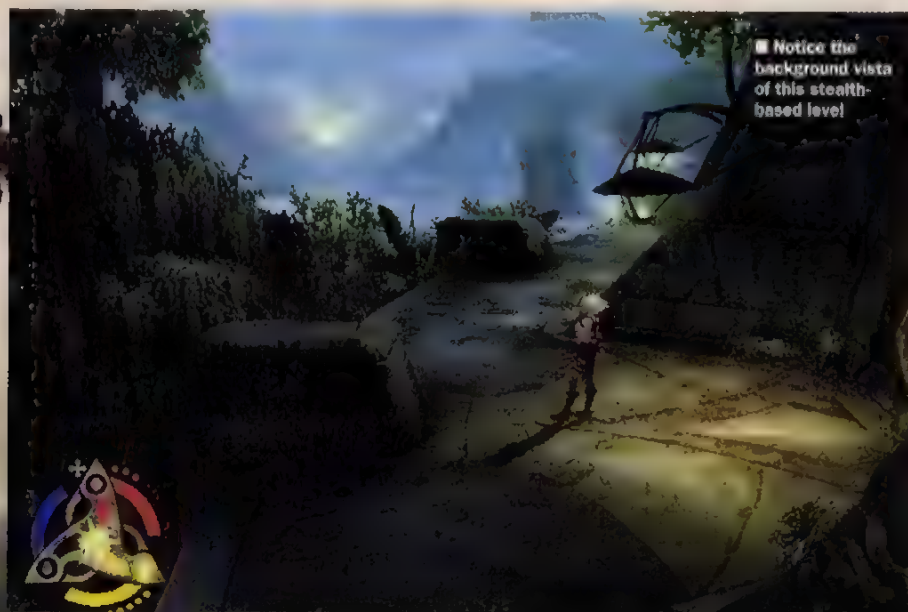
For anyone wanting to challenge *Stormfront's* usage of D&D's rules, president Daglow has already beaten you to the punch. "We'll get a letter, and it'll say, 'This isn't right,'" he jokes. "One of us will have to end up writing back and saying, 'No, you didn't look under this chapter, and this is why it's right.'"

Of course, the big question is, with R.A. Salvatore's involvement, are we going to see the most famous *Forgotten Realms* inhabitant of them all, the dark elf Drizzt Do'Urden? Game Informer did learn from publisher Atari that he is confirmed for the game. If he's in there, why isn't he one of the main playable characters? Will we get to spill blood with this incomparable badass? We asked Epps, but all he would tell us was: "We're trying really hard to offer a robust experience with Drizzt." If that kind of a tease doesn't get you to pick up this game, we don't know what will!

Despite the no-nonsense approach of the genre, *Stormfront* is eager to avoid any notion of this game being as clear-cut as most dungeon crawlers. Imbuing a real sense of story is one way to carve your own path. Engaging gameplay that offers many possibilities is another. In an effort to avoid a "kill foes, move on" repetitiveness, the levels themselves will have layers. One example we saw not only featured several distinct locations leading up to a boss battle, but each one played a little differently. For example, a forest level we played started out with pure combat. It then moved into a more strategic area where the best way to survive was to perform a push combo which shoved enemies into the mouth

of a massive water wheel that chewed them up. The action then switched to a raft travelling down a stream. Here you are called upon to dispatch archers on the riverbanks with your party's projectile attacks.

Running through each of the game's levels is a palette of visual effects. One seemingly small detail we've noticed is the concerted effort to embellish the backgrounds. A forest path isn't just a bunch of trees and bushes in the foreground, it's a full jungle canopy that looks dense enough to swallow an elephant. In the background of one area we witnessed, not only were enemies coming at us while the demon lord Merrshauk threatened behind the party, but also in the distance, mist-covered mountains trailed back for as far as the eye could see.



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tormfront attributes the game's look to not only the skill of its teams, but to the proprietary tools that the studio has developed. Although the game more or less runs on the same engine that powered

The Two Towers, the developer is quick to point out that it has evolved relentlessly since then. Quantitatively, how would you like to have 25 to 50 percent (depending on the situation) more characters onscreen than in The Two Towers? The proof's not just in the numbers, however. We witnessed one scene where groups of enemies approached our party, and yet the lighting effects on our characters and the spectral highlights on the floor were constant no matter how frenzied the action got. In addition, the game's audio is sophisticated enough to keep up with all this carnage and chaos – the code knows what every single body onscreen is doing and the context of the actions being performed. This makes for some stunningly realistic representations of the chaos of battle.

Seemingly peripheral elements like these can add up to make a big difference. The Two Towers turned the usual habit of crappy video game translations of movies totally on its ear – and not just because the base content was *The Lord of the Rings*. This was no accident. When you look at how much less fun The Return of the King was to play in Stormfront's absence, you believe that Forgotten Realms will deliver where Electronic Arts itself could not. Especially when president Don Daglow and company have set down the structure and philosophies that they have. The harmony of the title's elements is the product of the teamwork of the individual teams. "I've worked at a lot

of places over the years where one group holds the other hostage," says Daglow. "People here have checked their egos at the door

and said, 'We're trying to work together to make a great game.'" Now that Atari is heading Dungeons & Dragons: Forgotten Realms, and there is no fear of Electronic Arts pulling the franchise rug out from under them, the sky is finally the limit for Stormfront – and it's ready.

■ The temporary interface at the bottom left will let you keep constant tabs on all in your party

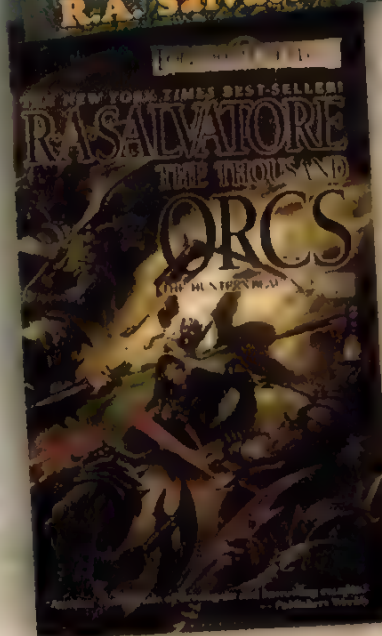


■ We'll come back later: A yuan-ti priest awakens Mershaulk



■ This level contains several different objectives for you to best





R.A. SALVATORE: THE KING OF THE REALM

Stormfront wanted to present its game through a story that was exemplary both for the genre and video games as a whole. It couldn't have done better than working with R.A. Salvatore. A best-selling author steeped in the world of Forgotten Realms, Stormfront says that it was more than just his skill and D&D knowledge that helped the studio out. His ability to adapt and work with the developer was invaluable. Daglow was amazed at the author's approachability. "During our first phone conference with R.A. Salvatore, we're being very respectful. One of the first things that happens is, after about three minutes, it's very obvious that this is a guy that just wants to get down to the nuts and bolts and just talk, he's not standing on any pedestal. It was interesting watching him turn from a statue somewhere up in the *New York Times* best-seller list to a real human being."

Apart from happily signing some autographs for the team, he willingly went back and forth with them, as both sides wrestled with how to fit his great ideas within the world of video games. Epps and producer Alyssa Finley can recall phone calls back and forth as the two sides would work to solve a problem like having to fit Salvatore's story into something as deliberate as the levels of a video game. Stormfront was more than pleased with the results, and we know that there will be more than a few heads that'll turn Forgotten Realms' way due to its involvement with Salvatore.

Apart from his enrichment of the Forgotten Realms universe in such works as *The Dark Elf Trilogy*, *The Icewind Dale Trilogy*, and *The Thousand Orcs*, Salvatore is also well-known for the *DemonWars* saga and adding to Star Wars' literary world. He wrote the novelization of *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, and even killed off Chewbacca in *The New Jedi Order: Vector Prime!*



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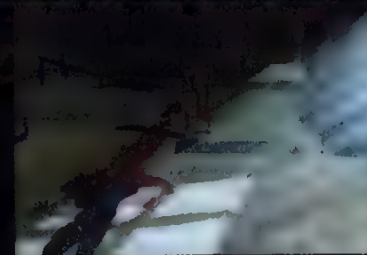
OVER 10 DEADLY WEAPONS FROM THE TRIVIAL TO THE
FILM-INSPIRED TO HELP YOU SURVIVE THIS NIGHTMARE.



A DOZEN HORRIFIC MONSTERS—EACH REPRESENTING
THE MEANS OF EXECUTION THAT BEFELL THEM.



INTERACT WITH HARDENED CRIMINALS: BARNER
THEIR ASSISTANCE OR END THEIR LIFE.



THREE DISTINCT ENDINGS DEPENDING
ON HOW YOU PLAY THE GAME.

The Suffering is an all-new next-generation entry into the action horror genre, and the first game of its kind to probe into the very unsettling and seedy underbelly of a maximum-security penitentiary, which is haunted by horrific and grotesque apparitions, all represented by the unique and disturbing executions that previously befell them. Take on the role of Torque, an inmate who must face much more than his own inner demons and the harsh and gritty reality of death row, as he fights to escape the unleashing of the penitentiary's gruesome secrets in what amounts to be a challenging and terrifying journey through one of the most hellish environments ever imagined. The Suffering features ultra-mature content and three distinctly different endings depending upon how you choose to survive.



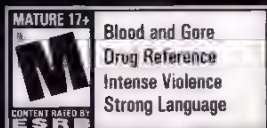
CREATURE DESIGN BY STAN WINSTON STUDIOS

*"Midway's action/horror title could be
the most gruesome videogame ever!"*

—IGN.COM

*"...adults will get a demented,
scary ride"*

—Game Informer



PlayStation 2





THE
SUFFERING™

PRISON IS HELL

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BLOODRAYNE 2

Concepts as cool as the one behind BloodRayne don't come around very often. If a game involves a vinyl-clad half-vampire lady with blades on her arms and martial arts skills worthy of a ninja, then sign us up. While the execution of the first title may not have been all that fans hoped for, developer Terminal Reality is committed to stepping it up with this sequel and crafting an experience that will leave gamers hungering for more. We had the opportunity to speak with Liz Buckley, product manager at Majesco, and Ray Holmes, the producer of BloodRayne 2 at Terminal Reality, and they were full of information on how this sequel is going to blow the original away.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO ■ **DEVELOPER** TERMINAL REALITY
■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER



What a butcher is doing with a meal we don't know, but it's bound to be unpleasant



BloodRayne 2 opens with Rayne at a gala event in a huge mansion, showing off her new dress – one of her alternate costumes in this title. This leads into a flashback scene, which bridges the gap between the two games and demonstrates the dedication to storyline this time around. “The story is a lot more cohesive than last year’s,” comments Buckley. “That’s an important part of taking the sequel to the next level – interweaving a lot of compelling characters into it.”

Indeed, the crux of the story is Rayne’s family, especially her father Kagan, who was presumed dead at the end of the first game. Surprise – he’s alive, and has put Rayne’s half-vampire siblings in control of a massive army with a single purpose. “What her dad is trying to do is create this Vampire Dawn, and how he’s going to do it is by releasing this thing called The Shroud,” comments Buckley. “All of the vampires come out and it’s kind of like open season on humanity.”

This ties into the whole structure of BloodRayne 2. Players will confront one of Rayne’s evil brethren at the climax of each act and gain a new ability by defeating them. To players of the first title, this is good news. Even Holmes admits, “I feel like the first one was kind of episodic...the sequel has more of a complete story arc throughout the entire game.”

This is a still from the FMV showcasing the Networks. Kagan’s whole scheme is so twisted, Buckley said, “There’s no way you can accurately convey the Shroud without an FMV sequence.”





See all the candy bars and such flying out of this explosion? That's because they're all independent objects

Giving BloodRayne 2 a distinctive look and feel is a big part of telling her story. This goal is accomplished largely by the settings Rayne travels through in her quest to defend humanity from her nefarious father. "What we're trying to do is create a lot more distinctive levels that have a real feel," says Buckley. Holmes adds, "It's not just going to be any city – it's going to be BloodRayne's city."

And what a city it is. It's currently comprised of 14 different areas, including such locales as the Wetworks factory and the inverted tower that leads to it. The tower is pretty much just one big long boss battle in which Rayne is spiraling down on a rail, fighting all the while. The Wetworks is a dark, horrible facility housing man-cows (genetically altered humans) designed solely to harvest blood in order to create the Shroud. If that's not unique level design, we don't know what is.

In order to facilitate these grand plans, Terminal Reality's Infernal Engine has received numerous upgrades. Light bloom, an effect that makes light sources look much more realistic, has been added. The polygon counts of both characters and environments have increased. Design tools are much better now, which frees up the developers' time to give gamers that much more for their \$50.

Of course, what good is an immersive setting if the player can't destroy it? Many of the machines and other objects that Rayne encounters can be taken out, and there will be some excellent effects to accompany the destruction. For example, glass will dynamically shatter from the point of impact and crash down randomly. Cloth (curtains, flags, etc.) not only moves with objects passing through, it can be sliced, shot, or otherwise deformed. Not only that, but Rayne's harpoon can be used to pull down certain parts of the environment. Topple walls onto enemies or bring down the balcony a sniper is standing on; the choice is yours.

The primary focus of BloodRayne 2, however, is the combat. "What we're trying to do is give the player a lot more control over what exactly Rayne does, when she does it, and why she does it," says Holmes. A number of innovations are in the works to further this aim including revamped controls, a Tekken-style combo system, and the integration of poles.

These poles play a major part in the upgraded battle system. "While she's on the poles she can shoot, she can slice, she can kick, so it's not just a navigational thing to get through a level; it's very much part of how she fights," says Buckley. We already told you about the all-rail slide boss battle, but this mechanic will be popping up all over the game.

True combos will also serve to diversify combat. "We're doing a ton more moves...upwards of 35 to 40," says Holmes. As you probably know, that number is huge for a game of this type. Totally reworked control will give players easy access to all of these new features – gone is the clumsy first- and third-person mix of the first title. "Since we're going to a more traditional third-person view, you don't have to touch the right stick if you don't want to," says Holmes. This should free up that camera-sitting time for more enjoyable pursuits. (Continued on page 57)



Rag doll physics make savoring the gruesome deaths of your enemies that much sweeter



DHAMPIR CAN RAILSLIDE, TOO

Speaking of animations, these action shots give a little more insight into how this title will look when it's up and running. What's really exciting about all this is that Rayne's different movesets can be chained together. For example, you could slide down a rail while unloading a couple of clips into some enemies, then jump off at the last second, flip over a bad guy, and decapitate him before hitting the ground. This is the kind of action that gets our blood going.



REFLECTING HER INNER BEAUTY

Stop staring already. Look past Rayne's physical appearance and try to appreciate her inner worth...okay, we're just kidding. Her character model is awesome for a number of reasons, not all of which are immediately apparent. Check out the contextual reflections on her vinyl outfit. That's all simulated in real-time, determined by nearby light sources. Then, when you're done with that, remember that these screens, while incredible, don't really show the best part: animations. Every move Rayne makes was created with a mixture of motion capture and hand animation, from swinging on poles to executing over-the-top combos.

A new target lock mode, activated by holding down the right trigger, allows further customization of Rayne's moveset. "It changes all your combat when you lock on," Holmes clarifies. "When you're not locked on, your attacks are more circular...you do less damage, but you hit more people."

This concept is directly related to the core idea behind combat in *BloodRayne 2* – that there are two kinds of battles. "We have this philosophy of having two types of fighting. There's the room-clearing kind of fighting, where you're fighting the punks, your fodder," Holmes informs us. "Then we have other opponents which are much more difficult, and they have to be fought on a more one-on-one level." He's not talking about bosses, either – just the higher-ups on the food chain, including direct minions of Rayne's siblings, like lesser vampires and dhampir (half-vampires).

Beyond fun combat and pretty visuals, every action hero or heroine needs some signature powers, gadgets, or what have you. For *BloodRayne*, that was her harpoon, vision modes, and feeding in the original game. In the sequel, she's retaining most of those and gaining a bunch of new ones. We may not know the full extent of her powers, but we did get the skinny on a few that sound excellent: Bloodstorm, Ghost Feed, Enhanced Blood Rage, and an as-yet-unnamed power.

Bloodstorm and Enhanced Blood Rage are pretty much what they sound like. One literally explodes Rayne's enemies, the other makes her Blood Rage ability even more powerful. We leave it to the reader to figure out which is which. Ghost Feed allows Rayne to send out part of her own essence to feed on a distant bad guy and transfer the power back to herself. Then there's the other ability which, though nameless as of now, is the most interesting of the lot. Instead of feeding on someone until they're dead, this power lets Rayne only partially drain them and use that connection to bend them to her will, creating a temporary ally. The only thing better than annihilating your opponents is watching them destroy each other.

We have to admit that a week ago, the idea of a sequel to *BloodRayne* did little to stir our blood. After speaking with the developers and seeing what the new game looks like, though, we can't wait to see what they'll bring us for a final product. We'll keep you informed of any news on the hottest bloodsucker around until her return to retail shelves, currently scheduled for October.



The forces of evil have received the same attention to detail as Rayne's bad self



Since the camera spends so much of its time behind Rayne, it's a good thing she's...shall we say, easy on the eyes



SIZE MATTERS NOT

This screen shows us another innovation beyond the particle effects and character models. The aprons on the foremen, as well as Rayne's hair and ribbons and every other piece of cloth in the game, are fully simulated. They don't move by scripted animations – they react according to whatever they come into contact with.



You've never done
anything
like this before.





MX UNLEASHED



ANOTHER CLASSIC FROM  rainbow
STUDIOS

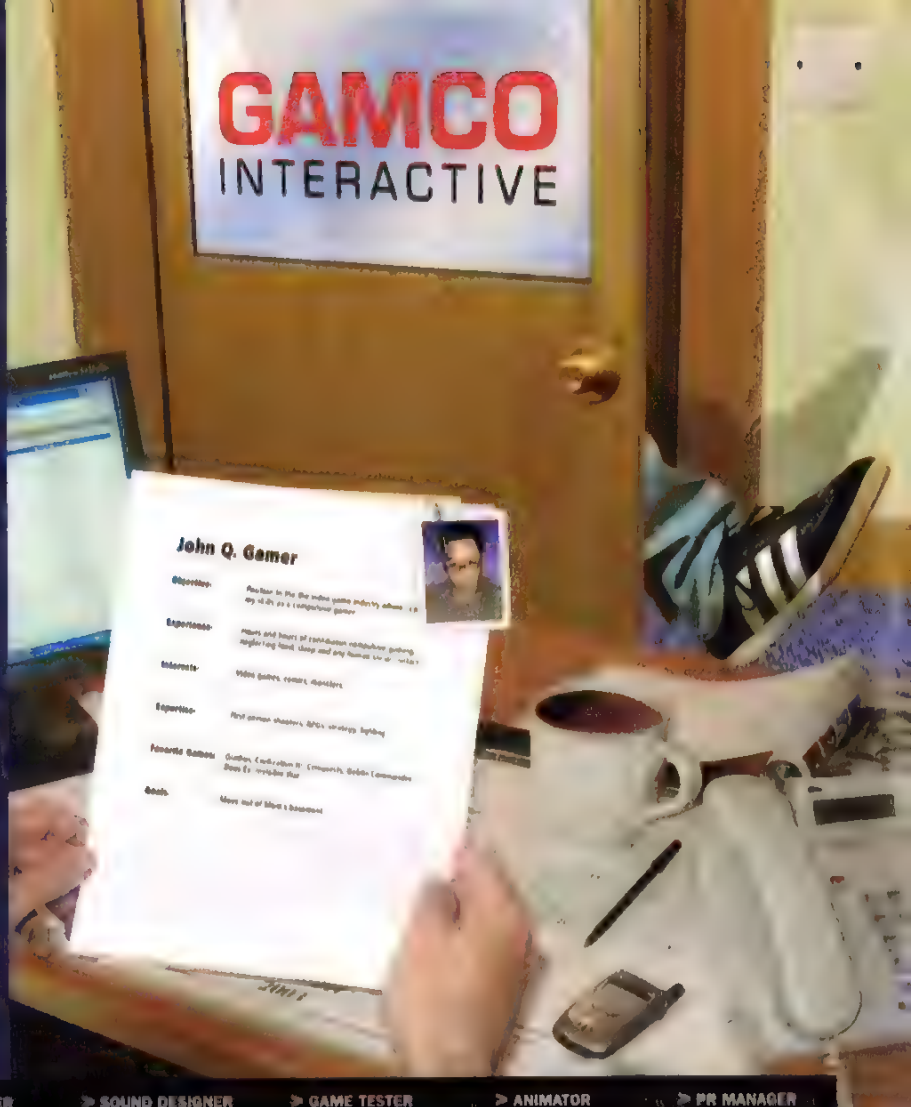
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PlayStation 2



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The Secrets Of Their Success



Eight Video Game
Insiders Tell You How
To Break Into the
Industry

While our readers are certainly capable of creating a cornucopia of strange and random queries, there is one question that is asked of Game Informer on a regular and frequent basis: "How do I get a job in video games?" For our readers that might be interested in a career in the industry, we decided to interview a variety of game professionals to give you a better idea of what these individuals do on a day to day basis. The results proved fascinating and revealing, and will hopefully give ambitious gamers a better sense of the tremendous challenges, as well as the many rewards, of a career in video games. The people we interviewed were also kind enough to give their advice as to what type of schooling and skills those who desire a job in gaming should seek out. As with any career, success in video games will come to those with the talent and work ethic it takes to make their digital dreams a reality. Think of this article as your first step to getting your foot in the door of the video game industry.

Programmers > JAN SACHARUK & SCOTT GREIG > BioWare Corp.



Scott

At the end of the day, the programmer is still the heart and soul of the game industry. Designers and artists dream big, but ultimately these craftsmen of code are the ones that perform the laborious task of creating the game engines and rendering technology that take these visions off the written page and into a virtual 3D world. We sat down with two programming pros from one of gaming's most respected development houses, BioWare Corp., the company that rocked the Xbox last year with *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. They are currently working on the highly anticipated *Jade Empire*.

and it's easy to make things overly complex for no reason. In the field in general, but perhaps especially in the game industry, elegance is about doing what you need with as little as necessary.

Scott: Before I starting working on games, I thought the hardest part would be the technical aspects. Looking back, I think I was completely wrong. The most challenging aspect of the job has been on the communication

side. When you have a group of highly motivated, top-notch professionals, getting work out of them is never a problem. The problem lies in making sure everyone knows what they need to know when they need to know it.

What do you like best about your job?

Jan: It's interesting. Games are big, interesting projects. They give you a chance to use the things that you never thought would be useful. It's a full application of everything that you were trained to do. It doesn't really matter what part of the game you work on, eventually you'll run into a problem that isn't trivial that demands that you really sit down and think about it.

Scott: I can honestly say that I have never been bored. That's a big deal for me. In every job that I have had prior to this, I eventually got to the point where I was just punching the clock waiting for home time so I could play games. I think the best part of my job is being able to tell my mother that all that time that I spent in arcades, playing console games, and playing with the computer turned out to be job training.

What do you think is the biggest misconception people have about your job?

Jan: That it's easy. I don't claim that this is the hardest profession in the world or anything, but it isn't trivial either. I've heard people often say that they could do a better job, or it would have been so easy to add feature X or remove bug Y. Games are really complicated. They use every resource that your computer or game system allows them to. Nothing else demands that you synchronize sound, video, input and system resources in the way or to the extent which good games do.

Scott: I think the biggest misconception is that all we do is sit around and play games all day. Well, let me tell you that I have never worked harder than at my time at BioWare.

Of course it really helps when you love your job, but in the end games get done because of an amazingly large amount of work by a group of very talented people. And we play a lot of games, too.

What advice would you give a kid that wants to get to where you are? What should they do to break into video games?

Jan: This is so cliché. Stay in school, all the way through university. There are a few programmers here and there that didn't finish a formal university education, but they're not common. You need to distinguish yourself. There are lots of good programmers that are trying to land jobs in the game industry. It's important to be good enough at everything that you can work on anything that you're asked to, but you should specialize in a particular field of Computer Science. [Also,] a small demo of a game that you've invented is also a good way to set yourself apart. Inventing a game and implementing it shows that you can imagine, design, and implement an idea.

Scott: Since I am ultimately responsible for the hiring of all the programmers at BioWare, I have looked at thousands of resumes, and have interviewed hundreds of candidates. Here is a list of what I look for in a good candidate: First, a formal education. We usually look for at least a BSC in computer science. Secondly, we look for a keen interest in video games. If a candidate doesn't live, breathe, and dream video games, then they will probably be happier somewhere else. Third, they need to have to good communication skills. I know every employer says this, but I have passed on people whom I was sure were truly excellent programmers but who I felt wouldn't thrive in the kind of team environment that we have here.

What's the most important lesson you learned in your career?

Jan: There's almost no such thing as a really complicated problem. Most big problems can be made into a series of small problems with simple solutions. When you do run into something really complicated, you just have to work hard at it. Oh, and nobody likes a hack. Keep your code clean, well-documented, and follow the coding standard that's laid out for you. It keeps people from getting mad at you, and it'll almost certainly work to your advantage in the future.

Any good perks of the position?

Scott: I have worked at eight different companies over my career and I can honestly say that I have never seen a company more devoted to providing the employees with as many perks as possible. Sure they expect a lot of hard work from us, but they really take care of us. For example, last night the company rented out a theater and took the entire staff to see the premier of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. This is just one of the perks that are too numerous to list here.

I think the biggest misconception is that all we do is sit around and play games all day.

SCOTT GREIG

Q: Tell us a little bit about your background and how you got into the game industry.

Jan: BioWare is my first job in the game industry. Most companies don't hire programmers directly out of university, either, so it was pretty unlikely that my first job in the game industry would have been anywhere else. All of my prior work experience was as a UNIX system administrator and general-purpose programmer.

Scott: Just like Jan, BioWare is also my first job in the game industry. Unlike him, I have been here for seven years and I was also one of the first employees. I was the lead programmer on *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights*, and I am also the Director of Programming. That's just a fancy way of saying that I'm responsible for hiring new programmers and for any cross-project programmer allocations.

Describe what you do on a typical day; what are your basic job duties?

Jan: My duties are pretty simple. I sit down at my machine and I program. I'm fairly involved in the combat system in our game, so I also spend a lot of time talking to other people about it, both asking questions and giving answers.

Scott: Hmmm...that's a tough one. Now that I think about it, every day is completely different. What it usually consists of is a lot of meetings and a lot of talking to various people. In the end, the duty of the lead programmer is to get the programming on the game done, whatever it takes.

What are the most challenging things about your job?

Jan: Integration. We have a lot of top-shelf programmers here, and they're all good at what they do. Despite that, making separate systems integrate cleanly is almost always the hardest thing that I have to do. Keeping things simple. Games are big projects,



Game Designer > EVAN WELLS > Naughty Dog

The game designer is the guiding creative force behind the games you know and love. While all departments leave their mark on the end product, the designer is the one that gives it an overall direction, plotting the gameplay, the levels, and most other aspects of the experience. Evan Wells, who now serves as Naughty Dog's game director, has been the designer for numerous popular titles, including *ToeJam & Earl in Panic on Funkotron*, *Gex*, the *Crash Bandicoot* series, and most recently *Jak II*. Evan was nice enough to share some of his insights and advice with would-be game designers.

The main task of the designer is to make sure the game is fun – that's really the bottom line.

GI: Tell us a little bit about your background and how you got into the game industry.

Jack: I've been playing games like crazy since I was growing up, but never really expected that that would be a career. Then, I went to college at Stanford and decided I would take a computer science course. I remembered having enjoyed programming in BASIC back on the Apple II Plus in elementary school. It was a hobby that I lost during high school; my school didn't have any kind of programming class. When I got to college I said, "I'll take a programming class and see if I still enjoy it." Sure enough, I did.

I started taking more computer classes, and after my sophomore year in college, I thought I should try to get a summer job. I happened to have a friend named Conrad Voorsanger – that's a very unique name. That summer, I was playing *ToeJam & Earl* and finished it all the way to the end and saw the credits. Mark Voorsanger was the programmer. I called up my friend Conrad, and sure enough, that was his brother. He put me in contact with him. One thing led to another, and they hired me as their designer for *ToeJam & Earl 2*. That's how I got in the door. I came on as a level designer. That was my first taste of video game design.

That was a four-month gig. During that time I met the Toys for Bob guys, who did *Star Control*, and they were busy working with a new company that was starting up to support the 3DO called Crystal Dynamics. Crystal was looking for people, and they offered me a job. Since I had two more years of college, I thought it was best to stick with school, so I asked them if I could get a job the next summer. The next summer I called them up, and they said they needed someone to do level layout for a project very similar to *ToeJam & Earl*, *Gex*, which was their upcoming game for the 3DO. As video game projects often do, it got massively delayed and they begged me to stay on. I

ended up going to school full-time and working full-time to finish *Gex*. I did *Gex 2* at Crystal, and after that I got the offer from Naughty Dog and came on down. I've been here for six years, since *Crash 3*.

Describe what you do on a typical day; what are your basic job duties?

The main task of the designer is to make sure the game is fun – that's really the bottom line. You also have to keep in mind

that it has to be completed, so the schedule and the feasibility of your ideas are important, too. If it's not going to fit in the schedule or if it's going to make a programmer pull his hair out, it's best to focus on something else. The day-to-day tasks depend on where you are in the cycle. Early on, you're doing a lot of brainstorming and figuring out what the core mechanics of your game are going to be. The terminology we use at Naughty Dog is the macro-level design. You have what your hero's mechanics are going to be, the variety of level looks you're going to have in the game, the major power-ups. If you pull back to a really high level and look at the game, you're finding the most important items. You lay those out so that those will drive what we call the micro-design, which are the actual levels and the moment-to-moment gameplay within those levels. At that point you're talking about the enemies, the objects, and the particular way you encounter those enemies and objects.

What are the most challenging things about your job?

The challenge of being a designer is not having a clear definition of what fun is. You're always looking for that elusive "fun-ness." It's a tricky thing. As I said, what you expect to be intuitive and easy to control because you've been playing it for months and months, you put it in the hands of somebody new – they just don't get it. It's a very iterative process, sitting down with the programmers and the artists to make these subtle changes until it feels just right. I've spent weeks sitting behind a programmer just asking him to change numbers back and forth until it feels right to me. It's a long process that doesn't really have an obvious end.

What do you like best about your job?

Creating a quality product that people enjoy is such an amazing reward. When you actually see the reviews come in and you see

people beginning to appreciate all the hard work that you've put into the product, it's very rewarding.

What do you think is the biggest misconception people have about your job?

There are a lot. With game design, everybody feels that they can do it because there is not any inherent, outwardly obvious talent. Like with an artist, some people can draw,

some can't. With programming, some people have the ability to write a program and some people don't. With design, if they've played a game, they feel like they can design a game. It's not necessarily that easy. I'm sure that there are a lot of talented people out there, but at the same time it is a skill that gets refined over time. Certain things become second nature to you because you've done it so many times. You see a lot of rookie designers make the same kinds of mistakes. People have a misconception about how easy it is to pick up.

What kinds of stress do you guys get under in terms of hours? How do you deal with working the kinds of hours that you work?

Well, to use *Jak II* for an example, from January to August of 2003, I had a total of four days out of the office – including weekends. It was probably an average of 12 hours a day. It was brutal. That's not something I want to repeat, and hopefully won't have to in the future.

What advice would you give a kid that wants to get to where you are? What should they do to break into video games? What type of skills should they try to get?

Playing games is obviously important. You want to have a good vocabulary of what other games have done. Not so you can necessarily steal ideas, but it's just like a movie director should watch as many movies as possible. If you want to be a game designer, you need to know where games have come from and what's currently popular. However, going to school is very important. I don't want it to sound like, "Just sit around and play games all day."

Beyond that, you really have to be a jack of all trades. It is good if you can draw. Hirokazu Yasuhara, the *Sonic the Hedgehog* level designer that works at Naughty Dog now, is an excellent artist who creates these sketches for the artists and programmers for what he wants his gameplay to look like and they are invaluable.

Also, I've found knowing how to program to be very helpful. When I'm talking to a programmer, I can look over his shoulder and see what he's working on and understand the numbers he's tweaking. When you talk to the sound engineers, you've got to speak their language. You don't have to understand to a deep level where you could do their job, but just be able to communicate with them.



Producer > **CAROLINE ESMURDOC** > Double Fine Productions



I decided that I loved what I was doing, working with these really creative people.

Everybody knows that games have producers, but few know what those producers actually do. In essence, a video game producer functions as the glue that holds a development team together, seeing to a variety of organizational tasks ranging from budgeting and planning to input on the direction of the game itself. With so many programmers, artists, designers, and animators working on a game at the same time, a producer helps make sure that all the pieces of the puzzle are coming together as they should. We recently sat down with Caroline Esmurdoc, an industry veteran who is currently working on Microsoft's highly anticipated Xbox title *Psychonauts*.

that had been in business for way longer than us were going out of business, because companies were doing fewer titles. So, Circus Freak folded. Just a few weeks later, I met Tim Schafer; Double Fine was looking for a producer, and I ended up here. Now, I'm producer on *Psychonauts*.

Describe what a producer does.

It's the hardest position to define precisely, because the needs of every project are different, so the expectations of the producer are different. In a general sense, I see the position as the communication hub – tasking, tracking, budgeting, and recruiting. Every project needs those things.

What is a typical day at work for you?

A typical day involves keeping my finger on the pulse of what everyone is doing. We have a team of 35 folks, and in my head I have where all those people are and what they should be working on. I don't necessarily track every single person every day, but I do at least every second day track what everyone is doing and make sure that it's falling in line with the tasks that have been assigned. I also play the game to make sure all the parts are falling in place. The difference between a green producer and one with considerable experience has to do with having a feeling for where a game needs to be at a certain time, because we are the ones that are responsible for budget and scheduling. We need to make sure everything is on track – the creative director isn't going to care, they just care about the vision they have for the game. It's my role to make sure that the game is making the progress it should be.

What are the most challenging things about your job?

Communication is a very, very hard thing to do right. Repeating myself is not something I like to do, but it's better that I say things multiple times and I make sure that people understand each other and groups understand each other. I work very closely with the leads. Making sure that everyone is on the same page is the biggest challenge.

It's hard to learn the vernaculars of the various disciplines that make up the game. As technology gets harder, the producer needs to understand [the terminology] so you can make trade-offs and set priorities for different things.

What do you think is the biggest misconception people have about your job?

I have a great one! I have had so many people believe that producers don't do anything; they think we work 10:30 to 5:00! I know it's hard to believe me, because I am one, but the good producers I know – not even speaking about myself – work their butts off. Because the goal of any producer is to stay ahead of the team. It's hard to stay ahead

of the team, especially as games get more complex.

What advice would you give a kid that wants to get to where you are? What should they do to break into video games?

A good producer needs to be communicative and have elements of charisma, and they need to be organized. They are the person the team turns to for structure. Left to its own devices, even in the hands of good leads, development can turn chaotic. So, communication and structure and organization are key to a producer. I don't know that there are necessarily classes that one can take. I do know that over time I've taken organizational management classes and business classes to hone some of my skills. Just to be able to understand numbers. Games are costing more these days, and as you grow in the producer role you need to know how to manage that kind of money and that kind of risk. So I do take some of those classes...also, you've got to love games!

Is having a technical background in programming helpful to producers, or is it really not that necessary?

I can't hold my own against a programmer. I don't believe a producer is necessarily hired to be technical – that's not their role on the team. They need to understand, or at least not be bored to death, by the terminology of the individual disciplines. If you're going to track a schedule, you need to understand what those tasks are, because at some point if something is not going to make it, you need to assess the risk and priority. But, that's easily a conversation with the lead programmer. So, you don't necessarily need a technical background, although it helps, there is certainly nothing wrong with programmers or designers that become producers.

What do you like best about your job? What motivates you to come to work every day?

I do game development because I live for that one moment when you have the first build that plays like a game. I don't think you're allowed to see the stuff that comes before that in the press, but there is always that one build where you get it – it's actually a game! I live for that. Currently, I don't think I've actually ever worked with someone with the genius of Tim Schafer [creator of *Full Throttle*, *Grim Fandango*, and the creative force behind *Psychonauts* – Ed.] and I'm constantly motivated by the ideas he creates.

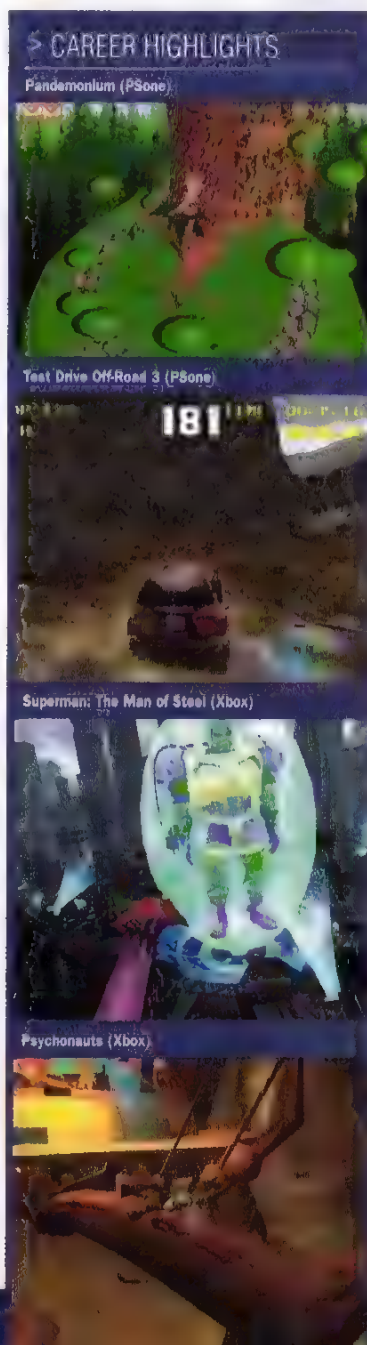
GI: Tell us a little bit about your background and how you got into the game industry.

Caroline: I fell into the game industry after a career in science; I was pursuing my doctorate in neurobiology. It wasn't right for me, and I had a falling out with my professor. I went down to Crystal Dynamics from Berkeley, where I was studying. My husband was at Crystal Dynamics and I went to tell him I just quit. This was at 11 in the morning. By 2pm I was their test supervisor! [Laughs]

I decided that I loved what I was doing, working with these really creative people. So, once I decided [I was going to stay], I went to the head of product development and told her and said, "When I grow up I want to be a producer." A couple of weeks later I was the assistant producer on *Pandemonium*. I also helped close up *The Horde* and some other projects they were working on.

From there, I worked on four other titles at Crystal. I worked my way up the ranks, from assistant to associate to producer. Then, I went to Accolade to work on the *Test Drive Off-Road* franchise. In the middle of that title, Infogrames bought Accolade. That brought the *Looney Tunes Racing* property to Accolade, so I did that title for them. I started on an original title just about the time Infogrames decided they weren't going to do original titles anymore. At that time, they said, "We're not going to do original titles anymore, but we love you and we love your team and we would like to continue working with you."

So, even though they were shutting down the San Jose studio and rebuilding in LA, they said if we were willing start a studio, [they would give us] a development deal. To a developer like me, that's the Holy Grail – your own space. [Laughs] So, we did *Superman: The Man of Steel* for Xbox as Circus Freak. We ended the project at a really bad time for developers – developers





Sound Designer > JACK GRILLO > Spark Unlimited

From the light tapping of a foot on a tile floor to the most fearsome explosions, each and every sound you hear in a video game is carefully placed where it should be by the sound designer. In an industry so focused on graphics, the sound designer's work often goes unnoticed. However, to know how vital sound and music is to the gaming experience, one need only turn down the volume on their television for a moment. For this article, Game Informer was lucky enough to interview one of the best soundmen in the business: Spark Unlimited's Jack Grillo

I think there is something about the process of making a virtual world come to life.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your background and how you got into the game industry.

Jack: I started with an early interest in music and recording as a teenager. The first clue that I was going towards sound design is that I was one of those guitar players that spent a lot more time perfecting the sound of my guitar amp than actually playing music. I studied anthropology and music in college, and after that I bummed around for a few years going from job to job, pretending to be a rock star.

Eventually I went to the Los Angeles Recording Workshop, which is a local tech school that is based mostly on music recording. I found that they had a small section on sound design, and I had a real interest in that. I think the biggest difference was that, with music recording, you're capturing someone else's creativity. With sound effects, I was actually able to be the artist, so to speak.

Through that school, I got an internship at a place called Franklin Media, which is a small design house. I worked there for about four years, first as an intern and eventually the supervising sound editor. It was a great learning experience. It was a small place, only about seven people at its peak. Because of that, I got to work on all the aspects of sound design – Foley, sound effects, dialogue editing, mixing, and everything else. The company itself worked on a variety of things – film, TV, commercial, and some video games.

One of the earlier projects for that company was The Lost World video game on PlayStation for DreamWorks Interactive. We worked with them for a couple of years, and eventually they wanted to bring their sound effects department in-house. So, they hired some familiar faces from Franklin Media. I was hired at DreamWorks at just about the same time that Electronic Arts bought it. So, I worked there for two and a half

years. That's where I really learned the nuts-and-bolts of the video game process, not just the sound design portion but actually how a game is made. I worked on Clive Barker's Undying for PC and three of the games from the Medal of Honor series. A year ago, I joined Spark Unlimited as the audio director. I'm now the lead sound designer for Call of Duty.

Describe what you do on a typical day; what are your basic job duties?

Over the course of an entire game project, the first step is to brainstorm with everybody. We do a lot of pre-production at Spark and a lot of planning and designing our project. What that means for me is a lot of research into the objects we'll be using. In our case, we use a lot of weapons. I've done a lot of work going out into the field and recording things; I've gone to battle reenactments to get the larger scope of a battle. Towards the middle of the project, a lot of my work is going out and collecting and editing sounds – creating as much content as I can. Towards the end, where we're at now, my daily job is tracking down how these sounds actually get into the game. At this point, there's a lot less actual sound design and more list-making and looking at my spreadsheet and making sure all the "t's" are crossed.

What are the most challenging things about your job?

I think there are two big challenges. One, every game I've worked on has used different technology. Every time I have to react to a different way to get the sounds into the game. The other challenge, and I think this is a big challenge for most sound designers in the industry, is the schedule. For video games, all departments are working on content simultaneously. So, everyone is doing their best to get things done at the same time. But, the nature of sound is that it usually reacts to some visual cue. So, it's sort of a chicken-and-egg thing. Any delay from another department creates a bigger delay for the sound department. In movies, you usually don't get started until the picture is locked. With video games, it's a moving target in that sense.

What do you like best about your job? What motivates you to come to work every morning?

I think there is something about the process

of making a virtual world come to life. Every action on-screen has some sort of associated sound with it. None of that stuff falls into place automatically; we put it together piece by piece. Each piece makes that world more realistic, more exciting. It's really fascinating to watch the game come together when the sounds start happening.

What advice would you give a kid that

wants to get to where you are? What should they do to break into video games?

If they are interested in sound design, one of the first things to do is open your ears. There is a whole world of sound out there going on around us. For someone who wants to get into more of the video game sound design realm, I would suggest to learn as much as possible about how sounds behave together and get a solid foundation about how sound works. Each sound behaves differently if it's played by itself or in combination. If they've got the software tools, I would experiment with pushing sounds from one extreme to the next, either with volume or EQ or whatever.

Is it important to know the nuts-and-bolts of recording technology before you specialize in video games?

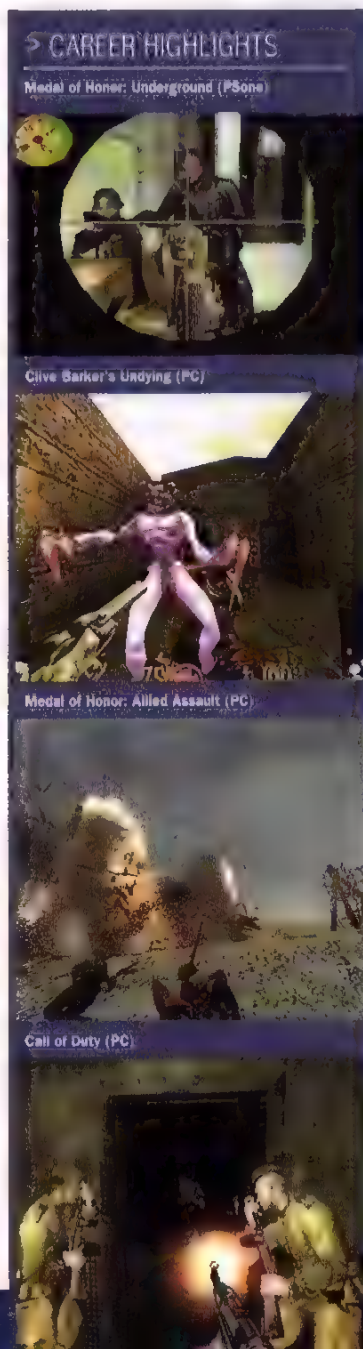
I would say that, for me, I consider myself a sound designer first and a video game sound designer second. Having that foundation is really important. Recording technology helps; sound editing helps. Going straight into video games from scratch, there is a lot you might miss. I think that if you went in to just video games, you may not necessarily have that ability to know when it's appropriate to record something or when to take it off a CD or whatever. Or, what's the easiest and most effective way to get a particular sound.

Is a tech school a good way to get that background?

Tech schools are great, and I would say a tech school leaning more towards recording and less towards video game sound is going to be more appropriate for someone just starting. I don't know if there are any video game sound classes out there, to be honest. Get a good basis in recording. The nice thing about the recording tech schools is, at least the one I went to, that part of the training is getting yourself an internship. Getting an internship and getting hands-on as soon as possible – I learned so much more on the job than I did in the school, but the school was the entry way to getting on the job.

Are there any good perks of your job?

The coolest stuff is going out and doing the field recording. I'm not a gun enthusiast, but spending a few days in the field with those things and recording them and [figuring out] where to put the microphones; it's a real big experiment, but it's fun as well. It's a big day out of the office, away from the computer. I think it's different from any other job in the video game industry, in that so much of what we do has to be captured in the real world.



Game Tester > DOUG DOINE > Electronic Arts



I'm one of those guys that sat at home...and thought it was cool playing games as much as possible.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your background and how you got into the game industry.

Doug: I started at EA seven years ago, in customer support. My background is that I'm one of those guys that sat at home and broke his computer and figured out how to fix it and thought it was cool playing games as much as possible. I'm a pretty hardcore gamer. From CS, I went to test and worked on a couple of console and PC titles. From there, I had a year in production, came back into test and have been there ever since.

What were some of the titles you've worked on in test or in production?

In test, I've worked on games like Soviet Strike, the Madden series, Tiger Woods, the Lord of the Rings series, and James Bond. I was an assistant producer on Madden 2001 on the PC.

What motivated you to come back to test?

One was the location. Also, test to me is where I had a better fit. I'm a pretty analytical thinker, so it fit my forte a little bit better to be in the testing realm. I felt I added more value there.

A lot of kids see the tester position as a good way to break into the industry. Is this true?

Yes, I definitely think it's a good place to start, because you can see the whole process as one. You see how the art works; you see how the coding side works, the engineering; you see how the audio works, and how the actual game designers do their thing. You're dealing with all these people on a day-to-day basis throughout the whole cycle. It's a good eye-opener as far as that's concerned. We deal with marketing, development, and even customer support at certain points. Every part of the company seems to flow through test at some point.

Describe what the testing process involves.

Well, essentially we get a very broken piece of software. What we do is go over different components of the game. The development team says, "Hey, we just tuned the AI - look for any problems in the AI." We look for things that just don't make sense.

In Bond, for example, there was a problem where you would shoot a gun at a guy and the guy standing next to him would just stand

there. Anybody that's getting shot at is going to move. Things like that.

We take little pieces at a time, analyze them, and put logic to them to make sure that the design is sound, to make sure that the production team's vision is fulfilled.

The other thing we do is try to break the game. We try to do the things that a normal user may do and inadvertently see something go wrong. We had a situation on Madden where a guy was attempting to catch field goals. Once he caught a field goal, the game would crash. It's those outside-of-the-box things that we think about.

So you then file a bug report on the problems?

We actually have a centralized database that all parties involved share and look at. Depending on how bad the issue with the game is, sometimes it takes a little longer to get taken care of, but basically everything gets resolved through the database.

What advice would you give a kid that want to get to where you are? What should they do to break into video games?

A strong passion for gaming is very important. Like I said, we're dealing with broken software, so there are a lot of times where you won't see a finalized product until the end of the cycle. So just having the desire to sit there and play is pretty important.

I have a degree in Computer Information Science. That helps you get that logical thinking down. Understanding all the things that can cause problems for PC titles, I learned a lot of those trouble-shooting skills in CIS. [You also need] a good work ethic in general. It's kind of a demanding job, but it's really fun to do.

What do you think is the biggest misconception people have about your job?

Lots of people think that we just kind of hang

out and play games all day. Again, the software we're playing with is pretty flawed and we have high demands on our time and we're very focused on what we do. Sometimes, the actual gameplay isn't that great, but the job on the whole is fun. It's not just playing games.

What are the most challenging things about your job?

One of the biggest challenges is the scope of the product. When we're dealing with a game like Tiger Woods, it's a very, very large game. To make sure that you have all your ducks in a row on a game like that is difficult. Time management is also important. You've got to know what to test and what not to test. You don't want to waste any time dealing with this, because we have a very short timeline, and we want to make sure we're hitting everything we need to.

What do you like best about your job? What makes you want to come to work every day?

Part of it is just because it's EA. I've been here for seven years and watched this company grow from 700 employees to I don't even know how many we have worldwide now. That's part of it, the other part is just a passion for gaming - putting good product on the shelves.

How do you deal with the burnout factor that comes from having to play the same game day after day for an extended period?

Getting up and walking away from your desk now and then is something I would recommend. Having other games to talk about while you're at work with your comrades is a good thing, too. Also, when I'm away from work, I'll always stay away from those types of games. For example, when I was playing Tiger Woods, I wouldn't play any other of the Tiger Woods games I had at home. Don't even watch golf on television; don't even talk about golf! [Laughs]

Any good perks of the position?

The perks are just being at a very good company. We do an event here on campus called Camp EA, where we showcase all of our games. That's something you'd never get to see in another job. The other perk is when you're in a store and you see a little kid going crazy for the new Madden that you just got done working on, it makes you feel good about all those hours and working as hard as you did. It really puts it in perspective.

What's the most important lesson you learned in your career?

Patience and a little bit of humility. With testers, things are pretty black and white. You need to learn that we're there to report the issues, and the production team makes the final decisions based on their experience. Sometimes it's hard. I've had arguments about rinky-dink bugs that have never really been an issue in the big picture, because I get passionate and worked up about it. Sometimes you just have to let it go.



Animator > **ALEX DROUIN** > Ubisoft Montreal

After the artists and modelers create characters, it's up to the animator to bring them to life. Animation is a big part of games, and no one does it better than Alex Drouin, who dazzled us with his work on *Batman: Vengeance* and most notably on the critically acclaimed *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, a game which displays some of the best animations we've ever seen. Here, Alex breaks down the nuts and bolts of the job, and gives some tips to aspiring animators.

GI: Tell me a little bit about your background and how you got into the game industry.

Alex: I worked as a shoe salesman for a while and then I was a clerk in a video rental store. I studied graphic design for three years and then I went to the NAD center in Montreal for an eight-month course on Softimage 3D. Ubisoft came there for interviews and offered me a job. So, before I could look anywhere else, I had a job in the game industry! Lucky me. I started in July 1997, so it's been 6 years.

Describe what you do on a typical day; what are your basic job duties?

A typical day can be very different depending on which stage of the process we're at. In the conception phase, we do a lot of brainstorming, chilling, playing, planning, and testing. Later on, when we have to get things done and the days get much longer, all we do is animate, animate, and animate.

What are the most challenging things about your job?

One of the biggest challenges is to take a 3D character and make it alive, with its own personality, while respecting the gameplay constraints and needs. Most of the time, we are tempted to put in extra details to create a cool character, but those details can reduce the fun factor.

Describe the animation process for us.

Before doing anything, I meet with the programmer that is doing the AI and we discuss how the animation will be managed by the engine. We go through all the technical stuff and he gives me his thoughts on the possibilities. Then, depending on the complexity, I act out the whole thing many times and get the main moves in my head, the weight shifts, and then create it using Character Studio. Then we integrate it into the engine, play it to see how it comes out, and modify each detail that could be enhanced. We can modify an animation up to five times before hitting the jackpot.

What do you like best about your job? What makes you get up and go to work every day?

The thing I like best is being able to come here late in the morning, sit behind my computer, put on a great CD, and then create crazy animation that will end up in a game that will be seen all around the world by gamers. That's great, my friend!

What advice would you give a kid that wants to get to where you are? What should they do to break into video games?

You should first go to school to get at least basic artistic knowledge. And then you can continue your education and study animation or you can just get a computer, get software and practice, practice and practice. Watching animated movies and copying from them can be good practice. Know what you want to do and get good at it...don't try to be good at everything! Of course, specialized programs can prepare you to get into the industry but in the end,

In the end, the most curious, enthusiastic, and talented person will get the job.

the most curious, enthusiastic, and talented person will get the job.

Any good perks of the position?

The best thing about my work is that I get to travel. The game industry being international, you can go everywhere around the world for free. And meeting folks from all different places on the globe is by far the best perk you can get! Of course, that is followed really closely by not having to get up early in the morning.



PR Manager > **NATALIE SALZMAN** > Midway Games

Public relations often gets a bad rap, as its practitioners are often portrayed as callow purveyors of marketing hype. In reality, PR serves a vital function in the game industry, serving as the middleman between publishers, gamers, and the press. PR professionals organize press trips, distribute assets like screenshots and movies to magazines and websites, and are instrumental in organizing large events like E3. Almost everything you see in the pages of *Game Informer* has been obtained through someone in PR. Midway's Natalie Salzman was kind enough to shed a little light on the art of game PR.

We're dealing with entertainment; it's a fun industry to be in.

GI: Tell me a little bit about your background and how you got into the game industry.

Natalie: I was a public relations major at Pepperdine University. I started off as a journalism major and switched to PR because it piqued my interest and seemed to suit my personality. I worked all through college at a PR agency that did a lot of consumer products and technology. When I got out of college, I went to an agency –

Bender/Helper Impact – that had a division that dealt primarily with interactive entertainment, mostly video games. I was there for about three years dedicated to games PR, working with companies like Sammy Studios, Kemco, Codemasters, and Namco. Most recently, I moved over to Midway and I am PR Manager here now, which is very different and I'm really enjoying it.

What are differences between working for a publisher versus working at an agency?

One of the biggest advantages is that you're not removed from marketing and development. That's been one of my favorite things about working for Midway. When I need something, whether it's a screenshot or a build of the game, I walk into someone's office and can get it firsthand.

Describe what you do on a typical day; what are your basic job duties?

My job is to publicize the games. From anywhere from 10 months to a year out, we start learning about a game that is going to be announced. From there, we facilitate a relationship between the media and development, and conveying development's mes-

sage about what the game is about. Also, providing assets, artwork, and screenshots to the media is a big part of the job. On a daily basis, I'm talking to journalists on the phone, via email or instant message, writing press releases, and pitching stories to different publications.

What are the most challenging things about your job?

One of the most challenging things is to get people to understand what PR really is and what we really do. I can't call someone on the phone and pay them to do a big story. That doesn't work; a lot of people don't understand the separation between church and state when it comes to advertising and editorial.

What do you like about your job? Why do you do what you do?

It's fun! Everyone gets stressed in their job on a daily basis, but we're dealing with entertainment; it's a fun industry to be in. It's a really small industry, which has its ups and downs, but you really get to know the people you work with, whether it's media or marketing or development. It's a close-knit group of people in the gaming industry.

What advice would you give a kid that wants to get to where you are, and work in video game PR someday?

I think whether you're promoting a game or any other product you need to be familiar with that product – especially for PR in the game industry. I make a point of playing every single game I work on, because you're dealing with media and journalists that know a hell of a lot more about games than you do! [Laughs] They can see right through you if you're not explaining something right or if you're spouting fluff at them. I think that college gave me a good foundation, but jumping in and working for an agency for a couple of years was really beneficial because that's always a really hectic environment.

How much do you travel in a given year?

We travel a lot. At minimum one trip a month, if not two. It gets very tiring at times. There are spurts where you've slept in your own bed three nights out of four or five weeks. But, then there are three weeks of down time and you get that itch to get back on the road again.

MAX PAYNE 2

THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

A FILM NOIR LOVE STORY

"TOP-NOTCH." EHM

"AWESOME." GAME INFORMER

★★★★★ GAMESPY

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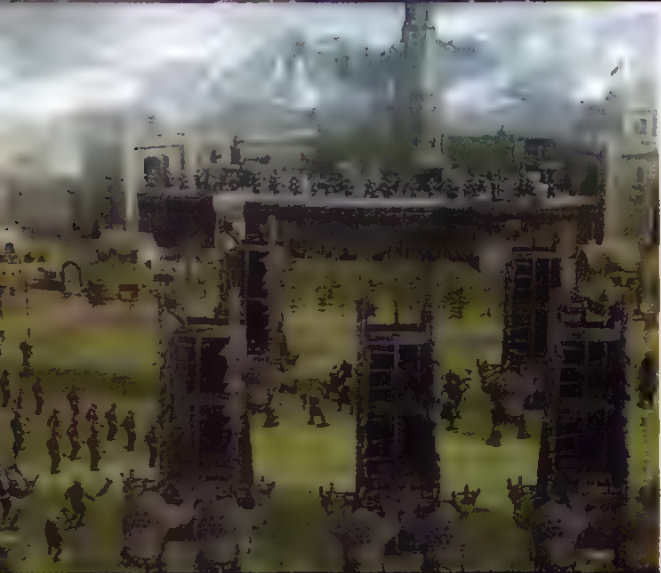


Intense Violence
Strong Language
Blood
Mature Sexual Themes

PlayStation 2



PREVIEWS



The revamped C&C Generals engine will support up to 500 3D units at a time



Do these only count as one?

PC

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

A NEW SAGA

Now that *Return of the King*

has finally come out and we've all raised our fists triumphantly and shed some tears (admit it!), we all wish that it would never end. And it almost didn't! If the movie's ending was any longer, Frodo and Sam's goodbye embrace could have spawned a movie of its own! Our grade-school immaturity aside, while we're sad to see the movies go, it's just the beginning of an all new phase for Electronic Arts. We've all enjoyed the non-stop action of the publisher's two hack n' slash games, but it's good to see the magnificent fight for Middle-earth from a different angle.

This PC-only game is a real-time strategy affair and is based on the Command & Conquer Generals engine, but with some slight upgrades. *Battle for Middle-Earth* can support a staggering 500 3D units onscreen at one time. The title lets you play as four sides: the men of Gondor in Minas Tirith, the Riders of Rohan, the armies of Isengard, or the hordes of Mordor. These sides will come complete with all the Ents, trolls, Nazgûl, Rohirrim, and Oliphants that you'd expect. This latter side is certainly going to push that 500 units benchmark to its fullest. Each force has its own point of strength. For example, if you decide to control Mordor, your ability to spit out units is unparalleled. On the other hand, whoever takes up the cause of Gondor will be strong in defense -- including the ability to lay traps once Sauron's forces breach your outer walls. Even Gandalf himself may come to your aid. How you build up your armies and what you do with them is the beauty of *Battle for Middle-Earth*. The game lets you dictate where the story goes, even though it hits all the major conflicts of the three movies.



We all want to dive into the battle of Pelennor Fields, but EA has given something better. Due to the inherent freedom of any RTS, that battle will be just one of many great sieges you'll partake in. For example, as the Riders of Rohan, you may be called upon to defend the Westfold and receive resource bonuses for each citizen you rescue. You'll build up your forces, following your side's particular tech trees. EA has told us that it plans some unexpected twists to this genre staple, but needless to say, all the unit types seen in the movies will be present, including heroes like Aragorn, Legolas, and even the Army of the Dead. These can be individually controlled with their own bonuses as special units. Of course, there are going to be so many soldiers at your disposal, you're going to want to command them with the grouping functions.

The publisher did tell us that Frodo and Sam will be in the game, but refused to elaborate in what way. We imagine they would act as a countdown counter for your quest (i.e. Gondor wins if it survives until the hobbits reach Mt. Doom). We asked if the Ring was usable, but EA wouldn't comment. C'mon, we just want to put it on once...

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (ONLINE TBA) ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS LA
■ **RELEASE** JUNE



The game's malleable story takes you to battles not in the movies



Mordor's strength lies in its numbers, while Gondor gets really, really cool shields



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC UNLIMITED ENABLED

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

CONTROL THE GALAXY



In total, players will be able to pilot 10 different air and ground vehicles



If voice masking makes it into the game, you may sound exactly like a battle droid when you talk into the headset



Mountable turrets are littered across command posts

“Talk about reenacting moments from the movies!” comments LucasArts producer Jim Tso after describing how someone can become a rear gunner on a Rebel snowspeeder and fire the tow cable. Overkill. Beating a dead horse. Milking the cow. Shaving a Wookiee. These are all things that we’ve heard in reference to LucasArts’ decision to create more games based on the Star Wars films. True enough, most people have played a Hoth level more than they would ever like to admit.

As familiar as this universe has become over the years, we can’t help but twitch with enthusiasm over the prospects that Battlefront brings to the gaming scene. Bearing a striking resemblance to Electronic Arts’ online juggernaut Battlefield 1942, hordes of players are invited to team up and battle against each other in galactic war. “We’re hoping to support at least 16 players over the Internet on the PS2 and Xbox, possibly more with a dedicated server” explains Tso. “On a LAN, we should be able to get around 32 players. For the PC, we think we can get double those numbers, 32 over the Internet and 64 on a LAN.”

Set in both the classic trilogy and Clone Wars era, players have a wide variety of options at their fingertips. Do you suit up as the Republic and combat the CIS, or take on the Rebel Alliance as a member of the Galactic Empire? Naturally, the maps differ for each area, as do the troop types and vehicles. As for which types of soldiers you’ll be able to command, “this is still in flux” says Tso. “At the very least, we’ll have a basic infantry grunt, a scout, a heavy weapons guy, a pilot/mechanic, and a few special classes depending on the faction. For example, the Republic will have a clone trooper with a jetpack.”

Despite the class, all soldiers will be able to pilot every vehicle and man any turret. Their differences will be based on the equipment they have and stats such as armor, movement, and health. For instance, an Imperial Officer can deploy a Probe Droid to scout the terrain. The Probe Droid

can also be used to call down an orbital bombardment.

When asked what types of vehicles players will be able to control and pestered to no tomorrow on the possibility of being able to pilot one of the coolest metal contraptions ever created, Tso chuckled and retorted, “Yes, the AT-AT will definitely be in the game, as will the AT-ST, speeder bikes, Rebel snowspeeders, X-wings, TIE Fighters, Republic Gunship, and other assorted vehicles from the movies.”

All vehicles will spawn at command posts. “The gameplay revolves around taking over the command posts on the map. Each command post provides vehicles, ammo, and health,” describes Tso. “In addition, certain command posts will have special bonuses. For example, if you control certain command posts on Tatooine, you might get Jawas that will automatically repair your vehicle for you.”

Much like the films, the war that you enter is galactic in size. With the introduction of Conquest mode, players will have the chance to take control of the galaxy one planet at a time. From the outset, the two teams pick which systems that they want under their control. From here, the teams take turns in deciding which systems to invade or defend. Tso elaborates, “Each system in the game has a special bonus that will be available to its owning team after a period of time. For example, if the Imperials hold Endor long enough, they can gain the use of the Death Star.”

Conquest mode can be played single player, but as we all suspect, it’ll best be played out online. Given how critical teammate interaction will be, the game will support the use of a headset. From what we hear, there’s a possibility that the familiar Star Wars voices will be selectable masks. How long have you wanted to sound like a stormtrooper?

As of now, there’s also a good chance that Battlefront will support cross platform play. As Tso says, “This is still being worked out.” LucasArts hasn’t confirmed when it will be released, but has given a tentative date of this fall.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE AND PS2 BROADBAND, 32-PLAYER VIA PC INTERNET, 64-PLAYER VIA PC LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC ■ **RELEASE** FALL



Setting up squad tactics is critical when defending a command post



A wide variety of troops from the CIS, Galactic Empire, Republic, and Rebel Alliance are available for play



"Say hello to my little friend!"



"So I was down in the hanger and the Princess ran by all in a huff. It sounded like she was complaining about her brother trying to make out with her."



The game will track an incredible number of statistics such as kills and shot accuracy



Players will be in constant communication with teammates via the headset



PLAYSTATION 2 UNLIMITED ENABLED

RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK

TERROR EN MASSE

While GameCube owning survival horror fans are still waiting for Resident Evil 4, Capcom has another promising offshoot of the RE franchise to offer PS2 players. We spent some time with *Outbreak* and have the full details on the team-oriented zombie game.

Online or offline, one to four gamers can group together and try to stave off infection, disable the zombies, and get out of town by completing the game's five scenarios. Players can pick from eight characters at the start and, as per usual with team-building titles, their attributes vary and each offers a special skill. Playing into their backgrounds, the reporter can pick locks, for example, and a particularly timid character can play dead in hopes that the zombies ignore his prone body on the floor.

To our mind, there are three main questions that come up when contemplating the above information. First, do you turn into a zombie? Indeed. A virus meter shows your level of infection (all players start the game infected, by the way) and it goes up more quickly if you're hurt, attacked, or standing still. Once it reaches 100 percent, you go into zombie mode for a few minutes and yes, you can kill your friends – then you die.

The second question is how does *Outbreak* compare to the other Resident Evil games? The control scheme is very

similar to the Resident Evil remakes, but the option to use the left analog stick is available for a more Onimusha-like feel. Except for the controls and subject matter, though, *Outbreak* is a different beast from past entries. There will be no finding of Crest keys to fit in the Crest lock. Each area feels like a real place, with environmental interaction more akin to a stealth/action game. For instance, if you come to a locked door, you can use the key you found a few rooms back (if you had the inventory space to pick it up), shoot it open (if you have a gun), or pick the lock.

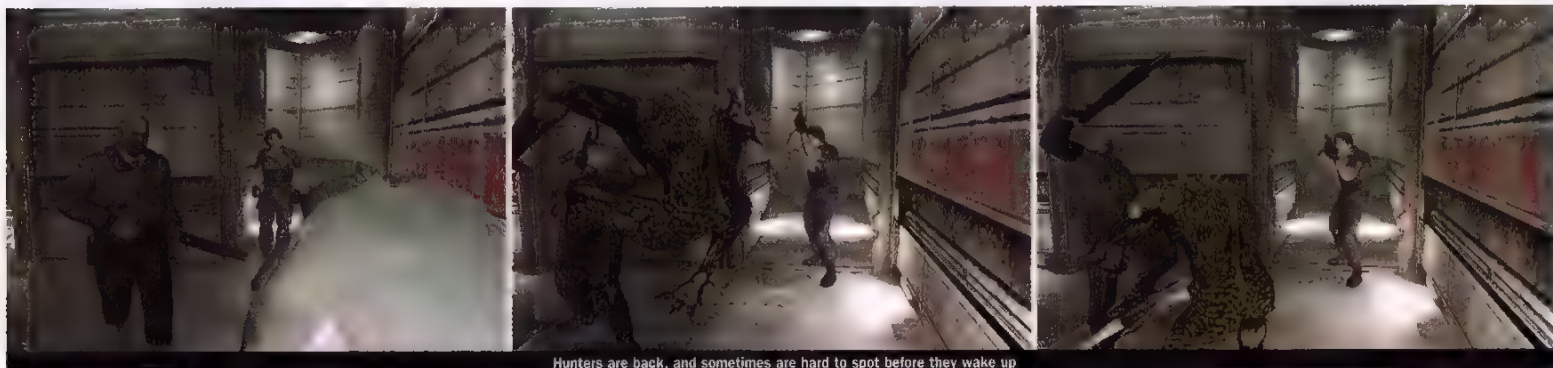
That last question? Well, for us, it was wondering about what that multiplayer experience is like. *Outbreak* offers two modes: offline and online. When offline, you'll play with the aid of two computer-assigned AI characters. Battling through random zombie encounters (the game has so much content generated randomly, in fact, that there is no official strategy guide planned for Japan), you'll communicate with teammates using four basic commands mapped to your right analog stick. While they'll sometimes heed your suggestions to follow or help out, they exhibit a lot of free will, sometimes leaving for totally different paths. Your reunion with characters exploring other areas is random, as is the items they are carrying with them upon their return.

Broadband or LAN-enabled online mode lets up to four

people travel through the same scenarios – although in addition to the unscripted zombies and partner AI, the game will also place health, weapons, and items randomly. Despite the *Outbreak* team's insistence that the lack of voice chat is a benefit and the only way to maintain reality within the online experience, we wished that there were another way to communicate with your human allies. Instead, you will use the same four voice commands available in offline mode.

Outbreak does offer other perks to persistent gamers, though. There are 260 collectable items that are purchased with Result Points awarded at the end of each scenario. Besides the predictable art and Resident Evil staples of alternate costumes, there are 20 NPCs that can be used as online characters (firemen and barkeeps, for example). All in all, unlike the forgettable *Dead Aim* entry, *Outbreak* looks to be a well-planned, nicely executed survival horror game, and certainly more than just a holdover to RE 4. And with a current estimate of 15-20 hours of gameplay (per character) to complete all five scenarios, this could be the most rewarding replay experience with zombies yet.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
 ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 30



Hunters are back, and sometimes are hard to spot before they wake up



Some characters start out with guns, but extra ammo can be hard to come by



The environments are more realistic, but still carry the franchise's trademark look



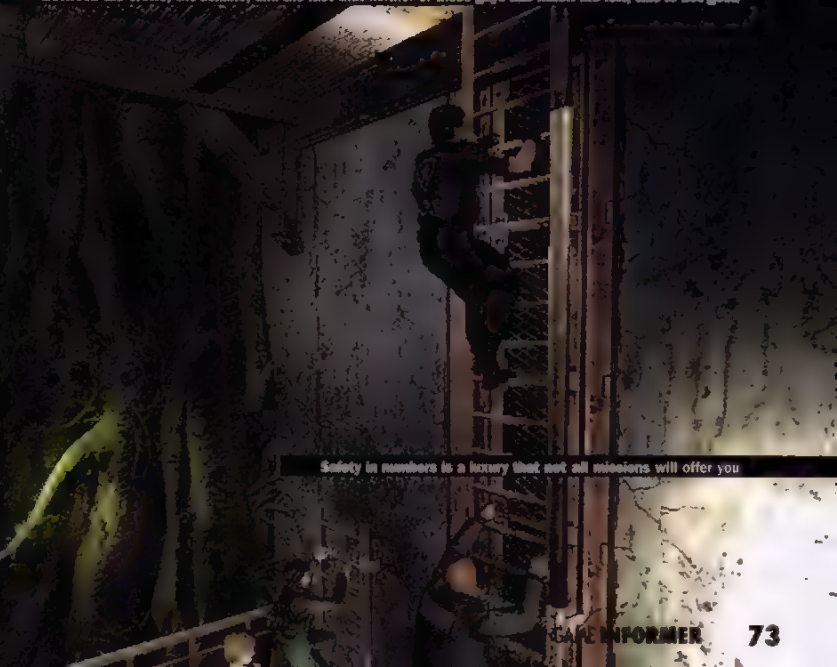
A boss battle ends each of the five scenarios



Between the crew, the zombie, and the fact that neither of these guys has much life left, this is not good



Players will need to disable the real-world security systems



Safety in numbers is a luxury that not all missions will offer you



The character models are extremely detailed



Not all environments are dark, but they're all foreboding



There's no shortage of different enemy types

XBOX | PC

PAINKILLER

STRONGER THAN VICODIN



The FPS genre keeps moving towards complexity. That's not a bad thing – titles like *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and *Rainbow Six 3* have much to offer. Sometimes, though, a little unadulterated action is just the thing to brighten up a rainy day. The expertise with which Painkiller puts a shotgun in your hands and a horde of zombies in front of you ought to scratch that itch.

Keep in mind that when we say "shotgun," we really mean "a variety of unique weapons, all of which are endlessly entertaining to use." Yes, there's the trusty double barrel, but also available are the minigun/rocket launcher (both in one convenient package), the spinning blades of death, and the stake thrower. You read that correctly, there's a stake thrower – a pneumatically powered weapon that launches two-foot pieces of wood at the bad guys. It's as amusing as it sounds; there's nothing like pinning a zombie to a second-story wall and watching it dangle limply from the huge chunk of lumber impaling it.

Every weapon has two fire modes – something of a standard in the genre at this point, but the cool thing is that these can be combined into another attack form. For instance, the stake thrower functions as a grenade launcher

in alternate fire mode, but if you press both buttons at the same time, it shoots a stake with a grenade attached. This mechanic is another great method of spicing up the action and enabling new strategies.

To enhance the carnage, Painkiller uses the Havok 2.0 engine to give it some of the best physics ever seen. Not only that, but developer People Can Fly has done some truly incredible things with the engine, the stake thrower being only one example. The environments, besides being gorgeous, are highly dynamic – players can actually topple crumbling walls or shoot cables to drop a platform that someone is standing on. The remarkable thing about this is the way it is integrated into the game. Rather than being forced to use the environment in a few scripted sequences, it's always a factor during gameplay.

The ambience created by each of Painkiller's levels is something to behold. Even in the pre-alpha build we played, everything from the graphics to the music to the incidental sounds are all done incredibly well and do an excellent job of bringing the player into the game's dark and foreboding world. Players will be able to take that step in March when the title becomes available for retail consumption.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER INTERACTIVE
■ **DEVELOPER** PEOPLE CAN FLY ■ **RELEASE** MARCH



Watch your enemies fly through the air...



...and get pinned to a wall



You wouldn't hurt an old lady, would you?

Some things even the undead can't survive





PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE UNLIMITED ENABLED

LEGENDS OF WRESTLING SHOWDOWN

OH YEAH!

Nearly everyone has fond memories of the wrestlers of yesterday, and Acclaim channeled this nostalgia into its Legends of Wrestling series. Starting from scratch with the third entry, *Showdown* should easily be the best of the series. Along with a new combat engine, *Showdown* also boasts more wrestlers, larger arenas, a new Create-A-Wrestler mode, feud-based storylines, and more. We could easily fill this space with the improvements in the game, but we figured that our readers would rather hear directly from two of its stars, Macho Man Randy Savage and the Ultimate Warrior.



MACHO MAN INTERVIEW

How does it feel to be considered a "Legend of Wrestling?"

It's really incredible to have that word synonymous with my name. To be called a legend is probably the best thing you can be called, you know? To be considered a legend of wrestling, especially as a second-generation wrestler, that's the ultimate moniker for myself.

Have you played the new game?

No I haven't. But I'm pretty familiar with the fact that somebody like myself could sit down and use the Ready to Brawl controls and get the moves of the wrestlers with just one to three buttons and the finishing moves with another button. It makes it easy and user-friendly. When I was working with the development people, when they were doing my character, they knew more about me than I did. They had my style down, which made me feel good about it. It meant that they really did their homework.

Who are you looking forward to wrestling in the game?

I think the real cool thing is that you can match the different

eras up, like Bruno Sammartino. I don't need to have a rematch with Andre the Giant, because he used to whoop me. I know I'm gonna get my butt kicked anyway, even in a video game.

Do you have any crazy wrestling stories that you'd like to share?

The craziest story I could ever tell is the one when I wrestled Jake the Snake Roberts, and I was tied up in the ropes. He took his king cobra and put it on my arm, and it bit me. They tried to get the snake off my arm and they couldn't get it off. What happened was that four days later my arm blew up like a balloon. I went to the hospital and told them what happened. They gave me antibiotics and everything like that. But the windup of the story is that 12 days later the snake died. The talk in the dressing room was, "Wow, maybe the snake was de venomized, or maybe Macho Man wasn't."

Here are some random matches for you: You, the Macho Man, versus Encino Man.

I'd definitely have to vote for myself.

Even though he's a caveman?

Even though he's a caveman. Hey, two out of three falls. I'll give him the respect of winning one.

Hulk Hogan versus Colonel Klink from *Hogan's Heroes*?

Colonel Klink, in a real match – because Hogan is a coward of a different kind.

How about Triple H, a.k.a. The Game, versus the staff of *Game Informer*?

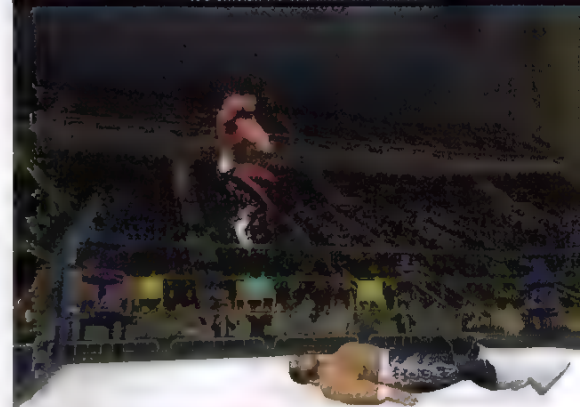
Triple H would win, the best three out of five falls.

You think we'd get him a couple of times?

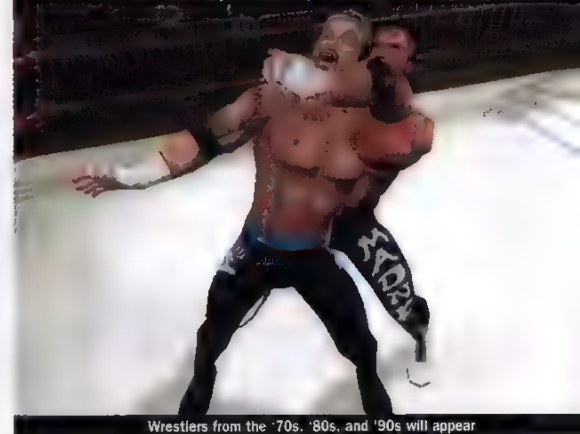
Yeah.



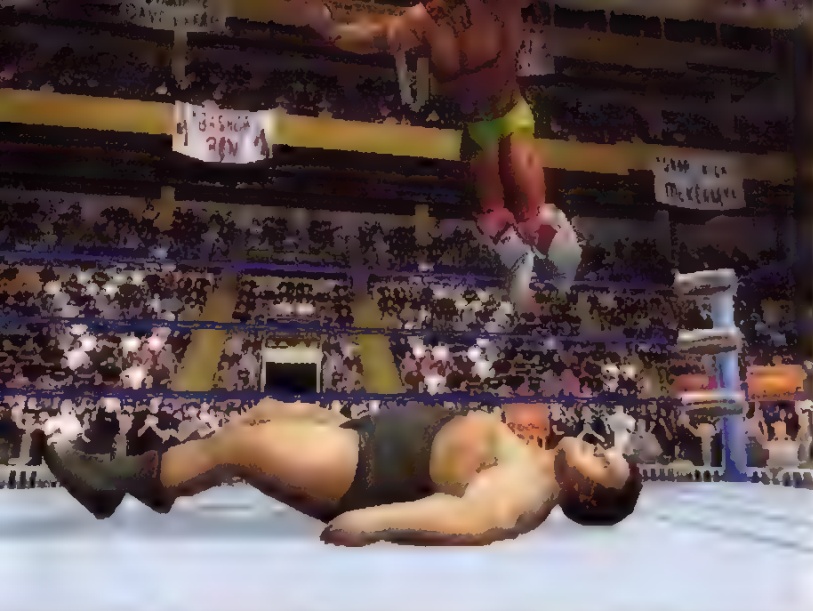
It's official: No one likes the Hulkster



In Career mode, you'll battle up the ranks to challenge Hogan



Wrestlers from the '70s, '80s, and '90s will appear



Andre isn't the only giant in this shot - check out the huge arena



ULTIMATE WARRIOR INTERVIEW

What's the Warrior been up to lately?

Largely what I do is I go out and I speak at schools - colleges, elementary schools. I motivate young kids about reading. I talk about politics and government on college campuses. I try to motivate people to reach their potential. And, I've been working on a book. My book will be about the deeper stuff that comes with the experiences I've had.

Who are you looking forward to wrestling in the game?

First and foremost is Bret Hart. He's made some derogatory comments about the legitimacy of my career. He's the one that I would like to have a confrontation with at first. And Sting, because we came up together. I think Ultimate Warrior would very easily kick his ass in the game. And of course, there are guys in the game I want to wrestle because it was always great, like Randy Savage. If there was anybody in the WWF that rose to a similar level of intensity as the Ultimate Warrior, it was Randy. The guy was incredible. I'm interested to see how I will match up against him and some of those other guys.

Who would win in a fight between Junkyard Dog and Snoop Dogg?

Junkyard Dog didn't have a whole army of bodyguards following him around, so you have to take that into account.

Ultimate Warrior versus Ultimate Electronics?

Like the store [itself]? That'd be more like a battle royale, wouldn't it? It would be one hell of a handicap match. Now, if you're talking about the employees of Ultimate Electronics, then I think I could hold my ground there, because you know who those guys are. Weaselly, slimy little salespeople who don't give you any breathing space. I think I could handle them.

Move sets are accurate for each wrestler



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

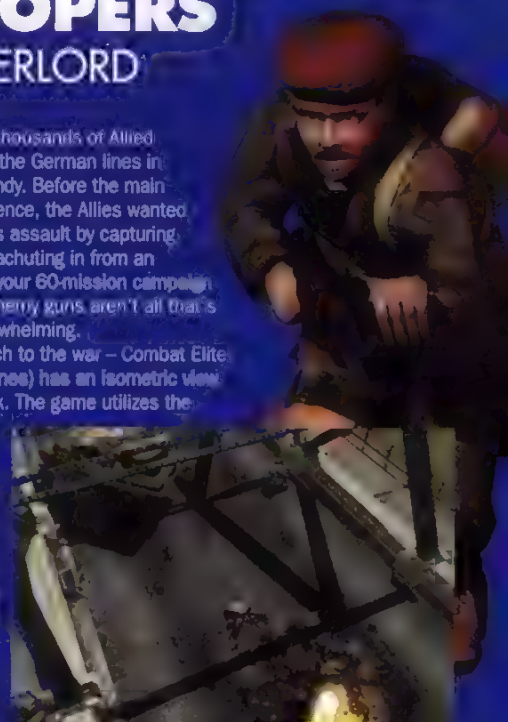
COMBAT ELITE: WW II PARATROOPERS OPERATION OVERLORD

June 5, 1944. Tens of thousands of Allied paratroopers prepared to land behind the German lines in preparation for the invasion of Normandy. Before the main assaults on the beaches could commence, the Allies wanted to secure the flanks of the amphibious assault by capturing key bridges, roads, and batteries. Parachuting in from an altitude of over 500 feet as you start your 60-mission campaign through Europe in *Combat Elite*, the enemy guns aren't all that's against you. The odds are simply overwhelming.

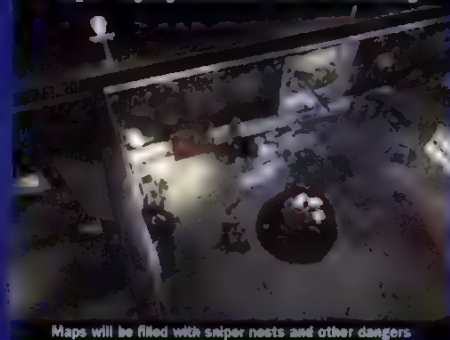
Acclaim is taking a different approach to the war - *Combat Elite* (previously known as *Behind Enemy Lines*) has an isometric view. This isn't so foreign as you might think. The game utilizes the

Smashland engine, which was used in the hit Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance. Moreover, developer BattleBorne is made up of industry vets, including the producer for Dark Alliance and the artist behind the Tom Clancy series. *Combat* will be an intuitive point-and-shoot affair even though the perspective may feel odd at first. One thing that will definitely make you feel at home is the game's remarkable graphics, most notably in its use of light and shadows.

Combat Elite is not a squad-based title, but how you manage your troops is important. The game takes you through numerous covert missions in WW II, including some in the heart of the Fatherland. Gaining experience lets you put skill points towards attributes. This, in turn, promotes you in rank. Once you become an officer, you can then turn around and boost up the skills of the soldiers under you - or choose to keep them all for yourself. Whatever your choice, you can't make it alone. Remember: The fate of freedom is in your hands.



The game's lighting and shadow effects are outstanding



Maps will be filled with sniper nests and other dangers

■ STYLE 1 OR 2 PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER ACCLAIM ■ DEVELOPER BATTLEBORNE ■ RELEASE JUNE 6

PREVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

SERIOUS SAM: WORD TO THE MOTHERSHIP

SERIOUS ACTION

Despite the name, Serious Sam has always been a very lighthearted take on blasting aliens. Developer Climax, which is making this new side chapter while Serious Sam originators Croteam work on the sequel for Xbox and PC, takes this philosophy and runs with it. With cartoony graphics and hammy one-liners, this franchise is unique in its blend of seriously pounding gunfights and a goofy Looney Tunes-esque vibe. There's very little pretense of having a plot, and the hardest choice players are faced with is whether to use the minigun or the rocket launcher. This paves the way for all sorts of cool toys, enemies, and levels to play around with.

Word to the Mothership sets out with a mission: Deliver entertainment in the form of mindlessly blowing stuff up. From what we saw of the game, it should never be said that it does not fulfill this goal. All of the powers of innovation possessed by the developers went into crafting fun weapons, cool enemies, and the most stable framerate this side of cinema. Even with twenty enemies, countless bullets, and some explosions all onscreen, the build we played had no slowdown at all.

Though solo play is very simple and action-oriented, the combo and reward systems inject some additional flavor. By chaining together your enemy kills, you get more points,

which can net you a medal at the end of the level. It's a simple, yet cool, concept that adds a little more spice without taking away from the action. Far from it – get your combo meter high enough and you go into a sped-up Killing Spree.

While the single-player mode is fun, multiplayer is clearly where it's at. Whether it's four-player split-screen on the 'Cube or eight-player online play on the PS2, the small maps make for a very old-school experience. Matches are nothing but running and gunning and trying to hit the armor spawns before you die. Beautiful. There are also Pass the Bomb and Hold the Flag modes for those who don't care for a standard deathmatch. Or, if that's not your thing, you can go through the entire 32 brand-new levels of solo mode (plus the ten which can be unlocked through collecting medals) cooperatively with a friend.

New to Serious Sam are the three vehicles in Word to the Mothership. A jeep with rocket launchers, a submarine, and a huge combine harvester are all available in the course of the game. And we all know what vehicles mean – more destruction, more mayhem, and more fun.

Word to the Mothership looks like it'll be the best bang available for gamers' \$20 this spring when it launches.



■ STYLE PS2: 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE), GC: 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE ■ DEVELOPER CLIMAX ■ RELEASE SPRING



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PLAYSTATION 2 UNLIMITED ENABLED

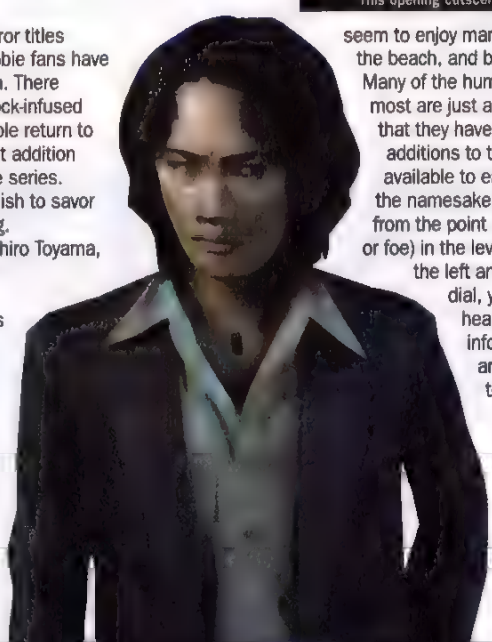
SIREN

HEED THE CALL

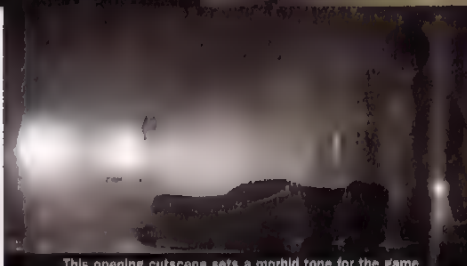
With all of the survival horror titles flooding the market as of late, zombie fans have had a nice brain buffet to nibble on. There have been lovely entries to the shock-infused Resident Evil franchise, an admirable return to the moody Silent Hill, and a brilliant addition to the classically scary Fatal Frame series. Currently in Japan, there's a new dish to savor that is coming stateside this spring.

Siren, by Silent Hill director Keiichiro Toyama, was developed by Sony Computer Entertainment Japan and offers enough innovation to make gamers around the world salivate at the title's fright factor. The story predominately takes place in a Japanese village called Hanyuda during the late 1970s. You will control not the traditional one or two survivors and escapees, but ten. By piecing together the plotlines of these very normal people (one pair is a teacher and young student who are trying to escape their school), you learn that a siren sounded around the same time as an earthquake rocked the village. After the screeching noise ceases, the characters notice that a new sea surrounding Hanyuda is blood red and the nearly-constant rain shares the morbid hue.

Outside of the playable characters and their companions, the rest of the village has turned into reasonably intelligent zombie-like creatures who



The Link Navigator menu helps players keep track of the many storylines.



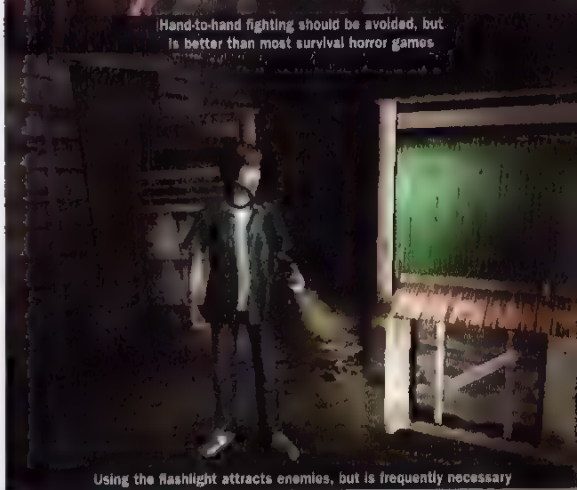
This opening cutscene sets a morbid tone for the game.

seem to enjoy maniacal laughter, long walks on the beach, and bludgeoning people to death. Many of the human characters are unarmed and most are just average folk – the only advantage that they have is one of Siren's innovative additions to the genre. Sight-jacking is available to each character after they hear the namesake siren, which allows them to see from the point of view of each person (friend or foe) in the level. By hitting L2 and circling the left analog stick around like a radio dial, you'll see what they see and hear what they hear. Using this information, your goal is to sneak around the enemies and avoid their attention at all costs.

Siren's other unique gameplay mechanic is its character and time management system. The story takes place over three days with the title's large cast. By using the Link Navigator screen, you can see which characters you have played at which time and if you completed the level to its fullest. It's an ingenious way for players to keep track of the story and the game's labyrinthine flow, which is made all the more important by the fact that gamers will move through areas multiple times. The actions of one character could affect another later on. Unlike its obvious inspiration Silent Hill, Siren lets players revisit areas that have already been visited and drop items, open doors, etc..



Hand-to-hand fighting should be avoided, but is better than most survival horror games.



Using the flashlight attracts enemies, but is frequently necessary.



Although it is better to avoid attention, characters can still escape.

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA ■ DEVELOPER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN ■ RELEASE SPRING



PLAYSTATION 2 UNLIMITED ENABLED

GRAN TURISMO 4

TOTAL POWER



Solid details about

Gran Turismo 4 have been scarce – which was okay, because we had been rendered speechless by its gorgeous looks anyway. Since having played the Japanese demo entitled Gran Turismo 4: Prologue, however, we've been able to recover ourselves and glean some new information for you.

After the release of Gran Turismo 3, Sony put out region-exclusive editions of the game featuring various concept cars. This time, however, developer Polyphony Digital is giving you all of its rides in one package. Gran Turismo 4 will also feature more "normal" cars, such as minivans. Series mastermind Kazunori Yamauchi wanted to expand the range of automobiles even further, by turning back the clock so you can experience rides from earlier in the 20th century. Sony isn't giving away all of the game's details just yet, but we did learn that not only will franchise standards such as drag racing probably be in GT 4, used cars will also be present after being absent in GT 3. So far, the title is boasting 50 tracks, but the only confirmed ones are New York, Tsukuba, Grand Canyon (rally), Fuji, Citta di Aria, and two courses in Taiwan and Nice.

The Gran Turismo franchise has always been on the cutting edge in the graphics department, but now it steps up to its contemporaries with online play. The game utilizes the console's hard drive, so downloadable tracks and car packs can be expected. Sony will hold tournaments, and is building a GT 4 community through pre-race lobbies and more.

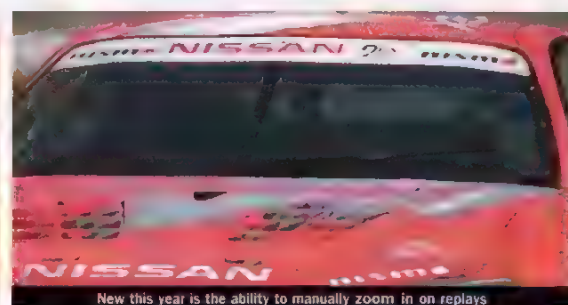
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
 ■ **DEVELOPER** POLYPHONY DIGITAL
 ■ **RELEASE** 2004

DOING LINES



These 2D roadside pedestrians will scamper out of the way as you pass.

Yamauchi said he was concerned that people were turned off by the series' difficulty. To remedy this, GT 4 will feature an increased focus on teaching players the fundamentals of driving. First off, the license tests will include lessons involving other cars. Here you will get a feel for taking the right racing line while in the thick of traffic, and learn how to do so without hitting others.



New this year is the ability to manually zoom in on replays.

In another first for the series, there will be penalties for reckless driving. Those who smash into other cars or track barriers with significant enough force will find their speed restricted for 10 seconds. Sony told GI that there will also be other penalties for those looking to beat and bang their way to the front.

NEW REALMS OF REALITY



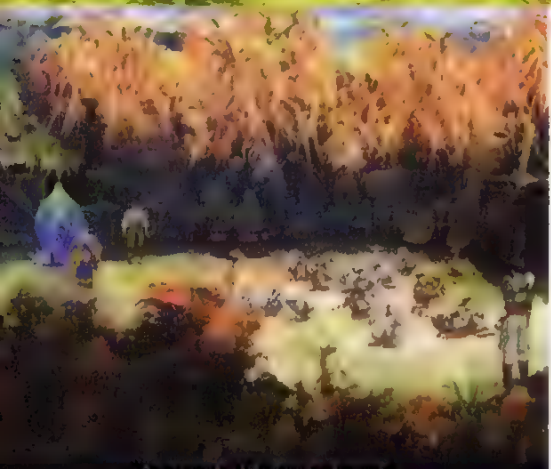
The urban towers of Times Square let precious little sunlight on its streets.

The graphical splendor of this game is obvious. What amazes, however, are some of the details nestled here and there. For example, developer Polyphony Digital went and got licenses for shops in Times Square for everything from MTV to the music retail chain Virgin Records. Significant work has also been done to redo the franchise's shadows. GT 3 simply had two values for cars: either it was in light or it was in shadow – simple as that. GT 4,



The new camera makes the photo-realistic backgrounds come alive.

however, is more complex. When you're racing under the shade of trees and buildings in the streets of Citta di Aria, for example, you will not only see the reflection of your surroundings off the top of your hood, but the sunlight will filter through the canopy of the roadside foliage as you scream by. Also new this year is a wider camera angle that not only helps you plan your racing line for future turns, but which highlights the beautiful surroundings.



An example of the busy backgrounds



Tinkerbell running from the fuzz



帝雨の母おはなガソ
The obligatory androgynous character

GAMECUBE UNLIMITED ENABLED

BATEN KAITOS

NAMCO SHUFFLES A NEW RPG INTO THE DECK

Given their affinity for obscure trivia, it is no surprise that the folks who brought us Xenosaga have named their latest game after a little-known star from the celestial version of connect-the-dots. In addition to being one of the pieces that make up the constellation Cetus (the sea monster), Baten Kaitos is also the most exciting RPG prospect on the GameCube to date.

The story takes place in a world where humans all have wings and live on continents floating in the sky, and centers around a single-winged young man who can communicate with spirits. Just from the screenshots, it is clear that the game looks gorgeous. What you can't see in stills, though, is the amount of motion that is happening onscreen, even as you just wander through town. There can be a dozen chickens pecking around, a random butterfly fluttering in some flowers, and the leaves of the trees swaying in the wind, all on a single screen. This, combined with a tropical soundtrack reminiscent of the PSone's Chrono Cross contributes a depth to the experience that is truly unique.

One interesting feature of the presentation is the use of portraits in addition to dialogue. Though the game does have plenty of voice-acting, most of your character's words are conveyed through text boxes. In order to add more emotion to this dry standard, they have included a portrait system where a picture of a character pops up next to their dialogue. But instead of being the same picture all of the time, there are a wide variety of

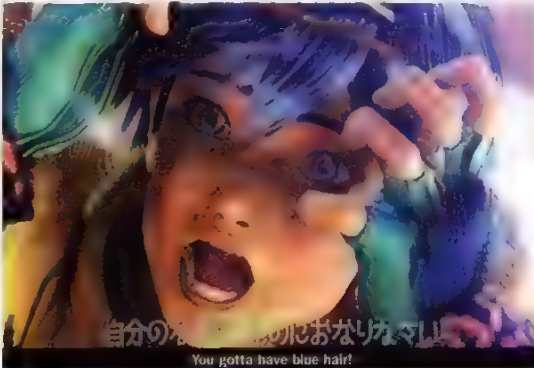
images illustrating feelings such as anger and confusion to help get the point across.

The aspect of the game that die-hard RPGers will find most jarring is the total lack of a battle menu. Everything in the encounters revolves around a revolutionary card system. You need to use the cards to flee from battle. You need to use the cards to heal. You need to use the cards for everything. They are divided up into numbers and suits, much like a regular deck. Before each battle the cards are shuffled and the player is dealt a hand, from which they then need to select the actions to be carried out in battle.

Not only do the cards determine what your action will be, but they also determine the effectiveness of those actions. For instance, if you select an attack card, your character will fly over to an enemy and take a swing. However, if you have a pair of attack cards, each with the same number in the corner, you will get a +1.0 percent bonus to your damage. After each attack, a report appears onscreen to break down what was played and what it did. Basically, the better the poker hand, the better the result.

If you're a GameCube owner, the good news is that Baten Kaitos will satisfy your RPG hunger in a big way. The bad news is that it doesn't look like it will be anytime soon. Though the game released in Japan in December, there hasn't been a U.S. release announced yet. You'll just have to preen those enormous wings while you're waiting.

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

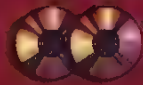


自分の髪色がおもしろくない
You gotta have blue hair!



ちえ、富ってくれるよ。
Michael Jackson Mugshot: The RPG

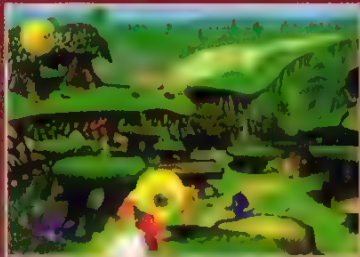
HE'D BLUSH, BUT HE'S YELLOW.



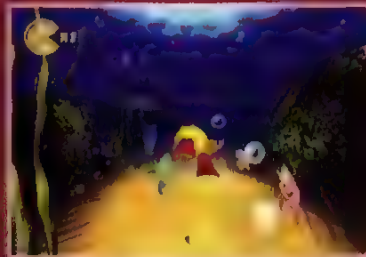
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PlayStation 2



XBOX

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

COPILOTS AND DRIFTING

RalliSport Challenge's sequel is an important game for publisher Microsoft and its rally developer of choice, Digital Illusions. Fortunately, it looks as though both companies are doing everything in their power to ensure a breakneck racing experience for Xbox players.

RalliSport Challenge 2 will be the first racing game to utilize Xbox Live's XSNsports.com service. Players will be able to set up a rally league, establish and annihilate rivals, and track extensive statistics through a web login to XSNsports.com.

Those without the Live service don't need to feel entirely left out, though. Digital Illusions has pumped each area of the game full of upgrades, improvements, and added features. Challenge 2 offers five rally race types in addition

to the standard modes we're all accustomed to (career, single race, time attack, etc.) These race types include the standards set by the first title, along with Crossover Duel, in which you battle another driver in a figure-eight shaped course with over- and underpasses. Race types brought back for the sequel are the obvious rally and rally cross and the popular ice racing and hill climb tracks.

The developer's first RalliSport title didn't offer as many cars or weather conditions as players are used to enjoying. Although these aspects are really peripheral to the actual racing, Digital Illusions is upping the available cars to over 40 and including the dangerous group B cars that aren't allowed in professional rally races. These rides are a no-no in the real world sport because of their "uncontrollable

horsepower." Nice.

Digital Illusions' upcoming opus certainly is a beautiful sight to behold and it now includes much-appreciated alternate weather conditions along with realistic damage that has a staggering effect on your car's handling and functionality. You can, in theory at least, lose specific transmission gears based on location and speed of impact. Also, when in the cockpit view, the game will show front and rear windshield shatter patterns – purists will have problems staying in that view as the damage severely limits your field of vision.

Look for the speed and drift in the early part of 2004, when we'll be able to tell you about the game's revolutionary online experience.



The ambient effects are pumped up for this edition

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 3

Drivers and spectators will be visible





XBOX | PC

RACE DRIVER 2: THE ULTIMATE RACING SIMULATOR

VARIETY MEETS REALITY

Hailed as the first caRPG, Pro Race Driver impressed gamers with its accuracy, variety of racing options, and narrative elements. Even though they dropped the "Pro" from the title, Codemasters' sequel, Race Driver 2, doesn't look like it has lost anything else that was good about the original.

The game retains the story-driven structure of its predecessor, but this time around it is told from a first-person perspective. Rather than follow Ryan McKane, who had his own baggage to deal with, you essentially become the main character. "Instead of watching someone else's story unfold in front of you, you create your own history," says Gavin Raeburn, studio head of Codemasters.

As the name implies, the game is a simulator, so the physics engine is focused on providing a realistic driving experience. There will be some adjustments, though, so don't go thinking you'll be qualified for your Supertruck license after a few hours of play. "We want the vehicles to handle as people expect them to handle," comments Raeburn. "A real racing driver wouldn't have to struggle too much with any vehicle you throw at them, and we don't think the player should have to, either."

The damage effects in the original Pro Race Driver were impressive, going so far as to allow you to lose tires and pieces of your car as you drove. Race Driver 2 takes the concept

one step further. You now have the ability to wreck your car completely. Raeburns tells us that "if you crash into a wall at 70 mph, the whole front of the car will crumple as you would expect a real car to. You'll get ripples down the side of the car, glass will smash, and you won't be able to drive anymore."

AI is always a concern in racing games, and the AI in Race Driver 2 is sure to give you a run for your money. The computer drivers are able to respond to the player's actions in a believable way, such as taking a second or two to respond if hit by the player. And if they are hit, they remember it and hold a grudge throughout the race.

The game will be available for online play on Xbox Live and the PC, so even once you finish the story mode, you can still cruise around with friends online. Or, you can gather up all those spare Xboxes and use your system links to set up multiplayer races for up to 16 drivers.

Following through with the concept of creating a realistic racing simulator, Race Driver 2 will include at least 35 vehicles, such as the Aston Martin DB9, and 56 circuits, including Pike's Peak. With everything that is being packed into this title, it has the potential to be a racing game that offers something new in a market saturated with mediocrity.

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
 ■ **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS ■ **RELEASE** APRIL



The game features tons of licensed cars



You can race against up to 21 other drivers



Opposing racers will take revenge for reckless driving

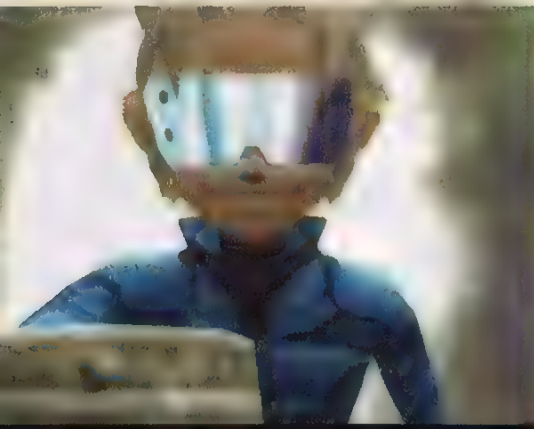


Drive in carefully-crafted environments

PREVIEWS



グロウダンのじしん攻撃



Our hero, complete with '80s shades



Gesundheit?



Jirachi, a hidden character

GAMECUBE

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

WHIP OUT THOSE POKÉBALLS

Nintendo's Pokémon franchise has long been dominating the handheld charts, but it seems to have gone into hibernation on the consoles since the N64 Pokémon Stadium games. That will change this spring, along with commonly accepted spelling of "coliseum," when Nintendo releases Pokémon Colosseum.

Colosseum is an attempt to fuse together the battle oriented Stadium titles for the N64, and the RPG-themed handheld titles. It combines them by allowing the player to capture and train Pokémon in the scenario mode, and then use them against opponents in the battle arena.

The adventure mode plays like an episode of the show, centering around a new main character who has stolen a valuable artifact. He travels from town to town, but instead of catching his little pocket monsters in the traditional way, he snatches them away from their evil trainers with the help of his stolen doohickey. When they are first encountered, they are called Dark Pokémon (they do have evil trainers, after all), but once you nab them you can slowly bring them back to the light and have them fight by your side.

Though the adventure mode seems well-planned, the heart of Colosseum is the battle mode. Here you can take all of the critters you've trained (including the Dark Pokémon you have redeemed) in your single player quest and use them in battle

against your friends or the computer. There are a variety of different challenges, like the new two-on-two battle, where you and a friend can join forces and act as a team. However, the catch is that if you want to play any sort of multiplayer in Colosseum, everyone needs to have a Game Boy Advance and a connector cable. Every player is then allowed to use individual menus rather than the one onscreen, which adds a larger strategic element than before. Now, the multiplayer aspect is a big draw for these games, and it will be limited severely by this connectivity requirement. Sure, Nintendo should incorporate the GBA, but would it have been too much to allow the use of standard GameCube controllers, too?

Though it seems unfair to require another game system for multiplayer, there is another benefit to plugging your GBA into the GameCube, providing you've played Ruby or Sapphire. Thankfully, all those hours you spent training and catching 'em all aren't wasted. There is a feature that allows you to import your cute creatures from those titles and use them to battle in Colosseum. Plus, if you pre-order the game, you'll get a bonus disc that allows you to download Jirachi, the newest secret character and focus of the upcoming movie, into Ruby and Sapphire.

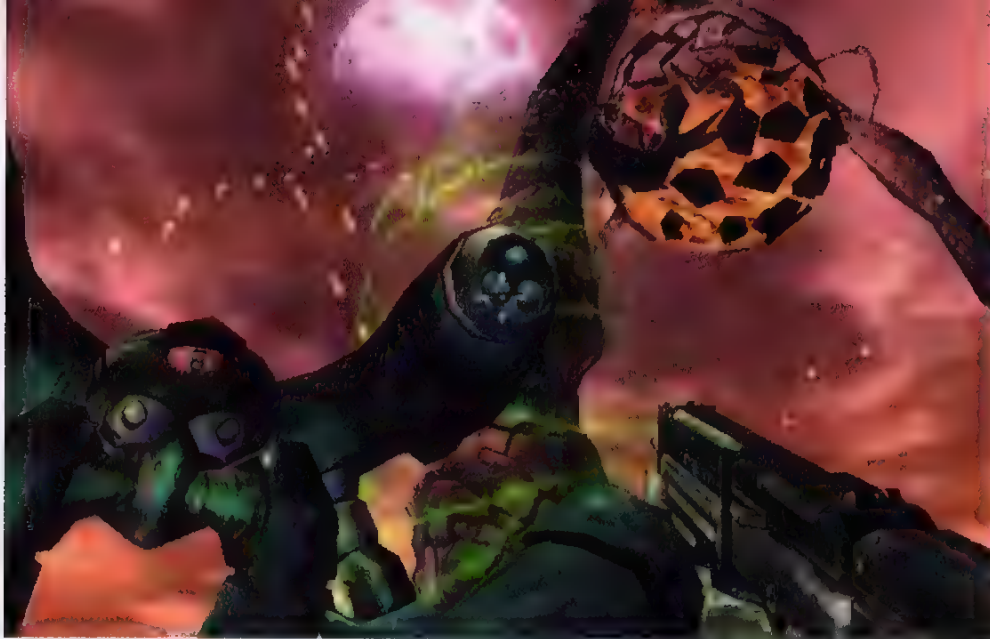
Regardless of how the multiplayer works, Colosseum at least looks like a solid Pokémon RPG with enough collecting, fighting, and training to keep fans happy.

■ STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ PUBLISHER NINTENDO ■ DEVELOPER NINTENDO ■ RELEASE MARCH 22



As expected, all characters are very realistic

Pokeparadise



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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

ROBOTECH: INVASION

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

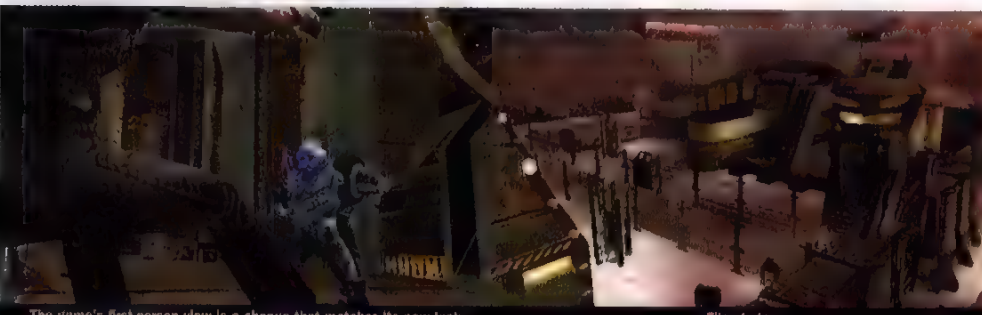
If TDK's last *Robotech* game got snaps for its replication of the classic anime series, then this new title is taking some chances with its totally different direction. The attempt here is to move beyond the typical fanbase (after all, won't they buy it if it says *Robotech* on it anyway?) and use what's compelling about the franchise on a more base level. Giant transformable robots? Check. Cool space aliens that won't stop till you blow a hole in their heads? It's in there. Assemble these elements in the *Robotech* timeline and it sounds like the game's got more than a fighting chance.

Unlike the third-person cel shading of *Robotech: Battlecry*, *Invasion* is a first-person shooter set in much more realistically conveyed environments. This allows TDK to fiddle with things like bump mapping for the textures and reflection mapping that makes the screen come alive. Don't worry,

however, *Invasion* isn't totally abandoning ship. The series' trademark transformable mechs are still here. The Cyclone is available, and its protoculture stores enable the motorcycle to also function like a second skin of mechanized armor when in Battloid mode. Through this transformable suit, limited bursts of flying are possible.

The story for *Invasion* isn't being divulged yet, but we're being told it does take place several years after *Battlecry*, which might place it into the New Generation phase of the anime series (a sweet FPS experience is the only hope of making Dana Sterling cool). Speaking of a new generation, this entry in the video game series adds online play, which will encompass up to 16 players, and will definitely include various game modes to have a blast with. How do you like *Robotech* now?

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE, OFFLINE MULTIPLAYER TBA) ■ **PUBLISHER** TDK INTERACTIVE
 ■ **DEVELOPER** VICIOUS CYCLE ■ **RELEASE** FALL



The game's first-person view is a change that matches its new look

File photo

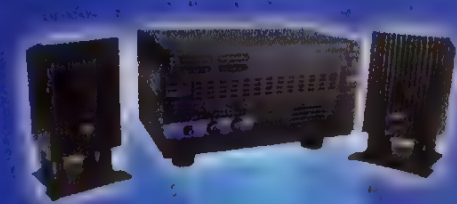


The facial details for characters are a long way from anime

Cyclones are this game's predominate mech of choice



PlayStation 2



Sound Systems



Wireless Controllers



DualShock 2

Maximum
Gaming



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PREVIEWS



PC

BREED

THE NEXT EVOLUTION OF COMBAT?

After having a chance to spend some quality time with an early build of this forthcoming sci-fi first person shooter, we came away quite impressed. If the final product is as polished as we hope it will be, Breed could be a real breakout title for developer Brat Designs.

A number of things stand out within the game's solid FPS package. The biggest are the minimap and waypoint systems. These two things make for a nice and simple method of keeping track of the tactical situation, which is extremely useful given the immensity of the areas. Contextual information, such as sighted enemies, also appears on the minimap, reducing the frantic "Who the heck is shooting me?" feeling.

Having the option to switch to direct control of any member of the squad lends a much more tactical feeling to the missions as well. Each marine has their own use – the sniper can take out distant enemies, the gunner can clear out groups of baddies or lay down covering fire, and the grunt can, well, support the other two. Using the talents of your team well can easily mean the difference between victory and defeat.

Gamers should be able to take command of this squad of marines and their supporting arsenal of tanks, fighter jets, and other vehicles in February, when Breed is scheduled to be in stores.



Ground-pounding isn't the only method of warfare

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA LAN OR ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** CDV SOFTWARE ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** BRAT DESIGNS ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY



PLAYSTATION 2

SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX

SAMURAI SHOWDOWN

When Seven Samurai 20XX was first announced, we were giddy to get Akira Kurosawa's legendary film in our video game hands. Except a literal translation is not what publisher Sammy intended at all. Why didn't the company want to turn the movie into a game? Was it something we said? It's all Jeremy's fault, isn't it? Well, Sammy Studios and developer Dimps are instead taking the film's basic story and themes for an action romp set far in the future. We've learned that things aren't so different in 20XX as they were in 16th century Japan.

One thing that gamers will instantly recognize is Seven Samurai's penchant for swordplay. We've had some hands-on time with the title early in its development, and we can already see the combo system coming together nicely, with smooth stokes showing through in the 16 different attacks that the hero (named Notoe) can use. He can dual-wield swords and power them up for a limited time for maximum damage. Fast-paced action is a common thread that is woven into the story with compelling results.

Of course, the movie's basic tale of seven disparate characters banding together to save a village beset by bandits holds true, no matter the setting, and it comes through all the more clearly due to the help of Mark Handler. Mr. Handler has translated such anime classics as *Cowboy Bebop* and *Metropolis*. "One of the earliest questions was: 'I don't get it. How does this relate to the original movie?'" says Seven Samurai's chief creative officer, Emmanuel Valdez. "And that's what we've done with [hiring Handler]. He has been very careful in the words that he chooses in making it a proper tribute." Actually, Valdez told us that as gamers progress through 20XX they will start to recognize more and more what the title has in common with the movie, until direct homages to Kurosawa's masterpiece are staring them in the face. In fact, the more we look at Seven Samurai 20XX, the more we see it's like the film all along – and that has us excited once again.



The combo meter on the right gauges your proficiency



The charge meter in the bottom left indicates when you can pull off a special move



Andrew Lloyd Webber's newest play hits off-off-off-Broadway



"As a robot I perform many functions, but I don't do that..."

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** SAMMY STUDIOS ■ **DEVELOPER** DIMPS ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 2



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

AREA 51

BEHIND THE COVER-UPS

Just having good gameplay and pretty graphics doesn't cut it in the FPS market any more. New titles need to have some sort of twist on the premise to make their mark on the genre – bullet time, Warthogs, whatever. Inevitable Entertainment, the developer of Area 51, seems to know this quite well, since the whole game looks to be packed full of cool things to do. We had a chance to interview Zach Wood, the game's producer, and he clued us in on a lot of them.

Cast as Lt. Nick Cross of the U.S. Army HazMat division, players will have to investigate the mysterious disappearance of the first HazMat team to enter the infamous Area 51 base. After that, according to Wood, "The rest of the mystery unfolds as you progress through the game and you begin to figure out things are not what they seem within Area 51. Many of the myths, stories, and lore associated with the base over the past 30 to 40 years may have actually been true." This certainly raises our hopes for an interesting and unpredictable plot, a rarity in action games. Even more promising, there will be other characters with their own agendas involved in Lt. Cross's journey. Says Wood, "There will be both solo and team battles as you progress throughout the game, but eventually the determination between who is friend or foe becomes blurry. The ultimate goal in Area 51, though, is survival."

To add to poor Nick's problems, his own body is not immune to the general weirdness around him. An extraterrestrial virus has gotten a hold on him, and he begins to undergo a strange mutation. All Wood would say about it is, "As far as what the effects are as a result of this change, and whether or not it can be reversed or stopped in time – well, you're going to have

to play to find out the answer to that." We'll bet dollars to donuts that some interesting powers will be involved, though.

Fortunately for Lt. Cross, he'll be able to recover some alien technology and use it against his foes. Not just weapons, either – Wood assures us that "many of the machines, computers and other objects of unknown or extraterrestrial origin within Area 51 will function in some manner or another to assist you or your team as you progress through the base." The addition of these elements should go a long way towards providing an environment that's interactive and functional as well as pretty – a concept dear to every adventure fan's heart.

With its mix of action, survival, and horror, Area 51 looks like it could be one of the best and most distinctive FPS titles in a long while. We'll find out the real truth behind the myriad scandals, cover-ups, and conspiracies this spring, when it's scheduled to ship to stores.



Not all mutations are good



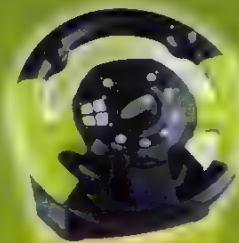
The environments are awesome



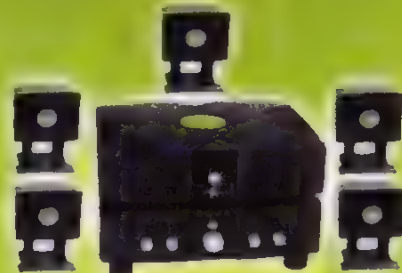
This is one of the coolest-looking aliens ever

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TBD) ■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY ■ **DEVELOPER** INEVITABLE ENTERTAINMENT
■ **RELEASE** 2ND QUARTER

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PHOTOPHILE

PLAYSTATION 2

CY GIRLS



Although Konami's new action title has been often compared to games like Metal Gear Solid, it's much more than a sexy sneaking adventure. Not only does *Cy Girls* feature two protagonists with separate storylines, but also both heroines Ice and Aska can jump into a virtual world for up to ten minutes at a time. Let's see Solid Snake do that! And yes, the duo does partake in some sexy sneaking. When it hits in February, you can be certain you'll be seeing plenty of girls creeping through shadows.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

WORMS 3D



Blowing up cute little invertebrates in a video game is more fun than scorching ants with a magnifying glass, but until now has lacked the depth that age-old pastime has offered. Well, Acclaim and developer Team 17 are dissatisfied with this deplorable state of affairs, and are doing their best to rectify the situation this very moment. In *Worms 3D*, players will be able to experience the timeless joy of classic *Worms* gameplay in a fully rendered environment. Obviously some tweaks to gameplay had to be implemented to make this a smooth transition, and that's why multiple camera views are available. Bilmp view can help target airstrikes, while first-person mode will allow bazookas and such to be fired with some hope of hitting their targets. *Worms'* goofy brand of chaos will be coming to all three major consoles and PC sometime in March.

PC

GANGLAND



Mob stories never get old – just look at the success of *The Sopranos*. Developer Media Mobsters is well aware of this, and is working on bringing PC gamers another huge player-driven Mafia adventure for Valentine's Day. During your quest to become the godfather, you'll be able to interact with over 500 citizens of Paradise City. Also promised is a blend of RPG, RTS, and simulation styles of play. What this means we don't know, but as you can tell from this screenshot, there's no shortage of bizarre things to do. At least, we consider getting married bizarre.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

JUICED



Juiced has some serious competition in the street racing genre, most notably *Midnight Club II* and *Need For Speed: Underground*. Acclaim is trying its hardest, however, to give you something new. This fall title will not only pit you and your infinitely customizable ride against opponents, with cash and cars on the line, it also adds a team dynamic that has been missing in other games of the genre. You'll recruit people for your crew and work with them during street races and on tracks to beat the competition. Real-life licenses, special challenges, and online play options are also stepping up to the line. In fact, racing for pink slips online is even being considered.

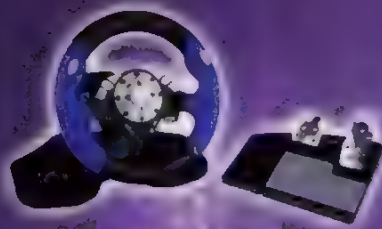
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC **UNLIMITED ENABLED**

HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN



Since you couldn't get enough of young kids playing with their wands, EA has summoned the third Harry Potter adventure, scheduled to appear on a console near you in spring. The big innovation in this release is that all three members of the Scooby gang are now playable. That's right; you'll now be able to guide Harry, Ron, and Hermione through a lengthy mystery filled with guys in scary bathrobes, barely-comprehensible sports, and of course, tea. Probably some kind of magic tea.

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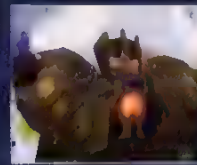


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REVIEWS



PS2
Champions Of Norrath
pg. 94



GC
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles
pg. 104



ANDY

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First Person Shooters
Interests: TiVo, Timberwolves Basketball, Our Forums, Pirates **Dislikes:** That Sam Cassell
Doesn't Get Enough Respect, Expensive Fires, Salt On The Road **Current Favorite Games:** Metroid Zero Mission, SSX 3, Champions Of Norrath: Realms Of Everquest, Neverwinter Nights: Hordes Of The Underdark, Deus Ex: Invisible War

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: The Stunning, The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, Gun, With Occasional Music by Jonathan Letham, The Steal Of The Draft, Back In The Rock Business: I Have Returned To Claim What Is Mine! **Dislikes:** The Economy, Ninja Gaiden Being Delayed, Cold Weather **Current Favorite Games:** Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne, Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando, Need For Speed: Underground, Top Spin

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.



LISA

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Puzzle, RPGs, Action/Platform, Horror **Interests:** Stitch 'N Bitch, Vertigo's Fables, Holiday DVD Releases, The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King, Acquiring My Very Own Minion, Alias Season 2 DVD Set, Babes Of Norrath 2004 Calendar **Dislikes:** Frozen Gunk Stuck To Windshield Wipers (Seriously Makes Me Crazy) **Current Favorite Games:** Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly, Ur: Ages Beyond Myst, Need For Speed: Underground, Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, The Sims: Bustin' Out (GBA), EyeToy: Play

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.



ADAM

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, RPGs, Strategy, Fighting **Interests:** Not Being The New Guy Anymore, Having Somebody I Can Truly Dork Out With In The Office, Developers Who Know What Makes Games Fun **Dislikes:** Paperwork, Nintendo Thumb, Losing My Mind To Ridiculously Long Working Hours, Marion Gaborik's Lack Of Anything Related To The Playing Of Good Hockey **Current Favorite Games:** BloodRayne 2, Neverwinter Nights, Hordes Of The Underdark, Hitman

Despite his waning attention span, every so often a game comes out that will completely dominate Adam's life for several months. Between these inverted periods of seclusion and obsession, he has been known to switch platforms, genres, and games with blinding speed, searching for his next true love. When Nintendo thumb inevitably forces him to turn to other pursuits, Adam can often be seen engrossed in the consumption of any sort of media, from newspapers to film to comic books and radio.



REINER

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** Sloan From Alias, Wanted (A Comic By Mark Millar), Sweetarts Flavored Candy Canes, The Da Vinci Code (A Book By Dan Brown) **Dislikes:** Running Out Of GBA Battery Power During A Boss Fight In Crystal Chronicles, Reality TV Shows, Claude Monet (Overrated Hack!) **Current Favorite Games:** Secret Weapons Over Normandy, Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II, Champions Of Norrath: Realms Of EverQuest, The Sims: Bustin' Out, Deus Ex: Invisible War

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 689 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, Perfect Dark, and XIII. He will also be featured as a playable character in another forthcoming release.



KATO

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King (The Book, The Film, The Appendix), Mando Diao, Matthew Sweet's Japan-Only Record, Up The Irons! **Dislikes:** The Atkins Diet Mafia (Shut Up Already!), People Who Argue About What-If Situations, Babes Of Norrath 2004 Calendar **Current Favorite Games:** The Lord Of The Rings: Battle For Middle Earth, Dungeons & Dragons: Forgotten Realms, Winning Eleven 7

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



JEREMY

Handle: The Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Adventure, Fighting, RPGs **Interests:** Being Serenaded By A Drunk Woman On My Birthday, The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King, The Alien Quadrilogy DVD Box Set, Bubba Ho-Tep **Dislikes:** My Computer's Refusal To Work For More Than Twenty Minutes, The "Good" Movies Of Oscar Season, The Lack Of Swedish Food In Sweden **Current Favorite Games:** Riddick, Secret Weapons Over Normandy, Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel, Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance (GBA), EyeToy: Play

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.



JOE

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** Cowboy Bebop, Family Guy, Seymour Glass, Dan Barr, Girls With Angel Wings **Dislikes:** Thoreau, Mummy Rot, The Block Button, Games That Don't Let You Kill The Townspeople **Current Favorite Games:** Final Fantasy X-2, One Must Fall: Battlegrounds, Deus Ex: Invisible War, Fatal Frame, Brain Lord, Munchkin (the card game)

Waging a constant war against reality, Joe is always on the lookout for a good escape. Apart from gaming, Joe's primary weapons in this battle are reading, watching anime, and playing D&D, where he is currently a halfling rogue with a tendency to contract debilitating illnesses. Joe plays his games into the ground, mercilessly conquering every sidequest and minigame, and he will continue to do so until real-life has more save points, plot twists, and attack buttons.

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 information and reviews range from 0 to 10, and is similar to school grades. A score of 0 and below is exemplary work. 5 and below is a failing grade. 6-7 is average, 8-9 is good, and 10 is excellent. The Game of the Month is determined by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

10	Outstanding. 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	Superb. 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	Great. 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	Average. 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, and how well it accounts for any flaws such as awkward collision or motion.

SOUND

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

PLAYABILITY

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

ENTERTAINMENT

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

REPLAY VALUE

The longevity of the title.

- High - You're getting popping this game is years from now.
- Moderately High - Good for a long while, but the thrill won't last forever.
- Moderate - Good for a few months or a few weeks at most.
- Moderately Low - After finishing it, there's not much reason to play 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
Max Payne 2:
The Fall Of
Max Payne
pg. 106

PC
Lords Of
EverQuest
pg. 111

HANDHELD
Baldur's
Gate: Dark
Alliance
pg. 114

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 Mario Party

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

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

CG – Computer-Generated graphics

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

fighting – A term we use for games like 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

Herman – The name for any stack of video games taller than you

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

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

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

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

minigame – A small, simple game within a larger one

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

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

N64 – Nintendo 64

NES – Nintendo Entertainment System

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

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

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

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

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

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

PSone – Sony PlayStation

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

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

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

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

SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL

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

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



GAME OF THE MONTH METROID: ZERO MISSION

Metroid: Zero Mission is the ultimate video game remake. Featuring a gracious amount of new content, improved graphics, and sophisticated controls; Zero Mission delivers a whirlwind ride of 8-bit goodness. Fans of the original Metroid will love the extra content, and gamers that never got the chance to experience the original will dance with delight as they find their way to the Mother Brain and beyond. Find out why Metroid: Zero Mission is our Game of the Month on page 113.

PC GAME OF THE MONTH NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK

Dungeons & Dragons fans have gotten a lot of releases in the last year, but the original Neverwinter Nights can easily be called the king of the hill. Hordes of the Underdark is a great expansion to an already excellent game, and gives all of us D&D people so much more in the way of character customization that we can't help but stand up and cheer. Add the fact that Hordes comes with one of the best built-in adventures around, and this is definitely something that no dork should be without. Check it out on page 110.



"...offers up the deepest dungeon crawling experience in the console universe to date."



PLAYSTATION 2

CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EVERQUEST

LIVE IN THEIR WORLD

Sony Online Entertainment's newest console addition to the EverQuest universe is impressive indeed. In fact, the amount of content Champions of Norrath offers is almost too much of a good thing (if that's even possible).

Developed by Snowblind Studios, the company behind the original Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance, Champions of Norrath offers up the deepest dungeon crawling experience in the console universe to date.

Champions' list of features reads like a perfect recipe for success. There are five playable character classes each with a wide variety of customization, including the ability to name your own avatar. All the dungeons in the game, save the city hubs that connect the whole world together, are randomly generated so that each and every time you play the game the experience is different. There are more than 10,000 randomly generated items in the game, and players can even modify them to create their own unique items. The list, as they say, goes on and on.

But perhaps the biggest and best piece of the Champions puzzle is the fact that the game can be played online with friends. Using the Network Adapter, PlayStation 2 gamers can take Champions online to explore and level up their

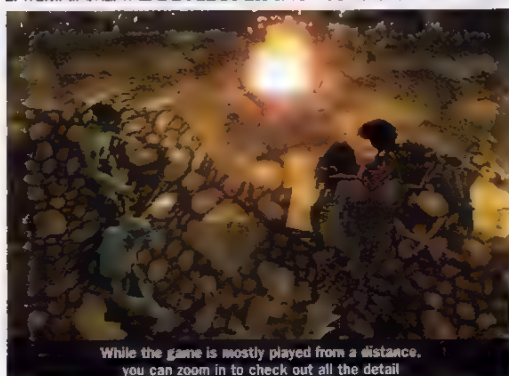
characters. In fact, the game has three different difficulty settings so that you can play it again with your leveled-up avatars.

This title can be played offline as well. In fact, you can insert or remove your character from an adventure any time you want. Play with three friends at Jimmy's house, and when his mom kicks you out for being a deviant, you can download your character to a memory card, and then continue playing with different players online.

All told, Champions of Norrath is a very compelling dungeon crawler. The ability to play online definitely makes it a standout in the sea of recent releases in the genre. However, the game isn't perfect. At times, it bogs down from the sheer amount of content it offers. Sometimes I felt like I almost had too many items to wade through or too many pointless dungeons to clear.

These simple complaints aside, if you love leveling up and searching for the latest and greatest weapon for your characters, you really can't go wrong with Champions of Norrath. It's a solid game that gets even better if you have the ability to go online and set out on adventures with other players from around the world. — ANDY

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** SNOWBLIND STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 2



THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN
T
ESRB
8.75

- **Concept:**
Use the EverQuest license to create an all-encompassing dungeon crawler
- **Graphics:**
The graphics and effects are top-notch in the genre
- **Sound:**
Obviously done by someone who has watched *The Lord Of The Rings* too many times (and that's a good thing)
- **Playability:**
It's all about the hack n' slash, however the battles still manage to be fairly challenging
- **Entertainment:**
If you love dungeons and finding items, you can't go wrong here
- **Replay Value:**
High

SECOND OPINION

With four-player online play, and the original Dark Alliance team fueling the development fires, you'd think that Champions of Norrath would be an easy pick over Dark Alliance II. As it turns out, both games excel in different ways and are equally rewarding. Norrath's greatest strength is its ability to make gamers come back for more. Both the online and single-player components have legs. With random dungeon generation, three difficulty settings (which require higher level characters), and over 10,000 items, there's more than enough content here. While both games play very similarly, Dark Alliance II edges out Norrath with little additions along the lines of dual-wielding and sprinting. Norrath is better suited for players who seek extensive multiplayer, whereas Dark Alliance II is the perfect fit for those who simply want a polished adventure to play through once.

REINER — 8.5

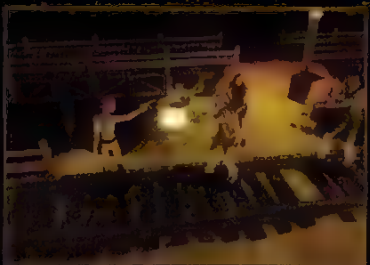
HAMMER. DYNAMITE.

ROCKET LAUNCHER.

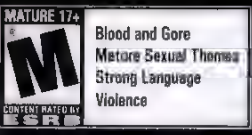
Just a few tools to help rebuild society.



WELCOME TO THE WASTELAND.



Humanity struggles to pick up the pieces after a devastating nuclear war. As a courageous member of the Brotherhood of Steel, your mission is to bring peace to this post-apocalyptic world filled with relentless chaos and radioactive nightmares.



PlayStation 2



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“...Army of Zin reintroduces you to old friends while at the same time making the situation current.”

PLAYSTATION 2

MAXIMO VS. ARMY OF ZIN

SWOON FOR THE OLD SCHOOL

Like going to a high school reunion without the nagging self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, Capcom's *Maximo Vs. Army of Zin* reintroduces you to old friends while at the same time making the situation current. Fond memories of old hack n' slash titles make gamers smile with recollections of long combo strings, the satisfaction of annihilating unending scores of enemies, and limited save points. This sequel brings out these same feelings in gamers of today, while updating the controls and general feel to current standards.

Mixed in with all these great highlights of the old-school action genre are the old-school ways of managing the difficulty level – limiting save points and the number of available continues. Some players will surely find this frustrating, as you'll be required to execute platforming and action exercises with nearly surgical precision if you want to make it to the end. But, to those who will gripe, I think that Zin isn't intended to be played all the way through in one chunk – do a few levels, maybe you'll get frustrated, but you'll surely come back to it later. The game is very linear and the rewards are big enough that you'll feel satisfied after completing a level well.

There were more than a few times that I chucked the controller with disgust and thought, "I hate Maximo. I hate his dumb lack of continues and I'm sick of this level." Then, I'd

go away and come back to it a few hours later. Finishing the level that I had cursed at before, I thought, "I love Maximo. Maximo is great and I want to play it all of the time!" I remember that this is exactly how I felt playing some of my favorite games in the early days of home console gaming. I hate, then I love, then I hate, and I love again.

Zin certainly does take all of the good parts of gaming's past, but how does it compare in other fields to current titles? It's certainly not a graphical powerhouse. The texture maps are pretty low resolution, but the environments generally make up for it with nicely vertical level design and lots of depth. The character designs are a perfect meld of kooky creativity and enemy types that fit in with the landscapes.

Some of the expected trappings of a current title are missing (co-op play for one), but ideas like purchasing lessons to learn new skills are present. The boxers made famous in the first title are back, but are more interesting because the undergarment you choose has an effect on your attributes.

Zin is a solid return to the golden days, but there's a reason that games changed. Fans of frequent save points will be frustrated, but devotees of the old hack n' slash will be satisfied tenfold. – **LISA**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 20



THE BOTTOM LINE



8.25

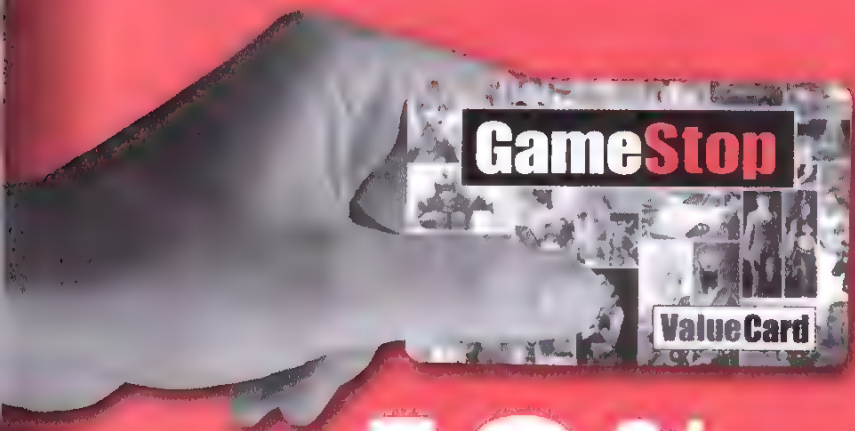
- **Concept:** Bring the old-school mantra of frequent, combo-laden combat with few distractions to the current generation
- **Graphics:** A step behind others of its ilk, but still features nice character designs and animations
- **Sound:** Eh. It's not bad, but it certainly isn't noteworthy either
- **Playability:** Great difficulty ramp-up and nice combos make the whole trip a pleasure
- **Entertainment:** Like days of gaming yore, Zin is satisfying and challenging at the same time
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Maximo is the kind of game mom used to make, assuming that your mother is a middle-aged Japanese man who worked on NES action games. I, for one, am glad that Capcom decided to make another iteration of the franchise. It's a simple principle: great hack n' slash action, gripping platforming, tons of power-ups and hidden goodies, and uniquely humorous deformed character designs. This game executes these concepts brilliantly, forcing you to conquer each level through lightning reflexes and perfect play, sending you back to the beginning of the world if you fail – just like in the old days before infinite continues. I like the new items and character-building features, which lets you keep more attributes from stage to stage, and hands out slightly more continues. Still, I wish as much progress had been made on the visual side of things, as *Maximo Vs. Army of Zin* looks painfully behind the times.

MATT – 8.5

MATH, FOR GAMERS



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"...falls right in line with the series' track record of being simply average."

PLAYSTATION 2
AIRFORCE DELTA STRIKE
 FOX 2 BY ANACONDA 3

As I rocketed through the clouds down into the eye of a tornado, I suddenly realized that my heart was racing, I had been holding my breath for the last 20 seconds, my hands were tensing up, and perspiration was forming above my brow. If this tautness persisted any longer, I'd likely keel over within the next minute or two.

Now, you're probably sitting there wondering why I'm giving a game that I claim to be a white-knuckle thrillride such a mediocre rating. As it turns out, tension-filled moments like the one that I've just described are spread apart by hours of mindless aerial combat that will likely lull you to sleep.

It's not the prettiest game in the skies, either. In fact, saying that it resembles an airborne flaming garbage heap isn't too far off of the mark. Where the assortment of craft show intricate detailing in their designs, the texture of the terrain, and effects accompanying explosions can most accurately be termed pixelated abominations.

To this day, I still find myself floored by the fact that the game has over 130 different playable craft. It's like the Pokémon of the friendly skies! Many of these vessels are similar in design, but the majority of them either control differently or feature different armor types and payload sizes. Old-fashioned World War II craft, new-age stealth

fighters, and even vehicles from Konami's classic arcade shooter Gradius can all be unlocked and piloted. In this regard, the game simply radiates replay.

Given how shoddy the controls in the previous two entries in the series have been, I actually like how this follow-up plays. The Novice control set is a little too tight for my liking, but the Expert scheme proves to be very precise and intelligently mapped to the controller.

Since this story is set in the future, you never really know what to expect from the missions. Mind-numbingly dull dogfighting is usually involved, but you may find yourself combating a battle station in outer space, locating the weak spot on massive ground vehicles, or escorting a train across a sea of elevated tracks. To rattle gamers' nerves and generate a false sense of excitement, NPC characters are constantly yelling commands in your direction. Constantly is the key word here. They never shut up! It drove me nuts!

Had the enemy AI been better, the speed not so sluggish, and the combat a little bit more on the arcade side like Secret Weapons Over Normandy, this game could have been something special. For the third consecutive time, however, it falls right in line with the series' track record of being simply average. — REINER

THE BOTTOM LINE
T **7**

■ **Concept:**
 Exhilarating dogfighting with science fiction themes and over 100 playable craft

■ **Graphics:**
 The aircraft modeling is respectable, but nothing else really jumps off of the screen

■ **Sound:**
 For the first time I find myself saying that there's too much spoken dialogue. Just shut up and let me fly!

■ **Playability:**
 Decent controls, tons of missions, and great variance in planes round out an enjoyable gameplay package

■ **Entertainment:**
 Loaded with noteworthy bonuses

■ **Replay Value:**
 Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Although I often speak of my undying love for the Super Nintendo, saying that a title reminds me of an SNES game is not always a compliment. Airforce Delta Strike, while not a terrible game, reminds me of some of the mediocre flight sims that appeared on my cherished system. Much like those forgotten games, Delta Strike lacks any sensation of speed whatsoever, and while the graphics are superior to the SNES, they are still far from impressive. The skies of Delta Strike have an overall blandness that's inexcusable in this day and age, but what irked me more was what came between missions. Let's have no more generic anime characters jabbering endlessly between flights, shall we? This title does have some creative missions to fulfill once it gets going, and I don't want to have to spend five minutes skipping text to get to them.

JEREMY — 7



■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT STUDIOS
 ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 3



"Hmmm...That area up ahead looks promising."



"They must be eating their Wheaties!"

WORLD

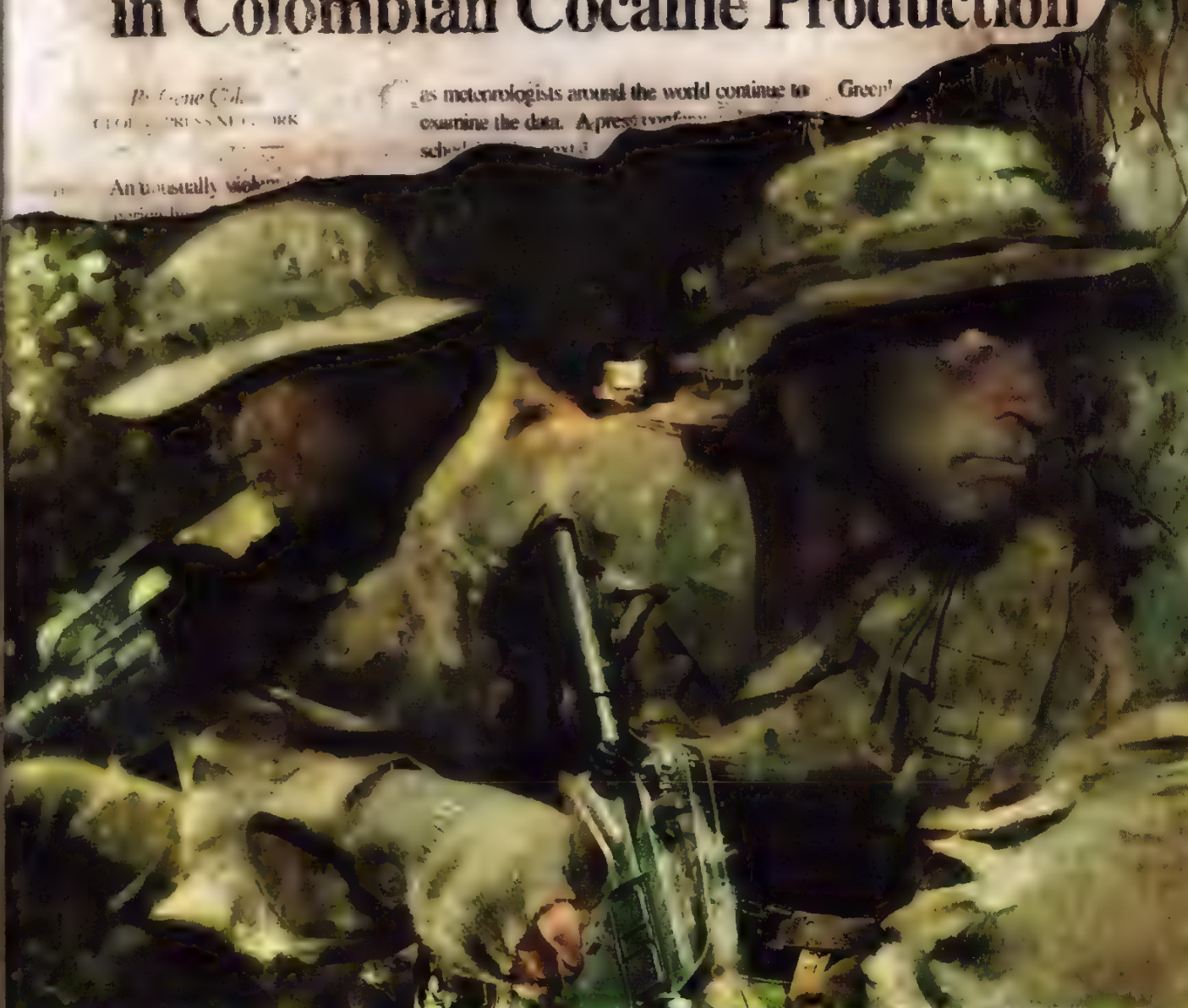
Bad Weather Credited for Sudden Drop in Colombian Cocaine Production

By Gene Col...
COLUMBIAN PRESS NEW YORK

...as meteorologists around the world continue to... Green...
examine the data. A press conference...
scheduled for next...

An unusually violent...
season has...

FREEDOM ISN'T FREE



EXPERIENCE NEW JUNGLE WARFARE AS THE GHOSTS RESTORE CUBA'S PEACE AND TAKE DOWN AN EVIL COLOMBIAN DRUG CARTEL.



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★ Tom Clancy's
**GHOST
RECON**
JUNGLE STORM



PlayStation.2



UBISOFT

"...a much deeper play with a higher level of interaction."



PLAYSTATION 2 UNLIMITED ENABLED

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

+1 SEQUEL

Approximately eight hours into this quest, I ran into a merchant who had an assortment of weapon enhancement gems for sale. After perusing his inventory, I decided to spend my hard-earned gold on a Moonstone and a Ruby. Applying both of these jewels to my reliable blade resulted in the creation of a +1 Fine Stirge's Bastard Sword. Curious as to how my concoction would fare, I returned to the battlefield with haste. In no time flat, I confronted a goblin rider mounted atop a wolf. Just as I engaged this foe, I noticed that fluids began oozing from my sword. With much bewilderment, I suddenly realized that it was bleeding...and not just a droplet or two, either. It was gushing buckets of blood. With each swing that this steel abomination would make, a brilliant crimson trail would follow. It was at this point that I mirthfully marched through the remainder of this game with an ear-to-ear smile on my face.

This is just a small taste of the role-playing bliss that can be found in Dark Alliance II. With roughly 90 levels spread across four expansive acts, this sequel absolutely shatters any fears that you may have had about this game being as short as the original. Although the development responsibilities have changed hands from Snowblind Studios to Black Isle Studios, significant enhancements accompany every inch of this game's coding.

Characters can now dual-wield armaments, sprint, and



THE BOTTOM LINE



8.5

- **Concept:** A straight-up sequel with the same great hack n' slash play and tons of new features
- **Graphics:** Same quality...yet still beautiful by today's standards. The lighting effects, water, and detail in the models are very impressive
- **Sound:** Not much of a soundtrack, but it does a nice job of creating realistic ambience for its stages
- **Playability:** The high level of interaction really brings you in and makes you want to tinker with everything
- **Entertainment:** Lacking online play, but longer and more dynamic than the original
- **Replay Value:** High

switch between three fighting styles on the fly. Missions are introduced in a non-linear fashion, with players having two to three path choices at any given time. Item customization can be tapped to create an unbelievable number of unique weapons and armors. Black Isle also did a great job of diversifying the experience that players have. You never spend too much time in the same environment, and different enemy types are interspersed with great frequency.

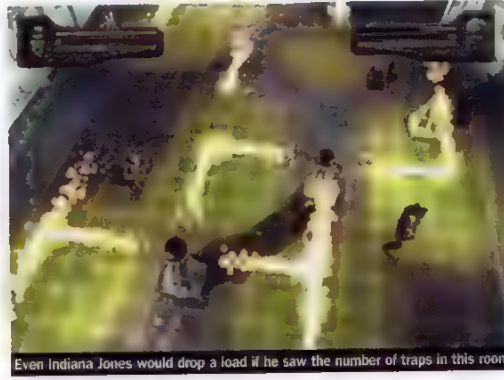
If anything, this is a much deeper play with a higher level of interaction. As notable as these improvements may be, I don't agree with all of the changes that Black Isle has instituted. In the original game's co-op play, the player who defeated a foe would get 60 percent of the experience from a kill. The other player would get 40 percent. Whoever touched the gold that dropped got it. This time round, both gold and EXP are equally divided. Because of this, the game no longer has such a high level of competitiveness amongst players. I was also hoping that the camera system would have been upgraded. Every minute or so, I found myself rotating the camera to reveal blanketed corners.

As much as I enjoy the online play and random dungeon generation in Champions of Norrath, Dark Alliance II's quest has a better flow to it, the stages show more variety, and the hack n' slash gameplay is more dynamic. That said, Dark Alliance II is the better playing game of the two, but it doesn't have the longevity of its rival. — REINER

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/ROLE-PLAYING ■ **PUBLISHER** INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** BLACK ISLE STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 20



Lacing magic to weapons produces spectacular results



Even Indiana Jones would drop a load if he saw the number of traps in this room

SECOND OPINION

With all of the dungeon crawlers coming out of the woodwork at the same time you would think that the quality of at least one of them would be poor, but nothing could be further from the truth. Sure, Dark Alliance II looks a little dated, but that doesn't stop the game from delivering top-notch action. It's so good, in fact, that I'd be hard-pressed to pick between this title and Champions of Norrath, as they both deliver great gameplay. Obviously, the lack of online action hurts this one, but the item creation angle in Alliance II is so absolutely brilliant, it would be a shame to miss it. In the end, I have to give the slight nod to Champions of Norrath, but if you don't plan to adventure online I would give Alliance II a serious look.

ANDY — 8.5



PLAYSTATION 2 UNLIMITED ENABLED

FALLOUT: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL

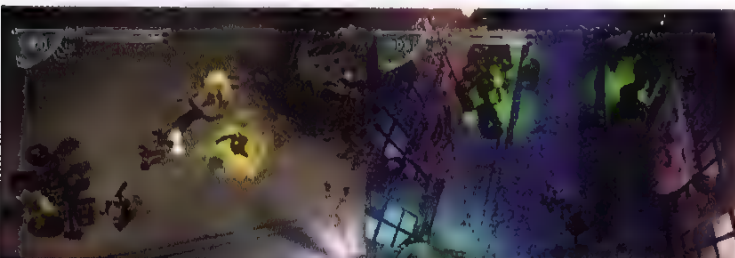
NUCLEAR WONDERLAND

What we're witnessing here, people, is the merging of two separate groups of people: Fallout fans who will slit the throats of those who betray their franchise, and action/role-playing fans who would rather slay radioactive spiders than dragons (at least once in a while).

I have good news for both camps. Fallout devotees can breathe again, knowing that the transition to top-down action preserved some of the most noteworthy aspects of the franchise. Like the strategy entries in the series, Brotherhood of Steel features hysterical, well-done voice acting and post-apocalyptic humor of that very particular breed popularized by the earlier games.

What the rest of us should know is that this is an entirely adequate action game, with a touch of role-playing about a post-apocalyptic Earth. During your journey, you'll hack n' slash your way through an army of foes, defeat a few interesting bosses, and allocate points towards customizing your hero. Other notable features include a two-player mode and the nice implementation of having your equipped armor and weapons appear clearly on your character.

Using the Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance engine, Brotherhood of Steel is certainly a respectable entry into this genre, and is funny enough to bring a few holdouts into its fold. — **LISA**



You'll often be facing a handful of enemies at once

The areas are varied and show some really nice lighting effects



The water is particularly nifty

Characters are funny and believable

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** INTERPLAY/VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
 ■ **DEVELOPER** INTERPLAY ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 13

THE BOTTOM LINE



8

■ **Concept:**
 Bring the Fallout of yore into an overhead action game

■ **Graphics:**
 I have a sneaking suspicion that they're fabulous, but the top-down view doesn't really let you get in there for a good look

■ **Sound:**
 No soundtrack to speak of, but great voice acting and useful enemy sounds

■ **Playability:**
 The controls are easy and straightforward

■ **Entertainment:**
 Brotherhood of Steel is strangely engrossing despite its merely average show in many regards

■ **Replay Value:**
 Moderate

SECOND OPINION

It's nice to see a sci-fi themed dungeon crawler every once and a while. This style of game typically has a fantasy setting, so the change in motif instantly sets Fallout apart from the rest of the genre. But does that mean it's one of the best titles of its type? Well, no; but it ain't bad, either. With its tongue-in-cheek humor and sharp graphics, Fallout has a great mood to it, and the gameplay is sound, if a little shallow. Ranged combat is a tad painful until you level up your shooting skills. The quest is a bit too linear to have much replay value, but the three playable characters each develop uniquely later in the game, adding a bit more reason to pick it up a second time. Much like the '50s sci-fi films on which it is based, Fallout will only appeal to a specific audience, but those who pick it up will enjoy its camp appeal.

JEREMY — 8

REVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2

WINNING ELEVEN 7

HELLO, TWINKLE TOES

This second American title absolutely proves that Winning Eleven 7 is the greatest soccer game in the world. It's not perfect, but it easily bests EA Sports' FIFA. I love the feeling of control. I can volley pass to a teammate when the ball's in mid-air, as soon as I hit the X button, I can intercept an opponent's pass in open space and counter-attack with a roaring run down the flank without worrying whether my player will actually pick up the ball. The game is flexible enough that you can concentrate on being as creative with attacks as you want to be. The new R3

function (last year's manual passing) lets you place the ball with the precision of a Beckham. With some of the deke maneuvers alone, I felt I was wearing Adidas made of silk — and that was just with the normal dribbling! The one gripe I have here is that I wish more of the special moves were centralized on the right analog stick.

I like the CPU's aggressive play in the middle of the field. However, I would like to see more specific styles from the CPU. South Americans should play with their distinctive creative flair instead acting like every other team.

Whether you're a would-be manager who wants unparalleled depth in the control of their squad or a striker with the skills to dominate, this is your game. — **KATO**

THE BOTTOM LINE



9.25

■ **Concept:**
 Keeps the same feeling of freedom while offering more moves and franchise depth

■ **Graphics:**
 This game looks extremely sharp, and it runs myriad animations without missing a beat

■ **Sound:**
 The announcers are chatty, but it turns repetitive quite quickly

■ **Playability:**
 When the ball is in the air, your players respond to you every whim. The timing is perfect.

■ **Entertainment:**
 Winning Eleven remains the best soccer game there is — period.

■ **Replay Value:**
 Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Winning Eleven doesn't necessarily have the flashy presentation of FIFA, but on the field it's nearly flawless, and easily the best playing soccer game in recent memory. The finesse of control, intelligence of the players, and strategies that can be applied are truly remarkable. There's a reason why Japan shuts down on the day of this game's release. Hopefully, America will embrace it as well.

REINER — 9.25

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER SPORTS ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
 ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 2

REVIEWS



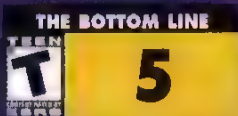
PLAYSTATION 2

LOWRIDER

ROLLIN' DOWN THE STREET IN MY 6-4

I'm not afraid to say it: Lowrider is the best car-dancing game ever. It's not one of the best games ever, but you must give it props for a unique premise. Yes, this (Japanese-developed) Jaleco title explores the California phenomenon of lowrider cars. For the few of you not familiar, lowriders are modified classic cars equipped with hydraulic suspension systems that allow drivers to make their vehicle hop with switches (for further information, see any number of early '90s gangsta rap videos).

And hop you will! Unfortunately, that's about all you'll do. The gameplay uses a timed-button-press mechanic à la PaRappa the Rapper, although it's not nearly as complex or fun. Just press triangle for front hop, X for back hops, and so on. Sometimes, you'll need to alternate buttons for front-to-backs or side-to-sides or bed dances. Despite the mind-numbing repetition, I was compelled to continue, if only because I became quite obsessed with buying new decals and accessories for my lowrider. For this reason, I actually enjoyed this game more than any I've ever scored a five out of ten. But that doesn't mean it's worth four of your tens. — **MATT**



- **Concept:** Make a car jump up and down through the use of hydraulics.
- **Graphics:** The cars are pretty nice, but the cookie-cutter crowds are a bit cheesy.
- **Sound:** "Get Low" by Lil' Jon & the East Side Boyz and little else.
- **Playability:** Harder than you would expect, given the simple controls.
- **Entertainment:** Simple, repetitive, and strangely addictive — like picking at a scab.
- **Replay Value:** Low.

SECOND OPINION

Funny as it sounds, this is a car-based game where you don't drive. Lowrider does allow you to bling up your ride to the point where Funkmaster Flex would drive it, but he'd have to do so outside this title — because you don't drive. The downright stupid gameplay is actually far, far worse than the average car customization. Ouch.

ADAM — 4

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** JALECO ■ **DEVELOPER** PCCW JAPAN ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 24



PLAYSTATION 2

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

THE RUNT OF THE LITTER

Bringing PC titles to the PS2 never seems to work out quite right; it's to developer Remedy's credit that The Fall of Max Payne plays as well as it does, especially considering the graphical sophistication of the title. It's no secret that this doesn't look as good as its bigger brothers, but it can certainly stand up to against anything else on this console.

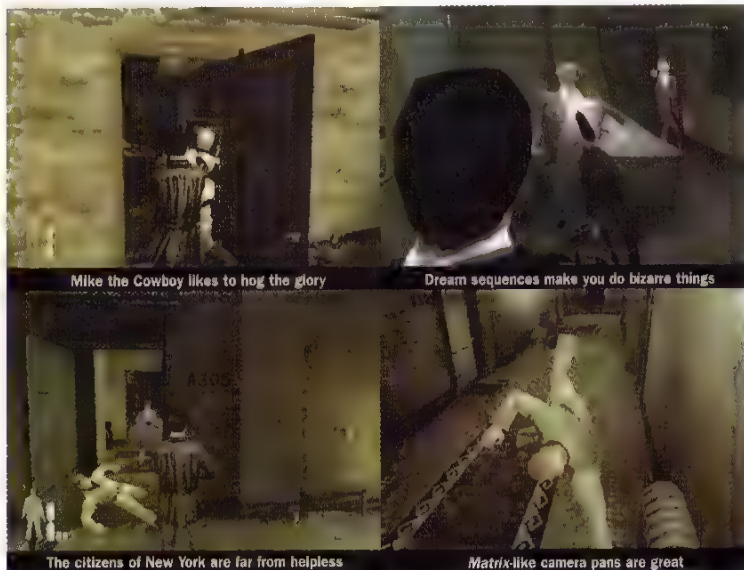
Though the title does maintain a stable number of frames per second, it's just not a very high number. The only times it really felt smooth were when I was in a small room with no other characters present — it was a fairly bumpy ride pretty much everywhere else. Tack on the abysmal load times and three-menu-deep saves, and you've got a significantly slower play than can be found elsewhere.

On the plus side, Max 2 is still an excellent game. All the content is still there, and when you're in the zone capping thugs, you tend not to notice a dropped frame here and there. Also, the control is about as good as it gets — rarely did I yearn for the precision of my mouse.

If you have access to one of the more powerful platforms, keep in mind that Max Payne 2 is a much smoother experience when backed up by some high-end electronics; but, if that's not an option, by all means get this. — **ADAM**



- **Concept:** Hey, let's pretend that the PS2 can run Max Payne!
- **Graphics:** There is no comparison to the Xbox version, much less the PC.
- **Sound:** Freakin' interstellar. Some of the best sound design around.
- **Playability:** Holding down R3 to speed up turning is a great addition that I'd like to see copied in every single title with analog view control.
- **Entertainment:** Still worth playing, but definitely of a lesser caliber than the other two releases.
- **Replay Value:** Moderate.



SECOND OPINION

Playing this port Max Payne 2 is like seeing a picture of Biggie Smalls wearing Naomi Campbell's bikini — you've got to appreciate the effort that went into fitting everything in, but the results are not pretty. Rockstar claimed that there would be more effort going into the PlayStation 2 port this time around. I only wish I could claim that the work paid off. Yes, it looks better than the horrid PS2 version of the original, but still does not come close to reaching the level of excellence achieved on the PC or Xbox. The primary flaws are mostly visual, everything from the poor water and explosive effects to the dreary texturing to the weird, angular character models. Also, the choppy framerate really diminishes the thrill of the jump-and-shoot action. Even worse, the game loads too often and too slowly. Sorry, Max, but maybe you weren't meant for PlayStation 2.

MATT — 7.5

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES ■ **DEVELOPER** REMEDY ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 3

PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: OPERATION SURMA

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI
 ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 9



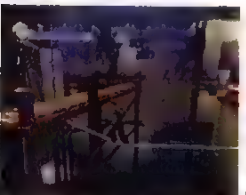
While it's not quite a classic, it's good to finally see some solid new entries into the stealth/action genre. It lacks the realism of Splinter Cell and the intensity of Metal Gear Solid, but Operation Surma makes up for it with

a good story, solid controls and graphics, and tons of interesting gadgets. Oh, and the Mission Impossible theme is still one of the coolest songs ever. The PS2 version lacks the polish of its Xbox cousin, but it's still evident that this may be the start of the next big stealth/action series. — **JEREMY**

T 7.75

CARMEN SANDIEGO: THE SECRET OF THE STOLEN DRUMS

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** BAM ENTERTAINMENT
 ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 12



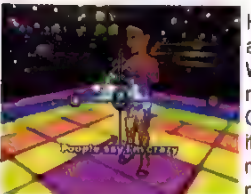
Okay boys and girls, it's time to find Carmen Sandiego! The globetrotting education wonderland is putting gamers through one of the most bland platforming experiences of their lives. I have my complaints with the game,

but the overwhelming feeling I have while tracking the wily Sandiego around the world is simple boredom. I'm not angry; I'm not cursing the screen (especially after I figured out the game's somewhat quirky stealth); I'm just disinterested. — **LISA**

E 6

AMERICAN IDOL

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS USA
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11



How bad are you expecting an American Idol game to be? Well, strangely enough, it's not nearly that heinous. Basically, Codemasters' first game using its Fox TV license is nothing more than an unpolished, but promising, rhythm title. The

judge commentary is repetitive, the clothing options aren't as varied as I'd like, and it only takes a few hours to become America's Idol. In addition, the rewards aren't that great; but the game is solid and the song list isn't as unspeakably painful as one would guess. It's not awesome, but it's also not without merit. — **LISA**

E 6.25

LUPIN THE 3RD: TREASURE OF THE SCORCER KING

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** BANDAI
 ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10



Lupin's video game adventure is getting two bonus points just for having a cool, interesting license. The stealth gameplay is repetitive and unoriginal, sucking all of the cheeky fun from the Japanese franchise.

Graphically, I suppose that the game is trying to replicate the stylish minimalism of the show, but it comes off as, at best, bland. This is a well below-average stealth/action snoozefest. — **LISA**

T 5.75

MONSTER 4X4: MASTERS OF METAL

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
 ■ **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 25



In my imagination, driving a monster truck is the ultimate rush of power, as you heedlessly crush all cars and obstacles in your way. Unfortunately, in Monster 4X4,

the rigs get hung up on everything from pylons to small picket fences, tip easily, and generally bounce all over the damn place like superballs. Basically, it's just like driving a crappy car except it's got big funny wheels and is hard to control. Given the nice graphics and fairly extensive career mode, I suspect some real care went into this game, so I'll acknowledge that the handling is probably "accurate." However, accurate ≠ fun. But, if you're the type of person who gives a rat's butt about the realistic replication of monster truck vehicle physics, this is your bag, baby! — **MATT**

E 6.5

EVERQUEST ONLINE ADVENTURES: FRONTIERS

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
 ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17



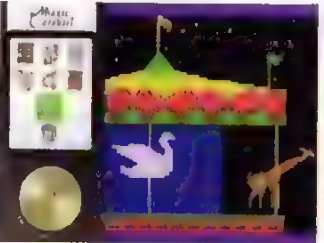
This incarnation of the online legend and opiate EverQuest is really just another hit for current addicts. If you haven't already played EQOA, Frontiers is no reason to start. The environments are graphically tedious, the targeting system is downright baffling, and unless you have a USB keyboard, you'll spend so much time navigating the cursor around to enter text, you'll think you should be getting experience points for it. But if you're already an EQOA junkie, there is plenty to enjoy. The graphics have been tweaked, new creatures and items added, plus a new race and class. Now you can finally fulfill that childhood dream

of becoming an Ogre Alchemist! — **JOE**

T 7.5

INTELLIVISION LIVES

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** CRAVE
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 20



Intellivision Lives is a neat compilation that offers over 60 different old-school Intellivision games (this even includes some unreleased titles

like Hardhat, Brickout, and Deep Pockets). While it is definitely fun to play some of these classics again and watch the programmer interviews, many don't quite play the way they should since you don't have the keypad, which was one of the system's highlights. Collectors will get a kick out of it for some of the extra data, but the games don't quite have the same luster as they do when you play it on an actual unit (although Astrosmash is much easier to play using the PS2 d-pad). — **ANDY**

E 5

REVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2

DOT HACK VOL. 4: QUARANTINE

FINALLY, THE END

To be blunt, those of you who have watched the show, re-watched the DVDs, and played through the first three chapters in this saga will buy this game no matter what I have to say about it. I don't blame you for doing so, if I had put in the 200-plus hours required to get all there is to get out of "The World's" world, I would do exactly the same — you owe it to yourselves to finish the task and find out what happens.

But, as is surely no surprise to anyone, there isn't anything in this final chapter that will convince those who have held out thus far to start up the journey. Surely, the pace of this game is quicker and more to the point than the earlier ones, but it still has the same problems as volumes one through three. Namely, camera controls that weren't acceptable with the first release, sub-par graphics and dialogue that's more stilted than an episode of *All My Children* with "the part of Mercedes will be played by people filling in every one of the roles.

I want to give this game bonus points for being an interesting experiment. Personally, I don't think that it was one that was worth trying. Hopefully, down the line, someone else can give us a similarly high concept RPG with a little more meat on its bones. — **LISA**

THE BOTTOM LINE

T 7.5

■ **Concept:** Finish the four-part saga started in February by bringing up all the loose threads.

■ **Graphics:** Same as in previous volumes, which in my opinion, means that they aren't that great.

■ **Sound:** Has no one in this game gone through puberty? The voice acting makes everyone sound like they're eight years old.

■ **Playability:** Same icky camera, same somewhat uncomfortable menu structure.

■ **Entertainment:** For those who have held out, this game is a great

■ **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

SECOND OPINION

Inventive dialogue. Intuitive gameplay. Acceptable graphics. The fourth and final installment in the Dot Hack series has none of these things. But, if you've played the first three, you aren't going to wise up and call it quits now, so while you're enjoying the thrilling conclusion, I'll be over here, doing fun things.

JOE — 6.5

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** BANDAI
 ■ **DEVELOPER** BANDAI ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 13



“...a faint echo of what you have come to know and love.”



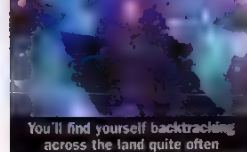
Rather than leveling up, players are awarded one attribute bonus at the end of each stage



When you fill up the bucket three times, a new area will open



In true Final Fantasy fashion, the boss battles are epic



You'll find yourself backtracking across the land quite often

GAMECUBE UNLIMITED ENABLED

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

NINTENDO'S BUCKET OF TRUTH

As renowned as the Final Fantasy series has become over the years, the release of Crystal Chronicles brings with it an air of unfamiliarity. Although many of its elements tie into the greater Final Fantasy universe, this is but a faint echo of what you have come to know and love.

While it can be argued that this is a new direction for the series, and therefore shouldn't be put on the same level as the other games, fans have come to expect the best from Final Fantasy, and with each passing release, Square has delivered. Crystal Chronicles may break new ground, but it lacks the creativity and passion of its role-playing brethren.

As stylish as the character designs may be, they are completely void of personality. The story is just as ambiguous. Never once did I feel attached to my character, nor did I care what twists or turns the plot would make. The Final Fantasy games are renowned for storytelling, but it seems like an afterthought in Crystal Chronicles. Cinematic flair is also noticeably absent.

The gameplay is just as careless and jagged. While the quest can be played single-player, it's meant to be tackled by a group of people (preferably four). Since each player utilizes menu screens often, Square and Game Designer's Studio decided that you could only play multiplayer with a Game Boy Advance attached to the GameCube. Hence, all menu management is done on the GBA screen, and the action on the TV is unaffected.

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO/SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** GAME DESIGNER'S STUDIO ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 9



"All right, who's on bucket carrying duty?"

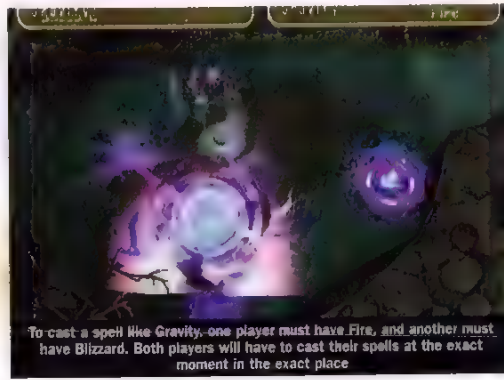
In theory, this is a just solution. As it turns out, though, I found it to be more detrimental to the quest than anything.

When a player accesses the GBA, their character on the TV cannot be controlled. Not only does this leave them open to attack, it more or less halts any progress that the group can make. So basically, you still find yourself sitting around waiting for your buddy to make preparations, but instead, you're doing it with a controller that has fewer buttons and dying batteries.

To make matters worse, players must also keep an eye on a bucket. To prevent characters from scattering and trying to run in different directions, the bucket emits a field of energy that covers roughly 80 percent of the screen. If you go outside of this barrier, you'll take damage. So you basically must stay huddled together as one person carries the bucket throughout a stage. Without question, this is one of the stupidest ideas in the history of video games.

When it comes to the basics of gameplay, the combat is respectable, but by no means great. I really like the timing-based combo system that accompanies both magic and general hack n' slash, yet I absolutely despise losing all of my magic with each new area that I enter. Hence, classes are not defined, and you never really get the impression that your character is growing in power.

There's little here that truly excites. Crystal Chronicles plays like an experiment gone awry, and is unfit to bear the sacrosanct Final Fantasy name. — **REINER**



To cast a spell like Gravity, one player must have Fire, and another must have Blizzard. Both players will have to cast their spells at the exact moment in the exact place



■ **Concept:**
A hack n' slash with inventive, yet highly aggravating GBA-based multiplayer connectivity, and a worthless bucket

■ **Graphics:**
Stylish character designs, gorgeous particle effects, and awesome boss designs

■ **Sound:**
Not the familiar Final Fantasy melodies, but memorable nonetheless

■ **Playability:**
Steers away from button mashing with timing-based chains, manual spell aiming, and multi-person combos

■ **Entertainment:**
A cookie cutter adventure with a lackluster story, poor character growth, and frustrating play

■ **Replay Value:**
Moderately High

SECOND OPINION

Crystal Chronicles is here to remind us that every so often, Square Enix actually puts out an average game. It seems like for every thing FF: CC does right, it does two things wrong. Combining spells with your teammates is awesome, but half the time it's less effective than two individual castings, and you lose all of your magic between areas. The effects and character models are cool, but downtimes really drag and many cutscenes look awfully similar. The worst part, though, is that character advancement is the slowest I've ever seen. Beat a boss and get your choice of +1 to one of your stats! Thrilling. There is certainly some enjoyment to be had here, but it's sprinkled somewhat thinly among all of the lame and boring parts. On a console with a lot of great four-player titles, Crystal Chronicles does very little to distinguish itself.

ADAM — 7

MONSTER 4X4: MASTERS OF METAL

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
 ■ **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 25



This game is a lot like riding with a mechanical bull: sort of fun, sort of painful, with absolutely no sense of control. The havoc created by huge trucks with clumsy handling is fun for while, but the controls are so awkward that you'll spend most of each race either upside down or missing crucial parts of your vehicle – like wheels. It all gets old pretty quickly in single player, but the game also has multiplayer, so you can round up some friends (if you've got them), grow out those mullets, and just watch each other fumble around in roaring death machines. Then again, that would even be fun without the game. – **JOE**

E 6.5

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28



This has been out forever, but we were unable to previously review the GameCube version of THUG. In the interest of giving Nintendo fans their due, let me say that this version has all of the things I both loved and hated about Underground – the awesome levels, the annoying story, the untouchable gameplay, and the inconsistently structured level goals. It's also probably my least preferred way to play Tony Hawk, if only because it makes me curse the GC's tiny d-pad and weird, oversized buttons. Also, unlike most popular GameCube titles, it does not feature any online play. That's a joke, people. – **MATT**

T 8.75

R: RACING EVOLUTION

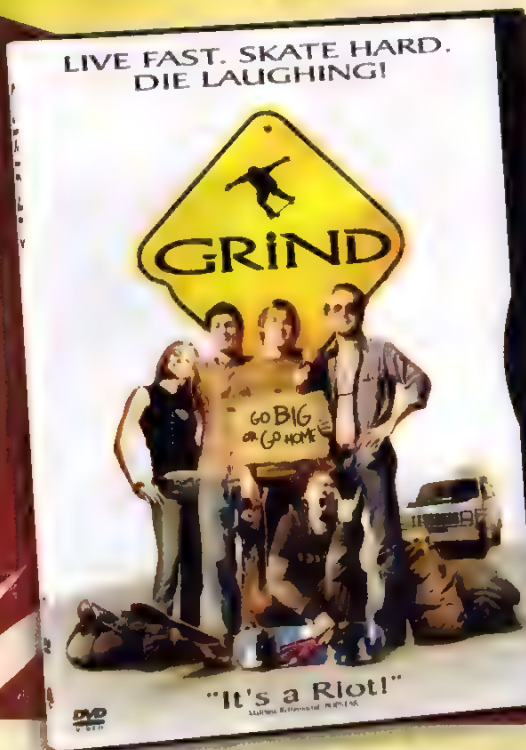
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
 ■ **PUBLISHER** NAMCO ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 9



I really do appreciate Namco's desire to infuse the racing genre with a little more soul, a little more humanity. The problem is that I can't get myself to really like Rena; she really comes off as a vapid, mindless character. Since the focus of the game is supposed to be Rena, the racer, the cars and tracks are secondary. During the story mode you will rarely revisit the rides or courses of past chapters. In addition, the racing physics do nothing to redeem the title, as it never really feels like you're going the displayed speeds. On the plus side, the ambient chatter between racers is a nice touch that spurred me on, though. – **LISA**

T 7

EAT. SLEEP. SKATE. LAUGH.



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"...this port admirably recreates the experience on the Xbox."

XBOX

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

BACK INTO MAX'S NIGHTMARE

The original Max Payne opened up a new frontier of shooter gameplay. By allowing players to slow the passage of time while performing acrobatic John Woo-inspired gun maneuvers, the game set a new standard in the genre. You won't have to think too long to come up with a list of titles that took a lot of inspiration from Remedy's innovations, and, as a result, Max Payne 2 doesn't offer the same shock of the new that its predecessor did.

In addition, Remedy hasn't really added much to the formula – this is a sequel in the purest sense, meaning that it essentially gives you more of the same. For those of you that had high expectations for Max 2, this might be a disappointment. However, I would argue that, in this case, I'm very content with Remedy's decision. In my mind, trying to make Max Payne a more complex experience would only diminish the very thing that makes it so great to begin with. I mean, do you really want your sublime violence watered-down with puzzle-solving or exploration? No thanks; there are plenty of other games that provide that – but few that make gunplay as gripping as this title does.

Another big draw of the series is the film-noir, graphic novel-inspired cutscenes. This time around, the story is even more mysterious, cutting back and forth in time as Max tries to escape his fate as an accused murderer. While I've heard some complain that the plot is a bit overblown

and intrusive, I actually appreciate the effort that went into creating a compelling story and finely drawn characters. Over the top? Sure, but I'll take it over the usual "let's get the terrorists" tripe that usually passes for writing in a video game. I especially like taking control of Mona's character and experiencing the events I'd just played as Max from a different perspective, à la *Pulp Fiction*.

While it's clear that Max Payne 2 is an experience tailored for a PC keyboard-and-mouse configuration, this port admirably recreates the experience on the Xbox. Obviously, the developers realized that your targeting could never be as precise with an analog stick, so they helpfully added an unobtrusive auto-aim feature, which translates into a frustration-free experience. Sadly, the graphics had to take a bit of a hit to run on Xbox. However, the PC version was absolutely stunning, so in its reduced form, Max Payne 2 is now merely a really, really good-looking game. Think of it like this: It was like Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, now it's like that cute girl that waited on you at Applebee's. Either way, she's way out of your league and you should be happy that she's even talking to you.

A few might complain that the journey is all too brief, and it is. Still, I wouldn't trade my time with Max Payne 2 for anything. – **MATT**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** REMEDY ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 26



This sniping sequence is memorable



You'll get to play as Mona for a time



The funhouse level is sick!



The animated cutscenes show a cinematic flair...



...but can't top the racy graphic-novel interludes! Hotsa, hotsa!

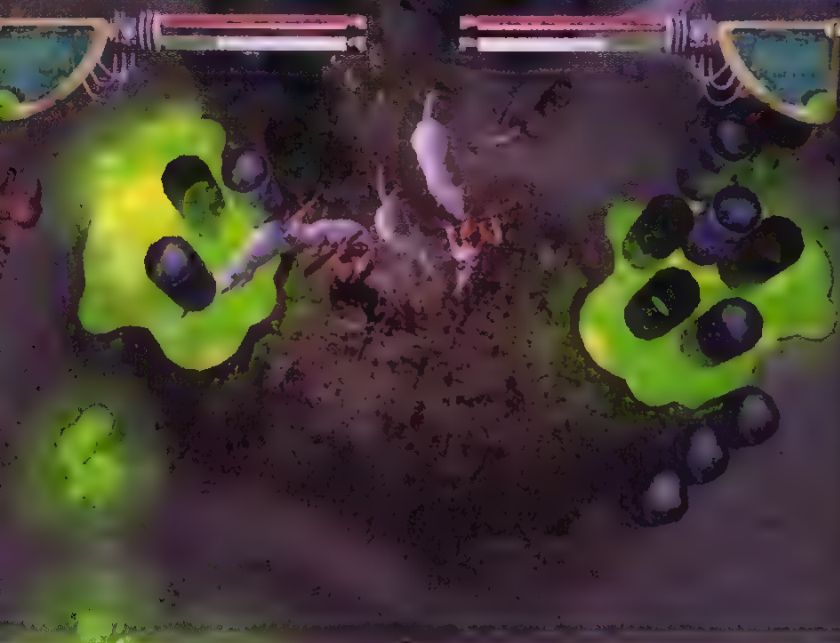
THE BOTTOM LINE
 MATURE
8.75

- **Concept:** Remedy returns to the dark, twisted saga of the coolest detective in video games
- **Graphics:** Sacrifices have been made in the explosive effects and texturing, but it looks remarkably like the PC version
- **Sound:** Great voiceovers, a gothic soundtrack, and ambient sounds abound
- **Playability:** Does a good job of tweaking the gameplay for the console
- **Entertainment:** Brilliant in its simplicity, Max Payne 2 is pure shooter excitement
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Without a doubt, *The Fall of Max Payne* on PC was one of the most polished games I've ever played. What comes as a surprise to me is the fact that this Xbox version, though slightly downgraded graphically from its forerunner, is a freakin' incredible title. The control is delightful by default, and you can even re-map the buttons. Barring these obvious differences and a slight auto-aim option in this release, it is identical in every way to its larger cousin. I honestly would not have known that this is a PC-to-console port if I had played this first – it feels like the Xbox has been Max's house from the beginning. Nothing at all has been cut; Max is taking out the trash in his full glory. I can recommend with a clear conscience that even if you have a PC that can run Max Payne 2, getting this instead would not be a waste of money.

ADAM – 9



"I never thought I would have an excuse to use the phrase "post-apocalyptic charm."

XBOX UNLIMITED ENABLED

FALLOUT: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL

TOXIC AVENGING

Despite what you might think, you have not played this game before. You've played third-person action games like this one, with the same co-op madness, using the exact same engine. But you haven't played one with the acrid, radioactive flavor of *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel*.

Part of what sets *Brotherhood* apart is the way it carries the same trademark ironic humor as the PC *Fallout* games. It has some downright hilarious moments, especially in the dialogue options. You can finally say everything you've ever wanted to say to that whiny mayor who always sends you on rat-killing quests, including all the F-bombs. The townspeople are particularly funny in their reactions, and though the voice actors aren't especially good, they sound appropriate. It gives the game a tongue-in-cheek kind of feel that is hard to resist. I never thought I would have an excuse to use the phrase "post-apocalyptic charm," but this game's got it.

The original attribute system for *Fallout* makes a smooth transition into this type of game, allowing you to spend points to customize your character and increase stats. You can improve things like your ranged attack radius, or gain a canine companion to travel with you across the wasteland. Though it is important how you expend your points, it doesn't affect gameplay to the same degree that it did in the original games.

There is just less focus on strategy and more on smashing. Because the game uses the same engine as *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, there is nothing really innovative in the presentation. The graphics look great, but I found myself wishing for a zoom button on more than one occasion. It feels like you're close enough to the action to control your character, but too far away to really take in the details.

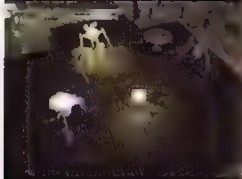
Unless you have the difficulty set to "pansy," you'll find yourself dying a lot. For me, it never got to the point where I was frustrated, though. It was more like the game was being a kindly father figure, saying "Now son, if you attack a horde of radioactive spiders head on, I will have to punish you." I learned my lesson, tried a different method, and moved on. It should be noted, though, that the boss battles are less like a fatherly lecture and more like being bent over the proverbial knee. They are genuinely difficult, but not impossible.

The game doesn't have any glaring failures, which is always good. And it made me laugh, which isn't necessarily bad. However, it is essentially nothing more than adequate on every other level. If you want to play a good chop-and-blast action game, but aren't really into dungeon crawling, this is worth a look. Or even if you're just really into the whole two-headed cow thing. — **JOE**

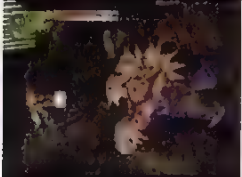
■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** INTERPLAY/VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **DEVELOPER** INTERPLAY
 ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 5



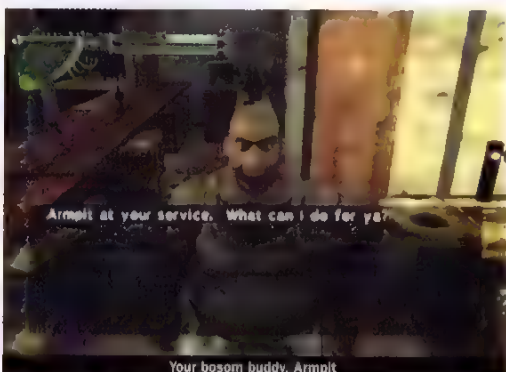
Get used to fighting scorpions of all shapes and sizes



When kitchen appliances attack!



Domesticated pets of the future



Your bosom buddy, Armpit



Twice the cud means twice the fun!

THE BOTTOM LINE



- **Concept:** *Baldur's Gate* minus bugbears, plus a lot of scorpions
- **Graphics:** Those water effects look oddly familiar. Don't go running around in puddles this time, though. It's acid. And it burns
- **Sound:** Some background music would have helped to set the tone, and it gets annoying to hear your character holler every time you attack
- **Playability:** The controls are fast, responsive, and easy to manage
- **Entertainment:** In my book, it's always fun to watch organic beings pop when you hit them with a spiked club
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

I'm a big fan of both *Baldur's Gate*-style adventures and 1950s nuclear paranoia, so *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel* instantly struck a chord with me. From the very start it has a great old-school charm about it, and is easy to get sucked into. I would have liked a camera that showed off more of the world — the graphics are pretty detailed, but thanks to the top-down view, you don't really get to appreciate them. The difficulty is a tad on the high side — certain enemies are nearly impossible to kill without a full stash of health items, and boss battles can be extremely frustrating. Then again, no one said life after a nuclear apocalypse would be easy. If you've ever seen movies like *Invasion USA* or *Atomic Café*, or if you long to do battle with giant radioactive scorpions, then this is the title for you. It's definitely not without its flaws, but the classic sci-fi vibe makes this one worth checking out.

JEREMY — 8

REVIEWS



XBOX

WRATH UNLEASHED

GODS AND MONSTERS

The world is destroyed, the gods are bickering, and the only way to save anything is to wage strategic wars over galactic wastelands. Welcome to Wrath Unleashed, a unique spin on a classic concept popularized by such favorites as Archon and Battle Chess. As an elemental god, you maneuver your armies across hexagonal tiles to control territory, and when an enemy moves into your domain you defend it in one-on-one, fists blazing (literally) combat. The strategy is what makes this game. Each tile on the grid is infused with the power of one of the traditional four elements that can give your units an advantage in combat. Victory depends on being aware of your surroundings and using the environment to your advantage. Or at least it would, if it weren't for poorly conceived one-on-one battles in need of some serious divine intervention.

Your godly minions are slow to respond to your commands and their moves have about as much variety as a caulk sandwich. Maybe I'm asking too much here, but when I think of celestial wars, I think of scarred landscapes and widespread decimation on a cosmic scale! You'd think they could have come up with a combat system based on more than biting and fireballs.

The strategy is intricate, the creatures are totally awesome, but some sketchy execution on the combat side of things keeps Wrath Unleashed from attaining immortality. — **JOE**

THE BOTTOM LINE
TEEN **T** **7.5**

- **Concept:** Take one chessboard, and mix thoroughly. A surprising library.
- **Graphics:** The artists put a unique spin on many traditional monsters. They look simultaneously awe-inspiring and terrifying.
- **Sound:** The orchestral and choral soundtrack lends a solid feel to the cerebral wars.
- **Playability:** The turn-based elements play well, but beware of sore thumbs from button mashing in the battle arena.
- **Entertainment:** The resurrection of a familiar idea carries it a long way, but the limited multiplayer modes and no online capabilities make it less gleam quickly.
- **Replay Value:** Moderate.

SECOND OPINION

If unicorns always looked as cool as they do here, then it wouldn't be considered "girly" to like them. If only everything else about this game was as cool. I felt like I spent more time staring at loading screens than actually playing. But then again, the gameplay is only mediocre, so maybe that's not such a bad thing.

JEREMY - 6.25



XBOX

CARVE

AQUANAUGHT HOLIDAY

It's ironic that developer Argonaut has put a lot of love into this game. Being a budget title, you'd figure they'd push it out the door faster than a Jehovah's Witness with bad breath. Instead, they've slapped some great water effects on this jet ski racer and even thrown in Xbox Live. What is missing, however, is that solid gameplay core which could have made those features something more than anecdotes.

Despite lacking everything from a real career mode to a notable physics engine, Carve definitely has its moments. My favorite was when I was hot on someone's tail — water was spitting up and forming droplets on my screen. Meanwhile, my craft would crest and dip in the swelling wake of my opponent. The trick system gets points for being integral to building speed, but its execution is uneven, meaning you don't always perform the tricks you've punched in. Other ideas, such as an AI teammate to help you out and team-specific characteristics, aren't executed to any satisfaction.

Sadly, that early '90s Body Glove wet suit will have to remain a dark secret in the depths of your closet. — **KATO**

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) ■ **PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE ■ **DEVELOPER** ARGONAUT ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 13

SECOND OPINION

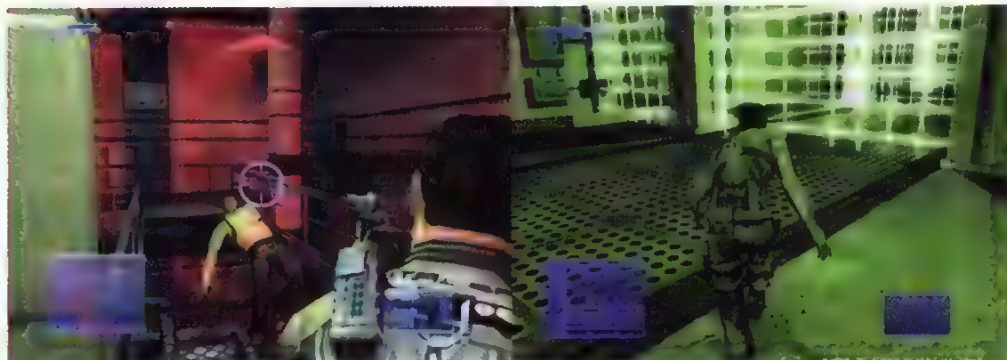
Aside from the shiny water effects, I find little to recommend in this tossed-off Splashdown clone. There's nothing very notable about Carve, other than the fact that the trick system never really lets you feel comfortable with busting moves.

MATT - 6.5

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE **E** **6.5**

- **Concept:** A budget game that almost covers up the reek of cheap jet ski cologne.
- **Graphics:** The water effects are exemplary even for a title twice its price.
- **Sound:** Don't know if the character voices or the music is more annoying.
- **Playability:** Much to the detriment of the game, the trick system is a shade off.
- **Entertainment:** Like a cat in water, you just can't get comfortable.
- **Replay Value:** Moderate.



XBOX

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - OPERATION SURMA

YOUR MISSION...SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT

While I find it odd that Ethan Hunt has a huskier voice than Ving Rhames (who voices cohort Luther Stickell), there's little else to poke fun at in Operation Surma. Developer Paradigm Entertainment did a bang-up job of creating thrilling espionage with varied mission objects and silky smooth controls. As much as the game leans on the genre's "duck into shadows" crutch, Paradigm knew precisely when to speed and change things up with exciting timed sequences and frenzied run-and-gun action. The scarcity of checkpoints and hawk-like vision of enemies can lead to frustration, but the overall gameplay package is solid and very much in line with Splinter Cell.

The plot makes about as much sense to me as the backwards-talking midget from *Twin Peaks*, but the CG cutscenes are surprisingly detailed and lengthy. It's not the next big thing, but it's next to impossible to put down once it gets rolling. — **REINER**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 2

SECOND OPINION

Operation Surma will be compared to Splinter Cell, but it could have had the freedom of Deus Ex: Invisible War. The trial-and-error gameplay is surprisingly addictive, but your gadgets offer only one solution for problems. Stiff combat also hampers this well done, but ultimately by-the-numbers title.

KATO - 7.5

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN **T** **7.75**

- **Concept:** A respectable stealth game based on the license that Tom Cruise ruined.
- **Graphics:** There are some nice lighting effects at work here.
- **Sound:** Either Ethan Hunt finally went through puberty or this voice actor is a bad casting decision.
- **Playability:** Unique gadgets are used frequently, and both stealth and running and gunning are tapped.
- **Entertainment:** Finely polished and worth playing all the way through.
- **Replay Value:** Moderately Low.

■ **STYLE** 1-4 PLAYER STRATEGY/ACTION
■ **PUBLISHER** JUCASARTS ■ **DEVELOPER** THE COLLECTIVE
■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS
 ■ **PUBLISHER** JALECO
 ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 12



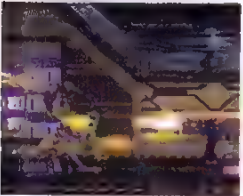
"Wow. A pool video game. Whee." If that's the type of reaction you have when you hear this title, then keep on walking; there's nothing for you here. But, if virtual pool does indeed interest you, then this title is pretty solid.

Sure, it has framerate issues and stiff animation, but it also has real-life players, solid physics, multiple game types, and a pretty easy learning curve. If nothing else, it's much easier to pull off tricky shots in this game than in real life. And let's be honest folks, if you like pool, what more do you need? — **JEREMY**

E 6.75

BLOWOUT

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 5



It is a good thing this game only costs \$20, because that's exactly what it's worth. Blowout is a side-scrolling shooter that will remind you of the glory days of Contra and Super Metroid, though it

doesn't actually measure up to either title. It is mindlessly blasting carnage with heavy artillery and the jetpack I always wanted as a kid. Sure, the game is a bit bland and outdated, with dull environments and aliens that just look like pasty-colored bugs, but you've dropped \$20 on things more stupid and worthless, like that Celine Dion action figure. — **JOE**

T 6.5

FREESTYLE STREET SOCCER

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ACCCLAIM
 ■ **RELEASE** APRIL 1



There are good ideas here, such as interactive objects and defensive shoves, but the game's execution comes off like Elaine Benes' (Seinfeld) dancing: A full-body dry heave of awkward movements that leaves one

embarrassed. The problem is that many of the tricks you do with the ball simply don't work. Worse yet is the abysmal AI — particularly for the goalies. Using this game as a paperweight would only give paperweights a bad name. — **KATO**

T 4

DINOSAUR HUNTING

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** METRO3D
 ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 17



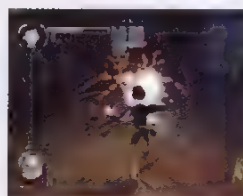
Surprisingly, this game is not entirely awful. The weary theme of hunting prehistoric prey is livened up a bit by the fact that you need to explore and determine the chemical formula that will tranquilize each type of dinosaur. Plus,

you have a hilarious dog that runs around and gets them all hot and bothered. Even so, the environments and gameplay are so lackluster that unless you want to use the game as an educational tool (it has a fair bit of factual dino-data), you won't get more than a couple hours of fun out of it. — **JOE**

T 7

THE HAUNTED MANSION

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** TDK MEDIACTIVE
 ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 17



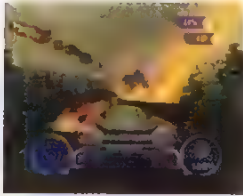
Although it shares its name with the new motion picture, this game is strictly old-school Disney, and, as such, has little connection to the film or star Eddie Murphy (there's nary a red patent leather suit

in sight!). However, it shares a big connection with the GameCube launch hit Luigi's Mansion, the game that was clearly the blueprint for developer High Voltage's work on this product. It's not nearly as fun as that cult classic, as the gameplay features way too much "exploration" and "puzzle-solving" that is more often than not just conquered by blind luck and scouring every inch of a room. However, the presentation is strong, and there are some genuine moments of surprise — most memorably a scene that shrinks your character down and places you on a life-sized pool table. — **MATT**

E 7

SPY HUNTER 2

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 25



The first entry in the Spy Hunter series was surprisingly good. This sequel is surprisingly bad. With mission objectives that are difficult to the point that I would much rather

listen to Fran Drescher recite *Macbeth* than watch my car explode one more time, playing Spy Hunter 2 is like living through a train wreck. Throw in an inconsistent targeting system and some of the ugliest texturing this side of the Sega Saturn, and it would seem that this title was created with the sole intent of hurting your feelings. The Interceptor still controls like a dream, but the rest of the game plays like a nightmare. — **REINER**

T 6

SILENT SCOPE COMPLETE

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SHOOTER
 ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
 ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10



This is a whole lotta Silent Scope! Similar to Grand Theft Auto, this series is coming to the Xbox in a value-packed form, with one disc that encompasses the entirety of the SS experience,

including Silent Scope, Silent Scope 2: Dark Silhouette, Silent Scope 3, and the Silent Scope EX arcade version. Basically, this will keep your trigger finger busy for a long time. I've always appreciated the franchise's gameplay, especially the way it's accessible to those who don't have the cash to spend on little-used gun peripherals. However, this bargain does come with a hidden cost — no visual enhancements have been made for the Xbox port. For this reason, these games are looking very archaic by today's standards. Still, three games for \$39.99 is a great deal for shooter fans — I just don't expect Complete to bring in many new converts to the fold. — **MATT**

M 8



XBOX

CURSE: THE EYE OF ISIS

YE OLDE SURVIVAL HORROR

Anyone see the movie *The Relic*? No, of course you haven't, but you have better things to do. That movie is about

creepy things happening in a museum, and so is this. But the similarities don't stop there — both are more successful franchises, and neither is as scary as *Rings*. I think it is. And while neither is bad per se, they're not particularly great, either.

As the name implies, *Curse* is about, well, a curse — specifically on an Egyptian artifact. The curse brings the dead back to life, and you have to fight them. The story is not all that compelling, or original, but then again, nothing about this title is. The graphics, while not terrible, are decent at best. Animation is stiff and limited, and the sound does nothing to create a mood. In other words, if you're looking for scary, this ain't it.

All around, *Curse* just bored me. The menus are clunky, the map is useless, and combat is too easy. On the other hand, controlling your character is easier in *Curse* than in the Resident Evil games that it so wishes to be. Like a B-grade horror movie, it's a passable title, and someone out there will enjoy it, but it's by no means ready for the big leagues. — **JEREMY**

THE BOTTOM LINE

M 6.75

■ **Concept:** *Curse* really, really, really wants to be a 19th century version of Resident Evil, and it's a lot like that series, except that it lacks the scariness and fun.

■ **Graphics:** Without a doubt, the worst-looking survival horror game on a next-gen system. The lighting is particularly bad.

■ **Sound:** The bland sound does absolutely nothing to create any sort of mood.

■ **Playability:** The controls actually work better than most survival horror games, but there are still strange glitches.

■ **Entertainment:** Like a bargain set of obscure horror movies, *Curse* seems like it should be a lot more fun than it actually is.

■ **Replay Value:** Low.

SECOND OPINION

If you're going to make me wander through a dark museum fighting generic Egyptian zombies with nothing to count on but a pointless map, bad camera angles, and shoddy gameplay, the least you can do is let me smash some priceless artifacts. *Curse* fails even in this, its last chance to make itself remotely entertaining.

JOE — 6

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER
 ■ **DEVELOPER** ASTYLUM ENTERTAINMENT
 ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 4

PC GAME OF THE MONTH
**NEVERWINTER NIGHTS:
 HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK**



"The amount by which it expands the game in every direction is truly epic."



Sparklies and shinkies are in abundance

Everyone's favorite D&D adversary

Despite being in-game graphics, the cutscenes look cool

PC

**NEVERWINTER NIGHTS:
 HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK**
 WRITE YOUR OWN HEROIC EPIC

When first looking through the manual and checking out all the new feats, classes, and powers available in this expansion, I thought that they were way too obscenely powerful and would throw off the game's difficulty balancing. However, even with a godlike character, the challenges found in the Hordes of the Underdark are no joke.

The adventure included in Underdark is one of the better official campaigns. Since players start at level 15, all the NPCs react to them as a legendary hero from the beginning – a nice change from the standard RPG opening. In all the time I spent playing Hordes, I didn't kill a single rat, maggot, or slime. In the very beginning of the quest, there's a blue dragon – which incidentally fell quite easily to Enseric the Longsword (who is quite the character himself, and has some of the best lines in the game). That's an example of the power levels involved here.

Hordes allows characters to reach level 40 (!), twice the old level cap, and doesn't disappoint in ways to make your hero über-powerful. Epic feats give you such silly abilities as turning into an ancient dragon or completely dodging one attack per round, no matter what. The six new prestige classes are fun to play as, though some are a bit

underpowered compared to others. Items scale up with you as well, and can grant some really sickening bonuses. Enseric, for instance, heals you for five hit points every time you hit something; though five HP isn't a whole lot when you've got 230 to begin with.

This expansion adds quite a bit of stuff for lower-level heroes as well. New crafting skills allow players to customize their equipment even more than before. Some of the prestige classes can be accessed as early as level six, and lots of new scripts have been added to give players greater control over their henchmen. Heroes can have two followers rather than the previous limit of one, which lets you have some semblance of an actual party even in single-player. Despite the new and vastly superior control, however, they still tend to run off and die when you're not paying attention.

Mod makers will enjoy the improvements on the already comprehensive toolset. BioWare has also added a number of scripts to the game which allow for better interaction and combat. Of course, these upgrades will help regular players as well, in the form of better modules to adventure through.

Owners of Neverwinter Nights are punishing themselves by not getting Hordes of the Underdark. The amount by which it expands the game in every direction is truly epic. — **ADAM**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 64-PLAYER VIA LAN OR INTERNET) ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** BIOWARE
 ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 2



Chain Lightning is too entertaining



Talking on dragons mano-a-mano isn't as foolhardy as you think

THE BOTTOM LINE

T **8.5**

- **Concept:** Allow heroes to reach utterly stupid levels of power, and give them suitably ridiculous tasks
- **Graphics:** Somewhat improved over the original, particularly the textures
- **Sound:** Same old Neverwinter sounds. The battle music gets awfully old
- **Playability:** The improved camera control is very welcome, and the whole interface is a little smoother around the edges
- **Entertainment:** There's no better way to dork out to the max, online or off
- **Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

Neverwinter Nights' first expansion, *Shadows of Undrentide*, was certainly an engrossing tale, and a great addition to the universe, but for how much I enjoyed that adventure it pales in comparison to *Hordes of the Underdark*. Sure, this expansion looks slightly better than the last, and manages to add in an assortment of new goodies for level-up junkies like myself, but what really makes this game for me is that it revolves around the Drow and all the dark creatures of the D&D universe. You just can't help but love Mind Flayers and those evil elf beeatches. If you managed to miss out on *Shadows*, you should do yourself a favor and make sure you check out *Hordes*, as it represents some of the best storytelling going on in the PC world. Even if you don't care about the plot, you can always just make some crazy powerful characters and tear it up.

ANDY — 8.5



PC

LORDS OF EVERQUEST

ANOTHER MONTH, ANOTHER RTS



THE BOTTOM LINE



7.5

- Concept:** Combine EverQuest with real-time strategy and try to give the big boys a run for their money
- Graphics:** Nothing that pushes the envelope too much, but high-end for the genre
- Sound:** Nicely orchestrated score. There could be a lot more unit voiceovers
- Playability:** Having full control of the camera is cool, but doesn't really add much. Trying to click on units during battle gets frustrating
- Entertainment:** EQ fans will likely eat this one up. Without the EQ license, it's merely an above-average title
- Replay Value:** High

The last couple of months have seen a whole slew of new RTS titles hit the market. Some good, some bad, but none with the gargantuan EverQuest franchise attached. Expectations for this title were pretty high, and for the most part LoE doesn't live up to them.

The gameplay is classic RTS, and thus a bit simpler than the current favorites. Resources in particular are dumbed-down – there's only one, and you can harvest it much faster than you can spend it. This makes for a different flow of play from similar titles, and cheapens strategy in the process.

Though there are three very different factions, the depth of units, upgrades, and spells isn't anywhere near what can be found elsewhere. Also, the skills are pretty weak – when I cast a spell with a 60-second cool-down, I expect it to lay down the law. In LoE, it'll maybe kill one unit. Also, even Lords (the LoE equivalent of a Hero in Warcraft III) only have four skills total, the second two of which you won't see in most games since it takes so long to get to the required level. The combat just never reaches the level possible in the big-time RTS titles.

With multiplayer significantly less user-friendly than in other titles and a lame single-player mode, LoE falls well short of the genre's top dogs. The fact of the matter is that this is the first RTS title from Rapid Eye, and they simply don't have the experience in smooth gameplay, balanced factions, and online support that Blizzard and Ensemble can bring to the table. – ADAM



Did you ever wonder what Emperor Palpatine would do in Norrath?

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA LAN OR INTERNET) ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** RAPID EYE ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 3

SECOND OPINION

I used to be a hardest of the hardcore EQ player. So in regards to the people and places in the universe, I know more about it than any normal person really should. Coming into this game, I was expecting to find myself enveloped in the universe and experiencing it in a whole new way – RTS-style. Sadly, while there are certainly parts of EQ lore to be found here, it isn't as interesting as I had hoped. As a Warcraft wannabe, the game is certainly competent, but it doesn't do anything you haven't seen before. Don't get me wrong, there is some fun to be had with this title, especially in multiplayer, but it never quite delivers like a Command & Conquer or Warcraft.

ANDY – 7.25

REVIEWS



PC

HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA

MAGGOTS A-PLenty

THE BOTTOM LINE



7

After sampling the waters of many MMORPGs, I feel like I've played several slightly different builds of the same game. Horizons did nothing at all to change that impression. Ten minutes into the title, a player-character dragon had befriended my female cat-person, and we set off in search of glorious adventure with heroic aspirations.

Six hours later, my draconian friend and I had valiantly slain several hundred maggots, cursed the asinine interface roundly, and gained a few levels. Unfortunately for us, these levels were lame – at each new one, all we got was a slight stat increase and a weak power. Five extra damage once every 30 seconds? Heroic. Indeed. To make matters worse, you get no say in what skills or powers you get; it's all automatic by class.

It became clear at this point that Horizons follows the MMORPG canon to the letter, that the graphics are very average, and that there's no reason to play outside the social aspect. You can find all of this in existing titles, and a vastly larger player base as well. I expect my \$50 brand-new game to do more than recap the genre, thank you very much. – ADAM

- Concept:** Do nothing at all to move the genre forward in any way, shape, or form
- Graphics:** It's no Final Fantasy XI. I'll say that much
- Sound:** Definitely the high point. The music is awesome, and fits the setting perfectly
- Playability:** Deep, yet counter-intuitive and frustrating
- Entertainment:** If role-playing matters more to you than exciting gameplay, you'll find more of it here than in the competition
- Replay Value:** High

SECOND OPINION

It's not often that I can feel so utterly dispassionate about a game. Everything that this title has to offer has been done before, but Istaria certainly is a good example of great classic premises. If you're new to the MMORPG boat, this is a good introduction; for everyone else, the genre has moved on.

LISA – 7

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** ARTIFACT ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 9

REVIEWS

PC

X2: THE THREAT

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ENLIGHT
 ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 1



Far from being an edge-of-your-seat space combat sim, this title is more of an economic simulation that lets you fly spaceships. Now, building up a trade empire in deep space amid

pirates and aliens could be very cool; but, to do it in X2, players have to slog through an almost obscene amount of downtime. One simple cargo run can take upwards of 15 minutes, even with the 10x-time compression on. Apparently in this universe, ships just don't fly very fast. Which is too bad, because with the depth of everything and overall graphical sophistication in X2, it could have been a much better title. — **ADAM**

T 7

PC

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
 ■ **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 20



I was beginning to think that I had a better chance of getting eaten by a shark than seeing another console RPG ported to the PC. With a sleek new user interface, perfect control

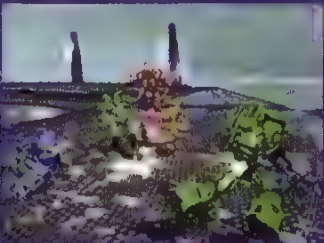
mapping, and a boost in graphical resolution, Knights feels right at home on the PC. If you haven't had the chance to play through this game yet, drop this magazine and run out to the store immediately. The level of control that you have over your characters' actions is truly remarkable. Do you fight the good fight, or turn to the dark side? The game is completely different for both paths and worthy of playing through twice. Combat is brimming with strategies; character development is extensive; and the story is brilliantly penned. Simply put, this is the best thing to happen to Star Wars since the original trilogy. — **REINER**

T 9.5

PC

ONE MUST FALL: BATTLEFIELDS

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 16 PLAYERS VIA ONLINE)
 ■ **PUBLISHER** DIVISIONS ENTERTAINMENT
 ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 14



One Must Fall: Battlefields is a solid mech fighting game that knows where its priorities are. This game was built for multiplayer. Sure, there's a half-baked single-player mode, but it clearly

exists only to train players to survive the online chaos. The game has arenas that can support up to 16 players clawing and kicking their way through a futuristic battle royale. This title uses many of the tired conventions of the fighting genre but manages to keep them interesting with great graphics, clean gameplay, and the potential to cause a lot of damage to a lot of people. — **JOE**

T 8



PC

SILENT STORM

TAKING ALL FRONTS BY STORM

Controlling a squad of either Axis or Allied commandos may not sound original or exciting, but the brilliance of Silent Storm is apparent the first time one of your soldiers levels up. Each of the six classes has their own Diablo-esque skill tree to progress through, and being able to guide your characters' development is both compelling and addictive.

Good level design forces players to properly utilize the abilities of their team. That, along with a robust combat system (there are six fire modes, for cripe's sake), makes tactics determine the outcome of battle. Also, the method you employ to complete a mission is up to you — each one can be accomplished in any number of ways.

Though its flaws are few, they are major. The turn-based system feels very artificial and makes gameplay very slow at times — I frequently had to wait for a 30-second enemy turn when I couldn't even see any bad guys. If Silent Storm had a better time system, it could have been a classic. — **ADAM**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** ENCORE ■ **DEVELOPER** NIVAL INTERACTIVE
 ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 20

SECOND OPINION

It is clear that a lot of effort went into this game, given the amount of historical detail and available combat options, but the turn-based system means you just spend too much time waiting around and getting shot. Plus, everyone sounds like they came straight out of an episode of Hogan's Heroes. Irritating.

JOE — 7.5

THE BOTTOM LINE

RATING PLATFORM
RP
 7.75

- **Concept:** Use the talents of your elite squad to pull off a variety of insane tasks
- **Graphics:** The animations are awesome; environments are lush but static
- **Sound:** It's a good thing that you can turn most of the voiceovers off
- **Playability:** Control is intuitive and smooth. Enemy turns take for freakin' ever, though
- **Entertainment:** The only thing holding this back is the oftentimes grueling slow pacing
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High



PC

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: TRIALS OF ATLANTIS

LIFE BEGINS AT LEVEL 40

With this second expansion to the popular DAoC world, developer Mythic Entertainment provides yet more excellent service to its fanbase. Nearly everything looks better with the release of ToA, each faction has a new playable race, and there's a staggering number of things to do after level 40.

Just exploring all of the huge new areas could be a full-time job in itself. However, the best part is clearly the titular Trials. These nine quests, each of which consists of around 10 sub-quests, grant mighty powers upon completion. Some require teamwork (up to several groups working together), while others must be faced alone. Not all players receive the same rewards, either — each class gets their own choice of abilities.

The endlessly amusing Realm vs. Realm raids and deep RPG elements of the original are only improved in this expansion. Between that and the new features, Trials of Atlantis is a total no-brainer for DAoC players and worth a look for newbies as well. — **ADAM**

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** ABANDON ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28

SECOND OPINION

Even if you have never played Dark Age of Camelot before, it won't take long for you to get sucked into Trials. I think there are literally one bajillion things to do in this world, and once you get going, you'll never get bored. It certainly targets high-level players, though, so think of it as the perfect excuse to spend a lot of time leveling up.

JEREMY — 8

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN
T
 8

- **Concept:** Make the power of lost Atlantis your own
- **Graphics:** Ambient life is nonexistent (outside of NPCs), but the new decals (murals, carvings, etc.) are incredibly detailed
- **Sound:** The ambient sounds for different areas are very cool
- **Playability:** The modular interface is still great. Movement could progress into the new millennium
- **Entertainment:** DAoC is definitely one of the better MMOs, and this expansion delivers quite a lot of cool new stuff
- **Replay Value:** High

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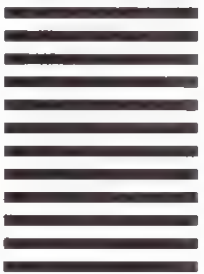
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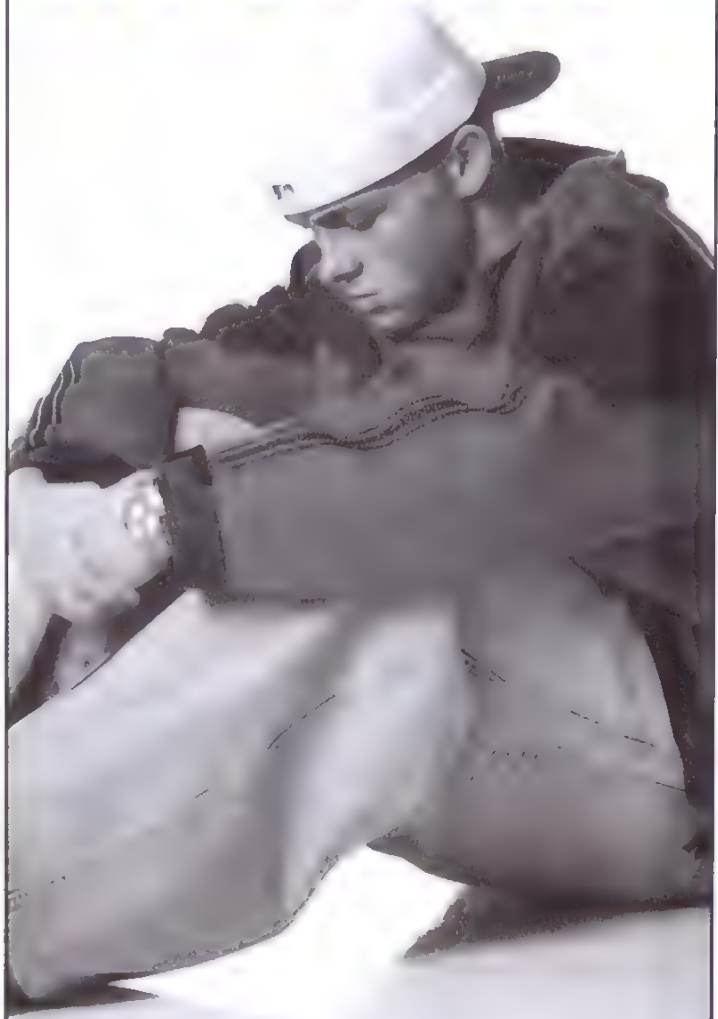
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THE BOTTOM LINE
E EVERYONE
9.5

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METROID: ZERO MISSION

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"...the new content is spectacular..."



When people ask me what my favorite game of all time is, I always answer the same thing: Metroid. Sure, Super Metroid on SNES took the concept and made it better, and Metroid Fusion was a fantastic follow-up on the Game Boy Advance, but when push comes to shove the original is where my vote will always go. Then there's Metroid Prime...but that's 3D and a story for a different day. This game and this story are all about the glory of 2D gaming.

So you can only begin to imagine my excitement when Nintendo's newest Metroid redo appeared on my desk. For those of you that may not know, Zero Mission is a special edition of sorts. It's the original Metroid with spruced-up graphics, streamlined level designs and gameplay, plus a whole new chapter. At its core, it is most definitely the original Metroid, but as you travel around the world you start to notice differences. Hallways are changed, statues lead you to the next objective, and abilities like Power Grip and Space Jump that never existed in the original iteration pop up in time.

Nintendo has been very hush-hush about this title since its announcement, and after playing through the game myself, I must admit I'm a little reluctant to give away too much, but I can give you some interesting facts to whet your whistle. The biggest chunk of new content takes place after you beat Mother Brain (which was where the original ended). Not only is this new zone fairly large (I would say it's bigger than Norfair and Brinstar combined) it incorporates a number of story elements that help tie the whole series together (including Metroid Prime).

In total, the game is still rather short. I beat it in roughly six and a half hours, and I wandered around a lot. But the new content is spectacular, and fans of the series will absolutely adore this special edition. And if you have never experienced Metroid, then you are in for a treat. My one rip on this title is the fact that the game now holds your hand a little too much, so the title loses some of the wonder and puzzle solving that I loved about the original. But don't let this one setback stop you from picking up one of the greatest titles in the history of gaming. — **ANDY**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 9



Cutscenes help flesh out the story



Not only are the graphics improved, but there are a number of new gameplay elements

- **Concept:** Update a classic with new graphics and lots of bonus material
- **Graphics:** Cnsp 2D sprites jump off your SP or GBA Player
- **Sound:** Fantastic from beginning to end
- **Playability:** Metroid's control set-up is still one of the most simple, yet complex schemes ever created — brilliant
- **Entertainment:** Replaying the original with added content is an 8-bit gamers dream come true
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

SECOND OPINION

Much like the extended editions of *The Lord of the Rings* movies, Nintendo has reworked the original Metroid to feature bonus content that ties into Samus' continuing adventures. I can't even begin to tell you how amazing this new material is. Let's just say that you're in for a big surprise after the Mother Brain fight. A huge surprise! I don't want to ruin the game for you, but I will say that there's a stretch of the game that I played with my jaw on the floor. Better yet, all of the original content has been extensively overhauled. The shape of the terrain has been altered dramatically, and as you progress through this incredible adventure you'll spot subtle changes every step of the way. With the original NES game included as a bonus, you'll get the chance to compare and contrast. Nintendo took one of the best games of all time and made it better. Buy it immediately.

REINER — 9.75



GAME BOY ADVANCE

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE

DUNGEONTASTIC!

Dark Alliance for the GBA is a lot like the "fun size" candy people hand out for Halloween. It's every bit as good as the full-size version, only smaller. More focused on action than role-playing, Baldur's Gate is one fun little fantasy (not in the old way) title.

Entering the city of Baldur's Gate as one of three classes – fighter, wizard, or archer – you progress through a fairly linear main story with optional side quests. You gain experience and find new gear like in any other RPG, but the main focus is exploration and combat. There are no combos or speak of, but the ability to switch between melee, ranged, and magical combat keeps things from growing stale. The constantly unfolding plot keeps things moving as well. It's an engaging title that's hard to put down once you're into it.

The graphics are nice, although the sound is far from impressive (even by GBA standards), but doesn't really detract from the experience. As far as fantasy titles go, Dark Alliance is more fun than cheesy, so bad they're-good films like The Dungeonmaster, starring Richard Moll from Night Court. And we all know that Bull Shannon is one hard act to toe. – **JEREMY**

THE BOTTOM LINE

T **8.25**

- **Concept:** Bring the Baldur's Gate to the GBA in an action-heavy dungeon crawler.
- **Graphics:** The characters are fairly blurry, but the environments are sharp and atmospheric.
- **Sound:** Background music is limited, non-existent, and the sound effects might make you think you're playing Gauntlet.
- **Playability:** Lining your character up with an object can be surprisingly tricky, but overall everything is solid.
- **Entertainment:** Once you're into it, it's hard to close this port.
- **Replay Value:** Moderate.

SECOND OPINION

Though it has mind-blowing graphical splendor going for it, this port also has a complete lack of re-engineered gameplay against it. Everything's slightly dumbed-down from the original, but the biggest problem is the inexplicable absence of recall potions. Walking back out of cleared dungeons is not how I want to spend my time.

ADAM – 7.25

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** DSI GAMES
 ■ **DEVELOPER** MAGIC ROCKETS ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 11

HANDHELD QUICKIES

GAME BOY ADVANCE

SHINING SOUL II

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK)
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ATLUS
 ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 24



Outside of annoying item management, Sega fixed most of the problems that plagued the original game. Enemies no longer run blindly into your extended sword; the dungeons showcase variety in design; and the character animations actually have some life and style to them. I absolutely loathed the first adventure, but couldn't seem to pull myself away from this one. It feels a little bit like Zelda and has the depth of Diablo. Not bad. Not bad at all. – **REINER**

E **7.5**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

YU-GI-OH! THE SACRED CARDS

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY
 ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4



Konami has messed with the format of its card-based empire, but now it has found a home. In order to get you to explore the new overworld map and fight everyone, The Sacred Cards gives you Duelist Points for battles won. Collect enough of these and you can access better cards and increase the size of your deck. While vets may find this limiting, it helped me to understand and manage my deck and trunk effectively. Regardless of your skill, everyone will be thankful for the improved battle interface. Sounds like I liked this game. Well, maybe I did. – **KATO**

E **7.5**

N-GAGE

RED FACTION

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA BLUETOOTH)
 ■ **PUBLISHER** THQ
 ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 15



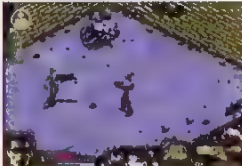
Red Faction is probably the best (and only) FPS title on the N-Gage, but that's kind of like saying that crabs is one of the best venereal diseases. It's not fair to compare a handheld version to its console counterpart, so all I'll say about the graphics is that they would have been good on a PC in 1997. The framerate is poor and the AI...well, there isn't any. I'd be willing to forgive all that, but the controls make me feel like I had a thumb cut off. Just remember this simple equation: first person shooter, plus N-Gage, equals poison. – **JEREMY**

M **5.75**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA LINK)
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18



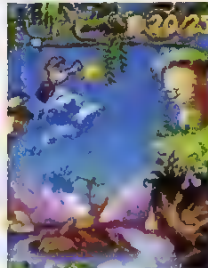
This GBA title features a tiny version of Arnie, who blasts his way through countless enemies in his quest to save John Conner. For a guy who has decried violence, he's sure found himself in one action-packed game. Your objectives change so constantly that it's easy to forget about the blurry graphics and simplistic combat. It's no shocker like his California victory, but it ain't no *Jingle All the Way*, either. – **JEREMY**

T **7.5**

N-GAGE

RAYMAN 3: HOODLUM HAVOC

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** GAMELOFT
 ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 11



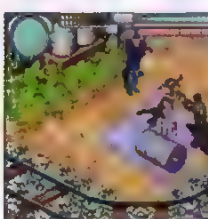
There's an old saying that goes "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." Well, consider Rayman 3 the cyclops that just may give you something you actually want to play on Nokia's ill-fated taco. It's a port of the GBA game from last year, and as such, is a nice-looking and enjoyable platformer. Although the scrolling and character movement is a bit choppy than before, the gorgeous graphics are actually better, due mostly to the N-Gage's superior backlit screen. Of course, it doesn't really innovate, but this is the kind of solid, respectable entertainment that N-Gage desperately needs. – **MATT**

E **8**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK)
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
 ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17



It's a shooter! It's a stealth game! It's a driving game! Amazingly, Everything or Nothing does all of these things, and (not so surprisingly) does none of them very well. I'm not a big proponent of the isometric view, and marrying it to sloppy stealth-style gameplay only exacerbates the problem. It's sort of hard to plan your next move when you can only see about 10 virtual feet in front of you, and as a result it's usually easier to just run and gun your way through the levels. It's sort of neat that they tried to incorporate driving into the mix, but it's a bad version of the old Spy Hunter at best. I like the numerous gadgets and upgrades you can buy for your Bond, and the multiplayer functionality; but really – why put expensive rims on a 1991 Hyundai? – **MATT**

T **6.25**

N-GAGE

SPLINTER CELL

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA BLUETOOTH)
 ■ **PUBLISHER** GAMELOFT
 ■ **RELEASE** DECEMBER 16



Sam Fisher sneaks into the second dimension on the N-Gage's Splinter Cell, and suffers from the pitfalls of every cell phone game ever created in the process. The hit detection is frustrating and the controls are confusing, but there are some unique ideas lurking in the shadows. The stealth aspects add a fun element lacking in most action platformers, and there is a surprising array of gadgets at your disposal. The game also features two multiplayer modes, so you can go head-to-head with a friend or tackle the co-op missions. It is a fun platformer with variety; you should certainly allow Splinter Cell to infiltrate your N-Gage. – **JOE**

T **8**

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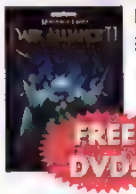
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Code: B644920A
\$54.99



Silent Storm
Free WWII Movie with Purchase!
Mature Gamers Only

Code: B645532A
\$49.99



Far Cry Expected Mar. 2004
FREE Overnight Shipping with coupon code: GIOVR

Code: 645327
\$49.99



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FREE Bonus In-Game Item!

Code: 645627
\$29.99



Greyhawk: Temple of Elemental Evil
Includes a FREE bonus Icewind Dale Game!

Code: B645273AB
\$49.99



Rainbow Six 3
Athena Sword
FREE Overnight Shipping with coupon code: GIOVR

Code: 645325
\$29.99

MORE BESTSELLERS	PRICE	CODE
Atan. 80 Classic Games-In-One	\$19.99	645667
Call of Duty	\$49.99	645313
Delta Force. Team Sabre	\$19.99	645611
Digital Blue Digital Movie Creator	\$89.99	645089
Final Fantasy XI Online	\$49.99	645389
Half-Life Counter Strike	\$29.99	644096
Myst 3 Exile	\$ 9.99	644094
Neverwinter Nights Gold Edition	\$39.99	645421
Neverwinter Nights Hordes Exp.	\$29.99	645295
Prince of Persia: Sands of Time	\$39.99	645328
Shadowbane	\$ 4.99	644939
Shadowbane: Rise of Chaos	\$19.99	645509
StarCraft Battle Chest	\$19.99	642254
Trainz Railroad Simulator 2004	\$39.99	645642
Tropico: Mucho Macho Edition	\$ 9.99	644678
Uru: Ages Beyond Myst	\$49.99	645260

Offers good online or call-in only. Not valid in stores. May not be combined with any other offers. Offers end February 29th, 2003 or while supplies last. GameStop.com reserves the right to limit quantities or orders. No substitutions. Credit card orders and checks via CheckFree Only. We DO NOT accept cash or money orders. Shipping offers good within continental United States only, excluding PO Box or APO/FPO addresses. Listed prices do not include shipping and handling. Prices are subject to change at any time. Not responsible for misprints or typos.

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 October 2003 Based On Units Sold

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
1	N/A	NBA Live 2004	PS2	8.5	Oct-03	\$50

We asked for this title for Christmas, but instead we received a subscription to the Pork of the Month Club. We were a little disappointed at first. Then we realized that nothing put us in the holiday spirit faster than waking up, going downstairs, and finding a big old bag of andouille sausage under the tree. It's porkariffic!

2	N/A	Jak II	PS2	9.25	Oct-03	\$40
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A little known fact about Jak is that his full name is Jakingford Hubert Nerdowitz III. He had it legally changed to "Jak" when he turned 18. So now he has something in common with Madonna and Cher. Well, he has a few other things in common with them, too, but you aren't ready to hear those. It would blow your mind, man.

3	1	Madden NFL 2004	PS2	9.25	Aug-03	\$50
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We love video game sports titles, because they make us feel like we're good at sports. If we played football in real life, we'd probably get snapped in half – and that's if we were playing against school kids. We don't go outside much; we're frail and fear natural light. You know Sam Jackson in *Unbreakable*? We're like that, only without the cool cane.

4	N/A	Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3	GBA	9.5	Oct-03	\$29
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When elected president, Game Informer shall declare it law that every household must own a copy of Super Mario 3. We think that would be enough to get us into office. We would also name the Marshmallow Peep our new national bird.

5	N/A	WWE SmackDown!: Here Comes The Pain	PS2	8.5	Oct-03	\$50
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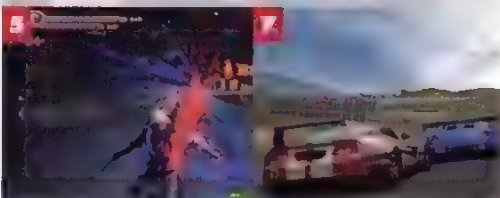
You can't fool us; we know why many of you bought the game. Four words: bra and panty match. Admit it. It's okay, we would have bought it for exactly the same reason if we were your age. But now we don't need to play this game to see girls in their underwear. We're old enough to rent videos.

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
6	N/A	Tony Hawk's Underground	PS2	9.25	Oct-03	\$49
7	N/A	Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike	GC	6.5	Oct-03	\$50
8	3	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	PS2	9.5	Sep-03	\$50
9	N/A	NBA Live 2004	Xbox	8.25	Oct-03	\$50
10	N/A	Viewtiful Joe	GC	9.5	Oct-03	\$40
11	N/A	Castlevania: Lament Of Innocence	PS2	8	Oct-03	\$50
12	N/A	SSX 3	PS2	9.5	Oct-03	\$50
13	6	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	PS2	10	Oct-02	\$27
14	N/A	Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This At Home	PS2	5.5	Oct-03	\$50
15	N/A	Kingdom Hearts	PS2	9.5	Sep-02	\$21
16	N/A	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Xbox	8.5	Oct-03	\$50
17	N/A	Conflict Desert Storm II: Back To Baghdad	PS2	7.75	Oct-03	\$50
18	N/A	Simpsons: Hit & Run	PS2	8.5	Sep-03	\$47
19	N/A	Kirby Air Ride	GC	7	Oct-03	\$50
20	N/A	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	PS2	7.75	Oct-03	\$40

JAPAN TOP 10

Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

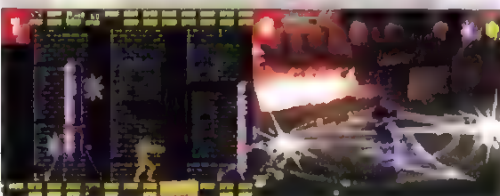
POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	Hot Shots Golf 4	PS2
2	N/A	SD Gundam G-Generation Advance	GBA
3	N/A	Wild Arms Alter Code: F	PS2
4	N/A	Mario Party 5	GC
5	N/A	Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	PS2
6	N/A	Pokémon Colosseum	GC
7	N/A	R: Racing Revolution	PS2
8	N/A	Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly	PS2
9	N/A	Mario Kart: Double Dash	GC
10	N/A	Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	GBA



GAME INFORMER TOP 10

Picks

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	Metroid: Zero Mission	GBA
2	N/A	Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest	PS2
3	1	Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	GBA
4	N/A	Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	PC
5	2	Manhunt	PS2
6	N/A	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	PS2
7	8	Mario Kart: Double Dash	GC
8	N/A	Maximo Vs. Army of Zin	PS2
9	5	Need for Speed: Underground	Multi
10	7	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Multi



PC TOP 10

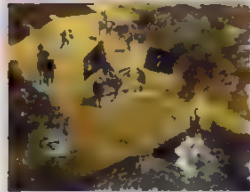
Based On Monthly Units Sold. Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Service. Kristin Barnett-VonKerff, 5161625, 2481

POS.	L. MO	GAME	MONTH	PRICE
1	2	Halo: Combat Evolved	Sep-03	\$39
2	N/A	Final Fantasy XI	Oct-03	\$50
3	1	Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne	Oct-03	\$39
4	N/A	Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis	Oct-03	\$29
5	5	Age Of Mythology: The Titans	Sep-03	\$30
6	2	Command & Conquer: Generals Zero Hour	Sep-03	\$27
7	N/A	Call Of Duty	Oct-03	\$50
8	3	Age Of Mythology	Nov-03	\$35
9	8	Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault Breakthrough	Sep-03	\$29
10	7	The Sims Double Deluxe	Sep-03	\$41



DYNASTY TACTICS 2

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY
 ■ **PUBLISHER** KOEI ■ **REVIEWED** OCT-03



With only a few minor play control tweaks and touch-ups, Dynasty Tactics 2 feels much more like an upgrade than a new chapter. The system of battle tactics has been expanded so you can serve your opponents pain in greater

portions, but that's about all that's changed. If you can get past the fact that it's the same game as the first, Dynasty Tactics 2 is pretty decent. The battle animations are exciting and commanding but whoopin' warners is always a good time. If you've never played a strategy game before, Dynasty Tactics 2 is a good choice, but if you've played the original, there's no reason to go back for seconds. — JEREMY

T 7.5

GAMECUBE

1080 Avalanche	6.25	Jan-04
Aquanaut: Battle for Atlantis	2	Oct-03
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	5	Dec-03
Beyond Good and Evil	8	Dec-03
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	7	Oct-03
Bonnie	6	Jan-04
Bomberman Jetters	8	Dec-03
Charlie's Angels	2	Sep-08
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix	8	Oct-03
Disney Extreme Skate Adventure	7.75	Oct-03
Drains of the 99 Dragons	1.25	Jan-04
Dungeons and Dragons Heroes	8	Nov-03
Dynasty Warriors 4	7	Oct-03
Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind GOTY Edition	7.75	Jan-04
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jul-03
ESPN NBA Basketball	9.5	Nov-03
ESPN NFL Football	9.25	Sep-03
ESPN NHL Hockey	8.5	Oct-03
Freaky Flyers	5.75	Aug-03
Freedom Fighters	6	Oct-03
Freestyle MetalX	7	Oct-03
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	8.25	Aug-03
Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	5.75	Nov-03
Gleadius	8.25	Oct-03
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
God of War	7	Jan-04
Heman 2: Silent Assassin	8	Jul-03
Hobbit, The	6.25	Jan-04
Hulk, The	5.75	Jul-03
Italian Job, The	5	Aug-03
Kirby Air Ride	7	Dec-03

Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8.25	Dec-03
Madden NFL 2004	8.75	Sep-03
Mano Golf: Toaststool Tour	8	Sep-03
Manxman: Rabbit Dash	9.25	Dec-03
Mano Party 5	2	Dec-03
Medals of Honor: Rising Sun	7.5	Dec-03
Metax Arms	8.5	Nov-03
Glitch in the System	8.5	Nov-03
NBA Live 2004	8.25	Dec-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.5	Jul-03
Need For Speed: Underground	9	Dec-03
NHL 2004	9	Oct-03
NHL Hitz Pro	8	Oct-03
Pac-Man Vs	5	Jan-04
PN 03	5.75	Sep-03
Pokemon Channel	6.5	Jan-04
Rogue Ops	7.5	Nov-03
Simpsons: Hit and Run	8.5	Nov-03
Sims: Bustn' Out The	9	Jan-04
Sonic Heroes	7.75	Jan-04
Soul Calibur II	8.75	Oct-03
Speed Kings	7	Jul-03
Spirit and Spells	2	Dec-03
SSX 3	9.5	Nov-03
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II: Rebel Strike	6.5	Nov-03
SX Superstar	6	Aug-03
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	8	Oct-03
True Crime: Streets of LA	8	Jan-04
Ultimate Musashi	7.5	Jul-03
Virtua Fighter 4	9.5	Oct-03
Wano World	8.5	Jul-03
Westendama XIX	7.75	Oct-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Forbidden Kingdom	6.5	Jan-04

XBOX

Aliens Versus	8.75	Aug-03
Predator: Extinction	8	Sep-03
Alter Echo	8	Sep-03
Amber 2	6.75	Nov-03
Aquanaut: Battle for Atlantis	2	Oct-03
Armed and Dangerous	8	Jan-04
Art Fatales	7.5	Jan-04
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	5.5	Dec-03
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	5	Nov-03
Battlestar Galactica	6.5	Jan-04
Beyond Good and Evil	8	Dec-03
Big Mutha Truckers	7.25	Sep-03
Bloody Road Extreme	6.5	Jul-03
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	8	Jan-04
Brute Force	8.25	Jul-03
Buffy: Chaos Bleeds	8	Sep-03
Cabela's Deer Hunt: 2004 Season	4.75	Nov-03
Celebrity Deathmatch	2.75	Jan-04

METAL ARMS: GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2 ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2 PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ **REVIEWED** NOV-03



There is little that seems certain about Metal Arms. Is it an FPS? Is it a cute-as-punch platformer? Will anyone notice this gem of a game? This title plays like a first-person shooter, but has the look of a third-person action/platformer. Metal

Arms does what a lot of titles fall well short of — delivering an engaging mix of styles to form a cohesive whole that spurs you on every step of the way. The gameplay always seems to shift at just the right moment, such as with the inclusion of rideable vehicles every now and then. Metal Arms works because its core is made up of tried-and-true gameplay styles. — KATO

T 8

Counter-Strike	7.5	Jan-04
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	9	Dec-03
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix	6	Jan-04
Deus Ex: Invisible War	9	Jan-04
Dino Crisis 3	6.25	Oct-03
Dinopolis: The Sunstone Odyssey	3.25	Nov-03
Disney Extreme Skate Adventure	7.75	Oct-03
Drains of the 99 Dragons	1.25	Jan-04
Dungeons and Dragons Heroes	8	Nov-03
Dynasty Warriors 4	7	Oct-03
Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind GOTY Edition	7.75	Jan-04
Enter the Matrix	8.5	Jul-03
ESPN NBA Basketball	9.5	Nov-03
ESPN NFL Football	9.25	Sep-03
ESPN NHL Hockey	8.5	Oct-03
Freaky Flyers	5.75	Aug-03
Freedom Fighters	6	Oct-03
Freestyle MetalX	7	Oct-03
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	8.25	Aug-03
Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	5.75	Nov-03
Gleadius	8.25	Oct-03
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	7.5	Jun-03
Grabbed by the Ghoules	4.5	Dec-03
Grand Theft Auto III/Vice City	10	Jan-04
Great Escape, The	7	Sep-03
Grooverider	2	Sep-03
Group 5 Challenge	8.75	Sep-03
Hulk, The	6.75	Jul-03
Indianajones	7.5	Aug-03
Intakar Job, The	5	Aug-03
Kill Switch	7.5	Dec-03
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	8	Jan-04
Links 2004	7	Nov-03
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8.25	Dec-03
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	8	Jul-03
Madden NFL 2004	9	Sep-03
Magic: The Gathering Battlegrounds	8.5	Dec-03
Maximum Chase	7	Jan-04
Medals of Honor: Rising Sun	7.75	Dec-03
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	8.5	Nov-03
Midnight Club 2	9	Jul-03
Midtown Madness 3	5.25	Jul-03
MLB Inside Pitch 2003	5.5	Jun-03
NASCAR 2	8	Jun-03
NASCAR Thunder 2004	8.5	Oct-03
NBA Inside Drive 2004	8.5	Dec-03
NBA Jam	6.5	Nov-03
NBA Live 2004	8.25	Nov-03
NCAA Football 2004	8.5	Jul-03
Need For Speed: Underground	9.25	Dec-03
NHL 2004	9	Oct-03
NHL Hitz Pro	8	Oct-03
NHL Pralls 2004	5.75	Dec-03
Ology: Myth of Demons	6.75	Oct-03
Outlaw Volleyball	8.25	Sep-03
Pratles of the Caribbean	7.75	Aug-03
Princess Persia: The Sands of Time	9.5	Jan-04
Pro Cast Fishing	5.5	Sep-03
Rainbow Six 3	8.5	Jan-04
Roadkill	6.5	Oct-03
Robn Hood: Defender of the Crown	6.75	Dec-03
Rogue Ops	7.5	Nov-03
Roller Coaster Tycoon: Secret Weapons Over Normandy	7.5	Jan-04
Sega GT Online	7.75	Dec-03
Simpsons Hit & Run	8.5	Oct-03
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	8	Jul-03

Soul Calibur II	8.5	Oct-03
Spawn: Armageddon	8.5	Jan-04
Speed Kings	7	Jul-03
SSX 3	9.5	Nov-03
Star Wars: Jedi Academy	8	Jan-04
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	9.1	Aug-03
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	8.5	Jun-03
Stargate: Infinity	5.75	Oct-03
SWAT: Global Strike Team	7.5	Nov-03
SX Superstar	6.5	Aug-03
Syberia	7	Oct-03
Tennis Masters Series 2003	8	Oct-03
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	8.25	Oct-03
Tony Hawk's Underground	8.75	Dec-03
Top Spin	8	Nov-03
True Crime: Streets of LA	8	Jan-04
Voodoo Vnca	8.5	Nov-03
Wakeboarding Unleashed: Featuring Shaun Murray	6.5	Jul-03
World Racing	5	Jun-03
WWE Raw 2	7.25	Nov-03
X2 Wolverine's Revenge	5.5	Jun-03
Yakuza	7	Dec-03
XGRA	5	Nov-03

Star Wars: Jedi Academy	8.5	Nov-03
Temple of Elemental Evil	7	Nov-03
Tropico 2: Pirate Cove	8.75	Oct-03
Tropico 2: Pirate Cove	8	Jun-03
UFO: Aftermath	8.25	Dec-03
Uno: Ages Beyond Myrt	8.25	Dec-03
Warcra3: Frozen Throne	9	Sep-03
Will Krull	7.75	Aug-03

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	8.25	Jul-03
Aladdin	8	Oct-03
Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge	5.25	Nov-03
Blackthorne	8	Dec-03
Buffy: The Sun is in Your Hand	6.75	Oct-03
Boxin: The Vampire Slayer Wrath of Darkful King	4	Sep-03
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	9.25	Jan-03
Cima: The Enemy	8	Dec-03
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	7	Dec-03
Demolition Man/Dark	8.25	Sep-03
Disney Extreme Skate Adventure	6	Oct-03
Disney's Magical Quest 2	6.75	Oct-03

BATMAN: RISE OF SIN TZU

■ **FORMAT** XBOX ■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
 ■ **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT ■ **REVIEWED** NOV-03



Comic legend Jim Lee actually created a brand new villain exclusively for the game, Sin Tzu; and the graphics nicely emulate the look and feel of the popular Batman shows.

It's too bad none of this care and effort went into the actual combat engine, which is a simplistic throwback to 8-bit brawlers like Double Dragon, minus the old-school charm. Seriously, other than buying new moves and a cool warped screen effect, this game just doesn't evolve past the old two-button shuffle. I'm pretty damn sure the Xbox (and Ubisoft) is capable of more than this. — MATT

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PC

Age of Mysterium: The Titans	9	Dec-03
Battlefield 1942	8.75	Sep-03
Secret Weapons of WW II	8.75	Sep-03
Black Mirror: The	4.5	Jan-04
Call of Duty	9	Dec-03
Civilization II: Conquests	9	Jan-04
Command & Conquer: Generals: Zero Hour	8	Dec-03
Commandos 3	6	Jan-04
Contract J.A.C.K	5.5	Jan-04
Day of Defeat	8.5	Aug-03
Deus Ex: Invisible War	9.5	Jan-04
Dungeon Siege	8.75	Jan-04
Legends of Aranna	7.5	Jan-04
Elder Scrolls II: Morrowind	9.25	Jun-03
Morrowind: Bloodmoon: The	9	Aug-03
Empire: Dawn of the Modern World	8.25	Dec-03
Eve: The Second Genesis	6.75	Dec-03
Final Fantasy XI	8	Jan-04
Ghost Master	7.25	Nov-03
Halo: Combat Evolved	8.75	Dec-03
Hidden & Dangerous 2	6	Jan-04
Homeworld 2	9.25	Nov-03
Korea: Forgotten Conflict	5	Jan-04
Lonheart: Legacy of the Crusader	8.5	Oct-03
Lord of the Rings: The War of the Ring, The	6.75	Jan-04
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	9.25	Dec-03
Medals of Honor: Allied Assault: Breakthrough	9	Dec-03
Medieval: Total War - Viking Invasion	8.75	Jun-03
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Janderbon	8.25	Aug-03
Nostalrius: The Wrath of Maestru	3	Jan-04
Patriot III	7	Jan-04
Pirate Hunter: Sassa and Destroy	6	Jan-04
Pirates of the Caribbean: PlanetSide	7.75	Sep-03
PlanetSide: Core Combat	2	Jan-04
Postal 2	7.5	Jun-03
Republic: The Revolution	6	Dec-03
Restaurant Empire	6.75	Jul-03
Rise of Nations	9	Jul-03
Runaway: A Road Adventure	7.25	Nov-03
Savage: The Battle for Newarth	8.5	Nov-03
Shadowbane	6.75	Jun-03
SimCity 4: Rush Hour	7.5	Dec-03
Sims: Makin Magic, The	7.75	Dec-03
Sims: Superstar, The	8	Jul-03
Space Colony	7	Dec-03
Star Trek: Elite Force II	8.5	Aug-03
Star Wars: Galactic: An Empire Divided	9.5	Jun-03

Donkey Kong Country	9	Jan-03
Dragon Ball Z: Legacy of Goku II	7.5	Jul-03
Dragon Ball Z: Taiketsu	6	Dec-03
Fire: Fantasy Tactics Advance	9.5	Sep-03
Fire Emblem	8.75	Dec-03
Freestyle	7.5	Aug-03
Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	7	Dec-03
Incredible Hulk, The	4	Jul-03
Jet Grind Radio	7	Sep-03
Justice League Chronicles	3	Dec-03
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8	Dec-03
The Lost Vikings: The	7	Jun-03
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	9.5	Jan-04
Max Payne	7.75	Jan-04
Medal of Honor: Infiltrator	6	Nov-03
Mega Man Battle Network 3: Blue and White	8	Jun-03
Mega Man Zero 2	7	Oct-03
Monster Truck Madness	4.5	Oct-03
Monty Combat: Tournament Edition	8.25	Aug-03
Muppets On With the Show	5.5	Jun-03
Ninja Five-O	8.25	Jul-03
Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee	4	Nov-03
Onimusha Tactics	7	Oct-03
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	6.25	Dec-03
Pirates of the Caribbean	5.5	Sep-03
Pokemon Pinball: Ruby and Sapphire	8.5	Oct-03
Road Rash Jailbreak	4.5	Aug-03
Rock 'n Roll Racing	8.75	Sep-03
Scoby Doo! Mystery Mayhem	6	Jan-04
Shining Soul	6.5	Sep-03
Simpsons Road Rage	2.25	Aug-03
Sims: Bustn' Out, The	8.5	Jan-04
Sonic Pinball Party	6	Jul-03
Space Channel 5: Ula's Cosmic Attack	7	Sep-03
Spyro: Attack of the Rhynocs	5.5	Jan-04
SSX 3	4	Dec-03
Splitter Cell	8.5	Jun-03
Star Wars: Flight of the Falcon	2.25	Jan-04
Strutman	8.75	Sep-03
Super Duper Sumos	6	Jan-04
Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros 3	9.5	Nov-03
Sword of Mana	7.75	Jan-04
Talk and the Power of Juj	5	Jan-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	7.25	Nov-03
Tony Hawk's Underground	7.5	Dec-03
Top Gear Rally	8	Jan-04
Wano World, Inc.	7.5	Jun-03
Mega Microgames	7	Aug-03
Ying Commander	7	Aug-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition: Starterway to the Destined Duel	7.5	Jun-03

NEW RELEASES ALL DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE. CALL YOUR LOCAL RETAILER FOR MORE DETAILS

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
PLAYSTATION 2		
2/3/04	Arforce Delta Strike	Konami
2/24/04	Alias	Acclaim
3/2/04	All-Star Baseball 2005	Acclaim
3/16/04	Backyard Baseball	Atari
1/20/04	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Vivendi Universal
2/2/04	Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest	Sony
3/1/04	Colin McRae Rally 4	Codemasters

TRIVIAL PURSUIT: UNHINGED

■ FORMAT PLAYSTATION 2/XBOX/PC ■ STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER BOARD ■ PUBLISHER ATARI ■ RELEASE FEBRUARY 24



This is the biggest thing to happen to trivia since...um... the last big thing to happen to trivia! Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged ain't yo' gran-mama's Trivial Pursuit! No siree! This version has crazy insane new rules that allow you to steal other player's pie slices and even features online play! That's right, now you can finally test your smarts against people other than the chronic alcoholics who play NTN Trivia at bars.

3/15/04	Crimson Sea	Koei
3/9/04	Cy G rts	Konami
3/1/04	Daredevil	Encore Software
1/13/04	Dot Hack Vol. 4: Quarantine	Bandai
3/1/04	Draxengard	Square Enix
2/3/04	Drift Racer: Kaido Battle	Sammy
3/16/04	Driver 3	Atari
2/17/04	Extreme Force: Grant City Anti-Crime	Namco
1/13/04	Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	Vivendi Universal
2/2/04	Fast and the Furious: The Fast	Vivendi Universal
3/24/04	Final Fantasy XI	Sony
3/9/04	FireFighter F.D.18	Konami
3/23/04	Ghost Master	Vivendi Universal
1/20/04	Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	Ubisoft
3/1/04	Grad us V	Konami
2/24/04	Headhunter: Redemption	Sega
3/2/04	Ice Nine	Bam Entertainment
2/10/04	James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts
3/2/04	Lifelink	Konami
2/16/04	Lobo	Kemco
2/16/04	Lupin the 3rd: Treasure of the Sorcerer King	Bandai
1/27/04	Mafia	Take 2 Interactive
1/20/04	Maximo vs. Army of Zin	Capcom
2/2/04	McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	Konami
4/1/04	Metal Slug 3	SNK NeoGeo
2/2/04	Micro Mayhem	Jaleco Entertainment
2/16/04	Moto GP 4	Namco
3/2/04	MTX: Mototrax	Activision
2/2/04	MX Unleashed	THQ
2/4/04	NARC	Midway
3/1/04	NBA Ballers	Midway
1/13/04	NFL Street	Electronic Arts
2/10/04	Nightsnade	Sega
3/2/04	Onimusha Blade Warriors	Capcom
2/24/04	Pitfall Harry	Activision
4/1/04	Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	Ubisoft
3/30/04	Resident Evil Outbreak	Capcom
2/17/04	Rise to Honor	Sony
3/9/04	Saturday Night Speedway	Atari
3/1/04	Scoby Doo: Mystery Mayhem	THQ
3/2/04	Seven Samurai: 20XX	Sammy
4/6/04	Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim
1/27/04	Sonic Heroes	Sega
3/1/04	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
3/2/04	Spy Fiction	Sammy
4/5/04	Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	Square Enix
1/13/04	Star Trek: Shattered Universe	Take 2 Interactive
3/1/04	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi Universal
2/23/04	Suffering, The	Midway
2/2/04	Ten Pin Alley 2	Jack of all Games
2/24/04	Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged	Atari
3/1/04	LFC: Sudden Impact	Take 2 Interactive
2/2/04	World Soccer Winning Eleven 7 International	Konami
2/10/04	Wrath Unleashed	LucasArts
3/23/04	X-Files: Resist or Serve	Vivendi Universal
4/22/04	Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	Atari

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
GAMECUBE		
2/17/04	Extreme Force: Grant City Anti-Crime	Namco
2/9/04	Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo
4/1/04	Froestyle Street Soccer	Acclaim
1/15/04	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Natsume
2/10/04	James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts
3/2/04	Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami
2/2/04	Micro Mayhem	Jaleco Entertainment
2/4/04	NARC	Midway
1/13/04	NFL Street	Electronic Arts
2/17/04	Phantasy Star Online II: CARD Revolution	Sega
2/24/04	Pitfall Harry	Activision
3/22/04	Pokemon Colosseum	Nintendo
2/2/04	PowerPuff Girls: Relish Rampage	Bam Entertainment
4/1/04	Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	Ubisoft
3/1/04	Scoby Doo: Mystery Mayhem	THQ

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
3/1/04	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
3/1/04	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi Universal
2/24/04	Tales of Symphonia	Namco
4/1/04	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco Entertainment
3/2/04	Zoids: Legacy	Atari

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
XBOX		
2/24/04	Alias	Acclaim
2/24/04	All-Star Baseball 2005	Acclaim
1/13/04	Auto Modellista	Capcom
1/20/04	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Vivendi Universal
2/24/04	Breakdown	Namco
3/1/04	Colin McRae Rally 4	Codemasters
3/1/04	Daredevil	Encore Software
3/1/04	Dead or Alive Online	Techno
2/24/04	Deadman's Hand	Atari
2/18/04	Dinosaur Hunting	Metro3D
3/16/04	Driver 3	Atari
2/17/04	Extreme Force: Grant City Anti-Crime	Namco
3/1/04	Fable	Microsoft
1/13/04	Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	Vivendi Universal
4/1/04	Froestyle Street Soccer	Acclaim
3/1/04	Full Spectrum Warmer	THQ
2/2/04	Funkmaster: Flex Digital Hitz	Jack of all Games
3/3/04	Fuzion Frenzy 2	Microsoft
3/23/04	Ghost Master	Vivendi Universal
2/2/04	Hardcore 4x4	Jack of all Games
2/24/04	Headhunter: Redemption	Sega
1/20/04	Intelivision Lives	Crave
2/10/04	James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts
2/16/04	Lobo	Kemco
1/27/04	Mafia	Take 2 Interactive
2/7/04	Micro Mayhem	Jaleco Entertainment
3/2/04	MTX: Mototrax	Activision
2/2/04	MX Unleashed	THQ
2/4/04	NARC	Midway
3/1/04	NBA Ballers	Midway
1/13/04	NFL Street	Electronic Arts
2/10/04	Ninja Gaiden	Techno
4/1/04	Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee 2	Microsoft
2/2/04	Outlaw Golf 2	Vivendi Universal
2/24/04	Pitfall Harry	Activision
3/3/04	Rainisport Challenge 2	Microsoft
3/1/04	Scoby Doo: Mystery Mayhem	THQ
1/27/04	Sega GT Online	Sega
4/6/04	Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim
2/10/04	Silent Scope Complete	Konami
1/27/04	Sonic Heroes	Sega
3/1/04	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
1/13/04	Star Trek: Shattered Universe	Take 2 Interactive
3/1/04	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi Universal
3/15/04	Steel Battalion: Line of Contact	Capcom
2/2/04	Sudeli	Microsoft
2/23/04	Suffering, The	Midway
3/9/04	Tanchu: Return from Darkness	Activision
3/15/04	Thief III	Eidos
2/24/04	Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged	Atari
2/10/04	Unreal II: The Awakening	Atari
2/10/04	Wrath Unleashed	LucasArts
3/16/04	Yu-Gi-Oh! X-Breed	Konami

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
PC		
3/1/04	Alias	Acclaim
2/2/04	Apocalypsis	Konami
4/1/04	Atlantis Evolution	Dreamcatcher
3/16/04	Backyard Baseball 2005	Atari
3/3/04	Besieger	Dreamcatcher
3/1/04	Black & White 2	Electronic Arts

TALES OF SYMPHONIA

■ FORMAT GAMECUBE ■ STYLE 1 PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ PUBLISHER NAMCO ■ RELEASE MARCH 15



Namco is bringing some heat to the ice-cold nether region that is known as GameCube role-playing games. This could be the best one yet, although that's kind of like bragging about being the best rapper in Poland. Still, Tales of Symphonia looks like

it has legs, and met with a warm reception in Japan upon its release in 2003. Dropping the 2D graphics of Namco's Tales of Destiny series, Syphonia is all polygonal, 3D, super-deformed characters up in ya Kool-Aid. As the kids say: Like whoa. Bloopy bleep bloop bloopy They say that a lot, too, from what we hear.

6/1/04	Black 9	Majesco
1/20/04	Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	Novologic
1/26/04	Blowout	Majesco
3/1/04	Breed	Hip Interactive
2/16/04	Call of Duty	Bethesda Softworks
5/17/04	City of Heroes	NC Soft
4/1/04	Crusaders Kings	Strategy First
2/25/04	Crystal Key II: The Far Realm	Dreamcatcher
3/1/04	CSI 2: Dark Motives	Ubisoft

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
3/2/04	Dead Man's Hand	Atari
4/15/04	Doom III	Activision
1/26/04	Drake of the 99 Dragons	Majesco
6/22/04	Driver 3	Atari
3/1/04	Drake Nakam Forever	Take 2
5/3/04	Dungeon Siege 2	Microsoft
4/1/04	Egyptian Prophecy: The	Dreamcatcher
3/1/04	EverQuest II Collector's Edition	Sony Online Entertainment
3/1/04	EverQuest II	Sony Online Entertainment
6/1/04	Exarh	NC Soft
3/1/04	Far Cry	Ubisoft
3/4/04	Forever Worlds	Dreamcatcher
2/2/04	Frogger's Adventures: The Rescue	Konami
3/4/04	Full Spectrum Warmer	THQ
2/16/04	Gangland	Whiptail Interactive
6/8/04	Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus	Vivendi Universal
11/1/04	Guild Wars	NC Soft
3/30/04	HalfLife 2	Vivendi Universal
2/2/04	IL 2: Forgotten Battles Ace Expansion	Ubisoft
6/1/04	Inquisition	Strategy First
1/23/04	Jack The Ripper	Dreamcatcher
2/10/04	Jagged Alliance 2: Wildfire	Strategy First
1/15/04	Jane's Civilian Flight Simulator	Xocal Interactive
11/1/04	Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi Universal
4/26/04	Lineage II	NC Soft
10/1/04	Lord of the Rings: Middle-Earth Online, The	Vivendi Universal
10/1/04	Lords of the Realm III	Vivendi Universal
1/15/04	Luxury Liner Tycoon	Globa Star Software

ULTIMA X: ODYSSEY

■ FORMAT PC ■ STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE-PLAYING GAME ■ PUBLISHER EA ■ RELEASE MARCH 25



Ultima Online was doing the MMORPG thang when Dark Ages of Camelot and EverQuest were still digital sperm, but eventually the series succumbed both to age and bigger, faster, stronger competition. Thankfully, EA is bringing out a new online Ultima project, Odyssey, that is being called a "sister product" and not an outright sequel. In full and gorgeous 3D, this game will allow for a speedier, more modern style of play, complete with all the depth you would expect.

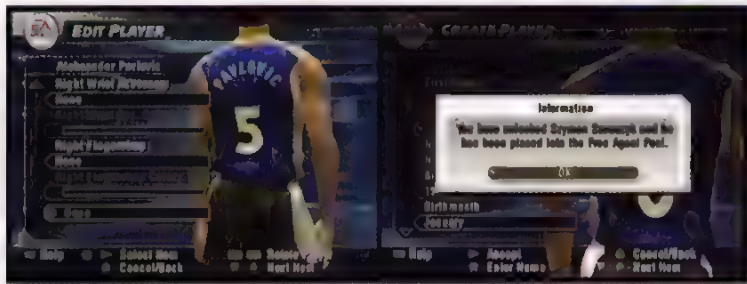
6/1/04	Matrix Online, The	Ubisoft
3/15/04	Medal of Honor Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts
10/1/04	Men of Valor: Vietnam	Vivendi Universal
2/2/04	Micro Mayhem	Jaleco
6/1/04	Movies: The	Activision
3/1/04	Mummy	Hip Interactive
5/3/04	Mythica Online	Microsoft
3/22/04	Painkiller	Dreamcatcher
1/13/04	Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	Ubisoft
2/2/04	Rainbow Six 3: Mission Pack 2	Ubisoft
6/1/04	Rome: Total War	Activision
1/15/04	School Tycoon	Globa Star Software
1/20/04	Silent Storm	Encore Software
3/15/04	Sims 2, The	Electronic Arts
2/24/04	Sitting Ducks	Hip Interactive
2/2/04	Soldier	Encore Software
2/2/04	Spell Force	Encore Software
3/1/04	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
7/1/04	Star Wars Galaxies Online Expansion	LucasArts
1/3/05	Swt 4	Vivendi Universal
6/14/04	Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms	Vivendi Universal
3/3/04	Thief III	Eidos
2/2/04	Train Simulator 2.0	Microsoft
2/24/04	Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged	Atari
3/1/04	True Crime: Streets of LA	Activision
3/25/04	Ultima X: Odyssey	Electronic Arts
2/3/04	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari
2/3/04	Unreal Tournament 2004 Special Edition	Atari
6/1/04	Vampire: The Masquerade Bloodlines	Activision
4/1/04	Warface: Command Battle for Europe	Codemasters
3/3/04	Wild West Shoot Out 3 Pack	Digital Leisure
6/14/04	World of Warcraft	Vivendi Universal
2/2/04	Zoo Tycoon 2.0	Microsoft

GAME BOY ADVANCE

1/27/04	Avatar	Capcom
1/13/04	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Ubisoft
3/30/04	CT Special Forces 2: Back to Hell	Hip Interactive
1/15/04	Dr. Seuss: The Cat in the Hat	Jack of all Games
3/23/04	Duel Masters: Semp Legend	Atari
3/1/04	Ice Nine	Bam Entertainment
2/24/04	Mega Man: Battle Chip Challenge	Capcom
4/1/04	Metal Slug Advance: Survival Mission	SNK NeoGeo
2/9/04	Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo
4/5/04	River City Ransom	Atari
3/1/04	Scoby Doo Two: Monsters Unleashed	THQ
2/24/04	Shining Soul	Atari
2/10/04	Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship 2004	Konami
3/2/04	Zoids: Legacy	Atari

SECRET ACCESS

NBA Live 2004



Create a player with one of these codes in lowercase as his last name. The corresponding player will appear in the free agent pool.

Aleksander Pavlovic – whsucpoi
Andreas Giyniadakis – pockdek
Carlos Delfino – sdfgurkl
James Lang – nbvksmcn
Kyle Korver – oeisndla
Malick Badlane – skenxido
Mario Austin – posneghx
Matt Bonner – bbvdckvm
Nedzad Sinanovic – xdsdrke

Pacellis Moriendo – qwpoaszx
Remon Van de Hare – itrvcjsd
Rick Rickert – poikjmn
Sani Becirovic – zxcvdri
Sofoklis Schortsanitis – ioubfdcj
Szymon Szewczyk – pololjjs
Tommy Smith – xcfwqase
Xue Yuyang – wmkzcoi

B.A. Barrakis
Miami, FL

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME



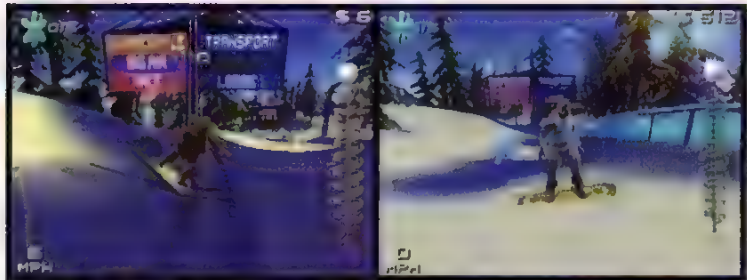
When playing the classic Prince of Persia game, you can skip to any level through the use of these codes.

Level 2 – KIEJSC
Level 3 – VNNNPC
Level 4 – IYVPTC
Level 5 – RWSWWC
Level 6 – GONWUC
Level 7 – DEFNUC

Level 8 – SVZMSC
Level 9 – DBJRPC
Level 10 – MZFYSC
Level 11 – BRAYQC
Level 12 – UUGTPC
Jafar Battle – LRARUC

"The Rhino"
Toledo, OH

SSX 3



For those of you who don't have the requisite time available to unlock things the normal way in this gigantic title, these codes should speed up the process. Enter them on the cheat menu.

All Boards – graphicdelight
All Peak One Clothes – shoppingpre
All Posters – postnobills
All Toys – nogluerequired
All Trading Cards – gotitgotitneedit
All Videos – myeyesaredim
Brod – zenmaster
Bunny San – wheresyourtail
Canhuck – greatwhitenorth
Churchill – tankengine

Eddie – worm
Gutless – boneyardreject
Hiro – slicksuit
Jurgen – brokenleg
Luther – bronco
Marty – back2future
North West Legend – callhimgeorge
Stretch – windmildunk
Sveite Luther – notsoveite
Unknown Rider – finallymadeit

Joey Thompson
Mobile, AL

CONFLICT DESERT STORM II: BACK TO BAGHDAD



Defending the free world doesn't allow for any farting around. Use this code at the main menu to unlock all the cheats. Then go to the options menu and the cheats should be available.

Cheat Menu – L1 (x2), R1 (x2), □ (x2), △ (x2), ○ (x2)

Garth Ennis
Los Gatos, NM

DRAGONBALL Z: BUDOKAI 2



Here's a cheap way to unlock stuff. It's a little more complicated than your standard button sequences – so pay attention, grasshopper! Oh, and we found the regular ways to get the hidden characters, too.

Get Free Capsules – Hold L1 and L2 while repeatedly entering and leaving a shop. This should cause your capsule percentage to increase every time, thereby unlocking bonus stuff.

HIDDEN CHARACTERS

Android 16 – Beat him with Goku in Dragon World
Android 17 – Beat him with Piccolo in Dragon World
Android 18 – Beat her with Krillin in Dragon World
Android 20 – Beat him with Goku in Dragon World
Captain Ginyu – Beat him with Vegeta in Dragon World
Cell – Beat him with Goku in Dragon World
Frieza – Beat him with Goku in Dragon World
Future Trunks – Beat Vegeta on Namek with Kid Trunks
Great Saiyaman – Beat Cell with Gohan in Dragon World
Hercule – Beat Majin Buu (fat) with Great Saiyaman
Nappa – Beat him with Vegeta in Dragon World
Raditz – Beat him with Goku in Dragon World
Recoome – Beat him with Goku in Dragon World
Videl – Beat Super Buu (with Gohan absorbed) with Hercule

Anton Deden
Bayport, MN

SPAWN: ARMAGEDDON



Enter these codes during gameplay.

All Weapons – Start, Up, Down, Right, Left, R1, R2, L1, L2
Unlimited Health – X, Left, ○, Right, R2, L2, Up (x2)

Robert Bonilla
Pittsburg, PA

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

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES



If being an unstoppable robot killing machine isn't good enough, use these codes on the cheats menu to give yourself that little extra boost.

50% Extra Health In Every Fight - Δ (x2), \square , \times , \circ , Δ , \square , \circ
50% Extra Health For TX In Every Fight - \square , Δ , \square , Δ , \circ , \times , \circ , \times
All Future Weapons - \times (x3), Δ , \circ (x2), \square , \times
All Past Weapons - \circ (x2), Δ , \square , \times , Δ (x2), \square
Instant Win - \square (x2), Δ , \circ (x2), \times , \square , Δ
Invincibility - \square (x2), \times , Δ , \times , \circ , \times , \circ
Quadruple Damage - Δ (x4), \circ , \times , \circ , \square
Unlimited Ammo - \times , Δ (x3), \times , \circ , \times , \square
Unlock All Levels - \square (x3), \circ (x3), Δ (x2)

Mike & Sam Eygendahl
Los Angeles, CA

GOBLIN COMMANDER: UNLEASH THE HORDE

Here's a whole load of ways to help out those poor goblins under your command. In order to use these cheats, you first have to press R1+R2 and hold them, press L1+L2 and hold them, hold down Δ , and press Down on the d-pad for three seconds.

100 Gold - L1, R1 (x4), L1, Δ , L1 (x3)
100 Souls - R1, L1 (x4), R1, Δ , R1 (x3)
1,000 Gold & Souls - R1 (x2), L1, R1 (x2), Δ (x3), L1 (x2)
Access All Levels (Profile "Bling") - Δ (x3), L1, R1, L1 (x2), R1, L1, R1 (x2), L1, R1, L1 (x2), R1, L1, R1, L1 (x2), R1, L1 (x2), R1, L1, R1 (x2), Δ (x3)
Fog of War Toggle - R1, L1, R1 (x2), L1 (x2), Δ (x2), L1, R1
God Mode - R1 (x3), L1 (x3), R1, L1, Δ , R1
Increase Speed 2x Toggle - R1 (x5), L1, Δ , R1 (x3)
Instant Win - R1 (x2), L1 (x3), R1 (x2), Δ (x3)
Reduce Speed 50% Toggle - L1 (x5), Δ (x4), R1

Frederik Pohl
Hamburg, SD

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND



In the world of underground racing, rules are made to be broken. These codes, which should be entered on the main menu, go a long way towards that goal.

Free Parts - \times (x2), Δ , \times
Unlimited Nitro - \times , \circ , Δ (x2), \times (x2), \circ
Unlock All Circuit Tracks - Down, R1 (x3), R2 (x3), \square
Unlock All Drag Tracks - Right, \square , Left, R1, \square , L1, L2, R2
Unlock All Drift Tracks - Left (x4), Right, R2, R1, L2
Unlock All Sprint Tracks - Up, R2 (x3), R1, Down (x3)
Unlock Drift Physics in All Modes - R1, Up (x3), Down (x3), L1

Jason McNabb
Roanoke, VA

CODE OF THE MONTH

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE



Sometimes a Soul Reaver just isn't enough. Enter these codes while the game is paused to enable the cheats.

All Bonuses - R2, Down, L2, R1, Left, L2, Down, L1, Δ
All Dark Chronicles - R1, Down, R2, L1, Right, R2, Δ , Down, L1
Fill 'Er Up - Left, Right, Left, Right, R1, L1, \circ , Δ , Down
Full TK Power & Health - Left (x2), Up (x2), L1, R2, \circ , Down, Δ
Give All Slams - Right, Down, Up, Down (x2), R1, Δ , \circ , Down
Infinite Reaver Charge - Down (x2), Up, Left, R1, R2, Down, Δ , \circ
Invincible - Up, Down, Right, Down, R1, R2, Down, Δ , L1
No Textures - L1, Down, R2, Right, R2, Up, Δ , L1, Down
Switch to Equivalent Toon Version - Up, Down, Up, Down, R1, R2, Down, \circ , Δ
Tube Reaver - Up, Down, Left, Right, R2, L2, Δ , Down, \circ
Wireframe - L1, Down, L1, Up, R1, L2, L1, Down, Δ

James Bartholemew
State College, PA

MANHUNT



You have to beat the game to use these codes. Enter them on the main menu.

Fully Equipped - R1, R2, L1, L2, Down, Up, Left, Up
God Mode - Down (x2), \circ , Up, \square , Δ , \square , R2, Up (x2), L1, Δ
Hellum Hunters - R1 (x2), Δ , \circ , \square , L2, L1, Down
Invisibility - \square (x3), Down, \square , Down, \circ , Up
Monkey Skin - \square (x2), R2, Down, Δ , \square , \circ , Down
Piggay Skin - Up, Down, Left (x2), R1, R2, L1 (x2)
Rabbit Skin - Left, R1 (x2), Δ , R1 (x2), \square , L1
Regenerate - R2, Right, Circle, R2, L2, Down, Circle, Left
Runner - R2 (x2), L1, R2, Left, Right, Left, Right
Silence - R1, L1, R1, L1, Right, Left (x3)
Super Punch - L1, Δ (x3), \circ (x3), R1

"GI Droid"
(location unknown - last seen
having a pillow fight with hobbits)

RAINBOW SIX 3

Knowing is half the battle. Knowing this code, which is to be entered during gameplay, may not win you the battle, but it should at least entertain you.

Laser Trail Code - Up, Down, Up, Down, R3 (x2)

Sgt. Slaughter
Camp Ripley, VA

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND



In the world of underground racing, rules are made to be broken. These codes, which should be entered on the main menu, go a long way towards that goal.

- Unlock All Circuit Tracks** – Down, R Button (x3), Black (x3), X
- Unlock All Drag Tracks** – Right, X, Left, R Button, X, L Button, White, Black
- Unlock All Drift Tracks** – Left (x4), Right, Black, R Button, White
- Unlock All Sprint Tracks** – Up, Black (x3), R Button, Down (x3)
- Unlock Drift Physics in All Modes** – R Button, Up (x3), Down (x3), L Button

Johnny Korea
Cook County, IL

GOBLIN COMMANDER: UNLEASH THE HORDE

Here's a whole load of ways to help out those poor goblins under your command. In order to use these cheats, you first have to pull the R button and hold it, pull the L button and hold it, hold down Y, and press Down on the d-pad for three seconds.

- 100 Gold** – L Button, R Button (x4), L Button, Y, L Button (x3)
- 100 Souls** – R Button, L Button (x4), R Button, Y, R Button (x3)
- 1,000 Gold & Souls** – R Button (x2), L Button, R Button (x2), Y (x3), L Button (x2)
- Access All Levels (Profile "Bling")** – Y (x3), L Button, R Button, L Button (x2), R Button, L Button, R Button (x2), L Button, R Button, L Button (x2), R Button, L Button, R Button, L Button (x2), R Button, L Button, R Button (x2), Y (x3)
- Fog of War Toggle** – R Button, L Button, R Button (x2), L Button (x2), Y (x2), L Button, R Button
- God Mode** – R Button (x3), L Button (x3), R Button, L Button, Y, R Button
- Increase Speed 2x Toggle** – R Button (x5), L Button, Y, R Button (x3)
- Instant Win** – R Button (x2), L Button (x3), R Button (x2), Y (x3)
- Reduce Speed 50% Toggle** – L Button (x5), Y (x4), R Button

Jimmy James
Gibraltar, VA

HUNTER: THE RECKONING – WAYWARD



Enter these codes during gameplay.

- 99 Conviction** – Y (x4), Up, Down, Up, Down
- Unlimited Ammo** – X (x4), Up (x2), Down (x2)
- Unlock All Secrets** – X, B, X, B, Up (x2), Down (x2)

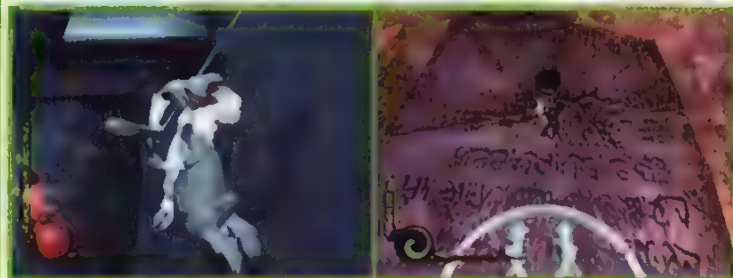
UNLOCK EXTRA CHARACTERS

- Carpenter** – Reach melee level 99 with any hunter
- Joshua** – Let 250 innocents die
- Vincent** – Reach ranged level 99 with any hunter
- Werewolf** – Reach conviction level 99 with any hunter

Abraham Van Helsing
Boston, MA

CODE OF THE MONTH

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE



Sometimes a Soul Reaver just isn't enough. Enter these codes while the game is paused to enable the cheats.

- All Bonuses** – Black, Down, White, R Button, Left, White, R Button, Left, White, R Button, Left, White, Down, L Button, Y
- All Dark Chronicles** – R Button, Down, Black, L Button, Right, Black, Y, Down, L Button
- Fill 'Er Up** – Left, Right, Left, Right, R Button, L Button, B, Y, Down
- Full TK Power & Health** – Left (x2), Up (x2), L Button, Black, B, Down, Y
- Give All Slams** – Right, Down, Up, Down (x2), R Button, Y, B, Down
- Infinite Reaver Charge** – Down (x2), Up, Left, R Button, Black, Down, Y, B
- Invincible** – Up, Down, Right, Down, R Button, Black, Down, Y, L Button
- No Textures** – L Button, Down, Black, Right, Black, Up, Y, L Button, Down
- Switch to Equivalent Toon Version** – Up, Down, Up, Down, R Button, Black, Down, B, Y
- Tube Reaver** – Up, Down, Left, Right, Black, White, Y, Down, B

Marco Oppenheimer
Portland, OR

DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE

Enter the following codes on the cheats menu.

- Special Meter Always Full** – happyfeet
- Unlock All Create-A-Skater Items** – gethotgear

Yuri Gagarin
New York, NY

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND



In the world of underground racing, rules are made to be broken. These codes, which should be entered on the main menu, go a long way towards that goal.

- Drift Physics For All Cars** – R Button, Up (x3), Down (x3), L Button
- Unlock All Circuit Tracks** – Down, R Button (x3), X (x3), Z
- Unlock All Sprint Tracks** – Up, X (x3), R Button, Down (x3)

Pat Fingis
Seattle, WA

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH

By beating a set time on a track, you can unlock a staff ghost to race against. Here's the dilly on that, as well as instructions on how to unlock all the goods.

UNLOCKABLES

All Cup Tour – Beat all cups on 150cc

Barrel Train – Beat the Star Cup on 150cc

Battle Buggy – Beat the Mushroom Cup on 100cc

Bloom Coach – Beat the Flower Cup on 50cc

Bullet Blaster – Beat the Special Cup on 50cc

Green Fire – Beat the Mushroom Cup on 50cc

King Boo Kart – Beat the Special Cup on Mirror Mode

Luigi's Mansion – Beat the Mushroom Cup on 150cc

Mirror Mode – Beat the All Cup Tour at 150cc

Para Wing – Beat the Star Cup on 50cc

Parade Kart – Beat the All Cup Tour on Mirror Mode

Petey Piranha and King Boo – Beat the Star Cup on Mirror Mode

Special Cup – Beat the Mushroom, Flower, and Star Cups on 100cc

Tilt Table Battle Stage – Beat the Flower Cup on Mirror Mode

Toad, Toadette, and Toad Racer – Beat the Special Cup on 100cc

Toadette Kart – Beat the Mushroom Cup on Mirror Mode

Turbo Birdo – Beat the Flower Cup on 150cc

Waluigi Racer – Beat the Flower Cup on 100cc

STAFF GHOSTS

Baby Park – 1:14:000

Bowser's Castle – 2:47:000

Daisy Cruiser – 1:55:000

Dino Dino Jungle – 2:03:000

DK Mountain – 2:15:000

Dry Dry Desert – 1:53:000

Luigi Circuit – 1:29:000

Mushroom Bridge – 1:34:000

Mushroom City – 1:53:000

Mario Circuit – 1:44:000

Peach Beach – 1:23:000

Rainbow Road – 3:19:000

Sherbert Land – 1:28:000

Waluigi Stadium – 2:02:000

Wario Colosseum – 2:24:000

Yoshi Circuit – 2:02:000

Hilary Bisenieks
Philadelphia, PA



1080° AVALANCHE



Enter these codes at the options screen to be able to jump to the final challenges in Match Race mode.

Novice Final Challenge – JAS3IKRR

Hard Final Challenge – ZAUNIKFS

Expert Final Challenge – EATFKRM

Hal Banks
Boise, ID

DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE



Enter the following codes on the cheats menu.

Unlock All Characters – entourage

Unlock All Create-A-Skater Items – trendytrickster

Unlock All Stages – ambassador

Michael Eisner
Orlando, FL

SSX 3



For those of you who don't have the requisite time available to unlock things the normal way in this gigantic title, these codes should speed up the process. Enter them on the cheat menu.

All Peak One Clothing – shoppingspre

All Videos – myeyesaredim

Brodi – zenmaster

Bunny San – wheresyourtail

Canhuck – greatwhitenorth

Churchill – tankengine

Cudmore – milkmedaisy

Eddie – worm

Hiro – slicksuit

Luther – bronco

Marty – back2future

North West Legend – callhimgeorge

Unknown Rider – finallymadeitin

Veronica James
Stillwater, OK

TRON 2.0



It's the future. Why shouldn't you have access to all this stuff? Fight the power with these codes, which should be entered after hitting the Talk key. Yes, you have to press return after you enter the code, too. Oh, and if the Talk key isn't working for some reason, try the Team Chat key instead.

All Guns – mpguns

All Weapons (for the stage), Max Health, Max Energy – mptears

All Weapons, Max Health, Max Energy – mpkfa

Display Coordinates – mppos

God Mode – mpgod

Level Skip – mpmaphole

Max Armor – mparmor

Max Energy – mpammo

Max Health – mphealth

Ander Alhelor
Gary, IN

MOVIES AND GAMES: A HISTORY OF SADNESS

These days, it seems that nearly every game with a hint of success has its film rights picked up by a studio. Any movie that seems like it might be a hit (whether it turns out to be or not) has a video game adaptation released along with it. The relationship between games and movies is undeniable and can be traced all the way back to the heyday of the Atari. But even though movies and games have been holding hands for decades, it doesn't mean their relationship has been a smooth one. On both sides of the equation, the film and video game alliance has produced some of the most notorious failures in entertainment history. The following is a brief listing of some of the greatest blunders in the film and video game partnership.

1982 | The Alien and the Computer

In what seemed to be the template for the video game and film relationship for years to come, 1982 saw two of its most high profile disasters: the E.T.

the Extra-Terrestrial Atari title and the movie *Tron*. To this day, E.T. remains one of the most notorious train wrecks in video game history. Designed by Howard

Warshaw (who also created the acclaimed *Yar's Revenge* cartridge for Atari), E.T. put the player in the role of the titular alien as he searched for pieces of an intergalactic phone in order to call home for a ride. The pieces, as well as all other goodies, could only be found at the bottom of wells, so basically the game involved falling down a lot of holes.

Thanks to the enormous popularity of the film, the title actually sold very well, and is the eighth best selling Atari game of all time. However, Atari

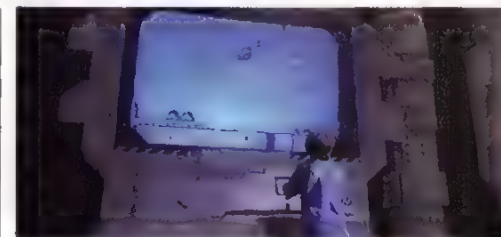
produced 4 million copies of the cartridge, and only sold about 1.5 million. The remaining copies were dumped in a landfill and buried, resulting in massive losses for Atari.

Nearly as disastrous was the Disney movie *Tron* released the same year. While it featured cutting-edge special effects for the time, the movie's subject matter and dark visuals turned off audiences.



The story of a programmer sucked into the video game he created, *Tron* was too dark for children and too confusing for adults unfamiliar with video games. The expensive film tanked, and its losses, combined with those of 1983's equally unsuccessful *Something Wicked This Way Comes* nearly put Disney Studios out of business.

Although the film itself may have been a disaster, *Tron's* legacy is not one of total failure. The movie spawned a very popular video game adaptation, and the film itself became a cult classic. In 2003, a sequel was released in the form of *Tron 2.0*, a well-received PC title from Buena Vista Interactive.



1989 | Nintendo Commercials Come to Theaters

In a staggering display of marketing genius, *The Wizard* was released in 1989. A thinly veiled commercial for Nintendo products, *The Wizard* is most notable for being the public introduction of Super Mario Bros. 3. The film also included plugs for games like *Double Dragon*, *Metroid*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Also making an appearance were the Power Glove, the Nintendo Hint Line, and ads for a skateboard company. Starring Fred Savage of *The Wonder Years*, and featuring appearances by Christian Slater (soon to star in the video game adaptation film *Alone in the Dark*) and a very young Tobey Maguire in an uncredited role, the movie did very poorly at the box office. These days, however, the film is fondly regarded as a nice piece of nostalgic kitsch. Because the two have a nearly identical plot, it's often referred to as the "kiddie version of *Rain Man*." However, *The Wizard* actually hit theaters a year before that movie, so perhaps the saying should be "*Rain Man* is like the grown-up version of *The Wizard*."



GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME | MARK KILLEEN



Every month one of Game Informer's readers picks his or her personal choice for Greatest Game Of All Time.

SHENMUE II

■ **FORMAT** XBOX
 ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT

My favorite game of all time is a title most people didn't play more than five minutes of; but those who didn't put it down right away got to experience a cinematic tale full of action, humor, mystery, and intense characters. It improved everything from its predecessor, and even featured upgraded graphics. It was the whole reason I got an Xbox: to experience the magic of *Shenmue II* in all its glory.

I was a huge fan of the first *Shenmue* on Dreamcast. It featured a gripping tale of an eighteen-year-old boy named Ryo Hazuki on his quest to search for Lan Di.

He swore he would avenge his father's death, no matter what. Ryo's journey had previously led him from Dobuita to the New Yokosuka Harbor, to Hong Kong, where *Shenmue II* begins. Ryo is unsure of this strange land and its people. He quickly learns who the good and bad types are, though. Unlike the first game, *Shenmue II* jumps straight on into the action. Free battles, QTEs (Quick Time Events), and the even more challenging Command QTEs lead the way through the Wan Chai district, where Ryo learns from such memorable characters as Xiuying, Guixiang, and Jianmin. His search for

1993 | Mushroom Kingdom

As beloved as the Mario titles are, that love was certainly not shared with the film adaptation. The first movie based on a video game, *Super Mario Bros.* was the perfect example of what not to do with an established video game property. While the film starred sibling plumbers named Mario and Luigi (with the surname "Mario," no less), little else was retained from the original games. The Mushroom Kingdom was replaced with Dinohattan, a city of people evolved from dinosaurs. Dennis Hopper played Koopa, the villainous ruler of the city. Many other Mario icons made an appearance, but mostly in



name alone. Rather than mushrooms, Goombas were portrayed as large men with tiny reptilian heads, Yoshi appeared as a small velociraptor, and the Princess as a grad student named Daisy.

Although the Mario brothers did wear costumes approximating their trademark clothes at one point, the look and feel of the film was nothing like any of the games. Fans stayed away in droves and the film lost close to \$30 million. Overall, it was so bad

that *Super Mario Bros.* enjoys a healthy cult following as one of the worst movies ever. Among the few highlights are the appearances of the Super Nintendo accessory, the Super Scope 6, as a gun near the end of the film, and political rockabilly singer Mojo Nixon as Toad.

1994 | A One-Two Punch

Gamers were served not one, but two truly awful game adaptations in 1994. Most players remember the heinous *Street Fighter: The Movie*, but many forget (for good reason) the *Double Dragon* movie. Both films had some interesting talent attached, but both utterly failed in the box office and in the eyes of fans.

Street Fighter concerned the evil M. Bison's plans to take over the world, and Col. Guile's attempt to stop him with the help of some of the world's greatest fighters. Even for a movie starring Jean-Claude Van Damme, the plot was as thin as dell-sliced turkey and gained a small amount of media coverage only because respected actor Raul Julia died during the filming. As M. Bison, Julia delivers a hammy, over-the-top performance that makes his final role all the sadder. After a long and respected career, his farewell role was as a megalomaniac who flies thanks to his magnetic boots!

While Van Damme's career died, some members of the cast were able to survive the tragic film and go on to better things. Actress Ming-Na, who played Chun Li, later joined the cast of the hit show *ER*. But more importantly, she went to star in a second failed video game adaptation when she voiced Dr.



Aki Ross in *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*. Also appearing in the movie was currently popular singer Kylie Minogue, who clearly needed work at the time.

Street Fighter: The Movie also has the strange distinction of being the only movie based on a game to spawn a game. The *Street Fighter: The Movie* game digitized actors from the film and placed them in a choppy, sluggish fighter. The combined movie and game may very well be the most concentrated example of the poor results of the movie/game partnership.

As if *Street Fighter* didn't heap enough pain on the community, *Double Dragon* emerged to kick gamers while they were down. Fortunately, few people experienced the sheer awfulness of the film, as it made barely \$2 million in theaters. Starring Scott Wolf from TV's *Party of Five*, Alyssa Milano, and *Terminator 2*'s Robert Patrick, the film also featured appearances from Vanna White and Andy Dick. Not surprisingly, it's considered one of the worst video game adaptations of all time. Strangely, the terrible script was co-written by Paul Dini, who would later go on to find much acclaim as the writer and producer of the enormously popular *Batman*, *Superman*, and *Justice League* cartoons.

the only man with answers, Yuanda Zhu, leads him to Guilin, where Ren of Heavens helps him navigate his way through a mystical, run-down city – the meat and potatoes of the game.

The QTEs through the Dancing Dragon Building, the plank crossing in the upper floors of the Ghost Hall Building, and the combination of the two actions (plus more) in the Yellow Head Building are more exciting and challenging than anything you'll find in *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, or *Pokémon*. Ryo eventually finds Yuanda Zhu, and is led to

the roof of the Big Ox Building for the greatest scene in video game history. The rooftop stare-down between Ryo and Lan Di while the villain's accomplice Dou Niu hangs a young boy over the edge and bellows "Let's see if this kid can fly!" is one of the best things I've ever seen.

But that's not all that *Shenmue II* is about. Over twenty free battles, fifteen QTEs, and dozens of cinematic sequences help the story (written by the legendary Yu Suzuki) unfold. It truly is a masterpiece.

Game Design & Development DEGREE PROGRAM



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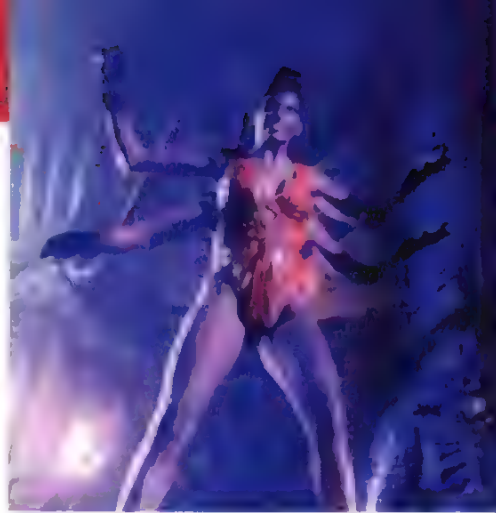
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1995 | Fatman Returns

While Dini's *Batman* cartoons became very popular in the late '90s, the caped crusader had to survive a few more blows to his image before his respectability was restored. The *Batman Forever* game for Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo was one of the earliest entries in Batman's long video game losing streak. The title boasted fully digitized actors, à la *Mortal Kombat*. However, none of the actors from the equally embarrassing film were in the game, so all roles were played by unfamiliar faces, many of whom were visibly overweight. The game tried to stand out by featuring Batman-esque gadgets, but still bombed, as few things in life are less appealing than a fat man in spandex doing high kicks.



1997 | A Series Gets Annihilated

Although the original *Mortal Kombat* film is considered one of the best video game adaptations, the sequel is widely reviled as one of the worst. The

original, which was loosely based on Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon*, featured heavy input from the game's creators in order to stay faithful to the material. Rumor has it that the filmmakers interviewed gamers to insure that the adaptation met their expectations. *Mortal Kombat Annihilation*, however, seems to have ignored everything that the gamers had to say.

Annihilation featured neither director Paul W.S. Anderson (who also directed *Resident Evil*) nor most of the original cast. The major problem with the film is that it tried too hard to shovel in as many references to the game as possible, including "Anamallities" and the centaur-like creature Motaro. The monster was played by former American Gladiator Malibu (also a former pro racquetball player), which speaks volumes about the quality of the acting. Not surprisingly, the film took in less than half what the original made. Strangely though, a third *Mortal Kombat* film is in the works, with a script by Drew McWeeny of the popular movie site *Ain't It Cool News*.

2001 | The Really Final Fantasy

While the hype machine was in full force over what was dubbed "the first photo-realistic CG movie ever," *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* earned some more dubious honors. To date, it is the biggest financial disaster of the video game-based movie genre. Thanks to the enormous production cost, *The Spirits Within* managed to lose over \$100 million dollars for its studio, Square Pictures. After the failure of the film, Square Pictures shut down. It has since produced the short film "Final Flight of the Osiris" for the *Animatrix* DVD, but has no plans for future theatrical releases.

Despite the admitted beauty of the film's visuals, the plot was too thin for most moviegoers, and not thematically similar enough for fans of the series. Although it is considered by many to be one of the best video game adaptations, it even failed to find much of an audience on DVD, ensuring that there won't be another theatrical release from the *Final Fantasy* series, at least for the foreseeable future.

While the collaboration between film and gaming has admittedly resulted in some undeniably shoddy end products, there have been many successes as well. *Resident Evil* and the first *Mortal Kombat* movie are almost universally liked by gamers. *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* was a huge financial success, although gamers are split on its quality. Many more video game adaptations are planned for the next few years, including *Silent Hill*, *Alone in the Dark*, *Dungeon Siege*, *Spy Hunter*, *Fatal Frame*, and many more. Chances are that many will be surprisingly good.

Games based on movies have seen an upswing in quality over the last few years as well. Titles like *Spider-Man*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, and *Enter the Matrix* changed the perception of what licensed games could do. Of course, movie-based games will be produced for as long as movies are made. Vivendi Universal's Senior Vice President of Product Development Michael Pole offers this thought on the allure of licensed games: "Movie properties have an inherent level of interest and excitement with the public based on the film studios marketing effort. For those properties such as *Hulk*, *Riddick*, and *Van Helsing*, our games get the benefit of both the studio marketing efforts while preparing to launch the movie, and the consumers' knowledge of the brand, which allows the title to stand out among an extremely crowded market. We are thrilled to have access to such a broad range of content and plan on building movie-based properties for years to come."



1999 | Wing Commander

He may be popular with the ladies, but not even Freddie Prinze Jr. could save *Wing Commander* from being a total loss. Along with his life partner Matthew Lillard, Prinze starred as a fighter pilot engaged in a galactic war with the evil Kilrathi aliens. Unlike the reptilian aliens in the games, the Kilrathi in the movie resembled catlike Muppets. The disparity between the two was especially strange considering that Chris Roberts, who worked on the video game series since the beginning, directed the film. Hammy acting, a terrible plot, and the presence of gravity in space earned *Wing Commander* the distinction of being one of the worst movies of all time. But like most failed game movies, it is not without its value. N-Gage fans will get a kick out of counting the various Nokia logos that pop up throughout the film.



THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

February 1, 1991 would prove to be an important day for adrenaline-infused gaming junkies. On that day, id Software was officially formed in Mesquite, Texas. The small, hardcore, and oftentimes eccentric team released *Commander Keen* and promptly rocked the computer gaming world in May of the same year with the shareware release of *Wolfenstein 3D*. Later titles only proved how id

could make good things better by upping the tension and action of *Wolfenstein* with *Doom*, *Quake*, their respective sequels, and the now de facto feature of offering players the ability to mod their favorite titles. The company's third entry to the *Doom* saga is still set to release "when it's done."

PSONE

THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS



RETRO RATING
4



For the love of all that is holy, this is even worse than the movie on which it's based. Making a sequel to *The Crow* was a bad idea; adapting the sequel into a game was a worse one. If this had been released on the Sega Genesis, the graphics would have been excusable, but on the PlayStation they're pathetic. The environments are washed-out and blurry, and characters are heavily pixelated. When you can make out your character's face, he looks like WCW's Sting. However, the most offensive thing about this title is the play control; imagine a clunkier *Resident Evil* control scheme with hand-to-hand combat. Left and right on the d-pad rotate your character, while pressing up makes you walk forward. In an action title, this setup simply doesn't work. Hit detection is terrible and response times are slower than molasses. But then again, it's probably a mistake to expect anything with the *Crow* name on it (after the first movie) to be any good.

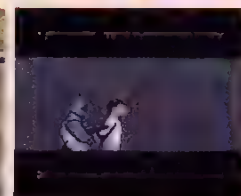
■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER ACCLAIM ■ DEVELOPER CONTENT
■ YEAR RELEASED 1997

SNES

NO ESCAPE



RETRO RATING
6.75



It may have not been a hit like *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, but *No Escape* can at least claim that it featured Ray Liotta in a game nearly ten years before the Rockstar juggernaut. Based on the movie, which starred Liotta, you play as Robbins, a convict sent to an island prison. On this island, various gangs have formed, and you must face them down if you are to escape. Every gang territory is a pretty basic platforming stage, and the combat is incredibly simple. If this were the extent of the game, it would be pretty lame, but *No Escape* actually tries to do a bit more. In the course of each level, you collect items that can be traded to the people back in your village. By collecting the right pieces, you can construct weapons and tools, like bombs, arrows, and even a gun. Some areas can't even be reached without the right item. It's a cool mechanic that partially redeems the poor combat and difficult jumping. *No Escape* is no classic, but at least it's not a total dud, either.

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER SONY IMAGESOFT
■ DEVELOPER BITS STUDIOS ■ YEAR RELEASED 1994

GENESIS

CUTTHROAT ISLAND



RETRO RATING
5



Like many games adapted from movies, *Cutthroat Island* is just a simple brawler with some licensed characters attached. Considering the ultra-poor performance of the film, this title would have probably made a bigger impact had Acclaim ditched the film tie-in. While it has its problems, *Cutthroat* is a fairly decent side-scrolling fighter. The character animation is great for the time, but the most positive aspect is the surprisingly deep combat system. Attacks include armed and unarmed combat, blocking, grappling, running, and sliding attacks, and even some basic combos. Certain stages feature non-linear paths, something quite rare for an old-school brawler. On the other hand, however, other levels feature vehicles like a mine cart, which are far less successful. The only way to pass these two areas is to memorize the placement of obstacles, which quickly becomes tedious. But on the whole, *Cutthroat Island* remains one of the better pirate games out there.

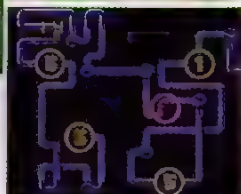
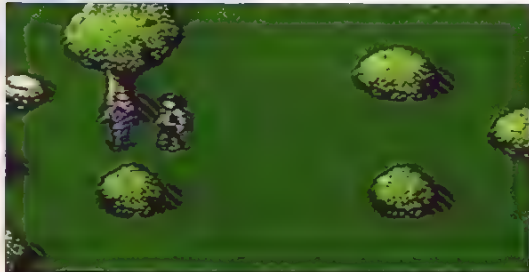
■ STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER ACCLAIM ■ DEVELOPER SOFTWARE CREATIONS ■ YEAR RELEASED 1995

NES

BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT VIDEO GAME ADVENTURE



RETRO RATING
7.75



ASK THE LOCALS FOR HELP, BUT REMEMBER TO BE EXCELLENT TO EVERYONE... DON'T MAKE THEM MAD!

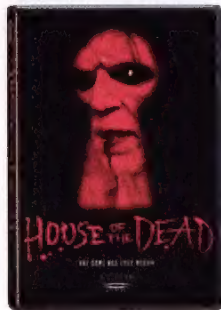
Much like the most excellent movies, *Bill and Ted's* video game has a great idea and a somewhat flawed execution. Rather than retell the first movie, *Bill and Ted's Excellent Video Game Adventure* is intended as a further adventure of the brain-dead duo. Someone has misplaced historical figures, and it's up to Bill and Ted to find them and return them to their proper time periods. Instead of fighting, the two distract their foes by throwing pudding cups, cassette tapes, and other non-violent items. Talking to people reveals clues, and Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter even make appearances in severely digitized form. The game requires a lot of patience, and the isometric view causes some terribly wonky control issues, but overall *Bill and Ted's* video game title deserves points for trying something different. It's not as cool as a rapping grim reaper or two big-booted Martians who join into one, but it's still worth a look. Station!

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER UN ■ DEVELOPER ROCKET SCIENCE GAMES
■ YEAR RELEASED 1991

HOUSE OF THE DEAD DVD

> **Manufacturer:** Artisan Entertainment > **Website:** artisanent.com
> **List Price:** \$26.98

Welcome to the first installment of *GI Goes to the Movies*, with your hosts, Reiner and Jeremy. On their maiden voyage, they took a close look at the cinematic masterpiece *House of the Dead*, coming soon to DVD.



Jeremy: Well, I have seen a lot of movies in my day, and this is certainly one of them.

Reiner: I really appreciated how this film...managed to fill my entire TV screen. It worked in my DVD player.

Jeremy: Yes, it worked in mine, too. I really liked that about the movie. I also liked that it didn't steal my lunch money or abduct my cat.

Reiner: Those are both good points. But let's face some facts here: There's nothing redeeming about this film at all.

Jeremy: I guess it was better than having oral surgery.

Reiner: I disagree. At least they put you out when you have oral surgery.

Jeremy: Yeah. Watching this movie feels like you're being stabbed in the eyes with dull pencils.

Reiner: I will say this: The fourth grade dialogue and completely obvious plot made me feel smart for the first time in my life.

Jeremy: Me too. But we're not. This movie is just that dumb.

Reiner: True. We were dumb enough to sit through the entire thing.

Jeremy: So to sum up, there are some people on an island, and there are zombies. Lots of stuff gets killed, but so does a little piece of your soul as you watch it. Enjoy! I give it a .37285 out of 10.

Reiner: I will give it a 2 out of 10, just because it is a video game movie with clips from the game in it. That's brilliant.



LARA CROFT WETSUIT STATUE

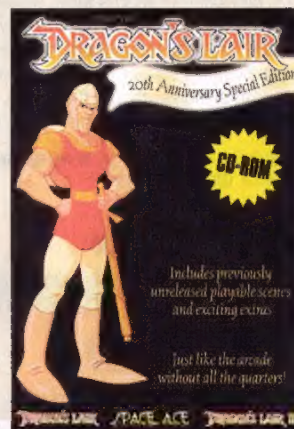
> **Manufacturer:** Sota Toys > **Website:** sotatoys.com > **List Price:** \$99.99

This limited edition 10-inch statue was created by laser-scanning Angelina Jolie to obtain precise details of every inch of her body. Just think about that for a second: a precise replica of Angelina Jolie's body. We talked to the gentleman who performed the scan and he confirmed that yes, he does indeed have the best job in the world. No, he's not planning on quitting, either. But he will be calling in sick the day Kathy Bates is coming in to be scanned for the *About Schmidt* Hot Tub Fun Playset. Urrgh. So anyway, exact replicas of Angelina in a skin-tight wetsuit rule! There are only 2,500 of these statues in existence, and every single person who buys one will brag about having her in their bedroom. Will you be one of those lucky (and slightly lonely) individuals? Come on, you know she'd look lovely between your Xena and Seven of Nine statues.

DRAGON'S LAIR 20TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EDITION

> **Manufacturer:** Digital Leisure, Inc > **Website:** digitalleisure.com
> **List Price:** \$19.99

When we mentioned Dirk the Daring to some younger kids the other day, they though we were talking about Dirk Diggler. Why some 13-year-olds had seen *Boogie Nights* we'll never know, because they stole our bikes and rode away before we could ask them. But for many of us old fogies, *Dragon's Lair* brings back fond memories of playing (or even just watching) Dirk's adventures back in the arcade. The Don Bluth-produced animated game was years ahead of its time, and still looks great to this day. This CD-ROM includes all three Don Bluth games – *Dragon's Lair*, *Dragon's Lair II*, and *Space Ace* – as well as a host of extras. It's the next best thing to having a time machine to take you to the glory days of the arcade. Of course, if we had a time machine, we'd get our bikes back.



GAME CHANGER

> **Manufacturer:** Gamester > **Website:** gamesterusa.com
> **List Price:** \$9.99

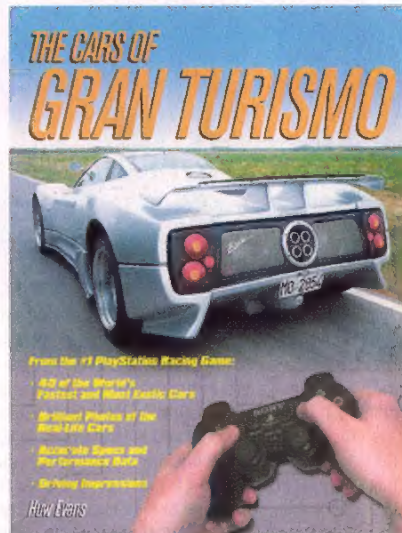
Ahh, laziness. Is there anything finer in this life? Laziness is like...em, it's like...uhh. We'd think of a good comparison, but that would take too much effort. We will say that we are huge fans of anything that makes life ever so slightly easier. Take, for example, the Game Changer. Operating on the same premise as a CD changer, you slip this onto your Game Boy Advance SP and put a cartridge into the three slots. When you want to change games, you simply turn off your GBA and flip the switch to the game you want. Not only does it store the games nicely and provide a comfortable grip for gamers with larger hands, it also saves you precious nanoseconds! Woohoo! After a long day of gaming, you may have saved enough time to, say, pick your nose. Ain't technology wonderful?



THE CARS OF GRAN TURISMO

> **Manufacturer:** Motorbooks International
> **Website:** motorbooks.com
> **List Price:** \$14.95

If you're a car aficionado or a racing game fan, this book is for you. A guide to the licensed vehicles found in the *Gran Turismo* series, this book includes photos, specs, performance data, and trivia on every car. Inspired by this awesome book, we have discussed publishing a "Cars of Game Informer" tome. This brilliant collectable edition would include pictures of a 1988 Chevy Nova, an 1987 Ford Tempo, a 1995 Geo Metro, and several other tricked-out rides. Look for our limited edition book soon at the bottom of a dumpster near you.



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