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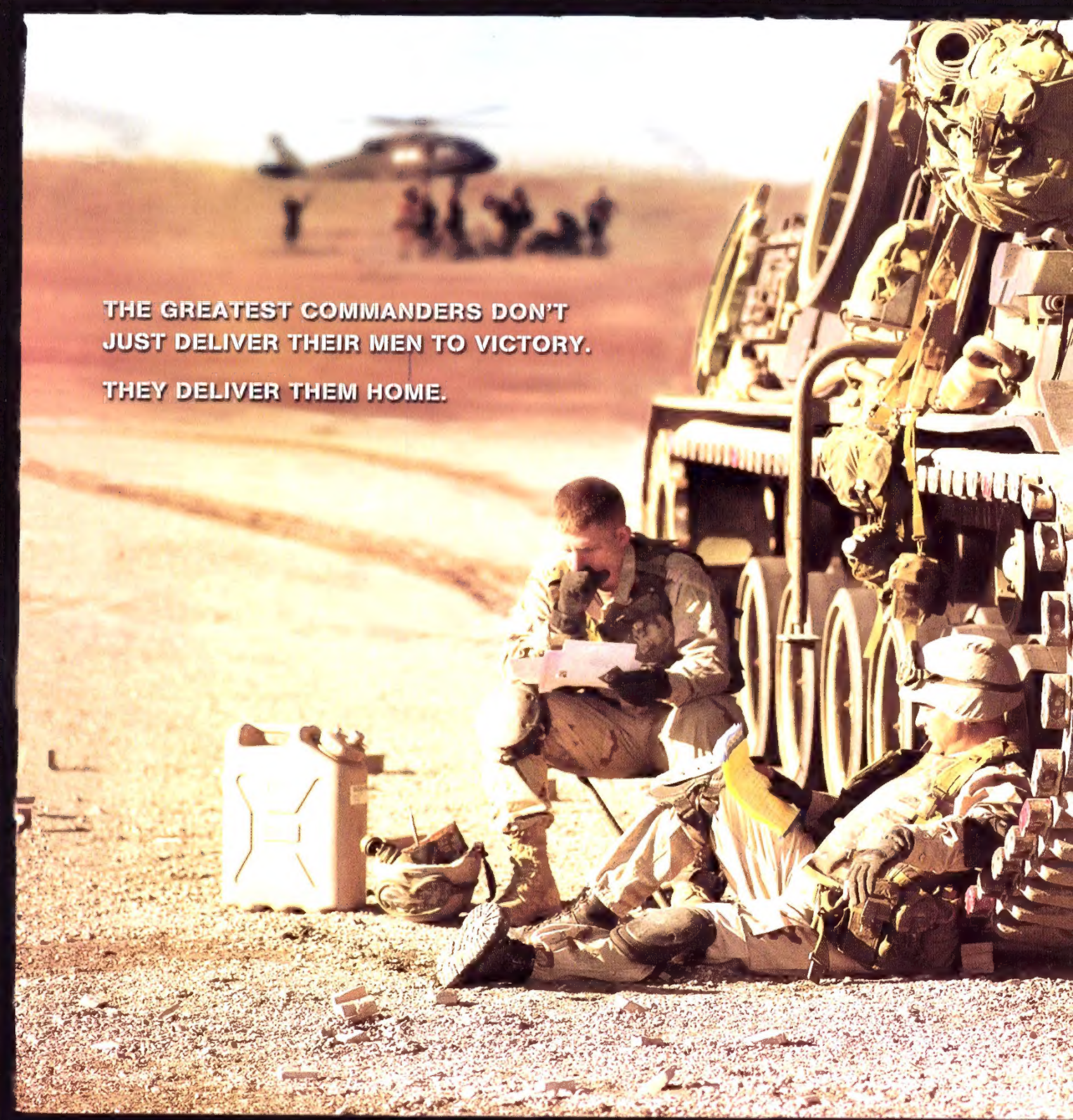

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Blood
Strong Language
Violence

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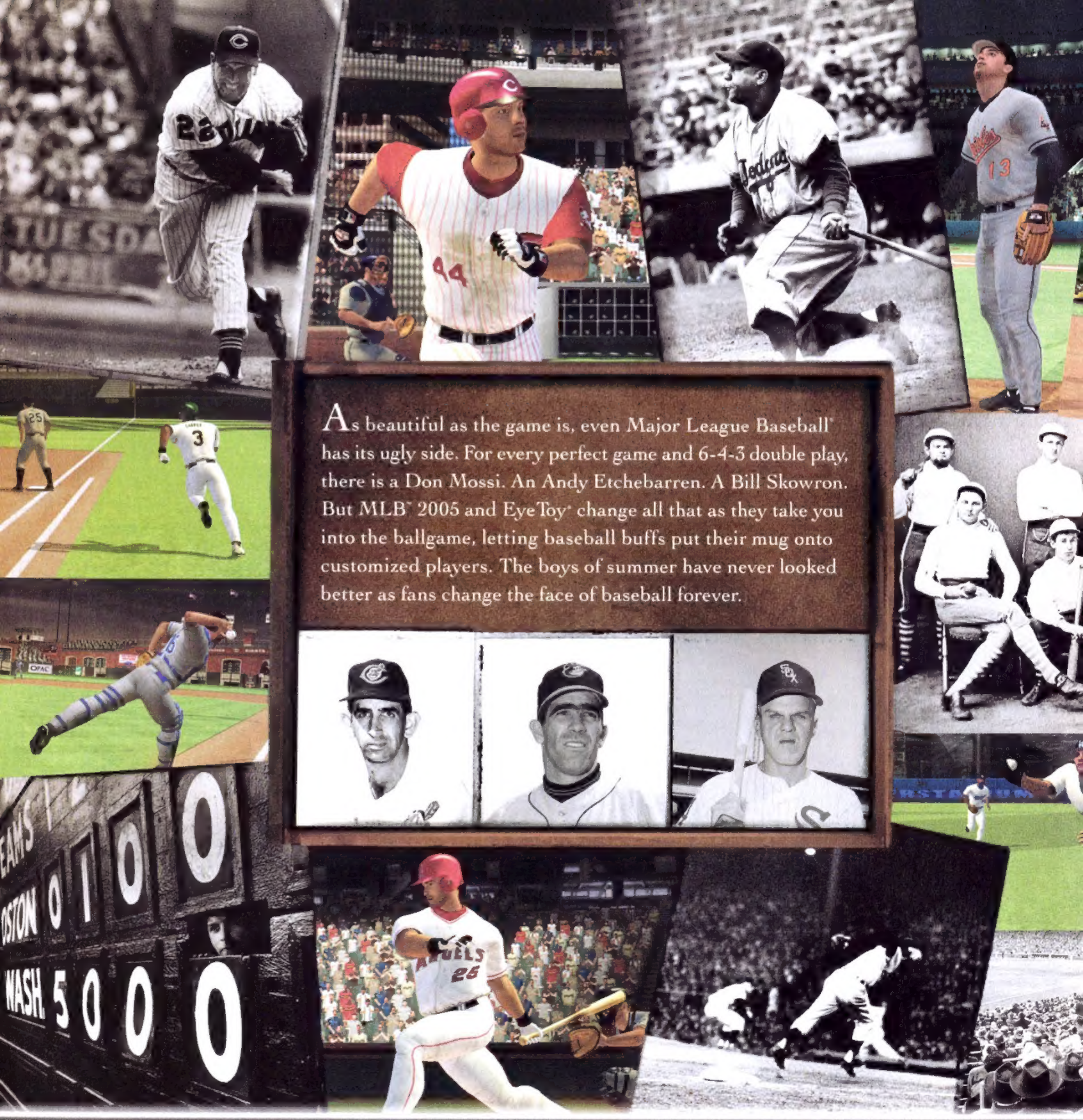

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L1 CAPTURED PHOTOS
R1
R2 HEAD TYPE
Skin 1
Head 3
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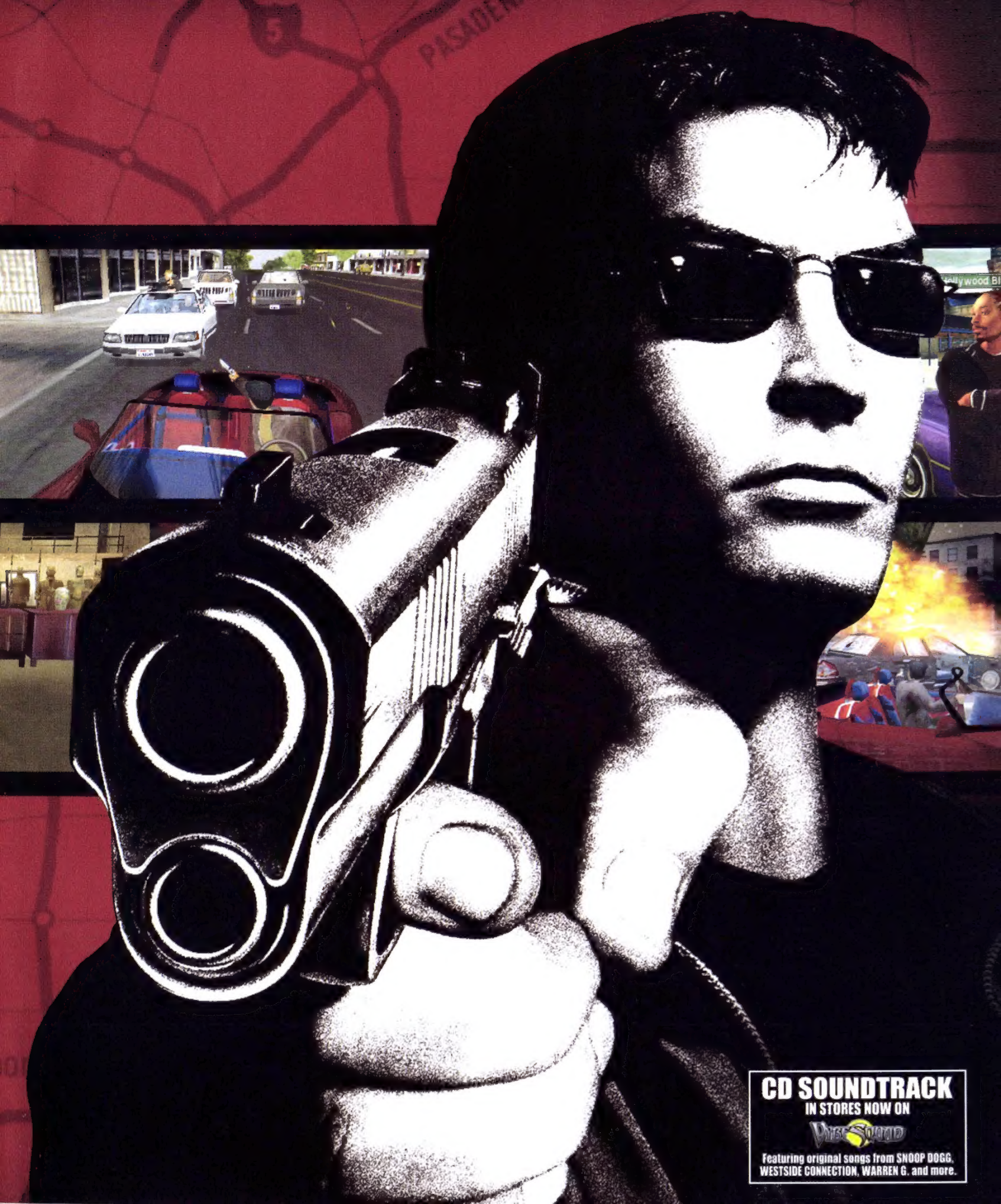
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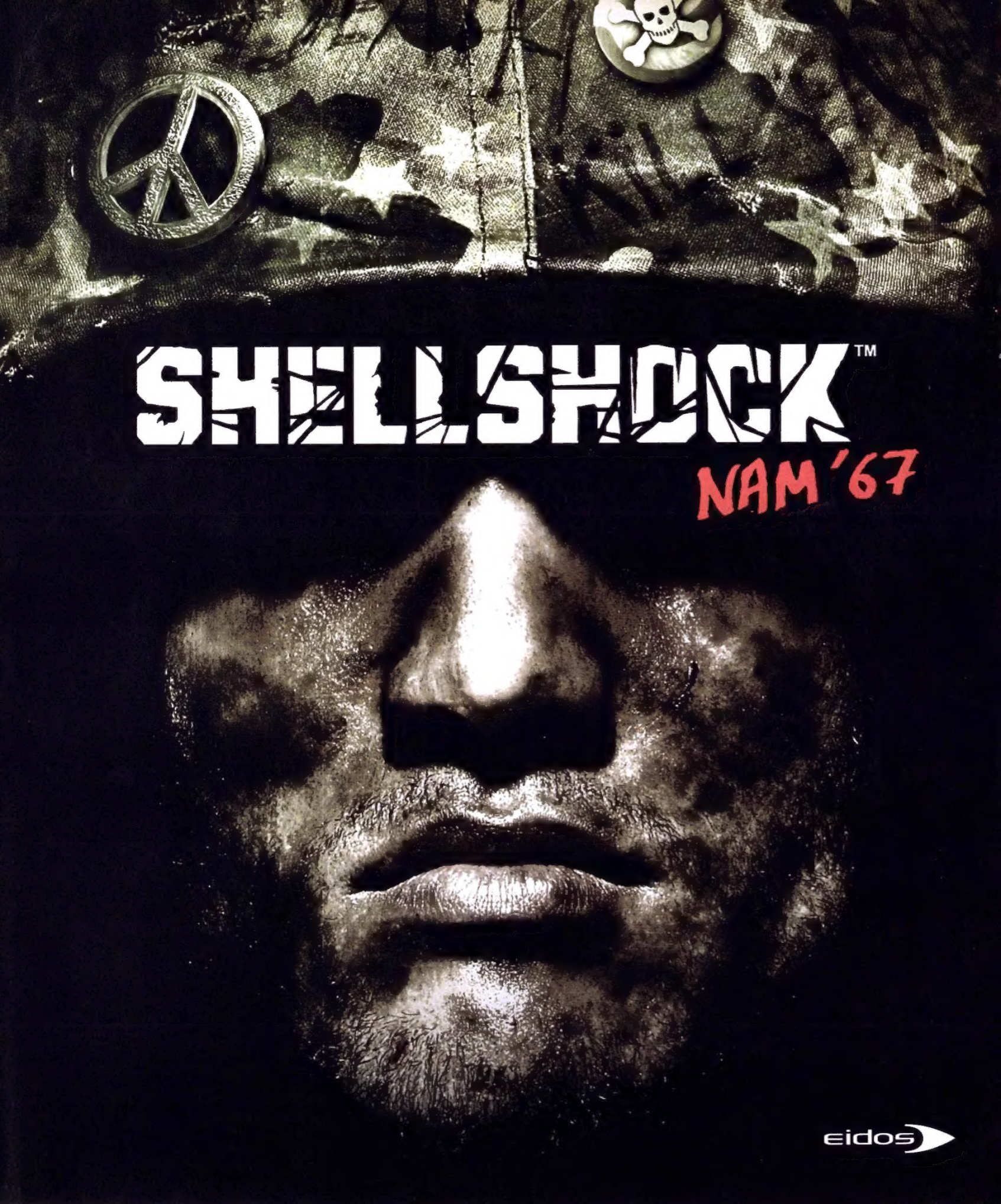
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The "How Did We Fit In This Many Features" Issue

cover story

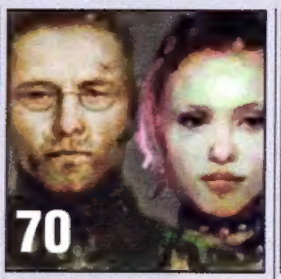
42 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

Ever since GTA III shattered conceptions and sales records back in 2001, the franchise has been one of the hottest topics in all of video games. We got tons of insider info on Rockstar North's forthcoming installment in the series, and decided we'd get too much grief if we didn't share.

features

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2
We went out to Montreal to get the how and why about the Prince and his new, more mature look.

DESTROY ALL HUMANS!
With a title like this, we had no choice but to go find out exactly what the heck the deal is. The full story on a cute, cuddly alien who terrorizes 1950s America awaits.



DEAD RUSH
Racing through hordes of zombies to discover the horrible truth – all in a day's work for the amnesiac only known as Jake.

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2
What's the best thing that could possibly happen to the revolutionary skating franchise? Going back to the roots and moving forward at the same time, baby!

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

PLEASE EXCUSE THE HYPE (BUT SOMEONE HAS TO DO IT)

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Last month I told you we would have an amazing cover story in this issue and POW! – this month we deliver the world exclusive first look at Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas – the follow-up to the biggest title to ever hit the PlayStation 2.

But that's not all GI has to offer this month (or any month, for that matter). You'll find this issue packed with feature after feature of content you won't find anyplace else. From the first glimpse at the critically-acclaimed Prince of Persia sequel, to the unveiling of the next groundbreaking title from Pandemic Studios, Game Informer has got you covered like no other video game magazine on the planet.

For all the great content you'll find in this gigantic mid-year edition of Game Informer, we are still working hard to improve the book each and every month. As you may have guessed, the staff and I are still tweaking the new design. Thus far, however, most of the feedback I have received has been extremely positive (which the staff and I appreciate, by the way), but please keep your input coming by posting your thoughts on our forums at gameinformer.com or sending an email my way.

And finally, we added another member to the team: Matt Miller, who we will affectionately call Miller since we have FAR too many Matts on staff. However, I'd like it known that I thought we should call him Milhouse – but he would have none of that! Make sure to send him an email and welcome him aboard.

Before I leave you to this action-packed issue, I'll give you a hint as to what you can expect from us next month. Not only will we deliver the most comprehensive coverage of the Electronic Entertainment Expo you have ever seen, but we will also give you another mouth-watering world exclusive. Game Informer, for the first time ever, will go behind the scenes at one of Nintendo's most exciting developers and blow the doors off what may be the biggest GameCube title of 2004. What is it? I guess you'll have to come back next month to find out. In fact, if I were you, I'd resubscribe just to make sure I didn't miss it.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** Game Informer's Alliance Of Death In Final Fantasy XI (We Die More Than Anyone), *The Shield*, Marvel's Ultimate Comic Line, *Shaun Of The Dead* **Dislikes:** Microsoft Throwing In The Towel For Sports, Billy Getting Everyone Killed In Final Fantasy XI, People Who Paid Money To See *The Alamo*, Not Having *Seinfeld* On DVD **Current Favorite Games:** Onimusha 3: Demon Siege, Final Fantasy XI, MVP Baseball 2004, Red Dead Revolver

Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** The Timberwolves, *Milestones 1: The Music And Times Of Miles Davis To 1960* By Jack Chambers, My New Run-DMC Figures, (Hopefully) Getting To See PSP At E3, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas **Dislikes:** That Red Haired Kid On American Idol, Archie Manning's Overbearing Ways, The Illness Sweeping The Office (Don't Touch Me, Disease-Ridden Peasants!) **Current Favorite Games:** Manhunt, Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain, Red Dead Revolver, River City Ransom EX

Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Moz's Comeback: *You Are The Quarry*, Encyclopedia Brown, Katz's Deli In N.Y., John Squire's Musical Interpretation Of Edward Hopper **Dislikes:** Plastic Surgery Reality Shows, That When It Comes To Daily Sodium Intake It's Possible For A Frozen Meal To Give Me More Than 110% **Current Favorite Games:** Rise Of The Kasai, Mario Golf: Advance Tour, Mafia, The Lord Of The Rings Pinball Game

Lisa >> *lisa@gameinformer.com*

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Survival Horror, Adventure, RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing **Interests:** That Feather Collar +1 In Final Fantasy XI (It's So My White Whale), *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, Thai Spicy Rice, The Lil' Endless Set **Dislikes:** Chicago O'Hare At 4:00 AM, Not Being Able To Find A Couple Of The Clone Wars Action Figures, Overly Blinky Cell Phones **Current Favorite Games:** Onimusha 3: Demon Siege, Final Fantasy XI, Prince Of Persia 2, Resident Evil: Outbreak, Mario Golf: Advance Tour

Jeremy >> *jeremy@gameinformer.com*

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Adam >> *adam@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Sunlight On My Drive Home From Work, Friends Visiting From Out Of Town, David Carradine, Gordon Liu, Beating Pitspawn Fouldog **Dislikes:** Films That Fail To Live Up To Their Hype, Hearing Nothing At The Office But FF XI Banter **Current Favorite Games:** Painkiller, La Pucelle: Tactics, Front Mission 4, Fire Emblem, WarioWare: Mega Party Games

Joe >> *joe@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** Pohns (Heated Up, With Cinnamon, Sugar, And A Cup Of Frosting For Dippin'), *Kill Bill*, Wind-Up Assassins, *Indestructible Object*, Getting An Errant Hat (Level 72, Here I Come!) **Dislikes:** Wearing Pillowcases, Suppohns (Potion Suppositories), Catching The Office Plague, Billy Getting Everyone Killed In FF XI (Billy, Noooo!), Wanting To Eat Imaginary Desserts **Current Favorite Games:** Destroy All Humans, Final Fantasy XI

Miller >> *miller@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Bendis Comics, Volcano Cakes, *Kill Bill*, Tax Refunds, D&D, Clone Wars Cartoons, Jon Stewart, *The Animatrix* **Dislikes:** Old Navy Commercials, Temp Jobs, Brussels Sprouts (Who Eats Those?), Stupid Halflings, Sharing My Name **Current Favorite Games:** Ninja Gaiden, Warcraft III, Final Fantasy XI, Amplitude, Crimson Skies: High Road To Revenge, Soul Calibur II, Halo 2 (In My Fondest Dreams)

Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Timberwolves Basketball, Drizzt Do'Urden, Liar's Dice At The Buddha Bar, Probot, *Deadwood*, *The Dave Chappelle Show* **Dislikes:** Pre-E3 Anything, That The Football Season Is Still So Far Away, That I'm Not Rick James, Bitch **Current Favorite Games:** The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures, Half-Life 2, Onimusha 3: Demon Siege

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GI SPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry

1 Jeremy discusses the Bush administration's strategy for rebuilding post-war Iraq with the WWE's D-Von Dudley **2** In the interest of... um... journalism, GI Online's Chris Cook interviews these comely tuner-car models in hopes of getting more inside information on Namco's upcoming racing game, SRS **3** Hey, not all games are made in California, Canada, or Japan! Just ask the gang at Monster Games (the team behind the upcoming Test Drive: Eve of Destruction) who represent Northfield, Minnesota to the fullest! **4** Matt re-ignites hip-hop's coastal beef by recklessly repping the Westside in Manhattan! Rockstar Games' Chris Carro and Devin Bennett look on in horror **5** Whoa. EverQuest fans sure are weird. So is the gal in the costume (who won an EQ dress-up contest at the recent Sony Online EverQuest FanFaire) **6** Pandemic CEO Andrew Goldman (right) smiles for the camera, while THQ's Tom Stratton (left) appears lost in thought. (Note: He's debating whether or not God could make a boulder so big he couldn't lift it) (Note: This last statement may be completely false) **7** Nintendo's Craig Dysart and Stephen Ward finally get to commune with Game Informer's legendary Brick Wall of Eternal Power **8** GI Online's Billy Berghammer hangs with Midway's Natalie Salzman at the Game Developer's Conference in sunny San Jose

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The Readers Strik

SPACE/TIME CONTINUUM

I know you guys are busy and all, but could you maybe get the E3 coverage a little earlier than the July issue? Sure, we could get info from the 'net, but we all know your coverage is the best!

The Twinkie Lord
Via email

Even though Joe has attained level nine as a black mage in Final Fantasy XI, his ability to bend space and time can not yet encompass the entirety of the Game Informer offices. This being a sad world of unbendable dimensions, we'll be bringing you all a blowout of E3 coverage in our July issue (which should plop into mailboxes around the middle of June). In the meantime, Billy and Chris will be harnessing their collective mojo to publish a staggering amount of E3 coverage throughout the show – so check Game Informer Online for daily updates.

TASTY SHAKE

I'm a long-time reader, first-time writer to GI. I just wanted to commend you on the excellent magazine you manage to put together every month. Kudos on the new "The Edge" feature. One question though, why did you decide to give it a name that makes me think of some second-rate soft drink? I can see it now, "The Edge Cola, official beverage of Game Informer Magazine."

Jeremy Gundel
Via email

We didn't intend to make the new insight into our review process sound like a sub-par soda, but we did want to make the feature sound like a Class-B energy drink. It may not be top shelf, but Game Informer's beverage of choice is infused with ginseng, guarana, and ylang-ylang!

CLASSIC PROPS

Thanks for the article on Kings Quest XI ["The Revival of Adventure Gaming," issue 132]. It really shows that you are an all-around game magazine. Great job!

Sue Scott
Via email

The section of our magazine covering classic gaming is usually a reader favorite, but the response to this article in particular has been overwhelmingly positive. Who says adventure games are dead?

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Hey Sean, it's Grandpa Schmemmen! I'm just sending you an e-mail to wish you a happy 31st birthday! Grandma and me will be at your house at 3:00 tomorrow! We'll pick you up and bring ya to Funzone!

I gotta run! The parfaits are ready!

Love,
Grandpa
Via yahoo.com

In all honesty, we don't know if this is real or weirdly marketed spam sent to our inbox. But man, this gem just can't go unpublished. If it's legit, we all say, "Happy 31st birthday to Sean, and enjoy the parfaits for us."

LIGHTEN UP

So I'm reading through the Dear GI section of my latest issue of Game Informer and it seems that there is a good many people who are upset at the magazine's reviews. Well, come on people – give them a break! The magazine is called, "Game Informer," not, "Game Liars: The Gaming Magazine That Tells You What You Want To Hear."

I personally agree with several of Game Informer's just and unbiased scores and I also disagree with a lot of Game Informer's just and unbiased scores. The bottom line is that they give you the facts about the game. It doesn't matter that they rated the game a 7 when you would have given it a 9.5, it's all about personal preferences.

So, in closing, please let Game Informer continue to give out its excellent reviews that are based on actual, unbiased information and not a dishonest desire to appeal to a certain group of fans.

Jay Talmadge
Via hotmail.com

Jay, we couldn't have said it better ourselves. Thanks.

WISECRACKING HIJINKS

Game Infarcer had me rolling around on the ground! I also wanted to say that Killian is the man and the Dreamcast is the best system you could ever own!

Mateo Fuentes
Via yahoo.com

I have been a reader for several years, and I have always been happy with your magazine. I just got the new GI April issue, and the Game Infarcer section leaves me puzzled. Why would you make fun of hardcore gamers like me? NiGHTS, Burning Rangers, and Chu Chu Rocket ARE the best games in their respective genres. I am Killian, let it be known!

Death to all that lives, destruction to all that has form!

Sean Dowling
Via msn.com

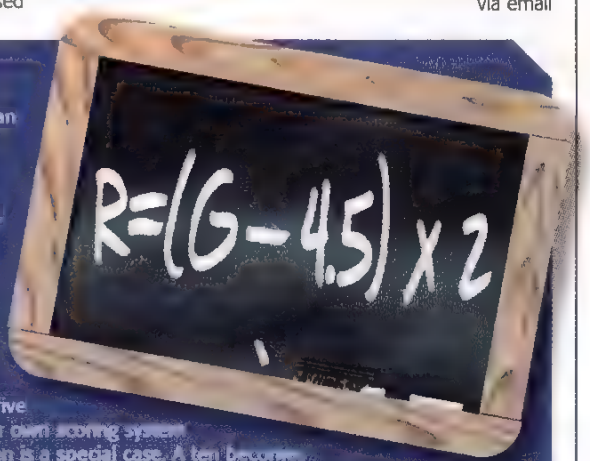
Just letting you guys know that Game Infarcer is the funniest stuff that I have read in a long time! You guys need to do this more than once a year. Keep up the good work!

The Darkone
Via email

Hey guys, I would love it if you could include Game Infarcer a little more often in your magazine, which rocks by the way.

Will Muncie
Via email

SCORING UPDATE



First, let me say I enjoy your magazine, more so than any other gaming publication on the newsstand. Second, your rating system is weird. Everything below five is basically the same dismal rating, as the legend on your scoring system already explains, and then everything else gets crammed into the upper half of the scale. This seems to lead to a lot of 8 and 9 point something ratings as you try and differentiate between the good games.

I have solved this problem with a simple equation: R=(G-4.5) x 2.

Take the Game Informer rating (G), subtract 4.5, and multiply by two to get the "Real" rating (R). A five becomes a one, a seven becomes a five (what your own scoring system describes as "average"), and nine is a nine. Now, ten is a special case. A ten becomes a Nigel Tufnel eleven. Since tens are exceptionally rare in your reviews, I felt this was fair.

I hope this equation proves useful to the mathematical purists out there like me who just can't cope with seven being the average in a 1 to 10 scoring system.

Otherwise, keep up the good work, and less that criticism comes

Sincerely,
Joe Loutzenhiser
Via email

By using mathematical mumbo-jumbo, you've utterly confused us. We're a simple people here at Game Informer. That being said, in last month's redesign, we added some clarification for scores between one and five. While seven is still deemed "average," the added information in the lower half of our scale offers a little more clarity in that range and hopefully alleviates the need for long division and other such "mathy" things. Check it out, won't you?

(Continued on page 19)

Send your comments to Game Informer. Snail Mail: Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 Email: deargi@gameinformer.com

REVIEW CREW, ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

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PlayStation.2

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(Continued from page 14)

Stephen Hawking's Underground does not suck!

Sincerely,
Mike "Gamebrain" Kobialka
Via email

Hello. I wanted to tell you that I wait every year for your April issue. This year though, I was slightly disappointed by your Game Infarcer. Don't get me wrong, I was on the ground laughing from some parts, (particularly the part about the "Ne-oh's") but it didn't live up to last year's Game Infarcer. Last year, I had to change my pants five times because I was laughing so hard. It was one of the reasons I re-subscribed to GI for two more years.

I just thought that you could use a huge fan's input on this. I hope that you can pick up the slack on next year's Game Infarcer.

Justin McCollum
Via email

Thanks for the hilarious Game Infarcer. It was great, especially "Happy Pie!" I laughed the whole time.

Thanks folks!
Serge Thechronotrigger
Via email

This is my first year having a subscription to GI, so it was the first time I got to read Game Infarcer. I'll admit, I was a little skeptical when I read the Editor's Forum by "Gangsta-Dan." It was kinda stupid, guys. But as I read more, I started laughing my ass off. You guys really managed to make something funny and satirical without it being stupid toilet humor. Very nice. Great timing, too, since I've only got one more issue left, and that just makes me want to renew my subscription more. Keep up the good work, cause you are currently my favorite game mag!

Critical Girl Gamer
Beth Johnson
Via email

▪ It appears that we have an 80/20 split here, folks. Eighty percent of readers dig the comedy collective as a whole; while twenty percent were offended by Killian, mostly because he reminded them of themselves. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, you know.

NEXT GEN T&A

When I first heard of The Guy Game through an Internet article, I was...not pleased. The fact that it popped up in your "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly" as 'Better than Good' [issue 132, April 2004] was even worse. Maybe I'm offended because I'm a girl, but it's likely I'm offended because I'm a human being with more than two functioning brain cells.

All this game is going to do is make the stereotype of gamers (as overweight guys who sit in their basement all day and would give their left arm to see a naked woman) even worse.

I'm just hoping this game goes the way of the dodo or ends up like BMX XXX.

Konitsu Gemstone
Via email

▪ What, you don't want to guess which co-ed can't supply a definition to the word "onomatopoeia" in hopes of winning points and watching them bare their chests? You're crazy, girl! Crazy, like a co-ed.

Konitsu, we're not trying to make fun of you (or imply that The Guy Game looks deep and interesting), it's just our particular brand of sarcasm – displayed both in the news entry you mention and our response here.

Anyway, as of press time, The Guy Game doesn't even officially have a publisher, so American store shelves are a few steps away for the title.

ENVELOPE ART

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:
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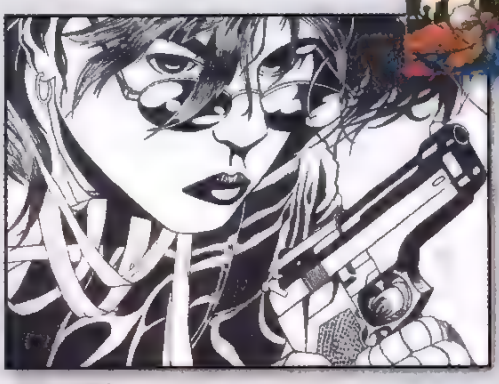
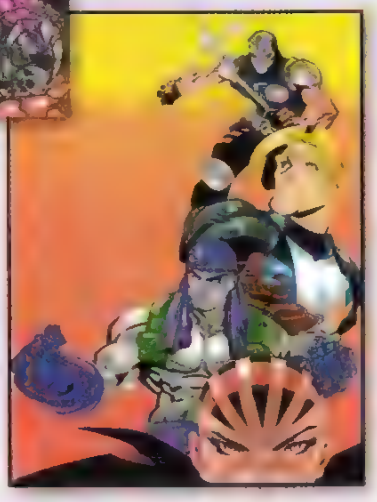
JUNE WINNER:
DAGO OROZCO

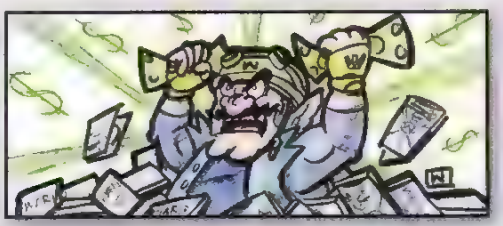
LEVAR WILLIAMS
"Lousy punk kids and their huge slashy claws!"



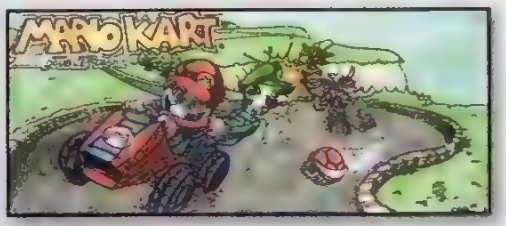
RICKY KING
Sure she's beautiful and deadly, but she's a lousy cook. Seriously, have you tried her lobster bisque?

ALEX JORGE
Check out the students of Bayside High in *Saved by the Bell 2525*





WILLIAM MATA
"Yes! Now I can afford my facelift!"



CARL ENGLUND
"Sorry bro, but I can't stop. I owe those monkeys money."

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THE FUTURE IS NOW

SONY EUROPE EXEC SPILLS ALL ON PS3 AND MORE

In a recent interview with the official PlayStation website, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe's COO David Reeves talked about Sony's plans for PlayStation 3 and PlayStation Portable, revealing several interesting bits of information. He even hinted at a design change for the PlayStation 2, similar to how the original PlayStation shrunk down into its current, compact PSone form.

Despite the disappointing initial sales figures for the company's all-in-one PlayStation 2 and DVD recorder, the PSX, Reeves sees this combination format as viable for the PS3. "I think you can probably guess that PS3 is intrinsically linked with PSX." He says that he sees two versions of the system (both of which he expects out in 2006): one for those who simply want a game machine, and a "home server" version which has "all-singing, all-dancing features with maybe a hard disc drive."

It is unclear if the PlayStation 3 will spearhead electronic downloading by the masses, but Reeves states that "the ultimate goal, of course, is to get into electronic broadband distribution." However, Reeves believes that the barrier to this, beyond widespread broadband penetration, is having the public becoming more familiar with downloading – something he doesn't think a mass audience is yet. Reeves believes Sony won't make this method of distribution big until "50 or 100 million people" are doing it.

As for PlayStation Portable, Reeves also had quite a bit to say. Squelching the development rumors that the unit didn't have enough power. "Will it play as fast [as the PS2]? Probably, technically, just a bit below, but it will have 30 MB of RAM, now. There's so much depth and perspective on that size screen, it will look better than PS2."

Despite the LCD screen's size, Reeves says that Sony is in talks with the motion picture industry to offer movies on the unit's Universal Media Disc format. "Trying to make a successful format is not easy; it's like MiniDisc. So you've got to have some added extras, and I think they will come up with quite a few surprises, so that you'd want to buy a movie on UMD as well as having it on DVD. Maybe. Or maybe all the new releases will come out on PSP." Despite probable region encoding for movies thanks to the involvement of Hollywood in the process, Reeves stated that he didn't think it would happen for games.

More could be in store, with features such as the location finder GPS (Global Positioning System) or the ability to support email or web browsing over a wireless, mobile network, GPRS (General Packet Radio Service). He says these can be added "in time."

In other PlayStation 3 news, Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun reported that Sony plans to incorporate Blu-Ray DVD technology in the upcoming system. Reportedly Sony vice president Kiyoshi Nishitani said that Blu-Ray (which offers storage of up to 50 GB per disc) is the ideal format for the system.

Currently Blu-Ray is a competing against the current DVD optical format that utilizes a red laser (as well as requiring several types of discs, such as DVD-R, DVD+RW, etc.), and which cannot read as much information per disc. Blu-Ray technology also enables the rewriting, recording, and playback of high-definition television (HDTV).

news

FOUL BALLS

MICROSOFT SKIPS THIS YEAR'S SPORTS GAMES

In a shocking announcement, Microsoft Game Studios has decided to not release a slate of sports video games for this year on the Xbox. This means no NFL Fever, NBA Inside Drive, or NHL Rivals until at least the calendar year of 2005. Microsoft had already said that it wasn't planning to release an MLB Inside Pitch this year (after having taken over 3DO's High Heat franchise), and it doesn't consider Amped or Top Spin to be a part of this ruling because they weren't annual games anyway.

Game Informer talked to Kevin Browne, the sports studio manager for Microsoft Game Studios, who was surprisingly candid talking about the reason for the decision – quality. "They're just not as competitive as we want them to be." Browne went on to comment that the company's dissatisfaction with its sports lineup went deeper than lackluster sales. Feature sets, gameplay, and presentation were all cited as reasons for the below-par quality.

Furthermore, Browne felt that the studio wasn't taking advantage of the fact that the Xbox was their home turf and simply smoking the competition with it. "Our role is to affect people's perceptions of the Xbox in a very positive way, and right now, our games don't necessarily stand up that way. We should be equivalent in gameplay, have our own special features because they are only the Xbox, and they should be exemplary of what the Xbox can do that other game platforms cannot."

Going forward, the studio believes that taking the year off will make a big difference in their quality. It's possible that being away from the spotlight could mean that Xbox's sports titles lose even the little momentum they've got, but Browne relished the challenge. He even left open the possibility of changing the names of the sports games to quell negative associations. When asked whether Microsoft would consider cutting any sports to strengthen the rest, Browne couldn't say. Furthermore, he said that the return of Microsoft sports is expected to happen during the current Xbox's lifetime, and that this decision wasn't affected at all by considerations of Xbox Next, which could come out as early as 2005.

If you ask Browne, Microsoft is still very much in the hunt to bring gamers the best sports experience possible. "If there are concerns people have expressed, it's that we won't come back. I just want to assure people that that's not in our thinking at all. What we're trying to do is create great quality games."

In other Xbox news, Tim Schafer's long-awaited Psychonauts has been derailed yet again. Microsoft announced it will not publish the action/platformer, although the company said it "would like to see the game on Xbox." Microsoft further stated that it was helping Tim and his company DoubleFine in its search for a new publisher.

games

THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE

EA USHERS IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS RPG

Electronic Arts was praised for its mixture of movie footage and blistering swordplay in its two previous games based upon the movie trilogy. Now the publisher is taking a whole new tack with The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age. This holiday 2004 game will appear on all major consoles, and expands into the RPG genre.

Players will be able to choose from either the good or evil side, allying themselves with Sauron and his minions to take over Middle-Earth, or aiding the Fellowship to prevent the downfall of Man. Unlike previous titles from EA, you won't control the characters seen in the movie. However, your path through the game will weave in and out of the main plot points and intersect with familiar characters. And as this awesome picture suggests, EA isn't going to make the same mistake twice and leave out the thrilling encounter with the Balrog demon. Players will also experience the fall of Osgiliath, the assault on Helm's Deep, and much, much more. Stay tuned for further details on EA's exciting foray into role-playing.

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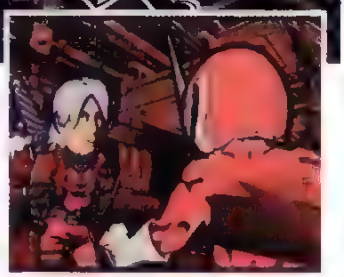
games

NO AVERAGE JOE

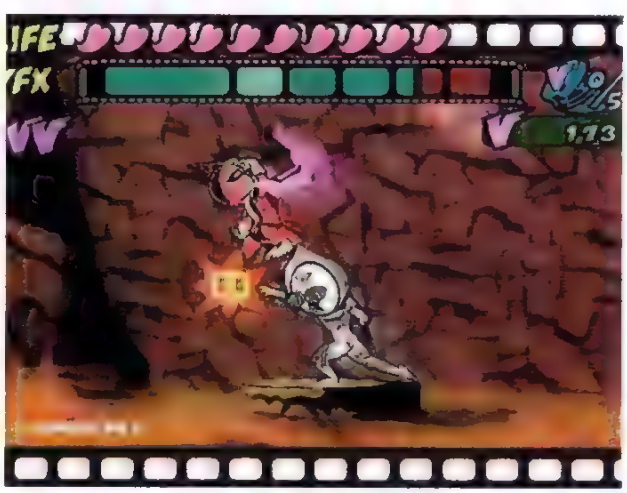
VIEWTIFUL JOE SEQUEL HITS GC AND PS2

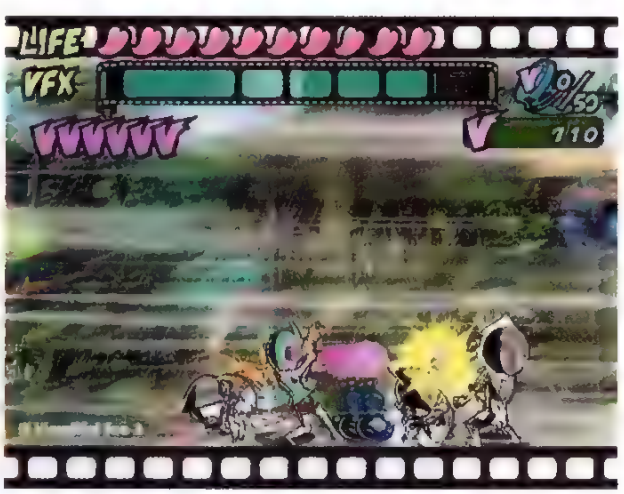


Devil May Cry's Dante will appear in the PlayStation 2 version of Viewtiful Joe

Breaking the exclusivity that bound the first Viewtiful Joe to the GameCube, Capcom has announced that the series' sequel will appear on both the GC and the PlayStation 2 this winter. Furthermore, the original is also slated for a release on Sony's console. Viewtiful Joe for the PS2 is the first announced product for Capcom's new Clover Studios, which will officially open its doors this July in Osaka. Clover is stocked with talent, including Devil May Cry executive producer Shinji Mikami. Accordingly, the PlayStation 2 debut of the original Joe will feature Dante as a playable character. Viewtiful Joe creator Atsushi Inaba will be Clover's president.

Viewtiful Joe 2 not only features the return of Joe, but his girlfriend Silvia is now also front and center as a superheroine. Both are playable in a new co-op mode. Joe has a new VFX power called Replay, which can triple the damage of attacks and power-ups. This sequel also brings you 40 new enemies, moves into locations like outer space, and adds transforming powers for Joe's ship, including the ability to change into a cannon or submarine at various points.





DATA FILE

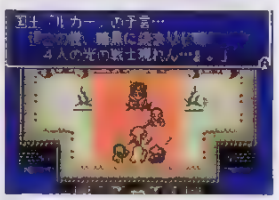
More News You Can Use

THE RETURN OF THE KING

SNK is getting with the times and giving us the first original King of Fighters title to be specifically made for the PlayStation 2 this fall. KOF: Maximum Impact isn't based on any arcade cabinet, and will feature characters new and old rendered in 3D.

FIRST FINAL FANTASIES ON GBA

Square Enix is bringing Final Fantasy I and II to the GBA this July in Japan. The first includes the Soul of Chaos dungeon which features bosses from other games in the RPG series. The second, meanwhile, will include a new story sequence regarding the background of the characters. Other new surprises are also expected.



COUNTDOWN TO EPISODE III

Star Wars fans are anxiously awaiting the DVD release of the original trilogy this September, which offers a making-of sneak peek at an Episode III game that LucasArts is making. The title will apparently appear on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox in the spring of next year. *Episode III* arrives in theaters on May 19, 2005.

EA'S RICCITIELLO QUITS

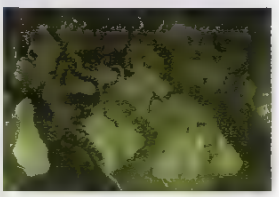
Electronic Arts' COO John Riccitiello has resigned from the company and will leave the industry. In the interim, CEO Larry Probst will take over Riccitiello's responsibilities.

NAMCO HAS TWO TALES

The PlayStation 2 in Japan will see two entries in Namco's Tales RPG series. A new edition entitled Tales of Rebirth follows a resurrection of a holy war in the kingdom of Callegia. Meanwhile, the console will get a port of the formerly GameCube-only Tales of Symphonia with some changes.

ALICE MEETS ALEC EMPIRE

Waxploitation Records has released a limited edition split 7" featuring Alec Empire's remix of "Skool Daze" from the soundtrack to American McGee's Alice PC game. The song's composer, ex-member of Nine Inch Nails Chris Vrenna, appears on the flip side doing a cover of David Sylvian's "Late Night Shopping."



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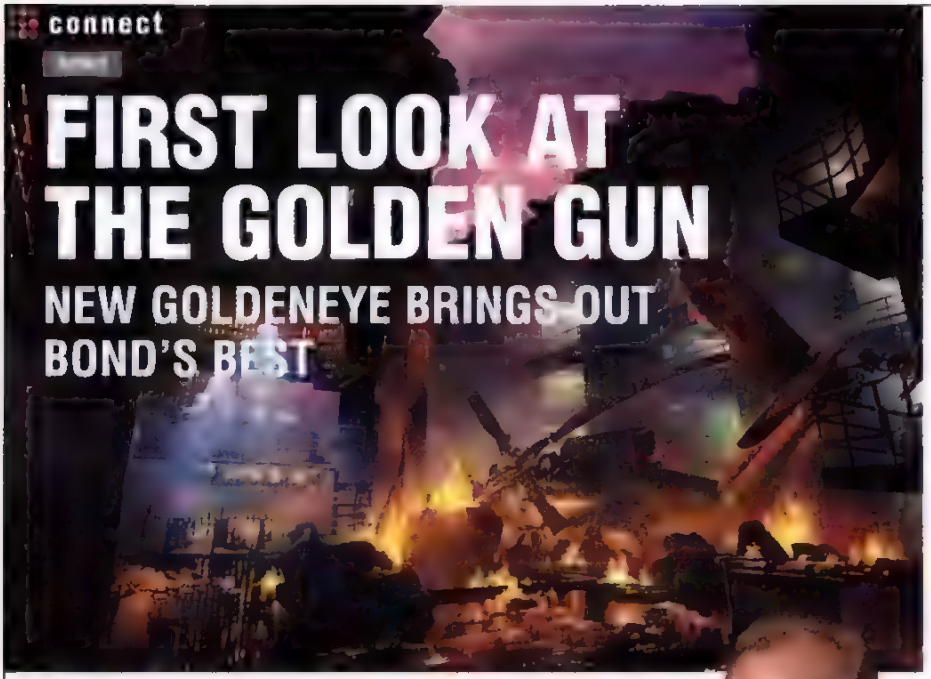
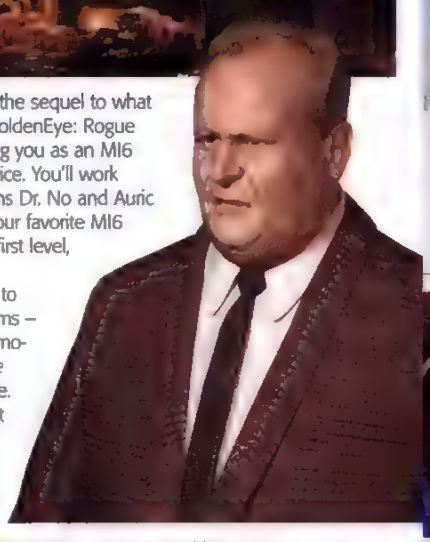
FIRST LOOK AT THE GOLDEN GUN

NEW GOLDENEYE BRINGS OUT BOND'S BEST



Electronic Arts has dropped all sorts of news regarding the sequel to what some call the best console FPS ever. Officially titled GoldenEye: Rogue Agent, the game takes you into new territory by casting you as an MI6 operative fallen from the graces of her majesty's secret service. You'll work your way up the ladder of evil as a pawn of legendary villains Dr. No and Auric Goldfinger in their rivalry to control the globe. And what of our favorite MI6 agent, Mr. Bond? He'll appear alongside you in the game's first level, before your discharge from the service.

What's more impressive about this title is the work done to bring you every element of the Bond universe. Sir Ken Adams – the movie series' set designer who came up with such memorable boss hideaways as the volcano lair from *You Only Live Twice* – has been employed to work his magic for the game. Fort Knox and the space station from *Moonraker* will be just a few of the familiar locations available. Likewise, all of the classic villain henchmen and women will be making an appearance. You'll be chauffeured in a helicopter by the infamous Pussy Galore and meet up with heavies like Oddjob and Jaws.



This likeness of Auric Goldfinger speaks to EA's dedication to the Bond universe

Multiplayer is sure to draw a lot of attention, and EA has been working to make it memorable. Levels will now feature death traps. For instance, being jettisoned from the Moonraker space station would be a particularly nasty way to go. Apart from your average running and gunning, however, Rogue Agent offers some new thrills. Combat revolves around the top two triggers on the controller, letting you simultaneously fire with one hand and throw punches with the other. Another exciting element of the gameplay is cover that degrades as it gets shot to pieces.

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent will appear before the end of the year on PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube.

R & D

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

Jackrabbit Slim's Dance-off

We, like most game dorks out there, love Quentin Tarantino. Sure, he's borrowed his best material from Asian action films, but who cares? His movies are a blast to watch and filled with tons of memorable moments. Inspired by his return to prominence with the *Kill Bill* movies, we've decided that it's high time we got some good QT-inspired video games. But rather than make titles based on each of his films, we'd like to see one game that combines the best elements of each. Thus we present Jackrabbit Slim's Dance-off! By using the Dance Dance Revolution pad, players would partake in a dance competition, á la John Travolta and Uma Thurman in *Pulp Fiction*. However, to make things more interesting, thugs and ninjas would attack during the contest, forcing players to defend themselves with a GunCon 2 and the katana-style Onimusha 3 Soul Controller. Dancing, gunfights, and swordplay would all combine into one delicious Tarantino-themed experience. And, of course, you'd watch yourself onscreen thanks to the EyeToy, so you can see how cool you look kickin' butt and getting' down. Jackrabbit Slim's Dance-off would be both ridiculously hip and outrageously violent, so we have a feeling Quentin would dig it.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With An Editorial Sarcastic Spin

GOOD

John Woo is spearheading a second attempt at a Metroid movie. The director who made Hong Kong action popular plans to produce the movie (and he may still direct it himself), and wants it to follow Metroid's storyline of Samus Aran's battle against the Metroid aliens and Mother Brain. We wonder if the film will leave the game's surprise twist intact. Woo's own Tiger Hill Entertainment also has three video games in development, along with a publishing deal with Sega.

BAD

Nintendo has lost another second-party developer. Silicon Knights (Eternal Darkness) is now allowed to make games for other consoles – although president Denis Dyack says that the Canadian developer's titles will still appear on Nintendo's systems.

SWEET

It's Mechagodzilla vs. The Rescue Dragon! A Japanese company has built an 11.5 foot tall prototype robot for clearing disaster wreckage. Enryu, as it's called, literally translates to "Rescue Dragon," and can toss aside debris with its two pincer arms. We expect these two to clash in the streets of Tokyo any day now.

GOOD

Fresh off the success of The Lord of the Rings, Peter Jackson is filming an adaptation of ape epic *King Kong*. As if that wasn't enough to do, he has rolled up his sleeves and become heavily involved in the video game based on the film, garnering "substantial creative control," according to The New York Times. The 2005 title, coinciding with the release of the movie, is being published by Ubisoft. Gameplay details are non-existent, but we hope the ending isn't a freaking half hour long!

MAYBE

Canadian developer Digital Extremes has announced it is working on a next-generation game called Dark Sector. The game is based on what the company believes the specs for the Xbox Next or PlayStation 3 may be. The developer says this footage is of in-engine gameplay. A look into the future? Maybe.

GOOD

Last month we told you all about Monster Games' wrecking machine Driven to Destruction. Now Atari has seen fit to hitch the title to its most well-known racing franchise. Monster's game is now known as Test Drive: Eve of Destruction.

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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

E3 A THING OF THE PAST?

E3 is the industry's biggest bash, but it may not be the way of the future. With big companies such as Rockstar and Atari scaling down their convention exhibits, as well as many publishers feeling that their games get lost in the confusion of loud music and booth babes, the face of the show is changing. We've even heard that giant Electronic Arts is considering pulling out of next year's E3.

RUBIN RUFFLES SOME FEATHERS

In a controversial speech at the annual DICE conference, ex-Naughty Dog head Jason Rubin called for more respect for game developers. He may have lost it instead. He declared that in order for the industry to be on par with Hollywood, the talent (i.e. developers) had to be treated accordingly. Attendees' opinion of Rubin's comments varied. Loose Talk has heard that some developers, despite Rubin's championing, aren't pleased, feeling that increasing developer star power takes away from what the focus should be – good games.

EA TO GO XBOX LIVE?

With news that Microsoft is slapping this year's crop of sports titles, some feel that this may be an indication that Electronic Arts sports titles will finally appear on Xbox Live – and this may even expand to non-sports games. No longer will you have to hear us talk about how your favorite EA title is only online for the PS2! The two companies have had continued talks to bring EA into the fold, but perhaps one of the biggest signs that these two might join forces online is that Microsoft has created a sub-server service (Live Server Protocol) that makes it easier for publishers to set up their own tournaments and leagues. This is a concession to some companies wanting to retain more control over their Xbox Live product.

BIOWARE MICROSOFT'S NEW REPUBLIC?

Canadian developer BioWare single-handedly helped boost the Xbox's sales, and Microsoft might be rewarding the company with a big, fat acquisition. Rumor has it that the console maker has already agreed to purchase the Knights of the Old Republic maker, and Loose Talk has heard that the Canadians were given a 10 million dollar check at GDC. BioWare is currently working on Jade Empire, another Xbox exclusive. Game Informer has contacted the developer, but it wouldn't comment on rumors, simply saying, "Microsoft is a certainly a valued business partner with whom BioWare enjoys a very positive and cooperative relationship." Such a move would be great for the Xbox, not only given the Canadians' proven track record, but to help regain some first-party software ground that the Rare acquisition lost.

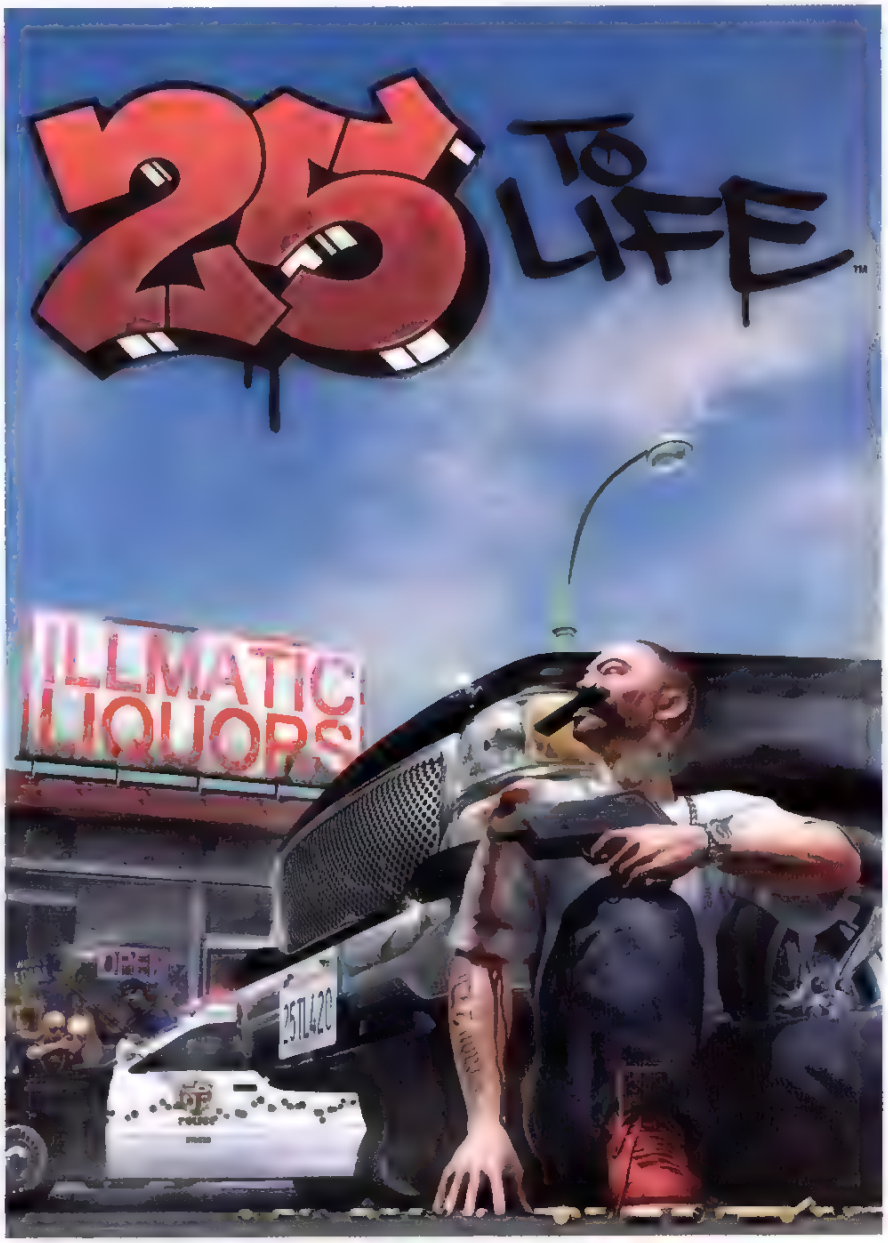
Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gamerinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Goemon has enjoyed a rich history in Japanese video games, but it wasn't until this SNES title that he first enjoyed success in the U.S. Known as Kid Yang for this particular game only, the star of the series traveled with his faithful companion Ebismaru (called Dr. Ying) laying down some Robin Hood-esque wealth redistribution with his trusty pipe. He went on to star in another title on the N64 in the States and many games over in Japan, but publisher Konami hasn't brought him over since.

(Answer on page 30)



news

SENTENCED TO THE STREETS

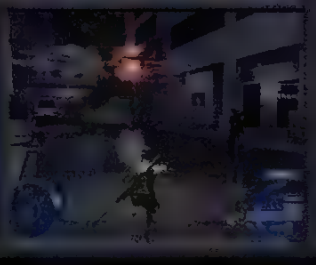
EIDOS' HILLS ARE ALIVE WITH THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE

It's urban insanity on the mean streets of Eidos' new third-person action shooter called 25 to Life. The game casts you as a gangster trying to carve out a living and survive amidst the drug lords, gangs, and flying bullets. Online play is also enabled for up to 16 players, and supports USB headsets. Here you can also take on the role of a copper trying to clean up the filth on the streets. Developer Avalanche Software is also considering letting players don the blue suit in single player as well.

Making your way in the game isn't easy, as the highly-interactive urban environments are teeming with life. Pedestrians can get in the way, as well as give away your position. You may even find yourself having to organize a jail break! As you rise up the ranks, your fully customizable character can be outfitted with the latest unlockable gear. 25 to Life is scheduled to appear on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox in February, and an all-star hip hop cast of licensed music is being sought for the soundtrack.

syphon filter
THE OMEGA STRAIN

▲ PLACE HAND HERE ▲



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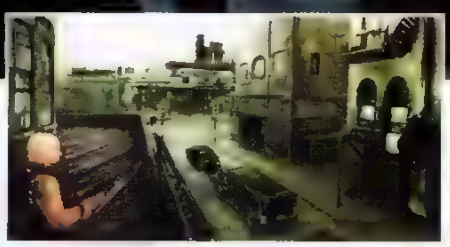
games UNLIMITED ENABLED

WHAT ARE YOU, SOME KINDA WISEGUY?

CRIME PAYS FOR ACCLAIM



Everyone wants a piece of the action, but Acclaim believes it's got the muscle to get to the top of the heap. The company is developing two games focusing on a life of video game crime – Interview with a Made Man (above) and The Last Job (right). Both are scheduled to appear on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox next year.

Interview with a Made Man's story of Joey Verola and his rise in the mafia isn't new ground, but the inspiration behind it is. Acclaim is working with renowned mafia expert David Fisher, the man who brought out the story of mob infiltrator Joey "Donnie Brasco" Pistone, and the only person to have seen the inside of the FBI's crime lab. Fisher aims to use his experience "to create the most authentic mafia game anyone has ever done. There is almost nothing in the game that is not true to real mafia form."

Interview with a Made Man chronicles Joey's rise through the '60s to the '80s, and the soundtrack will reflect that. Apart from giving people concrete shoes, players will participate in racketeering, loan sharking, assassinations, and other frowned-upon activities. The game also features a Picture in Picture system to give you a better understanding of your surroundings in real time.

The Last Job takes a slightly different approach to the wrong side of the law. The game puts you in control of a four-criminal group where you must effectively plot out and execute heists on banks, warehouses, museums, and anywhere else with valuable stuff hanging around. Gamers will be in command of all facets of their jobs, from the planning to the stakeout, and on to the final execution (including safe-cracking, keeping lookout, and driving the getaway car).

news

SEGA JACKS INTO THE MATRIX

MONOLITH GETS FAMED PUBLISHER AND AIM

Two confusing sequels. Less-than expected box office returns. Keanu Reeves. It seems that *The Matrix* isn't as cool as it once was, and things weren't helped when Ubisoft decided not to publish The Matrix Online. Fear not, however, as Sega has decided to step into the breach. The PC title is still expected to appear from developer Monolith before the end of the year. It's an interesting twist for Sega, since the company has been on a decline with its once-popular franchises and hasn't had a good online property since Phantasy Star Online.

There is further exciting news in the fact that AOL has signed up to include its popular Instant Messenger in the game. Players can link their AIM identity with their character in The Matrix Online and converse with people in and outside the game.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

PATRICK NAUD
PRODUCER, RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW

1 Civilization – PC
2 Metroid – NES
3 StarCraft – PC
4 Privateer – PC
5 Railroad Tycoon – PC

READER

KATE FEDEWA
LANSING, MI

1 Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear – PC
2 Quake/Unreal – PC
3 Counter-Strike – PC
4 WarCraft series – PC
5 Battlefield 1942 – PC

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to.

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email. topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists... Everybody Loves Lists

TOP 10 Things We'd Like to See in Final Fantasy XI

10 Concerts by the heavy metal sensation Mithrallica
9 A crazed drunken moogle roaming the land and trying to pick up chicks
8 PvP Rochambeau
7 A gangsta sub-job with the ability to perform chocobo drive-bys
6 A subtle "flipping the bird" emote
5 Tarutaru punting competitions and brothels
4 Summoning a Taco Bell Enchirito
3 An epic two-hour boss fight against Billy Zane
2 Wet t-shirt contests at Bastok Port
1 Space combat

Name That Game Answer: The Legend of the Mystical Ninja

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

GAME BOY ADVANCE

PlayStation 2

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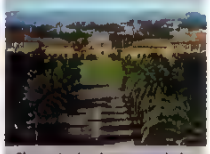
SHANE KIM

GENERAL MANAGER/MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS

>> After the recent departure of Ed Fries, Shane Kim stepped in to fill the role of guiding Microsoft Game Studios into the next generation and beyond. Game Informer was fortunate to be able to talk with Shane about his thoughts on his vision for Microsoft's Xbox development efforts. <<

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1989 ▶ Education



Shane Kim's education includes an A.B. from Stanford in Economics and International relations and an MBA from the prestigious Harvard Business School. During his education, Kim worked as a summer intern at Microsoft

1990 ▶ Joining the Giant Microsoft

Kim officially starts his career at Microsoft, working in the growing area of email technology, acting as the product manager on MS Mail for PC networks

1993 ▶ International Relations

Kim is promoted to group product manager in Microsoft's Consumer Division, and runs an international marketing team

1995 ▶ The World of Games

Entering the game industry, Kim becomes the director of business development for Microsoft Game Studios

1999 ▶ Zoo Tycoon

Eager to get his hands into development, Kim changes tracks, becoming a studio manager, and is instrumental in launching the very successful PC hit, Zoo Tycoon

2001 ▶ Starting the Xbox Era

Working hand-in-hand with Ed Fries as a general manager, Kim is one of the key players in the launch of the Xbox, and helps to shape Microsoft's console video game strategy

2004 ▶ Running the Show

With the departure of Fries, Kim takes the reins as the general manager of Microsoft Game Studios after a period of serving as the interim manager. He makes several key decisions, including putting the company's XSN sports franchises on hold for at least one year

So, how's the new gig going?
The new gig is really exciting. Because I've had so much experience with this group, there wasn't a big hurdle for me to get over in terms of getting to know the organization and understanding what my priorities should be. In that sense, I was really lucky to be able to hit the ground running, and I can tell you I've been running ever since I took the job. [Laughs]

Was it nice to get the "Temporary" tag removed from your title?
Oh yeah, absolutely. I joke with people that I made a lot of decisions that would have been difficult for my managers to reverse. I created a lot of locks and barriers to prevent an exit for myself – I don't think they had any choice. [Laughs]

Were you surprised to see Ed leave?
Yes, but I always worked pretty closely with him, and we always talked about what he wanted to do. I was certainly sad to see him go. I know that Ed is going to be really successful with whatever he is doing. He did some really amazing things at the company. He'd been [at Microsoft] for a long time, so I guess from that sense it didn't surprise me that he chose this time to go.

Can you talk a little bit about your philosophy of game development? What are your goals for Microsoft Game Studios?
I think our industry has done a fantastic job of really elevating video games to a legitimate art form. Consequently, I think we've done a really good job of training customers to expect more value for their money.

So, as the first party, we have to be the publisher that's creating the great franchises that lots of customers love and buy our platforms to play. That is the mission of Microsoft Game Studios. My philosophy is that great games come from the best talent. So I'm very focused on trying to make sure that we are working with the best talent in the industry both internally and externally, because I think the universe of people who can create these types of games is fairly small.

In the past, Microsoft as a first-party Xbox publisher really tried to hit a lot of the demographics – everything from Halo on one end to Kung Fu Chaos on the other. Recently, a few somewhat high-profile products, like Psychonauts and Oddworld's Stranger, have been shelved. Is this part of a strategy to focus your development dollars on fewer titles?
When we launched the Xbox, we were obviously the new kids on the block. Sony and Nintendo were established. So, we wanted to make sure we provided a reasonable breadth of content for customers who bought Xbox initially – because we were still trying to convince third parties to support us. We are enjoying great third party support now, so there is a tremendous variety of titles available for our customers. Now, as the first party, Microsoft Game Studios, we can really focus now on delivering the type of games and experiences that will hopefully be very unique to our platform. Those kinds of games are becoming bigger, more ambitious, more risky, and more expensive to make. So, we are focusing on the teams and the ideas and the titles that we believe can fulfill that mission. We have to be very diligent about where we're going to place our bets.

> *"One of the best parts of this job is that I get to work with incredible talent."*

In the case of Psychonauts or the Oddworld project, were they just not working out, or did you feel like they were getting too expensive?
We have great respect for the creators of both of those games. From a platform perspective, I hope their games are very successful on Xbox. But, when it comes to Microsoft Game Studios, we need to make some decisions about trying to focus on a smaller set of games and teams that we believe can have a significant impact. That leaves us some very difficult decisions. And, unfortunately, it's not a quality issue because those are both very, very talented developers.

Another big announcement that's come out recently is the decision to put the XSN Sports lineup on hold for at least a year. Why was that decision made, and are you worried that that might be perceived as killing some of Microsoft's momentum in that market? Sports is a very competitive arena.
Yeah, it is a very competitive arena. For us, customers come first. And so, we took a very hard look at ourselves. We wanted to make sure we were delivering the best experiences for our sports customers. We felt there was a gap between what they expected, what our competitors were delivering, and what we were doing. We made a pretty hard strategic decision to not ship new versions of our sports games this fall, as we reevaluated and reinvested in our sports strategy. I don't think that's a decision that you want to make all the time, but I think it is absolutely the right decision – certainly the right decision for customers.

Will the sports line be coming back in subsequent years?
I don't have any comment about the specifics. But sports are undoubtedly a very important part of our overall strategy. And speaking from the platform perspective, we're very fortunate to have great partners like Electronic Arts and Sega who deliver great sports experiences to customers. We're committed as a platform to sports gamers. So, we will certainly work as a company to ensure that people who love sports are going to have great experiences on our platform, whether that comes from MGS or it comes from great companies like EA and Sega.

Microsoft's decision to buy Rare was a major news story. Then the first game down the pike was Grabbed by the Ghoulies, which didn't really meet expectations commercially or critically. Are you concerned about their ability to deliver great games?
One of the best parts of this job is that I get to work with incredible talent. And I would definitely put Rare near the top of the list of the talent that we have internally. So, I'm very excited about the games that they're working on, some of which have been announced, like Conker and Kameo, and others that they're working on that I can't talk about today. I'm very bullish on Rare. We're certainly expecting great things from them. Players should expect that, too.

Is it difficult to get them to deliver games in a timely manner? It's something they have traditionally struggled with in the past.
Not at all. I wouldn't say that Rare, at least in my limited experience with them, are any different than [other] creators of great works of art that we've enjoyed in our industry. Look at the history of the big ambitious games; if you give the great creators the right amount of time, they will usually deliver really amazing experiences and titles. I don't think that's something that's unique to Rare.

Deep in the heart of Microsoft Game Studios, Shane Kim plots the course of the company's Xbox software strategy

XBOX'S GAME GURU

Photo: Rick Dahm

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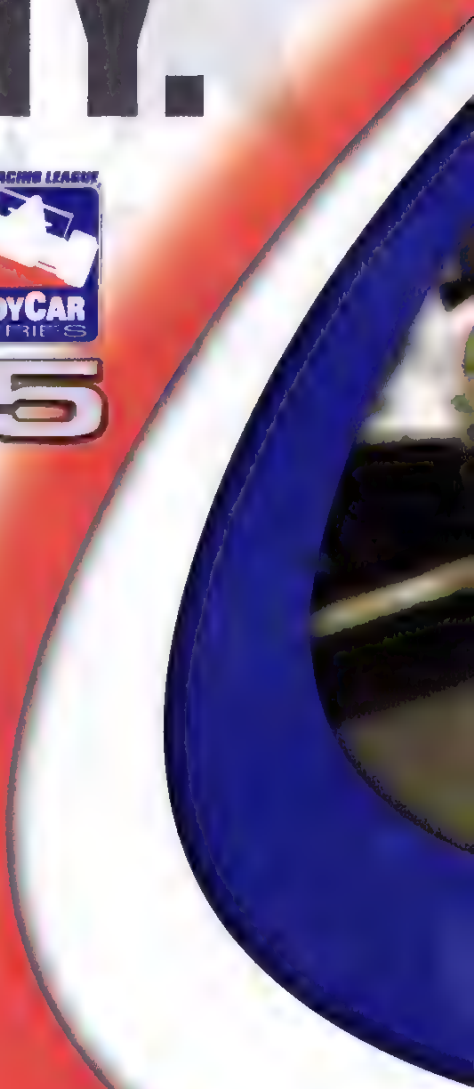

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AQUOS LC-45GX6U

Manufacturer: Sharp
Website: www.sharpusa.com
List Price: $9,999.00

Incredibly sexy by any tech-dork's standards, this set is packed to its slim-line gills with great features. The mind-blowing 1080p resolution is combined with a built-in HDTV tuner (eliminating the need for an external decoder), and the front speaker (mounted underneath the screen) is removable for those who prefer a different center channel in their home theatre setup. Besides all of the geeky tech porn, this TV is just plain too awesome for any of us to own especially because, at 45 inches across, it's one of the biggest LCDs available.

HDTV – WHAT GAMERS NEED TO KNOW

TV TYPES

Plasma – Undeniably cool, but problematic for video games because of burn-in and maintaince (the gas inside the set needs to be recharged periodically). Burn-in is what happens when a static image is on the screen for an extended period of time because of things like life bars, speedometers, or station identifiers.

LCD – Like a really big laptop screen, LCD screens are generally more expensive but have a brighter light source than plasma screens (so they're easier to see in well-lit rooms), are lighter, won't succumb to burn-in, and generally have a longer life span than plasma.

Rear-Projection – Not wall mountable like the previous two, rear-projection TVs include CRT and DLP (although not all DLP sets are rear-projection, the majority fall into this category). Generally speaking, these TVs are lighter and slimmer than tubes, but most of them fall behind the direct-view sets in terms of providing a true black and wide viewing angle.

Direct-view – Tube TVs are giant hulking masses. Because of the incredible weight, their size is limited (a 40-inch model weighs around 300 pounds – try and get that up the stairs by yourself). But, their lower price point, wide viewing angle and high resolution make these a nice solution for smaller rooms.

RESOLUTION

Interlaced vs. Progressive – When looking at HDTVs, lots of numbers followed by an "i" or a "p" are thrown around. The letter indicates either an interlaced or progressive method of displaying the picture. Interlaced pictures are made by drawing all of the odd-numbered lines on the screen and then going back to do the even-numbered ones. Progressive scan, on the other hand, writes one full frame of video from left to right every 1/60th of a second. Since the image is done all at once, the viewer sees less jaggies and motion artifacts (blurring around moving images).

480 vs. 720 vs. 1080 – The number actually indicates how many visible lines of detail are shown on the screen, so the basic gist is that bigger is better. That being said, whether the image is progressive or interlaced has more impact with regard to games, because of the motion artifacts with interlaced pictures – progressive scan trumps a higher resolution on some TVs.

■ OCC-flavored bikes, even those that require human propulsion, are seriously cool looking

etc

SCHWINN STING-RAY

Manufacturer: Schwinn **Website:** www.schwinnstingray.com **List Price:** $180

Talk to your parents about their banana seat sporting Sting-Ray of yesteryear and you'll probably get an earful about adding headlights, wheelie bars, and mirrors – bike customization in the height of muscle car madness. Right now, Schwinn is releasing their updated edition of the classic Sting-Ray – and it was created in partnership with our guilty-pleasure reality TV stars of choice: the Orange County Chopper boys. While only the bikes are currently available (but nicely offered in a handful of fashion colors), the plan is to start distributing a line of compatible accessories in the near future. Now get out and get some exercise!

etc

GBA SP HEADPHONES

Manufacturer: Majesco
Website: www.majescogames.com/accessories
List Price: $9.99

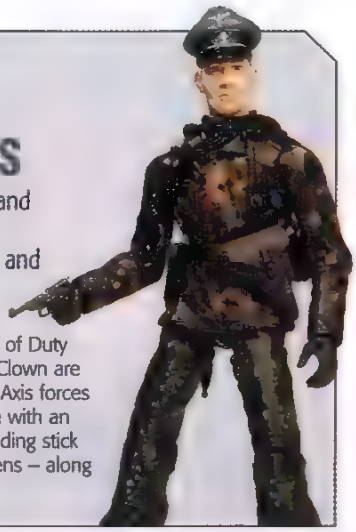
These licensed neckband-style headphones solve everyone's biggest gripe with the Game Boy Advance SP – the unit's lack of a standard headphone jack. Bypassing the adapter offered by the Big N, Majesco's headphones unfortunately won't work with any other devices currently on the market (there is no conversion to a standard jack), which is a bit of a bummer.

toys

CALL OF DUTY ACTION FIGURES

Manufacturer: Plan B Toys and Radioactive Clown
Website: www.planbtoys.com and www.radioactiveclown.com
List Price: $8.99

Based on Activision's acclaimed Call of Duty game, Plan B Toys and Radioactive Clown are teaming up to bring both Allies and Axis forces to action figure land. Each will come with an impressive array of accessories including stick mag pouches, mess kits, and canteens – along with weaponry, of course.



■ **Expensive, but powerful. It's a chick magnet, too…at least we think it should be**

pc

TEK PANEL 300G

Manufacturer: Hy-Tek
Website: www.tekpanel.com **List Price:** $6,495

The businessy version of this extremely sexy HDTV/computer hybrid made quite a splash on NBC's *The Apprentice* (sharp-eyed viewers would have noticed it in the players' suite), but Hy-Tek sent one of their gaming units our way to be pawed by everyone in the office. The basic idea for either version is the same: an HDTV LCD screen with a smoking computer built in behind it. The units can be set on a table or wall-mounted for all of your full-featured home theater, computer, and gaming needs.

SPECS:
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- Wireless keyboard, mouse, and remote
- Bose MediaMate Speakers
- Undeniable cool factor

pc

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 ZS GAMER LIMITED EDITION

Manufacturer: Creative **Website:** www.soundblaster.com
List Price: $149.99

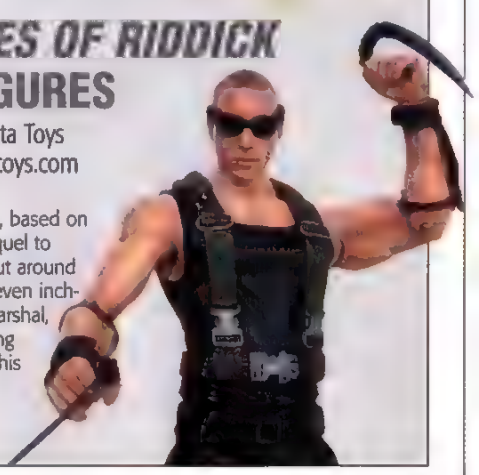
Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy, Halo: Combat Evolved, Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness, Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield, and Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell. What do these games have in common? Their full retail versions come packed in with the Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS – Gamer Limited Edition. Besides the games, this card pumps out 7.1 Dolby DTS surround sound and has received the THX Multimedia Certification – sweet for movies and even better for FPS titles.

toys

CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK ACTION FIGURES

Manufacturer: Sota Toys
Website: www.sotatoys.com
List Price: $12.99

This first series of figures, based on the upcoming movie sequel to *Pitch Black*, should be out around July and stand around seven inches each. Riddick, Lord Marshal, Kyra, Vaako, and a Lensing Necro are all offered in this initial series.

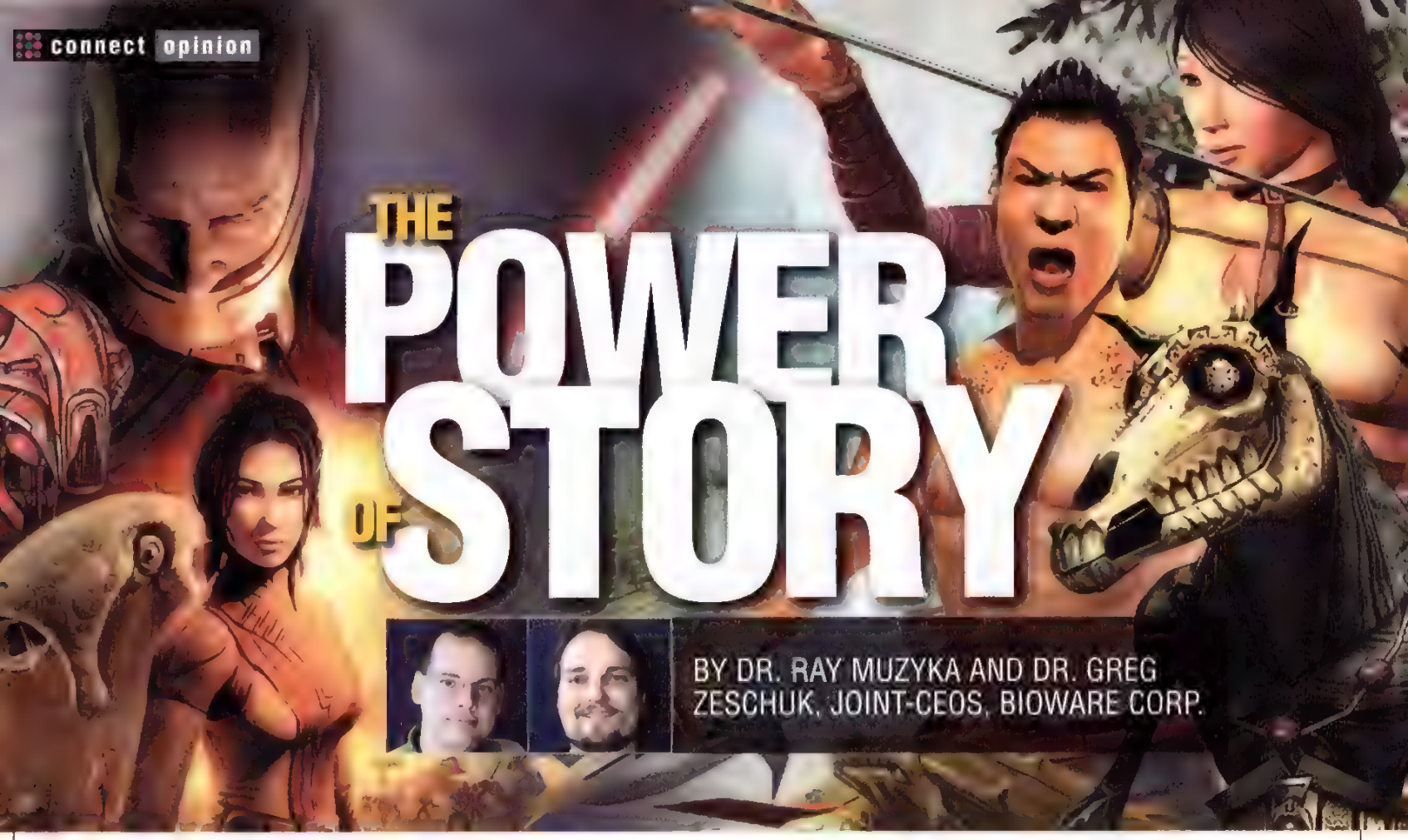


peripheral

NINJA GAIDEN XBOX CONTROLLER

Manufacturer: Nuby Technology
Website: www.nubytech.com **List Price:** $24.99

This certainly isn't rocking the world of video game accessories, but Nuby has partnered with Tecmo to offer fully-licensed accessories based on their crazy-hard Xbox title, Ninja Gaiden. The shiny controller offers, in addition to the usual array, a programmable macro button to shortcut those complicated combos.



THE POWER OF STORY

BY DR. RAY MUZYKA AND DR. GREG ZESCHUK, JOINT-CEOS, BIOWARE CORP.

Something we've all been watching in the video game industry is the crossover between video games and movies. The "Holy Grail" sought by game developers and filmmakers alike appears to be the simultaneous release of both a game and a movie. Films are driven by their stories, and video games increasingly include an immersive storyline as well. However, similarities aside, the type of storyline in a movie is quite different from that found in a typical video game. Which form of entertainment is better? And, is a storyline actually important to the success of a video game? We believe story is a key feature in gaming today, and that games will become the dominant form of entertainment in the future.

In the past, video games based on movies received limited attention and care in their storylines, and suffered as a result. Now that game platforms have improved to the point where amazing cinematic experiences can be delivered, video games have more than a fighting chance to create an immersive world in which a great story can be told, and we predict video games will continue to reach mainstream audiences at a whole new level because of the power of their immersive storylines and character development. The entertainment budget of a typical consumer is limited. It's our belief that video games will eventually win in the battle to capture the hearts and minds of the mainstream consumer, in large part because the storylines in video games continue to improve over time.

Stepping back to look at other forms of entertainment, stories drive almost all of our media experiences. Movies, books, television, video games – all of these various types of media have stories at their core. The games that really make a difference are memorable and live on in the minds of players because of the characters and worlds they bring to life in their storylines. Now, it is true that video games do not need a deep and fully expressive story to have an impact: Half-Life had a great story, and yet its power was in its subtlety. By comparison, in our most recent game, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, we told a story that was cinematic and bold in the style of our favorite Star Wars movies. Regardless of how complex the underlying story is, as long as a game has a story, and it is told in a way that draws in the player as an active participant, you'll want to play it to see how it ends.

The real power of story in video games is rooted in their non-linearity. Like movies, most games have a central, linear story that leads directly from point A to point B, but the best games take this further and allow the player to choose their path to some degree. Often the sense of choice in games is illusionary, but – provided the interface does not distract from the immersion – even limited choice is better than what other forms of entertainment can possibly offer. In Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic we let players explore the light or the dark side of the Force to great effect. In our next game, Jade Empire, we're taking the concept of making meaningful choices to a whole new level, where player choice directly affects a number of important parts of the game as you play the role of a martial arts master.

The way to drive home the true power of video games is to do something that can not be done in other forms of entertainment, and non-linearity in storyline is truly unique to video games.

> "The real power of story in video games is rooted in their non-linearity."

BioWare is a developer that has built its reputation on crafting memorable stories for its roleplaying games in titles like Baldur's Gate, Baldur's Gate II, and Neverwinter Nights. We believe that stories will be one of the most important parts of the video games of the future. At BioWare we already believe story is the key element in our recent games, like Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, and in our future projects like Jade Empire. But, developing a great story doesn't come without cost: We spend months carefully crafting the stories in our games, only to tear them apart in a quest to make them better still.

Do storylines actually deserve all this attention? We think they do, and in part because of their compelling, interactive, non-linear storylines, video games are increasingly breaking out to the mainstream audiences and competing with movies and television. Our industry is battling for the entertainment budget of the players and viewers of the world – and video games are just now starting to win in that battle! At BioWare we believe that video games are the best possible medium to tell a story because the player is not just a passive viewer, but an active participant. In a great game the player feels every twist and turn, drives the story and helps to create their own experience. That's the power of a great storyline in a video game; that's why we are convinced that video games will eventually prevail in the battle for consumer attention over all other forms of entertainment. ■■■

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

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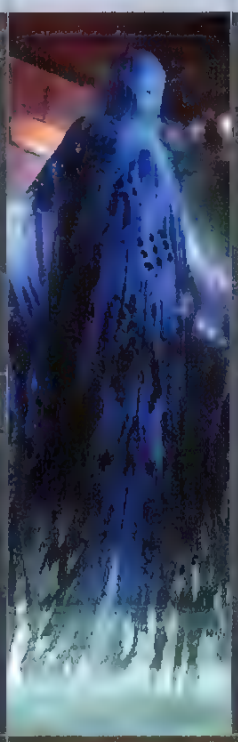
june

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
		01 **NEW RELEASES** • The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay – Xbox • Front Mission 4 – PS2 • PSI-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy – PS2, Xbox • ShellShock: Nam '67 – PS2, Xbox, PC • Sudeki – Xbox		**03** **MUGGLES CATCH POTTER FEVER** Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban releases on PS2, Xbox, GC, and GBA today, and opens in theaters on the 4th	**04** Tomb Raider's Lara [illegible] Jolie turns 28	
	07 **UNOFFICIAL NINTENDO DAY** Available today, gamers can run out and grab the NES-themed GBA and a handful of classic re-releases. Also on this joyous day, Nintendo is releasing The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures for GameCube.	**08** **NEW RELEASES** • Full Spectrum Warrior – Xbox • *Quantum Leap: Season 1* – DVD • Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon – GBA		**10** **WOMEN IN GAMES CONFERENCE** (June 10-11) If you are a woman and you work in the video game industry, travel to the University of Portsmouth in the United Kingdom to discuss the future of games from a female perspective.	**11** **BALD MAN LOST IN SPACE** *The Chronicles of Riddick* opens in theaters, and Vin Diesel shocks world with an Oscar-caliber performance	
	14 Haircuts get worse with age. Donald Trump turns 58.	**15** **NEW RELEASES** • *Curb Your Enthusiasm: Season 2* – DVD • Daredevil – PS2 • Double Dragon – GBA • McFarlane's Evil Prophecy – PS2 • Operation Shadow – N-Gage • Shadow Vault – PC		**18** **ANIMENEXT 2004** (June 18-20) Held in Secaucus, NJ, this is the place to be if you enjoy wearing costumes of video game or anime characters. Who knows! wearing a costume of Dante may get you a date with Sailor Moon.	**19** **BOTCON 2004** (June 19-20) Along with Peter Cullen (the voice of Optimus Prime) and Dan Gilvezan (the voice of Bumblebee), this two day Transformers expo is expected to draw a record number of nerds to Pasadena, CA.	
20 Nicole Kidman turns 37 today, while Tom Cruise cries himself to sleep with a bottle of chardonnay and Céline Dion's *All The Way: A Decade of Song*.	**21** **NEW RELEASES** • Mario Golf: Advance Tour – GBA	**22** **NEW RELEASES** • Astro Boy – GBA • *Bad Santa* – DVD • Shadow Ops: Red Mercury – Xbox • Showdown: Legends of Wrestling – PS2, Xbox	**23**			
27	**28** **FUSE 2004** (June 26-29) Also known as New Zealand Game Developers Conference, this three day event will include round-table discussions, game development tutorials, and public panels. www.nzgdc.org.nz/index.php	**29** **NEW RELEASES** • Dragon Ball Z: Super Sonic Warriors – GBA • Spider-Man 2 – PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA, PC • Yu-Gi-Oh: Reshef of Destruction – GBA • Mega Man: Battle Network 4: Red Sun and Blue Moon – GBA	**30** **SPIDER-MAN 2 OPENS TODAY!** Entire U.S. tech section shuts down. Nerds declare Kirsten Dunst the hottest thing in the history of hotness.			

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Language
Mild Violence

XBOX LIVE

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

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PLAYSTATION 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 19

RISING IN THE WEST

There's really never been a video game franchise quite like Grand Theft Auto. Both passionately loved and deeply reviled, it's sold more copies than any console series of this generation, all while causing more public outcry than any game in memory. However, it's important to remember that GTA is significant for much more than simply moving units or ruffling the feathers of "family values" watch-dogs. For millions of people around the world, Grand Theft Auto quite simply changed the definition of what a video game could be. After playing GTA III for the first time, you realize that games aren't just about action; they aren't just about exploration; they aren't just about story; they aren't just about racing – they can now encompass all of these things at once. Nearly every company in video games has learned the lessons taught by the success of Rockstar Games' flagship franchise, and each passing month sees developers attempting new ways of cross-breeding genres that were once thought mutually exclusive.

But a simple mixing of styles isn't the sole reason the series has struck such a chord with its audience. Unlike most game franchises, which take familiar characters and place them in new settings and situations, GTA takes its wide-open gameplay, darkly satirical aesthetic, and violent leanings into whatever time period and geographical setting its creators see fit. Like the Final Fantasy series, each new Grand Theft Auto is a fresh start for the franchise: new worlds to conquer, new stories, and new experiences. Because of this, much of the speculation regarding the next iteration of GTA has been regarding its setting. Where could Rockstar North take the saga next? Early speculation had it that the game would be subtitled "Sin City" and set in an ersatz Las Vegas. Then, after it was officially confirmed that the next chapter would be named Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, rumor soon spread that the title would take place in a fictionalized Los Angeles.

So, who's right? Well, as is often the case in the world of Rockstar, the truth is considerably more complex than we could have dreamed. Because, as it turns out, everybody was right – and that's only half the story. If this is all a bit confusing, we suggest you read on, because we can guarantee one thing: You have no idea what Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas has in store.

THE GOLDEN STATE

Perhaps sensing our anticipation, Rockstar's Dan Houser, the game's vice president of creative and one of the people most centrally involved in crafting the GTA universe, cuts through months of innuendo and gossip regarding the direction of San Andreas with a simple statement.

"San Andreas is not a city – it's a state," declares Houser. "Probably the most interesting thing you [need to] think about for a second is that we're not setting the game in a version of Los Angeles or San Francisco or Las Vegas, but in all three – and with the countryside in between."

Let that sink in for a minute, and you'll begin to understand just how large an undertaking this game has become for Rockstar North. Despite all their success, Houser makes it clear that the team is taking nothing for granted. "We take this GTA stuff really seriously and we work like f---- on it, and we don't just do it to try to churn out a game. We think we've got some clever ideas and some clever angles on things," he comments.

■ It wouldn't be California without a yellow, smoggy sky

While Vice City demonstrated remarkable progress in several key areas, the level of improvement being implemented in San Andreas might be best described as exponential. As Houser stated, the state of San Andreas incorporates three distinct urban areas: Los Santos (Los Angeles), San Fierro (San Francisco), and Las Venturra (Las Vegas). Each of these cities is relatively the same size as Vice City, and will be fully open to the player at different points in the story arc – all in all, Houser estimates that the entire game area is approximately four to six times as large as the entirety of either of the previous entries in the series. Add to this the fact that you'll actually travel between cities over roadways that stretch through a vast countryside, which are home to

■ "Welcome to Los Santos. Now, if you'll be kind enough to take off that watch and hand it to me."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ESTEVAN ORIOL

San Andreas' selection of vehicles reflects the game's California vibe. Expect a wide selection of pimped-out lowriders

their own unique characters and gameplay sequences. In essence, Rockstar finally seems to be closing in on its goal of crafting GTA as a living, breathing world.

The three cities also allow the designers to create a much more diverse set of experiences for the player, and each city is tailored to emphasize different aspects of the amazingly varied gameplay package.

"San Francisco has been done to death in games, but San Francisco has hills and GTA III had hills," Houser illustrates. "For good driving, one of the things that we missed [in Vice City] was hills. It just adds that third dimension; it's not as fun without it. So, in San Fierro, things are a lot more driving-focused and that's when the game becomes a lot more about cars and driving and the environment reflects that. But the story also reflects it. Then, the specialty vehicles unlock, and you can do some wild s--- you've never done before."

The rolling countryside will also expand the dimensions of the GTA experience, adding a dramatic scale that couldn't be accomplished in the urban confines of previous titles. "One of the things that the countryside gives you is a mountain; you've never had a mountain in a GTA game before," opines Houser. "The idea of being able to drive from LA, through the countryside, up a mountain into San Francisco and on to Vegas is just freakish, and it feels amazing! It's a real big change of experience – you feel like you're in this world, and the world feels completely 3D. It's got depth."

The game's scope has expanded not only in size, but in detail as well. Thanks to new streaming and rendering technology designed by Rockstar North's programming staff, the game will boast environments that are both more intricate and more interactive than those in previous titles.

"I think looking back to Vice City, we had a much bigger map, but not everything was as dense and interesting as it could have been," observes Houser. "This time, every bit of the map looks much crisper and has a lot more stuff going on. Obviously, the desert is deserted but there's still some weird s--- to see and the map still feels very vibrant and alive."

This sense of immediacy will be heightened by a number of nuts-and-bolts technical improvements to the game's graphics engine, which has been overhauled to incorporate real-time reflections on cars, windows, and mirrors, as well as new techniques like radial lighting, which allows for more realistic shadowing, and soft-shadow lighting for interior levels. Also, everything in the game now has independent models for day and nighttime, in order to make sure that objects look as detailed and vivid during the evening hours as they do during daylight.

Speaking of interior environments, this is yet another area in which Rockstar North is pushing the boundaries. While Vice City introduced interior gameplay into the equation, a vast majority of the buildings were little more than glorified save points. This time, tons of interiors have been fully rendered out, and tailored to facilitate new types of gameplay, most notably robbing houses…but more on that later.

Of course, what's the use of all this new real estate if you can't make it a part of your budding criminal operation? To this end, the purchasing of buildings – which was also present, but not fully developed in Vice City – has been given a much higher importance in San Andreas.

"It was something that we touched on in Vice City, when you acquired property and got this sense of starting to build an empire," said Houser. "That whole thing has been taken a lot further…In Las Venturra, you'll be able to run a casino there, which you will have bought and built."

HOME OF THE BODY BAG

The architect Frank Lloyd Wright once said, "They turned the country up on its side, and everything loose fell into California." This quote goes a long way towards describing the state that is probably one of the most culturally diverse regions on Earth. From hustlers of the Sunset Strip to the intellectual elite of Berkeley, California embodies the entirety of the American experience. All the crass commercialism and hippie idealism, the ghetto misery and Hollywood glitz, all the money and glamour, and suffering and dashed hopes that the country has ever given birth to somehow fought its way out west to lie down by the ocean.

If Rockstar was looking for rich source material for the cultural satire that's become the trademark of Grand Theft Auto, it couldn't do better than California, the state of Ronald Reagan and Ice Cube, hippie icon Jerry Garcia and high-class hooker Heidi Fleiss, the Beach Boys and Charles Manson. As any number of stand-up comedians have pointed out over the years, California is as strange and silly a place as you could imagine. Houser more succinctly summed up the Golden State vibe with a simple phrase: "Cali wierdness."

The team also couldn't have picked a more interesting time period for the setting of San Andreas: the early 1990s. One of the most troubled and divisive times in California history, the early '90s are most remembered for its intense gang warfare, when there were an estimated 15,000 active members of the Blood and Crip street gangs killing each other at a torrid rate. Things became even worse when years of abusive police actions finally resulted in parts of Los Angeles being burned to the ground after the beating of motorist Rodney King by four LA police officers, who were later acquitted.

This is the world that San Andreas' main character, Carl Johnson, finds himself coming back to after spending five years in Liberty City. Johnson left his neighborhood in the ghetto of Los Santos after the death of his brother Brian, who died in a tragic incident. Carl's older brother Sweet Johnson blamed him for Brian's death, leading to a period of estrangement that is broken by the sudden passing of his mother.

On returning home for the funeral, Carl finds his biological family and his former gang, the Orange Grove Families, in disarray. Sweet and his sister Kendall are at each other's throats. His former crew – Sweet, longtime family friend Smoke, and Ryder – have fallen from power on the streets, and are now besieged by both rival gang factions and internal quarrels.

Although Carl is reluctant to get dragged back into the street life, fate intervenes when his crew comes under the thumbs of Frank Tenpenny and Eddie Polaski, who Houser characterizes as a "heavy-duty pair of lunatic corrupt policemen on your case." As always, events soon spiral out of control, and Johnson finds himself on a frantic adventure that will take him across the state of San Andreas as he fights to preserve his

■ In Los Santos, carjackers are a little more forceful than they are in Vice City

■ Four person drivebys are one of the cooler features made possible by the improvements to the AI system

family, his gang, and his life.

Obviously, this subject matter has the potential to draw some heavy criticism from a number of quarters, so Rockstar North has undertaken an unprecedented research effort to make sure that San Andreas can capture the true essence of California, viewed through GTA's "distorted prism," as Houser puts it.

"We have a full-time set of researchers, which I don't think many other game companies have," Houser points out. "We also took the whole team and all the artists all around California and Vegas with hundreds of digital cameras – deep into nasty neighborhoods and the nicest casinos and all points in between. We watched hundreds of movies to get the California vibe into the game. Also, we've got people who are in those communities and in that environment who we speak to about stuff to try to make it as faithful to that as makes sense."

In addition to their internal research, the team partnered with Estavan Oriol, a LA-based photographer, clothing designer, and video director who once worked for the Latino rap group Cypress Hill. His shots (some of which you can see in this article), helped Rockstar North get a better feel for California street culture from the perspective of someone who has lived it. They've also struck up a collaboration with west coast hip-hop veteran DJ Pooh, a producer/film director famous for his work with Ice Cube, which include production credits on Cube's albums *Death Certificate* and *The Predator*, as well as writing and acting roles in the classic hood comedy *Friday*.

"Just one thing that makes me slightly nervous is the notion that it's a game about gang-banging, which it is not really," comments Houser. "It could seem that way if you play about three percent of it [but] it's very much lots of other things... On the one hand, the game is slightly more serious than previous games, on the other hand, it is still very much a satire."

In the tradition of GTA, you can expect that every part of society will be skewered with darkly comic precision, from the Hollywood Hills to the residents of the backwater towns that dot the rural regions of San Andreas. "Our take on the countryside from a sociological perspective is, if you're from the city, you fear the countryside – [all] the lunatics and maniacs," chuckles Houser.

One thing that Rockstar declined

■ Little touches like the real-time reflections in the headlights add to the sense of realism

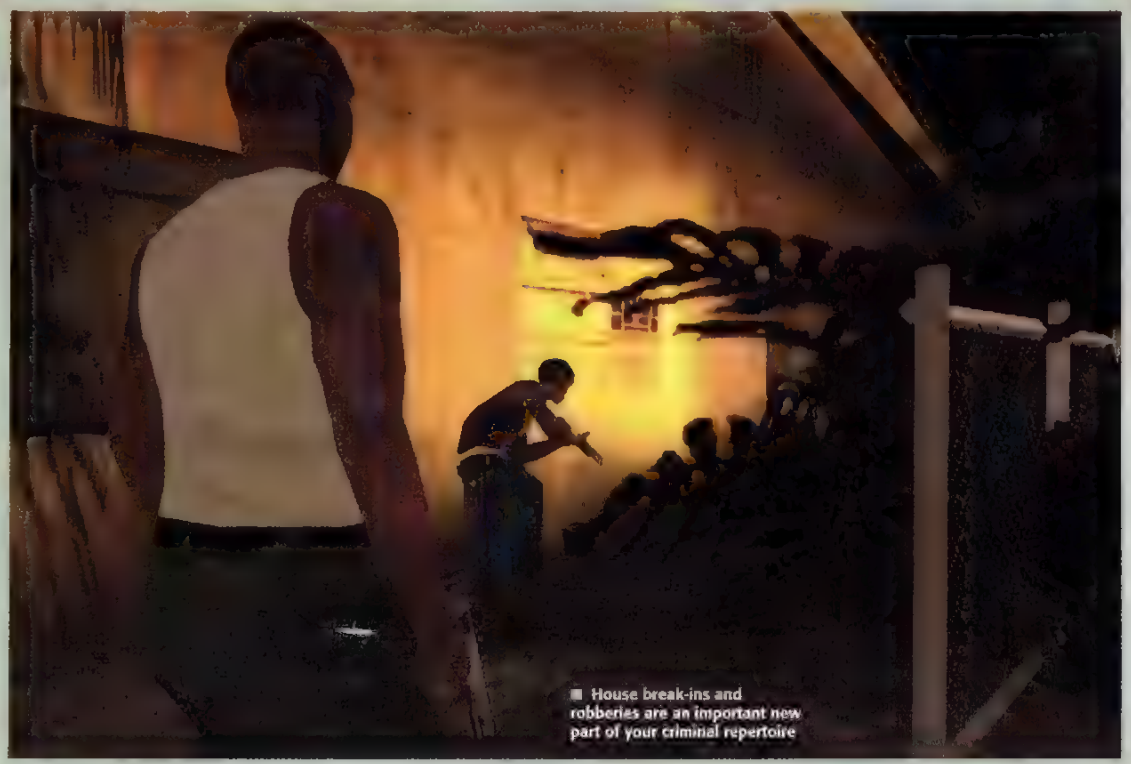
to comment on was the game's soundtrack or cast of voice actors – two areas in which Vice City, with its all-star talent and massive soundtrack of '80s hits (which was released commercially as a five disc box set), set new standards in the industry. For now, all we know is that the radio stations are back, and they will have a huge selection of era-specific music to play, as well as some older west coast classics.

When we questioned him on the musical portion of San Andreas, Houser didn't offer specifics, but did make this statement: "The plan with everything in the game is to push it further and harder than we ever have before," he offered. "A good thing to make clear is about the music, yes, there will probably be some rap music in there, but GTA music has always been about variety and we're not gonna deviate from that at all…California is one of the centers of music."

Questions about the game's voice cast drew out a little more fire from Houser, as he took some shots at what he termed video games' "horrible pandering to celebrity culture."

"We've done some really interesting stuff but I'll be honest with you, I don't want to talk about it because, it's actually annoying," Houser commented. "We started doing that stuff, and now other people are selling games on the back of the fact that they've got Heidi Klum or someone in the game, which I find ridiculous. We're not going to put a famous voice in just because it's a famous voice. We're going to get someone who sounds wicked for the character, and if they're not famous it doesn't bother us at all. Because I don't even think that is the talent. I think the talent is the people who make the games. The guys at Rockstar North are the stars of this thing. We've never sold a game on the back of the fact that this or that person is in it."

However, when we asked if this meant that Rockstar was using more unknown actors to fill the roles in San Andreas, Houser quickly laughed and said, "Now, I didn't say that at all!" Expect that, whatever the cast, San Andreas will have some very cool and appropriate acting talent signed on.



■ House break-ins and robberies are an important new part of your criminal repertoire

GTA fans can also expect that, much in the same way Vice City's storyline had loose ties to the events of GTA III, San Andreas will also tap into the series tradition in terms of both plot points and familiar faces. "For the hardcore obsessives that really follow the stories of both and can remember them in their heads," reveals Houser, "there will be lots of stuff that they can pick up on, some really fun stuff. Weird characters turning up again, other people mentioned; there will be lots of interesting stuff like that."

GAME RECOGNIZE GAME

More than any other series in history, Grand Theft Auto is about giving players the freedom to blast their way through amazingly detailed environments, doing anything and everything that their sick minds can dream of. Well, as you might expect given the epic scale of San Andreas, "anything and everything" just got a whole lot more interesting.

One of the more significant changes in gameplay experience is the work that has gone into the game's AI system. Each and every character you see on screen now has a "brain," and will react to your actions and other events in a much more intelligent fashion. Rest assured, the sometime dimwitted reactions of pedestrians in past editions of GTA is a thing of the past. NPC intelligence behavior has now become so varied that voiceover recording sessions for an average pedestrian character's dialogue have gone from a mere ten minutes to an hour in length. The AI is not limited to the behavior of NPCs, either, as San Andreas will implement dynamic difficulty based on your performance, sometimes easing the challenge to allow players to advance past troublesome objectives – a move Rockstar hopes will allow more fans to play San Andreas through to completion.

Even better, the new AI now allows you to recruit a gang to accompany you on missions. One deadly new application of this teamwork is the four-person drivebys. Trust us, the first time you slowly roll down the street with a three-deep crew hanging out the windows with pistols cocked and ready for action, you'll never want to go back to being a lone gunman again. This team-oriented dynamic has been created to further the feeling that you're actually running and commanding a criminal organization, a huge step forward from essentially being a glorified Mob errand boy in GTA III.

"You will be [running a gang], but it will be done in a way that keeps you in the story through phone calls and speaking to people instead of checking on inventory or something like that," Houser comments.

Rockstar North has gone to extremes to create a more interactive environment, modeling scores of unique interiors, a fully operational casino, and dozens of eating establishments. However, where in the past many of these things would have been nothing more than amusing diversions, this time they directly affect your character's progression, abilities, and even

appearance. It's not just a step up in terms of complexity from the simple cab missions of the past (although Houser promises even more of these types of minigame modes will be included as well), it's also part of an effort to make your every action tie in to the overall progression of your character.

"In GTA III, it could feel like, to some extent, there were two states: I'm on a mission and I'm not on a mission, and they weren't connected enough," comments Houser. "In Vice City, we made headway into closing that sense of separation – the story didn't feel like it existed just in the missions. But this time the whole game is happening all the time. Obviously, you still have missions you have to do, but when you're not on a mission, not only are there a thousand things to do, but what you can do relates to where you are in the story. The whole thing feeds back into how the story unfolds. The [side-missions] have relevance; you'll learn skills that you'll need on a mission."

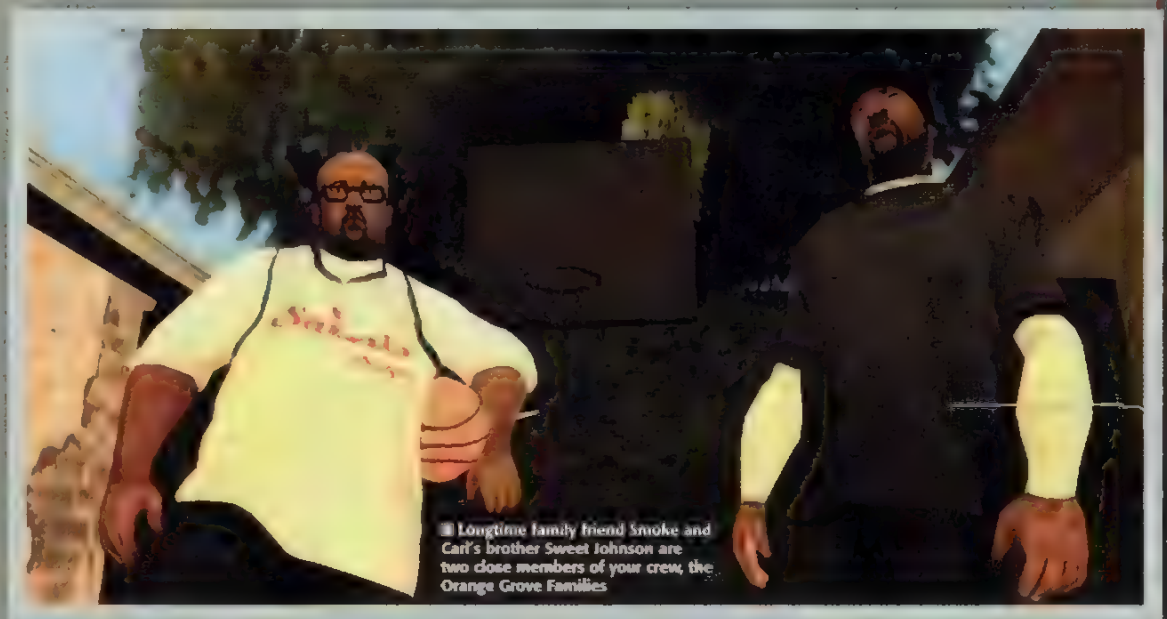
Obviously, with the increased importance of acquiring properties and building a criminal empire, money is now much more than just a way of keeping score. So, between major objectives, you can rob the scores of fully modeled dwellings for cash. House break-ins play a large part in San Andreas, but Houser warns that these jobs will require real skill and planning. In other words, don't expect a burglary to be as easy as a simple carjacking.

"[Robbery] is definitely a skill. If you don't do very well, someone's going to shoot your head off, and if you do it well, you'll get away with plenty of loot."

As the story progresses, new types of gameplay will open up, each specifically tied to the setting and story arc. In Las Venturra, you'll be able to gamble your hard-earned money away, just like in real life. No matter where you are in your long journey through San Andreas, Houser promises that you'll experience new and challenging types of gameplay.

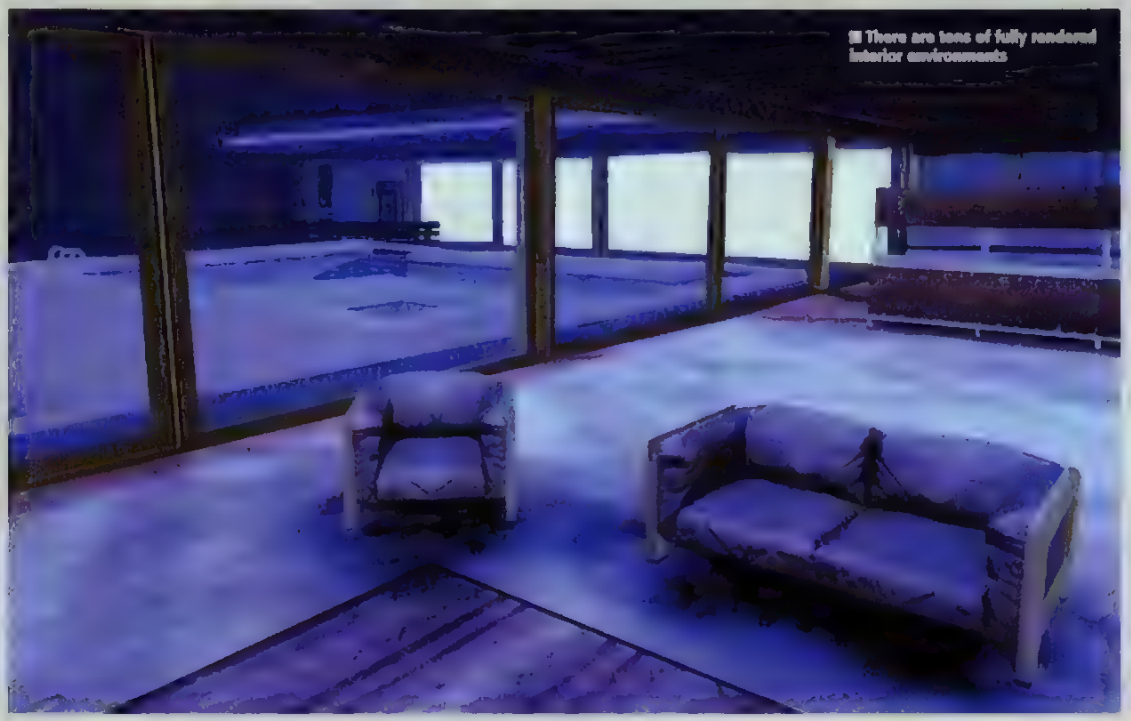
"There's a lot more complexity. The way it unlocks has been thought through a lot. You still start from pretty basic stuff; the tutorial is built into the game," Houser explains. "There're hundreds of skills to learn in this game so you can't have hundreds of tutorials. So each mission you learn a new skill. In every mission you'll be doing something new."

Just as the game is constantly evolving, so will your character. In fact, you'll see the results of your character's lifestyle right before your eyes. We've mentioned the fact that there are now numerous restaurants throughout San Andreas – and they are not a mere novelty. Adding a new dimension of realism, Carl will now have to eat in order to maintain his physical state – which is also reflected in a Stamina meter, something Rockstar North experimented with in Manhunt. And, as the saying goes, you are what you eat.



■ Longtime family friend Smoke and Carl's brother Sweet Johnson are two close members of your crew, the Orange Grove Families

■ Avoid exercise and consume junk food, and you'll end up looking like this



There are tons of fully rendered interior environments

Consuming fast food and avoiding exercise will actually make Carl gain weight, which affects everything from your speed to the character's physics-to humorous effect.

"Playing a mission when you're a fat bastard and everyone calling you a 'fat bastard' in the game world is an amazing experience," said Houser. Unfortunately, becoming overweight will frequently make missions either more difficult or outright impossible, forcing you to seek another very real-world solution to your problem.

"So, you eat your donuts, you get fat, you gain weight, you reduce your stamina and speed – how do you sort that out?" questions Houser. "You go to the gym, you work out, you gain muscle, and you gain a lot more strength, a lot more speed. The [character] model actually changes and he looks amazing."

Although it may seem like a gimmick, Houser sees the weight dynamic as yet another way of bringing the player closer to the main character and the story, a paramount concern of the development team. "We're trying to build up the sense of ownership over the world and over your character, from his weight to a hundred other things you can do to him in that world."

This effort to create a bond between the player and their onscreen alter ego is furthered by changes that are being made to the control scheme. It's no secret that gun targeting has been the area in most need of improvement in GTA, and although Vice City made significant strides in this area, Rockstar North has continued its effort to overhaul the targeting and camera systems.

"The hardest thing in any open-world, third-person shooter is making targeting fun," claims Houser. "It's something that people criticize in GTA, but I don't think there're many games that do it very well. It's a fundamental problem with a third-person shooter. We've done a lot of work to make that really fun this time."

While Rockstar won't divulge details regarding the targeting until they are fully "locked and loaded," when we pressed him on the issue, Houser responded simply: "Play Manhunt – the shooting levels in Manhunt. It's a development on that. I think you'd find those a lot more explosive and in-your-face than previously."

We certainly take this as a good sign, given the fact Manhunt has an alternate control scheme that allows players to use the right analog stick for look/target, as well as the ability for players to take cover behind outcroppings and auto-target from around corners – two features that would be amazing additions to the GTA universe. Whatever their plans, if San Andreas shows the same level of improvement in targeting that Vice City demonstrated over its predecessor, fans of the series should be quite pleased.

In general, a tremendous effort has gone into crafting more responsive character control, an effort that is paying dividends in many aspects of the gameplay package. "One of the areas we're working up is the hand-to-hand combat," comments Houser. "We're going to get a lot more variety in stances, attacks, and control over that. It's going to be new styles of carjacking. [There are] new things you can do such as swimming – a lot more detail and variety in the animation."

On the weapons front, although there will be new and unique armaments in San Andreas, the bounds of reality (and the early '90s time period) have somewhat limited the team options in terms of the new arsenal.

"One of the issues is that we've already put in a s—load of weapons, and it's thinking of new ones that make sense within the game that are [from the] real world without descending into laser guns and stuff – which we are definitely not doing," said Houser. "So, it's been finding a more interesting take on the weapons and a wider variety between the weapons. The changes haven't been [putting in] 4,000 guns, because there certainly aren't, it's more that there is a much different feel to each weapon and the feel has been overhauled."

No matter which gun is in your hand, you can expect that using it will be a good deal more rewarding, as Rockstar North is finally implementing what it calls an "impact

■ The police bird has a bead on a fugitive, a lighting effect that would have been unthinkable in Vice City or GTA III

animation" system – another term for rag-doll physics – which means enemies should fall to the pavement in a painfully realistic fashion. In addition, your character will now be able to dual-wield pistols, doubling your murderous prowess while adding a stylish Hong Kong-influenced flair to your homicidal rampages.

Further technological upgrades are being performed to the vehicle physics engine in the hopes of both tightening the core elements like car handling, in addition to opening up the possibility for completely new modes of transportation.

"It's still not meant to be a racing game, " said Houser. "It's meant to be a cruising and chasing game and it is still going to feel like that, but we're just reworking and overhauling everything. In Vice City the vehicles ranged from a moped to a plane, and the range is much bigger at both ends this time."

One completely new type of vehicle Houser described is not of the motorized sort. Just as Vice City introduced motorcycles to the mix, San Andreas adds another type of two-wheeled transportation. "We've added an absolute ton of new vehicles. You're actually able to ride a bicycle this time, as well – which is really fun. You have to press the buttons to make it go faster and it just feels like a bicycle, but in the GTA world."

WELCOME TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Leaving our meeting with Dan Houser, we couldn't help but feel a little overwhelmed. A new Grand Theft Auto title is a huge event in video games, and our expectations going in had been running high. However, nothing could have prepared us for just how large Rockstar North's ambitions for this project had become. We'd hoped for a larger city – what we got was a state with three cities, together comprising perhaps what is the most massive virtual world ever created on a console title.

San Andreas also promises to be the most dramatic and emotionally engrossing entry in the series to date. Starting in GTA III, we were thrown on to the treacherous streets of Liberty City as a nameless, mute thug – a grim cipher whose personality failed to extend past the barrel of his gun. In Vice City, we became rapt in the saga of Tommy Vercetti (masterfully voiced by *Goodfellas* actor Ray Liotta), a hardluck ex-con lost among the dangerously glamorous characters that populated the cocaine-addled Miami of the 1980s. This fall, we'll step into the dense drama of the Johnson family, one that aspires to encapsulate the tension and tumult of California in the early 1990s.

Just as some began to question whether GTA could withstand the pressure coming from franchises like True Crime: Streets of LA, Sony's upcoming The Getaway 2, or Atari's eternally delayed Driver 3, Rockstar stepped up to the table and, like one of the cold-blooded poker players that roam the casinos of Las Venturra, raised the stakes impossibly high. After the few hours we spent talking about the GTA team's commitment to making Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas its greatest development project to date, it became clear that Rockstar has no plan to step down from its position as one of the most daring and successful companies in video games. ■■■

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> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
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PRINCE OF PERSIA 2

"We know that when you build a sequel, you should only focus on what was wrong, because we know how to do what is good already," says Yannis Mallat, producer for Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time and our tour guide through Ubisoft's upcoming sequel. His stance explains the dramatic shift we can see in the Prince as a character – although The Sands of Time was well received by reviewers and players, there were a few universal gripes. One was the Prince – he just wasn't very cool. The hero was self-involved, bull-headed, a little bratty, and probably just like someone you knew in high school.

Looking at what the team has done so far, one thing is clear: This is a whole new Prince. "Do you think that he's hot?" Mallat asks. We pause; it's an unusual question. Well, yeah, we answer, the new Prince certainly does have that dramatic adventurer thing going on. "But why? Why do you think that he's hot?" he asks further.

The answer is simple: The Prince looks like someone who can kick epic ass and then be sensitive, even kind. The artist we're hovering over and Mallat nod in unison – they're pleased by our response because it's exactly the description they've been using in meetings for nearly a year now.

When the new game starts, the Prince as a person isn't surprised anymore. He's more mature, but the team also wants to make sure that he's classy. Sure, these traits are displayed in his new appearance – the hodgepodge of weaponry and accessories that look to be from different areas, his clothes that have clearly been worn – but it's also shown through his reactions, how he speaks, and who he allies himself with. He's weary, more grown up… experienced. The team tells us that his transformation is not so much due to the length of time that has passed from his last adventure to his latest outing, but what has happened in that time.

The old "N'Sync" Prince is gone, and the new one will do whatever is necessary to get the job done.

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THE RELUCTANT HERO

At the start of the game, The Prince finds himself surrounded by adversaries without any explanation to the player, reminiscent of the classic Resident Evil 2 opening sequence. The area, a besieged ship, is packed with enemies and offers little guidance. The Prince must get through this pirate ship of doom before he (and the player) will be told what's going on. He flips from foe to foe, dispatching them in an orgy of violence. This opening sequence is all about your gut reaction – you'll really learn what the Prince can do, from a combat point of view, later on.

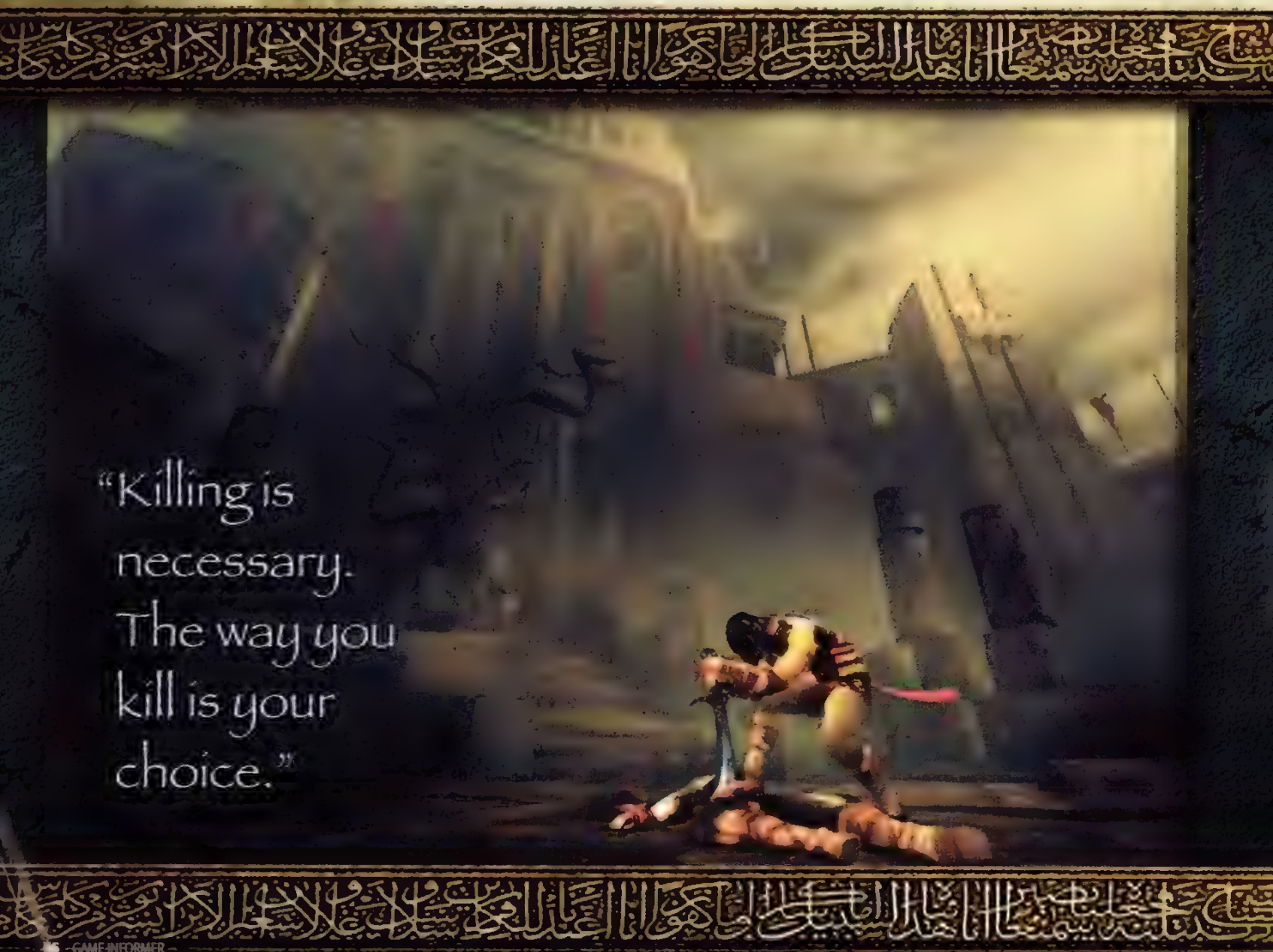
After this sequence, we realize that our hero is a doomed character. Although the exact time period is unknown, it's clear that the Prince has undergone a painful personal evolution and a dramatic change of worldview in the years that have passed since the first game. The Prince is fighting against his own fate and the events that transpired during The Sands of Time – he has broken something important and now he has to set things right.

This is an impossible quest, and the Prince is therefore fighting for his own life as well as the greater good. He has nothing to lose, but he also must not fail. Mallat feels that moral dilemma (between needing to save the world and having to do it with whatever means necessary), "makes the Prince a very interesting character."

Tonally, the sequel is much different from its predecessor, with the more intangible concepts of plot revelations, mature themes, and morality. Still, the team maintains three core principles for every title. Established before development started on The Sands of Time, the concepts are that everything (including the enemy types) has a reason for being there, that the environments should be large and continuous, and that there will always be a good story to tell.

In the first game, the goals were easy to understand: good (the Prince) will overcome evil (the vizier). He swung and ran his way through countless obstacles, hacked n' slashed past nameless foes, and still had his nobility and morality to pull him through as the good guy. But the methods we've seen the Prince use in the next game are harsher, even despicable. As Mallat puts it, "Efficient is the word."

Most of the enemies in Prince 2 are not human, but they are also not converted residents of a palace as seen in the last game. The sands possess them though, and that means that the Prince retains his powers from The Sands of Time. Without



giving too much away, the Prince doesn't have the dagger anymore, but he does still have fast-forward and reverse in his moveset. When bringing this up with Mallat, he wants to make it crystal clear that the time-bending powers aren't the focus of this outing – it's just one aspect of his arsenal. But that being said, Mallat remarks, "We knew that people never really played with the fast forward, but now they will have to. It's cool, and it's enhanced. But it's not the thing that we want to put in front of the gaming experience."

The only other complaint that people consistently had (outside of the Prince being sort of, well, young) was that the level of difficulty later in the game was about adding enemies to the battle – not making the combat itself more challenging. Time and time again, we heard this discussed while we were in the Montreal development studio. They were insistent: The combat is more involved, more dynamic, and the game will force players to use all of the skills in their arsenal. And, from our view, what an impressive arsenal it will be.

"Killing is necessary. The way that you kill is your choice." Mallat stops and lets the statement hang in the air. He wants to make sure that everyone heard clearly what he just said.

As the art shows, the Prince now dual wields weapons. This is no simple, one-dimensional combat mechanic, though. He will have his sword – a hero weapon present throughout his journey that he has picked up since the events in The Sands of Time. Those of you who have seen *Kill Bill* should think about it like Japanese steel, those of you who have not should understand that it is intrinsically a part of him, like a razor-sharp arm.

With his sword in his right hand, the left will be open to grab a secondary weapon. This could be nearly anything dropped by a foe – you can grab the weapon while in combat and kill the enemy with his own dagger, or pick up another sword, or even a mace. For more variety, the Prince could grab a small axe, which he can then launch at someone farther away. Based on what we've been told, nearly anything handheld is throwable – which includes other enemies.

The Prince can – and frequently will – grab a living enemy for use as a personal shield. Using a similar setup as Splinter Cell, (both in appearance and execution), he will grab an enemy, allow his captive to absorb a few blows, and when the shield is no longer useful, cut the guy in half. That's right, the Prince will just slice

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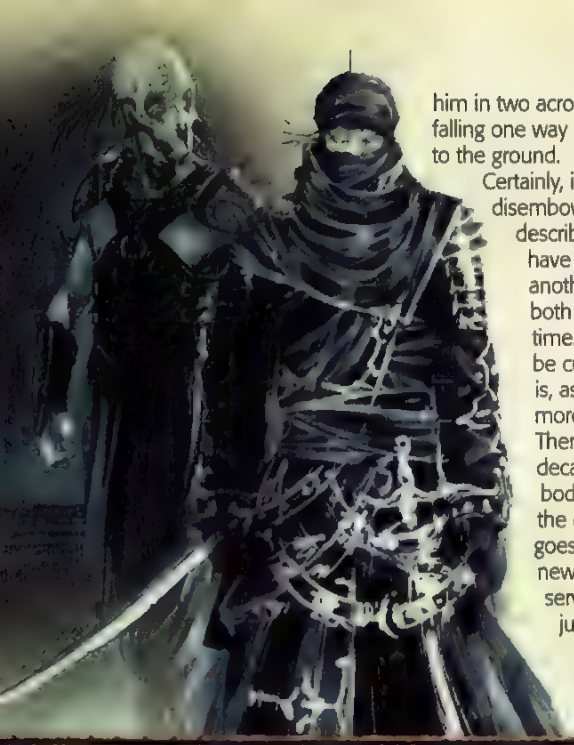
The number of enemies will not increase throughout the game – there will be hoards of them from the very beginning



him in two across the waist with the top falling one way and the bottom slumping to the ground.

Certainly, instead of the brutal disembowelment we just described, the Prince could have thrown that enemy into another foe – knocking them both down and buying some time. Either way, they will all be cut down and the Prince is, as we said before, much more efficient in his tactics. There will be severed limbs, decapitated heads, and bodies split vertically from the crown to the legs. "It goes with the new setting, the new mood, the new story. It serves a purpose. It's not just to be more gruesome," says Mallat.

The new mood also includes an army of new enemies. No longer is the team tied to making demonic variants of people and animals that would believably live in a palace. What they are looking for is a bigger scale – we saw the Prince crawling up the back of a behemoth nearly five times his size, slashing at his neck and riding it like a bucking bronco. The creature falls with a crash after the Prince shockingly and violently stabs him through the top of the head. Affectionately termed "rodeo mode" by the development team, this mechanic offers a collection of attack options that are mirrored in the more traditionally sized opponents.

Since there is no more sand dagger, the final blow laid out to enemies can have more variety. The combination of many sub-weapons, along with the main sword, lets the team (and the player) execute foes in a bevy of ways in addition to environmentally enhanced attacks. With one hand free, we saw The Prince in a room with a group of enemies. Running toward the pole in the center, he grabs hold, swings around parallel to the ground and kicks them all in a very over-the-top Hong Kong kung fu-inspired move.

This isn't the end of his acrobatic stylings by any means. In Sands of Time, the Prince could rebound off of walls and counterattack while in the air. In the new game, he can rebound off of enemies while attacking them, bounce to a wall, leap off, and hit a new target on the way down.

"I think that the platforming elements should be mixed with the combat and fighting. The Sands of Time was a lot of exploring, then fighting, then acrobatics, then fighting. We have both totally embedded into this game," says Mallat. Throughout the large-scale exploration rooms that players drank up in gulps during Sands of Time, the sequel will add

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During this opening level, the Prince's human companions will be killed in interactive scripted events – after ending your friend's life, for example, the enemies whose actions were previously scripted can then be attacked normally

Surely impressive because of its size, this enemy is even more so because it's not a boss. These large-scale attackers will appear frequently in the Prince's new adventure

In less than two seconds, this foe will be split in two

enemies sprinkled about. The Prince can attack while running along the wall. He can slide down banners by stabbing his sword through them and taking a ride. There are many areas, like on the boat where the game begins, that have ropes hanging down. The Prince can grab one, run back and forth across the wall to build up speed, and then, with the built up momentum, run across the wall to a platform farther away.

Still, it should be kept in mind that, unlike The Sands of Time locations, this is not his world. Mallat adds, "He has to be in a very strange place that he has never been before. He has to fix things. There are a lot of locations, but we want to keep the unity of locations, because that is an attribute of the franchise. Players feel not lost, but that the environment is having fun with them."

This very strange place is definitely here on Earth and is populated by dangerous beasts and menacing humans alike. Offering a more imminent threat and continuing sense of fear, the sequel features a series of boss fights, plot twists, changes in loyalty, and moral ambiguity about the Prince, his enemies, and his actions. It is important that players are so involved with the people he encounters that they feel bad for killing them. The game's maturity is also shown through the hero's choice of companions.

Farah, the first game's leading lady, was a bit flaky, sometimes helpful, certainly pretty – but generally not remembered fondly by gamers. It's not that they dislike the idea of a sidekick, but more that they wanted someone on the same level as our hero. In this game, the Prince seems to have found his match. "We don't want the player to know. We want them to wonder if she's helpful, if she's with me or not? But she's definitely gorgeous. She's not Farah. She's nastier, sexier, and more clever. She's more woman," says Mallat. She's also very elusive, as this is almost all of the information we could get out of the team regarding the Prince's mystery woman.

Highlighting the general lack of trust that the Prince might have for anything in his world now, the game borrows elements from horror movies to heighten the moody, decrepit feel of the villains and environments. It is certain that fear will play a much bigger role in this game than in The Sands of Time. While the vizier's palace was grand even after the sands transformed its inhabitants, these new areas are crumbled, dirty, and jagged. No one is going to cry if you slash the curtains to bits – anyone who cares is clearly long gone, and in certain places, it's almost like you can smell the stagnant water seeping in through the floor.

Truly desperate and unquestionably doomed, the Prince is going to lay a path of destruction in these haunted rooms, ripping, tearing, slicing, and dicing his way through hordes of enemies. He'll sever limbs, use the environment for his own gain, abuse human shields to his advantage, throw axes into the heads of enemies, despair at the loss of friends, be betrayed by those he trusted, and hate himself for the means necessary to achieve his ends. But, although the Prince has changed and the world he must explore is surely different than the first – still the core reasons of why people love the first game so much are there. He's a Prince, he's still in the time of Persia, but now he's going to kick much more ass. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX
> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER:** PANDEMIC STUDIOS AUSTRALIA
> **DEVELOPER:** THQ > **RELEASE:** FIRST QUARTER 2005

DESTROY ALL HUMANS!™

THEY CAME FOR OUR DNA,

THEY LEFT WITH OUR BRAINS!

It's 1 a.m. You're sitting out on your porch, an empty brown jug labeled XXX in one hand and a shotgun affectionately called "Bessie" in the other. Your neighbors have been missing for weeks, and now your cows have started vanishing, too. The police wouldn't listen when you tried to report it. They called you a drunkard, a lunatic. But you'll show them — you'll get to the bottom of this yourself. Tired and bleary-eyed, you see an eerie green glow coming from the cow pasture ahead, and something small and blue slowly walking towards you. As you try to bring Bessie up to your shoulder, you find yourself paralyzed with fear. Or is it? As the small humanoid moves into clearer view, you feel your stomach knot up. It might be the ray gun in his hand that makes you uneasy, or it could be his glowing, pulsating cortex. Whatever the case, as his mirrored eyes meet yours and he slowly transforms into your exact duplicate, his thoughts instantly melding with yours, you get the distinct sense that whatever he's planning, it ain't friendly.

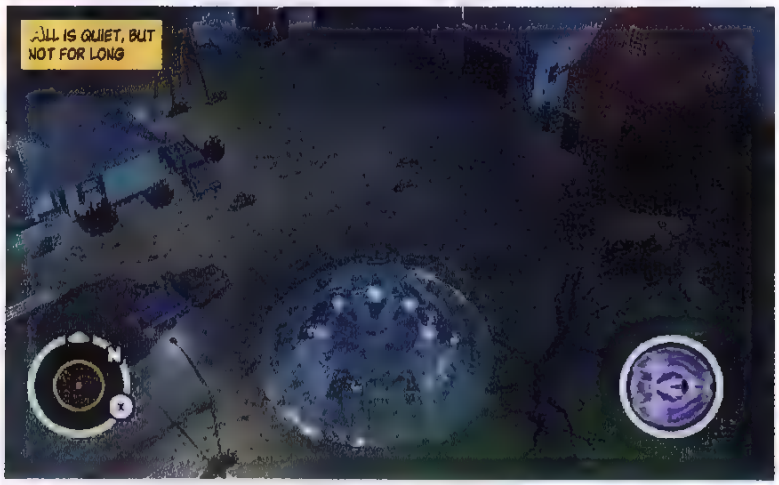
We Are Not Alone!

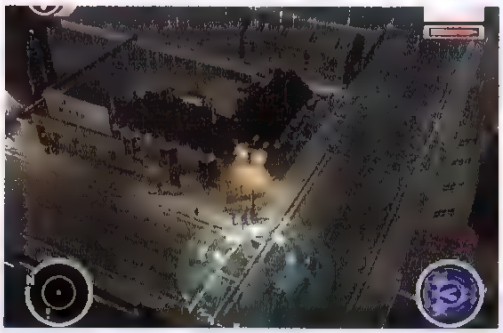
When you look at Pandemic Studios' most anticipated upcoming title, Full Spectrum Warrior (originally designed for the U.S. Army as a training tool), you'd think that this developer was focused on making games for the good guys, where the heroes always win, and the villains always get their comeuppance. While these games do make up a majority of the market, Pandemic also has something in the works tailor-made for those who would rather blow up the world than save it, aptly named Destroy All Humans.

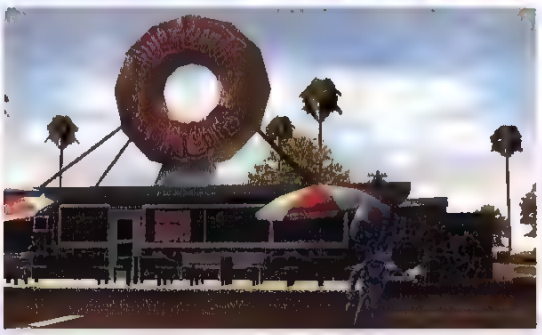
We recently visited Pandemic to get a first look at this unique game, and had a chance to chat with Pandemic Studios CEO Andrew Goldman about the inspiration for the innovative premise. "When Peter Molyneux announced Dungeon Keeper, it was kind of an awakening. We realized that you don't always have to be the hero," says Goldman. "In Destroy All Humans, instead of saving the world, you play as the aliens, walking among the humans and trying to subvert their defense systems."

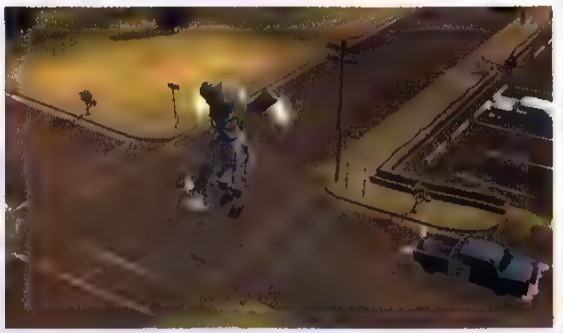
In order to amplify the chaos associated with an alien invasion, the game is set in an era where paranoia and fear were at an all-time high: the 1950s. It won't be the same idyllic decade you've seen depicted in movies like *Back to the Future*, though. You'll get to experience it from a different perspective; Destroy All Humans allows you to explore a world infused with classic Americana through the eyes of a four-foot-tall blue guy with impulse control problems.

You are a member of an alien race, but over the years, the blood of your kind has grown thin and weak; you are losing strength at the genetic level. Fortunately, possessing superior intellect, your race had the foresight to start several planetary colonies where the inhabitants, though not technically of your species, would have enough genetic similarity that they could one day be harvested to revitalize your aging DNA. Earth is one such colony. A scout ship previously sent to investigate the planet seems to have disappeared, so you are dispatched to deal with the situation. Your job is twofold: First, determine what happened to the crew that came before you. Second, after harvesting the necessary DNA, destroy all humans.









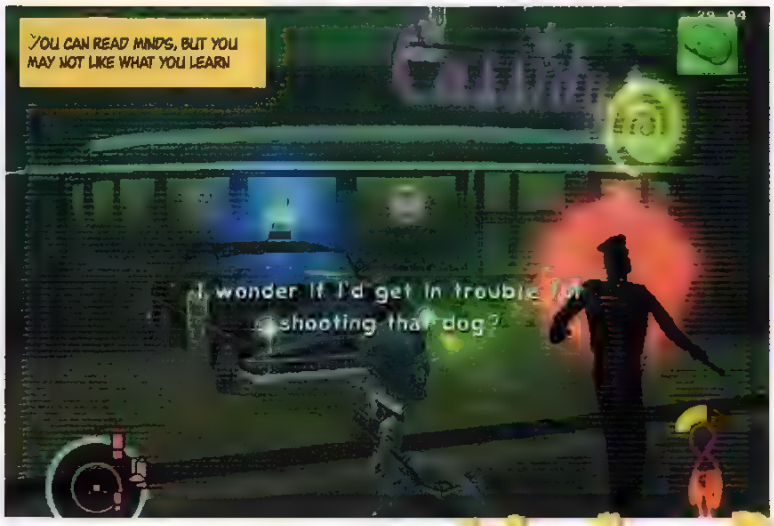
They Walk Among Us!

The gameplay is built around a core of free exploration, giving the player the chance to roam without constraints around four different areas, completing missions and just contributing to a general sense of panic. Your ship is initially shot down over the small rural community of Rockwell, but you eventually work your way through suburbs and government research facilities so you can hit 'em where it counts: Capital City. But your malicious intent notwithstanding, wandering around in any of these areas can be a trick; as a blue, big-eyed space creature, you tend to stand out in a crowd. Therefore, you'll need to find ways to blend in and keep the world ignorant of your presence until it is too late.

Your best tool for remaining inconspicuous is body-snatching. This power allows you to target anyone in your immediate vicinity and assume his or her form. Not only does this make it possible for you to walk the streets without inciting a riot, but it can also be a crucial part of completing certain missions. For instance, if you want to sneak into a government building for some sabotage, you'll need to find a government worker, body-snatch him, and then walk through the gates. However, even with the appropriate disguise, the guards may get suspicious if you don't identify yourself first. To avoid detection, you can use your "meet and greet" command, which allows you to interact with people, possibly receiving items or useful information.

You could theoretically just walk among the humans, switching from one form to another, and live peacefully among them. But that isn't your mission. You have to kill them, and in order to do that, you have some more devious psionic powers that can be used to attack humans and bend them to your will.

THE ALIENS ARE YEARS AHEAD OF US IN MONOCLE TECHNOLOGY



We Are Defenseless Against Them!

One of your sneakier abilities is the Cortex Scan, allowing you to read the thoughts of those around you. This isn't the most useful of skills, though, since not everyone is in possession of information that could be used to undo all existence on Earth. Most of the time, you'll just run into regular folks wondering what's for dinner. But sometimes you strike gold.

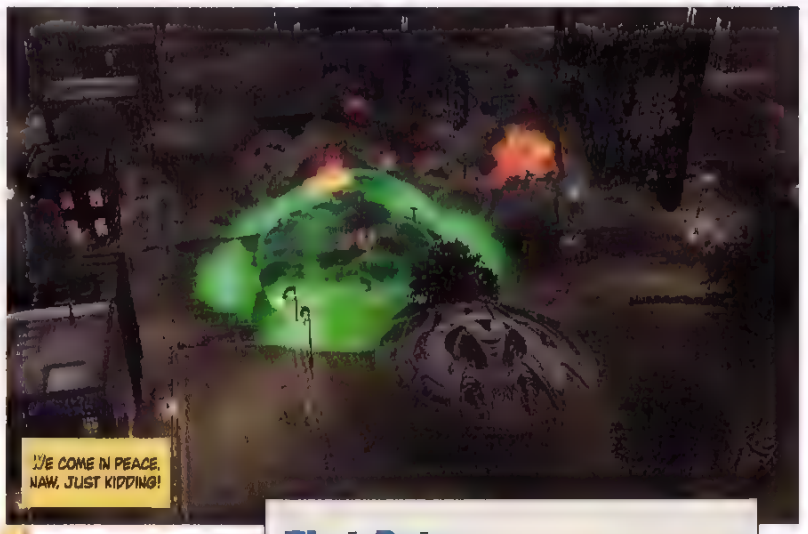
"There's a little bit of a collection aspect," explains Goldman. "If you gather particular thoughts as you are wandering through the city, they might lead to certain interesting dialogue options later on that you wouldn't have otherwise. For example, at one point you need to pose as a general and attend a top-secret meeting where an official who knows about the aliens is trying to convince other generals of the threat. If you have collected enough relevant thoughts, you will be able to say just the right thing to discredit him and convince everyone that everything is fine!"

Instead of reading minds, you can also choose to incapacitate them using hypnosis, or even brainwash them. This ability is most useful when someone has noticed that you aren't exactly "normal" and you want to keep the panic from spreading. "The population has varied levels of response to you," Goldman tells us. "They start out curious, but if they figure you out, they run around screaming. They might go off to another group of people or to the police, and then you have a problem." By hypnotizing people before they can spread the word, you can neutralize the threat before it begins. Sure, your supernatural powers can handle most pedestrians and police, but you aren't a match for the forces that can eventually be unleashed against you, such as the G-Men (similar to the Men in Black) or The Majestic (a secret organization veiled in mystery).

If playing with the humans' minds doesn't suit you, then you can manipulate their bodies instead. Showing off the game's impressive rag-doll physics, you can use telekinesis to lift people in the air, fling them into buildings, or if you're more sadistic, repeatedly bash them into the ground. You can even throw around objects from the environment, such as cars, crates, and cows! This ability alone promises to keep Destroy All Humans entertaining for hours, even if you don't attempt to complete any missions.

Goldman claims that this is all part of the philosophy behind the game: "Because we're presenting an open world, we want to continually offer consistent challenges, make it fun, but never make the players feel like they are stuck or have nowhere to go."

These powers all sound great, but it isn't until you see them in action and working together that you realize the amazing potential this mechanic holds. One scenario we played had us captured by the government and confined to an electric cage without any weapons. Little did they know the damage we could cause with our mind alone. First, we hypnotized the scientist observing us, forcing him to walk over to the control panel and deactivate the cage. Then, in order to avoid being detected by the military sentries on our way out, we body-snatched the scientist and strolled nonchalantly past the checkpoint. However, there were some places on the base even a researcher wasn't cleared for, and as we ventured into those areas, we were attacked by soldiers trying to protect the alien secret. To our delight, this just happened to be a waterfront base, and as the soldiers leveled their guns, we used telekinesis to pluck them off the ground and hurl them, screaming, one by one into the ocean. This left the path clear to that timeless icon that signifies you've "made it" as an alien civilization: the UFO. As we boarded our craft and watched the weapon systems unfurl, it became clear that, unfortunately for the humans, not all problems can be solved with your mind, and sometimes you need to resort to crippling, excessive force.



The Marvels of Modern Science!

In addition to heightened mental capabilities, you'll also have an arsenal of cosmic weaponry at your disposal. From the Brain Bug (a sniper rifle that causes the victim's head to explode) to the Ion Detonator (which evaporates any living thing within a few yards of impact), Earth's feeble weapons are no match for the terrible wrath of space. The second you open fire, everyone near you flies into hilarious fits of hysteria, yelling and flailing around in a state of total panic, trying to escape the inevitable.

Unfortunately, you don't begin the game with your full armament. "You are known as a bit of a loose cannon among your people," confides Goldman. "Your supervisors are reluctant to dole out the best and most destructive equipment. As you complete missions and prove yourself, you gain new weapons and upgrades, allowing you to exterminate humanity more efficiently."

Of course, with all these great weapons comes the temptation to overuse them. If you get too trigger happy, you'll have the G-Men breathing down your neck in no time.

But when things get too hot on the ground, you can always retreat to your UFO and let the destruction continue from above. You'll have a whole new range of weapons available in your ship, from a Quantum Disrupter (which can take out entire buildings in a single shot) to the classic Death Ray, which paints a searing wall of flame across the city streets, burning everything in its path.

The effects of these instruments of destruction are seen even more vividly due to the highly interactive environments. Though the terrain will stay intact, virtually all buildings, vehicles, and pedestrians will be destructible. After going on a five minute annihilation spree, we looked out from our vantage point in our UFO at the smoking rubble beneath us (which, until recently, was several city blocks) and felt a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. All of that carnage and ruin was a testament to the fact that we were doing our job well. Then, once the military showed up and started giving us guff, we just flicked a handy switch that threw the old spaceship into stealth mode and, while cloaked, slipped away from the fray unnoticed.

That Retro 50's Charm

Whether the image is taken from blurry pictures of dubious origins or early low-budget science fiction films, there can be no doubt that we all have a pretty good idea of how flying saucers should look. Tying into the goal of modernizing a classic feel, the UFO in Destroy All Humans is clearly modeled after this commonly held conception. Though it looks a little more high-tech with all of the guns and such, it still bears more resemblance to a hubcap than the complicated spacecraft of recent sci-fi flicks.

An Era of Prosperity!

It is important to keep in mind that all of these events are not occurring in today's technology-saturated world. The game is set in the 1950s, when everything appeared to be swell on the outside, but paranoia and mistrust were festering just below the surface. In order to portray this slice of American history, Pandemic is injecting several elements into the game that make it feel undeniably of the period, but with a distinctly modern twist.

The soundtrack is the most notable example. It will feature tracks that are stylistically similar to vintage science fiction movies, but with some additions and remixes to give it more of a modern slant. "The music is very much in the vein of Bernard Herrmann, which is very evocative of the period," Goldman explains. "We even have some remixed Elvis music!" Apart from the score, there are also environmental goodies in place that immerse the player in this world from the past. There are diners and donut shops peppered throughout the cities, houses are painted in glaringly bright pastels, and there are even drive-in theaters that play actual '50s films!

Even with all of this sunshine, the game's tone hints at the darker side of the era as well. "We're trying to play off many of the popular conspiracy theories of the time," remarks Goldman. "This is a world where those who wear tin-foil hats to keep the aliens from reading their minds are right — the mental probes can't get through aluminum!" The most entertaining tool the game has to illustrate this sense of conspiracy is the use of headlines. Headlines are newspaper articles that flash on the screen after you have wreaked havoc so thoroughly that a government cover-up is necessary. In one case, we had just destroyed the research facility where we were being held, completely leveling it to the ground. As our last Sonic Bomb hit the ground, the screen was momentarily taken up by the front page of a newspaper declaring "Fire Ravages Island!" Later, we fired a Quantum Disrupter at a cluster of attackers at a county fair, and as their bodies were vaporized, we saw the next morning's top story: "Freak Lightning Strike Kills Five!"

"We're trying to inject a sense of humor and variety into the game that the genre hasn't seen before," states Goldman. From what we've seen so far, this goal is well on the way to being accomplished; there is an engaging mix of satire, fantastic weapons, and freedom. Add to all of that the fact that telekinesis never gets old, and you have a truly unique title that will ensure gamers will be anxiously watching the skies, waiting for Destroy All Humans to come over the horizon. ■■■

The Music of Bernard Herrmann

You might not hear the name very often, but you probably listen to Bernard Herrmann's work in television and movies more often than you realize. He composed original music for several projects that have since come to define an era, such as *Citizen Kane*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Psycho*, and the science fiction classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

A sample of his work was even used as recently as *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (remember that tune Elle was whistling in the nurse uniform?). Though you won't actually hear his score in Destroy All Humans, the game's soundtrack is intentionally modeled after his style in order to convey a sense of the period and make the experience feel more authentic.

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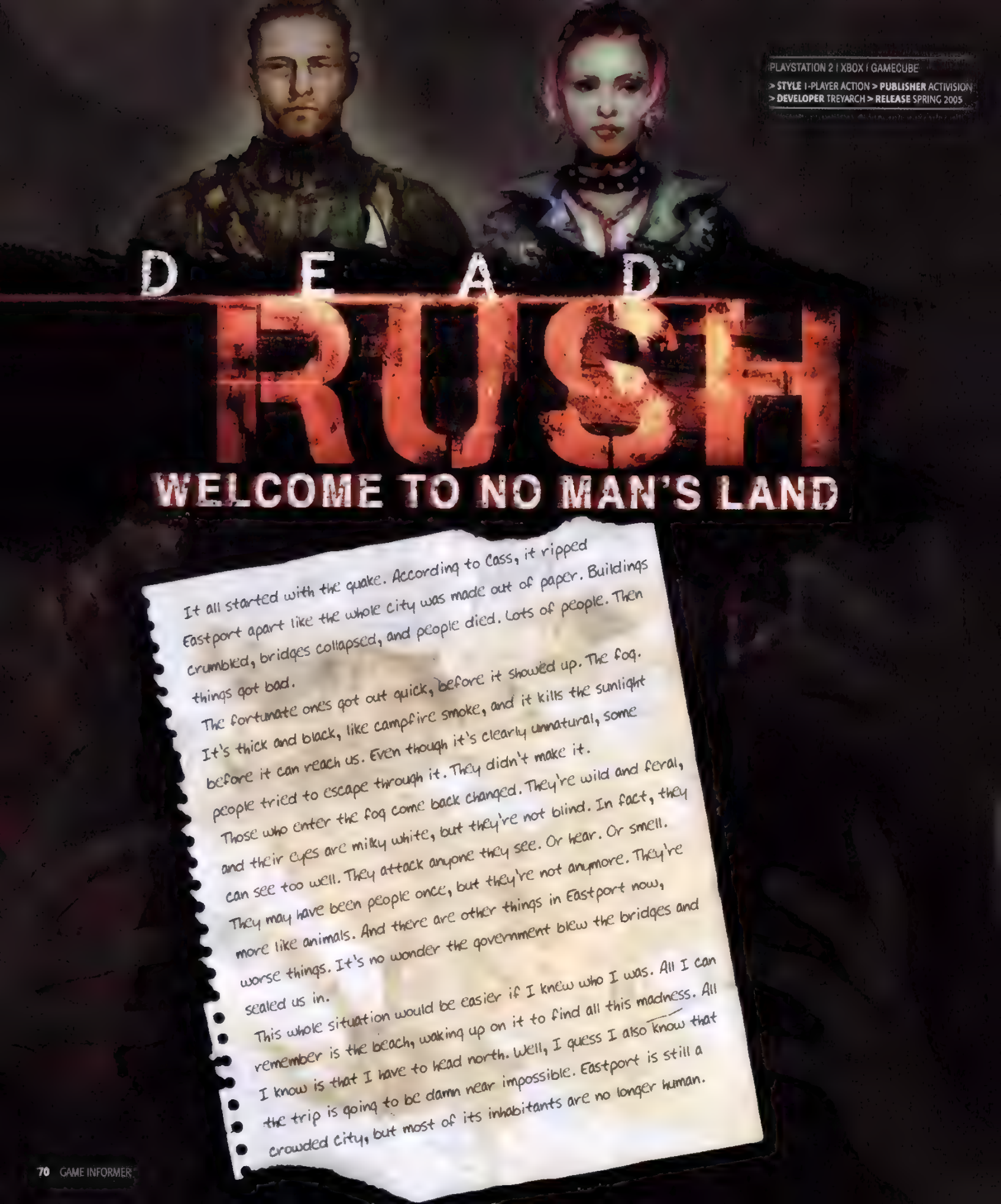


PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** TREYARCH > **RELEASE** SPRING 2005

DEAD RUSH

WELCOME TO NO MAN'S LAND

It all started with the quake. According to Cass, it ripped Eastport apart like the whole city was made out of paper. Buildings crumbled, bridges collapsed, and people died. Lots of people. Then things got bad.

The fortunate ones got out quick, before it showed up. The fog. It's thick and black, like campfire smoke, and it kills the sunlight before it can reach us. Even though it's clearly unnatural, some people tried to escape through it. They didn't make it.

Those who enter the fog come back changed. They're wild and feral, and their eyes are milky white, but they're not blind. In fact, they can see too well. They attack anyone they see. Or hear. Or smell. They may have been people once, but they're not anymore. They're more like animals. And there are other things in Eastport now, worse things. It's no wonder the government blew the bridges and sealed us in.

This whole situation would be easier if I knew who I was. All I can remember is the beach, waking up on it to find all this madness. All I know is that I have to head north. Well, I guess I also know that the trip is going to be damn near impossible. Eastport is still a crowded city, but most of its inhabitants are no longer human.

Each zombie has its own unique look

Bumpers and doors are among the parts that can be torn from your car

While running away from evil things, you can fire over your shoulder at them

Losing tires will make it easier for the swarming undead to catch you

As horror gamers know, zombies are scary. When you see one coming at you slowly from around a corner it's hard not to grip the controller a little tighter. See two or three and your heart typically starts to beat faster, your palms may begin to sweat. But what about when you spot four or five? How about a dozen? How would you react to a hundred zombies sprinting towards you, ready to rip you apart?

Activision and Treyarch are dying to see how gamers react to just such a situation with their new title, Dead Rush. While the game takes a few cues from classic horror games, it also adds several new twists to the genre. Sure, it has zombies, claustrophobic environments, and haunting audio and graphics, but it also has so much more. No longer will you face a small handful of enemies in a confined space; instead, you'll be confronted with legions of foes in a wide, free-roaming environment.

Dead Rush is unique amongst horror games in that it is best described by the tag "horror/driving," rather than survival horror. As the amnesiac protagonist Jake, you must head to the northernmost point of the besieged island city of Eastport in order to complete your mission. The main problems confronting you are the fact that you don't know what your mission is, thanks to the nasty gash on your head, and that the city is filled with zombies, feral humans called "gaunts," and things that are far worse than either.

At the start of the game, Jake wakes up alone on a beach with a head injury and no memory of who he is. His military garb indicates that he was one of the National Guardsmen sent in to deal with the Eastport catastrophe shortly after the quake, and a PDA found on the body of another soldier suggests their goal was a tower on the opposite side of town. Over the course of the game, Jake's memory will gradually return in jarring, black and white flashbacks, so the player learns the truth of what happened along with Jake. Over time, the facts of Jake's identity and his destination will become clear, as will the story of the creatures now running amok in the city.

Due to the bloodthirsty inhabitants of Eastport, you'll need transportation in order to make it to your destination in one piece. Abandoned cars litter the city streets, and you'll need to find the best rides available to get around. Eastport boasts at least six types of cars, with five variations of each, so choosing the right vehicle can be a tricky task. Do you choose the speed of a muscle car or go for the heavy armor of a large SUV? Try to find a police car or stick with the reliable taxi? Every car has a random amount of gas in the tank and damage to its body, so the perfect car may not be so perfect after all. Some may not even start. But then again, maybe you only want part of a specific vehicle.

Because cars are so key to Dead Rush – they serve as both transportation and mobile armor – it was important to developer Treyarch that they function in a fun and unique way. Thus, the salvage system was created. Every car in the game is comprised of individual pieces, each critical to the operation of the vehicle. Tires, rims, doors, roofs, hoods, and more are all separate pieces and can take individual damage, and having a usable car is key to survival. In Eastport, car problems are more than annoyances – they can be downright deadly. Should you lose a door, zombies or gaunts could grab you and pull you from your car. Lose a tire, and the loss of speed means that creatures will mob you in no time. Monsters such as the huge, doglike leapers can tear the roof off your car in order to get at the sweet, tender human inside. In order to keep your cars running, you can rip the pieces off of the other vehicles you find to replace (or simply

upgrade) your car. Creating *Mad Max*-esque hybrids is totally possible, if you prefer rolling in post-apocalyptic style. But getting parts and installing them both take time, so one has to be constantly alert while working in case of sudden attack.

Of course, Jake isn't a mechanic, so his repair skills are limited to bodywork. Cass, a young gearhead who survived the mysterious catastrophe, can help with the rest. Because of the free-roaming nature of Eastport, missions can be tackled in the order and manner the player sees fit, and several optional sidequests will always be available. Completing these missions may lead to the discovery of high-performance engine parts, which Cass can install in any vehicle you return to the garage. After souping up a particular vehicle, players may not want to lose it if it gets damaged, so salvaging parts off of other vehicles is often preferable to abandonment when your favorite ride loses crucial parts, which, of course, it will. Gaunts, zombies, and leapers all have a nasty way of ripping cars apart in pursuit of a meal. Fortunately, Cass can fix any car brought into the garage, but collecting a wide range of vehicles is still crucial for success.

The garage is the only true safe area of the city, which is a constantly changing, living thing. Earthquakes will periodically rock the city, which will physically alter the landscape. The various areas of Eastport will all have their own distinct looks, and include a business district, a slum, a collapsed subway, and Chinatown. Treyarch's goal with the city is to make it feel like a real place which has been ravaged by disaster. Every inch of the city is open for exploration, including building interiors.

While driving is obviously a huge component of this game, many quests will take place on foot, in both interior and exterior locations. Being outside on foot obviously isn't recommended, but sometimes is necessary. While inside, your mobile armor isn't an option, and you'll have to take on foes with only your weapons and your wits.

The on-foot sections of the game are presented in more traditional survival horror style, but still more fast-paced and intense. Gaunts will move around freely in pursuit of their own goals (namely feeding), so don't expect to encounter the same fiend in the same place time after time. They will actively search out survivors, battle leapers for fresh meat,

Jake is, as the French say, totally boned

A leaper's favorite meal has a crunchy outside and a chewy middle

The water around the island is boiling. Something is there, under the black surface. It's hungry.

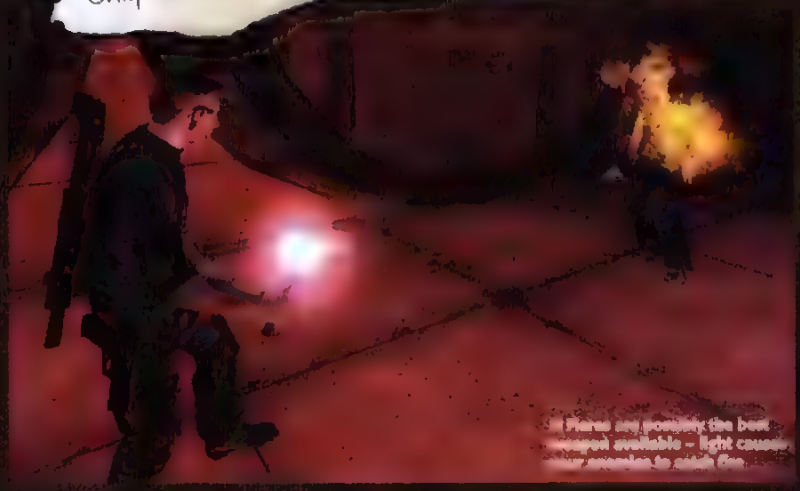
and even turn on one another if they're hungry. Of course, you'll have a host of weapons at your disposal, including guns, chainsaws, flamethrowers, axes, machetes, and most importantly, light. The creatures are all photosensitive, so a flashlight and road flares are often your greatest weapons.

Although the creatures will attack in swarms, don't expect to see the same generic enemy over and over. Thanks to a system that generates body parts from a large pool, enemies sport their own unique looks. You will see zombies who were once businessmen, service people, National Guardsmen, and more. You can play for hours without seeing two gaunts that look alike. Of course, since each body part is individually modeled, gaunts can be literally blown to pieces. Arms and legs can be blasted off, as can heads, which is the best way to take down a gaunt. Use a shotgun to blow its knees off, and a gaunt will still come after you, snarling and clawing its way across the ground. Only headshots can truly stop them. But then again, gaunts have a nasty habit of getting back up when you think they're dead.

The NPC survivors are generated with the same individual appearance system, but shooting them is generally a bad idea, as you'll need all the help you can get. NPCs will provide you with critical information, missions, and even backup in certain situations. In one particularly intense sequence, the survivors' holdout (two large tenement apartment buildings) is beset by gaunts. You and a handful of others must take them down as the light-sensitive creatures pour over your defenses in an attempt to destroy the floodlight generators protecting the buildings. As the gaunts flood into the survivors' stronghold, maniacally attacking anything in their path, Dead Rush's tagline certainly rings true: No place is safe, only safer.

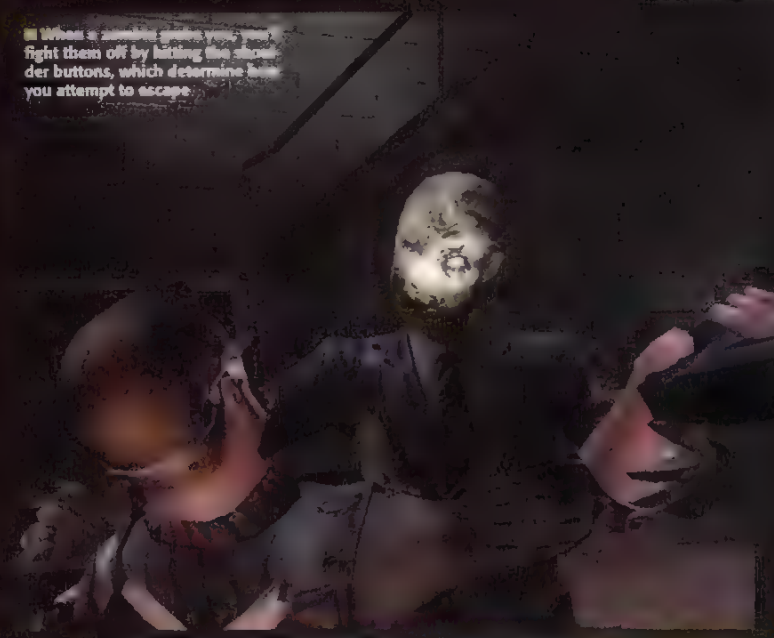
Although horror games are quickly becoming commonplace in the gaming world, no title has ever delivered a sheer volume of harm like Dead Rush. The scares are derived from the fact that the game never truly lets you catch your breath, never truly lets you relax. It's fast-paced, it's intense, and it's damn scary. When Dead Rush hits stores in the first half of next year, it's certain to drive gamers into a frenzy. Eastport has a way of doing that to people. ■ ■ ■

They're everywhere. Everywhere. No place is safe. Only safer.



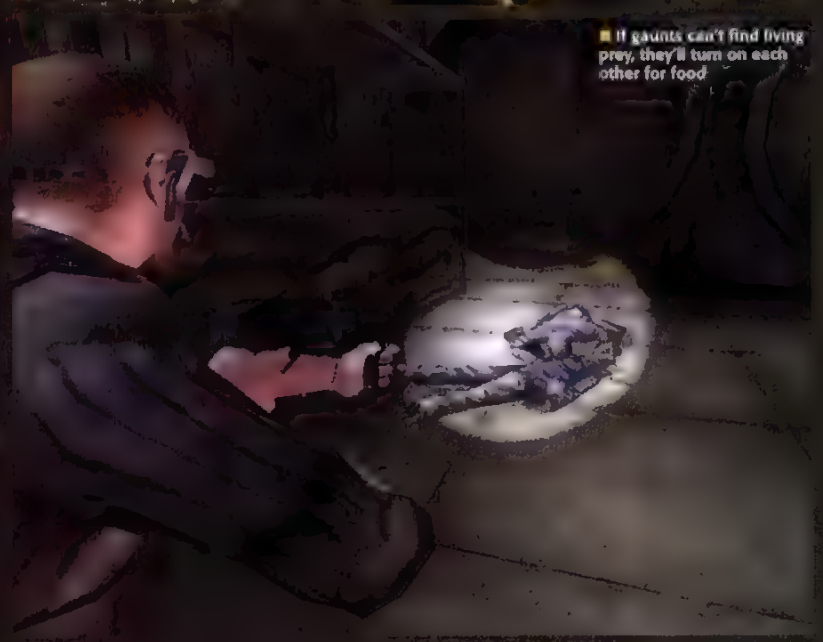
■ Flares are possibly the best weapon available – light causes your enemies to catch fire.

■ "You wouldn't eat a guy with glasses, would you?"



■ When a zombie grabs you, you'll fight them off by hitting the shoulder buttons, which determine how you attempt to escape.

■ Leapers tend to get a little rowdy when playing fetch



■ If gaunts can't find living prey, they'll turn on each other for food

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TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE
> STYLE: 1-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (ONLINE TBA) > PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER: NEVERSOFT > RELEASE: FALL

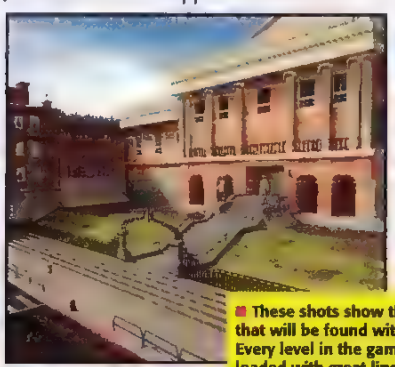
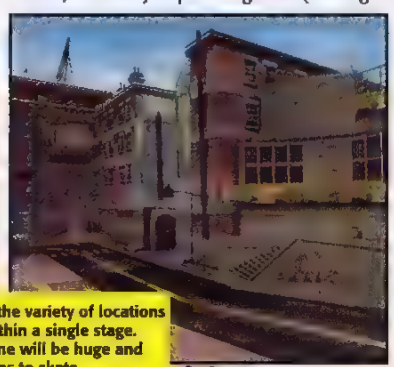
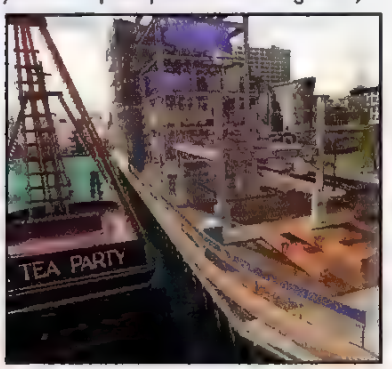
HEADING BACK TO

Imagine you are skating peacefully with friends, enjoying a beautiful day outside, when suddenly a black van appears out of nowhere. Ignoring it, you continue to bust out some board tricks as your friends look on. Unbeknownst to you, the van creeps closer and closer, until finally it bumps in to you, knocking you down. Two masked figures rush out, grab you, and haul you inside. When you wake up, they're standing over you, chainsaw in hand…

This may sound like the start of a new horror series, but it's actually the opening scene in the new chapter of a familiar franchise. The two masked figures are pro skateboarders Tony Hawk and Bam Margera, and you've just been drafted into their new worldwide underground skateboarding extravaganza: the World Destruction Tour. Welcome back to the Underground.

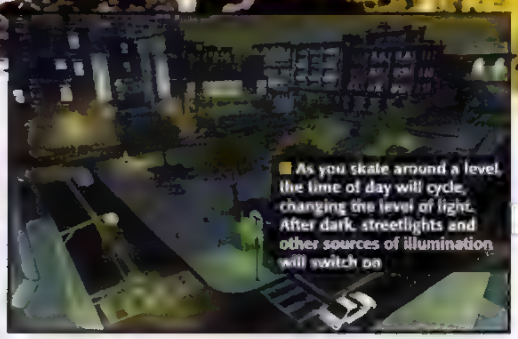
Tony Hawk's Underground 2, the latest chapter in the esteemed Tony Hawk Pro Skater series from the talented developer Neversoft, may very well be the best entry yet. That's a bold claim for such a consistent and respected series, but Neversoft is really doing everything it can to make sure its new title appeals to Hawk fans of all kinds. A terrific mix of old and new Tony Hawk games, Neversoft aims to appease both fans of last year's story-driven outing and the hardcore fans who prefer the classic tricking of the earlier titles. The latest entry in the series builds heavily on the last, adds tons of new features and moves, and even includes a second mode so huge it could almost be considered a separate game.

Tony Hawk's Underground (a.k.a. THUG) was a relatively large departure for the series because it introduced a story-driven level progression with the player as the central character, and followed the protagonist as he or she rose through the ranks to become a professional skater. THUG 2 continues with the story mode, and picks up where THUG left off. Now you are a professional skater, and have been recruited by Tony Hawk and Bam Margera into a tour that emphasizes skating and mischief over corporate sponsorship. Not only will you be required to pull off the same insane tricks as always, but more *MTV's Jackass*-style mischief has been incorporated as well (as hinted at by the World Destruction Tour name). You can now spray your own custom graffiti tag on walls, chuck apples at bystanders, and slap your logo sticker on walls. You'll also participate in outlandish goals, such as wheeling a sick kid on a gurney through the city to meet his idol, Tony Hawk. Of course, because this is a skating game, you can do gurney tricks, such as jumps and grinds (as long as you don't tip the patient onto the ground).

■ These shots show the variety of locations that will be found within a single stage. Every level in the game will be huge and loaded with great lines to skate

THE UNDERGROUND



Since THUG 2 has a bit of a lighter tone than the original Underground, the look has been changed to reflect that. In the first THUG, certain areas looked so realistically gritty (especially New Jersey) that they bordered on depressing. THUG 2, while still realistic, has a more upbeat, colorful look. The areas are just as open and huge as they were in THUG, and they look like more pleasant places to hang out in. If anything, the areas have actually grown in size: Each level will be filled with secret areas (many interior) that players can discover. In the Boston stage, you can skate through a door into a library, down into the subway, and even crash through the windows of a bank.

If these brighter, friendlier levels weren't enough, Neversoft has added even more to ensure players get the most out of each stage. Levels are more interactive and destructable than ever before. Objects can be knocked over, broken, and similarly vandalized. Grinding pipes may cause water to burst out at the seams, while grinding benches will cause shards of wood to fly. These little touches go a long way in making the areas feel like real places. But Neversoft didn't stop there. Inspired by the popularity of the earthquake in Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3, which changed the layout of the stage, each level will have an event that opens up new areas. In the Boston stage, the event is triggered by jumping over a flaming barrel, which causes your board to light on fire. While your board is burning, grinding a Civil War cannon lights its fuse, which causes the loaded cannon to fire on the structure opposite it. This damages the structure, opening up new lines to skate, which are surprisingly vertically oriented. Perhaps more than any other Tony Hawk game, levels stretch up into the sky, thanks largely to a new move called the sticker slap.

The sticker slap is an enhanced version of THUG's wall plant, in which players jump towards a wall, pushing off of it to gain height and change directions. The sticker slap functions the same way, except it plants a sticker on the wall where the player hits. This new move was designed to get players to take advantage of the underused wall plant, and can be used to reach new heights. It will allow players to reach areas that would otherwise be inaccessible by bouncing off the walls to ascend.

The sticker slap will help skaters reach new heights and extend their lines even longer, but of course THUG 2 has more new moves to offer. Players will now be able to jump atop a fire hydrant or other such objects and spin in circles with a move currently called the Natas Spin. This move is a fun new way to extend a combo, but what if you lose your balance and fall? Players will be able to recover from bailing on a huge combo, thanks to the new "spazz out" feature. Hitting a button repeatedly after bailing will build your spazz out level, which will cause the skater to freak out and break their board, throw it, or otherwise have a tantrum. Aside from being funny, spazzing out gives players a point bonus that can be used to start a new combo.

■ These shots show how completing a goal can change the shape of the level. After lighting your board on fire, grinding the cannons causes them to fire on the building, opening up new places to skate

Of course, veteran players won't bail on huge combos too often, and another new feature will allow those gamers to appreciate just how cool they truly are. By filling the special meter, players can use the new "focus" ability, which switches the action into slow motion and zooms in. Skating in slow-mo, players can get a close-up look at all the tricks they pull off, and since the special meter refills as tricks are performed, focus mode can be maintained as long as the player can keep up his or her combo string.

As nice as these new moves are, there's still more. Walking and climbing have been revamped and improved, and, as mentioned before, tagging and throwing have been added. While off of their board, players can spray their custom tag on any surface, and tags are even bigger if pulled off as part of a combo. Projectiles can be picked up and tossed at objects or people on or off the board, which definitely leads to some funny moments. Don't like the backwards-skating rollerblader? Knock him on his butt with a well-thrown apple!

Of course, tagging and throwing will have goals associated with them, as will sticker slapping and spazzing out. The goal system itself has been overhauled: No longer will you skate up to a character to receive a goal; instead, they'll all be accessible from a list on the pause menu. Neversoft felt the old system of getting goals interrupted the flow of action too much, so it was replaced with the new central list. But this doesn't mean you won't be looking for people in each level; in fact, it's just the opposite. For the first time ever, a Tony Hawk title features team skating!

At the start of each stage, you'll select one pro from your team to be your skating partner, and that character will be found somewhere in the level. When your partner is spotted, you can switch to him (or her) with the touch of a button. Each character has a unique goal list, so you have to skate as every character to finish every goal in a stage. Aside from your partner, every level will feature a guest skater and a secret skater, for a grand total of four playable characters in every area. Not only will the two hidden characters have unique goals, but they will also have their own move sets. Boston's secret character is appropriately Benjamin Franklin, whose special move, the Franklin Grind, involves the founding father being pulled around on his skateboard by a kite with a key attached. Not only is THUG 2 fun -- it's also educational!

■ The new stages feature more vertical space than ever before

■ It's all about the Benjamins

The library is one of the hidden areas for players to discover

The subway in the background can be entered to reveal a secret area, complete with street performers who will dance for quarters

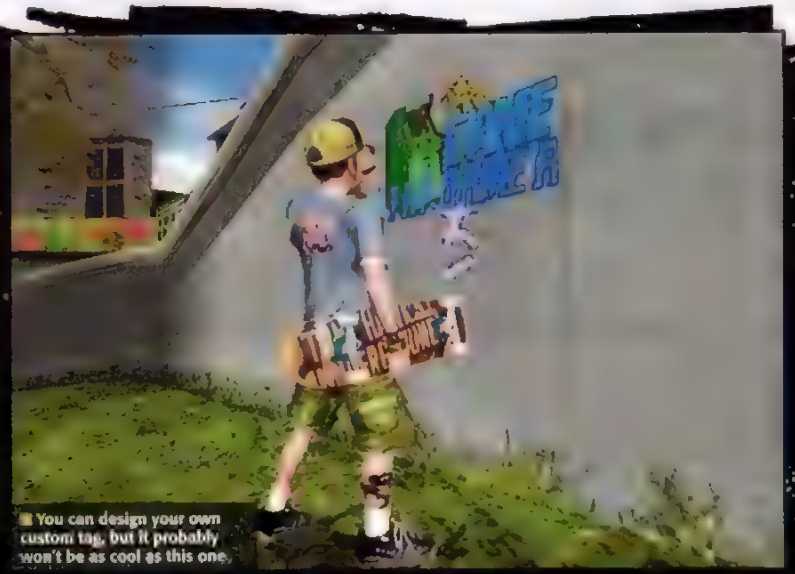
The guest skater in Boston is a tough looking guy on a motorized scooter similar to a Segway. While the scooter is obviously different than a skateboard, it is capable of all the same types of tricks. There will be a character with such a vehicle on every stage, replacing the drivable cars in THUG. While Neversoft likes the idea of vehicles, it realized that only those that control in the same manner as boards have a place in a skating game.

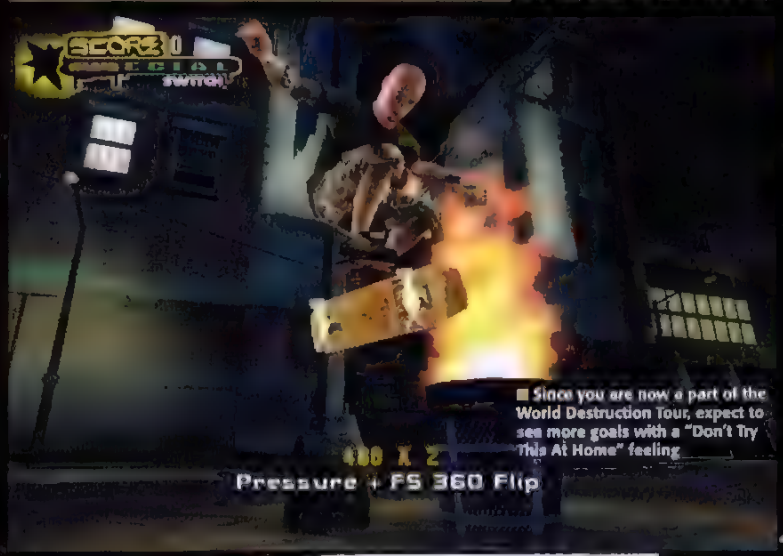
Secret characters will certainly add a lot of replay value, but players can look forward to even more that will keep them skating for days. Not only does THUG 2 feature a story mode that's as long as the last chapter, but it also features the return of old-school Tony Hawk gameplay. Classic mode consists of the two-minute timer and goals made famous in the first three Pro Skater games. Players can once again try to complete goals like getting a high score, collecting S-K-A-T-E, and finding the secret tape before the timer runs out.

Meant to appeal to Tony Hawk fans who miss the original gameplay style, classic mode will feature levels from Story mode, although in a different order, as well as updated versions of favorites from previous Tony Hawk games. Now players who prefer the fast-paced challenge of the timed runs will get as much out of the game as those who prefer the freedom of Story mode. Of course, secret characters discovered in Story mode can be used in classic mode, so there is incentive for both types of players to check out each gameplay style.

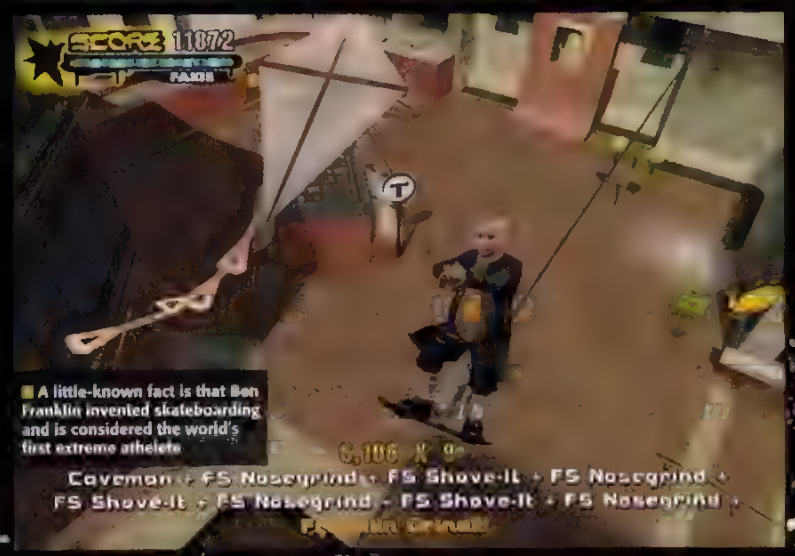
One might think that with so much content stuffed in a single title that some old features may get left behind. Not so. On top of all the new stuff in THUG 2, Create-A-Player, Create-A-Park, and Create-A-Trick are all returning with even more options for deeper customization. They are joined by Create-A-Tag and Create-A-Logo (for stickers) as well. The PlayStation 2 version will again sport the ability to download facial maps, as well as online features. The Tony Hawk games add more and more to the fantastic mix every year, and Tony Hawk's Underground 2 has outdone each installment so far in terms of sheer amount of growth. With so much content added, and modes that appeal to all types of Tony Hawk fans, we're confident that THUG 2 will be the most impressive installment of the series yet. Just like the real Tony Hawk himself, this title has all the makings of a champion. ■■■

The sticker slap allows players to push off walls while planting their customized logo on the wall


You can design your own custom tag, but it probably won't be as cool as this one



Since you are now a part of the World Destruction Tour, expect to see more goals with a "Don't Try This At Home" feeling



A little-known fact is that Ben Franklin invented skateboarding and is considered the world's first extreme athelete

The action looks to be as intense as ever

Enemy AI is reportedly improved – not that it matters when they're full of lead

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

TimeSplitters Future Perfect

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** FREE RADICAL DESIGN > **RELEASE** 2005

TAKING IT TO THE 'NET

One of the best franchises to be born on this generation of machines, TimeSplitters has been a staple of the console FPS genre since its 2000 PS2 debut. Game Informer is fortunate enough to have an exclusive first look at this third installment of the series, and as you can tell, it is a delightful sight to see.

Being behind the competition is something that developer Free Radical Design is clearly unwilling to accept, as one look at the feature list for Future Perfect will tell you. Online play (only for the PS2, more's the pity) for up to16 players has been confirmed, and extra stuff like stat tracking and matchmaking is "under serious consideration" according to Free Radical chairman Steve Ellis. Players will also be able to share maps that they create using the revamped editing tools over the 'net and download other peoples' work onto a memory card.

In another first for the franchise, drivable vehicles will also be available for players to tear it up with. Given the nature of TimeSplitters, we can surmise that there'll be some pretty sweet rides to roll in, but the specifics aren't being talked about yet. We've got to say, though, that the new trend toward vehicles in FPSs is one that we can certainly get behind.

The rest of the standard sequel improvements and additions are definitely a part of Future Perfect as well, with more than 20 weapons, six time periods ranging from 1924 to 2401, and a bevy of unlockable stuff (through the Challenge mode) like skins and maps. We've heard about a gravity device that can be used to move objects around, and a flare gun that's likely useful for more than lighting up a dark room. It's fun weapons and gadgets like these that make TimeSplitters such a good time, and it's reassuring to know that this aspect isn't going anywhere. The engine also continues to evolve, delivering more polygons, better textures and physics, and staying at the beautifully constant framerate that TimeSplitters is known for.

Future Perfect is still a long ways off with its 2005 release date, but it already looks awesome enough to get us all hot and bothered. We'll be sure to let you know more info as it becomes available, but feast on these screens while the intolerably slow grind of the seasons brings us ever closer to the new games we crave. ■■■

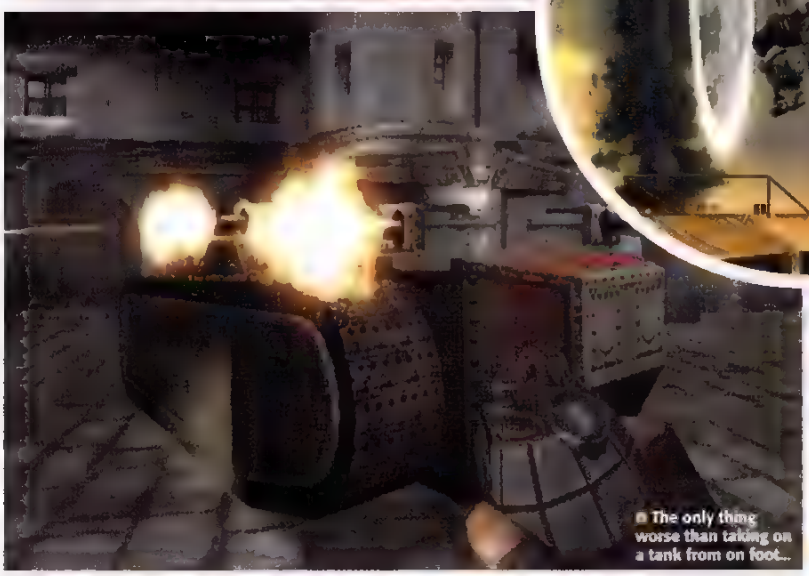
"Oh, this is the death caboose. My bad."

WARRIOR, KNOW THYSELF

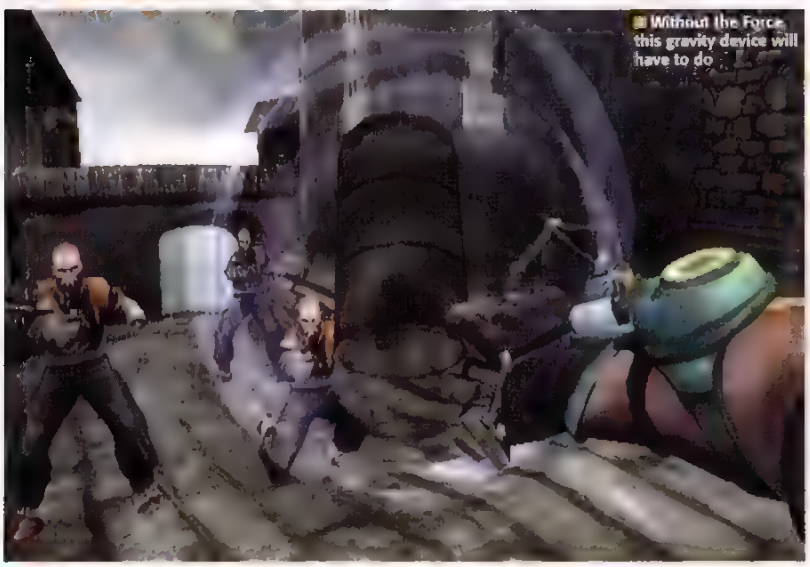
TimeSplitters has never really been known for an engrossing single-player story mode, but Future Perfect could change all that. As any sci-fi fan knows, travelling through time can result in goofy paradoxes, where you can meet yourself or even become your own grandfather (gross!). This idea is being incorporated into Future Perfect, and fighting alongside yourself to thwart the TimeSplitters nefarious plots could be super-sweet. Nobody outside Free Radical Design's offices knows exactly how this is going to work out, but it certainly has great potential.

Details like ejected casings make us happy

No matter the setting, you can't go wrong with a SMG


The only thing worse than taking on a tank from on foot...

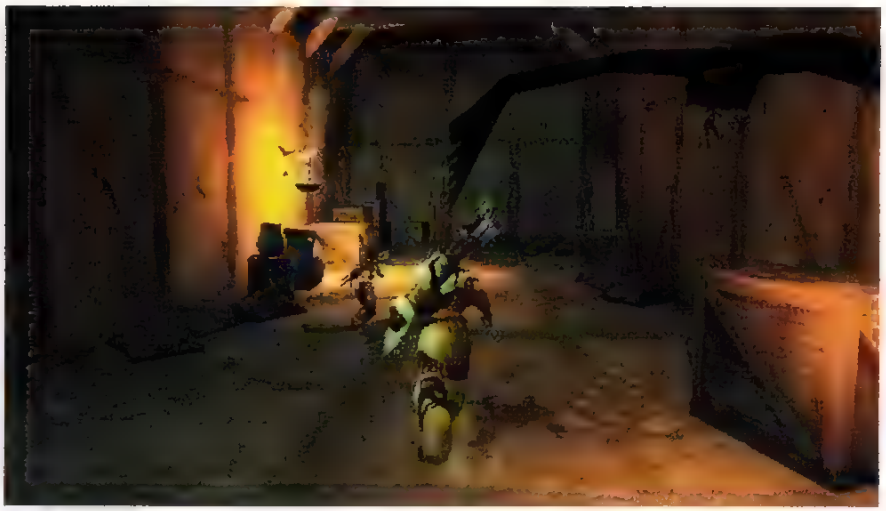
...is fighting a helicopter


Without the Force, this gravity device will have to do

If you had access to any time period, why would you get your wardrobe in the seventies?

■ Co-op play is really at the heart of Rise of the Kasai. Says Bottlerocket president J. Beard, "We really developed it from that point onward."

■ Tati isn't the only new playable character. The game's prequel setting to The Mark of Kri in the beginning levels introduces other fresh faces



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Rise of the Kasai

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** BOTTLEROCKET ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** EARLY 2005

A LETHAL DESTINY

Since Rise of the Kasai is the follow-up to The Mark of Kri, why isn't it called The Mark of Kri 2? Because there have been a lot of changes since this blood-thirsty stealth series debuted in 2002. Then again, the executive producer of Mark of Kri, J. Beard, wouldn't want it any other way. "To stop ourselves from getting bored, we have to approach it from a very new, fresh angle." Using the word "sequel" in a derisive way, Beard tells us what makes this follow-up to Kri different.

Over halfway through the development of The Mark of Kri, Beard approached Shuhei Yoshida, vice-president of product development at Sony, about creating his own company. Yoshida was receptive to the idea, and Bottlerocket Entertainment was born. Apart from being a way to keep the development team together, Beard (the company's president) envisioned Bottlerocket as a way to keep style a main component of their video games. "We really wanted to set something up that was very art-centric." With team and principles in place, Beard and company started to build up Rise of the Kasai into everything that Mark of Kri fans wanted it to be.

After watching over 750 hours of video tape of people playing Kri, and pouring through endless streams of message board feedback, Beard began to get some great ideas for Kasai that would surely please game players. The Mark of Kri was notable for using the right analog stick to assign target icons on enemies, but it lacked multiplayer – which is debuting in this follow-up. Not wanting to simply tack it on, the team explored how it could merge co-op play with the need to create an AI system that was dynamic and which would cohesively bind the entire title. Thus, similar to Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain, you can take your single-player game online, where you and a friend can finish off the levels and sever the heads of enemies in tandem motions of violence. In a mirror of The Mark of Kri's stealth killing of multiple foes, Beard told Game Informer that the team wants to include a way for two players to gang up on a single enemy that both players have highlighted with their analog sticks. We crave the overkill.

When not playing co-op (which is only available online), the AI will take control of your ally character (see the next page for more). Apart from it being extremely important that your comrade in arms doesn't act like a total boob, Bottlerocket wants to ensure that the game's AI is solid for other important reasons. "We've really put much more of a focus on scripting the AI so it causes fun, excitement, and it's very cinematic," explained Beard. "You could be in trouble, and all of a sudden you see Rau [the main character from The Mark of Kri] burst out from a balcony above you, pull out his bow, and start pegging arrows into the enemies around you, and then suddenly leap onto the roof next to you and he's gone." You could then choose to follow Rau's rampage, which would make the level unfold very differently for you. Beard estimates that each of the game's 10 levels will be at least three times as large as Kri's first area.

As if stealth killing and rampaging your way through this much larger title wasn't good enough, the team is going to give players a bigger payoff via boss battles. One example Beard told us of was a fight involving a giant tentacle beast summoned by the Kasai high priests. Each limb of this monster can be assigned an icon, and since every tentacle will have its own attack abilities, you'll have your hands very full. Similarly, there'll be more to hack in the game's environments, as well. Striking such interactive objects as rope bridges and chandeliers can take out groups of enemies in one fell swoop. Players will have to coordinate the use of these environmental cues with their co-op counterparts for maximum effectiveness.

It'll be almost three years since the release of The Mark of Kri before Rise of the Kasai comes out. We wondered if Beard thought EA's Lord of the Rings series had stole some of their action genre thunder. He didn't think so. Saying that Kasai and Kri's right analog system was more important than ever now that co-op was being added, he felt that the team was well on its way to fulfilling the company's ambitions. "Hopefully people will go, 'Hey that's a Bottlerocket game, I know these guys make these very beautiful, stylized games. I'm really curious." So are we. ■ ■ ■

The Thrill Of The Hunt

If you thought that Mark of Kri's Rau was fearsome, Rise of the Kasai's Tati will surpass him in her pure bloodlust. This automatic kill sequence shows one of her deadlier moments.

The Mark of Kri's story is centered around the Kasai's attempt to unite the six Marks of Kri which, if brought together, would ignite a devastating spell. One of the final pieces happened to be main character Rau's little sister, Tati (in the form of a birthmark on her body). The first three levels of Rise of Kasai takes place ten years before Kri, and allows you to play as other characters besides Rau or Tati. This section of the title goes into where the Kasai came from, and offers more backstory – something that Beard says fans of Kri were asking for. Then the game will switch to a period ten years after The Mark of Kri. Here you will be able to play as Rau or Tati, with each one selectable before the start of a level.

Players of Kri will recognize Rau's way of plowing through enemies with his Taiaha or sneaking up on people and cracking their necks. This time around, Tati will join him and introduce her own deadly arts. Since she doesn't have the brute strength of her brother, Tati has to be more precise with her strikes, slicing foes' Achilles' tendons and wheeling around her prey with multiple attacks. Beard describes it succinctly. "She is like a cat playing with a dying mouse." Amusingly, Tati's wild side is almost causing the team problems. "We're really trying to reign our animators in right now, because they are really getting out of control with this stuff."

One person who does have trouble with this new character is her own brother, Rau. Tati's delight in the flaying of the Kasai is in contrast with his more honorable way of looking at combat. Beard points out that this tension was something they wanted from the beginning. "We approached her as a character by saying, 'She must be pretty screwed up.' She's this little girl that gets dragged off by this wizard so she can get flayed so he can have this spell [in The Mark of Kri]. Her family gets wiped out around her. She's gonna be pretty screwed up. [So] let's not create this cheesy, traditional female character. Let's do something really different."

Another story point comes about due to Tati's stealth powers. Rau's aerial sidekick, the bird Kuzo, is back to scout environments for him, and Tati will have a similar mechanic to plot out areas. By Spirit Walking, she can inhabit the bodies of enemies – living or dead – to temporarily see what they see. She is also aided in stealth by the ability to cloud the minds of those around her. Thus, when she stands still against a wall, Tati is effectively rendered invisible to those searching for her. Finally, Tati has a bag of mushroom-like proximity mines. With these tools, however, come consequences; use of these powers isn't without cost. "Something that we're elaborating more on now is that one of the spells on Tati's back – one of the Marks of Kri – is not a good thing. It basically leaks magic and sweats evil. It starts to affect its holder." Although Beard told us that this won't have any gameplay effect on the player, it will be a key component in offering a compelling story and another reason we can't wait to get our hands on this game.

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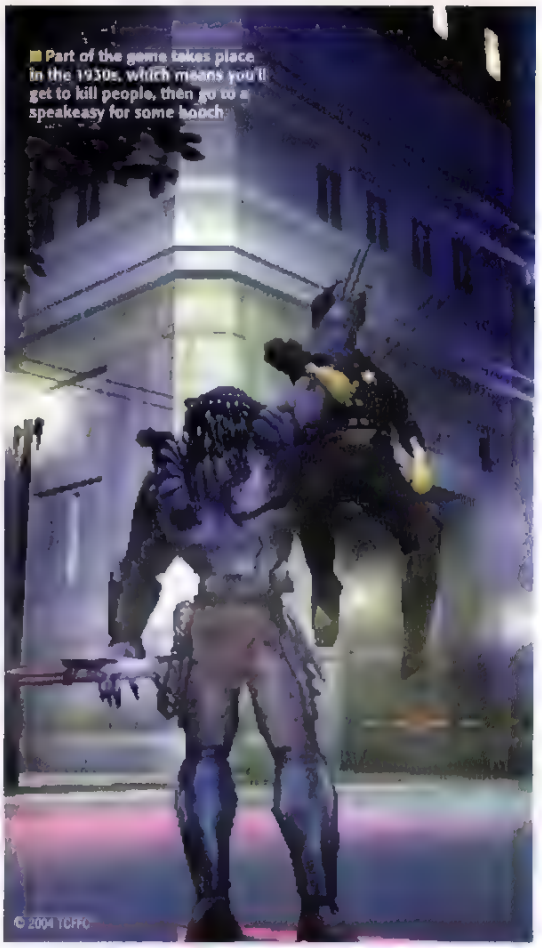


PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Predator: Concrete Jungle

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > **DEVELOPER** EUROCOM > **RELEASE** WINTER

IT LIVES FOR THE HUNT

Since the Predator movies might officially be the favorite films of the Game Informer staff (Danny Glover rules!), we were absolutely giddy to hear that the universe's most feared hunter was about to star in his own game. The prospect of an original Predator story that takes place in both the 1930s and 2030 really got our blood pumping, especially when we learned that all of the character's trademark weapons will be included! The Wristblades, Smart Disc, Combistick spear, and more are in the game, as will be the Predator's four distinct vision modes: Thermal Scan, Neuro Space Scan, Prey Scan, and Tech Scan. With so much Predator goodness, we naturally wanted answers about what else to expect, and Vivendi Universal Games' Executive Producer David Stalker took some time off from hunting humans to fill us in on this exciting project.

How did this title come about? Is anyone on the project a huge Predator fan?
After making Aliens vs. Predator games on the PC we felt we had to give the Predator his own game and bring it to consoles. Predators are such fantastic, cool, kick-ass characters…how could anyone NOT be a huge fan?

How does this title tie into the movies? Will it directly reference *Predator*? *Predator 2*? *Alien vs. Predator*?
Ours is an entirely original story, created to be an integral part of the overall Predator mythology. It is set within the same universe as the films, tying in some elements but without contradicting anything that happens in either of the two older movies or the upcoming AvP movie.

Did the filmmakers (of any of the movies) have any direct involvement in this project?
There hasn't been any direct involvement, but some of the development team was fortunate enough to go to Prague to visit the set of *Alien vs. Predator* and had a chance to show the game to Paul W. S. Anderson (the director) and some key members of his crew. We got to look at a lot of the stuff that was created for the movie, and we swapped some development stories. They showed us their Predator and we showed them ours!

The Predator is a tough character. How are you ensuring that players feel like a badass while playing him and still offering up a challenge?
Sure, Predators are immensely strong and agile and have some of the best weapons and technology of all time, but they still bleed and – as I'm sure you're all aware – "If it bleeds…we can kill it." Seeing that a good part of the game takes place in the future – and Mankind therefore has access to better technology and weaponry – the playing field is a little more level.

Will the Predator have any new tricks in this game that he didn't have in either the movies or comics?
In addition to the familiar weapons, gadgets and vision modes, there are definitely a lot of cool new features in the game as well, but first and foremost, we focused on creating – for the very first time – the quintessential Predator 3D action-gaming experience! In third-person, players can experience and appreciate the Predator's movement and combat skills in a way that they never have before…not even in the movies. This is no man in a suit. This is Predator for real!

Will gameplay feature an emphasis on stealth, or will it be faster paced?
Predator: Concrete Jungle has many different missions and challenges. Players can decide for themselves in many places whether to use stealth or more violent methods to proceed. For some challenges, there will definitely be a preferred way to tackle them but we're leaving as much up to the player as possible.

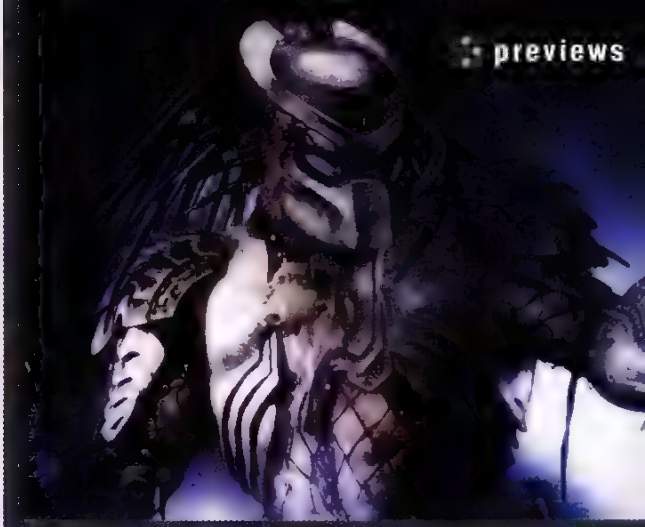
What are the challenges in working with a franchise like this?
It's totally cool to be able to mess around in the Predator universe! It's a huge privilege to build something that contributes to the mythology of this kick-ass cinematic anti-hero. As with anything that has a strong fan following, trying to satisfy all of the fans as best as possible is probably the biggest challenge.

Who do you think will be the next Predator cast member to run for political office?
I can't say for certain...but I think Carl Weathers' severed arm could be a strong presidential candidate in 2004. ■■■

Movie Pictures TM and Copyright 2004 FOX

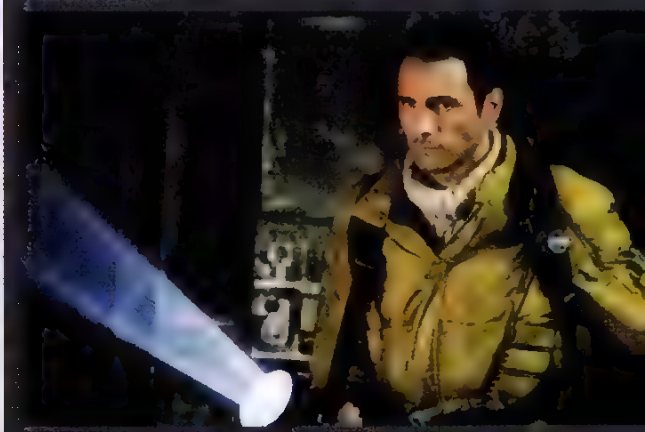
The Predator can cloak himself and become invisible, but that wouldn't be a very cool picture, would it?

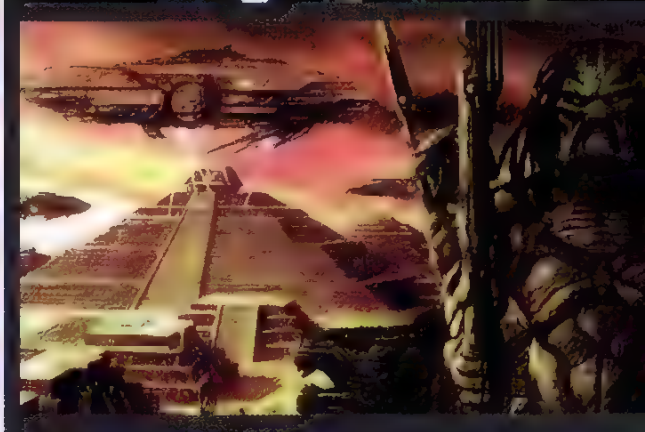
If it bleeds, it can still kill you



Aliens Are Sissies

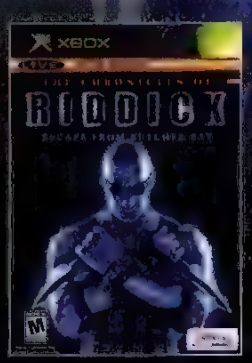
As most sci-fi fans know, the Predator will return to theaters this summer in the big-budget film *Alien vs. Predator*. Whether or not it turns out to be the glorious sci-fi slugfest fanboys have been clamoring for remains to be seen, but it certainly has us excited. These shots are only making us more worked up.





"The best looking Xbox game we've ever seen. And we've seen them all."

— Official Xbox Magazine



MATURE 17+
Blood and Gore
Mature Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Violence

UNIVERSAL

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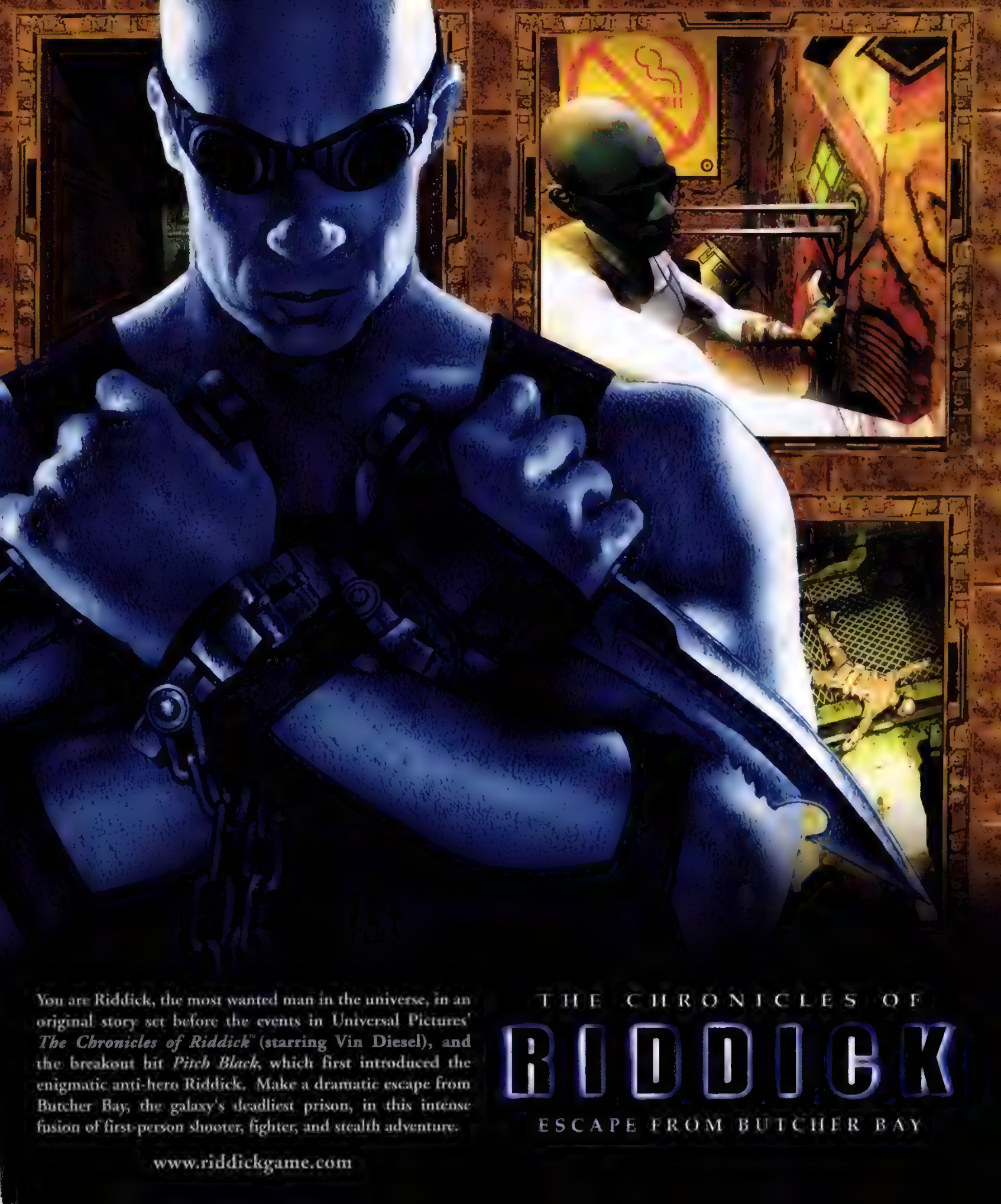

You are Riddick, the most wanted man in the universe, in an original story set before the events in Universal Pictures' *The Chronicles of Riddick*™ (starring Vin Diesel), and the breakout hit *Pitch Black*, which first introduced the enigmatic anti-hero Riddick. Make a dramatic escape from Butcher Bay, the galaxy's deadliest prison, in this intense fusion of first-person shooter, fighter, and stealth adventure.

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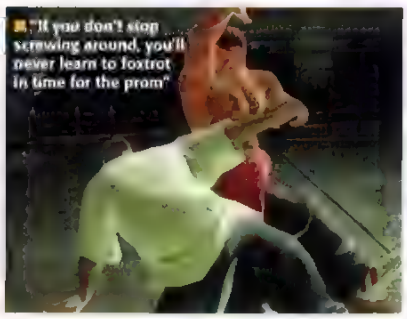
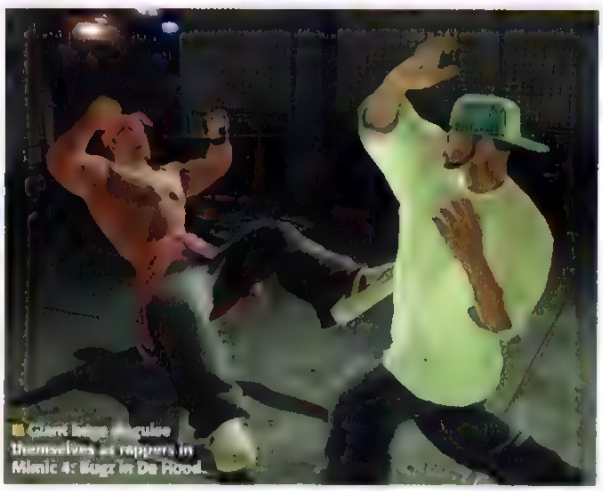



...client keep imagine
themselves as rappers in
Mimic 4: Bugz in Da Hood.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Def Jam Fight for NY

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (PS2 ONLINE TBA) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** EA CANADA/AKI CORPORATION **> RELEASE** FALL

KINGS OF CRUNK

We got beat up by a rapper once. But what can we say, Ice Cube is one bad mutha. Okay, it wasn't Ice Cube. It was Vanilla Ice. He's got a lot of pent-up rage, and in all fairness, we did start it. Perhaps telling him that his album *Mind Blowin'* lacked the musical genius of "Ninja Rap" wasn't the best idea.

Thankfully, fighting with rappers no longer has to be a shameful and embarrassing experience. EA is returning to the fighting game market with a new game based on its popular wrestling game Def Jam Vendetta. EA promises that Fight for NY will blow the original away with a host of new playable characters, additonal features, and a revamped fighting engine. EA is promising over 40 hip-hop stars and personalities, including Carmen Electra, Busta Rhymes (who both also appeared in the best game of all time, Celebrity Deathmatch), Ludacris, Method Man and Redman, and the Commandant of Pimpin' himself, Snoop Dogg.

Each and every character in the game will feature new moves, thanks to a fighting engine that will allow players to pick from five different styles to master. Up to three deadly arts can even be combined into vicious hybrids. Interactive environments, weapons, and 10 gameplay types will add even more spice to the combat. The Create-a-Player mode and online play (for PS2) only kick things up another notch, so Fight for NY is looking like one slick title. We just hope V-Ice isn't a hidden character. That guy scares us. ■■■

REDMAN INTERVIEW

The other day the Def Jam star stopped by the crib to holla at us about the game. Peep what he had to say, yo. We'll stop now.

Word on the streets is that you are a huge video game fanatic. What games are you playing now...and what are you looking forward to?
Yeah, I be on the PS2 daily. That Navy Seals SOCOM joint is my s@#$, I be online letting cats have it. I also be smackin' cats up with the New Jersey Nets in NBA Live 2004.

Did you give any creative input for your character in the Def Jam games?
Oh hell yeah, I told them to make sure my throwback jersey wasn't lookin' bootleg, you know what I sayin'? The head bands and doo-rag was part of my personal touch also.

How close does your wrestling prowess in real life come to your character in the game?
Man, I'm no joke with my hands in real life. But, my character in Fight for NY got some crazy moves that only Funk Doc could pull off.

What changes are you looking for in your character this year?
Just more style and sicker moves. You know, some real ghetto street brawlin' type s@#$.

All right...time for some fantasy matches. Who would win in these fights and why? Method Man versus Macho Man?
Mef, cause that's my dawg and he ain't takin' no L from some cat rockin' le-o-tards.

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles versus Godzilla?
Godzilla would make sushi out of they stinkin' asses.

If a developer decided to make Redman: The Game (a game all about you), what would you want it to be like? Can you give us an example of what you would like the developer to include?
It would be about me rollin' through the bricks and getting into different ghetto-ass scenarios. A lot of chicken heads, dope fiends, and thugs. Kinda like a real ghetto version of Vice City, but it would be called "Brick City."

***How High* was an absolutely brilliant film. Any chance that we might see Silas P. Silas and Jamal King making a return in a sequel?**
That one's a classic, but you never know. Mef and I are working on a TV show, though. I think people who like *How High* will feel this show too.

Any chance that you will make D*kazi clothing tailored toward gamers? As you've probably observed, gamers really don't have any fashion sense. Maybe you could lead the way!
Oh hell nah, I never thought about that, but that's not a bad idea. I might just do that. But, I'm not sure if them gamers are ready to be as dirty as me.

What's next for you?
I'm about to go roll somethin' up and hit the studio, I'm putting the finishing touches on my new album, *Red Gone Wild*, coming end of this summer.

Kicking butt in style

The gameplay is now more like a traditional fighting game rather than a wrestling title

"I don't know any Baggins! Leave me alone!"

Looks like Vah Shir may be one of the playable races.

Ain't nothin' wrong with a bondage pit.

PLAYSTATION 2

Champions of Norrath: Return To Arms

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SNOWBLIND STUDIOS > **RELEASE** WINTER

EVIL GODS NEVER STAY DOWN, DO THEY?

Snowblind Studios is the kind of developer you can't help but love – the original Champions of Norrath has only been out for a few months, and already it's cranking away at a sequel. Following the events of the first, and bringing a whole host of the usual sequel improvements, Return To Arms should scratch that hack n' slash itch for people who have a lack of decapitated orcs in their lives.

In addition to two new races, a multitude of spells and skills, and fresh monsters to dull your blades on, Return To Arms will also feature an unlockables system where exceptional performance will grant medals. These can then be used to obtain secret levels, artwork, or new items. How secret levels will work is still being decided on over at Snowblind, but we wouldn't be surprised if they involved some bosses and cool items which are otherwise unavailable, since we've heard tell of secret epic artifacts of immense power.

If you've been sinking a ton of time into the first game, fear not – that bad-ass Barbarian you've been leveling for the last three months doesn't have to go into cold sleep, since you can import your old characters into Return To Arms. He'll gain access to all the new skills and abilities, too, so he won't necessarily be gimped compared to a newly made adventurer. And besides, who doesn't like being able to jump right in to the higher difficulty levels right away without having to plow through the wimpy ones?

On the technical side, a streamlined engine that will result in much more stable framerates (especially online) should make it a smoother experience to take your hero all the way up to the new level cap of 80. And, with all of the expanded content that's available, there's no reason you should get bored with Return To Arms in the process, either. The online portion is being worked on as well, with better matchmaking and chat functions. Saving and loading between single and multiplayer will be somewhat more intuitive, too, and should help ease the frustration factor of playing online. Get ready to save Norrath from the evil god Innoruuk once again this winter, when this is scheduled to launch. ■■■

Both hacking and slashing? Brilliant!

That's what you get for smelling like ham.

If we had to pick one badass to take on a mech with a handgun, it'd be Jr.

KOS-MOS has been redesigned

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse

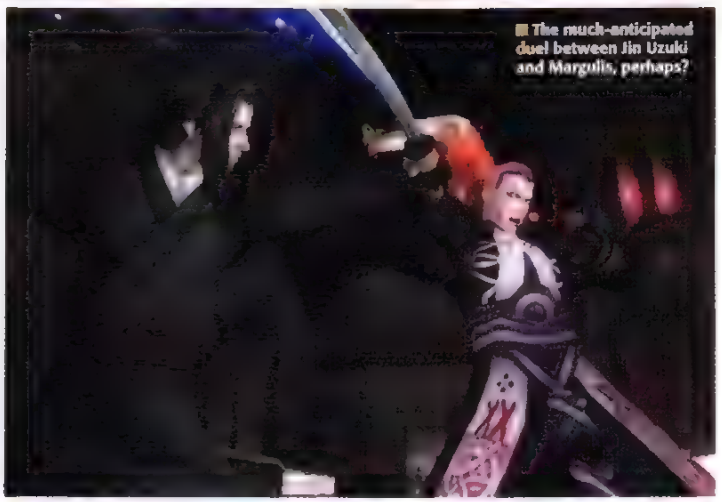
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** MONOLITH **> RELEASE** 1ST QUARTER 2005

REDEFINING EPIC

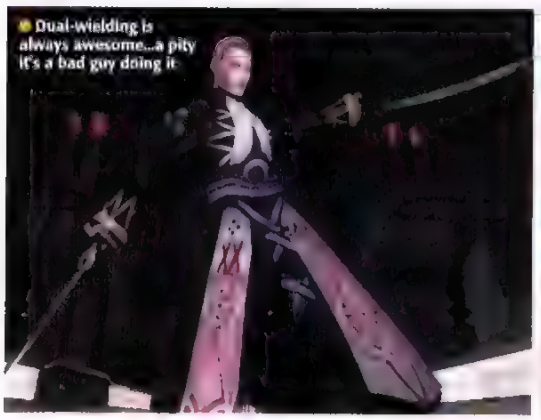
Though Namco is infamous for closely guarding the secrets of Xenosaga Episode II, we did get our trembling hands on some tasty new screens of Jenseits von Gut und Böse (which translates to "Beyond Good and Evil," a reference to philosopher Friedrich Nietzche's book regarding the impracticality of absolute morality) for your viewing pleasure.

Some unconfirmed details have leaked out of Japan, but speculation is fun, so here you go. For one, the template for MOMO, Sakura Mizrahi, will play a role in the events of Episode II. She's the daughter of prodigal scientist Joachim Mizrahi, and hopefully a key to the labyrinthine plot of Xenosaga. Another juicy tidbit claims that a new type of mechanized battle suit will be available. The A.M.W.S. is a smaller, high-powered version of Episode I's A.G.W.S., and will be able to be equipped with Anima Relics. Xenogears fans remember those, of course – they radically increase the power of a mech, and are somehow connected with the enigmatic Zohar. Finally, the battle system will reportedly incorporate combination techs between characters.

Hopefully more details will be forthcoming at this year's E3, but until Namco has something more to say, feel free to feast your eyes on these luscious shots. ■■■


The much-anticipated duel between Jin Uzuki and Margulis, perhaps?

Is anything sweeter than aerial mech combat?


Dual-wielding is always awesome...a pity it's a bad guy doing it

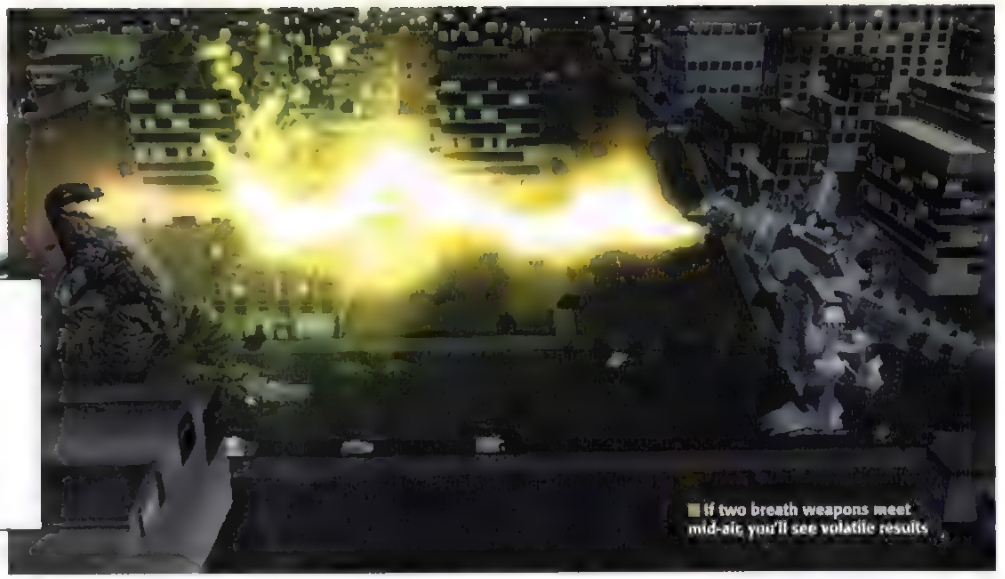
Pelingo will apparently return for a larger role

The mystery man behind U-TIC, Seller, is finally revealed

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Godzilla: Save the Earth

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING/ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
> PUBLISHER ATARI **> DEVELOPER** PIPEWORKS SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** FALL


If two breath weapons meet mid-air, you'll see volatile results

HAPPY 50TH BIRTHDAY!

It might be hard to believe, but that lumbering, nuclear-powered destroyer of buildings named Godzilla is turning 50 this year. Yep, after two dozen official movies and countless spin-offs and derivatives, he's officially hit his half century mark. The big green guy has one hefty birthday present coming his way this fall with the release of Godzilla: Save the Earth, undoubtedly one of the largest and most ambitious monster movie games to date.

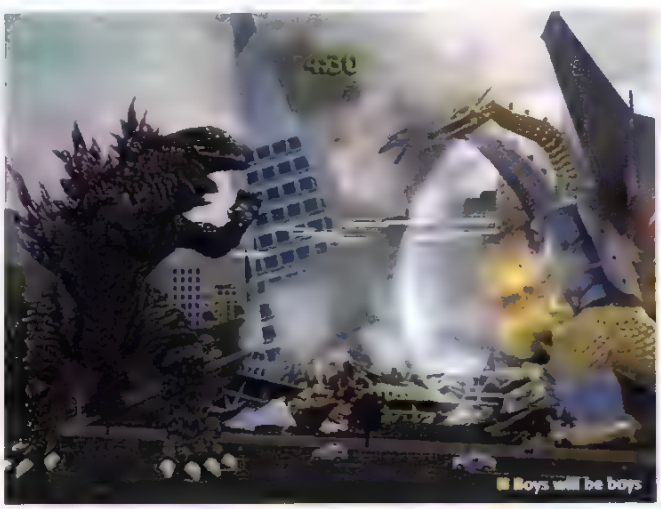
We recently sat down with an early build of the game and got the chance to beat the hell out of each other as well as various unsuspecting cities around the world. Much of the core gameplay is already looking great, and we're pumped about the numerous characters, stages, modes of play, and unlockables that the final product should exhibit.

Save the Earth will use a similar engine to the popular GameCube outing of 2002, Destroy All Monsters Melee. However, a tremendous number of improvements have been made that should drastically increase both the playability and likeability of this new title. There will still be versus and melee modes so that up to four players can whack each other silly. Godzilla will also be playable online for both PS2 and Xbox, so you'll no longer need to be in the same real-life city as your friends in order to level an in-game metropolis with them. In addition, there will be eventual downloads that include such goodies as new stages. Thanks to the brand new PS2 hard drive, you'll be able to download these levels onto either one of the two platforms.

But that's far from all that's being included. The focus of single player gaming will be the new story mode, where you'll fight through over a dozen lengthy levels linked together by CGI cutscenes. The style here seamlessly mixes third-person action with fighting. The effect evokes a genuine sense of being in a real Godzilla flick. On the first playthrough you'll primarily act the part of Godzilla. However, subsequent runs at the story will allow the use of your other monsters. Which brings us to one of the kickers: We expect to see upwards of 20 playable monsters, all of them taken from actual movies released over the years. Each will have their own special moves and abilities to harness. Among others, you'll see Mothra, Megaguirus, and Space Godzilla. Oh, and by the way, Space Godzilla is huge.

We're also told of some variations in the gameplay that piqued our interest. There'll be several levels that include a rail shooting element. In them, you'll fly through space blowing away aliens, or swim through the Pacific imploding submarines. We also saw over a dozen unique challenge modes, where a specific task needed to be completed as quickly as possible.

Technically, we're looking at a significantly higher polygon count than Destroy All Monsters Melee, and increased environmental detail such as land elevation. Add in an alien invasion story in which Godzilla saves the planet, and you'll see why this looks to be a highly radioactive egg of a title just waiting to be hatched and unleashed upon the world. ■■■


Boys will be boys

Godzilla's idea of bath time toys

The army will play a big role in both story and gameplay.

This isn't your grandpa's world war. Wait, yes it is

PC

Call of Duty: United Offensive

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** INFINITY WARD/GRAY MATTER INTERACTIVE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL 2004

DUTY CALLS...AGAIN

Last year Call of Duty exploded onto the gaming scene and established itself as a force to be reckoned with in the WWII action/FPS market. Boasting superior graphics, intense AI, and a grand, cinematic flair that would get Steven Spielberg's attention, Call of Duty succeeded in almost every way. This fall, fans of the original can expect to be drafted once again as Call of Duty: United Offensive arrives for PC.

Several gritty details have surfaced already. Included will be an all new single-player campaign where players will once again take on the roles of the Americans, British, and Russians throughout the course of a 10-mission story. The setting returns players to the fury of the European Theater, where several harrowing battles are awaiting their arrival. Among them is the titanic conflict of the Battle of Kursk, undoubtedly the largest armor and tank conflict of the second World War. Also promised are the heroic Battle of the Bulge and the invasion of Sicily.

New weapons are also helping to reinforce the Allies, of which the most exciting is probably the flamethrower. New player abilities, such as cooking off grenades, should make for some memorable moments. Enhanced weather and explosion effects are being incorporated to further spice things up. Finally, there will be brand new multiplayer levels and modes of play. Of these we're most excited to see the new tank combat mode, which has the potential for a whole lot of wanton destruction. What more could we ask for? ■■■

The flaming, smoking hulk of a plane never looked so fine

Ain't infantry warfare grand?

PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat 5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** FALL

FRIENDS IN THE SKIES

"Okay guys. On the count of three, we all do one of those really cool loopy things."

With well over one million copies of the latest installment flying off of store shelves, Ace Combat has quietly become one of the PlayStation 2's biggest success stories. In this next entry, Namco is putting the lives of others in your hands. Featuring the inclusion of wingman commands, it'll now be up to you to coordinate squadron attacks. It'll also be in your best interest to do everything you can to keep your mates alive. You remember how much you cried when Goose died in *Top Gun*? He was only in the movie for like 10 minutes! Imagine how devastated you will be if you lose someone whom you've been with for over 20 hours.

With radio communication from your wingmates and enemies adding realism to the mix, this should prove to be an unnerving experience in the video game skies. As of now, Namco hopes to have over 50 licensed planes in the game, and roughly 30 missions to play through. Along with a hefty dose of dogfighting, you'll find yourself (and your beloved air buddies) engaging in air-to-sea battles, recon, and rescue missions.

Before we leave you, we'd like to take a moment of silence to not only remember Goose (we miss ya, chum!), but also to reflect on just how damn hot Tom Cruise was in that movie. Ace Combat 5 is currently planning to touch down on retail shelves this fall ■■■

"After we blow up the Jamaican bobsled team, whadda say we go to Baskin Robbins?"

"What does this button do?"

Bombing dolphins is fun!

■ Players will be able to emulate native life forms with nanotechnology

PC

Perimeter

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** K-D LAB > **RELEASE** JUNE

TERRAFORMING IS COOL

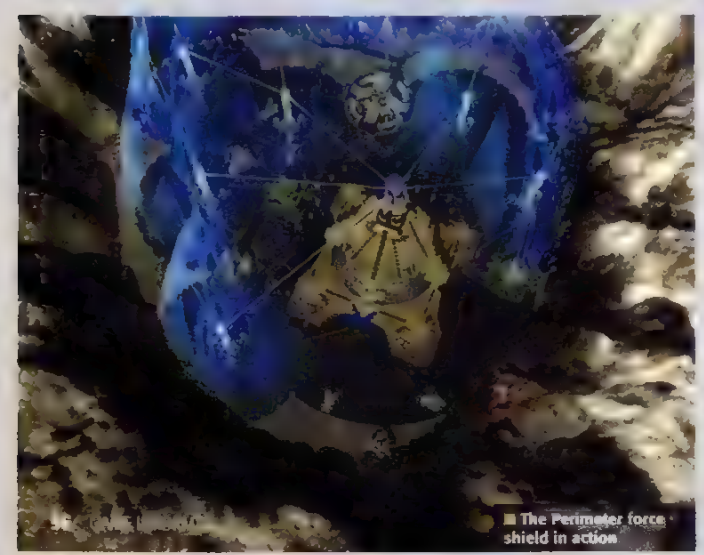
There are few better ways to make us happy than to expand on an existing genre by integrating brand-new concepts into it. Developer K-D Lab is attempting just that with Perimeter, a new RTS that contains not one, but three ideas that we've never seen before.

At the top of the list is terraforming. In Perimeter, this means altering the lay of the land to better suit you, by raising cliffs to form better defensive positions or flattening out an area in order to expand your base. However, cataclysmic natural disasters like volcanoes and earthquakes can upset the best-laid plans of aliens and humans, and will dramatically change the face of the planet in mere seconds.

Further increasing the depth of tactical options available to players, units in Perimeter are capable of morphing into completely different types of troops, even combining into big nasty ones. For instance, you could have your army grow wings to fly over a chasm, develop some claws to burrow under the enemy's force field, and then Voltron into a huge tank to lay waste to their base.

The aforementioned force field is the final element of Perimeter's innovation. These are gigantic impenetrable barriers that prevent any entry or exit, and clearly represent another interesting choice to make. While they do protect you from all attacks, keeping them activated will drain your energy reserves fairly quickly, and stop you from leaving your base to launch a counterattack.

If all of these ideas come through with a decent level of polish and balancing, Perimeter could be the next wave of triple-A RTS goodness. Stake your own claim to the overlordship of the planet in May, when Perimeter is scheduled to go to retail. ■■■



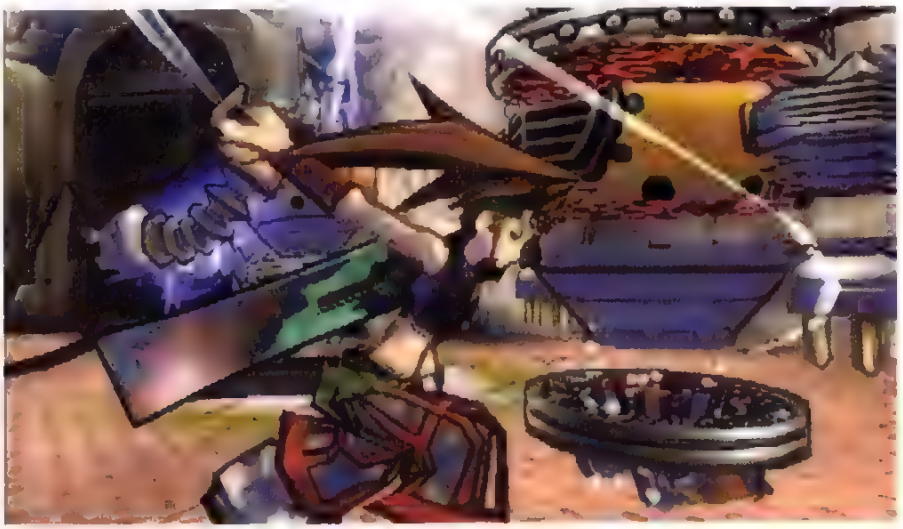
■ The Perimeter force shield in action

PLAYSTATION 2

Musashi Samurai Legend

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX USA > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** TBD

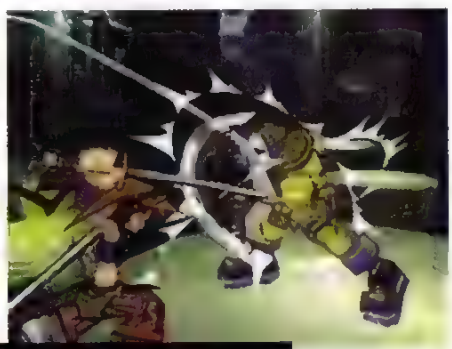
THE BRAVE FENCER IS BACK

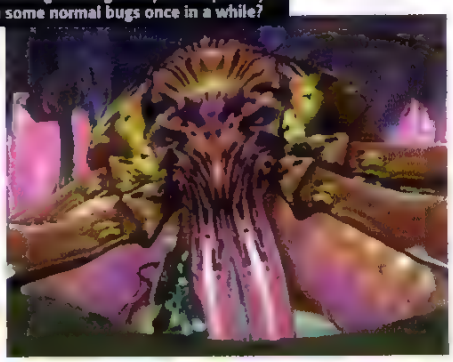


Right after it split with Nintendo, Square released a quirky action/RPG title for the PlayStation that featured a 3D world, a pokey-haired protagonist, and characters named after food. The title in question was Brave Fencer Musashi, and after a long absence, its star is returning in a brand-new adventure. Featuring character designs by Tetsuya Nomura of Kingdom Hearts fame, cel-shaded graphics, and a funky soundtrack, this title's got us more excited than Aquaman in a school of underage tuna.

Solid details on the project are still scarce, but we do know that Chrono Trigger/Final Fantasy IV producer Takashi Tokita is on board, as is Brave Fencer's producer, Yoichi Yoshimoto. With the director from the first game returning, we suspect that Musashi Samurai Legend will feature the same "unique" sense of humor. Characters will probably again be named after edibles. We hope there is a character named Circus Peanut. We just love those; they're like pure spongy gold!

Much like the first title, expect Samurai Legend to feature a mix of puzzle-solving and over-the-top action. Musashi will have the ability to protect his friends by literally carrying them away from danger. We like to think that this means Musashi will drag friends who've had a few too many out of bars as they scream "I'm Rick James, beeyotch!" Okay, that probably won't happen, but you can be sure that Musashi Samurai Legends will be full of equally strange sights. We're just happy to have another game with the word "samurai" in the title. There's been a real shortage of those lately. ■■■





These images show off the colorful look of the title. They also show some of Musashi's enemies, whose numbers include giant bugs. Why do they always have to be giant? Why can't we squash some normal bugs once in a while?

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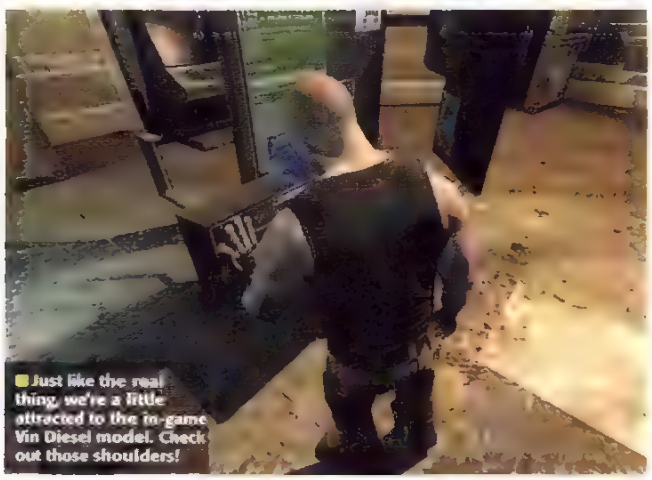
ONE CLICK AWAY

All of these screens are taken from in-game play. Seriously. Are you calling us liars?

Riddick hates guys who make snow angels



Just like the real thing, we're a little attracted to the in-game Vin Diesel model. Check out those shoulders!

A little hot lead ought to keep Gollum in line

XBOX

The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay

> STYLE 1 PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES **> DEVELOPER** STARBREEZE STUDIOS **> RELEASE** JUNE

THE NEXT BIG THING FOR THE 'BOX?

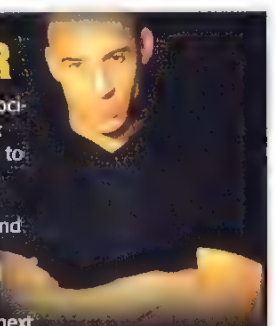
For countless months, Xbox gamers have waited patiently for the release of their preferred console's flagship title, Halo 2. While it looks like it will finally see release, it is still quite a ways off. Fortunately, the system will soon see another title that will make the waiting easier. We've had some hands-on time with The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, and we've got to say that this may very well be one of the best yet for the 'Box.

Although any game which plays out in the first person perspective is immediately labeled a shooter, Chronicles is far more akin to recent titles like Breakdown and Deus Ex: Invisible War. Sure, it has tons of guns blazin' action, but it also places a huge emphasis on stealth and hand-to-hand combat, and offers players several ways to tackle problems. For instance, you may bypass a guard by simply shooting him, or you might creep up from behind and snap his neck like a twig. Daring players can even attempt to disarm a guard by blocking the swing of his rifle, jamming it under his chin, and blowing his head off! Pulling off this disarm technique correctly usually results in a dead guard and a new weapon in the player's inventory.

While guns are certainly a huge part of Riddick's arsenal, hand-to-hand weapons are even more important at the start of the game. As soon as he arrives in Butcher Bay prison, Riddick comes face to face with scores of very unfriendly people, and weapons like shivs, clubs, and his fists are the best way to survive. Like Breakdown, Chronicles features immersive first person fighting that is simultaneously simple and deep. Pushing the analog stick in different directions while pulling the trigger determines what kind of punch Riddick throws. Fortunately, not every prisoner wants a piece of Riddick, some merely want his help. Throughout the various areas of the prison, players can decide to take on optional side-quests which can earn Riddick new weapons and unlockable extras.

It would be easy to dismiss this Vin Diesel-starring title as just another licensed product, but believe us when we say that to do so would be a mistake. The astounding visuals of this title have already been the subject of much discussion – the early version we played had a noticeable aliasing problem, but still looked better than just about every other game on the market. On top of the gorgeous graphics and fantastic sound (including great voice work by Diesel), this title features some really killer gameplay, and is easily one of the most unique and cinematic titles for the Xbox. If any game for the system has the potential to eclipse Halo 2, Chronicles of Riddick is it. ■■■

DIESEL POWER



While Vin Diesel is usually associated with films like *Pitch Black* and *XXX*, there's actually more to the man than being an action hero. Vin got his start in the theater, and wrote, directed, and starred in a short film called *Multi-Facial* that was accepted to the Cannes Film Festival in 1994. Both this short and his next project *Strays* (a feature film which he also directed) were so well received that Steven Spielberg wrote a part specifically for him in *Saving Private Ryan*. After *The Chronicles of Riddick*, the surprisingly versatile actor will star in the action-comedy *The Pacifier* and an epic drama based on Carthaginian general Hannibal Barca's attack on Rome in the 3rd century BC.

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK

"Don't cry for me, Argentina!"

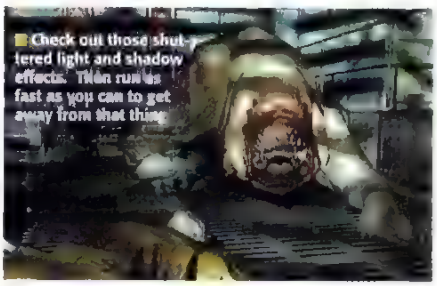
XBOX | PC

Doom 3

> STYLE XBOX: 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK), PC: 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** ID SOFTWARE (PC) / VICARIOUS VISIONS (XBOX) **> RELEASE** FALL

SCARY AS HELL, BUT WAY MORE FUN

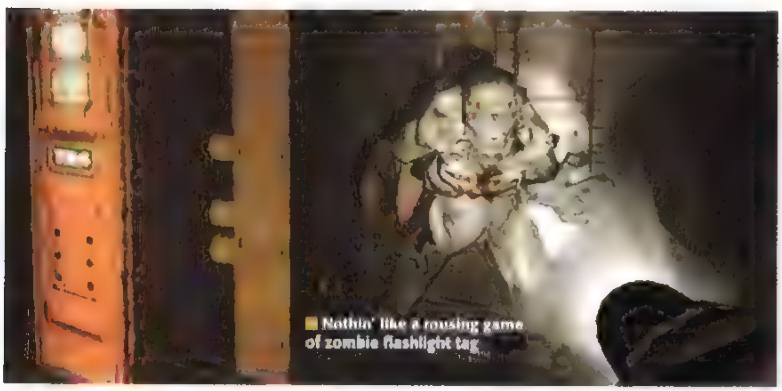
We recently got to see this long-awaited title in action on the Xbox, and everything we've experienced has indicated that the game is well on its way to being just as frightening and horrific as its grandfather, and we couldn't be happier. Doom 3 attempts to retell the nightmarish storyline from the beginning, albeit with several new twists and turns to keep us guessing along the way. As before, the real world is being encroached upon by hell, and the eerie in-game effects reinforce this fact with furniture hurtling across rooms and undulating tentacles popping through the walls. As they should be, the enemies are unrelenting and freakishly strong. We nearly soiled ourselves when a demon burst out of a grate to throttle us. You'll undoubtedly curse more than once as shot after shot fails to drop your vicious foes.


Check out those shuttered light and shadow effects. Then run as fast as you can to get away from that thing.

Given the dimly lit corridors through which you navigate, your flashlight will become an integral tool as it can be used to illuminate hidden items and power-ups. Much to your character's dismay, the shadows will also conceal deadly enemies. Take a look at that ghoulish hellspawn down there – not exactly what you want to find at the end of a dark alley.

The most notable addition in the Xbox iteration will surely be the recently announced two player co-op option – always a major plus. We've also confirmed a four-player death match, team deathmatch, and Last Man Standing mode all playable either on Xbox Live or by system link (sorry, no split screen). There will be five intense multiplayer maps to choose from, and the promise of voice chat for you talkative types. On the technical side, we're looking at 480p support as well as Dolby Digital 6-channel sound for the audiophile.

A lot of these details have yet to be confirmed for PC. However, we almost wept with joy when we heard that the PC version will likely ship with a level editor. Vicarious Visions is hard at work to unveil the Xbox version a few months after id's initial fall PC release. ■■■


Nothin' like a rousing game of zombie flashlight tag

XBOX

Far Cry: Instincts

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL **> RELEASE** TBA

Observe the backlighting effect on the left soldier. Sweet.

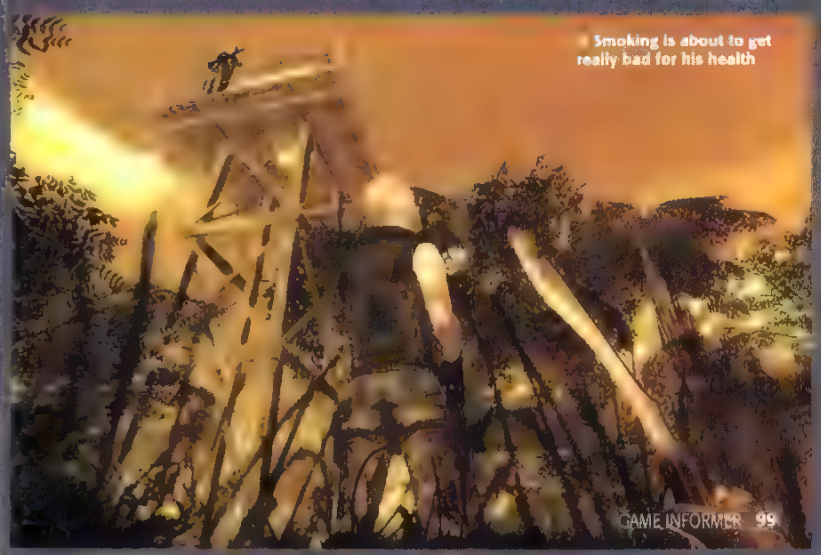
WAVES, BEACHES, AND GUNFIRE...PARADISE

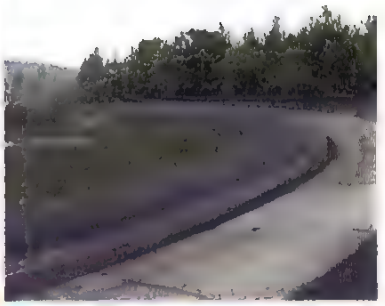
Nothing rounds off a nice day by the ocean like an island sunset accompanied by the roar of nearby explosives. It's the perfect combo, at least according to the success of Ubisoft's recent PC hit. Until now, console gamers have been forced to sorrowfully watch as their computer-playing brethren rejoiced in the tropical goodness that is Far Cry. Ubisoft plans to change all that with the announcement of Far Cry: Instincts, a brand new game in the series that will be developed specifically for consoles. The official line from the publisher confirms a release on Xbox, but we suspect we might hear announcements for other platforms in the coming months. Ubisoft reports that the game will be developed by a group made up of most of the Montreal-based development team that was in charge of the original Splinter Cell. Frankly, that suits us just fine.

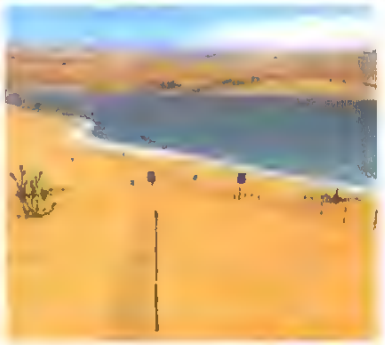
For those unfamiliar with the superb PC version of the game, Far Cry boasts an incredibly lush jungle environment that houses a deep survival action style of gameplay which has injected some much desired uniqueness into the FPS market. The AI in Far Cry has been heralded as eerily lifelike in its unabated attempt to wipe you out. In addition, the PC game has an extremely powerful engine capable of handling lighting and shadows with near perfect accuracy. The replay value alone is enormous, if for no other reason than the multiple paths that are available to complete any given objective.

The console version of the game promises to offer much of the same excellence, along with a brand new story and set of scenarios. Also promised is a broader range of strategies and survival tactics than in the original. That means you'll probably have new ways to hide and trick your enemies, but the AI will likely have new techniques to find and take you out.

Details are scarce after this recent announcement, but we should have more details as the months progress. If the PC title is any indication, we are in for one hell of an island vacation. ■■■


Smoking is about to get really bad for his health





UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Enthusia Professional Racing

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT STUDIOS **> RELEASE** SPRING 2005

RACING REVOLUTION

Konami as a publisher is known for many great things, but racing hasn't historically been one of them. So what's a company to do when it wants to start a revolution in driving simulation games? Find developers who want to change up the world of sim minded cruisers, of course.

Culling members from Namco's Ridge Racer series, the Enthusia team is switching its focus and adding innovative new features to the racing title, which is due out next year. The center of Enthusia and its gameplay is entirely the driver, and to this end, it features a few new bits of useful information and sleight-of-hand tricks to make players feel more like they're actually in a car, rather than lounging on the couch.

Clustered with the usual mass of instrumentation familiar to drivers across the land (speedometer, tach, and gear indicators, for example) is a small circle toward the bottom of the screen. Coined the Visual Gravity System or VGS, it shows the amount and location of force being put on the vehicle by accelerating, braking, or turning. In addition, a needle pointing out of the circle lets players know what direction their wheels are pointed. Why would one even need to know stuff like this? Because the tracks in Enthusia are twisty and the cars so accurately mimic their real life counterparts that knowing each ride's suspension and tire grip is necessary to shaving off crucial seconds.

Although not shown in the screenshots on this page, there are two examples of how Enthusia plops players into the driver's seat more than any racer we've faced. One is something that should be simple – raindrops on your windshield when in first person mode. While waiting on the line, drops fell and started to meander their way down the screen. When the light turned green and we peeled away, they shot up and off – their speed and trajectory directly related to the car and its speed.

More innovative though, is a transparent gray frame that lies over the outer border of the screen. It moves side to side and up and down to simulate the driver's perspective. For instance, if the car turns right, the driver's head pulls to the left and this frame makes you feel like you're taking that lean. It's subtle, but effective in convincing your brain that you're going around a corner at 65 miles per hour.

While we're still a long ways off from answering some of the big questions about Enthusia like multiplayer and career progression, this is shaping up to be one racer with a different focus that could give that other big-name driving sim a run for its money. ■■■

Although Enthusia is focused on the driver and the driving, the cars available are no small side note. Specific models and license agreements are still being kept under wraps, but the team has planned hundreds of vehicles spanning past, present, and concept models – we raced a few courses driving a Mini Cooper, a Lotus Elise, and a late '60s Fiat. Even better, it's hard to overstate how detailed these in-game models are. While navigating the car's customization menu, the chosen ride spins and flips towards and away from the camera, highlighting every nook and cranny. We saw the light reflecting off of tailpipe nubs and each blade of the air intake vents, for example. Auto makers are being extremely cooperative with the needs of the development team, but visible damage on the vehicles is a feature whose fate is still up in the air.

He's got his mother's cheekbones and his father's hydraulic-powered forearms

PLAYSTATION 2

Full Metal Alchemist and the Broken Angel

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER** RACJN CO **> RELEASE** TBD

EXTREME METALLIC MAKEOVER

Ah, kids .. One minute they're roughhousing in the backyard, and the next they're losing limbs using ancient forbidden magic to resurrect their dead mother. That was the story of Edward and Alphonse Elric's youth, at least. The accident left Ed with a metal leg and arm, and Alphonse's body was destroyed completely, forcing his soul to be bound to a mechanical suit of armor. The game follows the two brothers on their quest for the Philosopher's Stone (sorry, no Diagon Alley sidequests) so they can restore themselves to their true forms.

In Full Metal Alchemist (based on an anime of the same name), you play primarily as Ed, battling through stages while transmuting the objects in the environment and using them to your advantage. Objects that can be transformed will have an alchemy ring around them, which means that Ed can use his skill on them to change them into walls, spikes, and other useful tools. You can even alchemize Ed's metal appendages into more powerful weapons! Plus, if the going gets tough, you can also control the hulking tank Alphonse as he blocks and tackles for his older brother.

The premise is certainly unique, and the mechanic of using your surroundings as weapons has enormous potential. We'll just have to wait and see if this title will avoid the curse of low-inspiration that has been plaguing games based on popular cartoons over the last few years. ■ ■ ■

These circles determine which items can be transformed

Pumping iron! Get it? Iron! Grilliant!

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Terminator 3: The Redemption

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ATARI **> DEVELOPER** PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

GOVERNING THE HELL OUT OF THE FUTURE!

We miss the days when all Arnold wanted was your clothes, your boots, and your motorcycle. Now that he wants your tax dollars and political support, he's just lost that action hero flair. Thankfully, Atari's upcoming Terminator 3: The Redemption will give us a chance to relive the gun-toting glory days of the Kindergarten Cop in his most popular role.

T3 will be a third-person action game with a heavy focus on vehicle combat. As the Terminator, you'll be able to drive futuristic tanks, hovercrafts, and helicopters through 14 different levels, many of which are familiar environments from the films. When you aren't trucking around, you'll be on foot battling legions of robots using a combination of hand-to-hand moves and surrounding objects, like pieces of defeated foes.

Much like the recent James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing, T3 will feature special cinematic "Terminator moments," which are triggered when you execute a maneuver that feels uniquely Terminator-esque. Though the exact effect these sequences have on the game is still a mystery, you can bet that they'll look pretty sweet.

Even though T3's subtitle is "The Redemption," it probably won't make amends for the disappointing third entry in the Terminator movie series. However, with its healthy mix of ground and vehicle action, along with a two player co-op mode, it may finally redeem Arnold in the eyes of gamers for being connected with the abomination that was Total Recall for the NES. ■ ■ ■

Arnold plays William Tell... and misses

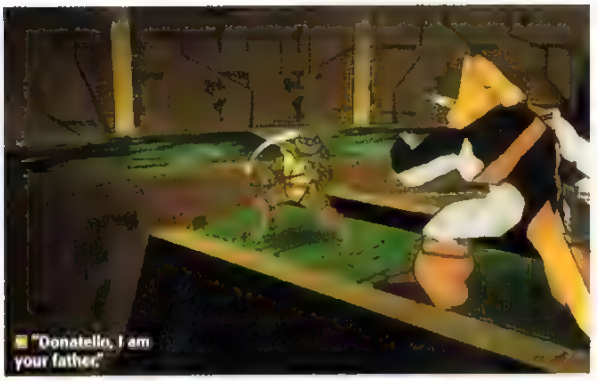
Crop Dusters of the Future

Vehicles will play a key role in the action

Rendering Arnold

If you're going to do a game with a license these days, it's expected that you use the voice and likeness of the lead character, and T3 is no exception. Fortunately, the folks at Paradigm Entertainment have gone all out to create an astounding character model for the T-800. It looks so realistic, you might find yourself wondering which button makes him talk about the economy using lame bodybuilding analogies.

Heroes in a half shell, indeed



"Donatello, I am your father."

Looks like someone delivered the wrong pizza

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC | GAME BOY ADVANCE

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT STUDIOS **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 2004

FOUR PLAYER SHELL SHOCK!

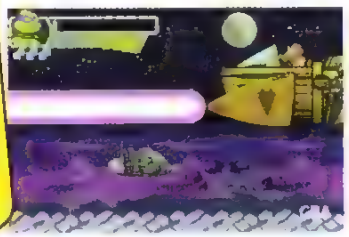
If you were anything like us, you dropped more than one week's allowance trying to get through the old TMNT arcade game. And you undoubtedly dragged your buddies into the loss of their hard earned dough along with you. Why? Because TMNT let four of you take on the roles of your childhood heroes simultaneously, and then bash through level upon level of incessant action. It was arcade fun at its best. We're more than happy to report that Konami has learned the error of its ways when it didn't include a 4-player option on its most recent console outing. GI managed to get some exclusive info revealing that TMNT 2 is chock full of multiplayer goodness, and all four turtles get to come along for the ride this time around.

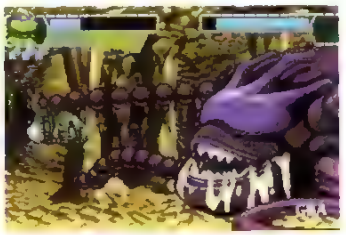
Apparently, the pizza-eating brothers will battle Shredder and the Foot Clan through a completely nonlinear storyline. Environments will be varied and unique, and some of the boss monsters look positively massive. The fighting system has been tweaked to allow for more types of attacks than ever before. In fact, due to combo strikes, we've been promised over 30 distinct moves. Up to four players will be able to play cooperatively through the story mode. In addition, there will be something called the Battle Nexus Mode, which will allow for competitive head-to-head ninja dueling action. This versus system will also include four player support, which promises to result in some pretty chaotic smackdowns. Each turtle will have their own individual abilities in battle, and all the voiceover work will be provided by the actors from the most recent Turtles animated series. Konami's latest TMNT game boasted as one of its strong points a beautiful cel-shaded look that flowed seamlessly through its animations. As you can see, the cel-shading has returned in the sequel, and the detail looks to far exceed its predecessor. And remember those old arcade versions we were just talking about? Well, the most exciting news is that TMNT 2 will include the original Turtles arcade games as unlockable extras. Since we've never actually had a console version of the arcade original that allowed for four players simultaneously, we're more than a little fired up.

We'd love to see this one be the title that brings "Cowabunga!" back into the collective gaming unconscious. If what we've been told is as good as it sounds, gamers may be in for one huge dose of Turtle Power come this fall. ■■■

Tiny Turtles

TMNT 2 will also see release on the GBA, albeit in a slightly different form. You'll have 4-player action via link cables, 40+ stages, multiple routes to objectives as well as hidden levels to find. We've also been told of "building sized bosses." On a GBA? This we have to see.





PLAYSTATION 2

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

> STYLE 1 PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN **> RELEASE** FALL

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Solid Snake is an unstoppable juggernaut. The guy takes on harrier jets mano a mano, not to mention nuclear-equipped walking battle tanks. The only question we have is this: Why is a one-man army, proficient with any kind of weapon imaginable, forced to resort to a simple punch-kick combo when faced with unarmed combat? Childhood trauma? Intimacy issues? Whatever the problem, Metal Gear Solid 3 will see it resolved with the addition of a new close-range fighting mechanic.

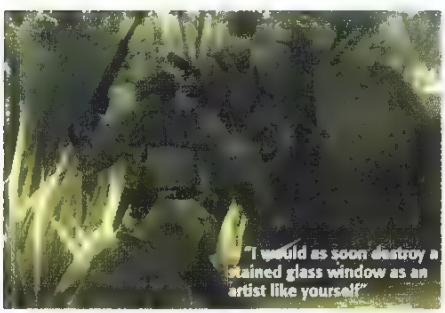
Snake's melee abilities will be based on a system called Close Quarters Combat. More than your average hand-to-hand style of fighting, CQC uses techniques that are only possible once you've mastered combat with guns and knives. In fact, in the real world, CQC is used almost exclusively by Special Forces units. It is based on the concept of being constantly aware of your surroundings, tension, and your enemy's body position. This means that instead of just shooting or punching guards, Snake will have a wide variety of ways to deal with them, depending on which weapons he has equipped and the enemy's relative location.

Unfortunately, the specifics of how the CQC system will be controlled is still a mystery, along with most other details about the game (especially the story). However, this new information certainly helps Snake regain some lost dignity after the revelation a few months ago that part of his mission in the Vietnamese wilderness would be changing outfits and putting on make-up. ■■■

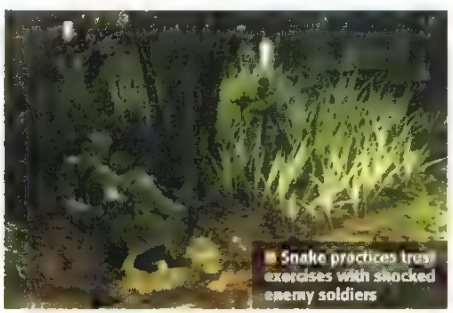
Close Quarters Combat

Here is a step-by-step example of a CQC technique that Snake will be able to execute:

1) The enemy suddenly attacks you from behind.
2) Your arms are held, and you cannot use your weapon.
3) Lean back towards the enemy, shifting your center of gravity backwards.
4) Seek an opening and tilt yourself diagonally and pull out your right leg. Press your elbow against the enemy's chest.
5) Hook your right leg into the enemy's leg while turning your body and pushing backwards. The enemy will lose balance and fall.



"I would as soon destroy a stained glass window as an artist like yourself"



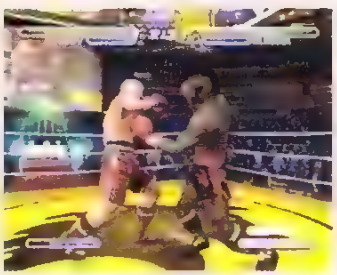
■ Snake practices truly exercises with shocked enemy soldiers

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Rocky Legends

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER VENOM GAMES **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER

HEY, AT LEAST IT'S NOT DRIVEN 2!



Rocky has never been a champion in the video game arena, but Ubisoft is bringing the Italian Stallion back to the ring in Rocky Legends. Interestingly, this title is being crafted as a prequel to the original film, one that traces the origins of the four best-known boxers in film history: Apollo Creed, Clubber Lang, Ivan Drago, and Rocky Balboa. From a Rocky fan's perspective, this is certainly an intriguing approach, and a great alternative to rehashing the plotlines of the movies yet again.

On the gameplay side, Xbox Live support is being implemented, which will support PvP matches as well as full-on leagues. Twenty-six new boxers have been created as well, bringing the total up to 40 (counting returning pugilists from the last title) to be unlocked through play. You'll also duke it out in 20 unique venues, 13 of which are completely new (including arenas dubbed the Docks, the Casino in Las Vegas, and the Philadelphia Art Museum). Training has been expanded to include a total of eight different games, all of which can be played against a friend in two-player mode. ■■■

One More Round For Rocky?

The thought of Sylvester Stallone getting back in the ring as Rocky seems as ridiculous as, say, an elderly Harrison Ford reprising his role as Indiana Jones (Oh wait, that's happening, too!). However, Sly has been making it known in Hollywood that he's interested in donning the trunks one more time, in *Rocky 6: Puncher's Chance*. Apparently, a script has been completed, and the story focus is on Rocky making a late-in-life comeback (think George Foreman) against a mysterious boxer named XL. No word as to whether Rocky then launches a kitchen gadget that helps America "knock out the fat" – but here's to hoping. Right now, the film is stalled in development, due to budgetary issues.

From the Outer Rim to the Core Worlds, players can explore 10 different space sectors

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PC

Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** FALL

EARNING YOUR WINGS

Approximately 4,735 years ago, LucasArts representatives and fellow development partners at Sony Online Entertainment spilled exciting details pertaining to Star Wars Galaxies' first expansion pack. Players would finally be able to leave their moisture farms behind and rocket into space in their very own spacecraft. Since this miraculous announcement, little else has been said about it. Many of us have since gone through puberty, exchanged vows, had children who in turn have had grandchildren, and upgraded our PCs at least 30 times. Most certainly, it feels like we've been waiting a lifetime for this highly coveted add-on.

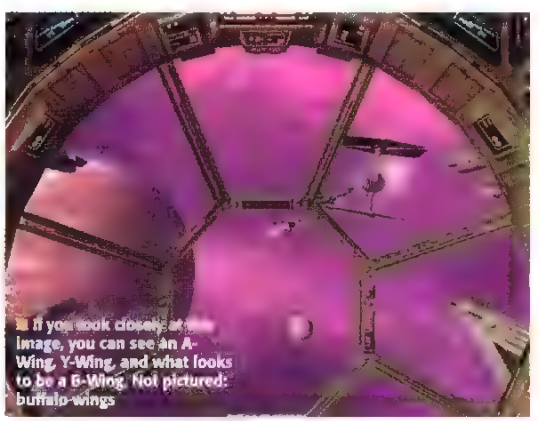
At long last, LucasArts is ready to spill the beans, and is confident that the tentatively named Jump to Lightspeed expansion will make its way to retail shelves this fall. The reason for the extensive delay becomes quite apparent when you factor in how much new material awaits players. Along with the popular X-Wing and TIE Fighter, players will be able to pilot 15 distinct vehicles, including the Millennium Falcon-esque YT-1300 Transport. How will you be able to procure one of these hot rides? LucasArts producer Haden Blackman explains, "As with weapons, armor, speeder bikes, and virtually everything else in the game, starships will be built by players for other players. The rate of player advancement through the ship-building profession will determine how many (and which types) of starships are available on a given server."

Much like character customization, you'll have every opportunity to personalize your craft's functionality and outward appearance. "In some cases, a modification will do both," claims Blackman. "Strapping on a new pair of engines to your X-Wing might enhance its top speed and also change the look of the craft." For now, LucasArts is focusing mainly on starfighters, but you will see capital ships, like the almighty Star Destroyer controlled by NPCs, serving as the centerpieces of epic battles.

Of course, to go against a vessel of this caliber requires some serious skills. A portion of your performance will be based on your twitch reflexes, as space exploration is fully compatible with joysticks. You'll also need to rely on astromech droids to improve your tracking and targeting systems. Strategizing and teaming with fellow wingmen for PvP and PvE combat is a necessity as well. There will be over 100 new missions based around the space component, as well as four new professions, and two entirely new playable species. ■ ■ ■

Some of the battles will rival the likes of the Death Star assault from *Return of the Jedi*

All ships feature finely detailed cockpits



If you look closely at this image, you can see an A-Wing, Y-Wing, and what looks to be a B-Wing. Not pictured: buffalo wings

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Death By Degrees

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER

360 DEGREES, TO BE EXACT

Namco's venerable Tekken franchise has been a staple of the 3D fighting genre for years, and now the Japanese publisher is looking to expand on that universe with Death By Degrees, a new action title starring Tekken's blonde assassin Nina. In trying to bring the total assassination experience to players, Namco is incorporating a multitude of melee attacks, firearms, stealth sequences, and puzzle elements into Nina's adventure.

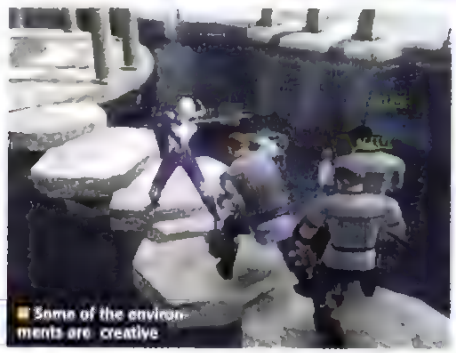
Nina will dispatch her legions of foes using a similar fighting system to the one seen in Rise To Honor. The analog sticks determine the direction of your attack, and you'll target whoever's closest to the angle you choose, though with two weapons you'll be able to hit multiple enemies at once. A number of moves from Nina's Tekken roots will be available as well, though only in animation – the controls in Death By Degrees don't exactly translate to fighting game-style combos.

The coolest feature we've seen by far, though, is the X-ray vision targeting. If Nina's concentration meter fills up, she can execute a special attack that targets a specific point on an enemy's body with an X-ray view, which will kill them immediately if done properly.

Namco is certainly attempting a lot with this title, and if it comes together more smoothly than some other games that got a little too ambitious, it could be a standout title this year. We'll just have to wait until October to see. ■■■

■ Double the katanas, double the fun

■ Don't get any ideas about X-raying female enemies, voyeurs



■ Some of the environments are creative

■ Throws and holds are a big part of Nina's fighting style

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XBOX

Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow

> **STYLE** 1-2 PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** AUGUST

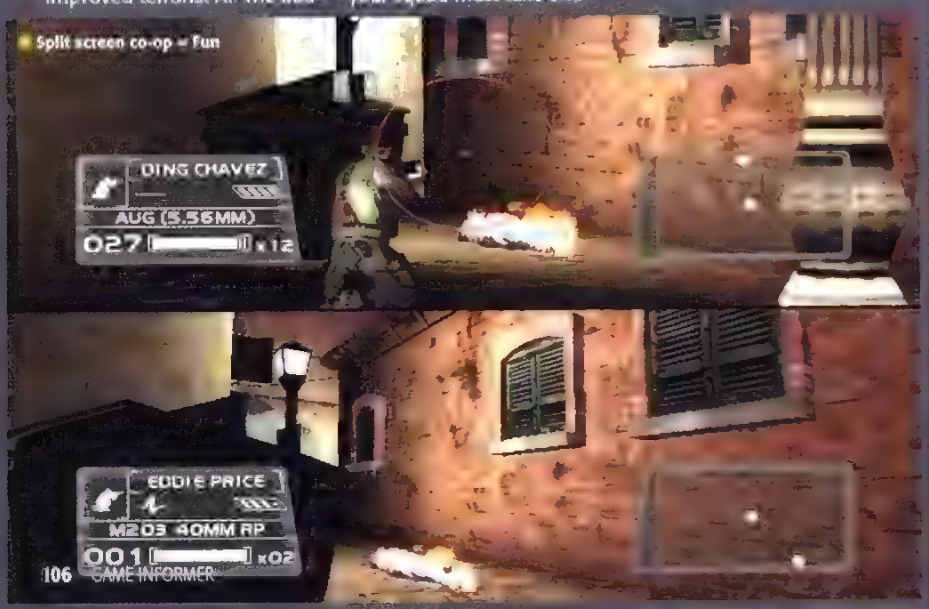
SO MANY TERRORISTS, SO LITTLE TIME

Time to hose down some terrorists

Xbox Live aficionados are in for a treat late this summer when the next version of Rainbow Six arrives exclusively for the big box in the form of Black Arrow. The expansion/sequel will introduce an entirely new campaign of intrigue and counter-terrorism. The setting this time around appears to be the area surrounding the Black Sea, where terrorists are attempting to destabilize the local governments in order to take over and manufacture WMDs (weapons of mass destruction, for those of you who haven't turned on the TV for the last 18 months).

A plethora of new features are planned. One of the coolest changes will be the improved terrorist AI. The baddies will call for backup when out-numbered, and they'll use hostages as human shields when threatened. Black Arrow will also be the first game to utilize the newer aspects of Xbox Live 3.0. These include player-created tournaments, MSN Messenger in-game, and online storage capability for rosters and friend lists. There'll be clan stats and competition, along with some sort of visual differentiation for each clan. We've also heard you can design your own arm patches for your team to wear in combat and then store them online. In addition, the new format will allow for private team lobbies where tactics and strategy can be set pre-game. There will be a new conquest mode where your squad must take and hold an area from attack. Also included will be the popular but heretofore absent capture the flag mode. As if that weren't enough, you'll also have the option of bot teammates in the cooperative online multiplayer experience. Offline, Ubisoft is throwing in a split-screen co-op mode so you can tackle the campaign with a buddy.

We're not sure, but we're beginning to suspect that Ubisoft might have a robot from the future that tells them exactly what gamers want. Whatever their secret, you can be sure that Black Arrow should be more than awesome enough to make up for it being the umpteenth counter-terrorism title in the last year. ■■■



Split screen co-op = fun

Having a sternum is overrated

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX | PC

Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth

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

ARE YOU THERE, CTHULHU? IT'S ME, JACK

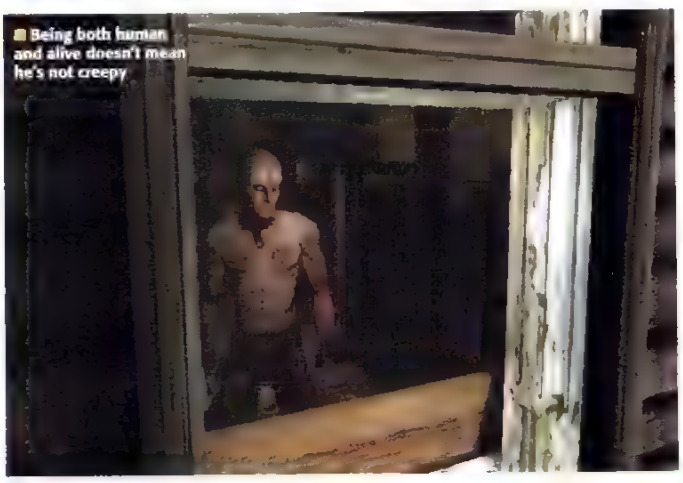
Based on H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos, which involves aliens, ancient evil, and a healthy dose of insanity, this title intends to bring gamers into the twisted world of Jack Walters – a man who has been marked by strange and terrible forces for an unspeakable fate.

Call of Cthulhu starts off, appropriately enough, with a cutscene of Jack in his cell at Arkham Asylum, which he has decorated with some lovely arcane designs drawn in his own blood. Then he hangs himself. This sets the tone for the entire game, there looks to be enough death, dismemberment, and general unpleasantness to satisfy even the most bloodthirsty dictator.

The main focus of the story are the nefarious doings of the Old Ones, which are nasty creatures who landed on Earth long ago and are now, for some reason, taking an active part in the events of the world. We won't blow the whole plot for you, but we've heard some talk about abduction. Cross-breeding has been mentioned as well, and you can only imagine how creepy it will be to watch a former friend slowly metamorphose into a ghastly abomination.

As for the gameplay, it will be a mix of first-person action, puzzle-based adventure, and straight up horror. Developer Headfirst is taking the Cthulhu mythos to heart, and introducing some interesting visual effects that will occur as Jack's sanity erodes. For example, when Jack happens upon a room that chronicles his life, his vision blurs and he stumbles about in a haze for a bit. Also, to spice up the action a bit, bullets won't stop when confronted with the thinnest of barriers. A .44 round, for instance, will be able to penetrate a garbage can and do some damage to whatever's behind it – so choose your cover carefully.

Horror fans just keep getting more and more franchises to enjoy, and if Call of Cthulhu lives up to its Lovecraftian roots, you may never look at a zombie the same way again. ■■■


Being both human and alive doesn't mean he's not creepy

"You got a problem with pointy ears?"

One of these lovely ladies is good, the other evil. Can you tell which is which?

PC

EverQuest II

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT **> DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** 2004

THE NEW FACE OF NORRATH

It seems that Sony Online Entertainment is no longer content with merely pushing out a new expansion pack every couple of months for EverQuest. This year will see an actual sequel come to light, with a completely new engine and an entirely separate world. In a general sense, EQ II is fairly similar to the original: Players will complete NPC-given quests, kill monsters, craft items, and more or less ride the experience train. Once you get down to the specifics, though, just about every aspect is refined, tweaked, and subtly changed.

Most every cool graphical technology is present in EQ II. Self-shadowing, bump mapping, detail textures, and more combine for a very nice-looking title. Magic-using players will no longer look drab in comparison to their meat shield friends – cloth looks incredible both in texture and animation, and makes wizard robes far easier on the eye. But mail-wearing folks have been anything but snubbed; the reflections off of a suit of plate armor are a sight to behold. Plus, the amount of options open to players at character creation is immense, from the muscularity of your hero to the slope of their eyebrows. It'll be virtually impossible for two characters to unintentionally look alike

The extent of the content in EQ II may seem overwhelming at first, but newbies should be introduced to Norrath at a reasonable pace. The branching level structure is a prime example of this – players start with an archetype, progress at level 10 into one of three classes, and choose from two sub-classes at level 20. Doing the math gives you 24 total classes, which along with the 16 playable races, makes for a good diversity of adventurers. Add in the ability to learn trade skills, and the capabilities of different heroes should be as varied as their appearances.

Though the majority of the quests in EQ II are standard MMORPG fare, there are two other types of adventures players can embark upon. Pioneer quests involve things like discovering lost continents, and will leave a mark on the world after you complete them such as the name of your guild on a monument. Hallmark quests must be completed every five levels in order to continue advancing, and are one way SOE is trying to make EQ II a more involving experience.

Another new feature of EQ II is Heroic Opportunities. A little dial in the corner of the screen will tell your group which types of skills to use in what order to whomp on the enemies. Should you complete the sequence within the designated time frame, you'll get a cool additional effect, like a group heal or mass buff. This encourages teamwork by rewarding characters for staying in their roles, and adds some nice extra flavor to combat.

Overall, EQ II feels like much of the same, but the promised level of refinement and polish that SOE is bringing to the project will hopefully result in significantly smoother gameplay for experience junkies. Look for it to go live sometime in 2004. ■■■

"Hey, you'd be pale too if you'd been looting dungeons for the last 20 years"

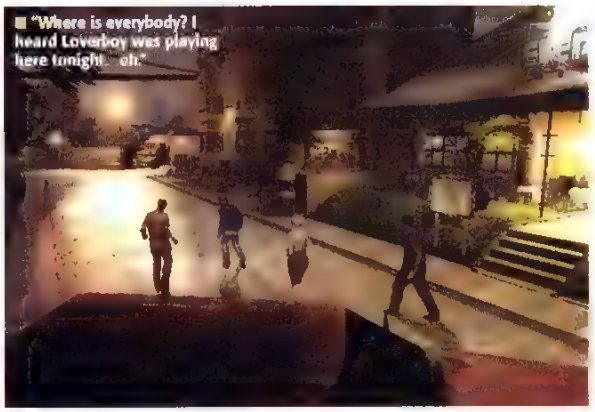
Bump mapping is a beautiful thing

Mermaid-fairies have apparently evolved past the need for clothes

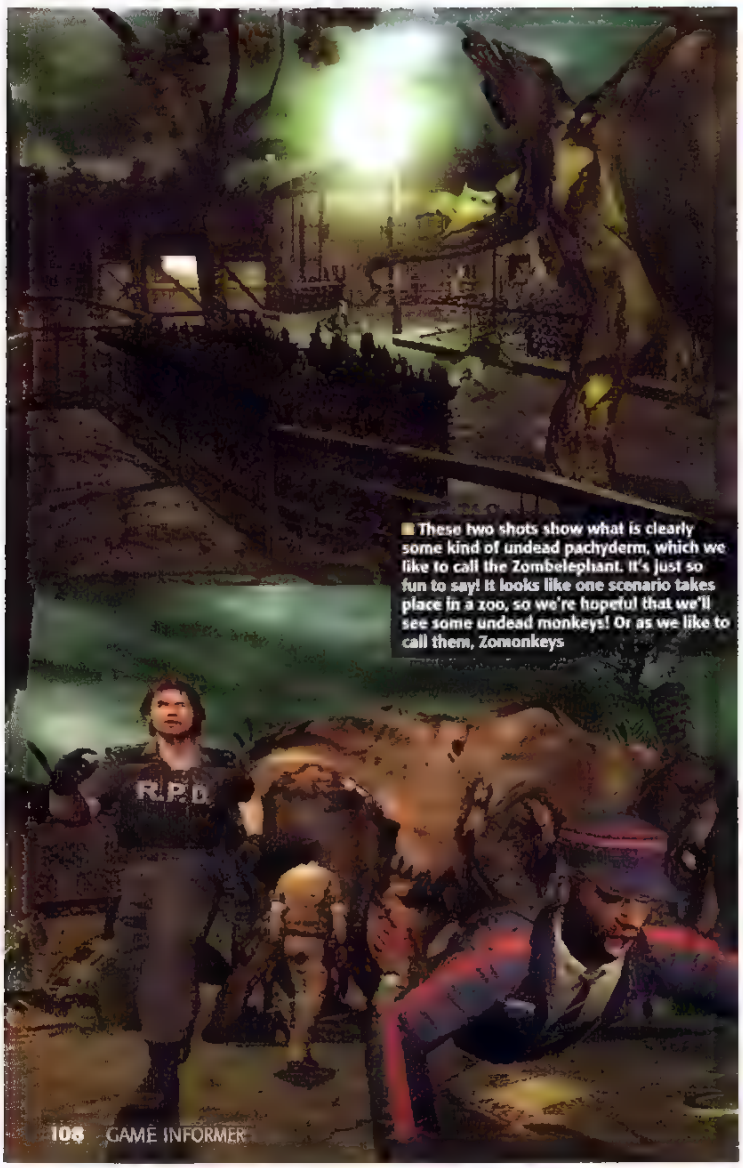
Spells and particle effects look awesome

Jane thought that her parents' custody arguments got uglier every month

"Waitress...give...zombie...napkin. Zombie...spill...Vit"



"Where is everybody? I heard Loverboy was playing here tonight...oh."



These two shots show what is clearly some kind of undead pachyderm, which we like to call the Zombelephant. It's just so fun to say! It looks like one scenario takes place in a zoo, so we're hopeful that we'll see some undead monkeys! Or as we like to call them, Zomonkeys

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Resident Evil Outbreak File #2

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

THE VIRUS SPREADS

With Resident Evil Outbreak only recently infecting stores, we were all a little shocked to hear that a sequel is already planned before the end of the year. Maybe the Outbreak virus is highly resistant to treatment and spreads so fast it simply can't be contained in one game. Whatever the reason, a few details about the sequel have oozed out, and we have to admit that we're itching with anticipation to see what Capcom has planned for this rapidly expanding series.

As with the first Outbreak title, File #2 offers eight unique playable characters, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Judging by the screens, they appear to be the same characters as the first Outbreak. As they are all normal citizens of Raccoon City, they'll have to rely on teamwork and the random objects they find to survive the onslaught of the undead. But zombies aren't the only things that they have to worry about. A host of never before-seen enemies will show up as well, and even the U.S. government is a threat this time out. It seems that the military is aware of Raccoon City's problems, and is planning to level the town with air strikes. Only through cooperation can you get out before the bombs start dropping.

The story will once again unfold in scenarios, which can be worked through in single and multiplayer modes. The lack of voice chat hampered the first title's multiplayer aspect, and it is currently not planned for the sequel, but perhaps that will change before the title's winter release. Despite that, several improvements are planned: For the first time in a Resident Evil game, players will be able to choose an all-analog control scheme. Woohoo! The prayers of a million gamers have finally been answered. Purists will be able to use the original scheme as well, and the areas will be larger and offer multiple paths to completion. Player performance will unlock goodies, and every imaginable stat will be tracked. Hmm...why would Capcom want to track players so closely? That sounds like something an evil corporation would do. Could Capcom and Umbrella actually be one and the same? Expect the answer to this and other bone-chilling questions in the dead of winter, when Resident Evil Outbreak File #2 wraps its ice-cold fingers around your PlayStation 2. ■■■

Found objects like brooms can be used for weapons or simply for keeping a tidy house

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX **> RELEASE** FALL

HOLY EXPANSION, BATMAN

Final Fantasy's online entry is getting a new expansion pack, and like all good surprises, the details we know so far are tempting enough to make us excited, but not revealing enough to ruin the joy of discovery.

For the PS2/PC MMO, Chains of Promathia will offer two new areas: the Tavnazian Archipelago and Movalpolos Once a thriving center of commerce off the western coast of Quon, the Tavnazian Archipelago was a peninsula until an army of beastmen unleashed a secret weapon that disintegrated the country's tie to the mainland. While the prosperous country fell into ruin, the beastmen retained control and it was thought that none of the Tavnazian people remained. From what we've been told, it appears that survivors have been found and are asking the aid of players

Movalpolos, juxtaposing the static Tavnazia, seems to be in perpetual motion across Vana'diel. Populated by a tribe of Goblins referred to as the Moblins, these beastmen are known for their superior smithing and alchemy skills along with rumored tinkering in bionics. Constantly drilling for materials under the surface of Vana'diel, the Goblins in Movalpolos continue to move their homes and equipment. Apparently, the citizens are so cut off from the outside world that even other Goblins have little information on the city's exact whereabouts at any given time

What specific missions will lead players to these locations is unclear, but it's obvious that Square Enix is taking their MMO seriously. Good news for those of us in the office who can't seem to tear ourselves away from it. ■ ■ ■

■ Outside of the beast-laden Tavnazian Archipelago

■ In the mines of Movalpolos, players will see the technological advances of the Moblins

■ Those little dudes are just so darn precious!

The Urbz: Sims in the City [Working Title]

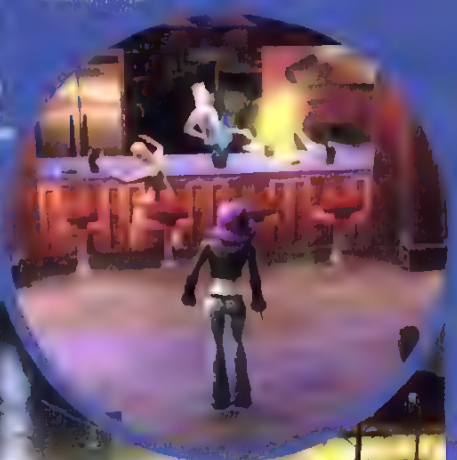
URBAN JUNGLE

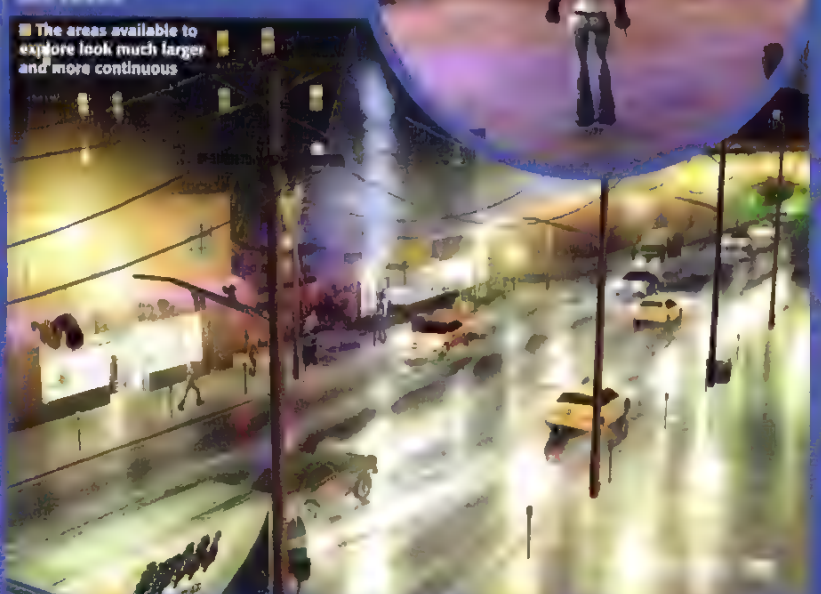
Maxis has really rocked the world with its line of Sims games designed specifically for the home console. The second entry, Bustin' Out, ramped up the speed, introduced a handy freewill system, and gave us seriously crazy jobs. The company is promising even more, though, in its next console outing – The Urbz.

Chucking their suburban roots, the Sims are moving into the big, scary city. Players will tweak their Sims with an enhanced character engine, and the results, as seen in these screens, look to be quite impressive. The title also offers new Power Socials to win friends, a faster-moving game, and all-new job options. Taking a cue from Bustin' Out on GBA, The Urbz will have players participating in minigames (lots of minigames, from what we hear) in order to advance [illegible]

[illegible] Maxis has confirmed an uptown nightclub, a subway system to fully explore, and a high-rise crib as playable locations.

We had a blast with Bustin' Out and based on these screens (where you can admire a street performer, for example) we're certainly jazzed about this latest console offering from Maxis, which will also feature EyeToy support on PS2. ■ ■ ■





■ The areas available to explore look much larger and more continuous

Teamwork is essential to completing some missions...

...though others are designed for solo play

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Guild Wars

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** NCSOFT **> DEVELOPER** ARENANET
> RELEASE 4TH QUARTER 2004

BUCKING THE TRENDS

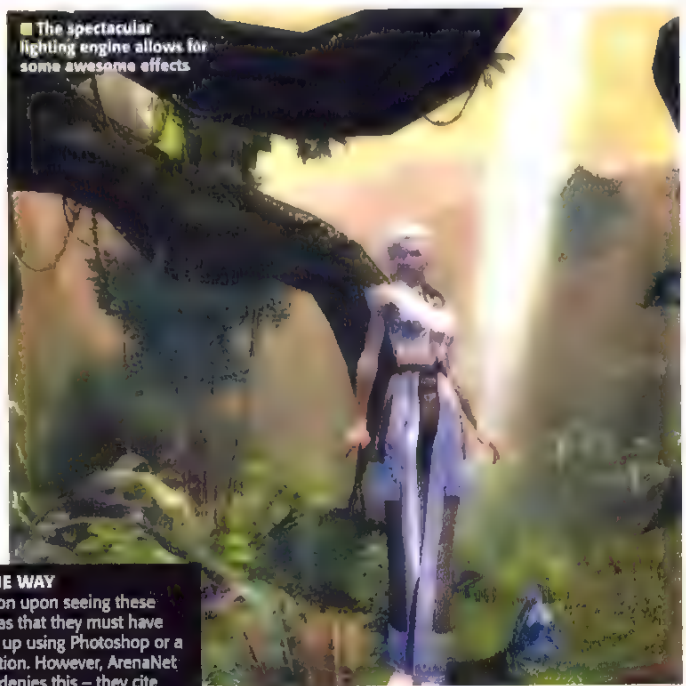
What excites us about Guild Wars is not the beauty of these screenshots, oddly enough. Yes, they look incredible, but what is truly remarkable about the game is the design philosophy behind it. Developer ArenaNet has had enough of the venerable MMORPG level grind, and is doing everything in its power to make sure that players who only spend a few hours here and there online can have just as enjoyable of an experience as the hardcores who don't so much play the game as live it. A large portion of that is ArenaNet's commitment to rewarding skill and strategy, rather than login time.

The biggest part of making this dream a reality is Guild Wars' skill system. Rather than having a few skills that need to be 'trained' for hours on end in order to be effective at high levels, players will have access to a bunch of abilities which will have to be equipped in only a few slots. Thus, choosing which ones to use on any given mission and knowing how to use them well has a much greater impact than just having the biggest character or best weapon.

Another huge difference between Guild Wars and other MMORPGs is that there isn't a persistent game world as such. Some places (arenas, for example) will always be around for players to interact within. However, whenever you or your guild embarks on a mission, the game will generate an area for it to take place in, which nobody else can enter. This means that there is almost no travel time – if you want to go rescue the princess, just pop in wherever the quest starts. It sounds strange, but we're willing to bet that this mechanic results in a much more fluid flow of play than the obscene amounts of time spent running in most MMORPGs.

Beyond the multitude of quests to embark upon, player vs. player content is a large part of Guild Wars. Cool rewards like flying your guild banner over the arena in which you won a tournament await the victorious, and the depth of strategy that will ideally be present should make PvP a blast. However, ArenaNet is promising that gamers who don't wish to deal with it won't have to, meaning that you won't have to worry about player-killers running around ruining other peoples' fun.

Since Guild Wars doesn't have a monthly fee, it will be that much easier for ArenaNet to attract the fanbase that's critical to any MMO. Plus, there aren't any separate servers or shards or realms or anything – anybody can with play anyone else, as long as they're both online. All in all, Guild Wars looks like a brand-new take on the whole MMORPG scene, and hopefully it'll realize its vast potential. Look for the servers to boot up late this year. ■ ■ ■


The spectacular lighting engine allows for some awesome effects

LIGHTING THE WAY
Our first reaction upon seeing these screenshots was that they must have been polished up using Photoshop or a similar application. However, ArenaNet unequivocally denies this – they cite their new lighting engine as the cause. Whatever the case, anything that makes Guild Wars look like this is a technology we can certainly endorse.

How could you not want to adventure here?

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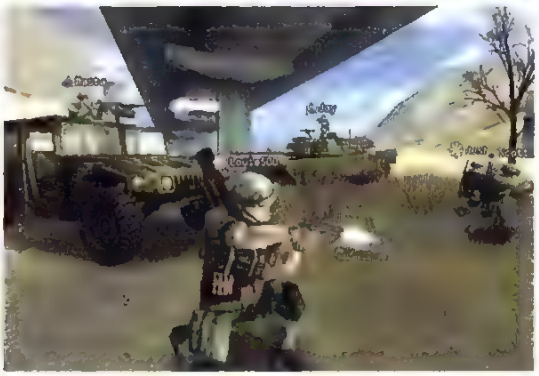
"I think he sees us."



The tank icons next to the names show promotions you can earn online

USB headsets will be vital to coordinating all your forces

PLAYSTATION 2

Battlefield: Modern Combat

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 24-PLAYER VIA BROADBAND) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE > **RELEASE** FALL

A WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PC aficionados have been hopping in and out of tanks and popping off heads in Battlefield games for a while now, and it's about time for console owners to get a chance to do the same in this new Battlefield installment. For those of you not in the know regarding the series, the focus is Conquest mode, where gamers pick a side and vie for the other army's control points in furious online frag-ging fashion. Only those with a broadband connection and a quick trigger finger need apply.

Modern Combat's urban settings will provide much tighter quarters than this

As the name implies, Modern Combat takes the series into the present day, with players choosing to join one of three superpowers: the U.S., the Chinese, or a Middle East coalition. Each of these sides will have their own weapons and unique control points (over 13 maps), and the game boasts a total of 70 weapons, including heat-seeking missiles. Commandeering various vehicles is a staple of the franchise, and Modern Combat offers 33 different varieties. Use of USB headsets will maximize your unit's potential, as will the five kits, or soldier types. Everyone can call in an air strike, but each will have its own specific way to do so. For example, the heavy artillery kit uses mortar attacks, while snipers use laser-designated bombs. Combat engineers are even capable of destroying and repairing bridges.

Battlefield is aiming to give you a stake in the action with online promotions as you rack up the kills. Apart from sheer glory, moving up in the military ladder also lets you play on rank-specific servers, thus offering a balancing of skill levels for those that want to play only with their peers. The game also supports the formation of clans, as well as the ability to create clan logos to affix on your tanks and vehicles.

Despite these pictures, Modern Combat has a variety of locations available apart from these urban settings. Battle will also be waged in the midst of remote forests. Visually, we hope that the game can clean up the fogging issues which made everything from sniper scopes to airborne combat slightly problematic. On the technical side, any bugs the game may ship with will be fixable with the patches that EA will offer via your memory card

We will say one thing – for a PlayStation 2 game, it's good to see that this title is letting up to 24 players engage. Up until now, many of the online team-based titles have been smaller affairs. The Battlefield series, however, thrives on letting its players make the most of the vehicles and maps, expanding its horizons beyond the more Rainbow Six-like tactical affairs. We suggest that you stand up and be counted. ■■■

XBOX | PC

Brothers in Arms

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** GEARBOX SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** WINTER

RELIVING HISTORY

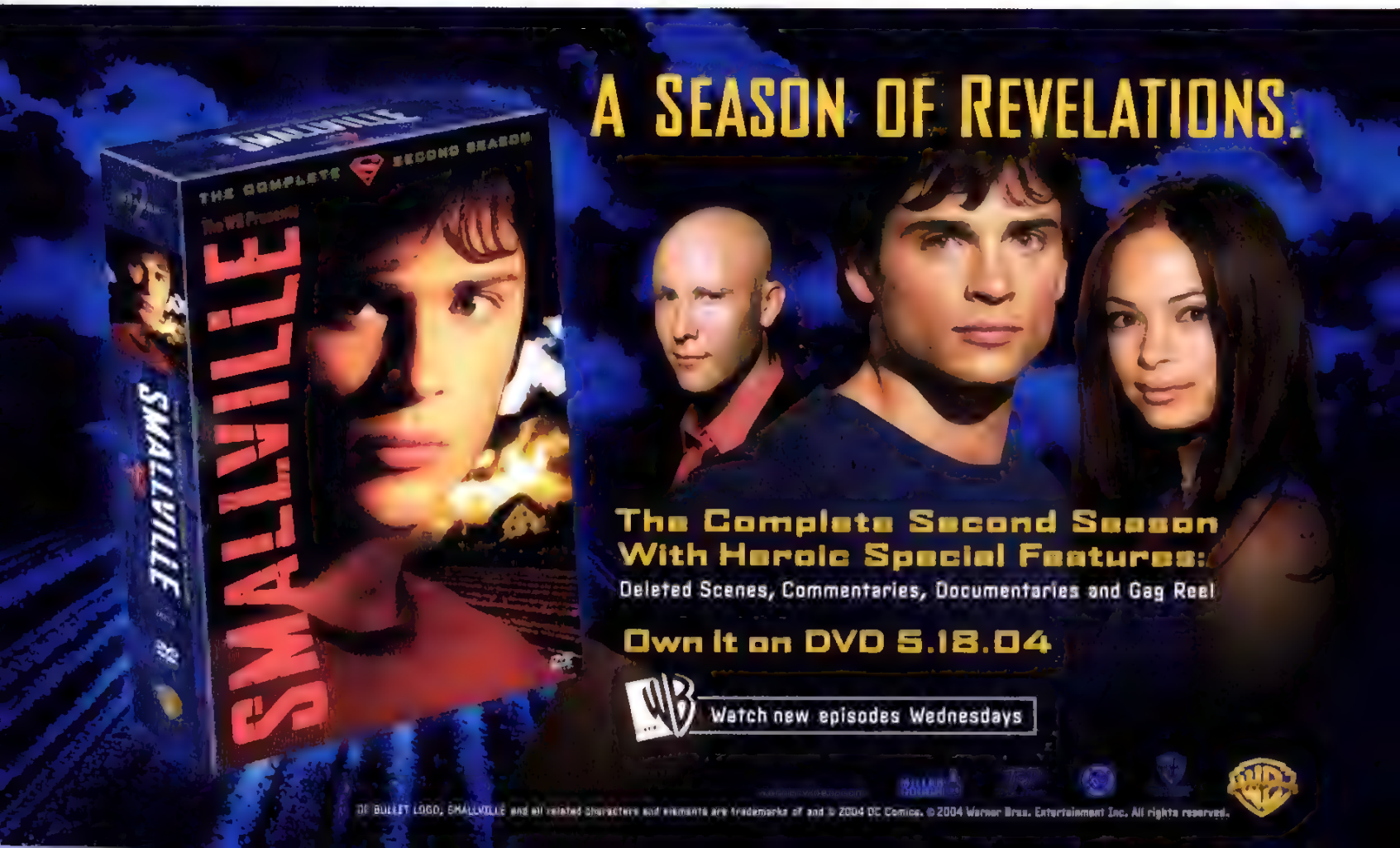
War! Uhhh! What is it good for? Basing video games on, of course. And no war is a better basis for a game than World War II, perhaps because there were so many different tales of heroism to explore. Ubisoft's new foray into the world of WWII games focuses on one of those, the true story of Sgt. Matt Baker and his squad of paratroopers, who valiantly spearheaded the invasion of Normandy.

Already being called one of Ubisoft's major E3 releases, Brothers in Arms is also being touted as the most realistic WWII shooter ever. The gritty atmosphere, historical events, and real time squad tactics make for an experience so authentic that Brothers in Arms has been endorsed by The Patton Museum, The National D-Day Museum, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the National WWII Museum.

Developed by Gearbox Software, Brothers in Arms puts you in the shoes of Sgt. Baker and charges you with the task of completing mission objectives while keeping your men alive. Gearbox's goal with this title is to cause players to experience the emotion of war, along with the action. While many players may be content to remain emotionally detached from the horrors of war, the lack of emotional maturity is something that keeps video games from being recognized as a legitimate art form. Should Gearbox succeed in its goal with this title, it may be more than just a great game, but an important milestone in the maturation of the medium. ■■■

Mystery Man

Although Sgt. Matt Baker, the central character in Brothers in Arms, is based on a real person, don't try looking him up on Google to learn more about him. The U.S. military only allows the names of officers to be used in outside projects. Since the person who inspired Matt Baker was only a Sergeant, using his real name would violate military rules. However, while his name has changed, Brothers in Arms will chronicle real events in real conflicts. So if your TiVo only records the History Channel, this may be your chance to step into some of the situations you've always heard about.



PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures

XBOX

Flat Out

We're excited to hear more about this collision-filled racing game being developed by Bugbear Entertainment and published by Empire. There will be 45 unique tracks and 16 individual cars, each one of which is upgradeable. Remarkably, every car will have 40 different deformable pieces, which means your ride is almost guaranteed to be a near wreck by the end of each race. Not only that, but the environment will also be destructible, and the leftover garbage will be strewn on the tracks to be hit by your competitors. Add in "demolition bowl" mode, a brand new physics engine, and online playability via Xbox Live, and this one might end up being a real smash come this fall.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

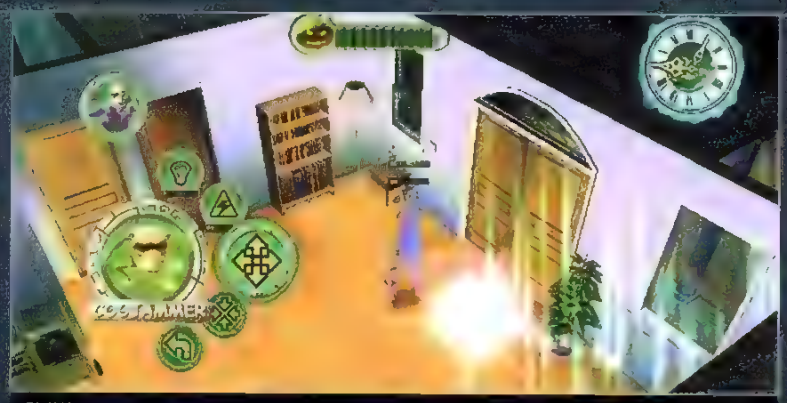
Spider-Man 2

Just in time for the movie, Activision's Spider-Man 2 will swing onto consoles this summer. It promises to improve on the well-received original movie adaptation in a number of ways, including larger cities that will stretch from the street to the sky. Spidey can now head all the way down to the sidewalk and take a leisurely stroll around Manhattan. There's no word on whether or not the game will feature the same endearingly stilted and awkward romantic moments as the movie but hey, we can hope, right? We've got such a crush on Tobey Maguire! He was soooo good in *Seabiscuit*.

PLAYSTATION 2

WWX: Rumble Rose

Konami's new all-female wrestling game is being touted as the definitive new title in its genre and it can certainly back up that claim. Wrestling experts Yuke's are handling the mechanics, while Polygon Digital (best known for their work on the Dead or Alive games and Ninja Gaiden) are creating the models. What's that? You just want to hear about the girls? Well, okay then. The number of skimpily-dressed females has yet to be determined, but they'll each have their own distict stripper-esque look, and the main goal is to humiliate your opponent until they give up. Yowza. Oh, and nudity is being considered. It's gonna be a long wait until this title's November release. Now go take a cold shower.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Ghost Master

Best described as a mix of The Sims and the movie *Beetlejuice*, Ghost Master met with such success on the PC that publisher Empire Interactive has decided to bring it over to the consoles. The addictive gameplay has you assembling a legion of spooks and sending them through houses, RTS style, to freak out the inhabitants and send them packing. Sporting a few new tweaks plus some levels that weren't available on PC, this inventive title is sure to make some hairs stand on end when it releases later this year.

PLAYSTATION 2

Beyond Echo Night II

Developer From Software started the tale of Richard Osmond in its 1999 adventure title Echo Night – where Osmond had to appease the ghosts who died mysteriously aboard the great ship Orpheus. Beyond Echo Night II continues this story of the world's best solver of otherworldly mysteries as he ascends with his fiancée to marry on the moon. After their shuttle crashes, Osmond wakes up to a haunted Lunar Station where he must find his beloved and figure out what really happened by solving puzzles and collecting items for the wayward souls trapped inside. Agetec hopes to have this game out in July.

PLAYSTATION 2

Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne

A young protagonist saves the world from demons while coping with loss and inner turmoil. No, it isn't *My Girl 3: Apocalypse* – it's Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne. More than just another RPG with a crazy name, Atlus' Shin Megami Tensei series has a significant following in Japan, but hasn't gotten much exposure in the U.S. Nocturne will feature a combat system that allows you to turn enemies to your cause and have them fight beside you. And if that doesn't sound cool, what if we told you that a certain legendary devil hunter would make an appearance? Look for it this fall.

XBOX | PC

Close Combat: First to Fight

While it never achieved the success of the Command & Conquer series, Close Combat's emphasis on realistic, historically accurate strategy is well respected by hardcore fans of the genre. Now, in addition to some new RTS titles, Gathering is expanding the property's horizons to include first-person shooting in the impressive looking Xbox/PC title Close Combat: First to Fight. Set to be released in late 2004, the game's development was overseen by a squad of real-life Marines to ensure that it provides all the realism CC fans expect.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

ESPN NBA 2005

Ambitious as always, this year's upcoming release is crammed to capacity with mouth-watering goodness. Not only has the television-styled presentation been enhanced with follow cams, press camera angles, and wipes, 24/7 mode is now twice as large and offers timed minigames along with over 100 new items. Concerning gameplay, IsoMotion is being reworked so that the game achieves the perfect balance for every offensive or defensive match-up. As always, ESPN NBA 2005 will release in the fall.

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Conflict: Vietnam

Vietnam games are the new iPod – everyone's gotta have one. Developer Pivotal Games and publisher Gathering are preparing its own entry, and the third installment of the team-based Conflict series, for a multi-console release this fall. They didn't have MP3 players back then, but if they did, your squad in Conflict: Vietnam would be listening to "Nowhere to Run" – because the game's enemies are going to be pressing you and your three mates pretty tight. Using booby traps and plenty of cover, the fully deformable environments will be flying as your crew fight their way out of 14 missions when caught behind enemy lines after the 1968 Tet Offensive. If you're lucky enough to survive, maybe you can leave Vietnam the way they did in real life – alive and on a chopper taking off from the roof of the U.S. embassy.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes the Neighborhood

This October, Eidos is unleashing a fresh wave of chaos with Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes the Neighborhood. This new extreme wrestling title promises to include a number of improvements over the original, including online play, larger and more realistic movesets, and a deeper Create-A-Wrestler feature. And judging by the picture above, there will also be no shortage of clowns or fat people. You gotta love a sport where eating an entire wedding cake is considered a good way to get in shape.

PLAYSTATION 2

Crimson Tears

Lovers of cel-shaded action should celebrate due to the announcement of Crimson Tears, a new beat-'em-up being developed for Capcom by DreamFactory. The game is set about 50 years in Tokyo's future, and you are cast in the role of three "human biological weapons," each of whom uses unique individual weapons to hack through randomly generated dungeon environments. The character models look sweet, and we always like the ability to chain together ridiculous combo attacks, which this title looks to deliver in spades this July.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NBA Live 2005

You just broke Kobe Bryant's ankles with a flashy crossover dribble. There's no one between you and the bucket. Time to show off. Do you perform an explosive tomahawk jam, or spin through the air with a 360? In NBA Live 2005, players will be able to select which dunk they want to perform as they elevate. The days of random slams are finally behind us. Live is scheduled to street just before the NBA opener this fall.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Bad Boys II

Later this year, Empire Interactive will bring us the official licensed game from the movie *Bad Boys II*. It won't have the onscreen chemistry of Martin Lawrence and Will Smith, but it will have their characters blazing through 13 missions inspired by the film. It also gives you the opportunity to cause as much environmental ruin as possible, getting the Chief ticked off and earning you the rating of "Bad Boy Cop." Of course, the game will give you the opportunity to be a good guy, too, arresting crooks properly without all of the property damage and mayhem – but that's boring. If you want that kind of justice, just go watch *Matlock*, sissy.

PLAYSTATION 2

Gallop Racer 2004

Giddyup this fall to the newest installment of Tecmo's long-running horse racing sim. There will be improved high-res graphics with enhanced shadow and color effects. We'll also be seeing several new camera angles for players to flip between during races. An impressive roster of 4,000 new horses will be available to jockey on any one of 42 unique tracks. The betting system and classic season mode will return accompanied by several new modes of play. You'll be able to negotiate with trainers and compete with rivals. To put it simply: If you watched *Seabiscuit* and afterward felt like quitting your job to work at the track, this one's for you.

PLAYSTATION 2

Shadow Hearts: Covenant

Set to release this fall courtesy of Midway, Shadow Hearts: Covenant picks up one year after the first entry (released in 2001) ends. Continuing the story of Yuri, this RPG takes place during World War I, but the enemies and settings are decidedly fantastic. In the first Shadow Hearts, Yuri could morph into different creatures and that skill is present in the sequel, although a secret cult has cursed the warrior to disable the ability. Yuri and his crew must travel to find a cure to his curse and defeat the cult, which is taking advantage of the worldwide warfare to further their plot of evil.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Heroes of the Pacific

We're all painfully aware of just how crowded the wartime FPS market is. However, running around with a rifle is hardly the only facet of a conflict – and in the Pacific theater of operations, the fiercest fighting was in the sky. Developer Game Studios is trying to catch that intensity in Heroes of the Pacific, an arcade flight simulator that puts players in the cockpits of over 25 World War II planes trying to accomplish any of more than 30 missions based on real events. Perform well, and you'll be able to unlock even more planes, including the feared Japanese Zero. Heroes is also heavy on the multiplayer component, supporting online, split-screen, and LAN play for all of its five modes – including co-op single-player missions. Stay with us for more as it becomes available, and get ready to grab your flight stick this winter when Encore releases Heroes.

XBOX | PC

Pariah

Developer Digital Extremes is known almost exclusively for their work on the delightful Unreal series, but now a new franchise is on the way, entitled Pariah. Details are scarce, but we do know that it's an FPS and is built using the latest revision of the Unreal engine from Epic Games. Also, in a move away from their previous work on Unreal Tournament, Digital Extremes is apparently committed to delivering a strong single-player experience with elements of survival among the running and gunning. We don't even know a release date yet, but given DE's track record, this is one to watch.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

The Nightmare Before Christmas: The Pumpkin King

Tim Burton fans unite! The quirky character of Jack Skellington is back from the grave to star in a new GBA title from Buena Vista. The story seems to be an origin tale of sorts, detailing the rise of Jack to the throne of Halloweentown. Gameplay looks to be side-scrolling action, but there should also be a healthy dose of puzzles and booby traps to liven up this undead king's adventure. You can also expect some carnival-themed multiplayer mini-games. Here's hoping this tale of the dead lives up to its movie namesake. Not surprisingly, you should find this title in stores next October.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC | GAME BOY ADVANCE

Need For Speed Underground 2

This fall, EA Games is taking us back to the world of illegal street racing with Need For Speed Underground 2. The sequel to 2003's hot racing title will feature new game modes, more than 30 licensed cars, and so many visual customization options that there will be 70 billion possible car combinations. That's right, 70 billion. We haven't seen a number that high since we had our cholesterol checked. On top of these slick features, races will now take place in free-roaming cities. Woohoo! It's like Grand Theft Auto, but with cars. Wait a minute...

PC

Soldiers: Heroes of World War II

If RTS titles until now have turned you off because of their fairly similar styles of play, Codemasters' Soldiers: Heroes of World War II might give you a reason to take another look at the genre. The variety of action available, from full-scale combined arms assaults to on-foot nighttime infiltrations, bodes well for the success of this title. Couple that with the ability to take direct control of one of your troops and run around with FPS-style controls, and it certainly seems that all of the content that war junkies could want is there. Oh, and there are five multiplayer modes to complement the four single-player campaigns. So, provided that all of these various facets of the game make a cohesive whole, gamers of many stripes will have their hands joyfully full come Soldiers' release in June.

PLAYSTATION 2

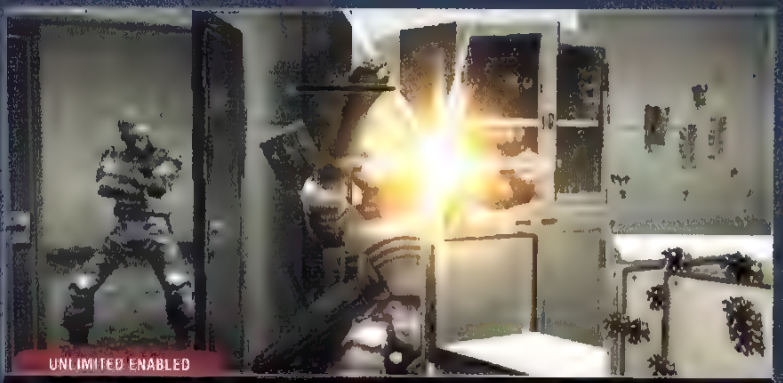
Ghost Hunter

Who you gonna call? Ghost Hunter! In the new PS2 title from developer Sony Computer Entertainment Studios Cambridge and publisher Namco due out in August, you play as professional parapsychologist Egon Spengler...oh wait, we're thinking of something else. You actually play as rookie cop Lazarus Jones, who has merged with a ghost, allowing him to see the dead. With a vast array of ghost-busting weapons, you must fight evil spirits in order to free your partner and save the world. Hmm...ghost busting. That sounds like a good idea. Why hasn't someone thought of that before?

PLAYSTATION 2

Inuyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask

This feudal anime already got the Bandai treatment in Inuyasha: A Feudal Fairy Tale (released in April 2003), but The Secret of the Cursed Mask looks to be a must-have for fans of the series shown on Cartoon Network in the States. Featuring original characters and cutscenes created exclusively for the game by show creator Rumiko Takahashi, the title will hit store shelves this fall exclusively for the PS2. Curiously for an RPG, completing the game will unlock secret areas for players to explore.



PLAYSTATION 2

Time Crisis: Crisis Zone

Who likes shootin'? Come on, you know you do. That's why Namco is bringing you another Time Crisis game this September. In Time Crisis: Crisis Zone for your PS2, you'll notice unprecedented environmental interaction (glass can be shattered, CDs can be blown off shelves, cloth can be burned, etc.), new weapons, and more. But the coolest new feature is the dual gun mode in which players with two GunCon 2s can wield one in each hand, John Woo style. Remember, any time you use both hands at the same time, it's officially called "John Woo style." Grab a slice of pumpkin pie in each hand and start shoving them both in your mouth. Now you're eating John Woo style!

PLAYSTATION 2

Karaoke Revolution Volume 2

In the tradition of sequels, Konami's Karaoke Revolution 2 will offer just one thing more. Thirty-five new tracks, seven new characters, three new venues, more than 30 new outfits, and dozens of unlockables will be included with one more gameplay option. The Medley Mode lets up to eight players link five song clips that will be played in quick succession -- mix up the new tracks like "Friends in Low Places" and "I Will Survive" to throw off your buddies. Look for the title in July of this year.

PLAYSTATION 2

Sega Super Stars

Just when you thought that the EyeToy would go the way of the dodo, developers have embraced this novelty device, and it appears as though it will be around for years to come. Out of the EyeToy software we've seen thus far, Sega's is easily the most intriguing. Featuring the company's most familiar faces from such games as Sonic, House of the Dead, Super Monkey Ball, and Virtua Fighter, the game will feature roughly 15 minigames with gameplay that fits the theme. Sega Super Stars is developed by Sonic Team and is scheduled to ship in the fall.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

ESPN NHL 2005

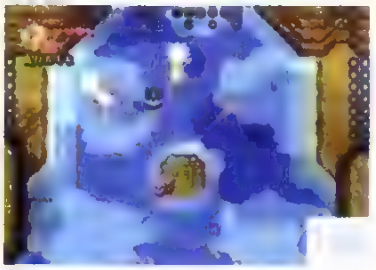
If Todd Bertuzzi does indeed get banned from the NHL for life, he can get his frustration out with the forthcoming release of ESPN NHL 2005. Set to ship this fall, fighting is the name of the game. Using a number of different techniques, players can bait opponents into a brawl, then beat them senseless with grapples, jabs, and uppercuts. New checks, defensive maneuvers, and board play are also included. ESPN is also promising that the Franchise mode, which now boasts a minor league system, will be the deepest in any sports game.

REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

Hitman: Contracts

Onimusha 3: Demon Siege



The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures

RalliSport Challenge 2

GAME OF THE MONTH

Onimusha 3: Demon Siege

To all great things there comes an end. In this final installment in the Onimusha trilogy, Samanosuke's journey concludes in the most spectacular of ways. With Hollywood-caliber production values, magnificent action, and visuals that leap off the screen with the utmost realism, this is the ultimate send off to one of the PlayStation 2's most well-received series. For all of the details, flip to page 126.

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

THE SCORING SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

> **Replay Value**

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

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

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

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

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

Painkiller

Shining Force

Painkiller

Do you feel like dealing with control points, inventories, or squads is a bit too much thinking to have to do in an FPS? Well, Painkiller chucks all that and gets up in your face with some incredibly polished, fast-paced, and ridiculously violent demon-slaying action. Oh, and did we mention that it's one of the best-looking games ever released, period? Check out the word on the first title from People Can Fly on page 134.

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the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The [illegible] form games. So whenever you see the logo, there is important [illegible] motion regarding that product.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CG – Computer generated graphics

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

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

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

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

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GBC – Game Boy Color

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

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

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

jaggies – Rough edges that are visible when they should be straight

LAN – Local area network. Connecting computers in the same physical space to play games against each other. Provides faster play than playing online

minigame – A small, simple game within a larger one

motion-capture – Using human models and sensors to record movement for game animation

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

N64 – Nintendo 64

NES – Nintendo Entertainment System

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

Parfaizer – A term we use for exaggerated awesomeness. Usually involves blowing a player part on its target. Just aim and fire.

particle effects – Things like smoke or sparks

PKer – Player Killer. Those people who play MMORPGs or shooters like Counter-Strike and intentionally kill their teammates in order to annoy them

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

pop-up – When onscreen objects, usually distant scenery, 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 leveling 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

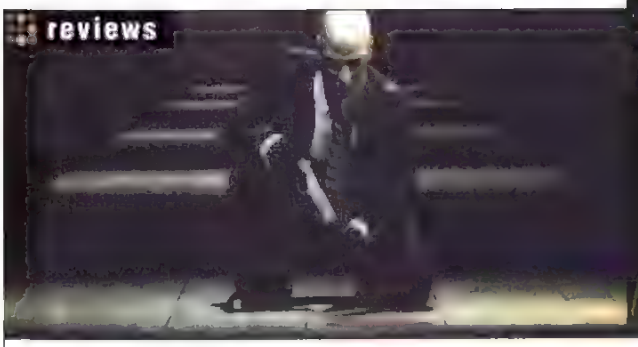
SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL

strategy – A term we use for games like Command & Conquer and Advance Wars

third-party – Software made for a console by a company that does not manufacture that console

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



Agent 47 can once again don the outfits of fallen adversaries

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Hitman: Contracts

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** IO INTERACTIVE
> **RELEASE** APRIL 21 > **ESRB** M

A BULLET TO THE HEAD

With a body count that doubles on each passing day, it was only a matter of time before Agent 47 cracked. In this third installment in the Hitman series, IO Interactive is inviting players to step into the mind of this ruthless contract killer and experience his mental anguish firsthand. Within the first few seconds the game, players bear witness to Agent 47 collapsing to the floor and losing consciousness. This spurs an interactive dream sequence set within a mental institution (which may seem familiar to those of you who played through the previous two titles). As Agent 47 fades in and out of consciousness, many of the stages that you will traverse represent a different memory in his tormented mind. Taking a stroll down memory lane, you'll perform the hits that shaped him into the hard-hearted killing machine that he is today.

Invading Agent 47's brain is a clever idea that does help flesh out the character to a certain degree, but I had an incredibly difficult time following the plotline. As clichéd as the previous two stories were, you couldn't help but fall in love with the events at hand. In this game, each passing second brought greater disinterest and a longing for the game to lose the artistic storytelling and get back to a hackneyed motion picture plot.

The delivery of Agent 47's exploits is just the tip of the iceberg concerning material that doesn't sit well. Regarding gameplay, IO has made significant strides to open it up and grant players greater freedom of choice. No longer are you railroaded into using just one technique to perform a hit. You can usually find two or three methods that will work. While I did get a kick out of watching Agent 47 put someone down with a syringe to the neck or a pillow to the face, I mostly relied on running and gunning to clear out areas. The first-person element works much better this time around (although the gun graphics are still quite appalling), and your foes usually don't show the greatest of intelligence when they lay down an assault. You can usually lead them into a trap, and within seconds, have a pile of six or seven guards at your feet. Of course, the option to sneak through every stage undetected is still there, but you are rarely forced to duck out of sight.

"Without being coerced into using a specific technique, you just feel lost in Contracts' massive levels."

Without being coerced into using a specific technique, you just feel lost in Contracts' massive levels. You'll often find yourself wandering aimlessly looking for the needle in the haystack that will complete the next objective. There really aren't any tense situations, calculated hits, or elements of surprise this time around.

Making the gameplay less linear really threw a kink in the chemistry that worked so well in the first two games. All told, Contracts is an ambitious release for IO, but the end result is a garbled mess of a game that has lost its way.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Learn how Agent 47 became a contract killer through slightly confusing storytelling, and missions that are not nearly as taxing

> **Graphics:** The environment detailing and realism in the character models is outstanding, but the first person gun graphics are downright appalling

> **Sound:** The soundtrack and ambient noises are implemented brilliantly and add punch to the experience

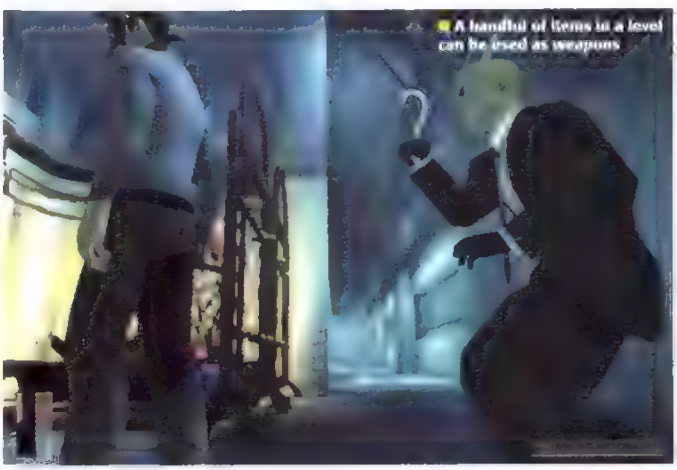
> **Playability:** Not nearly as demanding of skill. Running and gunning usually works best

> **Entertainment:** Easily the worst entry in the series. It no longer has that killer hook

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7.5

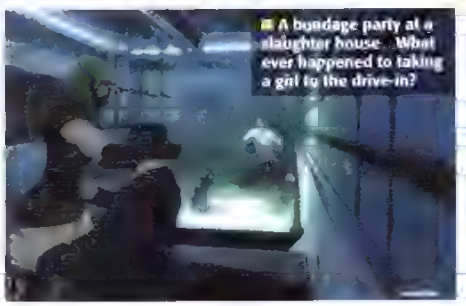
Hitman 2 was a refreshing addition to the stealth game canon, and a wildly popular console hit. However, it was a fairly linear adventure, forcing you to use a ton of trial-and-error and quick saving as you deliberately made your way through the levels laden with soon-to-be-deceased enemies. Hitman: Contracts seeks to give you more freedom, and in doing so largely loses what made the game compelling in the first place. In the opening level, you'll quickly learn that even if you blow your cover and alert the guards, it's easier to shoot your way out of a tight spot in the improved first-person view than it is to be stealthy. Also, given that it's hard to discern where you have to go to complete certain level goals, you often end up wandering around, randomly picking off enemies instead of plotting a devious course to success. In this sequel, Hitman feels less like a great stealth title than a mediocre shooter with a few cool gadgets and abilities.—**MATT**



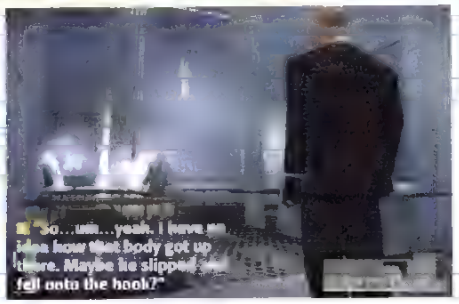
A handful of items in a level can be used as weapons

"You can keep the guns, sir. Just hand over that hideous red tie."

"I can't believe you freaks still have your Christmas lights up. It's May! This is one hit that I will take pleasure in."



A bondage party at a slaughter house... What ever happened to taking a girl to the drive-in?



"So...um...yeah. I have no idea how that body got up there. Maybe he slipped and fell onto the hook?"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Ribbit King

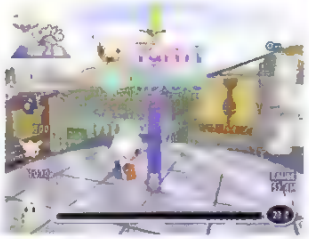
> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** BANDAI
> **RELEASE** JUNE 8 > **ESRB** E

I AM THE RIBBIT KING, I CAN DO ANYTHING!

Ribbit King, a truly twisted title that creates a new sport called Frolf (which is, basically, golfing with frogs instead of balls), is yet another game aimed at hardcore devotees of Japanese whimsy. You know who you are: You've beaten Rez 18 times You've written your own arrangements of the music in Gitaroo-Man for string quartet and woodwinds. On your left shoulder is a Mister Mosquito tattoo. I can almost imagine you interrupting me right now, whispering, "Matt, don't speak. You had me at Frolf." [cue tears and sappy music]

The rest of you might want to consider the decision to buy Ribbit King a little more carefully. While the basic mechanics are that of a simplified golf game (with a rudimentary two-click swing), the real meat of the Ribbit King experience comes from exploring the strange "gimmicks" strewn throughout each course. These include spiderwebs that can bounce your frog further distances, giant snakes that shake you in their jaws until you jiggle the analog stick to break free, or even conveyor belts that take frogs to otherwise inaccessible platforms. Much of your score depends on mastering these gimmick combos, which earn you big points (often more than getting the frog in the hole). This makes for an odd brand of play, but often the gimmicks are too random in effect to really allow for strategy. Many times, you'll hit what looks like a bum shot, only to be whisked through an unforeseen sequence of gimmicks that place you right up to the hole. While it's certainly amusing, after a time the heavy reliance on gimmicks felt, well, kind of gimmicky.

After the novelty is gone, it's an adequate, if goofy, golf title with passable technical execution. The camera system and graphics engine certainly won't win any awards (there are definitely times when the poor camera and overhead view make it difficult to aim – especially on the futuristic levels), but I guess that's not really the point. All in all, this feels like a stand-alone game that would have done better as a cool Mario Golf minigame mode.—**MATT**



BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **Concept:** Frolf: where sport and amphibious life meet!

> **Graphics:** A charming art style makes the ho-hum graphics somewhat irrelevant

> **Sound:** Yippie-skippy-synthy-plinky-Casio-doo-de-dah

> **Playability:** I think a three-click swing would have made this a little more interesting, but it's solid overall

> **Entertainment:** Japanophiles, cute-fetishists. Reserve your copy now. Everybody else: Rent it

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

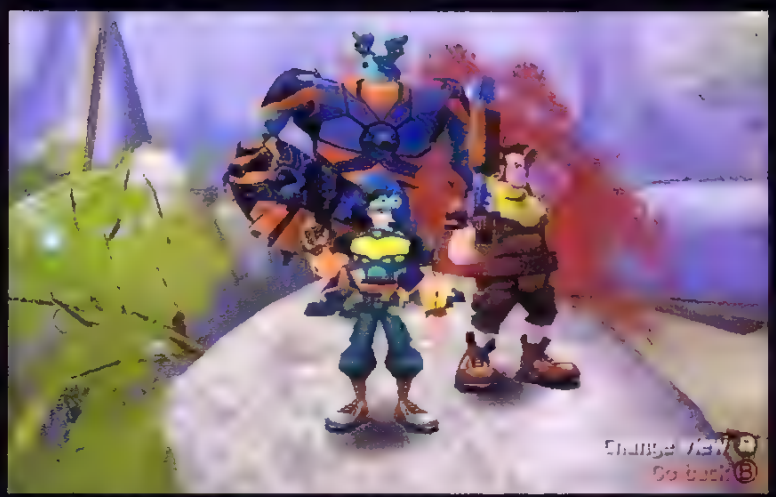
Second Opinion 7.5

As much as I dug this goofy little game, it's certainly not going to appeal to a wide audience. It's too basic and odd to strike a chord with mainstream gamers. But those who like their games heavy on Japanese flavor will definitely be pleased with this strange golf title. It looks a little bit sharper on the GameCube than on the PS2, but it's a bizarrely fun time on either system, and the unlockable cartoons on the bonus disc are a hoot. Yep, it's definitely as odd as it sounds, but if that's your thing (I know it's mine), then you'll have a blast with this title. —**JEREMY**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Future Tactics: The Uprising

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** CRAVE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** WARTHOG
> **RELEASE** MAY 4 > **ESRB** T



TIME FOR A TACTICAL RETREAT

Future Tactics started out on a good note with me at first because it reminded of two games that I enjoy: Worms and Final Fantasy Tactics. It was also refreshing to see a game trying new things, mixing turn-based strategy with platforming elements and massively destructible environments. Unfortunately, things went sour quickly when it became clear that none of these innovative features came together well, resulting in a smoking wreck of ideas that should have been fun.

The game's premise is pretty basic: a small group of good guys fight off an overwhelming alien force. Despite the simple setup, Future Tactics is surprisingly difficult, but not in that good "this game is challenging my strategic combat skills" kind of way. The monsters are overpowered, can communicate telepathically (which means if one sees you, they all do), and often respawn once they are destroyed. On the other hand, your characters are few, weak, and the death of a single one can mean game over. The result is numerous frustrating losses rooted in poor game balance rather than tactics.

Don't expect these problems to be lessened at all depending on which version you play; there are essentially no differences among the three. Even though the Xbox version is Xbox Live aware, there are no features that allow you to play against friends online. This means that Future Tactics is an identically mundane experience across the board. However, it does have a tempting $20 price tag, so if you really enjoy turn-based strategy and want to see an interesting new take on the genre, this could be worth a look.—**JOE**

The aliens ready the disco cannon

BOTTOM LINE **5.25**

> **Concept:** Turn-based strategy meets generic 3D action

> **Graphics:** They are either overly stylized, or just plain bad. The character models are pretty cool, though

> **Sound:** The thick British accents add some character to an otherwise unremarkable soundtrack

> **Playability:** There is no way to tell when you're entering an enemy's line of sight, leading to a lot of trial and error

> **Entertainment:** Despite its cartoony presentation, it is really too frustrating to enjoy

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 4.75

As much as I enjoy turn-based strategy games, I really couldn't find anything to like about Future Tactics. The aiming system was conceptually interesting, but adjusting the floating reticle quickly grew so tiring that I stopped going for perfect shots, and was left with a wholly unappealing gaming mess. The graphics can only be described as awful, missions are boring, and combat ranges from dull to frustrating. The enemy AI is terrible, as is the fact that losing one unit can end the game. Other than the price, Future Tactics has nothing to offer.—**JEREMY**

For each kill that you record, you'll earn cash that can be used to purchase new guns, upgrades, and multiplayer [illegible] and maps

Each of the six playable characters can tap into a Bullet Time-like technique. Here, Red demonstrates his multi-targeting

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Red Dead Revolver

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
> **RELEASE** MAY 4 > **ESRB** M

DARN-TOOTIN'

Drawing inspiration from Sergio Leone's classic spaghetti westerns and Clint Eastwood's hard-boiled, serape-clad performances, Red Dead Revolver stands tall with a conceptual basis that the video game industry has not vested a lot of interest in, yet many have yearned for. There are few things sweeter in this world than getting the opportunity to step into the boots of the pale rider and the quickest gun in the west. This is essentially what Red Dead Revolver offers.

All of the staples that we've come to recognize from films of this ilk (even the horse operas) are included in some fashion. You'll ride horseback and leap onto a runaway train, exchange fisticuffs in a bar brawl, and stare death in the eye in a high noon showdown. Thematically, developer Rockstar San Diego has hit the nail right on the head. You really do feel like the toughest cowboy to ever step foot in the west. Grainy graphical filters and era-specific camera effects are also used to make the cutscenes feel like the films that this game pays tribute to. Continuing its streak of wowing gamers with brilliant soundtracks that perfectly accompany the atmosphere of the game, Rockstar has decked this game out with an incredible selection of songs reminiscent of spaghetti western master Ennio Morricone.

While it sounds like the perfect game up until this point, Red Dead Revolver has a hobble in its strut when it comes to the delivery of gameplay. Granted, you will find yourself smiling wryly at the outrageous missions and scenarios that you'll get yourself into, but you never really feel like you have your feet firmly under you. Each mission comes and goes at such a rapid pace that I will go out on a limb and say that the game doesn't necessarily have levels, but moreover pockets of intense action. In this regard, it's all about the big moment and payoff. Exploration is limited and the environments are usually fairly small. The same goes for the delivery of playable characters. You'll spend most of your time as Red, but will control five other characters throughout your quest. Each one has a different attack and Bullet Time-esque special move. Again, however, you play as this character for 30 seconds to a minute, then move on. I just never really felt a connection with the characters or their surroundings.

As you would expect, the majority of gameplay is dedicated to running around and blowing vermin to kingdom come. The execution of this is commendable, and is very much in line with the Max Paynes of the world. Although just split-screen, multiplayer is surprisingly addictive and loaded to the hilt with extras that players can unlock throughout the game with cash earned along the way.

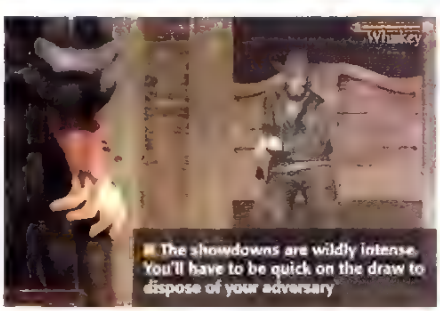
I really enjoyed the time I spent with this title, yet walked away wishing that it had a little bit more meat on its bones. If you find satisfaction in mindless action games in the tradition of Max Payne, you'll surely get your fill with Red Dead Revolver. —**REINER**

Multiplayer is overflowing with characters and fast-paced firefights

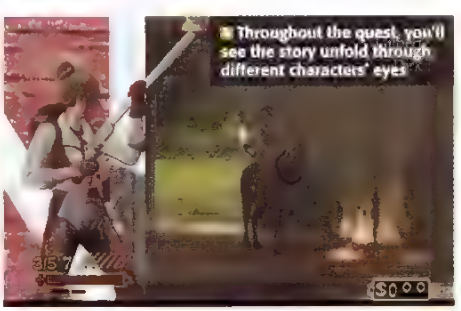
the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

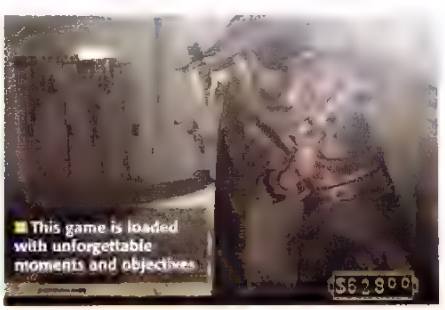
The Xbox version puts a bullet right between the eyes of the PlayStation 2. Not only does it run at 60Hz (twice the framerate of the PS2), it features 480p widescreen, twice the sound memory (on the PS2 you'll hear up to three ricochet sounds, whereas on Xbox you'll hear upwards of six to nine), and double the texture resolution. With hard drive caching the game loads twice as fast, as well. As if the technical edge wasn't enough of a reason to invest in the Xbox version, it's also Live Aware, and comes packaged with an exclusive multiplayer level (the Coliseum). Without the slightest hint of doubt, the Xbox version gets The Edge.



The showdowns are wildly intense. You'll have to be quick on the draw to dispose of your adversary



Throughout the quest, you'll see the story unfold through different characters' eyes



This game is loaded with unforgettable moments and objectives

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> **Concept:** Clean up the west as a merciless cowboy in this heavily influenced spaghetti western game

> **Graphics:** The character models are not the most detailed, but the environments look nice and I love the camerawork

> **Sound:** A remarkable soundtrack lures players into the vibe of the west

> **Playability:** Unnaturally short levels and satisfactory run and gun action

> **Entertainment:** The stages should have been longer, but replay is abundant in the number of unlockables and enjoyable multiplayer

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

Buck up, cowpokes. All y'all cowboys that been hankerin' for a good ole fashioned western, you best get ready to draw. Red Dead Revolver is without a doubt one of the finest titles to tap the often barren landscape of old west games. With a straight flush of soaring production values, the game offers a completely immersive gallop through the sights and sounds of an old cowboy flick. Chapters are short and fast paced, with a remarkable variety of challenges. Anything you've ever seen in a western movie you'll see here, from the duel at high noon to the high speed train robbery to the sleazy saloon girls. You are constantly unlocking new game features, which helps to drive the action forward. Combat is definitely more stylistic than it is technically perfect. The gun targeting system is generally well implemented, but frustrating at times – particularly with fast moving opponents. But if the old west strikes your fancy, I reckon you'd be a coot not to pony up the cash and take a shot at Red Dead Revolver. —**MILLER**

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PLAYSTATION 2

Onimusha 3: Demon Siege

GAME OF THE MONTH

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** APRIL 27 > **ESRB** M

SAVE THE BEST FOR LAST

The close of a trilogy is a touchy thing. Miramax's slasher pic *Scream 3* highlighted the role of each part: Chapter one sets the rules. Chapter two bends the rules. And chapter three throws them all out the window in favor of taking the story full circle.

Which brings us to the third part of the Onimusha trilogy, subtly titled Demon Siege. In the first of many switches from the franchise's usual MO, there are three playable characters – Jean Reno's Jaques, the first Onimusha's Samanosuke, and Parisian military woman Michelle. Each offers wildly different play mechanics, and this coupled with the game's time warp storyline (more on that later) offers needed variety to a survival horror franchise that was never really know for its fear factor.

Each character will upgrade their weapons and skills through the course of the game (much less so for Michelle, as she's playable for far less of the game than the other two) in the usual fashion – collecting souls. Without a combo-laden combat system, Demon Siege relies heavily on timing and strategy to master each of the three warriors. This mechanic is very reminiscent of Enter the Matrix for two reasons: minimal button presses result in onscreen action that looks very, very cool. Two, the timing of action is far more crucial than combos. The difference is that Demon Siege is just a much better game – the enemies offer more variety, the control is more precise, and the elemental weaponry is extremely varied.

While some action hardcores will likely fault the game for its simple control scheme, most will appreciate it for the satisfaction it brings to the screen. Kicking a demon away so you have better range with the Ball and Chain of Doom (my name for it, not the game's) is quite cool, after all. Just keep in mind that plot and combat play equal roles in the Onimusha universe, and each are doled out fairly.

On the story side of things, Demon Siege has that dual time period hook. How well is the idea executed? Well, Paris really looks like Paris; and without being able to experience feudal Japan firsthand, all I can say is that it looks beautiful in the game. The plot unfolds at a lightning pace and requires players to use one character (in one time period) to do something, which has an effect on the other character (in the other time period). Switching frequently, the game's pace is so well crafted that there are few places that seem to be a pause – you'll always want to do that next thing.

What I really like about this game is that I always felt like I was getting a new weapon, going to a new area, or fighting a new boss (most of which are ferociously tough, by the way). There was no drag for me. That, and kicking Genma butt made me look badass. Personally, I wouldn't want anything else for my favorite samurai/horror sendoff.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Craft a compelling, edge-of-your seat action game to conclude the Onimusha series

> **Graphics:** 3D backgrounds don't mean that players have camera control, but it does mean that everything looks really great

> **Sound:** The score alternates between totally inspired and super cheesy – but it does fit the game

> **Playability:** Timing is the key to success and I rarely felt robbed, so it did what it was supposed to

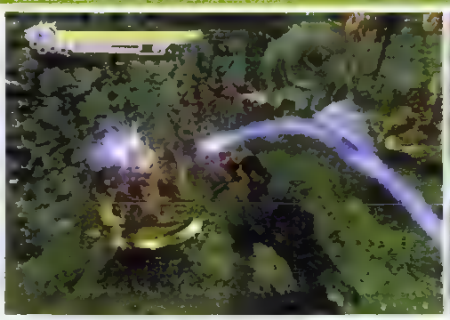
> **Entertainment:** Demon Siege is one of the most cinematic games to date, and I soaked up every second gratefully

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.25

The final chapter of the Onimusha trilogy radiates excitement and is the very definition of epic. The opening CG cinematic is so detailed and explosive that I wouldn't be surprised if George Lucas started handing out pink slips to the ILM crew. I know this clip is only a few minutes in length, but it is worth the price of admission alone. Further justifying that you absolutely need to add this title to your library, the gameplay is equally exquisite and is brimming with non-stop intensity. The methods with which you dispose of your assailants remain simplistic and true to the series. Plus, the battles are much larger in scope, the pacing of levels is relentless, and the visuals that you breathe in are all the more majestic. This truly is game development at its finest. While I would have liked to see more interaction in the environments, and depth in the combat, I really couldn't ask for a better conclusion to one of the PlayStation 2's finest series.—**REINER**

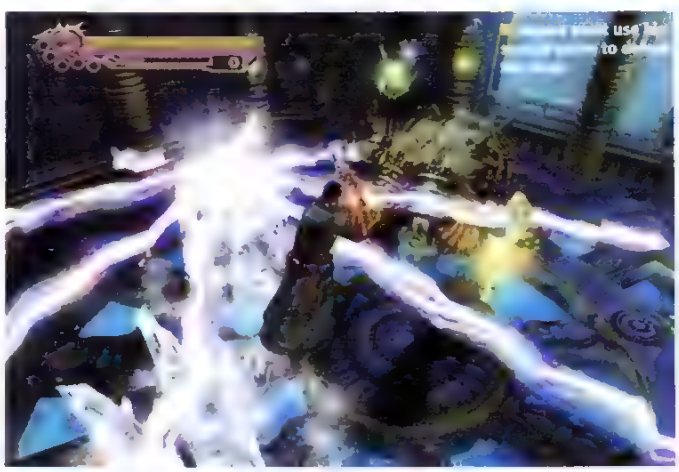
ARMING THE WARRIORS



Here, Jaques is modeling the latest in brain-squishing weaponry

Samanosuke makes liquid hot magma with his third weapon, the great axe

Michelle lays the smack down with her handy grenade launcher

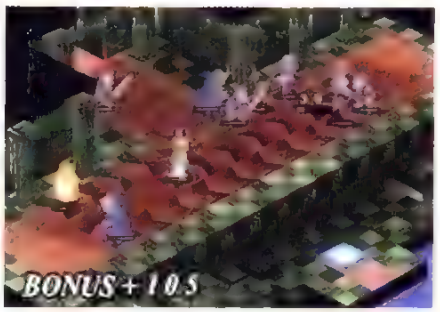


Michelle gets an intense battle in Paris

PLAYSTATION 2

La Pucelle: Tactics

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** MASTIFF LLC > **DEVELOPER** NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE INC. > **RELEASE** MAY 4 > **ESRB** RATING PENDING



TACTICALLY IMPRESSIVE, GRAPHICALLY CHALLENGED

After the success of Disgaea last year, Nippon Ichi eagerly prepared another of its Japanese tactical jewels for stateside release. The result is an incredibly deep gaming experience that you could easily pour dozens and dozens of hours into. The real disappointment is the alarmingly ancient-looking graphics. Just because the game is set in the Middle Ages, it doesn't mean the game needs to look like it was made back then as well. Though the hand-drawn backgrounds that fill La Pucelle have their own unique beauty, you still find yourself wondering if you didn't play this on a console about three generations ago.

The game relates the tale of a young girl and her little brother (who you might confuse as a little sister for the first few hours of play), that have begun their careers as demon hunters for the local Goddess Church. They unwittingly become embroiled in a world-altering story of betrayal and redemption, while simultaneously coming to terms with the childhood death of their parents. Amid the slapstick jokes and anime innuendo, there is a moving portrayal of characters dealing with their own broken lives.

The majority of gameplay is spent on a rectangular grid of squares. Your success against the relentless enemies depends on myriad variables including elevation, character orientation, proximity of allies, and position on the field. The game is further deepened by the immensely sweet ability to make the enemies defect to your party. By purifying foes of their dark essence, they will reappear on your team once you defeat them. This means that you can slowly build up a party composed of all sorts of different little beasties to command. Perhaps the most complex strategy involves the purifying of dark portals, from whence enemies continuously emerge. By doing so, you send out a shockwave of elemental power that can damage enemies or heal allies. All of that combined makes for a game that is intensely difficult to survive, and nearly impossible to truly master.

Ultimately, this title hits its big snag in the graphics department. What can I say? The animation is simplistic. Unmoving pictures thrown up on screen are somehow meant to pass for special effects. Detail is woefully lacking. The saving grace is the stylistic success of many of the hand-drawn images that permeate the landscape.

With that said, La Pucelle is an engrossing play that has the potential to kidnap you from family and friends for many a week. Its balanced strategic gameplay is only matched by its tremendous challenge. If you can look beyond its dated visuals, this little maiden might be just the girl for you.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Mix a disillusioned young girl with deep, engaging, strategy. Throw in a touch of anime humor. Stir, and serve.

> **Graphics:** Did someone just say PSone?

> **Sound:** Pretty standard RPG fare on the music. Surprisingly excellent voice acting.

> **Playability:** Easy to pick up, a monster to master.

> **Entertainment:** With a plethora of customization options, multiple endings, and endless recruitable party members, it's well worth your time.

> **Replay Value:** High.

Second Opinion 8.75

Developer Nippon Ichi has a tall order to fill in trying to make a title as charming and strategically deep as its 2003 opus Disgaea. Good news for everybody, then, that La Pucelle brings as much innovation and polish as its predecessor. This title's crowning achievement, though, is the learning curve. While it's easy (as far as strategy games go) to grasp the basics and get up and running on your quest, you could easily put a hundred hours into this title and still have things left to discover. This is as good an introduction to the genre as any, and an absolute delight to any fan of tactical RPGs.—**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 2

Front Mission 4

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT DIVISION 6 > **RELEASE** JUNE > **ESRB** T

LOVE STRATEGY? LOVE MECHS? READ THIS!

Considering the pedigree of the series, the publisher, and how much I enjoyed Front Mission 3 on PSone, Front Mission 4 is a disappointment on just about every level. It's a shame too, as the opening movie features wanzers (this series' version of the classic mech) battling it out in a ballet of death that got my strategy RPG juices flowing.

Unfortunately, the game isn't as exciting as its opening cinema. The story follows the tale of two wanzer pilots – Elsa and Darril. The game opens with Elsa as she investigates an attack on several German bases, then it shifts to Darril and his team in South America. Not a bad tale, but nothing you haven't heard before.

The same can be said for the gameplay as well. Front Mission 4 is a fairly basic strategy game from beginning to end. There are some nice touches however, including the ability to vastly customize your mechs, and a brand new Link System lets the player sync wanzers together so that you can unleash multiple attacks in a single round of combat.

Overall, the game moves fairly slow and the combat is not nearly as deep as it could have been. Combine the mediocre gameplay with the sub-par graphics and campy story, and you can begin to see why Front Mission 4 is a bit of a disappointment. If you love giant robots, there is a good twenty hours of gameplay here, so this game isn't without its merits.—**ANDY**

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Watch floating heads tell a story while you wage strategic battle with giant robots.

> **Graphics:** For a company like Square Enix, the graphics are surprisingly low-budget.

> **Sound:** From the voice acting to the battle music, no word fits better than "adequate."

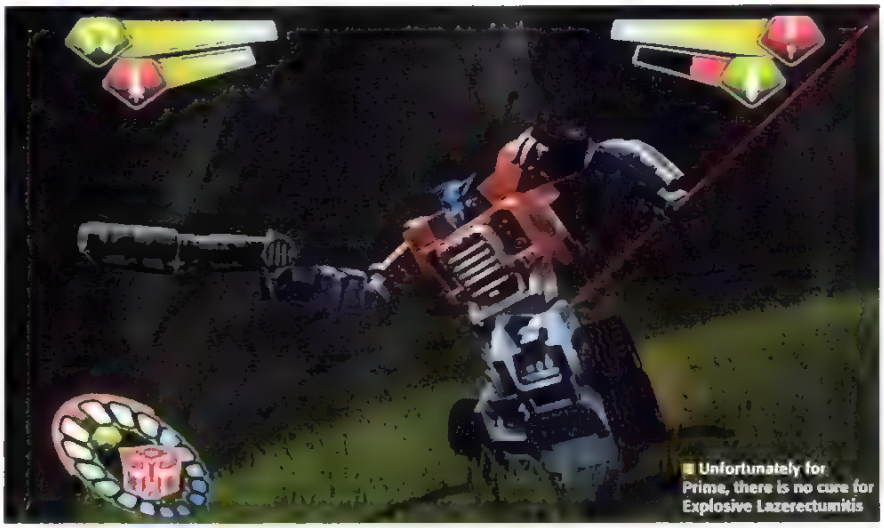
> **Playability:** Considering how deep strategy games have become, this is disappointedly shallow.

> **Entertainment:** The story, battles, and overall production values fall far short of expectations.

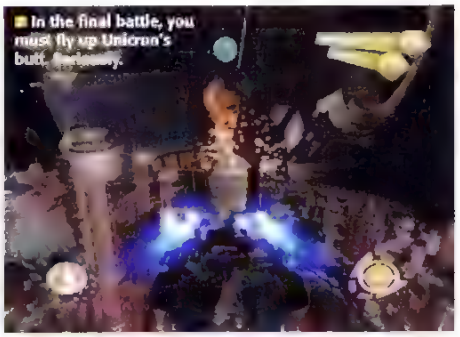
> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low.

Second Opinion 7.75

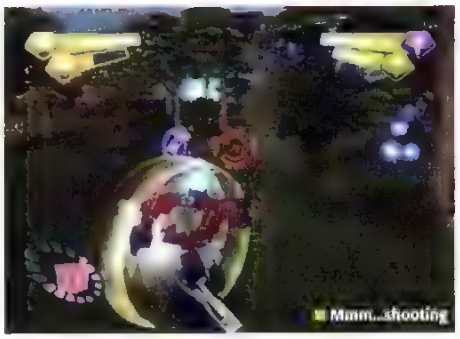
Even for being a turn-based tactical RPG, Front Mission 4 starts off awfully slow. Barring the intense opening cinema, the first three or so hours alternate between painful and lame. After that, FM 4 quickly becomes an engaging tactical RPG, though the graphics will never wow you and most everything that happens outside of combat is tedious and boring. Except for character development, that is – the new Link system adds an extra layer of strategy and keeps gameplay fresh. The nice RPG elements and challenging battles make FM 4 worth any strategy gamer's time.—**ADAM**



Unfortunately for Prime, there is no cure for Explosive Lazerectumitis



In the final battle, you must fly up Unicron's butt. Seriously.



Mmm...shooting

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Transformers

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** MELBOURNE HOUSE > **RELEASE** MAY 11 > **ESRB** T

LESS THAN MEETS THE EYE

As soon as Transformers fans see this score, the hate mail will begin. To them I say "Save it." You guys will absolutely adore this game. So don't waste your time telling me how much I suck (I already know), and go play this game. You'll be glad you did. Those who aren't hopelessly devoted to this franchise, on the other hand, won't be quite as enamored. It's certainly not a bad game – in fact, I'd say this could be the start of what is potentially a very good series – but it makes too many missteps to truly appeal to a wider audience.

But before I get into what this title does wrong, let's talk about what it does right. First off, the graphics simply rock. The stages are incredible to look at, and the Transformers themselves are just as impressive. The first stage, the Amazon, is one of the best-looking environments I've ever seen on the PS2, and the others are nearly as good. There are a few bland elements, such as the Decepticlones, but none of the visuals are at all bad. The look is great all around.

I also really liked…well, the graphics are the only thing I really liked. Having only three playable Autobots was a bummer, especially since I found no reason to play as anyone except Optimus Prime, as he felt the most balanced. The gameplay let me down in just about every way possible. Combat is repetitive and boring, the controls are goofy, and the rewards you earn simply aren't that rewarding.

In each stage, you'll face the same generic robots (who are actually pretty tough – even on the lowest difficulty level, this is a pretty hard game) in some very familiar third-person action. Run around, shoot the bad guys, and pick up the health power-ups they drop. It's standard stuff, and it would be second nature to play if the control scheme weren't so weird. It uses all four of the shoulder buttons, but the face buttons are virtually forgotten. Even on the last stage, I still hadn't completely adjusted to hitting L1 to jump.

Finally, the Mini-Con system, which is the basis of the entire game, also left a lot to be desired. As you progress through the stages, you'll discover Mini-Cons: little robots that can be equipped for additional powers. Only four can be equipped at one time, and they all have different power requirements, so your best (and most power-consuming) Mini-Cons can never all be equipped at the same time, and certain ones can only be used in particular slots. I would have liked to have had certain Mini-Cons grant permanent attribute bonuses; the enemies you face (especially the bosses) get tougher and tougher, and you really don't. Those that do increase your defenses typically have to be left behind in order to equip those that are essential to completing your mission.

> **"…makes too many missteps to truly appeal to a wider audience."**

Every time I started to enjoy Transformers, it did something to let me down. But I still have a lot of faith that it could grow into a great series. This title has plenty of flaws, but the main issue is that it's simply too typical and too clunky. By embracing what is so cool about the franchise, this series could really grow into something special. Consider this not a failed game, just a rocky start.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Everyone's favorite shape-shifting robots are back in an adventure that ties into the recent *Armada* cartoon

> **Graphics:** The environments are amazing, and the character models are sharp and detailed

> **Sound:** Meh. Not even the once-cool transforming sound is that impressive here

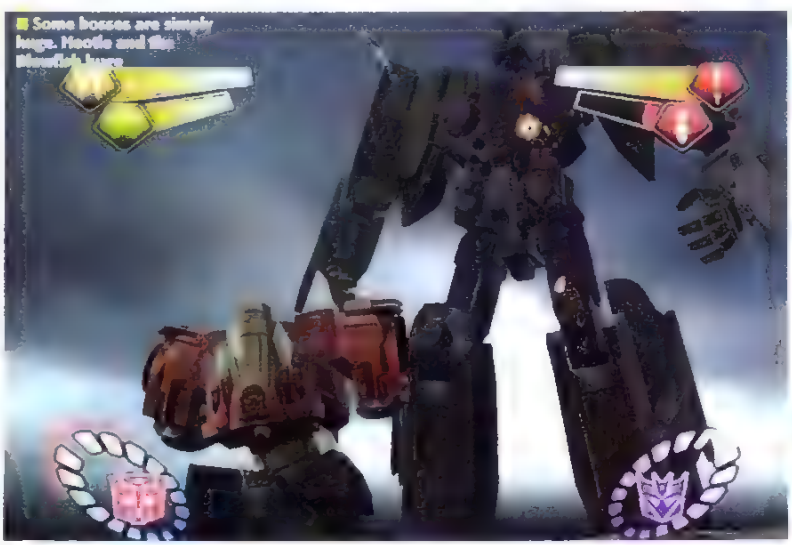
> **Playability:** The wacky default control scheme cannot be remapped and is hard to get used to no matter how long you play

> **Entertainment:** The cool license isn't enough to overcome the so-so gameplay, making this one for fans only

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 7

I had hoped that in my lifetime I would never have occasion to say "Optimus Prime is a fragile pansy." Unfortunately, I found myself repeating this phrase time and time again as he was blasted, punched, and hammer-thrown across all creation. Even without this inherent conceptual flaw, there are still some serious problems in the gameplay department that keep Transformers from reaching its potential. The controls are clunky, the objectives unclear, and the boss battles frustrating, making this nothing more than your average action title. However, I was amazed by how great the game looked – the cutscenes in particular are gorgeous. Plus, the ability to transform at will between vehicle and robot form lends itself to some cool moments. Maybe I even whispered "transform and roll out" to myself once or twice. Maybe.—**JOE**



Some bosses are simply huge. Hootie and the Blowfish huge

The cutscenes look awesome

PLAYSTATION 2

Corvette

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE > **DEVELOPER** STEEL MONKEYS > **RELEASE** MARCH 9 > **ESRB** E

DON'T GET THIS 'VETTE

Despite the fact that this game is officially licensed to show off Corvettes, it definitely isn't a good advertisement for the car. This title's arcade-style racing is so anonymous that it completely renders the Corvette name useless, and will probably have the same kind of negative advertising as wearing an R.J. Reynolds sandwich board outside a pre-school.

You will find no more joy if you're in one of the classic or newer models of the car – it's all the same bland experience. You can pick up upgrades to your car, but they don't change the feel of your ride whatsoever. I couldn't notice a difference in the handling of my Corvette until 1995 – and that was over halfway through the entire game. It seems these licensed parts are in the game to be just...licenses. Overall, your rides feel much too floaty. On the other hand, I did like a track or two in Corvette, but that still doesn't help the gameplay improve.

The only respite I got from this title's parade of mediocrity was the fact that at the end of each career tier, you would participate in a race with a pursuing cop and some oncoming traffic along Route 66. Then again, it wasn't as if I felt like I was playing Burnout 2 all of a sudden, or anything. If only there was a way to get across the country in the game by hitchhiking. You might be tempted to pick this game up because of its cheap price, but to paraphrase Carson from *Queer Eye*: It's not a deal if you never actually play it.

I imagine that good money was paid to General Motors for this license, but it's a shame that the developer couldn't also license some fun gameplay to go along with the Corvette name.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 4.5

> **Concept:** An unattractive Corvette commercial whose enjoyment lasts about 30 seconds

> **Graphics:** No, that's not motion blur, it's just the dodgy look of the game

> **Sound:** I'd rather sit and contemplate the sound of one hand clapping

> **Playability:** Apparently none of the Corvettes handled any differently until 1995

> **Entertainment:** This game isn't broke, but plenty of fixing is required before it's fun

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 6.5

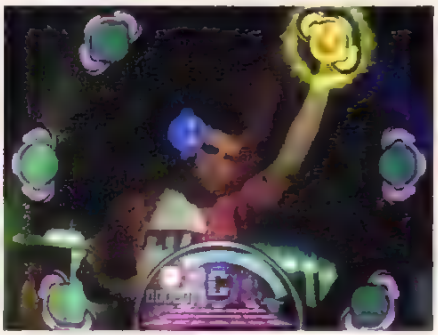
There's a saying that says, "You get what you pay for." Well, in the case of Corvette, a competent budget-priced racing title, you actually get a little bit more. Graphically, it's comparable to many higher ticket games, and the basic racing mechanics are pleasingly solid without really being distinctive in any way. The game also features a bevy of accurately modeled 'Vettes from the past to the present, and includes real manufacturer upgrades for the unlocking.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2

EyeToy: Groove

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE > **RELEASE** APRIL 20 > **ESRB** E

PUNK'D



What has two thumbs and loves EyeToy: Play? This chick! I still pop it in when non-gaming friends come by – everyone loves it, everyone knows how to play it, and you get to see yourself on TV. While Groove still has this base amusement factor and functionality, it feels just plain dull.

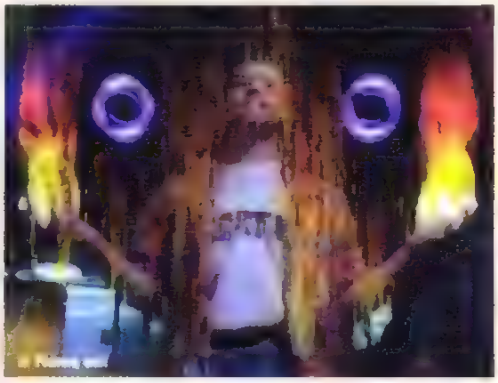
There are two different comparisons to be made when talking about Groove – one to the Play minigame it expands on, and one to the other rhythm games it falls into line with. We'll start with its predecessor. I rarely play the hit-the-speaker game in Play because I just couldn't figure out how to dance while still sitting on my couch, and the generic techno tunes were limited and grating. The twenty-some odd songs in Groove should fix the track issue (and there are a couple of gems in there that I really dug, but I'm a Beatles person, so the Elvis remix wasn't one of them), but instead it feels like a short, predictable jaunt through disposable dance/pop tracks.

As for not feeling the couch-bound groove, Groove does a few great things that take advantage of the camera control. Freestyle segments (which integrate new versions of the Playroom effects found in Play) and photo-ops are plopped into the middle of songs and let you just get down to your own beat for a few seconds. From a gameplay standpoint, the game adds wide, sweeping motions into the usual hit and hold commands found in other dance titles. Large stars will highlight a series of hitspots and players sweep their arms from one to the next, forcing a "spirit fingers", Broadway flapper kind of move.

But, in comparison to other rhythm titles, Groove falls well south of average. Limited unlockables and even more restrictive graphics make me think, "I could play this for three hours a day, every day, for the next six months and this would look exactly the same." Throw a new background on there or something, man! Even new hitspots or icons would have helped.

Also, multiplayer is a standard feature in games of this ilk, and Groove is no exception. Instead of having players side to side, dancing each other into oblivion, Groove puts them in front of each other. One dancer is blue and one is red. During the battle mode, players are supposed to hit the spots of their color – but it's just too manic and out of control to be much fun.

This is truly a sad, sad day for me. I gave Play a nine, and did it with full comfort and confidence. Groove, on the other hand, is something that I would pop in only if Codemaster's American Idol game had irreparable scratches. This is not to say that American Idol is bad, only that Groove is less enjoyable than a licensed, knock-off title – and that's not good.—**LISA**



BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Expand on the dancing/rhythm game found in EyeToy: Play

> **Graphics:** Well, it's you on the screen – a somewhat fuzzy you. The game interface is quirky, but doesn't change too terribly much

> **Sound:** The songs are either top-40 American pop or quintessentially European

> **Playability:** You hit the little markers with the beats of the songs. This isn't rocket science, people, but navigating the interface is still sort of a pain

> **Entertainment:** Fine at first, but the rewards aren't great enough to keep people groovin' for long

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6

How the mighty have fallen. No matter how much I tried to enjoy EyeToy: Groove, I couldn't escape the fact that it is just an expansion of EyeToy: Play's Beat Freak game, with a few new features and licensed tracks. It aims to be a rhythm game along the lines of DDR, but in doing so it loses all of the variety and replayability that made its predecessor so engaging. If you got sick of Beat Freak, you could always go smack some ninjas around in Kung Foo. If you get sick of Groove (which is highly likely, since there isn't much to spice it up), you've got nowhere else to go. Play made it fun to flail around and make a fool of yourself, but Groove just makes it depressing, and I know plenty of cheaper ways to regret vigorously shaking my butt, thank you very much.—**JOE**

When players separate from one another, the screen pans out to show more of the environment

Most of the puzzles in the game revolve around four-player teamwork

When playing the game alone with a GameCube controller, the GBA sections will overlay the GameCube screen

In single player, you still have control over all four Links. They will follow you, or you can line them up in four advantageous positions

UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAMECUBE

The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (GBA REQUIRED FOR MULTIPLAYER) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
> **RELEASE** JUNE 7 > **ESRB** E

THE MISSING LINK

While Zelda advocates will find solace in the inventive puzzles, archetypal boss battles, and familiar story arc that runs through every inch of gameplay, the main attraction and allure of this game is quite out of character for this hallowed franchise. As the name so clearly implies, this adventure shines the most with four people playing at once. Granted, you will get a sizeable charge marching through the dungeons by your lonesome, but this title is designed with the intent of having players communicate to solve puzzles and get rowdy as the competition rises.

Much like Square Enix's Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles release, you do have the option of using the GameCube controller in single player, but a Game Boy Advance is mandatory for multiplayer. I really didn't see the reason why I had to use my GBA in Crystal Chronicles, but it does make sense for this game. The TV screen is essentially the overworld and main area. All four players can interact here, and the screen will pan out and zoom in depending on where the characters are in relation to one another. When one person enters a cave or house they will disappear from this screen. At this point, the person needs to look at their GBA. As odd as it is to have to look up at the TV, then down at your handheld, it grants each player freedom to do as he or she wishes and not stay huddled up together. Of course, the Internet does the same thing, but until Nintendo realizes what this is, it looks like we're going to have to tolerate the GBA/GC connectivity gimmick.

If you do happen to have four friends who are Zelda fanatics and GBA owners, you are going to have the time of your life playing this game. The majority of puzzles revolve around all four characters working together as a team. You may be asked to throw switches at precisely the same time, stand together to pull a large lever out of a wall, or coordinate attacks against a dungeon boss.

As an avid Zelda fan that counts the days before each release, I walked away from Four Swords with mixed feelings. I love the retro gameplay, unforgettable melodies, and gorgeous visuals. However, with the quest broken up into stand-alone levels, the design feels more Mario than Zelda. Losing all of your hard-earned items and Heart Containers at the end of each stage is even more defeating. Outside of the brilliant gameplay, Zelda has always struck a chord with me for being a seamless adventure where anything was possible. Chopping the quest up kills the buzz and aura that surrounds it. I also found that many of the stages didn't offer enough action, especially when you have four people questing together.

All told, as a Zelda game, it doesn't come close to reaching the towering peak of brilliance that this series has established over the years. It's definitely shot from the same cannon, but it's a different type of game. While I can still picture the perfect Zelda multiplayer game that doesn't sacrifice the integrity of the series, Nintendo has chosen to move in a different direction where gimmicks take center stage. Questing with friends is an enjoyable experience, but it's also one that will have you longing for something much deeper.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Classic Zelda gameplay that stresses teamwork among four players

> **Graphics:** Mouth-watering Link to the Past-styled graphics and Wind Waker-esque effects

> **Sound:** You'll be humming these tunes until the day that you die

> **Playability:** Words cannot describe just how ingenious some of the puzzles are. The boss fights will also hit home with fans of the series

> **Entertainment:** A great party game, but nowhere near as complex as a typical Zelda adventure

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

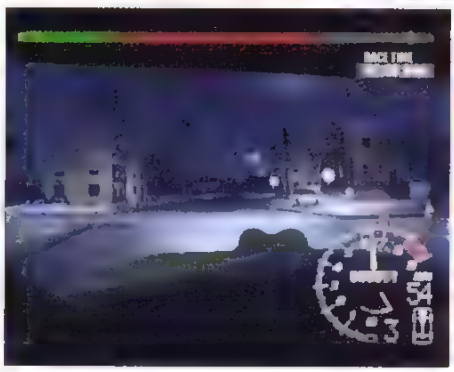
Second Opinion

Four Swords Adventures is so many things at once that finding the right words to describe why I love it and hate it all at the same time is difficult. For example, I love the old-school 16-bit-styled graphics combined with the punch of today's particle effects and the gaudy number of enemies the GameCube can process on the screen at once. However, my enjoyment of the title is greatly hampered by the whole connectivity aspect. Why give me this gorgeous full adventure and then have the gameplay switch back and forth between the two screens, basically forcing the player to use a GBA (or at least look at a little window that pops up onscreen if you play without one)? For one, I find the whole thing annoying, and more importantly, none of the switching back and forth actually makes the game any better. All my complaining aside, it is a pretty fun multiplayer experience. However, I think the game would have been better if it just stuck with the classic Baldur's Gate multiplayer formula, and created a better, more far-reaching Zelda quest.—**ANDY**

You'll often find yourself combating armies. You'll also notice the Wind Waker explosion effects are in the game

Some of the dungeons feature side-scrolling sections

Many of the boss fights are inspired by other Zelda games



No time to pull a *Thelma & Louise*

Ice Racing offers beating and banging with three competitors

Despite rare pop-up, this game has almost photo-realistic backgrounds

The Career mode gives you plenty of freedom with its long list of races

XBOX

RalliSport Challenge 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS **> DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE **> RELEASE** MAY 4 **> ESRB** E

TIMID ON THE GAS

I get the feeling that the success of the first RalliSport Challenge wasn't due to America suddenly going head over heels for rally racing. No offense to developer Digital Illusions – both the original RalliSport and this one are fun to tear through. However, I think that at the release of the first one, people were more enamored with the graphics of the then-new console. But to capture the hearts of rally fans and the rest of the public, it's going to take more than a pretty face this time around.

RalliSport Challenge 2 gives you more than just rally racing, and this helps open the game up to the player. You can compete against other cars simultaneously in Ice Racing or Rallycross, and the Hill Climb courses offer a change of pace that can be particularly grueling. Apart from this, it is the Career structure that I appreciate the most. Here you can switch between the different difficulties and rack up points to unlock both cars and tracks throughout the game in a great non-linear fashion.

With this excellent framework in place, however, I'm not as happy with the game once my wheels hit the dirt. Cars feel like they pivot on a central point too much. The result is that I could veer from side to side on the road and not feel like I was losing control of the car, even at full throttle. I'm not saying that you won't spin out – there are many opportunities to do that. However, I do think that your feel of the cars is lessened, and it also takes some of the skill and danger out of the races. I suggest that semi-experienced drivers tackle the Champion level first.

Despite the addition of greater physical damage to your cars this time around, I rarely feared for my life, which is something I look forward to in a rally game. The roads are simply too wide to produce that palm-sweating, claustrophobic feeling I crave from a title like Colin McRae. Furthermore, what's the use of putting in car damage if you don't have to repair it? Yes, it looks cool to have your windshield spider, but if you don't have to pay the consequences (such as spending time between races to fix things like in Colin), then that's just window dressing. While you can lose a wheel and have the steering lurch on you, I had to deliberately wreck my car in order for the game's damage to really matter.

My wish for narrower tracks aside, there is a lot to like racing through the game. Some portions can get pretty long, which increases the tension as you wonder when your next oversteer screw-up is going to happen. Of course, some of these mistakes will occur simply because you are marveling at the scenery flying by. The game still looks good in four-player split-screen, but I wouldn't advise playing this way unless you have a giant TV. Xbox Live is worth a tour, since you can race the normally solo-only rally courses with up to three friends.

I'm going to sound like a snob when I say that casual drivers are going to love this to the detriment of seasoned racers. Although I prefer RalliSport 2's career structure to that of Colin, I suggest that if this whets your appetite, that you check out the Scottish master.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> Concept: Digital Illusions tries to open up rally racing to the masses with great graphics and a non-linear structure

> Graphics: This game is a long, cool drink for thirsty eyes – particularly the headlight effects on night races

> Sound: You can choose between simple and advanced co-pilot directions

> Playability: Although I was disappointed in the cars' handling, there are differences among the rides

> Entertainment: There's a lot to take in here, but I keep coming back to my qualms with the racing

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

Xbox's rally title isn't a car sim, and it isn't an arcade racer, so it falls into this weird gray area that isn't my cup of tea. I want to have some say about my car – other than a skin that I have to unlock. From a physics standpoint (which I firmly believe is the cornerstone of rally), I think that RalliSport 2 doesn't ever let you get comfortable. I never felt like I knew how my car would react on which surface and at what speed, and isn't that the whole point of rally? The split-screen multiplayer is painful on most courses, but the online options are nice. The final blow to my enthusiasm for this game is the track design. Some are certainly quite nice and very fun, but it was extremely rare for me to get that "barreling down a wooded path with imminent death on both sides" kind of feel. As a whole, the tracks are very wide. Really, with a field this thick, there are other ways to swing the rear end of a Lancer around – and I think I'll opt for those.—**LISA**

XBOX

Mafia

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** GATHERING
> **DEVELOPER** ILLUSION SOFTWORKS > **RELEASE** MARCH 11 > **ESRB** M

PAYING RESPECTS TO THE DON

When we reviewed the PlayStation 2 version of Mafia a few months back, we claimed that the game didn't age well and wasn't nearly as enjoyable as it was on the PC when it originally released. With the arrival of Mafia on Xbox, many of the issues that plagued the PS2 version are nowhere to be found.

The loading times that stretched on for well over a minute have been shaved down to a reasonable 10 seconds. You'll also notice that the visuals in this version are a bit cleaner and the lighting effects showcase a higher level of realism.

The one area where the title hasn't made any strides forward is gameplay. If you had problems playing GTA because you felt that the gameplay was clunky, Mafia will make you pull out every last strand of hair. Not only are the character controls a bit awkward, driving a car from the 1930s that has about as much horsepower as a Rascal scooter isn't exactly a mind-blowing experience.

Thankfully, with compelling storytelling, and one ingenious mission after another, Mafia has enough firepower to keep you playing until the end.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Travel to the 1930s and join the Salieri family in this gritty action game that delivers a remarkable story and unforget table missions

> **Graphics:** Smokes the PS2 version in both lighting effects and load times

> **Sound:** There's nothing quite like the crackle of a Tommy gun The soundtrack is also a nice collection of thirties jazz

> **Playability:** The on-foot sequences are a bit stiff, and the cars just aren't that entertaining to drive

> **Entertainment:** The inventive missions and mobster-heavy story make an otherwise mediocre game very enjoyable

> **Replay Value:** Moderately l ow

Second Opinion 7.5

You've played gangsters before, but I doubt the story was as compelling as Mafia's. It drove me on and made even the simplest of missions somehow engaging – which the gameplay often wasn't. The graphical fogging and pop-up are unforgivable for an Xbox title, but you'd be disappointing yourself and the Don if you don't play it – and you wouldn't want to do that, would you?—**KATO**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Manhunt

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH > **RELEASE** APRIL 20 > **ESRB** M

WHERE OTHERS FEAR TO TREAD

Manhunt is grim, nihilistic, sickeningly violent, and far past any idea of "decency" that might still be left in video games. It also happens to be one of the bravest works of game creation I've ever played.

People will call the violence "dehumanizing," but I've never felt more like a human being in a game than when I was playing Manhunt. As James Earl Cash, you're hunted by roving gangs, forced to fight for your life with crude weapons like crowbars and machetes – all the while being taped for the mysterious Director (chillingly voiced by actor Brian Cox). Possessing no superhuman strength, you must carefully progress through the level, using audible distractions and the cover of darkness to kill your foes in myriad gruesome ways. Outnumbered and outgunned, you'll feel a gripping sense of fear, one much more real than the cheap zombie thrills of games like Resident Evil

Manhunt is controversial to be sure, but don't let that distract you from the fact that this is a finely crafted title – its stealth gameplay is very refined, especially in the way its enemy AI reacts to sound and light. Some might find it too slow and deliberate, but I appreciated the way the developers use the pacing to create an almost overwhelming sense of tension. I also applaud the way that Rockstar North forces us to confront video games' obsession with violence head-on, stripping it of the usual sci-fi and fantasy trappings. It's easy to say, "How could they make a game like this?" The harder question is: "How could I enjoy playing it?"—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** A great stealth title that features the most graphic violence ever seen in a video game

> **Graphics:** This Xbox port sees improved texturing and more refined character models

> **Sound:** Truly excellent – a masterpiece of chilling sound design

> **Playability:** The easy controls allow you to fully concentrate on strategizing your survival

> **Entertainment:** Far from the violent novelty that many would have you believe, Manhunt is brave and origina

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 9.25

Much like a puppeteer operating a marionette, Manhunt tugs at your emotions and will leave you a jumbled mess at the end of your gaming session. Anxiety, uncertainty, fear, relief – you'll know these feelings well by the time the credits roll. Whether you find yourself holding your breath as an enemy hunts you down or praying that an unsuspecting foe doesn't turn around before you can wrap the plastic bag around his head, Manhunt will surely have you on the edge of your seat with its amazing gameplay and dark atmosphere. Rockstar also did a phenomenal job of changing up the gameplay and throwing curve balls at the player just when it seems that action is going to get repetitive. The content may be controversial, but believe me when I say that this is one hell of a play that you do not want to miss.—**REINER**

XBOX

Yu-Gi-Oh!
The Dawn of Destiny

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2 PLAYER VIA SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI TOKYO > **RELEASE** MARCH 23 > **ESRB** E

YU-GI-UGH

The problem with reviewing the Yu-Gi-Oh! titles is that they are not so much video games as they are card games in video form. With the muscle of the Xbox behind it, Dawn of Destiny had the potential to break this trend and innovate within a series that is going stagnant. As it is, not only does this game try nothing new, it even manages to fail in several areas where its handheld counterparts succeeded.

The biggest problem is that Dawn of Destiny restricts your freedom like a galactic despot. You start with an awful deck, and you use it to fight groups of characters in a specified order. At least when I was playing the GBA's Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship 2004 last month, I felt that I had a load of available opponents, and that it was my strategy, not my cards, that determined the outcome of the battle.

Additionally, two of the major things the Xbox has going for it, graphics and Xbox Live, are absent from this title. It is clear that the developer was completely content with this being no more than a barely passable strategy game. Fans of the series will eat it up, but newbies will wonder (with good cause) if it's even worth the effort.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** "If it's good enough for the GBA, then it's good enough for the Xbox"

> **Graphics:** Continues the graphical tedium of its predecessors with monsters that would only be impressive on an N64 or PSone

> **Sound:** No voices, no notable effects, and a generic soundtrack make this aspect fee entirely absent

> **Playability:** If you understand the concept of a "confirm" button, you'll feel right at home

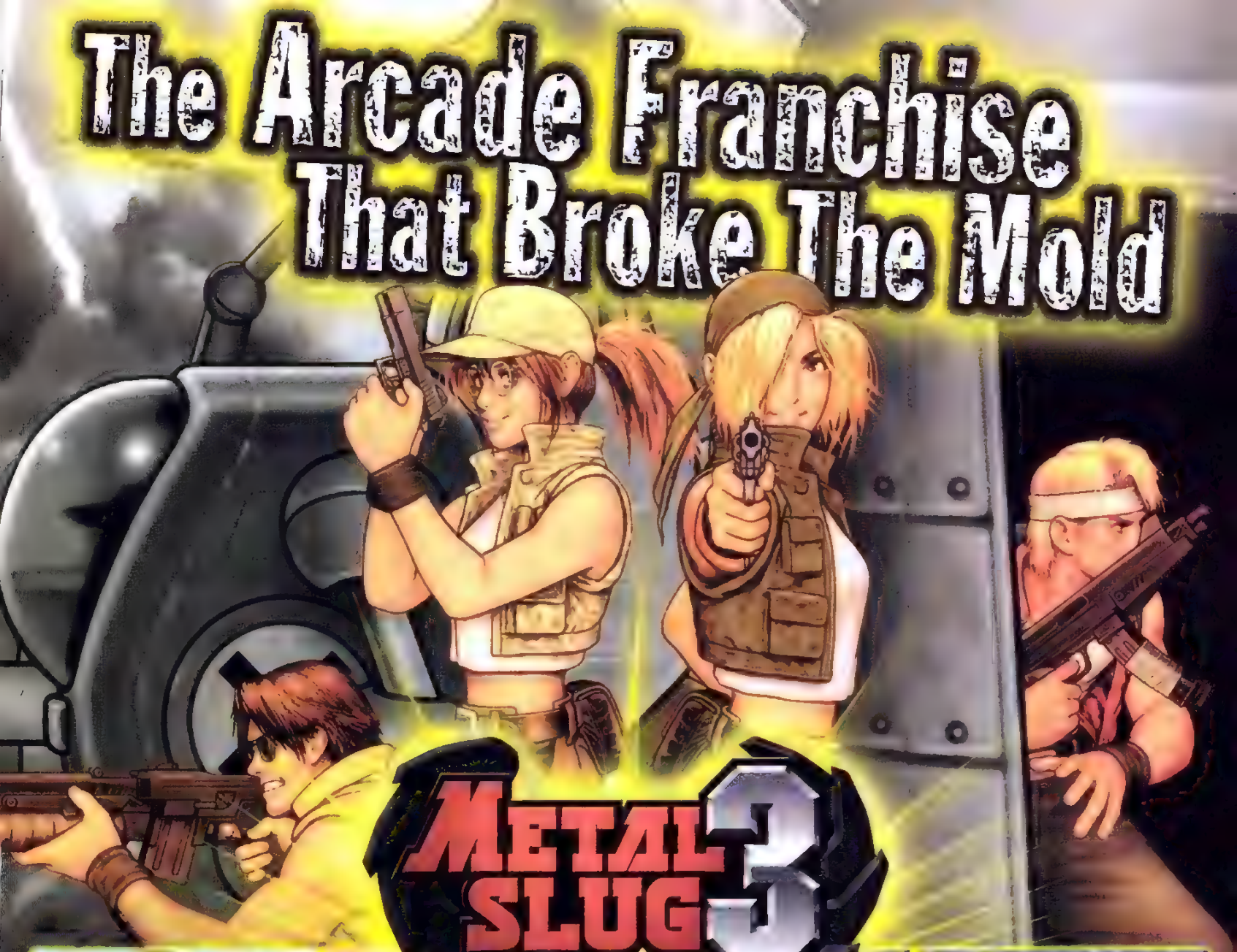
> **Entertainment:** Do you like losing duels due to factors that are beyond your control? This game is for you!

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 5

It's not even fair to call Yu-Gi-Oh! The Dawn of Destiny a video game – it's more like the solitaire programs that come preloaded on PCs. I'm sure the Xbox-owning Yu-Gi-Oh! fans (all six of them) will appreciate a chance to play the game without getting Cheetos crumbs on their precious cards, but everyone else will choose to play something that's actually fun —**JEREMY**

The Arcade Franchise That Broke The Mold



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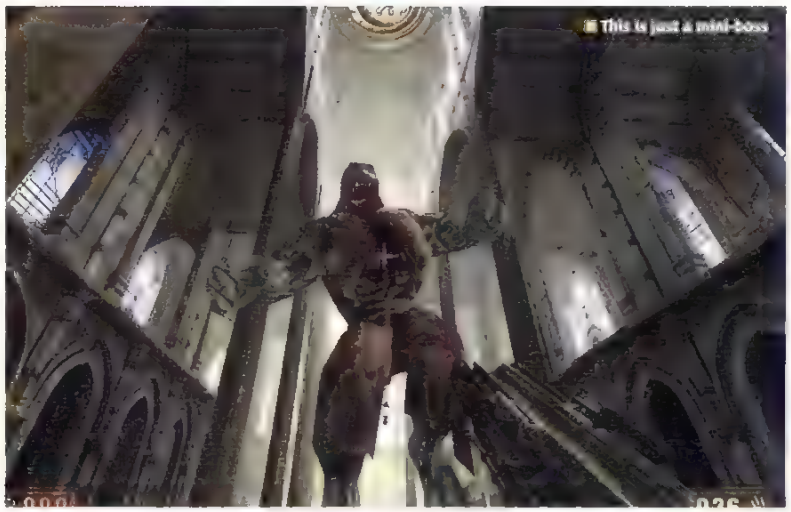


PC

Painkiller

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER
> **DEVELOPER** PEOPLE CAN FLY > **RELEASE** APRIL 12 > **ESRB** M

NOT FOR SALE OVER THE COUNTER

Certain jaded gamers have been known to complain that modern FPS titles are too complex and stray from their roots. Those people, along with many others, should be more than satisfied with Painkiller, a shooter in the grand old style Puzzles are typically nothing more complex than killing everything in sight, and levels usually funnel you from one encounter to the next with barely enough time to reload. These frantic fights are the emphasis and strength of Painkiller.

The recent demo of Painkiller, though entertaining for a while, really doesn't do the full game justice. The retail version is vastly more engaging, with some of the best enemy variety around and lots of unlockable special powers. Complete a level while fulfilling a special goal, like a time limit or weapon restriction, and you'll receive a Black Tarot card These can be equipped to add either a constant or one-time effect, and come in quite handy. Taking half damage or getting double ammo from boxes is as useful as you'd think, especially on the harder difficulty settings

The ever-changing encounters that you must face are the saving grace of Painkiller. Developer People Can Fly uses 26 different enemy types (plus bosses) perfectly. Just when you start getting bored with annihilating the grunts of the first chapter, a 350-foot-tall boss appears After that, enemies start having more ranged attacks and explosives, which totally changes the rules of engagement. Guys with swords aren't a big problem when you've got a shotgun, but charging a 400-pound chain gun-wielding demon isn't the best idea ever. Of course, using a rocket launcher is good way to turn the tables back around

Brilliant level design is the other way that Painkiller remains minty fresh despite being a straight up run-and-gun fragathon. Killing the exact same five baddies can be an utterly different experience when you're in a tiny corridor rather than an open courtyard. The way the stages are set up, with both terrain and enemies, gives players plenty of opportunity to explore the potentials of the available weapons and figure out how to use them most effectively.

The weaponry (or lack thereof), however, is my one big knock against Painkiller. There are only five to choose from, and though the alt-fire modes are very different from the regular attacks, 10 is hardly a huge number of ways to blow stuff up. They're still fun to use, but I found myself defaulting to the trusty old shotgun a bit more than I'd like to. Additionally, they are horribly unbalanced for multiplayer – the combination chain gun/rocket launcher is approximately 378 times more effective than anything else. This makes all but one of the multiplayer modes (the one where everybody switches weapons at regular intervals) boring, and severely limits this title's replay value.

"...a must-have for anyone who pines for the glory days of Doom."

Sub-par online play is hardly fatal to Painkiller, though. The outstanding graphics, unparalleled physics, huge levels, tons of unlockable cards, enormous bosses, and gameplay variety make this a must-have for anyone who pines for the glory days of Doom. —**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Explore the poignant moral dilemma of how best to mow down demons with various weapons

> **Graphics:** You'll need to expand your vocabulary to accurately describe how freaking great this looks

> **Sound:** With so many wailing guitars, you'd expect a bunch of ninjas to show up

> **Playability:** The fact that you can map Rocket Jump to a button says it all

> **Entertainment:** Perpetrating extreme violence against the hordes of Satan has never been so much fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

Painkiller does exactly what I imagine the developers set out to do. This is a game for the trigger-happy killer in all of us, with little in the way of plot, subtlety, or characters to distract us from what's important. What's important? Shooting demons. Lots and lots of demons. With beautifully gothic-inspired environments, you'll wade through literally hundreds of enemies while gleefully popping them full of buckshot and wooden stakes. There are no puzzles and little in the way of exploration, but you might be too busy shooting to notice that you stopped thinking nearly three hours ago. The most original aspect of the game has to be the gargantuan size of the bosses. We're talking walking mountains here – truly mind-boggling immensity. Even so, the game may easily bore many players who would like to see a little more out of their FPS. Also, unless you love instrumental metal music, be warned that you'll be the one needing the painkiller —**MILLER**

PC

Desert Rats Vs. Afrika Korps

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ENCORE > **DEVELOPER** MONTE CRISTO > **RELEASE** MARCH 31 > **ESRB** T

SLOWEST WAR EVER

A quick glance at the list of features in Desert Rats vs. Afrika Korps would make any armchair general froth at the mouth in excitement. Loads of unit types (there are eight different kinds of infantry alone!), the ability to target specific zones on vehicles, and all sorts of other things you don't normally see in an RTS would ideally make for a deep and engaging title. It's too bad that pacing and AI problems hold this back from its potential.

These AI issues are evident every second of play. Units rarely engage unless your troops come within their detection range, which allows you to take them on only a few at a time. A careful player won't lose many units, because it's far too easy to concentrate your entire force on a relatively small opposing army. On the other hand, if you advance much at all without sweeping the area with reconnaissance, you're liable to get completely annihilated – mines and bad firing angles can really hose you. The end result of all this is that you're forced to take things really slowly and win easily or plow ahead and die, which isn't exactly my idea of good pacing.

If you can suffer through the steep learning curve and get a really good grasp on the tactical possibilities, there is some enjoyment to be found here. However, all but the most hardcore strategy gamers should probably look elsewhere for their WWII simulation fix.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Use your tactical expertise to conquer North Africa during World War II as both the Germans and Allies

> **Graphics:** Good overall, especially explosions, but the ground is flat and boring

> **Sound:** Contrary to what you'd expect, the heroes sound awful, while regular units are entertaining and well done

> **Playability:** You'd better learn the hotkeys, because the right toggle is impossible to find in the heat of battle

> **Entertainment:** Playing alone isn't terrible, but forget the multiplayer

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

This is obviously a title aimed at hardcore RTS fans, and it's encouraging to see some of the steps that Monte Cristo has taken to ease some of the issues that usually come from managing the behaviors of your various units. There's also a great deal in terms of unit variety, and small details like being able to tow artillery and the fact that tanks have heavier armor on their front than on their back and sides, are all things that I would expect to make their way into future games in the genre. Unfortunately, the game itself isn't really as compelling as it should be, making Desert Rats vs. Afrika Korps yet another pretender to the RTS throne. Hopefully, next time the company will put its concepts to better use.—**MATT**

PC

Sacred

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ENCORE > **DEVELOPER** ASCARON ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MARCH 23 > **ESRB** T

IN SWORDS WE TRUST

There's no way to make the case that developer Ascaron isn't trying to emulate the towering success of Diablo II with Sacred. The good news is that they've succeeded better than anyone before them, but the bad news is that Sacred doesn't touch the perfection of Blizzard's landmark 2000 title.

Playing through Sacred is a lot like sitting down for a bit of Dungeons & Dragons. You've got your main quest, which guides you through the massive world (though you're free to roam about on your own), and then you've got various sidequests that show up in each town you pass through. All involve killing stuff, and all reward you with loot and experience. What's nice about Sacred is that you feel a lot more like you're part of a heroic epic, rather than just slogging through monsters to hit the next level.

The biggest thing in Sacred that sets it apart from the crowd is the fact that you can ride horses into battle, trampling your foes beneath you or scampering away to pound them with magic or arrows from afar. Having a trusty steed to take into the fray can make all the difference, but beware – they can get injured and die just like you can. Also, mounts serve as an excellent way to traverse the huge landscape, minimizing downtime between adventures. A high-level horse can actually outrun arrows, which is entertaining, if not exactly realistic.

The six different classes available to players all play fairly differently, though many share some special moves. Also, the skill system is designed so that two characters of the same type can easily have different strengths, which helps adventurers feel more unique. The variety of equipment that drops aids this as well – it's as huge and random as any RPG, and ensures that players have different gear. The replay value this would normally imply is hampered by the lack of random maps, though. Playing through as another class will certainly be different, but you'll still be doing the same quests in the same landscapes.

The overall enjoyment factor of Sacred is fairly high, but it does suffer from some stupid technical issues. Many sections of the interface feel clumsy, especially the skill-switching, and pathing and targeting could certainly work a bit better. On the whole, though, action/RPG fans won't be ill-served by picking this up.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Explore the gigantic world while killing a bunch of stuff and gaining some levels and loot

> **Graphics:** It's isometric, but the models and effects are very well done

> **Sound:** Kind of buggy and generic. Voiceovers are about 20 percent acceptable

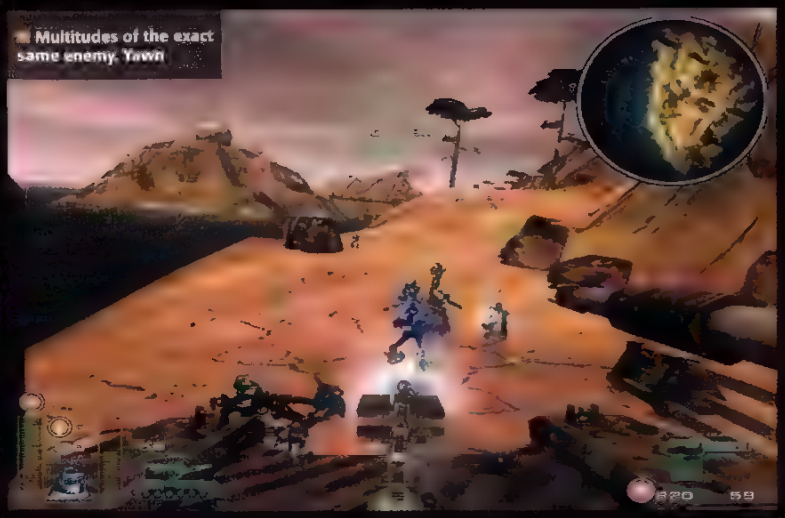
> **Playability:** Not being able to remap keys is so 1987. The first three hours of the stupid defaults will drive you nuts

> **Entertainment:** Probably the best Diablo II clone around, but still doesn't measure up to the master

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

You should be worried. Sacred has the potential to steal a great many hours away from your life. The game is immense fun, with beautiful, detailed backgrounds and dozens of individual character animations. The six playable classes are each unique and exciting in their own right. I was truly gratified to find that the menu system, maps, and inventory are all handled flawlessly. It's unfortunate that this otherwise gorgeous game is marred by some technical flaws in the hack-and-slash combat system. Even so, there are some hardcore Diablo II fans who are likely to find a new religion in the form of Sacred.—**MILLER**


Multitudes of the exact same enemy. Yawn

PC

Breed

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** CDV > **DEVELOPER** BRAT DESIGNS > **RELEASE** MARCH 23 > **ESRB** M

COMBAT DEVOLVED

Once, I had high hopes for Breed. In fact, if it gets a patch that fixes all of the broken bits (of which there are many), it may be a decent game someday. The ideas are sound, even original, but they're also all implemented very poorly. I can't think of a single element of this title that works well, and several don't work at all.

In Breed you control a squad of space marines, among whom you can switch on the fly, but their AI when you're not controlling them makes them worse than useless. They don't just get stuck, they also jump off of cliffs and waste precious sniper ammo in close combat. This is especially disheartening once you realize that level design in Breed mainly consists of two things: Emplaced guns you must snipe from far away or die, and hordes of identical enemies to be mowed down. Run out of sniper ammo, and the mission is all but lost – just one of those mounted weapons can tear your force apart in disgustingly short order if left operational.

Vehicles are present in some missions and help to spice up the gameplay, but driving them is generally less effective than being on foot – especially since your squad can't join you on them. Weapons are similarly disappointing. Not only do they sound wimpy, but the alien energy weapons you capture are so worthless you can't help but wonder how they took over the Earth in the first place. The human weapons are named strangely, but they behave exactly the same as the standard FPS rifles, shotguns, and such.

There are some exciting moments in Breed, where you really feel like you're humanity's last bulwark against extinction by hostile aliens. Surmounting the insane odds you're put up against is a great feeling, and some parts of the environments are destructible – it's pretty awesome the first few times you collapse a tower on top of some aliens' heads. These fleeting seconds of brilliance, however, are nowhere near enough to make me forgive the problems that plague this game.

Normally I try to refrain from commenting on stability issues, since they're almost always different from PC to PC, but Breed forces me to. On any of the three machines at GI's top-secret headquarters, it was a miracle if Breed went 15 minutes without crashing to desktop. If you absolutely must have a new sci-fi shooter you might consider this, but playing through Halo yet again is worlds better in my book.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> **Concept:** Ship a last-gen FPS, despite it being riddled with bugs and other technical problems

> **Graphics:** If you can ignore a low polygon count, abysmal texturing, and repetitive design they're not bad

> **Sound:** The voice-acting is too horrid to even be funny

> **Playability:** Clipping issues and teammate AI I wouldn't wish on Hitler make shooting aliens a chore

> **Entertainment:** Until a patch can resolve the glaring flaws this isn't worth your time, much less your money

> **Replay Value:** Low

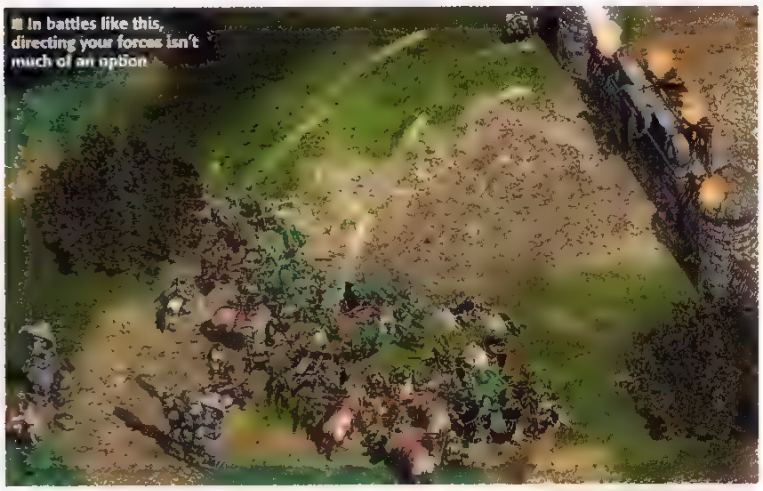
Second Opinion 6.75

Breed is cool because it lets you try so many things, and uncool because it doesn't do any of them particularly well. The environments are huge, but they lack variety. The vehicles are plentiful, but the controls are often awkward. However, my biggest complaint has to be the AI. Enemies often lack the most basic common sense. And though you can switch between allied team members at will, the computer-controlled squad is woefully stupid. There are also some horrific technical glitches, which the developer would be wise to address in an early patch. Still, the game has some bracing action, and includes a driving, pulse-pounding soundtrack.—**MILLER**

PC

Nemesis of the Roman Empire

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ENLIGHT > **DEVELOPER** HAEMIMONT GAMES > **RELEASE** MARCH 26 > **ESRB** E


In battles like this, directing your forces isn't much of an option

VENI, VIDI, VICI

It's nice to see an RTS that's not an overt WarCraft clone. Though Nemesis lacks the incredible polish of WarCraft and Age of Mythology, its unique play style is cool, especially if you don't like to go online; the two campaigns and random map generator are much better than the bare-bones multiplayer.

Some interesting design decisions in Nemesis make it play rather differently than a standard RTS. Building and resource-gathering are largely out of players' hands, and the landscapes are littered with minor structures that can be captured or used for various benefits. While these do remove the player from the action to some extent, they also free up your attention for the more serious business of commanding your armies.

What makes Nemesis such a unique RTS experience is the need to keep your forces supplied while they're in the field. It's not cumbersome to do so, however, and adds an extra layer of strategy to the whole game. Each of your forts, villages, and outposts has its own store of food and gold, making it much more important to manage your economy rather than just build a big horde as fast as possible.

The only problem I have with Nemesis's design is in the battles. Individual unit AI is fine, but the conflicts happen on such a large scale that it becomes almost impossible to execute any sort of strategy other than sending all of your units in and hoping for the best. However, that just moves the strategy to the placing of armies and economic decisions rather than the down-and-dirty fighting, so it's not all bad.

Nemesis is by no means a perfect game, but it's definitely a breath of fresh air within the RTS scene. The concepts it brings are innovative and well-implemented, and merit a look by anyone who enjoys the genre.—**ADAM**

The map gives a great strategic overview of the situation – and you can even give orders directly from it

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Command the legions of Rome, Carthage, Gaul, or Iberia in a real-time strategy slugfest

> **Graphics:** The animations are seriously short on frames and the environments are very static, but units are easily identified on the battlefield

> **Sound:** It's a good thing that with low system requirements you can run the audio app of your choice in the background

> **Playability:** Not having a minimap hurts for a while, but you get used to it

> **Entertainment:** New concepts and good execution make this worthwhile

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 6

The long awaited sequel to Celtic Kings: Rage of War is here! What, you've never heard of that game? Well few have, but apparently it did well enough to earn a sequel. Somehow though, I doubt the series will continue on past this point. Nemesis of The Roman Empire is a reasonably competent RTS title, but it's also unpolished and lacks much in the way of engaging content. Taking over structures instead of building them is conceptually interesting, but when I'm playing an RTS, I want the freedom to lay out my territory as I see fit. This may be a good choice for hardcore RTS fans, but most others will opt for more mainstream titles.—**JEREMY**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** JUNE 8 > **ESRB** T

EASILY OUTSHONE

When this game first released on the Genesis in 1993, it impressed gamers with its huge cast of characters, varied classes, and strategic combat. It also served as an inspiration for many turn-based titles that were to follow. Even though all of the elements that made this stand out in its time are still present, they are essentially in their original form. While the gameplay is still fun, Shining Force certainly feels like it has gathered some dust over the years.

To be fair, this isn't the exact same game that came out 11 years ago. The graphics are considerably improved, and there are also a handful of new characters and sidequests. But even with these alterations on the surface, the core hasn't changed. You wander around towns and you get into battles. As you progress, you add more party members to your pool of fighters and assemble a team based on each characters' abilities. Sound familiar? The biggest problem with this otherwise successful formula is that due to the basic battle system, it eventually feels like you're just repeating the same drill again and again.

While it does have a decent mix of strategy and RPG elements, you can't escape the fact that this is still just a Genesis game with a few minor improvements. With the other turn-based strategy titles available on GBA, like Final Fantasy Tactics Advance, Shining Force is really more enjoyable as a piece of nostalgia than a fresh gaming experience. —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Jump on the "re-release previously successful titles" bandwagon

> **Graphics:** Though jazzed up from the Genesis version, the parts that look best go by too quickly to savor

> **Sound:** The battle sounds are generic, and the score does little to rouse your fighting spirit

> **Playability:** The combat system and menus are easy to learn and navigate. Simple but effective

> **Entertainment:** The battles are fun and challenging, yet lack the depth to make the game truly engaging

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

Striking a nostalgic chord, this remake of the Genesis classic brings back a flood of fond memories, but also a slight pain with the realization that the games that we cherished back in the day don't necessarily stack up well against today's juggernauts. While boasting balance tweaks, enhanced menu management, and the inclusion of new characters, items, and side missions, the gameplay is just as shallow as before. It's an enjoyable play, but if you've already worked your way through Final Fantasy Tactics or any turn-based strategy game in the last five years, there's a good chance that you'll be disappointed by its simplicity. —**REINER**

Keeping your warriors grouped together is crucial

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Mario vs. Donkey Kong

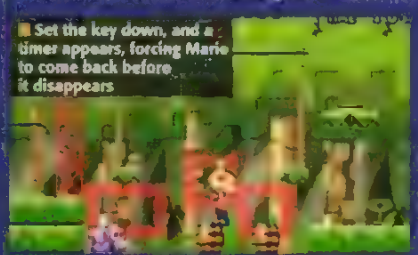
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** MAY 24 > **ESRB** E

SWEET HEREAFTER

Years from now, people's memories of this game will probably outshine its reality. Mario vs. Donkey Kong is a quick romp that has you using Mario's impressive action moveset to complete a series of puzzle rooms. That being said, the speed of the game seems to highlight its brevity – I was smoking through worlds in no time, but didn't get all of the collectibles. I guess I could go back later to be a completist, but I'm not really that kind of girl.

Instead, I enjoyed my time collecting the toys that Donkey Kong had stolen from Toad's little factory of joy. Each of the worlds follows a basic structure: six puzzle levels each composed of two sections (get the key to the door and grab a wayward toy), followed by one Mini-Mario level where Mario gets the little Lemmings-like versions of himself to a toy chest, and the boss battle. In these sections, DK will flip color switches and drop debris on you – players have to hit the ape a certain number of times before they die. It's pretty basic stuff, really.

Where Nintendo's quality truly comes into play, though, is the level design. Large-scale puzzles with a perfect ramp up of skill acquisition and difficulty carry players through the whole quest. There are few outside the Big N who could consistently deliver this caliber of action/puzzle gameplay, and I took great joy in using each new skill I received. They are easy to use, make sense, and the level design generally makes it really apparent what move players should use in which situations. Genius!



Set the key down, and a timer appears, forcing Mario to come back before it disappears

The handstand lets you kick falling objects without really trying

I guess that this game doesn't bowl me over just because I felt like I was always going to finish a level in two (at the most three) attempts. Doing the math, that means a few hours of gameplay for most players – some more if you're intent on unlocking everything. I wasn't, so its time in my GBA will be limited.

Despite my hesitance to proclaim this a miracle of modern handheld puzzle gaming, I don't want to understate how well executed this title is. Mario vs. Donkey Kong offers a really good time for everyone, while it lasts. —**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Update the Mario Donkey Kong puzzlers with new moves, graphics, sound and situations

> **Graphics:** Nice 3D hero models and the now-standard Super Mario Advance series graphics

> **Sound:** Mario is one chatty little bugger, and the sound effects are useful for gauging the play field

> **Playability:** Timing is crucial and some of the puzzles are deliciously mind-bending

> **Entertainment:** Short, but sweet

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

This is one of the rare Mario titles that seems like it was tailored for a specific audience, rather than the masses. The feeling is very reminiscent of the arcade classic Mario Bros., and the puzzle-oriented gameplay makes me flash back to the glory days of the original Game Boy. The graphics and sound are great, but the stages only offer one ideal path through them, so most won't feel compelled to revisit them often. Of course, Mario fanatics will love this title for its clever amalgamation of classic Mario and Donkey Kong elements, and puzzle gamers will enjoy the non-repetitive levels, but others won't be so impressed. The Mario titles are famous for pushing gaming forward, while this title looks squarely backwards. —**JEREMY**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Mario Golf: Advance Tour

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** CAMELOT SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** JUNE 21 > **ESRB** E

PIMPIN' IN PLAID

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Give the system a near-definitive golf title that even surpasses Mario Golf on the GC

> **Graphics:** Mario gets the 3D treatment, and the whole game shines

> **Sound:** You wouldn't dare roll down the avenue with these Caribbean tunes pumping

> **Playability:** Has all of the amenities you'd expect out of a big console counterpart

> **Entertainment:** Its utilization of an RPG-style world is an instant hook, but the golf is solid throughout

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

In the world of video game golf, the battle is between the three-click swing and the new analog styling of Tiger Woods. Here on the GBA, it's more natural for Mario Golf to champion the classic button-timing swing that developer Camelot has made popular through both this series and its original franchise, Hot Shots Golf. But that's not the only place where this game repeats itself. Eschewing an interface of boring menus, Camelot is also bringing back the RPG overworld structure that it included in Mario Golf back on the Game Boy Color – and we couldn't be happier because of it.

Having said all that, Advance Tour isn't revolutionary in any sense of the word. What it does do, however, is give gamers something that even Mario Golf on the GameCube lacked – reasons to compel you forward in the title. As a newbie on the tour, you can walk around to the four courses and enter into tourneys and participate in other tasks. This doesn't sound like a lot to chew on, but along the way, you'll unlock new locations, including a duel at Princess Peach's castle and some multiplayer-only courses. Of course, the game's connectivity feature with the GameCube opens up its own exclusives as well. The coolness of walking around this RPG-overworld is greatly helped by the fact that there's always something to do in Advance Tour. Unlike its console brother, this title gives you rewards of experience points for the many challenges it puts in your way. You can walk around and pick up playing tips from other golfers, as well as engage the local pros in making seven out of 10 mid-range putts, for example. If you search diligently enough, you may even find magic tickets to upgrade your clubs.

The experience you earn comes in real handy, letting you build up different attributes like your spin on shots. Since playing through the different courses in doubles golf play with a partner is key in unlocking everything, you're going to have to make sure that the character you pair up with is the same level – if not higher – than you are. It's aggravating to have to suffer the poor golf of your partner in doubles, but it's one of the many stick-and-carrot routines that this game goads you on with.

If there's an understated beauty of Advance Tour, it is that despite being a GBA title, it has no limitations in delivering top-notch golf action (it even has a system for reading the putting green that is quite accurate). In fact, its RPG aspects exceed the GC Mario Golf entirely. My only regret is that Camelot didn't fix the mistake that the 'Cube version committed and include more wacky courses, but at the same time, handheld golf has never been as much fun.—**KATO**

Second Opinion 8.25

I'm a geek for Hot Shots games. Which is good for Mario Golf Advance Tour, because it's basically the first Hot Shots title with some Mario franchise stuff thrown in. A perfect combination, in my opinion. I quibbled with the game about my putts now and again, but the courses and shots are generally easy to see. In addition, the overworld and extra challenges make this a golf game with legs far longer and better looking than Toadstool Tour, in my opinion. Some may think that that's an overstatement, but I'd be surprised if anyone was really disappointed with Advance Tour.—**LISA**

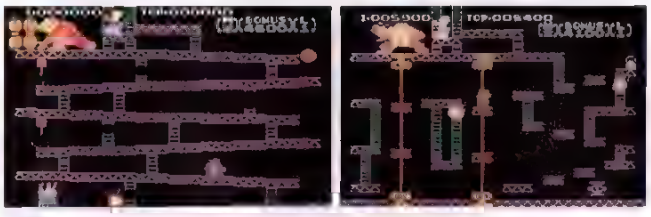
GAME BOY ADVANCE QUICKIES

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Donkey Kong

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** JUNE 7 > **ESRB** E



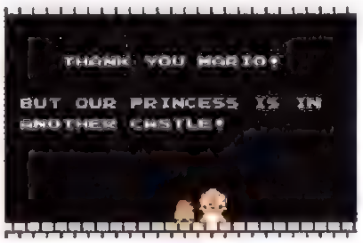
One of the games that defined the platforming genre as we know it, Donkey Kong is beautiful in its simplicity. You are Mario (a.k.a. "Jump Man"), who hops around three levels trying to save Pauline from an ape with serious glandular problems. "Wait," you might be saying, "I thought Donkey Kong had four levels!" Good for you. The original arcade cabinet did have four levels, along with a little animation of DK taking your main squeeze to the top of the screen. However, this version is a copy of the NES iteration, so the little cutscenes, along with the conveyor belt level, are absent. Regardless of the omissions and primitive gameplay, Donkey Kong is pure handheld history, and it's still got that irresistible old-school charm.—**JOE**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Super Mario Bros.

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** JUNE 7 > **ESRB** E



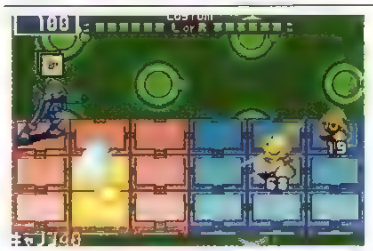
Admit it. You played it. You loved it. It might have been that first game that made you realize what was coming in this little hobby of ours. This is a perfect port of the original Super Mario Bros. Every last mushroom and goomba is accounted for, and you'll feel yourself slipping into a blissful recollection of your early days as a gamer. Just don't expect anything revolutionary here. The closest thing to newness is the ability to link up with another GBA to play with a friend, but don't worry. Two-player is still available on just one unit. If you're looking for innovation, check out the excellent Deluxe version on Game Boy Color. But for purists, this is the cream of the crop in retro goodness. So, if you're willing to drop the 20 gold coins for this one, enjoy your trip down memory lane.—**MILLER**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

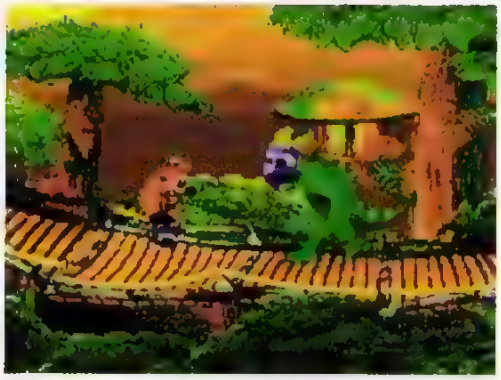
Mega Man Battle Network 4: Red Sun and Blue Moon

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 2 > **RELEASE** JUNE 28 > **ESRB** E



Mega Man has traveled a long and sometimes torturous road in his life as a gaming icon. His recent GBA excursions have cast Mega Man as a sentient computer "PET" program who battles Internet viruses. Battle Network 4 continues this tradition, but fails to present anything particularly novel in the offering. The RPG-style fights are uninspiring, and the storyline is simplistic. Still, the graphics are bright and inviting, with menus that are easily navigable. The two versions of the game will each offer unique plots, and expanded stories can be opened up by linking with someone who has the other edition. I can't help but think that I might be more engrossed if I was a much younger gamer. As it is, I was left patently unimpressed.—**MILLER**



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Rampage

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE)
> **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** VICARIOUS VISIONS
> **RELEASE** JUNE 1 > **ESRB** E

MIXED BAG AT BEST

I think that this title and its sister cartridge, Spyro Orange, are strange amalgamations of really divergent gaming themes. The platforming levels are derivative and uninspired. Though dull, these sections are broken up frequently by minigames that, more so than in Spyro Orange, are frustrating and not very much fun at all.

Certainly, you can play this wide variety of single-level minigames with friends, but the bite-sized bits of classic gaming concepts are poorly executed with inconsistent controls and wildly varying levels of difficulty. Why not just play the originals?

Perhaps, instead, you'd like to take a chance with the card game. Well, it's not really a game, but you can collect over 100 cards and trade with your friends that also has one of these two titles. What happens when you trade? Certain "special" cards unlock new characters that can be played in multiplayer minigames. Whee.

Unfortunately for each of these platforming stars, this cross-franchise experiment tries to go too many directions at once and ends up being stuck in mediocreland on all counts.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE **5.75**

> **Concept:** Mix a healthy dose of minigames into the action/platform soup. Include something about cards – kids love cards these days

> **Graphics:** Nice, clean character and enemy models along with better environments make this one more engaging than Spyro's entry

> **Sound:** More ooga-booga inspired than one would guess, but the GBA doesn't really pump out the bass

> **Playability:** Weirdly different minigames with horrid control schemes

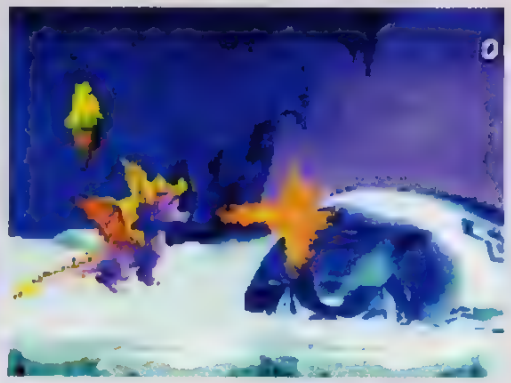
> **Entertainment:** This game is an odd mix of features, and each section leaves a lot to be desired

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 6

The Bandicoot suffers worse than Spyro in Crash Purple (which shares ties with Spyro Orange), if only for the fact that his last couple of GBA adventures were actually pretty great, and managed to approximate the gameplay of Naughty Dog's PSone Crash classics. In hopes of keeping the two titles' gameplay and design similar, Crash Purple now just feels like another watered-down platformer with some mildly amusing minigames. —**MATT**

Shooting sheep with a rocket launcher is admittedly fun, but weirdly enough, it does actually start to get old



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Spyro Orange: The Cortex Conspiracy

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE)
> **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** VICARIOUS VISIONS
> **RELEASE** JUNE 1 > **ESRB** E

LEAVES A BAD TASTE

Spyro's new Game Boy Advance cart is a weird collection of differing ideas. It breaks from the dragon's latest handheld entries by abandoning an isometric view in favor of a side-scrolling vantage point for the platforming sections – which, for us, is a good thing. But, unfortunately, the jumping is painful as all get-out.

Another shift for the franchise is the card trading option offered in conjunction with Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Rampage. This feature isn't particularly compelling, mostly because the cards don't look terribly cool and they don't do anything besides open up characters to use in the linked games – a bonus that I could care less about.

And about those minigames, most are like a single level from a classic title – Breakout, Asteroids, and the Test Your Might sections from Mortal Kombat are each used over and over. You'll encounter five per world and probably dread each one. I will say that the minigames in Spyro are far more fun than its sister title, though.

Spyro Orange is just a mishmash of concepts that never really gel into anything great.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE **5.75**

> **Concept:** Mix a healthy dose of minigames into the action/platform soup. Include something about cards – kids love cards these days

> **Graphics:** 3D-esque character models and environments with many levels of detail try to make this stand out

> **Sound:** It's GBA . and it's a little below current portable par

> **Playability:** Boss battles are tough, but not fun

> **Entertainment:** With no part executed particularly well, this is one sad little cartridge

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 6

Wow, five years ago the prospect of Crash and Spyro joining forces would have been pretty damn exciting. Today, I just don't really care about these characters anymore. Spyro Orange (like its Crash counterpart) is largely a selection of minigames loosely strung together with turgid side-scrolling platforming. In theory, the card-trading and cross-game sharing features are cool, but I highly doubt this mediocre addition will generate a kiddie game phenomenon—**MATT**

In this minigame, Spyro has to flip between floor and ceiling (in his robot) as he shoots rockets at the men in pretty, white jackets

Getting wrapped in chains is one of the new threats you'll face

GAME BOY ADVANCE

River City Ransom EX

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS USA
> **DEVELOPER** ATLUS > **RELEASE** MAY 25 > **ESRB** RP

RETRO CITY

I have very fond memories of playing the original River City Ransom with my younger brother back in the NES days, and it remains one of my favorite games of all time. This update of the Technos classic is every bit as good as the original, and even makes a few improvements. If, like me, you loved this game back in the day, stop reading this now and just go buy it. You'll still love it as much as I do.

On a basic level, everything is unchanged. The side-scrolling brawling, stat-boosting shopping, deformed characters, and bizarre dialogue are all still here. The animations are better, and there are even a few new moves. A few modernizations were also added (like being able to buy emo music from the record store), but nothing ruins the retro vibe. It's also funnier than I remembered: I had forgotten that the theme from Double Dragon plays during the fight with the Twins near the end of the game.

Those who didn't grow up with this title may not be quite as charmed with it as old fans, but many of them will still enjoy it. The RPG-infused brawling may seem a little thin today, meaning River City Ransom will probably become a cult classic for the second time.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> **Concept:** The NES classic makes a long-awaited return on GBA with a few technical upgrades

> **Graphics:** Much like the Mano Advance titles, EX looks better than the NES original without losing the flavor

> **Sound:** Pure 8-bit goodness

> **Playability:** For better or for worse, EX plays exactly the same as the original. A jump button would have been nice

> **Entertainment:** This new port proves that River City Ransom is still one of the best cult classic games of all time

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

River City Ransom has always boasted a healthy cult following for its endearingly stumpy character designs, solid brawler action, and strange English-as-a-second-language plot and dialogue (dying enemies often exclaim "BARF!" for no apparent reason and there is even a street gang called the Generic Dudes). All nostalgia aside, this is a fun, if fairly repetitive beat 'em up that will likely seem a bit dated to younger fans.—**MATT**

Is there anything more frightening than meeting two guys named Andy?

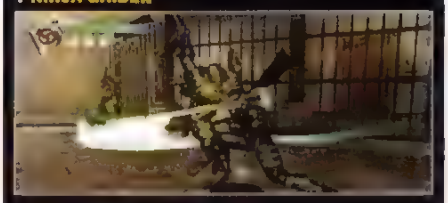
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For March 2004 Based On Units Sold

1 NINJA GAIDEN



In nature, ninjas actually coexist with cute bunnies in a very delicate ecosystem, using their swords to till the land as the bunnies cheerfully hop along. Once ninjas are removed from this environment, however, they become irate and violent, thus fueling the common misconception that they are silent assassins. For more information about ninjas and their natural habitat, consult your local zoologist.

2 POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

Cuddly little monsters standing by their masters, helping them through adversity while looking adorable all the while. If only real life were so picturesque. The furriest thing we've got around here is Jeremy, and he just gets uppity when we try to pet him.

3 MVP BASEBALL 2004

In a recent interview with Baseball, we asked what steps it will be taking to keep itself fresh as the years pass, perhaps along the lines of catapulting certain popular stadiums (like Minnesota's Metrodome) into outer space. Baseball was then heard to remark: "Get out of my office."

4 SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

If there is one thing that we have learned from Sam Fisher, it is this: Every game on the planet could be improved by adding sticky shockers. There just isn't enough convulsing and collapsing in games these days. Try to think of an example where this addition wouldn't be awesome. We dare you.

5 MVP BASEBALL 2004

See, this is what we're talking about! This game could use some serious sticky shocker enhancement. Is a runner stealing second? Fire away and watch the sparks fly! If there's one thing baseball needs, it's more smoldering bodies littering the field.

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Ninja Gaiden	N/A	XBOX	9.5	03/04	$50
2	Pokémon Colosseum	N/A	GC	7	03/04	$48
3	MVP Baseball 2004	N/A	PS2	9.25	03/04	$49
4	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	N/A	XBOX	9.5	03/04	$50
5	MVP Baseball 2004	N/A	XBOX	9.25	03/04	$49
6	James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	5	PS2	8.5	02/04	$49
7	Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	N/A	GC	9.25	03/04	$40
8	Final Fantasy XI	N/A	PS2	7.75	03/04	$98
9	Resident Evil: Outbreak	N/A	PS2	7.5	03/04	$50
10	MX Unleashed	16	PS2	8	02/04	$40
11	Rise To Honor	6	PS2	7	02/04	$40
12	Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3	14	GBA	9.5	10/03	$30
13	Metroid Zero Mission	N/A	GBA	9.5	02/04	$29
14	Halo	N/A	XBOX	9.5	11/01	$30
15	Drakengard	N/A	PS2	7.5	03/04	$39
16	Need for Speed: Underground	4	PS2	9.5	11/03	$48
17	Pokémon Ruby	N/A	GBA	7.25	03/03	$31
18	NFL Street	2	PS2	7.75	01/04	$47
19	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	12	GC	9.25	11/03	$48
20	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	N/A	GC	8	03/04	$40

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Dragon Quest V	N/A	PS2
2	Pokémon Fire Red/Leaf Green	3	GBA
3	Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors	N/A	GBA
4	Famicom Mini: Super Mario Bros.	4	GBA
5	Nobunaga's Ambition: Empire Creation	N/A	PS2
6	Shin Sangoku Musou 3 Empires	N/A	PS2
7	Pro Baseball Spirits 2004	N/A	PS2
8	Gokodemo Issho: Toro and the Shooting Star	N/A	PS2
9	Pro Baseball 2004	N/A	PS2
10	Kiniro No Gasshuberu!! Yujo Tag Battle	N/A	PS2

6

9

Source: Game Japan. Based on Monthly Units Sold

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	N/A	PS2
2	Manhunt	N/A	Xbox
3	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	1	Xbox
4	Unreal Tournament 2004	2	PC
5	Far Cry	3	PC
6	The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	N/A	GC
7	Painkiller	N/A	PC
8	Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	6	PS2
9	Red Dead Revolver	N/A	Multi
10	Ninja Gaiden	4	Xbox

2

6

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Battlefield Vietnam	N/A	$37
2	Unreal Tournament 2004	N/A	$37
3	Far Cry	N/A	$40
4	Counter Strike: Condition Zero	N/A	$36
5	Unreal Tournament 2004 Special Ed	N/A	$37
6	The Sims Deluxe Edition	3	$21
7	Call of Duty	4	$46
8	Drop!	4	$10
9	Zoo Tycoon: Complete Collection	5	$29
10	Age of Mythology	7	$32

2

6

Based On Monthly Units Sold

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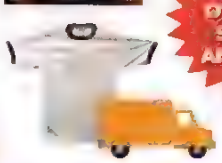

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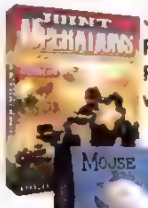

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Onimusha Blade Warriors - PS2 - Mar-04

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Hobbit, The	6.25	Jan-04
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
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Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8.25	Dec-03
Mario Kart: Double Dash	9.25	Dec-03
Mario Party 5	2	Dec-03
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	7.5	Dec-03
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	8.5	Nov-03
Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	9.25	Mar-04
Monster 4X4: Masters of Metal	6.5	Feb-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
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Need For Speed: Underground	9	Dec-03
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
NHL 2004	9	Oct-03
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Pokémon Channel	6.5	Jan-04
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Pool Paradise	6	May-04
R: Racing Evolution	7	Feb-04
Rogue Ops	7.5	Nov-03
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	6	May-04
Simpsons: Hit and Run	8.5	Nov-03
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Serious Sam: The Next Encounter	7.75	May-04
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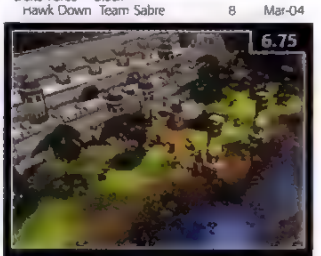
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	9	Dec-03
Curse: The Eye of Isis	6.75	Feb-04
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix	8	Jan-04
Dead Man's Hand	7.75	Apr-04
Deus Ex: Invisible War	9	Jan-04
Dino Crisis 3	6.25	Oct-03
Dinosaur Hunting	7	Feb-04
Dinotopia: The Sunstone Odyssey	3.25	Nov-03
Disney Extreme Skate Adventure	7.75	Oct-03
Drake 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, The	7.75	Jan-04
ESPN Major League Baseball	7.5	Apr-04
ESPN NBA Basketball	9.5	Nov-03
ESPN NHL Hockey	8.5	Oct-03
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	8	Feb-04
Fight Night 2004	9	Apr-04
Freedom Fighters	8	Oct-03
Freestyle Street Soccer	4	Feb-04
Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	5.75	Nov-03
Gladius	9.25	Oct-03
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Grabbed by the Ghoulies	4.5	Dec-03
Grand Theft Auto III/Vice City	10	Jan-04
Haunted Mansion, The	7	Feb-04
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death	6.75	May-04
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
Magic: The Gathering: Battlegrounds	6.5	Dec-03
Maximum Chase	7	Jan-04
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	8.75	Feb-04
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	7.75	Dec-03
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	8.5	Nov-03
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	7.75	Feb-04
MTX: Mototrax	7.5	Apr-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
MX Unleashed	8	Mar-04
NASCAR Thunder 2004	8.5	Oct-03
NBA Ballers	8	May-04
NBA Inside Drive 2004	6.5	Dec-03
NBA Jam	6.5	Nov-03
NBA Live 2004	8.25	Nov-03
Need For Speed: Underground	9.25	Dec-03
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
NHL 2004	9	Oct-03
NHL Hitz Pro	8	Oct-03
NHL Rivals 2004	5.75	Dec-03
Ninja Gaiden	9.5	Apr-04
Otogi: Myth of Demons	6.75	Oct-03
Pitfall: Harry	6	Apr-04
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	9.5	Jan-04
Rainbow Six 3	8.5	Jan-04
Roadkill	6.5	Oct-03
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	6.75	Dec-03
Rogue Ops	7.5	Nov-03
Scooby Doo!: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	7.5	Jan-04
Sega GT Online	7.75	Dec-03
Silent Scope Complete	8	Feb-04
Simpsons Hit & Run	8.5	Oct-03
Soul Calibur II	8.5	Oct-03
Spawn: Armageddon	6.5	Jan-04
Spy Hunter 2	6	Feb-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	9.5	May-04
SSX 3	9.5	Nov-03
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	5.5	Apr-04
Star Wars: Jedi Academy	8	Jan-04
Starsky and Hutch	5.75	Oct-03
Steel Battalion: Line of Contact	7.5	May-04
Suffering, The	8.25	Apr-04
SWAT: Global Strike Team	7.5	Nov-03
Sybena	7	Oct-03
Tenchu: Return From Darkness	7.25	Apr-04
Tennis Masters Series 2003	8	Oct-03
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	9.25	Oct-03
TOCA Race Driver 2	7.5	May-04
Tony Hawk's Underground	8.75	Dec-03
Top Spin	9	Nov-03
True Crime: Streets of LA	8.5	Jan-04
Unreal II: The Awakening	8	Apr-04
Voodoo Vince	8.5	Nov-03
Whiplash	4	Jan-04
World Championship Pool 2004	6.75	Feb-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrath Unleashed	7.5	Feb-04
WWE Raw 2	7.25	Nov-03
XIII	7	Dec-03
XGRA	5	Nov-03

PC

Age of Mythology: The Titans	9	Dec-03
Battlefield Vietnam	8	May-04
Black Mirror, The	4.5	Jan-04
Call of Duty	9	Dec-03
Civilization III: Conquests	8	Jan-04
Command & Conquer: Generals: Zero Hour	8	Dec-03
Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	8	Jan-04
Contract J.A.C.K.	5.5	Jan-04
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	7.75	Apr-04
Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis	8	Feb-04
Delta Force – Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	8	Mar-04



The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Ring - PC - Jan-04

Deus Ex: Invisible War	9.5	Jan-04
Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna	7.5	Jan-04
Empires: Dawn of the Modern World	8.25	Dec-03
Far Cry	9.25	May-04
Final Fantasy XI	8	Jan-04
Gangland	6.5	May-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
Horizons: Empire of Istaria	7	Feb-04
Korea: Forgotten Conflict	8	Jan-04
Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader	8.5	Oct-03
Lord of the Rings, The: War of the Ring, The	6.75	Jan-04
Lords of EverQuest	7.5	Feb-04
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	9.25	Dec-03
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault: Breakthrough	9	Dec-03
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	8.5	Feb-04
Northland	8	Mar-04
Nosferatu: The Wrath of Malachi	3	Jan-04
Patrician III	7	Jan-04
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	8	Feb-04
Pirate Hunter: Seize and Destroy	6	Jan-04
PlanetSide: Core Combat	2	Jan-04
Republic: The Revolution	6	Dec 03
Runaway: A Road Adventure	7.25	Nov-03
Savage: The Battle for Newerth	8.5	Nov-03
Silent Storm	7.75	Feb-04
SimCity 4: Rush Hour	7.5	Dec-03
Sims: Makin' Magic, The	7.75	Dec-03
Space Colony	7	Dec-03
SpellForce: The Order of Dawn	7.75	Mar-04
Star Wars: Jedi Academy	8.5	Nov-03
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	9.5	Feb-04
Sybena II	6.75	Apr-04
Temple of Elemental Evil	7	Nov-03
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	7.25	May-04
Tron 2.0	8.75	Oct-03
UFO: Aftermath	8.25	Dec-03
Unreal Tournament 2004	9.5	May-04
Uru: Ages Beyond Myst	8.25	Dec-03
Wars and Warriors: Joan of Arc	7.5	Apr-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
X2: The Threat	7	Feb-04

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Aladdin	8	Oct 03
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	8.25	Feb-04
Banjo-Kazooie: Grunty's Revenge	5.25	Nov-03
Batman: The Rise of Sin Tzu	7	Mar-04
Blackthorne	8	Dec-03
Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	6.75	Oct 03
Cima, The Enemy	8	Dec 03
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	7	Dec-03
Disney Extreme Skate Adventure	6	Oct-03
Disney's Magical Quest 2	6.75	Oct 03
Dragon Ball Z: Taiketsu	6	Dec 03
Fire Emblem	8.75	Dec 03

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time - GBA - Dec-03

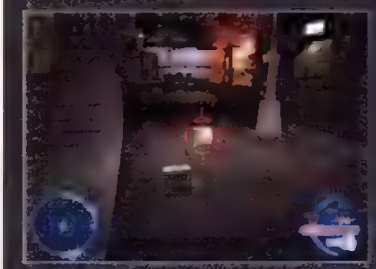
Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	7	Dec-03
Ice Nine	3.75	Apr-04
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	6.25	Feb-04
Justice League: Chronicles	3	Dec-03
King of Fighters EX2: Howling Blood, The	7.75	Mar-04
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8	Dec-03
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	9.5	Jan-04
Max Payne	7.75	Jan-04
Medal of Honor: Infiltrator	6	Nov-03
Mega Man Battle Chip Challenge	6	Mar-04
Mega Man Zero 2	7	Oct-03
Metroid: Zero Mission	9.5	Feb-04
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	6.25	Mar-04
Monster Truck Madness	4.5	Oct-03
Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee	4	Nov-03
Onimusha: Tactics	7	Oct-03
Pirates of the Caribbean	5.5	Sep-03
Pitfall: The Lost Expedition	6	Apr-04
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby and Sapphire	8.5	Oct-03
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	8.25	Dec-03
Rock 'n Roll Racing	8.75	Sep-03
R-Type III: The Third Lightning	6.25	May-04
Scooby Doo! Mystery Mayhem	6	Jan-04
Shining Soul	6.5	Sep-03
Shining Soul II	7.5	Feb-04
Sims: Bustin' Out, The	8.5	Jan-04
Sonic Battle	6	Apr-04
Sound of Thunder, A	4.5	Apr-04
Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack	7	Sep-03
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8	May-04
Spyro: Attack of the Rhynocs	5.5	Jan-04
SSX 3	4	Dec-03
Star Wars: Flight of the Falcon	2.25	Jan-04
Stuntman	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
Tak and the Power of Juju	5	Jan-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	7.25	Nov-03
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	7.5	Feb-04
Tony Hawk's Underground	7.5	Dec-03
Top Gear Rally	8	Jan-04
Wade Hixton's Counter Punch	7.5	May-04
Yu-Gi-Oh!: The Sacred Cards	7.5	Feb-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship 2004	6.5	May-04

Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain

Strategies From Lead Designer Scott Youngblood

General Gameplay

Smoke Grenades can conceal you from attack – Smoke grenades are one of the most useful items in Syphon Filter: TOS. Creative use can give you the extra time you need to disarm explosives, lock down doors, or make it through heavily guarded areas.



Ammo Sharing – Some weapons use the same type of ammunition. Got a favorite weapon for taking out bad guys but it doesn't seem to have enough ammunition? When equipping for a mission, choose weapons for the other slots that have the same type of ammo and never run out again!

Single-Player Tips

Carthage 2 – Shutting down power can make collecting viral containers easier.

Yemen 1 – Look for ways to distract the locals making entrance into sensitive areas easier.

Yemen 2 – Quick killing is essential to guarantee the survival of Zohar. Utilize target lock and then manually aim to pull off fast kills.

Chechnya – You've got a full arsenal of non-lethal weapons, and more can be found within the level. Your job will be much easier to accomplish if no one is awake to see you.

Multiplayer Tips

Carthage 2 – Look for a good spot to plant C-4; doing so makes dealing with the ALA death squad a breeze.

Yemen 2 – Look for hidden objectives that can only be completed with a buddy climb.

Myanmar – Provide covering fire for teammates carrying Imani's body.

Walkthrough: Carthage 2

The Warehouse district has six main objectives. Here's how to complete each of them:

Stop the Viral Containers from being released – There are three ALA terrorists who have viral containers that they are planning to release into the water supply. The onscreen timer counts down the time that the terrorists must be killed within. As long as all three are dead before the timer expires then the viral contamination will have been averted. In addition to killing each of the terrorists you must also collect each of the viral containers to prevent them from falling back into terrorist hands.

Terrorist #1 – This terrorist is located inside the pump room on one of the platforms. The platform can be reached by performing a shimmy from the far side platform. Performing the shimmy will be difficult unless the control room machine has been turned off, which closes the access tunnel shafts.

Terrorist #2 – This terrorist is located in the North Sewer Pipe near the street access ladder.

Terrorist #3 – This terrorist is located in the South Sewer Pipe near the furnace room.

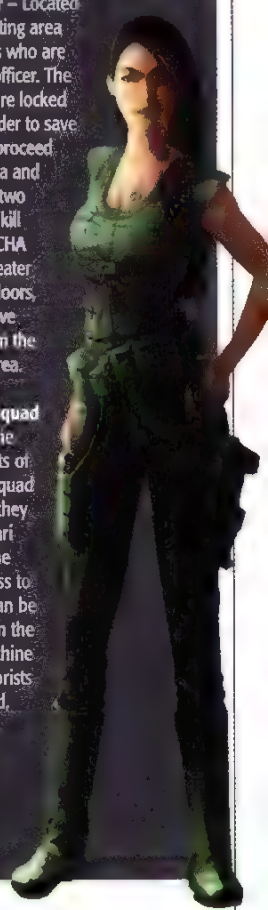
Eliminate the ALA Death Squad – The ALA Death Squad consists of four well-armed terrorists that start in the tenement area and make their way through the street level of the area and exit near the theater. If any of the Death Squad make it through the door near the theater then this objective will be failed. In multiplayer, the Death Squad can be taken care of easily by planting C-4 in the furnace, which in turn will explode, sending the Death Squad to a fiery grave. The C-4 can be obtained by performing a buddy climb to the top of the train car near level start and taking the charges that the terrorists were planting. Dealing with the death squad in single player requires taking them out along their route. One well placed frag grenade can do the trick, or you can try to pick them off one by one.

Eliminate the Unknown Terrorist – After dealing with the ALA Death Squad, an unknown female terrorist will appear in the tenement area. She is well armed and fairly skilled, making her a challenging foe.

Eliminate Fournier – Fournier appears after the female terrorist has been eliminated. He is located on top of the theater's marquee. Initially, he is occupied by taking pot shots at Imani.

Save the CHA officer – Located inside the theatre seating area are two ALA terrorists who are interrogating a CHA officer. The lower theater doors are locked from the inside. In order to save the officer you must proceed up to the balcony area and quickly eliminate the two terrorists before they kill the CHA officer. The CHA officer will exit the theater through the bottom doors, allowing you to retrieve Mujari's recorder from the front of the theater area.

Eliminate the ALA squad attacking Imani – The final objective consists of another ALA death squad group, but this time they have Imani and Mujari pinned down near the machine room. Access to the machine room can be gained via a ladder in the alley behind the machine room. Once the terrorists have been eliminated, the mission is over.



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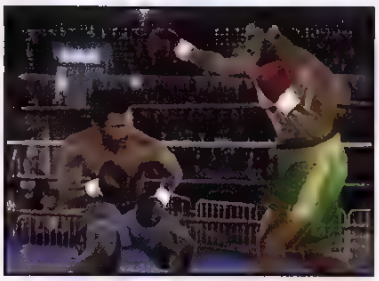
GameStop

Attention All Cheaters!
Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

MULTI-PLATFORM



Fight Night 2004

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Unlock All Arenas – From the main menu, go to My Corner, then enter Left (x3), Right (x3), Left, Right (x2)

Unlock Big Tigger – From the main menu, go to My Corner, then Record Books, then view Most Wins – Boxer, then press Up (x2).

MX Unleashed

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

In the Cheats menu, enter these as the appropriate cheat codes.

Unlock 50cc Bikes	SQUIRRELDOG
Unlock 500cc Bikes	BIGDOGS
Unlock All Machines	MINIGAMES
Unlock Career Completion	CLAPPEDOUT
Unlock Expert AI	OBTGOFAST
Unlock Freestyle Tracks	BUSTBIG
Unlock National Tracks	ECONATION
Unlock Pro Physics	SWAPPIN
Unlock Supercross Tracks	STUPERCROSS

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

Enter these case-sensitive passwords in the (gasp!) password menu to make all of this crazy business available. Provided you don't type them wrong, Tiger will say, "Oh yeah!"

Ace Andrews	ACEINTHEHOLE
Cedric The Entertainer	CEDDYBEAR
Dominic "The Don" Donatello	DISCOKING
Downtown Brown	DTBROWN
Edwin "Pops" Masterson	EDDIE
Erica Ice	ICYONE
Every Course	ALLTHETRACKS
Every Golfer	CANYOUPICKONE
Every Golfer And Course	THEKITCHENSINK
Hamish "Mulligan" McGregor	DWILBY
Moa "Big Mo" Ta'a Vatu	ERUPTION
Solita Lopez	SHORTGAME
Sunday Tiger	4REDSHIRTS
Takeharu "Tsunami" Moto	EMERALDCHAMP
Target World Challenge	SHERWOODTARGET
Val Summers	BEVERLYHILLS
"Yosh" Tanigawa	THENEWLEFTY

PLAYSTATION 2

Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest

Level 20 With 999 Skill Points – During gameplay, hold L1 + R2 + △, then press R3

Gladius

1,000 Experience – In the school menu, pause the game and press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left (x4), △, Right

1,000 Gold – In the school menu, pause the game and press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left (x4), △, Left

Easier Enemies – In the League Office, pause the game and press Right (x3), Up (x2), Left (x4), Right, Down (x4), Up

Full Camera Control – During combat, pause the game and press Up, Left, Down, Right, Left (x4), Up (x4)

Harder Enemies – In the League Office, pause the game and press Right (x3), Up (x2), Left (4), Right, Up (x4), Down

Ignore Class Restrictions On Equipment – In the school menu, pause the game and press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left (x4), △ (x3)

The Suffering

Enter these codes during gameplay while holding L1 + R1 + ✕.

All Weapons And Items (Except Gonzo Gun) – Down, Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, R2, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up, Right, Down, Left, R2, Down (x3), R2 (x2)

Black & White Mode – Up, R2, Left, R2, Down, R2, Right, R2 (press Start to disable)

Bloody Outfit – Up, Down, Left, Right

Clean Outfit – Down, Up, Right, Left

Full Health – Down (x3), R2, Up (x2), Down, Up, R2

Get Over Insanity – Right (x3), R2, Left (x2), Right, Left, R2

Gonzo Gun – Left, R2 (x3), Right, Left, Right, Left, Up, R2 (x3), Down, Up, Down, Up, R2

Grenades – Right (x3), Left (x3), R2

Kill Yourself – Down (x4), R2

Max Xombium – Right (x2), Up (x2), R2, Left, Right, R2, Right, Up, Right, R2

Molotov Cocktails – Down (x3), Up (x3), R2

More Negative Karma – Left (x2), Down, Up, R2

Refill Current Ammo – Right (x2), Down, Up, Left, Right, Left (x2), R2

Refill Throwing Ammo – Left (x2), Up, Down, Right, Left, Right (x2), R2

Shotgun With Ammo – Left (x3), Down (x3)

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3

Unlock All Missions For Custom Mission Mode – At the main menu, enter L1, R2, L2, R1, Left, Right, □, ○

GAMECUBE

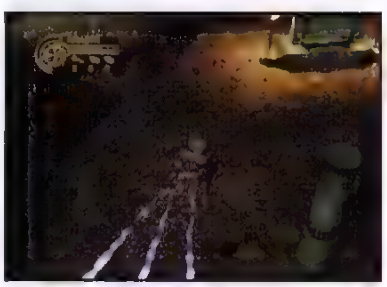
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour

Hold down Z when you press the Start button at the title screen. This allows you to select the S Tournaments menu. In there, you'll find the Hole In One Contest and Password Tournaments. We've decided to let you in on the passwords.

Password Tournaments	
Bowser Badlands Tour	9L3L9KHR
Bowser Jr.'s Jumbo Tourney	2GPL67PN
Camp Hyrule Tournament	0EKW5G7U
Hollywood Video Tour	BJGQBULZ
Peach's Castle Grounds Course	ELBUT3PX
Super Mario Open	GGAA241
Target Tour Tournament	CEUFPXJ1

Gratuitous Violence Towards Pikmin – If your ball lands in the yellow flowers on the Peach Invitational, you can see and hear small Pikmin flying out.

XBOX



Dungeons & Dragons Heroes

Hold the L trigger, then press the Y and A buttons at the same time to access the cheat menu. Input these codes to get pumped up. Note that you can keep hitting "Accept" to get more and more goodies

Attributes, Experience, and Gold	
10 Constitution Points	N STINE
10 Dexterity Points	ZXE053
10,000 Experience Points	DSP633
500,000 Gold	KNE637

Mod World

Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne

Max's second foray into the [illegible] slammed by many as being too short, criticism we won't discuss here, but if the ending of the game left you hankering for more, you should check out the official bonus chapters. Made by Remedy, the developer behind Mr. Payne, these last add-ons will give you some more thug-perforate. Unfortunately, these are only available for PC – the Xbox version doesn't support downloadable content. Find them at www.rockstargames.com/maxpayne2/downloads/MaxPayne2BonusChapters.php

[illegible] created content, including new levels and gameplay tweaks as well as learn about the ongoing Rockstar-sponsored mod contest at www.rockstargames.com/maxpayne2. Follow the links to the fansites in the Mod section of the site to find the [illegible] to prolong Max's pain.

[illegible] a bunch of new Dead Man Walking maps (though their quality varies wildly), new looks for the characters, different weapons such as the ever-popular silenced Beretta, and the ability to play in a first-person view. Though much of this stuff may not be to your liking, you could very well find something that [illegible] of Max's considerable [illegible]

[illegible] mention is The Hell Unchained, a total conversion that promises to be an entirely new and of itself when it's done. Check out the lovely render of the main character, and hope that this project doesn't fall into [illegible] way that so many others do.

Potions, Wands, and Other Items (Ten Each)	
Antivenom Potions	SPINRAD
Berserk Brew	THOMAS
Fiery Oil	EHOFF
Fire Bombs	WEBER
Fire Flasks	BROPHY
Flash Freeze	ESKO
Globe Potions	WRIGHT
Healing Potions (Large)	THOMPSON
Holy Water	CRAWLEY
Insect Plague	DERISO
Rods of Destruction	AUSTIN
Rods of Miracles	JARMAN
Rods of Missiles	MILLER
Thrown Axes of Ruin	ROMANO
Thrown Daggers	MOREL
Thrown Daggers of Stunning	BELL
Thrown Halcyon Hammers	PRASAD
Thrown Viper Axes	FRAZIER
Thunderstones	ELSON
Tomes of Lessons	PAQUIN
Tomes of the Apprentice	BILGER
Tomes of the Master	SPANBURG
Tomes of the Teacher	MEFFORD
Will Potions (Medium)	LU
Will Potions (Large)	GEE

Miscellaneous	
Credits	CREDITS
Disable Cheats	UNBUFF
Invincibility	PELOR
Nightmare Difficulty	MPS LABS
Unlimited MW	OBADHAI

Ninja Gaiden

Complete the following tasks to unlock the NES Ninja Gaiden games.

Ninja Gaiden I – Bring all 50 Golden Scarabs to Muramasa.

Ninja Gaiden II – After you've gotten NG I, go to the Clock Tower Plaza in Tairon City. Shoot the clock face (of the clock tower) with your bow from the ledge above the multicolored door, and a treasure chest with NG II will appear in the building opposite from you

Ninja Gaiden III – After you've gotten NG I & II, go to the Perisytle Passage in the Aqueducts. NG III will be on top of the broken pillar where you found a Golden Scarab before.

Passwords for Old School Ninja Gaiden

Enter these at the password screen within the Classic NG games.

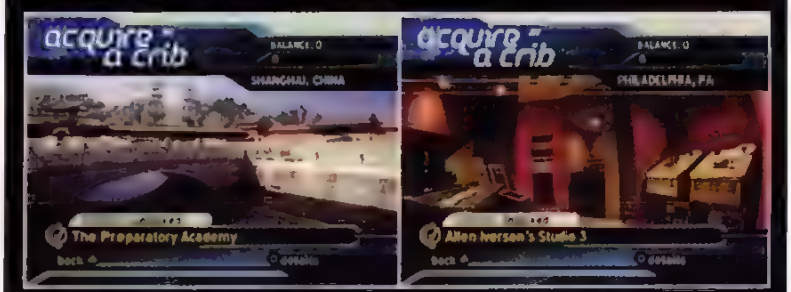
Ninja Gaiden I	
Act I	L, X, A, Y, A, X
Act II	A, X, X, R, Y, A
Act III	X, Y, B, R, L, X
Act IV	B, R, A, B, Y, Y
Act V	X, A, Y, X, L, L
Act VI	R, Y, R, L, A, X

Ninja Gaiden II	
Act I	A, A, B, X, Y, R
Act II	X, L, R, B, B, A
Act III	L, Y, B, A, R, R
Act IV	A, L, X, Y, Y, B
Act V	R, A, A, B, X, L
Act VI	Y, L, R, A, Y, R
Act VII	B, B, X, Y, A, L

Ninja Gaiden III	
Act I	B, Y, R, L, X, A
Act II	A, R, R, Y, A, L
Act III	L, B, R, Y, L, Y
Act IV	R, R, B, A, Y, X
Act V	Y, A, B, X, R, X
Act VI	B, X, X, A, X, Y
Act VII	X, R, X, Y, Y, L

Code of the Month

NBA Ballers



From the main menu, go to Inside Stuff and then Phrase-ology. Enter these codes there to unlock the corresponding piece of ostentatious bling.

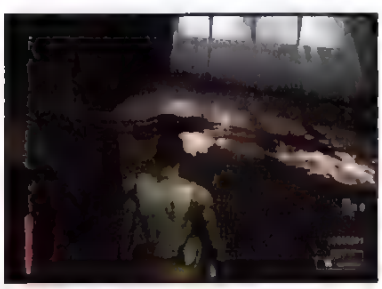
Alternate Baller Gear

Allen Iverson – KILLER CROSSOVER
Alonzo Mourning – ZO
Amare Stoudamire – RISING SUN
Baron Davis – STYLIN' & PROFILIN'
Ben Wallace – RADIO CONTROLLED CARS
Bill Russell – CELTICS DYNASTY
Bill Walton – TOWERS OF POWER
Chris Weber – 24 SECONDS
Clyde Drexler – CLYDE THE GLIDE
Darryl Dawkins – RIM WRECKER
Dejaun Wanger – NBA HANGTIME
Dikembe Mutumbo – IN THE PAINT
Dominique Wilkins – DUNK FEST
Elton Brand – REBOUND
Emanuel Ginobili – MANU
George Gervin – THE ICE MAN COMETH
Jalen Rose – BRING IT
Jason Kidd – PASS THE ROCK
Jason Terry – BALL ABOVE ALL
Jason Williams – GIVE AND GO
John Stockton – COURT VISION
Julius Irving – ONE ON ONE
Karl Malone – SPECIAL DELIVERY
Kenyon Martin – TO THE HOLE
Kevin McHale – HOLLA BACK
Larry Bird – HOOSIER
Latrell Sprewell – SPREE
Lebron James – KING JAMES
Magic Johnson – LAKER LEGENDS
Manu Ginobili – MANU
Nene Hilario – RAGS TO RICHES
Oscar Robertson – AINT NO THING
Pete Maravich – PISTOL PETE
Rall Allen – ALL STAR
Rashard Lewis – FAST FORWARD
Rasheed Wallace – BRING DOWN THE HOUSE
Reggie Miller – FROM DOWNTOWN
Richard Hamilton – RIP
Robert Parish – THE CHIEF
Scottie Pippen – PLAYMAKER
Shaq – DIESEL RULES THE PAINT
Stephon Marbury – PLATINUM PLAYA
Steve Francis – RISING STAR
Steve Francis (alternate) – ANKLE BREAKER
Steve Nash – HAIR CANADA
Tim Duncan – MAKE IT TAKE IT
Tony Parker – RUN AND SHOOT
Tracy McGrady – LIVING LIKE A BALLER
Isiah Thomas – TRUE BALLER
Wally Szczerbiak – WORLD
Walt Frazier – PENETRATE AND PERPETRATE
Wes Unseld – OLD SCHOOL
Willis Reed – HALL OF FAME
Wilt Chamberlain – WILT THE STILT
Yao Ming – CENTER OF ATTENTION

Other Stuff

Allen Iverson's Recording Studio – THE ANSWER
Karl Malone's Devonshire Estate – ICE HOUSE
Scottie Pippen's Yacht – NICE YACHT
Special Movie 1 – JUICE HOUSE
Special Movie 2 – NBA SHOWTIME
Special Movie 4 – HATCHET MAN
Special Shoe 2 – COLD STREAK
Yao Ming's Childhood Grade School – PREP SCHOOL
Kobe Bryant's Italian Estate – EURO CRIB

Marvin Harris
Pittsburgh, PA



The Suffering

Enter these codes during gameplay while holding L Button + R Button + X.

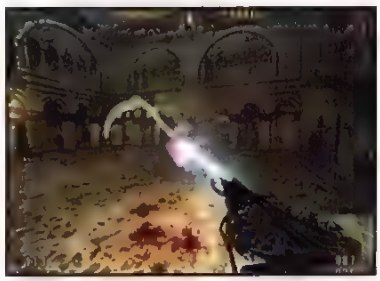
All Weapons And Items (Except Gonzo Gun) – Down, Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, A, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up, Right, Down, Left, A, Down (x3), A (x2)
Black & White Mode – Up, A, Left, A, Down, A, Right, A (press Start to disable)
Bloody Outfit – Up, Down, Left, Right
Clean Outfit – Down, Up, Right, Left
Full Health – Down (x3), A, Up (x2), Down, Up, A
Get Over Insanity – Right (x3), A, Left (x2), Right, Left, A
Gonzo Gun – Left, A (x3), Right, Left, Right, Left, Up, A (x3), Down, Up, Down, Up, A
Grenades – Right (x3), Left (x3), A
Kill Yourself – Down (x4), A
Max Xombium – Right (x2), Up (x2), A, Left, Right, A, Right, Up, Right, A
Molotov Cocktails – Down (x3), Up (x3), A
More Negative Karma – Left (x2), Down, Up, A
Refill Current Ammo – Right (x2), Down, Up, Left, Right, Left (x2), A
Refill Throwing Ammo – Left (x2), Up, Down, Right, Left, Right (x2), A
Shotgun With Ammo – Left (x3), Down (x3)

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3

Enter these codes during gameplay.

Invincibility – Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A
Laser Trails – Up, Down, Up, Down, R3 (x2)

PC



Painkiller

During gameplay, press the tilde (~) key to access the console. Then enter these cheats, which only work on Daydream and Insomniac difficulties.

All Weapons	PKWEAPONS
Bodies Never Disappear	PKKEEPBODIES
Decals Never Disappear	PKKEEPDECALS
Demon Morph	PKDEMON
Enemies Have 1 Hit Point	PKWEAKENEMIES
Excessive Gibbing	PKALWAYSGIB
Extra Damage	PKWEAPONMODIFIER
Full Ammo	PKAMMO
Full Ammo & Health	PKPOWER
Haste	PKHASTE
Invincibility	PKGOD
Lots Of Gold	PKGOLD

Sacred

During gameplay, press the tilde (~) key to access the console. Enter the Enable Cheat Mode code, and then enter the cheat codes.

Disable Cheat Mode	sys cheats 369
Enable Cheat Mode	sys cheats 963
Invincibility	cheat lord
Suicide	cheat suicide

Mini-Walkthrough

UNLIMITED ENABLED

The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures

Here's a quick rundown of strategies for all of the boss fights in this game. If you need help on the dungeons, want extra Heart Containers, or simply require assistance in general, head to the Unlimited section on www.gameinformer.com for a complete strategy guide! Who loves ya, baby!?

Level 1: Whereabouts of the Wind

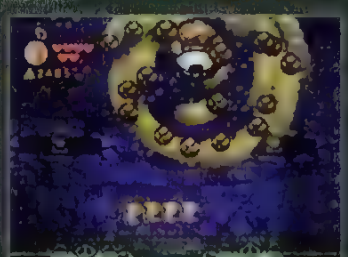
Hyrule Castle – Shadow Boss

If you've played through Ocarina of Time and Wind Waker, you should be able to defeat this boss with your eyes closed. Just avoid his sword attacks and stay back. When he shoots green energy at you, deflect the blast back at him – if you are playing with more than one player, stay a few inches away from the other players as the shot has to ricochet off of all of you. After you land a hit, run up and wail on him with sword attacks. After a few volleys and hits, he'll perish rather violently.

Level 2: Eastern Hyrule

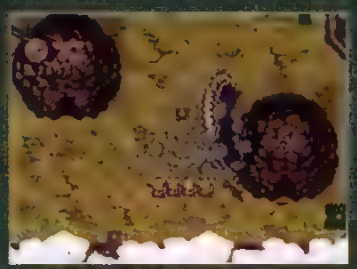
The Coast – Color Creature

Due to its erratic movement, this critter can be a bit frustrating, but it's actually quite easy to take down. Just switch control of the different colored Links and have them attack the same colored head of the beast. If you hit the wrong head, you'll have to start over. Just take your time and you should be able to accomplish this feat in no time flat.



Eastern Temple – Flying Eye

First things first, go against your intuition and fall into the hole. In this pit, you'll find the Boomerang. Snag it and return to the surface. Have your Links line up in a row, then get in fairly close to the enemy and launch boomerangs. Doing this will pull the boulders away from the large eye. Destroy these with your sword, and continue the onslaught until every boulder is taken care of. At this point, the eye will rampage. Steer clear of his plummet attack and slash him when he zooms by. Just wail away and after exacting a few combos, his reign of terror will come to an end.



Level 3: Death Mountain

The Mountain Path – Bird Boss

Timing is everything in this boss fight. Before doing anything, enter one of the caves and grab the Hammer. Next, head back outside and pick up a Bomb. Time your toss of it so that you hit the bird mid-air. This will send the winged monster slamming into a cave. Enter that cave and use the mallet on its head. Just slam that sucker good a few times and it will pull free from the cave. Repeat this tactic several times and the bird's mask will crumble (just like it did in Wind Waker). Here the strategy changes subtly. Continue tossing Bombs at it. From here on in, when you hit it, the bird will simply flow onto the ground. It's at this time that you should open up a can of sword-whooping ass. After a ton of hits, the bird will perish in a violent, yet beautiful explosion. Now, just progress to the east to finish the level.

Level 4: Near the Fields

The Field – Guardian Knight 1

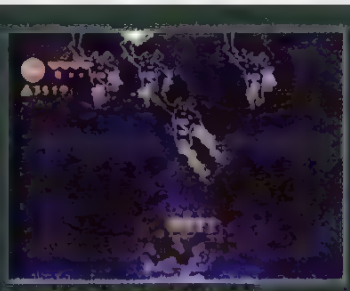
Before focusing on the large and rather deadly creature, take out the two skeletons. Next, step on the blue circle to warp into the dark world. Here, you'll have a clean shot at taking down this giant. Just avoid his sword thrusts and counter. He should fall after a few hits.

The Swamp – King Ghost

Unlike other boss fights, this one relies more on team tactics than individual effort. Have three of the Links remain on the switches to light the way. When the king ghost is illuminated, have your free Link slash him. Repeat this process to send this spirit to the netherworld permanently.

Infiltration of Hyrule Castle – Big Boo

Once again, illumination is the key to success. When this ghoul blows out your lanterns, you won't be able to hit him. Run and light them again. When he takes physical form, slash him. This will irritate the spectre, causing it to suck you up. Slash the little green ghost in its belly and it will spit you out. If you get caught in the ghost's light, it will blow out all of your lanterns. Stay clear of it. Repeat this process three times and this sucker is toast.



Level 5: The Dark World

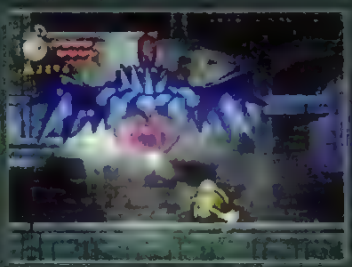
Temple of Darkness – Shadow Boss 2

Just like before, knock the green energy back at this foe. This time around, as you volley, the additional shadow bosses will throw white energy at you. You'll need to avoid this, yet maintain the volley until it hits your foe. Once he goes down, run in and slash away. We found it best to stay close to the enemy you are volleying against to cut off the angle of secondary fire. After a few hits, this guy will be gone for good.

Level 6: The Desert of Doubt

Pyramid – Centipede

To combat this centipede, pay close attention to the color of its tail. Use the same colored Link to swat at it with his sword. After three hits, the centipede will double. Battle both of them. Once one dies, the other one will increase in speed with each hit that you land. Just keep at it to conquer this foe.



Level 7: Tower of Winds

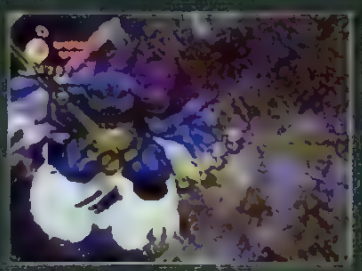
Realm of the Heavens – Eye Boss

Before laying down an assault, grab Roc's Feather from the southeastern room and step on the switch in the northeastern room. Hop across the platforms and take out all of the little creatures that you can. Enter the northwestern room and defeat the creature to free up the eyeball. When it is low enough, jump and attack. Just keep slashing at it and it will eventually fall to the ground, allowing you to unload on it. Repeat this process three times.

Level 8: Realm of the Heavens

The Palace of Winds – Vaati

To take this foe down, toss bombs into his whirlwind and time your toss so that the bomb detonates on his head. Next, drop into a hole and launch out of the cannon and slash the enemy on the head. It will then retreat into the underworld. Follow it down and slash it until it returns to the main chamber. One more airborne sword attack from the cannon will do the trick.



Level 9: Escape

The Tower of Winds – Ganon

There really isn't a lot of strategy to this fight. Ganon simply has an ungodly amount of hit points. Just hack away at him (lining up in a row helps) and avoid his lighting blasts that send you to the dark world where skeletons reside. If you are low on HP, you may want to enter the dark world to get some hearts. Otherwise, just pound away on him. After a number of hits, Ganon will change up his attack and throw his staff at you. Do your best to avoid it and continue your frantic assault to weaken his grasp over Zelda. When she enters the fray, block for her and keep Ganon at bay. Fire the green energy back at him until Zelda's attack is fully charged. When she releases the energy, fire your charged arrow shots at the ball and knock it into Ganon.

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen trying to make Kirsten Dunst stand in the rain)

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW: AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF ATARI'S GOLDEN AGE

It's hard to imagine a time before video games became the corporate cash-cow they are today. While the industry hasn't entirely ditched its dirty t-shirt for a suit-and-tie, it's readily apparent that the games business isn't the freeform hacker experiment it started as. Howard Scott Warshaw, the mind behind some of the greatest (and one of the worst) Atari cartridges of all time, remembers the early days of home console gaming in his documentary DVD, Once Upon Atari. *While certainly a treasure trove of knowledge for would-be game historians, it's also a fascinating portrait of a group of very colorful individuals who drove themselves to the limits (and nearly crazy) in the pursuit of a new form of entertainment. We recently spoke with Warshaw to get some of his thoughts and feelings about the Atari era.*

Let's talk about your background. How did you get into computers/games?
Initially, I was going to school at Tulane University and I was double majoring in economics and math. I was avoiding computers like the plague – I had no interest in them whatsoever. At one point in my economics work, some professor told me, "If you're going to go anywhere with economics, you've got to know computers."

So, I went and I took one computer course, and it was like an epiphany! It was like, "Oh my God! This is so much fun and so easy, and there's no homework. All I have to do is write these little puzzles." That was it. I finished off my math and economics, and I ended up going to grad school for computer engineering. That's what got me into computers.

Then I went to Hewlett Packard – and that was the end of my enthusiasm for computers for a while! It just wasn't the place for me, as you can imagine. I used to act up a lot. I did a lot of goofy stuff; I was definitely the wacky guy at HP. One day one of my coworkers came in and started telling me how he would tell his wife stories about the crazy stuff I was doing at HP, and his wife was saying that sounded a lot like the place where she worked. That was a place called Atari. So, I thought that sounded interesting, so I went and interviewed there. They wouldn't give me an offer because they thought I was too "straight" to work at Atari. But I literally begged and begged and they finally gave me an opportunity. After I did Yar's Revenge, they decided that maybe I did belong there.

So Yar's Revenge was the first title you did at Atari?
The first game, yeah.

Atari was famous for a very loose work environment. How did this affect the work you did and how did it benefit or hurt the company and people in it?
It's an interesting question of balance. It was a wild, crazy environment – it was extreme and intense and it was just plain fun. We were all totally into that. I've thought about that a lot, and I always have the "80-20" theory of programmers. Eighty percent of programmers go into technology to avoid people. If these people were not programmers they would be accountants and actuaries. The other 20 percent are artistic types who view computers as a vehicle for expression. These are people that, if they weren't doing programming, would be musicians, painters, or sculptors. I think, at Atari, we had a particularly high percentage of the "20 percenter" type of people. Now, as games have come to evolve, you can have a much higher number of the "80 percenter" people because the people that are making the game technically don't have to be the creative people.

– *Once Upon Atari* **is required viewing for any old-school game fanatic, and is for sale at www.onceuponatari.com**

So, was the atmosphere at Atari the product of having so many of those "20 percenters"?
So here's the thing about that kind of environment. Finding inspiration for technology is rarely a big deal, because it's very mechanical. But where do you find the inspiration for your fun stuff? You need to come up with new gameplay; you need to come up with things that no one has thought of before. So, how do you get into that frame of mind? What you do is eliminate anything that seems like a rut – try to randomize the stimulus of your environment by acting out or feeling free to do anything at any time.

There were some people that couldn't tune into it, and

they just couldn't produce anything worth playing and they didn't succeed. And, there were some people that couldn't tune out of it, and they'd get sucked into it. They had some great ideas, but they could never execute them because they couldn't stop being distracted. You have to be able to f— around, and you have to be able to sit down and work.

You obviously worked with a lot of colorful characters at Atari. In the DVD there are a lot of great stories about hijinks and pranks. What are some of your favorite memories of that era?

Todd Frye [creator of Pac-Man for the Atari 2600], was an enormous character. Todd was an off-the-wall guy, and an on-the-wall guy, because he used to literally climb the walls. He was frenetic; he was out of his mind. He would jump and scream and yell and get excited, and he would generate ideas. That enthusiasm was really great. Then you had guys like Rob Fulop, who was so witty. The banter was great.

I was kind of extreme. I had my bullwhip. When I was working on Raiders of the Lost Ark, I would walk around cracking the whip all the time. You've got to think of a guy that's in marketing who is visiting Atari – a suit – and is expecting a somewhat normal work experience, then he hears something that sounds like a gunshot. He turns around, and there is a guy standing there with a 10-foot bullwhip! [Laughs] He doesn't know what to make of that. Then he makes his appointment and finds out that this is one of our key programmers! [Laughs] He was thinking, "You've got an intruder in the building and he's got a bullwhip!"

You were definitely not averse to doing some partying in the Atari days. How did this lifestyle affect the work the team was doing, for good or ill?

Well, it clearly had negative effects on some people and the environment. It made it very difficult for some people to participate; it made them nervous. Did it help creatively? I think so. It depends on what type of drug you're talking about. There was a lot of pot. There was a lot of coke. But, there's a lot of coffee in some environments, and the coke can be analagous to coffee. It keeps people going, because people were working all the time and they just kept going and going. But, the question you've got to ask is: "Where do you hit the point of diminishing returns?" Where are people getting so focused on the drugs that they are losing focus on the work? Some of that happened.

Talk about the stress level…was there a high burnout rate at Atari?

Yeah, I mean, Atari had more nervous breakdowns than any place that any of us had seen. I mean, literally, people went crazy on a regular basis – people that couldn't handle it, people that couldn't make something fun or even master the technology. Then there were also the interpersonal aspects, in that as the money came in there were levels of resentment.

In a lot of ways, Atari is an archetypal American story, as a small band of friends make something that changes the world…then it inevitably becomes big business and things change – jealousy, marketing, and pressure. How did that change things at Atari?

There was a lot of squabbling and tension because we felt that the marketing people who didn't understand the challenges involved were frequently asking for things that reflected the fact that they had no concept of what we were doing. All they know is that they are looking at something running on 1974 technology and comparing it to 1981 state-of-the-art technology, which is much more expensive. They're saying, "Wow, that 1974 technology just isn't looking anything like what this 1981 arcade technology can do, so you engineers must not be doing a good job."

And I don't mean to be excessively harsh on them, because that's a natural place for them to be. It's not their job to know the difference. But the thing that was disappointing to us as engineers was that there didn't seem to be any effort on their part to try to appreciate or try to learn anything. They rode proudly on their misconceptions.

Talk about some of the projects you're most proud of that you did at Atari.

They say pride is a deadly sin, but I'll die someday anyway [Laughs]. One thing I'm proud of overall is that every game I did at Atari was a million seller; I never missed. I'm very proud of Yar's Revenge. Yar's Revenge had a lot of "firsts" in it, almost more than any other game. Yar's Revenge was groundbreaking in a lot of ways. It was the first game with reset from the joystick. It was the first game with a full-screen explosion. It was the first game with an Atari-approved Easter egg in it. It was the first game to have a comic book attached to it with a backstory; it was the first game with a backstory that was really developed.

Also, it's probably impossible for you to get through an interview without talking about E.T., one of the most high-profile disasters at Atari. Talk about your experience and what went wrong with E.T.

The problem with the game was this: they were negotiating for the rights to E.T., and they were negotiating way into July. This was a game that had to be released for that coming Christmas, which meant that the game had to be in production by September 1st. They didn't complete the negotiations and get ready to actually make the game until the 26th or 27th of July. Okay. At that point, they started calling up people and asking who wanted to do E.T. – no one would touch it. Spielberg said that he liked Raiders and he liked Yar's and he wanted me to do it. They came to me and said, "Can you do E.T.? We need it for September 1st."

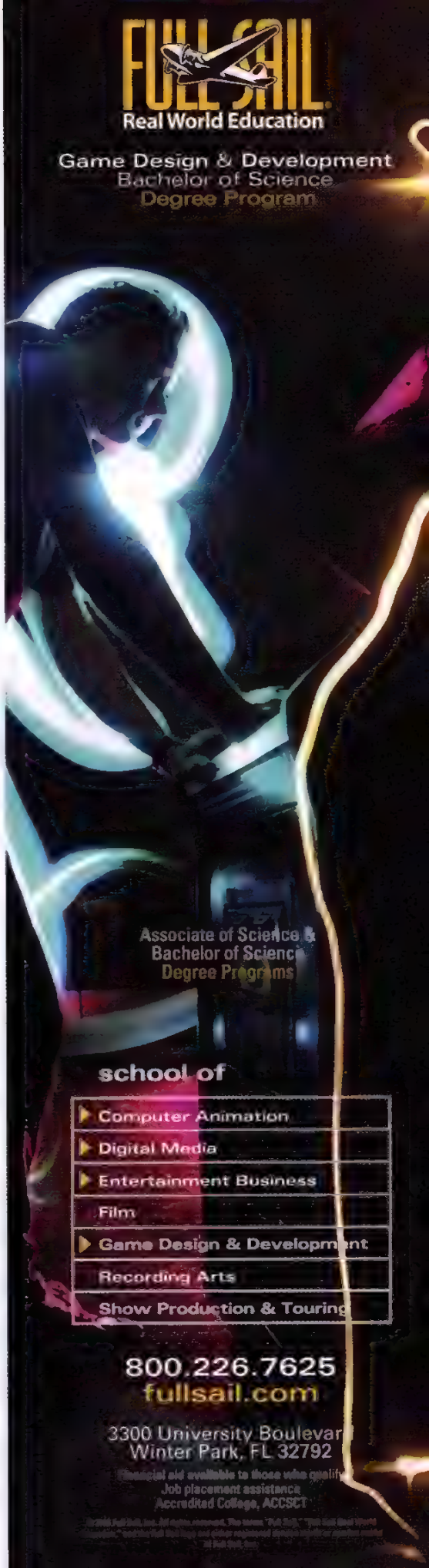
I said I would and just charged them more. It was a challenge, because no one had ever done a game in less than five or six months. Here was a game that had to be done in five weeks, and no one would touch it, except me – because I'm stupid! [Laughs] And, I like a challenge and I felt I could design it. That's the thing about E.T. that's weird, because I did a full 8K game, all fresh code, all fresh graphics – I didn't rip anything off. I put it together, and felt like I had something that had some play to it and even got several Easter eggs in it – and I did it in five weeks.

Steven Spielberg was impressed with Warshaw's work on Yar's Revenge and Raiders of the Lost Ark, which led to his fateful involvement with the critically reviled E.T.

How did you come to leave Atari?

I left Atan in late 1984, after the dust had cleared. I started at Atari in early '81, and I got to Atari and there were about 1,500 people working there, a little less. I was there when it went up to 10,000 employees, and I was still there when it got down to 200 employees. The thing was that Atari was a company that was like a time bomb in every sense of the word. Here's what happened: Atari was a system that was set up by [Atari founder Nolan] Bushnell and his guys. They set it up and it was just poised to take off then.

So, it's a coincidence that Warner buys right at that time, Bushnell and his boys are out, Warner brings in their management team, and a little while after that – whammo! – it takes off and goes through the ceiling. I believe that whoever was in charge there – no one could have f—ed it up! But what happened is that, after it takes off right after Warner installs their new management team, it makes it look like their management team did the trick and made it explode.



So, they get the credit for this incredible rise that they have no concept about – it just blindsided them. But then what happens is that it starts to turn around. Because these people have no idea why it succeeded, they have no idea what to do to fix it once it starts to fall off! So, they did things so wrong. And the things they did on the way up were so mean and cruel that whenever anyone in the industry got a chance to kick Atari on the way down, they did it with both feet.

Talk about *Once Upon Atari*. What prompted you to make it?

I'm a storyteller, and I like to tell stories. I knew that Atari was a story that had to be told. The more that I saw media talking about – "what it was like to be at Atari behind the scenes" it was all just crap. It was bulls—; nobody had a clue. What amazed me is that people were publishing and selling material about what it was like to work at Atari that was boring; it was pathetic. The truth about it was so much more interesting than what people were publishing. It became offensive to me that people were trivializing this thing that was so amazing and intense for us.

Once Upon Atari features interviews with many of the original Atari 2600 programmers

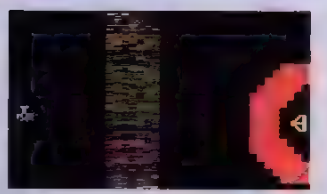
I started to become interested in video production, and decided that Atari was a story I wanted to tell. So, I thought of the title and shot all the interviews and started putting together the episodes over the course of about seven years. I couldn't stand to see people so misinformed. *Once Upon Atari* is the only thing about Atari that's composed and put together entirely by people that worked at Atari. Everything else you see is produced by someone who wasn't there. That lacks credibility to me.

Also, there's the factor of, because I was there with them, I knew what questions to ask and what stories to go after. And these people were willing to talk to me. Some of the other people have talked and interviewed people that worked there, but you just don't talk to outsiders like you talk to an insider.

How did the Atari gang feel about it once it was actually done?

They love it. Here's what *Once Upon Atari* really is. You could say it's a nice documentary, but the fact is that it's a very special and sacred memento of the most precious time in all of our lives. This was my gift to them, because these were the people that gave me the most amazing experience of my life. ■■■

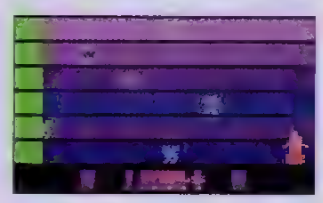
HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW: A GAMEOGRAPHY



Yar's Revenge – Atari 2600 (1982)
Warshaw's first, and probably best-loved, game at Atari, Yar's Revenge is remembered as one of the classics of the era. The game offered a blistering brand of space shooter action, and also featured many innovations, including impressive explosive effects.

Raiders of the Lost Ark – Atari 2600 (1982)
With Raiders of the Lost Ark, Warshaw managed to create a fun-to-play movie licensed title – a trick that was not easy to accomplish on the primitive Atari 2600. Director Steven Spielberg was impressed with the game, which led to him offering Warshaw the job to program the ill-fated E.T.

E.T. – Atari 2600 (1982)
Sadly, E.T. – one of the worst disasters in gaming history – has been the title most associated with Howard Scott Warshaw. Developed in an amazing five weeks, the game had solid sales based on the strength of the franchise, but once gamers realized how awful it was to play, retailers were faced with millions of unsold copies – many of which were eventually buried in the New Mexico desert.



Saboteur (Atari 2600 prototype, released in 2004)
Warshaw's fourth game for Atari was called Saboteur, although it was briefly retooled as an A-Team title that was eventually cancelled. Luckily, in 2004, Warshaw's creation finally saw the light of day thanks to Albert Yarusso, who found a ROM and eventually released the boxed version of the game that can be purchased at www.atariage.com.

Battletanx: Global Assault – PSone (2000)
Later in his career Warshaw did a stint at 3DO, working on a number of projects including serving as senior programmer on Battletanx: Global Assault for the original PlayStation.

Jacked – (PS2/Xbox/GC) – Unreleased
One of his last outings in game development, Jacked was 3DO's attempt to rekindle the motorcycle combat gameplay of the Road Rash series. Unfortunately, the title was being developed at the same time 3DO unceremoniously went out of business, ending Warshaw's involvement with the project. JoWood Productions bought the rights to the game, so hopefully it will yet see the light of day.

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME
By John the Zelda Freak

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

> **FORMAT** PSONE | N64 | DREAMCAST
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION

Games that revolutionize a genre are very rare. Even fewer are extreme sports games that present a new idea. I mean, how would you change a BMX game or skating game? Neversoft truly created a masterpiece as they changed the vision of extreme sports, maybe even video games as a whole, when they released Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2.

In the beginning, the controls seemed fairly simple: flip, grab, ollie, and grind buttons pressed together with the d-pad execute the commands. However, once you've reached the last level, you face a competition requiring skill beyond what you could ever even think of as possible when you first started the game. But the controls have become so complex, yet so easy to use, that scoring a 30-plus trick combo becomes second nature.

Another great point about this game is how you advance through the levels. Once you've completed the first one, which seemed like a breeze, the second is just as easy. You might think that something's wrong here, but the computer was really just playing with your mind. You gain experience with such speed that no goals are ever too easy or too hard. Never in any other title have I found such a perfect learning curve as I have found in this game.

But it won't be so easy to unlock the great hidden extras in the game. With hilarious secret characters (Spider-Man, a hottie army girl, and a fat, doughnut-eating police officer), cheats (perfect grind and manual, ability to make your character fatter than a garbage truck), and new areas in the levels, you just won't stop playing until everything is completed. Continuing on with the extra material, there is, as was new in 2000, a create-a-skater option and, my personal favorite, a create-a-park mode. You'll spend years (literally) with your friends making new parks and testing them out for your own enjoyment. Knock yourself out.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

A small, yet extremely significant event in the history of video games occurred on June 17, 1980. On this day, Atari's Lunar Lander and Asteroids became the first two games to be registered in the U.S. Copyright Office. This effectively ended gaming's early days as a do-it-yourself hacker phenomenon, setting the stage for every gaming-related lawsuit filed in the years to come. Yes kids, video games are big business, and it all began here.

Atari's Lunar Lander & Asteroids arcade cabinet

PSONE

BUSHIDO BLADE

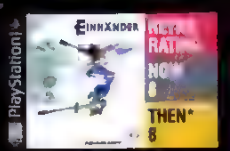
> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE SOFT, INC. > **DEVELOPER** LIGHTWEIGHT CO. LTD. > **RELEASE** 1997

Forget all of the special moves you spent so many years learning; down, down-left, left + punch isn't going to help you here. Instead of focusing on shooting fireballs or acrobatics, Square Soft's Bushido Blade has a much more calculated combat system where timing is everything. The button-mashing chaos typical of the genre won't do any good; your warriors don't have life bars, so a single well-placed slice will end the match. As a result, you have to pay close attention to your movements and attacks, how long they take, and where they leave you vulnerable. Striking at the right time is critical; even if you don't score a kill, you can immobilize an arm or a leg, leaving your opponent vulnerable and shuffling around trying to avoid your attacks. Not only is this hilarious, but it keeps the gameplay fresh and fun, as do the six playable characters and eight authentic weapons. Despite its dated graphics and a somewhat awkward control scheme, Bushido Blade achieves an ideal that few fighting games since have realized.

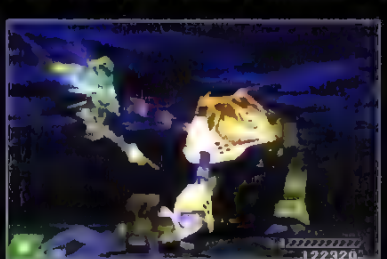
PSONE

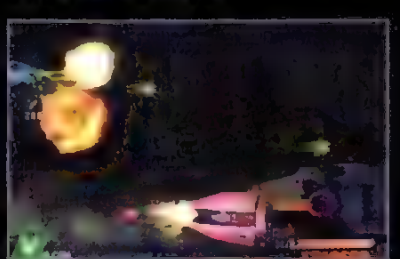
EINHÄNDER

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SHOOTER > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE SOFT, INC > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE CO, LTD > **RELEASE** 1998



There's something about side-scrolling shooters that has managed to stay pure over the years. Where other genres, with the advent of 3D gaming, have been retooled to keep up with the times, the basic presentation of the shooter has remained the same since the days of Space Invaders: Things come at you, and you blast them. Einhänder is no exception, but it makes its mark by incorporating an interesting system for equipping weapons. Certain ships have the ability to dual-equip the gunpods they yoink from their enemies, effectively giving you three weapons (counting your main gun). You can be firing your regular cannon, have a vulcan gun attached on top, a grenade launcher on the bottom, and use all three simultaneously to cut a swath through the onslaught of enemy ships. With all of the hardcore (and sometimes unreasonable) difficulty that many expect, Einhänder continues to deliver today, and even stacks up pretty well against modern powerhouses like R-Type Final and Ikaruga.





SEGA GENESIS

DUNE: THE BATTLE FOR ARRAKIS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** VIRGIN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** WESTWOOD STUDIOS > **RELEASE** 1993

Frank Herbert's classic novel *Dune* was influential even beyond the literary world. In addition to inspiring a generation of sci-fi readers, it also served as the basis for what is often cited as the first RTS game ever developed. The player chooses one of three houses (Atreides, Harkonnen, or Ordos), and follows a campaign made up of real-time battles with the objective of controlling the planet Arrakis and its primary resource, the spice Melange. Dune: The Battle for Arrakis lacks many of the amenities that we, with our WarCraft-weary eyes, take for granted. The bare bones are there, though, in the form of skill trees, resource management, and some unique units for each of the three houses. Arrakis' signature Sand Worms also roam the map to consume both friendly and hostile units, and since there's no "walk without rhythm" command, you're always vulnerable. All of these strategic elements come together to form an intricate and revolutionary game that laid the groundwork for Westwood's later Command and Conquer series and the genre as a whole.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer

GAMEOVER

Press START to Continue. 9, 8, 7, 6, 5...

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Nowadays, it seems like every day is a holiday. Administrative Assistant Day...what the hell is that?! The scoring table is a list of some of the coolest holidays that Hallmark hasn't started forcing upon you yet, but should!

1. In the unforgettable arcade game Tapper, what song can be heard in the western bar?

- **A.** "Oh, Suzanna" by Steven Foster
- **B.** "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" by Sons of the Pioneers
- **C.** "El Paso" by Marty Robbins
- **D.** "She Bangs" by Ricky Martin

2. In 1992, Mindscape had plans to release a game based on the *The Road Warrior*, the second in Mel Gibson's *Mad Max* series. As development neared completion, the licensing for the title was stripped away. Rather than canning the project, Mindscape decided to release the game. What was it called?

- **A.** Combat Cars
- **B.** Death Duel
- **C.** Outlander
- **D.** RoadBlasters

3. In the GameCube title The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, gamers learned that Tingle had three companions with him. Along with Ankle and Knuckle, who is Tingle's other accomplice?

- **A.** Marcel
- **B.** David Jr.
- **C.** Kooda
- **D.** Dingle

4. Famed B-movie actor Bruce Campbell (*Bubba Ho-Tep*, *Army of Darkness*) has provided voice work for numerous games. Which of these titles is he NOT featured in?

- **A.** Pitfall 3D
- **B.** Spider-Man: The Movie
- **C.** Broken Helix
- **D.** Assault: Retribution

5. Bionic Commando featured one of the most shocking boss fights in all of video games. At the end of the game, players ran headlong into a heavily armed helicopter with a pilot bearing a striking resemblance to Adolf Hitler. What was this maniac's name?

- **A.** Master-D
- **B.** Generalissimo Killt
- **C.** Major Destructo
- **D.** General-BM

6. In 1984, Activision released a game called H.E.R.O. on various home systems. What is H.E.R.O. an acronym for?

- **A.** Helicopter Emergency Rescue Operation
- **B.** Hero Elite Rescue Operation
- **C.** Hero Elite Relief Operation
- **D.** Heavy Ethiopian Rodeo Organization

7. Whether you were tossing papers through windows on Easy Street, avoiding dogs on Middle Road, or running over break dancers on Hard Way, Paperboy showed us that delivering the news to people is a dangerous and extremely violent career. What was the name of the paper that you delivered in this classic arcade game?

- **A.** The City Herald
- **B.** The Daily Sun
- **C.** The Atari Times
- **D.** The City Tribune

8. Sony Computer Entertainment America published the first entry of the Battle Arena Toshinden series. Which publishing house released the sequels?

- **A.** Time Warner Interactive
- **B.** Playmates Interactive Entertainment
- **C.** Accolade
- **D.** Acclaim

9. Bungie Studios will forever be remembered for its work on the Halo series. Gamers of a different beat will likely remember this company for other reasons. Before getting its feet wet with Microsoft, Bungie mainly created games for the Macintosh. Which of these games did Bungie create exclusively for Mac?

- **A.** Myth: The Fallen Lords
- **B.** Marathon 2: Durandal
- **C.** Weekend Warrior
- **D.** Oni

10. Within its first week of sales in the United States, Sony sold over 100,000 PlayStations. On what day did Sony release the PlayStation in the United States and what was the original retail price?

- **A.** September 5, 1995 $349
- **B.** October 1, 1995 $299
- **C.** September 1, 1995 $249
- **D.** September 9, 1995 $299

BREAKDOWN

10% of PlayStation 2 owners are online in North America

40% of our features this month have shots of characters standing in front of donut shops

76% Electronic Arts claims that its Madden NFL series accounts for this percentage of all Xbox football game sales

0% The percentage of the population Game Informer expects will pick up Grabbed by the Ghoulies at its amazing new $19.99 price point

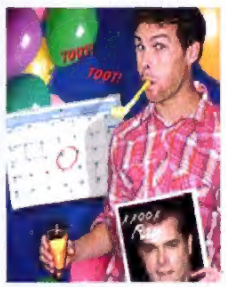
37% The improvement in accuracy during laparoscopic surgery demonstrated by doctors who play at least three hours of video games a week over those who don't, according to a recent study

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

0-2
Cyborgs Haven't Taken Over the World Yet Day

3-4
Washed Up Video Game Character Day

5-6
Make Out With Random Hottie Day



7-8
Ray Liotta Day

9-10
Gamer's Day

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

WHO ARE YOU?
MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG
NEMESIS? AVENGER? HERO?
OUTSMART DONKEY KONG AND BRING BACK
THE MINI-MARIOS IN MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG.
ONLY FOR GAME BOY ADVANCE.
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Cartoon Violence
GAME BOY ADVANCE SP
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JEAN RENO AND TAKESHI KANESHIRO

TWO HEROES, ONE DESTINY

500 BC 1000 AD 2100 AD

1100 BC 500 AD 1500 AD

THE FINAL BATTLE BEGINS.

Starring international acting sensations, Jean Reno as Jacques Blanc and Takeshi Kaneshiro as Samanosuke, Onimusha 3 Demon Siege is the final chapter in the Onimusha Trilogy. Two heroes from different lands, travel through time and space to defeat the evil Nobunaga and his hordes of darkness. Control the fate of both men as you journey from 16th Century Japan to modern day Paris and back. The final chapter in the Onimusha trilogy begins.

MATURE 17+
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

PlayStation 2

CAPCOM
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